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exclusive preview

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17 INCH LCD GROUP TEST ◀◀

ONIMUSHA 3 REVIEW ◀◀

PETER MOLYNEUX INTERVIEW ◀◀

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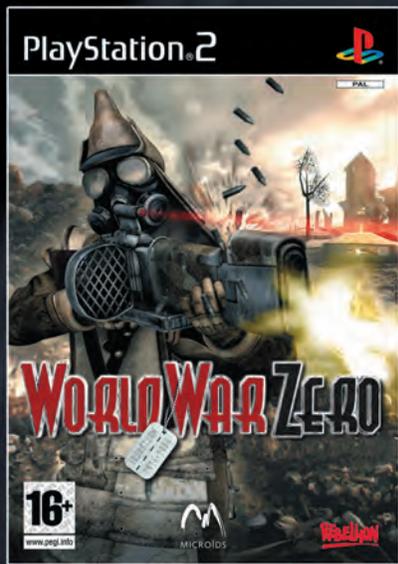
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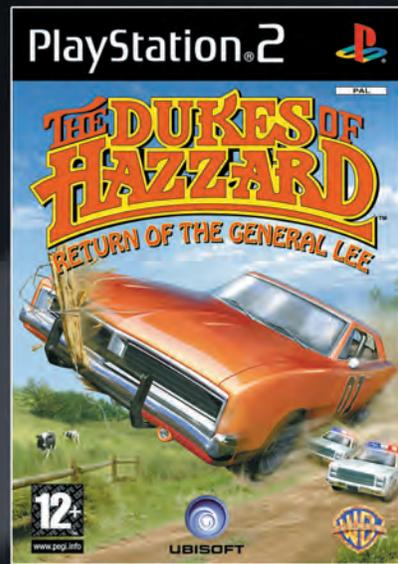




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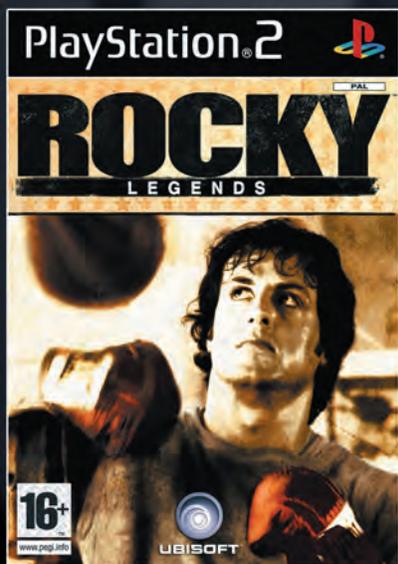
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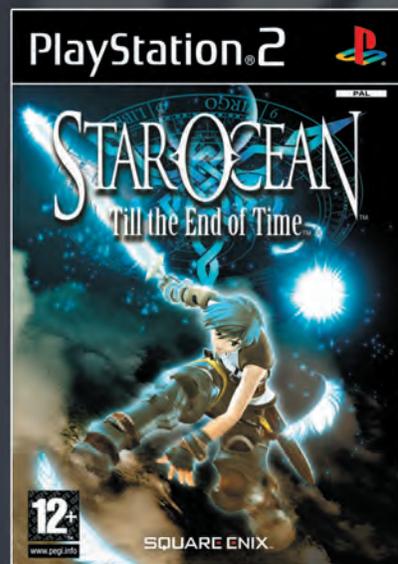
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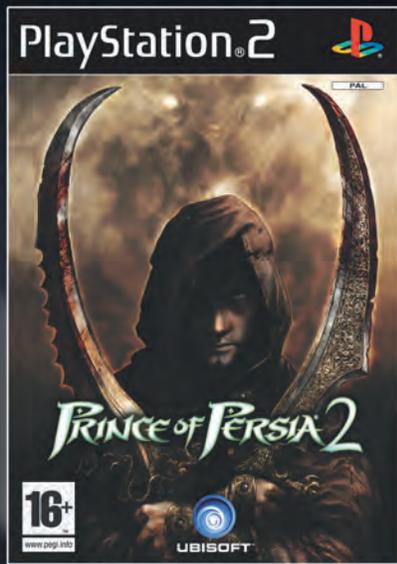
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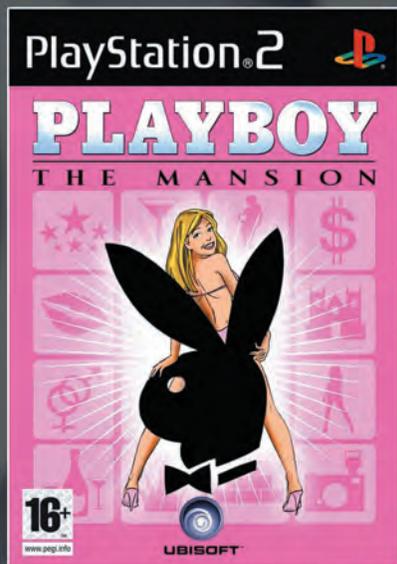
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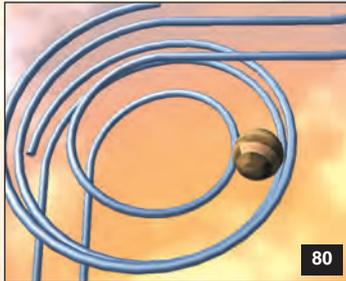
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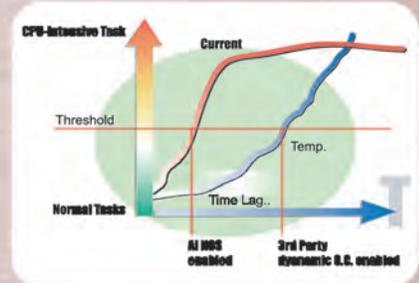
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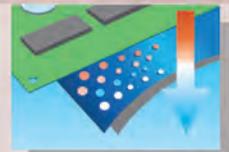
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Two great games, cinemas and some other words

Tomb Raider Returns - for real this time
 If you're like me, bitterly disappointed with the last attempt at a Tomb Raider sequel then you might be interested to know that Toby Gard has joined Crystal Dynamics to work on the next Tomb Raider game. You should care because Toby Gard is the original creator of Lara Croft and after the poor Angel of Darkness the big shots at Eidos decided to take the license away from Core Design and hand it over to the capable team at Crystal Dynamics. The first Tomb Raider is around 7 years old and if you remember playing that one the fact that the creator of the Tomb Raider legend is now working on the latest sequel should come as rather good news. The only problem now is if the next game is a shambles we'll have nowhere else to turn and will spell a tragic end to the girl that changed the face of gaming. Oh, there's also a rumour doing the rounds that Warren Spector [Deus Ex creator] is also helping out with the game.



It didn't get any better than this - and hasn't since...

Stale Wars: A personal crusade

A long time ago in a cinema quite close to you actually...

Cinema Projectionist [a job description]

Projectionists operate projection machines that show films in a cinema. They receive spools of film, check and load them onto the projectors in the right order, ensure that the film runs smoothly, and repair, store and send them to the next destination after the run of performances.

Other duties include maintaining projectors, operating the sound system, dealing with lighting, heating, ventilation, fire alarms and equipment, as well as electrical, water and gas supplies, if installed.

A projectionist needs to be:

- Punctual, patient and alert
- Practical, with good sight and hearing, and good hand/eye coordination
- Good at problem-solving, with an eye for detail
- Interested in mechanical/electronic equipment, and films

I took this off some website somewhere because we have a little problem in this country that needs to be addressed. It seems that local cinemas are grabbing random people off the sidewalk, sticking a uniform on them and shoving them into the projector room. Apparently their only experience in 'movies' is having hired a few at their local video shop. Just imagine if the first time you saw Star Wars on the big screen the opening 20th Century Fox fanfare was muted or at best scratchy, the aspect ratio of the screen was incorrect and the opening Star Wars introductory text was reversed. You're certainly not watching what

the director intended and all because some idiot is sitting with his finger up his nose instead of doing his job properly and has ruined the experience for everyone. So, a little note to the cinema 'managers' at Monte Casino and Fourways Mall in Gauteng - please fire all the idiots you have running the projectors and hire properly trained staff [see above job description]. We come to the cinema to watch movies, not experience technical difficulties because of your incompetence. It happens time and time again and there's nothing more irritating than having to run out the cinema to let you know there's something wrong.

This is also a special plea to all NAG readers, if you ever experience technical problems, stale popcorn or dirty toilets complain to the manager and demand your money back. As my good buddy always says, "touch the wallet and you touch the soul". There's nothing like a mob of angry people to get a little action going.

Bits & pieces

Many of you might feel the same way about our exclusive feature preview that starts on page 40 - it's the kind of excited anticipation that you'll only get if you've grown up with the series - dare I say forget DOOM and get ready for Quake again?

We've started a dedicated hardware section on our forums. Go here www.nag.co.za to ask all those stupid questions you've been dying to know the answer to anonymously.

In the next issue you can expect a monster review on The Sims 2 and anything else we can dig up. The November issue is usually the start of the festive gaming season when all those big titles everyone's waiting for finally arrive. The good news is that this period extends right past the March 2005 issue of NAG. I say this every year but it's never been this good to be a gamer.

If you're feeling charitable you can congratulate us again - this issue represents the third time we've had to increase our magazine print run in 2004. It seems that our readership is growing at a phenomenal rate and you existing readers have an insatiable hunger for whatever it is we're doing right. The good news for you [for me it's a new car] is that we can channel even more resources back into the magazine making it bigger, better and harder.

Michael James

[Editor]



Quake IV!

Bribery and corruption

Like last month [thanks to Activision] we have some exclusive cover artwork and a juicy Quake IV article to go along with it. In this fast paced industry of ours they sure do know how to drop bombs on the gaming press. That said, we are an easy sell and when it comes to Quake we'll stoop quite low to get the scoop.



That's about it - there is no funny story about the cover except that we had to keep things very quiet while working on the article and cover. We even had to blindfold the monitor in case something slipped out.

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: **October 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 October Caption



'This is going to be a tough caption to come up with' - NAG's [99.7% lame] effort

September winner



"It's a bird, it's a plane, no, it's Vin Diesel in a mermaid costume, start filming!" - **Simon Strehler***

*We know it stinks but it was the best of the lot...

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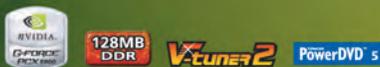


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Give our game movies to Japan!

words james francis

I'm not a Wapanese by any degree - my fascination with Japan and its culture is purely anthropological. Besides, those people have 86 volcanoes, not to mention earthquakes and tsunamis - all hitting one of the most densely populated areas on Earth. But the people of the Rising Sun do have certain flair to how they put things across, especially in their media.

Take popular Japanese films, for instance. These might range in topics and approach, but they all have a more hardcore visual quality that seems to appeal to their market - and to the world at large, as movies like *The Matrix* proved with its hefty list of Japanese influences. While the Europeans love exploring the surreal and the Americans have perfected the art of making a blockbuster, Japan lends itself to making things look good.

I'm not a Japanese movie guru by any means - I grab most of my prospective rentals and buys from ads, reviews and anything that bothers to talk about the films. When it comes to making things with style, even if substance often is lacking (look, the Japanese might know how to tell a story, but they're right up there with the yanks when it comes to producing pop trash) these movies do things like they should be done.

So why are we shipping all our game licenses to Uwe Boll and other dubious directors? Obviously games lack the substance to make them a movie, since you create that substance by interacting with the medium. We see this time and time again, because game movies are often shallow with extravagance to back them up. I'd pay money to see a Kitamura-san production of *Bloodrayne* or *Max Payne*. And give Hideo Nakata a stab at a *Silent Hill* movie.

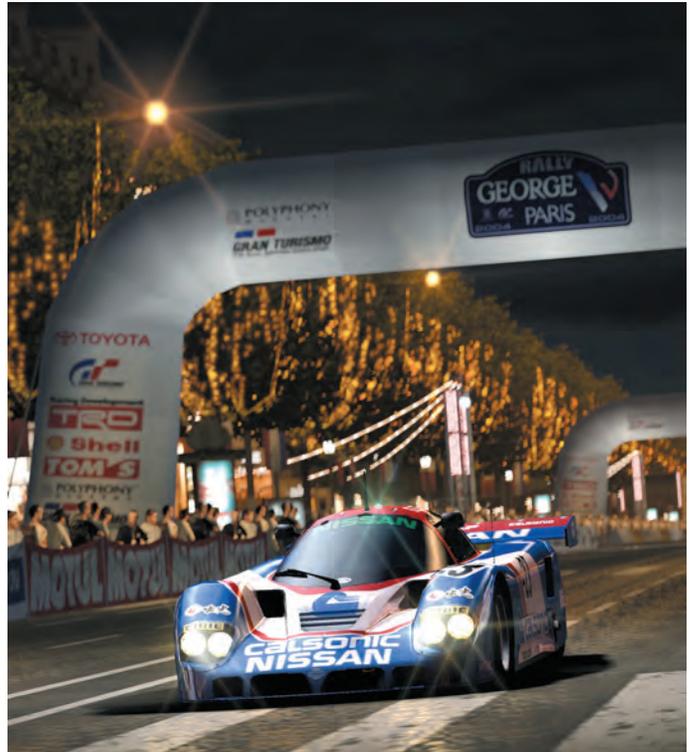
These guys can make good, stylish movies - if anything they're the ideal people to sell the concept to big budget US directors. Who knows - one day we might see a decent *Half Life* movie from James Cameron's stable...

on the wire

Gran Turismo 4 Mobile

Legendary racing title makes its way to the PSP

Gran Turismo 4 Mobile will be a direct port from the PS2 version of Gran Turismo 4, and is unlikely to be ready before the introduction of the PSP handheld to the gaming market. "The PSP is a portable game machine, and people may think it's oriented towards playing simple games, but it really has the same hardware performance as the PS2," stated GT producer Kazunori Yamauchi in an interview. "There's basically two ways of making games for the PSP. One way is to develop an original new game, which in general will be limited in its content since the price of PSP games aren't going to be too high, meaning the game's development budget will also be limited. We're going to be taking the second method, which is to take a system from a major title, and effectively sliding it onto the PSP hardware." It was recently revealed that Gran Turismo 4 is currently about 75% complete, and will be released by year's end.



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Act of War: Direct Action

Ever wanted to control the US troops? Now you can

Atari has initiated a new project, Act of War: Direct Action, a real-time strategy game set in the near future, in development at French developer Eugen Systems. The game will see the player taking elite US troops into battle against an evil international force, with battles unfolding in locales such as Moscow, Tokyo and San Francisco. The game will include online multi-player support for up to eight players, and is expected to be ready in mid 2005.

Viacom considering Midway takeover

CEO REVEALS COMPANY'S PLANS

Sumner Redstone, Viacom's CEO, has told regulators that the media company, which owns lucrative licenses such as MTV and Nickelodeon, might consider expanding itself by buying Midway. Sumner himself already owns 73.6 percent of Midway's stock and has promoted his daughter Shari Redstone as Vice Chairwoman and former VU Games chairman Kenneth Cron as CEO. The news comes as a blow to THQ, who currently develop and publish several lucrative Nickelodeon licenses such as Spongebob Squarepants and Rugrats.

Sweden Bans consoles in prison Apparently they can help you escape

Swedish authorities have banned PlayStations and other consoles from their jails, because the Internet connectivity and the unmonitored communication that comes with that have proven too serious a security risk, Swedish press reported. Apparently some inmates have built small mobile phones that work with the consoles, allowing for access to outside telecommunications. Recently there were two jailbreaks from high security prisons, involving outside assistance, though all the fugitives were caught.



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Locked and Unloaded

words ed dracon

MTN recently launched the new re-branding of its cell phone content under the MTN Loaded banner. Convenient, easy access to cell phone games, ring tones and all that jazz. Use WAP to get to the page, select what you want and voila. It downloads to your phone and the cost gets charged to your account. No mess, no fuss.

If you believe that, I've got a blind one-armed jewel-making monkey to sell you.

My initial experience with this 'service' left me with a bitter taste in my mouth and swearing at a tech support person even after I had already put the phone down. It all started innocently enough. First I downloaded a ring tone which to my dismay sounded nothing like the song it was supposed to. This I overlooked since ring tones often don't sound like the song they're supposed to be. Unperturbed, I attempted to download a Java game. My first attempt failed, due to some technical error. I attempted to download it again but a network error caused it to fail. My third attempt was met with yet another network error. Fourth-time lucky? Nope, instead a 'please call this number' message replaced the download screen. Seems there is a limit to how many times you can download a game. Calling the number; the tech support person seemed very helpful up to the point where I was mysteriously cut off. I called tech support again, a different person listened to my woes and said she would send me the proper WAP settings for my phone; it seems they sent me the wrong settings. I asked about the game, if I would have to pay R50 again to download it. Seems so, despite the error being on their side. Pay again for a game I have already bought, but couldn't get due to their ineptitude?

I decided to play something on my Gameboy Advance instead.

miktar's soapbox



WarCraft manga trilogy on the cards

Blizzard and a publishing company called Tokyopop are teaming up to produce WarCraft: The Sunwell Trilogy. The first title in this three-book series, Dragon Hunt, will appear next February.



Unreal Championship 2: The Liandri Conflict

Mortal Kombat characters make a guest appearance

With Epic Games having recently set up shop at Midway it comes as a pleasant surprise that the Xbox title Unreal Championship 2: The Liandri Conflict will feature a selection of Mortal Kombat characters within the game. The MK characters will be able to use their fatality moves within the game, adding to the much hyped action titles market appeal.



Next month will see the introduction of Sony's EyeToy: Play 2, a bundle of games that make

use of the EyeToy accessory for the PS2. Some of the featured games also make use of the microphone to control the action. Various effects have been included, such as the ability to use a cut out image of the player superimposed on some digital environment, or the ability to use coloured objects to control a game. The games include Table Tennis, Boxing, a Kung-Fu game, a cooking game and several more.

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Cossacks II slips to 2005
 CDV Software's upcoming Cossacks II: Napoleonic Wars, originally scheduled for release late this year, has been postponed to the first half of next year. On the upside, the developer will be releasing a demo version by the end of this year.

Ghost Recon 2

The same, only different

In an unusual move, various platform versions of UbiSoft's upcoming Ghost Recon 2 will not be ports or the same game in any other way. In fact, the PC and Xbox versions will be set seven years after the version to appear on PlayStation 2 and GameCube. The PC and Xbox version will be set in 2014, and its story will be related to, and derived from, events in the other version. Online play will be offered on the PC, Xbox and PlayStation 2 versions. The PC version will be released early in 2005.



Silent Hill 5 on next generation consoles

LEAD DESIGNER REMAINS MUM

Silent Hill 5's lead designer Masashi Tsuboyama has confirmed rumours that the next game in Konami's popular survival horror series will not appear on the current generation of consoles. He didn't elaborate on the reason why or what we can expect from the series after the excellent Silent Hill 4: The Room, but it has lead to a lot of speculation on what is being planned, including a possible release on the next Nintendo console. What we do know is that little will be said until the console manufacturers themselves start talking about their planned hardware.



Acclaim files for Bankruptcy Ailing publisher reaches end of the road

Publisher Acclaim, who has worked with such major licenses as Turok, WWF (now WWE), Simpsons, Alien, Burnout and Dave Mirra BMX has applied for Chapter 7 bankruptcy. Under this move, all the company's assets will be liquidated to try and consolidate the publisher's debt, which is listed at around \$100 million. This has cast a serious shadow on the future of several top notch games currently in development at the company, including Red Star, The Last Heist and The Bard's Tale. Juiced, the street racing simulation that was to be released soon, isn't affected as much as it is owned by Games 4 Fun, the financing company that funded developer Juiced Games. They are already looking for another publisher.



KOHAN II KINGS OF WAR II

Kohan II: Kings of War

Kohan II Kings of War features a new state-of-the-art 3D graphics engine that delivers a breathtaking world of magical splendour, heroic deeds, and fearsome enemies.

With six unique races and five political factions to choose from, players will head into battle with thirteen potential combinations and will watch in amazement as hundreds of units wage war in intense real-time strategy action. features.

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Heart of Empire: Rome



Tycoon management gladiator style

Game titles are making less and less sense every day, as developers run out of ideas and strive to avoid (too much) repetition. Heart Of Empire: Rome is Deep Silver and Deep Red's (yes, believe it!) upcoming tycoon-style game. The game will require players to manage all aspects of Roman administration, from construction of buildings and provision of amenities to dealing with political intrigues. The game should be arriving next May.



Alexander

Ubisoft has acquired game publishing rights to Oliver Stone's upcoming film Alexander, which is based on the life of Alexander The Great.

"We are extremely excited to bring the grandeur and epic experience of the film Alexander to the video game arena," said Laurent Detoc, executive director of Ubisoft's North American division. "Our development team is thrilled to be working with director Oliver Stone to ensure that the video game captures the essence of this extraordinary motion picture. The game will include selected music from world famous composer Vangelis - whose music comprises the film's soundtrack - movie extracts, and other features to make sure that the game is as daring, bold and ambitious as its subject, Alexander the Great." The game will be released on PC at the same time as the film debuts in the States.



Desperados 2

Desperados 2 - Cooper's Revenge is under development at Trinigy GmbH, and will make use of the Vision Game Engine. The game will blend elements of real-time strategy, tactics and action. More details can be found on www.trinigy.de.



X2: The Threat Expansion

EgoSoft and Deep Silver have announced an expansion pack for the space flight simulator X2: The Threat. Other than the fact that it will be released next February, little is known at this point.



L.A. Rush

L.A. Rush from Midway it set on the streets of Los Angeles. The concept that Midway is currently playing with includes highly destructible environments and dynamic, real-time weather and traffic conditions. The game is scheduled to appear on PS2 and Xbox in 2005.

The Bloodrayne movie cast gets richer by the day. Apart from **Kristanna Loken** as the lead, **Ben Kingsley** has been signed to play her father, the vampire overlord Kagan.

Midway's popular new title **Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy** is the next project that Spynhunter producers Adrian Askarieh and Chuck Gordon want to work on. Spynhunter, based on another Midway title, stars **The Rock** and will be released early next year.

Pulp Fiction co-writer and Rules of Attraction director **Roger Avary** has revealed that he's working on a movie script based on the Silent Hill games.

John Carmack and his wife Anna Kang, well known in **Machinima** circles, recently celebrated the birth of their first child, Ryan.

iFone has acquired rights from **Psygnosis** to develop and publish **Lemmings** games for mobile phones. The first of these games will be appearing on American and European phones by the end of the year.

Eidos has acquired all Western game publishing rights for an upcoming series of games that blend events from Episodes 1 through 3 of the **Star Wars** saga with elements from **LEGO** toys. Next April will see the first product from this line.

THQ have revealed that developer **Relic** cost them nearly \$10-million to buy. Relic is currently working on **Warhammer 40k: Dawn of War** for the publisher.

Vivendi Universal plans to release a third-person shooter titled **Scarface**, based on the film of the same name. The game will feature an event-driven storyline, and is scheduled for release Q2 2005.

If playing digital god isn't enough for you, Electronic Arts and **Atomic Toys** have joined forces to release a series of **The Urbz** figurines.

Microsoft has disbanded its Xbox Sports teams, a formality after signing on EA's sport range for the **Xbox Live** service.

Warner Bros has bought **Monolith**, the developer responsible for, amongst others, **Aliens vs. Predator**, **TRON 2.0**, **NoOne Lives Forever** and upcoming shooter **F.E.A.R.**

Hironobu Sakaguchi and **Kensuke Tanaka**, both formerly of Square Enix and previously involved in the Final Fantasy franchise, have founded a studio called Mist Walker. The studio is at work on two role-playing titles for undisclosed platforms, which the company assures us will feature the emotional involvement that was a trademark of their previous work.

Sega Europe have signed a deal with Macrovision to use **SafeDisc** anti-copy technology in their games.

Will of Steel

CAN YOU SAY COMMAND AND CONQUER GENERALS CLONE?

GMX Media has announced a modern warfare tactical real-time strategy game titled Will of Steel. The game will be set predominantly in the Middle East, and will boast dynamic climatic and lighting effects which will influence battlefield conditions. Career advancement will allow players to take advantage of new options that become available to them. No PC release date has been announced yet, and even the developer is unknown, so this title is presumably in its very early stages of development at this point.



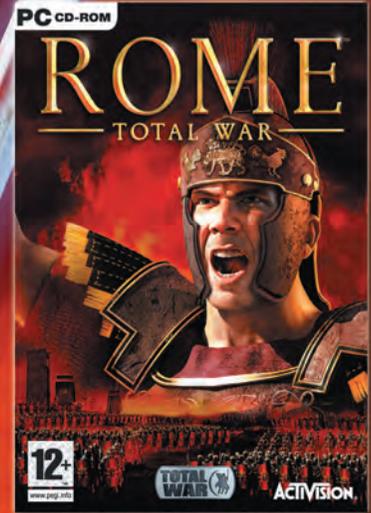
Nintendo's **Mario Party 6** is scheduled for GameCube release on 6 December, and will come bundled with the Nintendo GameCube Mic controller - a microphone. Very little is currently known about the game, and which of its modes will make use of the voice-activated controller. A portable version of Mario Party, Mario Party Advance, will be released for the Game Boy Advance on the same date.



