

NAG

SOUTH AFRICA'S LEADING TECHNOLOGY & COMPUTER GAMING MAGAZINE



MADE IN SOUTH AFRICA

- GTA: **SAN ANDREAS** REVIEW ◀◀
- DVD WRITERS** - WE BURN 15 OF THEM ◀◀
- MEN OF VALOR **REVIEW** ◀◀
- HALF-LIFE 2 **BENCHMARKING** ◀◀
- INTERVIEW** - ATI GETS TECHNICAL ◀◀
- DESTROY ALL **HUMANS** PREVIEW ◀◀
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FlatOut
Zoo Tycoon 2
Rollercoaster Tycoon 3

NAG January 2005

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Microsoft Specification Library 2005 | i320x CPU | 2GB RAM | DVD-R 16X Drive | 4GB HD

Demos: FlatOut | Zoo Tycoon 2 | Rollercoaster Tycoon 3 | Derelict
Movies: Battlefield 2 | Constantine | rAge 2004 | Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith
Drivers: ATI Catalyst 4.11 [Windows XP - 2000]
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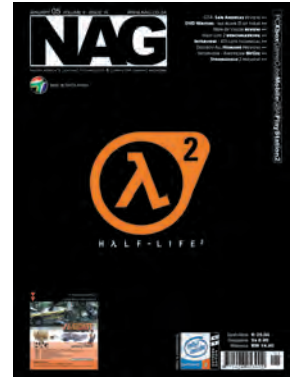
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Small
PlayStation 2



fun,
anyone?

The obvious choice for cover this issue was Half-Life 2, the not so obvious choice was just using the logo. The reasoning: Half-Life 2 is a genre revolutionising classic and also the best first person shooter we've ever seen so it deserves a special edition cover of sorts. The interesting thing about the cover this issue is that it's slightly raised, or embossed if you want to get technical. This [embossing] was a relatively simple process that required me sending a few extra image files to our printer and I think about 2 phone calls. Okay, so I guess it's not that interesting but hey what else am I supposed to say here? At least it's the truth. Go to page 46 and read all about it.



W

elcome to the world famous NAG Magazine experience...

This might sound a little strange to some of you but I'm glad it's all over. Half-Life 2 is finally done, out and finished.

This issue does welcome in a new year but it also heralds the dawn of a new and exciting age in gaming. This epic new adventure we're all about to embark on is largely thanks to the passing of two of the most over hyped and highly anticipated first person shooters in the history of computer gaming full stop.

DOOM 3 and Half-Life 2 are finally on their way to becoming footnotes in the big history book of gaming culture, or perhaps even whole chapters.

It's an oddly liberating feeling to finally be rid of them so we can get on with our lives - sounds dramatic but consider this, many development cycles can stretch out to 5 years. This translates poorly in the monthly magazine business because it represents around 60 editions or if you do the sums 7440 magazine pages we create and you read between one game and its sequel - theoretically that is. It's absurd and I'm often mystified how these marketing and PR types can stretch things out for years - where does all this information come from and is it all really necessary? Who is at fault here, is it a push or pull association - is the demand for all this that high or is the marketing machine that aggressive?

In the past all you had was 2 pages from an overseas magazine and a scant preview to go on and games back then never missed a release date because they didn't have a release date. Now we've got conceptual art, personal diaries, new screenshots [each month], leaked artwork and fan sites! If this wasn't all bad enough it's set to get much worse with the launch of the Nintendo DS and upcoming PSP, Xbox 2 and PlayStation 3, new 3D acceleration buzz words we've haven't even heard of yet and bigger and better cooling solutions. Can one compare the gaming industry to a bizarre alternative Hollywood where the games are the celebrity stars and NAG is nothing more than an elaborate gossip magazine all justified because it's an intellectual hobby? I'm not sure how to feel about that one.

But back to my point [let's forget about all that gossip stuff for a second]. Thanks to the two culprits mentioned above [DOOM 3 and Half-Life 2] for the last 2 years the future of gaming has been clouded with numerous delays and announcements and screenshots and snippets of information surrounding these two games and their supporting infrastructure, that most gamers have forgotten about everything else - and we're just as guilty. If you look back over 2004 you'll discover these two titles have dominated the press, Internet and numerous other places and now that they are finally

Where to begin...

out, reviewed, poked and prodded to death we can finally look forward to the future. This also means everyone can stop anguishing about their machine specification and buy something other than a 3D card. I guess with Unreal 3 and Quake IV looming we'll never escape this cycle of big action games occupying all the headlines... until the next Diablo announcement I expect, oh and let's not forget what might be announced in Los Angeles this year at E3.

But enough unrefined philosophy from me, remember I don't have a degree in anything useful except being born to do this thing called gaming which I'll do until they unstick my rotting WASD configured fingers and pry the mouse from my cold dead hand. I'm sure I've heard that line somewhere else...?

I-magine fire their rockets again...

In December Len and I were invited to the offices of I-Imagine to take a peek at their new game in development. It was a Monday, the visit was originally scheduled for the previous Saturday but guess what - there was a little delay. ;) It looks like this kind of thing happens no matter where you are in the world. The funny thing is when I heard there was a delay I didn't even blink twice - that's gaming culture for you. So anyway, about their new game - it's like this, you control this <NDA> and it <NDA> over an <NDA> where you get to <NDA> and other cool <NDA>. Exciting or what? Well what did you expect this early on and no, there's no release date to speak of. Jokes aside it was a privilege to take a look at their latest project and they even wanted to know what we thought about it. As you know by now we're always full of comments about poor game design and lame storytelling but oddly when faced with some real input for a change it proved to be difficult to be unbiased and subjective instead of indiscriminately unloading all barrels. But we did give them as much 'useful' input as we thought applicable before they started nodding and smiling. The hardest part of the whole experience was keeping quiet about what we thought would be a cool idea in the game - even though a few slipped past. Anyway, it was an amazing way to wrap up a magazine deadline and the end of the year - witnessing the birth of something really new and exciting. This is a thank you to the good people at I-Imagine - just a pity about that contract you forced us to sign, and next time I'm saying no to the chicken burger.

Other than that, nothing else of use, except to enjoy this issue. 2005 is set to be a hell of a ride!

Michael James
[Editor]

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: **January Caption**

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

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



NAG's January Caption



'View from inside a robot long drop' - NAG's [99.1% lame] effort

November winner



Termite 662 to Termite 539, "quick, pull the carpet now!" - Almero Stoltz

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Support Dual DDR400
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& S/PDIF support
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SPECIFICATIONS:

		EX65PE	EX65	EX18
CPU	TYPE	Intel P4/Celeron	Intel P4/Celeron	AMD K7
	FSB	400/533/800	400/533/800	200/266/333
CHIPSET		Intel 865PE / ICH5	Intel 865PE / ICH5	nForce2-GT/MCP-T
VGA		None	8X AGP (OnDie)	8X AGP (OnDie)
SOUND		AC97 5.1	AC97 5.1	AC97 5.1
LAN		10/100/1000	10/100/1000	10/100/1000
SATA		2	2	None
USB2.0		2	2	2
IEEE1394		2	2	1
DIMENSIONS		300(L) x 200(W) x 185(H)mm	300(L) x 200(W) x 185(H)mm	300(L) x 200(W) x 185(H)mm

Looking Forward!

words james francis

Last month I lamented what I thought was important for gaming in 2004. But that's all in the past; what will 2005 hold? Naturally I have an opinion on that as well...

The most obvious part of 2005 will be what developers make of the Source and Doom 3 engines. While we'll still see a lot of action from the stalwart Unreal Tournament, these new engines are really of the next generation. At the moment it's very hard to judge which engine will be more popular: id underutilized their technology while I suspect Valve got a lot more mileage out of Source, so it's up to the third party developers to see what comes out of this friendly war.

2005 will also be the year of the DS and PSP. Both units will be out in most of the world throughout next year, plus we'll be able to judge them thanks to more software releases. Matters like the PSP's battery life will finally be resolved in one way or another and anyone watching the performance of that particular unit will get a good idea how open the public is to convergence and watching movies on a mobile platform.

Staying on the console front, rumours hold that Microsoft is to reveal the Xbox's successor at CES while the PlayStation 3 will be unveiled at E3 and the Tokyo Game Show will host the first playable PS3 titles. Maybe we'll hear something more about Nintendo's Revolution as well. We should also start hearing a lot more about Sony's online plans and strategy for the next generation, something I suspect will play a major factor in their plans after the immense success of Xbox Live.

We can start calling 2005 the year of the MMOG. With both World of Warcraft and Everquest II having shipped in November '04, not to mention several launches planned for other titles throughout this year, I don't think we'll see the genre move out of its uncertainty, but it will have a far more solid footing on what to expect from the market. Sadly we won't see much of that happen locally, mainly due to the costs involved to run such a server, but there is a light at the far end of the tunnel: local gamers should keep an eye open for changes in the Broadband scene as certain regulations protecting Telkom fall away in February, something that could really bring a lot of growth to gaming and the IT sector.

on the wire



Superheroes face off in court

Marvel sues NCsoft and Cryptic Studios

Marvel has taken legal action against Korean publisher NCsoft and developer Cryptic Studios over copyright infringement within their massively multiplayer online role-playing game City of Heroes. However, the basis of the law-suit is somewhat bizarre - the companies in question are being sued over player-created characters that resemble trademarked Marvel superheroes, rather than about content created by the developer. This suit, should it succeed, could set a legal precedent that severely limits in-game customisation options in future computer games. This, in turn, would result in far more restrictive games being developed.

Xbox 2 development is starting Begun, the Console War have

Recently Tecmo unsurprisingly announced that they are supporting the Xbox 2. The company was responsible for Xbox exclusives Ninja Gaiden and the latter part of the Dead or Alive franchise. Tecmo's President, Junji Nakamura, didn't stop there, though. In an interview he slammed Sony for not being forthcoming with more information, saying that Microsoft are far more responsive (probably thanks to the publisher's good relationship with the Xbox).



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EyeToy: Kinetic

Get thin while you play

Sony and Nike Motionworks have collaborated to bring EyeToy: Kinetic to PlayStation 2 in early 2005. The program is designed to help users increase and maintain fitness levels by means of interactive exercise routines, and making use of the EyeToy camera. In addition to general fitness, Kinetic also focuses on reactions, posture, balance, breathing and body toning and conditioning. Fitness fanatics will point out that warm-up and stretching before exercising are crucial, and Kinetic doesn't overlook this aspect, either.

Star Wars RTS coming

LucasArts recently revealed that Petroglyph, a development company made up of former Westwood (best known for pioneering the real-time strategy genre with Dune 2, and then the groundbreaking Command & Conquer series) employees, is at work on a new real-time strategy title based on the **Star Wars universe**. The company will be aiming at satisfying both hardcore gamer and casual audiences - a difficult challenge indeed.

EA employees sue publisher Overworked and underpaid, like everyone

Electronic Arts and the industry as a whole is under scrutiny for bad employment practices after several workers employed at the publisher's Californian division filed suit against the company for abuse of employees, including frequent overtime, often without remunerations for the extra time or for holiday and sick days lost. The case is based on Californian employment laws that now empower this kind of action and it's expected that EA will contest the case.

The event was fuelled even further by the now-infamous EA_spouse blog, a journal posting that details the problems one EA employee had to endure during a project, lamenting the lack of payment for overtime. The controversy has since spawned an open letter from the IGDA (International Game Developers Association) criticizing working conditions in the industry, a topic that has long been an uncomfortable thorn in the industry's side but one that was avoided until now.

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Steam-clean your colon

words ed dracon

With a pernicious penchant for infuriating those trying to just *play the damn game*, Valve's content delivery system Steam has certainly been getting its wholly justified share of flack since the release of *Half-Life 2* with its incompetent authentication system. My own pathetic attempts at getting the development kit for *Half-Life 2* have left me cursing the nefarious *Content Server 25* and it's refusal to let me download the SDK.

Yet despite the endless hassles with authenticating *Half-Life 2*, regardless of the infuriating Steam is currently unavailable messages, I still have a certain good feeling about Steam and how it sees the future of content delivery. With an advanced peer-to-peer system and interesting ideas about regionalized server distribution, Steam can do well by the industry and gamers once all the kinks have been ironed out.

Let me digress quickly and explain why, in overly complex terms few people will understand. Steam is a broadband (hence South Africa's problems with it) business platform for direct software delivery and content management. That means, distributed file systems and a shared set of technology components. Essentially this translates into situations such as downloading and installing Game A, and finding that when Game B is released you already have over 50% of it in your hard-drive due to the shared resources between Game A and B. This is an exciting idea. It opens up a plethora of avenues for gamers and developers alike.

In the meantime however, Steam represents a kludgy and haphazardly implemented system for curbing piracy and short-changing gamers who have to deal with its constant crap. Well, as someone possibly important once said, 'You have to break a few eggs to make an omelette... or a mess.'

miktar's soapbox



Tasteless or Educational?

JFK assassination game stirs controversy

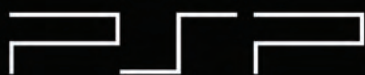
Scottish developer Traffic Games released a game entitled *JFK: Reloaded*, which contains a section allowing players to experience the infamous assassination of the US' 35th president by playing as Lee Harvey Oswald, has incurred negative responses from the Kennedy family, who obviously regards the game as insensitive and exploitive, especially since gamers are awarded for mimicking Oswald's shots.

The developer doesn't agree. Kirk Ewing from traffic Games says it was done with full respect and allows a new generation to relive history from a different point of view. Since that distinction is left to the player, though, the Kennedy's doesn't agree, calling the game "despicable".



Battlefield: Modern Combat and Black on Xbox 2

Electronic Arts has let it be known that *Battlefield: Modern Combat*, from Digital Illusions, and *Black*, from Criterion, will both be appearing on the next version of the Xbox. Currently, no decision has been reached regarding development of these titles for PlayStation 3.



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Cameron does anime

Titanic director back at work

James Cameron has confirmed that he is working on a live-action adaptation of Yukito Kishiro's Battle Angel Alita.

"We're in pre-production right now on a project called BATTLE ANGEL, which is something I've been working on for several years and we're finishing up the shooting draft right now. We've been designing - it's a big science fiction film and there are a couple of things that are interesting about this project," he says in the interview. "The main character, even though it's a live-action film, will be done with CG animation and the second thing that's interesting is we're going to be shooting it in 3D using the stereo imaging system that we've been developing for the documentaries."

Vin Diesel in gaming

Some time ago, actor Vin Diesel formed Tigon, a games development company. Its first project, in collaboration with Starbreeze, was Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay for Xbox. Diesel has stated that a sequel is now being planned. Tigon is now also involved in another project with film director Singer, of X-Men and The Usual Suspects fame. Titled Secret Service, it deals with exactly that government agency, and is claimed to place emphasis on authenticity and realism.



Taking your console to Hollywood Increased movie-game synergy in Japan

Capcom has announced that the company will be increasing its involvement in tying in game and film properties.

An animated movie based on the Mega Man Battle Network games is on the cards, as is a live action (that is, using actors) Onimusha-inspired film, the latter to be released in 2006. Devil May Cry will also, if all goes according to plan, be making a silver screen appearance. Capcom also intends to develop more games based on films, with the key philosophy being to expand on the relevant settings, rather than trying to recreate films' story lines, this latter being the most common mistake made in this context.

Capcom isn't the only gaming company looking closely at the big screen - Nintendo plans to enter the animated film industry.

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Portable guide books for popular platforms

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Publishing house O'Reilly has released a series of pocket guides for the Treo, iBook, PowerBook and Xbox. The "Fan Books" are designed to show owners of these devices how to get the most from their systems. The emphasis is on making users aware of various tricks to personalise their systems, and also on making users aware of their less well documented features and capabilities.

www.oreilly.com



Xbox 2 rumours

Some rumours have started to circulate regarding the next version of Microsoft's Xbox console. Firstly, these would indicate that the system will be called Xbox Next, and two versions besides the basic one are hinted at - Xbox Next HD, which will sport a hard drive, and Xbox Next PC, which is believed to be a console-PC hybrid, although given that the Xbox 2 is based on PowerPC G5 processors, should this latter prove to be true, it will be interesting to see how it is implemented. A hard drive version of the Xbox 2 would be perfectly logical, as such a version would offer additional functionality, such as media processing and management.



X2 - The Return

An expansion pack to Egosoft's and Deep Silver's highly acclaimed X2 - The Threat will be seeing the light of day next February. The story, which is claimed to be six times as long as that of the original game, picks up shortly after the end of The Threat. Various new features have been added, including the ability to connect factories into complexes, new ships and weapons, re-definable keys, interface enhancements and an improved menu system. No word on multiplayer support, however.

Capcom announced a growth in revenues, supported mostly by the success that the **Resident Evil** and **Megaman** (Rockman in Japan) franchises have achieved for the publisher.

Sony's debt rating has been dropped from A+ to A. It's not a major downgrade, but it will make it harder for Sony to secure funding from investors at certain interest rates.

THQ has bought Australian developer **Blue Tongue**, currently working on Polar Express titles as well as two unannounced projects.

The day before the release of Halo 2, Microsoft made good on its promise to crack down on modified Xboxes by locking them out of the **Xbox Live** online service.

Rumour has it that **Valve** released a 'pirate' copy of **Half-Life 2** on the **Torrent** networks as a means to sniff out and ban pirates' accounts. The developer hasn't commented on this.

Tecmo is suing Japanese magazine **PC-Giga** for publishing screenshots of **DOA Volleyball** characters in the nude. The company successfully sued the creator of the tool that allows this modification earlier this year.

Slitherine continues its 4X (eXplore, eXpand, eXploit, eXterminate) strategy series with **Legion II: Civilization & Empire**, set in the ancient Mediterranean. The game appears to have an Age of Empires style in terms of game dynamics, and will be released late next year.

Battlefield 1942 developer **DICE** might be bought by **Electronic Arts**, who already own a 19% stake in the company and has shown that it's interested in the rest of the pie.

A deal has been signed by **Digital Illusions** and **Electronic Arts** to develop a game for PlayStation 2, Xbox and the next-generation consoles on their way from Sony and Microsoft. At present, little else is known about the project, barring the estimated release date of late 2006 or early 2007 - the game is planned to be released concurrently with the PlayStation 3 and the Xbox 2.

Nintendo in 2005

The first quarter of the year will see the release of Resident Evil 4, Virtua Quest and Star Fox: Assault on GameCube, with Legend of Zelda, Geist, Donkey Konga 2 and Fire Emblem following within the following three months. Game Boy Advance owners have only Legend of Zelda: The Minish Cap to look forward to early in the year, but the following couple of months will herald the release of Ace Combat, Klonoa 2, WarioWare Twisted, Mario Party Advance, Fire Emblem 2 and Pokemon Emerald. For DS owners, Wario Ware Touched! and Pokemon Dash will be the early treats, with Metroid Prime Hunters arriving somewhat later in the first half of 2005.



Next Carmageddon

An eagle-eyed observer recently spotted "Carmageddon TV" trademarked on the US Patent and Trademark Office web-site, the name filed by SCi Games. This name may be what the next Carmageddon title will be called, and this would be consistent with the fact that it is being developed (by Visual Sciences) for the PlayStation 2 and Xbox consoles, to be released next year.



Legend of Kay

A young cat studying martial arts is called upon to rescue his fellow villagers, who have been captured by an evil emperor and his invading "gorilla army" (cute!) This action-adventure game also features elements of role-play and beat-'em-ups, and will be available from JoWood in February.

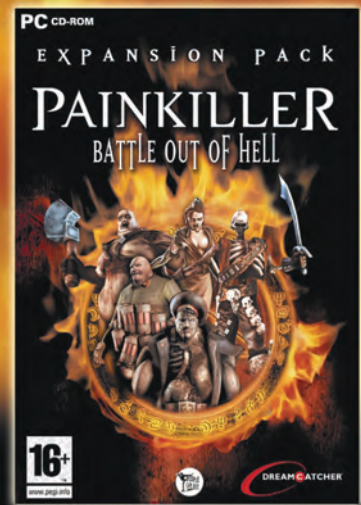


PC CD-ROM

PAINKILLER
BATTLE OUT OF HELL

EXPANSION PACK

PAINKILLER
BATTLE OUT OF HELL



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Game prototypes? Sony, Microsoft and Nokia on board for scheme aimed at reducing risk in concept development

British company Game Republic has designed and presented a business scheme called the Game Republic Integrated Prototype Production programme, which aims at reducing cost risks involved in game development. GRIPP will help developers reach the concept approval stage, essentially a prototype, at which point format holders such as Sony, Microsoft and Nokia will make a decision regarding the proposed product. Numerous publishers have already signed on as partners, and Sony and Microsoft have both responded very positively to the programme.

Halo the movie

Rumours abound on the big screen adaptation

Samuel L. Jackson and Ed Harris in a Halo movie directed by Ridley Scott? The thought of that, despite the terrible reputation game-related movies still manage to maintain, is great news for fans of the series. Despite our misgivings over Halo 2 and the over-inflated scores it achieved, a live-action sci-fi movie starring Master Chief sounds like a good idea, especially with such a stellar cast. It's all still rumours, though. Sci-Fi News scooped the story, even posting several story boards for the movie, saying Warner Brothers is the studio behind the project. But Ain't It Cool, another popular movie rumour site, contradicted this, saying that none of the names mentioned have confirmed that they are involved or even interested. Ridley Scott's connection is thanks to Bungie - the company refuses that anyone other than the Alien director does the honours - so far the famed director hasn't said anything either.



Oni Koei Announce Co-Development of Film and video game

Based on a script by the late Akira Kurosawa, Oni will be set in 16th century Japan and will deal with the enigma of a blond samurai seeking to discover his past and destiny. Kou Shibusawa Production and Kurosawa Production are responsible for this film project, expected to be completed in 2006. Koei will collaborate with the abovementioned companies by developing a game for the next generation of the PlayStation, as well as multiple format content and merchandise. The game is to be released concurrently with the film's theatrical debut in 2006.

web scores

	[PC] Half-Life 2	[PC] Codename Panzers	[PC] FIFA 2005	[PC] Men of Valor
NAG [100]	96	81	82	88
gamespy.com [5]	5	4	NR	3.5
gamespot.com [10]	9.2	8.8	8.9	7.9
pc.ign.com [10]	9.7	8.3	8.6	6.8
	[Xbox] Chronicles of Riddick	[PS2] GTA: San Andreas	[PS2] Crash Twinsanity	[PS2] Tony Hawks Underground 2
NAG [100]	87	95	69	76
gamespy.com [5]	NR	5	NR	4.5
gamespot.com [10]	9.3	9.6	7.3	8.3
ign.com [10]	NR	9.9	7.7	8.6



Parents support the ESRB

Ratings system finds favour with guardians

The ESRB has sought to back its voluntary rating system amidst ongoing controversy of violence in games with a study by Peter D. Heart Research Associates, which found that 83 of parents polled agreed with ratings and 5% even felt that the ratings were too strong. The results come from polling over 400 parents by showing video footage of 80 games released in the last twelve months. The parents then responded on whether the related rating suited the game.

The ESRB ratings have become an important factor in the industry's fight to keep games away from government intervention, a battle that the movie and music industries also have to endure. Luckily a large amount of US senators and government notables are in favour of the system and feel that it works. "Nearly forty percent of all Americans plan on giving or receiving a computer or video game this holiday season," said Senator Rick Santorum (R-NC). "I urge parents to be aware of the ESRB rating system and the guidance it can provide."



EA broadens involvement with music New music label emerges

Electronic Arts has entered into a joint venture with Cherry Lane Music Publishing. This new subsidiary has been named Next Level Music, and is not a record label as such, but rather a channel allowing emerging artists to gain exposure via the computer games medium. Games have been recognised as a means for songs to receive more "airplay" than even broadcast media can provide, as has been demonstrated by games like Grand Theft Auto. The publisher plans to sign up new acts as well as publish and promote their own catalogue of music.

Gran Turismo 4 ready, new title announced

Polyphony's Gran Turismo has gone gold and will have hit Japanese shelves in mid-December. Two more GT titles are now planned. The first is Gran Turismo for Boys, which will either be heavily discounted or totally free, and which will be aimed at children up to the age of about 8. This title will be a hook to capture the future male auto enthusiast market. Gran Turismo 5 will break with the franchise's previous history by incorporating damage modelling. The reason for its previous absence is the added level of complexity in terms of development, but Polyphony feels ready to take this challenge on.



PlayStation 2



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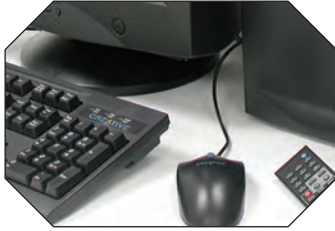
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usa release dates



January 2005

- BloodRayne 2
- Chaos League
- Cold War
- Creature Conflict: The Clan Wars
- Driv3r
- Dungeon Lords
- Guild Wars
- Hearts of Iron 2
- Playboy The Mansion
- Postal 2: Apocalypse Weekend
- Project: Snowblind
- The Matrix Online
- The Punisher
- The Stalin Subway
- Star Wars Republic Commando
- Stolen

January 2005

- Far Cry Instincts
- Fullmetal Alchemist & the Broken Angel
- Full Throttle: Hell on Wheels
- God of War
- NFL Street 2
- Playboy The Mansion
- Project Snowblind
- Spy vs Spy
- Suikoden IV
- The Getaway: Black Monday
- The Punisher
- Virtua Quest
- War Chess

January 2005

- Dead to Rights II
- Forza Motorsport
- Full Throttle: Hell on Wheels
- Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath
- Predator: Concrete Jungle
- Project Snowblind
- Resonance
- Scrapland
- Spy vs Spy
- The Fast and the Furious
- The Punisher
- Tork: Prehistoric Punk

January 2005

- Resident Evil 4
- Virtua Quest
- World Championship Poker

january at a glance

07

Movie

Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow
www.skycaptain.com



07

Gaming

Naked IT CS Clan Competiton
www.nakedit.co.za



21

Movie

Blade Trinity
www.bladetrinity.com



21

DVD

Catwoman



28

Legend

Jerry Seigel, creator of Superman, died at age 81 on this day in 1996.





Bytes from South Korea

by matthew lowry

The other day, while pushing aside heaps of dirty clothes, tripping over piles of CDs and wading through the frightful amassing debris that is my apartment, I happened upon my collection of PC game CDs (interestingly the only neatly arranged possessions I have). While flipping through them I realized something so obvious I am loathe to admit that it has taken this long for me to reflect on the thought.

What dawned on me is that every PC title I own was produced in the USA, and as an honorary American I have been press-ganged to take up arms against the many misbehaving scoundrels that the rest of the world monotonously keeps pitching against the great US of A. Oh how I long to just once lock and load my German mg 42 machine gun, and ready my sights on the approaching allied forces at Normandy. Would it be the end of the world to add an extra German-centric campaign to the latest WWII shooter? After all, WWII did end 60 years ago, and its not like I'm asking to fly airliners into buildings or anything like that.

Could Korea bring the needed diversity in games that we, as international gamers, long for? Quite possibly.

Would you believe that Korean-made online game exports are estimated to reach as high as \$250 million this year, and if the trend continues we should start to see new and exciting Korean titles hitting the shelves, challenging the current hold that the US has on the market. Hopefully the competitive nature of industry will result in better games, as opposed to more frequent games of lesser quality.

Keeping a close eye on the situation is The Korea Game Development & Promotion Institute, a government-run organisation whose sole purpose is to promote gaming in Korea. Their vision is "to become one of the top-three global gaming nations by 2007". This year Korea's game makers have signed contracts with numerous foreign buyers, including CCR Inc, HanbitSoft Inc and Sunny YNK. Maybe the next time you load up the latest FPS you'll be playing as Korea's last hope against the onslaught of western society.

Here is a game concept for you to conjure with - Stop western society from taking over the world!

At the moment Korean online games are primarily exported to Japan, China and Taiwan, but the KGDI expects that as broadband usage increases in the US and Europe sales will grow in those areas. With Korean games like NCsoft's Lineage and Gravity Corp's Ragnarok already enormously popular in Asia, the future looks bright for gamers around the world.

Other Gravity Corp games include Rose Online and Requiem, and NCsoft titles include Lineage II, Gameting, City of Heroes, Guild Wars, Alter Life, Tabula Rasa and Auto Assault.

As Seen On TV

Ever wondered how you would promote Ratchet & Clank 3 in Japan? By breaking wind...



Two Japanese school boys talk about the strength of their farts...



The first kid breaks wind - an admirable effort...



The second kid breaks wind as well - destroying the wall...



...and everything else behind it, thanks to his superior Level 3 fart.



The point? In the game you can upgrade your weapons insanely. Simple!

"DEATH IS AN ARCADE CONCEPT, INCURRED TO KEEP YOU PUTTING MONEY IN. IT HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH NARRATIVE, SO IT'S NOT A MECHANIC WE'RE IMPOSING ON YOU"

AMERICAN MCGEE

AMERICAN MCGEE

TMEIC

Before you ask, American McGee really is called American. Clearly, when you're promoting a game and your name is part of its title, it pays to have a distinctive moniker, but this isn't a marketing ploy. McGee's mother knew of a girl called America and thought it was a pretty name, and so American became, well, American. Most gamers will associate the unusual name with American McGee's *Alice*, a twisted take on Lewis Carroll's *Alice In Wonderland* and *Through The Looking Glass* that became a cult success on the PC when it was released in 2000. Though the game was published by Electronic Arts, *Alice* was McGee's project and established him as something of a gaming auteur.

McGee's new title, *Scrapland*, boasts an 'American McGee Presents' tag to advertise its credentials, although McGee insists that wasn't deliberate. "It happened by accident when we were making *Alice* and I fought against it tooth and nail," he says, "but later they went ahead and did it anyway. Of course, later it made no sense to dump a brand EA had spent good money building." EA's insistence on using McGee's name on his first game may seem unusual, but apparently there's a good reason why we don't see Shigeru Miyamoto's *Mario Kart* or Hideo Kojima's *Metal Gear Solid*. "Publishers want to build their brand," explains McGee. "They want you to think 'EA Games' or 'Activision'. They don't want you to think 'that guy' because that guy could be working for someone else tomorrow."

As it happens, 'that guy' is now working for himself, having founded TMEIC (The Mauretania Export Import Company) a few years ago. TMEIC is a videogame, film and television production company, and it's one of the publishers of *Scrapland*, an action-adventure sci-fi title that's soon to arrive on PC and Xbox. "This was a complete project brought to us by Mercury Steam [a small Spanish developer] and I liked it so much I decided to front it in a publicity and marketing capacity, which has already got it more publicity than it might have on its own merit," McGee explains, realising the significance of his name's 'brand'. But his role extends beyond that of a typical publisher - he also

contributed to the game's story and dialogue. Still, he's used to turning his hand to all aspects of game production. During the Nineties he spent four years at id where he worked on various *Doom* and *Quake* titles in a variety of roles (design, programming, music management, sound design... you name it). In 1998 he moved to EA where he consulted on titles like *The Sims* before developing *Alice* and becoming creative director of the company's Redwood Studio.

It's clear that McGee's favoured platform is the PC, though he's concerned that it's losing out to consoles. "The PC is a wonderful platform - it allows young developers to make money and consumers to try new and interesting genres they wouldn't see on the consoles," he says. "However, it's becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy that people aren't buying PC games so stores aren't giving them shelf space. It's a problem only consumers can do something about."

