SEPTEMBER 04 VOLUME 7 ISSUE 6 WWW.NAG.CO.ZA

NAG

SOUTH AFRICA'S LEADING TECHNOLOGY & COMPUTER GAMING MAGAZINE

- LAZY GAMER'S GUIDE: ZALMAN **FANLESS** CASE
- **WARHAMMER 40K**: DAWN OF WAR PREVIEW
- PC **CASES** GROUP TEST
- **DOOM³** REVIEW
- **11** IN-DEPTH HARDWARE REVIEWS
- **THE MOVIES** PREVIEW
- GROUND CONTROL **II** REVIEW
- DAVE PERRY **INTERVIEW**
- FEATURE - **INTEL'S** NEW TECHNOLOGY
- SPIDER-MAN 2 **PC** & **PS2** REVIEWS

PC**X**box**G**ame**C**ube**M**obile**G**BA**P**lay**S**tation**2**

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EXCLUSIVE SA REVIEW

DOOM³

124 PAGES OF HELL ON EARTH

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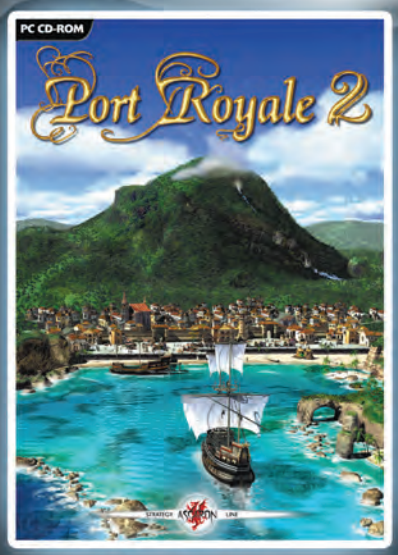

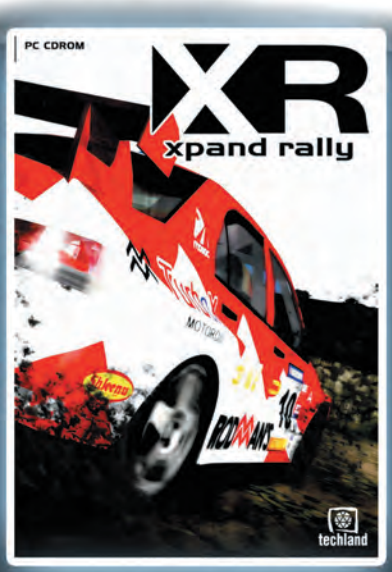

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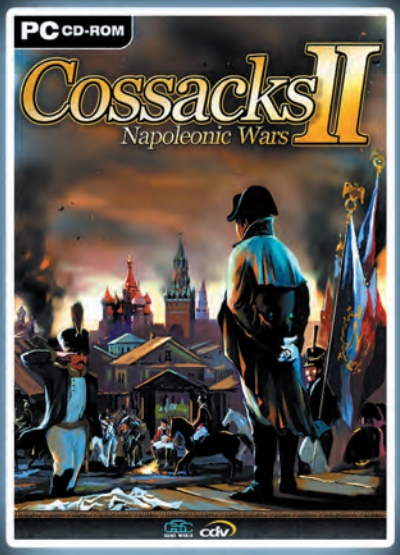

games to keep you indoors

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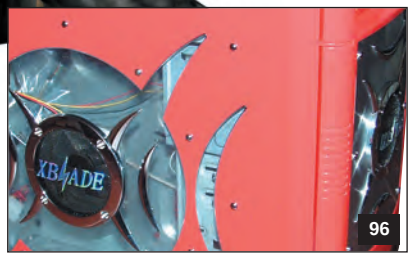

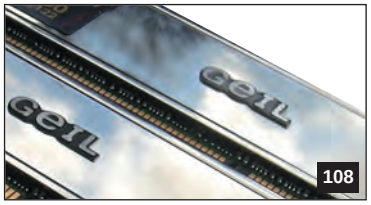

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ed's note

The tale of 2 covers... a paradox

Here's something interesting to think about. If you have a look at the cover this issue you'll see that on the bottom right is an image of the other cover. Now if you look even closer you'll see that the smaller alternative cover has an even smaller image of the actual magazine you're holding in your hands and then... if you look even closer you'll see that the second small cover has an even smaller image of the alternative cover, and this is where it stops. I didn't go beyond this fourth distillation of the cover because the printed resolution is too low to show that level of detail. Note that electronically the process could have continued indefinitely regardless of visible resolution because it is an infinitely self-repeating process. The bottom line here is this - if resolution and eyesight allowed and you could zoom in to that fifth 'invisible' image you'd find a tiny magazine cover without the alternative magazine cover image on it because it can't exist.

There's plenty to talk about so hold on tight...

They bought my review

On 15 July 2004 I was in the UK in a town called Slough. I wasn't permitted to tell anyone in the office [or anyone else for that matter] where I was going. "Not even your mother or whichever God you pray to at night", it said in the contract. It was truly a business trip to Hell and back...

To clarify, a few other European [Germany, Italy and UK] publications and NAG were invited by Activision to be among the first people in the world to review DOOM³ [naturally PC Gamer in the USA got the world exclusive but that probably has something to do with the fact that they print a few million monthly copies]. Over the course of two days straight with short sleep and feeding periods myself and nine other Editors played DOOM³ to completion [well just me and the PC Zone guy actually managed to finish it] with enough time to slip in a few multiplayer games, and the review in this issue is the fruit of that trip.

I'd like to thank Activision and MegaRom for sending me on what can only be called a dream business trip to Hell and back. Special thanks to Suzanne at Activision for arranging extra accommodation for me to stay in London for the weekend so I could go and get a few supplies from The Gadget Shop in Oxford Street.

For anyone who loves games it's hard to beat being the Editor of a gaming magazine, now if you add to that being one of the first people in the world to play DOOM³ you have a gamer that can now die happy. Lucky for me the game is rather good - imagine having to write a bad review after all that... phew!

Bridging the gulf

The minimum system requirements for DOOM³ according to id's Todd Hollenshead look like this.

CPU: Intel Pentium 4 [or AMD Athlon 500] 1.5GHz.
GPU: Nvidia GeForce 3, Ati Radeon 8500. RAM: 384MB.
HDD: 2GB.

Great, so you just scrape by... or not. :(However, the specifications required to run the game optimally look a little different beginning with a 3GHz CPU, .5GB RAM and a rather fat footprint of 4GB on your hard drive with the final wallet purging slot being taken up by nothing less than a top end 3D card, Nvidia 6800 or Ati X800 - the choice is yours. With a machine like this you can turn all the candy dials to max and flip the 'blow my mind' switch as the game streaks by at the 'ideal' frame-rate. Isn't the point of this game to showcase id Software's graphical elegance and take the first person experience to the next level? Is this level of gaming something you'll ever see with your minimum specification rig? If you don't own a monster rig the question then turns to what exactly are you buying and playing then - just another first person shooter that happens to be made by id Software or the latest cutting edge 3D experience? It says so on the box doesn't it and the minimum specification seems to be the disclaimer.

In this game box is the latest, most advanced 3D engine on the planet [until we can have a look at the Source engine that is] and you can experience it if you own all this expensive hardware <insert expensive brands>. Is this just marketing malarkey we should know better than to believe or are we being sold something under false pretences? Imagine going to see the latest Hollywood blockbuster and just because you can't afford the Delta-Alpha 9000X vision enhancer shades you'll only be able to see a third of the special effects!

I guess those who have the computing muscle to experience DOOM³ in the best possible way won't care, but those who just pass the silicone test, those who won't be seeing everything the game has to offer might. Something else to consider - guess what all those game reviewers out there are going to be playing DOOM³ on? The very best hardware available and will therefore experience the game in the best possible way making it justifiably easy for them to shower praise on the graphical quality while they gasp at the heat hazed passageways, cringe in terror at the freakish creations and finally exit to Windows exhausted. Great game they'll say, best looking graphics ever they say. The bottom line - if you want to play the game everyone is scoring so high you better upgrade your system. Don't feel bad, you should be thanking John Carmack - if it wasn't for him we'd all still be playing plinking and plonking 16-bit games on our 7.16MHz 68000 CPUs.

Last bits

rAge is happening again this year. Make sure you're there over the weekend 1 - 3 October 2004. If you're still not convinced go to **www.rageexpo.co.za** to see what a huge blast it was last year.

In case you're wondering - the retro section has run its course and will be replaced by something even better soon [maybe even in the November issue] - it's what you've all been asking for since I can remember.

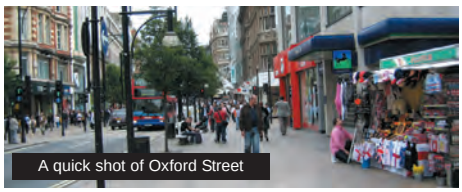
Remember to thank MegaRom and NAG this issue for the stunning DOOM³ poster - don't say we don't love you.

Because we said nice things about Miktar in the Ed's Note last month James made several snide remarks throughout the month in protest. So to make up for it a little here's a special message for James: Stop being such a baby!

Don't enjoy the issue, but if you do you can go to hell.

Michael James

[Editor]



A quick shot of Oxford Street

Caption of the Month

Each month we'll select a screenshot from one of the games in the issue and write a funny caption for it, well... we'll try and make it funny...

Your job is to see if you can come up with an even funnier caption and send it to: **ed@nag.co.za**

Subject: **September Caption**

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

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

NAG's September Caption

'Corporal Johnston lights a fart near the ammunition depot' - **NAG's [88.9% lame] effort**

June winner

"The things I do just to get into a NAG screenshot" - **Nick Steere**

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The nobility of piracy

words james francis

People with PC's equipped well enough to flawlessly run Doom 3 aren't the poorest folks in the land, they're just tired of waiting.

This user from the Spong forums says it all to me as far as the massive piracy of Doom 3 goes. I really don't see what the fuss is - did people think the game wouldn't get pirated heavily? Okay, it was still a surprising event, seeing the game shatter all the records on Bittorrent and other peer-to-peer networks. But remember that this is the same series that demolished shareware download records back in the early nineties.

But what do you expect? It's not only one of the biggest titles to be released in gaming history, but it's also at the end of a dry spell in game releases. Of course people are going to pirate it! This, briefly at least, highlights a different side to pirate culture - people want games as early as possibly. When it comes to piracy amongst hardcore gamers, you are generally dealing with a different breed; hardcore gamers tend to pirate for three reasons: they either can't afford the game, they can't get it in their region or they simply just can't wait. But a lot of these guys also end up buying the game when they like it (or usually shrewdly throw it aside when the game doesn't meet their expectations). But there is a thing, an almost invisible line that separates hardcore gaming piracy from the rest of the field.

It's no excuse, of course - zero day groups do end up contributing to the general piracy going around, giving black market retailers their content. So it's nothing we should condone by any real measure.

on the wire

Infinium Labs have appointed Saitek as the official peripheral supplier for the Phantom. The company will design the upcoming console's controller and collaborate with Infinium on the peripheral look.

Splinter Cell 3

SAM FISCHER IS BACK

Its working title was Splinter Cell 3, but it has now been officially named: Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory. This particular instalment will include a cooperative multiplayer mode. It is scheduled for release before the holiday season on PC, Xbox and N-Gage.

Online Gaming revenue to triple

$1.1 billion by 2008, says report

The Yankee Group has reported that online gaming revenue will grow steadily in the coming years, totaling around $1.1 billion by 2008. The group cited new markets, new devices and a move away from CD-ROM based games and future console retail prices as reasons for the proposed growth. Advergaming also has a significant role to play, bringing in extra revenue for developers and publishers, and the relationships between broadband service providers and console manufacturers will also contribute. "Console growth is negatively affecting CD-ROM based PC game sales," said Michael Goodman, Media & Entertainment Strategies senior analyst. "PC gamers are migrating to consoles, causing revenues for PC games on CD-ROMs to decline and console revenue to grow."

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Battlefield: Modern Combat's release on **PlayStation 2** and **Xbox** has been delayed to late next year. The primary reason for this is the addition of an off-line single-player mode, which was strongly indicated by popular feedback. Its online multiplayer mode will support up to 24 players.

Tekken 5

Kick someone's butt with your iron fist

Namco recently unveiled an early version of its upcoming Tekken 5, which should gladden the hearts of many who were disappointed by Tekken 4. The character line-up has been broadened, and many aspects that were unpopular in Tekken 4 have been removed. Some new characters have also been added. Also among the most noticeable improvements is the array of highly atmospheric backdrops, compared to its predecessor's relatively lifeless arenas. The coin-op arcade version is expected to be released in November, with a PlayStation 2 port scheduled for release next February.

Mixed reports over Game Marketing
US Federal Trade Commission releases its findings

The US Federal Trade Commission has released its fourth annual report on the marketing of violent media to children, in which it praises the industry's self-imposed ESRB rating system. But at the same time it criticizes game marketing for targeting the wrong audiences. The industry uses a self-regulatory system called AdCode, which includes guidelines to stop mature ads from being placed in media that is largely accessed by people under the age of 17, but according to the report, this is often ignored. It also criticized the system for not making provision for T (Teen) rated games, which are often published in magazines with a 13 and lower age group.

A new Pokemon game for the Game Boy Advance will be released in Japan in mid-September. Titled Pokemon Emerald, it is something of a follow-up to Pokemon Ruby and Pokemon Sapphire. Now that's imaginative naming... The new title will support Nintendo's GBA Wireless adapter.

The name's Bond...

words ed dracon

It's only a few hours before the Final Deadline™ and this column absolutely refuses to write itself.

Usually there is a topic, some major point of contention at the forefront of my mind, itching, burrowing to get out and onto virtual paper.
It's obvious so far (if you've been paying attention) that I'm having a sterling lack of such topics right about now. Is it the lackluster industry of late, the journalists having nothing better than the age-old 'videogame violence' debates? Perhaps it's the utter quiet, the void before the Q4 release barrage?
The more astute observation however, reveals a rather Occam's Razor revelation. There are people in this office playing DOOM 3 and I cannot partake in the fun until my work is done. My work is impeded however, by the promise of hellish demons attempting to copulate with my skull. A cyclic feedback, letting my work slip further and further into problematic delay. But I'm a professional after all, such temptations are part and parcel of the James Bond lives we game journalists lead.
Q, please hook me up with a modded PC case capable of releasing stun-gas and able to fire twin heat-seeking rockets at my deathmatch opponent. Of course, how professional be I when I use the age old axiom of 'when you cannot think of what to draw/write, then use that exact lack of subject as your subject matter'? Undoubtedly professional, for no litany is too difficult when you're a Man for All Gaming Seasons. I'll have my vanilla coke unshaken, not stirred while I load up DOOM 3 for king and country.
Who needs work-stress anyway?

Doom 3 making headlines the world over

Doom 3 won't support Windows 98, id Software announced. The company recommends gamers purchase either Windows 2000 or Windows XP for the best results.

A few days ahead of its release Doom 3 already caught the world's attention by being a victim of massive piracy. The BBC reported one instance of a peer to peer network which had over 50 000 users downloading the game, technically costing id and Activision millions of dollars, though most analysts feel the game will still clean up.

Move2Play

SHOOTING DUCKS AND COCONUTS

Europress has revealed Broadsword Interactive's upcoming Move2Play for the PlayStation 2, expected to debut in November. The game requires the EyeToy camera for PS2, and centres around a carnival theme, with various carnival games and activities being emulated by motion-capture via the camera. The game will also feature a two-player mode wherein two players will interact with each other within the game.

Gathering announces Wings of War

A World War I aerial combat sim for the Xbox and PC is currently in development for an expected Q4 release. Wings of War will feature around 25 Allied and German planes with the action taking place not only in the air but on trains and boats as well. The game features over seventy stages and includes mini missions which result in you receiving aircraft upgrades. Online play has been announced only for the PC version.

Record Q4 period expected

But not everyone's happy about it

Reuters have reported that the upcoming fourth quarter will be the biggest in gaming history, thanks to publishers stockpiling triple-A titles for the period. In fact, Bank of America Securities Analyst Gary Cooper has dubbed the period a "Murderer's row" of blockbusters, citing that this will be the heaviest 6 month sales period the games industry has ever seen.
He also added his voice to the call for a more balanced released schedule. Last year several key titles were swamped by prominent releases during the Christmas period, while the rest of the year remained characteristically empty.

Halo 2 Collector's Edition
A must have shiny collectable tin

A Limited Collector's Edition of Halo 2 will be released alongside the standard version this November. The limited edition will boast a second DVD containing artwork, features and documentaries.

Square/Enix expands

JAPANESE PUBLISHER OUTLINES PLANS

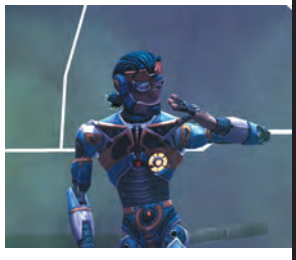
Square/Enix's head of European Operations, John Yamamoto, has spoken about the company's plans for Europe, which includes turning its London-based localization office into a fully functional publishing house. This will help with the timely releases of Square/Enix's popular titles, including Final Fantasy XI and Kingdom Hearts II, which will be distributed by Ubisoft. The company also plans to bring other high-profile titles to the market, such as the popular Full Metal Alchemist, as well as acting as publisher for Macrospace's cellphone titles.

FFXI: CHAINS OF PROMATHIA

Square Enix has announced that, within a couple of months, an expansion to the massively multiplayer online role-playing game Final Fantasy XI will be on its way to the PC. Titled Chains of Promathia, it will add a new chapter to the story, as well as adding new areas and towns.

The release of **BloodRayne 2** will be accompanied by the launch of a series of BloodRayne comic books. These comics will be published by Majesco on a quarterly basis thereafter. A film is also in the works, scheduled for next year.

Late November will see the release of Miami Vice, a third-person open-ended, free-roaming game that will afford players the opportunity to embark on a crusade to destroy a narcotics cartel.



Scrapland for PC and Xbox is a third-person action title where you play as D-Tritus, a robotic denizen of the city Chimera on a world made of crap parts, as you take them over in order to use their abilities.

Valve has announced the minimum and recommended system specs to play its upcoming, highly anticipated title Half-Life 2. Players will need at least a 1.2 GHz processor, 256MB of memory and a DirectX7-capable graphics card. To enjoy the game's full glory, players will need a 2.4 GHz processor, 512MB of RAM and a DirectX9-capable graphics card. These requirements are not as severe as some people had feared. Valve also announced an upcoming time-limited beta of Counter Strike: Source, which will be a Half-Life 2 update of Counter Strike. The beta will likely commence early next year.

Brothers in Arms, the upcoming WW2 shooter from **Gearbox** and **Ubisoft** has slipped off the 2004 release calendar, settling instead for an "early 2005", according to the publisher.

Crytek, developers of the smash hit **Far Cry**, have signed a strategic partnership deal with **Electronic Arts** to create brand new intellectual content and a series of games based on it. Crytek only had a one game deal with Far Cry publisher **Ubisoft.** No further details were given on what they are working on.

Publisher **Midway** has signed a three game deal with **Epic** for **Unreal** games. The deal includes the Xbox title Unreal Championship 2 and two undisclosed PC titles.

Next year will see the seventh title in Eidos's **Tomb Raider** series of games. This will coincide with **Top Cow** concluding the first volume of its Lara Croft: Tomb Raider comic books.

id Software is planning a sequel to **Return to Castle Wolfenstein**. The company has revealed nothing further, but rumour has it that it will make use of the **Doom 3** engine, or a derivative thereof.

Bryan Singer, who directed X-Men, has been taken on to direct the next **Superman** movie. It is unknown what impact this will have on Singer's other two projects, Logan's Run and X-Men 3.

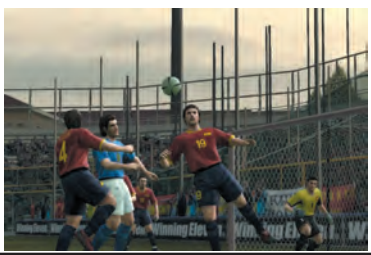
EA has bought **Criterion,** the company who developed Burnout and the middleware suite **Renderware**, used in games such as Grand Theft Auto 3 and Call of Duty.

In a landmark case SCEE won a judgment that declared Mod Chips illegal under the new European Union Copyright Directive. This suit finally settles the dubious legality of these devices, which allow gamers to run unsigned and copied games on their consoles.

Pro Evolution Soccer 4

Shingo "Seabass" Takatsuka takes soccer to another new level

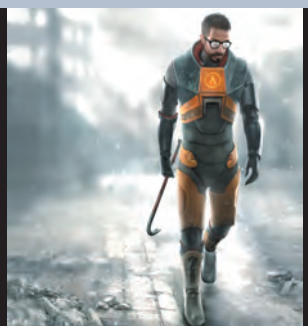
Konami's upcoming Pro Evolution Soccer 4 will appear on PC, Xbox and PlayStation 2 late this year, if all goes according to plan. Every aspect of the game has been refined, from the control interface right through to the strategic elements of the game. Of course, the graphical technology is also, inevitably, evolving. The game is also expected to have several all-new features.



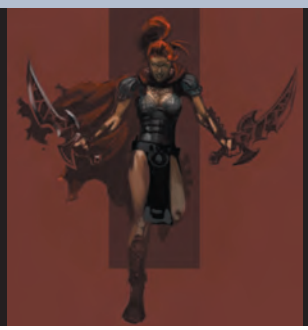
Secret of the Silver Earring

Up for a bit of sleuth work?

This month sees the release of Frogware's graphical adventure Secret of the Silver Earring, which features Sherlock Holmes. Although it is puzzling how a Sherlock Holmes game can be made without the input of (the very deceased) Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, nevertheless this whodunit offering from Ubisoft will have players progressing through levels, each requiring the examination of clues and the investigation of suspects in order to solve the mystery.



In a radio interview **Valve's** Doug Lombardi said that the developer is planning to meet publisher **Vivendi's** early August master check date, keeping **Half-Life 2** on track for a possible September release.



Dungeon Siege II has been rescheduled for release early next year. The sequel will retain the feel of its predecessor, but will enjoy a revised combat system and deeper story. It is in development at Gas Powered Games, and will be published by **Microsoft Game Studios**.

Atari announces Neverwinter Nights 2

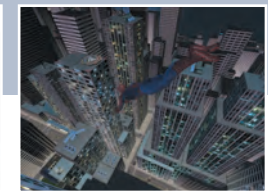
KOTOR II developer scores Neverwinter Nights sequel

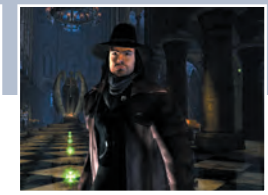
Atari has confirmed that Neverwinter Nights 2 is in fact in development by Obsidian Entertainment for a 2006 release. Obsidian is a development house founded by Feargus Urquhart and several other employees from Interplay, who were responsible for such classic RPGs as Fallout 2, the Icewind Dale series, and Planescape: Torment.

"BioWare and Atari created an immense community of players attracted by both the immersion of an interactive gaming experience and the ability to create their own pen-and-paper styled modules. Neverwinter Nights changed the very nature of roleplaying games," said Feargus Urquhart, Obsidian Entertainment's CEO. "With Neverwinter Nights 2, we're going to take that incredible experience to the next level by combining a huge new single-player game with deep character development and many new upgrades and enhancements to the already powerful BioWare Aurora Toolset for the modding community."

Web Scores

	[PC] Doom 3	[PC] Ground Control II	[PC] Beyond Divinity	[PC] Blitzkrieg Burning Horizon
NAG [100]	94	73	73	78
gamespy.com [5]	4.5	4.5	4.5	3
gamespot.com [10]	8.5	8.5	7.9	7.3
pc.ign.com [10]	8.9	8.8	8	7.9
	[PS2] Spider-Man 2	**[PS2] Van Helsing**	**[GBA] Yu-Gi-Oh: WCT 2004**	**[GBA] Boktai**
NAG [100]	85	69	65	72
gamespy.com [5]	4	3	4	3
gamespot.com [10]	7.2	6.9	6.1	8.3
ign.com [10]	8.8	6.5	7.5	8.5





The next couple of months will see the release of the **Gizmondo** handheld gaming device in the UK. Some time thereafter, a racing game entitled **Chicane** will make its debut on the system. The game will feature Britain's Formula One driver **Jenson Button**. The game will take advantage of the Gizmondo's Bluetooth capabilities by supporting up to 4 players in a game.

Bytes from South Korea

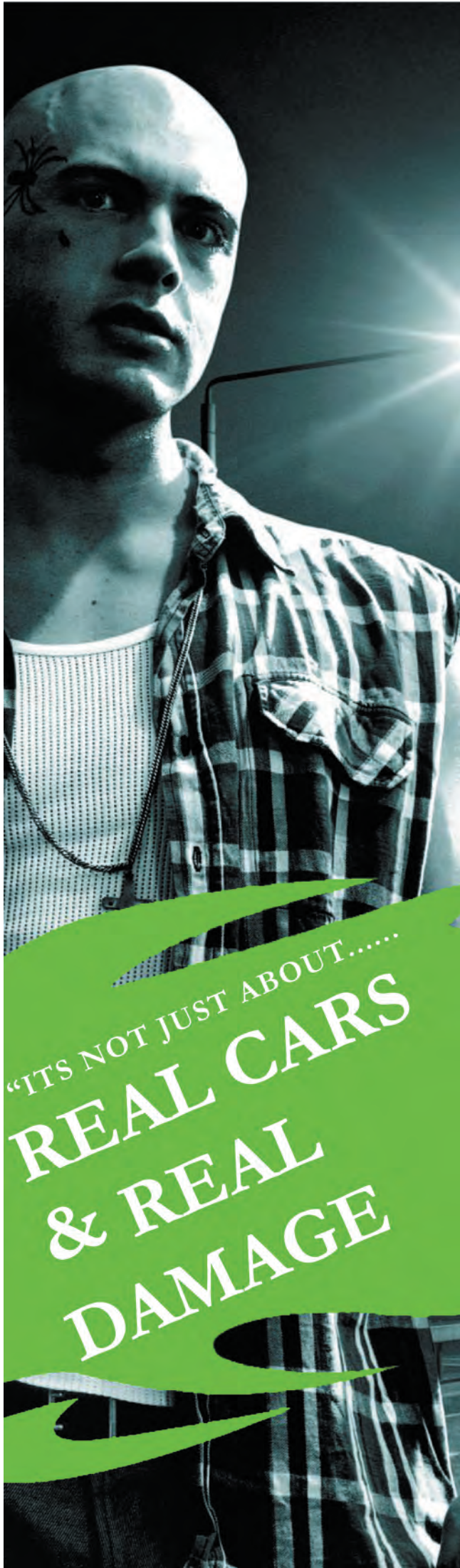
by mathew lowry

Yongsan Electronics Market

Living in South Korea these past three weeks has been an absolute revelation to me, in particular the different way in which gaming is perceived on this side of the globe.
Most people would agree that gaming in South Africa is generally regarded as a pastime or a hobby. Over here however, gaming is a way of life. The kind people at NAG, have asked me to provide a South African perspective on the state of gaming in South Korea, and over the next few months you will be able to read about my personal experiences in this complex and beautiful land.

Yongsan Electronics Market is a computer hardware enthusiasts dream come true. The first thing you notice about Yongsan is the enormous amount of electronic goods on offer. While this might sound obvious I just was not prepared for what awaited me.
The market is situated in the capital city, Seoul and is fairly close to Itaewon. (Itaewon is probably the most westernized community in South Korea, being home to many US soldiers.) Yonsan comprises some two dozen buildings housing between 5000 and 10 000 stores! It is impossible to confirm exactly how many stores there are because the whole place is a massive maze of shops and outlets that stock just about anything with a plug attached.

According to the many Koreans I have spoken to, it is the biggest electronics market in Asia, and it is claimed that you can pay between 30% and 50% less for goods here than what you would at regular stores. I am starting to build up a computer for myself, and this seems mostly true when comparing prices. There are no set prices for most goods, and if you are willing to barter and haggle with the salesmen you can get cheaper prices for almost any component. Code numbers on the doors of the hundreds of stores help overwhelmed shoppers like myself remember where you got which price for which component. To prevent sensory overload I shop with a specific goal in mind. There is just so much to see at once that you could find yourself curled up on the floor, eyes twitching and repeating, "I no have PCI expless, AGP onry" over and over again.



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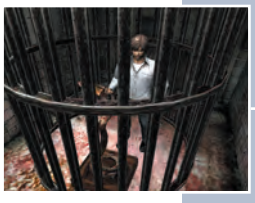

Anarchy Online - Alien Invasion	PC	RPG	September 1
I of the Dragon	PC	Action	September 1
NASCAR 2005: Chase for the Cup	GCN	Racing	September 1
Vietnam: The Tet Offensive	PC | PS2	Shooter	September 1
Digimon Rumble Arena 2	GCN | PS2 | Xbox	Fighting	September 2
Juiced	PC | Xbox | PS2	Racing	September 4
Wings of War	PC	Flight	September 6
Asterix & Obelix	PS2	Action	September 7
Gary Grigsby's World at War	PC	Strategy	September 7
Kingdom Under Fire: The Crusaders	Xbox	Strategy	September 7
Kohan II: Kings of War	PC	Strategy	September 7
Pokemon Fire Red	GBA	RPG	September 7
Pokemon Leaf Green	GBA	RPG	September 7
Richard Burns Rally	PS2	Racing	September 7
Silent Hill 4: The Room	PS2 | Xbox	Adventure	September 7
Terminator 3: The Redemption	GCN | PS2 | Xbox	Action	September 7
Zoids: Legacy	GCN	Action	September 7
Burnout 3: Takedown	PS2 | Xbox	Racing	September 8
Euro Rally Champion	PC | PS2	Racing	September 9
EverQuest: Omens of War	PC	RPG	September 13
Fable	Xbox	Action	September 13
FlatOut	PC | PS2	Racing	September 13
The Saga of Ryzom	PC	RPG	September 13
Bad Boys: Miami Takedown	GCN | PS2 | Xbox	Action	September 14
Call of Duty: United Offensive	PC	Action	September 14
Civilization III: Complete	PC	Strategy	September 14
FlatOut	PS2	Racing	September 14
ShellShock: Nam '67	PS2 | Xbox	Shooter	September 14
Ultima X: Odyssey	PC	RPG	September 14
Turok: Evolution	PC	Shooter	September 15
Def Jam: Fight for NY	GCN | PS2 | Xbox	Wrestling	September 20
DreamWorks' Shark Tale	PS2	Action	September 20
F-Zero: GP Legend	GBA	Racing	September 20
Star Wars Battlefront	PS2 | Xbox	Shooter	September 20
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2005	PC | PS2 | Xbox	Sports	September 20
Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War	PC	Strategy	September 20
Dance Dance Revolution Extreme	PS2	Music	September 21
Final Fantasy XI: Chains of Promathia	PC | PS2	RPG	September 21
Headhunter: Redemption	PS2 | Xbox	Action	September 21
Second Sight	GCN | PS2 | Xbox	Action	September 21
Silent Hunter III	PC	Simulation	September 21
Star Wars Battlefront	PC	Shooter	September 21
Rome: Total War	PC	Strategy	September 22
X-Men Legends	GCN | PS2 | Xbox	Action	September 22
Donkey Konga	GCN	Music	September 27
DreamWorks' Shark Tale	GBA | GCN | PC | Xbox	Action	September 27
Full Spectrum Warrior	PC	Strategy	September 27
Codename: Panzers	PC	Strategy	September 28
Colin McRae Rally 2005	Xbox	Racing	September 28
Crash Twinsanity	PS2 | Xbox	Platformer	September 28
Evil Genius	PC	Strategy	September 28
Myst IV Revelation	PC	Adventure	September 28
Rocky Legends	PS2 | Xbox	Sports	September 28
ShellShock: Nam '67	PC	Shooter	September 29
DJ: Decks and FX	PS2	Music	September 30
Pitfall: The Lost Expedition	PC	Action	September 30

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HE'S ONE OF THE MOST WELL-KNOWN DEVELOPERS IN THE INDUSTRY, HE INTRODUCED US TO EARTHWORM JIM, AND HE DOESN'T WEAR A BANDANA. DAVE PERRY IS ALREADY A GAMING LEGEND, BUT NOW HE'S GOT HIS WORK CUT OUT TRYING TO SAVE THE MATRIX...

"I STILL FEEL LUCKY TO THINK THAT I GET TO MAKE GAMES FOR A LIVING AND CHARGE GAME-PLAYING TO MY TAXES"

DAVE PERRY, SHINY ENTERTAINMENT

SHINY ENTERTAINMENT

Dave Perry

The sun is beating down on Shiny Entertainment's California office; inside, the team is hard at work on the follow-up to 2003's Enter The Matrix, which received a mixed critical response. The Matrix is arguably no longer the hottest movie licence in town after the lukewarm response to the film sequels, and Shiny's (not to mention parent company Atari's) bank balance depends on rekindling interest in a fading franchise, but Shiny president and co-founder Dave Perry has never been worried by what his detractors think. "Reviewers have their own feelings on what is a good game," he says. "It tends to be way off from what the average gamer wants - they want complexity, normal gamers want simplicity. We end up getting pulled both ways. We focused on the gamers and we ended up with the number-one movie game of 2003, so I still stand by that decision. Were we happy with the final output? Would we have changed anything? Always. That's what keeps this job interesting."

In 2002 Shiny became a wholly owned subsidiary of Atari in a $47 million deal - a far cry from its beginnings as the 'little company that wanted to make games for SEGA'. Perry formed Shiny in 1993 after leaving Virgin Games where he'd overseen development of Cool Spot and Aladdin. Prior to that, Perry grew up in Northern Ireland, moving to London to develop games for the likes of Mikro-Gen, Mirrorsoft and US Gold. Shiny's breakthrough project was a quirky platformer starring a talking worm and a psychotic crow. The character of Earthworm Jim was the brainchild of illustrator Doug TenNapel who impressed Perry with his ideas. "I liked it so much I made it our first project," says Perry. "It was the last game at Shiny that I was the lead programmer on. From that point forward I went to the dark side and became a manager, running the company."

The Earthworm Jim series racked up millions of sales worldwide, spawning sequels and several lucrative licensing deals including action figures, comic books and a television cartoon series. We may even see Jim launching cows on a PS3. "I would love to make another Earthworm Jim game, but not until I get a gap in our schedule - it's crazy, but we are booked to January 2006 already," explains Perry.

As one of the most well-known figures in electronic entertainment (he sits on the advisory board of the Game Developers' Conference and uses his personal website to offer advice to aspiring programmers and developers), Perry has some strong opinions about the direction gaming is taking, particularly when it comes to violence. "Videogames often put you into dangerous situations," he explains. "Not because we are trying to make people more violent - we do it because when you are in a dangerous situation, you feel challenged, concerned and you need to fight for your survival. It's more fun than being in a predictable safe environment. Violence is, has been, and always will be a part of society, especially when people feel desperate and can see no other way to settle a dispute. I would rather put a videogame in their reach than a gun any day."

