February 04 Volume 6 Issue 11 www.nag.co.za

NAG

NEW AGE GAMING MAGAZINE

south africa's leading technology & computer entertainment magazine

made in south africa

Lazy Gamer's guide to
The Thermaltake Aquarius III External
Liquid Cooling System

Previews of The Sims 2, Area 51
Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow, Perimeter

Also...
Anime, Role-Playing, Hardware and News

Games that didn't suck
in 2003

Comparative Hardware Roundup **Hard Drives**
ASUS ATi 9800XT Review

Game Reviews of Need for Speed: Underground
XIII, Judge Dredd: Dredd vs Death
War of the Ring, **Worms 3D**, True Crime

PC**Xbox**GameCube**Mobile**GBA**PlayStation2**

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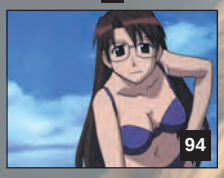

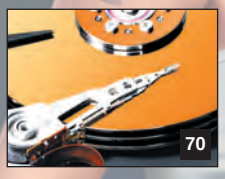

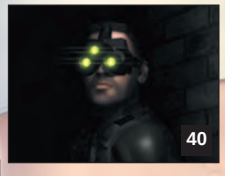

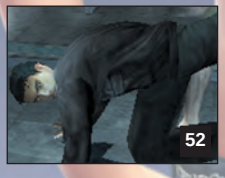

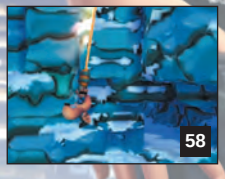

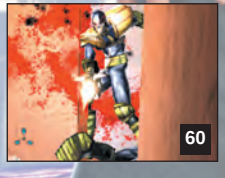

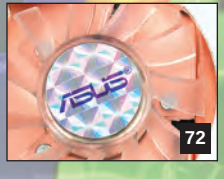

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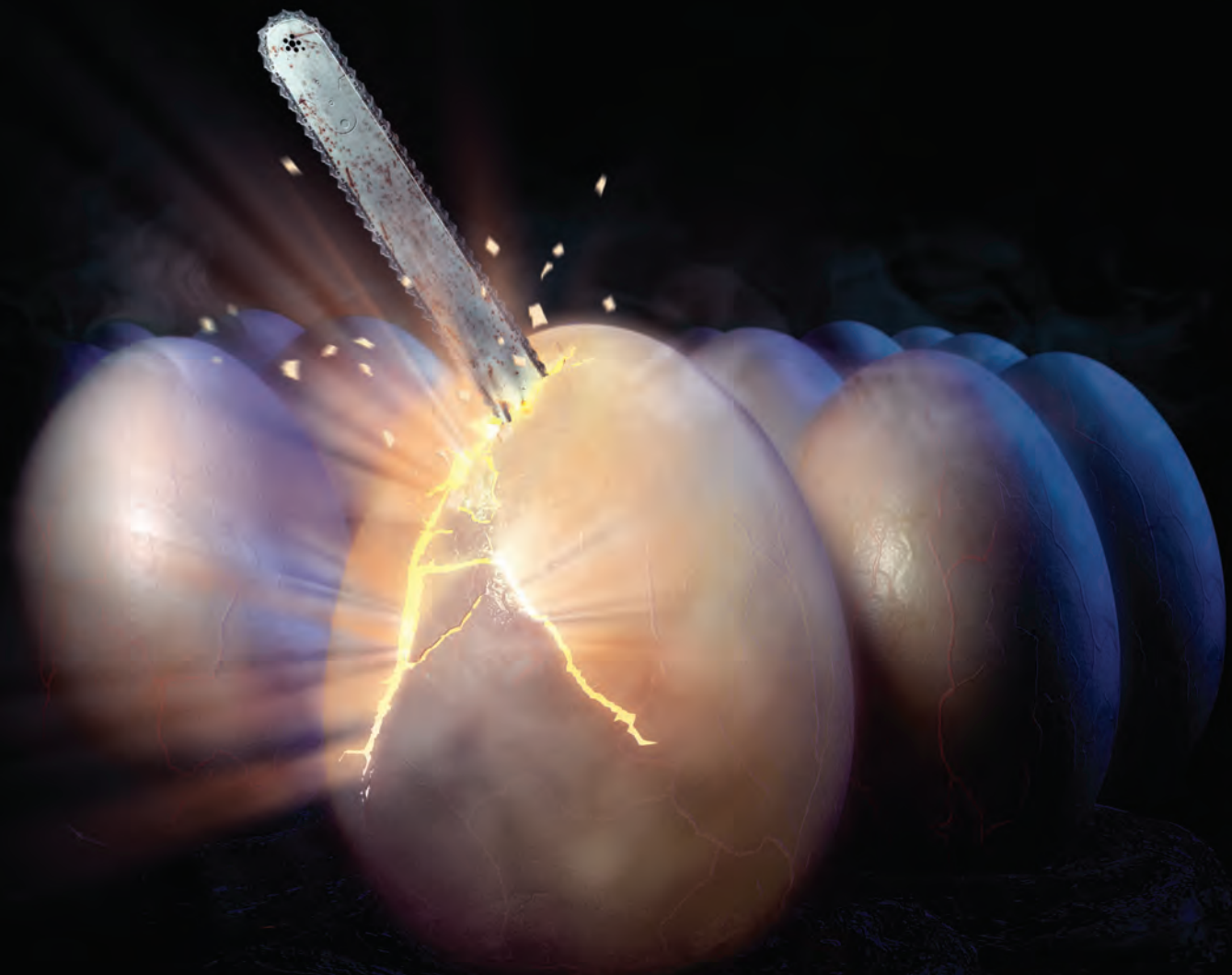
These few brave companies make the Cover CD a reality every month... Think fondly of them!

megarom interactive

EA GAMES

Microsoft

Intel® Pentium® 4 processor Extreme Edition Challenge



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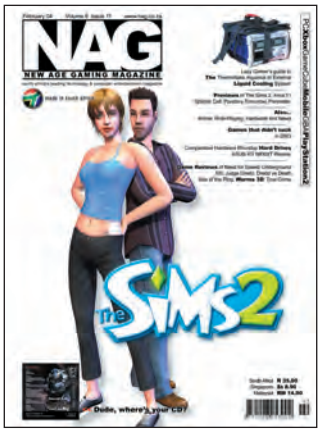

Stimulating Personal
People Simulator, say that 3 times fast for a free lollipop! Yes, in the next month or two The Sims 2 will be in stores around the world. This is the biggest selling game franchise on the planet and this sequel is going to pad the bonuses of Electronic Arts executives for years to come. It's games like this that are putting computer gaming on the map with the general masses out there and while spending hours taking care of a virtual version of yourself because your real life is such a failure might not appeal to everyone, you should be grateful it's so popular because it helps grow the whole industry. It all starts on ***page 36****. Send yourself there.*

Ruff

The February issue is a rough one, like recycled one-ply. The reason is a lethal combination of holiday laziness layover and the bewildered feeling you get half way through an issue deadline when you first realize you've been on holiday far too long now and cannot compose a simple sentence or cope with all the demands - help! It takes a full month and a whole magazine cycle to get back into the holding pattern.
So now that we're really well into 2004 a few interesting announcements have appeared here and there; hardware news seems to be console centric in these early months with encouraging pricing details on Sony's new handheld console, the PSP and more speculation and rumour regarding the next generation consoles than I've ever heard before. Reading between the lines you'll notice that the one detail the big guns are labouring over most is who will release first and their subsequent jostling for position in the 'who announces first wins' race. When it comes to PC hardware, although not much has reached official announcement status yet there is news of a new power supply and motherboard standard, DDR II memory and other interesting processor, slot and socket innovations, changes and designs. Software is looking stronger than ever with games like DOOM 3 and Half-Life 2 dominating the limelight but don't forget about other big titles like The Sims 2, Dungeon Siege 2, Black & White 2, and if anyone actually cares anymore, Duke Forever, which is now slated for a late 2004 release at best i.e. 2005. That's seven years of development time… seven (7) years! On the movie front you'll get to watch everything from Spider-Man 2 to Dawn of the Dead and things like the next Resident Evil movie and Alien versus Predator - yummy! Other new developments out there are seeing games being taken more seriously in the cellular market and pretty much everywhere else; the convergence of mediums is upon us and with development companies supporting multiple formats the age of gaming is well and truly here. The natural follow on to the digital revolution is the entertainment revolution and unless you want to fry your IQ by watching Magnum PI reruns on the Series Channel, playing games in whatever format they take is the better option. Just be careful you don't start seeing messages and hearing voices telling you to do evil things - you know there's a devil inside every game box, a shotgun in your dad's cupboard and a Wimpy just around every corner.

2004 in short
Coming from a tornado of a year where we increased our print run twice and put on rAge 2003, we have some bigger things planned for gaming in South Africa this year and thanks to the ongoing support of the gaming industry and in no small part the hardware industry, NAG is in the enviable position to really make things happen for the benefit of our readers. For starters over the last year NAG has formed partnerships with a few of the more dynamic companies out there to bring you games and hardware and greatly reduced prices because we all know having a pretty magazine is one thing but saving people actual hard cash is really how we'd like to be remembered. Some things to look forward to this year: April is our birthday issue (make sure you get that one) - it's going to be huge and will have a few surprises; then in the middle of May we're heading off to E3 again and you can expect another huge supplement in the July issue of NAG. rAge 2004 will be the event to go to this year - many of the distributors and publishers are planning big things for South Africa's largest electronic entertainment show early in October. After that who knows - there's so much going on I'm really going to have to get myself a team of assistants this year.

[FYI] Cover CD
At time of publication there were very few actual game demos available so we crammed as much other stuff on the CD as possible - almost the exact opposite of the January issue. This is just so you know why we do the things we do sometimes (oh, and also to satisfy the two readers who complained about there only being 3 [massive] demos on the January CD).

Michael James [Editor]

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: **February 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 february caption

'**R.I.P. Max Payne** - soon after Max bought the brown leather jacket, the fashion police got him' - **NAG's [97% lame] effort**

december winner

'This guy's a headshot looking for a place to happen...' - Jon Ambler

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- Integrated with 256MB DDR memory
- Features DVI-I, TV-Out and D-Sub connetors
- All new 256-bit memory interface
- Supports video capture for video editing (VIVO)
- Supports Gigabyte "V-TUNER" overclocking application
- Bundles three world-class games and PowerDVD 5.0

NVIDIA GeForce FX 5900XT GV-N59X128D

- Powered by nVidia GeForce FX 5900XT GPU
- Supports the new AGP 8X and latest DirectX 9.0
- Integrated with 128MB DDR memory
- Features DVI-I, TV-Out and D-Sub connectors
- All new 256-bit memory interface
- Supports Gigabyte "V-TUNER" overclocking application
- Bundles three world-class games and PowerDVD 5.0

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- Integrated latest 256MB DDR Memory
- Supports the latest MicrosoftR DirectXR 9.0 and OpenGL®
- 8 parallel rendering pipelines process up to 3.3G pixels per second.
- All new 256-bit memory interface.
- DVI-I and TV-Out connector supported
- Supports Gigabyte V-Tuner for overclocking.
- Bundles 4 Newest Full Version Games & PowerDVD 5.0

RADEON 9800 PRO GV-R98P256D

- Powered by ATi RADEON™ 9800 PRO Visual Processing Unit (VPU)
- Supports the new AGP 8X standard
- Supports the latest Microsoft® DirectX® 9.0
- Eight parallel rendering pipelines process up to 3 billion pixels per second
- All new 256-bit memory interface
- DVI-I and TV-Out connector supported
- Supports GIGABYTE V-Tuner for overclocking
- Bundles three world-class games and PowerDVD 5.0

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- 802.11g compliant, supports Super G with data transfer rate of up to 108 Mbps
- Gigabyte Smart Setup II, Plug & Play.
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- Supports AGP 8X interface for excellent graphics performance
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- Integrated Marvel Gigabit Ethernet controller
- Gigabyte patented DualBIOS? technology design

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- Integrated GigaRAID IDE RAID Interface
- Integrated Gigabit LAN Ethernet controller
- Supports high quality 6-channel audio
- Integrated IEEE 1394 FireWire interface

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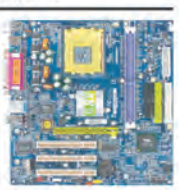
- Integrated 10/100Mb Ethernet controller
- Provides 6 USB 2.0 ports for high-speed connectivity

USB 2.0 | 10/100 LAN | 6-Channel Audio | EasyTune™ 4 | Q-Flash™ | @BIOS™



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PCFormat Gigabyte "Best Motherboard Brand 2002 & 2003"

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tech news:

New Timex GPS watch

Sometime around April, Timex and Garmin International will release the Timex Bodylink System, a watch with chronograph, heartbeat monitor, data storage with USB interface and GPS. The functionality of the GPS allows speed determination as well as location awareness.

Dell W1700 - monitor with TV tuner

Dell has released a 17" monitor with built-in TV tuner. In addition to the above, it boasts an excellent variety of input methods, including DVI-D, S-Video, Composite Video and Component Video. It carries a pair of 5W speakers and a set of RCA connectors for the audio signal. Dell will soon ship an entry level PC system that includes the W1700 monitor.

Contax SL300R T*

Kyocera has released the Contax SL300R T* digital camera. It features a Zeiss lens system with 3x optical zoom, has 3x digital zoom and 3.17 megapixel resolution, and can capture video at 640x480 at 15 or 30 fps. It has a 1.5" LCD display, and weighs in at 125g.

PCs to change radically this year

Many elements of computers will change this year. Both leading CPU manufacturers are set to change the socket format of their chips. Intel is about to replace the current socket 478 with socket 775 and AMD will move from 754 and 940 pin sockets to mostly 939 pin designs. Both companies will change processes from 130nm (nanometres) to 90nm. Around mid-year, DDR-II will start replacing DDR memory, and will make use of a new DIMM format. A new motherboard form-factor, BTX, will be introduced, which will boast better power distribution and cooling, as well as being compatible with the new CPU and memory connections. A new power supply standard will be introduced, which will necessitate new cases. A new bus will also be introduced, PCI Express, which will replace both PCI and AGP. As a result, all expansion cards will also change in order to be able to connect. This year will see more major changes to the technology than we have ever seen in one year.

Mentor Brand 3D

Sunnytech has released the Mentor Brand 3D 5.1 Surround Sound Headphones. These connect via USB, requiring no audio card and no software, and take over audio tasks completely, disabling the rest of the audio subsystem while connected.
www.listentobelieve.com

New handheld console

Tiger Telematics is developing the Gametrac, a handheld console that features a digital camera and GPS. The device can also serve as a video and audio player, and boasts Bluetooth and cellphone connectivity, although the latter does not support voice calls, seemingly built for data communication only. It uses Windows CE, and displays via a 2.8" screen. The inclusion of GPS opens some interesting options to game developers, as well as allowing parents to track the movements of their offspring. The system is expected to be in production by mid-year.
www.gametrac.com

Technology news from the other side

by Iwan Pienaar

Netgear Wireless Digital Music Player

This device allows dispersed access to a centralised store of media across a property. As well as serving MP3 and other audio formats, it can also stream Internet radio.

Nokia 5100 with FM radio

Nokia's 5100 is a phone designed to survive abuse. It is encased in rubber, and can easily survive splashes of water or use in the rain, although it is not waterproof as such. As well as standard features it also boasts a few that are out of the ordinary: an FM radio, a stopwatch, sound meter, calorie calculator, thermometer and a small torch built into the top of the unit.

ZVUE! Personal Video Player

Handheld Entertainment has released the ZVUE! Personal Video Player. It is about the same size as a deck of cards and supports video, as well as a variety of image formats and MP3 audio. Output is via a 2.5" TFT colour screen.
www.hheld.com

Bomb-making CDs nabbed in Saudi Arabia
Saudi authorities arrested five people last month after raiding computer shops selling CDs containing hidden bomb-making instructions. Some of the shop owners might not have known about the tutorial files hidden on the CDs. According to a Saudi newspaper, only someone with technical knowledge would be able to find the files.

Web innovator knighted
Britain's Queen Elizabeth has kicked off the New Year by knighting Tim Berners-Lee who added hyperlinking capabilities to the Internet in 1990.
According to Buckingham Palace, Berners-Lee received the honour because of his services to the global development of the Internet. Berners-Lee said he considered the knighthood an honour that applies to the whole Web development community. "I accept this as an endorsement of the spirit of the Web; of building it in a decentralised way; of making best efforts to keep it open and fair; and of ensuring its fundamental technologies are available to all for broad use and innovation, and without having to pay licensing fees," said Berners-Lee.

Credit you can feel
US-based company Applied Digital Solutions (ADS) has developed a credit card that can be implanted under the skin of its owner's arm. The device is based on an injectable radio-frequency identification (RFID) chip that emits an identity number when waved over an electronic radar. While the card is impossible to lose, unless you manage to misplace your arm, security experts believe that criminals could clone the signal by recording it and playing it back. Privacy advocates are also concerned that the chip will allow advertisers to track people's shopping habits or pave the way for government surveillance. However, ADS argues that cloning the signal would be very difficult because it is encrypted. MasterCard has already begun trials of RFID chips in 16 000 credit cards in the US.

Fiat goes with Penguin
Italian motor company Fiat is deploying the Linux open source operating system on Intel Itanium 2-based servers to support its European sales and support network. The system will allow its sales outlets to provide continuously updated product and marketing information and let sales staff check stock availability and examine payment and financing options. It features a database server running Red Hat Linux Advanced Server 2.1 and Oracle 9i Real Application Cluster. The system's application server is based on Intel Xeon processors, Red Hat Enterprise Linux Advanced Server 2.1 and IBM WebSphere Application Server 4.0 to manage and integrate a range of e-business applications.

Driver distraction to get the boot
German engineers are working on a system to help drivers cope with the increasing number of electronic devices in cars. The smart assistant will decide when it is too dangerous for a driver to be disturbed, and will divert phone calls to voice mail, hide arriving e-mails and lock the controls of the satellite navigation system and CD player. However, the engineers have found that the theory seems to be easier than the implementation thereof. Walter Piechulla, the architect of the system at the University of Regensburg, says the system has been tested on drivers ranging from novices to experienced ones. While the test system could only divert phone calls, the working version would also be able to hold back incoming texts and e-mails and turn off functions such as radio channel changing and inputting new destinations into a GPS navigation unit. A dashboard light or audio cue could be used to show when devices are locked out. If the driver is already on the phone when things get busy, the system could sound a repetitive alert that both people on the phone would hear.

tech news:

Acer Ferrari 3000LMi

Are you puzzled by the heading? Well, Acer and Ferrari have a business partnership, and the former has just released a Ferrari-red notebook, the 3000LMi. It features a Radeon 9200 128 MB graphics processor, 15" screen and 60 GB hard disk drive. In other respects, it is fairly ordinary.

Korea to build 100M bps Internet system

By 2010, South Korea intends to have a national Internet infrastructure running at speeds of 50 to 100Mbps. The network will be called the Broadband Convergence Network. The project will cost around US$80 billion and will create 370000 jobs. South Korea currently boasts the highest portion of its population subscribed to broadband in the world.

Largest prime number yet

Michael Shafer, a 26-year-old American graduate student, has discovered the largest prime number known to date. The number is 6 320 430 digits long (so we shan't be printing it here!), and took over two years to calculate using a distributed network of over 200 000 computers. In addition to being a prime, this new number is a Marsenne prime, which has a specific format and special mathematical significance. The discovery was made on 17 November last year, and was recently verified. [*Sadly it doesn't get anymore exciting than this, Ed*]

Tapwave Zodiac 2

A company called Tapwave has launched the Zodiac 2, a 128 MB Palm device with gaming functionality. The unit boasts an ATI graphics accelerator, an impressively high definition screen and a built-in analogue controller. As yet, however, the device has attracted little support from game developers.

ClashPads

Radica Games has released a most unusual controller for the PlayStation 2. Available only in pairs, the reason for which will become apparent, they are called ClashPads. In addition to providing the usual functionality of a controller, each has four extra buttons. These buttons allow a player to scramble, disable, make over-sensitive or take control of the opponent's controller. This novel idea could change the nature of a game radically, making it more about keeping control than about the game itself!

Epson's Livingstation TV

Epson's Livingstation TVs are HDTV sets with a number of unusual features. The units will be available in 47" and 57" rear-projected LCD models, and feature a built-in photo printer, CD-R drive and a variety of media card readers. The sets will be hideously expensive, as they are being priced in the US$3500-5000 range in the US.

ApeXtreme Personal Gaming Console and DVD Player

VIA will soon launch this console system, aiming it at the entertainment market, rather than only the gaming market. The system will run on a version of Windows XP that will be embedded and thus almost instant to boot. It will sport a variety of connectors, and its controller will be wireless. Graphics will be powered by VIA's S3 DeltaChrome GPU. The system will be able to play a wide variety of media types, and will include Media Player in its operating system.

New Philips TVs

Philips is sprucing up its range of flat-panel LCD and plasma TVs. Toward mid-year, the company's line will range from 14" to 42" and feature new technologies. A cool gimmick that has been added is Ambilight, which is ambient lighting projected from the rear of the TV set, and which can be controlled, in terms of hue and intensity, via the remote control. The TVs will also feature WiFi connectivity and will sport media card readers.

Prismiq Media Player/Recorder

Prismiq's latest digital media player/recorder boasts 802.11g Wi-Fi and is capable of recording TV programming on a PC equipped with a TV tuner card. An agreement between Prismiq and CinemaNow will grant the unit's users access to over 3000 downloadable or streamable movies.
www.prismiq.com

Apple iPod Mini

Apple's iPod Mini is the company's latest portable audio player, and is substantially smaller than its predecessor. It is also available in a range of colours, unlike its precursor's white-only. The device's control interface has been upgraded, despite it having a smaller screen. The iPod Mini makes use of a 1" hard drive to provide 4GB of storage. It should be available by April.

tech news:

Gameboard EGB-10 & Bluetooth CAR-100

Sony Ericsson has adopted a light hearted approach to mobile communication devices by launching two unique accessories for its phones.
Designed for the Z600 model, the Gameboard EGB-10 turns it into the closest thing to a handheld gaming console possible. It fits around the back and sides of the unit, and resembles a slightly squashed Dual Shock controller for PlayStation.
The limited edition Bluetooth CAR-100 is an accessory which attaches to a number of phone models and is controlled by either the keypad or joystick and is the next step in the popular market of miniature RC cars.

Motorola WR850G Wireless Router

The Motorola WR850G is a four-port 10/100 Base-T Ethernet switch/router which uses a 802.11g wireless access point and is backwards compatible with 802.11b networking equipment. It supports data rates up to 54 Mbps and makes sharing of files, printers, peripherals and your internet connection a synch.
www.motorola.com

Motorsports Controller

The Motorsport Controller will allow you to control virtually any in-game vehicle by manipulating the handlebars. It features a throttle, working headlights and also handbrakes and has been optimized for the PlayStation 2, however an included adapter will enable you to use it on your GameCube or Xbox.
www.gemini-usa.com

Nyko AirFlo Wireless PS2 Controller

Nyko's new AirFlo Wireless PS2 Controller features the ability to switch channels, allowing for multiple-frequency gameplay, with a ten-hour battery life and ergonomic grip, all while offering an adjustable breeze to combat those sweaty palms.
www.nyko.com

FlexUSB Cable

The press release boldly states 'The World's Only Fully Adjustable USB Cable'. Making its debut at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas in January, the FlexUSB Cable allows for cable direction to be set and locked in all four directions, without the long "loop-around" required by other cables. Able to work with both Windows and Macintosh computers as well as all USB devices this nifty innovation will make it easier to get to those confined spaces.
www.ideativeinc.com

To map the Web in a day

Barrett Lyon of the US has initiated a project, which he has dubbed Opte, to map the Internet. His approach makes use of good old 'traceroute' (tracert). His goal is for the mapping to be achievable in one day and yield a graphical representation of the actual geographical layout of nodes and links. Such maps could be quite useful for predicting the effect of a natural disaster on the infrastructure. Each colour on this Opte map represents a region - North America, blue; Europe/Middle East/Central Asia/Africa, green; Latin America, yellow; Asia Pacific, red; Unknown, white.

Intel sponsors digital home innovation

Intel has launched its Digital Home Fund, which consists of US$200 million in grants to companies developing innovative hardware and software technologies for the digital home. The initiative is aimed at converging consumer electronics and information technology to a seamless wireless home network.

"As more entertainment and educational content becomes digital, people want to edit, manage and access that content and share it among multiple devices including TVs, stereos, PCs and handhelds," said Intel Vice President and Intel Capital President John Miner. "The Digital Home Fund is designed to complement Intel products and accelerate development of key technologies and content which enhance and simplify the digital home experience."

For more information go to www.intel.com/capital.

Bill Gates announces Windows Media Center this year

Microsoft Chairman Bill Gates has announced the company's new integrated digital media software and hardware plans at the CES convention in Las Vegas, USA. The new technology will enable users to share media, such as image files, movie files, and sound files from any computer with Windows XP Media Center Edition, in any room of the house, regardless of whether someone else is currently using that computer, and regardless of the computer's location within the house. The new technology allows digital media to be shared on either a television set (which can be fitted with a set-top box to receive the signal, or with TV sets that are integrated with this technology), or using an Xbox console.

The Xbox Media Center Extender Kit will consist of an Xbox DVD disc and a dedicated remote control, and will also allow users to view digital media from any room in the house.

Legacy of Kain: Defiance

The next chapter in the epic Legacy of Kain series is a cutting-edge action/adventure game featuring more action then ever before. Take control of two powerful and highly evolved vampires: Kain, an all-powerful demigod, and Raziel, a demonic angel of death. Each equipped with a legendary sword, Kain & Raziel must battle through a world loaded with conflict and intrigue as they attempt to unravel their destinies and defeat the dark forces that seek to condemn their world to eternal damnation.

Available FEB/MAR 04

PC CD eidos

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pc news:

Duke Nukem Forever - taking forever
3D Realms recently announced that Duke Nukem Forever, which went into development in 1997, will not appear before the last quarter of this year at the earliest, and most likely some time next year in practice. [*Yawn, Ed*]

Sid Meier's Pirates!
Firaxis Games released a few details of the upcoming Sid Meier's Pirates! This game will be an update of a game released in 1987, but will feature a heavier emphasis on role-playing elements. The game will use the same game engine used by Morrowind and Dark Age of Camelot. It is expected out later this year, to be published by Atari.

An open-and-shut case - for some!
Last year, 23 development studios closed down in Europe. In 2002 the figure was 14, while the year before that saw eight closures. This may suggest trouble in the industry, but given how many new studios open each year with hopes of breaking into the market, and many of them without anything truly new to bring to the party, these figures are hardly surprising.

Gaming industry keeps growing
According to ELSPA sales of computer games reached an all time high last year in the UK, with a 7.1 percent growth over the previous year. Electronic Arts managed to score 5 titles in the top 10 sellers, as well as 14 in the top 40. No new consoles were released last year, but the presence of three mainstream console systems contributed to gaming sales.

Inuits

Playlogic International will, toward the end of the year, publish Inuits, a third-person action adventure game for PC and PlayStation 2 that is in development at Widescreen Games. Players will quest to right a wrong armed with weapons and magical spells.

Kombat

Kombat is a real-time strategy game set during the Second World War and will feature three factions: Germany, the USSR, and Allied forces. Each faction will have access to a large number of infantry, artillery, armoured, engineering, naval, and flying units as you play the game as the commander of a single platoon, with the ultimate aim of achieving the rank of general and being able to control entire divisions.

Race Driver II

Codemasters are at work on the rather grandiosely titled Race Driver 2: The Ultimate Racing Simulator. The game will be available for PC and Xbox late this year.

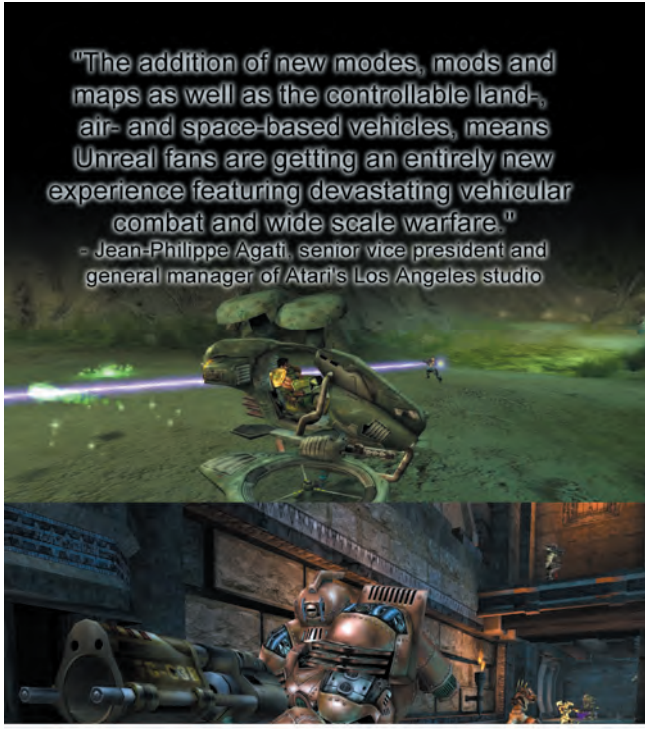
Starship Troopers

Paul Verhoeven's 1997 movie Starship Troopers will come to life on PC's and consoles late this year under the direction of Empire Interactive.

New Harry potter game

EA's British studio is at work on Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban, which will require players to master the skills and attributes of all three major characters in the story. The game will be released for PC, PlayStation 2, Game Boy Advance, GameCube and Xbox in May.

"The addition of new modes, mods and maps as well as the controllable land-, air- and space-based vehicles, means Unreal fans are getting an entirely new experience featuring devastating vehicular combat and wide scale warfare."
- Jean-Philippe Agati, senior vice president and general manager of Atari's Los Angeles studio



Unreal TOURNAMENT 2004

Unreal Tournament 2004
UT2K4 is a multiplayer FPS that combines the kill-or-be-killed experience of gladiatorial combat with cutting-edge technology. Ten game modes - both team-based and "every man for himself" - provide even the most hardcore gamer with palm-sweating challenges through unbelievably detailed indoor arenas and vast outdoor environments. As the ultimate techno-gladiator of the future, players will take their fates into their hands, battling against up to 32 other players online in action-packed, frag-filled arenas.

Available
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PC CD

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console news:

First PS3/Xbox 2 game
British developer Climax is at work on a game codenamed Avalon, which will feature land, sea and air vehicles. The game is being developed for Xbox 2 and/or PlayStation 3.

The Punisher
THQ has announced a game for Xbox and PlayStation 2 based on Marvel's The Punisher, under development at its Volition studio. This game and a movie are both expected to be released late this year.

Shaman King
Konami will be developing games based on Hiroyuki Takei's anime series Shaman King. The PlayStation 2 title will combine elements of strategy and role-playing, and is expected to ship near the end of the year. The Game Boy Advance version will consist of a side-scrolling adventure, and is planned for release at the same time.

The Getaway 2
Sony Computer Entertainment Europe has confirmed that a sequel to The Getaway is in development at its London studio.

Xyanide on N-Gage
Playlogic will be releasing a version of the Xbox and GBA action shooter Xyanide for the N-Gage within the next couple of months. Overloaded Pocket Media is responsible for this port's development.

N-Gage titles for this year
Nokia has announced a number of upcoming titles for its N-Gage handheld console, spanning numerous genres, and many sporting multiplayer support. The game titles are the following: Ashen, Operation Shadow, Requiem of Hell, Sega Rally Championship, Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Jungle Storm, Worms, WWE, Marcel Desailly Pro Soccer and Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004. A number of other games are already complete and about to begin shipping.

Activision Signs Shrek 2

Activision has acquired the rights to publish games based on DreamWorks's upcoming animated movie Shrek 2 on all platforms. This is in addition to existing rights for the film producer's upcoming movies Shark Tale, Madagascar and Over the Hedge. The game will combine squad-based action with traditional action-adventure elements.

Fight Night 2004

The PlayStation 2 and Xbox will both be seeing the release of EA's Fight Night 2004, with Heavyweight Champion Roy Jones Jr. as the cover athlete. The game will offer a career mode and online play.

Fight Club

Vivendi Universal is planning to release Fight Club, in development at Genuine Games, late this year. The game will attempt to capture both story elements and fighting aspects from the film of the same title. The game is being developed for PlayStation 2 and Xbox, and is expected to carry a 'mature' rating.

Final Fantasy X2

Square-Enix's upcoming Final Fantasy X-2 is unusual in being the first true sequel in the series. It will offer a mission-based dynamic that will allow non-linear play culminating in multiple possible endings. This online title is scheduled for release this month.

Driv3r

Atari has signed a blockbuster Hollywood cast to lend voices to Driv3r, which is scheduled for release in mid 2004. Michael Madsen, Ving Rhames, Mickey Rourke and Michelle Rodriguez will play the lead roles in the third installment of the gritty, crime-fighting game series. Locations for the game include Miami, Florida; Nice, France; and Istanbul, Turkey.

Ys VI for console soon

Falcom is working on a console version of its PC action-RPG Ys VI: The Ark of Napishtim. In development for PlayStation 2 the game will follow the adventures of Adol Christian using the PC game as a base. It will feature new characters, additional stages, new music as well as CG movies and artwork from previous Ys games. The game will be released in Q4 2004 by Konami.

