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BATTLEFIELD 2 REVIEW BY BRAVO SQUAD ◂◂
PIMPED OUT JUICED REVIEW ◂◂
GEFORCE **7800 GTX** BLOWS US AWAY ◂◂
MONSTER CARD: ASUS EN6800 ULTRA-DUAL ◂◂
TWISTED METAL FUN IN **BURNOUT REVENGE** ◂◂
BATMAN **BEGINS** REVIEW ◂◂
WE STROKE **7** OF THE BEST GAMING MICE AROUND ◂◂
7 SMOKING **PREVIEWS** ◂◂
BOILING POINT: ROAD TO **HELL** REVIEW ◂◂

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CONTENTS

** Where's the pilot in this artwork?*

REGULARS

10 Ed's Note
12 Bytes
22 Multiplayer
28 Opinion – The Domain of The_Basilisk
30 Opinion – Miktar's Meanderings
32 Opinion – On the Wire
34 Inbox
79 Competition: Design your own gaming magazine
88 Subscriptions
90 Tech News
114 Lifestyle: Anime
116 Lifestyle: Role-Playing
118 Lifestyle: Books
120 Lifestyle: Music & DVDs
122 Game Over

FEATURES

26 Interview: Steve Reid, Red Storm Entertainment
36 Blog: Guild Wars

HARDWARE

94 Gigabyte GeForce 7800 GTX
96 Sapphire X800 XL 512MB
97 Corsair XMS2 DDR2 Twin2X 1GB
97 Vantec Mach1 Heatpipe CPU Cooler
98 ABIT AN8 Ultra
100 Asus P5WD2 Premium WiFi TV Edition
102 Asus WL 500G Deluxe WLAN router & WL-100G Deluxe Wi-Fi PC-Card
104 GA-8I955X Royal
106 H@rdCor3: Gaming Mice

PREVIEWS

40 Serious Sam 2
44 Burnout Revenge
48 Paraworld
50 Daxter
52 187 Ride or Die
54 Full Spectrum Warrior: Ten Hammers
56 Stargate SG-1: The Alliance
58 Trauma Centre
60 Soul Calibur III

REVIEWS

64 Battlefield 2 [PC]
70 Boiling Point: Road to Hell [PC]
72 Imperial Glory [PC]
74 Dungeon Lords [PC]
76 Still Life [PC]
78 Sudeki [PC]
80 Juiced [PC/PS2]
84 Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition [PS2]
85 Gungrave Overdose [PS2]
86 Batman Begins [PS2]
87 Enthusia Professional Racing [PS2]
88 Medal of Honor: European Assault [PS2]

ON THE DVD

ADD-ONS	NAG July 05 Sizzler | WC3 Anarchy Pack
DEMOS	Area 51 | Battlefield 2 | Cricket 2005 | Dungeon Siege II | Psychonauts | Worms 4 Mayhem
DRIVERS	ATI Catalyst 5.6 XP | NVIDIA ForceWare 77.72 XP
FLASH	Alien | Freddy vs Jason | It's a Wonderful Life | Jaws | Pulp Fiction | Scream | Texas Chainsaw Massacre | The Exorcist | The Shining | Titanic | Work It
ANIME	A3 Base | DAZ Studio Base | DAZ Studio | Howl's Moving Castle | Kakurenbo | LO Magazine August
MOVIES	Age of Empires III | Counter Struck | Ghost Recon Advance Warfare | King Kong | Lord of the Rings Online | Prey E3 footage | rAge 2005 teaser | vid.review | War of the Worlds
PATCHES	Battlefield 2 v1.01 | Boiling Point v1.1
UTILITIES	DivX 521 XP | FRAPS | PagePlus SE | PCMark 05 | QuickTime Alternative

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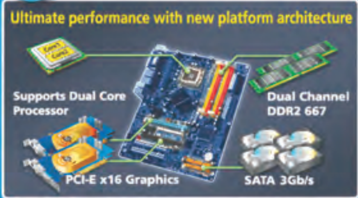
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ED'S NOTE

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HIGHWAY TO HELL
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LOCK AND LOAD GIRLS

BATTLEFIELD 2 ARRIVED AT the office last month. All the Battlefield fans installed it immediately and began to play. The grumbling was excessive - everything from, this AI sucks to why are there no airplanes in the single player mode? Then we had, "Hey! It just threw me to the desktop and it always hangs when I click on the multiplayer tab". It was a din. Invariably, after some time someone would throw up his hands and tell anyone who was listening that, "… they'd better patch this thing and soon. I'm not playing it like this!" Which gets me to my point [you need a 'true' story to make a point in print otherwise it's just rambling]: gamers and their patching expectations. I was about to call this phenomenon, or syndrome, Patch Expectant Behaviour. After consulting with others in the office, getting various German words translated onto English and then translated back into South African, I'll settle on Patch Addicts. We're all a bunch of patch addicts. Or the extreme version – you know those people who say they're not buying this game until the first patch arrives [also linked to people who are waiting for the next hardware revision of the PSP before they place their orders].

Is it even conceivable in today's gaming culture that a game might be released that doesn't require a patch? Perhaps all games are released not requiring any patching. Or just imagine for a second a world without the Internet or similar patch delivery mechanism in place. We'd just have to live with any problems we discovered and end of story. This then might force developers to get it right the first time. The problem now is that developers know there's a backdoor after releasing a game, and might perhaps release an incomplete title just because they know they can fix it later. Or are the gamers out there simply unwilling to put up with a few bugs without crying patch? The question is: which side is driving this phenomenon? Debate here: *letters@nag.co.za*.

The upside to all this is that at the end of the day, even if it means suffering through 150MB of downloading, the final version of the game you bought off the shelf six months ago has been tested by thousands of people, fixed and retested [rinse repeat], and is the best it will ever be today.

…against the machine

Just a word on rAge 2005 [September 29 to 2 October]. From our recent status meeting, this year's rAge is gearing to blow your mind right out of its cranial nook. From an exhibitor point of view, everyone who matters has confirmed their attendance. So you can expect all the gaming companies showing their latest and greatest [this means you can actually play games at rAge you won't see in the shops for a good couple of months]. You can think of rAge as the bonsai version of E3… There's even talk of bringing in experts form overseas to demonstrate certain games, among other things. Our advice to you, start saving your money now because all the retailers and hardware vendors have confirmed serious discounts, free vouchers and tons of cool stuff. I know this is sounding like a marketing pitch of note, but it's important that rAge is well supported by the gamers and represents a big step in the right direction for those of you who'd like a small sampling of E3 magic in your own backyard. Go to *www.rageexpo.co.za* for more details. If you aren't satisfied after 90 days, we'll refund you the full amount.

Michael James [Editor]

COVER STORY

WE DESIGNED THREE COVERS this issue [see above left] and it went a little something like this… We were planning on doing an upcoming FPS article on all the new shooters on the gaming horizon. But we ran out of space in this issue [James wanted ten pages and I was offering four]. Then Hellgate: London arrived at the office in the form of an interesting Q&A with Bill Roper [those of you who know who he is should be rather excited] so we had the feature [text], but not enough artwork [only the cover art]. So we had to drop that in favour of Serious Sam II, which was our original plan for the cover right in the beginning, before it expanded to a giant FPS feature. Our Art Director is still trying to find someone to blame for having to design three different covers, so we thought we'd appease him and feature them all here.

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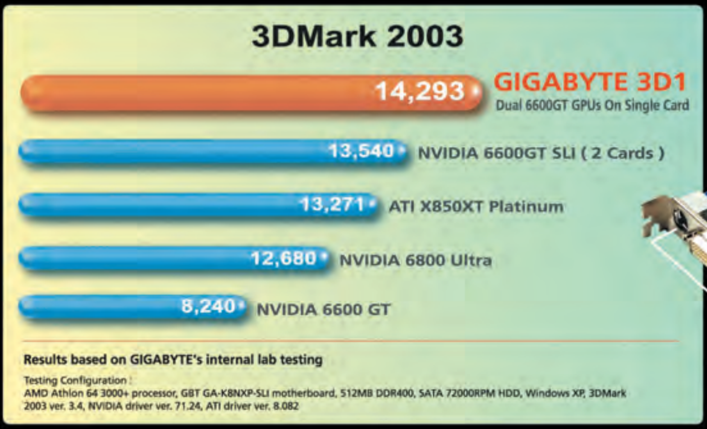

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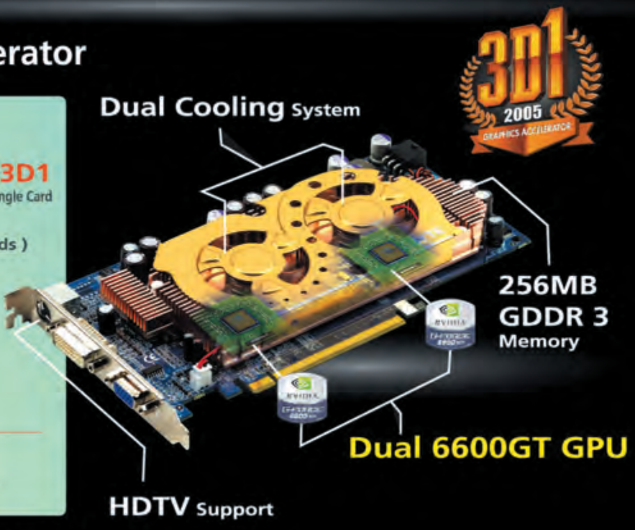
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BYTES

TEAM NINJA BOSS CRITICISES 360 DVD

Not enough space, says Itagaki

Team Ninja has always been a fan of Microsoft's hardware and they aren't shy about using the 360 either, especially when Dead or Alive 4 will be a 360 launch title. But the Japanese preference to use pre-rendered cut-scenes over real-time ones is causing a problem. According to the developer's chief, Tomonobu Itagaki, the 9GB capacity of the DVDs isn't allowing for enough space for the high-definition cut-scenes. By merit, because the hardware will already deliver high definition real-time graphics, the pre-rendered sequences are expected to look much better.

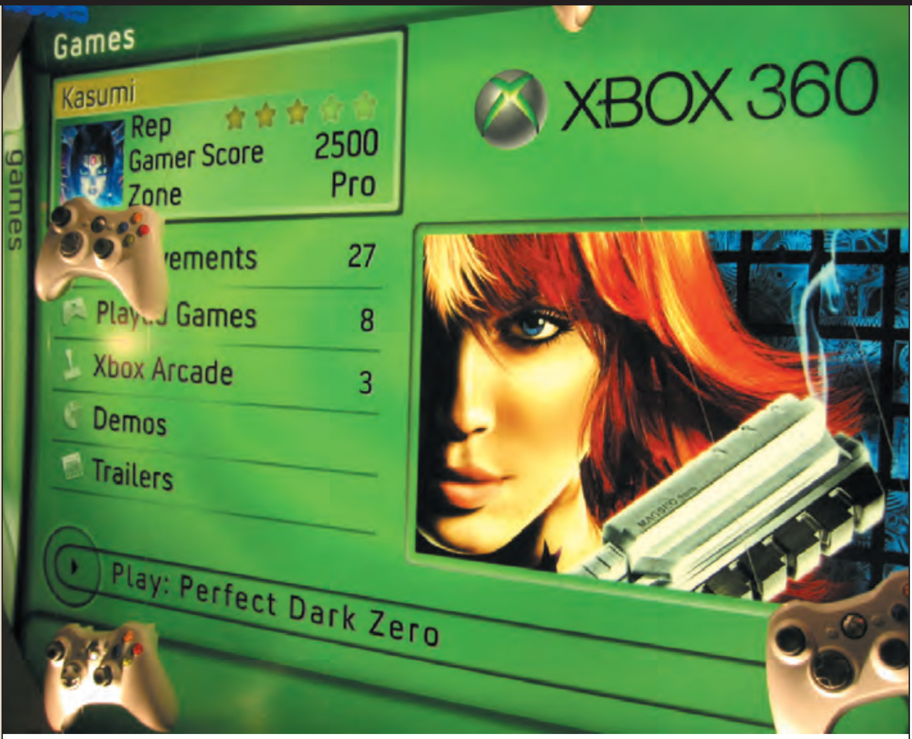
"The screen resolution for Xbox 360 games will be in high definition, so the pre-rendered movies are going to be pretty large," commented Itagaki. He illustrates by saying the DOA 4 trailer, at a quality that the team approves of, would sit at 2GB.

Still, the developer is pretty hyped about the 360 and is working on titles for it, thanks to a close relationship with Microsoft.

GAME VOICE ACTORS MAY STRIKE

Making their voices heard

Voice actors involved in the development of games have been demanding higher rewards for their efforts, claiming that they are entitled to profit shares or royalties on successful titles. A dispute has consequently developed between actors' unions and game publishers. Tensions have escalated to the point where the possibility of strikes cannot be ruled out. However, publishers are not very perturbed about this, as other means of providing the required voice-overs can be achieved.



UPDATE 360

The Xbox just keeps getting better

MICROSOFT RECENTLY REVEALED THAT the Xbox 360 will evolve, with later models boasting added functionality, particularly in terms of media handling. Later generation models may include an HD-DVD drive, which would be used for movie playback – it's however unlikely that game developers would adopt it, as it would make their games incompatible with older hardware. (The PlayStation 3 will use Blu-Ray discs for both applications, although it is no longer clear that this will be the next official DVD format.)

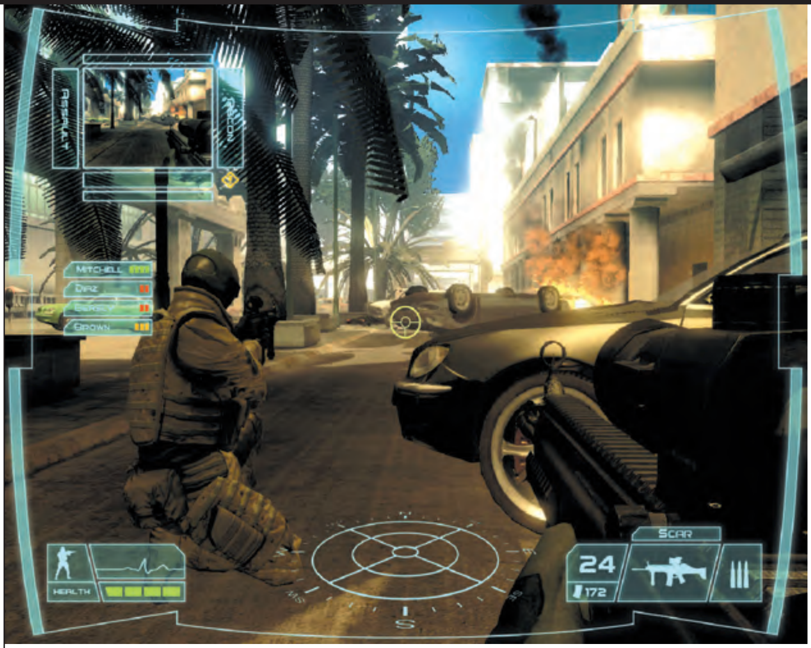
Microsoft executives have also revealed that the company hopes to sell 10 million units of its next-generation console within the first 12 to 16 months of market presence. The company believes that this is a key figure to reach in order to achieve sales momentum, as a large installed base means strong support from games developers (which in turn means many titles to lure further prospective buyers).

MTV GAMES

MTV is diving into the gaming scene with cross-medium broadcasting and advertising on the cards. As well as collaborating with publishers on game soundtracks and exposing game-inspired talent to the music industry (cross-pollination, as it were), the company also recognises a phenomenon that has been manifesting of late – many young people no longer turn to television as their primary form of entertainment. In fact, some don't even watch TV at all. This new division is aimed at reaching this segment as well.

Dead or Alive movie

A film based on Tecmo's Dead or Alive is in the works, and is to be directed by the director behind Romeo Must Die and The Transporter. The cast is unusual and consists almost entirely of never-before-seen talent. The only exceptions have played minor roles in various action flicks.



GHOST RECON ADVANCED WARFIGHTER

The next in this series from Tom Clancy and Ubisoft casts the player as a futuristic soldier in the year 2013. Urban warfare is the flavour of the day, as well as the trademark extreme gadgetry and over-the-top vicious band of soldiers hell-bent on something or another. Expect this one toward the end of the year.

SONY IN EUROPE

In response to plaintive queries from European consumers regarding the perpetual delays in Sony's European launches, officials stated that localisation into so many different languages takes extra time. A positive side-effect (according to Sony) of this is the fact that by the time the hardware arrives many of the bugs have been ironed out. These delays have prompted European gamers, not willing to wait for the September release, to find alternative ways of acquiring PSPs. However, Sony is actively pursuing and prosecuting parallel importers.

"PS3 IS NOT A TOY!"

Ken Kutaragi, head of Sony Computer Entertainment, is incensed at the fact that the PlayStation 3 is being referred to as a toy. His view is that the system is a "supercomputer" that will, by default, run on the Linux operating system. In fact, the system is expected to be able to run multiple operating systems simultaneously.

PlayStation®2

TOP TWENTY

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2. GT4
3. God of War
4. F1 05
5. Madagascar
6. Fantastic Four
7. Destroy All Humans
8. MX VS ATV Unleashed
9. Midnight Club 3
10. Area 51
11. Enthusia
12. SingStar Pop
13. Metal Gear Solid 3
14. Death by Degrees
15. Dynasty Warriors 5
16. Street Racing Syndicate
17. Lego Star Wars
18. Project Snowblind
19. Sponge Bob
20. Moto GP4

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GAME BOY MICRO

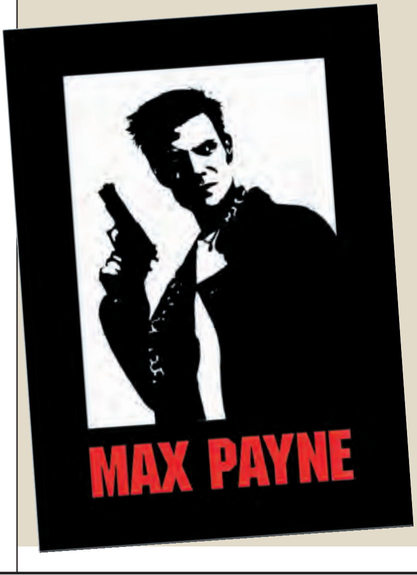
A new and smaller version of the Game Boy, the Game Boy Micro, was unveiled at this year's E3. It has now been scheduled for a November launch. Additionally, it looks like the Play-Yan, a clip-on accessory that allows a Game Boy to be used as a media storage and playback device, may be made available in the West.

BLIZZCON GAMING FESTIVAL

Blizzard Entertainment will be hosting BlizzCon (Blizzard Convention) on 28 and 29 October, in California. As well as competitive events, players will be able to participate in Q&A sessions with people behind the scenes of current Blizzard projects. [www.blizzard.com]

MAX PAYNE MOVIE

Yet another upcoming game-to-movie conversion is the silver screen version of Max Payne. As yet, the director and cast are unknown. We can only hope that this game-to-film tie-in attempt is better than some we have seen in the past!



SQUARE ENIX'S FUTURE PLANS

AT A RECENT GENERAL shareholders' meeting, the company revealed some of its plans and thoughts for the coming financial year. Officials dodged the question of when the next Dragon Quest title would be released, suggesting the creation of spin-offs to keep the brand alive. The company is aiming at selling between three and four million copies of Final Fantasy XII for the PS2. Being a transitional period for consoles, the coming fiscal year is being seen as a difficult, challenging time for the company. Perhaps the most pertinent and relevant projection is Square Enix's view that the future lies in online gaming.

METAL GEAR SOLID 4: ONLY ON PS3!

The next Metal Gear Solid is only being developed for the next PlayStation, with no plans whatsoever for support for other platforms.

"As a developer, I see the three consoles as different kinds of meals," said Hideo Kojima. "The PlayStation 3 is a sumptuous feast for special occasions; the Xbox 360 is a fine Sunday dinner; and the Revolution is a rich, home-cooked supper."

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YU-GI-OH! DUELLISTS HEAD FOR TOKYO!

Game Boy Advance-owning Yu-Gi-Oh! duellists from all over the globe will converge on Tokyo in August, as Konami of Europe's hunt for the greatest Yu-Gi-Oh! World Championship Tournament 2005 player heats up.

For the third year running, Konami of Europe has invited fans of its Yu-Gi-Oh! Day of the Duelist – World Championship Tournament 2005 title for Game Boy Advance to a series of local competitions designed to pit the best duellists from each country against each other. Local competitions are being held in all major European countries during June and July, including the UK, France, Germany, Spain, Italy, Sweden, and Holland.

Entrants will compete against each other in a knock-out tournament which will ultimately reveal each country's greatest duellist. The winners will then be flown to Japan for the annual World Final in Tokyo. Taking place from 6 to 7 August, the European winners will be pitted against the best players from the US and Japan for another tournament – this time to determine the world's best Yu-Gi-Oh! World Championship Tournament 2005 player.

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THE ENIGMATIC REVOLUTION

Nintendo executives remain tight-lipped about certain innovations that they keep mentioning (but not actually revealing). The reason stated for this is the possibility of plagiarism by other companies. "Because the user interface is going to drive the Revolution software design, that's what's going to make our software stand out. Nobody else is going to be able to do what we do with next-generation game software. So, I can't reveal anything. It's under wraps because it's the big gun," said Shigeru Miyamoto.

For what it's worth, it is known that the next 3D Mario Bros game will be appearing on the Revolution and not on the GameCube.

MICROSOFT TO HACK ITS OWN PRODUCT

The fact that the Xbox 360 uses both a different CPU and a different GPU to its predecessor makes backwards compatibility extremely difficult. However, Microsoft has found a way to do this, though it is a bit of a hack. The company has licensed NVIDIA's technology in order to be able to emulate the graphics on the 360's ATI chip. Microsoft will be recompiling certain games' executables to enable them to run on the PowerPC processors and the ATI graphics chip. These will be shipped with the unit on its hard drive. Further patches will be made available via Xbox Live. The company is aiming at making all Xbox titles compatible with the Xbox 360.

MORE VIN DIESEL...

AN UPCOMING FILM ADAPTATION of the Hitman games series will see Vin Diesel cast in the role of Agent 47. The actor has also expressed his interest in becoming involved in the production of upcoming Hitman games. His likeness and voice will, however, not appear in the next instalment, Blood Money. *[Must be the bald head, Ed.]*

ALICE MOVIE – AT LAST

A film version of American McGee's Alice is being planned, with Sarah Michelle Gellar in the lead role. There have previously been rumours about the production of this film, but this is the most concrete news we have heard for some time. The film is to be directed by Marcus Nispell, who helmed the remake of The Texas Chainsaw Massacre. No time-frame has been cited regarding Alice.

PlayStation 2
killer7
OUT AUGUST 2005
www.killer7.com
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GTA GETS HOT AND STEAMY

Did Rockstar circumvent the ESRB?

IT APPEARS THAT GTA: San Andreas has a few surprises left in it by the developers, surprises which are getting some folks hot under the collar for a variety of reasons. A Dutch gamer, Patrick W, discovered that there is an interactive sex game in San Andreas, which you can perform if you get on well enough with one of the game's six girlfriends. All it takes to unlock is to change the censorship status in GTA: SA, a modification which is now infamously known as Hot Coffee.

But the modification doesn't add anything to the game - it just unlocks something the Rockstar developers kept and disabled in the game. This has caused an outcry on whether Rockstar did this to circumvent the ESRB rating for the latest GTA title. Currently rated at M for Mature, the sex antics would have pushed the game into AO (Adults Only) territory.

Strangely the usual critics of violent and explicit games, the US politicians, haven't caught onto this, instead focussing on largely inaccurate complaints about upcoming title 15 to Life.

Rockstar and its publisher Take 2 has not said anything, but the ESRB has a problem with it. Executive Director Patricia Vance told GamePolitics in a June 20th e-mail, "We are currently looking into this situation. We do not know the source of the content nor the code that was created to access it. As always, we will ensure that all ESRB rules and regulations were properly followed by those participating in the rating process."

UK XBOX MODDER CHARGED AND SENTENCED

A UK gamer was arrested, charged and sentenced for selling modded Xbox consoles - which is illegal in the UK. A crackdown on mod-chip makers and accessories in the UK even ensures that an Xbox owner is not allowed to alter their own hardware. Still, the gamer was looking for it: as part of the package, the consoles advertised on his Website also contained 200GB hard-drives (as opposed to the standard 40GB drives) and came pre-loaded with pirated titles. The gamer got 140 hours of community service and had to pay court costs of £750.

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WEB SCORES

Battlefield 2 [PC]

NAG [100]	**82**
GAMESPY.COM [5]	**5.0**
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	**9.3**
IGN.COM [10]	**8.9**

Juiced [PC]

NAG [100]	**78**
GAMESPY.COM [5]	**3.0**
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	**6.2**
IGN.COM [10]	**6.0**

Imperial Glory [PC]

NAG [100]	**73**
GAMESPY.COM [5]	**3.0**
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	**6.7**
IGN.COM [10]	**8.5**

Boiling Point [PC]

NAG [100]	**76**
GAMESPY.COM [5]	**NA**
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	**7.0**
IGN.COM [10]	**7.0**

Batman Begins [PS2]

NAG [100]	**67**
GAMESPY.COM [5]	**3.0**
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	**6.7**
IGN.COM [10]	**6.8**

Midnight Club 3 DUB Edition [PS2]

NAG [100]	**81**
GAMESPY.COM [5]	**4.5**
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	**8.3**
IGN.COM [10]	**9.2**

Enthusia Pro Racing [PS2]

NAG [100]	**68**
GAMESPY.COM [5]	**3.5**
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	**7.4**
IGN.COM [10]	**7.2**

Juiced [PS2]

NAG [100]	**89**
GAMESPY.COM [5]	**3.5**
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	**6.3**
IGN.COM [10]	**6.5**

The ratings in this section, apart from the NAG ratings, are not the opinion of NAG Magazine. Duh.

PSP PIRACY LOOMS

UMD games appear online

SONY IS ENTERING AN epic battle between itself and the pirates - and it's likely to take its toll on the PSP-buying public. It didn't take long for someone to hack the browser in Wipeout Pure and use it as a Web browser. Sony put a stop to this, releasing a security update that disabled the feature (also disabling homebrew development, which has spawned a lot of free software and emulators). The company now plans to sell its own browser - roughly at the price of a PSP game.

Still, you can't keep a good pirate down and not too long ago someone cracked the encryption of the PSP's UMD format, along with the speculation that these games can be played off a memory stick. Now this has actually happened and at least four games can be downloaded and played on the PSP illegally. Sony will naturally retaliate with another security patch and new PSP games require updated software on the unit. But this is far from over and likely to cause Sony and the PSP users a lot more headaches in the months to come. Microsoft tried the same with the Xbox, continually updating the dashboard software - mostly a futile exercise.

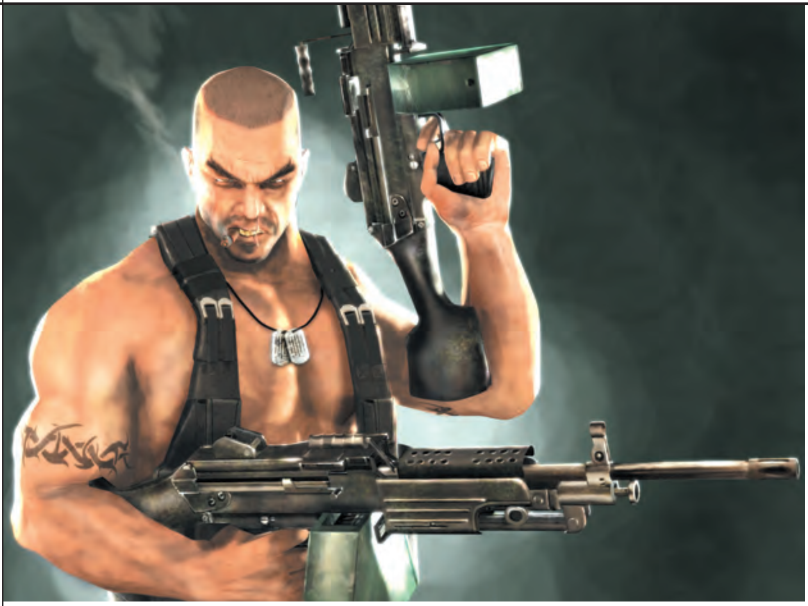
PLAYSTATION: ADVERTISER OF THE YEAR

Since 1994, the PlayStation brand has won 26 awards at the Cannes International Advertising Festival. This year was no exception, with Sony receiving the Advertiser of the Year 2005 award. Ken Kutaragi, President and Group CEO of Sony Computer Entertainment, accepted the prestigious Advertiser of the Year Award honouring PlayStation's creative and innovative advertising.

The award recognises PlayStation's advertising since its introduction in 1994, as well as its impact on the worldwide entertainment industry. Since its launch PlayStation has won an astonishing 26 Cannes Lions, including three Grands Prix. The first Grand Prix was awarded to the press ad 'Nipples' in 1999, followed by the press ad 'Rebirth' in 2003, and last year 'Mountain' won the Film Grand Prix.

EverQuest: Depths of Darkhollow

Next month will see the introduction of a new expansion pack for EverQuest, titled 'Depths of Darkhollow'. Besides the usual enhancements, this add-on will feature 'monster missions' wherein players can play as monsters. Additionally, high-level players will be able to make use of the spirit shroud facility. This will allow high-level players to assume low-level avatars to join with young characters who are earning experience for their high-level characters. Boxed and downloadable versions will be released in September.



FAR CRY INSTINCTS FOR XBOX ONLY

The PlayStation 2 version of Ubisoft's Far Cry Instincts has been cancelled and will now be exclusive to the Xbox. The scheduled release date of September 2005 will apparently still be met.

KID STABS SIBLING OVER GAME RAGE

No, he wasn't playing GTA

An 11-year-old boy stabbed his younger cousin after becoming frustrated with The Incredibles. The boy was playing the title, becoming increasingly frustrated, while his baby nephew was crying in the room next door. He snapped, picked up a knife and stabbed the baby once - though not killing him. The wound was only discovered when his mother returned and found the baby bleeding. The infant spent six days in hospital and has since been reconciled with the 11 year old.

"I paused the PlayStation. I went to the kitchen and collected the knife. Without realising it, I stabbed him," the boy said. "I have done something awful. Something really bad has happened to [the baby]," the unnamed child said upon arriving at a friend's house ten minutes after the incident.

While some have reacted automatically by blaming games, the police are considering other factors, such as a conversation the boy had with his teacher prior to the event. The boy is facing charges of attempted murder and wounding with intent.

DUNGEON SIEGE MOVIE

It seems every month we hear about more game-to-film conversions. Considering past history, one can't help but wonder whether getting this much practise will ever pay off and result in an excellent piece of cinematography? Well, that aside, Uwe Boll is working on Dungeon Siege, and has taken on Tony Ching, best known for his work on House of Flying Daggers, as action director and choreographer. No cast members have been announced.

EDUCATIONAL XBOX

Microsoft recently donated 80 Xbox consoles to educational facilities in Tokyo, Japan. The units have been equipped with videoconferencing capabilities, and were supplied for the purpose of educating students in IT literacy.

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ON THE HORIZON

US RELEASE DATES

PC RELEASE DATES

Date	Title	Genre
Aug	187 Ride or Die	RPG
Aug	25 To Life	FPS
Aug	Big Mutha Truckers 2	Racing
Aug	Call of Cthulhu: Dark Corners of the Earth	Adventure
Aug	City of Villain	RPG
Aug	Dungeon Siege II	RPG
Aug	Earth 2160	Strategy
Aug	Jaws Unleashed	Action
Aug	Madden NFL 06	Sport
Aug	Ultima Online: Mondain's Legacy	RPG
Aug	WWII Tank Commander	Action
Aug	Yetisports: Arctic Adventures	Sports
Sept	Blitzkrieg II	Strategy
Sept	Customplay Golf	Sport
Sept	Dragonshard	Strategy
Sept	EverQuest II: Desert of Flames	MMORPG
Sept	Fahrenheit	Adventure
Sept	Seven Kingdoms: Conquest	Strategy

PS2 RELEASE DATES

Date	Title	Genre
Aug	Animaniacs: The Great Edgar Hunt	Adventure
Aug	Armored Core: Last Raven	Action
Aug	Beat Down: Fists of Vengeance	Action
Aug	Big Mutha Truckers 2	Racing
Aug	Bomberman Land 3	Action
Aug	Call of Cthulhu: Dark Corners of the Earth	Adventure
Aug	Darkwatch	Shooter
Aug	DICE	Action
Aug	Dragon Force	Strategy
Aug	Evil Dead Regeneration	Action
Aug	EyeToy: Chat	Other
Aug	Genji: Dawn of the Samurai	Action
Aug	Inuyasha: Feudal Combat	Fighting
Aug	London Taxi Rush Hour	Racing
Aug	Madden NFL 06	Sport
Aug	Namco Museum: 50th Anniversary	Action
Aug	Neopets: The Darkest Faerie	Adventure
Aug	Pump it Up: Exceed	Music
Aug	Sonic Gems Collection	Action
Aug	The Incredible Hulk: Ultimate Destruction	Action
Aug	Zatchbell	Fighting
Sept	Colosseum: Road to Freedom	Action
Sept	Fahrenheit	Adventure
Sept	Getting Up: Contents Under Pressure	Action
Sept	NASCAR 06	Racing
Sept	Scooby-Doo! Unmasked	Adventure
Sept	Spartan: Total Warrior	Strategy

XBOX RELEASE DATES

Date	Title	Genre
Aug	Animaniacs: The Great Edgar Hunt	Adventure
Aug	Metal Slug 4 & 5	Fighting
Aug	Namco Museum: 50th Anniversary	Action
Aug	The Incredible Hulk: Ultimate Destruction	Action
Sept	Far Cry Instincts	FPS
Sept	Fahrenheit	Adventure
Sept	NASCAR 06	Racing
Sept	Ninja Gaiden: Black	Fighting
Sept	Scooby-Doo! Unmasked	Adventure
Sept	SnoCross 2 Featuring Blair Morgan	Racing
Sept	Spartan: Total Warrior	Strategy

PSP RELEASE DATES

Date	Title	Genre
Aug	Prince of Persia: Warrior Within	Action
Sept	Burnout: Legends	Racing
Oct	The Con	Fighting
Nov	Marvel Nemesis: Rise of the Imperfects	Fighting
Nov	Mortal Kombat: Deception	Fighting

GAMECUBE RELEASE DATES

Date	Title	Genre
Aug	Animaniacs: The Great Edgar Hunt	Adventure
Aug	Geist	FPS
Aug	Hello Kitty Roller Rescue	Action
Aug	Madden NFL 06	Sport
Aug	Namco Museum: 50th Anniversary	Action
Aug	Nintendo Pennant Chase Baseball	Sport
Aug	The Incredible Hulk: Ultimate Destruction	Action
Aug	Zatchbell	Fighting

DS RELEASE DATES

Date	Title	Genre
Aug	Nintendogs	Strategy
Sept	Another Code: Two Memories	Adventure
Sept	Scooby-Doo! Unmasked	Adventure
Sept	Scurge: Hive	Action
Sept	Yu-Gi-Oh! Nightmare Troubadour	Action

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CHARTS

PC Games

#	Title
1	Battlefield 2
2	Sims 2
3	Sims 2 University
4	Star Wars Knights of the Old Republic Classics
5	Juiced
6	Need For Speed Underground Classics
7	Sims Full House Collection
8	Harry Potter Prisoner of Azkaban Classics
9	SWAT 4
10	Star Wars Knights of the Old Republic 2 Sith Lords
11	Age of Empires II Gold
12	Lego Star Wars
13	Lord of the Rings Return of the King Classics
14	Flight Simulator 2004
15	Empire Earth 2
16	Boiling Point Road To Hell
17	Star Wars Republic Commando
18	CSI 2 Dark Motives Exclusive
19	Rugby 2004 Classics
20	Battlefield Vietnam

PlayStation 2

#	Title
1	Gran Turismo 4
2	Star Wars Episode 3 Revenge of the Sith
3	Midnight Club 3
4	EA Sports Pack: Tiger Woods 2005/Fifa 2005
5	Need For Speed Underground 2
6	Rugby 2005
7	Medal Of Honour European Assault
8	Fifa 2005 Platinum
9	Metal Gear Solid 3 Snake Eater
10	Burnout 3 Platinum
11	Juiced
12	Singstar 3 Pop [no microphone]
13	Splinter Cell Chaos Theory
14	Getaway 2 Black Monday
15	Street Racing Syndicate
16	Tiger Woods 2004 platinum
17	Singstar 2 with Microphone
18	Fifa Street
19	Playboy Mansion
20	WWE Smackdown vs Raw

WCG
WORLD CYBER GAMES

AUGUST AT A GLANCE

6-7
Gaming
World Cyber Games SA Preliminary [JHB]
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13-14
Gaming
World Cyber Games SA Preliminary [JHB]
www.worldcybergames.co.za

6-27-28
Gaming
World Cyber Games SA Preliminary [CT]
www.worldcybergames.co.za

CHINA OPENS GAMING REHAB CLINIC

Kick your gaming habit

ONLINE GAMING IN FAR Eastern countries is endemic amongst its population, often forcing governments to place mandatory shut-down times on servers. China is combating the growing addiction to online games, especially MMOGs, with a new clinic officially licensed by the Chinese Government.

Based near the Beijing Military Hospital, addicts will have the support of 23 nurses and doctors in a 1,015 day course. The rehab routine starts at 6am every day and involves medication, exercise, acupuncture and being strapped to a machine that delivers 30 volt shocks to pressure points - apparently to stimulate nerve endings. Patients are also fed a clear liquid intravenously to "adjust the unbalanced status of brain secretions."

Internet addiction is reported to be rising steeply, with an estimated 2.5 million Chinese being hooked (out of a billion plus people), though other agencies dispute the figure as inflated. But if you want your addiction cured at this clinic, it will cost you around $45 a day - roughly the weekly wage of the average Beijing citizen.

RESIDENT EVIL

MORE RESIDENT EVIL ON THE WAY

Constantin Film AG will be producing two more Resident Evil films. The next film will be titled Resident Evil: Afterlife and will be set in Southwest US. The as-yet unnamed fourth instalment will be set in Tokyo. Milla Jovovich will once again portray the lead character.

DIGITAL ILLUSIONS ON A NEW PROJECT

Digital Illusions, responsible for the Battlefield series, has announced that a new project is underway. Besides stating that it is based on an existing franchise, the company revealed nothing more, with the exception of a release tentatively scheduled for the first half of 2006.

DS EXPANDS

The DS will soon have a real expansion for the Japanese game Band Brothers. The expansion will ship on a GBA cartridge, for which the DS has a slot. The expansion only works if you have the original DS game also in your unit.

HERE WE GO AGAIN...

Once again, media coverage of crimes that are supposedly linked to computer game violence has resulted in bad news for the industry. This time the location was Japan, where several crimes have been blamed on violent game content. Japanese authorities now seek stringent restrictions, while publishers are looking at ways of self-regulation in order to be able to retain freedom of expression.

NexStar 3

Form and functionality collide with style in the NexStar 3 External Hard Drive Enclosure from Vantec. With its mirror finish, sleek curves and bold colors, the Vantec NexStar 3 stands out from the crowd. The sturdy drive cage protects your hard drive while the aluminum case effectively draws away the heat, protecting your drive from overheating.

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DREAMHACK: SWEDEN'S GAMING EDEN

JÖNKÖPING, SWEDEN - THE location for the world's largest LAN party, catering for roughly five thousand gamers. Dreamhack holds the official Guinness World Record for the most computers on a single local area network, at 5,852. At this year's summer event, held from the 16th to the 19th of June, not only did players arrive for a few days of casual fun, but for two very serious tournaments as well. Dreamhack played host to both the CPL World Tour's Sweden stop, and the Swedish / Norwegian ESWC qualifiers.

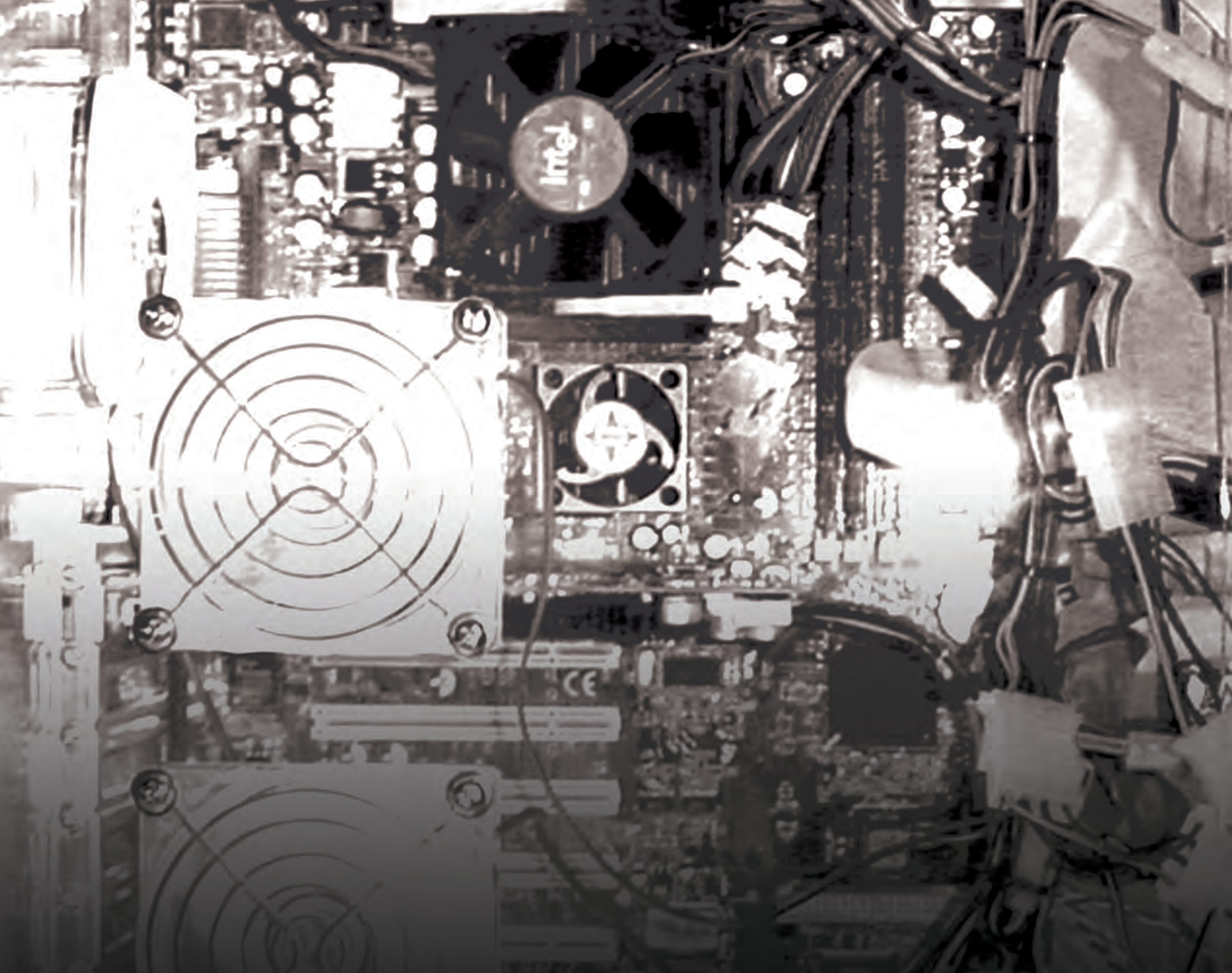
Sweden's ESWC qualifiers are always noteworthy because the winners are usually considered the favourites to win the final event in France. The once-unstoppable WarCraft III duo, Heman and Madfrog, were Swedes, as was SK Gaming's old powerhouse Counter-Strike team. The CS line-up at Dreamhack this year was star-studded. With teams like NiP, Eyeballers and SSV-Lehnitz in attendance, the competition was always going to be stiff. However, most of the teams had undergone major roster changes in the preceding weeks, and so the outcome was anything but certain. NiP, showing off their new line-up for the first time, managed to come from the loser's bracket to win, restoring some of their former glory. ICSU, placed second, also earning their trip to France, narrowly beating out the Eyeballers, as well as the mix team, M&M, made up of ex-Lehnitz players and Xeqtr from NoA. Norway's Team 9 also secured their country's qualification spot in a come-back from the loser's bracket.

WarCraft III was all about multi-gaming team Fnatic, who had recently acquired a new WarCraft III squad. The acquisition proved to be well worth the money for the Dutch team, as both Sweden and Norway's qualifiers were won by Fnatic players. Creolophus (Norway) and Sase (Sweden) also finished first and second in a separate tournament hosted by Dreamhack. Another Fnatic player, Bjarke, had won the Danish qualifiers a week earlier.

The World Tour tournament was perhaps less interesting than it had been in the past. Although the skills level was particularly high, there were few upsets and the overall results looked rather similar to those from last month's stop in Brazil. American pro-gamer Fatal1ty, the man everybody loves to hate, gave Vo0 some of his closest games in a long time, but was unable to pull through with the win and had to settle for second place. Vo0, the illustrious Dutchman, thus picked up his third World Tour win, cementing himself comfortably at the top of the leader board. Zyz took third place again, Ztrider fourth again, and Stermy, once again, fifth. The only surprises were UK player Zaccubus' eighth place, and Spain winner Stelam's failure to even make the top eight. In the overall rankings, we see Fatal1ty moving up to within two points of Zyz, and Stermy overtaking Stelam. [www.dreamhack.org]

RESULTS

1. Fnatic/Vo0
2. SK|Zyz
3. Fatal1ty
4. Stermy
5. SK|Stelam
6. x6.Lexer
7. Fnatic/Ztrider
8. Fnatic/Gellehsak



NAG LAN @ rAge

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Northgate

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NAG LAN @ RAGE

FOR PLAYERS WHO HAVE never experienced the thrill of a large BYOC LAN (Bring Your Own Computer), this is the perfect time to get acquainted with the local LAN culture. The event will be held in the upstairs section of the annual rAge expo at the Coca Cola Dome, Northgate, overlooking the expo floor (the same location as before, for those who attended in 2004), and will cater for 700 gamers (200 more than last year). Servers for all the popular games will be provided, and the communities of several non-mainstream competitive titles will most likely be running their own tournaments as they've done in the past.