With this in mind, it's perhaps not surprising that some of Perry's favourite games aren't shy of spilling a bit of claret, though he likes these titles for other reasons. "I like games that give you the sense of freedom, games that make you feel like you are there," he says. "My favourites recently were Grand Theft Auto, Call Of Duty and Battlefield 1942. I wish we had made Battlefield 1942. We did make an exterior multi-player game called Sacrifice. It won 42 industry awards, but it was definitely not for those 'normal' gamers; Battlefield was. I feel they did an amazing job, and also made it accessible so that I can challenge friends that are not hardcore gamers."

How different Perry's life would have been had he stuck to his original career choice - dentistry. "I still feel lucky to this day to think that I get to make games for a living and am able to charge game-playing to my taxes," he says. "Shiny is doing well, our last production was a number-one bestseller and our company has survived for over 10 years." With fast cars, Californian sunshine and a dream job, you have to wonder if Perry ever thinks he's in the Matrix, rather than making the games...

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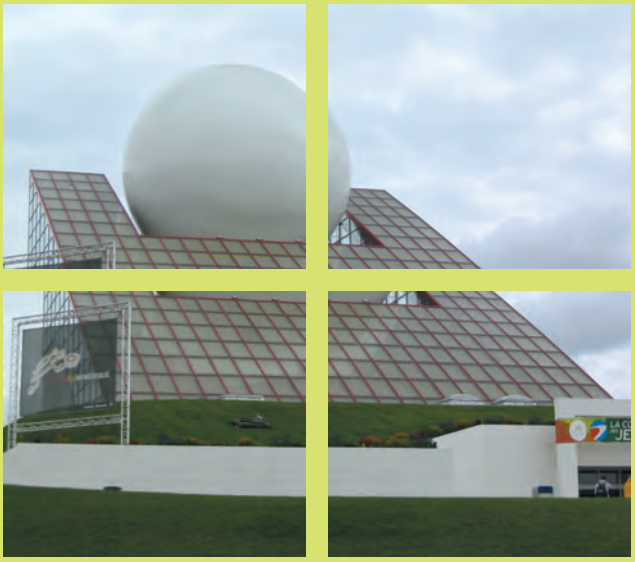


La Coupe du Monde des Jeux Video

by lauren das neves

"Puis j'avoir sept burgers de fromage avec des fritures, deux avec du jus, l'une eau et quatre cokéfie svp."

We spent seven days in France attending the Electronic Sports World Cup and still, the most effective way of ordering food was by gesturing wildly to the menu item on the wall and holding the relevant number of fingers up to indicate quantity. It was a challenge of note to get some decent food at any given point, but that's not to say that we left there feeling starved.

It was an encounter filled with a plethora of conflicting experiences and emotions, but being surrounded by some of the world's most talented gamers and actually seeing them in action was surreal to say the least. The level of gaming and the talent that these guys exhibit is inspiring to watch and we soaked it all up in the hope of bringing some of that expertise back with us to impart to our local gaming community.

So why were we in France to begin with? For the first half of 2004 over 40 countries the world over participated in regional competitive gaming events, in an elimination process that would see each countries top players attending the Grand Final of the Electronic Sports World Cup in France in July. South Africa was represented by Team Evolve in Counter-Strike and sWoop in WarCraft III, each having won in their respective games at the Mexcom Arena 77 ESWC Qualifier at The Carousel Casino in April. Also representing South Africa in the Unreal Tournament 2004 Masters Cup was Mburr, who was one of 16 international players selected by the ESWC committee to participate.

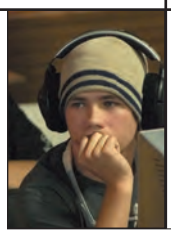
After a twelve hour plane journey, a four hour wait in the train station, a two and a half hour train ride, and then a ten minute bus hop, we finally arrived at The Futuruscope in Poitiers, along with around 500 players from around the world. The first obstacle that we faced, aside from being dead tired of course, was trying to communicate where a very definite language barrier existed. When playing games however this becomes completely irrelevant and manages to put everyone back on a level footing where only your skill sets you apart from everyone else. So when we spotted someone wearing a green and gold SA rugby jersey among the sea of foreign faces, it was with some amusement we discovered firstly that he could speak fluent English and secondly that he was originally from South Africa, now living in Germany and was an ardent gamer himself. Furthermore it turned out that his brother had been watching the Evo games on HLTV back in SA and had been SMSing him to find out how we were doing. Small world. Speaking of which, our contingent grew by three extra people when we were joined by Zick, who was placed 2nd at The Carousel qualifier in WarCraft III and Mark and James from ZE, who also came in 2nd in the CS finals at Carousel.

So, we had our SA team, we had our party of supporters, now all we needed was some luck in the group draws. Fortunately we landed up in Groups 1 for WarCraft III, Counter-Strike and UT which made the task of competing against these teams more of a challenging one than an impossible one. With one full day of scheduled practise games before the competition began, the SA team were well prepared the following day to take on their opponents. Evo played particularly well, winning their first game against deaThRow [Greece] 16-14, losing their second game against Armateam [France] 11-13, winning their third game against electronic Empire [Portugal] 13-4, losing their fourth game against Virtus.pro [Russia] 10-13, and winning their fifth game against Napalm Death [Iran] 13-3. These matches were nail biting to watch and this is probably the best result that Evo has had to date at an international event. It would seem that their continued exposure to international competitions is starting to show some positive results. Even though they only managed to place third in their group, needing a first or second place to go through to the next round, their overall result should be seen as a moment of glory in anyone's eyes. sWoop on the other hand had a much

tougher battle on his hands, winning two and losing four of his scheduled WarCraft III matches, achieving fifth place in his group.
With South Africa to date not having had any official Unreal Tournament 2004 competitive events, Mburr went in knowing that he didn't have nearly as much practise behind him as he needed, so set about to gain as much from the experience as he could in terms of learning from his opponents. He eventually placed fourth in his group and came away with some invaluable play experience.

It is indeed a pity that we are not able to send our players to compete overseas on a more regular basis, as the exposure to such a high level of competitiveness and skill is what makes you a better opponent. However, knowing that we only really attend two international events a year, makes one realise just how skilled our SA team is with the limited exposure they have, and their potential to excel in a world class arena is more of a reality now than it ever has been before.

In amongst the copious plates of croissants for breakfast, the bizarre freezing cold weather in the middle of summer that we stoically endured to watch the Quake 3 finals, and the absurdity of watching the Counter-Strike final outside on a big screen whilst listening to a French shout cast, the experience was all good.
And so we bid farewell to France - and spent most of the plane trip home looking forward to a thick juicy steak and being able to converse freely in a language that the rest of the world (excluding France) finds perfectly acceptable.



Player of the Month

Name: Kevin Murphy
Nick: silenceR ($tryfe)
Age: 19
Occupation: Student
Clan: Evolve
Games: Counter-Strike
Quote: "Straight thru -_-"
Achievements:

- Member of the SA team for ESWC 2004
- Member of the SA team for ESWC 2003
- Member of the SA team for WCG 2001
- 1st at Arena 77 ESWC Qualifier 2004 (Team: Evolve)
- 1st in PCGL Online League 2004 (Team: Evolve)
- 1st at Gamers Gate ESWC 2003 (Team: Evolve)
- 1st at 1000manlan (Team: Evolve)
- 1st at Gamers Gate Eastgate 2002 (Team: Bravado)
- 2nd place at Worfaire Finals 2002 (Team: Bravado)
- 1st place at Worfaire Finals 2001 (Team: XTC)

When playing for a team such as Evolve, are you ever under pressure to perform or else be replaced?
Well, not at the moment. I think our team has really come together since the 2004 ESWC tournament in France. But it is very hard to stand out, since all the players are top notch and know what's cutting. In the beginning there was a lot of pressure on each player, especially me, since I'm from Port Elizabeth. The rest are from Johannesburg, so it was easy for a JHB guy to squeeze himself in.

Why have you chosen a team game over the individual games?
I think most players don't have a choice nowadays, since most single player games aren't as popular as the team games. There isn't really a big individual game at the moment. Counter-Strike is huge here, but when it dies I'm sure we will all change.

What are your feelings on your team's performance at ESWC this year?
We came really close to getting through the group stage, and it was very disappointing for the team, but when we realised that we only lost by 1 or 2 rounds to some of the top 8 teams in the world, we didn't feel that bad. I'm not sure if we could have beaten Schroet Kommando, since Virtus.pro plays a totally different style to us, but the fact that we lost by 2 rounds to them and SK lost by a few more - all I can say is that it would have been a good game.

You have been referred to as the biggest cry-baby since Deathsbane, and also the little sister that sWoop never had. Obviously the community has nothing but the deepest affection for you - how do you feel about the local scene?
Hahaha, I don't mind the community, I guess, but it gets a bit annoying when people talk about Evolve having extra benefits. We do one thing wrong and it gets blown up to the size of sWoop's bra (double D). And yes he's lucky to have a little sister that can out-aim him in any FPS game.

www.rageexpo.co.za

rAge 2004

When New Age Gaming's first official foray into event organisation - the aptly, although somewhat melodramatically titled "Really Awesome Gaming Event" of 2003 - met with a very respectable measure of success, it was only natural to aim even higher for the sequel. The_Basilisk cornered NAG's illustrious editor and rAge co-ordinator, Michael James, hoping to unearth a few more details about the plans for this year's expo, which takes place from 1 - 3 October at The Dome.

Gaming events have proven over and over again to be a highly volatile domain and, as Michael agreed, their quality depends largely on who is running them. Those gamers who participated in the recent Electronic Sports World Cup Qualifier at The Carousel will be pleased to hear that the LAN and competition at rAge will be handled by virtually the identical team. Arena 77 will once again be at the head of the competitive gaming, and the NAG LAN will be set up and supervised by the VC crew. The remainder of the expo will be run by Michael and the NAG team, event managed by T2 Events (Tungsten Design on logistics), and Lime Envelope, who will be handling the public relations. Each department has extensive experience in events of this nature, and looking at the track record, things should go ahead without any major hitches.

As for what we, the gamers, can expect to see inside The Dome this year, Michael summed it up in a quick list of the exhibitors. Needless to say the list encompasses the full range of hardware, software and console gaming available in South Africa: "You can expect to see PlayStation and Nintendo on the console side; Vivendi, Electronic Arts, WWE, MegaRom and Microsoft on the PC side; and Rectron, Corex, Frontosa, Sapphire, Esquire etc on the hardware side. We are expecting many retail stores, because a number of last year's visitors said they would have liked to see more places where they could buy stuff. We're also having alternative gaming exhibitors catering for fans of anime, figurines, comics, card games such as Magic: The Gathering, etc. Most importantly, there will be more games on display for the public to try than last year, on both PC and console. Fear not - there will be more than enough to see, hear and do during the weekend." In the way of new technology, rAge 2003 saw the premier of the Nokia N-Gage phone, and while Michael was unable to cite specific details, he did hint at the possibility of further exclusive showcases. With an eventual goal to fill the entire floor space of The Dome, rAge 2004 will be almost twice as large as last year.

The growth of the expo on the whole is an intriguing prospect, and Michael was unreserved in expressing his ambition: "My goal with rAge is to recreate the feel and vibe of E3 concerning showing of new titles, to run the biggest LAN competitions (where cash prizes are concerned), to host the largest LAN on the calendar, to offer the biggest selection of retailers, and to showcase the very latest technology." For the moment, however, the LAN will be limited to 500 participants. "We don't currently have the capacity to run both the LAN and the competitive area when the LAN exceeds 500 heads," said Michael. "The aim is to offer a better experience, rather than to jam 1000 people into a potential problem."

Catering for the attendees of the LAN is thankfully one of Michael's primary concerns, and players will be allowed to stay through the night on the Saturday. "There will be food and drink available until late at night - 22h00, and regarding sleeping (who sleeps at a LAN anyway?), there will be an area set aside where players can sleep. There will be 24-hour security covering the removal of computers, and we will be using the same system as last year (sticker / name-tag system, and checking of bags). Needless to say this is one of our highest priorities." On the competition side, the first two confirmed titles announced by Arena 77 are the stalwart Counter-Strike, as well as a new game to the tournament market, Juiced, a street racing game. "We're aiming to offer something different as well as the usual staples," said Michael, but he also made it clear that the Real Time Strategy market would not be excluded. The other competition games will be announced shortly, as will the prizes, which have been described as "serious."

A great event is nothing without people to enjoy it, and the marketing behind rAge is touted as being quite far-reaching. Michael estimated that between 30 and 40 percent of the attendees of last year's event were members of the casual, "non-gaming" public. The focus is on raising this percentage and, with it, bringing new players into the market. "Considering that we speak to a large number of gamers already, basically all of our extensive marketing for rAge 2004 is focused directly at the general public," said Michael. "Hopefully once these casual gamers visit rAge, they will want to know more, or perhaps try a genre they haven't tried before."

The only worry I have about the marketing is the painful history of gaming-related radio advertisements, complete with lasers and miscellaneous Pac-man sound effects. "Painful is a kind term," admitted Michael. "At least these days we are asked on occasion by the marketing companies for a little input. And at least they're trying different marketing avenues. But I find that advertising on the radio is just more noise that everyone tries to avoid in between the music anyway."

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Does size matter?

Does size really matter? Is bigger always better or does quality feature in this equation of fun? How big is big enough? Who will be the judge saying this is big, bigger, better? What is internationally accepted as big enough? Do we need bigger? More importantly, do we want bigger? In order to get an answer, size needs to be defined to some extent.

In the world of nano-technology, big is awfully small. In terms of the world, the ocean is big. Then again the sun is big, yet our solar system pales in comparison to some other known systems. Or is huge the galaxy, the universe? Thus, big depends on your reference and need. So whether it be in Spain, America or the Netherlands, let's see what their idea of a big LAN is.

On June 6th, 2004, 18 of the best WarCraft III players from 20 countries and territories around the world gathered in Shanghai, China with one purpose: to become the ACON4 World Champion. Over 500 spectators gathered to witness the absolute highest level of competition and play.
The winner got a brand new car for his efforts.

MassiveLAN Buffalo, New York's largest LAN Party ever with over $29,000 in prizes had over 300 gamers. MassiveLAN is also an official US World Cyber Games Qualifier offering a chance to join the US WCG team to compete in the World Finals in San Francisco.

The WCG itself has grown from 562 participants from 55 countries in 2003 in Seoul, Korea to 700 gamers from 60 countries for a total prize purse of US$400 000. A BYOC part of the event caters for 600 seats for a 5 day pass & 200 seats for a single day pass. In 2004, the second Electronic Sports World Cup held preliminaries in 50 countries, involving about 250,000 players all over the world and 500 champions during the finals. Not too bad, but not under one roof.

Although the total number of players involved with WCG is staggering, the Drome 11, in Netherlands, which took place from 2 to 4 July 2004, manages an impressive 2000+ people! Now how is that for size? Up to date SA has seen large events with more than 300 gamers. The highlight, and low point for some, must have been 1000 man LAN. As the name suggests, SA was trying to get more than a 1000 gamers in order to lay claim to the title of biggest LAN in the Southern hemisphere, competing with Australia.

ATM, the biggest LAN ever seen inside the borders of Denmark, also claims 2000 free spaces for gamers and other interested people. In Sweden, Dreamhack have had 500 women from a total of over 3000 people. That means that they had more females playing at one event, than most of our biggest LAN's had participants.

Omkring manages 4500 people. This is certainly an event of massive proportions.

Certainly a quick overview of big LAN's in the world must take into account QuakeCon. It started way back in 1996 with about 120 people that attended with their 120 computers. The 9th annual QuakeCon 2004 video game festival and tournament at the Gaylord Texan Resort & Convention Centre in Grapevine, Texas lets you hang out with 5,000 of your closest friends, and compete for $150,000 in cash and prizes.

In October 2003 the first annual ATI/AMD CYBER X Games came to Las Vegas. It is held in conjunction with the Consumer Electronics Show. This must certainly be the biggest, nastiest gamer festival with the chance to win $600,000 in cash and prizes over the course of several qualifying tournaments and the championships. The $100,000 Counter-Strike first prize was the single largest purse in gaming history. The 2,500 open spots for the BYOC event were available on a first come, first served basis. The BYOC let the first 1500 pre-registered participants in at "no charge". Although 5000 was not beat, the purse was certainly the biggest that I know of.

The Gathering must have the honour of the largest LAN party in the world. Last year, 5200 visitors attended the annual event, which takes place at Vikingskipet Olympic Arena in Hamar, Norway, and lasts for five consecutive days.

When Million Man LAN tried to port their very successful party (1500+) to Los Angeles, a measly 80 or so sign ups forced a cancellation.
So is bigger really better or is it really all about the actual experience itself?

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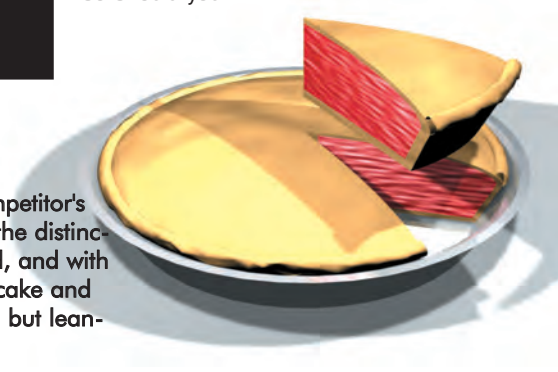
Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this column are not necessarily those of the management and staff of NAG Magazine. But sometimes they are... and other times... they're not.

Ramjet reads

The Domain of The_Basilisk

so should you!



TWO STEPS FORWARD, ONE STEP BACK.

In the realm of the hypothetical, there are four types of gaming events - a competitor's event, an organiser's event, a spectator's event and a sponsor's event. I make the distinction between them because each type has a very different set of ideals in mind, and with gaming, it seems, there is seldom a situation where all parties can have their cake and eat it. In reality, every event will be a combination of these four possible types, but leaning more towards one of them.

As things stand, we're doing the time warp, ladies and gentlemen, or some similar and equally stupid popular dance routine. We appear to find it impossible to grow this industry in a regular and consistent manner. Instead we go through alternating phases of good and bad. There will be a period of growth, then a period of remission. Hopefully the good will continue to outlast the bad, but ideally the bad should not be a hindrance at all. South Africa is already far behind the rest of the world in this respect, and we are not currently doing ourselves any favours. The reason for these occasional obstacles along our path can easily be spoken about within the theme of this article, and it is simply what happens when one of the aforementioned types becomes too dominant over the others.
Let's explore this idea a little further.

The Competitor's Event

Most of the readers of this magazine are, I assume, gamers - although not all serious competitive gamers - and will probably, at some point in their life, be among the attendees of a gaming event, such as rAge or the Electronic Sports World Cup. The competitor's event is aimed at satisfying the desires of these people, who are essentially the clients, and follows a simple principle of business: "the customer is always right". Common features of this type include:

- A Bring-Your-Own-Computer setup as opposed to sponsored PCs.
- A dedicated venue with easy access to cheap food and drink, as well as mini mal distractions, glare on monitors, etc.
- No long delays between matches, and the ability to network with the rest of the LAN during these breaks.
- Trestle tables.

The Organiser's Event

It is often impractical to give the gamers anything and everything they want, and the line has to be drawn somewhere. The organiser's event makes life as easy as possible for the staff (who are getting paid very little, if at all) by imposing a rigid event structure which prevents as many problems as possible. Here we will generally see such things as:

- Sponsored PCs with no additional software allowed.
- A competition network that is isolated from the free-for-all network.
- Regular breaks for the staff.

The Spectator's Event

No sport can truly thrive without a fan base, and there is a serious, although as yet untapped, potential for entertaining the masses at gaming events. In order for this to work, it must be made an absolute priority, and that is the main reason it has never been fully realised in the past: we simply have not had the resources. For example, there needs to be:

- A separate branch of staff in charge of overseeing the spectator experience.
- Separate "theatres", all equipped with projectors, to cater for all fans of the different games.
- A commentary team.
- A fixed broadcast schedule.

The Sponsor's Event

This is a bit of a misnomer really, because in actual fact there is no such thing as a sponsor's event. Or, rather, there should not be. The sponsor should be involved only in their allotted advertising, which should conform to the event, not the other way around.

spon·sor (*n.*)
One that finances a project or an event carried out by another person or group. The attitude behind this one is that gamers should be eternally grateful for the money being spent on their insignificant little pastime, and that he who pays the bills, makes the rules. Ordinary business-client relationship standards do not seem to apply, and common symptoms include:

- Events in shopping malls.
- Obsessive concern for the image of the setup, without any attention paid to the playing environment.
- Understaffed events due to cost cutting.
- Substandard equipment due to cost cutting.
- Inflexibility on "matters of principle", rendering the facilitators powerless to correct even the simplest problems.
- Decisions made by agents who have no experience in or knowledge of the gaming environment.

Evidently, with each type of event, sacrifices must be made. If things are made easy for the organisers, the competitors suffer. To provide a professional service to spectators, the workload on the staff is increased, as is the budget. There are many examples. The trick is in finding that balance, and it requires a compromise from all sides. We are dealing with a developing sport here, and above all else we should be looking out for the interest of the sport itself, not any one of the parties involved. Everybody, especially sponsors, would do well to remember that. There are four areas required to make this industry work. Sponsorship is only one, and it is only as important or as insignificant as the others.

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INBOX

Letter of the moment

FROM Alter_Ego
SUBJECT What happened to the extra?
I don't know if anyone would agree with me, but I get really annoyed when game publishers would rather not produce a game to the level that their equipment and staff could produce but push to get it released just in time for Christmas. Yes, people are more likely to buy games for their brats, I'm sorry, I mean children - at Christmas time, but does that really justify selling us, the gamer that buys their own games, lesser goods? I also noticed that Microsoft is leaving many 'extras' out of their new Xbox, just so that it can arrive in time for the Christmas shopping rush. And, besides, the true gamers (the ones who, at some stage, will need to go to Gamers Anonymous) will buy the game they've been reading about for months when it comes out - January through to December. On the other hand, if it's so important to release the game at Christmas, why don't the publishers produce the game to its fullest capacity and then hold on to it until the next Christmas season comes around?
The misconception is that developers rush to hit Christmas deadlines which causes this problem and then that problem. Yes, the Christmas buying period is very attractive so deadlines are set to coincide with these releases - that's the business end. The bottom line with magazines, movies, games etc. is that they all need some point in time when they must be done i.e. a deadline. The problem isn't with the setting of the deadline to coincide with Christmas but rather with the managing of the team creating the game to hit that deadline. If you manage well, the game ships in time with no cuts and minimal bugs, if you're inept it ships rushed with problems and serious oversights like the multiplayer component only available at a later stage via download! And then we have Valve and 3D Realms who fall so far off the scale that they've created their own ill conceived category - when it's done. In my opinion, 'when it's done' is something only id Software can call on a game; they coined it and it shouldn't be used as an excuse - it's a status. But anyway, this bad management leads to the kind of delays that upsets marketing, PR, news and press rollouts - which then creates the perception that a game is close to being released when it's not and this then creates poorly timed hype... leading to hype overload which then creates bad press for some games... rinse and repeat. This is just a brief gloss over the issue - the point being, don't blame Santa Claus - blame the person in charge of the development team [i.e. George Broussard and Gabe Newell]. NAG Ed.

FROM Dr Krutikova
SUBJECT "Forget about Freeman!"
Is it me or does Half-Life 2 stray a bit too far from its roots, really? Remember the good ole' Half-Life, how much fun we had throwing those cute squeaky critters in a room full of marines, the satisfaction after taking down that pain in the ass military helicopter or what fun we had shooting Barney in the head and taking his ammo (don't deny it). When I see these new Half-Life 2 screenshots it's like a whole different game, I swear, if it wasn't for the name "Half-Life 2," I wouldn't be able to tell the difference. The game (from what I've seen) looks more like some sort of urban warfare struggle against giant Starship Trooper bug freaks than what I had expected. And what's this crap with being original from other games that everyone is on about - sure it's nice for flavour but freaking "spore grenades" and a "manipulator?" WTF!? It's like they changed everything, hell, why not make Half-Life 2 a freaking RPG? Why not, you could go around killing stupid "Combine Soldiers" with your stupid "spore grenades," what a joke. No but seriously, why was the Quake franchise such a success? Because they stuck to a winning formula, Half-Life had that too no doubt, but what they are doing with this sequel is a bit over the edge in my opinion. That's why I think Doom 3 is going to be big, because they did just that, they kept the plot, the rocket-launchers, the zombies and the spooky settings, they hardly changed the story from Doom 1 because they know it's a winning formula and they're damn right about it. I would much prefer the classic hand grenade and plasma-gun over a crazy spore grenade or manipulator. Q: How does the spore grenade work anyway?
Don't you think you should at least play the game before levelling so much criticism at it? I don't think it's fair to judge a title until you've actually played it - the outside bug freak scenario is only one of the many different aspects of the game. I think it's great that the developers are exploring new options instead of duplicating a 6 year old experience. In answer to your question, the spore grenade discharges alien pheromones which attract aliens, apparently not good if this happens close to you. NAG Ed.

FROM Syl
SUBJECT The Sims 2
I'll keep the insults to a minimum but jeez, what is your deal? Bigger and better magazines (and websites) have placed The Sims 2 at the top of their Best of E3 lists, they've described it as a playable PIXAR movie, and they've said it is the next generation. Oh, and just to remind you The Sims 2 is only the sequel to the best selling PC game in the world ever and it's also the one game that you snubbed completely in your E3 supplement. Why? Who knows? I buy your magazine to see what's new and on its way but with your half-assed exposure of integral gaming events such as E3, I don't see the point in bothering.
Well I'm sorry if you feel that way but nobody in the office knows what you're talking about - can you maybe give us the website for this 'Sims' game so we can look it up? NAG Ed.

FROM Neville
SUBJECT South Africa and game development
I recently started buying NAG and have learnt many new things about gaming from your magazine. It has altered the way I look at games. Some interesting things came up in the last two issues that I would like to comment on starting with game development in South Africa. The May edition had a few things to say about game development in South Africa. I agree. It is a shame that our boys can't come up with at least a few good titles every ten years or so. I think you guys are in the position to make a difference. I think a few articles on South African games would point out that there is a huge gap in the market and lots of money to be made. Here are a few things that came to mind.
1. Who are the leading game developers in SA?
2. How do they compare to international developers?
3. What games worth mentioning are out there?
4. What does the average guy need to do to become a game programmer?
5. What is the preferred programming language?

If you look at how extensively the Chinese and Japanese use their culture in designing games, we here in SA have a lot we can turn into games, for example: high crime rates, violence on the streets is the order of the day, amazing natural resources and wildlife, many different cultures to draw upon, drug trafficking like nowhere else, deserts, jungles, mountains and many more. The point is - we can come up with many titles that will sell internationally. We just have to get around to doing it! (Well).
1.
I-Imagine [www.i-imagine.com] are the only active local development outfit that have published an international title... and they are currently working on a new game. There was another development company called Twilyt Productions but they disbanded soon after announcing their latest effort Zulu War. They had some local success with Toxic Bunny and another game called The Tainted - I was also told about a deal involving publishing Toxic Bunny in Europe somewhere but memory fails me.
2.
Chase [developed and released by I-imagine, published by Bam! Entertainment] is an excellent Xbox game and was rated highly by the game press overseas. It was developed in South Africa so therefore we compare well.
3.
Chase on the Xbox.
4.
Talent, patience, the ability to work as a team and a little mathematics I'm told.
5.
Game programming languages vary but common advice is to start with something "simple" like taking a course in programming then move onto experi-

SHORTS

FROM Henk
SUBJECT Online Gaming
There is but one issue concerning gaming that really makes me depressed. And that is Telkom. <*Snip, Ed*>
There was more to this story but he summed it up so well in two sentences. NAG Ed.

FROM Morgue [FLB]
SUBJECT The Aliens are Invading
Giving the Space Invaders Anniversary edition an NA is nothing more than shirking your duty to attach a score. A score is always relevant, no matter the age of the game featured.
Well, I put this question to Miktar [the reviewer in question] and after a loud and very weird outburst that sounded like a pregnant Siberian yak missing a jump he mumbled something about it being Space Invaders [*duh, Ed*] and then something ugly about readers with too much time on their hands. The rest isn't fit for publication. NAG Ed.

FROM Morgue [FLB]
SUBJECT Space Harrier
How do you justify the acres of open space on your Industry News pages? Maybe you're going for a 'look', and maybe you're too lazy to fill in the gaps.
Because of the way we print the magazine we can only afford so much ink in certain sections. So to save money we leave open space all over the place... NAG Ed.

FROM Jonathan
SUBJECT Short
Is this short enough?
We've had shorter. NAG Ed.

FROM Jonathan
SUBJECT Badger
Can I have cute little badger dude's autograph?
You can if you can revive him... NAG Ed.

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

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

menting by yourself [leave the matches alone this time] and then if you're really smart C# is the ultimate.
Yes, we have ability but I'm guessing we lack the budget and I'm not so sure that some of your more 'out there' ideas would take off that well. The good news - keep reading NAG for at least the next one or two issues - we're launching something large and exciting that'll hopefully kick-start game development on all levels in dark Africa. Well, we can only hope - like they say, you can bring a pig to the trough but you can't make him look up. NAG Ed.

FROM H4BP06
SUBJECT New Age Gaming
I just want to say I love your magazine and all, but I've got one problem. Ever since you gave yourself this new, cool look, you've left out the words New Age Gaming Magazine under your logo. You might think everybody knows what NAG stands for but there are many new readers that I know of who don't have the foggiest of ideas what NAG means. This is not only for your new readers but also yourself - don't you have any pride about your name? Have you at NAG forgotten about what your logo really means? Has Far Cry grown very popular with the public, because I haven't heard much hype about it with the public? I don't really think it's that important.
We were worried that people would think we were some new Christian movement that supported gambling in Las Vegas - so we clipped it to NAG, now everyone thinks it's a magazine aimed at housewives... In truth we can't really think of a better meaning for the acronym so you readers let us know and we'll consider giving what we do more meaning. NAG Ed.

FROM Ockie
SUBJECT Competitive Gaming
I have a lot of issues to talk about but this is really getting me ticked off. I'm sure there are a lot of others who can't keep up with the stuff you have to buy to be able to run the latest games. You try so hard and then a little 10 year old comes up to you and starts laughing because your PC can't run this game at 60FPS and his machine can. My point is that a lot of people just want to tear you down because their PC is better. I know a small group of people in Cape Town who I thank for making me see the real way to game. They don't laugh when your PC blows up, don't insult you when you get a good kill and they give you as much advice as possible. They do have big computers but they don't laugh because you have a lousy 1.3GHz with a GeForce 2 or whatever it is you have. I just wish that most of the gamers will one day be more like them.
We normally rip each other off about PC specifications and poor scores in multiplayer games for fun - it's usually good natured jesting but if there are people out there who are deliberately trying to break down fragile egos and make other gamers cry then you had better stop. Nobody likes a bully. Just remember if you are getting bullied at LANs wax on, wax off - learn that crane kick Tae Kwon Do thing from Mr Miyagi and take them down! NAG Ed.

FROM Cyborg Chef
SUBJECT Letter from dipsh1t
There was this letter in your June edition from somebody called "Rob", subject, "An important issue in gaming today". Normal letter, guy starts off with a bit of sucking up then goes on about how long he's been buying the magazine, blah etc, at the beginning of his letter I thought this guy was trying to be sarcastic or something, but later goes on about "... I'm sure I can expect a malicious and sarcastic answer from you, placed in your brain by Satan's demons..." Huh? Anybody who's been reading your replies since January 2003 should know the main theme of the letters section is to give people sh1t about their stupid ideas, except for the letter of the month, one guy who actually has got a good point - that's probably why you guys only have one letter of the month, all the other is stuff like "Run, run! Be afraid of the 666 barcode, Diablo will take your soles!" Shame on those readers, it gives me cold shivers to think maniacs like that coexist here in our society. Hopefully you guys won't have any protesters planting crosses in front of your office and shouting verses from the Bible at you... Wish you the best of luck with readers such as these.
Yes it is hard sometimes - I almost made you the letter of the month winner but you screwed it up when you started talking about soles. Soles are fish and I didn't really see how fish fitted into the general direction your letter took? NAG Ed.

FROM Anakha
SUBJECT Broken Promises & late reviews
First off, regardless of what my account says I am a NAG subscriber, secondly I think NAG is a great magazine. Now to the depressing part of it all, you promised us a review on PCI Express two months ago I think, and lo and behold we're still waiting for it. What happened did you guys shoot your reviewer or something? Also how is it possible for you to review the Nvidia 6800 Ultra 1 or 2 months after it came out? You then went further in the review to say we can't wait to see ATI's response. Hello when I read your review I had also read the review on ATI's new baby. Why is it that you guys get such late reviews on hardware? I think the reason must lie in getting it into the country. Just a suggestion but if you are going to say that we can expect a review in the next months issue please deliver and if you can't please give us a reason why.
Thanks to the adoptive and technology hungry nature of many of our readers NAG is usually one of the first publications to receive new hardware as it lands in South Africa. We can't beat the Internet for getting early reviews out as we have to print and distribute magazine [typically a 2 week delay]. On occasion we've even held back a deadline because of an exclusive review or first look. To clarify, when we published that article on the 6800 there was no response or new card from Ati to consider. Regarding the PCI Express article - that wasn't our fault - the writer [James] took almost 3 months to research and understand how PCI Express actually worked. Don't worry we're not going to let him near anything technical again - he's a little slow and we wanted to give him a fair chance. NAG Ed.

FROM John
SUBJECT New computer
Please could you send me some information of computer specifications correlating with new games, e.g. Battlefield 2, Half-Life 2 etc? GeForce FX, motherboard etc. I am new to SA and want to buy a new PC, the best gaming one possible, so I went to the stores but they only said "buy this PC, it's an apple and it costs a developers ransom". I am not familiar with PC specifications so please keep that in mind. If you don't have time to do favours, what with gaming and all, I am willing to pay for your services.
To begin and just for the record, don't go back to any shop that offers you an Apple after you've just asked for a gaming PC. To end, and sorry if this sounds harsh, we're not computer dealers but rather magazine publishers. We'd love to help you and the other 3 million readers that keep asking us for our help in putting together a dream computer but... we can't help all 3 million of you - it's just too much typing and administration [this is also the reason why we went for the playing games and publishing side of things]. Instead of offering everyone budget personalised quotes we do comparative reviews and other articles all about the hardware everyone wants to own but can't really afford. Here we talk once and many listen - it's more effective. So, please keep reading the magazine and contact those companies that advertise with us for prices and suggestions - this way everyone wins and we don't have to process quotes for computers that we don't sell. Or visit the NAG forums [www.nag.co.za] and post your question there - the usual helpful bunch will offer some great amateur advice. NAG Ed.