He also believes developers have to maintain the status of the PC as a gaming platform, and in *Scrapland* there are various elements that distinguish it from console or arcade fare - you can't die, for instance. "Death is an arcade concept, incurred to keep you putting money in," explains McGee. "It has nothing to do with narrative, so it's not a mechanic we're imposing on you." The PC's capabilities are also making it easier for *Scrapland* to expand into other media. "At the moment we're going after TV, perhaps even a feature film," says McGee. "When you look at the screen you could be watching a Pixar movie. It won't be hard to sell from a visual aspect."

McGee's next game - American McGee's *Oz*, a PC title based on the *Wizard Of Oz* books - seems to be on hold, but deals have already been struck to develop *Oz* books, toys and films. The fact so much has been licensed from a game that doesn't exist yet suggests that the American McGee brand has established itself as a name to be respected. And remember, it is a real name. **N**

**TIGER WOODS? JOHN
MADDEN? TONY HAWK?
PAH! THEY JUST PUT
THEIR NAME ON THE
BOX OF TOP-SELLING
GAMES. AMERICAN
MCGEE, ON THE OTHER
HAND, ACTUALLY
MAKES TOP-SELLING
GAMES BEFORE
PUTTING HIS NAME
ON THE
PACKAGING. AND
THOSE GAMES AREN'T
BAD, EITHER...**

A word from Prophecy

words jian reis

PH BALANCED

The days of LANs being a haven for warez may be slowly taking a turn for the better. With tough copy protection like Steam, and more titles sporting multiplayer dependent on the gamer possessing a legitimate CD key, more and more gamers are buying their games. But what do you need to know if you're taking your legal games to a LAN? Some pointers from the folks over at www.prophecy.co.za on LAN safety.

The most important thing to keep in mind when you take your games to a LAN is to keep all the documentation, CDs and boxes together, and out of sight, if possible. A CD jacket with all your CDs and CD-keys that you can keep in your bag is ideal. If you take each game in its own box, never leave your games unattended. Titles bought with your hard-earned cash are a soft target for shady characters at a LAN. Don't assume that it's safe to leave your games lying about, no matter how reputable the LAN may be.

If you do need to leave your PC for an extended period of time, put your games away somewhere safe and private, like the boot of your car. LAN organizers are typically busy folk, and may not be able to take care of your goodies. They're a last resort.

Be sure to not share your games on the LAN network. Not only is it illegal, but it could allow people to steal your CD key or login details. CD key theft is an easy thing to do - don't make yourself a target.

Most EULAs will allow you to burn a backup copy of a game to CD-R or DVD, but you're entering murky waters when you start using third-party software such as no-CD cracks to crack a game you legitimately purchased. You may have bought the game, but most developers don't see that as a license for you to tamper with the code by installing cracks and hacks. Keep your game clean rather - it's easier to download new game content or patch a clean installation of a game anyway.

www.prophecy.co.za

CPL nabs exclusivity on Painkiller



The Cyberathlete Professional League has signed an agreement with the publisher of the Painkiller game which gives them worldwide rights to host multiplayer Painkiller competitions. This includes any Painkiller tournament which takes place either live or online in which prizes offered are in the form of cash or merchandise.

Any organisation who may want to host a professional Painkiller tournament will now have to contact the CPL in order to obtain the necessary approval from them.

www.thecpl.com

Naked IT looking to sponsor a clan



Having recently launched their new 300 m2 e-Club store in Blackheath, JHB, Naked IT are now looking for a clan and a RTS player to sponsor in 2005.

They will be hosting a Counter-Strike clan and WarCraft III competition at their new store, in which the winners of each event will secure a sponsorship from Naked IT for all major competitions and events attended in 2005.

Date: 7 - 9 January 2005

Venue: Naked IT Hillcrest Centre E-Club

Entrance: R20 per person

Booking: info@nakedit.co.za | 011 678 1288

www.nakedit.co.za

PlayStation Expo and Tournament



PlayStation and Anime fans in Port Elizabeth can look forward to their very own expo, which will be taking place at the University of Port Elizabeth on the 18th and 19th February 2005.

Hosted by SA Game Over, the event will be the first of its kind in SA and the tournament organizers are hoping to bring a unique experience to PlayStation fans. Visitors to the expo will be able to participate in a number of competitions such as a Tekken Tournament, and a big screen battle, while gamers can bring along their old PlayStation games to either trade or sell. There will also be a variety of Japanese goods on display as well as a dress-up competition (referred to as cosplay), which is a popular pastime in Japan.

www.geocities.com/sagameover

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WHAT DO VALVE SOFTWARE AND METALLICA HAVE IN COMMON?

Half-Life 2 is out.


Now, the reason I'm mentioning this is not because of how difficult it is to believe it's finally happened (this being over a year since the first planned release date) nor because I believe every gamer in South Africa to be blind, deaf and/or isolated from all sources of information. It is, instead, because the release of this revolutionary game has put a whole new spin on the piracy debate - a debate which has long concerned me. Valve Software, the developers of Half-Life 2, have made it impossible to (legally) play the game without access to the internet in order to authenticate it. The authentication is done via their online service, Steam. This is not completely unheard of, of course. All MMORPGs (massively multiplayer online role playing games) require online authentication, and our old favourite, Counter-Strike, has been running through Steam for some time now. But what makes the case of Half-Life 2 particularly special is that, for the first time, you cannot play a single-player game without access to the internet. And I find this utterly unacceptable.

legally, Valve can do whatever they want with their product. Nothing is forcing us to buy copies of Half-Life 2, and none of our consumer rights are being infringed upon. But they are essentially discriminating against a significant segment of the gaming population, as well as causing unnecessary hassle for everyone else. The most unfortunate group are the people with 56k modem or slower connections, and those with no access to the internet at all. ADSL and ISDN users are in the minority when one considers the average household on a worldwide scale, and many privileged gamers, as well as gaming developers, tend to forget this. Apart from excluding those without the internet (especially outside of Europe, Asia and North America), Valve are causing far-reaching problems. The game takes several hours to authenticate on 56k and some ISDN lines (which costs additional money due to phone expenses), and it is frighteningly common for it to fail to authenticate at all, even on ADSL. For a game that is strictly single-player (I will leave CS: Source as a separate issue for now), I consider it unreasonable to expect this strain to be carried by the consumer.

Although, we need to ask why exactly Valve have chosen to cause us so much pain and suffering. Surely they understand that this policy is likely to frustrate many of their clients. The answer, of course, is to protect their intellectual property, a goal on which the company have

placed a heavy emphasis. Basically, Valve do not want to lose revenue due to piracy. The big question is - is the inconvenience worth it? Is the consumer's sacrifice translating into any compensating gain? One might be tempted to answer yes, Valve are now receiving the money that is rightfully theirs. This is a triumph of morality, a victory of the lawful over the lawless, and as such, the price is one we should gladly pay.

Piracy will never cease to exist. We all saw what happened with Metallica and their crusade against Napster. After Napster's closure, other peer-to-peer networks immediately began to spring up, and mp3s were distributed even more regularly than before. There is also no such thing as "uncrackable" software. Despite all the precautions, the safeguards and the security employed by Valve, Half-Life 2 has been cracked twice to date, by two separate groups, and both versions are available for download on most peer-to-peer sharing networks. The crack requires no online authentication, and is less buggy than the original game. Compared to the strain of having to connect to Steam in order to play, it is a wholesome relief. Already it is easy to find at most large LANs in South Africa, and even those who own original copies are installing it because it saves them the effort. Valve have released much propaganda surrounding the crack, falsely calling it defective, and threatening to ban Steam accounts of the people who use it. But it works, and with it there is no need for

Steam at all. Besides, Valve would be banning the accounts of those who do own original copies, and leaving the pirates unscathed. These methods are ineffective, the game is indeed being pirated at an unprecedented level, and the inconvenience is still being carried by the honest end user. That's some fuzzy logic right there. Valve appear to have missed an important point. By implementing these overly rigid control mechanisms, they are in fact encouraging piracy. It's the rebel syndrome that affects all of humanity - we naturally tend to resist control. The children of authoritarian parents are more likely to rebel; an observation with a firm basis in psychological research. Crackers see high profile games such as Half-Life 2 as a challenge, especially when security is supposedly at its tightest. The more Valve try to "crack down" on piracy, the harder crackers will work to thwart their efforts. It should also be remembered that most pirates would not buy the game if they could not pirate it. Most people steal intellectual property because they couldn't be bothered otherwise, not because they're uncontrollable kleptomaniacs. Valve are not doing themselves any favours by treating their customer base as criminals. People such as myself are not going to buy Half-Life 2 on principle, others will simply not care, and many more will download the crack purely because they don't have the time or the energy to sort through Valve's corporate manure. 



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INBOX

Letter of the moment

FROM Jean

SUBJECT Psychology and The Sims

[This letter is in no way meant to belittle "The Sims" game or its creators or the people who play it. I like the game and appreciate the idea behind it].

NAG describes The Sims as the world's most successful PC game, and truly so. The Sims series is the best selling PC game to date. 'Why is this?' someone would ask. Basically The Sims is described as a game which simulates the birth, life and death of a hypothetical character. This character could have different characteristics in appearance, attitudes and personality all of which are chosen or developed by the gamer, giving them total control. Humans exist in such a diverse world where we by nature change ourselves, our surroundings and our behaviours constantly. We want to better ourselves (well, most of us do) by nature and nature is what keeps the balance in everything. Perhaps people play The Sims so much because it gives the player a feel of total control in life they wish to have. Perhaps players create a character that they themselves would want to be. In The Sims game your characters are exactly what you have made them to be and you can control everything how you want any time you want.

You as the player are just as in control of everything within the game as God is in our lives. You don't just give and take life like in all other games these days, but you can control everything in the game to great detail.

Do you think The Sims is so popular because we as humans all envy God for his power and this is the game which gives us the closest feel to the power of control that he has?

If so, then you have to give it to the game designers for marketing it so well to the public.

With respect to whatever religion you're into... I don't think most people crave the power of God or a God or for that matter are mindless enough to think that they are making a better life for themselves by living dangerously through another medium. It's just an escape from reality much like movies, music, books and television but in this medium you have a level of control over something that most people can understand - their own lives. I'm talking mass market gamers here. The hardcore side of the fence still enjoy playing something like Half-Life 2 because in their world [filled with fantasy, imagination etc.] they can easily conceive and believe in the reality created by a science fiction shooter. The Sims is successful largely because everyone can understand it and play it - it's a little like solitaire in many ways. This 'winning' formula is easily dissected but almost impossible to duplicate which makes your explanation of the phenomenon a little more likely. Perhaps everyone really wants to be God. But what do I know, I just play the games. Anyone else out here with something meaningful to contribute - send mail to letters@nag.co.za. NAG Ed.

FROM Ripper_09

SUBJECT What if...

Since I was 6 years old, I have been playing games. Since then, I have seen drastic improvements in graphics and the play dynamic and the quality in games. But lately I have been wondering - what if someday we reach the peak of digital performance? What will happen to the gaming industry then? Will game developers continue making games without any major improvements or no improvements at all? Or will they just stop making games as it will be a matter of: seen one game, seen them all and what about the people who develop the new graphics cards or motherboards?

How many people could lose their jobs as a result of this?

At that stage there'll be something else on the horizon to pursue. The rate of technological evolution is accelerating daily and depending on what books you read things either go very well or very badly. I guess once they're done with graphics and sound they'll be forced to create some decent original content. More likely everyone will start trying to plug their hardware or install their software directly onto or into the brain and we all know how that one ends. NAG Ed.

FROM Robert

SUBJECT Making a game

For a few years now I have been playing around with programming computer games. I wasn't too serious about it and I was just having fun. Most of the games were never more than an idea, and many of them just never got finished, as I was always getting distracted with new things. Quite recently now I have decided to make a good game and finish it, and I am getting along quite well, it's not DOOM 3 quality, but is not meant to be (I'm not there yet!). Anyway, my point is to say thanks for your excellent magazine, as it has really been a great inspiration and help to me along the way, and I am sure it always will be.

When I was much younger every school holiday would start off the same - let's make a cool game this holiday guys [fuelled in part by all the gaming magazines we bought and read from cover to cover]. We'd spend all our time at school before the holiday discussing ideas, drawing levels and characters and even fleshing out the play dynamic here and there - it would be a dragon that blasted military jets and ion cannon emplacements or a game where you could be any of the monsters you killed. The first or second day of the holiday finally arrived to see 2 or 3 of us sitting around the trusty Commodore 64 with all our papers, ideas and enthusiasm ready to go. Ten minutes later we'd be engrossed in Wizardry or Uridium with all our good intentions out the window until school started again. We had the talent to really create something amazing but ironically the industry we wanted so badly to contribute to ended up distracting us so much that we never did anything more than play the games our then heroes had created. So my advice to any young potential developer out there is to burn all your games right now or you'll end up just like me. ;) NAG Ed.

FROM ironwolf

SUBJECT It was so easy

I was wondering why the Cyberdemon in DOOM 3 was so easy to kill? I finished it on my second attempt; it was like taking candy from a baby. I had more trouble taking out the guardian of Hell. So I would like to know, are developers making better graphics and other fancy things or making the end boss a challenge? I hope this doesn't carry on because I'll have to stop playing FPS.

I remember you, you were the same person complaining that the enemies in Far Cry were too hard to kill. I expect if you battled for a week to finish off a game because of a tough end boss you'd also have something to say? NAG Ed.

FROM KRISAN

SUBJECT Fighting games

I've been thinking recently (which is very rare). Fighting games are not all violence but in fact enhance the player's skills. Sure we all like games like DOOM, UT etc. but we don't really develop skills by using the mouse. But games like Tekken would make the player execute different combos by pushing a combination of keys at the right time.

SHORTS

FROM NAG Reader

SUBJECT Half-Life 2

I can't install the game. Valve ripped me off. I only have a 56K modem and their patch took forever to... Why can't I play the single player version? I'm never playing another Valve game again. Those idiots at Valve suck. Moan and bitch. Complain. Cry. Whine. Etc.

To all those NAG readers that wrote in to express their frustrations about Half-Life 2 and online decryption and the 101 other topics regarding Half-Life 2 you'll be happy to know that our various opinions about the whole thing can be found scattered around in this very issue - check The Domain of The Basilisk, Ed's Note, the review and Miktar's Soapbox. Just not here please, we're trying to enjoy ourselves. NAG Ed.

FROM Morgue [FLB]

SUBJECT Pick a side of the fence

I hate to be critical (although it's never stopped me before!), but on page 16 of your October 2004 issue, NAG moans about game titles making less and less sense as developers run out of ideas and strive to avoid repetition - and yet, when they don't make such efforts, NAG moans about them being unoriginal. It's a catch-22 for the poor developers. How about agreeing on a standpoint?

Umm, no. We prefer living in do as you please land; it's where the happy bushes grow. Also, there's a big difference between being original and being stupid. NAG Ed.

FROM Christopher

SUBJECT Badger lives on!

I recently discovered that the Badger who in fact everyone believes is dead is actually not dead, but alive. The clever Badger managed to escape the printing press and now finds itself on the NAG Cover CD. Pop the November 04 CD in your drive, and then open that drive, don't let it play automatically and you should find him as an icon. So do I get a prize?

You're reading your prize right now. NAG Ed.

FROM Mortal Wombat

SUBJECT Dishwasher

What ever happened to the dishwasher game? Well you know what they say about dumb ideas and Las Vegas weddings. NAG Ed.

FROM Tiza

SUBJECT Hardcore dude

Everyone always wants to know what constitutes a hardcore gamer. In the November issue I read about that Korean guy Kim Kyung-jae who died after playing games for 86 hours straight. So if computer games cause your downfall then you are a hardcore gamer.

That is a little extreme in terms of an example but at least he died happy. NAG Ed.

FROM Lourens

SUBJECT BOOM

My parents always shout at me when they find my fireworks. I asked my buddy "Bryce" where I could hide them and he told me in my PC, so I did. One day I was surfing the net and boom the crackers went off. Smoke and chips were everywhere. Why did the fireworks launch?

This is why you don't mix hillbillies and technology. NAG Ed.



The 'Letter of the Moment'
prize is sponsored by EA Africa

The winner receives 2 games for coming up with the most eclectic chicken scratch

The player not only learns the position of the buttons by heart but also develops excellent timing. The reason why I brought this up is because nobody (that I know) likes fighting games. If others disagree, I don't blame you since you have different tastes and may like the PC better. But Ed, do you prefer the PC or the Console?

Games do develop a limited range of skills in the real world but nothing you can put on a CV. This may seem like playing the field so I'll give 2 excellent examples why I like PC and PlayStation 2 equally. I like both platforms for a very simple reason - there's no Burnout 3 available on PC and no Half-Life 2 on console. These are two of the best games ever in their respective categories. I enjoy playing games - not platforms. NAG Ed.

FROM D4rk 4ng3L
SUBJECT None given

This is my first time writing a letter to NAG but all I want to say is that you guys rock! (I know that is so cliché but it serves its purpose). I have been buying your magazine since 2001 and you guys are ahead of the competition 150%. Anyway now that I have firmly put my head so far up your a55 I can taste the old, left-over pizza from last night, I have a big favour to ask of you... PLEASE CAN YOU INCLUDE WITH NEXT MONTHS COVER CD THE TRAILER FOR STAR WARS III - REVENGE OF THE SITH... It's one of the coolest trailers I have ever seen. I saw them air it last night and I just have to see it again. The world wide release of the movie only happens on the 19 May 2005 so if you do this I will at least be satisfied until then.

You kiss butt like no other, well done! The trailer is on the CD that came with this magazine and please don't write whole sentences with the caps lock light on - it can be annoying, especially if you have to retype it all for the sake of editing. NAG Ed.

FROM And-i
SUBJECT What is up

Thanks for publishing my letter in the November issue. In reply to your comment, you should take it as a compliment because your magazine is F--king great (excuse my French but there is no other word that can express that much passion). My mates in my small community joke around and say I'm a celebrity after that letter was published. So it just shows how many gamers see your magazine as an inspiration for their every day gaming! Guys at school would rather whip out a NAG and start reading it, than whip out their text books and start thinking about passing the year... Your magazine is truly an inspiration to every gamer out there... and on behalf of all the gamers out there I would like to say thanks!

Imagine how famous you're going to be now - just remember where you came from and who got you here. It's also good to hear that you and your friends would rather be reading NAG than those silly school books. We'd like to think that our success is in some way thanks to a few personal failures here and there - shows dedication you know. Thanks for supporting the magazine, just make sure you save up some of your future McDonalds salary to buy 2 copies of NAG every month - one to read and one to keep, remember, one to read and one to keep, all your friends do it so what's wrong with you? NAG Ed.

FROM Morpheus
SUBJECT Are you that good

My friend and I think you are really funny with your replies but we want to know if you are as good at gaming as you are at disrespecting people. My friend is really good at Half-Life and we would like to challenge you to a LAN game. I wonder if you



could beat him.

I'm pretty much good at everything I do, so yes, I'd probably kick your [I mean your friend's butt] around any level he's playing on. After school I'll meet him behind the bicycle shed and we'll see who brings the bigger joystick. ;) NAG Ed. Just for the record I don't play Counter-Strike anymore for the same reasons I don't play Pac-Man anymore.

FROM Keith
SUBJECT PS2 Viruses

This may sound like a stupid question and perhaps it is, but I wanted to ask you if it is possible to get a virus on your PS2 while playing online? This bit of information would be a great help. Another question I wanted to ask was, is it dangerous to play PC games online even with a decent anti-virus program? Thanks for the help! I look forward to the next amazing edition of your fine magazine.

At this stage it's not possible to get a PS2 virus. As a rule before connecting any machine to the internet install Norton Antivirus and the latest Zone Alarm [www.zonelabs.com]. NAG Ed.

www.nag.co.za - The Forums

This is an example of the madness that is the NAG forums. Go there, learn, discover and return with the treasure.

Hardware.NAG Forum topic
Which MOBO do you prefer?

Cyclone
Which MOBO is the best for example MSI, Gigabyte, ASUS...etc and why?

Lord_Sybrwulf
DFI Lanparty allegedly...best for overclockers. But your question is very vague, and frankly quite redundant. You want the best motherboard for what?

Gouhan
Hello everyone. New here, but decided to go right ahead and add my 2c on any interesting topics. DFI makes some real great OC products the two that come to mind are the 250UT A64 board and the DFI LanParty 2 Ultra ... I've seen the highest clocked 64's and XPs on these boards. Abit also makes equally good boards I believe and Asus makes some nifty Intel Platform boards too. You can add Gigabyte and Chaintech to that list too. Heck I think there's a lot of good MOBO makers out there. You just need to find the right model for your needs. (MSI isn't so great though).

phrozenlesk
Gigabyte isn't so good either. I always used the

trusty old Asus and Epox (which is not so trusty and good anymore) and walked over to Gigabyte but am very disappointed with the product. Lot of extras though but that doesn't justify the price over the performance.

Asus, DFI and Abit are good for gaming but still it depends on the use of the system, gaming, workstation etc. and then you should also look at what processor you're going to use because different MOBO makers makes different quality MOBOs for cpus (Intel and AMD)

CrackHitter

Yeah I've got to agree with Gouhan. I just got my DFI nf3250 GB and it kicks ass, the performance and tweakability make it my favourite when it comes to A64.

BlaZe

Asus, Asus, Asus, Asus, Asus, Asus, Asus, Asus, Asus, Ctrl+V, Ctrl+V, Ctrl+V, Ctrl+V, Ctrl+V, Ctrl+V, Huh!, this is not possible!

Norse_Valhalla

I've had MSI and Gigabyte boards, and I've been very happy with both. Yes, Gigabyte is a little overpriced but you know you are getting quality. If I had to choose I would pick MSI. Good performance.

MrBean

Best board out there for A64 754 right now is the DFI UT 250gb. If you are considering socket 939, look at the MSI Neo2.

For Intel Northwood, you won't find better than the Abit IC7-Max3. My 2nd choice for this platform is the Asus P4C800-Deluxe Rev2. For LGA775 (Prescott) consider the DFI 875P-T.

For overall excellent memory performance, which I have personally tested works very well on all the above mentioned MOBOs, you will be hard pressed to do better than the TCCD-chipped OCZ 3200 Rev2's.

In most cases they will do DDR540+ speeds in dual channel mode on Intel and Socket 939, and DDR600 or close to in single channel 754 MOBOs. Hope this helps a little.

Carnajo

Ah yes, but where to get them OCZ Ram modules?

MrBean

Import them like we all do
www.excaliberpc.com. This is where I got mine from...

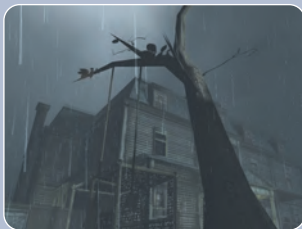
New Years resolution #1: I must stay away from the NAG forums, it's ruining my life!

www.nag.co.za

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Previews

NAG's Wanted List



Call of Cthulhu

PC, Xbox
2005 (Hopefully)

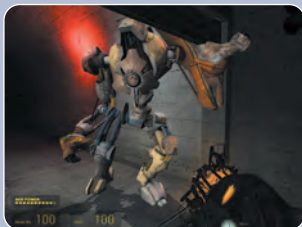
Arguably the last remaining FPS of the current tribe that has suffered numerous delays, we're still interested in this adaptation of the RPG and Lovecraft's work. Call of Cthulhu looked impressive for the past two years, but it's really about time we get to play it.



Any game

Any Platform
ASAP

The guys who worked on Sam & Max 2 left LucasArts and started their own adventure game studio, so naturally we're eager to see whatever they are working on next, especially since the freelance police have not been left out of the equation.



Alex & Dog

PC
2005

One of the highlights of Half-Life 2 is any sequence or mission involving Alex's robotic side-kick Dog, so Valve's plan to release more episodes online featuring the duo is good news for us. You might want to dust off that credit card, though.

Games are all about living those realities you can't, so being an alien hell-bent on wiping the human race off the face of the universe definitely qualifies, thanks to Destroy All Humans. We also have a chat about the new Oddworld game, Stranger's Wrath while another peculiar creature, the half-demon Dante, makes his return in Devil May Cry 3. And if all that makes you insecure, build a castle in Stronghold 2 or run away from jungle mercenaries in Boiling Point.

Legend of Kay

Developer **Jowood** Publisher **Jowood** Platform **PS2** Release Date **February 2005**



Ninjas are quite popular these days, so a feline one is bound to get attention. Kay has to defend his home after the evil emperor and his gorilla minions invade. It sounds like another action-platform game with role-playing elements, but if it's done well, we won't complain.

Mercury

Developer **Ignition** Publisher **Ignition** Platform **PSP** Release Date **Q2 2005**



After the fun we had with Balance, more physics-powered puzzle platform gaming sounds like a great idea. Mercury involves tipping the level so as to safely navigate your glob of mercury to the end mark. Combine that simple but challenging idea with the PSP and you might be onto something big.

Ground Zero

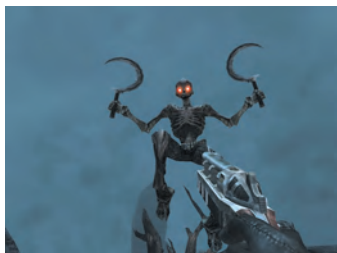
Developer **Comport Interactive** Publisher **Comport Interactive** Platform **PC** Release Date **TBA**



Post-apocalyptic RPGs are still in high demand. For some reason, despite the digital role-playing game's surge in popularity, we're not being flooded with Fallout clones and sci-fi fans are still left wanting. Ground Zero might change that - the human race is blown back into the Stone Age, so you follow a set of co-ordinates that promises a paradise on Earth. Naturally it isn't, so that's a good excuse to start a squad and take on arms.

Darkwatch

Developer **Sammy** Publisher **Sammy** Platform **PS2 | Xbox** Release Date **Q1 2005**



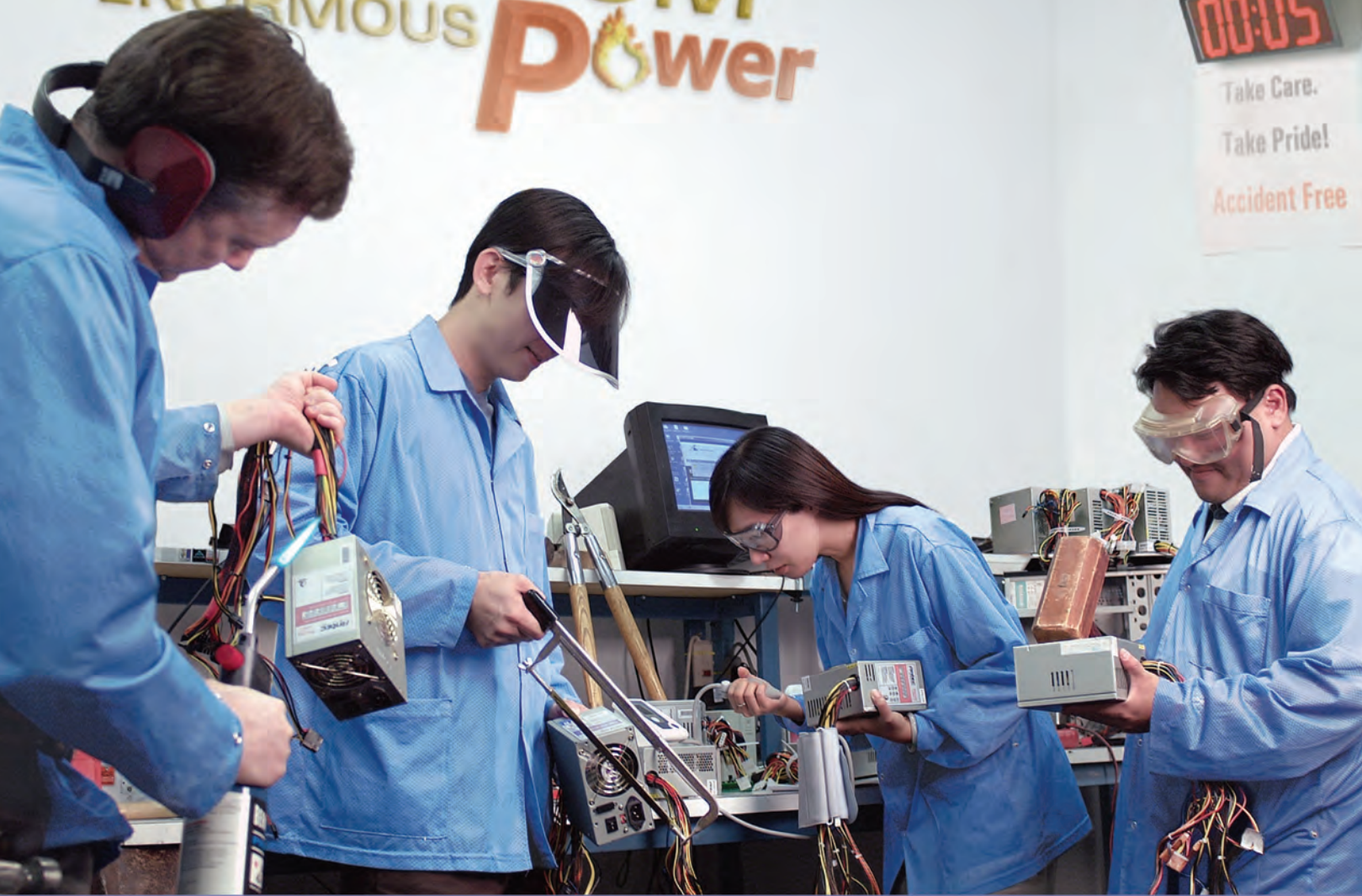
We like to think of Darkwatch as Bravestarr meets Vampire the Masquerade. Not an RPG, but you do run around as a member of the Darkwatch - the wild west's answer to the men in black, except your caseload involves the paranormal and our hero happens to get bitten in the beginning of the game as well. What else?



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A GIANT STEP ON MANKIND



When your race is dying and you need to save it with genetic data from another planet, what do you do? Invade them! But before any of that can happen you need one determined green man with bug eyes and a big head to go and destabilize the world, including the cows. Meet Crypto – he's out to Destroy All Humans!

Mankind must die – and you're just the alien for the job. Enter Crypto, your avatar in Pandemic Australia's *Destroy All Humans*, a different take on aliens invading the world. And it's hardly a title that defies description: you're a small, green alien and you want to kill everything remotely human on the face of planet Earth. Crypto is part of an advanced force out to clear the way for a full-blown invasion by the Furons, his race and all-round bad guys. Actually our anti-hero is the several-hundredth clone of a specific alien and part of his mission is to retrieve genetic data from the planet to help save his own species, which apparently includes an invasion and Destroying All Humans! And as games have shown us: everyone loves a hero, but we all want to be the bad guy.

Crypto approaches his job on Earth with fervour, making you wonder if he hasn't been stuck in an underground military facility for a while. The green alien will have five areas to traverse in the final game, including an attack on the capital city. *Destroy All Humans* is based on the 1950s ideology of the nuclear family and obviously makes use of the old pulp-novels talking about invasions by



little green men. Crypto will traverse over farmlands, into little towns and even hit the big cities in his quest to destabilize the region and bring mankind to its knees. A free-form movement system compliments this world

so you are allowed to go pretty much where you please in a level; all that's expected from you is to reach the respective objectives. Overall there will be twenty missions spread over five regions, plus a few sandbox missions to occupy players otherwise.

An alien's arsenal is an important part of completing such a daunting task. Crypto can employ a range of weapons to do his bidding, including a zap gun, the





Destroy All Humans Preview



Ion detonator and something called the Sonic Boom. Short trips can be made by the supplied jet pack and Crypto's ship is also fully battle-ready, so if things get really hairy in a situation it looks like you can hop onto your craft (which is upgradeable) and bring the skies down on your aggressors. This, of course, will attract a large amount of attention – not something that an alien wants.

