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COLD FEAR PREVIEW ◂◂
RUGBY 2005 **PREVIEW** ◂◂
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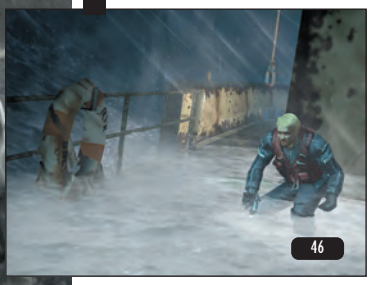

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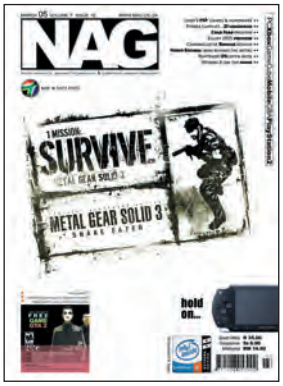
ed's note

It's white and...

Let's see... The March cover... umm, all the artwork was in on time. James actually came up with the original concept and then tried to stare us down, daring anyone to come up with a better idea. This cover was pretty much finished about three days before deadline. There wasn't any other "hot" cover in a holding pattern. The only area of controversy might be the brighter than white bright whiteness of it all. We've run test groups in the past and they all said too much white hurts the brain where the eyes plug in, but these same people also said the white cover really stands out in the sea of other gaming magazine covers. Well anyway, this is probably the least exciting "cover story" of the year. Next month, however, will be a real hoot. Then again, if not, you can read all about it here.



Hurricane NAG

I wish this hurricane pace would settle down a little so I can do just one normal issue of the magazine for a change. No referendum [go to page 28 now!], no "do we/don't we" planning for a DVD, no articles to write or games to look at, no hunting for artwork on a slower than usual FTP server, no moving office, no explaining to the new people what Quake is and so on... just a normal issue before the madness of E3, and then the madness of rAge. Then before you know it, Santa is getting commercially flogged for everything he's worth, New Year blurs past and it all starts from scratch again. I believe this is called burnout and I'm having it 15 years early. But I won't cry about it too much - this is the coolest job in the world after all... and it's all mine <evil laugh>.

The big question

Cover DVD. Do we or don't we [go to page 28 to vote]? Will this be the end of NAG or the beginning of something new? With many big titles planned for a DVD only release this year, the time has come to upgrade. So get along to page 28, examine the offer there, consider the inevitability of the DVD format as essential gaming paraphernalia, and then head over to the NAG Website www.nag.co.za to cast your vote and/or buy yourself a DVD drive - we've partnered with Rectron and Kalahari.net to bring you a decent offer. A DVD drive delivered to your door for R199.95. We'll be having this special until the end of April 2005, so please consider your vote very carefully. But you must vote immediately or we won't have enough time to make a call for the April issue. It's in the balance and you are the last straw.

Portable fun

The other day I was told by Miktar that my two thumbs up rating for any product means nothing to him these days. Naturally this was before we kicked Ramjet out - so now he chooses his words more carefully. But it still hurt. It cut me deep. Sniff... I am human you know... someone got a tissue? Okay, never mind about all that. The centre of controversy these days is the looming battle between the PSP and the DS. It's an office divided. But because Sony sent us to London for a few days, the upper echelons of the NAG editorial staff are leaning towards the PSP and because we run the show, our opinion is the only one that really matters at the end of the day. Shameless tactic to squeeze a comfy overseas trip out of Nintendo - perhaps, nothing is above or beneath us. Sony is, however, sending James over to the UK for the PSP European launch in an effort to 'buy' another PSP supporter. So we'll see how that one turns out. Let's just hope he doesn't ask anyone important about the battery life - he has a nasty habit of wrecking international relationships with his candour. Regarding PSP battery life - reports on this range from 3-6 hours of usage depending on what you're doing. However, if you can afford a PSP, a second battery shouldn't be that much of a stretch... right? Unfortunately a clear winner between the DS and PSP will never emerge simply because you can't compare hogs and dogs. If that weren't enough, this year we'll be "experiencing" announcements on the next generation consoles from Sony, Microsoft and Nintendo. You'd swear they have nothing better to do than make money.

Coming and going

Walt [Shryke] has left the fold but will still be contributing on a freelance basis. He's just moved into a different cell block. Spending that long at a gaming magazine eventually starts having an effect on some people. Their minds keep telling them they're supposed to be at work, but playing games just never really feels like work. There is some clever psychoanalytical concept behind all this that only a professional will be able to explain. I just hope we didn't fry his coconut beyond repair.

Seriously, I'd like to say thanks to Walt for all the years of dedication and commitment in what can only be described as a rollicking rollercoaster of a stay with NAG. You've set yourself free for a new adventure in life and that's always a very tough thing to do - especially at your age... :). So respect and break a leg, I guess, are more apt than good luck in this case.

Alex [Ramjet] is also moving on. Many will cry coincidence, and the conspiracy theories about Shryke and Ramjet being the same person will rage for countless minutes. None turn of course. Many have demanded an explanation for his leaving slash firing and my explanation is ham. You see, people are sometimes just like ham, ham in the fridge. It just sits there taking up space, full of potential. There is comfort in the fact that the ham is there ready to be eaten at anytime, made into a decent sandwich or something tasty. Anything is possible with good ham and enough potential is like hope eternal. It's good ham you see, damn good ham. Then one day it starts to smell funny at which point it gets tossed out - all that potential gone and forgotten because now it's a health risk, a liability. Horrific images of you arriving home one night, drunk, and deliriously hungry fill your mind. Perhaps in that haze of booze, that fog of sleeplessness, you dare sample that potential. Ramjet was good ham until he went bad... and we had to toss him out.

I'd like to extend an official welcome to Chris, Kirsten, Paul, and Nati. These are our fresh faced recruits - full of eagerness and potential, they're new you see. Some of them don't even know what Quake is, while others can rail a pumpkin at ninety frames a second. This year has certainly started with a bang - let's see if it continues. Oh, remember to go to page 28 to vote and win and dance and sing. Do it for yourself. Do it for the gamers. Do it for NAG.

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: **March 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 March Caption

'The more Bernie thought about it the less fun lying on a giant picture of a mountain became' - **NAG's [62.3% lame] effort.**

January winner

"Everyone looks forward to feeding time at the NAG office." - **Johan Geldenhuys.**

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The importance of Pick-Up-And-Play

words james francis

The past weekend has been an easy haven of gaming thanks to me packing up my hardware and migrating to a LAN for a few days. This is a fairly uncommon event: I used to LAN a lot, especially the small variety that consisted of stuffing five to ten people in two rooms and highly questionable tables, but this doesn't last forever. Those were, after all, the days that anything released with multiplayer capacity was a reason to check it out. But today everything comes with some sort of connectivity over a network.

That and games have become too complicated. Most titles released these days require some kind of tutorial or basic instruction set before you can start playing, or there are two crowds: the beginners and the elite, with little room in the middle for anyone else. Console games still get away with this, since consoles don't tend to overcomplicate game designs and control schemes (though there are quite a few that still try and push this aspect of the game). PC games, on the other hand, like to go overboard and once you involve both the mouse and the keyboard you have a problem.

The game of the moment at this particular LAN was Flatout and for two simple reasons. Firstly, it was completely destructive. So even if you were terrible at it you didn't mind much - providing that you crashed your car in a spectacular-enough fashion. Secondly, the game uses the keyboard and only the keyboard. Granted, we are dealing with an arcade-style racing title, so you can't exactly compare it to an RTS or FPS title, but you can compare it to Modern Combat, the Battlefield 1942 mod. This is a traditional FPS, but the emergent game play makes it easy for players to get their bearings without being beaten to a pulp every ten seconds by someone else leaping all over the level.

Every year the PC seems to be limiting its own market. Even as more and more people get desktop machines, how many of those can really run the latest title? How many PC owners would care that much, especially when confronted by a title almost absurdly complicated (in their eyes) and not worth learning? The one upside of console games being ported to PC is that at least this sector gets taken care of, to a degree. But, there isn't nearly enough attention from serious PC developers to exploit this side of the market. Instead, most things released directly to PC tend to feed the hardcore players with mid-to-high end systems, which means that most new players on a PC will still stick to Solitaire, The Sims, and Popcap games for their gaming dose. No wonder that in 2004 nearly 200 million PCs were sold (compared to the PS2 reaching 100 million in 5 years), but the PC segment makes up barely 10% of the total gaming market...

EA gets DICE majority

Developer buyout saga laid to rest

Electronic Arts finally managed to gain a majority share in Digital Illusions (DICE), the developers of the popular Battlefield series. As part of their acquisition spree, the mega publisher wanted to purchase DICE, but shareholders in the developer resisted, not wanting to relent so much control to EA without certain conditions being met. This was finally resolved by the end of January and EA managed to get 3 million shares from shareholders as well as around 898,000 on the open market, making its share total 59.8%. With warrants in hand, if exercised, that will increase the share to 67.8%.

DS online

Nintendo talks about DS online service

Although Nintendo has maintained for some time that the online market is not a priority, it appears that the company has, in light of Sony's and Microsoft's successes in the field, finally faced up to the fact that online gaming is inescapable and must be catered for. The company recently dropped an official hint that online networking via the DS' wireless connectivity is being researched. It seems probable that the company will debut online functionality with the DS, and refine it with the release of its upcoming, next-generation home console, the Revolution.

Activision buys Vicarious Visions

Another developer joins the Activision stable

Publisher Activision continues its strategy of consolidating industry developers under one umbrella. Having recently purchased Infinity Ward and Neversoft, the publisher shelled out an undisclosed amount of money for Vicarious Visions. The studio is currently known for working on Doom 3 Xbox, but they also released Spiderman 2 for the DS, which is proving to be the biggest third-party title on the platform at the moment. Activision, known for publishing the Tony Hawk and Spiderman games, not to mention most titles using id's Quake 3 engine (including developer Raven Software), has been on a buying spree for a while - it also owns Call of Duty developer Grey Matter.

"Vicarious Visions' talented development team and proprietary technology combined with our internal systems and capabilities will play a key role in Activision's continued leadership on the next-generation platforms," beamed Kathy Vrabeck, Activision president.

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Jilted lover gets her revenge digitally

Woman arrested for deleting game character

A jilted ex-girlfriend took her anguish out on her former lover by deleting his Lineage character, including all his collected items. The woman, in her early thirties, admitted to the crime after being arrested by the police after the account owner reported the matter. Since he didn't financially suffer any loss, she was arrested on the grounds of not being authorised to access his online account.

"I did it as revenge for breaking up with me," she told police. Ironically the couple met online during the game and even though romance blossomed, it soon turned sour. Lineage is a popular MMORPG in the Far East, boasting one of the highest membership totals for any online title. [*Burn her at the stake, Ed*].

Word is out that **Namco**'s upcoming Tekken 5 will include the original **Tekken**, in celebration of the latter's 10th anniversary. It is also possible that Tekken 2 and 3 will also be included in the release.

Electronic Arts is toying with the idea of producing a **reality television series** based on **The Sims**. One possible way to implement this might be to have a group of people, a family for instance, controlled by input from the TV audience. Given that reality TV shows and The Sims both enjoy a predominantly female audience, this venture may succeed.

Marilyn Manson's "Use Your Fist and Not Your Mouth" track from his 2003 album The Golden Age of Grotesque will anchor an in-game soundtrack for Ubisoft's **Cold Fear** title.

Battlefield 2, from Digital Illusions and Electronic Arts, will be released towards the end of May, instead of March as recently cited. Ironically, this is in line with the original release date estimation first given when the game was originally announced - so overall it is not really being delayed.

Word is out on a new slim-line version of the **PlayStation 2**, this time in a shiny silver finish, for fashion-conscious console gamers. This edition should be available soon.

mktar's soapbox

Today's pointless gadgets are tomorrow's companions!

words ed dracon

Or at least, that's what I personally hope for. I've never been much of an animal lover. Oh, don't get me wrong; I adore dogs and cats and other allergy inducing fuzz balls, but I have no love for picking up the waste that these complex machines of nature produce. Enter, the RoboRaptor from the people who brought us RoboSapien. The RoboSapien was a surprising success when it was released; the bipedal robot could walk, talk, dance, and move around with an eerie fluidity only seen before in bad sci-fi flicks.

But, for all its amazing agility and style, it still remains a toy - an expensive gadget to entertain you for a few weeks before being replaced by the next best thing. However, there is no doubt that these pointless gadgets hold a deep-rooted appeal to some. The RoboRaptor is an example of this. The little dinosaur will walk, run, sniff, hunt, and even snap at your hand if you bother it while it's stalking your slippers. When in a playful mood, it will nuzzle your leg and undoubtedly produce the appropriate "aww, that's cute" from its owner.

This is the start of something beautiful, I feel. As Sony's foray into robotic pets (the Aibo) proved; humans can prefer a mechanical companion as opposed to a living, breathing pet - myself included. Perhaps it's misanthropy on my part, but I eagerly look forward to the day when I can have little packs of robotic raptors roaming my living room, eating small children, and never messing on the carpets.

That is the future.

Sony PSP not hitting the right buttons

Get used to it, says Kutaragi

Sony Entertainment's Boss, Ken Kutaragi, revealed to Nikkei Business that the company has had over 5,000 units returned over a supposed defect. One of the buttons, positioned closest to the screen, is raised slightly higher and has a tendency to stick. But he defended this as an intentional design feature and urged users to simply get used to it.

"I didn't want the PSP's LCD screen to become any smaller than this, nor did I want its machine body to become any larger," he told Nikkei Business. "The button's location is [engineered] on purpose. It's according to specifications. This is something that we've created, and this is our specification. There was a clear purpose to it, and it wasn't a mistake."

This is, in a way, a response to whether the US version will have this problem. Currently the PSP, which launched in Japan in December and has sold over 800,000 units, has revealed itself to have a few problems - twisting the cases slightly lets the game disc eject. These and other concerns are likely to be addressed before a Western launch, but Kutaragi maintains that gamers and developers "have to adapt."

At a separate event, talking at the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan's Professional Activities Committee, Kutaragi launched an uncommon criticism, saying that Sony has not moved to capitalise on the mobile market after its huge success with the Walkman. Calling the company's innovation diluted, his comments implied that he would have liked to have launched a portable PlayStation long before now, especially considering Nintendo's success with the Gameboy hardware.

Delta Force: Black Hawk Down on PS2

Rebellion is the development studio charged with the task of creating the PlayStation 2 version of NovaLogic's Delta Force: Black Hawk Down. The console version will resemble the PC version, but is being significantly enhanced. New features include a 32-player online multiplayer mode and skill development over the course of a single-player game. The developers expect to have it ready before mid-year.

Half-Life 2 Lost Coast

New level plus new features coming

Valve Software has announced new features which will be added to Half-Life 2, showcasing them in a new level called The Lost Coast. High Dynamic Range (HDR) lighting is an effect that gives light a very realistic glow and was first seen in an early tech demo which didn't make it into the final game. Steam will detect your hardware specifications to determine whether your computer is capable of supporting HDR.

Valve will also be releasing a CS: Source map called cs_compound as well as introducing the crowbar, Stunstick, and Slam to HL2 deathmatch.

Airliner Pilot

Just Flight has embarked on an innovative project aimed at aviation enthusiasts. Its upcoming Airliner Pilot, to be released next month, combines flight simulation with management simulation elements, allowing players to pursue an aeronautical career. Players will advance a character during the course of a game, rather than merely plotting single flights. The software will be released as an add-on for Flight Simulator 2002/2004.

Namco and Capcom crossover RPG

Namco's 50th anniversary sees its characters revived

The two gaming giants Namco and Capcom have teamed up to develop a strategy role playing game that will feature characters from both companies' long histories. The game's rather flimsy story revolves around a space-time distortion, thus justifying the characters from the various universes encountering each other, and will feature much dialogue, which should prove entertaining. Namco x Capcom, as the game is titled, will be available for PlayStation 2 in May (in Japan), and in it you can expect to meet many legendary characters from a host of classic games.

According to Namco executive Youichi Haraguchi, the original concept for the game came two years ago. "Back then, we already had about 100 characters in the game, but we felt that something was still missing," he said. "So we came up with the idea that it would be more thrilling and exciting if we brought in characters from another company, and we really wanted to do it. When we thought about what company had enough unique characters that could match with ours to make things even more stunning, we could only think of Capcom."

The characters will be illustrated by Takuji Kawano (artist of the Soul Calibur series). Namco x Capcom will also feature an opening animation by Production IG, which created Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex and the anime sequence featured in Quentin Tarantino's Kill Bill: Vol. 1.

Doom 3 delayed

The Xbox version of Doom 3 as well as its recently announced PC expansion, Resurrection of Evil, have been delayed and will not be meeting the on-shelf dates. The reason for the games slipping is apparently related to Activision's 2005 fiscal year results.

Two of the three next-gen consoles to appear at E3

Both Nintendo and Sony have confirmed that their GameCube 2 and PlayStation 3 consoles will be unveiled in some form at this years E3. Speaking in a recent interview with Japanese magazine ITmedia Games, Nintendo of Japan PR Office Manager Toyoda Ken said, "we are still looking at E3 as a launching pad for the 'Revolution' platform, and are deliberating if we should feature the actual console, visuals, or simply illustrate the concept behind it".

Rollercoaster gets a wet expansion

RollerCoaster Tycoon 3 will see an expansion in June, says Atari. Titled Soaked! The expansion will add a plethora of water themed attractions to your park such as water slides, aquariums, wave pools, laser-light water shows, and a Waterfall and Swimming Pool Designer.

K-D Lab, the Russian development studio behind Perimeter, has disclosed that an expansion pack, titled **Emperor's Testament**, is on its way, though no release date has been indicated. The add-on will boast a complex, convoluted story-line, in addition to new units and buildings.

Take-Two Interactive has acquired rights to the Civilization property. The first title to come from this deal will be Civilization IV, late this year, and other products will follow thereafter. This latest, in Sid Meier's hugely successful series will feature technological innovations including 3D graphics, as well as both single and multiplayer modes.

3d Realms has shut down a fan mod project that wanted to remake **Duke Nukem 3D** in the Source engine. This has fuelled speculation that the long-awaited Duke Nukem Forever will be at E3.

Bethesda has signed a deal with **Take 2**, giving the latter publishing rights in the US and Europe for **The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion**.

EA founder, **Trip Hawkins**, has been chosen to join the **DICE Hall of Fame** this year. This puts him amongst the likes of **Shigeru Miyamoto**, **Yu Suzuki**, **Will Wright**, and **Sid Meier**.

According to the **Electronic Software Association** and **The NPD Group**, video game software sales hit a new record in 2004 of $7.3 billion in the US, compared to 2003's $7 billion. Hardware sales were down, though, resulting in a lower overall sales figure.

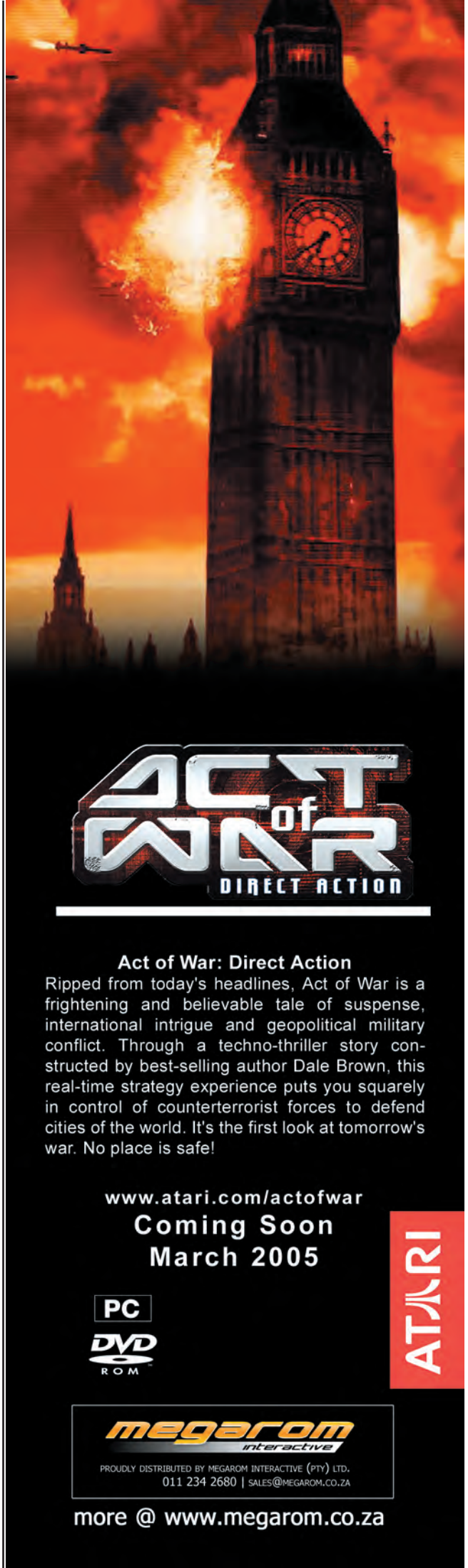
EA updated its software line-up to reflect thirteen titles to launch for the **Xbox 2** in late 2005/early 2006.

F.E.A.R.

Monolith's F.E.A.R. (First Encounter Assault Recon), to be published by Vivendi, is a first-person shooter that looks set to measure up to the new standards in the genre. Some multiplayer details have recently been released. The most interesting item is the slow-motion power-up (a popular new bandwagon in the industry, it seems), which will be available even in multiplayer modes. The developers have gone to great lengths to ensure that this devastating item doesn't unbalance the game, by introducing certain drawbacks, such as the fact that everyone will always be aware of where and in whose possession it is at any given moment. Additionally, the nail-gun in F.E.A.R. will actually be able to nail victims to walls. Another new element is the inclusion of melee combat, with some of the kicks and moves appearing to be Matrix-inspired. The game should be out in June or July.

TimeShift

Saber Interactive is developing TimeShift for Atari; a first-person shooter with a slight twist. While playing this game, players will be able to slow down, pause, and reverse the flow of time, which will be required in order to overcome adversaries and solve puzzles. The game is being developed for PC and Xbox (and possibly PlayStation 2, though the latter is unconfirmed). The game will be released late this year.



Take 2 buys Sega studios

The 2K Sports brand is born

Take 2 Interactive, publisher of titles such as Max Payne and Grand Theft Auto, has announced that it bought Sega's Visual Concept Entertainment and Kush Games studios for around $24 million. This gives the publisher control over the new 2K Sports brand, which it will obviously harness against Electronic Arts' ever-growing sports line-up (EA has recently added the ESPN license, formerly used by Take 2, to its stable). The deal will also see the studios develop titles for Sega's Arcade division. The Japanese publisher in return, will distribute Take 2 titles in Japan and the Far East.

This has also resulted in the launch of the 2K Games; a decision at Take 2 that will house, apart from 2K Sports, Venom Games and Poptop Software, as well as titles such as the Close Combat series and Stronghold 2.

EA isn't feeling threatened. "They are paying an exclusive price for a nonexclusive agreement," EA VP of corporate communications, Jeff Brown, commented. He went on to note that the deal "proves that there is still competition in sports games."

Live hits 1.4 million

Microsoft quite lively about latest stats

Microsoft revealed that, thanks to a productive Christmas period, the Xbox Live subscription service has surpassed the 1.4 million mark - mostly thanks to sales of Halo 2, which has surpassed its prequel with 6.6 million copies sold. Halo 2's obvious appeal lies in the game's users logging over 91 million hours of game-play time since its launch. Yet, this still means that less than 9% of Xbox owners (around 16 million) are on the monthly paid service, but it's still a large number (when considering that only 3 million out of 80 million Sony PS2 users are online).

"Our consumers are passionate about online game-play and seek larger-than-life digital entertainment experiences," said Xbox chief Robbie Bach. "We will continue to offer our thriving community best-in-class games, downloadable content, unique programming, and the expanded features and services found only on Xbox and Xbox Live."

Live's fortunes are set to increase when Microsoft launches the Live Arcade service (focused on small, easy but very playable games) in Europe later this year.

Music download service for PSP

Sony takes on Apple

Sony's PlayStation Portable currently enjoys a service that allows downloading of automatic updates for its operating system. But the company plans to expand this facility to allow downloading of more varied content. Initially, it will support gaming applications, but Sony intends to eventually extend this to include online purchasing of music, and possibly other media such as movies. Currently, this market is dominated by Apple's iTunes Music Store distribution service.

Ubisoft Montreal set to boom

1,000 new jobs, with government help

Ubisoft has announced that it plans to expand its Montreal operation by 1000 jobs in 2010, effectively doubling the current work force there. The studio is best known for its work on the Prince of Persia and Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell titles. This growth comes with the help of the governments of Quebec and Canada, which are putting quite a bit of money in helping the sector grow and "solidify Montreal's position as a world-leading interactive entertainment centre."

In particular, Emploi-Québec has been contributing $6.3 million (USD $5.3 million) in financial assistance for the first three years of the expansion program, as part of Ubisoft's accelerated job creation plan. The Ministère de l'Education will invest $5.3 million (USD $4.28 million) over five years to create a specialised training centre for interactive entertainment, and an additional $6 million (USD $4.85 million) from Investissement Québec over three years as part of Ubisoft's expansion program.

"The interactive games industry is growing rapidly and we expect it to double within seven years," said Yves Guillemot, Ubisoft's CEO and co-founder. "Ubisoft is home to the second-largest creative team in the industry and it has a world-leading studio in Montreal. These are two critical elements for the future, especially considering that the next generation of game consoles will offer unparalleled potential in terms of content and technology."

Vivisector: Beast Inside

Action Forms has released some information regarding Vivisector: Beast Inside. Most of this deals with the very impressive technical aspects of this upcoming game, as well as mentioning that the story is set in 1878 on a remote island where a twisted scientific genius' experiments with animals have gone wrong. However, the company neglects to specify a genre. Judging from what little is provided; it appears to be a first-person shooter with elements of character development akin to those to be found in role-playing titles. The game is being developed for PC, but at present a release date is not known.

Cold Winter

This April, Vivendi Universal will release Cold Winter; a first-person shooter with an international espionage theme. The developer, Swordfish Studios, appears committed to raising the bar in realism, citing highly realistic damage and injury models, and high levels of environment interactivity. Numerous multiplayer modes are on offer, with online action being powered by GameSpy. For more information, visit www.coldwinter.com.

Silent Hunter III

Command the cunning and deadly U-boats of the North Atlantic and experience the tension-filled atmosphere of a WWII submarine movie. The king of submarine simulations returns with an all-new 3D game engine, new crew-command features, and more realistic action than ever before. The game includes a career campaign, patrols that have both single and historical missions, a mission editor, and a multiplayer feature.

www.silent-hunteriii.com

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Sprint Car Challenge

Sprint Car Challenge from Liquid Games is an arcade racing game inspired by Sprint Car racing, one of the most extreme forms of motor sport. The game, available from the end of this month, offers both sprint and rally cars, and a selection of courses in various environments. Being an arcade-style game rather than a simulator, it awards points not only for performance and cunning moves, but also for more violent antics. A salient feature of this title is that it is being released at a fraction of the price that is customary for games these days.

World Tour Soccer 2006

Sony is at work on this new football game, to be released on PlayStation 2 late this year under its 989 Sports label. This ambitious title will contain at least 935 professional teams and 19000 players from 32 different leagues! It will also allow players who own an EyeToy to capture their likenesses to be pasted onto a player model.

Overdose

SCi, Deadline Games (from Denmark), and Take-Two Interactive have teamed up to bring us Overdose some time this year. This title's atmosphere will be reminiscent of over-the-top action movies, and its story will revolve around a DEA (Drug Enforcement Agency) agent on assignment to bring down a Central American drug cartel. It is being developed for PC and PlayStation 2.

Driv3r on PC

As you read this, the PC version of Driv3r may already be on shelves, though perhaps not yet locally [*March apparently, Ed*]. The story in Driv3r is very reminiscent of certain films that revolve around illegal racing and car theft, with the main character undercover to try and take down a ring of car thieves and their clients. Several Hollywood actors provided voice talent for the game. The PC version features a new level, but is otherwise pretty much the same game as the console version.

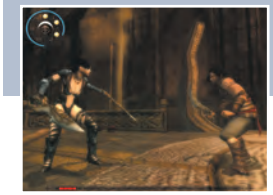
Chariots: The First Olympics

Candella Software is at work on a chariot racing game for the PC, set in the first Olympic Games in 776 BC in Ancient Greece. Players will be able to select both charioteer characters and their vehicles. Other than this, the developers have revealed relatively little, with the main thrust of their marketing being visual splendour. Time will tell whether playability matches up to the graphical gimmicks.

web scores

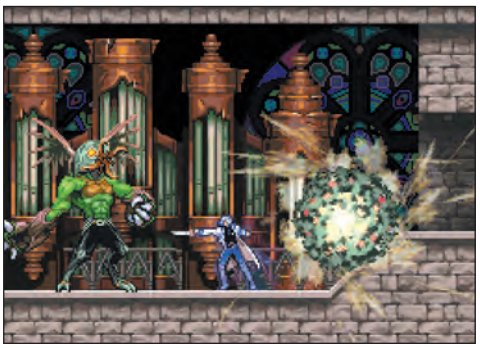
	[PC] MOH: Pacific Assault	[PC] Prince of Persia: Warrior Within	[PC] Chronicles of Riddick	[PC] Sid Meier's Pirates!
NAG [100]	85	80	93	78
gamespy.com [5]	3.5	4.5	4.5	4.5
gamespot.com [10]	8.3	7.4	9.3	9.2
pc.ign.com [10]	7.8	9.1	8.8	9.2

	[PS2] The Getaway Black Monday	[PS2] Ratchet and Clank Up Your Arsenal	[GC] Donkey Konga	[GBA] The Legend of Zelda The Minish Cap
NAG [100]	65	85	70	90
gamespy.com [5]	2.5	5	4	5
gamespot.com [10]	6.4	8.7	7.5	9.1
ign.com [10]	6.5	9.6	8.5	9



Castlevania DS

Konami has officially confirmed that a Castlevania game is on its way to the Nintendo DS. The game will be consistent with previous Castlevania titles, but will also make use of the hand-held's special features, such as the wireless connectivity and the touch screen. Castlevania DS is expected to be released late this year.



Castlevania: Curse of Darkness

A new chapter in the Castlevania saga is on its way from Konami, to arrive on PlayStation 2 late this year. However, the story will not deal, as in previous instal-ments, with the conflict between Dracula and the Belmont clan, but will instead focus on enmity between two Devil Forgemasters. The game dynamic will resemble that of Castlevania: Symphony of the Night.

Madagascar

This May will see the release of Activision's Madagascar, based on the DreamWorks film with the same name. Players will develop their animal charac-ters' skills as they progress through this humorous adven-ture and its contained mini-games. The game is being developed by various studios for PC, PlayStation 2, Xbox, GameCube, GBA, and Nintendo DS.

EyeToy: Monkey Mania

Sony Japan has announced EyeToy: Monkey Mania, which takes the style of a board game while making use of the EyeToy Camera attached to a PlayStation 2. The game, which is aimed at a very young audi-ence, incorporates a number of mini-games that can also be played separately, and supports up to four players.

usa release dates

March 2005
Act of War: Direct
Brothers in Arms: Road to Hill 30
Close Combat: First to Fight
Cossacks II: Napoleonic Wars
Darwinia
Driv3r
Elite Warriors: Vietnam
ER
Guild Wars
Project: Snowblind
Psychotoxic: Gateway to Hell
Silent Hunter III
Stalingrad
Star Wars: Republic Commando
Stolen
The Bard's Tale
The Matrix Online
The Sims 2 University
Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon 2
Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory

March 2005
Brothers in Arms: Road to Hill 30
Cold Fear
Devil May Cry 3
Dragon Ball Z Sagas
Dynasty Warriors 5
Enthusia Professional Racing
EyeToy: Kinetic
Ford Racing 3
Full Spectrum Warrior
God of War
Musashi: Samurai Legend
Predator: Concrete Jungle
Red Ninja: End of Honor
Resident Evil Outbreak File #2
Rugby 2005
Tekken 5
TimeSplitters: Future Perfect
Rainbow Six: Lockdown
Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory
Worms: Forts Under Siege

March 2005
Brothers in Arms: Road to Hill 30
Close Combat: First to Fight
Cold Fear
Conker: Live and Reloaded
Dragon Ball Z Sagas
FlatOut
Myst IV Revelation
NARC
Notorious: Die to Drive
Red Ninja: End of Honor
Star Wars: Republic Commando
Stolen
TimeSplitters: Future Perfect
Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory
Unreal Championship 2
Worms 3D
Worms Forts Under Siege
WWE WrestleMania 21

March 2005
Donkey Kong Jungle Beat
Donkey Konga 3
Dragon Ball Z Sagas
EA Sports Fight Night Round 2
Fire Emblem
Geist
Mortal Kombat: Deception
Stolen
TimeSplitters: Future Perfect
TMNT Mutant Melee
Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory

march at a glance

04
Movie
Constantine
www.constantinemovie.com

06
Motor Sport
Australia Formula 1 Grand Prix
[*yippee, Ed*]
www.formula1.com

07-11
Awards
5th Annual Game Developers Choice Awards,
San Francisco California
www.igda.org/awards

19
Gaming
Mayhem Open LAN
www.mayhem.co.za

20
Motor Sport
Malaysia Formula 1 Grand Prix
www.formula1.com

24
Gaming
PSP launch in USA

25-28
Music
OppiKoppi Easter Music Festival
www.oppikoppi.co.za

Bytes from South Korea

by matthew lowry

It should follow that a country as engrossed in gaming and electronic gizmos and gadgetry would have an interest in other forms of media as well. And media really does comprise a large part of Korea's visual language, whether it is as simple as the millions of cell phones or as surreal as the automated toilets I have encountered here and there.

Twenty-first century Koreans by nature seem to be bound to and entwined with media and electronics of every form. Television stations in South Korea have little need for imported shows as there is an abundance of locally produced programmes on offer. This is (apart from my not being able to watch movies I want to) a very positive trend for the country, which produces its own quality entertainment, and is something that I would love to see grow in South Africa. When things are done here in Korea, they are done right, and by way of bone-crushing, back-breaking hard work. The Koreans have worked themselves out of many years of oppression and poor economic conditions to become the leaders in many fields of industry and business. Animation is one such industry in which they are making their mark, and is one of the primary reasons for my being here, so I'll share some of my experiences.

Until now America, Europe and Japan have been the glory boys of animation, but Korea is fast becoming the new kid on the block, and behind the scenes, is the work-horse of much of the animation seen around the world at the moment. Many of the local film and television animations currently made here are being overseen by overseas supervisors.

A producer will send out a supervisor to the country where the animation is to be made. The supervisor, usually an art director, lives in Korea at the producer's expense, and directs the project.

While here I have met one such supervisor, Brent Dawes, a Zimbabwean animator/writer/director who was also involved in Africa's first full-feature animated movie, "The Legend of the Sky Kingdom". While in Korea he has been working on the next release from Sunrise Corporation, a Zimbabwean collaboration of like-minded professionals who are currently involved with several projects, including some that will be made in South Africa.

Have a look at their Website, www.sunrisecorporation.net. Brent's work was recently included in an animation festival held here, the Seoul International Cartoon and Animation Festival, or SICAF. The festival showcases animation and displays cartoons from around the globe, including work from Germany, the UK, Korea, Hungary, France, Russia, China, Austria, Japan, Zimbabwe and many others. Also on display was some work from South Africa's very own William Kentridge, a Johannesburg based artist/animator. There were hundreds of animations on show, including Ghost in the Shell 2, Back to Gaya, The Triplets of Bellville and a Korean offering that made me chuckle, "Doggy Poo". The story is about, well, a doggy poo. He feels alone and worthless and is always being rejected and mocked, but then he meets a sprouting dandelion who needs Doggy Poo to become a beautiful flower. Visit www.doggypoo.co.kr to watch the Doggy Poo music video, and much more!