Lara Croft gets two new men

Do they get her though?

Toby Gard, creator of the Lara Croft character, and Warren Spector, creator of Deus Ex, have joined American development studio Crystal Dynamics to work on the next Tomb Raider game. The franchise was taken away from Core Design and reassigned to Crystal Dynamics after the release of Tomb Raider: Angel of Darkness. The next Tomb Raider game will make its debut at E3 2005.



Rome: Total War

Rome: Total War is the multi award winning, massively anticipated, next generation of the Total War series which is set to redefine the real time strategy (RTS) genre in 2004.

Four years in the making, Rome: Total War features revolutionary technology that brings epic, cinematic battles to the PC with graphics and a game dynamic beyond anything which has ever been seen.

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Half-Life 2 woes Sabotage or plain stupidity?

Perhaps you could argue that Valve fans are just too tenacious when they look at the game files, but it turns out that the recent Counter-Strike Source Beta accidentally contained a file within it that revealed the entire Half-Life 2 script, including a surprise ending. Embedded as a '.gcf' file, someone unpacked the suspicious-looking script and discovered the entire plot to Valve's upcoming game. This adds another chapter to the developer's list of woes with the game, including the much-publicized theft of the title's source code.

Painkiller: Battle out of Hell

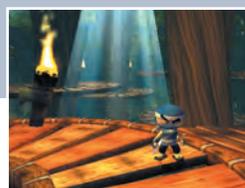
Inflicting more pain on unsuspecting hordes

The expansion pack to the highly successful shooter Painkiller will be released before the end of the year. Battle out of Hell continues the story from the original and includes an additional single-player chapter with 10 levels, as well as new multiplayer modes, maps and models. We can also look forward to meaner bosses and cooler weapons with a map editor Software Developer Kit thrown in as a bonus.

It is unusual for a handheld game to make no use of the device's directional controls, but Nintendo's new **WarioWare** game does exactly that. An attached sensor detects movements of the console, and is thus controlled by twisting and tilting the GBA. The game features over 200 mini-games and another hundred that can be unlocked by overcoming bosses. The game will become available later this month.

Web Scores

	[PC] I-Ninja	[PC] Transport Giant	[PC] Kreed	[PC] Catwoman
NAG [100]	71	64	44	52
gamespy.com [5]	n/r	n/r	n/r	n/r
gamespot.com [10]	n/r	n/r	n/r	5.6
pc.ign.com [10]	n/r	n/r	n/r	3.8
	[PS2] Onimusha 3	[PS2] Driv3r	[PS2] Formula One 04	[PS2] Aterix & Obelix XXL
NAG [100]	90	75	70	64
gamespy.com [5]	4.5	n/r	n/r	n/r
gamespot.com [10]	8.3	5.4	n/r	n/r
ign.com [10]	9	5.4	n/r	n/r





William Tsai
Marketing Specialist, ASUS SA

ASUS recently established a local service centre in JHB. What prompted this move?
We have had a local office for about two years now, so we wanted to move forward from that. We opened a notebook service centre, based at our JHB head office, which also acts as a global repair centre. So if you have bought an ASUS notebook overseas you can still have it repaired here. The hardware carries a 2-year glob-

al warranty and we wanted to support that by becoming one of the GSMs (Global Service Member).

This isn't new to the market, though, is it?

[laughs] No, of course not. I know lots of our competitors have local repair centres as well. This was largely prompted by our successful strategy at our headquarters in Taiwan, which is why ASUS is number one over there in notebook sales, thanks to the excellent and fast repair service. Of course South Africa is a lot bigger than Taiwan, so we can't do things exactly like they do, but we still plan to provide good service and short repair times. When your notebook is gone for more than three days, you suffer a lot because you need it by your side. Normally with other brands I've found that repairs take two to three weeks, which is very inconvenient. To help with this, we also have a pick-up service to make things easier.

How strong is ASUS in the local graphics market?

We've just really started with it. In the past the channel [the link between importers, distributors and vendors] wasn't very stable, but that's changed recently. Another reason why we haven't done so well in the past is because of how the hardware market worked. ASUS built its name on its quality, which is why we started the service centre. Unfortunately South Africa seems to be a price-driven market, where people like to sell fast first and look at quality later. Another problem is SA's location: it's far from everywhere. So there aren't a lot of competitors here and the price margin for local dealers is extremely high. In Taiwan we only make five to eight percent, whereas local mark-ups are much higher.

What would you attribute this high margin to: greedy retailers or because of the market's high-risk nature?

There's no real competition. It's unusual for a manufacturer to have only one distributor, but this is common locally. That's why we have two distributors for hardware such as our motherboards and VGA cards, and two distributors for Notebooks as well. So we can compete outside with a reasonable price. That means lower margins but everyone still makes money. We also focus a lot on seminars and meetings to help educate the vendor and buyer channels.

Is the local market big enough to support two distributors?

You see, we don't only look internally in the sense of what ASUS should deserve. Instead, the two distributors are to build a healthy relationship and to build the market. We also don't simply want to follow everyone else and settle for the same things. By doing this we're looking beyond the current market share that everyone has.

ASUS components, including Motherboard, VGA graphics cards and optical devices are distributed by Axiz and Corex IT. ASUS Mobile solutions, including Notebooks and PDA's are distributed by Proton Technologies and Storgate. For more information, you can contact ASUS at (011) 783 5450.

TONY HAWK'S UNDERGROUND 2



Tony Hawk's Underground 2

You paid your dues in Tony Hawk's Underground, now prove yourself in Tony Hawk's Underground 2.

It's time to go globetrotting on a sick international road trip with Tony Hawk and Bam Margera. The latest evolution in the #1 action sports franchise, THUG 2 delivers a hilarious story mode, an unprecedented level of customization, and more moves than the Skate Gods could dream of. Grab your board, an arsenal of spray paint and prepare to wreak havoc around the world.

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International Release Dates



Mobile Suit Gundam: Gundam Seed
 Worms Forts Under Siege
 Atlantis Evolution
 BloodRayne 2
Call of Duty United Offensive
 Conflict: Vietnam
 IHRA Professional Drag Racing 2005
 Mortal Kombat: Deception
 Shade: Wrath of Angels
 Backyard Wrestling 2: There Goes the Neighborhood
 Dead or Alive Ultimate
 Hot Wheels Stunt Track Challenge

PS2
 PC
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 PC PS2
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 PC GBA PS2 Xbox

Action
 Strategy
 Adventure
 Action
Shooter
 Action
 Racing
 Fighting
 Action
 Wrestling
 Fighting
 Racing

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 Oct 5
 Oct 5



Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude
 Men of Valor
 Robotech: Invasion
 TOCA Race Driver 2
 Tony Hawk's Underground 2: World Destruction Tour
 Codename: Panzers
 SD Gundam Force
 I of the Dragon
 Paper Mario: The Thousand-Year Door
 Shadow Vault
 Tak 2: The Staff of Dreams
 ER

PC PS2 Xbox
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Adventure
 Shooter
 Shooter
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 Sports
 Strategy
 Action
 Action
 RPG
 Strategy
 Platformer
 Adventure

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FIFA Soccer 2005
 Pacific Fighters
 Tribes: Vengeance
 Armada 2: Star Command
 Dungeon Lords
 Sacred Plus
 Superbikes TT
 Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas
 Ape Escape: Pumped & Primed
 Boktai 2: Solar Boy Django
 Law & Order: Justice Is Served

GBA GCN PC PS2 Xbox
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Sports
 Flight
 Shooter
 Action
 Action
 RPG
 Racing
 Action
 Sports
 Adventure
 Adventure

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 Oct 19



Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 2: Battle Nexus
 The Bard's Tale
 Time Crisis: Crisis Zone
 Ace Combat 5: The Unsung War
 Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex
 Will of Steel
 Armies of Exigo
 Close Combat: First to Fight

GBA GCN PS2 Xbox
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Action
 Action
 Shooter
 Flight
 Action
 Strategy
 Strategy
 Shooter

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Killzone
 Star Wars Galaxies: Jump to Lightspeed
 TY the Tasmanian Tiger 2: Bush Rescue
 Vampire: The Masquerade - Bloodlines
 The SpongeBob SquarePants Movie
 The Incredibles
 Knight Rider 2

PS2
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 GBA GCN PS2 Xbox
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 PC PS2

Shooter
 RPG
 Platformer
 RPG
 Platformer
 Action
 Action

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Zoo Tycoon 2
 Premier Manager 2004/2005
 Championship Manager 5
 FirePower
 LMA Manager 2005
 Total Club Manager 2005

PC
 GBA PC PS2
 PC
 PC
 PS2 Xbox
 PC PS2 Xbox

Simulation
 Sports
 Sports
 Flight
 Sports
 Sports

Oct 29
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 Oct 31
 Oct 31



Bytes from South Korea

by matthew lowry

Since arriving in South Korea I have made a number of friends, foreign as well as Korean (I've even met an Afrikaans guy from Potch). The one common factor among my non-Korean friends is that none of them are what I would call gamers. However, the common factor among the Korean kids that I teach, besides speaking Korean and having black hair, is that almost every single one plays some sort of game or surfs the internet for entertainment.

In fact, gaming is so popular here that PC or internet rooms can be found on almost every street, in every city, all over Korea, and are open 24 hours a day. There are at least five of these rooms, called PC Bangs (pronounced like the Afrikaans word for scared), on my street alone. These PC Bangs are all equipped with decent computers with huge screens, and broadband internet that would make a SA internet user drool. Korea's internet subscribers number more than 10 million thanks to a 1999 government effort to get Korea connected.

StarCraft is alive and well in Korea, so much so that I am tempted to call it an obsession. Turning on a TV reveals two dedicated gaming channels, MBC Games and Game TV, and StarCraft match-ups are the main attraction. I have also seen Korean games being played, Lineage being by far the most popular. For various reasons consoles were not imported into Korea from Japan for a while and as a result PC games were the only logical choice for most gamers.

On these channels you can often see match-ups between competitors who achieve a kind of pop idol status among their fans. Yes, fans! Hundreds of spectators turn up to watch these competitions, and each gamer, dressed in what can only be described as a cross between F1 racing attire and a naval captain's uniform, will have his/her own following of supporters in the crowd. There are also in depth interviews before the games, and post-match tactical analyses that rival Naas Botha on Boots 'n All. And don't forget, this is all broadcast on regular television, 24/7.

The reasons for gaming being so popular in South Korea are many and varied. Population versus geography is one factor. Take a look on a map of the world and compare South Korea to South Africa. South Korea has a population of 48,324,000 and South Africa 43,647,653. Now compare their land areas and you will realize that people in Korea are living on top of each other, which makes for close-knit communities. These communities and limited space has led to making Korea such a gaming-mad country. This network of gaming communities are able to meet regularly by way of the easily accessible PC Bangs. Add to this the government decision to get Korea wired up with high speed internet connections meant that by 2002 there were 25.6 million internet users in Korea, more than 50% of the population! Cheap and easy to pay internet bills and even cheaper internet café rates make gaming an enormously popular attraction for young people in Korea.

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MIDDLEWARE:

Criterion is a big name developer these days, owing to sterling titles such as the meticulously detailed car-wrecking-simulator series *Burnout* and the highly anticipated upcoming game known only as *Black*. In a surprising move silently criticized by smaller developers (for a variety of reasons), industry giant Electronic Arts swooped in and purchased the aforementioned UK developer. This in turn means EA has acquired Criterion's RenderWare, technology which alone is off responsible for almost one quarter's worth of games. "This is a great fit," said EA Chairman and CEO Larry Probst. "Criterion offers us studio talent and a proven management team, globally recognized intellectual property and technology infrastructure that will accelerate our readiness on the next generation of consoles." Loosely translated from the Public Relations mumbo-jumbo, this means that EA now has a powerful bit of software and a talented, proven developer whereas Criterion now has a lot of comfortable monetary backing. This is all very well for the new bedfellows, but rising concerns from the previously mentioned smaller developers are starting to nip at the edges of this flowery future. Being a multi-platform publisher, it makes sense that EA would enjoy having its developers use software that allow for easily, multi-platform development. RenderWare is good at that, as well as allowing for the rapid creation of prototype or even finished games, efficiently.



EA CEO Larry Probst continues his company's aggressive buying with the acquisition of Criterion

Among other popular middleware, RenderWare forms part of a staple diet for developers seeking to produce games in a cost-efficient manner, especially for multiple-platforms. The recently released game *Astrix & Obelix XXL*,

an Atari title note, would not have been possible without RenderWare. What happens now, when development crunch-time hits at EA developers as well as non-EA developers? Will EA be able to objectively prioritize the required attendance of RenderWare support at the development houses? Valid concerns, but ones only time (or timely press-releases) can tell.

Still a point of contention among gamers and developers alike is the question of whether middleware helps or hinders the market. Due to its nature, middleware is a double edged sword allowing for either easier development with more time

spent on quality, or easier development resulting in cookie-cutter template games pushed out at machinegun-fire rates. This is more predominant with lazy developers however, games such as *The Movies* and *Call of Duty: United Offensive* prove that you can use middleware and have an entirely unique title. An agreed upon point however, nay, fact, is that middleware makes producing games easier and faster.

For a weak analogy, imagine middleware as the software equivalent of a car that can sit between yourself, and your anticipated destination. A car can help you get there faster, at a price of course. For developers, middleware can fill in the gaps between their vision, and the final game we play. Quite often, middleware may more be a case of 'Start-And-EndWare', with developers only having to fiddle with a bit somewhere along the middle. Middleware comes in a variety of flavours and ideas, some like RenderWare are actually full development suites allowing developers to create their levels, characters and almost the entire game within the tool itself, requiring only a minimal bit of programming to have it up and running on multiple-platforms.



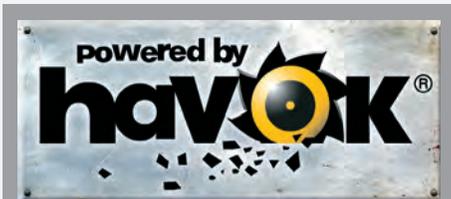
Middleware does accelerate game development significantly, but this also often risks getting a 'cookie-cutter' feel, often seen with license titles like *Astrix XXL* and *Spongebob Squarepants: Operation Bikini Bottom*

THE NEW DNA?

With nearly 50% of the games currently in development using some form of Criterion's middleware technology, RenderWare is hot property – so much so that EA recently acquired the entire company, including the not-so-recent addition of Burnout to the publisher's catalogue. How will this impact the market and how big a role is Middleware starting to play in the development process as studios see costs go higher every day?

Facets such as Physics, Artificial Intelligence and other game-related functions are also included, giving developers more time to work on their game instead of trying to program the complex torque systems behind a 4-wheel drive vehicle and the A.I. that is supposed to drive it. Well, that's the idea, anyway.

Other middleware solutions such as the Havok physics engine (used in Painkiller) perform a rather singular function, but attempt to perform it better than anything else out there. Havok represents a more puritan middleware concept, it in itself being a part that you 'plug into' your existing project to achieve the desired results. Physics is a complex thing tied to innumerable factors of hardware, so why re-invent the wheel when you can simply pay for a new set of tyres? Ironically, one of the problems middleware is sought to solve, the rising costs of game development, is actually being contributed to by middleware itself. As the demand for cost-cutting development has



Middleware like Havok's physics engine has helped companies achieve a cutting-edge game dynamic while cutting down on development times

risen over the years, it seems as if middleware has inflated its own price to match its rising importance. Licensed technology, 3D engines such as Monolith's Lithtech Engine (used in games such as Shogo, Blood 2 and No One Lives Forever) and the Unreal Engine are also considered middleware, though they represent a much more costly alternative to sitting down and programming your own way to have players blast through corridors of enemies or landscapes of demons. The benefits to developers using proven technology such as the Unreal Engine or even the new DOOM 3 engine are plain, especially in the case of the Unreal Engine in which a game can be ported to multiple platforms with a minimum of fuss.

Microsoft, never being one to follow a bandwagon, has its own (naturally hyped) middleware concept in the form of XNA. Representing a common groundwork for developing titles that can be released on Xbox and PC simultaneously, Microsoft has actually said that they believe XNA is "the way all developers should be working". It's a powerful claim, but XNA is a powerful thing in itself capable of saving millions of dollars by prototyping game ideas rapidly instead of wasting time/manpower on dead end ideas. While not an entirely new concept, middleware or development packages to develop for a console has been around for some time, Microsoft is taking every opportunity to make sure that the gamers themselves are starting to realize that such power as XNA exists. Perhaps to make them question developers who are not using this supposed 'wonder-software'.



Microsoft hope to cut down on development costs with their own middleware, XNA, which allows developers to create games for the Xbox, Windows and mobile platforms

As the industry keeps moving forward, you can expect to see the logos of even more middleware solutions appearing on the boxes of games. Whether this is a good or bad thing, lies entirely in the hands of those who would use middleware, but due to the rising costs of game development, it's fast becoming an irreplaceable tool in developers' collection to make games in a cheap, timely and effective manner. Whether it turns into a wolf in sheep's clothing for quality titles remains to be seen, but the technology definitely is here to stay.

GMAIL

the Google Revolution 2.0

words: Tom Taylor



Search Mail

Search the Web

Show
Create

Compose Mail

Send

Discard

Check spelling

Inbox

Starred ★

Sent Mail

All Mail

Spam

Trash

Labels

Edit labels

To:

Add Cc | Add Bcc

Subject:

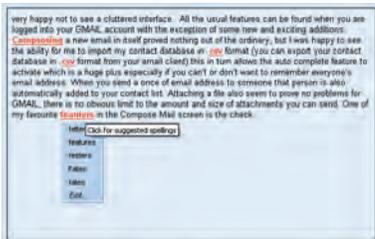
Attach a file

The battle of the free email service providers is officially on as Google recently launched the Beta stage of its new, free, emailing service called Gmail. Apart from the fact that it features an advanced search engine and spam filter, one of the best things about Gmail is that you have up to 1 GB of space to use for your emails - not too shabby for a free email service.

I have been using Gmail for about a month now and I think it is the best online email service to date. The process, apart from the Beta testing invites, is a relatively simple one but the fun starts once you have logged into your inbox for the first time. What impressed me at first was the clean layout that is reminiscent of Google; I was expecting at least one intrusive banner but thankfully this was not the case. Ads in Gmail work on the same principle as that of the Google search engine: Google AdWords is a context sensitive text ad service which will display ads in relation to the text in your email, so if you have an email with the word DVD player in it, you will find ads which relate to DVD players. Some might find this a form of invasion of privacy but I look at it like this: you are using a free service, DON'T COMPLAIN! Besides, if you have top secret emails to hide, buy your own domain and use your own mail server. I think the Gmail ads are the most unobtrusive advertisements of any service, paid for or free, that I have ever used.

All the usual features can be found when you are logged into your Gmail account with the exception of some new and exciting additions. Composing a new email in itself proved nothing out of the ordinary, but I was happy to see the feature where I could import my contact database in .csv format (you can export your contact database in .csv format from your email client), which in turn allows the auto complete feature to activate and seek up contacts within your address book. When you send a once-off email to someone, that person is also automatically added to your contact list. Attaching a file also seems to be no problem for Gmail, there is no limit to the amount of attachments you can send, though there is a 10 MB file size limit. One of my favourite features in the Compose Mail screen is the Check spelling feature which will highlight misspelled words and give you alternate suggestions for that word. This feature is fairly accurate and I have not found one occasion where it missed a word. Another benefit to using Gmail is that HTML emails will not display active content until you tell it to, this is great as some spammers use those HTML emails to see whether an email address is active.

Find it such a hassle to find emails related to a series of conversations between me and another contact, I often find myself having to search through hundreds of emails to find the one where specific information can be found. Gmail has a nifty new feature called Conversation, this feature sorts all your email according to the



Spelling is handled by clicking on the Check Spelling link, which switches the window into spelling mode. Now misspelled letters are highlighted, complete with alternative spellings and similar words to use.



When you receive an email from another person, all the emails from that contact beforehand gets stacked underneath to give you a clear idea of what's been discussed. As long as the subject line doesn't change (apart from RE:, FW: and the usual email prefixes), the emails will stay within that conversation.

Send

Discard

Check spelling

Gmail – just another free email service? One gigabyte of storage space is a lot to offer, but other providers have also started to jump on that bandwagon. Besides, anyone can offer space. So what does Gmail have that makes it so special? Well, Google’s Midas touch with design and interface, for one...

[gabbamouth@gmail.com](#) | [Contacts](#) | [Settings](#) | [Help](#) | [Sign out](#)

[how search options](#)
[create a filter](#)

“conversation” you had. This feature is very similar to that found in Outlook 2003 but is a new addition to the online email feature list. Even in your Inbox, emails are automatically sorted according to conversation: this might take some time to get used to but I sometimes wonder how I could live without it, especially when you get a reply to a message a couple of days, or even weeks, down the line.

Gmail does not make use of folders as other email clients do but rather makes use of Labels, allowing you to assign more than one to each email while you can only store an email in one folder. When you assign a label to an email it remains in your inbox, the difference being that when you click on a Label called, say, friends, then only the emails you labelled as friends will be displayed. This method also seems like a strange way of doing things but again this method is very effective. When looking at the 1 GB of space made available to you as a Gmail user the question of SPAM comes to light - Google has spent a considerable amount of time on this very topic. The Spam filter included with Gmail is surprisingly good although it initially allows one or two obvious Spam emails through it seemed to learn from its mistakes, there is also the capability to Report Spam which will allow the Spam engine to learn and adapt to find Spam coming to your Inbox.

Lastly, you will find a Settings link in your Inbox, this takes you to various settings

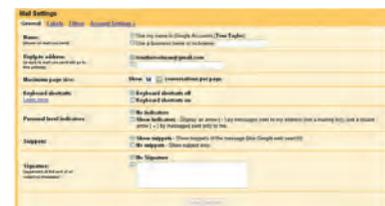
which you are able to tweak on your Gmail account. These settings include being able to change the name that is displayed when you send emails as well as adding a signature (it is also nice to note that Gmail does not include a tag line at the end of each email sent from your account as Yahoo and the likes does). The Settings tab is also where you toggle the keyboard shortcuts on or off, yes, there is an array of keyboard shortcuts you can use with Gmail. You also have the ability to set various filters such as the action to be taken when an email from a specific recipient arrives.

I was kind of hoping for some sort of POP3 access to Gmail, although no free email service offers this but I found an equally great solution; the Gmail Notifier (<http://toolbar.google.com/Gmail-helper/>) takes up very little resources and sits in your System Tray. When you receive a new email message a little window will pop-up notifying you of that email with the first couple of lines of text in that email along with the senders name.

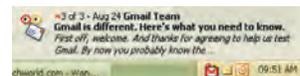
Even though Gmail is still in Beta testing it is by far the best online email service I have used to date. I honestly hope that they are holding back one or two features for the final release of this service as it seriously needs virus scanning capabilities and some more customizable features but as I am 95% happy and would urge anybody to convert. 



Gmail allows you to build filters using values such as the source, destination, subject and even specific key words, from which you can determine actions such as sending it to the trash, giving it a certain label or even highlighting it for your attention.



For an online email service, Gmail is very rich, especially when you delve into the settings. Here you can set the reply email address and the name you want to be displayed, as well as your signature and how you want what types of mail to be handled. Gmail also allows you to import your Contact list from a .csv file or online services like Yahoo and Hotmail.



While Google has been cracking down on third-party notifier tools for Gmail, it has released its own app built for the service. Sitting in your system tray, it will notify you once new mail has arrived in your account. The Gmail notifier can also take over any mail clicks in your browser and redirect them to Gmail instead of your resident email program. You can grab it at <http://toolbar.google.com/Gmail-helper/>

Image courtesy of Lionhead Studios

WE WANTED TO TALK TO GAMES INDUSTRY VETERAN PETER MOLYNEUX ABOUT HIS LATEST TITLE, FABLE. WHAT WE ALSO GOT WERE TALES OF PASSIONATE EMBRACES, TWO-DAY-OLD SANDWICHES AND THE REASON WHY HIS GAMES TAKE SO LONG TO DEVELOP...



"WHAT I HAVE DONE IN THE PAST AND MUST STOP DOING FROM THIS DAY FORWARD IS TALKING ABOUT GAMES BEFORE THEY'RE ANYTHING MORE THAN A CONCEPT IN MY HEAD"

PETER MOLYNEUX, LIONHEAD STUDIOS

LIONHEAD STUDIOS

Peter Molyneux



On meeting Peter Molyneux, we immediately notice the messy notepad in front of him. A peculiar first observation to make in the company of the man who has been making waves in gaming since Populous through Theme Park to Black & White, but a valid one, as Molyneux continues to draw more charts, shapes and diagrams. Sometimes to emphasise key words, occasionally to help explain a point, usually indecipherable to all but himself.

