NAG

SOUTH AFRICA'S LEADING TECHNOLOGY **&** COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT MAGAZINE

MADE IN SOUTH AFRICA

124 PAGES OF PURE CABBAGE

PCXboxGameCubeMobileGBAPlayStation2

IF YOUR CD IS MISSING START SHOUTING AT PEOPLE UNTIL IT GETS FIXED

04
colin mcrae rally

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004

www.nag.co.za

NAG

april 2004

Demos: Colin McRae Rally 04 Single Player __ Painkiller __ Unreal Tournament 2004 Demo
Movies: Battle for Middle Earth __ Fight Night 2004 __ ESWC Teaser Trailer
Drivers:
Patches:
Add-Ons:
Utilities: Cheats

sponsors Electronic Arts | MegaRom Interactive
[1] 3 big demos
Minimum Specification (April 2004): Pentium 4 1 GHz / 128 MB RAM / 64 MB DDD Video Accelerator / 300 MB HDD

NAG is powered by

intel inside
H T
pentium **4**

Is your
Final
Fantasy
Shaken
or Stirred?

Experience the thrill of 007 Everything or Nothing™
on PlayStation 2® and Game Boy Advance™ or get
ready for an adrenalin packed, mystical adventure
with Final Fantasy®X-2, available on PlayStation 2®.

EA GAMES™

www.ea.co.za

Challenge Everything™

CONTENTS

76

112

44

54

62

71

04 colin mcrae rally

NAG
april 2004

Demos: Colin McRae Rally 04 Single Player | Painkiller
Unreal Tournament 2004 Demo
Movies: Battle for Middle Earth | Fight Night 2004 | ESWC Teaser Trailer
Drivers:
Patches:
Add-Ons:
Updates: Chaos

sponsors   [t] 3 big demos

Demos Colin McRae Rally 04 Single Player | Painkiller
Unreal Tournament 2004 Demo **Movies** Battle for Middle
Earth | Fight Night 2004 | ESWC Teaser Trailer

90

ed's note

An itch you can't ignore…

Because I have no real clue about what's really happening in the gaming industry, I usually keep this part of the magazine as vague and irreverent as possible. You know how it is - we all have our little faults that need covering up. This issue is special however because it's our birthday issue so I can focus on describing what we've been up to instead of straining out something intelligent.

New look [again]
Yes, we've changed the magazine again - finally. I was really getting tired of looking at that old design - I can be honest and say that it sucked. For those of you who are about to start complaining remember that in life the only constant is change (I think I saw this on a poster somewhere). But I really like to think of it in this way, *'Things do not change, we change.' - Henry David Thoreau (1817 - 1862), Walden (1970).*
Essentially what this means is that the magazine you hold in your hands has never really changed (only your perception of it has) so if there's something you don't like just slap yourself and don't do it again.

Naturally without a good team NAG is nothing, so I'd like to say that if everyone wasn't involved in the way they are you'd be looking at just another trashy rag trying to dishonestly attract readers with false promises and nasty lies. So this is me saying thank you to everyone who slaved over this issue for days [and weeks] on end, you know that without you I'd be able to pay myself a much bigger salary and drive a better car - so thanks from the bottom of my heart!

Things we've done and why
1. We've added an industry news section - here we discuss, report and take a look at the gaming industry in general and tell you what to think. We also interview people who are making a difference or not - you decide. *Biggest challenge of bringing this section to life - reducing noise levels in the recorded interviews and then transcribing them.*

2. NAG is becoming a cut and paste publication - we've syndicated very specific and exclusive material from one of the leading gaming magazines in the UK for you. This kind of material isn't something you'll see on the internet or on any shelf in SA soon. Look out for exclusive interviews and our all new retro section - essential if you want to know where gaming originated from. I've decided to start this section off based on my own personal experience / collection / memories of hardware and software I've had over the years. If there's a special home computer, console or whatever you fondly remember drop me a mail and I'll see what I can do about including it. *Biggest Challenge - getting all the paperwork in place and converting their style to fit our style.*

3. We've brought you more exclusive previews this issue, made possible because the international gaming industry is slowly starting to take South Africa seriously and the only reason they're doing that is because more people are actually buying games in this country than ever before - so well done there. *Biggest challenge here - deciphering some of the text written by some of our journalists.*

4. Refined our reviewing process. Considering that any monkey can review a game, and many do in other 'gaming' publications, you can take comfort in the fact that we have, at least, been doing it longer than most and we've never lost a nights sleep because of a poorly written and incorrectly hacked out review - so we must be very confident that we're doing something right. To clarify our new direction, we've cut all the bum fluff from our reviews and are now aiming to bring you more concise information because not many people can afford the time away from playing games to read about them, not to mention [based on numerous letters] many of you have trouble with some of the 'larger' words - probably because you spend too much time playing games. Try turning on the sub-titles every so often, you'll be surprised what you learn. ;) *Biggest challenge - getting the new word counts right.*

5. We're adding more content to our hardware section because it seems that if there's one thing gamers can spend a ton of money on it's their rigs. For some reason hardware is arriving and leaving the office like fat people at a salad bar - we've got too much so we need to grow bigger (see above clever fat people analogy). Challenge in this case - finding space to pack everything, oh and having to give back my dual LCD Viewsonic panels. Unless Corex can find it in their hearts to, umm, let's see lend them to me forever? I know I'm begging but they are so pretty.

6. We've also bunched all the odds and ends that pertain to a gaming lifestyle together under one banner. We've nipped, tucked, sucked and trimmed all the fat from the magazine and have hopefully produced a better looking and feeling work of art. If you disagree, send me mail [ed@nag.co.za]... if you love it, buy 2 copies.

And the best part of all, this is only the beginning...

Michael James
[Editor]

PS This is our birthday issue so read it nicely will you? I think we've just turned 6. Or we're five because getting to 1 takes a year? You know what... I really have no idea what I'm talking about.

PPS If you haven't been there in a while (or ever) go to www.nag.co.za. We have exclusive wallpapers of the issue each month and smack talk is back - only online...

We'd also like to welcome a new member to the NAG team... hi Miktar aka carp [and a few rude words we can't print].

We ran an experiment this month to see if scantily clad girls on the cover really do sell more magazines. So, if you're reading this message then they obviously did.

Find out more about these ladies on **page 54**.

Caption of the Month

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: **April 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 April Caption
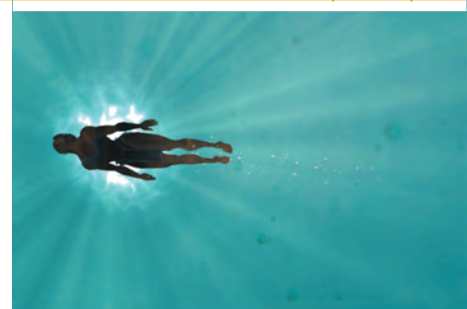
'View from the bottom by Concrete Boots' - **NAG's [92% lame] effort**

February winner

'Just then Neo realised he took the blue pill.' - **Eric van Heerden**

industry in focus

Albert Havenga
CEO, Mexcom SA

What would you say is the condition of the ISP market right now?

The ISP market is a very competitive one. You have the no-frills ISPs up to the ones that offer tons of additional services. Then there's the corporate market as well. We're converting into our own ISP in April, so that we can compete with the general market. Value-added products tend to be more of a problem these days. Some ISPs will offer a lot of value-added services, such as spam blocking and virus scanning. But those slow the connection down, and are moot anyway when you consider that programs like the new Outlook are good at blocking spam anyway.

Aren't you already an ISP?

We're a fourth tier ISP, we are now becoming a second tier ISP. One roof, all services.

Do you see broadband taking over dial-up?

Definitely! Dial-ups are still great if you need to quickly access the Internet – while you're away from home or the office, for instance. But the cost of a broadband connection is much cheaper in the long run. It's also faster – you can never be too fast.
There are still issues such as capping, but I think these will disappear over time.

Will wireless Internet become major competition to traditional broadband?

The only time when wireless will become serious competition is when you can take a machine anywhere and connect without the help of a router. It's also unreliable in the sense of if the weather's bad or other influence. For gaming it's too unreliable with connection drops. But in a corporate environment it's a great idea, and there will be a lot of development for it in the future.

You recently acquired a lot of extra bandwidth, apparently for gaming servers and other services?

That's what it all boiled down to at the end of the day. It's part of a partnership with MTNS, who supply bandwidth at certain times for the game servers.

How much bandwidth?

It's a 2 megabyte pipe. The average gamer sits on 8kb a second. Divide that into the 2 megs and you support a lot of connections. At some stage we will expand to first tier, but International bandwidth is expensive so it doesn't make sense jumping into that now.

What sold you on supporting local gaming?

Our managing director has been playing games for thirteen years and he encouraged Mexcom to be involved. There's also a lot of opportunity to create awareness for gaming, which is why we got involved with Arena 77.
We want to diversify as well. In the gaming industry everyone seems to focus on one certain type of game like Counter-Strike or Quake. This is because the learning curves tend to be small, whereas if you play a game like Lock-On it takes a month just to get used to the interface. So we want to make people aware that there are more games you can play online.

Does this involvement go beyond servers?

Yes. We're sponsoring a high school and a primary school, part of the deal is that we host LANs there with Arena 77 on some weekends. We also sponsor prizes for the LAN competitions.

T rating not always accurate

According to a study done by Harvard's Kid Risk Project, the ESRB T rating (for Teen) is often not accurate about the content found in games. Kimberly Thompson, founder of the project, and Kevin Hanniger, a doctoral student, played 81 randomly sampled games for about an hour a piece, listing content as they played. They concluded that only about 52% of the ratings are accurate. The remaining 42% contained scenes of sex, violence and language that wasn't noted on the cover rating. 15% of the games also had alcohol and tobacco use that wasn't noted on the box.
Thompson did however conclude that the rating system works, but said there is room for improvement.

Sammy President appointed to Sega board

Sega of Japan has appointed Sammy president Hajime Satomi as the new chairman of the Board of Sega, replacing the current chairman Hideki Sato, who has been moved to vice-chairman. Sammy is Sega's largest stockholder after buying 22.4% of the company last year.

^ **Soul Calibur rights picked up**
Anthem Pictures have picked up the rights for Soul Calibur, thus planning to make a movie of it, something that's becoming a common practice. In related news, New Line said they don't have the relevant rights anymore, so the chances for a third Mortal Kombat movie seem unlikely. But if one happens, it's likely to be based around the recent Deadly Alliance title, said the series script writer.

> Nokia disappointed with N-Gage sales

In an interview with Financial Times, Nokia CEO and Chairman Jorba Ollila admitted that the Finnish cell phone manufacturer was disappointed with the sales of the N-Gage. "The sales are in the lower quartile of the bracket we had as our goal," he told the publication, admitting for the first time that the company isn't happy with the platform's performance. In the past, Nokia has been slow in releasing numbers and tended to cite distribution numbers instead of actual sales. But the N-Gage is far from done. Ollila added that it will take until at least November 2005 (2 years after its launch) to gauge its success.

> EA shuts down Origin

Electronic Arts have shut down Origin, the studio best known for the Wing Commander and Ultima game series. The staff have been offered the chance to relocate to California and join the EA offices there. This is all part of EA's plan to consolidate its internal development efforts. Similar moves were made when the publisher shut down Westwood and announced the move of Maxis to their LA offices.

> Atari CFO resigns

Atari senior vice president and chief financial officer David Fremed has resigned with immediate effect. No reasons were cited for Fremed's departure and while the company searches for a successor, senior executive vice president Harry Rubin will be overseeing Atari's financial section. Fremed has been with the company since May 2000.

> Peter Molyneux joins Hall of Fame

The Academy of Interactive Arts & Science has honoured Peter Molyneux with the Hall of Fame Award at this year's Interactive Achievement Awards, held in Las Vegas during the DICE summit. He joins the ranks of Shigeru Miyamoto, Sid Meier, Hironobu Sakaguchi, John Carmack, Will Wright, and last years honouree - Yu Suzuki.

> IDGA honours industry veterans

The International Game Developers Association honoured six industry professionals for their roles in the evolution of interactive digital entertainment. Held on 24 March, the 4th annual Game Developers Choice Awards handed awards to them, including Masaya Matsuura, responsible for games like Parappa the Rapper, UmJammer Lammy and Vib Ribbon, BioWare CEOs Ray Muzyka and Greg Zeschuk for the Community Contribution Award and PopCap Games will receive the Maverick Award.

Eidos buys Hitman developer

Eidos' future looks brighter than usual, considering it bought Hitman developer IO Interactive, signalling an upturn in the publisher's fortune. The company also announced that the next Hitman will be out by April and a fourth in the series will be released within the next fiscal year. They also added that Crystal Dynamic is doing a great job with the development of the next Tomb Raider game, saying the base technology has already been finished. The title is slated for release in 2005.

On the wire
words james francis

The Hard vs. the Obscure

Have you ever heard of HardOCP.com? I have, but that's my job. It's a hardware site that focuses on the gaming side of things and it's been around for a while. But the site is not exactly in the same league as Anandtech or Tom's Hardware. Then again, maybe it is, but that still leaves it far removed from the likes of Gamespy and Gamespot.

Then there is the Phantom, a broadband console from Infinium Labs that was announced early last year, but to date actually has to show itself in the form of a working unit (they promise it will be at E3, after several false starts). Infinium have quite an uphill battle, because a lot of people, including me, think they lack the credibility to bring out a platform that will compete against the big guns in the gaming hardware market. Then HardOCP released an article last September, claiming the console was a hoax, vapourware, and questioned the shady past of the company's CEO and other irregularities. Infinium responded with a lawyer's letter and things just went downhill from there - to the point that HardOCP took legal action in early March to force Infinium into resolving the situation.

I have to wonder if there is a more mundane news event currently happening than this? HardOCP have a story and they are clinging to it because they say its freedom of speech, I say they are enjoying the surge in mass gaming media attention. Infinium is spending more time in the headlines because of all this than the actual Phantom itself. I'd be willing to bet there are people who know about Infinium but have never heard of the Phantom. All this because one site says a console that still has to show itself is an expensive hoax?

Does any of this really matter? Even the stories of Linux on the Xbox has more relevance to us than this nonsense. And do you really care that you can boot Linux on an Xbox?

HE'S SOLD PASCAL PROGRAMMING BOOKS AND HAS CLEANED OUT CAPTAIN SENSIBLE'S MOUSE BALL, BUT NOW DARRYL STILL IS ON A MISSION TO TELL PC GAMERS ABOUT 'THE WAY IT'S MEANT TO BE PLAYED'...

NVIDIA

Darryl Still

As the PC market is once again starting to increase the graphical gap between itself and its console peers, the graphics-chip developers are milling around behind the scenes, getting ready to lend a helping hand. One of these visual wizards is Darryl Still, NVIDIA's head of developer relations in Europe, whose current task is to ensure that NVIDIA's 'The Way It's Meant To Be Played' campaign is a success. In the past he's made the Atari ST a hit in Europe - not bad for a man who once traded his Spectrum for an Oric ("I thought it was the next big thing") - so can his mission to bring high-quality graphics to PCs succeed?

"[The campaign] been very successful so far," says Still. "Our core objective is to try and make the PC games-buying experience as simple as it is for home console owners. [PC gamers will] see a game they fancy, pick up the box, check at a glance that it will work once they get home and it does." It's an admirable aim, and the process has seen NVIDIA working with developers, publishers and hardware suppliers to ensure that, first of all, PC gamers know that they've got NVIDIA graphics technology in their computers, and that games with the 'The Way It's Meant To Be Played' logo on them will work with their machine.

Of course, there's more to NVIDIA's new campaign than simply making sure that the remaining 25 per cent of non-NVIDIA-based software carries that prestigious logo. Part of the remit of Still and his team is to work closely with various developers to ensure that everything runs smoothly. "Anybody that's developing a title for the PC should be looking at getting the 'The Way It's Meant To Be Played' seal of approval on their title because 75 per cent of their consumers have NVIDIA technology in their machines," he says. "We've got over a hundred titles shipped with the logo on the box and we're hoping to achieve a similar amount in the coming year." With this in mind then, it's perhaps interesting to find out what sort of titles NVIDIA is primarily interested in, and it may not be the answer you'd think.

"Basically, we will work on any title that's of any worth and uses 3D technology, or 2D in the case of Sports Interactive's Championship Manager series," Still says.

"We work with these guys [the developers] to make sure that the product looks as good as it can on our technology and, most importantly, that it works every time."

You'd expect such a close-knit relationship to give rise to a few differences of opinion, but according to Still, this never happens. "I don't think there's any ego involved in most cases," he says. "[Developers] are happy that our engineers have a very targeted focus. Their primary concerns are the graphics and the shaders and that they can offer good technical insights, like getting water effects to appear more stunning or simply squeezing out some extra frames per second. We try and fit seamlessly into the developer's schedule so that we can act as a mentor or advisor or, if need be, a Q and A lab; basically, whatever best suits their needs." Indeed, while NVIDIA is keen to step back and let the developers get on with their work, it's quite happy to help out in more precise areas if the need arises. "We've designed several specific effects in the past - like in TRON 2.0 - that have had a big impact within the actual game, but we never forget that we're a guest in their development schedule," Still explains. "We are not the owner of the software. It's their baby and we're just there to help in whatever way we can."

Of course, NVIDIA's most recent campaign wouldn't have got anywhere if its ethos was to simply storm into the nearest development house and tell them exactly how they should work. Indeed, you only have to look at titles like XIII, Beyond Good & Evil and the upcoming Painkiller to realise that NVIDIA works best when each arm of the operation is left to do its own job. As Still explains, all projects work both ways and NVIDIA's job behind the scenes is just as important. "This is a two-way affair and we do everything we can at our end to ensure that the gaming experience is perfect for the end user. That's both ours and the developer's main goal." And with some of the world's biggest and best developers already on board, it looks like we will end up playing our games the way they're meant to be played... ◩
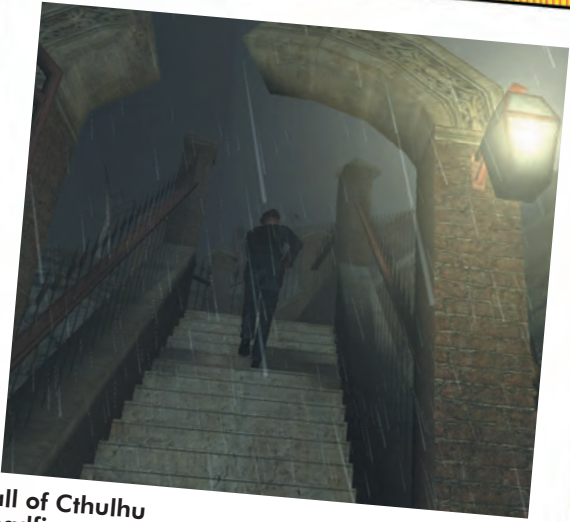
Call of Cthulhu
Headfirst Productions | Bethesda

H.P. Lovecraft's creepy world gets a digital treatment in the game based both on his books as well as the cult pen-and-paper RPG game. You play an investigator tracking the doings of a strange cult, leading you to the port town of Innsmouth.

So far what we've seen and played has been a very solid-looking game with good graphics, but more importantly new play dynamic elements that will return horror to the FPS genre. Though time will tell if Headfirst's HUD and play dynamic changes will only appeal to hardcore fans of the franchise, we're pretty confident this is going to be one of the finest story-driven shooters in the past few years.

Painkiller
People Can Fly | Dreamcatcher

They call it a horror shooter, but we as the gaming press would like to use a more objective 'Killing ugly things with no prejudice'. Look, the game in which monsters attack you by the dozens and your bullets send them flying further than the piñata your fat cousin struck at the last family gathering does not qualify as horror. It does however fall into that valued bracket of absolute havoc, and we approve dearly.

What's the story? Some guy in purgatory shooting his way to heaven. Who cares? The game boasts a lot of firepower, impressive use of Havok 2.0 physics and some really nice art and models. Heavy Metal gaming? Indeed…
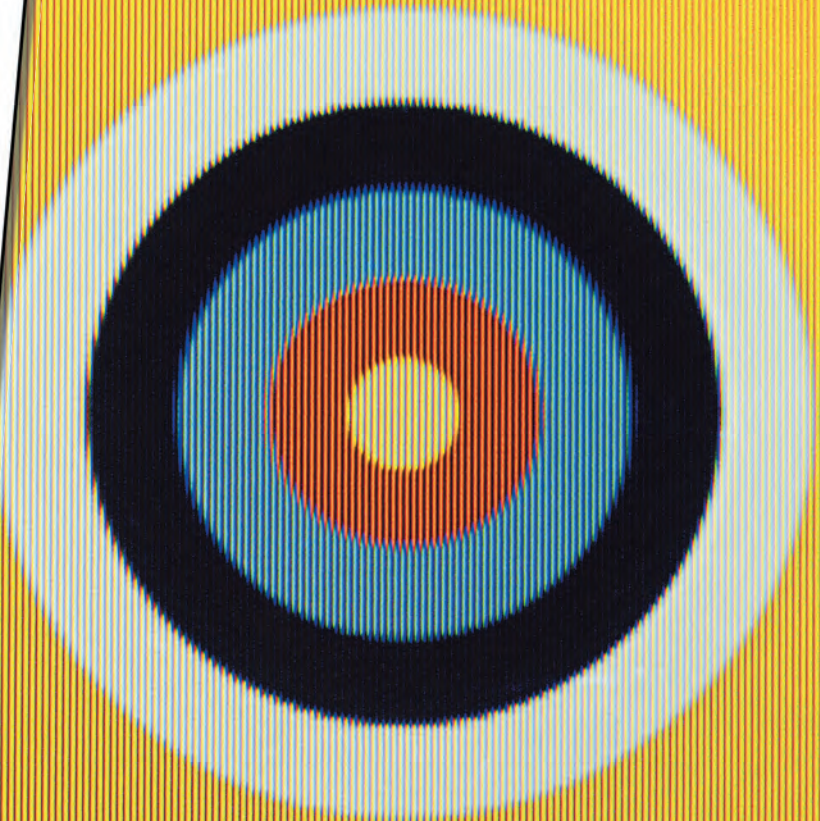
LOCKED
AND
LOADED

Contrary to popular belief, there is more to 2004's FPS market than Half-Life 2 and DOOM 3. Genus *Biggus Gunnus* has a few other surprises in store that you might or might not have heard of…

S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Shadow of Chernobyl
GSC | THQ

We blame the lack of hype around this game on some lackluster marketing attempts. So far all that we've been privy to are those high-resolution movies and screenshots that keep getting released. Even DOOM 3 had a leaked beta!

Stalker has 'underdog' written all over it. While it's not as technology-centric as Far Cry, DOOM 3 and Valve's offering, the graphics are looking impressive. But it appears to be a thinking man's game where the bad guys are few and far between, relying more on exploring the eerie terrain of a near-future Chernobyl wasteland. Developer GSC even went to the place for a day, taking creepy pictures of abandoned buildings and pumpkin patches left unattended. Ah, we jest now but wait for it – Stalker is going to rattle your spine.

Unreal Tournament 2004
Digital Extremes | Atari

Look, let's not mince words here – UT 2004 isn't much more than a really big mod. But oh what a mod it is. While 2003 was bogged down with a lot of stuff no-one needed, UT 2004 streamlines the game significantly, making it easier for gamers who are new to the series. It's also far easier to find objectives and points are awarded for creative play dynamic (such as stealing vehicles).

Ah, vehicles – now there's the real catch. Mayhem on wheels and in the air hasn't been this extreme since Tribes 2 became popular and if the game can support equally large maps, it's bound to replace the Starsiege legacy – not to mention that it is still the most mod-able shooter around.

Far Cry
Crytek | Ubisoft

Let's call Far Cry the poorer cousin to HL2 and D3. That said, its one damn pretty game, boasting lots of eye-candy, good physics and AI that is actually as good as they said it would be. But why dabble on semantics – we've all played the demo, and perhaps that leaked MP beta, but we're not telling.

Far Cry seems set to be the shooter of the year, except that the title will be taken by the aforementioned giants. That doesn't matter, though, since it will still have it's time in the sun. It's too good not to.

Battlefield Vietnam
DICE | Electronic Arts

Battlefield 1942 took the world by storm, but BF: Vietnam will turn it on its ear. Instead of pushing out a sequel that won't seem any more than a mod, DICE have gone for broke and upgraded the engine significantly. The game also introduces heavier artillery, helicopters, napalm bombing runs and a range of other destructive methods used during the campaigns.

The real change, though, is that unlike Europe and the Pacific, Vietnam has more jungles than a redneck with a stolen, broken lawnmower's yard, inspiring a lot of close-quarter, guerilla-style combat. The Vietcong also had far different weapons than the US forces, creating a possible watershed in how the two sides use battle tactics.

New Name. New Events. Same Ownage.

Everybody's favourite local tournament organiser, Gamers Gate, have changed their name to Arena 77. Most will have made the connection (if only subconsciously) between old and new, because of the announcement of the Electronic Sports World Cup qualifier, which is to be held at the Carousel Casino from the 23rd to the 25th of April. Community.za met with Len Nery, head of Arena 77, to discuss his plans for the company in 2004.

"Arena 77 ushers in a new phase for us," he said, when asked about the new name. "We are offering so much more this year, and did not want to be merely a gate for gamers."

What is being offered that sets this year apart, you may ask? For starters, Arena 77 has chosen to invest heavily in the online community, with a new website, featuring downloads and a forum where players' questions about events can be discussed directly, and a range of online gaming servers sponsored by Mexcom SA. Currently supported are the two most popular first person shooters, Counter-Strike and UT2004 Demo, but there is a poll on the site where players can vote for their favourite title. An online league is also in the works, where players will be ranked internationally through Cyberleagues.org. Still more big news is World of WarCraft, which Arena 77 hopes to be hosting locally on their server as soon as it is released.

But the company's main launch will be the ESWC qualifier event. While still at the Carousel, the event will be held in a new arena, more suited to spectators, and where players under the age of 18 will be more accommodated, instead of having to walk around the outside of the Casino. In addition to the Counter-Strike and WarCraft III competitions (where the winners will be flown to France), there will be plenty of technol-ogy on show, such as Intel's "Extreme PC", a D-Link wireless demonstration (which includes a free competition for any player who is wireless enabled), and case modification goodies from Naked IT. Also on the competitive note, DFI will be selecting five Counter-Strike teams to receive sponsorship in the form of their LANparty motherboards. A full prize listing for the competitions will be announced closer to the time.

MegaRom will be launching Far Cry at the event and will be running a mini competition, where the winner will walk away with an Intel Extreme PC. The format of the competition will be announced at the event to ensure a level playing field, and it will cost only R10 to enter. Finally, raffle tickets will be sold for R5 on the final day, and the person drawn will also receive an Extreme PC. Entrance into the event costs R100 for the open LAN, and R120 for a place in the tournament. Accommodation costs are listed in detail on the Arena 77 website.

To end off, Len hinted at many more surprises to come. "At the event we have an opening ceremony planned, and that ushers in the start of our membership program that will offer gamers decent pricing on high-speed connections. Later in the year, we move onto WCG 2004, followed by rAge 2004. And I'm sure most would agree that we have consistently handed over more prizes than people ever expected."

Website: www.arena77.com
IRC: za.shadowfire.org, #arena77

Player of the Month

Name:	Rikus Jordaan
Nick:	Gandulf
Age:	28
Occupation:	IT Industry - PM Manager
Clan:	Team 42 (UT2003) and Clan Casual (Quake 3)
Games:	UT2003 | Quake 3 | Unreal Tournament
Achievements:	- 1st place at Koltagon 2000 Unreal Tournament
	- 2nd place in Quake 3 Team at Worfaire 2000 (Team: NDC)
	- 4th place in Quake 3 1v1 at Worfaire 2000
	- 3rd place in Quake 3 Team at Gamers Gate 2002 (Team: TM)
	- 3rd place in Quake 3 1v1 at Worfaire Finals 2002
Quote:	"Ack!", "Oi!", "Ow!"

<The_Basilisk> What are the advantages and disadvantages of being one of the older gamers in a predominantly young (one could even say childish) playing environment?

I was thinking about that the other day. I do not think there's a really big advantage to it at all. The only advantage you have, I would say, is to be a bit more mature in the taunts. The younger chaps tend to still think it is "kewl" to swear and such like. The disadvantage of older age is slower reflexes. It's hard to keep up with the younger guys when it comes to reflex.

<The_Basilisk> How important are demos? Do you watch them, and why, or why not?

I'm not really a demo kind of guy. I do not think it will help you much after you know the basics of a game. It is sometimes fun to watch, but that's about it. You will not become a good golfer, for example, by watching the game. You have to play it in order to improve. It is awesome to watch competition demos though. It's the same as a big international rugby game.

<The_Basilisk> What do you think makes a good competitive game?

That's kind of hard to describe. I would say that the game should not be too complicated. Take tennis for example: the game is simple in concept but extremely hard to master. The same should go for a competitive computer game. Keep it simple, but make it really hard to become the best. There should be a growth factor. I think Quake 3 is the best example; the game is not really complex, but you can do so much with the few options that you have available.

<The_Basilisk> I find gamers are a lot less motivated to be the best these days. What is your opinion on this?

Yes, gamers are less motivated. There's not much to play for these days. The important games have been left out of the major international tournaments and hence people have lost interest in those games. I think gamers are waiting for the next big thing to be released so that there is something to play for again.

<The_Basilisk> Your predictions on the "next big thing"?

I'm putting a lot of faith in Doom 3. There is also Painkiller, UT2004, and of course Quake 4. I do not know about Half Life 2. I have never been a Counter-Strike person and when I hear Half-Life I think of Counter-Strike.

Ignite Drops Brothers

The recognisable duo of Tyrone and Christopher Lautre, better known as the Counter-Strike brothers Explicit and Apocalypse, have been dropped from the well-known team Evolve Ignite. The news has come as remarkably sudden, and as usual, reaction from the community has been mixed. Most have expressed astonishment at this very radical change to the tried-and-tested line-up that characterized the team through the entire 2003 season (a record for the longest lasting unchanged team), but some have said they expected it, and that it is for the better. Both parties explained that the fall-out between them happened due to both personal issues and a difference in professional opinion towards gaming. Neither wished to comment on the exact details, but we are told there had been differences between them for a while. Explicit and Apocalypse will be replaced by Light (ex-captain of The Usual Suspects) and Nitros (former captain of the team Seven E-Sports Stars).

We spoke to James "Prem" Schwikkard, leader of Ignite, about his new-look team. "Considering the fact that we have just started playing with Nitros and Light and haven't had a LAN practice yet, we have been faring pretty well against our other Evolve team, with some nice close matches," said James, "so I'm pretty optimistic. Light has proven at Mayhem that he has a lot of skill and we are willing to do the hard work to get him up to team play standards for the Electronic Sports World Cup qualifier. He has the right attitude towards the game and his new team mates. As for Nitros, we did not want to take on two new players - I mean new to playing in big competitions and finals - and so he was an obvious choice, as he has the experience. He has been out of action for quite a while, but we feel it will not be too difficult to get his aim up to scratch. Both new players are very excited about playing for Ignite. They are hungry to win and ready to work for it."

Wolvenoids Lair

Have you ever wondered what games are still being played at LANs in South Africa? The only game that comes to mind must be Counter-Strike. Yes, good old CS with all the cheats, all the backstabbing, lies, deceit and deceptions. Unreal Tournament 2003 only lasted for about two or three LANs and no one ever mentioned it again. Sure it was played at big events, but the support was dismal to say the least. Quite sad since it wasn't such a bad game. Unfortunately Quake 3 is now considered redundant, totally obsolete and only a few still enjoy playing it. So I started musing about what games we can expect to see taking off at LANs in 2004 and, consulting my crystal ball (female intuition to those not in the know) for my next fix to escape reality and crush the fragile male ego. I surfed the Internet browsing forums and clocked enough voyager miles to take the lady with twelve kids in a boot around the world twice, to find the following games worthy of LAN status this year.

Painkiller

If you played Quake for more than a week, this will surely be on your Christmas, Birthday or any other list that may enable you to wander through this pixel wonder. Using a custom engine, Painkiller follows much the same line as Serious Sam, but implements various deadly weapons. Painkiller employs the Havok 2.0 physics engine, allowing for inverse kinematics ("rag-doll physics") and deformable, interactive environments, and lots of colourful lighting. Painkiller's Multiplayer mode is powered by GameSpy for in-game and external server browsing. Currently targeting 32-player servers with the following 5 modes:

1) Deathmatch - The player is on his own, playing in "me against the world" fashion.

2) Team Deathmatch - A mutation of Deathmatch, in which the competition is between teams made up of a number of players, trying to out kill the other teams.

3) People Can Fly - A modification of Death match 1 on 1. In this mode both players have only the Rocket Launchers. The damage to the other player can be done only when he is airborne: it can be done by shooting the rocket exactly under the enemy's feet.

4) Voosh - Voosh is a multiplayer mode in which each player has the same weapon. After a certain period of time each player's weapon is switched to either the next in line (set by the server), or a random one. All weapons have infinite ammo.

5) The Light Bearer - This mode assumes that Quad Damage never wears off. The first player who takes the Quad, can use it as long as he stays alive. Also, with every successful frag, the player gets +10 HP. When he is dead, he drops the Quad, and another player can pick it up. The winner is a person who has the Quad at the end of the game. However, every time someone picks up the Quad, the limit time is raised by 30 seconds, to make it possible for other players to get a chance.

Unreal Tournament 2004

Three important additions to UT 2004 can be seen. The first is the stationary turret, many of which are placed atop both transports, with the potential to rip through enemies in a hurry. The downside, of course, is that you're a sitting duck for enemy snipers while using the turrets (and sniping is a very useful ability on this map). The second addition is the weapons station -- instead of having to scramble around collecting guns and ammo every time you re-spawn, there's a small station near your spawn point which gives you a preset cache of weapons and ammo, which allows you to get into the action much quicker. The third (and maybe the most useful) addition is a small arrow in the upper left of your screen that points the way towards your next objective, similar to what you'd see in many driving games. This is a huge help in overcoming the learning curve for each map, and is one of those "Aha!" features that makes you wonder why no one else has done it before.

DOOM 3

If the name does not bring tears to your eyes as you remember how you spent your youthful days hunting down all those glorious monsters, don't fret. This instalment is sure to enslave a whole new generation.