As countries other than the traditional animation powerhouses are proving that they can produce great animation (take New Zealand's Lord of the Rings for example) one can only hope that South Africa will soon be added to the list of producers of credible, quality, film animation.

Second Sight

Second Sight gives players control of a character endowed with incredible psychic abilities. The game offers multiple approaches to completing levels either via stealth, dramatic gunplay, psychic powers or a combination of all three. The ability to psychically influence characters and remotely manipulate objects and individuals provides for a totally fresh play dynamic.

www.codemasters.co.uk/secondsight

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“I said Freeze, Assh*le!”

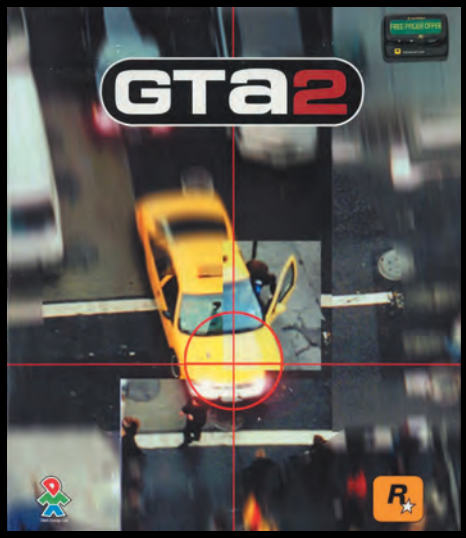
on the CD

GTA 2 returns to the masses

In a way, Grand Theft Auto 2 has always been the black sheep in the GTA family. The first game, while flawed, created the series, kick-starting a free-form crime spree over three cities that involved hit-and-runs, murder, jobs from the mob and, of course, grand theft auto. Meanwhile GTA 3 brought us down to street level and created a new legion of virtual criminals, now plying their trade from a far more comfortable eye level – something the top-down approach of the game could never match.

But in between these two there was GTA 2; a title that fell short purely because it was a bit too ambitious in the graphics department. Sporting a DirectX-powered engine and support for accelerated elements such as coloured lighting, it literally ran like a hog and most gamers couldn't summon up the CPU power to have it run smoothly (a necessary aspect in a game where you run from the law every five minutes, navigating manic city streets). This also hurt the buggy multiplayer mode, since system demands often caused games to fall way out of sync.

Despite this, GTA 2 played a huge role in the series' evolution. It introduced the concept of working for multiple gangs,



balancing your reputation with each as you take on missions, and essentially starting a war between them. The title also decided to forego GTA's limited players' lives, which meant that you could fail indefinitely until you ran out of money.

It also upped the mature content with cops and civilians cursing and riots and crime happening all over the city. Lastly, it created a save system in the form of churches – every time you visited, depositing a bit of money into the collection tin would save your game or, as the game put it, “Jesus Saves”.

Rockstar has released GTA 2 to the public for free as part of their Classic Games campaign. The title, which is on our cover CD this month, has been adapted to run on Windows XP (something the original GTA 2 struggled with) and on today's hardware, it obviously excels, showing off what it really was about. You can even get a few friends over and try the multiplayer death match - but naturally, the real appeal here is to get a chance and play one of the oft-overlooked gems in the GTA series. N

Please note that GTA 2 is only suitable for players aged 18 and older.

*it's not nice to swear

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The military and games

words jian reis

How many times have you played a war game and wished, even just for a moment, that you were really there on the battlefield or really up in that Spitfire shooting down an enemy plane? Honestly, I haven't really, because the whole point of games is that I can be a decorated war hero without leaving my armchair and thereby avoid the unpleasantness generally associated with getting shot by a real gun.

Evidently, the fact that games in general are war-based has not escaped those wily folks who are in charge of waging war. More and more countries are utilising games and game technology to train their soldiers for war. A mouse is a pretty poor substitute for a gun (a fact that dawned on me the first time I fired a handgun), but there's more to war than just being able to shoot accurately.

Most recently, there have been reports of the Chinese army using bootlegged copies of Counter-Strike to teach squad movement fundamentals to their recruits. Several photos, that made their way onto the Internet, clearly depict shaven Chinese recruits engaging in a good old game of Counter-Strike.

Some armed forces have made no secret of their dabbling in computer games - the US army commissioned the creation of America's Army, the free FPS that was primarily designed as a recruiting tool. The Swedes have bought game technology from Digital Illusions, the company behind the Battlefield series of games. With scalable maps and an incredible degree of realism, the Swedes are no doubt using Battlefield 2 as a potential training tool for recruits.

So with the armed forces getting in on the gaming action, is there any cause for concern? Not really, unless you're really paranoid and are inherently distrustful of all human beings - like Ramjet. Who knows? Maybe future conflicts can be resolved with a friendly bout of Counter-Strike: Source.

Okay, who are we kidding? People with real guns playing Counter-Strike? That's just asking for trouble.

www.prophecy.co.za

pH Balanced

Arena 77 hosts SA ESWC 2005

Arena 77 has once again secured the rights to organise the official Electronic Sports World Cup Qualifier in South Africa for 2005. Len Nery, Tournament Organiser for Arena 77 confirmed that the qualifier event will likely be held during the last week of April or the first week in May at a casino venue in Gauteng. Players can participate in either Counter-Strike 1.6 as a five man team, or individually in WarCraft III: The Frozen Throne. There will be an Open LAN, as usual, for those gamers not inclined towards the competitive side of things.
www.arena77.com

World of WarCraft ZA

Despite the fact that Vivendi Universal hasn't officially released World of WarCraft locally, there is still a thriving local WOW community who, through their various family/friends residing overseas, have managed to secure Authentication Keys (needed to play online).
The WoW ZA IRC Community can be found on irc.shadowfire.org in channel #WoW.
worldofwarcraft.co.za/forum

Naked IT ESWC Challenge

Naked IT will be hosting a warm-up event in Johannesburg for players who will be participating in the 2005 SA Electronic Sports World Cup Qualifier. In addition, Naked IT will be sending the winning CS team and WarCraft III player to the ESWC SA Qualifier - which will be organised by Arena 77. Prizes for the Naked IT Challenge include; the entrance fee to the ESWC Qualifier, paid-for accommodation for the weekend, and transport to the event.
Date: 25 - 27 March 2005.
www.nakedit.co.za

International Players of the Year 2004

A committee, drawn from nine top gaming media organisations, was recently appointed to determine the best overall FPS players of the 2004 season. The participating organisations were; sports.ampednews.com, Cached.net, Cyberfight.org, Esreality.com, GIGA.de, GGL.com, Gotfrag.com, RadioITG.com, and ShackES. The winners were; Paul "czm" Nelson (USA) in Quake, Laurens "Lauke" Pluymaekers (Netherlands) in Unreal Tournament, Sander "Vo0" Kaasjager (Netherlands) in Painkiller, and Dennis "walle" Wallenberg (Sweden) from Spixel / EYEballers in Counter-Strike. The awards ceremony is an annual event, hosted live on Radio ITG.
www.ggl.com

Major Tournament Games Announced

2004 was certainly an interesting year for e-sports. Largely because the "next generation" games, that had been looming for several years, finally hit the shelves. Painkiller, Doom 3, Half-Life 2 (Counter-Strike: Source) and Tribes Vengeance were all released within a comparatively short space of time. Naturally, with a fresh line-up of high-profile titles, competitors were on edge to find out which would be supported in tournaments for 2005. Also in question were the futures of games such as UT2004, Counter-Strike, StarCraft, and Quake 3. The speculation is now over and players and teams can at last start preparing for the big competitions. The World Cyber Games, Cyberathlete Professional League, and Electronic Sports World Cup have announced their game choices, as well as clarified several rumours.

The WCG's choice is probably the most controversial. The list is comprised of six PC and two console games. In alphabetical order; Counter-Strike: Source (PC - FPS), Dead or Alive Ultimate (Xbox - Fighting), FIFA 2005 (PC - Sports), Halo 2 (Xbox - FPS), Need for Speed Underground 2 (PC - Racing), StarCraft: Brood War (PC - RTS), WarCraft 3: The Frozen Throne (PC - RTS), and Warhammer 40K: Dawn of War (PC - RTS). Prize money is yet to be announced. Counter-Strike has been replaced by its Source Engine equivalent and, surprisingly, there is no duel-based first person shooter on PC. Already, the worldwide UT2004 community is up in arms about being excluded. The WCG has also been criticised for including three Real Time Strategy titles, which is said to be biased towards Asian countries. There is no information yet as to which of these will be supported locally, or even if there will be a South African qualifier this year.

The Electronic Sports World Cup has elected to follow community trends more closely. Also, being held earlier in the year, it will be supporting many of the older games that the WCG and CPL have dropped. As usual, it is exclusively for PC competitors. The competition will be split into official disciplines and masters' cups, which will be mixtures of invitations and qualification. The game list in alphabetical order is as follows; Counter-Strike 1.6 (Official Discipline - FPS - $120,000 purse), Counter-Strike 1.6 Women's Cup (Masters Cup - FPS - $30,000 purse), Gran Turismo 4 (Masters Cup - Racing - $12,000 purse), Pro Evolution Soccer 4 (Official Discipline - Sports - $40,000 purse), Quake 3 (Masters Cup - FPS - $12,000 purse), Unreal Tournament 2004 (Masters Cup - FPS - $12,000 purse), and WarCraft 3: The Frozen Throne (Official Discipline - RTS - $40,000 purse). While the big news is the selection of CS 1.6 over CS: Source, the ESWC has reserved the right to change the competition to Source if they so decide and we are still waiting for the final decision. Locally, there will be qualifiers for Counter-Strike and WarCraft 3, courtesy of Arena 77.

While the CPL World Tour official game, Painkiller, was already announced last year, the ever-popular Counter-Strike has also been added to the tournament line-up. For the first two stops of the tour (Turkey and Spain), the competition will run version 1.6, but will switch to Source after that. Small tournaments for WarCraft 3 and Need For Speed Underground 2 have also been confirmed for Turkey. The World Tour will be making nine qualifier stops and one final stop, with the overall prize purse set at $1,000,000. Qualifiers will be held in Istanbul, Turkey (February), Barcelona, Spain (March), Sao Paulo, Brazil (May), Berlin, Germany (June), Dallas, USA (July), London, UK (August), Stockholm, Sweden (September), Beijing, China (October), and Santiago, Chile (November). The final will most likely be held in Dallas, USA, at the CPL's home venue, in December.

interview

Name: Sean O'Reilly
Nick: FANA
Age: 21
Games: Quake 3, Counter-Strike, UT2003/4, Doom 3

Achievements:

- 3rd place in Doom 3 at rAge 2004
- 5th place in UT2003 at ESWC Qualifier 2003
- Top 12 in Quake 3 at 1000manLAN 2003
- Top 12 in Counter-Strike at Worfaire 2002

You came third at the rAge 2004 Doom 3 tournament, which was your first podium finish. However, rumour has it that you hardly practised. What do you attribute your success to?
I think it was because I had played past competitions in other events, such as Counter-Strike, Quake 3, and Unreal Tournament. I had a rough idea, based on the list of players, what the standard of play would be like at rAge. I reasoned it would come down to duel experience as well as knowing the game. I used to play a lot of Quake 1 back in the day so I managed to pick up the game pretty quickly.

Do you think Doom 3 was a poor multiplayer title, or did the community not give it enough of a chance?
Just by playing Doom 3 you could tell the game was not designed for heavy multiplayer action. Although fun, it was lacking things like hit scan weapons, which are pretty standard in modern duel games.

Is Painkiller just a passing fad then, considering, of course, that it has no direct hit scan either?
I have not played enough Painkiller to say, but my guess is that it's just something to keep us occupied until the next big multiplayer FPS is released. It definitely does not have the following that Quake 3 and Quake 2 did.

What do you think of the WCG's decision to exclude a 1versus1 FPS this year?
I think it is shocking. They are alienating a large percentage of gamers. I think they could do well for themselves by holding a Master's Cup for Quake 3. Something to keep the duel fans like me happy.

What are your gaming plans for the 2005 season?
I'm looking into playing Counter-Strike: Source this year. The game is an improvement over the other Counter-Strikes, but I will have to see if life gets in the way or not.

Do you play single player games? If so, what is your favourite title?
I do enjoy a good single player game. I had loads of fun with Half-Life 2, but I think the best is a toss up between Heavy Metal: FAKK 2 and Super Mario Bros. 3.

Disclaimer: **Imagine if we actually endorsed what this clown said each month - we'd be the laughing stock of the whole gaming industry. That said - the opinions expressed herein do not reflect those of the management and staff of NAG.**

Five... four... three... two... one... lift off!

The Domain of The_Basilisk

DON'T HATE THE GAME, HATE THE PLAYERS

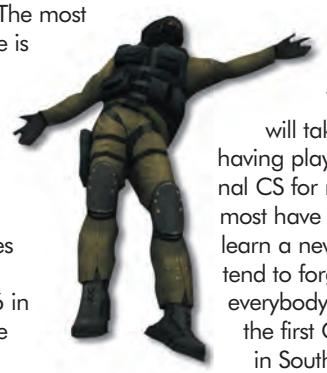
It's the big bang that gamers across the world have been waiting and praying for. The life of Counter-Strike as a competitive platform is finally coming to an end. Taking its place is the remarkable CS: Source. An instant classic that brings a refreshing air to a stale genre and opens up vast new tournament opportunities worldwide - certain to take the evolution of e-sports to the next level. And everyone hates it.

What I find amusing is that the current Counter-Strike community regards CS: Source as "unfit for tournament play," completely disregarding the irony of the fact that they already play CS 1.6. The Half-Life engine was a poor adaptation of the original Quake 1 engine to begin with and as such, Counter-Strike was riddled with bugs. But it was popular for this very reason - new players did not feel completely outclassed and were motivated to keep trying. Now, the randomness was certainly frustrating for the competitive community, but by playing the game for so long they learned to live with the drawbacks and began to put more emphasis on teamwork as opposed to individual skill (which, as I have said, is inconsistent).

CS: Source, by contrast, is based on the Half-Life 2 Source engine (to state the obvious), which is a far more stable and wonderfully versatile engine. I will concede that there were several non-engine-related bugs in the initial release (now rectified), which is typical of the CS development team. But even these bugs paled in comparison to those in previous incarnations of CS. Essentially, Source is a far more consistent game, based on a far more consistent engine. There is still random bullet spread, but this has always been a feature of CS and nobody ever complained before. My take on the community's attitude is simple. They have not acknowledged that Source is an entirely different game.

Sorry to be the harbinger of bad news, but this is something new and totally unlike the original Counter-Strike. The physics of a game determine its capabilities, and while Source's weapons, maps, and play dynamic resemble that of CS 1.6 and earlier versions, they are different in fundamental ways. These may seem subtle initially, but they translate into a huge variation when all the permutations come into effect together.

Ask any top competitive player. The most frequent complaint about Source is that it "… doesn't feel like CS." There are new flash spots, the movement is less staccato, there are new sniping opportunities, and the guns handle differently. Hell, the new Famas burst-fire alone introduces an entirely new element.



CS: Source is better than CS 1.6 in every respect (except possibly the net-code). Accuracy is far more reliable and the days of emptying entire clips and hitting nothing but air are over. The maps and new weapons balance allow for greater variation in play styles, the graphics are much improved (and, at last, can be suitably scaled according to your hardware capabilities), and the new physics make for a much smoother game overall.

So why do so few Counter-Strike players like this game? It's constantly being called random and skill-less and I've heard that many of the top competitors intend to quit once the transition to Source is effected. Perhaps the answer can be gleaned from the fact that players, new to the CS series, love it. For the first time Unreal Tournament, Tribes, and Quake players are actually interested in trying a game with the words "counter" and "strike" in the title. The local Source servers are filled to capacity. New teams are continually springing up overnight like Jack's infamous stalk.

Let me spell it out then. The old CS community is upset because this is not Counter-Strike. This is not 1.6. The reason it feels skill-less is because nobody is skilled yet. The game is in its infancy and will stay there for the next year at least. The new physics system will take a while to master. And having played nothing but the original CS for nigh on seven years now, most have forgotten what it is like to learn a new game from scratch. We tend to forget just how shocking everybody was back in 2000, when the first CS tournament was held in South Africa, and how far we've come since.

Source is perfect for competitive play. It's the least buggy, most balanced Counter-Strike yet, and better still, it looks good for the sponsors. I salute organisations such as the World Cyber Games and Cyberathlete Professional League who are going ahead with Source regardless of the community's objections - it's high time someone smacked some sense into them. Let the stubborn children quit. Let new stars take the stage if needs be. Source is an investment for the future of team-based FPS gaming. Personally, I intend to play it, and that's quite something coming from the man who publicly denounced all things Counter-Strike a few years back. Perhaps it's the allure of a trip to Singapore and that R50, 000 at Rage, but I wouldn't even be considering it if it weren't a serious improvement over its predecessor.

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ARENA 77

INBOX

Bunny

Letter of the moment

FROM Scry
SUBJECT Psychology of The Sims
In response to Jean's letter in the January 2005 issue: The Sims is one of the most blatant forms of escapism ever conceived by man!
It succeeds in this not by taking one's mind off matters but by artificially either removing or improving matters. Its effectiveness lies in its very simplicity as "life" in The Sims cannot become "complicated" - there are no underlying issues between characters, characters are stereotypes, etc. This also explains why the game is so addictive when there's really no goal in it (the goals are created by the player). The Sims also offers a rather effortless way to achieve some of these goals. Of course its fun to create your own character and partake in some interior decorating but that's not why people buy the game. And neither do people buy the game to control a few polygons (well, I hope not...). The amount of control given to the player is just another one of the aspects that builds upon the escapism the game offers. The sheer magnitude of control the player is presented with is only a more direct means of achieving whatever has been desired, such as (with no trouble) forcing two people to fall in love - undoubtedly requiring a lot more effort in reality. An immediate sense of security is presented not only by the ability so to save and load a game, but also by the prospect of starting over. That said, you'd have to be rather dumb (or just slightly sadistic) to lose the game - does The Sims have a "Game Over" screen? It is not control people want - control is merely a means to advance upon the aspirations and eliminate the problems of a given individual; and doing this, however artificial it remains, is escapism in its deepest sense - especially overcoming the problems. Strikingly ironic, it isn't people who lead "poor" lives that enjoy The Sims the most (at least not in my experience). I can think of only two reasons for this: a) owning a copy of The Sims is rather circumstantial (the rest being self-explanatory) and b) the persons one would expect to indulge the most in the escapism the game offers are in a state of sad denial - claiming that The Sims is for (excuse the euphemism) abnormal individuals. It is in fact those who have little to nothing to complain about who enjoy The Sims most. Admittedly, they sometimes refrain from playing the game as serious as intended but this is nevertheless contradictory to what one would expect. The reason for this possibly being is that as they do not have to worry about large problems, they worry about the small things in life - aspects which The Sims does not include as they are far too subtle. Or perhaps the mass market mainly consists of such well-off gamers [?] which still doesn't actually answer anything. Perhaps the Ed has clearer insights regarding this irony?
Umm, have some free games. NAG Ed.

FROM Eddy
SUBJECT Great Disappointment
Just thought I would let you know that I bought your December issue, great reading but as always game demos were a complete waste of time as they just freeze up the system! Don't you guys test these demos? See my system specification attached.
Thanks for the system's specifications but I'll need more than that to help you. If every demo we put on the CD crashes your system [I'm assuming this based on your line, 'but as always...'] then I'm going to suggest that you take a closer look at your system before you blame our CD. Why not download and install 3DMark [here:http://www.futuremark.com/], run it and see what happens. This is also the first complaint we've received from anyone regarding the December CD. I'm not being bitchy but please examine the facts Watson. NAG Ed.

FROM Milky
SUBJECT Old Things Suck
This letter is opposed to all of you people who keep saying old games are better than today's technologically advanced titles. And people saying that games have dry story lines, your old games didn't even have those! You're all just saying this for the sake of some kind of revolution against new games, but deep inside when you lie in your bed at night you can't help but think you enjoy new games better; it's true and you know it man.
You're right, why are we such fools? Sometimes I feel just like Jerry Springer. He used to ask questions, make comments, and engage the guests on his show. Now he just introduces the people and stands back. NAG Ed.

FROM Matthew
SUBJECT Cosplay Obsession
My one friend Brett *<removed>* thinks he is Goku from Dragon Ball Z. He peroxides his hair and wears orange overalls, he also started going to the gym a few years back just to look buff like Goku. The problem is he is getting old and most people think he comes from prison. He is pretty big now but this obsession has to stop. Do you have any advice for me?
Plant something incriminating on him, call the cops, tell him the cops are of a higher level than him, and watch the fun unfold. NAG Ed.

FROM PCK
SUBJECT Where in the World...?
Let me start off with the greatest cliché of all time: Great magazine. I love reading the game reviews and especially the pages on new gadgets. I would just like to know, or should I say ask something very important. Where in the world do I find these games? I have been to all major retailers (you can edit this out: *edited, edited, edited, edited, edited, edited, edited, edited.*) you name the place, then I have been there or have phoned them. I live in PTA Centurion and would like to know if there is maybe a shop in the Gauteng area that specialises in PC Games. Please help a wondering soul. If there isn't a shop like this, do you think that might be a good business opportunity?
How can telling us how great we are be considered a cliché? But besides that, you've highlighted one of my pet hates. I intended to write a complete Ed's Note on this at some point, but because I'm lazy by nature I'll just bang this out here. I too have experienced this problem. Buying games in South Africa is a chore. It's not often that I come down from my tower up high and actually go out to buy a piece of hardware or software, but over the last 3 months I've had to buy, among other things, an ADSL Modem and LOTR: Battle for Middle Earth (for a friend). Firstly, the modem took about 3 stops and 2 phone calls before I ended up on the Internet (I had to wait another whole day for the delivery). Battle for Middle Earth took 3 different stops until I found and bought the last remaining copy. There is a serious need for retailers to start stocking game titles properly. To get around all the problems in this industry, the most basic start has to be stock availability. This small town mentality must go or some big fish from overseas [EB Games] will arrive someday and gobble everyone up. My suggestion is to order it via www.kalahari.net - it gets delivered direct to your door. NAG Ed.

FROM Lee, the Old Age Gamer
SUBJECT Violence in Games
Game violence seems to be the flavour of the month lately. Years ago in the late fifties and early sixties (yes I'm that old!); we kids used to use the most powerful graphics card known to man - the human imagination. Cops and robbers, cowboys and Indians, war, were all games with one object in common - to kill the bad guys. In addition we used to read comics, watch TV, and movies all with a similar theme. Now whether this type of activity breeds a future generation of murderers and war mongers I don't know, but I do know that I am a regular law abiding citizen and a pacifist. I also still enjoy violent movies and video games. If one looks at the animal kingdom the hunter of the species is usually endowed with aggressive tendencies to facilitate survival. Just imagine a timid lion that was afraid to chase an antelope - his pride wouldn't survive for long. If we then accept aggression as part of the human psych, it should be acknowledged, controlled and provided with harmless outlets - not denied and suppressed. Parental guidance should be part of that control. For those of us who are not children anymore, the more gory the better, after all, it's only images on a screen. Keep up the good work and I look forward to NAG and your hilarious comments every month.
I **think the term you're looking for is grey gamer [not a derogatory term but a compliment because**

SHORTS

FROM André
SUBJECT Cover Disc 2005
This is going to sound ridiculous... but before I say what I want, let me inform NAG (that's you) that you are the best magazine in the existence of printing and ink! Now, to my silly little statement - thank you for the way the Cover Disc was packaged. It was in a harder plastic and folded in, instead of sticking. I must admit that I found the others extremely annoying due to this fact. But thanks!
Why don't you just fold it in half if it's sticky? NAG Ed.

FROM Reinhardt
SUBJECT Intel CPUs
I love Intel and hate AMD, but one drawback is irritating me. Why doesn't Intel release a 64bit processor, they do have that Itanium thing but it isn't for multimedia or home use and I don't want to go the cheap way (AMD).
Trust in Intel my brother. Do not stray to the dark side. NAG Ed.

FROM Reinhardt
SUBJECT Headphones
Just tell me how the hell do they make 5.1 channel headphones? Does it consist of 5 peaces (sic) that you attach to your head (ears) huh?
Each earpiece houses 3 speakers - very clever when you think about it. NAG Ed.

FROM Shuayb
SUBJECT Reflexes
I wanted to know if fast action games like Unreal Tournament, Doom, and Spider-Man and so on improve your reflexes. If so it would be a very good way of advertising the game. Doom 3. Buy Now! Improves Reflexes + gives splendid graphics. I like the smooth paper material used for the front cover of NAG.
It won't work. Besides, when people find out they have to buy an expensive computer system to go with their shiny new game they might sue someone. NAG Ed.

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

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

you're a true gamer; one who doesn't give up his passion just because he gets married, has kids and starts living on credit]. When I read your topic, I rolled my eyes and groaned something about another games and violence letter, but then you went on to praise the magazine and me in particular (my eyes rolled back and a warm smile appeared on my face). Thanks for writing a decent letter and then wrapping it up with some very deserving praise. It's people like you who help me avoid ending each day in physical violence. NAG Ed.

FROM Ripper_09
SUBJECT Just a Response
My letter was posted in the January issue of NAG, when you replied with, "at that point there will be something else on the horizon to pursue." Although I thought about your point, I also thought that sometime, there will be nothing else more to pursue. At some or other point there will be nothing more to improve. That may not happen in a while, but sometime we will in fact have nothing more that can possibly make headlines and amaze the gaming industry, or any other major industry as well. Now you just think about that. Oh, and one more thing: Thanks for your great and informative magazine. Keep up the excellent job.
I think not - you simply cannot make all-encompassing statements about the future saying that it will all be 'done' one day. Two hundred years ago people couldn't even conceive a simple thing like Pong. In the future of humanity there will be things that you and I cannot even comprehend or conceive. So saying that it'll all eventually end is bogus - they're still working on the wheel after all. But please do keep responding if you think I'm wrong. I have been wrong in the past, once or twice. Arguing my point keeps me honest. NAG Ed.

FROM kabelo
SUBJECT Lack of Nintendo Games in NAG
Hello NAG you have an excellent magazine but I have only one problem, it involves GameCube games or lack thereof. What I am saying is why don't review GCN games more often, there are many games you have not yet reviewed... [*Snip, Ed*]
Well it seems that after my nagging in the previous issue, Nintendo SA decided to send us a few games - some of them are reviewed in this very issue. So, thank you Nintendo. You made me cry like a baby until you came to the cot to see what the problem was. NAG Ed.

FROM KRiSAN
SUBJECT Do We Support Piracy Without Knowing?
My friends and I always wondered, is it piracy if: My friend buys a cool game that I like and he lends it to me without charging me? Can he copy one of my games and not sell it or benefit financially in any way? Is it illegal to get games imported from other countries through places like CD Warehouse? Why some people buy pirated games is not their fault. We only have our country's gaming industry to blame. In SA we had a game called Final Fantasy X-2, but did we have a Final Fantasy X? We had a Project Zero 2 but no Project Zero. Fans of the game want to collect and play the game that they only have the sequel to, but it's impossible to get it legally so the only way they could get it is through piracy and importing games if that's not piracy too. Please answer my questions. It's really important.
There's an old saying; if it looks like piracy, smells like piracy and sounds like piracy then it probably is piracy. You may lend as many games to your friend as you wish but, he cannot copy those games and keep them for himself - I thought this would be obvious. If he copies a game for himself, then he is benefiting financially to the tune of R299 or whatever it would have cost him. This R299 would usually have gone to the developer, so therefore your friend stole R299 - and you are his accomplice. Getting games imported isn't technically illegal - this is referred to as grey market software and because it usually costs significantly more, it's not really a widespread problem. People usually buy imported games if they are looking for specific box editions or collector's editions. At this point in South Africa you can buy pretty much any new release title available - so, that poor excuse for piracy doesn't stand anymore. Perhaps you should stop looking for angles to justify piracy and just pay for the software you use. NAG Ed.

FROM Nicolas
SUBJECT Logic's Out the Window
I'm hoping my e-mail is typed out in such a way that you won't resist showing it as an example to those who don't know what Caps Lock is. Oh, and great magazine, but make Ramjet in the middle or something like that, ending off your magazine on a negative note doesn't leave everyone feeling too great about your magazine (apologies to Ramjet, he really isn't so bad, everyone, it's just the feeling of ending off so harshly that makes me uncomfortable). I'd just like to rant (this is why this e-mail is hard to read, because it's so crammed with opinion and facts that there's no way to organise it all) a bit to express just how annoyed I am with these HL2 attacks... [*Snip, you mean all opinion and zero fact Ed*].
That column expresses the joy that is Ramjet - he has darker days, but then we don't let him write much on those days. Besides, this is his last issue anyway. I said let's have pizza and beer or something to celebrate him leaving, but someone else said let's get the pizza two weeks before he goes, let it get mouldy and then throw it at him when he leaves - mixed bag at this office. NAG Ed.

FROM Lola
SUBJECT Missing Half-Life 2 Levels
I would just like to ask you a question regarding the Half-Life 2 Promotional Videos. In these videos, released by Valve, you see quite a lot of footage, that isn't remotely inside the actual game. Was this intended, for not ruining the storyline before you played the game, or was the game changed so severely after recording them, that these promos don't make any sense, or fit in anywhere in the game? As an example, in the video called Docks, the player starts out with just a Crowbar on some docks, which doesn't happen in the game at all. Tunnels is one of the main reasons I bought the game, and if I remember correctly, it was on one of the NAG Cover CDs. It had a blue monster that stabbed a guy. Although I am not saying that Half-Life 2 was not a superbly excellent game, my question remains, where did all the fake promos come from - from a different version of the game, or is it just for publicity?
There's no conspiracy surrounding the examples you raise. The reasons why they dropped certain levels could be that they were just done up for E3, had technical problems, were not exciting enough to play, didn't fit, and didn't flow around the rest of the game. I believe the Tunnels level was dropped because it wasn't fun, even though it looked cool. NAG Ed.

FROM Aaron
SUBJECT The Long and Short of it
Your magazine is really great. I think I speak on behalf of many fellow gamers when I say that Half-Life 2 was far too short, but one of the things that really annoyed me is that I have watched many trailers for Half-Life 2 and some of the scenes I have not experienced in the game. Is Half-Life 2 a linear or non-linear game?
See previous letter. NAG Ed.

FROM H Willemse
SUBJECT None
Usually I'm the quiet guy, you know the one that doesn't write funny letters to magazines and blow off steam on public forums. I consider myself as civilised and my opinions too intellectually refined to waist (sic) on the average mind (but today I shall take exception). I rather prefer to read the lesser folks' letters and amuse myself with their tactless blundering, the endless nagging and whining in which they always avail themselves and then there is the simplicity with which they never fail to advertise the inhibition of the 'random intelligence generation factor'. Today, however I shall humour you with some theatrics of my own and elucidate the reason for my intrusion. Enough is enough! How much more mind numbing, agonizing publicity are you going to lend to that detestable FPS genre? It is always unoriginal in the extreme and can be termed as the same old game in a new box! Shooters should be outlawed and its fans deemed deviants! Merely possessing a FPS should be a criminal offence! I for one have had enough of this crap. It is stupefying how actual human beings can blindly embrace a venture so purely insane. And you publicists are not helping the situation, instead you popularise the debacle to the point of it becoming a sect, and don't tell me you're only reflecting public opinion - you create public opinion! [*Who us? Ed*] Other than me refusing from now on to read any article with the titles of certain deviant software technologies in them, I wish to commend you for an otherwise excellent publication.
I was initially impressed by your usage of large words until the word 'waist' appeared. I always say; read your letter at least twice before sending it - please. First Person Shooters [or Fist Pistol Shotgun] games are like big Hollywood blockbusters - without which the industry would disappear under a heap of chess games, submarine simulations, and adventure quests with three headed monkeys. So praise the reality of the FPS game and if you don't like them, don't play them. NAG Ed.

FROM Lourens
SUBJECT Public Mislead
The gaming industry is growing everyday. Most new gamers don't really know much about gaming, and aren't really aware of NAG. rAge did a lot for new gamers but there are many new gamers that are not really sure what game to buy. I was sitting on the beach reading a newspaper when I saw a review for a game, it was Shellshock: Nam 67. The dude who reviewed it gave the game 9/10. I was totally shocked - the guy had probably never played a game in his life and was making up stuff like you couldn't believe. He was talking about how original the game is; he also mentioned something about how intense the game was. The worst of all is that a lot of people read the article and then buy the game. The game obviously bores them and they probably think if this is what the gaming industry has to offer I don't want to be a part of it. Isn't there a way that NAG can publish a review in a newspaper every now and then?
This is a pet hate, no call it peeve of mine, but I won't go on too much about it because it's growing the industry. But then again; is writing about something you know nothing about good? NAG Ed.

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Things to consider:

- DVD is the obvious choice of optical media at the moment
- 600MB [CD-ROM] versus 4.7GB [DVD-ROM]
- Most new demos released on the Internet are over 400MB, making it impossible to put more than a single game demo on a CD. 2-4 new demos are released a week
- The Half-Life 2 demo was too big to put on the CD
- The hot new RTS from Atari, Act of War, will only be available on DVD-ROM
- Silent Hunter III is only available on DVD-ROM
- There is a new trend. Development companies release full games on the Internet, and as time goes by many of these will weigh in over 700MB and you'll lose out

Some recent examples [demo sizes]:

Star Wars: Republic Commando Demo	421.1MB	Prince of Persia: Warrior Within Demo #2	297.2MB
The Settlers: Heritage of Kings Demo	370.5MB	Act of War Demo	668.8MB
Silent Hill 4: The Room Demo	497.6MB	Half-Life 2 Demo	751.2MB

This would be about 3GB of amazing games for you to try leaving us with another 1.7GB for patches, game modifications, movies, and so on.

Don't just think about your current situation – even if you're planning on buying a DVD drive in the next 2-3 months, vote yes for us to switch to DVD.

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A WORLD OF GAMING ON YOUR DOORSTEP

RISING THROUGH THE RANKS FROM ANSWERING PHONES TO PRODUCING ONE OF THE LARGEST EVER ONLINE SERIES CAN'T BE AN EASY TASK. WE CATCH UP WITH JAMIL DAWSARI TO FIND OUT HOW IT'S DONE...

"THE GOOD IDEAS THAT WE NEVER THOUGHT OF ALWAYS COME FROM THE PLAYERS AFTER THE GAME'S OUT. WE CAN'T WAIT TO SEE WHAT THEY'LL COME UP WITH THIS TIME"

JAMIL DAWSARI

JAMIL DAWSARI

Electronic Arts

ELECTRONIC ARTS™

It might be sub-zero outside EA's imposing Chertsey headquarters, but inside it's cosy as 30 computers gently hum together in a testing room. The machines are waiting for eager gamers to strap on their headsets and begin playing, what could be one of the biggest online games of 2005 - Battlefield 2. Hosting this gaming session is EA producer, Jamil Dawsari, who - even after flying all the way from Digital Illusions in Stockholm, where he's based - is bubbling over with enthusiasm for DICE's latest title and is more than happy to give us an insight into how he ended up producing such a high-profile game.

"I actually started with EA on the phones and followed a very standard career path until I ended up where I am today," begins Dawsari. "I just climbed with each title I worked on and eventually landed myself the Battlefield series which required me to move out to Sweden."

Being involved in a company as large as EA pretty much ensures that there'll always be new games to work on, and Dawsari's rise through the ranks has seen him being involved in a wide range of projects.

"The first game I ever worked on was Extreme Pinball," he remembers. "Although I'm very fond of the game I was disappointed with how it performed; it deserved to have much more done with it. Out of all the games I've worked on, I have to say that the Battlefield series has been my favourite. The team of people I've been working with are exceptional and considering the way Battlefield 2 is shaping up, it's looking like it could be my favourite of all of them."