FROM Jason
SUBJECT Inbox
Whilst reading the Inbox page of your July publication I noticed your comment that you cannot meet the demands of your sarcasm hungry readers. I thought you might divide the spread page into the serious letters you have received during the previous month and the trash that inspires sarcasm. I would also like to agree with the comment that all readers who have no sense of humour and take every comment as a personal insult should find another magazine.
I'm not really sure what kind of topics are interesting anymore. At this stage I think we've all read just about everything there is to know about gaming, the industry and when Half-Life 2 isn't coming out. Right! How about this, I'll promise to only publish intelligent mail in the next issue if you promise not to get angry when all you get is 2 blank pages... deal? NAG Ed.

Go here and register or we'll do nasty things to your mother's garden gnomes...
www.nag.co.za

Badger Hunt #8 Winner [July Issue]

[*Ed: The badger's appetite for danger seems to be growing - anyone watching Reality TV will tell you that standing next to the track during a race can result in being squashed by a car. Below is the winner's moment of discovery*].
The badger is cunningly hidden in between all the spectators next to the track on the top left screenshot of **page 52**. - *Francois Louw*

Some bad news... it's all over! :(
There's been a slight mishap of sorts this issue, our beloved little Badger [unofficially named Frank] was squished by one of the demons in DOOM3 - Ramjet wrote a beautiful epitaph for the badger and it goes a little something like this...

Here lies the Badger
He ran out of luck
The poor little bastard
Got hit by a truck*

*Stood on by a minion from Hell actually - Ramjet has no eye for detail.

At his request, the badger's remains will be randomly scattered over the printing press while it churns out the October issue.

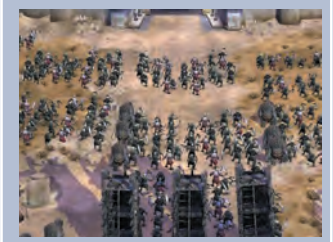
Usual Mail: P.O. Box 237, Olivedale, 2158 | **Real mail to:** letters@nag.co.za
Important: Include your details when mailing us or how will you ever get your prize...

Previews

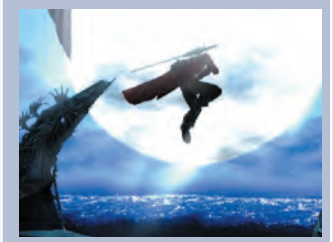
Sit back as we go to The Movies, get locked in our apartment in Silent Hill 4, see what's new in the Metroid Prime sequel and try to kill David Hasselhoff in the next Knight Rider game. But first, what's new...

NAG's Wanted List

Halo 2
Xbox
11 November 2004
The PC version might have been lame, but the Xbox title wasn't. So we're very excited with how Halo 2 is shaping up.



LOTR: Battle for Middle Earth
PC
November 2004
Emotional units? Massive armies? A chance to play as the armies of Mordor? Why stick to a white wizard when you have a massive glowing eye?



Devil May Cry 3
PS2
TBA
Dante's back! After the average performance of the second game Capcom are going back to their DMC roots, which is never, ever a bad thing. More demonic gunplay? Yes please!

Johnny Whatever

Developer **Warthog** Publisher **TBA**
Platform **PC** | **Xbox** Release Date **September 2006**

The Iron Royals have enslaved the people of New London, Rock-N-Roll has been outlawed and the Queen has been imprisoned in a vat of mustard while squads of Robo-Bobbies terrorize the populace. We couldn't have said it better ourselves. What might sound like something out of 2000AD is actually a new title over at Warthog. You play Johnny, a rock n' roll musician forced to take action when all your band mates are arrested. Luckily your guitar does more than simply play music - explosive sound would be more apt. A bright and colourful action game with an 'Everyone' rating? Rare indeed.

Scrapland

Developer **Mercury Steam** Publisher **Enlight**
Platform **PC** | **Xbox** Release Date **Q4 2004**

American McGee returns as he is hired to produce this interesting action title based in a world of robots. Boasting a free and dynamic world (or GTA3-style as the developers put it), you play as a robot who has to investigate a murder charge against you. You'll do this by exploring the world, which boasts a lot of NPCs, the ability to build and pilot ships and your own talent of changing into one of 15 characters. And that's not to mention the races, combat and other aspects of a highly interactive and vibrant game world - something the developers are obviously taking great pride in.

Pathologic

Developer **Ice-Pick Lodge** Publisher **Buka**
Platform **PC** Release Date **TBA**

When the people of an isolated town start dying from a mysterious illness, three people show up to investigate. With all the hallmarks of a survival horror, Pathologic is a first person adventure game that features three campaigns (for each character) and multiple endings. It also boasts a non-linear flow and a living, breathing world that runs along a real-time timeline plus an inventive survival system. And that's just the tip of the feature iceberg for what sounds like a very promising entry in the Adventure/Horror genre.

Trackmania Sunrise

Developer **Nadeo** Publisher **Digital Jesters**
Platform **PC** Release Date **Q1 2005**

The award-winning racer finally gets a sequel after its successful run last year. Featuring cars that can go up to 440 kph, Trackmania Sunrise will feature more of the maddening track building and racing that made the first so popular. The final game will boast new play modes as well as far more cars and tracks, but most importantly more control has been handed to the player to make those extreme jumps hallmarked by the first game - all of this on an engine that doesn't require a high spec machine. Driving fans should keep this one tagged.

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THERE IS ONLY WAR

Acclaimed developer, Relic Entertainment, has the responsibility of bringing one of the most successful tabletop war games to the PC as you control one of four unique races in head-to-head or cooperative multiplayer action, where faith, skill, and strategy are requisites in ruling the universes. Over the past few years we have seen a number of Warhammer titles, most of which have done well but none that has lived up to initial expectations, however THQ has high hopes for this one to become the brand leader!

HEADHUNTER

The backdrop story to Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War tells of ten thousand years that have passed since the treasonous acts of Chaos toppled the Golden Age of mankind. Fires burn brightly throughout the galaxies, illuminating carnage and slaughter as mankind defends itself from ancient enemies. Hardened forces collide with one goal in mind, the complete extermination of their opposition. Warhammer offers a game of infinite detail, which has already received much media acclaim from its recent appearance at E3. Derek dela Fuente spoke with the Jay Wilson, Lead Designer, who was given a comprehensive insight into what gamers can expect when the game is released.

Please can you tell us a little about Relic?
Relic has been making games since 1997 starting with the award-winning Homeworld, and has gone on to make the well-received Impossible Creatures, and Homeworld 2. We've always specialized in creating great games with cutting-edge technology, and we get better with every game. We think Dawn of War will be further proof of that.

What kind of interaction did you have with Games Workshop and are you all great Warhammer gamers?
We've been working with Games Workshop since day one on this project, and have a very strong relationship with them. Communication is an open door, and we share all our ideas, concepts, and finalised work with them for their input, support, and approval. It's been a very positive process all-around. And yes, many of the people on the Dawn of War team are hardened veterans of Warhammer 40,000. I myself had 5 armies when we started the project (7 armies now).

Buildings tower over the battles and units are in scale with the details around them, like light posts and electrical wires

What unique qualities do you feel the Warhammer Universe offers to a RTS game? We have seen many Warhammer games in the past and none have done as well as anticipated or hoped. Can you put a finger on why?
Warhammer 40,000 offers one of the most exciting and unique settings that can be found today. It's easily as cool, rich, and deep as any other license on the market. And for games focused on war, there is little more perfect than a universe whose tagline is 'There is only war'.
Some Warhammer games have done alright. But it is true; Warhammer and Warhammer 40,000 games have never been run away hits. We think there are a variety of reasons why this is the case. For one, we believe most developers have worked too much on capturing the details and not been focused enough on what is most entertaining and instantly appealing about the universe. We also think that the Warhammer 40,000 universe is not an easy one to convey well. Just ask some Warhammer 40,000 players a few questions and you'll quickly find that even they can't agree on most details regarding how things should be realised.

Can you set the scene for gamers and tell us what the objectives will be?
Games in Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War represents a small section of the front line of a great conflict - the most exciting section! The disparate forces clash in jungles and dense urban settings fighting over objectives in an all-out war to destroy each other and achieve victory. Gamers have a wide variety of ways that victory can be achieved. Many involve holding a majority of key strategic locations against the enemy for a required amount of time, some involve eliminating a key structure or unit belonging to the enemy, and others just focus on annihilation.

What are the environments the game is set in and can you tell us something exciting about them?
The entire game takes place on a single planet, named Tartarus.

Meet the Family

Chaos is an elite mob of daemonic warriors who rely on very powerful, but expensive, units and in some cases mass numbers to crush their enemies. Chaos field horde units like cultists to engage and distract their enemy, followed with versatile elite warriors who take advantage of the enemy's confused state to destroy them. Chaos use many surprise tactics like summoning daemons directly onto the battlefield. Chaos love to stare their enemy in the face, and so have more powerful close combat options than Space Marines. And when all else fails, Chaos can field some of the singularly most powerful units in the game, including Obliterators, and the Bloodthirster, a monstrous greater daemon.
Orks are for players who like to use straightforward tactics and 'lots' of units to overwhelm their enemy. Orks have the lightest armour of any of the races, but can be fielded in the greatest numbers. They are a fast, hard-hitting, close combat focused army that uses brutal fire support like artillery and the mighty Squiggoth transport to throw their enemy off-balance, and then sweep over them with a horde of troops. Orks are also a very aggressive and dynamic force which can generate an enormous amount of firepower (albeit very inaccurate firepower) from every unit, structure, and vehicle, even while on the move.
Space Marines are the most conventional and versatile force. Their units are well rounded, good at close combat and at range. They're tough, and can adjust to any combat situation on the fly. Their units are all very elite and so cost more and take longer to field, so they generally field smaller numbers than most of the other armies. They also rely heavily on their vehicles, and have the largest selection of vehicles of any race in the game. While they lack the huge, 30-foot tall daemons of other races they make up for this with devastating abilities, like orbital bombardment, and the ability to drop units almost anywhere on the battlefield.
To overcome their enemies the **Eldar** focus on their high speed, high firepower, and affinity for deception and misdirection. Unlike the versatile, well-rounded Space Marines, or the close-combat focused Orks, each Eldar unit has a specialised role that they excel at. These specialisations make them very strong at what they do, but also very weak when they are out of their element. Each piece of the Eldar army must work together in concert to assure victory, but when they do it is a sight to behold. The Eldar also rely on high-speed units and transportation systems. They can teleport infantry units and even entire bases between their Webway Gate structures, cloak their bases, and have the fastest vehicles in the game. They also have powerful psychic units that are able to lay waste to anyone who opposes them.

Tartarus is a moderately settled world, similar to Earth in some ways. Most of the battlefields in Dawn of War occur in vast, demolished, urban sprawls, although there are also some battles that occur in the remote rural areas, like jungles and wastelands. The thing we're most excited about with our environments is the sense of realistic scale we've achieved. Buildings tower over the battles and units are in scale with the details around them, like light posts and electrical wires.

Expound the virtues of the resource system and will the game offer all the traditional values or are you trying to be innovative?

When we approached doing a resource system for an RTS in the Warhammer 40,000 universe, we wanted to create a system that not only fitted well within the universe, but also eliminated some of the things that we feel most players don't enjoy about RTS games - namely, harvesters.

So, you've built your empire, you have your army, you're all good, right? Then your enemy manages to sneak past your army and kill a dozen wood-choppers. No worries, right? I mean, a well-trained and well-equipped soldier is more important than some guy chopping wood, right? Wrong, at least in most RTS's the death of a few wood-choppers equals certain defeat for even the mightiest of armies. It's a frustrating and unrealistic system that we knew had to change.

In Dawn of War resources are claimed by capturing and holding strategic points. These points can only be captured by infantry, and once captured they produce 'requisition' that can be used to call in new units, weapons, and tactical options. Players can reinforce these points to increase the amount of requisition they produce and protect them, allowing players to create an effective 'front line' defence around their base, making them more resilient.

This system takes the frustration and vulnerability out of the resource system, and assures that the most effective way to defeat your enemy is to face them on the battlefield.

If you had to target one aspect of the game that you are really proud of what would it be?

I used to say the look and feel of combat in the game, and while I am still very proud of how visceral and dynamic the battles have turned out to be, now that we're getting closer to completion I have to say I'm quite proud of how the multiplayer game has turned out.

Games Workshop encouraged us to create as much new content as we could handle. They were keener on us creating new content in the universe than even we were!

What kind of license do you have to create new ideas – even units and weapons in the game and does all this have to be cleared? What new idea that the team has created do you feel will impress?

Games Workshop encouraged us to create as much new content as we could handle. They were keener on us creating new content in the universe than even we were! 'ALL' content we create, whether it is new or a reproduction of something that already exists in the Warhammer 40,000 universe has to be cleared through Games Workshop, but they've made the process quite painless. The relationship has been really rewarding for everyone involved. I'd say the creation we're most proud of would be the completely new Space Marine Chapter, the Blood Ravens. The colour scheme, Chapter badges, and an initial take on the history of the Chapter were all created within Relic in conjunction with Games Workshop. In addition, there is lots of completely new content, things never before seen in the Warhammer 40,000 universe, like field bases for all the major races, and units, some re-works of existing units, and some completely new.

A lot of people are put off by Warhammer merely because they are not au fait with the world. Firstly, who are you aiming the game at and are you trying to entice new gamers and how can this be done? Warhammer is seen as a very serious and detailed tabletop game, is this a problem?

The Warhammer 40,000 tabletop game is a hobby for very serious and dedicated gamers, but you have to ask how such a hardcore, expensive, time-consuming hobby could enrapture millions of avid gamers worldwide? The answer is that the Warhammer 40,000 universe is one of the coolest, most exciting licenses you can find, and our goal has been to bring that license to life like no one ever has before in a video game.

30-foot daemons tossing soldiers around by the dozens, lines of tanks rolling into an enemy front line with multiple turrets firing in every direction, hardened warriors using massive weapons, then stowing them and charging into combat with a combat knife in their hands, and a battle cry raging from their throat. This is what Dawn of War is, and we can't see how 'anyone' who likes games won't think that's cool, regardless of the license.

We think Warhammer 40,000 players will be happy with the results as well.

The Movies

Lights! Camera! Action! While the process of making a blockbuster movie has become a lot more complicated than those three words would indicate, Lionhead believe that with their new management simulation The Movies Spielberg, Tarantino and (God forbid) Uwe Boll wannabes can churn out their own masterpieces.

PC | PS2| NGC XBOX

Developer: Lionhead Studios · **Publisher:** Activision · **Supplier:** MegaRom [011] 234 2680 **Genre:** Management
Release Date: Q4 2004

Gamers love movies. While music might still see you dragged off to some dark concert venue with bad sound or an over-charging, underperforming club, movies and games share similar hallmarks: it happens inside buildings and rarely requires standing. So it seems a bit strange that games for making movies have been very scarce, with only a few notable examples arising when FMV was still all the rage in games.

Peter Molyneux, who has long since earned his Management Simulation laurels with titles such as Theme Hospital, Dungeon Keeper and Populous (not to mention Black & White, Syndicate and so on...), decided to realize this idea with The Movies, a title currently being polished at Lionhead Studios. The concept sounds simple enough: build and manage a studio, manage the careers of your actors and make movies. Using these three pillars as a base, the game will allow players a huge amount of depth and interesting play, all taking place over the history of cinema.

Using an accurate technology timeline, new advances in cinema will appear as you play the game and your studio grows. As with any management title, cash is king and you need to make money in order to make better movies. Wardrobe, sets, promotions and so on are very important factors if you want to make a blockbuster movie. For instance, running a good cafeteria and paying writers to come up with good scripts is vital if you expect to survive.

Actors also cost money and stars even more. Apart from contending with their ever-swelling egos by getting them the food they like or that grandiose trailer they demand, you also have a big degree of control over them, to the extent that you can use plastic surgery to make them more attractive. But the more fame stars gather, the more they'll cost you and you'll start needing to fend off rival studios out to bait your money-making ensemble. Of course you can return the favour and head-hunt stars from other filmmakers. Stars can also develop destructive habits, such as over-eating or over-drinking, which will hurt their appeal and your bottom line (not to mention that a difficult actor could delay a film's completion).

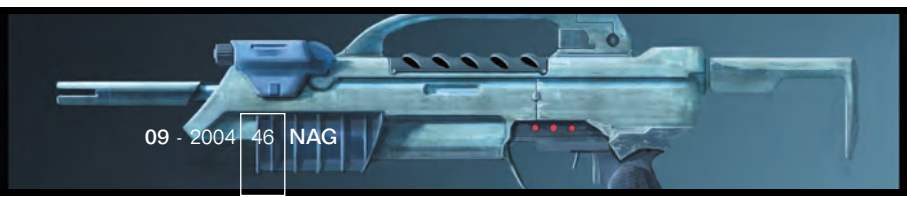
All of this, though, is built around the process of making movies. And we can always trust in that Molyneux Magic to deliver more than your standard management simulation. The timeline in the game plays an important role in your success. Since the game takes place over the extent of the 20th century (and a little in the speculative future of movie making) you have to be conscious of the time and society you are dealing with. Showing a little too much skin in the thirties can bomb your film. But at the same time not taking risks won't get you anywhere - as with the real thing, infamy and controversy can work for or against you. Keeping your films varied and interesting is important, since the audience does get bored (and can be very critical). On the flipside, not every film has to be a blockbuster at the box office - DVD and VHS also exist (when they are invented on the timeline) for more revenue. Once again money plays an important role, because the more you spend the better your production quality - for instance writers who brainstorm more end up producing better scenes for you. And as time goes by the scripts available become more numerous and epic. This same rule applies for everything in the game - keeping a good eye on your cash flow and the sensibilities of your audience will get you far.

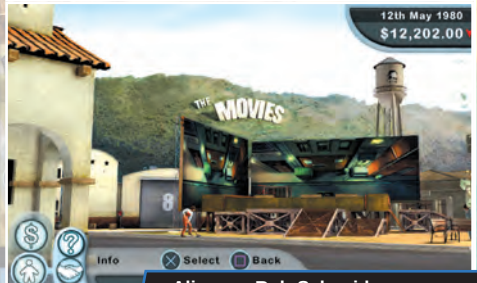
The play dynamic is spiced up even more with challenges. Characters will approach you with movie projects which, if you are successful, will lead to more money or several game advantages. One example is a mob boss who wants you to cast his untalented wife in a movie. Manage this feat and he returns a few favours, such as getting you off tax for a year. These random challenges can sway a game in your favour and they are the only way to unlock some bonus and secret parts to The Movies, not to mention possibly more work from the challenger.

At this point things might seem very complicated, so a simple interface is very important. In fact, The Movies' straight forward implementation makes one wonder why this hasn't been done before. Keeping a tab on your studio is simple enough with a myriad of visual queues and a detailed but simple HUD, while making movies consists of building a set (which come in a huge amount of flavours), adjusting the camera angles and then using sliders to decide the intensity of a scene - for instance, an argument can be a simple exchange of words to a full-blown brawl. But we're assured that players can go much deeper into the process if they want to, indicating some deep micro-management for some.

The Movies will also have a sandbox mode for those eager to get their hands dirty. This part of the game allows you to change settings before you start, such as how much money you start with or if your stars can throw tantrums. The PC version will be backed by a community site that players can upload their creations to and Lionhead have the mod community in mind - the game was designed from the ground up to be mod-able and the studio is even considering releasing the tools they used to make sets, props and so on. Meanwhile console gamers can swap movies on memory cards.

Due out later this year on the PC and the three console platforms, The Movies is the long-sought return of Molyneux and his talented crew to the genre he knows best, since he helped invent it - and it looks to us as if he's on his way to reinventing it.





Movies We'd Make

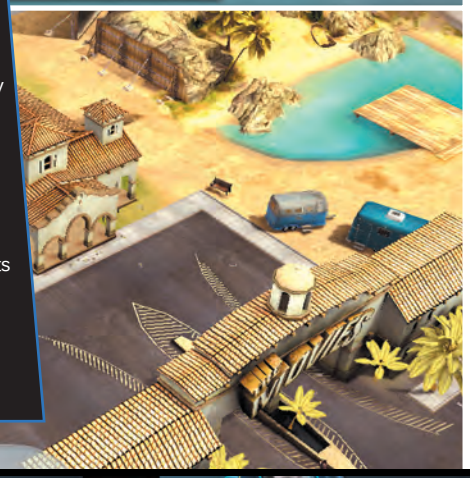
Alien vs. Rob Schneider
Because we really don't like him. Plus it'll stop him from making Rob Schneider is Alien.

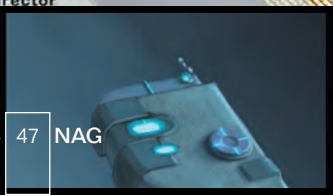
The Matrix: Kill Stuff
Just lots of scenes where cool people in sharp clothes destroy foyers, hallways, entire city blocks… everything that would've have stopped Revolutions from sucking.

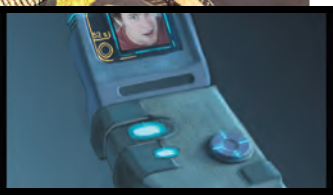
Apocalypse NOW!
While Copolla's epic war movie was excellent, it underplayed the Now bit. We figure more guns and less talk will fix this.

8 Mile Crossroads
Eminem and Britney Spears play struggling performers looking for their big break. Then a truck hits them.

Starship Troopers 2
The straight-to-video sequel wasn't bad, but we want more marauding killer bugs. This one's a no brainer. In fact, why isn't it at the top of this list?





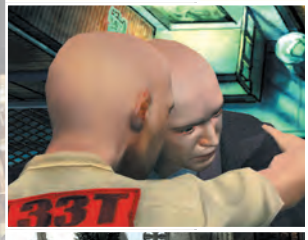


Q&A

Derek dela Fuente spoke with Adrian Moore, Lead Designer on The Movies

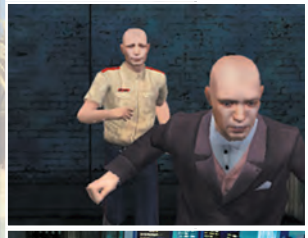
What was the biggest change made to the game since development started?
I guess the biggest change we made as we got up and running was deciding to make actual movies. In the beginning we were running with the concept of making trailers of movies - promotional shorts that represented the films that were being made in the game. Now the game allows you to actually make short films, which is far more fun.

How does The Movies' reward system differ from other Management Simulation titles?
The big rewards really come from the challenges - characters approach you, offering you opportunities. If you accept a challenge and achieve it (for example casting a pop star in a leading role and having a hit movie) it is possible to get hold of hidden stuff that is not available elsewhere. Aside from the challenges, we're really making a point of the player feeling good about success. When a hit movie is released the money on the interface sparkles and shines as it rolls in. The queue of people outside the cinema reinforces the feeling of doing well.

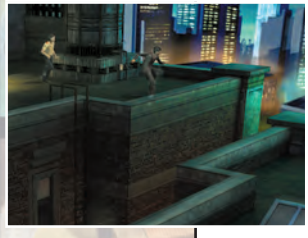


Have you based most of the cast list on famous actors and what are some of the varied traits they offer and how do you know if an actor will fit the part?
The actors in the game are not based on famous film stars but it is possible to create your own. You can change facial features, makeup, hairstyles, costumes and the physique of your stars, allowing you to re-create your favourite heroes and villains.
Each actor has individual traits in terms of acting ability, suitability for types of films, and waywardness. For example, one actor might be a fantastic actor, great in horror movies, but likes to get drunk a lot. Another star may be an average actor but suitable for all genres of film, and be clean living.

Is there a progression and timeline for actors?
Every person in the game ages with time, so each actor can become 'past it' as they grow old. It's possible to send them into plastic surgery to give them face lifts to extend their careers however!



So far what has been the most difficult aspect in putting this game together?
The sheer scale of the project. Because it runs through time - from 1900 to a little way into the future, it means we have to create costumes and write music to create the sense of each era. Unlike other simulation games, The Movies features the ability to make films, which means a massive amount of work in terms of creating thousands of individual movie scenes. It's been hard to seamlessly marry the simulation with the movie-making side. It's been a challenge but the whole team is working very hard together.



What are the limits when it comes to making movies?
Of course there are restrictions, but we've afforded players a huge amount of freedom. There are thousands of scenes, 40 sets, hundreds of costumes and dozens of backdrops, and the ability to customise each and every one of these elements. There is so much freedom that the number of combinations of movies that people can make using the game is vast.

Are you concerned that such an ambitious title will be hard to sell to gamers?
Not at all. The game has an incredible amount of depth but on the surface it is really, really simple to play. We've spent enough time on the interface to ensure that.

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Knight Rider 2

PC | PS2

Developer: Davilex · **Publisher:** TBA · **Supplier:** TBA · **Genre:** Action · **Release Date:** Q4 2004

Knight Rider may not mean much to younger gaming fans but older TV viewers will remember this now cult series with extreme fondness. Alongside the likes of Starsky and Hutch, He-Man and Miami Vice (another of Davilex's new titles), it has a lot to live up to as it's brought back to life and up to date for the critical and analytical perusal of PC and video gamers. Derek dela Fuente spoke with Lambert Wolterbeek Muller, Technical Director & Senior Producer at Davilex, to find out about the sequel to the highly successful first Knight Rider, which was released in 2002.

"The Knight Rider license has a lot to offer. It is a broadly recognised brand and plays well into the 70s and 80s revival. It also has a lot of action and strong characters creating a great basis for an exciting game and a strong storyline. It is always important to obtain a good license deal in the sense that you have access to almost all elements from the series when basing a game on TV or movie formats. This is definitely the case with Knight Rider. It helped us create the original Knight Rider feel and atmosphere in the game. The only limitation Universal gave us was - everything you could do in the game should fit within the Knight Rider universe. So don't expect bloody massacres but rather stylish action packed missions in line with the actual TV series."

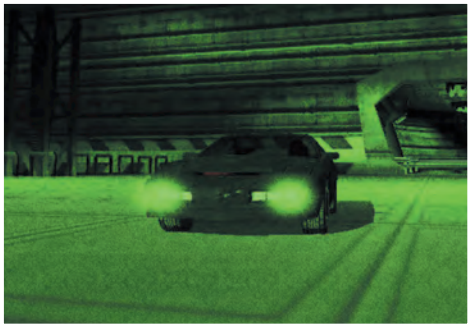
Once again you play KITT, the AI-powered super car from the series. The first game resulted in a lot of feedback for improvements including being given a distinct graphic overhaul and more in-game animations and effects have been added. The missions have also been spiced with more variety. In addition to this KITT has been granted combat abilities, emphasizing the importance of action in the sequel. There is a feast of weapons on hand although some fans may see this as sacrilege.

Lambert explained, "Actually, in several episodes KITT was armed with a laser. We believe the weapons KITT uses in the game fit within the Knight Rider universe. Don't worry, KITT won't fire any nuclear warheads, but will utilise sophisticated weapons in the true Knight Rider style."

Knight Rider 2 opens the opportunity for more boss fights and a new range of high-tech enemies that will get in your way. Michael's evil twin brother Garth also appears with his own evil car KARR, but the developer is tight-lipped over what to expect.

All of this will be complimented with several mini-games including Dirt Track Racing and The Shooting Gallery that unlock as you finish specific missions. The usual touches, such as Michael and KITT talking to each other are also back, as well as the high-tech modes, Turbo Boost, scanners and the high-octane Super Pursuit Mode. Missions will vary, with some encouraging free-roaming while others keep you on a certain trail.

"We have gone the extra mile in Knight Rider 2; we have listened to the comments people gave us on the first version and have implemented and improved the game tremendously. The result is a game with a compelling play dynamic," Lambert concluded.



Hey, don't shoot my car! [*Wouldn't something about the Obelisk of Light from C&C igniting David's eighties style hairdo have been funnier? Also, never go here: www.davidhasselhoff.com. Ed*]

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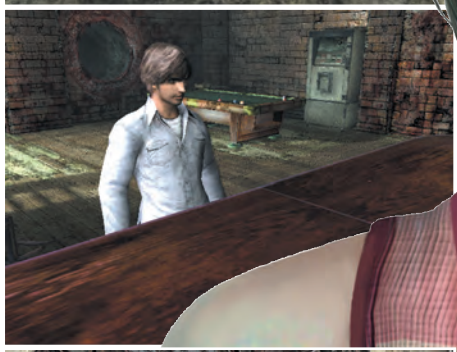
Silent Hill 4

PC | PS2 | XBOX

Developer: Konami · **Publisher:** Konami · **Supplier:** Futronic [082] 235 1234 · **Genre:** Survival Horror
Release Date: October 2004



Awake to the casual sounds of the street outside your apartment window. Breathe the air outside, but you can't. Windows jammed, stuck, and unable to open in the least. Living room presents the same problem. Chains, locks and more chains deny you access out your front door. It's barricaded, from the inside? The peephole, through which you see your neighbour as she knocks on the door. Scream, shout and slam against the door. Can't hear you, and leaves cursing you for ignoring her. Slam your fists against the windows trying to attract passer-bys in the street. Nothing, nobody looks up. Is this a dream?

A hole in your bathroom wall, leading into darkness. Is something in the apartment with you? Do you climb into the hole to see how far it goes?

Despite popular belief the Silent Hill series is less about scaring you, more about unnerving you - giving you a deep paranoia. Scenes from the series have been cruel and grotesque, rightly so. The obvious shock-value does the trick, but cunningly masks a deeper, more artfully incognito venture into to the survival horror genre. Eluding to deeper truths yet maintaining a solid basis of unknown, Silent Hill is the true ambiguous nightmare creator. Matching its cousin in terms of releases, Silent Hill has oft been compared to Resident Evil. Despite sharing the genre, they approach it as differently as night and day. Not-so-much zombies, rather constructs, lumbering creations with a seemingly dedicated purpose, yet never perfectly directed at the player alone.

Not taking place at the location of Silent Hill itself sets The Room apart from its predecessors in a noted way yet does not alienate it from its older brothers. The lead protagonist you control has spent fair time at Silent Hill and does not seem to be immune to its machinations. Exploring your apartment is a first-person affair, a first to the series itself. It's a crafty method of involvement and heightens the element of claustrophobia. You cannot leave the room. Not in the conventional way, at least. Leaving through the hole in your bathroom wall pushes you into one of many 'Worlds', seemingly normal locations such as subway stations and forests, with less normal activities. Combat with the biological constructs that wish to do you harm has been improved with a few interface upgrades, the third person camera once again showing you just enough to get by, yet little enough to give you the Fear. Outside The Room, third-person perspective is back in play. Everything is more artful, the graphics lusciously elaborate than anything the previous titles achieved. It suffers from slight control issues, natural in a console-to-PC port yet is remedied by using a gamepad with dual-analogue.

PC Silent Hill fans seem to be in for a real treat, even before completion Silent Hill 4 looks to be Konami's best work yet.

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Metroid Prime 2: Echoes

NGC

Developer: Retro Studios · **Publisher:** Nintendo · **Supplier:** Futronic [082] 235 1234 · **Genre:** Action
Release Date: Q4 2004

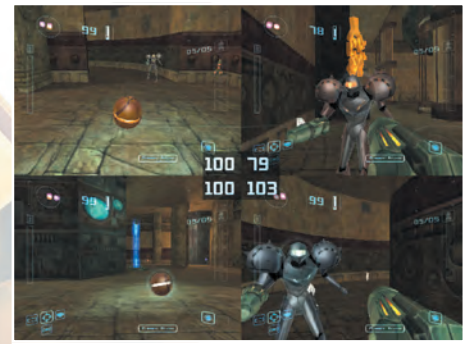
When Retro Studios was first announced to be the team responsible for taking a loved 2D game into the first-person 3D era, there was a lot of doubt circling the industry. Now, looking back at the released game and the expectations it's easy to say that not a single thing fell short. The transition was flawless, the additions to the universe inspiring.

Metroid Prime 2: Echoes see Retro Studios once again diving into the universe of Samus Aran - this time around the female bounty hunter is investigating an abandoned Federation ship on a planet named Aether. Staying true to the series ethos, Samus loses most of her Power Suit's abilities upon crash-landing on the planet and witnessing the scene of a slaughter. The planet, it seems, has been dimensionally doubled - one exists in darkness and the other in light. Luminoth, a peaceful people, inhabit the Light Aether while the Ing Horde inhabits the dark. Samus soon finds that there is something even more dangerous than the Ing Horde on the planet, a dark creature that is growing more lethal by the minute. Has Retro taken inspiration from the recent Gameboy Advance Metroid title, Metroid: Fusion, by re-using the idea of a 'Dark Samus' who is set on the destruction of its originator?

Once again the Scan Visor will be integral, the various modes of the Visor allowing you to explore every tiny bit of the terrain as well as scan creatures for vulnerabilities. Staple Metroid power-ups such as the beam weapons, bombs, missile and suit upgrades as well as the Space Jump and Grapple Beam return accompanied by the new Light and Dark Beams. It's not clear yet how the Light and Dark beams will be utilized, though initial reports indicate that the inhabitants of the Light and Dark Aether may themselves be the polarized power source for the beams. As expected, each new weapon or ability found allows the player to access a new area of the environment or re-interpret a previously explored area.

Up to four players will be able to battle one another in the new (and first-ever for the series) death-match mode. How the incorporation of being able to turn into the Morph Ball or use the Grappling Hook will affect the stock-standard death-match is yet to be seen, the multiplayer is a feature that will either be highly entertaining, or completely avoided.

From such a loved license we expect only the best. A sterling title such as the previous Metroid Prime does not always mean that its sequels will be of similar calibre but we have high hopes for the continuation of the Prime branch of this series.



Big ugly nasty monsters... [*...could come up with a better caption than this. You're fired! Ed*]

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reviews

Q here...

The Q3 dry spell is, theoretically, winding to a close... in other words, a gaming bonanza is around the corner.

The last few months have been the ones that every gamer dreads - the third quarter of every year, when the game well seems to inexplicably dry up. However, as we stride boldly into September, we are aware of two things. Firstly, the year has, once again, flown by and secondly, the gaming ground water level is on the rise. Of course at NAG we have to produce things well in advance, so there may still be a month or two yet before the expected big name reviews grace our pages (excluding, of course, one of the biggies of the year, DOOM 3).

The whole situation does make one wonder, though, about the marketing tactics of the gaming industry. Q3, after all, covers the period of the long summer school holidays in the United States. In fact, the July / August period sees a lot of holidays happening, summer or not, and yet game publishers still have not seemed to cotton onto the idea that it is an important marketing period. Take the film industry as an example of summer holiday exploitation. Films with huge youth appeal, like Spider-Man 2, are slated as summer releases because of the fact that millions of kids with nothing to do and a few bucks burning a hole in their pockets are going to stream off to cinemas to watch it. One would think that this rather obvious approach would appeal to game marketers, but apparently it doesn't. They are still fixated on that other all important marketing feeding frenzy: Christmas. That said, August did see the world-wide release of DOOM 3, which was a great idea from publishers Activision (taking advantage of the lack of triple A titles and all) but let's be honest - DOOM 3 doesn't need a gap in the market to shift titles off of shelves. In any event, we have the SA exclusive review of the game, to which words and screenshots simply don't do any justice to the game itself.