Since DOOM 3 will only support up to four-player matches currently, our hope lies with modification outfits such as Orange Smoothie to come to the rescue.

The new "Berserker" power-up, gives players 2x power and 2x speed for a limited amount of time, also boosting

melee combat significantly, allowing for one-punch kills (Super Gauntlet?). One amusing effect is the continual screaming that accompanies carrying the power-up; you can easily hear the screaming of an enemy "Berserker" from pretty far away, signalling that it might be best to run in the opposite direction.

DOOM 3 doesn't deviate far from the standard multiplayer FPS formula - the game's advanced technology does however change the game in a number of ways. As id's Todd Hollenshead explained, DOOM 3's multiplayer features "per-pixel hit accuracy," a far cry from the early days of death match when player models were inside an invisible bounding box, allowing you to "hit" players even when you've actually shot the area just next to them. It's now possible to watch a rocket pass under a player's arm, and the overall effect is that you need to be a bit more accurate with many of the weapons.

The game's advanced lighting does a lot more than offer eye candy (which is considerable in itself). From a strategic standpoint, you could occasionally catch the shadows of other players as they approached, giving that extra split-second of warning that sometimes means the difference between getting the frag or getting killed. Areas have light switches that can be turned on or off, and other lights in the level could be shot out for the duration of the level, forcing players to resort to a flashlight, which might as well be a big neon "SHOOT ME" sign.

Tribes: Vengeance

According to multiplayer designer Michael Johnston and lead designer Ed Orman, Tribes: Vengeance will be a game that's shaped significantly by user input, both from experts and beginners. The pair outlined four common criticisms of the previous games. One,

they seemed "slow" at the beginning; two, their environments were too big and didn't allow much opportunity for fighting; three, the games were too complex to understand easily; and four, Tribes 2, specifically, was buggy at launch. The designers explained that each of these issues was carefully considered, so the team has now implemented actual play dynamic features to address them. The team is also including several smaller maps that were specifically designed for as few as two players at a time. This was done so that new players could get into the action quickly rather than having to roam around huge, empty maps. The game is built on a heavily modified version of the Unreal engine, and interestingly enough, some enterprising hobbyists have actually been working on the first modification for Tribes: Vengeance - a customized game mode called Starsiege 2845. Standard modes like capture-the-flag and deathmatch, as well as more unusual modes, like a ball-carrier mode in which you must pass and carry a ball into your opponent's goal (like Unreal Tournament 2003's bombing run mode). The final game's maps will apparently be usable and reusable in different match types, thanks to the game's "universal game mode" feature, which automatically adds or deletes environmental features depending on the game mode you choose. For instance, choosing ball mode causes a platform to spawn in the middle of the map to house the ball, while the same object would not be present in a capture-the-flag map.

Söldner: Secret Wars

In terms of team-based multiplayer shooters, Söldner: Secret Wars is often compared to Battlefield 1942 and Operation Flashpoint. In fact, it bears an uncanny similarity to the latter because, like Flashpoint, Söldner is a

semi realistic shooter set in a gigantic virtual countryside. Up to 32 players can join a server, and 128 players can potentially play on a dedicated Linux-based server. Like Battlefield 1942, the key to multiplayer will be vehicles. One of Söldner's most interesting features is that virtually every object in the game is destructible, and all weapons have penetration value, which means you can literally shoot through walls if your weapon is powerful enough. Though this adds substantially to your CPU's burden of processing, it does add some interesting game possibilities. There's an audience out there for team-based, realistic shooters, and Söldner is certainly an ambitious attempt to reach out to these fans.

Half-Life 2

Very little official information has been released about the multiplayer aspect of the game, but we did manage to dig up an interview with Gabe Newell where he confirmed that it will support over 32 players. We can also expect to see some of the modifications from Half-Life making an appearance. The multiplayer will be operated using the Steam software.

I'm sure there are some favourites that some of you are eyeing, and I did not mention. This was just my list of games that showed potential for LANs, and their success is dictated by the community's support. So if the games allow for low enough machine specification, and the game play is addictive, the game will last. I just wonder if we haven't come to expect too much from new titles, and get bored quickly before we move on to the next release, which is clone number 3 for the month?

May the frags be with you
Wolvenoid
www.vc.org.za

And in this corner, the champion, undefeated for three years running, wearing the spotted green-and-purple trunks...

The Domain of The_Basilisk

THE BOUNCING BALL OF THE NEW MILLENNIUM
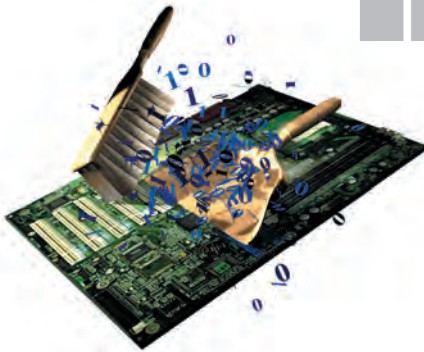
"Hello there, my name is Mr Newblar. I'm a mid-level manager at a large corporation. We sell accessories made in Taiwanese sweatshops to the first world at ridiculous prices, but you aren't interested in things like that, are you? You're interested in me because, just like you and millions of other highly educated people, I'm connected to the internet. A veritable treasure trove of useful and up-to-date information! And don't forget communication! Yes, e-mail, the most useful of all! Well, I got an e-mail from an old friend I hadn't spoken to in years. How pleased I was! It was entitled "Hi" and I could hardly wait to read it. I was a little surprised when the e-mail was just a single line long. "Check this out!" it said, and attached was a file called "youllneverbelievethis.exe." Naturally, I had to share in the joy it had given my friend, so I clicked on the file. That's strange, I told myself, when it didn't seem to do anything. Anyway, the next morning my computer wouldn't load up. And neither would any computer in the whole company. Oh, by the way, did I mention that my name is Mr Newblar, and I'm a complete bloody idiot?"

Contrary to popular belief, viruses aren't getting smarter. In fact, they're becoming rather basic in comparison to the days of MS DOS and Windows 3.1. Unfortunately, it's people who are becoming more stupid. Or rather (and perhaps even more frightening), stupid people now have access to technology.

That is the reason for the rapid spread of today's "killer viruses" that ravage the internet, bringing digital traffic to a standstill and knocking entire corporations out of action for several hours, if not days. With the advent of e-mail, virus creators (the people who like to cause chaos, death and destruction, praise Satan, and all that) realised that they didn't have to do much work in order to get a virus to spread like wildfire. In the past, the virus had to transfer itself surreptitiously from one machine to another, sitting on the ends of "harmless" files. Nowadays, all it has to do is appear in an inbox as an attachment, and chances are some moron will straight-out run it. This is easier to program, and as a result, many more viruses are being written. Infamous examples like the "I love you" virus simply play on the general ignorance of modern computer users. Most of them have no idea what makes an executable (.exe) different from a picture file (.jpg, etc) or a document (.doc or .rtf). They will run the attachment because the author of the e-mail says it's okay. That's more than enough for them.

The way most e-mail viruses work is as follows.

Their creator sends the virus as an attachment to a few random addresses that he either guesses or finds by hacking e-mail servers and getting a list of users. Once those first few are sent out, he simply sits back and relaxes. His work is done. The spread of the virus from there on is engineered by the principle of ignorance. When a well-meaning but generally computer illiterate secretary or, as in my first example, a just-as-illiterate mid-level manager, runs the program, the damage is done in an instant. What they do exactly varies from virus to virus (common examples include: deletion of system files or all files of a particular type, Denial Of Service attacks against large internet-based companies, and general slowing of internet traffic), but they all have one thing in common - as part of their function, they send themselves to everyone listed in the victim's address book. And so the cycle continues.

You'd think the general public might have learned their lesson by now, but it was just last month that another major virus shot its way through the net like a drug through an addict's bloodstream. Are we *that* masochistic as a species to keep on passing viruses around as if we actually *enjoy* doing it? There are several obvious and practical ways to keep modern infections away from your precious system, and no-one seems to be listening to the advice. On the most basic of basic levels, if you are so computer illiterate that you can't even find the on/off switch (let alone tell the difference between file types of e-mail attachments), purchase a copy of the latest virus protection software and *keep it updated*. Then, as an added precaution, don't open any e-mail attachments without someone else (who preferably knows what he's doing) present to keep an eye on things. However, I assume that most of the readers of this magazine know a little more about the matter at hand. And for you people, there is no excuse. The simple rule is: don't run an attachment if you're not expecting it, *especially* if the e-mail seems generic (as if it were written for other people as well as you). Get hold of your friend / colleague / family member, and find out if that person really sent you something, and what it is. And as for people you don't know sending you mail, just don't read it. No matter how enticing it may seem. Mail from strangers is either going to advertise Viagra or contain a virus. Let's all use some common sense here.

INBOX

Letter of the moment

FROM Cloud
SUBJECT When will SA treat gaming as seriously as the rest of the world?

From the 16th to the 18th of January 2004, Blizzard held an invitational competition for WarCraft 3. Sixteen countries including South-Africa were involved and the event was held in Korea. As a WarCraft 3 player and fan I downloaded the videos and saw the awesome stage and huge crowd. I firstly downloaded our South African representative's game (Christopher [Swoop] Barter), he was up against some Asian guy using the nick Cherry-Reign. The whole setup was so professional, two soundproof booths for the competitors with a huge screen for spectators and way cool Blizzard jackets worn by the participants. The commentary was done in a language I don't understand, probably Korean, but the level of excitement in commentary reminded me of an English Premiership soccer game... this made me realize just how seriously gaming is taken in countries such as Korea. And it made me think, maybe this is the reason why SA hasn't been put on the map yet as far as gaming is concerned.

Here's how I see it. Gaming is a sport and just like "normal" sports such as rugby/cricket and soccer there's a certain amount of talented people who will excel at a certain sport (provided their talent is discovered that is). We haven't won any major gaming competitions as yet simply because we don't take gaming seriously enough.

I hope that some day, my nephew and kids will live in a society where gaming is truly appreciated and not frowned upon... which sadly is the case in SA at the moment.

At this stage in South Africa, gaming has never been so good - almost all the overseas publishers are represented here and we get invited when companies like Blizzard host major international tournaments. When it comes to competitive gaming we have certainly seen the support from local companies in their sponsorship of major events, which allows SA players the opportunity to compete overseas in big tournaments. Based on a brief discussion with a colleague, there are three problem areas we can immediately identify. 1. Relatively small talent base 2. Nerves from lack of experience when travelling overseas and playing in a big tournament (players are overwhelmed) 3. Lack of practise against overseas players [adds to the nerves]. An area where SA is still lagging behind is in online play as our local bandwidth doesn't allow us to be competitive when playing online against overseas players. With our players not getting sufficient practise against the stronger teams worldwide on a more regular basis, we are not as competitive when attending overseas tournaments as we would like to be. That's not to say that we don't have the talent and potential, simply not the adequate means to see results - but this shouldn't be an excuse. **THE ED**

FROM Borg
SUBJECT Length of games

The last couple of months I have been playing new games, buying them, and finishing them in less than a week. On some of the good ones, I upped the skill level to max, and still finished some of the games in the same week and some just over. It seems to me that the game developers are spending more time on developing the amazing graphics than an actual decent long story. We used to take longer than a week to finish playing games like Unreal, Doom & Quake. It seems like missions and games are becoming shorter. Now I'm not saying sacrifice graphics, but maybe add more to the games. The maps are there. Like in Call of Duty, brilliant game, but maybe the developers could have sent the character back to meet up with his old troop, or send in the guys to assist another troop under fire - anything to draw out the game a bit longer. I hope when I play Half-Life 2 and Doom 3, they will satisfy me in this regard, especially since these are sequels to good games and the series should not be ruined, like they ruined it with the

NAG bench created by Quentin Nell

release of Unreal 2.

I was just reading your magazine, and noticed some person mentioning something about spelling mistakes. Yeah we all make them so let's get over the fact that the 'gods' @ NAG make them. So let's just read and enjoy the magazine like we are supposed to. Hell we are all human.

This is true, but in some cases [Halo] it would have been better to cut out the endless level padding and cut the game down by a few hours. There's nothing more tedious than backtracking through the same level and killing the same monsters. I'd rather hang myself. Regarding the spelling, yes... gods do make mistakes - I have a rather long list

SHORTS

of NAG readers and 'hardcore' gamers that are a testament to this fact. THE ED

FROM **Werner**
SUBJECT **POWER!**

I've found the true reason why we all have a need to upgrade our hardware constantly. It's the same reason why we want more powerful cars or bigger houses, the reason is our human nature. Even if your PC can play all the latest games you still have the urge to upgrade. Having the best represents power and to gain power is human nature. So even if you drive a new Volvo you still want better and there is nothing to do about it except maybe taking medication. So unless you suppress the urge with medication, you can never win!

Yes human nature - terrible thing - it's the reason why we do the things we do and provides a convenient excuse for behaving poorly. So by your logic do people who drive cheap cars have no human nature? On a closing note - it's a BMW you want to be driving not those other inferior cars. See BMW, I support you so much and yet you do nothing for me... Boohoo. THE ED

FROM **Jeansy**
SUBJECT **Game names!**

I have noticed that newer games have these incredibly long names. For an example look at this new Max Payne game, Max Payne 2: The Fall of Max Payne. What a mouthful, they could have just called it Max Payne 2 and got it over and done with it but no they had to go the long route. What are developers thinking? The other thing I've noticed is that the longer the game name the more expensive it is, look at the new latest 'long named' Microsoft titles. There is a way to give a game a name that is short and fully describes it like Half-Life 2. The best example however is a game name that sounds so good that it should be given an award, it's a perfect example of a name, a description, it resembles a trilogy, and it's the ultimate game name... DOOM 3.

I think developers try and spice up the image of their sequels with subtitles to try and make the game seem more than it is. Your comment about high prices accompanying long names is guano. Who knows what the longest name for a game is? THE ED

FROM **Gunther**
SUBJECT **Technology News**

I refer to the third inset in your technology news column "credit you can feel". Hopefully the readers know what is on the way, and that soon none will be able to buy and sell without this implanted chip or as we know it, the "mark". Did you know that scientists have spent many years and millions of dollars researching where to implant a chip in the human body, so that it does not require batteries? Their solution is quite scary - the only two places where bio-heat energy is sufficient to power a tiny chip is, under the skin of the right hand, or your forehead. As it says in Revelations 13:16 in the Bible, we have been warned.

Don't implant any chips! We don't want to be a number (it's not cool) also the bit that follows after you die will truly suck. If you don't believe me check any bar code for the '666' lines - in a barcode the first two longer lines represent a six, the middle two represent a six and the last two longer lines represent a six - check any product.

P.S. I wish this was a paranoid rant.

You know, this is actually a paranoid rant. Next you'll tell me we never landed on the moon. Why not also the left hand BTW? THE ED

[barcode] 0 4
9 771028 053002

Hello, Satan? Come in Satan...
A reader spots the devil.

FROM **George**
Subject **Americans**

Hi, you guys do a great job and all, and your magazine is really cool and all and blah and you do your blah and blah. Okay, straight to the point, McDonalds. First of all, why did they come to South Africa? They're a bunch of Americans who came here to make a quick buck by killing innocent cows. I mean, who kills cows for a living? Their food is disgusting anyway.

I have a theory that cows were put here by aliens to fatten up humans so the aliens could eat us. I will actually be visited by one of these aliens next year in March, but considering my position I can't really tell anyone about it, I mean who will take me seriously then? Besides, if I could really see into the future why wouldn't I just get the paper and crack the lottery? But then maybe I know money is useless in the future and playing games is a route to salvation from the cow seeding human eating aliens. Also, please put a little effort into your praise of NAG - I mean, really! THE ED

FROM **Gareth**
SUBJECT **Sponsorship for a school league**

If you are willing to support such a league, you might be interested in this offer I am about to make. I am thinking of starting a school league in Cape Town. It will be held over the summer school weekends, once every Saturday. Therefore I will only need 11 Personal Computers, peripherals and games to run it. If we can make this an official tournament, we might even reach new heights in competitions such as Carousel, rAge etc. The venue is not a problem. I really hope that we can come to an agreement.

If this is your idea of a business proposal... oh hang on you said you were at school right? Okay, NAG will sponsor you with 11 bowls of jelly and some change for tuck. No really, keep reading NAG - there are unique and serious plans for a school league in the future. It's just not something one can leap into right now. THE ED

Did you know: Badgers can swim and even dive

This badger thing has gone too far!

Badger [new rules]
Some rules: The winner will be picked at random as not everyone subscribes to NAG; only send in E-mail (transferring SMS entries onto my PC is painful); the subject line must read: Badger <Month> I use a mail sorting system, competitions, Caption of the Month, Badger, Spam, Personal etc. so using the wrong subject line will result in accidental deletion or misfiling and you'll never win anything…

Badger Hunt #4 Winner [March Issue]
Well. Thanks to our new rule of selecting a winner randomly we couldn't do the draw in enough time for this issue [still getting 3-4 mails a day at time of writing this]. Instead here's a quote by William Shakespeare (1564 - 1616) on patience, "*How poor are they who have not patience! What wound did ever heal but by degrees.*" - Yes, it also took me 2 reads to get it. ED

This is what you're looking for each issue - a badger hidden inside a screenshot inside the magazine. Happy hunting!

2 better than 1?

Will Metal Gear Solid: Twin Snakes usher in an era of quality remakes, or quick cash-ins? Expected at the beginning of this month, we're hoping that Silicon Knights does this classic title justice.

Iron Phoenix

First-ever team based online Fighting Game, with Ninjas! It's got weapon-based melee combat and enough Fu for any kind of Kung. The recently announced Iron Phoenix promises to take up to 16 players into a team-combat based mythical Chinese martial arts world with beautiful battle arenas and wide open outdoor environments. Developer Interserv International, Inc. has revealed that players will be able to choose from ten playable characters and participate in numerous online play modes, traditionally found in online shooting games. A single player mission mode has also been announced, though it's obvious the major focus of the game is its online segment. With a huge variety of weapons-based combos and the lure of a meaningful storyline, 'Iron Phoenix' looks to be a highly anticipated Xbox title. Expect it in the 3rd Quarter, 2004.

Proof that game chicks are better than game guys...
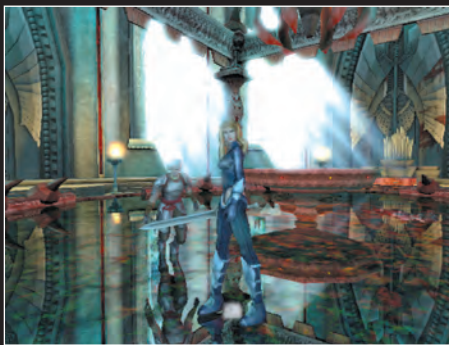
Shiny ancient Chinese floors...

And it's co-op on both consoles... Bonus!

The GameCube and PS2 get Serious. Take-Two Interactive have announced that its Global Star publishing division will release Serious Sam: Next Encounter for both the PlayStation 2 and the Nintendo GameCube. Developer Climax has revealed online play for up to eight players as well as a two-player split screen option for PS2 and a four-player Deathmatch option for the GameCube. Expected 2nd Quarter.

Expansion for the PC Game of the year

6 new nations
4 new campaigns
Over 20 New units

RISE of NATIONS
THRONES & PATRIOTS

BIG HUGE GAMES

Microsoft game studios

Rise of Nations: Thrones and Patriots introduces six new nations, four unique single-player campaigns, more than 20 original units, new wonders and new government types. Unlike other historical RTS games, the Rise of Nations franchise allows gamers to quickly play through eight historical epochs of time from the Ancient Age to the Information Age.

Vengeance

noun: 'venjuns
The act of taking revenge (harming someone in retaliation for something harmful that they have done) especially in the next life

In 2004 the game that brought weapons and high-rise combat kicking and screaming into the gaming arena plans to storm the mainstream and seat itself as one of the biggest action games of all time.

Since it first appeared on the shelves back in 1 999, the Tribes franchise has been one firmly embraced by a small, but incredibly dedicated, group of gamers so it comes as no surprise that the announcement of Tribes: Vengeance has been met with an equal amount of joy and trepidation – will the new developers, Irrational Games keep true to the spirit of the earlier games in the franchise or will they do the unthinkable and branch out on their own? The answer is that they've done both, keeping the essential Tribes play dynamic elements while adding a stack of new content uniquely their own.

The evolution of Skiing

Ironically the thing that really captured the imagination of the gaming public with the first game was nothing more than a bug or exploit – skiing (the ability to slide down incline surfaces to gain incredible momentum and speed) was never meant to be a feature of the first game. There's an old joke about a car with no transmission never needing to have the transmission fluid – the omission or mistake was a feature, not a flaw. Never has the instance been truer than in the case of the Tribes franchise. The ability to ski proved so popular that it reappeared in the sequel and will once again appear in the third game in the series, Tribes: Vengeance. Whilst the act of skiing is without a doubt one of the most exhilarating modes of movement in any FPS, every silver lining has its dark cloud – in the previous games in the series the act of skiing is very hard to learn making the game very hard to pick up for new players, alienating a lot of the marketplace. Tribes: Vengeance may very well see an end to this alienation as they have implemented some nifty new features. We first had a chance to see Tribes: Vengeance nearly six months ago and at that time the design team was acutely aware of the problem with skiing – as Michael Johnston, Lead Designer and the man in charge of multiplayer development in Vengeance put it, "I hear that a lot. It's easy to say that you haven't put in enough time to ski properly but you shouldn't have to dedicate lots of time to enjoy a game. That's something we've tried to address."

Address the problem they have, not only is the physics engine more lenient on new players (without penalizing old school Tribes fanatics) there are a number of small tweaks that should ease new players into the game without simultaneously making the stalwarts think that the franchise has sold out. In previous games players could control their direction in the air by simultaneously hitting the desired direction and the jetpack key. This may not sound difficult in print, but it is quite counter-intuitive in practice. Whilst a good degree of control can be gained in this way in Vengeance, players can also control their avatar, to a lesser degree, without the necessity to use the jetpack. In such a way new players can ease their way into the physics without being as heavily penalized in the previous games ▶

"It's easy to say that you haven't put in enough time to ski properly but you shouldn't have to dedicate lots of time to enjoy a game."

and this is just the tip of the iceberg. Skiing still takes some time to master but the developers have instituted some nice little features that will help new players along. Tribes: Vengeance features two full physics engines; a modified Karma engine as well as a purpose built one. One of the features of the purpose built engine is to allow the steepness of a gradient to effect the speed at which a player runs – simply put, the steeper the incline you're running down, the faster you move. Although this is by no means as fast a mode of transport as jetting and skiing, it at least allows new players to traverse the map in a relatively short amount of time.

> During play one thing became very obvious – Irrational have lived up to their promise of making the game much more new player friendly.

Vengeance in the flesh

Recently Vivendi and Sierra hosted an event in San Francisco to show off the multiplayer element of Tribes: Vengeance and allowed us to have a play on one of the maps that the game has to offer. Although the finished code will reportedly be shipping with 20+ maps we were only able to play on one. This map, known simply as "Fort" is a good example of what players will be able to expect – rolling terrain with bases at each end and multiple routes to reach each of them. Unlike the other Tribes games, Vengeance will feature more than large hilly maps, although they will make a return appearance. Players will also have the chance to duke it out in underground caverns complete with stalagmites and stalactites, industrial facilities, sports style arenas and even some smaller, far more intimate maps for as few as two players. All of the maps will also be playable with all of the game modes through a method Irrational Games calls the "universal game mode". Choosing a specific game mode will spawn mode specific objects, items or terrain into the map – choosing Capture the Flag will spawn flag points in each base whereas the as yet unnamed sports game (similar to Blitz Ball from UT2003) spawns a platform in the middle of the map for the ball and a goal above each of the bases.

During play one thing became very obvious – Irrational have lived up to their promise of making the game much more new player friendly. Within the first 15-20 minutes of play new players (such as myself) were beginning to get the hang of skiing, albeit in a very cursory way and could hold our own in some of the more heated duels. Before any Tribes fan starts to think that the game has been simplified for a newbie crowd then never fear – the Tribes veterans were still kicking our collective butts as was the case with the earlier games in the series, the only difference here being that the new players could have fun whilst it was happening.

Keep it in the family

Tribes: Vengeance keeps the tradition of players being able to choose their armour and pack at the start of the round or to change it during the round at the team's supply station as well as being able to choose specific packs that will define the role of the player in the match by giving them special skills such as the ability to repair vehicles and items and the like. Along with the three different suits

of armour (Light, Medium and Heavy) there will be four or more packs available in the game leading to many different possible character permutations. Only two of the packs have been revealed so far but these packs give us a good idea what we can expect from the final game. Each of the packs will have both an active and a passive skill. The "Energy Pack", for instance, will give the player a passive boost to the speed at which the player regenerates energy and an active skill that allows them to make quick bursts of speed. The "Repair Pack" on the other hand has a passive bonus of constant but slow health regeneration and an active skill that allows players to repair objects or heal teammates. Vengeance will also feature four drive-able vehicles that include a Humvee style supply truck that can act as a mobile spawn point and re-supply station and a slow but incredibly maneuverable aircraft/gun platform. All of the favourite Tribes weapons will be making a return including the ubiquitous Spinfusor and minigun as well as some armour specific weapons including the Light armour Sniper Rifle and the Heavy armour Mortar.

Going Solo

Far and away the most unique part of Tribes: Vengeance is the fact that Irrational Games has chosen to develop a fully featured single player campaign rather than a simple set of tutorial missions as seen in the previous iterations of the series. This choice is not surprising considering that Vengeance is not only the first dedicated shooter the team has developed but Irrational is much better known for their deep storylines and great characters from such games as System Shock 2 and Freedom Force. The single player campaign features an original plot by Ken Levine (the man responsible for System Shock 2) and is set some 400 years before the first Tribes game, giving the developers the chance to flesh out the history of the game world as well as play with some of the elements with impunity. Players will be cast as a number of different characters over a number of different years. Whilst all of the missions follow the same storyline they won't necessarily follow the same timeline so players may find themselves playing an Imperial Princess in the modern day in one mission only to find themselves transported 20 years back in time to take part in the events that lead to the previous mission in the next. Although we were unable to play any of the single player campaign during the press LAN we did get to see some in

action and at this stage of development it looks very impressive. One level saw the player having to storm an enemy base as an AI controlled heavy-armoured companion bombarded the defensive gun emplacements with its mortar while another saw the player making their way through the depths of an enemy base to destroy a reactor. The layout of the interior maps was especially interesting as they combined more traditional FPS level design with unique Tribes elements such as enormous pipes and conduits that could be used almost like skateboard half-pipes, allowing the player to make massive ski-jumps up to levels above and use their momentum to carry out bombing/strafing runs. ◪

> Irrational Games has chosen to develop a fully featured single player campaign rather than a simple set of tutorial missions as seen in the previous iterations of the series.

Shellshock: Nam '67

PC | PS2
Xbox

The latest location in the war-shooter craze currently imbued in gaming is Vietnam, a war steeped in controversial topics. World War 2 had outright bad guys (the Nazis) while Phan Van Dong's VC squads can barely be painted with the same brush. And a ton of movies depicting the era represent it as unforgiving and very violent - something games like Vietcong just started to touch on.

Eidos is getting into the shooter action with Shellshock: Nam '67, one that promises to show the more grim side of the war, something these screenshots seem to advocate quite firmly. You'll take the role of a rookie soldier on his first tour and witness the action and atrocities of the war first hand, including napalm strikes, the deadly tunnels and other events. As you progress through the ranks to Special Forces, you'll see everything from the jungles and wetlands of South and central Vietnam to the mountains of the North.

The play dynamic footage released so far indicates more true-to-life combat in the vein of Vietcong, but more graphical and intense, in the line of Call of Duty. Developed by new studio Guerilla, it uses their proprietary technology and will be heading out to the PC, PlayStation 2 and Xbox in June this year.

"You'll take the role of a rookie soldier on his first tour and witness the action and atrocities of the war first hand, including napalm strikes, the deadly tunnels and other events."

Heavy subject matter is the order of the day

Sing Star

PS2

It was only a matter of time before the gaming industry attempted to provide an outlet for all the potential pop star singers and karaoke addicts out there. Sporting two rather sturdy microphones and a USB adaptor for attaching them to your PS2, Sing Star from London Studio comes in the two audiophile flavours of Classic and Pop, and with enough groove for anyone.

Taking inspiration from the various other music/rhythm (and often humiliating) games out there such as the exasperating Dance Dance Revolution and arm-flapping inducing EyeToy: Groove, the basic idea behind Sing Star is that you have to sing along to the song and try your best to emulate the general tone of the original vocals. The system seems quite lenient, relying more on tonality than actual pitch and sound of the vocals, allowing those of us who are vocally impaired to get reasonable scores.

During our experience with Sing Star we found that the music provided in both the Pop and the Classics sections seemed quite varied, perhaps overly so. Almost no two songs are of the same type, making it more difficult to find a group of songs you can easily deal with. Despite this, we were pleased to find that most, if not all songs came complete with their original music video in the background while we tried our best not to sound completely off-key and kilter.

If you're one person short of a duet, Sing Star has a rather unique and daunting Career mode, starting you off in small clubs where you have to achieve a certain amount of points by singing some of the easier songs. Later on, full-fledged concerts push your vocals to the limits by requiring you to sing difficult songs and still achieve good scores. If groups are your thing,

Pass the Mic mode lets multiple people each have a go at singing, a rather interesting addition to any kind of party.

Sing Star is a very enjoyable experience often bordering on complete and utter lunacy, especially once we threw away the shackles of decency and pride, diving headlong into the karaoke experience. This is one we're keeping an eye out for.

P1 01320

Once I had a love **and it was a gas**
Soon turned out had a heart of glass

P1 00290   00940 P2

When I go round, bab**y round round**
Spend the night on me

P1 00890

The way you move so sca**n**dalous
It's all about the two of us

P1 07870   05640 P2
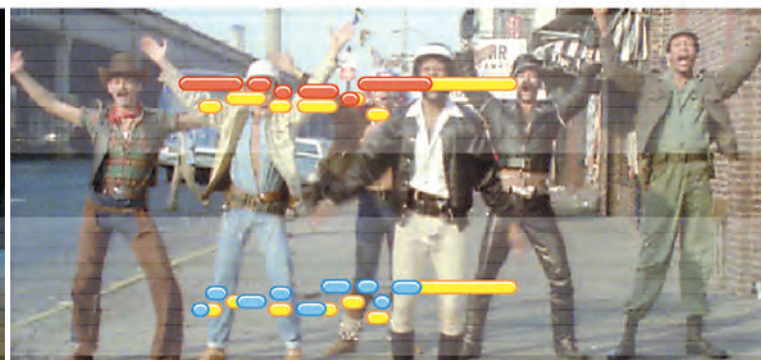
It's fun to stay at the Y-M-C-A
Look! It's Miktar's favourite song!
...n to stay at the Y-M-C-A

B.C.

XBOX

Q&A

Derek dela Fuente interviews Ben Cousins, former lead designer at Intrepid, on one of the years most anticipated titles, BC, slated for an Xbox release.

Q What can we expect from B.C., an out-and-out console action romp, or one with significant depth and strategy?

Our desire from the outset with this title was to provide both types of experiences, giving the player the freedom to choose to be clever or go in guns blazing. The basic character control and interface for BC is deliberately simple, comfortable and intuitive, we want the player to experience no difficulties at all interacting with the world, moving around, picking up objects and attacking creatures. The viewpoint is a typical third-person camera that players of many action adventure games will be familiar with. In addition to this, the missions in the game can be completed in any way the player chooses. Some players may move through the missions, killing indiscriminately and attacking every creature on sight, destroying all vegetation in their path. Some players may choose to employ sneaky but violent tactics, while some players may try to move through the game doing minimum amount of damage to the environment, sending creatures to sleep rather than killing them and trying to avoid damage to plant life. Any path is available to the player.

Q Can you tell us a little about the rival race?

We are trying to keep this enemy secret. It is unlikely that anyone will see these creatures until they play the game. I can say, however that they are a terrifying, organised and vicious enemy.

Q Evolution appears to play a significant role, can you elaborate on what form this takes in the actual game?

One of the player's key tasks is to find objects in the world that could be used to upgrade the technology of the tribe. These items are usually obtained through completing missions. For example we may have a mission to find five examples of a special plant that grows in an inaccessible part of the environment. When these items are taken back to camp the tribe may discover that the plant can be used to string a bow and arrow, and the player is now able to purchase this weapon from the camp with food collected in the world outside.

From left to right: Zogg, Thukk and Mary-Anne

Q Is the 'highly talked' about simulated eco-system as deep as people are making out, can you give us some specific information on how this pans out?

The power of the eco system is the way the mechanics combine to make a complex world. For example, all creatures in the world have a favoured food (it could be pine cones, leaves of a certain plant, or meat). The creatures actively forage and hunt for this food stuff. At certain times of the day they will also look for water or they may sleep through the day or the night. If you set the game in motion with a few creatures in the world you will begin to see these desires and routines making a complex simulated environment. A group of predators may happen upon some herbivores at a drinking spot one day and attack them, killing one and eating it. Another day they may not be in the right place at the right time.

Q I've heard that every item in the game can be picked up, is this

purely for combat purposes or for other reasons, i.e. combining wood with stone to make a simple axe perhaps?

Every item under a certain size can be picked up and used as a weapon, thrown as a weapon or given to another team member. In addition the player can (later in the game) add chemicals to these items. They can add any chemical to any item. These chemicals include fire, poison and sleeping drugs. Thus the player can add fire to a tree branch and use it as a torch or to ward off predators. They could add fire to a pine cone, and throw the burning object into long grass to scare creatures away. They can also add poisons and drugs to objects that they know are favoured foods for certain creatures. The item system is central to the game, and there is a lot more I am not able to talk about at the moment.

Q Peter Molyneux has talked of a 'sea of blood' when large dinosaurs are killed, can we really expect to see this

much gore or will it be toned down?

Currently we are working on a blood and gore model, which like the rest of the game is a slightly exaggerated version of reality. The life of prehistoric men and creatures is an extremely violent one naturally and we don't want to hold back in terms of representing this brutality. We hope the players will experience a combination of revulsion and pity when they kill the large creatures in the world.