The Battlefield series that Dawsari speaks so highly of has been a huge player in the online gaming world and over the last few years has provided gamers with several titles and expansion packs. But, creating games about war in times when real conflicts are raging and concern over game content is at an all time high, must be a tricky business.

"It's something that we do have to worry about," Dawsari says. "But the Battlefield series has never been about the violence. We've been very careful with Battlefield 2 and made sure it has as few connections to real wars as we could. Instead of naming actual countries in the area, we've created the Middle-Eastern Coalition force. There's no blood and no graphical violence - it's very possible to make games of this type without resorting to these things. It's all about gameplay and fun."

A lot of hard work has clearly been ploughed into the latest Battlefield title, and it seems the teams at EA and DICE have been so busy that they haven't even had a chance to reflect on what the upcoming next-generation consoles might mean for the industry.

"It's obviously all very exciting, but to be honest we've all been so busy with Battlefield 2 and had so little time to stick our heads out of the trenches that we've not had the chance to see what's coming" Dawsari admits. "Having been locked away for so long, I'm not the best person to give my opinion but we always look forward to new challenges. In exactly the same way, many recent games that I've been meaning to play have just slipped past me because I haven't had the time to sit down with them. I'm really into my RTSs and there are so many around at the moment that I want to make a start on. I've been planning on giving Battle For Middle-Earth a play for some time now - who knows, maybe when Battlefield 2 is out of way I'll have the time."

With Battlefield 2 due out in a matter of weeks, it looks like Jamil will soon have that precious time he needs to do some catching up - unless, of course, there's a new project waiting for him…

"Well, I suppose if you asked my wife what was going to be next for me she'd probably say it was vacation time," he laughs. "In fact, if you were to ask me, I'd have to say it was vacation time as well. At the moment it's really not clear where the Battlefield series will be headed after number two, so nobody really knows what will happen next. I guess we'll just have to wait and see…"

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portable future

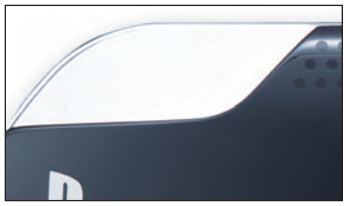
hardware

Approximate retail price: R 1800.00
Available: Q2 2005

The "walkman for the 21st century" is the claim and gaming is the focus. NAG was invited to London in December for a preview of the Japanese launch of the PSP. Our "job" was to play games on the PSP and form our own opinions about the unit through actual testing - and we, of course, took full advantage of the five star luxury accommodation and expensive looking food and wine. We won't get into any discussions about the PSP's ability to play movies, music, wash the dishes, or act as your girlfriend but, believe us, it can do just about all of these things. And if the leaked update is anything to go by, the PSP is set to replace just about everything you carry around that beeps and blinks. There is a great vision here - much more than just a portable gaming device. But considering that we were invited to play games, it's only right to discuss the PSP as a gaming console. Here's a quick look at Sony's entry into the portable console market...

Back end | Not that exciting to look at but all the crucial bits plug, slot or fit in here. The PSP is powered by a Lithium-ion battery which you can recharge using the supplied AC adaptor. Next is a memory stick slot which, unsurprisingly, takes a memory stick. Last but most important is the UMD drive slot - this is where you insert your game discs [see right]. Forget about piracy as there's no such thing as a UMD writer - and as far as Sony is concerned there are no plans to produce any.

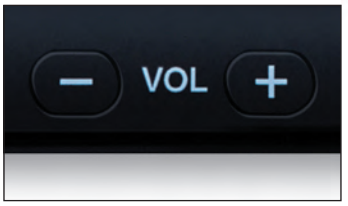
UMD | Universal Media Disc - this is Sony's proprietary media solution designed exclusively for the PSP, ostensibly to curb piracy. These little 60mm discs can store up to 1.8GB of data and feature a protective plastic housing.



Shoulder buttons | Not that revolutionary, but if you consider the whole package it would seem that Sony has all the bases covered. Nothing goes better with the sleek black design than a pair of translucent shoulder buttons.

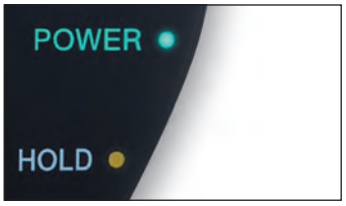
D-Pad | It wouldn't be a Sony gaming device without a D-Pad. The design of the unit is such that the position of the D-Pad feels very natural and comfortable. Getting to the shoulder buttons takes a little getting used to however, but perseverance always pays off.

Analogue | Operated using your thumb, the surface is slightly rough to prevent slippage. Using the analogue control proved a little unnatural and was pretty useless while playing Formula One. This will definitely be something you either love or hate.



Audio | Crisp, clear and in stereo. The PSP certainly delivers the goods in the sound department. You can listen to your games by way of the stereo speakers built into the unit or simply by plugging in a headset. Next to graphics and play dynamic, good sound is always important.

Conventions | Next to these gaming culture symbols the PSP will be adding some new ones - but more on that in a future issue. There was a complaint that the Square is positioned too close to the screen causing, what many thought to be a malfunction. Not so says Sony.



Battery | The apparent issue with the battery is certainly a personal one. Many people think four hours are too short while just as many say four hours are more than enough. Then again, you can always buy another battery - which shouldn't be a problem if you can afford the PSP.

Design | This is one piece of kit that has desirable stamped all over it and will certainly have your mates turning green with envy. Not only that, it also features a metal ring to attach the PSP to your wrist.

Screen | The display is a 4.3 inch, 16:9 Wide screen TFT LCD running at a 480 x 272 pixel resolution featuring 16.77 million colours. Can you say wow? You have to see it to believe it - something you can be proud to show off around the campfire.

portable future

software

All PSP first line-up titles feature opportunistic based play at their core. In English, they all feature some element, be it a mini game or a reduced time-based activity, where players can actually accomplish something while playing a game for only 30 seconds. A smart move by the big boys at Sony and what must be quite a departure from what they're used to. How the third party developers interpret this mandate remains to be seen and as with all software, things will eventually settle into what people really want and not what boardroom executives think they want. That said; gaming on the PSP has to be seen to be believed: crystal clear and crisp visuals that move around the ample screen with grace and fluidity. Already there were some clear differences in graphics quality between titles, with Ridge Racer picking up the award for best looking game of the lot. Another focus area was the ability to enhance games by downloading content onto a memory stick and then using that content in your games. Wipeout Pure was the strongest in this area. Overall the message is clear - this is a must get if you're looking for a serious portable gaming platform that has the open-ended potential to be anything. Oh, all the developers were insistent that no code has been ported and that most of the graphics, for most of the games, are all brand new - effectively squashing any rumours of porting PS2 code across from the PSP. Regardless of the platform battle, this is one slick unit that deserves all the attention Sony's marketing money can buy.

games

Medievel

Players control Sir Dan through new levels and adventures in the spirit of the original game.

This game was originally released on the PlayStation, but never on the PS2, and now appears on the PSP. The original scriptwriter has expanded on the plot, but the game features all new artwork and code. Being designed for the PSP, the game features a save anywhere system and a number of other opportunistic based game play dynamics. MediEvil emulates the graphical style of Tim Burton's, The Nightmare Before Christmas with a stop motion film quality feel. There will be 72 characters and eight mini games - these mini games are fast and quick to play and link back to the main game. For example: teaching players how to shoot arrows helps them acquire a skill they can then use in the main game.

Formula One

Unlike the PlayStation 2 version of the game, Travellers Tales were brought in for the PSP version. A fresh new look was required as well as a change of focus for the game - steering away from simulation and focusing more on a fun and arcade style play dynamic. This mandate was put in place to facilitate the quick pick up and play nature of portable gaming. For those players interested in a longer challenge, the championship mode can be played for several hours. The game features the 2005 racing season and will include new circuits like Turkey and all the current teams and drivers - especially useful this year, thanks to all the reshuffling. Up to eight players can play head to head on the same track. Formula One is not a launch title and is only about 60% ready (as at December 2004). It should be released in June 2005.

Ridge Racer - European Title

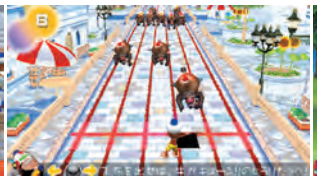
Ridge Racer is by far the most visually impressive game of all nine titles showcased at the launch event. It's amazing to see such a diverse range of graphics in terms of quality, at this early stage in the development of all the games for this platform, and will certainly make all future developments that much more interesting. However, for some of you the most highly anticipated element of this game might be the Rally-X mini game, which you can play at the beginning while the title is loading - this version of Rally-X features all 20 levels.

The game offers a number of game modes with special emphasis on World Tours. These feature unique custom tours, based on the opportunistic play nature of the PSP, where you can create games that last just 10 or 15 minutes. The random nature of the course selection ensures a different experience each time. There are 24 race circuits, some from previous games and some new but all updated exclusively for the PSP. Fifty cars, all designed by a proper car designer, ensure that the vehicles look realistic while still being fictitious.

The game also features a Nitro System where drifting around corners at high speed builds Nitro which can be used to gain an advantage over other competitors. Plays well and looks great, you can ask for nothing more.

Wipeout Pure

This 5th iteration of the Wipeout series was already one year into development at time of viewing [December 2004]. It features, again, no old art assets or code - everything was designed and built from scratch. Only the concept remains - futuristic high speed racing with weapons. One of the main areas of focus for the team was to build in the option to download content from the start. Gamers will be able to download new tracks, music, and ships onto a memory stick and then experience this new content in the game. In terms of size: an average sized track weighs in at 4MB while skins and music are significantly smaller. The game features eight tracks set in a mountainous area, five different speed classes (two are available from the start), Vector for beginners, and Venom for those ready to take on the game. After that, Flash opens as the intermediate between the beginner classes and the expert classes with Rapier next and Phantom being the fastest. While these classes unlock, players will have access to all the ships from the start. The game also features tons of content that can be unlocked. For the potable nature of the



Ape Academy

Out of all the titles on show, Ape Academy was the highlight. Although it bears uncanny similarities in execution and format to the super successful Wario Ware, it has a unique charm of its own and will probably be the title most people will want. The game borrows generously from the Ape Escape series, so much so that the boss monkeys from the Ape Escape game are the teachers in Ape Academy. The bulk of the play here involves a number of short and fun mini games - for example: counting monkeys as they cross the screen by pressing a button, or how about protecting your banana, from attacking zombie monkeys, with a catapult and a banana boomerang. If single player fun gets dull then there are a multitude of multiplayer games, even a few using a single PSP unit. The best example of this is the One Minute race, where players must keep a finger on a button while they wait for the starter pistol to go off. When you hear the pistol the quickest button press wins the game. Tremendous fun combined with simple concepts and a quick pick up and play game dynamic, make Ape Academy highly anticipated.

PSP, this game has shorter tracks and if you really have to do something else in a hurry, there's always the hibernate mode.

Football [working title]

It's soccer. A natural choice for the hardware platform, especially in Europe. The developers we spoke to, see one of three possible scenarios arising in the average life of the PSP owner, and have tried to come up with playable content to maximise each gaming situation. First up is the scenario where there is one PSP but many people. Here the game evolves into a multiplayer experience focusing on a high score table - you need to beat the high score by employing your superior football skills. The second scenario is you on you own - here there is a single player token system which effectively allows you to upgrade your team by earning tokens (or money) and get a better team to progress further to be able to buy an even better team. The last scenario is the multiplayer mode - two players head-to-head, winner takes all. The game features a built in alert system with an emphasis on challenging strangers anywhere and anytime.

WRC

The least impressive title of the entire show, but this was simply because it was only 60% complete. This brings up four racing games of some or other description and once again holds the argument that this genre must have enough of a fan base to sell PSP units. So from a looks point of view: terrible. But hidden under the blandness is

a rally title built on a strong and well recognised brand. This is the first officially licensed handheld FIA World Rally Championship game with all the tracks, thrills, and spills of the real thing - well, while taking the bus. The game feature 16 rallies from around the globe, including Japan and Mexico, plus 19 bonus stages and downloadable content. There are 30 fully deformable cars, plus all 17 registered drivers from the six official manufacturers. So it's very official then… Besides all this, you can link up to eight other PSP units for all the multiplayer gas you can shake mud at.

Fired Up

Fired Up is the adrenaline boosting gut punching action game of the launch. This is all about explosions and multiplayer mayhem. You job is to shoot, collect, defend, and destroy everything and anything that gets in your way. Each environment is a large open area stretching 2km in all directions. The game features objectives such as collecting tokens. Get 10 tokens and the weapons in the area

upgrade - so if you're finding a particular mission a little taxing, just stop the fighting and start collecting until you get a gun big enough to progress. Other game modes include missions - for example: if you kill five enemies in 45 seconds there is an increase in health and armour in the environment, again making progression easier. Besides driving around, you can leave your vehicle and man turrets or even switch vehicles. The game is designed so that you can make progress on a level even if you play it for 30 seconds (sticking to the opportunistic base play we've been on about the whole way through). Multiplayer via Wi-Fi makes taking the fight to up to eight other players possible. Fired Up plays well and is a must have if this is your kind of game.

Everybody's Golf

Not really one for dad. Not until Electronic Arts puts Tiger Woods on the PSP, that is. Everybody's Golf is highly successful in Japan and America and is apparently perfect for the PSP. It's a golf game that features cute cartoon-like characters that can be upgraded if you unlock the right kind of content. For example: you can unlock accessories including glasses, clothing, and even hair styles. Once again it was stressed that this is all original content not ported. There are six courses in total, featuring 18 holes each and you can play using any one of ten characters. You can have up to eight people in a game at the same time - all using the same unit, great fun. Besides a solid single player game there is a mini putting game for shorter play opportunities.

Double Vision

feel-good gaming

Uncontested for the most part, the Gameboy Advance has clearly been the de-facto hand-held system for those who simply have too much time on their hands, or ride the bus obsessively. Recently however, new contenders to the throne, such as PDAs, cell phones and Sony's pernickety PSP, have appeared.

How will our favourite franchise flogging developer keep their foothold in this increasingly chaotic market?

Give the gamers what they never knew they wanted.

From Left to Right: Nintendo's Super Mario 64 DS, Nintendo's WarioWare Touched!, Sega's: Feel The Magic: XY/XX, Ubisoft's Bomberman DS, EA's Tiger Woods 2005, Konami's Castlevania DS (top) and Activision's Spider-Man 2 (bottom)

Why yes, it does have two screens. The whole dual-screen thing is really rather important when it comes to the Nintendo DS. Nintendo has put quite a lot of effort into promoting the fact that you now have double the amount of gaming "real estate," giving you the ability to view a mini-map, or inventory, while playing (without having to pause the game).

In essence however, the dual-screens are only as functional as the developers could imagine. Thankfully, it seems that most developers, on board for the long haul with the DS, have quite the imagination. Initial titles such as Metroid Prime DS: First Hunt and Mario 64 DS, while sterling in their own right, seem to have rather limited views on what one can do with two screens. Both games play on the top screen and display a map on the bottom screen. Yet, it soon becomes apparent that always having a map of your surrounding area in view is a lot more functional than one would think.

But that's not actually the real kicker. Sure, double the viewing pleasure is nice and functional; but what about the touch-sensitive bottom screen? Well, it certainly responds to touch and the included stylus (a little stick you use instead of your grubby fingers), but what's the attraction?

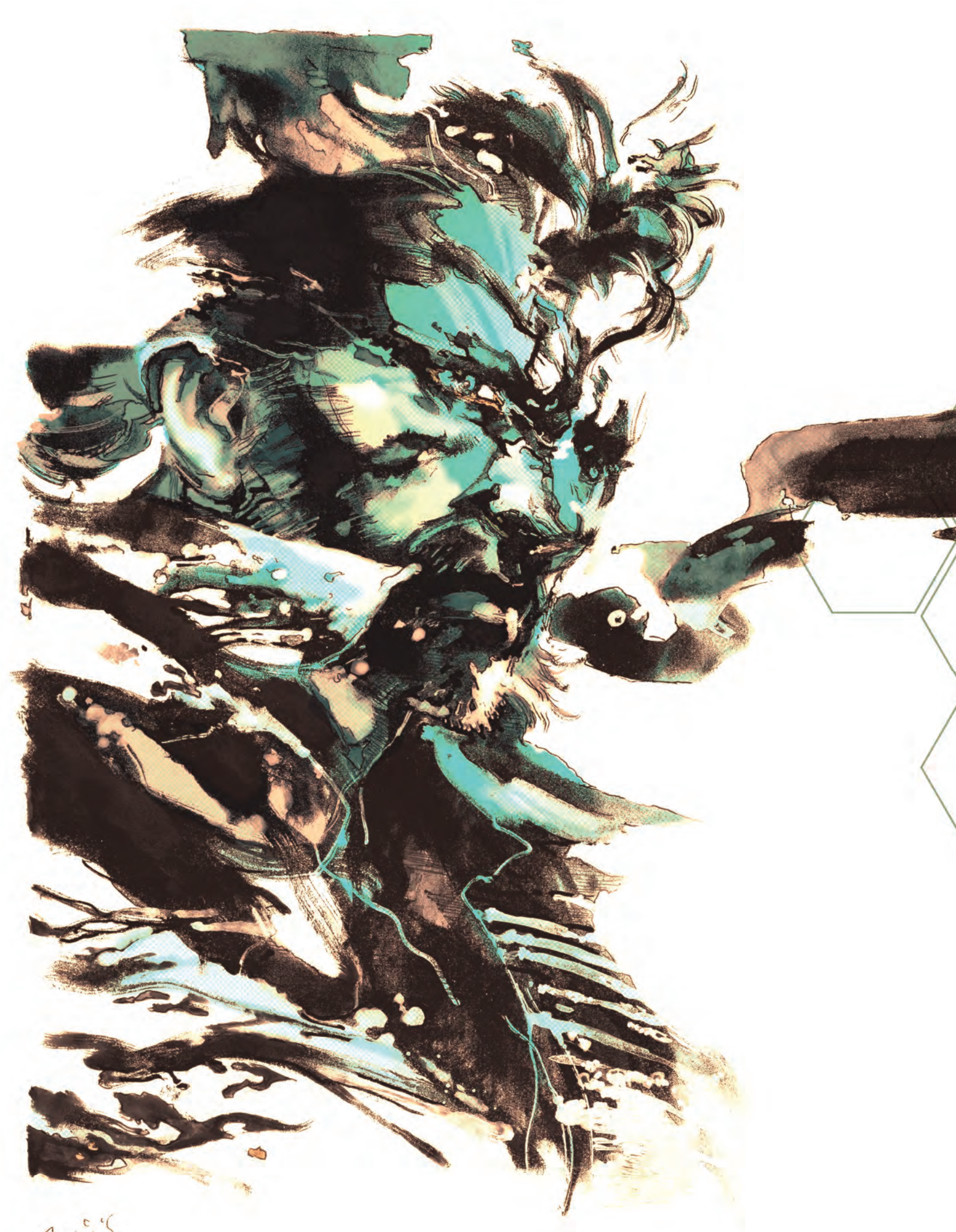
Quite simply; the touch screen is actually a stroke of ingenuity. Yes, standard PDAs have touch-sensitive screens, yet have always been overlooked as a new form of actually playing games. On the DS, the touch screen functions as either a place where some games are played (usually mini-games involving drawing, rubbing, rotating or sketching), or it can be used as an impromptu analogue input. Both Mario 64 DS and Metroid Prime DS can be played this way - using your left (or right) thumb to move your character as you drag your digit on the lower screen. This method of movement works well, considering the fact that the DS only has a traditional 4-way digital pad (not quite what one would prefer for precise 3D movement).

Currently, the touch-screen-centric mini-games are both creative and macabre at the same time. In Mario 64 DS specifically, most of the mini-games require quick thinking and concentration as you draw lines to connect other lines, rub away the darkness to find the ghosts, pull a slingshot to shoot enemies out of the sky, and so fourth. This new method of interaction is currently novel, but could become a decent standard pending developer utilisation.

New fancy input methods and dual-screen concepts aside - the DS is a little powerhouse on its own. Decent 3D capabilities, surprisingly good sound, built-in wireless, and a microphone certainly add an attractive sheen to the DS. To take advantage of the wireless capability of the DS, it comes included with Pictochat (built into the unit itself) and lets you 'talk' to up to 16 people in the immediate vicinity, by drawing pictures or typing on the on-screen keyboard. It's all very appropriate for the younger market and the Nintendo DS will, without a doubt, soon be banned from schools.

The cartridges are much smaller than the GameBoy Advance's carts. They slot into the back of the unit with a satisfying click and will only eject once they've been pressed down again. Interestingly, a small "catch" stops them from flying out, preventing eye-damage or lost games. The DS has an extra slot for playing original GameBoy Advance games (these look crisp and clear regardless of which screen you choose to play it on), but unfortunately does not support older GameBoy Colour or GameBoy titles.

Overall, the Nintendo DS is definitely true to Nintendo's unofficial "gaming before everything else" motto; preferring to be a hand-held focused entirely on gaming instead of attempting to be an all-in-one multimedia solution. Only time will tell if this motto will work in the DS' favour. At base value however, the Nintendo DS is a sleek, silver system that simply begs to be touched.



OUROBOROS

THE METAL GEAR SOLID LEGEND

"Life isn't just about passing on your genes.
We can leave behind much more than just DNA.
Through speech, music, literature and movies...
what we've seen, heard, felt
...anger, joy and sorrow...
these are the things I will pass on.

That's what I live for.
We need to pass the torch,
and let our children read our messy and sad history by its light.
We have all the magic of the digital age to do that with.

The human race will probably come to an end some time,
and new species may rule over this planet.
Earth may not be forever,
but we still have the responsibility to leave what traces of life we can.

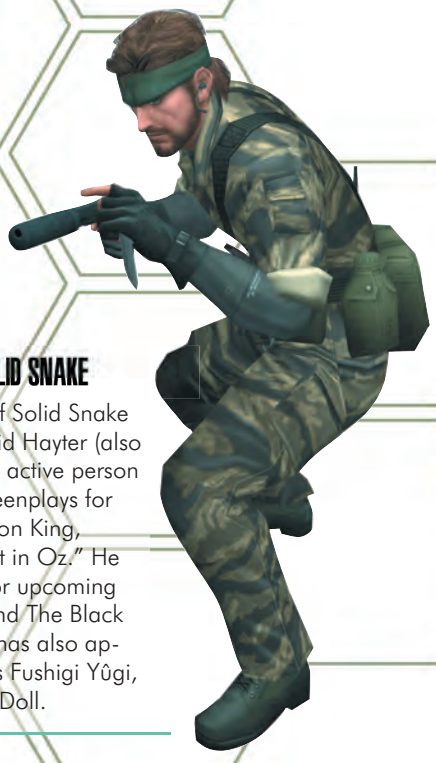
Building the future and keeping the past alive are one and the same thing."

Solid Snake / Metal Gear Solid 2

Hideo Kojima made the gaming world sit up and take notice. In 1998, Hideo's 8th game, Metal Gear Solid, challenged the face of gaming by asking the question: "How much of a human being is defined by the genes?" Naturally, the game's success wasn't solely defined by asking an interesting question and incorporating it into the theme, but rather the sum of that question alongside groundbreaking cinematic-direction and refreshing game dynamics.
Its sequel, Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty was themed

THE PERILS OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS TAMPERING

around the complementary question to its predecessor: "How much of a human being is defined by information?" By drawing the player into the lavish, yet dark world of lead protagonist and all round hard-ass, Solid Snake (voiced by multi-talented David Hayter), Hideo stealthily wrapped the player in a social-commentary cunningly disguised as a game. It's plausible to consider MGS2 as modern art; players and fans alike easily exploring the themes of independence, love, genes and nuclear weaponry through its visuals and engrossing story arcs.



Born on August 24, 1963 in Setagaya, Tokyo, Hideo Kojima had already made a name for himself as early as 1987, with the original Metal Gear and highly acclaimed titles such as Snatcher and Policenauts - regarded favourably as games ahead of their time, containing innovative ideas often inspired by rather arbitrary things.
Possibly the most relevant of examples is the origin of the door/key system found in the original Metal Gear. The player amassed up to 9 keys, and doors required one of the nine keys. At a door, a player had to check each of the 9 keys against the door to find the correct one, often while being pursued by guards who were intent on killing the player. This novel (though frustrating at times for exactly the right reasons) concept was inspired by Hideo Kojima's penchant for zombie horror movies of all things. In the original 1978 zombie horror, George Romero's Dawn of the Dead (a favourite of Hideo), a policeman fumbles with his keys at a door trying to find the right one while being

THE VOICE OF SOLID SNAKE

Despite being famous as the voice of Solid Snake in the Metal Gear Solid games, David Hayter (also known as Sean Barker) is also a very active person in Hollywood, having written the screenplays for movies such as X-Men 2, The Scorpion King, X-Men, and the television series "Lost in Oz." He is also working on the screenplays for upcoming movies The Watchmen, Iron Man, and The Black Widow. As an active voice artist, he has also appeared in numerous animes, such as Fushigi Yûgi, Yû yû hakusho and Rakusho! Hyper Doll.

pursued by zombies. Hideo wanted to capture the anxiety and tenseness of the scene, and translate it into a game. For the most part it worked, adding a new depth to games quickly forgotten in the tide of gaming advancements over the years.

His most successful series, Metal Gear Solid, and its most recent sequel, Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater form the culmination of Hideo's design philosophies and ideals. Each iteration of the game forms its own island of concepts and dynamics, yet each still remains connected to each other through the lead protagonist and Hideo's oddball sense of continuity.

Metal Gear Solid firmly entrenched itself in its tactical espionage role with its emphasis on covert and stealth forming the core, around which an almost whimsical tale of governments, deceit, and special operations gone wrong revolved. The eventuality of it all - a climatic battle with Metal Gear itself (a land based tank obviously inspired by Japanese mecha, capable of intercontinental nuclear launches). Achieving an entirely new level of cinematic presentation, Metal Gear Solid etched itself into the hearts of gamers around the world. Naturally, expectations were high for its sequel.

When the sequel was released however, it became obvious that, while Hideo retained the Hollywood inspired cut-scenes and musical score (written by Harry Gregson-Williams) for Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty, the direction and focus of the game itself was shifted significantly towards a more, modern idea. From the start, vivid concepts were presented to the player with the plotline reaching an almost bizarre climax near the end of the game. Fans of the first game went so far as to say that Hideo Kojima had "lost it" and "needed a long holiday." Regardless of opinions, Metal Gear Solid 2 gathered critical acclaim for both its bold vision and impressive visuals - especially considering the limitations of the PlayStation 2 on which it featured. It was the small details however, that indicated Hideo's handiwork. Instead of Solid Snake holding his gun pointing up while running (as in Metal Gear Solid), Snake instead points his gun towards the floor which is proper military technique. When squads of soldiers walk

MEMES EXPLAINED

Examples of memes are tunes, ideas, catch-phrases, clothes fashions, and ways of making pots or building arches. Just as genes propagate themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body via sperms or eggs, memes propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain via a process which, in the broad sense, could be called imitation. If a scientist hears, or reads about, a good idea, he passes it on to his colleagues and students. He mentions it in his articles and his lectures. If the idea catches on, it can be said to propagate itself, spreading from brain to brain. As N.K. Humphrey neatly summed it up: "... memes should be regarded as living structures, not just metaphorically but technically. When you plant a fertile meme in my mind, you literally parasitize my brain, turning it into a vehicle for the meme's propagation in exactly the way a virus may parasitize the genetic mechanism of a host cell. And this isn't just a way of talking - the meme for, say, 'belief in life after death' is actually realised physically, millions of times over, as a structure in the nervous systems of individual men the world over."

WITH THE NATURAL ORDER INDEPENDENCE CONFINE

up stairs in groups, the last one up would tap the guard covering them from the top of the stairs on the shoulder to indicate that he must follow. Hundreds of

small military and generally correct details filled the world of Metal Gear Solid 2.
Despite critical acclaim and recognition for its technical achievements, fans and industry individuals alike only had a lukewarm reaction to the announcement of yet another sequel. After all, at the end of Metal Gear Solid 2's production, Hideo had said that there would be no more. Now it's here, the sequel Hideo said he wouldn't make.

A prequel no less, Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater unfolds in 1964 at the height of the Soviet Cold War and features a rather novel twist for those who have been following the series. To avoid spoilers, nothing will be said other than that those who have been wondering about the origins of Solid Snake's DNA will finally have their question answered.
It seems that Hideo had his fun and fill with Metal Gear Solid 2, taking the players on an interesting mind-trip and raising thought-provoking questions. Metal Gear Solid 3 contains no such lunacy and is possibly the most 'normal' title in the series. In an odd change for Hideo, this third game is actually more of a game than it is either art or a cinematic experience. All the movie-inspired styling is still there, as well as a wonderful soundtrack once again composed by Gregson-Williams. But this time round the entire experience is more geared towards being a game in itself. Gone is the helpful radar, gone are the easy rations that healed you. Instead, eating various kinds of snakes and small animals will help you regain the health you've lost by bleeding if you were shot. Don't tend to the wound, and your health will constantly drop. Medical procedures, such as splinting a broken arm and bandaging a bullet wound, will dictate how far you will be able to regain health again. Eating the right kind of snake will heal poison or other ailments.
It's all new to the series, yet reassuringly tried-and-true when it comes to gaming itself. It's what the Metal Gear Solid series has needed for a while - to come back down to earth.

What would Hideo Kojima like to do next? "Direct movies," he says, without any trace of irony.

HIDEO KOJIMA'S GAMES
CREATED AND PRODUCED

1986	Yumetairiku Adventure
1987	Metal Gear
1988	Snatcher
1990	Metal Gear 2: Solid Snake
1994	Policenauts
1997	Nijiiro No Seisyun
1998	Irodori No Lovesong
	Metal Gear Solid
2000	Metal Gear Solid Integral
	Metal Gear: Ghost Babel
2001	Zone of the Enders
	Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty
	Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance (3)
2003	Anubis: Zone of the Enders 2
	Bokura no Taiyo (Boktai)
2004	Metal Gear Solid: The Twin Snakes
	Zoku: Bokura no Taiyo (Boktai 2)

Colonel: The mapping of the human genome was completed early this century. As a result, the evolutionary log of the human race lay open to us.

Rose: We started with genetic engineering, and in the end, we succeeded in digitizing life itself.

Colonel: But there are things not covered by genetic information. Human memories, ideas. Culture. History.

Rose: Genes don't contain any record of human history.

Colonel: Is it something that should not be passed on? Should that information be left at the mercy of nature?

Rose: We've always kept records of our lives. Through words, pictures, symbols... from tablets to books... But not all the information was inherited by later generations.

Colonel: A small percentage of the whole was selected and processed, then passed on. Not unlike genes, really.

Rose: That's what history is Jack.

Colonel: But in the current, digitized world, trivial information is accumulating every second, preserved in all its triteness. Never fading, always accessible.

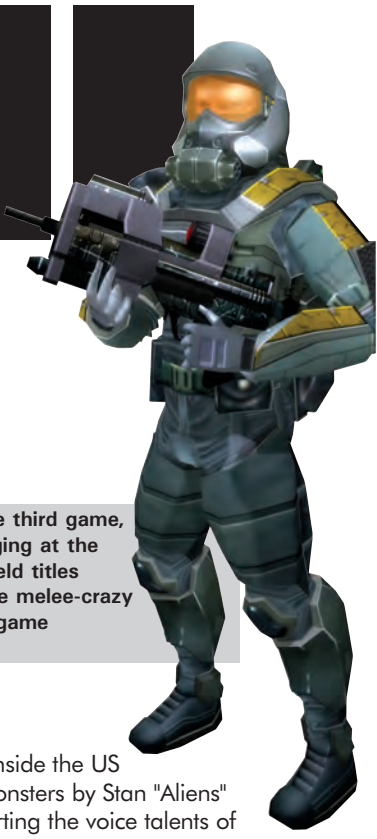
Rose: Rumors about petty issues, misinterpretations, slander...

Colonel: All this junk data preserved in an unfiltered state, growing at an alarming rate.

Rose: It will only slow down social progress, reduce the rate of evolution.

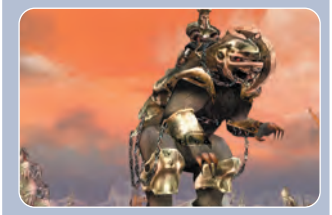
MENT LOVE GENES MEMES

Previews



NAG's Wanted List

Star Wars: Republic Commando
Xbox | PS2
March 2005
The Star Trek Elite Force games wet our appetites for more license sci-fi FPS action, so Republic Commando, starring the bad-asses of the Star Wars universe, looks very appealing…



Guild Wars
PC
Q2 2005
A completely free MMORPG? No joining fees, no monthly cost, nothing, nada! There is a catch, though - the game's expansions will be sold to make money. Still, if you're that into the game that you crave an expansion, then maybe it's worth the cash?

Project Snowblind
PC | Xbox | PS2
March 2005
What would have been an action component to the Deus Ex games, has become its own title; complete with lots of action, big weapons, and the ability to upgrade with cybernetic implants. It has the potential for some serious single-player action.

With Metal Gear Solid coming to an end, we look back at what it took to get to the third game, Snake Eater, as our cover story (about the game). This month the previews are bulging at the seams with two hands-on EA Sports titles, a look at action horror Cold Fear, handheld titles such as Mercury and Infected, Worms 4, Command & Conquer-killer Act of War, the melee-crazy Unreal Championship 4, squad-powered war action in Brothers in Arms, and board game shenanigans with Mario Party 6.

Area 51

Developer **Midway** Publisher **Midway** Platform **Xbox** | **PS2** Release Date **Q2 2005**

What should you expect from a shooter based inside the US Government's most notorious base, featuring monsters by Stan "Aliens" Winston, music by Chris "NIN" Vrenna, and sporting the voice talents of David Duchovny, Powers Booth, and Marilyn Manson? Hell, we don't know either, but Area 51 has been in development so damn long that we'd just like to see what the final game is like. Since being announced in 2001, the game might finally see the light in the first half of this year. More than that we can't tell you … otherwise we'd have to kill you.

Star Wars: Empire at War

Developer **Petroglyph** Publisher **LucasArts** Platform **PC** Release Date **Q2 2005**

Wahoo! Another Star Wars game! Wait, that's no reason to celebrate - Star Wars games are terrible by tradition. That is, of course, unless a third-party developer gets its hands on the license. This is the case with Empire at War, which is being developed by Petroglyph, consisting largely of ex-Westwood staffers. Using a proprietary engine, the action places you between Episodes III and IV, as you aid or resist the Empire. Battles will be spread over familiar areas plus new territories, lifted from the books and other media. But these are all moot points: a Star Wars RTS with a chance of being really good is enough of a prospect to get excited about.

Alien Hominid

Developer **The Behemoth** Publisher **Zoo Interactive** Platform **Xbox** | **PS2** Release Date **May 2005**

Alien Hominid started its life as a flash side-scroller but, soon got nabbed for development into a built-from-scratch hand-animated side-scroller in the tradition of Metal Slug. As a small alien, you have to get off the planet and kill as many MIBs and other agents in your way by traversing the various levels and bosses. It's cute, bloody, and straight forward; plus it reportedly has cheat codes that give the alien various types of hats. It's unlikely that you'll see a copy surface locally but, this might be a good import when it's released in the UK.