With the Vaalhooligan Crew [VC] in charge of the setup and administration, players can count on a relatively problem-free network and stable power supply throughout the weekend. VC have been responsible for several national-sized events during the past two years, including the Carousel ESWC qualifiers and last year's NAG LAN at rAge, and therefore carry an invaluable amount of experience with them. The networking equipment has been sponsored by D-Link, and the effectiveness and reliability of the equipment has been proven at various Arena 77 events in the past. Security will be present twenty-four hours a day and gamers will be able to stay and play throughout the weekend. In short; all aspects of the LAN have been tried and tested extensively over the years, and it is difficult to foresee any hiccups with such a smooth track record.

Tickets for the NAG LAN are only available through Computicket [www.computicket.co.za] and will cost R185 person, which is valid for the whole weekend and gives you free access to the rAge expo downstairs.

rAge kicks off on the 30th of September and lasts until the 2nd of October 2005. [www.rageexpo.co.za]

IDENTITY GAMING LOOK TOWARDS Q4

"1.6 IS DEAD," STATED Julian Bales of local Counter-Strike team, iDentity Gaming. With the Electronic Sports World Cup 2005, we are effectively seeing the last of the original Counter-Strike. While there is a lot of support for CS: Source among the new players, many of the veteran teams are dreading the change. Identity are indeed planning to give Source a go, as are all the top teams (like it or not), but they have also turned their attention to the impending release of Quake IV. In this spirit, they have recruited a Cape Town Quake squad, headed by the legendary Stephen "Ph4ntom" Cloete. The other players in the team are far less well known, but Identity will be hoping that the skill of the WCG 2002 7th place finisher will start to spread around. Identity Quake now consists of: Ph4ntom, Syph3r, Gameb0y, Prisma, Avatar and Lazarith.

WEG SEASON 2 HEATS UP

AFTER THE IMMENSELY SUCCESSFUL first run of the World E-Sports Games, we're back again for more of the same action in Counter-Strike and WarCraft III. The WEG is based in Seoul, South Korea, and is featured live on local television. More teams and players were invited this time round, adding to the already impressive skills base. The tournament has also been shortened to four weeks, instead of two months, at the request of the players.

The first two group stages have already been played, and only four Counter-Strike teams and four WarCraft III players remain. Without a doubt, the biggest shock of the tournament was the departure of clear CS favourite NoA in the first round. According to their captain, Jorgen "Xeqtr"Johannessen, the defending champions lacked motivation and just couldn't pull themselves together when it counted. Mikey "Method" So has been quoted as saying: "We deserved to lose. We sucked." After their elimination, the players of NoA decided to take a break for a while, and it's unlikely the team will survive in its current form.

Last season's runners-up, Four Kings, are now looking set to take the title, already having qualified for the semi-finals in the top position of their group. The 4K machine is being helped along by former NoA player Ola "Element" Moum, who left NoA for a contract with Brazilian team MIBr (Made in Brazil), only to depart to Four Kings two weeks later. 4K will have to fend off strong Swedish challengers Begrip, Norwegian Catch-Gamer and the dark horse, China's Abit Strike, but they appear to have the skill to do it.

WarCraft III is being largely dominated by the South Koreans, as expected. The final four are Mouz.GoStop (South Korea), last season's champion Moon[One] (South Korea), 64AMD-Winner (Lithuania) and Mouz.Shortround (USA). The previous runner up, SK|Zacard failed to progress through the second group stage, losing to each of his fellow South Koreans. Check back next month for the final results. [www.worldesportsgames.com]

Computers that Accommodate Your Lifestyle, Not the Other Way Around

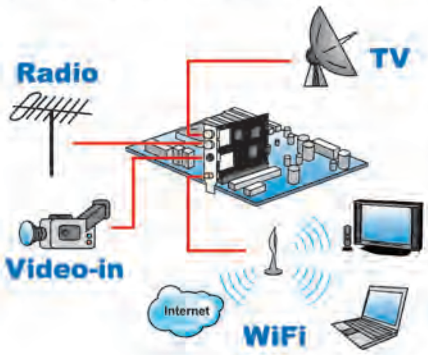
Multimedia and home entertainment are the next big trends that are projected to take personal computing out of offices and studies, and become the entertainment centerpiece of your living room. However, how many computers out there really deliver all the promises of fun, excitement and convenience? The best way to get a computer that fits your way of life, is to build it yourself with all the customized features you really need.

Just imagine a computer that lets you watch TV, record your favorite shows, enjoy FM radio and stereo-quality sound, share information and go online wirelessly, compute with exceptional performance, lower system noise and overclock intelligently all right out of the box. Hmm...sounds too good to be true right?

The recently launched ASUS Intelligence (AI) Life Series motherboards, the P5WD2 Premium and P5LD2 Deluxe, from ASUS are made to blend lifestyle and computing in one single package. Some of the innovations adopted by the boards are excellent foundations for putting together a true multimedia entertainment system.

TV tuner and wireless connection-Double Enjoyment

Most boards don't have more than 5 PCI slots, so why take up two precious connections with a TV tuner and a wireless card. The two AI Life boards bundled the unique WiFi-TV card, which includes TV tuner functions and wireless connectivity in one PCI card.



Besides regular TV and PVR (personal video recording) functions, the card also supports digital TV with DVB-T standard to provide a flexible solution for TV viewing. FM radio reception is also available for more entertainment options.

The card further provides IEEE 802.11a, b and g standards for wireless connection to the Internet and other digital devices. Share photos, videos and MP3 music files between the wireless devices at home without tangling wires, and link the same devices to the Internet with AP (access point) functions. The unique setup wizard makes establishing a wireless environment a piece of cake whether you are an expert or beginner.

Great audio experience

Alright, you can catch the Super Bowl or other shows on systems based on the P5WD2 Premium and P5LD2 Deluxe, but an entertainment system is not really an entertainment system without bumpin' sounds. The P5WD2 Premium and P5LD2 Deluxe offer 7.1-channel and 8-channel audio output, respectively, and Dolby audio technologies to deliver powerful sound to go with whatever visual applications you have running on the system.

AI Quiet - Powerful yet quiet

Many motherboards offer overclocking features that raise CPU performance to handle resource-hungry tasks. The two ASUS boards, of course provide these overclocking features to bring out the true potential of a system, but they took it up step further.

It's hard to concentrate on a huge proposal or a movie when the fan keeps spinning away and making annoying noise. AI Quiet dynamically controls CPU speed and reduces temperature and fan speeds when peace and quiet are what you desire.

Stack Cool 2 - Zero noise cooling

Another feature to lower system acoustics is Stack Cool 2.It is a fan-less cooling solution that effectively transfers heat generated by the critical components to the other side of the specially designed PCB (printed circuit board) for heat dissipation. The result is a temperature decrease of up to 20°C.

Dual-core CPU - Power for multimedia

To enjoy multimedia entertainment that includes simultaneous operation of several applications, your system needs the power to handle multi-tasking. Supporting the Intel 955X chipset (P5WD2 Premium) and 945P chipset (P5LD2 Deluxe), both ASUS boards are ready for the Intel dual-core CPU. The advanced processing technology contains two physical CPU cores with individually dedicated L2 Caches to satisfy the rising demand for more powerful processing capability.

AI Life motherboards bring lifestyle and personal computing together. They entertain you with TV, radio and Dolby sound, and link you to the rest of the world via wireless connection. To create a peaceful environment, several new and improved innovations are also included to reduce noise and temperature. Don't change your way of life for a computer. Instead let the ASUS Life Series improve the quality of your life.

P5LD2 Deluxe	***P5WD2 Premium***
Support Intel LGA 775 CPU	Support Intel LGA 775 CPU
Intel 945P chipset	Intel 955X chipset
FSB 1066/800/533	FSB 1066/800/533
DDR2 711/667/533/400	DDR2 711/667/533/400
Intel Dual-Core CPU Ready	Intel Dual-Core CPU Ready

INTERVIEW

We've spent many happy hours gunning down friends and strangers alike while wrapped up in various Tom Clancy-influenced worlds. We meet one of the men who made it all possible.

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STEVE REID

RED STORM ENTERTAINMENT

WITH RED STORM NOW recognised as one of the world's leading developers it's hard to believe that when it first opened its doors in 1996, less than 20 people were in the company's employ and there was only just enough money to keep things going for six months. It's a horrible thought, but imagine what Xbox Live would be like without Red Storm? Can you even conceive a day without Ghost Recon or Rainbow Six? Nope, nor can we.

"The first years gave the original employees all of the challenges of being involved with the starting of a business" states Steve Reid, managing director of Red Storm. "If our games didn't sell, we would have been just another footnote in the history of gaming. To make it even more difficult on ourselves, we set our goals high."

Very high, in fact. Rather than just settling for throwing a few titles at the gaming public and finding their feet, the Red Storm team planned from the very start to create a franchise. "We didn't just want to make games, and this was a very difficult decision," Reid tells us. "Add to that the fact that we were extremely 'experimental' with marketing, and it's no surprise that we almost put ourselves out of business. But we survived and succeeded. As a studio, we've been through it all."

Having the will to continue when things were so tough paid off and things started to go well. Red Storm ceased to be an independent company at the end of 2000 when it was acquired by Ubisoft. "Before Red Storm was purchased, we were developing, publishing and even distributing our own games," Reid remembers. "This gave us the business maturity to make the transition to a studio for Ubisoft. It was a mutually beneficial acquisition situation: the Red Storm board wanted to sell, the studio wanted to keep developing, and Ubisoft wanted to expand its portfolio to include games from the FPS genre – something that suited us just fine."

The acquisition of smaller studios by large companies doesn't always go this well. Development horror stories involving rushed deadlines and lack of creative control are something we're used to hearing about in interviews, but it seems Ubisoft is going about things the right way.

"Ubisoft looks to Red Storm to be the experts within our genre," Reid explains. "Red Storm doesn't have total control over our schedule or projects, but we do have excellent collaboration with Ubisoft's worldwide studios. The management controls things like scope and priority and then we get the big assignment – making the magic happen."

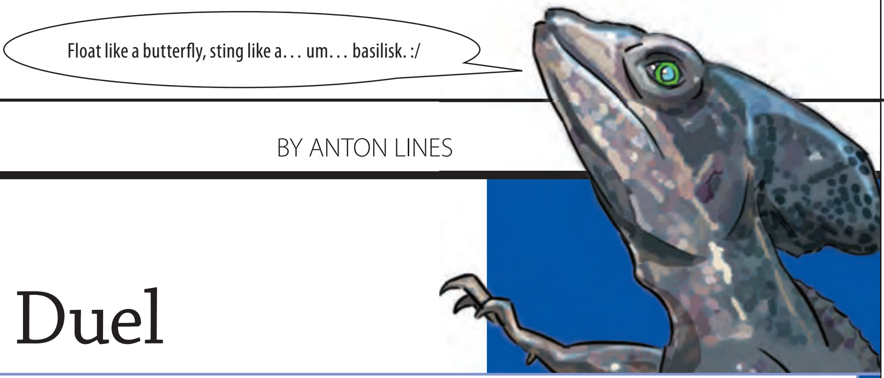
Anyone who has been playing games over the last few years is probably well aware of the 'magic' Steve is speaking of. The Ghost Recon and Rainbow Six games have been among Ubisoft's best-selling titles, and it looks as if there's still plenty of life in both series.

"We've won some awards and sold a few million games – that's a great feeling," Reid admits. "With the competition in military games increasing, we often get asked about how this might influence our future. We would like to think that others are joining the genre because they've seen our success. As a result of their realism, combat games are a classic theme and are here to stay."

> "you want to treat your workers like nameless cogs, then you should be making coat hangers"

To date the Rainbow Six series has been met with praise at every step. But with the last game, Rainbow Six 3, being such a success, is Steve worried that the forthcoming sequel may not live up to the fans' expectations?

"The scariest thing – beyond the threats of bodily harm from some of our overly enthusiastic 'fans' in terms of feature changes – might be the impact that we can have on some people," Reid says with a smile. "The fans are great. In fact, most of us are cut from the same cloth. If we give them a great game, they will play it forever. The online postings can be a bit harsh sometimes, but we try to remember that it's their appreciation of our products that drives them to this rabid-dog state of enthusiasm. People need a release. People want to play the hero. They want to save the world. We just give them the opportunity to do so." **NAG**


Float like a butterfly, sting like a... um... basilisk. :/

DOMAIN OF THE_BASILISK

BY ANTON LINES

Future of the Duel

ROUGHLY TWO YEARS AGO, the glorious era of competitive Quake III came to an end. Even though the game continues to be played on and off today, there was a clear point at which it lost its mainstream tournament support. After the Cyberathlete Professional League dropped it in favour of Counter-Strike, and the World Cyber Games soon followed suit, the global community had to start looking for a new duel-based (one-versus-one) death match game.

Fortunately, the timing of Unreal Tournament 2003 couldn't have been better. While initial responses to the game were mixed, it managed to gather enough support from both players and organisers to take over where Quake III left off. The following year saw Unreal Tournament 2004 picking up even more support than 2003, ensuring the survival of the duel-based game type - at least, for a while.

But things turn around quickly in the cutthroat reality of competitive e-sports, and the World Cyber Games has once more become the symbolic agent of change. UT2004 has been dropped from this year's game list and, for the first time ever, has not been replaced by another duel-based title. While many have been quick to blame the WCG, it is difficult to say what real alternatives they had. Their decision is rather a symptom of the deeper problem - game developers just haven't given us anything new to play.

Okay, I'm exaggerating a bit: there have been plenty of new first person shooter titles. It's just that they all suck. Doom 3 started off with the advantage of massive worldwide hype and a huge potential player base, but threw all that away simply by not caring enough to fix the obvious problems in the multiplayer aspect. The developers of Painkiller pledged to create a game to cater specifically to the needs of the competitive community, but have thus far failed on virtually all of their promises. The CPL is not expected to use Painkiller again for next year's World Tour.

So, it seems we've been left in a bit of a lull for the moment. But is there anything on the horizon to look forward to? The next instalment of Unreal Tournament might prove fruitful, but it's only being planned for a 2007 release. The other obvious option is Quake IV, and I'm sure I don't need to explain how eagerly it is being anticipated. In the last few months there has been a surge of activity on the online Quake III servers as local 'pro-gamers' prepare for number four. But is it going to fill the role, or will it be another Doom 3? Critics have pointed out that id Software isn't even involved, and that the game will be focussed on single player. Not encouraging. However, contrary to these reports, it seems the Quake III development team is in fact working on the multiplayer aspect, leaving the single player aspect to Ravensoft. That's better news, but it still doesn't guarantee us a good competitive title.

Either way, the proof will be in the playing. To be honest, I'm a little nervous. If Quake IV doesn't succeed, we're in for a pretty dry 2006. Team-based game types seem pretty secure right now, with Counter-Strike and CS: Source still leading the way. But for those who enjoy the faster-paced, higher-pressured atmosphere of the duel, the future is uncertain. To use a broad analogy: it would be like removing tennis, golf, and most track and field events from the sporting calendar for a year. Oh well, I guess no-one would really care. We'd still have soccer. **NAG**

> "In the last few months there has been a surge of activity on the online Quake III servers as local 'pro-gamers' prepare for number four. But is it going to fill the role, or will it be another Doom 3?"

The views and opinions cited in this column do not necessarily reflect those of NAG Magazine and its staff.

BUNNY BOILER
BASH THE BISHOP
CORPORAL PUNISHMENT
LONG JOHN SLITHER
THE WORMINATOR

WHO YOU CALLIN' SPINELESS?

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BY MIKTAR DRACON

Gestalt!

I'M GUESSING IT SAYS a lot about my personality when I concede that my all-time favourite game villain is a giant operatic singing mound of... poo. It says more about my personality, really, that I'm not afraid to admit it. That is, I'll admit it, but don't you dare bring it up at dinner parties.

That amusing little piece of info aside (it'll no doubt later be used for extortion), I was originally going to write something scathing about the CPL (Cyberathlete Professional League) and their recent ruling that prohibits tactical play in favour of forcing combatants to constantly attack each other. Not to mention that they now also forbid profanity, shouting and teasing during matches. Why not just forbid fun and good-natured jibing entirely Mr. CPL, you silly gaming Nazi you?

After all, what better way to further the acceptance of competitive gaming as a real sport, than by entirely removing the elements that exist in existing professional sports?

Anyway, I was going to write about that, but then I remembered that I find competitive gaming asinine and fatuous so I'd rather not waste my time and space with it. That's what Mr. Lizard-breath (Teh_Bassasslisk) does: he digs all that crazy hippy competitive gaming stuff. Although, in his defence, he's been rather on form of late discussing real gaming in his column.

Hmm, now I've forgotten what I actually wanted to write about. *[This is called padding, Ed.]*

I've already established in previous issues that: (1) consoles are the future of gaming; (2) PCs are becoming obsolete with regards to that, yadda, yadda; (3) explained how Sony is being a poop-head; (4) and elaborated on South African gamers being lazy, and etcetera.

This seems to be a good time to resort to my back-up topic, and one that is quite dear to me, really. Be nice to it, it's a tender topic and quite shy around new readers. Now how will I breach this topic in a genteel and cultured manner, I wonder? Ah, I have it.

People who preach and posture, but don't actually have a clue what they're talking about, must please do the world a favour and shut their proverbial pie-holes. Why do certain people insist on spewing out complete and utter bull-stool when it's obvious they're literally pulling the information out of their over-utilised derrières?

To place this into context: I've got a certain type of person in front of my mind's eye (and they're not happy to be there). You've probably met the type, though they come in a variety of shapes and sizes. Usually, they're found trolling on forums (especially gaming forums), where they take every opportunity to comment on a subject they know nothing about. Honestly, what is the point of debasing perfectly good subject matter by inserting a comment like "Oh, World of Warcraft has been released in South Africa!" or my favourite, "The Xbox 360 will be sold in South Africa!"

There is just no excuse for blatant idiotic misinformation, there really isn't. If I ever overhear someone spewing misinformation while I'm at a gaming event, rest assured, I will roll up a newspaper, not to mention rub their nose in 'it'. Gamers are already swallowing everything the hype-engine powered marketing departments evacuate from their bowels. There is simply no need for gamers themselves to add more to the heaping pile of poop. Especially not gamers who should know better, because let's face it; Google can make anyone an expert on something. You just have to bother doing a quick search.

And so, we've come full circle. From operatic poo, to misinformed poo. I hope you've enjoyed the ride. **NAG**

> "People who preach and posture, but don't actually have a clue what they're talking about, must please do the world a favour and shut their proverbial pie-holes."

Leeroooooooy
Jeeeeeeeenkins!

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5 REASONS TO GET THE NEXT ISSUE OF SA COMPUTER MAGAZINE

SA Computer MAGAZINE
INTUNE
APPLE IS BACK IN TUNE AND HAS ITS GROOVE BACK

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2 CORES DO MAKE A RIGHT
intel pentium EXTREME EDITION

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Total Control TV

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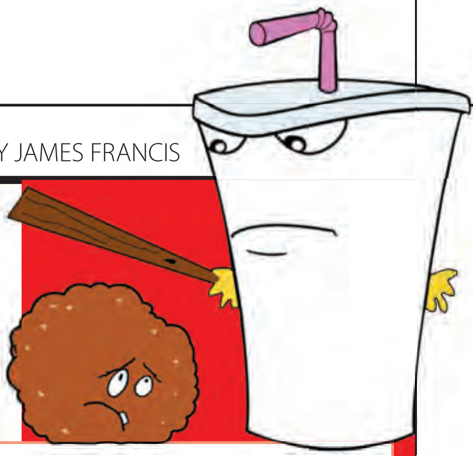
ON SALE 3 AUGUST 2005

BY JAMES FRANCIS



What's in a review?

ARE YOU PLAYING BATTLEFIELD 2 yet? Are you killing time in what has to be the best damn shooter ever made? Have you been devoting your life to being the best of the best on the ranked servers? Surely this has to be the best game ever!

And judging from the myriad of reviews on the game, it definitely is. After all, any title that keeps scoring very high from a range of sources has to be excellent. All those reviewers are entitled to their opinion and I'm sure even this magazine will give it a sterling recommendation. That's fine: everyone's entitled to their opinion. Here is mine.

Battlefield 2 stands for that part I hate about games. It's the point where a title is technically excellent, doing everything you want it to do and everyone loves it - to the point that no one seems to care about the seriously glaring problems the game has. Firstly, is Battlefield 2 all that big an achievement considering the fact that DICE had a proprietary engine to do their bidding (as opposed to the then-outdated Torque used in Battlefield and Tribes), plus the feedback from two versions and two expansions, not to mention numerous mods? In fact, a lot of BF2's ideas were cannibalised from Trauma's Desert Combat. DICE did bother to employ Trauma briefly, firing them once the game was released. Then there is the feature set. The list of punted changes to the game, such as penetrable materials and a buddy list never materialised, and there are numerous others (still listed on the official Battlefield 2 site at the time of writing) which aren't in the game. This isn't the Diablo 2 saga where fans actually started hyping features beyond what the developers revealed. DICE said these would be in the game.

Okay, not everything you want in a game makes it - we know that. But DICE also neglected to tell us that the stats, medals and extras you can unlock rely completely on your online account. In other words: unless you have at least a dual ISDN setup, you can't use that feature. At the back of the box the following is vaguely mentioned: "Defeat the enemy online to rise through the ranks and unlock weapons and medals". That's it. No sticker and no mention that you won't get much out of this game unless you have an online connection.

Yes, LAN play still works – sans any bots (because I think DICE and EA are too lazy to support this feature). The single player sucks. The maps are too small, the bots are useless (unless you tweak the scripts yourself) and the game is very limited here - even more so than previous Battlefield games. Look at UT 2004. It had bots and a good single player campaign. So did the technically inferior BF-clone Star Wars Battlefront.

But most reviewers just ignore this. Why? Because it's a great game! How can you flaw a game on mere technicalities, moving backwards on some features and misrepresentation when it's so much damn fun? Look, any idiot can write a game review: you play it, you like it, you write it. That's not the point. Game reviews are meant to inform you of all the pros and cons of a title you might not discover until you spend cash on it. That's the point of a review. But that's not the practical reality and reviewers often succumb to hype as quickly as their readers - if not faster.

I don't read game reviews for that reason, because reviewers can be harsh when they want to be, but it takes little to turn them into screaming little girls at an R&B concert. I generally don't ask star-smitten little girls advice on anything. Should you? **NAG**

> "Battlefield 2 stands for that part I hate about games. It's the point where a title is technically excellent, doing everything you want it to do and everyone loves it – to the point that no one seems to care about the seriously glaring problems the game has."

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GRAND FINALS
Where: Singapore When: November 16th-20th, 2005

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CLOSED
JUMP

INBOX

SO NOW THAT MY replies to the letters are a little more helpful I'm accused of being excessively sarcastic. What to do… oh, what to do? The eyeballs of tens of thousands of readers are on this very line waiting to see my next move. The anticipation is killing me, and I really feel like an egotistical megalomaniac [it's a great feeling, especially when you don't care about consequences]. I think the best way to handle this is to explain my approach to these pages, my core philosophy as a gamer - which is lucky and cunning enough to have the best job in the world. I don't really know if you care or not, if you even read these pages or if you decide that there's more to life than reading a bunch of replies to letters. I just don't know and never will know what people really want, and because of this I just don't care.

Why do you think I can or want to help you with your game that won't load? I'm not in technical support largely because of all the stupid people out there calling support lines. If you can't figure out how to get a game working on your PC, then you're probably better off sticking to consoles. Why do you think that I care if your mouse or keyboard doesn't work? All I'm really interested in is the origin of the Scroll Lock key and to find out what it's used for. And if it has no use, why doesn't someone remove it? It's much like the tilde [~] key is used for dropping down the console in games like Quake. Why do you think the developers of Quake selected this key for that particular function? Was it because nobody uses it for anything else? This is the kind of thing I find interesting and therefore assume most other people out there will also find interesting. And the best part about this is if I'm wrong about it, I'll never know. So what's the point in worrying what people think? You'll never know, but all this might just be some elaborate marketing gimmick to get more people talking about NAG and buying NAG. I mean, who in their right mind does away with the usual letters page to write 3,000 odd words of text on the subject of replying to letters in a magazine? I'm sure I have better things to do – like playing Battlefield 2 for example. I actually though this might be quicker and easier than reading and replying to all those hundreds of letters each month. I guess I'll know at the end of all this. So this raises the question if all this was planned and whether it has some deeper meaning? Or is it just really because the Editor of this magazine would rather be playing games than writing replies? But you already know the answer to this one – it's the lazy version.

In an attempt to be useful I'll try and answer all your questions in one go. I'm hoping that this will generate more thinking and hopefully some interesting letters in the future. You can forget all that laziness stuff. I'm really doing this for you and for the raising of the standard of gaming in South Africa.

(1) No. You cannot get a job at NAG by just being good at games or by playing games all day long. Any idiot can play videogames, so this will never be a qualification. The people who work at NAG are, to put it modestly, gifted and talented in so many different ways it'll scare the hell out of you. If you really think you have what it takes, then write a damn good article about gaming and send it to me. I'm not interested in your opinion on the latest version of Quake. Everyone has a valid opinion on just about everything. The best part is that in 99% of all the cases where I actually ask someone to send me something, I never hear from them again. If you're not willing to put in the effort, then why write the mail in the first place.

(2) No. There are no high paying jobs for developing games in South Africa. Live with it. If you're really motivated, then go overseas to study, spend the money, do the research and it'll pay off… if you're lucky. Unfortunately, in South Africa the one established development studio is well staffed with exceptionally talented people. It's a pity because I'd love to encourage South Africans to create games, but I'd have trouble sleeping at night knowing you're living on the street in a cardboard box. That said; why not code smaller projects like Flash games? Start small and then move onto other things. I know one day we'll have a thriving game development environment in this country – just not right now. I also don't know if any local Universities or Colleges offer game development courses. What I do know, is that asking me to find out is not the best way to start a letter.

(3) No. You can't have free stuff. Just because we're basically sitting on heaps of unused old hardware at the NAG office doesn't mean we want to give it away. Having all this stuff in the same office creates a special and cosy environment which everyone thrives in. It must be something to do with all that silicon, metal and shiny buttons that makes gamers want to work hard. Occasionally we get sick of looking at the same pile of junk and decide to hold a clearing out competition where some lucky reader walks away with a box of goodies we don't find valuable or interesting anymore. The latest 3D cards have been known to find their way into these giveaways... it's that crazy.

(4) Yes. It's hard doing this job, even though it's more fun than stacking boxes or cleaning toilets all day. Deadlines are missed, people need to be beaten on a regular basis and getting everyone at the office at the same time for a meeting is like trying to pick up all the mercury you dropped onto the carpet… impossible. We love this job, but it is hard work. So at the end of the day, the perception that we spend all day playing games, and maybe write a few lines of text here and there is the stuff of pure fantasy.

(5) Yes. We think the scoring system in the magazine works just fine at the moment, but this doesn't mean it won't change in the future to something completely different. We know you're a smart bunch and will be able to keep up with us, no matter what new radically complicated or overly simplistic system we cook up next. I think keeping everyone guessing is still the best strategy.

(6) No. Your other gaming magazine isn't better then us – just different. Better is finding R1,000 in an envelope instead of R10 - nobody will disagree that finding more money is better. NAG has its strong points and I'm sure its bad points - as does everything else on Earth.

(7) Yes. Magazines are infinitely better than the Internet for more reasons than we would care to mention. In fact, the Internet is really just a research tool that's also the carrier of porn, Viagra, random spam and viruses – yes much better. You can also take a magazine wherever you go. And because it's printed, people tend to be more careful about what they say. That said; I am biased because I publish a magazine. But remember, I probably use the Internet more in a day than most people do in a working week - so I should know.

(8) No. Don't say nice things about the magazine just to get your letter noticed or printed. It has deteriorated to such an extent lately that people start with a line of praise and revert to blah and so on as part of the praise. How do you think this makes me feel? I'd rather you told me that the magazine sucked, but you just wanted to let me know that... blah, etc.

(9) Yes. I get all the news sent to me first - even before it appears on the Internet. So sending me 'news' isn't really helpful, because I already know about it or someone in the office will mention it anytime soon.

(10) No. If you disagree with a score we gave a game then fine. You have your opinion and we have ours. Demanding to have a game reviewed again is ludicrous! Besides, what on Earth do you have at stake here? Did you produce the game? Why take things like this so personally? It's just a score in a magazine about a game. Not some life changing legislation in a government gazette.

(11) Yes. Intel is better than AMD. Why? Because NAG is a better gaming magazine than all the others. This processor is much better than the other because we like it, and yours is much better than ours because you like it. Getting into the price

RUN TO AVOID GETTING KILLED
BLOWING UP SOON!!
JUMP

Sunset Riders (1993)

argument never produces a winner. So at the end of the day, I always say that I like Intel because they're more expensive and I like having expensive things. It's not my fault. I'm spoilt and demanding and pout when I don't get my own way.

(12) Yes. Counter-Strike sucks. I'm so tired of those two words in the gaming context that the next time I hear them I'm going to <insert bizarre method of suicide here>. But this is just me. I love playing Unreal Tournament and Burnout 3 and I'm sure thousands of people out there don't like either. The only difference between them and me is that my job involves writing about games in a gaming magazine.

(13) Yes. I prefer ATI. This is only because at the time of writing they made the best 3D cards. When the times comes, and oops I think it already has, that NVIDIA makes a better 3D card, I'm going to switch my allegiance and not because I'm a traitor. It's because I want the best [see above].

(14) No. I don't have a cheat for you to get past this or that level of this or that game. Remember the research tool called the Internet – use that to find a cheat. As much as I'd love to help everyone, I'm not that idle, ever. And if I were, I'd be playing games myself and not looking up a cheat on the Internet for someone I don't even know. If this sounds too harsh just try and imagine getting a mail like this every other day. You too will go mad.

(15) No. Don't take opinion columns seriously. These people have an opinion on a topic and because they possess all the other skills necessary to work here, their opinions will always have enough merit getting them published in their columns. One day I might decide that their opinions are no longer valid and at that point I'll know that I'm getting too opinionated for this job. Then I'll move on to pack boxes somewhere.

Phew, my fingers are getting tired of all this typing. I've now decided that this is the last time I'm going to try something like this. How's it going on your side? Probably too much text to read in one go. It is almost two entire pages of text without a single break, picture or something interesting to read. Just remember this is all for the greater good, and if you've made it this far the next bit should go quick.

(16) No. Violence in games is never going to turn any normal person into a raving lunatic. I've recently become addicted to an online game and it has affected the magazine [these two pages for example]. I know I'll only realise the real impact of this when I get this magazine back from the printer and see all this text - but that's my lesson to learn. Remember this is actually part of some larger experiment and marketing activity. If I ever figure out how it all fits together, you'll be the first to know.

(17) Yes. I believe that one day all games will look and sound exactly like real life. I also believe that we'll be seeing this sooner rather than later. It doesn't help, however, to daydream about this magical day in the future when you'll have all these great games to play right now. Stop worrying about polygon counts and special effects and just try to enjoy the game for what it is. There are far bigger problems out there, such as not being able to skip past video sequences, bind your keys easily or not being able to save wherever you like.

(18) No. Not one single platform is better than any other. They all have their merits and disrespecting the console compared to the PC just tells me that you haven't really tried all types of games. You only have to look at the stuff coming for the PlayStation 3 and 360 to understand what I mean.

(19) Yes. I understand that all games should be released without a single bug and never require a patch. But the day this happens I'll eat my small finger. Because humans make mistakes there will always be errors in games – this is just the way it works.

(20) No. Older games are not better than newer games. If you remember any old game fondly, it's because back then it was the best and offered something new and probably pushed the boundaries for you. But that's enough of this.

So next month remember that this isn't an agony aunt column, nor is it some technical support facility. It isn't a source of cheat codes and most definitely isn't the place to complain if nobody talks to you because you still play Counter-Strike 1.6. I always read and try to reply to every letter out of some misguided sense of (a) duty and (b) fear that if I don't, nobody will write in anymore. And then there'll be no letters page. But regardless of what I do, my mailbox is always full of interesting mail from an even more interesting cross-section of the South African public. I never in my wildest dreams thought that this many people could share the same kind of passion and, besides that, have all these other interests that I also have. Doing this job is incredibly fun and easy. You'd have to assassinate me first before I ever leave. So keep them coming and I hope you all have a little more insight into the business of writing and replying to letters in a gaming magazine. What did you really expect me to do? Keep my mouth shut and squeeze out some meaningless, but nice reply to every dumb question I get? I don't think so. So if you want to hear my opinion, send me yours. And if we disagree or you leave feeling less than happy then write a letter to Fair Lady – they really know how to make you feel special. To Electronic Arts, please hang onto those two games this month. We'll revert back to our normal programme next month.

If you find any of this offensive please turn to page 36.

Some tips for writing to NAG:

In terms of topics you can write about anything you like. Even though many topics are rehashed over and over, each person brings a unique angle to the subject matter. So your two line e-mail about piracy can be just as interesting as someone else's nine page essay on the sociological impact of piracy on communities and how they advance criminal activity.

It's important to read through your e-mail at least once before you send it. The reason for this is twofold. Firstly, when I get a mail that reads like a five year old wrote it, I take it less seriously. And secondly, if the spelling and grammar are poor it takes much longer to edit into shape for publishing and therefore stands less of a chance of being published.

Never write everything in capital letters or start every world with a capital letter – mail like this is never read and just gets deleted. Use a proper subject in the subject line or the mail will be automatically moved to the junk mail folder and deleted. Keep it simple but clear and avoid excessive use of these characters [! @ * ([ ]) - | ~ $ &]. Three to eight words should be more than enough.

Please feel free to insult us and tell us you think we suck. We take everything as constructive criticism, no matter how dumb it may be and when you talk about your friend having a problem – we know it's you.

Telling us what a brilliant issue you have just read is also encouraged. We usually only get crack pots sending us mail. So the odd letter of praise telling us how great we are really helps turn that frown upside down.

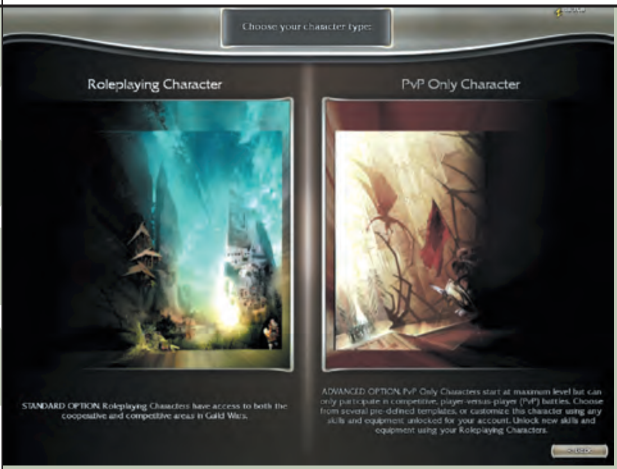
It's okay to mail without making a point. We understand that sometimes people just like to chat and get something off their chests. Just please don't be annoyed when you don't get the kind of response you were hoping for.

Be prepared to be abused by the letter answering system. There's a good reason why the magazine will always have the last say and in print. It makes us look important and makes you look dumb. It's just the way it works.

Remember that we know that you crave fame and fortune, so you'll try that little bit harder or be that little more obscure with your mail just to get your letter published. We know how you feel because we do the same thing all the time.

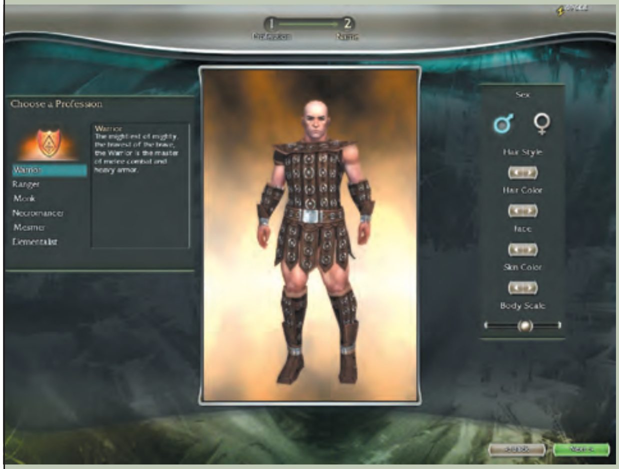
I hope this month's letters page has been constructive in some way. Next month we'll be back to normal and everyone can get on with their lives again. **NAG Ed.**

IMPORTANT STUFF! PAY ATTENTION!
Land Mail: P.O. Box 237, Olivedale, 2158
Cyber mail: letters@nag.co.za
Important: Include your details when mailing us or how will you ever get your prize if you win. . .


Choose your character type
Roleplaying Character
PvP Only Character

STANDARD OPTION Roleplaying Characters have access to both the cooperative and competitive areas in Guild Wars.

ADVANCED OPTION PvP Only Characters start at maximum level but can only participate in competitive, player-versus-player (PvP) battles. Choose from several pre-defined templates, or customize this character using any skills and equipment unlocked for your account. Unlock new skills and equipment using your Roleplaying Characters.


1
2
Choose a Profession
Warrior
Ranger
Monk
Necromancer
Mesmer
Elementalist
Sex
Hair Style
Hair Color
Face
Skin Color
Body Scale

Warrior
The mightiest of mighty, the bravest of the brave, the Warrior is the master of melee combat and heavy armor.

1
2
3
4
5
Head
Chest
Legs
Hands
Feet
(1) Weapon
(1) Shield/Focus
(2) Weapon
(2) Shield/Focus
Items
Runes
Prophet's Scalp Design
Attribute Points

THE GUILD WARS JOURNAL

GUILD WARS (WWW.GUILDWARS.COM) IS an interesting new MMORPG (Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game) attempting to do something a little different from the usual MMORPG fare. The main drawing card of Guild Wars (and what sets it apart), is the fact that it doesn't charge a monthly membership fee. A once-off purchase of around R350 gets you the entire game and unlimited access to the world.

This is obviously a wonderful concept, but how does it work in practise? Developer ArenaNet has mentioned that future expansion packs will have to be purchased, and that is what will cover the expensive nature of running a MMORPG.

In the meantime, let's get into the game and see what all the fuss is about.

DAY 1

June 28th, 2005 | 7 Comments

I bought an account key online with a friend's credit card (not having one of my own). You can either buy a key from **www.plaync.com** or from within **the game** itself.

To get the game, you can either purchase the CD-ROM version, or simply download a tiny 60KB file from the **Guild Wars Website** - which was what I did. Once I installed this file, I had to go online and download a further 20MB or so of data, and then I was presented with the login screen. I entered my account key, and was allowed to create a character. You can create multiple characters, so experimenting with the various classes and professions is possible.

Interestingly enough, Guild Wars has two flavours. You can either create a **Role-Playing character**, which is your usual MMORPG fare of 'pick a class, adventure around the world, complete quests and improve your character', or you can create a **PvP (Player vs. Player)** character which allows you to pick a class, a kit and then jump into the Arena combat of the world instantly, at the highest level possible. Naturally a PvP character cannot adventure around the Role-Playing character world - it's purely for human versus human combat.

I decided to create a Role-Playing character.

After having chosen my appearance and class (warrior), I was plopped into the world after another 10MB file download. The game ran me through a basic movement tutorial, and then advised me to speak to a specific NPC (Non-Player Character), in order to kick-start the basic quest. Guild Wars has an interesting way of handling how it downloads areas and such. It tends to send the most critical files first when you enter a new area, and only sends the extra bits (guards and non-vital models/textures) later when you return. It streams things in the background, making your playing experience very seamless.

The starting quest led me to my first **Solo Area**. Guild Wars is divided into three types of areas. **Districts** are where players meet up, trade, buy items and do the usual things. Solo Areas are levels where only you play with no other players around. These areas are great for when you want to level your character or just spend some time alone, completing small quests. Then there are **Mission Areas** where a team of players can attempt a specific quest. When you're in a District, you choose whom you wish to team up with. The team leader then starts the mission. Inside a mission, only the members of the team are allowed, preventing the annoying user-related aspects usually found in MMORPGs (people camping around monster spawn areas, people killing you while you're on a quest, etc).

Back at the ranch, I was happily killing weak creatures in the Solo area and completing menial quests as the game continued to teach me the basics. Graphically, Guild Wars is stunning. The world is detailed and vibrant - a nice departure from the usual substandard MMORPG graphics.

Having reached the end of my day, I went and did some research. I found that my account was situated on the **European server**. There are **American, South Korean** and European servers, but players aren't limited to teaming up with people from their specific regions. You can go to an **'International District'** and meet up with players from all three regions - quite a nice touch for the more global-centric individual.

Posted by Miktar at 2:37 AM | COMMENT?

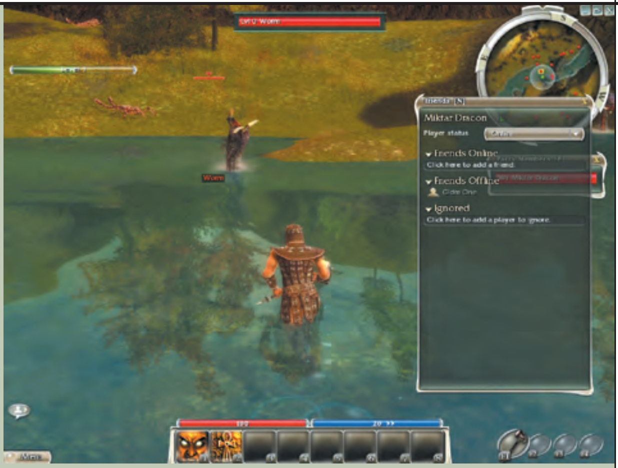
DAY 2

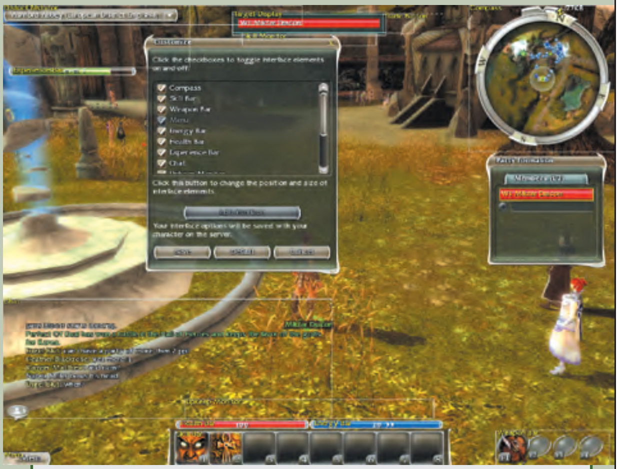
June 29th, 2005 | 3 Comments

Having had very little time to play, I quickly jumped into the game and continued my questing, which eventually led me towards choosing a secondary profession. In this case, I was interested in the Necromancer profession. Each **profession** has a quest preceding it, allowing you to test-drive the various skills and abilities that come with these professions. Once you're happy with your choice, you can accept the profession and it becomes permanent.

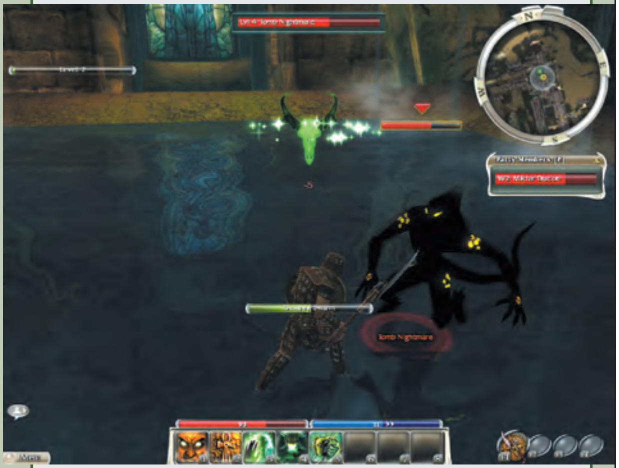
Unfortunately my time was up and I had to log out of the server. Before I did, however, I added the name of a friend, whom I knew was playing Guild Wars too, to my in-game friends list. The friends list alerted me that my friend was online, so I sent him a quick message and logged off.

Posted by Miktar at 11:43 PM | COMMENT?





ArenaNet really know how to develop a game that has all the trimmings you could want. Aside from an in-game friends list, guild creation and so fourth, you can also customise the interface to an obscene degree. Elements can be moved around and scaled with ease. Want your mini-map to be bigger? Enter customisation mode, and simply drag it's edge until it's the size you want. You can rearrange every single bit of information, or switch them on/off depending on your preference.

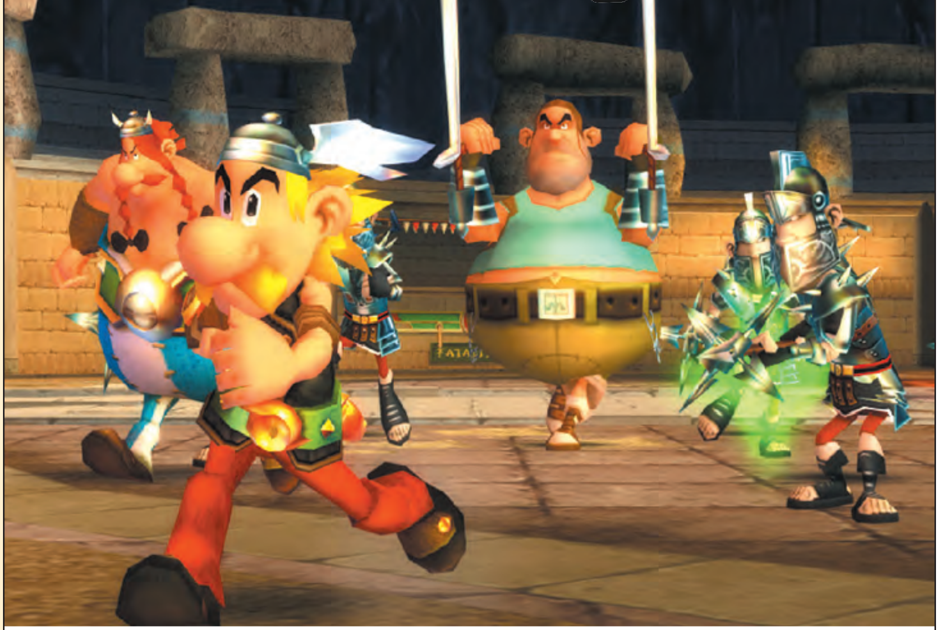


Next month we'll go into more detail about the classes and professions in and other activities you can do around the world such as crafting, team missions and Player vs. Player combat.