Q The combat system sounds to be revolutionary; can you really hit dinosaurs out of the ballpark with a burning tree branch?

Yes, if you have a big enough branch, and you hit a small enough creature they will tend to travel a long distance. We want the player to have the freedom not only to attack creatures head on, or with a bow or spear at a distance, but also let them use the environment creatively to kill creatures. **N**

Luckily, most victims are rendered unconscious by it's breath before being eaten

World War Zero: IronStorm

PS2

Developer: Rebellion Software · **Publisher:** Wanadoo Edition · **Supplier:** TBA · **Genre:** First Person Shooter
Release Date: Q2 2004

Derek dela Fuente hooked up with Aeron Guy, Project Leader at Rebellion, to get the latest on World War Zero: IronStorm on the PlayStation 2.

Q Is World War Zero: IronStorm (WWZ) in effect the same game as the PC version but placed onto the PS2 and brought bang up to date?

No we definitely consider this to be more than a port of the PC version. The underlying story and environments are the same but the play dynamic, characters, weapons, game structure and interface are completely new. The biggest difference is the way the game plays. We have transformed the game into a fast and furious, console friendly, arcade shooter. The levels flow more coherently removing many of the areas where the player was required to backtrack.

Q When working on the PS2 do you try to create new and innovative effects and routines in terms of movement and presentation?

Yes, always, with every title we do on the PS2 the engine improves. We now have a solid engine with which to get environments up and running very quickly. This allows us to focus much more on the finer details. The effects I am most proud of are the sun glare and the burning flags, also the particle effects which I feel are some of the best in any game of this genre.

Q What kind of research have you done in terms of locations or even weapons and have you kept the action pretty realistic considering the story-line?

The locations flow in a realistic manner dictated by the story. One of the strongest plus points for me is that the story is not convoluted, the progression through the game always has a purpose without the player feeling cheated by moving goal posts. Much discussion went into character design and how to make the environments feel like war had been raging for fifty years.

Q Being a shooter, how strategic will WWZ be?

There are many areas in the game that require strategic planning, and objectives can be completed in a variety of ways. In one level the player enters a town square guarded by tanks, snipers and a mounted high-calibre machine gunner. Again there are many ways of completing this section and many vantage points to choose from. For example, by staying close to

"Enemies will intelligently select weapons in their inventory depending on the situation"
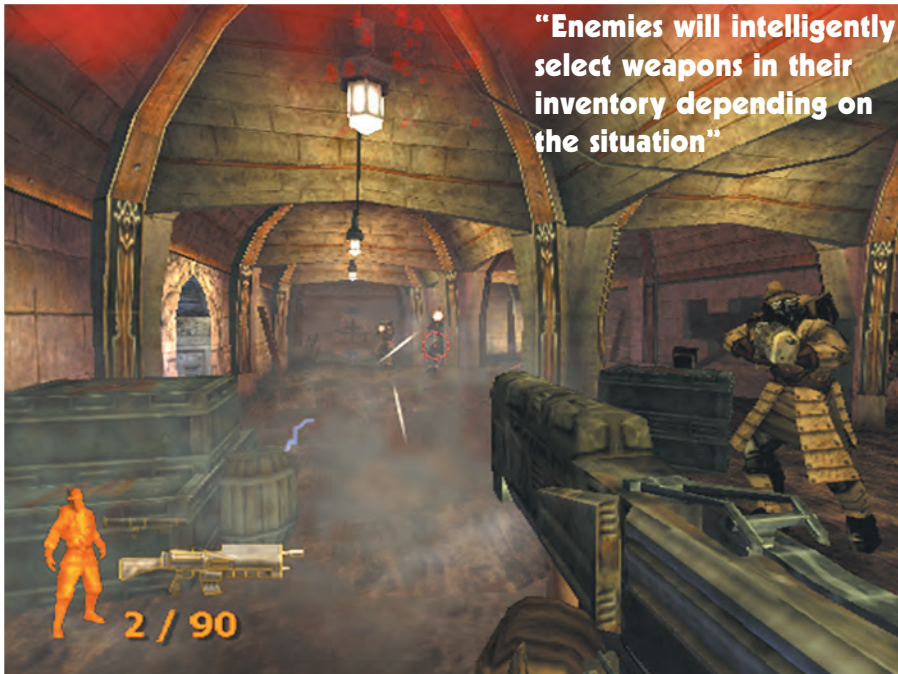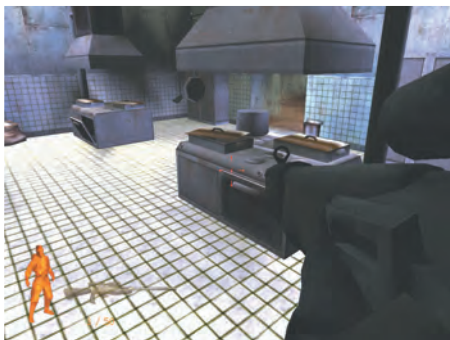
the tank, approaching from the blind side, the player can use the tank as mobile cover while taking out the other obstacles, or chose to use stealth, taking out the snipers and mounted gunner from various vantage points before tackling the tank.

How big and diverse are the locations?

The game consists of sixteen very diverse levels taking the player through trench warfare, urban environments, secret underground weapons facilities, vast steam-punk moving train carriages, and close quarters corridor battles in the Reichstag in Berlin.

How complex will game interaction between characters be and does the AI in the game ensure it is more than just mindless shooting?

There are many subtle decisions made by the AI in WWZ. Enemies will intelligently select weapons in their inventory depending on the situation, swapping to a grenade to flush the player out if they are trying to make use of a cover point, or swapping to a short range weapon if using an RPG when the player closes in. All groups of enemies have commanders, which if killed will affect the morale of the group as a whole, making them easier to kill. My personal favourite however is the wounded, kamikaze AI state whereby wounded enemies will choose whether to surrender or drop a grenade at their feet with the aim of taking you with them!

What do you believe makes a good action game?

Fun. Simply put, fun is absolutely the most important thing. The player should never feel frustrated by the game and should always be faced with fresh challenges and graphical diversity. Atmosphere and ambience are pivotal to increasing the playing experience; in WWZ we have explosions going off all around the player, buddies screaming and dust and fire fogging the players view. In other areas, by contrast, we have gone for a very soft, visual beauty and quiet sound track to lull the player into a false sense of security.

Do the weapons all offer their own unique qualities?

All the weapons are unique: fire-rates, accuracy ranges, scopes, clip sizes and re-load times all affect the weapons making choosing the correct one very important. We spent a great deal of time making the guns feel right, from the recoil, controller rumble to the animations and sound, one of our pet hates is shooters where the weapons feel weak.

Shooting someone in such an uncomfortable looking uniform is an act of mercy

234 / 100

20 / 200

Full Spectrum Warrior

PC | XBOX

Developer: Pandemic Studios · **Publisher:** THQ · **Supplier:** WWE [011] 462 0150 · **Genre:** Tactical Shooter
Release Date: Q3 2004

Full Spectrum Warrior is a squad-based, tactical-action game, based on a light infantry-training simulator designed by Pandemic Studios for the U.S. Army, which delivers the experience of squad level command in the heat of battle.

The product was developed with expertise from University of Southern California's Institute for Creative Technologies (ICT), which worked with Pandemic to bring state-of-the-art technology to the game. Designed to simulate today's challenges of urban combat missions, the game hopes to deliver a level of realism and accuracy that has never been seen in a military-based game.

Lead Designer Laralyn McWilliams gives some insight, "we have a great combination of talent and experience making the game. Our Project Lead, William Stahl, worked on both

Battlezone and Battlezone II, and he leveraged that expertise with strategy/action titles into the core design of Full Spectrum Warrior. The rest of the Full Spectrum Warrior development team here at Pandemic has years of combined experience making a wide variety of games in different genres. On the army side, we worked with ICT to create the army version, and we have several military consultants still working with us on the commercial version.

Our central vision is to combine a strategy play dynamic with a realistic and immersive environment that places you right down on the battlefield with the soldiers. Creating an authentic experience is very important to us - we recognize the tremendous sacrifices and hardship endured by soldiers in the line of fire, and we've done our best to depict their duties accurately."

Two technical initiatives have been

undertaken with most of the team's effort going into increasing the artistic and play dynamic aspects of Full Spectrum Warrior. At the end of the day a game is judged on its presentation and its playability. In terms of the visuals the team is trying to push as many polygons and textures as they can to create a realistic environment.

Being based on a simulator can cause a number of problems and the involvement of ICT was primarily with the army version of the game rather than the commercial game currently in development. Pandemic worked closely with ICT and several different army organizations to make the army training version of Full Spectrum Warrior, visiting army training facilities and army personnel visiting their studio on numerous occasions.

Full Spectrum Warrior is set in a fictional Middle Eastern City, torn apart by a brutal dictator who seized power

"We recognize the tremendous sacrifices and hardship endured by soldiers in the line of fire, and we've done our best to depict their duties accurately."

Percy finally found the flock of pigeons that had ruined his dress uniform

in a bloody coup. Since that time, he has mounted an organized attack against the country's ethnic minority while using a platform of anti-Western sentiment to ally with terrorist factions. Your platoon is a part of a UN coalition sent to remove the dictator from power and deliver much needed aid. Your tasks and objectives range from protecting your platoon's convoy, to securing parts of the city, to eliminating snipers that endanger civilians and other soldiers.

"You are in charge of two fire-teams, each with four soldiers. Each soldier in your charge has a distinct personality that you'll come to recognize over the course of the game. You can tell your two fire-teams to move, including using a variety of formations. You can also tell them to attack enemies with their standard weapons or grenades. While the controls are easy to master, your 'toolbox' for interacting with the game is quite robust. In fact, there are so many different ways to solve the game's scenarios that we find ourselves playing the levels a bit differently each time"

The behavioural movements and actions of the players are critical in this genre of game and getting this right is one area the team believes they have got sussed.

"The AI we've developed is unique and quite powerful, enabling the soldiers to think and behave both as individuals and as a group. Unlike other war settings, the soldiers in Full Spectrum Warrior are not drafted into service. They have signed up voluntarily, and they are experienced professionals. While the stress of battle affects their demeanour, they will never 'break' and perform poorly. We want your focus to be on squad-level tactics, not on managing each individual soldier's morale."

Each member on your four-man fire-team has a defined role, mostly derived from his equipment. Once again, we stick to the authentic army load-out. Your teams use M4 rifles, some with the M203 attachment, Squad Automatic Weapons, fragmentation and smoke grenades, and occasionally other specialized pieces of equipment. ◪

FlatOut

PC | PS2 |XBOX

Developer: Bugbear Entertainment · **Publisher:** Empire · **Supplier:** WWE [011] 462 0150 · **Genre:** Driving
Release Date: Q3 2004

Bugbear is hard at work on a new breed of racing game where getting to the finish line isn't just about racing - it's about surviving. While this concept might sound a bit like the Destruction Derby series, the real change comes in the game's revolutionary damage model, which allows for spectacular crashes and impressive native damage to the cars.

"The exceptional part about FlatOut is the moment when you make a mistake and crash through the fences or tyre walls on the trackside," explains Aki Järvilehto, Bugbear's director, "when your hood violently tears away soaring over the windshield and you're buried under the shower of tyres, which smash your roof in, that's when you know you're really racing! What separates FlatOut from many other games is that we want to make the crashes visually very rewarding to the player. And we want the player to keep driving even when he's lost the windshield or the driver side door and his engine is in flames!"

Damage will happen in real-time, using the exact points of impact - something that has been lacking in racing titles for a while. All this is wrapped in a realistic physics engine, modelled around Bugbear's belief that while there are a lot of racing games being released - all focus on great-looking cars that can't be damaged. Even the aforementioned derby games kept visible metal carnage to a minimum, usually just showing cracked windshields and lost hoods. Each car in FlatOut is comprised of dozens of small parts that can be ripped off or broken, adding to the realism or accidents.

The game features a career mode where the player has to progress through various underground leagues, making a name for himself. The team also mentioned that there will be mini-games on the side, but didn't elaborate. 16 cars will be available and as you collect cash from winning races, these can be upgraded in a variety of ways. The tracks are also diverse, with numerous shortcuts and alternative routes - some tracks boast up to 45 variations in them, but the final number of tracks is still being decided on.

Aki even went as far as comparing FlatOut's physics showcase to cars as what Half Life 2 has planned for FPS titles and by the look of it, they are doing a good job. Of course, physics and damage models take processing power, but Bugbear didn't reveal the expected specifications for the final release. But since the game is slated for a late 2004 release, this shouldn't be too big of a concern.

"when your hood violently tears away soaring over the windshield and you're buried under the shower of tyres, which smash your roof in, that's when you know you're really racing!"

Maybe the Ed will let us use his BMW to test how realistic these physics actually are...

gaming news

Time to accessorize »

words ed dracon

Back in the day (yes, those halcyon days) gaming was an activity that required very little in the way of extras. You needed a console/computer, some software and a lot of imagination to fill in the gaps between the monochromatic pixels. For a better gaming experience you might have procured a joystick for space-battles or barnstorming, perhaps even a game-pad to make your pit-falling or lode-running easier.

I don't have to mention how much times change, we've all seen the effect of the clock on game mechanics, graphics and interactivity. Concepts have been refined; more buttons now have to be pressed to get Mario to do his thing while some games require professional contortions just to move your character around. For some, this added complexity in the human interface between them and their gaming seems to be a point of contention while the rest of us can't help but look on in awe. A wave is building on the horizon, ready to crash down upon our unsuspecting wallets to wash away all our savings. Heralded by such titles as Dance Dance Revolution that requires you to physically dance on a dance-mat and the impressively humiliating EyeToy which leaves our arms flapping, developers seem to be intent on using specialized devices.

Upcoming titles such as Lifeline require you to interact with a character using a microphone, something that the obscure Dreamcast Seaman attempted with little result; possibly due to the actual content of the game rather than the principle of it (a fish with the head of a man is quite strange, after all). Sing Star also uses a microphone for its off-key karaoke input while the button-covered specialized controller for Mech Assault actually requires you to start your Mechs engine by turning a key. Apparently the expansion actually adds foot pedals into the mix turning it more into a simulator than a game.

Hefty price tags for all this novelty aside, could all of this (and the various spin-offs inspired by it) breathe new life into a jaded industry, or will it simply give developers more bang for our buck and leave us sitting with more cables to trip over?

BAFTA's award winners

The **BAFTA game and film awards** were recently announced, and they look as follows:

Grand Theft Auto: Vice City won awards for best sound, best action, best PS2 game, best PC game, best design and the Sunday Times Readers' Award
EyeToy: Play - awards in Children's category and Technical Achievement
Advance Wars 2: Black Hole Rising - awards in the Strategy and GBA categories
Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic - best Xbox game
Metroid Prime - best GameCube game
Tony Hawks - best mobile game
FIFA 2004 - best sport game
Project Gotham Racing 2 - best racing game
Soul Calibur II - best introduction
The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Walker - best adventure game
Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets - best music
Game of the Year went to **Call of Duty**.

v Midway's near-future plans

Midway recently announced the upcoming release of the next Midway Arcade Treasures, a compilation that will include Mortal Kombat, Mortal Kombat II, NARC and Total Carnage. The company also plans to release a new Gauntlet game, with John Romero involved in its development. A new Mortal Kombat title, Deception, is also on the cards, and will boast features new to fighting games, as well as re-introducing some classic MK characters. The company has also announced that its previously planned Justice League, announced last July, has been cancelled; no reasons were given.

WINNER BAFTA GAMES AWARDS

< Zoo Tycoon 2

A sequel to Zoo Tycoon from Blue Fang Games is on its way from Microsoft Game Studios, to be ready by the end of the year. The new title will feature a 3D graphics engine and enhancements to all game elements.

< Jak III

Sony has released some very sketchy information about Naughty Dog's upcoming Jak III. The game is expected to be complete late this year, and a screenshot has been made public. Other than that, it appears that more details will only become available at E3.

< Ratchet & Clank 3

Sony Europe and Insomniac have announced Ratchet & Clank 3, scheduled for release late this year. More details should come to light at this year's E3, next month.

< Far Cry movie in the works

Uwe Boll, a film maker with a taste for converting gaming franchises into movies, will be producing a feature film based on UbiSoft and Crytek's PC shooter Far Cry, in addition to other projects he is undertaking.

< Marvel and EA work together

Electronic Arts and Marvel Comics have signed an interesting-sounding deal that cuts both ways. EA will produce fighting games featuring Marvel characters facing EA-created characters, while Marvel will begin publishing comics featuring EA's game characters.

< UEFA Euro 2004

Electronic Arts and the Union of European Football Associations have signed a deal allowing EA to produce a game based on the upcoming Euro 2004 football tournament. In addition to the usual features, the game will boast a dynamic morale system that will affect players' performance based on performance in previous games. The game is being developed for PC and leading consoles, and is scheduled for release around the time of the tournament finals in the middle of the year.

International Release Dates

• Microsoft Train Simulator 2	PC	April 1, 2004
• Syphon Filter: The Omega Strain	PS2	April 3, 2004
• Gradius V	PS2	April 4, 2004
• TOCA Race Driver 2: Ultimate Racing Simulator	PC	April 4, 2004
• NBA Ballers	PS2	April 5, 2004
• NBA Ballers	Xbox	April 5, 2004
• Wario Ware Inc.	GCN	April 5, 2004
• Alias	PC	April 6, 2004
• Beyond Divinity	PC	April 13, 2004
• Egyptian Prophecy: The Fate of Ramses	PC	April 14, 2004
• Full Spectrum Warrior	PC	April 14, 2004
• River City Ransom EX	GBA	April 15, 2004
• Masters of the Universe	Xbox	April 18, 2004
• Masters of the Universe	PS2	April 18, 2004
• Masters of the Universe	GCN	April 18, 2004
• City of Heroes	PC	April 27, 2004
• Lineage II: The Chaotic Chronicle	PC	April 27, 2004
• Taito Memories	NG	April 27, 2004
• Sega Rally Championship	NG	April 27, 2004
• Transformers	PS2	April 2004
• Time of Defiance	PC	April 2004
• Legends of Wrestling: Showdown	Xbox	April 2004
• Legends of Wrestling: Showdown	GCN	April 2004
• Shining Force: Resurrection of the Dark Dragon	GBA	April 2004
• World Tour Soccer 2005	PS2	April 2004
• Pool Paradise	Xbox	April 2004
• Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse	PC	May 1, 2004
• Pikmin 2	GCN	May 1, 2004
• Rent a Hero No. 1	Xbox	May 3, 2004
• Mega Man Anniversary Collection	GCN	May 3, 2004
• RalliSport Challenge 2	Xbox	May 4, 2004
• Ashen	NG	May 10, 2004
• Headhunter: Redemption	PS2	May 11, 2004

v Armies of Exigo

Electronic Arts, Black Hole Games and film producer Andrew Vajna (noted for films such as the Rambo series, Total Recall and Terminator 3) have teamed up to produce games. Their first project is Armies of Exigo, an innovative-sounding real-time strategy title. The game will feature the addition of subterranean combat to the usual surface and aerial skirmishes, and the two levels will be played simultaneously, allowing players to implement surprise deployments and requiring them to execute and defend from attacks from all directions. The game will also feature a physics engine that allows total interactivity with the environment, and the building and destruction of bridges. The engine, which has been in development for over two years, will also allow each player to field up to 200 units at a time. No release date has been suggested so far.

v Second Sight

Second Sight from Free Radical is set to be an action title with stealth elements. The story revolves around an amnesiac who wakes up with psychic abilities in a lab. Players will have a mystery to unravel during the course of the game. No other details are known at present.

v Prism: Black Shield

The US Army National Guard has commissioned Rival Interactive to create a first-person shooter game, titled Prism: Black Shield. The game's theme will be anti-terrorist activities using near-future equipment and armament.

v Area 51

Inevitable Entertainment is currently developing Area 51, a first-person shooter set in the reputed alien-research facility. The story appears to be a fairly standard one involving a virus that transforms humans into malevolent fiends and an ancient alien civilisation, adding some government conspiracies to add spice. The game will offer a variety of weapons, as is to be expected, and will feature multiplayer support via split-screen, LAN and online access. The game will appear late this year on PlayStation 2 and Xbox.

aS seen on tv

Super Smash Bros N64
aired 1998-1999

A happy group of Nintendo characters frolic in a field of sunflowers. Birds are singing, world peace is the status quo.

Until, of course, Yoshi gets tripped...

Punches fly in a brawl that would make WWE Superstars hide behind the cigarette machine.

And then some...

No fatalities, but close enough.

Web Scores

	Armed & Dangerous [PC]	X 2 The Threat [PC]	Spellforce [PC]	Contract Jack [PC]
NAG /100	88	81	79	48
gamespy.com /5	3	n/r	3	3
gamespot.com /10	7.3	7.4	7.9	5.9
pc.ign.com /10	8.3	7.3	8.2	6.1
	Final Fantasy X-2 [PS2]	Legacy of Kain [PS2]	Metroid Zero Mission [GBA]	Mario Party 5 [GC]
NAG /100	86	78	91	76
gamespy.com /5	3	2	4	3
gamespot.com /10	8.1	6.9	8.5	6.9
ign.com /10	9.5	8	9	7.9

< Creature Conflict: The Clan Wars

Cenega Publishing's upcoming Creature Conflict: The Clan Wars will be released on PlayStation 2 and Xbox, in addition to the PC, as was originally planned. The game, in development at Mithis Interactive, will feature several multiplayer modes as well as the single player campaign mode.

< Athens 2004 on PS2

Sony has acquired the rights from International Sports Multimedia to develop Athens 2004, based on this year's upcoming Olympic Games. The game, in development at Eurocom, is scheduled for release in July, just before the start of the Games. Both the venues and the events included in the game are extensive and thoroughly researched.

< Mythica cancelled

Microsoft has cancelled its formerly upcoming massively-multiplayer online RPG Mythica. The reason given for this is that the genre is overcrowded, and Microsoft is already committed to multiple projects in this field, and thus doesn't wish to dilute the genre. In this age of mass-produced games, it is quite refreshing to see a project canned because it might become one of a multitude of similar games, even though it is sad to see the interestingly themed Mythica go.

< Gran Turismo 4 delayed further

Gran Turismo 4 has slipped again. The most recent official release date estimates quoted June or July, but now the game has been delayed till late this year, or possibly even early next year.

New Broom…

Things have been shaken up on the pages of your favourite gaming magazine, and reviews look all new!

You may notice that the reviews look just a little different this month - this introductory page, for example, is new. Or it's back. Something like that.

In an attempt to make sure that our reviews offer you the best starting point when making your game purchasing decisions, we have streamlined the whole process a little. You'll notice (because we know that you pay attention to these things) that our review pages offer fewer words and more pictures. Representing a game in print is very difficult, and so more, bigger screen shots are obviously important to bring as much of the game across as we possibly can.

You'll also notice that there are no longer pros and cons included in our reviews. This is because we like to think that you do actually take the time to read what we have to say, instead of just glancing at scores and summaries.

On a serious note, though, the whole change in our review layout is there to serve you better; with more to-the-point articles that contain all the information you need to make the best choice when it comes to spending your hard earned cash.

Our rating system is still the same as always (yes, with that mean old "50% is middling" approach,) based upon the average of ten scores assigned for each title reviewed. Categories include graphics, sound, story, originality, control, playability, continuity, multiplayer, A.I. and the reviewer's opinion score. This means that even the prettiest game may get a lower score because of poor controls, for example… and that information will be locked away in the review text itself.
Best get reading…

Teach a monkey - draw a picture

Award of Merit
A silver award is given to a game that achieves a score of 85 to 90. It's a good thing.

Award of Excellence
A gold award is given to a game that achieves a score of above 90. It's even better.

Editor's Choice
Every now and then, when the Ed sees a game he likes, he gives it this special award. He sleeps a lot though, so this is a rare thing...

Platform
Platforms are now described using icons rather than just plain old words. For those of you who don't know (shame on you) they are, left to right, top to bottom: Game Boy Advance, GameCube, N-Gage, PC, PS2 and Xbox.

Scoring
As we said, our scores range from one to one hundred, with a score of fifty being considered average. Live with it.

Final Fantasy X-2

PlayStation 2 Review

Now Available

Silver Award

When dealing with a game of this particular type, one must look at it from two different perspectives. Firstly as a piece of interactive entertainment, and secondly as a work of literature. In the first category, merely mentioning the name of the game should be enough to set the highest of graphical expectations, and they are indeed met with splendour.

The in-engine animation has been refined drastically since FFX, adding a range of new facial and bodily expressions to the characters, and correcting most of the "jumpiness" that had been a major criticism in the past. The pre-rendered video sequences are stunning, as usual, and their integration into the engine is seamless, adding extra flair to pivotal plot points. The emphasis has been put on the characters this time, as opposed to "special effect" and establishment shots that we saw predominantly in FFX.

However, there is not much new content in terms of locations and monsters, and people who played the original in depth may become frustrated with the lack of fresh visual stimuli. Essentially, things have been improved, not re-invented. FFX-2 is less of a sequel and more of a continuation of the previous game.

The play dynamic itself is the most impressive aspect. Usually I find myself hurrying through the battles to get to the story, but this time it was the other way around. The battle system has been given a speed boost like never before, and can take a little getting used to. The learning curve is well worth it though, as it is ultimately more skill-based and thus more rewarding. A variety of new features such as timed attacks and player-controlled counter-attacks have also been introduced into the mix, which makes for a dynamic and exhilarating combat experience. The optional sub-quests are challenging, original and provide plenty of arcade-style fun as a sort of "intellectual break" from the main story. While the game is relatively short and quite easy, it has extensive re-playability in that it contains a large amount (over 50%) of hidden content.

It is also especially important to make mention of the soundtrack. Nobuo Uematsu's absence from the credit list has made a huge impact on the overall feel of the game. The industry legend opted not to undertake the project, leaving it to two "junior" composers, who have given it a far livelier, J-Pop attitude. This ties in strongly with the game's stark changes in emotional focus, which I will discuss in the following paragraphs.

We resume the story of Yuna, the high summoner who defeated Spira's (her

world's) greatest enemy, two years after the fact. She has since become a treasure-sphere hunter, teaming up with her cousin Rikku (from the original) and newcomer Paine. Yuna's interest in spheres stems from a movie sphere she found, which appeared to contain the image of her ex-lover, Tidus, who supposedly died at the end of FFX. Unfortunately, this is where the plot falls apart. It's sentimental and unconvincing - the emotional sincerity we have become accustomed to is gone. The game is obviously aimed mainly at a female audience, and the developers took this idea too far, forgetting that women are not merely dumber versions of men.

There is one redeeming factor in that the sub-plot concerning Meyvn Nooj, Baralai and Gippal (the three political leaders of Spira) is actually immensely intriguing, but they only play a very small part in the story. This is a gross shame, since they have far more potential than the flat caricatures of Yuna, Rikku and Paine. The game is

light-hearted as a whole, and can even sometimes become painfully cheesy.

A series with a history as rich and impressive as Final Fantasy will naturally fall under harsh criticism. X-2 has its flaws, and is probably one of the poorer games that Square have released, but it is still leagues ahead of the average console game and has proved to be the most enjoyable overall single-player gaming experience I have had for quite some time. ▉

> **"Essentially, things have been improved, not re-invented. FFX-2 is less of a sequel and more of a continuation of the previous game."**

X-2 is significantly above average and will keep the player thoroughly entertained.

86

Evolution

One of the main ways in which the game changes from instalment to instalment is the Character Advancement System. What we see today is the result of more than a decade of evolution, having its origins way back in the 1980's. However, Final Fantasy 7 was the first to make a huge leap from its predecessors by introducing the Materia System (most popular to date), where players attached gems to their equipment, and this allowed them to learn new abilities. Final Fantasy 8 saw probably the most debated development, the Junction System, where the characters' abilities were linked to the creatures they summoned. FFX again introduced something entirely new, with the Sphere Grid System, which had the characters progress along a path of nodes which were filled by spheres collected during battle. FFX-2 has opted to combine the sphere idea with the concept of FF7, to create the Dressphere System. Class-specific "dresspheres" must be found and equipped, allowing the character to adopt the class of the dressphere (e.g. Warrior, Black Mage, Samurai) and learn its unique abilities.
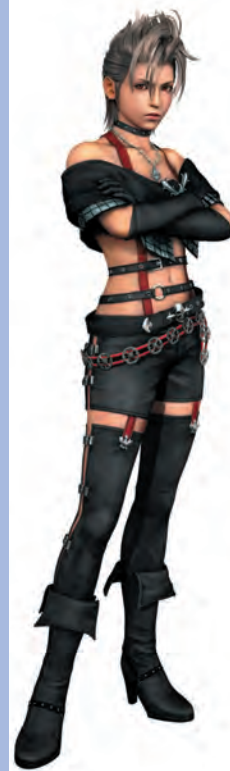
X2: The Threat

PC
Review

X2: The Threat is a space simulation title that will grab the attention of anyone who thought that Microsoft's Freelancer was a bit restrictive. In fact, X2 offers gamers such an open-ended play dynamic, that anyone vaguely interested in space management will play this for a long time.

While X2 features the obligatory "main quest", players are by no means forced to get involved in this. Right from the start, you are left to your own devices and can decide what you want to do in this universe. Play consists of trading, fighting, building and (of course) flying.

Homeworld showed gamers that playing a game in space can be a graphically beautiful experience. X2 takes this a step further. Simply put, the game is breathtakingly beautiful. Gamers even have the option to run the game as a benchmark.

Unfortunately, the one disappointing aspect of X2 is its storyline. I would strongly advise gamers to ignore the main quest and focus on the sandbox nature of the title. Any game featuring characters with names like Ban Danna should have the warning sirens go off.

Players can get a myriad of missions from the countless number of space stations scattered throughout the X2 universe. While these are your standard fare, the sheer variety of missions will keep you glued to the screen for hours. Of course, players can play the game as space pirates and prey on other ships. You can even set up your own space station and become a trading post of your own when you have enough resources.

There are a host of ships to buy, steal and destroy and range from transports, passenger liners and battleships. For obvious reasons, your ship is the single-most important element of the game. You can install different upgrades that include weapons, shields and miscellaneous equipment that allow you to save the game at any location instead of only at space stations.

One of the more surreal elements of the game is docking your ship with a space station. The space station revolves around its own axis and the entrance stays constant making for some interesting flight manoeuvres.

X2: The Threat is definitely a niche title. If you enjoyed playing titles such as Elite, Privateer and Freelancer, then it will be the game for you. However, steer clear if you are looking for a fast-paced, action-orientated offering. X2 is more cerebral than that.

X2: The Threat will satisfy all the demands of space management junkies.

81

To infinity and beyond!

"X2 offers gamers such an open-ended play dynamic, that anyone vaguely interested in space management will play this for a long time."

Contract J.A.C.K.

In an apparent attempt to milk the success of the NOLF series, Monolith have released Contract J.A.C.K., a half hearted attempt at letting the player experience the other side of the law. In this game, the player controls John Jack, a contract operative working for the evil organisation H.A.R.M, which we met in the NOLF adventures of Kate Archer.

Making use of the now very out of date Lithtech engine, Contract J.A.C.K. feels extremely dated in the graphics department. There is no rag dolling, for one thing and, when compared to titles that we see hitting the shelves these days, the game looks like it belongs in a bargain bin.

But there are more problems with this title than just dated graphics. The game itself is a mindless affair, with the player doing little more than just running around shooting stuff. The seven chapters in the game all feel a little too drawn out, while the overall impression of the title is that it is far too short, and lacking the pizzazz that NOLF brought to our PCs. And the humour? It's there, but it is not as good as other NOLF titles, and most of the funny dialogue is drowned out by the constant sound of gunfire.

Where NOLF had a certain charm about it, Contract J.A.C.K. feels strained. The subtleties of the previous titles are gone and, even if merit can be found in the opening moments of the title, it gets boring rather quickly.

The game visits a few different locations and has a number of weapons for the player to use, but the gadgets and exotic locations that made NOLF such fun are gone. This title has no finesse and should only be considered by the truly desperate as a gaming option. ◣

> **"Where NOLF had a certain charm about it, Contract J.A.C.K. feels strained."**

The official prequel to NOLF 2 is lack lustre and weak... **48**

Look! He died, just like everyone else!

In Memoriam

PC Review

Award of Excellence

Suggested Retail Price: R 300.00 · **Developer:** Lexis Numerique · **Publisher:** Ubisoft
Supplier: Bowline [021] 550 9700 · **Genre:** Puzzle · **Reviewer:** Walt Pretorius

Minimum Specifications: Pentium II 333 MHz · 64 MB RAM · 8 x CD ROM · 32 MB Video Card · 700 MB HDD

It's truly rare for an original game to hit the shelves these days. In fact, even In Memoriam doesn't qualify as truly original in genre - but its approach and play style is simply brilliant and very, very new.

Reminiscent of mystery titles like Treasure Hunt, In Memoriam is set up as a "real world" mystery. The player is provided with a copy of a DVD made by the evil genius known as "PHOENIX." Encoded in the DVD are clues to the whereabouts of ace reporter Jack Lorski and his companion, Karen Gijman. The player then takes part in the investigation as part of a crack team trying to find these two missing people.

This title is all about research. There is no action, no running and jumping. Instead there are enigmatic clues, old film clips and mysterious letters which lead the way. Each "level" is made up of several puzzles - when they are all solved, the player can progress to the next level.

We've seen this kind of game before. In fact, the advancement of PC technology has made games like this almost obsolete. However, it is technology that has made this particular game possible. Now, for the first time ever, this kind of game gets a real world feel - the player is drawn into the game through the use of two things that have advanced in leaps and bounds over the last few years… e-mail and the internet.

Several web sites relating to the game have been set up. Researching these sites, as well as ones that exist independently of the game (normal, every day sites) will yield the clues needed to crack the puzzles. In fact, the "fake" web sites can even be found using a search engine! Together with that, e-mails are sent to the player that contain clues uncovered by other "researchers." This obviously means that you need a 'net connection to play, though…

This element gives the game an incredibly realistic feel, and takes it from a puzzle solving game to an utterly addictive experience. Add to that the overall creepy feel that the game has captured, and you are left with an absolute winner. If you like your gaming to be cerebral and mentally stimulating, you can't get any better than this. Who needs a rocket launcher when you have the "real" world to deal with?