Hello Kitty Jump Rope

Developer **THQ Wireless** Publisher **THQ** Platform **Mobile** Release Date **TBA**

What, another Hello Kitty game in this section? No, we're not fans and odds are that we ran out of games for this section. But, look at it this way: this mobile game from THQ Wireless is bound to keep your sister or girlfriend happy. So you might want to make a note about it. Basically, you play with Kitty and her friends and essentially you have to skip a rope. The better you are, the more flowers you get. The more flowers you have, the more you can unlock. Doesn't it make you want to puke? [*Just once? Ed*]

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- Bundles 2 world-class games, PowerDVD 5.0 and PowerDirector 3 ME

GV-NX66256DP NVIDIA GeForce 6600

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- Integrated with The Industry's Best 256MB DDR memory and 128-bit memory interface
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CABIN FEVER

Terror on the High Seas in Cold Fear

Darkworks, the development house behind the Alone in the Dark sequel, The New Nightmare, is continuing its journey into the realms of horror with Cold Fear - a creepy title based on an abandoned Russian whaling ship. Pumping into the visceral side of the brain; the game promises to be a mix of action and horror as you take on the role of Tom Hansen, a US Coastguard officer, who is sent investigate to why the big ship is afloat. As one might deduce; things are not quite as they seem and our pal Tom is definitely in a spot of trouble...

Fans of the horror genre could be in for a real treat - if the screenshots and information live up to expectations. Some of the features touted include: a dynamic environment on a stormy sea, intense combat, intelligent enemies, and a high element of the shockingly unexpected. Set onboard a drifting Russian whaling ship (in the middle of a howling storm on the Bering Sea) and a mysterious oil rig, players must turn their interactive surroundings to their advantage to take down human (and not-so-human) enemies to save their own lives. Using proprietary technology, Darkworks has set out to create a new environment in the Survival Horror genre - not unlike 2002's The Thing - featuring a ship that rolls back and forth in rough seas. In short, it has the potential of being really scary, especially for aficionados of ghost ship-style horror. We spoke to Antoine Villette, co-founder of Darkworks and Creative Director of Cold Fear, about the innovative and frightening experiences on offer.

How difficult was it for the team to conceptualise and create a horror action game? Do you believe expectations are higher for this genre, as you are creating a unique situation and must have gamers on their toes?
When your ambition is to widen the perspectives of a well-established genre, many issues are raised and many new ideas surge into your mind. But at the same time you have to struggle against old habits. You have to encourage people to consider the problem from a different angle and to innovate in the solutions they will propose. To achieve this, a prototype is a good means - though it is rare enough. Therefore it is crucial to communicate again and again on the vision you have, accept compromises, but without moving too far from the original concept.
Expectations are high. We have to provide all the elements that made a success of the horror genre, but also bring enough innovations and refreshing ideas because we do not want to be charged with laziness in a well-established genre. Most of all, we want our own expectations to come true.
That's why it was mandatory for us to face the challenge of creating a demanding environment, such as a storyline focused on a raging ocean. Once this step had been validated in terms of art, technique, and game play, the challenge was to develop and deepen the concept and build something coherent in all aspects. It is hard, often frustrating, work because you have to make many crucial choices.
But our core objectives remained the same. Never letting the player rest and constantly putting him under pressure - not because of frustration but thanks to the situations we built.

There has always been a debate that creating real emotions to frighten a player is beyond video and computer games. What would your comments on this be?
I would advise that you play Cold Fear with headphones late at night… Seriously, I think that videogames have now reached an emotional potential comparable to other media. Of course some means are still quite limited, but tremendous progress has been made each year. Moreover, the "grammar" for writing videogames is taking more and more into consideration, even if we still are at the very beginning of the process. And even if we do not have ready-made recipes for creating emotions, we now understand most of the common mistakes to be avoided.

From some of the early screenshots the game is already looking fabulous. What kind of focus will there be on special/particle effects and can you give an outline of the variety of settings the game will offer?
Faithfully rendering the sea, the storm, and rain was our main challenge and also the first one we addressed. We used our own SFX engine and took advantage of the extraordinary talent of the artists here at Darkworks. For the indoor parts of the game, we gathered a huge documentation database, which was the basis of our designers' work, with two seemingly contradictory objectives - coherence and variety.

What areas can be expected in the game?
The Cold Fear story takes place on a Russian whaler and an oil rig - which has been converted into a scientific experiment complex. The drilling platform itself is divided between several modules that are linked together with catwalks. That allows us to provide a lot of diversity in a universe that is submitted to very strict rules in terms of visuals.

Getting the in-game cast right must be a big job. Do you work along the lines of trying to make them plausible and what kind of AI will they have to react and respond in a sensible way?
Actually this is a very important part of the game. That's why we

"The game is aimed at a mature audience, so we do not have many constraints other than being coherent"

asked Richard Dansky (who also worked for UbiSoft on titles such as Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon 2) to work on the "script doctoring" and dialogues. He is also the person who monitored the speech recordings. Some scenes benefited from special attention and will be really moving. But again, Cold Fear is essentially action-orientated and the characters are always caught by the emergency of the situation. The most present emotion for the NPCs is panic. And you'll see that this emotion will be true to you too…

Have any films or media inspired the team, and if you wish to be seen as being innovative in one area where would it be?
We watched The Perfect Storm a lot. Darkworks has always been interested by the water, the marine elements, and horror on the other side. Cold Fear allows us to consolidate those interests. Moreover, I think that evolving in a constantly shifting environment is quite innovative as well.

What kind of moves, actions, and skills are on offer for Tom Hansen?
Tom can walk, strafe, run, crouch, shoot, and cling. It is all we needed to make the player live the Cold Fear adventure.

Could you expand on one in-game event that you are creating and that really captures the essence and ethos of the game?
On the deck of the whaler (washed up by breakers), Tom Hansen fires on an oil barrel that explodes and throws the enemies, who were rushing on him, in the sea. But as he approaches a dead body to get some ammunition, it wakes up and rushes him, howling.

Tell us about the technology and engine that will be running the game - perhaps PC focused? Have you created your own tools and engine? What are some of the 3D engine's interesting and unique features?
We use Renderware for the 3D and F-Mode for the audio. Everything else has been developed internally. I think that our scripting engine is the most important part of the puzzle, as it allows us to create the tension and interest in the game.

Who are you aiming the game at? Will there be any kind of censorship?
The game is aimed at a mature audience, so we do not have many constraints other than being coherent.

Finally. What kind of variety in terms of action, passive exploration, and interaction does the game offer and can you play it in different ways?
During the play tests one could already notice several game styles - the "berserker", the "cautious", the "methodical"… I do not mean that the game adapts itself (in real time) to the player, simply that very different players find pleasure in playing the game, as they all seem to discover something that satisfies their expectations. N

Worms 4

PC | PS2
XBOX

Developer: Team 17 · **Publisher:** Codemasters · **Supplier:** MegaRom [011] 234 2680 · **Genre:** Platform Action
Release Date: Q2 2005

Say what you like - we enjoyed Worms 3D. Granted, the added dimension didn't make it quite as pick-up-and-play as former titles in the series, and it was pretty heavy on annoying crash bugs, but we love Worms and those slimy sadists can't do much wrong in our eyes. Since going 3D, the series has opened a strategy tier with Worms Forts, but Worms 4 returns the player right back to where he wants to be - worm-on-worm action with the biggest, maddest weapons ever conceived.

This time, the developers can actually, with all honesty, say that the Weapons Factory is a new section that allows players to design whatever weapon they feel like. Some of the examples quoted are Exploding Chickens and Toilet Bombs. So we're guessing imaginations can run wild in this section. The usual artillery is back as well with a few additions, such as the Poison Arrow, Sentry Gun, Tail Nail, and the Bovine Blitz, which involves a bombing raid with cows...

The themes for the different levels are; Arabian, Jurassic, Camelot, Construction, and Wild West. In total, there will be 25 single player and 20 multiplayer maps - the former are also available in multiplayer. As with Worms 3D, a lot of the single player tasks will involve doing certain tasks and thus not always hinge on defeating the other team. Larger maps are the order of the day here, though it wasn't mentioned by how much.

Several improvements, including a better 3D camera and overall interface, hope to lure more Worms fans back and convey that 3D is the way to go in this series. Personally, we hope they have addressed the Network problems that plagued Worms 3D, but we're sure we won't be disappointed. Then there was the problem of console owners, not being able to use multiple controllers - something that definitely appears to be a very stupid oversight on Team 17's behalf. In fact, Worms 3D had a lot lacking in terms of game design and technical finesse - aspects that Worms 4 will need to improve in the franchise. Still, Worms remains a game series that rarely let us down, but then again, we are big fans.

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Brothers in Arms

PC | PS2
XBOX

Developer: Gearbox · **Publisher:** Ubisoft · **Supplier:** MegaRom [011] 234 2680 · **Genre:** First Person Shooter
Release Date: March 2005

In the eyes of NAG, Gearbox Software has a lot of ground to cover before the developer proves itself. Having made a gaming legacy consisting mostly of ports or expansions (starting with the Half-Life expansion Blue Shift), Brothers in Arms represents Gearbox's first foray into triple-A games. On the upside, at least, this won't be an offering from an inexperienced crew and by all accounts the game looks very promising so far.

Brothers in Arms is based around the allied invasion of Normandy - a nine-day period of hell as men on the frontlines tried to take territory held by the Germans. Playing as Sgt. Baker, you lead squads of fighters through various missions in this D-Day campaign. At this point it seems pretty old-hat. World War 2 shooters as a genre cannot be called underutilised and it's hard to imagine what Gearbox could add to the genre that crews, like Infinity Ward and 2015 haven't. But we're assured that there is a lot more here than meets the eye.

Realism seems to be the main mantra in Brothers in Arms. The developer scouted the French countryside and created levels to resemble it. The creation process also took advantage of stock footage and a lot of time was taken to ensure that the battles, seen onscreen, are faithful versions of the actual conflicts. The second ace up Gearbox's sleeve is the squad dynamic. Unlike other war shooters (with the notable exception of Hidden & Dangerous), where your squad members and support units either are simply scripted to react to situations or often just don't react at all, Brothers in Arms allows the player control over two squads that can be directed through the battle. Gearbox boasts that this is complimented with some very realistic and unscripted behaviour, such as ducking for cover, giving cover fire, making burst runs, and generally reacting to the battle as you would have.

Generally, the idea of controlling a squad through any kind of first person shooter is a daunting and often unappealing task, but Brothers in Arms plans to remedy the problem with a very simple control scheme - essentially directing the troops to do basic movements and relying on their own AI to react to dangerous situations. This kind of system found its birth with the Rainbow Six titles and the excellent Full Spectrum Warrior gave us an idea of how well AI-driven squad games can work. So Gearbox's intentions sound promising.

The final game will be mature with strong language and war-like violence, but since realism is essential to Brothers in Arms, it isn't likely to exploit this with gratuitous amounts of either. The realism ticket is also likely to make confrontations tougher than is the norm, but games like Call of Duty have already set a standard here that can be followed and improved on. It might be our weakness for war-based shooters, but Brothers in Arms sounds promising.

A new dawn for World War II FPS titles? [*Sigh. Ed]*

Here we see an example of how real world photographs were used in the rendering of in-game art...

Rugby 2005

PS2

Developer: EA Sports · **Publisher:** Electronic Arts · **Supplier:** EA Africa [011] 516 8300
Genre: Sports · **Release Date:** 2005

ON THE CD

Who knows? We don't know anything about rugby...

It would seem that a company like EA would realise the potential of a title based on Rugby. Hey, it might not be as big as soccer, but large parts of the world, including most of the Southern Hemisphere and large bits of Europe, are quite obsessed with those butch men and their funnily shaped balls. While watching a bunch of sweaty guys grope each other on a playing field might not be as popular as watching the strange displays that soccer players cook up when they get the ball in the back of the net, it still has a massive appeal - especially as an electronic entertainment title.

Despite this wide appeal, EA Sports have yet to produce a rugby simulator that doesn't leave a taste, similar to licking out a kitty litter box, in the mouth. Fans of the game and the game genre have flocked to stores in anticipation of iteration, ever hopeful, but ultimately having to suffer through the horror of the franchise.

Those days are set to end, at least if early versions of Rugby 2005 are anything to go by. Capturing the nature of a team game like rugby, with all its variables, in electronic format is certainly not the easiest thing to do. However, the EA Sports design team have tackled the problem full on, rucked their way through the problems, and are making for the try-line with... ok, enough with the rugby analogies. Basically, what it comes down to is that the team behind this new title have taken things far more seriously than before.

The overall play dynamic has been improved, with a more flowing style of play, leaning more towards a FIFA style of play rather than the "pachyderms in syrup" feel of before. Controls have also been trimmed up, made easier to handle, and the graphics have received a major overhaul (making the players within the game actually look human).

With so much work going into this new title, it looks like it's going to be a good year for people who like rugby and computer games - and a combination of these two obsessions. And yes, you will be able to play the Springboks in the new game. You probably wouldn't want to, as in-game performance is based on real world performance, but you may if you like.

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Act of War: Direct Action

PC

Developer: Eugen Systems · **Publisher:** Atari · **Supplier:** MegaRom [011] 234 2680
Genre: Real Time Strategy · **Release Date:** March 2005

Has Command & Conquer's time finally come? Westwood's (and now EA's) masterpiece series hasn't been the same for a while. And that part of the RTS genre has longed for an alternative that isn't a cheap knock-off or an obvious clone. Enter the guys from Eugen Systems and their future-generation war game Act of War.

In the near future a secret consortium, known as the Consortium, decides to seize the world's remaining natural resources, using highly advanced weaponry. The US gets involved and deploys Talon, a task force set to engage the Consortium and stop them from forcing us all to buy bikes. In short, it's pretty stock standard and Act of War wouldn't want it any other way. Instead of carving a new niche within the genre it is going for C&C territory, seeking to bring new life to that side of strategy.

C&C fans might find comfort in that and in the full motion video clips used to portray the story. Actually, Act of War goes all the way on this section, using FMV, CG, and in-game clips to convey the events and give that feeling of war. Rather well suited to a generation of people that now have network news access 24-hours a day. The story itself was developed alongside writer Dale Brown, who is writing a separate book alongside the game. The book will be released at the same time as the game, but won't feature the same story. This ensures quite a bit of realism in terms of future technology. In short, whatever you see in the game exists - in theory

at least.

In order to maintain game balance as well as encourage a bit more strategy, than simply rushing an opponent, unit usage can be brutal. At the grass roots you can upgrade infantry through their experience gained. One example is that a three-chevron soldier can take out 5 one-chevron soldiers without breaking a sweat, while larger units have their own pros and cons. Helicopters, for instance, are lethal against artillery or infantry units, but they fall like flies when encountering surface-to-air defences. One future unit, a mobile armoured infantry unit called SHIELD, is quick and very lethal, since it is armed with both missile launchers and mini-guns. The catch is that these have to be switched by pressing a button, meaning that your highly elite SHIELD soldiers also need a degree of micro-management.

The final title will feature multiplayer and a skirmish mode - here you have access to the US military as a third faction, though they stick to today's weapons while both the Consortium and Talon have more hi-tech gadgets at their beck and call. The game designers have gone to great lengths to achieve both a cinematic sense of realism and detail. Areas, such as around the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, have been modelled to look just like their real-life counterparts and small touches, such as civilian crowds and large explosions, blend realism and over-the-top war games quite seamlessly.

Act of War seems generic, but that's because it's not going out of its way to be too original. Instead, the guys at Eugen wanted to bring something new to a familiar segment of the market and the effort seems to show. Perhaps those ex-Westwood guys need to start taking a few notes… N

Mario Party 6

GCN

Developer: Nintendo · **Publisher:** Nintendo · **Supplier:** Futronic [011] 256 7760 · **Genre:** Puzzle
Release Date: March 2005

We're always ready for another party. [*You almost make us sound cool… Ed*]. Unflinching from its formula, Mario Party 6 is a board game of sorts. Instead of chasing a static goal, you have to collect stars that randomly appear around the board in order to win. What started as a charming use of Nintendo characters on the Nintendo 64 has now turned into an annual release, with Mario Party 6 marking the sixth year. Just like sports games where each year's release brings minor mechanical upgrades, Mario Party is the same in this incarnation - still recognisable from its forbearers but sporting a fresh coat of paint.

This year round, the theme of Mario's party is 'cosmic', represented by the sun and the moon, the time of day shifts on the board, and some aesthetic changes. Aside from the visual, the day/night aspect plays an interesting part as it affects several paths on the board.

The most significant inclusion this time round, however, is the microphone peripheral provided with the game. New mini-games take advantage of voice-activation and speech-recognition via a microphone, though the idea of a group of people yelling into the microphone sounds like something that could go terribly wrong. Thankfully, the option of turning off all the microphone-based mini-games exists for those who want to keep things civil.

As you progress around the board, players are once again thrust into a variety of mini-games involving either excessive skill or pure luck (often one is replaceable by the other). All the mini-games, this time round, are 'new', though a lot of the mechanics implemented will seem very familiar to those who've played the previous titles. Regardless, the brilliance behind Mario Party has always been its accessibility; just about anyone can play the mini-games and understand the rules of the board game.

Once again, the main party mode can be played by up to four players. The mini-games at the end of each round involve either two-versus-two, team-based, or full on four-player melees, depending on the roll of the dice. The dynamic here is interesting - depending on whom you get paired up with, it could tactically be to your advantage to purposefully lose.

Nintendo seems happy with how things are going for Mario Party, opting to keep things 'more of the same', perhaps to its detriment. If you've played the previous five titles, there's still something new for you in this release. However, the presentation seems lacking. Despite new board designs, it seems that Nintendo is riding the graphical technology of the previous games for as long as it will still sell.

If the previous Mario Party titles didn't interest you, then Mario Party 6 won't try to get your attention. None the less, for a light accessible multiplayer experience, it seems number 6 is a good roll.

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Unreal Championship 2: The Liandri Conflict

XBOX

Developer: Epic · **Publisher:** Midway · **Supplier:** TBA · **Genre:** Action
Release Date: 2005

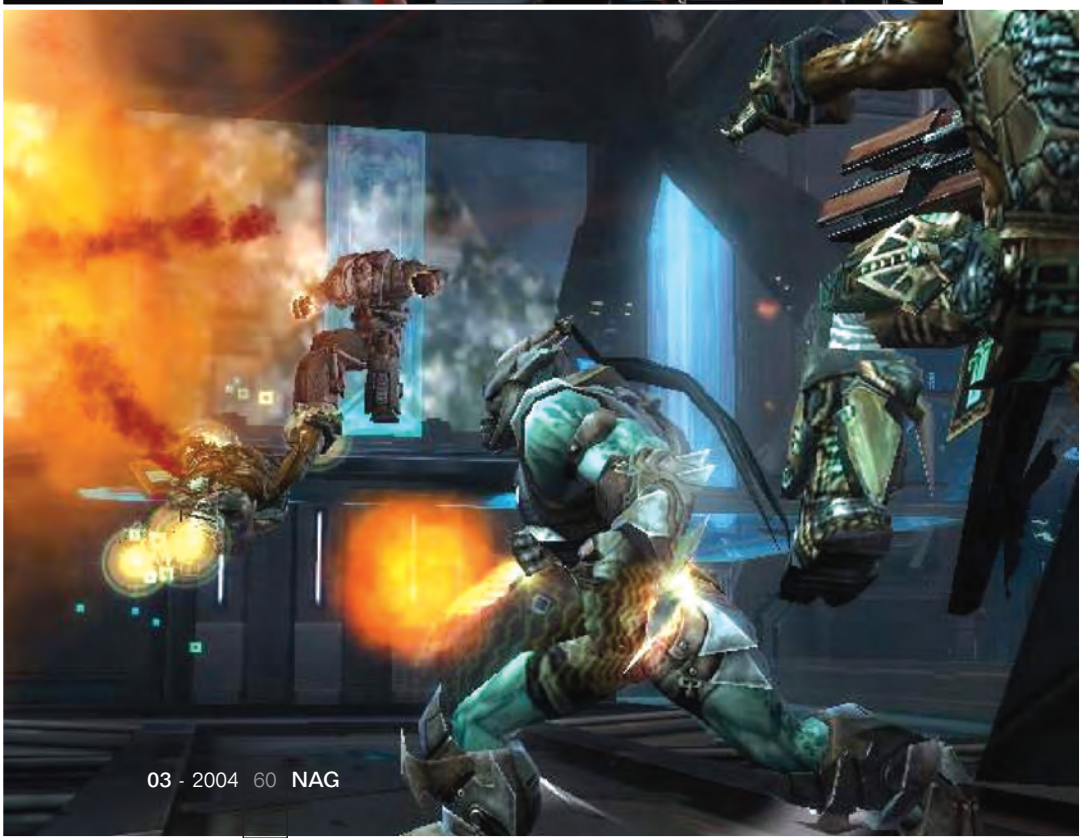
Unlike many of its FPS counterparts, the Unreal franchise has become exactly that - a place that serves for three distinct tiers: the Unreal story-driven games, the Unreal Tournament combat titles, and the Xbox-native Unreal Championship. The latter took things away from the traditional FPS styling Unreal is famous for, introducing melee combat and focusing on a far more console-hardy crowd. The sequel, named The Liandri Conflict, continues this tradition, but with a few marked differences.

Since Unreal Championship's release, Epic has signed a deal with Midway for three Unreal games. Unreal Championship 2 forms part of that stable and the numerous game play enhancements shows that a lot of thought has gone into it. Most notably is the ability to switch to third-person mode. While melee uses this compulsorily, Unreal Tournament players can use the first person mode with traditional weapons if they want. But, the third person allows for a far better feel towards wall-jumps, attack moves (this is kept simple, featuring strong and weak attacks and strong and weak lunges), and deflecting the bullets of attackers. Epic also hopes that this will introduce a new level of strategy to the game, since taking someone on with a gun might not be as effective when they can leap around you, hitting back your bullets.

Melee combat is used to stun an opponent. The more you hit them the more stunned they become and eventually you'll be able to execute an instant kill move. In a nice addition to their partnership, Midway's Mortal Kombat has several characters (yet unannounced) that will feature as playable characters - each using their known Fatalities as finishing moves.

A bit more focus was also spent on the single player. While the Unreal Championship series is meant for online play (16 players over Live), Epic realised that several fans would like more of an off-line experience. This is created with a better single player campaign, including a full story campaign with one of the characters, and quick matches against the game's reportedly excellent AI system.

Graphically it's far more polished than Unreal Championship or even Unreal Tournament and won't disappoint. Whether the new moves and views will appeal to fans remains to be seen, but it looks really good and lends a new dimension to the FPS' future on consoles. Throw in the Mortal Kombat characters and there are a lot of reasons to wait for Unreal Championship 2.



Lego Star Wars

PS2

Xbox

PC

Developer: Travellers Tales · **Publisher:** Eidos · **Supplier:** Megarom [011] 234 2680 · **Genre:** Action
Release Date: April 2005

When we first experienced Star Wars, I am sure, we never quite pictured it alongside those plastic blocks we had all tried to build a robot with. But the Lego range of toys has evolved a lot over the years to include movie franchises like Star Wars and Harry Potter. So a game was almost inevitable, especially since this isn't Lego's first foray into digital entertainment.

Still, Lego Star Wars is a very unique concept. It's set in the first three Episodes of the Star Wars series and gives access to 30 playable characters from the films. All done in the signature Lego style, players will be able to traverse 18 levels and at least one bonus offering (including the Trade Federation Battle Cruiser and the Pod Races). The characters all feature unique abilities as well as class abilities. For instance: the Jedi characters can all wield lightsabers, while some droids are capable of hacking computers.

The game features no actual dialogue. The Lego-styled characters use basic expressions we're familiar with - smile, frown, and so on - and these in turn, are used to explain what's going on. The main focus is on getting into the game fast. Another unique addition is how the Force is used in the game. Since we're dealing with Lego here, characters will be able to transform the world block by block using The Force. It seems that there will also be other ways to build using the Lego pieces, but not much more has been revealed.

As one can gather, there will also be enemy and Dark Side characters in the game. While these will obviously be opponents, you will also have the ability to use them in a free play mode. In this, a player can choose any characters he has already encountered for a team, opening possibilities to reach areas and bonus levels not normally open. In the normal state of play, characters are swapped simply by clicking on them - the game AI then takes over the rest of the party.

It remains to be seen if Lego Star Wars will impress more than just Star Wars fans or young gamers. But, the amount of attention the title has been getting suggests that there is a lot more here that what former Lego titles have had to offer. If anything, we'll finally get to stage a Jedi fight with tons of Lego characters, without needing to buy the whole collection first...

The lightsaber convention became awkward when Jim realised his wasn't the only blue saber

Fight Night 2005: Round 2

PS2 | GCN
XBOX

Developer: EA Sports · **Publisher:** Electronic Arts · **Supplier:** EA Africa [011] 516 8300 · **Genre:** Sports
Release Date: March 2005

When a game revolutionises the way a genre is approached, it's always big news. But because these trend setters invariably raise the bar a couple of notches, their sequels often have problems in meeting the high expectations automatically imposed on them by eager fans.

Fight Night 2004 was such a title; bringing with it a new control system that added a whole new element to boxing simulations. Its new incarnation, in the form of Fight Night 2005: Round 2, uses the same system, of course, but also attempts to go the extra mile to bring a new level of excellence to the young series.

What can we expect when the title hits the shelves? Definitely more boxing action and a revamped interface that feels less glamorous and glitzy than that of Fight Night 2004. The developers went for a grittier feel that could almost be termed "retro-noir," complete with old fashioned type-writers, for entering player and fighter details, and various retro promotional posters, which display during loading times.

Greater attention to detail has been paid to the overall graphics - venues are more detailed and feature lighting that can only be called dramatic, fighters bodies and movements look far more realistic, and special effects for hard punches (in the form of camera shake) and "pre-knockout" times (in the form of a vignette) were added. A very comprehensive replay system is also on the cards, as well as a refined character creating process that will, amongst other things, allow you to effect your custom made boxer's physique more accurately.

Some new famous faces are also being incorporated into the game, but most of the greats who featured in Fight Night 2004, will be making a come-back in this new title. Rocky Marciano, Sonny Liston, Roy Jones Jr., and a host of other fighters will be available for play in one of the game's different modes. The player will even be able to recreate the careers of some of these greats.

To be frank, we will in essence be getting more of what we got in Fight Night 2004, but with the tweaks and extras thrown in. It looks like we're in for a really good bout of boxing action later this year.

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Infected

PSP

Developer: Planet Moon · **Publisher:** Majesco · **Supplier:** Ster Kinekor [011] 445 7900
Genre: First Person Shooter · **Release Date:** TBA

Braaaaains! Zombies are currently a fad that we deeply approve of, because unlike any other element in the horror genre, zombies deliver what we all want: buckets of gore, any weapon you can conceive, and the all-important body count. It's a gaming concept made in Heaven (Hell?) and one that developers are eager to work on, including Giants and Armed & Dangerous alumni Planet Moon Studios. As part of a three-game deal with publisher Majesco, these Brits are heading towards the PSP with a run-and-gun game involving the living dead taking over New York.

You are the rookie cop, Officer Stevens, and after being infected you discover that you are immune. Through the help of a scientist you get a gun that uses your blood and causes the infected to explode - we're not sure how much more effective that is to, for instance, the traditional method of using large calibre arms, but we'll buy it.

Using the PSP's gorgeous widescreen, you'll run through the various stages using this and other weapons at your disposal to take out the monsters. Apart from dual-gun action, it will also be able to set up chain reactions - all of which just mean more and more gore. If the hordes get too much, special attacks such as air strikes will also be available from time to time.

Infected really wants to take advantage of the PSP's multiplayer capabilities and therefore Wi-Fi will be supported for both Deathmatch and team-match games (no co-op mode has been confirmed, though). While on the theme of infection, beating your multiplayer opponent will apparently infect them with your avatar, which will then in turn infect other PSPs playing the game.

It's a bit early to draw a final judgment, but Planet Moon has yet to make a game we haven't liked, plus this one has zombies that explode. That should be enough for anyone.

Mercury

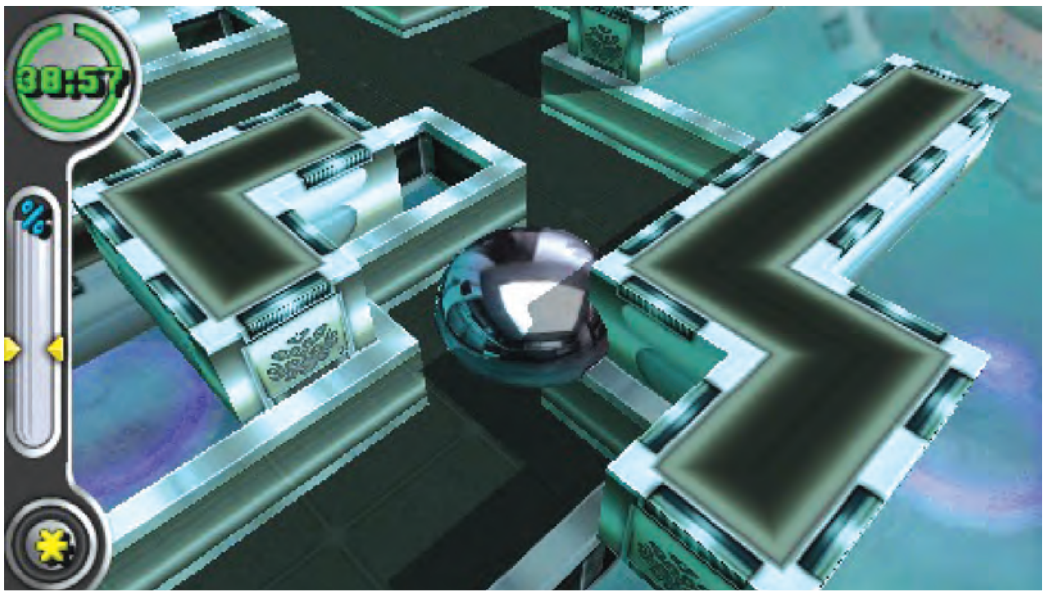
PSP

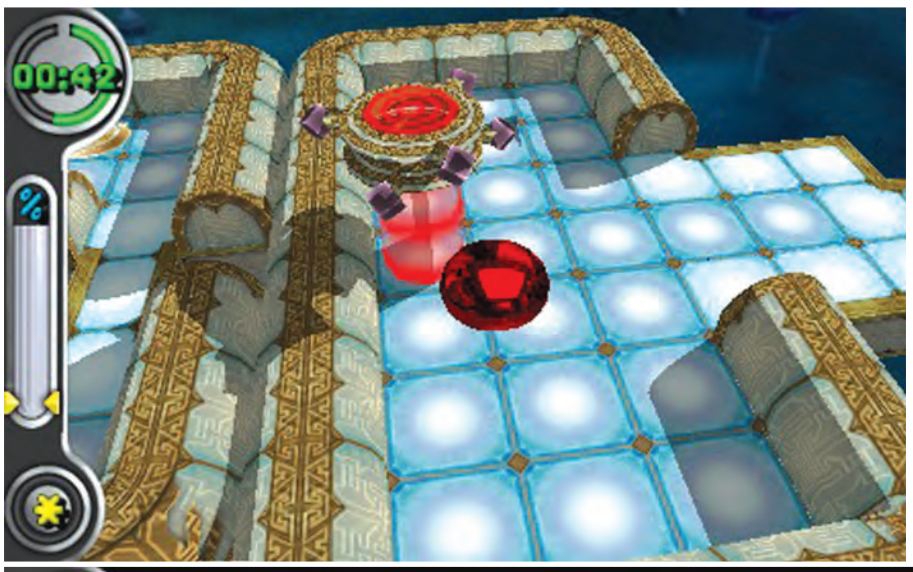
Developer: Awesome Studios · **Publisher:** Ignition · **Supplier:** Ster Kinekor [011] 445 7900 · **Genre:** Puzzle
Release Date: Q2 2005

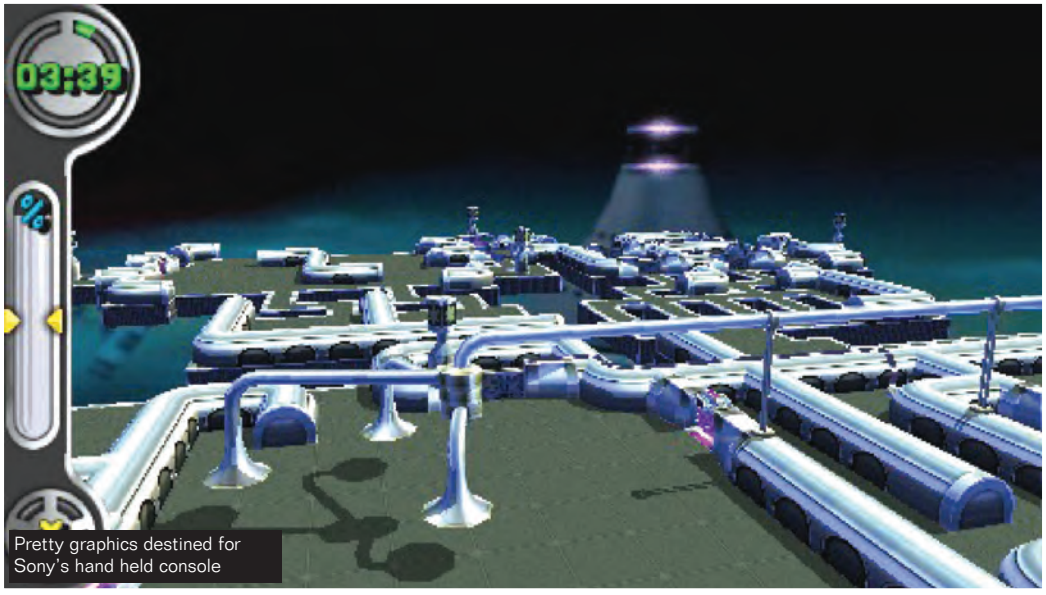
After the physics-powered fun of Ballance, puzzle games seem to have achieved a new dimension. While it has always been a fringe genre, a good puzzle title is never an unwelcome thing and always tends to eat up more game time than everything else you're busy with at that moment combined. Mercury, an experimental title for the PSP (and one we've mentioned several times before), looks set to bring this magic to Sony's handheld and is bound to have players tear their hair out in no time.

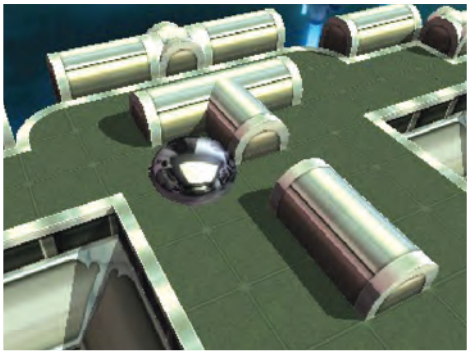
The concept is very simple: players need to navigate a blob of mercury through a maze by tilting the level itself. Using what is being touted as very complex and advanced coding, the movement of the blob (or blobs) is constantly being calculated to give a realistic effect. In turn, the player has to react and tilt the level accordingly - this might sound very easy but it can become pretty tough, since the mercury can be split into multiple pieces or accelerate beyond the control of the player. The mercury can also be changed into different colours, applying different speeds and handling to the glob - multiple globs can also be turned into multiple colours. Finally, a variation of levels can be expected, though what we can expect or how many levels will be in the final title hasn't been confirmed yet.

In short, it appears to be a straightforward game design that uses basic changes in the levels and mercury to make for some very tough situations - the kind that makes you scream in frustration, only to try again later. Either way, even if Mercury doesn't quite hold up to the promise it's projecting, a physics-driven puzzle game on the PSP sounds like a great idea.









Pretty graphics destined for Sony's hand held console

reviews

Goodbye to the magic

Has the march of technology removed the spark of magic from new innovations? It would seem that way...

Reviewing games for NAG is more difficult than many people would at first imagine. However it does have its perks - not least of which is the opportunity it affords the reviewer to witness the nature of the gaming industry in a rather more intimate fashion than most other gamers ever do. Much can be learned about the trends within the industry purely by studying the products that come from it.

The biggest impact that working with games for a living has, is the realisation of just how far we have come in recent times. While electronic games have been around for a while, it is the most recent period of gaming history that displays the most progress.

Not all that long ago, basic animations and sixteen colours managed to illicit gasps of awe from those who encountered them. Now it takes realistic motion and highly detailed textures (not to mention a host of other features) to get any positive response at all from the ever growing base of game playing consumers.