Perhaps this time of year could prove advantageous to titles that don't necessarily fall into the triple A category... games that could benefit by the minimised competition inherent to the period. But publishers obviously rely very heavily on Christmas to shift stock, even if it means running the risk of being overshadowed by more prestigious titles.

It's quite mysterious, really, this marketing beast. But, thankfully, soon we won't have to worry about this phenomenon for a good few months at least...

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

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

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

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

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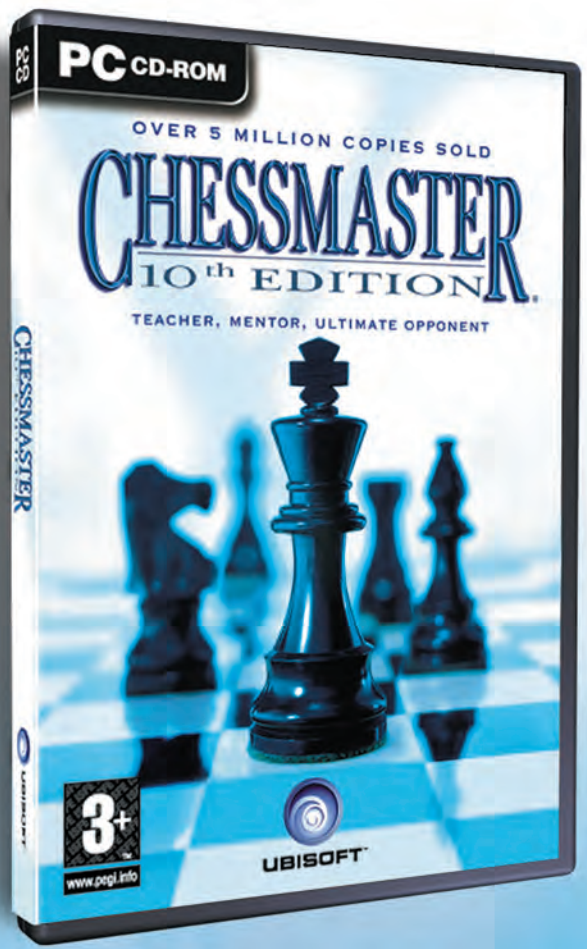

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EXCLUSIVE FIRST SA REVIEW

DOOM³

PC Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 329.00 · **Developer:** id Software · **Publisher:** Activision
Supplier: MegaRom [011] 234 2680 · **Genre:** FPS · **Reviewer:** Michael James
Minimum Specifications: Pentium 4 1.5GHz · 384 MB RAM · 8 x CD ROM · 64 MB Video Card · 2.2 GB HDD

Unrealistic expectations, rumour and speculation all conspire as DOOM³ arrives. Laden with more baggage than any game in the brief and vibrant history of this industry the latest update of the worlds most infamous gaming franchise has finally come to rest on hard drives around the world. Steeped in gamer lore and legacy, fuelled by nostalgic reminiscing and produced by id Software, a development outfit with an almost blatant disregard for convention, DOOM³ is the most anticipated game ever – but enough with the drama.

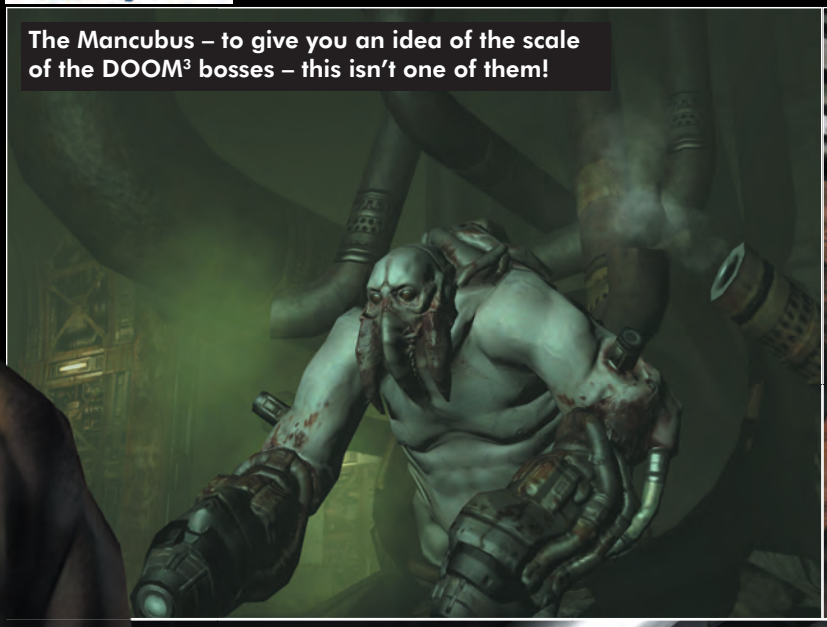
From the time it was announced until the day it was released so much has been guessed, speculated on and rumoured that nobody can really say for sure anymore what it was supposed to be. From the onset DOOM³ was charged with being a different kind of gaming experience; id Software made it clear that this wasn't going to be another endless and mindless corridor run and gun first person shooter. It also wasn't going to be just another offshoot with a different angle – realistic and historic, Call of Duty; hardcore science fiction, Halo; multiplayer-only, Battlefield; creep and sneak, Thief; obscure and bizarre, Serious Sam or even retro, Painkiller. First Person Shooters are the Hollywood blockbusters of the gaming world with Far Cry as undisputed king of the hill… until now.

DOOM³ has not only leapt into the number one position but has rather brought with it a uniquely original style of shooter – the First Person Survival Horror [FPSH].

One tuff marine

DOOM³ begins like many others, and as you might imagine you're a tough marine – not just any marine however, but one of Earth's meanest. Not long after checking in at the Union Aerospace Corporation's [UAC] Mars research facility and performing a grunt training stint, an invasion of demons overwhelms the facility. After all the excitement dies down you discover that you're the only thing standing between Hell and Earth, or Hell on Earth if you like – very much like the original game in fact.

Moving along at the very start of the game you're given a



The Mancubus – to give you an idea of the scale of the DOOM³ bosses – this isn't one of them!

In-between all the zombie killing you can take the scenic monorail tour of the outside of the facility

The ArchVile in action - he is able to summon creatures - expect to get busy

Nothing comes apart better than a zombie kissing a shotgun shell

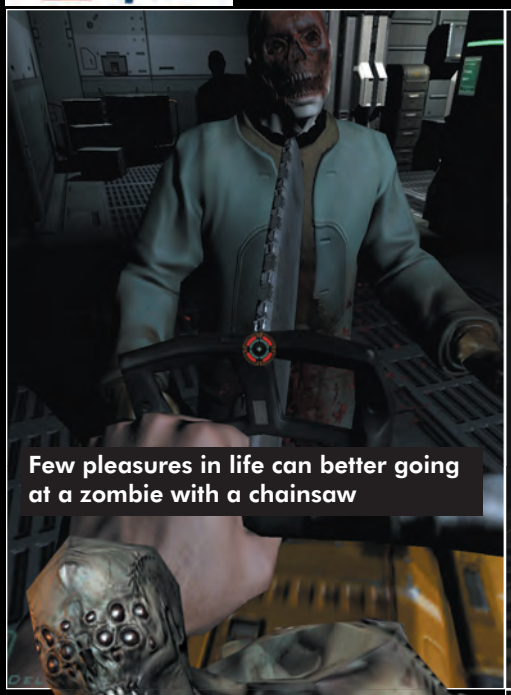
First encounters with a Hell Knight – you can scream like a little girl, nobody will laugh!

PDA, this essential piece of equipment is your alternative [secondary] interface with the game environment [primary input interface uses bullets]. The PDA does a remarkable job of filling in the gaps by providing the player with a wealth of trivial and sometimes oddly funny information about the inner workings of the facility, current security clearance, mission objectives, information about weapons and Mars Facility procedures, protocols and so on. As you explore the facility you will find many of these PDAs left behind by UAC personnel who are either deceased or had to leave in a rush. If you are given or pick up a PDA all of its information is downloaded to your PDA, and it is from this downloaded information that the most useful information in the game is obtained in the form of security codes for not only unlocking deeper areas of the facility but accessing and opening storage lockers in which you'll find everything from weapons and armour to demons [just remember to stand back when you open any locker that looks suspicious]. If you're sharp you might even discover a secret id Software PDA [hidden in the game and containing messages form the development team]. As a small example of the kind of polish and seamless integration between you and the game world, while you're listening to the audio logs on your PDA it is possible to return to the game world and continue playing with the audio log running the background. This allows you to take in all the trivia without having to sit and actually pay attention to it.

To move the game along you'll sometimes be contacted via radio and given various missions to perform. The pace of the game is relentless from the very beginning and you always feel under pressure to perform, survive or just exist. The game certainly keeps you busy all the time, almost too busy to notice that you're still collecting 'keys' and opening doors. The play dynamic in DOOM^3 isn't new in terms of getting from place to place, so if you're expecting some revolution here you're going to be disappointed. Where DOOM^3 really shines is the creepy atmosphere it creates, even when nothing is happening you still feel a little unnerved. On the most basic level you have a gun, you shoot things, you collect security clearances, you open doors and explore, and you shoot more things. This is the basic formulae of the game and admittedly offers up nothing new and does little to further this tried and tested game dynamic. Where DOOM^3 comes into its own is how this formulaic gaming dynamic is delivered.

Too much pressure

The atmosphere in DOOM^3 is intense and without exaggerating you'll probably jump in your chair at least twice while playing through the game. The reason DOOM^3 is so mentally unnerving and stressful is that you play most of the game in the dark using only your flashlight to illuminate the way forward; this simple but clever game mechanic effectively always has you on your toes as you stop to scan a room for activity, proceed cautiously, hear a noise, swing around, spot something in the shadows, switch to gun, squeeze the trigger – click! Reload while you back away… into another creature you didn't see… panicking you looking for an exit while your vision jerks and fades to blood red. [Best marine on Earth: 0 demons from Hell: 1]. All too often while playing you'll find yourself rapidly backing up firing into a gloomy corridor away from something nasty. This game dynamic doesn't represent the whole game but it always seems that there's a dark corner in every room that might conceal something evil. As a

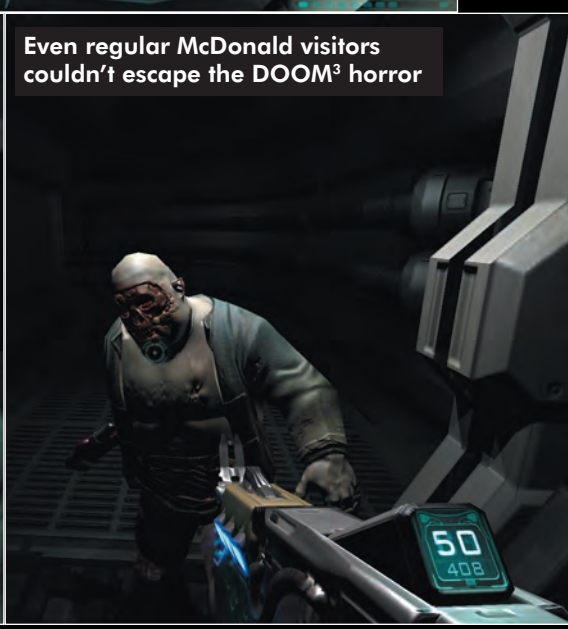


Few pleasures in life can better going at a zombie with a chainsaw

The Maggot

A good example of the level of detail that went into the design and look of the Mars Facility

The nasty mastermind



Even regular McDonald visitors couldn't escape the DOOM³ horror

salute to DOOM legacy the game isn't short on secret panels that open revealing some mutant creation whenever you pick up that new weapon or shard of armour. In DOOM^3 there is always the potential that something grim is hiding just around the next corner – it gets so bad that in some areas of the UAC facility, when things are quiet and nothing comes crawling, leaping or screaming at your throat the level of nervous tension increase exponentially as you wait for the inevitable scare.

Environment

One area of the game that needs special mention is the level design and overall look of the facility. The game is fairly linear and doesn't lend itself to much freeform exploration so essentially it's a shooter on rails; there is usually only one way you can go in any given situation and while some areas do feature well concealed paths most of the game is very cut and dry. The fact that almost every centimetre of the facility is unique in some way is truly astonishing – in recent memory there hasn't been a shooter with so much detail and variation. From the huge mechanical works of art powering the heart of the facility to the various grates and panels on the floor everything looks different – much like you'd expect a real environment to look and function. Scattered around the facility you'll find different machines that perform odd functions and you'll be hard pressed to find two display monitors that look the same. The way the whole game environment blends from one area to the next and then functions logically is a remarkable feat of level design and creation. It's not hard to see where the last four years of development disappeared to.

Besides the look of the place the game relies heavily on sound to draw the player deeper into the game world and DOOM^3 only features one musical track. The reliance on subtle sound effects instead of the thumping soundtrack many were expecting was a wise choice on the part of the developers as it keeps the player alert and adds to the tension. All too often sparks fly and a panel is blown off the wall in an explosion of steam, adding to the tension. The voice acting is superb and the various sounds of the monsters work well to send chills South, especially when you're low on ammunition and you hear the unmistakable sound of a Hell Knight. To deal with the bad guys DOOM^3 features all the weapons you'd expect – they say there's nothing like a little hand-to-hand combat, yeah, nothing to get you killed. Fists are nice for clocking up the accidental multiplayer kill for bragging rights but in the game they're only for show – your flashlight packs more of a punch. All the favourite weapons from DOOM are present with a few new additions. The game forces you to use almost all the weapons by either making some enemies more resistant to certain weapons or by pure physics. That said, you'll find returning to the shotgun provides the best overall coverage when dealing out the aces.

Monsters

They fight amongst themselves, they throw things at you, they claw and shoot you and they even drink your blood if you let them. Unlike the previous versions of DOOM you won't find the hordes of monsters in a single large room kind of gaming here but rather less inconveniently placed demons in areas where retreat options are few. As you'll see from the screens DOOM^3 demons range from demonic marines and zombies to the spider-like Tick and Trite variety ending with huge end-level bosses that'll kill you the first time around because all you did was stand and stare during the first encounter. Each demonic creature features its own unique personality, some will stalk you using the walls and ceilings while others just come straight at you clawing the air as they growl in anticipation of tearing you apart. It's scary stuff. Another bonus is that you're constantly introduced to new enemies even close to the end of the game.

Bucket of mud

Multiplayer differs from Quake III in that there's no excitement to be had from jump pads, wide open spaces, rockets and rails. DOOM^3 is more intimate although of the few matches we had most players tended to gravitate towards areas that offered a little height and space. The multiplayer [limited to 4 players] is technically flawless but isn't something you'll find everyone playing into the night; it's just not built for that kind of gaming and the predictable future will see a number of modifications to the game that'll let us all experience the joys of Quake DM4 once again (this engine is perfect for that level). DOOM^3 is more reminiscent of Quake DM in fact than anything else – Quake 2 saw the introduction of big air and railing, something Quake III exemplified and now we've returned to the more claustrophobic feel. What let's the multiplayer down significantly are the maps, they're just too dark and closed in. Thankfully this is something that can easily be changed and the DOOM^3 gaming community is waiting patiently for the first new maps to appear. One of the downsides is that DOOM^3 requires serious bandwidth to enjoy the online experience and this is something we're going to have to live without in ZA. Seeing that nothing is perfect, DOOM^3 does bear a few problems, aside from the limited multilayer game. It's important to bear in mind that some of these negatives can be viewed in the light that DOOM^3 is designed to be a simple shooter that tips its hat not only in style and dynamic to the original game but also in game logic and good old fashioned DOOM lore. For example you can't use the flashlight and weapon at the same time but you can carry all your weapons around with you – this steering here and there around realism makes for good gaming however. Like the movies, suspension of disbelief and enjoying it for what it is goes a long way. The enemies are not intelligent and with the exception of a few of the demonic marines that'll take cover and shoot at you from behind crates and the odd demon versus demon in-fighting all these monsters, bugs and demons are predictable.

Negatives aside it's important to remember that DOOM^3 is the most polished gaming experience currently available and each negative is more about expectation based on current FPS titles than there being anything wrong with the game. On the plus side you'll be surprised what kind of lower specified PC DOOM^3 can run on. It has more than enough options that can be turned off.

The question of wether or not id Software can make a single player game has been clearly answered. This game will amaze and delight, hurt and excite you – it's the ultimate in gaming and has once again set the bar in terms of defining a genre and pushing technology to the limits. It's a badass game and FPS veterans might want to play it on the hardest setting for a real challenge that should last beyond 30 hours. **N**

This isn't a game – it's an experience every gamer should engage in!

94

They look a little like dogs from the front but trying to rub a Pinky Demon behind the ears will result in a few stitches

Proof that we finished the game

Second opinion: At one point in the game I stopped and scrutinized a room. It was, basically, a computer room that consisted of multiple pillars stacked in order. Later I eyed a hallway that claustrophobically crawls up the innards of a section through stairs. And as I clumsily stumbled down a dark passage, focusing on the flickering light up ahead, a hidden room pops open and out runs an imp with my blood in its eyes.
Everywhere you can see the hallmarks of an id-developed game. Even the health packs have that familiar Quake 2 sound and when you blow up a lesser monster, the explosion of guts is a perfect rendition of the original Doom giblet animations. This game is partly so awesome because it feels like the original Doom and everything that haunted you back then (and has since lost its impact as endless hours of playing the game tends to do) is back with new teeth and a much nastier demeanour – especially when you realize that you're back in those first days of Doom when you inched into a dark room, hearing the snorts and growls of Hell's citizens. At least this time they gave you a flashlight. If you're a Doom fan or love your single-player FPS titles, you can't miss this game. It is everything I loved about the original Doom and then some. Can you really get higher praise than that?
92% James Francis

A Cacodemon gets pissed

AOpen Games reviewed on Rectron machines

Mashed

PC Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 299.99 · **Developer:** Supersonic · **Publisher:** Empire
Supplier: WWE [011] 462 0150 · **Genre:** Racing Battler · **Reviewer:** Miktar Dracon
Minimum Specifications: Pentium 3 1.0GHz · 256MB RAM · 4 x CD ROM · 32MB Video Card · 600MB HDD

In the heyday of gaming there was a game that exemplified four people attempting to use one keyboard for a game, at the same time. The Micromachines games of the past introduced a fun, quirky and exhilarating game dynamic to the top-down racing genre, something that Mashed has obviously drawn heavy inspiration from. Mashed could be described as a 'top down racing battle game', but since the camera rarely stays birds-eye, it wouldn't be an entirely true statement. There are a few different styles of racing aside from the standard 'get to the finishing line first', the main one being a battle to be first off the screen. Essentially, if the gap between you and your opponent is big enough, your opponent loses a point and you gain one. The first one to a certain amount of points wins. Add weapons into the mix, such as side-mounted shotguns and grenade launchers and you have a volatile blend of frantic fun. Such fun is best served in a group of 4. Unfortunately, Mashed only allows you to play multiplayer on one keyboard. No network options at all. The single player endeavour has you racing along a variety of tracks, finishing them unlocks them for use in multiplayer (the multiplayer mode needs to be unlocked initially too). Often the combination of aggressive and insipid AI, the horrible camera that insists on showing you as little of the road ahead as possible and the constant annoying stream of insults from your opponents is enough to drive even the most hardened gamer over the bend. Add to that a ludicrously short lifespan (less than a day) to finish the single-player, bland graphics and a general lack of polish and you might wonder what all the fuss is about. A few multiplayer bouts with some friends however, should remind you where the fun of the game is to be had.

A retro-themed title with a lot of fun to be had but severely lacking in quality

65

Some races appear to be modelled on afternoon traffic on the N1

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AOpen Games reviewed on Rectron machines

Ground Control II: Operation Exodus

PC Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 299.00 · **Developer:** Massive Entertainment · **Publisher:** Sierra
Supplier: Nu Metro [011] 340 9345 · **Genre:** Real Time Strategy · **Reviewer:** Alex Jelagin
Minimum Specifications: Pentium 800MHz · 256MB RAM · 24 x CD ROM · 32MB Video Card · 1.5GB HDD

It's been four years since Massive Entertainment released the revolutionary tactical game Ground Control, and for some time now we've been hearing about plans for the sequel. It has finally arrived, and the inevitable question is: "does it break new ground the way its predecessor did?" Just as inevitably, the answer is a resounding "no". Simply put, it would be impossible for a sequel to serve up as much innovation as the original title did, particularly one as ahead of its time as Ground Control was in its day. Nevertheless, Massive Entertainment has once again produced a very impressive offering. Instead of major innovation and originality, the developers have improved and refined their previous winning formula, which could be considered a prototype for Ground Control II: Operation Exodus.

Players of the original Ground Control will be delighted by its descendant's control configurability, which allows players to choose between substantially differing control schemes, and to tweak them to their liking. Additionally, the game boasts a wide range of graphical settings, even allowing the player to select levels of anti-aliasing and anisotropic filtering. I think we'll be seeing much more of this sort of functionality in upcoming games. One interesting change to the interface is the fact that no longer are players restricted to issuing orders to entire squads of units, but rather can directly control each individual unit. This stems from the manner in which an army is grown - acquisition points are gradually accrued over time, with the income rate depending on the number of units being fielded (upkeep). Reinforcements can then be purchased to be delivered by dropship. In order to field an effective army, it is important to keep unit types mixed, just as in any good war-game. Therefore it takes some time before any sizeable homogeneous squads actually form. Also, some units are loners, for example the Raptor sniper.

Graphically, the game very much resembles its ancestor. Bear this in mind as you peruse the screenshots, as these barely do the game justice by dint of their lack of motion. To put it simply, just as Ground Control blew us away with its advanced graphics, so has Operation Exodus taken my breath away. The terrains are detailed, and the skies are breathtakingly beautiful. The modelling detail is somewhat wasted most of the time, as given the fact that unit-to-building scales are fairly realistic, one generally spends most of the time zoomed fairly far out, in order to see enough of the battlefield. The game's sound effects are perfectly acceptable, and the soundtrack isn't too irritating, as is so often the case. The voiceovers I found, initially, to be a bit annoying, but once I heard enough different characters speaking, I actually started liking the varied accents. It must be said that the characters are somewhat one-dimensional, but at least they've been included. Although fairly basic and linear, the game at least makes an effort at a story-line, with characters exhibiting rudimentary emotions and motivations; all too often I've found that military-themed games lack a character-based story, providing nothing more than a dry campaign progression. This game's story offers some emotional byplay, betrayal and a twist or two.

Operation Exodus takes place over 300 years after events in Ground Control, as reflected in the brief historical background section of the manual. (An amusing, in a gallows-humour sort of way, entry in this section mentions "humanity is almost wiped out in the Sixteen Minutes War".) Players assume the role of Captain Jacob Angelus in the NSA campaign, the NSA being a distant descendant of the Crayven Corporation of Ground Control. The opposing side is a biotechnological race known as the Virons, and also features a single-player campaign. Either side can be played in multiplayer. All NSA (stands for Northern Star Alliance) units have two operating modes, and many become immobile in their secondary mode. Secondary modes allow the deployment of special weapons or changing stance for effec-

All units and buildings cast complex shadows, vehicles leave tracks

tiveness against an alternative opponent type (for example, the Liberator terradyne's secondary mode switches to a machinegun that is effective against infantry.) The Virons feature a supposedly "innovative" play dynamic - pairs of like units can be melded to form a different unit. Those of you familiar with StarCraft will realise that this is hardly original. Virons have fewer basic units, so melding units provides Virons with additional units and additional abilities, and melded units can be unmelded, yielding the original contributors.

Controlling the combat action is fairly intuitive, once you configure the interface to your liking. The free-roaming camera is a pleasure. Ground Control II's play dynamic places a heavy emphasis on the subject of the game's title - controlling territory. In both single-player and multiplayer, there are two types of tactically important locations - victory locations and landing zones. Landing zones are places that dropships can deliver reinforcements to, and thus it is vital to always control at least one such area. Victory locations are areas of abstract significance (i.e. they represent important choke-points or the like); to win, one usually needs to capture a certain fraction of all victory locations. Both of these significant location types usually end up being hotly contested, and the use of sound tactics is vital in order to secure and hold these areas with the limited forces one generally has at disposal. In short, as tactical simulations go, this game does very well indeed, and comes highly recommended to war-gamers and strategy fans.

Second Opinion

With it's deviance from the stock-standard Real Time Strategy base-building fare, Ground Control 2 manages to rekindle the true strategy that's been missing from recent offerings. Everything is about being at the right place at the right time, using the right units and making sure you've got the right units inbound. Every battle is a visually memorable affair, every unit detailed far beyond what the genre has seen before. It may not break new ground already paved by its predecessor, but it raises the visual bar up a few notches out of reach of the competitors.

Miktar 83%

A well-presented, visually breathtaking and very challenging war-game. Try it!

73

Bridges can be death-traps - cross them quickly!

"Hey, Phil, is our base the green spot or the red spot... I can't remember..."

the drop on things

Dropships are a crucial element in Ground Control II. All forces are delivered to the battlefield by these gargantuan aircraft. It follows that looking after them, and the landing zones that they deploy to, is essential. Dropships were also a feature of the original Ground Control, but whereas in that game their sole function was to deliver and retrieve troops, in Operation Exodus they have become active players. They can be upgraded in terms of armour, engines (speed), fuel capacity, weaponry, sensors and cargo capacity. Each of these characteristics can be upgraded several times, and it's up to the player to determine how important it is to spend resources on these upgrades instead of on additional troops. Once a dropship delivers its load, it can be made to hang around in the area, and can even be ordered to fly out to attack targets. The amount of time it can linger on the battlefield depends on its fuel capacity and, indirectly, on its engines, which influence its flying speed. Needless to say, killing an enemy dropship can be highly advantageous, cutting off an enemy's reinforcements until it is replaced.

AOpen Games reviewed on Rectron machines

Beyond Divinity

PC Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 299.00 · **Developer:** Larian Studios · **Publisher:** Digital Jesters
Supplier: WWE [011] 462 0150 **Genre:** Adventure · **Reviewer:** Walt Pretorius
Minimum Specifications: Pentium 3 800MHz · 256MB RAM · 4 x CD ROM · 64MB Video Card · 2GB HDD

It's not surprising that Divine Divinity spawned a second episode - it was particularly well received overseas, and so the developers obviously took a leaf from the books of many others and made a sequel.

On the upside, the sequel certainly is better than the first game, but it still falls short of being a classic.

The game allows the player to create a character from one of three classes, which is paired with an evil death night; the two have been spiritually bound together by a malevolent demon. If one dies, so does the other. The main body of the game involves escaping from said demon's dungeon. The player also gets to visit "battlegrounds" - unique worlds in an alternate reality where the player can trade and gain extra experience by completing quests outside of the demon's dungeon. Also, the player can find summoning dolls that allow extra characters to be added to the game temporarily.

Beyond Divinity features dialogue scripted by Rhianna Pratchett, daughter of the famous Discworld creator Terry Pratchett. It also has a wide variety of skills and items (many of which are upgradeable) and it allows the player to get involved for a good long time in the game.

The game is not a bad title at all, but those who are impatient with elements that could be considered mediocre may find it a little irritating. It's a strong title, but it certainly does not enter the fight for top adventure title. The long nature of the game means that the player will run into the same kind of monster repeatedly (which can get a little tedious) and unobvious clues or courses of action can get really frustrating.

Graphically the game is nothing truly exciting, but the title looks good enough to not be a problem. The control system is basic enough (although, before patching, there are one or two hiccups) and is easy to use.

On the whole, Beyond Divinity allows the player to enjoy a good story and is definitely playable, although it does have its problems.

Fans of adventure titles that are willing to be a little forgiving will certainly enjoy this game for a good long time. If you are the impatient sort, though, you may want to consider your actual purchase of the game a little more carefully than usual.

Although not the best adventure title ever, forgiving players will certainly enjoy this one

73

A mysterious entrance... probably more skeletons inside! [*Sigh, Ed*]

Oh look, magic skeletons... again...

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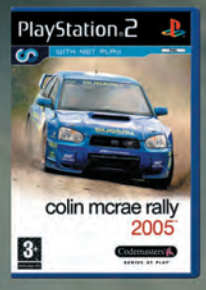

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AOpen Games reviewed on Rectron machines

Spider-Man 2

PC
Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 299.00 · **Developer:** Amaze Studios · **Publisher:** Activision
Supplier: MegaRom [011] 234 2680 · **Genre:** Action · **Reviewer:** Adam Liebman
Minimum Specifications: Pentium 600MHz · 128MB RAM · 4 x CD ROM · 16MB Video Card · 827MB HDD

It's no surprise that as big a box-office release as Spider-Man 2 should be accompanied by a game, neither is it a surprise that said game should appear on multiple platforms, since the big-wigs responsible no doubt want to cash in on the movie's hype in as wide an area as possible. What is surprising, however, is that the console and PC interpretations of Spider-Man 2 are two completely different games, made by two completely different developers, and while the one is a veritable masterpiece of a game, the other is an utter abomination. The biggest draw of the console version of Spider-Man 2 is the degree of freedom it affords players - the whole city of Manhattan is at your disposal, and you are free to run, crawl or swing wherever you choose. In an absolutely ludicrous move, this freedom has been all but completely stripped away in the PC version. For instance, instead of being able to attach a web-line to any structure of sufficient height, the PC game requires you to aim an onscreen crosshair with the mouse at a "swing icon" suspended in mid-air - provided you're close enough, and your aim is accurate enough, the word "SWING!" will appear beneath the target, at which point you can click the left mouse button to take to the air. This principle also applies to using the zip-line to quickly reach distant walls, as well as to attacking enemies - all actions are carried out by means of the left mouse button and on-screen indicators, presumably so as not to over-complicate the play dynamic. The game's haphazardly constructed story line loosely ties in with that of the movie, but mainly sees Spidey battling against legions of non-descript thugs, with a few old favourites such as Rhino, Mysterio and, of course, Doc Ock, thrown in as boss fights. To further insult one's intelligence, however, each boss-fight is preceded by a graphic rendering detailing precisely how the boss in question needs to be defeated. Ultimately, one can't help but feel short-changed by the whole Spider-Man 2 experience on PC, particularly after witnessing the brilliance of the console version. It often feels as if the PC incarnation was designed squarely with a very young (and quite possibly also mentally-deficient) audience in mind, and it never manages to provide much in the way of either excitement or challenge, let alone replay-value. If you still need your fix of web-slinging goodness, rather look at the console version - this one's best left very well alone.

Uninspired and immature Spider-Man title - no fun, and no challenge

56

Spider-Man 2

PlayStation 2 Review

Silver Award

Suggested Retail Price: R 499.00 · **Developer:** Treyarch · **Publisher:** Activision
Supplier: Ster Kinekor [011] 445 -7900 · **Genre:** Action · **Reviewer:** Adam Liebman
Requirements: 1 Player · 195Kb Memory · Analog: sticks only · Vibration compatible

Spider-Man has rather a long history of video-game appearances, most of which haven't, thankfully, been too bad (as is all too often the case with superhero games), though his last appearance, in the game based on the 2002 movie, was widely regarded as his best. This time around, no doubt in an attempt to cash in on the hype surrounding the release of the second movie, Activision and Treyarch have upped the stakes somewhat, and they've done extremely well, too. The game's storyline, which does tie in with the movie but also offers its own unique elements, is set across a number of chapters, but the entire game takes place on the streets of Manhattan. Throughout the game, Spidey has complete freedom of movement throughout the entire city (and it's pretty big, too), which is littered with citizens needing help, would-be robbers and race-style challenges among others. Completing any of these tasks is optional, though if you succeed with any of these "missions" (which range from preventing armoured cars from being robbed and retrieving balloons for children to delivering pizzas and taking photos), you are rewarded with "Hero Points", which can be traded in at one of several shops around town in exchange for upgraded abilities. In addition, each chapter also has a list of primary objectives, which can include obtaining a specific amount of hero points, meeting a certain character at a specific venue or defeating a boss, like Rhino, Shocker or Mysterio.
Completing the primary objectives advances the story to the next chapter, while updating your "to-do" list. The freedom of movement in the city and the non-linear order in which things can be done lets you go at your own pace and keeps the play dynamic fresh and interesting - should you simply wish to climb skyscrapers (since each tall building has a token on top which can be collected for additional bonuses) and not fight thugs, you can do just that; if you'd rather advance the story to the exclusion of the side-quests, that's ok too. Sadly, on account of the magnitude of the environment you find yourself in, it seems that some of the texture quality has suffered, though the graphics are by no means poor. The voice acting, by the cast of the movie, is absolutely superb, perfectly capturing Spider-Man's "unique" sense of humour. Ultimately, Spider-Man 2 on the console is a highly entertaining, and very nicely polished title, sure to please any self-respecting webhead.

Well-rounded and entertaining superhero title - great degree of depth

85

The return of the original swinger

AOpen Games reviewed on Rectron machines

Blitzkrieg: Burning Horizon

PC Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 299.00 · **Developer:** Nival Interactive · **Publisher:** CDV
Supplier: WWE [011] 462 0150 **Genre:** Strategy · **Reviewer:** Walt Pretorius
Minimum Specifications: Pentium 3 450MHz · 64MB RAM · 12 x CD ROM · 16MB Video Card · 1.5GB HDD

The original title in this series, simply called Blitzkrieg, brought a game to the CDV stable that didn't make the same mistakes as the Sudden Strike series; it was a World War II simulator that was eminently playable, and more forgiving than its predecessors. It allowed the player more freedom than before and, although base building wasn't involved, it was one of the better real time strategy games of its time. So, of course, when Blitzkrieg: Burning Horizon showed up at the office, some folks were fairly excited. Well, I was, anyway.

Sadly, though, Burning Horizon doesn't quite live up to the previous title in the series, which seemed to be a far more complete title than this newest offering. It offers only one campaign and, while this campaign may be lengthy, there just isn't enough variety within the game to write home about. Sure, there are a whole bunch of new units that can be used (56 in fact) and there are also a number of "independent" missions too, but, quite frankly, the game leaves something to be desired in my mind.

The title is more of an expansion than a follow up, and many will be disappointed by the lack of content.

That said the content is of the same high quality that the original Blitzkrieg offered. Better than average graphics and a very versatile system of controls allows the player to do virtually anything possible in a squad based war situation. Tanks can be entrenched, buildings can be occupied, roads can be mined, bridges rebuilt - you get the idea. There's something utterly cool about blind firing into an enemy camp right on the other side of the map with long range artillery…

An improved AI makes the game a bit more challenging than before, and the action is fast paced and furious. While the campaign deals with Rommel's campaign during World War II, the game also visits the Pacific theatre in some of the extra missions, adding the Japanese army to the mix as a new nation that can be experienced by the player.

Blitzkrieg: Burning Horizons needs to be considered carefully before leaping in and making a purchase. Quite frankly, if you played the first game and loved it, then you will undoubtedly enjoy this too. However, starting the Blitzkrieg series with this title will be a bit of a downer - rather play Blitzkrieg first.