In Memoriam is a gaming tour de force that deserves the highest praise!

New concepts in a classic game style make In Memoriam one of the best puzzle games in years.

90
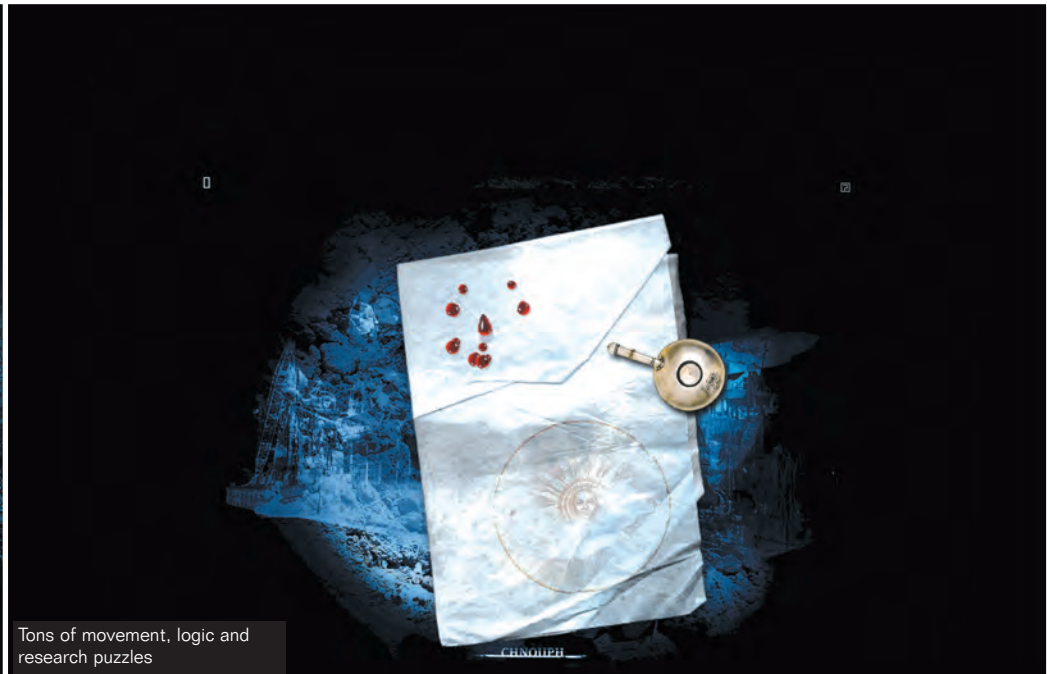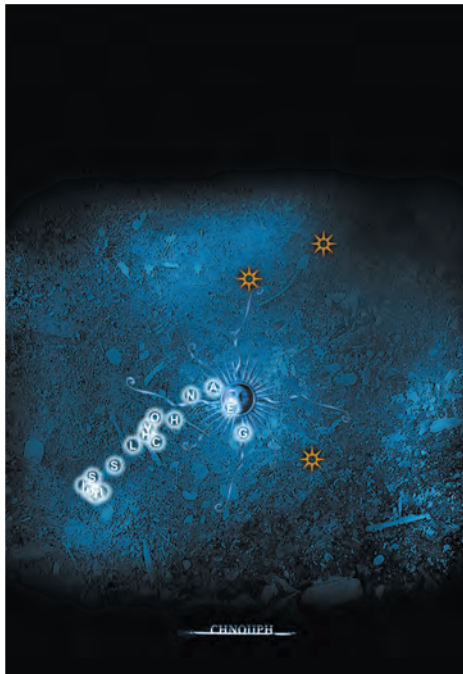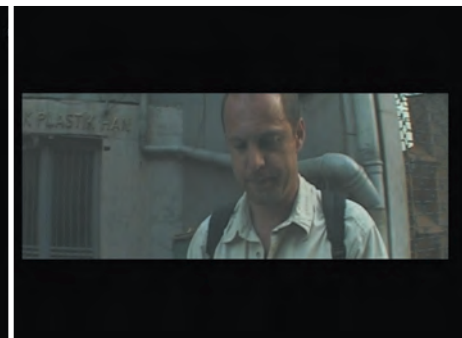
Tons of movement, logic and research puzzles

Urban Freestyle Soccer

PlayStation 2 Review

Now Available

Suggested Retail Price: R 499.00 · **Developer:** Silicon Dreams · **Publisher:** Acclaim
Supplier: Ster Kinekor [011] 445 7900 · **Genre:** Sports · **Reviewer:** Adam Liebman
Requirements: 1-2 Players · 58 KB Memory · Analog Compatible · Vibration Compatible

The amalgamation of extreme and traditional sports in videogames has long proven to be a worthwhile venture, if properly executed, NBA Street Volume 2 being the single most recent title that immediately springs to mind. Following in the footsteps of EA Big's hit, Acclaim have attempted to introduce the same concept to soccer (or "football", to avoid upsetting the purists), but the result leaves much to be desired. The concept of street soccer differs from the true form of the game in that the teams consist only of 4 members, and the notable absence of a referee, effectively legalising fouls (which, in UFS, include throwing the likes of chairs and trashcans at members of the opposing team). Basic moves such as ground passes, lobs, shots and sprints are present, as are trick moves, reminiscent of those found in the FIFA series, although far more outrageous and also less complicated to perform. The idea, of course, being to accumulate trick points with the aim of charging up your "netbuster" meter, allowing you to perform an absurd and nigh on unstoppable shot at goal. The controls are smooth and responsive, though frustration manages to manifest itself in poor collision detection. Trick moves generally result in a loss of possession, free balls are far too difficult to pick up, and tackling seems to rely more on luck than physics. N

> **"The concept of street soccer differs from the true form of the game in that the teams consist only of 4 members, and the notable absence of a referee, effectively legalising fouls (which, in UFS, include throwing the likes of chairs and trashcans at members of the opposing team.)"**

Potentially fun arcade style soccer plagued by a highly frustrating play experience.

55

And we thought Rastafarians were all peaceful stoners...

Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance

PC
PC Review

Now
Available
play

Suggested Retail Price: R 320.00 · **Developer:** Konami · **Publisher:** Konami
Supplier: Futronic [082] 235 1234 · **Genre:** Stealth · **Reviewer:** Iwan Pienaar
Minimum Specifications: Pentium III 800 MHz | 128 MB RAM | DVD ROM | 32 MB D3D Video Accelerator
3.8 GB HDD

After a long wait, Metal Gear Solid has made its debut on the PC with Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance. In what is fast becoming a trend, publisher Konami has shipped the title on a DVD instead of several CDs. This means that players will need a minimum hard drive space of 3.8GB and a hefty 7.7GB for the full install.

With the debut of Metal Gear on the PC, the company had the perfect opportunity to introduce spy-with-an-attitude Solid Snake to a new gaming market. Instead, all but the most patient of players will quickly get annoyed with the title due to its terrible controls. Quite frankly, unless your fingers can rival that of a contortionist's, playing Substance with a keyboard and mouse is impossible. A game pad is a must-have. Even then, satisfaction is not guaranteed as the controls do take getting used to. Additionally, Substance does not officially support ATI cards. This means that many ATI owners will have to download a 12MB patch from Konami in order to get the game to work properly. Thankfully, this seems to only be a problem with some of the older generation ATI cards as Substance worked perfectly with my Radeon 9800SE.

On the positive side, Substance offers the player countless hours of replay value. The main game is composed of two chapters, each broken into different missions. Then there are the missions, VR mission, alternative mission and Snake Tales modes that offer an additional 500 missions. Also, as with any console port, there are numerous characters to unlock. The game also features an interesting dog tag collection feature. Essentially, players collect enemy dog tags and view them in a console-style menu.

The impressive musical score from Harry Gregson-Williams, who worked on The Rock and Armageddon, combines well with quality graphics and realistic game dynamics. In fact, the stealth nature of Substance is so important, that you can complete the game without killing any enemies. The majority of the game takes place in third-person view but there is a first-person mode available for certain actions.

Substance has all the ingredients of a brilliant title with a story line coming straight from the cloak-and-dagger movies of the eighties. Unfortunately, control and graphic card issues will see it fade from memory fast. This one will probably only get played by the same players who have played earlier versions on the PlayStation console. **N**

Clumsy controls hamper what should have been a great game.

75
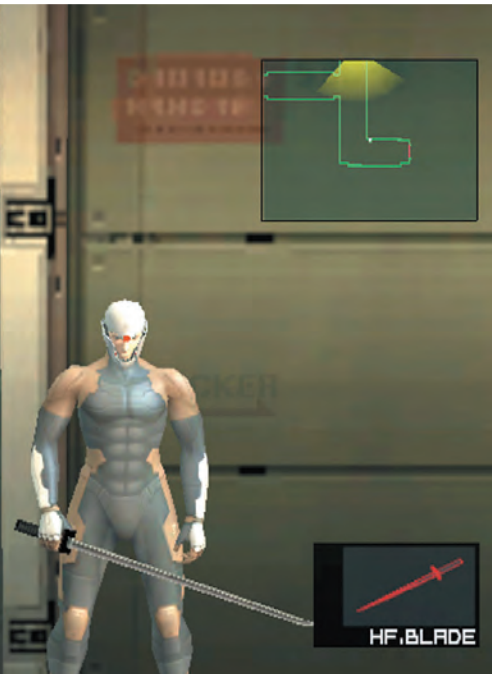
Where is Neo and his bullet-time when you need him?

HF.BLADE

Armed and Dangerous

PC Review

Award of Merit

Suggested Retail Price: R 299.00 · **Developer:** Planet Moon · **Publisher:** LucasArts
Supplier: EA Africa [011] 516 8300 · **Genre:** Action · **Reviewer:** Walt Pretorius
Minimum Specifications: Pentium III 1.0 GHz · 256 MB RAM · 4 x CD ROM · 32 MB Video Card · 2.0 GB HDD

The makers of Giants: Citizen Kabuto are back in action with a new instalment of mad cap action and off the wall humour. That's right, Planet Moon Studios have made a new game, and it's quite literally killer.

Called Armed and Dangerous, this title follows the exploits of a misfit crew of Robin Hood inspired rogues as they attempt to free the world from an evil tyrant by stealing a powerful book from him.

The action is fast paced and quite chaotic. The player only ever controls one character, namely Roman, although his companions Q the tea drinking robot and Jonesy the foul mouthed Scottish mole do help out in most missions.

The missions are basically either third person run and gunners or arcade style turret shooters. They can get a bit stale after a while, but this game is largely what you make of it, and the ongoing humour of the cut scenes alone is enough to make you play right through.

Armed and Dangerous is charming in its nastiness, and will have you howling with laughter at even the most bizarre and tasteless of its jokes. Excellent voice acting and good graphics complement the story line and, although the game is somewhat short, locked features and pure addictiveness give it a fair amount of replay value - as do the five various difficulty levels available.

It's all about big guns and bigger explosions in this title. The weapons are quite strange, to be frank, and include items like the Vindaloo rocket launcher, the Topsy-turvy bomb (which inverts the game world, causing all enemies in range to "fall off," the Portable Black Hole and the Land Shark Gun (which sends a huge shark swimming through the level to devour your enemies - and you, if you're not careful.)

Players may notice homage paid within the game, particularly to Star Wars (in the cut scenes) and MDK (in the game itself.) In fact, Armed and Dangerous has a very MDK feel about it, and fans of those titles will certainly enjoy this one.

It is a crazy and hilarious title, with tons of action thrown in. It may not be the most original ever, but it certainly ranks up there for pure entertainment value. You will either love it or hate it. Personally, I love it, and I give it a very strong recommendation.

Tons of action and laughs from the makers of Giants: Citizen Kabuto.

88

Dodging is a great skill to have in this game...

Silly us
we've given our pc a function
you'll never use

a warranty

Thanks to the remarkable care we take when assembling and testing Emerald PC's by hand,

warranty returns are something we're not too familiar with.

EMERALD
······brilliant thinking

LIQUID LAB

Manufactured and distributed by Light Edge Technology

Cape Town	Durban	Johannesburg	Port Elizabeth
021 510 8270	031 263 0121	011 315 6680	041 367 3062/5

SpellForce

PC
Review

Phenomic Game Development brings us SpellForce, a game that is part role playing, part real time strategy and all addictive fun. In this title the player controls a Rune Warrior, a powerful member of a group of fighters that were once slaves to the powerful Circle Mages. But now you are free, and it is up to you to help the last remaining Circle Mage free the world of a new evil.

The player can control up to six different races, including humans, orcs, dwarves and elves, through the use of special runes that activate Race Monuments. Get the monument, and the race is yours to control. Additionally, heroes can also be summoned from similar monuments, and are also dependent on possessing the right rune. Leading these forces makes up the real time strategy side of things, and the game gets very interesting when the player gets to exploit the various different races in unison.

However, it's not all hack and slash here. There are also times when the player will be required to play their avatar solo, without the benefit of an army to back them up. This is where the CRPG side of the game heats up… in fact, the player earns experience and levels up just like any other CRPG or adventure title, and gets to equip the avatar (and heroes) with a wide array of equipment and magic spells.

The game is fairly pretty for its genre and allows for a high degree of zoom right from a top down isometric feel through to a third person mode.

The story within SpellForce is complex and interesting, spanning around 20 different worlds. The saddest part of this game comes from the fact that much of the game comes from the game engine cut scenes. Fair enough, but the voice acting is rather… well, let's say it ranges from good to utterly awful.

Look past the voices and you have a game that is massive amounts of fun to play. It's quite under-hyped, making it something of a diamond in the rough. SpellForce is quick paced and entertaining, and offers the best elements from CRPG and RTS styles of play. The interface is simple and responsive, with a few new ideas thrown in to help streamline the gaming process.

This is a truly fun game that will entertain those not overly picky for a good long time.

A good RTS and CRPG mix makes for a fun gaming experience.

79
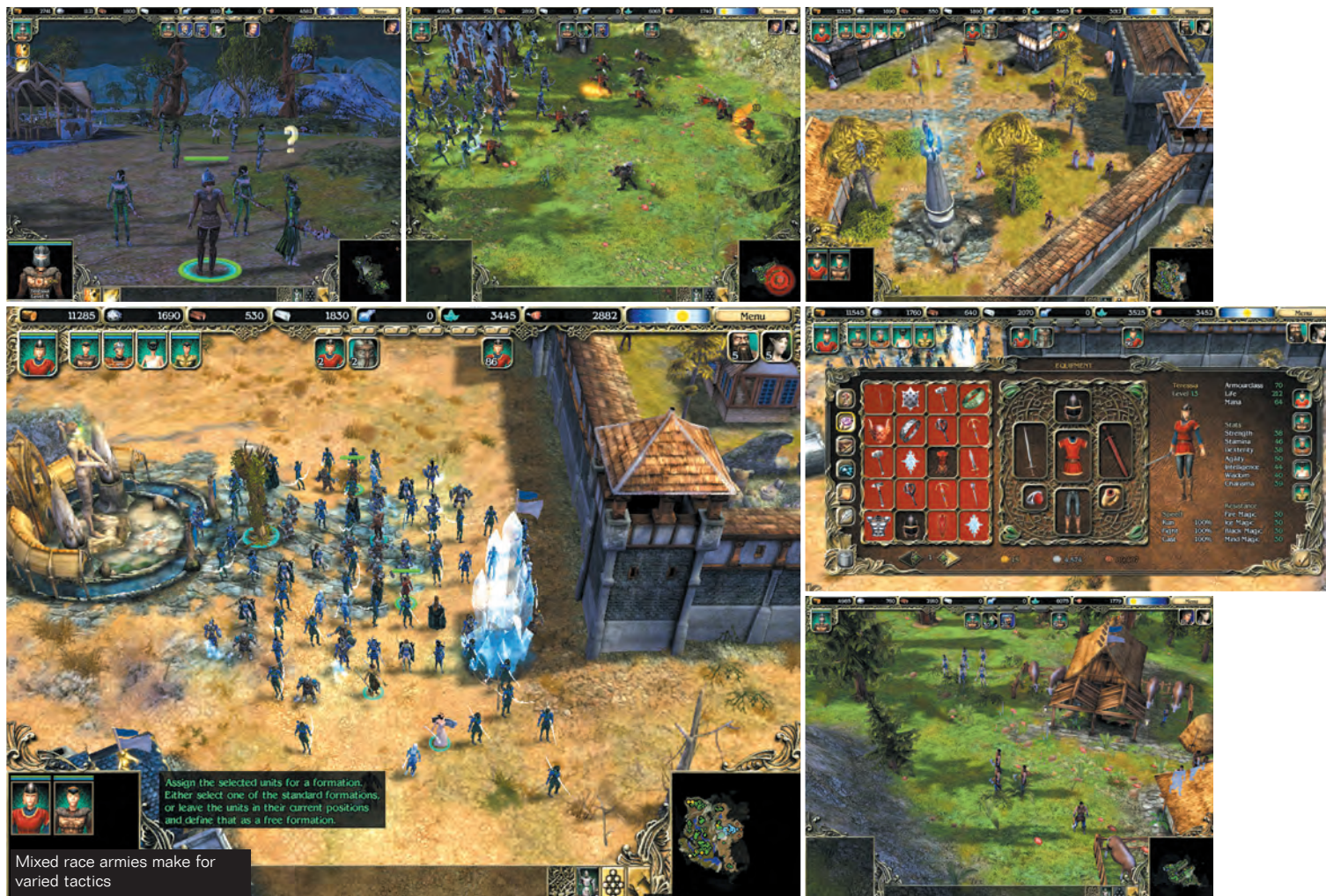
Mixed race armies make for varied tactics

Metroid: Zero Mission

GBA Review

Award of Excellence

Suggested Retail Price: $ 29.00 [R 200.00 excluding shipping · **Developer:** Nintendo · **Publisher:** Nintendo
Supplier: Futronic [082] 235 1234 · **Genre:** Adventure Platform · **Reviewer:** Miktar Dracon

I n 1987 the original Metroid brought us the first chapter in the long running, much appreciated saga of bounty-hunter Samus. Zero Mission proves to be much more than a simple port; managing to be a thrilling new retelling and upgrade with fresh graphics, level design, control elements, power-ups and story twists. Going back to Zebes has never felt this good.

In terms of the new graphics, Zero Mission comes across as lusciously crisp, more-so than its predecessor Metroid: Fusion. Samus herself has been given a slight makeover; appearance and control scheme have been refined. Considering Metroid has always been the de-facto in lonely exploration, these adjustments make for a much more enjoyable experience.

Slightly longer than Fusion but a touch easier, Zero Mission contains the expected cerebral level design where each new weapon/ability allows you to reach previously inaccessible areas. Staple moves such as the morph ball have returned along with various additions from Fusion

for even more puzzle/action oriented moments. The creatures from which this game takes its namesake are bigger and more frightening than the original, emitting a general sense of danger when they appear. Most major events such as this are announced via quick cut-scenes (something Fusion introduced), which does a perfect job of enhancing the mood already set by the atmospheric music/silence.

Worth mentioning is the inclusion of the original Metroid, unlocked once you finish the game.

Overall Zero Mission can be perceived as an almost flawless game, shining with polish and brimming with quality. You don't have to be a fan to appreciate this new incarnation of the classic and while the genre might not appeal to everyone, one would be hard-pressed to find fault in Zero Mission. 🅽

We should be so lucky to get more remakes of this calibre and quality.

91

Buffy the Vampire Slayer: Chaos Bleeds

Buffy Summers makes a welcome debut on the PlayStation 2 in this second Buffy the Vampire Slayer game, sub titled Chaos Bleeds. The game is very similar to the original Xbox version, complete with rollicking combat, vampires galore and very stupid walking dead to beat up on.

The developers of this title have given the player a bit more to play with this time - instead of just using Buffy, the player now gets to control Buffy, Xander, Willow, Spike and even the rather yummy Faith.

Chaos Bleeds feels a little more reserved than the previous Xbox title but, for all intents, is still a huge amount of fun to play. The added variety of play styles presented by the different characters makes for a fun change within the game.

The game is nice to look at and feels a lot like a "real" Buffy episode, with wise cracks and a script that would fit in comfortably with the television show. The biggest dilemma that the game has is a camera that leaves something to be desired… while it is fine most of the time, it gets a little poor at other times, making the game difficult to play just then.

On the whole, a fun third person adventure, full of stakes, spades, iron poles and other impromptu weapons to beat up bad guys with.

Take on vampires, demons and dumb dead as various Buffy cast members.

77

Legacy of Kain: Defiance

Just when you thought the story had ended, Eidos returns us to the world of the Legacy of Kain. This title, however, is a little different from previous incarnations in that the player gets to control both Kain and his fallen lieutenant, Raziel.

The title expands both characters to a degree, with new powers and story line elements furthering the entire title series. Overall, though, the player should not expect too much improvement in terms of the game dynamic - it's the usual third person action adventure style stuff that the Legacy of Kain titles have always delivered. Certain elements of the series that could have been addressed in this title (like the inability of the characters to strafe) never were, and the camera is dumber than ever before.

That said, there have been a number of improvements to the game. Graphics are better than ever, for example, and the puzzles and plots within the game are more complex. Other than that, this title delivers exactly what you would expect. Lots of exploring, lots of movement based puzzles and lots of hand to hand combat. The story line is of the usual high, complex quality.

While the game is great fun to play, the overly dumb camera does get rather annoying at times. It is the biggest flaw in an otherwise solid game.

Play as both Raziel and Kain in the next installment.

78

Gladius

PlayStation 2 Review

Now Available

Suggested Retail Price: R 499.00 · **Developer:** LucasArts · **Publisher:** LucasArts
Supplier: EA Africa [011] 516 8300 · **Genre:** CRPG · **Reviewer:** Adam Liebman

Requirements: 1-2 Players · 365 KB Memory · Analog Compatible · Vibration Compatible

Gladius, a turn-based RPG set in a mythological world, gives you a choice of two characters, each in control of a "school" of gladiators. At the outset, your character's school consists only of one other member, and it is your task to travel through the world, fighting in each different area, recruiting new gladiators along the way, while also increasing your existing squad's statistics, with the aim of becoming the best gladiators in the world. Aside from a few scarce random encounters while travelling between areas, battle is confined to the various towns' arenas. It needs to be said that anyone looking for fast paced action will likely be disappointed with Gladius - thanks to the depth of skills, equipment and magical abilities on offer, much time needs to be focussed on efficiently developing your characters, and the turn-based combat too is slow paced. This however makes for a very rich and rewarding experience, relying more on strategy than brute force. Also, thanks to many battles placing restrictions on the class, gender and weight of eligible contestants, you'll be forced to rotate your squad to ensure that your warriors don't flag behind in their statistics. In addition to the incredible depth of the play dynamic, excellent voice acting and well animated characters mean that Gladius is pleasing to the senses too.

"A very rich and rewarding experience, relying more on strategy than brute force."

Turn-based RPG sure to please anyone looking for a rewarding strategic challenge.

78

Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles

GCN
Review

Co-developed with Gamer Designer's Studios, Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles (FFCC) is part of the Final Fantasy series in name only. Only a few recognizable items and creatures remain; everything else from detailed story arcs, amazing pre-rendered cut-scenes and the usual deep experience/upgrade system has been left out of this potentially bland addition to the series.

At its core, FFCC remains a simplistic hack & slash with a few added facets such as teamwork and solving puzzles. Theme-setting story about deadly miasma aside, get ready for five years (roughly a few weeks of playtime) of fighting bosses, trudging through dungeons and collecting myrrh to protect your hometown. Progression is limited; each miasma stream blocks your path until you've defeated a boss. Random cut-scenes on the World Map provide little story, each event literally a simple 'good luck' from another caravan. Sometimes you get the same cut-scene multiple times. At the end of each year the game presents a simple summary of events complete with a little dance from your characters.

The world consists of 14 dungeons, each one mostly different. Some dungeons seem obscenely long, others obnoxiously short. Trolling these dungeons alone in single-player is hardly worth it, despite a Moggle (furry little creature) offering to carry your chalice. Bland and uninspired, FFCC was obviously not designed for a single player. In multiplayer the game provides a lot more enjoyment, although one person has to carry the chalice and thus is unable to fight or cast spells. While the 'circle of life' provided by the chalice does force a little teamwork, the person carrying the chalice often feels useless.

Combat is limited. You can either pick up items or attack, while the L and R buttons switch your main action. If you're healing and want to attack, you have to scroll through your actions until you find it. This causes a lot of wasted spell-casting or item usage. Despite these shortcomings, the ability to fuse spells together on the fly with your friends is quite enjoyable, while the unbalanced levelling system (which involves completing a specific task in a dungeon better than your friends) tends to detract. The choice to enforce the use of a GBA as your controller in multiplayer seems both innovative and idiotic. While the information provided on your GBA screen is useful, it does not merit forcing you to buy more hardware so you can play multiplayer.

FFCC + 3 friends + 4 GBAs = Worth it. No friends or GBAs? No fun at all. **69**

Multiplayer Cooperation

Every time you enter a dungeon, each player (in multiplayer) is randomly assigned 1 of the 4 maps, each with a specific use. The idea behind this is to promote communication between players, sharing of information about their surroundings. How well it works however, seems to be determined by the general camaraderie between the players.

STR 22
DEF 21
MAG 12
Memories 1
Bonus
Inflict damage

Radar: This map shows the general lay of the land making it easier to navigate from point A to point B.

STR 23
DEF 23
MAG 10
Memories 1
Bonus

Monster Locator: Relative positions of nearby monsters are revealed, giving a bit of direction to the party.

STR 22
DEF 24
MAG 13
Memories 4
Bonus

Treasure Locator: Treasure chest positions are marked on this map, whoever has it might share the location.

Goblin
HP 8/10
Vulnerable to fire
Vulnerable to lightning
Vulnerable to slow
Items:
Phoenix Down
STR 21
DEF 20
MAG 15
Memories 4
Bonus
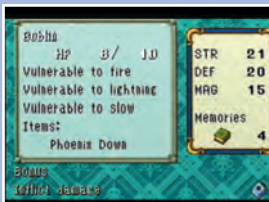
Scouter: Once a monster has been defeated, this will show the monsters weaknesses and what they usually carry.

"Theme-setting story about deadly miasma aside, get ready for five years (roughly a few weeks of playtime) of fighting bosses, trudging through dungeons and collecting myrrh to protect your hometown."

Dancing Stage Fever

PlayStation 2
Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 396.00 · **Developer:** Konami · **Publisher:** Konami
Supplier: Ster Kinekor [011] 445 7900 · **Genre:** Rhythm & Dance · **Reviewer:** Miktar Dracon
Minimum Specifications: 1 - 2 Players · 200 KB Memory · Dance mat compatible

With the recent release of EyeToy: Groove, gamers have been enjoying games that require them to leave dignity behind. The original forerunner in this genre of humiliation is the Dance Dance Revolutions series, requiring you to 'dance' in time to arrows onscreen. A song/difficulty is selected and then you find yourself having to step on the correct arrow (up, down, left or right) in time to arrows reaching the top of the screen, usually on the beat of the song.

More difficult songs require you to 'hold' your foot down on a step while stepping on other arrows - or you may even have to step on a lot of different steps on 1/8th the beat. It's a strange concept, but very entertaining (only with a dance mat, however, pressing buttons on a controller is not the same). Dancing Stage Fever manages to combine some of the better hits from the previous titles and includes a few top Euro songs by the Spice Girls and Ace of Base. A lengthy Tutorial mode makes sure you know what you're

doing while the Weight Loss mode helps you dance your way to fitness by giving you a proper workout. As you progress, only a paltry few songs get unlocked sadly. If you have a Dance Mat, Dancing Stage Fever is a good title to start on but veterans might want to invest in some of the older titles. ∖

Insane amounts of fun and fitness if played with a Dance Mat, else give it a skip.

78

Pokémon Channel

GameCube
Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 399.00 · **Developer:** Nintendo · **Publisher:** Nintendo
Supplier: Futronic [082] 235 1234 · **Genre:** Puzzle · **Reviewer:** Miktar Dracon
Requirements: 20 Memory blocks

Pokémon Channel tries to deviate from the fighting/collecting norm of Pokémon titles, instead heading into something indefinable yet addictive. At its foundation, Pokémon Channel involves watching Pokémon themed TV channels with your pet Pikachu who will ask you on occasion if it is allowed to do certain things, such as playing with the objects in your room or how to work the TV. As you teach your Pikachu things, it will be able to help you out with certain tasks.

Watching all the channels provided will unlock more channels the next day and your Pikachu even learns to sing the theme-songs of shows. Horrifically cute yet oddly addictive, it's all held together with the Clock system. Money is acquired via the Quiz show or auctioning off your artwork with which you can order items from the Shopping channel. NiceCards, TV sets or dolls of your favourite Pokémon are delivered in real world time. If delivery is set for the next day at 1pm, you will have to wait until then for your package.

There are many different activities; you can paint, grow a garden, collect the NiceCards, buy new mini-games or visit forests/beaches during the day or night. Included is the Pokémon mini-movie called Pichu Bros, a DVD quality animated movie in several parts. Pokémon Channel is not for everyone; yet it remains a decent title. ∖

For kids or adults who think they are kids, but mostly just for Pokémon fans.

79

Metal Arms: Glitch in the System

Metal Arms is a platform game with the emphasis unequivocally placed on destruction, and although it is reminiscent of many other recent titles (most notably Ratchet & Clank), it is aimed at an older audience (more evident in the game's often irreverent humour than in its visual style) and manages to provide a solidly entertaining, if occasionally frustrating, experience. The enemies are smart, not to mention powerful, and thanks to the difficulty of the game, success is often accompanied by immense satisfaction. The weapons are upgradeable with kits hidden around the levels, eventually putting some truly devastating (and, of course, entertaining) hardware at your disposal. The control set-up is intuitive, allowing you to quickly and effortlessly change between different combinations of primary and secondary weapons (secondary weapons including the likes of grenades and other support weaponry), though the lack of an option to invert the x-axis, compounded by clumsy camera panning, can make both aiming at enemies and platform jumping extremely frustrating. The locales are mostly well detailed, and the animations are superb, though heated battles are sometimes plagued by frame-rate drops. The sound too is good, despite bland backing music, thanks to well-crafted sound effects and on-the-ball voice acting.

Entertaining platform action, though it proves fiendishly annoying at times.

73
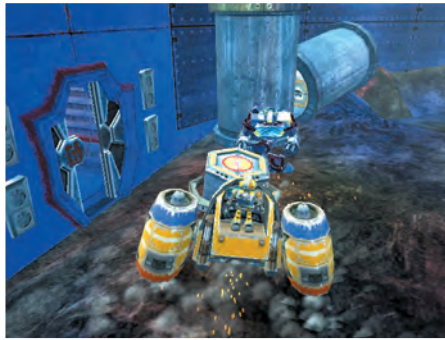
review

Mario Party 5

GameCube
Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 325.00 · **Developer:** Nintendo · **Publisher:** Nintendo
Supplier: Futronic [082] 235 1234 · **Genre:** Puzzle · **Reviewer:** Miktar Dracon

Minimum Specifications: 3 Memory blocks

Instead of your Birthday, The Dream World is in chaos thanks to Bowser and the only way to solve it is to play a board game with metric tons of mini-games. The obvious 5th instalment to the series, Mario Party 5 has upped the ante by including over 60 utterly new mini-games and a revamped single-player mode.

The basic premise of the game is unchanged; players take turns rolling dice to move around a board collecting coins and stars. After each turn a mini-game is played to win coins in either free-for-all or team-based games.

Major changes have been made to the way Mario Party plays out. Players can now use capsules to add/change event spaces on the board to try and put one over on their opponents or can use a capsule directly on themselves at a cost of coins. Duel mini-games make for one-on-one battles where players can bet coins/stars and often result in lengthy grudges. The previous title had an issue with taking too long to do certain things, but this has been resolved and the maps themselves

have been given a 3D makeover.

New characters have been added while some have been taken away, including Donkey Kong who now appears as an event on the game-boards. The single player has been improved significantly; you now compete against the Koopa Kid Brigade-a trio who take their turns simultaneously which cuts down on wait time. Breaking away from its board-game nature, a separate vehicle combat game has been added where (based on how many mini-games have been played) you can buy parts for your vehicle and participate in one-on-one combat.

With more modes/game-types than could possibly be listed here, Mario Party 5 is a great party game with hours of fun for up to 4 people and even has a decent enough single-player campaign. N

Possibly the best of this underappreciated genre, Mario Party 5 improves on its predecessor.

76

It's pretty, bright, colourful and addictive... like acid caps...

Gladiator: Sword of Vengeance

PlayStation 2
Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 499.00 · **Developer:** Acclaim · **Publisher:** Acclaim
Supplier: Ster Kinekor [011] 445 7900 · **Genre:** Action · **Reviewer:** Walt Pretorius
Requirements: 1 Player · Analog Compatible · Vibration Compatible

It took a while, but it seems that Gladiator games are the next big thing, with a few new gladiator based titles coming out this year. One of the first is Gladiator: Sword of Vengeance, a tour de force on the PlayStation 2 that takes the player back to a more savage time.

Set in a mythical version of ancient Rome, Gladiator: Sword of Vengeance takes place at a time when the beloved emperor has died and the new man on the throne is an evil and twisted despot. The only one who stands in his way is the previous emperor's favourite gladiator, Invictus Thrax - the Invincible Thracian. But the new emperor has plans for him and, after a great gladiatorial contest, Invictus Thrax lies dead. However, the new emperor has angered the gods, and they choose Invictus Thrax to be their champion…

While the story within Gladiator: Sword of Vengeance is based on classical Roman mythology, the developers took a hell of a lot of licence with the "histories," freely intermingling Roman and Greek mythologies with very little respect for the "facts." Call me picky, but the Romans stole enough mythology from the Greeks for the game to have been purely Roman.

Mythological discrepancies aside, the game allows for some of the most stunning brawling style combat ever seen on the PS2. With combo attacks, god-like powers and more than 60 "fatality" death blows, the action is intense and very gory. Dual targeting makes for quick changes between enemies as well, meaning that the combat is even faster paced and chaotic.

Good controls mixed with great graphics and brilliant voice acting; the voice of Invictus Thrax is supplied by British TV and film star Sean Pertwee. This is a great action title for those who like their game violence chaotic and gory.