While stealth doesn't seem to be a major component in Destroy All Humans – it is after all an action adventure title – Crypto has some fierce competition in the form of everyday humans, the army, police force and of course those danger men in black, who are aware of Crypto's mission and are obviously out to stop him. In our protagonist's favour, apart from his technology, are his psychic and telekinetic abilities. Crypto can hypnotise most humans, making them do his bidding.

Yes, you can steal humans and control them. This is obviously an extremely useful ploy since a small, big-headed green alien will definitely stand out in the crowd and will probably make up the bulk of the game's time. Some humans are harder to gain control of while others are simply immune thanks to their training. But you and Crypto will have more-or-less free reign over your human-jacking activities. The powers also extend



to manipulating people and objects via telekinesis. Crypto can push over objects or fling hapless victims through

the air, using his head, which in turn creates useful distractions – even as a controlled human you can still attract unwanted attention. These mental kidnappings have another dimension to them: interaction. Sometimes to get somewhere you need to get past the right people. This is done via conversations. A bar below your character reveals if your questions and answers are making you more or less alien, where tipping the scale to the human side will alleviate suspicion and get you where you want to be. Get caught out and the wrong people in the area are alerted to your presence – remember: humans shoot first when it comes to little green men. Perhaps it's a good thing that, thanks to the completely destructible terrain, Crypto's ship can level entire city blocks if he feels like it...

Humour will be a major component in the game. If anything, Destroy All Humans looks to be very funny, as you'd expect. The 50s setting and severe cheesy retro feel of



Crypto and his equipment is an obvious tongue-in-cheek homage to this period in schlock sci-fi. At one point Crypto sees a screening of Ed Wood's notoriously bad Plan 9 from Outer Space on a drive-in screen and under the impression that it's a documentary on his invasion plans destroys the entire movie lot. Or at least that's one of your missions. Fans of the Invader Zim series will quickly warm up to Crypto's out-and-out hate for humans, reflected by his constant remarks about their (our?) inferiority (and balanced by his own megalomaniac-fuelled stupidity). The plot also involves some brief conversations with cows and since Crypto can read minds, it's quite hilarious to see him trawl the urban landscape of domestic livestock, probing their inner thoughts (and probably their physical beings as well). It's been just under a year since the game was officially announced and THQ has been keep-

ing things under wraps, only releasing more screenshots on the game. But playing as a little green alien, boasting a devastating collection of technology, with the intent to kill everything in fully-destroyable levels sounds like a great idea to us. **N**



Developer: **Pandemic**
Publisher: **THQ**
Platform: **Xbox, PS2**
Expect it: **Q1 2005**

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Devil May Cry 3



PS2

Developer: Capcom · **Publisher:** Capcom · **Supplier:** Ster Kinekor [011] 445 7900 · **Genre:** Action
Release Date: Q2 2005




After a disappointing sequel and almost two years of rehabilitation, ultimate badass Dante gears up and gets ready to bring back the glory of unrelenting wanton violence to the PlayStation 2. Running as a prequel to the original game, Devil May Cry 3 may be just what the fans have been asking for.

Devil May Cry is all about the crazy moves and the copious amount and assortment of enemies for you to plough through. This third incarnation appears to take its strengths from the first game in terms of game dynamics and play style, thankfully so. New to the series however, is how Dante's big list of moves is separated into four distinct fighting styles. Switching between the styles occur either at the start of the mission or at special statues found at a point of the level. Four styles are available, namely Sword Master, Gunslinger, Trickster and Royal Guard Dante.

Each style provides different functionality depending on which button you press. Under the Sword Master style Dante can perform a shredding move, slashing away nearby baddies. Trickster style represents mobility; allowing you to dash up walls and dodge enemies with flourish. Gunslinger style lets you control the direction of Dante's second gun; one gun shoots forward while the second fires in the direction one tilts the right analogue stick. Gunslinger also lets you flip over enemies and unleash a shower of bullets. No info has been released about Royal Guard Dante yet, though there is hope for a more close-combat melee style.

While each style changes the way you play, Dante still has a large set of moves brought over from the previous titles that work irrespective of which style you choose. Melee moves can send enemies flying into the air or be used to slam down on them from above. Dante's twin guns still provide most of the action allowing you to skilfully take apart enemies. A context sensitive action button lets you achieve rather crazy stunts such as surfing on the bodies of enemies down a corridor, firing your guns all the way or swinging around a pole kicking enemies as you go. Once again, multiple weapons are available ranging from handguns to shotguns, each with enough fun for everyone.

A surprising addition comes in the form of the music. Early demos have had each level accompanied by a heavy rock/metal soundtrack with actual lyrics, though it's unconfirmed if each level in the game will have lyrical backing.

Surprisingly deep and gloriously gothic in nature, Devil May Cry 3 should leave a few sceptics stunned. If not that, at least it should redeem the brand in the eyes of those who got burned during the last go-round. 



Muzzle flash right out of a John Woo movie...

Boiling Point: Road to Hell



PC

Developer: Deep Shadows · **Publisher:** Atari · **Supplier:** MegaRom [011] 234 2680
Genre: First Person Shooter · **Release Date:** 2005

Another day, another new first person shooter? That seems to be the case in the overpopulated genre, but fans of the games never complain for more action, providing that the titles are good. Formerly known as Xenus, Boiling Point plans a different approach for gamers. With a new publisher under its belt, the game isn't planning to astound us technically, but instead presents gamers with an immersive and seamless world to play in. You are Kevin Myers, a former

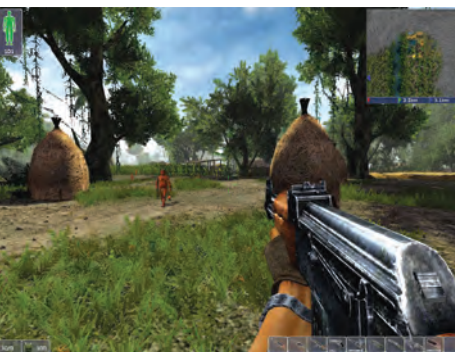
French Foreign Legionnaire who heads into the jungles of Columbia in search of his missing sister. This means a lot of interacting with the country's citizens, including drug dealers, the corrupt police force and other groups that might help or hinder your progress. Deep Shadows has gone to a lot of trouble to present a living world, with detailed villages showing the decay and wear of time; trucks are rusty and mud-packed while the jungle is a lush, green area full of dangers.

The entire idea is to make the world

as convincing as possible, so interacting with a car means you'll sit inside and see your player grab hold of the grubby steering wheel. Hands-on reports indicate that the interface is very familiar territory to shooter fans, so at least the game should handle well. A realistic play dynamic in action shooters has come in vogue with Far Cry and the oft-delayed Boiling Point should make a welcome addition to the genre, providing it gets the polish that often separates the good from the bad in the FPS world. **N**



Pretty... pretty damn deserted, actually...





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Stronghold 2




Developer: Firefly Studios · **Publisher:** Take 2 Interactive · **Supplier:** MegaRom [011] 234 2680
Genre: Real Time Strategy · **Release Date:** Q2 2005

Stronghold appeared a few years ago and quickly turned into a sleeper hit, partly because it was the first modern game to delve into defensive play in an RTS on a large scale by letting you build and defend your own castle. As the name suggests you had to run your own fortress, stemming the tide of invaders and rival armies while at the same time keeping your peasants happy and fed. Good sales and a solid following mean a sequel is on its way; this time the series goes 3D.

Obviously simply stepping from one dimension to another won't be enough, but Stronghold 2 is definitely looking good and interesting. In this title you have to get the king back on the throne; he went into hiding when his armies were defeated and now all the land barons are fighting over the rule of the land. So you are back to fighting your neighbour, something that apparently happened quite a lot in those times, except now there's more detail. Stronghold 2 wants to bring that whole castle feeling across even further as you have more micro-management options in the game, meaning players will have a more living and breathing homestead, shifting away from Stronghold's more arid feeling - so much so that the developers claim Stronghold 2 to be the most accurate depiction of siege-warfare and castle life.

Players can gather honour points that can be used to lift their own status or improve units. You'll be able to host tournaments and fairs, watch trials in the court yard and even see your food being prepared in the kitchen. In the same tradition more detail has been lent to customizing the game itself, from your own coat-of-arms to a larger variety of castle decorations (including those heads on spikes). The story is handled in a non-linear fashion as you use your castles for hubs to choose where to go next. The battles also seem more epic, but it's hard to tell considering how intensive combat already was in the first game.

All this detail sounds great, but we have to wonder how much time will be spent on running a castle? After all, some players simply want to fight while others would prefer just to focus on their castles, so we'll have to see what kind of auto-management system the game will offer. Still, with the credentials of the first game and its expansion behind the series, Stronghold 2 should be on the right track for a worthy sequel. 



Everything would have been fine if Nigel hadn't gone near the flaming arrows after his refried bean dinner...





Cutaways provide a sneak peek into the life within the castle



The Sims 2 University




Developer: Maxis · Publisher: Electronic Arts · Supplier: EA Africa (011) 516 8300 · Genre: Management
Release Date: 2005

If you predicted a Sims 2 expansion, that hardly bought you a drink. EA is notorious for backing the franchise with tons of expansions, but it makes sense because The Sims is a very expansion-friendly concept. Thankfully we're not being offered the same packs of the first game with a new coat, instead we'll find our Sims wandering University.

Allowing you to guide your young adult Sim through a new chapter, The Sims 2 University means that your sims will have to take courses, of which there are 11, and keep their grades in check. As a reward for sticking to your studies, the expansion also includes four new career paths.

Socializing is a major factor here as there are room mates, campus friends, sororities and even a secret society. Parties will be common and it's bound to be a job keeping your sim socially popular and academically sound at the same time. The goal-system has been adjusted accordingly, but it will be interesting to see how the various orientations of the parent game will be used in a University environment. Money is still a factor, but unlike regular Sims your student has to take up part-time jobs like tutoring or waiting tables (or even print fake money if you know the right people.)

Overall the goal is to become the "Big Sim on Campus". EA haven't alluded to any engine or play dynamic changes other than what we can judge from the features list, but if the expansion boasts the same level of detail and fun as The Sims 2, it's bound to impress or at least keep Sims players happy until the next expansion. 



What would 'varsity life be without a co-ed pillow fight?

ASUS also offers several other AI Proactive features

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Stack Cool technology utilizes a mini PCB stacked against the main PCB to conduct heat away from power components, resulting in a 10° Celsius temperature reduction. This fan-less design enables cooler overclocking, greater stability and longer system life without an extra noisy fan.

CPU Lock Free

CPU Lock Free unlocked the CPU multiplier restrictions set by Intel on its processor. Users usually tweak their systems either by increasing FSB frequency or CPU multiplier, which is locked for the Pentium 4 CPU. ASUS motherboards now offer CPU Lock Free, which enables CPU multiplier adjustment. Multiplier reduction provides more flexibility for increasing FSB frequency without raising CPU clockspeed, successfully improving data transfer between the CPU and memory modules.

PEG Link

PEG (PCI-Express Graphics) Link significantly boosts performance of PCI-Express graphics cards to deliver superior video quality. On traditional platforms, users can't manually tweak graphics card performance since the driver controls graphics card overclockability. PEG Link, a BIOS-based feature, is specifically created to eliminate this limitation. It automatically detects system configuration and adjust related parameters to provide powerful visual performance

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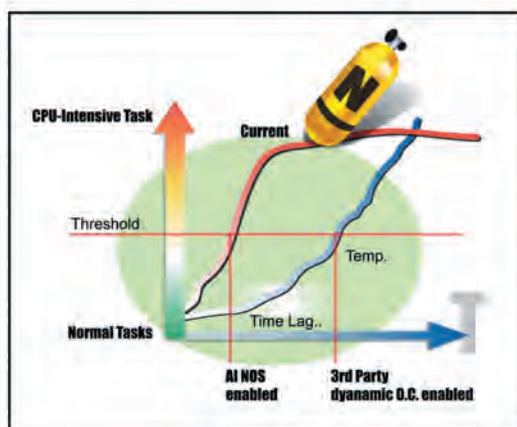
It doesn't matter how fast PCs have become or will become, there will always be users who want more speed and more power. The most effective way to boost performance and find out the real potential of your existing PC is through overclocking.

In the past, overclocking required a certain degree of tech-savvy since it was a complicated process that involved switching quartz oscillator and adjusting parameter jumpers. Though overclocking is now much simpler with most of the adjustments done in BIOS, users still have to gain necessary experiences through trial and error to become more efficient in tuning settings.

ASUS recently introduced the AI (ASUS Intelligence) Proactive Motherboard Series, which incorporated smart innovations for raising system performance. These features are user friendly and take only a few easy steps to activate.

AI NOS – Detect power consumption and overclock

Different combinations of motherboards, processors and



AI NOS detects CPU power consumption and boosts performance when it's most needed.



ASUS AI Proactive motherboards incorporated convenient overclocking innovations.

memory modules result in different setting adjustments during overclocking, which is very confusing for users without the technical know-how.

AI NOS (Non-delay Overclocking System) is an automatic overclocking mechanism on ASUS motherboards based on Intel's 915 and 925 chipsets. Without lifting a finger, this exclusive feature intelligently monitors processor loading and raise CPU performance. No more complex settings!!

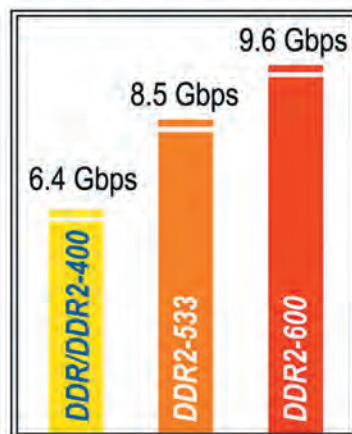
Overclocking systems offered by other motherboard makers detect CPU temperature. However, high temperature doesn't translate to high CPU loading. It takes a certain amount of time for processors to heat up from heavy workload, meaning by the time these temperature-based systems activate, CPU loading most likely already returned to a normal level. AI NOS, on the other hand, monitors CPU loading by detecting power consumption. Processors

consume more power when it's overworked, and thus AI NOS boosts system performance when it's needed the most.

Exclusive native support for DDRII 600

Memory is another very important aspect for improving computing performance. Since the 915 and 925 chipsets only support up to DDRII 533, to enjoy DDRII 600 on these boards, users must first increase FSB (front-side-bus) frequency. Unfortunately, most CPU probably can't handle this type of system bus overclocking.

ASUS' AI Proactive Motherboards, with superior engineering, enabled native support for DDRII 600 despite running on the 915 and 925 chipsets. No need to mess around with the FSB. Simply install DDRII 600 modules on the ASUS AI Proactive Motherboards for enhanced performance.



DDRII 600 offers larger memory bandwidth

With the processor and memory, the two main factors for system performance, taken care of, it is no wonder that many hardware testing media are calling AI Proactive Motherboards the most overclockable solutions for Intel's 915 and 925 chipsets.

If you have any query, please contact ASUS at (011) 783 5450

stranger's WRATH



The Oddworld series lives on in **Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath**, a First Person Shooter based on the bounty-hunting adventures of one creature in the strangest land of them all. We spoke with Lorne Lanning, President and Creative Director, about the project.

Where did the original idea for Oddworld come from?

The original idea for Oddworld was a cracked mirror reflecting the 'too insane to be believed' realities of our own world. I thought up much of it myself, but it's best when the team participates as much as possible once building a title. Guided synergy creates the strongest experience.

Stranger seems more conventional than other Oddworld titles. Is it?

There is a number of over 'arc'ing' design goals for Stranger, both for story and gameplay. As always, we want to tell a compelling story of industrial vs. natural and we wanted the environments to feel and look right for the story setting. For the mission plans, we spent a lot of time making sure that a given bounty mission would support both a direction action approach and more stealthy approach. I think that players will find some of the game more conventional, like the stronger hero type, and some of the action mechanics, but much of it is not conventional. The live ammo is a very unconventional change to action games, as is the concept of enemies being worth more alive than dead. It's important that players consider their tactics if they want to earn big bucks and buy various upgrades. Stealthy approaches where you eliminate enemies one at a time will give the player higher payouts than going in guns blazing.

Can you tell us more about the Stranger?

Stranger was crafted to have unique moves and abilities. There were secrets about his character which needed to be conducive to his movements as well as his attitude. We wanted a hero that could transcend normal shooting abilities, while also transcending normal navigation abilities. Combining physical melee/ramming abilities with shooting created some unique combinations that would offer the gamer more choices in how to take on enemies. There is more to his character to describe, but part of what makes him special are his secrets, so telling them now would give a bit of this away, which I wouldn't want to do.

How are you using the ability to switch between third and first person view-points in the game?

Obvious uses for new mechanics are always good, because they feel natural. However, being able to switch freely allows the players to approach the game the way they want. Third person is generally best for moving quickly and getting a better view of your surroundings. First person is where the weapons are available, so it's generally better for combat, although Stranger has a number of 3rd person melee moves. It is also good to get behind cover in a fire fight, and then switch to 3rd person to see around walls so you can see the outlaws without having to

expose yourself to getting shot.

The Stranger has a rather peculiar weapon, doesn't he?

Yes, he does! The double-barreled crossbow allows players to set up any type of combination of ammo on the launcher. One on the left and one on the right. These ammos can then be fired by pulling the corresponding trigger. You can find a variety of upgrades like a sniper scope, directional mic for listening in on enemy conversations for useful information, clip extenders, larger ammo bags, etc. Naturally, all of these cost moola so players must be careful about just killing since enemies are worth more alive than dead.

What can players expect in the characters and levels?

Well, I can't speak about some of the later characters and locales, but each character group has their own areas and purpose in the game. For example in the dusty, desert areas, the people live in towns. They have a myriad of problems for Stranger to solve, information to give, and opinions to express. (Whether you want them or not.) Talking to them or just listening in on their conversations provides some background on the current problems. The outlaws on the other hand inhabit the wilderness and are always up to something. They rob wagon trains, steal water facilities, etc, and their hideouts fit well into the western theme. The natives are at the bottom of the pecking order and have lost much of their land to the other character types.

Tell us about some of the visual effects and technology 'wow' factors on offer!

The programmers have done an amazing job creating a very powerful piece of technology and the artists have definitely pushed it hard. We have tri-blending, detailed light

maps, normal mapping, self shadowing, particles, depth of field, reflections (the water looks great), etc. In addition, much of the world is destructible, so Stranger can smash his way through outlaw hideouts and uncover hidden moolah.

How important is technology to Oddworld and its evolution?

Technology is definitely a limit for what we can create. It's a terrible limit, but one that's got to be tackled head on. We have always felt heavily restricted with each generation of game consoles. This medium is still very young and still extremely limited by technology. Unlike film, where great ideas can be manifested a number of ways, in games we're all surfing the same technological threshold and thus all governed by much of the same constraints. Ideas are not the key to games today, technology still is. As a result, games aren't changing that quickly. They are evolving slowly due to the nature of the console systems, their limitations, and the expense it takes to build on them. For more ambitious ideas that could be games... sure, there are a lot of those ideas that would apply to more powerful hardware. But to speak about them now, I've learned, is counter productive. Better to show the ideas when they are ready to be born, rather than talk about them before their time. **N**

Developer: **Oddworld Inhabitants**
 Publisher: **EA Games**
 Platform: **Xbox**
 Expect it: **Q1 2005**



reviews



Blame Shifting

Everyone is pointing fingers at Valve for the Half-Life 2 installation debacle. But who is really at fault?

The release of Half-Life 2 caused quite a stir in late 2004... While the game was highly anticipated and proved to be a very good title indeed (see the review in this issue) the install process left a great many gamers cold. The question, though, is why did this happen?

Obviously Valve was very interested in taking on the piracy problem in a very head on fashion when they conceptualised the whole Steam system. Would it be fair to say that the inherent culture of piracy residing within the gaming community could directly be blamed for the problems that people experienced while installing Half-Life 2? Sure, why not. And while some might, for whatever misguided reason, feel that piracy benefits the industry, Valve's reaction to the problem obviously indicates that these opinions are invalid and poorly thought out. Capitalism works on making money, and piracy is contrary to that... the days of developers doing it only for the love (and not the money) are as long gone as the days when long hair on guys was in fashion.

But the problem extends further than just being a knee-jerk reaction to a growing global problem. Essentially, gamers in South Africa suffered the problems they did for a reason that

was far beyond Valve's control - or even knowledge.

Half Life 2 installations in the States were largely without problem - the reason being that the United States has a much better established broadband infrastructure, allowing for easier and faster authentication of the game. Additionally, the servers for Steam authentication are located in the USA, meaning no international internet complications. Essentially, it was almost as though they could plug their machine right into the server and get the job done. Valve, essentially, catered for the American market while not thinking of the rest of the world.

And why should they? The US is their largest market, followed by Western Europe (which also has a good infrastructure.) Us here at the southern tip of Africa are a mere drop in the ocean for them and, considering the facts that we are both behind the technological times here and have a very piracy driven culture, they cannot be blamed for this problem - if you are reasonable and consider all the facts. And seeing as how internet authentication will probably become the new way to combat piracy, all we can do is hope that South Africa catches up to the rest of the world - it's time to leave the Stone Ages.

In case you didn't know yet...

Award of Merit

Any game scoring between 85 and 90 on our super tough scoring system gets this award. It's a mark of quality.



Award of Excellence

91 and above in the score box gets a game this coveted and world famous accolade. Only the best of the best get this rare and sought after award.



Editor's Choice

Once in a while, a game comes along that displays certain qualities which our editor likes. Pretty colours and loud noises help...



Platform

Platforms are 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 - because we can. Live with it.

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- 30 email redirects
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- Control panel
- Virus scanning
- Spam filtering (SpamAssassin)
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- Webmail
- Custom error documents
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- SSI
- FrontPage server extensions
- 2 Databases (MySQL or Postgres)
- Control panel
- Virus scanning
- Spam filtering (SpamAssassin)
- Webstats
- Webmail
- Custom error documents
- 50 Group mails
- Site builder
- 2 Sub domains

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- PHP
- SSI
- FrontPage server extensions
- 1 Database (MySQL or Postgres)
- Control panel
- Virus scanning
- Spam filtering (SpamAssassin)
- Webstats
- Webmail
- Custom error documents
- 25 Group mails

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Half-Life 2



Suggested Retail Price: R 299.00 · **Developer:** Valve Corporation · **Publisher:** Vivendi Universal
Supplier: Nu Metro [011] 340 9345 · **Genre:** First Person Shooter · **Reviewer:** Michael James
Minimum Specifications: Pentium 3 1.2GHz · 256 MB RAM · 8 x CD ROM · 32 MB Video Card · 4.5 GB HDD

For Valve it's been a long road getting Half-Life 2 on the shelves. \$40 million, five years of exhaustive work, an expensive ongoing legal battle with their publishers, a missed deadline and the theft of their intellectual property have all conspired to get us to where we are today. Half-Life 2 is a convincing argument for the evolutionary theory that favours the fit and the strong. Against all the hardships the creative team at Valve have produced the best computer game ever and have convincingly laid the first real foundations upon which this industry can build captivating and engrossing experiences that rival all other forms of entertainment.

Half-Life 2 is such a significant departure from what we're used to there isn't really a standard you can measure it against. It's not the graphics because that's not important, it's not the artificial

intelligence, it's not the story or the play dynamic or the sound but rather the way all of these components are deviously strung together. Compared to Half-Life 2 all other games in this genre appear primitive and bland and just as the original Half-Life changed the way we thought about first person shooters, Half-Life 2 has done it again.

So, it's not simply another game but rather a paradigm shift that has forged a new way of thinking about the gaming industry. It'll be the launching pad for a thousand modifications, maps, ideas and inspiration. But enough with the gushing praise, you need to be convinced, and so welcome to the world of Half-Life 2.

Highlighting plot details is a little unfair so to avoid spoilers let's just jump right in with the basics... humanity is being oppressed by the Combine, an alien force that has taken control of

the planet. The human race is now in a submissive role, existing under an alien martial law and this submission is actively encouraged by Dr. Breen [former head of Black Mesa from the original game] who appears on all communication channels forcing propaganda down the throats of all the citizens of City 17. Some time has passed since the events in the original game and as usual there is much mystery surrounding how you come to be on a train headed for City 17 where your adventure begins.

You begin the game as an ordinary citizen of City 17 without any kind of weapon, except the ability to throw garbage at Combine soldiers [which usually results in being clubbed with a stun weapon]. This is how the beginning of the game plays out, you exploring your surroundings and gradually figuring out where to go and what to do. As you move around the game



Fits like an old glove



This is what crawls around in the sewers in City 17 - remember to flush properly





Just look at that water...



AUX POWER
FLASHLIGHT

This is why you don't go to Ravenholm...

AMMO 6 20



Funny how these things always grow right above where you need to go



HEALTH 100 SUIT 98

AMMO 5 30

The bad news is that after this Ant Lion Guard is finished mauling these guards you're next

world you're always under the watchful gaze of Combine soldiers who instruct you where to go and what to do and during all this time you can hear Dr. Breen telling you to cooperate and be a good citizen - it all feels so wrong. The level of intensity that builds during this initial level shows its true face when you commit your first violent act. It all happens so quickly and you react to the situation with deadly force and after the dusts settles you're left with a mixture of wondering if you did the right thing and a sickening dread that you've just gone too far. This emotion is created by the level of insignificance and lack of control you're made to feel during the beginning stages of the game - sheer genius. Eventually after a few desperate encounters with the Combine you stumble across the resistance and this is where the game really kicks off.

The telling of the story happens as you play through the game and disconcertingly while you play, everyone you encounter treats you like a hero, capable of achieving anything. This immediately puts pressure on you as you're expected to know what to do in any situation but as the player you really have no idea what they're talking about or what you are required to do.

One of the game's landmark achievements is how it delivers the story and creates the atmosphere. The character modelling and animation is nothing short of brilliant and you'll constantly be amazed at the lifelike behaviour everyone exhibits. From the small subtle nuances like one character affectionately touching another's arm or the visible signs of tension and fear makes the overall experience that much richer and believable. Valve have truly reinvented in-game characters with Half-Life 2 and this is just one small area that has significantly raised the bar higher than previously imagined.

Any game that manages to do something new in this saturate market is something special and Half-Life 2 offers heaps of new experiences. Although Half-Life 2 is a first person shooter it manages to give the player so much new stuff to do that'll have you shaking your head and wondering why this concept or that play dynamic has never been done before. New experiences range from physics based combat where players can pick up a brick and throw it at enemies, to racing along the desolate highway 17 in a heavily modified dune buggy. On some



levels you'll control a small force of alien Ant Lions and in others you'll have to move through an entire level without touching large portions of the ground.

Using the gravity gun you'll fling saw blades at zombies slicing them in half and, as well as the usual tense combat where you not only fight Combine soldiers but 50 foot stalkers, you'll also find yourself setting up perimeter defences with stationary gun turrets. In other areas players must shove a blockade of burnt out cars off a cliff so they can pass. There's just so much game here that enhances the traditional run and gun play dynamic we're all so used to. On a basic level the traditional shooting bits are intense and in some areas you'll even get to control a squad of soldiers as you try and take back the city and remove the alien presence. There is really so much sheer variation that the 20 odds hours of play feel more like 40.

From a technical standpoint the game features stunning visuals that are only let down a little by low resolution textures used in the large outside areas but this is an acceptable and minor sacrifice compared to the overall gains. Sound is used to great effect with some



So what's the big deal about the Source engine, people ask? Aside from being the power behind the lush visuals of Half-Life 2, Source also represents a major milestone in how games are developed, translated and released. Coupled with the content delivery system Steam, Source integrates physics, radiosity and detailed lip-syncing to provide a highly cinematic experience.

Let's get slightly technical for a moment so that we can elaborate:

The Source engine uses a technique called global radiosity, a method of shading the world realistically based on how light bounces around the environment. Each model in the world, such as enemies and vehicles, take this 'radiosity solution' into account and quickly adjusts it's own shading to make sure it looks right (for example, if an enemy is standing next to a red wall, the enemy itself will have a red tint due to the 'reflected light' off the wall).

In addition to the realistic way Source handles lighting, it also uses Normal Mapping to add an extra level of detail to walls, floors and models. In a nutshell, Normal mapping allows the engine to add extra bumpiness, specular lighting or reflections and refractions to textures. The specular mapping itself can be used to put shiny parts, or specifically darken areas on the same material. Simply put, a brick texture can have shiny 'water' dripping down it while the grooves in-between the bricks are dark and unaffected by the natural

lighting in a scene.

All this detail in the textures is augmented even further by powerful Pixel Shaders, bits of programming that allow artists to add even more complexity to a scene, such as Fresnel (French physicist who supported the wave theory of light, investigated polarized light, and developed a compound lens for use in lighthouses) water reflections and so fourth.

But the true icing on the Source cake has to be its approach to lip-syncing and character emotion. Characters can blink, raise a questioning eyebrow and even appear to be thinking based solely on body language and facial emotes, all of which is easily created, defined and implemented by the artists and scriptwriters using the Source engine. Once a character model has been created, key facial positions are defined using a sort of 'muscular and bone' structure underneath the face, then these 'emotes' can be blended together on cue, real-time, as the character speaks to you or to another character. All of this matches the actual speech perfectly, and can even be easily tailored to specific

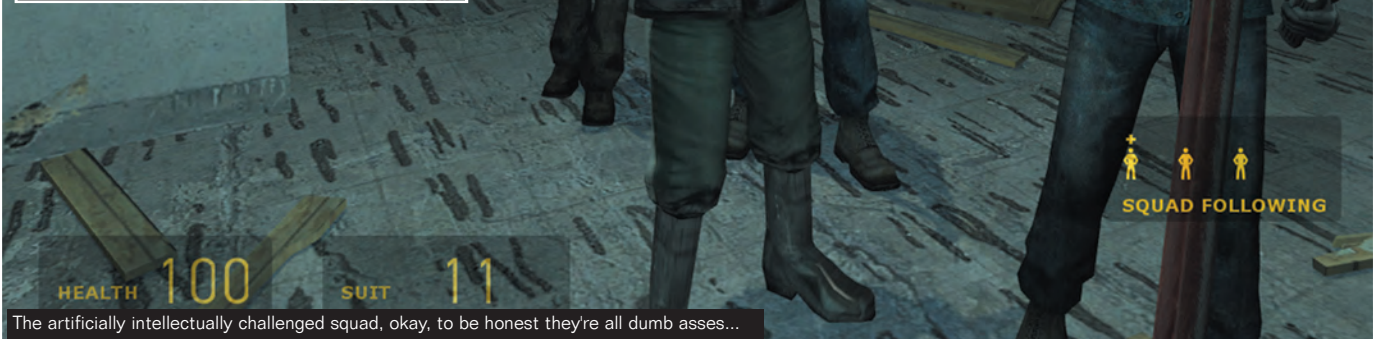
regions and languages (such as Japanese and French, each with the appropriate facial animations depending on how that region speaks, since the action of raising an eyebrow can mean different things in different countries).

All of this, together with a detailed physics system that supports weight, buoyancy and other real-world physical traits along with a WYSIWYG (What You See Is What You Get) level editor, forms the almost overpowered Source engine and its healthy ideas about how game development should be approached.





If you don't like the look of something light it up a little

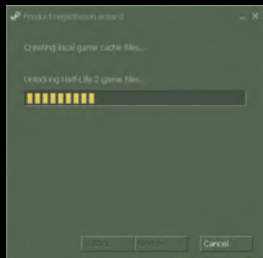


The artificially intellectually challenged squad, okay, to be honest they're all dumb asses...