PREVIEWS

IT'S THE MONTH AFTER E3, so let's see if we can get some normality back into this section. With the arrival of the new platforms and the current ones expanding their catalogues a lot, it's impossible to cover everything out there. Still, we think games like Stargate SG-1, Daxter, Paraworld, Soul Calibur III and the Full Spectrum Warrior sequel deserve your attention. And do catch the hands-on Burnout Revenge preview on your way out.

ASTERIX & OBELIX XXL 2: MISSION LAS VEGUM



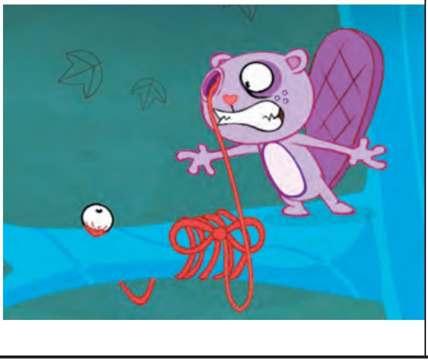
DEVELOPER Etranges Libellules **PUBLISHER** Atari **PLATFORMS** PS2, PC **RELEASE DATE** October 2005

Our favourite Gauls are back! XXL, released last year, wasn't bad or great, but we had fun. In the sequel, Asterix and Obelix head off after Getafix, who has gone to Las Vegum, Julius Caesar's new theme park. The druid is acting strange, plus all the other druids in the Roman Empire have disappeared. It seems our heroes will have some clobbering to do!

HAPPY TREE FRIENDS

DEVELOPER Flashman **PUBLISHER** TBA **PLATFORMS** TBA **RELEASE DATE** TBA

As you can see, there's no information on this one. In fact, Flashman is still looking for a publisher interested in the idea of a Happy Tree Friends game. We are, though, and we hope they get one. Any franchise born from a Flash cartoon involving cute animals getting themselves into all kinds of gory, violent trouble deserves a game.



WANTED

Conker: Live & Reloaded

PLATFORMS: Xbox

By the time you read this, Conker will be on the shelves and we'll be playing it. How can you ignore the most foul-mouthed cute animal in gaming?

Earth 2160

PLATFORMS: PC

This has always been an underdog series. While C&C and WarCraft were making their mark, the Earth games slowly built a cult following. And with 2160, we might see the title that will break into the RTS mainstream.

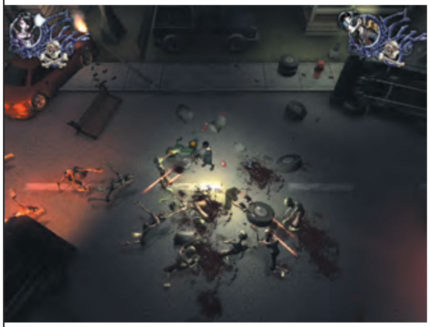
Jade Empire

PLATFORMS: Xbox

We haven't gotten a copy of Bioware's first original game yet, but the reports are that it's really good, plus it involves martial arts. We all wanted to be Ninjas when we were little. We still do and are.

MONSTER MADNESS

DEVELOPER Artificial Studios **PUBLISHER** Artificial Studios **PLATFORMS** PC, Xbox 360 **RELEASE DATE** Q1 2006



You have to love top-down shooters, especially those with multiplayer capabilities. Monster Madness will allow up to four players to blow, hack, maim and burn a lot of bad monsters, who happened to show up while their parents are out of town. And because it's heading for the Xbox 360 as well, the visuals won't be half bad either.

KINGDOM UNDER FIRE: HEROES

DEVELOPER Phantagram **PUBLISHER** Deep Silver **PLATFORMS** Xbox **RELEASE DATE** September 2005

The Kingdom Under Fire series is nearing its next release, boasting crisp graphics and addictive RTS play, mixed with third person combat on the battlefield. The first game pleased Xbox owners, but the second boasts that it enhances practically everything in the game, plus of course a new set of heroes, characters and units.

GOLDENEYE: ROGUE AGENT

DEVELOPER EA **PUBLISHER** EA **PLATFORMS** DS **RELEASE DATE** August 2005

Not everyone liked the new direction Rogue Agent took, but the DS version should still be worth owning, if only for the 7-player wireless multiplayer – using one cartridge. The single player campaign will have six missions, which is a tad limited, but it will still be a polished FPS for the DS.

PROJECT GOTHAM RACING 3

DEVELOPER Bizarre Creations **PUBLISHER** Microsoft **PLATFORMS** Xbox 360 **RELEASE DATE** Q4 2005

Thanks to the limited presence of the Xbox locally, most gamers don't know anything about the Project Gotham Racing series. This launch title for the 360 will definitely warrant some attention, because it will be the first showcase of the new console's pushing racing games. And after looking at the screenshots, you can see what the fuss is about.

What we're playing at the NAG office ...

Battlefield 2

Well, duh! Obviously we're playing the new Battlefield game and we obviously love it. We're also swearing a lot and half the staff have missed their deadlines. The other half isn't even at work.

Juiced

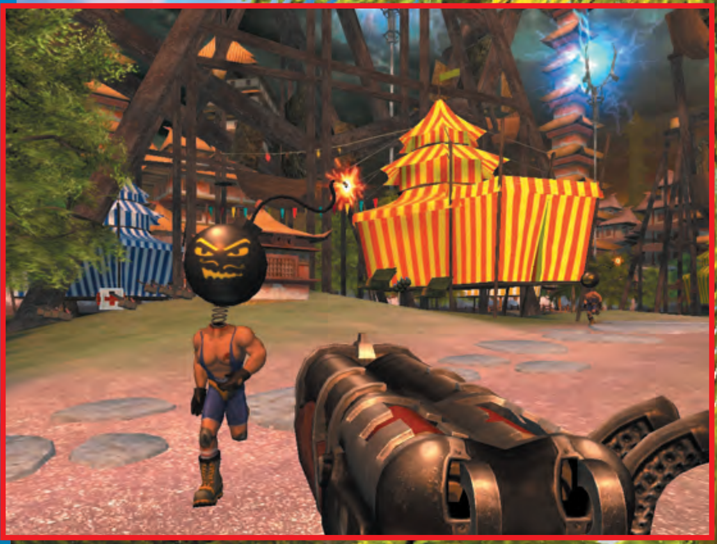
The Tony Hawk of street racing is finally here and while you can read our verdicts in the reviews section, it will suffice to say it's really good.

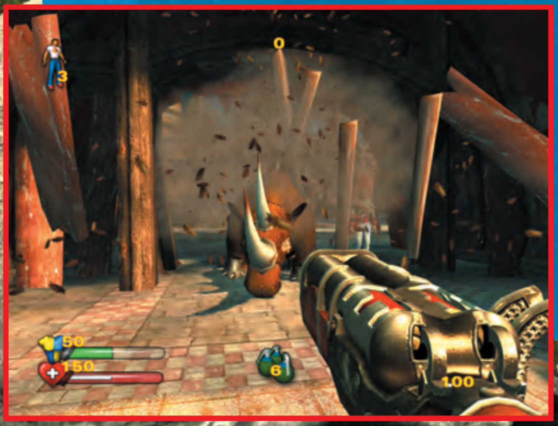
GTA San Andreas

Yes, it's the return of the King! Honestly, if it weren't for games like Juiced and Battlefield 2 to divert our attention, we'd be playing this non-stop. There's just too much to do and steal.

YOU CAN'T BE BLAMED for finding Serious Sam II a bit confusing. Technically it's the third game in the series. The first game was released in early 2002, featuring an over-the-top engine and the most enemies on your screen (bar, maybe, KISS) in a game ever. The Second Encounter, originally touted to be the second in a trilogy, was released later that year and featured a revamped Serious engine, more monsters, larger maps and buckets of the insanity that this series is renowned for.

The third game never materialised and Serious Sam II isn't the third game – it's the official Serious Sam sequel. But before we launch into that, perhaps some explanation on Sam's world is necessary. If you've never played Serious Sam, you arguably have no concept of how chaotic and action-intensive the titles were. Serious Sam followed a simple Gauntlet-style formula: players moved into an area that was then flooded with monsters. Literally hundreds of game sprites popped up on the horizon and they had no intention to negotiate. You and Sam did, though. Using a blend of the most destructive weapons yet seen in a shooter (including a cannon that shot atomic cannon balls) and a set of one-liners that would even make Ash





VITAL INFO

Platforms
PC XBOX

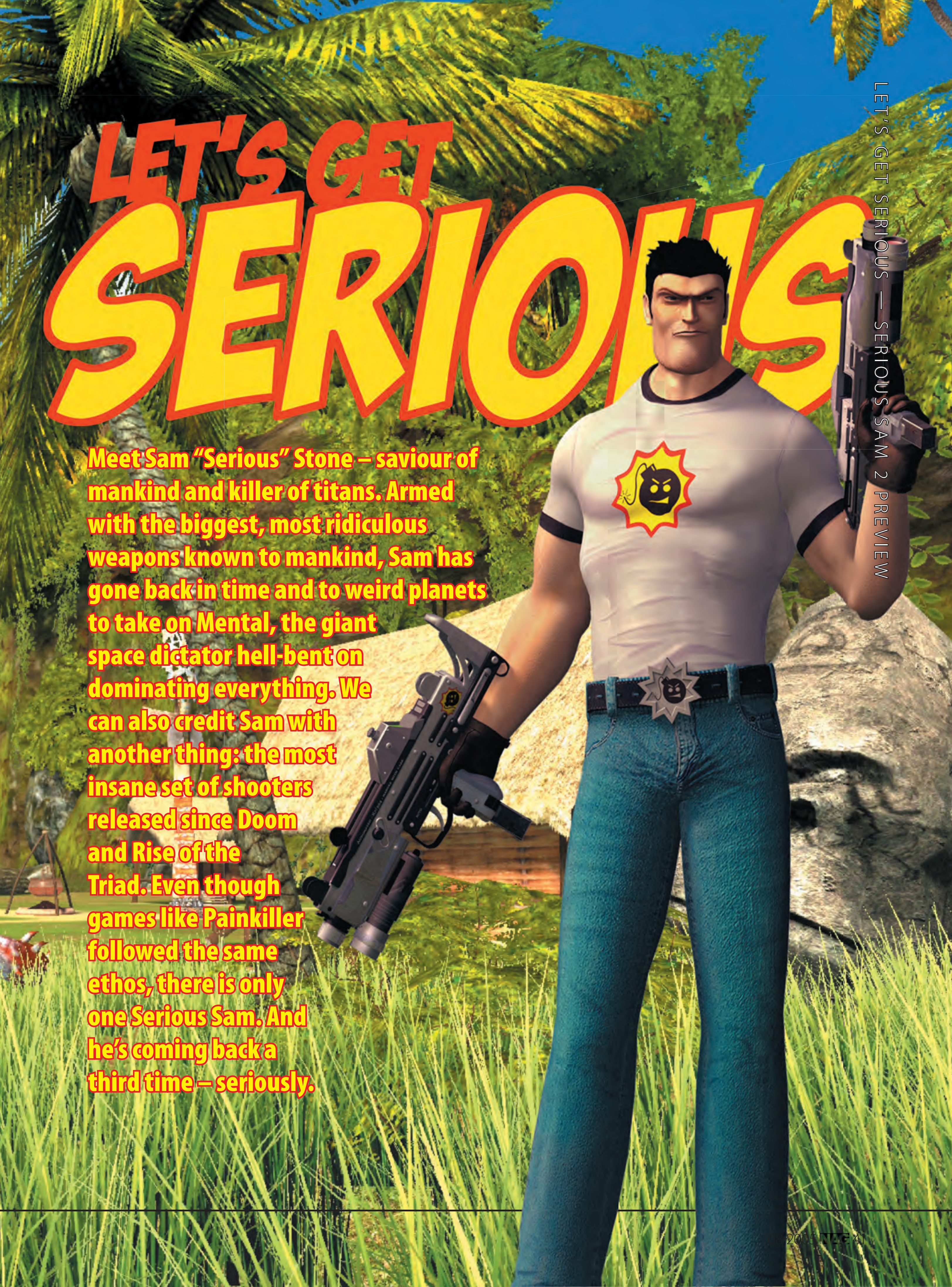
Developer
Croteam

Publisher
2K Games

Supplier
Ster Kinekor Games
[011] 445 7900

Genre
FPS

Release Date
Q4 2005



LET'S GET SERIOUS

Meet Sam "Serious" Stone – saviour of mankind and killer of titans. Armed with the biggest, most ridiculous weapons known to mankind, Sam has gone back in time and to weird planets to take on Mental, the giant space dictator hell-bent on dominating everything. We can also credit Sam with another thing: the most insane set of shooters released since Doom and Rise of the Triad. Even though games like Painkiller followed the same ethos, there is only one Serious Sam. And he's coming back a third time – seriously.

proud, diplomacy involved killing everything in your way with extreme prejudice. Whether it's a horde of headless kamikaze bombers running towards you, an enraged bull tearing through everything or the final boss of the first game that made Sam look less than two feet tall: kill 'em all and let God sort them out. The stories were equally over-the-top. Sam was sent back in time as a last-ditch effort to save humanity from an alien invasion that started ages ago amongst Earth's ancient societies. So, basically it involved running around levels modelled on Aztec, Egyptian, Babylonian (and more) settings, packed with the most ridiculous and fun monster designs ever seen in a shooter (and perhaps in a game). Serious Sam's development clearly had few rules and bothered little with believability and coherency: monsters and weapons often made little to no sense. Not that you cared – as long as they died when you pummelled them with rockets and bullets.

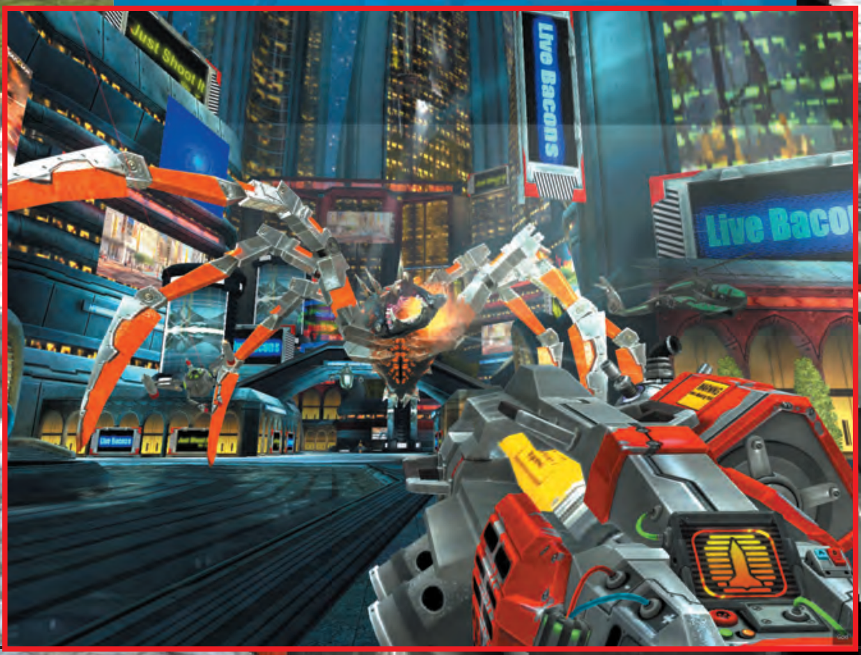
The Serious Engine itself was a step in this direction. There have been more technically impressive shooter engines on the market, but few reached the same level of creativity the Serious Engine touted - especially with how it mangled physics. It was also one of the first engines to fluidly move between detailed interiors and massive exteriors. In the opinion of NAG, it's definitely the most underrated shooter engine on the market.

SO WHAT'S SAM UP to now? Well, Mr. Stone is still out to get Mental and Mental is still out to take over everything. But the time-travelling theme changes to a space-faring one. On his way to Sirius, one of Mental's conquests and where the giant resides, Sam is contacted by the Great Wizards Council of Sirius. These old men inform Sam that if he wants to beat Mental, he needs the pieces of a medallion, all which have been spread to various planets. In short, more places to visit, more things to shoot. There isn't much more to tell, but Serious Sam has never been about plot twists, and the reason why you are shooting stuff is really as vital as it was for Quake, Doom or Duke. Who cares? Line them up and tick them off!

Still, Serious Sam II will be the largest game in the series by far. In total, fans can expect over 40 levels spread over seven environments (or planets). These include tundra levels, jungles, modern cities, swamps, a volcanic planet and even a world where everything is a giant (including the insects), making you and Mental's minions look only a couple of centimetres tall. Ever shot an ant with a shotgun? To compliment this larger world, the game will also boast 45 new enemies, as well as some old familiars from the first games. But perhaps the biggest change is vehicular and animal-back combat. Granted, vehicles are the latest fad in the FPS genre, but you can trust in Sam and Croteam that the ones on offer in Serious Sam II will be over-the-top and pretty unique. The animal-back combat is especially intriguing, but Croteam is hush about this feature. Finally, new weapons and upgrades will also be in the package. Once again, not a lot of detail on this, but screenshots (and movies) have shown old weapons as well as new ones such as dual Uzis.

THE SERIOUS ENGINE IS also a whole new beast. Built from the ground up, it supports OpenGL, DirectX and the Xbox platform natively. In fact, when you look down the engine's laundry list of features, it clearly goes out of its way to support as many of the general standards as possible, plus it was built to work on the Xbox effortlessly (like the later Unreal engines), so console fans are bound to see some mileage out of this as well. The physics features are equally elaborate and are likely to take on anything that Havok and its contemporaries have been introducing to gamers. Networking features include support for LAN play, online play via your own means of Gamespy, and finally support for Xbox Live as well – all easily interchangeable. And though we have no confirmation of this, we're expecting co-op play, probably the series' best network feature, to be part of the package as well. The Serious Engine can even natively play MP3, WMA and Ogg Vorbis files. The AI section also has a long list of features, but we doubt you'll see that in serious action (no pun intended) in Serious Sam II: monsters are meant to be stupid and come in droves. But we'll punt the party line here: according to Croteam the new engine allows for a hundred times more detail on characters and environments. That same distinction applies to the physics engine (which was already cool in the Second Encounter). Oh, and in case you are wondering, Croteam says it will shatter its former record for the most monsters on the screen.

"SAM STONE IS BACK to rescue the universe one bullet at a time" states the press release. We couldn't agree more. In a market now dominated with physics-rich, atmosphere heavy and eye candy-pushing titles, Serious Sam II could risk being overlooked - but that would be a serious crime. With the changes made to the engine, the spirit of the series still well-intact and a developer who has proven it prefers fun over technicality, Serious Sam II is definitely one of the most important shooters in the next year… or at least the most fun of the lot. After all, Sam remains the only game character to find a chainsaw and then proclaim: "Look, Ma! I'm a lumberjack!" Priceless. **NAG**



SERIOUS BAD GUYS

Serious Sam 2 will boast 45 new enemies and some of the old ones. That's a serious number and these guys are seriously badass. Here are a few serious problems you'll encounter... *[Okay enough with the seriously, Ed.]*

Martial Arts Zombie

Mental made this undead race from the Kung Phews. Ironically they can only do a flying kick (so they have hooves) and they launch massive shurikens at you.

Beheaded Kamikaze

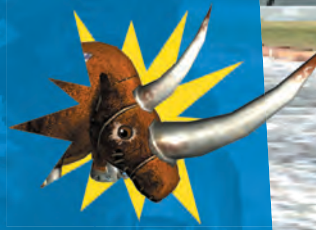
"If you can't make it better, make it bigger" said Mental's scientists. So now the familiar Kamikaze soldier has one big bomb dangling from his head with a spring. Nifty.

Zombie Stockbroker

When a shortage of Mental's favourite food, banana ice-cream, caused the market to crash, countless stockbrokers committed suicide to escape his wrath. So Mental had them reanimated to pay their debt.

Rhino Cybertoy

A toy that Mental found in his basement, he had it mass manufactured so that every family could have one. And to stop mutinies, he had their bellies filled with exploding plasma fuel.



Torso Mech

He saw Sam kill his father, Biomechanoid Major, and he wants revenge. But the only way the game's developers would recast him is if he went for plastic surgery. We're not making this up.

Arcade racing was in the dumps before Burnout 3 riveted us to our gaming rigs last year. And even though Burnout Revenge sounds exciting, just how much can you improve on an excellent game? Enter Emily Newton-Dunn, Burnout Revenge's Producer, to answer some questions.

What do you see as the most significant improvement, change or design idea within Burnout Revenge, and what does the 'Revenge' tag mean?

We introduced the concept of aggressive racing and takedowns in the last Burnout. But in fact you could race to the finish line without having to engage your rivals along the way. We loved the aggressive side of takedown and wanted to up the fury. So this time, you can't progress through the game unless you actively tussle with rivals. Aggression means progression in Revenge! We also realised though, that if we wanted to up the aggressive ante, we were going to have to make a few changes to the gameplay as well. One of the core things we looked at was the tracks. In Burnout 3, the tracks were beautiful for racing on. They had great corners to drift around, but there weren't that many places that you could actually fight on and smash your rivals into. This time round, we focused on what you could do on the tracks, where you could throw your opponents and which elements of the track design you could use to take them down. For this reason, the new Revenge tracks feature alternate routes, shortcuts, hard stops, choke points and ramps [which you can perform vertical takedowns from].

The Revenge name came about because of the aggressive driving. Taking revenge is such a cool emotion and plays really well with Burnout.

How many of the team working on Burnout Revenge have worked on previous Burnout titles? Have there been any fundamental changes in the setup of the team [Criterion] since it was taken over by EA?

We pride ourselves on being a great company to work for, and a large proportion of the existing team worked on previous Burnouts. Other former Burnout members have moved upstairs to work on Criterion's new game, Black, and there's a lot of friendly rivalry between the teams.

I'm happy to say that EA has been really supportive since we joined the company and we have been pretty much left to our own devices with the offer of help from EA's incredible resources, should we need them. It's been nothing but a positive experience. Criterion always strives to create and deliver games of the highest quality, which fits perfectly with EA's own philosophy.

Burnout Revenge will have accurate depictions of the settings which include Tokyo and Rome. Which features of the cities mark them as unique, and what were some of the tasks you had to undertake to ensure accuracy and details of these locations?

We have announced tracks in Detroit, Tokyo and Rome and, of course, there will be more to follow. Visually, every track is unique and carries a flavour of the city that it's based on. You'll never be able to negotiate a city using the Burnout streets, but you will instantly recognise where you are. For example; Detroit is industrial and grimy while Tokyo is clean and the night time setting sets off the neon hoardings brilliantly. Burnout will never be about pedantically replicating a road map. Burnout is a fun game and everything in the

OWNED

burnout goes for revenge

VITAL INFO

Platforms

PS2 XBOX

Developer

Criterion

Publisher

Electronic Arts

Supplier

EA Africa [011] 516 8300

Genre

Arcade Racing

Release Date

Q4 2005

"Aggression means progression in Revenge"

design, including the tracks works towards that. While some buildings may appear familiar – and some will be very familiar, like the Coliseum in Rome – you won't be able to recognise your granny's condo from the roadside!

With Burnout winning so many awards and the fast nature of the game, it must have been hard to find technical room for improvements. So would we be correct to say the game relies more on locations and the layout and design of the game? To add to that, will the recently announced next generation consoles give the team even more scope to create innovative ideas?

We pride ourselves on being world leaders on this generation of hardware, and somehow our incredible technical team manages to get more out of current hardware with every Burnout. I think we've had some fantastic innovations in the game! I'm sure that the next generation of hardware will offer its own unique opportunities, but we're not going there right now.

What modes will be on offer and can you expand on the all-new Revenge mode and Traffic Attack mode for our readers?

Burnout fans won't be disappointed by the number of modes we have this time. Naturally, we have the established modes and two new ones: Grudge Match and Traffic Attack. Grudge Matches are really cool because they appear out of the blue. Start messing with a particular car in a race and if you take it down enough times, it will challenge you to a Grudge Match. Beat the car, and you'll unlock it in your garage. Lose however, and you risk everything that you have won in the previous race. It's a really cool mode that's all about the risks and rewards that Burnout fans have come to expect from our games. Traffic Attack is seriously cathartic. It's everything you have ever wanted to do in busy traffic. Traffic Attack is about going wild in rush-hour traffic and taking everything out. Smash through cars, score pile-ups and try to beat the clock. Naturally there are rules. Traffic travelling in the same direction is safe, while big stuff and oncoming traffic is bad. But you can always smash the safe stuff into the unsafe stuff! Very simple and very satisfying.

You have brought in professional car designers. Is it part of a clever marketing ploy? What does this mean in terms of the game's look and the actual playability of the cars/game?

We all love cool cars here. And what's the most outrageous [and naturally fun] thing you can do to a cool car? Smash it to smithereens of course! And that's exactly what we and every person, who plays Burnout, get to do. We brought in real car designers because we wanted our cars to look authentic. We wanted them to have a style and personality that is consistent with Burnout, but we also wanted cars that would look like they could exist in real life. In terms of playability, we have divided the cars into three classes: Race, Muscle and Crash. Each car has its strengths and we encourage the player to put the cars to the test.

How much planning, testing and reworking goes into the track design, and is there a process of hand drawn designs, computer designs and code testing?

Getting the Burnout games to play so well is a constant iteration of fine tuning and that includes the tracks. The team will probably start the design by visiting the location they are basing the track on - taking some reference photos and generally getting a feel for the place. This reference material will then be brought home to start working on the visual identity of the tracks.

In the meantime, another part of the track team will create a white box to try out the playability of the track. This is a very rough representation of the track without any of the pretty add-ins. This gives us the chance to try out various gameplay options before the track is fully built. Once they are happy with the basic track gameplay and the visuals are added, the whole team will start to play the tracks and add their own layers of complexity - like the traffic setup for example.

How much more car and environmental deformation will be on offer, and is this one of the reasons why we have yet to see licensed cars included?

We reckon that there's about three times more vehicle deformation in Revenge than there was in Takedown. An incredible amount when you think how hard we pushed the hardware last year.

The sound effects, within the gameplay, are a really significant factor in the overall enjoyment of the game. Are these all real digitised sounds, and how do you go about putting this all together? Do you have libraries of pre-recorded sounds?

Our audio guys are a creative bunch and use a mix of what's already available and bespoke audio which they record themselves. The car engines are mostly recorded from real cars and the sounds of the smashing and metal on metal are from trips to the scrap yard. That said, they're a creative bunch and recently got a choir together made up of the rest of the team. I can't tell you what for just yet, but I know it'll bring a smile to your face when you hear it in-game! **NAG**

Hands On

We test drive Revenge

You just don't get a faster, harder hitting and visceral racing game than Burnout 3. Or at least, you didn't until Burnout 4 was announced. We took to the city with an exclusive hands-on test of Criterion's next sure-fire vehicular extravaganza.

The most noticeable change to Burnout 4: Revenge is that you no longer have to avoid cars. Incoming traffic and buses still spell certain car-crushing doom, but now you can actually slam into the back of cars and smaller vans, sending them hurling forward into other cars or your opponents. This new aspect actually changes the game quite a bit, removing the frustration of hitting cars at high impossible-to-steer-speeds, and replacing it with a kind of demented glee at having taken out your opponent using a smaller car as a bowling ball. Visually and aurally Criterion is physically abusing the ageing PlayStation 2. Revenge looks and sounds almost as if it should be on a next-gen console. Smaller graphical touches are evident with newspapers and other debris now littering the city streets. The streets are now more detailed, urban and contain multiple paths.

These multiple paths may yield a quicker route, or actually allow you to use the environment against your opponents. You could, for instance, push crates into your opponent's path.

The new Revenge mode pits you against the clock. Each time you take out a passing car or van, you regain some time. Essentially, Revenge has you taking out your frustrations on every single car you see (with the exception of busses and oncoming traffic) in a bid to extend your clock. When the clock hits zero, the game is over and your score gets tallied. There is almost no verbal way to describe the sheer experience Burnout 4 represents. The quality of the audio, supporting the lush visuals, is something that simply has to be experienced.

Criterion has, somehow, managed to improve upon perfection.

VITAL INFO

Platforms

PC

Developer

Sunflower

Publisher

Deep Silver

Supplier

TBA

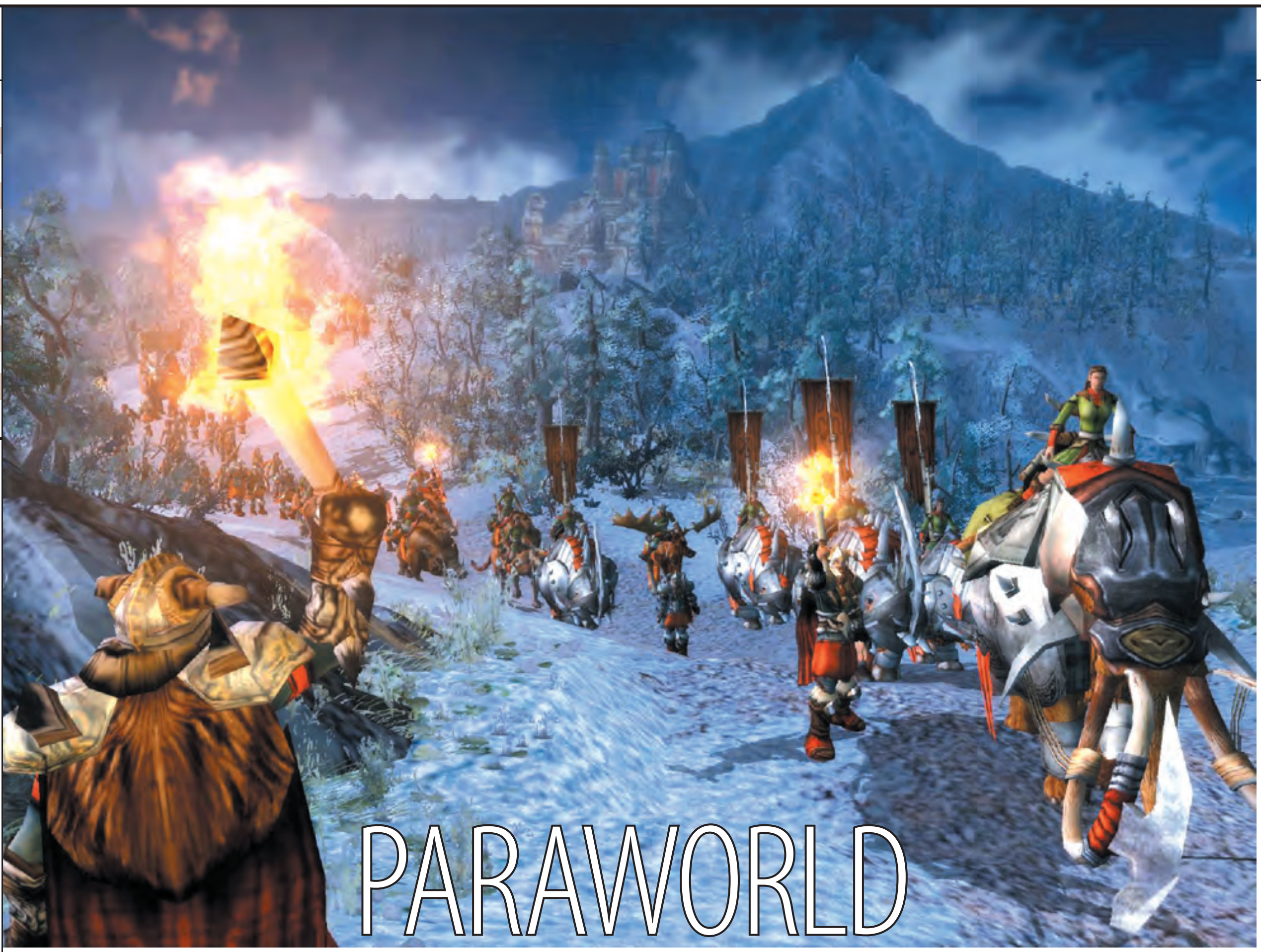
Genre

RTS

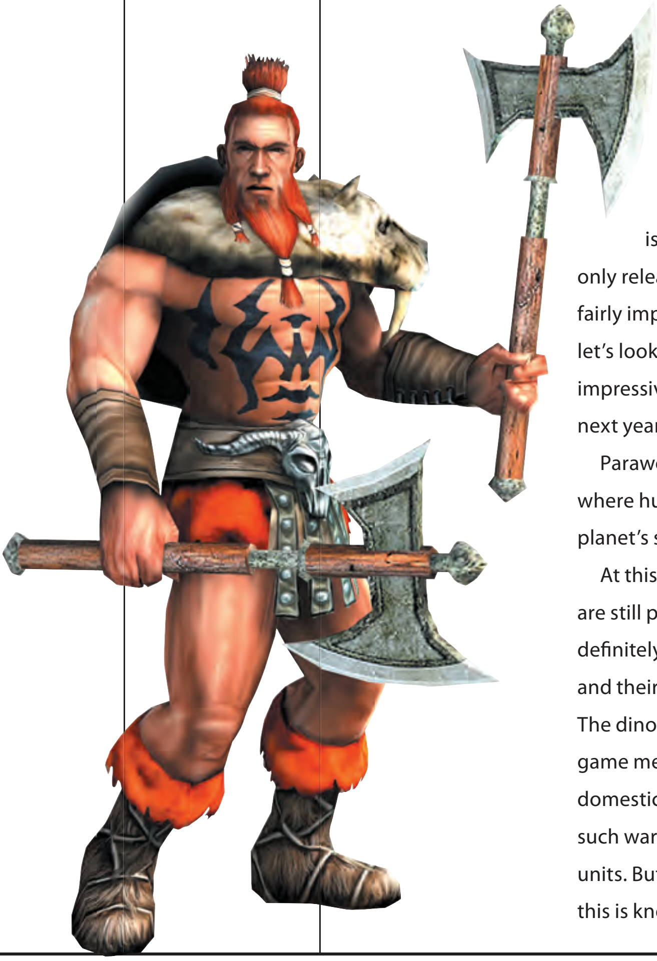
Release Date

Late 2005

There is no denying this game's visuals and Sunflower's RTS reputation should make for a solid game



PARAWORLD



PARAWORLD IS A GERMAN game – we can prove this. SEK, the internal group in Sunflower working on the title, stands for 'Spiele-Entwicklungs-Kombinat'. Naming the games they worked on is a bit pointless, because a lot were only released in Germany or Europe, but it's a fairly impressive catalogue. With that settled, let's look at what is at least the most visually impressive RTS heading towards the PC in the next year.

Paraworld takes place in a primeval era where humans and dinosaurs both wander the planet's surface.

At this point, the setting and story details are still pretty vague, but the concept is definitely interesting. As mentioned, players and their tribes share the world with dinosaurs. The dinosaurs bring a new element to the game mechanics: the lumbering giants can be domesticated and bred, in turn being used for such war functions as troop carriers or siege units. But the trick in taking full advantage of this is knowing your environment. Paraworld boasts over 50 species of animals, each with their own advantages and dangers. For instance, Velociraptors hunt in packs and are very efficient at attacking vulnerable tribe units, while a rogue Tyrannosaurus rex stomping through a battle could upset things quite a lot. Some species even call for support when they are attacked.

This dynamic is further tweaked with climate zones. While RTS games generally have more than one climate zone, or at least a scenario (city, jungle, snow planes), in Paraworld this will affect several parts of the game, including what species you would find there. Combined with the tribal units you build and train, it gives players a larger array of options and outcomes for a battle, dependent on the dinosaurs they use (and avoid) and how they create their army and how the environment impacts the strategy they would like to use.

Both dinosaurs and tribal units can be upgraded and taught new abilities. For instance: a tough unit like a Brachiosaurus can be fitted with upgrades like a catapult, transport basket or siege equipment. If you have domesticated Raptors, you can catapult their eggs into enemy camps – the small Raptors that emerge out of the shattered eggs create a lot of havoc among the enemy.

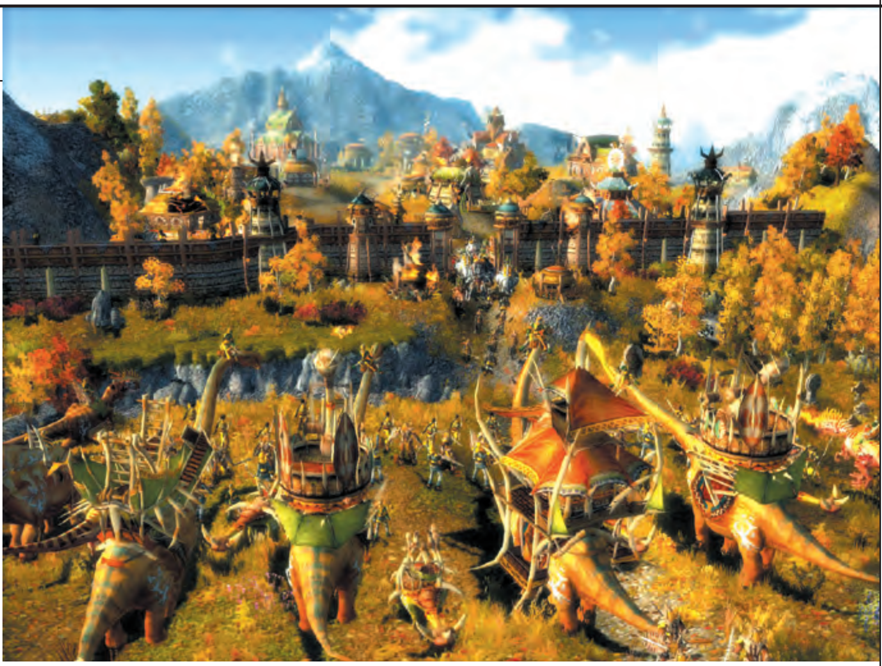
To keep control over all of this, Paraworld introduces the Army Controller. This area of the game gives you total control over your army (as the name suggests). Through it, players will be able to monitor every unit they have, including what they are doing, if they can be upgraded and their general status, as well as give them orders. The upgrading of dinosaurs and units is all maintained in the statistic controller. Upgrading units is vital, because it unlocks new weapons and abilities for the units involved, as well as the expected stat and health upgrades. There will also be hero units to compliment the armies.

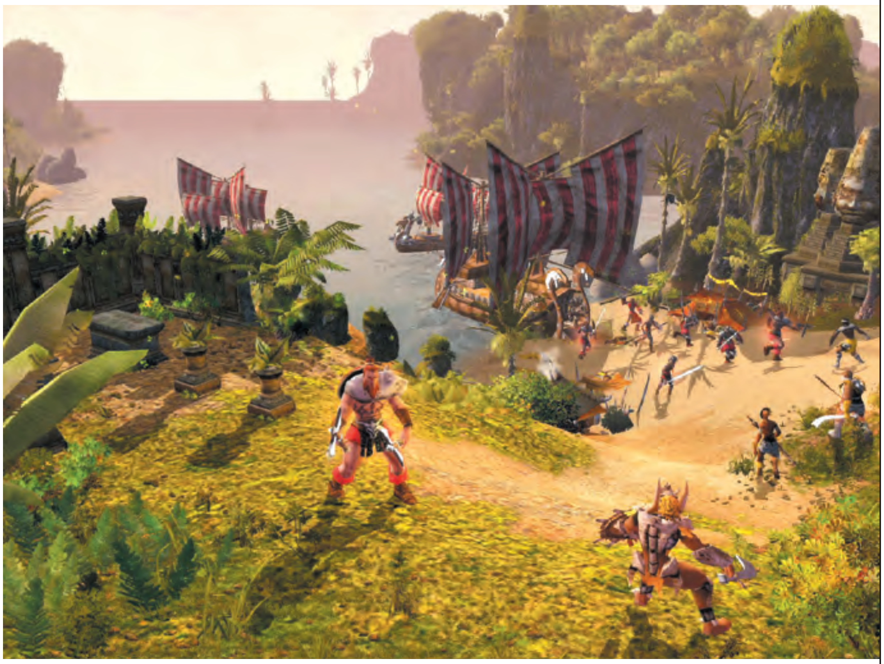
Resources are divided into three: Stone, Wood and Food. The latter can be harvested or gained through hunting, though as mentioned you'll have to be careful about what you hunt, because the predators that roam Paraworld can be very dangerous. A fourth resource, Skulls, appears during combat and is used to upgrade a unit.

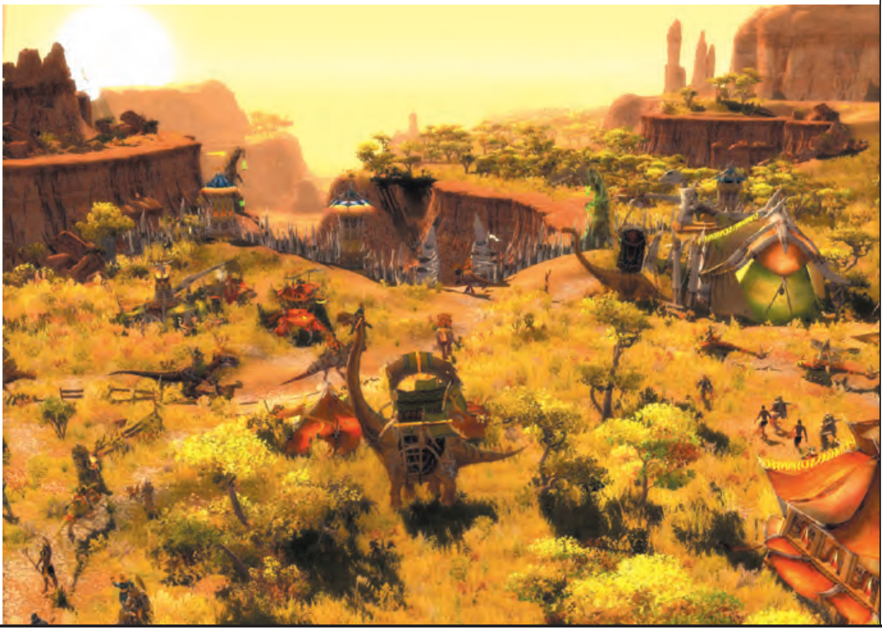
The final game aims for around 20 playable maps, ranging from small to huge areas of 5km^2. Because of all the action, micro-management has been kept to as little as possible, especially since players would be more interested in exploring and domesticating the animals roaming the plains.

Finally, you can't dispute Paraworld's graphics fidelity. The proprietary engine, Pest, has been built specifically for the game and boasts a high level of scalability. Though the game world still handles between 10,000 and 120,000 polygons, the character and animal models vary between 300 and 2,500 polygons. All this is buttered up with DirectX 9.0c effects, which the engine supports natively.