While inaccurate in the mythological sense, this game is full of brawling action and fun.

82

Rayman 3

N-Gage Review

Suggested Retail Price: TBA · **Developer:** Ubisoft · **Publisher:** Gameloft
Supplier: Nu Metro [011] 340 9345 · **Genre:** Platform · **Reviewer:** Walt Pretorius

The N-Gage lends itself perfectly to platform games (being that it is a handheld) despite the orientation of the screen. Rayman 3 is one of the first titles to hit the unit from that genre and, quite frankly, it's lovely. Then again, it's also one of the most frustrating experiences I have ever come across...

As to be expected, the game is full of fun and adventure, with bright graphics and simple controls. It's the most fun you can have with your phone. ∎

Platform fun for the masses! Bright, colourful and challenging.

80

Splinter Cell

N-Gage Review

Gold Award

Suggested Retail Price: TBA · **Developer:** Gameloft · **Publisher:** Gameloft
Supplier: Nu Metro [011] 340 9345 · **Genre:** Action Platform · **Reviewer:** James Francis

A great remake of the award-winning GBA version, the game is a side-scrolling game that takes Sam Fisher to all the familiar locations in the 3D original game, employing grenades, silencers and a myriad of acrobatic stunts to get the job done.

Graphically it's on par with the GBA platform title, though the N-Gage's controls aren't quite as friendly. Still, this does little to detract from a great handheld game that you should own if you have an N-Gage. ∎

Stylish and true to the GBA version and the game series.

90

Virtua Tennis

N-Gage Review

Suggested Retail Price: TBA · **Developer:** Sega · **Publisher:** Sega
Supplier: Nu Metro [011] 340 9345 · **Genre:** Sports · **Reviewer:** Walt Pretorius

With the "upright" orientation of the N-Gage's screen, Virtua Tennis has the perfect aspect for this kind of game. The graphics are bright and well defined, and the sound is also very good. However, the game is rather limited in what you can do with it.

A limited choice of players and a rather short career mode, combined with tricky controls, make Virtua tennis something of a challenge. ∎

Tricky controls and a short game length affect this tennis simulator poorly.

70
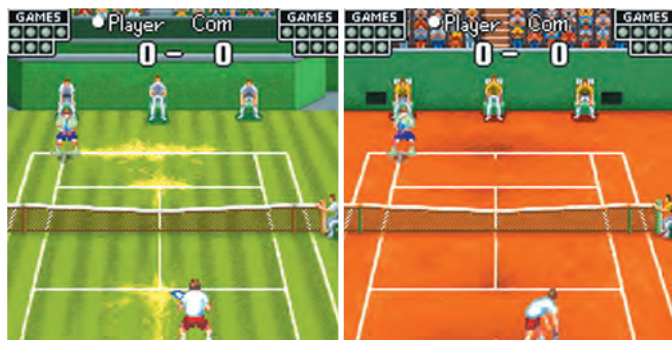
Red Faction

N-Gage Review

Suggested Retail Price: TBA · **Developer:** Monkeystone · **Publisher:** THQ
Supplier: Nu Metro [011] 340 9345 · **Genre:** FPS · **Reviewer:** James Francis

Red Faction was primed by Monkeystone as one of the reasons to get an N-Gage. But the lack of shoulder buttons means that strafing is too tricky. That said, the levels are short enough to not frustrate and the 3D graphics are the best seen on the platform so far.

It's not a great port and the control system leaves a lot to be desired. The game also feels bland and boring at times. Monkeystone and THQ should have tried for a more suited title. ∎

Passable, but iffy controls and lacklustre levels lets it down.

56

tech news

thE LiGhtER SidE OF tEChNOLOGY

In a survey which was conducted recently by GameMore LTD in the UK it was established that people don't use their computers as a way to cut themselves off from other people, but as a new way to interact with them. Matt Bellringer, Technical Director of GameMore went on to say, "When we looked closely, we found that the main reason people enjoy computer games so much is because they like to compete and co-operate with other gamers, and that playing against the computer just isn't so much fun."

While these findings relate specifically to computer games, it appears that computers and technology are increasingly being used to carry out tasks that would ordinarily be done face to face by human beings. For instance, a doctor has recently been fined $25,000 for prescribing drugs over the internet to patients whom he has never even met. But it gets even better. It appears that camera phones are also being used by General Practitioners to take snap shots of patients, which they then send off to a specialist to obtain a diagnosis for a patient. Staying with cell phones, a company in Korea has fired a quarter of its staff by sending them all a SMS text message. The company has stated that this was the most effective way they had of reaching the employees as they were striking at the time and could not all be reached.

With such a vast amount of technology at our disposal it stands to reason that our motor vehicles are next in line for a major automated update. Toyota has risen to the challenge by unveiling its new 'concept car' which, aside from replacing car keys with a customised SIM card, also has a built in feature that communicates directly with speed cameras and instantly charges your credit card with the relevant fine.

In some instances however there seems to be no substitute for face-to-face communication.

In Greece in 2002 parliament passed a law that banned all public gaming conducted by electronic and mechanical means. This was in an attempt to curb rogue game hall operators who illegally turned arcade games consoles into gambling machines. Bizarrely enough this law is still being strongly enforced today and has led to countless internet café owners spending short overnight stints in their local jail. Now Internet cafe owners are attempting to draw attention to their unusual situation by using the publicity surrounding the Athens Olympics, which is set to take place in August, to get this law overturned. "There were even plans to hold the World Cyber Games here in Athens because of the Olympics. But when officials realised what the situation is here in Athens, they decided to hold the Games in San Francisco instead," said Aris Assimakopoulos, a 28-year old computer specialist who runs an internet cafe in downtown Athens.

^ Viewsonic Quad Display
Featuring 4 Viewsonic LCD screens mounted on a steel stand, the Quad allows you to have four active screens - as long as your video card supports it. The screens can all be rotated and the whole setup has a 5 year warranty. It's yours for only R 37 500 Incl. VAT [RRP]. You can get the two-screen variant for a cool R 19 000 Incl. VAT [RRP] - screens included, of course. www.corex.co.za

< Plextor
In May Plextor will be releasing its MPEG4 converter, ConvertX PX-M402U, which can convert input video stream into MPEG1/2, MPEG4, and DivX.

> Thermaltake SilentTower Cooler
Thermaltake have announced the worlds first 4-in-1 cooler. The SilentTower has been designed for existing (AMD Athlon XP, Opteron, Athlon 64, Athlon 64 FX, Intel P4 Socket 478 Northwood, Prescott) and even the future Intel Prescott LGA775 processors. www.thermaltake.com

USELESS FACTS ABOUT ...

Google [www.google.com]
- It was started at Stanford University
- It is translated into 97 languages
- It gets more than 200 million requests a day
- The name originates from the word googol, which means 10100
- The Google index is updated every 20-30 days

"Within the last seven days, Google has altered and augmented my perceptions of tulips, mind control, Japanese platform shoes, violent African dictatorships, 3-D high-definition wallpaper, spicy chicken dishes, tiled hot tubs, biological image-processing schemes, Chihuahua hygiene, and many more critical topics. Clearly, thanks to Google, I am not the man I was seven days ago."
John Gaeta, visual effects supervisor, The Matrix trilogy

< Sony's new PDAs

Sony has released two new PDAs, the high-end Clie PEG-TH55 and the middle-range Clie PEG-TJ37. The unit is small and fairly light, and runs on Palm OS 5.2. The PEG-TJ37 differs in its CPU, making use of the Motorola I.MXL processor, in a smaller ROM, which is on-chip, and a smaller, 320x320, display. It lacks a memory stick connector, but is otherwise very similar to its more expensive cousin.

< GBA Movie Player

This device is a unit that plugs into a Game Boy Advance's or Game Boy Advance SP's cartridge slot, with connectors to allow a game cartridge to be connected to it, as well as a CompactFlash card carrying the media to be viewed. The device supports a variety of movie formats, music and e-books. The package includes Windows software to convert files into suitable formats, but the CompactFlash card must be purchased separately.

< No PSP until 2005?

Although the PSP is still expected to launch in Japan late this year, it is likely that the West won't get it until next year. Sony intends to have all its ducks in a row in terms of game and other content development, so that software can be available for the portable when it is released.

^ PS products will talk to each other

Sony has revealed that the PSP and PSX will both be able to communicate with each other and the PlayStation 2. It may also be possible to transfer games from the PlayStation 2 to the PSP.

v Xbox 2 no HDD

Microsoft has entered into an agreement with M-Systems, which is to produce customised memory units for future Xbox products. Given that the technology sounds very much like a variant of a memory card, this suggests that the Xbox 2 will carry no hard drive, loading game data from a disc and storing changeable information on the memory units.

Technology News
from the other side

words iwan pienaar

T **AKING NOTES FASTER THAN A SPEEDING BULLET**
Carnegie Mellon University has unveiled Valerie, the world's first robot receptionist. In true receptionist fashion, the blond Valerie interacts with people via gossip. The university's computer science and drama departments collaborated on the two-and-a-half year project to create a socially skilled robot that engages people. At least jealous spouses will be more at ease when their better-halves have to "work late" with Valerie.

HAPPY NEW YEAR, AGAIN AND AGAIN
Xinhua news agency has reported that the Chinese sent some 15.6 billion short messages through their mobile phones in January. However, this was at least in part due to New Year and Lunar New Year celebrations that took place. What makes this number so astounding is the fact that there are "only" 270 million mobile phone users in China. According to Xinhua, China is the biggest mobile phone market in the world with the number of mobile phone users growing by 8.1 million in January. The country also has approximately 270 million fixed line customers. Telkom eat your heart out.

POTTERING FOR A FORTUNE
It's official. Harry Potter author J.K. Rowling is now a billionaire. According to the Forbe's magazine's annual list of billionaires, Rowling has joined such illustrious company as Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates and investor Warren Buffet.
Of course, Gates has topped the list for the 10th straight year with Buffet a close second. Buffet was the most successful billionaire as he increased his net worth by $12.4 billion this year to see him touch the $43 billion mark. Slightly less impressive is Gates who increased his wealth by a mere $5.9 billion to reach $46.6 billion. While this figure is impressive, it bears mentioning that Gates is worth less than half of what he was during the dot-com boom in 1998 when he had $100 billion behind his name.
Things are looking up though. Forbes reported that there were 587 billionaires around the world this year, up from the 476 of 2003. The total net worth of these people is estimated to weigh in at $1.9 trillion. Older, married men dominated the list which includes only 53 women and 24 single people. The average billionaire's age is 64 with only 27 coming in under 40. I wonder how many journalists have made the list?

TINY MEMORY CARDS ON ITS WAY
SanDisk and Motorola have created a smaller removable flash memory card format for use in mobile phones. It is expected that the cards will be released during the third quarter of the year to coincide with the launch of the third-generation Motorola phone designed to use them. While the mobile phone company recently showed off 32MB versions of the cards, it will eventually feature 512MB of storage space. The cards are roughly .5 by .4 inches in size, considerably smaller than the current miniSD card that measures .8 by .7 inches. With the new Motorola phone, the memory card is stored behind the battery, next to the SIM. While the cards are removable in this position, a Motorola spokesperson believes that buyers of these high-end phones will buy the largest capacity card and stick with it. Motorola expects slots for the new memory cards to start appearing on the outside of phones to accommodate users who have several cards. The memory card specification will be made open to other manufacturers.

> Acer's new stars in home entertainment
The Acer Aspire RC900 and Acer Aspire RC500 series represent a new kind of multifunctional home system offering five different entertainment modes: Video, TV, Photo Album, Music and FM radio. They come in a variety of different configurations with 15" or 17" CRT or LCD Acer monitors. www.acer.co.za

> Gigabyte RZ boards
Gigabyte has announced ten new entry level models of RZ mainboards, with variants supporting both Intel and AMD chips. The boards carry a variety of chipsets, ranging from SiS, through VIA and to Intel.

> NVidia scores DOOM 3
NVidia and Activision have signed some deal that advertises the graphics giant's GeForce FX line of GPUs as the ideal choice for iD's upcoming shooter, DOOM 3. The PC version of the game is scheduled for release within the next couple of months, with an Xbox version to follow later this year.

> Fuel cell development progressing
Passive fuel cells have been in development at Fujitsu Laboratories for some time. The company has recently made a significant breakthrough in terms of the materials used for the cells' construction. The new methods allow a higher methanol concentration to be used in the fuel, allowing higher power output. Passive cells make use of gravity to "pump" the fuel, rather than actual pumps, which would drastically reduce the usable power output. The units have also been slimmed down, with the current prototype being 15mm thick, holding 300ml of fuel, and producing 15 Watts of power. A notebook running off such a fuel cell can run for eight to ten hours.

> Sony buys SCE

Sony recently acquired the few shares of Sony Computer Entertainment that it didn't own - a mere quarter-percentile share of the company. The shares were bought for the equivalent of US$40 million, from Ken Kutaragi, the creator of the PlayStation.

> Another new chip

Sony and Toshiba, both of which are involved in development of the Cell chip that should enter mass-production early next year, have started a new microprocessor development project. While Cell, which will power the next PlayStation, uses a 65 nanometre architecture, the next chip is expected to use a 45 nanometre architecture, rendering it smaller and faster. The chip is expected by some to enter production in 2007.

> PS2 Videophone

Sony recently demonstrated a PS2 with a connected USB camera communicating via IP. It is currently unclear whether the company intends to develop and market the conversion commercially, or whether this is just an experiment. At this point, the technology is very much in the development stage.

v Intel eyes optical options

Intel's Components Research Lab is hard at work on practical ways to interconnect chips and other computer components by optical means. The reason for this is that electrical-based methods will start hitting obstacles such as signal attenuation once bandwidths reach 10 gigabits per second. Optical approaches can sidestep these difficulties, but have their own inherent problems that must be overcome. Current estimates suggest that optical interconnections will start appearing in PCs anywhere from 2 to 7 years hence, to be followed relatively shortly thereafter by optical transports within chips themselves.

v Intel's upcoming 64-bit chip

Intel will enter the 64-bit arena in the next few months. Nocona processors (for dual-CPU servers) and upcoming Prescott chips (for single-CPU workstations) will be released soon boasting 32/64-bit capability. PCs are not likely to get this technology for some time thereafter, given the scarcity of 64-bit software for desktops, as well as price implications. The new technology will allow processors to address over 4 GB of RAM. Operating system vendors will be supporting 64-bit Intel chips by the second half of this year.

v Panasonic video camera with a DVD writer

Panasonic have released the VDR-M70K, a video camera that has the capability of writing the recorded data onto DVD-RAM/R (80mm). It will be retailing for around $1090.

tech news

One Mouse many mouses

words james francis

Yes, you read right. The plural for a mouse, leastways the hardware version, is mouses. This is news to me, since I always thought it was mice. In fact, so does my Word dictionary, which keeps underlining every occurrence of mouses in red jagged lines.

But it is official, at least according to Dictionary.com, but both Websters and Cambridge's online dictionaries disagree. So does Wordweb, instead defining it as 'mousing around'.

Obviously there is a lot of contradiction doing the rounds here, not to mention that calling a mouse times several 'mouses' sounds stupid. And that's just what we need - more ways to make it implicitly clear that computers are alien devices, far fetched from anything natural, especially rodents with a liking for grain and being called Jerry.

But where does this come from? According to the book Wired Style: Principles of English Usage in the Digital Age it's still a bit open to debate, but mouses is the accepted form, mainly to distinguish the electronic pointer device from Mus Musculus, the common house mouse. It might be because of some digital snobbery, or perhaps it's because there are hundreds of species of mice in the US alone.

I don't ever recall going into a computer store and requesting mice, only to be presented with something gnawing on a stick. Neither has any pet shop owner presented me with the latest optical model when all I wanted was something cute, small and smelly if you leave the cage unattended for a few minutes.

I don't know who is responsible for making up these language rules. In a world where you get to vote over which party spends your taxes, it should only be fair that we don't just accept words that seem to slip in just because someone can't comprehend the difference between the tip of a tail and a USB plug. I want a say in this! And I say 'No!', because mouses just sounds daft.

v New headphones from Sony

Sony's Street Style range of headphones offers a foldable design, which is great for portability, and 30mm neodymium drivers. The MDR-G74SL model also features a turbo bass duct, for improved bass frequency response, and an extension cable.

< Motorola MPx

This device is a phone/PDA hybrid with some nifty features. The most striking element is the fact that it can be opened in two ways - as a clamshell phone, or in landscape mode, which makes available a QWERTY keyboard, email handling and media playback functions. The MPx also sports a 1.3 megapixel digital camera, and carries Microsoft Windows Mobile software. It is expected to become available in the second half of the year. www.motorola.com

< BenQ digital camera

Drive Control Corporation will be distributing the BenQ DC S30 digital camera locally. This funky device is a digital music camera that combines high-resolution features and an FM/MP3 radio and will retail for R2599.00.

< Dell gaming notebook

Dell has introduced a notebook that is truly gaming-capable. The Inspiron XPX comes with all the bells and whistles, including: Pentium 4 / 4EE 3.4GHz CPU, ATI Mobility Radeon 9700 with 128MB, 512MB DDR400, gigabit-capable integrated LAN, V.92 modem, DVD-writer, 60 or 80 GB hard disk and 15.4" display. A number of optional extras are also available. Expect this one to be fiendishly expensive, though.

< EIZO FORIS.TV

This intricately-named device is actually a LCD TV with built-in DVD player. Although it boasts reasonable specs, including the 170-degree viewing angle of its 23" screen, it appears to only offer NTSC broadcast decoding, rendering it almost useless in this country, unless it is connected via a suitable VCR or similar device.

HIGH TECH MEETS HIGH STYLE.

diNOVO MEDIA DESKTOP™ FOR BLUETOOTH™. Introducing a dramatically designed Bluetooth desktop that's not only an advanced cordless keyboard and mouse, but lets you manage your media from anywhere in the room. A sleek, titanium-finished cordless keyboard with a rechargeable, award-winning MX™ optical mouse gives you unsurpassed precision and accuracy. And a revolutionary MediaPad lets you monitor digital music and incoming messages while it moves freely with you.

www.logitech.com

Logitech.

Logitech
MX 510

South Africa's first look at Logitech's
new gaming mouse

Firstlook

1

2

3

4

1.The next in Logitech's MX series, the 510 is a corded USB mouse with a 5.8 megapixel per second speed, making it one of the fastest mice on the market, if not the fastest.

2. The mouse has a total of 8 buttons. There are the three standard buttons, plus the back and forward buttons on the side. The scroll wheel has two 'Cruise' buttons and lastly is an application switch button seated behind the scroll wheel.

3. The big deal with the MX 510 is the mentioned 5.8 Megapixels speed, making it faster than a pig covered in butter sliding down a grease pipe. And it's optical, but that's not much of a feature - who uses ball mice anymore?

4. The MX 510 also has a unique cover in that no two look the same. It's a bit hard seeing the actual effect on a photo, but the mouse itself has imbedded flowing patterns that change slightly with the light. Right now only blue is available, but more colours are planned.

RRP: 499.00 • Supplied by: Logitech • www.logitech.com

Though old, Quake III Arena is a popular choice to see how a machine carries itself with fast 3D rendering.

Mad Onion's 3DMark series still remains the most popular synthetic benchmarking utility.

3D BENCH-MARKING

writer: Russell Bennett

Benchmarking is a popular term used everywhere when it comes to hardware performance, especially in the 3D Card market. And while it might seem as simple as running a few popular benchmarking programs, really knowing what your hardware is capable of requires a bit more insight…

Benchmarking may seem like a simple process, simply a matter of comparing different components on the same platform and then comparing the results taken from benchmarking software.

It isn't however, as there are numerous variables involved with even single components in the system. Graphic cards are a good example, as each manufacturer uses different implementations of frame buffers and 3D techniques such as volumetric fog generation and shadow creation. The RAM coupled to the card is clocked at different speeds, as are the GPUs themselves, and all feature a raft of chipset-specific optimisations and enhancements for the 3D engine being generated to take advantage of.

This is the reason why standard APIs such as DirectX are created, supposedly so that programmers working with 3D hardware can code in a single environment (Direct3D) and their instructions can be translated through the API into commands for the graphics card itself. Variances in the platform itself also need to be considered, but this is another article altogether. Right now I'll stick to graphics card benching.

Ideally, to obtain a true and unbiased indication of precisely which hardware is the more capable, you need to be able to run the exact same set of 3D commands through the GPU, measure these results and repeat this test precisely using the hardware to be compared against. This is where benchmarking applications enter into the equation.

The first priority in this operation is to ensure that you have a "clean" machine if you're expecting any useful results. While that doesn't necessarily mean a fresh installation of Windows, a quick trip to the Task Manager to close all memory-resident programs not essential to the test does the trick.

It's a good idea to begin the appraisal of any graphics hardware by running a few synthetic

Gun Metal benchmark 2 displays large amounts of activity on the screen at once, and can only run with FSAA on.

Aquamark 3 provides an excellent indication of a GPUs DirectX 9 performance.

The Dungeon Siege benchmark add-on throws the non-interactive "player" amidst all manner of scary creatures.

Halo Combat Evolved makes full use of DirectX 9, as well as MDK-like enemies and plenty of corny banter.

benchmarks on the system. These programs, such as FutureMark's 3DMark03 and Aquamark 3, are written purely for benchmarking and does exactly what you need it to do - run a number of preconfigured scenes using various 3D methods, counting the frame rate of the resultant output. The only problem with these suites is that they are open to manipulation through specific driver optimisation. As the scenes rendered by 3DMark03 are always the same, graphics chip manufacturers can analyse precisely which aspects of their products might need optimisation and build these card-specific code paths into the latest driver versions. Both ATi and NVidia came under attack for doing precisely that with 3DMark03.

Now while these optimisations might skew the benchmark results, synthetic benchmarks are nonetheless a good indication of just what a GPU is capable of. As the scenes and engines used are written for the sole purpose of stretching a new card to its maximum potential, they generally push the boundaries of graphics technology to the limit.

If you want more real-world performance figures, current games are the best place to look. This, combined with synthetic results, gives a better indication of how each different adaptor fares in specific titles. Quake III Arena, while long in the tooth at this point, is a useful real-world benchmarking tool. Other games which include benchmarking modes are X2: The Threat, UT2003, Dungeon Siege, and Halo Combat Evolved to name but a few. Even if the title itself doesn't have a built-in benchmarking mode, a frame-counting utility like Fraps (www.fraps.com) can often be used.

Even here, however, driver optimisations come into play, and every single game is written with card-specific optimisations of its own which can further twist the facts.

At the end of the day, minor optimisations in drivers are excusable, provided the manufacturers don't take such optimisations to ridiculous levels. It is these routines, after all, that allow us to play the latest gaming titles with maximal quality settings sans lag.

Games are all written to run optimally on a single graphics chipset. Both NVidia and ATi have development programs centred around their own technologies, and both also have teams of optimisation engineers who go out to game developers and ensure that the code-paths used in the game will work as well as possible with their company's products. These optimisations make benchmarking any graphics chipset an exercise in discovering the driver version which delivers the best performance with the lowest interference due to shortcuts. System instability, for instance, or scenes where lighting effects are only partially rendered are the results of optimisations gone too far.

Of course, the person running the benchmarks also needs to know the engines being employed themselves. X2, for instance, uses all DirectX 8.1-based shaders and techniques, as well as a lot of stencil shading, to generate its beautiful 3D space environment. This means that the results of such a test may not accurately depict what a card will do with DX 9.

Halo is a useful real-world benchmark thanks to its ability to use both pixel shader versions in the market today, namely version 1.1 and version 2.0. This feature allows an insight into how any given card would run the game in both DX 8.1 and the newer DX 9.

The range of real-world tests run should include as many gaming genres as possible to get the most rounded overall impression of a GPU. NVidia suggests booting up and running the current top 25 game titles for the most accurate representation, but this would take too long, so a standard series of titles, amended as newer games using newer technology become available, is better.

My personal benchmark series currently includes the synthetic benchmarks 3DMark03, Aquamark 3, Gun Metal and Codecreatures Benchmark Pro. Real-world benches are done using Quake III, UT2003, Halo Combat Evolved, Call of Duty, NASCAR Thunder 2004, Live for Speed, WarCraft III, Command and Conquer Generals, Tomb Raider Angel of Darkness, Dungeon Siege, X2, Max Payne 2 and the latest demos such as Far Cry.

All benchmarks are repeated using as many resolutions as possible to see how the cards handle the different loads placed on them by different output resolutions, and done yet again to test the effect of anti-aliasing and anisotropy routines. Usually the entire range of tests is repeated using a completely different platform as well to judge the affect the specific platforms might have on the results.

It's a laborious process, but in the end you are left with a comprehensive measurement of a graphics cards real performance capabilities. N

WORKING
PLAYING
COMMUNICATING

by James Francis

With Microsoft cancelling its Sidewinder series of gaming peripherals, the market might seem uncertain for peripherals. But Logitech recently announced their best quarter yet and the control device manufacturer seems to be stronger than ever, with plans to establish this same legacy back in South Africa. We spoke to Robert van de Vegte, General Manager of South Africa and the Benelux about the company's results, their plans for the country and Logitech's involvement with game development.

How does South Africa compare to the international markets?

There are many things you can compare with Europe - retail to retail, end user to end user, but the rest can be totally different. Still, it's a wonderful market. I think that in general retail, it's not that advanced compared to the European or the American markets in terms of listing products, presenting products, product knowledge and supporting retailers. That's the job we're going to be focusing on. We really want to educate people in this market, to get the right information to the end user. South Africa's market is of at least the same importance as our European Market. It's a very big country, a lot of things happen here and it's growing very fast.

What do you have planned for the region?

We're going to increase activities in PR and advertising to make it clear to the market that the brand is here. What I discovered in my first trip, and also now in my second, is that we have a wonderful name in South Africa and I'm very happy, very proud of this. It showed us that even though last year we had problems in terms of logistics and internal problems on how to adjust to the market that the commitment of the end user is still there. The interest of the end user is still there.

Would you say there are a lot of growth prospects?

Absolutely. I'm convinced of that. For the last couple of years, the IT market has grown very fast, not only in the corporate market, but also in the home market, and that's the market which we are targeting. If you look at us as a company, we always want to add extra features and user experience to our products. We were the first to introduce cordless products into the IT market. There is no other company that produces so many cordless products.

Logitech recently posted its most successful quarter in the company's history. What did you do in the last year that resulted in this success?

A couple of things. The consistencies of bringing new products that meet the new demands of the end user, improving designs, quality is being recognized by consumers all around the world. We are a technology company, we're not a marketing company. We develop products that people like to use and that are easy to use.

Does that encapsulate your business philosophy?

That's an important message, an ethos for us. It's all about user experience.

You're one of the few companies that have a very broad range of products. Usually when a company spreads themselves out that thinly it tends to degrade the products, but Logitech has held strength in all the markets. Speakers, mice, keyboards, con-

trollers compete with the likes of Creative, Microsoft and Madcatz. How do you maintain that?

It's a tough job, we are humans as well. We often talk to different people and different retailers. You have to promote a category that, a couple of months before, you've never heard about. When we started a new category, such as our speakers, we wanted to bring the user experience to that same category. It's the basis of our company. It also has to do with how our company is organized. We have several business units, each responsible for a category. We do not have centralized head offices that approach the whole market, we take a local approach.

What did you think about Microsoft leaving the gaming peripheral market?

We were surprised. On the other hand, for a company like Microsoft it makes sense. Their priority hardware focus is the Xbox and taking technology into the living room.

Logitech developed the EyeToy for Sony as well as other technologies for games. Could you expand a bit more on that?

We supplied Sony with the EyeToy, but we also brought the video technology to them. The voice technology in SOCOM was also supplied by us and it's really becoming a big deal. Voice-controlled gaming is becoming important for the PC platform. Broadband is growing and people like to communicate with each other. If you have someone overseas, you want to hear their voice and speak to them using voice and webcams.

In the beginning you're a little bit shy. I'm Dutch, and the Dutch don't like to have their face all over the camera. But the Americans are much more open to this type of communication and the consumers in Europe are using more and more this feature in communication.

What do you see in the future of the cordless market?

We feel that cordless is actually a wonderful feature for the end user. Cords aren't in your way, you can move the keyboard or mouse without the cables getting caught. Cordless is all about better comfort and a better user experience. That's been a big part of our success - bringing the cordless products to the market. Still, only 5% of the market is cordless, so we have a big market ahead for us.

There is no company that has the same experience in wireless technology. In developing, and improving. We already have the 6th generation of cordless products. If you have a cordless product, you expect the same level of quality as from a corded product, that's why we introduced the fast RF technology into our mice. There's no difference in performance between cordless and corded.

Is Logitech going to introduce their own console in a few years?

[Laughs] Not really, we focus on technology that isn't too complex.
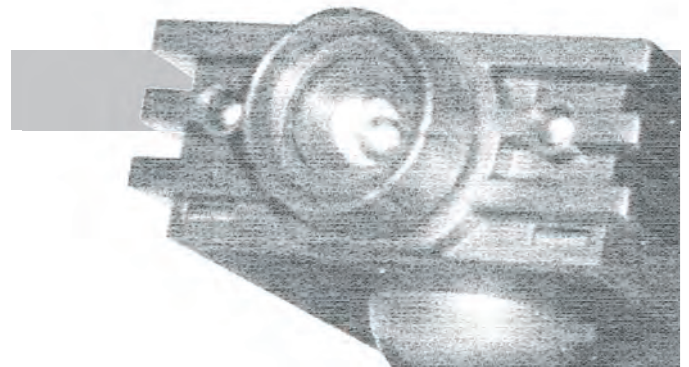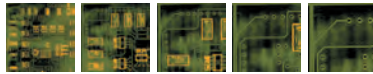
ABIT KV8-MAX3 AMD motherboard

On review here is the ABIT KV8-MAX3 motherboard, this Taiwanese company's only Athlon 64 platform offering. To test the board, we also got our hands on an Athlon 64 3200+ CPU, and it being the first time I'd gotten hold of one of these 64-bit chips I was eager to discover just how much of its capabilities were hype, and how much fact.

This particular ABIT motherboard is dripping with additional value; as if the company decided to simply throw all the technology they had at the product to impress the pants off of the consumer.

One of the most obvious (and immediate) quirks you'll notice on this board is the ABIT -exclusive embedded processor with "Guru" printed on it. This chip provides automated over clocking using the company's new uGuru service. uGuru is actually a complement of system monitoring and adjustment tools, some of which were previously available separately, combined into a single overclockers dream tool. ABIT EQ monitors every aspect of your board which you could want monitored, from various fan rotational speeds to voltages and temperatures on your DDR RAM and CPU.

There's also OC Guru, a Windows environment clock speed adjustment utility, FlashMenu which allows for one-click BIOS updating (again in the Windows GUI), an audio signal processing and adjustment tool called Audio EQ, and a dedicated fan-speed adjustment tool which allows for complete control over system fan speeds for the quietest system operating environment possible.

The process of speeding up your system through judiciously increasing your system bus frequency has really never been easier or safer with all of this monitoring going on. Simply slide the slider up the scale in OC Guru, apply the changes and voila.

The KV8-MAX3 also comes with an integrated 3Com 3C2000 Gigabit LAN adaptor for optimum network performance, up to six SATA drives supporting RAID 0, 1, and 0+1. There's standard IDE connectivity, 6-channel integrated Realtek audio with SPDIF in and out connectors and automatic jack-sensing technology, and of course the 800 MHz FSB with 400 MHz DDR that the Athlon 64 chip needs.

ABIT have built its own motherboard cooling solution called OTES to further help those wanting to push the clock frequency boundaries by quietly and efficiently cooling the chipset and CPU. A plastic exhaust tunnel is built onto the board exiting at the back-panel beside the keyboard and mouse ports with a quiet fan attached to draw hot air off the chipset and out of the system.

Another neat little additional feature is called SecureIDE. A backing plate with Firewire-like ports connects to a small PCB housing that's called an X-Wall chip, which in turn connects to your IDE bus itself. In short, without inserting one of the provided keys into the aforementioned ports, the data stored on your hard disk is encrypted and entirely inaccessible.

AGP speeds are clearly not an issue as this was one of the most impressive aspects of the machines performance during the benchmarking process. Apart from the RAM performance, which was also stellar at 3120 MB/s thank to the integrated memory controller on the CPU itself.

The ABIT KV8-MAX3 is a beautifully implemented piece of hardware to run your new 64-bit chip on, offering great performance, stability, and a host of value-ads which just sweeten the purchase. And, of course, enormous over clocking potential, with built-in safety nets for the overzealous and extensive monitoring to keep the overly cautious happy as well.

The KV8-MAX3, and the Athlon 64 chip running on it, is perhaps not quite as deeply, overwhelmingly impressive as you'd expect a "fresh" architecture to be, but it still represents a pinnacle in high-end desktop chips. And without a doubt combines into one of the most capable gaming platforms I've seen.
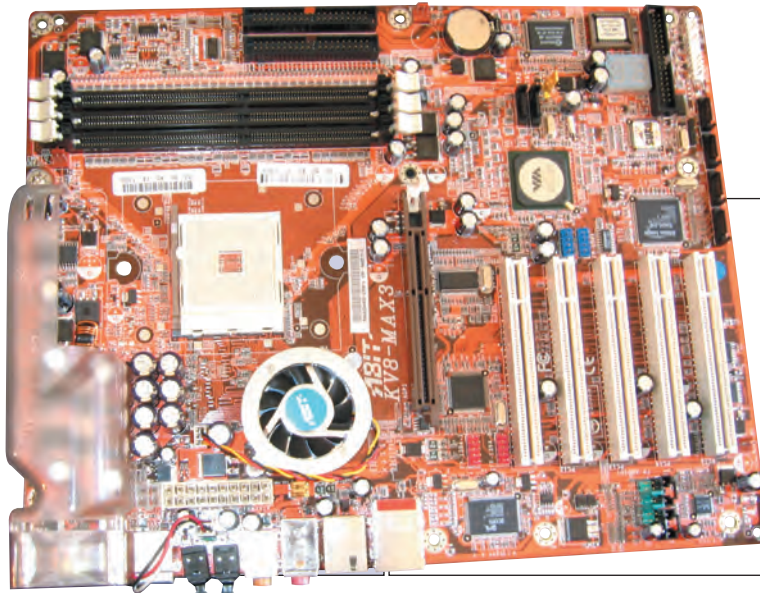
Plus: Gaming performance **Minus:** Some Athlon 64 compatibility issues **Reviewer:** Russell Bennett
Supplier: Esquire Technologies [012] 657 1111 **Internet:** www.esquire.com **RRP:** R1700.00

Liteon 8X External DVD R/RW

LiteOn expand on their external writer range with this sleek black model. As usual, it plugs in via USB 2.0 and uses a two-prong power point. Writing speeds are good, but this is obviously limited by your USB speed, so it doesn't quite compete with similar internal burners. CD burning speed is fast, though, and the DVD playback is great, except on low-spec machines, since the USB link pushes up the CPU cycles significantly. Writing speeds range from 2x DVD-RW to 8x DVD+R and 24x-CD-RW to 40x CD-R.

