

NAG

NEW AGE GAMING MAGAZINE

south africa's leading technology & computer entertainment magazine



made in south africa



Lazy Gamer's guide to
The Thermaltake Xaser III Skull

Previews of DOOM 3, Deus Ex: Invisible War, Final Fantasy XII and **Armed & Dangerous**

Also...

Anime, Role-Playing, Hardware and News

AMD 64 A long look into the future + Intel Extreme Edition **examined**

Comparative Hardware Review: **MP3 Players** + a look at **peripherals** that changed the world

Game Reviews of Prince of Persia, **Commandos 3**, SSX 3, **Yager**, Colin McRae 4 and many more

PCXboxGameCubeN-GageGBAPlayStation2

EXCLUSIVE SA INTERVIEW

DOOM 3™



EXCLUSIVE
Meet the beautiful Star
Reporter from the pages of Game
Magazine!

DOOM 3
January 2004

UNDERGROUND

sponsors >>> 3 monster playable demos

<< **This should be here.**
Welcome to 2004.

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EXCLUSIVE!



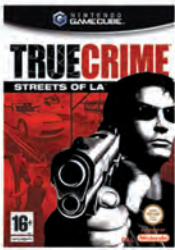
GAME BOY ADVANCE



GAME BOY ADVANCE SP™



R'ZONE



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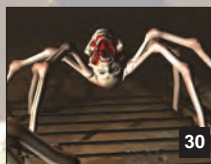
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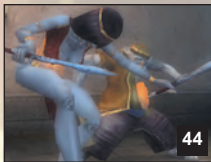
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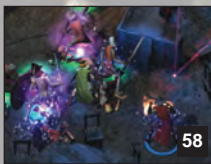
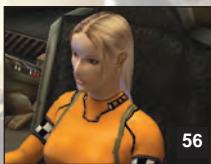
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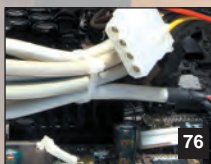
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MONSTER DEMOS!

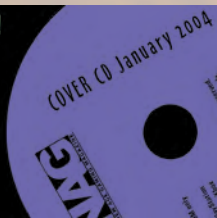
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These few brave companies make the Cover CD a reality every month... Think fondly of them!



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Doomed!
DOOM 3 will be the biggest thing in the gaming industry in the last 10 years. Maybe, but then let's not forget the PlayStation, the Pentium, 3D accelerators, Optical mice, Quake - the list

goes on. But more to the point, NAG is proud to bring you an exclusive interview with three big shots at id Software, lead designer - Tim Willits, programmer - Robert Duffy and CEO - Todd Hollenshead. For those who dare to dispute the mightiness of DOOM 3 we will be taking another look at Half-Life 2 in a future issue and hopefully we'll be able to bring you some exclusive stuff you haven't seen or heard about yet.

And, remember, before you commit your cash elsewhere NAG is teaming up with a few leading industry people here in SA to bring you a huge deal when you buy DOOM 3, think massive and large and amazing and you'll start understanding where we're coming from.

The next big thing... Worms 3D!

In recent history [well... as far back as we go] there hasn't been this much worm abuse since the last drunken S&M convention ran late. Worms 3D has to be one of the best multiplayer games ever, even matching the legendary Quake. At one stage the Worms fever got so bad in the office that the issue you're holding in your hands right now almost never made it to the printer on time. Look out for an in-depth review in our February issue.



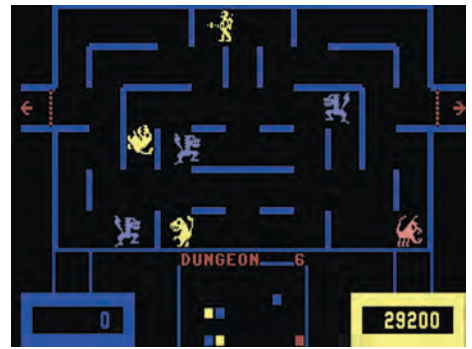
Imagination depravation

Take any old game, and by old I mean anything made 20 years ago. If you do happen to actually get any of these games running it's not hard to see why gaming never really took off like it has today. Consider those terrible blocky sprites, ponder the horror of only ever seeing 8 colours on-screen at the same time and try to imagine the complexity of getting a game to load off a tape deck. It sucked but it was utopia - whole new genres appearing every month, real innovation with each new game - the list is long.

This is the reality of the origins of gaming. Back then you needed to have a little imagination to actually enjoy anything presented to you on the screen - back then what was presented on screen served as more of a primitive guide-dog role for your imagination than anything else. In the past the Cyber Demon seemed a lot scarier in your head than that blocky mess of pixels on the screen. Sadly, today the trusted guide-dog has been given the bone and everything is force-fed and hand delivered via super-couriers that measure everything in gigabytes and megahertz per second. We've got rag-doll physics, 3D engines, atmospheric lighting and sound effects delivered by technology that costs more than a small vehicle. In this very precise and specific reality much less imagination is required to achieve the end result. So today it's becoming much harder to present anything on-screen that will ever live up to expectations because those expectations have been filed and dulled away to such a point that nothing is ever going to impress you as much as the last game you played. And so the jaded gamer is born, fed and will eventually die, citing how good it was years ago. But when they do look back, the ugly mess behind them seems absurdly surreal. The message here is, don't lament about how great the old games were, remember what they're making these days is vastly superior - drop the negativity and just try enjoying a game instead of looking for faults and trying to relive a past you never really had.

Welcome to 2004 - this year is going to rock!

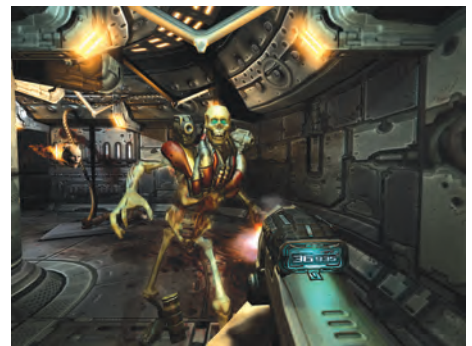
Michael James, Editor, NAG Magazine



[1983] - Wizard of Wor on the Commodore 64



[1993] DOOM



[2004] - DOOM 3 on the PC

remember what they're making these days is vastly superior - drop the negativity and just try enjoying a game instead of looking for faults and trying to relive a past you never really had.

Caption of the Month Competition



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: **January Caption**

If you use the wrong subject in your e-mail it'll get deleted...

Your prize: Our sponsor for the screenshot of the month competition is Vivendi Universal Games. They said they'll give us something interesting each month... if we don't want it we'll be sure to send it along to the winner mentioned to the right of this... here...?

NAG's january caption



'It's too early in the year to think of a clever caption' - NAG's [100% lame] effort

november winner



"I can't believe we got chosen as the screenshot of the month" - Morgue[FLB]

NAG Review Rigs supplied by:

Your Components Solution Provider



Specification

Intel P4 3.1 GHz 512KB
Gigabyte GA-8SG800 Motherboard
NVIDIA GeForce4 Ti 4200 with AGP8X
AOpen A90E 19" Monitor | TwinMOS 1GB RAM DDR 266
Seagate Barracuda 80GB | AOpen CD ROM
AOpen Tower Chassis | Logitech Cordless Desktop



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Aeolus

Best performed Geforce FX5950 GPU



Aeolus Geforce FX 5950 Ultra

nVIDIA Geforce FX5950 GPU
256mb fast DDR video memory
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DVI, Video Out, CRT connectors - Full nVIEW functions support
Cinematic quality special effects and studio quality color
Free bundled with WinDVD support Deluxe DVD / VCD play back
Support 8X AGP and Direct X 9.0

Aeolus Legend
Aeolus, dwelling at Island Aeolus that floats in the sky, stands seized of the power of playing with nature wind under His employ, forecasting the weather, and the mastery of navigational knowledge, bestowed by Zeus.



Geforce FX5700 Ultra nVidia FX5700 Ultra



- nVIDIA Geforce FX5700 Ultra GPU
- 128mb fast DDR video memory
- CineFX II Engine, 475MHz core clock.
- DVI, Video Out, CRT connectors
- Full nVIEW functions support
- Cinematic quality special effects and studio quality colour
- Support 8X AGP and Direct X 9.0

Geforce FX5700 nVidia FX5700



- nVIDIA Geforce FX5700 GPU
- 128mb fast DDR video memory
- CineFX II Engine, 425MHz core clock.
- DVI, Video Out, CRT connectors
- Full nVIEW functions support
- Cinematic quality special effects and studio quality colour
- Support 8X AGP and Direct X 9.0

Geforce FX5600XT nVidia FX5600XT



- nVIDIA Geforce FX5600XT GPU
- 128mb fast DDR video memory
- CineFX II Engine, 425MHz core clock.
- DVI, Video Out, CRT connectors
- Full nVIEW functions support
- Cinematic quality special effects and studio quality colour
- Support 8X AGP and Direct X 9.0

Geforce FX5200 nVidia FX5200



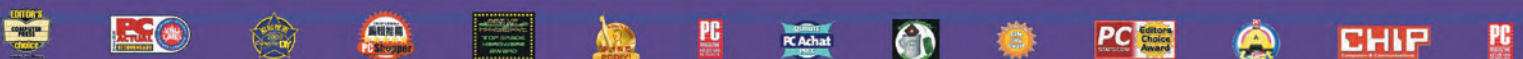
- nVIDIA Geforce FX5200 GPU
- 128mb fast DDR video memory
- CineFX II Engine, 400MHz core clock.
- DVI, Video Out, CRT connectors
- Full nVIEW functions support
- Cinematic quality special effects and studio quality colour
- Support 8X AGP and Direct X 9.0



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Component Solutions



tech news:

Zippy EL-715



Zippy Technology has released a new keyboard ideal for LAN gamers. The EL-715 is 18mm thick, weighs 650g and features lit keys that allow it to be used without difficulty in the dark. It has a slick look and will be available in silver or black.

PlayStation processors

Sony has commenced production of a new 90 nanometre chip which will henceforth power the PlayStation 2. The more compact technology allows more chips to be manufactured on a wafer, thus reducing production costs. The new chip may also find application in other Sony products, including the PSX entertainment system, and rumours abound that Sony are considering introducing a PStwo, which would be the PlayStation 2 equivalent of the PSone. As for the "cell" processor that Sony co-developed with IBM and Toshiba, and which will power the PlayStation 3, it is expected to go into mass production in the second half of 2005.

Logitech diNovo Media Desktop



Logitech's innovative diNovo Media Desktop is a complete desktop Bluetooth solution. It includes a Bluetooth hub, a slim keyboard, the MX900 Cordless Optical Mouse and a Media Pad, which allows the user to control various media applications. The system boasts an artistic design, and carries a five year warranty.

PS3 focus on EyeToy



Sony envisions some interesting uses for the EyeToy in their upcoming PlayStation 3, which is expected to become available in late 2005. One of the company's emphases seems to be the use of the EyeToy as an input device, interpreting users' hand gestures and body language, and even determining a user's emotional state from visual cues from the user's face. Such technology would enable gesture-controlled navigation of menus and other interfaces, akin to that seen in films such as Johnny Mnemonic and Minority Report.

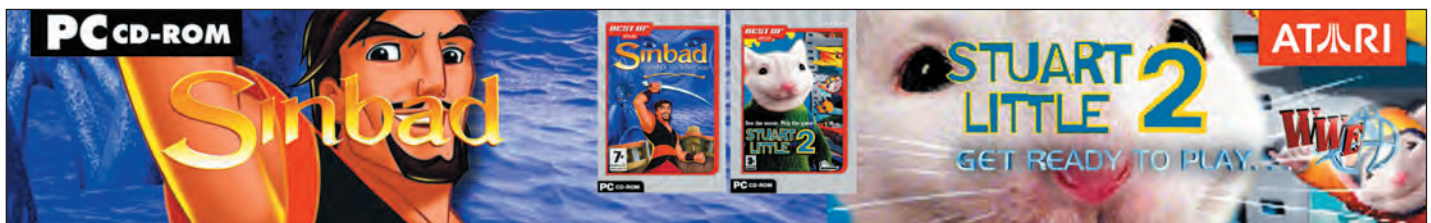
Game Changer

A company named Gamester has released a gimmicky device for the Game Boy Advance SP, called the Game Changer. The device fits to the bottom of the handheld and accommodates up to three cartridges, allowing the user to switch between games by sliding a switch.

Logitech QuickCam Orbit



Logitech's new QuickCam Orbit is a ball-shaped camera with a unique feature - it automatically tracks the movement of your face when you are using it for video calls and the like. Other than that, it is a full-featured still and video camera with a built-in microphone and digital zoom. It can capture video at up to 640x480 and can take stills with a resolution of 1.3 megapixels. It is compatible with a wide variety of messaging software, and can be used with USB 1.1 or 2.0.



Plantronics CT12



Plantronics has released a new hands-free telephone, called the CT12. The device is compact and light, and features a headset that can be worn over head or ear. A little red light at the end of the mouthpiece pulses when the phone is in use to alert others that the user is on a call, and a three-line LCD display provides the user with relevant information regarding the call. The battery life supports up to 5.5 hours of talk time and up to 10 days of standby, and the unit has a range of around 30 metres. The microphone boasts rudimentary noise-cancelling technology. <http://plantronics.com>

Nyko's iType2



Nyko's iType2 controller is an innovative combination of PlayStation 2 controller and keyboard. Being very compact, it is not suited to entering large chunks of text, but is ideal for quick inter-player communications during online play, allowing team mates to make short comments or issue instructions without having to put down the controller and pick up a keyboard.

Hi-Touch Imaging HiTi 640PS photo printer



This device is designed specifically to print digital photos, although it can cope with some other tasks, as long as the size is limited to 4x6 inches (10x15cm). It can be attached to a PC via USB, or can be used stand-alone by plugging in a CompactFlash, Secure Digital, MultiMediaCard or Memory Stick. It offers a resolution of 403dpi, and carries a one-year warranty. www.hi-ti.com

Xbox 2 and processors

Rumour has it that Microsoft is planning to make its first demonstration of the Xbox 2 at the Game Developers Conference in late March this year. This makes sense in light of the fact that Sony intends to unveil the PlayStation 3 at this year's Electronic Entertainment Expo, in May, and Microsoft no doubt would like to beat its competition to the punch.

Thomson Lyra PDP 2860 multimedia player



The Thomson Lyra PDP 2860 is a portable multimedia player with a built-in 20GB hard drive. It is compatible with a wide range of multimedia formats, and is recognised as a portable drive by Windows and other current operating systems. Although compact and light, it still manages to include a 3.5" colour LCD display. www.thomson.net

Xbox FPS Master

Radical Games has released a controller for the Xbox that is designed specifically for first-person shooter players. The controller's unique layout allows players to control both analogue sticks at all times.



Microsoft has acquired the rights to use IBM's new leading edge processors in future versions of the Xbox. Adopting a non-x86 CPU will make backwards compatibility almost impossible. IBM has been heavily involved with both Sony and Nintendo as well, so the company seems set to have some success in the console market.

Rio Cali



The Rio Cali is a flash-based portable music player that boasts 256MB of memory, expandable by means of Secure Digital or MultiMediaCard. It includes a stopwatch and FM tuner. Accompanying software allows it to be used as a portable data drive. It is fully compatible with both Windows-based machines and Macs. www.rioaudio.com

Sony PSX



Sony will soon be introducing the PSX entertainment system at a price comparable to that of DVD recorders. The all-in-one solution will play PlayStation 2 games, as well as being able to view and record DVDs and TV programmes. Two models will be available, one with a 160GB hard disk, the other carrying a 250GB hard drive, and will be available in a selection of colours, including red, blue and yellow.

New Nintendo console

Nintendo plans to release a new gaming console this year. It is currently unclear what exactly this new product will be, though it is known that it is not the successor to either the GameCube or the Game Boy Advance. The company has only said that the new device will be completely different to previous products. The company is eager to beat its competition, Sony and Microsoft, to the release of their next generation of hardware.

Meanwhile European sales of the Game Boy Advance SP have exceeded 2 million units since its launch last year. Total GBA and GBA SP sales now exceed 9 million units. Models in two new colours, Arctic Blue and Flame Red, were recently released. A number of game titles will have been released in the holiday season, including the likes of The Hobbit, The Lord of the Rings: Return of the King, Tony Hawk's Underground, Final Fantasy Tactics Advance and Super Mario Advance 4: Super Mario Bros 3.



Now this is what we call an imaginative case mod. Although not very practical if you are heading off to a LAN every other weekend, its pretty nifty if you have the urge to move your PC room around every other day.

Creative Zen NX



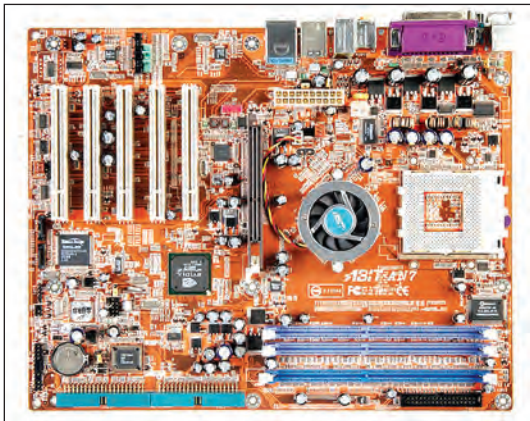
The Zen NX is a portable media player that doubles as an external drive. It connects to a PC via USB 2.0, and has a capacity of 30GB. Its battery provides 10 hours of use. Windows XP recognises it as a removable disk drive, and it supports most audio formats.



D-Link launch new products

D-Link and TI launch 802.11g+ products
Switch D-Link have launched a range of 802.11g+ wireless products based on Texas Instruments's TI TNETW1130 chipset. The new products are claimed to provide up to an eight-fold improvement in throughput over 802.11b devices. The family of products has been dubbed D-Link AirPlus XtremeG+, and includes a 2.4GHz Wireless Access Point, a 32-bit wireless card bus adapter for laptops, 32-bit wireless PCI adapter for desktop computers and a wireless broadband Internet gateway with built-in 4-port switch.





ABIT AN7 motherboard

ABIT's new AN7 motherboard features a second processor that assumes the tasks of monitoring and tweaking the hardware, freeing the main CPU from these tasks. The board carries on-board memory dedicated to saving overclocking settings for individual applications, and has what has been named the BlackBox, a facility that records the state of the computer in case of problems or crashes, allowing technicians to more easily identify the source of the problem. Other features include Socket A for Athlon XP processors, 400MHz FSB, nVidia nForce 2 Ultra 400 chipset, Dual DDR400 memory, 2 SATA ports, 2 IDE ports, on-board 10/100 LAN, 2 1394 ports and 6 USB2.0 ports. The board also boasts S/PDIF In/Out connectivity.



Corex, a local distributor, have some really funky case modding gear for the die hard PC decor enthusiasts...

Cable slewing kit

A new trend, particularly among case-modders, is the use of tube cables. A viable alternative is the Vantec Cable Slewing Kit, which accomplishes a similar result using existing wires. The net result of the use of such a kit or tubular cables is that the interior of the case becomes neater, as well as improving airflow inside the box, keeping temperatures lower.

Spectrum Fan Card

Case-modders will love Vantec's Spectrum Fan Card. The device fits into an available PCI slot and features two fans to directly cool any nearby slot-mounted devices, as well as improving overall airflow. The unit sports UV-sensitive materials that light up due to the UV LED lights carried by the card.

SENDING E-MAIL FROM THE GRAVE

Just when we thought we have seen everything, a new service has been launched that allows people to e-mail their loved ones after they die. The service, Mylastemail.com, aims to help subscribers say goodbye properly to their loved ones when they meet their untimely ends. Once an account has been opened the user will be able to print out a Mylastemail certificate that should be kept with his/her Will. This certificate will then be given to the Trustee on their deaths. The Trustee will then return the certificate and a copy of the Death Certificate to the Web site whereupon the subscriber's last e-mail messages will be released. There is also an Auto Release option that will automatically send out e-mails should the subscriber not log on to your account within a specified amount of time. A three-year subscription costs \$9.99 that allows users to write up to five e-mail messages. The service is designed for "anyone over the age of 18 who wishes to leave behind a goodbye message for their friends and family. The service is about being prepared for the sudden and unexpected."

I wonder when they will start offering Web cams inside coffins? That way you can see your loved one decay from the comfort of your own home.

US UNIVERSITY MAKES SUPERCOMPUTER LIST

Virginia Tech researchers and students have assembled a supercomputer with 1 100 Apple Macintosh G5 processors that has been ranked as the third most powerful computer in the world.

The machine, dubbed X by the students and researchers, has been clocked at performing 10.3 trillion operations per second. While traditional supercomputers can cost hundreds of millions of dollars to maintain, X reportedly cost "only" \$7 million to build. The Earth Simulator in Japan is still the fastest machine on Earth, running at an amazing 35.9 trillion operations per second. Its price tag of \$250 million is considerably more than the run-of-the-mill top-end gaming machine. The HP AlphaServer SC at the Los Alamos National Laboratory has been ranked as the second-fastest computer clocking in a "measly" 13.9 trillion operations per second.

I wonder if these machines would be able to run Doom 3 and Unreal 2 properly when the games eventually get released?

IBM SUPERCOMPUTER BASED ON GAMING CHIP

On the topic of supercomputers, IBM says it has built a supercomputer the size of a small household appliance that is based on technology that will be used in some of the next-generation consoles scheduled for release late this year.

The Blue Gene/L has been ranked as the 73rd fastest computer in the world and can perform two trillion calculations per second. It uses 1 000 microprocessors that are based on Apple Computer PowerPC microchip technology. The cool thing is that these PowerPC chips are currently used in Apple Computers. The scary thing is that IBM plans to interconnect 128 copies of this configuration to produce the final version of the machine. Big Blue aims to eventually build a supercomputer capable of performing one quadrillion calculations a second. According to IBM, the technology used in the supercomputer will be the foundation for the GameCube 2 and PlayStation 3 consoles that the company is currently working on. The final version of the supercomputer will be used in the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in California.

pc news:

Rappers in a gamer

Artists Eminem, Dre and 50 Cent will soon appear in a video game with a criminal flavour. Earlier last year Eminem was sued by Conspiracy Games for backing out of a deal to make a game with them, in favour of Rockstar Games. Could these rappers be involved in the next Grand Theft Auto, perhaps?

Deus Ex 3 on its way

Even though Deus Ex: Invisible War, the second title in the series, has not yet been released (December for the States, February elsewhere), Warren Spector of Ion Storm confirmed that preliminary work has begun on the third instalment, whose story will be tied in with that of both of its predecessors.

GalCiv Expansion

Stardock Systems plan to have the add-on pack Galactic Civilizations: Altarian Prophecy ready by February next year. The expansion will feature a host of improvements and enhancements, many of these allowing players to create and implement their own maps.

PC version of Fable?

Lionhead Studios and its satellite Big Blue Box are very interested in developing a PC version of the Xbox RPG Fable. The companies are currently in discussions with Microsoft regarding this proposed project.

Star Wars: Battlefront

LucasArts will release a Battlefield 1942-style online multiplayer war action set in the Star Wars universe. The game will be released in 2004 on the PC, PS2 and Xbox.

I of the Enemy

Enemy Technology is presently developing a future genre, real-time strategy game called I of the Enemy. The game will feature 25 single player missions and a skirmish mode with up to 8 players on the Internet or LAN.

Restricted Area



4am Entertainment Corporation will be publishing the English version of German-based Master Creating's upcoming action role-playing game titled Restricted Area. Players will assume the role of one of four playable characters, two male and two female. The story is set in 2083 in a Cyberpunk-style world run by corporations, and will offer over 160 hours of play time. The atmosphere of this title is expected to be dark and brooding, and it will feature familiar character advancement mechanisms, as well as varied levels of artificial intelligence depending on the opponent. Restricted Area is planned for release in April this year.

New Jagged Alliance Project



Strategy First and i-Deal Games will be releasing Jagged Alliance 2: Wildfire early this year. Wildfire is an expansion of Jagged Alliance 2 that features heightened authenticity and realism, enhanced graphics and sound, improved artificial intelligence and increased sub-quest relevance. Around a dozen new weapons have also been added.

The Matrix Online



Monolith and EON Entertainment are at work on The Matrix Online, a massively multiplayer online role-playing game set to be released this year by Ubi Soft. The game's story will be written by the creators of the movies, and it will, of course, take place in a persistent universe. The basic premise behind the Matrix should prove ideal for a game of this nature, as the game's "playground" will be a virtual online reality.



Black Hawk Down: Team Sabre



NovaLogic will be releasing an expansion pack for Delta Force: Black Hawk Down early this year. Team Sabre will include two new single player campaigns, set in Colombia and the Persian Gulf, as well as 30 new multiplayer maps and a mod building toolset. Furthermore, players will now have the option of playing as SAS. Naturally, a set of new weapons has been included, as well as a few new vehicles.

Blitzkrieg II



Blitzkrieg II is on its way from Nival Interactive, although at present no release date has been set. This sequel will make use of full 3D, unlike its predecessor, and will offer representations of the European, Pacific and African theatres of war. Other features will include unit experience, destructible environments and the effects of terrain and weather conditions.

Your New 'Friends'

Demilich



Harpy



Beholder



Mind Flayer



Mithral Golem



Spider Demon (Bebilith)



Drider



Eyeball



Demonflesh Golem



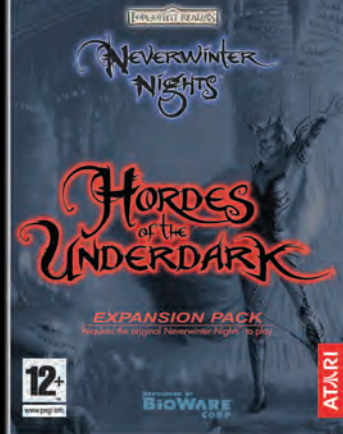
Azer



Slaad



PC CD-ROM



Neverwinter Nights: Hordes of the Underdark

Neverwinter Nights: Hordes of the Underdark is the second expansion for the revolutionary role-playing game Neverwinter Nights. BioWare has created a dark and dangerous world of adventure set in the world of Dungeons & Dragons.

New 20+ hour single-player adventure
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4 new tilesets | 16 new creatures
Over 50 new feats | Over 40 new spells
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pc news:

Battlefield: Vietnam

Digital Illusions are at work on a sequel to EA's Battlefield 1942. The game, titled Battlefield Vietnam, will retain its predecessor's style while adding new features. Fighting in theatres from jungles surrounding the Ho Chi Minh Trail to the city streets of Hue, players will choose from two well-equipped forces, the United States or the North Vietnamese Army and Vietcong. Battlefield Vietnam should ship in Q1 2004.



Silent Storm: Sentinels



Nival Interactive is currently at work on an add-on for Silent Storm, currently tentatively titled Sentinels. The expansion will add new content and technology, as well as a weapon reliability factor which will determine how frequently weapons jam or break down. New mission objectives and locales are also on the cards.

Pool Paradise



Pool Paradise is an upcoming pool simulation with a difference - the action is not set in dark, dingy pool dives, but rather at an idyllic South Pacific island. The game will also include several mini-games, and snooker pro Jimmy White will be popping up somewhere in the game. Pool Paradise will be available on PC, Xbox, PlayStation 2 and GameCube from March this year.



Unreal II XMP



Legend Entertainment are well into the beta test phase of development of Unreal II XMP, the multiplayer component for Epic's Unreal II. Although it wasn't part of the original plan, approval for the project was eventually granted, and the team has been busy since around the middle of this year. Very good news is that XMP will be released as a free add-on.

The overall philosophy of this game component is class-based team play. Three classes are available, the ranger, tech and gunner, each with its own strengths and weaknesses, and they all function best in combination with each other. Each of them is able to generate a different replenishment item (health, shield and ammo) to be dropped for team mates. To win a match, a team must gain control of all of four artefacts that are present on each map; to further this goal, teams must seize control of energy, turrets and deployment points in order to gain advantages in the game. Three vehicles will also be available, each fulfilling a slightly different role. The scoring system is not a straight frag-based one, but rather a system that awards points not only for kills but also for support functions and daring manoeuvres.

Maps, of which 8 will ship in the original pack, will support up to 32 players, but the designers suggest that more than 26 players on a map may make the game too hectic. Weapons from the original single payer game have been adapted and balanced for multiplayer action, and fixed turrets will also be present. The add-on has been designed with support for future modding in mind.



Lock On: Modern Air Combat

Fly a variety of combat aircraft in the most graphically rich, audio intense game environment ever created for a combat flight simulator. The game includes a dynamic campaign system, eight U.S. and Russian jets, an immersive combat environment, and intense in-your-face action. Filled with extreme campaigns, realistic flight modelling and flexible game options, Lock On will provide unlimited game play action to both novice and veteran flight simulator fans.

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console news:

The Lord of the Rings: Treason at Isengard Cancelled

Scheduled for release in Q4 2003, The Lord of the Rings: The Treason of Isengard has been cancelled by Vivendi Universal Games. The reason cited was that the game was not shaping up as strongly as anticipated and would likely not satisfy the expectations of Tolkien fans. The game was due to be released on the Xbox and the PS2.

Gundam Game for GameCube

This year Bandai will release Kidou Senshi Gundam: Senshi tachi no kiseki for the GameCube, the first Gundam game for Nintendo's console. The title's second part translates roughly to Tracks of the Heroes. The game will be an action title revolving around mech combat, and will feature many elements from the original Gundam. In anticipation of this upcoming title, Nintendo has released a special GameCube bundle in the trademark colours of Char, one of the characters in Gundam. The package includes a red GameCube, a red GameBoy, a red mech figurine and a demo disk of the upcoming game.

Dead or Alive Online

Tecmo are releasing an online version of Dead or Alive and Dead or Alive 2. The first is identical to the original Sega Saturn version, and may thus feel dated to most players, while the second is a total revamp.

Sengoku Musou

Omega Force is at work on Koei's Sengoku Musou, a tactical action game set in 16th century Japan. The game will feature multiple paths through its impressive 500-odd missions, and will offer alternate endings. The company hopes to have the game ready in Japan early next year, with worldwide distribution to follow thereafter.

PSP Titles from Koei

Koei is at work on three as yet unannounced titles to coincide with the launch of the Sony PSP handheld console, which is currently planned for the end of this year. Two of these titles will be released worldwide, while the remaining one will be exclusive to Japan.

Killzone (PS2)



Under development at Dutch studio Guerilla, Killzone is being designed to be a squad-based first-person shooter with a science fiction flavour. As a member of the Earth-loyal ISA, the player will oppose the nefarious designs of the separatist faction Helghast. Of course, a wide selection of weapons is expected. The game is planned for release late this year on the PS2 and has coined itself the nickname of 'Halo for the PS2'.

Isle of Man (PS2)



Isle of Man TT Superbikes is currently under development at Jester Interactive, and is expected to be released early this year for PlayStation 2. The game will feature over 50 bikes from all the major bike manufacturers, which will be raced over the world famous 37.73-mile course. TT Superbikes will also have several multiplayer options including 2 player split screen and a sidecar mode of play.

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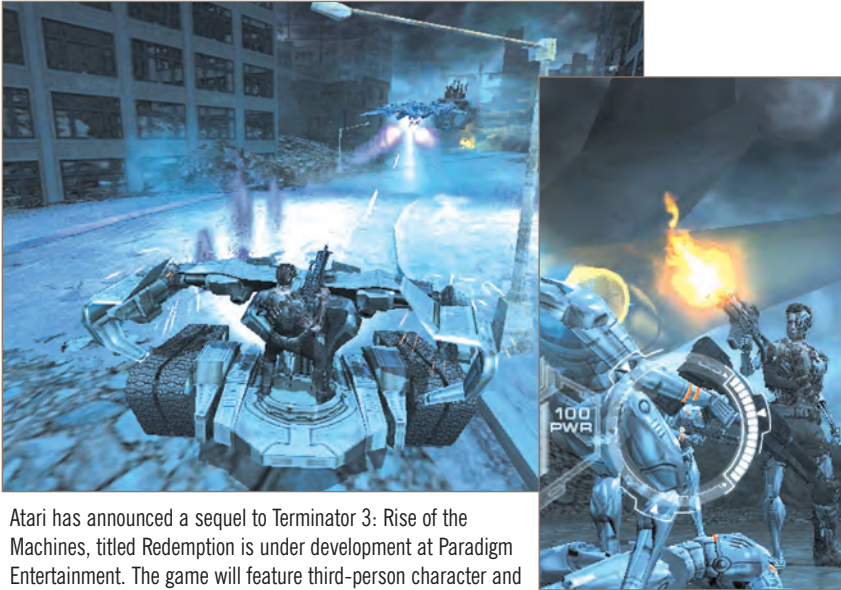
PlayStation 2



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Terminator 3: Redemption PS2 | Xbox | GC



Atari has announced a sequel to Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines, titled Redemption is under development at Paradigm Entertainment. The game will feature third-person character and vehicle based combat, and will cast the player in the role of the terminator depicted by Arnold Schwarzenegger. The actor's facial and vocal likenesses are being used in the game. The game should be ready by around the middle of this year, and will be available on PlayStation 2, Xbox and GameCube.

Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy PS2 | Xbox | GC



This upcoming game from Midway will be an action title to be available on all next-gen consoles around the middle of this year. It will revolve around the use of psychic powers.



Beyond Good & Evil

The peaceful planet of Hyllis has fallen under siege by a relentless alien race. After a devastating battle, a Hyllian named Jade is relieved to find that the planet's defence forces have saved the populace from certain destruction. But when Jade takes a mysterious reconnaissance assignment for IRIS, a rebel organization that challenges the official version of events, she must question her own perception of truth. Angered and shaken by what she discovers, Jade begins a harrowing journey to get to the core of the conspiracy.