We're here to grill Molyneux about Lionhead Studios' latest title, Fable. How does he feel after what must have been a tough four years of development? "It's very emotional," he answers, sounding worn out yet relieved. "To be honest with you, I have to be careful not to break down in tears because it is an incredible feeling of accomplishment. When you climb a mountain that hard and that difficult, it's really, really tough. Just to see the game being played by anyone is an amazing feeling and to see people actually enjoying it, it's amazing."

Xbox RPG fans have been waiting a while for Fable and Molyneux is keen to talk about development times. "Let's just talk about why I am really stupid because what I do, and have done in the past and must stop doing from this day forward, is talk about games before they're actually anything more than a concept in my head. We spoke about Fable before there was one character sketch and what ends up happening is that people think 'Jesus, this game has been around forever!' So these days of me talking about concepts before they have actually even begun to be final have got to stop."

Molyneux's past titles, such as Populous and Magic Carpet, stretched technology to breaking point and his forthcoming games look set to continue that trend. So what comes first, the ideas or the technology? "What I should do is look at the technology, obviously, but what I do do is think of the ideas. The frightening thing about that is I have no idea where these ideas come from. It is the most inconvenient times that ideas have popped into my head. Even when in the middle of passionate embraces I've said 'Hang on a second, I've just got to stop there... just got to write something down'. You never know if it's going to be in the middle of the night, in the middle of the day, sitting on the toilet, in the middle of an interview." We lean in, to see if we can make sense of the

notepad sketches, hopefully unveiling his next big plans. No such luck. "Every great superhero comic I have ever read when I was a kid, the bits I enjoyed the most in every film I've seen, is when they didn't have power and when they discover they have power," Molyneux continues, explaining Fable's central idea. "And that's what Fable is really about - it's the discovery of the player having power." He scrawls circles to emphasise the words 'discovery' and 'power'.

Fable's gameplay revolves around a 'good and evil' dynamic, but Bioware's Knights Of The Old Republic beat Lionhead to the punch. "That system was ripped off completely from Black & White. I really hope people forget about that system," Molyneux says. "In fact, I'm relying on them forgetting about that system. The difference between Fable and Knights Of The Old Republic is that Fable tracks your morality every single second of gameplay. That's a lot cooler than doing a quest and doing A or B; this is much more like a flow." Despite his pride in this moral system and the little touches throughout Fable, Molyneux insists he doesn't want to shepherd the player towards these, preferring to tempt them instead. "I know there are lots of people out there who find immersive worlds about as interesting as a two-day-old sandwich. They just want to go on and play the quests, they don't want to mess around getting married and all that. However, what I'll make sure I do, I put plenty of temptations in their way. I think temptations in the way of this really strong story that guides you through are important."

So the first time Molyneux played through Fable, was he good or evil? The notepad is abandoned for the first time as Molyneux leans back in his chair. "What do you think?" he asks. We think he'd make a great bad guy. "You're right," he says, laughing. "They have all the fun." 



Player of the Month

Name: Julian Bales
Nick: Raumas
Age: 20
Occupation: BCom student at WITS
Clan: Damage Control
Games: Counter-Strike
Quote: "Assumption is the mother of all ****ups."
Achievements:

- Member of SA team for ESWC 2003
- 1st Place at WCG Johannesburg Qualifier 2004 (Damage Control)
- 2nd place at Mayhem Offline League 2004 (Zero Effect)
- 1st place at Mayhem Offline League 2003 (Evolve)
- 1st place at Gamers Gate ESWC Qualifier 2003 (Evolve)
- 1st place at 1000manLAN 2003 (Evolve)
- 1st place at Worfaire Durban Preliminary 2002 (Gamers Inc)
- 3rd place at Worfaire Finals 2002 (Gamers Inc)

What were your reasons for leaving Evolve, a well established and highly successful team?

There were a few reasons, but it was mainly because I felt we needed some more competition in South Africa if we wanted to do well overseas. Having one team winning all the time, and winning so easily, wasn't helping anyone. So I tried to create that competition. Plus, sometimes it's more fun trying to take down number one than being number one.

Do you think DOOM³ will appeal to CS players?

It looks like the sort of game I could get used to playing. Many current CS players were Quake players before, myself included, so I'm sure the appeal will be there. I think a lot of players are searching for something new to play. All DOOM³ needs is servers and local support.

What, if anything, would you change if you were running gaming events in South Africa?

The spectator side of SA events. I still feel no competition has come close to Worfaire 2000, where there were three large projector screens, and every competitor had a 19 inch monitor in front of them, from which the crowd could watch that player's point of view.

Is there a divide between single player and multiplayer games? Do you still play games by yourself?

There is a huge divide. Playing against a computer can never compare to playing against a human. I still play single player games, but I battle to finish them. I get bored of them very quickly. I feel the older titles are better than today's games, but that's probably just nostalgia talking.

Do you think there's a bright future for gaming in South Africa?

I feel we need a new game to spark interest. There are many potential gamers out there, judging by the number of consoles sold. Someone just needs to find some way of attracting their interest.



First SA DOOM³ Champion Crowned

Karl Buys, better known to the gaming community as "Mburr" from Team 42, has won the first ever DOOM³ competition held in South Africa. The tournament took place in celebration of the launch of the revolutionary game on the 13th of August, at Northgate shopping centre in Johannesburg. **The_Basilisk** was on the scene to file this report.

Arena 77 (event organisers for the ESWC) were again at the helm, in conjunction with MegaRom and Budget Technologies (who provided the venue and sponsored PCs). The launch party was packed with well known local gaming personalities, such as NAG's Editor, Michael "RedTide" James, other members of the magazine staff, representatives from the game distribution companies, and almost all of the top FPS players in Gauteng. An incredible total of 96 people were accepted to participate in the competition, which was entirely free of charge. In addition, each participant was given a complimentary soft drink at the nearby coffee shop. But the freebies were insignificant in comparison with the real benefit of attending the event - the chance to be among the first in the country to sample the game in a competitive environment. For many it was their first exposure to the magic of DOOM³, and for others, their first legal exposure.

The event had its share of problems. Power issues delayed the start of the tournament for about an hour, with warm-ups also being interrupted. Thankfully, however, there were no power drops during the matches themselves. The biggest general complaint about the event was the performance of the PCs, which varied severely, some machines getting a comfortable 60 frames per second, and others falling to single digits on the counter. The playing field was, in many cases, rather uneven, and this did result directly in the early elimination of a number of good players. Although, since the competition was free, the criticism has been more constructive than usual, and most of the people I spoke to were fully satisfied with the overall experience. Sound failure on one of the machines resulted in one match having to be restarted, but otherwise there were no unforeseen hitches while the games were in progress. The staff must be complimented for their understanding of the gamers' situations and their willingness to listen to suggestions.

The tournament proceeded in a single elimination format, and the pressure was on from the very first matches. Former Quake 3 greats, Destroyer, Mielie, n00b, LUAP, Viper and Enemy; old school Quake 2 player dislekcia; as well as top Counter-Strikers, Gandalf and Slipstream, were among the highly skilled pool of entrants. Having no previous results from which to allocate seedings, the group



Forum War

Saturday the 21st of August will live on in infamy as the day a combined NAG/Saix Games Servers (SGS) team of warriors battled Prophecy veterans in the virtual jungles of Indonesia. Over 50 players competed in South Africa's first Forum War, making it the biggest organized online game in South Africa.

The premise of Forum War is simple: two forums go toe-to-toe in Novalogic's shooter, Joint Operations: Typhoon Rising. With support for huge games, an arsenal of helicopters, jeeps and all sorts of modern weaponry, Joint Operations is the current game of choice for Forum Wars.

Forum Wars is the brainchild of Errol 'veng' Enslin, a regular poster on the NAG and Prophecy forms, who sees Forum Wars as an opportunity to promote online gaming between forum-goers. There's no prizes for the winning team, except bragging rights and a rather fancy virtual floating trophy which proclaims them as current champions, but that didn't stop the first Forum War from being a huge success.

In the Prophecy vs. NAG/SGS game, three maps were played, with both teams making use of a Teamspeak server to facilitate online communications. By the time the first map got underway, there were 51 players locked and loaded, ready for jungle warfare. The chaos that ensued was unprecedented - fifty gamers armed with high explosives, helicopters and APCs can do a lot of damage. After three maps, the NAG/SGS team had come out on top with a respectable win. [You were expecting some other result? ;) Ed]

All in all, the event was enjoyed by all who took part, and was so successful that a number of future Forum Wars have already been scheduled. If you want to be part of the Forum Wars action, go sign up at www.forumwars.co.za.

draws were done randomly. This gave some very interesting groups indeed, considering only first place in each group would qualify for the next round. Gandalf, Mielle and Enemy ended up together, with Mielle winning the group with a frag in the last second. On the other side of the brackets, the games were not quite so close. After a fairly tight first round, Mburr took his second game with a staggering 49-8 spread, and went on to reach the final comfortably. Back in the other semi-final, an unknown player calling himself Impulse-9 managed to get the better of the highly experienced n00b and with the victory, he earned the chance to meet Mburr for a shot at gold. The final itself was fast-paced and was won primarily through Mburr's uncanny ability to predict his opponent with remarkable accuracy. The new elements of gameplay introduced in DOOM³ (stealth, power-up activation, etc) were used extensively, and we can be sure we're going to see many new ways to play the game in the future. The eventual score was 14-3 in Mburr's favour. He took home a GeForce 6800, a gigabyte of Kingston DDR RAM, the Doom Collector's edition, and other assorted DOOM³ merchandise.

Final standings:

1. 42::Mburr
2. Impulse-9
3. eoe`n00b
4. LUAP

PCGL Update

In recent months, the Professional Cyber Gaming League successfully completed their first endeavour, which, as you may recall, was the Counter-Strike 1.6 Seeding League featured in the May 2004 issue of this magazine. The league spanned "a gruelling 8 weeks, 24 teams, 264 matches, 13 admins and two pools with a total of 803 points", and the results can be considered a reasonably accurate appraisal of where the online teams stand in relation to each other. Unsurprisingly, Team Evolve finished comfortably in first place, followed by their arch rivals, Zero Effect, in second. However, it should be noted that Zero Effect have

since undergone many changes, including splitting up and getting back together, and the new, highly-rated team Damage Control was formed too late to participate. As it stood, the top five teams were:

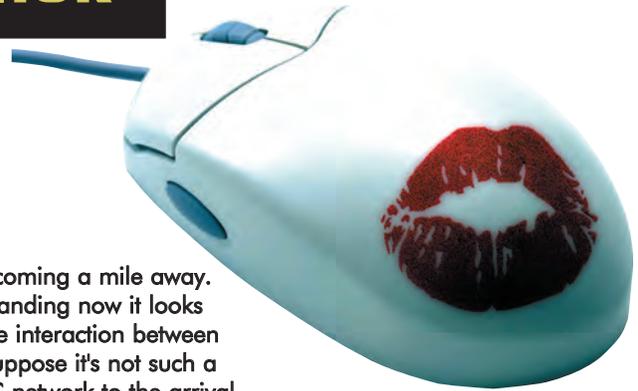
- 1) Evolve Aim
- 2) Zero Effect
- 3) Bad Habit Boyz
- 4) Ethereal
- 5) Enigma

Now, having taken a well-deserved four week holiday, the PCGL staff are back with their second league offering. This time they have chosen to support the

local Natural Selection (another modification for the Half-Life engine) community, rather than sticking with Counter-Strike. Natural Selection is a team-based hybrid between First Person Shooters and Real Time Strategy titles, set in the all-too-familiar environment of aliens and marines. "The PCGL hopes to elevate the brilliant, although small Natural-Selection community in South Africa, and to be the starting block for greater events in the future," said Matthew "Immortality" Goslett, Speaking on behalf of the organisation. For more information about the league, visit the PCGL's website. www.thepcgl.com

The Domain of The_Basilisk

Hey, at least it's not crack!



THE ERA OF THE MAYHEM GIRLS

It was only a matter of time. In retrospect, I should have seen this coming a mile away. All the signs were there from the beginning, and from where I'm standing now it looks like this outcome was inevitable. Everywhere, in all walks of life, the interaction between men and women can either be prosperous or an utter disaster. I suppose it's not such a big step from the formation of channel "flirt" on the Shadowfire IRC network to the arrival of the fabled Mayhem Girls. I mean, put two hundred single guys in one place and someone's bound to notice.

I never thought I'd see the day when gamers would have groupies. The biggest rock bands in America who sell millions of albums a year, sure, I can understand them having hordes of crazed fans lusting over their every discarded item of clothing, but for heaven's sake, gamers? A year ago, it would have been preposterous to expect any female fans to show up at a gaming event (ones who are not friends, girlfriends or wives of one of the players, and who aren't players themselves). These days you can expect anywhere from five to twenty of these girls at any event where the number of participants is large enough or the stakes are high enough. They seem to be there supporting their sporting heroes, just like they might Graeme Smith or Ernie Else. But, if you are unlucky enough to enter into a conversation with one of them - won over, no doubt, by their astounding grace and charm - you will find that not only do they lack any form of understanding of the games they are watching, but they have not a shred of desire to acquire such knowledge. Further investigation will reveal that they are, for the most part, computer-illiterate, and yet more probing will unearth the fact that they knew none of the players beforehand, and those they do know now, they have met at the event itself. So... non-gamer girls are coming to events with the sole purpose of picking up gamer guys. Now I am not usually inclined towards leet speak, but that deserves a BIGLOL. (Translation for the illiterate: big laugh).

IRC trends tend to be a good indicator of the status quo in the gaming community, and the mere existence of channel (#) flirt reveals much indeed. It was initially formed to destroy #chicks-chat, and that aim was remarkably successful. But whatever its early intentions were, it now stands as a serious channel of its own, and its statistics speak volumes. The user count averages between twenty and forty, depending on the time of day / week. Out of these users, the average number of females is between one and three. In total, about seven different females have visited the channel throughout its existence, compared to the hundreds of different males. You'd think the lack of oestrogen input would render it defunct, but it's one of the more popular channels on Shadowfire. That's quite sad. Shadowfire is a network comprised almost solely of gamers, and by the looks of things, very desperate gamers. (Very few of the female gamers I know have ever chatted in #flirt). Now, of course there are those who frequent such channels for a bit of a laugh, but they are the exceptionally small minority. "This channel just shows me the state of social decay in the world," said Sean O'Reilly, also known as Fanaticism, one of the #flirt operators. Another user, who asked to remain anonymous, had the following to say: "It's like a wretched hive. A haven for the hopeless. The Pit of Puberty!"

Using that as a benchmark, the Mayhem Girls (named after the event at which they first appeared) suddenly aren't so surprising anymore. Better still, it should come

as no great shock that they are amazingly popular. It must be quite the experience, to be fawned over by every guy in a fifty-metre radius as if you are the only female left alive on the planet. Sure the quality of the attention is a little suspect, but it's more than made up for in quantity. "You have the sad, depressed, single, attention-deprived male, and the attention-seeking female," says Sean. "The two work wonders when put in the mix."

There is something worrying about girls who will resort to looking for affection in an environment they have no interest in (save for the affection itself). What one will usually find, should one feel inclined to do the research, is that they have met with repeated failure elsewhere. The gaming community, then, is a new playground where nobody knows their names. This is bound to cause problems, and experience has shown us that it does, and will most likely continue to do so. Personally, I don't care for tourists, even though they might strengthen the gaming economy. I can understand that girls who play games would want to meet like-minded guys (there's no shortage, believe me), and those rare but genuine cases I have no problem with. But the techno-harlots who show up for easy pickings are just giving the sensible men headaches, the less sensible emotional issues, and the women a bad name in general.

"Sean", we call, "that one over there's looking at you!"

"Um," he says, not turning his head. "But I have a lightning gun." 



Some people choose our P160 case for its anodized aluminum body. Others crave its swiveling control panel, removable motherboard tray, and isolated HDD bays. But some of us see its optional clear side window and think **“I bet rodents would look cool in there.”** Hey, it's *your* case. Do with it as you please. To learn how we can help you build truly eye-catching systems, visit www.antec.com.

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I N B O X

Letter of the moment

FROM Hendri

SUBJECT Improvements in games

Most new games go on about the number of characters or polygons on screen at one time or how much more realistic the physics are and so on. But are these really improvements or are the designers of games just riding on the back of hardware improvements? In my book improvements are when something can be done better with the same amount or less resources (CPU power). So are all these improvements in games really improvements or just programmers being able to use more 'code' at the same time than before.

I think I've covered this topic a while ago but in a different manner. I'd also love to see how games would improve from a coding point of view if hardware technology froze for a decade. Coming from an 8 and 16 bit computing background it was always a wonder each year to see how programmers, artists and musicians kept squeezing more and more power out of older systems such as the Commodore Amiga or even further back, the ZX Spectrum. Every time someone declared an impossible limit of programming had been reached there was a queue of new games that took the goalposts even further. This fantasy world of yours isn't something we'll ever see as there is no real limit as far as hardware technology expand goes and as it does the code will adapt and probably bloat even further. Ultimately who really cares - as long as we keep seeing better looking and playing games we shouldn't complain, but then again we're gamers.
NAG Ed.

FROM Dale

SUBJECT War is on

There is an ongoing war between PC and PlayStation [a war, when did this happen? Ed]. I feel as if PlayStation, on many occasions, has won the battle - for example - the new Spider-man 2 game. I have played it on both PS2 and PC and the PS2 version is 10 times better. The game is completely different, in the PlayStation version there is more freedom, similar to True Crime and in the PC version the opposite is true. Why such a big change in style - it's like a whole different game?

The two versions of Spider-Man 2 were developed by different development companies - one with a little talent and the other without [NAG scored the PC version a generous 56 while the PS2 version scooped a respectable 85 - Silver Award]. The reviewer even went as far as saying that the PC version might have been created with children in mind. I find it hard to believe that there's an Activision executive sitting in an office somewhere that thinks the PC version is a hot ride. Can someone please fire this fool before he screws up another movie license?
NAG Ed.

FROM Frans

SUBJECT It has been a year...

I was wondering when your wonderful magazine would be doing another preview or review on the game (drum roll) The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. You gave your adoring readers a three page teaser in your July 2003 Issue. It was indicated then that it would be released in the fourth quarter of 2003. I am still waiting with baited breath. I have been to a few websites and am getting no joy. So I was wondering could you look into your crystal ball and give me an indication of when to expect the game... or horror of horrors that it has been cancelled.

3DO [the publisher] went a little bankrupt so until someone else picks up the license, The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse has been placed in an

indefinite holding pattern... I'll just keep my mouth shut about piracy and how it will eventually kill our industry...
NAG Ed.

FROM Ben

SUBJECT Are we responsible enough?

I know this subject has been done to death but I picked up the newspaper this morning and on the front page was the cover of the game Manhunt with the heading "Mom blames computer game for son's murder." The story in the paper was about a 17-year-old who killed a 14-year-old with a hammer and a knife. They found out that the 17-year-old was obsessed with the Manhunt game (admittedly it's a typical news paper report, but it must have some truth to it). "So what" you might say, "I play games like that and don't have violent urges." What if I was to tell you that the killer was brought up in an extremely violent home environment? That's right. You would quite happily believe that, right? Not all people that come from abusive homes will go out into the world and be violent, but the potential for violence is much higher. My point being that kids playing games like Manhunt who come from a violent upbringing could be negatively influenced by the content in a game or movie. You'll always get people saying, "It's just a game. How could it possibly influence your actions? Ridiculous!" I would have agreed with you three years back, but go and play DOOM and then play DOOM3 and you'll see that games are not just innocent fun anymore. They've actually become a very adult thing. I believe that times have changed and with it we need to change our views on what we let our young minds see. There should be a campaign that educates both parents and retailers and it could start with companies like NAG and the local game distributors. I know this will be costly, but at least it will be a responsible step in the right direction and will be seen as such by others. I think we are all so desperate to promote gaming in this world that we forget that it could have severe consequences (if only to a few) if we don't do it with a little foresight and wisdom.

A good point, it's plain to see that as games become more realistically frightening, edgy and risqué to cater for the rapidly growing adult gamer market we need to be especially vigilant now more than ever when protecting younger gamers. Strong opinions are formed about the world when you're young and if negativity and violence are all you're exposed to what other kind of response should be expected from you? By the way, Manhunt carries an 18 age restriction - enough said.
NAG Ed.

FROM Gary

SUBJECT Manhunt Banning?

As a professor of anthropology [The scientific study of the origin, the behaviour, and the physical, social, and cultural development of humans. www.diction-ary.com. Ed] from Cambridge University said "What video games did Ghengis Kahn, Hitler and Atilla the Hun play?" The reaction of the media will always be lame... they blamed Quake for the Scottish school massacre. It's not the game or movie that's to blame but rather the psychological makeup of the individual due primarily to the parents or guardians treatment and upbringing of the child. Just because they performed the act cannot be blamed on a game or movie but rather that the individual was pre-disposed to this action. It's the failure of the family, social services and medical fraternity. Concluding with the professor's point... when Vikings raped and pillaged was it because they had some future vision of television or played violent games...? Don't be ridiculous. The human is a selfish, violent animal and often looks for excuses to validate "inhuman" behaviour because otherwise

SHORTS

FROM yUDI

SUBJECT Macintosh Mice

Even though Macintosh computers have USB ports, it does not mean that a 2 button (or more) mouse will work. Am I right?

I heard that the Macintosh USB ports are slower than normal USB ports because their data pipeline was originally only designed to handle the traffic generated by the clicking of a single mouse button and this is why they can't have two or more buttons. But I'm not an expert when it comes to Macintosh technology - everything I know is based on what I read on the back of a box. Perhaps someone who actually has a Macintosh can tell us why the Macintosh struggles to process the data generated by having two mouse buttons (or is that mice button?).
NAG Ed.

FROM Vera

SUBJECT Font size

I personally enjoy reading a whole bunch of letters. So, for what it's worth, my vote is smaller font, more letters.

Done! I win.
NAG Ed.

FROM Vera

SUBJECT Cooling

Does a computer that runs games need extra cooling?

If you're a company that sells extra cooling hardware then you're definitely going to promote a culture that views cooling as critically important when it comes to enhancing the game 'experience'. If you're a hardware reviewer and you've just lifted your tenth 8KG heat-sink and multiple gyroscopic fan assembly out of its box you might be inclined to think this whole cooling thing has gone a little too far down milk alley. If you're a gamer or computer enthusiast and want to start tinkering with your system without spending 10K+ then modifying, cooling and over-clocking is a good place to start. In short there is no real answer to your question - it all depends on which side of the bank account you're stealing from and what you mean by need.
NAG Ed.

FROM ChApS

SUBJECT Hardcore

Well done on the magazine blah blah blah, now onto the letter.

These blah(s) are going to have to stop...
NAG Ed.

FROM Daniel

SUBJECT Job Enquiry

I would like to enquire if you have any freelance jobs available at present.

If so, please forward me the particulars.

If you're going to ask for a job you should try and put a little more effort into the process. Submitting some actual text for me to look at would be a start especially considering that I don't usually base these kinds of decisions on two line e-mails.
NAG Ed.

they would have to accept the social responsibility of their actions... or rather lack of action. Unfortunately these arguments will bounce backwards and forwards until the end of time, if it's not with burning in Salem and Dungeons and Dragons



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

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



turning our young people into killers then it must be games, movies and violence in the news. All we can do is pray that the future holds more reason and sanity than insecurity, blame shifting and ignorance. NAG Ed.

FROM Elvin Jedi
SUBJECT Girly Covers

I've been an addict of your magazine for the past 4 years now and have never missed an issue since I discovered the Holy Grail that is NAG! But lately something has started to bother me. You see, I'm a girl gamer and I always adored the magazine's cover pages (and duly resisted the urge to rip them off and display them on my wall), but these days I can't help but notice that those awesome game covers are gone, only to be replaced with scantily clad girls! Now I understand that the majority of your readers are guys, but I think we girl gamers deserve some consideration too! It's bad enough that gaming magazines are shelved between men's entertainment magazines and that I receive some weird looks from people if I stand there paging through magazines (which they obviously think is not a gaming magazine), but now it actually looks like I'm reading a men's entertainment magazine! I'm not saying deprive the poor guys from their little pleasures, just remember that there are girls reading your magazine too who would rather stare at an amazing gaming cover like the stunning Homeworld 2 cover, than some girl in a bikini! I don't have a problem with a drool inducing cover every now and then, just not every month!! Now if you'll excuse me, I have to go and read my NAG under my bed with a flashlight, so that I don't scare my granny with the cover...

Okay, point taken - don't worry the girl cover thing is really just a dig at the competition and we'll stop as from the September issue. Promise! But if a really good looking rendered girl type picture lands on my desk I might be tempted. NAG Ed.

FROM Raymond
SUBJECT Good Classic Gaming

I picked up a copy of your magazine and on the front cover was Larry, bringing back happiness and old memories! "He's back, the legacy continues..." it's really great to see this classic game [*Leisure Suit Larry, Ed*] make its way back to life, and even though it's not under the direction of Al Lowe, it will do. Okay, so let me irritate all your readers by saying I love all the classic Sierra games and have played them all, KQ, SQ, PQ, the lot... Point and click adventures are greatly missed, not just by me but by everyone I know that grew up with them. Call me boring, but it would have been great to buy Space Quest 56 and follow another adventure with Wilco. Sierra games were not only original but created unique puzzles and scenes to talk about. So from a true Sierra fan, I look forward to buying the new Larry game and hopefully there is a Space Quest in the works somewhere too. Well fine, let me dream then! But don't listen to me, buy your DOOM3, and do your shooting, but don't come crying to me when all you get is blood and gore, I know King Graham would have done it with a four-leaf clover and a magic mirror.