PlayStation®2

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PlayStation.2

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*dates subject to changes

scores, charts and release dates:

PC Web Scores

Title	NAG	gamespy.com	gamespot.com	pc.ign.com
XIII	81	3	6.4	8
FIFA 2004	83	-	7.8	8.5
NFS Underground	85	4	8	9
LOTR: The War of the Ring	71	3	6.7	-
Disciples II: Rise of the Elves	85	4	7.6	7.9

Console Web Scores

Title	NAG	ign.com	gamespot.com	gamespy.com
True Crime [PS2]	74	9	7.2	4
Mace Griffin [PS2]	70	6.3	7.2	4
Ratchett & Clank 2 [PS2]	87	9.4	8.8	4
Roadkill [PS2]	70	7.7	7.6	2
Viewtiful Joe [GCN]	80	9.5	9.2	5
Mario Kart Double Dash [GCN]	70	7.9	7.9	4

www.musica.co.za

CHARTS

1	PS2	Need for Speed Underground
2	PS2	WWE Here Comes the Pain
3	PS2	WWE Smackdown Shut your Mouth Platinum
4	PC	Sims Makin' Magic
5	PC	Need for Speed Underground
6	PS2	Dragonball Z Budokai 2
7	PS2	GTA III & Vice City Double Pack
8	PS2	Tekken 4 Platinum
9	PS2	Medal of Honor Rising Sun
10	PS2	LOTR Return of the King
11	PS2	True Crime Streets of LA
12	PS2	Getaway Platinum
13	PC	Spyro Enter the Dragon
14	PS2	Crash Bandicoot 5
15	PC	LOTR: Return of the King
16	PS2	Tony Hawk Underground
17	PS2	FIFA 2004
18	PS2	Rugby 2004
19	PS2	SSX 3
20	PC	Call of Duty

Chart information supplied by Musica for the period 1- 31 December 2003

Selected International PC Release Dates

Joint Operations	Action	February 14
Breed	FPS	February 14
Supreme Ruler 2010	Strategy	February 18
Psychotoxic	FPS	February 24
Unreal Tournament 2004	FPS	February 24
Judge Dredd vs Judge Death	FPS	February 25
Medal of Honor: Pacific Assault	FPS	February 25
EverQuest: Gates of Discord	MMORPG	February 27
City of Heroes	MMORPG	March 14
Black 9	Action	March 14
Painkiller	FPS	March 23
Knights of the Temple	Action	March 23
ALFA Antiterror	Tactical	March 23
The 5th Disciple	Action	March 23
Sam & Max Freelance Police	Adventure	March 23
Earth 2160	Strategy	March 23
Stunts: Final Stage	Racing	March 23
Advent Rising	Action	March 23
Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow	Tactical	March 23
Etrom	RPG	March 23
Counter-Strike: Condition Zero	FPS	March 25
Worms 3D	Strategy	March 25
Syberia II	Adventure	March 26
Crusader Kings	Strategy	April 1
Half-Life 2	FPS	April 27
Hitman 3: Contracts	Action	April 27

Selected International Console Release Dates

AirForce Delta Strike	PS2	Simulation	February 3
Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance	GBA	Role-Playing	February 3
Drift Racer: Kaido Battle	PS2	Driving	February 3
He-Man: Masters of the Universe	Xbox	Action	February 3
Rent a Hero No. 1	Xbox	Adventure	February 3
R-Type Final	PS2	Action	February 3
The Fast and the Furious	PS2 | Xbox	Driving	February 3
X-Files: Resist or Serve	Xbox	Adventure	February 3
Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles	GC	Role-Playing	February 9
James Bond 007: Everything or Nothing	PS2 | Xbox | GC	Action	February 10
Marcel Desailly Pro Soccer	NGE	Sports	February 10
Metroid: Zero Mission	GBA	Action	February 10
Nightshade	PS2	Action	February 10
Ninja Gaiden	Xbox	Action	February 10
Seven Samurai 20XX	PS2	Adventure	February 10
Starcraft: Ghost	Xbox | PS2	Action	February 10
SVC Chaos: SNK vs. Capcom	PS2	Action	February 10
Wade Hixton's Counter Punch	GBA	Sports	February 10
World Soccer Winning Eleven 7	PS2	Sports	February 10
Wrath Unleashed	PS2 | Xbox	Strategy	February 10
All-Star Baseball 2005	PS2	Sports	February 15
ChopLifter: Crisis Shield	PS2	Simulation	February 17
Dinosaur Hunting	Xbox	Action	February 17
Disney's Aladdin	GBA	Action	February 17
FirstStrike: Grant City Anti-Crime	PS2 | Xbox | GC	Action	February 17
Lobo	PS2	Action	February 17

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- 3COM Gigabit LAN
- ASUS WiFi slot

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- IEEE1394
- ASUS AI Features
- SATA RAID

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BY ORDER - The Editor

THE LEAST WORST GAMES OF 2003

Who was king of the zoo in 2003? We took a gander through our issues of the past year and came up with the best games, using a highly scientific process that would take at least six bar napkins to explain (using both sides). And then there are the complexities of collecting bribes, resisting pressure from the industry to accept smaller pay-offs and other significantly dubious calculations, all to bring you the least worst (or the best, if you want) of 2003.

NAG's games for 2003 were selected through polling the magazine staff, freelancers and other people directly involved in the reviewing of games for the magazine. The games people could vote for all featured in NAG issues in 2003 – from January to December and were split into ten genres as well as the four major platforms in South Africa. So who did we vote the best in 2003? Turn the page…

THE LEAST WORST GAMES OF 2003

Action: Max Payne 2
developer: Ritual publisher: Take 2

In Max we trust! Even though it was shorter and there really wasn't that much new in the sequel, Max Payne still managed to grab everyone's attention and give us another high-action quick fix.

Runners-up
Freelancer (Digital Anvil/Microsoft)
GTA: Vice City (Rockstar/Take 2)

Game of the Year

Final Fantasy Tactics

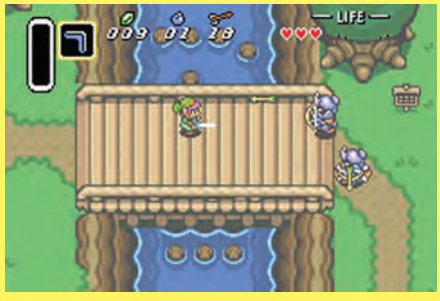
developer **Square** publisher **Nintendo**

Final Fantasy on the GBA? Should we say more? Well, yes, we should. Instead of coming across as Square/Enix groupies, which we are not, instead FFTA is a fine example of turn-based combat on the GBA, right up there with the excellent Advance Wars. And the lower-spec graphics mean that the hordes of Square CGI groupies will not play the game and then only seem to know anything about the cut-scenes.

Runners-Up

Legend of Zelda

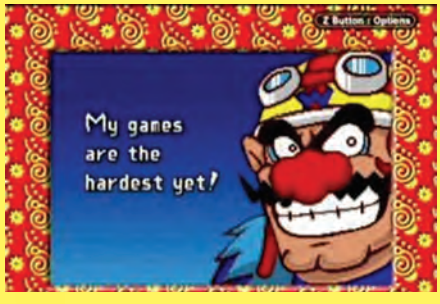
A Link to the Past
developer **Capcom** publisher **Nintendo**



Well, what do you expect when Capcom ports what is possibly the best Zelda game ever made to the best handheld platform ever made? One of the best reasons to own a GBA, of course.

WarioWare, Inc.

Mega Microgame$
developer **Nintendo** publisher **Nintendo**



This game consists quite literally tons of mini games each speeding up to test your reflexes. It's the ultimate case of mindless games meets timed button bashing, and it's as addictive as Irish coffee in the Antarctic.

Fighting: Soul Calibur 2
developer: Namco publisher: Various

Is it the finest fighter ever conceived? Probably not, but as far as beating-things-up-with-melee-weapons go it's the best of 2003, and a classic fighting game by every right, especially to fans of the series.

Runners-up
Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance (Midway/Midway)
Capcom vs. SNK (Capcom/Capcom)

Flight Sim: IL-2: The Forgotten Battles
developer: 1C Company publisher: Ubi Soft

It's quite rare to encounter actual mediocre flight sims, so making the top of this list is quite a feat, but Il-2's stand-alone expansion brought a new lease of life to an already excellent game.

Runners-up
Combat Flight Simulator 3 (Microsoft/Microsoft)
Flight Simulator 2004: A Century of Flight (Microsoft/Microsoft)

Game of the Year

Grand Theft Auto: Vice City

developer **Rockstar** publisher **Take 2**

It might be a sad irony in gaming that the game of the year on the PC platform is the add-on to a sequel. But there is much to be said in favour of Vice City. For one, you now can change your look, especially into really loud tropical shirts. Plus there are the added vehicles, the new city, the ability to buy buildings and overall just so much more opportunity to rob nuns, run over old grannies and pimp-slap the neighbourhood pimp in search of his hidden dough. Yes, that's it: it's just more of a whole truckload of illegal fun and of that we approve (at least, in games).

Runners-Up

Call of Duty

developer **Infinity Ward**
publisher **Activision**

After years of experience from making Medal of Honour, some of the developers eloped and made this game – arguably the finest World War 2 shooter ever made and definitely one of the best single player games of the year.

Splinter Cell

developer **Ubi Soft** publisher **Ubi Soft**

Once an Xbox-exclusive, we are so happy that Ubi Soft decided to port the game over to PC, bringing to the masses one of the finest sneakers ever made, even according to MGS creator Hideo Kojima (well, he loved the engine).

First Person Shooter: Vietcong
developer: Pterodon publisher: Take 2

We know a lot of you are going to bemoan this one, but that's because you either never played the game or found it too hard. But in the midst of sci-fi shooter and WW2 scenarios, Vietcong was true to its location and excellent once you got into it.

Runners-up
Call of Duty (Infinity Ward/Activision)
Return to Castle Wolfenstein (Grey Matter/Activision)

GameCube

THE LEAST WORST GAMES OF 2003

Management Sim: Ghost Master
developer: Sick Puppies publisher: Empire

The only thing better than a game that wants you to scare people out of their houses is one that's fun and pretty as well. It could have all gone wrong so easily, but Ghost Master beat the odds and gets our thumbs up.

Runners-up
Pikmin (Nintendo/Nintendo)
Sim City 4 (Maxis/Electronic Arts)

Game of the Year

Legend of Zelda
The Wind Waker
developer **Nintendo** publisher **Nintendo**

In the back room we have a shrine set up for three people: The editor, because he pays us, Scott Bakula, because everything he does is sci-fi gold, and Shigeru Miyamoto, because even God looks up at him when it comes to games. WindWaker is no exception. The cell-shaded graphics were scoffed at when first revealed, but it turned out to mould a game not quite as good as Ocarina of Time, but still one of the finest titles ever. Granted, the GameCube hasn't had a lot of titles released on it, but most of them have been excellent, making this an even more coveted title, in our humble opinion.

Runners-Up

Pikmin
developer **Nintendo** publisher **Nintendo**

Consoles have a way of showing us how a few buttons and simple concepts can create a complicated, fun and ever-changing game. When Pikmin came out, it was the reason to own a GameCube. It still is.

Runners-Up

Metroid Prime
developer **Retro Studios** publisher **Nintendo**

The return of Samus is one thing. The return of Samus in her own first person shooter is quite another. You could argue we liked Prime because it's more Metroid, but an immersive storyline, smooth gameplay and excellent graphics makes this an all-time classic.

Platformer: Metroid Fusion
developer: Nintendo publisher: Nintendo

Ah, a new Metroid game that would have been so at home on the SNES it might as well get itself an embroidered towel. Featuring the same paced but intelligent gameplay as the original, Metroid Fusion reaffirms why this is one of the finest platform series out there.

Runners-up
Super Mario Sunshine (Nintendo/Nintendo)
Warioworld (Nintendo/Nintendo)

Racing: Colin McRae Rally 04
developer: Codemasters publisher: Codemasters

Okay, granted, it wasn't the best racing game ever released, but while everyone else was clamouring for street racing cred, Codemasters released a realistic, solid and pretty rally game (can we call Rally pretty?). Besides, the world can use more Angry Scotsman With Car sims…

Runners-up
Starsky & Hutch (Minds Eye/Empire)
Midnight Club II (Rockstar/Take 2)

Game of the Year

Zone of Enders
The 2nd Runner

developer **Konami** publisher **Konami**

Hideo Kojima is a legend by now thanks to his phenomenal Metal Gear series. But that doesn't mean the man can't make other games. Sure, 2nd Runner had a ton of interface designs and sounds that were identical to MGS 2, but that didn't stop it from being an excellent title, complimented by some of the most jaw-dropping graphics on the PlayStation 2. Yeah, we got off on piloting a massive armoured quit with an endless supply of missiles.

Runners-Up

Soul Calibur II

developer **Namco** publisher **Electronic Arts**

While it's still disputed amongst NAG staff whether this is the finest fighter ever, it is one of the best released in recent years and definitely a fine game to play on Sony's console, especially if you like pummelling opponents with weapons.

Tony Hawk Pro Skater 4

developer **Neversoft** publisher **Activision**

How on earth can the fourth incarnation of a game still make it onto this list? Maybe because it's just damn good. Granted, the Tony Hawk franchise desperately needs a new breath of air, but we still find it as intense and addictive as ever.

Realtime Strategy: Homeworld 2
developer: Relic publisher: Vivendi

It is intensely rare for a game to be so good that it would be crazy to try and change it. Luckily Relic realized that their unique RTS was one of these creations and instead opted to just make things prettier, more streamlined and vaster. Is anyone complaining? We didn't think so.

Runners-up
Command & Conquer: Generals (Electronic Arts/Electronic Artst)
WarCraft III: The Frozen Throne (Blizzard/Vivendi)

Runners Up

THE LEAST WORST GAMES OF 2003

2nd Runner Up

Grand Theft Auto: Vice City

developer **Rockstar** publisher **Take 2**

Grand Theft Auto fans would spit and curse profusely (we did) if they knew just how close Vice City came to being game of the year. Alas, this was not meant to be and even a hap-hazard hijack of the ballot vehicle could not have changed matters.

Of course, seeing Vice City in the top 3 is no surprise – GTA 3 and its stand-alone sequel have made a lot of waves in the gaming community, not to mention a ton of cash for Rockstar. Semantically there is little to really write home about in Vice City, apart from the addition of pastel suits, bikes and Roy Liotta's voice, but it gave GTA 3 far more than a new lease of life – it went and stole a new generation for it.

Crime puns aside, the additional vehicles and the ability to change clothes (plus a far more chatty character) made up for most of the things missing from an already excellent game – the type that you can pull off the shelf now and start playing again.

Soul Calibur 2

1st Runner Up

developer **Namco** publisher **Various**

Ah, the famous Soul Calibur 2. We used to get along well with each other while playing this game, until one idiot had to evolve beyond button bashing and actually play the game properly, using counter attack and bludgeoning our poor characters over the head with his weapons.

The Soul Calibur series has always had an odd space in beat-em-up mythos. It's not the original 3D full combat game, Virtua Fighter was. It didn't write the rules on violence (or for that matter using weapons), Mortal Kombat did. It didn't invent counter-combos and smooth motion, Tekken did and as far as looks go, we all yearn for the luscious graphics of the Dead or Alive series. But still the series prevails, probably because it manages to bring individual elements from all these games together, plus add its own magic (and stylish cast of characters). In fact, apart from Rare's Killer Instinct, we'd be hard pressed to find a more eclectic bunch. And this helps it to being one of the best fighters of all time and a runner-up to our top game for the year.

Survival Horror: Silent Hill 3
developer: Konami publisher: Konami

Unlike other games in the genre, Silent Hill doesn't boast high-powered weapons or explosive rounds. Instead it's you and your flashlight (and pistol) against an unknown evil stalking every dark corner – and the third game in the series pulls this off best of all.

Runners-up

Resident Evil 0 (Capcom/Capcom)
Eternal Darkness (Silicon Knights/Nintendo)

Tactical Shooter: Freedom Fighters
developer: IO Interactive publisher: Electronic Arts

The makers of the Hitman series go squad-based on us in a gun-happy game where controlling your squad is as smooth as shooting Russian invaders in the head. Just watch out for the return fire…

Runners-up

DF: Black Hawk Down (Novalogic/Novalogic)
Rainbow Six 3: Raven Shield (Red Storm/Ubi Soft)

Game of the Year

Legend of Zelda

The Wind Waker

developer **Nintendo** publisher **Nintendo**

How can you become the game of the year? Well, firstly, Legend of Zelda collectively got more votes than any other game on our list, showing that even though not everyone regarded it as their favourite, it appeared the most on the list of games our reviewers liked. Throw in that despite a huge outcry, initially, over the new cell-shaded graphics, Wind Waker not only went on to shut up its critics but also to be a critical and commercial hit. And lastly, a lot of people at NAG who have played it consider it one of the most breathtaking and vast games released in 2003.

Boasting an open-ended quest structure, tons of sub-quests, fun combat and lots of islands and dungeons to explore (not to mention a story that carries on the legacy of Link, that pointy-booted, green-loving, sword-swinging elf thing), it's a great example of how 3D worlds can truly expand gameplay and how necessary it is to think outside of the box, despite what fans of the game might think – maybe a lesson a few other developers should consider?

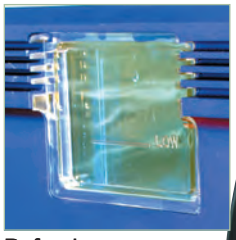
Thermaltake Aquarius III External Liquid Cooling System

Is it a bar fridge?
The main unit is a rather bulky external affair that sits next to or on top of your PC case. A PCI cable runs from it to your PC, through which it monitors the system and allows you to control the cooling via the comprehensive multifunction front panel.

Chill, dude...
Making your machine run cooler is never a bad thing. Water cooling is proving to be a viable option these days, and Thermaltake have established themselves as sound contenders in the field. This, the big boy of their water cooling range, is the Thermaltake Aquarius III. And boy, is it big!

Supplied By: Corex [011] 707-5000
RRP: R 1895.00

A fan...
The main cooling fan is a rather bulky affair housed within the main unit. A complicated structure of copper heat sinks allows maximum cooling...



Refreshments...
A side mounted window allows you to monitor the system's water level. This is sort of important, seeing as how you need to keep a certain level of liquid running for the system to work properly...

The right mix
The multifunctional front panel displays water temperature, as well as CPU temperature. Alarm and pre-recorded functions apply for both. Additionally, a handy dial can be used for those all important adjustments to the unit's operation.

Topping up the tipple
To fill the system with the all important water, and to top it up, a removable reservoir is used.

Another round!
Getting the water around your PC is fairly simple. A pump housed in the main unit, along with several reinforced pipes and a plate that mounts to the rear of your case - and not to forget the CPU cooling plate - form part of a watertight system. Convenient taps allow for the system to be disassembled for transportation purposes, without spilling a drop.

Pub crawling
A handy carry case is provided with the system, to make dragging the whole thing around the country a little easier. The case is adjustable, and comes with an extra pocket for pipes and the like.

PC CD

cut along line

You Need Cash

cut along line

PC CD-ROM PlayStation.2 PC CD-ROM PlayStation.2 PC CD-ROM PlayStation.2 PC CD

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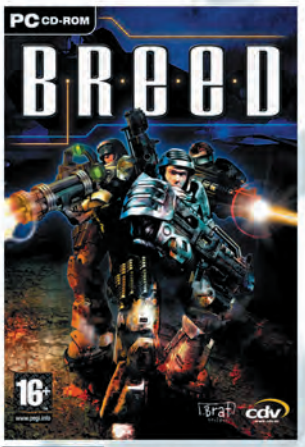
Dear Mr Bank Manager,

Thank you for being the best Bank Manager In the best bank in the whole world. As you may know the happy season is over and I find myself in an awkward predicament. I sent requests to my family for the exact games or "training simulations" that I required way in advance but alas my pleas to further my education were ignored. I have nowhere to turn, I require a loan that will cover the costs of the following "training material".

Best Regards

_____(insert your name here)



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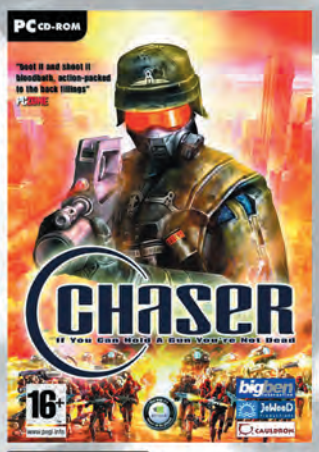
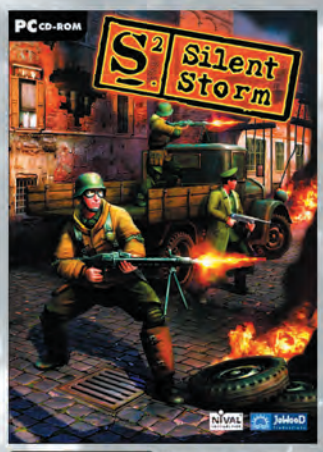


JoWooD Productions Jan2004



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PC CD-ROM PlayStation.2 PC CD-ROM PlayStation.2 PC CD-ROM PlayStation.2 PC CD

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GET READY TO PLAY...

need for speed

Trivia: The original Need for Speed was called Road & Track Presents: The Need for Speed. All NFS games have been published by EA.

The Need for Speed
1995

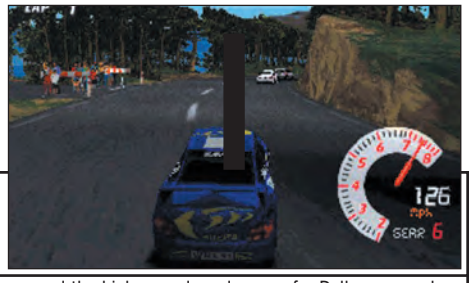
Featuring several real-world cars the game was first with FMV sequences showing off the cars. Plus those who finished it got a new track and car to boot! The game only featured three tracks that were segmented into smaller parts.

Need for Speed II
1997

Even though cops disappeared, the game was bigger with more tracks and cars. Locations stretched from the US to Nepal and it had the most interesting batch of cheats, one even allowing you to ride a Tyrannosaurus Rex.

Need for Speed III: Hot Pursuit
1998

Cops return with a vengeance, since not only are they, well, everywhere, but you could drive as one as well. The game also expanded on a lot of NFS' game modes, and was the first in the series to support 3D acceleration.



Need for Speed: V-Rally
1997

This PlayStation off-shoot swapped the high-speed road racers for Rally cars such as the Subaru Impreza and other models. Overall there were 11 cars to race over 42 tracks. A break from the NFS tradition, it still looked and played well.

Need for Speed: High Stakes
1999

In comes split-screen support for your PC, not to mention 20 new cars. Still, a lot of fans felt cheated, since it was essentially just a prettier and slightly improved version of NFS III. That didn't stop it from being popular, though.

Need for Speed: V-Rally 2
1999

The rally off-shoot returns, this time with more game modes, tracks and cars. It also allowed users to build their own tracks. The years between releases paid off well since it was a far better game and a rally classic.

Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit 2
2002

Need for Speed returns to arcade style racing. The game featured modern and older cars, lots of tracks, more game modes and very aggressive cops. It wasn't a huge leap in the series, but it returned to the NFS arcade mechanics that made it famous.

Need for Speed: Porsche Unleashed
2000

Seen as the best looking NFS game (at least until Underground), it featured Porsche models throughout the company's past. It's also one of the very few games that allowed braking using gears (not even Gran Turismo does).

Need for Speed Underground
2003

Need for Speed goes into the dark area of street racing, giving folks a chance to race for better cars, not to mention being able to build them up and show them off. A distinctly new and polished direction, it seems to add an entirely new lease of life to the series.

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writer: Anton "The_Basilisk" Lines

domain of the_basilisk:

"Let me show you the simple secret professional gamers use to build up their leet skill in just 90 seconds a day!"

Having already covered everything one might need to know about game setup of First Person Shooters, we can now move on to the juicy bits. What you are about to read is a collection of tips and teachings from the best in the country, and even the world. Sit back and prepare to learn what has taken the collective top players years to understand. (Hey, I have to make it sound exciting, don't I?)

Part 3 - Finesse and shooting stuff

Aim

The most obvious aspect of playing FPS games well is your ability to hit your opponent, and regardless of what some people may say, it is the most important. Hitting him/her consistently puts them under pressure, forcing them to make mistakes. Your aiming skill will also determine your approach to the strategy of the game. An aggressive play style, for example, can only be effective if you are out-aiming your enemy. It doesn't matter how good your plan is - you need the skills to make it work.

There are three main types of aiming. The first is called "prediction aim", the second "flick aim", and the third "spam".

Prediction aim is placing your crosshair in the position where you believe your opponent will be by the time you click and fire. (This includes tracking, since it is a predictive exercise as well). In this respect, aim is closely related to movement. It is one of the reasons it takes a while to get into a new game. Prediction is difficult unless you know the possibilities of where your enemy can go. Similarly, you need to know the map. You might miss a shot if he/she suddenly runs over a bump in the terrain.

Flick aim is the term used to describe reflex shots, where you literally "flick" your mouse in the direction of the opponent and click. Spam aim entails shooting (mainly splash damage weapons) at where you think he might be coming from, around corners or at important items. For the most part, you cannot even see him. As they say, the more the merrier. The more you fire, the greater your chances that he will run into it.

You must master all three types, and this can only be done with practice. Of course, some people are born with more natural aim than others, but for everywhere except the very top, talent is unimportant.

Anyone with the dedication to succeed can learn to aim well enough to be a solid competitive player.

Movement

This is a far reaching category, including moving quickly from one part of the map to another, learning advantageous trick jumps, and dodging your opponent's fire. When wanting to become competitive in a game, I would recommend first taking some time to run around the maps alone. Play around with the physics features of the game (such as strafe-jumping in Quake 3 and dodge-jumping in UT2003) and practice getting from one spot to another. When you've done that, do it backwards. This is especially important. Most overlook the usefulness of being able to run away while still returning fire. Get hold of trick-jump demos (also on www.esreality.com, www.cyberfight.org and www.cached.net) and practice what you see. Not everything will be useful, most of them are just of people showing off. But there are also some that will help you greatly.

Dodging is the most underrated skill in competitive gaming. The golden rule is: never run in a straight line. Move about in short bursts, circle-strafe (move in a circle), dodge short distances, make little jumps. Don't put yourself in the air for long periods of time as you become predictable again. Avoid what comes naturally - this is a conscious effort you have to make. Think about the movement you find easier to hit, and don't do it yourself.

Timing

Once you can move fast, you need to be in the right place at the right time. This means arriving at items the moment they appear on the map, so that you (and only you) can pick them up. Believe it or not, I hardly see anyone doing this properly. It is the easiest part of your game to improve on, and so there is absolutely no excuse for having poor timing.

Each game is different, and has different items which spawn at different times. Learn the spawn times of the weapons, damage amplifiers and especially the armours / shields / mega-health. Practice your addition and subtraction with the game clock, so you know precisely when the item will appear. Start alone, then with bots, then with a human opponent. If you have far more health, better weapons and are dealing double or quad damage, chances are you'll come out on top. Timing also allows you to control your opponent. When you know what he needs (health or an important weapon), you know where he is likely to go.

In Counter-Strike, and other similar games, there are no items that spawn on the map.

But in these, the importance of timing can still be seen in co-ordinated attacks and actions at specific times on the clock. Regardless of your game, timing will always enter into it in some way. Time left in the round / match plays a large part in strategy. The clock is a valuable resource. Use it always.

Awareness

Knowing exactly where your opponent is, what weapons he has, and what health he is on, is the final crucial skill. You must be the one to lay traps and surprise him, not the other way around. When he disappears from sight, don't just forget about him. Think about the possibilities of where he could be headed, and then listen. Sound is almost as important as the visual. Listen for footsteps, gunfire, the sounds of items being picked up (they all have unique sounds) and even the noises of weapon switching. Use sound to confirm where you think he is going. Or if you are completely lost, lurk about in dark areas and let him give himself away the next time he picks something up. Think about sequence (when he picks up two or more items, you can tell which direction he is travelling in). Try to guess where he will go next.

Strategy and Practice

A common tactic is to take an early lead, then play defensively, forcing your opponent to make rash attacks when the situation does not really favour him.

Incorporate what you know; application is everything. As long as you have the four skills mentioned above, you will develop your own understanding of strategy. It is a knowledge you need to build up over time, and not something you can learn from playing bots. Watch demos as an introduction, then play as many games as you can against human opponents.

Find a duel partner - someone who has the same skill, dedication and focus as you. In the case of team games, find a clan.

Constantly trying to better one another is where the real improvement comes.

It is also a good form of motivation. And this is the thing about practice: more practice is good practice. If you want to do well at something, you need to put in the effort.

LAN as often as you can. Playing online with latency is very, very different. Because of the lag, the overall standard of aim is lessened, and so you can get away with far more risky play styles.

You do not get properly punished for your mistakes and you may develop lazy habits as a result.

Finally, do not be disheartened during periods where you do not seem to be improving.

Every person has their own learning curve, and unfortunately most people give up long before they reach their potential.

Everybody goes through a slump before becoming really skilled. You will get over it if you keep at it. Perseverance guarantees success. [*Hallelujah, Ed*].

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The next evolution of The Sims

We can imagine the day that Will Wright sold the idea of The Sims to the EA execs, who decided to humour him, not knowing they just okayed the most successful game series in history. Now the sequel, The Sims 2, for the first time, sees players control their Sims over an entire lifetime. Every choice that is made has a relevant and dramatic effect on the life of a Sim. More life-like Sims, An all-new play dynamic, and the groundbreaking addition of genetics, with the DNA of Sims passed down through generations, gives players a more vivid, realistic, and in-depth Sims experience. All of this takes place in a new, amazingly life-like 3D world. Derek dela Fuente spoke with **Lucy Bradshaw**, Vice President in charge of PC Development about the upcoming game.

When you sat down to create The Sims 2 you must have had some radical ideas in mind. So what was the vision?

The design vision was centred on the Sims themselves. One of the first questions we posed to ourselves was, "How can we make our Sims even more believable and engaging?" We recognized that players projected stories on their Sims and we wanted to even further enable this pastime with the game and game play. One key element was to give the Sims real lives. They needed to be able to grow up and experience all of the chaos and mayhem that comes at each stage of life. The fun of the relationships Sims could have across generations also inspired our design thinking. Just about everyone can relate to the annoying little brother, the angst of dating in the teen years and more. We knew there would be a ton of fun in exploring new game play around having the Sims grow up.

You now control the Sims over a lifetime. How radically will this change the game in terms of feel and ideas? Can you highlight aspects of the game that will change pertaining to this and how involved can the game get with a lifetime on offer?

This will affect the new game big time! Sims change over their lifetime.
Playing a teen Sim requires a different strategy than playing an adult Sim.
The idea of playing a Sim from cradle to old age and seeing the next generation of a family unfold is a big new change to the long term game play. An example of how the player will feel the game play change can be seen in the transition for Child to Teen. The children are very dependent upon their family for their development. We have split the social needs of the Sims into Family and Friend.
The children look to their families to fulfil this motive. However, when they become teenagers that need shifts and friends become far more important. The player will continually have to change their strategies for playing each individual Sim as it moves through his or her life.

How will the player understand the DNA and genetics of the cast and how will they be able to change or manipulate this aspect?

When players create a Sim they have a great set of tools that allow them to make very unique Sims, from their looks to their personalities and aspirations. Sims pass on not only their physical characteristics but also their

"The Sims have facial animations and fingers. They even have unique hairstyles that move."

"You can modify the terrain, and build your Sims' house on a hill, complete with decks, foundations and multiple stories."

personality traits to their offspring. Over time, as you play the game you can play generations of the same family. Some physical characteristics are dominant, and you'll see these through a family resemblance of all of the Sims of the same family. It is really fun to see where the extended family of a specific Sim lives in the neighbourhood, or even open up that Sims' family tree and see it all laid out right in front of you.
You can even experiment with the DNA in the Create A Sim where you can create the offspring of two adult Sims and see how their genes combine. It's incredibly powerful to see what the child of a pair of Sims will look like. We've even gone as far as allowing some of the custom content to get passed along as well. We experimented with creating some 'skins' of Alien-like Sims and then introducing them as the Dad of a Sim. What fun!

Did you bring in outside help or look into this area to assist the advancement of the Sims?

We do consult experts all of the time, particularly in the realm of personalities for our Sims.

Could you expand on 'life big moments' along with the 'life score'?

In The Sims 2 our Sims grow up, have memories and are much more aware of their surroundings and past. This allowed us to have each Sim have a sense of personal history. The events that the player exposes them to over the course of their lifetime are very much a part of who that Sim becomes. Events like their first crush, or the sting of a failed first kiss attempt. Even their first job and promotion have both an immediate and lasting effect on a Sim. Because these events affect their mood and behaviour, they can become more set in their ways over their lifetime. If you have created a shy Sim and have pushed her into failed attempts at love, you will see her become even shyer over time. Sims are, however, inventive and find unique ways of expressing themselves no matter who they are. They are always surprising.

It has been mentioned that the cast is now more intelligent and more responsive to other cast members and the surroundings. Can you give examples? Is the AI and awareness of the cast always a big focus?

Sims now have not only memories and greater awareness, but they behave uniquely based on their personalities. If you, as the player, ask a sloppy Sim to clean up, you'll know it is not their first choice of activities.
They'll do it but they will let you know that it does not make them happy.
These are the more extreme elements of our new Sims behaviour. There is a ton of nuances that go into making Sims more believable. They react to events around them. They are attracted to Sims based on their own tastes. They are interested in activities based on not only their personality and age but also their current mood.

You have created a new 3D engine for the game. What aspect of the technology is a real step forward and how important is it to constantly advance technology?

The Sims look so much better, sexier, and they change over time. That is one advantage of the new engine. The overall effect is what is compelling. We have put in so much more depth. The scenes from the neighbourhood from the houses to the Sims are full of detail. We can get closer to the action and this is a lot of fun. The dynamic lighting of a scene can make it much more dramatic.
Another huge area that this impacts on is the building experience. You can modify the terrain, and build your Sims' house on a hill, complete with decks, foundations and multiple stories. When you decorate their house, you can enter design mode and select new elements for almost everything in the catalogue.

An all-new 'Create-A-Sim' feature which allows you to customize the facial features of your Sim with a few simple clicks and players are now able to build dwellings over two stories and have the ability to coordinate and customize the homes of their Sims to a new degree of design with all-new furniture, lighting and objects. The one feature that is making us excited is that the Sims cast can form complex relationships and are able to distinguish between family and friends, platonic friendships and romantic love.

What kind of new and improved facial and body movement animations are there, and how do physical characteristics, even traits, of a character change, as they get older?

This is a vast area of enhancement from the previous engine. The Sims have facial animations and fingers. They even have unique hairstyles that move.
Since we can blend animations, the variety of their movements goes far beyond what we had in the previous version. They can get pregnant, and it shows. They age, and they can also get fat or fit depending on the activities the player drives them to. It is really fun to see a Sim birthday with the transition from a child to a teen. Not only to see how their features mature, but also just the transformation in general.