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scores, charts and release dates:

PC Web Scores

Title	NAG	gamespy.com	gamespot.com	pc.ign.com
Prince of Persia	95	-	-	9.6
Commandos 3	63	3	7.9	8.9
DS: Legends of Aranna	58	4	5.4	7
Chrome	71	3	7.2	7.9
Sims: Makin' Magic	77	4	8.3	8.2



Console Web Scores

Title	NAG	ign.com	gamespot.com	gamespy.com
Colin McRae 04 [PS2]	78	-	-	-
SSX 3 [PS2]	86	9.5	9	5
Jak II Renegade [PS2]	81	-	9.1	2
Freestyle Metal X [PS2]	70	7.6	6	-
Lord of the Rings ROTK [PS2]	80	8.9	8	4
Billy Hatcher [GCN]	57	7.7	6.7	3



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CHARTS

1	PS2	WWE Smackdown Shut Your Mouth Plat
2	PS2	The Getaway Platinum
3	PC	The Sims: Makin' Magic
4	PS2	Rugby 2004
5	PS2	Tekken 4 Platinum
6	PS2	FIFA 2004
7	PS2	ATV Offroad Fury 2
8	PC	Rugby 2004
9	PS2	Gran Turismo 3 Platinum
10	PS2	SSX 3
11	PS2	Tony Hawks Pro Skater 4 Platinum
12	PS2	Grand Theft Auto III Platinum
13	PC	Max Payne 2
14	PS2	Crash Bandicoot 5
15	PS2	Lord of the Rings: Return of the King
16	PS2	WRC II Extreme Platinum
17	PS2	Tiger Woods 2004
18	PS2	Burnout 2: Point of Impact Platinum
19	PS2	GTA 3 plus Vice City Double Pack
20	PC	Sims: Superstar

Chart information supplied by Musica
for the period 1- 30 November 2003

Selected International PC Release Dates

Inquisition	Adventure	January 2	
Wars & Warriors: Joan of Arc	RPG	January 13	
Jack the Ripper	Adventure	January 13	
Apocalyptica	Action	January 14	
The Egyptian Prophecy	Adventure	January 14	
Atlantis Evolution	Adventure	January 14	
Alias	Action	January 14	
Full Spectrum Warrior	Action	January 14	
Lotus Challenge	Racing	January 15	
Battlefield Vietnam	Action	January 27	
Forever Worlds	Adventure	January 27	
Silent Storm	Tactical	January 28	
BlowOut	Action	January 28	
Drake	Action	January 28	
Rainbow Six 3: Athena Sword	Tactical	January 28	
Train Simulator 2	Simulator	February 2	
Joint Operations	Action	February 10	
Breed	FPS	February 17	
Supreme Ruler 2010	Strategy	February 18	
Psychotoxic	FPS	February 24	
Unreal Tournament 2004	FPS	February 24	
Medal of Honor: Pacific Assault	FPS	February 25	
Black 9	Action	March 14	
Painkiller	FPS	March 23	
Knights of the Temple	Action	March 23	
ALFA Antiterror	Tactical	March 23	

Selected International Console Release Dates

Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance II	PS2 Xbox	Role-Playing	January 5
Corvette	PS2	Driving	January 5
Fallout: Brotherhood of Steel	PS2 Xbox	Role-Playing	January 6
Final Fantasy XI	PS2	Role-Playing	January 6
Harvest Moon: A Wonderful Life	GCN	Role-Playing	January 6
Little League Baseball 2003	GBA	Sports	January 6
Sega Rally	NGE	Driving	January 6
Sonic Heroes	PS2 Xbox GC	Adventure	January 6
The Fast and the Furious	PS2	Driving	January 6
X-Files: Resist or Serve	PS2	Adventure	January 6
Charlie's Angels	PS2	Action	January 13
Dead or Alive Online	Xbox	Action	January 15
NFL Street	Xbox GC	Sports	January 15
River City Ransom EX	GBA	Action	January 15
Star Trek: Shattered Universe	PS2 Xbox	Simulation	January 15
Unreal II: The Awakening	Xbox	Action	January 15
Maximo vs. Army of Zin	PS2	Action	January 20
Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Jungle Storm	PS2	Action	January 20
Bomberman Jetters	GC	Action	January 20
Daredevil	PS2 Xbox	Action	January 27
Disney's Aladdin	GBA	Action	January 27
Mafia	Xbox PS2	Action	January 27
Armada 2: Star Command	Xbox	Adventure	February 2
Drift Racer: Kaido Battle	PS2	Driving	February 3
Fila World Tour Tennis	Xbox	Sports	February 3
Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse	Xbox	Action	February 3

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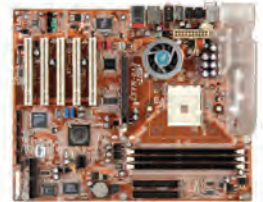


ABIT IC7- MAX3 - the most advanced cooling system

The IC7-MAX3 is equipped with incredible features for a desktop motherboard. For users who require MAXimum security and storage, the ABIT MAX3 features 6 channel serial ATA RAID with the Silicon Image 4-port serial ATA RAID controller plus native 2 channel support, as well as ABIT's latest ABIT Engineered™ feature: Secure IDE™. What is most exciting about MAX3 is that it features the most advanced cooling technology ever seen before on a motherboard- OTES.

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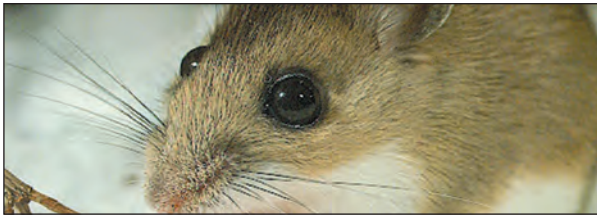
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PERIPHERAL

The main cause of phobia is a fear of not having control. But amongst the bolstering ranks of gamers there is no place for a lack of control. Control is everything! The difference between winning and losing can have a lot to do with (but more often than necessary blamed on) your peripheral. And in the past years there have been a few shifts in peripheral designs that we never really needed, but have since carved such a niche that we'd be curled-up crying geeks without them. So in acknowledging this fact, you have to tip your hat to the peripheral changes that really made it all happen for us over the years...

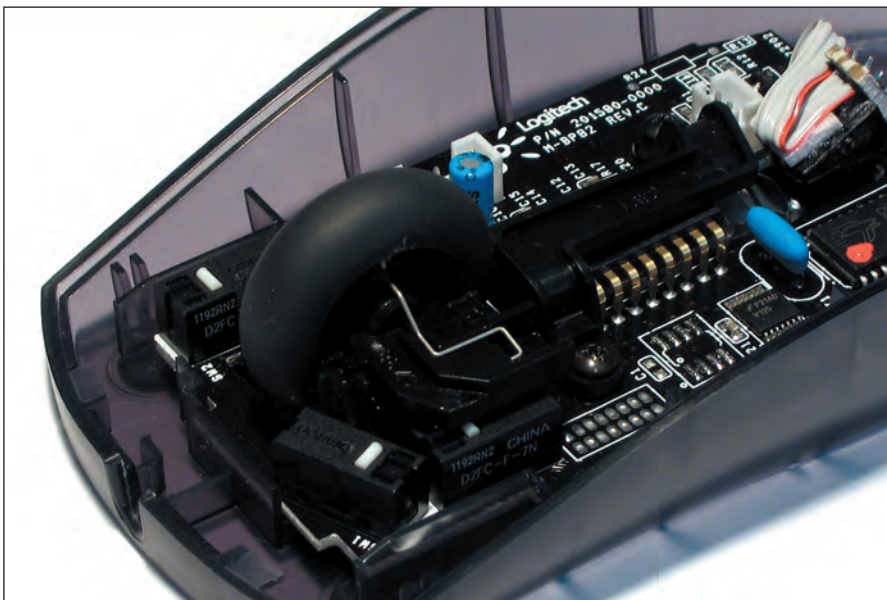
THE MOUSE

This little critter has been around longer than you'd think. First conceptualized by Doug Engelbart in 1951, it was shunned for a while, and then cropped up as a prototype developed by him and other associates for NASA. But it only really hit the public sector in the early 80s when Apple made their own version. Since then it's become irreplaceable in PC gaming, with even John Romero insisting in the early 90s that the best way to play Wolfenstein was with a mouse and keyboard. Not to mention that Point-n-Click adventures would never have worked, so where would Sierra and LucasArts be now?



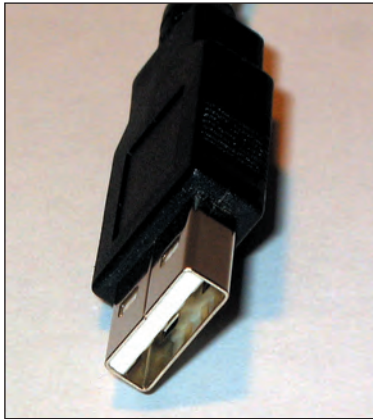
THE SCROLL WHEEL

Courtesy of Microsoft, the scroll wheel arrived with the introduction of their Intellimouse in 1996. Since then it's become the most widely-seen peripheral change on the mouse. Other manufacturers might still skip the ergonomic design, but everyone has a mouse wheel, some even experimenting with two. In 2003 Microsoft introduced the tilt technology, which still has to prove itself, but the mouse wheel is here to stay, being used in nearly every genre on the PC.



usb

Before USB you needed either a game or a serial port (depending on what you needed), not to mention that you had to reboot when swapping devices (plus, plugging a device into a running machine sometimes resulted in blowing the port). USB changed all of that, plus increasing the speed of the devices plus providing them with power. Introduced in 1996, now even headphones come out with USB support, and with a USB Hub you can have tons of devices connected, though the table space and cables are a bit of an issue...



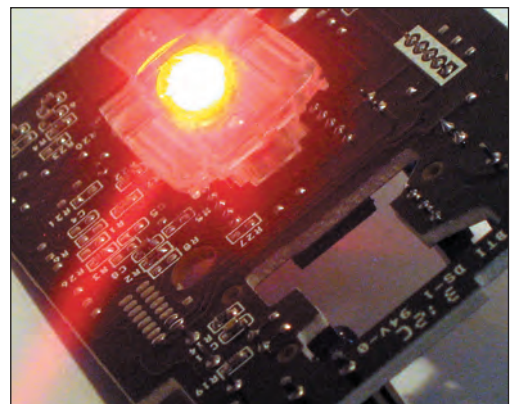
THE RUMBLE PACK

Released not long after the N64 itself (1996), the rumble pack started the whole craze of having some sort of reaction from your controller when you play. This one, though, plugged in separately and required 4 batteries to make it work, but it was the start of something that is now common in all the corded console controllers (and some wireless ones). In fact, playing a game these days and not feeling some sort of vibration from your controller just feels wrong. [Umm, no. Rather not, Ed].



OPTICAL MICE

It's a bit of an argument to whether Microsoft or Logitech were the first to release an optical mouse that didn't require a special pad. But they were quite expensive when they were first released in 1999, not to mention slow. But a lot has changed, since, and optical mice are faster than ball mice, not to mention they last longer and don't require having any lint and grime gathered from your desk cleaned out periodically. And everyone we know owns one, except for those people who also can get along without a scroll wheel and VGA graphics.



REVOLUTION!

anALOGUE STICKS

The analogue stick on a controller first appeared on Nintendo's Ultra 64, better known as the N64, in 1996. The console, though far more powerful than Sega and Sony's offerings, kept being delayed, but the games and the nifty new controller made up for that. The analogue, though, sat smack in the middle of the controller, but it was a start and the predecessor to dual shock technology. Now every next-generation console uses analogues and even Sony's upcoming handheld will feature it.



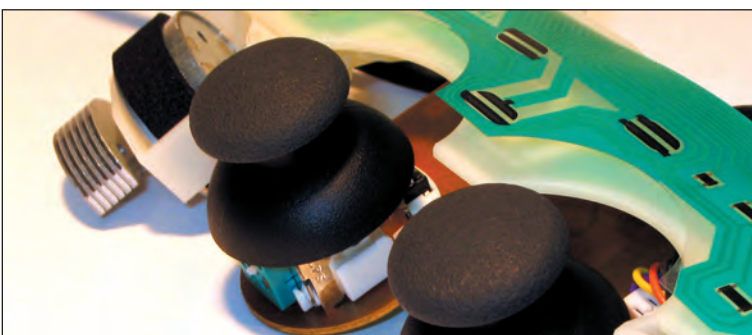
force Feedback

The feeling of having an F-14 rattle in your hand through your Joystick appeared in the consumer market when Immersion licensed their Haptic technology (which already existed in the design and science worlds for a few years) to Microsoft and Logitech for the Sidewinder and Wingman series of joysticks. This quickly emerged into other peripherals, specifically steering wheels, adding to that tar-grinding experience we all now take for granted.



dual shock

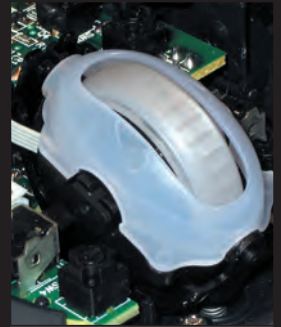
The year was 1998 and Gran Turismo was about to be released. And to compliment the game, Sony planned to also release their new Dual Shock controller at the same time. You could argue that Nintendo were first with analogue on a controller, but dual shock has its own niche. It was a lot more comfortable, especially for driving games (hence the GT connection), and the dual sticks opened a myriad of play dynamic options, including first person shooters finally becoming mainstream on consoles.



ONE DAY WHEN THEY ARE GROWN UP...

Tilt Wheel

Microsoft's newest mouse enhancement, namely the Tilt Wheel, still lacks some finesse, not to mention it has no diagonal support. But once developers catch on to the device, we can imagine a few advantages, such as easier sideways leaning in FPS titles, or quickly rummaging through your inventory...



The EyeToy

Sony's Logitech-developed EyeToy holds a lot of promise, in the way those devices that really surprise you do. It sounded very gimmicky, but it's a lot of fun and it's a great way to get a lot of people to look stupid at the same time. Now it's simply a question of more games that support it, as well as maybe additional content for EyeToy owners, similar to the GameCube/Gameboy Advance pair-ups?



Microphones

Headphones with microphones are nothing new, and there are a few people that use them diligently. But it seems that only serious competitive gamers have a use for them. Except on the Xbox, of course, where you can loudly smack talk your opponents over Live. That's what we'd like to see more of!



Bluetooth

Ever since Nokia had the foresight to include this wireless standard into the N-Gage everyone is on the bandwagon, with even a proposed add-on for the GBA to allow for random multiplayer. And with the gazillion handhelds on their way with Bluetooth support, widespread wireless multiplayer gaming (on most platforms) must be around the corner.



DVD

Well, duh! But we had to mention it first, didn't we? Actually it's a moot point - both the Xbox and PlayStation 2 already use it, and the GameCube is using something similar. Even the mysterious PSP will have DVD capabilities, according to the rumour mill. In fact, only PCs are lagging behind. Considering they are not much more expensive than normal, decent CD-Rom drives, this one's a given. We won't even take credit for it.



lazy gamer's guide:

Thermaltake Xaser III Skull VM3000A Case

Display it!

Looks pretty, doesn't it? The Xaser III Skull case is smaller than the normal Xaser III - about the size of a Midi case. It also has a plastic front door instead of the normal metal one. Call it a light version, except it looks more aggressive and at R 1199 it's much more affordable than the Xaser III 2000's R 1999 (both without a power supply). Made by Thermaltake, you can grab one at any decent PC retailer, or phone Corex at (011) 707 5000 for more info...



Cool it!

The Skull case has 4 fans - two mounted at the back behind the CPU, acting as extractors, one over the PCI and AGP slots (intake) and one blowing air over your hard drives. Each sits in its own plastic chassis (except for the back-mounted, which share a chassis). The left-side panel has two grate holes for air-flow inwards.



Control it!

Being the junior of the Xaser III server case, the front display unit isn't quite as fancy, giving only control over two fans. But you can still monitor your temperature and set an alarm temperature. If you have it available on your board, you can also connect two USB ports and one Firewire port to the front bay. The skull motive on the front of the case can also light up and even rotate its lights.



Shield it!

The weird design on the side has something to do with EMP shielding, but since we're not planning to be lanning anywhere near microwaves or nuclear test sites, it's a bit of a moot point. Good looking, it's just a pity it doesn't light up in any form. There is space, though, on the side to offset a case light.

Mount it!

With the case you'll get enough brackets to mount three 3.5" drives (hard drive, stiffy etc.) and three 5.25" drives (CD-Rom, etc). You simply clip them on and slip the drives into the front - no screws required. You can also mount additional drives using screws. The case can carry four 3.5" drives and six 5.25" drives, and it has space for an additional hard drive on the fan bracket overhanging the motherboard.



Clip it!

The motherboard clips into the movable bolts on the mounting board. With the supplied level you can also easily slip the board out again, so you never need to use a screw anywhere to secure the board. The back of the plate is secured with two slide-clips that are screwed down as well. Your cards in your AGP and PCI slips are held in place with clips as well, instead of screws.



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The Lost Vikings
1992



One of the best platform titles ever released, it also placed Blizzard on the map. When three Vikings land in an alien dimension, they need to find their way back, as well as beat the evil aliens, by combining their individual skills.

The Death and Return of Superman
1994



Blizzard's first game for DC, it featured the epic death and return to life of Superman. Developed for the SNES, it was nothing special, but still remained a fairly fun beat-em-up where Superman walked and flew around taking out the tons of monsters attacking him.

Justice League Task Force
1995



Blizzard's SNES game was based on the famous league of heroes from the DC universe, and had you taking a role of one of the heroes such as Green Arrow or Batman and fight characters in this standard beat-em-up.

WarCraft II: Tides of Darkness
1995



WarCraft returns with a higher resolution, a new plot, vastly-improved graphics and a great play dynamic over land, sea and air. It became an instant hit, especially to online players, and made Blizzard the king of RTS again.

WarCraft II: The Dark Saga
1997



Blizzard combined WarCraft II and its expansion into one game, and released it on the PlayStation as part of all the RTS games that got ported to the system at that time.

Norse By Norse West: The Return of The Lost Vikings
1997



The Vikings return in this sequel to the classic, this time with updated graphics and play dynamic. The mechanics are still the same - navigate your three Vikings with their unique skills through puzzle-filled levels. Not quite the classic Lost Viking was, it's still a lot of fun.

Diablo II: Lord Of Destruction
2001



The expansion actually improved the game to its classic status, and is seen as a must-have if you want to play the game. Apart from a huge play dynamic and graphics improvements, LOD also brought along tons of new monsters and items, new character classes and a new area, plus the demon Baal.

WarCraft III: Reign of Chaos
2002



15 years after closing the dark portal, a new evil has risen, and suddenly the humans and Orcs find themselves fighting something far worse than they imagined. Four races and new 3D graphics are wrapped around the familiar concepts of the series, plus new additions such as Hero units.

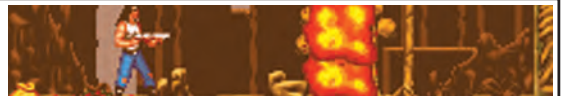
Blizzard have been around longer than you think. Created in 1991, their first name was Silicon and Synapse...

WarCraft: Orcs & Humans
1994



The original WarCraft RTS predates even Command & Conquer, and also introduced multiplayer to the genre. Humans and Orcs fight it out as the green hordes try and take the Humans' land. An instant classic.

Blackthorne
1994



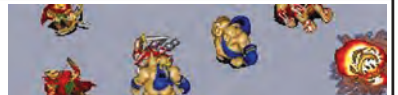
Bought by Blizzard from a failed developer, they completed it and released one of the finest platform/stealth shooters in the vein of Prince of Persia and Flashback.

Diablo
1996



Next to WarCraft, this is Blizzard's flagship title, and the game that put Blizzard North on the map. Relentless hack-n-slash action took you all the way down a dark set of catacombs to eventually face the demon Diablo himself.

WarCraft II: Beyond the Dark Portal
1996



After defeating the Orcish invaders, the humans venture through the dark portal the hordes used to enter Azeroth to close the portal once and for all. New maps and a few new units made for a nice expansion.

StarCraft
1998



A cult classic and one of the most successful RTS titles in history, despite a troubled and oft-delayed development cycle. Take charge of one of three races as you battle for supremacy in three distinct storylines. If that wasn't enough, innovative additions to the multiplayer made it a huge hit at LANs and online.

StarCraft: Brood War
1998



If StarCraft turned the game series into a classic, Brood Wars made it into a cult icon. Expanding on the stories of the original game, it brought in tons of new play dynamic changes, units and 100 new multiplayer maps.

Diablo II
2000



Diablo II reaffirmed Blizzard's position with their fans, as well as a developer of multi-million selling games. Expanding to four new areas, new character classes and those trademark excellent Blizzard CGI movies, it became an instant classic.

WarCraft III: The Frozen Throne
2003



The evil of the undead returns when two fallen heroes plan to release an undead lord from his frozen prison. As with Blizzard's usual expansion strategy, the game expands on the original storylines in a vast way, as well as new lands, units and maps.

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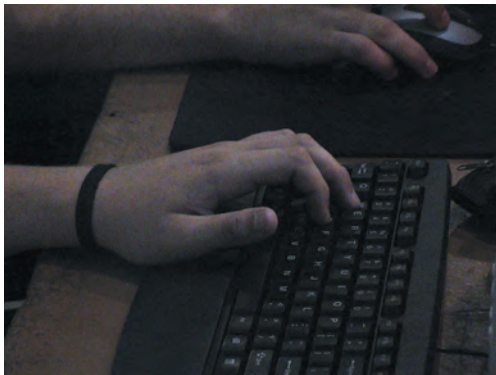
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The FPS: Reloaded

Last month we took an elementary look at how to prepare oneself, and one's game, in order to play First Person Shooters (FPS) successfully. We discussed the importance of graphics setup, reducing detail settings, and making your opponent's model stand out from the background. We also looked at the role of mouse sensitivity and acceleration. This month, we continue where we left off, with further pointers about good setup.

▶ The easiest way to spot a newbie is to check if he is using the "next weapon" and "previous weapon" keys, even more so if he has them on the mouse-wheel. Before you can even think about mastering a game, you have to bind your keys correctly. "Binding" is the term used for setting an action to a specific key.

There are three common areas of the keyboard where players choose to put the majority of their controls - the "qwerty" area, the keypad, and the arrow keys. Each of these setups has its pros and cons, except for the arrow keys, which are simply inefficient because of the large distance between them and anything else on the keyboard, leaving you with very limited binding options. Don't play on the arrow keys. The qwerty area (the default settings in many games)



allows for a large number of available binding options around the "w", "s", "a", and "d" movement keys. It also affords easy pressing of the spacebar with your thumb. The drawback here is that the letter keys are not perfectly in line, and this can, in some cases, result in messy movement. The keypad (where I personally choose to play) does not have as many binding options, but I find it to be more than satisfactory, and the keys are lined up, making it more comfortable. For this, you need to ensure you have space on the table to your left (provided you are right-handed), as you will want to have your playing keys near the centre of the screen.

Now that you've chosen your keyboard position, it's time to make use of it. No matter how overwhelming it may seem at first, you must set a key to each weapon / function available in the game. You may not have need for them all to start with, but as you develop, you will find their uses by instinct. Never, and I do mean never, use next/previous weapon for your weapon selection. This is slow, unreliable and gets you into a habit of not switching your weapons. As you learn, you will see that each weapon has a particular use in a particular situation, and you will want to have quick and easy access to the right one. The most classic example is rocketing someone into the air in Quake 3, then switching to railgun and fragging them in the air (which is easier to do, since their movement becomes predictable).

Put your most common weapons closer to the movement keys, so your fingers don't have to travel far whenever you need them. Generally, it is a good idea

to have your instant-hit weapons (in Quake 3 and UT2003, etc) right above your keys for left and right. This will boost your reactions and result in more railgun / lightning gun hits where they count. For games such as Counter-Strike, use those keys for your primary weapon and pistol. Do not use the numbers above the letter keys for important binds (this is often the default) - they are too far away. Lastly, your jump key. Either set it to whatever key is near your thumb (don't use any other finger for it on the keyboard), or the right mouse button.

Whichever one works for you. However, in games with a secondary weapon function, such as UT2003 and Counter-Strike, always use the right mouse for this, and put jump on the keyboard. When thinking about Field of Vision (or FOV), we are getting slightly more advanced. Your FOV is how much of the 360 degree 3D world fills your view at any given time. There are

Part 2 - Setup, continued...

countless schools of thought about it amongst the vast gaming community of the world. The top players, across many different games, use FOVs ranging from all the way from 70 to 130. If you test this out, you will see just what a large range it is. Whatever suggestions I give here, there will be

"professional" examples to the contrary, and as I say with everything, it is only necessary to find a FOV you are comfortable with. A general guideline I can give is: your FOV should correspond inversely with your mouse sensitivity. That is, if you have a low mouse sensitivity, your FOV should be higher (100 to 110 is the range you should be looking at). This allows you to see more around you, counteracting the negative effects of the low sensitivity in close-quarter fire fights. Your target on the screen will be smaller, but moving slower, and so it balances out. On the contrary, if your mouse sensitivity is high, you should keep the FOV low (85 to 100), or your accuracy will suffer when your target moves too quickly across the screen. The advantage of a low FOV is a bigger target to aim at.



about it amongst the vast gaming community of the world. The top players, across many different games, use FOVs ranging from all the way from 70 to 130. If you test this out, you will see just what a large range it is. Whatever suggestions I give here, there will be

Demos and Spectating

Demos of other players are possibly your greatest resources, but they can often be a hindrance if you do not know how to learn properly from them. It's the same as it is with configs, really. You can pick up many useful tricks, and come to understand the tactics that become standard in the community. But since each person has a unique way of playing, trying to completely copy another player's game style will get you nowhere. You must take what is useful to you and scrap the rest (while still being aware that someone else might use the same thing against you). Don't sit and analyze single games (unless you are trying to learn more about a specific opponent), rather let all of the knowledge seep into your brain gradually and become reflex. The more you know about what can be done, the less there is that will surprise you, and that is part and parcel of FPS skill. I have hardly played any Quake 3 in my gaming career, yet I can keep up with everyone else purely due to what I have learned from watching hundreds of demos. General aiming ability also plays a role, of course, but I will get into that at a later stage. You can find large archives of demos for almost every competitive game on websites such as <http://www.esreality.com>, <http://www.cyberfight.org>, and <http://www.cached.net>. To make demo viewing easier, download the free program "Seismovision" from <http://www.planetquake3.net/seismovision>. Download, watch, keep abreast of international trends. Especially in a community as isolated as South Africa's, this knowledge will play into your hands as a huge advantage. Look for important games, such as the finals of large overseas tournaments. Get to know who the best players are - the quality of the demo determines how much you could conceivably learn from it.

Next month, in the third and final part of this series, I will be explaining how to approach a game, how to learn its subtleties, and how to improve to the point of mastering it. Topics covered will include aim, movement, timing and awareness. In addition, I'll be giving some tips on the best practice methods.

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// generated by quake, do not modify
bind J "nextweapon"
bind K "previousweapon"
bind SPACE "toggleweapon"
bind HOME "sensitivity 3.25"
bind = "reload"
bind . = "isidling"
bind - = "isidling"
bind 0 "weapon 10"
bind 1 "weapon 1"
bind 2 "weapon 2"
bind 3 "weapon 3"
bind 4 "key_name "Clivity Quaid""
bind 5 "weapon 5"
bind 6 "weapon 6"
bind 7 "weapon 7"
bind 8 "weapon 8"
bind 9 "weapon 9"
bind = "reload"
bind [ "weapon"
bind ] "weapon"
bind | "weapon"
bind ~ "toggleweapon"
bind ` "weapon"
bind 0 "key_name good job!"
bind q "weapon 1; sensitivity 3.25; cg_weapon 0"
bind e "toggleweapon"
bind s "weapon 1; sensitivity 3.25; cg_weapon 0"
bind w "weapon 2"
bind z =
bind x =
bind c =
bind v "followme"
bind q "weapon 3; sensitivity 3.25; cg_weapon 0"
bind e "weapon 5; sensitivity 3.25; cg_weapon 0"
bind s "back"
bind = "toggleweapon"
bind v "key_name Roger That/omg!!"
bind = "toggleme"
bind q "weapon 7; sensitivity 3.5; cg_weapon 0"
bind e "toggleme"
bind s "toggleme"
bind PAGE_UP "jump"
bind PAGE_DOWN "previousweapon"
bind ALT "aspect"
bind WFF "warp"
bind DEL "lockpick"
bind PGDN "lockpick"
bind Z "sensitivity"
bind F1 "vote yes"
bind F2 "vote no"
bind F3 "toggleme"
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"... the best-looking game in the series yet." - ign.com

- ☞ Play over 50 stages across 17 unique maps
- ☞ Giant siege engines: battering rams, catapults, and bridge layers
- ☞ Fierce new one-on-one duels
- ☞ Create your own officers and bodyguards
- ☞ New character-specific special attacks
- ☞ Brand-new Weapon Upgrade System
- ☞ Kingdom Play! Select a new general for each stage in Musou Mode
- ☞ 3 brand-new officers for over 40 playable characters

EXCLUSIVE
USA DOOM 3
INTERVIEW

DOOM™



THE EVOLUTION OF EVIL



In 1994 id software accumulated their collective history of programming genius, relentless action, a cutting-edge play dynamic, twisted sense of humour, heavy metal music and interest in hospital accident photos into a game that pushed the envelope for games, both in technology and maturity. And in 2004 one of the biggest and most important games in PC history returns to pick up the goal posts and take them into Hell.



"There are always limitations, even when working with bleeding-edge technology like the DOOM 3 engine, but that hasn't stopped us from creating the game that we set out to make."

Tim Willits

Q: When creating DOOM 3, how much did you go back to the old concepts and designs of the original game? Is it a matter of now being able to portray what you've wanted to way back in the early 90s?

Tim Willits: When John Carmack came up with the original design for DOOM in the early 90s, he had a vision for what he wanted to create; a game with intense action, scary environments, and truly terrifying monsters. Although the original DOOM technology was groundbreaking for its day, and the game has become one of the most popular in history, it is with DOOM 3 that the original vision is being fully realized, and we can present an experience that rivals CG movies.

When John started researching the new technology after QUAKE III he saw the potential in the unbelievable environments that could be created with the lighting, shadows, and bump mapping, and knew that now was the time to bring his original vision for the DOOM world to life. If you thought the original DOOM was scary, you may not be able to finish DOOM 3.

Q: Although we've only seen very small bits of it, DOOM 3 is very likely to have the best graphics ever seen on PCs. Would you say you have succeeded in developing everything you had wanted to

or did you have to deal with the inevitable limits, which, no matter what, still affect today's machines?

Tim Willits: There are always limitations, even when working with bleeding-edge technology like the DOOM 3 engine, but that hasn't stopped us from creating the game that we set out to make. Our focus from the

beginning has been to create a truly terrifying experience for the player, and the technology is the cornerstone upon which we build. By utilizing the realistic lighting system, dynamic shadows, real-life physics, 6 channel audio, and rendering technology that gives flat walls depth, our designers and artists have crafted a world that will truly put you in the game like never before.

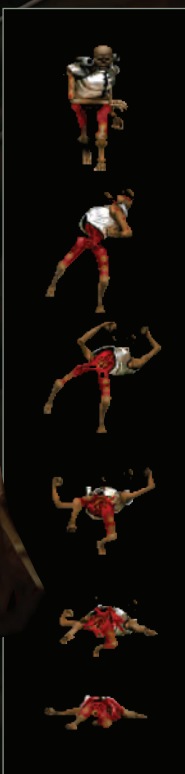
Q: The DOOM saga can be considered as the proper shoot 'em all: adrenalin and pure action. In this third episode, it appears that we can expect some evolution in the gameplay, rather than the classic run-and-gun, marine-and-monster format. Can you tell the reason for the increased story and the work you did with your writer to develop the game?

Tim Willits: When you sit down to play DOOM 3, we want you to believe that you're there, on Mars, battling the most unbelievably scary creatures you've ever seen. It is those moments, when you've completely forgotten that you're playing a game, that we can terrify you the most, and we must utilize every element of the technology, art and design to suspend your disbelief. At the heart of DOOM 3 is the action and your battle with the forces of Hell, but we also allow you to interact with other characters, and use those characters to maneuver through dangerous situations. All of this is wrapped up in a Hellish setting with a history and story that make the experience believable and allow you to dig deeper into the UAC, where you can discover the secrets of the game and the characters that you're there to protect.

Q: The design philosophy behind DOOM 3 seems less about pushing out more polygons, and instead exploiting technology that hasn't been really utilized in earnest up to now, such as real-time mixing of sound and detailed physics. Was this a conscious decision from the start, or did the project evolve into this approach?

Tim Willits: When we set out to make DOOM 3, we wanted to create a frightening environment; one that was truly realistic, and a place that players would believe they were in. In order to achieve these goals, we needed to create an environment that emulates the "real" world visually, aurally, and physically as much as possible. The DOOM 3 graphics engine is second to none and renders the most realistic looking graphics ever seen in a game. Additionally, our new physics system has helped us create some really interesting situations in the game. We have circumstances that require you to move and manipulate objects in an area in order to progress. We have destructible walls that demons will come crashing through, and the environment is full of objects that creatures can hurl at you.

The new 6-channel real-time sound mixing has also helped us create some very scary environments. You'll be wise to pay attention to the directional sound cues in the game. If you aren't careful and don't notice the sound of a demon or zombie creeping up behind you, you'll be dead before you know it.