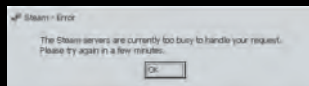
Briefly Steam is a concept created by Valve to legally distribute content to gamers online. Steam is so functional that it was possible to preload most of Half-Life 2 before the game went gold and when it was released Steam kicked in and allowed gamers to download the final chunk of the game, authenticate the serial key online and unlock Half-Life 2 to play without ever needing a box, CD case or manual.

That's Steam in a nutshell and based on the sheer amount of negative traffic received around the world it has become apparent that many gamers don't like the fact that you need to initially be con-



nected to the internet to unlock and play a game, with particular emphasis on the fact that Half-Life 2 is essentially a single player game. It was inevitable that rampant piracy would result in something like this happening and while people think they have a valid argument as to why they should now pirate the game they don't.

Having said that Valve should have placed a large orange sticker on the box stating that an Internet connection is required. They should have better prepared retailers so they could warn people. The real tragedy is that the time and complexity of getting this title to run will prove too much for the average consumer - exactly the kind of person that everyone wants to attract to the gaming industry. If you compare the installation of Half-Life 2



with The Sims 2 it's clear that the former is geared around simplicity. Should this affect the score? Yes and no. The review sample installed perfectly and

thanks in part to an intermittent Internet connection took just over 1 hour to get running. This is probably the first time since Command & Conquer that a games' installation faced up to so much scrutiny. They usually just get on with the job and work without an effort. Game journalists often joke that some games only scored 30% because they installed. Why are people irritated, because they cannot pirate the game, because they had to wait a few hours to play it, because the gaming community hit critical mass on this and suddenly Valve became a favourite target? Ironic that the best first person shooter ever created should stumble so badly over the smallest hurdle when creating a game - the installation routine. Will this affect the score in a big way then, no - it's taken into consideration overall.

of the best atmospheric noises ever conceived in a game. Besides the visual image before you the audio creates an entirely separate 'unseen' world all around you and it's not until a grenade goes off near your head and your hearing temporarily fades do you understand just how effective the use of audio is in Half-Life 2.

Half-Life 2 didn't score 100% for a few reasons and the biggest complaint has to be the squad artificial intelligence. On a number of occasions during the game resistance fighters join up with you and you can control what they do to some degree. This is all fine and well but they are pretty dumb when it comes to cramming doorways and clogging up staircases. Annoying in any circumstance but unforgivable if it gets you killed and the worst part is you can't put a bullet in their skulls. In terms of the whole game this is the only complaint that detracts from the experience. One other potential problem that brings a more real edge to the fairytale is the installation routine and

getting your copy authenticated by an online service before you can play. This isn't a problem if you have plenty of fast cheap bandwidth but people with old modems are going to battle to get Half-Life 2 to run and those without Internet connections simply can't play the game. Some debate is also raging regarding the lack of any multiplayer support in the final game, Valve have said that Counter-Strike source is the multiplayer part of Half-Life 2 but it seems this explanation isn't going down to well with the community in general. This is something time will fix with the scores of modifications and enhancements to the game that'll be arriving in the months to come but as it stands out of the box you can't play the game without a decent Internet connection and there is no straight Half-Life 2 multiplayer.

It must still be stressed that these points are negligible when compared to the whole game and are worthwhile putting up with to get to the experience locked away inside.

Half-Life 2 has shown the way forward for this entertainment medium, it's not about running around with a gun anymore it's an immersive interactive experience that will change the way the industry thinks about games. Aside from being the best first person shooter ever created Half-Life 2 more importantly takes the genre to new levels in terms of experiencing a game. This game is almost as important of a step forward as the introduction of 3D acceleration, it's just a shame that a laboured installation routine and high age restriction are going to get in the way of more casual gamers experiencing one of the defining titles of our time. Half-Life 2 is a classic in every sense of the word and a simple review like this just doesn't do the game any justice - you have to play it to understand.

A true classic that takes computer gaming to the next level

96



Λ² The Cast



Dr. Eli Vance
Good friend of Gordon Freeman. Eli has created a new laboratory called Black Mesa East and is dabbling in experimental technology.



Dr. Wallace Breen
This is, for all intents and purposes, the bad guy in the game. He is credited with brokering a deal with the Combine and selling out humanity.



Alyx Vance
The daughter of Eli and key figure in the fight against the Combine. If they made a movie she would probably be Gordon's love interest.



Dr. Ruth Mossman
An associate of Dr. Vance, Ruth and Alyx don't get along. If they made a movie this would be the secondary but unsuccessful, love interest.



Barney
Hates the bad guys, likes cracking jokes at Gordon's expense. If they made a movie this would be your cop buddy.



G-Man
Mysterious and secretive the G-Man would be the cigarette smoking guy from the X-Files if they made a movie. During the game the G-Man makes a number of appearances.



One of the last members of the cast is Dog, Alyx's pet robot. Here Dog is about to toss this van at someone



FIFA 2005



Suggested Retail Price: R 299 · **Developer:** EA Sports · **Publisher:** Electronic Arts
Supplier: EA Africa [011] 516 8300 · **Genre:** Sports · **Reviewer:** Warren Steven
Minimum Specifications: Pentium 700MHz · 128 MB RAM · 32 x CD ROM · 32MB Video Card · 800MB HDD

Nothing has changed in the FA Premier League of late so we are left with few opportunities to make a difference, except when we take matters into our own hands and force the issue. This being said we have been able to forcibly take control of our favourite teams over the years and simply lambaste our opposition time and again; well that would be on easy mode for the most part, but we walk off victorious nonetheless.

The top football game on the PC has been too close to call for a few years now as EA Sports and Konami struggle for supremacy. Each title has a handle on their specific selling point and are currently probing in order to find out just how to make that all important difference. EA Sports FIFA 2005 once again wins hands down in the presentation and licensing departments, but has missed the tackle in bringing Pro Evolution Soccer down in the reality and playability departments.

EA Sports has worked hard on closing the gap when it comes to playability. The superb work on the physics and one-touch mechanics has given FIFA 2005 a more polished feel and most certainly more dimension to its play dynamic. Most importantly the soccer ball takes on a new element of independence as it features as a separate animation, which allows the ball more fluidity and realism during the game. Gone are the 45 degree turns with the ball stuck to your feet that is synonymous with arcade games. This gives the 2005 version of FIFA more scope in its playability and creates more opportunities with its off the ball moves.

FIFA boasts 18 leagues, 11000 authentic players and 38 national teams, which unfortunately doesn't include our own Bafana Bafana, who have been unwillingly omitted. Though we can all confess to the fact that we normally play with the top ranked teams when trying to be competitive, it was always fun to take on your younger brother with Bafana Bafana just to prove a point.


Game options have been given a twist with the inclusion of what was meant to be an improved 15-season career mode. Alas the attempt is feeble and uninspiring because it tries to merge the impending playability of

Total Club Manager 2005, but ends up watered down to something that is a mere sample of its worth. The ability to use FIFA 2005 in conjunction with TCM2005 does get the juices flowing, but the inkling of boot before the sock is evident.

EA Sports have refined the reward system to unlock items such as 3rd kits, extra music tracks, official balls and even the oddball Italian referee Pierluigi Collina. Points are awarded to you for reaching certain milestones, which in turn can be used to unlock these items.

Presentation is as usual superb with a large variety of sound tracks from the likes of Morrissey, Scissor Sisters, Los Amigos Invisibles and Debi Nova, to mention a few. Commentary from the legendary John Motson and Ally McCoist is for the most part timely and realistic, with a few odd mistakes here and there. Graphically FIFA 2005 is stunning and performs well on entry to

medium level gaming rigs. As a package you cannot beat FIFA for giving you an authentic feeling that combines with its TV style approach to entertain you.

It must get increasingly harder each year to evolve a generic product into something sellable. EA Sports have cracked the nod once again, but let it be said there was much room for improvement that seems to have been overlooked to concentrate on other areas. FIFA 2005 is certainly a package for the football fan regardless of its improvements over the 2004 version, but EA Sports must go the extra mile next time round to be considered in a similar light. 

Presentation and authenticity give FIFA 2005 the edge once again

82



GAINWARD
Beyond Your Imagination



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GTA: San Andreas



PlayStation 2
Review



Award of
Excellence

Suggested Retail Price: R 499 · **Developer:** Rockstar North · **Publisher:** Rockstar
Supplier: Ster Kinekor [011] 445 7900 · **Genre:** Action Adventure · **Reviewer:** James Francis
Minimum Specifications: 1 Player · Analog compatible · Vibration compatible

At the time of writing this game has sold in its millions locally and even shifted a lot of records on the local scene. While I'm highly reluctant to use a game's sales figures as a positive point (since even terrible games can sell well) I can't help but regard San Andreas' success as related to what is simply one of the best games made. Yes, there's also the matter that San Andreas is the latest game in the most successful franchise known to gamers. But it's hard to fault the series for rehashing the same formula because GTA is a very flexible open-ended game, constantly dominating the benchmark for emergent gameplay. And yet despite such high standards San Andreas rises above everything else in the series, no question about it.

The game wastes little time, as usual, in putting you into your situation. Playing as CJ (short for Carl Johnston) your character returns to Los Santos after the murder of your mother; in no time a trio of police officers frame you for the death of a cop and you are stuck in the city until they run out of uses for you. At the same time you discover that the old neighbourhood has fallen on hard times and your gang is now a mere shadow of what it was. Time for action? Fo' sho!

San Andreas has one singular word to describe it: Huge. I'd like to amend that with words like unbelievably, ridiculously and amazingly huge. This stands true in San Andreas' scale, scope and detail. As far as the first city goes, I'd bet you can comfortably fit Vice City and Liberty City into Los Santos alone. Considering that that only makes up a third of the game (there are still two more cities plus several small towns scattered along the country side), you could wager that the only game in the series that rivals GTA: SA in size is the original GTA - and there you couldn't travel between the cities.

That, of course, requires you to unlock them. Unfortunately I have bad news for players who enjoyed GTA 3 and VC's easy-to-unlock territories: San Andreas is a far bigger game in terms of missions as well and you'll find you spend a lot more time in an area than before. Missions still progress the game with large steps, but thanks to the scale


of everything there is a lot that can be unlocked and discovered. Each city contains far more story branches than any of the former games could present and it's obvious that Rockstar wanted players to spend a lot more time investigating their environment and working towards new goals.

That's the scope and scale, so what about detail? This was the cherry on the top; Rockstar took advantage of a GTA mainstay - the statistic that you could access during the game detailing your progress - and made them count. Now doing something actually improves your skill, but in an RPG style where you never worry about skill points or levels - you simply do things and you get better at it. Shoot a gun often and effectively and your gun skill goes up, making you more accurate; ride a bike often and it becomes harder to fall off and easier to manoeuvre; swim underwater and your lung capacity increases.

Yes, you can swim. But we'll get back to that in a moment. San Andreas allows you to build your character as you see fit (and as monetary means allow). You can buy clothes (and not single pickup options like Vice City had - in GTA: SA you actually go shopping) for a certain image, get a hair style and even get tattoos. Gym a lot and you buff up, eat a lot and you become fat; run a lot and you become fit; build

up your overall health and it's amazing what you can get away with.

All these stats are complimented by CJ's mobility: he can now scale walls, jump fences and swim in water. Fighting is eased with a new lock-on system courtesy of Manhunt and some weapons even feature instant kill modes (using a knife you can slit an adversary's throat), while Stealth Mode allows you to hide from the police and commit burglaries.

Graphically it's amazing, outdoing its peers and at times really pushing the PS2 to its very limits. This smacks of fan bias, but my only real complaints towards San Andreas lies in its scale: I suspect a few gamers will get impatient with the amount of work involved to open new areas, but with over 150 hours of play potential (Rockstar's estimate) don't expect a short crime spree. Listing all of GTA: SA's improvements will take far more than two pages and it's moot - just take my word for it that if you enjoyed the GTA series, you should get San Andreas and if you want to experience one of the best games in recent years, ditto. 

*The best GTA game ever made.
One of the best games ever
made. Got that?*

95





"Yo, gramps, gimme yo' watch, yo' wallet and yo' butt ugly hat!"



After a few moments Jameel began doubting his choice of getaway vehicle



Codename Panzers: Phase One



Suggested Retail Price: R 299.99 · **Developer:** Stormregion · **Publisher:** CDV
Supplier: WWE [011] 462 0150 · **Genre:** Strategy · **Reviewer:** Alex Jelagin
Minimum Specifications: Pentium 3 750MHz · 256 MB RAM · 8x CD ROM · 32 MB Video Card · 3 GB HDD

The unassuming packaging and rather dull title did not prepare me for the sheer brilliance of this game, and I was soon totally engrossed. It can be compared in style to Ground Control, but set in World War II, as the title implies. My greatest criticism regarding most strategy games, particularly those with believable or historically themed settings, is that they tend to lack story - mostly the developers provide a series of briefings and instead of a riveting plot, we are served up a dry documentary. This is not the case in Panzers - although firmly rooted in the historical timeline of WWII (thus offering some educational value), Panzers features a set of characters whose roles the player assumes during the course of the various campaigns, and these characters convey their thoughts, often totally irrelevant to the military situation, or sometimes quite funny, by means of diary

pages. This is further reinforced by the strongly cinematic fashion in which events are portrayed - cut-scenes rendered by the game engine, which is more than equal to the task, occasionally interrupt the action to bring across elements of the story.

The game's graphical engine is breathtaking, to say the least, and it's amazing that the developers boast such low system requirements, though, to be honest, I think it might run sluggishly on a system with those specs. Units are highly detailed, as is the environment, and an incredible level of shadow complexity is evident, with every sheaf of wheat casting its shadow upon the ground or other nearby objects; even ladder rungs on the side of a Soviet tank cast shadows on the tank itself! Explosion effects and the like are also of a high standard, and different munitions explode in their own distinctive and authentic fashions. Furthermore,

much time must have been invested in designing all manner of terrain objects - right down to latrines complete with interiors. The only regard in which this engine is lacking, is the fact that everything is highly animated - except faces; characters talk to each other without even their lips moving. This advanced graphics engine is shown off to good advantage by a highly mobile camera, though it must be said that its control could have been made more intuitive. The beautiful graphics are complemented by very believable sound. An interesting fact about the unit acknowledgements is that, barring the leader/hero character unit, all units report and respond in their respective languages, rather than in pseudo-accented English; this is a two-edged sword, as knowing German or Russian proves useful (the Russian radio messages are authentic, correct and unaccented, while the German sounds right



Russian tanks with their distinctive green paintjobs

to me, though I can't tell for sure), but those ignorant of these languages will miss much, as did I in the German campaign. It's just as well that the last and hardest campaign is the Allied one, meaning that nothing of importance is missed by us English-speakers. The musical score is unusually good for a military-themed game, but I imagine that after a few hours most players will be reaching for WinAmp regardless.


Before discussing the control interface, it's best if I describe how the game is played, to put it in context. Panzers is mission-based but is not truly a real-time strategy title, given the fact that players don't create buildings or units. Successfully completing primary, optional and secret objectives earns prestige points. These can be spent between missions to purchase additional units, or change existing crews' vehicles. This latter is a very important aspect - the vehicles' crews gain experience, not the vehicles themselves, so it is possible to assign veteran crews new, better vehicles. Alternatively, place

green crews in the nastiest vehicles to improve their survivability and chances of advancement, and assign elite crews to the most fragile recon vehicles. Units can be sold off, too, redeeming their prestige cost, should it be found that the current force's design isn't effective enough, or should you wish to try a different approach. The scope of available units includes a variety of infantry ranging from riflemen and medics to snipers and flamethrowers, among others, and a host of vehicles. The latter include tanks, artillery of various types, including self-propelled units, ammo trucks, repair crew vehicles, anti-air weapons and staff cars and transports of various kinds. Be assured that you'll never have an army consisting of all unit types, so re-playability is high. The focus is on ground forces - players are given virtually no access to air units, other than on a strategic requisition level - during a battle, several icons may or may not be available, allowing players to deploy a limited number of recon planes, fighter-bombers,

bombers, paratroopers or artillery barrages.

Controlling the units in combat is fairly intuitive, and the developers have provided two alternative key binding schemes, a proprietary one and a generic one they refer to as "classic". This latter is based on the key assignments used in many RTS games, and is similar to that of WarCraft III. I found it easiest to use this "classic" key scheme, rather than trying to learn a new one, and RTS veterans will likely find this to be true for them also.

Panzers offers strategy and tactics on separate levels - the former is involved in deciding how to build one's army, while the latter is applied on the battlefield. Understand that a tactical error or an unsound strategy will cost you units, and it hurts to lose even one unit, usually. Of course, in multiplayer deathmatches this is something to accept, especially if the rivals are of similar quality.

(Speaking of multiplayer - adversarial games are short and savage, seldom lasting more than five or ten minutes. This could be a great game for tournament environments.) Bargaining around throwing one's weight around will result in inferior forces in superior positions massacring your army. Panzers requires players to make tactically sound decisions and not to be lazy. The campaigns are satisfyingly long, and follow the events of World War II, with the first campaign dealing with the German blitzkrieg that got the ball rolling. Difficulty levels have been implemented in an interesting manner - on easy difficulty a player's losses will be replenished after a battle, complete with experience; normal difficulty means that a player's losses are replaced with green troops; on hard difficulty, losses aren't replaced at all; this last seems to be the way the game is ultimately meant to be played. 

Panzers is an outstanding game that, unfortunately, may well not get the recognition it deserves

81



Tony Hawk's Underground 2



PlayStation 2
Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 489.00 · **Developer:** Neversoft Interactive · **Publisher:** Activision
Supplier: Ster Kinekor [011] 455 7900 · **Genre:** Skating · **Reviewer:** Adam Liebman
Requirements: 1-2 Players · 133KB memory · Analog: Sticks only · Vibration compatible

Tony Hawk's Underground 2 marks the sixth instalment of the Tony Hawk series (which started with the Pro Skater games), and by now, one would hope that the series is coming fairly close to achieving perfection in what can only be described, at least at this point in time, as a fading genre. And, I imagine, that this is, in fact, about as close to perfection as one could hope for, though the shift of emphasis from skating to toilet-humour-style destruction might disappoint purists.

The crux of the game is the story mode, which sees a bunch of professional skateboarders, as well as a few characters from MTV's Jackass (Bam Margera, Wee Man and Steve-O, among others) embarking on a "World Destruction Tour" - basically, you make your way through a variety of levels, ranging from Barcelona and Berlin to

Australia and New Orleans, with the majority of your goals revolving around destroying things and causing chaos rather than on your mastery of the skateboard. The story mode is a refreshing addition, and is for the most part entertaining, though it marks a departure from the concepts that drew many people to this series in the first place. Fortunately, there is also a classic mode present, which incorporates the story mode levels, as well as some additional ones from prior titles. In this mode, you are presented with a list of goals more akin to those found in the original titles, which are generally more orientated towards skateboarding skill, and is certainly the more difficult of the two modes. The mix of old and new should be enough to satisfy both purists and casual gamers or newcomers to the series, without leaving anyone feeling substantially short-changed. Visually, THUG2 can hardly be faulted,

with very nicely detailed environments and characters, though slowdown issues do occasionally present themselves. The soundtrack is typical of this style of game, as are the sound effects, and the voice-acting is provided by the skaters themselves, adding to the game's sense of authenticity. All in all, Tony Hawk's Underground 2 seems to be as close to the consummate skateboarding title as we will ever come, and it remains a highly entertaining experience. Having said that, however, it must also be noted that it doesn't differ too substantially from its predecessors - if this is your first Tony Hawk outing, you won't be disappointed, but if you've already been there and done that, this might just feel like more of the same.

Very little we haven't seen before, but still very enjoyable

76

And on PC?

With each new iteration of the franchise, Tony Hawk has managed to consistently come out on top with flair. While not groundbreaking in regards to sports titles, THUG2 has enough new aspects to guarantee joy for the fans and interest for those new to the series. Stylistically, the 'MTV Jackass' approach to the plot works well while the comedic value of the cut-scenes keeps things interesting in-between the love/hate skateboarding sections. Definitely the best we've seen of Tony Hawk so far.



Miktar Dracon 85%



This game is a blast... and this caption is lame...



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Men of Valor



PC Review



Silver Award

Suggested Retail Price: R 299.00 · **Developer:** 2015 · **Publisher:** Vivendi Universal
Supplier: Ster Kinekor [011] 445 7900 · **Genre:** FPS · **Reviewer:** James Francis

Minimum Specifications: Pentium 3 1.3 GHz · 256 MB RAM · 4 x CD ROM · 64 MB Video Card · 3 GB HDD

As the World War Two mobile slows down, Vietnam finally takes the stage in war shooters. So far, the genre has seen very few titles, including the technically excellent Vietcong and the disappointing Shellshock: 'NAM 67. Men of Valor, a suitable homage to developer 2015's other achievement Medal of Honor, is by far the best game yet to grace this sub-genre - and by a mile or so to boot.

Men of Valor does for Vietnam what Call of Duty and Medal of Honor did for the Big Two - it achieves a cinematic effect of the war. Playing as Carl Johnston, you go through your tours of duty and take part in major operations throughout the US campaign in Vietnam. Each operation starts with US National Archive footage explaining what happened in this era of the war. It creates a sobering and balancing effect, feeling more like a documentary than World War 2's bravado briefings. In fact, if MoV has at least one achievement, it's that the game maintains that inherent critical and cynical view of the war as we know it. You play as an African American, a touch that laments a topic often bridged in war movies. The game also doesn't demonize the Vietcong by any means more than what atrocities they did commit. Quotes on loading screens give a wide

range of views on the war, from politicians to soldiers to even Ho Chi Minh. This doesn't take the edge off the game, though. Out there it's you or them.

Vietcong was a slow-moving, accurate game that demanded a lot of attention to your surroundings. Men of Valor cuts through this politely by giving more action-packed combat as VC soldiers jump out of the jungle, taking shots at you. Unlike Shellshock, though, the game also compliments this with ambushes and attention to detail. You aren't under constant siege, but the thick jungle foliage holds a lot of surprises. The combat scenes are usually very well thought out and you are forced to use duck-and-gun game tactics as you rush from cover to cover, shooting the VC and avoiding getting shot. In the event of taking a hit, you can hold down a key for bandaging, but you can't return fire, which often translates to a frantic salvo towards the culprit and dropping down to save what's left of the damage. This creates tense moments because stopping your health from bleeding away is vital, but often bandaging yourself exposes you to gunfire. You can raid dead soldiers for ammo and canteens, which replenish health, so your average fire fight involves shooting at heads, ducking for cover, scouring a corpse for supplies, more shooting and rushing to forward

cover.

The Unreal Tournament engine powers the arena for this lush game. As you go from area to area - jungle, rice farms, hill assaults, river missions and so on - the detail is startling and you never forget the effect of the jungle. 2015 went into great detail, making sure the foliage of each region matches its actual counterpart; this effort is obvious as you play the game - 'jungle truly in not a single word.

But in all of its grace, Men of Valor also falls short in a few sections, all tied to AI. The enemy AI isn't that impressive and while they are lethal, I often felt they got lucky or I just did something really stupid. The VC also make up for this in large numbers and cunning placements, but sometimes the fighting feels mechanical as the bad guys do stupid things. Your own squad mates are even worse. I often fell foul to a VC that happily ran around my back amidst my squad mates. Once I even cleared a hut and found one of my squad standing inside. While you don't need your team and the terms of play is strictly singular, in Vietnam's jungle combat you often need to rely on your squads actions. There's no 'I' in 'team, just in 'idiots' and I'm surrounded by those.

In terms of a war game, I'd still rank Call of Duty above 2015's offering. But my love for the Vietnam War movies and Men of Valor's own shine place it a solid second. It's a great war game that treats its subject matter as well as the player with respect, but it's slightly let down with lacklustre AI. That's not enough, though, to really bring down its quality. **N**

It might be let down by some AI issues, but Men of Valor is by far the best Vietnam and one of the best war games ever made

88



A traditional Vietnamese cookout...





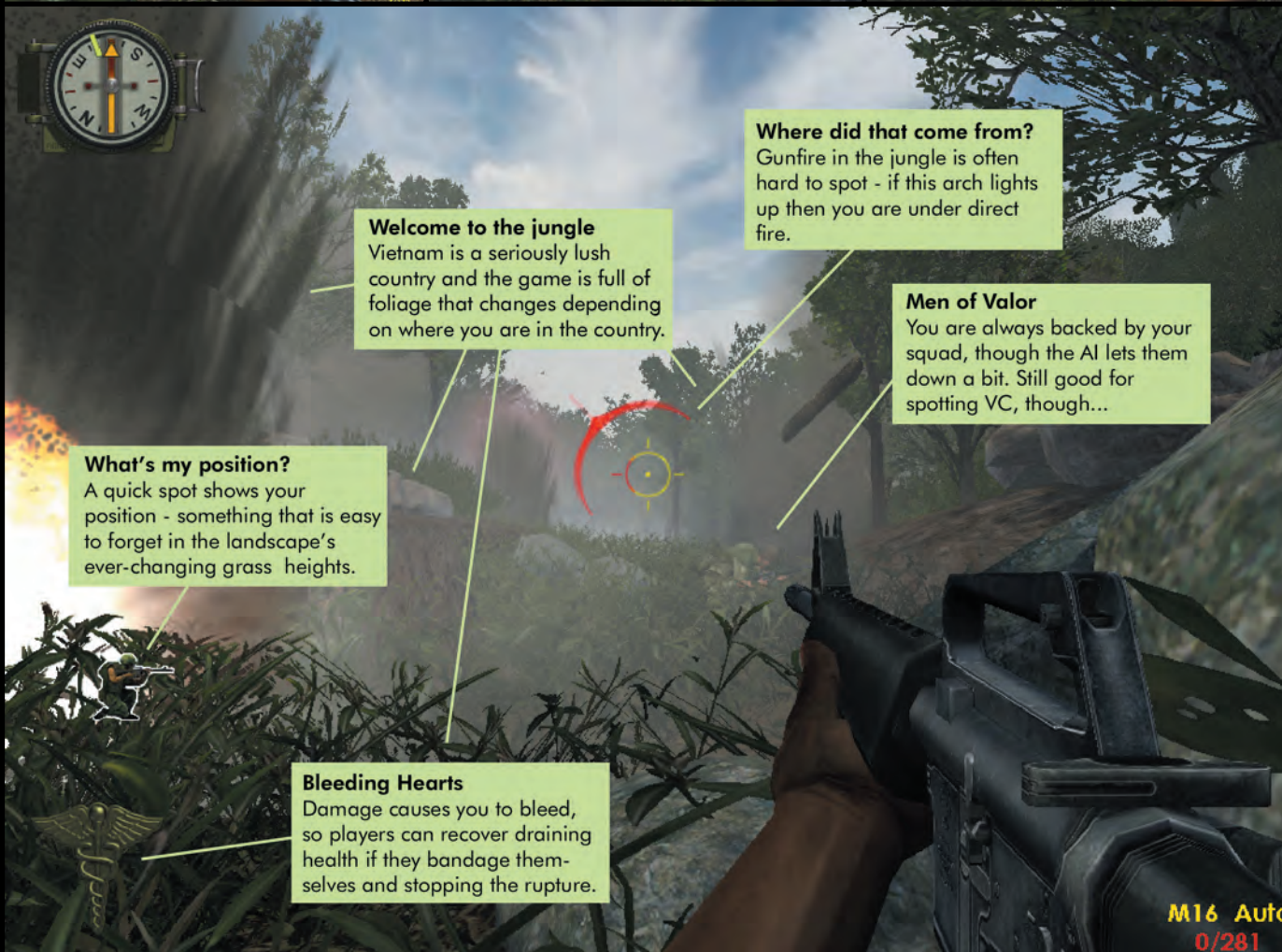
There are 264 enemies hidden in this picture!
Can you find them all?



South Vietnam



North Vietnam



What's my position?
A quick spot shows your position - something that is easy to forget in the landscape's ever-changing grass heights.

Welcome to the jungle
Vietnam is a seriously lush country and the game is full of foliage that changes depending on where you are in the country.

Where did that come from?
Gunfire in the jungle is often hard to spot - if this arch lights up then you are under direct fire.

Men of Valor
You are always backed by your squad, though the AI lets them down a bit. Still good for spotting VC, though...

Bleeding Hearts
Damage causes you to bleed, so players can recover draining health if they bandage themselves and stopping the rupture.

M16 Auto
0/281

Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude



Suggested Retail Price: R 299.00 · **Developer:** High Voltage Software · **Publisher:** Vivendi Universal
Supplier: Nu Metro (011) 340 9345 · **Genre:** Adventure · **Reviewer:** Miktar Dracon & Walt Pretorius
Minimum Specifications: Pentium 2 800MHz · 128 MB RAM · 24 x CD ROM · 32 MB Video Card · 3.5 GB HDD

Well, it's been decided that since Larry is such a multi-faceted game, we're going to do things a little differently for this review. Instead of the usual verbal diatribe of laundry-list style features, it's a dialogue. Since I was here first, I'll start it off by saying that this new Larry title is possibly the worst game I've played in my life.

But it's got naked chicks in it!

Yes, it does. But if you wanted naked chicks, you could just subscribe to various websites for cheaper than the price of this game, right?

Chicks on websites don't bounce...

I'm sensing a common theme here. Regardless this is the same line of thinking that'll help this game sell despite the fact that it's nothing more than a few tacky half-assed mini-games thrown together in-between cumbersome 'adventure' sections...

There were mini-games?

Yeah, remember those annoying bits in-between the not-funny (although sometimes funny) cut scenes with chicks, where you had to think?

Oh, yeah, those. They were rotten. But at least the graphics and... err... physics were super realistic...

About as realistic as a Tom & Jerry cartoon. Stylistically the game definitely has a certain flair, a kind of homage to its predecessors. But this certainly isn't a Larry game. Where is the witty dialogue? What happened to the double entendres?

Who the hell wants to use tired old gimmicks like "story" and "adventure" or even "thought" when there are virtual chicks around?

Those of us who are expecting a game to play, I reckon. Look, once you get past the obviousness that Magna Cum Laude is just trying to use sex to sell, there really isn't anything left for the game to do. Sure, you can find 'secret tokens' and use those to purchase nude-skins for the characters and the ability to play 'strip-dance', but overall this new Larry game missed the Love Boat and is completely deprived of the comedy that made the series popular among the 'older gamers' out there.

But isn't Larry all about tasteless humour? I mean, there hasn't really ever been any degree of class in this series...

Tasteless, but not lame. When Al Louw created the Larry series he presented the world with a chance to use everything possible to go against the impossible and get the girl, no matter how disreputable the girl. This new 'generation' of Larry (since you play the cousin of the original Larry) doesn't hit the mark on any level aside from a blatant sex-based cash-in.

To be honest, playing Devil's Advocate for this game is virtually impossible... it is rubbish that is beyond redemption! 🍌



Who's Talking?

This review was put together by two reviewers - **Miktar** speaks in **black**, **Shryke** speaks in **red**.

Miktar says "Avoid at all cost."
Shryke says "Yeah, what he said."

38



This game teaches great family values - get them drunk to get into their pants... what's next, Rohypnol?