We are well aware of the fact that games are big business and that competition is a vital factor in any capitalist venture. We also know that the ever quickening pace of technological advancement is allowing game creators to tackle more ambitious projects virtually every day. The result of this situation is that games are becoming more and more impressive with every batch that hits the shelves. So why then, when we were once astounded by even the simplest of electronic entertainment, are we so unmoved when experiencing what should be, in terms of those 16 colour days of yore, utterly miraculous?

Quite simply, it comes down to a supply and demand situation. When something is exotic, it is in great demand, and people will be more appreciative of it. It's basic human nature. When, however, something is available in abundance and is of a very high quality, it becomes ordinary - it would have to be of a truly excellent quality to get much of a response at all.

In short, the abundance of high tech games is making us all a little more jaded than we were five years ago. This requires game makers to create even better products (because of the whole competition angle) to stay ahead of the game. The bar is raised and the overall quality of the product is improved (theoretically), merely to stay in the market. In turn, the consumers get used to the higher levels of quality which, after time, once again become ordinary. It's a vicious cycle - but it does keep the overall quality of games at a constant high. Perhaps that isn't such a bad thing.

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PlayStation 2

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AOpen Games reviewed on Rectron machines

Prince of Persia: Warrior Within

PC Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 299.00 · **Developer:** Ubisoft · **Publisher:** Ubisoft
Supplier: Megarom [011] 234 2680 · **Genre:** Adventure · **Reviewer:** Miktar Dracon
Minimum Specifications: Pentium 3 800MHz · 256 MB RAM · 4 x CD ROM · 32 MB Video Card · 1.2 GB HDD

In finding a game that took a license and refined it to a dreamy perfection, look no further than Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time. If you want a game that simply didn't sell well, also look at Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time. It's an odd duality in the industry when a game receives critical acclaim from reviewers, yet achieves poor sales. In an attempt to avoid a repeat of this, Ubisoft has opted to make Warrior Within a darker, edgier game, hoping these traits will make it more 'focus group' friendly. The Prince himself has matured immeasurably since The Sands of Time, returning with a darker heart and a lust for battle. In essence, everything about Warrior Within is an improvement over its predecessor. The additional acrobatic combat, darker story and longer playtime add up to exactly what fans wanted. Yet, while Warrior Within is a much better game than The Sands of Time, it simply isn't as much of an experience.

The darker tones and moodily taciturn Prince will certainly appeal to a broader audience, yet it all seems oddly trite. Despite this however, all is forgiven with the return of the cinematic jumping sections and interesting time-based puzzles that made The Sands of Time such a memorable experience. Gamers appreciate a game that lets them pull off excessively flashy moves with ease.

As we know; the Prince averted his own death in The Sands of Time by mucking about with the Dagger of Time and generally holding his finger on rewind until his mistakes were sufficiently erased. The catch however, is that Fate seems to have a Hitman of Time in the form of the Dahaka, a nasty beast with infinity-shaped horns that tries to kill you at every turn. Naturally the Prince isn't keen on this idea, opting rather to sail to a cursed island holding the birthplace of the Sands of Time, in an attempt to avoid his preordained death. The story unfolds at a reasonable pace, marred slightly by the tedious front-and-back-tracking the Prince now has to do, instead of the linear progression The Sands of Time had.

Acrobatically, no additional moves feature with the exception of an interesting rope-and-wall technique and the ability to use ludicrous amounts of stylish acrobatics in combat itself. The Sands of Time had set segments of running, jumping, climbing trees and combat, each with defined start and end points. Warrior Within however, is seamless in its cohesion. Often the

Ahmed obviously found that last caption very funny...

Prince has barely finished his back flip-to-pole-and-rebound-off-wall-to-safety, when an errant denizen of evil decides to pop in and have a chat with swords. Often a quick flick of the mouse dispatches the bad guys with ease (as well as a slow-motion pan-around showing off the new emphasis on blood and violence), though some enemies will require a bit more tact and skill, as they block your attacks or flip around like ninjas trying to avoid your strikes.

The new combat system works extremely well (and is entirely appreciated), managing to keep a frantic pace as you wield single or duel weapons for devastating combo attacks, back flip off walls or hurl daggers at enemies. There are an excessive amount of combination attacks available, though none are really required to make progress in the game.

Time, once again plays a role in events; this simply wouldn't be a worthy sequel without the ability to rewind time right after you have made a completely stupid jump into oblivion. The rewind ability was, and still is, one of the most sterling aspects of this new series and entirely necessary to keep players from throwing their monitors out a window. New time-related attacks during combat even help the score a little - the plot itself throwing you back and forth between two eras of the island, making for an interesting adventure. It's a treat watching the crumbling, decaying castle on the island transformed back to its original glory as you go back in time. The time-hopping though, quickly becomes a chore in relation to the backtracking required to get back from point B to A.

Warrior Within achieves a wonderful blend of traditional platform and current-generation action, holding a fine amount of depth and playtime for the interested gamer. Newcomers to the series may feel more comfortable with the more familiar style of action in Warrior Within, making it easier to overlook the slightly unpolished edges. Fans of The Sands of Time however, will most probably quietly lament the innocent loss of the Prince's sarcastic wit and light-fantastic feel of the series.

A fitting sequel, but not a continuation

75

Enemies quite literally go to pieces...

AOpen Games reviewed on Rectron machines

Medal of Honor: Pacific Assault

PC Review

Silver Award

Suggested Retail Price: R 299.00 · **Developer:** EA Games · **Publisher:** Electronic Arts
Supplier: EA Africa [011] 516 8300 · **Genre:** First Person Shooter · **Reviewer:** Jian Reis
Minimum Specifications: Pentium 4 1.5GHz · 512MB RAM · 8 x CD ROM · 64MB Video Card · 3GB HDD

When it comes to World War 2 shooters, the Medal of Honor games have pretty much set the standard for excellence in terms of graphics, story telling, and gripping game play. The latest addition to the family is Medal of Honor: Pacific Assault and it may well be the franchise's finest hour.

Having played almost all of the MoH titles, and most of the expansions, the thing that most noticeably separates Pacific Assault from previous MoH games, is the sheer polished quality of the final product. EA have spent a lot of time making MoH: PA the best game they could. This game is class, and if you're a fan of WW2 shooters, you can put down this review at this point and go get it. It is simply that good.

The game play is much what you'd expect if you've played a MoH game - squad-based tactical encounters that have you infiltrating enemy camps, blowing up radar installations, fuel dumps, tanks, and ammo depots. This time you're in the Pacific Theatre, fighting the Japanese at every turn, and the action is never dull. One typical mission has you sweeping the area near an airfield for Japanese patrols and then heading further inland to silence the artillery batteries that are pounding the airfield. You return to your airfield to find it under attack, and you are expected to get behind a Bofors 2lb anti-aircraft gun to shoot down marauding Zeros and dive bombers.

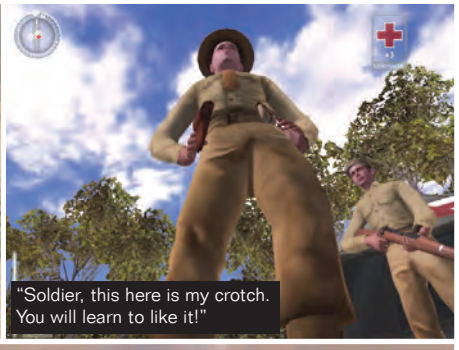
The graphics are absolutely top-notch. Your first real mission has you defending Pearl Harbour from attack, and as you race down Battleship Row in a PT boat, Zeros making strafing runs overhead, you're simply wowed by the sheer beauty and chaos of the entire scene. MoH: PA also utilises Havok physics, so objects in the game world respond to the player's actions in a realistic way.

Playing MoH: PA on a 5.1 speaker system with EAX3, is quite an experience - especially on missions where you have planes flying overhead, artillery fire pounding a nearby bunker, machine guns rattling everywhere, and the shouts and screams of team-mates and enemies filling the air. It's an audiophile's dream.

The single player experience is without a doubt the finest of any of the MoH games yet. It's a non-stop action fest from beginning to end, and some of the sequences are guaranteed to blow your mind.

If you're lusting for World War 2 shooter action, it doesn't get much better than this

85



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AOpen Games reviewed on Rectron machines

Alexander

PC Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 299.00 **Developer:** GSC · **Publisher:** Ubisoft
Supplier: Megarom [011] 234 2680 · **Genre:** RTS · **Reviewer:** Walt Pretorius
Minimum Specifications: Pentium 3 1.5GHz · 512MB RAM · 12 x CD ROM · 64MB Video Card · 2.0GB HDD

It would seem that the ability to salvage a decent game out of a movie license is a miracle. Not impossible, but very close. While one or two development houses actually seem to put some effort into the whole deal, others just couldn't be bothered. Take Alexander for example. The game is based on Oliver Stone's film, Alexander which, I might add, isn't really getting rave reviews itself. Here is a game that is relying so heavily on its name, that all else seems to have fallen by the wayside. Any innovation that may have made this game competitive, in the real time strategy market, has been cast aside because of the developers' obvious fixation on the marketing potential the film and Colin Farrell have. Hell, they even put his face on the game's cover.

It must be noted, however, that this game is not completely awful - unlike most film licensed games that are released. It is solidly mediocre and that, perhaps, is the worst part of all. At least, when a game is truly bad it is obvious that the developers didn't make any effort. Here it is hidden under a veneer of quasi-quality that might imply inexperience on the part of the development house. But, GSC is hardly a new kid on the block.

The premise, obviously, is that the player takes the part of the heroic Alexander (who is represented onscreen by a mounted character, constantly bathed in a strange and completely cheesy "heavenly light"). As such, the player gets to run ragged over the ancient world, pillaging where possible, and generally causing mayhem of a colonial nature.

One thing that must be highlighted (that does set this game apart), is the huge number of units that can be fielded during battles. Seeing such vast armies on-screen is quite an enjoyable experience.

Alexander will prove a challenge to some, and will probably gain something of a following. It's just a pity that something with so much potential doesn't offer more than just what it is - a brilliant example of gaming mediocrity.

Because the title is quite average, it couldn't be called bad. In fact, there are one or two factors within the game that caused a raised eyebrow or two. But these are not enough to drag this title to any decent height of achievement.

A very mediocre RTS - loosely based on a film of the same nature

65

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Alien

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AOpen Games reviewed on Rectron machines

Chronicles of Riddick

PC Review · Award of Excellence · Editor's Choice

Suggested Retail Price: R 299.00 **Developer:** Starbreeze · **Publisher:** Vivendi Universal
Supplier: Nu Metro [011] 340 9345 · **Genre:** FPS · **Reviewer:** James Francis
Minimum Specifications: Pentium 4 1.8GHz · 256MB RAM · 16 x CD ROM · 64MB Video Card · 3.7GB HDD

How often is it that the star of a movie announces in an interview that another game in the movie's franchise is on its way, even before the publisher or developers can blink? Granted, Vin Diesel is an avid gamer, but this is generally unheard of. Then again, Chronicles of Riddick is unheard of. In one swoop, a single title on the PC managed three distinctions never witnessed before: a great license game, a great port, and an excellent FPS. Chronicles of Riddick is a gem that stands right beside anything else released into the FPS genre in recent years.

The main reason is because it's a paradigm shifter. Firstly, Riddick disposes of the notion that licensed games are generically bad. As a prequel to the Riddick movies, it does a more than worthy job of adding meat to the universe and is an absolute must-have for fans, negating the usual role of license games to be slap-dash cash-ins to a movie's hype. This game stands right next to Pitch Black in importance to Riddick's story. Then it sidelines the status quo with a port that proves itself more than worthy to be on the PC.

The game play is sleek, the controls and difficulty have been adjusted to suit a PC audience, the checkpoints are complimented with an optional quick save feature, and even the menu system is very PC friendly - the only chinks in the armour are that the models aren't of the best quality; something that shows on higher resolutions.

Lastly, there is Riddick the FPS. PC shooters are usually extremely rigid in their implementation. With a few exceptions such as System Shock, Far Cry, and the few RPG FPS titles around, FPS titles stick to the "go there shoot that" formula. Riddick introduces a solid adventure feel to it. With multiple missions in certain sections, you walk around and talk to characters who will give you missions to do. Some advance the plot while others just give you bonus material, such as money, cigarette packs (to unlock extras), or security codes for bonus areas and so on. In-between these are numerous combat sections, blending full-blown assault with stealth moves and platform-style 3rd person climbing and hanging. Riddick is a very accomplished combatant, thus the game has a worthy melee combat mode that uses the four directional buttons to apply different types of blows to opponents. There are also counter moves (such as grabbing someone's fist and then punching them on the jaw) and critical kills, such as forcing a guard's gun to his chin and squeezing his trigger finger.

In terms of sheer innovation, Riddick beats any FPS out there hands down and you can easily compare it to Far Cry's open-form approach to maps. While both Doom 3 and Half-Life 2 sought to muddle with a very linear approach to game play, dressing it up with physics, nice graphics, and impressive models, Riddick joins the ranks of games that show what you can really do with the genre once you put your mind to it. There are some finer points you could criticise it on, but the overall product makes almost anything Riddick does wrong very forgivable. A classic. N

A gem in its own right and a must-buy for any fan of the genre or series.

93

The line at the cafeteria was getting brutal

Nightvision meets LSD

The beginnings of a bad day

Hold still, this won't hurt a bit

ON SALE MARCH 2

AOpen Games reviewed on Rectron machines

Syberia II

PC Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 299.00 · **Developer:** Microids · **Publisher:** Microids
Supplier: MegaRom [011] 234 2680 · **Genre:** Adventure · **Reviewer:** Alex Jelagin
Minimum Specifications: Pentium II 350MHz · 64MB RAM · 16 X DVD ROM · 16MB Video Card · 800MB HDD

Point-and-click adventure games have come a long way since the days of the likes of King's Quest. The Syberia games, although sharing a genre with the aforementioned, are as far removed from them as Far Cry is from Doom. Syberia II is available on the Syberia DVD release, which includes its predecessor as well. The package is quite worthwhile, especially for players new to the series.

Point-and-click games generally suffer from a specific malady - the character ends up walking almost endlessly (traverses three locations to go back somewhere to pick up a required item, then walks all the way back to use it, only to find that something else is lacking, therefore walking through a couple more screens, and so forth), and talking to the same non-player characters over and over again. This is, regrettably, true of this title and I found it quite amusing that the main character is named Kate Walker. On the upside, it is possible to make Kate run by double-clicking destinations. While this does not have an impact on in-game play in the least, it does cut some of the tedium. The developers have tried to make Syberia II appear non-linear, but this fails totally. Puzzles must be solved and appear in sequence - so solving them out of sequence is not an option. Dialogues with non-player characters offer menus for discussion topics. But, while this may suggest non-linear conversations, this is not the case. The best way is to follow up every available thread and doing so from top to bottom, results in the most consistent and logic conversations.

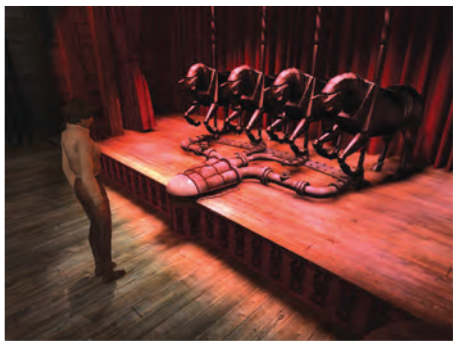
Despite these (fairly) minor shortcomings, the game is rather good. Its strength lies in the fact that it is very immersive (and somewhat addictive) as adventure games tend to be. Cleverly, the designers have incorporated a back-story that runs more or less in parallel with the character's progress. This consists of events and conversations taking place somewhere other than where the player's character is, but which nevertheless affect the character. I will only mention that corporate machinations are involved, so as not to spoil the story for those planning on playing this game.

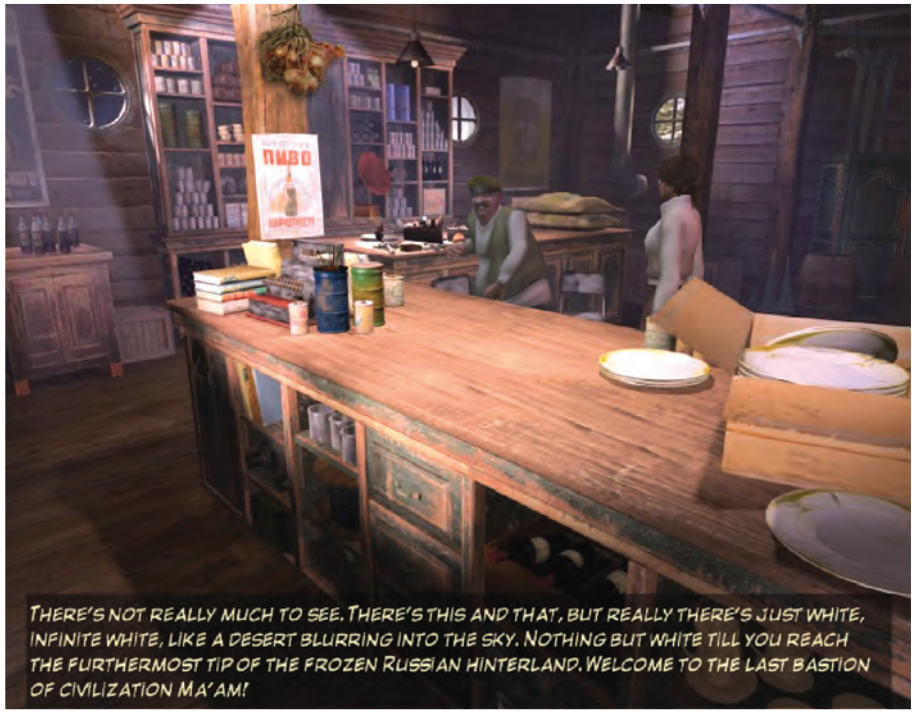
The game's most striking feature is its visual splendour, which at times is breathtakingly beautiful. As you will gather from the screenshots - a lot of work went into the design of the locations. The story is also rather intriguing and satisfyingly long. At times though, the dialogue is rather shallow and forced. The soundtrack is subdued, subtle, often quite eerie, and sets a languid, melancholy mood that is appropriate to the story.

The game is low on system requirements and you won't need a supercomputer to play it. Given the nature of the game, it is to be expected that players may get stuck on occasion. The developers' Website has a forum where players can discuss game elements and seek help in difficult situations.

If you want to kill a few hours while savouring a moody story, this one may well be for you

69





There's not really much to see. There's this and that, but really there's just white, infinite white, like a desert blurring into the sky. Nothing but white till you reach the furthermost tip of the frozen Russian hinterland. Welcome to the last bastion of civilization Ma'am!

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Killzone

PlayStation 2
Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 439.00 · **Developer:** Guerilla · **Publisher:** SCEE
Supplier: Ster Kinekor [011] 445 7900 · **Genre:** First Person Shooter · **Reviewer:** Adam Liebman
Minimum Specifications: 1-2 Players · 63KB memory · Anaogue compatible · Vibration compatible

Having been touted before its release as the PS2's answer to Halo, Killzone is an FPS set quite firmly in the future. The game starts with the lead character, Templar, and his military regiment coming under attack by a race known as the Helghast. It is soon revealed that after humanity's colonisation of space, a small group of people went off to form their own society on what, unfortunately, turned out to be a rather toxic planet which has, over the years, not only mutated their bodies, but also filled them with an insatiable desire for universal domination. And, needless to say, it's up to you to stop them. You will, along the way, meet three other playable characters; namely a female assassin, a heavy weapons expert, and a Helghast defector. This effectively gives you four different ways to tackle each of the 11 missions in the game, though the play dynamic remains fairly generic, irrespective of which character you're using. And the play dynamic is, in fact, just that - utterly generic. For the most part, you'll find yourself facing legion upon legion of Helghast troops, and to make matters worse, it seems the developers went into complete creativity deficit after modelling the first enemies you encounter. Subsequent foes, though occasionally wielding stronger weapons, are virtually indistinguishable from earlier ones, bringing with them a terrible sense of monotony. The artificial intelligence also proves quite disappointing - it shows one or two moments of brilliance, but inconsistency is undoubtedly its most noticeable attribute. If you find yourself in the enemy's line of sight, they'll react swiftly and forcefully, but if you approach at an angle, they remain blissfully unaware of your presence. Your teammates also seem to do little other than just follow you around. Another letdown is the lack of attention given to the storyline. The concept is certainly imaginative and promising, but it's told in a lacklustre manner, and not enough time is spent on events leading up to the war in which you find yourself fighting. Visually, Killzone looks impressive initially, but slowdown and draw-in problems soon begin to manifest - detracting from the play experience, as well as making it difficult to appreciate Killzone's futuristic visual style. Fortunately, the audio fares slightly better with the voice-acting and score worthy of being mentioned - though this is sadly not enough to drag this title out of the depths of mediocrity.

Highly publicised potential Halo-killer that sadly fails to live up to expectations

64

No variation makes this one dull

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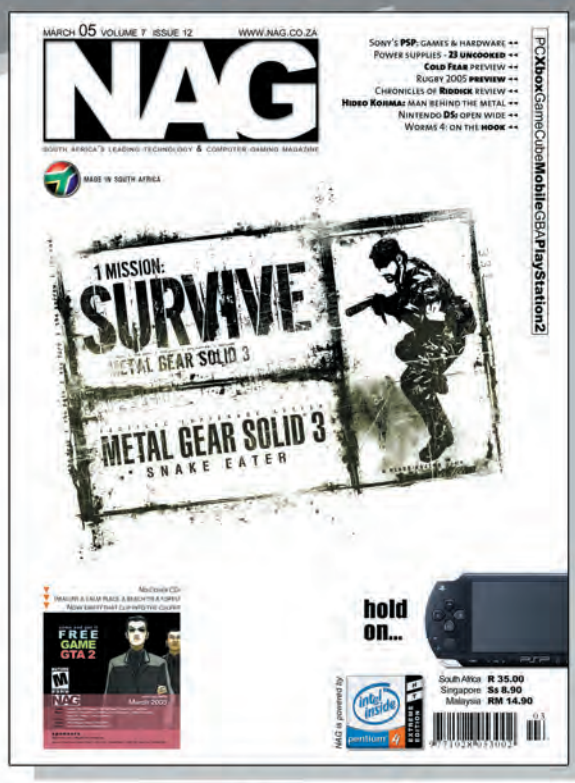

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The Getaway 2: Black Monday

PlayStation 2
Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 339.00 · **Developer:** Reflections · **Publisher:** SCEE
Supplier: Ster Kinekor [011] 445 7900 · **Genre:** Action · **Reviewer:** Walt Pretorius
Requirements: 1 Player · Vibration compatible · Analogue compatible

Sequels have a way of either surpassing their predecessors or, alternately, being utter rubbish. It's very seldom that a middle ground is found and when that is achieved, the tendency is to lump them into the latter category. After all, sequels should be better than their predecessors, shouldn't they?

The Getaway 2: Black Monday is a game that falls into this rare category. The game has been taking a huge amount of flak but, to be honest, it really is no worse than the original Getaway. Then again, it isn't much better.

As one might expect, The Getaway 2 starts out feeling like a gritty British film, resplendent with good dialogue, an incredible amount of very foul language, as well as a good plot. It features a Special Forces cop (who is controlled by the player), involves several driving and shooting missions, and mostly deals with cop kind of stuff. To say any more would be a bit of a spoiler, so we shall avoid that.

The game, as stated before, involves driving to various points through busy streets and then performing missions while there. It features no user interface for ammo or wound totals (you have to rely on the character's appearance for that) and requires the player to take part in fairly realistic gun battles. The control available to the player is extensive, allowing for a great number of situations to be encountered and dealt with.

Aside from having a great plot, The Getaway 2 has very little new to offer the player. In fact, it seems as though the game has had no work done on its overall engine at all. No visible revamps or tweaks can be found anywhere within the title. Essentially it feels more like an expansion to the previous game than a new title and, in today's competitive gaming market, the lack of technological advancement inherent in this game borders on inexcusable.

The Getaway 2: Black Monday is a very good game, despite feeling so dated. If it had been released hot on the heels of the first Getaway, or if the developers (who with the first title raised the bar a few notches) had bothered to include a few new aspects in the game's code, it would have been an absolute winner. As it stands, however, The Getaway 2 falls into pure mediocrity with very little chance of reprieve from that lowered status.

A nice enough action packed sequel, but a lack of advancement makes it feel dated

65

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AOpen Games reviewed on Rectron machines

The Settlers: Heritage of Kings

PC Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 299.00 · **Developer:** Blue Byte · **Publisher:** Ubisoft
Supplier: MegaRom [011] 234 2680 · **Genre:** Management · **Reviewer:** Walt Pretorius
Minimum Specifications: Pentium 3 1GHz · 256 MB RAM · DVD ROM · 32 MB Video Card · 1.5 GB HDD

Here's an interesting series for you. The Settlers has not exactly been the high paced action kind of game that results in a long legacy, but somehow it has, spawning five titles. Additionally, the first four versions of the game never saw revisions that could be called anything other than minimal - they stuck to their cartoon style and pedantic style of game play. This fifth instalment has received so much in terms of revamp and upgrade that it almost seems like a new game. Almost, that is, until that good old pedantic, plodding game style settles in.

The biggest mistake anyone can make, in terms of this game, is to assume that it is a strategy title. To be more accurate; The Settlers: Heritage of Kings would have to be described as a settlement management game, with a few combat bits thrown in for good measure. It's more important to get your settlement churning over effectively than to build up a vast army - although having one won't really hurt overly much. For the most part, however, the player needs to balance resources and research to support any army that is created.

The single player game is almost unrecognisable as a Settlers title. With the inclusion of a hero, central to the story line, as well as an overall change in the game dynamic (those irritating little border markers of old are long gone, making base building so much easier, for example), the game has received a new lease of life. But once the player gets involved in playing the game, the old Settler fundamentals reveal themselves.

The biggest revamp is in terms of graphics. Although the game features a camera that could only be described as crippled, the overall look of The Settlers: Heritage of Kings is quite beautiful, with a high zoom level, detailed animations, and beautiful textures. It's a pity the same couldn't be said of the voice acting - this aspect of the game is rather awful.

The Settlers: Heritage of Kings will never become a smash hit title. It's the kind of game that will find a group of rabidly dedicated followers, rather than appeal to a mass market. It's a fun title which, if the player can get past its slow nature, will provide hours of fun in both single and multiplayer modes.

A slow paced and pedantic strategy management sim that will appeal to fans

79

Setting up a resource site with a mine, housing and farms

Weather can play a very important part in this title

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WWE Smackdown! vs. Raw

PlayStation 2
Review

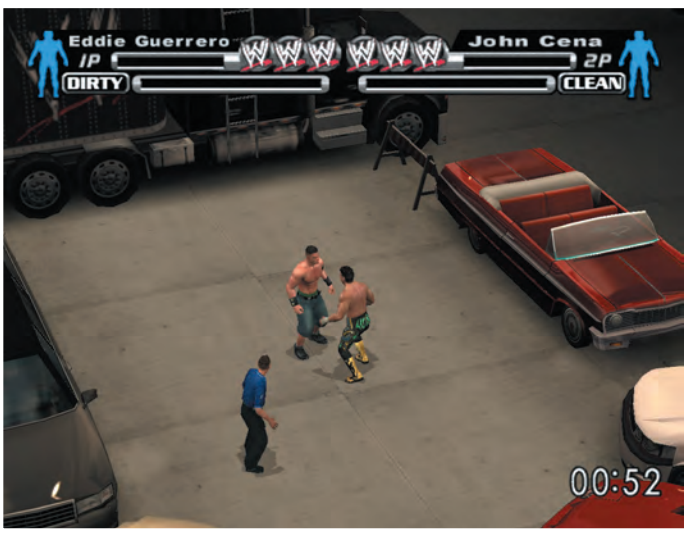
Suggested Retail Price: R 439.00 · **Developer:** Yuke's · **Publisher:** THQ · **Supplier:** WWE [011] 462 0150
Genre: Wrestling · **Reviewer:** Adam Liebman

Minimum Specifications: 1-6 Players · 497 KB memory · Analogue compatible · Vibration compatible

Now in its sixth instalment, the WWE Smackdown! series has always managed to up the ante noticeably with each new release - with the changes brought about in last year's title, Here Comes the Pain, certainly being the most noteworthy. It seems, though, that the series has reached the point where the developers are more focussed on refining their product, rather than implementing any serious overhauls. There are certainly some noticeable changes in this release, though none of them are exceptionally revolutionary. One is the addition of a new "tactics" meter which is built up by staying in character. If your character's supposed to be a bad guy, then arguing with the ref and using illegal weapons will fill up your tactics meter. If you're a good guy, playing to the crowd with taunts and aerial moves will accomplish the same. Once your meter's filled, you'll be able to inflict some extra damage with your next move - nothing radical, but an effective addition. Other minor changes to the game dynamic are present, namely the removal of most backstage areas, as well as limiting weapon usage by having weapons disappear after a few hits - presumably to iron out cheesy tactics. Other than that, however, the play dynamic is largely reminiscent of that in the previous title, which is by no means a bad thing. Once again, the variety of different types of matches on offer is very vast and should definitely please fans. The career mode, however, has been truncated somewhat - it's still an integral part of the game, though the storyline is much more linear this time around, offering the player far less choice over his character's actions. It isn't terribly written, though the reduced degree of player involvement may disappoint. In terms of audio, Smackdown! vs. Raw features voice-acting from all the featured wrestlers in the game - unfortunately, however, many of them prove to be even worse actors in the recording studio than they do on TV, with many lines coming across as either rushed, or heavily contrived. Visually, however, the game continues the series' reputation for excellence, with very realistic and detailed characters. Devotees or newcomers to the series will undoubtedly enjoy it for a very worthwhile period of time. For the casual gamer who already owns this game's predecessor, there may be too little innovation to warrant a purchase.

Great wrestling title, though more a refinement of last year's product than a true sequel

77



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The Legend of Zelda: The Minish Cap

GBA Review

Silver Award

Suggested Retail Price: R 360.00 · **Developer:** Capcom · **Publisher:** Nintendo
Supplier: Futronic [011] 256 7760 · **Genre:** Adventure · **Reviewer:** Miktar Dracon
Requirements: 1 Player

Born in the tender gaming years of the 1980s, the diminutive little hero Link has certainly been around the block. He's saved Hyrule, gone back in time and saved Hyrule, worn a mask and saved Hyrule, controlled the seasons and ages (to save Hyrule), and ultimately sailed the oceans to save Hyrule. Oh, and he saved princess Zelda too. Somehow, we've never gotten tired of his escapades and Zelda's ineptitude to stay away from harm.

Taking the reigns of this cherished series, Capcom have opted to go back rather than forward. The Minish Cap could be considered a re-telling of the classic story as you walk Link's path from the beginning, but with a few twists. New characters have been added to augment the story and to introduce new elements into the game dynamics.

Small in stature but big on helping out, the Piccoli are a big new addition to the world of Hyrule and can, conveniently, only be seen by children. The Piccoli are tiny and can only be talked to when Link himself does a little reducing (thanks to some handy pots that seem to do exactly that). As you adventure around what initially seems to be a small map, most of the plot unfolds as memory serves. Shortly after the start however, a talking cap gets introduced to Link and a rather wonderful, comic duo quickly grabs the centre stage for the rest of the game.

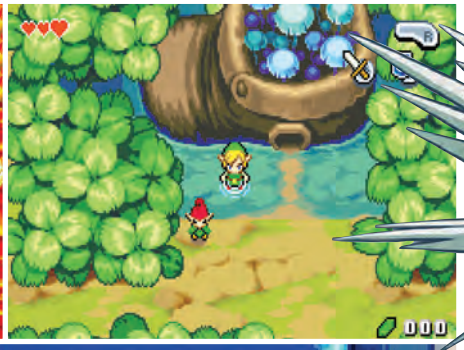
The characterisation of the world and its inhabitants is colourful and vibrant, with each piece of dialogue delightfully camp yet appropriate - much like the overall visual appearance. Each bit of artwork is crisp and animated, while the puzzles themselves (although a touch easy at times) are usually devious and often mind-numbingly lateral.

Each dungeon holds an experience of its own, expanding each time you find a new item that allows you to access a new part of the world. The mole gloves for example, allow you to dig through certain types of rock. Once they have been acquired, previously inaccessible areas are suddenly wide open for you to explore. Much of the enjoyment in Minish Cap derives from experimenting with new items.

Oddly, Minish Cap suffers from being too short in relation to its predecessors, though one could argue that it's simply better this way. A good 20 hours of game play is nothing to scoff at, with every second of it a lavish and entertaining jaunt with the little green kid and his new jabbering cap.

Slightly short but satisfyingly sweet every step of the way

90



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The Legend of Zelda: The Minish Cap	2004
The Legend of Zelda: Collector's Edition	2003
The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker	2002
The Legend of Zelda: Oracle of Ages	2001
The Legend of Zelda: Oracle of Seasons	2001
The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask	2000
The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time	1998
The Legend of Zelda: Link's Awakening DX	1998
The Legend of Zelda: Link's Awakening	1993
The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past	1991
Zelda II: The Adventure of Link	1987
The Legend of Zelda	1986

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McFarlane's Evil Prophecy

PlayStation 2
Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 439.00 · **Developer:** Konami · **Publisher:** Konami
Supplier: Ster Kinekor [011] 445 7900 · **Genre:** Action · **Reviewer:** Walt Pretorius
Minimum Specifications: 1 Player · Vibration compatible · Analogue compatible

Add the name Todd McFarlane to a piece of entertainment and you are almost guaranteed of success. Hey, the man did create Spawn, after all. Perhaps then, we shouldn't consider the Spawn movie or, for that matter, McFarlane's Evil Prophecy. These two bits of entertainment would certainly lead one to believe that the veneer of McFarlane's name on anything other than a comic book is roughly equivalent to a thin layer of gold plating covering a dung ball.

The basic premise of the game is great, to be honest. Four varied characters respond to a number of supernatural disasters around the globe, taking place around the turn of the last century, in an effort to avert the end of the world as we know it. Fair enough - hey, it could even be fun. However, these characters are heavily clichéd, the plot is laughable, and the game play is about as much fun as shoving your hand into a wood chipper just to see what would happen. The controls are sluggish, the game dynamic is made up of basic monster bashing, and the graphics are dated. Even the voice acting would have been bad, if they had bothered to include any - instead you get treated to bad dialogue in text format, a concept which is so out-of-date it might actually be coming into fashion again. Sure, you get to play four characters and switch on the fly, but they're not decent characters to start with. If you really like this game, you may want to check with your shrink for possible latent masochist tendencies.

A lacklustre game depending on its name rather than its quality **45**

Ratchet & Clank 3

PlayStation 2
Review

Award of Merit

Suggested Retail Price: R 439.00 · **Developer:** Insomniac Games · **Publisher:** Sony Computer Entertainment
Supplier: Ster Kinekor [011] 445 7900 · **Genre:** Action · **Reviewer:** Adam Liebman
Requirements: 1-8 Players · 599KB memory · Analogue compatible · Vibration compatible

Insomniac Games has, with the prior two instalments of the Ratchet & Clank franchise, built up a reputation for producing quality platform titles and the third in the series certainly upholds that reputation - though by now, I'm becoming slightly reluctant to refer to this title as a platform game, since it is, in fact, more of a shooter/platform hybrid. Once again, our heroic duo has to save the universe, this time from the evil robot known as Dr. Nefarious. Aiding them in their quest is the ever-entertaining Captain Qwark, and his team of "elite" personnel. The majority of the game dynamic follows the Ratchet & Clank formula, mostly involving shooting at anything that moves with an incredibly broad variety of weaponry and with a few platform elements thrown in here and there for good measure. Once again, combat earns you experience, which allows you to upgrade your weapons through five different levels. Bolts left behind by "departed" enemies, once again act as currency, allowing you to purchase new, more destructive toys. Of course, mini-game style interludes to the action are abound, and despite the fact that we've seen most of the elements of this title before, the play dynamic is always fast paced, entertaining and highly addictive. Coupled with fantastic graphics, excellent sound, and a quirky, well-written storyline, Ratchet & Clank 3 is sure to appeal to devotees of the series and newcomers alike.