**"We're committed to having the game run on as many systems as possible."
Tim Willits**

Q: One of the downfalls of horror-styled games is that the player has a level of control as opposed to watching a horror movie, where you are little more than a helpless spectator. DOOM 3 is meant to be scary. So what is the biggest challenge in creating a game that actually scares the player all the way through?

Tim Willits: DOOM 3 is scary because you are in control. Only in first-person gaming do you see through the eyes of the character, and in turn sense that things are happening to you. DOOM 3 has many gaming elements from fast paced combat, to more deliberately paced exploration, and we derive much of the fear through the pacing of those elements. Our focus is on putting you in numerous situations where we build tension without combat. For example, you may find yourself walking through an area of the UAC when all of a sudden the lights go out and you are lost in complete darkness. You hear the sounds of something crawling in the ceiling panels above you. You pull your flash out but then can't carry your gun. You stumble around the darkness trying to find the exit, as the sounds of demons grow louder.

DOOM MODELS

DOOM aims to have very advanced-looking models, even though they are low in polygon count.



1. This particular character has about 250,000 polygons in his high-poly model. The high-poly model is used to generate the normal map which is combined with several other texture passes in the renderer, and placed on the low-poly model to create the in-game image.



2. This is the model that is actually being used in the game. This particular character has about 1,400 polygons in his low-poly (in-game) model.



3. The in-game character. As you can see, the final result is a 1,400-poly model that can be rendered in real-time, but looks like a 250,000-poly model that could normally only be pre-rendered.



Chainsaw



Pistol



Shotgun



Machine Gun



Plasma Gun

GET YOUR GUN

A slower play dynamic or not, DOOM 3 will still be about shooting your way through - we seriously doubt that minions from hell are into negotiation. So a few of the weapons at your disposal...

Fist

We suppose. Plus the knuckle dusters, though we doubt Kevin Cloud will be modelling it on his arm again.

Chainsaw

Your trusty friend... while the chainsaw isn't exactly the weapon you want to be stuck with, there is something about the chug-chug sound it makes as you're running down a corridor. And let's face it - it's the ultimate weapon for testosterone-crazed shooters.

Pistol

Everyone in the military needs their trusty military pistol, and even though you get more powerful weapons, you can always rely on your pistol to have a few shots left. Well, hopefully. At least you don't need to keep one in the barrel - shooting yourself when having a demon tear down towards you isn't an option. *[Depends on the type of demon really, Ed].*

Shotgun

While there's no mention of the super shotgun making a return (but we can hope), the shotgun is there to deal out some punishment. Besides, it's nice to have a weapon that can stop most things in their tracks without risking blowing up in your face.

Machine Gun

Yup, this is new. The Chain gun still appears in the game, but it hasn't quite got that Zen 'feel' of mass carnage meets bullet economy. This gun, on the other hand...

Plasma Gun

It looks mean and it spews blue sparks of death. The plasma gun still remains the best way to clean out a room by using a combination of running and frantic shooting. It's also sure to be a crowd favourite in the multiplayer.

HE Grenades

Not part of the original DOOM, they now make an appearance. Considering that running around levels shooting bad guys like you are an angelic Rambo isn't going to be the best approach, grenades should be useful to sort out some sticky situations.

Rocket Launcher

Ah, enough said.

BFG

It stands for the Big F***ing Gun, and it even crops up in a few movies. Of course, neither models in Quake II or III did achieved the ridiculous level of destruction the original did. Once again, we can only hope...

Soul Cube

This new weapon is an ancient artifact that was used to combat Hell in the past. Nothing else has been revealed, but part of the game takes place in the ruins of an ancient Martian civilization, so we're guessing it comes from those parts - makes sense if you think about it.

**"We are looking forward to seeing all of the cool content the community produces."
Robert Duffy**

OUR DOOM WISH LIST

Christmas comes once a year, DOOM comes even less. So we thought it apt to think of a few things we'd like to see back in the game (but haven't seen yet).



The Man

We know he's not there, but it's a wish list after all. We're of course referring to the player's face at the bottom of the screen that got more bloodied as he took hits.



The Cyberdemon

Well, he's only the finest boss ever to appear in a game. Nothing was quite as nerve-racking as sitting in that small room with all that ammo in it and hearing his metal hooves

clanking and thudding in the courtyard outside.



Exploding Barrels

Who remembers shooting a barrel full of toxic waste and watching it start a chain reaction, blowing up every other barrel in the room and hopefully

a few monsters as well? While we doubt DOOM 3 will strive for similar comic value, a few ooze-induced explosions aren't a bad idea.



Soul Sphere

Or a mega health, if you will. Not that we doubt there will be a mega health in DOOM 3, but we're curious to see how a soul

sphere would look with the new technology...



John Romero's Head

No chance at all of that happening, but it was kind of strange how the mastermind behind the whole invasion from Hell was a head on a stick. Not that it matters, we all shot at it anyway. [Some ran away, Ed].

You can almost feel them in the room with you but you still can't see anything. Then, without warning the lights come back on, and you find that you are surrounded by demons - all of them bent on destroying you, and you must then fight your way out.

Sometimes the anticipation of what is going to happen can be more frightening than the actual event.

Q: Can you update us on the monsters? How many of the original DOOM monsters have made the cut and are appearing in the new game? And how many new denizens from Hell can we expect?

Tim Willits: We are bringing back a lot of the classic monsters found in both DOOM and DOOM II but are obviously able to realize them in ways never originally imagined. Players familiar with the original games should be able to recognize which monsters have returned, but also see the remarkable difference between what we can do with the DOOM 3 technology, versus what was possible 10 years ago. We are taking the original monsters to an entirely new level, and we're certainly not limiting ourselves to just using the classics. We have developed some amazing, never-before-seen creatures that we are sure will become classics on their own. I would hate to give an exact count of the new monsters we have in the game because the game isn't finished. If someone here has a great idea for something new, we'll add it in. That is the advantage of id, we are small enough and flexible enough to massage the game if good new ideas present themselves.

Q: How have the interactions with the surrounding environment been implemented?

Tim Willits: Interactions with the environment are handled in a couple ways - the GUI (Graphical User Interface) system, and our proprietary physics system. We've added a GUI to the computer systems throughout the UAC. It is a very powerful interactive paradigm; it doesn't require additional controls. You interact with the GUIs the same way you interact with a web page, and the graphics are presented with a flash-like level of interactivity and quality. The computers can control anything from complex machinery to simply turning on or

off the lights in a room.

We've found this to be a very easy thing for players to understand. You simply walk up to a GUI, your weapon lowers and a mouse cursor appears on the screen. When you are finished interacting with the computer you just walk away and your weapon reappears.

Our physics system also allows a new level of interaction with the environment. Any object in the world (including monsters) can be assigned physical properties like mass and friction. When that object is shot, kicked, blown away by an explosion, etc., the object will fall, bounce, tumble or fly through the air exactly as you would expect.

Q: When it comes to weaponry, what can players expect of original DOOM weapons and any new surprises?

Tim Willits: The original DOOM weapons that are returning are the pistol, shotgun, chaingun, plasma rifle, rocket launcher, and BFG. We have also added a new light machine gun, HE grenades, as well as a special weapon called the Soul Cube.

We can't talk too much about the Soul Cube because that would give away too many surprises but what we can say is that it is an ancient weapon, one created millions of years ago to stop the forces of Hell. It was used in an epic battle of good versus evil long before Earth was anything like we know it today.

Q: What can you tell us about the minimum computer and graphics card specs?

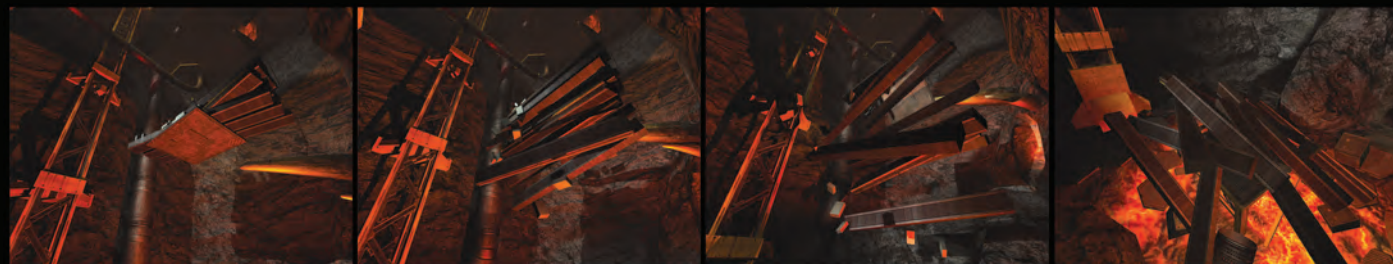
Tim Willits: Until the game is more complete, it is impossible to accurately nail down the minimum system specs, but we're committed to having the game run on as many systems as possible.

Q: For multiplayer, what will players like the most about 4-player Deathmatch? Can you confirm any other new multiplayer details?

Robert Duffy: Players are going to really enjoy the atmosphere presented during Deathmatch. The real time lighting and shadows present a very convincing and creepy environment. Making use of the interactive

PHYSICS ENGINE

This is a series of in-game screenshots which demonstrate some of the power of the proprietary physics system. A crane is holding a load of steel girders and boxes. The platform breaks and sends the girders crashing to the cavern floor. Each object falls, bounces, and interacts just as objects would in real-life. The DOOM 3 world is filled with this level of world interaction.



**"I firmly believe that the DOOM 3 rendering paradigm is the future of FPS games and that the engine will be the foundation for a number of great games."
Todd Hollenstedd**

elements of each area also provides a lot of fun as you can turn the lights out across an entire area by cycling down a power generator or use teleportation devices to move between areas. It is a great blend of the atmosphere and feel of single player with the faster paced multiplayer setting.

Q: Are there any new story details or information you can tell us about how DOOM 3 starts and how the Mars base is taken over?

Tim Willits: Upon arriving at the UAC, you will have an option to explore a limited amount of the facility before the demonic invasion takes place. You can explore some of the more administrative areas, talk with other characters, and learn about what is going on with the experiments, while discovering some secrets about the other main characters. You'll really get a good feel for the base, and what is going on before all Hell breaks loose. The pre-invasion exploration can be experienced at whatever pace you wish. We don't push you into anything in the beginning; we let you move around freely for a while before the action starts. However, once the demons arrive you should expect the unexpected as we will send you on a rollercoaster of action and suspense.

Q: A big appeal in the game is the potential for creating mods and maps. How much of the development is focused on giving gamers tools to expand on the DOOM universe from their own PCs? Will the development tools be made available to gamers?

Robert Duffy: From early on we wanted to make sure DOOM 3 was easily modified by the community. Some early key decisions have made this easy for us as all of the non-commercial tools we use are built right into the game. The world editor, as well as the other tools, can be run right from the console. Another key factor is all of the source areas, scripts, gui scripts, etc. are all available right out of the box. This provides a huge learning tool for people, as they can see exactly how we put the game together. In the past we would typically only release one or two examples, but with DOOM 3 they have everything available. We are looking forward to seeing all of the cool content the community produces.

Q: The Quake III Arena engine has become a standard for third party developers. What are your expectations for the DOOM 3 engine?

Todd Hollenstedd: The DOOM 3 engine is a bigger leap technologically than the Quake III engine was, so it may take a bit longer before you see as many third party games come out that are using it. However, I firmly believe that the DOOM 3 rendering paradigm is the future of FPS games and that the engine will be the foundation for a number of great games. The DOOM 3 tech has the potential to have an even longer useful life than Quake III, which is arguably the longest-lived first person rendering engine ever.

Q: Did the leaked Alpha build of last year have any effect on DOOM 3's development?

Todd Hollenstedd: The leak was certainly disappointing and was a major distraction when it happened. But it didn't have any significant impact on the game or the development progress.

Q: Have you paid any attention to the competition? If so, how? Are there any games out there that have truly impressed you?

Tim Willits: Everyone at id loves games and we play a lot of different titles. You can't work in this industry and not play them; it helps you recognize what fans expect from AAA titles as well as showing you what trends are developing.

We have never singled out a particular game and tried to emulate it, we do our own thing. We believe that if we make a game that is fun to play and it impresses us, then hopefully other people will also enjoy it.

Because we are a small company and everyone on the design team has input, we can get a lot of different influences and inspirations from what everyone likes. Some people here are really into anime, others comic books or novels, some people collect horror movies, and others have huge model collections. Since everyone draws inspiration from different areas and everyone has input on the game it is impossible to nail down any one specific inspiration for DOOM 3.



pc preview:

deus ex: invisible war



Thanks to the legacy left by the first game, **Deus Ex: Invisible War** remains highly anticipated despite a constantly shifting release date. We spoke to the Ion Storm team, specifically Harvey Smith, the Project Director, about what players can expect in the next part of the sci-fi saga by Warren Spector.

What games have the team created before working on **Deus Ex: Invisible War**?

The team consists of about 30 people, who have worked on a wide range of games: *Deus Ex*, *Ultima 7* (Serpent Isle), *System Shock* (1 & 2), *Thief* (1 & 2), *Terra Nova*, *Splinter Cell*, *Brute Force*, *Conquest*, *Freelancer*, and *Ultima Online*. Overall, this team is full of people who love complex games that try to realistically portray an immersive environment with lots of interactivity, a great story and significant exploration value.

Warren Spector has been credited as a visionary. Can you tell us why he is so well respected?

Warren has a reputation for being associated with games that appeal to players interested in depth of play and story evolution. Because these ideals complicate development (adding cost and time) most companies tend to stay away from this level of intricacy. Warren is one of those developers who embrace it. *Origin*, *Looking Glass* and *Ion Storm* are all companies that have championed depth of play, story and 'game design' as an art form.

What do you feel the game offers to the genre that is innovative? What is different about your approach to creating game concepts and utilizing technology? In effect, what gives you an edge?

We feel that our philosophy of empowering the player

with multiple paths and multiple solutions to problems sets us apart from most other games. The ability of our player tools and our game world to interact in interesting ways lets players develop their own strategies and play style, and that is an important part of our being both an immersive simulation and an RPG.

As a sequel would you say it is harder this time around, what kind of continuation is there from the first title and are you adding things that could not easily be designed or implemented the first time?

As you know we're continuing the story, the game picks up 20 years after *Deus Ex*. In the first game, JC Denton went into Area 51, and had the option of merging with an AI (becoming a benevolent world saviour), joining the Illuminati or plunging the world into a new Dark Age. *Invisible War* picks up from there. We want to make the sequel true to the original, a *Deus Ex* game, which means a combination of action, RPG and stealth, with multiple solutions to all problems. However, we're also adding an AI system based on the *Thief*

games (and *System Shock 2*), made by some of the same programmers and designers, the option of playing a male or female player-character, 'Havok' physics, volumetric lighting and normal maps, advanced sound propagation that helps with stealth play, more active play dynamic tools, and better accessibility.

You have spoken about there not being a linear plot, so firstly how intuitive is the play dynamic and how different is the plot line in both eventualities and the way you can play the game?

We give players the choice of genders as yet another axis of player expression and to deepen immersion in



the game-world. The play through path will be the same for both genders, but certain non-player characters will respond differently to your gender.

How would you say the game is broken up in terms of action, stealth, RPG, strategy etc.? When you design a game do you try to throw all these components in and how do you ensure the action and story do not appear contrived?

This depends on the player's approach. The player is free to ignore stealth, if he (or she) wants. Or, the player can choose a bunch of character powers, weapons, weapon modifications and paths through the game that support stealth. We've really always had to work very hard - there are many complex features making up Invisible War. Hybrids are difficult to finish, polish and balance. The game can be approached as an action or stealth mission game. However, it's also partially an RPG. So the plot is important.



The story and missions that make up Invisible War take the player from Seattle to Cairo to Germany to Antarctica to another (secret) location. Many of the characters from the first game have grown older (and have changed in interesting ways). In the Deus Ex universe, most characters represent some political agenda. Some reward violence while others prefer the player to try to resolve conflict with stealth or negotiation.

One of my favourite moments in Deus Ex involved Paul Denton yelling, "You jackass, those were people!" We want the characters to have strong viewpoints.

The game's AI is central in how the game works, so could you give the readers an example of how good (or sophisticated) the AI is in terms of an event/character in the game?

An interesting thing about the Deus Ex universe is the wide range of character groups, or factions, that you interact with over the course of the game. We have built a sophisticated disposition management system,

whereby the player's actions directly affect his or her relationships with these different groups of characters. There are several opportunities in the game for the player to have a non-player character fight alongside him or her. In the Cairo mission, Klara Sparks (another nanotech-modified antiterrorist agent) may be recruited to temporarily ally herself with you, and fight

other characters that are hostile towards you. Conversely, if you attack Klara, she will eventually turn against you, but not before several warnings. Your relationship with this character causes her to assume that your first several attacks were unintentional. In a more global sense, our game's AI affects its behaviour based on the combination of the player's actions and its attitude towards the player.



pc preview:

armed and dangerous

Planet Moon Studios, renowned for the strange but funny (and very addictive) *Giants: Citizen Kabuto* (as well as some development honours on *MDK*), mark their return with a title that looks to be shaping up as the next *Giants*, at least in tongue-in-cheek spirit. We spoke to them about the game, sweaty men, Boritovia and mortality.

Armed & Dangerous appears to be a 'tongue in cheek' offering. How important is humour to the game? I'm not sure what you mean. Armed & Dangerous is a deadly serious action game based on the true story of a cockney criminal mastermind, a mole and a robot. Why would you say its tongue in cheek [laughs]? Honestly,

our primary focus in the game has been on fun and insanely over-the-top action. The humour is an aspect of all our games, but is not the 'point'. Certainly, we're not a developer that would be likely to make a deadly serious, gritty game, which attracted LucasArts in the first place.

enemy installations and equipment. From subterfuge and sabotage to wiping out everything you see.

Please briefly give the readers your basic overview to the game and what has inspired you to create this concept?

The game is set in the downtrodden land of Milola, currently controlled by the tyrant King Forge. You play a band of Robin Hood-like thieves who are trying to pull off the ultimate heist and, in the process, end up getting drawn into a rebellion to topple the King. We were inspired by our own experiences. Over half the team grew up in Boritovia, which, as you will recall, was controlled by General Stanislav Ludvikz until 1999 - General Ludvikz unlawfully seized control of our parliament in 1983 on St. Visene's day. I won't bore you with political details, but most of us were actually fighting in the resistance while we were developing *MDK*. We chose to make *Armed & Dangerous* as a tribute to the brave men and women who died in the Battle of Broken Shoes, bringing liberty back to our homeland. [None of the NAG staff were in school by



There are 21 missions in the game - how diverse are they in terms of looks and action?

Diversity is a key for us - both in looks and in play dynamic. Every mission has a different set of sub-missions, so there are dozens and dozens of missions to perform during the course of the game. Play types range from saving peasants that have been captured by the tyrant King and returning them home to blowing up

"Armed & Dangerous is a deadly serious action game based on the true story of a cockney criminal mastermind, a mole and a robot."





1999 to attend history classes, so we'll leave that one hanging].

The game offers up many original ideas, one being when the screen flips upside down...

The weapon you're referring to is called the 'Topsy Turvy' Bomb. It's a massive corkscrew that you drill into the ground and then use to flip the world upside down. This causes your enemies to go hurtling off into the sky. You then flip the world right-side up and they come crashing back down.

We wanted all of our weapons to be intense and fun to use. In addition to the 'Topsy Turvy' there are over a dozen others, there's the Land Shark Gun, which has been raising a few eyebrows. It fires a baby shark into the ground that expands once it's underground into a full-sized shark. You see it shoot a fin up from the ground and 'swim' through the earth toward your enemy. The shark then comes bursting up out of the ground and chews up your opponent, pulling him under.

My favourite weapon right now is called the Home Wrecker Bomb. When you hit the right combination of

buttons, it causes a group of large, sweaty men to show up at the player's house, eat his food, drink his beer and insult his family. They then tear up the furniture and pass out drunk on the floor. It's not really so much a 'practical' weapon, but it sure makes us laugh.

Expand a little on your graphics/games engine - what it offers and how different the Xbox and PC versions will be and what problems and tweaks you have had to make for each version?

We use our internal Amityville 2 engine, which was developed specifically for this game. Our engine was built to allow us to render a huge number of enemies at a time. This allows us to have, in some missions, hundreds of guys on screen at once.

The PC version will allow for higher resolutions than the Xbox, simply because the PC has more RAM and has higher quality monitors than your TV. However, the main difference between the two is control and that comes down to player preference. We've worked with the control of both versions to make the game feel platform native. By that I mean that the game feels like a mouse and keyboard shooter on the PC and feels like it was made for an Xbox controller on the Xbox.



There are many interesting characters in the game. In total how many are on offer, including baddies?

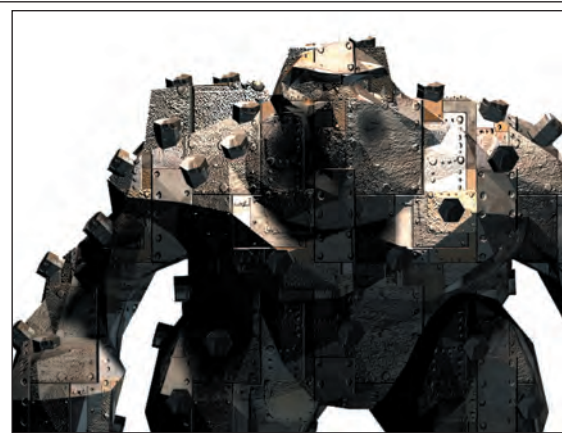
There are over 40 characters in Armed & Dangerous, many of whom are integral to the storyline that is played out in the cut scenes. On offer as enemies, there are the King's grunts - mean tempered armoured man-beasts who shoot at you with rifles and bows, the King's captains, who are much more dangerous shock-troopers, and then a lot of special enemies. Among the special enemies are the Weaving Monks of the Wild Wood, who cast deadly spells at you and also throw out a bit of a Gregorian chant. In total there are over a dozen types of enemies to destroy utterly in A&D.

How does the game and storyline evolve?

The 21 missions are designed to be played in succession. After most missions, the story further unfolds through cut scenes, and most of the missions are completing important tasks relating to the story. There are also several bonus missions that the player can unlock by finding hidden treasures in the levels. These missions are infinitely re-playable. Well, not really infinitely, the player will die eventually. We all do.

What is your favourite action event in the game that you feel sums up the ethos of this title?

My favourite set of missions is the Base Defends, in which it's you, alone, atop a base wall with a single turret, holding off an entire army. It sums up the ethos of the game because it's big guns, big action and huge explosions. That said, I do still giggle every time I send fifteen guys screaming off into the heavens by flipping the world upside down.



ps2 preview:

final fantasy xii

At a recent press event, which was held in the Roppongi Hills complex in Tokyo, Japan, the crew of game developers from Square Enix presented their latest creation in the Final Fantasy series. Final Fantasy XII looks to be the most graphically stunning game yet in the series, but it remains to be seen when we will actually get to play it, as only a release date for Japan has been announced.

The World of Ivalice forms the backdrop to its story and the opening sequence of the game sets the scene for the enriching experience we have all come to know and love so much. The rulers of the continent of Valendia, the Arcadia Empire and the rulers of the continent of Ordalia, the Rosaria Empire, are at war with each other. In the midst of the conflict, victory of a small kingdom called Dalmasca, is claimed by the Arcadia Empire. Princess Ashe of Dalmasca, who is now the only living member in the royal family since her father died, which makes her the heir to the kingdom, joins a resistance army who has been battling against the mighty Arcadia Empire. Enter Vaan, a handsome, dreamy 17-year old lad who also lost his family in the war. Ashe and Vaan meet and so an adventure begins that is set to change the world forever. Heading up the development of Final Fantasy XII, Yasumi Matsuno (creator of Tactics Ogre, Vagrant Story and Final Fantasy Tactics) pointed out that while the game was set in the same world as that of Final Fantasy Tactics, it would take place in a different time period. Inspiration for the creation of Ivalice came from Turkey itself, "We saw the blend of different cultures and the blend of different architecture types in the buildings." Matsuno adds, "The European and Arabic cultures blend into a Mediterranean look. It encompasses the story, the look, and everything."

Matsuno has gathered an impressive team to work on this project and when you scan through the list of people involved you will notice that many of them have worked with him on several other projects. The team includes art director Hideo Minaba (FFT), background designer Isamu Kamikokuryou (FFVIII and FFX), character designer Akihiko Yoshida (Tactics Ogre, Vagrant Story, FFT) and music composer Hitoshi Sakimoto (Tactics Ogre, Vagrant Story, FFT). It's easy now to see the common thread that is subtly woven between FFXII and Final Fantasy Tactics.

So, with this impressive array of talent all gathered to create another masterpiece, what else can we tell you about the actual game? Well we know that the game is based in a medieval Mediterranean setting which will feature various races such as Bangaas and Vieras; the races will all speak different languages and will be from varying social classes. The infamous Chocobos and Moogles will also make an appearance. For those of you unfamiliar with Moogles, they are cute creatures with balloon-like antennae coming out of their heads. Matsuno is considering adding leg irons onto their feet, building on an idea which he had about eight years ago.

From a graphical perspective Final Fantasy XII is sure to leave you staring in awe. While using fewer polygons for the character models than those used in FFX, and more advanced texture work, they were able to produce real-time models with three light sources, which make the in-game characters look as though they are from a cut-scene. The map is also rendered in full 3D which will allow you to change your viewpoint as you play, giving you full freedom of movement. Another interesting addition to the game will be the range of flying aircraft, which weaves its way into the storyline when Vaan has a dream of becoming a pirate of the sky. One flying vessel was revealed to be around 340 metres in length. With the game close to 70% complete more details are certain to emerge soon.



PC
CD

The Gift List

PC
CD

cut along line

cut along line

PC CD-ROM PC CD-ROM PC CD-ROM PC CD-ROM PC CD-ROM PC CD-ROM PC CD-ROM

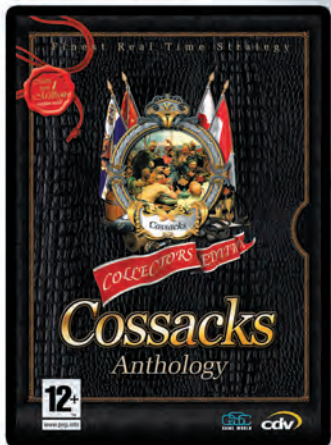
Dear Mom Dad Brother Sister Gran Friend Other (tick appropriate)

Thank you for being the best _____ (as above) in the whole world. As you may know the happy season is around the corner. The last thing I would want you to do is waste hours and hours shopping for a gift for me.

In the spirit of giving I have decided to GIVE you this card with some ideas. This will save you hours of precious time. Everything I do is to make your life easier.

Bless you in this time of love and happiness.

Love _____ (insert your name)



PC CD-ROM PC CD-ROM PC CD-ROM PC CD-ROM PC CD-ROM PC CD-ROM PC CD-ROM

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GET READY TO PLAY...



pc preview:



We'll let the screenshots do the talking, but it's essentially that manic mix of racing, havoc and getting passengers to their destinations before the clock runs out. It looks pretty and the preview version has three different stages, each with different characters and music. There's also a challenge section where you can complete tasks for each of the characters.

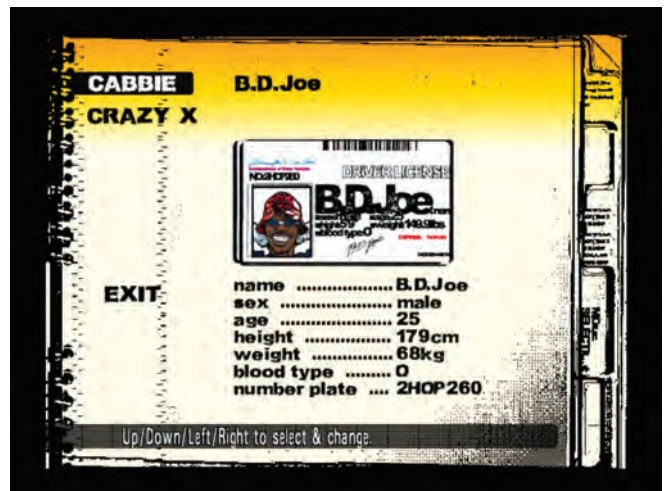
The control system isn't ideal, since it's a direct port - so no mouse option, but you can plug in a game-pad and play it as it should be played. The manic play dynamic is exactly what you need after a crazy day. No release date yet, but it's somewhere in 2004 (we're guessing sooner than later) that it will appear locally.

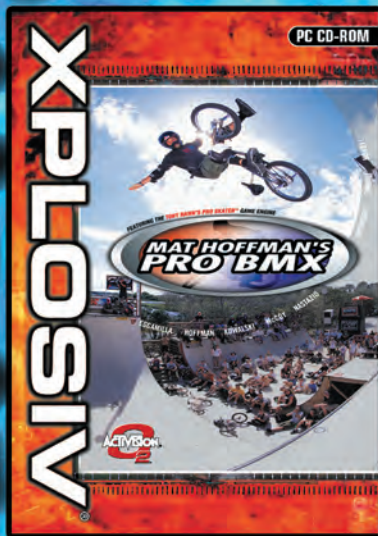
crazy taxi 3

When there's money to be made, we'll stop at nothing... or, in the case of Sega's classic, for nothing - except passengers however, as long as they can perform a rolling dive.

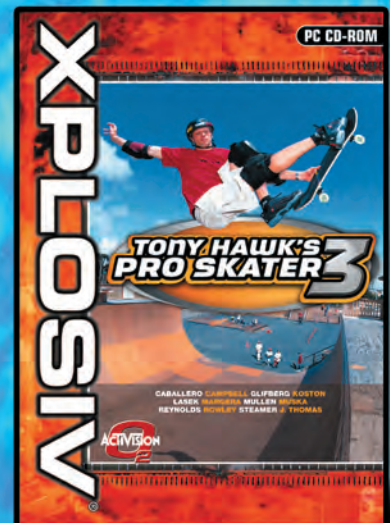
We'll fondly remember the Dreamcast for a few reasons, one of them being Crazy Taxi. Thankfully the game has since re-emerged on every platform out there, including a so-so version of the first game for Windows. But the third game is far prettier, thanks to its Xbox origins and now it's coming to the PC.

We'll let the screenshots do the talking, but it's essentially that manic mix of racing, havoc and getting passengers to their destinations before the clock runs out. It looks pretty and the preview version has three





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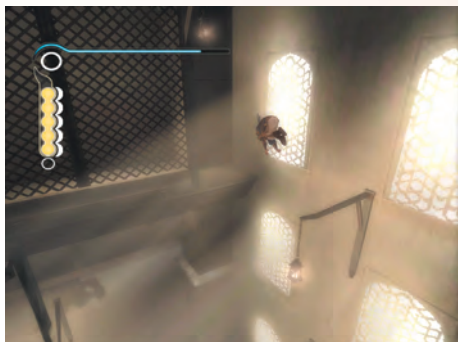
GET READY TO PLAY...



pc review:



prince of persia: the sands of time



You can't cross a canyon in small steps. But if you are the Prince of Persia, you can shimmy and rebound all over the damn thing until you find a good route. And even worse, you'll look really good while doing it. Game developers - eat your hearts out. The king of the platform game is back.

Rumour has it that this game had its humble origins as a guy who could do tricks against walls, something akin to the ease and simplicity of Tony Hawks Pro Skater. The developers then took the prototype to the folks who own the rights to Prince of Persia and showed them the demonstration, with the request to make a new POP game out of it.

The rest is gaming history, in more ways than you'd think.

The Sands of Time is one of the most amazing games to have ever been released. Yes, I said ever. In all my years of playing 3D platform titles I've never quite seen anything like this.

There have been a few truly great games - the original Tomb Raider, Soul Reaver and even the latest iteration of Indiana Jones.

But none of them manage what POP does - unbelievably

fluid animation combined with great level designs, a captivating story and a control system that would make even the folks at Nintendo drool over its simplicity. Controlling the prince is simply a matter of steering him with your mouse and keyboard, the jump and function keys, and the special function key that enables you to run along ledges, scale walls, do back flips (as well as block in combat).

With the jump key you can bound up narrow walls, swing between pillars, grab outcropping poles and dangling ropes, and even leap over some enemy units, bringing your sword down on their heads. The function key exists for those small but essential functions, such as letting go or putting away your weapon. And from there on it's simply a matter of using your directional keys and mouse to tell our hero which direction he should jump/shimmy/attack/roll, etc. etc. etc. . .

Then there is the Sand of Time, embodied in the Dagger of Time.

The plot involves, briefly, how your father conquers a palace and takes a large hourglass as a gift for another emperor, while you find the dagger and decide to keep it. But a series of events unleashes the power of the hourglass, and with the help of the Maharaj's daughter



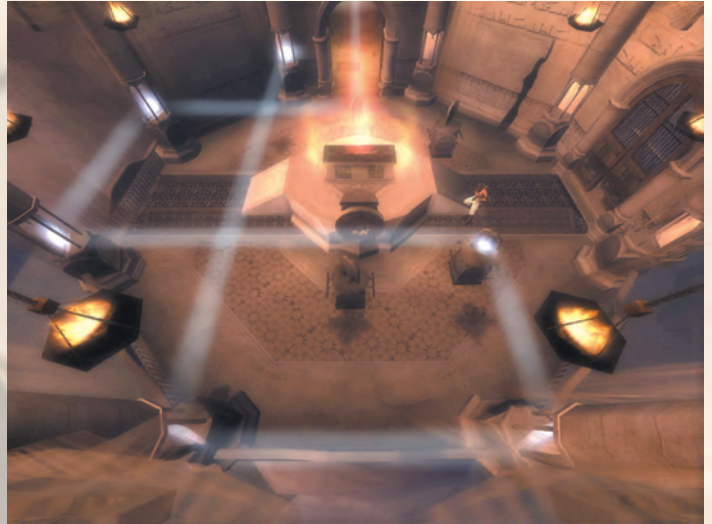
extras

While the PC version doesn't offer anything extra each console version of the game features a different additional bonus mini-game. With the PlayStation 2 version you can unlock the entire original Prince of Persia, while the GameCube version will allow you to download the mini-game and play it on your GBA. Xbox players will be able to play Prince of Persia 2.