Coming from Europe, Paraworld is unlikely to get the attention its peers will, but it would be foolish to ignore it, because it sounds interesting, looks stunning and has dinosaurs. Any game in which you can train packs of prehistoric predators to attack your enemy has our immediate attention. **NAG**



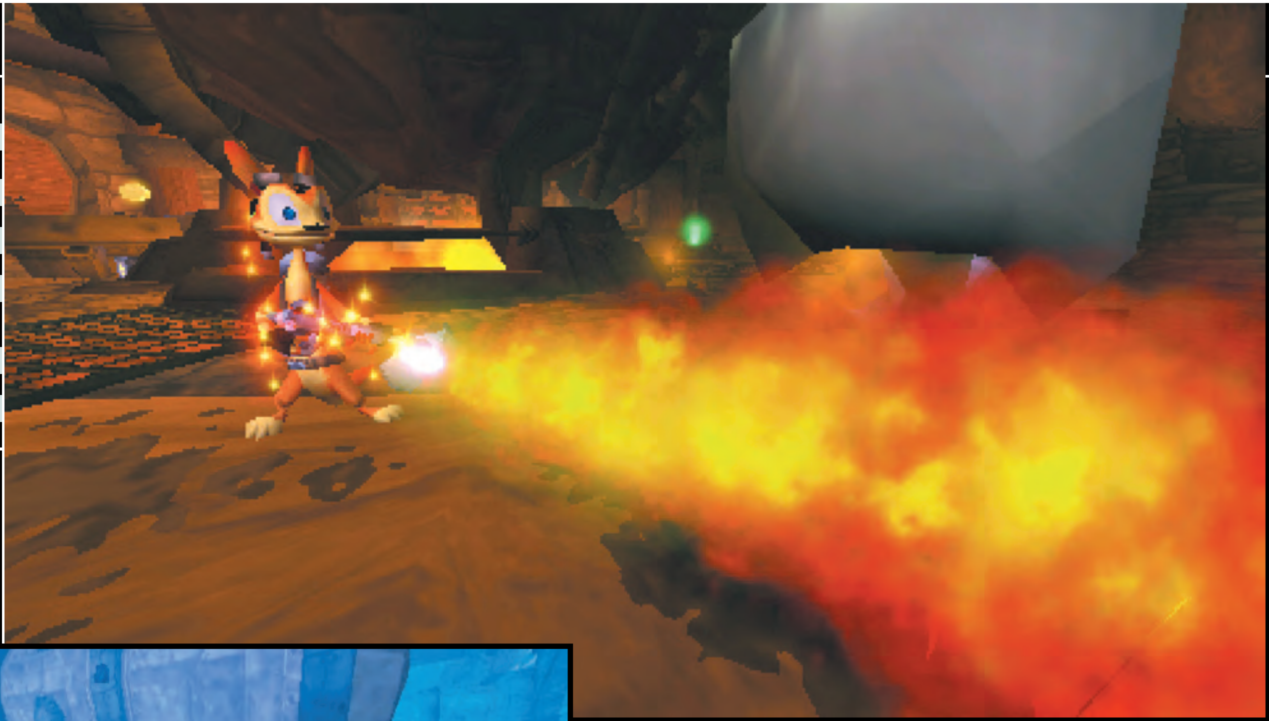


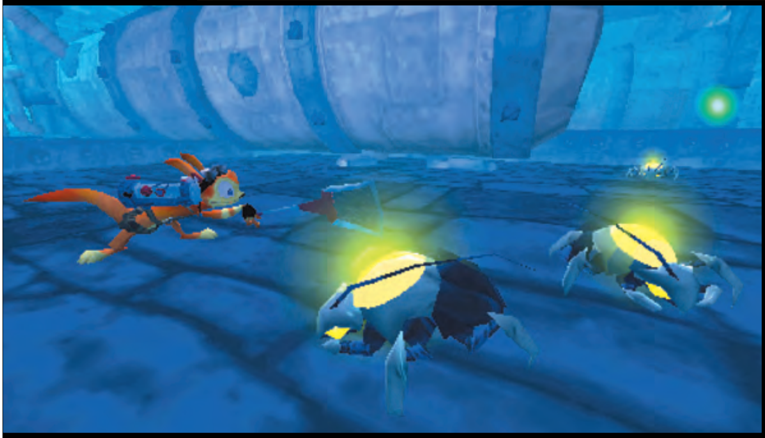


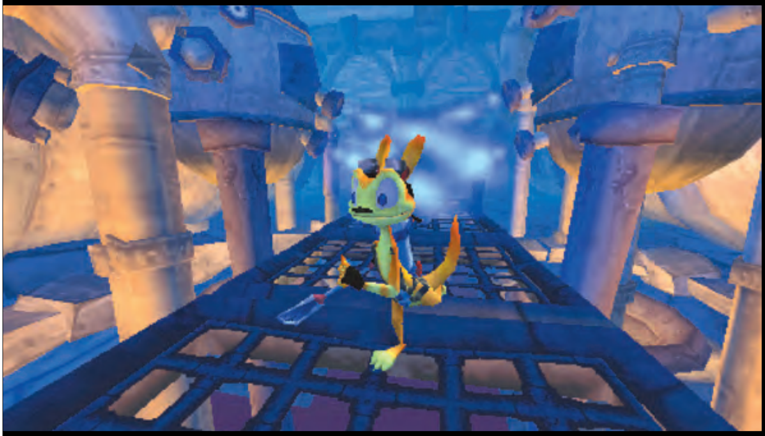
VITAL INFO

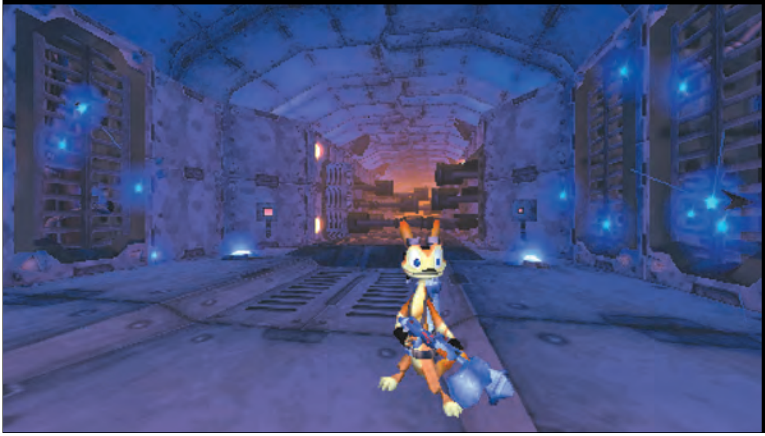
Platforms	PSP
Developer	Naughty Dog
Publisher	SCEE
Supplier	Ster Kinekor Games [011] 445 7900
Genre	Platformer
Release Date	Q2 2006

Cute, furry and funny-of course he gets his own game!









DAXTER

AH, DAXTER. THE REAL reason why we played through the Jak & Daxter trilogy was for the poor guy who got turned into a rodent - because he was funny, sarcastic and always had an animation ready when you completed a section or found something valuable. The little animal even got his own space in the limelight in Jak 3, which featured several sections in which you played as Daxter.

Now let's count up these benefits: a multi-million selling series featuring a furry rodent everyone loves? A spin-off was inevitable. Daxter is heading towards the PlayStation Portable and is an entire game dedicated to Jak's pal. It takes place just before the event of the second Jak game, in which Jak is imprisoned. Daxter regales the tale of his friend trying to free the imprisoned hero. But before that happens, you need a job – and Daxter takes up the role of a pest controller, setting out to get rid of mysterious bugs that have started to swarm Haven City. While on these missions, Daxter discovers more clues on where Jak is being held and how to rescue him,

Development honours, though, are not Naughty Dog's. Instead, Ready At Dawn is working on Daxter - a team that includes developers from Blizzard and Naughty Dog. The developer actually pitched the idea in the first place, which Naughty Dog and Sony agreed on, plus the original developer is very involved with the project, given the close ties between Naughty Dog and Ready at Dawn. The game's script was written by Naughty Dog Creative Director Dan

Arey, so the style and humour will still be traditional to the series.

Because it is based between Jak 1 and 2, the characters then known in the series don't reside in Haven City, while those we do know in Haven only appear in the second game. This gave Daxter a lot of opportunity for cameos as well the introduction of a few new ones.

Taking advantage of the PSP's unique power, Daxter impresses audiences with its graphics, particularly the fur effect on our protagonist. The final game will also have around 20 minutes of cut-scenes, while the playing itself spans over 15 levels with 25 missions. There will also be weapons unique to Daxter's abilities (such as a fly swatter and crop duster) and multiplayer support for two to four players. The system will be more restrictive than, say, Jak 3, but free-roaming is still an element of the game and vehicle missions come in the form of crop dusting.

The combat system is also new. Daxter can use acrobatic moves and weapons to take out opponents, but he can also combo-link attacks for greater effect. This results in more and more elaborate acrobatic moves, ending with a finishing move if you did it right. Being an animal, Daxter has a far more elaborate set of moves, including sneak attacks, wall jumps and various ambush options.

Daxter will be the first PSP game to connect to the PlayStation 2, through upcoming racer Jak X. All this will really bring to the party, though, is extra material to be unlocked in both games. For instance, characters that feature in Daxter will be unlocked in Jak X as new racing choices.

The Jak & Daxter series has been an immense success for both Naughty Dog and Sony, so it's no surprise that a PSP spin-off is on its way. Thankfully it wasn't decided to port one of the existing games and this might lead to a whole new branch of games in this series. Besides, now Daxter will be so much more than just a talking fur adornment on Jak's shoulder. **NAG**

Look at that face- how can't you expect more sarcasm and snotty remarks from Daxter?

VITAL INFO

Platforms

PS2 XBOX NGC PC

Developer

Next Gen Entertainment

Publisher

Ubisoft

Supplier

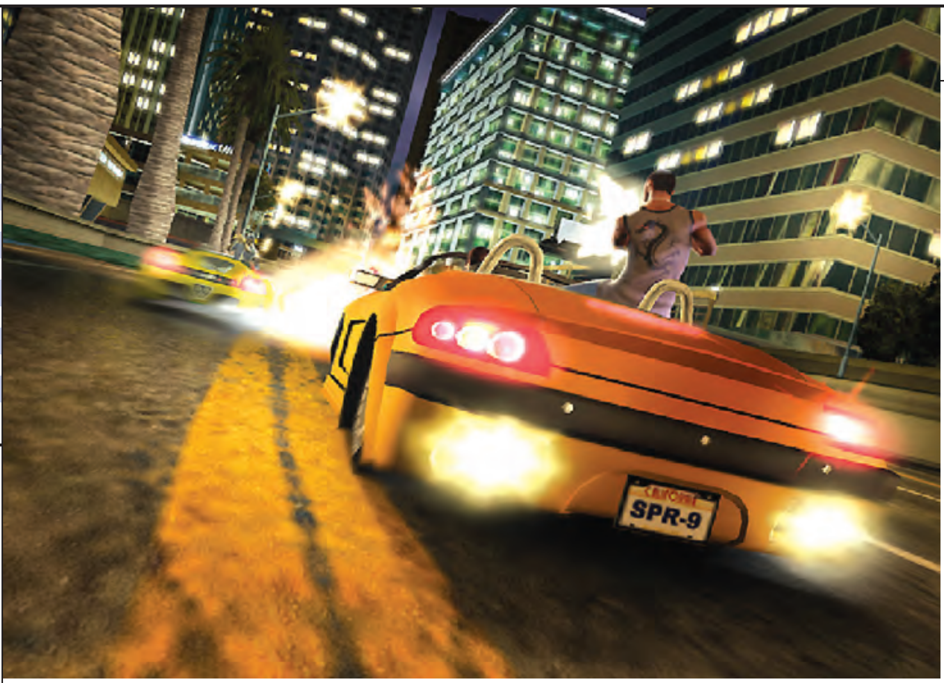
Megarom [011] 234 2680

Genre

Racing/Combat

Release Date

Q3 2005



High speed chases and lots of gunfire - we're giddy about the prospect!

187 RIDE OR DIE

Pedal to the metal as vehicular combat gets serious

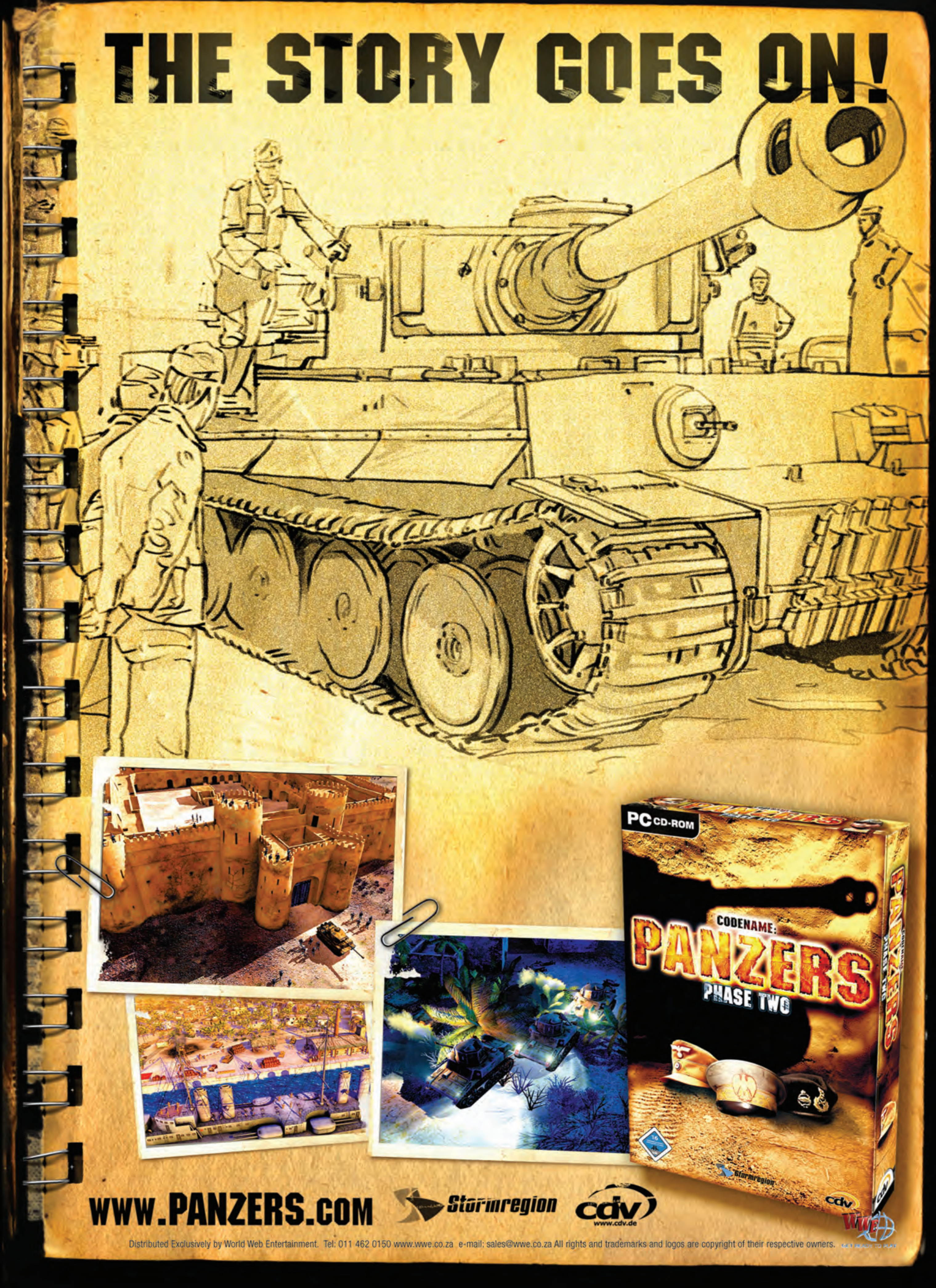
TAKING TO THE STREETS, brandishing a gun and a car with serious horsepower has always been a popular concept in games. We like our action fast and we like blowing things up. What better hybrid could there be than a vehicular combat game? But as with all great ideas, execution has been flawed and games in this mould either focus too much on one side, or not enough on either. Or they are just bad. But 187: Ride or Die really wants to break this stigma, according to the developers.

The word from Next Gen Entertainment is that they love two things: combat and driving. The game's Project Manager, Ali Kojori, has a resumé that includes SSX, Def Jam, FIFA 2003 and Fight Night 2004, while a lot of the team coming from Ubisoft have a lot of experience in developing racing and shooter titles. Perhaps the one thing that indicates their seriousness in balancing the play dynamic is that 187 will feature two control schemes: one is a more classic racing layout with shooting as a secondary function, while the second lends you much more control over the combat side of things, keeping driving interaction to the basics.

The story is based in a US West Coast city, similar to Los Angeles. Larenz Tate (Menace 2 Society) is Buck, a young gun hired by local hood Dupree (voiced by Guerrilla Black) to defend his turf from another rival, played by Noel G. Boasting a strong cast of characters, 187 clearly wants to give a more mature and cinematic feel to the game, buoyed by a high level of graphics. The AI and car physics are also being taken seriously – rubber-band mechanics that would let players catch up easily (or allow the AI to do so) won't feature. Instead, the CPU players will make mistakes, crash and have varying degrees of aggression towards all of the players in the game, real or not. The car models will be destructible and real-time damage appears to be a mantra for the development team. As Kojori said, players want to see things happen in real-time.

187 can be mistaken for another run-of-the-mill combat racer – it might even turn out to be just that. But on paper and from the visuals demonstrated so far, it could be something much better and finally a solid arrival in a genre that has needed a good game for a while. **NAG**

5 BUCKSHOTS!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VITAL INFO

Platforms
PC XBOX

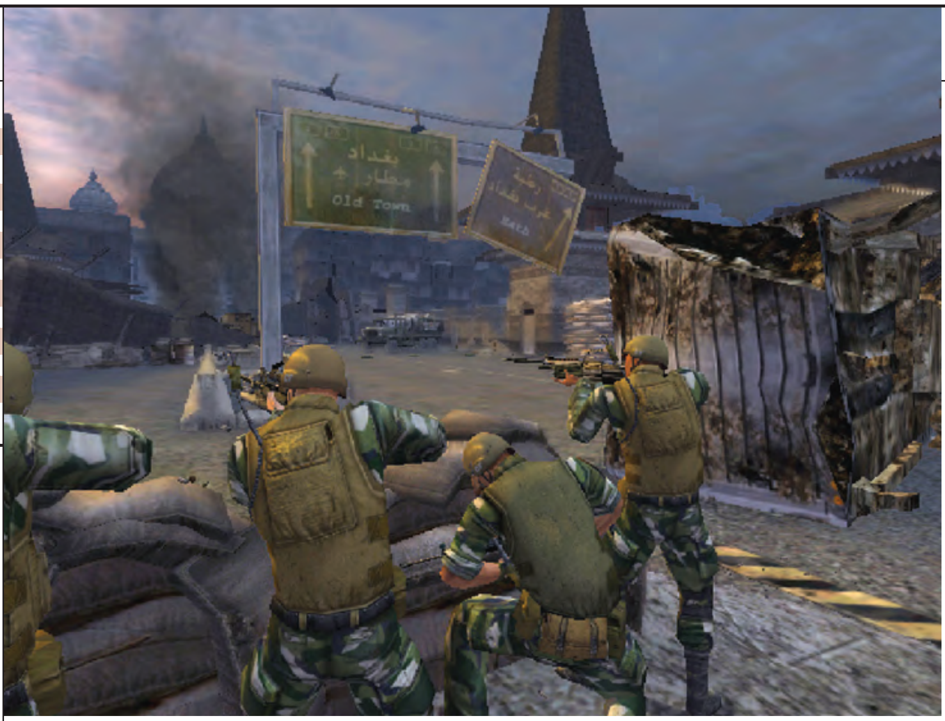
Developer
Pandemic

Publisher
THQ

Supplier
WWE [011] 462 0150

Genre
Tactical Squad

Release Date
Q4 2005



Squad tactics in Ten Hammers promises to be even more refined and involved

Things get serious with vehicles in the fray

FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR: TEN HAMMERS

MILITARY SIMULATORS ARE A dime a dozen these days, all boasting some sort of affiliation with the military. But Full Spectrum Warrior still stood out as a top-notch tactical title, realistic to its subject and very addictive to play. So how exactly can you improve on such a game enough to justify a sequel?

Pandemic obviously thought about this, because Ten Hammers (named after the Ten Hammers or Tien Hamir mountain range near which the game takes place) wants to push the game further and make it more accessible, but challenging, to players.

One major area that was addressed is the game's replay value. Pandemic addressed this aspect by now randomly inserting enemy units into a map, so every time you play, you don't know what to expect or where. To compliment this, the strategy has been given more options and the structure was made less obvious. Commanders now have more cover options, as well as the ability to command a squad from another squad's location. Vehicles also debut, which commanders can order as well to help provide mobile cover or push the enemy back a bit.

To keep the realism tag on, soldiers are now limited. Players can now permanently lose soldiers and there is only a limited roster available to choose from – the point is to make the squads less mechanical and more personal, as well as to increase the strategy of the combat. More weapons and units can also be expected, as should be with any good sequel.

Finally, in multiplayer mode fans will be glad to hear that 'a versus' mode will feature, allowing two players to fight against each other, taking the opposite sides of the conflict. Apparently such a match plays just like a single player game, except that it's a real opponent on the other side.

It's likely that these changes will make the game a lot more challenging, perhaps scaring off more casual players. But die-hard fans of Full Spectrum Warrior and tactical games in general will probably get a kick out if it. Besides, it's not as if Full Spectrum Warrior was easy in the first place… **NAG**

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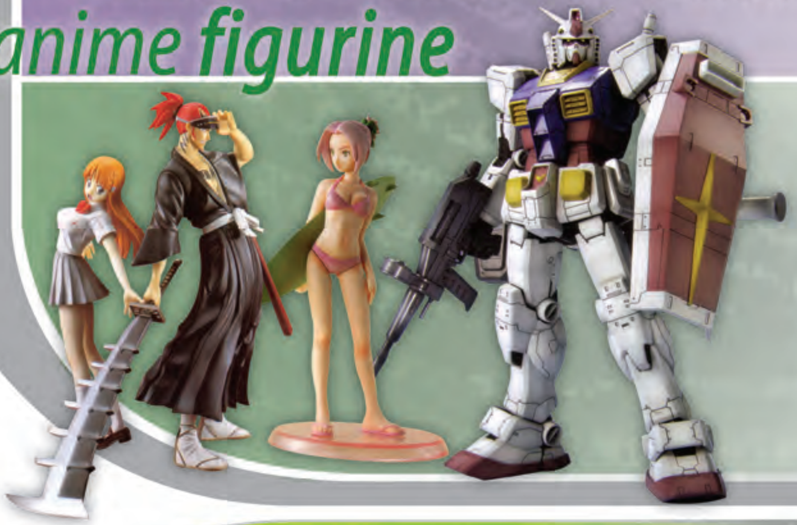

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VITAL INFO

Platforms
PC XBOX PS2

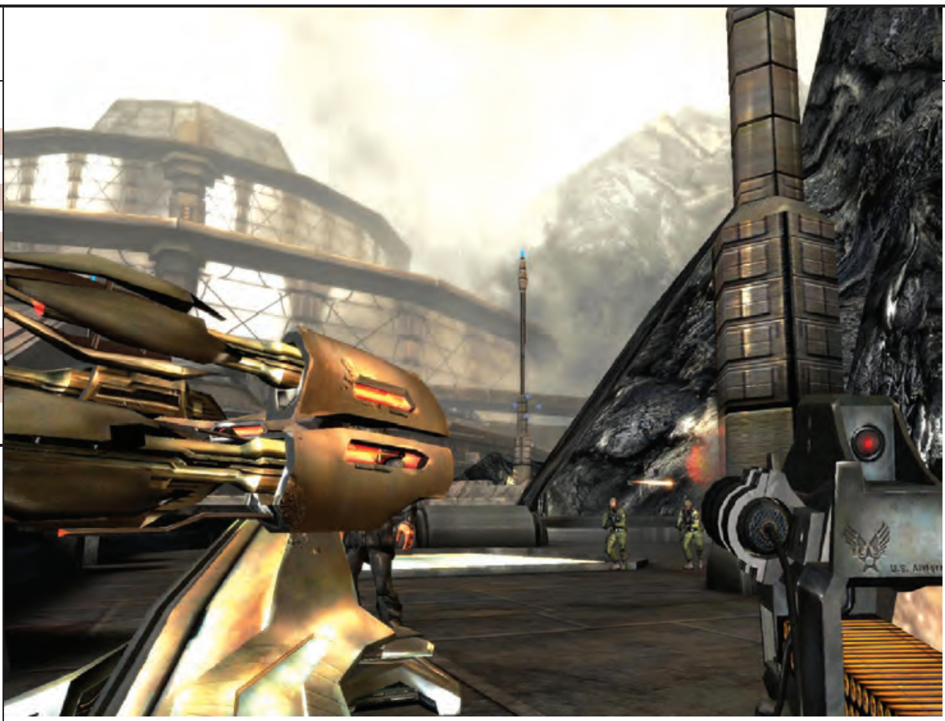
Developer
Perception

Publisher
JoWooD

Supplier
WWE [011] 462 0150

Genre
Action

Release Date
October 2005



Rich with possibilities, the new Stargate worlds alone should be worth seeing

Gods, guns and Goa'uld-it's another day in Stargate

STARGATE SG-1: THE ALLIANCE

TV SERIES MADE FROM movies are often terrible. There have been some exceptions, though. Buffy the Vampire Slayer was a bomb, but the TV series quickly built a cult following. And while Stargate the movie is a sci-fi classic, no-one expected the TV spin-off starring McGuyver and a few unknowns to be a hit. In fact, it's a massive hit heading into its ninth season - so it's about time for a game.

Arguably Stargate's TV charm comes from the gate itself, because it allows for limitless opportunities in terms of where to go. In the game, developer Perception aims to have 15 different worlds to go to, including infiltrating one of Anubis' bases and visiting the Haaken. Every world will have multiple missions and objectives, while the weapons and technology also take advantage of this smorgasbord - players will even be able to use Jaffa armour and weapons, as well as some of Goa'uld powers. And the missions will be playable in both single player and co-op.

That's probably because of the squad mechanic. You will be part of the SG-1 team, who then leaves to respond to an ally's distress call. Powered by a beefed-up Unreal engine, the game will have squad tactics, though the developers promise this is very easy and intuitive to use. In fact, a lot of work has gone into making the game accessible to most players, even non-Stargate fans.

The actors from the series have provided their voices and likenesses to the team and MGM has provided years of art and detail from the series to work on. So at least from a fan's perspective, no stone is left unturned.

The final game will have vehicles to use, several multiplayer options and a few surprises Perception is hinting at, but won't tell. We have our doubts – license games, especially based on TV shows, are rarely good. But the experience behind Perception and the wealth of the Stargate universe makes us lean towards this being a hit. Besides, everyone who watched Stargate wanted to be in Stargate. This might be a dream come true. **NAG**

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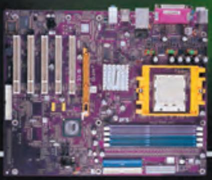

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VITAL INFO

Platforms

DS

Developer

Atlus

Publisher

Atlus

Supplier

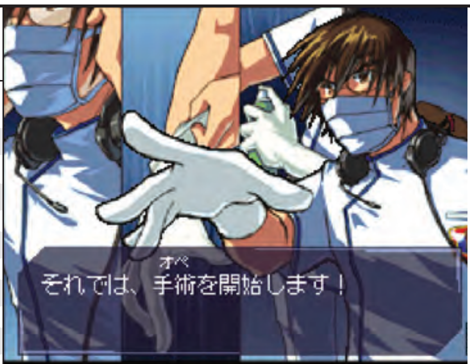
Nintendo [011] 256 7760

Genre

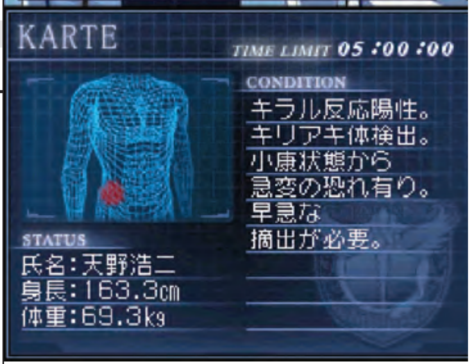
Surgery Simulator

Release Date

December 2005



それでは、手術（オペ）を開始します！



KARTE

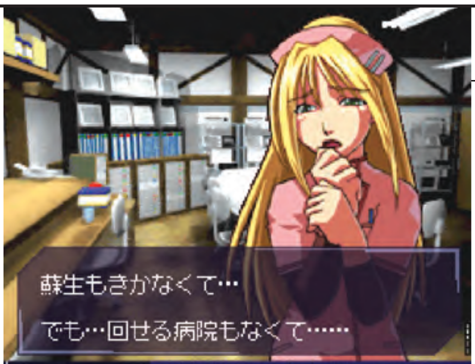
TIME LIMIT 05 :00 :00

CONDITION

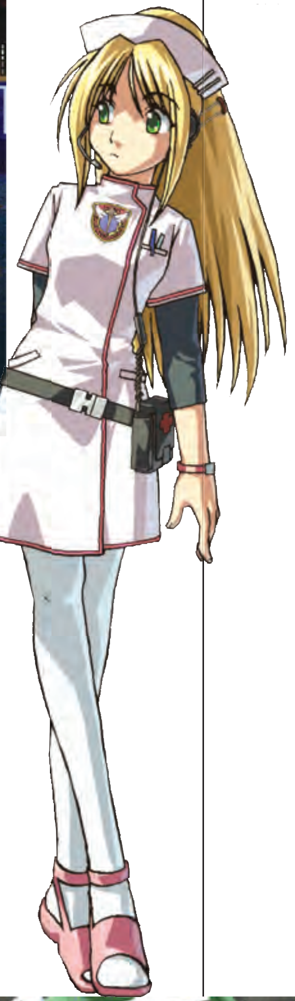
キラル反応陽性。
キリアキ体検出。
小康状態から
急変の恐れ有り。
早急な
摘出が必要。

STATUS

氏名：天野浩二
身長：163.3cm
体重：69.3kg



蘇生もきかなくて…
でも…回せる病院もなくて……



TRAUMA CENTER: UNDER THE KNIFE

A stylus for a scalpel? Expect that and more weirdness

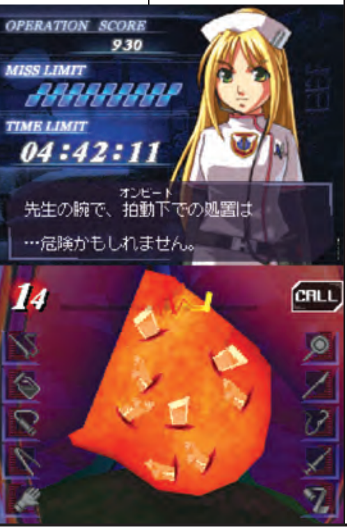
GIMMICKS IN GAME DEVICES are common, but often never used to their real potential. Things like the EyeToy and dance mats are either limited or we've yet to see something really innovative being done with such peripherals. But Nintendo, for a change, was not going to simply have the DS' touch screen as such a feature, clearly obvious from their own games. But even then Trauma Center excels far beyond this point. In it you are a surgeon.

Grim? Definitely. Using the DS' stylus as a scalpel, players will be able to operate on patients, removing tumours, fixing wounds and other tasks surgeons generally have to do. On top of this, players will have to monitor vital signs, apply anaesthetic and overall ensure that their patients don't die. To make things tougher, the clock is counting against you.

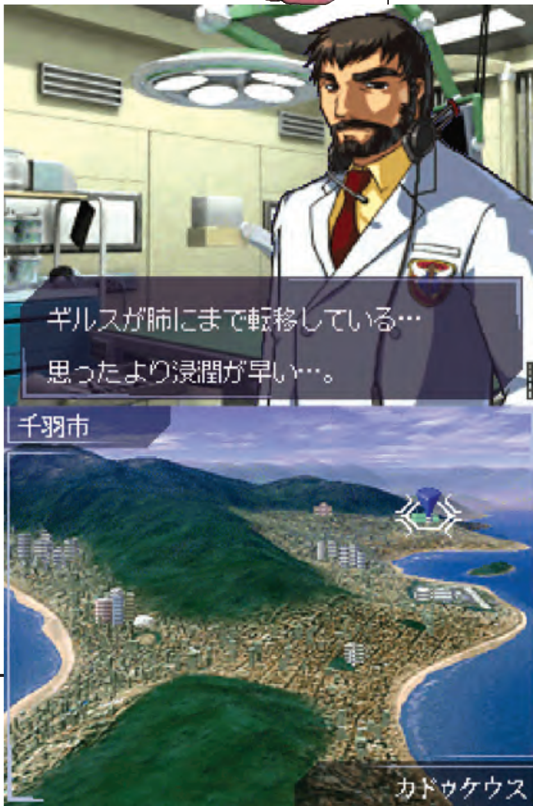
Trauma Center will have a story mode, featuring events surrounding a mysterious new disease which makes the population drop like flies. Through this, you'll meet and work with various characters, not to mention operate on a lot of them. It's essentially a puzzle game that requires speed, grace and accuracy to win. As a bonus, players can go back afterwards and retry a procedure for a better score.

There isn't any mention of wireless support or any multiplayer features. But that's not a big deal – the concept alone is very interesting and will definitely bring a new challenge for DS owners. It is, of course, not settled on whether the game will be good – it could just be terrible. But even then we'll commend it for doing something different.

Not for the feint of heart or motor-skill challenged, Trauma Center will make an interesting addition to our gaming libraries when it is released. **NAG**



先生の腕で、拍動下（オンビート）での処置は
…危険かもしれません。



ギルスが肺にまで転移している…
思ったより浸潤が早い…。

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VITAL INFO

Platforms
PS2

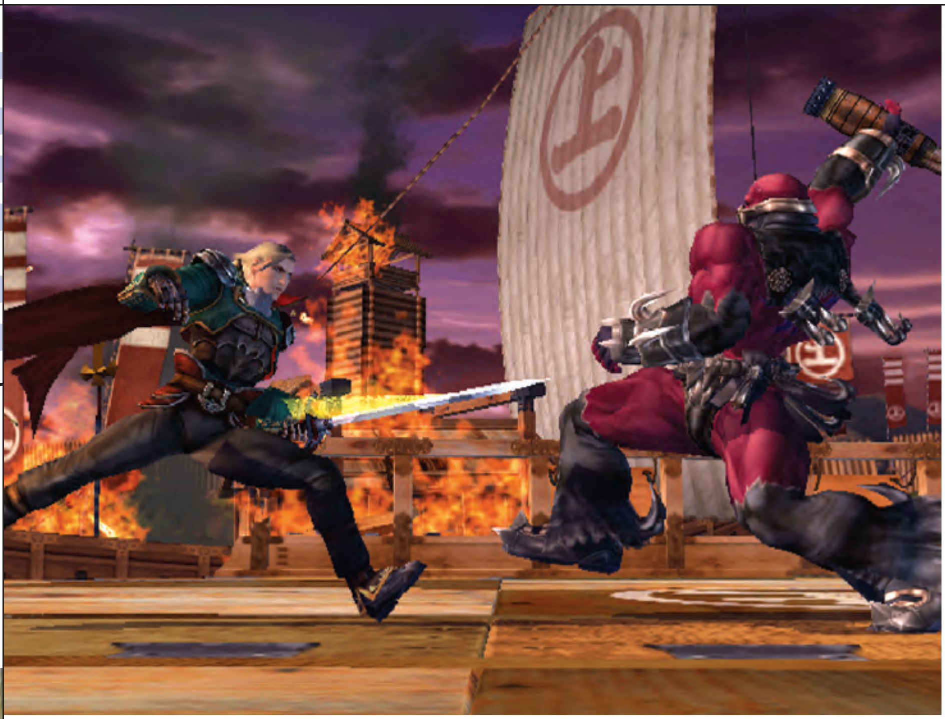
Developer
Namco

Publisher
Namco

Supplier
Ster Kinekor Games
[011] 445 7900

Genre
Fighting

Release Date
October 2005



More weapons, more character. I.E., more Soul Calibur

SOUL CALIBUR III

"TOWARDS THE END OF the 16th Century, the two opposing blades have risen again to the centre stage once more. The eternal tale of legendary rivalry is to be retold again…"

Let's face it; fighting games don't need a story. When they do try adding some atmosphere via a story, it usually ends up sounding contrived or downright ludicrous. Soul Calibur III may have a silly premise (pretty much unchanged from the previous titles), but what it doesn't lack is stunning visceral weapon-based combat.

The biggest change to the franchise is possibly the PS2 exclusive nature of the upcoming Soul Calibur. Namco seems pretty adamant that there will not be future porting to other systems. When asked why the limited release, Namco simply replied that they wanted to "… release on the widest-install base". Granted, the PS2 is the most popular console, but that doesn't make it the best platform for a game.

Visually there seems to be only marginal improvements; characters are still detailed and backdrops are lush, but very little headway has been made in terms of advancement. The PS2 hardware is starting to show its age and limits, unfortunately.

Three new (tentative) characters have been announced. Zasalamel uses a rather large scythe to dispatch of opponents, while the bird-like grace of Tira accentuates the use of her rather unique Ring Blade. Setsuka, the last of the newcomers, uses a hidden sword in her umbrella.

The most exciting new feature is the Character Creation mode, which allows players to create their own unique warriors with a wide berth for appearance and a range of fighting styles. The expected plethora of modes and special conditions make a return, along with a new Story mode that blends fighting with a strategy element, though little has been said about this.

Fans of the series should be happy with this incarnation of Tekken's polar opposite, though the PS2 exclusivity is sure to annoy those who agree that Soul Calibur II was best experienced on either a GameCube or Xbox. **NAG**

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FFS! I DIDN'T TK, I SWEAR ...

REVIEW

64 Battlefield 2 [PC]

70 Boiling Point: Road to Hell [PC]

72 Imperial Glory [PC]

74 Dungeon Lords [PC]

76 Still Life [PC]

78 Sudeki [PC]

80 Juiced [PC/PS2]

84 Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition [PS2]

85 Gungrave Overdose [PS2]

86 Batman Begins [PS2]

87 Enthusia Professional Racing [PS2]

88 Medal of Honor: European Assault [PS2]

64

80

AWARDS CRITERIA

In case you didn't know yet...

Award of Merit

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

Award of Excellence

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

Editor's Choice

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

Platform

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

PC PS2
NGC XBOX
PSP GBA
DS

Scoring

Our scores range from one to one hundred, with a score of fifty being considered average - because we can. Live with it.

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Tri Huynh
Senior Engineer, Corporate IT
NVIDIA

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REVIEW

If you dare get tangled up in the online craziness here, kiss your life goodbye!

82

VITAL INFO

Platforms	PC
Suggested Retail Price	R 299
Developer	Digital Illusions
Publisher	Electronic Arts
Supplier	EA Africa [011] 516 8300
Genre	FPS
Age Restriction	13V
Minimum Specs	Pentium 4 1.7GHz 512MB RAM 8 x CD-ROM 128MB Video Card 2.3GB HDD

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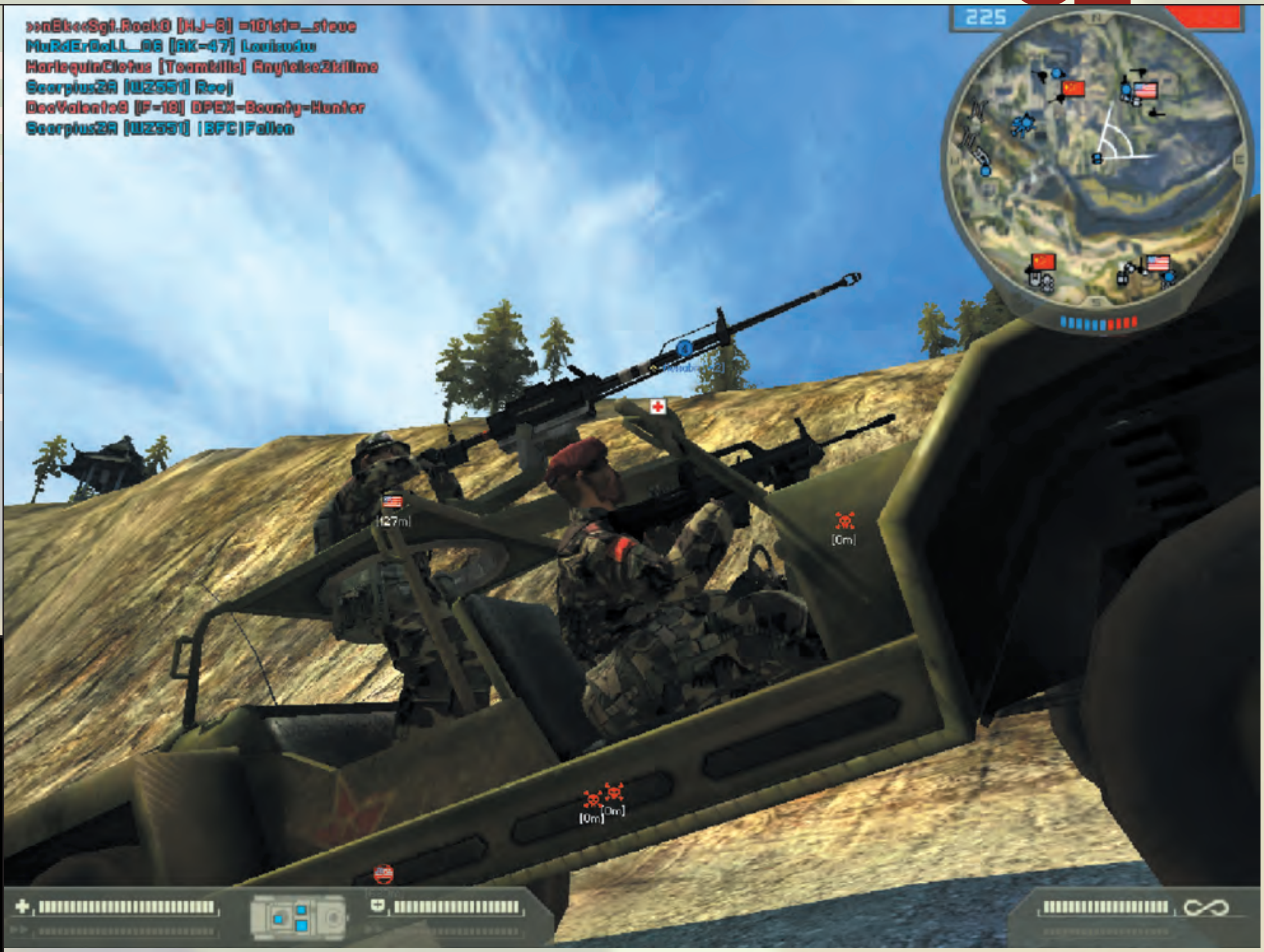