How complex is the character creation and have you added any interesting elements just for fun?

The character creation is extremely versatile. You can create unique Sims by modifying their full facial structure or just specific features, hairstyles, clothing options and even makeup. I think some of the more unique elements of our Sim creation process are that you can create offspring of a Sim and see how their DNA passes along. Since our Sims are family groups, you also get to set their family relationships. This is also where you give your Sim his or her initial personality and aspirations.

What new or interesting settings or events are there and what is your favourite new feature?

My favourite feature is the differences in behaviour that come from different personalities. These are a lot of fun to see in the game. Watching a shy Sim hover about like a wallflower while the outgoing Sim 'works the room' is a blast. I'm also a big fan of the teen experience we have brought to the game. Just watching them dance and have a pizza party really reminds me of my own teenage years.

Is this the biggest advance yet in The Sims and do you always try to play safe with in game issues and characteristics? In real life things are a little uglier.

Yes, this is a real leap from the original Sims in so many ways. Creating believable human characters in our Sims is a pretty huge undertaking. The better they look, the more fidelity players expect of their behaviour. By electing to give our Sims better looks, facial animations, and allowing the player to get closer to them, we needed to advance the AI significantly. And, yes, getting closer and having new animations has forced us to consider the boundaries that we want to maintain as well.

"In The Sims 2 our Sims grow up, have memories and are much more aware of their surroundings and past."

developer: ubisoft [] **publisher:** ubisoft [] **distributor:** megarom (011) 234-2680
release date: q1 2004 [] **genre:** tactical shooter [] **internet:** http://cmt.ubisoft.fr/pandora_tomorrow
platforms: pc | ps2 | xbox | gcn

writer: Derek de la Fuente

pc preview:

splinter cell: pandora tomorrow

With Splinter Cell wowing audiences in 2003, it's no surprise that a sequel is in the works. We spoke Domitille Doat, the Producer, to get the first real insight into the game and looked into the game's design, what to expect and the new Multiplayer feature.

Was the team surprised by the success of the original Splinter Cell and how then do you go about creating a sequel?
Not surprised, but extremely relieved. Putting so much effort into a game and then thinking that players may not see or play it would have been painful. The good thing about it being played by a lot of people is that you get a large amount of feedback. The key point for us was that positioning of realistic stealth was something very demanding at all the levels of design but this high level of demand was really appreciated at the end of the day by gamers. Splinter Cell is not a melting pot of many other universes or games. It is a crystal clear type of game: realistic infiltration and stealth. We are not trying to mix with anything and everything, we are just making everything that is possible to deepen this realistic stealth experience with exclusive play dynamic situations, wider settings, diverse NPC behaviour, new athletic moves and enhanced visual effects and of course through a new type of game mode: Splinter Cell multiplayer!

Could you tell us a little about the storyline and how you go about creating more realistic settings?
JT Petty, the scriptwriter of Splinter Cell, is the scriptwriter of Pandora. This allows the trademark to be recognizable but it also allows for great improvement and evolution. We've clearly established the rules of the Splinter Cell universe: the Tom Clancy style, verisimilitude, insider information, complex patriotism and geopolitical intrigue - all the tenets of a techno-thriller.
The base of it starts with a crisis in Indonesia and East Timor, the brand new democracy in East Timor is supported by the American Government against Indonesia. The Indonesian government cannot stand intrusion in what it qualifies as internal affairs and finances terrorist groups to attack any official American buildings in Dili. The leader of the terrorists is Suhadi Sadono, an extremely charismatic and seductive militant whose discourse is based on the fact that no nation however big and powerful has the right to interfere in the national affairs of another country.

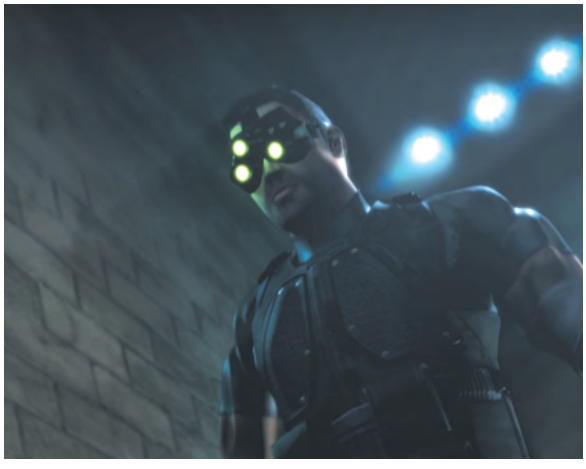
The game is being developed over a number of formats. What kind of problems will this create and does it also allow you, without any compromise, to develop each platform to its full potential?
It is not a really problematic situation as long as you have the resources and the talent to develop many formats in the same time. It is not the same team working on each platform or achieving all the platforms potential. We did the same for Splinter Cell and it worked perfectly.

Of the new gadgets, which one is your favourite?
My favourite gadget is the optic cable - I just use the optic cable all the time obsessively. It is a new optic with thermal and night vision included in it. For any of the new gadgets we always have our bunch of experts, ex CIA agent and soldier to advise us.

Tell us more on the new multiplayer mode. Will everyone play as Sam?
Every fan of the original game knows that there is only one Sam Fisher, and he works alone. So no, you won't be playing Sam online. Instead the storyline for the new game features the NSA experimenting with a new type of infiltration operation that requires small 'shadow net' units. Those are the people that the NSA calls upon when one man is just not enough. We propose you take the role of a Shadow Net spy, which is close to Sam Fisher's style of play of course, but you can take the role of the opposition as well, namely the mercenaries.
What's interesting here is that as we worked on opposite abilities of the 2 teams you can feel two completely different emotions regarding the team you're playing. As a mercenary, even fully loaded, you will feel uneasy in dark, vertical and narrow places, which are spies' playgrounds.
The game offers 2 vs. 2 configurations. This is an open configuration though so you'll be able to play 1 vs. 3 as well. The most important thing there is that we try to keep the integrity of the stealth transposing it to the online. On one hand in stealth games, action is the result of observation through anticipation. On the other hand stealth is all about tension. Tension requires slow pace to settle properly. There is a clear fact: the number of players has a direct influence on the play dynamic. The more players you add to the game, the less you control encounters between players and the pace of the action. Putting too many players on the playfield will bring too many random encounters and too fast action and will ruin any attempt of anticipation and keeping tension high. These were the two reasons, which clearly oriented our decision when we opted for a 4-player game.
About the number of levels, there will be 8 totally different environments, offering various settings. Since all the action takes place at the same time on different locations the events will occur at different stages of the day. We offer to play different game-modes. Obviously the modes are variations around the notion of objectives. The main mode is called Neutralization: as a spy you have to reach objectives and neutralize them - meanwhile mercenaries will defend them. Another mode called Extraction forces movement and cat and mouse play as it incorporates dynamic elements: the spies have first to reach their objective then take it back to another 'safe' point, pretty much like the FPS classic mode CTF.

Are there any really cool locations that are quite unusual?
On the top of a high-speed train in between Paris and Nice in France: 300 Km an Hour.

The enemies were much smarter than was expected, which was great. How did you achieve such well implemented AI and have you worked on any new behavioural or AI features?
The AI is divided into two parts in Splinter Cell: the generic AI in the hands of one person only and the level specific events in the hands of the level designers under supervision of the AI engineers. The code is good and enables even more diversity of situations now with civilians having different reactions than guards, with fiends becoming enemies and vice versa. We did our best on this matter because we know it is the key for the final quality perception.



developer: k-d lab [] **publisher:** codemasters [] **distributor:** megarom [011] 234-2680
release date: tba [] **genre:** strategy [] **internet:** www.kdlab.com/eng/projects/perimeter.html
platforms: pc

writer: Derek de la Fuente

pc preview:

perimeter

In the blundering RTS genre it's quite hard to introduce new ideas that appeal both to fans of the genre and mainstream gamers. But the new offering from K-D Labs and Codemasters plans to change all of that, especially if it means moving mountains…

Perimeter has been in development for 3 plus years and even in the early stages the game appeared to be taking a new route in trying to be inventive under the RTS banner. Already in terms of ideas and presentation it is shining through with its stylised looks and extra detail. An innovative Real-Time-Strategy game, it pits players against each other or AI opponents in a life and death struggle to seize territory and establish critical protective 'perimeters'.

K-D Lab is at pains to point out that Perimeter does not copy other RTS products but instead offers a well-balanced combination of new terra-forming principles and territorial wars with traditional strategy elements. Detailing the list of innovations and new directions K-D explore could sound very boring but with many developers working almost tirelessly to a formulaic structure with only the storyline and a couple of technology issues really expressing much imagination, it is worth noting.

The spotlight is focused on strategic terra-forming - a first we are informed - where terrain is used as an active part of the real-time play dynamic. Instead of simply building a base, players need to take into regard the terrain and how to use it to their advantage. Perimeter allows players to instantly transform their units into different units if enough energy is available. There are three basic types of units - soldiers, officers and technicians - but more complex units can be created resulting in light, middle and heavy units with different kinds of weapons, protection levels and movement abilities. Preserving, maintaining and developing this chain is one of the main play dynamic challenges. A lot also depends on how you manage your energy - the more you grow the more energy you will get but also consume. Combat units are organized into squads. Thus the gamer does not need to control each unit and manages combat forces on the higher strategic level, giving orders to cluster groups.

A sense of uniqueness about the game in almost every area is apparent by the way the team has approached the RTS genre. Although the play dynamic is built on territory seizure, where players must terra-form diverse landscapes in order to extract vital energy supplies is appealing enough, it goes deeper than that. It's about balancing your forces and it is not always the biggest weapon that is the most effective. Defending your sections is as important as attacking and a special force-field can be placed up which will give you perfect protection against certain weapons and attacking forces but like all good things it comes at a cost - an exorbitant amount of energy and other debilitating effects on your progress. In addition to the epic single-player campaign mode that spans several centuries it will also include a multiplayer mode that supports both LAN and Internet connections. Although the pinnacle ideas of research, base building, development and epic battles is ingrained within the game design it is the mix and extension of ideas that could turn this into a classic. The focus to winning is both energy and unit management but possibly more important is forward thinking and planning - which encapsulates all that's best within the RTS genre.

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developer: midway [] **publisher:** midway [] **distributor:** ster kinekor (011) 445-7900
release date: q2 2004 [] **genre:** first person shooter [] **internet:** www.midway.com
platforms: ps2 | xbox | gcn

writer: Derek de la Fuente

ps2 preview:

area 51

Aliens? Military Black Ops? Dark Conspiracies? Mulder and Scully had the short end of the stick; this job demands big guns and lots of explosions.

Area 51 will take the player through eight massive levels within a clandestine government complex, combining intense combat, exploration, adventure, discovery, and puzzle solving. Blending graphic violence with science fiction the player will discover secret areas and items, including the answers to this rumoured government conspiracy, using unique three-character squad-based play dynamic with a Dynamic Character Switching system.

"Area 51 pulls the player into the depth of the conspiracies behind the secret military base." Says Roger Balettie, Area 51's producer. "As Lt. Nick Cross, a US Army Hazardous Materials (Hazmat) specialist, who, with his team, must investigate the mysterious viral outbreak that has severed communications with the base. During his investigation, Lt. Cross stumbles across alien creatures and becomes infected with a biological mutagen that begins to affect his very humanity."

The game combines elements of precision sniper attacks and hand-to-hand combat, taking three distinct characters on individual and cooperative missions. To successfully carry out missions, accomplish goals and ultimately complete the game, players must utilize each character's attributes to unleash destruction on aliens while progressing through alien-inspired levels and mysterious settings.

"There are several very distinct areas in the Area 51 game. Without giving away too much of the story, we can divulge that the player definitely gets 'behind the scenes' of the military establishment at Area 51 and confirms some of the long-standing conspiracy theories! While the military complex is very realistic, what follows afterwards is shaping up to be the best part of the game."

Stan Winston, renowned creature designer, contributed to Area 51's intrigue by creating artwork of some of the disturbing alien characters and mutations featured in the game. Stan, the four-time Academy Award winner, is responsible for designing many of the most enduring creatures of the big screen, including Jurassic Park Aliens.

"Stan helped the entire team get started when we were in the conceptual phase. His prototype drawings have either been incorporated exactly or have been the inspiration for some of the creatures the player will encounter. He definitely has a unique style, and we're sure that Area 51 will live up to his reputation for creating scary and engaging monsters and aliens."

The player will interact and speak with NPCs throughout the game, but will also be in contact with a surface member of his team. Through these NPCs, the player will be given pertinent information regarding the goings on inside Area 51 as well as objective information. Cut scenes will be used to set up certain scenarios or show special events as they take place in the game. For the most part, the game is linear but there will be extra side-objectives that the player has the option to complete outside of the main storyline.

The team has also placed a high premium on the overall audio experience in the game. The environment, while looking fantastic, will also have an audible 'life' of its own. In addition, the team is contracted with Chris Vrenna (formerly of Nine Inch Nails) to write the musical score that will make sure that Area 51 is a distinctive experience on all fronts.

"Multiplayer and online play will be included with the project when it ships. Inevitable [developer] has a strong experience base with online console games, so we're going to do everything possible to make the world-wide experience great for everyone! It's always exciting to work on online functionality as it allows you to extend the life of your game beyond the single player experience."

Overall, this could be a good title to keep an eye out for on PS2 later this year.

Enough said!!!!
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developer: namco [] **publisher:** namco [] **distributor:** ea africa [011] 516-8300
release date: q1 2004 [] **genre:** racing[] **internet:** www.namco.com
platforms: ps2 | xbox | gcn

writer: James Francis

ps2 preview:

r-racing revolution

Namco are not newcomers to the racing arena, thanks to their stylish Ridge Racer series of games. But those have always been more traditionally arcade and not in the same league as Gran Turismo and Project Gotham. Of course, if someone else builds it, they will come, so you need one too.

R: Racing Revolution seems to be a mixture between classic arcade elements and more realistic racing. The preview build showed off all five game modes, the most interesting being the story mode, where you play as Rena, an ambulance driver who gets recruited into racing. Every few races you get rewarded with a nice cut scene advancing her story.

As with any game in this genre, there is the expected wide selection of cars, the ability to buy and modify cars (you can upgrade the power and weight of cars), open new tracks and so on. There are Rally races, drag races, city based tussles and track races. The difference we noticed is the implementation of Race points. While most racing games have this, Namco's system has a more arcade feel. Race points allow you to buy upgrades, unlock races against other rival opponents and affect a range of small changes in the game. You accumulate these points through winning races, but also in how you drive. Each rival driver on the track has a panic meter, allowing you to put pressure on them and cause them to make mistakes. Some rivals are far harder to intimidate than others, though. As you drive, your style, time and handling accumulate points for you, so the better you drive overall the more points you gain. Your pit crew is also on hand to give advice: say you take a corner too wide or brake too early, they tell you.

As you progress, there are various training levels to teach you how to drive, making Revolution far less intimidating to new drivers than the likes of Gran Turismo. That said, it's still challenging enough for salted drivers and as you progress the game's pace and difficulty increases a lot.

With that you have three difficulties and the option of brake assist, though we spent more time fighting against the assist than have it work for us, so we never used it. If you get bored of single player, you can race someone else in vs. mode, which allows you to bet Racing Points or load your improved cars. There are several classes, including drag and privateer, a fair selection of tracks (though they seem a bit few) and 11 good ambient dance tracks to play to.

The graphics still need some polish, but overall it's shaping up to be a solid driving game that'll appeal to most gamers, even those who don't like driving games.

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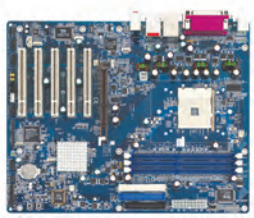

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E-mail: wentek@metroweb.co.za

developer: electronic arts [] **publisher:** electronic arts [] **distributor:** ea africa [011] 516-8300
rrp: R 285 [] **genre:** driving [] **internet:** www.needforspeed.com
platforms: pc | ps2 | xbox | gcn

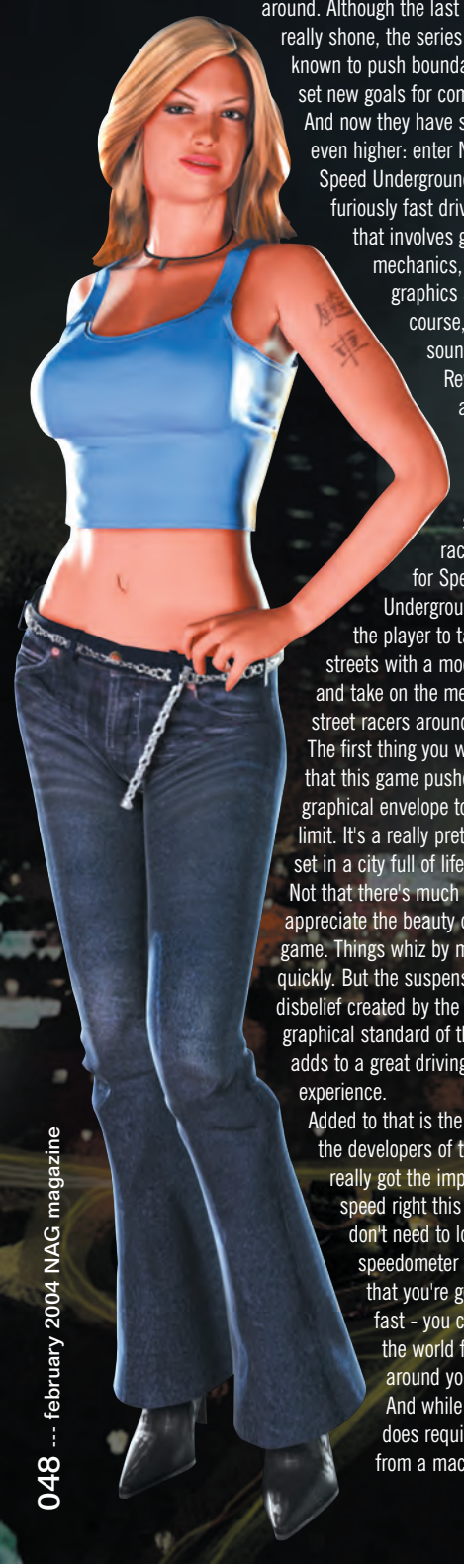
reviewer: Walt "Shryke" Pretorius

pc review:

need for speed underground

NAG AWARD OF MERIT — NOW AVAILABLE

The Need for Speed legacy grows each year, it seems, with new titles appearing all the time. But the EA driving title has gone through something of a slump of late, with lacklustre games that didn't deliver what people had hoped for. That, however, is about to change…



Electronic Arts' Need for Speed series has always been considered one of the best driving games around. Although the last few haven't really shone, the series has been known to push boundaries and set new goals for competitors.

And now they have set the bar even higher: enter Need for Speed Underground, a furiously fast driving game that involves great game mechanics, incredible graphics and, of course, a stunning sound track.

Revolving around the world of shady illegal street racing, Need for Speed Underground allows the player to take to the streets with a modified car and take on the meanest street racers around.

The first thing you will notice is that this game pushes the graphical envelope to a new limit. It's a really pretty game, set in a city full of life and detail. Not that there's much time to appreciate the beauty of the game. Things whiz by much too quickly. But the suspension of disbelief created by the high graphical standard of the game adds to a great driving simulation experience.

Added to that is the fact that the developers of this game really got the impression of speed right this time. You don't need to look at your speedometer to know that you're going really fast - you can tell by the world flying by around you.

And while the game does require a lot from a machine, you will get away with running it on a 700MHz processor with a scant 32 MB of graphic power, thanks to its highly customizable graphic options. That said, this game is so pretty that, if you're at the bottom end of the spectrum, you might even consider an upgrade, just to see it in all its glory.

This game is all about style over substance. Sure, it's great to get behind the wheel of a virtual Ferrari and take it for a spin, but there's something more "real" about the twenty "tuner" cars on offer in this title. They range from Golf GTis through to Imprezas and beyond, allowing the player to race in cars that are far more run of the mill than the sports monsters that used to be Need for Speed's stock in trade.

However, being a street racer means that you have to be a crowd pleaser. This opens a whole new spectrum for vehicle customisation.

Sure, you need those engine upgrades and a new turbo to win the races, but you have to look good doing it. In fact, the visual upgrades available for the vehicles offer far more variety than the performance upgrades.

They range from body work like bumpers and side skirts to accessories like window tinting, right through to vinyl applications and sponsorship decals. These upgrades are earned by scoring style points during races, through actions like near misses with traffic, power sliding, winning laps and so on. The better your car looks, the more these points are modified by a reputation multiplier, and the more upgrades you can get hold of.

Certain options could have been included (like custom spray jobs) but there is a wide variety of things that can already be done, so we won't whine too much.

The actual races are tough. So tough, in fact, that one would hazard a statement along the lines of: "Need for Speed Underground is the most frustrating game ever made." You'll find yourself playing the game to spite the game, trying to beat it for personal satisfaction and just to be able to swear at it in triumph.

Why is the game so frustrating? Two main factors contribute to this matter - opponents and traffic. The opponent AI is quite clever, and gets nasty when it thinks you're doing too well.

AI opponents will think nothing about ramming you into a convenient tree rather than losing the race. And there is no second place here - it's first, or lose. Tournaments do work on a point system, but the most of the game requires a clear victory for you to advance through the 111 single player "career" events.

▲ It's easy to be distracted by all the prettiness. Distraction here would probably result in an altercation with an ice cream van, though...

▲ Getting the car sideways is a hell of a lot tougher than it looks

This gets maddening.
It seems that all the AI brains got given to the opponents, leaving the traffic that trawls the streets in many events to be witless morons who invariably get in your way. There seems to be a randomised factor to the traffic - occasionally there will be a car in the same place, but for the most part it just seems to flow around the track - and get in your way. If nothing else, Need for Speed Underground will certainly improve the colour of your four lettered vocabulary.
The game features excellent physics, but completely lacks a damage model - your car will come through even the most bone crunching accident without a scratch. While this should be annoying, the exhilarating play helps you ignore it. Additionally, you can't build up a "stable" of cars - you can only have one at a time. This is a bit sad, but also forgivable.
One big mistake that cannot be overlooked is the fact that, other than an online mode, there is no multiplayer option - made even worse by the fact that this game screams multiplayer and pink slip racing (another reason for a stable of cars, might I add.) However, at the time of writing, EA have stated that they are looking into a multiplayer implementation of the game.
You will be excused if this beautiful game with its great sound track, excellently modelled cars and gritty feel remind you of movies like "The Fast and The Furious." That's what it's all about. Need for Speed Underground is the best driving game we have had the pleasure of seeing in a long time. It has something for everyone, and is a game that you should seriously consider owning.

online play

Need for Speed Underground takes online play to a new level. In addition to running well on even 56k connections, the game allows for a smooth interaction between consoles - players using PCs can compete against those playing on other platforms.

▲ Customisation goes as far as painting bits of your engine. Yeah, we know, that's pretty anal...

▲ Although you should be leaving a layer of paint on this fence, the non-existent damage model keeps the repair bills right down...

the spice of life

Need for Speed Underground is not just about driving around a track really quickly, in order to be top dog. In fact, the game offers a variety of new skill challenges for players. These take the form of different race events and while most of them may seem a little run of the mill, the variety that they introduce to the game adds enjoyment, if nothing else:
Circuit - Just a plain old race. You have a number of laps in which to beat your opponents.
Lap Knockout - Like a circuit, this race takes place over a number of laps. However, the last driver to cross the finish line in each lap is eliminated. A great reason to perform well.
Sprint - A one way race along a course that does not join up with itself again. In other words, there are no laps here, just an A to B course to drive.
Time Trial - Like sprinting, there are no laps in these events. There are no opponents either, in fact, other than a clock and a time that you need to improve on.
Dragging - The ultimate in all out speed, dragging involves getting your revs and gear changes just right (along with a well timed burst of nitro or two) to beat your opponents in a straight sprint over a shorter distance.
Drifting - The slowest event, drifting requires the player to get his car sideways - the more time you spend skidding, the better you do. And the track is oiled, for that extra bit of glide...

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Minimum Specification
Pentium III 700 MHz | 128 MB RAM | 8 x CD ROM | 32 MB D3D Video Accelerator 2 GB HDD

- ☺ Awesome graphics
- ☺ Addictive
- ☺ Great play dynamic
- ☹ No multiplayer
- ☹ No damage model
- ☹ Frustrating

Summary
Need for Speed Underground is a super fast, brilliantly fun game that explores the world of illegal street racing. 20 cars to choose from, a variety of events and a killer AI make it a challenging, frustrating title well worth the effort. This is the shot in the arm that the Need for Speed series needed.

85

developer: ubisoft [] **publisher:** ubisoft [] **distributor:** megarom (011) 234-2680
rrp: R 299 [] **genre:** first person shooter [] **internet:** www.xiii-thegame.com
platforms: pc | ps2 | xbox | gcn

reviewer: James "Priest" Francis

pc review:

xiii

The idea of a cell shaded shooter actually appeals to me. Unlike a lot of 'fans' of the FPS genre, I think there's a lot to be said for games that actually try and do something new, as opposed to constantly using the two most common FPS mechanics - shooting stuff and making shooting stuff look good at high frame rates.

▲ Long distance kill, up close detail

▼ Keeping abreast of the action

▼ Sound effects for people with no speakers

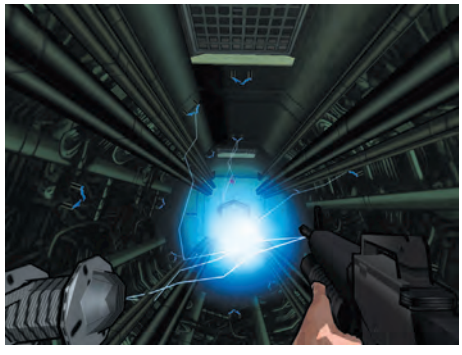
XIII obviously is one of those titles. While it still relies on familiar concepts like navigating linear levels and shooting people in them, the first obvious change is how it looks. Based on a popular series of European Graphic Novels of the same name, the game is loosely based on the plot of the first book. You are a man who has lost your memory and all you know is that you have a tattoo (XIII) on you; someone shot the president of the US and everyone thinks that someone is you. To boot, apart from them, someone else also wants you dead.

Obviously the point is to navigate through the game and unravel the secret. You do this in a variation of missions (ranging between sneaking and all-out action) over several locations from city rooftops to snowy mountains to a foreboding mansion. It's a standard cloak-n-dagger story that might have you hooked. But the real charm of XIII is its comic-book feel. Events are highlighted using comic-style frames that appear as certain things happen. Shoot someone in the head, for example, and three frames flash after each other showing how they plummet down the side of the building. Detection also works this way, as you can spot a close enemy's footsteps thanks to little 'tap, tap, tap' sound effects displaying on the screen. Even loud explosions and gunfire have comic sound effects complimenting them.

Game-wise you have a fair arsenal, reasonably intelligent bad guys, and the ability to take hostages, which is very useful, should the level allow you to do it. The game also maintains enough of a pace, though I felt they let the cat out of the bag far too early story wise. Part of XIII's pace is the cool music that accompanies it - easily one of the best game soundtracks I've ever heard.

Sadly, afterwards, XIII isn't all that much to write home about. While you have fun playing it, and the gimmick of a cell-shaded shooter is excellent, the game feels sparse and hollow compared to other shooters. Granted it's a comic world, but comics are not rendered in 3D, so some adjustments would have been okay. The game can also be unrelentingly tough, some sections having you scream in frustration. Unlike shooters such as Call of Duty, which inspires the same reaction, XIII's skin-of-your-teeth moments are not that necessary.

Still, it's a good game, and one I'm curious to see in future incarnations. If anything, it's a welcome change in scenery from the drudgery or standard shooters everyone seems to be releasing these days.



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Minimum Specification
Pentium III 700 MHz | 128 MB RAM | 12 x CD ROM | 32 MB D3D Video Accelerator | 120 MB HDD

- ☺ First cell-shaded shooter
- ☺ Feels like a comic
- ☺ Fun
- ☹ Can be frustrating
- ☹ Bland at times

Summary
It's not a great shooter, but XIII is good. Plus, the cell-shaded graphics are done well. The game lacks a bit of graphical polish, and some scenes are more difficult than they should be, but there's no reason not to give XIII a go.

81

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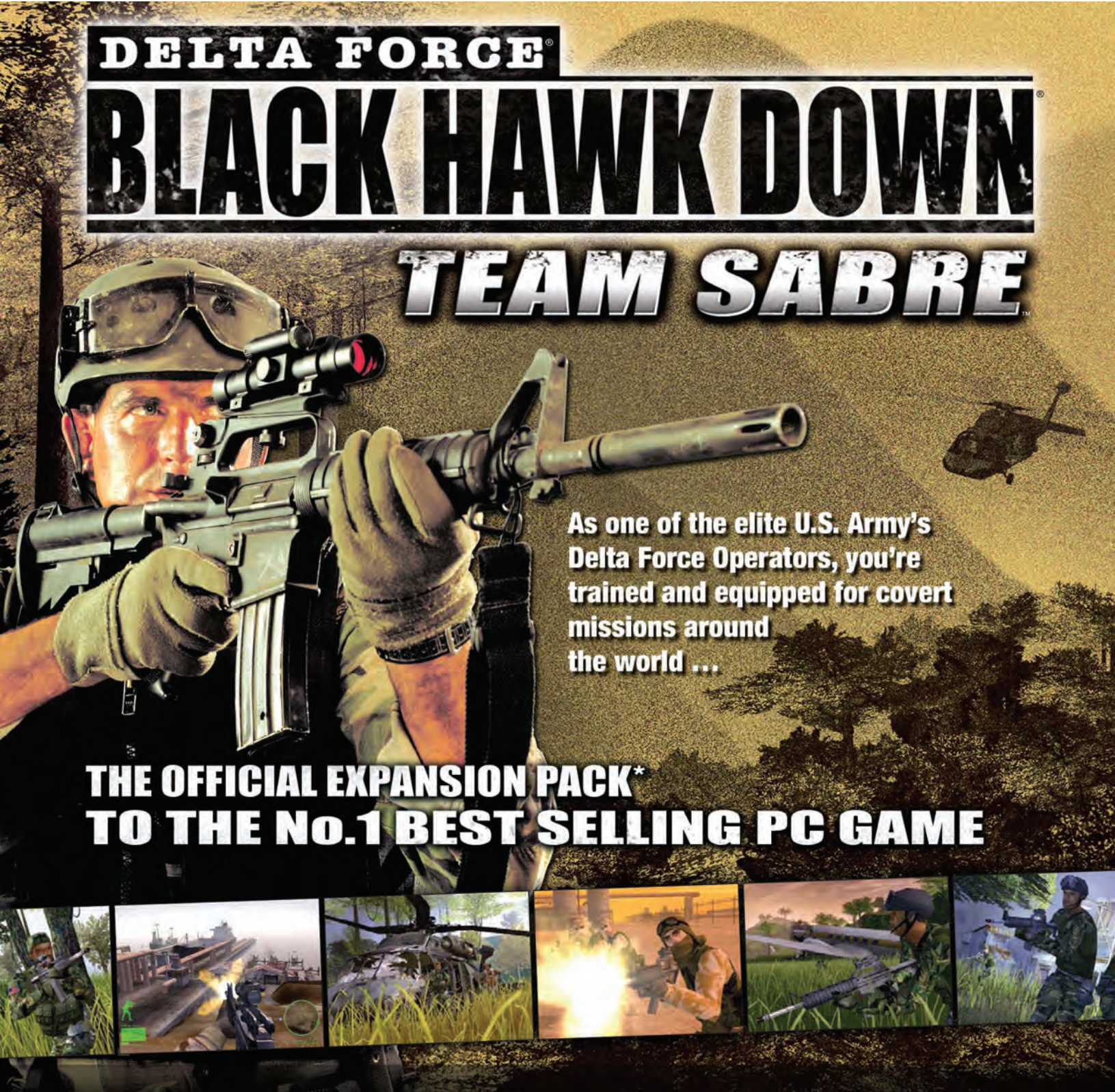

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developer: luxoflux [] **publisher:** activision [] **distributor:** ster kinekor (011) 445-7900
rrp: R450 [] **genre:** action [] **internet:** www.truecrimela.com
platforms: ps2 | xbox | gcn

reviewer: Walt "Shryke" Pretorius

ps2 review:

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true crime: streets of la

The world is, when all is said and done, a hard place. It takes a special kind of person to find the courage, willpower and perseverance to keep the peace, maintain order and stop the bad guys in their tracks. That may or may not be you.

Grand Theft Auto 3 brought free form adventure gaming to the light in a big way. The freedom that you experienced was brilliant - you could run riot as much as you liked, complete the occasional mission and, above all, do exactly what it was that you wanted to do, within the confines of the game, of course. And it was a lark on the wrong side of the law.

Take the same idea, make it a bit more serious and switch sides - viola, True Crime is born.

To describe True Crime: Streets of LA, one would have to say that it is a fighting-driving-shooting adventure title with a good story and believable characters. Add to that a good sound track, and you will almost be able to get over the fact that the graphics are a little, well, mediocre. The human modelling is the worst part.

Yet the game has an appeal - proof once again that graphics aren't everything - and playing it can be an addictive affair. The player takes on the role of Nick, an LA cop who has been assigned to an elite crime fighting unit to investigate Triad activities.

Being a Chinese-American, Nick supposedly has the edge.

The game is an interesting mix of mission based and freeform game play, with many un-lockable upgrades for the way the player drives, fights and shoots. In truth, everything is part of a mission, but some missions have no time limit, allowing the player to spend hours tracking random crimes, exploring the city and commandeering vehicles. You can even spot check civilians walking around - sometimes they are criminals, most times they aren't.

True Crime works on a dual rating. Arrests and solved crimes earn the player badges, which can be spent on upgrades, while overall actions earn you either good or bad karma. Run over a little old lady, the karma takes a knock. Bad karma means bad things - good karma means good things. You get the picture.

On the whole, this is a fun and engrossing title, full of action and adventure. The control system is a little weird, but not overly so. In fact, shooting and fighting in this are easier than in GTA3. So is driving, for that matter, but it's far less spectacular. Also, the fact that you can shoot from inside a moving vehicle does have its merits.

Crimes can be solved either by arresting criminals, or dealing out a more immediate form of street justice. Which you do depends on you. There is no rule that you have to be a good guy in this title. You just need to get the job more or less done.