It always helps my state of mind to see that there are still plenty of old school gamers that read NAG and play games. My question - where do you find the time to play games in-between looking after children, shopping for groceries at month end, keeping the wife happy by watching Bold and

Beautiful reruns with her, cleaning the pool, picking up the dog carp, fixing the washing line, working late hours ... I could go on but then it would all end with a loud bang and the smell of gunpowder. Is there any time left for gaming once you get married, have kids and get serious about life? Should you cast aside some of your responsibilities and make time for gaming or just give it all up because you need to start saving for your retirement home instead of 'investing' in that shiny new 3D card? NAG Ed.

FROM Zh4qC
SUBJECT Hardcore Gamer?

There are many different aspects, perspectives, statements and definitions to explain what constitutes a hardcore gamer. Some criticise gamers only because they're blinded by confusion, a hardcore gamer is not defined by the amount of games he's played, the hours he's played, his system specifications, his uptime statistics, his script file, his oversized desktop screen-cap or his broadband connection. A gamer is a part of a cult: having the capability, knowledge and the talent of understanding computer literature. A gamer is not a dweeb, nerd or anti-social, instead gamers have the ability to see the amazing statement the game makes, like a book that allows them to play the lead character. Resulting in them appreciating the hardship, work, beauty, time and experience put into a game, which is a difficult thing for most game critics to understand. People are afraid of what they don't understand... A hardcore gamer compromises some of his precious time to devote it to gaming, either 2 hours a day or 6 [refer to NAG Feb '04 'Domain of The Basilisk: So you want to be a... FPS player: Part 3'], it depends on the situation the gamer is in. It is that moment in time, when a gamer devotes himself completely to a game, only to experience the full effect this awesome display of dancing pixels can have on him. This time, that the gamer spends gaming, is sacred: he involves himself to the point of no return, it's only him, the AI and, if connected, other gamers. When a 'Hardcore Gamer' is at this point of no return, the hardcore part starts taking place - he is the best, the fastest and the smartest! He will either fail or triumph, either way he will then continue with his everyday life, only to return the next day to sample the taste of competition while getting better at what he plays again! This all, which leads to the point of wanting and needing to be the best, is what makes a Hardcore Gamer. **Interesting description, I didn't want to ruin your poetic style by editing this too much, but it's not up to me - the readers must vote. Is this the definitive description of a hardcore gamer or should I have forwarded this garbage to the recycle bin? Send me your letters!** NAG Ed.

FROM VanmaN
SUBJECT Cooling Debate

Responding to the Letter of the Month for August - Matt stated that he cannot see the need for all the advanced cooling methods available on the market today. He claims that his AMD 64 runs at an astonishingly low 37°C. This person clearly does not stay in the warmer parts of the country or alternatively has the air conditioner running throughout the entire summer. I live in a humble little place called Ellisras [*I've heard of it, but where is it?* Ed], about 50KM from the Botswana border [*Oh, Ed*]. Our average daily temperature during summer is 39°C, and that's in the shade. This means our CPU's are

at ±39°C before the PC is powered. A CPU with standard cooling can run between 45°C and 55°C easily in this weather. During December we reach daily temperatures up to the mid forties, thus CPU's can easily run into the sixties on these days. The whole PC community in our region appreciate the great innovative cooling measures available on the market these days - we even dream of better cooling solutions. I guess it all depends on your environment as well as how high you regard the life expectancy of your precious hardware. Oh yes and did I mention, these great cooling devices allow for the sometimes much needed over-clocking. If you don't cool, then sorry, no extra juice from that CPU. Alas it's not only CPU's that require cooling, RAM, Hard Drives, CD/DVD-Drives, Graphic Cards and yes, your Motherboard also requires cooling to last the trip to the next upgrade. Shakespeare could have summed it up "To cool or not to cool - what was the question?"

Are you saying that extra cooling should only apply to people living on the lip of an erupting volcano, in the centre of a star or to those daring gamers that over-clock their systems? Guess what. You're 100% correct. I believe that at least two-thirds of all the cooling gear sold in the whole world is to paranoid people who believe they have a heat problem [and much of this is probably based on touching their cases with a flat open palm and a furrowed brow]. If somehow I'm wrong about this phenomenon then my next guess is that by some bizarre coincidence every single cooling component manufacture in the world is based in Nevada - now that would explain a lot. NAG Ed.

FROM Charl
SUBJECT Gaming

I have been thinking about the arguments between AMD vs. Intel and Macintosh vs. PC. There are certain benefits such as an AMD being cheaper or less wiring in the Macintosh, but what does it matter. Everybody knows that when you've got to game, you've got to game. And a true, hardcore gamer will game on anything he or she can get his or her hands on. Besides, it's not about on what you play, but what you play that matters! **True, but please tell me exactly how I'm supposed to play Command & Conquer with only one mouse button?** NAG Ed.

FROM ironwolf
SUBJECT THIS IS A PG18L

I'm really pi**ed off because Crytek are really a bunch of dumb a**es they make a game with awesome graphics but the story is cr*p and the AI sucks. Why you ask, because the f**ken monsters are so damn hard to kill, you shoot the f**ken monster and it doesn't die. Even using my strongest gun doesn't work. Now from knowledge I know that 100 bullets is a lot and can kill anything so why the f**k don't the monsters die, this just gets on my tits. I don't care if 20 million people finished the game but it's really a load of sh*t **I liked the bit about the 100 bullets - if you're having so much trouble killing things in games perhaps you should consider a tamer nickname like Cotton Bunny? You might also look at cleaning up the language, if I was your mother I'd hang myself.** NAG Ed.

Go here and register or we'll go ape!
www.nag.co.za

Badger Hunt #9 Winner [August Issue]

[Ed: Our winner this month has the dubious honour of being the last winner of the Badger Hunt competition ever and to celebrate we've decided to do nothing much at all really. To the right is the winner's 'snappy' mail.]

The badger is on **Page 33** in the top right screenshot entitled 'vibrant, lively and oh so pretty'. It can be found next to the Ferris wheel. It looks kind of sad due to it not being able to go on the ride due to height restrictions. - *Paul Barfoot*



SHIELDS UP!

Microsoft introduces Service Pack 2, their most ambitious Windows update yet

Security is a major concern these days – if you spend any amount of time online you run the risk of attracting spy-ware or a large variety of malicious programs. Invasive advertising measures such as pop-up ads have become quite a scourge, especially to the average PC user and the amount of intrusive attacks on machines have increased dramatically over the years. But perhaps the flagship of this new underground movement in security attacks is the Trojan, a small program that relies on human interaction to spread its code – in the past few years the news services regularly featured a new variant spreading like wildfire over the Internet.

Being the major provider of operating systems to the PC market, this places a massive burden of responsibility on Microsoft. The company has been very proactive in releasing patches for security flaws in its software and measures are constantly taken to improve the security of the average PC. But this isn't really the solution. Statistically the majority of security breaches and Trojan attacks are not because of a lack of a patch, but the amount of time it takes for end-users to install the latest updates.

Microsoft are very aware of this flaw in the whole security infrastructure and has addressed it with a lot of success: the amount of time between Nimda's appearance and end users patching their system was 331 days; Sasser, the latest Trojan to wreak some form of havoc on systems, only had fourteen days before it was rendered impotent. The problem is that most virus writers do not actively seek exploits in Windows – instead they watch the Microsoft tech site for white papers detailing security flaws and the patch made for it, then reverse-engineer the code to discover and use the exploit.

So the problem is human, but you can never accuse your customers of negligence: the burden of responsibility falls on Microsoft and their answer to it is Service Pack 2.

More than a Rollout

SP1 was essentially a compilation of the various security patches that the company has released over the years for its operating systems, but SP2 is characteristically different in that it makes very specific changes to your OS. The main focus of the update is to make PCs more secure by making updates easier and giving both network administrators and end-users a lot more control over what goes in and out of their systems. The most visual addition to this is the Security Dashboard, a single area where you can see the status of your security situation.



The new Security Dashboard aims to give users a single location where they can see their machine's security and update status

The dashboard shows the status of your Windows security path updates, virus definitions and firewall health, and should interact with third-party software already installed on your PC; even though a lot of companies still have to adopt these new security features in their software, the means is now in place to easily inform users if their PC can be compromised.

The Windows Update section has also been given a major overhaul and now includes the Update Client, a piece of software that sits natively on your machine and will keep track of updates for all your Microsoft programs. This service only goes active in January, though.

From a technical perspective a lot more power has also been handed to administrators handling large amounts of machines. More security-specific group policies can be made and security features can also be set at a domain level.

It's all yours

But the real aim here is to make the end-user PC safe. As I mentioned before, the human element is currently the Achilles Heel of security, so SP2 had to be designed with the average PC user in mind – who isn't tech savvy or understands the concepts behind a Firewall. Windows XP's own firewall has often been criticized as being far from up to the job, so this was one area that was given a lot of adjustments. But if you use your own firewall software the native program can be turned off. The same goes for most of

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SHIELDS UP! - A look at Service Pack 2

the new security elements – the idea is to make things as non-intrusive and intuitive as possible. Nearly every security aspect in XP now carries large explanations on what they do and why they need to do it.

The single most obvious change, though, would probably be the addition of pop-up blocking software and more efficient security when it comes to e-mail. Pop-ups have been around for a while, prompting a lot of companies to create blocking software and developers to add such functionality to their web browsers. SP2 introduces this feature to Internet Explorer, maintaining an easy-to-edit list of URLs that originate pop-up ads. The scripting capabilities of these windows have been limited as well to stop sites from displaying pop-ups which resemble Windows dialogue boxes: a commonly-used way to lure unsuspecting web surfers into sites.

Spoofing and scam sites are also targeted – Windows takes every effort to indicate the actual location of a site that you are about to go to and even when you are there it will indicate the server's real web origin.

On the e-mail side, the security features that Outlook users have been familiar with for a while now find their way into Outlook Express. Opening attachments has been disabled by default (though you can change this option). The client also asks several times on your certainty that you'd like to open the file – this extends even into zip attachments: if an attachment is zipped, Windows still regards the inside files as potentially dangerous as well and will check if you really want to execute the file; this functionality also extends into the popular Winzip client. A new addition to both versions of Outlook is that you can set how the client should handle specific file types. For instance, if you are in the habit of receiving lots and lots of Image attachments, you can set that these be ignored by the security settings. Zones can also be set up so that specific users or domains

are regarded as safe. These measures might seem a bit overbearing for high-end users, but they have been designed with the man on the street in mind, who has proven his tenacity for opening unsolicited attachments.

One problem with Service Pack 2 is its sheer size: at over 200MB it's a daunting prospect to get, especially over South Africa's numerous dial-up modems. Microsoft SA realizes this and has imported thousands of SP2 CDs for XP users. Keep an eye out for a free copy at popular computer retailers and banks, or give Microsoft a call at 0860 2255 67 and they'll ship you a free copy.



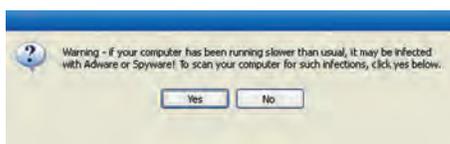
Shields up

There's a lot more under the hood to protect PC users out there, such as new speed bumps to stop buffer overflows (Microsoft's representatives claim that this means the end of the infamous Blue Screen), boot-time security and per-application security checks to make sure malicious software doesn't slip in between the cracks. All of this has come at a bit of a cost, as an estimated

10% of PCs are having some form of problem with the update, but mainly due to third-party companies still adjusting their software to accommodate the new features. The pack also brings improved Wireless security and adds native Bluetooth support to XP.

Uptake of SP2 is likely to be slower than the first, because it does a lot more to and for your system, which invariably means extra resources and a brief learning curve. But as the world becomes more and more connected, such features

have become essential, whether you get them via Windows or other applications. If anything, SP2 will stop all those virus attachments coming your way because someone in accounting thought that a screensaver was mailed to them...



Spoof pop-up ads' potency are significantly decreased with more limited scripting when it comes to modifying the look of a pop-up window

Our resident tech guru Tom Taylor expounds on his impressions of the SP2 beta

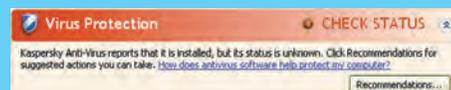
I think I am one of the few people who still get excited about service packs, which is probably because I tend to look at SP's slightly differently than normal folk. I have been using SP2 for quite a long time now and I think it is one of the best Windows enhancements yet. Granted the fact that it falls short in many aspects it is a step in the right direction. The new Security Centre lies at the heart of SP2 and this is where I picked up the first set of short-falls. For one thing it does not work with many of the anti-virus applications available today. I use eScan which is, to my mind, one of the best AV applications around and SP2's Security Centre tells me it can see it, but cannot check its status. While I am sure this problem will be sorted in due course it is frustrating nonetheless. A good idea would have been for Microsoft to include a basic virus scanner but I am sure the software giant would be criticized for that and dragged to court, again.

Another of my gripes is that, similar to the AV scenario, the Firewall monitor cannot work in conjunction with 3rd party applications such as the ever-popular Zone Alarm, which is a major shortcoming in my eyes and one that I hope is resolved soon. The Windows Firewall can be disabled but the Security Centre will not be able to monitor any other software firewall. For seasoned computer users this should not pose a problem but regular computer users are bound to be confused by this sort of thing. Moving onto Internet Explorer there have been some long overdue enhancements such as pop-up blocking but we still do not have tabbed browsing capabilities; I guess I will stick with Mozilla's Firefox then.

As an 802.11g wireless user, I had endless problems with Windows XP's wireless support. So it's wonderful to find that SP2's much hyped wireless enhancements work great; for one thing it now remembers settings such as which networks you deem safe and lets you view at a glance which networks in your area are secure or not. Another welcome addition is the Bluetooth support that SP2 now offers. The Bluetooth's control panel also offers some pretty nifty features which, in conjunction with the soon-to-be-released Bluetooth 1.2 specification, should provide some promising results.

One of the new features of SP2 which many people won't notice is the new Windows Installer 3.0. This application is what Windows Update uses to download and install any new updates. The reason why I find this application so exciting is that it allows for an array of improvements to the Windows XP OS. For one thing, the patches downloaded by Windows Update will be much smaller, this, especially in the South African market, is an answer to many headaches. My favourite feature in the Windows Installer 3.0, though, is the fact that patches will now be individually removable.

There is so much more to say about SP2 - my experience has been a fairly seamless one. Apart from the odd warning message popping up that says SP2 might have issues with certain applications, all those applications execute and run problem free. I think my only major gripe with SP2 is the Security Centre's current lack of support for certain third party applications.



A different view on SP2

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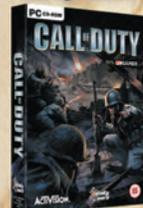


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We peer into the hazy future as more and more games get announced, since we're leaving the slump part of the year. In fact, there are so many games being released in the next few months that we slapped twenty of the prime cuts into a 12 page monster feature - all to keep you informed. And if you still have some future zest left, check out our Nightmare Before Christmas and a hands-on look at the Lord of the Rings turn-based RPG The Third Age. Plus another one the Ed had to keep quite about...

NAG's Wanted List



Dungeon Siege 2

PC

November 2004

It might not look that different, but there's a lot more to it. Remember, Chris Taylor and his boys even skipped out on the expansion to work on this sequel.



The Movies

PC

November 2004

Lights! Camera! Action! Yeah, we'll get tired of saying that eventually, but when the father of all Management Sims (and all-round development god) Peter Molyneux, makes a new one, you have to pay attention.



The Punisher

PS2

TBA

Take people and stick them into hot oil, wood chippers and piranha-infested tanks. Or bludgeon them with meat cleavers and pool sticks. It's all in a day's work for a very violent version based on the comic, not the movie.

Stronghold 2

Developer **Firefly** Publisher **Take 2**

Platform **PC** Release Date **2005**



The first Stronghold was such a gem in the rough, so it's not only great to see that a sequel is finally being planned, but the game also has a very impressive new look, taking full control of today's 3D technology. Thousands of units, improved multiplayer and a new mode called Castle-Life are a few of the features mentioned so far. And since there aren't nearly enough strategy games built around the principle of building and defending your castle and its surrounding villages, we're very happy to see Stronghold back in action.

Constantine

Developer **Bits Corp** Publisher **Enlight**

Platform **PC** | **Xbox** Release Date **2005**



We shouldn't get too excited here, since the game might be a spin-off of the Constantine movie, which is due out in 2005 as well, and stars Keanu Reeves as John Constantine, the cancer-plagued warlock in Neil Gaiman's excellent Hellblazer comic series. And anyone whose read these will definitely be interested in what Bits Corp and SCI could get up to, especially if they rely more on the graphic novels than the movie for inspiration.

Oddworld Stranger

Developer **Oddworld Inhabitants** Publisher **Electronic Arts**

Platform **PS2** | **Xbox** Release Date **TBA**



It's good to see an old friend back! The Oddworld series has seen better days, but perhaps their new home at mega-publisher EA will change things around. Oddworld Stranger is certainly a sign of this as you take on the role of The Stranger, a bounty hunter operating in the strange Oddworld universe, all in the glorious 3D we last saw debut with the Oddworld Xbox launch title. Of course it's looking a lot better than back then, plus now everyone can play it, not just Xbox owners. Happy?

Act of War

Developer **Eugen Systems** Publisher **Atari**

Platform **PC** Release Date **2005**



Terrorism seems vogue these days, at least when you're out to get them. Atari joins the bandwagon with Act of War, an RTS title wherein you direct an elite squad of military vets and rookies out to stop the bad guys, who are being financed by a ruthless Fuel Consortium (in a story penned by famed author Dale Brown). A bit sensationalistic, plus the screens don't actually show off what the game might look like, but it's rare for Atari to release an RTS title, so maybe the boys over at Eugen Systems must know what they're doing.

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- Dual Gigabit LAN
- IEEE 1394b
- Intel High Definition (HD) Audio

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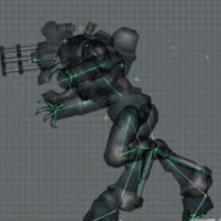
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QUAKE IV

7 years ago a lone marine brought down the planetary defences of the Strogg home planet and destroyed their leader. It wasn't enough. Now you must return to deliver a full and final assault where the line between alien and human blurs...

Are you ready for QUAKE IV?







QUAKE IV



PC
Preview

Developer: Raven Software | id Software · Publisher: Activision
Supplier: MegaRom [011] 234 2680 · Genre: FPS · Release Date: When it's done

It came as a bit of a surprise when another mysterious offer arrived from id Software and Activision – more contractual paperwork had to be signed before we were told that an exclusive interview and some juicy artwork for QUAKE IV could be ours if we would be kind enough to initial here and here, sign there and hand over whatever was left of our free will to the gentleman dressed in black. It was a long wait for the closely guarded QUAKE IV press materials to arrive, but certainly worth it as you'll soon discover. In the interests of allocating as much space for imagery and useful information as possible we'll cut the 'interesting' NAG office anecdotes here and just get on with the interview.

Raven Software Q&A

Spokespersons

Eric Biessman, Project Lead | Rick Johnson, Lead Programmer
Jim Hughes, Lead Designer | Kevin Long, Lead Artist
Zack Quarles, Lead Audio | Brian Raffel, VP



Q: Describe the storyline of QUAKE IV (where does the game take place)?

Earth is under siege by an alien race. The Strogg are cybernetic warriors - a mechanical frame and decaying body parts stabilized by flesh consumed in a systematic annihilation of other species and civilizations. In a desperate attempt to survive a Strogg attack on Earth, an armada of Earth's finest warriors is sent to take the battle to the Strogg home planet. Earth's assault force is nearly annihilated immediately, but one marine manages to infiltrate the base, bring down their planetary defence systems, and kill the Strogg's collective brain and leader - the Makron. Earth assumed the destruction of the Makron would end it all, but it didn't.

That's where QUAKE II leaves off and QUAKE IV begins.

The Strogg quickly regroup under a new and more powerful Makron. However, with the Strogg's planetary defences still destroyed, Earth's forces can deliver a full and final assault. This time you're not alone. An army of soldiers are fighting with you and an arsenal of weapons and vehicles are at your disposal. QUAKE IV delivers you deeper into the heart of Stroggs, past their human factories, and directly into the cyber-realm, where you'll eventually become Strogg yourself.

Q: As QUAKE IV is an intense, action game, what will players experience?

[Jim Hughes] To start with, QUAKE IV is all about being part of an epic sci-fi battle filled with fast-paced, explosive action. We're using the DOOM

3 tech, so you know that QUAKE IV delivers an amazing experience, both with stunning visuals, set within an authentic science-fiction world, and heart-pounding, intense gameplay. Players are thrust into the role of a marine taking part in a massive invasion of the Strogg home world, where they get to experience the war while fighting alongside the huge marine invasion force as well as on their own.

Q: Are any of the classic enemies returning in QUAKE IV?

[Eric Biessman] As QUAKE IV picks up from QUAKE II, many of the original creatures have returned. Look forward to once again battling Gunners, the Strogg Marines and Gladiators, just to name a few. We've also added plenty of new creatures to surprise veteran QUAKE fans out there. Plus, each enemy has been heavily updated to take advantage of the power of the game's technology, so all of the enemies are absolutely state of the art.

Q: Are any of the classic weapons returning in QUAKE IV?

[Eric Biessman] As you would expect, some of the classic weapons from QUAKE II are definitely coming back, like the blaster (with flashlight), shotgun, machine gun and even the nail gun. We've gone through each weapon to make sure it's been updated and polished to be just right. And, we've also added some new firepower too for gamers to take into battle. We're staying true to the QUAKE series, making sure great care is being taken to really make the weapons shine.

Q: QUAKE IV uses the DOOM 3 engine. What is the difference from DOOM 3?

[Rich Johnson] QUAKE IV is more like an intense action movie to DOOM 3's horror movie feel. We're going all out to deliver a fast paced adrenaline rush of combat. Overall, most of our work has been spent towards the



creation of QUAKE IV itself as the DOOM 3 tech provided us with many of the fundamental systems straight 'out of the box' so to speak.

Q: Tell us about the variety of gameplay – we understand there are indoor and outdoor missions and vehicles too?

[Jim Hughes] Without getting into too many specifics, we are creating a large amount of varied locations that players visit on their trek across the Strogg home world. The DOOM 3 tech has been great. We're able to create both indoor environments and outdoor landscapes that will enable us to deliver an overwhelming experience for gamers. From journeying deep into Strogg industrial complexes to driving vehicles across the barren and blasted planet surface, players experience a huge variety of visuals and gameplay. As they progress throughout QUAKE IV they'll also meet a large variety of opponents and obstacles that they'll have to overcome to proceed and survive the mission at hand.

Q: What can you tell us about QUAKE IV multiplayer?

[Rich Johnson] Since this is a continuation in the QUAKE series we felt QUAKE IV would best be served by capturing all of the things that made QUAKE III Arena great. With that in mind we are delivering a multiplayer experience akin to QUAKE III Arena. QUAKE IV features hyper-fast action, deadly weapons and all of the things that made QUAKE III Arena great – bounce pads, trick moves, you name it. Die-hard fans will feel right at home.

Q: How did Raven get selected to develop QUAKE IV? Can you tell us a little about Raven's background?

[Brian Raffel] Our relationship with id Software goes back to our early days of development. Together we worked on titles like Heretic and Hexen. Eventually we moved on to develop several titles using id technology. Our experience with first-person action titles, knowledge of previous id technologies and our strong working relationship with id made working on QUAKE IV a natural fit.

Q: Tell us about the artwork and level of detail in graphics in QUAKE IV?

[Kevin Long] For QUAKE IV, we tried to retain the artistic look and feel of QUAKE II, but we've updated it with new artwork, textures, skins, and models. We have drawn upon a wealth of sci-fi and horror novels, comics, anime, and films as inspiration, as well as our own artists and modelers' fantastic ideas and concepts to create a truly horrific alien world and culture. Our modelers have created some really phenomenal looking creature models for QUAKE IV, with poly counts ranging between 750,000 polys on up to 4,000,000 polys for the high poly versions of our models. Thanks to the technological advancements of the DOOM 3 engine, the entire art team is very excited about the level of detail we're now able to throw into our characters, world models, and textures.

Q: How is motion-capture being used in development?

[Brian Raffel] We've used motion capture in the past, at Raven, to help attain a more realistic feel and movement in our games. QUAKE IV has

taken this to a new level as we have just added an in-house motion capture studio. This lets us greatly speed up animation times and get things into the game quicker. It also allows the animators to focus on making sure all of the alien, non-human creatures and objects in the game get the special attention that they deserve, in order to deliver the types of character movement and animation necessary in QUAKE IV. In short, by having the motion capture studio in-house it is letting us greatly expand our horizons in what we can do.