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U-Move SuperSports



PlayStation 2
Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 299.00 · **Developer:** Sample · **Publisher:** Sample
Supplier: Ster Kinekor [011] 445 7900 · **Genre:** Mixed · **Reviewer:** Miktar Dracon
Requirements: 1 - 4 Players · 280k Memory · Sony Eye Toy

Right off the bat, straight out of left field Konami throws a winning punch with its first EyeToy foray. Now with the obligatory sports-related commentary out of the way, U-Move SuperSports is a surprising title with its intelligent use of the EyeToy and attention to detail. In keeping with a seemingly unwritten rule of EyeToy development, the characters in the games and interface are com-fortingly cell-shaded and do a great job of explaining what is required from you for each game.

Covering almost every conceivable sport from Rugby to Soccer (even the ludicrous Curling), certain games seem almost too complicated for their own good and the required fidelity with regards to the EyeToy will have you switching on lights and wearing dark clothing (the EyeToy works best this way) in an attempt to make that critical shot.

Much in the same vein as EyeToy: Play 2, U-Move's multiplayer component is

made up of players taking turns to do the required jiggling and shaking and tiebreakers involve a simultaneous pile-up of limbs.

For the times when you simply don't want to concentrate, U-Move SuperSports provides a fun-box area with odd experimental EyeToy applications where simply waving your arm results in patterns, colours or an 'instant-replay' of your action cascading down multiple screens.

U-Move SuperSports contains an incredible amount of content and well-thought out games, though obviously all are sports-oriented. [N](#)



Impressive use of the EyeToy and incredibly addictive right from the start

74

Singstar Party



PlayStation 2
Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 489.00 (includes microphone) · **Developer:** SCEE · **Publisher:** SCEE
Supplier: Ster Kinekor [011] 445 7900 · **Genre:** Karaoke · **Reviewer:** Miktar Dracon
Requirements: 1 - 2 Players · 200k Memory · Microphone

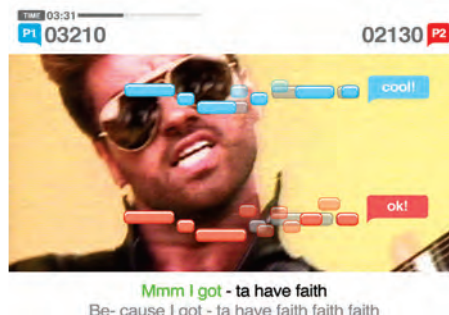
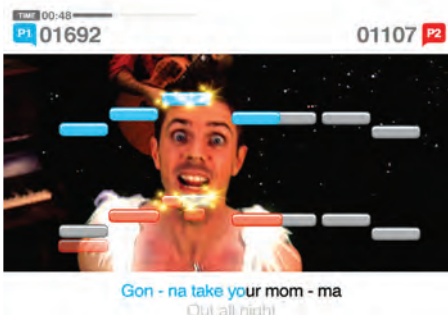
We've already established that games involving dancing, waving your arms around like a maniac or singing require a certain level of embarrassment to make it fun. EyeToy, Dance Dance Revolution and Singstar have proven that there is a lot of joy in simply forgetting how stupid you look or sound and just playing the damn game. Singstar Party attempts to take this concept up a notch by adding a new Duet mode where, if the song

allows, players each take a specific role in the song. For example, the song "I've got you babe" gives you the choice between being either Sonny or Cher. Choice made, you only sing your respective lines while your partner sings the other. It's a novel concept and works quite well, aside from the small interface oversight of warning a player who doesn't know the song off by heart, when his or her lines are up next. The career mode has been removed completely, replaced instead by a much larger selection of songs

than were available in Singstar. This extended selection seems chaotic at times; very new and very old music intermixed. EyeToy support makes a return, replacing the original music video with your own meandering vis-age while singing. Singstar Party could have done with a few more changes or feature additions, but if you're looking for an encore then it'll do just fine. [N](#)

A reasonable continuation yet lacks enough content and change to set it apart

69



This is Football 2005




PlayStation 2
Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 469.00 · **Developer:** 989 Sports · **Publisher:** Sony Computer Entertainment
Supplier: Ster Kinekor (011) 445 7900 · **Genre:** Sport · **Reviewer:** Adam Liebman
Requirements: 1-2 Players · 1 752KB memory · Analog: Sticks only · Vibration compatible

The soccer game market is undoubtedly quite a competitive one, though the annual offerings from EA Sports and Konami usually prove to be of far better quality than their closest competitors. Nonetheless, over the years, Sony has been steadily gaining ground with its "This is Football" series, and the latest instalment, though imperfect, is yet another step in the right direction. Once again, the title does not bear the same degree of official licensing as the latest FIFA title, with the stadium and team names being



the most obvious casualties, but it does carry the FIFPro license, meaning that the vast majority of real world professional players are available. Once again, the standard exhibition match and season mode (complete with transfer market) are on offer, and the career mode, which sees you guiding a young school team from obscurity to a professional league, also makes a return. Also present is a challenge mode, which scores your performance after a game according to how stylishly you played, which makes an interesting addition. The controls are, for the most part, fairly responsive, though the play dynamic is occasionally hampered by instances of poor collision detection, or asinine AI. Nonetheless, the game is, for the most part, entertaining and absorbing - FIFA devotees will likely prefer to remain with that particular franchise, but TIF2005 may be an attractive option for newcomers to the genre. 

Well produced football title - an entertaining alternative to FIFA

75



PlayStation®2



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EyeToy: Play 2



Suggested Retail Price: R 489.00 (with camera) · **Developer:** SCEE · **Publisher:** SCEE
Supplier: Ster Kinekor [011] 445 7900 · **Genre:** Mixed · **Reviewer:** Miktar Dracon
Requirements: 1 - 4 Players · 300kb Memory · Sony Eye Toy

When the first EyeToy: Play arrived it was met with the kind of critical success usually reserved for types of mad scientists who invent Super Babies; ultimately fun, yet confusingly so. EyeToy: Play 2 does not try to hide the fact that it's essentially reworking a lot of the ideas from the first Play, yet throws in enough new facets to make us forgive them. The multitude of games are now more fleshed out and feel more like a proper experience,

instead of a quick jaunt into a mini-game. Alongside the new embarrassing experiences available, is the option to make your friends suffer too. Up to four people can participate in the new multiplayer mode, possibly the most enjoyable aspect of Play 2. Each player takes solo turns at certain segments of the games while tiebreakers can involve up to four people simultaneously waving their arms.

Each game is preceded by a lengthy load-screen, but the sheer addictive-

ness of EyeToy-style games involving copious gyrations of your limbs more than makes up for this shortfall. For the paranoid, the welcome return of EyeToy: Spy lets you take sneaky shots of anyone who triggers the motion-sensitive camera, while the Experiments section gives reasonable enjoyment punching a 3D model of your own head. [N](#)

More of the same, but reworked into a fresh new package with some funky ideas

73



Dancing Stage Fusion



Suggested Retail Price: R 299.00 · **Developer:** Konami · **Publisher:** Konami
Supplier: Ster Kinekor [011] 445 7900 · **Genre:** Dancing · **Reviewer:** Miktar Dracon
Requirements: 1 - 2 Players · 30kb Memory · Dance Mat · Optional Eye Toy support

When it comes to the Dance Dance Revolution series with it's exceptionally abundant range of titles, one has to wonder what new aspects could possibly be introduced that would keep long-running fans of the series happy or even garner the interest of passer-bys. Fusion answers that question with a definitive smirk and a short yet solid list of new features along with an appreciated lengthy list of tracks.

Alongside the expected euro-pop songs currently abusing the UK Top 10 charts, Fusion has a cunning repartee of fan-favoured DDR music to balance things out and provide truly challenging situations. Standard modes such as Tutorial and Workout have been given a spit and polish while the unexpected addition of EyeToy-compatible Party modes adds some flavour. Using both a Dance Mat and the EyeToy can be a harrowing yet hilarious experience, yet not required as the Party mode also has non-EyeToy games.

A reasonable amount of new songs can be unlocked provided the required criteria such as score, ability and so forth is met, each new song providing an extra challenge. As a whole, Fusion is a quality package containing all the functionality and features from the previous Dancing Stage titles and combining them with attractive presentation and a new polished overview. [N](#)

Superlative for the series, Fusion is the perfect package for enthusiasts of this genre

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Bust-a-Bloc



PlayStation 2
Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 469.00 · **Developer:** Midas Interactive Entertainment · **Publisher:** Midas Interactive
Supplier: WWWE (011) 462 0150 · **Genre:** Puzzle · **Reviewer:** Adam Liebman

Requirements: 1-2 Players · 40KB memory · Analog: Sticks only · Vibration compatible

Simplicity in games is something to which we are no longer accustomed, despite it being a principal hallmark of many games of old, which many of us fondly remember. Lately, of course, there have been a lot of attempts at recreating those old, but entertaining titles, and Bust-a-Bloc is just such an effort. Anyone who remembers Arkanoid will find

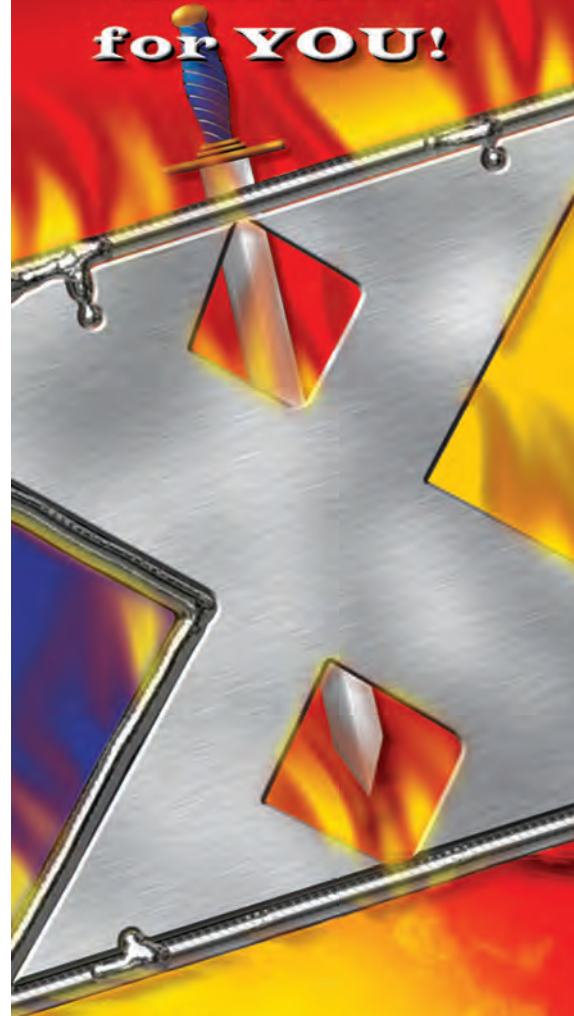
this instantly familiar - the objective is to bounce a ball off a paddle, in order to hit (and destroy) a number of blocks above it. When all the blocks have been destroyed, the level is complete, while allowing the ball to drop off-screen causes you to lose a "life". The biggest changes to the play dynamic of the original arcade titles is the availability of power-ups that have effects ranging from increasing paddle size to spawning new balls, and the change to a 3-D perspective. Unfortunately, although the play dynamic eventually becomes addictive, the game is poorly paced, with the early levels having "speed limits" set on the ball, effectively keeping it at a snail's pace, which is highly tedious and frustrating. Once things pick up a bit, the game becomes more tolerable, but it quickly becomes repetitive - it's good nostalgic fun while it lasts, but doesn't offer enough depth to make it a worthwhile experience.



Amusing puzzle game while it lasts, but tires quickly

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Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay



Xbox Review



Silver Award

Suggested Retail Price: TBA · **Developer:** Starbreeze Studios · **Publisher:** Vivendi Universal
Supplier: TBA · **Genre:** First Person Shooter · **Reviewer:** Miktar Dracon
Requirements: 1 Player

There is a certain amount of pre-requisite groaning involved when it comes to the announcement of a game based on a popular license. A good example of merited consternation is the Harry Potter franchise, riddled with mediocrity in its application and pockmarked with terrible games. When *Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay* was announced, doubt about the quality of yet another license game started to grow, especially with fans of the movies - small miracles do happen, and then result in larger miracles.

At its core, *Butcher Bay* remains a First Person Shooter. While this may speak of being a basic clone, the method with which the game pulls off its genre changes everything. Achieving a sorely missed level of style, consistency and basic innovation elevates this title way above standard fare.

Constant flawless execution of concepts such as its tutorial and theme-setting *Half-Life*-inspired "on rails" introduction set the tone, while the simple controls don't disappoint. In keeping with the in-your-face style of the movies and attitude of lead protagonist, Riddick (voiced throughout the game by Vin Diesel himself), the standard gun-based combat is augmented by rather brutal fist-fighting capabilities. One can actually see the bruises on an opponents face as you proceed to pummel and punch, additions such as knives and knuckledusters making an even bloodier mess of things.

All around you and throughout most of the game, environments are stunningly detailed and starkly contrasted by the hard absolute blacks of shadow, perfect for the sneaking portions of the game (especially after you acquire the recognized ability to see in the dark). Friends and foes alike are lifelike,

sporting quality animations and textures that simply have to be seen to be believed. Equally, the level of detail in sound and music (the latter slightly repetitive unfortunately) intensifies an already solid experience.

Despite being shorter than one would wish, from start to finish *Butcher Bay* equates a rollercoaster ride into a well-crafted universe and engrossing story. Additionally, fans of the movies are in for a few surprises while gaming puritans should be content with solid game dynamics and a few welcome innovations. **N**

An important landmark for the Xbox, the FPS genre and games based on licenses

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Timeline

Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay functions as a flashback to events before *Pitch Black*, while the animated short-film *Chronicles of Riddick: Dark Fury* (by the team who created 'Matriculated' on the *Animatrix* DVD) sits snugly in-between the movie *Pitch Black* and its sequel, *Chronicles of Riddick*.



Hey, isn't that my ex-girlfriend?



Obviously an optical shine job improves graphics...

Crash Twinsanity



PlayStation 2
Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 499.00 · **Developer:** Travellers Tales · **Publisher:** Vivendi Universal
Supplier: Nu Metro (011) 340 9345 · **Genre:** Platform · **Reviewer:** Adam Liebman
Requirements: 1 Player · 328KB memory · Analog: Sticks only · Vibration compatible

In a twist many of us would never have anticipated, the latest outing in the Crash Bandicoot series sees the traditional protagonist, Crash, teaming up with his arch-nemesis from the previous titles, Dr. Neo Cortex, in an effort to save the world as they know it from a force even more twisted and evil than Cortex himself. Needless to say, the primary "innovation" introduced by Crash Twinsanity is the addition of Cortex as a playable character, and teamwork mechanics (akin to those found in titles such as Ratchet & Clank), to make the play dynamic more interesting. In addition, in certain levels, Cortex's niece, Nina, appears as another playable character to add further variation to things. And it can quite comfortably be said that Crash Twinsanity does indeed boast a greater amount of variation than any of the previous Crash titles. Of course, the traditional Crash Bandicoot mechanics predominate the game, meaning that for the most part, you will be controlling Crash alone, with his repertoire of moves largely unchanged from prior outings, and once again, the biggest aspect of the game is typical platform game style jumping. Though this might be just what we expect from a Crash title, it also proves to be this game's Achilles heel - it's not even the lack of innovation that becomes annoying, but the lack of precision with which certain aspects of the plat-

form game mechanics have been implemented. The camera is still a source of constant frustration, as are the controls - there are several points in the game that require jumps aimed to precision, and the combination of the antagonistic camera and the slightly unpredictable controls can make these exceptionally frustrating. Add to this the fact that the save-points are few and far between, and playing the game can feel at times like a chore - had it been a little more forgiving, Twinsanity would have been a far more enjoyable experience. In spite of the annoyance factor, and the lack of innovation inherent in the game dynamic, Crash Twinsanity does manage to be an entertaining experience, largely thanks to the well-written and acted script, which is seldom lacking humour. The graphics too are reasonable, though they aren't spectacular, and the sound effects and backing music are effective

and well-suited to the game. Ultimately, Crash Twinsanity is certainly by no means a groundbreaking platform title, and it does have its minor niggles and flaws, but it still manages to be an enjoyable experience.

Though lacking in originality, Twinsanity marks a welcome return to form for the Crash Bandicoot series

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**Tech Musings:
Teleport into the Future**



words james francis

Welcome to the world of Teleports - and it's something Gene Roddenberry probably did imagine, but not the process of shifting matter across space instantly. While scientists are still working on cracking this elusive technology beyond simply shifting single pieces of quantum material, Teleports are a more current development, namely sites that have satellite access and provide a myriad of technology services within it.

There are some telecommunications hubs that count as Teleports, but the idea has found a real drive in business Teleports - large buildings that sport all forms of modern technology support and built for businesses to rent. Hong Kong became the latest participant in this new trend, spending \$2 billion on a centre called Cyberport. Like all teleports it provides high-speed network access to the world and sits complete ready for any business to move in, plug into the network and telecommunications grid and start making money. Some centres even feature data storage services and wireless connectivity. Cyberport also boasts shops and a hotel as part of the centre. So we have technology able buildings - big deal. Actually it is. Teleports are a serious means to attract businesses to a city. The offer of a technology-ready building that will carry your company through the information age is obviously a very good prospect and the companies are flocking to the idea. Hong Kong's project was in response to China building a Teleport of their own - and these two are the latest in dozens of these high-tech offices. New York built the first one in 1998 for \$70 million and since then many more have jumped up, with even more to follow. Its part of the technological revolution: while current buildings stand to make the expensive decision of whether to become modernized to this extent or not, Teleports are starting from the ground up and are a genuine wave of the future.

So where's South Africa's Teleports? We do appear to have one, but it's focused on the space industry and there seems to be no mention of one being built any time soon, though several new buildings (such as the proposed conference centre in Centurion) will have state-of-the-art technology and accessibility. Alas, we hit that familiar wall of our terrible telecommunications situation, since these high costs are definitely hurting the broadband growth sector - a vital pillar to any Teleport's functionality. Maybe we'll see one after February 29th?



Seagate 400GB Barracuda

Seagate's new Barracuda 7200.8 boasts a capacity of 400GB, and despite having a rotary speed of 7200rpm, the manufacturer claims that built-in technology allows it to match the performance of 10000rpm drives. Average seek time is 8ms, and the drive, along with smaller models, is available with SATA or Ultra-ATA interfaces. This range is unusually quiet, and carries a five-year warranty.

ASUS A8N-SLI Deluxe

This new motherboard from ASUS is designed specifically with SLI (multiple graphics cards) applications in mind. It incorporates two original features - EZ Plug and EZ Switch. The first consists of power supplies located adjacent to the PCI-Express slots, so that power degradation and electronic interference are minimised by shortening the power leads. The second, EZ Switch, extends the life of a SLI Selector Card (required to instruct the motherboard that the system will run in SLI mode) by making it easier to connect and disconnect it, reducing wear and tear and the possibility of damage.





Saitek X-52 Flight Control System

This successor to Saitek's X-45 Flight Control System consists of a joystick and a throttle, the latter featuring a LCD that displays various pertinent details while "flying". The joystick and throttle, of course, are covered in a variety of buttons, hat-switches, sliders and wheels.



FlexView 121AH-D

Eizo Nanao is advertising an unusual item - a 12.1" LCD monitor, presumably for use in environments with limited space, or for specialist applications. The unit has a hinged mounting, supports a resolution of up to 1024x768 and has an automatic brightness correction function that senses environmental illumination and adjusts accordingly. It boasts 90-degree vertical and 120-degree horizontal viewing angles, and sports a variety of inputs.

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Interview



Tony Tsao
President
D-Link International

We hear that D-Link is only second to Cisco in size?

Yes, but we can also be considered the biggest. Cisco places a lot of focus on technologies that sit in the middle of large networks. We do the same, but we also have a large market share in small business and personal use network technologies.

What kind of personal use technologies?

Wireless technology for multimedia is an important focus. The home is becoming more and more connected, but we can't rely on TV and DVD manufacturers to start building network support into their products. Networks are what we do best, so there is an important market in the home consumer. Our Media Lounge hardware is a good example of bringing electronic elements in a home together under one product and making it easy for the consumer to have a wireless home without having to change all their electronic equipment.

So it's safe to assume that Wireless is a big part of D-Link's future plans?

Yes, wireless technology already has a lot of applications today, especially with the growth of broadband.

Broadband seems to have become a key player in networking. How important is the technology to the networking sector?

Extremely! Broadband has created a new need for wireless and general networking technology at all levels of society - from business through to the private consumer. Delivering hardware that is cost-effective, easy to use and of good quality has become far more important than the marketing talk that usually surrounds Networking because we are dealing with a much wider audience with a variety of needs. One of the reasons why D-Link is such a large market leader is because we focus on this need in the market, instead of delivering large and frankly over-priced hardware that only companies can afford.

In light of this, how key is it that South Africa develops its broadband services?

Broadband is very important - connectivity to the Internet is vital to a lot of companies and the number is growing; this ties in directly with the growth of networks and networking technology. High costs and poor infrastructure hurts the growth of companies, especially larger ones, not to mention that it makes it more inaccessible to the average consumer who is taking an interest in modern technology in their homes.

Plantronics headphones

Plantronics has released the GameCom range of headsets, all featuring noise-cancelling technology, which is becoming the de facto standard in the industry. The GameCom Pro1 is a gaming-oriented headset, while the rest in the range offer a variety of features, such as Bluetooth wireless and a selection of styles. The GameCom line includes a total of five products with two wearing styles per gaming platform plus the GameCom Halo 2 Edition headset.





New wheel from JOYTECH and WilliamsF1

JOYTECH has released its second collaboration with WilliamsF1, the JOYTECH Official WilliamsF1 Team 'Force Feedback' Racing Wheel for the PlayStation2. Its creators boast unparalleled realism and customisability as key features, in addition to a built-in display that informs the user of all current settings; this display also features a stopwatch function, allowing players to measure and record lap times and the like. An auto-detect function determines whether a game being played supports Force Feedback, activating it when this is the case. Complete pedal sets and gear-shift round out the system.
www.joytech.net



Media Oriented System Transport

This is a classic case of the acronym being developed first, then words being fitted to it. Regardless of how it was named, MOST is the networking standard for in-car information systems. Fujitsu has made use of this fibre-optic bus system to present a complete in-car infotainment system. The networking standard allows for modular implementation of various devices, including TVs, DVD and other media players, PCs, navigation systems and cell-phones. Video codecs are responsible for the dissemination of streams based on (data) bus loading. Now, instead of "are we there yet?" parents will be selecting the next Disney movie to be played on the rear screens for the kids! The MOST network allows for different streams to be enjoyed by individual users, too, meaning each viewer can watch his or her own preference.

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Richard Mudd
ATI Techn
Head of Sales
ATI
STAFF

Getting Into The Game

Ati on making games, making cards
and why you shouldn't listen to
Nvidia

Graphic card manufacturers tend to operate at a level of technical obscurity, presenting marketers and public relations managers to answer the questions on their latest technologies and where the companies are heading, so it's a rare opportunity to sit down with someone who is deeply involved with the technical side of the industry.

Richard Huddy, Head of European Developer Relations at ATi, sat down with us to talk about ATi's technology, Nvidia's The Way It's Meant To Be Played campaign and why they chose Shader 2.0b

ATi are supporting DX 9 heavily, but what do you plan to do with the new 1.5 GL Extensions?

I am by background a DX guy, so I've been evangelizing Direct X. We definitely find that DirectX is where people shift games more, but OpenGL is something that we can't give up and even if we could we wouldn't. The best thing about it is that we can be as inventive as we like with any extensions to expose any part of our hardware. We don't have to have it approved by anyone. Obviously it's best if you end up with pretty uniform exposure; the OpenGL extensions are obviously the way we prefer to expose everything. That tends to work pretty well – I'm not an OpenGL guy, but what I see is that we're able to take all of the capabilities of the hardware and with very few exceptions we standardize the extensions which give people access to it in a way that makes sense. You should not as a programmer have to say "right, I'm going to program this for ATi hardware or Nvidia hardware." It's extensions hell.

When you consider that the Riva TNT already had bump-mapping support, aren't we pushing out 3D technology faster than we ever use it?

Well, there is a sense that the innovation leaves the platform rather under-explored. It can be the case that you end up with that jump to the next generation before everyone's squeezed everything they could out of the previous generation. But I don't think that's the most interesting facet of the industry. The bump-mapping that you mention on the TNT – I was at Nvidia at the time that it was brought out – what you did is you took a brightness map of an object and essentially off-set it. It was called offset bump-mapping [and] it was poor-quality mimicry. As soon as the angle was anything other than close to ninety degrees you would get nasty artefacts from it and worse still it required tremendous amounts of intervention from the CPU. You could do bump-mapping but you suffered because you couldn't go beyond about 10 000 polygons a frame. These days the Microsoft guys say the Xbox can do around 150 000 polygons per frame – that's a typical Xbox game. A PC can shift a lot more than that. That's why you don't see these huge blocky characters with lumpy animations running around anymore, because we've got rid of the bump-mapping that we used to have that would have forced you to have low poly counts and now you

can have things with silhouettes that look realistic and bump-mapping that works at every angle.

Isn't it a matter of you pushing the market?

No, we see more enthusiasm, not less, for the high-end boards. It used to be the case that you would typically think about two percent of the graphics boards will be sold to the high-end user at very expensive prices. Okay, they have industry influence: a lot of people listen to their advice. But when we first launched the 9700 we totally underestimated the number of people who are willing to pay the high prices to get the rich gaming experience. You can say that people are being ripped off and I guess it's a matter of personal perspective. But are you being ripped off if you only get a few hundred hours of great gameplay experience? There are plenty of other things that might cost a lot more than that for the entertainment. It's a matter of making a choice. Whenever you have money in your wallet you make your own personal choice on what you spend it on. What we are seeing at the moment is that people are very enthusiastic about the new technology because it gives them a new experience.

Do you think 3D graphics card capabilities are going to become standard on today's machines?

Absolutely. You can see that from what Intel's done this year. The new PCI Express board has Pixelshader 2 in hardware there. It's not necessarily the kind of experience where you want to put on Far Cry and play with many of the settings on – the graphics are not high performance. But it's there and the manufacturers will clearly improve the performance. They won't step it down and down and down. Basically they are trying to deliver more value and that's just integration. It doesn't cost a lot to put the hardware in and ATi and Nvidia both dabble in the integration market. It's a tricky market to play and it takes a lot of time to qualify the hardware, but it presents interesting opportunities. There's no point in buying a board with no graphics capability; the extra that you pay is pretty small. On the other hand the performance is not blinding – if you are a high-end gamer you won't play on integrated graphics. But if all you want is graphics for the masses, then yes, absolutely. ►

Nvidia uses its “The Way It’s Meant To Be Played” campaign to market its cards with gamers as well as work with developers to get the most out of their hardware. What is ATI doing in that regard?

Interesting question, particularly the way you phrase it, because I see “the way it’s meant to be played” not as a two-pronged attack – working with developers and informing PC owners. I see it exclusively as creating demand amongst consumers and the board partners. They sell it as optimized for Nvidia, [but] try taking one of these games and put it on Nvidia hardware and ATI hardware: does it look better? Does it run faster on Nvidia hardware? Typically not! Most of them we find actually run faster on ATI hardware. It’s all about the message and not about the content; it’s style over content a hundred percent. They put a tremendous amount of money out, usually with publishers and not with developers. I often hear a developer say they didn’t get any money out of it. The deal was signed with the publisher and [the developer] has no control over it. In September 2003 one of the Nvidia guys said that they had another \$25 million to spend on the project by the end of the calendar year. Gushing money to the publisher, what does it buy for the developer? Nothing. Does it reduce their development time tables? Not at all. Do they have a developer relations program? Yeah, I used to run their European developer team for four years and it’s just the same as the kind of stuff we do at ATI. We take the message out, we say “This is the hardware, this is how you handle it, this is the right kind of thing to do, here are some interesting techniques that you might want to use...” I’ll sometimes sit down with developers as they write the code for their games. But Nvidia doesn’t have any special relationship with developers in that respect. It’s all tied down to the publisher; it’s all about this message. And to my mind as a technical guy, even though I’m talking to press here and doing marketing I’m a technical guy and I really resent money that’s spent on marketing and dressed up as money that is being spent on developers – it’s not. And that’s why “The Way It’s Meant To Be Played” is to me a very empty program. It’s just this message. If I give you an Nvidia logo at the beginning of a game, you’re going to want Nvidia. It’s a bit like the old Intel Inside stuff which used to say that if you want the Internet, you

really need Intel. Come on! We could do more about marketing ourselves, but as a technical guy I don’t care about that. There is a plan for a campaign, though certainly not at the same kind of scale with so many tens of millions of dollars thrown around. But there will be a campaign from ATI and we will offer genuine value, so it’s about raising the QA (Quality Assurance) standards.

Why is Quality Assurance such an important factor in this, apart from the obvious consumer benefits?

What games publishers hate most of all is when they get a call and they have to support a game. A single call usually kills all the profit that they’ve made on that specific copy and when they get into two calls there’s no money to be made on that particular copy. So it’s such a disaster for them when they have a significant number of QA calls. From that perspective it’s all about making sure that it goes into the game player’s machine, loads up and it works perfectly. That kind of satisfaction from the consumer is the single most important thing for a publisher. A developer may want more than that; developers might want to position themselves as technology companies and want to give you the richest experience or the best game they can come up with. But the publisher is killed by support. Everything that we can do to make sure that that experience is just smooth and slick – more like a console, less like the agony of a busted PC. Everything we can do there makes a difference. So when they ship a title, there should be almost no calls and certainly something we see from companies like EA is that they say they don’t have much in the way of QA issues with ATI. We do that largely because we put out a new driver every month; high quality stuff that anyone can use without spending any money. We invest a tremendous amount in the QA process. If I want to get an urgent build of a driver, I’ve got just about no chance. The driver has to go through QA. If I wanted to go around that, there has to be a really damn good reason for it.

Your latest generation cards use Pixel Shader 2.0b instead of the latest iteration. Why go with 2.0 instead of 3.0? And what’s the difference between 2.0 and 2.0b?

What we added when we went from Shader 2.0 to Shader 2.0b is we added support for very long shaders, we added more temporary registers in the Pixel Shaders; we improved our vertex shader support so that we had assigned costs for trig functions [effectively moving the load of trig math functions away from the CPU to the GPU]. Those are all implemented in 2.0b. The most important of those is probably the Long Shaders. But the key question actually is what’s the difference between 2.0 and 3.0 and why did we decide to miss that difference out. So the difference: A texture



Pixar’s Geri’s Game

look-up in the vertex shader. But I don't see much noise about it and what surprises me is that I don't see much noise about it from Nvidia, because it feels like a big technology jump. The trouble is that it runs really slow and you can only fetch from a very limited subset. It has relevance when it comes to displacement mapping, but displacement mapping isn't actually a useful technology without sub-divided surfaces – that's the way everything is created in Hollywood. That involves painting high detail factors onto low detail geometry, which means you need more geometry and some kind of a tessellator [tessellating means to fit identical shapes together exactly] in there. In the ideal circumstance you go the route of using sub-division surfaces [a surface that dynamically adds and removes vertexes]. But it's how you represent it. Take Geri's Game, the original CG movie – Geri's face is modelled with subdivision surfaces and displacement maps. If it was only subdivision surfaces, it would look smooth and plastic and not very interesting. And if it were only displacement maps, it wouldn't have enough detail to it and look strangely angular. Without both it's like a car and petrol: I give you a car but no petrol – now travel 100 miles. Can't do it; you'll have to leave the car behind. And you wouldn't fancy petrol on its own either. Give you both and suddenly you're motoring. Without subdivision surfaces in the geometry process you can't really make much use of displacement mapping. There's a bit you can do, but not very much. And many of the things you can do turn out to be problematic. So we decided not to put in displacement mapping.