A great WWII strategy game, if sadly lacking in content

78

Opening up at long range with the big guns [*captions to inspire us all, Ed*]

Law & Order 2: Double or Nothing

PC
Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 229.00 · **Developer:** Legacy Interactive · **Publisher:** Adventure Company
Supplier: WWE [011] 462 1050 · **Genre:** Pont and Click Adventure · **Reviewer:** Walt Pretorius

Minimum Specifications: Pentium 3 500MHz · 96MB RAM · 8 x CD ROM · 16MB Video Card · 650MB HDD

Adventure games of the point and click variety went through something of a scarce phase but they do seem to be resurfacing of late. This game, based on the popular television series, is such a title and, while the prospect of the game may seem a little stilted, it really is something of a gem.

The player needs to be aware, though, that this game certainly isn't everyone's cup of tea. It requires the player to perform a murder investigation (playing as the partner of Lennie Briscoe, played by Jerry Orbach on TV and in the game) collecting evidence and interviewing suspects, before taking the case to court where, as the assistant district attorney, you need to argue the case and get a prosecution.

It sounds straight forward enough, but the game is very complicated, and needs the player to be thorough. Part of the investigation includes getting search warrants and such (which is quite tough to get right) and arguing in court requires the player to be on the ball, or the defence attorney will walk all over them.

Fairly good graphics and voice acting bring life to the game, which is a little static when all is said and done. The story is good and not obvious or predictable (although it does seem to be sometimes) and fans of the series will certainly enjoy this rather complex and entertaining whodunnit.

It's not exactly what one would call a thrill a minute title, but the satisfaction of uncovering clues and fleecing witnesses into making unguarded confessions is very real in this game. Those that enjoy their gaming more cerebral will enjoy getting to grips with this title and its complex, entertaining story. Oh, and the little touches that make the game feel like an actual Law & Order episode are a nice extra.

An engrossing point and click mystery for those who like their gaming thought provoking

79

The victim: cause of death... serious headache

AOpen Games reviewed on Rectron machines

Joint Operations: Typhoon Rising

PC Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 299.00 · **Developer:** Novalogic · **Publisher:** Novalogic
Supplier: MegaRom [011] 234 2680 · **Genre:** First Person Shooter · **Reviewer:** Iwan Pienaar
Minimum Specifications: Pentium 3 1.2GHz · 256MB RAM · 16 x CD ROM · 32MB Video Card · 1.5GB HDD

Electronic Arts' Battlefield 1942 re-awakened gamers to massively online first-person shooter games a few years ago. With Joint Operations: Typhoon Rising, Novalogic is cashing in on this resurgence. This is not a bad thing as the developer has put together a title that is refreshingly different to previous offerings.

Granted, playing historical battles like World War II and Vietnam are fun, gamers have clamoured for more modern theatres of operations. Set in present-day Indonesia, Typhoon Rising allows you to play on either the side of the Western special operations forces or as one of the rebels who are fighting for their independence.

Players can elect to be one of five character classes - Rifleman, Gunner, Engineer, Medic and Sniper. Each class receives specialised weapons in addition to the common weapons available to other classes. These classes are fairly self-explanatory and players will know that a combination of different character types will be the best way to go about multiplayer mayhem.

Typhoon Rising does contain a single-player mode, but this merely provides gamers with training missions on how to use different weapons and vehicles. Weapons are varied and cater for different styles. While by no means an amazing experience, these levels are varied enough for players to get a good idea of what multiplayer gaming will offer.

Thankfully, local distributor MegaRom knows the importance of having local servers and is sponsoring the Novaworld server on SAIX. The latest patch is 1.2.0.10 and is ideal for lower-end PCs. Just a pity that the patch weighs in at a hefty 27MB.

This title really comes into its own as an online experience. While lag will be a problem for us poor dial-up users, it does perform adequately without driving anyone up the wall. The modes of play are Cooperative Games, Advance and Secure, Team Death-match and Team King of the Hill.

If you enjoyed Battlefield 1942, then Typhoon Rising is the game for you

80

Driving force

As in Battlefield, Typhoon Rising features a range of vehicles to control, hitch a ride in or ride shotgun with. Each vehicle can be driven at three different speeds and is focused on arcade fun more than precision realism. Helicopters are notoriously difficult to master, so expect your fair share of crashes. Just remember, that you lose points if your passengers are killed before they get out. While not the most powerful vehicle, the armoured attack vehicle does provide sufficient weaponry and armour for quick incursions. Just a pity about those damn windows!

Life rule #266254: Don't fire a gun inside a vehicle that has bullet-proof windows...

Hector was always a little trigger-happy

"If it moves, it's a VC... if it stands still - it's a well disciplined VC!"

AOpen Games reviewed on Rectron machines

Robin Hood - Defender of the Crown

PC Review

Suggested Retail Price: TBA · **Developer:** Cinemaware · **Publisher:** ZOO Digital Publishing
Supplier: WWE [011] 462 0150 · **Genre:** Adventure · **Reviewer:** Alex Jelagin
Minimum Specifications: Pentium 500MHz · 128MB RAM · 4 x CD ROM · 16MB Video Card · 0.5GB HDD

I remember playing, back in 1988 or thereabouts, Defender of the Crown on the Commodore 64. So upon getting Robin Hood - Defender of the Crown from Cinemaware, I wondered whether it would be "the same game". I was disappointed to find out that it is, in fact, the same game! Granted, the graphics and sound are of present-day calibre, but the play dynamic has barely progressed at all.

Here's a brief description of the original title. It was an adventure strategy game comprised of several different modes of play. An overview map allowed the player to review income, based on territory controlled. From this view, it was possible to attack armies and besiege castles, or launch raids on enemy holdings. Combat screens were rudimentary, with battles being based on the sizes of the armies involved.

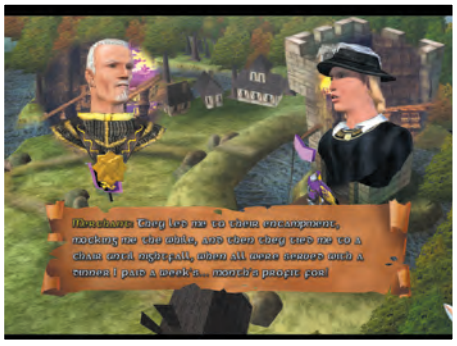
To get an idea of this new version, re-read the above paragraph! The control interface is sluggish, and does not even allow the inversion of the Y-axis.

On the plus side, the graphics and sound are of very high quality. Character animations are very good, and there is rudimentary lip-syncing and facial expressions. Backdrops are detailed and the game displays some appealing lighting effects. Voice-overs are crisp, and the dialogues contain a wry humour.

While this game may appeal to younger first-time gamers, everyone else should steer clear

34

"Die, River-dancer!"



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DJ: Decks & FX

Guest Review by 5FM DJ Kevin Fine

PlayStation 2 Review

Silver Award

Suggested Retail Price: TBA · **Developer:** Relentless · **Publisher:** SCEE
Supplier: Ster Kinekor [011] 445 7900 · **Genre:** Music mixer · **Reviewer:** Kevin Fine & NAG
Requirements: 1 Player · Analog compatible · Vibration compatible

Music mixers, if anything, are a waste of time. Some are meagre samplers, allowing you to do some basic mixing while others are far too complicated. So we're pretty brazen about these applications when they come crashing through our door slot - that's why it sounded like a great idea to get someone, anyone, else to do the review of DJ: Decks & FX, a new title from Relentless.

Luckily for us 5FM's Kevin Fine not only knows dance music, he also happened to be at DJ: Decks & FX's launch, held not too long ago at Ibitha, that clubber's paradise off the Spanish coast.

"What they did at the launch - which was fantastic - was in the middle of the sets; they had a couple of DJs there, some big names and more unfamiliar guys. In the middle of the night they just switched over to the PlayStation and the guys DJ'd off that; they showed everything they did on a big screen. So you could actually see him mixing, moving the knobs, changing the record."

Bias? Maybe - these launch events have a lot of charm. But we've also spent time in front of Decks & FX and it really is an impressive-looking title, sporting sleek 3D graphics of a full mixing set. You elegantly switch between the various elements of the boards, doing your thing, all in the comfort of a single controller.

"Anybody who has played a PlayStation game will get into it easily. I played it once, and went back to the console, just messing around. One of the developers came along and played it for a while, so after watching him, I said 'Alright, guide me through it'. By the third time I played it I was solid! I was doing loops, I was doing samples, mixing - you name it. I was making sounds that would take anyone on vinyl months to make."

Sounds elaborate, doesn't it? That's the amazing thing about this title - the controls are very fluid, so you don't spend a lot of time getting used to things. The amount of steps between various sections of the mixing station is a matter of zooming in and messing about with the individual settings. And it's that easy. Drop on two records and then start messing with the timing, speed, effects, loops and so on.

"I think for anybody who'd like to be a DJ, you have exactly what you want in front of you in terms of a mixing desk. And the way they've made it so easy for you to interact with each element of the setup, whether it's the record deck, the effects or a loop, is really, really well done. It's almost like they've just taken a Technics table and put it there for you. You've got your start button, you can re-queue, and you've got your pitching levels, looping… You can also record your sessions and play it back."

In fact, we figure that the game should allow for at least six hours worth of recording, since it doesn't record the actual sound but instead what you are doing while mixing. And to add to the authentic feel of the simulator, you can plug in a set of USB headphones and have the one audio channel play on that. The deck comes with a range of effects to change the sound of the audio, as well as the usual knobs to tweak the various frequencies of the song. For instance, turning the beats per minute right up

Kevin Fine - We never gave him this copy of NAG, he had it all along. Honest!

(capped at 180) and then isolating the bass track is very simple. You can also record short pieces of music, allowing for background loops to be mixed back into a song.

"I had two tracks playing, took a loop from the one track, killed it, put on another record, let the loop run and then mixed percussion into that. Then I put on another record, left the percussion running, took the loop out, played the new track and then ran an acapella version over the percussion. I managed to do this within two times of playing the game - it was mind blowing!"

It really is that easy. In fact, it's rather boggling how well this has been done. The game features forty tracks to play with, as well as a selection of acapella samples and a whole library of effects. The track library keeps tabs on what you have already played in a session, plus if you really don't feel like being involved, you can always play a recoded mix or leave it to the game AI, which has proven a very competent DJ itself.

Throw in multi-player and you have a well-rounded mixing game that anyone can pick up, play and really enjoy. In fact, the only real shortcomings were the inability to scratch and you can't control two channels at once (crash mixing isn't an option). Also, there isn't any kind of goal-based system, such as a career mode, so you'll only be playing this if you want to mix a few songs. That and we don't like house music that much. Good thing Kevin does.

"I don't think it's going to appeal to a DJ, but somebody who doesn't want to spend the money to get into it - two good turntables, an amp, a mixer, effects board... it's going to cost you a lot of money, and that doesn't include your vinyl. So for somebody who is interested in music and wants to act like a DJ, this is perfect."

Limitless and fun for all aspiring DJs **85**

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Syphon Filter: The Omega Strain

PlayStation 2
Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 499 · **Developer:** SCEI · **Publisher:** SCEE · **Supplier:** Ster Kinekor [011] 445 7900
Genre: Action · **Reviewer:** Adam Liebman

Requirements 1 Player · 63KB memory · Analog: sticks only · Vibration compatible

Syphon Filter has, up until now, been one of the few successful PSOne franchises lacking a next-generation console iteration, though Sony Computer Entertainment have at last risen to the task of rectifying that. In a departure from tradition, Gabe Logan, the hero of the first three titles, has been relegated to a supporting role in the game's story line, with the player being able to create and customise an individual character instead. The game spans 17 missions. Although the primary objectives need to be completed in order to progress to further levels, the secondary objectives serve to unlock bonuses such as extra weapons or customisation options for characters. Unfortunately, much of the game seems to have been designed with online play in mind, and thus certain secondary objectives are effectively unattainable, since they apparently cannot be achieved without co-operative play. Sadly, the emphasis placed on online competition also detracts from the longevity of the game - though the single-player mode is fairly extensive, it can become frustrating and even repetitive at times, and one feels that the implementation of online play resulted in the solo campaign being slightly less polished than it could have been. Nonetheless, the play dynamic is solid, and encompasses the typical aspects of a third-person shooter. The AI manages, for the most part, to display an almost decent amount of intellectual prowess. Unfortunately, though, the control set-up is often overly complex, and the game's style movement feels clunky at first, but with time, these flaws become less noticeable. Visually, the environments, which range from city settings to the jungle, are reasonably well done, though they are by no means spectacular. The characters, though, display a pleasing scope of variation and detail, despite that the animation is perhaps a little less fluid than it ought to be. In terms of sound, the voice-acting is typical fare for the genre - it's not a dramatic masterpiece, but it gets the job done well enough, without becoming unpleasant. The sound effects are convincing, though, and the background music fits the action rather well. Ultimately, Syphon Filter: The Omega Strain manages to provide an entertaining and solid single-player experience, despite its flaws, but given its predisposition to online play, it's likely to leave many gamers rather unsatisfied - until online play becomes viable, one could probably find a better title in this genre.

Solid though imperfect action game, suffers from lack of online availability here

71

Milo found the security panel when all he was looking for was the men's room...

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AOpen Games reviewed on Rectron machines

Pro Rugby Manager

PC Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 299.00 · **Developer:** Cyanide Studio · **Publisher:** Digital Jesters
Supplier: WWE [011] 462 0150 · **Genre:** Sports Management · **Reviewer:** Iwan Pienaar
Minimum Specifications: Pentium 3 500MHz · 128MB RAM · 12 x CD ROM · 16MB Video Card · 1.1GB HDD

Just when gamers have recovered from the terrible Electronic Arts Rugby 2004 offering, Digital Jesters releases Pro Rugby Manager. Billed by many as the rugby equivalent of Championship Football Manager, this title is as hopeless as the Springboks' trip to last year's World Cup. Granted, it might be unreasonable for me as a rugby fan to expect the developer, Cyanide Studio to at least get the names of the players and stadiums right. And it is just plain silly to want a less clunky menu system. In fact, going through the menus and different match options reminded me of the very clumsy Motorola mobile phone menus of yore. On the positive side, Pro Rugby Manager does get the technicalities of rugby right. Being a management and play hybrid, this title does capture the essence of the sport. It is just such a pity that the basics have been overlooked and gamers are treated to yet another shoddy rugby game. Before you start accusing me of being biased against management games, I gave Championship Football Manager an 88 percent mark. As a management title, Pro Rugby Manager offers players everything they might require. A plethora of season options are at your command. The negatives quickly overpower the positive aspects of the title. No, Pro Rugby Manager is best left where it belongs - on store shelves collecting dust.

Unless you are a masochist at heart, do not even touch Pro Rugby Manager

46

Who?

Gun Metal

PC Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 139.00 · **Developer:** Yeti Studios · **Publisher:** Zoo Digital Publishing
Supplier: WWE [011] 462 0150 · **Genre:** Action · **Reviewer:** Walt Pretorius
Minimum Specifications: Pentium 3 900MHz · 256MB RAM · 8 x CD ROM · 32MB Video Card · 740MB HDD

It may, at the offset, look like nothing more than a super violent version of Transformers but, when you really get into the meat of it, Gun Metal is a fun and entertaining title. It lacks any kind of deeper meaning and substance, but doesn't really need it. It's all about blowing things up.

The player takes control of a large robot that, at the press of a button, converts into a powerful fighter jet. Each mode has its strengths and weaknesses, of course, and the game will require the player to make the right choice at the right time.

While the title's controls are simple enough, the game dynamics get very difficult very quickly. Being in control of a super weapon, the player is expected to beat off huge amounts of enemies very early on in the title.

Gun Metal is very pretty to look at, with great modelling and effects adding to the overall eye candy of the game. The sound, too, is of top quality, making the experience a great treat to the senses.

Do not expect depth or meaning from this title. It comes down to a simple prospect: if it moves, kill it. While this doesn't make it a good game, its fun to get down to a little mindless violence every now and then, isn't it?

It's mindless violence, but damn, is it pretty!

74

Death from above [*very inventive, Ed*]

Boktai: The Sun Is In Your Hands

GBA
Review

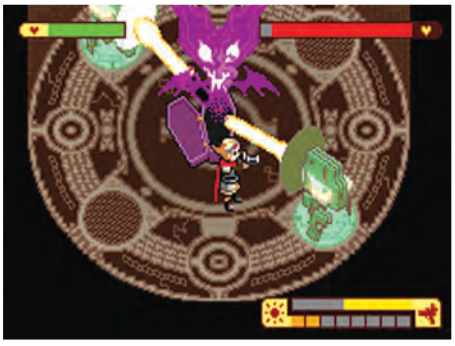
Suggested Retail Price: R 369 · **Developer:** Konami · **Publisher:** Konami
Supplier: Futronic [011] 315 0079 · **Genre:** Adventure · **Reviewer:** Miktar Dracon
Requirements: 1 Player

Let's take one Hideo Kojima, well-known gaming legend responsible for the stealthy Metal Gear Solid series. Add to that, a GameBoy Advance cartridge that can detect levels of sunlight. Mix them for a while, and then throw in the natural lateral thinking leading towards vampires. The end result of this gaming culinary experiment, is a rather unique moment in gaming where not only do you interact with the game, the game tells you what to do in real life. Essentially, Boktai is a slick, crisp looking adventure title where you sneak around the castles, crypts and forests belonging to Vampires that you, Solar Boy Django, have to destroy. Your 'solar gun' is useful for destroying most enemies; you recharge your gun by standing in the sunlight (the real sunlight). If you're inside a castle or dungeon, you have to find a part of the level where the 'sun' can shine through the ceiling. Upgrades to your gun allow you to achieve certain goals while the ultimate destruction of a Vampire boss involves trekking into his castle, getting his casket and dragging it back out the way you came into a Circle of Power. Final destruction can only be achieved in direct sunlight, which can pose a problem if you're a night-owl. Small touches really make Boktai shine, but you need sunlight to truly appreciate it.

Innovative fun in the sun but daylight restrictions may annoy some

72

"Excuse me, I am looking for Count Big-Evil-Nasty-Vampire-Dude... have you seen him?"



Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six 3

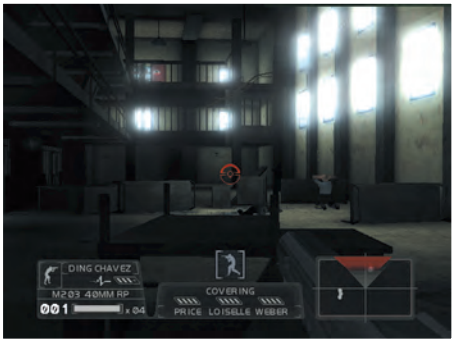
GameCube
Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 499 · **Developer:** Red Storm · **Publisher:** UbiSoft
Supplier: Futronic [011] 315 0079 · **Genre:** First Person Shooter · **Reviewer:** Miktar Dracon
Minimum Specifications: 1 - 2 Players · 20 Memory blocks

It's only after an excessively long load-time to get to the menu, then an equally long-load time to get into the game, that initial concerns about this final port of Rainbow Six are confirmed. It's not a very good port at all. While the game at the core of it all is still classic Rainbow Six with all the trimmings fans have come to love, it's incarnation on the GameCube may leave fans with a bad taste in their mouths. The story is presented with rather ugly cinematic sequences while picking your initial team and load-out thankfully remains painless. Each of the 25 missions into typical dangerous foreign scenarios is playable cooperatively with a friend, but only missions you've unlocked in single player are available to play in the cooperative game mode. While the single player mode has reasonably high-quality graphics, the GameCube levels are plagued with slowdowns and a noticeable fluctuating frame-rate. Some levels seem almost unplayable. It gets worse in the split-screen multiplayer mode. Despite it's shortcomings in the areas of graphics, load-times and overall quality, Rainbow Six retains the realistic tactical game dynamics that made the series so popular. All the trademarked Tom Clancy realism is there, just in a rather unappealing package.

An example of a good game suffering due to a bad port

62



X-Files: Resist or Serve

PlayStation 2
Review

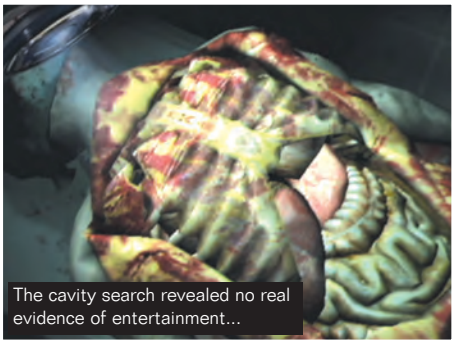
Suggested Retail Price: R 499.00 · **Developer:** Black Ops · **Publisher:** Sierra
Supplier: Nu Metro [011] 340 9345 · **Genre:** Adventure · **Reviewer:** Walt Pretorius
Requirements: 1 Player · 165KB Memory · Analog compatible · Vibration compatible

This new X-Files game does most of what the last one did - it's written by the same script writer, it feels a lot like an X-Files episode, and it takes the player into that uniquely strange world that belongs to the TV series. The player takes control of either Scully or Mulder in this rather long and interesting story, and the voices are supplied by the original actors, which is a great bonus. It has an interesting story and is relatively challenging to play (although some clues are really tough to find.)

The game's biggest problem lies in two technical areas that are sort of related. The first is the awesome amount of clipping that the game contains. Shining a flash light at a cash register, for example, results in the cone of light shining right through the object. This goes a long way to ruin the suspension of disbelief within the title. The next big issue is a really irritating fixed camera. As you progress through the levels, the camera changes position along the way. All good and well, until you get to a spot where you are low on ammo, running away from zombies and the camera suddenly switches, leaving you running into the waiting arms of your pursuers.

It's really just a version of Resident Evil, when all is said and done...

A potentially great game with a few ruinous problems **71**



The cavity search revealed no real evidence of entertainment...

Red Dead Revolver

PlayStation 2
Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 499.00 · **Developer:** Rockstar Games · **Publisher:** Take Two
Supplier: Ster Kinekor [011] 445 7900 · **Genre:** Action · **Reviewer:** Walt Pretorius
Requirements: 1- 2 Players · Analog compatible · Vibration compatible

Western titles always get a mixed reaction, and this one will be no different. Quite honestly, I loved it. It has a "spaghetti western" appeal to it that will strike a cord with fans.

The player controls Red, a gun slinging bounty hunter out to avenge the death of his parents. The game is full of third person action, similar to titles like GTA3. Sadly, control limitations on the PS2 make aiming in the game quite difficult (which leads to huge amounts of frustration) but the cheesy story and great atmosphere of the game make it well worth the effort. A rather unique "quick draw" system enhances the atmosphere even more. In fact, the game is put together in such a slick fashion that it's hard for western fans not to love it. Film grain and scratches abound, as well as the music and camera angles (including the odd bad focus) add to the homage that the game pays.

Sadly, the control system leaves a bit to be desired - that aiming problem really is an issue, and the rest of the controls can be difficult, initially at least. But the overall feel and "over-the-top" nature of both the story and the characters is hard to resist, despite any frustration that may be encountered. Perhaps you should try it before you buy it, but this one is solidly on my personal wish list.

A great spaghetti western, despite a few control issues **80**

A game so cool it defies captioning

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Van Helsing

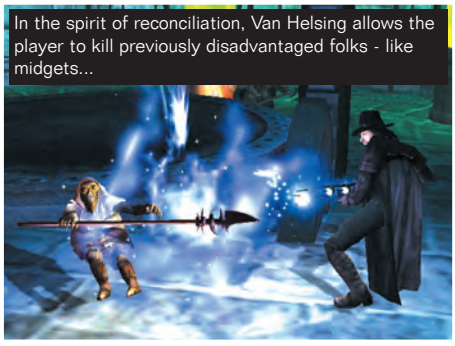
PlayStation 2
Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 499 · **Developer:** Saffire · **Publisher:** Vivendi Universal
Supplier: Nu Metro [011] 340 9345 · **Genre:** Adventure · **Reviewer:** Adam Liebman
Requirements: 1 Player · 157Kb memory · Analog: all buttons · Vibration compatible

Based on the recent movie of the same name, Van Helsing sees you filling the shoes of the legendary vampire hunter on his quest to rid the worlds of assorted forms of supernatural evil. In addition to the legions of gargoyles, trolls and vampire bats, you'll also square off against the likes of Mr Hyde, the Wolf Man, the Frankenstein Monster and Count Dracula himself. To aid you in your quest are a number of weapons, both projectile and melee, which are upgradeable through the course of the game. Fortunately, unlike many movie-based games, Van Helsing is an enjoyable and well-made title. The play dynamic is quite simple, revolving primarily around blasting anything that moves, and solving relatively straightforward switch-pulling puzzles, but the game still manages to be quite entertaining. The controls are intuitive and responsive, though the game suffers from the lack of a user-controllable camera, which leads to a few headaches whilst playing. Nicely detailed graphics, with characters resembling their silver-screen counterparts, and reasonable sound (including voice-acting by Hugh Jackman), round out the package. Van Helsing is certainly not the best game in its genre, and it is somewhat short-lived, but it does manage to be an enjoyable and entertaining title, and is one of the better movie-based games around.

Solid adventure title - won't win any awards, but could've been a whole lot worse

69



In the spirit of reconciliation, Van Helsing allows the player to kill previously disadvantaged folks - like midgets...

Athens 2004

PlayStation 2
Review

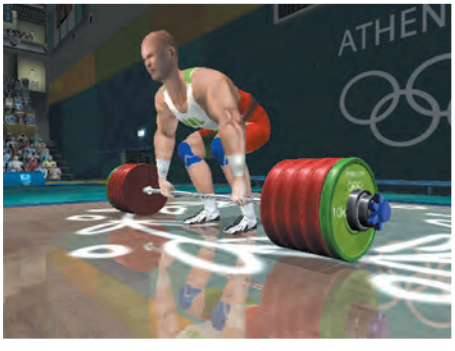
Suggested Retail Price: R 499 · **Developer:** Eurocom Entertainment · **Publisher:** SCEE
Supplier: Ster Kinekor [011] 445 7900 · **Genre:** Sports · **Reviewer:** Adam Liebman
Minimum Specifications: 1-4 Players · 43KB memory · Analog: Sticks only · Vibration compatible

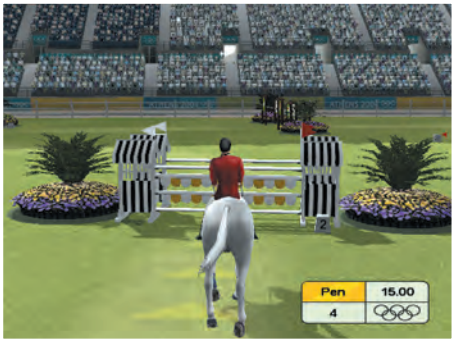
As the majority of games have become increasingly complicated in recent years, many of those games that once fell into the "extraordinarily-simple-but-just-as-enjoyable" category have now fallen by the wayside, and any game that resurrects the long forgotten mechanics that were hallmarks of those titles is often greeted with nostalgic glee. One style of game probably regarded by many as classic is the button-mashing athletics title, that manages somehow to reduce even the more complicated events to sequences of rapid button taps, and Athens 2004 seeks to revive this "genre". Having never been a big fan of these titles, Athens 2004 did initially disappoint me, though I was pleasantly surprised to see that certain events, such as skeet shooting and archery, do make use of slightly more intellectually taxing concepts than simple button bashing. Nonetheless, I soon remembered just what exactly it was that made these sort of games truly enjoyable - multiplayer. Although the game dynamic remains the same, competition against real people manages to be less frustrating than sustaining irreversible finger joint damage in the solo mode. Athens 2004 is the ideal party game candidate. If you're looking for something with some single-player value, though, you're likely to quickly tire of Athens 2004.

Fun in groups, but dismal alone - hardly an "Olympic" calibre game

56

The pool mere seconds after Stan noticed a suspicious floating object...





Yu-Gi-Oh! World Championship Tournament 2004

GBA Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 369 · **Developer:** Konami · **Publisher:** Konami
Supplier: Futronic [011] 315 0079 · **Genre:** CCG · **Reviewer:** Miktar Dracon
Requirements: 1 - 2 Players

It's the most accurate recreation of the Yu-Gi-Oh! trading card game yet. There are over 100 all-new cards, over 1,000 cards in total. There are four new CPU-controlled opponents. If you have no idea what I'm talking about, then you've missed the collectable trading card craze. Yu-Gi-Oh! involves using trap and monster (among other things) cards to decrease the amount of health your opponent has, who in turn attempts to do the same to you. First one to zero life looses. This edition of the game gives you 25 opponents to battle, each with different playing styles. Each opponent does indeed present a different challenge, keeping you on your toes and forcing you to rebuild your deck with new cards won from battles. If you're looking to play the card game without spending exuberant amounts of money buying boosters (collections of random cards) then this is a much cheaper and quicker alternative. The physical rules of the card game can be quite confusing but playing the game makes it much easier to understand what's going on. It may not be a graphically amazing game, but everything is functional and crisp. Fans of the series have probably already bought this title, so for the rest of us it presents the chance to get into the craze. If we want to, that is.

It's yet another Yu-Gi-Oh! game with marginal improvements over its predecessors

65

AN ALIEN RACE IS INVADING EARTH AND IT'S UP TO YOU TO SAVE HUMANITY!

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warblade

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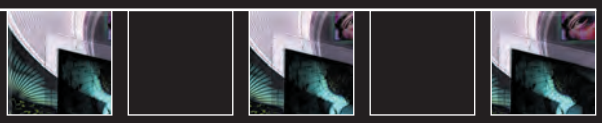
PC CD

Tech Musings: In your livingroom



words james francis

Thomas Jefferson said that every generation needs a revolution, but at the rate we're going, we seem to be making up for all those Neanderthals who went for lifetimes without any shift in the status quo, bar a few eventful lion attacks. And more than ever you often don't know about it until you are in the thick of things - the latest thing that you'll be hearing a lot of in the future is the home media centre.

It's not a new concept - the living room becoming more and more of a digital haven has been an idea that companies like Microsoft and Sony have had on their agendas for a long time. But the first real move towards bringing the digital and lounge together are wireless media hubs. These network-able units have slowly been surfacing all around the office - a sleek network hub that plugs into your TV and establishes a wireless network to your PC - the end result is that you can browse your PC music and movie collection and play them over your TV and home entertainment system.

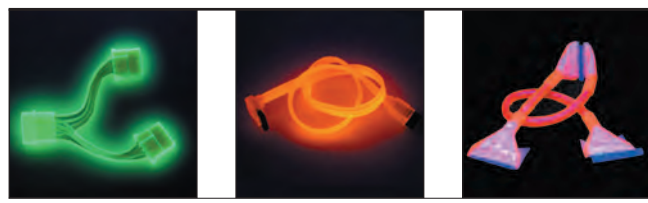
I also recently discovered a new online radio service called Late.fm. It uses the technology from Audioscrobbler, a plug-in that monitors your play list habits and sends the data to a server, which then configures the radio broadcast to your taste. It's not foolproof, especially with very large collections, but the notion is there: thanks to digital technology, personalization is a lot more practical.

This is all part of a trend that started years ago with the first mainstream CD recorders that allowed someone to write their own compilation without the help of a PC. MP3 and other digital formats are slowly making this approach unpractical (since it's quite expensive), but they are just continuing the flow, much to the frustration of entertainment companies.

This is still one lesson the movie and music industries need to learn - personal content and digital delivery ARE the ways of the future - no legislation can stop that. And the sooner they embrace that the sooner everyone will be able to take this new frontier forward. Personalized digital entertainment? It's already here...

D-Link wireless entertains

The D-Link Wireless Media Player is now available in SA at an estimated retail price of around R2200.00. This unit effectively connects your computer to your living room entertainment system so you can view photos, listen to MP3's and watch movies on your TV that are stored on your PC, without having to worry about the messy wires lying around. The unit connects either via 802.11g wireless or Ethernet cabling and will enable you to stream digital content from the internet directly to your TV, all from the comfort of your favourite couch using a remote control device.
www.d-link.com



Case modding gear

Naked IT is the official supplier of all Akasa case modding products in South Africa, which come in an assortment of Day-Glo colours. Their range includes 70mm UV power splitter cables (R29.00), round IDE ATA-133 cables (R79.00), round 45cm floppy drive cables (R39.00), 45cm Serial ATA cables (R49.00) and 10cm 4 pin power cables (R19.00).
www.nakedit.co.za

New Intel chipset and Xeon CPU

Intel has officially introduced the Xeon 2.8 to 3.6 GHz processors, which features all of the latest CPU technologies. Also new from the company is the E7525 chipset, which apparently performs about 30% faster than previous generations. All the major players in the main board market, as well as several less-known ones, will be releasing Xeon-based solutions in the near future.

Nintendo DS in the news

Nintendo plans to launch its DS handheld unit on 4 November in Japan, and a week later in the States, with Europe having to wait until Q1 2005. The Japanese launch is expected to be accompanied by the release of about half a dozen titles, with a like number more arriving by year's end. With over 100 companies having committed to making games for the DS, Nintendo have stated that 120 games are in development at the moment, with 20 of them being first-party titles. Apparently, Nintendo is hoping to sell around three million units by next March.

In a recent press released they stated, "Nintendo DS, originally chosen as the code name, has been selected as the official product name. The Nintendo DS name evokes the idea of a portable system with dual screens, providing the rationale for the final name." The Nintendo DS has also been slightly re-designed to sport a slimmer and sharper look. Some of the modifications made to the original design are a thinner black base, an angular platinum flip-top cover and a larger face and shoulder buttons. A new addition to the unit is a storage slot for the stylus.

Fashion monitors from Philips
Philips has released the stylish, feature-rich Silver range of flat LCD monitors. The units are available in 15", 17" and 19" variants, and feature the LightFrame technology, which can enhance images and user interface windows automatically or manually, at the user's discretion.

Designer Microsoft optical mouse
Microsoft recently introduced a new optical mouse, designed by Philippe Starcke, an unconventional pop artist, philosopher and designer. The design features elegant integration of various elements within the styling.

New gimmicky PS2
Sony recently released a new gimmick, the Pearl White PlayStation 2. It retails, in Japan, for the same price as the regular unit, and is of basic configuration (no iLink or DVD remote control).

inMotion iPod Portable Speaker System
Altec Lansing has released a portable docking station that accommodates an iPod, providing speakers and the option of recharging while listening. Docking iPods are supported directly, while older units can be hooked up via a cable. Assuming decent batteries are used, the unit can play continuously for up to 24 hours; or can be powered by mains.

PlayStation 3 to be revealed

A recent Sony presentation indicated that the PlayStation 3 will be unveiled before the end of this year, with the software development kits becoming available to developers early next year. The system is also expected to be showcased at next year's E3, although games most likely will not be ready before much later in the year, given the fact that developers will be adapting to a completely new architecture. Presently, it looks likely that the system will reach consumers either late next year or in early 2006.

Sony also recently confirmed that the PS3 will incorporate the Blu-Ray disc format. The console will come with a Blu-Ray disc drive which will enable it to play back high definition movies on a disc which can hold up to five times more data than a current DVD disc.

Virgin Electronics Wearable MP3 Player

Virgin Electronics released the Wearable 128MB MP3 Player, a tiny device weighing only a few grams. Two buttons control all of the unit's functions, and data transfer and recharging are both accomplished by means of a USB connection. It ships with an armband and ear buds. The company also introduced an affordable yet high quality noise-cancelling headphone set.