Q: Can you describe the sound in QUAKE IV?

[Zack Quarles] QUAKE IV utilizes a fully immersive 5.1 surroundscape. We have a complete Protools studio here in the Raven office to make sure that the aural experience matches that of the visual element. The sound in QUAKE IV plays a very important role in defining the atmosphere and environment of the Strogg universe. Just like visuals, the audio will help present the hybrid nature of the Strogg embrace - the familiar with the alien, the organic tied to the mechanical. It is a sound designer's dream.

Q: How much is id Software involved?

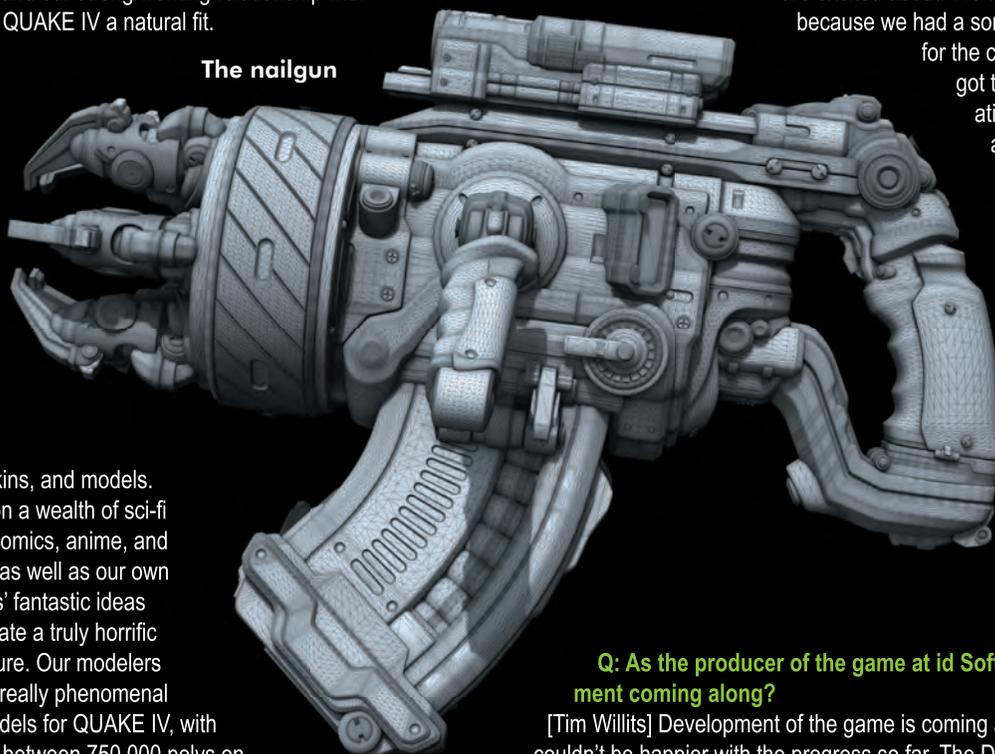
[Eric Biessman] We've always had a great working relationship with id and making QUAKE IV has been no different. In the past, we've worked closely with them on titles like Heretic and Hexen and we've also been privileged to work with their earlier technologies. Tim Willits and our design team have been working very closely on making sure that QUAKE IV not only remains true to the QUAKE II universe and is an outstanding game, but also that we're getting the most out of the technology and advancing the gameplay in fun and exciting new directions. We've also received awesome feedback on the artistic side of things. It's been a great give-and-take throughout the entire development and I think that everyone is happy that we've been able to mould a game that both companies are excited about. We were also very lucky

because we had a sort of "backstage pass" for the creation of DOOM 3. We got to watch the game's creation from the ground up and that really gave us a great advantage when it came to making QUAKE IV. id would find the best way to do something and would pass that info on to us. It really saved us a lot of time. To make a long story short, there has definitely been a good deal of id Software involvement.

Q: As the producer of the game at id Software, how is development coming along?

[Tim Willits] Development of the game is coming along nicely and we couldn't be happier with the progress so far. The DOOM 3 technology is very advanced and, even for a veteran team like Raven, quite challenging at times. But, with DOOM 3 now completed they are now working on finished code and any problems they may face we probably already solved while working on DOOM 3. id and Raven have had a long history of working together and that has helped a lot during the development of QUAKE IV. By taking our lead, Raven has done some great things with both the visuals and gameplay.

We are confident that QUAKE IV will be a worthy successor to the QUAKE franchise. **N**



The nailgun

Distinguished developers - Raven Software

Raven Software is the talented development company that has joined forces with id Software to create Quake IV. Their relationship with id Software began in 1992 with the production of ShadowCaster which used a modified version of the Wolfenstein 3D engine that introduced gamers to jumping, flight and swimming. This formed the solid foundation of their relationship but the game that sealed the deal was Heretic, a game that used a modified DOOM engine to bring a unique fantasy element to the first person shooter genre. [Some of you may remember the hilarity of firing an egg at your multiplayer opponent which turned them into a helpless but nimble chicken]. Heretic was a significant achievement that enjoyed critical and commercial success and cemented the relationship between id Software and Raven Software in the minds of gamers. This relationship spawned many innovative games over the years including the successful Soldier of Fortune franchise.



Raven's significant id Software engine technology licensing timeline

ShadowCaster [1993] used a modified Wolfenstein 3D engine created by John Carmack.

Heretic [1994] used a modified DOOM engine and introduced the gaming world to the inventory system.

Heretic II [1998] used a modified Quake II engine and featured a third person camera.

Star Trek Voyager: Elite Force [2000] used a modified Quake III Arena engine and was the first ever game based on the Star Trek Voyager series.

Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast [2002] used a modified Quake III Team Arena engine.

The last game created by Raven Software was **Soldier of Fortune II [2002]** which also used the Quake III Team Arena engine but featured a number of Rendering, AI and scripting modifications to enhance the game. Released in May 2002 this was the last game Raven released so you can best guess that they've been working on Quake IV since then putting development time at around a speculative 2 years.



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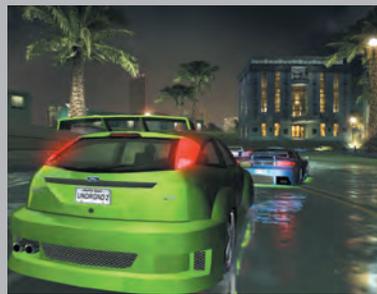
AND OTHER WAYS TO AVOID CRAPPY GIFTS



The holiday period is all about giving and getting. We particularly like the part about getting and feel that if you made this the sole focus of the whole holiday theme, then everyone would be a lot happier. Besides, isn't Santa footing the bill?

The problem is that whenever you request a gift you never get it. Sometimes you might end up with a traditional crappy gift, like a jersey or a pair of socks, but the real bitter pills come from when you begged and pleaded for Far Cry, but your relatives bought you Deer Destroyer XVII. This is obviously no way to run a self-respecting gamer gift scam, so we've prepared 20 of the must-have games of the fourth quarter in 2004, hands down the busiest release schedule of the year, all in handy little cut-out coupons that you can drop in an envelope and send to Santa or your grandmother or leave them up on the fridge for your entire family to memorize.

On a more serious note, the next ten pages contain what we regard as some of the biggest titles coming out between October and December. Some of them might already be on the shelf when you read this and some might get delayed until next year, but the bulk will be out there to keep you happy over Christmas. Obviously a lot of great titles were omitted due to space constraints and we left the ones that don't need any mention, like Half-Life 2 and The Sims 2, off of the list. Honestly, if you haven't heard about them by now...



This coupon entitles you to one copy of NAG, since you were stupid and actually cut out half the coupons, which wasn't really what we meant when we said "cut out the coupons". But if you can manage to send this coupon to Santa Clause, he might send you a crisp new copy of this magazine. Don't send it to us - we don't even wear red. Besides, what kind of fool cuts up his copy of NAG anyway? If you really need to do it, make photo copies...



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Dungeon Lords

Developer: Heuristic Park
Publisher: Dreamcatcher
Platforms: PC
Release Date: October 2004



The RPG genre might seem like exciting territory, but it's not a very innovative genre, with developers preferring to follow trails blazed by Blizzard or Bioware, with a few notable exceptions. Then there is the dreary bastard-child, the 3D action-RPG, which often degrades into mundane play mechanics. That's why a title like *Dungeon Lords*, from Wizards & Wizardry designer D.W. Bradley, looks very interesting. It might come off as another RPG-wannabe, but at its core is a far more in-depth system for role-players, while action fans are rewarded with a combat system which demands reflexes and quick thinking, especially in melee situations. Combine that with a lush 3D world boasting some juicy graphics out of the DirectX 9 closet. *Dungeon Lords* rounds itself with tons of items, an advanced magic system, lots of NPCs and monsters and levels that can change their layout and design if you replay them.

It might be a bit ambitious, but *Dungeon Lords* looks to be solid in its approach, not to mention that it has a nice repertoire of elements to make the game stand apart from the rest of the RPG crowd.



Rome: Total War

Developer: Creative Assembly
Publisher: Activision
Platforms: PC
Release Date: October 2004

Go big or go home. There are a lot of RTS games out there that boast hundreds, or even thousands, of units in a game. But none have reached the zealous scale of battle that the *Total War* series has enjoyed, earning them a well-deserved spot amongst RTS fans as one of the finest strategy series ever made. So with *Rome*, the next instalment, it just makes sense to push that envelope a little further.

The most obvious change is the engine, which now boasts 3D all-round, something that was impossible with the hardware of earlier years. This, combined with the motion-captured units, translates into some amazing battle scenes, rivalling anything you've seen on screen and surpassing most, if not all, of these movies. Cities have also been given a new look, handing the game a more organic feel, since building and managing your empire is part of the deal if you plan to wage war successfully. It's hard to encapsulate how stunning *Rome: Total War* is looking in such a small space, but it's going to be a hit with anyone who want battles big, vast and bloody.



Tony Hawk Underground 2

Developer: Neversoft
Publisher: Activision
Platforms: PS2, Xbox, GCN, PC
Release Date: October 2004

Enough people know Bam Margera, from the original *Jackass*. And we all took to the first THUG game's storyline approach like giddy schoolgirls at a Brad Pitt underwear-signing event. And combining these two into a new game is Neversoft's strategy with the new *Underground* game. You play as a no-name skater who through a series of bizarre (and probably moot) events end up joining Tony Hawk's team in the World Destruction Tour – a contest to see whose team is better: Bam or Tony's. And whoever loses fits the final bill.

The team-based story means that not only will you have your own character, which has his general set of goals to achieve, but you can switch to other members of the team, which includes guys like Bob Burnquist and Mike Vallely, each with their own set of tasks and tricks to accomplish. There are also hidden characters, such as Benjamin Franklin, to discover (also with their own quests and tricks).

It might be old hat, but the *Tony Hawk* series is still going strong and THUG 2 gives us no reason to doubt it will stay that way.



GTA 3: San Andreas

Developer: Rockstar
Publisher: Take 2 Interactive
Platforms: PS2 (PC unconfirmed)
Release Date: 22 October 2004



Rockstar plan to take their GTA franchise up yet another step by not only giving us the largest play area the modern series has yet seen – players will also find that the list under the heading “Stuff To Do” is much, much bigger as they explore the game world with protagonist CJ. This is because money plays a far bigger role and not every mission pays out as handsomely as past games have. But you’ll need cash to buy weapons and clothes, not to mention that your wealth determines your influence and reputation. To get more padding for your wallet, Rockstar have introduced Robbery – the ability to walk into anyone’s home and rob them blind. While not really a part of the game’s main story, it will make up a vital component to surviving the streets of Los Santos, San Andreas’ capital. Keeping fit, eating and swimming have all been added, as well as the compulsory

improved engine. San Andreas is Rockstar North’s most ambitious entry into the game series yet, introducing a lot of new play dynamic elements while still trying to retain the core open-ended style of play that made the original games so popular, not to mention that instead of one city, players now have an entire state to play in. Focusing on West-coast gang life, your character returns to make his name again in the state, keeping true to the GTA moniker that crime does pay. But little more has been revealed, except that players will have access to a nippy BMX. It’s hard for us to doubt Rockstar or the next GTA game, because the series has a solid reputation. The new improvements by-and-large sound excellent, not to mention that the gangster perspective should make for a nice change in scenery and pace.



Full Spectrum Warrior

Developer: Pandemic
Publisher: THQ
Platforms: PC, Xbox
Release Date: October 2004



Two issues ago we awarded the excellent Xbox version of this game 91%, so it's no surprise that a PC version is very exciting news. Built around technology developed for military simulators by Pandemic, this third-person game is based around squad strategy, as you leap between two squads, directing them through hot situations. Using these two teams you use them to help each other clear dangerous situations and take out hostile units, all using actual US Military tactics, call signs and training.

Not a lot has been said about the PC version, but if the Xbox version is faithfully transferred, with a mouse interface thrown in, things cannot go far wrong here. And rumour has it that PC gamers will have access to additional missions.

Ports are usually dubious at best, ending up as pale comparisons, especially when it's a console-to-PC job. But Full Spectrum Warrior looks like it's shaping up nicely, not to mention that the console version is a gem. Unless Pandemic manages to bungle the PC version, owners of the beige box could get a classic of their own very soon.

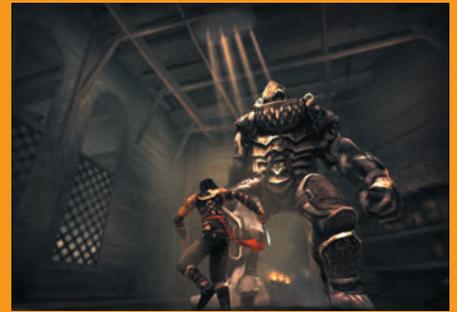


Prince of Persia: Warrior Within

Developer: Ubisoft Montreal
Publisher: Ubisoft
Platforms: PS2, Xbox, GCN, PC
Release Date: November 2004

Despite our invariable ability to be right about all things gaming, no-one here at NAG could explain why Prince of Persia: Sands of Time performed so poorly initially, since it's one of the best platform games ever conceived. But it did eventually make a profit, enough so to justify a sequel. But how do you improve on a game that has managed to rewrite every rule that exists in the action-platform genre?

Well, grittier is a start. POP's levels and enemies felt a bit clinical at times, so POP 2 intends to change that with more creative and ferocious opponents inside a richer and more interactive environment. This time our prince, much tougher and salted after years of beating up time monsters, arrives at an old Gothic castle where your adventure starts. While UbiSoft have been keeping story details under wraps, the play dynamic itself is the real draw-card. Acrobatics and combat has now been combined; dual weapons, instant kill moves and additional gymnastics have been added – rounding to will be a superb sequel – unless you didn't like Sands of Time.



Gran Turismo 4

Developer: Polyphony Digital
Publisher: Sony
Platforms: PS2
Release Date: November 2004

This is a busy year for car fans. If you're not still engrossed in NFS Underground or Project Gotham Racer 2, you can certainly look forward to Juiced, Konami's GT-rival Enthusia or, of course, the one that started it all – Gran Turismo. The latest game has been lambasted on occasion for only being more of the same, but that in itself isn't bad, considering that Polyphony have nearly perfected the art of creating digital cars. The latest game will boast yet another large collection of games and tracks, all with cutting-edge physics and graphics. Serious tweaking, though, has gone into the AI (GT3's Achilles Heel), which is reported to be much more realistic than any of the former games. Car handling has also been given an overhaul, both to make the cars drive more realistically and help give novice drivers a better chance of getting into things.

Online racing also finally makes an appearance, as well as a rather unique photo mode that will allow you to print pictures via certain USB printers. But all this is moot – you're going to get it, regardless, right?





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LOTR: Battle for Middle Earth

Developer: Electronic Arts
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Platforms: PC
Release Date: November 2004



What do you get when you combine the team behind Command & Conquer: Generals, complete with the impressive Sage engine and all of their experience, with EA's great run of the Lord of the Rings movie license? This piece of intellectual property has made the publisher, New Line and Peter Jackson a lot of money, seeing the name appear in nearly every game incarnation bar, god forbid, a kart racer. But a real-time strategy seems such a natural move, it can't fail. It did, though, with the disastrous War of the Ring, Vivendi's ill-fated entry into the genre. But somehow we don't share the anticipation that BFME will suffer the same fate. If the stacks of play dynamic movies haven't convinced you yet, the final game sure will.

Apart from empowering you to play as any of the four sides in the story (Rohan, Mordor, Gondor and Isengard) over an open-ended campaign map, BFME introduces new elements such as human emotions (your soldiers can cower, cheer,

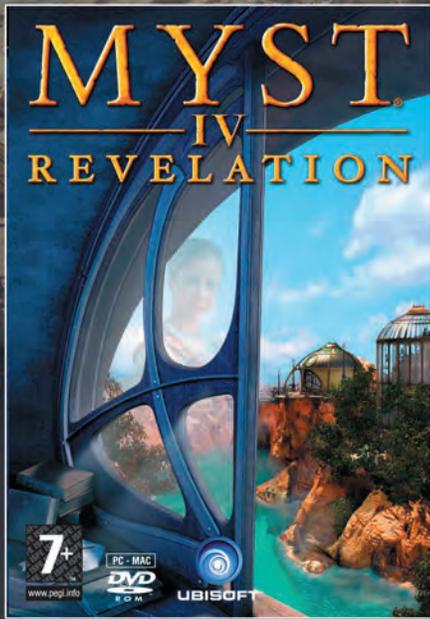
storm and sometimes just freeze in fear) as well as large scale armies – a concept that has really reserved itself for strategy simulations like the Total War and Cos-sacks series. Sage has also undergone a rework, since the C&C games didn't feature support for supple, emotive bodies (tanks don't need to bend, crouch or run away really fast). This extends into the game world, which is brimming with animals and animated scenery – the world and its various locations is actually a major focus in the game's design, since focus groups regarded Middle Earth more important than any of the four specific factions.

If anything, it's once again a license game being done right and fans of both the movies and the books are bound to get a kick out of controlling the various forces, which are looking very impressive. It might be tricky controlling the thousands of units the game displays, but we'll worry about that when Battle for Middle Earth is released.



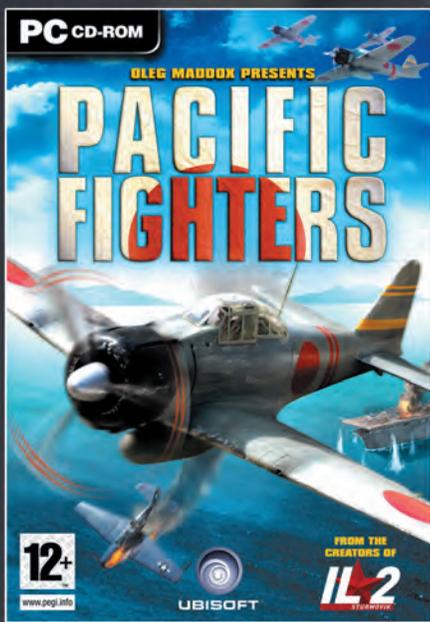


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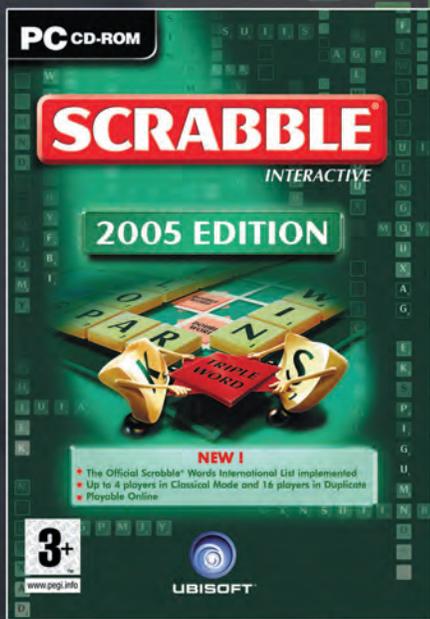
Myst IV Revelation [Available October]

Within the visually awe-inspiring world of *Myst*®, a gripping family drama will slowly unfold. In *Myst IV Revelation*, players finally learn the fate of *Sirrus* and *Achenar*, two villains first introduced in the original *Myst*. The brothers have remained trapped in separate prison worlds, abandoned by their father for crimes they had committed. Players are engaged in uncovering the mystery surrounding a little girl's disappearance, daring to venture deep inside the intense worlds of the villainous brothers. Understanding their motives is key to the success of the investigation and will be a true "revelation."



Pacific Fighters [Available October]

The award-winning flight combat from Oleg Maddox's *IL-2* series moves the setting from the Eastern front to the fierce combat of the Pacific theatre. Allied fighters and bombers square off against the notorious air power of the Japanese empire. For the first time, a large variety of British aircraft will be included along with U.S. and Australian planes. Target enemy ships, vehicles, airfields, and a host of AI-controlled aircraft. Re-enact some of the most famous air battles of WWII in places like Pearl Harbor, Guadalcanal, and Iwo Jima.



Scrabble Interactive 2005 Edition [Available October]

Various game modes, including the official Standard and Duplicate modes, and the Official Scrabble Words International List, will allow gamers to master letters and words and become experts. Compete against the best players with the online mode and with virtual opponents whilst in single player mode. The 2005 Edition includes multiple levels of difficulty, a tutorial and the moves of the most famous Scrabble players which will provide experienced gamers with hints. *Scrabble Interactive 2005* edition is an updated experience for the whole family!

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Splinter Cell 3: Chaos Theory

Developer: Ubisoft
Publisher: Ubisoft
Platforms: PC, Xbox, GCN
Release Date: November 2004



The only reason why you shouldn't be taking Splinter Cell 3 as seriously as most of these games is because it's already the third in a series – that alone should sell the game. But if you expected the boys at UbiSoft Montreal to sit still and just churn out a by-the-numbers sequel, you're in for a shock. We obviously were when we first saw the game. Sam Fisher is back and not only has he never looked better, he's also never been better at what he does. Sporting a whole new range of moves, including kicking in doors and pulling opponents over railings and edges, everything is rendered inside the most beautiful SC game yet – and definitely one of the most graphically astounding titles out there (including on the PC), if only for the awesome weather effects. But SC 3 is a veritable bag of graphical tricks that stands up to anything out there or upcoming in the market. The game will also feature a co-op mode, something that is bound to be even more popular than Pandora Tomorrow's challenging deathmatch. If you thought we've seen the best Splinter Cell had to offer, you're going to be very pleasantly surprised.



Warhammer 40k: Dawn of War

Developer: Relic
Publisher: THQ
Platforms: PC
Release Date: October 2004

"There is Only War." This is the mantra behind the Warhammer universe, so naturally the first true RTS in the series inherits it – in spades. Developed by RTS veterans Relic (Homeworld, Incredible Creatures), Dawn of War is a chaotic, action-packed and violent game where you choose one of four races (including a Space Marine clan unique to the game) and battle it out for supremacy. The four races (Eldar, Space Marine, Chaos Marines and Orcs) actually play differently and relying on more random damage rolls means that battles are more chaotic and intense and balancing has been worked on extensively to make the sides play differently but still keep things interesting and fair. It's excessively violent, as you'd expect from the game world it's based on, plus it seems to keep fans of the tabletop version quite happy while still appealing a lot to gamers in general, judging by reactions to the beta. If you can do that with a game, and Relic has, then you're onto something good. Keep an eye out for this one.



Vampire the Masquerade: Bloodlines

Developer: Troika
Publisher: Activision
Platforms: PC
Release Date: October 2004

There are two types of people waiting for Half-Life 2: those who want to play it and those who want to see the next Vampire game being released. See, the title currently being developed by RPG veterans Troika, who have titles like Fallout and Arcanum to the credit of their crew, uses Valve's Source engine, so it's pretty. It's also quite in-depth and features all the clans of the White Wolf RPG game. Playing as a vampire in the treacherous and violent underworld of the city, the play dynamic is a combination of action and serious role playing (something Troika has always excelled at) as you engage in conversation with NPCs to get information, get missions or gain new allies while using an FPS-style combat system where you employ guns and your supernatural powers to beat your opponents. The first digital title based on the license was a bit linear and didn't take real advantage of the subject matter. Bloodlines, on the other hand, is set to be a very impressive entry to the RPG genre, not much unlike the System Shock series in its day.



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Killzone

Developer: Guerilla
Publisher: Sony
Platforms: PS2
Release Date: Q4 2004

How exactly do you beat the best console shooter we've ever seen yet? Sony faced this problem when they came face-to-face with Halo and the immense success it has had on the Xbox. While the PlayStation 2 has had some excellent shooters, none of them achieved the fanatical following that Halo has and with the Timesplitter series now being multi-platform, the PS2 needs a killer shooter. Enter Killzone, already touted as the Halo for the PlayStation 2, since it not only boasts a vast combat-intensive game world, but also brings 16-player online play (supporting a variety of game types, including Deathmatch). Set in the future, you're part of an elite squad fighting for the ISA Command against the ruthless separatist faction the Helghast. Choosing one of four characters, you take on the fight for your side in a shooter that blends squad combat with solo play – not a lot unlike Halo, actually, because despite sounding like a team game, it's a solid single player experience as you fight the Helghast in their eerie, glowing gasmasks. Killzone's strongest card at the moment is its graphics, since the game boasts some of the best shooter graphics we've seen,

especially on a console. There will be over twenty weapons and eleven environments (including jungles, cities and swap areas) in the game and we can presume some sort of vehicle support will be there as well. The play dynamic and AI has had the press from around the world as excited as teenagers at a boy band show, but the real reason to feature Killzone is that it might actually beat Halo at its own game when it reaches its exclusive home on the PS2. Of course, without a network quite up to scratch as Live, it's far from a done deal yet.