One thing Nvidia do have us on with 3.0 is you get two more full accuracy floating point interpolators [a process that fills in the gaps between data points]. You get ten floating point interpolators as opposed to eight and two fixed point interpolators. That means you can pack an extra light into the pixel shader and there are some cases, as Far Cry found, where you can put three lights into one pass and that's the maximum on ATi hardware, while you can put four lights in a pass on Nvidia hardware, which is the maximum they can handle. DirectX 9 supports 8 lights normally, but as a guy talking to programmers I would never recommend that you light things with eight lights. You may have eight lights in the room, but that chair [pointing to a nearby chair] is lighted by the three nearest lights; that's the way programmers tend to do it. Sometimes they go to four but historically it's always been three and that's not suddenly come up now that it's three lights versus four. The other difference is that we do 24-bit floating point arithmetic in the pixel shader while Nvidia do 32-bit. I've put out a fairly open challenge to both Nvidia's Developer Relations group and anyone else to show me a difference – what's the point of this. And I've yet to see a single demo which shows a significant difference. 24-bit floating point is so accurate that the extra stuff doesn't matter.

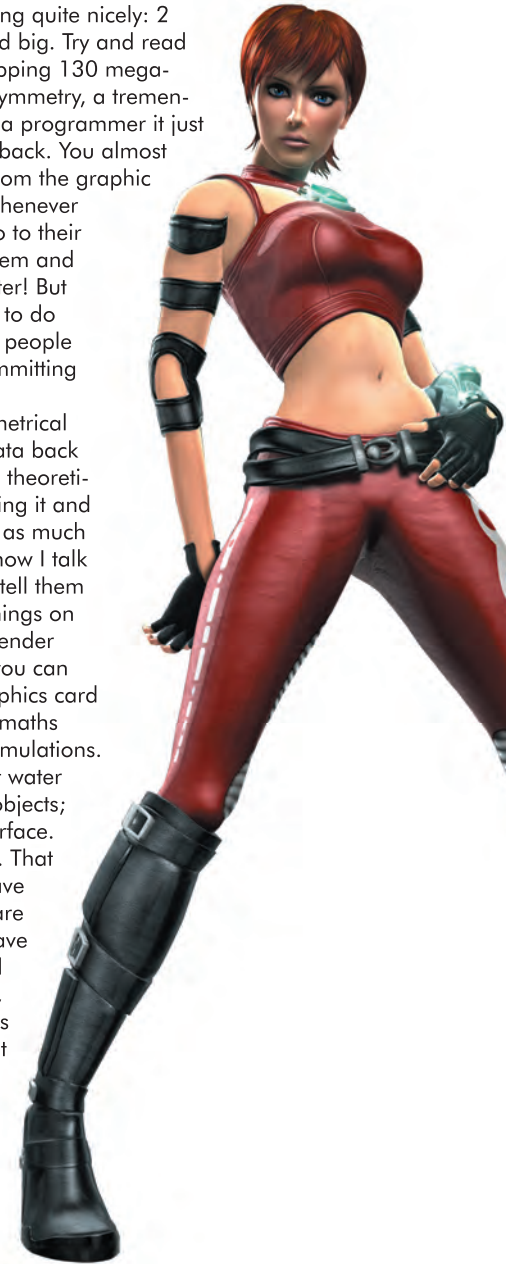
So you end up with a whole bunch of empty advantages with Nvidia and you pay a colossal amount. Instead of our 160 million gates on the chip they've got 222 million. It's an extra third of the size of the chip and for what? In my mind Nvidia made a marketing decision. They say here's Shader Model 3, it will be useful in the future – I'm not arguing with that – we'll have it now even if it's near-as-damn it prohibitively expensive. It's not the right time for it; games programmers have not finished using up the capabilities of Shader Model 2. If there's one thing they want, it's longer shaders.

How long do you expect it will take before we see games that really make use of PCI Express' bandwidth?

Most games don't push enough data to saturate AGP 4x, so AGP 8x in that sense is somewhat redundant. You do see advantages

in some situations, particularly if [the game] is very texture heavy or vertex heavy, so the data won't fit on the graphics card and you fetch it through AGP access. DOOM 3 does it particularly if you go for the ultra high setting. So either we have to make a card with 512 MB of memory or we use PCI Express. But in my mind PCI Express is best because it takes the brakes off in a different area. If you try and transfer data from the CPU to the graphics card, it goes along quite nicely: 2 gigabytes a second – nice and big. Try and read that back and you get a whopping 130 megabytes. It's about a 20-to-1 asymmetry, a tremendously violent asymmetry; as a programmer it just stops you from reading data back. You almost never try to read data back from the graphics card to use on the CPU. So whenever a programmer does that, I go to their house, kick the crap out of them and threaten their cat. It's a disaster! But programmers always wanted to do this, so we've had to educate people on how to do this without committing performance suicide.

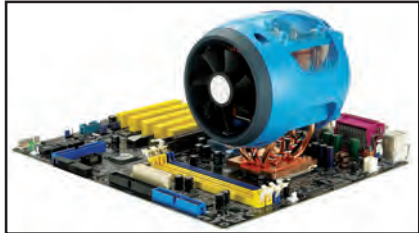
However, PCI Express is symmetrical again, so now you can get data back fast. Even with the 4 gigabyte theoretical limit, I could start measuring it and maybe get three to five times as much as AGP used to give me. So now I talk to game programmers and I tell them that they can do some nice things on the graphics card – you can render some beautiful scenes – but you can do more than that. It is a graphics card but it's also a highly parallel maths processor. You can do fluid simulations. This means, for instance, that water can flow around banks and objects; it doesn't have to just be a surface. Now it can wash things away. That would mean the water will have to interact with things which are in the game. To do that I'd have to do the fluid simulation and get the data back to the CPU, which you can do now. So this is freeing up the creativity that I've been stifling for the last six years. ■



This interview was conducted with the help and collaboration of Jian Reis (www.prophecy.co.za) and Danny Day (dislekcia@gmail.com). Thanks go to them and to Richard for his time and answers.

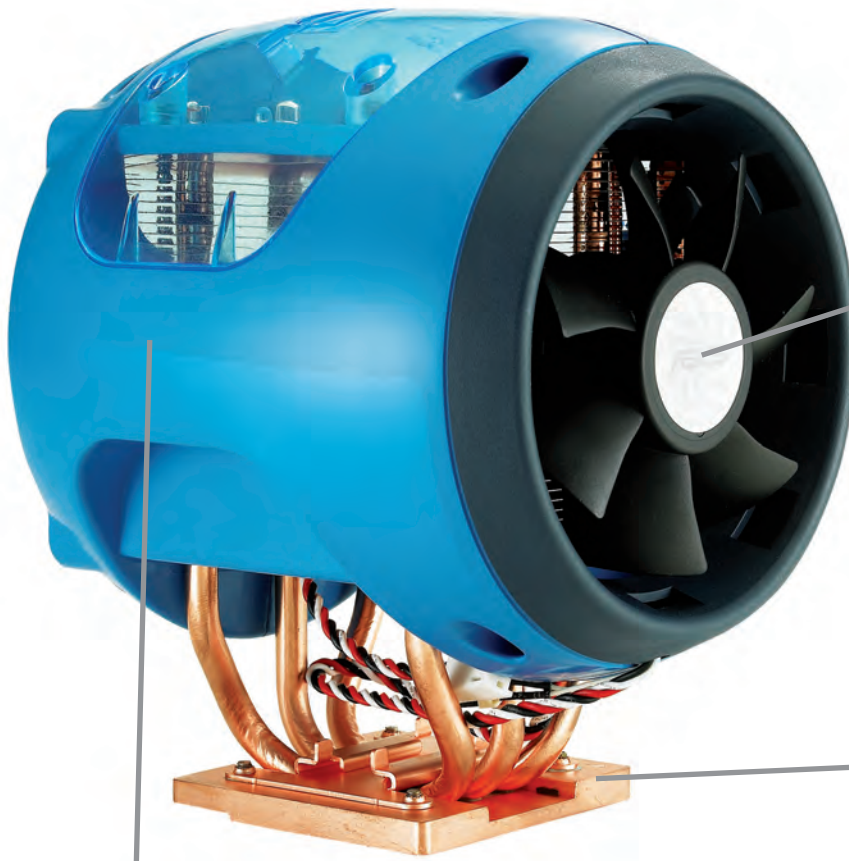
ASUS Star Ice CPU Cooler

Supplied by ASUS [011] 783 5450
R459.00



Smart clips allow this cooler to be used with LGA775, Socket 478, K8 and K7 platforms. It's pretty large and dominates the motherboard, but this powerful cooler blasts the heat directly at the back fan ports of your PC, thereby eliminating heat build-up.

If you don't want to go with water cooling, then you need to go big. And big is exactly what the ASUS Star ICE CPU Cooler is. This mammoth device dwarfs most of its competition, both in size and in performance. It fits virtually any motherboard and case, and is designed to use air as a very effective cooling method by quickly blasting heat right out of your PC case. That's pretty big talk...



The fan itself can be set to either an automatic or manual operation mode. In automatic, heat sensors help the fan determine what speed to rotate at to provide optimum cooling. In manual mode, a front or rear mounted fan control can be used to set the fan speed. Pretty nifty, eh?

No matter what the configuration of the motherboard or chassis this system is used with, it is designed to eliminate heat extremely effectively. A copper CPU contact plate leads heat up through three heat pipes to a soldered stacked fin array, which allows effective heat dissipation. A large front mounted fan moves air across this fin array, blasting the hot air towards the back of the PC case. A second fan can be added to the rear of the unit for even more effective cooling.



The Star Ice comes in a variety of different colours (well, ok, three) to choose from. Additionally, the top translucent plate of the unit's housing glows - making for an attractive addition to a windowed case.



For the technically minded, here are the specs for the Star Ice
Specification summary:
CPU Application: LGA775 (PCG 04B), Socket 478, K7, K8
Cooler Dimension: Ø119 x 114.5 x 144.5 (H)
Heat-sink Dimension (mm): 86 x 80 x 120 (H)
Heat-sink Material: Copper base / Copper stacked fins with heat-pipes (Ø6 x 3pcs)
Fan Dimension: 80 x 80 x 25
Fan Bearing: 1 ball
Fan Speed: 1,500 ~ 4,500 rpm ± 10%
Life Expectation: 50,000 Hr



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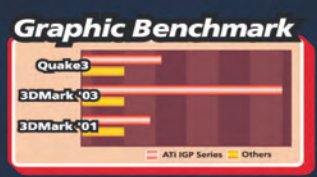


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Stress test series

These panels in the stress test demonstrate the various shader effects utilised to create realistic water and glass surfaces. The DX8 offering (bottom right) is unable to perform the lengthy calculations required to generate these surfaces and instead outputs a blank panel, while all three DX9-based cards (6600, X700 and X800) produce the desired effects. The 6600 (top right) can't complete these complex calculations quite as quickly as the ATI offerings, resulting in slightly lower frame rates overall.



survival of the fastest

how the top 3D cards benchmark on the Source engine...

Russell Bennett

Half-Life 2 has finally arrived, and whether you're a fan or a critic, it has to be conceded that the Source engine on which it is based is one impressive piece of work indeed. This engine will form the basis of video card benchmarks for a long time after the thrill of the game has faded, and considering the Counter-Strike multiplayer component uses the same basis, gamers will be purchasing video card upgrades to extract the highest frame rates from this engine for some time yet.

With the spread of offerings we've collected, we will get a good indication of just how scalable Source really is, as well as take a look at the benefits of a more powerful graphics card in this quality title.

Older-generation cards, such as the GeForce 3 Ti550, FX5200 and 9600 Pro, demonstrated wildly different outcomes during the course of these benchmarks. The Ti550 simply omits the majority of the post-processing shaders as it cannot perform these calculations, and therefore ends up with an artificial result significantly higher than newer-generation offerings. It's still playable, although the "water-man" of the stress test appears as simply a white texture and the in-game water looks decidedly reminiscent of GLQuake rather than the gorgeous tribute to the power of pixel shading it ought to be. Nonetheless a frame rate of 63 in the Stress Test using high detail settings makes the title very playable, but if you've seen the game on a DX9 card you're sure to want more. The 5200 and 9600 are capable of performing the shader routines, but this fact actually makes the 5200 in particular significantly slower across the board than the GF3

which just doesn't even try and render these effects. These last-generation mid-range offerings don't do particularly well in the HL2 bench then, although the 9600 Pro does a much better job than the 5200 managing an average of 32 fps in the stress test using high detail settings, 4 X Full-Scene Antialiasing (FSAA) and 8 X Anisotropic filtering (AA) against the dismal 19 scored of the NVIDIA offering.

Cards which were until recently top of the range, namely the FX 5900 and Radeon 9800 Pro, do a stellar job of rendering HL2, but the GeForce runs by default using the DX8.1 code paths. It's interesting considering these cards competed directly with one another only a short while ago, and once again the 9800 takes the crown in this category with 35 fps in the custom-recorded Canals2 timedemo at highest detail with FSAA and AA turned on. The 5900 manages only 28, although in less shader-intensive levels and without filtering the delta closes somewhat.

On to current-generation offerings, and here we have two headline players in the hotly-contested mid- ▶

What are shaders?

Shaders and shader performance are both critical elements of benchmarking in Half-Life 2, as the game uses so many of these quality-enhancing techniques to provide the realistic visuals which draw us deeper into the storyline. But the technology itself is, as is always the case with PCs, all about mathematics.

A shader allows for the manipulation of a graphical object, either a single pixel or a single vertex, by algorithms which create a desired visual effect. The natural-looking water with its reflections and the play of light on it, is just such an equation. In this case, the shader is constantly calculating the amount of light hitting the body of virtual liquid and the visual effects of these calculations create this stunning HL2 resource.

Pixel shaders are programs which calculate and manipulate the lighting, consistency and texture of graphical elements to allow programmers to create an almost unlimited array of realistic-looking materials and surfaces which can then be included in the game world. As the name suggests, the calculations which such shaders execute to create these realistic materials are done on a per-pixel basis allowing programmers of the Microsoft DirectX API the control to create exactly the effect they envisage in their mind's eye.

Vertex shaders similarly manipulate existing graphical elements, namely vertices, to generate realistic geometrical effects. Vertex shaders are also often needed to feed data to pixel shaders, as these require vertex data to perform their own manipulations.

These shaders have been a part of the DirectX API since DX8, and have gone through three versions since their introduction, each subsequent update providing more detailed control of the effect created. They are both a part of the software (DX), and have been implemented in dedicated gaming graphics hardware so that developers are able to generate specific visuals simply by making a call to the hardware, rather than utilising precious CPU resources to perform these calculations. Provided the hardware is capable of executing these instructions quickly enough, this integration means that shader effects can be inserted into DX titles without impacting CPU calculations at all, the load is taken entirely by the GPU.

range DX9 space from the old protagonists, namely the Radeon X700 and GeForce 6600 offerings. This was one of the most interesting segments of this review, but once again a clear winner emerges and yet again it's an ATi offering.

The 6600 suffers due to its drastically lowered clock frequencies and simply can't match the "leaner X800" performance of its competition. Although identical in concept, produce a lower-spec version of the top of the range models and sell it at a more affordable price point, the X700 is far better realised. The 6600 GT sounds far more promising than this vanilla variant sporting much more acceptable clock speeds by modern standards.

It's particularly under the demands of filtering that the NVIDIA offering starts to unravel. At high detail settings without FSAA enabled, the 6600 achieves 37.15 fps in the Canals2 timedemo against 43.61 for the X700. Turn 4 X FSAA and 8 X AA on, and these drop to 31.05 and 39.94 respectively. In the stress test the delta is larger still, with the NVIDIA managing 52.86 to the X700's 67.20. Both boards feature 128 MB RAM so the difference comes down to clock frequencies and

more pixel processing pipelines on the ATi.

Finally, the fastest board in our collection, the X800 Pro 256 MB. This card positively monsters HL2, and although far pricier than any of the other options in this review I'll include the frame rates here for reference nonetheless. In the Video Stress Test, the slower FSB of the AGP platform I used for testing limits the X800 early on, so there's less than 10 fps difference between high detail with FSAA and the lowest detail settings. The X800 Pro pulls 81.92 with FSAA and AA turned on and all other settings at their max, 85.70 at the same detail with filtering disabled, and 89.94 at low quality settings.

Reviewing the performance of these cards, it is possible that the HL2 code paths generally favour the ATi offerings as this manufacturer seems to dominate contrary to what I'd read on Internet technology news sites and forums. If this is the case so be it, making HL2 to ATi what DOOM 3 is to NVIDIA.

Disregarding this possibility, what I can tell you is that the Source engine really is capable of scaling down to



Canals series

Once again the difference between the capabilities of these generation of cards is quite clear. The Ti550 (on the left), limited to the DX8 implementation of shaders, generates a flat and unrealistic water texture even though DX8 has a famous water shader built in to it. The more complex DX9 water however is a lengthier algorithm, which the limitations on the older DirectX version make impossible to calculate. DX9 cards deliver water which reflects both the world and entities in a highly realistic manner.



Waterman series

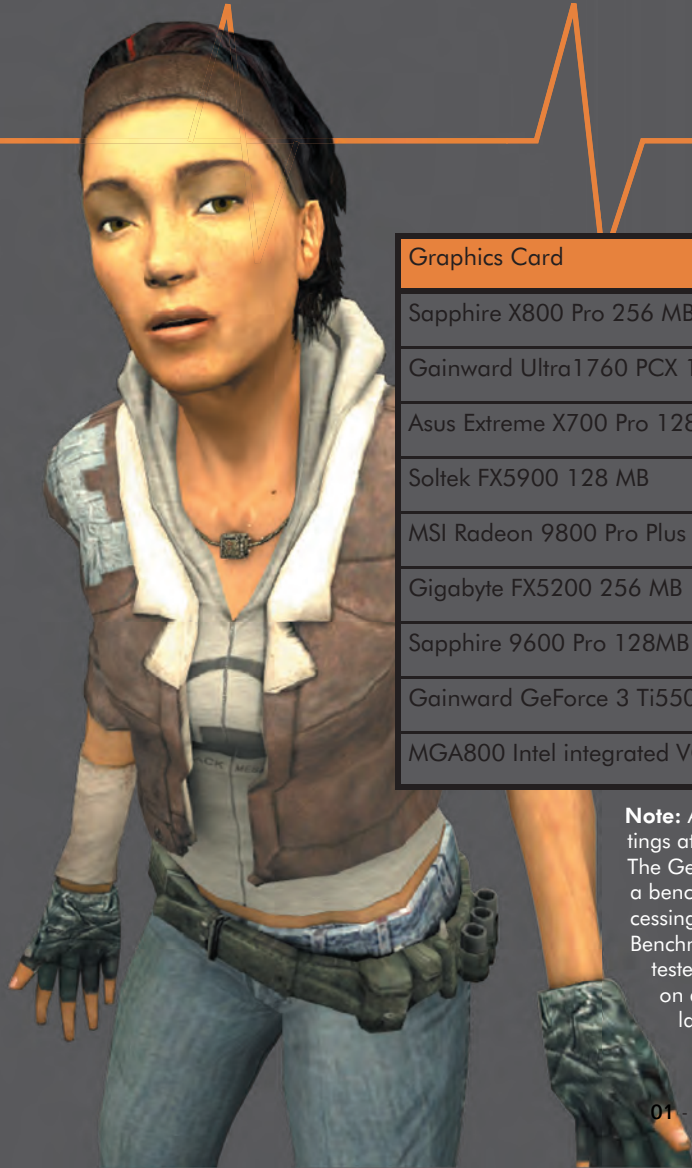
Also in the stress test, this model has been layered with pixel processing to create a translucent, watery skin. Once again the mathematical abilities required to compute the lighting and colour of the pixels being manipulated proves beyond the limitations of DX8 (on the left), resulting in the blank model, or white texture you see, being displayed instead on the Ti550 instead of the shimmering apparition which the X700 generates.

older graphics boards, with limitations and dramatically reduced visual quality of course, but you would certainly be able to play the game even on cards as old as a GeForce 2. Even the Intel graphics solution built into my LGA775 P4 motherboard ran HL2 without major hassles, although admittedly I don't think I'd enjoy sacrificing the pixel processing and still getting lag in frantic fire fights. Newer DX9-offerings are what you really want for the full HL2 effect, and from the panel we collected there's a definite preference towards Radeon-based offerings. I would love to have had a 6800 GT to really test the X700 Pro's mettle, but against the vanilla 6600 the Radeon takes the title with ease. Similarly, we need to get hold of a 6800 GT or Ultra to compare against the frames obtained by the X800 Pro, untouchable in this instance. If you are lucky enough to have such a high-end GPU installed, HL2 will run at its most beautiful, it being the first title I've seen which really should be run with at least some FSAA enabled to avoid jagged-edged textures.

The scalability of this engine, and its extensive use of advanced shader models to create a stunning and realistic game world, makes HL2 an excellent benchmark of the DX9 performance of graphics hardware. By extension then, the engine is excellent at testing the shader models implemented in the silicone and how well these differing techniques cope when trying to render apace with the rapid-fire action. The higher precision and flexibility of DX9-based offerings, which incorporate all the quality and performance benefits of this latest API and its shader implementation into the hardware itself, are geared to render these higher-quality surfaces fast enough to maintain decent frame rates. They have more pixel and vertex pipelines built in, although the limited number of pipelines incorporated into NVidia offerings result in a general performance deficit. Specific enhancements built into the driver could turn these results around, but simply increasing the DX9 performance of the hardware itself is a better path to take. As things stand at the moment, Half-Life 2 is a major blow to NVidia and really shows off the advantages of ATI-based cards as the DX9 hardware of choice. **N**

DX9 versus DX8

The differences between DX8, which cards like the FX5900 are better able to process, and DX9 which the newer offerings like the X800 take advantage of to deliver their higher-quality visuals, comes down to shaders. DX9 shader effects are more realistic as the newer API provides DX programmers with more powerful shader capabilities. The pixel shader instruction set for instance, which defines how powerful this shader engine is, has been doubled in the latest incarnation to 64. The vertex shader set is similarly doubled to a total of 256. What's more the number of constants which each shader expression is capable of making use of in its calculations more than doubled for both shader types, allowing programmers to code much longer and therefore more complete shader routines to deliver the highest levels of surface and material realism. Floating-point precision, which dictates how many colours and shades can be generated for the most realistic look, has also been dramatically increased with DX9 now supporting full 128-bit capabilities. DX9 and DX9 hardware is capable of performing arbitrary maths calculations to generate pixel colours freeing the developer by providing more than one way to generate an image. And finally, the DX9 specification includes program flow-control capabilities so that developers can code loops and branches into their shader routines allowing the shader to terminate itself, for instance, when it knows that no further calculations are necessary on the object.



Graphics Card	Stress Test	Lab	Coastal	Canals	Total
Sapphire X800 Pro 256 MB	81.92	72.19	68.92	51.10	274.13
Gainward Ultra1760 PCX 128MB	52.86	51.4	52.47	31.05	187.78
Asus Extreme X700 Pro 128MB	67.20	61.92	64.05	39.94	233.11
Soltek FX5900 128 MB	34.05	36.19	38.00	28.86	137.1
MSI Radeon 9800 Pro Plus 128MB	43.98	50.05	48.48	34.10	176.61
Gigabyte FX5200 256 MB	19.14	28.86	24.04	15.92	87.96
Sapphire 9600 Pro 128MB	32.27	35.47	37.92	28.05	133.71
Gainward GeForce 3 Ti550 64MB	63.04	46.4	63.65	43.12	216.21
MGA800 Intel integrated VGA	8.82	15.43	11.76	7.02	43.03

Note: All results shown are at 1024X768, 4X FSAA and 8 X AA enabled, all detail settings at the maximum. The GeForce 3 Ti550 results are skewed as it ignores shaders and would not complete a benchmark run with FSAA and AA enabled, so figures shown are with these post-processing effects turned off. Benchmarks were conducted on two separate systems, with the AGP boards being tested in an older 533 MHz FSB P4 3.06 GHz, and the PCI Express cards running on a similarly-clocked P4 3 GHz with an 800 MHz FSB. All NVIDIA cards had the latest WHQL-certified 66.93 Force ware drivers installed while ATI offerings got the Catalyst 4.11 driver package.



The Big Mouse Fight!

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to fight night. In the left corner we have the Razer Viper from the stables of the people who brought you the legendary Boomslang and in the right corner we have the Logitech MX1000 the first laser mouse in the world.

Everyone has their own preferences when it comes to choosing a mouse but precision and ergonomics play the biggest roles in determining what constitutes a great gaming mouse.

Over the last couple of months there have been some great developments in the mouse industry; probably the most significant is the launch of the Logitech MX1000 Laser Mouse. I am not going to go into the technical aspects of this new technology but the introduction of laser has added a whole new dimension to the precision and surface compatibilities of the mouse. On the flip side of this coin, Razer also released a high precision mouse and with the introduction of a local distributor it seemed fitting to do a shoot off between the two.

Round 1 - Razer Viper

After having looked at the MX1000 the Viper seems somewhat plain, but do not let its looks fool you. One of the biggest advantages of the Viper is that it is exceptionally light, this makes it a lot more accurate and it feels much faster, as there is no weight forcing it down. The Viper features a 1000 DPI optical lens and has a long 210 CM USB cord. Its ambidextrous profile is a great plus for lefties and its slightly elongated body makes it comfortable as the palm has some place to rest. On either side of the Viper are non-slip rubber grips which allow the mouse to be accurately handled even with sweaty hands. The translucent body which glows red when used also adds a very nice look to this mouse. There are only the two mouse buttons and a scroll wheel available on the Viper which might pose a small problem for gamers who are used to the side buttons on most new mice, also the scroll button, I found, was not as responsive as the one found on the MX1000. The software bundled with the Viper allows you to customize the sensitivity of the movement and the speed of the double click. You are also able to change the scroll speed and set it up to be used with either your left or right hand.

Precision: 1000dpi (Optical) Weight: 110 grams	
Plus: Ambidextrous Light weight Super sensitive	
Minus: Only two buttons	
Supplier: PC Savers Distribution [011] 440 8843	RRP: R549
Internet: www.razerzone.com	Reviewer: Tom Taylor

Round 2 - Logitech MX1000

The MX1000 is, as mentioned before, the world's first laser mouse. The major benefit is that it works on virtually all surfaces even rough surfaces that used to create problems such as those damned tables at the local LAN. A feature I particularly appreciate, but not everyone will agree, is that the MX1000 is a heavy mouse. This is largely thanks to the built in Li-Ion battery, the MX1000 is also a wireless mouse and the transceiver doubles as the charger cradle. An innovative feature of the MX1000 is that it has a battery-level indicator which will tell you when the battery needs recharging. Left handed folk will sadly not find much use for the MX1000 as its profile is designed to be used with your right hand. The ergonomics of this mouse is by far the best I have experienced and the main reason for this is because of the concave thumb rest just below the side buttons. Speaking of which, this mouse features eight customizable buttons which is great if you are used to making use of the extra buttons in your games. The software basically allows you to set the sensitivity of the laser and to customize the button functions.

Precision: 800dpi (Laser) Weight: 168 grams	
Plus: Accurate laser Very comfortable Wireless	
Minus: Some might find it a tad heavy	
Supplier: DCS [011] 466 5099	RRP: R799
Internet: www.logitech.com	Reviewer: Tom Taylor



Knockout!

This is one of the hardest comparisons I have ever had to do. Both of these are excellent mice and looking at each ones strengths and weaknesses I still feel that both have a place in the market. I played some Battlefield 1942, Half-Life 2, and UT2004 with both mice and both performed very well. The MX1000 is, as already mentioned, much heavier than the Viper but it simply needed to have its sensitivity upped a little. Because I have fairly large hands the weight and the ergonomics made this a great mouse for gaming and I did not experience any skipping or jumping due to the wireless. The Viper on the other hand was super sensitive thanks to its light weight and this made it a dream to use. The lack of more buttons and the cord are about the only two features that counted against it. The MX1000 is sensitive enough for an enjoyable gaming experience and it has ample customizable buttons and is very comfortable to use. The Viper came in a very close second but its lack of buttons lets it down.

Antec Aria SFF case



The Small Form Factor (SFF) market is booming with cube-like PC and home-entertainment systems - small is in, but the form factor has its limitations. Many SFF cases come complete with their own custom motherboards, limiting the upgrade path severely while locking customers into a specific brand. What's more these boxes tend to be supplied with 250 or even 220 W PSUs, not ideal for any power-hungry gaming hardware. And, cooling high-power components in such close confines is always going to be a concern. This Antec Aria sidesteps the first two problems by allowing the user to install any Micro-ATX motherboard they'd like, and also includes a 300 W PSU complete with 120mm fan to reduce operational noise levels. The Aria wraps this up in a stylish black and silver casing which lights up blue when power is applied. Noise levels are actively damped throughout the unit, from aluminium and plastic

sandwich side panels to rubber damped screws for securing your hard disk to the chassis with the minimum of vibration. As the piece de resistance, there's an 8-in-1 card reader built into the front panel which will connect to any motherboard with USB headers. This Aria case looks good and has all the basics for a portable gaming solution, although the cabling is really crammed in there and will make the installation of the components you select a cramped job indeed. Still it ran the low-power hardware I installed with no thermal issues and with very little noise being generated. It's a good choice if you're interested in building yourself a SFF box using the mix of components you want in it, and great for unobtrusive low-noise home entertainment boxes.

Plus: Flexibility and the juice for gaming hardware
Minus: Tight confines | Messy cables

Supplier: Frontosa [011] 466 0038
Internet: www.frontosa.co.za

RRP: R1190
Reviewer: Russell Bennett

Zalman Noiseless Switching 400W PSU

Zalman are becoming well known in the local market for its different and low-noise focussed component cooling solutions, but the company also make ancillary components dedicated to the silent computing ethos, like this ZM400B "Noiseless Switching" 400W PSU. Encased in a nicely finished matt-black ATX design, this unit features only one, small fan at the rear of the unit as opposed to the more conventional large-diameter blower many after-market PSUs utilise drawing air from below. This approach has been adopted in an effort to keep noise levels to a minimum, and opening the PSU up reveals why the unit is able to cope with thermal loads with just this low-capacity fan included. Two large heat sinks cover the internal components to ensure that heat is not an issue even under duress. From a noise perspective, it works like a treat. This unit is very quiet for a PSU easily capable of coping with high-end gaming demands. The slight whine of the

small lone fan is practically the only sound generated at low temperatures, and even when this accelerates to higher rotational speeds under heavy load and higher temperatures it remains comparatively silent.



What's more the voltages supplied revealed ample power and the lowest variances I observed in comparison with my own ThermalTake PurePower 480W and the Vantec Ion 2 also reviewed in this issue. This unit firmly entrenches Zalman as a reputable supplier of high-end power systems. Steady voltages under any circumstance and a drastic reduction in noise levels make the ZM400B a twofold winner.

Plus: Unshakeable voltage supply | Low noise generation
Minus: Visual appeal could be added to by enclosing cables in a sleeve

Supplier: Frontosa [011] 466 0038
Internet: www.frontosa.co.za

RRP: TBA
Reviewer: Russell Bennett

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- Recommended Retail Price = R995



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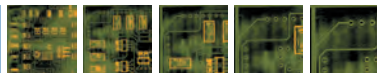
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Gainward Ultra 1760 PCX Golden Sample

In South Africa, there has been a distinct lack of representation for NVidia-based PCI-Express cards since this new bus was introduced. We've had ATi high- and mid-range offerings from various suppliers steadily becoming available with the late arrival of an NVidia 5950 PCI-e board seemingly the only alternative. NVidia has struck back, specifically in the mid-range, with its latest NV43 chipset powering the GeForce 6600 series offerings. This review is an exclusive hands-on look at the Gainward Ultra1760 PCX Golden Sample, a vanilla 6600 GPU optimised for higher than standard clock frequencies and ready to take the fight to its competitors in this high-volume segment.