The unit politely sits on a desk in either a flat position, or vertical if you use the sturdy seating bracket.

Plus: Good writer **Minus:** DVD writing can be slow **Reviewer:** James Francis
Supplier: Corex [011] 707 5000 **Internet:** www.corex.co.za **RRP:** R1881.00

QBiC Mini Barebones System

Strictly speaking, the unit shipped to us isn't barebones, instead sporting everything except a CD-Rom drive. The system comes with an AMD XP 2800, 2 40 GB hard drives, 512 MB of RAM, a Soltek GeForce 5900 FX plus a few other odds and ends. With all this, the unit is remarkably light and comes with a carry bag. It also seems to circulate air well so it doesn't overheat, despite the small interior. All this comes with Windows 2000 installed.

I'd have preferred XP instead, and the missing CD-Rom is a strange oversight, but for what it is - a small, powerful, non-intrusive PC - the QBiC does a great job.

Plus: Small and convenient **Minus:** No CD-ROM drive **Reviewer:** James Francis
Supplier: Eurobyte [011] 234 0142 **Internet:** www.eurobyte.co.za **RRP:** TBA
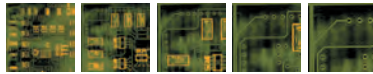
ASUS P4R800-V Deluxe Motherboard

ATi recently released its 9100 IGP chipset into the Pentium 4 motherboard market, and has received impressive reviews in the international press for the speed and stability of this new offering. The ASUS P4R800-V Deluxe motherboard is the first sporting the 9100 IGP chipset to reach SA shores.

Being the Deluxe edition, this particular ASUS platform includes support for positively everything. There's the 800 MHz FSB of course, dual-channel DDR 400, SATA with RAID capabilities, and IEEE 1394 interface. And that's just the beginning…

ASUS have integrated a Marvell Gigabit NIC onto the board as well, and should wireless LAN be the route you have chosen incorporates a proprietary slot for an ASUS WiFi card. And while on the subject of networking, a new feature called ASUS LAT (LAN Acceleration Technology) links the networking interface being used directly to the North bridge for even better network throughput. The integrated 5.1 channel audio subsystem features SPDIF out for connecting the best quality speaker systems, facilitated through the installation of a backing-plate connected to the SPDIF out header on the board itself.

The Radeon 9100 IGP graphics system can be configured to steal away either 64 or 128 MB of system RAM at start-up to act as dedicated video memory, and while this means that only 380-odd of your 512MB system RAM is available to your OS it does make for much brisker video performance than those awful 8 MB shared RAM configurations.

Let's not get ahead of ourselves, this adaptor only manages 748 points in 3DMark03. But the 3DMark 2001 result of 4888 is far more revealing, since this is a DirectX 8.10 based VGA design after all.
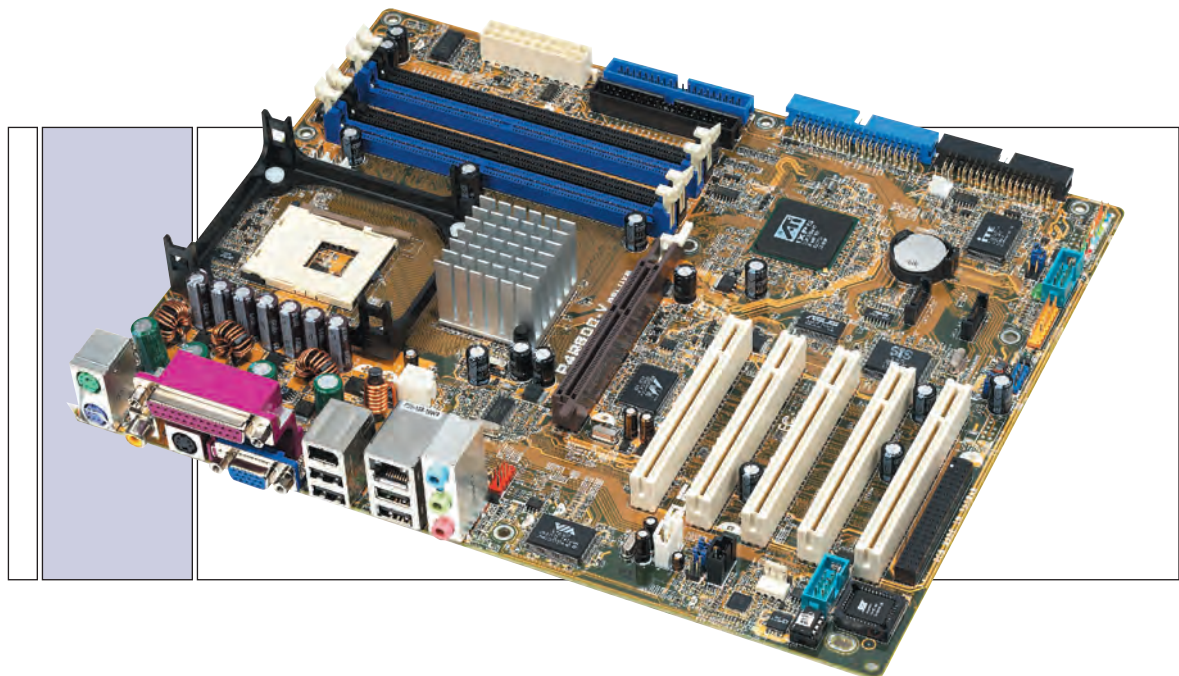
Following on this decent performance, for an integrated graphics chipset after all, the rest of the ASUS board has more pleasant surprises up its sleeve. The chipset, for instance, gets a combined index of 8050 MB/s, ranking it among the fastest P4 chipsets available today. That Gigabit NIC transfers data at phenomenal speeds as well, and even has a Virtual Cable Tester (VCT) tool integrated in the LAN chipset, capable of reporting cable faults and even the distance from the point to the failure!

Running this chipset saw a slightly older 3.06 GHz 533 MHz FSB P4 CPU performing at its absolute best as well. SiSoft processor scores were often above the reference figures for a similarly configured system, managing a power packed 9024 MIPS and 6733 MFLOPS respectively in the ALU and FPU tests. Multimedia performance was even better, with integer operations coming in at 23689 it/s and floating point calculations happening at a rate of 33688 it/s. Far quicker than on the Intel 845 chipset which is usually home to this CPU.

The BIOS is the complete opposite of the more conservative one found on my older board as well, with just about everything you might like to tweak or tune available in it. From SDRAM timing to CPU voltages, this BIOS could yield great overclocking results with a little effort. With ASUS CrashFree BIOS 2, it really is easy to restore the system should anything go wrong by booting off of the motherboard resources CD. This ridiculously feature-rich board even has a voice system for reporting POST errors. Beep code? What's a beep code?

The ASUS P4R800-V has all its bases covered in my book. Great performance, fabulously upgradeable and overclockable, widely technology-compatible, and so very feature rich. The ATi 9100IGP chipset might not perform like a Radeon, but who really expected it to? And the power of the rest of this chipset really makes up for it.

Plus: Performance **Minus:** Nothing **Reviewer:** Russell Bennett **Supplier:** Corex [011] 707 5000
Internet: www.corex.co.za **RRP:** R1450.00

Logitech Extreme PC Gaming Headset

Logitech's new Extreme PC Gaming Headset is designed to make the most of elements like comfort and sound quality. With near-tear drop shaped ear pieces and a "behind the head" design, the headphones are very comfortable indeed. An inline volume control and mute switch allows for quick control of the headphones. A microphone using a racket positioning system and a flexible end on the mike boom allow for easy placement of the microphone.

The sound performance of the headphones is great when it comes to treble, but the overall bass response of the device leaves a little to be desired. Of course you can toggle your system settings, but you will need to fiddle a bit to find the perfect balance between good bass and distortion.

On the whole, these are fairly good PC specific headphones, but they don't compete with some of the bigger (more expensive) models out there.

Plus: Comfortable **Minus:** Poor bass response **Reviewer:** Walt Pretorius
Supplier: Logitech SA **Internet:** www.logitech.com **RRP:** R359.00

Keymaestro Internet Keyboard

If you really need space on your desk and you've shrunk practically everything else down, how about your keyboard? Or if you travel a lot and you need a keyboard that comfortably fits in a laptop bag, something this small is probably what you want.

This is a no-frills keyboard with Internet shortcut keys at the top.

Everything is here, but it's been compacted a lot. While that makes it impractical for a desktop PC, but great for laptops or any other reason you need a keyboard in a bag for. It's a pity that it's not USB, meaning it won't hot swap with any computer. Other than that, it might be what you want. If you have a bag full of portable hardware, that is…

Plus: Convenient for travel **Minus:** Not USB **Reviewer:** James Francis
Supplier: Esquire Technologies [012] 657 1111 **Internet:** www.esquire.com **RRP:** TBA

Massively mobile data

Chronos 3.5" HDD External Case

In a traditional IDE environment, being able to connect only four devices to the IDE bus is a storage problem for enthusiasts. Particularly with the size of average data growing exponentially, requiring that your storage capacity grow with it.

Combine this hurdle with another small problem faced by these same enthusiasts, that of being able to carry large chunks of this data pool around with you and you can see why the three external drive bays being tested here have a potentially enormous market.

Two SNT products are on test here, and both take the most technologically cutting-edge approach to resolving these issues. These offerings are quite simply external housings for Serial ATA (SATA) hard disk drives, and since SATA cables can be significantly longer than standard IDE ribbon cables, connecting these drive bays directly to your machine isn't any hassle at all using the supplied connections.

Once connected almost the full SATA transfer rates are available, slightly slower than if the drives were connected to your system in the more traditional manner. The particular SATA drive I used in benchmarking these enclosures delivered an average of 82 MB/s, but housed externally pulled together a still-healthy 74.

Apart from the massive benefit of simply being able to unplug your large drive while the machine is still on and move it to another machine, you also get a separate power source for one of your storage devices thereby placing less load on your power supply.

The SNT 2313SATA is well-built and feels solid enough to offer some protection to your data in the event of a mishap. Installing the drive into the enclosure itself is made dead simple through the use of a removable-backplane system. Simply slide the drive housing, with interface electronics attached, out of the case itself, connect and secure your drive, and replace the cover.

The 2316SATA enclosure offers the exact same robust and user-friendly design, performs identically, and includes an additional cooling fan built into the underside of the drive tray itself. This fan sits directly beneath the drive when mounted blowing cooling air straight onto the integrated electronics to further extend the life of your storage investment.

Chronos supplied us with an external hard disk enclosure utilizing a conversion interface to pull the data from a standard IDE drive through the IEEE 1394, or Firewire interface.

In this application the ATA throughput of the drive is slightly hampered by the 400 Mb/s of bandwidth available to Firewire devices. Not that this is particularly slow, with this Chronos device able to deliver data at an impressive 38 MB/s consistently.

Using Firewire makes the drive instantly accessible to any Mac or PC with a Firewire port and makes daisy-chaining of a number of such enclosures possible, eliminating any practical storage device limitations. Of course sharing the bandwidth of this bus between too many devices would effectively limit the number of devices which could realistically be connected, but the theory is sound at the least.

However, the Chronos loses points in construction and design. A cheap-feeling plastic casing, fidgety plastic opening and closing routines, and barely enough space to squeeze a standard 3.5" HDD into, make installing the drive itself less of a pleasure than either SNT offering.

With similar devices using the USB interface available just about everywhere at the moment, it seems that storage limitations of the past are over. Of the three products here, my recommendation would have to be the SNT 2316SATA for its performance and rugged construction, if you have a newer machine with SATA onboard.

If not, the same design can be had with a Firewire or USB connection as well. While the Chronos offering delivered very good performance, the flimsiness of the construction drops it out of the running in my view.
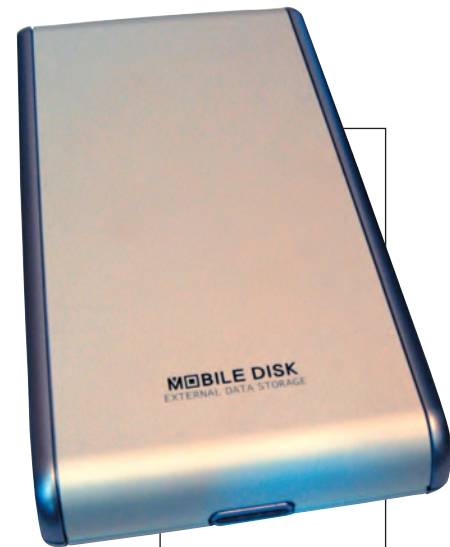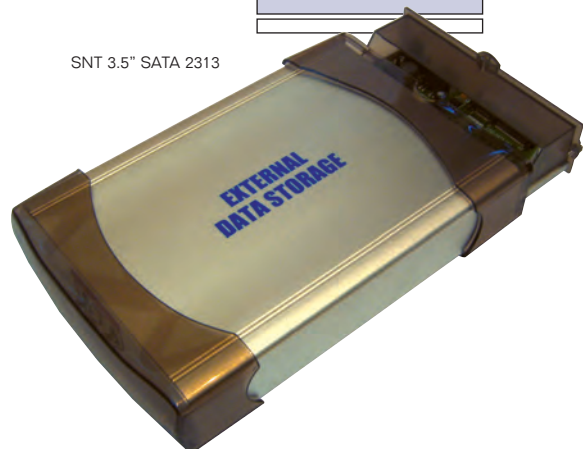
SNT 3.5" SATA 2316

SNT 3.5" SATA 2313

Plus: Portable hard drives **Minus:** Potential storage management headaches **Reviewer:** Russell Bennett **Supplier:** Esquire (012) 657-1111 **Internet:** www.sample.com **RRP:** Chronos 3.5" HDD External Case - R420.00 | SNT 3.5" SATA 2313 - R380 | SNT 3.5" SATA 2316 - R480.00

Thermaltake Extreme Giant III

We've all experienced the desire. The insatiable hunger for more power. No matter how much you spend on a system, the nature of the technology beast is that sooner or later what was the latest and greatest begins to flag, and a costly replacement becomes inevitable. But if there's a technical bone in your body, you've also considered over clocking to delay the expenditure. But the biggest barrier to running higher clock speeds is that the heat being generated, the death of many a good component, rises exponentially as you exceed the default frequencies.

Thermaltake is a company which thrives on this thirst for more clock cycles, producing and selling a range of hardcore cooling solutions for all the heat-generating products in your machine. And the product being tested here, the Thermaltake Extreme Giant III VGA cooler, is the mother of graphics card cooling solutions.

Building this metal shell complete with multiple fans around an old GeForce 2 leaves you with a card which looks far more impressive than any brand-new GeForce FX or Radeon 9800. And it works too. Where this aging board previously ran at a steady 54 degrees C, the Giant reduced this reading by a full fourteen degrees making even rather wild clock frequency adjustments non-fatal to the GPU.

Apart from the heat sink which completely engulfs your card, the Giant sports a large front fan, Turbo-Flow top-mounted extractor fan, and dual heat pipes bent into a U-shape running along both front and back sides. There's also a speed switch, which changes the rotational speed of the main fan and turns the Turbo-Flow (sounding not unlike an aggressively-tuned car's turbo system) fan on and off.

Be warned, however, that extreme care needs to be taken when installing this product. Due to the lack of proper mounting-holes for the main fan, other than the heatsink fins themselves, a cherished Radeon 9800 PRO was destroyed during this testing process.

Also, the Extreme Giant III is so substantial that if you're running slightly tall DIMM modules, you could well have problems with your RAM preventing the correct re-insertion of your graphics card into its AGP slot.

The Extreme Giant III dissipates heat beautifully, looks technician-tough, and makes a great noise. It serves its sole purpose flawlessly, but be at your most wary when constructing the cooler onto your card.
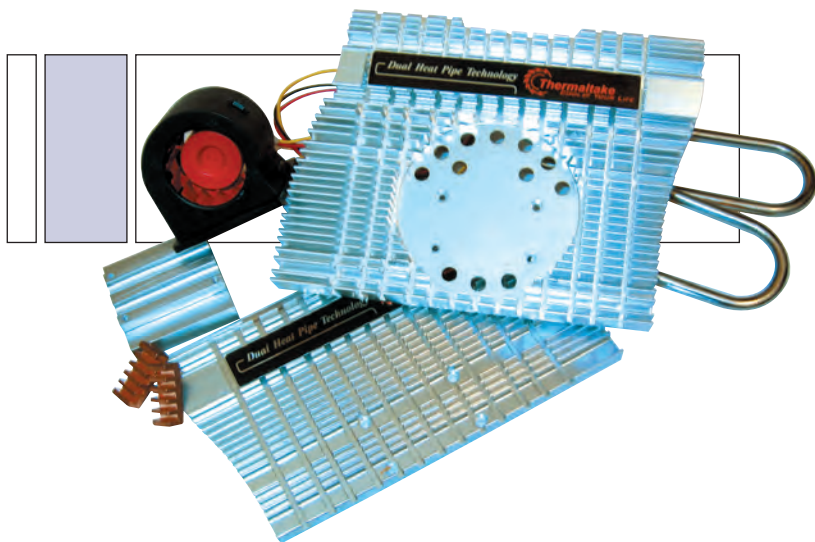
Plus: Great noise **Minus:** Dangerous to hardware **Reviewer:** Russell Bennett
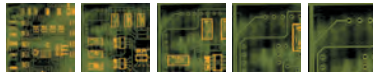**Supplier:** Corex [011] 707 5000 **Internet:** www.corex.co.za **RRP:** R395.00

Chronos Bluetooth Presenter

I t's not the kind of thing gamers are going to clamber over, but the Chronos Bluetooth Presenter is a prime example of how this new technology is making the world a better place for those who like their gadgets.

Basically, this is something that you're going to find in the board room rather than anywhere else. The device is designed to make the lives of those doing visual presentations via computer a whole lot easier. The unit takes over from any other form of input device, allowing the user of a Bluetooth capable computer to perform an entire presentation without the need to constantly return to the computer or rely on an assistant.

The small silver device is comfortable in the hand, and has every desired function available at the touch of a button.

A directional stick (much like a PS2 analog stick) as well as scroll buttons, a function button and a built in laser pointer allow the user ultimate freedom and presentation capabilities. No wires or the like interfere with movement, and the audience does not become an obstruction during the presentation. The unit is powered by two AAA batteries, and is small enough to be concealed in one's hand.

As stated before, it's not really a gaming device (although using the laser pointer to drive your cats nuts is kind of fun) but it is a powerful unit to show off what Bluetooth can do. For those of you reading this that may be responsible for presentations, welcome to the new century… this device is the perfect compliment to any corporate environment. For those of you not in that line of work, we found that long sweeping motions with the laser work most effectively for cat chasing games.

Plus: Versatile... **Minus:** ... if you have a board room **Reviewer:** Walt Pretorius
Supplier: Esquire [012] 657 1111 **Internet:** www.esquire.co.za **RRP:** R820.00

Thermaltake Hardcano 12

T he more cooling devices I come across, the more I love the idea of monitoring and controlling the temperature within our ever faster and ever hotter PCs. I wear my low temperature AMD claims like a badge, to be honest and, with the Hardcano 12 from cooling masters Thermaltake, I now have the evidence I need to back up those claims.

The Hardcano 12 is a front mounted unit that takes up a 5 ¼" drive bay. Using it, one can control the speeds of up to four case and board fans, as well as monitor the temperature of four regions inside the PC box.

The unit monitors fan speeds, and allows for quick adjustment of said speed - allowing the user the perfect balance between temperature and fan noise. Of course, you need fans that have adjustable speeds to make use of this function, but even with standard fans the device can report back concerning fan RPMs, at least. More importantly, the user can confirm that fans are actually working, as fan failure is reported via the device.

Additionally, four regions of the PC can be monitored for temperature. These are up to the user, although the suggested monitoring spots are the CPU, the GPU, the power supply and an ambient temperature reading near the CPU. This is particularly useful to make sure your system doesn't overheat (obviously) and to determine where heat problems within your system may be coming from. A heat alarm can also be set, so that you are warned when your system gets above a certain temperature.

A big advantage that the Hardcano 12 has over heat monitoring software is that you can easily monitor temperatures while playing games, and get an accurate check on the performance increase and its effect on your PC heat. You don't need to ALT-TAB around the place, and know that your measurements are spot on at just a glance.

The unit is a sleek black thing about the size of a standard CD-ROM drive. It is fronted with easy to use buttons that take care of every function the unit has, as well as a bright blue LCD display to show you all those facts and figures. On the down side, it introduces eight new wires to the inside of your case, making things a little more difficult to keep tidy. Then again, four of those wired allow you to power fans centrally from the Hardcano 12 itself, and, along with the temperature sensor wires, can be relatively easily hidden.

The Hardcano 12 is attractive enough to make a great addition to any modders case, and useful enough to be worth the price. In fact, it's on my ever growing Christmas wish list!

Plus: Extremely useful **Minus:** Lots of extra wires in the PC box **Reviewer:** Walt Pretorius
Supplier: Corex [011] 707 5000 **Internet:** www.corex.co.za **RRP:** R570.00

H@RDCOR3

Portable Storage Devices

writer: Tom Taylor

The days of using stiffy's are long gone, unless of course you still live in the dark ages. The USB flash disk has changed the way we look at carrying data around and has also increased the capacities we are able to put in our pockets. With the release of USB 2.0 a while back, these nifty little devices got a big break in terms of data transfer speeds. This, in turn, allowed for much larger capacities to be produced as transferring data would not be a painstakingly long process as it was with most large capacity USB 1.1 disks.

In essence a USB flash disk is a memory chip which can connect to the USB port of your computer. USB flash disks do not need batteries to operate as they draw their power requirements from the USB port and in almost all cases the data retention of these devices is about 10 years. Apart from being a portable storage device most USB flash disks can be used as boot devices. This means that you can stick some boot files on it and in your computer's Bios, if it has the capability, set it to boot directly from the USB flash disk. Most manufacturers also include security software with their products allowing the data to be secured behind a password or specially created password protected partition.

We have also included external hard drives and hard drive housings in this round up. The great thing about an external hard drive is the fact that it offers much greater capacities than a USB flash disk and it can be carried around. In all fairness it is not quite as portable as its USB counterpart but having the ability to carry 160 GB, for example, to a friend's house and copy files without lugging your computer around is quite satisfying. External hard drives are a bit more expensive than its internal counterparts but as a secondary drive to your computer the speed difference (using USB 2.0 or FireWire) is hardly noticeable.

If you have a hard drive lying around and have no space to fit it in your case or you simply do not want to add it to your computer, you can buy a housing for it to make your own external hard drive. Generally speaking, going this route works out slightly cheaper than buying a branded external hard drive and the benefit is that you can shop around for the cheapest hard drive. In either case, having a storage device you can carry between your home, work, and friends is a great alternative to carrying your computer with you.

Benchmarking

I only ran benchmarks on the USB disks this month and I did so by making use of the Removable Storage benchmark featured in the new SiSoft Sandra 2004 (www.sisoftware.net). This benchmark produced a Combined Index and Endurance Factor result which is what I used to rate each product. Here is an excerpt out of the SiSoft Sandra help file.

The typical usage model for these devices is File operations, such as writing a file to the device, reading a file from it, and deleting a file, this benchmark exercises the devices in terms of these operations (to measure the "raw" cluster level performance of the device, it is recommended to also test it by means of the File System Benchmark module).

The following characteristics are measured for each of the four representative file sizes of 512 Bytes (representing a minimal single data cluster file), 32kB, 256kB and 2MB - Read Performance, Write Performance, Delete Performance, Combined Device Index and Endurance Factor.

H@rdcor3 test PC supplied by Light Edge Technology

2 GHz Intel Pentium 4
MSI 865PE Neo2 motherboard
Transcend Radeon 9700
Philips 107E 17" Monitor
Transcend 512 MB DDR500 RAM
Western Digital 80 GB HDD 7200rpm
LG DVD/CD-RW combination drive

Transcend JetFlash

I have always liked Transcend products, I personally use their DDR500 RAM and I am very impressed with it, their JetFlash USB drives is no exception. The unit I tested was the 128 MB version and included with this unit is a neck strap and USB extension cable. It sports all the usual features and its beauty lies in its simplicity. Sadly after about 15 retries I gave up in testing the combined index of this drive as it kept on telling me it cannot write to the disk. It was established that SiSoft Sandra has issues with this particular device. COMBINED INDEX: N/A | ENDURANCE FACTOR: 20.7 | DATA COPY: 11 SECONDS

USB Flash Disk

| Value for Money 80 | Performance 80 | Overall 80 |

Plus: Aesthetics **Minus:** Could not perform the benchmark **Supplier:** Rectron (011) 203-1000
Internet: www.transcendusa.com **RRP:** 128MB - R349 | 256MB - R649 | 512MB - R1299

Leadtek My Memory

Up until this month's H@rdcor3 roundup I did not know that Leadtek made these devices (shame on me), but I am happy to report that I am well impressed by their offering. Unlike traditional USB flash disks, the one from Leadtek is encased in a switchblade-like housing which allows the USB port to flip out when needed. Even though this is an innovative design I am a bit wary that this method is not dust proof and carrying it around in your pocket might damage the USB port. The supplied CD also features some handy utilities. COMBINED INDEX: 1006 ENDURANCE FACTOR: 7.2 | DATA COPY: 13 SECONDS

USB Flash Disk

| Value for Money 75 | Performance 75 | Overall 75 |

Plus: Nice utilities on the CD **Minus:** Port not totally covered by its housing **Supplier:** Rectron (011) 203-1000 **Internet:** www.leadtek.com.tw **RRP:** 128MB - R349 | 256MB - R649

SanDisk Cruzer Mini

For those of you who own PDA's or digital cameras, I am sure you have heard of SanDisk. This company has been around for a while and their memory products for the above mentioned devices are excellent to say the least. With that in mind, I was happy when I heard that they are now producing USB flash disks for the PC as well. The Cruzer Mini I tested this month has a capacity of 256MB and is bundled with a neck strap and two, coloured, replacement caps. Sadly there are no extras but as a flash disk this is a great product. COMBINED INDEX: 15774 ENDURANCE FACTOR: 4.3 | DATA COPY: 12 SECONDS

USB Flash Disk

| Value for Money 70 | Performance 80 | Overall 75 |
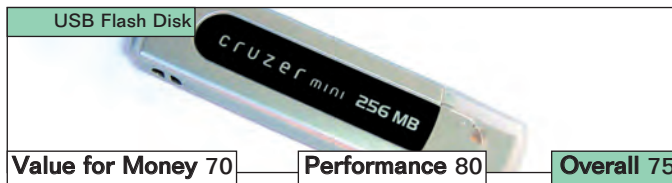
Plus: SanDisk reliability **Minus:** Price **Supplier:** SanDisk (021) 423-6990
Internet: www.sandisk.com **RRP:** 128 MB - R557 | 256 MB - R876

Ridata EZdrive

Ridata has been fairly big on the blank CD and DVD market and it was with some excitement that I looked at the EZdrive. The first noticeable thing about this device is that it has a retractable USB port which, with the push of your thumb, can be opened or closed. The idea behind this method is simple and there are no real moving parts within the device. It is simply a housing around a movable USB flash disk. When opened the disk is locked into position so when you push it into a USB bay it will not retract. COMBINED INDEX: 1403 | ENDURANCE FACTOR: 4.2 DATA COPY: 37 SECONDS

USB Flash Disk

| Value for Money 65 | Performance 60 | Overall 63 |

Plus: Innovative design **Minus:** Price **Supplier:** Reviva (021) 409-7950
Internet: www.ridata.com **RRP:** 128 MB - R510 | 256 MB - R890

A-Data Agenie

A-Data is a fairly new company but in a couple of short years they have proved that their products can perform on par with popular brands we all, already, know. The Agenie is a fairly small and lightweight USB flash disk which is encased in a plastic housing. Shipped with this flash disk is a USB extension cable and a neck strap. Looking a little closer you will see that there is no write protection switch, which is a must on these devices. This sadly counts against this little device and for serious users I would not recommend it. COMBINED INDEX: 1917 ENDURANCE FACTOR: 23.4 | DATA COPY: 37 SECONDS

USB Flash Disk

| Value for Money 70 | Performance 60 | Overall 65 |

Plus: Small and light **Minus:** Slow data copy **Supplier:** TVR Computers (021) 555-0891
Internet: www.adata.com.tw **RRP:** 64 MB - R320 | 128 MB - R400

A-Data JOGR

A-Data has definitely got a winner on their hands with this USB flash disk. If you look at the typical use of a USB flash disk, it is to carry data around, most of the time a USB flash disk would be in your pocket or around your neck and it is prone to knocks and drops. The JOGR is a shock and water resistant USB flash disk which can withstand the worst of knocking about thanks to its rubber housing. Looking at how I treat my USB flash disk this would be the next logical solution and I was really impressed by this one's durability. COMBINED INDEX: 1553 | ENDURANCE FACTOR: 9 | DATA COPY: 14 SECONDS

USB Flash Disk

| Value for Money 70 | Performance 70 | Overall 70 |

Plus: Rugged **Minus:** Pricey **Supplier:** TVR Computers (021) 555-0891
Internet: www.adata.com.tw **RRP:** 256 MB - R824

A-Data i-Drive

The i-Drive from A-Data is a USB flash disk and a PC camera, unlike some of the newer camera-enabled USB flash disks this one must be connected to your computer in order to take photographs which makes it very limiting as a digital camera. Luckily it can double as a web camera and the supplied USB extension cable is bendable to any position you can think of making it easy to position this device as a webcam. The quality of the webcam on the i-Drive is quite good and is rated at 640x480 pixels. COMBINED INDEX: N/A | ENDURANCE FACTOR: 20.7 DATA COPY: 11 SECONDS

USB Flash Disk

| Value for Money 65 | Performance 70 | Overall 68 |

Plus: Built in webcam | Good quality **Minus:** Bulky **Supplier:** TVR Computers (021) 555-0891
**Internet:** www.adata.com.tw **RRP:** 256 MB - R793

Chronos USB Flash Disk

Chronos is a brand often associated with the budget end of the market and even though this is true for the most part, this company still produces some great products for the budget conscious buyer. The Chronos USB Flash Disk is slightly bulkier than most of the USB flash disks in its class but this in itself should not pose any problems. Bundled with this device is a lanyard and USB extension cable; looking at overall value, sadly, this time it is not Chronos' product performance which lets it down, but its price. COMBINED INDEX: 1405 | ENDURANCE FACTOR: 5.2 DATA COPY: 25 SECONDS

USB Flash Disk

| Value for Money 60 | Performance 60 | Overall 60 |

Plus: Solidly built **Minus:** Slightly bulky **Supplier:** Genex Solutions (021) 551-8887
Internet: www.chronos.com.tw **RRP:** 128 MB - R499
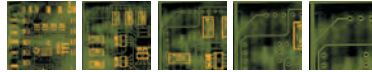
Sahara USB 2.0 Flash Disk

Sahara made a good choice on the OEM product they decided to have their logo printed on. The small black USB device features nothing fancy but its performance is what counts in its favour. Included you will find a neck strap and USB cable and even though the product itself will not win any designer awards, I was impressed by the speed in which it copied the test data. If product design does not concern you much then this would be the device for you. If you are like me and want something a little sexier then look elsewhere. COMBINED INDEX: 1103 ENDURANCE FACTOR: 9.7 | DATA COPY: 11 SECONDS

USB Flash Disk

Value for Money 80	Performance 80	Overall 80

Plus: Data copy speed | Size **Minus:** Nothing **Supplier:** Sahara Computers (021) 551-5595 **Internet:** www.sahara.co.za **RRP:** 128 MB - R369 | 256 MB - R595

Apacer Handy Steno

Full marks for the design of the Apacer Handy Steno! I was very impressed when I saw this product for the first time. Even though this device is slightly longer than most of its competitors I really like the look and feel of it. A thin cable keeps the lid of this device permanently attached to it and I was even more impressed by the inclusion of a desktop docking station. Its performance was not bad either and considering its price you do not pay much extra for what this USB flash drive has to offer. COMBINED INDEX: 979 | ENDURANCE FACTOR: 10.5 DATA COPY: 12 SECONDS

USB Flash Disk

Value for Money 75	Performance 75	Overall 75
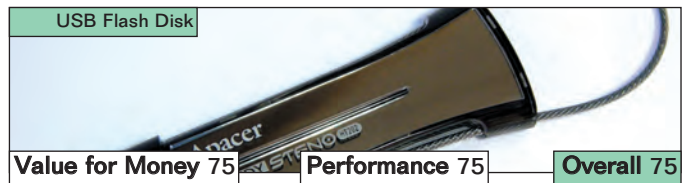
Plus: Everything **Minus:** Nothing **Supplier:** Pinnacle Micro (021) 551-3310 **Internet:** www.apacer.com **RRP:** 256 MB - R685 | 512 MB - R1550

Sahara 5-in-1 eDVR

This 128 MB USB device is a digital video recorder, digital camera, voice recorder, webcam, and USB storage device. Yes you read correctly, all of the Sahara 5-in-1 eDVR functions are powered by an internal Li-Polymer battery which recharges when connected to your USB port. As expected the quality of the photo's and video is not superb but for what it is, it is very acceptable. I think this is a great little device and as an all-in-one device it paves the way for greater things to come.