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Devil May Cry 3

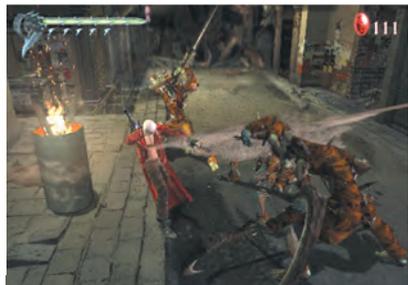
Developer: Neversoft
Publisher: Activision
Platforms: PS2, Xbox, GCN, PC
Release Date: Q4 2004



We love the DMC series, even if the second one did take a bit of a dive compared to the excellent debut title. But Capcom have listened and the order has been restored as the third game is really a prequel. Also, if the over-the-top acrobatics wasn't enough for you, Japanese director Yuji Shimamura (Versus, The Returner) lends his unique brand of over-the-top action cinematography to the intro sequences, which all use the in-game engine, inevitably influencing the actual fighting in DMC 3.

Since it's a prequel, in which Dante goes after his brother Virgil who in turn is bent on becoming a super-villain, the fighting is not as set as in the later years, allowing Capcom's Studio 1 to introduce four different fighting styles, namely the Gunslinger, Swordsman, Trickster (a highly acrobatic style) and the Royal Guard – a style that emphasizes defence and using your enemy's weaknesses.

More Devil May Cry, especially if heavily influenced by the first game, is never a bad thing. And it boasts heavy music, ruthless adversaries and unrelenting, non-stop action – enough to sway our opinion.



Star Wars Battlefront

Developer: Pandemic
Publisher: LucasArts
Platforms: PC, PS2, Xbox
Release Date: October 2004

Take the Battlefield concept and wrap it with the Star Wars universe; leave to cook over at red-hot developer Pandemic's house and voila – Star Wars Battlegrounds. Compliment this with everything you can conceive about Star Wars and you have something quite different. It would be fair in a sense to accuse LucasArts of yet again milking their franchise by pumping a popular genre into it, but Battlegrounds has far more going for it. Apart from being able to play out battles from every film, ranging from the rebels versus the Imperial troopers on Endor to a good old droids versus ugly water creature fight on Naboo. There will also be NPCs like Darth Vader who will appear from time to time and affect a battle's flow.

It's ambitious developing such a game for multiple platforms, plus we'll have to see how the opine PC crowd reacts to it, but it looks good and holds a lot of promise. Plus, despite how hard LucasArts have tried to ruin the license, there's still the hope for great Star Wars titles - which do arrive from time to time.



Mortal Kombat: Deception

Developer: Midway
Publisher: Midway
Platforms: PS2, Xbox
Release Date: Q4 2004

The MK series never wants to die and for good reason: it's not only a great fighting title, but also the goriest of the elite few that share space with Tekken, Soul Calibur and Guilty Gear X. The 3D transitions in the past haven't been great, but 2002's Deadly Alliance set a new benchmark for the series, ushering a new era of life for Sub Zero, Raiden and all their buddies. The latest title plans to take this even further, with a new storyline and new additions to the 24-strong fighting roster, including the return of some familiar faces like Kabal and Nightwolf.

The fighting style has been tweaked to streamline better, especially when juggling fighting styles and a Hari Kiri move that lets you commit suicide before an opponent pulls out a fatality on your beaten fighter has been given to each character. Some mini-games to win more Koin's have also appeared.

In short, it's another big step up as Midway finds its feet again with this great series. And what other fighting game allows you to kick your opponent into a pit of spikes?



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Red Star

Developer: Acclaim
Publisher: Acclaim
Platforms: PS2, Xbox
Release Date: Q4 2004

Action scrollers have been in a lull of late with a lack of good titles, with most of the upcoming titles being sequels or revamps of familiar play styles. And while we're all pining away for some more contra action, something fresh wouldn't hurt. For a change, though, the change comes from an American studio and publisher duo – rare in a genre that's virtually dominated by Japanese developers. Red Star is based on the independent comic series of the same name, taking place in a world the creator of the comic defines as Military-Industrial Sorcery. That sounds complex, but it translates into kicking ass with both ranged and melee attacks. While not rewriting the book, Red Star definitely aims to bring something

new to side-scrollers, mixing ranged combat beautifully with powerful melee attacks. Choosing one of three characters, you get a wide array of ranged and close-quarter attacks, involving a huge amount of combos. This is extended even further in co-op since two players can do moves together – for instance, you can fling someone into the air and your friend knocks the wind out of them with a leaping attack.

As is the vogue for scrollers at the moment, Red Star is suitably loud, colourful and action-packed. As one NAG staffer commented, this looks like the kind of game you'll be swearing at for hours on end. If you know anything about action scrollers, that's pretty high praise.



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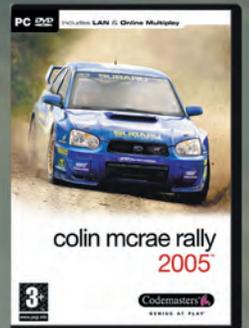
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Need for Speed Underground 2

Developer: Electronic Arts
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Platforms: PS2, Xbox, GCN, PC
Release Date: Q4 2004



EA has a knack for making good sequels that seem to keep the original alive while still adding enough to the next game so it doesn't feel like an expansion. This isn't always the case, but *Underground 2* follows the philosophy nicely by keeping the basic game intact. The races are still more-or-less the same, having you pace off against other opponents and their souped-up cars in a variety of race modes. But the obvious additions are being made with better graphics, improved steering and physics, plus a few more race modes (including drift racing, which sees you tear around corners trying to beat your opponents and look good at the same time).

Underground's truly big change is the city itself, which is now much larger and even allows tracks to span over several locations, lending itself to more scenic and challenging routes (not to mention that any repetition factor is greatly diminished). A new Nitros system – based on your performance in a race – adds a new dynamic to racing. More music, new cars and modifications obviously also follow suit, making a game that will probably keep all you closet underground racers happy.



Def Jam: Fight for New York

Developer: AKI Corporation
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Platforms: PS2, Xbox, GCN
Release Date: October 2004

When you can't get any respect from a New York kingpin, the best solution is obviously to enter illegal street fights and punch your way to the top. While not that simple, that's more or less where the sequel to the excellent *Def Jam Vendetta* is going. Graphically the game has been given a major upgrade, but the real appeal lies in the environment, since you can use it to beat up your opponent. Not only will the game let you slam your favourite gangster rapper into a concrete pillar or floor, but the crowd are always on hand with objects to pummel him with (including beer bottles...). As you might have gathered (or know from the first game) DJ:FNY uses a lot of the musicians from the Def Jam label to fill its roster (35 to be exact), but there are also new and original characters, giving you around 70 fighters to try out. More combat styles are also introduced, as well as a shit-hot soundtrack – but what else do you expect from such collaboration between EA and Def Jam? We can hear the knuckles cracking already...



Men of Valor

Developer: 2015
Publisher: VU Games
Platforms: PC, Xbox
Release Date: October 2004

War – what's it good for? Well, Mr. Brown, games of course. That's pretty evident with the craze around war shooters these days. Vietnam finally graduated as the new exotic location for the digital killing fields and developers 2015, known for their excellent work on the *Medal of Honor* games, are hard at work on this title, one that is shaping up to be what *Call of Duty* was for World War 2. Playing as a Rookie who eventually finishes three tours of duty, *Men of Valor* aims to look at the intensity of battle, building the game around run-and-cover techniques as you would use them in the jungle. Apart from intuitive combat play dynamic designs, the game also aims to be authentic, relying heavily on US National Archive footage. And, yes, the weapons are modelled to mimic the real deal. A nice use for precision shooting has found its way into the gunplay – useful for those tunnel missions. What little time we could spend with *Men of Valor* really impressed us, providing you like intense war shooters like *Call of Duty*, and we're eager to get our hands on the final version.



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Fight Club

Developer: Genuine Games
Publisher: VU Games
Platforms: PS2, Xbox
Release Date: October 2004

It seems a bit dubious to make a game based on a cult movie and book, but Fight Club had an unconventional both as a game, at least as far as licensed titles go – especially when you consider that the original crew of the movie had little to nothing to do with the game. Basically the developers were left up to their own devices and this has delivered one of the grittier and more graphic fighters that the gaming world has yet seen.

As you can gather from the shots, the game has been concentrated around the fighting side of things. You create a character (or choose one of the movie ones) and choose a style for him – martial arts, wrestling or brawling. This will decide how you'll be fighting, because Fight Club is all about beating the life out of your opponent and in FC-style, you can tap out a character.

The fights are quite graphic and intense; since there are no weapons, grappling, punches and kicks are the means to-

wards victory, though you're also allowed to use the scenery to your advantage – ramming someone's head into a table could really sway things in your favour. Arenas will be based around movie sets as well as new areas, and characters can move the fight between arenas – for instance from outside the bar to inside and vice versa.

Fight Club's real appeal, for us at least, lies in that you can break bones. Kicking out knees, snapping arms and even breaking necks is allowed, and the damage is permanent for the duration of the fight. And if you play on Live's Hardcore mode, you need to pay for medical treatment, not to mention that you can lose a character permanently...

It might seem a bit suspect, being based on a famed cult movie, but Fight Club has been really surprising, plus it's about time a gritty brawler street fighter makes its way back into the genre.



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The Lord of the Rings: The Third Age



PS2 | NGC
Xbox

Developer: EA Games · Publisher: Electronic Arts · Supplier: EA Africa [011] 516 8300 · Genre: Action
Release Date: Q4 2004

It's a cliché, but it's hardly flawed as a basis for the start of an epic journey. One badass knight of Gondor (you) on the trail of The Fellowship, reasons unknown, has to travel through Rivendell, the mines of Moria as well as the Gap of Rohan. This is all very Middle-Earth, of course - nothing less for the upcoming Lord of the Rings title, The Third Age. Unlike other titles of the license so far, The Third Age takes a conventional Eastern Role Playing approach instead. Remarkably similar to the Final Fantasy series, it's a game where the player explores [this was 'explodes', Ed] the world third-person and battles pop up when an enemy is run into. In battle there is no movement, only a static environment and traditional turn-based RPG combat.

You cannot create your own character or a party in The Third Age. The main characters come provided, complete with names, personalities and so fourth. As the plot progresses, some characters might leave you as others join. The depth then lies in the weapon and armour outfitting as well as skill development. The skills themselves are unbound to class, meaning you can have your dwarf learn the mystical art of shooting fire from his hands.

As mentioned, the battles are turn-based. Players choose actions for the characters in a mostly random order, and then the actions play out in succession. Much of the animation thus far is spectacular; spells and attacks are smooth and contain enough eye candy to put a diabetic into shock. The Balrog itself was a stunning sight to behold: flames and smoke filling the screen and creating a tangible mass of evil. Putting a spin on things, items can change around the order in which actions take place. If a massive Orc is set to maim your elf in the next turn, an item could be used to enable the elf to

go first or even have the Orc lose its turn. Advance combat manoeuvres also exist and special skills can be used for protection or inspiring the team.

The press demo we played only allowed for limited combat inside the mines of Moria, yet revealed enough interesting facets to wet our appetites. It will be possible to play through certain missions as the enemy, though no extra story will be gained, only new items and such. The evil quests are more in the line of side-quests, there to add some spice.

In a surprise deviation from even its Eastern flavour, there are no shops in The Third Age. Treasure and items can only come from slain enemies as well as chests found. This might lead to frustration, shopping has always been a great way to break up the tedium of battle after battle. Conversation is a reasonably single-minded affair with no branching in the dialogue at all, or even lengthy conversation topics.



"Damn it, Gandalf, you could have told us to bring our asbestos robes!"



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Tim Burton's The Nightmare Before Christmas



Developer: Studio 3 · Publisher: Capcom · Supplier: Ster Kinekor [011] 445 7900 · Genre: Adventure
Release Date: Q4 2004



Movie license games might be getting better, but they've only begun their journey. In other words, most of them still suck. So we can't be blamed for being a bit cynical (and very sceptical) when we first heard that a Nightmare Before Christmas game is in the works, not to mention that every time someone decides to dabble in a license that has serious cult appeal, fans get jittery. But Capcom's Studio 3, known for a range of projects including the latest Resident Evil titles on the GameCube, are doing the development honours, something that places this title a step well above the rest of the license crowd, at least in potential. And so far it seems like we won't be disappointed.

Kicking off with a brand-new story line, the game is a follow up to the movie that was released ten years ago. This alone should show that The Nightmare Before Christmas is more than just a franchise cash-in. In true tradition with the movie, which was the first feature-length film shot completely in stop-motion, the game feels exactly like that: a stop-motion production in which you take charge of Jack Skellington, the notorious pumpkin king. Oogie Boogie is back and you have to stop his plans of revenge.

For this Capcom have designed a new weapon called the Rubber Soul, a whip that gathers souls (don't worry - an uninventive name masks something that looks very impressive). Jack is also capable of three different personas - each with their own playing and combat styles - which the player can switch in-between at any time. Since Jack only has one weapon, power-ups and original combos are big features of the play dynamic, though Capcom haven't divulged a lot of details on that.

Visually it's been pretty impressive so far, keeping to the spirit of the movie, partly thanks to the co-operation from Disney, who own the original film rights; Studio 3 had access to the original film material, specifically the original models used, allowing them to recreate the essence of Burton's creations. The two companies also worked together to get the artistic feel right - balancing Studio 3's graphic know-how and Disney's artistic flair seemed to have been successful and the game ends up resembling the movie in a lot of ways when it comes to the look and feel of the game world and its characters, laying to rest one big concern we've had over Nightmare's development cycle.

It's been ten years before a game like this decided to surface, but the developers appear to have taken decent advantage of the decade's advances in gaming technology and The Nightmare Before Christmas is looking really good. We don't say this often for licensed titles, but we're looking forward to this one.



We asked Hironobu Takeshita, producer from production Studio 3, a few questions:

The Nightmare Before Christmas game/storyline takes place a year after the events of the film. How true to the film essence will the game be?

Essentially the game can be viewed as a sequel to the film so it is essential that we remained true to the world Tim Burton created and the wonderful characters that inhabit it. That said, an interactive game delivers a different experience to a film so we had to make subtle changes.

The game is based on very stylised looks and characters. Will the game feature most of the characters from the film and also mirror its ambient look and what is the hardest facet in putting the game together?

Yes, all the characters that made the film so special will appear in the game and we have worked extremely hard to ensure they and the environments keep the look and feel of the movie.

What are the objectives from the player's perspective?

Well, Oogie Boogie is back and he wants revenge. So, it is up to Jack Skellington to thwart Oogie's plans and restore harmony to Halloween Town.

Will you give the readers an insight into Jack Skellington - some of his traits, foibles, and characteristics and is he an endearing character?

In the game Jack has three forms - the default character in his trademark black suit; Santa Claus and The Pumpkin King and the player can switch between them at any time he wishes. Now while Jack assumes all three of these personas in Tim Burton's film we had to come up with original attacks for each. Jack's weapon is called Rubber Soul and as you will have seen from the screenshots this allows Jack to 'whip' his enemies and also pick them up and throw them around! Santa Claus has a sack full of presents which deliver a nasty surprise and finally The Pumpkin King has a fire attack.

What really stands out about the game for you?

I am really pleased with the Rubber Soul weapon as I think it suits Jack's personality really well.

What locations will be on offer and will each location offer up ideas and events specific to that theme? Highlight briefly one innovative one.

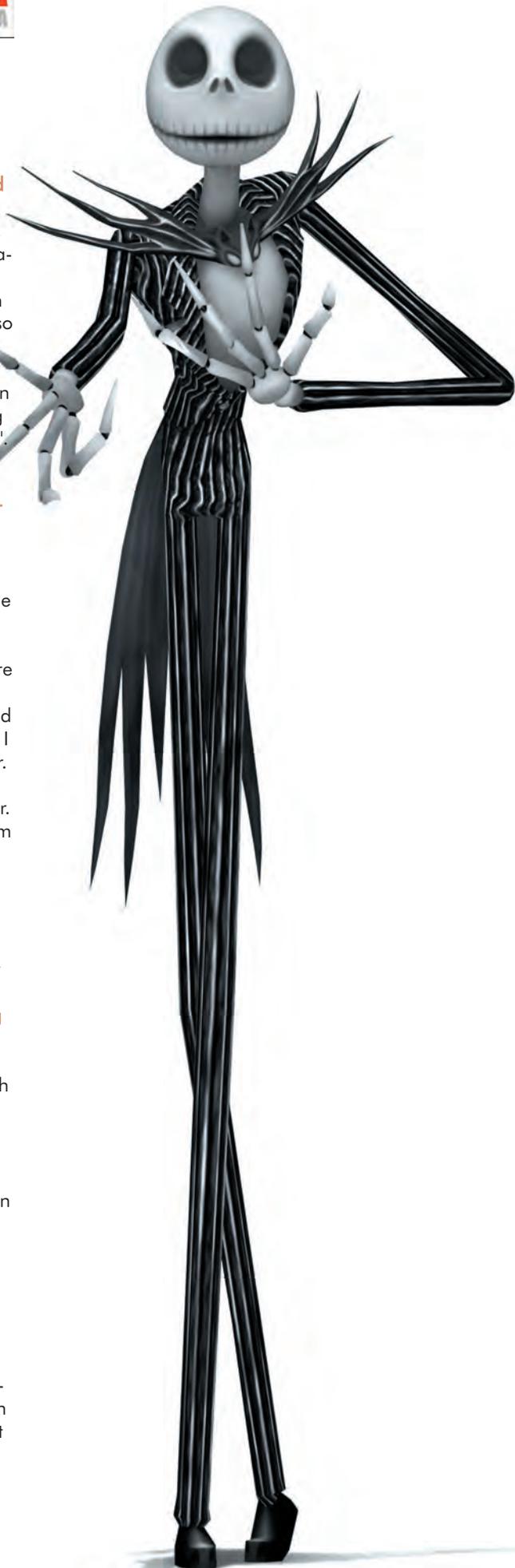
The Nightmare Before Christmas features a number of different environments including naturally Halloween Town as well as Christmas Town. Also in addition to new stages you will find some new areas that didn't appear in the movie. For example, in Christmas town you can visit the 'Big Pumpkin' and even 'Dracula's Castle'.

How focused is the team in creating unusual effects and even lighting for the game?

Probably working with Disney has helped us the most when achieving some fantastic effects. After all it's the combination of Capcom's graphical 'know-how' and Disney's artistic excellence that makes The Nightmare Before Christmas the game it is. If I were to list one effect that has helped us achieve the 'Disney feel' the most I would have to say it is the glow filter. Most filters fit over the entire screen but the 'glow filter' is a sectional filter. Placing it on lighted items helps them give off a glow that contrasts with surrounding dark areas. All of this gives the game a magical 'cartoon-like' effect.

The original motion picture certainly featured very stylised animation - how have you gone about capturing this?

Tim Burton's The Nightmare Before Christmas was the first feature length film to use the Stop Motion technique. This painstaking process involves making minute movements to the various parts of the intricate models, taking a still image and then repeating the process. The stills are then put together and when viewed in a sequence show perfect movement. The challenge for us was to recreate these fluid movements in a video game. Our starting point was to examine the actual models from the film from which we created plasticine models and from then went on to create the 3D rendered models. It took a long time, but we are really pleased with the results. 



reviews



Bridging gaps

Developers seem to be broadening their approach to game genre, resulting in a few original ideas...

It is becoming increasingly more difficult to neatly pigeon-hole games into handy genre categories. While the standard fare of FPS, RTS, Simulation and so forth does still exist, there has been a movement building for some time now that values the cross pollination of genres within games. One such title is Juiced, where what could normally be considered a driving simulator also begins adding in elements of management.

Is this because developers are trying to increase the appeal of games by broadening the market, or because of the lack of originality inherent within the stricter adherence to established genre ideas? It's hard to tell, really, because no one is actually coming out and admitting any particular motivations.

Motivations aside, the appeal of the games are indeed increasing. People who would not normally be interested in a racing game may find Juiced rather interesting, for example,

because of its overall broader appeal and increased depth.

Where this is all going is also difficult to say - one would need to be a particularly good fortune teller to try and predict anything very accurately in an environment as volatile as the electronic entertainment industry.

However, current trends would suggest that the whole gaming industry is going through some sort of paradigm shift, at least in terms of genres. Whether it is player driven, or a by-product of a very competitive market, games are breaking moulds and setting new boundaries all the time. This, of course, is a very good thing, because it shows that developers are actually putting more thought into games than just where the next pay cheque is coming from. And as long as the industry has people in it who want to advance the state of games - help them evolve, as it were - we can be sure of getting more exciting games with at least partially original approaches in the future.

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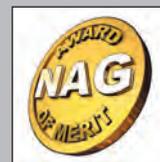
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Editor's Choice

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

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Onimusha 3: Demon Siege



PlayStation 2
Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 399 · **Developer:** Capcom · **Publisher:** Capcom · **Supplier:** Ster Kinekor [011] 445 7900 · **Genre:** Action · **Reviewer:** Adam Liebman

Requirements: 1 Player · 378KB Memory · Analog compatible · Vibration compatible

The third instalment of the Onimusha series sees the return of Samanosuke Akechi, the protagonist of the first game, as well as a new addition, French cop Jacques Blanc (played by film star Jean Reno), in a quest to defeat the evil Nobunaga and his demon legion, spread between ancient Japan and modern day France (needless to say, mysterious time-travel portals play a rather prominent role in the storyline's development). Though the storyline is, to say the least, rather unlikely, it nonetheless proves quite riveting and engaging, providing an excellent mixture of depth and pace that prevents the experience from ever sinking into monotony, thanks to the skilful manner in which it's told. For those unenlightened about the Onimusha series, it manages to create an atmosphere almost reminiscent of the survival horror genre, but with a far heavier emphasis on action. It's not a horror title by any stretch of the imagination, but the tone it presents is every bit as engaging, providing a very solid foundation for the game dynamic to rest on.

In terms of the game dynamic, although rudimentary key-seeking quests are present, the game remains very much action-oriented, with the most noticeable change from its predecessors being the welcome change to analogue movement control. The presence of the additional character Jacques makes for a more varied experience, with Samanosuke favouring a melee combat style, whilst Jacques is more suited to ranged combat, with his primary weapons being whip-derivatives of various descriptions. This provides an excellent opportunity to show off for anyone willing to spend enough time to truly master the moves - combining Jacques's whip skills with those with which he wields his pistol can result in moments that can only be described as "pretty damn cool". As in the previous games, you'll encounter a variety of new weapons as you progress, and by absorbing souls (small, floating orbs released by expired enemies), you are able to upgrade your weapons at any of the save-points scattered around the game. Of course, there are several different varieties of these orbs to collect, each with a different function, among



them being the activation of "Onimusha" mode, from which the series takes its name, which turns the character into a supercharged version of himself that is truly every villain's worst nightmare.

Furthermore, the time-travel aspect of the game adds a greater emphasis on thinking, since actions carried out by Jacques in the past have an impact on Samanosuke in the present day. To aid in the execution of the time-hopping aspect of the game, is a new character known as Ako, a fairy capable of travelling through time - at certain points you'll encounter a portal through which she can be sent, in order to ferry items between the two lead characters. She can also be equipped with a variety of different vests that each provide different advantages. In addition to all this, she also serves as a rather useful targeting indicator when you're locked onto an

enemy. Also present at various stages of the game are the sliding-tile puzzles, with which anyone who has played the prior titles in the series will be familiar. The control system, though it can't be configured, is intuitive and responsive, and although advanced moves are available for both characters, the basic stuff is usually more than enough to take on the legions of hell-spawn you'll encounter, though the fixed camera angle occasionally results in a little frustration.

Visually, Onimusha 3 can't be faulted; the cut-scenes, unfortunately a little sparse, given their brilliance, are beautifully rendered, and the switch from pre-rendered to live backgrounds, combined with excellent detail and in-game animation makes Onimusha 3 a delight for the eyes, despite the presence of a few incidents of frame-rate slowdown. The character's facial mapping is absolutely spot-on, and the



Isn't this that French dude?
What's his name again...?



environmental effects are also excellent. Be warned, however, that things such as blood and bits of flying internal organs are commonplace, and although the gore setting is somewhat adjustable, the visuals are still not for the faint of heart. The sound effects are particularly well done, and the backing music fits the atmosphere to a tee. Unfortunately though, the voice acting leaves much to be desired - in a very confusing move, Jacques switches between French and English at times throughout the game, with the French lines voiced by Jean Reno, but his English dialogue has been provided by a completely different voice-actor.