▲ Although no one spoke of it, they all knew the Prince was a swinger



▲ We're sure this puzzle appeared in at least one Indian Jones movie

you need to fix things up and restore the sand. The dagger gives you the ability to control time. Much in the same way as games such as Max Payne, you can slow time down. You can also use the dagger to slow down enemy units, or to make blindingly fast attack runs on groups of monsters.

But the most useful feature is the ability to rewind time. Say you are struck down in combat. Simply hold in the rewind button and the actions that took place slowly devolve, showing you what happened.

Then you slot back into normal time and you are able to do a timely block or back flip to avoid the blow.

The catch, of course, is that you only have limited amounts of sand, and you can only regain sand from fallen monsters and sand clouds.

Also, whenever you do an important action your timer resets and starts to fill up again. This timer dictates how far back you can rewind, and it prevents

you from constantly using time to your advantage. The dagger's features also introduce another aspect - fearlessness. Suddenly you are more willing to make huge leaps and take chances, because you can rewind the effects. I only realised this at a stage where you lose

the dagger, because suddenly things seemed a lot tougher.

The game takes place in one colossal palace, and you'll traverse everywhere, from the mess halls to the dungeons to the tombs and even some more mystical places.

The levels are exquisitely designed and navigating obstacles or solving puzzles require a degree of hit-and-miss logic. As you progress, the décor and architecture also slowly change, reflecting the areas you are in.

It's too subtle to make you realise you are in a completely new area, but it happens enough to keep the game fresh and interesting.

You also collect four different swords in the course of the game, and despite the game lacking a wide range of enemies or traps, it never gets tired.

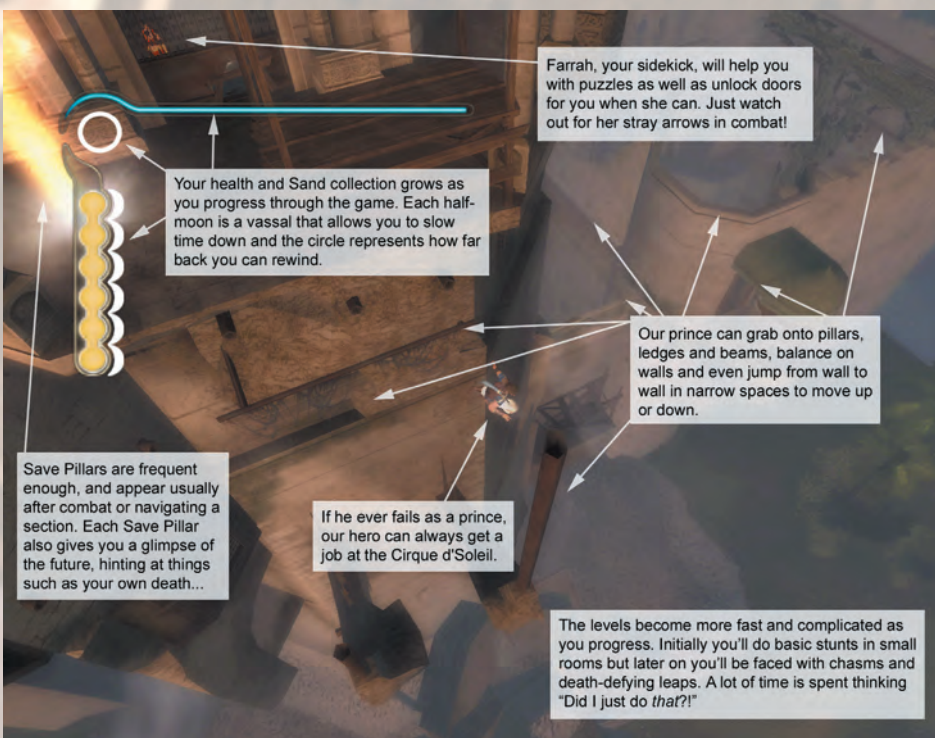
Honestly, my only complaints are that some level puzzles are quite tricky, the camera isn't always your friend (but the overview and first person modes make up for this) and when you finish the game, you are not rewarded with the original title, as console gamers are, but instead with the ability to load any of the game's levels.

It's very hard to explain just how smooth and impressive Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time is.

What I do know is that it's raised the bar for platform games by several dozen notches and other developers have their work cut out for them. Actually I feel sorry for them - it's simply not fair to be expected to compete with the likes of POP.



▲ When the big bird appeared, he realised his millet sack disguise was a bad idea



Your health and Sand collection grows as you progress through the game. Each half-moon is a vassal that allows you to slow time down and the circle represents how far back you can rewind.

Farrah, your sidekick, will help you with puzzles as well as unlock doors for you when she can. Just watch out for her stray arrows in combat!

Save Pillars are frequent enough, and appear usually after combat or navigating a section. Each Save Pillar also gives you a glimpse of the future, hinting at things such as your own death...

If he ever fails as a prince, our hero can always get a job at the Cirque d'Soleil.

Our prince can grab onto pillars, ledges and beams, balance on walls and even jump from wall to wall in narrow spaces to move up or down.

The levels become more fast and complicated as you progress. Initially you'll do basic stunts in small rooms but later on you'll be faced with chasms and death-defying leaps. A lot of time is spent thinking "Did I just do that?!"



all games reviewed on recontron machines

Minimum Specification
Pentium 3 800 MHz | 256 MB RAM | 16 x CD ROM | 32 MB D3D Video Accelerator
1.5 GB HDD

- ⊕ Awesome animation
- ⊕ Great controls
- ⊕ Clever level design
- ⊖ Occasional camera issues
- ⊖ No un-lockable content

Summary
If John Woo and Walt Disney made a game, this would be it. It's one of the best games ever made, and probably game of the year - even counting Wind Walker. If you love platform games, this is the best yet. If you don't, learn to and play this game.

95

pc review:

NOW
AVAILABLE



commandos 3: destination berlin

This title was highly anticipated by a number of gamers across the world. Commandos has attained a cult following, and those who enjoyed the first two were itching for more while those who hadn't played them were intrigued by the highly detailed screenshots and trailer clip released by Pyro. Commandos 3: Destination Berlin has since arrived, so it's time to see if it lives up to the anticipation.

Pyro Studio's isometric-view action-strategy war game now comes armed with bigger explosions, better visual effects and more missions than ever before. The recipe for this game has remained practically



▲ Your sniper never gets given enough ammunition



▲ Is it only me that remembers the giant mushrooms in WWII?



▲ War-torn Stalingrad depicted in great detail

unchanged since the release of the first instalment some years back. It was widely criticised for its clunky interface and often too-challenging missions, but was nonetheless recognised as original and a good play by those who persevered. It even spawned an add-on pack after all, a sure sign that someone enjoyed it at least.

Commandos 2 offered the exact same frustration and thrills, but with crisper graphics, even more detailed environments, and some nice additions to the play dynamic itself. One thing many hadn't expected it to introduce was multiplayer capabilities, but upon discovering Commandos 2 in multiplayer co-op I for one was hooked, and played it through right to the end with a couple of friends as my sniper and Green Beret backup. This latest title is just the same. Clearly the developers decided that if the following it had already gathered enjoyed the recipe so much, they'd be happy to serve it up yet again. So we're off to the Second World War to follow the heroic efforts of the Commandos squad...

It's a big install, although interestingly enough not quite as big as the last Commandos game, coming in at just under 1.9 GB. But then the game itself runs fairly quickly, without excessive load times and with no signs of lag whatsoever. Considering that most modern machines can put most of the levels in RAM this isn't that surprising.

The first campaign mission you play brings it all back. Everything is familiar, the essential shortcut keys come to hand quite quickly and soon you're coordinating your team's moves with at least a semblance of ease. The thing is the interface really is a clunky, unnatural thing. Even in this third instalment. You'd think they might have streamlined it a bit to allow for a shorter learning curve for new players, and less frustration for veterans. On top of the struggle you're likely to have with the control system, your first missions (apart from the tutorials which I'd recommend to beginners and experienced players alike) are challenging. Nothing like easing you in,



the first campaign trail you're likely to take will have you hunting a talented Nazi sniper, and then repelling an entire paratrooper strike force in quick succession. A piece of advice given during the tutorial is well worth listening to if you find yourself getting miffed with the high level of difficulty in this game. That is, F9 is your quick save key, and F11 your quick load. Use them very regularly [but make sure you get them the right way around! There's nothing more annoying... Ed] The missions themselves evolve into an average little story, and you'll find yourself taking advantage of the strengths of your individual team members more as the game goes on. Where in *Commandos 2* you usually had plenty of time to examine a situation before entering the fray, this one seems to favour hordes of opponents needing to be gunned down quickly. Graphically, this game has few faults. The outdoor

engine offers stunning detail on absolutely everything, with each map having obviously taken some time to complete. Environments are authentic and characters are nicely animated in all their actions. And as I mentioned earlier, the enhancements to the weather effects allow for far nicer snowfall and even torrential rain to be depicted. Lighting is another area to which the developers have dedicated significant effort. As searchlights scan areas they illuminate patrolling soldiers complete with generated shadows very effectively. And yes, the explosions themselves are bigger and prettier than before.

The indoor engine is a more truly 3D affair than outside, with full rotational freedom on the camera and a proper 3D environment. Zooming in as close as possible to the characters inside reveals models that are detailed, but that still go blocky when viewed from too close. This makes for really funky blood splatters when you get shot while in this view as square blobs of red erupt from your already blocky character.

The soundtrack is good, although your team's comments as you command them soon get tiresome, but this is something which every game including such remarks has always suffered from, so it can be overlooked.

One thing the more astute of you may have noticed is that as yet I haven't mentioned multiplayer once. That's because, while multiplayer is still there, the best part of this component in the second game is not. You can play Deathmatch and capture the flag modes, and there is a

cooperative mode which allows two squads to work together against two competing squads. But you cannot play through the campaign cooperatively. And unfortunately, the multiplayer modes which are included are just no fun.

The title is likely to do relatively well in the market, but it just doesn't quite cut the mustard with me. There's nothing fresh about it whatsoever, and the best feature of its predecessor has been left out! I know they must have been worried about alienating the fan base by doing anything too radically different, but a little bit of innovation is required if a title is not going to be stale at launch time.

Commandos 3, I'm afraid, is just that.

frustration

Right from the start this title offers you the choice of taking on any of the three available campaigns. This allows for some flexibility, and in case you get stuck on one of the campaigns, which you will, you can at least try a mission in a separate campaign while you figure out a solution in your head. However, even on normal difficulty, all three of these campaigns are incredibly frustrating from the get go, and the fun soon dissolves into tedium as you progress two steps in a mission, quickly auto-save, get shot up by a new troop of Nazis you hadn't spotted, and proceed through extensive quick-loading to figure out how to gain your next two steps.



AOpen

all games reviewed on recontron machines

Minimum Specification

Pentium 1 GHz CPU | 256 MB RAM | 4 x CD ROM | 64 MB D3D Video Accelerator
2 GB HDD

- ⊕ Nice lighting and weather
- ⊕ Detailed environments
- ⊕ Good character animation
- ⊕ Zero innovation
- ⊕ No multiplayer co-op campaign
- ⊕ Clunky interface

Summary

Commandos 3 offers nothing new or exciting beyond a new set of *Commandos* missions for those who enjoy being frustrated by an unfriendly interface. It looks good, and is very challenging indeed (too challenging at times), but ends up being disappointing.

63

pc review:

It has often been wondered as to what would happen when aliens finally do make themselves known to us. Will they bring peace, the harbingers of a new age of enlightenment? Or will their motivations be more sinister? There are no doubts here - these aliens have shown up with no desire to befriend humanity. But humanity isn't that easy to beat, nor that simple to suppress...

Developed by Altar Entertainment and published by relative newcomers Cenega, UFO: Aftermath is a game which deals with humanity fighting back against alien forces that have invaded the world. With most of the human populace gone and most of the planet deserted, it is up to an intrepid few to turn the tide and save the human race from genocide.

Sounds pretty keen, doesn't it. In fact, a few of the folks here at NAG were reminiscing about a similar title series, X-Com, which dealt with a similar topic. In fact, the similarities are more than just a few - both X-Com and UFO: Aftermath are turn based strategy titles dealing with a war between aliens and humanity. Both have variable mission choices (in terms of the jobs you decide to take on) and have extensive research tech trees. But X-Com was, and still is (if you can get past its anachronisms) a better title.

UFO: Aftermath is the kind of game that had a lot of potential, but failed to deliver fully in the final product. The play dynamic is annoyingly slow, due to the fact that every event causes the game to pause, with an inane announcement from one or other team member. This would be slightly less annoying if the voice acting was a lot better. Also, the tactical ability of the team is hampered by slightly thick members in its makeup. The result: a tedious title in which the best way to go about things is to stick together and charge down the enemy with guns blazing.

Things may have been a bit better had the graphics shaped up to standard. However, poor models, uninspired settings and a camera from hell make looking at the game almost as painful as playing it. The "ambient mood music" that pipes through the speakers constantly belongs in a lunatic asylum's elevator and, as I said, the voice acting is laughable. The control system is rather basic, but team members seem to have an annoying way of ignoring orders and getting themselves shot.

I am sad to say it - because I had high hopes for this game - but UFO: Aftermath really isn't much to write home about. Sure, absolute enthusiasts may find a little merit somewhere within the game, but it will never have more than a mildly interested cult following in my bet. This in itself is a pity, because of the strong ideas and brilliant legacy (if you want to associate the game with similar titles that happened by in the past) that the game had to work off of. Fans of the series may find a lot of merit in this title, but newcomers to

the X-Com range will have to exercise a lot of patience. Given time, the game does get fairly addictive.



ufo: aftermath



AOpen[®]

all games reviewed on rectron machines

Minimum Specification

Pentium III 500 MHz | 128 MB RAM | 8 x CD ROM | 32 MB D3D Video Accelerator
 1.25 GB HDD

Great idea

Voice acting

Control

Dumb team members

Summary

While UFO: Aftermath could have been a great alien bashing turn based strategy title, it fails to delight - in fact, it fails to do much more than mildly amuse. A game with a lot of potential not put into practice, this title is tedious and often annoying. Wasting Greys may be fun, but not even the most anti-alien masochist would survive too long with this one.

58

*There is no emotion,
there is peace.
There is no ignorance,
there is knowledge.
There is no passion,
there is serenity.
There is no death,
there is only the Force.
Jedi seek to improve
themselves through
knowledge and training.
Jedi respect all life
in any form.*

*fear leads to Anger.
Anger leads to HATE.
Hate leads to Power.
Power leads to Victory.
The dark side is
stronger than the light.
True Power is only achieved
through testing the limits
of ones Anger, AWOL
Passing through unscathed.
your hatred
will make you strong.*



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ps2 review:



Although conventional racing games have long been a console mainstay, rally games have never enjoyed the same level of popularity, despite the fact that, when well produced, they can be just as, if not more, entertaining than a run-of-the-mill racing simulation. Codemasters have developed a reputation for creating excellence in this under-nourished genre, and their latest creation is no exception.

Since its inception, the Colin McRae Rally series has certainly been an exceptionally popular franchise, and for very good reason. The series has always managed to expertly translate both the depth and adrenaline charge associated with the sport, without making the games too complex for novices to also enjoy. Of course, it should go without saying that success in Colin McRae Rally 04 is not the simplest thing to come by, and it will take even seasoned gamers a bit of time to become accustomed to the handling of the vehicles, which is not only radically different from most other racing simulators (as one would expect), but also presents somewhat of a departure from earlier McRae Rally games. The physics models for the cars has been reworked to provide an altogether more realistic rally experience, which ultimately means that truly mastering the game is more difficult than in previous incarnations. Of course, once you've got to grips with the controls and the general feel of the game, winning a race is all the more satisfying for the extra effort that had to be put in.

Pick your poison

You'll be pleased to know that Colin McRae Rally 04 offers a total of over 20 cars, comprising modern two- and four-wheel-drive cars (with the two-wheel-drives being the easiest to drive, at the cost of reduced power outputs), as well as "Group B" vehicles, offering extensive power, but which are also extremely difficult to control. Furthermore, each car has its own distinctive feel, as one might expect, adding to the depth of the title - a factor that has been sadly overlooked by many racing simulators. Of course, only a few cars are initially available, with the rest having to be unlocked through the course of the game. Along the way, you'll also be able to open up additional tracks, as well as earn upgrades for your vehicle by way of completing mini-

game challenges. Ultimately, the cars handle in a very realistic fashion, though even the smallest of trackside obstacles acts as a solid barrier, though once you learn to stay on the track at all costs, this becomes less of a problem.

Hear her purr

Graphically, Colin McRae Rally 04 does not disappoint - even the front-end, with its unmistakable "less is more" minimalist design just oozes class. The vehicles are very nicely detailed, with splendid damage effects, such as loose, swinging doors and flying bonnets. The tracks too manage to look quite realistic, at least at speed, and the weather effects are also fairly well executed. Aurally, the engine provides a satisfying roar, particularly from the in-cockpit view, and everything from the scraping of tyres on loose gravel to the painful clash of a meeting between bumper and tree trunk is faithfully recreated, though the navigator's directions do tend to sound more akin to a GPS device than an actual human.

Which way, chief?

As far as rally titles go, Colin McRae Rally 04 is undoubtedly one of, if not the, best title available, and fans of the sport are unlikely to be disappointed by it. Casual gamers, and those accustomed to more traditional racing simulators may find the slower paced action of a rally game isn't exactly to their liking, and the "one car on the track at a time" approach may be somewhat unsettling, so my advice to you is to approach with caution, but for those who get the ultimate rush out of off-road action, it's unlikely that you'll find a better way to get your fix than this.

colin mcrae rally 04



Minimum Specification

1-4 Players | 2963 KB | Analog: All buttons | Vibration compatible

- Realistic
- Graphics
- Challenging
- May not appeal to mainstream fans

Summary

Colin McRae Rally 04 lives up to expectations by improving in almost every way. Great realism, a myriad of vehicles on offer and the overall challenge of the game will keep even veterans entertained. Great graphics and sound make for a thoroughly polished title. Those who prefer "standard" racing titles might want to try it first, but if you enjoy rallies, you can't do better.

78

PlayStation®2

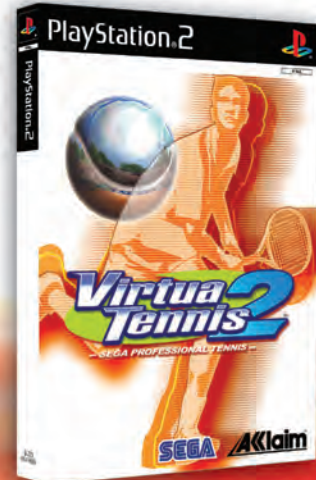
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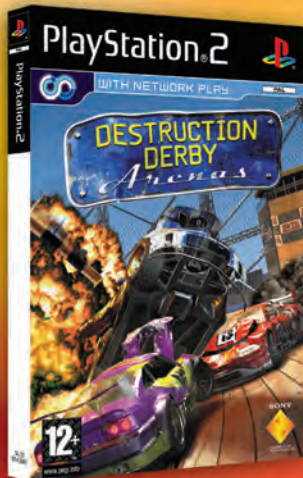
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pc review:

dungeon siege: legends of aranna

► "Change is coming my way - I can feel it" Beck might have been onto something, but he definitely wasn't mentally linked into the future and referring to this expansion, which adheres far better to "The more things change, the more you realise you just beat up something like it earlier" [deep, Ed].

The world might just end, and you're in charge of stopping it from happening. As is always the case with these massive hack-n-slash titles, there are evil things afoot and you end up discovering it's your destiny to stop it/them/they from completing its/theirs/they're/whatever dire deeds. No doubt Dungeon Siege 2 will have the same plot line, and since Gas Powered Games is hard at work on that, they left the DS expansion to Mad Doc Games. Essentially, this is as vanilla an expansion as you can hope for. While the team made some minor improvements to the game, it's Dungeon Siege all over again. This time around you visit an island off your shores where a monster called the Shadowjumper has stolen a valuable artefact and intend to use it to start The Great Clock. To you, this translates into travelling across the entire land, through its many regions, until you get to him, clobber him over the head and take back the artefact. When I say this is vanilla DS, I'm not kidding. With the exception of a few new races and monsters, weapons and areas, this is the same game. It even comes with the same problems. It took me around 16 hours to complete, but it felt like much longer, because like its parent, The Legends of Aranna becomes very repetitive very fast. The Diablo series was saved from this thanks to being able to teleport to town every now and then, as well as being able to become increasingly stronger. But DS follows a linear move from beginning to end, and you'll never revisit areas. Still fans loved that, so no point in changing the formula.

What irks me though to some degree is how the game has not fixed any significant problems with the original. Clipping in combat still makes it hard to see who is where. Your inventory is still a mess of items, with not nearly enough places to flog off stuff. And the new pack unit, a large sort of lizard, ignored every single stay or wait command I gave it, happily running into combat at a moment's notice. Needless to say at one point he died and I didn't see the need to resurrect him again. Besides, he only carries as much as a normal character. Your pack mule, though now far

more docile, still has that annoying small screen when you work with shop owners. And the game still has huge balancing issues. By the end of Aranna I was ignoring loot and generally hacking my way through crowds without a problem, and the final boss wasn't nearly as big a challenge as the first one you meet.

Aranna's biggest failing (or success) though is that, just like DS, it becomes more of a chore than fun to play. Even though the terrain changes and your characters level up, it becomes tedious, and the more things change the more they stay the same. To me it was four to six hours too long and seriously lacking in any real variation. It's a fun expansion, but you must love DS in order to really get any mileage out of this and still not be disappointed. It is, though, a great place to jump into the series, since Aranna includes the original game as well.



AOpen

all games reviewed on recontron machines

Minimum Specification

Pentium III 333 MHz | 128 MB RAM | 8 x CD ROM | 8 MB D3D Video Accelerator
 1 GB HDD

- ⊕ More Dungeon Siege
- ⊕ Better spell management
- ⊕ Backpacks
- ⊗ Not enough new stuff
- ⊗ Still unbalanced
- ⊗ Tedious

Summary

Take out the improvements, which they surely could have patched in, and you have something that is just like Dungeon Siege, just in a new place with some new monsters. Even the old interface annoyances are still there to make you feel all warm and fuzzy.

58





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pc review:

yager



Flying around in a futuristic ship performing mundane tasks like a circus monkey and having to listen to your arrogant virtual persona sprouting corny 'cleverness' at every turn has the potential to force even the most dedicated gamer to give up in disgust long before mission 2 ever loads... but when a game looks this good you start caring less about the quirky problems and more about just enjoying the ride.

Graphics aren't everything. Repeat three times. Gaming journalists have been delivering this sermon since the first good looking but poor playing game betrayed the trust and stole everyone's money. You can trust in Yager however because this is one game that delivers much more than a lovely graphics engine.

But we'll start with the negatives first - these are grouped into two major categories and one minor, ship control and console legacy being the biggest offenders and bug control bringing up the rear.

In Yager you control a ship, the Sagittarius - this ship has two modes of flight [hover and jet] and as you'd expect they behave exactly how they should, except in hover mode your turn rate is so slow it completely ruins the ace fighter pilot feel the game tries to push across. Increasing mouse sensitivity to compensate renders the other control aspects overly sensitive and therefore unplayable. The second issue is that Yager is ported

from the Xbox and suffers from a few limitations, conversely it also benefits slightly from this legacy. Where it suffers is play dynamic limitations and although Yager is definitely an arcade action game the lack of depth is missed as well as being able to save whenever you like - thereby forcing you to re-play lengthy sections of some levels frequently - thankfully you can skip in-engine and video sequences. Lastly the game features a few annoying bugs that ruin the experience such as sudden exits to the desktop, choppy play, the locking out of the keyboard and issues with audio settings. The audio setting problem is annoying as all the sound values reset to 100 percent for no apparent reason, making the music and sound effects rather loud and drowning out the important verbal instructions. On the plus side, being a console port means there are things to unlock such as new ships that can be viewed in the Ship Database area. Your performance in various categories is also displayed after completing a level, such as number of ships destroyed, accuracy and the completion of additional mission goals - the better you do here the more levels are unlocked. Unfortunately this is it - even after completing the game there is no big reward such as being able to fly any of these unlocked ships or new game options. Offering more dynamic expansions to the game after completion would have been a better option as the missions themselves are short and engaging enough to warrant playing again even if it's just to show off your 3D card.



▲ two huge vessels exchanging fire - reminds one of Return of the Jedi - if you turn down the lights a little

Drop dead

The screenshots don't do the game any justice - this is one you need to see for yourself. The level of detail is remarkable, the only thing missing is being able to do damage to everything you see - flying into structures and trees has no effect other than reducing your health. The game also features an interesting selection of music that tends to emphasise flourish and pomp instead of meaty substance; the sound effects are top notch with

convincing enough explosions and weapon fire. The voice acting, although corny, is delivered with enthusiasm and the characters in the game all feature unique enough personality traits to make them memorable, this is important because the game does feature more video and story than many others. All this extra effort reinforces the thinking that the developers really took their time with Yager and wanted it to be an epic adventure and they have succeeded in this regard to some degree.

In case you're wondering, the game features no multiplayer mode and instead of knocking it out with a few gamers at a LAN, you're told to watch the website for developments if you should click on the Multiplayer icon. Thankfully the single player game is adequate enough to justify the cost. In this genre Yager is certainly one of the better action games out there and if this looks like your thing you won't be disappointed.

Just in

Just before this issue went to print the multiplayer patch for Yager was released [v 5.24]. It weighs in at a sizable 86.9 MB and offers up Multiplayer Deathmatch and Team Deathmatch modes as well as 10 new maps, 6 new fighters and it also fixes some graphics and other bugs. If bandwidth isn't an issue for you then this addition will certainly add some extra spark to the game. The original score still stands however.

AOpen®

all games reviewed on rectron machines

Minimum Specification

Pentium III 1.0 GHz | 256 MB RAM | 8 x DVD ROM | 32 MB D3D Video Accelerator
 3.5 GB HDD

- ⊕ Gorgeous visuals
- ⊕ Entertaining
- ⊕ Accessible

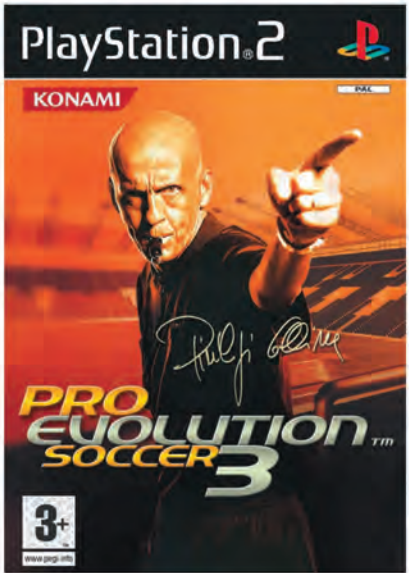
- ⊗ Massive installation
- ⊗ High system requirements
- ⊗ Control issues

Summary

If graphics are everything then Yager has it all - this is one of those rare titles that can draw a pointing and gasping crowd behind a player in less time than it takes to read this paragraph. Overall a fun arcade experience that lacks polish with a few irritating quirks that prevent it from attaining any awards.

74

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"Pro Evolution Soccer 3" now comes with improved AI and a redesigned graphic engine for greater detail. Also introducing an innovative "shop" element that allows the player to trade points for stadiums, teams, players, strategies and even new hair styles. With a multi-player option of up to eight players, the prospect of a threesome just isn't as exciting as it used to be.



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pc review:

chrome

Chrome puts you in the boots of Bolt Logan, intergalactic mercenary in the 22nd Century, and has many good features let down by one or two little issues. With action games being a little thin on the ground these days and what with Half-Life 2 and Breed moving to 2004 - Chrome has a chance to stand out.

Chrome is a very pretty game, from vast rendered terrain to detailed plant life and beautifully painted skies. This tactical shooter borrows a lot from great games like Deus Ex and Half-Life, but the good news is it puts its own spin on successful ideas.

You get to play Bolt Logan, a mercenary who is betrayed by a close friend, and get to see the plot unravel as he is helped by Carrie an agent of SPACON - he goes on missions for SPACON and gets more and more involved in the murky wars between giant intergalactic corporations. As the story progresses you get to make choices that determine the course of the outcome based on decisions you make.

Voice acting and story development are pretty good, but as with most action games you need to wrack up the body count to progress.

Chrome has a nice selection of weapons as well as the obligatory machine guns and rocket launchers - you are limited by your inventory size and therefore cannot carry every weapon you find, while certain missions also need you to use specific types of weapons to move the plot on. Weapons can be fired randomly or you can use the weapon sights by pushing the secondary fire button which pops up the sights, each weapon has a uniquely futuristic look and is fantastically modelled with high detail and a chromed finish.

Chrome is relatively easy as the enemies you encounter

seem to be equipped for a holocaust and carry huge inventories of ammunition and health, which makes each level pretty trouble-free once you have picked up all the goodies, even on higher difficulty levels. AI ranges from great to downright stupid as they appear to have been to marksmanship school and can hit you at 1000 paces. Other times you can walk up to them and put a pistol to their head before they react or they stand around watching you kill their buddies one by one. Once they do see you they go brain-dead, walking straight at you without a thought for personal safety.

As the game progresses you get implants ala Deus Ex - this is meant to help with the few bosses you encounter but otherwise are hardly used. Implants can overload causing you to lose stamina and better implementation of these implants would have made them less of a gimmick.

Chrome is beautifully rendered, with scenes of lush tropical forests and frozen landscapes - it's a pity though that the ambient sound feels empty almost as though all life had been removed before you landed. The soundtrack is also pretty forgettable although weapons resound with a solid thump.

Multiplayer features the normal flavours you expect to find, from Deathmatch to CTF, the problem though is the lack of online servers as getting support for new games is usually difficult in SA.

Considering Chrome offers nothing new in terms of play dynamic and seems to have latency issues even on a LAN it's hard to see it becoming a popular online game. Chrome is a good game with a few flaws, if you can look past this you have something to play while you wait for something better to come along. Personally I enjoyed the outing while it lasted.



AOpen

all games reviewed on recontron machines

Minimum Specification

Pentium III 800 MHz | 256 MB RAM | 8 x CD ROM | 32 MB D3D Video Accelerator
1.7 GB HDD

- ⊕ Graphics
- ⊕ Non linear play dynamic
- ⊕ Multiplayer included
- ⊗ AI acts dumb
- ⊗ Multiplayer support
- ⊗ AI is super accurate

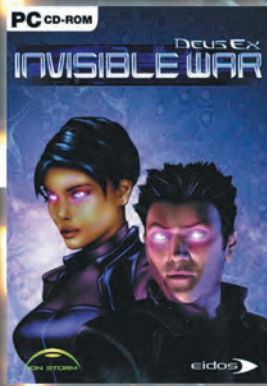
Summary

Chrome is fun - it has some amazing graphics coupled with great and not so great play. Let down by a few flaws especially the AI - Chrome is still a decent diversion with a few stealthy moments added to change the pace.

71



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pc review:

the temple of elemental evil

For many years, the Temple of Elemental Evil has meant an excellent adventure and challenging quest for pencil and paper role players around the world. In fact, this stalwart of Dungeons and Dragons has often been called the greatest adventure ever created for the role playing game. So it's rather obvious that it should come to the PC, what with Dungeons and Dragons' heavy representation on this electronic gaming platform.

The newly re-invented Atari pairs up with developers Troika to bring one of Dungeons and Dragons' best loved adventures to life on the PC. It's called Temple of Elemental Evil and it brings a high level of detail to the CRPG genre. Unfortunately that detail tends to fall into combat strategy and, as is normally the case with CRPG titles, the actual role playing element suffers for it. Not that this is not an enjoyable game - quite the contrary, in fact. Temple of Elemental Evil is a deep and enticing tale that proves very entertaining indeed. However, the game's strength lies away from the story... it's in the fighting.

Temple of Elemental Evil uses a version of the third edition Dungeons and Dragons rules optimised for computer play. It's more like Pool of Radiance and less like Baldur's Gate, with a complex turn-based combat system that mirrors the D&D rules to a tee - so much so that the whole combat procedure can get a bit tedious. However, once you get the idea of how it works into your head, it is great fun. Players of Dungeons and Dragons

third edition will notice these little elements that make the pencil and paper version of the game so effective in depicting combat.

Progressing through the game can take quite some time. You will need to retry various areas over and over again as your characters get stronger. This frustration inducing element of the game is quite strong, but it can be overcome with a bit of patience.

Temple of Elemental Evil seems to assume that players are going to have at least a rudimentary knowledge of Dungeons and Dragons. Take, for example, the whole alignment question. Nowhere in the game or in the manual could we find a detailed explanation of how alignments affect the characters, yet it is said to be important in the game. It's a small matter, but

oversights like this can adversely affect a player's gaming experience. Also, many items lack definitive descriptions.