Archos AV420 and AV480 portable video recorders

These versatile devices are available in 20GB and 80GB variants, respectively, and can be used for video or media capture, storage and playback, or even simply as hard disks. Although such devices are hardly uncommon these days, these are impressive in terms of their comprehensive connectivity, being able to hook up to just about anything. They connect to a TV or other video output device, but also carry built-in TFT LCD displays. Music can be played for up to 16 hours, while watching video on the built-in screen for 4.5 hours is possible, though no doubt longer if using an external display. Both units are compact and weigh in at just over 300 grams.

Mad Catz 7.0 Universal LCD Game Screen

This novelty is a screen that can be clamped to a gaming console or, by means of an optional accessory, to the back of a car's front seat, and which connects to any console. It is roughly the size of a hardcover book, featuring a 7" screen, and weighs in well under a kilogram. The system features a built-in speaker system and headphone jacks.

Sony's PSP - the stuff of science fiction

All right, so the idea of a handheld device with the power of a complete gaming console is hardly a difficult concept any more. And the fact that it will support up to 16 players in a wireless network without the need for a hub is not at all far-fetched. But Sony also recently demonstrated (**note:** not announced, but demonstrated!) a spoken language translating technology called Talkman. Anyone for an electronic Babel fish?

New range of Apple monitors

It seems every couple of months Apple introduces new monitors. This time, the company unveiled a 30" model capable of resolutions up to 2560x1600, as well as a 23" and a 20" model which will replace existing flat-panels. All models feature FireWire 400, USB2.0 and DVI connections.

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(monthly online gaming competition avalable)
ZAPS
LanParty Zone

intel transformed

Words: Tom Taylor

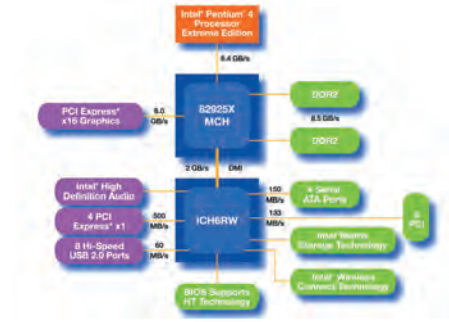
If by now you have not heard of PCI-Express or the new Intel chipset family, then get out from underneath that rock you're living under, because this is the most exciting thing to happen to the PC world since the move from ISA to PCI slots.

The debate between AMD and Intel will rage on forever, but for people like me it is the technology that matters, not the branding that's behind it. The first time I heard of the new LGA775 socket from Intel I was skeptical and fascinated at the same time. Skeptical because the move to a new technology does not always move smoothly and when a company tries to introduce a new standard that everyone should adopt, it can leave a bitter taste in the mouths of consumers and hardware developers alike (remember Rambus?). Skepticism aside, this new technology is fascinating, read on to see why.

On the 19th of June this year, the embargo on the new Intel 925X Express Chipset (Alderwood) and the Intel 915 G/P Express Chipset (Grantsdale) was lifted. Not only does this new technology bring with it the new Intel sockets but an array of hardware "extra's" which adds a ton of value to desktop platforms.

The new chipsets, the 925X and the 915G/P, replace the current 875P and 865PE chipsets respectively. The most significant and obvious change is the move from socket 478 (mPGA478) to the new socket 775 (LGA775) chipsets. Not only does the new chipset feature almost 300 more pins but the actual pins have moved from the CPU to the motherboard. Yes, you read right, the new Intel Pentium 4 processors do not have any pins attached to them. This bold move, according to Intel, is because future processor requirements exceed the capabilities of the current Socket478. LGA775 also supports a faster FSB (Front-side Bus) and the extra pins allow for additional I/O signals and the distribution of current loads. Some motherboard manufacturers have raised concerns regarding this new development as it will be the motherboard that gets returned when the pins are bent or damaged, not the CPU. But as long as the CPU is installed carefully you should not run into any problems. Having the socket change also brings about it a new bracket to attach the heat-sink and fan. Socket478 brackets required the CPU to be kept in position by the ziff-socket and the heat-sink would in turn clamp down on the motherboard putting tremendous stress on both motherboard and CPU. The new socket775 bracket does the actual CPU clamping while the heat-sink is kept in place by four spring loaded push pins, this system makes the new install CPU's much easier to install and it places the motherboard under a lot less stress.

So what are we getting with the new 925X and 915 chipsets? Well, for one thing both these chipsets support the new bus technology called PCI Express (see our August issue for an in-depth look into this technology) and compatibility with DDR2 (some 915 chipset motherboards will support DDR I while the 925X chipset only supports DDRII), Intel's new High Definition Audio, and Matrix RAID. We are also seeing the slow phase-out of ATA100/66 (IDE ports) and the increased support for Serial ATA, more specifically Serial ATA II which is backwards compatible. The new chipsets now support up to four SATA150 devices while IDE support now drops down

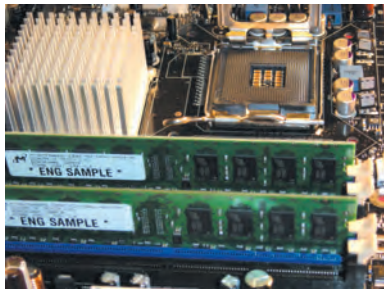


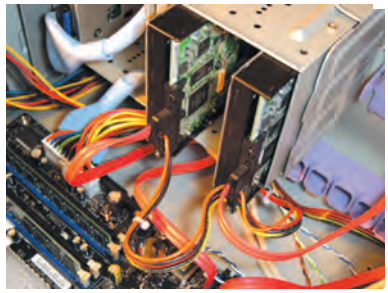
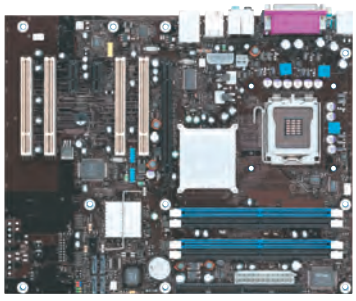
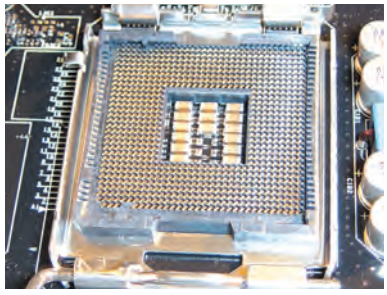
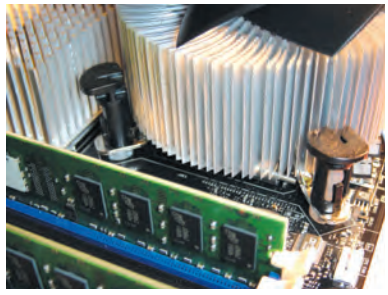
The 925 chipset introduces support for all of the new PC technologies, including PCI Express and DDR2, as well as Matrix RAID, Serial ATA II and Intel's own High Definition Audio, which supports Dolby Digital EX, THX and DTS.

Brand	Processor Number	Processor Generation / Socket (Architecture)	Clock Speed	Front Side Bus	Cache	Intel Technologies
	6XX Sequence					
	660	Prescott / LGA 775	3.60 GHz	800 MHz	1MB L2	HT
	650	Prescott / LGA 775	3.40 GHz	800 MHz	1MB L2	HT
	640	Prescott / LGA 775	3.20 GHz	800 MHz	1MB L2	HT
	630	Prescott / LGA 775	3.00 GHz	800 MHz	1MB L2	HT
	620	Prescott / LGA 775	2.80 GHz	800 MHz	1MB L2	HT
	3XX Sequence					
	335	Prescott / LGA 775 & mPGA 478	2.80 GHz	533 MHz	256K L2	
	330	Prescott / mPGA 478	2.66 GHz	533 MHz	256K L2	
	325	Prescott / mPGA 478	2.53 GHz	533 MHz	256K L2	

New naming convention

If that was not enough, Intel realized that the MHz race was over and it is the CPU features which really count, to that effect Intel have also introduced a new Processor naming convention to keep up with the Jones's. This is sure to create a lot of confusion so memorize this cheat sheet; we will have a pop quiz at the end of the lesson.



Clockwise from top: The new standard adds support for DDR2 memory | SERIAL ATA support has also been expanded, limiting the board to one IDE port | the new fan design uses spring pins to keep it in place, taking pressure off the board and CPU | the new technology sees the CPU pins appear on the board itself | a motherboard with the 925 chipset.

to two devices (one IDE port). SATA II also introduces a much awaited feature called Native Command Queuing (NCQ); in a nutshell this technology allows for compatible drives to accept more than one command at a time thus increasing the storage performance by allowing the drive to optimize the order of commands.

Getting back to the features of the new Intel chipsets, there are definitely a couple of things to get excited about. First up is the Intel Matrix RAID technology, if you are familiar with RAID setups then you should know you are only able to make use of one RAID level at any given time. If you want to change you have to format your drives and reconfigure your RAID levels to the desired one. The two most popular levels are RAID 0 and RAID 1. RAID 0 (stripe) basically allows you to combine two drives of the same capacity into one big drive with the major benefit being improved performance as they are able to read and write at the same time. RAID 1 (mirror) is used where data integrity is required at all times, basically it will mirror everything that is on one of the drives onto the other one, effectively keeping a backup of your files in real time. Intel's Matrix RAID technology allows you to have the best of both worlds by running both of these two RAID levels across two hard drives. Essentially what you will do is have your operating system on the RAID 0 partition as you will benefit from the performance of this RAID level while your data files can be hosted on the RAID 1 partition.

The other exciting feature is Intel's new High Definition Audio which features 192kHz, 24-bit 8-channel audio. DTS, THX, and, Dolby Digital EX are all supported with Intel's new integrated audio solution. Intel also improved the jack sensing technology, this means that users can now plug a device into any of the audio ports and the PC will reconfigure the port for the device.

This was just a brief overview of what Intel offers with this new technology but the one question I am sure is on your mind now is: What are the performance gains of Intel's latest chipsets?

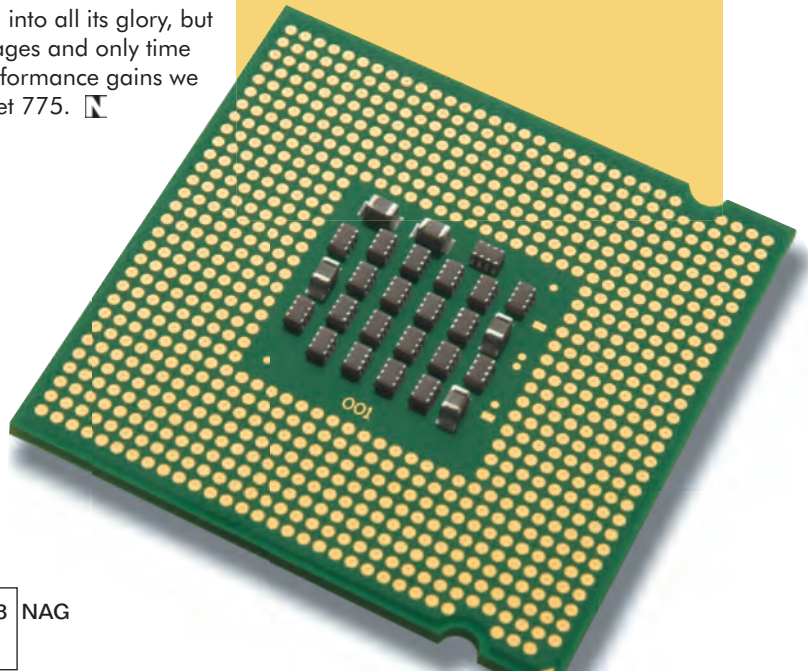
Well the short answer is: Not much. The long answer is: As with most new technologies, the starting performance gains are usually small. I must admit that I was hoping for much higher performance gains but the technology and the added benefits around it is enough to keep me satisfied for now. Obviously, as the hardware performance increases we will see this technology bloom into all its glory, but it is still in its infant stages and only time will tell how much performance gains we will see from the socket 775.

Benchmark results

The press kit I received from Intel consisted of the Intel D925XCV motherboard, two sticks of Micron 512MB DDR2 SDRAM, an Intel Pentium 4 560 (3.6GHz) CPU, and two very rare Maxtor MaXLine III 250GB hard drives. These hard drives feature SATAII support and boast a huge 16MB cache buffer. I set the hard drives up in RAID 0 configuration and used a NVIDIA GeForce PCX 5750 graphics card.

3DMark2001SE:	13242
3DMark03:	3328
Far Cry 1.1:	23.08 FPS

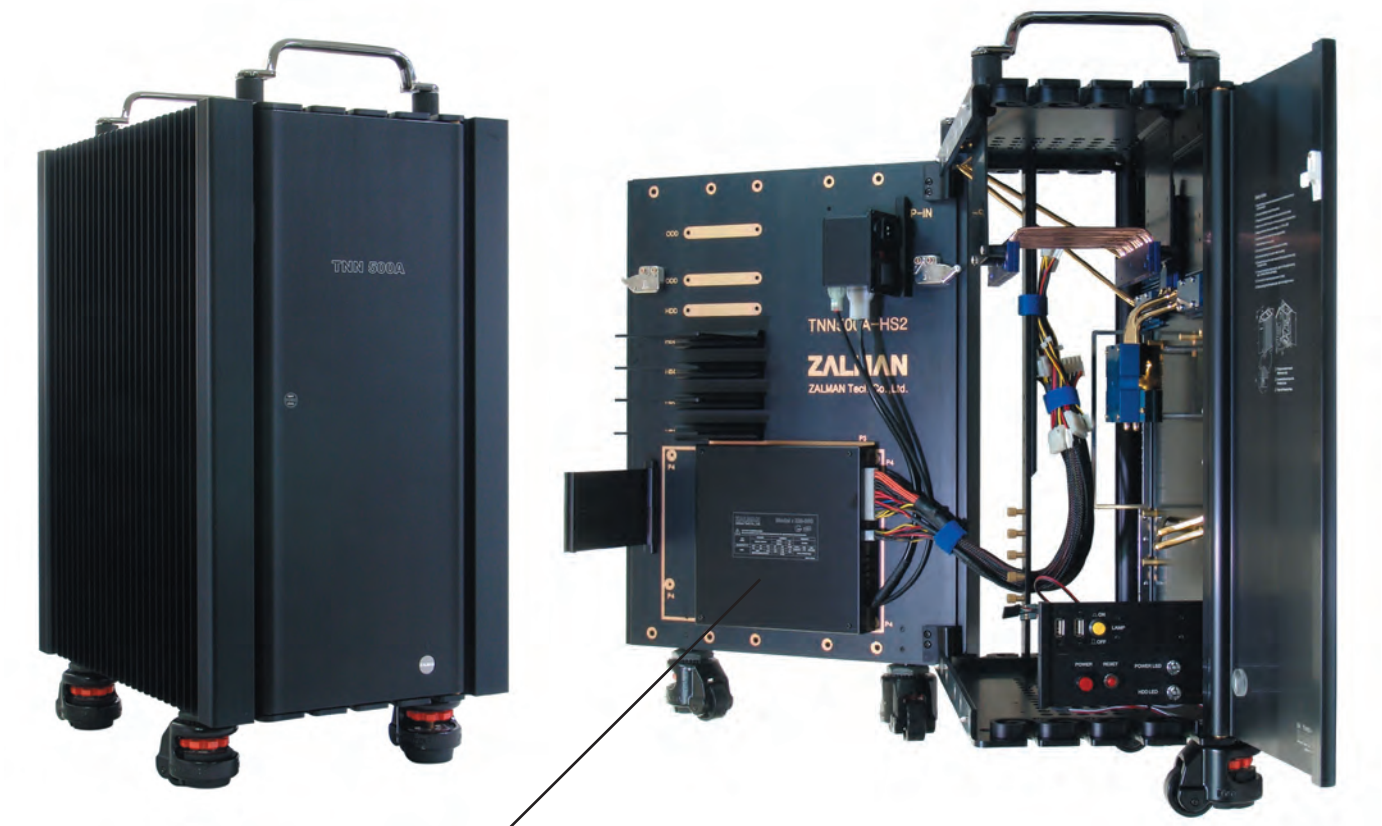
Unreal Tournament 2004:
83.83 fps (botmatch)
(dm-rankin: 95.40 fps, as-convoy: 65.36 fps, br-colossus: 90.74 fps)



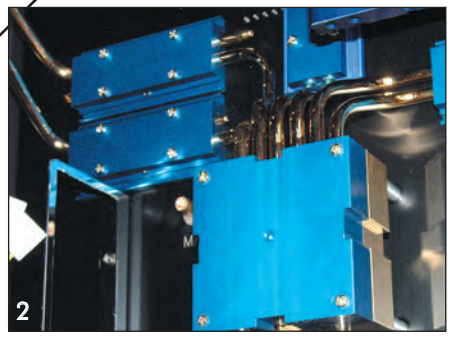
HANDS ON TESTED

Zalman TNN 500 A

A completely fan-less, noiseless PC? Has the perfect PC case finally arrived? Sure, if you don't mind the size, weight and a hefty price tag. Still, now we know it can be done...



This is a monster case, weighing in at a solid 25 Kg. And it's main feature - absolutely no cooling fans. Everything that generates heat on the machine is cooled via the unique inside design that causes heat to flow outwards. If you will, it's a large heat sink.



1. The power supply only supplies 300W, but you can order larger models. Obviously because even the PSU doesn't have a fan, it requires a custom designed unit. It's also much more space-conscious than traditional supplies.

2. Everything inside the case uses heat sinks and copper piping to channel heat away from the components, towards the sides of the case. This includes your graphics card, cooling or the hard drives and even extra parts to cool the North Bridge chip.

3. The TNN (Totally No Noise) 500 series is also shielded against electro-magnetic interference and this front panel includes a handy lamp, since an all-black case could make things very dark inside.

RRP: R 8000.00 from Frontosa International [011] 468 4724 | www.zalman.co.kr

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BUDGET TECHNOLOGIES

Pre-Order

H@RDCOR3

writer: Tom Taylor

Cases

Ah cases, the bones and skin, fur or scales for our computers. I see cases as an extension of our computing personalities as there are literally hundreds of different designs available. All of them having long since moved away from the awful beige most of us grew up with are now available in a variety of colours, shapes, and sizes.

Case modification has also become a big part of computing life. You will find that most people at your local LAN will have, at some point in their gaming lives, added a touch of creativity to their cases by adding a light, cutting a hole, or building an entire case from scratch. One of the best things about cases these days is the fact that case modification is not so much a dire necessity as the battle against the beige has been won. Many cases now have ample creativity and modifications straight out of the box, a perfect solution for the lazy-cretin such as myself. One of the most obvious examples of this is side-panel windows - there are many case manufacturers who have opted for this route and it's actually satisfying to see that manufacturers have seen the demand for such modifications and have implemented them into the mainstream so quickly and effectively.

Another fresh sight is the comeback of the desktop case (you know, the one which your monitor used to stand on). I remember my first couple of computers had desktop-type cases, this retro movement is not just aimed at workstations anymore and cases by companies such as Antec have actually made these desktop cases funky again. The one thing I am looking forward to seeing is the desktop PC with a top window panel included.

The next big thing is undoubtedly Small Form Factor (SFF) PC's, though. Internationally this trend has really taken off and products such as the Shuttle XPC have achieved "super" popularity. Nobody wants to sacrifice valuable desktop real estate anymore and if we can get a complete PC in a third of the size of a normal PC, what a bonus. It is important to note that small does not mean less powerful though, these SFF PC's are capable of accommodating today's latest hardware, the only thing that shrunk was the motherboard, Heat-sink and Fan (HSF), and the case itself. Sadly this is also the main reason why these SFF PCs are so expensive. So this month I have opted for the mammoth task of sourcing, unpacking, and installing these products. I decide to get cases from the most entry level to the very high-end to provide a nice spectrum for all budgets. Sadly I was unable to get most of the high-end cases I requested, with the manufacturer's excuses ranging from "it's too expensive to ship" to "we don't have stock". [*Well I guess they lose out then. Ed*]

SYNAPSYS COOL PC TECHNOLOGY cooling provided by Synapsys

EMERALD brilliant thinking

Test PC by Light Edge Technology

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

CX-5959BLW

This model has been around for a while and its integrated handle made it a popular case for LAN gamers. This new version has a windowed side panel which has its obvious advantages. Even though this case feels flimsy it offers quite a lot in terms of space; inside there is space for seven hard drives, or six if you use a stiffy drive and four optical drives. The fact that this case includes a 300W PSU is a great advantage, especially at its estimated retail price. On the front of the case is a little flip door which reveals two USB ports as well as a headphone and microphone jack. The power and reset buttons are situated on the top of the case just at the base of the handle which should not pose any problems. In all fairness, with this case you get what you pay for, it's a great case for beginners but it is a tad too flimsy for me.

Value 80 | **Look & Feel** 70 | **Functionality** 75 | **Overall** 75

Plus: Handle | 300W PSU **Minus:** Not solid construction
Supplier: Wentek International [021] 551-866 **Internet:** www.wentek.co.za **RRP:** R320

CTL-303A

Even though this is a very plain case, its smooth lines and simplistic layout really attracted me. This case also falls in the budget range and if you do not want a window in your case this is a great solution. It is bundled with a 300W power supply and even includes a three-prong power cable. Inside it can take five hard drives, or four with a stiffy drive, there is also space for four optical drives. Between each hard drive slot is a 3mm gap which is great to help improve airflow around hot running drives. On the side panel there are two 80mm fans which have silver fan grills protecting them. On the front of the case you will find two USB ports as well as a headphone and microphone jack. The latter needs to plug into the ports of a sound card so a special PCI bracket (it has a hole in it) is provided. This might not be the neatest solution but not all motherboards have headers for this functionality.

Value 80 | **Look & Feel** 78 | **Functionality** 74 | **Overall** 77

Plus: PSU | Two fans included **Minus:** Budget case, budget quality
Supplier: Wentek International [021] 551-866 **Internet:** www.wentek.co.za **RRP:** R245

SA-802A

Aluminium seems to be the in-thing these days and I have seen numerous cases made completely from this light weight metal. This case, including its 300W PSU, is extremely light weight. Accessing the case via its side panel is easy as it makes use of thumb-screws so no screwdriver is required. Even installing hard drives or optical drives is easy as this case requires no screws. It is able to accommodate up to four optical drives, two hard drives and a stiffy drive. At the back of the case, is an 80mm fan which is preinstalled with this case and because of the front USB ports cannot accommodate another fan there. On the right side of the case is space to place an IEEE-1394port as well as two audio jacks, but you would need to have the correct fittings to place it there. This case is not particularly big and for the average Joe it will suffice. One thing I would have liked to see was a couple of extra fan holes but if you have the know-how, this metal is easy to cut.

Value 75 | **Look & Feel** 80 | **Functionality** 77 | **Overall** 77

Plus: Light weight **Minus:** Lack of fan holes
Supplier: Genex Solutions [021] 551-8887 **Internet:** www.genex-sa.co.za **RRP:** R480

AOpen H500B

Upon unpacking it, this case looks a lot like a small version of a high end server case as it has a tinted-translucent plastic bezel which covers the optical drives. Below this bezel, hidden behind another flap are two USB ports as well as a microphone and headphone jack. Looking at the inside of the case it includes a 300W AOpen PSU as well as a handy two-way power cable. On the inside back of the case is space for two 80mm fans, one preinstalled. On the inside front of the case there is space for another 80mm fan, but the screws keeping the front USB and audio connectors in place obstructs the proper placing of the fan, a solution to this would be to place a washer or alternative spacer at each corner of the fan to create a small gap. This case is able to accommodate four optical drives and three hard drives (or two with one stiffy drive). Finally, a nice touch is a window on the side panel.

Value 78 | **Look & Feel** 80 | **Functionality** 78 | **Overall** 78

Plus: Side panel window | Translucent bezel **Minus:** Obstruction of front fan
Supplier: Rectron [011] 203-1000 **Internet:** www.rectron.co.za **RRP:** R649

AOpen AB-950S

This is one of the most intuitive case setups I have seen in a long time. This AOpen case's most prominent feature is the inclusion of a colour coded keyboard, mouse, and a set of speakers. Obviously this is not aimed at the high end market but it is definitely a great choice for someone who wants to move away from the dreadful beige we are so used to. The case features a 300W PSU; it has space for two 80mm fans at the back and has the usual front USB and audio connectors. It can accommodate four optical drives, two hard drives and one stiffy drive. This package is available in four colours namely red, blue, silver, and black. The case itself does not look too bad, it features smooth contours and clean lines; the included bundle though is what adds value and is the perfect solution for anyone wanting to have a funky colour coded system at a great price.

Value 90 | **Look & Feel** 89 | **Functionality** 80 | **Overall** 86

Plus: Added bundle **Minus:** A side window would have been nice
Supplier: Rectron [011] 203-1000 **Internet:** www.rectron.co.za **RRP:** R649

Antec SLK2650-BQE

This case falls under the Antec Solution Series (value series), but don't let that fool you as it has most of the features of their more advanced cases at a lower price. The SLK2650-BQE has a matt black finish and includes an Antec SmartPower 350W PSU. On the back end of the case there is a 120mm Antec fan and there is space for an 80mm fan in the front. The side panel features an intuitive air hole which has a retractable duct attached. In theory this will allow your CPU to suck air directly from the outside of the case. A very nice feature is the inclusion of rubber grommets (spacers) where your hard drives screw into place, this is great for both shock and noise absorption. There is space for two hard drives, one stiffy drive and four optical drives, the latter sporting screw less mountings. As seems to be customary, there is a front bezel which covers the optical and stiffy drives, two USB ports also found their way to the front panel. Overall this is a great case at a great price.

Value 85 | **Look & Feel** 90 | **Functionality** 90 | **Overall** 88

Plus: Loads of nice features **Minus:** Pricey
Supplier: Frontosa [011] 468 4724 **Internet:** www.antec-inc.com **RRP:** R850

DTO-80E-B50

This Mini server case from Genex Solutions is very impressive and hosts too many things to mention here. Firstly it ships with a whisper quiet 350W PSU (and I do mean whisper quiet). It can accommodate six hard drives in its side mounted brackets, two in its normal stiffy bay brackets and two more in a metal flap that can double as dual 80mm fan holders which blow directly onto the motherboard. There is also space for four optical drives. At the back of the case is a built in 120mm fan and there is space for another one at the front of the case, which along with an optional 80mm fan will also cool the hard drives. Lastly there is an 80mm fan at the top of the case which sucks the warm air out. The PCI brackets use a screw less system and the most exciting feature is the built in LCD in the front bevel which covers the optical drives. This is an awesome case for the person not wanting a fancy gaming rig, and it's relatively cheap too.

Value 90 | **Look & Feel** 90 | **Functionality** 90 | **Overall** 90

Plus: Great features | Solid build **Minus:** It's quite heavy
Supplier: Genex Solutions [021] 551-8887 **Internet:** www.genex-sa.co.za **RRP:** 780

Chenbro Gaming Bomb

Rectron has made a great decision to stock Chenbro cases, not only are they good looking but the brand has a great reputation internationally, and the Gaming Bomb case follows in this tradition. The case is not particularly large but has sufficient space on the inside for even the most enthusiastic computer user. It has space for four optical drives, six hard drives, and one stiffy drive. The case ships with four drive rails which can be attached to an optical drive for easy installation and removal. At the back of the case is a bracket for one 120mm fan and one feature I particularly liked was the screw less PCI-bracket locks. The side panel has a funky window design, a B for Gaming Bomb and the front panel features two USB ports, an IEEE-1394 port as well as some audio connectors. Even though I liked this case, it did not present anything exciting. Its successor, the yet to be released Gaming Bomb II, on the other hand is awesome.

Value 80 | **Look & Feel** 80 | **Functionality** 79 | **Overall** 79

Plus: Screw less PCI lock **Minus:** Nothing special
Supplier: Rectron [011] 203-1000 **Internet:** www.rectron.net **RRP:** R799

Chenbro Xpider II

The first thing that came to mind when I unpacked this case was "spider-man, the movie", which is kind of nice, but in all honesty the overall look is a bit gimmicky. The Chenbro Xpider is a fun case for the playful or younger gamer. The inside of the case reveals the same screw less PCI clips as with the Chenbro Gaming Bomb. Another nice touch is the addition of a large 120mm fan at the back of the case. This case can accommodate up to four hard drives, two stiffy drives, and four optical drives. I appreciated the fact that two of the front panels are designed to be used with optical drives, effectively hiding them from plain sight. The front panel connectors hide behind the little spider figurine and features the usual audio connectors, two USB ports, as well as an IEEE-1394 port. The side panel is about the only thing that confused me. It sports two red triangles around a mirror-like metal plate, after a short-while though I figured out that the metal part can be unscrewed to reveal a window.

Value 80 | **Look & Feel** 75 | **Functionality** 80 | **Overall** 78

Plus: Looks different... **Minus:** ...though a little gimmicky
Supplier: Rectron [011] 203-1000 **Internet:** www.rectron.net **RRP:** R 1099

MSI Hetis 865GV-Giga

This MSI bare bone is aimed at the SOHO/workstation environment. The case itself looks fairly plain as it has a beige finish but it has some pretty nifty features. The main feature of this case is that it includes an Intel 865GV based motherboard. This motherboard features onboard Gigabit LAN, VGA, and audio, and you simply need to add the CPU, RAM and drives to have a complete PC. The motherboard supports Serial ATA hard drives and the included PSU included is rated at 250W. The front panel features all the connectors you would ever need, there are four USB ports, an SPDIF, a mini IEEE-1394 port, as well as the usual audio connectors. On the back of the case you will find the other ports, including two more USB ports, a Gigabit LAN port, a printer port, a DVI port, as well as an AV-out. There is not much room for any extras and this case can only accommodate one optical drive, a stiffy drive, and one hard drive. All in all this case is great for an office environment and will definitely be a space saver.

Value 78 | **Look & Feel** 80 | **Functionality** 75 | **Overall** 77

Plus: Small | Motherboard included **Minus:** Pricey
Supplier: Light Edge Technologies [021] 510-8270 **Internet:** www.lightedge.co.za **RRP:** R1900

CM-6985K

The CM-6985K is a micro-ATX desktop case which means traditional motherboards will not fit inside it. Similar to the Shuttle and X-PC this case is designed for a specific motherboard. The first snag I ran into when reviewing this case was opening it, it is particularly difficult as the whole front panel including the outside cover slips off. The PSU included is 230W mini-PSU which should be sufficient for its target market, the home user. This case can accommodate one stiffy drive, one hard drive (or two if you don't install a stiffy drive) and one optical drive. The PCI brackets can only accommodate mini-PCI cards so its expandability is very limiting. Once closed, the front panel features a door which hides the optical drive and right next to it you will see the stiffy drive template. The front panel connectors only feature two USB ports but there is space to place audio connectors, IEEE-1394 ports, as well as a 15-pin parallel port. Even though this case has a good price, it will not be everyone's cup of tea.

Value 70 | **Look & Feel** 70 | **Functionality** 70 | **Overall** 70

Plus: Small | Neat **Minus:** Requires mini-ATX motherboard
Supplier: Wentek International [021] 551-8866 **Internet:** www.wentek.co.za **RRP:** R340

Antec Overture

Following in the Antec tradition, the Overture is a very smart looking desktop case which sports a glossy black finish. Upon opening the case you should notice that the power supply does not sit at the back as is customary, but rather in the front of the case. The hard drive bays now sit at the back and an included 80mm fan blows cool air into the case. These hard drive bays feature noise/vibration dampening grommets and the bracket can accommodate up to three hard drives. The Overture includes a TruePower 380W PSU which should be more than sufficient for most users of a case such as this one. On the left hand side of the case is a fan hole with dust filter to provide cool air to the PSU. The front of this case sees two USB ports, an IEEE 1394 port, as well as the two usual audio connectors. There are two front stiffy bays which could also be used to house hard drives and finally there are two optical drive bays.

Value 85 | **Look & Feel** 88 | **Functionality** 80 | **Overall** 84

Plus: Very smart exterior **Minus:** Price
Supplier: Frontosa [011] 468 4724 **Internet:** www.antec-inc.com **RRP:** R1399

Shuttle XPC SB75G2

If it's a high-performance PC and a SFF you are after then the XPC is definitely the way to go. There are models for almost every chipset available but the one I received for review was based on the Intel 875P chipset. The great thing about the XPC's is that you virtually get all the functionality of a desktop computer at a fraction of the size, this includes the performance factor. The SB75G2 includes all of the connectivity options such as USB, IEEE-1394, 8X AGP, Serial ATA, Gigabit LAN, and Serial ATA RAID. The power supply shipped with this unit is rated at 250W and there is space for one optical drive, one hard drive, and one stiffy drive (or two hard drives if you omit the stiffy drive). The front of the case sees two USB ports, an IEEE-1394 port, and some audio connectors while the back features the usual ports. Inside there is space for one large AGP graphics card and a PCI card and the CPU is cooled by the supplied HSF which feature a special design to fit in this SFF PC.

Value 80 | **Look & Feel** 88 | **Functionality** 85 | **Overall** 84

Plus: Potentially a great performer | RAID capabilities | Many optional extra's **Minus:** Pricey
Supplier: Wentek International [021] 551-8866 **Internet:** www.wentek.co.za **RRP:** R3199

FIC Condor

Small form factor PC's seems to be all the rage these days, especially those capable of playing high-end games. This case from FIC is able to do just that, with the right hardware of course. The Condor is slightly bigger than the normal SFF PC, but the extra space is well worth the bigger size. As it should be, the Condor comes pre-installed with an original Intel D865GWV motherboard which supports 8X AGP, DDR400, and Serial ATA. Opening the case requires the simple push of a button and the complete side and top panel folds out. The major benefit of this is that installing hardware is very easy. The Condor can accommodate one optical drive, one stiffy drive, and one hard drive. Strangely the power supply included in this unit is rated at 200W, as this is supposed to be a gaming rig and once a 3.2GHz CPU is installed with a DVD-writer and an ATI Radeon X800, the power supply is destined to choke your system.

Value 80 | **Look & Feel** 88 | **Functionality** 85 | **Overall** 84

Plus: Special HSF included | Looks great **Minus:** 200W PSU
Supplier: Genex Solutions [021] 551-8887 **Internet:** www.genex-sa.co.za **RRP:** R2399

Chenbro Hornet

The Hornet is a very "different" looking SFF case. By this I obviously mean that its main feature is its resemblance to a hornet, which is not a bad idea if you are playful at heart. Inside it is quite cramped, as is the case with all of these types of cases, there is space for one stiffy drive, one optical drive, and two hard drives. The main hard drive bay features the rubber grommets which absorb shock and vibration, and is always a welcome sight. The PSU is rated at 270W, and there is a small 60mm fan preinstalled which sits right under the PSU. The layout of the drives is quite interesting, the stiffy drive found its way to the top end of the case while the optical drive is positioned vertically on the left side. At the bottom of the case are the front panel connectors which include two USB ports, two audio ports, and an IEEE-1394 port.