On paper, this latest offering actually looks rather underpowered with a 300 MHz clock and 275 MHz (550 effective) memory frequency. Otherwise the changes made to the NV40 GPU to create NV43 look remarkably similar to the differences between those used by ATi in the X700 versus X800 series. Half the pixel and vertex pipelines as well as half the memory bus width, dropping the 6600 down to 8, 3 and 128 bits. So far it's all very familiar, bar those 3 vertex pipelines versus the 6 which ATi

decided to leave in its X700 ranges. Even the approach to cooling these solutions follows a similar vein, both X700 and 6600 coolers look almost exactly like petite versions of the solutions found on their larger stable mates.

When it came to benchmarking this board I used an LGA775 P4 3 GHz chip running 512 MB of DDR400, and used the latest WHQL-certified Forceware package 66.93. Running at the default clock settings yielded a score of 7854 in 3DMark03 at 1024 X 768 with no antialiasing (AA) enabled. These figures are just a few hundred below the scores attained by an X700 Pro elsewhere in this issue, the most direct competition for this offering.

In the DX 9 graphics festival that is Doom 3, the Gainward board takes a not unexpected lead pumping out 47 fps without AA and a less commanding 20 with this feature enabled with 4 passes. Incidentally this no-AA framerate even bests the X800 Pro fitted to my own system, although this more pricey option does regain its dignity once this image-enhancing feature is turned on. Those low clock frequencies do take their toll in the benchmarks, with reports of 6600 GT models featuring far more

agreeable 500 MHz and 1 GHz core and clock frequencies showing that this chipset is capable of performing nearly as well as a full-blown 6800. Fortunately, this model being a Gainward Golden Sample, I was able to toy with over-clocking to try to attain such lofty heights of performance.

At a core of 380 MHz and RAM pushed up to 750, this board was stable and a good 700 points faster in 3DMark 03. Without a doubt a natural over-clocker, as these Golden Sample offerings generally are, pushing up frequencies suggests that the reports on the abilities of the 6600 GT are true. What's more, this total of 8513 beats out both the X700 Pro and XT offerings recently tested in these pages.

With its default clock frequencies, the 6600 GPU seems underpowered compared to its rivals, with a massive frequency delta to the GT flavour probably making this version the one to look at if more frames are paramount. That said, the extra frequency on offer from this Gainward Golden Sample make it a very attractive compromise, unlocking some of the stunted potential of the vanilla NV43.



Plus: Over-clocking ability overcomes clock frequency deficiency to a certain extent
 Minus: Beaten in the mid-range by similarly priced competitors

Supplier: Axiz [011] 237 7007
 Internet: www.axiz.co.za

RRP: R1699
 Reviewer: Russell Bennett

Asus Extreme AX700Pro

Asus has added another mid-range offering to its product set with the Extreme AX700Pro. This latest ATi-based offering is intended to deliver excellent DX9 performance in the latest titles without taking out a second bond to pay for it.

The RV410 chipset used in the X700 series is based on the R423 of the X800. It features the full 6 vertex pipelines of this design while pixel pipelines drop to eight and the memory bus to the GDDR 3 RAM drops to 128 bits wide.

This X700 Pro differs from the XT variant tested last month in clock frequencies and onboard RAM. While XT flavours are currently only available with 128MB, this Pro version packs 256 MB albeit at a lower effective frequency of 864 MHz compared to 1.05 GHz. The core clock is also lowered to 425 MHz. All X700 offerings are currently only available in PCI-Express with AGP flavours only scheduled to hit the market by the middle of 2005.

Offerings in this highly-competitive mid-range market segment are all about one idea... namely delivering performance as close to the flagship ranges as possible without breaking the bank. This Asus X700 Pro delivers benchmark results just marginally lower than a higher-clocked XT variant, which still puts it above a last-generation range-topping model, the 9800 XT.

3DMark 03, running on a P4 3 GHz 800 MHz FSB system and with Catalyst driver set version 4.11 installed, delivers a highly credible 8168 at 1024 X 768 with no post-processing effects enabled. Similarly configured, Doom 3 and Far Cry deliver 39 and 54 fps averages, with 4X AA dropping these frame rates to 17 and 38 respectively.

What is interesting is that this Pro model is priced almost identically to the X700 XT, since it features double the RAM I guess. The end result of combining this larger capacity with lower clock frequency makes it perform on a broadly similar plain as well, although for my money the XT is probably the better offering for gamers wanting every last ounce of oomph for their cash.

The Asus software package includes GameFaceLive, Video Security Online and an over-clocking tool called HyperDrive. At this stage, the Asus high-end graphics cards bundle with quite a few free games and some models even bundle with Webcam so the user can use GameFaceLive and Video Security Online immediately. Nevertheless the X700 Pro performs admirably, consistently achieving higher results than the older 9800 XT could manage particularly in DX 9 titles, which is precisely what ATi intended for it to do. And it is much better mid-range value than the severely limited X600...



Plus: Great performance for the price
 Minus: Poor retail package | Competing with bigger brother XT on price

Supplier: ASUS [011] 783 5450
 Internet: www.asus.com

RRP: TBA
 Reviewer: Russell Bennett

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 - Support Buffer Underrun Prevention™
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 - Worth R250.00

This Christmas, Corex would like to give all users a gift, buy the fastest BTC 16x DVD dual, and you will receive a BTC stylish Webcam for absolutely free!!

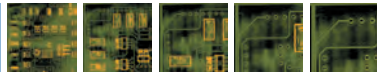


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Zalman Theatre 6 5.1 channel headphones

Zalman has been sending a lot of product in for review of late, so it was without much surprise that I discovered the headphones I was enjoying come from this very manufacturer.

The Zalman Theatre 6, to give it its full name, is no ordinary set of headphones however. They're really more of a mobile surround sound solution, as they are the first of their kind to incorporate 6 speakers to deliver positional audio. That's right, 5.1 channel surround sound headphones.

While the phones themselves obviously include smaller "side" speakers, this addition doesn't make the set overly bulky, and they're nicely designed for transport too with the speakers folding neatly away. They're comfortable to wear for long periods, although in the SA summer they tend to heat your head up so the occasional break to cool your brain would be recommended. The sound generated by these earphones is of general high quality, but you'll need to play with the equaliser to find an optimum bass balance, as by default the bass dominates the experience. Once dialled in to your tastes though, crisp 3D audio is delivered and the surround-sound effect is really well produced. Wearing this set means you're able to hear where the whirring ant-lions are coming from in Half-Life 2 perfectly even late at night in a crowded household.

One glaring omission to this well-executed package is a simple, rotary volume control knob. You really don't want to constantly have to adjust volume in-game through the menu interface, nor do all games allow such liberties.

The Theatre 6 is the first of its kind and a solid product. Combined with the Zalman external USB 5.1 channel sound card, the company are even taking surround sound capabilities to laptops.



Plus: Unique Mobile surround sound system Minus: High pitches can result in some speaker feedback	RRP: R499 Reviewer: Russell Bennett
Supplier: Frontosa IT [011] 468 4724 Internet: www.frontosa.co.za	

Rockfire Cyber Rhino

Rockfire has a good reputation for game-pads and such, managing to achieve a stoic balance between ludicrously low-priced and manageable quality. Lacking an analogue stick of any kind, the Cyber Rhino seems almost traditional in its approach to game-pads, letting you settle with the 8-buttons; 4 in the standard positions, 4 on the shoulders and a click-able bi-directional cross-pad. The grips under your palms are ribbed for gaming pleasure (helps prevent sweat build-up) and shaped in the traditional way, although the actual face of the unit seems bland and barren. The layout of the 4 shoulder buttons, two on each side, may be a little uncomfortable for some as the two top buttons are set at an odd angle. During heavy stress-testing, the shoulder buttons also revealed a slight lack of sensitivity, often resulting in button-presses going astray. Regardless, the Cyber Rhino is a good game-pad with classic gaming in mind and great for the budget-conscious.



Plus: Affordable Minus: Slightly bulky	RRP: R199 Reviewer: Miktar Dracon
Supplier: Corex [011] 707 5000 Internet: www.corex.co.za	

Nokia 7610

With a penchant for oddball numeric keypad layouts, Nokia confirms that they're perfectly willing to sacrifice ease of use for style and design yet again. Despite this, there is no doubt that the Nokia 7610 is a rather attractive phone. A larger than normal display presents crisp visuals to augment the well-designed interface present on the 7610. The main pull factor with the 7610 however is the 1 Mega pixel camera, capable of taking extremely high resolution (especially considering standard cell phone cameras) photos (up to 1152 x 864 pixels) and storing them on the extra memory provided with the phone. Unfortunately, higher resolution does not always bring better clarity. Under low-lighting the camera still produces image artefacts and noise on the photos. It's a step in the right direction for cell phones trying to be digital cameras, but a little too pricy for snap-happy shutterbugs out there.



Plus: 1 Mega pixel Camera Functional interface Minus: Keypad configuration frustrating Expensive	RRP: R5500 Reviewer: Miktar Dracon
Supplier: Nokia [011] 799 7400 Internet: www.nokia.co.za	

Zalman CNPS7000b Silent CPU cooler

The Zalman CNPS7000B-AICu silent CPU cooling solution is an active cooler, so it won't be as quiet as a fanless design, but then ought to provide better cooling than completely noiseless solutions like these.

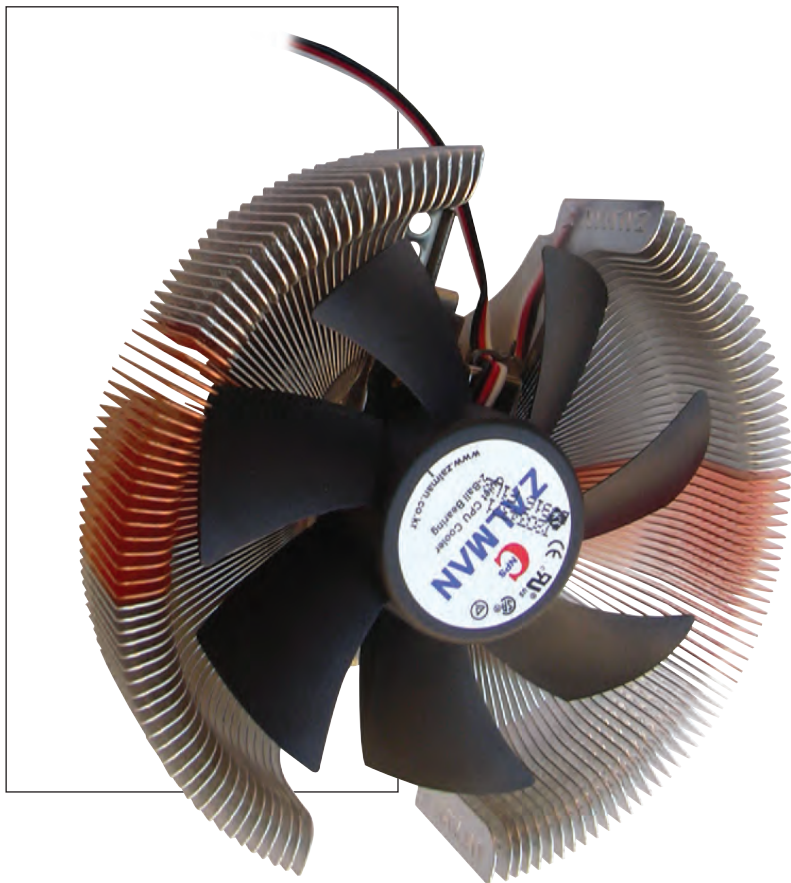
Made of a combination of aluminium and copper, the cooling fins spread outwards and upwards from the CPU plate itself and surround a 92mm fan with heat-dissipating metal. One of the benefits of this design is that while this cooler is large with ample surface area, it remains low enough to fit comfortably beneath the PSU in configurations which find the CPU socket in this location.

This cooler comes with FanMate 2, consisting essentially of a black box with a rotary knob attached providing either manual fan-speed control or automatic, temperature-controlled adjustment.

Zalman has also been innovative in terms of the installation of this part.

Two metal supports require attachment to your board beside the CPU retention clip, onto which the heat sink / fan combination unit is bolted in turn. It's easy and there's little risk of damaging your CPU with this mechanism. This unit really delivers. Running at the lowest rotational speed of some 1500 RPM, this cooler emitted very low noise levels and maintained the AMD 1800+ chip I tested with at 42 degrees C under load, 11 degrees cooler than the standard AMD cooling solution. At the max RPM of 3000, the CPU remained stable at 36 degrees, and even at this speed noise levels were significantly lower than the default part.

The CNPS700B can be attached to just about any type of CPU configuration except LGA775 and comes highly recommended. It's the best of all worlds, delivering low noise and highly efficient CPU cooling.



Plus: Easy and safe installation | Excellent cooling performance | Among the best air-based CPU coolers
 Minus: Nothing jars

Supplier: Frontosa [011] 466 0038
 Internet: www.frontosa.co.za

RRP: TBA
 Reviewer: Russell Bennett



Sole Distributor

3.5" NexStar 2 External Enclosure

Sleek and stylish, the NexStar 2 External 3.5" Hard Drive Enclosure is a great, no-frills way to upgrade any internal 3.5" hard drive into an external storage solution. Installing a new hard drive can be a hassle, especially if you are trying to add storage to a notebook computer. With the NexStar 2, you can upgrade your storage in minutes. The NexStar 2 takes advantage of USB 2.0 and Firewire to help you move your data fast. Because the NexStar 2 is plug & play, you can easily transfer data between Windows XP/2000 systems without worrying about drivers or rebooting. The NexStar 2 External 3.5" Hard Drive Enclosure is the smart way to easily add storage to your computer.



Cable Slewing Kit

It offers 3 separate channels, which can be adjusted to allow the inside of a computer case is usually a mess of cables and wires. Power cables get tangled up and loose wires can be damaged from fans or other jagged edges inside the case. The Vantec Cable Slewing Kit is the ideal way to eliminate these problems. The braided sleeve is expandable up to 150%, making it easy to slip over any plugs or connectors. Made of flexible material, the Vantec Cable Slewing Kit will not break or crack. The Vantec Cable Slewing Kit is also ideal for bundling cables and wires outside your case as well.

Worth R150.00

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Razer Diamondback

Having gone through almost every conceivable mouse on the market, there are a number of simple factors that influence performance gamers to purchase a competitive gaming mouse. These quite simply are speed and precision. Up until now the market was owned by Microsoft and Logitech, but a blast from the past has finally usurped these major brands by focussing on what the competitive gamer desires most, accuracy. Razer is no newcomer to the competitive gaming market and have won many awards with their award winning ball mouse the Boomslang. They have been missing from the market over the last few years due to certain commercial issues that seem to have finally been put to rest. Razer's first entry into the optical mouse market was a solid effort by taking on the top brands and for the most part beating them at their own game. However the aptly named Razer Viper never quite overshadowed its opposition. So Karma

went to work to create the ultimate weapon, and have come as close to a perfect tool as the modern era will allow with their new Razer Diamondback.

It's a perfectly balanced mouse that offers ambidextrous usage, 7-programmable buttons and an optical engine that totally blows its opposition off their mouse pads. Slightly bigger than its brother, it's weighted slightly heavier and has the same big buttons that are synonymous with all Razer mice.

The new Karma Precision Optical Engine is by far the biggest selling point with a phenomenal 1600dpi that is twice that of its closest competitor. Other features include a 16-bit data path, always on mode, non-slip side rails, Teflon feet, and 7-foot non tangle cord.



There is one downside that unfortunately comes from a simple design flaw. The side buttons have been strangely positioned in the grip area, this will affect the way you hold the mouse, which will take a bit of getting used to. However after a few days you will have it fitting snugly and hitting shots you normally would only dream of making.

The Diamondback is without a doubt the must own techno gadget for any gamer who wishes for perfection and seeks that competitive edge. Using the Diamondback in conjunction with a Razer ExactMat makes for radical improvements in your accuracy. Karma have created an unfair advantage for those who are smart enough to own a Diamondback, for those who haven't the foresight, good luck.

Plus: Precise & Highly Accurate On-the-Fly Sensitivity Flawless performance Minus: Side button positioning	
Supplier: PC Savers Distribution [011] 440 8843 Internet: www.razerzone.com	RRP: R699 Reviewer: Warren Steven

Vantec Ion 2 350W PSU

Your PC absolutely requires one thing to run at its best, or at all for that matter. Without a strong supply of power, the most powerful GPU, CPU or overclockable motherboard amounts to nought. Zip. Zero.

However the choice between running a brandless 250W or adding another R400-plus to the purchase of a new machine is difficult, the 250W ought to cope with most regular loads after all, and the money saved could go towards a higher-frequency processor or some added RAM...

Ideally you'd like the highest-spec machine with a PSU capable of powering it and future gaming upgrades. Enter Vantec with the 350W Ion 2, a PSU with the capacity needed by gamers at a more reasonable price point. It's a good looking unit, in a high-gloss but scratch-resistant black coating and with all of its connector cables pre-sleeved. There's a large 120mm fan for

dispelling the most air with the least noise, and 2 X SATA as well as 6 X Molex connectors, sufficient for all but the most extreme needs.

When installing the Ion 2 you'll notice that the ATX-12V connector has been kept short. Fair enough, as most installations would require no more cable length than what is provided. The EZ-Grip Molex connectors are a delight, making removing power connectors from IDE and VGA cards both easier and safer.

The temperature-controlled fan does keep noise levels down slightly, but it's a barely noticeable improvement over regular PSUs. It's the provision of solid voltages that really differentiates the Ion 2 from unbranded offerings, demonstrating the advantages of having a higher wattage and APFC



(Active Power Factor Correction) capabilities.

Using Motherboard Monitor 5 to measure the PSU when idle and under load revealed a steady 3.28V average on the 3.3V circuit, and a slightly low 4.92 V average on 5V. These figures suggest that the unit is perhaps not as powerful as higher-end models, with more variance under load. It's a solid performer, make no mistake, and great value for money.

Plus: Steady voltages Attractive price Minus: Not as powerful as could be desired	
Supplier: Frontosa [011] 466 0038 Internet: www.frontosa.co.za	RRP: R470 Reviewer: Russell Bennett

Microsoft Fingerprint Reader

The scanner features a lengthy cable with a USB connector. The device itself is a little larger than a box of matches, weighs almost nothing and has rubber feet to keep it steady while your biometric information is scanned. Using Windows SR2 it automatically detects and the provided software works flawlessly. If connected and set-up correctly when prompted for any password, local or remote all you need to do is place your finger on the sensor and the fingerprint sensor will either automatically access the file if previously linked to your fingerprint or it'll launch an application [create fingerprint logon] that guides you through the process of linking your fingerprint to the protected information. The only concern is that the product is shipped with a warning that the fingerprint reader is not a security feature and is intended to be used for convenience only. An amazingly easy to use and useful device that is probably best suited for home use.



Plus: Easy to use and very handy	RRP: 499.00
Minus: Not a security device	Reviewer: Michael James
Supplier: Microsoft [086] 022 5567	
Internet: www.microsoft.com	

A4 Tech Wireless Optical Mouse

Once over the initial cringe at the badly designed box, this little unit managed to surprise despite severe scepticism. Essentially what you have is a wireless optical mouse, sitting on a 'mouse pad' that connects via USB to your computer. Using electromagnetism, the pad delivers power to the mouse as long as the mouse is on the pad itself. Sitting portrait, the pad seems very small especially for those used to the larger pro-pad mouse pads. One can, thankfully, sit the pad landscape and press a button to re-calibrate the mouse to take this into account. It's an interesting trade-off, having a mouse pad with a wire instead of a mouse with one. The optical mouse itself is sturdy and sensitive yet a touch noisy when clicking the buttons. On the whole, it's an interesting method for using a mouse and especially suited for laptops due to its minute nature.



Plus: Small Sensitive and smooth	RRP: TBA
Minus: Cabled mouse pad	Reviewer: Miktar Dracon
Supplier: Eurobyte [011] 234 0142	
Internet: www.eurobyte.co.za	

Nokia 3220

Sturdy and actually quite stylish, the Nokia 3220 could easily become the next 'standard' phone in Nokia's range. The 3220 represents a wholesome cell phone with all the extraneous bloat removed. Surprisingly, the cumbersome interface usually found on Nokia cell phones has been replaced on the 3220 with a rather simplistic yet very responsive set of menus and functions, making the phone quite a joy to use.



It comes as no surprise that the built-in VGA camera is mind-numbingly terrible, while the lack of Bluetooth support in the 3220 could be overlooked due to the sheer amount of rather high-quality Java games included with the phone. Essentially, the 3220 is about as 'stock standard' as you can get with a price to match, which works in its favour. The 3220 is a no-thrills cell phone that does exactly what it needs to.

Plus: Functional and fast	RRP: TBA
Minus: No Bluetooth	Reviewer: Miktar Dracon
Supplier: Nokia [011] 799 7400	
Internet: www.nokia.co.za	

Coolermaster Aerogate 3

And the cooling craze continues... Coolermaster, who by implication of their name specialise in keeping our machines running at non-explosive temperatures, have recently released yet another five and a quarter inch bay fan control unit. With so many of these devices out there, end users have the luxury of choosing their preferred style and having the function there by default.

The Aerogate 3 controls four separate fans inside the PC, and measures temperatures with four different sensors. Temperature alerts can vary from 10 to 90 degrees Celsius, and can be set individually for each of the four monitoring channels. An adjustable alarm sound and attractive "brushed metal" finish round the package off. There's not much more to say - it works very well, is clear and easy to use. If the looks suit you, then it would be the one to buy...



Plus: Attractive Simple to use	RRP: TBA
Minus: Not exactly innovative or original	Reviewer: Walt Pretorius
Supplier: Rectron [011] 203 1000	
Internet: www.coolermaster.com	



DVD Writers



Benchmarking

As usual, all of the optical drives were tested on my test machine. To test the speed and performance of each DVD Writer I made use of DVDInfoPro (www.dvdinfo.com) and Nero CD/DVD Speed (www.cdspd.com). In order to test the time it took to write to each DVD I made use of Nero Burning ROM Reloaded, version 6.6.0.1, (www.nero.com). I compiled a folder with random data items

of about 4.3 GB which I then wrote to each DVD. I did exactly the same with the Double Layer DVD discs and used about 8 GB of data for each disc. All the scores you see in the specifications table were calculated out of the average of the two test runs with the exception of the Double Layer tests which were only conducted once.

DVD Writers have, in recent months, dramatically dropped in price and are virtually within everybody's reach. The ability to be able to store 4.7 GB of data onto a disc makes CD-ROM's feel almost equal to the outdated stiffy disc. Sadly, unlike CD-ROM's, DVD formats are a little more complex. I did a detailed explanation in the December 2003 issue so I will not cover that topic again but if you do not have that copy laying around anymore (shame on you!) you can read all about the different DVD formats on the Internet.

One major thing that has changed from the roundup I did in the December 2003 issue is that this year we did not only see faster DVD writing speeds but we also saw the introduction of a new format, Double Layer. The technology behind this new format is very interesting so I will explain it very briefly.

Developed by Philips Research and MKM (Mitsubishi Kagaku Media) Double Layer DVD's increased the capacity capabilities to 8.5 GB. In a nutshell this was achieved by creating a DVD disc which has two writable layers, hence the name. This means that the laser is able to focus its laser on either the top layer or the one "hidden" behind it.



Test PC 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

MSI DR8P

The MSI DR8P is a Dual DVD Writer capable of writing at 8X on both the DVD+R and DVD-R formats. This optical drive features what MSI dubbed the Active Panel which is basically just removable front panels for this drive. The box includes three coloured face plates, beige, silver, and black; the clip mechanism for the face plates is very innovative as they simply clip on without putting much effort into it. Bundled with this DVD-Writer you will find a copy of Nero 6 OEM Suite as well as a Cyberlink DVD which contains PowerDVD, PowerProducer 2 Gold, and PowerDirector SE+. Looking at some of its features, this drive sports ABS (Anti-Bumping System) a shock absorbing technology and SoftBurn which allows this optical drive to operate at relatively quiet levels. Looking at its performance, there was nothing that stood out and its performance was pretty much on par with its competitors.



Warranty: 1 Year

Value for Money: 82 Performance: 80 Overall: 81

Plus: Very quiet | Active Panel easy to install/remove Minus: Not a 16X drive
Supplier: Light Edge [021] 510-8270 Internet: www.lightedge.co.za RRP: R799

LITEON SOHW 1213S

The DVD Writer from LITEON is a 12X Dual Format optical drive. As you may or may not know, the LITEON brand is a favourite amongst enthusiasts, so it was with a degree of anticipation that I conducted this product's review. The drive itself, as is the case with all LITEON optical drives, looks plain in comparison to some of its competitors but the bundle makes up for this. Included in the box you get two blank DVD's (one DVD-RW and one DVD+RW), I think it is a shame not more manufacturers do this. The software bundle includes a copy of Nero 6 OEM Suite and Cyberlink PowerDVD 5. The technologies included with this device is SMART-X and SMART-BURN. The first mentioned is a technology which automatically adjusts the data extraction and writing speed while the latter is simply a buffer underrun prevention technology.



Warranty: 1 Year

Value for Money: 80 Performance: 90 Overall: 85

Plus: Blank media bundled Minus: No face panels
Supplier: Proton Technology [021] 552 5201 Internet: www.prototech.com RRP: R899

TEAC DV-W512G

TEAC, as a brand, has been around for quite some time but I have not had much experience with its computer peripherals. I was thus curious to see how this optical drive performed in comparison to some of the bigger names in the industry. The TEAC DV-W512G is not a particularly beautiful device as it features a plain looking beige front panel. Inside the box you will find a blank 8X DVD-R disc as well as a copy of Nero 6 OEM Suite. The TEAC DV-W512G is a Dual Layer DVD-Writer and can write to both the DVD-RW and DVD+RW formats and sports a maximum of 12X DVD+R writing. I was fairly impressed by the performance offered by this optical drive, especially in comparison to some of the 16X DVD-Writers in this roundup. If this is what it can do at 12X I am curious as to how its 16X successor will perform.



Warranty: 1 Year

Value for Money: 85 Performance: 90 Overall: 87

Plus: Performs well Minus: Looks very plain
Supplier: Esquire [012] 657-11-11 Internet: www.esquire.co.za RRP: R700

NEC ND-3500A

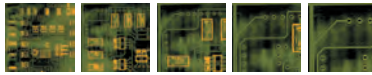
NEC, another well known brand, is fairly new to the South African computer peripheral market. The ND-3500A is NEC's top of the range optical drive, the drive itself is pretty standard looking and the one submitted for review had a black front cover, a model with a beige cover is also available. The NEC does not come in a box as it is an OEM model, this also means that it does not have much extra's. The only software bundled with this drive is a copy of Nero 6 OEM Suite. The NEC ND-3500A is a Dual Layer DVD-Writer and is one of only a handful of drives capable of writing Dual Layer discs at 4X. Looking at the performance I am happy to report that that the NEC is pretty much on par with its competitors although I expected slightly better benchmark results from this drive.



Warranty: 1 Year

Value for Money: 89 Performance: 90 Overall: 89

Plus: Performance Minus: Bundle
Supplier: TVR Computers [011] 807-1390 Internet: www.tvr.co.za RRP: R749



Samsung TS-H552

Samsung optical drives have been a very strong brand in South Africa. The Samsung TS-H552 optical drive sports DVD+R Dual Layer compatibility and is capable of writing Dual Layer at 2.4X. The drive itself looks very much like the older drives in the Samsung stables and the one I received for review featured a beige front panel. People with black cases will be happy to know that there is also a model with a black front panel available. The bundle with this drive does not look very promising at first, as there is only one CD in the box, but this is packed with five software titles. These include Nero Express 6.3, WinCinema, WinDVD Recorder, WinDVD Creator, and DVD Copy. Looking at its performance I was impressed by the Seek time of this drive although the total time it took to burn a disc was a little disappointing.



Warranty: 1 Year

Value for Money: 83 Performance: 80 Overall: 81

Plus: Seek time Minus: Total burn time
Supplier: Sahara [011] 542-1000 Internet: www.saharapc.co.za RRP: R699

BENQ DW1600

BENQ is a brand that has gone from strength to strength and they are producing really great products. Their optical drives are no exception and I was fairly impressed with the product I received for review. The only thing that needs improvement is the aesthetics of their optical drives but the performance was great. The drive itself looks pretty ordinary but supports Dual Layer DVD+R at 2.4X. The bundle is also somewhat impressive and in the box you will find one blank 16X DVD+R disc (these are very, very rare), Sonic RecordNow!, Sonic DLA, WinDVD Creator, and BenQ's proprietary QVideo and Book Type Management. The latter allows you to create a DVD-ROM disc which is compatible with virtually all DVD players. This is a feature that, sadly, only a hand full of DVD Writers are capable of. The performance of the BenQ was not bad either and the seek time was very impressive.



Warranty: 1 Year

Value for Money: 88 Performance: 83 Overall: 85

Plus: Bundle | Price Minus: Nothing
Supplier: Esquire [012] 657-1111 Internet: www.esquire.co.za RRP: R550

Sony DRU-710A

Sony is undoubtedly one of the biggest electronics brands in the world but it has not penetrated the South African market as it has done overseas. Their latest DVD Writer is the DRU-710A, this optical drive sports 2.4X Double Layer capabilities and looks, aesthetically, very pleasing. The front panel looks similar to previous model's but this time the package includes a black front panel which, sadly, does not feature the same translucent/mirror look of the original. I was a little disappointed with the bundle as there was no blank media included and the software disc only included Nero 6 OEM Suite. I was really hoping to see an awesome performance result with this drive but sadly it is pretty much standard in comparison to its competitors. The main factor which lost the Sony DRU-710A many points is its high price tag, this is guaranteed to scare many consumers away.



Warranty: 1 Year

Value for Money: 80 Performance: 83 Overall: 81

Plus: Aesthetics Minus: Bundle | Price
Supplier: Light Edge [021] 510-8270 Internet: www.lightedge.co.za RRP: R999

LG GSA-4120B

This is one of the most impressive DVD Writers I have seen in a long time. The LG GSA-4120B is one of the first triple-format drives to hit the market and is the ultimate device to ensure you are compatible with all the DVD formats. This optical drive is capable of writing to DVD-RW, DVD+RW, DVD+R (Double Layer), and DVD-RAM. LG also got the formula right in making this drive look "uber" sexy without changing the appearance much and simply adding a silver stripe across the bottom. Sadly the bundle that ships with this hard drive is bleak in comparison to the hardware. The only software disc included in the pack is a copy of Nero 6 OEM Suite. I was impressed by the speed at which this optical drive performed which was better than most of its competitors. A 16X DVD+R version of this drive has been produced by LG but is not yet locally available.