True Crime: Streets of LA will provide the player with a lot of fun, provided the player is prepared to live with the iffy graphics. Not too bad a title at all.

Beating up semi naked guys in a sauna - every day work for Nick

Requirements
single player | analog compatible | vibration compatible

- ☺ Lots of variety
- ☺ Fairly free form
- ☺ Lots of fun
- ☹ Mediocre graphics
- ☹ Not exactly innovative

Summary
It may not be the most original idea, and it may not be the best in terms of graphics, but True Crime: Streets of LA is a great, almost free form shooting-driving fighting title that reminds one of a more serious version of Grand Theft Auto 3. Good sound track and a fun story make up for the areas in which the game is a little lacking.

74

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021 510 8270	031 263 0121	011 315 6680	041 367 3062/5

developer: capcom [] **publisher:** capcom [] **distributor:** futronic (011) 315-0079
rrp: R 499 [] **genre:** platform action [] **internet:** www.capcom.com
platforms: gcn

reviewer: Ed "tar & feather" Dracon

gcn review:

viewtiful joe

We need a hero! Silvia (Joe's girlfriend) has been captured by the bad guys and dragged into the world of the silver-screen. Joe's favourite hero, Captain Blue, is dead! Stepping up to the mantle of hero-ness, only Joe can save his girlfriend and restore peace to the world. While he's at it, he might as well become one of the most memorable characters in gaming history, thanks to the brains and the beauty of Viewtiful Joe.

Once in a while some company out there (this time, it's Capcom) tries to redefine or re-invent a specific genre, injecting strange yet original concepts into the play mechanics of a title in the hopes of satisfying those of us who are tired of clone after clone of vanilla titles. Usually, these titles become obscure cult hits with a dedicated following, but never truly shining in the spotlight. Viewtiful Joe however is one game that begs, no, demands the spotlight that it richly deserves, for it is rare that a quality title such as this is achieved.
If there was one word able to encompass all that Viewtiful Joe is, that word would be style. Inspired by the old superhero movies and comics, the game presents itself in an utterly appealing and refreshing way, going even so far as to display all the action as if it's on a movie-reel. Graphically, Viewtiful Joe sets a new standard for both action platform games and cell-shaded (comic book looking) games in general. Joe himself is beautifully animated and shaded, dispensing justice in silky smooth animation. Each enemy is willing to receive insane amounts of damage in the most explosive and fluid ways. Every backdrop is hand-drawn and detailed, oozing with colours. Viewtiful Joe is a beautiful game, no two ways about it.
The game is your standard platform fare; viewed from the side, Joe runs from left to right attacking enemies, solving puzzles and defeating bosses. Each level is divided into smaller segments with objectives such as 'defeat X amount of enemies' or 'figure out this puzzle', which keeps the level interesting and varied. On occasion you might even have to outrun an explosion in true Hollywood fashion. Joe can punch, kick and jump as well as dodge incoming attacks (which are shown to you through little skull indicators, so you can dodge them). While this is all very interesting, it's all been done before. However, being in the movie world now, Joe has access to some incredible powers called VFX (Visual Effects). These VFX powers are both beautiful to look at and incredibly fun to use. One of the first VFX Powers Joe gets is VFX Slow, which also happens to be the most crucial. As simple as holding down a button, Joe uses up his VFX Gauge (which will replenish if not used) to slow down time, allowing him to hit enemies easily and even send them flying into other enemies (if he dodges their initial attack), creating a combo effect. Some enemies can only be attacked while slowed-down and during slow-motion helicopters fall out of the sky since their rotors don't spin fast enough. Throughout the game you will have to use VFX Slow at the right times to solve certain fast-moving puzzles and defeat certain enemies, as well as dodge incoming bullets. Later abilities such as VFX Mach Speed causes Joe to pummel enemies so fast that they burst into flames, while VFX Zoom allows Joe to momentarily stun enemies by striking a heroic pose. In-between levels you are given the chance to purchase new moves and upgrade some of your VFX abilities by using the 'Viewtifuls' you've acquired through creating massive combos by using your VFX intelligently.
Each chapter is presented as a 'TV episode' in the Viewtiful Joe saga; every boss is memorable and often frustrating. Viewtiful Joe only allows you to save in-between specific levels, making the game very difficult in places but still leaving you begging for more. The music is themed and appropriate, creating a truly Hollywood-style experience. The voice acting could have been a bit better, but even so it seems appropriate for the nature of the game.
Joe himself is a fun, witty and charismatic figure that seems all too comfortable in his new superhero role. Everything about Viewtiful Joe speaks quality, polish and attention to the things that make games fun.

life is viewtiful

Stunning graphics would be nothing without fun to back it up. Thanks to the VFX power that Joe can use, interesting combos and effects can be achieved with an almost ridiculous amount of ease.
VFX Slow: Using the silky smooth slow-motion at your command, you can pile up hits on an airborne enemy as well as sending their body flying into other enemies, creating a domino effect. Helicopters even drop out of the air when you slow their rotors down.
VFX Mach Speed: Go Turbo! Hit enemies so fast, they burst into flames! Joe moves like lightning, so fast that it even seems as if there are multiple copies of Joe attacking!
VFX Zoom: Get a closer look at the action, striking a pose that causes Joe's opponents to stop what they're doing and cower in fear. Great for those detailed kicks and punches.

Requirements
3 memory blocks

- ☺ Pure unadulterated fun
- ☺ Graphically delicious
- ☺ Stylish and refreshing
- ☹ Difficult
- ☹ Short

Summary
An underdog diamond in the rough, Viewtiful Joe amiably redefines the action platform genre. Sleek and stylish, simply a joy to look at - Hollywood would be hard pressed to try and compete with the sheer action available in Viewtiful Joe.

80

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developer: liquid entertainment [] **publisher:** sierra [] **distributor:** nu metro (011) 340-9300
rrp: R 285 [] **genre:** real time strategy [] **internet:** www.lordoftherings.com
platforms: pc

reviewer: Alex "R.A.V.E.N." Jelagin

pc review:

lord of the rings: the war of the rings

One game to ride the bandwagon
One game to cash in
One game to lack originality and in mediocrity languish.

Movies about games and games about movies - that's the current trend in the industry. Fair enough, the Lord of the Rings franchise has achieved a high profile since the Tolkien Estate granted film rights, and the pictures have been of the highest standard. So it is rather a pity when game developers jump on the bandwagon but don't really have anything original to offer. So it is with The Lord of the Rings - War of the Ring. In most respects, this is a rip-off of Blizzard's strategy games, right down to the interface and many of the characters' special abilities.

The game features two resources, both of them gathered from concentrated sites with structures that can be built over them for harvesting purposes (rather like the vespene geysers of StarCraft) - food and ore. Various combinations of these are used to build structures and train units. The two featured sides are the Free Peoples of Middle Earth and the legions of Sauron, and these have been made adequately diverse in terms of their underlying infrastructures. The good side must build its buildings within a certain range of each other, while the evil side must corrupt the land in a way most reminiscent of WarCraft III's blight of the Undead faction.

A pleasant variety of units is on offer, and generally it's a good idea, as is the case in most real-time strategy titles, to mix up different types in an army. The interface is much akin to that of WarCraft III as well, with the command bar at the bottom of the screen grouping various units into subgroups, which can be cycled between by means of the TAB key, just like in WarCraft III. The units are depicted graphically in a peculiarly fuzzy manner which, although not most conducive to screenshots, does lend them a gritty and fairly believable aspect. The terrain graphics are quite well implemented, and includes nice touches such as the fact that units moving through tall grass will disturb it with their passage. Water surfaces are also fairly well executed, although the all-too-common mistake of making it unrealistically transparent is made.

The storyline is a confused affair - it doesn't really follow the plot of the original, which is understandable, as that wouldn't lend itself very well to a campaign-oriented strategy game. Some effort has gone into making the missions interesting, but they struck me, overall, as being too easy. Fortunately, three difficulty levels are available. The skirmish AI, in particular, is a walkover. The skirmish/multiplayer maps are quite well made, and there is a decent number of them.

So, you might think, in light of the last few paragraphs, is my introduction not a bit harsh? Well, sadly, the game plays so much like a slowed down version of WarCraft III that many players will feel like they've done this all before, only faster. Players who are not very familiar with the real-time strategy genre are likely to enjoy War of the Ring, perhaps even greatly. But veterans are likely to get bored and revert to more competitively intense titles. Despite being a technically sound game in most regards, if rather unoriginal, in terms of multiplayer appeal I feel War of the Ring will struggle to compete with established titles such as WarCraft III and Command & Conquer: Generals.

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Minimum Specification
Pentium III 800 MHz | 256 MB RAM | CD ROM | 32 MB D3D Video Accelerator
2 GB HDD

☺ Pretty graphics	☹ Unoriginal
☺ Great audio	☹ Uninspired briefings

Summary
Although from a technical standpoint this game can be faulted on little, it cannot be judged in pure isolation. As a result, it suffers from not offering anything new to owners of other current RTS games, and so is recommended to players new to the real-time strategy genre.

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▲ As a last ditch effort, Rodney produced his secret weapon - a big head...

▲ WarCraft of the Rings...

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developer: team 17 [] **publisher:** sega [] **distributor:** wwe (011) 462 0150
rrp: R 299 [] **genre:** strategy worming [] **internet:** www.worms3d.com
platforms: pc | ps2 | xbox | gcn

reviewer: Ed "Miktar" Dracon

pc review:

worms 3d

When a game stands alone atop its genre mountain unchallenged by even the most basic of clones, one would naturally assume that the reason for this is that potential competitors feel that one cannot improve upon perfection. While not a completely factual assumption, it could be considered mostly correct due to the winning formula of the Worms series. However, while Worms 3D is a testament to the legacy Team 17 has created with their wriggly franchise, it's also an indicator of rigid and possibly stale thinking, hampering the development of the series.

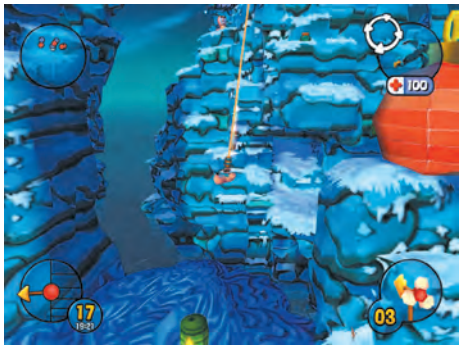
Loved for its simplistic (yet difficult to master) play dynamic, Worms has always put fun before form and delivered addictive destruction in a graphically simplistic package. Deviating from this, the new Worms 3D tries to deliver Classic Worms in a new, possibly appealing 3D form allowing 360 degrees of carnage. While on the surface one would have to be hard-pressed to find fault with the game, deeper inspection reveals a very sad opinion. Worms 3D is just not as good as it could have been. Yet, in a world deprived of decent multiplayer games, nothing is quite as much fun as assaulting your friend's squad of annelids [*you're not impressing anyone, Ed*].

The 5th incarnation to the series, Worms 3D obviously marks the ascent (or descent, depending on how you feel about it) of Worms into the 3rd dimension, the biggest change yet. Thankfully, the destructible terrain we've all grown to love was translated perfectly into 3D with the noted exception of napalm induced excavation. If you've never been privy to the Worms experience, simply put, the destructible terrain means that a little effort (a rocket) can go a long way (take out an entire enemy team by shooting the floor out from under them). The worms themselves have retained their welcome expressive nature and facial features, the environments range from spooky to Normandy beach, providing ample scenarios for battle. While not exactly a special effects extravaganza, the graphics do what they need to do, much like the single player component.

Don't expect an intricate storyline or mind-blowing revelations with the single player, but you can expect a lot of fun and frustration. The new campaign mode pits you against most ingenious and often slightly insane mission objectives while other featured challenge sections are there to hone your skills to perfection. Honestly though, who plays a Worms game for the single player? It's all about getting together with your 4 friends either locally on the same computer (it's a turn-based game after all) or over a network or the internet and let slip the worms of war, complete with silly voices and off-beat super-weapons.

Fans of the previous incarnation might be a little disappointed that favourite game-modes such as Fort are absent, but it's forgivable. The new Wormpot mode adds some spice to multiplayer, pulling a literal lever on the Wormpot slot machine gives you a random combination of modifiers for your next game, aspects such as Double Damage on all bullet-based weapons or Aqueous Super Sheep. If you've had your fill of vanilla Worms Deathmatch or Team-Deathmatch, Wormpot is a refreshing addition. Randomly generated terrains help keep things interesting, though the addition of a level-editor would have been a bonus.

Worms fans could not have asked for more, newcomers to the genre however might wonder what all the fuss is about. A few bugs concerning multiplayer aside and the occasional gripe with the new control/camera system, not to mention the lack of a proper Death Cam (showing you how you've annihilated an enemy worm), Worms 3D is a solid strategy title and still some of the best fun to be had between friends (or enemies).



worms across the board

Yet again, developers feel that no system should be exempt from being blessed by Worms 3D, though you might find that the PC version holds a few trump cards over the PS2 and GameCube versions. Aside from the obvious (and easy) internet play, navigating the menus using the PS2 or GameCube controller can be more of a chore than you're willing to attempt.

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Minimum Specification

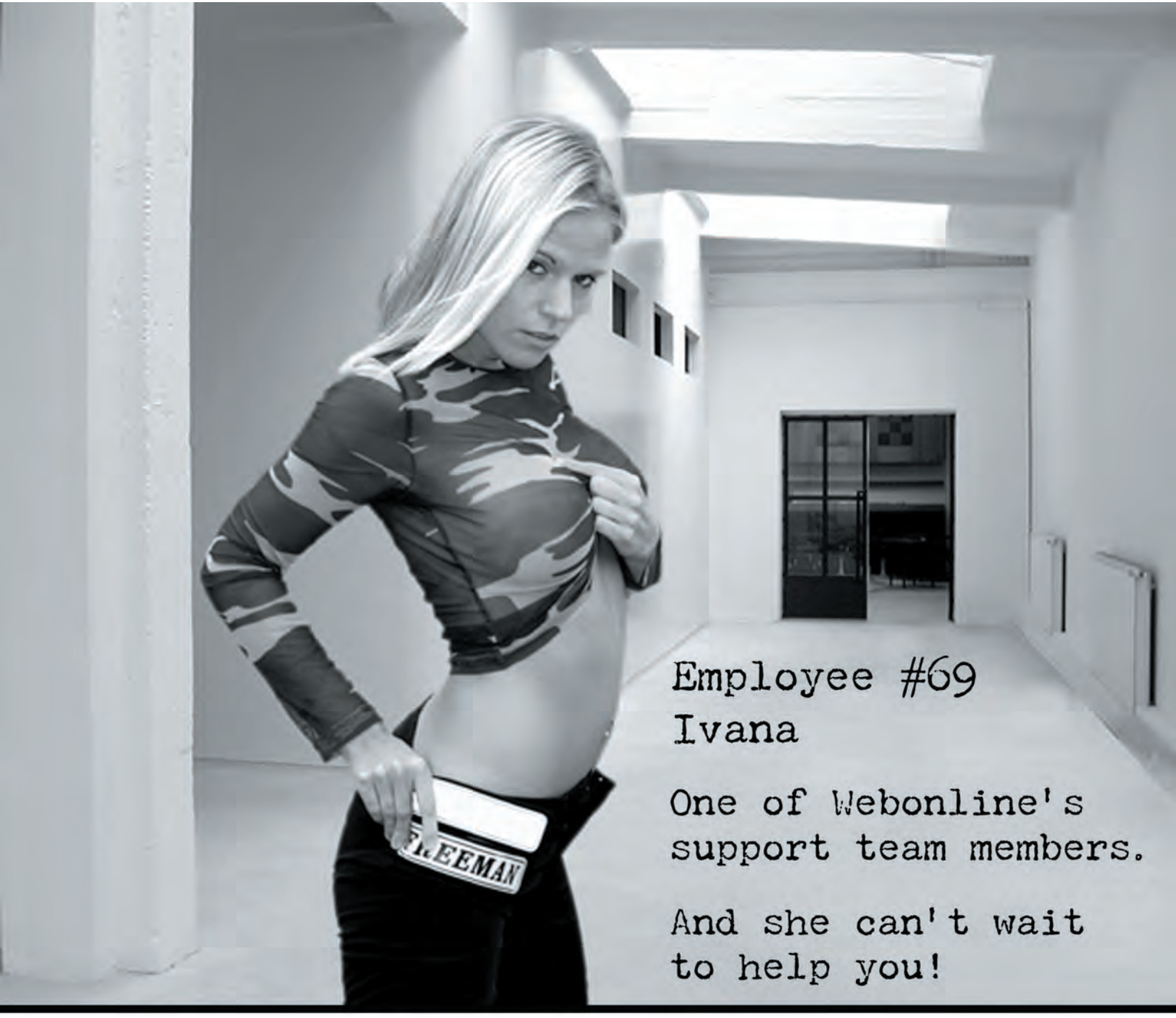
Pentium III 800 MHz | 256 MB RAM | 8 x CD ROM | 32 MB D3D Video Accelerator
1.5 GB HDD

☺ It's Worms	⊗ Initially buggy
☺ Fun	⊗ 4 players max for multiplayer
☺ Addictive	⊗ No level editor

Summary

Amazing annelid-inspired fun, Worms 3D proves to still be the champion of legal fun with up to 4 friends. While not a drastic leap or bound in the genre (aside from the slide into 3D), it's hard to find fault with a game that's just so addictive. Fully featured (yet lacking some features we could really do with), a great title that'll have you coming back for more, more than often.

81



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developer: rebellion games [] **publisher:** vivendi universal [] **distributor:** nu metro (011) 340-9345
rrp: R 285 [] **genre:** first person shooter [] **internet:** www.dreddvsdeath.com
platforms: pc | ps2 | xbox | gcn

reviewer: James "Punish me Big Boy" Francis

pc review:

judge dredd: dredd vs death

"I am the Law!" While Stallone made us cringe with his awful rendition of Megacity 1's toughest lawman, hearing Dredd say it while shooting a cavity in a perp's head is absolute bliss. You have been warned, citizen.

I'm in two minds about Judge Dredd. On the one hand the game really goes out of its way to provide a proper title based on the Judge Dredd world, even adding such nice touches as zombie Fatties and Judge Anderson's cleavage. But purely through doing this, the game also drops a few conventions FPS players will be used to by now.

The first is the Lawgiver - the firearm all Judges use. It has six bullet types so you never need to use any other firearm. While it makes sense to equip your law enforcers with the equivalent of a sadist's Swiss Army Knife, it does mean that your selection of guns is limited, since Rebellion didn't feel the need to expand much in this area.

Yet another dynamic resulting directly from playing as a Judge, is that you can't just shoot people. Don't get me wrong - not only is there is plenty of violence to go around, since almost nobody goes quietly (plus arresting people is fun). But you can disarm a perp by shooting the weapon out of their hands. The idea here is to arrest them - arresting perps keeps your Judge Meter in check, adding to your final score.

The final score of each map is pretty important and it takes into account your accuracy, sentences given, people shot, Judge Meter (which dictates how lawful you've acted) and time to complete a level. This assigns a rank to you, which unlocks new content. Mostly these are multiplayer models, but you can also unlock new arcade levels to play. Sadly, Rebellion opted to use no artwork from the comics at all, something I'd have liked to see as a fan. The subsequent arcade levels come in various forms. In some you need to kill a certain amount of enemy units, in others you have to escort witnesses or even take on judges. These are a blessing, because the single player campaign is far too short. Playing it in the two-player co-op mode, we finished it in less than six hours. Going solo is significantly tougher, but it's not a hard game to play. Not enough changes. You never fly in an H-Wagon or take a ride on your bike or even take pot-shots at Bat Gliders. The game's lifespan would also have been extended significantly if there were more levels involving solving day-to-day crimes, such as stopping bank robbers. Considering the amount of options the designers had, I think they did far too little.

Justice Dredd style

Multiplayer makes up for some of it, but not really enough. While the designers made a ton of game modes, there's nothing spectacular here and definitely not much to extend the life of the game. The Block Wars mode is particularly disappointing, since you can walk into the opposing block and shoot people in the head, instead of sticking to your building (disappointing to Dredd fans and dull to conventional multiplayer gamers).

Despite all the drawbacks, I had a lot of fun playing Dredd vs. Death, but perhaps that's because I'm a great fan of the comics. But take that away and you have a very standard shooter that won't stand up to the top titles on the market. In trying to strike a balance between mainstream gamers and Dredd fans, Rebellion has managed to do neither, instead giving what is really a bit of a lacklustre attempt at a shooter.

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Minimum Specification
Pentium III 700 MHz | 128 MB RAM | 16 x CD ROM | 32 MB DirectX 9 Video Accelerator | 1.5 GB HDD

- ☺ Judge Dredd!
- ☺ Lots of action
- ☺ Feels like a comic
- ⊗ Too short
- ⊗ Not enough variation

Summary
Rebellion had a lot to work with here and yet they ended up with a pretty standard shooter. Sure, it's authentically Dredd, but get beyond that and you have a lacklustre shooter that plays well but doesn't leave you with any fondness afterwards.

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developer: strategy first [] **publisher:** strategy first [] **distributor:** tba
rrp: tba [] **genre:** turn based strategy [] **internet:** www.disciples2.com/D2/
platforms: pc

reviewer: Brett "Hunter" Smith

pc review:

disciples 2: rise of the elves

NAG AWARD OF MERIT

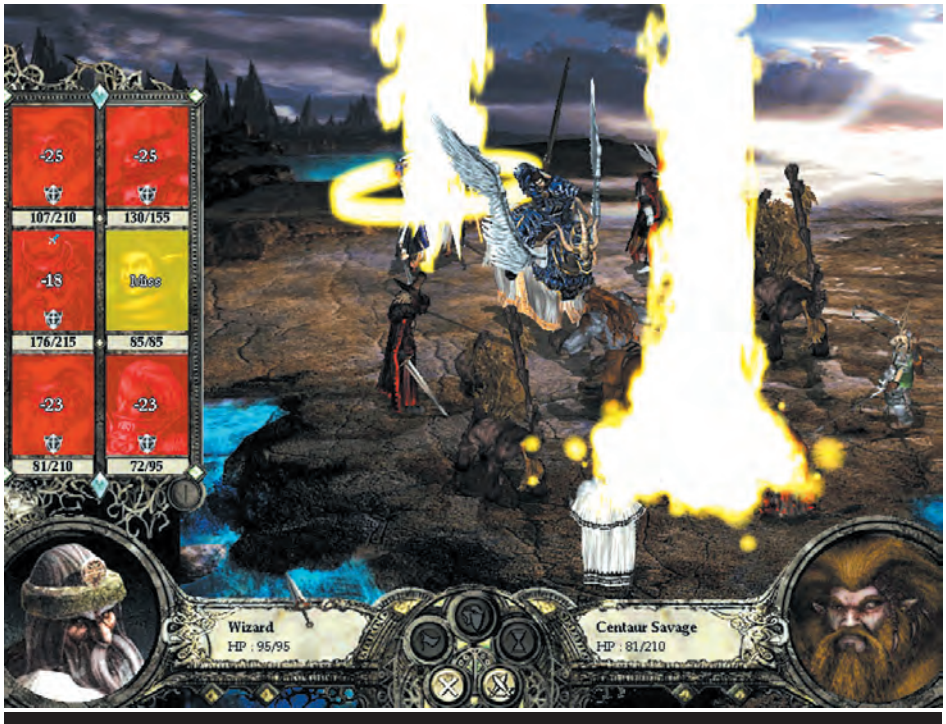
Rise of the Elves, expansion for the epic Disciples 2: Dark Prophecy has struck the gaming market with all the grace and precision one would expect from a well aimed arrow. Disciples 2 gamers have always run afoul of this ancient race, and at long last they can take control of these fey champions themselves.

With the success of Dark Prophecy, one would expect Strategy First to be hard pressed to improve upon such a gem. Yet they have, once again claiming superiority in the turn based strategy market. All the nuances of Dark Prophecy have made their way into Rise of the Elves, along with the attention to detail, time and effort Disciples fans have come to expect from the developers. While Rise of the Elves adds little to the existing game, apart of course from new units, various game enhancements and upgraded map editor options, Rise of the Elves nonetheless is a complete success, and a most worthy addition to the Disciples 2 world. The reason Rise of the Elves has been so eagerly anticipated is simply because the original game was that awesome. But what is Disciples 2? Five races are yours to command, each with their own unique strengths and weaknesses, each with their own tale and unfolding set of events. The storyline for each race is masterfully done; the writers managing to give each tale an individual flair as well as having them compliment each other. After selecting your race (Demon, Human, Dwarven, Undead or Elven) you choose a Lord type. A Warrior Lord grants your troops regeneration, a Mage Lord can cast each spell twice a day instead of once, and Guildmaster Lords grant their thieves many more abilities than the other Lords. Unlike most strategy games, combat is not won by hurling hordes of units at enemies in the hope that sheer numbers prevail. Instead, each hero can have up to five units supporting him. These heroes and units gain experience and level as they progress. Apart from improved hit points and damage, heroes gain extra abilities. When a creature levels, they "evolve", gaining an entirely new form, new attack animation and upgraded skills. Before a unit can upgrade, it requires not only enough experience points, but also the pre-requisite building in your Capital. Often a build tree branches, leaving you with a tempting choice of upgrade paths. Once a certain path has been chosen, the other branch falls away. Losing your upgraded units is a serious loss, not only in what those units bring to the battle, but in time invested in them. If you cannot get them resurrected, you'll need to start over with a level 1 unit again.

The game is visually beautiful; each spell has its own animation, and there are over 100 of them. Combat is simply stunning, for once combat is entered the game takes on a pseudo Final Fantasy style with impressive attack animations.

Multiplayer allows up to four players to battle each other. The campaign editor offers a plethora of options yet is exceptionally easy to use, allowing you to weave your own story with all the bells and whistles you wish, improving the shelf life tremendously. Rise of the Elves adds new units and options, allowing you to create scenarios limited only by your imagination. The sheer attention to detail, and the time and effort invested in this game, catapults Disciples 2 above the rest. Bugs are virtually non-existent, and the patches are there more to improve your gaming experience than to fix what few bugs have crept in. Disciples 2 and Rise of the Elves are unequivocal proof that there are still games out there unmarred by shoddy development, insufficient beta testing or the general malaise that has befallen many games of late.

A refreshing and thoroughly addictive game, Rise of the Elves will provide you with numerous hours of entertainment as you lead dragons, werewolves, gargoyles, demons (in fact, over 200 units) against your foes.



Pillars of flame and other biblical style ways of smiting the enemy...

a good deal

Interestingly, Strategy First has decided to include Disciples 2: Dark Prophecy along with Rise of the Elves, so you gain the entire game as well as this expansion. Furthermore, it is already updated to the latest patch. If that is not worthy of honourable mention, then nothing is.

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all games reviewed on rectron machines

Minimum Specification
Pentium 233 MHz | 32 MB RAM | 8 x CD ROM | 8 MB D3D Video Accelerator 1.1 GB

- ☺ Stunning attention to detail
- ☺ Engrossing storylines
- ☺ Pure addictiveness

Summary
At long last the Elves have arrived, and we have the honour of leading them into battle. A much anticipated expansion to Disciples 2, Rise of the Elves adds beautifully to the existing storyline. Along with new units and upgraded map editor options, this is a worthy expansion for an already epic game.

85

developer: plastic reality [] **publisher:** cenega [] **distributor:** bowline (0800) 203 048
rrp: R 199 [] **genre:** squad-based military strategy [] **internet:** www.koreaforgottenconflict.com
platforms: pc

reviewer: Iwan "Da3dalus" Pienaar

pc review:

korea: forgotten conflict

World War II (WWII) titles have been a dime-a-dozen ever since the start of computer gaming in the eighties. Recently, developers have cottoned on to the fact that there have been other great wars in the 20th century. One war that has received little or no game coverage has been the Korean one of the 1950s. Spanning the conflict from 1950 to 1953, Forgotten Conflict is a more elaborate version of the classic Commandos.

In fact, when playing Forgotten Conflict one can be forgiven for thinking that developer Plastic Reality merely expanded on play dynamic elements of the Commandos series. This is not entirely true. Plastic Reality readily admits to being influenced by Commandos, but Forgotten Conflict is an attempt to break free from the standard squad-based real-time strategy offerings.

Featuring 12 levels, it places the gamer in control of a squad of up to five military specialists that include a demolition expert, a sniper and a medic. Sound familiar yet? However, unlike Commandos, each squad member is able to perform the actions of another one. Sure, your demolition expert is going to make a poor medic, but these are all military specialists that would have received extensive training in different fields. As has become the wont of war games, Forgotten Conflict features a tactical mode that allows the player to pause the game and issue commands to his/her squad.

One area that really stands out in the game is its graphics. Liquid Reality put in some hard work in the games 3D environment and it shows. The terrains are all beautifully rendered and the weather effects are really something to watch out for. Unfortunately, the game is quite buggy with the sound being the most annoying problem. Using two different PCs, I simply could not get the sound to work properly. Forgotten Conflict also crashes frequently and occasionally your squad members get stuck necessitating a restart of the mission.

Alas, Forgotten Conflict does not feature a multiplayer game mode. Pity, since this could have worked very well in the "new" setting.

Korea: Forgotten Conflict, like so many of Cenega's other offerings, promises much but fails in its delivery. If you are willing to forgive the game its bugs, then the subject matter and graphics should make playing the game less frustrating. Buy at your own risk.

- ☺ Different
- ☺ Tactical mode
- ☺ Similar to Commandos
- ☹ Buggy
- ☹ No multiplayer
- ☹ Sound issues

75

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developer: ea sports [] **publisher:** electronic arts [] **distributor:** ea africa (011) 516 8300
rrp: R 299 [] **genre:** sports[] **internet:** www.fifafootball2004.ea.com
platforms: pc | ps2 | xbox | gcn

reviewer: Iwan "Da3dalus" Pienaar

pc review:

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fifa 2004

It is that time of year again when the latest EA football incarnation, FIFA 2004, has arrived on our shores. FIFA Football 2004 is simply the best title in the franchise. Well, until FIFA 2005 comes out that is.

I have been a critic of Electronic Arts (EA) for releasing at least one football title a year since its inception. It is not as if the new releases are bad. On the contrary, the titles are all very good in their own way. It is just that I believe that EA could have the latest squads and players as well as improved game elements available as downloadable patches instead of getting gamers to purchase a new title every year just because of some minor improvement. After having played FIFA 2004 for a couple of weeks now, I have been converted. Simply put, this offering puts all its predecessors to shame. EA has just about improved on every element of the FIFA franchise. The graphics and music are the real crowd pleasers of this package. EA has really pulled out all the stops when it comes to motion capturing the players in the game. If you are a regular football spectator, you will even notice the different idiosyncrasies of some of the players. Even just watching the computer play against itself is great fun.

The company has also stayed true to its tradition of releasing sport titles with funky soundtracks. FIFA 2004 is no different except for the sheer range of country-specific tracks to choose from. While veterans of the series will feel right at home with the controls, EA has made several enhancements to the game dynamic. For one, the player is now able to control off the ball players much better during the game. Tactics can also be changed on the fly, although in the heat of the action things can become fairly frenetic.

FIFA 2004 also introduces an enhanced management system to the franchise that would put some dedicated management games to shame. The set pieces have received a makeover with the player being able to choose the exact type of spin to impart on the ball. The physics behind the engine is very realistic and will be a treat for all David Beckham students.

While it is possible to have fun playing FIFA 2004 with a keyboard, I would suggest using a controller as it simplifies all the numerous key combinations.

Unfortunately, gamers will need to download a patch before getting the most from their experience as this will enable one to change the controller settings and play IP and LAN matches. Of course, my biggest gripe of the franchise persists. I can understand that it is impossible to include every league in the world. EA could at least try and include all the top leagues. After all, how many times are you going to play an English third division team? Bar these annoyances, FIFA 2004 has become my favourite sports title and is a must-have for all football supporters.

- ☺ Play Dynamic
- ☺ Graphics
- ☺ Music
- ☹ Finicky controls
- ☹ Some leagues get preferential treatment
- ☹ Technical issues

83

developer: kuju [] **publisher:** thq [] **distributor:** WWE [011] 462 0150
rrp: R 299 [] **genre:** first person shooter [] **internet:** www.firewarrior.com
platforms: pc

reviewer: Iwan "Da3dalus" Pienaar

pc review: warhammer 40 000: fire warrior

The well-known strategy table top game, Warhammer 40 000, has had its fair share of computer titles in the past. Unfortunately, the most recent offering, Fire Warrior, should be approached with a pinch of salt as it is perhaps one of the worst games I have ever had the displeasure of playing.

The developers Kuju decided to break away from the strategy aspect of the franchise and go the first-person shooter route. While this does not sound like such a bad idea in theory, the way it is implemented fails dismally. Fire Warrior simply does not bring anything new to the genre. It is almost as if the developers thought that they could throw together a slip-shod title and justify it by saying that the game is based on a well-known franchise (Star Wars games anyone?).

It also suffers from numerous technical glitches. For one, the damage model is totally deficient. On several occasions I stood within point-blank range of an enemy, emptying several magazines of my most powerful weapon into his chest, only to see him still standing there.

On other occasions, the enemy grunt could be walking in the distance with me firing one shot in his general direction only to see him keel over. It also takes an insanely long amount of time to reload your weapons. Thankfully, the enemy also suffers from this. It would be extremely funny, if it was not so damn annoying, to gaze out on the battlefield and see all the soldiers crouching and reloading their weapons.

So who would enjoy Fire Warrior then? To tell you the truth, I have no idea. It would be best if gamers give this title a wide berth. Unfortunately, the damage to my poor psyche has been irreparable (the things we have to do for our readers). [*You're such a soldier, Ed*].

- ☺ It installs
- ☺ Big levels
- ☺ Umm… DVD packaging?
- ☹ Damage control system
- ☹ Nothing new
- ☹ Slow weapon reload time

50

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developer: related designs [] **publisher:** CDV [] **distributor:** WWE [011] 462 0150
rrp: R 299 [] **genre:** strategy[] **internet:** www.nomans-land.com
platforms: pc

reviewer: Alex "R.A.V.E.N." Jelagin

pc review: no man's land

This game is subtitled "Fight For Your Rights!", and I can't help but think that we should be fighting for our rights to games that are fun to play.