Well polished, thoroughly enjoyable platformer - nothing radically new, but tremendous fun **85**

The Incredibles

PlayStation 2
Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 449.00 **Developer:** Heavy Iron · **Publisher:** THQ
Supplier: Ster Kinekor [011] 445 7900 · **Genre:** Action · **Reviewer:** Miktar Dracon
Requirements: 1 Player · 100kb Memory

It seems to be an unwritten rule, perhaps even an enforced law of the gaming industry, to constantly take movie licenses and turn them into half-hearted, uninspired, and often insipid games. While The Incredibles isn't exactly the worst game-of-a-movie we've ever seen, it certainly doesn't win any awards for ingenuity or creativity. Split into sections, where you play a member of The Incredibles family (you must have seen the movie by now, so a plot synopsis isn't really needed), you either beat things up as Mr. Incredible, beat up more things and swing around as Ms. Incredible, run really fast through 'on rails' sections as Dash, or try to sneak around as Violet. Each section certainly attempts to make the most of the intellectual property Pixar has provided, yet the lush and lavish environments often give way to bland play and frustrating controls. Heavy Iron has managed to achieve a sad level of mediocrity with The Incredibles, giving us a game that simply begs to be great but only manages a paltry passable.

Most definitely aimed at kids, The Incredibles will no doubt still find its way into the hands of the young ones, who simply adored the movie. However, it's important to note that while the game starts off on a low level of difficulty, it tends to suddenly ramp up at each boss fight, making for a highly frustrating experience.

Quickly loses anything incredible it might have had

60

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AOpen Games reviewed on Rectron machines

Sid Meier's Pirates!

PC Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 299.00 · **Developer:** Firaxis · **Publisher:** Atari · **Supplier:** MegaRom [011] 234 2680
Genre: Adventure · **Reviewer:** Walt Pretorius

Minimum Specifications: Pentium 3 1GHz · 256 MB RAM · 4 x CD ROM · 32 MB Video Card · 1.2 GB HDD

Pirate games are, by and large, hit and miss affairs - with far more of the attempts falling into the miss category. It seems that the swashbuckling nature of pirate life (at least the one that Hollywood would have us believe) is relatively difficult to capture in game code. Even games based on popular licenses (Pirates of the Caribbean in this case), manage to suck the hind one so completely that gamers around the world went quite green at the gills while playing it.

There has been a shift in the wind, though, as Sid Meier swings to the genre's rescue with the release of Sid Meier's Pirates - an engrossing and lively look at buccaneers, privateers and other generally nautical scallywags.

The game takes the form of both a trade simulation and an adventure. The player's character sails around the Caribbean stealing other people's possessions, selling these (often back to the people they were stolen from), all while searching for his missing family and plotting revenge on the evil Baron Montalban.

It doesn't seem very exciting, but there is quite a bit more to the game than first meets the eye. Politics, for example, are fairly important... and in this case they really are gunboat politics. Four nations; the French, Dutch, Spanish and English, colonise the region. Simply sinking every ship you come across will leave you with very few safe havens and even fewer friends. But, sinking a Dutch ship, for example, and then blowing the hell out of a few Spaniards (or whoever the Dutch are at war with at the time), before calling at the next Dutch port, does make things a bit easier when appeasing the Dutch governor.

Romance also plays a part in the game. Governors have daughters who need to be wooed and this is achieved by dancing with them. Yes, you read that right. Get the steps right and they might reward you with either a useful character-enhancing gift, or some useful information. Hey, you can even get married.

Ship upgrades, minimal crew management, sword fighting, and treasure seeking all come into play, as well as a few other things too. Of course, finding the character's family is very important, as it is a big part of the story - although the freeform play style means that you don't have to. The only limitation on the game is the fact that your character ages (visibly, too) and that you will have to retire at some point. The game then performs a nice summary of your career.

With good graphics, simple controls, variable difficulty (that can be changed during the course of the game), and a rather complete feel to it, Pirates is a fun title. However, it may not appeal to a large number of gamers due to the fact that it spans a few genres without falling solidly into a specific category. Impatient players may also find the game rather repetitive after a while.

A wonderful swashbuckling adventure for trader fans

78

Yes, you too can spend your time beating up fat Spanish seamen...

Donkey Konga Pak

GameCube Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 450.00 · **Developer:** Nintendo · **Publisher:** Nintendo
Supplier: Futronic [011] 256 7760 **Genre:** Rhythm · **Reviewer:** Miktar Dracon

Requirements: 1 - 4 Players · 3 Memory Blocks · Bongo Controller support [*Seriously, Ed*]

Rhythm is a pretty primal thing, especially hitting things in time to a beat. It's a very logical conclusion then, that the simian superstar, Donkey Kong, should spearhead Nintendo's foray into the wonderful world of rhythm-based games. Donkey Konga comes bundled with a set of rather sturdy Bongos, consisting of two resistant surfaces for you to slap/smash and a 'clap sensor' (a glorified microphone). The game itself is pretty much standard fare for a rhythm game, involving hitting either the left or right bongo, both, or clapping at the right time. The track list for Donkey Konga is varied and entertaining, consisting of oldies, game tunes, and more recent music. At its core, the game is fun and highly entertaining. Having been sent only one set of bongos, no comment can be passed on the multiplayer aspect (although it does have promise, allowing up to 4 people to bongo away).

While the concept is fun and well executed, the game itself lacks some basic depth. Once you've played each of the songs at least once, it seems there is very little else to do (multiplayer aside) except attempt them on a higher level of difficulty, or mess around with buying soundsets for the bongos (making them bark or sneeze instead of the traditional bongo sound).

As you play you get coins with which to unlock a higher difficulty for the songs, as well as a few mini-games - although the mini-games themselves aren't very inspiring. Rhythm fans and casual gamers alike will enjoy Donkey Konga, but it lacks true staying-power.

Light-hearted rhythm fun, slightly lacking in substance

70

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GoldenEye: Rogue Agent

PlayStation 2
Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 379.00 · **Developer:** EA Games · **Publisher:** Electronic Arts
Supplier: EA Africa [011 516 8300 · **Genre:** First Person Shooter · **Reviewer:** Adam Liebman
Minimum Specifications: 1- 4 Players · 78KB Memory · Analogue compatible · Vibration compatible

In a departure from tradition, the latest James Bond title sees you playing not as everyone's favourite spy, but as a villainous, former MI6 operative, involved in a power struggle between Auric Goldfinger and Dr. No. The game's title, in fact, refers to the prosthetic eye the title character has been fitted with, courtesy of Goldfinger himself. The concept is certainly very exciting, but the play dynamic sadly fails to capitalise on this. In fact, there is very little to set this title apart from countless other first-person-shooter games currently available. The only redeeming factor for this title, it seems, is the fact that as you progress, your prosthetic eye gains new abilities; such as being able to see through walls, or put up magnetic shields around your character. Other than that, however, the game feels much like a standard, uninspired shooter - blandly detailed environments, and hordes of generic foes do little to improve this. Furthermore, the game never really gives much insight into the title character, and the concept of playing as a villain is certainly underemphasised. The game rewards you for performing "evil" acts such as using foes as human shields - exactly the sort of action performed by countless good guys in many FPS titles that are far more enjoyable than this. Ultimately, the game feels like little more than a sloppy attempt at what could have been a very exciting twist on the Bond series - better luck next time.

Very plain FPS - lacking anything to make it stand out in a crowded genre. Definitely shaken, not stirred

66

2 guns are always better than one.... [*what an insightful caption, Ed*]

Fight Club

PlayStation 2
Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 439.00 · **Developer:** Genuine Games · **Publisher:** Vivendi Universal
Supplier: Nu Metro [011] 340 9345 · **Genre:** Fighting · **Reviewer:** Miktar Dracon
Minimum Specifications: 1- 2 Players · 70kb Memory · Analogue compatible · Vibration compatible

You are not your license. You are not how many polygons you can push. You are not the console you use. You are not the sum of your un-lockable content. You are not your pathetic game dynamics. You are the all-singing, all-dancing insipid title."

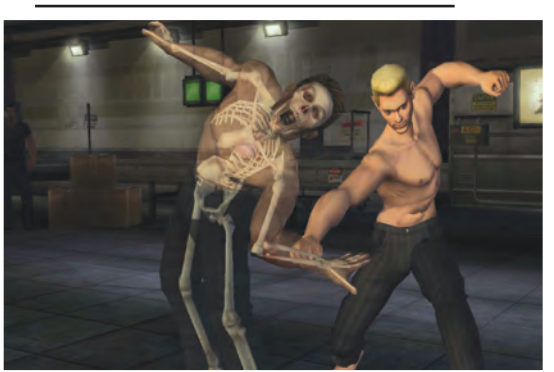
Yes, that was a quote from the movie, cunningly altered to suit the review of the game - based loosely (very loosely) on the movie with the same name. Developed by Genuine Games, Fight Club attempts to create an intense experience that combines the characters, settings, and story elements from the movie, with a 'realistic' fighting system. Cut away the marketing nonsense and you're left with a completely half-hearted attempt to create a fighting game that can barely stand on its own two feet.

Aside from completely missing the aim of the movie (thankfully included with the game, redeeming it slightly), Fight Club seems to have been hastily thrown together with glaring shortcomings. Characters tend to only mouth their words and insults (making it look as if sound files are missing), while the laughable story-mode barely manages to limp along as you fight character after badly modelled character from the movie.

It's a shame to see really good concepts, such as 'bone breaking' during fights (where you actually see the skeleton of your opponent and the offending bone snapping), and the persistent bruising/bleeding, go to waste on such a completely lacklustre title.

Great movie, shame about the game

40



Ghost Recon 2

PlayStation 2
Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 429.00 · **Developer:** Ubisoft · **Publisher:** Ubisoft
Supplier: MegaRom [011] 234 2680 · **Genre:** Tactical · **Reviewer:** Adam Liebman
Requirements: 1 Player · 225KB memory · Analogue compatible · Vibration compatible

Taking on the role of an elite military operative known as a "Ghost", the sequel to the dismal (at least in its PS2 incarnation) Ghost Recon, revolves around you and your unit having to put a stop to an impending war between North and South Korea which, without your intervention, would certainly develop into a globe-threatening nuclear war. The game's perspective has shifted from the first to the third-person, and takes on the form of a highly linear and very non-specific outdoor shooter. Although you have three other team members under your command, issuing commands is rendered largely worthless, thanks to what often appears to be inebriated artificial intelligence. The stealth aspects of the game are just as pointless - no matter how well hidden you believe yourself to be, the enemy always seems able to hit you at will. Of course, this concept doesn't work both ways, and you'll often have a hard time spotting your camouflaged enemies. Add to this the frustration induced by limiting save points, the routine of dying and reloading, and replaying already completed sections of levels; and the game soon becomes very tiring. The lack of any split-screen multiplayer modes only serves to make matters worse. The unpolished feeling that surrounds the single-player mode leaves Ghost Recon 2 sorely wanting. With no redeeming factors, Ghost Recon 2 can be considered, at best, as being thoroughly average and uninspired.

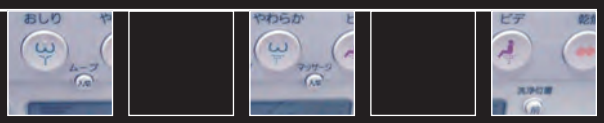
Typical but flawed and frustrating shooter. Likely to disappoint

63

Jackson lights a fart in the hilltop bunker

Killing hay bales - important military work...3

Tech Musings: The Japanese Loo



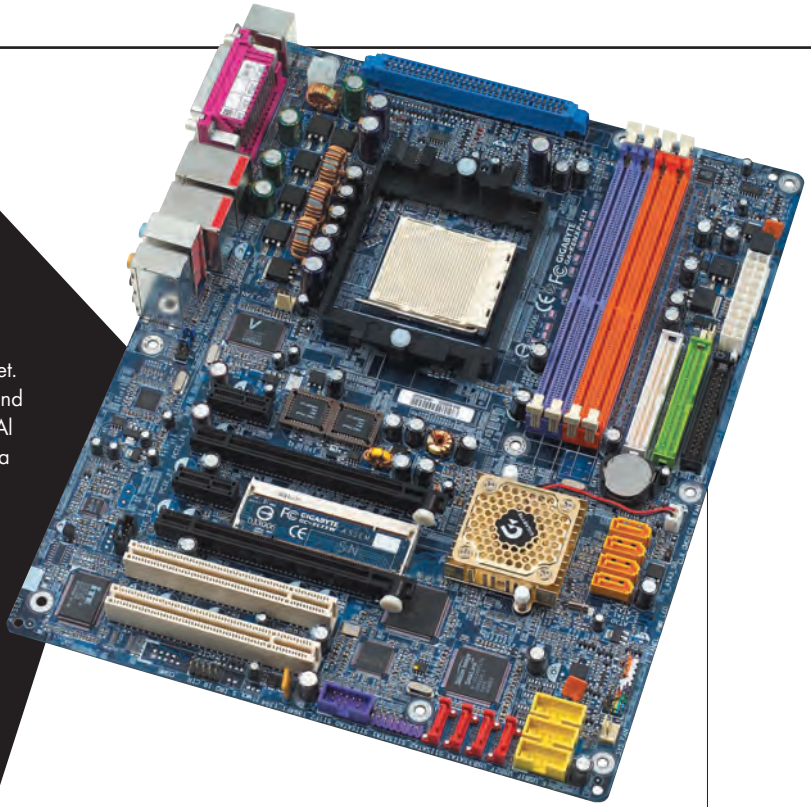
words james francis

I'm not extremely demanding when it comes to heading towards the toilet. Usually this exercise involves the following: a clean toilet, toilet paper, and sometimes a book or magazine. That should be enough, unless you're Al Bundy, who placed a lot of importance on a good toilet. Still, there it was a matter of a comfortable seat and a good flushing sound.

Not in Japan, though. In the land of the Rising Sun they have something called a Washlet; probably the most advanced toilet in the world. This isn't something you'll find in a millionaire's house, straight from a Neiman Marcus catalogue, either - more than half the households in Japan have one of these babies. So to them it's a standard affair, but to me it seems like the Frankenstein Rolls Royce of bathroom decor - awe-inspiring, intimidating, and downright scary at the same time.

The Washlet is a feature-filled toilet. Most notable is that it has a self-cleaning nozzle that sprays warm water at your posterior (or groin, depending on your gender and whether it was a number one or two) for maximum cleaning efficiency. That's not too advanced, nor is the heated, germ-resistant seat, except that said seat can also massage you for extra comfort. A new feature, added recently, is an ozone spray that keeps the air crisp and fresh, despite the best efforts of a post-chilli stew binge. Some models even boast armrests for the elderly, air-conditioning for your bathroom, or glow in the dark for those nocturnal missions where you are too damn lazy to find the light switch. You can even get a feature that slows down the lid as it is closed, to stop it from being slammed. Almost every aspect of these toilets can be adjusted - the water pressure, the temperature, and so forth. Plus, most new models are pressure-sensitive, so they go into power-saving mode when not sat on.

If that isn't enough for you, there's another quirky device on the Japanese market which is hands-over-feet superior to that German invention, which scolds men for standing while peeing. Japanese women generally don't want people to hear the noises emitted from a stall when they are in there, so they would keep flushing the toilet (which wasted a lot of water). It wasn't long before sound boxes were invented that constantly made the sound of flushing water when you turned them on...
So, are we just not as advanced as the Japanese? Perhaps the West has lost the plot on what a good toilet experience should be. Or perhaps it's just balance. The alternative in Japan, after all, involves squatting over a porcelain depression in the floor...



New Gigabyte motherboard

The new Gigabyte GA-K8NXP-SLI board is predominantly aimed at gamers. It features support for AMD Athlon64FX/64 processors, as well as PCI Express SLI and Serial ATA II. The board also boasts Dual Power and security technologies and carries the nForce4 chipset.

Air Flo EX controller for PC and Mac

Nyko Technologies, renowned for their console controllers with ventilation for the hands, have released a console-style controller for PC and Mac. The game-pad includes dual analogue control sticks and an 8-way directional/point-of-view pad. Keys can be mapped to the various components, allowing games that weren't designed for a controller to be played with the Air Flo EX. As with previous Air Flo products, the device has ventilation holes and grooves that blow air over the user's hands, reducing perspiration. New to this version is adjustable air-flow intensity.

Thrustmaster T510 headphones

These headphones make use of HRTF (head related transfer function) technology to provide surround sound via two speakers. The set is compatible with Dolby Digital, Dolby Pro Logic II, and Dolby Headphone, which it decodes by means of a small decoder box. The overall design emphasises portability, and includes a holder with a clip for the decoder. Input is via optical connection, so there is some limitation as to what it can connect to. At present, this system is available only through Amazon.com.

Next GeForce chipset to power PlayStation 3

NVIDIA and Sony are collaborating on the design of the graphics power plant for the next PlayStation, which will be a variant of the next GeForce GPU series. Sony has opted to have the graphical element developed by a third party, due to the fact that this increasingly complex endeavour is best left to specialists in the field. The new chip is being designed to interface with the Cell processor that will be at the heart of the next Sony console - it is quite possible that it will be implemented in other consumer electronics devices that will also be powered by Cell.

Logitech Play Link

Logitech has introduced an easy-to-use wireless network adapter called the Play Link, which is designed to connect any two devices with standard Ethernet ports. It has a range of 30 meters, can penetrate walls, and features secure encryption. It currently operates on a frequency of 900MHz, yielding a bandwidth of 1.5mbps, but future models will make use of 2.4GHz transmissions. The product's most salient feature is the fact that it is completely plug-and-play, requiring no software drivers, configuration, or hardware tweaking.

LG KV3600

LG has introduced an innovative new gaming phone. The KV3600 is somewhat large by current standards, but this is due to the fact that it has two keyboards, two game-pads, a pair of stereo speakers, and an ATI graphics engine. Its most unusual feature, however, is a tilt sensor, which allows controlling games by tilting the unit from side to side - this control method is very suited to some types of games, such as snowboarding titles and the like.

Asus Vento 3600

Asus will be releasing a new gaming case that is said to combine practical features and style to "take high-performance gaming to the next level." The Vento 3600 is covered in a UV paint coating that gives off a shiny waxed look - its purpose being to prevent scratches. Another interesting feature is the front door which swings upwards. It has an 8cm fan at the front and a 12cm fan at the rear for efficient airflow and heat dissipation, as well as a side ventilation hole with an air duct. It is available in three colours - green, red and blue.

Creative keyboard

Creative has manufactured its very own musical keyboard which blends high-tech software with a customised keyboard to transform the PC work station into a music studio.

Prodikeys TM DM and Prodikeys TM Value are two versions of a music-and-PC dual keyboard, which integrates a velocity-sensitive 37-key MIDI keyboard with music controls (like Sustain, Octave Shift buttons, Pitch Bend and Volume Wheel), and an ergonomically designed PS/2 PC keyboard with Multimedia Playback buttons and programmable Hot Keys.

Prodikeys is designed to fit perfectly onto any desktop PC for work or music creation. The product is bundled with easy-to-use software which features six modes designed for playing, learning and creating music.

Users can select PentaTunes and FunTunes for instant access to the world of digital music, whilst Learn mode provides tuition on selected songs, from the library or downloaded from the Internet. In FixedChord mode and Intelligent Chord mode one can play ad-lib or along with a rhythm accompaniment, whilst Perform mode allows the user to explore up to 128 different instrument types and 100 rhythm types.

Features allow the user to sequence, record and save music creation in WAV, MIDI or MP3 format. The product includes a Hot Keys Configurations utility for customising applications, Web and keystroke access on the Programmable, Internet Hot Keys and MIDI keys. "Creative have come out with an exciting, interactive product that will enhance the digital lifestyle market. Users that want the best out of robust technology that is beneficial for both the home and work environments should consider this versatile device," says Atul Gupta, MD at Sahara Computers, official distributor of Creative products in SA.

The recommended retail price of the Prodikey TM DM is R799 Vat Incl. and the Prodikey TM Value is priced at R959 Vat Incl.

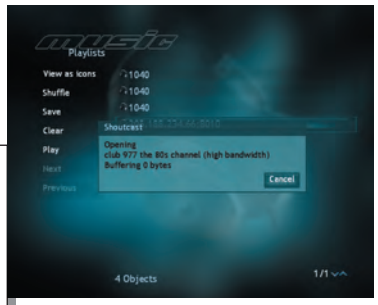
Video on Nintendo DS

Nintendo has announced an accessory for the Game Boy Advance SP and DS that will allow playback of audio and video media on the handheld consoles. Tentatively called the Play-yan, the unit is about the size of a game cartridge and connects in the same way. The device carries a headphone jack, allowing audio to be played directly or via the console's hardware. MP3 audio and a variety of video formats are supported, and storage is provided by SD cards plugged into the adapter.

Xbox Media Center

Created by dedicated programmers who simply love the Xbox and its potential power, the Xbox Media Center is an application that can be installed on an Xbox, allowing owners of Microsoft's big console to listen to streaming music, view images, check out the weather and listen to MP3 collections. It's the all-in-one wonder application for those who don't want to muck about with the trials and tribulations of the Personal Computer. It can even stream the newest movie trailers, if that's the kind of thing you enjoy.

Run your Apps
Since applications can be installed on the Xbox, the XBMC also includes a useful application launcher so you can jump straight into the game of your choice, even while playing your music in the background.



Shoutcast on the Xbox
With full support for Shoutcast streams, if your Xbox is plugged into an active Internet connection you can search for and play Shoutcast streams of your choice, without needing a computer at all.

The Image Collection
An included image viewer lets you grab images from network shares and then keep them on your Xbox, so you can show your friends all the useless photos or joke images you've collected over the years without needing to take along your entire computer.

Video Support
Videos (basically DVDs or movie files) can also be copied to the Xbox and played back later.

Make your Xbox a jukebox
Using a standard network cable, XBMC can copy music and movies from any computer connected to the same network your Xbox is connected to. The music is copied to the Xbox's personal hard-drive where it can be played later at leisure.

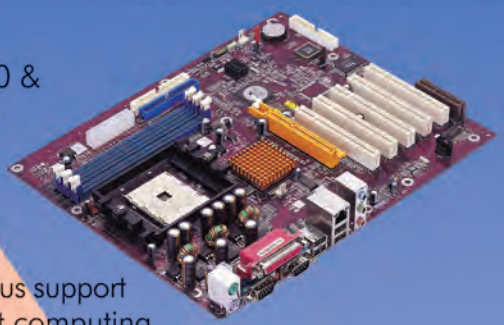
ECS ELITEGROUP

The Ultimate Gaming Motherboards

KN1 v.1.0

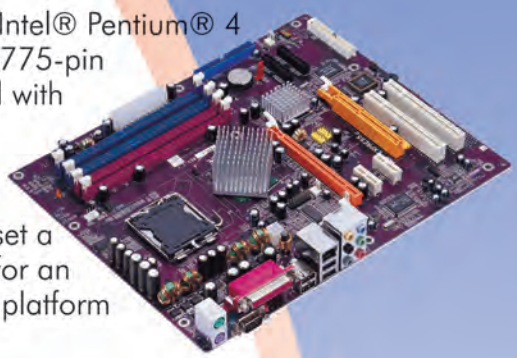
Uses NVIDIA single chip to leverage powerful 64-bit architecture of the AMD Athlon® 64 FX, AMD Athlon 64, & AMD Sempron™ processors, which support up to AMD FSB 1000 MHz CPU & DDR400 MHz memory to bring the latest in technology to the AMD platform.

K8T800-A V1.0



Based on K8M800 & VT8237 chipset & supporting latest AMD Athlon® 64 processor with HyperTransport to provide simultaneous support for 32-bit & 64-bit computing with 1600 MT/S system bus & DDR400 to deliver enhanced system performance. Best choice for K8 platform!

915G-A v1.2A



Incorporates the Intel® Pentium® 4 Processor in LGA775-pin package coupled with Intel ® 915G & ICH6 chipset, supporting latest 800MHz FSB to set a new benchmark for an effective desktop platform solution.

PF4 v.1.0 & PF21 v.1.0

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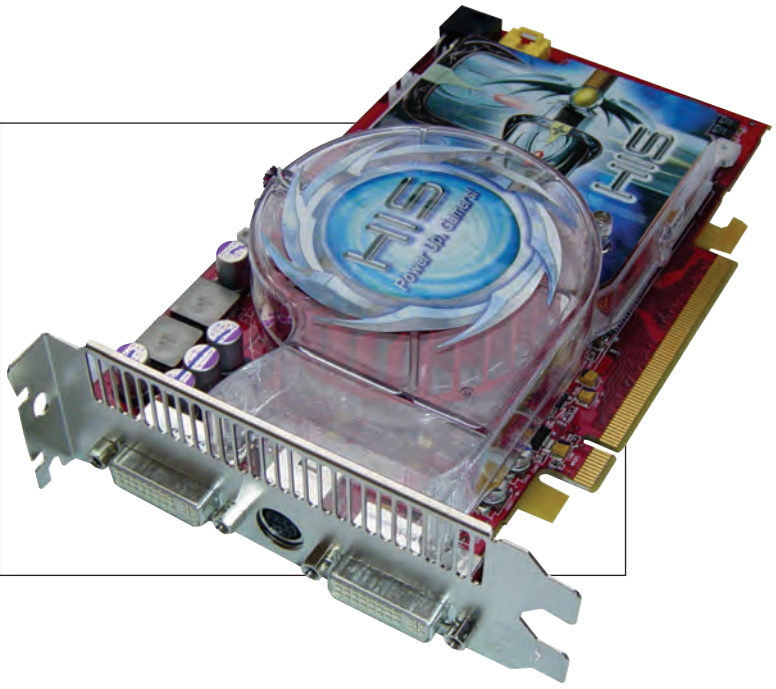
HIS X850 XT VIVO Edition

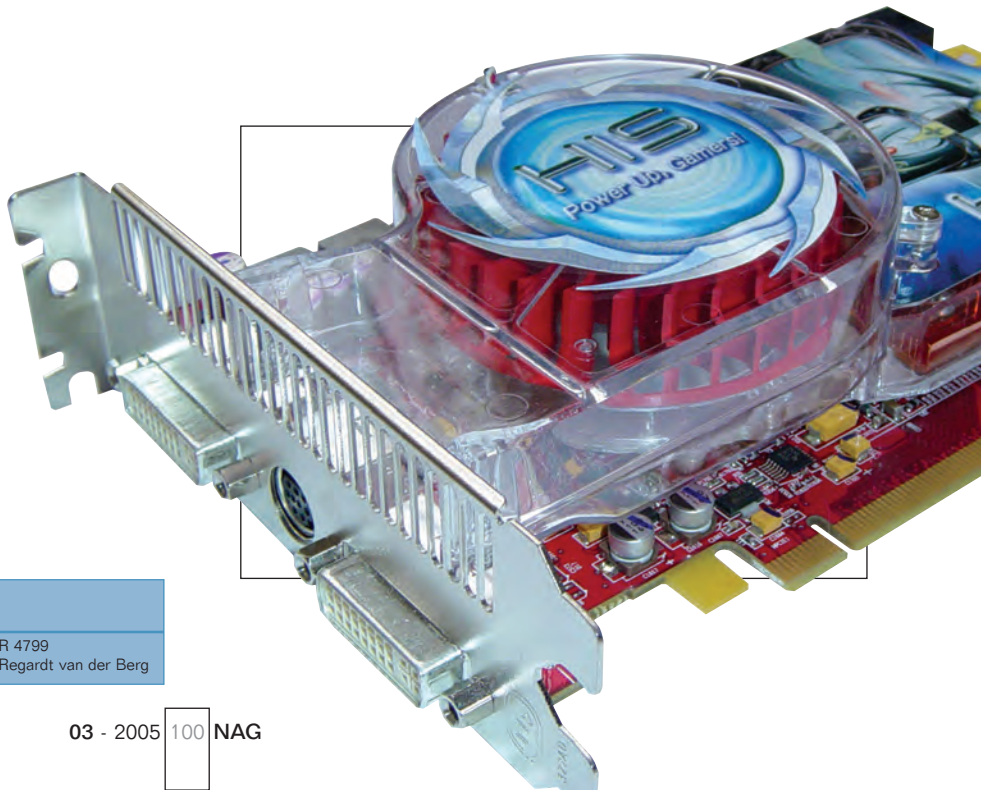


Just when you thought you had saved enough money for the latest high-end ATI graphics card, the X800 XT Platinum Edition, ATI releases a model that supersedes it. Based on the R480 core, the X850 XT does not feature major performance increases over its predecessor, the X800 XT (R430), but was developed natively for PCI-Express. So what is all the fuss about? Well, for one thing ATI has developed the X850 on a new fabrication process, which enables them to "theoretically" push the frequency of the GPU (Graphics Processing Unit) much higher than they could with the X800's GPU. This new fabrication process is possible due to improved technology, which allows ATI to make use of optimised silicone to create this new line of graphics processors. There are three graphics cards in the X850 range; the X850 Pro, X850 XT, and the X850 XT Platinum Edition.

This month I was fortunate enough to get my hands on the HIS X850 XT VIVO Edition and, even though I wasn't exactly over the moon with the performance results, the technology that drives this card was what impressed me the most. This card features 256MB GDDR3 and a core frequency of 520MHz. Its memory operates at a data rate of 1.08 GHz. The X850 XT range uses a cooling solution that is very new for ATI and is quite similar to the infamous "leaf blower" which was first seen on the NVIDIA FX 5800. For those who do not know what I am referring to; this card uses a two slot cooling solution, which means that it features a rather large heat sink and fan. The noise produced by this cooling fan is not as loud as that of the "leaf blower" but, when you play a game or run a benchmark, the fan noise is very noticeable. When you are simply working in a 2D environment, such as Windows, the fan is throttled down to a very quiet operational mode. Interestingly enough, I measured a temperature of between 45 °C and 53 °C on various places around the card when running the benchmarks. The X850 XT VIVO Edition features two DVI-ports. Don't worry if you don't have a monitor with a DVI cable. In the box you will find two DVI to VGA adapters. There is also an S-Video port that allows you to plug a video source into the card. You can also display a video feed from the card to a television; and the cable, to perform this task, also comes included. Looking a little closer at the power connector on this card you may notice that it is not your normal 4-pin power connector. This is because the new X850 range requires more power that its predecessors. For this reason you will also find a 4-pin to 6-pin power cable in the box. On the software side, I was a little disappointed not to see a larger selection. As is, you will find a copy of Counter-Strike Condition Zero, Cyberlink Power DVD, as well as ULEAD Video Studio 7 SE. There's also a DVD with various other software titles.

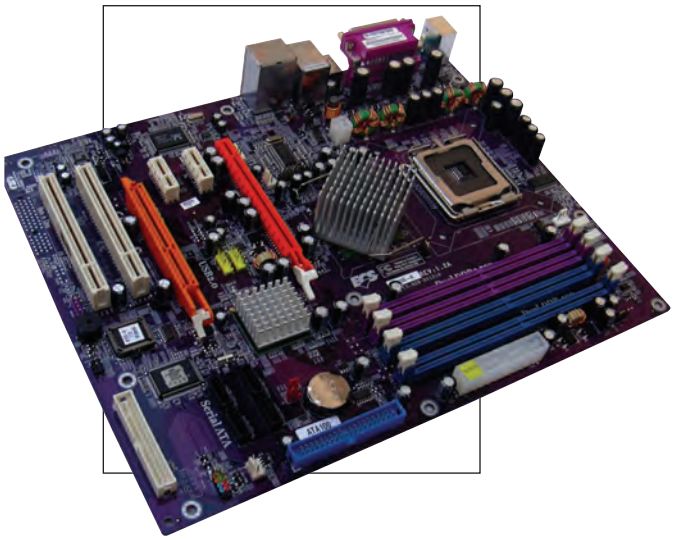
I benchmarked this card using an MSI 925X Neo motherboard with a 3.4 GHz Extreme Edition Processor. The test board also sported 1024 MB of DDR2 533 MHz RAM and a Seagate Barracuda 120 GB SATA hard drive. None of the hardware was over clocked and I used the very latest Catalyst 5.1 drivers. The first benchmark I ran was 3DMark05 build 1.2.0. It produced a score of 5 617 while 3DMark03 build 3.6.0 produced a score of 12 582. I also ran Aquamark 3 with the Direcpll.dll hotfix and the HIS X850 XT VIVO Edition achieved a score of 69 056.

According to ATI, the X850 range of graphics cards will be more readily available than its extremely scarce X800 predecessors - mainly thanks to the new fabrication process. Only time will tell if this is true though.



Plus:	Native PCI-Express | Great performance
Minus:	Performance only slightly faster than X800 XT
Supplier:	Sonic Informed [021] 551 8218
Internet:	www.sonicinformed.co.za
RRP:	R 4799
Reviewer:	Regardt van der Berg

ECS 915G-A Motherboard



When the specifications for the Intel 9x series chipsets were released, the lower-end 915 offering appeared to be the ideal solution to me, as it was capable of supporting both the old and new standards in RAM modules, while delivering all of the major benefits of its higher-end stable mate. The 925 package only supported DDR2, meaning a costly upgrade path for users wishing to take advantage of the new feature set.

Add new PCI Express graphics boards into the equation, and suddenly gamers wanting to upgrade would not only need a new LGA775 CPU, but DDR2 RAM modules and a new high-end graphics card. That's barely an upgrade anymore, and more like purchasing a whole new machine.

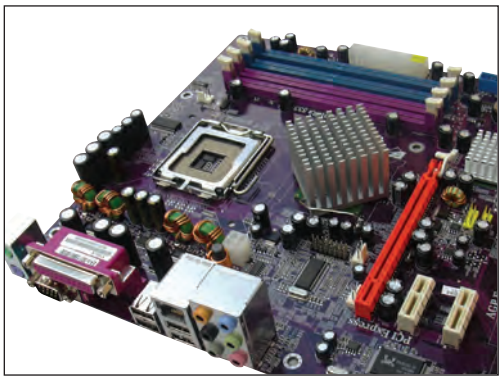
For this reason, the adoption of the latest chipsets has been rather slow. Only those with deep pockets have been able to build PCI-E DDR2 monster gaming systems, while the majority have skimped and saved and tried to extend the life of existing hardware as far as possible.

Taiwanese motherboard manufacturer, ECS, appears to have solved this all-in-one upgrade dilemma with this solution - the 915G-A. This product not only brings the benefits of DDR2 and PCI-E to the table, but also includes both standard DDR and AGP slots for older hardware. A phased upgrade is thus made possible.

Unfortunately, it doesn't quite work out that way. Rather than the AGP 8x standard, which Intel has ceased to support, this ECS offering uses a proprietary AGP Express bus. More of a glorified PCI slot than a full-blown AGP. If you're thinking of extending the life of a high-end AGP graphics card with this board, you'll be disappointed by the performance hit it will take. What's more, not all AGP 8x cards will work with AGP Express. In fact, the list of supported offerings on the ECS support page is not comprehensive. Insert a card not on this list, and the system refuses to boot. Worse, the support page warns of potential damage to the board. Fortunately for me, it just refused to start and the AGP card continued to work.

And in terms of RAM? By putting 2 DDR2 and 2 DDR slots on the board, ECS has traded compatibility for a maximum possible total of 1GB using 512MB modules. Not a train-smash, but a definite future bottleneck.

You can run both AGP and PCI-E slots at the same time, making the use of these motherboards for multi-monitor systems an excellent idea. In fact, besides the criticism levelled above, the board performed extremely well with a high-end PCI-E graphics card, conventional DDR, and a bog-standard 3.0GHz P4 installed. And that's a lovely shade of purple the PCB is finished in.