Value NA | **Look & Feel** 85 | **Functionality** 80 | **Overall** 82

Plus: Looks "different" **Minus:** No external eject button for optical drive
Supplier: Rectron [011] 203-1000 **Internet:** www.rectron.net **RRP:** TBA

MSI Mega 865

The MSI Mega 865, which is one of my favourites, has been around for a short while. The Mega 865 is not intended for high-end gaming even though you can install most high-end hardware in it. It sports an Intel 865G motherboard; it has a 200W PSU pre-installed and is compatible with DDR400 RAM. There is one AGP 8X and one PCI slot and it can accommodate one optical drive and one hard drive. The Mega 865 is an entertainment system and it has a radio tuner built in which can be operated when the PC is switched off, you can also install a TV-Tuner which will allow you to watch DVD's from this unit. It can also be used as a CD-Player or MP3 player. On the front of the case is a large, multi coloured display which shows either track and radio information or system temperature, depending on its current mode.

Value 80 | **Look & Feel** 88 | **Functionality** 90 | **Overall** 86

Plus: Functionality **Minus:** Pricey
Supplier: Light Edge Technology [021] 510-8270 **Internet:** www.lightedge.co.za **RRP:** R2995

Thermaltake Lanfire VM2000

The Thermaltake Lanfire VM2000 is one of those cases that can't be overlooked. The VM2000 is a light weight aluminium case with all the goodies you need to start your case modding career at a reasonable price. First up you will notice it has a Thermaltake Hardcano 9 pre-installed, this device allows you to control your fans and measure the temperature of your CPU and case. It also has a front bezel which covers the optical drive bays and below you will find two USB ports and one IEEE-1394 port. On the inside there is only space for four hard drives (or three if you have a stiffy drive). One of the things I like most about this case is the fact that it comes with four fans, one in the front, one in the back, one in the side panel window, and the last one is strategically placed to cool the hard drives. There is also PCI back-lock which allows for screw less installation of your cards.

Value 89 | **Look & Feel** 90 | **Functionality** 80 | **Overall** 86

Plus: Price vs. features **Minus:** Small on the inside
Supplier: Corex [011] 707-5000 **Internet:** www.corex.co.za **RRP:** R1095

Koolance PC2-650BW

This is the case I have personally been using for a while now and for me, this is one of the best cases around. The major attraction to the PC2-650BW is that it has a water cooling system built-in. The case itself is fairly big and has enough space inside to pack almost all the hardware you would ever want, it can accommodate three optical drives and up to six hard drives. The brackets that mount the hard drives can be clipped out of the case for external hard drive installation and the optical drives can be removed by pulling them out of the front of the case. The side panel features a window and the front bezel sports a funky blue-lit pattern symbolizing a circuit board. On the front there are also two USB ports and one IEEE-1394 port and on the top of the case, where the water reservoir is, is a LED which displays the CPU temperature.

Value 85 | **Look & Feel** 90 | **Functionality** 89 | **Overall** 88

Plus: Built-in water cooling **Minus:** Pricey if you are not fussed about water cooling
Supplier: Synapsys [011] 447-9175 **Internet:** www.synapsys.co.za **RRP:** R2299

Coolermaster CMSTacker

Wow! This case is simply beautiful. The CMSTacker offers a load of space in one of the sexiest designs I have seen to date. One of the things that make this case so attractive is the mesh theme throughout. Virtually the entire front panel features removable mesh plates, there are 11 in total (one hosts a stiffy drive), these can be removed to install optical drives, 120mm fans, or any other front panel device such as fan controllers or temperature displays. For serious power hungry machines there is even space to add a second PSU at the bottom of the case. The power supply preinstalled is rated at 350W and there are two 120mm fans installed as well. On the front panel, above the mesh plates you will find a whopping six USB ports, there is also an IEEE-1394 port and the usual audio ports. This is truly the mother of all cases and for versatility this is definitely the one.

Value 90 | **Look & Feel** 95 | **Functionality** 95 | **Overall** 93

Plus: Everything **Minus:** Absolutely nothing
Supplier: Rectron [011] 201-1000 **Internet:** www.rectron.net **RRP:** R1499

Thermaltake Tsunami

Again Thermaltake raises the stake for other case manufacturers with their latest creation, the Tsunami. What makes this case so attractive is its smooth, wavy, curves, hence the name Tsunami. Inside this case you will find two 120mm fans situated in the front and rear of the case. There is ample space for your drives, it can accommodate up to five hard drives and those rubber grommets we have seen a few times are also installed in this case. There is also space for two stiffy drives and four optical drives. The PCI brackets make use of a screw less system and even the hard drive brackets can be removed without the use of a screwdriver. The usual front connectors have moved to the top of the case with the Tsunami and here you will find two USB ports, one IEEE-1394 port and a microphone and headphone socket. About the only thing missing from the case is a side panel window, but it is available in another model of this case.

Value 80 | **Look & Feel** 89 | **Functionality** 88 | **Overall** 85

Plus: Looks elegant **Minus:** A tad pricey for what you get
Supplier: Corex [011] 707-5000 **Internet:** www.corex.co.za **RRP:** R1595

These three cases were late arrivals - they came in just before we went to print - so we twisted the Editor's arm until he agreed to let us include them. The doctor says the injuries suffered to his elbow should heal up just fine...

Hoga XBlade

MID RANGE

The real appeal in the XBlade is whether you want a very orange case or not. Since I like them bold and angry, this one does push most of the right buttons, and the front face rounds the package off nicely with a well-formed design, though it might be a bit over-the-top for most people. Sporting a side-panel with a mid-mounted fan, you'll also find another larger fan mounted at the back. A front face panel gives the compulsory sound and USB (2) ports, as well as space for a Firewire cable. Inside you can mount four large and small drives, as well as one Stiffy drive. It is very pricy, though, since there isn't a PSU included, plus I'm not keen on the power buttons sitting outside of the front-face doors - all within easy reach for curious fingers.

Value 80 | **Look & Feel** 90 | **Functionality** 85 | **Overall** 85

Plus: Vibrant but classy orange **Minus:** No PSU | You might hate orange
Supplier: World Computer Systems [011] 823 2002 **Internet:** www.wcs.co.za **RRP:** R799

Treetop Diablo

MID RANGE

If there is one word for the Diablo, it's 'striking'. The fine, smooth black finish is complimented by the aggressive yellow face design, obviously the origin of its name. A front USB bay (for two ports) that includes sound completes the look, though as with the RAIDMAX I felt it sat too low down. The window design, though, really clinches the case's look, especially with the tribal-sun metal fan covering. Inside you have three fans and mounts for four more, plus vent holes on the opposite panel. The Diablo should house three hard drives, four large drives and a stiffy drive. No PSU makes this an expensive case, but it's got a very smooth and different finish- if you like arrogant, but not too extravagant, you can't go far wrong with this look.

Value 83 | **Look & Feel** 92 | **Functionality** 80 | **Overall** 85

Plus: Lots of fans and fan mounts | Nice paint finish | Looks cool **Minus:** No PSU
Supplier: World Computer Systems [011] 823 2002 **Internet:** www.wcs.co.za **RRP:** R799

Treetop RAIDMAX R8685

MID RANGE

I'm not sure why they called this the Raidmax, since it doesn't have anything specifically to do with RAID technology - or rather, there's nothing on offer here you can't find anywhere else. Taking part in Treetop's design philosophy, this grey number has a nicely-rounded design, but is not as flashy as the Diablo case. If anything, it's more for the minimalist who wants something above the usual beige box. Three fans and four additional fan mount spots join space inside for around four large drives, three hard drives and one stiffy drive. Outside you have a nice window panel with a tribal design and fan cover, plus a front panel for USB (2) and sound, but no Firewire - personally I felt this bay is too low, placed at the bottom of the front face. Plus, the price does not include a PSU, but it is a strong chassis with a nice feel to it.

Value 70 | **Look & Feel** 75 | **Functionality** 80 | **Overall** 75

Plus: Loads of fans and fan mounts | Not too flashy **Minus:** No PSU | A bit dull | No Firewire FSP **Supplier:** World Computer Systems [011] 823 2002 **Internet:** www.wcs.co.za **RRP:** 699

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Asus P5AD2 Premium 925X chipset motherboard

The Asus P5AD2 Premium motherboard uses the latest Intel 925X series chipset with a veritable bevy of additional benefits. Beginning with simple things, like SATA cables for instance - there are no less than 8 of them provided in the box, as there are the same number of SATA connectors on the board itself split between two SATA RAID controllers.

Speaking of SATA, the latest 900-series motherboards use the second generation of SATA controller which brings along a number of small but useful tweaks. No, this is not the next generation of SATA, just an enhancement to the original controller specification. Most notably, booting off a SATA drive is now just as simple as booting from IDE... no additional SCSI drivers are needed at installation time whatsoever.

There's one vanilla IDE channel, and two more supported by a third RAID controller, which all told provides massive drive capacity, provided your PSU can cope. There's even an SATA back panel provided which allows for the connection of external SATA drives or drive enclosures.

In terms of networking, again ASUS customers are spoiled with this offering. There are two integrated Marvell Gigabit LAN PCIe adaptors, as well as integrated 802.11g wireless networking kit with external aerial for the best reception. The wireless LAN includes software which turns the board into an Access Point running at 54 Mbps.

Connectivity options continue with 8 USB 2.0 ports and Firewire, with ports built on to the motherboard back panel and more available by plugging the provided backing-plate into the appropriate motherboard headers.

This offering provides the quietest operating environment thanks to a completely fan less design. It features Stack Cool, which is in essence a heat sink unit attached to the underside of the PCB beneath the CPU, to keep temperature levels down without resorting to noisy, power-consuming fans.

Of course, being a 925-based board, only DDR2 memory modules are supported in dual-channel architecture. This Asus offering does include native support for running these modules at 600 MHz as opposed to the more ordinary 533 MHz that this first generation of DDR2 modules are rated at. Then of course there's an LGA 775 socket for your CPU, 16x PCIe slot for graphics, and the Azalea audio engine.

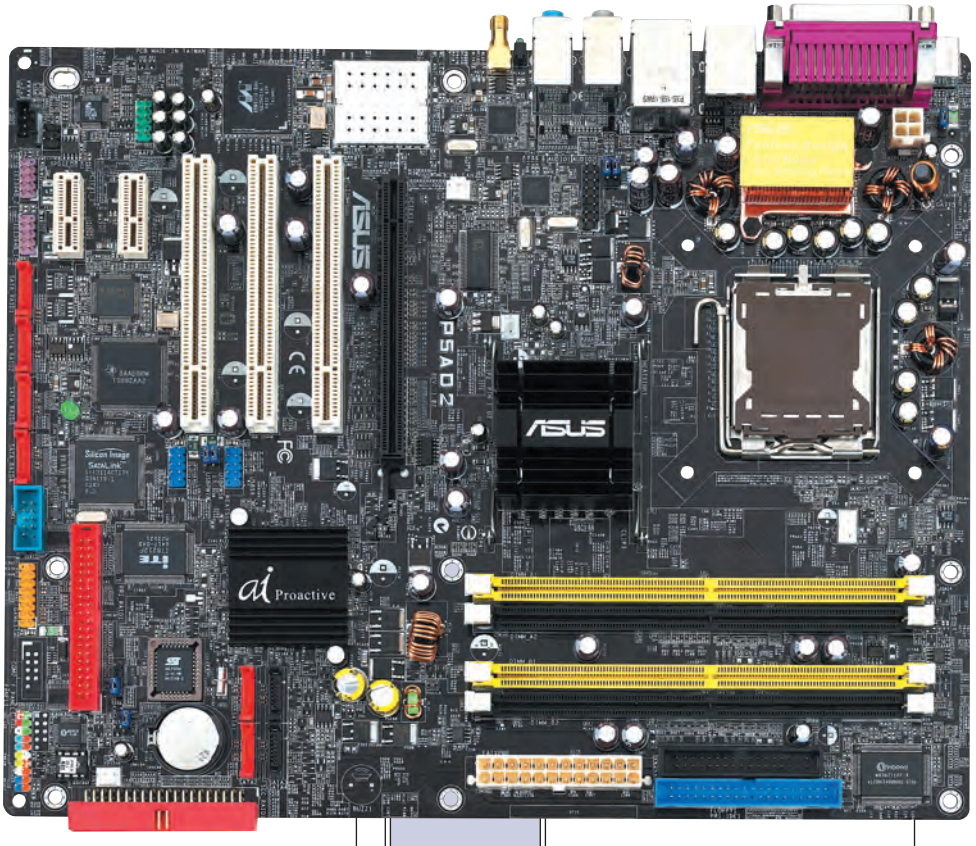
Entering the BIOS for the first time reveals an amazing array of options and features. One which I particularly liked is a LAN cable-tester built into the BIOS itself! Without getting anywhere near an OS, and without paying for a separate cable tester, this board analyses any cable attached to the LAN port and will provide detailed information on the position of a break at up to 100m cable length.

Enter the Jumper-less Configuration section of the BIOS and you'll be blown away by how simple over-clocking a system on this board actually is. Intel were supposed to have locked the new LGA chips to prevent over-clocking, but motherboard manufacturers learnt very quickly how to get around this and boards like the P5AD2 were the result.

FSB and RAM frequencies can be pushed up to over 1 GHz and 800 MHz respectively, simply by selecting an over-clocking profile from the BIOS. Or you can choose to over-clock your system in percentage-based steps, from 5 to 30 percent.

Looking at that DDR2 RAM for a moment, reports on the web maintain that this technology is only really beneficial when you start jacking up the frequencies, but I found that over 5000 MB/s throughput in standard 533 MHz mode is a decent performance gain from even the fastest "over-clocked" DDR 533 parts. And yes, push that frequency up just slightly to 600 MHz and the bandwidth increases accordingly to 5500 MB/s, with no stability or heat issues whatsoever. It's impressive. [*One day it's all going to go bang, Ed*]

Running at the default 2.8 GHz the Intel CPU yielded SiSoft Sandra 2004 results of 7217 ALU MIPS and 5677 SSE MFLOPS. Clocking this up to just over 3.15 GHz by pushing the FSB up to 900, and once again with a mere 2 degrees difference in temperature these figures rise to 8422 and 6627 respectively, placing it in the high-end of desktop systems. Overall, well, if you're looking to upgrade and want all the bells and whistles there's just no choice in my opinion. This Asus P5AD2 ought to win awards for feature-richness and usability.



Plus: Phenomenal product with excellent features **Minus:** Nothing **Reviewer:** Russell Bennett
Supplier: Axiz [011] 237 7007 **Internet:** www.axiz.co.za **RRP:** TBA

Asus ExtremeAX600XT / TD PCIe graphics board

PCI-express, or PCIe, is here. AGP is on its way out the window. So as well as having to buy a new motherboard, LGA 775 CPU, and DDR2 DIMMs, you'll need to get a PCIe graphics card as well. All in all an upgrade right now would put quite a heavy load on your wallet.

Fortunately mid-range PCIe cards such as this Asus Extreme AX600XT are already available to soften the blow somewhat. This product is meant to offer decent gaming performance at a price-point which is that much easier to stretch to, especially considering the wad of other new hardware involved in such a system upgrade.

But is this card any good? For that matter, is PCIe any good? Let's look at some benches to find out.

Running the Catalyst 4.7 drivers supplied with the card on a P4 3 GHz with 800 MHz FSB and 1 GB of DDR2 RAM, the AX600 scores an unimpressive 4327 3DMarks, at 1024 X 768 with no filtering techniques enabled. At the same resolution but with 6X FSAA in effect, this offering delivers a distinctly mediocre 1829 3DMarks.

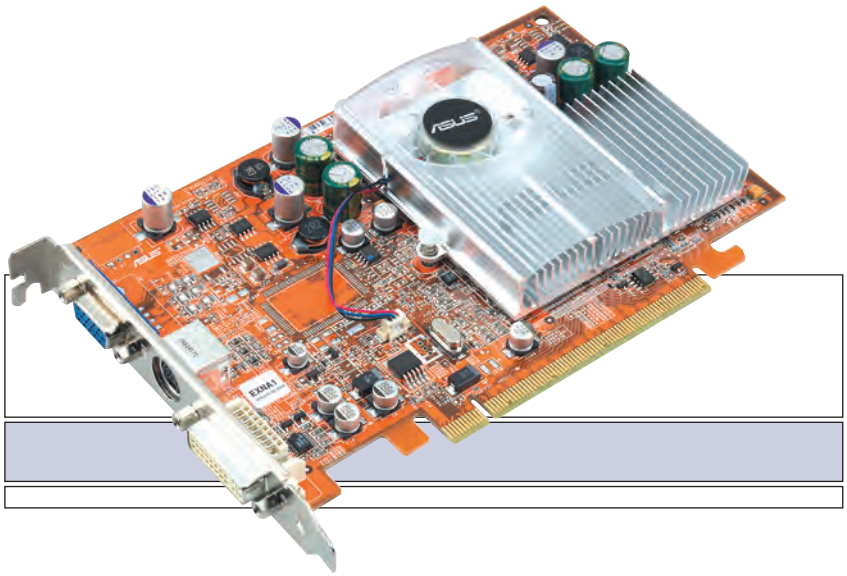
These scores compare directly, and in fact are slightly below, figures I achieved in a benchmark of a 9600 XT around half a year ago. And in gaming the new blood also consistently underperforms its older AGP-based brethren.

Scoring 33478 in the DX9-oriented Aquamark cements this card in its mid-range arena. And using the newly-released Far Cry benchmarking utility yields an average FPS of but 36.97 on the UbiSoft Volcano demo run. As a comparison, a much older-tech MSI 9800 Pro AGP card gets around 10 FPS more on Far Cry, hits 40K in Aquamark, and is rapidly approaching 6K 3DMarks.

The Asus card comes with a fairly standard software bundle including Asus utilities GameFace Live and SmartDoctor. At least you get a full version of Deus Ex: Invisible War as part of the package.

It does sport a very neat cooling design complete with glowing blue inserts, however, and while such small aesthetics really shouldn't elevate it to high in my mind, it does slightly. Asus clearly understand aesthetics.

Despite less than sparkling performance the Asus AX600XT does represent a decent way of getting in to the world of PCIe without spending excessive amounts of cash. A 9600XT, or even Pro, on an older AGP-based system will give slightly better performance though.

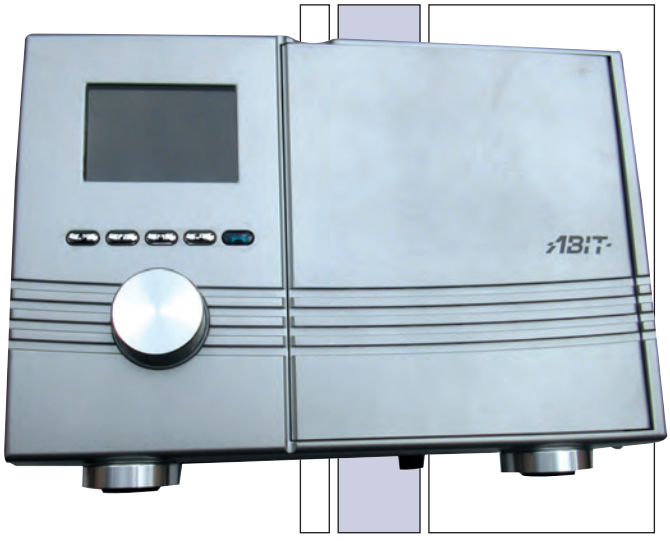


Plus: Solid | PCIe graphics card entrant point **Minus:** Nothing spectacular on the performance charts
Reviewer: Russell Bennett **Supplier:** Corex [011] 707 5000 **Internet:** www.corex.co.za **RRP:** TBA

Abit DiGiDice

Lifestyle products, they're called, or consumer electronics perhaps. The Abit DiGiDice is not a computer, although all of its hardware is straight out of the PC world. No, it's a home entertainment unit, like a VCR or Hi-fi.

Housed in a square, silver casing with an LCD front panel and single, large rotary knob it looks the part. Optical drives are concealed behind a neat but cheap fold-away panel, as well as USB, Firewire and audio ports and a pleasant surprise... in the form of SD card slots to feed the built-in reader module.



This barebones system contains an Abit IS-50 mini-motherboard. It may only have two RAM modules but they're dual-channel DDR400 at least, while P4 CPUs of a wide range of FSB speeds and clock frequencies can be plugged in complete with Hyper-Threading support. There are two IDE channels, one AGP and one PCI slot. LAN, audio and onboard Intel VGA already sprouts from the standard rear connector panel anyway. Although one feature missing is a TV-Out port. Surely a device like this, primed for watching DVDs, viewing digital photos from an SD card, and playing or ripping music, ought to be able to output its signal to a standard TV? Anyway, it's nothing that the addition of any AGP card with this functionality can't resolve...

The rest of the package is slick, although the entire case construction feels rather flimsy and bendable. There's a remote control included in the box, which has all the standard software (including Clone CD for burning CD copies and WinDVD) on it as well-labelled rubber buttons.

And at the end of the day, it's a PC back-end, so plug keyboard, mouse and screen in and you can install and run what you like.

Between the LCD panel and rotary knob sits five programmable hot-keys, which by default are set to enable the user to control the unit entirely using the buttons in conjunction with the knob. With the clear LCD display giving a comprehensible readout of information all the while.

And as a PC? It has what it needs to be an adequate system as well in fact. Not cutting-edge, but a solid game machine for instance given the right combination of components.

With, yes I know it sounds strange but... included rose lavender aromatic oil and a metal oil burner which attaches to the case...

Plus: Both a consumer and IT box | Adequate at both **Minus:** Few gamers would want it | A hardcore desktop it isn't
Reviewer: Russell Bennett **Supplier:** Esquire Technology [012] 657 1111 **Internet:** www.esquire.co.za **RRP:** R2399.00

i-Mate

The i-Mate, developed by Carrier Devices is one of the niftiest gadgets around today. Not only is it a fully fledged PDA, but it has a cell phone built in. Under the hood this little devil sports a 400 MHz X-Scale PXA263, 128 MB RAM, and a 64 MB ROM (that is more processing power than my first PC). By today's PDA terms the specifications of this unit are fairly standard. What really attracted me about this device is the fact that you do not have to carry two devices around when you purchase it. Its cell phone capabilities are as good as most high-end cell phones today; it supports Bluetooth, GPRS, and works on 900 MHz, 1800 MHz, as well as 1900 MHz frequency ratings. The operating system on this unit is Windows Mobile 2003 for Pocket PC Phone Edition, and is fully compatible with most of your office applications, including Outlook and Excel. The fun thing about a pocket PC such as this one is that there are literally thousands of applications and games (freeware and commercial) available for it; this can range from a Calorie Calculator to a DivX movie player. Other features of the i-Mate include a 640x480 digital camera with video capturing capabilities, the length of which depends on the amount of memory you have available. Being a Windows based device it was no surprise to see Windows messenger installed, this is obviously for chatting on MSN over a GPRS connection. Shipping with the i-Mate you will find a cradle which both charges and synchronizes it with your computer. The battery life is not particularly great especially when using it a fair amount, keep in mind that this is a computer first, cell phone second, so battery life is bound to suffer. On the plus side though, a device such as this should be plugged into its cradle fairly regularly to ensure your data is backed up securely. There is so much more to write about this funky device but space does not permit it, I suggest you go to www.imate.com to see the latest developments on this device.

Plus: Cell/PDA combination **Minus:** Expensive **Reviewer:** Tom Taylor
Supplier: Leaf Wireless [011] 326 1844 **Internet:** www.imate.com **RRP:** R6000.00

Sapphire Radeon X600 XT

Sapphire are another graphics board manufacturer who quickly realised the implications of the new PCIe graphics interface, and this company too has a mid-range PCIe X600-based graphics card on offer. Called simply the Sapphire Radeon X600 XT, does this board represent a viable and affordable alternative to an AGP equivalent?

This is a very clean-looking card. There's a discrete heat-sink and the entire PCB looks very close to the reference board. The Sapphire offering is in truth rather plain looking overall.

In fact, its performance can be summed up with a similar word, ordinary. Once again, this latest board delivers benchmark results below an AGP 9600 XT, and even marginally beneath the Asus X600 implementation tested elsewhere in this issue. 4248 3DMarks with no FSAA, 1735 with 6-pass filtering turned on.

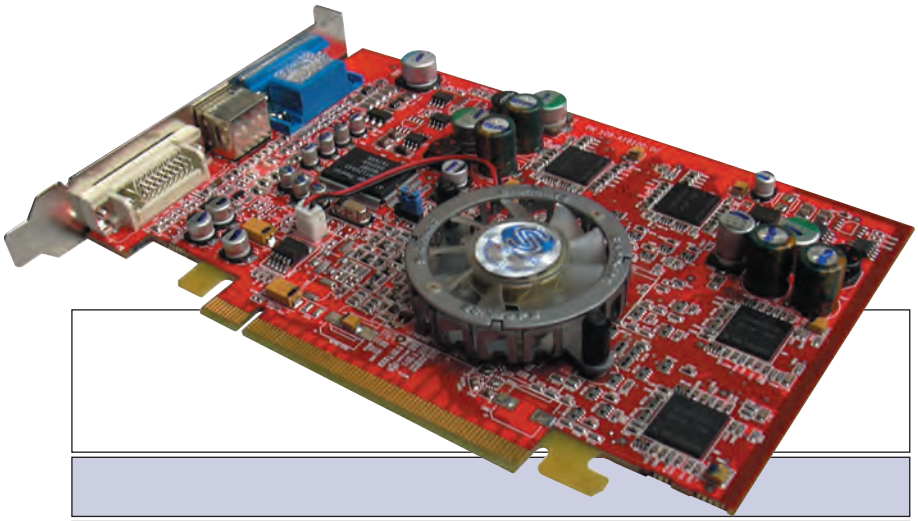
Even upgrading from Catalyst 4.7 to a Beta 4.8 package, and along with this software modification adding the just-released DirectX 9c saw very little performance gain on this Sapphire offering. Even Aquamark 3 returned scores slightly below par at 32878.

Using the Far Cry bench, we can see that with all details maxed out and no FSAA or Anisotropic filtering, the X600 performs adequately delivering a playable average frame rate of 49.75 in the Pier benchmark run. Start playing with these image-enhancing options though and the frame rates plummet rapidly to an unplayable 20 FPS and an even more pointless 18.49 if you combine both FSAA and Anisotropy.

As affordable PCIe entrance boards, the X600 just doesn't really do enough to confirm the claimed benefits of this new architecture. Performance close to, but in fact behind, older AGP-based mid-range offerings raise the question of whether the extra bandwidth on offer by the interface is really beneficial to any card, not just the high-end offerings.

In terms of included software, the Sapphire offering does at least come with Prince of Persia - Sands of Time, as well as Splinter Cell Pandora Tomorrow. Software is the standard fare of PowerDirector, MediaShow, and the bespoke Sapphire over-clocking solution.

Not a convincing argument for the new graphics interface then. I can't recommend this card or any X600 offerings I've looked at thus far. Sure it makes the upgrade process somewhat less painful on your wallet, but for no real, immediately obvious performance benefits whatsoever. If you already have a 9600 Pro, XT or above in AGP form, stick with this interface a little while longer.



Plus: An attractively priced PCIe graphics board **Minus:** Slower than older 9600 XT using AGP
Reviewer: Russell Bennett **Supplier:** Esquire Technology [012] 657 1111 **Internet:** www.esquire.co.za **RRP:** TBA

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Geil Value DC dual-DDR RAM

After being disappointed by two more exotic set of matched Geil dual-channel RAM modules, I approached this test of the company's Value DC brand without high hopes. And yet, these innocuous DIMMs were to shatter this expectation of mediocrity.

These 256 MB DDR 400 chips are covered by a deep blue, metallic heatsink. Not quite as attractive as the polished silver of the DDR550 chips from this company, but pleasing nonetheless.

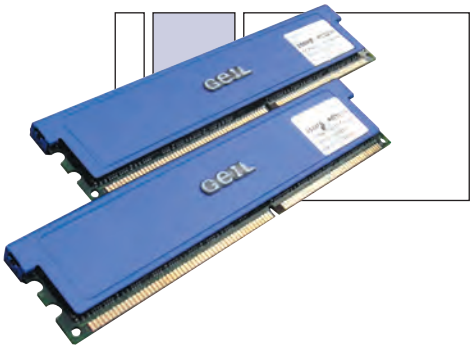
Upon installing these modules, the 3.0 GHz 800 MHz FSB P4 LGA platform I was testing on felt immediately more responsive. Running SiSoft Sandra revealed that not only did these parts push out a surprising 4562 MB/s of throughput, they did it time after time after time, with only the normal, tiny fluctuations in performance that can be attributable to memory fragmentation after repeated benchmark runs.

Over-clocking these chips yielded slightly better results still, now the system was managing almost DDR2 levels of performance as it closed in on 5000 MB/s without suffering any major heat issues thanks to those stylish blue cooling solutions in place.

Despite the Value moniker, this is the matched set of DDR from Geil I was most impressed with, by far. Medium latency from CL 2.5-4-4-8 timings, phenomenal throughput and a fairly attractive design bring this offering home ahead of both of the so-called higher-end products tested this month. Particularly if you're just a user who wants memory that performs decently without having to run the risk of over-clocking to extract decent figures.

Although ideally I'd love these modules wrapped in the manufacturers DDR550 clothing. That shining silver metal is too stunning to believe, coupled with the stability of this RAM performance would make an ideal solution from both an aesthetic and practical point of view.

Until you upgrade to a DDR2 system, if it's a bit more power you're after consider this Value DC RAM from Geil. It'll boost your system noticeably without any negative effects, provided your motherboard supports dual-channel operation and, preferably, some manual timing controls so you can clock it beyond the standard 400 MHz when you wish to.



Plus: Wonderful performance **Minus:** Not silver-encased **Reviewer:** Russell Bennett
Supplier: Naked IT [011] 482 5493 **Internet:** www.nakedit.co.za **RRP:** R1099.00

512 MB Geil DDR 550 DC RAM

With DDR2 no longer on the horizon but a real, available product, the lifespan of standard DDR looks to be no longer than a year, or perhaps two at a stretch. But if you've recently upgraded your system, you're likely to want to try and extract the best performance from your older technology for as long as possible before upgrading to the new architecture.

One good way of boosting the performance of current systems is through the installation of some seriously fast RAM modules. Such as these Geil DDR 550 DC matched DIMMs for the best dual-channel performance.

The package includes two DDR 550 DIMMs of 256 MB each for a 512 MB total. Before going any further, the presentation of the product itself is simply fantastic. Never before have I laid my eyes on such aesthetically desirable RAM modules. Encased in a gleaming silver heat-sink arrangement, and feeling hefty and substantial in your hand when it comes time to installation, this offering ought to deliver the goods if pure looks are anything to go by.

And the fist time I ran SiSoft Sandra 2004 to learn about the performance backing this quality appearance up I was impressed. In the region of 4600 MB/s throughput is faster than conventional DDR RAM has any right to be after all.

However, the second and third times I ran the memory bandwidth benchmark component of the application my satisfaction faded somewhat. These Geil PC4400 chips appeared highly unstable, with the second run yielding only 2500 MB/s and the third a lacklustre 3200, similar to standard DDR 400 parts.

Over-clocking your CPU and hence memory clock frequency helps. Clearly, chips designed to run at such high frequencies appeared to have some issues at lower settings. Even so, with the memory clocked up to 533 MHz these Geil chips were delivering close to 5000 MB/s, a highly impressive throughput for the technology.

If you're an over-clocker looking for the fastest and by far most aesthetically pleasing RAM solution available this Geil offering is worth a look. Although if performance were the sole factor, I've benchmarked high-frequency memory modules capable of delivering more than these Geil chips.

If you aren't the over-clocking type, this beautiful matched set of RAM is pointless… in fact it could even slow your system down, so be warned.

Plus: Damn, they look incredible! **Minus:** Unstable and slow at conventional frequencies
Reviewer: Russell Bennett **Supplier:** Naked IT [011] 482 5493 **Internet:** www.nakedit.co.za **RRP:** R2099.00

X-Alien Mini Server Case

You could accuse this case of a few things. Firstly, it's a bit of a knock-off of the Alienware cases, if only in spirit, but I could argue that it just cashes in on the popularity of aliens. You can also say it's not that good looking - and I'd agree, since there are far more spectacular models on the market.

But when it comes to the stuff that counts, the X-Alien case does the job almost perfectly. Larger than the average gamer case, which tends to be a midi tower, it instantly reminded me of Thermaltake's range of chassis, because it took quite a lot of inspiration from that range. The giveaway to this is the inside compartment that holds all the brackets for screw-less installation - something often mimicked by other cases, but not to this level and quality. The case also has the familiar fan bridge that hangs over your cards, plus it allows for easy installation of hard drives, since these bays face to the side of the box. The top mounted fan and USB/sound bay are also dead giveaways (the final version will also have a fan control built in, but the model we were supplied didn't have that yet).

There are, in fact, no real new ideas in this case, but it does manage to bring a lot of them together into one package. That includes a front-mounted LCD temperature display and the fan bay located next to your drives. All this is housed in a lightweight aluminium chassis and can be carried with the collapsible handle at the top.

Inside you have loads of space, allowing for multiple hard and CD-ROM drives. As mentioned, some of the HDD bays face to the side, so you can easily remove drives, especially since the case uses mounting brackets. The only problem I encountered here is that you need a pretty long IDE or SATA cable that can reach from your board to the drives.

The case only ships with three fans, the largest sitting at the back, glowing neon blue. All of this you can admire through the window, which has been fashioned into an alien's face.

It's a solid case, complete with all the trimmings you'd want, plus it has loads of interior space for those large hardware expansions you inevitably fall into. One thing it does neglect is clips to mount your motherboard on, opting instead for the almost archaic method of using screws. And it won't be your cheapest purchase, sitting at nearly a grand without a power supply. But if you are in the market for a good, high-end case, but not willing to break the bank on one of the luxury models, this is the next best thing in line.

Plus: Large interior | Lots of smart features **Minus:** Expensive | No motherboard clips
Reviewer: James Francis **Supplier:** Naked IT [011] 482 5493 **Internet:** www.nakedit.co.za **RRP:** R999.00

Gainward Ultra 2100

It's taken long enough to hit SA shores… after all the chipset this Gainward Series 2200 offering is based on was launched before the competitions X800 to the international market. Nonetheless here is the first nVidia 6800-based offering to become available locally.

This particular card is also a Gainward "Golden Sample", which to quote the product sheet, means that 'it is rigorously tested to ensure optimum operation even when toying with frequency settings to get even more performance from it'. The "Golden Sample" variant also comes with 2.8 ns DDR RAM, which isn't quite full-blown DDR3 but nonetheless should offer that bit more bandwidth we gamers crave.

This 128 MB offering features all the technology updates which the NV40 chipset on which it is based has brought to the gaming party. UltraShadow II, CineFX 3.0 and IntelliSample III for instance, each enhancing certain elements of the GPUs overall performance. As is well known by now, this chipset is also the first to support Shader Model (SM) 3.0.