The setting of No Man's Land is pioneer-era Northern America, and involved factions include the English, French, Spanish and several Red Indian factions. The developers seem to have missed the point with regards to what constitutes a game that is fun to play. Instead of providing a game dynamic with pace and vigour, they have instead swamped us with hundreds of units. Now, granted, a decent variety of units is important, but an overwhelming multitude like this just makes the game tedious. Particularly when the units are tiny and the interface is sluggish.

The graphical engine seems to be a 3D version of Age of Empires, at least in terms of appearance. The landscape models and textures are quite good, displaying a fair amount of detail. The unit models, however, are too small to be easily distinguished, forcing frequent zooming in that reduces overall battlefield awareness. This is no doubt the result of an attempt at realistic scaling of units in comparison to buildings. However, in a game, realism should take a back seat to playability.

One interesting innovation in this game is the fact that cavalry units can be made to dismount, for example when facing spear-wielding infantry. It is sad to see such sophistications go to waste by being surrounded by a boring game dynamic. No Man's Land is also quite resource intensive, even though the level of the graphics doesn't really justify this. The game also suffers from some bugs, particularly in terms of sound playback, which is often choppy.

The game's tendency to wave an American flag around also virtually ensures that it will only really appeal to American patriots, possibly in addition to grizzled old historians. If the Age of Empires games are too fast-paced for you, then by all means check this one out. Otherwise, I would recommend you rather try something from Blizzard or Electronic Arts.

- ☺ Some minor elegant subtleties
- ☹ Poor sound
- ☹ Slow

40

developer: lost toys [] **publisher:** encore studios [] **distributor:** tba
rrp: tba [] **genre:** first person sdhooter [] **internet:** www.losttoys.com
platforms: pc | ps2 | xbox

reviewer: Brett "Hunter" Smith

pc review:

battle engine aquila

What happens when you get arrested for illegal racing? Why, get given the sleekest and most powerful weapon the Forsetti forces have available, of course! There is one tiny catch though; you have to destroy the Muspell forces which have declared war on the Forsetti.

With the controls of the Battle Engine Aquila at your fingertips, it's time to embark on a series of action packed missions. But what is the Battle Engine? Simply, it's a large piece of Mecha hardware that can transform for both ground and air based battles. Just don't try to go swimming with it.

An Xbox port, the game runs well on computer, though its multiplayer is sadly lacking. Furthermore, both players will need to use the same computer, the action taking place in split screen mode. Being an Xbox port, there are a number of goodies to unlock, such as character bios and artwork. Whilst piloting the Aquila, you get the distinct impression that you are but one unit in a large RTS game. Enemy and friendly units swarm over the landscape and dart through the air, explosions send infantry flying and missile strikes bombard the land around you. Taking the Aquila into the air and looking down serves to drive this impression home even more firmly. This is a war and it actually feels like it.

The graphics are beautiful, the music fast paced. Combined with the sheer amount of things happening around you, Battle Engine Aquila thrusts you headlong into fast paced and often hectic battles. As the game progresses you gain wingmen and new weapon combinations. Sadly you cannot choose how to outfit the Aquila, and have to accept the configurations presented to you.

At the end of the day it's a great deal of fun, and if you have enough patience you'll be able to unlock all those goodies.

- ☺ Over 40 missions
- ☺ Action packed
- ☺ Feels like you are in battle
- ☹ Poor multiplayer
- ☹ Unlocking goodies sometimes requires too much

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developer: bitmap brothers [] **publisher:** strategy first [] **distributor:** wwe [011] 462-0150
rrp: R 299 [] **genre:** real time strategy [] **internet:** www.frontlinecommand.com
platforms: pc

reviewer: Walt "Shryke" Pretorius

pc review:

world war II: frontline command

World War II has been a topic of interest almost ever since it happened. And this is no less true of the PC game market as any other form of entertainment. But the strategy market of this genre is a little under investigated, with only a number of titles from CDV making any real impact. However, the legendary Bitmap Brothers have now taken up the cause…

When the name Bitmap Brothers is mentioned, one expects a certain level of quality - developers don't become legendary without reason, after all. So it is with good reason that a player will expect a lot from WWII Frontline Command. However, even legends have weaknesses, and this game is somewhat of an Achilles' heel of this particular development crew.

Frontline Command takes the player to the battle in the form of a 3D squad based strategy game that is ostensibly isometric with a reasonable amount of camera control. As a matter of fact, Frontline Command is not a bad game at all. But it's not what one would expect from the makers, and it doesn't go far enough to compete with titles from other developers. Blitzkrieg, for example, was a better game, although it did lack some of the features that this title has.

Despite some very good ideas, Frontline Command doesn't shine when the overall picture is considered. It is more user friendly than certain other games, but graphically, sound wise and in terms of plain old play dynamic, it has nothing incredible to offer. Additionally, the lack of a skirmish mode is a sad oversight on the part of the developers.

Frontline Command is not quite as tough as titles like Sudden Strike, so it holds a certain appeal for the less than hard-core strategy gamer. That said, though, buyers may want to try it out before they commit cash to buying it. Get past the few niggles and it can be fun.

- ☺ Easy to get into
- ☹ Not exceptional

66

developer: secret level [] **publisher:** atari [] **distributor:** megarom [011] 234-2680
rrp: R 349 [] **genre:** strategy [] **internet:** www.mtggame.com
platforms: pc | xbox

reviewer: Walt "Shryke" Pretorius

pc review: magic: the gathering - battlegrounds

The greatest games in history are often those that seem simple on the surface, and yet are deeply complex affairs, games that require a player to delve so much deeper than just the basic rules and principles of play to the subtle strategies that exist hidden within the game. Games where forethought and planning are as important as making a move - Magic: The Gathering is such a game - at least when played with cards, it is…

While there have been other incarnations of Magic: The Gathering on the PC, they have all been based around the card game. These earlier titles used virtual cards to play the game, and were rather enjoyable, if a real game couldn't be found. Battlegrounds takes a different, more literal approach. In this game, the supposed wizard duellists who sling spells at each other are clearly depicted - two characters who face up and use various spells to try and best each other in a real time struggle.

The spirit of Magic: The Gathering is one of careful consideration and forethought. This, due to the real time aspect of the game, is lost entirely. The player runs around to collect mana, and then casts spells as quickly as possible from a limited selection of abilities. It's all about speed, with little or no finesse needed. This button bashing makes for a rather poor rendition of the card game it is based on. Additionally, Magic: The Gathering Battlegrounds is a port, and it shows. The graphics and sound aren't the culprits though - it's the control system. The strangest choices of control buttons add to the horror with which this game will be received by M: TG fans.

Battlegrounds is a poor attempt at recreating a more paced and lively version of what is (and should always be), a thoughtful and slow paced game. All finesse and skill has been stripped out of it, to make a title with little merit even as a standalone game.

☺ Pretty

☹ Button basher
☹ Not much finesse
☹ Lost the MTG spirit

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developer: inevitable entertainment [] **publisher:** vivendi universal [] **distributor:** nu metro [011] 340-9345
rrp: R 280 [] **genre:** adventure [] **internet:** www.lotr.com
platforms: pc | ps2 | xbox | gcn

reviewer: Walt "Shryke" Pretorius

pc review: the hobbit

With The Lord of the Rings fever still running high, it's small wonder that someone saw fit to bring out a game based on the "prequel" to the trilogy, a book that is almost as celebrated as the longer Lord saga. Based on The Hobbit, this game looks at the adventures of Bilbo Baggins and the events that lead to the discovery of the one ring, as told by Tolkien.

Vivendi Universal tried to challenge EA's position as Lord of the Rings software top dog once, and failed. But now Sierra have taken to the fray, although their approach is somewhat different. Rather than try to create a Lord of the Rings game, they went to the next best source material: the Hobbit. This game is definitely aimed at a younger market, much as Tolkien's book is. It is a third person adventure title that pretty much captures the spirit of the book while not necessarily remaining faithful to the original story. In fact, within the first few minutes, discrepancies can be found. However, assume that this is just a form of developers licence, because the game itself is highly entertaining. It does get a little tedious at times, what with the myriad of "sub quests" that create a bit of bogginess, but on the whole it is a satisfying gaming experience. It's a pretty game to look at, and the voice acting is of a good enough quality to make it enjoyable. Additionally, the game features a simple control set-up (due to it being a port) that is easy to learn and pretty much handles everything effectively. It's best summed up as a Tolkien platform title, with adventure elements. It won't be everyone's bag, but it will keep youngsters and fans of Middle Earth well entertained.

☺ Nice control
☺ Pretty

☹ Not true to story in small ways

65

developer: bioware [] **publisher:** atari [] **distributor:** megarom [011] 234-2680
rrp: R 249 [] **genre:** role playing [] **internet:** http://nwn.bioware.com/underdark/
platforms: pc

reviewer: Walt "Shryke" Pretorius

pc review: neverwinter nights: hordes of the underdark

Far beneath the city of Waterdeep lies a section of a vast subterranean expanse called the Underdark, from where dread creatures could at any time rise up and lay waste to the world above. And that time is now…

It may have started in Neverwinter, but the Neverwinter Nights is becoming something of a Faerun gazetteer, featuring a different city and district of the Sword Coast with each new expansion. This time it's off to metropolitan Waterdeep, where all races live in harmony. All, of course, but the Drow, dark elves who reside far below in a vast cavern system called the Underdark. And now, lead by a powerful female of the species, they have decided to wreak havoc on the surface world. Hordes has done something that was missing in Shadows of Undrentide, the previous expansion. This time round, it's quite possible to take your favourite character (who would have been a bit too powerful for the previous expansion) and enter the Underdark with just the right amount of challenge. That's because Hordes is designed for higher level characters. In fact, level one characters are pretty much D.O.A. in this title, which features stronger monsters, new creatures and spells, as well as undiscovered settings and all that kind of stuff.

The really nice thing is that the game allows character development into what is known in D&D as "epic characters." These adventuring juggernauts can achieve levels above the normal limit of twenty - right up to thirtieth level, in fact. More complicated scripting in the game means that older machines will suffer a little, but those that don't encounter any problems will find this an entertaining and worthwhile extra twenty hours of Neverwinter Nights.

☺ More Neverwinter Nights
☺ High level characters
☹ Older machines suffer

84

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developer: firaxis [] **publisher:** atari [] **distributor:** megarom [011] 234-2680
rrp: R 229 [] **genre:** turn based strategy [] **internet:** www.civ3.com
platforms: pc

reviewer: James "Priest" Francis

pc review: civilisation III: conquests

There are two things certain in life - death and taxes. And once you run your own empire, it's amazing just how much of those two you get to deal out. Of course, as Sid Meier's classic game has taught us, being supreme ruler of all isn't easy, but it can be fun.

In a nutshell, if you don't play Civilisation, don't bother reading this review. It's not aimed at you. And if the score seems high, that's because it's a Civilisation-based score, and has nothing to do with any other game or expansion out there. The pack introduces seven new nations, each with their own advantages, though none of them are particularly different to the races you can already find, other than new graphics and the relevant historical names. They did, though, add five new wonders such as The Internet and The Knights Templar. Conquests also introduces the arrival of Tobacco, Jade, Sugar and other resources, not to mention several new military units, plus even more tribe-specific units. The package is rounded off with new campaigns and new victory conditions (including the fun Regicide, where a nation has a king unit that must be killed). But as with any proper expansion of this nature, the real tweaks are the ones you do not notice. The most obvious is the Governor, a button in each city's screen that allows you to let the PC manage a city. This keeps such pesky problems as famine, civil disorder and taxes out of your hair. A Cycle Cities button is also now available, as is moving units in stacks, instead of telling each one to move when they are all clustered together. This makes the management of large civilisations a lot easier. A small tweak I really appreciated was the ability to name units, making sure some squads stand out from the crowd. I tended to name units according to their cities of origin or the regions I wanted them to spend most of their time in (thus making sure I don't waste valuable moves accidentally moving a unit somewhere else). Unless you are dead happy with Civilisation 3 as is, this is a good buy, especially since it gives the game a new lease of life current players will enjoy.

☺ New interface additions
☺ New clans and resources
☺ New conditions and campaigns
☹ Only appeals to Civilisation 3 fans
☹ Tech tree still slow

87

developer: insomniac games [] **publisher:** sce [] **distributor:** ster kinekor [011] 445-7900
rrp: R 499 [] **genre:** platformer [] **internet:** www.ratchetandclankgadgets.com
platforms: ps2

reviewer: Adam "Madman" Liebman

ps2 review:

ratchet and clank: going commando

The immensely successful starring duo of the original Ratchet & Clank are back, albeit with a few minor personality modifications, in all their glory in Going Commando, and thankfully, Insomniac Games have managed to improve upon the original in almost every way.

Ratchet & Clank 2 opens with our heroes trying to combat an enemy even greater than the one they defeated at the end of the first game: trying to figure out how to keep themselves busy after saving the universe.

Needless to say, the start of a new adventure isn't too far off, and the pair are soon on a quest to retrieve a stolen experiment for a slightly eccentric businessman. As you might imagine, this soon evolves into something far more epic, but the story, though entertaining, is certainly not revolutionary, though it manages to be gripping despite its simplicity. In terms of the play dynamic, the action is still more shooting than platform orientated, though the difficulty has been scaled up somewhat, making Going Commando a more fulfilling affair than its predecessor. Also, your arsenal now consists of a total of 22 weapons, all of which gain "experience" as you use them, allowing them to be upgradeable. Also on offer are several mini-games to keep things interesting. In terms of visuals, Ratchet & Clank 2 is absolutely awe-inspiring, with wonderfully detailed and colourful (not to mention huge) levels, and a frame rate that almost never skips a beat. Once again, the sound effects and music are spot on, and the voice acting superbly brings the quirky characters to life, though it should be said that Ratchet's personality in particular has somewhat matured, which is by no means a bad thing, as he now tends to be far less annoying than the first time around. All in all, Insomniac Games have done a sterling job not only in addressing and correcting all the flaws of the first game, but also in improving most other aspects of the game, resulting in a thoroughly engrossing and entertaining platform experience that no-one should be allowed to miss.

- ☺ Amazing graphics
- ☺ Immensely re-playable
- ☺ Thoroughly entertaining play dynamic
- ☹ Story could be better

87

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developer: nintendo [] **publisher:** nintendo [] **distributor:** futronic [011] 315-0179
rrp: R 499 [] **genre:** racing[] **internet:** www.nintendo.com
platforms: gcn

reviewer: Ed "Miktar" Dracon

gcn review:

mario kart double dash

A noticeable gap in the GameCube range is that of racing titles. Not wanting to disappoint, Nintendo takes the opportunity to once again push their established character menagerie of Mario, Peach, Bowser and co. to try and fill the speedster void with their newest addition to the Mario Kart series with Mario Kart: Double Dash.

Double Dash may seem to sport a very primitive racing concept, yet quite the contrary prevails. A kart itself has two characters on it, one to drive, one to dish out punishment in the form of power-ups found on the track itself. You can swap between the two characters at any time so as to hold double the amount of power-ups or to switch between the latent abilities of the different characters. Each character has a specific power-up that works differently for them, for example, instead of the usual Shell attack - Bowser hurls a massive kart-crushing shell. Finding a character that suits your play-style is half the fun.

The other half of the fun (and most of it) comes in the form of the ludicrously addictive multiplayer. Broadband adaptor aside (which allows up to 8 players), you can distribute 4 players any which-way you like, either as a 2 on 2 cooperative battle (one drives, one shoots), or as a 4 player free-for-all. You can either race the championship races or participate in Battle Royal style Deathmatch games where you have to pop each others balloons or simply hold on to a Shine for a certain amount of time. Cooperative play is the main focus and while there are elements where players have to work together if they are on a single kart, it feels like Nintendo didn't add enough to make the title last. There are only a few courses and hardly any un-lockable content. While it could be considered a quick cash-cow, Double Dash still manages to provide good entertainment if you have the controllers and friends.

- ☺ Cooperative fun
- ☺ Many multiplayer modes
- ☺ It's Mario Kart
- ☹ Not enough tracks
- ☹ Not enough content

70

developer: electronic arts [] **publisher:** electronic arts [] **distributor:** ea africa [011] 516-8300
rrp: R 385 [] **genre:** sports[] **internet:** www.harrypotter.ea.com
platforms: pc | ps2 | xbox | gcn

reviewer: Walt "Shryke" pretorius

ps2 review:

NOW AVAILABLE

harry potter: quidditch world cup

The Harry Potter craze meant that this title was bound to come along sooner or later. Quidditch World Cup allows the player to enter into a tournament of Quidditch against the best teams in the world in a game that is either a Harry Potter title for sports fans, or a sports title for Harry Potter fans.

Harry Potter: Quidditch World Cup is yet another product to add to the ever expanding Potter franchise. In it, the player takes control of a team of Quidditch players to try and best opponents.

Initial games are played at Hogwarts, and serve as something of a tutorial on how to play the game. Here you learn all about Chasers, Seekers, and the Golden Snitch and learn how to get to grips with what can, at times, seem like a complicated affair.

In truth, the game turns out to be formulaic before long. Using the same tactic over and over will almost guarantee victory for the player although this isn't because the game is easy to control. The simple systems are sure enough, but complicated moves and special tricks take some getting used to.

Quidditch World Cup's target market is certainly a younger audience, although the game does appeal to all with its good graphics and excellent coverage of the game.

It is true to the Potter universe, and includes characters that will be fondly remembered from the book - including unlocking the Bulgarian Quidditch team.

On the whole, the game is nothing really special, although fans of the Potter universe will doubtlessly derive more enjoyment from it than others. It's a fun distraction, sure, but does not go much beyond that status.

It is neither a great sports title, nor a great Potter title. It treads the waters of superior mediocrity.

☺ Fun
☺ True to the universe

☹ Predictable
☹ Too easy

60

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developer: SCEE soho [] **publisher:** scee [] **distributor:** ster kinekor [011] 445-7900
rrp: R 449 [] **genre:** dancing [] **internet:** www.eyetoy.com
platforms: ps2

reviewer: Walt "Shryke" Pretorius

ps2 review:

NOW AVAILABLE

eye toy: groove

The Eye Toy, along with its Play disk, performed something of a revolution in the gaming world. The fact that the player was the controller amazed those who played it and, despite the fact that the games provided with the unit were simple at best, the Eye Toy became a popular item. So what's next?

Eye Toy Groove, that's what. In their rush to capitalise on the success of the Eye Toy, SCEE Soho have produced another game for the unusual input device. And, quite predictably, it's about dancing.

Eye Toy Groove has a lot of potential, but lacks a lot of polish and is missing certain features that one would think were absolutely necessary for a game of its type. It comes with a large number of dance music tracks for the player to make use of, and features music videos and the like. But what if it's not your taste? Tough! All you head bangers out there who thought you might be able to play Eye Toy Groove with erratic head movements and swishing hair better think again, because the one feature that should have been included - the ability to play your own CDs and "choreograph" your own routines - is conspicuous in its absence.

Eye Toy Groove feels rushed. The game lacks a lot of polish and has almost no substance. However, the title does come down to a matter of "what you make of it." If you just stand there and wave your arms, it's pretty dull. If you actually dance, it's not so dull.

The fact still remains, though, that the developers could have taken the game a few steps further. They could have included fun features and challenges that were more than mere prancing about in front of a camera.

▲ These screen shots are only representative of the game. The usual background is filled with dirty coffee cups, ugly people and unmade beds

☺ It's Eye Toy!

☹ Rushed
☹ Can't use your own music

50

developer: indy games [] **publisher:** sci [] **distributor:** ster kinekor [011] 445-7900
rrp: tba [] **genre:** extreme sports [] **internet:** www.sci.co.uk
platforms: ps2 | xbox | gcn

reviewer: Adam "Madman" Liebman

ps2 review:

rolling

NOW AVAILABLE

Extreme sports titles are undoubtedly in abundant supply right now, but sadly, most appear to simply be rip-offs of more established titles, and unfortunately, Rolling offers too little in the way of innovation to escape obscurity in this already overpopulated genre.

Having played as many extreme sports titles as I have, it's become painfully obvious to me that whether the subject matter is skateboarding, wakeboarding, biking or even inline-skating, the play dynamic is almost certainly identical to any other game in the genre, and Rolling is no exception. Everything from level-design to the control system is thoroughly reminiscent of the entire Tony Hawks series, save for the latest Hawk game. Each level has a list of objectives, generally comprised of high-scores that need to be achieved, items that need to be collected, and gaps or transfers that have to be found and completed. After completing enough of the objectives, a new level or competition (once again, a la Tony Hawk's Pro Skater) is unlocked. Despite its similarity to other titles in the genre, though, Rolling still manages to be entertaining, and completing all the objectives for each level is sure to keep you busy for a while, though the control system tends to feel clunky and unresponsive at times, making for unnecessary frustration. The interface too can be confusing, particularly in the Create-a-Skater mode, which is but a stripped-down replica of that seen in other titles. Visually, Rolling is far from being an eyesore, but is also by no means superb - the levels and character models could certainly have been better detailed, and the animations could have been a little more fluid. The sound track is typical fare for the genre, consisting mainly of punk rock music, but is nothing remarkable. Rolling does, however, boast a play-list editor, so you can ensure that your favourite tracks are played while omitting those you aren't particularly fond of. Despite its flaws, Rolling certainly does have the potential to be an entertaining and enjoyable game, but I sadly couldn't shake the feeling that I'd done it all before, not to mention the impression that a little more work could have gone into polishing a few of the title's rough edges. If you are desperately seeking an inline-skating title, this might fulfil your craving, but if you don't particularly care for rollerblading, you'd do better with Tony Hawk's latest offering.

☺ Manages to be entertaining
☺ Authentic recreation of the sport
☹ Resembles other titles too closely
☹ Average graphics
☹ Poor creation mode

64

developer: terminal reality [] **publisher:** midway [] **distributor:** ster kinekor [011] 445-7900
rrp: R 449 [] **genre:** action[] **internet:** http://roadkill.midway.com
platforms: ps2 | xbox | gcn

reviewer: Adam "Madman" Liebman

ps2 review:

roadkill

NOW AVAILABLE

Driving around with reckless abandon whilst spewing hot lead at pretty much anything that moves in a plague-ravaged post-apocalyptic style world is certainly an enticing video gaming prospect, and that's precisely the thinking behind Midway and Terminal Reality's latest offering, Roadkill.

At the outset, I feel it imperative to forewarn you that Roadkill is blatantly vulgar, with more than a healthy dose of explicit violence thrown in for good measure. Toilet humour rules the day and anyone easily offended would do best to give Roadkill a miss. Having got that out of the way, Roadkill is an addictive and entertaining game, despite its obvious similarity to the Grand Theft Auto series, though a greater focus on Roadkill's shooting aspects than the GTA titles. You assume the role of Mason Strong, a bitter and jaded man who has a score to settle with one of the most powerful gang's leader. Throughout the course of the game, you'll find yourself working as a mercenary for different gangs through three different cities, with the ultimate aim of exacting revenge on a former partner. The story certainly isn't extraordinary, but it does well to tie the action together, and excellent voice-acting makes the cut-scenes at least somewhat entertaining, if at times somewhat disturbing. The majority of the game sees you driving around the cities fulfilling various objectives, such as crate deliveries and assassinations, whilst trying to fend off rival gangs as well as the cops, using a variety of obtainable weapons, as well as some assistance from a computer controlled tail-gunner. Visually, aside from a few incidents of slow-down, Roadkill's graphics are pleasing to the eye, with very nicely detailed cities and vehicles, and well animated pedestrians. Thankfully, the game is long enough to keep you occupied for upwards of 8 hours without becoming too tedious or repetitive, though the multiplayer mode can quickly become tiresome. Terminal Reality have done a good job of producing an entertaining title best described as a mixture of Grand Theft Auto and Twisted Metal, with a very simple yet effective and addictive play dynamic. It's not the most original title around, and at times it may be too crass and offensive for its own good, but for a mind-numbing vehicular blasting frenzy, it's certainly a worthwhile title.

☺ Addictive
☺ Great voice acting
☺ No-frills fun
☹ A little too vulgar
☹ Lack of originality

70

developer: warthog [] **publisher:** vivendi universal [] **distributor:** nu metro [011] 340 9300
rrp: R 499 [] **genre:** first person shooter [] **internet:** www.bountyhunter-games.com
platforms: pc | ps2 | xbox | gcn

reviewer: Adam "Madman" Liebman

ps2 review:

mace griffin: bounty hunter

It seems that first-person-shooters are no longer the PC's exclusive domain, with titles like Halo showing that properly executed, a console is more than up to the task of hosting a quality FPS, though they still remain rather few and far between. Vivendi Universal and Warthog aim to rectify that with Mace Griffin Bounty Hunter.

Mace Griffin Bounty Hunter, set a number of years in the future, has the player controlling a former member of the elite police force known as the Rangers. Mace is fresh out of the slammer, and looking for revenge, taking on assignments as a bounty hunter to fund his quest. The story feels more than slightly generic, with traditional elements of corruption, assorted angst and huge conspiracies all present in copious amounts. Bland voice-acting doesn't further the cause either, the lead character's persistent monotone being the primary culprit. Thankfully, though, as with most FPS titles, the story is just about the least important element of the whole package, and the play dynamic manages to compensate for its weaknesses. All in all, the action mostly comprises straight-forward blasting, with all the traditional machine guns, shotguns and sniper rifles present, as you try to complete your various assignments. Very few sequences demand much of the grey matter, as the puzzles revolve mostly around platform jumping. Fortunately, the monotony of running around and shooting things is relieved every so often by space-combat sequences, which see you flying around in a spaceship and shooting things. Having established that Mace Griffin offers little or no originality over similar titles in terms of the play dynamic, it is nonetheless an entertaining, engrossing and satisfying experience, also offering a very respectable challenge, though the controls do provide their fair share of frustration. Mace Griffin's graphics are decent, though there are few things that really stand out, and the action sadly does become choppy at times, though this is but a minor inconvenience. Ultimately, Mace Griffin Bounty Hunter is a solid and enjoyable FPS title that manages to surpass most of its competitors - it's neither brilliant nor revolutionary, but it will more than manage to hold your attention, and that's really what an FPS should be all about.

- ☺ Challenging
- ☺ Thoroughly enjoyable FPS experience
- ☺ Great sound…
- ☹ …Except for dodgy voice-acting
- ☹ Slightly sloppy control
- ☹ Choppy frame-rate

64

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developer: namco [] **publisher:** namco [] **distributor:** ster kinekor [011] 445-7900
rrp: R 499 [R 699 with g-con 2 light Gun] [] **genre:** light-gun shooting [] **internet:** www.namco.com
platforms: ps2

reviewer: Michael "RedTide" James

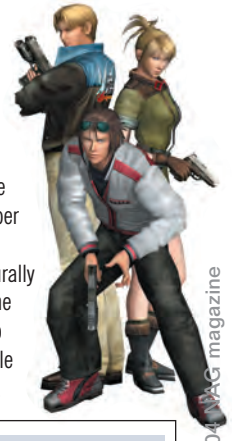
ps2 review:

NOW AVAILABLE @ M Musica

time crisis 3

They say that games featuring light-guns and steering wheels are easier for most people to understand - apparently the 'traditional' buttons and joystick [arcade] or mouse and keyboard configuration is a little too abstract for non-games. Ultimately what this means is you should get a light-gun to get granny off the Eye Toy so you can play a decent shooter once in a while.

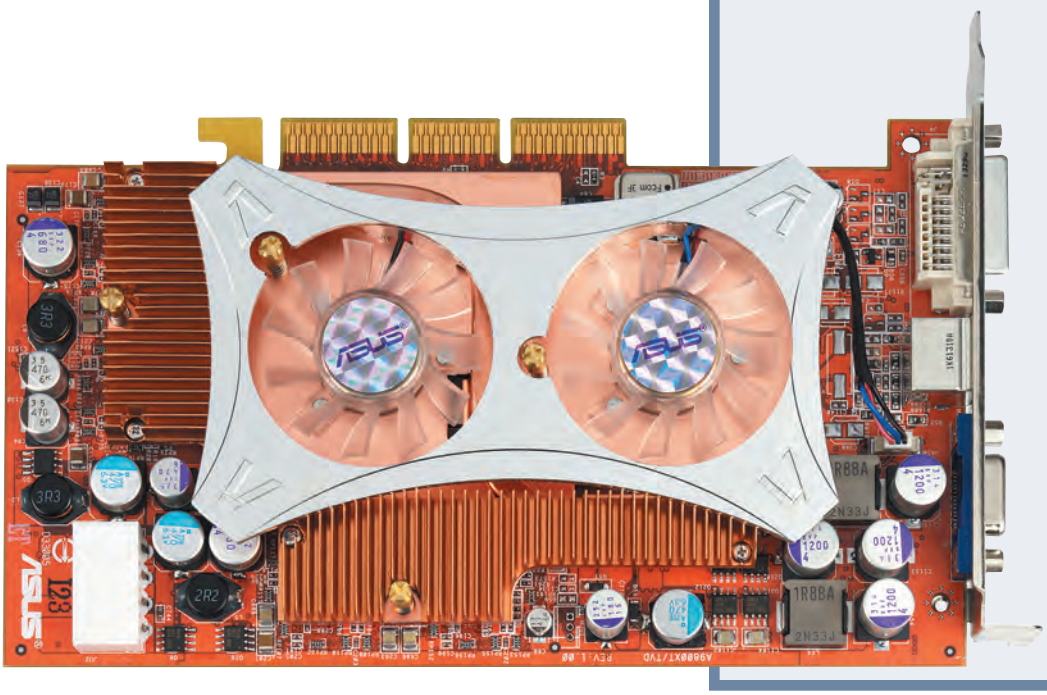
Light-gun based games are probably more immersive than most other genres because the play dynamic gives you an actual gun with plenty to shoot at on the screen - no time to get bored. Time Crisis 3 is another instalment in the series and improves on just about every aspect of the previous titles. Although best suited to be played with a light-gun, Time Crisis 3 features excellent support for a standard controller and with a little practise you can really fine-tune your aiming and speed. But playing with a controller is really a sacrilege and besides using a light-gun not only looks better [with the lights dimmed down] but feels and plays better to. Incidentally you can buy the G-Con 2 Gun version for approximately R 205 more if you don't already own a light-gun and the extra money is well worth the fun.
To elaborate, your objective in the game is to shoot your way through the bad guys while following a forced pathway through the various environments and locations. You can use the duck feature to dodge incoming fire and at the same time take the opportunity to reload your weapon. Besides simple shooting and dodging the game throws various scripted sequences your way and this effectively spices up the action as rocks fall from above and explosions destroy parts of the scenery. In your quest you'll have access to four different weapons, namely a handgun, shotgun, machinegun and grenade launcher - extra ammunition can be collected by killing the yellow enemies.
The graphics are well animated, crisp and vary greatly from area to area, the sound is also very 'real' with meaty thumps and loud explosions all doing the game justice and effectively drawing players deeper into the experience.
Besides being a little short and naturally requiring a light-gun to fully enjoy the experience, the game is very hard to fault. Namco are at the top of the pile when it comes to this style of game.



- ☺ Lovely to look at
- ☺ Varied
- ☺ Worthy additions
- ☹ Short
- ☹ Better with a light-gun
- ☹ Tough in places

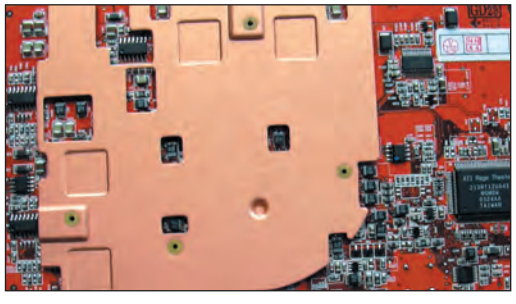
84

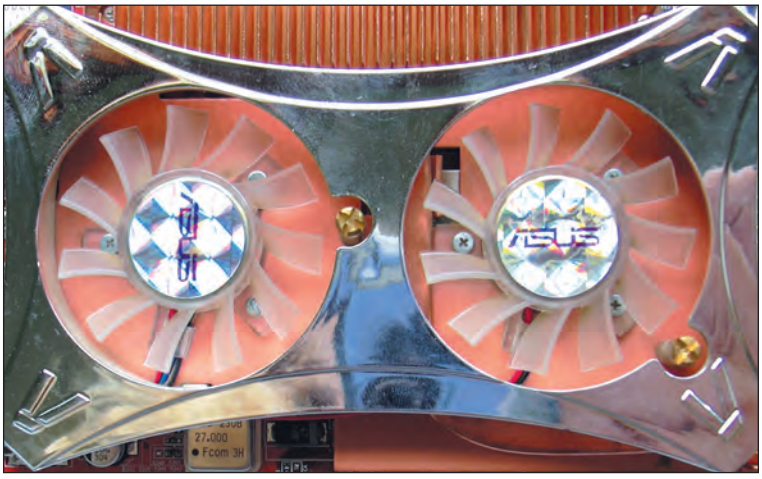
ASUS Radeon 9800 XT



It's a New Year and rather than setting feuds aside Canadian graphics chipset manufacturer ATi is surging strongly ahead with its latest R360 chipsets into the gaming market.