The player can generate a number of characters, none of whom are utterly central to the game... it's about the party, not one character (a nice change from previous D&D based titles.) Other characters (up to a maximum

of eight) can join the party during the game.

At the time of writing, the patch for this game had just been released. It was long awaited and quite necessary - it fixes a lot of little bugs and hiccups that bring the game down a notch or two. Get the patch if you want a fair idea of the title.

A slightly overcomplicated inventory system is the only drawback for a simple and rather friendly interface.

Graphics are good and the sound is better than fair. Overall, Temple of Elemental Evil is a great game, although new comers may want to exercise a bit of patience and do a lot of precautionary saving. Running in sword swinging is going to get your party massacred.



AOpen

all games reviewed on rectron machines

Minimum Specification

Pentium III 700 MHz | 128 MB RAM | 4 x CD ROM | 32 MB D3D Video Accelerator
800 MB HDD

- ⊕ Lots of play depth
- ⊕ Good graphics
- ⊕ Strategically detailed
- ⊕ Time consuming
- ⊕ Unforgiving
- ⊕ Slow character progression

Summary

Temple of Elemental Evil is yet another game based on Dungeons and Dragons - it comes in the form of a CRPG with turn based combat very faithful to the pencil and paper rules. It feels a lot more like Pool of Radiance than Baldur's Gate, and its slower pace may frustrate some. Overall, though, it's a detailed and very worthwhile game to play.

84

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ps2 review:



Developers always face a rather daunting task when creating a new platform game - being as popular a genre as it is, innovation is becoming increasingly difficult to find, since it seems almost everything has been done before. Thankfully, though, it seems Naughty Dog aren't quite scratching the bottom of their barrel just yet.

The original Jak & Daxter was highly successful at the time of its release, showing that Naughty Dog was, in fact, capable of producing more than just rehash after rehash of the original Crash Bandicoot. Despite it being unmistakably reminiscent of most other platform games of that time, it nonetheless managed to showcase some of the PS2's abilities in the machine's infancy, and helped relieve the conspicuous lack of PS2 platform titles. All these factors mean that there's a lot of hype surrounding Jak's return, only this time, the

competition in the genre's somewhat stiffer, and so Naughty Dog have had to do their best to pull out all the stops with Jak II: Renegade, and although it isn't absolutely the best platform game I've played in recent memory, they've still done an excellent job.

New & Improved

One of the most noticeable differences between Jak II: Renegade and its predecessor is the maturity of the content. Everything is a lot darker and more moody this time around, from the various locales you'll find yourself adventuring through to the personalities of the characters themselves - Jak in particular has lost the innocent quality that epitomised his character in the first title and, unsurprisingly, considering his having been tortured for two years, is considerably bitter (and somewhat jaded). After escaping the prison, Haven City serves as a hub connecting all the other levels of the

game, which are generally opened by completing missions with refreshingly varied objectives. But be warned, some of these missions are fiendishly difficult - thankfully, though, you'll often have several objectives to complete at any given time, and you can switch between the tasks as you like - to ease the frustration. Along the way you'll also be able to "borrow" hover-cars in a style alarmingly similar to Grand Theft Auto, as well as engage in some hover-boarding to relieve the platform monotony.

Sitting pretty

When it comes to visuals, Jak II certainly

doesn't disappoint. The locales are immense and exceptionally well detailed, despite the necessary gloominess of some of them, the animations are fluid, and the characters are convincing. The voice-acting too is very nicely done, and they do well to convey the intricacies of the characters' personalities. The sound effects too are convincing, and the background music, though unremarkable, never becomes annoying or obtrusive. On the whole, the entire sensory experience delivered by Jak II: Renegade is thoroughly impressive. Ultimately, Jak II: Renegade is undoubtedly a quality title, and it does well to introduce enough novelty to escape the mould of its predecessor, without alienating fans of the original. It is, nonetheless, difficult to consider it to be revolutionary, though it manages to hold its own against the likes of Ratchet & Clank and Sly Raccoon. Fans of this genre will almost certainly enjoy it, and it has enough depth to keep one entertained for a decent amount of time.

Minimum Specification

1 Player - 1151KB memory | Analog: sticks only | Vibration compatible

- ⊕ Excellent graphics
- ⊕ Engrossing story
- ⊕ Non-linearity
- ⊖ Can be frustratingly difficult

Summary

This is a thoroughly polished platform title that manages to avoid the monotony that commonly plagues the genre. Wonderful graphics, superb voice-acting and an engaging plot make it an excellent choice for those who enjoy the genre. One shouldn't expect anything too different from other games in this vein, though.

81



▲ Jak's budget burrito meal kicked in just in time...



▲ see what we mean about the graphics - lovely and shiny



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pc review:



the sims: makin' magic

They still tout it as being the world's favourite game. But now, seven expansions later, has it reached time for the creators of The Sims to say "on to the next thing?" It would seem so, because it does appear that they are grasping at straws...

Flogging a dead horse is never a pretty sight. On the other hand, urging a horse with a few paces still left on is perhaps a good thing. Whichever the case is here,



Maxis have released yet another expansion for the Sims: the last one, apparently, before their concentration gets diverted towards the next logical step, being Sims 2. But this latest expansion really does not seem to "fit" with the rest of the Sims world. After all, despite a few oddities, all the Sims expansions have been pretty... well... normal. Now, though, they turn your Sim family into the Addams family with Makin' Magic, an expansion dedicated to the supernatural.

Although it does come across as something of a desperate attempt to produce just one last Sims expansion, Makin' Magic has several redeeming features - not the least of which are the sometimes surprising results of your Sims' esoteric experimentation.

In addition to the expected new items, locations and characters, Makin' Magic introduces a bartering system to the game, as well as a magical duel system and a host of new activities for your Sims to undertake and learn. Additionally, you can even build custom haunted house roller coaster rides, and perform magic shows for those willing to watch.

When compared to other Sims expansions, Makin' Magic can be considered a little disappointing. It is not as revolutionary as Hot Date, or as fun as Superstar. However, it does add to the game in many ways, and creates a nice finale for the series.



- Entertaining new elements
- Lots more to do
- Seems a bit "desperate"

77

pc review:

the sims online

The popularity of the Sims is undeniable. Similarly, the popularity of online real time communication, through mediums like IRC, is also undeniable. So, take one of the world's most popular games, and combine it with real time interaction, and what do you get? The Sims Online, of course...

While the Sims has arguably run its course, the release of The Sims Online is breathing life into the game once more, albeit in a very different guise. This stand alone title allows the player to interact with other Sims players from around the world in a place not unlike the Sims houses they are already used to. The difference is that, apart from a few NPC characters, every Sim you meet has a



person controlling it.

The idea may seem almost as laughable as some people find the game that spawned it, but the truth is that The Sims Online is proving very popular. Giant communities already exist around the game, with various players

offering employment, skills improvement and even entertainment of a decidedly adult nature. And all the while, people are communicating via a "speech bubble IRC" system, as well as private messaging.

To go into the intricacies of The Sims Online in this short review will be nigh impossible, but here's a quick overview. Certain Sims (anyone with the cash can do it) own houses, which are themed into skills houses,

romance houses, money houses, and shops and so on. These Sims earn money for every real time hour that other players spend at their house. They may also get roommates, who help with the upkeep of the house, and allow larger properties to be built. These roommates have almost the same powers as a house owner, and also earn money from visitors.

Owners offer incentives to visitors, like extra money for jobs completed, which in turn gets more players to spend more time at their houses. And then there's marriages, business arrangements... even crime families.

The game environment has been made very complex by the players themselves. It is very entertaining and quite rewarding, if the Sims is your thing. Be warned, though, that regular large downloads do occur, and a monthly subscription fee of \$9.99 is charged to use the servers.

- Great fun
- Nice interaction with other players
- Huge downloads
- Monthly subscription

78

Shuttle creates, others follow...



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ps2 review:

NOW AVAILABLE



SSX was one of the first games we saw for the PS2, and it seems that as long as the console is around, this title will just get better and better. First there was the ground breaking SSX, then came SSX Tricky and now, here comes yet another visit to the snowy slopes that we know so well, in the form of SSX 3.



SSX 3 has everything you may expect, including the favourite Elise Riggs (that blonde bombshell that has always been the iconic figure at the head of this title series). And, of course, there is a lot of snow, not to mention the over the top action that one has come to expect from the title series. On the whole, SSX 3 is really more of the same. The tricks are new, the courses are new - but for the most part, it contains the usual style of play that is the hallmark of SSX. The most notable difference between the previous title and this new one is the level of graphics. SSX 3 looks even better than previous versions (if that's possible) and the new, action packed and changeable environments are as exciting as ever. The thing that impressed greatly was the level of the in-game music and sound effects. Featuring bands like



SSX 3

Queens of the Stone Age, Moby and Fisherspooner, along with a very competent "DJ", this game is one of the

most exciting games, musically, in a long time. Overall, the whole game is the usual impressive package that one would hope to get from EA Big's SSX series. Fans will be elated, and newcomers will find a game that is fun, exciting and very easy to pick up.



- ⊕ Good graphics
- ⊕ Great music
- ⊕ More SSX!
- ⊖ Not overly original

86

ps2 review:

NOW AVAILABLE



The culmination of Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings epic happened in cinemas around the country in time for Christmas and, as expected, Electronic Arts took up the challenge of producing a title to accompany the film into entertainment history.

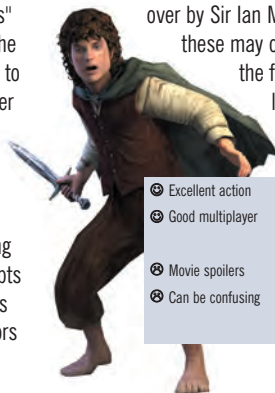
When Electronic Arts released their action packed The



the lord of the rings: the return of the king

Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers game, they brought a new kind of adventure driven fighting title to the PlayStation 2. With this latest game they haven't managed to redefine any genres - but they have delivered more of the same brawling action that made the first title so great to play. Based around the events that take place in the third film (more so than on events in the book, anyway) Return of the King features voice acting by some of the original cast, and allows the player far more variety in terms of playable characters. The game follows three "paths" through to the conclusion of the story, which allows the player to make use of different character groups: the hobbits, Aragorn and company, and even Gandalf the White. A lot of content related to the film can be unlocked, including set photographs, movie excerpts and very interesting interviews (like three of the "hobbit" actors

comparing their gaming prowess). The game is manic to play, and there are times that players may have difficulty seeing what exactly is going on - there are a myriad of combos and upgrades, but the action can devolve into frantic button bashing at times. Good graphics and good sound add to the addictive play dynamic as the player pounds his way through various missions, which range from "getting from A to B" to "survive this number of enemies." There isn't a lot of depth to the story, but it doesn't really need it. The story is filled in by film footage narrated over by Sir Ian McKellen (that would be Gandalf) and these may contain a few spoilers if you haven't seen the film yet (where have you been?). Oh, and let's not forget the great co-operative multiplayer mode...



- ⊕ Excellent action
- ⊕ Good multiplayer
- ⊖ Movie spoilers
- ⊖ Can be confusing

80

ps2 review:

freestyle metal x

Riding a motorcycle is dangerous. Ask me, I know, and I have the scars to prove it. That's what makes the prospect of playing a game like Freestyle Metal X so exciting - the tricky nature of motorcycles. After a few hours, though, I am pretty sure that I could use some of these bikes...

Extreme sports still prove popular when it comes to console based sports simulations. With big names like

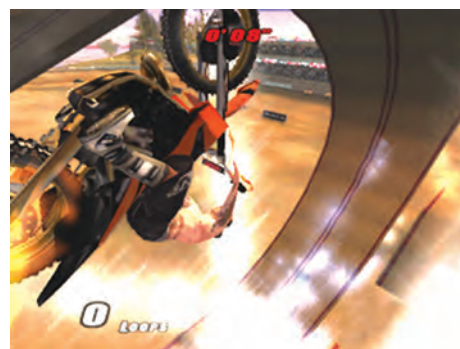


EA already on the cart, it makes it difficult for other publishers to get on and enjoy the ride - especially when the games they produce don't really compare. Freestyle Metal X is great in idea, poor in execution. Take, for example, the fact that you can only really come off your bike if you mess up on a trick. Sure, it's only a game, but no biker is that good. Perhaps a little attention to overbalancing couldn't have hurt.

Let's try to be a bit less picky, though. Graphically, the game does perform admirably, although it doesn't challenge the top runners in that field. The sound is great, because it features a very nostalgic and good collection of hard rock and metal songs.

Where the game really gets annoying is the control system. It doesn't work anything like one would expect, meaning that you have a lot of adjustment to do when you first take to the game. This leads to frustration and smashed controllers. Perhaps a more standardised system would help, but the rider tends to be unresponsive in the game, resulting in slowly performed tricks and high difficulties in setting high scores.

The game has an adventure style feel, very similar to later Tony Hawk titles, for example. And although the game can be fun, the frustration levels resulting from the dodgy control system makes for a less enjoyable gaming experience.



- ⊕ Cool stunts
- ⊕ Excellent music
- ⊕ Motorcycles are cool
- ⊖ Control system
- ⊖ Can be unresponsive

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Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines
Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines will - for the first time on next-generation console systems - allow players to become the Terminator Series signature icon, Arnold Schwarzenegger as the original Terminator. This marks the first time Arnold Schwarzenegger's voice and likeness has ever appeared in a home video-game.



X-Men 2 - DVD
Hatred and distrust brew between humankind and the mutants. An unprovoked mutant attack on the President gives General William Stryker his long-awaited opportunity to wage all-out war against the mutants - a war that would leave only one race victorious.

pc review:



Tactical squad-oriented shooters are enjoying a tremendous amount of popularity at the moment, and with the current state of world affairs, wars on Iraq too, are in vogue. Once again, Pivotal Games have combined those two elements, and although Conflict: Desert Storm II is certainly not perfect - it is still a very rewarding and entertaining experience.

Conflict: Desert Storm II sees you in command of four elite soldiers, members of either the US Delta Force or the British SAS (it's your choice), fighting for the liberation of Kuwait in the Gulf War of 1991. Each soldier has a different speciality, such as sniping, explosives, or heavy weapons, and you can switch between members of your team at any time during a mission, which you'll soon find is a necessity if you're planning to succeed. You'll also need to learn how to manage and assign orders to the troops you're not currently controlling, generally simultaneous to trying to keep your currently selected squad member from



ending up looking like a target practice dummy. Trying to juggle all these elements at once is quite tricky at first, and the complex control system doesn't make this task any easier, but with perseverance, the control system can be mastered, allowing you to better enjoy the game, and enjoyable it certainly is. Despite the rather steep learning curve, Conflict: Desert Storm II manages to deliver a satisfying experience that requires both

thinking and a willing trigger finger, quite a rare and certainly refreshing combination. Visually, very well detailed characters and environments make the game a delight to see, as do the weather effects, though the character animations leave a little to be desired in the way of realism. When it comes to sound, decent and helpful voice-acting (particularly when issuing orders) help one to stay on top of things, and the sound effects accompanying the varied sorts of weaponry are also quite convincing. Ultimately, Conflict: Desert Storm II is a very enjoyable action title, despite the occasionally clunky control and complicated play dynamic. It's daunting at first, but if you take enough time to familiarise yourself with it, you'll find that Conflict: Desert Storm II is thoroughly entertaining and rewarding, particularly if you're a fan of the tactical action genre - a solid and enjoyable title.

- ⊕ Engrossing and addictive
- ⊕ Generally good graphics
- ⊕ Realism
- ⊖ Weak control

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pc review:



Star Wars games have somewhat of a shaky reputation, but the Jedi Knight series, in general, has been widely heralded as one of the finer gaming franchises in existence. A year and a half after the release of Jedi Knight II, LucasArts are back with Jedi Knight: Jedi Academy - but does it produce enough innovation to live up to the reputation of its predecessors?

The most obvious difference between Jedi Knight: Jedi Academy and its immediate forerunner is the presence of a new lead character, Jaden Korr. At the outset of the game, you're able to customise Jaden's race, gender, appearance and the style of his (or her) lightsaber, presumably in an effort to help the player more closely identify with the character. Jaden is en route to Luke Skywalker's Jedi Academy, and is the most promising student of the current crop, on account of having already constructed a lightsaber, a task usually only completed during the course of Jedi training. Of course, this means that from the outset of the game, the lightsaber is at your disposal, whereas the previous titles forced you to wait several missions before acquiring it. The game consists of several 'sets', each

consisting of 5 missions, which can be tackled in any order, after which you are able to return to the Academy for a plot-advancing mission. Sadly, however, the storyline seems to be nothing more than a threadbare excuse that only just manages to tie the missions together. In terms of play dynamic, the greatest changes to Jedi Knight II come in the way of a vastly improved lightsaber combat system, and a points system that allows you to "purchase" upgrades to your Force abilities, from either "side" of the Force. Whether you choose to prioritise either light or dark side abilities makes no difference to your character's personality, however, but the plot does give you an opportunity to choose where you place your allegiances. Visually, the graphics are somewhat dated, since the game was built on the Quake 3 engine, though this does mean that it will run on even a relatively old machine. In terms of sound, the soundtrack is typical Star Wars fare, though the voice-acting is of quite a high standard. In general, Jedi Knight: Jedi Academy doesn't introduce many advances over its predecessor, and anyone looking for something vastly different will be disappointed. For those who just want more of the same, with a few refinements here and there (mainly by way of the

lightsaber improvements and additional multiplayer options), or for anyone who has not yet experienced the Jedi Knight phenomenon, this is undoubtedly a solid and enjoyable title.



- ⊕ More 'realistic' lightsabers
- ⊕ Entertaining multiplayer mode
- ⊕ Lengthy single-player mode
- ⊖ Dated graphics
- ⊖ Poor storyline
- ⊖ Too similar to Jedi Knight II

68

gcn review:

billy hatcher and the giant egg

Famed creator of Sonic the Hedgehog, Yuji Naka and Sonic Team return to the scene with their latest offering, Billy Hatcher and the Giant Egg. While the title may sound like a lost Roald Dahl book, it sadly lacks the spark of imagination attributed to his literature. As 3D platform games go, there is nothing strikingly wrong with Billy Hatcher, nor is there anything to write home about.

The short and sweet of it, is this. Hanging out with his friends, Billy Hatcher stops a crow from attacking a chicken-person. Transported to a once-magical land, the local god politely asks you to save his land. Using dark magic, the crows have plunged the chicken-realm into darkness. Donning a special suit that allows Billy to control special eggs, it's up to him to restore light to the land. The plot is your

standard fare. Do good, defeat evil. While simplistic, it's a fun and whimsical plot that suits the light-hearted style of the game well. Everything, from the catchy music (which quite often includes kids singing) to the bright and colourful graphics, is quite stylish. Billy Hatcher himself is well designed and easy to control. Pushing against an egg causes Billy to roll the egg in front of him, allowing him to roll it over enemies (or fruits to make it grow), or to use the egg in a variety of amusing



combat moves. Once the egg is a certain size, you can hatch it to reveal the creature (or item) inside. Creatures are of an elemental flavour and used to overcome certain basic puzzles. The sound effects might get a bit annoying at times, but no reason to use the mute button arises.

Sadly, the game is quite short (2 days of play, more if you wish to complete it 100%) and suffers extreme slowdowns in certain areas. While it does include a multiplayer mode, this unfortunately becomes dull quite quickly.

If Billy Hatcher was an omelette, it would classify as well-prepared, yet bland and lacking in extras. If you like omelettes, it's a good choice. If you want a meal, Billy Hatcher would fail to satisfy.

- Fun
- Quirky
- Challenging
- Uninspired
- Slowdowns
- Short

57

PlayStation 2

* FEB/MARCH 04



PlayStation 2



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PlayStation 2

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pc review: american conquest: fight back

Comedian Eddie Izzard once joked that Europeans thought they had the right to colonize the world because they had flags, while the primitive people they took the land from didn't. Jokes aside, the period of colonialism was one of the bloodiest in the earth's history, because very few primitive cultures would just sit back and watch the light skinned interlopers claim the lands of their forefathers.

American Conquest: Fight Back is a stand alone expansion for CDV's American Conquest series. Designed by the same guys that brought Cossacks to light, the game allows the player to field truly massive armies in an American historical context.

This truly is an expansion, because it takes the previous game to new levels. Covering the era between 1517 and 1804, American Conquest: Fight Back offers 5 new nations, including the Dutch, Russians and native American Haida, with more than fifty new units for the player to send into battle.

The game features the same high end strategy approach that Cossacks used, with formation based strategies turning into battles capable of handling up to 16 000 individual units.

American Conquest: Fight Back is a strategist's dream. It may not have the best sound or graphics, but the game approaches strategy in a serious and above all realistic way, resulting in battles that are tough, fierce and demanding on the player.

Although the game has only two zoom levels and a static camera, the overall essence of each battle is effectively captured.

In addition to several campaigns and a random map mode, American Conquest: Fight Back also introduces 10 new "Battlefield" missions - a mode of play that is almost a sort of survival challenge. In short, this is a great title for strategy fans.

- ☉ Huge armies
- ☉ Realistic strategy
- ☉ Lots to do
- ☉ More of the same
- ☉ A bit dated
- ☉ Limited camera

80

Its realism and the huge armies that can be fielded make it a truly fun and challenging experience.



pc review: patrician III: rise of the hanse

At a time when northern Europe saw a vast amount of inter city sea trade, it is up to you to make your mark. There are a great number of trading management games out there, all playing on the premise of supply and demand.

Patrician III is yet another title like this, and it certainly isn't the best of the bunch. The game is competent enough, though, and trading fans will probably enjoy the great detail that the game goes into. Some players may find the medieval trading title to be a bit intimidating though.

Altogether, a fair game, if a little lacklustre as it requires a level of dedication from the player that only true trading simulation fans will be willing to put up with.



- ☉ Big
- ☉ Complex
- ☉ Perhaps a little demanding
- ☉ Seems dated at times

69

pc review: cossacks anthology

When German publishing company CDV released Cossacks a few years ago, its realism and number of controllable units immediately grabbed the attention of the real-time strategy world. Unfortunately, local gamers were left out in the proverbial Siberian cold as the only way we could get our grubby little paws on this gem was to import it.

Thankfully, local CDV distributor WWE has convinced the powers that be to make the Cossacks Anthology available to the local market.

The Anthology consists of European Wars, The Art of War and Back to War. While the graphics and the series itself might seem dated when compared to CDV's more recent offerings like Blitzkrieg and American Conquest, it still makes for riveting play.

If you are a serious real-time strategy gamer that dislikes controlling Orcs, Dwarves and only a handful of tanks, then Cossacks is the game for you.



- ☉ It installs
- ☉ Big levels
- ☉ Umm, DVD packaging?
- ☉ Damage control system
- ☉ Nothing new
- ☉ Slow weapon re-load time

80

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[w] 99mm x [h] 73mm



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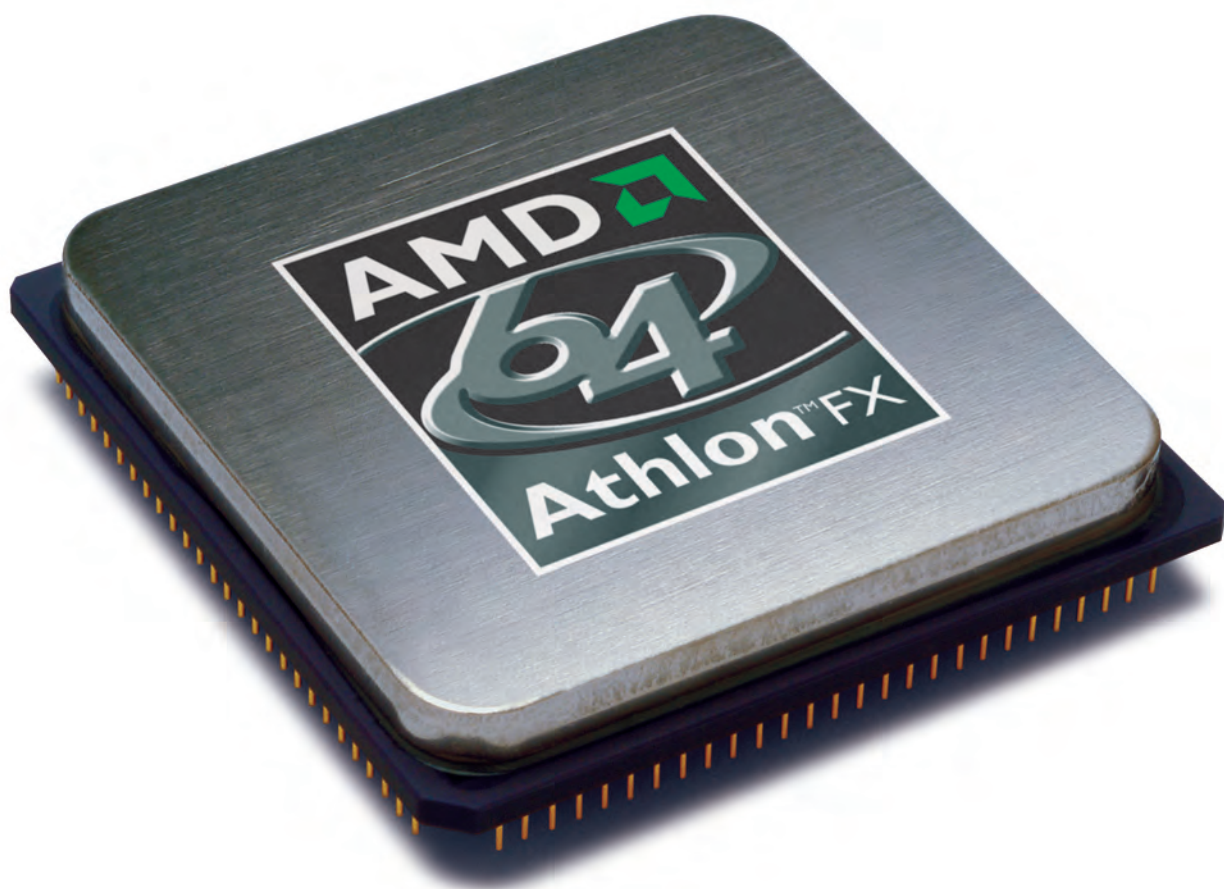
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EXCLUSIVE
SA INTERVIEW

GENERATION 64

AMD talks about gaming, business, the future and coffee





2004 might be the year that marks the true emergence of the 64-bit chip. At least that's what AMD hopes for as it brings the technology, originally launched in its Opteron server chips, to desktop systems around the world. But is 64-bit on the desktop the way to go and is the world ready for it? More importantly, is it the next big step in gaming? Pierre Brunswick, AMD's General Sales Manager for the Middle East, Africa and the FSU, thinks it is, so we sat down with him and spoke about the Athlon 64 and AMD's future plans.

How much influence did the gaming market have in the development of the Athlon 64?

When we designed the 64 bit chip, the game industry was one of our targets. The people came to us and asked for an increase in performance. [Both] the gamers and the Software Developers - all of them said the rendering possibilities were dead for 32-bit. So we incorporated that into the design. The chip also has the North Bridge built in, which controls the memory access. So that removes a lot of the latency seen with current designs.

Why the delay in releasing a 64-bit desktop processor?

We wanted to go to 64-bit a long time ago, 3 years ago in fact. [So] we talked to our customers about what they really need, and if they really needed to go to 64-bit. We refuse to force customers into a new direction. We refuse to say "You have been learning English for the past few years, now you have to learn Chinese".

The first group to say they do need 64-bit were the Database developers. 32-bit has reached the limit in the amount of data it

can handle at a time, so it creates bottlenecks with large databases. For instance on the stock market a user needs to use six to eight frames to access the data of one thing. With the 64-bit he has all the information in one frame, allowing him to make a decision faster. That's why we came out with the Opteron first [AMD's server based chip].

On top of that we also wanted to be cost effective. For the high-end industry such as servers, cost is not an issue. We also discovered that there are two different markets for the PC - cinematic computing and high-end computing, of which gaming makes up a big part. So we decided to develop two processors. But once again we could not launch a product without building a cost-effective base. So we talked to all the motherboard and chipset manufacturers, the developers and the gamers to see what we could do. We discovered that we could match the competition of existing products. For instance, today you can buy a Pentium 4 3200 or an Athlon 64. It's exactly the same price, but it's an increase in performance because of the Hyper Transport technology and the cache memory and memory changes. And, of course, the 64-bit.

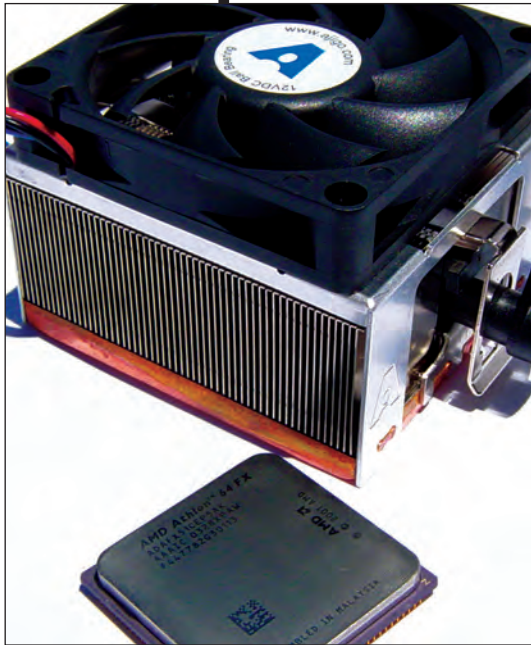
So the 64-bit is an extension of AMD's business philosophy of low cost, high-performance chips?

I wouldn't say it's an extension - we just follow the demands. You can't go below the price-positioning, but we are still very competitive. It's not cheaper than the competition, but you have more performance for the same price.

But if you are aiming for the high-end PC market, specifically gamers, why aren't there any 64-bit games available?

I was very surprised. I thought the gaming industry would jump on it, because they were complaining about the limitation of 32-bit. But we were thinking hardware. We gave developers that possibility. It took IBM 2 days to recompile and optimize their DB2 database to 64-bit, because it's so simple. So we said "It would take one month and all the games would be ready!" But the





developers said no! Why should they just recompile a game to run five percent or twelve percent faster when they can redesign the game? Next year we could have 64 versus 64 players. Where do you think that power is coming from? The developers have a lot of imagination and they want to bring that to reality.

Intel recently announced their BTX standard that changes a lot in how Motherboards look and work. Will AMD follow suite or are you staying on your own course? Is there any chance of AMD getting involved in manufacturing motherboards?

Let me give you the AMD approach - and this is the long-term approach. I cannot comment on the technology we are currently working on, but I can give you the philosophy of AMD. We are very customer-centric. When we start with a new product we start with our own chipsets, making sure they are optimized. Then we approach the manufacturers. But we are in the same ecosystem as the motherboard manufacturers. There's no way we'll produce motherboards. There is no way that we will interfere with their business. We don't want to make our own servers or software. We don't want to interfere with this system we have.

How long does AMD expect to keep manufacturing for and supporting the 32-bit market?

We believe before the end of 2004 64-bit will cover the market for PCs above \$800. After that I don't know. But I believe there is still more of a demand for \$700, \$600 and even \$400 machines. There are even \$350 machines being released in regions like India and China. So the thing is, you need 32-bit for those markets.

To answer your question properly, I would say that we don't need 64-bit everywhere. But this is also a benefit to the Athlon 64. If you are a company, and you want to upgrade an area, you can rather buy the Athlon 64 instead of the latest 32-bit at the same price. And if that section, maybe your accounting, needs the power of 64, you just recompile the data - you can call a professional in to do it. It will take a few

days and then your department can use it. If your designer needs 64 bit, it's a matter of changing his software. So the benefit of our system is you can upgrade, move, when you want, the way you want for no real extra cost.

Can we assume the technology is fully backwards compatible?

This one is very simple to answer - there's no difference, except for speed. I have the 64-bit processor in my laptop, and there was no difference, except that my wife complained! I asked what was wrong and she said it's broken. Apparently she would boot up the machine, go make coffee, come back and it would still be booting. Now it boots too fast. What could I say? It's 64-bit! [laughs] But except for not having coffee breaks, it works perfectly.

Is it fair to see this as a massive technological leap?

Well, to give you an example, we've been running 32-bit games on 64-bit machines using Windows 32-bit operating systems, not the enhanced versions. Even then there is a massive difference because of the memory and the new architecture. Then we used a better version of the operating system - the extended version - and you cannot compete. [That's] without the game being optimized for the system. So what we are saying is that if you have to buy a new computer, and you'll have to buy a 3000, 3200 now, you should not buy a 32-bit. You will have it for three or four years - we know that. You won't have it for only six months, it'll be too expensive. So if you have it for that long, you know you'll be playing on 64-bit. Maybe only twenty percent of your applications will be 64-bit in the first year, but after that it could be 40 percent! Look, if you want to wait a few months, that's okay. But there's no point in buying a PC now or in the future that is 32-bit.



AMD Athlon 64

There has been a lot of hype in recent months regarding AMD's new processor, the Athlon64. For the uninformed, the "big thing" about these processors is that this is the first 64-bit processor which is aimed at the desktop computer. Yes, 64-bit CPU's have been around since the beginning of the year but those CPU's were aimed at server computing. The AMD Opteron was the first AMD CPU to introduce this architecture but these CPU's only had a maximum clock speed of 2 GHz. Finally, after what seemed like an eternity, AMD finally released the AMD Athlon 64 3200+ and the Athlon 64 FX-51.

With the launch of the Athlon 64 processor we have been introduced to a number of new architectural features.