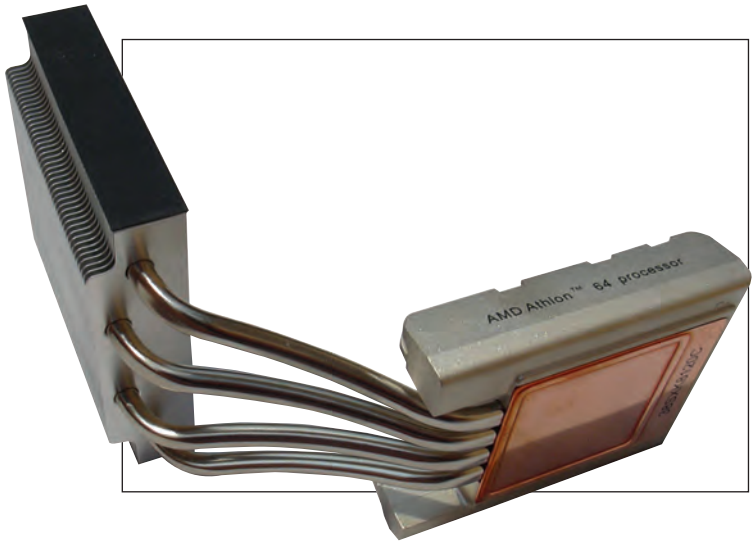
Plus:	Dual-compatibility means easier upgrade path		
Minus:	Limited performance and headroom		
Supplier:	Esquire Technologies [012] 657 1111	RRP:	TBA
Internet:	www.esquire.co.za	Reviewer:	Russell Bennett

Shuttle XPC SN95G5

The specification sheet of this Shuttle XPC SN95G5 SFF unit suggests that the company has released what could well be its finest gaming performance offering ever, thanks to the power packed into the nVidia NForce 3 Ultra chipset sported by the motherboard lurking in this box. But, can the G-series setup, which has just been superseded in expandability by the slightly larger P-series units, support this goal or will it limit this XPC to the realm of mediocrity? Let's take a look…

Aesthetically, the subtly redesigned exterior of this offering scores brownie points because it is now really stylish, with a glossy black finish to the face and black aluminium side panels. Everything, from your disk drives to the front panel connector, is concealed behind hinged covers. It's inside that this offering really gets interesting though. The nForce 3 Ultra chipset is essentially an evolution of the standard nForce 3 250, which itself is a fantastic performer particularly in gaming terms. The Ultra really just brings a faster HyperTransport link, now capable of running at 1GHz, which ought to give a few more benchmark points across the board.

Interestingly, rather than using the nVidia Gigabite Ethernet (GbE) controller featured on-board with this chipset, the Shuttle makes use of a Marvell solution which, unfortunately, makes the use of the lovely nVidia hardware-based firewall features impossible. Apart from this, however, this XPC is a great little SFF solution. There's more than enough storage capacity on the board itself with two IDE and two SATA ports available for a total of six connected disks. The chassis itself is only capable of housing one optical, one hard disk drive, as well as one floppy drive (should you choose to install the latter). The additional drive space found on the newer P-series Shuttle chassis would be welcome on this solution.



An AGP 4X/8X slot handles graphics duties, but, as the slot is on the edge of the board the use of a range-topping, dual-slot card is out of the question. The 240W PSU also restricts the user from fitting a best-of-the-best AGP graphics solution from nVidia, making ATI GPUs the only real choice for those looking for maximum 3D performance.

CPU cooling is taken care of by the ICE cooling solution which will be familiar to users of older Shuttle systems. The ICE cooling solution features heat-pipes which draw heat from the heat sink attached to the CPU, into a radiator-like arrangement and is completed by a large system fan to draw cool air over the unit. This functions very well indeed keeping processor temperature down to a very manageable level even in this space-limited environment.

Overall performance is fabulous. An Athlon 64 3000+ processor, widely regarded as one of the best gaming CPUs available, is utilised in this system and produces top-notch benchmark figures. The system comes with 512MB DDR 400 and a Radeon X800 Pro installed. In 3DMark 05 it scored 4338 points - well ahead of the older 3.06GHz P4 system this graphics card usually runs on.

This XPC could really be a stellar, very mobile gaming system. There are compromises, particularly in the area of storage and a high-end power supply, but with well-chosen peripherals these could be avoided and a real monster machine created. Alternately, Shuttle needs to put this platform into a P-series chassis with its 3 drive bays and 350W PSU.

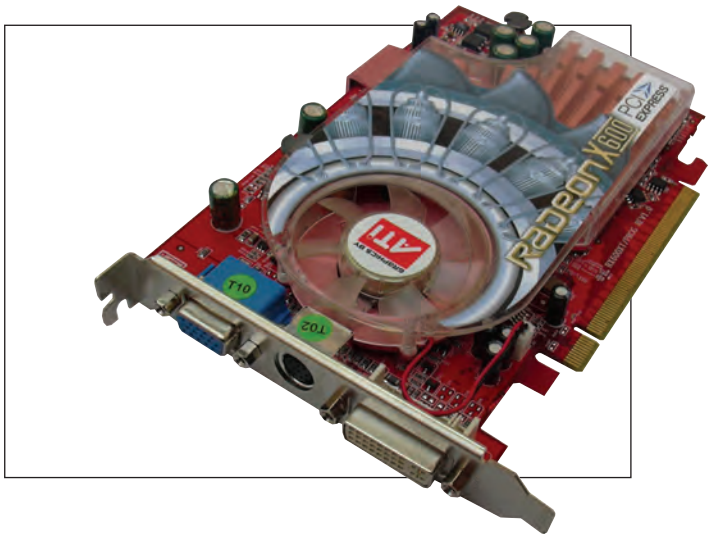
Plus:	Stylish looks | Quiet operation | Nice gaming CPU
Minus:	Very limited space | Can't fit high-end graphics board
Supplier:	Proton Technology [011] 486-0748
Internet:	www.prototech.co.za
RRP:	R 4300.00
Reviewer:	Russell Bennett

GeCube X600 XT Extreme

The last X600 offering I tested failed to really impress. It was a budget way of getting into PCI Express technology, I know, but an overall lacklustre 3D performance left me feeling that the architecture itself was perhaps not all it was said to be. So when an X600 XT (manufactured by GeCube) arrived at the office, I decided to take another look at the range.

In brief, the X600 is to PCI Express what the 9600 was when AGP was still the top dog. The RV380 GPU is an evolution of the RV350 GPU. It is now coupled with 128MB of fast video RAM, a decent clock frequency at 365MHz for the RAM and a 500MHz core. However, the performance such statistics hint at never actually materialised, although this offering was better than the original version I tried. It is, without a doubt, a step up from the 9600 it replaces, particularly when it comes to applying post-processing shaders and effects. With the latest Catalyst driver, version 5.1, installed on Windows XP SP2, the MadOnion / FutureMark synthetic benchmarks placed the X600 in the entry-level segment. At standard resolution without FSAA or AA enabled, this GeCube board hits 1630 in 3DMark, and just manages to stay above 1000 with these two image-enhancing tweaks enabled (at 4X and 8X respectively).

Admittedly, these are the highest figures I have seen for this budget GPU, making the GeCube X600 XT Extreme the highest-performing of the crop tested thus far. Now, perhaps being overexposed to high-end parts has distorted my view, but for a gamer the lacklustre performance of this GPU family, from ATI, really leaves the impression that not as much effort was spent on creating the card, as was spent on deciding how to market it cheaply.



Plus:	Best performing X600 tested
Minus:	A below par 3D offering
Supplier:	Sonic Informed [011] 880 2684
Internet:	www.sonicinformed.co.za
RRP:	R 1400.00
Reviewer:	Russell Bennett

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Zalman CNPS7700-Cu High Performance Ultra Quiet CPU Cooler

Zalman has super-sized their notorious 7000 CPU cooler to give us the 7700Cu all copper High Performance Ultra Quiet CPU cooler.

Relying heavily on the award-winning cooling design of the 7000, and employing Zalman's Computer Noise Prevention system, the upgraded 7700Cu weighs in at a hefty 918g and measures 136mm in length and width and 67mm in height.

The 7700Cu consists of 134 copper plates, interlocked at their base, to form the radial cooler. Machined and polished, the base allows for optimum cooler-to-die surface contact, enabling a cooling surface area which equates to a whopping 3268cm^3. Integrated into the cooler is a cage-less 120mm fan able to have its rpm adjusted between 1000rpm and 2000rpm, courtesy of the included FAN MATE 2 fan speed controller.

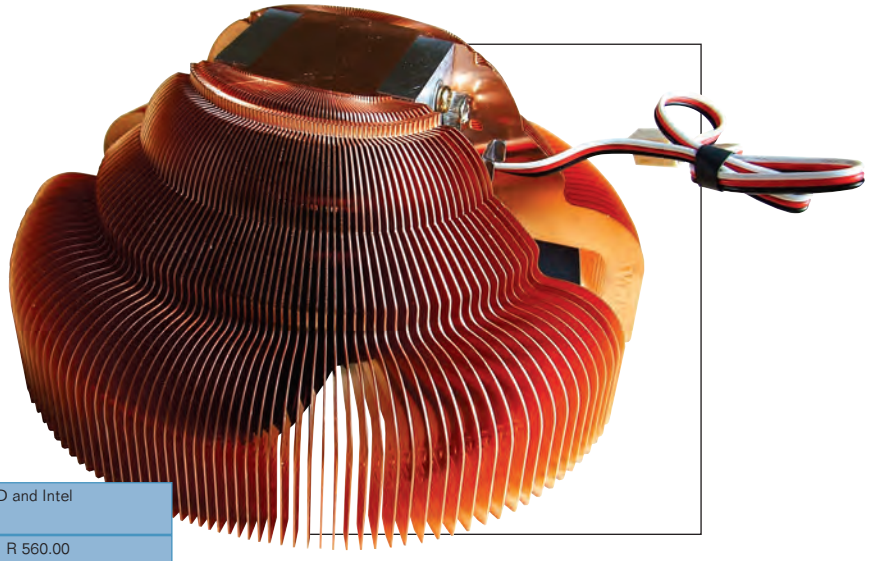
Another upgrade, the FAN MATE 2 improves on previous shortcomings of the FAN MATE 1, namely cable length and a tricky speed control knob.

As we have come to expect from Zalman, the package is well presented with all the necessary bits and pieces required for easy mounting to any of the compatible sockets, namely Intel's LGA775 and Socket 478, or AMD's Socket 754 (Sempron), 939 and 940.

It is important to note at this juncture that not all motherboards or chassis/cases are compatible with the 7700Cu. This is due to its size, weight, and mounting requirements.

Easily installed, the 7700Cu is a powerful almost silent cooler even with the fan set to maximum rpm. The incredible size of the cooler enables it to simultaneously cool the CPU, RAM, motherboard, and North-Bridge and even, to an extent, the graphics card.

Taming the intense heat of a Prescott processor at full tilt quietly, is no small feat. The 7700Cu does it well, exceptionally well indeed. This is a testament to the silent, yet powerful cooling ability of Zalman's new giant.



Plus:	Quiet | Powerful cooling | Universal - works on both AMD and Intel
Minus:	Few compatible motherboards
Supplier:	Frontosa [011] 466 0038
Internet:	www.frontosa.co.za
RRP:	R 560.00
Reviewer:	Victor Moore

Logitech Z-5500

If you have never heard the legendary Logitech Z-680s in action, you do not know what you have missed. If you have, then their successor, the Z-5500, will blow you away. These are more than merely a set of computer speakers. They can be connected to your DVD player, Xbox, PS2, and CD player. This speaker set consists of 5 satellite speakers which are rated at 62 Watt RMS (the centre speaker is 69 Watt RMS). The subwoofer is massive and is rated at a thumping 188 Watt RMS. Total RMS power output is 505 Watts, and believe me, it is loud. One of the things that I really enjoyed about the Z-680 was its clarity at loud volumes. The Z-5500 is the same - if not better. Even at full volume the satellite speakers produce crisp sound without any distortion of high pitched tones. In reality, I was only able to listen to the Z-5500 at about half its volume, which was already so loud that the neighbours started complaining. If you have the facility, you can also connect your computer or DVD player to these speakers via an optical cable. Other connectivity options include coaxial and the standard three RCA jacks. The Z-5500 includes a hardware Dolby Digital decoder which is Dolby Digital Pro Logic II certified. It is also THX certified and features DTS 96/24 surround sound. The Control Panel, which is basically the heart of this speaker set, offers a myriad of features. There are various sound effects you can select; such as Pro Logic II Movie, an effect ideal for watching DVD movies as the sound is decoded to give you the full cinema effect, and Pro Logic II Music, which offers a similar effect but is more suited to music. You can also adjust the bass, surround, and centre speaker levels, and a full-function remote control is included. If you enjoy loud quality sound, the Z-5500 is well worth the investment. I know … I am saving for a set.

Plus:	What's not to like here?
Minus:	If it is too loud, you are too old
Supplier:	DCS [011] 466 5099
Internet:	www.logitech.com
RRP:	R 3899.00
Reviewer:	Regardt van der Berg

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writer: Regardt van der Berg

Power

Benchmarking

It is very difficult to accurately test a power supply without a very expensive oscilloscope. Therefore, for this month's roundup, I used the second best tool - a digital multimeter. I installed each power supply on my test machine and connected the multimeter to both the 12V and 5V rails. Rails… rails, what are those? Well in the "industry", rails are what we refer to as the "power line" for, say, the 12V cable.
Looking at the 12V and 5V rails, you should notice that many of the power supplies don't produce a clean 12V output. This is very common - there is a 5% variation threshold which allows each rail to be either 5% more, or 5% less that its "rated" value. As long as the power supply output is within this 5% threshold it is acceptable. Once it produces an output that fluctuates more than what is acceptable, you should look for a different power supply. ATX maximum and minimum voltages:

Rail	Min	Max
5V	4.75V	5.25V
12V	11.4V	12.6V

Once I had the power supply installed, I checked its voltages when the computer was booted up and running idle. I then proceeded to run the Passmark Performance
test to put the computer under load, and I again checked the voltage. Where there was fluctuation in the voltage, I noted this. It's very important to take note that even though there are various software applications available and most motherboard BIOS's are able to report the voltage rails of a power supply, these are very rarely accurate. Testing a power supply directly, with an oscilloscope or multimeter, is recommended.

The power supply is often overlooked when it comes to troubleshooting your computer. In many cases, an underpowered system could cause crashes, lock-ups, and a number of other unwanted events. Also, when upgrading your computer, the power supply is often overlooked and you could run into problems when you want to run that new, power-hungry, graphics card you have just installed.

So what power supply should you buy? Generally speaking, the "no-name" brand power supplies or those that often come preinstalled with a new case, are more than powerful enough for most home or office users. Once you start with case modification or high-end system building, however, you might find that you need more power. Many enthusiasts are also quite fussy when it comes to power, and rightly so. Certain power supplies are prone to voltage fluctuation; caused when a particular power supply is not able to sustain a solid voltage and jumps between, say, 11.92V and 12.20V. This phenomenon is definitely not ideal but is quite common.

One of the biggest, and often unanswered, questions is: "… what strength power supply should I buy?" Generally speaking, most consumers should find that a 300W PSU will be sufficient for a computer that has a standard CPU, hard drive, optical drive, and memory. But I am sure that most of our readers don't just have standard computers to power. Ideally, you should calculate the power consumption of your computer - this will allow you to know how much power you will need. There are various tools available on the Internet to help you with this job. One of these can be found at the JS Custom PC's Website at (www.jscustompcs.com/power_supply/). All you need to do is to select the hardware, you have installed in your computer, and the tool will calculate the approximate power your components consume. I calculated the following based on a high-end computer [*see insert*]: The recommended power supply for this computer is 398 Watts.

Once you have calculated the approximate amount of power your computer requires, I suggest you aim slightly higher when you actually purchase a power supply. A 400W power supply should be sufficient, but I would suggest a 450W PSU (or higher if you can afford it).

CPU:	3.4GHz Intel Pentium 4 Extreme Edition (103W)
Graphics:	ATI RADEON X800 (93W)
Memory:	Two sticks DDR (20W)
Hard Drives:	Two (50W)
Optical Drive:	DVD-Writer (25W) DVD/CD-RW Combo Drive (30W)
PCI Cards:	PCI Network Card (4W) Sound Blaster (7W) Additional PCI Card (average) (5W)
External Devices:	USB 2.0 Device (5W)
Other Accessories:	Two 80mm fans (4W) Two Cold Cathode Tube Lights (6W) Internal 6-in-1 memory card reader (10W) Motherboard (25W) Floppy Drive (5W) Keyboard and Mouse (5W) CPU Fan (3W)

Test PC by Light Edge Technology

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

GeniSAT 250W

It is somewhat unfair to compare this PSU to the other units in this roundup, but admittedly, it held up quite nicely under the LGA775 power requirements. This PSU though, is targeted at entry-level computer setups such as Sempron and Celeron based systems. It features four 4-pin peripheral power connectors, two 4-pin floppy drive connectors, one 4-pin CPU connector, and one 20-pin motherboard connector. Another indicator that this is an entry-level PSU is the short cables, making it only suitable for mini- or micro-ATX cases. Even though the output voltage produced by this PSU is within the 5% variation range, I would rather recommend a higher rated PSU, especially when you are connecting a high-end graphics card and extra hard drives, for example. For basic home use or office use, this PSU would perform just fine.

Value for Money: 70	Features: 60	Overall: 65

Plus: Capable of running a power PC **Minus:** Not recommended at a rating of 250W
Supplier: TVR [011] 807-1390 **Internet:** www.tvr.co.za **RRP:** R199

GeniSat 300W

The GeniSat 300W is the larger brother of the previous model and unlike it, this one really impressed me. In all fairness, this is still not the sort of PSU I would hook up to a high-end system, but for everything else it performed rock solid. Looking at its cables, you will see a bit more than your usual cable layout. It features six 4-pin peripheral power connectors, two 4-pin floppy drive connectors, one 4-pin CPU connector, one 6-pin auxiliary connector, and one 20-pin motherboard connector. Even though it is just a 300W power supply, it is very well ventilated. It sports one 80mm fan, but has a fairly large ventilation grid at the bottom of the unit. What impressed me most about this unit though was its stability under load. Its rails did not fluctuate at all, which is one of the signs of a great power supply.

Value for Money: 75	Features: 70	Overall: 72

Plus: Solid rails **Minus:** No SATA power connector
Supplier: TVR [011] 807-1390 **Internet:** www.tvr.co.za **RRP:** R250

Antec NeoPower 480

This is truly an innovative PSU. The NeoPower 480 features a cable management system that allows you to only connect the power cables you actually use. In the box you will find a set of cables which can be plugged directly into the power supply. These cables range from normal 4-pin peripheral connectors to the new 6-pin PCI-Express power connector. There is also a dedicated fan-only power connector, allowing this PSU to control your case fans and ensuring that they do not spin at full RPM when not needed. Looking at the unit, I really liked the Titanium grey finish which would look great in a black case. At the bottom of this PSU is a large 120mm fan and at the back is a ventilation grid. The 12V and 5V rails produced rock solid voltage output. Even though the 12V rail was running below 12V it did not budge - even under load conditions.

Value for Money: 80	Features: 90	Overall: 85

Plus: Cable Management System **Minus:** Rail produced 11.89V
Supplier: Frontosa IT [011] 466-0038 **Internet:** www.frontosa.co.za **RRP:** R1350

Proton 500W

The second PSU submitted by Proton Technology, is a monster in comparison to its counterpart. This particular model comes in a box that ships with a 3-prong power cord. The unit itself features three 80mm fans; one at the back (naturally), one at the bottom, and one on the front-end (where the cables protrude). Even though this is a 500W PSU, it isn't high-end, per se. It features the same basic cable layout as found on other, older, PSUs. This includes four 4-pin peripheral power connectors, two 4-pin floppy drive connectors, one 4-pin CPU connector, and one 20-pin motherboard connector. I would have liked to see the addition of a SATA power connector or even a 24-pin power dapter for today's new motherboards such as those featured on LGA775 boards. I was also a little disappointed because the 12V rail fluctuated quite a bit.

Value for Money: 70 | **Features: 70** | **Overall: 70**

Plus: Good price for a 500W PSU **Minus:** 12V rail fluctuates a lot
Supplier: Proton Technology [011] 486-0748 **Internet:** www.prototech.co.za **RRP:** R355

Light Edge 350W

This is a basic, run of the mill, PSU. It is rated at 350W, which is touching the line between entry-level and more advanced usage. Its "no-name" brand status, however will exclude it from a list of must have PSUs for more experienced computer users. But for system builders and office or home users, this PSU will be sufficient. Interestingly enough, it features a 24-pin motherboard connector which is great as it supports most new motherboards. Sadly, if you own an older motherboard that requires a 20-pin motherboard connector, you will not be able to make use of this PSU. Ironically, it does not feature any SATA power connectors, but has the other basic connectors such as four 4-pin peripheral power connectors, two 4-pin floppy drive connectors, and one 4-pin CPU connector. It also sports a 6-pin auxiliary power connector. Looking at the multimeter readings, I was pleased with the voltages produced by this PSU.

Value for Money: 60 | **Features: 60** | **Overall: 60**

Plus: 24-pin motherboard connector **Minus:** No SATA connectors
Supplier: Light Edge Technology [021] 510-8270 **Internet:** www.lightedge.co.za **RRP:** R300

Light Edge 450W (LC-B450E)

Unlike its slightly lower rated stable-mate, this 450W PSU didn't live up to its rating. When I connected this device to the multimeter, I was satisfied with the 5V rail which produced a normal reading. The 12V rail, however, produced a below 12V reading - even in idle conditions. Putting it under load only dropped the reading on the multimeter further. Looking at the other PSUs in this range, this brand seems to under perform in its 12V rail. This is not necessarily a major issue, especially for home or office users, as the voltage is within the 5% variation range. But for gamers or seasoned computer users, this might pose a bit of a problem. Looking at its cables it features eight 4-pin peripheral power connectors, two 4-pin floppy drive connectors, one 4-pin CPU connector, a 20-pin motherboard connector, and a 6-pin auxiliary power connector. It also sports two 80mm fans; one situated at the back and one at the bottom.

Value for Money: 65 | **Features: 60** | **Overall: 62**

Plus: Eight peripheral connectors **Minus:** 12V rail
Supplier: Light Edge Technology [021] 510-8270 **Internet:** www.lightedge.co.za **RRP:** R410

Light Edge 500W (LC-B500E)

This 500W unbranded PSU from Light Edge is not much more expensive than its "no-name brand" counterparts, but offers quite a bit more in terms of output voltage. Connecting this power supply to my test system and measuring its rails, produced satisfactory output voltage results. I only noticed a slight fluctuation in its 12V rail that measured about 0.02V in variation. The unit itself features two 80mm fans; one at the back and one at the bottom. I was pleased to see that this PSU featured very long cables, making it a great PSU for larger cases. It also features eight 4-pin peripheral power connectors, a 20-pin motherboard connector, two 4-pin floppy drive connectors, one 4-pin CPU connector, and a 6-pin auxiliary power connector. I would have preferred to see a SATA power connector included though.

Value for Money: 70 | **Features: 70** | **Overall: 70**

Plus: Long cables **Minus:** SATA power connector
Supplier: Light Edge Technology [021] 510-8270 **Internet:** www.lightedge.co.za **RRP:** R471

Light Edge 400W (LC-B400ATX)

This is the 400W model from Light Edge. The first indication that this is aimed at a slightly more serious market is the longer-than-average power cables which I thought were very handy. This PSU features a bit extra in terms of the actual power connectors too. It features eight 4-pin peripheral power connectors, two 4-pin floppy drive connectors, one 4-pin CPU connector, and a 6-pin auxiliary power connector. On the power supply, you will find two 80mm fans; one situated at the back and one at the bottom. The 5V rail produced very acceptable results and maintained a solid voltage even under load. The 12V rail let this unit down and under load dropped to below 12V. Even though this is within the 5% variation range, it isn't ideal for high-end systems.

Value for Money: 65	Features: 60	Overall: 62

Plus: Eight peripheral connectors **Minus:** 12V rail
Supplier: Light Edge Technology [021] 510-8270 **Internet:** www.lightedge.co.za **RRP:** R355

AOpen 400W (Z400-08ATA)

Essentially, 400W should be more than sufficient for most computer systems and this AOpen 400W PSU does the job effortlessly. There are only two things that count against this model though - its power cables are a little on the short side, which will result in a very uncomfortable installation in larger cases, and I detected a very slight fluctuation in both its 5V and 12V rails when I connected my multimeter. This fluctuation, even though only about 0.02V, is not ideal for computer enthusiasts, but it shouldn't be a problem for home or basic office users. I was impressed that this PSU featured a 24-pin motherboard connector and one SATA power cable. The other power cables include seven 4-pin peripheral power connectors, two 4-pin floppy drive connectors, and one 4-pin CPU connector.

Value for Money: 70	Features: 75	Overall: 72

Plus: 24-pin motherboard connector | SATA power connector **Minus:** Short power cables
Supplier: Rectron [011] 203-1000 **Internet:** www.rectron.co.za **RRP:** R342

Genex 550W (CWT-550AD)

This Genex branded PSU is rated at 550W and is relatively heavy. It also offers a little more than your average PSU. It sports two fans; an 80mm fan at the back of the unit and a 90mm fan at the bottom. The 90mm fan is translucent and if you have a passion for modding you could easily add an LED to it. I really liked the fact that the 20-pin motherboard power connector is wrapped in a nylon mesh which helps to keep the cables neat and tidy. The other cables include eight 4-pin peripheral power connectors, two 4-pin floppy drive connectors, one 4-pin CPU connector, and a 6-pin auxiliary power connector. There is also a 3-pin thermal control connector which plugs into your motherboard and will allow your computer to control the fans on this PSU.

Value for Money: 75	Features: 75	Overall: 75

Plus: Thermal control fans **Minus:** 12V rail just below 12V
Supplier: Genex Solutions [021] 511-8887 **Internet:** www.genex-sa.co.za **RRP:** R718

AOpen 450W (Z450-08ATA)

The AOpen 450W is slightly more powerful than its 400W counterpart, but I detected a little more fluctuation on this one when I connected the multimeter on the 12V rail. The 5V rail, on the other hand, produced acceptable results. Having said that, this PSU is more than sufficient for home or office users wanting a little more power than is usually required. As with its 400W counterpart, I was again a little disappointed to find that it featured relatively short cables which would make it a tad difficult to use in larger cases. On the plus side though, this 450W PSU also sports a 24-pin motherboard connector and one SATA connector. The other power cables included on this power supply are seven 4-pin peripheral power connectors, two 4-pin floppy drive connectors, and one 4-pin CPU connector.

Value for Money: 70	Features: 75	Overall: 72

Plus: 24-pin motherboard connector | SATA power connector **Minus:** 12V rail fluctuation
Supplier: Rectron [011] 203-1000 **Internet:** www.rectron.co.za **RRP:** R403

AOpen 500W (AX-500A)

By the looks of this PSU you can almost immediately see that it produces more power than its lower rated counterparts. This 500W PSU features a large 120mm fan at the bottom, while the back simply features a honey-comb mesh ventilation system. Sadly, this AOpen PSU features the same problems as the other two in this month's roundup. It has fairly short cables and its 12V rail fluctuates a little more than one would like for a high-end computer system. The AOpen 500W also sports a 24-pin motherboard power connector and a SATA power connector. The other power cables include seven 4-pin peripheral power connectors, two 4-pin floppy drive connectors, and one 4-pin CPU connector. Even though this PSU is rated at 500W, which is more power than most people would need, it would be a great unit to include in an office or home user PC that needs to power many peripherals.

Value for Money: 65 | **Features: 75** | **Overall: 68**

Plus: A lot of power for the average person **Minus:** 12V rail
Supplier: Rectron [011] 203-1000 **Internet:** www.rectron.co.za **RRP:** R677

Antec SmartPower 350

This Antec PSU falls in the budget Antec range and is very well priced. One of the major benefits of this model is that you get a brand-name PSU at a very reasonable price. The SmartPower 350 features a 90mm fan at its underside and an 80mm fan at the back. Looking at its power connectors, there are seven 4-pin peripheral connectors, two 4-pin floppy connectors, two SATA connectors, one 6-pin auxiliary connector, and the usual 4-pin CPU and 20-pin motherboard connectors. This PSU also sports a 3-pin fan signal connector, allowing you to use one of the many applications on the Internet to monitor the fan speeds of your PSU. Looking at the voltage rails; the 12V rail dropped a little below 12V when I put the computer under load, and the 5V rail remained stable.

Value for Money: 80 | **Features: 70** | **Overall: 75**

Plus: Price **Minus:** 12V rail fluctuated slightly
Supplier: Frontosa IT [011] 466-0038 **Internet:** www.frontosa.co.za **RRP:** R375

Proton 300W

This 300W PSU from Proton is another "no-name" brand model. It is rated at 300W and should be fine for entry-level use. This PSU features one 80mm fan which, even though it spins quite profusely and can be noisy, keeps it running at a cool 29 degrees (even under load). Looking at its cables, it features four 4-pin peripheral power connectors, two 4-pin floppy drive connectors, one 4-pin CPU connector, and one 20-pin motherboard connector. I was a little disappointed with the multimeter results, before and after I put this power supply under load. In idle mode the 12V power connector produced 12.30V, while its average under load was 12.05V. Sadly, this PSU's voltage fluctuated quite a lot between 12V and 12.30V, which is something you don't want happening in your system. The 5V rail was a lot more stable and produced 5.08V under load without fluctuating.

Value for Money: 60 | **Features: 60** | **Overall: 60**

Plus: Price **Minus:** 12V rail fluctuates a lot
Supplier: Proton Technology [011] 486-0748 **Internet:** www.prototech.co.za **RRP:** R185

Antec TruePower 330

This is definitely one of the better PSUs in the 300W-350W range. It sports seven 4-pin peripheral connectors, two 4-pin floppy drive connectors, one 6-pin auxiliary connector, two SATA connectors and the usual 4-pin CPU and 20-pin motherboard connectors. What I also liked about this product was the inclusion of two fan-only power connectors - this allows you to connect your system fans directly to the TruePower 330 which will regulate the fans' speeds. Also attached is a 3-pin fan monitor connector allowing you to monitor the speed of the fans connected to this power supply. The Antec TruePower 330 produced rock-solid 12V and 5V rail voltage outputs. Even under load conditions the multimeter did not detect any voltage changes. At the back of this power supply you will find, not only an 80mm fan, but also a 4-pin peripheral power connector allowing you to power up a device without opening your case.

Value for Money: 80 | **Features: 75** | **Overall: 75**

Plus: Rock solid 12V and 5V rails **Minus:** 12V rail reading just under 12V
Supplier: Frontosa IT [011] 466-0038 **Internet:** www.frontosa.co.za **RRP:** R520

Antec TrueBlue480

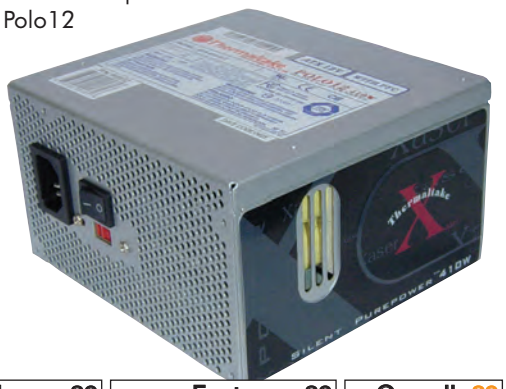
The Antec TrueBlue480 is the type of PSU I would recommend to someone who wants more than the average amount of power with a little bit extra. The little bit extra I am referring to, is the blue LED inside this PSU, which lights up the two fans situated at the back and bottom of this unit. You will also find a 4-pin peripheral power connector at the back of this PSU, making it easy to power a peripheral without opening your case. Even though the 12V rail produced a reading of just under 12V, this PSU provided a rock-solid supply of power even under load conditions. Looking at its power cables it sports the usual 4-pin CPU connector, 20-pin motherboard connector, six 4-pin peripheral connectors, two SATA connectors, and one 6-pin auxiliary connector. It also has two power connectors for your case fans, as well as a 3-pin fan monitor cable to connect to your motherboard.

Value for Money: 85 | **Features: 75** | **Overall: 80**

Plus: Rock solid 12V and 5V rails | Blue LED **Minus:** 12V rail reading just under 12V
Supplier: Frontosa IT [011] 466-0038 **Internet:** www.frontosa.co.za **RRP:** R930

Thermaltake Polo12

The Polo12 is actually more of a computer cooling kit than just a PSU. The box includes various accessories such as a CPU heat sink and fan, which can be used on Pentium 4 and AMD K7/K8 systems, as well as a 120mm case fan. Both these are adjustable using the supplied fan controllers (you can either use the front mount or rear mount bracket). The PSU itself is rated at 410W and has a 120mm fan with a ventilation grid at the back of the unit. One of the things I really liked about this PSU, was that each cable is sleeved. This makes a big difference once installed and helps keep your case clutter free. The connectors include nine 4-pin peripheral connectors, two SATA connectors, two 4-pin floppy drive connectors, and the usual 20-pin motherboard and 4-pin CPU connectors. The Polo12 also features a blue LED that highlights the 120mm fan.



Value for Money: 89 | **Features: 89** | **Overall: 89**

Plus: Sleeved cables | CPU and case fan | Price **Minus:** Slight fluctuation in 12V rail
Supplier: Corex [011] 707-5000 **Internet:** www.corex.co.za **RRP:** R773

Thermaltake PurePower 480

This PSU from Thermaltake is rated at 480W and forms part of the Xaser series of products. It features individually sleeved cables. I also liked the matte black finish that seems to be scratch resistant. The PurePower 480 features two 80mm fans, one at the bottom of the unit and one at the back. On the right side of the unit you will see a ventilation grid - this is to cool the capacitors situated just behind it. The connectors include nine 4-pin peripheral connectors, two SATA connectors, two 4-pin floppy drive connectors, a 20-pin motherboard connector, as well as a 4-pin CPU connector. The peripheral connectors also feature a new plug design that allows it to be removed from a device much easier than was possible before.

Value for Money: 85 | **Features: 80** | **Overall: 82**

Plus: Sleeved cables **Minus:** Slight 12V rail fluctuation
Supplier: Corex [011] 707-5000 **Internet:** www.corex.co.za **RRP:** R643

Zalman 400W ZM400B-APS

Zalman is a very popular brand internationally. Only recently have we started seeing its products hit our shores. The Zalman 400W ZM400B-APS PSU is a fairly plain looking unit with a matte black finish. Once you test it under load conditions though, you should notice that this is a rock-solid performer. Connecting the multimeter, it showed a steady voltage reading at just under 12V which did not budge even in idle conditions. I was a little disappointed to see there was not much in terms of extras with this PSU even at its fairly hefty price tag. Something like sleeved cables would have been a welcome extra. As-is, you will find seven 4-pin peripheral connectors, two SATA connectors, one auxiliary connector, two 4-pin floppy drive connectors, as well as a 4-pin CPU connector and a 20-pin motherboard connector. If you are not into extras but looking for a sturdy performance, this PSU will suffice.

Value for Money: 80 | **Features: 70** | **Overall: 75**

Plus: Rock-solid performance **Minus:** Price
Supplier: Frontosa IT [011] 466-0038 **Internet:** www.frontosa.co.za **RRP:** R920

ThermalTake PurePower 360

The ThermalTake PurePower 360 is pretty much an entry-level unit but offered slightly more stable voltage rails than its "no-name" brand competitors. Having said that however, I was still a little disappointed in the fluctuation of the 12V rail. Looking at the unit in more detail you will find two 80mm fans, one at the back and one at the bottom of the unit. It also features six 4-pin peripheral connectors, two 4-pin floppy drive connectors, a 6-pin auxiliary connector, one 4-pin CPU connector, and a 20-pin motherboard connector. There is also a 3-pin fan monitor connector, which you can plug into a fan monitor header on your motherboard. This will allow a software application to monitor the fans inside the PurePower 360. As I have mentioned before, I was a little disappointed with the voltage fluctuation, especially on the 12V rail.