What's more Asus has two new offerings in the ATi XT product family, and on test here we have the Asus Radeon 9800 XT, the range-topper. This is the first time in a number of years that a manufacturer has offered the best available from both big-hitters in 3D graphics today, namely ATi and NVidia, and this move can only end up being good news for consumers.
The 9800 XT is built on a unique if not especially pretty orange PCB. The hue of the board itself lessens the impact of no small amount of copper covering the offering in the form of a newer and more efficient cooling system. The two fans employed by this solution are silver, surrounded by flimsy-feeling aluminium shielding, and covering a heat sink construction so big it makes for one seriously weighty adaptor.
It doesn't go so far as to require a two-slot design like range-topping competitors, but it certainly looks like it means business. Definitely not a purely aesthetic addition as we were soon to discover that the new cooling capabilities are necessary. The board also features 256 MB of on-board RAM, and includes the ATi Rage Theatre chip for capturing inbound data streams.
As far as additional value goes, Asus are not pulling any punches either. An orange CD carry-case is included in the package, containing a number of game titles and additional software. Half-Life 2 is of course the headline title included, although this appears only in the form of a coupon giving the holder the right to download this highly-anticipated title the moment it gets released.
On the purely 3D side, there's a utility called Asus Smart Doctor 2 for easy over clocking and monitoring of the Radeon's vital numbers. Not that the default settings are inadequate mind, with this new chipset running a few Hz faster than the previous high-end offering the 9800 Pro. The VPU core manages 412 MHz while the RAM is good for a DDR speed of 728 MHz.
These higher clock frequencies are really the biggest difference between the older chipsets and the newer one. The R360 also uses the company's new "Black diamond" insulation material for improved isolation from electrical interference or noise.
Gaming performance reflects the higher frequencies across the board. This Asus product scores achieved 6190 points in Futuremark's 3DMark 03, and moderately clocked up managed 6374 although doing this also generated a peculiar snowing effect. 6190 is clearly ahead of all the competition, so we're content to peg it there.
X2: The Threat, is a brand new offering from Egosoft, and usefully includes its own benchmark mode for another look at a card's overall performance. In this title, NVidia-based cards have the edge thanks to the extensive use of stencil-shadows and this company's enhanced shadow engine which allows it to generate these effects on a single pass. Nonetheless, the average frame rate of 59.617 achieved by the 9800 XT is more than adequate for playing the game at the highest levels of quality without the interference of lag. The best NVidia score achieved was marginally faster with 63.4 fps.
Aquamark 3 is widely considered to be one of the best indications of DirectX 9 performance available today, and the shaders employed here are a key indicator of a graphics card's abilities to run the current and upcoming generations of gaming titles. The Asus Radeon 9800 XT smashes all of its competition in this bench with an outstanding score of 40 600, 2000 points higher than its biggest competition the FX 5900 Ultra. Finally UT 2003 underscored these indications of pure power with flyby scores ranging from a lowest of 112.3 fps (Citadel map), to a storming 226.2 fps on Asbestos. Once again these results are the highest of all the 3D hardware available today, enjoying a 10% performance improvement over the already-impressive scores achieved by the older 9800 Pro.
This Asus offering, and the R360 chipset it is built on, is without a doubt the current leader in 3D graphics performance. NVidia have a new chipset due soon to counter these body-shots being dealt by ATi, but must concede defeat in this particular battle. It's not a cheap board, but for those wanting the best gaming performance money can buy there is no other option.





REVIEWED BY	
Russell "Quickbeam" Bennett	
PLUS	**MINUS**
The fastest 3D card available Fairly unobtrusive Video-in capabilities	Hotter and less stable than older versions Software can cause problems

SUPPLIED BY: Corex [011] 707-5000
PRICE: R 6685.00
INTERNET: www.asus.com

Sapphire ATi All-in-Wonder 9600 Pro

The Sapphire ATi All-in-Wonder 9600 Pro is truly a jack of all trades, with a high level of mastery in each of these categories despite the old proverb.

Let's back up for a moment and have a look at where this product actually comes from, its origins in the ATi family tree so to speak. The 9600 series was created to replace the ill-fated 9500 in the mainstream segment of the graphics board market. This predecessor product didn't meet with failure from the consumer's perspective, delivering excellent performance results for its mid-range price tag. No, it was a failure for ATi itself which had simply throttled the chipset of the then range-topping 9700, and as a result had landed itself with a costly board to produce that actually lost the company money. Hence the 9600 was born, based on the newer RV350 chipset also found in the Radeon 9800 product range. This Graphics Processing Unit (GPU) brought a number of benefits for the company in terms of production costs through various technological enhancements. It is manufactured using a 0.13 micron process to begin with, allowing for higher core clock frequencies at lower cost. Where the R300 chipset being superseded ran at 275 MHz, the RV350 is clocked at 400 MHz in final production form.

What does all this mean in real terms though? Well, 3DMark03 maintains that this offering is good for 3500 3DMarks, an excellent showing for a product targeted at the mainstream like this one is and well clear of its competition in this segment. And if you're willing to go the R500-R600 higher up the price range for this, the All-in-Wonder version, the additional value really makes the extra spend worthwhile.

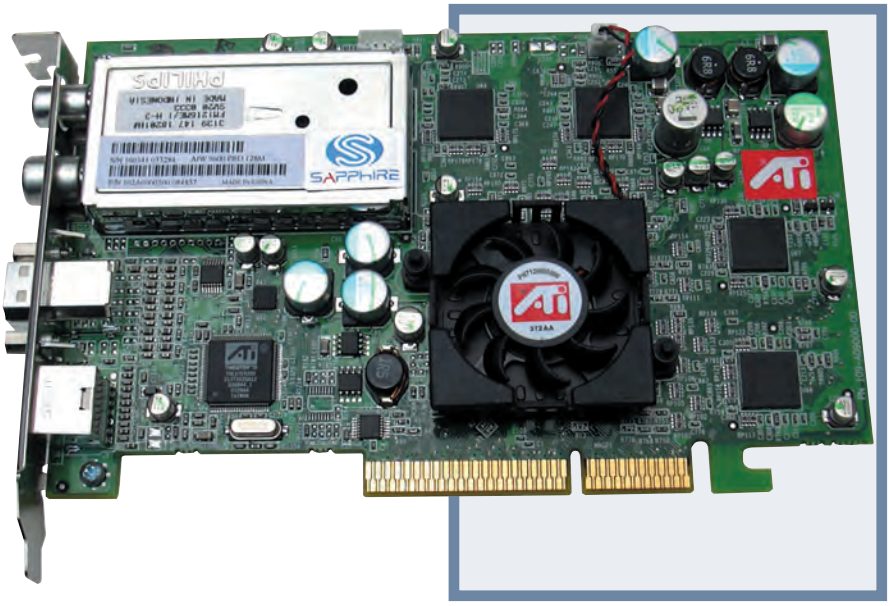
For R2200, you not only get a highly capable 3D renderer for gaming, but a fully-featured TV-card to boot. The 9600 Pro All-in-Wonder comes with a break-out box for accepting inputs from a variety of sources, has dual-monitor functionality built-in as well as TV-out and is capable of running all three displays at once. For good measure, there's even an FM-tuner thrown in to turn your PC into an on-demand boom-box.

The Radeon Remote Wonder is another addition to this package sure to have purchasers pleased with their decision. Included in the box is an infra-red receiver unit which connects via USB, and the large but clearly well-built Remote Wonder itself is ready to be used. This unit contains all the functions needed to control your PC as a television, VCR, or DVD-player. Video is captured in the Mpeg-2 format at any quality level from a number of presets, including DVD-quality recording. Once captured, your video can be manipulated and edited through the Pinnacle Studio 8 package also included in the box.

Although you can get a similarly capable gaming card at a cheaper price, none can match the versatility and extra value you get with this All-in-Wonder offering. I'd recommend it to anyone wanting to play the latest DX9 games as well as play around with some video from time to time.

REVIEWED BY	
Russell "Quickbeam" Bennett	
PLUS	**MINUS**
Great gaming performance	A little bit pricey
TV card functionality	No DV input
No heat generation issues	

SUPPLIER: Sapphire Technologies [011] 314-6201
PRICE: R 2199.00
WEBSITE: www.sapphiretech.com



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Thermaltake Aquarius II Water Cooling System

As our PCs get more and more powerful, they generate more and more heat. It's something of a given, if you think about it. In the last few years, the effective dissipation of internal PC temperature has gone from a precaution to a necessity. In fact, it seems that an entire industry has sprung up around this process, including even the unthinkable - putting a water-based cooling system in your PC.

Thermaltake are becoming a very big name, what with products like the Xaser case range and their excellent, controllable fans. They are fast becoming masters of PC cooling - so it's little wonder that they have produced the Aquarius II, a system that uses water to cool your CPU.

Initially, the idea of bringing water anywhere near the inside of your PC case is unthinkable. After all, the inside of a PC contains some pretty expensive electronic bits, and water added to electricity is not really a great option.

But Thermaltake aren't getting to the forefront of system cooling by taking unnecessary risks. The Aquarius II system is completely water tight and, despite its questionable cooling method, does not pose any threat greater than user error to your beloved machine.

Three major elements make up the Aquarius II system; a heavy plate with a copper base to cool your CPU, a copper radiator fan to cool the water and a pump to keep the liquid moving. These units are connected by way of tough rubber tubing which, reinforced by steel springs, allows the water to be transported to the various parts like a simplified circulatory system.

Installing the system is a lengthy affair, and it requires, at the very least, a lot of measuring, cutting and rearrangement of parts inside your case. Not all cases are the same inside, obviously, so the rubber tubing, for example, is supplied in one long length, which needs to be trimmed to fit inside the case that will hold the system.

Secondary parts are also included to facilitate the fitting of the system, including clamps and powerful magnets to hold the components in place - the system is entirely screw-less, which is something of a bonus.

The installation process may even require low level motherboard modification (depending on the type of processor) so it is not advised for absolute beginners. That said, the system is accompanied by thorough and clear instructions.

Great care needs to be taken while installing the system, of course, as damage to the piping could result in catastrophic system damage.

Working around the system would be tricky if everything was screwed into place, but the magnetic plates supplied with the system allow for individual components to be moved easily (if rather carefully) should you need to, while still holding everything securely in place.

So it's in the machine… but does it work? The answer is, quite simply, yes. The cooling effect on the machine is quite noticeable, particularly during peak performance. The water in the system is mixed with a special cooling solution (which the makers are pretty stingy with) that allows the system to be constantly cooled.

Massive temperature spikes that result from gaming or other heavy CPU usage are lessened to a large degree, meaning that your system runs in a more stable temperature band and, once the increased CPU usage ends, the system cools down much faster than one with just a normal CPU cooling system, like a fan.

Additionally, the Aquarius II is much quieter than a CPU fan. One would expect the pump (which is internally lit for those that enjoy their case modding) would make something of a racket, but the overall noise reduction is quite a treat.

The entire set up runs on 250 to 400 ml of water which needs to be topped up via an external, removable reservoir around twice a year.

Cramped cases are not going to fare too well with the system, as it does take up a bit of space. However, the system is obviously adjustable to the interior of the case, and the tubing can be run virtually anywhere that it will not be damaged.

Additionally, case modders may enjoy the unique look of the system once it is up and running.

On the whole it's not something that everyone needs. But people who have heat problems will definitely want to consider this as a relatively cheap and very effective way of shedding those unwanted degrees of temperature and noise.

REVIEWED BY	
Walt "Shryke" Pretorius	
PLUS	**MINUS**
Effective cooling system	Complicated installation
Quiet	Very little cooling solution supplied
Looks great	

SUPPLIED BY: Corex [011] 707-5000
PRICE: R 1095.00
INTERNET: www.corex.co.za

ASUS Radeon 9600 XT

This is the second 9600 XT I've had on review since the R360 chipset was launched into the market, and interestingly enough comes from Asus, a manufacturer who until now had been an NVidia-supporter. The manufacturer is not changing allegiances, but merely expanding into the ATi-based sector of the market to offer its customers the choice of both of the biggest names in GPUs.

This card is targeted at the more price-sensitive chunk of the gaming market than its 9800 bigger brother, and is pitched against the NVidia FX 5600 in both price and performance. The older 9600 Pro stood up very well indeed against this manner of comparison, and the company hopes to extend the slight lead eked out using the higher clock frequencies of this otherwise very similar new chipset.

One of the most attractive features for both this mid-range market and Asus customers looking at the more expensive 9800 XT, is the optional inclusion of ATi's Rage Theatre chip on both products. Previously, users wanting the privilege of being able to capture video had to pay the extra money, and frequently accept lower 3D gaming performance, for an All-in-Wonder variant.

The XTs come with their own basic break-out box to distribute both incoming and outgoing S-VHS or composite video feeds. And the inclusion of these capabilities has also prompted the company to include two new pieces of software for the sake of added value, namely Asus VideoSecurity II and Asus GameFace.

While the first of these is pretty self-explanatory, GameFace is a clever piece of code which allows a small screen to be overlaid onto any games you play. This screen can transmit video data from a friend's web-cam or even TV channels tuned in to your XT with minimal overhead on the game itself.

But at the end of the day it's a great gaming performance that consumers will be looking for when considering the 9600 XT, although the video capabilities are certainly a bonus worth factoring in to your final decision. So just how does this latest offering fare?

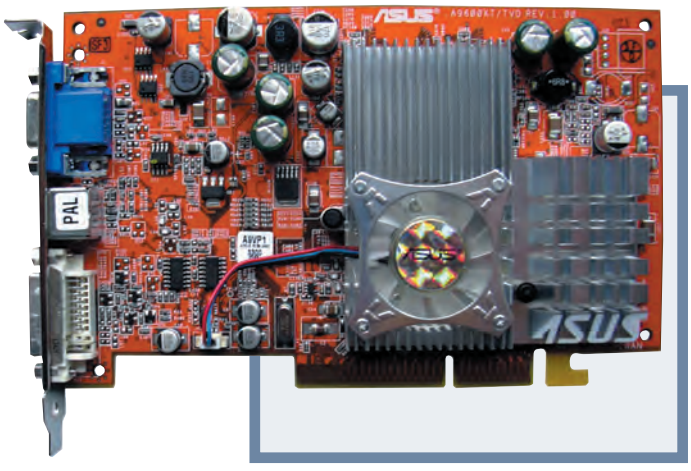
Very nicely, thank you very much. Its X2 result of 45.6 fps is enough to run the game in one level below the highest detail setting without lag intruding on your game. And 3DMark 03 gives the 9600 XT an excellent 3753. Interestingly, this score is some 200 points lower than the last incarnation of this chipset I reviewed (a Sapphire board), perhaps a signal that the "enhanced Asus drivers" shipped with this card are not quite so enhanced as claimed. Indeed, with the generic Catalyst 3.9 drivers (which the Asus drivers are based on), this board breaks 4000 points in the Futuremark bench.

Those X2 figures are interesting, as the 9600 XT beats the FX 5600 at anything below 1600X1200 resolutions, where the 9800 is behind the FX 5900 Ultra at all resolutions.

UT2003 places the Asus XT even further in the lead of the mid-range segment. Its lowest average frame rate comes on DM-Inferno, at 98 fps, while the highest score is returned on the Asbestos flyby, a mouth-watering 192.7 fps. Once again, it's only at resolutions of 1600X1200 and above that the 5600-based boards even come close to matching these figures, with lower resolutions seeing the 9600 XT outscore this competitor by roughly 25%.

And finally, the telling Aquamark 3 benchmark run. Aquamark rose to popularity after the debacle surrounding 3DMark 03 cast doubts on this benches validity. The Aquamark suite was shown to be a more accurate and reliable measure of DirectX 9 performance and this is where the 9600 XT really shows its mettle. Its 29 627 Aquamarks is a full 10 000 points clear of the nearest 5600 competitor, and in some cases with some Detonator versions even bests the loftier 5900 cards.

In gaming, these figures translate to peace of mind. Every new game you get will run on this adaptor, although the most demanding might need minor detail tweaking for optimum frame rates. But for the price, and considering the additional value of the Rage Theatre capabilities and included software, the 9600 XT rules the price-performance equation. NVidia, it appears, have no option but to make the upcoming NV-38 offerings more competitive than the current model line-up.



REVIEWED BY	
Russell "Quickbeam" Bennett	
PLUS	**MINUS**
Great price/performance ratio	Over clocking issues
Video-in capabilities	Slightly slower than other 9600 XT offerings
Apparently bug-free	

SUPPLIED BY: Corex [011] 707-5000
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INTERNET: www.asus.com

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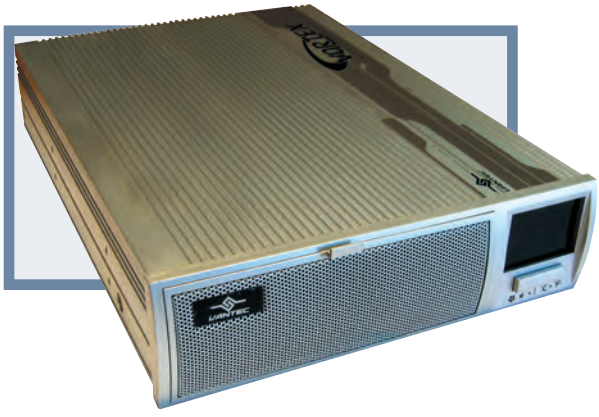
Vantec Vortex Hard Drive Cooler

Heat is the enemy. That seems to be the catch phrase these days, especially now that computers run faster - and therefore hotter. And while there are a great many really excellent products on the market to help you get your machine closer to solar surface temperatures, you have to kind of wonder about the fact that the "heat panic" is perfectly capable of spewing out as many gimmicks as valid devices.

As everyone knows, heat can adversely affect the performance of your computer. I am not talking about that instant, over-clocked, thermo-nuclear CPU kind of heat. Nope, I mean the slow, insidious, creep-up-on-you-and-fry-your-system kind. And one of the devices that (apparently) suffers from this back door attack is the good old hard disk drive.



See, heat affects the longevity of your drive. Too much heat and, boom, there she blows, right in the middle of a very important LAN game.

The answer lies in the hard drive cooling bay, like the Vantec Vortex. This unit uses a horizontal cross blower fan to move air across your hard drive, thereby cooling it.

About the size of a CD-Rom drive, the Vortex takes up a 5 ¼" bay in your case. The front mounted unit pulls air from the front of your computer and pushes it over the HDD, which is housed inside it. A removable dust filter keeps the nasty grit out, and a front facing LCD screen informs you of the current temperature of the hard drive. The unit has two fan speeds, and is relatively quiet, even at high settings.

The hard drive itself sits in the backless case, on four vibration dampers. These dampers are not adjustable. If, like mine, your hard drive doesn't fit, it's a matter of "make it fit." However, once in place, the HDD is held fast. A thermal sensor is attached to it to make sure that things are going the way they're supposed to.

The Vortex does work. A fairly considerable drop in HDD temperature was observed during testing, so, no problems there. But I do have two points regarding the device that I am undecided on.

First off, all the hot air from over your HDD is blown out of the back of the device - right into your case. Now, this may not be a problem, but it certainly will change the air flow within your case at least. However, it is very unlikely that the overall effect will be too hectic.

The second point is far more pertinent, though. I have lost hard drives before, for a variety of reasons. But no one ever told me that my drive died because it got too hot. That said, the long term heat damage may have done something to affect the drive. I don't know. The question is, do you really need to cool your hard drive? Sure, it's probably a good idea, but is it absolutely vitally necessary? That, I suppose, is up to each user. If you want to cool your drive, I would highly recommend this unit. It's sturdy, attractive and it does work.

REVIEWED BY	
Walt "Shryke" Pretorius	
PLUS	**MINUS**
Looks good It works brilliantly	Takes up a 5 1/4" bay HDDs are different sizes Is it necessary?

SUPPLIED BY: Corex [011] 707-5000
PRICE: R 465.00
INTERNET: www.corex.co.za

Philips 530 Cell Phone

Much as I love gimmicks and little do-dads on a cell phone, in the end it's all about having a functional, fast tool that you can drag with you anywhere. Sadly, a lot of cell phone manufacturers seem to forget this design basic.

Cell phones are often the bane of my existence. Okay, it's not quite that catastrophic, but these little tools can be the source of a lot of frustration, especially when battery life comes into play. Here I'll give Philips' 530 model a nod of achievement. While it doesn't boast the lifespan of some business model phones, it's still quite reliable (6 hours talk time).

However at one point I was tempted to phone the manufacturers and ask them if the review model I had was faulty, because my opinion of the phone is summed up by one glaring problem - it's very, very slow. And while I could go into the features, such as the attachable camera and the ability to listen to and record FM music (plus a basic sequencer built in, marketed as BeDJ), none of these mean squat if the phone is an annoyance to navigate.

Navigating the menus feels very sluggish. Sometimes this might cause you to jiggle the navigation in frustration. This has the equivalent effect of typing instructions on your keyboard when your PC is lagged - the slew of commands suddenly come through and the hardware then races past the options you were looking for. To combat this problem though you can assign shortcut keys to menu commands or simply use the voice command feature.

My other gripe lies with the SMS features. While typing SMS messages becomes easy once you get to know the keypad's functions, you can't send to multiple numbers, unless you select each number after sending the former message and recalling the last SMS. Adding capitals (no all caps) to sentences is even more infuriating. The phone does however support a variety of message services and ships with a hands-free kit, which also works as the radio antennae.

The phone also comes with a Ministry of Sound music file CD. Why a Ministry of Sound CD you may ask? The association here lies in the BeDJ feature which is an on-board recording and mixing studio. You can download tracks via infrared from the Ministry of Sound CD and/or add your own sounds and then use this as your ring tone. If you aren't feeling that creative you can always download sounds from the website www.2doyourthing.com.

The 530 is available in a choice of 6 colours - Star White, Jazzy Blue, Techno Green, Soul Black, Pop Orange and Titanium.

REVIEWED BY	
James "Priest" Francis	
PLUS	**MINUS**
Full colour screen Interesting ring tones Feature-rich	Extremely sluggish Poor SMS interface

SUPPLIER: Philips [011] 471-5000
PRICE: R 2000
WEBSITE: www.philips.co.za

Thermaltake Xaser III Mouse Pad

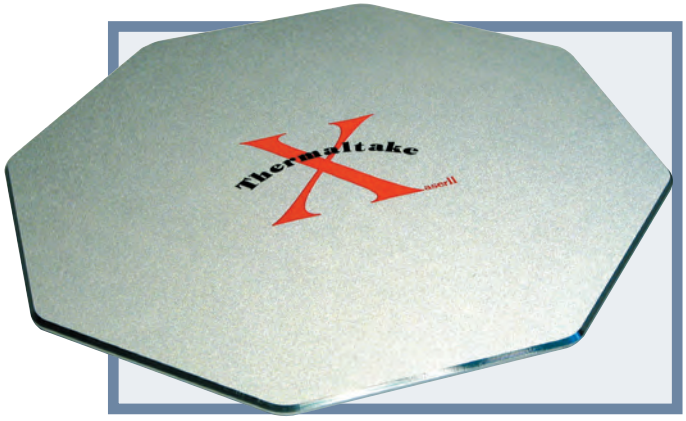
Once again, one is faced with a quandary. What exactly can be said about a mouse pad for a product review? But, as it turns out, the Xaser III is not just any normal mouse pad…

The first thing that you notice about this mouse pad is that it is heavy. That's mainly because it is made out of aluminium. Yes, that's right: this is not so much a mouse pad as it is a mouse plate. The octagonal plate measures 177mm across, making it fairly small when compared to some of the mats being used by gamers.

The whole "pad" is finished with a rough surface, which aids any kind of ball or optical mouse in tracking movements accurately. However, this roughness also is fairly abrasive - the mouse doesn't seem to glide over the pad. In fact, the pad is so abrasive that it will have your mouse clean in about five minutes, and will start working on scouring your mouse away within the first hour. Prolonged use may even cause damage to the friction pads that are fitted to the bottom of your mouse.

Six foam rubber "feet" fixed to the bottom of the pad prevent it from sliding around while you use it. These also lift it from the table surface and are positioned in such a way that any kind of quick movement near the edge of the pad will cause it to tip slightly, which can get pretty damned annoying in the heat of battle.

It is a novel idea, and you'll be pretty much the only person at any LAN to sport this baby (what with mouse pad purchases being a sort of impulse, "maybe I need a new one" thing.) But other than its different shape and unusual material, it doesn't do a hell of a lot more than any other mouse pad. Its weight and rigidity, along with its relatively small size and abrasive surface, make it a dubious buy at best.



REVIEWED BY	
Walt "Shryke" Pretorius	
PLUS	**MINUS**
Looks cool	Heavy
Durable	Abrasive
	Small

SUPPLIED BY: Corex [011] 707-5000
PRICE: R 95.00
INTERNET: www.corex.co.za

JOGR USB Stick

A USB flash stick you can take into the shower? What's the point? Well, not much, unless you get caught in the rain, of course…

Wrapped in rubber, this 256 MB memory stick is fast (USB 2.0 complaint) and looks the bit too. Its selling point is that it's water resistant. This doesn't mean you can go diving with it, but the occasional rain shower or something similarly unexpected will not mean the end of your data or the stick.

By that logic, of course, I'd expect this is the kind of thing you hook onto your car keys or something similarly exposed. This is easy enough thanks to the supplied ball chain that wraps through a gap in the unit. But at one stage I had to remove the unit and carry it in my tog bag. The problem was that the rubber cap loosens a bit as you use it. This is fine for every day standard use, but since the unit dangles at the end of your keys, the momentum occasionally shook the cap loose, and a water-resistant stick without its rubber cap is a bit moot.

Overall a great stick, but it's just a pity the cap isn't sturdier or uses some sort of clipping mechanism.

REVIEWED BY	
James "Priest" Francis	
PLUS	**MINUS**
Water-resistant	Cap loosens after some use
Fast	Cap falls off
Sturdy	No more cap

SUPPLIED BY: Corex [011] 707-5000
PRICE: R 950
INTERNET: www.corex.co.za

H@RDCOR3 hard drives

Increasing the size of your hard drive space or adding a new hard drive to your computer is one of the quickest and easiest ways to improve your computing experience.

It is increasingly becoming necessary to acquire larger hard drive space, as most of today's new software applications and games require a lot of it. I remember when my operating system required a couple of megabytes in order to work. Today, Windows XP Professional installs on just over 1GB of hard drive space and in order to work efficiently needs about 1.5GB of hard drive space. What is even more interesting is that most of today's decent games span's more than two CD-ROMs meaning that the installation sizes start at about 1GB. But probably the biggest culprit in the consumption of hard drive space is MP3's. Legal issues aside, MP3's take up between 3MB and 10MB, depending on their encoded bit rate. I encode all my MP3's at 196Kbps and on average they are 6MB in size. If you get to a stage whereby you have about 4000 MP'3 (and I have seen guys with more than that amount) you can almost guarantee that you will be short of about 30GB of hard drive space.

So now that you have come to a stage where you have realized that you need more hard drive space, you will ask yourself the following questions: Which one do you buy? What should its capacity be? Which one is the best value for money? And how do I install it? To find the answers to these questions read on.

writer: Tom "Fr00tC@k3" Taylor

All H@radcor3 hardware is tested on an Emerald computer supplied by Light Edge Technology:

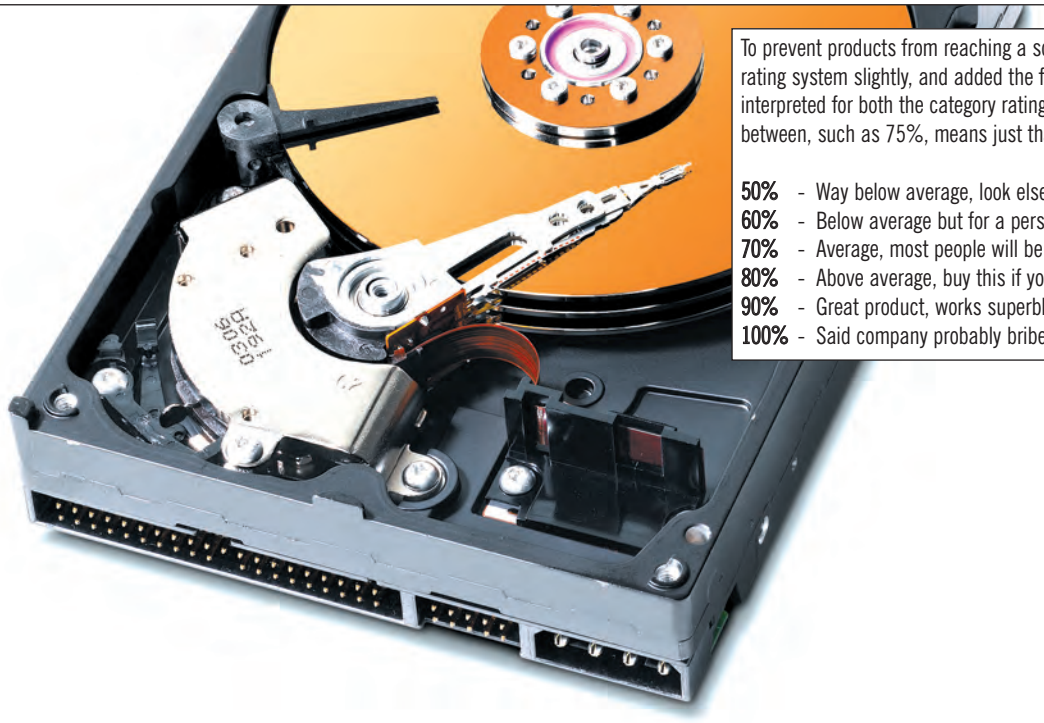
2GHz Intel Pentium 4 processor
MSI 845PE Max 2 motherboard
Transcend Radeon 9700
Philips 107E 17" monitor
Transcend 1GB RAM DDR333
Western Digital 80GB HDD 7200rpm
LG DVD/CD-RW combo drive

What is Serial ATA?

This is the newest technology to grace hard drives, Serial ATA (Advanced Technology Attachment) or SATA for short is basically an improvement of Parallel ATA technology. The first noticeable difference is the Serial ATA cable and smaller plug. Serial ATA cables are much thinner than their older, 40 pinned, counterparts and with this smaller size it presents a much faster data throughput. At its fastest implementation Parallel ATA is able to produce a data throughput of 133MBps (Mega Bytes per second) which seems to be very close to the 150MBps offered by Serial ATA but the restriction to this is that only certain Maxtor drives currently support 133MBps while all the other drives are still based on the 100MBps standard. Another major problem facing traditional parallel cables is the way in which it transfers data, the data in such a cable is transferred in parallel. This means that data is split up between the wires at the beginning of the cable and then gets reassembled at the end of the cable. In essence the more wires at the device's disposal the faster the data will be transferred, this is obviously impractical.
Another problem with this ancient technology is that data loss is imminent as it is very susceptible to interference from other devices. Nowadays we see many companies produce rounded IDE cables and even though these wires look funky and increase air-flow inside your case, the bundling of the wires leads to potential crosstalk between the wires in the cable. It is also interesting to note that rounded IDE cables have not been approved by the official industry in looking over the ATA specification. In all fairness most of the larger companies who produce these cables do not simply bundle the cables together to create a rounded IDE cable, they design the cable so that it has the least amount of data interference from the other strands of cable bundled with it. The last problem with Parallel ATA cables I will focus on is the maximum recommended length of these cables. After about 40CM the signal in these cables decrease and leads to data loss, this is a major problem especially in large server cases where the components are situated well away from each other. Even for most home users who purchase IDE (Integrated Drive Electronics) cables that are 60cm in length (these are readily available) data loss will be imminent and will lead to the devices having to resend data which effectively slows down the computer.
So now that we know what the Parallel ATA technology and IDE cables' limits are, let's look at how Serial ATA has rectified and improved it. At the very heart of Serial ATA we already see a huge improvement, instead of parallel, data is transferred in Serial. Each Serial ATA cable hosts a minimum of four wires and its transfer speeds are currently rated at 150MBps, this will soon be doubled to 300MBps and it is hoped that by 2007 Serial ATA will have a maximum transfer rate of 600MBps. The inner workings of Serial ATA is very simple, it effectively only needs two wires, one to send data and the other to receive data. Besides the faster transfer rates of Serial ATA, the length of the cable can also now be greatly improved and 1 meter cables are already available.
Having to set the master and slave jumper settings on a hard drive is a thing of the past. With Serial ATA you only have one drive per cable and most motherboards feature four or more Serial ATA headers on the motherboard. Serial ATA also fully supports RAID levels 0, 1, 5, 0+1, and 1+0.
If you would like to get more in depth information on how Serial ports and parallel ports work go to the How Stuff Works website where they explain it in great detail (http://computer.howstuffworks.com/question11.htm).

Benchmarking

For this months H@rdcor3 roundup I decided to review only hard drives larger than 80GB as they have become very cost effective and anything smaller in size will not be beneficial to you in the long run. Benchmarking a hard drive is quite a long process and I had to work during most of my pathetically short holiday to bring you this feature (don't thank me just deposit some money into my PayPal account). Each hard drive I tested was installed in my test machine. The hard drives were set up as primary masters (as no other hard drives were present) and I installed Windows XP Professional SP1 as the operating system as well as all the drivers for the test machine. I then installed the benchmarking program and before any benchmarks were run I did a full system defrag to ensure optimal performance. The benchmark program I ran was Ziff Davis Winbench 99. An in-depth explanation into the working of this utility and a downloadable version of this application is available from http://www.etestinglabs.com/benchmarks/winbench/ default.asp (Winbench 99). Lastly I worked out how much each hard drive costs per megabyte by simply taking the estimated retail price and dividing it by the size of the hard drive. This method is surprisingly effective in seeing which hard drives offer better value for money.



To prevent products from reaching a score close to 100% I have changed the rating system slightly, and added the following definitions. These can be interpreted for both the category ratings and the overall score. Any score in between, such as 75%, means just that, it is not quite

50% - Way below average, look elsewhere
60% - Below average but for a person on a tight budget this should suffice
70% - Average, most people will be happy with it
80% - Above average, buy this if you want better than the standard
90% - Great product, works superbly, great features, my recommendation
100% - Said company probably bribed me, "the ultimate product"

Founded in 1979, Seagate was the first company to build 5.25-inch hard disc drives specifically for the PC. Since then Seagate has come a long way and in fact they were the very first company to release a Serial ATA drive in this country early last year. The hard drives from Seagate I am reviewing this month are the Barracuda 7200.7 range. Available in both Parallel ATA and Serial ATA, all Barracuda drives features Seagate's SBT (Sound Barrier Technology) which ensures a quieter operating drive.

Seagate Barracuda 7200.7 80GB

I have developed a lot of respect for Seagate hard drives in recent months due to the fact that these hard drives offer great performance and value for money. The Seagate Barracuda 7200.7 80GB range of hard drives are perfect for people who want to upgrade their hard drive to something a little bigger than what they have got. The two drives I reviewed were the ST380011A and the ST380013AS. The ST380011A features 2MB of cache and a 7200rpm spin speed. I would obviously prefer 8MB of cache for the drive on which I install my operating system, but for people on a tight budget or as a slave drive this one would be perfect. According to the benchmark programs this drive does not perform badly at all and its average seek time of 8.2ms is excellent for a relatively "entry-level" drive such as this one. If you are looking for a master hard drive (one on which you will install your operating system) then I would suggest you spend a little more and get a drive with 8MB cache. If your motherboard has Serial ATA headers then the ST380013AS is one of the best buys you are going to come across this month. Retailing at about R100 less than its closest competitor in this roundup, this Serial ATA hard drive features 8MB cache, an excellent average seek time of 8.2ms, and the usual 7200rpm drive motor. If you are not on a tight budget then I would suggest spending an extra R250 and getting the 120GB version of this drive, the Seagate Barracuda 7200.7 120 GB ST3120026AS.