Ultimately, though, Onimusha 3 is a thoroughly enjoyable gaming experience, combining technical excellence with a very engaging storyline and play dynamic - it isn't perfect, and some of the departures from traditions established by the prior two games might not be to everyone's liking, but once you've been enthralled by the masterfully told story and the exhilarating

action, the minor niggles that are present simply seem to fade away, giving way to the shining brilliance that lies underneath - there can be little doubt that much effort went into making this title as enjoyable and polished as it is. Onimusha 3 is certainly not a light-hearted experience, and the degree of gore present sets it quite firmly in the "mature" category, but it's a riveting and enjoyable title that will likely please both fans of the series and newcomers alike. █

Riveting action title with fantastic graphics and captivating storyline

90



Catwoman



PC Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 199 · **Developer:** EA Games · **Publisher:** Electronic Arts
Supplier: EA Africa [011] 516 8300 · **Genre:** Action · **Reviewer:** Adam Liebman
Minimum Specifications: Pentium III 800MHz · 256 MB RAM · 8 x CD ROM · 64 MB Video Card · 1.5 GB HDD

It's almost a given that any title based on a highly hyped movie will not only be highly hyped itself, but will also appear on multiple platforms, in a stroke which, though perhaps lacking in work ethic, makes sound financial sense. Except, possibly, when that game is Catwoman. Based on the movie of the same name, and telling the story of Patience Phillips, on a quest for revenge after being reincarnated as Catwoman subsequent to her murder, the PC version of Catwoman is almost an exact duplicate of its console cousin, with a notable exception being an even more frustrating control scheme. The game dynamic revolves around simple combat with mostly nondescript foes, with a reasonable dose of wall-climbing and pole swinging thrown in. The tasks aren't particularly complex, however - the biggest challenge is presented by fixed camera angles which prevent you from lining up jumps, and even seeing who's attacking you, at

times. Furthermore, the level design is somewhat confusing, though a rudimentary first-person-view has been included, complete with a sort of "trail" indicator that tells you where you should be going. In its favour, Catwoman boasts fairly good graphics, though the sound (voice-acting particularly) leaves something to be desired. Catwoman is, sadly, rather far from being a must-play - anyone who doesn't have an unhealthy obsession with seeing a pixel representation of Halle Berry writhing around in a cat suit would do better leaving this title well alone. [N](#)

Catwoman could've been great, but only just manages to claw its way into mediocrity

52



Obviously she only learned one special move when she turned all cat-like...

Catwoman



PlayStation 2 Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 399 · **Developer:** EA Games · **Publisher:** Electronic Arts
Supplier: EA Africa [011] 516 8300 · **Genre:** Action · **Reviewer:** Adam Liebman
Minimum Specifications: 1 Player · 243KB Memory · Analog: sticks only · Vibration compatible

Superhero (or occasionally, super heroine) movies are always ideal candidates for videogames, though those videogames are often just as good candidates for becoming heroic wastes of potential. Sadly, Catwoman proves to be just that. The game follows the story of Patience Phillips, who tragically dies from the ever-popular "knows-too-much-about-the-big-corporation's-dirty-laundry" syndrome.

Having been reincarnated as the supernaturally-advantaged Catwoman,

she begins the mandatory quest for revenge. Although the storyline follows the movie's (which itself hasn't been praised for its strength), the game tells it in a confusing manner that never makes one feel involved with the game. The game dynamic centres around simple combat as well as a fair amount of platform leaping, which in itself seems a fairly sound concept, but a clumsy control system and highly antagonistic fixed camera angles prove to be far more fearsome foes than the generic enemies populating each level.

In fairness, Catwoman manages to excel graphically, with very well detailed character models and convincing animation, but the experience is hampered by particularly poor voice-acting (mainly attributable to Halle Berry herself). Ultimately, one is left feeling rather ripped off by Catwoman (whose vocation in thievery is no excuse) - what could have been an engaging and rewarding experience is marred by lacklustre story-telling, an uninspiring game dynamic, and a hostile control scheme, leaving very little other than an exercise in frustration that, while pleasant to look at, is terrible to play. [N](#)



Catwoman just the way we like her... going away



Tragic exercise in wasted potential - great graphics, but otherwise quite awful

53

Asterix and Obelix XXL



PS2
Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 499.00 · **Developer:** Atari · **Publisher:** Atari **Supplier:** WWE [011] 462 1050
Genre: Action · **Reviewer:** Miktar Dracon
Requirements: 1 Player · 360kb Memory · Vibration compatible · Analog compatible

By Totatis, it's been a long time since the energetic duo of diminutive Asterix and oversized Obelix have graced the videogame market and given the Romans some magic potion-powered hell. Hitting the market with little fanfare, Asterix & Obelix XXL is a RenderWare powered multiplatform endeavour that tries to capture the spirit of a much-loved license right from the start. Slightly lukewarm however, is the actual result. Despite initial sterling touches such as an intro where Asterix & Obelix proceed to hit Romans into outer-space, complete with 'PAF!' sound effects, the whole ordeal comes off slightly half-hearted and even manages to catch one off-guard with the darker undertones presented by Atari.

Asterix has always been a light-hearted tale into new cultures containing both mature and immature humour, enough to satisfy multiple generations simultaneously. XXL however lacks the flare and fun of the comic and does little to try and match the wit of the originator. Essentially the game is an action-platformer; you control either Asterix or Obelix (the other character either automatically follows you and attacks enemies or is waiting somewhere for you to do something) and then proceed to explore the sometimes colourful, sometimes drab environments. Asterix wouldn't be Asterix without tons of Romans to maul and here is where the game is both sides of the coin. Combat is a simple affair, you can punch and jump. As you defeat Romans they drop helmets which can

later be used to purchase special combo moves which can eliminate multiple enemies at once. The spunky Dogmatix features too, the tap of a button will cause him to bite a Roman on the derriere, resulting in him dropping his weapon. Usually the background music remains ambiguous, yet combat brings noteworthy high quality music that seems out of place with the rest of the game.

Completing missions involves lots of combat, jumping puzzles as well as 'team-moves' where one character is doing something and the other automatically helps, such as Asterix manning a Ballista while Obelix moves it from side to side. Sometimes you might even have to gingerly attempt to navigate a windy corridor while trying to keep your torch lit. Once a set of missions have been completed, you save one of the kidnapped villagers and then proceed to the next continent and the next theme. As you country-hop the missions manage to keep a slight tint of originality but the monotony of the combat and puzzles eventually becomes a burden. 

It's wonderful to see this duo in a videogame again, but the magic isn't there.

64



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Driv3r



PlayStation 2
Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 499.00 **Developer:** Reflections **Publisher:** Atari **Supplier:** WWE [011] 462 0150
Genre: Action **Reviewer:** Walt Pretorius
Minimum Specifications: 1 Player · 87kb Memory · Analog compatible · Vibration compatible

Someone once said that anticipation is half the fun. Well, that damned liar should be dragged out into the street and shot. Especially when it comes to the gaming industry. Take, for example, Reflections' latest PS2 title, Driv3r. Despite the obvious "leet-speak" sensibilities in the name, the hype around this baby got quite insane, and fans of the previous two titles were quite rabid with expectation and excitement by the time the latest instalment was released. Once again, the hype-machine inspired anticipation was turned, dare I say, into disappointment.

Driv3r is not a bad game. That needs to be stated before anything else. It is enjoyable and, despite some quirky out of vehicle controls, is lots of fun to play. But it's not Driver.

The developers of Driv3r obviously were more focussed on the story aspect of the game and, while this is a good

step, the very essence of the series seems to have been lost - or slightly misplaced, more accurately. The end product is a game that feels more like Grand Theft Auto 3 than Driver, with a lot more attention and importance being foisted onto the out-of-car elements of the game than ever before. It could just as easily have been called Walk3r (but the horrific images of an aging Chuck Norris in a cowboy hat brought on by that analogy may be just a little too much to bear.)

A very impressive intro film attempts to seamlessly blend into mediocre in-game graphics (quite a let down) right at the start, and the player is then required to perform various missions to get through the interesting story line. However some of the missions can get stupidly difficult (especially when shooting is involved, because controlling the character outside of the vehicle is a bit like trying to steer a beached ocean

liner down a residential lane) and story mode can quickly lose its charm. The free drive modes are brilliant, though - many hours of fun can be had out-running over-zealous AI cops in a variety of vehicles... which includes motorcycles. The physics of the game are a little overstated (in a Hollywood kind of way) but are still fairly realistic, and the driving controls are sharp and responsive.

Driv3r is an ambiguous game. It is a bit better than average as a stand alone title, but somewhere between the drawing board and the final product, the spirit of the series was forgotten.

A fun driving and shooting title, but fans of the series may be sorely disappointed

75



Hakim the Cop realised that they were going to dock his pay for vehicle damages... again

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Evany: Key To a Distant Land



PC Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 199 · **Developer:** The Adventure Company · **Publisher:** The Adventure Company
Supplier: WWE [011] 462 0150 · **Genre:** Adventure · **Reviewer:** Miktar Dracon
Minimum Specifications: Pentium III 600MHz · 64 MB RAM · 4 x CD ROM · 32 MB Video Card · 1.2 GB HDD

Sequel to *The Crystal Key* (1999), it seems odd for The Adventure Company to release a sequel five years later. *Evany* is by no means a terrible game; it's simply not a very good one. None the less, if *Myst/Riven* style games pique your interest then *Evany* is right up your ally. Possibly the major benefactor towards the game's mediocre standing, is its plot. In the original game, your father saved your Homeworld of *Evany*, but the expected peace and prosperity never came.

Instead, everyone turned into zombies. The problem here is that you never see what's happened to *Evany*, so it's hard to care about a problem you can't see. Most information comes second-hand, losing its effect. Only around 8 people seem to populate this adventure game and while some may look alien, they act and talk just like humans. Dialogue is sparse and uninspired. The game world is just not fleshed out at all. Most of the time, it feels like you are solving puzzles just because there is nothing else to do. Despite clumsy writing,

there are some redeeming factors. The interface is clean and intuitive, getting around requires very little walking. The puzzles are interesting and have a smooth difficulty curve, though this is mostly let down by the low-quality of the blurry graphics. The Adventure Company can do much better, they've proven as much. [N](#)

Outdated adventure game whose charm may appeal to some

48



Please sign our "kill the developers" petition...



That's a juggle - their reason is so strong it'll knock you out even if you get it on your skin.

Kreed



PC Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 299 · **Developer:** Burut · **Publisher:** Russ-o-Bit · **Supplier:** WWE [011] 462 0150
Genre: First person shooter · **Reviewer:** Miktar Dracon
Minimum Specifications: Pentium II 800MHz · 128 MB RAM · 4 x CD ROM · 32 MB Video Card · 1.4 GB HDD

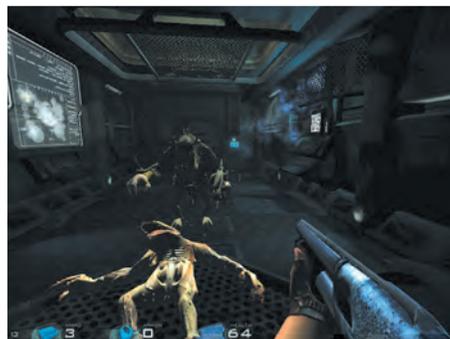
There are simply not enough adjectives of the negative persuasion to accurately describe exactly how bad *Kreed* is. One would think that, quite simply, developers would not stand to release something so blatantly terrible. And yet, here it is - a pinnacle testament to terrible game design, horrible play dynamics and an overall lack of polish. It's a rare occurrence that it's not a singular facet of a title that brings it down, but rather the whole damn thing. Everything about *Kreed* is lack-

lustre, uninspired and quite terrible. From the start, the gratuitous use of bump mapping to try and mask the bad modelling and level-design is a good example of how technological advancements cannot always hide poor games. The creature designs are insipid and the AI bland and predictable. The voice acting is characteristically (for such a foreign developer) and comically bad, but that could have been overlooked if *Kreed* had any semblance of an intelligent plot. A first person shooter does not need

a great plot, per say, but when it lacks everything else a plot would help. Multiplayer is included and only just scrapes past bearable. Few maps, bad map design as well as unresponsive and limiting controls sour the whole experience quite a bit. *Kreed* leaves a bad taste in your mouth, no matter how much you try to enjoy it. [N](#)

Almost as bad as it gets, when it comes to bad games

44



Exactly where Kreed belongs...



Warblade



Suggested Retail Price: R 249.00 **Developer:** Edgar M Vigdal · **Publisher:** Edgar M Vigdal
Supplier: Etienne Dreyer (072) 293 9884 · **Genre:** Shooter · **Reviewer:** Miktar Dracon
Minimum Specifications: Pentium II 300MHz · 32 MB RAM · 4 x CD ROM · 16 MB Video Card · 30 MB HDD

Remakes of retro titles are certainly en vogue lately, classics getting a facelift and a new price tag are hardly a rare sight. Mostly a single-man effort, Warblade is a stunning attempt at bringing back the glory of Galalga-style game dynamics. Somewhere along the line however, a few things went wrong and something was lost in the translation.

If an analogy had to be used, let's pretend Warblade is a car. A car, with every conceivable feature/option/add-on that you could think of, and then some. Unfortunately, the car itself looks terrible and can only drive at a snail's pace. Warblade is a very clinical translation of its retro counterpart, including the sheer unrelenting difficulty from the retro age. Surprisingly, while the special effects such as explosions and such are stunning the rest of the game has a generally ultra-low graphics quality. Enemies are bland and uninspired, following a very formulaic graphical style. Levels tend to repeat concepts a little too often and you'll find yourself with

more deja-vu than was originally intended, though two smaller mini-games are there sporadically to break up the tedium.

Despite all this, Warblade contains enough features to almost, almost make up for the other areas in which it is found lacking. Multiple game modes, secret bonuses as well as decent support for submitting hi-scores online remains really appealing, a variety of add-on content can be downloaded from the official site to add some extra spice. One of the biggest factors against Warblade as it stands is that the game simply does not justify the price. Remakes of this kind are almost a dime a dozen, with dime pricing. Costing close to that of a modern-day title, even retro-addicts would have a hard time swallowing the idea of paying this much for Warblade. 

Everything you could want, in a very unappealing package

54



We can't even think of a good caption...

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Transport Giant



Suggested Retail Price: R 299.00 · **Developer:** JoWooD · **Publisher:** JoWooD · **Supplier:** WWE [011] 462 0150 · **Genre:** Management · **Reviewer:** Walt Pretorius
Minimum Specifications: Pentium 3 500MHz · 128 MB RAM · 4 x CD ROM · 16 MB Video Card · 1 GB HDD

While management games certainly aren't a thrill a minute, they are still meant to hold the player's attention for longer than, say, fifteen and a half seconds. This is where Transport Giant falls sadly short, because the nature of the game (at least early on) is so incredibly slow that you'll probably fall asleep on your keyboard.

Of course, those that persevere with the game will enjoy it, once things like trucks and airplanes start making an

appearance, but it's a long and difficult road getting there.

Transport Giant is a pretty run of the mill supply and demand style management title, with little new or exciting to offer the player. Its replay value is massive (what with randomly generated levels, if so desired) and, with the games relaxed pace, it offers great value in terms of time spent playing.

But the player is going to have to be patient, and by that I mean more patient than your average management fan.

Additionally, a lack of any form of tutorial (combined with a less than effective manual) adds frustration to the game.

Transport Giant is not a bad game, but it's hardly brilliant either. It has average graphics and often iffy controls, and really doesn't do anything to get folks all excited - even by supply-and-demand standards. [N](#)

Nice depth, great detail... slower than frozen syrup...

64



Ballance



Suggested Retail Price: R 129.99 · **Developer:** Cyparade · **Publisher:** Atari · **Supplier:** WWE [011] 462 0150 · **Genre:** Puzzle · **Reviewer:** Walt Pretorius
Minimum Specifications: Pentium 2 350MHz · 64 MB RAM · 8 x CD ROM · 8 MB Video Card · 150 MB HDD

While we missed out on the original release of Ballance, it merits a look in its newly acquired budget guise.

Puzzle games are few and far between these days, and the overall idea and look of this title make it something rather different.

The premise of the game is incredibly simple - navigate a ball along elevated tracks, from a starting point to an end point. It sounds simple enough, but Ballance is a very deceptive game in that respect. First of all, there are three materials that the ball can be made of - stone, wood or paper - and there are various places in the level where the material of the ball can be changed. Seeing a "changing station" doesn't mean that you should change the ball, though... just a small part of the title's "charm." Each material has its own advantages and disadvantages, so the right choice is crucial to successfully completing a level.

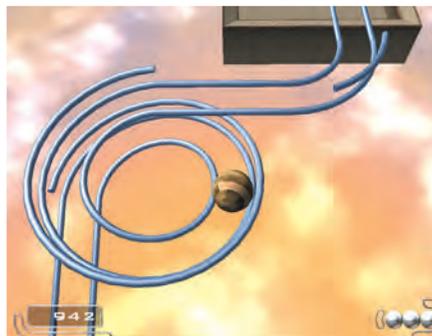
Add to this the fact that the levels are best described using the word "precarious," and you will see that the game is challenging indeed. Levels are constructed out of a surrealistic collection of rails, pipes, wooden platforms, brick constructions and the like.

The overall ambiance of the game is very soothing and calming in a Buddhist kind of way. A good thing too, because if it wasn't most users would probably put their fist through their monitor in frustration. Frustration is what it's all about though, and adds to

the personal reward of finishing levels in this fun and challenging game. [N](#)

It's a little ball obstacle course... sheer genius, I tell you!

80



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Formula One 04



PlayStation 2
Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 499 · **Developer:** Studio Liverpool · **Publisher:** SCEE
Supplier: Ster Kinekor [011 445 7900] · **Genre:** Racing · **Reviewer:** Adam Liebman
Minimum Specifications: 1-2 Players · 646KB Memory · Analog compatible · Vibration compatible

The hallmark of any popular sports simulation appears to be the release of a new version on an annual basis, seemingly irrespective of whether enough improvement has been made over the last title to actually merit a sequel. Fortunately, though, Formula One 04 does indeed appear to offer a marked improvement over its predecessor, and although it's unlikely to be hailed as the definitive Formula One simulation, it's still a reasonably enjoyable prospect. Needless to say,

one of Formula One 04's biggest drawing points is the official license - a full complement of real-world drivers, teams and tracks is present. The heart of the game, though, lies in the career mode - in a departure from tradition, the career mode sees you creating your own driver, rather than taking control of a real one, and working your way up from a post as test-driver for one of the poorer F1 teams to the top of the sport's pecking order. It's a refreshing change, though it often proves extremely difficult, to an extent that

may discourage novices. Furthermore, although the game dynamic has an unmistakable tendency towards the arcade side of racing rather than being a pure simulation, the controls feel loose and unrealistic at times - this mix of arcade-style handling and difficult races certainly feels slightly out of place. Nonetheless, slick graphics and a fair deal of challenge should be enough to make this worthwhile for fans of the sport.



Action for the enthusiast



Entertaining Formula One title with a fair degree of depth, though slightly unforgiving

70



Richard Burns Rally



PlayStation 2
Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 499 · **Developer:** Warthog · **Publisher:** SCI · **Supplier:** WWE [011] 462 0150
Genre: Racing · **Reviewer:** Walt Pretorius
Minimum Specifications: 1- 2 Players · 100kb Memory · Analog compatible · Vibration compatible

When contending with titles like the very popular Colin McRae series, a new title on the block needs to bring something special to the fore. For Richard Burns Rally, this special something is an overzealous approach to extreme realism.

This title may have more appeal to hard core fans than to your run of the mill weekend rally game player because it certainly does put the player in the hot seat when it comes to doing

things just right. Slight miscalculations and mistakes have no place here; the competition is tough and the game requires an exacting performance from the player. In fact, those that take their gaming less seriously may find the demanding nature of Richard Burns Rally frustrating. Additionally, the real enthusiast will find the limitations of the PS2 controller annoying for this title. Luckily, it does support steering wheel options for those that have such a peripheral for the console and using one does make a lot of difference to

the game play experience. With extensive training, a variety of rally settings, a number of cars and various modes, Richard Burns Rally offers up the standard rally simulator fare, and is graphically not on par with the competition. However, purists and enthusiasts will get a big kick out of the game's heightened realism.

A very challenging rally title that will certainly appeal to enthusiasts

73



Creepy isn't it?



PANZERS

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.hack Infection



PlayStation 2
Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 499 · **Developer:** Bandai Interactive · **Publisher:** Bandai Interactive
Supplier: WWE [011] 462 0150 · **Genre:** RPG · **Reviewer:** Miktar Dracon
Requirements: 1 Player · 700kb Memory · Vibration compatible · Analog compatible

Rarely does a breath of fresh air sweep into the gaming industry as eloquently as .hack Infection has. With much aplomb, Infection sidles easily into the rather ambitious concept of 'Simulated MMORPG', or Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game. There is no internet connection required to play Infection, it 'pretends' to be an online game for the sake of the story and does a reasonable job of keeping the illusion.

As the average boy Kite, you have to

try and unravel why your friend is in a coma (believed to be the result of playing 'The World'). The premise is sound; the plotline does a good job of involving the player in the game. Essentially, .hack is more about the story around 'The World', than the game itself. To support that ideal, Infection comes with an extra 45min DVD containing part 1 of the four-part movie Liminality which lends support to strengthening the story.

As for the game itself, 'The World' is standard RPG fare. You go into gener-

ated areas called Fields (generated by choosing keywords, allowing for amazing variety) and kill monsters, gain experience, buy new weapons as well as strengthen ties with your 'friends' online by sending them virtual e-mails. Infection is a long game, 40+ hours of playtime for those dedicated enough to pursue it. [N](#)

The start of an involving journey wrapped up in a solid RPG concept

76



Confused?

The story of .hack//SIGN (26 episode TV series) takes place before .hack//INFECTION and the .hack//LIMINALITY series. It introduces "The World" and the events leading up to the game's beginning. .hack//SIGN takes place almost entirely online and follows the adventures of player characters as they try to unravel the mystery of a character who cannot leave "The World". The .hack//LIMINALITY series and .hack//INFECTION begin at roughly the same time after .hack//SIGN, paralleling each other in parallel worlds. The .hack//LIMINALITY series takes place offline, telling Mai Minase's story after she becomes involved through her friend Tomonari Kasumi, who falls into a coma after playing the game. .hack//INFECTION (PS2 game) returns to the online world through Kite, a young player and friend of Orca of the Azure Sea, a character mentioned in .hack//SIGN.



.hack Mutation



PlayStation 2
Review

Suggested Retail Price: R 499 · **Developer:** Bandai Interactive · **Publisher:** Bandai Interactive
Supplier: WWE [011] 462 0150 · **Genre:** RPG · **Reviewer:** Miktar Dracon
Requirements: 1 Player · 700kb Memory · Vibration compatible · Analog compatible

Continuing where .hack Infection left off, .hack Mutation is part 2 of this 4-part double-disc epic.

Once again you meet up with your friends 'online' and attempt to find the truth behind the ominous game 'The World'. As expected, you can bring your save data over from Infection so you can hit the ground running using your levelled up characters and items. Again, the game is a standard RPG with a few interesting touches such as combining 'keywords' to generate custom fields/dungeons

where you kill monsters to gain experience and gold.

The second part of the Liminality movie is included on a 30 minute bonus DVD; fans of the original TV series .hack//Sign will be pleased to know that favourite characters from it appear in both Liminality as well as Mutation. The core concepts of the first game remain unchanged in Mutation; you could essentially consider them one game. Every area from Infection is available in Mutation, as well as special areas if you use your save game from Infection. Some new content has

been added, such as a mini-game in which you race your pet Grunty as well as the ability to add new features to Grunties in the field, making them more useful. As a standalone title, Mutation may only be average but combined with Infection they form something greater than the sum of their parts. [N](#)

The solid continuation of the .hack project, with just enough improvements to remain fresh

76

I-Ninja



Suggested Retail Price: R 299 · **Developer:** Namco · **Publisher:** Namco · **Supplier:** WWE [011] 462 0150
Genre: Action · **Reviewer:** Miktar Dracon
Minimum Specifications: Pentium III 800MHz · 64 MB RAM · 4 x CD ROM · 32 MB Video Card · 1.15 GB HDD

Its debut on the PS2 was met with acclaim and generally a lot of good things being said about it. I-Ninja may have 'kiddie' styling but it's a stunning platform game through and through. Everything that made it popular on the PS2 has been faithfully translated over into this new PC release, the only noticeable upgrades being that of a higher resolution and seemingly slightly crisper textures.

I-Ninja takes a lot of good elements from different games out there and combines them into a fun, functional package. Ninja himself is responsive and his array of moves makes combat and general jumping around a blast. Complete enough levels and you go up in ranking, the higher the ranking the more levels you can access. Kill enough enemies, and you get a better sword. The levels remain interesting and varied throughout the game, the sound and music slotting in seamlessly. The entire experience is vibrant and

quirky, even Ninja carries the game far with his comical dialogue and personality.