One of the first new features is the integrated memory controller. Traditionally this controller was situated in the Northbridge of the motherboard, the memory controller then "communicated" to the processor via the FSB (Front Side Bus). This usually happened at the speed of the FSB which, with the latest Intel processors, ran at 800MHz. AMD's new integrated memory controller can "speak" directly to the CPU at the speed of the CPU which, in the case of the Athlon 64 FX is 2.2 GHz. The second new feature of the AMD Athlon 64 is its bigger L2 cache; it was only a matter of time before we would see the L2 cache increase to anything over 1 MB. Intel has already released their Pentium 4 Extreme Edition which has 2 MB of L2 cache. The Athlon 64 was introduced with 1 MB of L2 cache while it still has 128K of L1 cache. The "major" new feature of the new Athlon 64 processors is its Hyper Transport technology, not to be confused with Intel's Hyper Threading. Many people have criticised AMD for naming its new technology so similar to its rivals'. In a nutshell, Hyper Transport is a link designed to increase the communication speed between the circuits in computers. This allows for a much faster bandwidth throughput, 6.4GB/s with Hyper Transport, as opposed to 3.2 GB/s without it.

The two new CPU's

The Athlon 64 3200+ will be the direct replacement of the Athlon XP range of processors and this is evident when looking at the model number. The first noticeable feature of this mid-range CPU is its heat spreader which was first introduced with the Opteron processor. This CPU makes use of the 754-pin micro PGA socket and has a clock speed of 2 GHz. AMD has upped the L2 cache, as announced, to 1MB. It also features a single channel 64-bit memory controller and the integrated memory controller is compatible with DDR400 RAM, it is not compatible with registered (buffered) RAM though.

The Athlon 64 FX-51 is the flagship processor of the new AMD line-up. Apart from the physical similarities to the Athlon 64 3200+, this processor features a little more under the hood. The new naming convention of the Athlon 64 FX-51 does not mean much in terms of this CPU's performance but is rather an indication that this is a new line of CPU's that is being produced by AMD. It has long been a fact that AMD has moved away from the traditional MHz rating and named their CPU's according to theoretical performance numbers. The next CPU to be released next year will be the Athlon 64 FX-53, which obviously will be faster than the current FX-51. The new Athlon 64 FX-51 makes use of a 940-pin micro PGA socket and runs slightly faster than the Athlon 64 3200+ at 2.2 GHz. Looking at its integrated memory controller, the Athlon 64 FX-51 supports dual

64-bit DDR RAM. One of the biggest features I dislike about this processor is that it requires registered DDR RAM which is a lot more expensive than un-buffered RAM. Granted the fact that this CPU is aimed at high-end computing, upgrading to it will not be a reality for most. Another aspect to this processor which has put me and many others off, is that next year AMD will re-release the Athlon 64 FX-51 with a new socket. The new 939-pin micro PGA socket will hopefully have certain benefits such as support for un-buffered RAM but the major problem with this scenario is that in a year or two's time, motherboard manufacturers will stop producing motherboards for the 940-pin AMD CPU's leaving potential upgraders out in the cold. The unfortunate answer to this is that there will still be Opteron based motherboards for a long while to come (AMD Opteron CPU's also use 940-pin micro PGA sockets) and users can upgrade using those motherboards. The problem is that these motherboards are aimed at server use and not for high-end computing such as gaming.

For now, I would leave the Athlon 64 to first carve a way for itself into the market before buying it. Both CPU's are still fairly pricy and because there is not much in terms of software, or operating systems for that matter, available, these processors cannot be fully utilised. Hopefully this will change when we start to see games and applications developed for the 64-bit platform.

Benchmarking

Even though the test machine supplied by AMD had both the Beta version of Windows XP 64-bit Edition and Windows XP Professional preinstalled I was unable to run any benchmarks on the Windows XP 64-bit edition as this OS still has some known issues with DirectX 9. There also were not any 64-bit benchmarking applications at the time of going to print. Instead I simply ran 32-bit benchmarks on a 32-bit operating system to see how it would compare to our current CPU's.

The test bed

AMD Athlon 64 FX-51
ASUS SK8N Motherboard (NVIDIA NForce3 Pro 150 Chipset)
2x 512MB PC3200 CL2.5 ECC Registered Memory
Dual Western Digital WD360 36GB 10,000RPM Serial ATA Hard Disks in RAID 0 Array
Leadtek WinFast A350 Ultra TDH (GeForce FX5900 Ultra)

The benchmarks

Please keep in mind that the scores below do not indicate the full performance capability of the Athlon 64 processor as all tests were run in 32-bit.

Sisoft Sandra MAX3 Memory Bandwidth: 5900/5900
Sisoft Sandra MAX3 CPU Arithmetic Dhrystone ALU/Whetstone FPU: 7619/4200
Sisoft Sandra MAX3 CPU Integer/Floating point: 13455/12300
3DMark 2001 SE build 330: 18909
3DMark 2003 build 340: 5610
UT2003 Botmatch:110.7
UT2004 FlyBy:250.4
Aquamark3: 43.156

What does the 64-bit mean?

Traditional computers are based on 32-bit processors; this architecture had various limitations but none too serious for the average home user. So why is 64-bit of any significance you might ask?

Well the answer can get a bit technical so bear with me. When talking about 32-bit or 64-bit processors, we refer to the data stream that the processor is capable of delivering. A 64-bit CPU is able to hold 64-bit numbers in its GPR (General Purpose Registers) this as opposed to the 32-bits that a 32-bit CPU can hold. Let me explain registers in a bit more detail. In every CPU there are things called registers, these registers, similar to the CPU's cache, are storage locations for numbers. These numbers can be virtually anything that the CPU requires to do its job. Keeping this in mind you should then also understand the need for new software. Because AMD simply doubled the existing 32-bit data stream, it is backwards compatible with software which was written for 32-bit CPU's (virtually all software currently available). It is also for this reason that the 64-bit CPU needs software which has been coded for the extra 32-bits.

REVIEWED BY

Tom "fro0tc@k3" Taylor

PLUS

64-bit computing for the desktop computer

MINUS

No software to utilize it yet available

SUPPLIED BY: Corex [011] 707 5000

PRICE: Athlon 64 3200 R 4499 | Athlon 64 FX-51 R 7999

INTERNET: www.amd.co.za

Intel Pentium 4 Extreme Edition



Intel Corporation, or Chip-zilla as they are affectionately known, has run separate product lines for its desktop- and server-oriented CPUs since the introduction of the

famous Pentium Pro. This astonishing chip started the concept of incorporating more cache and higher mathematical ability than desktop bound parts and was considered a very capable low-end server chip as a result.

The trend continues today, with Intel's Xeon processor having much more cache built onto the die to improve raw performance than Pentium 4 offerings. But what would happen if we were to take this technology and make it available to desktop users? We'll find out soon enough, as the company recently launched its ultimate desktop processor utilising this very idea, and named it the Pentium 4 Extreme Edition.

We got hold of a system built around the Extreme chip from Intel to see just what kind of benefit this whopping 2 MB of L3 cache can bring the mainstream market. Looking at the specs of this new processor, it's interesting to note that while the Xeon is still stuck on the older 533 MHz FSB, this Extreme runs a full 800 MHz FSB suggesting that the chip really has more in common with a P4. It's just borrowing a page from the Xeon book rather than actually being based on the server architecture.

Running at a clock speed of 3.2 GHz, it's faster than any Xeon in terms of pure frequency as well. But will these advantages give it a noticeable edge in the operations a consumer will want it to perform? More cache generally means that tasks where the same data is used repeatedly will be dramatically accelerated, but in operations where new data is constantly being called cache hits are likely to be low and therefore little performance advantage is likely to be forthcoming. This test pc came with all the possible technological trimmings as well, just to make sure that the machine would have every possible advantage in a shoot-out. Two Serial-ATA drives running as a Raid set to make sure that the storage subsystem could keep up, a 128 MB Radeon 9800 Pro graphics card for high gaming scores, and 512 MB of Kingston HyperX PC3500 DDR RAM to keep the CPU cache fed.

An interesting fact about the Extreme processor is that it more than doubles the transistor count of a standard P4 chip thanks to the on-board cache. It adds just over 100 million transistors to the 75 million of the standard CPU, which is astonishing considering that it appears to be the exact same size.

3DMark 03 offered little indication that this chip was something special. The Gallatin core in the Extreme performed exactly the same as a similarly-clocked Northwood of the P4 in the CPU tests, and since the overall score of this application relies mainly on the power of the GPU the 5700 achieved by the new CPU

reflects the speed of the Radeon more than the chip itself.

SiSoft Sandra 2004 was the first benchmark where the real differences could be examined in detail. In this suite, the Extreme showed its dominance over the competition in just about every area. CPU arithmetic tests returned a result of 9872 MIPS and 7154 MFLOPS, while the nearest competitor could only manage 8863 and 3468 respectively. And this reference chip was an AMD Opteron. On the multimedia front the Extreme wasn't quite so far ahead, managing just a couple of points more than its own baby brother the 3.2 GHz P4. Strangely enough the SATA Raid configuration could only manage to match two ATA100 drives set up in the same way, and not beat them. I was underwhelmed the last time I tested an SATA device and this result reinforces that feeling now.

Testing purely the cache systems on the chip yielded the anticipated result. The Extreme was not only well clear of an Opteron and an AMD Athlon XP 3200+, but of a 2 GHz Xeon processor as well. Only the 3.06 GHz P4 chip using RDRAM was able to keep up, and even it began to struggle with larger block sizes. The Extreme manages to keep it up slightly longer and wins this test hands down. Speaking of memory, although it isn't the focus of this review the Kingston HyperX parts used on this machine delivered truly stunning performance. Although no such standard exists, the company calls this enthusiast-focussed part a PC3500 DDR chip, since it runs at higher than the standard 200 MHz clock speed of PC3200. And the benchmark results support this, transferring data through this memory at over 5 GB/s. Real-world tests confirm what the benchmarks have already suggested. That is, in applications which re-use the same data, the Extreme does deliver some additional performance over the standard 3.2 GHz P4. But in most cases, like gaming and 3D Studio MAX, the cache is rendered irrelevant as new data needs to be read in on every operation.

Video encoding performance was measured in FlaskMPEG, where using the DivX 5.03 video codec at maximum priority produces an AVI at between 30 and 35 fps. My older P4 3.06 running a 533 MHz FSB manages to peak at 30 fps, so this benefit can be attributed almost entirely to just the higher core and bus clock speeds, and of course those Kingston RAM modules.

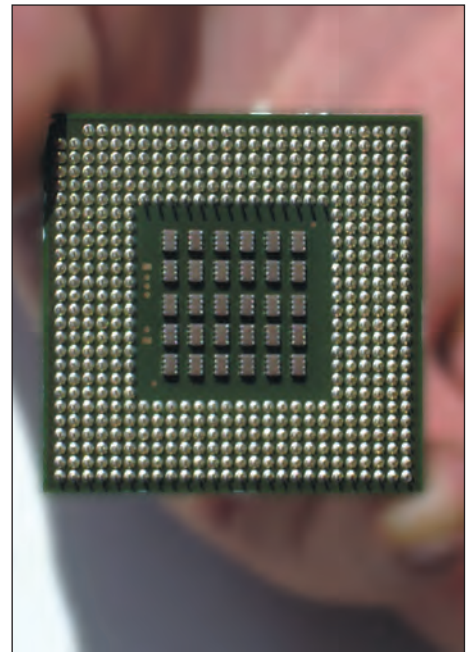
For the massive price premium Intel are asking for the Extreme Edition, I wouldn't say it was worth it right now. Perhaps when and if these prices go down it will be, as

this system was without a doubt the best performing desktop I have tested. Still, not fast enough to warrant the significant price delta between this and a standard P4 processor.

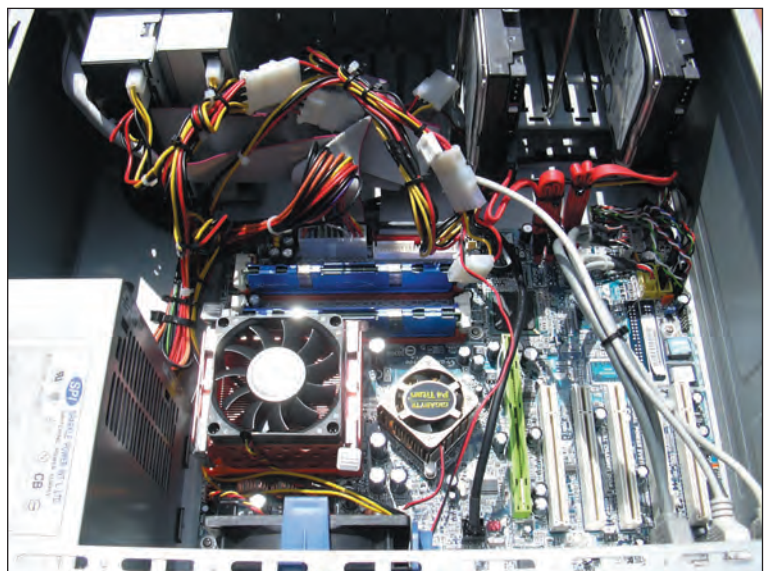
The extra cache on the Extreme only helps in certain, very specific applications. Standard computing will see the benefits of that headline-grabbing clock frequency coming through, but otherwise little performance increase to be had running an Extreme versus a P4 3.2 or XP 3200+.

REVIEWED BY	
Russell "Quickbeam" Bennett	
PLUS	MINUS
Best performing desktop system I've tested Kingston RAM really flies	Very expensive SATA a disappointment

SUPPLIED BY: Intel [011] 806 4530
PRICE: R 8030.00 (P4 Intel Extreme Edition chip)
INTERNET: www.intel.com



There are far more transistors in there than a normal P4...



Sapphire 9600 XT

ATI have yet again upgraded its product line up with the newest versions of chipsets being deployed across the range, and giving birth to the XT series. On review here we have a Sapphire 9600 XT with 128 MB of DDR RAM, the replacement for the older-generation 9600 Pro board and similarly targeted at the mainstream segment.

The new chipset, called RV360, brings with it a number of enhancements. ATI are adamant that rather than simply being a clocked-up R350, this GPU features an entirely new design to products using the older chipset. Apart from the fact that it runs at a core clock of 500 MHz, however, very little has changed on-paper compared with the older generation. The manufacturing process itself is different, however, using a new "Black Diamond" insulation material for the transistors themselves which is said to allow for higher clock speed due to reduced capacitance.

The 9600 XT comes bundled with the latest ATI Catalyst driver set, version 3.8, which brings some interesting additions itself. But more on that later, the package also includes Tomb Raider: Angel of Darkness, Power DVD, and yes, as promised by the chip-maker before the theft of Valve's source-code, the full version of Half-Life 2. Or a coupon giving the holder the right to download the full version once it's completed, at least.

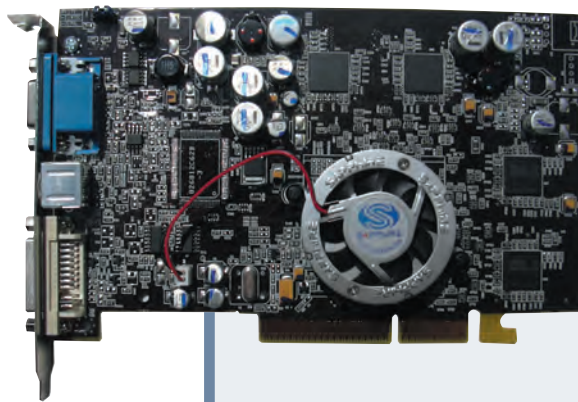
The latest Catalyst package has two major additions worth mentioning. The first is dubbed "Overdrive", and is a dynamic over clocking utility which modulates the core clock speed of the GPU based on temperature ranges. I'm always concerned about automatic over clocking utilities, but Overdrive seems to work very well, and with the feature enabled I experienced no problems during an extended gaming stint. There's also a new tab in the advanced settings menu called VPU Recover, which allows the software to reset just the graphics card should a problem occur therefore eliminating the need for the user to restart the system in the event of a graphics-related application crash.

When it comes to 3D

gaming performance, the XT is really a card on a mission. Its 3DMark score of 4072 is 500 points higher than a 9600 Pro with the same amount of video RAM, commensurate with the increased clock speed. In fact, benchmarks across the board reflected similar 10-15% improvements in score. Aquamark 3, an excellent DirectX 9 benchmark, gave it an overall rating of 32 576, compared with 26 766 for the older card. And the X2: The Threat rolling demo benchmark jumps from 38 fps to just over 42. Examining the benchmarks in more detail reveals that there are good improvements in vertex shader performance on the XT, but overall the higher scores come from all aspects of the 3D benchmark. Across the board, the frame rates enjoy an average of 10% improvement, reflecting the higher clock frequency on the XT offering. At R 2400 for this Sapphire 9600 XT, the mainstream graphics market has a new champion. You can get low-end NVidia-based cards with twice the RAM for half the price, but they won't give you the frames this XT can deliver.

REVIEWED BY	
Russell "Quickbeam" Bennett	
PLUS	MINUS
Good price point Superb performance New Catalyst features	It's not a 9800 Pro

SUPPLIED BY: Sapphire Technologies [011] 707 5000
PRICE: R 2400.00
INTERNET: www.sapphiretech.co.za



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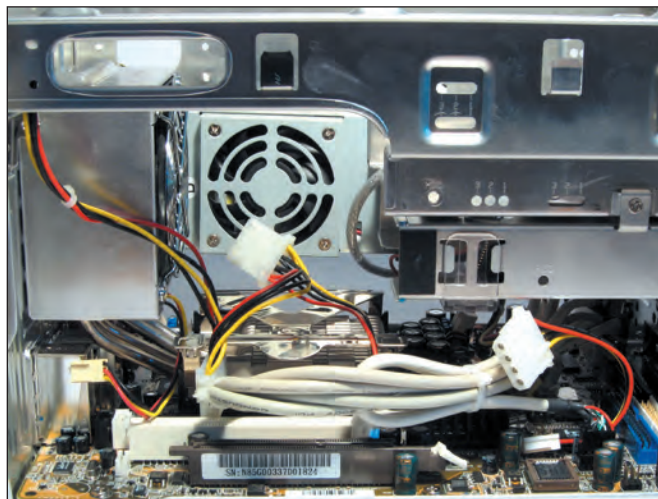
WEB: WWW.COREX.CO.ZA

FAX: 011 707 5050

Shuttle SN85G4 XPC

Shuttle's XPC range is the ultimate SFF (small form factor) barebones system and the range offers support for both Intel & AMD platforms. This month we look at a XPC that supports the latest 64 bit revolution from AMD. It's called the SN85G4 and boy did they cram the features into this package.

Shuttle's XPC has enjoyed maximum exposure through sponsorship of local gaming events and teams, the small packaging is ideally suited to the competitive and



LAN gaming scene. Coupled with the fastest CPU's from AMD the SN85G4 might be the smallest in size but not in features, from the 6 in 1 card reader, fire wire and SATA connectors to digital audio connectors.

AMD 64 is a performance CPU, the only downfall with the Shuttle solution is their implementation of Nvidia N-Force 3 solution which has had a few performance problems; the VIA solution is the better choice at the moment and comparative benchmarks were down on the results obtained from the VIA solution we used last month. N-Force 3 problems aside the solution is still one of the most featured available. Finally we see the death of the 1.44 Floppy, Shuttle have included a card reader with support for the most common formats (Sony Memory Stick, Smart Media, SD and Compact Flash) making the Shuttle a great multimedia solution for the digital buffs. Installation of components in SFF solutions is sometimes tough, besides one or two niggles the XPC was relatively easy to work with. Graphics cards are not



usually a problem but the new FX Ultra cards are just way too big for the XPC (if you want to close the case that is), but it takes our recommended ATI 9800 with no problem. The SN85G4 is relatively quieter than the previous XPC we reviewed, and the BIOS allows you to tweak this even more using the Ultra-Low setting, this setting is only recommended for office work as hardcore 3D work will drive the temperatures up from a 60 degree base. Using the Smart Fan setting is best as it adjusts the fan speed depending on thermal load, the problem with this is the constant fan noise as it starts up. Shuttle have managed to make the AMD 64 XPC look extremely slick, finished in black and silver and made from aluminium which has weight and thermal benefits. For those looking for an ultra compact, portable but fully featured solution then the SN85G4 XPC is one of the best SFF solutions available, all I need now is 19 inch LCD to go with it.

REVIEWED BY	
Brett "KnightMare" Hamilton	
PLUS	MINUS
Small and sexy	Thermal issues
Features	Noise
Weight	N-Force 3 chipset

SUPPLIED BY: Proton Technologies [011] 486 0749
 PRICE: R 3172.00
 INTERNET: www.shuttle.com

Cybertronics Cyberstik 2 Mid-Air Joystick

After the release of the force feedback joystick I personally thought that was as far as a joystick would evolve. Enter, for the first time here in South Africa, the Cybertronics Cyberstik 2.

The unique feature is that this unit is controlled free from the base, which means that you can hold it in the air, hovering over your desk, or you can place it between your legs if you play flight simulator games. At first this concept is difficult to get used to as I have always been able to push my joystick to either side and know that is its limits. The Cyberstik 2 on the other hand does not have this limitation and you can simply manoeuvre by twisting your wrists. The joystick features a trigger button, four alternative buttons within thumb reach, a throttle, and an 8-way HAT switch. On the top of the unit there are three more buttons but these are so obscurely based that I can never see them get used. The Cyberstik

2 is very comfortable and can be used on the base if needed. The secret to using this joystick effectively is not to turn your hand but to twist your wrist otherwise your aircraft or vehicle will not move in the desired direction. The one feature I really missed is the rudder control, I am forever using the twist grip of my current joystick in Battlefield: 1942 and battled (excuse the pun) to fly without it.

This joystick does however have its strengths and I recommend it to be used with racing games such as the Need for Speed titles. Its price seems a bit high and I would rather invest in a decent force feedback joystick.



REVIEWED BY	
Tom "Fr00tc@k3" Taylor	
PLUS	MINUS
Innovative	I still prefer my Microsoft Joystick

SUPPLIED BY: Virtual Sense [021] 982 7173
 PRICE: R 849.00
 INTERNET: www.virtualsense.co.za

ASUS MyPal PocketPC A620BT

The A620BT is Asus' second release into the PDA market, obviously following on the A620. And once again they aren't interested in introducing a low-range unit for the masses, but rather a serious contender for king of the Pocket PC hill.

At first sight, the units look nearly identical, except that Asus opted to drop the aluminium casing for a plastic compound. While this means the new model doesn't really look as imposing as the original, it is quite lighter - one of the lightest PDAs I've dealt with so far. It's also pretty thin, at around 1.3 centimetres. The screen itself is roughly 5.5 x 7.3 cm and displays 65536 colours at 16 bit, at a resolution of 240x320. Powered by Windows Mobile 2003 and a 400 MHz chip, it has 64 MB Flash and SDRAM individually and supports CompactFlash Type I and II cards. Throw in Bluetooth and Infrared support, voice recording, handwriting recognition, decent audio playback via a small speaker or the earphone jack and a rechargeable internal battery that boasts 19 hours of long battery life, and you have the whole package.

I enjoyed working with this model. While there were eventual slowdowns, this is easily fixed by rebooting the unit via the button at the back. The display is clear and colourful, and because it uses the Windows platform, it supports a lot of software, including Office and Outlook - both of which ship with the unit.

The wireless and Bluetooth features add quite a bit since it made connectivity to the Internet a breeze. It also means you can use a Bluetooth headset to listen to music as well as swap data with any other Bluetooth or wireless-capable devices. In the audio area the A620BT is great - the sound output is very clear, better than most PDAs, and even the recorder, which uses very high compression and low quality, still delivered decent recorded notes.

Battery-wise I'm also impressed. Granted, the PDA sat in its cradle quite often, but it never actually ran out of battery life over, say, a weekend, when it didn't get charged. That said, it's hard to vouch for the actual lifespan of the battery itself, but it's a high-quality Lithium, so a few years would be my guess.

The design itself has its problems, though. The first thing that struck me is that the PDA's pouch is just that - a simpler pouch, bereft of any sort of clip or buckle. So it protects the PDA, but you can't hang it from your belt. Both the power and record buttons sit at the top, and while you can't



accidentally switch off the unit, unless you hold down on the button for quite a while, the record feature is another problem, since it will, at the least, open the Notes screen, and at worse, start recording. It wasn't a huge problem, but I did occasionally tap the button when I pulled the PDA out of its pouch. Overall, though, Asus kept their name high with another proper PDA. It's a bit feature-rich if you want something low-end, but it's worth the price if you need all the extras.



REVIEWED BY	
James "Priest" Francis	
PLUS	MINUS
Feature rich	Pricey
Light weight	Bigger than standard
Good audio playback	

SUPPLIED BY: Proton Technologies [011] 486 0749
 PRICE: R 3999.00
 INTERNET: www.asus.com



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Plantronics Audio 45 USB Stereo PC Headset

With multiplayer gaming becoming more and more popular, the need for good, "private" sound delivery grows - especially in a LAN environment. Whether because sound features high in your tactical agenda (as it well should) or because you are just being considerate, the need for a good set of headphones becomes apparent every day.

Plantronics have been around for quite a while, and are becoming a well recognised name in the PC headset market. While any kind of headphones can be used, those specifically designed for PC use do have a number of features which enhance the PC gamers experience - and this particular headset is no different. This is one of the most practical headsets we have seen for some time, largely due to the inclusion of a USB interface device with the headset. This USB unit obviously plugs into a USB port and features a 32-bit DSP to enhance the two way audio signal when it is used. It also features a headphone and microphone jack.

Two examples of the practicality of the device (based on



real life NAG experiences) follow: a machine experiencing sound driver problems resulted in gaming not being viable on the PC. However, the USB device does not use the machine's sound drivers; plugging it in with a set of headphones resulted in perfect sound via the headset. The second example involved an Antec server case, which has no front mounted headphone jacks, but does have

front mounted USB ports - the solution there is obvious. The USB device can be used with any headset - it is not permanently connected to the headset it is supplied with.

The headset itself is near perfect for gaming. The only drawback (which could not effectively be tested) is the fact that it seems a little fragile. This shouldn't be too much of a problem, though, seeing as gamers should generally not be in the habit of sitting on their headsets. The unit itself is very light and comfortable, with an adjustable headband and microphone. This latter device

can be extended to fit any user, or can simply be flipped up if it is not needed. It also features a digitally enhanced noise reduction system, which helps for voice recognition systems... or even just for clear sound delivery.

The headphones deliver a good audio level in perfect stereo, and are coated in a comfortable 4mm sponge. An inline volume and microphone mute control makes for easy adjustment of volume levels.

The 60Hz - 16kHz speaker response makes for clear sound delivery.

Armed with a three meter cable, this headset is perfect for gamers who move around a lot. It is not the best headset on the market, but the combination of good quality and good price make it a sure win and a personal choice for discrete sound delivery for this reviewer.

The additional USB device is a good bonus as well, adding excellent value to this great device.

REVIEWED BY	
Walt "Shryke" Pretorius	
PLUS	MINUS
USB unit Lightweight	Not very loud Feels "flimsy"

SUPPLIED BY: Plantronics [0800] 2202 02
PRICE: R 749.00
INTERNET: www.plantronics.co.za

AOpen DV 3000 Digicam

We saw this camera's little brother in the last issue. While impressive at the price, the DV 2000 had its limitations.

The DV 3000 is pretty much an identical unit to the DV 2000, except for the fact that it is a different colour, and handles 3.1 megapixels as opposed to the "smaller" unit's 2.1 megapixel capability.

In fact, the only other difference is that this unit's resolutions differ ever so slightly from the DV 2000.

Oh, yeah, and the one is branded Mustek, while this one is branded AOpen.

The DV 3000 acts as a video camera, still camera and mass storage unit, and it's small enough to fit in your pocket. It feels a little weak in terms of construction, though, so don't sit on it.

Overall, it's handy, but you're not going to be making a big budget film on it. Not bad for quick, easy access and spur of the moment things.



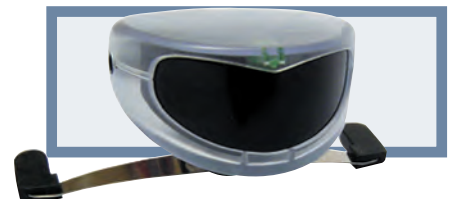
REVIEWED BY	
Walt "Shryke" Pretorius	
PLUS	MINUS
Nice price Handy	Not much improved on the DV 2000

SUPPLIED BY: Rectron [011] 203 1000
PRICE: R 1299.00
INTERNET: www.aopen.com

NaturalPoint TrackIR

It was only a matter of time before a product like this graced our shores. I have read numerous reviews of this product and many people have many mixed feelings about it.

The product is NaturalPoint TrackIR (pronounced tracker), and basically allows you to use your head to move the mouse cursor. TrackIR however, is not designed to be used in Windows as a replacement for your mouse but rather to help you in games and to compliment your mouse. The unit looks a lot like an alien-morphed web cam but instead is an infra-red device which picks up your head movements. In order to make this system effective and not let it track anything except you, you have to use a silver, reflective dot (there are plenty extra in the box) which can be stuck to your forehead, hat, or headphones. I tried the TrackIR in many games but in titles such as Battlefield: 1942 or Unreal Tournament it was very difficult to



control. The one game where this product will be a major benefit is in Flight Simulator. If properly installed, you will be able to look around your cockpit or to either side of the plane by simply tuning your head slightly. The movement is extremely smooth and works surprisingly well. The software allows the TrackIR to be enabled or disabled while in the game and sports features such as calibration and various profiles for your favourite games. Serious Flight Simulator pilots should try the TrackIR as they will not be disappointed.

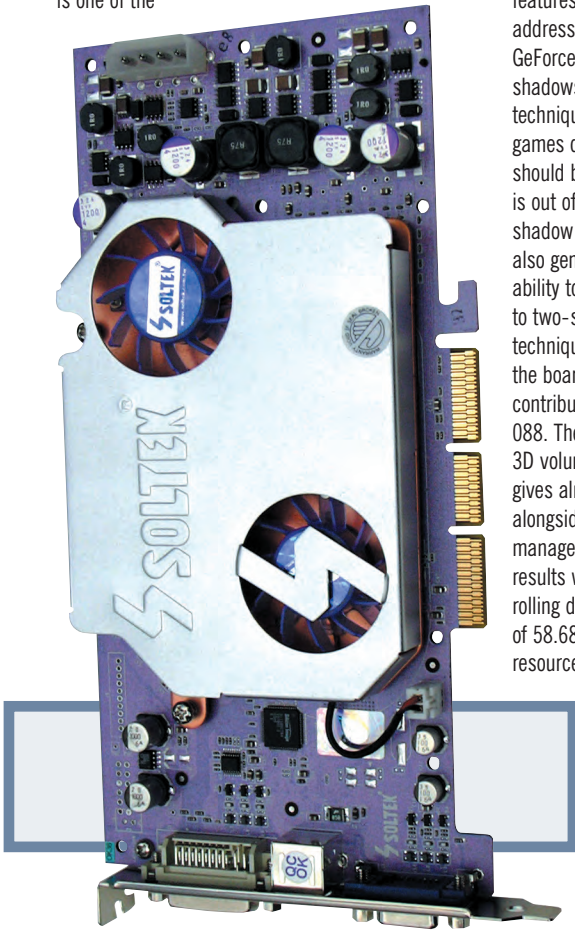
REVIEWED BY	
Tom "Fr00tc@k3" Taylor	
PLUS	MINUS
Great for Flight Simulator 2004	Expensive

SUPPLIED BY: Virtual Sense [021] 982-7173
PRICE: R 1077.00
INTERNET: www.trackir.com

Soltek GeForce FX 5900

The graphics card on review here is pretty much the top of the range NVidia offering to the hardcore gaming segment of the graphics board market today, except for the Ultra version of the same GeForce FX 5900 in this review and the latest FC 5950 offerings.

The Soltek GeForce FX 5900 has 128 MB of DDR RAM, a 256-bit Graphics Processing Unit (GPU), and CineFX 2.0, the latest incarnation of the shading engine at the core of the FX series from NVidia. The chipset being used is dubbed NV35, and is one of the



most powerful GPU architectures in the game today. Yet having said that, this card's most direct competitor, the ATI Radeon 9800, gave the NV30 chipset used in the older 5800 series a sound beating when the two were first introduced, and it was at this battle that the graphics cards wars appeared to be turning around. Long-time champion NVidia were shown to have chinks in their GeForce powered armour, and the competition were quick to

pounce. The 5900 series is NVidia's answer to these challengers. The NV35 is leaner and meaner than its predecessor in every way, and aims to address this hiccup for the time being. There's a new 256-bit memory handling system, the second-generation Intellisample HCT routines claimed to deliver a 50 percent increase in compression efficiency when doing colour compression, dealing with z-buffers handling textures.

That second-generation CineFX shading engine features one particularly ingenious enhancement to address the well documented performance hit which GeForce FX 5800 cards suffered when rendering shadows. Dubbed Ultrashadow technology, a technique called "shadow culling" is used to allow games developers to tell the GPU when a shadow should be rendered and when it should not, when it is out of scene for instance, greatly enhancing shadow generation. Standard stencil shadows are also generated much faster thanks to the NV35's ability to render volume shadows in one pass thanks to two-sided stencilling. The results of these techniques speak for themselves. Aquamark 3 gives the board an excellent GFX rating of 4725, contributing to an outstanding overall score of 39 088. The details of the benchmark shows that in the 3D volumetric fog portion of the test the FX 5900 gives almost 60 fps, where an older 5800 I tested alongside the newer offering could just barely manage 47. 3DMark 03 delivers similarly impressive results with an overall score of 4827, while the X2 rolling demo showed an excellent average frame rate of 58.686 making this upcoming and undoubtedly resource-intensive title more than playable on this card.