Value for Money 80 **Performance** 85

Pros:	Great price | Perfect for adding more hard drive space
Cons:	One year warranty
Supplied By:	Rectron [011] 203-1000
ERP:	R649
Internet:	www.seagate.com

82

Value for Money 70 **Performance** 87

Pros:	Cheapest 80GB Serial ATA drive I have seen to date
Cons:	120GB only R250 more
Supplied By:	Rectron [011] 203-1000
ERP:	R749
Internet:	www.seagate.com

78

Seagate Barracuda 7200.7 120GB

If somebody were to ask me today what size hard drive they should buy I would recommend a 120GB hard drive. These offer more than enough space for anybody to store just about anything and once you have installed one you can brag with your friends that you have more than "100 gig" of hard drive space. The first hard drive in this range I am looking at is the ST3120022A. Sadly though, it only has 2MB of cache and a one year warranty, its average seek time is superb though at 8.2ms. Again retailing at close to R100 cheaper than its closest competitor it becomes very difficult not to recommend this Seagate hard drive. What caught my eye though was that the 8MB cache version of this drive was only about R50 more than this one and has three years warranty, no prizes for guessing which one I would buy. That is the problem with purchasing a hard drive today, or most PC components for that matter, there is always something better for a few Rand more. As you would have read in this roundup, this makes it very difficult to single out a hard drive as the best one around. The second 120GB hard drive I am looking at is the ST3120026A. Even though this hard drive is a Parallel ATA hard drive it has proven that it can deliver good performance at a very reasonable price. It features 8MB of cache and at R7.49 per GB it is one of the cheapest 120GB hard drives around. Keeping in mind that the cheapest 120GB drive only has 2MB of cache and a one year warranty, this drive seems all the more worth it. The ST3120026AS is the third and last 120GB hard drive from Seagate I am looking at. This hard drive is simply the Serial ATA version of the ST3120026A. It also features 8MB of cache and a three year warranty. Performance wise it is slightly faster than its Parallel ATA counterpart but this is purely thanks to its Serial ATA interface. Even though this hard drive is not the best value for money hard drive around it is still a great drive and one I would put on my top 5 list. Obviously if you do not have any Serial ATA headers on your motherboard then I would suggest either the ST3120026A or the 160GB drive called the ST3160021A.

Seagate Barracuda 7200.7 120GB ST3120022A

Value for Money 89 **Performance** 87

Pros:	Cheapest Rand per MB drive in this roundup
Cons:	8MB cache version only R50 more
Supplied By:	Rectron [011] 203-1000
ERP:	R849
Internet:	www.seagate.com

88

Seagate Barracuda 7200.7 Plus 120GB ST3120026A

Value for Money 90 **Performance** 87

Pros:	Great price | Warranty
Cons:	Not Serial ATA
Supplied By:	Rectron [011] 203-1000
ERP:	R899
Internet:	www.seagate.com

88

Seagate Barracuda 7200.7 120GB ST3120026AS

Value for Money 80 **Performance** 87

Pros:	Three year warranty
Cons:	Nothing
Supplied By:	Rectron [011] 203-1000
ERP:	R999
Internet:	www.seagate.com

83

Seagate Barracuda 7200.7 160GB

Looking at the specifications page of this roundup it becomes apparent that the first 160GB hard drive I am reviewing this month, the ST3160021A, has one thing no other drive in this roundup has, a Rand per MB value of just under seven Rand. Even though this hard drive only has one year warranty and 2MB of cache it still offers great value for money in terms of storage capacity. Normally I would recommend a drive with these specs as a slave drive but its performance in the benchmarks was not bad at all, and even though I had no means of testing the cache the fact remains that this is a 160GB hard drive which offers the cheapest Rand to MB ratio. Looking at the ST3160023A it has 8MB of cache onboard and comes with a three year warranty. The ST3160023A is the "upgraded" version of the ST3160021A and sadly I have to admit that the slight

Barracuda 7200.7 160GB ST3160021A

Value for Money 94 **Performance** 80

Pros:	Cheapest Rand per MB
Cons:	Only 2MB of cache and one year warranty
Supplied By:	Rectron [011] 203-1000
ERP:	R1099
Internet:	www.seagate.com

86

Barracuda 7200.7 160GB Plus ST3160023A

Value for Money 85 **Performance** 82

Pros:	It's 160GB
Cons:	Not really value for money
Supplied By:	Rectron [011] 203-1000
ERP:	R1249
Internet:	www.seagate.com

83

performance difference does not completely justify the R200 price difference. If you are very particular about a product's warranty then this drive might be worth it. Either way I would rather suggest the Barracuda 7200.7 Plus 120GB ST3120026A which also offers 8MB cache and three years warranty but at R899 for its 120GB. The final hard drive from Seagate I am looking at is the Serial ATA version of the ST3160023A called the ST3160023AS. Offering 8Mb cache and a three year warranty this drive is a good choice for people who want more than the average hard drive. Logically this is the most expensive Seagate drive in this roundup but at only R50 more than its Parallel ATA counterpart Serial ATA owners will not have a difficult time to choose this one over the older Parallel ATA hard drive. Performance wise this drive was on par, although I would have liked to see a slightly better performance rating from this Serial ATA drive.

Value for Money 83 **Performance** 82

Pros:	Well priced compared to its PARALLEL ATA brother
Cons:	I still prefer the Barracuda 7200.7 160GB ST3160021A
Supplied By:	Rectron [011] 203-1000
ERP:	R1299
Internet:	www.seagate.com

82

Maxtor has been around since 1982 and in 2001 they acquired Quantum HDD to become one of the largest hard drive companies in the world. The hard drive range I am looking at for this roundup is called DiamondMax Plus 9 and then there is the 250GB MaXLine Plus II. In general the Maxtor range of hard drives has a slower average seek time than Seagate and Western Digital hard drives. Another disappointing factor is that the Maxtor hard drives had some of the most expensive Rand per megabyte pricing. On the plus side, the Maxtor drives performed on par with the other hard drives in this roundup.

DiamondMax Plus 9 80GB

The three hard drives which take their place in the 80GB capacity section are the 6Y080L0, 6Y080P0 and 6Y080M0. The 6Y080L0 is the cheapest of the Maxtor range in this roundup, it offers a rating of 7200rpm and a 2MB buffer making it a great drive for people wanting to increase their current hard drive space. Even as a hard drive for an entry level computer this one would suffice, sadly its Rand per megabyte rating is over R9 per MB, making it a bit difficult to recommend. As is the case with all of the Maxtor drives, the average seek time of this one is not ideal but its benchmark results showed it can put up a fight. The second contender in this capacity is the 6Y080P0, this drive simply sees an added 8MB of onboard cache while its one year warranty stays the same; performance wise it did slightly better than even some of the Seagate drive which was a welcome pleasure. Sadly its Rand per MB rating is over the R10 mark which was disappointing. The final drive in this category is the 6Y080M0, this drive sees the addition of Serial ATA in this range. It is exactly the same drive as the 6Y080P0 apart from its Serial ATA interface and I was very happy to see that its price also remained the same as its Parallel ATA counterpart., it also offered some great benchmarks results .All in all I still feel that the minimum drive anybody should invest in these days is a 120GB, but for a little added space these drives are not bad. It is just a pity for these drives that the Seagate offerings are much better in terms of value for money.

Value for Money 65 **Performance** 87

Pros:	Not bad benchmark performance
Cons:	Average seek time
Supplied By:	Rectron [011] 203-1000
ERP:	R749
Internet:	www.maxtor.com

76

Value for Money 60 **Performance** 89

Pros:	Benchmark results
Cons:	Not truly value for money
Supplied By:	Rectron [011] 203-1000
ERP:	R849
Internet:	www.maxtor.com

74

Value for Money 64 **Performance** 90

Pros:	Great performance
Cons:	Expensive
Supplied By:	Rectron [011] 203-1000
ERP:	R849
Internet:	www.maxtor.com

77

DiamondMax Plus 9 120GB

The DiamondMax Plus 9 120GB range of hard drives I reviewed this month consisted of two Parallel ATA drives and one Serial ATA drive. The first hard drive in this range is the 6Y120L0, this hard drive features 2MB of cache and comes with a one year warranty. Looking at its benchmark performance it under performed slightly compared to its Seagate and Western Digital counterparts. As was the case with the DiamondMax Plus 9 80GB range of hard drives this one is also slightly more expensive than the other 120GB hard drives in its class making it not so easy to recommend. The 8MB cache version of the afore mentioned hard drive is the 6Y120M0. Featuring the same 7200rpm motor and average seek time of 9.3ms as the other DiamondMax Plus 9 120GB hard drives, this one has a three year warranty. Performance wise it was not as fast as some of the other hard drives in its class and sadly, as seems to be the case with most of the Maxtor drives, it was slightly more expensive than its competitors. The last hard drive in this range I looked at was the 6Y120P0, this one being the Serial ATA version of the 6Y120M0. It also features 8MB of cache and offers a three year warranty. What sets this drive apart from its competitors' offering is that it is priced the same as its Parallel ATA counterpart. Even though its counterpart is not the cheapest 120GB drive on the block it is nice to see a manufacturer making the price of Serial ATA the same as Parallel ATA drives. Its performance is also slightly slower than those from Seagate and Western Digital and the one thing I still do not like is its slower average seek time.

DiamondMax Plus 9 120GB 6Y120L0

Value for Money 80 **Performance** 85

Pros:	There is not much one can praise it on
Cons:	Seagate's offering is still better
Supplied By:	Rectron [011] 203-1000
ERP:	R999
Internet:	www.maxtor.com

82

Maxtor DiamondMax Plus 9 120GB 6Y120P0

Value for Money 80 **Performance** 86

Pros:	8MB cache | 3 years warranty
Cons:	Same price as the Serial ATA version
Supplied By:	Rectron [011] 203-1000
ERP:	R1099
Internet:	www.maxtor.com

83

Maxtor DiamondMax Plus 9 120GB 6Y120M0

Value for Money 85 **Performance** 88

Pros:	Serial ATA at Parallel ATA's price
Cons:	R9.15 per MB
Supplied By:	Rectron [011] 203-1000
ERP:	R1099
Internet:	www.maxtor.com

86

MaXLine Plus II 250GB

The MaXLine Plus II range of hard drives are Maxtor's enterprise-class disk drives which are designed to offer better speed and density compared to the older tape backup solutions or newer optical backup devices such as DVD writers. Even though this hard drive is aimed at the backup-device market does not mean it will not work as well in a home computer. The hard drive in this class I looked at was an awesome 250GB drive. The 7Y250P0 has an average seek time of 9ms and has 8MB of cache. Naturally this drive would have a three year warranty and looking at its benchmark performance it becomes obvious that speed junkies might look elsewhere. It was no surprise to see that this hard drive was fairly pricey and at about R10.79 per gigabyte this hard drive will not be my first choice. As a secondary drive in your computer or a dedicated backup drive this hard drive will offer all the space you need.

MaXLine Plus II 250GB 7Y250P0

Value for Money 79 **Performance** 78

Pros:	Awesome capacity
Cons:	Expensive
Supplied By:	Rectron [011] 203-1000
ERP:	R2699
Internet:	www.maxtor.com

78

The original briefing for this month's roundup was portable drives and hard drives. This was changed at the last minute as I wanted to dedicate an entire roundup to portable storage devices, anything else would not have done those nifty devices any justice. I apologise for any inconvenience caused.

Western Digital is one of the storage industry's pioneers, the company has been around since the early 1970's and began to design and manufacture hard drives in the late 1980's. Sadly due to the local distributor, Drive Control Corporation, not willing to provide me with hard drives over the festive season when they closed I had to source them elsewhere. TVR Computers were quick to respond and even though they did not have all the stock I requested they provided these three most popular drives.

These three hard drives take form in the WD800, WD1200, and the WD2000. The first mentioned is an 80GB hard drive which features a 7200rpm motor and 8MB of cache. It also features a three year warranty, a welcome feature as its direct competitors, the Seagate Barracuda 7200.7 80GB ST380013AS and the Maxtor DiamondMax Plus 9 80GB 6Y080M0 only offer a one year warranty. Looking at its performance, this hard drive is much the same, if not slightly faster than the offerings from Seagate and Maxtor. If I were to buy an 80GB drive then this one would be it. The 120GB drive from Western Digital is a Serial ATA hard drive and it is called the WD1200. This Serial ATA hard drive features 8MB of cache and comes with a three year warranty. Performance wise it was pretty much on par with the rest of the hard drives in its class. Its estimated retail price is also not bad either and I will find it difficult to choose between this one and the Seagate Barracuda 7200.7 120GBST3120026AS. The final hard drive I looked at is the 200GB, WD2000. This superbly priced Parallel ATA hard drive offers a three year warranty and an average seek time of 8.9ms. Sadly though it only has 2MB of cache onboard, but you can't deny the fact that a 200GB hard drive at this price is a good buy either way. Performance wise it performed pretty much as expected, and would compliment any computer beautifully. Now where did I put that spare R1549 I had the other day?

Western Digital Caviar WD800

Value for Money 80 **Performance** 90

Pros:	Three year warranty | 8MB cache
Cons:	Nothing
Supplied By:	TVR Computers [011] 807-1390
ERP:	R749
Internet:	www.westerndigital.com

85

Western Digital Caviar WD1200

Value for Money 80 **Performance** 85

Pros:	Serial ATA | 120GB | Three year warranty
Cons:	Nothing
Supplied By:	TVR Computers [011] 807-1390
ERP:	R1049
Internet:	www.westerndigital.com

82

Western Digital Caviar WD2000

Value for Money 90 **Performance** 75

Pros:	200GB at under R2000
Cons:	2MB cache
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ERP:	R1549
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Model Name	Interface	Cache	Model Number	Speed	Average Seek Time	Warranty	Rand per MB	Price	Rating	Ziff Davis WinBench 99	
										Disk Transfer Rate: Begin (in MB/s)	Disk Transfer Rate: End (in MB/s)
Seagate											
Barracuda 7200.7 80GB	PATA	2MB	ST380011A	7200 rpm	8.2ms	1	R 8.11	R 649	82%	48.5	24.6
Barracuda 7200.7 80GB	SATA	8MB	ST380013AS	7200 rpm	8.2ms	1	R 9.36	R 749	78%	49	25.3
Barracuda 7200.7 120GB	PATA	2MB	ST3120022A	7200 rpm	8.2ms	1	R 7.07	R 849	88%	49.6	25.2
Barracuda 7200.7 Plus 120GB	PATA	8MB	ST3120026A	7200 rpm	8.5ms	3	R 7.49	R 899	88%	49.9	26
Barracuda 7200.7 120GB	SATA	8MB	ST3120026AS	7200 rpm	8.5ms	3	R 8.32	R 999	83%	49.5	26.2
Barracuda 7200.7 160GB	PATA	2MB	ST3160021A	7200 rpm	8.2ms	1	R 6.86	R 1,099	86%	52.2	26.9
Barracuda 7200.7 Plus 160GB	PATA	8MB	ST3160023A	7200 rpm	8.5ms	3	R 7.80	R 1,249	83%	52.1	26.7
Barracuda 7200.7 160GB	SATA	8MB	ST3160023AS	7200 rpm	8.5ms	3	R 8.11	R 1,299	82%	52.1	26.1
Maxtor											
DiamondMax Plus 9 80GB	PATA	2MB	6Y080L0	7200 rpm	9.3ms	1	R 9.36	R 749	76%	49.3	25.5
DiamondMax Plus 9 80GB	PATA	8MB	6Y080P0	7200 rpm	9.3ms	1	R 10.61	R 849	74%	49.4	25.1
DiamondMax Plus 9 80GB	SATA	8MB	6Y080M0	7200 rpm	9.3ms	1	R 10.61	R 849	77%	49	24.9
DiamondMax Plus 9 120GB	PATA	2MB	6Y120L0	7200 rpm	9.3ms	1	R 8.32	R 999	82%	50.2	26.5
DiamondMax Plus 9 120GB	PATA	8MB	6Y120P0	7200 rpm	9.3ms	3	R 9.15	R 1,099	83%	51.1	27.2
DiamondMax Plus 9 120GB	SATA	8MB	6Y120M0	7200 rpm	9.3ms	3	R 9.15	R 1,099	86%	50.6	26.5
MaXLine II 250GB	PATA	8MB	7Y250P0	5400 rpm	9.0ms	3	R 10.79	R 2,699	78%	53.9	28.6
Western Digital											
Western Digital Caviar WD800 80GB	PATA	8MB	WD800JB	7200 rpm	8.9ms	3	R 9.36	R 749	85%	49.2	24.9
Western Digital Caviar WD1200 120GB	SATA	8MB	WD1200JD	7200 rpm	8.9ms	3	R 8.74	R 1,049	82%	49.9	25
Western Digital Caviar WD2000 200GB	PATA	2MB	WD2000BB	7200 rpm	8.9ms	3	R 7.74	R 1,549	82%	54.3	28.9

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by anton lines

Beyond the Game

This is the World Cyber Games' official slogan. When one listens to a master of ceremonies saying how the World Cyber Games is not just about gaming, but also about bringing the youth of the world together, it all sounds like a clichéd ploy to make the event seem bigger and better.

Having recently experienced first hand the remarkable camaraderie that develops between the players, team leaders, and even some of the spectators at World Cyber Games 2003, I now understand why gaming and especially international tournaments like these are so important.

It happens everywhere on a smaller scale. The first big LANs started to emerge in South Africa towards the end of 1999, and immediately people were drawn in. There is a special bond that develops between the regulars at Mayhem, Organised Chaos, Funky Cow, or any public event - a connection that people who only play online cannot understand. You step into the hall, and immediately there are a hundred others who share your hobbies, interests, and are, for the most part, about the same age as you. The experience is limited in South Africa, however, just like it is in any single country. But at the World Cyber Games, and other international tournaments, you have the opportunity to meet and interact with just about every type of person in the world. While there are players of all ages - the youngest being eleven year old Kikuji (UT2003) from Japan, and the oldest being our very own Warren "Storm" Steven, weighing in at thirty-three - the majority of the participants are between seventeen and twenty-one. The managers, team leaders, and strategic partners make up the bulk of the older attendees. When six hundred players, from countless language and cultural backgrounds, gather for a gaming festival, the competition itself becomes insignificant and the combined presence of the players takes the front seat. Just like it is with the "online-only player" example, anyone who has not been to a major international tournament will not truly be able to understand the meaning it has.

At first it's easy to tell the difference between the players who are there for the first time, and those who have been before, but this soon changes as the event progresses. A simple pastime such as competitive gaming actually has brought them together. It is somewhat like the "secret club" that children often invent, the elite gathering that only the very best in the world have the honour of attending. For those few days, they are gods among men.

Each group of countries has a particular way of dealing with this status, and the distinct personalities among their players start to surface. The Central Europeans tend to be very focused, keeping to themselves and trying at all times to maintain their professional image. This is not surprising, considering Sweden is home to the best Counter-Strike team in the world, the best Quake 3 TDM team in the world, and the two best WarCraft III players at the Electronic Sports World Cup. Germany boasts the top Unreal Tournament 2003 player, and both of the world's highest ranked FIFA players. They can sometimes seem snobbish, but this is really because they take it more seriously than everybody else, and have a high level of confidence as a result.

A large slice of the gaming population hail from North America. This is usually the most diverse group at an event, as the USA and Canada both send massive teams, representative of almost an entire continent. Some of the players are dedicated (such as Team 3D, who finished second in Counter-Strike at WCG), while others appear not to be too worried if they win or lose. A few are downright arrogant. But the two most obnoxious nations at WCG 2003 turned out to be France and Russia, their players hardly showing anyone respect or consideration. When the news that the two countries had gotten into a punch-up (an argument that started over the French female Counter-Strike team) made its way through the Player's Village, it was not difficult to believe.

South Africa, Australia and New Zealand form yet another group. Gamers from these three countries are very similar people (maybe it's the weather...) and always seem to get along well (unless the rugby / cricket is mentioned). The atmosphere surrounding the players is laid-back, relaxed and carefree. The majority of this group were at WCG 2003 with the sole intention of having fun, although that didn't stop Snoop, Australia's UT2003 representative, from finishing third in the individual competition.

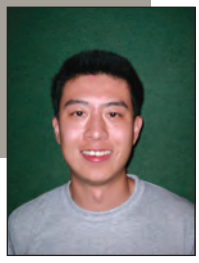
The Asian gamers also share several common traits. They are remarkably friendly and will make a conscious effort to get to know you, despite the obvious language barrier. The Koreans, in particular, are excessively hospitable and always do everything in their power to ensure the WCG experience is a comfortable one for the visitors. However, the rivalry between the Asian countries themselves is fierce (as it is with many other aspects of their lives), and the players are especially competitive when dealing with other Asian opponents. Strategy games are highly favoured in the east, and the internal competitiveness has kept their skills sharp. Asia's achievements are nothing to be laughed at - South Korea has won the StarCraft tournament at WCG for three years straight, and a Chinese WarCraft III player took a silver medal this year.

The year of 2003 has come to an end, and as we prepare for our 2004 competitive gaming season, we look forward to many more narrow victories, amazing skill, fantastic brute strength and much abuse. International gaming tournaments are not something that every player in South Africa will have the opportunity to experience. In fact, it is safe to say that the majority will never have this chance. But those who have leave inspiration for those who dream of being next. Gaming is about far more than just the tournament. The effort required to get to the top is worth a hundred times itself in the end.

community.za:

player of the month

Name:	Robert Dake Lu
Nick:	Undead
Age:	21
Occupation:	Student at the University of Pretoria
Clan:	N/A
Games:	Quake 3 | Quake 2 | Duke 3D | StarCraft | WarCraft III
Achievements:	Represented South Africa at the World Cyber Games 2002 2nd place in Quake 3 at Worfaire 2002 finals 2nd place in Quake 3 at Worfaire 2002 preliminaries 4th place in Quake 3 at Worfaire 2001 finals 1st place in Quake 3 at Worfaire 2001 preliminaries 1st place in Quake 3 Team Deathmatch at Worfaire 2000 (Team: eXcess) 9th place in Quake 3 individual at Worfaire 2000 2nd place in StarCraft Team at Worfaire 1999 (Team: Dark Haven)
Quote:	"Have luck :D"



<The_Basilisk> What do you look for in a competitive game?
<Undead> I look to see if the game will be played over a number of years, if it will attract many new gamers and if they will enjoy playing it. For me personally I think the community of the game makes a huge impact on how long it will last. I hope to play and socialize with more female gamers.

<The_Basilisk> Is gaming like riding a bicycle for you, or do you have to practise to stay in shape?
<Undead> Haha, I wish it was like riding a bicycle. Good point. I think I improved in gaming from losing and not giving up, carrying on playing for the fun of it. To get to the top competitively, practice comes first. It's best when practising with a consistent team or partner.

<The_Basilisk> You've been relatively inactive over the past year. What's the reason for this, and do you intend to make a re-appearance any time soon?
<Undead> I became inactive after going to WCG Korea 2002 - it was a dream come true. Unfortunately Quake 3 was not added to the WCG 2003 list so I haven't been practising it since. I still enjoy playing now and then online, on Mweb Kalahari, and at some LAN events, but not on a competitive level. I have been playing WarCraft 3 lately on local servers, getting bored of First Person Shooter games and getting back to my Real Time Strategy roots. My decision on going competitive again depends on my studies and the quality of forthcoming games such as Quake 4 or Counter-Strike 2. For now I still play PC games. Once a gamer, always a gamer.

<The_Basilisk> How different is playing online to playing on LAN?
<Undead> For Quake 3, I definitely prefer LAN. I get to meet the people that I play, and the best part is hearing all sorts of curses from across the room when they get killed. But if I lived in another country where ADSL is common, I could play against many more opponents over the net. Online is a massive market for attracting new gamers.

<The_Basilisk> What do you think of the celebrity status of certain overseas gamers?
<Undead> When I was in Korea, what struck me the most was when the number one Starcraft player walked off the stage, there was a crowd of girls chasing after him. I would love to be ranked top overseas :D

community update

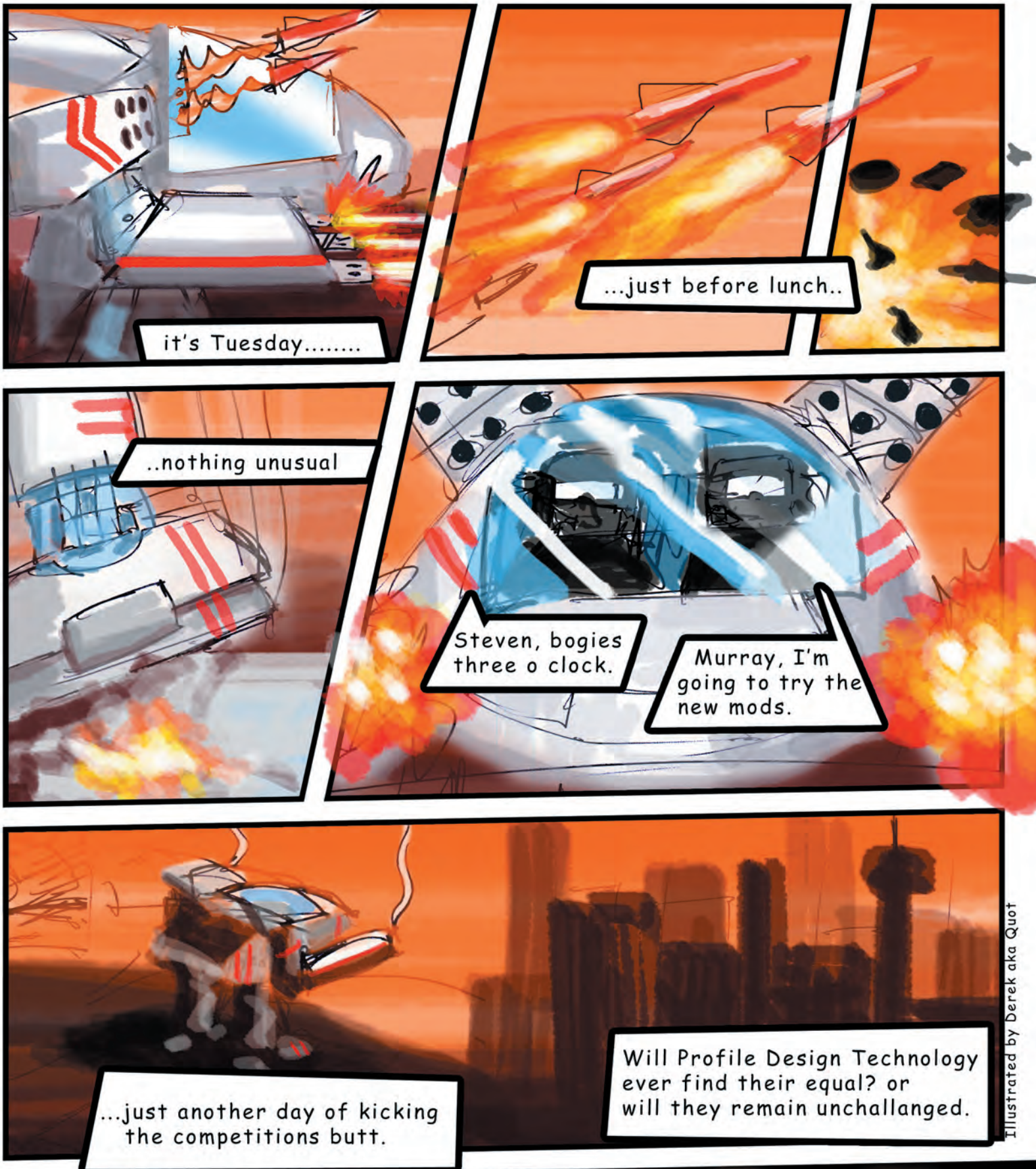
In what has come as possibly the most debated move in South African Counter-Strike history, Team Ignite has left its former clan Damage Control to join forces with the powerhouse of the local community, Evolve.

Having risen quickly up through the ranks during the 2003 season, Ignite turned heads at every tournament with their remarkable teamwork and tenacity. Only two of their players had any previous experience at the top level, and it was mainly due to this that they became renowned as the champions of the underdogs. With a string of competition finishes starting early in the year at fifth and leading up to their huge victory at NAG's rAge event, they have proven themselves to be more than deserving of the professional status. At this stage in their gaming careers, according to Ignite's leader, James "Prem" Schwikkard, the move to Evolve was a natural one. "We had talked about it amongst ourselves several times," he says, "and after rAge, we met and weighed up the positives and negatives, deciding that it could only be good for us and Evolve. I then approached Warren Steven (manager of Evolve) with the idea. So this has been in the making since early November last year."

Warren "Storm" Steven issued the following statement about the merge: "Due to ever-increasing international standards, Team Evolve, looking towards 2004, has incorporated DC-Ignite into its infrastructure to allow this talented team of players the opportunity to practice against players who have plenty of international experience, as well as fall under an established management system." The business management of Ignite will now be handled by Evolve. Their much-talked-about sponsorships from Shuttle, AMD and Sennheiser during 2003 are the obvious indicators that management is of a high standard. At this point, it is uncertain whether Ignite will keep their old team name, but all five members of the squad remain unchanged.

The news of the merge has been received by the community with widely mixed reactions, some of Ignite's supporters expressing disappointment at the team having "sold out". When asked about it, James was reluctant to give specifics, "We had many people congratulating us on the move, although we did find a large number of people angry at us for joining. They all had their own reasons." Fears that Evolve now hold a monopoly on local Counter-Strike are starting to spread rapidly, but with the increased practice between the two Evolve teams, it can only serve to improve them both, giving South Africa a better chance in international tournaments. And, of course, people should not forget that there will always be a new underdog. Team Synergy will certainly not be content with third place for long.
Synergy boasts an exceptionally strong individual lineup, consisting of Gandalf (formerly of DC Octane, with World Cyber Games experience), Surge (formerly of Evolve and DC Octane, with World Cyber Games and Electronic Sports World Cup experience), Raumas (formerly of Evolve, with ESWC experience), Slipstream (formerly of Evolve, also with ESWC experience), Thor (formerly from the United States of America, with Cyberathlete Amateur League experience) and Deathseeker (formerly of Damage Control). We will see how the team fares at the Mayhem Offline League which starts in February.

On the Unreal Tournament 2003 side, we have several major changes as well. Longstanding clan Naja split up due to internal conflict between the three leaders, leaving behind a few clanless players, and a new team called Murder.inc. The core of the team is made up by Nautilian (WCG 2002 for Unreal Tournament), Gengis (3rd place finsher at WCG South Africa Qualifiers) and Haja (former leader of Naja). Notably missing is Zero-1 (2nd place at WCG South Africa). The future of Murder.inc is uncertain, and will probably depend on local support for Unreal Tournament 2004, which is due for release in the next few months.



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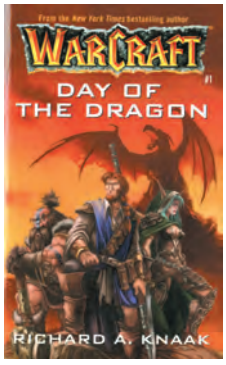

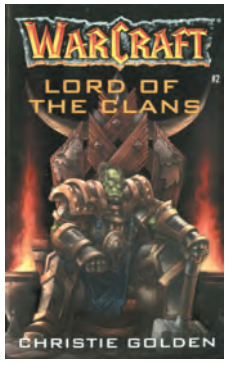

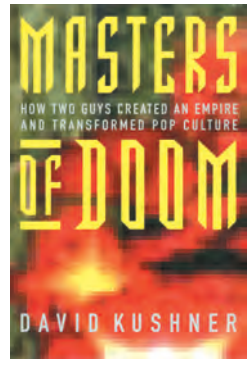

Blizzard Entertainment unleashed the WarCraft real-time strategy franchise on an eager gaming public almost nine years ago. It instantly became a success the world over. It has subsequently spawned two sequels and several add-ons that have seen the brand become a lucrative franchise. Not content to sit on its laurels, Blizzard commissioned several top fantasy authors to write novels based on the world of Azeroth. The first three books in the series have been published so far, and judging by its reception, Blizzard has cottoned onto another way to fatten its coffers.

WarCraft 1: Day of the Dragon

Richard Knaak, who penned the critically acclaimed The Legend of Huma, was given the unenviable task of kicking the series off with Day of the Dragon.

The Kirin Tor, a powerful group of wizards who are the rulers of the Dalaran region, are increasingly concerned that the Dragonmaw clan still have control over the dragons of Azeroth. These Orcs are using the dragons to conduct raids on villages in Azeroth, leaving death and destruction in their wake.

They send the maverick mage, Rhonin, on a dangerous mission to the Orc-controlled lands of Khaz Modan - he must monitor the threat and report his findings. However, Rhonin is soon propelled into a conspiracy that sees him joining forces with the beautiful but fiery elvin archer Vereesa and the courageous dwarven griffon rider Falstad to uncover a plot that could see all Azeroth turned into a wasteland.

Knaak sets a fiery pace throughout the novel but still manages to provide the uninitiated with enough information on the WarCraft setting. Day of the Dragon is an ideal platform for the series, as it has sufficient depth to stand on its own and does not come across as something that is derived from a computer game.

WarCraft 2: Lord of the Clans

The second book, Lord of the Clans, is a somewhat different beast altogether. It should be considered as prescribed reading before playing WarCraft 3: Reign of Chaos.

Christie Golden, best known among Dungeons & Dragon enthusiasts for launching the Ravenloft line, has fleshed out the story of the enigmatic Orc leader, Thrall, in an entertaining way.