Warranty: 1 Year

Value for Money: 93 Performance: 89 Overall: 91

Plus: Writes to all formats Minus: Bundle
Supplier: Axiz [011] 237-7000 Internet: www.axiz.co.za RRP: R699

BTC DRW1016IM

BTC is a relatively new name to the optical drive industry and the few drives I have tested under this brand have been pretty good. The BTC DRW1016IM is BTC's latest offering and features 16X DVD+R capabilities, it can also write to Double Layer DVD+R discs. Looking at the bundle there is not much in terms of extras and you will find only two software discs. These contain Nero 6 OEM Suite and a Cyberlink CD containing PowerDVD 5, MediaShow 2, and MusicMatch Jukebox. The best part of the bundle is the inclusion of two extra front panels which are black and silver, respectively. Looking at how it performed in writing DVD's I was a little disappointed that this BTC drive did not live up to my expectations. An interesting feature of this drive is that it comes with an application (www.drupdate.com) which automatically checks for newer versions of its firmware.



Warranty: 1 Year

Value for Money: 88 | Performance: 83 | Overall: 85

Plus: Automatic Firmware update **Minus:** Performance
Supplier: Corex [011] 707-5000 **Internet:** www.corex.co.za **RRP:** R695

Pioneer DVR-108

Pioneer is another leader in the electronics industry and has been around for a very long time. Pioneer has been very quiet in optical market sectors in this country which is sad especially seeing that most of its optical drives are only available in OEM form (no boxed version). The DVR-108 is undoubtedly one of the most impressive (next to the LG GSA-4120B, of course) drives in terms of its feature table. This is the only one of two drives in this roundup to support 16X DVD-R as most of the other drives only support 16X DVD+R. It also supports DVD+R Dual Layer at 4X. About the only thing that did not impress me was the bundle which only included a copy of Nero 6 OEM Suite. Looking at how it performed though, I am happy to report that it lived up to my expectations and its benchmark results proved it.



Warranty: 1 Year

Value for Money: 80 | Performance: 90 | Overall: 85

Plus: 16X DVD+R and DVD-R capability | Performance **Minus:** Bundle
Supplier: Esquire [012] 657-1111 **Internet:** www.esquire.co.za **RRP:** R840

AOpen DUW1608

AOpen has been around for ages and this brand has products in most of the hardware categories available. Its latest DVD-Writer, the AOpen DUW1608, can write Double Layer discs at 2.4X and DVD+R discs at 8X. The drive itself looks pretty much standard but the inclusion of two extra face plates should bring a smile to people with coloured cases, the two face plates are silver and black respectively. Looking at the bundle there is, sadly, only the standard software suites available and the inclusion of a blank disc would have been a nice touch. As is, you will find a copy of Nero 6 OEM Suite included in the box as well as a copy of PowerDVD 5. Looking at its performance I was pleasantly surprised to see that the AOpen could keep up with some of the other big name brands.



Warranty: 1 Year

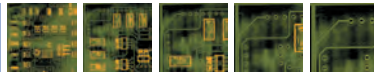
Value for Money: 88 | Performance: 83 | Overall: 85

Plus: Performance **Minus:** Nothing extra
Supplier: Rectron [011] 203-1000 **Internet:** www.rectron.co.za **RRP:** R695

DVD formats 101

Webopedia:
www.webopedia.com/DidYouKnow/Hardware_Software/2003/DVDFormatsExplained.asp
 DVD Forum
www.dvdforum.org/tech-dvdprimer.htm





GIGABYTE GO-W1608A

GIGABYTE, another big brand in the computer hardware arena, is a brand I am particularly fond of; I have always found that its products seem to perform pretty competitively compared to some of the other hardware giants. I am again happy to report that this month its GO-W1608A DVD-Writer did not let me down. The drive features 2.4X Dual Layer support as well as 16X DVD+R support. I was a little disappointed in the lack of a black or silver face plate but such is life. The bundle, also, is pretty much standard with its competitors and again I emphasize the lack of a blank DVD writable disc. The bundle that ships with this drive consists of Nero OEM Suite and PowerDVD 5. On the performance side of things this drive did not perform as well as I would have hoped but it did perform on par with many of its competitors.



Warranty: 1 Year

Value for Money: 88 | Performance: 83 | Overall: 85

Plus: Performance **Minus:** No extra face plate
Supplier: Rectron [011] 203-1000 **Internet:** www.rectron.co.za **RRP:** R695

ASUS DRW-1604P

ASUS is a brand that is very familiar amongst enthusiasts and I am happy to report that the DRW-1604P delivers on expectations. This is the second of only two optical drives in this roundup that supports 16X writing on both DVD+R and DVD-R formats. It also sports 4X Dual Layer DVD+R compatibility. The drive itself looks fairly regular and I was disappointed not to see the inclusion of any front panels. Sad as this may be the specifications, as mentioned, made up for this and the speed at which it wrote the test data was impressive. The bundle is also very average and features a copy of Nero 6 OEM Suite and ULEAD Disc Creator. The box also includes an emergency eject pin which I think is a great idea. This pin allows you to eject the tray when there is not power to the drive, this pin also works on other branded drives.



Warranty: 1 Year

Value for Money: 88 | Performance: 83 | Overall: 85

Plus: 16X DVD+R and DVD-R capability | Performance **Minus:** Bundle
Supplier: Corex [011] 707-5000 **Internet:** www.corex.co.za **RRP:** R695

LG GSA-5120D

LG dubbed this the Super Multi, and rightly so. This is a great external optical drive. The GSA-5120D features a Mac-like white glossy finish with a silver face plate. On either side of its housing you will find a set of rubber feet which allows you to operate it on its side. It is also capable of writing to a DVD+R disc at 12X while its Double Layer capabilities are 2.4X on DVD+R media. As with the internal version this drive is also capable of writing to DVD-RAM discs at 5X. To me one of the most significant features of this external drive is its compatibility with both USB 2.0 and IEEE-1394 (FireWire) interfaces, in fact it has two IEEE-1394 ports. Another interesting feature is the inclusion of a power switch on the back of this drive. Performance wise I was impressed with this external drive and the fact that it supports all of the DVD formats makes this a great drive.



Warranty: 1 Year

Value for Money: 89 | Performance: 84 | Overall: 86

Plus: USB 2.0 and IEEE-1394 | Supports all DVD formats **Minus:** White is not everyone's colour
Supplier: Axiz [011] 237-7000 **Internet:** www.axiz.co.za **RRP:** R1700

lomega Super DVD Writer 12X

lomega is undoubtedly the pioneer of the storage industry and I am always excited when a new product lands on my desk. The Super DVD Writer is lomega's latest external optical drive and as always lomega have created a very sexy unit. This drive sports a black and silver finish which should look good on any desk. The Super DVD Writer is capable of writing to Double Layer discs at 2.4X and it can write DVD+R discs at 12X. On the back of this drive is a single USB 2.0 port and two RCA jacks which is used to connect this drive to a speaker set or amplifier. The bundle that comes with this drive is pretty standard across all lomega products and includes the following software titles lomega HotBurn Pro, MyDVD 5, CinePlayer 1.5, lomega Automatic Backup, MusicMatch Jukebox, and Adobe Photoshop Album. Performance wise this drive did well and performed on par with drives featuring similar specifications.



Warranty: 2 Year

Value for Money: 85 | Performance: 83 | Overall: 84

Plus: Bundle | Looks great **Minus:** 16X version coming soon
Supplier: Storgate [011] 695-1600 **Internet:** www.iomega.co.za **RRP:** R1453



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Stylish LED pad with 7 diff colors
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Test Media

Verbatim was kind enough to provide all the blank discs for this month's roundup. The 8X DVD+R discs provided by Verbatim-SA, (011) 804 7403, performed superbly. I was very impressed by the fact that during my two day test period not one Verbatim disc failed, and I ran each test twice to ensure consistency. To test the Double Layer speeds of the optical drives that supported this feature, Verbatim also provided the Double Layer DVD+R discs. These were rated at 2.4X as 4X Double Layer discs were not yet available at the time of conducting the benchmarks. Most computer shops should stock these discs and the estimated retail prices of these are R15 for the 8X DVD+R and R99 for the Double Layer 2.4 X DVD+R discs.



Model	Nero CD/DVD Speed				CPU usage			DVD burn time (4.3 GB of data)	Double Layer DVD burn Time (8 GB of data)
	DVD		Random Seek time (ms)		At 1X		Burst Rate (MB/s)	in minutes	in minutes
	Average	Start	End			At 4X			
MSI DR8P	6.35	3.99	7.99	138	11	80	25	7.31	N/A
LITEON SOHW 1213S	9.71	5.45	8.31	117	16	24	23	6.52	N/A
TEAC DV-W512G	9.7	5.41	8.93	126	20	24	23	6.53	N/A
NEC ND-3500A	10.66	6.57	8	125	7	35	27	06:27	26.19
Samsung TS-H552	6.2	3.43	8.29	99	6	23	26	7.56	26.29
BENQ DW1600	6.24	3.43	8.36	95	6	25	24	7.19	26.53
Sony DRU-710A	6.2	3.44	8.29	120	10	18	33	7.28	27.01
LG GSA-4120B	7.67	4.23	10.26	106	7	15	26	6.12	26.15
BTC DRW1016IM	6.2	3.43	8.29	150	4	14	42	7.25	26.45
Pioneer DVR-108	9.22	5.23	5.09	133	5	23	43	6.39	26.23
AOpen DUW1608	8.8	4.81	11.77	135	8	24	40	6.38	26.39
GIGABYTE GO-W1608A	6.2	3.46	8.28	100	9	18	32	6.55	27.11
ASUS DRW-1604P	9.37	5.23	12.52	134	5	15	43	6.38	26.41
LG GSA-5120D	7.68	4.1	10.26	103	7	25	24	7.41	27.05
lomega Super DVD Writer 12X	7.7	4.11	10.29	103	9	31	20	7.37	27.01



Model	CD-ROM	CD-R	CD-RW	DVD-ROM	DVD+R	DVD+RW	DVD-R	DVD-RW	DVD+R (Double Layer)	DVD-RAM
MSI DR8P	48X	40X	24X	16X	8X	4X	8X	4X	N/A	N/A
LITEON SOHW 1213S	48X	48X	24X	12X	12X	4X	8X	4X	N/A	N/A
TEAC DV-W512G	48X	48X	32X	12X	12X	4X	8X	4X	N/A	N/A
NEC ND-3500A	48X	48X	24X	16X	16X	4X	12X	4X	4X	N/A
Samsung TS-H552	48X	40X	32X	16X	16X	4X	12X	4X	2.4X	N/A
BENQ DW1600	40X	40X	24X	16X	16X	4X	8X	4X	2.4X	N/A
Sony DRU-710A	48X	48X	24X	16X	16X	4X	8X	4X	2.4X	N/A
LG GSA-4120B	40X	40X	24X	16X	12X	4X	8X	4X	2.4X	5X
BTC DRW1016IM	48X	48X	24X	16X	16X	8X	16X	4X	4X	N/A
Pioneer DVR-108	40X	32X	24X	16X	16X	4X	16X	4X	4X	N/A
AOpen DUW1608	48X	48X	32X	16X	16X	4X	8X	4X	2.4X	N/A
GIGABYTE GO-W1608A	48X	48X	24X	16X	16X	4X	8X	4X	2.4X	N/A
ASUS DRW-1604P	40X	32X	24X	16X	16X	4X	16X	4X	4X	N/A
LG GSA-5120D	40X	40X	24X	16X	12X	4X	8X	4X	2.4X	5X
lomega Super DVD Writer 12X	40X	40X	24X	12X	12X	4X	8X	4X	2.4X	N/A

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TEAC Internal Drive DV-W516G 16xDVD+R, 8xDVD-R, DVD+/-RW media DVD double layer media

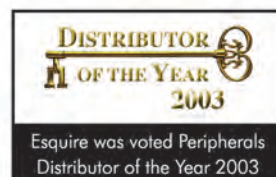


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news

destination: japan



There are many compelling reasons to visit the Land of the Rising Sun. Japanese culture can be wonderfully eccentric and a refreshing break from the conventions we are all familiar with in the west. Not only anime fans, but anyone with a sense of adventure or the desire to broaden their experience should consider a holiday (or business

trip, if that is more convenient) to Japan. Of course, there are many old wives tales surrounding Japanese culture, and also many aspects that are largely overlooked. Anime, it should be remembered, draws less inspiration from its own culture than it does from the cultures or ideas that fascinate it. Anime is a creative outlet, not an accurate depiction of Japanese life.

In the next few weeks, the writer of this column will be leaving for Osaka (a major city southwest of Tokyo), from where I

will be travelling around most of the country and taking great pleasure in investigating the quirky phenomena that supposedly defines the culture. In the following months, I will be sharing my experiences with the reader, as well as providing a guide for those who wish to follow in my footsteps. Travel to (and within) Japan is notoriously confusing if the traveller has not done the proper research. As such, I will begin next month with a section on how to go about planning such a trip from South Africa. *[Don't drink the water dude! It's got them brain bugs... Ed]*

review

grave of the fireflies

Osamu Tezuka, creator of the original graphic novel, *Metropolis* (itself inspired by the original 1926 film by Fritz Lang), had long desired to translate his masterpiece into film. Unfortunately his wish was to go unfulfilled. The project had still not been undertaken before his death in 1989. However, Rintaro, Tezuka's protégé, took it upon himself to write and direct the film in honour of his former mentor and friend. Rintaro's credits as a director were no less illustrious, and he proved his ability once again when *Metropolis* became a worldwide hit. Critics have called it one of the best anime films ever made. As the title suggests, *Metropolis* is set in a very large, futuristic city, populated by both robots and humans. The two "societies" are sharply segregated, and discrimination against robots is common. Overall, the setting is similar to the *Animatrix* episode "The Second Renaissance", although the concept for *Metropolis* was first devised by Tezuka in 1949. Kenichi, the nephew of a detective employed to locate a brilliant but insane underground scientist, falls in

love with a mysterious girl named Tima. Tima then turns out to be one of the scientist's creations - that is, a robot. The film explores several complex concepts, including the morality of using robots in war, and whether an artificially intelligent being can love.

A defining feature of *Metropolis* is that its art direction is significantly different from conventional anime. Osamu Tezuka's original style has been preserved, and as such the characters take on a more western, caricature-like appearance. Facial features, such as moustaches, are exaggerated, and the overall result is somewhat comical. The locations, on the other hand, are rendered in spectacular, realistic detail, using a combination of 2D and 3D animation. This leaves the characters' unusual appearance even more evident. At times, the foreground and background seem to lack integration, and the characters sometimes seem overly ridiculous for a serious film, but the effect is unquestionably unique and most certainly memorable. The story is compelling, the characters are well written, and the ending is about the most spectacular you will ever be likely to see.

Format: Movie Age Restriction: PG 10
Availability: www.amazon.com - \$23.99 excl. shipping



music.

This CD has to be one of the more bizarre ones around. Then again, these guys are not actual monks (despite what everyone thinks) so them singing songs like Hurt by NIN and Ave Stani doesn't really seem that twisted. Great stuff, if you like the Gregorians...



The Dark Side
Gregorian

Still Not Getting Any
Simple Plan



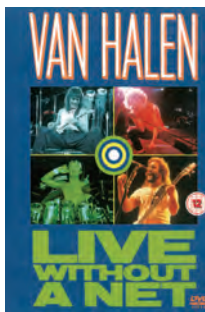
Bob Rock as producer used to mean platinum sales. Now, apparently, it equates to unoriginal rubbish that we've heard a million times before. This is semi-skate-punk-college rock at its most unoriginal. Buy it if you have to...

Roger Daltry and Pete Townsend have got old, but they still know how to rock. This nostalgic DVD features a live The Who performance in Boston, and is filled with all the greatest hits of this influential band. Your parents will probably like it more than you will, though...



Live in Boston (DVD)
The Who

Live without a Net (DVD)
Van Halen



At least this isn't a reunion - it's just old. Van Halen's mastery of their music is clearly shown in this blast from the past, but sadly the brilliant David Lee Roth had already left the band when this was recorded. Once again, your parents will probably love this.

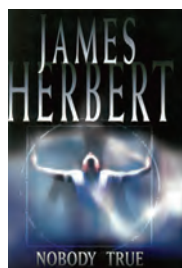
books.

The chilling work of British writer James Herbert is to European readers what Stephen King's writing is to American ones. Like King, combining the unimaginable with the very real is Herbert's speciality.

His 21st and latest novel, **Nobody True**, continues this trend. The protagonist, Jim True, has a unique ability. He has mastered the art of performing out-of-body experiences. Stumbling across this skill when he was young, True has found it useful to go on these existential travels throughout his life. As he is moving back to his body after one such experience, True discovers that his physical self has been horrifically slaughtered by a serial-killer. Now without a body, True can see what people really think of him. Combining humour (albeit very black) with poignant moments, Herbert allows the

reader to be drawn into True's life, or lack thereof. However, these vignettes are there to flesh out the overriding narrative of the serial killer. Through his body-less wanderings, True discovers that his wife and daughter are on the murderer's list. Unable to physically interact with the world, he is desperate to find a way to protect his family. This conflict mirrors True's battle to reconcile the fact that he is for all intents and purposes dead. The tag-line of the novel reads, "I wasn't there when I died." This phrase and the title become increasingly important as the plot progresses. **Nobody True** provides the reader with a fascinating alternative to the formulaic thrillers out there. A must read.

Nobody True
By James Herbert
Price: R103.95 (excl. delivery)



What better way to start the New Year than to take a look at the best science fiction short stories of 2003. In **The Year's Best Science Fiction**, renowned editor Gardner Dozois has compiled 29 stories that cover a variety of otherworldly topics. This annual anthology, now in its 21st edition, is always eagerly awaited by science fiction and fantasy fans alike. Weighing in at a hefty 660 pages, this is the ideal book to read while everyone is still recovering from the Festive season. Winner of the 2003 Locus award for best anthology, Dozois continues his tradition of including numerous award-winning short stories. This latest volume includes works by Kage Baker, William Barton, Nancy Kress and Walter Jon Williams. A useful reference is the inclusion of an honourable mentions section that lists the works that could have easily been included in the anthology.

Several stories examine our loneliness in the galaxy. There are also numerous stories that use humour to drive home serious issues. One of my favourites is Paul Di Filippo's *And The Dish Ran Away With The Spoon*. It is a cautionary tale that examines what could happen if our household appliances become too intelligent. Think of it as Terminator meets *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*. Of course, in a collection such as this, there are too many other good stories to single out. Suffice it to say, this is an anthology that no science fiction or fantasy fan can afford to be without. Go get it now.

The Year's Best Science Fiction - Twenty-First Annual Collection
Edited by Gardner Dozois
Price: R188.95 (excl. delivery)

books supplied by

role-playing.

spycraft

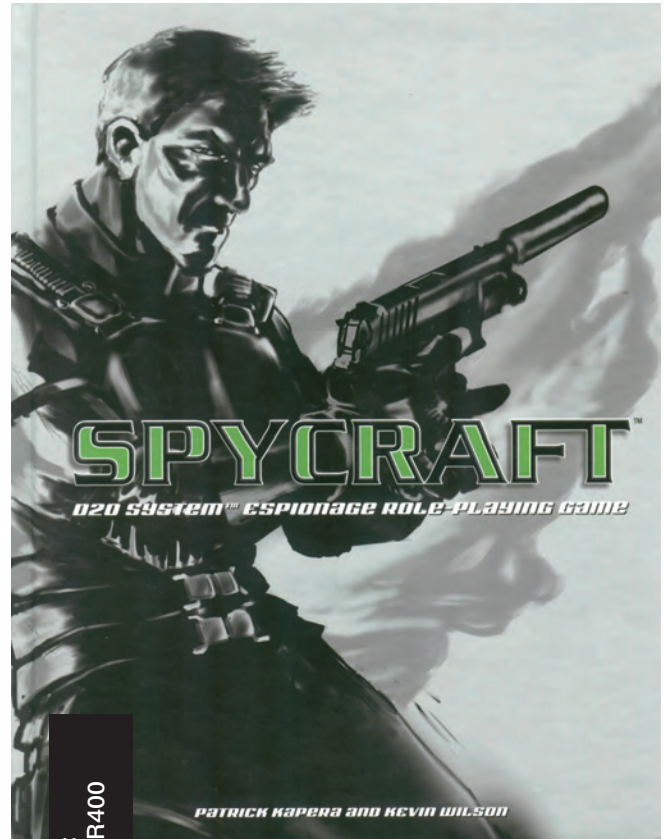
The D20 System just gets bigger and bigger - Wizards of the Coast seem to be cornering the market quite effectively with their new and effective rules. Thankfully, though, the games that are being released for this rule system tend to be better than a large number of others out there.

Spy titles are few and far between. The last truly popular one was probably the classic James Bond 007 role playing game, which disappeared from the shelves a great many years ago. AEG publishing have decided that it's obviously time for another espionage based title and have produced the Spycraft series of games... there is already a vast array of source books available for this D20 System game, which allows players to enter the world of high tech espionage in a pencil and paper paradigm.

But buying these source books can wait a little while - the core book for Spycraft is packed full of information, including one of the biggest equipment chapters we have ever seen! You don't need much more than this and the Dungeons & Dragons Player's Handbook to successfully run a perfectly acceptable spy based game.

It's more Mission: Impossible than James Bond in execution - the game feels more realistic than Hollywood, but it does feature some pretty sci-fi style gadgetry.

All in all, this is great fun for those who like their role playing to be a good mix of intrigue and action. There are no orcs in it, though, so some gamers may not like it much...



Spycraft
Approx. R400

munchkin

OK, so this isn't really a role playing game per se, but it does relate to role playing and, seeing as how we have looked at one of Steve Jackson Games' Munchkin books before, we thought that this hilarious card game has a place on this page.

Basically, the premise of the game is as follows: Go down in the dungeon. Kill everything you meet. Backstab your friends and steal their stuff. Grab the treasure and run.

This game is made up of 168 cards which depict monsters and treasure. Examples of monsters include the Large Angry Chicken, Snails on Speed, Shrieking Geek, Stoned Golem, 3 872 Orcs, Net Troll, Plutonium Dragon and the Unspeakably Awful Indescribable Horror. Treasures include the Tuba of Charming, Sneaky Bastard Sword, Singing and Dancing Sword, Horny Helmet, Potion of Idiomatic Bravery and Electric Radioactive Acid Potion.

As you can see, this game is totally irreverent when it comes to all the role playing clichés out there.

The game is very simple, played with cards, and is all about getting one over on whoever you can. It's brilliant fun, especially if you have been role playing for a few years and are a cynical type.

Munchkin
Approx. R225





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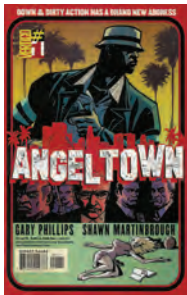
This is a series of short stories with one thing in common; they are all illustrated by Tim Sale. There is a little bit of everything here, from a Batman and Catwoman moment of romance to gritty detective thriller, and even a ghost story. Whatever type of story you like there will be something in here that appeals to you. The artwork is well crafted, changing style to suit the nature of the individual stories, giving you a perfect feel for the scene. Try it, you won't be disappointed.

The Authority Revolution
DC Comics
R21.50



Building on an already controversial series, this comic book looks at what might happen if a slightly bizarre group of super heroes tried to take over America, and set all the things that they saw as wrong with the country right. How does middle class America deal with legalizing gay marriages, allowing freedom of ANY religion, and making folks think for themselves? This is a story that expects you to think, and maybe even form your own opinions. Are you ready for the challenge?

Angel Town
Vertigo
R21.50



Someone has killed a pretty young woman and the chief suspect is her missing celebrity boyfriend. Nate Hollis is a private investigator, hired to find the missing basketball player and get to the truth of what happened, before the police get to him and don't give him a chance to explain. Strangely, the woman who has hired Nate is the basketball player's lawyer, and she has taken on the case before even meeting up with the star. Riddles and mysteries are what this one is all about.



Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon
Comics one
R152.95

This is not an adaptation of the film, or even the story on which the film was based. Rather Crouching tiger is a series of graphic novels that tell of the early life of Li Mu Bai and Shu Lien, the heroes of the film.

These stories explain how they met and fell in love, and why they could never marry. Of course where would any such story be without loads of expertly drawn martial arts action scenes? Another unusual fact for those who are interested: the entire story is done in watercolour, a very unusual technique in manga publications.

graphic novel

This is a series of stories based around the "Common Grounds" coffee stores, a franchise for the super hero and super villain communities. Each story focuses on what happens when these people lower their guard and show **just how human they really are**. What makes one individual turn to crime and another to saving the world? What really goes on in the head of a hero who lives life at super speed, and can't sleep? Most of all in this collection, you will learn that nothing is ever as simple as you thought it was.

Common Grounds
Image
R142.95



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+ 7 Speakers
+ Remote



KA-859CEV

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+ 5 Speakers
+ Remote



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board games.

settlers of catan

Having won the German Game of the Year title for 1995 and the US Game of the Year title for 1996, Settlers of Catan allows the players to explore a "wild island" and develop it through cleverly implementing resource and developmental strategies. While this game is technically what could be called "older," especially in this fast paced computer age in which we live, it certainly falls into the category of a classic. With simple game play amounting to a surprisingly

complex level of strategy, Settlers of Catan is a great way to while away a few hours with your friends. Hexagonal tiles and simple play pieces are complemented by full colour cards. Overall this game is solid and enjoyable, rather engrossing and tons of fun. It's almost like a slightly more complex version of Monopoly, set in the ancient world...

Settlers of Catan
Approx. R399 (incl. shipping)



war of the ring



When we say that this game is huge, we mean it in more ways than one. A truly massive board makes for the play area, a huge number of highly detailed figures are provided for use and the game play covers absolutely epic struggles. Players can experience the world of J R R Tolkien's Lord of the Rings through this game (which is thankfully devoid of reference to the movies that were recently released.) This is a complex game, featuring all the famous names from the book... a truly spellbinding title indeed. Top quality artwork complements this well made package, adding to its already high value as a board game investment.

War of the Ring
Approx. R669 (incl. shipping)



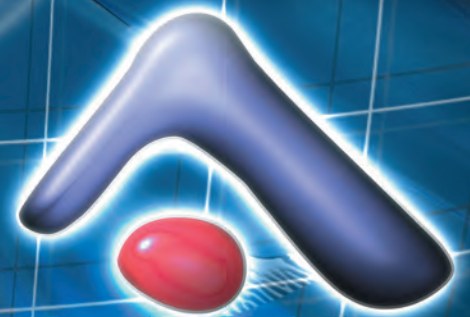
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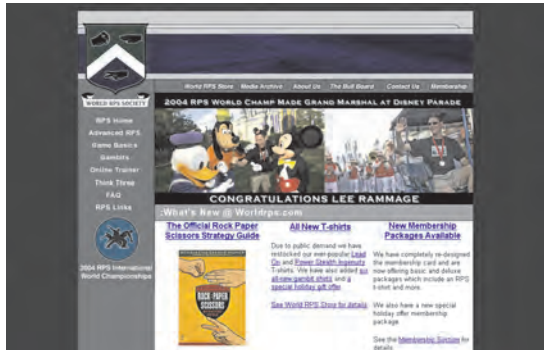
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Development Dictionary

www.gamedev.net/dict/

We wouldn't call it definitive yet, but Gamedev's ongoing dictionary on gaming names and terms, as well as related sectors such as file formats, programming and other tech topics, is a project worth book-marking, just to settle those arguments that come up every now and then over what a word means. Based on reader-submissions, it's bound to grow a lot, so head on over. Maybe you have a few words to add yourself...



Rock, Paper, Websitel

www.worldrps.com

Rock Paper Scissors is a serious game with serious rules and serious people who play it. We know this now and admit so humbly, for we have been enlightened by this site - the official web space for the World RPS Society. Basically they promote the game in a fun and safe way to resolve disputes. The site even has a rule guide, an online trainer and news about the world RPS champion.



Underground Adventures

www.adventuredevelopers.com

Adventure Developers is back! The site has been an important part in the independent and underground Adventure development circles, so seeing it back in action should get all Adventure fans excited. Focused on amateur adventure game development, you can find out how to do it and get the tools you'll need, or you can simply browse their reviews and archives for what has been released and what's currently in development. And it's all free.



Console-jacking!

www.grandthefendo.com

Grand Theft Auto on the NES! Development for retro consoles has been a surging scene in the past few years, but this is by far the most interesting project we've seen for the NES. The game is a part of the original title, except the graphics and other elements have been adapted to work on Nintendo's original system. The game hasn't been released yet, but this site has all the info you need on the project.

Flashlight

Icon Story

An oldie but a classic. Things were fine on the Windows Desktop until the MSN icon decides to pick a fight with the ICQ icon. From there it just degenerates into a desktop brawl, not to mention still one of the finest pieces of Flash animations out there. A must for any Flash fans.

[Because certain people forgot to put this flash movie on the Cover CD this month you'll have to use www.google.com to find it. The person responsible has been slapped... Ed]



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RAMJET'S
RAMPAGE

We're tired of seeing people calling games "perfect." Can't happen, folks...



With the new year looming ahead like some ominous beast ready to spring all that unexpected trouble on us - just like last year - it's time for a realism injection. Besides which, I am tired of drunk people telling me that "this year's going to be better than last year." And if any group of people need a bit of a reality kick in the collective fan boy spawned crotch, it would be gamers.

Gamers are hardly realists... anyone who spends their time in fantasy realms and then talk about it like they actually experienced it has to be a little less than properly hinged. But that doesn't mean that gamers are stupid. Contrary to the bald faced evidence, they aren't.

However, they are prone to being swept away by hysteria and failing to see the wood for the trees as a result. Like screaming, tear gushing, snot encrusted groupies at a Beatles concert, they fail to realise that what they are experiencing may somehow be less than the hype they have been blinded by claims.

OK, sure, not every gamer suffers from this PR fuelled delirium, but there are good number out there that need a boost jolt from the reality current before they make utter fools of themselves. We call these hapless fools "fan boys." For some reason these guys are blind to the short comings of whatever game they are currently fixating on, singing its praises while everyone else checks their own shoes to see if they stood in something.

These guys are, of course, mostly harmless. They are annoying in a pathetic, painful kind of way. But every now and then a fan boy with a modicum of influence gets a lot of people to listen to the sugary crap he is spouting about a sub-standard game - effectively spreading the cancer of his obsession to people who don't really need it.

Take, for example, a very prominent gaming related website that recently rated a certain game with a score of 100%. Now I may be a bit "Zen" in my approach to life, but "100%" implies perfection which is (despite what Basilisk thinks of himself) an utterly unattainable goal. There is no such thing... sure, you have to aim for it, but you can never really get there. Close, but no cigar, if you get my meaning. This kind of opinion expression is unrealistic and obviously tainted, and should not be taken seriously at all.

So here's my plea for the New Year - call it a general resolution request: Next time you want to start spurfing gushy sentiments about how wonderful a game is, take a step back, remove the rose-coloured shades and think about the fact that the game was made by a human being... probably one with glasses, pimples on his butt and a 32 year old virginity that isn't going anywhere. It's pretty hard for us to get things right, folks, and perfection is not something that can be found in anything made by man's hands. Certainly not in games.

city 17:
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administrator:
michael james
ed@nag.co.za
+27 83 409 8220

g-man:
james francis
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strider:
len nery
len@nag.co.za
+27 84 594 9909

the prowler:
jacqui jacobs
jacqui@nag.co.za
+27 82 778 8439

combine assassin:
lauren das neves
lauren@nag.co.za

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Usually a dumb idea at the time but the ride you get is definitely worth the paperwork. Las Vegas Weddings...

A NAGGING SUSPICION 2

art & words by Walt Pretorius






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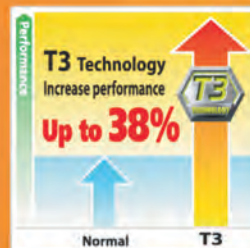
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