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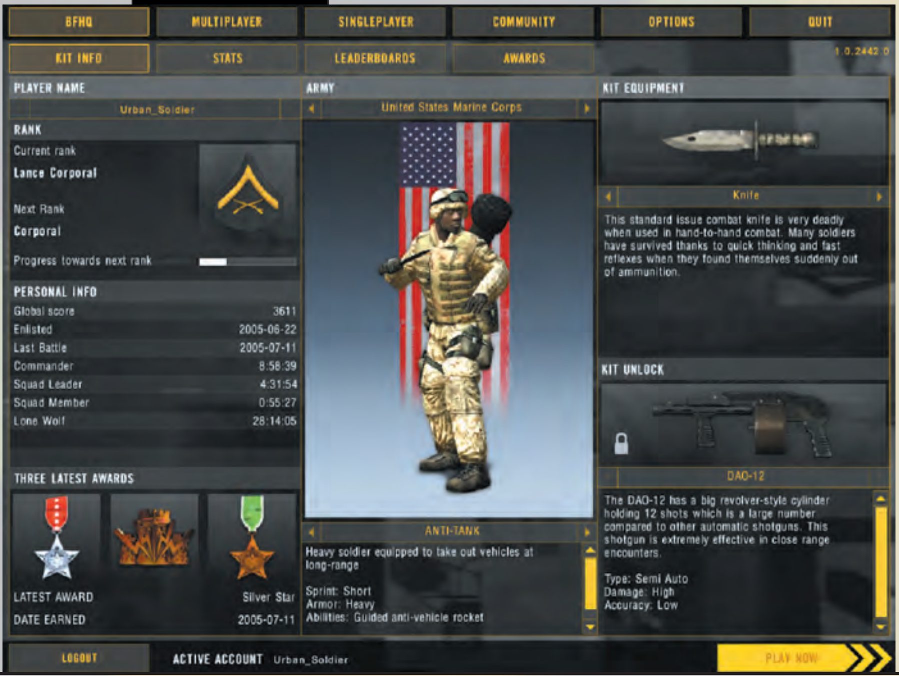
>>nBk<<Sgt.Rock0 [HJ-8] =101st=_steve
MuRdErDoLL_06 [AK-47] Louisvdw
HarlequinCletus [Teamkills] Any1else2killme
ScorpiusZA [WZ551] Reej
DocValente9 [F-18] OPEX-Bounty-Hunter
ScorpiusZA [WZ551] |BFC|Fallen
```

BELOW: ***BFHQ – this is where you can view all your vital statistics***

BATTLEFIELD 2



PLAYER NAME
Urban_Soldier

RANK
Current rank
Lance Corporal
Next Rank
Corporal
Progress towards next rank

PERSONAL INFO

Global score	3611
Enlisted	2005-06-22
Last Battle	2005-07-11
Commander	8:58:39
Squad Leader	4:31:54
Squad Member	0:55:27
Lone Wolf	28:14:05

THREE LATEST AWARDS
LATEST AWARD Silver Star
DATE EARNED 2005-07-11

ARMY
United States Marine Corps

ANTI-TANK
Heavy soldier equipped to take out vehicles at long-range

Sprint: Short
Armor: Heavy
Abilities: Guided anti-vehicle rocket

KIT EQUIPMENT
Knife
This standard issue combat knife is very deadly when used in hand-to-hand combat. Many soldiers have survived thanks to quick thinking and fast reflexes when they found themselves suddenly out of ammunition.

KIT UNLOCK
DAO-12
The DAO-12 has a big revolver-style cylinder holding 12 shots which is a large number compared to other automatic shotguns. This shotgun is extremely effective in close range encounters.

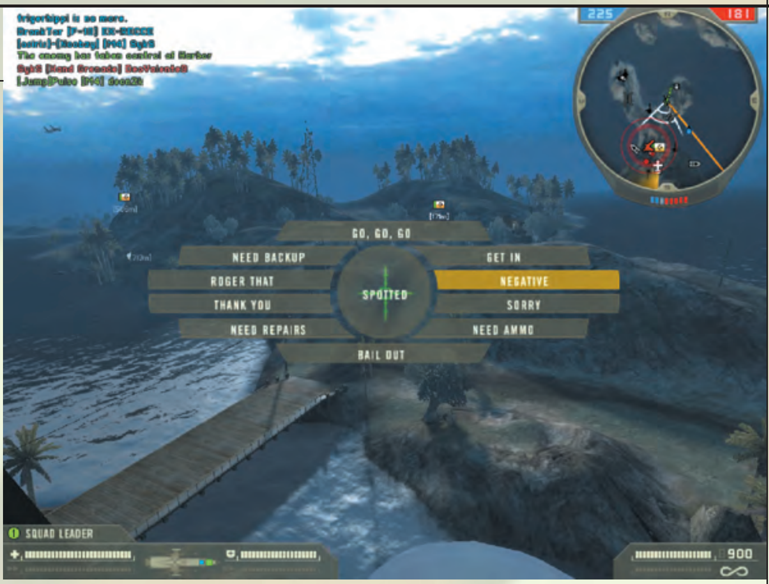
Type: Semi Auto
Damage: High
Accuracy: Low

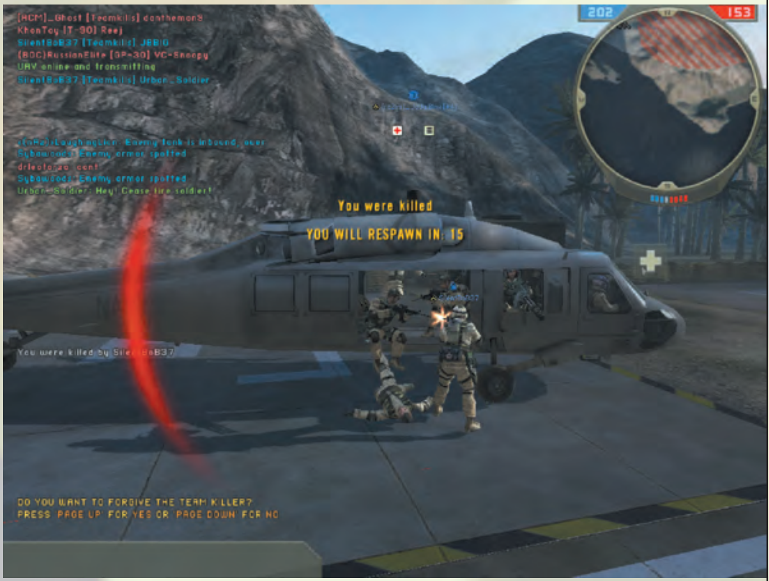
ACTIVE ACCOUNT Urban_Soldier

ADDICTION IS A TERRIBLE thing and Battlefield 2 is one game you'll have a hard time leaving alone. It preys on the unwary, and once you start you'll probably not be able to stop – at least not without some professional help. Battlefield 2 uses a simple game mechanic that first appeared in the space combat simulator Elite. Today you'll find it in any massively multiplayer online role-playing game [MMORPG] and even in seemingly innocent games like Pokémon. What is this magical entity which keeps people playing games like this into the early hours of the morning, and to the exclusion of everything else? Is it the lush graphics and immersive sound effects? Or is it the intense action or perhaps the engrossing storyline? No, it's none of these tangible things. What it is, oddly enough, is a basic human tendency that seems to occur in a growing number of gamers – the drive to be the best at something or at least to be better than most. To put it plainly, Battlefield 2 offers the most current FPS vehicle to show the world that you can kick arse and have the medals and ribbons to prove it. The other phenomenon at work here is the upgrade path effect. In the game, depending on your performance, you're awarded a rank and the ability to unlock new weapons. And as we all know, this simple dynamic keeps you coming back for more until you've achieved the highest rank possible and unlocked all the toys available. Welcome to a new era of online gaming… again.

TOUGH ENOUGH

THE ORIGINAL BATTLEFIELD ALLOWED anyone with even rudimentary first person shooter skills to be a hero on the battlefield, because the focus was on the group effort and not the individual. So for instance, if you only killed a single enemy soldier you were contributing to the overall effort. This simple game mechanic catapulted the original into the limelight, and created something of an online phenomenon by offering veteran gamers something truly unique and original while opening the game up to just about anyone with an interest in shooters. The sequel, while upping the ante in every department, has quite smartly put the focus back on the individual player, while still retaining that special 'everyone gets to have fun' play dynamic. How this works is, while playing the game online, you accumulate points for combat, taking enemy positions and various other activities. These points translate into various ranks such as Lance Corporal, Corporal and Sergeant, etc. So the more you play, the higher your rank. Along with rank come privileges - the most notable being the ability to unlock weapons to improve your play. Some have argued that these new weapons aren't that special and only represent a small improvement over the standard issue stuff. But the bottom line is you still feel special while using an unlocked weapon, and sometimes that's enough. So in effect you can call Battlefield 2 a variant of MORPG [multiplayer online role-playing game]. It's missing the 'massively' in front of the usual acronym, because the battlefield is limited in size. Only so many people can play at the same time and the 'game' turns around so quickly. This 'levelling up' is what sets this game apart and makes it so compelling to play.

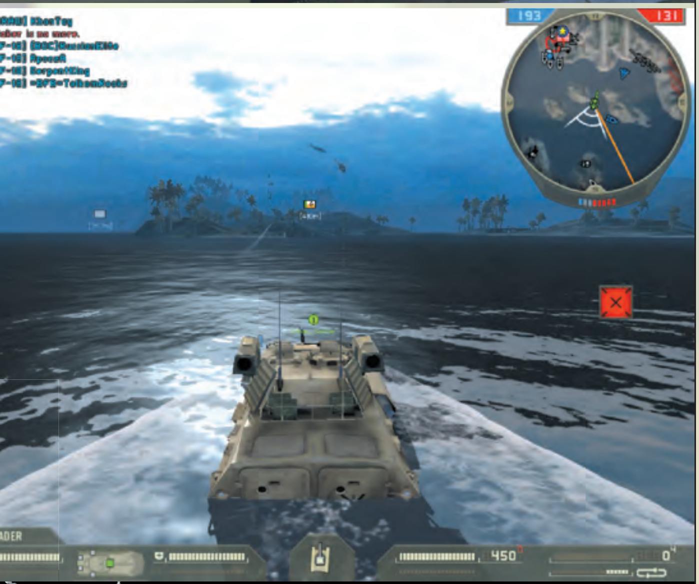




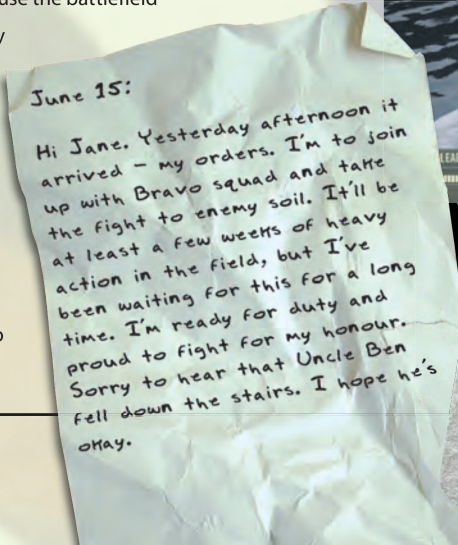
You were killed

YOU WILL RESPAWN IN 15

DO YOU WANT TO FORGIVE THE TEAM KILLER?
PRESS PAGE UP FOR YES OR PAGE DOWN FOR NO



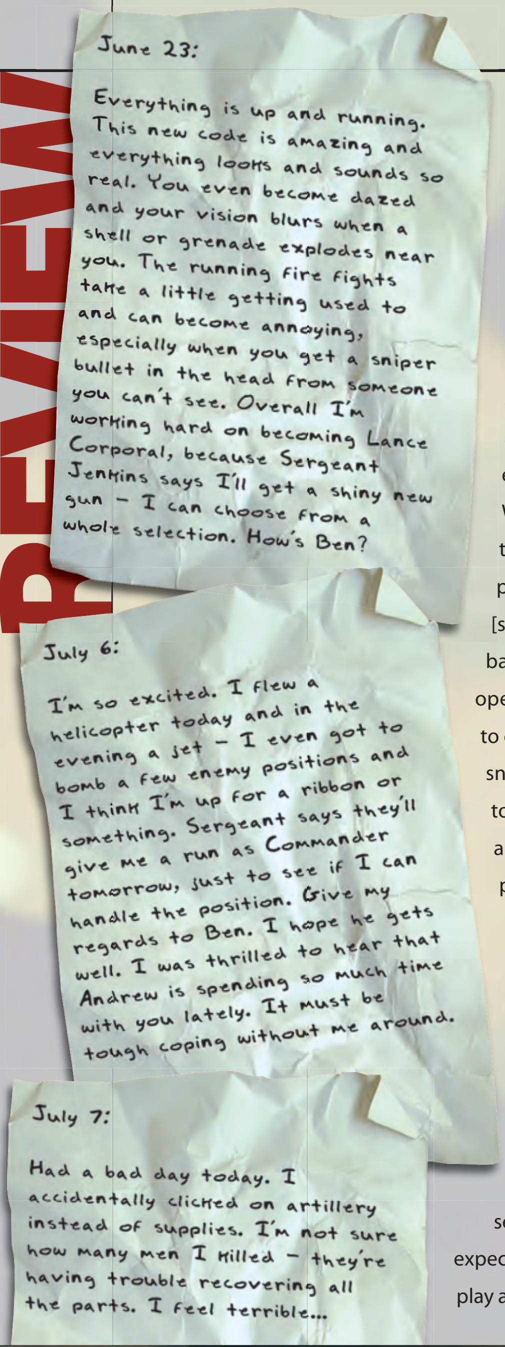
ABOVE: ***This doesn't work if you're a tank!***



June 15:

Hi Jane. Yesterday afternoon it arrived - my orders. I'm to join up with Bravo squad and take the fight to enemy soil. It'll be at least a few weeks of heavy action in the field, but I've been waiting for this for a long time. I'm ready for duty and proud to fight for my honour. Sorry to hear that Uncle Ben fell down the stairs. I hope he's okay.

Michael James
'Urban Soldier'
14032248
Echo Squad
Commander



June 23:

Everything is up and running. This new code is amazing and everything looks and sounds so real. You even become dazed and your vision blurs when a shell or grenade explodes near you. The running fire fights take a little getting used to and can become annoying, especially when you get a sniper bullet in the head from someone you can't see. Overall I'm working hard on becoming Lance Corporal, because Sergeant Jenkins says I'll get a shiny new gun – I can choose from a whole selection. How's Ben?

July 6:

I'm so excited. I flew a helicopter today and in the evening a jet – I even got to bomb a few enemy positions and I think I'm up for a ribbon or something. Sergeant says they'll give me a run as Commander tomorrow, just to see if I can handle the position. Give my regards to Ben. I hope he gets well. I was thrilled to hear that Andrew is spending so much time with you lately. It must be tough coping without me around.

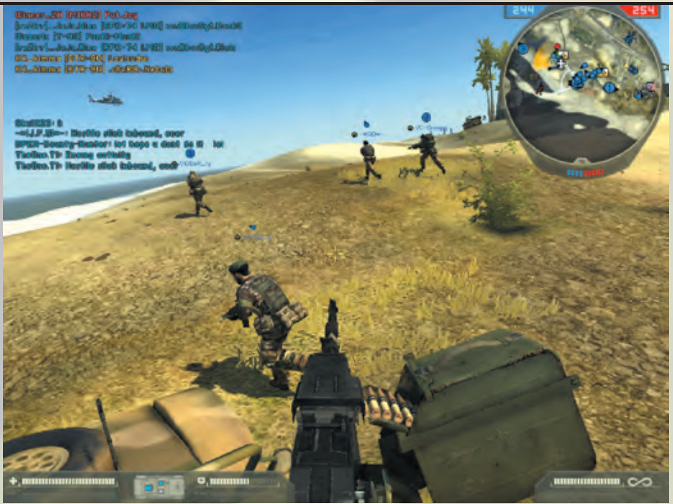
July 7:

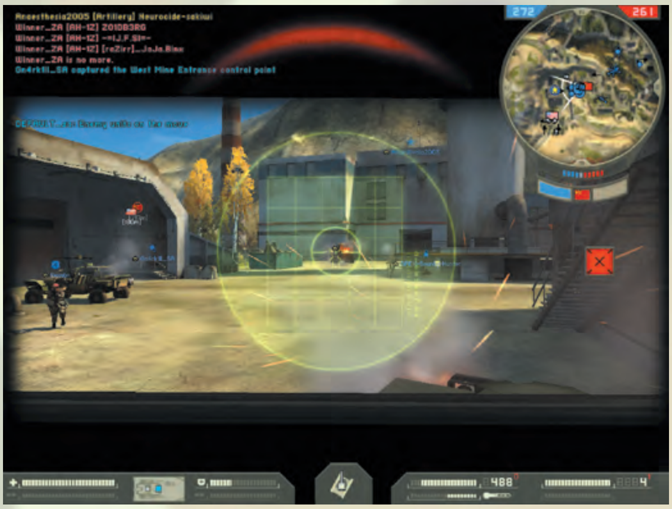
Had a bad day today. I accidentally clicked on artillery instead of supplies. I'm not sure how many men I killed – they're having trouble recovering all the parts. I feel terrible...

From a technical point of view, the game's improvements aren't limited to the obvious areas such as sound and graphics. There are more classes of soldiers to use, each with their own good and bad points. For example, the engineer class can repair things and lay mines, but only has the use of a shotgun as primary weapon limiting effectiveness in most combat situations. What is good about the class system is that almost everyone will find their own place in the game, from sneaking around [special operations] to running gun battles in the streets [assault]. The game is open ended enough for the aspirant soldier to do just about anything - from simple sniping enemy soldiers, to strapping C4 to a fast moving vehicle and taking it on a suicide mission by driving it into a base populated by enemy soldiers and gently pressing the detonation button.

MEDIC!

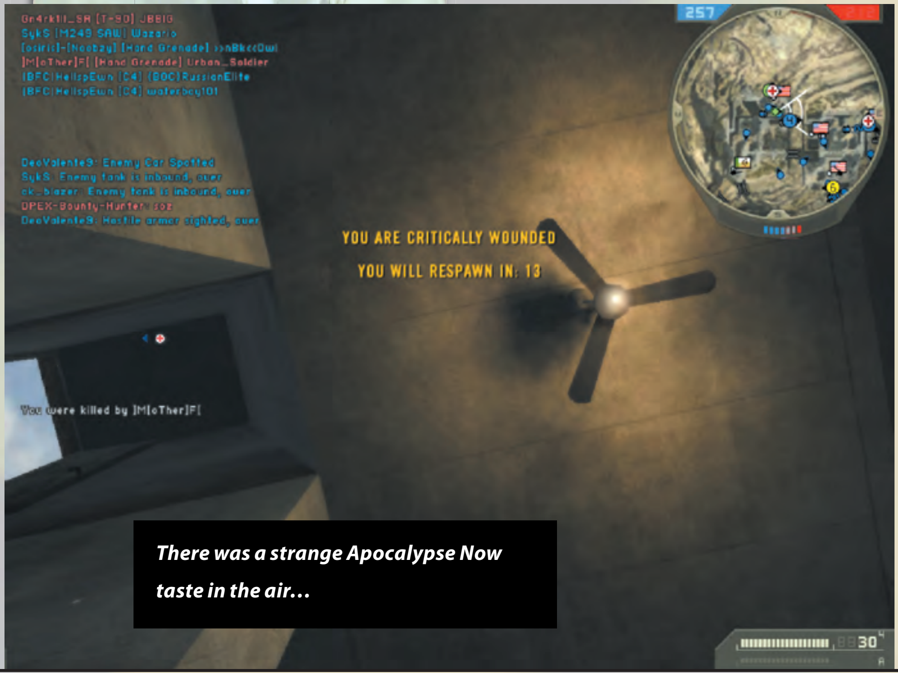
ON THE NEGATIVE SIDE of the coin and for whatever reason, this game was released a little prematurely and will require extensive patching to get it right. Depending on your particular set-up and if you're unlucky, you can expect crashing back to your desktop during play as well as bizarre graphical glitches.





Players who use certain key bindings aren't able to play as they're used to [in particular players who use the left mouse button to move forward]. The multiplayer menu is unresponsive and can hang your system. The game seems a little unbalanced in that certain team tactics are impossible to prevent, such as packing a helicopter full of engineers and hopping from flag to flag. The single player mode is a joke in terms of scope and artificial intelligence, and this is just listing some of the major issues. However, and this is a big one, at the end of the day it's definitely all worth the effort. There are few words that can describe the joy of playing this game online, accumulating points and the subsequent increase in rank – not to mention the swapping of war stories at the office or online the next day. Battlefield 2 is a revolutionary game in many ways, but it's prevented from being a great game because there's still much work to be done on it. Our advice [in its current form], forget this game if you don't intend playing it online. But if you have a solid Internet connection and a decent system, Battlefield 2 is one of the best games you'll ever play and definitely the most fun to be had online at the moment.

[The patch for Battlefield 2, version 1.01, is on this month's DVD, but don't install it because EA says it's broken and not supported by local servers, Ed.] **NAG**



YOU ARE CRITICALLY WOUNDED

YOU WILL RESPAWN IN: 13

You were killed by]M[oTher]F[

There was a strange Apocalypse Now taste in the air...

FRONT-LINE INTEL

AFTER WHAT SEEMED LIKE a decade since this game was first announced, I felt both excited and frustrated by Battlefield 2 when I finally installed and played this game. There is no doubt that this is one of the best multiplayer games ever, but it is obvious that the game development was rushed in order to get it finalised for its release date. There are numerous bugs which should never have made it past beta testing. And some features were promised, but were never included in the final version of the game. Luckily there is nothing too serious which a patch cannot fix. Visually however, this game is very impressive and the maps are an absolute pleasure to play. The BFHQ and the new ranking system are what will keep most gamers, including myself, glued to their PCs as there is always another rank or award to achieve. About the only major gripe I have with Battlefield 2 is the punishment mechanism for team killing. This system is simply not intuitive enough and there is nothing more frustrating than being kicked off by the server because some idiot ran in front of your Jeep or into your artillery strike. Now let me get back to my game!

Regardt vd Berg
'Reaj'
93564756
Echo Squad
Anti-Tank

89%

DESPITE ALL OF ITS advances and generally evolving the FPS multiplayer experience to a new level, DICE's game takes a few steps back as well. A lacklustre single player campaign which is actually poorer than the original game's offering and a limiting LAN multiplayer setup, along with a barrage of bugs and missing features, leaves a big taint on an otherwise excellent game. It would be pedantic to argue that perhaps DICE was being lazy, or that mere oversight forgot to point out how the persistent account influences the game, but Battlefield 2 disappoints about as much as it impresses. Sadly, hype will carry it and the developers won't be rapped over the knuckles for what is essentially a shoddy game. Everyone will keep playing Battlefield 2, but if you have a problem with it getting a low score, then obviously you're not perturbed by a game so flawed that it already has a massive patch on its way. It turns out the bug legacy of Battlefield lives on as well. Oh, and don't bother getting it if you don't have at least dual-ISDN. The offline and LAN features alone just aren't worth it.

James Francis
'Jaxiest'
958473667
Echo Squad
Special Ops

60%

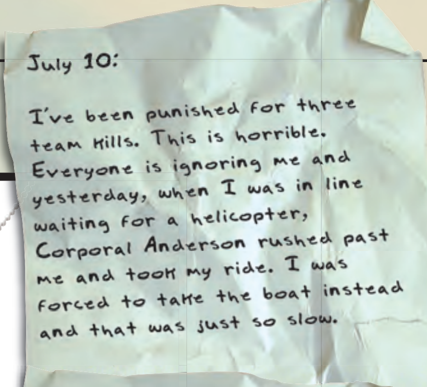
THE BATTLEFIELD 2 BOX (and Website) both make promises. Features and functionality are listed, plain as day, as elements to expect. But most of those items ended up being lies - horrible untruths that had gamers salivating but left them hungry instead. But perhaps that's a little cynical, since when it all comes down to it, Battlefield 2 is an addictive, rewarding game where you get to drive tanks over your team-mates (with the expected retaliatory action from your team-mates involving helicopters and missiles). When played properly (utilising the RTS-style Commander interface and Squad system), Battlefield 2 becomes a tactically cerebral title, fresh and fulfilling. It's unfortunate though, that most gamers (especially online) prefer to approach the game as they usually approach life - run in, do what they want, complain when things don't go their way and then quit when their side is losing. Misanthropic opinions aside, DICE (or rather, the now jobless Trauma Studios) has done a sterling job in taking what made the Desert Combat mod for BF1942 so popular, and converting it into a shining example of how teamwork can win the day. But putting C4 on your team-mate's back is infinitely more fun.

45434543
Echo Squad
Medic

70%

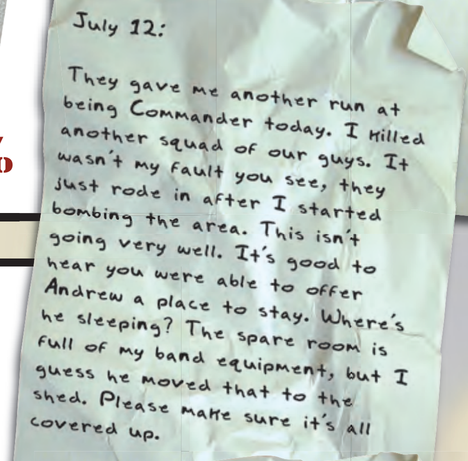
MY FIRST IMPRESSION OF Battlefield 2 was that it looked very nice, but that the gameplay left a lot to be desired. I found it irritating to constantly have to go into a separate menu to change my spawn point because it had been lost since I last spawned. It seemed to constantly interrupt the flow of the game for me. I would have liked to try CTF as I'm not a big fan of capture and hold games, but nobody ever plays it. The vehicles were nice, but the jets in particular took some learning to fly. I wanted to practice with them a bit, but was frustrated because single player mode only allows you to play the 16 player maps, which usually don't include jets. I have to give Battlefield 2 credit for running on the pathetic FX5200 of my laptop, but the server browser was a nightmare and frustrating. All I want is to connect to a specific IP, not wait for authentication and refresh for 10 minutes. I think I had more fun in commander mode than actually playing it as an FPS - despite people on the server constantly trying to mutiny for no reason. The weapons also just seemed boring. I miss Tribes 2.

45%



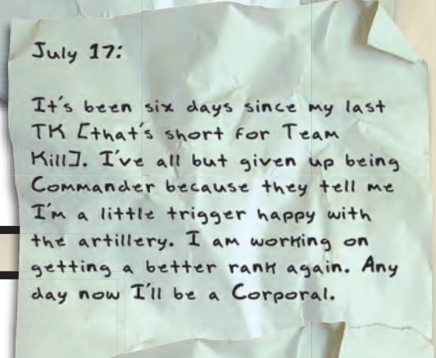
July 10:

I've been punished for three team kills. This is horrible. Everyone is ignoring me and yesterday, when I was in line waiting for a helicopter, Corporal Anderson rushed past me and took my ride. I was forced to take the boat instead and that was just so slow.



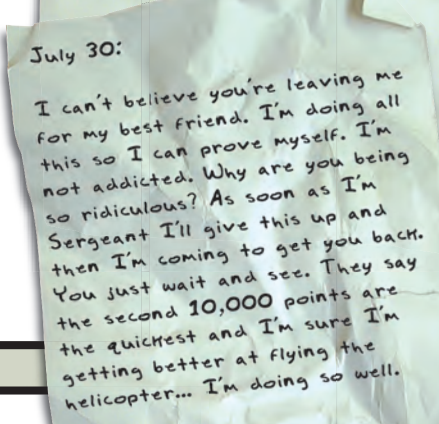
July 12:

They gave me another run at being Commander today. I killed another squad of our guys. It wasn't my fault you see, they just rode in after I started bombing the area. This isn't going very well. It's good to hear you were able to offer Andrew a place to stay. Where's he sleeping? The spare room is full of my band equipment, but I guess he moved that to the shed. Please make sure it's all covered up.



July 17:

It's been six days since my last TK [that's short for Team Kill]. I've all but given up being Commander because they tell me I'm a little trigger happy with the artillery. I am working on getting a better rank again. Any day now I'll be a Corporal.



July 30:

I can't believe you're leaving me for my best friend. I'm doing all this so I can prove myself. I'm not addicted. Why are you being so ridiculous? As soon as I'm Sergeant I'll give this up and then I'm coming to get you back. You just wait and see. They say the second 10,000 points are the quickest and I'm sure I'm getting better at flying the helicopter... I'm doing so well.

LOCAL RANKED SERVERS

Get along to *games.saix.net* and check out their server listings for Battlefield 2 servers. There are three in total and at the time of writing, were heavily populated every night.

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A great idea that is just too demanding on the system for its own good

76

VITAL INFO

Platforms

PC

Suggested Retail Price

R 299

Developer

Deep Shadows

Publisher

Atari

Supplier

MegaRom [011] 234 2680

Genre

FPS

Age Restriction

16+

Minimum Specs

Pentium 4 2GHz
512MB RAM
6 x DVD-ROM
128MB Video Card
4GB HDD

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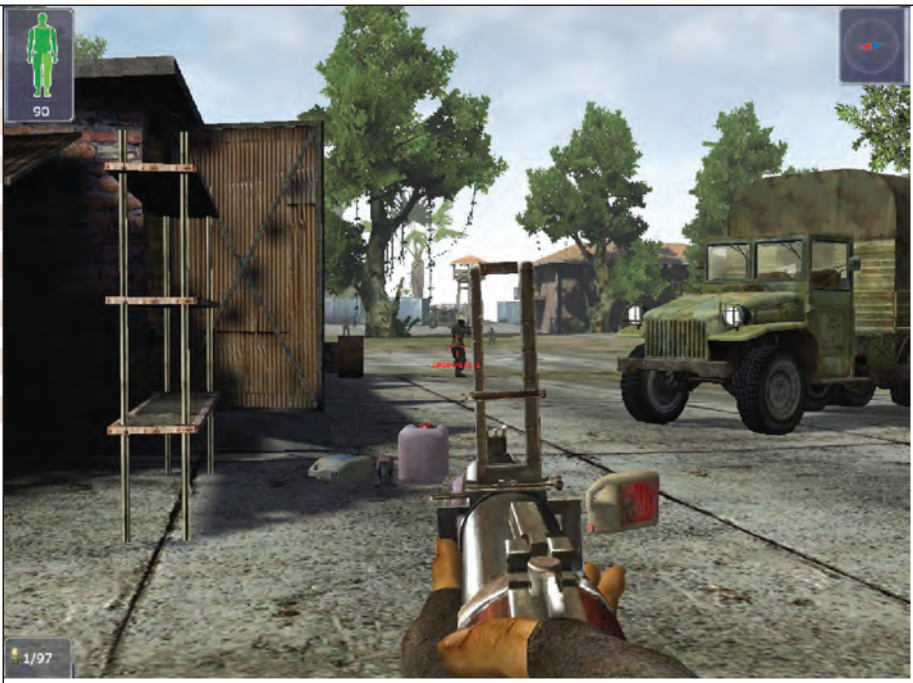

Driveable vehicles and 20 weapon types make for intense action at times

BOILING POINT: ROAD TO HELL

WHILE BOILING POINT MIGHT feature Arnold Vosloo's face on the cover, it's not his voice in the game. Sure, that might be a small disappointment, but it's nice to see people from our country – particularly when they're involved with gaming.

The missing Vosloo is not the only disappointment within this game, though. There are more things to groan about.

Boiling Point's story is simple enough. The player controls Saul Myers, an ex-Legionnaire whose daughter has gone missing in a South American style banana republic while doing some investigative journalism. Myers then takes it upon himself to seek out the hapless lady, with explosive results.

The story is pretty good, but the concept behind the game is what shines. It is basically one massive level – around 450km^2 for the player to explore. The theory is that the player can do whatever he/she likes within this huge level, without the agonising procedure of having to wait for load times. The player is given total freedom to go where he/she wants and to do what he/she likes. Yes, there is an overall mission, but the game has a freeform (almost role-playing) style that allows the player to spend just as much time ambushing mafia types and selling their weapons on the black market as anything else.

The perpetual nature of the game means that factions and individuals will have changing attitudes towards the player (based on his actions), which will determine the way they act or react towards him. The player basically makes his own bed and is often forced to lie on it.

In theory and on paper it sounds absolutely fantastic, but realistically the game's overall concept is its downfall. The hardware requirements to run this game properly are immense, and even if you have the necessary hardware, your machine will still strain under the demands Boiling Point places upon it. With a minimum processor requirement of 2GHz, it's far beyond what many players can manage. Additionally, a project like this is so vast that it becomes a virtual breeding ground for bugs – and Boiling Point has many.

Boiling Point is not a bad game. The idea behind it is great, and a player with the patience to download the inevitable patches (the first one was 80MB) and possibly wait for technology to catch up with the demands of the game will be in for a great time, although they will have to put up with the game's problems in the interim. With the notable exception of the horrible voice acting, Boiling Point will certainly strike a chord amongst a certain sector of gamers. Others may just get too frustrated. **NAG**

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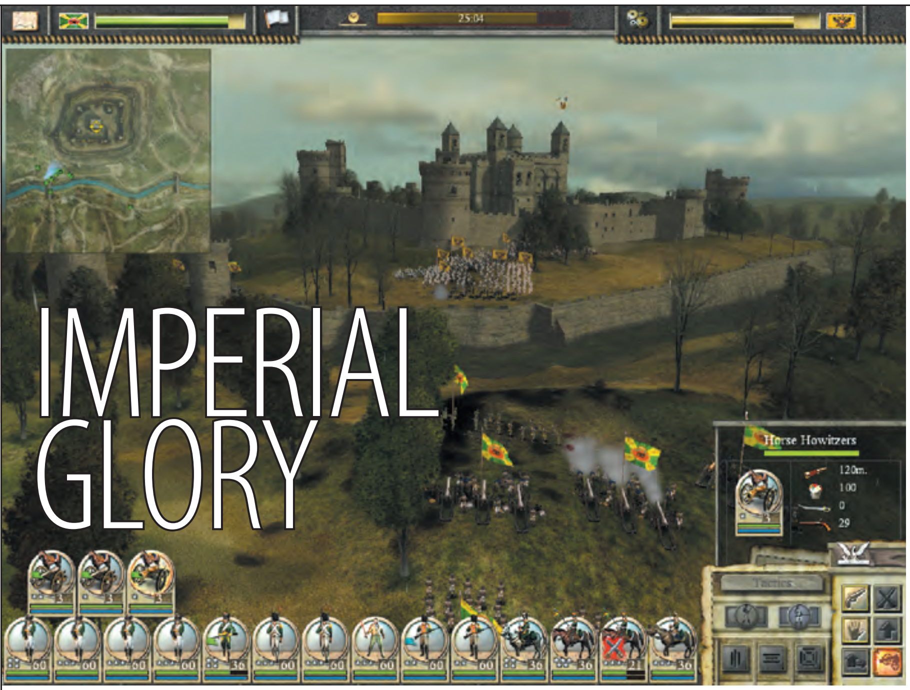
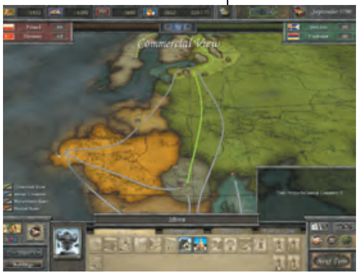
A highly complex, challenging and rewarding strategic game for those with time to spare

73

IMPERIAL GLORY



LEFT: ***A castle siege***



BELOW: ***Trade routes provide vital income***

VITAL INFO

Platforms
PC

Suggested Retail Price
R 299

Developer
Pyro Studios

Publisher
Eidos

Supplier
MegaRom [011] 234 2680

Genre
Strategy

Age Restriction
12+

Minimum Specs
Pentium 1.0GHz
256MB RAM
DVD-ROM
32MB Video Card
2.5GB HDD

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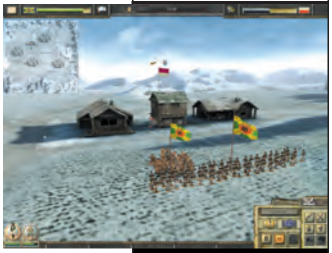
THE GAME COMPRISES OF two main elements: the empire management screen, and real-time battle maps. The former is presented in the form of a portion of late Renaissance Europe, which is partly determined by the nation you choose to play. Five playable empires are offered: Britain, France, Prussia, Austria and Russia, each with its own advantages and drawbacks. The empire management aspect is the key aspect in a campaign game, and it is possible to play such a game without ever controlling a battle (although computer control is likely to yield less than optimal results).

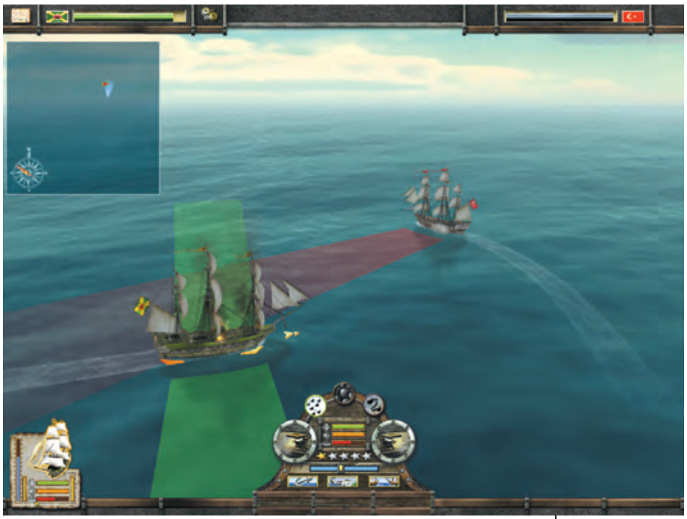
The most fascinating aspect of the game is the long campaign game. Empire management is performed in turns, with the five dominant empires and a host of initially neutral countries. The most appealing aspect here is that war is only one possible path to victory. The diplomacy system is very sophisticated, with options for defensive alliances, commercial treaties, declarations of war and marriage proposals, among others. Economy and technology also play important roles. The technology tree is a threefold affair that spans three eras. There is little room for customising your nation, however, as all research items must be completed in order to be able to advance to the next age. Age advancements do, however, offer choices of government models.

The battle map follows the pattern of the Total War games, with slight control enhancements and significant improvements to the graphics. Periodically, a voice will comment on the overall progress of the engagement. In other respects, the soundtrack is adequate, tending to be blandly tranquil, by and large, with slight changes in tone and tempo alerting a player of various events. Land battles feature controls which allow players to set formations for their units and for their entire armies. An expansion on the Total War games is the inclusion of naval battles, which are subject to their own particular subtleties, such as keeping track of the wind direction.

In addition to the campaign mode, players can opt for a historical battle or a quick battle, both of which are played exclusively on the battle map. Scenarios include simple battles across a battlefield, battles with specific objectives and castle sieges, playable from either side. Multiplayer games adhere to this format. Battles in this game are highly tactical, and first-time players can expect a few defeats at first. **NAG**



ABOVE: ***Infantry advancing on enemies***



FAR RIGHT: ***The coloured stripes indicate the arc of fire of the ship's cannons***

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A great multiplayer role-playing adventure, offering many enjoyable hours

73

VITAL INFO

Platforms	PC
Suggested Retail Price	R 270
Developer	Heuristic Park
Publisher	Dreamcatcher Interactive
Supplier	WWE [011] 462 0150
Genre	RPG-Adventure
Age Restriction	12+
Minimum Specs	Pentium 3 1.0GHz 384MB RAM 4x CD-ROM 64MB Video Card 1.6GB HDD

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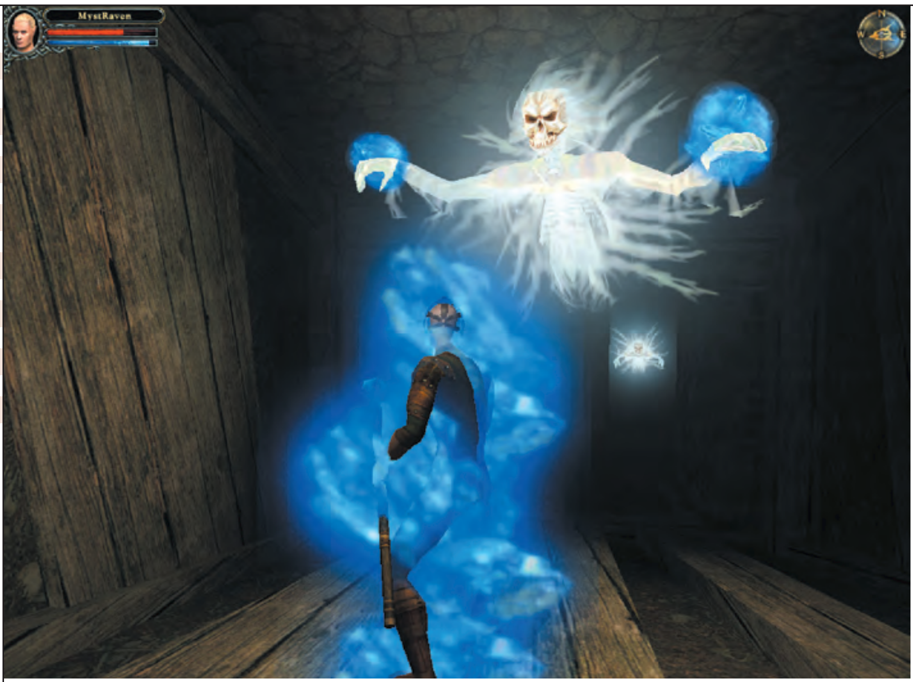


Is it just me or is it cold in here?

DUNGEON LORDS

THE NATURE OF DUNGEON Lords is that of a Diablo-style role-playing game with elements of third person action thrown in – a blend that works very well. Play consists of a combination of combat (both melee and ranged) and spell casting. Melee combat is quite tricky to get the hang of at first, but once you have figured out that rhythm is key, it all suddenly becomes much easier. The magic system is actually a set of several different magic types: arcane, celestial, runic and nether. The first two are fairly straightforward and form the backbone of the mage and adept classes respectively. Runic magic works by the combination of rune stones, and nether magic is achieved by combining various gruesome spell components.

From a visual point of view, this game is quite impressive. Locations are beautifully rendered and subject to real-time lighting effects, including day/night cycles and torchlight and magic weapon discharges. The models of other entities in the world are particularly impressive. The level of detail is amazing and the animation is of a high standard.

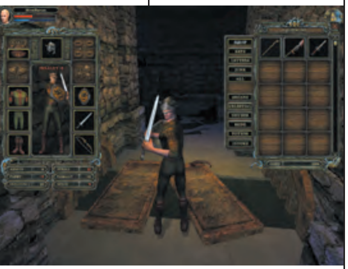
The game is very story driven, and some players may be frustrated at the amount of reading which is sometimes required to follow the plot. The story itself is quite long, and the plot branches through numerous quests. It is, in fact, possible to take on too many quests, and then flounder around wondering in which order to carry them out in.

A game like this is based on character development (including character attributes, skills and equipment). Dungeon Lords offers an interesting experience system that uses experience points in two ways, simultaneously. Firstly, their aggregation results in the character attaining higher levels – this is normal. Additionally, however, each experience point also translates into a skill or attributes purchase point, with each of these requiring varying numbers of points in order to be chosen. So skills can be learned even before an experience level is gained.

Unfortunately, the game is currently subject to some bugs and oversights and will allegedly be patched soon.

While the single player experience is most enjoyable, players will find that they can hardly achieve anything. For example, if you aren't a rogue, forget about trying to pick locks or disarm traps on treasure chests – dabblers will not succeed at such endeavours. This is true for most elements in the game, and it seems the game's design favours a group experience - with the party members complementing each other's skills in order to cover all bases. As a multiplayer game, this title shines. **NAG**

The inventory system is simple, efficient and elegant



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A damn good yarn for adventure gamers who can stomach gore

80

VITAL INFO

Platforms	PC
Suggested Retail Price	R 199
Developer	Microids
Publisher	DreamCatcher Interactive / The Adventure Company
Supplier	WWE [011] 462 0150
Genre	Adventure
Age Restriction	18+
Minimum Specs	Pentium II 800MHz 128MB RAM 16 x CD-ROM 32MB Video Card 600MB HDD

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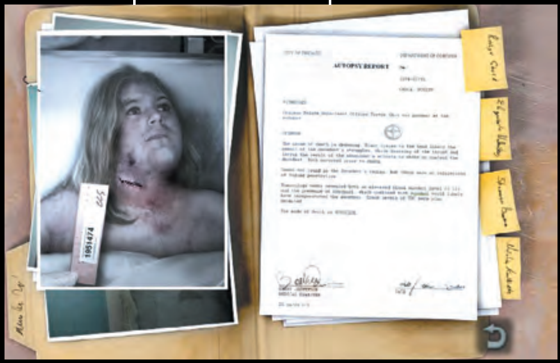
STILL LIFE



ADVENTURE GAMES ARE BECOMING far and few between and, unfortunately, seem to be a dying breed. The glory days of the LucasArts and Sierra created two-dimensional jaunts through imaginative worlds and brain-bending puzzles have all but faded, save for the works of The Adventure Company, trying desperately to keep the genre alive, and the mouse cursor scavenging the screen for that elusive clickable hotspot.

Still Life is exactly what you would expect, if you are familiar with the genre. The premise: you play Victoria McPherson, a brilliant young FBI agent tormented by a serial murder case in which five people have already been murdered, and the case seems impossible to crack. Taking a break, she finds that one of her grandfather's old case files from the past resembles her current case, right down to the killer's Modus Operandi. What follows is a whirlpool of intrigue, spiralling through modern day Chicago and late 1920 Paris.

Adventure games have always been story-centric with the plot being the key player in how the game is received. Thankfully, Still Life lacks nothing in that department. Its characters are dramatic and substantial while the plot proceeds at an intriguing pace.

The supporting player (the game dynamic itself) may not exert enough energy to draw new players into the genre, but it certainly does what is required. The opportunity to investigate the crime scenes of gruesome serial homicides plays out with fantastic dark flair, its slavish dedication to convention scratching the methodical, cerebral itch all diehard adventure games fan have. Controlling Victoria and interacting with the environment unfortunately lacks old-school adventure styling, due to the lack of a mouse cursor with which to interact with the environment. Instead, you manoeuvre Victoria into close proximity of something of interest and she will look at an item or object, indicating that a quick press of a key at that stage will cause interaction. This system is functional, but seems to neither detract nor improve on the original methods.

Victoria and all her cohorts are beautifully conceived and presented. The cinematics set each scene appropriately while the lavishly detailed environments are a reminder of what gaming will lose if this genre disappears. **NAG**

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Big eyes, small mouth, no depth, mostly harmless fun

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VITAL INFO

Platforms
PC

Suggested Retail Price
R 299

Developer
Climax Studios

Publisher
Zoo Digital Publishing

Supplier
WWE [011] 462 0150

Genre
RPG

Age Restriction
12+

Minimum Specs
Pentium III 1.5GHz
256MB RAM
16 x DVD-ROM
64MB Video Card
1.8GB HDD

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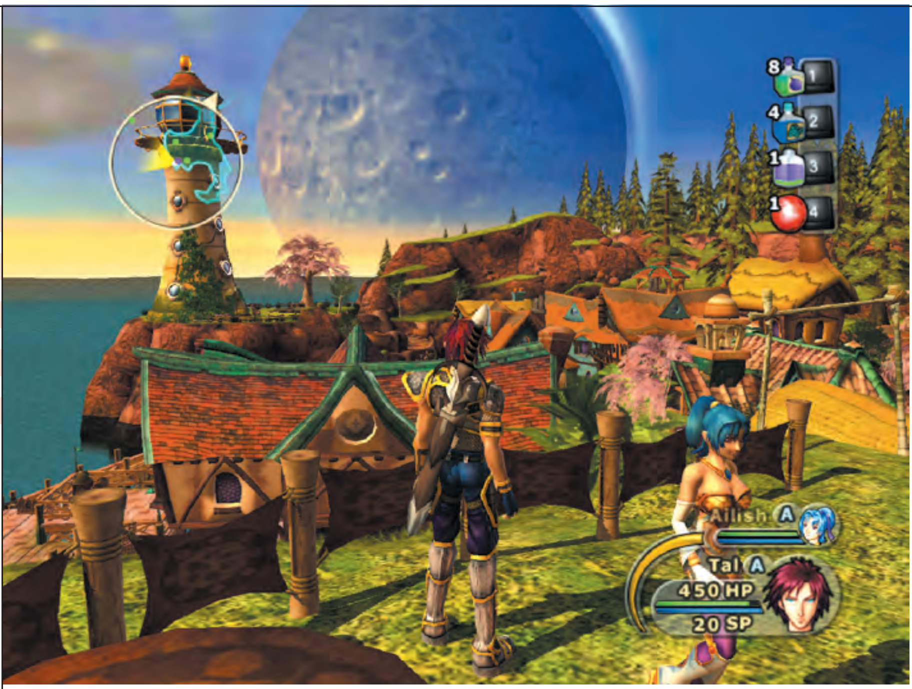
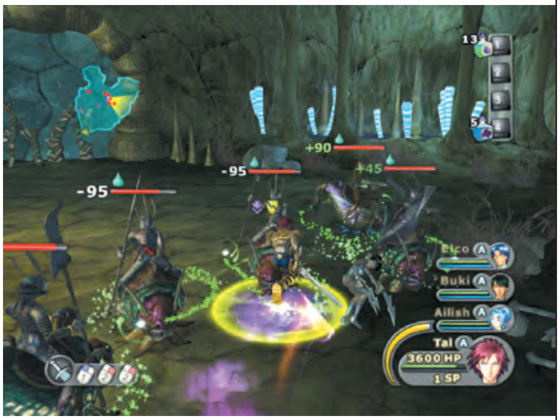


The cinematic style and character customisation makes for visual splendour



SUDEKI

HAVE WE AS GAMERS actually had enough of the slow-motion effect pioneered in the obscure 1981 film, *Kill and Kill Again*, (but popularised by *The Matrix*), often referred to as bullet time? Probably not, and Sudeki actually uses it to good effect.

But first an examination of the rest of the normal speed game.

Think of Sudeki as an excursion to a Star Trek convention with your Spock-loving Star Trek fan, from the new age bookstore, who does William Shatner impressions. You can choose to drink in the experience and enjoy it for what it is, not scratching too deep. Or you can over-analyse it, thus shattering the illusion and then trudge around miserably for the rest of the day.

Role-playing action at its most basic form, you run around the linear-progressed game world killing creatures, completing quests and thus gaining experience with which to improve your character. Later, you have control over four characters in total, each with their own strengths and weaknesses. Swapping between them is instant, but often slightly cumbersome due to how enemies attack.

The combat is what sets Sudeki slightly apart from the pack. Instead of mindless mouse-click abuse, you have to time left and right mouse button clicks to achieve a variety of combos, making the combat slightly more engaging. When you wish to use a special ability or drink a revitalising potion, this is where the aforementioned bullet time kicks in. Pressing the quick-menu key slows the game down rather impressively - birds fly slower, chirps become baritone drones and enemies lunge at you in super-slow syrup-vision. From here you can select which skill to use and once selected, the game resumes normal speed with a satisfying crescendo of sounds.

For the most part, Sudeki holds itself together well. The graphics are supportive and present a lush, detailed world. Yet, the characters seem waxen and uninspired. Overall Sudeki fails to take advantage of so many breaks it has: the technology, the voice actors at its disposal and the use of the four characters. Regardless (and despite a camera that loves to judder for no reason), Sudeki provides a reasonable hack-and-slash experience sure to appeal to fans of hyper-intelligent anime-inspired characters. **NAG**

xyz GRAPHICS
Job#: 6833 File Name: M6833C_Sprd
Client: NAG Date:03.29.05
Linescreen: 133fj Operator: dn
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2158

*Examples of acceptable game artwork

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Job#	NAGCOMP			**REVISION**	**Vendor**	DonkeyKART	**Approval**	**Date**
Filename	NAGCOMP.psd			**0**	**Studio**	normie		
Date/Time	3/3/05 5:05 PM				**Producer**	KO		
Title					**CD**			
Pub				NAG	**AD**	Marco		
Live	.75				**CW**			
Trim	18 x 10.75	**Gutter**	.75		**AE**	TB		
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INTERNAL CHANGES 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

300 pixels/inch | CMYK | 3mm bleed [all around]
216mm x 291mm