COMBINED INDEX: 238 | ENDURANCE FACTOR: 1 DATA COPY: 79 SECONDS

USB Flash Disk

Value for Money 75	Performance 60	Overall 68

Plus: Many uses **Minus:** Uses USB 1.1 **Supplier:** Sahara Computers (021) 551-5595 **Internet:** www.sahara.co.za **RRP:** 128 MB - R1099

Z-Cyber Cool Disk 2.0 V2

When opening the Z-Cyber Cool Disk 2.0 V2 box you cannot help but notice the classy packaging and the inclusion of a leather pouch. The device itself is not as small as some of the other USB flash disks in this roundup but it performs quite well in comparison. The Cool Disk 2.0 V2 also sports a utility CD which features a useful security application for use with this device. All-in-all this is a great device that offers a great performance rating and if it is not the size you are after then this USB flash disk is for you. COMBINED INDEX: 1009 | ENDURANCE FACTOR: 8.9 DATA COPY: 31 SECONDS

USB Flash Disk

Value for Money 65	Performance 65	Overall 65

Plus: Bundled with leather pouch **Minus:** Bit bulky **Supplier:** DCC (021) 531-6454 **Internet:** www.z-cyber.net **RRP:** 128 MB - R517

DigitalWay MPIO HS100

This is the one device that impressed me the most in this months H@rdcor3 roundup. DigitalWay is a manufacturer which is well known for its superb MP3 players and the HS100 follows in this tradition as a USB flash disk with a difference. Instead of using a memory chip to store data, the HS100 uses a rotating magnetic storage element. This might be of some concern as moving parts tend to be more sensitive but this device is able to take some knocks. The best feature about the HS100 is its price compared to other devices in its capacity range. COMBINED INDEX: 1091 ENDURANCE FACTOR: 3.8 | DATA COPY: 15 SECONDS

USB Flash Disk

Value for Money 78	Performance 75	Overall 77

Plus: Capacity **Minus:** Bulky **Supplier:** Reviva (021) 409-7950 **Internet:** www.mpio.com **RRP:** 1.5 GB - R 2070

MSI Mega Stick 256

A couple of days ago the latest MSI USB MP3 player landed on my desk and I just had to include it. The Mega Stick 256 is a MP3 player, voice recorder, FM radio, USB flash disk, a mini language tutor (if you use the Quick repeat software), and it also features an LCD with backlight. What I liked about the MSI Mega Stick 256 as a voice recorder is the capability to connect an external microphone, great if you want to spy on those annoying neighbours.

COMBINED INDEX: 320 | ENDURANCE FACTOR: 2 DATA COPY: 88 SECONDS

USB Flash Disk

Value for Money 80	Performance 60	Overall 70

Plus: Great MP3 player **Minus:** Uses USB 1.1 **RRP:** R000.00 **Supplier:** Light Edge Technology (021) 510-8270 **Internet:** www.msi.com.tw **RRP:** R1695

Kingston DataTraveler 2.0

Kingston is undoubtedly one of the worlds leading memory manufacturers and I am happy to report that their USB flash disks are also of the best I have seen. Having said that, I think they should look at the design of their USB flash disks which I feel could look slightly more attractive. On the disk is a preloaded utility called TravelerSafe which allows you to create a secure partition on the Kingston DataTraveler 2.0 to keep all your documents safe from prying eyes. It was the fastest one on test and its price is not unreasonable either COMBINED INDEX: 6138 | ENDURANCE FACTOR: 26.6 | DATA COPY: 7 SECONDS

USB Flash Disk

Value for Money 90	Performance 90	Overall 90

Plus: Extremely fast **Minus:** Slightly bulky **Supplier:** Axiz (011) 237-7000
Internet: www.kingston.com **RRP:** 256 MB - R796 | 512 MB - R1594 | 1 GB - R3190

Kalliba Removable USB Flash

Kalliba, South Africa's own memory manufacturer, made the natural progression to produce a USB flash disk. The unit I got for review was the 1 GB USB flash disk and even though it offers a massive capacity its physical size remains fairly standard among its competitors. As with most of the drives in this roundup, this one can be used as a bootable disk and by using the software your data stored on it can be password protected. I was very impressed with the Kalliba USB flash disk and I hope that we will soon see a USB 2.0 version. COMBINED INDEX: 684 ENDURANCE FACTOR: 1.0 | DATA COPY: 70 SECONDS

USB Flash Disk

Value for Money 60	Performance 60	Overall 60
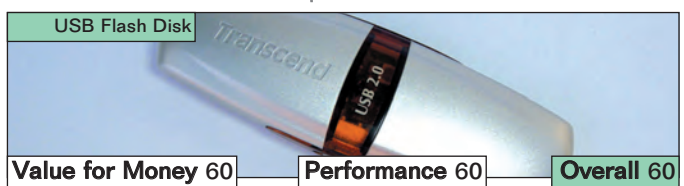
Plus: Capacity **Minus:** Uses USB 1.1 **Supplier:** Axiz (011) 237-7000
Internet: www.kalliba.com **RRP:** 256 MB - R739 | 512 MB - R1594 | 1 GB - R3190

"The USB flash disk has changed the way we look at carrying data around and has also increased the capacities we are able to put in our pockets. With the release of USB 2.0 a while back, these nifty little devices got a big break in terms of data transfer speeds."

LaCie Big Disk 500GB

LaCie is well known for its stylish products and cutting edge technology and with external hard drives that statement could not be closer to the truth. The LaCie Big Disk 500 GB hosts, as its name implies, a whopping 500 GB of storage. The device consists of one 500 GB, 7200rpm, hard drive and its aluminium-alloy housing allows you to connect it to your computer via USB 2.0, FireWire 400 (IEEE 1394a), or FireWire 800 (IEEE 1394b). Shipping with this unit you will find a mountable bracket allowing it to stand on its side as well as all the cables you will need to connect it to either of its ports. The one thing you will notice when taking this unit out of its box is its weight. Weighing almost 2.5 Kg this hard drive is not intended to be carried around, but to have 500 GB of portable storage, its weight would be the last thing on my mind. A bigger version is also available sporting an awesome 1Terabyte capacity.
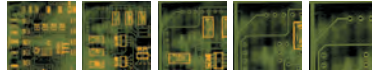
External Hard Drive

Value for Money 80	Performance 75	Overall 78
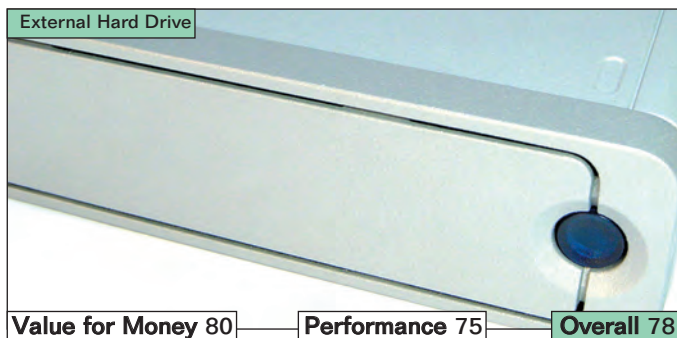
Plus: 500 GB of portable storage space **Minus:** Weight **Supplier:** DDS (021) 510-3425
Internet: www.lacie.com **RRP:** R6399

Iomega HDD 120GB

Iomega has always been one of the forerunners in the storage department; remember Zip and Jazz drives? One of their newer devices, an external hard drive obviously, hosts a 120 GB, 7200rpm, hard drive and is able to connect to your computer via USB 2.0. Aesthetically the Iomega HDD 120GB is a beauty, even though it has a plastic housing its metallic silver and dark grey colours would look good on any desk. A nice addition on this hard drive is compatibility with a Kensington lock and the inclusion of Norton Ghost 2003 is another added bonus. The port it uses to connect to your computer is not a traditional USB port but rather a proprietary SCSI-like connector. The benefit to this is that if you want to make this device FireWire 400 compatible you simply need to buy the correct cable. Sadly, this method can create its own set of problems, like when you forget this "special" cable at home.

External Hard Drive

Value for Money 75	Performance 75	Overall 75
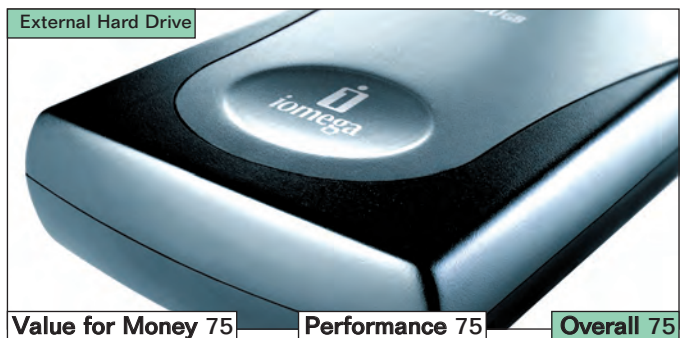
Plus: Size | Look | Performance **Minus:** Proprietary USB 2.0 Cable
Supplier: Data Shuttle (011) 466-2331 **Internet:** www.iomega.co.za **RRP:** R2071

Western Digital 120 GB Combo HDD

As one of the largest Hard Drive manufacturers, it is only logical that Western Digital would produce an external hard drive. The Combo Hard Drive from this storage giant gets its name from the fact that it is compatible with both FireWire 400 and USB 2.0. Thanks to its semi translucent and metallic silver housing this external hard drive would look right at home next to an Apple G5, but for computer use this device would be equally complimentary to any desk. This device is slightly larger than some of the other external hard drives I reviewed this month but is still small and light enough to carry around. On the back of the drive are two FireWire connectors and one USB 2.0 connector, the one thing that I would have liked to see though, is the inclusion of an 8 MB buffer instead of its 2 MB buffer. Even as it is you will not be disappointed with this device and I can easily recommend it.

External Hard Drive

Value for Money 70	Performance 75	Overall 73

Plus: Looks stunning **Minus:** 2 MB Buffer **Supplier:** DCC (021) 531-6454
Internet: www.westerndigital.com **RRP:** R2300

Maxtor Personal Storage 5000 DV

Maxtor is another hard drive giant which has produced an external hard drive. The Personal Storage 5000 DV is a USB 2.0 and FireWire 4000 compatible drive and sports a 160 GB, 7200rpm, drive with an 8 MB buffer, a winning combination in my books. The drive looks smart in its metallic blue housing and it stands slightly raised thanks to its rubber feet. On the front of this external hard drive is the button, which when pressed, activates the OneTouch Backup feature and backs up all the files and folders on a specified drive. In order for this to work though you would need to install the supplied software, I would have appreciated more if this was customizable but it is a good idea nonetheless. Considering that this drive is targeted at the data backup market, I was impressed by what it had to offer as a portable storage device as well.
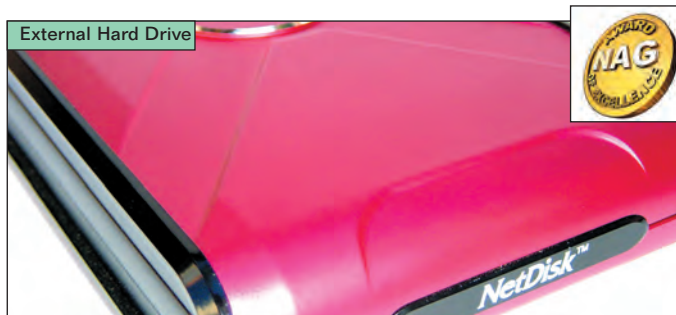
External Hard Drive

Value for Money 90	Performance 90	Overall 90

Plus: Price | 8MB buffer **Minus:** Nothing **Supplier:** Rectron (011) 203-1000
Internet: www.maxtor.com **RRP:** R2599

Ximeta NetDisk

At first the Ximeta NetDisk seems like an ordinary external hard drive. I mean, it sports a 160 GB, 7200rpm, hard drive and it can connect to your computer via USB 2.0. Upon closer inspection you will notice that this device also has an RJ-45 Ethernet jack onboard. This is where the Ximeta Netdisk gets its name from; this versatile device can be connected directly to a network to become a NDAS (Network Direct Attached Storage) disk. Once connected to a network each workstation wanting access to the NetDisk will need to have a small application installed. To swap between the USB 2.0 and Ethernet connections you simply need to flip a toggle switch to whichever connection you prefer. For home use or at a LAN the NetDisk can serve as a file or backup server without the need for a computer to power it. This is truly a useful device and I highly recommend it.

External Hard Drive

Value for Money 85	Performance 90	Overall 88

Plus: External hard drive & network storage device. **Minus:** Nothing **Supplier:** Dimexcor
(011) 886-1566 **Internet:** www.ximeta.com **RRP:** 80 GB - R2199 | 120 GB - R2899 | 160 GB - R3489

DataFab MD2-FW2

DataFab is very well known for its peripherals, more specifically, its memory card readers. This unit consists of a basic plastic housing and it is able to connect to both USB 2.0 and FireWire 400. Opening this housing I got a bit concerned in that there are no soft rubber-pads included or built into this device as a means to lessen the shock of an installed hard drive when carried around in this housing. Seeing that a 2.5-inch hard drive in itself is already a rugged device, some soft padding would have been welcome. The hard drive, when installed, is screwed directly to the circuit board which in turn clips onto the housing. My only concern aside this housing will provide sturdy and durable protection for a 2.5-inch hard drive and the capability to connect to both USB 2.0 and FireWire 400 is a welcome bonus.

2.5-inch Housing

Value for Money 80	Performance 75	Overall 78

Plus: Supports USB 2.0 and FireWire 400 **Minus:** External power supply
Supplier: Light Edge Technology (021) 510-8270 **Internet:** www.datafab.com **RRP:** R695

Acrox External USB enclosure

Acrox is a fairly new brand to South Africa and of the products I have seen this manufacturer produce I am happy to report that I am impressed. My first impressions of the Acrox External USB enclosure was, where does the hard drive go? This housing measures a tiny 16.5mm in height, making it the smallest housing in this roundup. Upon opening this unit you are greeted with a small purple circuit board and nothing else. The lack of a soft rubber support also concerned me with this device but the casing itself seems sturdy enough to take a couple of knocks. To me, one of the best features of this housing is the fact that there are no bulky external power supplies to carry around. Power to this unit is supplied by a converted USB cable which connects to the tiny round power plug. The data connection also makes use of USB and this device is USB 2.0 compatible. I was also impressed to see the inclusion of a Nylon pouch in the box.

2.5-inch Housing

Value for Money 90	Performance 90	Overall 90
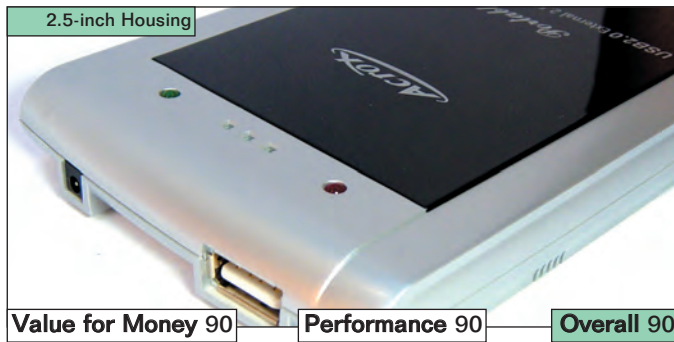
Plus: Very small | Uses USB port for power **Minus:** Nothing
Supplier: Wentek International (021) 551-8866 **Internet:** www.acrox.com.tw **RRP:** R324

Chronos Mobile Disk

Aesthetically, the Chronos Mobile Disk is a nice looking external housing with a metallic silver and pearl-like finish. Chronos opted to go with a screw-less casing which in theory is a great idea but in practice it becomes a bit difficult to open this housing. On the inside though, the 5.25-inch hard drive still gets screwed to the casing to prevent it from shifting around. As with all the other external housings, there is not much to look at on the inside, only a 4-pin power connector, an IDE cable, and a circuit board found their way into this one. On the front of the housing are two status LED's, one for power and the other disk activity. Looking in the box I was pleased to see a stand for this housing, allowing it to stand upright in tight spaces. The Chronos Mobile Disk uses USB 2.0 as its data connectivity and an external power supply provides it with power.

5.25-inch Housing

Value for Money 80	Performance 75	Overall 78
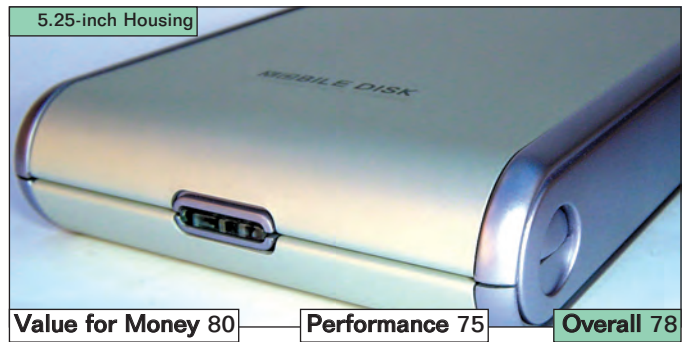
Plus: Looks great **Minus:** External power supply **Supplier:** Genex Solutions (021) 551-8887
Internet: www.genex-sa.co.za **RRP:** R 495

DATAFAB MD3A-FW11-USB2

This external 5.25-inch hard drive housing might not look like much but it is definitely one of the better ones on the market. For some reason this device shipped as a boring old beige device, the colour we all love to hate. Looking on the inside I was impressed to find a metal cage in which the hard drive is fastened, there is also a small fan at the back of the housing which will blow cool air into it, a must if you are going to be installing a 7200rpm hard drive. Another feature I really appreciated was the inclusion of a power switch on the front of the unit. There should be no problem connecting this housing to virtually any computer as it is USB 2.0 and FireWire400 compatible. If you are of the case modification type you can make use of the removable front panel and put a smallish LCD in this housing, something which is sure to have your fellow gamers talking.

5.25-inch Housing

Value for Money 75	Performance 75	Overall 75
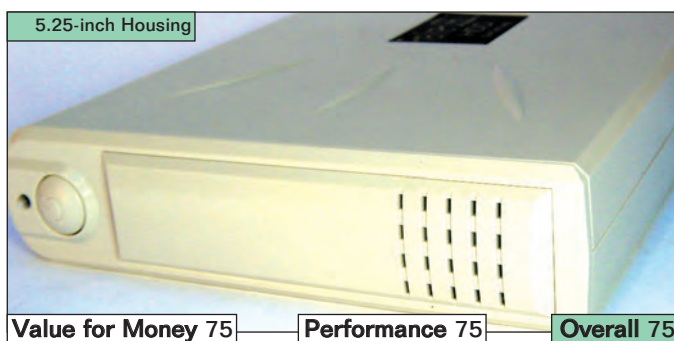
Plus: Metal housing on the inside **Minus:** Not good looking
Supplier: Light Edge Technology (021) 510-8270 **Internet:** www.datafab.com **RRP:** R695

Tsunami Deva Mobile Storage

Even though the Tsunami Deva Mobile Storage is the largest external housing in this roundup, its sports a couple of features none of its competitors does, for one it is able to accommodate either a hard drive or an optical drive. On the bottom of the housing is a flip out handle which makes carrying this device, because of its size, a lot easier. One of the main reasons why it is so bulky is because it has a 42.5W power supply built in. This also adds to its weight but considering the hassle free way of powering this unit that is not a major concern. Looking at the inside you will also find a small fan and an audio connector which leads to a Stereo RCA connecter at the back of this housing. Connectivity is provided in the form of USB 2.0 and because it has an internal power supply you can simply connect the standard three-prong power cable to it for power.

5.25-inch Housing

Value for Money 90	Performance 90	Overall 90

Plus: Internal power supply | Carry handle **Minus:** Bulky
Supplier: Wentek International (021) 551-8866 **Internet:** www.mova.com.tw **RRP:** R513

Little fishes • Nasty phone calls • Gory soundtrack

Trailerwatch

Alien Vs. Predator

21st Century Fox released an Internet-only trailer of the upcoming Alien vs. Predator, due here in October. It elaborates a bit more from the original teaser, and we're guessing humans find an old Predator tomb which is infested with Aliens. That prompts a hunting party to show up and take care of things. The highlight - a very spooky-looking predator mask, but naturally there are lots of scenes with face huggers, stealth camouflage and a few other surprises. But other than it being AVP, we're still waiting for some really exciting footage…

Movie

Finding Nemo
S: Albert Brooks, Ellen Degeneres, Willem Dafoe **D:** Andrew Stanton, Lee Unkrich **R:** 100m (A)

Pixar does it again, taking computer animation to a new level in complex underwater scenes. This film details a father clown fish's search for his son, and features some very fine voice acting performances (particularly by Ellen DeGeneres.) The film has some very funny moments, but it does seem a little long after a while. Overall, it's great family entertainment.

Movie

The Italian Job
S: Mark Wahlberg, Charlise Theron, Edward Norton **D:** F. Gary Gray **R:** 106m (10V)

A fun film full of intrigue and exciting driving, The Italian Job is not exactly high brow entertainment. That said - it is an enjoyable way to while away an hour and a bit. The plot is fairly predictable, but the action is very exciting. Also, if you're thinking of buying a Mini Cooper, this film shows the little car in action. Of course, take Hollywood driving with a pinch of salt...

Movie

Phonebooth
S: Colin Farrell, Forest Whitaker, Kiefer Sutherland
D: Joel Schumacher **R:** 78m (13VL)

Joel Schumacher is back in form in his best movie since Flatliners. When a man answers a phone call at a booth in the middle of New York City, he suddenly finds himself hostage to a sniper - and he is unable to tell anyone. In fact, all he can do is follow the man's instructions - all this amidst police who think he committed a murder - a top class and original thriller.

CD

Kill Bill Sound Track
Various Artists [Gallo]

As you may expect with a Quentin Tarantino related sound track, this one has a few surprises on it. It's full of varied sounds and artists, ranging from Nancy Sinatra to Tomoyasu Hotei and even Gheorghe Zamfir. It's fun and eclectic, but it certainly is not meant for everyone. You need an open mind when approaching this one!

CD

Three Days Grace
Three Days Grace [BMG]

Although they may look like a bunch of skate-punk thugs, Three Days Grace are quite surprising in their musical style. They are the first new rock band in ages that don't sound like a Nickelback clone, for one, and their old style sentiments make for quite a change in a world crammed full of commercialised clones. Rock lovers should enjoy this one.

CD
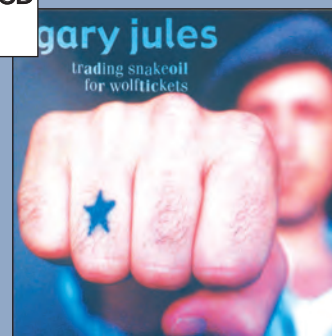
Trading Snakeoil for Wolftickets
Gary Jules [DGR]

Everyone wants this CD for the version of Mad World he recorded in 94, but Jules has a lot more to offer. Something between Simon & Garfunkle and Cat Stevens, it leans a bit too much into country territory to be truly folk. But it's still a very soothing selection of songs that deserves more attention than it will probably get.

Great directors • Serial Experiments Lain • Psychics and Sisters

Anime Legends

Rintaro

While the careers of Japan's best directors are generally well-documented, information on Shigeyuki Hayashi is surprisingly scarce. In fact, most people will not even recognise his pseudonym, Rintaro. But despite this apparent lack of notoriety, Rintaro is one of the most prolific directors in anime history, credited with over fifty titles, including several early episodes of Osamu Tezuka's Astro Boy, Record of the Lodoss War, Final Fantasy OAV, X, and Metropolis.

Not many details are available about his childhood, but he was born in 1941 and began his career in the late 1950's as a runner for Toei Doga Productions. He hoped to be promoted to animation, but three years later the company had still not recognised his abilities. It was at this time that the great Osamu Tezuka formed Mushi Productions and began his work on the Astro Boy series. When Rintaro left Toei Doga to apply for work at Mushi, he was immediately noticed. Tezuka, realising the talent he had discovered, took a chance and put Rintaro into the role of lead animator. The two worked day and night to finish the episodes every week (often working 24 hour days), and soon Rintaro was directing as well.

In 1972, after completing eight full-length series with Mushi Productions, he left to become a freelancer. He has since worked with Madhouse, Group TAC, Sunrise and Tatsunoko Productions, in roles ranging from direction to animation to art direction to storyboarding. In 2001, in memory of his former mentor Tezuka, he wrote and directed his own version of Metropolis, which was acclaimed by critics as one of the greatest anime films ever.

Anime DVD
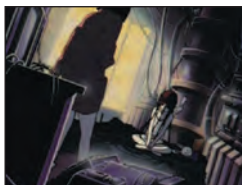
Serial Experiments Lain
Format: Series [13 Episodes]
Language: English, Japanese with English subtitles
Availability: www.amazon.co.uk - £ 14.99 excl. shipping. [Box set]

Most people will tell you that Serial Experiments Lain is the most confusing anime they have ever seen, and this is a starting point for the basic introduction I am going to give you. This is a series based on the surreal, the philosophical and the abstract. It's a work of art, and certainly not for the weak-minded.

Lain Iwakura is a high school girl in present-day Japanese society. She's a loner, with few friends, regarded by many as rather weird. And after a girl in her class commits suicide, she starts receiving e-mail from the deceased, Chisa, who claims to have left her body behind to live in the "wired" (the internet). Lain becomes suddenly interested in technology, and convinces her father to buy her a new "Navi" (PC). From there on, things start becoming stranger by the second - she spends more and more time in the wired, appears to develop multiple personalities, and men in black suits start to follow her around. The plot is excessively difficult to explain in a short paragraph, but you can rest assured that, while you will probably have no idea what is going on for most of the series, it resolves itself magnificently in the end. The show's final comments on the nature of reality and ethics are thought-provoking indeed. The animation is absolutely stunning and done in a completely original style. While it is "experimental", it is polished and well-suited to the complex strands of story and character which flow through this masterful work. Lain is to anime what The Matrix is to western cinema in terms of groundbreaking concepts.

Anime Comics

Psychic Academy
Tokyopop
R96.95

This surprisingly good manga story follows the life of Ai Shiomi - up till now he has lived the life of a normal teenager. Then he shows signs of having psychic power and is sent to a special school for the world's first generation of psychic kids. Life for Ai is made increasingly complicated by the fact that his older brother is a teacher at the school, and feels the need to protect his "little bro". Then there are Ai's childhood friends and the schools top students, two young girls who both want more than Ai's psychic power. All of this with Ai not believing he has any power at all, and you have a very unhappy boy, who might just have to save the world again too.

Sister Red
ComicsOne
R93.95

Leave it to the Japanese to arrive at a whole new version of how vampires came to be. You get to learn the story through the experiences of a young girl named Mahito, who's only goal in life was to look after her cousin Erika, until the night she gets run over by a drunk driver, and killed. Suddenly Mahito is reborn as one of the Median, or undead. She discovers she has one half of the heart of the original immortal inside her. Now all sorts of creatures are out to get her, most wanting nothing more than to rip the beating heart from her chest. On the up side though, she gets to wreak her revenge on the guys who ran her down and drove off without stopping.

Little machines • E-effectiveness • Totally gonzo, man…

Prey
Michael Crichton
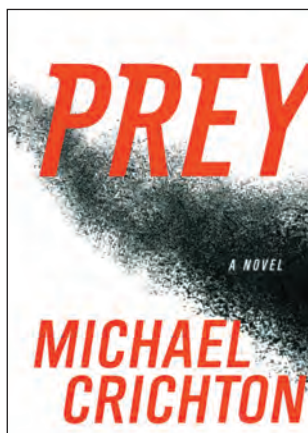
The name Michael Crichton evokes images ranging from dinosaurs (Jurassic Park), Demi Moore (Disclosure), murderous apes (Congo) and emergency room life (E.R.). In fact, Crichton's books cover most genres, although I haven't come across a Western written by him yet. He is one of those few writers who refuse to be tied down to a specific genre. Instead, Crichton attempts to challenge contemporary wisdom and issues with every book he writes. And now with Prey, the prolific author has entered the world of nanotechnology. The majority of Prey deals with how man is faced with a threat of his own making and how he needs to find a way to undo that which (perhaps) he should not have done in the first place. Again, Crichton is perhaps less condemning of redefining creation as Shelly and he is much more reserved in his judgement. If anything, Crichton seems to say that boundaries need to be pushed, albeit in a more controlled manner.

The book is enjoyable and a light read considering that the subject matter might be new to many. My only criticism of Prey is the fact that it reads very much like a movie. While this might not be a bad thing, depending on your taste, Crichton has perhaps fallen into the trap of writing elaborate screenplays instead of thoughtful novels. Also, because of this, the protagonists in the novel are not fleshed out as much as I would have liked.

Crichton also resolves the novel too quickly for my taste. However, I am convinced that this is the kind of novel that will appeal to many readers in the same way it did to me.

Supplied By: kalahari.net • **Website:** www.kalahari.net • **RRP:** R251.95 (excl. delivery charge)

Evolve
Rosabeth Moss Kanter
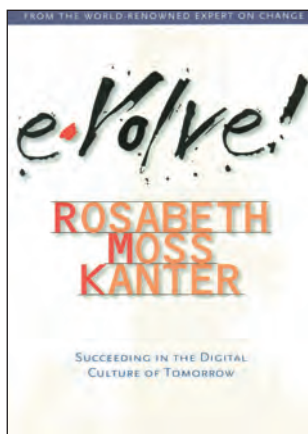
Written by Rosabeth Moss Kanter, who has been named as one of the fifty most powerful women in the world, Evolve discusses how people and companies must change to succeed in the Internet world. Divided into three parts, the challenge of change, the essence of e-effectiveness and leading fundamental change at Internet speed, Kanter explains how the digital culture will transform every aspect of business.

Kanter, a professor of business administration at Harvard Business School, used three methods of analyses to test the hypotheses she makes in the book. Firstly, a global print and online survey was conducted amongst companies from North America, Europe, Latin America and Africa. Secondly, she had a team conducting more than 300 interviews with companies spanning the globe. Lastly, Kanter examined several companies in depth with regards to case studies, repeat interviews and the like.

While Kanter runs the risk of elaborating too much on specifics it is important in a book of this nature to be as thorough as possible. This thoroughness might be too daunting for some readers. However, if you are a business-minded person, then Evolve will definitely keep your attention.

I would suggest that even people who do not care for business and how companies operate give this book a read. Evolve combines Internet issues with standard business practice and offers the reader a guideline of how companies should address the information age.

While this book is not written to be the be-all and end-all of what a company should do to be successful, it certainly does provide keen insight from a business perspective.

Supplied By: kalahari.net • **Website:** www.kalahari.net • **RRP:** R256.95 (excl. delivery charge)

Better Than Sex
Hunter S Thompson
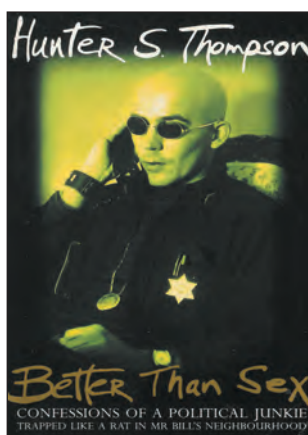
In 1994 the US was preparing to elect a new president. After the prelims the candidates available were George Bush senior, going in for a new term, or Bill Clinton, the new kid on the block.

A spiritual successor to Fear & Loathing on the Campaign Trail, Thompson follows the events of Ross Perot's rise and fall, after which he gets involved in trying to get Clinton elected, not because he believed him to be a good candidate, but simply because he saw him as less evil.

Throughout Better than Sex you will read faxes sent to and from the White House. You will see how Bill Clinton steals Hunter's chips, and you will see just how ridiculous a political election can get, even when you don't quite have the riotous corruption and rigging that some smaller countries persist on.

This is an almost daily diary of a gun toting, drug taking writer who is not afraid to ask the wrong questions. Interesting comparisons are made to the Watergate situation and even though the book was published long before the ascension of George W Bush to assume his father's mantle, there are some quite obvious and scary comparisons to be made between the events that happened during Bush Senior's election and that of his son. Not least of which is Iraqi Wars part one and two and Bush's quick fall from popularity due to the economy.

While Better Than Sex is a reasonable addition to Thompson's library, it's not quite as potent as his earlier works and can be too self-indulgent. But anyone with even a loose interest in the American political system should give it a look.

Supplied By: Outer Limits • **Website:** www.outerlimits.co.za • **RRP:** R120.00

books supplied by

kalahari.net ®

Saving the world • Write or buy? • Playing secret agents

Role playing review
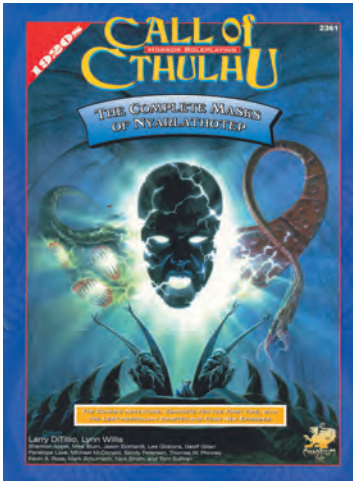
Masks of Nyarlathotep
Chaosium Inc.
RRP: R 400.00

While we mainly look at rule books in this section, there are some pre-generated scenarios and campaigns for various games that truly warrant further inspection. This is a prime example. Masks of Nyarlathotep is a full campaign designed for the Call of Cthulhu role playing game and it is, without a doubt, one of the finest campaigns in existence.

The story told within the pages of this book (and thereby the tale that the players experience) is a globe trotting adventure set in the 1920s. The players will begin by investigating a murder in New York City and then commence on to London, Cairo, Kenya, Australia and Shanghai. During this time, they uncover a plot of Earth shattering (literally) proportions and it is up to them to try and put a stop to it.

In true Call of Cthulhu fashion, the campaign is full of cults, mouldy old books, insanity and mindless monsters.

While most store-bought scenarios don't allow a lot of leeway for the GM to make use of, Masks of Nyarlathotep lets the GM inject a huge amount of his own flavour into the story. Additionally, a large number of story threads for impromptu adventures are also included - some of these adventures may have relevance to the overall story, while others do not.

The true value of Masks of Nyarlathotep lies in the length of time that it takes to complete the campaign. It is a truly cosmopolitan and vast tale, with something for everyone. Call of Cthulhu players who enjoy their action with a "save the world" flavour (and who doesn't) will truly be able to dig their teeth into this one. It is full of research and fights and, thanks to its globe-trotting nature, offers quite a challenge for the GM too. Every Call of Cthulhu player should experience the brilliance that is Masks of Nyarlathotep.