Value for Money: 78 | **Features: 75** | **Overall: 76**

Plus: Price **Minus:** 12V rail fluctuation
Supplier: Corex [011] 707-5000 **Internet:** www.corex.co.za **RRP:** R513

ThermalTake PurePower 480 Butterfly

This PSU actually forms part of a cooling kit. Not only will you find the 480W PSU in the box, but you also get a case fan with a front panel fan speed controller, which will allow you to adjust the speed of both the case fan and the power supply fan. The unit itself features two 80mm fans and I particularly liked the scratch resistant matte black finish. A feature people with a case window will appreciate, is the removable side plate on this PSU - which reveals a translucent panel through which the LED inside the PSU shines. This LED flashes 7 various colours which look quite funky. Another handy feature is that each set of cables is individually sleeved. The power cables include two SATA connectors, eight peripheral connectors, two 4-pin floppy drive connectors, and the usual 4-pin CPU connector as well as the 20-pin motherboard connector.

Value for Money: 80 | **Features: 85** | **Overall: 82**

Plus: Sleeved cables | Case fan **Minus:** Price
Supplier: Corex [011] 707-5000 **Internet:** www.corex.co.za **RRP:** R950

Thermaltake Silent Purepower 560

The Thermaltake Silent Purepower 560 is a monster of a PSU, not in size but in sheer power. If you run a myriad of peripherals (and then some) off your PSU you should be aiming for this one. It even ships with an adapter to turn the 4-pin CPU power connector into an 8-pin connector as used on server motherboards. This PSU features two fans; one 80mm fan at the back and a 90mm fan situated at the bottom of the PSU. The power cables include eight 4-pin peripheral connectors, two 4-pin floppy drive connectors, two SATA connectors, a 6-pin auxiliary connector, a 4-pin CPU connector, and a 20-pin motherboard connector. Each cable is also individually sleeved, making it easy to tidy up your case once installed. I was fairly impressed with the multimeter readings and I only detected a very slight voltage fluctuation on the 12V and 5V rails.

Value for Money: 80 | **Features: 80** | **Overall: 80**

Plus: 560 Watts **Minus:** Pricey for the average user
Supplier: Corex [011] 707-5000 **Internet:** www.corex.co.za **RRP:** R1225

Vantec ION2

This 350W PSU is surprisingly quiet even though it hosts a 120mm fan at the bottom. This large fan is temperature controlled, which means it will only speed up if the PSU starts to get warm. The glossy black finish looks funky and even extends to the cable sleeves which are also completely black. The power connectors featured on this power supply include six 4-pin peripheral connectors, two 4-pin floppy drive connectors, two SATA connectors, one auxiliary connector, a 4-pin CPU connector, and a 20-pin motherboard connector. I really liked the 4-pin peripheral connectors which feature a new "easy to remove" grip that actually push the connectors out of the socket when you squeeze them. Looking at the multimeter reading under idle and load conditions, I was a little disappointed to see a constant 0.30V fluctuation in the 12V rail.

Value for Money: 78 | **Features: 75** | **Overall: 76**

Plus: Price | Sleeved cables **Minus:** 12V rails
Supplier: Frontosa IT [011] 466-0038 **Internet:** www.frontosa.co.za **RRP:** R450

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How to test a Power Supply's rails

Important: Testing a power supply is dangerous if you don't know what you are doing. I don't recommend that you attempt the following steps if you are not familiar with electronics and don't know how to use a digital multimeter. NAG cannot be held responsible for any damage caused to you or your computer by following these steps. You have been warned!
1.Switch your multimeter to the 20V DC position.
2.Take a free 4-pin peripheral connector and connect the multimeter as follows for either of these voltages (the black probe of your multimeter must always connect to the black pin of the connector, which is Ground).

To test the 12V rail.

Connect the black probe to either of the black connectors and the red probe to the yellow connector

To Test the 5V rail.

Connect the black probe to either of the black connectors and the red probe to the red connector

	12V idle	5V idle	12V under Load	5V Under Load
Antec NeoPower 480	11.89	5.11	11.88	5.1
Antec SmartPower 350	12	5.04	11.93	5.06
Antec TruePower 330	11.94	5.05	11.94	5.05
Antec TrueBlue480	11.94	5.02	11.94	5.02
AOpen 400w	12.16	5.09	12.06	5.11
AOpen 450W	12.14	5.06	12.03	5.08
AOpen 500W	12.04	5.02	11.93	5.05
Genex 550W	11.99	5.06	11.99	5.06
Genisat 250W	12.11	5.06	11.98	5.07
Genisat 300W	12.14	5.08	12.02	5.1
Light Edge 350W	12.22	5.05	12.13	5.07
Light Edge 400W	12.08	5.13	11.93	5.06
Light Edge 450W	11.96	5.08	11.81	5.11
Light Edge 500W	12.21	5.16	12.1	5.2
Proton 300W	12.3	5.04	12.05	5.08
Proton 500W	12.55	5.18	12.3	5.22
Thermaltake Polo12	12.1	5.12	11.96	5.15
ThermalTake PurePower 360	12.18	5.16	12.02	5.19
ThermalTake PurePower 480 Butterfly	12.12	5.16	11.95	5.18
Thermaltake Silent Purepower480	12.38	5.22	12.22	5.26
Thermaltake Silent Purepower 560	12.21	5.15	12.5	5.15
Vantec ION2	11.99	5.1	11.8	5.13
Zalman 400W ZM400B-APS	11.94	5.12	11.87	5.15

ASUS DVD Burners enable 16X Burning with 8X Discs

Although DVD burning technology has progressed to 16X, the supply of disc media supporting this new high-speed standard remains low. Even if you are one of the lucky few that is in possession of these expensive discs, you still have to worry about burning reliability unless you want a stack of overpriced coasters.

Optical drive makers, of course, won't let their technological advancements go to waste. Take ASUS for example, the company introduced an innovative feature called "Over-Speed Burning". This feature enables users to enjoy fast 16X burning with 8X discs, which are more readily available and more affordable. It's a cost-effective way to shorten burning time.

Double burning speed on dual-layer disks

Over-Speed Burning also supports double-layer disks, which offer large data capacity up to 8.5GB, roughly 2,000 MP3 songs. Most double-layer discs at the moment support 2.4X speed, meaning to burn a full disc takes approximately 40 to 50 minutes. 4X disks are available as well, but higher speed also comes with higher price. With Over-Speed Burning, you can burn an 8.5GB, 24X double-layer disk in only 26 minutes.

Disc quality detection for best burning speed

The advantages of Over-Speed Burning are pretty obvious. The one thing you need to pay special attention to is disc quality. Please make sure you purchase discs approved by the manufacturer of your drive. ASUS optical drives actually leveraged a mechanism for disc quality detection and intelligently adjust for the most suitable burning speeds to prevent poor quality and damaged discs.

In conclusion, if you know what to look for, enjoying the fastest burning speed doesn't necessarily have to mean emptying your wallet. DVD burners with Over Speed Burning are excellent solutions as the shortage of 16X and 4X dual-layer discs continue and these discs remain expensive.

Double layer burning comparison

Disc media	Burning speed	Burning time	Good	Bad
2.4X	2.4X	40-50 min	· Disc is easily attainable · Affordable	Long burning time
4X	4X	26 min	· Short burning time	Supply is low Very expensive
2.4X	Over Speed at 4X	26 min	· Disc is easily attainable · Affordable · Short burning time	High-quality discs needed

The Choice of Expert Gamers

ASUS Gamer Edition Cards Deliver Big Bang for the Buck

The launch of new titles such as Lineage II and Doom3 should propel a wave of system upgrade among serious gamers, since more powerful video performance are needed to smoothly run these latest 3D games. Taking into account that many gamers probably don't have huge budgets to enhance their gaming systems, ASUS, a leading provider of graphics solutions, recently introduced special Gamer Edition video cards, which offer explosive graphics at affordable prices.

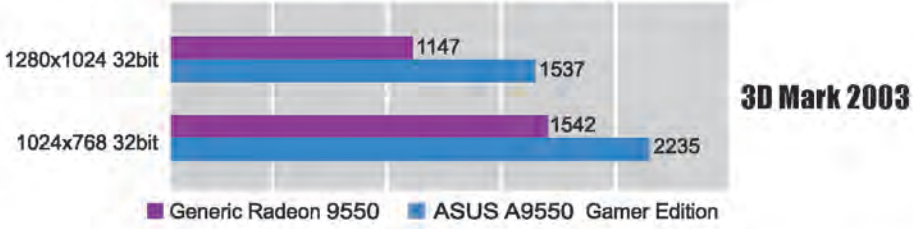
Improve circuitry and memory modules

Gamer Edition, as the name suggests, is specifically tailored for gamers by redesigning the circuit board, upgrading memory specification and incorporating unique features. Compared with solutions supporting the same graphics core, ASUS Gamer Edition cards deliver superior video performance.

For example, the ASUS A9550 Gamer Edition (supports ATI's Radeon 9550 chipset) provides a 25% performance increase compared with typical Radeon 9550-based graphics cards. And the ASUS V9250 Gamer Edition (supports Nvidia's FX5200 chipset) is 50% more powerful than other FX5200 solutions.

Same performance using lower-end graphics core

It takes strong engineering to be able to redesign the reference card. The ASUS V9999 Gamer Edition runs on Nvidia's 6800 chipset, but the card's performance actually approaches those supporting the next-level chipset, the 6800GT.



With higher-end memory, the prices of Gamer Edition cards are slightly higher than solutions using the same graphics core, but enable far better video capability. ASUS Gamer Edition is currently the choice of many gaming experts and users who demand top-of-the-line visual effects. Give a little more and you'll get back so much more.

news

Being a Foreigner in Japan

From the moment you step off the plane at either Kansai or Narita International Airport, you are in a different world entirely and you stand out like Ramjet in a crowd of happy people. The signatures of Japan fill your vision any way you look, starting with a cute anime dog explaining what to do at customs. But all the signs are in Kanji characters and there are probably no other westerners in sight. Of course, nobody speaks English.

A foreigner in Japan feels remarkably foreign, and anyone without a little knowledge of Japanese will find even the simplest undertakings extremely difficult. It is a highly efficient, organised society, but only for those who have grown up there. For outsiders, it is one huge maze. A prime example is the Japanese address system. While the major city avenues have names, the majority of streets do not. They only have numbers, and these are not up on any sign posts. To complicate matters further, the buildings themselves are numbered not in order of placement, but in order of construction - so you could very well have numbers 3 and 682 right next to each other. When giving directions, the Japanese will rather instruct you by using land marks, such as a Seven-Eleven or an arcade, or draw you a map.

Japanese people are extremely helpful towards foreigners and will go out of their way to understand you, even if it means a quick game of charades. This helped a lot when it turned out that my accommodation in Osaka, which I had booked and confirmed telephonically, did in fact not exist. Should this or any other mishap befall you, head for the nearest tourist information centre, located near any large train station. There you will probably find someone who speaks Engrish (this was not a typo).

review

My Neighbour Totoro

Format: Movie **Age Restriction**: All Ages
Availability: www.amazon.com - $ 9.98 excl. shipping

Before starting the review, I would like to point out that Amazon.com is offering this DVD at an exceptionally low price, and as such there is no excuse for not purchasing a copy. My Neighbour Totoro is possibly the most beautiful film ever produced in any genre or style. In the opinion of many critics, traditional animation has never reached a higher standard.

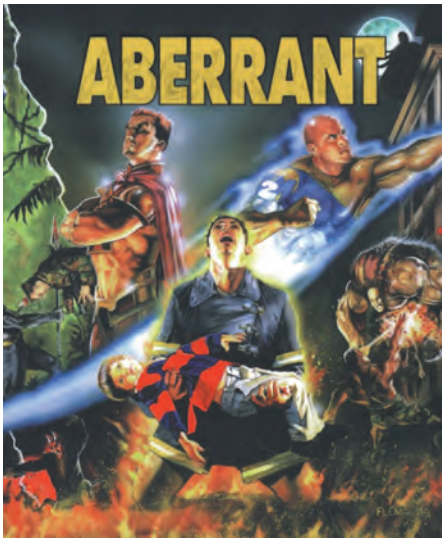
Each individual frame is a timeless work of art that any museum curator would be proud to exhibit. The writer, director, and producer is none other than Hayao Miyazaki. His trademark fairy-tale style reached maturity with this film, and the story is one that truly captured audiences of all ages and preferences.

As usual his characters are very young. Central to the plot are two little girls, Satsuki and Mei, whose mother is seriously ill and in hospital. They yearn to visit her, as her condition is worsening, but all hope seems lost until they stumble upon the abode of the mythical Totoro - a huge, furry, benevolent creature with magical abilities. There is also a strong Lewis Carol influence in this film, especially with the appearance of what looks very much like the Cheshire Cat.

rpg & books.

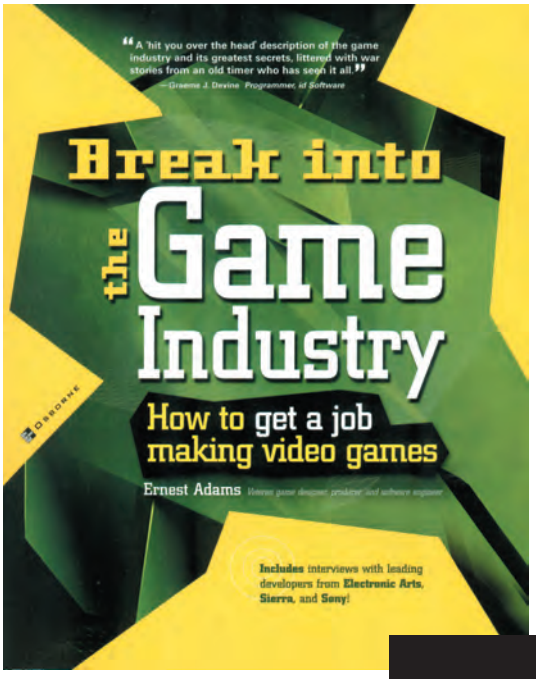
Aberrant

Sword & Sorcery, the d20 division of White Wolf Publishing, has converted White Wolf's Trinity Universe to suit Wizards of the Coast's d20 game system. This allows us a unique comparison between two very popular game systems - it is possible to see how the d20 system compares to White Wolf's regular ten sided success based rules.
For those who don't know, Aberrant is a game that allows the player to take the role of an evolved human being. These "new" humans are said to be the next step on the evolutionary ladder by some, and are called hideous mutants by others. Nicknamed "novas," these individuals display incredible powers that could only be described as super-heroic.
The game certainly smacks of an X-Men style universe; but considering the fact that there is no X-Men RPG out there, we'll forgive them for that. It features a very detailed and rich back story, allowing the players to enter a universe that is complex and exciting. Full of intrigue, politics, and general skulduggery; this back story allows for a far wider spectrum of role-playing possibilities than one may initially expect. Additionally, the flexible game and character generation systems allow players to come up with unique and interesting characters - without too much rule bending.
When comparing the new d20 rules to the older White Wolf system based ones, one cannot help but feel that the game has become overcomplicated. The White Wolf system has always placed role playing above dice rolling, whereas the d20 system (with its roots in the historically dice-heavy Dungeons & Dragons) demands many more skill checks and general polyhedron throwing. In short; the game's addictive flow (and smooth story line) has been interrupted by the addition of (perhaps unnecessary) rules and regulations.
The d20 system certainly has done a lot for role playing. It has created a lovely cohesion within different settings, removing the need to relearn (and get confused by) tons of proprietary rules.



Aberrant
Price: TBA

But, the system doesn't always improve games that are remade to suit it. Aberrant is clear evidence of this.



What could be more fun than to write a book on how to get into the game industry? Think about it. You get to do research on how the industry works and meet all the top players.
Then again, you also have to deal with sceptical publishers and a fickle audience who may still need convincing about the merits of making a career out of gaming. Can developing games really qualify as earning a living? Of course, games involve much more than just developing them. There is also the marketing, publishing, distribution, quality testing, and much more to consider.
With Break Into The Game Industry, Ernest Adams shows just what professional gaming is all about. Gaming, as an industry, is already rivalling movies as a popular form of entertainment. Quite simply, there is huge earning potential for people involved in AAA titles.
Adams, an ex-lead designer at Bullfrog Productions, has compiled a fascinating book that is both fun to read and informative. From looking at the origins of interactive entertainment (a nice euphemism for gaming if ever there was one), to examining the future of game development, Adams combines humour with a keen analytical eye.
Admittedly, some chapters might not seem relevant to the local market (such as intellectual property issues) but, these are very useful in gaining an insight into how the U.S. market works.
This is an informative read whether you are a keen gamer or just interested in gaining an understanding of the game industry. [*What's to understand? Ed*]

Break Into The Game Industry
By Ernest Adams
Price: R 216.95 (excl. delivery)

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www.kalahari.net
A WORLD OF GAMING ON YOUR DOORSTEP

movies & comics.

The Terminal
Tom Hanks and Catherine Zeta Jones star in Steven Spielberg's film about an East European stuck in an American Airport, because his visa has been cancelled. The premise of the film is a bit of a stretch (not that this has ever bothered Spielberg). It's a film you will either love or hate... with unbelievable characters, strained plot sections, and an overall smarmy feel that seems prevalent in Spielberg's latest work. We fall into the latter.

The Actors
Michael Caine stars in one of his rare comedy roles as a down-and-out actor who tries to take advantage of a gangster. Obviously, his plans don't go quite as planned, launching a series of funny and entertaining mishaps. While Michael Caine is great at high-brow comedy, he certainly isn't bad at this less cerebral stuff either. If you watch this film, not expecting deep meaning and life changing experiences, then you will probably enjoy it.

Bloodrayne Skies Afire
Digital Webbing
R34.50

Based on the computer game of the same name, Bloodrayne consists of a number of single episode stories following the adventures of Rayne, a half vampire monster hunter. If you have played the game and want more of the character you will like it. If you haven't played it, but have an interest in pretty girls with big blades who hack up the bad guys, you will still like it. The art is pretty, the storytelling is excellent, and you don't have to wait for next month to find out how the story ends.
Give it a try, and then try and stay away from knife shops.

Constantine
DC/Vertigo
R44.95

For those who just have to know what the plot in a film will be - especially before the film is released - you can now get Constantine, the movie adaptation. Anyone who has read the original Hellblazer will find that this title bears little resemblance to the original story - it is, after all, an American production. But don't give up on it for that reason. It is still a good story, with plenty of violence and suspense. A warning though, it has much the same attitudes to religion as those of The Exorcist. So if amorality offends you, maybe you should give it a skip.

Johnny The Homicidal Maniac
Slave Labor
R 24.50

Now this is one well named comic. There is no attempt at morals or justification in this comic. Just loads of good gothic gore and killing of innocent people. Actually, none of the people are innocent; they have all done something to deserve to die. Something like; not saying good morning, or chuckling at the strange gothic clothes he wears. If you like your violence edged with humour (like going to see slasher films for laughs), try Johnny for your written entertainment.

graphic novel

Not really a graphic novel as such, this is a collection of articles and discussions by Neil Gaiman, creator of the Sandman comics and the Neverwhere TV series.
This collection of articles goes into every aspect of his creative life, as well as seeing how his creations have touched the lives of others.
You'll never see a Goth again without wondering if he or she had read Sandman.

Hanging Out With The Dream King
DC Vertigo
R 154.95

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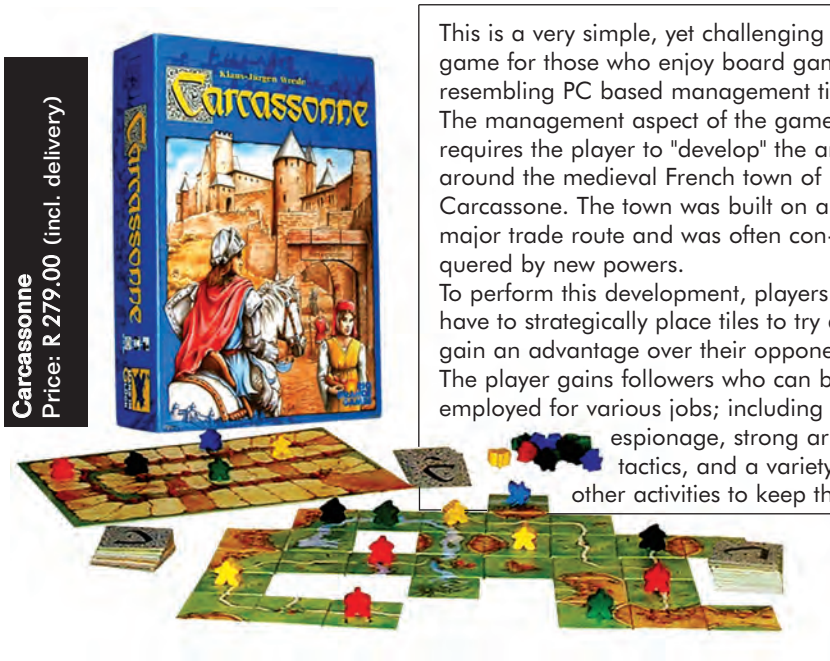
board games & strategy guides.

Carcassonne

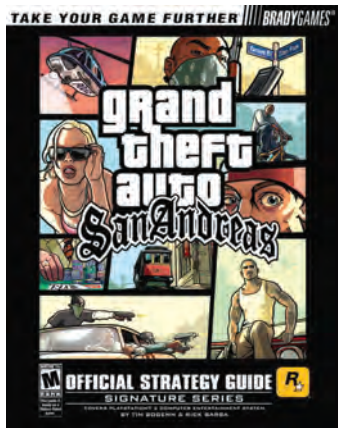


Carcassonne
Price: R 279.00 (incl. delivery)

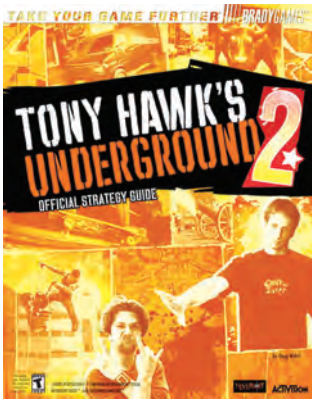
This is a very simple, yet challenging game for those who enjoy board games resembling PC based management titles. The management aspect of the game requires the player to "develop" the area around the medieval French town of Carcassone. The town was built on a major trade route and was often conquered by new powers.
To perform this development, players have to strategically place tiles to try and gain an advantage over their opponents. The player gains followers who can be employed for various jobs; including espionage, strong arm tactics, and a variety of other activities to keep the others from winning.
While the game is incredibly easy to learn, it has that rare quality that creates a true classic - the quality that enables a wide variety of strategic depth within the game itself. Each move made by each player in Carcassonne, can be vital to success in the game. And the overall nature of it makes it a simple, yet cerebral pursuit.
Carcassonne is a beautifully produced, sturdy product made out of stiff card and wooden playing pieces. The game is suitable for 2 to 5 players (aged ten and up) and will keep the players entertained for a long time.
Available from www.boardgames.co.za

GTA San Andreas Strategy Guide

You can place strategy guides in three broad categories: novel, vital and bible. This slots solidly into the third option, mainly because San Andreas is the kind of game where you can spend hours exploring it and still not find everything. Broken down in order of the missions, the guide also contains complete maps, hints on how to handle situations ranging from combat and racing to street gang wars. You'll also be enlightened on things to do in the game, such as great BASE-jumping spots and the locations of stores that unlock eventually. With other games, guides tend to be useful. But, after spending time with this tome it's become a vital component to GTA: SA.



Tony Hawk's Underground 2 Official Strategy Guide



A strategy guide is essentially about one thing and that's giving you the information you want to know. Bradygames have always had a generally high quality to their guides, providing all the information you need to get 100% out of the game as well as extra titbits just for the fun of it. Unsurprisingly, the Tony Hawk's Underground 2 official guide is professional and functional, falling short only in the area of miscellaneous information that would have filled the whole book a bit more. Regardless, the complete "skate-thru" (complete with detailed maps) covers every objective, guest skater and hidden area meticulously. As a strategy guide, it fails to disappoint.

Available from Pearson Education at itminds@pearsoned.co.za
Internet: www.bradygames.com

www.

Comrade Mario
www.aethiamud.org/communist_mario

He might be an Italian plumber who has given children all over countless hours of fun, but in reality Mario is actually a subversive force promoting Communism around the world. The first clue to this is the appendage he shares with commie supreme, Joseph Stalin. Then there is the fact that he always takes down a flag at the end of some levels - clearly the sign of revolutionary tendencies. If you need more; isn't King Koopa, after all, a king and Mario a rebel trying to dethrone the monarchy, or status quo? That, folks, is why the world is so screwed up; we've all turned into dirty red Commies!

Tag the world CS style
www.we-make-money-not-art.com/counter-street-art

Love it or hate it, you have to appreciate the fact that nearly everything in Counter-Strike can be vandalised with a team tag. Since placing your defining image on a slab of concrete isn't exactly a new concept, this site has created its own collection of tags for the game - based on popular brands and street designs familiar to the graffiti scene. It's no excuse to start playing the game again (unless you are drunk and there aren't any actual CS players involved), but it's a nice touch for street culture meets game culture.

Putting the V in Video Games
www.gamevideovault.com

Who needs to read? Apart from NAG, of course, there is no need to tax your brain with the cryptic figures writing is comprised of. Instead of reading, why not have everything delivered directly to your MTV-powered brain with this Site. It features news, reviews, and previews in video format from Gamer.tv (the channel that recently revealed it had more viewers than the collective readership of UK Gaming magazines). Sure, you might not want to venture there without a low bandwidth connection, but if you can carry the load, it's worth visiting.

SACM goes blogging
www.sacm.co.za

Sister magazine, SA Computer Magazine, has recently seen a re-launch, a new look, and a lot of new pages. On top of that; its online presence also got a revamp, opting for the lazy but very informative format of a news blog. In case you missed the hype; a blog is an easy-to-access collection of posts from the Site members, giving up to the minute news reports, meanderings or just downright nonsense. Not that you'll get anything but timely technology news on the SACM site, but it's only fair to warn you that some NAG folk are writing for it as well...

CES to the Core
www.core77.com/ces

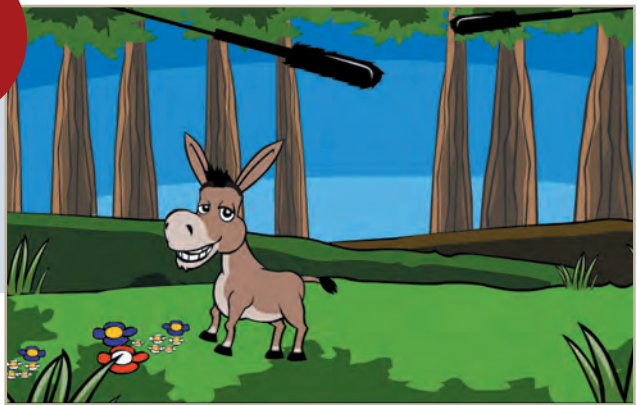
Design blog, Core77, decided to take a hop over to the halls of CES 2005 - the biggest consumer electronics show around. This year might have been filled with familiar MP3 players and gadgets which claim to be able to transform your living room into the Next Big Thing. But, the design gurus have still managed to dig out some very unique designs to look at, including a jacket that has built-in headphones for its cap. Nothing we'd buy, just yet, but we wouldn't mind a few free samples...

*Flash*light

ON THE CD

Shrek shorts

What happened behind the scenes? What didn't they show us? Who really is the father of Donkey's babies? These and other pointless mysteries get solved in this collection of flash skits based on Shrek and Shrek 2. Some miss but some hit with a vengeance; if anything, it's worth a chuckle for fans of the series.



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The Final Insult

Ramjet's Rampage

Don't let the doorknob hit you in the @$$ on the way out, Ramjet!

I am so tired of being a nice guy. You might think that this is a strange thing coming from me in particular, but honestly, I have been pulling punches for so long that my arms have started getting shorter. I have expended all my energy on restraining the boiling rage that gaming in this country breeds within my already withered and prune-like heart - it has finally been sapped. In short, no more mister nice guy. The gloves are off and the fists are encrusted in broken glass, a-la Jean-Claude Van Damme. It's time, boys and girls, to take a real long, hard, bloody-nosed look at the state of our local industry.

If I hear one more person tell me how wonderfully gaming in this country is growing, I believe that I will probably have to have my foot surgically removed from their nether regions. Gaming might be growing, sure, but it is growing not because of the way the industry is run… it is growing in spite of it. There isn't even a single culprit that can be singled out. The whole industry is in a mess. There are, of course, a few shining examples who stand head and shoulders above the rest in terms of doing things right. But, if I were to say "they know who they are," all the other idiots who are stuffing things up royally will think I mean them and carry on blithely running amok and driving the industry as a whole, to an inevitable and possibly final collapse. So, for those who are doing things right - tough! You're getting lumped in with the rest of the rabble. If you don't like it, do something to change the industry.

Where to begin? Shall I start with the money grubbing hardware suppliers who unashamedly charge exorbitant prices for the bits and pieces that we need to make our machines run at least passably? These fools really think they have pulled the metaphorical wool over our eyes when, in truth, any consumer with only a rudimentary skill in math (and I am talking chimpanzee level here) can figure out that the overseas prices don't quite correlate with our own - even with inflated import duties.

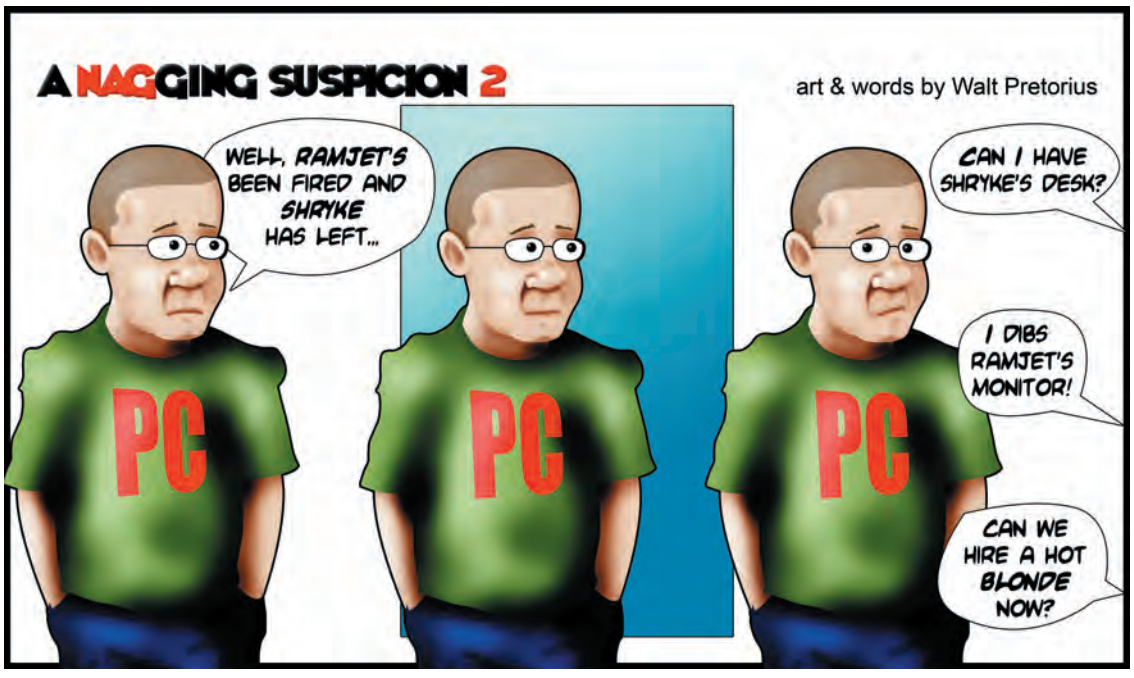
Or should I start with the software distributors, who wouldn't know a good title if it bit them in the butt? Sure, we may have the cheapest games in the world here, but with the utter incompetence of the distributors leading to under stocking, abysmal marketing, and the apparent apathy that breeds piracy, it's a surprise that these people are still in business.

Perhaps I should begin with retailers who seem closer to resembling under evolved primates than store owners? These plebeians sell products they don't even understand, and will always go the extra mile to rip off unsuspecting Johnny Dolt - if they even provide you with anything approaching competent service in the first place.

Or maybe I should start with the root of the problem: the gamers themselves. They are either completely computer illiterate morons who complain that our cover CD doesn't work in their hi-fi, or they are arrogant, know it all wastes of oxygen that seem to think the sun goes down when they sit down. All while displaying their obvious lack of intelligence by lapping up all the effluent the industry pumps into their food troughs, complaining loudly between mouthfuls.

This final message is for them. Wake up. Stop talking and start acting. If you want the industry to actually change, you need to get off your backside and flex those weak, geeky little muscles a bit. Wagging you tongue at the problem does nothing to change it… in fact, it just goes to show how pathetic you really are. Case closed.

[You know what? I think we've all had enough of you by now. You're fired and I'm going to replace you with a female columnist just to rub it in. Ed]



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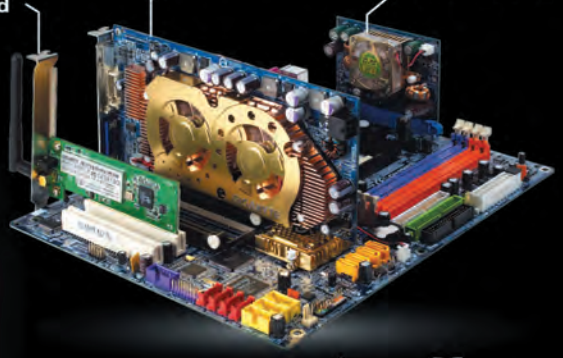

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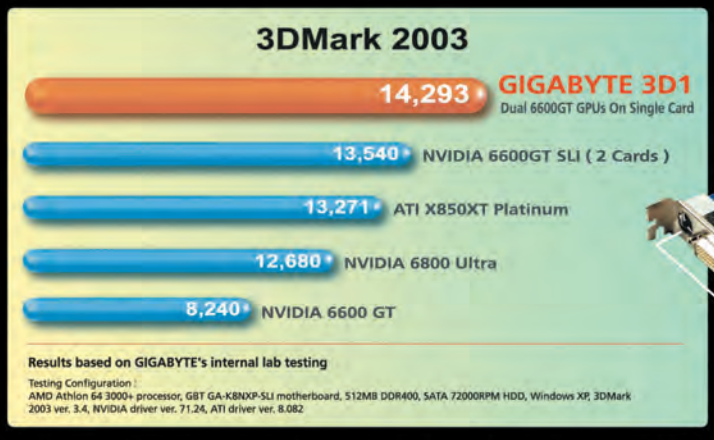

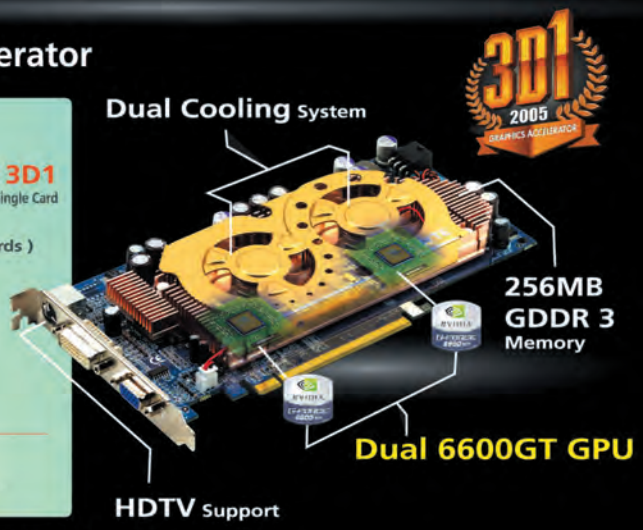

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