Just how does this high-end offering from nVidia compare to its deadliest rival, the X800? For benchmarking we used Forceware 61.77 and beta 62.20 drivers, and found very little difference between the two, running on a 3.06 GHz P4 with 512 MB DDR RAM and the just-released DirectX 9.0c. The standard run of benchmarking software (3DMark03, Aquamark 3, X2), is bolstered with the addition of HardwareOC's FarCry benching utility as this is the only game title at the moment with support for SM 3.0. Finally, with the release of Doom 3 imminent, I thought it prudent to haul the Alpha of this massive title out of storage one final time.

3DMark 03s standard benchmark run, at 1024X768 with no filtering enabled, saw the Gainward post a formidable 8468, some 300 points below the score achieved by the X800 Pro. With 4-pass FSAA enabled, the card manages a commendable 5978. The X800 with 6X FSAA turned on returned 5300, while my standard MSI 9800 Pro 128 MB pulls about 5900 with FSAA turned off. The 6800 is definitely a step up from this older hardware then, and running neck and neck with its fiercest competition at this point in the testing process.

In Aquamark 3, the 6800 didn't manage to put together quite so definitive a showing. While 48798 Aquamarks is a good score, more than any previous-generation card could ever hope for, it is eclipsed quite comfortably by the X800 Pro which manages to breach 50 000 without any trouble. One for the competition then from this DX9-oriented benchmark suite.

X2, on the other hand, is a battle which the nVidia offering easily wins. UltraShadow II takes care of the stencil-shading procedures used in this game to generate its complex shadows in a single pass, and at 1280 X 1024 with shadows, bumpmapping and FSAA enabled still the 6800 sails through this bench with more than 50 fps average. This game is made very playable by this Gainward offering even when excessive numbers of ships are dropped into a system.

Doom 3 is another title in which shadow-generation mechanisms play a significant role in the overall performance of the graphics hardware. Once again the 6800 stands out as the quickest I have ever tested, averaging just under 50 fps in the Alpha version of this title, and never dropping below 30 even in frantic gunfights. The X800 can't match this performance, and in the Doom 3 bench nVidia is a clear winner.

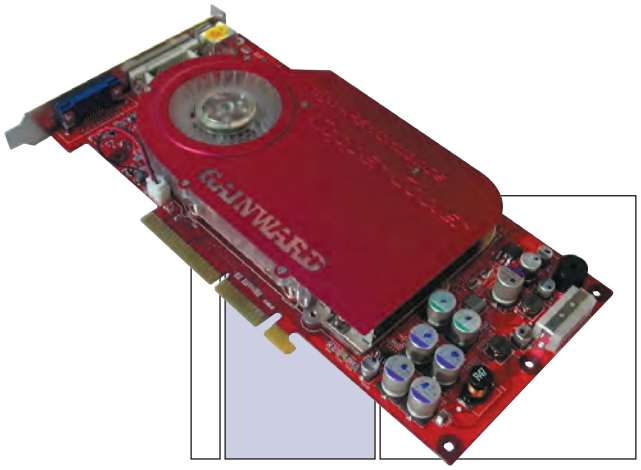
Finally, we come to FarCry. I'm very grateful that the Hardware OC benching utility was available when it came time to perform these tests, as it made running the benches over and over to look for differences in SM 3.0 a breeze.

The result, is that the new shader model makes very little visible difference at all, nor does it bring significant performance benefits. On average, each demo ran about 1 fps quicker overall using the newer model, with negligible image quality improvements.

There's more than enough raw power in NV40 to run the title extremely well however. The Regulator demo delivers an average 36.7 fps at 1024 X 768. Four-pass FSAA drops this rate down to 31, while running Anisotropic filtering with FSAA does the most damage dropping average frames down to 20. Not enough to see off the competition from ATi in this title, but plenty to enjoy the game to its fullest.

A brief word of caution concerning power consumption. The Gainward manual recommends at least a 300 W PSU. For the duration of the benchmarking, I ran the 6800 off a Thermaltake Xaser 480 W PSU, but I originally connected the system up using a much cheaper AOpen 300 W. Massive stability issues and restricted performance was the result of this test, so make sure you have a decent PSU if you're looking at a 6800-based unit.

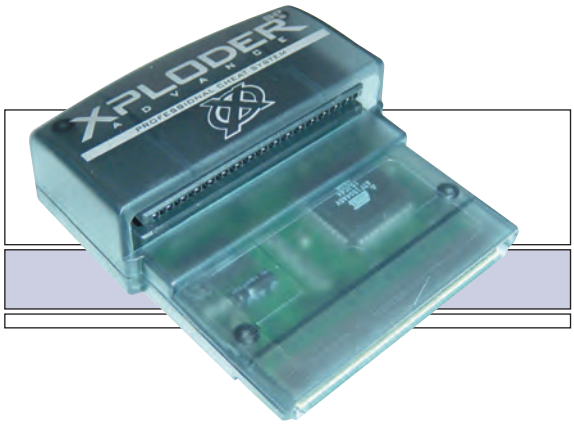
Overall the Gainward Ultra 2100, to give it its official title, performed extremely well across the board. Typical nVidia driver-juggling for running different titles mars the experience slightly, but the power on offer is just about exactly on par with ATi's monstrous X800. NV40 wins out on stencil-shadow heavy titles and GL rendering, while the R400 takes top Direct3D honours, but just barely. At the end of the day it will come down to personal choice, and if you're lucky enough to get either a 6800 or X800 unit be content with the knowledge that you've one of the most powerful boards in the world today.



Plus: More powerful than absolutely everything in some tests **Minus:** nVidia driver issues
Reviewer: Russell Bennett **Supplier:** Axiz [011] 237 7000 **Internet:** www.axiz.co.za **RRP:** TBA

Xploder for Gameboy Advance + SP

The Xploder for Gameboy Advance + SP is an intuitive system which allows you to make use of cheats and save games on your GBA or GBA SP. Similar systems are available for the PlayStation 2 and they all work on the same principle. With this kit you get a special cartridge which plugs into the game port of your GBA, the actual game in turn piggy backs on this cartridge. There is also a USB cable included in the kit which allows you to connect your GBA to your computer and backup your save games, or load new cheats and save games, all of this is done via the software which can be installed from the supplied CD. The system works surprisingly well, except for the fact that at the time of writing this review there where no cheats available for Spider-Man 2, a game I just recently purchased. The actual list of games this product supports is quite vast and I do not foresee any major problems in getting a cheat for your game, unless of course it is very new. Activating a cheat or save game is very simple and you do not need to be connected to your PC to do so. Simply insert the special cartridge that is provided, piggy back the desired game on it and switch on the GBA. It automatically boots into the Xploder menu system which allows you to scroll to the game you want to cheat and then you can activate it just before you start the game. You can also add your own cheat codes to the Xploder system by adding them onto the database by either doing so on your GBA or on the computer. This system works well and just for being able to back-up your save games, it makes it worth it.



Plus: Backup save games **Minus:** Not all of the latest games supported **Reviewer:** Tom Taylor
Supplier: Bowline [0800] 203 048 **Internet:** www.xploder.net **RRP:** R399

Western Digital Media Centre

Ah yet another all-in-one USB device comes across my testing workbench. This time it's a Western Digital Media Centre, combination external hard disk drive and 8-in-1 smart card reader, as well as USB 2.0 Hub.

At first glance the Media Centre looks positively awesome. Sure mobility is compromised by the size of the unit and the need to carry power around with it, but then again if it's only SD card operations you need it for, the power converter is at least unnecessary. It does, after all, house a chunky 250 GB HDD in that case.

Connectivity is well taken care of, with two USB and two FireWire ports, for daisy-chaining devices using this connection bus straight through the Western Digital product. Stylish buttons embedded into the face of the unit provide power on/off for the unit, and one-touch operation of the Dual option Backup value-added software.

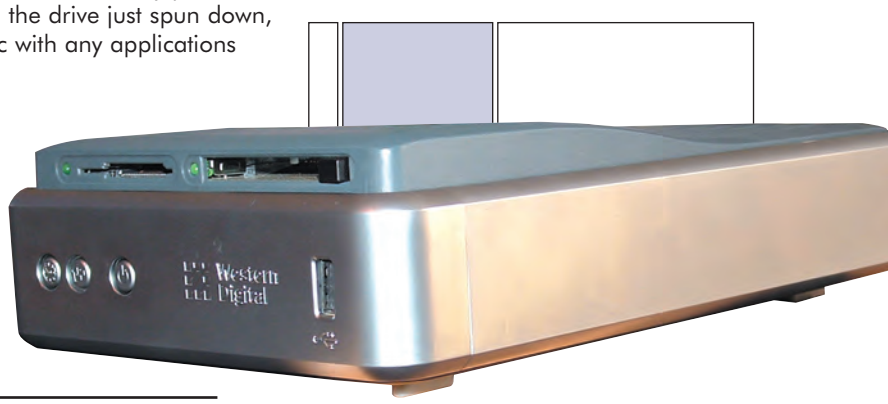
USB hub functionality is drastically limited with only 2 ports available, but it's better than nothing. Performance through this interface is excellent, with the unit peaking at a steady 23000 K/s. This allowed 15.5 GB of data to be copied across to it in 13 minutes, a respectable figure for an external drive.

The hard drive encased is in fact an 8MB-cache 7200 RPM unit capable of higher speeds than this but of course it is the external connection which slows this throughput down here.

What I did not like about the WD Media Centre was that despite claiming to have a Safe Shutdown feature, the hard disk wore so rapidly that after just a few weeks the hard disk had an annoying tendency of dropping power after 20 minutes or so of being active. After making an undoubtedly power-related sound the drive just spun down, causing havoc with any applications which might still have been accessing data on the unit.

Then there's the additional Dual-option backup software, a utility which backs up key system and user files either automatically or at the prompting of the operator. This software works remarkably well, I was just more concerned about the health of the external solution than my directly-attached drives to feel any safer about my data after having used the solution.

A good idea, and a nice combination of features even though as a USB hub it's fairly pointless.



Plus: Card reader and substantial mobile hard disk in one **Minus:** Unreliable | Easily breakable
Reviewer: Russell Bennett **Supplier:** Drive Control Corporation [011] 887 8927 **Internet:** www.drivecon.net **RRP:** TBA

anime.

Remember to take a look on the cover CD for the fourth issue of **LO Magazine** - it's an anime magazine in .PDF format. Please note this magazine is not created by NAG Magazine - we're just providing the vehicle...

news

see you, space cowboy

Joining the ever-increasing ranks of anime-series-turned-video-games is Shinichiro Watanabe's masterpiece, Cowboy Bebop (one of the most acclaimed shows of all time) now intended for the PlayStation 2 and in development by Japanese studio Banpresto.

Previously, Cowboy Bebop was the inspiration for a PSX title of the same name, which was only loosely based on the series and not well received by fans or critics. However, this instalment promises to be different, with many of the show's original creators lending their talents to the game's production, including jazz legend Yoko Kanno. You play as Spike Spiegel, Jet Black or Faye Valentine, assuming the role of a bounty hunter through 50 missions, on all of the inhabited planets of the solar system. The developers have made it clear that the game will follow the events of the series, and that hidden pieces of the back story will be unlocked as the missions are completed. A cell-shaded approach has been taken with the graphics, attempting to mimic that of the series as closely as possible. The play dynamic will be primarily combat-based, and the characters will be equipped with a variety of moves, each in their own characteristic fighting style. We will find out how the final product measures up when it is released in October, but so far it looks to be heading in the right direction.

review

royal space force: the wings of honneamise

In the early 1980's, college students Hiroyuki Yamaga, Takami Akai and Hideaki Anno came together as the revolutionary animators who would go on to found studio GAINAX on Christmas Eve 1984. Breaking with tradition, their first project was not based on any popular manga, but rather a short story written by Yamaga, entitled "Honneamise no Tsubasa - Oritsu Uchugun". To secure funding for the film, the burgeoning company produced a four minute short film / trailer which they then took to Bandai Visual. A budget of eight hundred million yen was immediately approved - the largest budget that had ever been granted to an anime film - and production began, utilising a total of over three thousand animators. Each frame was rendered individually, and the production was designed by a team of art directors and engineers who traveled worldwide in their research. This bit of background information should give the reader a general idea of just how vast and detailed the visuals are.

The film deals with the topic of space exploration, but not in the usual giant robots and storm troopers sense of the term. It is concerned with the politics surrounding the world's first space flight, and how it affects the character of the people involved. Although set in an elaborate alternate world, the film obviously intends its observations to be relevant to our own, and as such the focus is on the human elements in the story, not the science fiction. The Wings of Honneamise is "sci-fi" by setting, not theme. The characters are well rounded, open to a severe amount of interpretation and therefore endlessly intriguing. Shirotsugh Lhadatt, the protagonist, at one point questions his own nature in the memorable words: "Suppose life's a story... have you ever wondered if maybe you aren't a good guy?" anton lines

Format: Movie **Age Restriction**: PG 13
Availability: www.amazon.com - $26.96 excl. shipping

WWE
TBA

Yu Yu Hakusho - Ghostfiles

The first 4 episodes of this quirky series about a boy in the afterlife make for a good gateway drug, leading you to harder anime and more Yu Yu Hakusho binges. The story is off-centre and often quite morbid, yet the light-hearted antics try to mask a deeper philosophical question of 'how much do we matter to each other'. The dubbed English is high-quality, though the lack of original voices might perturb some. Don't let the FUNimation (introduced Dragon Ball Z) logo put you off, Pierrot (created Key the Metal Idol) brings rich character development to the table.

music.

No Silence |
ATB

ATB's new album is fairly worthwhile, in an ambient trance house kind of way. It is fairly reminiscent of the Robert Miles era, and its vocal driven songs are enjoyable and easy on the ear. It's nothing massively new or ground breaking but it is pleasant listening.
If your tastes tend towards a more nostalgic sound, you will probably enjoy this.

UB40 Homegrown DVD |
UB40

It might be "old people's music," but the charm of UB40 cannot be denied. This DVD features an impressive live performance in Amsterdam, which contains some of the best loved tracks from this long-lived super-group. Extra features include interviews and behind the scenes goodies as well. A must for fans!

books and graphic novels.

graphic novel

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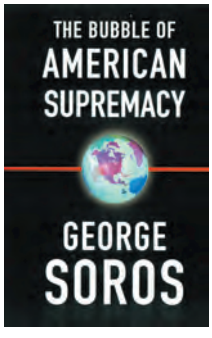
Toyfare Twisted Theatre
Wizard publications
R86.95

The Bubble of American Supremacy
By George Soros • R149.95 (excl. delivery)



To say George W. Bush and the United States government are taking a hit in the popularity stakes is akin to saying that Doom is just another game. Subsequent to the September 11 attacks in 2001, worldwide sentiment has changed from being sympathetic to the American people to that of outrage at their "democratically elected" president. It seems that the Iraqi invasion and the subsequent non-appearance of the weapons of mass destruction was the last straw. In The Bubble of American Supremacy, businessman George Soros argues that the current state of world affairs is exactly what Osama Bin Laden would have been waiting for. Soros states that "by declaring war on terrorism and invading Iraq, President Bush has played right into the terrorists' hands."
The book is divided into two parts, A Critical View and A Constructive Vision. In the first part, Soros does not pull any punches on how Bush is using September 11 as an excuse to do what he wants. He scrutinises Bush's doctrine, his foreign policy and Iraq and shows the reader just how ludicrous the Iraqi invasion was.
Soros changes tact in the second part and discusses how America (as the only true remaining superpower) can use its dominant position in the world to make things right. Again, Soros makes valid points but these will in all likelihood be slammed as being anti-American and unpatriotic.
Ironic isn't it that America is referred to as the land of the free and where freedom of speech is embedded in the collective psycho of its citizens?

Havoc After Dark: Tales of Terror
By Robert Fleming
R132.95 (excl. delivery)

At first glance, Havoc After Dark appears to be a standard horror anthology. Comprising 14 stories penned by Robert Fleming, it has the obligatory werewolf, vampire and voodoo offerings. In fact, the first two, Life After Bas and The Tenderness of Monsieur Blanc, seem to follow the tried and tested formula used by many classic horror tales. Fortunately, Fleming hits his stride from the third story and starts offering the reader chilling tales that become increasingly sinister as the anthology progresses. Horror in Havoc After Dark takes many different forms. As mentioned earlier, the standard monster fare makes an appearance. These tales are interspersed with ones dealing with psychological and physical dangers. All told, Havoc After Dark is a thought-provoking anthology and a worthy addition to the horror connoisseur's library.

books supplied by
www.kalahari.net
A WORLD OF GAMING ON YOUR DOORSTEP

role-playing and strategy.

review

Pirates of the Spanish Main

We're familiar with CCG, Collectable Card Games such as Magic: The Gathering. CCSG? Now that's an entirely new abbreviation, and it's from Wizkids (who brought us HeroClix). It stands for Collectable Constructible Strategy Game and as the title indicates, it happily features Pirates and pirate-y things such as Ships, Treasure and more.

Pirates, as far as information goes, comes in only one flavour.

A single Game Pack the size of your average Magic booster, estimated to retail at R35. Inside the foil wrapping you'll always find 2 ships, though the exact ships are, in the tradition of collectable things, random. The ships need to actually be constructed, popping out the masts, bows and poop-decks from the plastic cards, and then assembling them by slotting them into the right slits. The power (and often point cost) of a ship is determined by the number of masts it has. Two-mast ships are mostly speedy but lack firepower since each mast represents both a hit-point and a cannon. Get hit, lose one mast. Ships have nationality, crew aboard ships (crew also come in card form, entirely random and each with special abilities) need to be of the same nationality as the vessel or they may not use their abilities.

Combat is fluid and surprisingly fun, attributed mostly to the quick-play dynamics. Each mast/cannon has a dice picture on it, showing you the required roll you have to beat to hit a ship with cannon fire. Each Game Pack comes with a tiny dice, so you'll never have to look for one (unless you lose the tiny dice). Ship movement can either be L, or S. L represents the longer red-edged side of the card that the ship came in, S is the smaller, white-edged side. If a ship can move L + S, you move the ship the distance of the length of the card, and then you may change its angle of direction and move the length of the short side of the card. It's quick and simple, no measuring tape required as per usual with table-top strategy games.

Since its pirates, you play for treasure. Treasure is stacked on islands, the first to bring back more than half of the initial treasure wins. The combat is easy to learn, the premise is fresh and fun while the strategy involved gives enough depth for those who like to think hard.

review

Trigun

When making a game based on other forms of popular entertainment, there are always certain risks involved. Will it capture the spirit of the original work? Will the fans of the original work be prone to role playing and, if so, will enough of those fans buy the product? Is the scope behind the original setting enough to sustain a prolonged role playing game campaign?

While it may sometimes seem to be a great idea to produce a role playing game based on some other entertainment work, these things do need to be considered. One title, though, seems to have captured a little corner of the role playing market - Trigun.

Based on the very popular anime series of the same name, this D20 system game allows players to enter the over-the-top world of anime and experience the Trigun world "first-hand." And seeing as how many role players enjoy anime, it looks like the title should prove rather popular.

The book is beautifully produced, with many full colour pages describing the series (which will allow the GM to base his campaign around the series and thereby add some "credibility" to the game. Of course, this does limit the time span that the game may encompass, but limitations are only as prohibitive as a GM allows them to be.

Trigun Core Book
Approx. R400

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comics.

Rogue
Marvel Comics
R22.50

If you have seen the X-Men movies and you want more detail on the cutest of the bunch, Marvel has brought out the series for you. Though the series starts with a current setting, it soon leads into the dark memories of the girl who can absorb anyone else's powers and thoughts with a single touch. At the same time she has to deal with a boyfriend gone blind and a mysterious stranger who appears to know more about her past than Rogue herself. Like Emma Frost, its predecessor, this series is aimed at both the fans, who want to know more, and those who want a good story, that doesn't assume they have already read the last 200 issues.

Kabuki the Alchemy
Icon comics
R21.50

A new episode in the life of the Japanese assassin known as Kabuki, this time the incredible collage style artwork of David Mack has his assassin escaping the confines of the organization she has been forced to serve. Comparing issues of Christian rebirth to new beginnings in life and other philosophical questions, this is a comic to make you think and feel, as well as giving you pretty pictures. If you have any interest in Japanese history and society, then give Kabuki a try. You are guaranteed to learn and understand a lot.

Samurai Crusader
Viz Graphics
R120

One of the most bizarre titles to come out of the Manga world, Samurai Crusader follows the adventures of Kunomaru, a young student determined to be the best swordsman. Unfortunately for him this is the 1930s and sword skill is less important than it used to be, so he has to set off to travel the world. First stop, Paris, where he meets up with a struggling writer, named Ernest Hemmingway. He also uncovers a plot to steal the legendary sword Kusanagi from the Japanese embassy; legend has it that whoever controls the sword will rule Japan. Nazi's, Samurai and adventure in the Indiana Jones style - this story has it all, and fine artwork as well.

strategy guides.

Supplied by Pearson Education
www.bradygames.com

Not everyone needs a strategy guide, but for some, getting everything out of their game is integral. Much like a car enthusiast would like to know everything about cars or their car, a strategy guide allows that type of gamer to get the most out of their game.

The **XIII** strategy guide is both slick in presentation and in the amount of information it contains. It not only covers the history of the lead character in more detail than the game itself, but it also delves into detailed descriptions of the secondary characters, the weapons and the other equipment XIII will use during the game. Each mission is given a detailed walkthrough as well as a 'quick and dirty' quick-through, showing you only the key points you need to achieve that level. There is even a section dedicated to the multiplayer side of the game, giving you helpful hints and tips on how to stop getting shot.

Using the same 'video' theme that the game **Manhunt** utilized, this guide compliments the game quite well. The Director is a character in the game that tells you what to do; this guide tells you how to do it. All the weapons are examined; all the places to hide are shown. The guide perfectly suggests when to hide, when to run, when to shoot and when to kill in a gruesome manner. Aside from a walkthrough, there is also an in-depth analysis of the various ways to Execute the enemies, as well as how to unlock the bonus missions and extra content.

If you believe this guide's tagline of 'A Badge and an Attitude can only take you so far', then you're in luck. **True Crime**, set in the city of Los Angeles, can be a large and daunting game. This guide has a comprehensive walkthrough that shows you how to experience every moment of play as well as how to reach the alternate cinematic sequences and alternate missions. The detailed maps of Los Angeles come in handy for finding your way around, while the detailed look at each weapon, vehicle and fighting skills makes beating down/driving down punks easier. As a bonus, you get a concept art gallery and actual California Police Dispatch Codes.

Who wouldn't want a 2-sided poster of the Prince doing his Persia thing? With a dimensionally complex game such as **Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time**, the guide does a sterling job of re-creating the levels as 3D maps, giving you a good perspective on the areas and how to reach hard-to-reach places. The walkthrough is comprehensive showing you the best possible paths around the traps, as well as a 'quick rundown' of what you need to do each mission. Every enemy's strengths and weaknesses are examined and you're guided on which moves are best used to dispatch them. A detailed chronicling of the Prince of Persia is included, giving you insight into its humble beginnings in 1989. Bonus content such as character and enemy artwork is always appreciated.

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Got something to say? Want to nominate some sites for this section? Or are you just generally bored? Remember that's there's always our online site, packed with crazy forums, off-the-wall gaming news and the Editor's personal diary, which we scan pages from when he's not looking. Oh, and you can subscribe to the weekly e-mail newsletter.

Even on the international arena, things are settled with Rock. Paper. Scissors! This funny compilation of photos from Saddam Hussein's pre-trial hearing is quite a read, and another tip of the hat to the crazy nature of Internet culture. That, and now Pen Missile and Tiger Claw are both legal moves in this age-old game; at least when you're playing against Saddam.

www.rockpapersaddam.com/index.html

Voice acting and sound have long since been a bit of a humorous part of gaming, with some titles featuring the worst dubbing or voices imaginable, and there seems to be no end to the flood of bad linguistics. This site acts as a museum for the terrible sounds that come out of your speakers. Most of the games are Japanese ports, though a few Western titles also get the dubious honour. Sound clips are in MP3 and each file has a comment to why it's bad as well. But sometimes all you need to do is listen...

www.audioatrocities.com

A game written in only 5k of code? That's nothing new, but what if we tell you that it's a first person shooter? That's a bit more impressive, isn't it? This cute little shooter runs straight through your browser and is quite something to see, if you don't mind the small space it plays in. Load it up, run around the room, shoot the bad guys and collect health - basically what you'd do in any FPS.

www.wolf5k.com

There's really no point in going to this site - at least, no practical point. The service is geared towards the American market and besides that we suspect that you can handle yourself at least a bit when things don't go quite right on your PC. Visit Geek Rescue if you want to see some inventive, user-friendly usage of Flash. It's nothing spectacular, unless you keep in mind that no conventional site technology can give this kind of professional display for customers.

www.geekrescue.com

www.hovercarracer.com

Recently signed to a movie contract by Disney, Matthew Reilly's Hover Car Racer is a free set of novels based around a young pilot and his races in what could aptly be described as Wipeout. Light, easy sci-fi, the books make for a fun read and are the perfect fodder for when you really don't want to work on that proposal.

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LEGACY

Warhammer titles

Everyone might remember the disappointing Firewarrior from last year, but the Warhammer universe has a rich history of solid games to its name...

Space Hulk (1993)
A conversion of the turn-based real-world game, Space Hulk was the first Warhammer computer game and still remains a scary game to play. Not a bad start for the series...

Space Hulk: Vengeance of the Blood Angels (1995)
A sequel that dared to make a lot of changes to the original's play dynamic, it was met with a mixed response, but still remains a good, if very tough, game.

Final Liberation: Warhammer 40,000 Epic (1997)
Not the best or the worst in the series, this isometric RTS-inspired game boasted bigger armies to control.

Warhammer: Shadow of the Horned Rat (1996)
Based in the original timeline, Warhammer's first RTS was well ahead of its time in innovation, but it only allowed you to play one race.

Warhammer 40,000: Chaos Gate (1998)
A squad-based action game, it was all too often compared to the excellent X-Com, which it seemed to imitate the most – not such a bad thing.

Warhammer: Dark Omen (1998)
A sequel to Horned Rat, this time the action was more RPG based as you played the role of Morgan Brenhart and managed his armies for battle.

Warhammer 40,000: Rites of War (1999)
One of the best in the series yet, this turn-based action title put you in charge of the Eldar race as they drive the humans from the Maiden world.

Warhammer 40,000: Fire Warrior (2003)
Warhammer's first real shooter turned out to be linear, boring and a mark on the Warhammer game lineage, especially compared to the excellent Space Hulk.

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Mona Loser...

Ramjet's Rampage

Complaining doesn't make you special... it makes you annoying!

Indeed, Ramjet does read the Domain of The_Basilisk, in order to avoid writing the same kind of drivel that Lizard Breath does.

People sometimes ask me (between the expletives describing me as everything from a dog's bum to someone having incestuous relations with my female parent) why I get back to the same topics again and again. My reply is simple - because people a) never change and b) never listen. So, quite frankly, I am prepared to repeat myself until I am dark blue in the face on topics such as this one.

We do not, by any stretch of the imagination, live in a perfect world. If we did, politicians would earn the same amount as other civil servants, and I would have a harem of Swedish girls who were kicked out of flight attendant school for being too damn pretty at my beck and call. But we can't all have what we want, purely because the world is, as I said, imperfect.

And this is a fact we all know. It's nothing new - this is no newsflash. Life is harsh, deal with it. Buy a damn helmet.

Yet, despite the fact that we are all well aware that this old world is completely imperfect, people still whine... and this is not just a gamer phenomenon. It pertains to every person, almost - or at least every person lacking the experience and wisdom to throw those rose-coloured shades aside and see the world for what it really is.

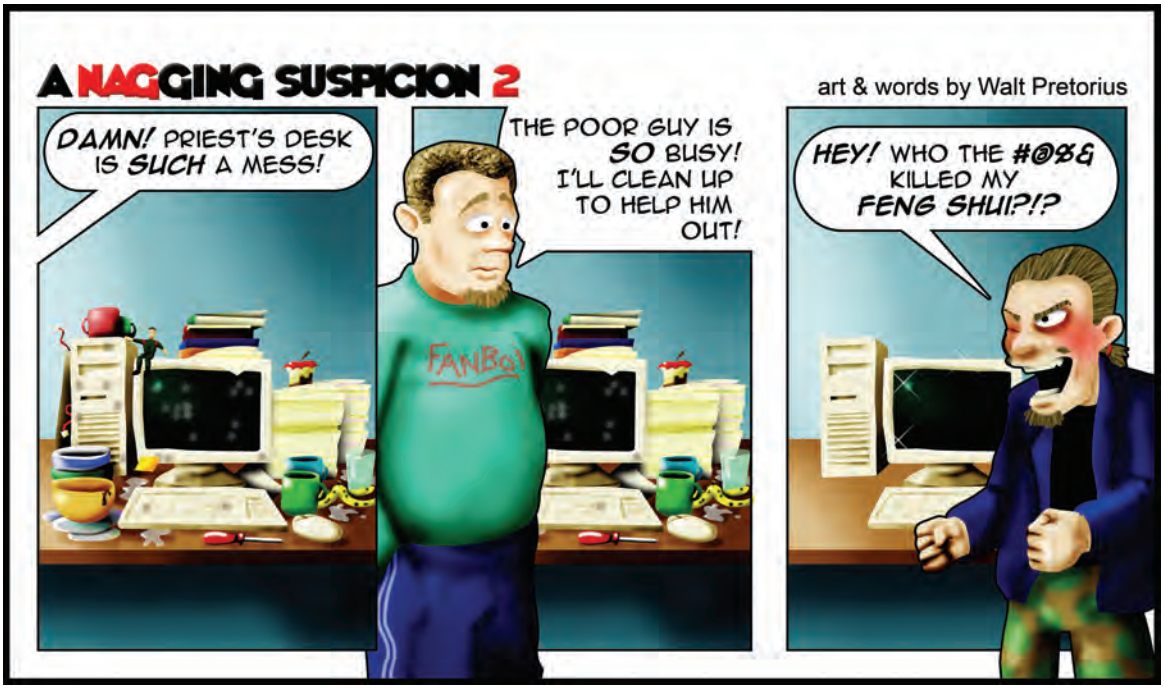
Complaining is a good thing, of course. It helps to create a better environment for us all, in theory at least, but the fact of the matter is that complaining needs to be tempered with forethought and reasonability for it to be effective.

So, rose-coloured glasses and an unwillingness to take all factors into account are two of the three problems we face here. The third is the fact that people (and this is most definitely aimed at gamers) have a strange way of inflating their own self worth in the grand scheme of things. So, without further ado, I would like to make my statement for this month. Mull it over for a while:

You are not special. Other people are not here purely to please you. You may think, in your selfish little life that your tantrums make the world a better place but, quite honestly, they don't. All they do is make other people despise you.

Next time you want to complain (about a magazine, gaming event, or anything else) take five minutes to think first. Then construct an argument, and put it forward reasonably. Be prepared to listen to the other side of the story. Ask yourself if you (honestly) could do a better job (which is doubtful.) And be prepared to admit when you are wrong. And don't fly off the handle at every chance you get.

These are elements of mature thinking. Try it sometime.



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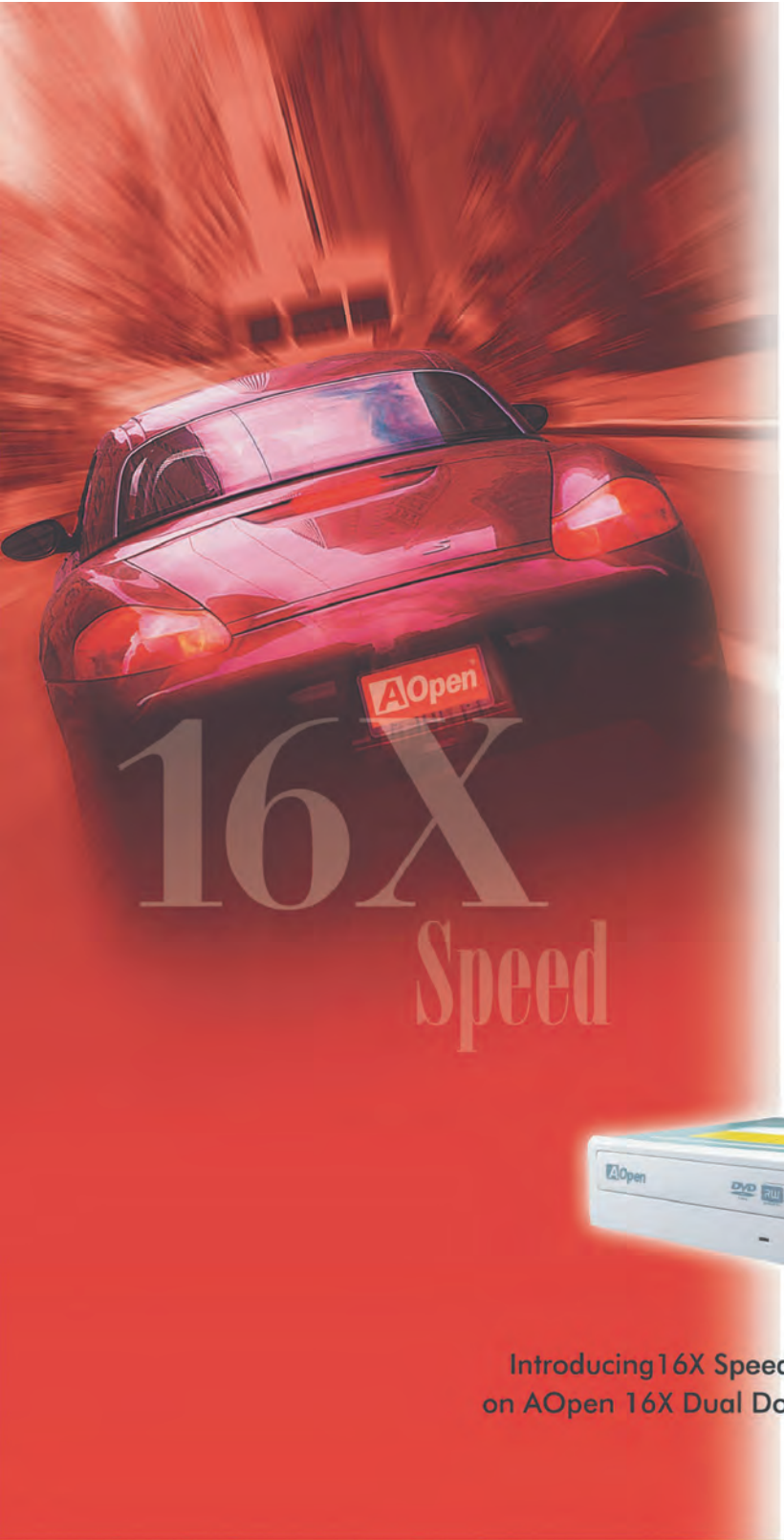

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