2005/07/10 09:15:28 PM

A good-looking street racer with innovative twists

78

VITAL INFO

Platforms
PC

Suggested Retail Price
R 299

Developer
Juice Games

Publisher
THQ

Supplier
WWE [011] 462 0150

Genre
Arcade street racer

Age Restriction
12+

Minimum Specs
1GHz CPU
256MB RAM
NVIDIA GeForce 2 ATI 8500
32MB or better
8 X DVD-ROM drive
2.5GB free HDD

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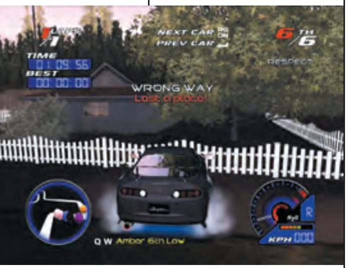
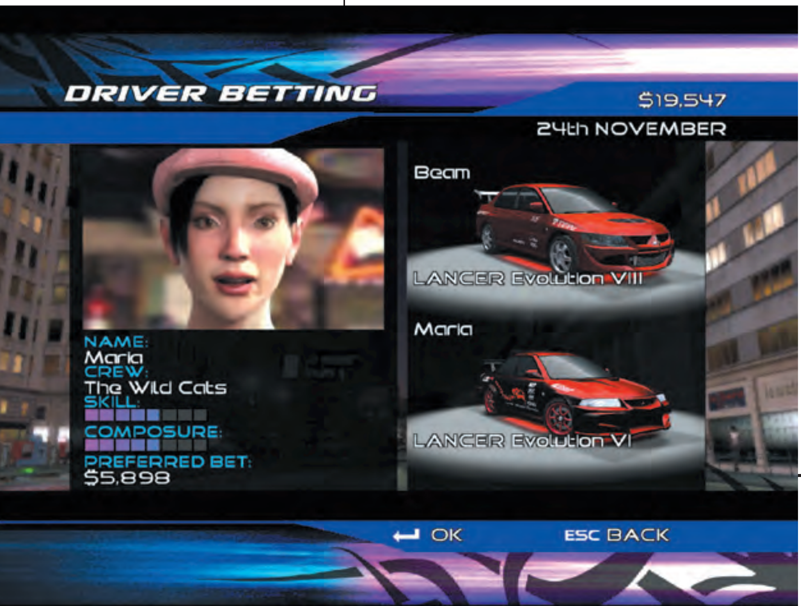
JUICED

JUICED HAS HAD A rocky road to its release. It was first due to be launched almost a year ago, under the Acclaim banner. When this stalwart of the gaming industry unceremoniously went belly-up, developers Juice Games found themselves with a pretty much complete game raring to be unleashed into the hardcore street racing niche, but sadly no publisher to get it out there. THQ salvaged Juiced from the ruins, clearly recognising some merit in the title just waiting to be capitalised upon.

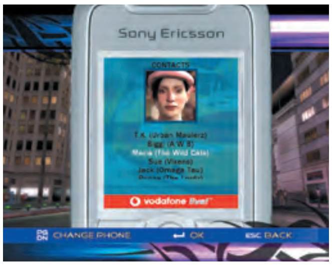
Unfortunately, the year-long delay Juiced suffered as a result of all these corporate hassles cost it valuable momentum in the global gaming market. The arcade street racer gap Juiced was hoping to plug right into, had been neatly filled by giant titles such as Need for Speed Underground and the console-derived Midnight Club. Although this was not nearly as overpopulated a genre on the PC as on the consoles, it still left Juiced with a rather small target into which to squeeze itself with some originality and innovation. And it actually succeeded in doing this, to a certain extent. The gaming industry is so fast paced that delaying a title for a year really puts it on its back foot in terms of the originality of its content, as well as the technology underlying the game engine. And as you continue to delve deeper, more flaws arise in the title. And although none of these faults on their own are enough to really

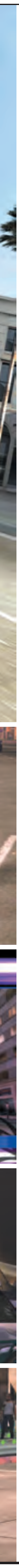




Beam
LANCER Evolution VIII
Maria
LANCER Evolution VI

NAME: Maria
CREW: The Wild Cats
SKILL:
COMPOSURE:
PREFERRED BET: $5,898





wreck your racing experience, together they add up to a fair degree of tedium.

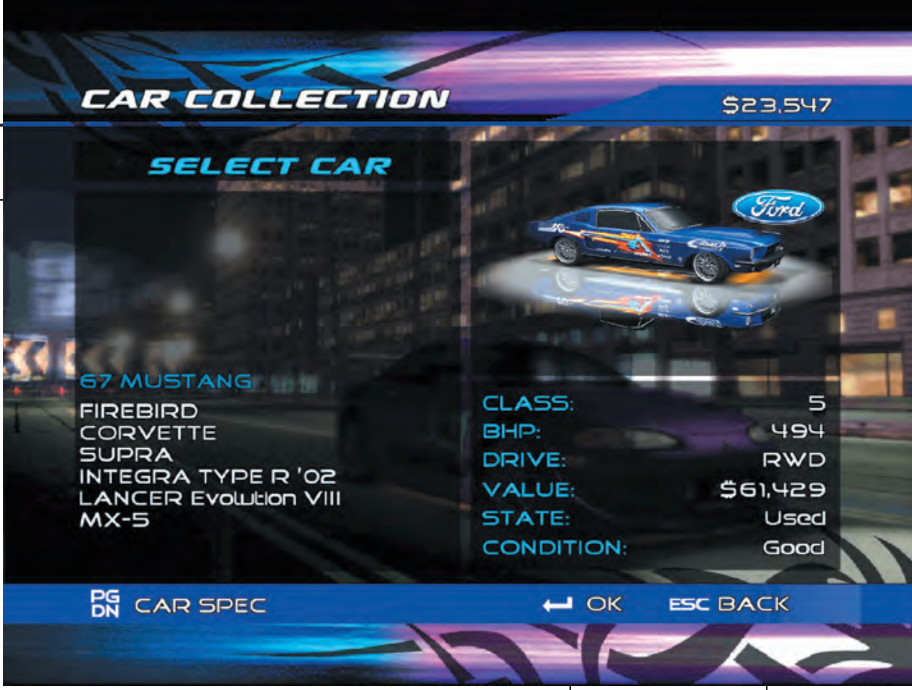
What Juiced really does well however is to draw the player into the action. This title actually does a better job of getting you to suspend your disbelief and allow you to really take on your fast-driving steel-nerved street racing persona than it involves you in the racing action itself.

The racing crews on the streets of Angel City each have their own ideas in terms of what sort of activities earn their respect. TK (the first crew leader you'll meet) tends to look more at the successes and failures of your circuit racing skills, while Biggie values a racer by the size of the wad of cash he is willing to wager. Careful though, none of them appreciates being smashed into during a race, and hooligan destructive driving is penalised with a fall in respect.

Building respect is crucial in Juiced, as it allows you to race the crew leaders for pink slips, and also gives you access to their tracks when you host your own events. This career mode can be extremely frustrating at times, and it can be difficult to recover when things start going awry. Lose enough money, and maybe a pinkslip race or two, and you can easily end up in a deep pit of financial woe.

But this source of frustration is also one of the reasons you keep coming back to the game. Juiced is a title that actually gets your heart pumping and adrenaline flowing. Because almost every time you race, you are risking something you worked for. Pinkslip events, which cost you your heavily modified ride often complete with two or more 'prototype' modifications which deliver stupendous levels of performance, can be extremely disheartening - and there is no retry or restart race button to save your gambling ass either.

Another interesting quirk in the game is the physics model itself. It's no doubt an arcade racer through and through, but dare skip over a kerb in a powerful RWD car with too much throttle and the rear will snap round, almost as if imitating a more realistic car model, but with none of the control. It's a little surreal, and can take a bit of getting used to.



CAR COLLECTION $23,547

SELECT CAR

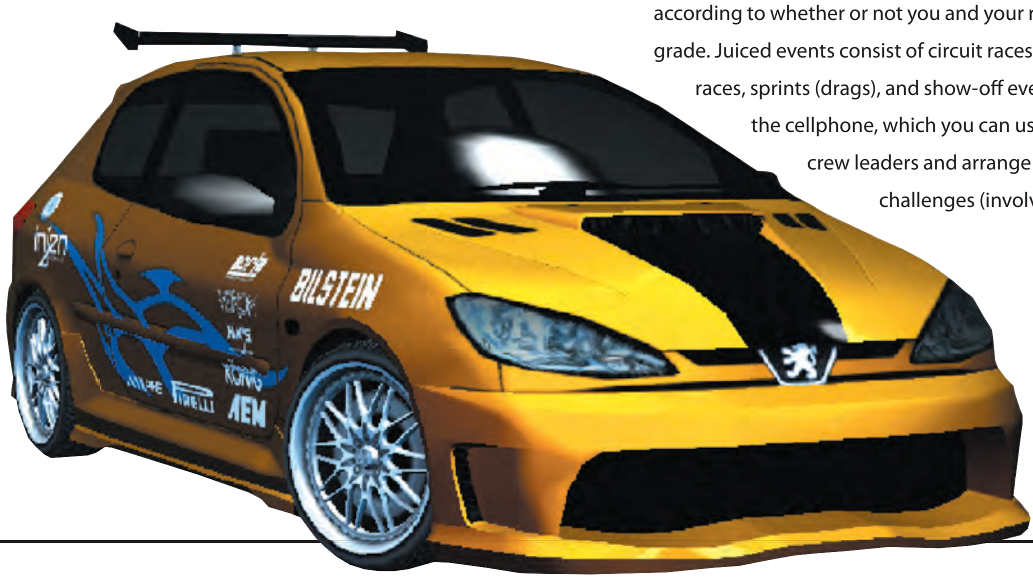
67 MUSTANG
FIREBIRD
CORVETTE
SUPRA
INTEGRA TYPE R '02
LANCER Evolution VIII
MX-5

CLASS:	5
BHP:	494
DRIVE:	RWD
VALUE:	$61,429
STATE:	Used
CONDITION:	Good

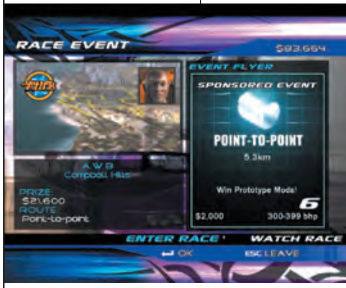
The physics model is so quirky, that in the early levels we found ourselves preferring the keyboard to our force feedback wheel as the FWD cars are easier to control with digital inputs. Once you're up into the top of class six (300-399bhp) and transmitting this power through only the rear wheels, digital control becomes nearly impossible, and we had to switch over to the wheel in order to remain on track.

Customisation options of each car are adequate but nothing to write home about. What's more, over-tuning your car is a real concern, as it could drop your power output into the lower segment of the class above. You can remove your higher-level upgrades to restore the desired competition class, but this actually costs money as you have to pay for the stock part to be refitted. Modding is very much the same old story, and it's a pity that the modding features of Street Legal haven't filtered down to more mainstream games.

Your career is dominated by two items. The calendar, which lists the events being hosted and colour-codes them according to whether or not you and your ride make the grade. Juiced events consist of circuit races, point-to-point races, sprints (drags), and show-off events. Then there's the cellphone, which you can use to call up other crew leaders and arrange to drive some challenges (involving specific



BELOW: ***Sponsored events like this one will earn you awesome prototype mods to boost your ride's power to extreme levels***



RACE EVENT $83,664

A.W.B
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$21,600
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Point-to-point

EVENT FLYER
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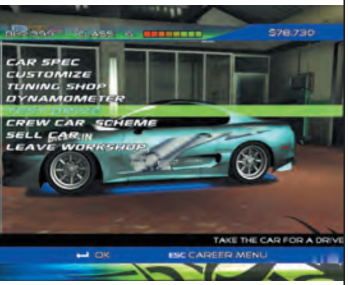
Win Prototype Mods!
6
$2,000 300-399 bhp



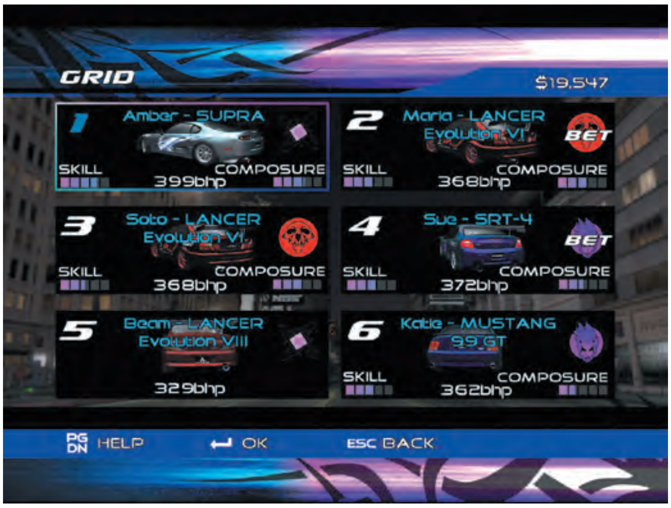
vehicles and specific performance targets, like completing entire laps without dropping below 225km/h for instance), or even to set up a pinkslip race.

The AI is not clever at all. In fact it's annoying, especially considering there is no way to fast forward or skip the races you elect to allow your AI crew mates to run. The graphics however are really quite stunning. The car models shine convincingly, and little bits of road debris are constantly being kicked up by the cars in front of you for extra effect. The speed blur effect, which again is in no way original at this point in the genre, looks good, but is really there to hide the fact that the engine struggles to get across a convincing sense of travelling at 300km/h plus on a public road.

Audio is good too - each car's engine actually sounds relatively close to the real thing. Just listen to the difference between the Lan Evo's turbocharged 'four' and the Subaru's flat-four boxer motor and you'll understand what we mean.

Finally, the online multiplayer element works very well with little lag even for the limited-bandwidth SA connectivity. There's nothing particularly different about it compared to the career mode, but taking other players' tricked-out rides from them after a hard-fought battle is genuinely inspiring - even though it doesn't happen all that often. Not many racers seem prepared to commit their cars online.

This attitude is fair enough considering how these races work against the AI. Juiced has one of those completely broken impact models. So you will time and time again lose your hottest car due to the fact that your opponent can merely brush your tail and spin you into a wall. Yet, you can ram him at top speed with vicious intent and it will illicit no



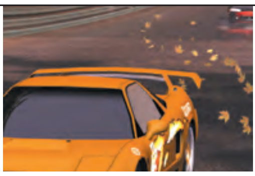
JUICED [PS2]

89

WE REMEMBER WHEN WE played the first demo of Juiced. And honestly, it didn't impress all that much. But luckily demos are just that: demos. On the other hand, the full release of Juiced is really one of the best racing games ever made. No kidding. The box promises over 50 cars, with over 7.5 trillion customisation possibilities. Sound a bit bold to you? Well, whether it's true or not, Juiced delivers, and then some.

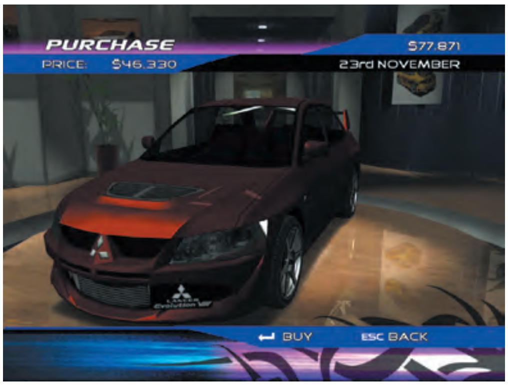
Probably the only downside of Juiced is that there isn't an easy mode. It's not the most forgiving racing game and a lot of people might have a problem - especially if they've played NFSU on the lowest difficulty. For the rest, all the little problems are far and few. None of the NFS titles really come close to Juiced. Its balance between realism and pure entertainment is perfect, delivering a mix of nail biting action and pure excitement. Car modding is fun, but maybe not as technically involved as expected – still, the mixture of cars will keep you busy for long enough. The only place Juiced falls short here is that you can't change your cars' lights. And there is only one type of Neon modification. But the paint options are by far the best of any game. You choose all the colours on an XY-axis, based on three different paint bases - the possibilities are therefore endless.

The AI is well balanced and never becomes too predictable. The only niggle is that each character only has so many lines of dialogue and these are repeated race after race, over and over. Consider turning off the voices, and the music cuts in-between every menu, which means you only hear snippets of songs – of which there are not enough in the first place. But the amount of tracks, and the randomness of their order means that the game is still fun. You will become insanely proud and protective over your cars, to a level where you will curse your crew members for crashing them. Jumping between races, the workshop and other menus happens quick enough not to be irritating. And even though the games' loading times are a bit long on the PS2, it is bearable. Juiced is fun to play and as much fun to watch. Friends won't get bored of seeing you play it, and multiplayer has auto-modding, at the click of a button, so everyone can play without having to get their own cars in career mode. All in all, it's almost the perfect racing



more than the merest shimmy and cost you a lot more time than it will cost him - almost as if his tyres are glued to the virtual tarmac. This is incredibly annoying, and it is this fact that will cause you to eventually throw up your hands in disgust and never look at the game again.

Despite all of its flaws, release delays and half-sim half-arcade physics model, Juiced does a decent job of it overall. While the drive itself may not be particularly realistic, the surge you get from risking your most valuable vehicle in a pinkslip race is as real as it gets, which is what elevates this title above its ample competition. It's a pity then that the skewed collision model tarnishes this aspect dramatically.



We wouldn't call it a must-have title due to its pretty annoying deficiencies. But it's nevertheless worth a look if you're champing at the bit to get down to some hardcore virtual street racing. But be warned, your blood pressure will shoot up a few notches when you play Juiced for any period of time. **NAG**

1/3 LAPS
4th/4
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game for the serious racing fan or anyone who prefers more thinking and technicality than mere arcade action. Maybe all that needs to be done now is to combine Juiced and Street Legal. Then finally, we'll all be happy. **NAG**

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Entertaining and expansive arcade-style street racer – much fun to be had here

81

VITAL INFO

Platforms
PS2

Suggested Retail Price
R 499

Developer
Rockstar San Diego

Publisher
Rockstar Games

Supplier
Ster Kinekor Games
[011] 445 7900

Genre
Racing

Age Restriction
12+

Minimum Specs
1-2 Players
125KB memory
Analogue: Sticks only
Vibration compatible

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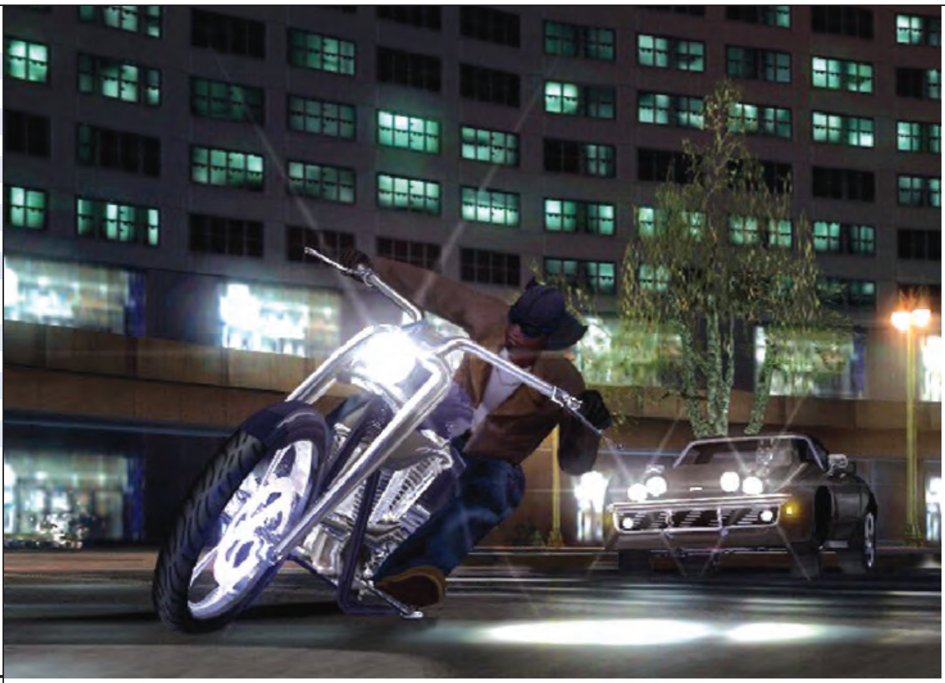
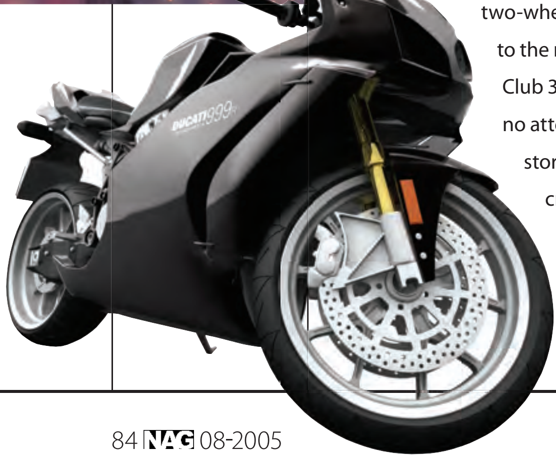


The only racing game in which you can race both cars and bikes

MIDNIGHT CLUB 3: DUB EDITION



THE STREET-RACING GENRE IS becoming increasingly popular, particularly since the emergence of the Need for Speed: Underground franchise. Most fans of the genre still fondly remember Rockstar's Midnight Club 2, which was universally well-received, and for good reason. Rockstar is back, this time in association with tuner magazine DUB, and the result is Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition, which is undoubtedly one of the best games to emerge in this growing genre. It's important to realise from the outset that Midnight Club 3 is an out-and-out arcade racer, and therefore uses a physics engine appropriate to the approach. In other words, anyone expecting Gran Turismo-style realism will be disappointed. If you're looking for high speed, huge jumps, big crashes and two-wheel skids, however, you've come to the right place. In addition, Midnight Club 3 is all about racing. There's been no attempt made at trying to tie a storyline into the action. You simply cruise around the city (you begin in San Diego and can later unlock two additional cities, namely Atlanta and Detroit) and engage in a variety of races, including point-to-point sprints, checkpoint races, circuit races and others, with the aim to win cash, new cars, or to unlock additional events or cities. Winning cash will usually be your primary concern, since money is the key to upgrading your ride, both inside and outside. There are a number of improvements you can purchase to upgrade your engine, transmission, brakes and the like, all of which contribute to better performance on the road. There are also a myriad of aesthetic modifications that can be made. As fans of the genre would expect, the car's bodywork is your playground, and you can chop and change spoilers, hoods, rims and more, as well as invest in new paintwork or decals, allowing you to completely personalise and customise your car (or bike, for that matter). The visuals are generally impressive, though a few incidents of slowdown present themselves, particularly when large crashes occur. But the car models are all very well detailed, and the game does well to create the impression of travelling at speed. The soundtrack (and effects) is also top notch, and accompany the action perfectly. Ultimately, Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition is a very well produced title that serves to greatly refine its increasingly popular genre. Fans of the series or of street-racing titles in general, won't be disappointed. **NAG**

An action *tour de force* with its fair set of flaws and fun

VITAL INFO

Platforms

PS2

Suggested Retail Price

R 349

Developer

Red Entertainment

Publisher

Sega

Supplier

WWE [011] 462 0150

Genre

Action

Age Restriction

16+

Specifications

1 Player

100KB memory

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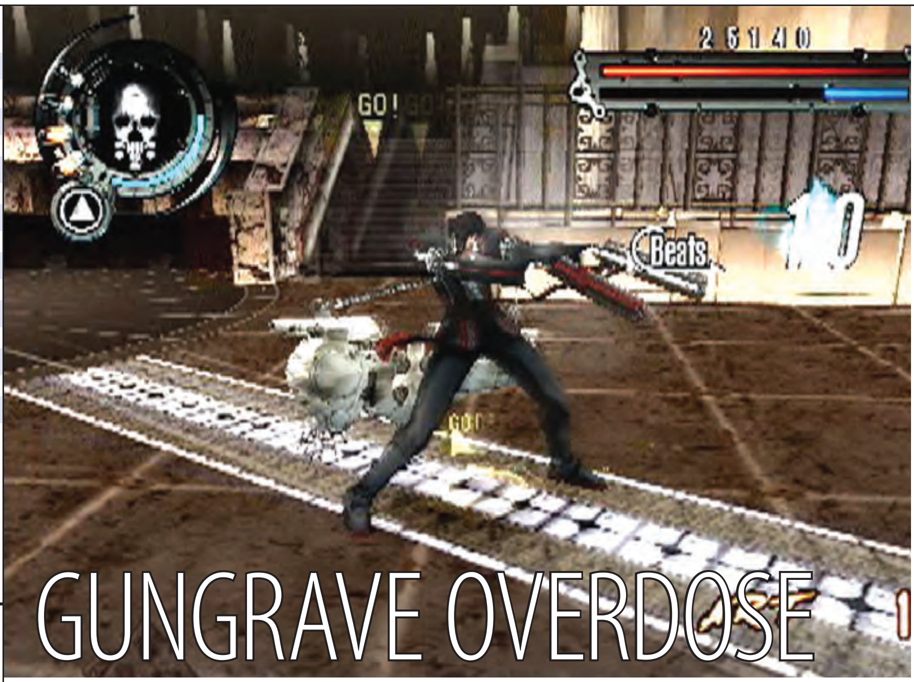
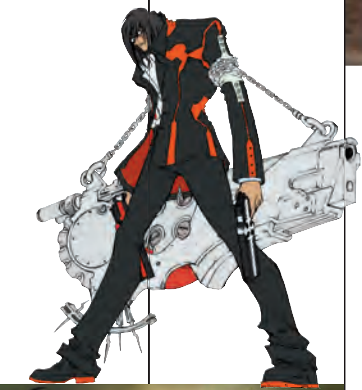
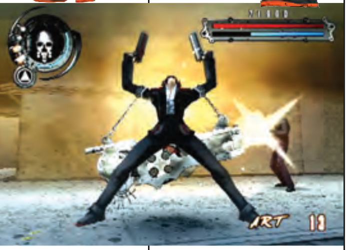


GUNGRAVE OVERDOSE

Everything in sight is yours for the taking





BEYOND-THE-GRAVE (LEAD PROTAGONIST'S NAME, can you believe it) just can't manage to remain dead. So, the undead Mafioso, turned almost-good-guy, is back from the beyond (called back by the usual love-interest in these types of stories) to try and stop the usual horrible events that may happen if some game character doesn't decide to intervene.

The short of it: Gungrave OverDose is an intense, challenging and mostly satisfying experience. Even the slightly convoluted plot can be rather involving if you can get over the almost ludicrous nature of the entire game universe.

One could consider Gungrave OD 'the poor man's Devil May Cry', since it has a fair set of similarities with Dante's visceral escapades, but doesn't come close to the same level of polish and flare.

The default over-the-shoulder camera does its job, while slaughtering bad guys gives you Artist Points (the amount of which is determined by the variety of your attacks), and these points can be used to unlock more moves and power-ups. Slightly into the game, two extra characters are unlocked; both with their own plot and play mechanics - though neither character seems fully fleshed-out as the lead character's endeavours.

After a while the level design seems to get more and more uninspired, but if you're still playing that far in you're probably there for the action and nothing else - so it shouldn't matter.

Visually there is a lot left to be desired, but the nature of the game, it's big messy pleasure of sheer blitzkrieg action, manages to brush over its flaws. **NAG**

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Well polished and presented title, but with far too an unsatisfying play dynamic to be worthwhile

67

VITAL INFO

Platforms

PS2

Suggested Retail Price

R 361

Developer

EA Games

Publisher

Electronic Arts

Supplier

EA Africa [011] 516 8300

Genre

Action

Age Restriction

16+

Minimum Specs

1 Player
96KB memory
Analogue: Sticks only
Vibration compatible

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"Let's see if you can fly punk"

BATMAN BEGINS

THE FILM BATMAN BEGINS has been almost unequivocally heralded as an excellent film, and one that did much to make up for the shortcomings of some of its laughable Hollywood predecessors. As such, it's no surprise that it has spawned a videogame counterpart. But unfortunately, despite a very glossy sheen, the game leaves much to be desired. Following the storyline of the film, Batman Begins sees you controlling the Dark Knight during the early days of his crime fighting career - beginning with his training in the Himalayas, and progressing to his emergence as Gotham City's resident caped crime fighter. The game dynamic largely revolves around stealthily creeping around, while despatching foes, and trying to avoid face-to-face confrontations with gun-wielding enemies, since Batman's lack of any superhuman powers mean that he'll come off second best in any encounter with hot lead. His greatest asset is his ability to terrify his enemies before attacking, and this is implemented in the game dynamic through the inclusion of a 'fear meter'. Each level provides you with ways to psyche out your enemies, usually by doing something like blowing up barrels, or knocking over crates from a distance with your Batarang. These actions build up the fear meter, which in turn makes foes drop their weapons and start to panic, making for easier fights. While the concept is spot on, the execution is somewhat lacking however. The level designs are highly linear and icons appear whenever you can interact with the environment to try and spook your enemies. The entire experience therefore requires very little initiative from the player, and even though Batman's actions look rather cool, performing them leaves one feeling quite uninvolved and unfulfilled. Combat too is far too straightforward and altogether too easy, provided you're not taking on a pack of machine-gun toting bad guys. Also present are two short levels in which you drive around quite recklessly in the Batmobile. These are short-lived and feel as if they were simply thrown into the game for the sake of completeness. The presentation of it all, however, is undoubtedly excellent. The visuals are beautiful and recreate the film's atmosphere wonderfully, as does the sound track - not to mention the voice-acting, provided by the film's acting talent. Unfortunately, despite all the polish, the game remains too unfulfilling, which is a shame, considering how involving the play dynamic could have been. **NAG**

Different take on the racing simulation genre, but requires a lot of patience to enjoy

68

VITAL INFO

Platforms
PS2

Suggested Retail Price
R 489

Developer
Konami

Publisher
Konami

Supplier
Ster Kinekor Games
[011] 445 7900

Genre
Racing

Age Restriction
3+

Specifications
1-2 Players
463KB memory
Analogue compatible (all buttons)
Vibration compatible

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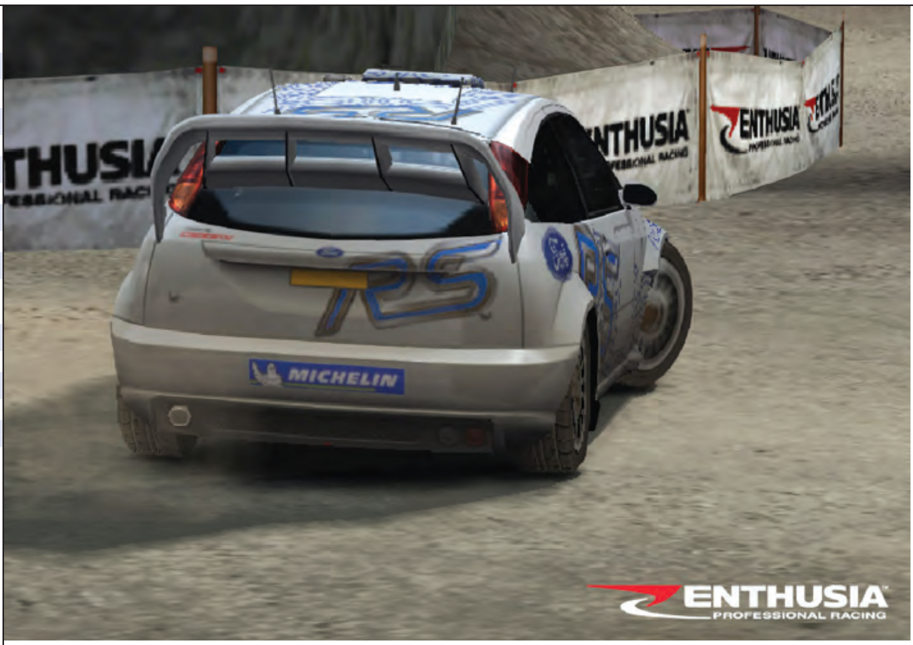
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Using a non-linear throttle gives you total control over acceleration and deceleration

ENTHUSIA PROFESSIONAL RACING

IT TAKES A FAIR degree of bravery to release a racing title designed to compete with a product like Gran Turismo 4. This title, with a different approach to the genre, focuses far more on driving skill than vehicle tuning, but the result is sadly still in need of a lot of refinement. Featuring 50 tracks (including two real-life venues) and 200 licensed cars to race with, Enthusia certainly has much to offer in terms of variety. The essence of the game is the 'Enthusia Life' mode (the career mode), in which you are presented with a choice of different races in which to compete. Taking part in an event uses up one week of the in-game calendar. After each 12-week period, the results from your nine best races are used to calculate your overall ranking. Your aim is of course to be ranked number one. The twist in the game is the inclusion of skill and Enthu points, which are determined by the way you drive. Skilful driving yields skill points, which gradually upgrade your vehicle, making it easier to win races. Conversely; poor driving (going off-track, hitting other vehicles, etc.) detracts Enthu points. Should these reach zero, you'll be barred from competing for a week, and your overall ranking will consequently suffer. Unfortunately, all of this is daunting at first and the cars' handling is initially very unforgiving. Progressing into the game often feels arduous and requires far too much patience. On the whole, it feels as if Konami has tried to do too much with this title, and the result is initially overbearing and intimidating. It's not a terrible game, but takes too long to truly become enjoyable (and to be considered as worthy competition for GT4). **NAG**

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REVIEW

A return to form for the popular franchise – immersive and entertaining

78

VITAL INFO

Platforms
PS2

Suggested Retail Price
R399

Developer
EA Games

Publisher
Electronic Arts

Supplier
EA Africa [011] 516 8300

Genre
FPS

Age Restriction
16+

Specifications
1-2 Player (1-4 with multitap)
95KB memory
Analogue: Sticks only
Vibration compatible

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The choices you make in the game will shape your individual experience

MEDAL OF HONOR: EUROPEAN ASSAULT

THE LATEST IN A very long line of World War II shooter titles, which has been largely successful (but also spawned some disappointing titles), Medal of Honor: European Assault sees the franchise return from the Pacific front of the war to Europe. The game starts off in France, with later levels seeing you take on Nazi troops in Russia, Belgium, and North Africa. Fortunately, the game also marks a return to form for the series, and while it isn't startlingly innovative, Electronic Arts has made a few worthwhile changes to the game dynamic. The end result is a pleasing and enjoyable, if slightly short, outing. Major changes include the addition of a three-member squad that follows you around and provides you with backup. You can issue rudimentary orders to them, though thanks to a poor AI, they often throw themselves directly in the line of fire. They do, however, sometimes prove useful. Where your team-mates' AI fails, however, the enemy AI succeeds impressively. Enemies are highly aggressive this time around, and you're forced to take cover at all times, or you face being shredded into chunks by a hail of bullets. The most important change, however, is a less linear approach to the levels. Each level has primary objectives which must be completed, but you are often offered a number of ways to go about this. In addition, there are also hidden secondary objectives which can be completed, which further encourage you to explore each locale, rather than simply following a set path and blasting everything in your way. The game's sound manages to live up to the reputation of the franchise, with an epic, sweeping score, and convincing voice-acting. Decent, if unremarkable graphics, further round off the package, making for an entertaining and slightly different World War II shooter. **NAG**

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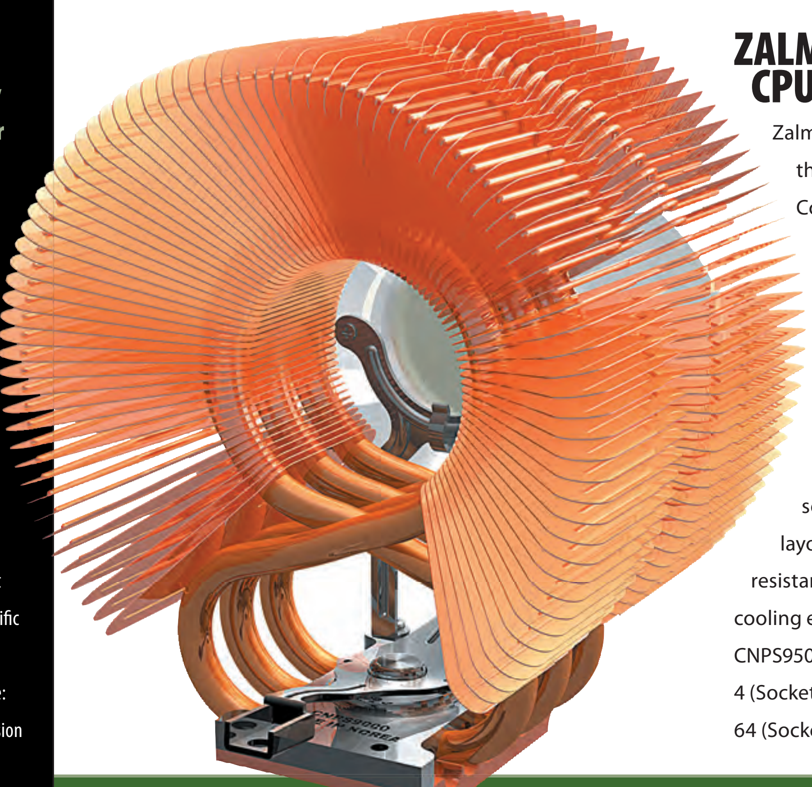
TECH NEWS

Creative X-Fi Xtreme Fidelity audio processor

Creative is in the final phases of developing a ground-breaking new audio processor that will contain 51 million transistors. The chip will enable sound processing functions that are too demanding for current processors. Three specific new applications are being cited by Creative: Crystallisation, Expansion and Virtualisation of sound. Crystallising will allow 16-bit sound to be 'upgraded' to 24-bit, thus increasing the resolution of sound samples. Expansion and virtualisation will enhance the way sounds are placed in 'virtual speakers'. This will allow better simulation of surround sound through stereo, and will allow a 5.1 speaker system to simulate the placement of over a hundred speakers. The company will be announcing a new range of audio cards that use the X-Fi chip within the next couple of months. [www.soundblaster.com]



ZALMAN AIR-COOLED CPU COOLER

Zalman announced the release of the CNPS9500 LED CPU Cooler at Computex in June. The primary innovation lies in the patented figure 8 shape bending of its heat pipes. This structure simulates the effect of six heat pipes with only three. The cooler also uses aerodynamically designed ultra slim heatsink fins, set in a performance optimised layout, all of which minimizes airflow resistance and weight while maximizing cooling efficiency and performance. The CNPS9500 is compatible with Intel Pentium 4 (Socket 775/478) and AMD Sempron/AMD 64 (Socket 754/939/940).

ASUS EN7800GTX SETS BENCHMARK WORLD RECORD

The Asus EN7800GTX SLI graphics card rewrote the world record for 3DMark05 benchmark with a score of 16,770 points. The system was based on the A8N SLI Premium motherboard running two Asus EN7800GTX SLI graphics cards in SLI (Scalable Link Interface) mode, with 256MB high-speed DDR3 video memory. The previous record was set by a system with two Asus EN6800ULTRA graphics cards at 14,623 points. [www.vr-zone.com]

AMD
64
Athlon X2

NEW AMD ATHLON CPU

AMD has introduced the Athlon 64 FX-57, a very high-performance single core CPU aimed at gaming applications. Built on AMD's 90-nanometer silicon-on-insulator (SOI) process, the Athlon 64 FX-57 combines a clock speed of 2.8GHz (200MHz faster than the 130-nanometer FX-55) with 64K apiece of Level 1 data and instruction and 1MB of Level 2 cache. Like its predecessor - and AMD's general-purpose, single core Athlon 64 and dual core Athlon 64 X2 CPUs - the Socket 939 chip combines a built-in DDR memory controller with HyperTransport bus and AMD64 technology for a smooth transition from 32- to 64-bit x86 operating systems and applications. It also adds support for SSE3 as well as SSE2 and 3DNow multimedia instructions and a thermal design power of 104 watts. [www.amd.com]

NEW N-GAGE ACCESSORIES

Nokia will be releasing some new accessories for the N-Gage QD. These include a carry case, carry cases for game cards, a wireless Bluetooth headset, a snap-on speaker, an adapter that doubles MMC slots and a strap.

[www.n-gage.com]

ALBATRON 7800GTX

This is one of the first implementations of NVIDIA's new GeForce 7800 GPU, which is said to deliver twice the capabilities of its predecessor, the GeForce 6800. The card carries 256MB of DDR3 memory with a 256-bit bus. The GeForce 7800GTX GPU core clock is rated at 430MHz and also supports SLI dual VGA card technology.

[www.albatron.com.tw]

SEAGATE POCKET HARD DRIVE

Seagate has released a stylish and elegant palm-sized USB 2.0 portable hard drive. The pocket drive comes in two capacities – 2.5GB and 5GB and is now available locally.

[www.seagate.com]

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GIGABYTE GOODIES

Gigabyte Technology has introduced the 3D range of hardware, which ventures into territory previously untouched by the company. The 3D Aurora chassis is an elegant case that boasts virtually tool-free installation of components and an abundance of space – five 5¼" bays and five 3½" bays. FireWire, USB and audio connectors are present on the front of the case.

Another new item is the 3D Galaxy Liquid Cooling System, which manages to circulate 400 litres per hour. An oversized radiator means that the adjustable fan's speed can, under normal conditions, be safely reduced in order to minimise noise. Aimed at case-modders and other image-conscious computer users, the system incorporates blue LED lighting.

[www.rectron.co.za]

GIGABYTE
TECHNOLOGY

Hard drives reach half a terabyte

Maxtor has announced that they will be shipping their next-generation 3½-inch 7,200rpm 3.0Gb SATA and ATA 133 hard drives with capacities of up to 500GB in the third quarter of this year. The new 500GB hard drives will include a host of new features to meet the distinct needs of each brand's application area. The features will provide significant improvements in areas such as performance, thermal optimisation, data management and security, interface and AV stream detection. The 500GB hard drives will also be RoHS (Restriction of Hazardous Substances) compliant.

THE VAJA CASE AKA THE CONSOLE SUIT

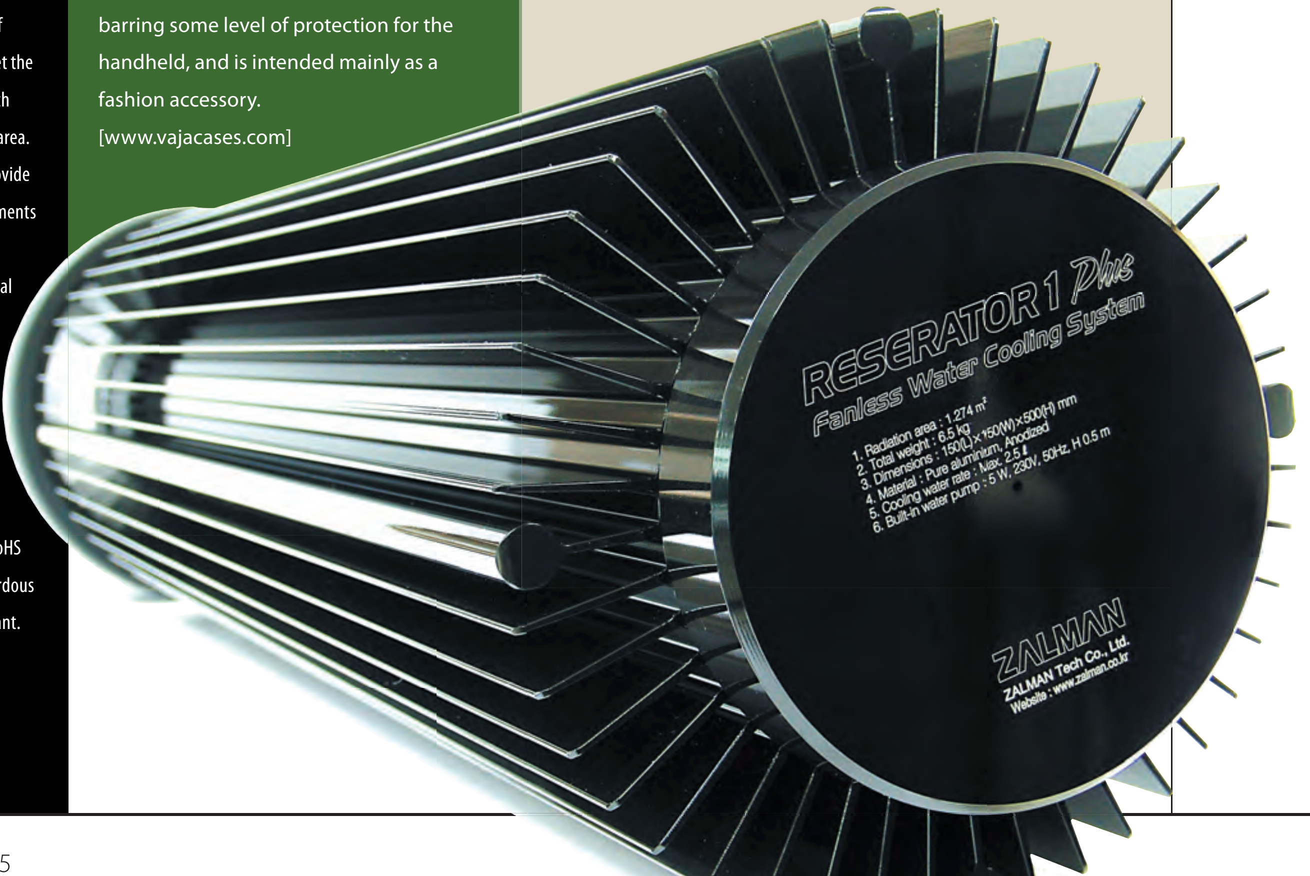
This is a leather hard case that fits the PSP perfectly. It serves no real useful function barring some level of protection for the handheld, and is intended mainly as a fashion accessory.

[www.vajacases.com]

RESERATOR 1 PLUS PASSIVE COOLING SYSTEM

This is an update of an earlier Reserator cooling system from Zalman. Besides the fact that the new one is black as opposed to the original blue, it features new CPU and GPU cooler designs, and includes an anti-corrosive water additive. The previous version was rather noisy, so it is to be hoped that among the improvements in this new model is a quieter water pump.

[www.zalman.co.kr]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Website : www.zalman.co.kr

SyncMaster 204T
SAMSUNG

SAMSUNG 20.1" LCD

Samsung SyncMaster 204T is a 20-inch TFT-LCD monitor delivering a 700:1 contrast ratio, 0.255mm pixel pitch, 1600 x 1200 maximum resolution, a scanning frequency of 30-81Hz horizontal and 56-75Hz vertical, and horizontal/vertical viewing angle of 178°/178°. It features built-in power, a narrow bezel with MagicTune and MagicRotation technology and has a height adjustable stand. It comes in either silver or black and makes playing Battlefield a true experience of note. [www.samsung.co.za]

THERMALTAKE KANDALF VA9000

This new Thermaltake chassis from the renowned cooling specialist is designed with cooling requirements firmly in mind. It includes heat pipe heat dissipation technology and carries four fans in its default configuration, with attention paid to the ability to mount a specialised cooling system. It is available in black and silver, and supports a wide range of motherboard form factors. [www.corex.co.za]

Kandalf
Thermaltake

Kid lends a hand