RPG Classics

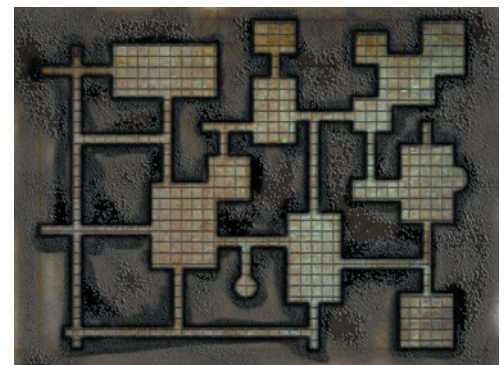**James Bond 007 RPG**
Gamma Games

Conversions from one or other entertainment format into a role playing game is always a questionable prospect. Can a game capture the spirit of the film, for example? Is there enough scope in the original story to fuel long term role playing campaigns?
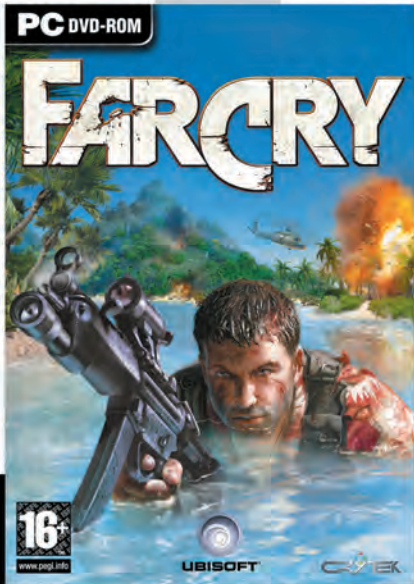
Surprisingly, there are a number of role playing games based on films which have proven to be quite successful. One such title is the James Bond 007 RPG, in which the players take the part of agents on Her Majesty's Secret Service.

This game made use of a simple percentile rule system, and was a wonderful recreation of the Bond world. It allowed the player to enter the world of super spies with authentic looking supplements (including "official" stationery) and tons of detail on locations, gadgets (in the incredibly rare Q Manual) and the like. Pre-designed scenarios were based on some of the best bond films, Like Dr No, Man with the Golden Gun and For Your Eyes Only. However, these scenarios were altered so that fans of the films would still be challenged and in for a few surprises.

The James Bond 007 RPG was (and still is, if you can find it) a slick and well put together package intended for play by smaller groups. Fans of the films particularly will enjoy the near perfect renditions of chase scenes, gun battles and villains. In fact, just the information on several of the older bond characters makes this a worthwhile read.

Roleplaying 101

Store-Bought vs. Home-Brew
Which adventures are better?

When a GM decides to start up a weekly role playing game, a big question arises immediately. Should he create his own scenarios and campaigns, or should he run with store-bought products to fuel the game? Each has its own advantages and disadvantages, of course, and the final decision should really rest with the GM's style.

Home-brewed adventures generally take a lot more work than the other variety. Inexperienced GMs, particularly, will find that they will need to make notes for virtually everything. Keep in mind, too, that the more work and detail put into such a scenario will mean a more enjoyable and believable experience for the players. GMs with a few more years under their belts will be able to, theoretically, put a little less work in and rely on their ability to think "on the fly." This kind of spontaneity is great for gaming, but can get out of hand.

Store-bought campaigns are a great idea for new GMs, as they will let them learn how scenarios should be put together. However, while they require relatively little preparation on the part of the GM, they tend to be far more rigid in their structure, making winging things a bit more difficult. Additionally, GMs may end up reading the scenarios, instead of presenting them in an entertaining manner. That said, the stories in these store-bought campaigns tend to be very good, and the time saved in preparation can be put into polishing the overall presentation of the game.

In the middle we have pre-generated settings (like D&Ds Forgotten Realms) where the GM is given a richly detailed world to play with, as well as few adventure ideas… but no pre-written adventures.

In the end, it comes down to personal preference. Most GMs tend to prefer their own stories. However, there are a great number of pre-written campaigns that show a great amount of merit.

Spiderman • The lanky man • DC's solution

The Pulse

Marvel Comics
R 24.50

The Daily Bugle, the biggest Paper in the Marvel Universe is hiring a new staff member, Jessica Jones, ex super hero, ex private detective, is now turning journalist. Her boss is J Jonah Jamison, the planets biggest superhero hater, but Jessica's going to work for him on a pro superhero column. What she doesn't know is her fellow journalist on the column has been told that if he grabs any dirt on any of the costumed hero's he gets to print it too. No prizes for guessing which type of article Jamison is hoping to get.
Also just for good measure in issue one, the police are dragging a body out of the lake, a dead woman who appears to have been dropped from high over the lake.
Whodunit, as well as an examination of moral standpoints. What more could you want?

Abadazad

Crossgen
R 25.50

A hundred years ago an author wrote a series of books about Little Martha's adventures in Abadazad. Katie's little brother Matt loves her reading to him about how Martha outwitted the evil "Lanky man". Then one day Matt went on a faire boat ride, and didn't come out the other side.
For five years Katie feels guilty for not going with Matt. Then her ancient neighbour tells her their world of Abadazad really exists, and Matt is held prisoner there by the Lanky Man. Faced with a choice of calling her psychiatrist or saying the magic words over the blue crystal, Kate makes the wrong choice, and finds herself in the magical land, on a journey to save her brother.

Graphic Novel

Crisis on infinite earths
Graphic Novel: DC
R 230.95

In 1985 DC comics had a huge problem, their universe had got away from them.
Every time they wanted to do a slightly different version of one of their superheroes they created a different "parallel universe" where the story happened.
The problem was it became impossible to tell which version of a hero you were seeing, and who had done what.
To solve this situation DC took a bold step, they asked Marv Wolfman to write them a story that destroyed the parallel worlds.
Not only this, but they gave permission for main characters to be killed, without the usual comic allowance for return.
As a result you have crisis, a huge book to encompass a huge storyline that changed the DC universe forever.
Not only is this book notable for the story, but also for the art.
George Perez, one of the comic world's top artists had to learn how to draw some 380 different DC super heroes, a mammoth task for anyone. The cover too is notable for the painting skills of Alex Ross who has not only put onto his cover, every single one of the heroes involved in the story, but they are fully painted as well.

A situation that has resulted in the cover being released as a poster nine feet long and three feet high!

Mexcom

Electronic Sports World Cup
Qualifier

Venue: The Carousel Casino | **Date:** 23 - 25 April 2004
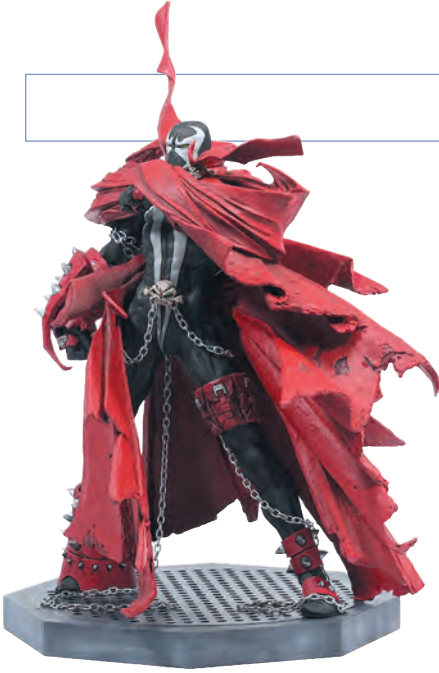To register for the LAN, Counter-Strike or WarCraft III competition go to
www.arena77.com

Spawn Series 25

The latest release from Todd McFarlane consists of covers from his long running Spawn comic book and other spin-offs, including Sam and Twitch and a deluxe boxed set of the Creech from the Image title of the same name. Although these figurines may not have enough movement to really satisfy small kids, and are in fact not suggested for kids under 3 because of small parts, they are really well made, more resembling statues than toys in the amount of detail they have.

Spawn
R 130.00

Hellspawn
R 130.00
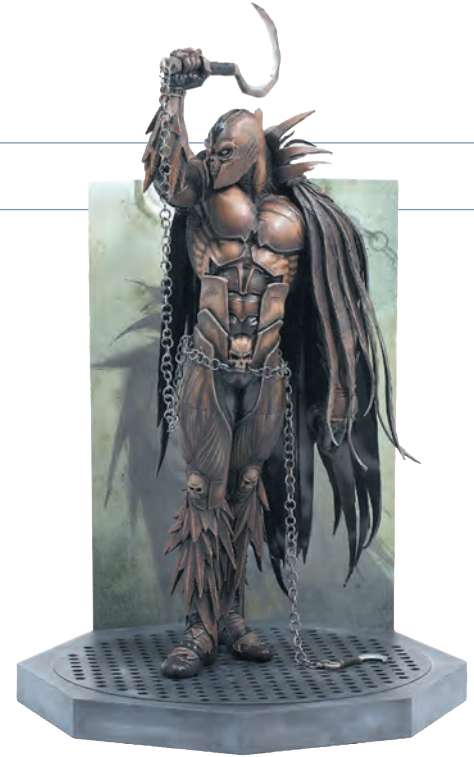
Creech
R 130.00
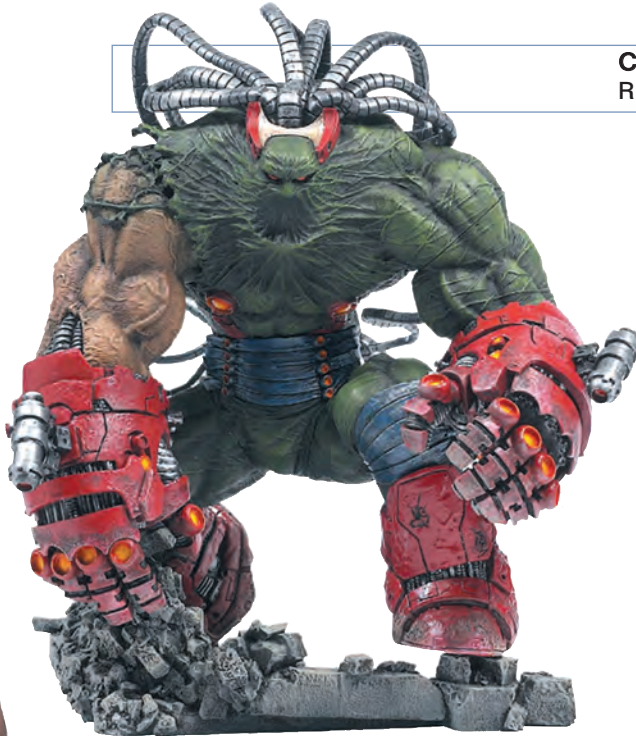
Sam and Twitch
R 130.00

Spawn
R 130.00
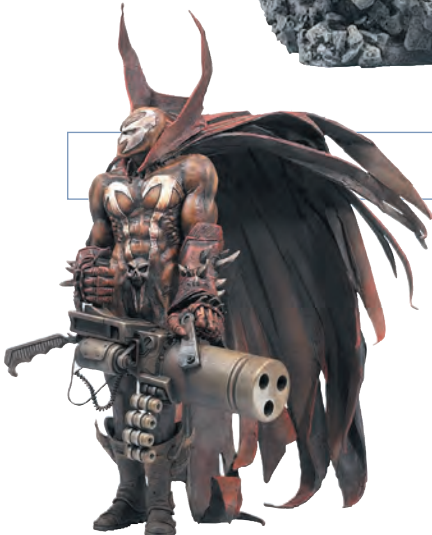
Supplied by Outer Limits (011) 482 3771

Subscribe now and save R 80.00

For your money you get the following:
■ 12 issues of New Age Gaming delivered to your postal address ■ 12 Cover CDs attached to the 12 issues delivered to your postal address ■ 12 clear plastic bags containing 12 issues of New Age Gaming delivered to your postal address also containing 12 Cover CD's ■ **Interesting** text to read each month… ■ **Exciting** files on the Cover CD ■ **The** satisfaction of knowing you have people out there who will pretend to like you because you paid them money ■ A nice 'suck-up' letter once a year reminding you to renew your subscription ■ Being able to say, 'I'm a subscriber' when you call or e-mail us and thinking we're going to treat you better than everyone else. What else…Umm, Yes! Save R 80.00 a year!
Hang on… there's one more thing - never run the risk of missing an issue because you were too slow one day.

Yes, [I bought into the marketing hype] and **I** want to subscribe for R 340.00 - so hurry up and send **me my** first issue!

Your Title [Mr. or Mrs. Etc]: _____

Your Name [first name]: _____

and Surname [last name]: _____

Only R 340

_____
_____
_____

◄Postal Address
Where must we send the magazine [please triple check this - if it's wrong and we have to send another issue just because of something you messed up, it's going to be deducted off your total remaining magazines]

The day you were born: _____

Your age: _____

Contact Details►

Telephone work: _____

Telephone home: _____

Fax: _____

Cellular: _____

E-mail: _____

Please choose payment method
Bank Deposit   Cheque   Postal Order
☐   ☐   ☐

Can we send unsolicited material [special offers] to your postal address or E-mail address - you'll like them!
Yes   No
☐   ☐

Here are the Bank Account details [use these details when putting money into our bank account]
NAG Magazine - Nedbank - Account Number:1469 083 280 - Branch Code:146905 [Hyde Park]
Once you have paid the money into our account fax us a copy of the subscription form plus the bank deposit slip to [011] 704 2948 - no deposit slip = no subscription.

Please make cheques and postal orders out to 'NAG Magazine' and then mail the completed form above [Photostats are acceptable] to 'Subscription Department' P O Box 237 Olivedale 2158.

For further information please contact the subscriptions office on **[011] 704 2701** between the hours of **09h00 & 15h00** or **subs@nag.co.za** anytime.

For those of you lacking a military background that's 9am in the morning to 3pm in the afternoon - if you can't call between those times then send an e-mail to subs@nag.co.za and if you don't have e-mail then send a fax anytime to [011] 704 2948. Please make sure you write clearly. With e-mail and fax enquiries expect to be contacted within 24 hours of sending your enquiry.

Please allow 4-6 weeks delivery for your first issue. Although we try our best to ensure you have your magazine before everyone else this sometimes just isn't the case. Just remember the point of a subscription is convenience and saving cash - not getting it before everyone else.

Please note that all the outlined subscription rates and offers are only valid for postal addresses in South Africa. If you live outside the borders of South Africa and would like to receive the magazine on a monthly basis please contact the subscription department directly for pricing.

Lose weight • Read web comics • Eat toast

www.getupmove.com

Lose weight now! Ask us how! And we'll tell you what this site told us - get an Ignition pad and start playing Dance Dance Revolution at home. Get Up Move is a small piece of the web dedicated to Tanya Jessen, a nice gal who lost 95 pounds playing the game. We tried, but alas those steps are too complicated…

www.webcomics.com

What if we told you there was a place where you can view all of your favourite web comics in one place? Well, if there was, we'd keep it to ourselves, but this is the next-best thing. Webcomics.com harvests comics from member cartoonists (and there are hundreds). You can then set up your own page and select which you want to read every day. The service is slowly growing and makes it much easier to keep tabs on what is good and worth reading out there.

Right now not too many of the mainstream print comics are supported, but a large amount of famed web comics are on there, so get cracking!

www.astro-zombie.com

Welcome to Astro Zombie : Psychedelic : Ambient: Dub : Goa : Psytrance : Global : Prog : Space : Krautrock : Metal : Punk : Gothic. Yes, we just stole the site's subject line, because it actually says it all. Reviews, previews, interviews and news based around what they call Head Music. Assuming that means 'music with intelligence' you won't get a boy-band or the latest queen princess on here. Not even that overplayed song Complicated gets even the bat of an eye. There is some good reading on Norwegian Black Metal, though.

www.drtoast.com

A slice of calmness
In mankind's world of bloodshed
Spread some marmalade

A little Haiku calm, dedicated to toast. This and other useless (or useful, depends how much you like toast) is available on this site. It also has a Q&A on toast (like, why does my toaster burn my toast?) a lot of toast recipes (it's a versatile thing after all) and other resources to make your toast experience that much better.

personal.inet.fi/clan/kummaseta/kitt.htm

There are three kinds of people in the world - our mothers, people who know and adore KITT, and idiots. But to inform you all and expand the cause of global knowledge, KITT is Michael Knight from Knight Rider's computer, built into that cool black car we all wanted to own as kids. And this little flash animation allows you to press KITT's buttons and get him to call you Michael - which is a lot more innocent than we make it sound.

starsiegeuniverse.com

There are over 10 games based in the Starsiege universe, only two being the infamous Starsiege Tribes games. So where did it all begin? And what is the big deal really? We don't know and we don't really care that much. But if you are that interested, there probably isn't a better place on the digital highway.

ATARI 2600 VCS

Classic Machine

Whether it was Pac-Man, Defender or Space Invaders, Atari's 2600 Video Computer System (VCS) offered gamers all the best titles. However, what started so well would come tumbling down at a memorable low point in eighties gaming history.

Released in America in 1977, many see the Atari 2600 VCS as the true beginning of video gaming as we know it. The system, which came packaged with two CX40 joysticks and a CX30 paddle controller (which was particularly suitable for games such as Pong), featured six silver switches, a cartridge slot, and sported a decidedly Seventies-looking wood grain and black plastic finish. These 'Woodies', as they're now called by collectors, were robust and could withstand even the most energetic gaming.

Going on sale at $200, initial sales of the system were slow, but Warner Communications (which had bought Atari for $28 million a year previously) wasn't going to sit back and watch its product flop. Over the next few years, the company managed to secure an impressive number of exclusive titles for the format (both in-house and third-party), and by 1980 the console was booming. In fact, Christmas that year turned out to be a disappointment for many children as Atari simply couldn't manufacture enough hardware to meet the demand, and the system sold out. It was later revealed that the company had made a record profit of $2 billion during that year.

However, with confidence now overflowing from its runaway success, Atari was becoming complacent, and the 2600 started to be inundated with poor-quality releases. By 1983 the market could no longer support the amount of tat that was being churned out and the videogames industry went into a decline. During that year, many smaller developers went out of business, and Atari posted a net loss of $533 million - mostly due to the overproduction of unpopular titles.

A short while later, reports were issued suggesting that a large number of unsold Atari cartridges were being buried in the desert, and it seemed that the company's grip on the videogames industry was finally at an end.

Despite the demise of the 2600 VCS, Atari managed to remain competitive in the industry for a further four years, with cheaper, more compact versions of the console continuing to sell at a steady rate. But during 1988 the company managed to lose another $84.8 million, and with the Nintendo Entertainment System dominating the market, it was impossible for it to regain its foothold. Atari would never again enjoy the success it had had in 1980. Of course, with Infogrames now officially calling itself Atari (after acquiring the company nearly three years ago), that may well change in the near future…

SPECIFICATIONS

CPU (Central Processing Unit): 8-bit MOS Technology
CPU Speed: 1.19 MHz
GPU (Graphics ProcessingUnit): 'STELLA' TIA (Television Interface Adapter)
GPU Speed: 1.19Mhz
Memory: Main RAM (Random Access Memory): 128 Bytes
Resolution: 320 x 200
Colours: 256
Maximum Colours Displayed At Once: 16
Sound Channels: 2
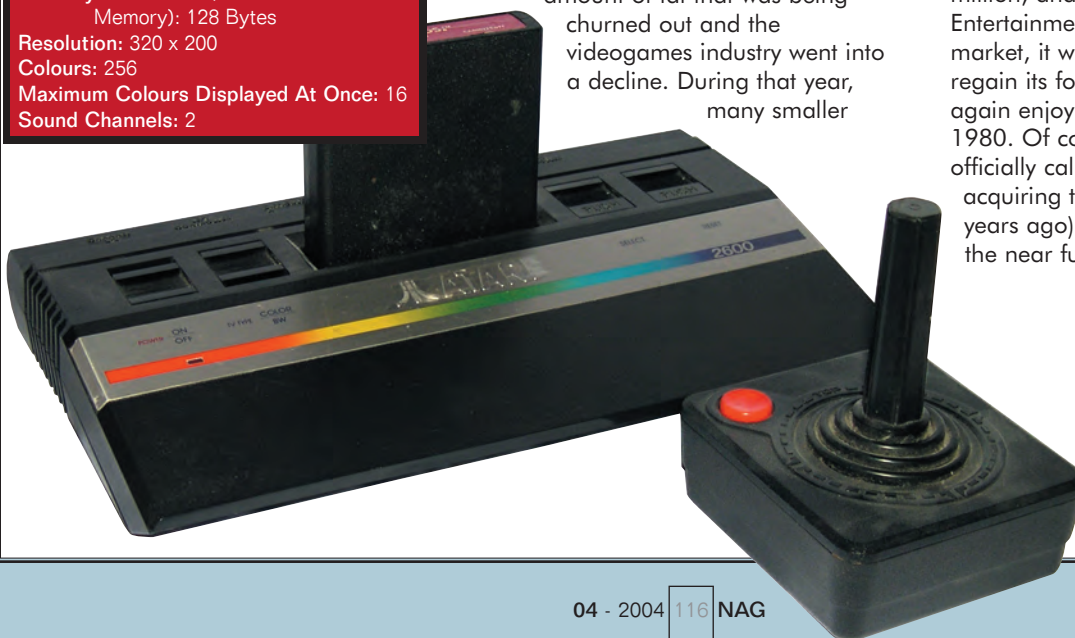
◀ The Atari 2600 VCS was a well-built machine that was seen by many as the first true console. Sadly, the industry slump of 1983 hit Atari hard and the 2600 faded away.

SIX OF THE BEST

Here are six great titles that were available for the Atari 2600. They may look simplistic now, but believe us - at the time these were at the cutting edge of electronic videogames. Forget Grand Theft Auto and check out these beauties…

SKY SKIPPER
Publisher: **Parker Brothers**
Year: **1983**

Based on a Nintendo arcade game, the main objective in Sky Skipper was simply to save caged animals that were being held captive by a gorilla. This was achieved by temporarily knocking him out with bombs, then collecting the animals in your biplane - a task that was made more difficult by the limited amount of fuel you were given at the start of each mission.

Although translated by the Parker Brothers, the game managed to maintain the quality of a Nintendo release - right down to the cutesy visuals.

POLE POSITION
Publisher: **Atari**
Year: **1983**

Once one of the most popular non-character-based videogames of all time, Pole Position was featured in the 1985 children's film, D.A.R.Y.L. Now merely just another retro racing game, Pole Position was extremely popular thanks to its instant pick-up-and-play quality – rather than reaching checkpoints, the objective was simply to pass enough rivals in a set time.

Good-looking and fast moving, the game blended realism (well, it was as realistic as you could hope for back then) with all the thrills, spills and excitement of an arcade racer.

BATTLEZONE
Publisher: **Atari**
Year: **1983**

Based on the 1980 coin-op by Ed Rotberg, Battlezone was an early tank simulator in which you had to destroy enemy battalions, jet fighters and even flying saucers. The original arcade version of the game featured twin joysticks to accentuate the feeling of driving a tank, and while this control feature was obviously removed from the home version, many felt that the 2600 conversion was more playable.

Amazingly, it was possible to get enemies shooting at each other by using those in close range to shield you from others that were further away.

PITFALL
Publisher: **Activision**
Year: **1982**

Playing as jungle explorer Pitfall Harry, the objective of Pitfall was simply to collect treasure, while avoiding all the dangers of the jungle – sort of like I'm A Celebrity, Get Me Out Of Here, only much more realistic and amusing.

You began the game with 2,000 points and more could be earned by collecting money, silver, gold and diamonds. However, each time you made a mistake (which was fairly regularly – this was a tricky game) points were lost.

COMBAT
Publisher: **Atari**
Year: **1978**

Also known as Tank Plus, Combat came packaged with the 2600 and featured a massive 27 games all based around a combat theme. Much like Mario Party or Super Monkey Ball, the game offered a decent enough single-player mode, though it was the multi-player option that really added to the overall longevity.

Space Invaders, on the other hand (which was available at the same time), initially attracted people to the machine, though many gamers found that it became samey far too quickly. Not a problem for Combat…

MARIO BROS.
Publisher: **Atari**
Year: **1983**

The original Mario Bros. was included as a bonus feature with Super Mario Bros. 3 on the NES and with each of the Mario translations on GBA. However, it was sold as a standalone title when Atari published it for the 2600 back in 1983.

Using either Mario or Luigi, the aim of the game was simply to destroy creatures that came out of pipes by knocking them onto their backs then stamping on them. Simple compared to later Mario games, but great fun nonetheless.

ATARI 2600 VCS

Page 1 [top to bottom left to right]
Arcade Golf, Astroblast, A-Team, Bachelor Party, Base Attack, Beamrider, Beany Bopper, Bermuda Triangle, Berzerk, BMX Air Master, Bowling, Boxing, Burgertime, California Games, Chopper Command, Commando, Crazy Climber, Decathlon, Defender, Donkey Kong, Double Dragon, Eggomania, ET, Fishing Derby, Flash Gordon, Frogger, Galaxian, Gauntlet, Golf, Grand Prix, Gremlins, He-Man, Ikari Warriors, Joust, Kaboom, Karate, Klax, Krull, Kung Fu Master, Mario Brothers.

Page 2 [top to bottom left to right]
Mouse Trap, Night Driver, Pac-Man, Pitfall, Pole Position, Popeye, River Raid, Road Runner, Robin Hood, Saboteur, Seaquest, Skateboardin, Sorcerers Apprentice, Space Shuttle, Spider-Man, Spy hunter, Star Fox, Star Gunner, Star Wars-ESB, Stuntman, Submarine Commander, Summer Games, Super Cobra, Super Ferrari, Super Football, Superman, Taz, Tennis, Tetris Copy, Time Pilot, Track and Field, Trick Shot, UFO Patrol, Vanguard, Wall Ball, Wizard, Xenephobe, X-Man, Zaxxon, Zoo Fun.

Classic Machine

LEGACY

The SCUMM Engine

SCUMM, LucasArts' adventure game system, spawned some of the greatest titles in its decade-long lifespan...

**Maniac Mansion
1987**
In one of the first point-n-click adventure games you had to rescue your girlfriend from a creepy mansion where a mad professor held her hostage. The game features five different endings, depending on which characters accompanied you.
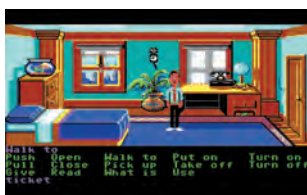
**Zak McKracken and the Alien Mindbenders
1988**
Aliens are controlling our minds using the telephone system! Tabloid reporter Zak finds out and with the help of a bogus crystal and three cohorts he's out to stop them, as well as discover a two-headed squirrel...

**Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade
1989**
Based on the third movie of the same name, Indiana Jones goes after the grail before the Nazis find it. The game was combat intensive, but still remains an adventuring classic.

**Loom
1990**
Music is magic and you had to complete tasks weaving magic using notes, which you observed – thus slowly solving the mystery that darkens the land. One of the more unique games released using SCUMM.

**Day Of The Tentacle
1993**
Return to Maniac's Mansion, this time to stop a crazy tentacle from taking over the world! This can only be done using time travel, but the professor botches up and your three characters end up at the same mansion – but in the past, present and future.

**Indiana Jones and the Fate of Atlantis
1992**
Still regarded as the best Indy game made, it featured three ways to play the game as you hunted for the mythical Atlantis, obviously before the Nazis get there and take advantage of the ancients' fantastic power source.
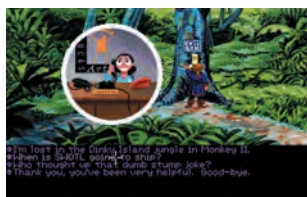
**Monkey Island 2: LeChuck's Revenge
1991**
LeChuck is back, this time as a zombie. Meanwhile, Guybrush still tries to attain infamy, this time by finding the legendary treasure called Big Whoop as well as win back the heart of Governor Elaine Marley.

**The Secret of Monkey Island
1990**
Undoubtly the start of the most popular SCUMM series ever made. Guybrush Threepwood wants to be a pirate! And he goes to Melee Island to do just that, as well as fall in love and eventually battle the ghost pirate LeChuck.

**Sam & Max hit the road
1993**
Arguably the funniest game ever made. Based on a cult comic strip, Sam and Max (a Dog and psychotic rabbit) are on the trial of Bruno, a missing Sasquatch, and his freak girlfriend.

**Full Throttle
1995**
Ben is the leader of the Polecats, a team of bikers in an industrial future. When they get framed for the murder of a famed industrialist, the man has to go out and chainwhip a few people to get the answers he needs to clear his name and free his gang.
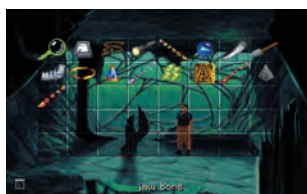
**The DIG
1995**
An asteroid is hurtling to Earth and must be stopped. But the team sent to stop it finds an alien structure and get transported to a strange planet. Featuring a more serious storyline and harder puzzles, it had limited appeal but still remained a classic.
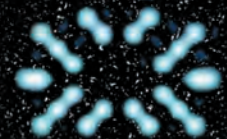
**Curse of Monkey Island
1997**
The last of the SCUMM games, the third Monkey Island was far more animated, leaving behind the mostly pixel feel of former games. This time Guybrush accidentally curses Elaine with a wedding ring and has to find the cure. And, of course, Le Chuck is back and nastier than ever.

"IF YOU'RE GOING TO CONQUER THE UNIVERSE, DRESS ACCORDINGLY."

INTRODUCING A RANGE OF GAMING-INSPIRED T-SHIRTS, EXCLUSIVE TO MUSICA.
These t-shirts are imported from the **UK** based company, **Joystick Junkies**, which combines clubbing, fashion and gaming.

THE RANGE IS AVAILABLE AT THE FOLLOWING SELECTED MUSICA STORES: Brooklyn, Canal Walk, Cavendish, Cresta, Eastgate 1, Eastgate 2, Fourways, Gateway, Greenacres, Menlyn Park, Midlands Mall, N1 City, Polokwane, Riverside Mall, Secunda, Shelley Beach, Somerset Mall, Tableview, Tygervalley, V& A Waterfront, Waterfall Mall, Welkom and Westville.

**MUSICA.
THE SOUL STORE**
www.musica.co.za

WHAT'S IN A LAME?

RAMPAGE

What's in a nick? Maybe it's your way to establish a semblance of identity for yourself, but the rest of us have names. And we like being refered to by said names. Unless you change your name - ass might be suitable...

There is a certain little something that I just don't understand. Actually, there's a hell of a lot I don't get, but this particular thing has prompted me to spew out another article.

I have a name. I am not going to say what it is, because some of the less stable readers of this publication may be able to find me, but I assure you that I do have one. It was given to me by parents with a sense of humour, and it's a horrible one, but I do have it and it is mine. It is how I am identified to the world. Say my name to someone who knows me, and they get the unpleasant mental picture that is associated with it.

I also have a nickname. A nick, in other words. Say it, and people think about these horrid little articles of mine. It is an alter-ego, as it were, a facet of my personality. In fact, I think it is quite appropriate to that side of my being. But, while it describes that area of who I am, it does not describe the entirety of my existence. It is not, in other words, my identity.

So why do people who know my real name insist on calling me Ramjet? Why why why? People who know me and know more about me than just the Ramjet side of things still insist on calling me by that name. I just don't get it.

But it goes further than that. There are people out there who insist on being addressed by their nicks. I am sorry, but this is ridiculous. I refuse to call some pimple faced, spectacled, weedy geek "Vorkon the Destroyer." Hell, I won't even call him "Vork." I will call him by his name, his legal identity as he is recognized by the real world. Should the nerd go and change his name legally to "Vorkon the Destroyer," then maybe I would call him that - if only while pointing out what a sad and pathetic life form he really is.

It would be better if nicks were at least reasonable and realistic… said geek might reasonably be called "zit" or "weed." But gamers give themselves such over-blown, ridiculous nicks anyway, like "Vorkon the Destroyer."

Nick names used to be given to people by other people, and they often described something about the person they were given to. I think we should go back to that system. Gamers should be given nicks by their peers. There would be a whole lot less of that "Vorkon the Destroyer" rubbish around, at least. And just think how satisfying it would be to yell out "I fragged Zit again" at LANs.

NEXT MONTH

Soft Stuff: [Granny gums]

Well after this issue it's going to be hard to deliver the goods in May - but deliver we will and must we goods, or something like that! Apart from the usual sections one thing stands out from the crowd - a monster Half-Life 2 preview [we hope - check the cover if in doubt], reviews of all the latest games on all the available platforms, fun, laughter and little puppies on a soft warm quilt. As you can see we only really have one confirmed article next issue - so expect a few blank pages if things don't improve soon. We also look at Wireless Internet technology [if James can get a signal on his farm]. Lastly we look at the new James Bond game and the ever impressive Castle Strike.
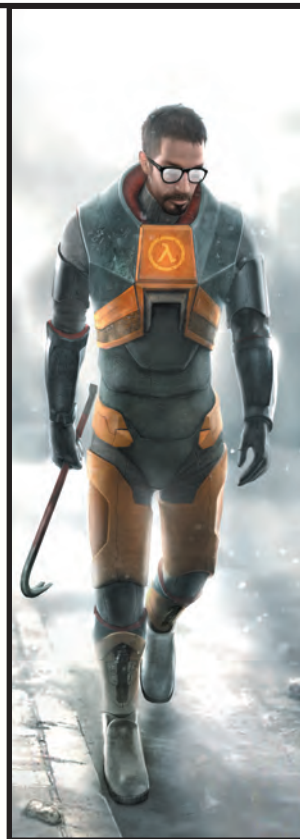
Hard Stuff: [Granny sweets]

We've got keyboards, cables, tights, graphic cards, new technology, and old technology with new stickers on it, a rusty pipe and a few other interesting hardware items. Yes, it'll be more interesting than keyboards and cables and there are no tights. Do look out for our group test if you're planning on making some case modifications to your rig. Yippee!

Timing:

The May issue will be on-shelf 29 April 2004.

Disclaimer: The makers of NAG Magazine would like to insist that readers do not try and recreate anything between these two covers. Failure to comply will result in absolutely nothing - just consider this an empty threat. [*Right, enough lameness for one issue, Ed*]

"I'd like to thank the academy…"

PlayStation 2

SPYHUNTER 2