Spanning the time from his infancy and leading up to Thrall becoming the shaman warrior many gamers know him to be, Lord of the Clans has become my favourite of the series thus far. Golden had to walk the double-edged blade of convincing the reader that the Orcs are not the mindless, blood-thirsty race that many believe them to be and still portray them as sufficiently dangerous to mankind. Perhaps the most difficult thing about this novel is getting used to this duality, especially after having read Day of the Dragon. Lord of the Clans does progress at a slow pace but this is due to the nature of the novel. After all, Golden has to establish the psychology of Thrall and how he has become one of the most feared Orc warriors.

In some ways, the characterisations are very stereotyped but somehow Golden makes it work to her benefit. For anyone looking for a slightly different take on the WarCraft universe, this book would be it.

WarCraft 3: The Last Guardian

While its predecessors take place between the second and third games, the third novel in the series, The Last Guardian, is set during the first WarCraft title.

It tells the story of Medivh, the Guardian of Tirisfal, through the eyes of his apprentice Khadgar. The Guardian comes from a line of champions imbued with god-like powers and charged with fighting a secret war against the Burning Legion, an army of demons out to destroy Azeroth. In my view, Jeff Grubb's work should have been the first book in the series, but with Blizzard timing the first two books to coincide with the release of the third game; it made better sense for the company to leave this one for later.

The Last Guardian focuses more on Medivh than the impending war between humans, Orcs and the Burning Legion. However, Grubb never loses himself in the biography and uses the war as a chain to pull the story of Medivh along. While not the best of the series, this is still a very enjoyable read.

the warcraft series

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RRP: R 91.95

From a fan's point of view, reading Masters of Doom is both enticing and extremely nostalgic. In fact, while reading it I progressively started playing everything from Wolfenstein to Quake 2 again. That's because if you grew up, or at least participated, in the era of id - from Commander Keen through to Doom and finally Quake 3; past John Carmack's strangeness and John Romero's rockstar days, it really strikes a few chords.

The book is a narrative story-telling of the history of the two Johns - how they got to meet at Softdisk, left to start making their own games, created the id Empire through Apogee and GTI and eventually went their different ways. It documents the arrival and departure of a lot of gaming legends who had to do with id, covers Carmack's genius with programming and Romero's insatiable lust for playing and understanding games, chronicles the ups and downs behind the titles PC owners have loved over the years and even the disastrous years of Ion Storm and Daikatana.

What surprised me is the amount of detail that the book opens up. It also dispels a good deal of urban myths around the company and its owners, especially Romero in his notorious long hair "Wrote It" days. In fact, I have a whole new degree of respect for him and the other id alumni. And despite his strange and often harsh, cold demeanor, Carmack also comes across as more human than you'd have thought. It concludes chronicling the notorious incident that started DOOM 3 and saw the departure of Paul Steed, plus the ways the two Johns are moving these days (simple games and rockets).

While I would have preferred a less story-driven and more documentary style book with more quotes and references from other people, Masters of Doom is a great read for any gaming fan, especially those enthused with PC shooters. It's a historical tip of the hat to a giant in PC games, though it does seem to conclude that id is at its end, spiritually at least.

masters of doom

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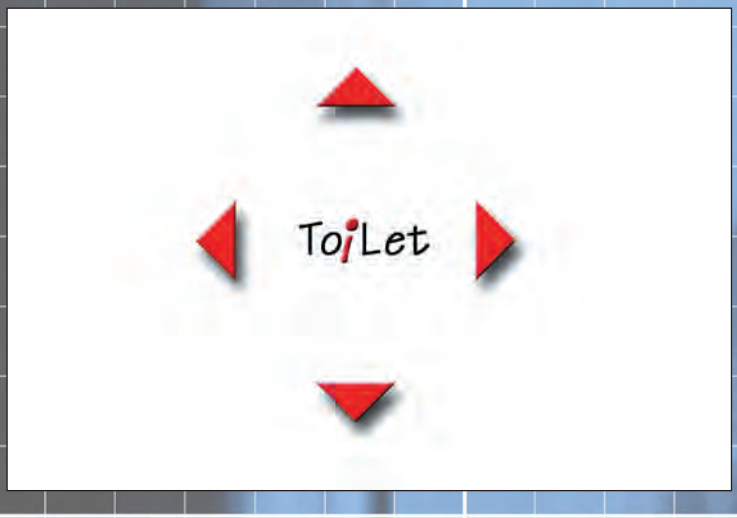

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Role-playing isn't all about swords and sorcery, as we discover with this month's Zombie gore fest. And comics are not always about skin-tight suits and big breasts, but sometimes go to the dark side (or light side) of life. And everyone deserves a cute figurine in their life…

Knights of the Dinner Table
RRP: R37.95
Follow the gaming sessions of the role playing geeks everyone warned you about. The poor long suffering game master, the hack 'n slasher, the rules lawyer and the female who tries to bring a little sanity into the mix, all written and drawn by a man who has been a gamer most of his life. As well as the comic strips there are reviews, articles on various aspects of gaming and news of upcoming developments in the industry.
Oh and get someone to tell you about the infamous Gazibo incident.

League of Extraordinary Gentlemen Vol 2
RRP: R194.95
You may have seen the movie, now read the real adventures of the league, before America got hold of it. In this second series Britain has been invaded by illegal aliens... from Mars to be precise. The league are called in, and meet up with such luminaries as Dr Moreau and Rupert the bear. Shudder at the unspeakable atrocities committed in the London Museum and see Alain Quartermain and Mina Murray finally get it on.
Also, like the first book, pay attention to every panel, because there is always something of interest happening in the background.

Dark Minds Macropolis
RRP: R 24.50
Even in the future crimes need to be solved, but sometimes the normal police can't handle it - so the SIU is formed. Follow two detectives tracking a serial killer through a dark, gothic world, where all is not as it seems; especially when the detectives in question are battery operated! The story is gritty and the world unpleasant, and the artwork really pretty. Buy it now and then collect the first series as well.

Judge Dredd featuring Judge Death
RRP: R189.95
You have seen the movie, but don't be put off by Mr Stallone. Meet the real Judge Dredd in these early stories, featuring his arch nemesis, Judge Death. If Dredd is the ultimate lawman, Death takes things one step further. On his world, it was realised that all crime was committed by the living, and therefore the way to stop crime was to eliminate the living. This twisted logic is brought to the mighty Mega City one and now it's up to Dredd to figure out how to defend his city from something already dead. Humour, violence and death... what more could you want?

Magic the Gathering: Darksteel is coming!

It's that time again when a new magic set gets released. Every year a new 'block' of 'sets' is released. A block consists of 3 sets, the first is a large set which you can buy both starters and boosters packs. The following two sets of the block are smaller and are only released with booster packs.

Darksteel is the second set in the Mirrodin trilogy. The Mirrodin block is based in a world where artifacts are in abundance, a technologically advanced world. This block may have up to 50% of the cards being artifacts.
Traditionally with a new set comes new mechanics. Darksteel brings the following new mechanics:
Indestructible - Indestructible permanents can't be destroyed. Not by anything. If a spell tries to destroy an indestructible permanent, nothing happens--not even if the spell prevents regeneration.
Modular - Modular is always listed with a number; an artifact creature with modular comes into play with that many +1/+1 counters on it. When that creature is put into a graveyard, you can put its +1/+1 counters onto any other artifact creature in play.
It also brings new ideas for equipment which effectively allows you to "throw" your equipment for an effect, an example could be " , Unattach Equipment: Destroy target creature."
These new mechanics may bring some great new decks onto the scene, which can abuse cards from Mirrodin like Power Conduit. Plus Indestructible creatures will give control decks a headache. We hope to see some new decks hit the scene which are cheap to build and very competitive.

See you at the Pre-Release!

Death Manga Statue
RRP: R700
From the Sandman comics comes the manga style version of his little sister, Death. In her mini skirt and Tank top she really is the ultimate Goth's goth. She's 20 centimeters high and made from cold cast porcelain; one of a limited series of 2000. Take her home with you, and maybe when the moment comes you will go into that good night with a smile on your face.

Dark Carnival Madam Mortus
RRP: R 190
For those of you who dreaded going to the circus as a child because the clowns were scary here is the figure set to prove you were right.
Pictured is the Madam Mortus figure, who works like a magic eight ball. You pull the leaver as you ask her a question and she will give you her answer, usually not one you want. Along with her, a collection of circus freaks make up the set. Only for the twisted.

Sandman Mini Bust
RSP: R450
Here we have the Sandman mini bust, cool and suave on his pedestal... hidden at the base is the key to hell. And hey, he's wearing black - obviously a family trait, as well as being socially acceptable in any gothic household.

Masamune Shirow's Intron Depot Figures
RRP: R50
Shown here are Glen (standing) and Garnet, two pretty manga babes from the master artist and story teller Masamune Shirow. These mini figures stand 5 centimeters high and come with an assortment of weapons, like every good manga chick should. Also in the series is the fury figure, a small round robot, with enough cannons to do some serious damage.

RPG Review: All Flesh Must Be Eaten

It's not often that a game is so perfectly set up for a Hollywood horror style of role playing. All Flesh Must Be Eaten has struck a wonderful balance between mechanics and genre, enabling the GM to come up with some great role playing material.

Basically, it's a zombie survival horror game. While this may seem a bit limited in scope, All Flesh Must Be Eaten comes with a guide to creating just about any kind of zombie related horror story (from your basic "the dead are back and they want brains" right through to "post apocalyptic radiation fuelled night crawlers") with a healthy (if you'll excuse the pun) bunch of options for the GM to make up his very own setting.
All Flesh Must Be Eaten is massively conducive to the typical high violence, shambling mass style of story that seems to surround any kind of zombie story that we see on the silver screen. It has a fast paced system that allows for quick resolution of tasks - making sure that the game gets back to the action where it belongs, instead of getting bogged down in hours worth of dice rolling.
While there are many generic horror games, All Flesh Must Be Eaten's focus on one kind of horror - the living dead in all their bits-falling-off glory - allows for a greater amount of detail to go into the bad guys. This is prime stuff, and, in the hands of the right GM, it can turn out to be as frightening as it is fun.
Naturally, a game like this does create worries about a high PC mortality rate, and it should. Death comes easily in All Flesh Must Be Eaten, and a long term campaign will have to be carefully constructed to both keep the players interested and allow for new PCs to join the group. However, not every role playing game is about seventeen year saga campaigns… sometimes you just need a bit of distraction, and All Flesh Must Be Eaten's zombie-genre versatility makes it perfect for the occasional quick hit session.
It is a game with tons of potential. It is up to the Game Master to make this one work in which ever way he prefers.

Movie music faces

www.idea-a-day.com
John Cage said "I can't understand why people are frightened of new ideas; I'm frightened of old ideas" Well, he'd have loved Idea A Day, a site dedicated to a new idea a day. The ideas aren't copyrighted, and some can be really mundane. Others are truly brilliant, though, and quite a few are more lateral than a dozen drunk crabs.
You could file it under 'site for wasting time', but it's a bit of an education browsing some of the suggestions, though the site doesn't allow commenting. Alternatively you can subscribe to the site and have ideas sent to you every day.

www.loudside.com
Corrupting the youth since 1995, one of the slogans proudly read. Loudside is a site dedicated to the louder, harder side of music, and we don't mean Linkin Park. That said, despite the plethora of news on truly heavy acts such as The Crown and Deicide, they also cover the more unconventional acts such as Automa Machine and Circle Take The Square.
The site covers alternative genres such as metal, industrial, punk and so on, including popular acts like Slipknot, with great efficiency. Apart from daily news, bands also have their own sections with Bios, song samples, music videos and pretty much everything you want to know.
It's a one-stop shop for anyone who likes music with real aggression (not the angsty teen whining nu-metal bands are so fond of).

www.movies-studio.com
Ever needed wallpapers or themes for your favourite movies? Studio sites are often graveyards when it comes to these free promotional methods, but luckily independent sites such as Movie Studio.com are a bit more progressive. The site holds wallpapers and screensavers for basically all the box-office movies that have been or will be on circuit in the past year or so, all wrapped up in a nice, fast design, unless you are allergic to green. This site has a lot of green.

atomfilms.shockwave.com/af/spotlight/series/stainboy/
There are two kinds of people in the world - Tim Burton fans and people who will become Tim Burton fans. The strange director behind Batman, Edward Scissorhands and Sleepy Hollow, not to mention the mind behind Nightmare Before Christmas, seems to have a universal appeal amongst independent-minded people. His online flash comic, Stainboy, might not be the kind of stuff you can show to just anyone, but it's entertaining in Burton's trademark B-movie awkwardness.
Follow his adventures as he stops villains like Match Girl, Toxic Boy, Stare Girl and Bowling Ball Head.

www.snapfiles.com
File service Webattack have undergone a change in the new year to a new look and a new feel. It is still essentially the same service underneath, but it gives a great opportunity to introduce more readers to it. Similar to Download.com and other file repositories, Snapfiles have a range of freeware and shareware applications that you can download for free. The difference comes in Snapfiles' presentation and ease of use. While the likes of Download.com are a bit intimidating and sites such as Tucows are often just unappealing, Snapfiles feels homely and small enough for anyone to navigate around it, even though it has a large selection of applications over a wide range of categories.

www.morphases.com/editor/
This nifty site lets you take photos of faces and manipulate them into something really odd, then mail it off to a friend (or enemy). The possibilities are quite ranged as you can move the eyes, nose, eyebrows, mouth, chin, hair and forehead. You can pull them further apart, closer together or completely skew. You can also bring in elements from other faces and build a completely new face. Then you can add glasses, hats and other accessories. We tried to create the editor, but they limit their photo range to humans. [*Do you really think I never see things like this, Ed*]

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music & schoolgirls

by Anton Lines

Anime Legends - Nobuo Uematsu

This month's legend is a cross-over between the worlds of anime and anime video games. He's been called the John Williams of the video game world, and is none other than Squaresoft's main music man.

His birthday is March 21, 1959, and his birthplace is Kouchi City.

As a child, he always looked up to famous musicians and eventually started to play the piano because he wanted to be like Elton John (this by his own admission).

Without attending any music lessons, he taught himself to play at age twelve.

After school, he played as both a live and studio keyboardist for several up and coming rock bands, but it wasn't long before he decided that performing was not his forté.

Instead, he made the career move to composition and began to send out demo tapes of his work to every company he could think of.

After his graduation from the University of Kanagawa (completely unrelated to his music), he was hired by Radio CM to write jingles and other promotional music for the station. He worked there until 1985, when he was recruited by Squaresoft to write game music for them, through recommendation by a friend who was also employed there.

The company was then working on an anime-style role playing game called Final Fantasy.

Since then, he has worked on almost every Squaresoft game, including all eleven Final Fantasy projects to date. He has also ventured into the world of music for animations, his credits including several lesser known series as well as the more popular "Ah! My Goddess" movie.

Nobuo's hobbies are listening to Irish music, watching Japanese pro-wrestling, brewing his own beer, learning the fiddle, and of course playing the piano.

He is married to a woman named Reiko, and is rather fond of his dog, Pao.

A few of Nobuo's musical works:

- 1985-2003: Final Fantasy I - XI
- Phantasmagoria
- Gun Hazard
- Ten Plants
- Ah! My Goddess: The Movie
- 1995: Chrono Trigger
- 1996: Super Mario RPG: Legend of the Seven Stars
- 1998: Ehrgeiz: God Bless the Ring
- 1998: Esoteria

MoviE RevieW

Azumanga Daioh

Every so often a show will come along and outright redefine my perceptions about a particular genre or theme. Azumanga Daioh has done this for both comedy and high school-themed anime. It is, in a word, brilliant.

What is remarkable about the series is that it does not follow a conventional storyline at all. Instead, it progresses through what I call a "growth" sequence of events, where character development is the focus of the story. It is basically three years out of the lives of a group of high school girls. Having said this, it is also not like western sitcoms where the chronology of the episodes is irrelevant. Azumanga Daioh does follow on from one episode to the next, and it is important to watch them all in the right order.

The primary characters are: Sakaki-san, a quiet girl with a talent for athletics and a secret passion for animals; Chiyo-chan, a ten year old who has been allowed into high school because of her genius abilities; Osaka; a transfer student from Osaka (nobody remembers her real name); Yomi and Tomo, two friends who have been together since grade school but still fight like cat and dog; Kagura, determined to be the best swimmer in the country; and Kaorin, who seems to be in love with Sakaki-san (don't ask, don't tell).

There is no other way to say this: the show is hilarious. Even for someone who has been watching anime for years and has become used to the comedic style of Japanese humour, Azumanga Daioh still surprises at every turn. There is something different about it. The humour is present on a number of levels, and with each level comes a new revelation, and a new bout of laughter. You can watch the series over four or five times and still be discovering hidden jokes and references. Often the simplest situations are littered with insinuations.

The animation is, for the purpose it serves, flawless. Much of the humour is also visual, and is brought out well by the drawing style. A lot of standard anime industry conventions have been utilised in original ways, and even more completely new ideas have been introduced. Not only is the drawing appropriate, it is also beautiful. The soundtrack is also one of the best I have come across - the music itself is funny.

With a show like this, a substantial amount of the humour is usually lost in translation, but this time round we have been blessed with a fansub translation that is nothing short of amazing. For each reference, there is a translator's note explaining it, and the English usage is exceptional. I have never seen Japanese wordplay so well expressed in my own language. Azumanga Daioh is being distributed officially in the west, but if you can, get hold of the fansubs as well.

Genre:	Comedy
Year:	2002
Producer:	Series + Short Film
Format:	26 + 1
Episodes:	Japanese with English subtitles
Language:	All Ages
Availability:	Uncommon

Concept	9
Story	9
Soundtrack	9
Characters	10
Animation	10
Translation	10
Total Score (out of 100)	95

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Badger Times

Badger Hunt #2 Winner [January Issue]
[***Ed:*** *I received this mail 24 December 2003 @ 12:27 PM making Jonty our winner. Well done for spotting a very well hidden badger. At time of printing only 5 other people sent in the correct location of the badger. Here's the message*]:
I found the badger: Page 46, Commandos 3 review, top left corner, the badger is upside-down in one of the inventory block thingy's.
Jonty

Ed: *Well done - your prize should arrive eventually.*

Mistaken identity and red herrings
Odds and Ends
The badger is on the front cover between the soldier with the red beret and the soldier wearing the helmet. To make the competition more effective - any old idiot can STB (spot the badger) if he's always on the front cover - rather hide him somewhere in the magazine... Nice Max Payne 2 review - I think that overall the reviewers are doing a better job… [*Cut, Ed*].
Morgue [FLB]

Ed: *Correct, the badger did and will probably make more appearances on the cover unless a bigger gaming legend appears, however, the badger competition was and is only for a hidden badger in a screenshot inside the magazine. The badger on the cover was a rare breed of badger called a red herring. It's amusing that you refer to the Max Payne 2 review in the same letter - that's where the badger was hiding in that issue.*

Badger found
I found your badger! And it only took me one quick scan of the magazine. Anyway it's on page 60 [January issue] the bottom left screenshot, in the middle of the shot (about).
Andre

Ed: *Actually, that isn't the location of the badger. Incidentally if you think this whole badger thing is getting tired send me a mail to complain or do you like searching for him each month?*

This is what you're looking for each issue - a badger hidden inside a screenshot inside the magazine.
The badger on the cover doesn't count - he wears fake fur.

Another announcement
Send us your technical questions as well as letters, we're starting a technical help section for all hardware issues in the next month or so. We've formed a smart team to answer all your queries and I can personally guarantee that these gentlemen are the best journalists in the country for answering these types of questions... well that's what they told me. See example below:

Problem
Just a week ago I got Freedom Force from a friend. It started up fine, but when I clicked on options it exits the game and goes to the desktop. I installed the latest drivers for my graphics card. I could finally play Freedom Force but then I couldn't play any of my other games like GTA III. What could the problem be?
Reader

NAG Technical: From the information you've supplied we have deduced that [snip, Ed]
Ed: *So. If you send in your technical questions, problems etc. we'll do our best to assist you. Please do remember the following - we can't help you if you don't supply us with detailed information such as your system configuration, type of 3D card, amount of RAM etc. We also need to know how the problem happened, for example in the above letter it would be helpful if we knew how the other, older games crashed and when they crashed [during loading, clicking on a menu etc]. The more detail you give us the more likely we can help you. Also, remember to always download all the latest drivers for your hardware plus the latest version of DirectX and any patches the game might have - as a rule many problems disappear once the software is updated.*

Originality
I came across a game for the GBA, Boktai. It has a light sensor in the cartridge which uses actual sunlight to power up the weapons which are used to kill vampires - original, eh?
yUDi

Ed: *Yes, that is definitely original. So what happens if you want to play it at night? I actually visited the site and here are their tips for playing in the sun [unedited] - I wonder if this was cleared with marketing?*
1. Although "Boktai" is a game that requires sunlight, playing under the sun for too long is not recommended for your health. Please do not stay under the sun for too long.
2. *When playing under the sun, wear a hat, do not expose your skin too much, use sun block, and drink enough water.*
3. *When you stay outside for a long time on a very sunny day, your eyes could start hurting. If the abnormalities of your eyes (trouble seeing, tears, itchy eyes, pain, etc.), go to a physician immediately.*
4. *When playing indoors, avoid playing in a dark spot. Play where there is enough light.*
5. *When you are tired or sleep-deprived, you should not play too much for your health.*

We can end the war today...
All I want to know is how many readers you have on average per month. And if the person reading this is the person Ed said he was going to hire to delete all of my mail... surely you have an idea? Go and ask Ed for me and tell me what he said, but don't tell him I asked 'cause then he's going to go all sarcastic on you. Then again... you're probably thinking "if this guy stops sending mail to Ed, I won't have a job anymore!" well if you co-operate I will continue sending mail to Ed… if you fail to comply you'll be out of a job as I will find another source to reveal to me how many readers NAG has per month.
P.S. I have just created 134 Hotmail accounts, all with unique user names... I have buddies online just waiting for me to issue the launch command.
Cloud

Ed: *Go ahead - launch… why are you looking for this information anyway? Are you a spy?*

Letter on idea for game
I know there are many games where there is an option to be the bad guy (which is just swell), but what about a game where the only thing you can be is the bad guy. I'm talking about a game where you are perhaps a terrorist. Just think, you could hijack planes or takeover buildings with hostages while your loyal men guard the entrances. Then, depending on how bad the situation is determines how big a police force you get (i.e. SWAT coming in through vents). I don't think any company would make such a game because of 9/11 or because they might be accused of promoting terrorism… but at least it would be something different.
F!nGeR

Ed: *Sounds like fun, but we really don't need another excuse to have games banned forever.*

Macintosh games
How about dedicating a small section of your magazine or even website to Apple Macintosh games?
Mac fan Jacob

Ed: *Because of the general rarity of Macintosh in South Africa, a whole section or even a single page on this platform would be hard to support - hell, I'm not even sure right now where to go to buy a Macintosh, besides didn't your mother ever tell you never trust a mouse with only one button. This site here will tell you why you should switch: www.apple.com/za/switch. I might be persuaded to reconsider if I had a good enough reason.*

***sigh* Originality, again**
I've been wondering why games based on movies are so crappy (The Italian Job for example). I have come up with a theory. With any other game that is not movie based, the game developers can go wild. They can do anything they want to. They are not limited to anything. Games which are based on movies, however, are forced to use characters, locations and weapons from the movie. If they put in anything extra, everyone says, "Hey this game is BS! There's no plasma gun in Lord of the Rings!" In this way the game developers are limited in what they can do. Movies should stay in the movie houses, and games should stay on the PC.
EvilCow

Ed: *Funny that, a plasma gun in Lord of the Rings - I'm sure I saw Gandalf shoot*

Image: Play game while the sun shines

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

letter of the moment

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

Shorts

OMW
Why are computers so ridiculously cheap of late? I recently saw a retail store flyer and their top of the range PC is going for like 4K and they're usually so expensive.
Cloud

Ed: *Beware of cheap computers, four large ones should only really buy you a decent 3D card and maybe a hard drive, not a whole gaming rig.*

What happened to Ramjet?
I noticed in the revamped December Issue there was no Rampage? What happened?
Reader

Ed: *We moved him to the last page and reduced his space - this way we can control and limit the amount of damage he does to his already poor image.*

Quick one
Just a quickie Ed, do you think there's a future for Tomb Raider? I mean all their latest titles are extremely disappointing (Chronicles, Angel of Darkness!). Is it over for Ms. Croft? In my eyes it seems to be, and I'd hate for that to happen... Lara Croft Forever!
The Real Lara Croft [*apparently, Ed*]

Ed: *Well, news on the wire has it that all future development for the Tomb Raider franchise is going to Crystal Dynamics. I'd personally rather see them give the whole licence to the team that put Prince of Persia together - now that's a development team.*

plasma out of his walking stick / wand / staff thing... <10 000 Lord of the Rings fans cringe>.

Smack Talk
I'm writing to ask you what happened to smack talk last month. Did Priest and Shryke get into a fight and break up or what? It used to be one of my favourite sections in the magazine.
12-gage

Ed: *I thought they were scraping the bottom of the deck under the bottom of the barrel and decided that the world would be better off without them - they might return if they come up with some decent material. When asked why they might not return to the spotlight I received a rude remark from Shryke along the lines of, "Get <very rude word>" and Priest simply stated that he had nothing more to write about - and something about not being paid enough.*

Demos and stuff
A little bird told me that you have the final say about what goes onto the cover CD. Now, all I ask is that you include DirectX 9.0b on the CD because I would really like to take my brand new demo of Halo for a test drive. I can't do this currently because you (excuse this) jackasses neglected to put DirectX 9.0b on the same Cover CD as the demo.
Uncle Bob

Ed: *Umm, I had nothing to do with that particular decision - it was their fault, they are to blame. It has been fixed in this issue however. I'm sure it was part of a tactic to make people buy both issues - you know how marketing people operate…*

Why
Will someone at the cover CD department please tell me why the cover CD is rated to work on a 733 MHz machine where we run a 1 GHz machine and it still runs extremely sloppily? And also why does my machine not even want to load Lock On, and when I try load it the machine just doesn't respond? My guess is that you are using extremely cheap code or you are just not using the code correctly. If it is actually a problem with our so-far-problem-free-machine then can you please mail us back on how to fix this problem.
R@id3n

Ed: *Like I've said in the past, the Cover CD is nothing more than a collection of files we've downloaded off the internet. We don't and never will be able to offer support or technical trouble shooting for any of the files on the Cover CD. The minimum specification printed on the Cover CD is exactly that, a minimum specification. Do these things, get the latest drivers and DirectX, defrag your hard drive, install the game, turn all the graphics and sound knobs and buttons to their lowest possible setting and try run the game again - you'll be surprised at just how many games work perfectly well on the lowest of system configurations. Also a 1GHz computer and whatever graphics, memory configuration that came with it is going to battle when running the absolute latest games at their highest settings [which incidentally are what most demos are]. And one last thing when complaining about software not working you really need to include a few more details other than your CPU speed and a statement that something doesn't work. Try upgrading every once in a while and please do tell me what exactly cheap code is?*

Level of experience
I am a full time gamer and I want to know how good these tournament winners really are. Are they really that good? The reason I am asking is because some people rate their level of playing on how many computer players they can play against and on which difficulty. Recently I heard of this guy in our street that can play against 11 computer players in Command & Conquer: Zero Hour with the hardest difficulty selected and he wins, so I thought okay I will challenge him. Let me say that it was one of the easiest games I have ever played and won. The point that I am making is that every one at home who can't go to gaming events must not think that the gamers there are that good, you might be better.
Pure_Acid

Ed: *There is a world of difference between playing against the computer and a real human. Also remember that tournament experience (and something they call match temperament) also counts for a lot.*

Cheese
First of all, why did you remove the Frozen Throne strategy guide? I found the "So, you want to be a FPS gamer?" section very informative although most of it is common knowledge, I guess the new players need some place to start.
Here's my (cheesy) topic:
Every month it's the same - loyal readers of NAG write in about what games lack and how the world would be a better place with spawning rocket launchers all over the place. What is wrong with developers these days? Don't they see the criticism they receive on their lack lustre games? Why do they keep on making the same mistakes?
So, then it is true... a bunch of hillbilly developers are trying to take over the world?
I'd like to know what your sarcastic point of view to this is, Michael James (not bond).
Ch33d4r_b0b
(I'm expecting a reply, thank you very much.)

Ed: *We didn't remove the strategy guide it just came to an end. I too have wondered about game developers, who must play games and therefore be gamers, who must read gaming magazines and should therefore know what makes a game suck. Or do they treat all criticism with mocking laughter and continue to make sub standard games? I don't know? Remember I don't do sarcasm anymore - I'm trying to improve the quality of letters in NAG.*

S.A. Gaming will never be the top
Well done on a brilliant PC magazine. I'm a scholar and an avid gamer. I asked the school's permission to use the computer centre for gaming. I was granted permission and the club was full every week. To my dismay there were certain adults who were against these activities and the club was shut down due to their influence. I see a good opportunity in our country where we can develop gaming and there should be a league between schools in a particular area. This will increase the experience of gamers in the country with even provincial and national leagues being established. NAG is doing a great job promoting and making people more aware of gaming in S.A. Let us raise the banner of gaming and show the ignorant what talent the country truly has.
Chris Rooney

Ed: *Well done for getting the gaming centre up and running - you sound like a politician? Pity about those interfering parents, you'll probably find they stick their noses into other people's affairs to cover up their own inadequacies and failings or they're just bored, or even worse they fear that which they don't understand. I expect they've seen one too many gaming adverts where the player must slay the forces of evil and protect the Earth. Anyway, keep fighting the good fight - I'm sure there are an equal amount of parents out there who would promote a gaming centre (just mention you might start using certain substances to entertain yourself instead of your PC if you don't get your own way).*

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A lack of balance

Ok, for a change I am going to aim something the other way - this one goes out to game and hardware reviewers.
I am no expert, I must admit. But I have an opinion, much like everyone else and, for once, I actually think that I have a valid point. It's rare, but it does happen. Inflation is something that you start worrying about when you notice that you've been earning the same amount for the last four years, but the price of everything you need to survive has gone up. That's when you sit up and really start to notice the effects of the increase in prices that results because of it.

But inflation works in other ways to. In fact, I am starting to believe that inflation is less of an economic phenomenon, and more part of human nature. A strange statement, sure, but bear with me here. The reason I say this can be found in the very magazine you have just left your sweaty paw prints all over. Flip back a few pages, and you will see what I mean.

By way of qualification, let me elaborate. Take a stack of coins. Any coins, doesn't matter - if you are wealthier, they can be five buck coins. Poorer, five cent coins. It doesn't really make too much difference. For argument's sake, let's say 100 coins. Right. You have one hundred coins. Now, divide that stack in half. You should have two stacks now, with fifty on one side and fifty on the other. The reason for this is because half of a hundred is fifty. No-one can disprove that fact, although (by the end of this) some people are going to try. Now, imagine that the left hand stack represents bad, while the right hand stack represents good. You still with me? Do try to keep up.

Now, imagine that the bottom most coin of the left stack is extremely bad (let's call it coin number one) and that the top most coin of the right stack is incredibly good (that will be coin one hundred). Every coin from coin one is a little better, and every coin below coin one hundred is a little worse. Logically, the coins would balance out their degrees of good vs bad at around coin fifty (or around coin five-oh-point-five, but that's being a bit too technical now… and we have to consider the number zero, after all). That means that coin fifty, by definition, would be average. Medium. Mediocre. Typical. Run of the mill. Usual. Not exceptionally good, but not exceptionally bad either.

That could not be said of, say, coin seventy five, because if we divided there, our coin piles would be uneven, wouldn't they? You would have a whole lot of bad, but not much good. And we know that, in theory, if average is the middle point, there is as much good on the one side as there is bad on the other side. Otherwise average wouldn't be, well, average.

Are you still with me here?

Do you agree with me? You can't refute my argument, because it is FACT, so don't even try, bozo.

If the above equation (simplified to a level that even you can understand) rings true - which it does - then why in the name of holy blue blazes can you not apply the principle when you rate your game and hardware reviews? I ask you with tears in my baby blues, folks. Game reviewers have inflated game scoring to such a degree that now 75 is considered average.

The result is that, with most games appearing in these pages being above average, everything is crammed into the 75 to 95 range (because there are no perfect games) thereby limiting the range of numerically indicating how good a game or device is to a paltry 20 points out of a possible hundred. And, might I add, that NAG policy states that 50% is average. So stuff what our editor says, we'll just do what everyone else without a modicum of sense does, right?

It comes down to this - when I read or perceive that a reviewer considers a figure of around 75% to be average, I immediately think that, no matter how knowledgeable they may seem, they are in fact a moron. Because they cannot grasp a simple concept of what it means to be numerically average on a scale of one to a hundred. It also indicates that the person assigning the score cannot possibly be rating the product in terms of what is current, because a current average game would be…? That's right, a 50% game! And that, my dear colleagues, I am afraid, casts a poor light on this publication that we hold dear. It doesn't matter that the industry around us does the same thing. If all your buddies inject black tar heroine into their veins, are you going to do the same?

Think about it. For a change.

next month:

Soft Stuff: [Marshmallows]

Although the next month or [at a stretch] two are notoriously meager when it comes to new releases, announcements and previews we're convinced that 2004 is going to be very different. We don't know why, it's just a feeling - like when your grandfather's leg swells up just before a big storm. For starters we're working on a few exclusive previews - we're trying for the new Lord of the Rings Strategy from Electronic Arts, or perhaps something even bigger - hush, hush. We will be reviewing Beyond Good & Evil, X2: The Threat and the controversial Manhunt - block your ears kids.

Hard Stuff: [Jaw Breakers]

Besides taking a long and loving look at all the console peripherals money can buy we'll be dissecting the DiGiMatrix from ASUS to see if it lives up to its cool name [we also opened it to see if Neo was inside], James will be telling us all about the ViewSonic 18.1" ThinEdge Digital LCD Display if he can figure out where the USB plug goes and we also [big one] investigate the next [censored] of [censored] - sorry this is very exclusive and therefore classified for now - you'll be impressed and even learn something you thought you didn't know.

Timing:

The March issue will be on-shelf 26 February 2004.

Disclaimer: [Message to all 'competition' publications] Although we do understand it must be frustratingly tempting to leech these ideas for your own magazine(s) please try and be original every once in a while - it's starting to get a little embarrassing and awkward around the table at press lunches. You know what I mean. Thanks for being a sport, no hard feelings.
[Message to readers] Some of the items mentioned here might not actually end up in the March issue - this is just the way of things sometimes.

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