A 14-year-old boy, with help from his father, has developed the GameHand gaming glove. The purpose of this nylon and Lycra garment is to prevent a player's hands from slipping on the controller due to sweat from prolonged play. The glove leaves the fingertips exposed, in order to maximise tactile feedback, and has a silicone-based palm to firmly grip the controller.

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GIGABYTE
nVIDIA

GIGABYTE GEFORCE 7800 GTX

Believe it or not, we have not seen a major graphics card refresh from the duelling giants NVIDIA and ATI for over a year now. This is largely due to the fact that dual-card configurations, namely SLI and most recently CrossFire, have become the focus of the overall performance crown race over the last six months - an indication that graphics board manufacturers have seen the path being travelled by CPU vendors and have chosen to pursue a similar strategy. Whatever the case may be, in the NVIDIA line-up, cards based on the older than 12 months NV40 architecture remain the company's only outright performance option.

But NV40 has not been the performance leader in single-GPU configurations since the launch of the ATI X800 series. Although the late arrival of CrossFire has had NVIDIA sitting pretty at the top of the overall performance rankings with its SLI offerings, it has now decided to make an effort to reclaim dominance in single-card setups, with its very latest new generation of graphics boards known as G70.

The Gigabyte GeForce 7800 GTX is the first of this new line-up to hit the global market, and it elevates the performance of conventional single-GPU rigs to new realms of accelerated 3D performance - its benchmark figures in most cases very nearly on par with those of a dual 6800 Ultra setup, previously widely accepted as the overall fastest graphics configuration available to gamers.

The G70 architecture now sports 24 pixel pipelines and 8 vertex shader units, compared to the 16 and 6 respectively of previous generation parts. Operations efficiency, however, has been increased in these pipes themselves, reflecting NVIDIA's assumption that future gaming titles will place far more emphasis on shader performance than just about anything else (a trend which can already be witnessed in titles like Half-Life 2). To this end, the number of ROPs has been kept the same at 16, with NVIDIA focussing on the processes being applied at the pixel level for performance improvements, rather than the output of these calculations to the frame buffer.

Core clock frequency has increased from 400MHz to 430MHz, while memory clock is equal to the fastest 6800 solutions at 600MHz (or 1.2GHz as they are DDR modules). This might not seem a significant increase, but it's the transistor count increase from 220 million to just over 300 that really reflects the higher internal processing power of the new GPU.

Benchmarking the 7800 GTX brought up absolutely staggering figures on just about every run. Having never tested a 6800 Ultra SLI setup myself, these figures by far eclipsed even the most potent graphics boards to have ever crossed my desk. Let me run some numbers by you.

3DMark 05 was first up. This graphics-heavy synthetic benchmark made mincemeat of the most powerful boards available when it was first introduced, and even 6000-series and X8xx offerings often struggled to better 5,000 points in this application at the standard resolution of 1024x768 with no FSAA or anisotropic filtering enabled.

My own X800 Pro AGP scored just under 4,500…

The 7800 GTX managed 5,556 at 1600x1200. At 1024x768, and with 4 x FSAA and 16x AA enabled, it pulled 6,179 points. And even at the almost ludicrous resolution of 1920x1440 without pixel processing, it scored 4,797 3Dmarks.

One of the most impressive details of this performance was the fill rate test. Here the G70 architecture was far superior to any counterparts, consistently managing 10,200 MTexels/s, compared to an average of 6,400 on an X850 XT for instance.

The older 3DMark 03 had, naturally, even bigger numbers in store. Again, for reference, the X800 Pro got just on 10,000 at standard resolution and quality. The GTX got closer to 16,000. 4-pass FSAA and 16x AA only managed to drop this figure to 11,000, and at max resolution of 1920x1440 this beast still pulled over 10K. Okay, so slapping FSAA and AA on at this crazy resolution resulted in a minor crunch, but nonetheless 4,968 3DMarks, at 1920x1440 with all pixel-sharpening tricks enabled, is absolutely astonishing.

id Software's Doom 3 is notoriously favourable to NVIDIA and its UltraShadow techniques, but this card needs no favouring. If 60fps is a general guideline for a very playable framerate, the owner of a GTX will be smiling as this card managed 76.4fps, at 1600x1200 and in the Ultra detail setting. Once again, enabling 4 x FSAA was the only way to really cause the GTX much strain, and this dropped the framerate to 47.4 at this resolution, still at Ultra quality. Lower resolutions only resulted in the CPU / platform running out of steam far before the GPU did.

In addition to this pure performance, the G70 is more power-efficient allowing NVIDIA to drop its PSU requirement to 330W while keeping the card to a one-slot design with a large, but quiet aluminium cooler attached to the unusually lengthy, but standard width PCB.

With the G70, NVIDIA is once more the unrivalled king of the GPU. And 7800 cards are already widely available; although they are maddeningly expensive locally. Of course if your wallet has the depth of the Grand Canyon, you could even buy two and run them in an SLI configuration… talk about overkill. I cannot wait to see if ATI is able to execute on its normal trick, of hanging back for NVIDIA to launch its new-breed offerings, and then promptly improving on these performance figures with its latest design. **NAG**

VITAL INFO

Pros
Undeniably, indefatigably and unanimously the most powerful graphics card available today

Cons
Come now, it's the latest and the hottest, and any chinks in its armour will only be revealed when competition for it arises

Supplier
Rectron [011] 203 1000

Internet
www.rectron.co.za

RRP
R6299

Reviewer
Russell Bennett

EDITORS NAG CHOICE

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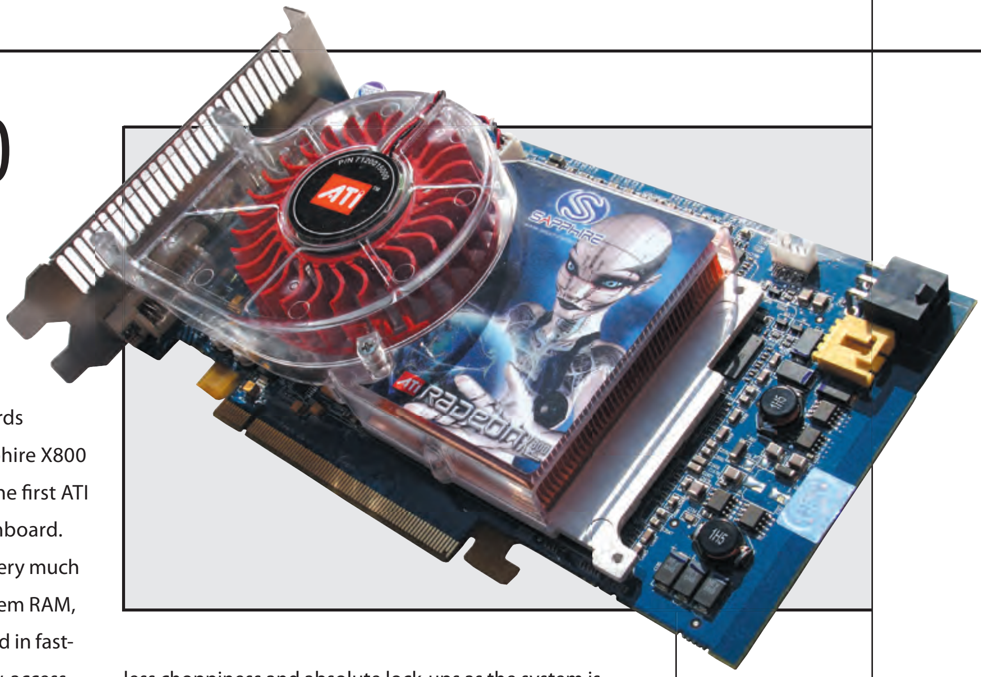
SAPPHIRE X800 XL 512MB



THE SAPPHIRE X800 XL is a mid-range offering, specifically designed to plug the gap between the cheap, but useless integrated graphics and the top of the range, but costly cards available from either camp. This particular Sapphire X800 XL, however, is different. It also happens to be the first ATI Radeon product to come with 512MB of RAM onboard.

Increasing the RAM available for your GPU is very much like adding more system RAM. In the case of system RAM, bigger DIMMs mean that more data can be stored in fast-access memory and less needs be read from slow-access disks whilst processing. In video, the slow-access become the DIMMs (as they are being accessed across the system bus), and the fast-access is the integrated RAM. So more on the video card means less time waiting for RAM which in turn often has to wait for the disk. There is a catch however.

Exactly like with the system, more RAM is really only useful when your application (or game) has to frequently access data over the slower bus during normal operations. This access dramatically hampers performance, so reducing it invariably leads to a higher perceived performance. However, if the application has been designed in such a way that it does not require constant access to uncached data (as most games have to in order to optimise their performance) more RAM will have little appreciable benefit.

Doom 3 widely advertised the fact that it was created with 512MB of video RAM in mind. In fact, the title menu suggests that Ultra quality should only be applied with a 512MB card or the performance would be poor, although more powerful GPUs have rendered this statement false, managing to run the title at Ultra even with “only” 256MB RAM.

That said, this X800 XL does perform admirably, clearly demonstrating that with a slightly less powerful GPU, but double the RAM, Ultra quality can remain a playable alternative. But, you can’t really see the benefits of this system-munching quality setting at low resolution, or without enabling multisampling. And unfortunately the X800 XL chipset is not actually all that powerful. So while you get 54.4fps at 1024x768 with FSAA enabled, pushing the resolution to 1600x1200 causes this figure to fall below 30.

What these empirical figures don’t show however, is the fact that while the X800 512MB may be rendering slower than, say it’s big brother the X850 XL, it is smoother, with less choppiness and absolute lock-ups as the system is asked to feed the GPU. In real gameplay, this results in a far more playable experience, so the 512MB clearly does what it is intended to do.

Half-Life 2 was not a title I expected to be all that affected, as the Source Engine relies heavily on shader performance for its framerate. However, on this title the results surprised, and the 512MB card actually demonstrated an advantage at higher resolutions and with detail settings turned up in particular. In fact, even at 1024x768 with 4-pass antialiasing enabled, the X800 XL was just barely slower than the framerates recorded by the X850 XL board. Real gameplay also showed noticeable smoothness.

Nothing else in the benchmark run showed any performance improvement with the 512MB card. In every case, from synthetic applications from FutureMark, through to real-world titles like UT2004, the additional RAM was simply never brought into play even at the highest quality and resolution combinations.

Unfortunately this card has a two-fold downfall. The first one is a personal gripe I have with it, in that the XL-family dual-slot cooling solution reminds me very much of the original NVIDIA 5800 “leaf-blowers”. It makes a really unpleasant racket.

The second problem is its price. You ought to be able to get a fully-fledged X850 XL for this price, which might be marginally slower in Doom but beats the X800 GPU in everything else available right now purely due to the clock speed difference.

The Sapphire X800 XL 512MB is therefore only suitable for those craving the best possible experience from these two big name titles and literally nothing else whatsoever. For anyone else, a higher-spec card at a similar price is the clear winner in this context. **NAG**

VITAL INFO

Pros
Bragging rights – first 512MB card

Cons
New “leaf-blower”
Larger RAM only helps performance of very specific titles
Excessive price

Supplier
Sapphire Technology
[012] 998 0471

Internet
www.sapphiretech.co.za

RRP
R3999

Reviewer
Russell Bennett

CORSAIR XMS2 DDR2 TWIN2X 1GB

CORSAIR IS RECOGNISED AS the top provider of RAM for the enthusiast market. The company has carved itself an enviable niche by repeatedly producing DIMM modules capable of performing at ever higher clock speeds to satisfy the dedicated system tweakers' wildest desires. And although original DDR was only ever taken to DDR 400 by standards bodies, this manufacturer supplied modules to the overclocker which were capable of more than 600.

Now DDR2 is here, and it appears nothing has changed. Beneath those lovely black heat spreaders lie a pair of matched DDR2 DIMMs which Corsair claim can be safely clocked to, wait for it, a full 1,000MHz! Officially then, RAM has cracked 1GHz.

Even at the standard 667MHz, these modules perform well. Where DDR400 manages 4,500MBps throughput on a vanilla 3GHz P4 and a 915 chipset board, this DDR2 RAM at 667MHz gets up to 5,332MBps using a P4 3.8GHz. Crack the RAM frequency up to 800MHz, and you're looking at an almost 10% performance boost with a total of 5,918MBps. At 889MHz it shoots up again to a scarcely conceivable 6,740MBps. At this point those spreaders are working hard, but the system remains fairly stable.

In 3DMark 05, the 800MHz setting was enough to add a full 1,000 points onto the total score. At 1024x768 with no FSAA or anisotropic filtering and a 7800 GTX, this system managed a run of 7,339. At the maximum 889MHz, the benchmark would not complete a run due to heat, but an aftermarket CPU cooling solution would resolve that.

These modules are targeted squarely at the overclocker, and they're an attractive proposition. The low latency of these modules (5-4-4-9), really start to tell at the highest clock frequencies in particular, and RAM of such gargantuan headroom is the only thing that would sustain the cravings of those modders who get the latest chip offerings and then want to boost their overall performance beyond the maximum.

If you're prepared to invest in the hottest machine you can get and still want more, you would be prepared to pay for RAM to support your aspirations. **NAG**

VITAL INFO

Pros
RAM throughput just scales up and up as you increase frequency

Cons
Too rich for my blood

Supplier
Rectron [011] 203 1000

Internet
www.rectron.co.za

RRP
R2499

Reviewer
Russell Bennett

VANTEC MACH1 HEATPIPE CPU COOLER

THE MACH1 FEATURES DUAL copper heat pipes embedded in an all copper base and dual copper fin array. Add to this a side mounted heatsink fan pushing its channelled air sideways through the copper fins, and over the heat pipes courtesy of a stylish plastic casing, and you have the makings of an Ace.

Vantec has not stopped there. They have rounded the package off nicely with a professional fan speed controller. Not only does the controller, which fits into a PCI slot, offer a slick sliding mechanism to determine fan speed, but all the wiring is in the form of attractive ribbon cable. Bye, bye to scraggy loose fan controller wires in your case.

The package includes all the mounting hardware and thermal paste necessary for attaching the Mach1 to the following supported CPUs: Intel Pentium 4 Socket 478, AMD Athlon 64 Socket 754, Athlon 64FX Socket 940, Sempron Socket 754 and Opteron Socket 940.

Fan speed is rated at between 2,800rpm and 3,800rpm and operation is a breeze thanks to the new controller. The fan speed controller easily adjusts, offering countless increments in fan speed. Low speed settings return good temperatures and the noise levels are acceptable. However, at maximum fan speed the noise becomes unacceptable as the cooling capacity of the Mach1 is not justified.

The cooling performance of the Mach1 is very good albeit not the best we have seen. This can probably be attributed to its average cooling footprint. The casing which is employed as a channelling aid works extremely well. It has openings on both its upper and side surfaces allowing for air to be sucked in from these locations as well.

The included installation manual is Spartan by any standards, and may prove to be a headache for novice users wishing to upgrade their systems' cooling capacity.

With this in mind, the Mach1 is really noisy under maximum load and would not be well suited to anyone wishing to launch their system through any barriers other than the sound one. **NAG**

VITAL INFO

Pros
Powerful cooling
Aesthetically appealing

Cons
Very noisy

Supplier
Frontosa [011] 466 0038

Internet
www.frontosa.co.za

RRP
R410

Reviewer
Victor Moore

ABIT AN8 ULTRA

THE ABIT AN8 ULTRA is almost the same motherboard as the more gamer-orientated AN8 Fatal1ty - except that it costs less than half. The difference between the two comes down to a few aesthetic lighting touches, a fuller bundle of goodies, the famous gamer's name endorsement and a more aggressive version of OTES.

The AN8 Ultra is an nForce 4-based motherboard, and like its big-name sibling is ideal for the enthusiast market. Although I might not be a fan of the automatic overclocking tools associated with the uGuru branding, ABIT boards are almost supreme on overclockers' wish-lists, second only to the DFI LANPARTY series for pure manual tuning and tweaking capabilities.

One of the first things you'll notice about the AN8 is the small number of ports on the back panel. Half of this space is consumed by the array of cooling fins which are connected to the Northbridge cooler via a heat pipe. This is the ABIT Q OTES system - for cooling this chipset component more efficiently without creating additional system noise. Extra heat dissipaters are located behind this unit, on top of the "100% Japanese" capacitors and MOSFETs located along the top edge of the CPU socket.

Situated on the back panel are a PS/2 mouse port, a keyboard port, one FireWire port, four USB ports and an RJ45 socket for the integrated NVIDIA Gigabit LAN solution. There are no LPT (printer) or COM ports at all, and these are not even included in the box as an additional extra - although extra back plate mounted FireWire and USB ports are provided. The audio solution is integrated in the form of a custom add-in card which plugs directly into the motherboard itself. This is an excellent 8.1-channel audio solution by the way, particularly when compared to the earlier Fatal1ty version's Realtek 6-channel system.

Internal features are pretty standard and include two IDE connectors, four SATA 2 slots and one of the most inconveniently placed floppy drive connectors I have ever seen. Clearly ABIT has decided that traditional tech-like serial ports and floppy disks are now entirely secondary.

And to be honest, they really are. Where the AN8 really gets interesting is once you boot up the board and take a look at the BIOS. Overclocking options are numerous, and the performance potential of a system built on this board, with carefully balanced and tweaked components, can only be described as phenomenal.

CPU core voltage options stretch from 1.4V to 1.75V (in 0.025V increments), and DRAM can be clocked all the way up to 3.55V for those proprietary high-end overclocking DIMMs. DRAM timings can be extensively altered with a full page of BIOS settings, and even the HyperTransport links and chipset can have their voltages tampered with.

Running an Athlon64 3000+ and its DDR400 RAM at significantly higher voltages than they normally operate at, yielded a solid performance increase on this AN8 Ultra, without stability compromises. AMD parts are far more open to this manner of treatment than Intel parts, but the fans included with the Fatal1ty version of this board would give me extra peace of mind, as that heat pipe gets rather hot during operation.

The ABIT AN8 Ultra is a superb board, with extensive tweaking options at an attractive price point. And while it doesn't include a glut of features, everything the enthusiast could ask for is there. **NAG**

VITAL INFO

Pros
Awesome overclocking features
Silent heat pipe
Northbridge cooling

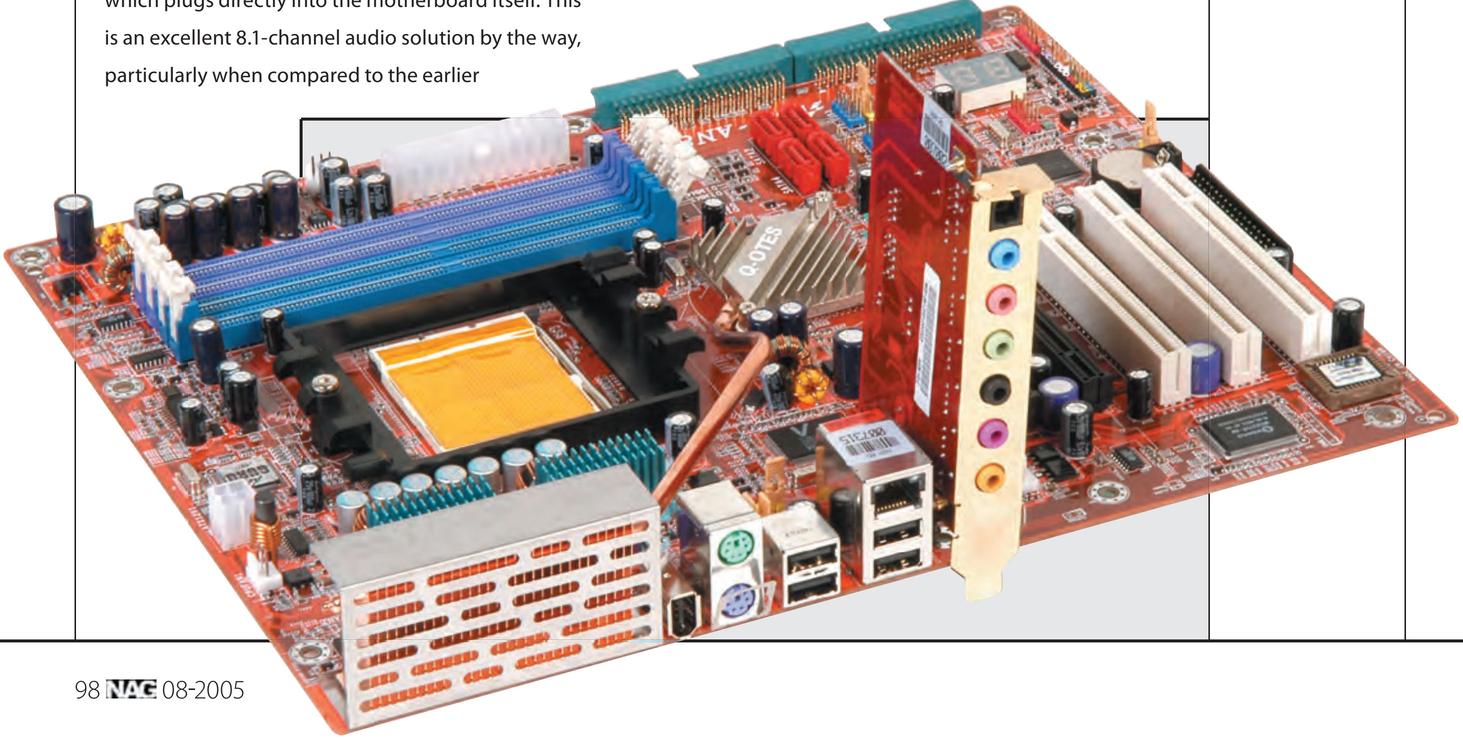
Cons
Ludicrous placement of floppy disk connector

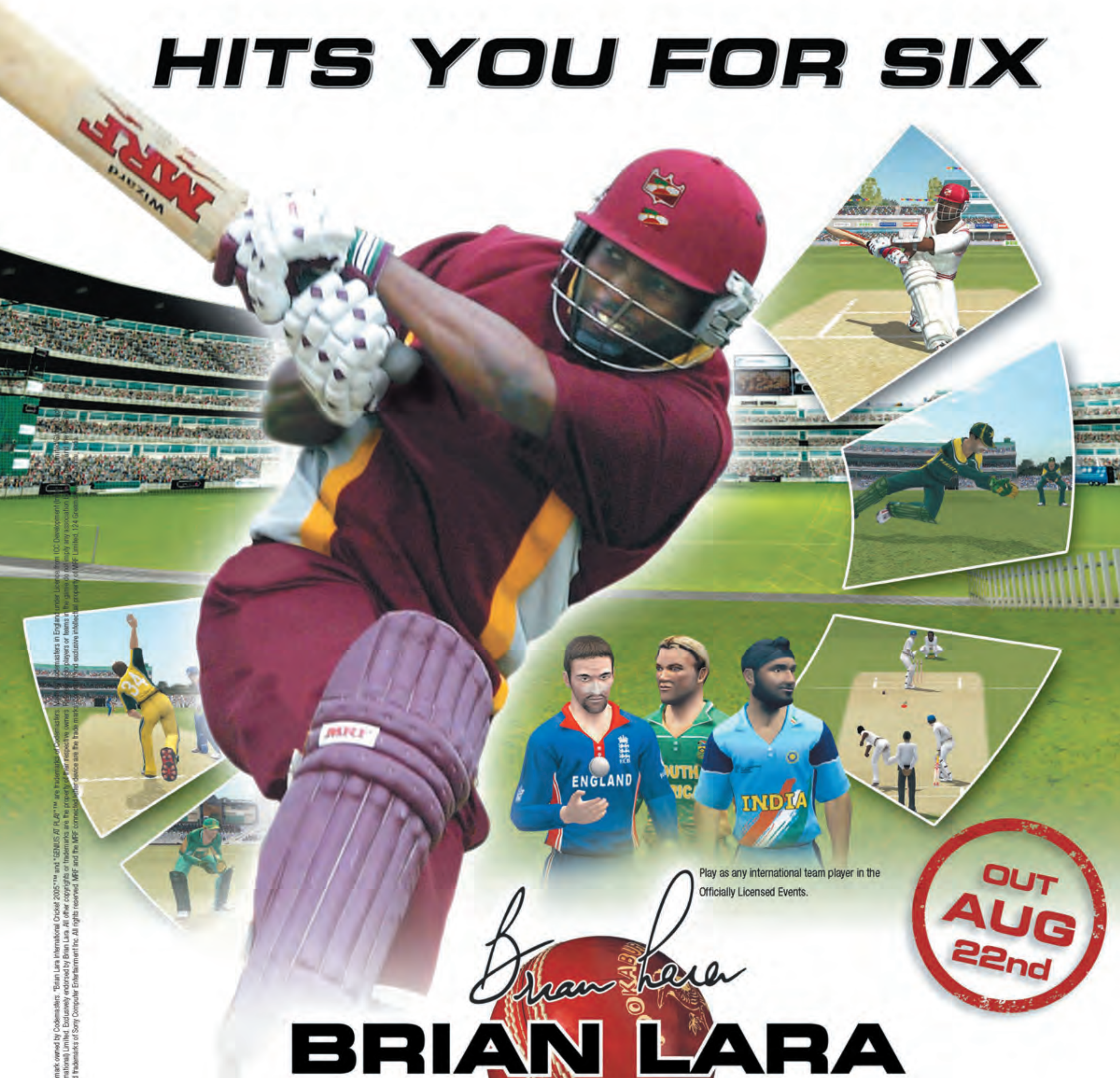
Supplier
Frontosa [011] 466 0038

Internet
www.frontosa.co.za

RRP
R1325

Reviewer
Russell Bennett





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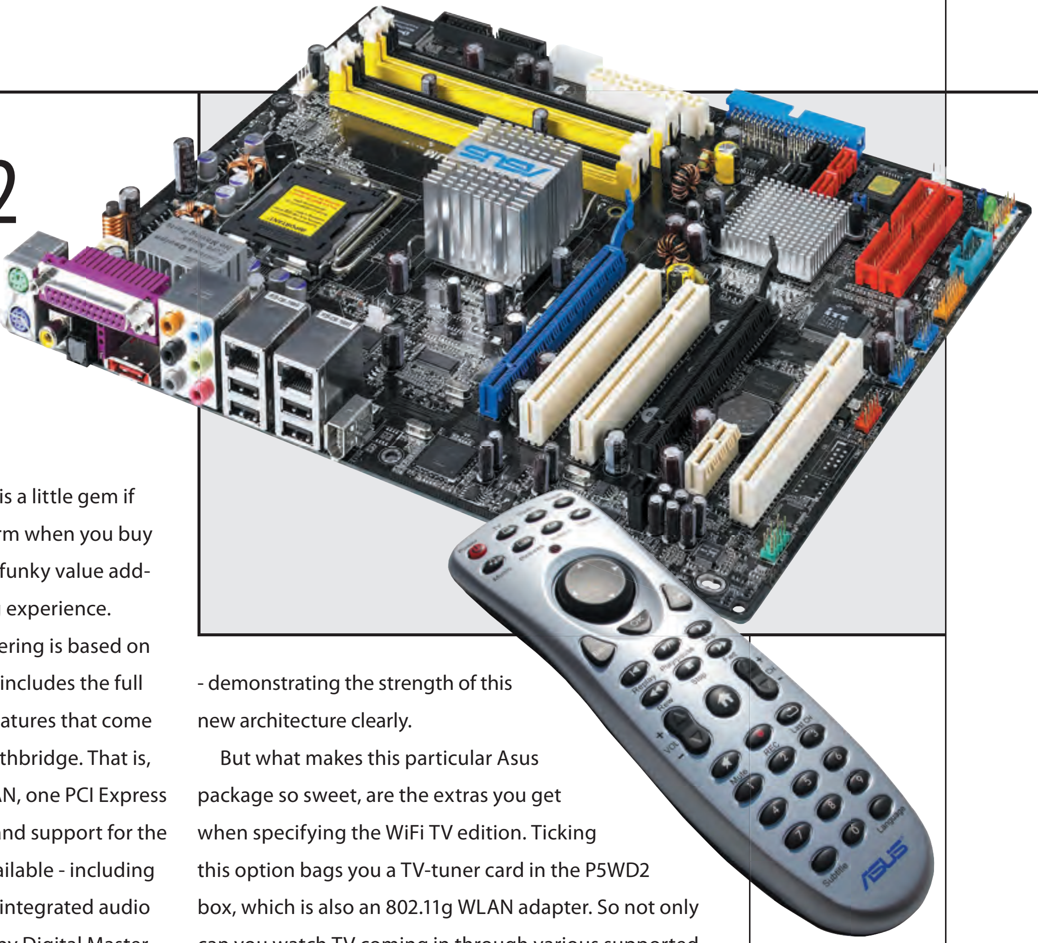
PlayStation.2
PC DVD
BRIAN LARA
CRICKET 2005
3+
Codemasters

ASUS P5WD2 PREMIUM WIFI TV EDITION



THE ASUS P5WD2 PREMIUM WiFi TV Edition is a little gem if you not only want a working platform when you buy a new motherboard, but also a stack of funky value add-ons to further enhance your computing experience.

Starting with the basics, this Asus offering is based on the latest Intel 955 chipset, and as such includes the full range of already impressive standard features that come with this architecture and its ICH7R Southbridge. That is, four SATA 2 connectors, dual Gigabit LAN, one PCI Express slot, one PCI slot, a single IDE channel, and support for the full range of LGA 775 CPUs currently available - including dual core and EE. The Realtek ALC822D integrated audio solution is used, making this board Dolby Digital Master Studio certified like all the other 955 platforms currently swarming the market.

The American Megatrends BIOS, on the P5WD2, is crammed full of system tweaks and adjustments. It was this board which enabled me to get a stable clock when testing the Corsair 1GHz DDR2 RAM of 867MHz and I believe, with some additional cooling, this could have been pushed higher. When the firmware got corrupted after hours of tuning and tweaking, the board detected the problem and restored the original BIOS from an embedded image without me having to do a thing - very useful.

With a brand new P4 570 CPU running at 3.8GHz (on loan from Intel SA) the P5WD2 put in a sterling performance. The benchmark results look a little like an all-time high scores list with the aforementioned 1GHz Corsair DDR2 modules and a Gigabyte NVIDIA 7800 GTX installed.

In 3DMark05, with all the clock settings at their default, the system delivered 6,458 at 1024x768 with no antialiasing or anisotropic filtering. The same graphics card in a 4GHz 915-chipset with DDR400 achieved 6,100 at this quality setting. So the platform alone delivered this 350 point gaming performance boost.

In truth it felt like more. In my custom Empires Dawn of the Modern World scenario, specifically created to push a platform, this solution easily matched the performance of the previous-generation P4EE CPU, and continued to deliver playable framerates even when pushing the unit count from its 4,500 starting point to in excess of 8,000 - demonstrating the strength of this new architecture clearly.

But what makes this particular Asus package so sweet, are the extras you get when specifying the WiFi TV edition. Ticking this option bags you a TV-tuner card in the P5WD2 box, which is also an 802.11g WLAN adapter. So not only can you watch TV coming in through various supported inputs, you also get full Wi-Fi capability including WLAN router functionality at the cost of a single PCI slot.

When you're being social and want your PC to take on the role of a home entertainment media centre, Asus has also included a media remote which sends signals to the system via a USB IR receiver, negating the need to even plug this receiver onto any IR motherboard headers.

For adding multiple screens to a single machine, the P5WD2 Premium also incorporates a second PCI Express graphics slot. Although not a full-speed 16x slot, this 2x/4x Universal PCI-E slot is ideal for adding a second display card purely for driving two more screens. When running this slot in 4x mode however, the single PCI-E 1x slot beside it is disabled as a result of vendors having only a total of 20 PCI-E channels available to the bus.

The P5WD2 Premium WiFi TV Edition combines a motherboard with excellent default performance and epic overclocking capabilities, with a host of funky and fun additional features thrown in to add value to the overall package.

The purchaser of this system will first and foremost receive a stable PC platform, a quality home entertainment solution with remote and a WLAN-enabled TV viewing station. The enthusiast gets the additional bonus of comprehensive system tweaking capabilities, making the P5WD2 Premium an ideal choice for hardcore gamers and dabblers looking for a PC/entertainment appliance crossover. **NAG**

VITAL INFO

Pros
Stable platform
Detailed overclocking features and cool added bonuses

Cons
None

Supplier
Asus [011] 783 5450

Internet
www.asus.com

RRP
R2999

Reviewer
Russell Bennett

FATAL1TY AN8 SLI

MOTHERBOARD

- NVIDIA® nForce 4 SLI supports AMD Socket 939 with 2000MT/s Hyper Transport ™ Technology
- 4 DIMMs Dual DDR 400 up to 4GB
- 4 ports SATA 3Gb/s RAID 0/1/0+1
- 2 ports IEEE1394a
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- NVIDIA® GbE/Firewall/SATA on chip
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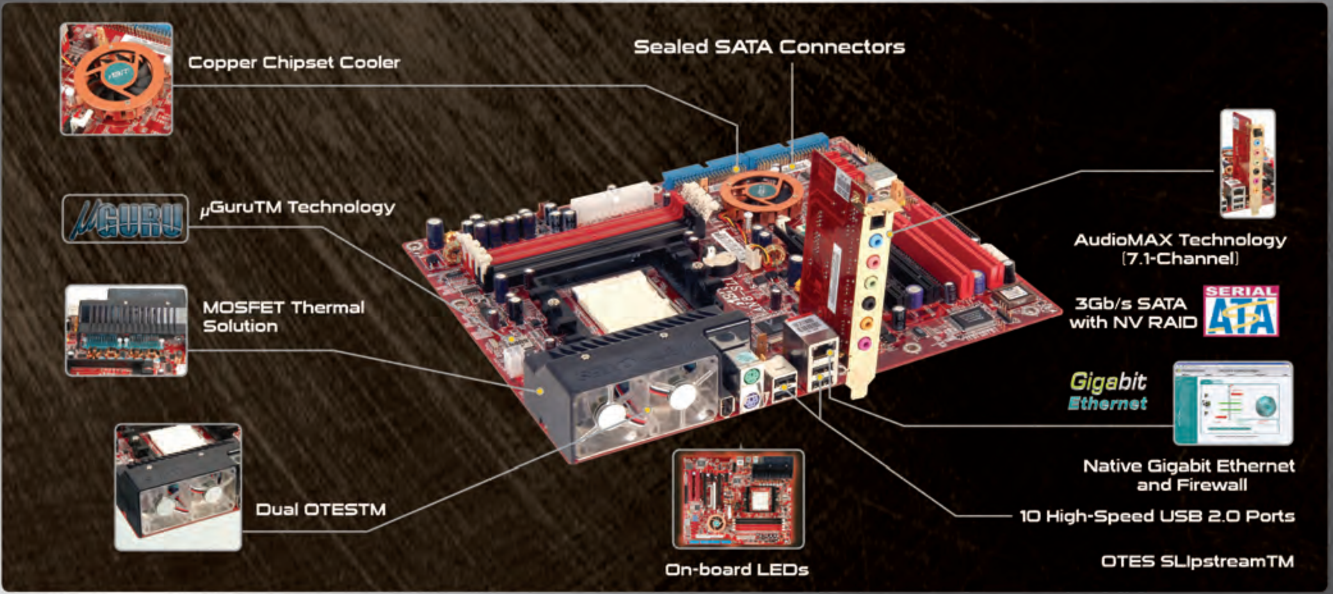
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ASUS WL 500G DELUXE WLAN ROUTER & WL-100G DELUXE WI-FI PC-CARD

IN A CORPORATE WIRELESS LAN (WLAN) implementation, speed is not necessarily the most critical factor. But in the gaming world, we know that speed is everything, and at times we scorn WLAN for the lower throughput it offers compared to a wired LAN architecture.

This is where technologies like AfterBurn, as found on these Asus Deluxe products on test, come into play. AfterBurn is said to double the throughput of 802.11g to 108Mbps bringing wireless networking on par with Fast Ethernet.

The problem with these solutions is that they are all of course proprietary. So Asus' 'turbo' wireless equipment will not work with D-Link's 108Mbps implementation and so on. So, should you really want to deploy a high-speed WLAN, you would have to get networking kit from the same vendor for every PC connected to the access point, as well as the access point itself.

In the case of this Asus proprietary offering – AfterBurn - following this route will get you peak transfers of 54Mbps, averaging 36Mbps, compared to the peaks of 34Mbps and average of 26Mbps which is the norm with regular 802.11g products. This is the reason why these 'enhanced' WLAN platforms simply do not impress me. I never really thought wireless connectivity would be the answer for high-speed data access anyway - it's there purely for the niceties of mobility.

The WL-500G is a great WLAN access point, WAN router and small switch in one however, and gets my stamp of approval - proprietary technology or not. It may not be the prettiest casing for a WLAN AP I've ever seen, but it is packed with all the useful, real-world functionality you would need to build a small, secure private network with broadband Internet connectivity and mobility enablement in a home or small-office environment.

This Asus unit features four 10/100Mbps Ethernet ports, WLAN accessibility and extensive security features focussed on the WAN to assist in keeping your always-on connection free of security problems. Simply logging into the Web-based management GUI gives you access to built-in firewall functions, URL filtering and WAN to LAN packet filtering. WLAN security is fairly standard, with the 500G featuring the disabling of SSID broadcasting, and full WEP or WPA authentication and encryption mechanisms, with support for a RADIUS server if one exists in the environment, to ensure your air-based data is kept safe from prying eyes.

What I found particularly nice about this GUI is that it is context-sensitive. If you disable the WAN functionality for instance, and use it purely as a WLAN AP, the WAN configuration options will disappear and not confuse any issues. This and the Quick Setup wizard make it a breeze for even non-network admins to configure.

The 500G Deluxe incorporates two USB slots, allowing you to turn the device into a print server for the entire wired and wireless network by simply plugging a USB printer directly into the router.

Although networking equipment which is not standards-compliant worries me in today's age, the Asus WL-500G Deluxe is a very good all-round performer. And the WL-100G PC Card offers excellent range while AfterBurn does provide a useful performance boost on an Asus AP. **NAG**

54Mbps Wireless Router
Afterburner Throughput Enhancement
PWR
AIR
WAN
LAN1
LAN2
LAN3
LAN4
ASUS
ASUS
Unwire New Possibilities
WL-100G
DELUXE
Afterburner Enhanced Wireless PC Card
ASUS
LINK
AIR

VITAL INFO

Pros
Fully-featured LAN, WAN, WLAN and print server solution in one

Cons
When will we see a standards-based 108Mbps Wi-Fi?

Supplier
Asus [011] 783 5450

Internet
www.asus.com

RRP
WL-500G Deluxe: R999
WL-100G Deluxe: R399

Reviewer
Russell Bennett

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GA-8I955X ROYAL

DUAL CORE PROCESSING HAS arrived, with the Intel Pentium D now available from distributors countrywide. Along with the new CPUs have come new platform solutions. And Intel 945 and 955 series chipsets have very quickly found their way into the product line-ups of every major motherboard vendor. Here we have the premium Gigabyte dual core platform, the GA-8I955X Royal, on review.

Gigabyte has taken on the Royal moniker to denote its richest and most opulent technology offerings. In the case of the 8I955X, that means support for all LGA 775 processors - from the Pentium 4 to the Pentium D (dual core) and even P4EE product ranges. The ICH7R Southbridge provides four SATA 2 and a single IDE channel, with Gigabyte adding 2-channel IDE RAID and 2-channel SATA RAID to the mix (although these extra SATA ports are incredibly inconveniently located).

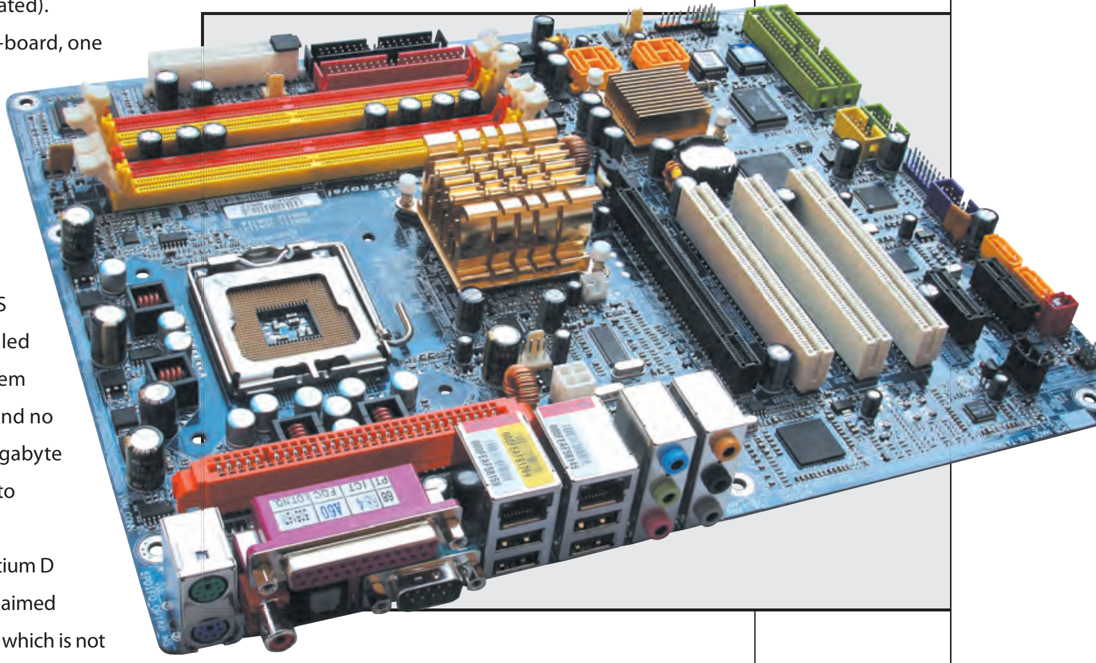
There are dual Gigabit LAN ports on-board, one of which is PCI-E based, Ultra DPS providing 6-phase power for extra stability, and an integrated audio solution which was awarded Dolby Digital Master Studio certification underlining the fidelity of its output. Although I've been impressed with DPS before, this time the daughterboard failed to function, and trying to start the system with it installed caused mild sparking and no action. In addition to these features, Gigabyte has thrown in a USB Bluetooth dongle to backup the Royal aspirations.

We tested the board with an Intel Pentium D running at 2.8GHz. To properly test the claimed DDR2 888 support (a memory 'standard' which is not yet finalised), we used a set of matched, Corsair XMS2 DDR2 1,000MHz DIMM modules for a total of 1GB of high-speed RAM.

The first thing you'll notice when accessing the BIOS, is the very conventional look, feel and features of the firmware. That is, until you go into the M.I.T. subsection, where a whole world of performance tweaking options awaits those keen to dip into the frequency and/or voltage boosting game. CPU, RAM, PCI Express bus and the system FSB can all be adjusted, with the widest range of available tweaking options I have ever seen. For the lazy overclocker, there's even CIA 2 (CPU Intelligent Adjuster), which can clock your chip up or down on the fly for maximum performance depending on software load.

Clocking the RAM up to the claimed 888MHz maximum is quickly achieved with this wealth of adjustments, with the CPU boosted from 2.8GHz to 3.1GHz as a side-effect of this tweaking. Unfortunately, at these settings the system started to show some signs of instability under XP SP2, with various random bits of hardware being 'redetected' every hour or so as the system ran. What's more, benchmark results were slightly lower than those achieved at the standard clocks.

SiSoft Sandra Professional 2005 figures for this dual core processor and platform, at default clocks, revealed a fractional performance margin over the exact same configuration with a 3.8GHz P4 570 CPU installed. Multimedia performance levels were similar, with both scoring in the region of 62,578. In arithmetic functions however, the dual core managed a combined index of 17,505, while the vanilla P4 could only manage 15,000 - a significant advantage for the D in maths operations.



The GA-8I955X Royal is a solid platform for anyone considering upgrading to dual core. The reasons for this upgrade are not compelling enough from a gamer's perspective yet to make it worthwhile – gaming benchmark figures ran very close to a 3GHz LGA 775 with older DDR RAM across the board, and the feature set is pretty standard considering all 955-based offerings are range-topping models at present. The Pentium D could well have potential however, as indicated by the phenomenal arithmetic calculating results. **NAG**

VITAL INFO

■ Pros
A good platform with excellent system tweaking options

■ Cons
Not certain that two extra RAID controllers (an IDE and a SATA), and a Bluetooth dongle are enough for the 'Royal' tag

■ Supplier
Rectron [011] 203 1000

■ Internet
www.rectron.co.za

■ RRP
R2399

■ Reviewer
Russell Bennett

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- Relocate-able HDD & FDD drive bay
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- Dimension: 530 x 220 x 560 mm (H*W*D)

Meets Intel BTX Thermal Requirements and passed Intel Thermal testing