No more derogatory "dust buster" comments can be passed at this newer offering either, thanks to the replacement of the noisy FX-Flow cooling solution with a far more attractive twin-fan unit designed by Soltek itself. The adoption of this quieter cooling system is made possible by the fact that the NV35 chip doesn't run as hot as the NV30 did. This I can confirm,

while the test system needs additional cooling with the 5800 installed, the 5900 runs happily without these extra fans in place.

The Soltek FX 5900 is a very good card, and should definitely be one of your options if you're looking for the best-performing graphics card available on the market today. It doesn't regain top spot from the Radeon 9800 Pro, but it at least comes slightly closer than the NV30-based cards ever did.



REVIEWED BY	
Russell "Quickbeam" Bennett	
PLUS	MINUS
Quiet	Large, heavy
Good drivers	Expensive
Performance	No extra software

SUPPLIER: Eurobyte [011] 234 0142
 PRICE: R 3759.00
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MP3 PLAYERS



The MP3 file format has caused much controversy in recent years. This file format which has caused so much damage in terms of music piracy has also made our lives much easier and allowed us to store our (hopefully legitimate) MP3's in a tenth of the size of a .Wav file.

Music pirates have made good use of this opportunity and when looking at P2P (peer to peer) applications such as Kazaa, Morpheus, and iMesh it becomes apparent that with the MP3 file format still in use, we will not see the end to music piracy. In preparation for this month's H@rdcor3 roundup I installed Kazaa to see what the current state of file sharing is. The first time I logged in, I was quite surprised. The status bar at the bottom of the application indicated the following: 2 739 595 users online, sharing 500 686 474 files (4 212 888 GB). These numbers are mind boggling and I can almost guarantee you that most of those files are MP3's. Sadly the temptation of file sharing is always there and many computer users fall under this spell. LAN's are also one of the prime examples, and although many people do not like to talk about it, file sharing is a big burden for most organisers. Sadly it is not something I see coming to a halt in the near future.

writer: Tom "Fr00tC@k3" Taylor



What is MP3?

It is the file extension for MPEG, audio layer 3. Layer 3 is one of three coding schemes (layer 1, layer 2 and layer 3) for the compression of audio signals. Layer 3 uses perceptual audio coding and psychoacoustic compression to remove all superfluous information (more specifically, the redundant and irrelevant parts of a sound signal; the stuff the human ear doesn't hear anyway). It also adds a MDCT (Modified Discrete Cosine Transform) that implements a filter bank, increasing the frequency resolution 18 times higher than that of layer 2. The result in real terms is layer 3 shrinks the original sound data from a CD (with a *bitrate of 1411.2 kilobits per one second of stereo music) by a factor of 12 (down to 112-128kbps) without sacrificing sound quality.

Source: www.webopedia.com

*Bitrate denotes the average number of bits that one second of audio data will consume.

Kalliba MP3 Plus

It was just a matter of time before the local RAM manufacturer, Kalliba, would move into the MP3 player market. Their offering, the MP3 Plus, features an LCD screen which displays the MP3 file of the current track and the unit features a graphic equalizer which you can set to various music genres such as rock or pop. It also offers voice recording capabilities, and one feature in particular I liked was that you could delete any track, if needed, to make space for your voice recordings. This unit is not like the USB flash disks we have come to love, and sadly you need a separate cable to connect it to a computer. The downside to this is that you have to carry the cable around if you want to transfer data from, say, your work computer to your home computer. The sound quality on this unit is not bad at all and is quite loud; the only thing it lacks is bass.



Features **83** Value for Money **80** Sound Quality **80**

Pros: Loud
Cons: Needs a USB cable
Supplied By: Axiz [011] 237-7000
ERP: R899 (128MB) | R1399 (256MB)
Internet: Internet: www.kalliba.com

81

Apacer Audio Steno BP300

Apacer is fairly well known for its Handy Steno range of USB flash disks and their MP3 players seem to be heading in the same direction. The BP300 is an oddly, yet funky, shaped portable USB flash disk, MP3 player and voice recorder all in one. It features an LCD screen which allows you to see the file name of the MP3 currently playing and it allows you to set the graphic equalizer to one of the preset modes. The BP300 is bundled with a neck strap, a USB extension cable, and two interchangeable caps, which protect the USB plug on the unit. There was only one thing about the BP300 which I did not like at first and that is the buttons on the front of the unit which are situated very close to each other. The sound quality, on the other hand, is louder than most of the MP3 players in this roundup - this is largely thanks to the decent set of earphones which this device ships with.



Features **85** Value for Money **89** Sound Quality **85**

Pros: Sound quality
Cons: Buttons
Supplied By: Corex [011] 707-5000
ERP: R899 (128MB)
Internet: www.apacer.com

86

Z-Cyber Boom'N

This MP3 player is fairly unique in that it sports a velvet-like, red casing. There is no LCD screen on this MP3 player but it does have an equalizer and repeat one song function. I did not particularly like the fact that the play button, forward and backward control, as well as the volume control, is all the same button on this unit. For one thing this means that there is no fast forward or rewind functionality on this unit and that you cannot simply flick the button up or down to change volume but rather have to hold it in. The sound quality produced by this MP3 player is sadly not the best in this round up and I would have preferred something with a bit more "oomph". One thing that I did like about this unit is the inclusion of an arm strap which will allow you to strap this unit onto your arm if you go to the gym or jogging.



Features **70** Value for Money **83** Sound Quality **75**

Pros: Arm strap
Cons: Sound quality
Supplied By: Drive Control [021] 531-6454
ERP: R615 (64MB) | R780 (128MB)
Internet: www.z-cyber.net

76

Freecom Beatman Flash

The Freecom Beatman range of MP3 players has enjoyed much popularity. The Beatman Flash has been around for a while and I still have mixed feelings about it. The unit is block-shaped and is fairly small, it sports an LCD screen and features 64MB of internal flash memory. One of the things I liked is that it provides a slot for an additional Smart Media card. Another thing which impressed me was the inclusion of a pair of Sennheiser earphones which really helps this little unit produce superb sound. Now onto the one thing I did not like, the unit does not get recognised by Windows XP and you need to install a program called Freecom Digital Audio Manager. Without this program you will not be able to copy music onto the unit, effectively limiting you from importing music onto it, from any computer which does not have the software installed. The overall sound quality of this unit is superb and you can clearly hear the crisp sounds and deep bass. Sadly it is not particularly loud.



Features **85** Value for Money **82** Sound Quality **88**

Pros: Great sound quality | Looks funky
Cons: Needs specific application | Not loud enough
Supplied By: Square One [011] 321-5900
ERP: R1299
Internet: www.freecom.com

85

Transcend JetFlashM

Transcend is undoubtedly one of the worlds leading RAM manufacturers, it is thus not difficult to see why I expected quite a lot from their MP3 player offering. I am happy to report that I was very impressed. Even though this unit does not feature an LCD screen or an equaliser, it produces crisp sounds with strong bass effects. The JetFlashM also doubles as a voice recorder and a USB Flash Drive, thanks to its ability to simply plug into a USB port. This is also a driverless unit as no operating system later than Windows 98SE requires any driver or software installations. To me, one of the best features of this unit is its sound quality. It not only is able to produce a very loud output but its tones are also excellent, as mentioned before.



NAG
EDITOR'S
CHOICE

Features **85**

Value for Money **90**

Sound Quality **90**

Pros: Loud and crisp sound
Cons: No LCD screen
Supplied By: Light Edge Technology [021] 510-8270
ERP: R750 (128MB) | R1200 (256MB)
Internet: www.transcend.com.tw

88

X-Micro Epic Mp3 Player

X-Micro is fairly new to the MP3 player market but has not yet delivered a product that disappoints. The Epic MP3 Player, sadly, did not impress me as much as some of the other participants in this roundup. This MP3 player features an LCD screen and uses two AAA batteries, which is not common, as most MP3 players only use one. The result of this is that this device is quite a lot thicker than some of the other MP3 players. The one thing I did not like about this device was that changing its volume is slow and its maximum is not very loud. The Epic MP3 player plugs directly into an open USB slot and can, thus, be used as a portable storage device. The sound quality was good, but it was not very loud, a feature I feel is important. On the up side, its two batteries will give this unit a slightly longer battery life.



Features **84**

Value for Money **85**

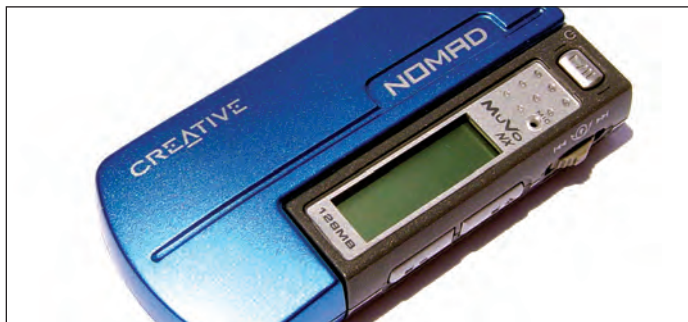
Sound Quality **84**

Pros: Price
Cons: Not very loud | Slow volume control
Supplied By: Genex Solutions [021] 419-8956
ERP: R725 (128MB) | R1265 (256MB)
Internet: www.x-micro.com

84

Creative Nomad Muvo NX

The **Creative** Nomad range of MP3 players has been around for a while and has also enjoyed much popularity. The Nomad Muvo NX is one of the latest products in this range and hosts some minor improvements over its predecessor. For one thing there is an LCD screen on the unit and the button configuration has changed slightly. The Muvo NX is also slightly different from the other MP3 players in this roundup in that it consists of a USB dongle and a battery pack. The dongle is the part which hosts the LCD screen and the buttons, while the battery module just provides power. In the box that this unit ships in there is an extra, white coloured, battery module. I was a little disappointed with the headphones which came bundled with the Nomad Muvo NX as it produced hollow sound, after plugging in the earphones which came with the Creative LX100 MP3 player the sound was superb and enjoyable.



Features **89**

Value for Money **80**

Sound Quality **86**

Pros: Very small
Cons: Bundled earphones
Supplied By: Sahara Computers [011] 542-1000
ERP: R1093 (64MB) | R1367 (128MB)
Internet: www.creative.com

85

Creative Digital MP3 Player LX100

The **Creative** Digital MP3 Player LX100 is one of the better looking units in this roundup. This is mainly due to its large LCD screen. The LX100, interestingly enough has a built in Li-Ion battery which automatically charges when the unit is plugged into your computer. The only downside to this is that you cannot simply install new batteries when the built-in ones deplete and if you are on the road this could pose a problem. It requires a proprietary cable which means that it cannot be plugged into any computer without this cable. What I loved about this unit, though, was that it also had a built in FM radio. Overall the sound quality of this unit was great - the treble and bass sounds were close to perfect. I also appreciated the fact that I was able to set the equalizer manually.



Features **90**

Value for Money **80**

Sound Quality **90**

Pros: All in one unit
Cons: Built in battery
Supplied By: Sahara Computers [011] 542-1000
ERP: R1503 (128MB)
Internet: www.creative.com

86

Sony ATRAC3plus D-NE1

Those who know me know that I love Sony products. They always produce funky gadgets and good quality products. It has been ages since I have looked at any form of portable music device from Sony and I was quite impressed with the ATRAC3plus D-NE1. Looking like a very slim Sony CD Walkman, this device is able to play MP3's as well as music CD's. What is even better is that by using the supplied software you can convert your CD or MP3 collection to ATRAC3plus files which allows you to store up to 490 music files on one CD. Personally I would keep my music in MP3 format, as the 150 or so MP3's on one CD would suffice to my needs. The Sony ATRAC3plus D-NE1 also comes bundled with a docking station which allows you to charge the ultra-slim Ni-MH batteries which are in this unit. The sound quality of this unit is excellent and the only thing that will put me off from buying this unit is its size compared to dedicated MP3 players.



Features 89

Value for Money 83

Sound Quality 93

Pros: Discman which plays MP3's
Cons: Not as small as a dedicated MP3 player
Supplied By: Sony (011) 690 3200
ERP: R2499
Internet: www.sony.co.za

88

Slim Devices SLIMP3

Even though this product is not a portable MP3 player as such, I thought it would be perfect for this roundup as it is quite unique and functional. The SLIMP3 player is a network MP3 player and it allows you to connect your hi-fi in your living room to your computer in your study. This unit simply plugs into your local network, or directly into your computer using a crossover network cable and by using the software which you, sadly, need to download you set up a server for the SLIMP3 on your computer. The box itself then needs to be set up near your hi-fi, and connected to it using an RCA cable. The SLIMP3 also comes with a full remote control which allows you to play, search, and browse your MP3 collection. The multi-line LCD display is bright and easily readable for a fair distance. Avitech Systems said that they will soon start stocking the wireless version of the SLIMP3 which will eliminate the need for a network cable between your hi-fi and your computer.



Features 85

Value for Money 80

Sound Quality N/A

Pros: Unique functionality | Useful
Cons: Pricey
Supplied By: Avitech Systems (041) 373-7702
ERP: R2500
Internet: www.slimdevices.com

82



Self-sponsorship: XTC leads the way



A clan that has been around for as long as most gamers can remember, Xpertz@Total.Chaos, has come up with a unique concept in the local gaming community. Instead of asking for money from corporate sponsors, they are attempting to

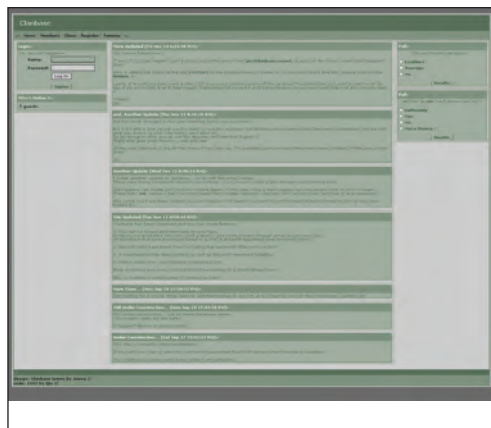
fund themselves through the profits made from an online computer store. They now supply a wide range of components from cases to hard drives to peripherals. The store is run by Slade, Soulreaper and Immortality, three leading members of the clan. "Sponsorship for gaming clans is hard to find, and unfortunately it isn't a cheap hobby," says Kenneth 'Slade' Willmore. "We decided to open an online shop and take matters into our own hands, instead of waiting and hoping for sponsors."

The store has been open since October 2003 and has so far had a fair degree of success. "To date we have made a number of small sales, for example mice, graphics cards and processors. We are hoping to increase sales in the upcoming year when more gamers are aware of our presence," says Kenneth. He believes that, being gamers themselves, the managers of the store have a unique insight into the market. "Unlike most PC stores, we actually know what is needed with regards to gaming and performance. We have the experience, and we know what quality in a gaming platform is. Our store is aimed at all people involved in the gaming scene, whether they are casual gamers, hardcore gamers or professional gamers. Hopefully, if all goes as planned, we will introduce our own gaming rigs this year for professional LAN gaming events."

Currently the store only sells to customers in the Johannesburg area, and payment can be made by means of Cash on Delivery or Internet Banking transfers. "After placing an order, the customer is contacted the very next day and arrangements are made for payment and delivery of goods," explains Kenneth. "Since we only work in the Johannesburg area, delivery shouldn't take more than a day, two at the most, depending on stock availability. All of our products, of course, come with a 12 month warranty from the date of purchase. Our prices compete with any PC or gaming store in Johannesburg, and customers should feel free to submit quotes to us, or visit our site and take a look for themselves."

The website for the store is located at <http://shop.xtc-clan.za.net>.

XTC's main achievement as a clan was the Counter-Strike win at Worfaire 2001, where their first team went on to represent South Africa at the World Cyber Games in Korea. The clan then disbanded in early 2002, but was revived again by Slade and Soulreaper. "We were members of the original XTC and had a pure love for the clan." When asked what the future holds for the Xpertz, Kenneth explains, "Currently all members in XTC are awesome friends, and therefore there are no tensions or politics surrounding the clan. We aim to become, again, as competitive as we once were, and to enjoy the journey getting there."

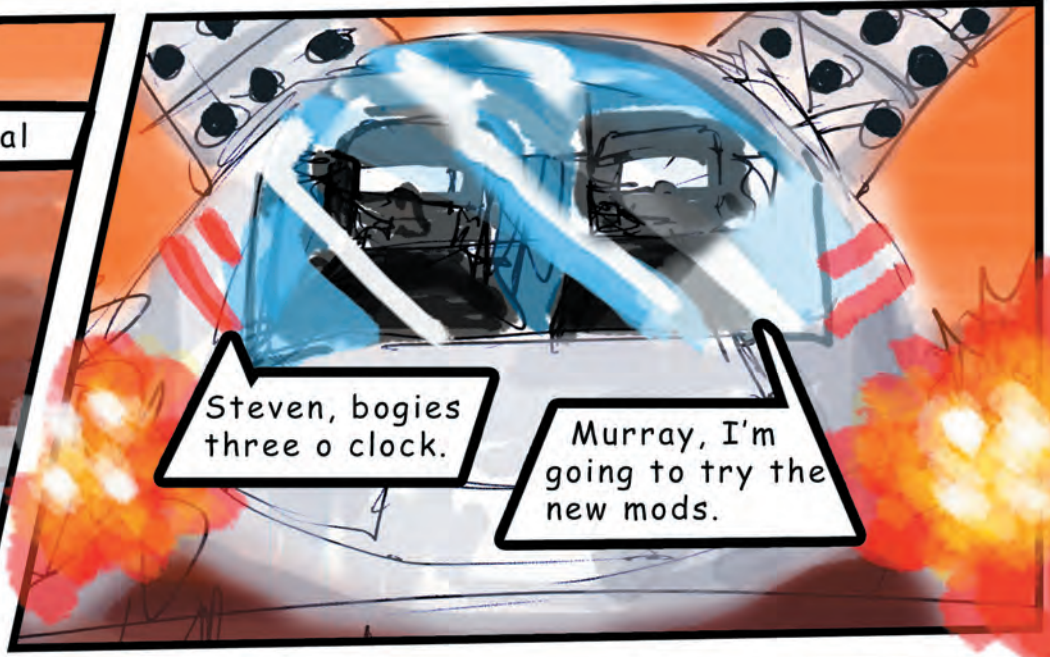
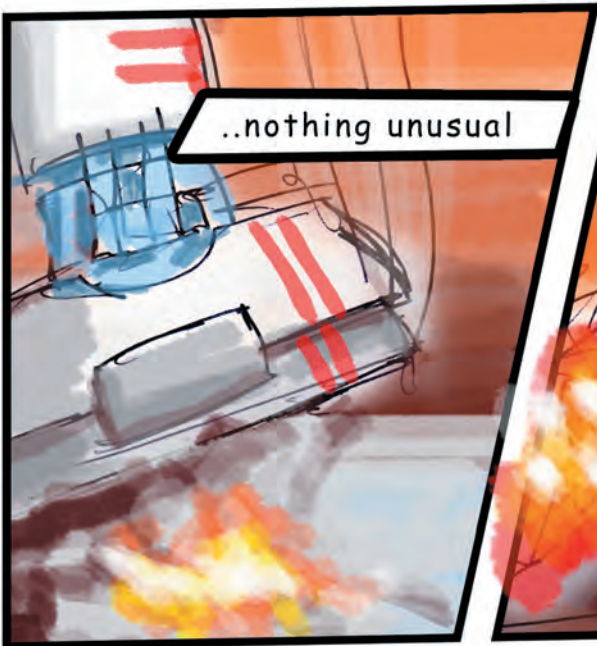
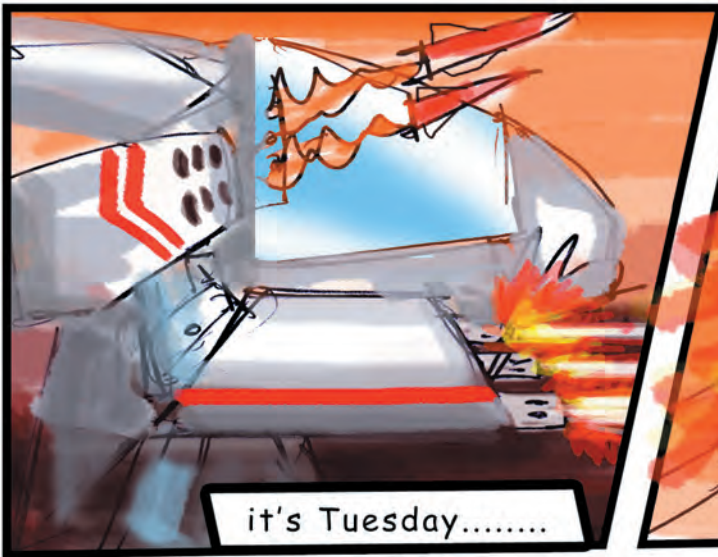


New Generation Community Websites

Throughout the history of local gaming, there have been several notable sites that catered for the needs of their community. Many will remember the likes of Hacksaw and Playgames (which ran community gaming servers), but since the downfall of both there has been a gap waiting to be filled. In recent months, in a sudden rush of new ideas and people generally getting off their rear ends and putting in the effort, two new community websites have sprung up.

The first, and most comprehensive of the two is Gamewave. The people involved with this project include the likes of Wisecrack, Twobit, XperiAnce, Supercow, Gandalf and some names from the XTC and DC crowds. The site, <http://www.gamewave.za.net>, features game reviews, industry news and information on community events and services. In addition, Gamewave run their own servers, currently supporting games such as Counter-Strike and Enemy Territory. They are the force behind a new online Counter-Strike 1.6 deathmatch tournament, which is currently in the early stages of organisation. We will hopefully have more information about this next month.

The other site is Clanbase, located at <http://www.clanbase.za.net>. Taking after the European gaming league of the same name (<http://www.clanbase.com>), this site aims to be the centre of online team-based tournaments in South Africa. Designed and organised by Jeeva, and coded by Qix, Clanbase is in the process of seeking sponsorship for their proposed leagues. As more information becomes available, it will be covered by Community.za.



Illustrated by Derek aka Quot

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John Connor may have thought his troubles were over, but when another T-101 shows up to protect him from the latest model of killer robot, he realises that he cannot avoid a future that he is destined for.

Walt: Terminator 3 is a fun film, although there is something that doesn't feel quite right about it, in terms of the rest of the series. As Arnie's last film (officially) the title is full of action and lots of destruction sequences, and is as over the top as one would expect it to be. On the whole, the film is not the best of the three Terminator titles, but it does satisfy for those who want a good serving of action.

James: This is not really what I would call a suitable extension of the Terminator series of movies, probably because James Cameron didn't direct it. But it still exists out of necessity, if only to have a new Terminator movie. And that's what it is - non-stop action and destruction, plus an excuse to see the Terminator rendered by today's SFX technology. It's nothing compared to the first, especially story-wise, but it's a good excuse to see cyborgs blow stuff up in style.

Bruce Banner turns into a big green mutant every time he loses his temper, thanks to a twisted father's genetic experiments. Banner must overcome his fears and become a hero.

Walt: While people probably flocked to this film expecting a whole lot of "Hulk smash," Ang Lee's treatment of this misunderstood hero was surprisingly sensitive and incredibly pleasing on the visual side of things.

Destined for cult film status, The Hulk is a tour de force that may disappoint those who expect a typical superhero movie. However, it is a work of cinematic genius that sheds a new light on the comic book hero.

James: If the terrible Daredevil helped pay for this movie, all is forgiven. One of the most thoughtful and stunning superhero movies ever made, it is well worth watching, even if the first 30 minutes drags like a snail through molasses. But at the end, it all comes together in a great, if somewhat overbearing and cerebral, film.



Frank Abagnale Jr posed as an airline pilot, doctor and public prosecutor all before his 21st birthday, writing millions of dollars worth of bad cheques while avoiding a persistent FBI agent.

Walt: This film came as something of a surprise. While not a fan of either lead actor, I was pleasantly surprised by both DiCaprio and Hanks.

It may not be the kind of film that one would expect from Steven Spielberg, but it does showcase the director's talent at making good movies.

Do not be misled by the trailer for this one - while it appears that Catch Me If You Can is something of a comedy, the film is rather serious in nature, despite a few light hearted moments.

James: I first saw this on an in-flight movie and loved it. Then I watched it again on DVD and I still love it. The only reasons not to watch this is if Spielberg, DiCaprio or Hanks leave a bad taste on your mouth, and it has to be a very bad taste to miss out on a gem like Catch Me If You Can.

A group of Navy SEALs face terrible atrocities as they try to rescue a group of refugees from war torn Nigeria. Trekking to Cameroon on foot, the group must face the worst of war crimes.

Walt: Although reports about this film were mixed, I was pleasantly surprised. It's not another Black Hawk Down, not by a long shot, but the film is solid enough to hold its own in the market place.

Tears of the Sun is remarkably non-politically correct (something that is rare these days) and has a number of very heavy, disturbing scenes. Needless to say, it's not one for the kids.

Bruce Willis delivers a good role as Lt. Waters, but he certainly is showing his age.

James: Simply put, if you want a gung-ho style action movie with Navy SEALs, while still taking in regard the more balanced approach of recent war movies, Tears of the Sun is good fun. Call it a Black Hawk Down Lite, if you will, but the cinematography is good, the action sequences are very well done and enough ammunition is fired to waste a small country.



In Time: The Best of R.E.M. 1988 - 2003
R.E.M.
Gallo

Pop rock has been highly influenced by this excellent band, and all the hits are here to prove it. Track listing includes: Man on the Moon, Losing My Religion, Orange Crush and Everybody Hurts.



You Come Before You
Poison the Well
Gallo

Solid New Metal that quickly descends into predictability. Not bad, however, if you're in the mood for very heavy. Don't judge this by the cover - it doesn't look like anything metal bands normally have.



Permission to Land
The Darkness
Gallo

Retro rock and glam styling combine in a rather different album that can be difficult to swallow at times. The music is great, but the vocals take a bit of getting used to. Not bad stuff, altogether.



Boozed, Broozed and Broken Boned (DVD)
Zakk Wylde's Black Label Society
WWE

You can't get more bottom line, guitar driven rock than this. A great stage show by a band that defines its genre, this is a good one for traditional hard rock lovers.

Toshiba P20 17" Wide Screen Notebook [Satellite P20-S203]

Cinematic widescreen multimedia goes mobile

The **Satellite P20 multimedia** showcase takes the imagination to an astonishing new level. Its sensational 17" wide-screen display, supported by cinematic-quality NVIDIA graphics and harman/kardon stereo sound, provides unprecedented theatre-style computing on the go. This full-fledged mobile entertainment platform gives you true desktop replacement, wrapped in an innovative red and silver case that stands out from the rest.



Features



- **Super-crisp** 17" display featuring a widescreen 16:10 ratio and outstanding harman/kardon audio deliver real cinema-standard mobile entertainment.
- **NVIDIA** GeForce FX Go5200 with DX9 support generates faster, smoother special effects for superior 3D gaming.
- **Intel** Pentium 4 Processor 2.8/ 3.0 GHz processing with HT Technology, 512 MB DDR and 60/80 GB HDD run big multimedia tasks effortlessly.
- **Unique** twin Module Bay design features a Module Bay DVD Multi drive and a Module Bay main battery that can easily be exchanged with other optional modules for further functionality.
- **Innovative** red and silver styling concept with multi-coloured LED palm rest keys makes a major style statement.

Limited Specifications

Processor

Intel® Pentium® 4 processor with HT Technology
 Clock speed: 3.00 GHz
 Front Side Bus: 800 MHz
 2nd level cache: 512 KB

System Memory

Standard: 256 + 256 MB
 Maximum Expandability: 2,048 MB
 Technology: DDR RAM

Hard Disk

Capacity: 80 GB

DVD-Multi Drive

Maximum Speed
 Read: 24x CD-ROM, 24x CD-R, 12x CD-RW, 8x DVD-ROM, 8x DVD-R, 8x DVD-RW, 2x DVD-RAM
 Write: 16x CD-R, 4x CD-RW, 1x DVD-R, 1x DVD-RW, 2x DVD-RAM

Display

Size: 17"
 Type: Wide View 16:10 TFT colour display

Graphics Adapter

Manufacturer: NVIDIA®
 Type: GeForce™ FX Go5200
 Memory Amount: 32 MB
 Memory Type: DDR Video RAM
 Graphics Accelerator: 128 bit
 Connected Bus: 4 x AGP bus

Internal Video Modes

Resolution: 1,440 x 900
 Maximum Number of Colours: 65,536

Battery

Technology: lithium-ion
 Maximum Life: up to 2.5 hours

Wireless Communication

Compliance: FIR
 Wireless Technology: Fast InfraRed
 Wireless Technology: Wireless LAN upgradeable

Toshiba Remote Control

Data transmission: InfraRed
 Function: Power On/Off, CD/DVD play control, volume control, keyboard emulation, task change, maximize window, TV button

Wired Communication

Topology: International V.90 modem, V.92 ready
 Speed: 56 Kbps data (V.90) and 14.4 Kbps fax
 Topology: Ethernet LAN
 Speed: 10/100 Base-TX

Sound System

Supported Audio Format: 16 bit stereo
 Speakers: built-in stereo speakers - tuned by Harman Kardon, Dolby Digital (AC-3) sound

Physical Dimensions

W x L x H: 419 x 293 x 47 mm
 weight: 4.5 kg

Pointing Device

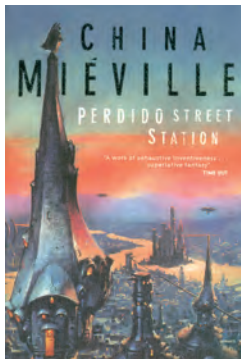
Type: Touch Pad

Operating System

Windows® XP Home Edition

Bundled

Hardware AC adapter
 TV-out Cable
 Toshiba Remote Control



After having read through the mammoth *Perdido Street Station* (it weighs in at just under 900 pages), I found it difficult to believe that this is only China Miéville's second novel.

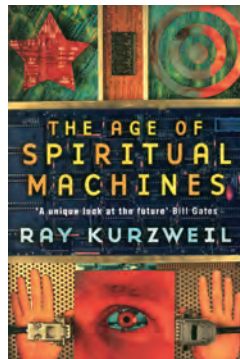
This cyber-punk novel is so well crafted that it leaves the imagination agog at what power he still has up his sleeve to dazzle readers with in future novels. *Perdido Street Station* is set in the metropolis of New Crobuzon. The name of the book is derived from the station that forms the heart of New Crobuzon. The story weaves together several different narratives in such an intricate way, that it could only be appreciated in full once you have turned the last page. The three main characters of the novel, mad scientist Isaac, insect creature Lin and wingless Yagharek all connect in some way to each other.

In fact, the beauty of *Perdido Street Station* lies in the way Miéville has structured the story. Seemingly innocuous occurrences lead to startling consequences later in the novel. The characters and metropolis are vividly constructed. However, the author still leaves room for the reader's imagination to populate the broader flavour of the novel. Unlike Tolkien who intricately described every part of his Middle-Earth, Miéville gives the bare bones of New Crobuzon and leaves the reader to flesh out the body.

Miéville admits to drawing inspiration from Melvyn Peake (see our October review of *The Gormenghast Trilogy*). While elements of *Gormenghast* do come through, this novel is no plagiaristic rehash. In fact, even if you are not a fan of cyber-punk novels, *Perdido Street Station* will still manage to entice you into reading just that extra chapter every night before you go to bed.

perdido street station

Supplied By: kalahari.net
 Website: www.kalahari.net
 RRP: R 127.00



Ray Kurzweil takes the reader on a technological journey from the beginning of time to 2099. However, while many people might think that this is just another imaginative futurist, Kurzweil is no mug with technology. Considered by many to be the foremost expert on artificial intelligence, Kurzweil has eight honorary doctorates and several science awards behind his name.

The majority of the book is dedicated to describing major technological events. He goes through evolution to context and knowledge and even the building of new brains to show the reader what has already taken place. The last four chapters each focus on a different time in the future - 2009, 2019, 2029 and 2099. In each of these chapters, Kurzweil examines how technology has impacted different aspects of our lives.

Unfortunately, the biggest problem with this book is that the Third World is completely neglected. Kurzweil does not mention the Digital Divide even once. One could say that in Kurzweil's future everyone will have access to all these amazing technological breakthroughs. I, however, think not. Apart from this, *The Age of Spiritual Machines* makes for an interesting read. I did enjoy the first part of the book more than the predictions. While this might not be everybody's cup of tea, it definitely provides food for thought of what the future might hold in store for us.

age of spiritual machines

Supplied By: kalahari.net
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 RRP: R 159.95



A book like *Dungeons and Dreamers* would have been laughed at a few years ago. Subtitled *The Rise of Computer Game Culture from Geek to Chic*, the book delves into the history of computer gaming as a social activity.