Ventilation opening on top (62 opening ratio)

Detachable front Door design

Relocate-able 12cm Blue LED Fan

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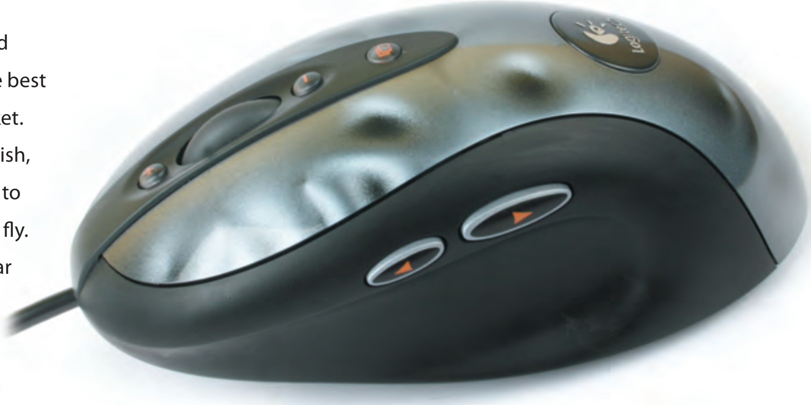
GAMING MICE

EVEN THOUGH THE MOUSE plays a big role in the gaming world, we've only recently started seeing new and innovative technologies and features dedicated to gaming mice. These features include an 800dpi or 1,600dpi optical engine, customisable buttons, and of course, funky designs. Yet, through all of these technological advances, most gamers still prefer a corded mouse - and we agree. This month we compare seven mice (from the top manufacturers) in order to determine which mouse is the ultimate gaming peripheral.

LOGITECH MX518

Logitech's recently released MX518 has to be one of the best mice currently on the market. Apart from its funky 3D-finish, its key feature is the ability to adjust its sensitivity on the fly. The MX518's shape is similar to that of the MX510 (which it is replacing), with some minor improvements to round it off. We loved the fact that buttons on the mouse are kept to an absolute minimum, and that the sensitivity adjustment buttons are logically placed near the mouse wheel.



Logitech
MX518
Optical Mouse
M/N: M-BS81A
P/N: 831349-0000
MADE IN CHINA
NOM

EDITORS' NAG CHOICE

VITAL INFO

Plus
On-the-fly sensitivity adjustment between 400dpi and 1,600dpi

Minus
Not for left handed people

Supplier
DCS [011] 466-5099

Internet
www.logitech.co.za

RRP
R599

VALUE	ERGONOMICS	COMFORT
90	90	95

OVERALL
91

Logitech
MX LASER

VITAL INFO

Plus

Battery life

Works on almost any surface

Minus

Heavy

Not for left handed people

Supplier

DCS [011] 466-5099

Internet

www.logitech.co.za

RRP

R799

VALUE	ERGONOMICS	COMFORT
85	90	90

OVERALL

88

LOGITECH MX1000

The original laser mouse still holds a soft spot in our hearts. This cordless mouse features an 800dpi resolution and sports a built-in rechargeable battery with battery indicator LEDs. It has an excellent battery life. Ergonomically the MX1000 is a pleasure to use, but left handed gamers are again left out in the cold. Some users will also find the MX1000 on the heavy side. Performance wise, the MX1000 is a great mouse for almost any occasion.

Logitech
M/N: M-RAG97
Rating: 4.2V ⎓ 800mA
P/N: 852152-0000
S/N: LZB43252630
CLASS 1 LASER PRODUCT
Complies with IDA Standards DB101104
EN 60950
NOM
NYCE
FCC ID: DZL201758
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T41126
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MX LASER
20X
832-852nm
OFF ON
RESET

ViPowER
Mobile Rack Specialist
• Transparent Plastic
• 3 color LED Fan
VPQ-10LS2FU-133
IDE
Ultra UDMA 133
VP-1028B
Backup
Restore
Hi-Speed USB 2.0
IDE to USB 2.0
SwapRACK
2 Fan / Latch-switch Type
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Serial ATA SATA
IDE to SATA
SwapRack
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MICROSOFT WIRELESS INTELLIMOUSE EXPLORER

The Microsoft Wireless IntelliMouse Explorer is Microsoft's current flagship mouse, and even though it is not aimed at the high-end gaming market, this mouse is still a great contender. Ergonomically this mouse is great and very comfortable to use. It is not as sensitive as some of the other mice in this roundup, but if you tweak your driver settings it will perform well. On the left side of the mouse are two customisable buttons and the scroll wheel features Microsoft's Tilt Wheel technology.

VITAL INFO

Plus
Comfortable
Battery life

Minus
Not very sensitive

Supplier
Microsoft [0860] 2255 67

Internet
www.microsoft.co.za

RRP
R499.95

VALUE	ERGONOMICS	COMFORT
70	88	80

OVERALL

79

RAZER DIAMONDBACK

Razer's mice are undoubtedly the envy of almost every gamer. The Diamondback features an ambidextrous design and its optical engine operates at 1,600dpi. The Diamondback also features on-the-fly sensitivity adjustment, but this requires the software drivers to be installed and you need to press a button on the mouse while scrolling the wheel to change the sensitivity. The large left and right click buttons on this mouse make it a pleasure to use. There's another button on either side of the mouse providing four customisable buttons in total.

VITAL INFO

Plus
Ambidextrous
Very sensitive

Minus
On-the-fly sensitivity adjustment requires two buttons to be pressed

Supplier
PC Savers [011] 786 5313

Internet
www.razerzone.com

RRP
R549

VALUE	ERGONOMICS	COMFORT
89	90	90

OVERALL

89

VITAL INFO

Plus
Glowing scroll wheel doubles as event notifier

Minus
Not ideal for gaming

Supplier
Esquire [012] 657-1111

Internet
www.esquire.co.za

RRP
R99

VALUE	ERGONOMICS	COMFORT
80	80	85

OVERALL
81

BENQ M800

As is the case with almost all BenQ hardware, the M800 is a beautiful looking mouse. Although it is not ideally shaped for gaming, it does support both left and right handed use. There are also no extra buttons on this mouse, but it does feature a nice looking blue glow to its translucent plastic parts. We were very surprised with the performance of this 800dpi mouse. Not only does it feature great sensitivity, but the included software will enable the scroll wheel to glow one of three different colours based on specific settings (such as when a new e-mail arrives or when you have an MSN alert waiting).

BenQ
Model: M800-C1D Patent Pending
P/N.: 99.Q4088.C1D
S/N.: 99Q4088C1D51B08423SA0000
FC
TÜV
R41097
N11444
CE
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Made in China
CM-2

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GENIUS NETSCROLL+ SUPERIOR

Genius has long been in the peripheral industry and we were pleased to see that they have a new product aimed at the gaming market. The Netscroll+ Superior features a right hand only design and sports a total of seven customisable buttons. The optical engine in this mouse delivers an 800dpi resolution, which should be sufficient for most gamers. Aesthetically, this mouse could have done without the chrome coloured buttons and a better thumb rest would have made this mouse a lot more comfortable.

Genius
Model: GM-03009U

VITAL INFO

Plus
Price

Minus
Chrome buttons look cheap

Supplier
Axiz [011] 237 7000

Internet
www.geniusnet.com.tw

RRP
R165

VALUE	ERGONOMICS	COMFORT
85	85	80

OVERALL
83

ACROX LASER MOUSE

Following in Logitech's footsteps with laser technology (and an almost identical form factor) Acrox recently released its laser mouse. The Acrox Laser mouse features a corded design and is very light. Using the mouse, we were surprised at the smooth tracking and sensitivity. The design (although borrowed) is very comfortable and fills the palm of your hand very comfortably. Unfortunately we didn't receive a boxed version of this mouse, so we cannot comment on the drivers and other technical specifications. The Website didn't provide much assistance either.

ACROX
LASER

VITAL INFO

Plus
Form factor
Laser engine

Minus
Design "borrowed" from Logitech

Supplier
Wentek International
[021] 551 8866

Internet
www.acrox.com.tw

RRP
R399

VALUE	ERGONOMICS	COMFORT
80	88	88

OVERALL
85

hot mobile games straight to your phone

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R40.00

The king of action heroes, Duke Nukem is bringing his kick-butt style of alien extermination to the world of mobile phones. One man versus 1000 aliens - it's hardly fair! But don't expect Duke to show pity as he blasts each one into quivering goo.

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R 50.00

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sms **BIG 171827** to **42609**
R 50.00

Asphalt Urban
sms **BIG 171822** to **42609**
R 50.00

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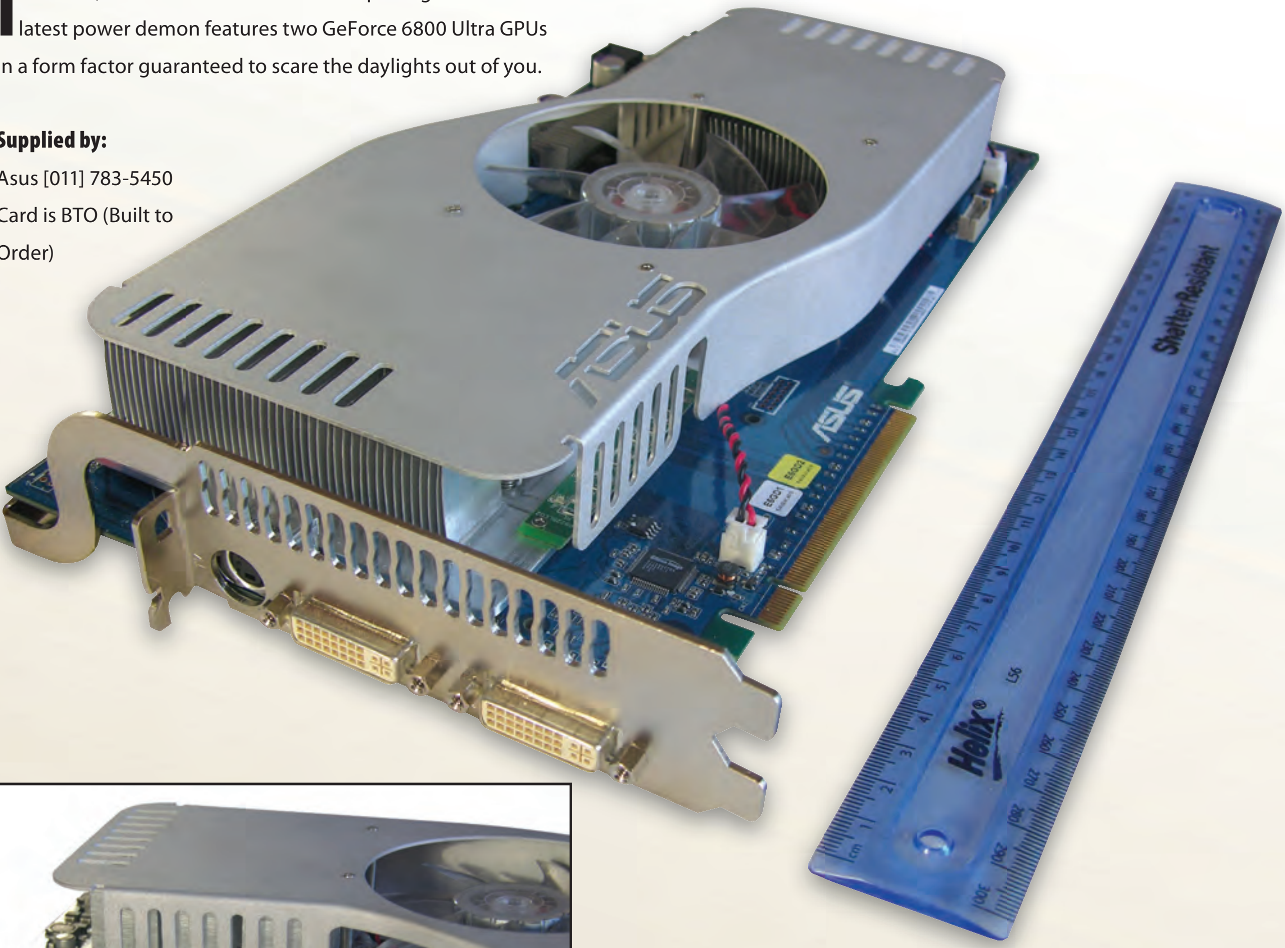
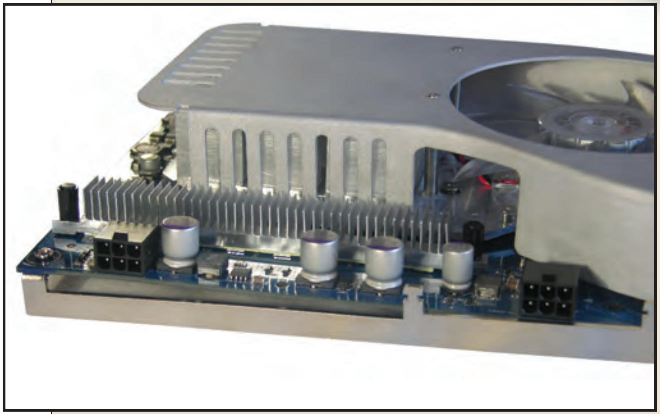
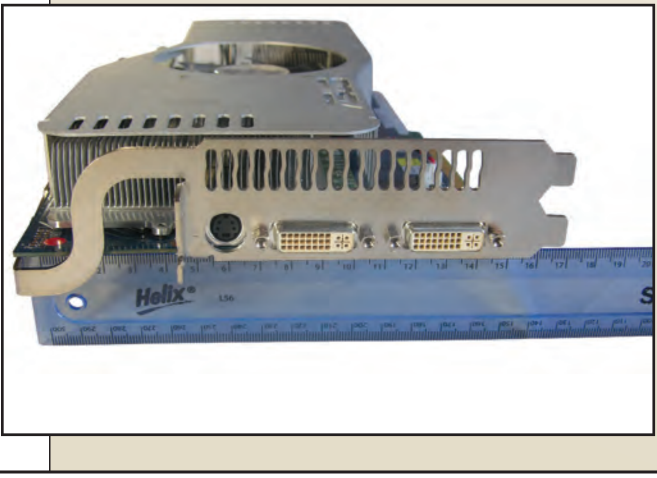
ASUS EN6800ULTRA-DUAL

ITS OFFICIAL; DYNAMITE DOESN'T come in small packages! Asus' latest power demon features two GeForce 6800 Ultra GPUs in a form factor guaranteed to scare the daylights out of you.

Supplied by:
Asus [011] 783-5450
Card is BTO (Built to Order)







THE HASSLE WITH SLI is that you need two identical VGA cards to ensure trouble free operation. Asus's solution places two GPUs on a single card. The ASUS EN6800Ultra-Dual sports two GeForce 6800 Ultra GPUs, clocked at 425MHz with 512MB DDR3 memory clocked at 1,100MHz. As can be seen from the accompanying picture, this is without a doubt one of the largest graphics cards we have ever come across. In fact, most gamers will battle with the installation as most computer chassis simply don't have enough room to accommodate this monster. It measures a whopping 40mm x 300mm x 175mm. A single large fan is situated in-between the two GPUs and does a pretty good job of keeping the cards cool. On the downside, it tends to be quite noisy when playing games. But in a 2D environment such as Windows, the noise levels are acceptable. If you want this card, chances are you will also need to upgrade your power supply, as the EN6800Ultra-Dual requires a minimum 550W PSU. Luckily you will not be restricted to only use this card on Asus' motherboards. Almost any SLI motherboard will work; you may just need a BIOS update.

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Syd Mead – Designer of our Future World

THE FUTURE OF OUR world is shaped by the people who envision it, people like Syd Mead (SM). Having created sets, props and vehicles for classic movies such as Blade Runner, 2010, Tron and Aliens, and real-life designs, Syd Mead has definitely left his mark on past, current and future generations.

Your first professional job was in 1952, at the Alexander Film Co., where you did animation cell inking, character origination and background illustration. On which animation did you work at the time?

SM: Alexander Film Company in Colorado Springs produced advertisement trailers for theatres. These were shown between features. So, there was no real 'title' for them, other than the client's account number, run time, etc. It was my first paying job doing creative work. I was nineteen, and advanced from inking over pencil drawings to character creation and background production.

Has it always been your dream to go into animation and illustration?

SM: I never had a 'dream' to get into either. I learned to draw very well growing up, going into media such as coloured (waxy) pencils, ink and water colours. By the time I started at Alexander Film, I was just involved in an artistic job that paid a salary. There was no particular knowledge of what either illustration or animation was about... just that it was a job where I could do artwork and get paid for it.

You spent three years (1959-1961) at Ford Motor Company's advance styling centre. What was your job description at Ford?

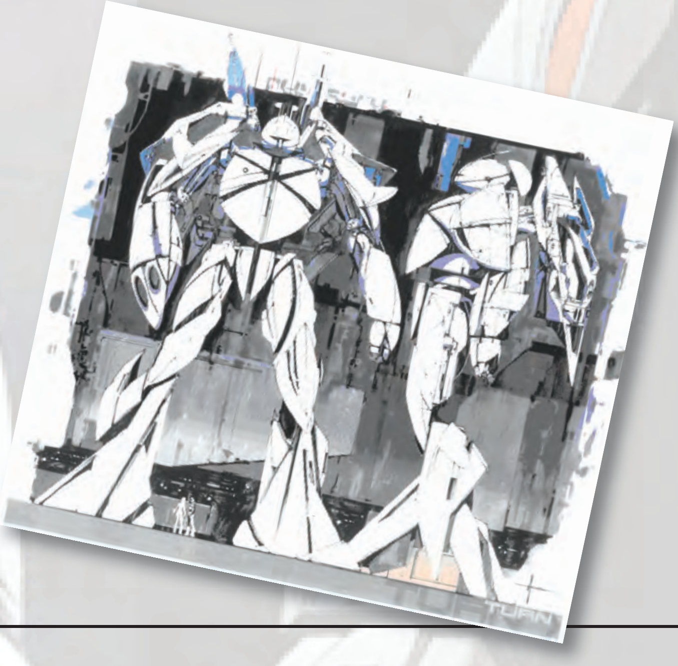
SM: I graduated from the art centre school in Los Angeles in 1969 and was hired by Ford Advanced Design Studio. We worked on advanced vehicle concepts for the other studios, in addition to producing 'advanced' production versions for review. My job was...well, 'designer.'

What illustration and design work did you respectively do on the films Star Trek, Blade Runner, Tron, Aliens and Short Circuit?

SM: Star Trek: The Motion Picture - I received a call from John Dykstra asking "... would you be interested in working on a science fiction movie?" I said yes and met him and his partner, Bob Shepherd, at the Century Plaza Hotel in Beverly Hills for lunch. They were having trouble coming up with something for the V'Ger entity. I approached the problem from an industrial design angle; designing to accommodate this six axial aperture thing which the studio had already bought. I was going back and forth to Europe at that time on consultancy work for Philips Company in Holland. As the V'Ger project got started, I took a planned trip to Holland. Paramount had a messenger pick up my concept sketches at the hotel in Eindhoven every other day, driving them to Amsterdam and flying them back to Hollywood for Robert Wise and John to look at.

Blade Runner: I met Michael Deely, Ridley Scott and his production guy at the 9000 Building on Sunset Boulevard for our first meeting after a phone call from Katy Haber. I was the first person to be hired for the movie production. I designed all the vehicles (except some of the 'fly-through' ones) including the spinner, Deckard's sedan, Sebastian's truck and the taxi. I also designed a little car 'scene filler' that was never produced. I then moved on to exterior façade design, interior sets, props and eventually, all of the matte preliminaries in post.

Tron: I got a call from Don, Steven Lisberger's producer. I drove over to the Disney bunch in Burbank and had lunch with them. I received a script and started on first doing the light cycle, then the tank and then the recogniser interior. Lisberger liked what I was doing, so I advanced into scenic sketches, the



by A.J. Kock

CPU and eventually the graphical 'typeface' for the film's release publicity.

Aliens: I was in Florida as one of twelve judges for that year's Miss Universe Contest. I received an Aliens' script from James Cameron via Federal Express, and started sketches on the plane on the way back to Hollywood. I designed the Sulaco, interior sets and was set to work on the drop ship and loader when the production group left for England to Pinewood Studios.

Short Circuit: Short Circuit was originally funded by PSO Productions in Beverly Hills. I was flown to Japan to see 'state of the art' robots at the Tsukuba Tech Expo. That's were I saw the first generation of walking robots from Honda (compared to the current Asimo). I started right away upon my flight back, and we satisfied John Badham with the final design the day before he was to show the robot to the PSO people. They loved it, Eric Aller built them, and the movie was that summer's hit sci-fi release. The sequels were awful.

What has been the most rewarding project for you as a creative person?

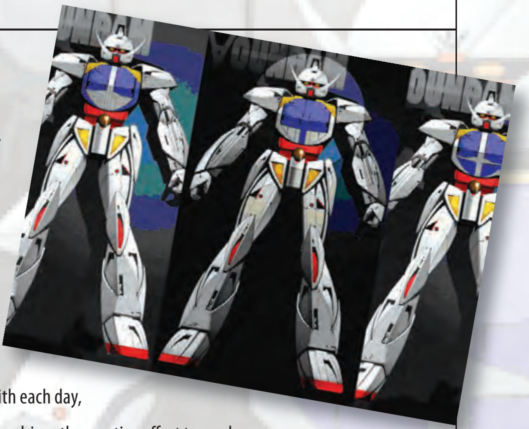
SM: Designing the interior of the Fah'd Boeing 747-400 SUD (stretched upper deck) was the most challenging, the most creatively fun and the most elaborate design job I've ever worked on. The final result was spectacular, and today remains the most elaborate interior ever installed on an operational aircraft.

How did the job for the redesign of the main character of Mobile Suit Gundam come about?

SM: Our agent at the time called and said: "Syd, we've got a big job with Bandai-Sunrise for their anime character story, Gundam." I had no idea what a 'Gundam' was, but we flew to Japan and had a three hour meeting with Tomino-san, the author, and his staff. I got along instantly and set to work on the first set of sketches while in a suite at the Akasaka Prince Hotel in Akasaka District, Tokyo. Then I came home and continued on the designs, sending them by fax, hard copy and electronically. My second trip to Japan on this job was another working week at the Akasaka Hotel, and after the job was done, a third 'thank you' trip. The series aired for one year on Channel 4 and was an instant success. The action figures of the robots I designed were always sold out the first week they were in stores. In all, I designed seven robots for the series. Gundam Mobile Suit, 'Turn-A' version was a remake of one of Japanese anime's iconic characters. Several years earlier, I'd redesigned the Yamato, the 'other' iconic Japanese anime character ship.

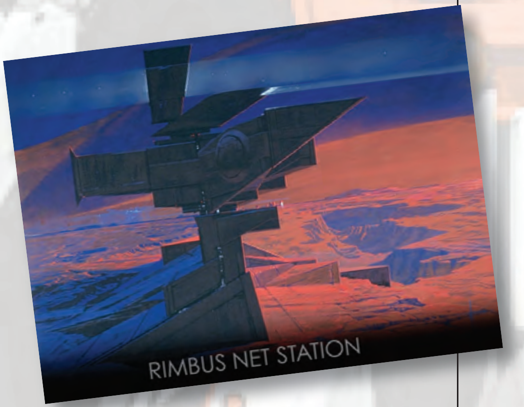
Are your designs led by functionality or artistic expression?

SM: Both. You have to separate end result from front end start. For movies, the result has only to 'look like it works' given the time and technological story environment. The artistic expression is part of the presentation of the idea to whoever is going to approve it. The artistic expression in the real world is judged by the market that the design is aimed at. If everybody likes it, you have a hit. If nobody buys it, that means that, although it works perfectly, it is perceived on a range from 'ugly' to simply 'I don't like it.'



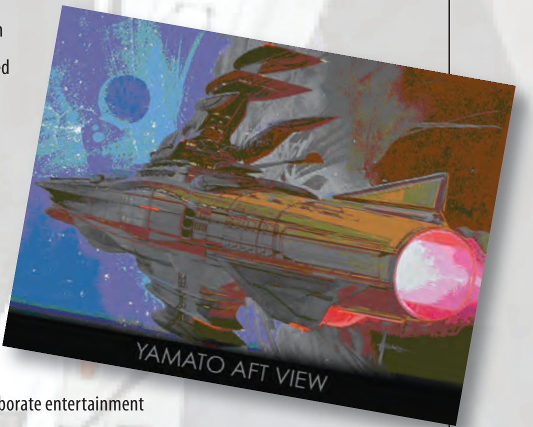
What and/or who inspires your work?

SM: I am inspired by the sense of the story I'm working on. Life is a story with each day, week and month being a chapter. The story drives the creative effort to produce a 'solution' that fits the time frame and the technological conceit that the story is based on.



Is there a 'core idea or message' which you express through your designs?

SM: In spite of the turmoil and nuttiness that persists in the world, I'm an optimist. My partner, Roger Servick and I were recently in the Middle East - but in the part of the Middle East that makes sense. They are Muslims, yes, but they haven't taken the belief system to psychotic lengths of rampant insistence. They very frankly want to make money. The streets are paved, there is landscaping, the architecture is breathtaking and Dubai, Bahrain, Abu Dhabi and Qatar are all striving to create a Middle East destination attractor. So, my core ambitions are centred on depicting a future that 'works'. Where society is balanced between necessity and efficient preparation for the future success.

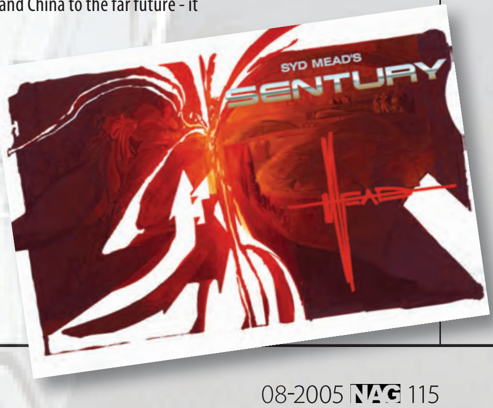


Is there a creative endeavour that you feel you would still love to pursue?

SM: I have worked on master plans for elaborate entertainment destination resorts. I would like to design one of these from zero, see it built and create an immersive environment that would span human sensibility and accomplishment from ancient Rome, Egypt and China to the far future - it would be from 'when' to 'whenever.'

Website: www.sydmead.com

Syd Mead's latest publication is entitled Sentury. **NAG**



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Serious alien site? We doubt it. PR spoof for Destroy All Humans? Pretty likely. Don't visit this site if you are looking for concrete proof that aliens exist. Instead, check out the 'amateur' footage starring Crypto as he blasts various humans, including the Star Wars kid, with his rifle.

www.dofus.com

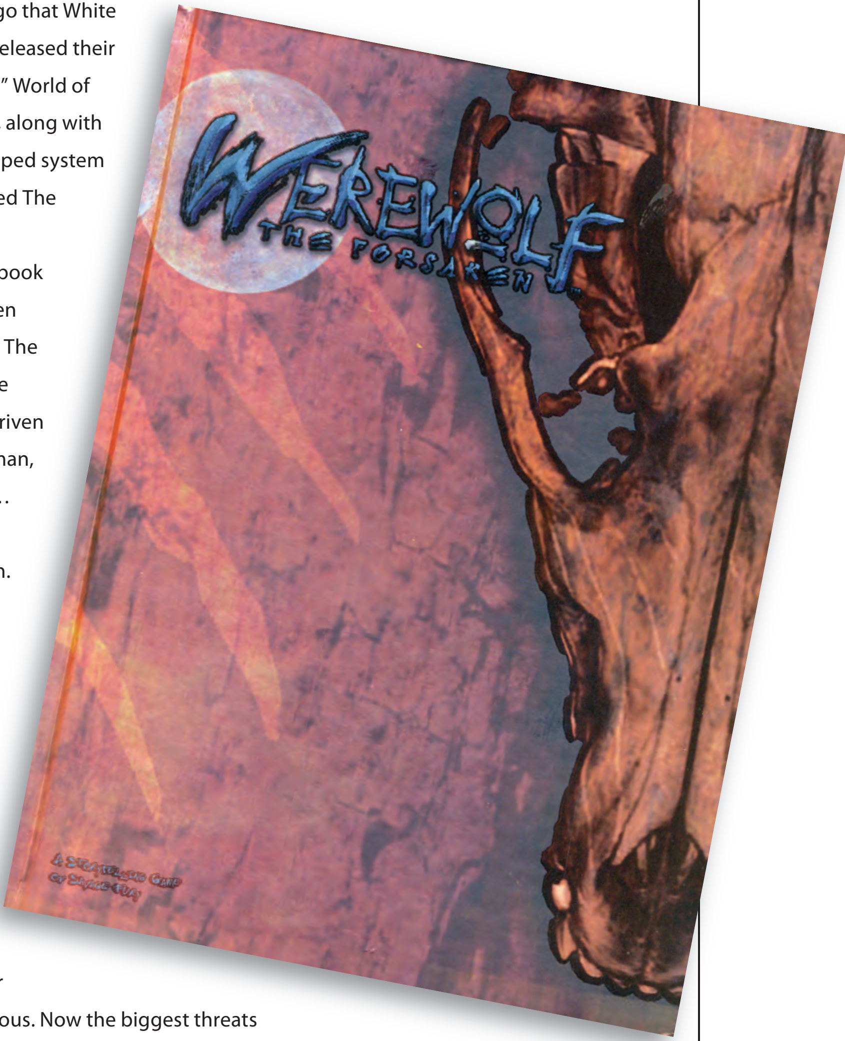
This Flash-based French MMOG recently launched its English beta, with a full release of the game planned for later this year. It's perfect for people who want to play in a MMOG without lots of downloads and with pick-up-and-play style action.

www.primepuzzle.com/images/clinger.swf

The Liquid Man is a Flash oddity we can stare at for hours. Basically it's a rehash of the familiar object-following-your-cursor trick. But in this case the object is a top-down perspective of a man who fluidly moves while following your cursor. Pretty cool.

role-playing

Werewolf: The Forsaken



IT WASN'T TOO LONG ago that White Wolf Publishing released their "new and improved" World of Darkness rule book, along with a completely revamped system for Vampire, subtitled The Requiem.

Now the second book in the series has been released. Werewolf: The Forsaken returns the player to the rage driven existence of a half man, half wolf character… but things have changed once again.

Where Werewolf: The Apocalypse (the 'old' version) was all about fighting against the evil forces who wanted to destroy Mother Earth, The Forsaken makes the battle for survival more insidious. Now the biggest threats come from other werewolves, from malignant spirits and from the werewolves themselves. Existence as one of the Forsaken is a difficult and sometimes short-lived thing.

As with Vampire: The Requiem, White Wolf has 'redone' almost every aspect of the Werewolf game for this new edition. While there are still some familiar concepts, all the old 'werewolf words' have been replaced with a more coherent sounding set of words. The mythology has been completely rewritten and the structure of werewolf society has been totally altered as well. The game is almost unrecognisable now. And that is a good thing.

As with Requiem, Forsaken is a massive improvement on its previous incarnation. It is a paranoid, hard hitting game - far more thought provoking than the old combat driven version of the title. Combined with the refined (faster) new White Wolf system for World of Darkness, this game has become diverse and a pleasure to play - not just a bunch of werewolves beating up everything any more. It demands a lot more from the player in terms of role-playing… not just good dice rolls.

Fans of the World of Darkness absolutely have to own this intriguing and exciting game. It's a masterpiece.

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GPU Gems 2

By: Randima Fernando, Matt Pharr

Price: R579.95

Supplied by: Pearson Education | www.pearsoned.co.za

THE FIRST GPU GEMS book achieved runaway success with game developers and graphics aficionados around the world. GPU Gems 2 builds on the original's winning formula with experts and industry professionals detailing the latest and greatest techniques to get the most out of high-end video cards. The contributor list is a veritable who's who of the real time graphics field.

But be warned. This is not a book for the faint hearted, or those with no idea what a pixel shader is. The bleeding-edge content requires you to have more than a nodding acquaintance with either the DirectX or OpenGL APIs to make headway. A good understanding of shaders is also recommended. Thankfully, the particular flavour of shader language you prefer doesn't matter as most shaders are presented in pseudo-code. For the graphics professional (or avid follower) however, this is a must have. The techniques presented are often surprisingly simple in implementation and always ingenious. The scope of content is broad; a large section of the book is devoted to general purpose computations on the GPU, with image-oriented computing and simulation algorithms sharing space with more canon graphics problems such as shading and lighting, geometric complexity and a new focus on high quality rendering.

One of the typical problems with having so many different contributing authors is consistency. Some chapters are excellent reads while others feel very code intensive; this is the only shortfall in an otherwise impressive resource. If you have anything to do with GPUs, you need this book.

GPU Gems 2
Programming Techniques for High-Performance Graphics and General-Purpose Computation
NVIDIA
Edited by Matt Pharr
Foreword by Tim Sweeney, Epic Games
Randima Fernando, Series Editor

2005 Gamer's Almanac

By: Sean Carton

Price: R289.95

Supplied by: Pearson Education | www.pearsoned.co.za

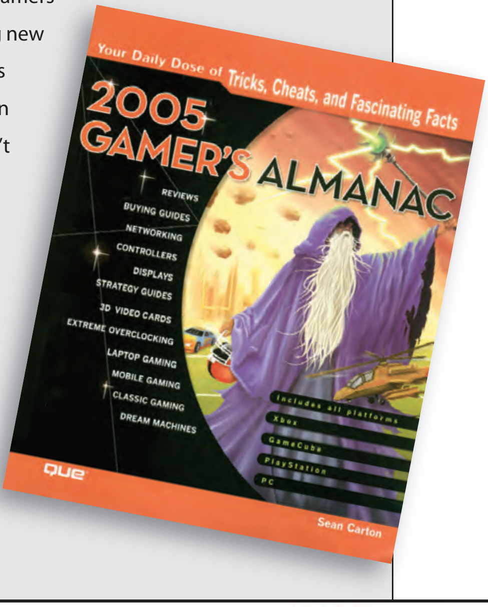
GAMERS ALWAYS WANT MORE. More games, more patches for the games they enjoy; not to mention more information on games they're interested in. In keeping up with the gaming Joneses, the Gamer's Almanac is a good reference book or bathroom-break reading material. Every page in the book represents a day in a year (simply for the theme), while specific days contain information pertaining to specific systems, such as the PC, Xbox, PlayStation 2 and Game Boy Advance. Pretty much every gaming-related system is covered during the course of a week.

A page in the book may contain a review of a game (usually recent), interesting information on an upcoming game, cheats, tips, hints, guides and even a little bit of nostalgic history. While every page may not appeal to everyone, there is breadth in the Gamer's Almanac to keep most gamers (or people interested in gaming) happy.

The only aspect of the book that could be considered a let-down is when interesting subjects are cut rather short due to the 'page by page' nature of the book. Certain topics may be continued on another page, but this is rare.

Overall, the Gamer's Almanac is an interesting read - the type of book you can come back to again and again, pick a page at random and find something new to engage yourself in. Sometimes the book provides links for further reference or to download something specific it mentions (such as a free game or a good modification for a game), and that's always fun.

While the more hardcore gamers out there won't find anything new in the Almanac, since it covers most of the broad well-known topics, the casual gamer won't be disappointed with its variety of reviews, strategy guides or its information on buying gaming related stuff, monitors, video cards and so forth.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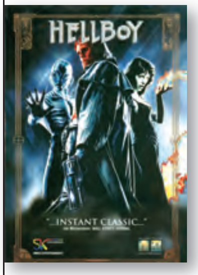
The Aviator

SOME HAVE CALLED HIM a genius, while others have called him a madman. Like so many others who have soared to great heights, he is a lot of both. The Aviator is based on the life of one of the great pioneers of aviation in the 20th Century, Howard Hughes.

Although Hughes' obsessions and compulsions would ultimately get the better of him, The Aviator concentrates more on the legendary entrepreneur's most productive years.

Leonardo DiCaprio excels in the role of Howard Hughes. The 29-year-old actor must play Hughes from his early 20s, all the way up to his early 40s, and at any age, he doesn't really look a great deal like him. However, it doesn't take long to accept him in the role, despite the physical differences and not altogether convincing aging (or lack thereof), as he delivers a quality performance that carries the film through some very dark patches.

The Aviator is a well made film, and one of last year's best, with enough great moments to make the three hours not seem so long. Historians may scoff at the historical inaccuracies, while some Scorsese admirers will wish for more of his artistic touches, but taken as a biopic constructed with entertainment in mind, the goods have definitely been delivered. It won't be the final word on Hughes' life, but as a Hollywood treatment, it has all you'd expect as a film befitting a legend.



Hellboy

YET ANOTHER ACTION FILM based on a comic-book series, and another attempt at packing as many computer-generated special effects into a movie as possible.

Other than possessing a character with witty phrases, a terrible grooming job, big muscles and two oversized cut-off knobkierries glued to the front of his head (which need to be grinded down every now and then), this movie isn't much of anything. The plot has holes all over the place and a majority of the smaller-time characters are as dumb as bricks.

Not only was Hellboy mostly created with computers, it was more boring than we had expected. Toward the end, we were hoping the conclusion could save some face, but it turns out it didn't quite work.

We would recommend seeing this movie if you're desperate, dateless, not playing Battlefield 2 and have nothing better to do. To sum up this film in one word: Mediocre. ***[I thought it was cool, Ed.]***

music

the BLACK EYED PEAS
AM
MONKEY BUSINESS

GORILLAZ
EMI
Parlophone

Black Eyed Peas:
Monkey Business

Multi-platinum Grammy Award winners, The Black Eyed Peas, look to follow-up the phenomenal success of 2003's Elephunk with Monkey Business, another lively collection of fat beats, Latin rhythms, hip-hop flavours and exciting collaborations.

And for the most part, it succeeds in eclipsing the quality of their breakthrough record, featuring some brilliant tracks that should provide a perfect accompaniment to the long summer months. Kicking off with the upbeat "Pump It", which features a funky rhythm that unfolds against a sample of Dick Dale's Miserlou (from Quentin Tarantino's Pulp Fiction soundtrack), the album proceeds to deliver a madcap musical journey that mixes the funkiest sound of the mainstream with something a little more eclectic on the side.

Take the first single, "Don't Phunk With My Heart", for instance, which blends hip-hop beats with the sound of Bollywood to effortlessly flamboyant effect. Or the strings-laden "Don't Lie", a lush summer anthem packed with shimmering acoustic guitars, feel-good beats and a nice male-female vocal trade-off. Both are examples of how the Black Eyed Peas aren't content to merely pander to the mainstream vibe, preferring instead to create their own distinct sound.

Monkey Business will have you swinging to its funky rhythms all summer long.

Gorillaz:
Demon Days

Emerging from the jarring cacophony of the "Intro" steps a veritable musical Frankenstein. Say hello to Blur front man Damon Albarn's brainchild, Gorillaz, a concept band that presents a heady, aromatic blend of hip-hop and bordering-on-dangerous sci-fi obsession. Each member of the band is represented as a slick cartoon character (on the sleeve), because let's face it; we'd all rather be badass, shifty-looking, anime-influenced hip-hop caricatures than dumpy middle-aged white men. Under this guise, Albarn is free to dabble in all the dark, arcane dancehall/hip-hop arts. Self-indulgence is the name of the game, and Albarn takes full advantage of his free reign.

Demon Days has two things going against it: it is both a sophomore attempt, and a side project. Despite this, the album is surprisingly successful, with a depth that goes beyond simple trashy techno. There is a subtlety to the tracks, and Albarn's mournful voice gives life to otherwise stale beats. The music is chameleon-like, shifting and squirming through several styles before at last settling on a definitive idea. The overall effect is an album that is being developed while one listens to it, an achievement that gives life to what could have potentially been a musical ego trip.

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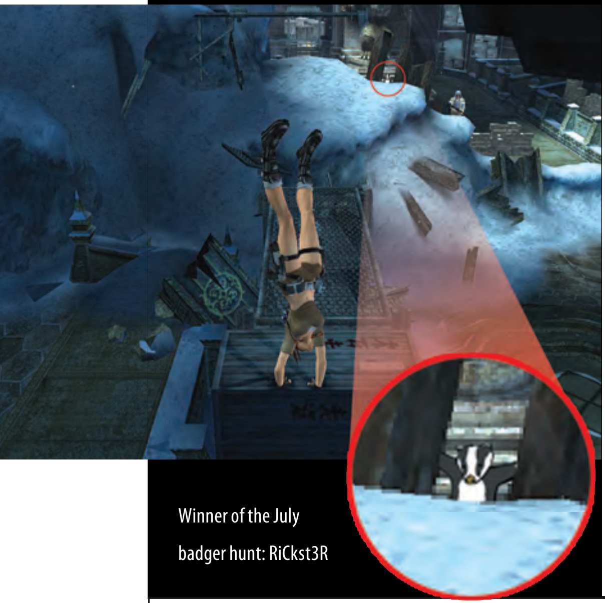
GAME OVER

BADGER HUNT

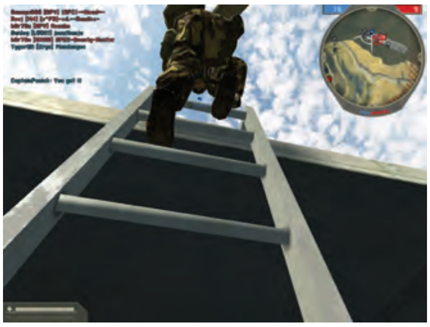
DUE TO POPULAR DEMAND we've resurrected the badger hunt competition. Each month we choose a cunning hiding place in the magazine for our badger friend [this might be in a screenshot, on a piece of artwork, the cover or anywhere really]. Your job is to find him and let us know you have!

We'll announce a random winner each month, but we don't have a sponsor for this competition yet. So all you'll get for your effort is a pat on the back and your name up in lights. Send your badger spotting to this address **[ed@nag.co.za]** with the subject line **[August Badger]**.



Winner of the July badger hunt: RiCkst3R

CAPTION OF THE MONTH

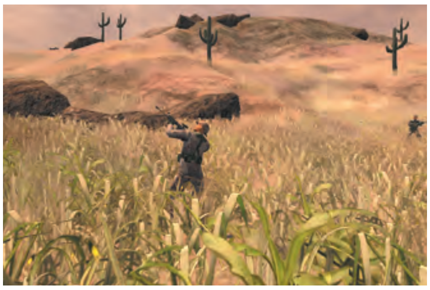


This month

NAG'S LAME ATTEMPT:

"Does this ladder make my bum look big?"

EVERY MONTH WE'LL CHOOSE a boring, odd or peculiar screenshot from any random game and write a bad caption for it [unless we can think of something clever ourselves]. Your job is to come up with a better [funny] caption and send it to us. The winner of this competition will get a free game from Vivendi Universal Games. Send your captions to this address [ed@nag.co.za] with the subject line [August Caption].



Last month

JULY'S WINNER:

"The scarecrows on Uncle Bob's farm were really aggressive!"

– Nico

RULES: (1) If you don't use the correct subject line, your mail will be automatically filtered by our spam software and deleted. (2) If you think sending in 20 captions for the same screenshot is how you want to play the system, then put them all in the same mail or we'll keep the top one and delete the rest. You probably won't win anyway because you can't follow simple instructions. And people who can't follow simple instructions don't deserve to win things. (3) You must remember to help smaller kids have fun too. (4) No shoes or boots in the play area. (5) Everyone has fun if you share. (6) No climbing on the outside of the structure. (7) No pushing on the slide. (8) Keep your mouth shut and cellular phone off in the cinema. (9) Buying pirate games empowers criminals. (10) No fishing.

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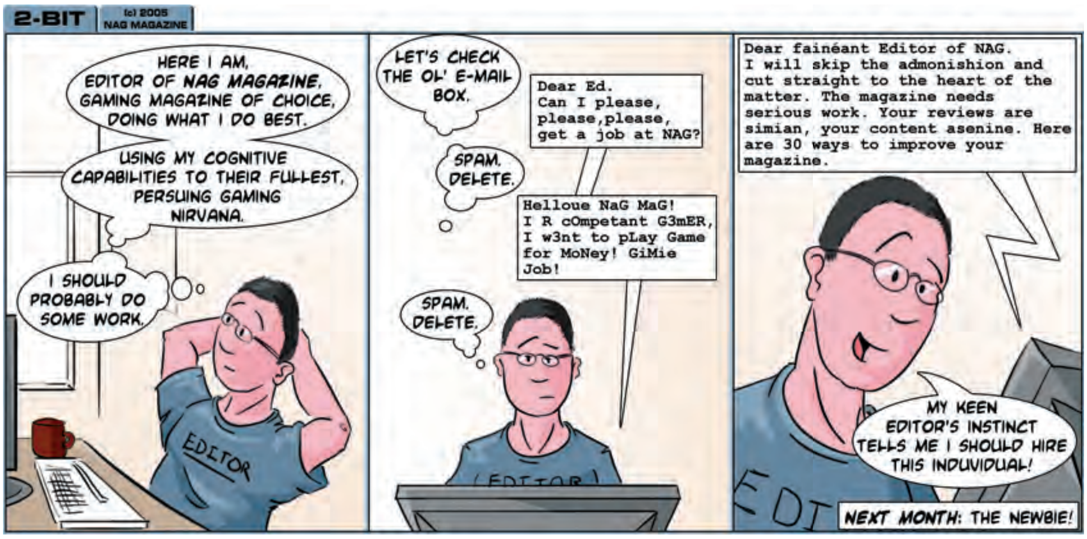
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