Starting back as far as the early seventies, King and Borland show the reader how games like *Dungeons and Dragons* (the ultimate in social gaming at the time) managed to influence various developers, including Richard Garriott (who brought the *Ultima* series to our PCs) and the boys from id. *Dungeons and Dreamers* investigates LAN play, online play (which is much older than you may think) and even has a look at the modern day "cyber-athletes," using Dennis "Thresh" Fong as an example. Another group of players looked at by the book are the four members of one of the first ever all-woman clans, *Psychotic Man Slayers* (yes, that's right, PMS.) *Dungeons and Dreamers* is an interesting read, but its broad focus makes for a very speedy style used by the authors. Additionally, the book tries to cover a vast amount of ground in a relatively short space of only 257 pages. Instead of concentrating on a number of areas, the authors got very sketchy at times. On the other hand, certain areas are overly focussed on. While id arguably had the biggest impact on multiplayer gaming, the writers of the book choose Richard Garriott as their main focus. The man certainly had good ideas, but his influence on gaming culture (except for bridging the gap between table top *Dungeons and Dragons* and computer games) is questionable. Yes, *Ultima Online* was well received, but the culture was well established by that time. While the book is an entertaining and informative read, people familiar with gaming and computers may find that the book tends to "dummy-down" a bit every now and then, as though the book is written for people who are not gamers. It's a bit of an "outside looking in" approach that makes the book very accessible for people outside of the gaming community.











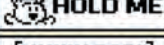












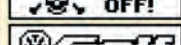







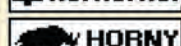
















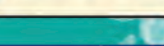

dungeons and dreamers

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Buyisa (Instr.)	10153	14153	18153		20039	24039		20139	24139
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Crazy in love	10341	14341	18341		20076	24076		20175	24175
Cry me a river	10225	14225	18225		20079	24079		20224	24224
Don't let me down	10201	14201	18201		20085	24085		20225	24225
Don't mess with my man	10243	14243	18243		20088	24088		20226	24226
Feel	10206	14206	18206		20089	24089		20227	24227
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If you're not the one	10203	14203	18203						
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One love	10337	14337	18337						
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 **TISCALI**
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alt.gaming:

This month we take a look at three new comic titles, as well as how to put together a killer limited deck for Magic: The Gathering. Last, but certainly not least, we have a look at Shadowrun and Earthdawn, two role playing games with something in common...



Tales of the Realm (Crossgen)

RRP: 26.95

Elven sorcerer, Dwarf, fighter, hulking troll. It's a group straight out of Dungeons and Dragons. Except this group are actors in a fantasy TV series, though they really are creatures of fable. Now they want to break into movies. Join our intrepid group of heroes as they fly dragon air to try and make it big in Hollywood. In a series where trolls get upset about being stereotyped after learning to speak in more than grunts a thousand years earlier, this will turn every fantasy concept you had on its head. Story by Rob Kirkman and art Matt Tyree.

Ruse (Crossgen)

RRP: 24.50

For the fans of Sherlock Holmes, or the recent League of Extraordinary Gentlemen, meet Simon Archard and his lovely assistant Emma. The stories in Ruse follow the great detective, Archard as he solves the nefarious crimes in the city of Partington. While Emma, no bumbling Watson, uses her magic to save her boss far more often than he realizes. Ruse is the Victorian age, with a little magic thrown in. Though the artwork is very pretty, this tale is among the strongest storylines in comics or literature, now or in the past.



Magic:

Following last month's limited article, this issue will discuss the basics about creating a limited deck.

Often during pre-releases or sealed decks you are posed with many choices on what colours, cards and lands are best to play. This article is meant to help you navigate the basics of limited deck building.

Firstly a limited deck, by the rules, can be no fewer than 40 cards. When building any deck you shouldn't be tempted to exceed minimum deck size.

As soon as you add more cards it starts to change the statistics of drawing the cards you really need or want to draw.

At most go to one additional card and that should only be for more land.

The basics of a limited deck are 16 creatures, 7 tricks

and spells and 17 land. If you have a deck full of cheap casting cost spells and creatures then you can adjust this to 16 creatures, 8 tricks and 16 land, and also inversely if you have a high casting cost deck then it should be advised that you go up to 18 land by either dropping one creature or spell slot.

In standard play you are using a much larger card pool and therefore have more options in your strategy to build a deck. This means you can build a control deck that can beat an aggro deck, or a combo deck.

However in limited play you have as the name hints a "limited" pool of cards to build the deck. This is why 90% or more of the limited decks you will face will have a creature strategy containing between 12 - 16 creatures.

This is format dependant as some sets have fewer

creatures than others.

So the trick to this format is to split out your colours and creatures and find the highest quality and number of creatures in 2 colours.

Going into a third colour is possible but usually just a splash for a very good card with only a single of that colour's casting cost.

Once you have your 16 or so creatures then select the best 7 spells in the same 2 colours.

However if a certain colour has more removal it is acceptable to replace a creature for a removal spell, as they net you the same board position, except you get to kill your opponent's greatest threat.

If you keep to these basic rules you should have a competitive limited deck and win more matches than before.

Creating a limited deck



Supreme Power (Marvel Max)

RRP: R25.50

One of the premier stories in Marvel comic's mature line, this story follows the life of a super hero type in the real world. What happens when you have a man with the ability to do anything, and he gradually finds out that George Bush and the American government have been brainwashing him into believing they are the only good nation in the world, so he would aid them in enforcing their policies on the rest of the world.

A story that perhaps lies a little close to the bone for some. But if you ever had concerns about Big Brother USA give Supreme Power a try.



RPG Review: Shadowrun | Earthdawn

The connection between these two titles may not be immediately apparent, but Shadowrun and Earthdawn are inexorably connected: they are set in different time periods of the same universe.

Earthdawn is the fantasy version of the game. It's all swords and sorcery and huge heroics as characters battle to free their world from the grip of horrors that have claimed it.

Shadowrun, on the other hand, is the cyberpunk sci-fi version, in which players use technology and magic to battle against the odds, whether as free operatives or as workers for a powerful super corporation.

Both titles feature the same system - an effective if sometimes clunky rule set that allows for the relatively painless resolution of most situations.

Both titles offer a wide variety of character races available for play, and each also features a healthy selection of character careers.

The main differences between the two are

setting and theme. In terms of theme, Earthdawn tends to be a more heroic, honourable sort of game, while Shadowrun tends to be decidedly, well... shadowy. Both titles can be played independently of each other - it sometimes seems that the similarities in the universe of the games is purely coincidental.

While Shadowrun is a rather unique title, with its sci-fi / fantasy mix, Earthdawn has far more competition - what with a large number of other fantasy games out there. However, it has proven in the past to be a very well liked title, because of the differences that it has in approach to the fantasy genre.

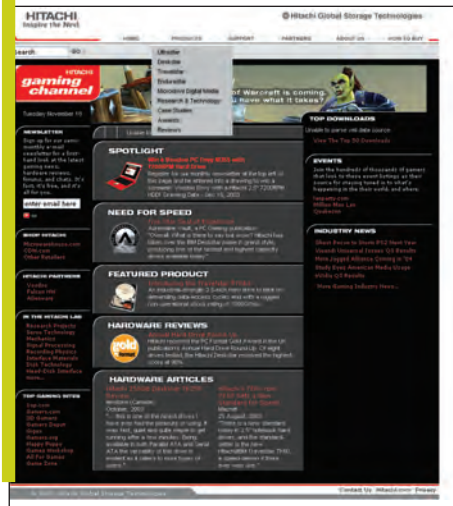
Both have something of an anime feel in their execution (not so unusual for sci-fi role playing, once again, but a bit strange in the fantasy genre.) Overall, both games are very worthwhile and rewarding, and offer brilliant alternatives for role playing groups who want to try something a little different.

RRP: R270 each



www.doom3.com

When we were there, there was nothing to see, but you can expect a website up soon, covering the game's news and latest assets. Meanwhile, you can always try www.planetdoom.com instead, or visit the site and look at the small animated Flash message telling you it's coming soon. We hope so, id, we hope so...



www.hgst.com/portal/site/gaming/

Hard drive manufacturer Hitachi have opened their own Gaming channel, delivering news to gamers regarding their hard drive technology, as well as news from their technology partners. Of course, they also use the space to blow their own horn a bit, pointing to all the latest reviews online, from gaming sites, on their hardware. It's nothing special, unless of course you're a fan of their drives or you are in the market for a new storage device and you want to know how it'll affect your gaming lifestyle. They have enough competitions to enter, though you'll have to be in the US for it to count. Still, it's worth looking in and feeling annoyed.



www.camperstrike.co.uk

In this topsy-turvy world you are loved the one second and hated the next. Currently the group being frowned upon are Counter-Strike players, even though every man and his pet hamster played it not so long ago (not that they'd ever admit it). Still, it's a good bit of fun, but you don't need to load the game to play it. Instead, this little flash game recreates the game online - in a way. It's a variation on the usual bird shooting game where you have to shoot moving targets on the screen, this time said targets being moving dummies sliding in and out a Counter-Strike level. You, of course, don't move, but instead get to unload your clip at the passing white boards. It's not as easy as it sounds, though...



www.machinima.com

People are always going on about how game engines are looking more and more like the CGI movies of yesteryear. In no time we'll probably have real-time visuals that look as good as the Diablo 2 movies. Point: games are impressive, especially since the 3D revolution. So it's no surprise that there is actually an animation movement around game engines. Machinima doesn't exclusively focus on using real-time game engines, but the bulk of it is made up of movies made using the various titles out there. In a nutshell, it means people can make props and characters, and then use various machines to play everything out to a script, record it all in the angles you need, and then cut it into a decent movie. It's a fledgling movement, but it already resulted in one music video that appeared on MTV. Machinima.com is the centre for this movement and can tell you all you want to know about the art. You can also download various movies and read some articles on how to get into it yourself...



www.vugames.co.uk

Being a gaming magazine, we tend to leave all the sucking up to the sales staff, since they have to get those precious ads. Meanwhile, we get to reside in our mighty gaming thrones and casually criticize and break down any game that dare cross our reviewing gaze (and afterwards, we all hit the local pub for happy hour). But every now and then something happens that brings us humility and makes us see the errors of our ways, if only briefly. Vivendi Games' new site for the UK should be declared a poster child on how company game sites should look. It's not the fastest loader, but it's pretty damn comprehensive on its games, plus it's pretty, and we like pretty. It's full of flashy, bouncy things that tell you of the games, plus lots of screenshots and downloads for every title on there. The site still maintains the balance between PR and information, and while VU are obviously pimping their goods to every extent, it's still an informative site done in great style. It's too slow to be a proper gaming site, but most gaming sites are too...



www.anime.co.za

Anime is a bit like Star Trek and gaming - most of us deny we enjoy it, because we risk getting boxed into the same group as the fanatics. Thankfully, not all fans of Japanese animation and the massive industry of merchandise around it are virgins with a thing for tentacle monsters and females in uniforms (though avoiding the latter might indicate you have even deeper problems). It's hard to stay in the Anime loop, though, but Anime.co.za attempts to come to our collective rescue. While it still has a lot of growing to do, and the size of the reviews and such is not that impressive, it's a good place to start learning about titles out there. The site also links to several local Anime groups and retailers, making your perusal of goods that much easier.

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Anime Legends - Osamu Tezuka



Out of the many influential figures to come out of Japanese animation, Dr Osamu Tezuka is probably the most renowned. He is regarded by many to be the greatest manga artist who ever lived, and the father of anime as we know it. Born in 1928 in Osaka, he drew his first manga at the age of nine, and went on to complete close to fifty original comic series', spanning tens of thousands of pages. He made his debut at the age of eighteen, while a medical student at Osaka University, with a newspaper strip called "Machan's Diary". Earning his physician's license in 1951, he divided his life between his dual love for cartoons and medicine.

In 1947, he published the full-length manga "New Treasure Island", selling an unprecedented 400,000 copies. The graphic novel "Metropolis" (which was recently adapted for the screen by director Rintaro) followed in 1949, and when "Jungle Emperor Leo" (later becoming the anime "Kimba the White Lion") was serialised the following year in

Japan's leading manga publication, Manga Shonen, Tezuka's position as the leading comic artist of his day was firmly established.

But the series that catapulted Tezuka into the history books was none other than "Tetsuwan Atom" (Mighty Atom), known in the west as "Astro Boy". It launched his career as an animator, and forever changed the Japanese people's ideas about anime. He continued producing television series' and numerous short films, forming the production company Mushi Productions in 1961, where he worked with many young animators such as Katsuhiro Otomo of "Akira" fame. He continued to create original anime and manga until his death on the 9th of February 1989. He was 60 years old.

The following day, Japan's Asahi Newspaper had this to say about Tezuka's life: "Foreign visitors to Japan often find it difficult to understand why Japanese people like comics so much. One explanation for the popularity of comics in Japan is that Japan had Tezuka Osamu, whereas other nations did not. Without Dr. Tezuka, the post-war explosion in comics in Japan would have been inconceivable."

Osamu's anime legacy

- 1957: "Astro Boy"
- 1962: "Adventures of Sinbad"
- 1964: "Memory"
- 1964: "Mermaid"
- 1965: "Warriors of the Universe"
- 1965: "Amazing Three"
- 1965: "Kimba the White Lion"
- 1967: "Princess Knight"
- 1970: "Cleopatra"
- 1978: "Phoenix"
- 1988: "Self Portrait"



"Tetsuwan Atom"

Movief Review

Perfect Blue



In the West, it's been said that Perfect Blue would be the outcome if Walt Disney and Alfred Hitchcock ever made a picture together. It is an animated suspense thriller, quite different in atmosphere to most traditional anime films. Mima Kirigoe is a famous pop singer who decides to make a bold career change and try her luck as an actress. When her pushy agent gets her a role in a sexually-themed thriller, she is reluctant at first, but agrees to take the part. As the filming of the movie gets underway, the lines between fiction and reality become dangerously blurred, and her life begins to unravel.

The film is unique in its ambiguous mood and its concept of reality. It creates a sense of unease and uncertainty in the audience, who are never quite sure whether what is happening is real, a scene from Mima's movie, or an image in her mind. The interplay between these three aspects of reality is the film's strongest point. However, it does tend to slip into cliché rather often, relying on obvious themes and dialogue that seems forced at best. This detracts from the most important facet of a good thriller - subtlety. Having said that, it is certainly thought-provoking, and the shortcomings are more in its execution than its concept.

The animation is good, but not quite up to what one would expect from director Satoshi Kon (Memories) and special advisor Katsuhiro Otomo (Akira). Character motion flows nicely, but is overdone in certain scenes. The direction is straightforward for this type of film, and takes inspiration from many western live-action thrillers.

The musical soundtrack and effects are nondescript - I found the audio was not used to its full potential, given the possibilities in the thriller genre. And on another sound-related note, the English translation and voice acting are done badly. If you are given the choice, watch it in the original Japanese.

Perfect Blue is a film definitely worth the watch for entertainment value. It is also a perfect example of how animation can be used to tackle mature themes, instead of the usual childish connotations of the medium. As a work of art, however, it has its pros and cons, and comes out somewhere above average, but nowhere near remarkable.

Genre:	Thriller	Concept	8
Year:	1997	Story	9
Producer:	Madhouse	Soundtrack	7
Format:	Movie	Characters	7
Episodes:	1	Animation	7
Language:	English, Japanese with English Subtitles	Translation	7
Availability:	Common	Total Score (out of 100)	77





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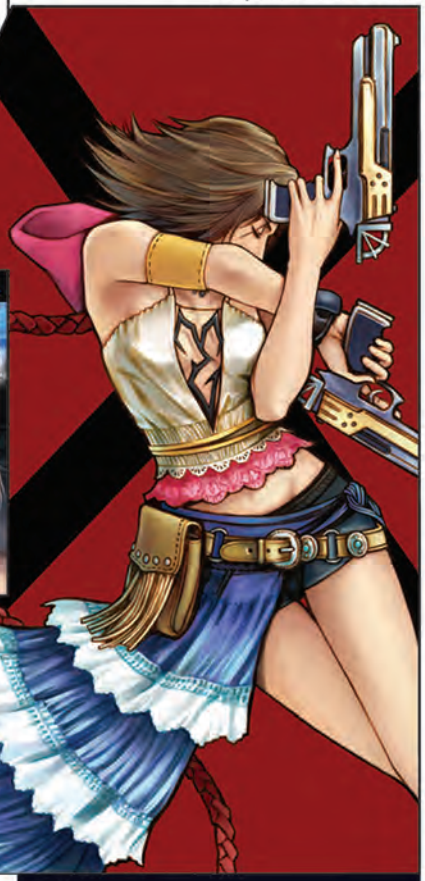
Winners of Decembers SMS Competition for Instant prizes are:

- Ratchet & Clank 2 for ps2 - Brent Clarke
- Sims Bustin' Out for ps2 - Paul Pollock
- DBZ Budokai 2 for Ps2 - Marie Heymans
- DBZ Broly movie DVD - Darren Maxwell
- Excel Saga Tv Series DVD - Shea Bethell

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The Green solution to your lifestyle blues

A warm and special message from the Editor of this fine magazine...

I have decided that it is our responsibility [NAG Magazine] and mine in a smaller way to improve the quality of the letters pages, unimaginatively but fondly known as Inbox. Over the years things have been good and bad, there was even one issue where I didn't bother editing the letters at all just to show everyone exactly what arrived in the NAG mail each month. As an interesting side note, snail mail [except for competitions] has almost completely disappeared, there was a time when we used to get

SHORTS

Badger Hunt #1 Winner [badger the witness]

[Ed: I received this mail on 26 November 2003 at 7:36 PM making Brett Smith our first winner of the hidden Badger Screenshot, here is what he had to say]: Ok... I found the badger... complete with bullet time dodge and all. :) For the specifics, page 49, bottom screenshot on the far right edge of the page, just above the AOpen logo. [December issue].

Brett

Ed: Well done - your prize should arrive eventually.

Casing

Technically no matter where you are there is heat in South Africa, so a computer with black casing will get hotter. (In reference to the SMS you got in November issue).

Zed

Ed: You'll need to do a little better than that. There isn't heat inside a Steers fast food walk-in freezer anywhere in South Africa so your argument is weak.

Running Old Games

There was a letter in your November issue from AI about running old games on Windows XP and PRO. They actually are supported! Go into the properties of the file and under compatibility, change it to Windows 9x or whatever it used to work on. I had the same problem and this sorted it out.

Zed

Ed: Yes, of course... umm, I knew that all along. This is why we can never do a technical support section in NAG - we're [and I mean all of us except me] are too dumb.

around 20 - 40 actual letters in the post box every month. But now the e-mail has swelled and the snail mail has diminished. This is a sign of the times and along with it an evil has appeared - the quick nasty mails, the poorly constructed mails, the long deranged essays etc. and so on. This isn't restricted to just South African gamers but everyone everywhere. In light of this the magazine is launching a campaign to clean up and improve the mail system; just think if we can do it here imagine what will be possible years from now. No more spam, no more ALL CAPS MAIL, no more teh porli splet mail [let's face it Word spell checker, like AI in games, has a long way to go before humanity can be proud of it]. So send us your best mail this year, covering interesting topics about games, hardware or even personal experiences about gaming, a LAN you attended... all the warm and fuzzy stuff that'll actually contribute to the industry. From my side I'll try my best to be nice to everyone and actually answer some letters properly and not tear apart any dumb questions or pointless mails, and above all, I'll turn my automatic reply back on and in some cases reply to NAG mail in person... I plan to be more organised this year.

So, consider this issue and most of the February issue [thanks to mail in my inbox versus magazine to shelf lag] a final farewell to the way it was and let us all embrace a new beginning, the proud birth of a new era in gaming culture. Are you with me? And for those of you who think this is some kind of trick - be quite, the others might hear you.

Thanks, Ed

Wire

I really hope you will be able to help me. Tell me where I can order some of those (Sunbeam EL Wire). I'm in Pretoria but do you maybe know of a place in Pretoria or Johannesburg where I can buy those wires? Tell me how does that wire work?

Robbie

Ed: <Bites lip> to order it go here: www.modshop.co.za - they supplied the stuff for the feature we ran in the November issue. As to your question about the inner workings of electroluminescent wire or more correctly cable... I don't have a clue, but I do know how to find out and arrived at this explanation. It seems legitimate but

like I said I wouldn't know - I did however also discover that you shouldn't screw around with mercury lamps - something about radiation and vaporised DNA.

"The design and construction of EL cable is similar to a coaxial cable. The outside electrode is composed of two thin copper wires twisted in a spiral configuration around a semi-conductive phosphor. The actual light is emitted due to the properties of the semi-conductive phosphor between the copper-wire electrodes. The cable is cool to the touch and never gets hot."

Lame Excuses

Developers are coming up with more and more intelligent excuses for not having their projects finished by published deadlines. Let's take Valve, for example. "Umm, we let someone take our source code. You will have to wait another 6 months for us to finish the game now." Do they really expect us to believe that they don't make daily or even hourly backups? In an environment where coders are paid huge salaries, every minute counts, especially when deadlines loom, and this is even more pertinent in the case of the development of a high-profile game like Half-Life 2. Backups would be an absolute priority. But no, someone 'stole' their source code. What's next? The dog ate their hard drive?

Morgue [FLB]

Ed: They weren't saying the source code was stolen gone, only 'stolen' copied. I just thought it was funny that someone might use a 'dog ate my hard drive excuse.'

Nowhere Software

This whole release date situation is getting ridiculous with some game developers! In the July 2002 issue of NAG I read that DOOM 3 was almost finished. I was awestruck and couldn't wait. I also adhered to the warnings that a GeForce 2 won't cut it and that a GeForce 3 is really what you want - fair since a while before that Doom 3 was featured using GeForce 3 technology. The article also stated that John Carmack said if you

really want to see Doom 3's capabilities you need a GeForce 4 Titanium. So around the beginning of this year I scrambled up enough money and got myself a GeForce 4 Ti 4200. Yippee! I'm ready for Doom 3. But Doom 3 never arrived the summer of 2002, neither June 2003 and there's still no hope of a summer 2003 release. It is as everyone knows, scheduled for release somewhere in 2004! What this means is by that time the GeForce FX will have gone and the new cards will be out. So naturally Doom 3 will be optimized for these new cards since it already probably isn't a DirectX 8 game anymore but DirectX 9! This puts me two card generations out and not on the preferred or recommended card list! I can't afford another R2000 card since I need to upgrade within the coming months which already is something like R4000. If they stuck to their release date the first time around I would've been fine. Other games can make it like Max Payne 2 for instance, and sure, stuff happens but this is getting ridiculous. I mean no real tragedy struck id Software like it did Valve with the hacking saga, so what the hell are they waiting for?! The thing is I am a big fan of id since the first Doom came out! And I've played everything from that through to Doom 2 and on to Quake 3! So I just can't wait!

Donovan

Ed: Welcome to the wonderful world of computer gaming - it seems as though you're more annoyed that the game is late than your 3D card issue. We feel your pain brother, stand forth and shed thy grievance and aggravation, the mighty DOOM 3 will be with us soon and then my brother we shall all rejoice. The good news is that we do have an exact release date for DOOM 3 - it's sometime at the end of April 2004, maybe... we think. Look, worst case scenario, it slips

Image: Mr. Ronnie Ho-Hip come up with these barrels of toxic NAG glop.





to 2005, so start saving now and remember everyone plans to buy a new 3D card every second year. Tip: If you eat enough dog food you will eventually get used to it.

Counter-Strike servers

I'm sure there are many, many people who feel the same way that I do about the stupid banning on these servers, I've been banned from one server for swearing twice, over a period of about 4 hours, it's not like I compulsively swear. Counter-Strike also has an age restriction, so I'm sure that if you're old enough to see blood, I'm sure you're old enough to glance over "obscene" words.

SHORTS

Magazine Suggestion

Subject: Courting Controversy.

Suggestion - how about posing a controversial issue once in a while, and then printing as many responses to that issue as possible in a special feature. This could be a "Reader Response Report" or something like that. I think this could be quite popular, and would give your readers more of an idea of what their counterparts think about certain issues (topics can range from piracy and the price of games to NAG page design and the anticipation for locally-produced games).

Morgue [FLB]

Ed: How do you, the reader, feel about this idea? Respond to letters@nag.co.za.

Question

I am not sure if this is even legal but can you put a DVD or game [a copy if need be] with one of your Cover CDs once a year or so? Then increase the price of the magazine to cover the purchase of the DVD and CD.

Reader

Ed: There are idiots. They're everywhere and some of them even read this magazine.

Plural of Mouse

Something has been bugging me for a while now and that is the fact that you people at NAG and some other people from other PC magazines refer to the plural of a PC mouse being mice. It's wrong! The plural for the rodent mouse is mice but the plural for a PC mouse is MUSES! Now please start using correct English in your magazine. I dig NAG and have been buying since July and it's been brilliant!

Concerned reader

Ed: I don't think so.

If every source of entertainment had the same idea as those who operate these servers, just imagine all those PG 13 programs that would be banned as the hero decided to say "hell yeah, we beat the crap out of those buggers!". It would be insanity - I think there should be a poll.

SoulRaider

Ed: Why must one swear to make one's point? Or is it more the case of using the naughty words because we just heard them... also, your mild example of swearing above certainly isn't anything close to the string of obscenities some of these foul-mouthed characters spew whenever their terrorist bangs a big toe. I say everyone should be hooked up by their nipples to high-voltage electrodes that string out of some proprietary card and if they swear the administrator can send a little reminder 'message' not to - that would be entertaining. If you really want to swear so badly, rob a bank and join a jail.

Anime and the kings behind it!

This is a reply to a letter in the November issue of NAG, "Anime and the ar53hol behind it".

Hey guys, I also read the NAG anime section every month and I don't always agree with the rating you guys give, but common Silver Dragon, DBZ... worse still, Pokémon, what the hell is wrong with you, have you even ever seen a real Anime? I've been collecting Anime for a couple of years, watched my first one in 1991, bought my first one, one tape at the time, in 1996 - Ghost in the Shell. So throw any anime series or movie name my way and I have ten to one seen it by now. So that brings me to the point, the people are shown stupid things like DBZ and Pokémon and they think that all anime is like that. < Goes on a bit, Ed> I say to Silver Dragon, do yourself a favour and look for something good like Cowboy Beebop, you'll change your mind so fast you'll wonder what time warp you've been living in as a five year old!

Snake Eyes

Ed: Right, enough with this yak and knack about what Anime is and isn't and what is good and bad - I'm tired of getting mail about this. Let's all just try and get along. I believe most Anime 'fans' caught onto the idea of Anime when they heard there might be a little nudity in their Saturday morning cartoons, especially after catching a

glimpse at a few interesting, but oddly angled, pictures on the Internet. These people then went on a massive search for an actual movie and nine times out of ten ended up with something tame to mild only to fast-forward through the movie, and after seeing nothing of interest, gave up on the whole scene citing how childish Pokémon is. The other 1% actually watched the whole movie and ended up enjoying it and went out looking for more - the Cowboy Beebop fraternity. Then there are others who got lucky, saw a little action and are now the owners of a well worn VHS tape as well as a really skew opinion of Anime... am I close? Have I left anyone out? Oh, hang on - there are also others who've always watched things like Maya the Bee and Pokémon and either did grow up or didn't. I'm not picking sides, just outlining them.

Spelling

Just noticed in the last few issues there are the hard-to-be-pleased spelling critics. So here is a bit of useless information for them.

Aoccdrnig to rscheearch at an Elingsh uinervtisy, it deosnt mtaer in waht oredr the ltteers in a wrod are, the olny iprmoentn tihng is taht the frist and lsat ltteer is at the rghit pclae. The rset can be a toatl mses and you can sitll raed it wouthit porbelm. Tihs is bcuseae we do not raed ervey ltteer by it slef but the wrod as a wlohe.

SirBenn21

Ed: We do try you know. I've instituted a new policy in the magazine to try and combat all spelling mistakes - use smaller words!

Forums

Some stuff from the NAG Forums - www.nag.co.za

Topic Starter

WiDoW_MaKeR

Post subject: The Best Game in the world

What in your opinion is the best Game you've ever played?

Worship

It's hard to decide on a best game ever, since there are millions out there. However a personal favourite is Final Fantasy, as you all should know is a everlasting game!

MrBored

Quake 1, hands down, no contest.

Why so much?

I am still a little worried about things that are going on in this country. I'm talking about the price of games. New games are very expensive and cost around the price of a CD writer - I know that the real price of the complete game package is mainly the effort and time taken to develop the game and it's only a small cost to put it on CD, in a cover with a little book. But if you are an average gamer with not all the money in the world, like me, the temptation of buying pirate games often arises. These pirate copiers are everywhere, in newspapers, on the Internet, hell there are even half a dozen of these copiers at my school. Pirate games cost anything from R40 - R100, and with originals costing R299+ it's no wonder that piracy is so rampant. All I'm trying to say is that if developers made the price of games lower, piracy will almost completely be eliminated. Example, if a developer releases a game for R 100.00 (original) and a pirate releases it for R 50.00 (fake), gamers will definitely purchase the original because the pride of owning the real deal is pretty cool. You can't tell me that it costs more than R 50.00 to make the final package. So why not lower the price and sell triple or even quadruple the games and make even more profit.

Shaun

Ed: I've heard that argument more times than I can count and while it certainly sounds enticing the problem with criminals is that they always look for the cheap and easy option in every scenario - I doubt that anyone will pay more for the legitimate product, even if the difference was as little as R20. They'd still buy the pirate version because it's like an addiction, "if I pay R 100 I'll have two games instead of one". And please don't tell me that R 299 is expensive. If it wasn't for this spoilt rotten pirate culture, one or two games every other month would be more than enough for most, but because we pirate we have developed a taste for 10 games a month and that's a hard habit to kick. And that, "sorry I'm a poor gamer" motto doesn't cut it either. The only real difference is there's a very real and serious price to pay for sniffing cocaine but no penalty for ripping off games. They say the true test of a person's character is what they'd do if there were no consequences to their actions.

If you suspect anyone of pirate activity contact SAFACT on Telephone: +27 11 886 3824 or E-Mail: safact@iafrica.com

2004 in retrospect

NAG
NEW AGE GAMING MAGAZINE

Ah yes, it's a bright, shiny new year! As the final strains of Jingle Bells fade back into the festivities closet and the final hang over starts making way for a little dull edged comprehension, one cannot wonder what this New Year - the fourth since the computer world was supposed to end - will bring us. It has to be better than the end of last year. Why, all those little gamer kiddies crying almost broke my heart. Why were they crying? Because all the nice games they had so politely asked Santa for got delayed, due to the fact that those naughty game development elves couldn't pull finger out and finish a product on time, for once.

So many of the games that had the more fanatical gamers retiring to the bathroom with double page advertisements and an extra helping of bog roll just never showed

up... looks like we're going to have to turn Easter into the "big gaming season" this year. But that's okay, it's in the past. This year will be different.

2004's potential is shiny and glittering, just like all those wonder game CD-ROMs that were suspiciously absent from 2003's Christmas stockings. There's a lot to look forward to, without a doubt.

There are going to be games galore this year folks, exciting titles delayed for the most whimsical reasons imaginable. We are yet again going to be able to spend

joyous months gnashing our teeth and chewing our finger nails to the quick in anticipation of which title will be set back next. And we will all be feverishly

wondering if this year, after so long, at least one game publisher is going to wake up one morning with a sudden attack of morality - just sort of sit up and say "hell, gamers bought me yet another Ferrari in 2003, maybe it's time to give something back to the community..."

And there may even be exciting record attempts this year, like the record for the Longest Delay Before Releasing a Sub Standard Game (although

Blizzard's Diablo II is still a tough contender to beat on that count)... or maybe even a challenge on Dice's well established Most Overall Patching Needed for a Single Game title.

And how can we forget that we may yet again have another computer super-corporation deciding that South Africa is a market that is not viable for their gaming products, without having the decency to tell us why.

Also, we may have another exciting instalment of "Dude, where's my Source Code?" to follow this year, not to mention the potential for our all time favourite upgrade race, also known as "Our Game is Too Good for your Crap Computer."

So much to look forward to! I can hardly contain myself. So many surprises and disappointments coming our way. One thing is for sure, though - all those that think this year will be any better than the last better wake up and smell the burned out processors... Happy 2004!



next month:

Soft Stuff: [Marshmallows]

Bored of your own life? Missed so many Sims expansions you can't afford the repayments to catch up? Whatever your skew on The Sims they're back in The Sims 2 and we stare at them in a massive preview. In terms of reviews we have everything from the broomstick riding Harry Potter to the tough and dirty True Crime - it's a mixed bag of wet mice, cats and dogs. Miss it and in 7 days something green and smelly will grow between your toes.

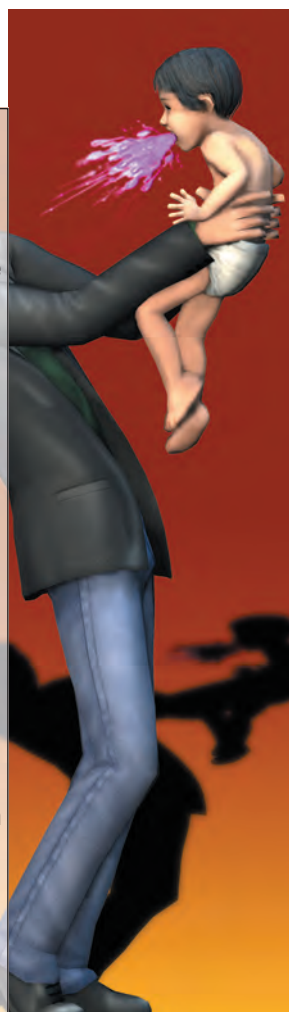
Oh, one other important thing - in the next issue we look at what made it and what didn't in 2003. We're handing out awards for the greatest games and hardware last year so we can drain more advertising out of the winners. ;)

Hard Stuff: [Jaw Breakers]

Before the shiny new 9800 XT was unpacked everyone had to wear corduroy drool bibs and anti-static ankle chains - is it hot or not? Find out when you get the February issue of NAG. We also do a hard drive and potable storage medium round-up and one of the braver staff members decided to experiment with a water cooling system [we still think it could be hooked up to an aquarium].

Timing:

The February issue will be on-shelf - 29 January 2004.



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