While the later levels might require some inhuman timing, overall the game is relatively easy with little in the way of frustration. I-Ninja is a great example of the quality and innovation that can be achieved; it's a blessing to now find it available to those who do not own a PS2.

The spunky platform title from the PS2 translated to PC, all the vibe and colour intact **71**



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

Warblade focuses on extreme playability as it throws PC arcade shoot'em up action at the gamer. Solid gameplay is what sets this title apart from others in the genre. This is pure arcade action as it was back in the golden era of arcade games!

warblade

Features include:

- 100 action packed levels
- Time trial levels
- Profile system to record your progress
- 2 full voice packs
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- Submit high scores online
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- High quality music and sound effects
- And much more...



RRP
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Tech Musings:
It's plastic!



words james francis

UK scientists have made the first plastic magnet that operates at room temperature. The first magnet that you could melt was made in 2001, but it only operated at below 10 Kelvin (-263 ° C); since then scientists have made numerous of these things, but they all needed to operate at very cold temperatures. Considering there isn't a huge demand for magnets in Antarctica, the North Pole, Pluto or the Free-State, there's not much point in a magnet that operates in sub-zero temperatures.

Now they have one that works in your living room, making the polymer from two compounds: PANi and TCNQ. But what does that mean to you and me? After all, there isn't a magnet shortage in the world. In fact, most people don't even know where they come from. As one friend explained, magnets come from Magnetia, a planet made of magnets. I don't think magnets get a lot of thought from people.

But they are important components to a lot of inventions. The compass obviously springs to mind, but these devil rocks do a lot more, including medical uses such as cell separation and bone growth therapy, scientific endeavours such as high-power telescopes and particle experiments and everyday uses such as electric motors and speakers. I'm generalizing a bit - some of these use electro-magnets, so a plastic compound isn't going to be of much use. Then again, what do I know? I'd have never thought about making a plastic magnet in the first place.

Hard drives, on the other hand, can make use of this new technology. The magnetic coating inside a drive has reached a sort of saturation point quite a while ago, since manufacturers are concentrating their efforts on faster speeds and better information sorting. Replacing that layer with this new polymer will mean much more storage space, not to mention far longer data life. I don't know whether this technology will also replace the aluminium plates used in hard drives, but let's assume that - which means that drives would also become a lot lighter and suck far less power, plus they could rotate at much higher speeds.

Not that we'll know soon. IBM's tech labs reckon that it will be a long time before we see any practical application of the technology. But it's coming. And here you thought we've done it all.



nVIDIA PCI Express graphics

nVIDIA recently demonstrated the GeForce 6600GT, a mid-range card that compares favourably enough, considering its more affordable price-tag, to higher-end cards. The new card is natively PCI Express, so AGP versions will carry a bridging chip. An interesting aspect of the 6600GT (which is expected to be implemented in subsequent models, too) is a new form of SLI. SLI was used in Voodoo cards (back in the day!) to allow two cards to be used together, effectively boosting performance. nVIDIA's new architecture allows any number of cards (have to be of the same model, though) to be used in conjunction, and the multi-rendering is achieved in two ways - the first is by the two cards rendering alternating frames (effectively boosting the frame rate); the second is by load-balancing the rendering process (rather more complicated). The first 6600-based cards should be emerging as you read this, in 128MB and 256MB variants.



Samsung's yepp MP3 players

Two portable MP3 players from Samsung are very worth of mention. The YP5 yepp is the size of a cigarette lighter, and yet boasts all the features one would expect from a portable MP3 player. By means of a line-in cable or the built-in microphone, it is possible to encode audio directly to MP3. The unit has 128 MB of Flash memory, built-in FM radio and a 7-colour LCD display. Its operating time is rated at 12 hours off one AAA cell. The YP-60 Sports yepp is the athlete's MP3 player. This model has 256 M of Flash memory, and features similar to those of the YP5. In addition, the Sports yepp also offers a stopwatch, heart-rate monitor and calorie meter, as well as a fitness management application. Its operating time is rated at 15 hours. Both models include connectivity to PC via USB.



ABIT AG8 and AA8 DuraMax motherboards

Esquire Technologies is distributing, locally, the new ABIT AG8 and AA8 motherboards, based on the Intel 915P and 925X chipsets, respectively. Both feature SATA RAID, PCI Express X16, FireWire (IEEE1394), on-board Gigabit LAN and 6-channel audio, as well as ABIT's ?Guru performance and stability management technology. The AG8 supports Dual DDR400, while the AA8 makes use of DDR2533/400.



Kitchen TV

Manufacturers keep creating hybrid appliances in the name of integration, but here LG may have gone too far. The company is advertising a fridge with a built-in TV. The white monster boasts a 13-inch LCD screen, two speakers, AM/FM tuner and TV tuner. The screen is also used as a control panel for adjusting operating parameters such as internal temperature of the various compartments. In other respects, the fridge is fairly ordinary, if boasting rather upmarket features, reflected in the unit's price tag of around R30 000.



Gigabyte Neon Cooler 7

Gigabyte's 3D Cooler series has been extended by the introduction of the Neon Cooler 7 range, designed for AMD K7 CPUs. The design includes both copper and aluminium and has been implemented in such a way as to minimise turbulence in the heat dissipation process. The fan speed is adjustable, from 1500 rpm to 3400 rpm.

Fans of the computer



Ultra-cool
TORNADO
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Ultra-quiet
STEALTH
noise level 21 dBA



Ultra-smart
THERMOFLOW
auto fan speed 1950~3400 rpm



Ultra-bright
UV - LED FAN
available in 5 colours



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Pioneer DVD turntable

Pioneer's DVJ-X1 is the first DVD-based turntable, allowing real-time mixing of both audio and video streams. The unit supports a full range of mixing functions, such as scratching, looping and instant cues, and its design is fairly user-friendly. An external preview monitor allows the user to see what is about to be created on the main display.

Sony Qualia 017 MiniDisc player

Sony is selling a highly exclusive, upmarket minidisc player called the Qualia 017. The company is only manufacturing 15 of these units per month, and the price tag is well in excess of 2000 US dollars (I shudder to think of its price in local currency, hence no conversion!) They are available in silver and gold, with brass body construction, coated with palladium, which is used in expensive watches and similar jewellery items.



BenQ's DC C50 digital camera

This new model is capable of a resolution of 2048x1536, or 2848x2160 interpolated (extra pixels are added by the camera, resulting in a softer image.) It features a 3X optical zoom and 4X digital zoom, and boasts the ability to take three pictures with different exposure values simultaneously, allowing the user to choose the best one. Another unusual feature is voice over photo, which allows the user to attach up to 10 seconds of audio to each photo.



3D controller for PS2

British hardware manufacturer In2Games has developed an innovative 3D controller for the PlayStation 2. Named the GameTrak, it consists of gloves attached to a floor-mounted base unit by strings. Users move their hands about to control the action, and the controller determines the location of the player's hands from the amount of tension and the angle of the strings.



Gigabyte 16X DVD recorder

Despite being predominantly known as a motherboard and graphics card manufacturer, Gigabyte has jumped on the digital video bandwagon and released the GO-W1608A DVD recorder. The full-featured unit can record and play back both DVDs and CDs.



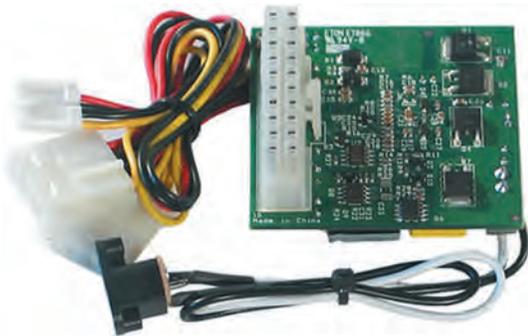
Waterchill HDD cooler

Asetek has released Waterchill, a range of cooling systems for hard drives, in 3.5-inch and 5.25-inch variants. The company reports temperature reductions of between 34 and 42 percent. Each kit can satisfy the cooling needs of up to eight drives. www.asetek.com



Logitech MX1000 Laser Cordless Mouse

Logitech has just launched a new optical mouse that uses a laser beam instead of LED, which is said to provide up to ten times better resolutions. The other improvement Logitech have made is to use a lithium-ion battery, which makes charging your mouse only necessary around every 20 days. We will have a full review of this mouse in next month's issue.



Tiny power supply

Mini-box.com has introduced a range of very compact Mini-ITX power supplies, the PW-120-M (61x57x30mm) and PW-200-V (155x23x30mm). Being highly efficient, these units require no cooling fans, thus greatly reducing noise levels.

Chill Tower

Fanless water-cooling system



ZALMAN Reserator 1



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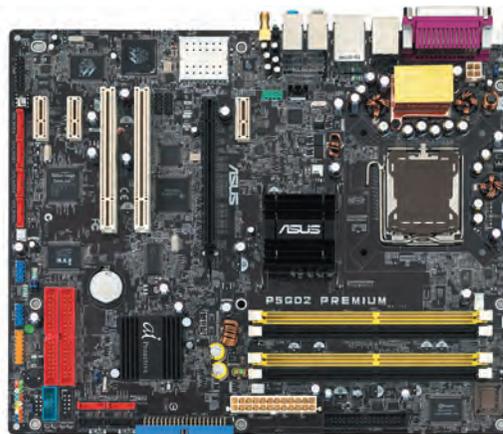
Sony DCR-DVD301 digital camcorder

This new camcorder records directly onto 3-inch DVD-R/-RW discs. It also boasts a 3.5-inch hybrid LCD display with great freedom of rotation. The camera is also able to take still shots at a resolution of 1 mega pixel.



NeoSol Clid portable video player

NeoSol's soon-to-be-introduced Clid portable video player features a 2.2" OLED screen and a TV tuner. Its 2.5 GB hard disk can be used for recording or playing back DivX, MP4, XviD and WMV version 9 files. The unit is compact, and connects to a PC by means of USB2.0.



Asus motherboards

Asus has two new boards available - the P5AD2 Premium makes use of the Intel 915P chipset, while the P5GD2 Premium is built around 925X. These boards feature a host of new over-clocking and performance functions. For graphical performance, the company has designed PEG (PCI Express Graphics) Link Mode, which allows tweaking of performance in a similar way to how system bus and memory bus speeds are adjusted. Intel's Performance Acceleration Technology on the 925X chipset is unaffected by the board's performance functions, which can run in conjunction. Among the innovations is the fact that the new intelligent over-clocking system is governed by CPU power consumption, rather than CPU temperature, so changes take effect immediately. Another innovation is Stack Cool, a second PCB stacked underneath the board that effectively acts as a heat-sink for the whole board. www.asus.com



Who watches the watchers?

The Brilliance 190P5 from Philips is a 19-inch LCD monitor with built-in speakers and SmartManage technology, allowing IT managers to remotely configure and maintain workstations in, for instance, a corporate network. Management functions, whose emphasis is security, can be carried out even while the unit is powered down, and IT administrators can send messages to their clients. The 190P5 supports resolutions of up to 1280x1024, and boasts exceptionally low power consumption.



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Fan-less cooler with heatpipe cooling concept, welcome to the 0 dB level of thermal tech Fanless103



Fanless103 (CL-P0019)



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- High efficiency ventilation: Dual 12cm silent fan in front & rear, 9cm fan on side panel
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Xwing Bluetooth Mouse Series
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Portable 3.5" Hard Disk enclosure, backup file easily
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Compatible with notebook, desktop PCs, and MAC

SilverRiver 2.5" Aluminum Enclosure



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TrueLight Memory Heat Spreader



Application for all standard DDR module and SDRAM
Dissipate RAM heat for improved cooling performance
Easy installation Up to 8 Different lighting modes

Silverstone cases arrive in SA

Naked IT have added the SilverStone range of cases to their extensive catalogue. Retailing at R1 099.00 the Temjin range (pictured here) is a high-quality option for anyone in the market for a midi-case. Apart from a solid finish and strong chassis, the range also boasts ample fan space and two internal fans, one being a larger model, though you'll have to get the PSU separately. The Temjin range also boasts a larger server-size case, which we review in next month's issue. www.nakedit.co.za



Snoopers beware

Microsoft have just launched a new line of input devices which come with biometrical sensor fingerprint readers, used for controlling access to your PC. The range includes a standalone fingerprint sensor, Optical Desktop with fingerprint reader keyboard and a mouse reader bundle.



XB-Comm Bluetooth Wireless Controller & Headset

For use with Xbox Live, the XB-Comm Controller will allow you to move freely around the room whilst using it. Why you would want to cruise around your room whilst playing online is beyond us, but hey, who are we to judge?



Nokia's new novelties

Nokia has added three new models to its range of phones. The Nokia 7260, Nokia 7270 and the more unusual Nokia 7280, which is controlled by voice. The handsets should be available later this year.



D-Link Media Lounge
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With the D-Link DSM-320, you can get a media player that delivers the digital home experience right in your living room

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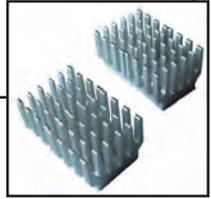
Zalman Reserator



Supplied by Frontosa [011] 468 4724
www.frontosa.co.za | R 2 300.00

Korean company Zalman finally arrive on our shores with their cooling options, premiering with, among others, The Reserator, a fan-less water-cooling system, featuring a stylish radiator sitting outside the box. Obviously that means that you can't really move your PC around (or do it very carefully), but for a stationary setup it makes for a rather stylish addition. Standing at 50cm in height and weighing in at nine kilograms when filled with water (complete with screw-on lid to keep the liquid inside), the Reserator uses no fans, relying on the size, finned-design and volume of the radiator to dissipate heat. Inside you will find a small pump and the kit has instructions on how to install your own if this one stops working after its run its lifespan. The Reserator ships with CPU, GPU (graphics card) and RAM cooling blocks, plus all the silicon cables, connectors and other gear you'll need to get it to work; a Hard Drive cooler is also available separately.

VGA cooling is on hand and included with the package, ready to be fitted on most of today's cards. The kit also includes four heat sinks to place on video ram and anything else that might need a tad bit of cooling down.



This large hub is your CPU cooler – a touch bigger than the standard flat block that ships with a lot of coolers.



The fins used in the design allow for better heat dispersion, but they've all been rounded to avoid any serious injury. Still, it is made of metal, so don't fall and hit your head on it.



Since the unit is fan-less and the pump doesn't make any noise either, it would be hard to see if the Reserator is doing its job (unless your CPU explodes or something). This extra attachment features an orange buoy that moves around while liquid moves between the cooler and your machine.



You can buy Zalman's hard drive cooler separately, but it only helps dissipate heat and doesn't plug into the Reserator 1 or any other cooling device.



Notice our 'professional' photographer's face on the lower curve of the heat-pipe

Witness the Evolution of Extreme with Sapphire @ **Age** (STAND M)



RADEON 9600XT

128MB/256MB DDR high performance two-channel DDR memory interface accelerates the latest 3D applications. Highly Optimized 128-bit 2D engine with support for new WindowsXP GDI extensions.

RADEON X600XT PCI-Express

Xperience Xotic worlds jolted to life by the industry's most feature-rich VPU, with hardware acceleration of all that DirectX® and OpenGL can bare! Xperience the stunning special effects delivered by Smartshader 2.0™ Full Precision DX9 Shader support and lose yourself in vivid landscapes devoid of jagged edges forged by SmoothVision 2.1™.

RADEON X800 PRO

The X800 series of graphics cards and more specifically the RADEON™ X800 PRO, introduces numerous industry firsts such as: Twelve X'treme pixel pipelines, and 256MB of X'treme GDDR3 memory.

TOXIC X800 PRO VIVO

Developed for the enthusiast. Built-in calculated performance enhancements with the inclusion of the Automated Performance Enhancement (APE), Temperature Monitoring Ready (TMR) and Lethal Cooling technologies.

RADEON X800XT

Xperience SAPPHIRE and Xperience True High Definition (HD) Gaming, Sixteen X'treme pixel pipelines, and 256MB of X'treme GDDR3 memory operating at a frequency north of 1GHz! Stop playing with toys and step into the Xotic world of Xcessive features with the SAPPHIRE RADEON™ X800 XT!

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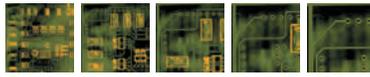
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- Namibia:** Opening early 2005

www.esquire.co.za



17" LCD



Technology is moving at the speed of light and everyday we see new and exciting products or improvements on existing technology to make our lives easier. LCD's are not new to the computing industry but have only recently become capable of producing image quality which is on par, if not better, than our beloved CRT monitors.

LCD's are flat panel monitors, which means that they are virtually a tenth the width of CRT monitors. This huge space saving is not just a blessing in cramped offices but for home users and gamers this is a huge advantage, besides, a decent LCD offers awesome picture clarity. If you have enough cash lying around, I assure you, there is nothing sweeter than a dual LCD setup. Sadly all this luxury comes at a price and LCD's are still about three to four times more expensive than their CRT counterparts. On the plus side we are seeing a steady decrease in this price, as we do with all computer hardware, and a major increase in the technology that drives it. Because of this advent in LCD technology it has only recently become viable for gamers to invest in an LCD monitor. This month we take a look at LCD technology in closer detail and discuss what makes a great LCD and what doesn't noting some very important points to look out for when deciding on an LCD.

SYNAPSYS COOL PC TECHNOLOGY cooling provided by Synapsys

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



Benchmarking

The major reason for me deciding on 17-inch LCD's this month was that 15-inch LCD's are slowly being faded out while 19-inch LCD's are still too pricey for most consumers. The 17-inch LCD is a decent size for most people and gamers while its price is reasonably affordable. In testing this month's LCD's I played some games which included DOOM³ (obviously), Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow, Far Cry, and UT 2004. When playing each game I looked for an effect called ghosting (more on this later). I also looked at the desktop performance such as its performance in office-like applications and general usage. Aesthetics also play an important role as these products have the potential to look sexy and some of them include extra features such as built in speakers and so on. I used DisplayMate (see sidebar on next page) extensively to ensure that each LCD was calibrated correctly and that the colour saturation was perfect.



Philips 170B

I have always liked Philips monitors, call it brand loyalty or call it regular kickbacks (just kidding); their monitors have always impressed me. It was thus with baited breath that I installed their 17-inch LCD panel for this month's roundup. The unit I received for review featured a black finish with a hint of silver. Aesthetically this is a very smart LCD as it features simplistic lines and nothing that would cause an eye sore. The front panel features the adjustment buttons and volume controls for the speakers as well as a power button. The sound quality of which is not the best I have heard but will suffice for basic use. At the back of the monitor are two input ports, a 15-pin VGA port and a DVI port. The image quality impressed me but I did, on occasion, detect minor ghosting of the image in the games I played. For movie playback and general PC use its 1280x1024 resolution was ample. The 170B is a very bright monitor with beautiful colour saturation and is great for all-round use.



Value 80 | Aesthetics 85 | Picture Quality 85 | Overall 83

Supplier: Light Edge Technology [021] 510-8270 Internet: www.lightedge.co.za RRP: R4200
 Plus: Picture clarity Minus: Price
 Warranty: 3 years

MAG MS776

MAG has been around for ages and I have always considered them to be the underdogs of the monitor industry. The MS776 is, for the most part a good LCD but its picture qualities lack slightly, but more on this later. The casing of this monitor features a grey/silver finish with a matching stand, when unpacking this unit you have to attach and fasten the stand with a thumb screw. On the front panel you will find a speaker on either side of the bottom panel, the sound quality is fairly good and is relatively loud as well. Between these speakers you will find the control buttons but no volume buttons. On the back of this LCD is a single 15-pin VGA connector with stereo RCA inputs for the audio (a 3.5-inch jack to RCA cable is included). The picture quality sadly does not live up to the MAG reputation and the LCD is overly dark, even setting its brightness to the maximum value. Ghosting also appeared more often than what I would have liked which doesn't make this a great LCD for gaming.



Value 70 | Aesthetics 80 | Picture Quality 70 | Overall 73

Plus: Loud built-in speakers Minus: Picture too dark | Ghosting appears too frequently
 Supplier: Genex Solutions [021] 551-8887 Internet: www.genex-sa.co.za RRP: R3500
 Warranty: 2 years

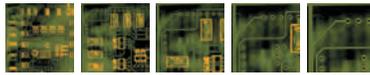
Proline MON17LCD

This is the first Proline LCD monitor I have reviewed and I still have mixed feelings as to whether I like it or not. In all fairness this LCD is probably better suited for the office environment but it does not perform too badly on the gaming side of things. Aesthetically this monitor is not the best looking LCD I have seen to date, it almost has a retro look to it as its casing features a thick border around the LCD. The colour scheme is silver on black and the front panel only features the control buttons. The MON17LCD, is also surprisingly light, this is partly due to the light-weight base on which the LCD stands. Looking at the image quality I would have liked it to be a little brighter than what it is but it's fine for most applications. I also only picked up slight ghosting when testing.



Value 80 | Aesthetics 75 | Picture Quality 80 | Overall 78

Supplier: Pinnacle Micro [011] 265-3000 Internet: www.proline.co.za RRP: R2999
 Plus: Price | Light weight Minus: Looks a bit plain
 Warranty: 3 years



LCD Pop Quiz

What is an LCD?

LCD stands for Liquid Crystal Display; the technology has been around for quite a long time. A good example of the benefit of this technology is its use in Laptop computers, but it also offers other advantages such as its low power consumption. In a nutshell, LCD's consist of layers of glass with a layer of liquid crystals sandwiched between them. The liquid crystals then react to a current which is passed through them. It gets more complex from here in so I won't bore you with the details, for a great in-depth explanation visit the How Stuff Works website, (<http://electronics.howstuffworks.com/lcd.htm>).

What is Interpolation?

In LCD terms, Interpolation occurs when the monitor is operated at a resolution other than its native resolution. For example: all of the monitors in this roundup had a native resolution of 1280x1024, if I attempted to run it at, say, 1024x768 the text on the desktop would appear blurry and the same goes when you run a game at another resolution. The reason for this blurry text is because the graphics card wants to place a pixel on a spot where another pixel is already residing (due to the fact that the resolution has shrunk and the image is then compressed). If you want to learn more, I found a great website explaining it in detail, www.interpolatethis.com.

What is ghosting?

The ultimate test to see whether an LCD is good for gaming or not is to see if it suffers from any ghosting. Basically what ghosting means is that if the LCD cannot respond quickly enough to the changing pixels on the screen (usually evident when playing games or watching a DVD) it creates a shadow effect on the object on the screen. In a game such as UT2004 and NFS, ghosting can be extremely irritating as it would feel as if the LCD is out of focus. A decent LCD, aimed at gaming, should bear very little ghosting artefacts, the best way to check if an LCD suffers from this is to test it hands on. In Windows and office scenarios, ghosting is not such a big problem although in some cases it could be irritating to use if an LCD suffers from it badly enough. If you want to learn more about ghosts go here, www.allaboutghosts.com.



CTX S762G

CTX is another of those brands which has been around for ages but never really got the respect it deserves. This particular model I reviewed, the S762G, is a great example of what CTX is capable of. The LCD itself sports a simple yet smart look. It has a silver finish with hints of black here and there and its front control buttons look just as elegant. There are two speakers built into this monitor which are situated at the bottom corners of the LCD. Sadly the sound quality is not good at all and I wouldn't use it for anything other than basic office use. Natively, this LCD supports DVI and has a DVI cable built in. It also has a 15-pin VGA port for older graphics cards. Interestingly enough this LCD also features a handle which makes it much easier to carry around, if the need arises. The picture quality was also very good and the colour saturation excellent. I detected slight ghosting on occasion but for the most part it performed well.



Value 78 | Aesthetics 85 | Picture Quality 85 | Overall 82

Plus: Great picture Minus: Price | Built in speaker quality
 Supplier: Esquire [012] 657-1111 Internet: www.esquire.co.za RRP: R4200
 Warranty: 1 year

Sahara HD-772

Sahara has recently undertaken to create its own line of Sahara branded hardware. Impressively, the Sahara branded hardware I have seen has been top notch. Their latest LCD, the HD-772, follows suit and I am happy to report that I was well impressed. The colour scheme of this LCD is black and works quite well with the wide border around the actual LCD. There are the usual control buttons on this unit but they are situated on the right-hand side of the LCD. The front panel only hosts the on/off button with speakers on either side of it, the sound quality of which is not too bad. Once unpacked you have to fasten the base to the body of the notebook and it requires a 12V DC power supply to operate, which is included. On the back of the LCD you will find just a 15-pin VGA connector with stereo RCA audio inputs. Picture-wise this LCD performs on par with the other LCD's in this roundup. I would have liked it to offer a slightly brighter picture but the fact that there is very little ghosting makes this a good option for gaming.



Value 85 | Aesthetics 80 | Picture Quality 86 | Overall 83

Plus: Picture quality | Looks larger than a 17-inch Minus: No DVI port
 Supplier: Sahara [011] 542-1000 Internet: www.sahara.co.za RRP: R3199
 Warranty: 1 year



BenQ FP767

I'm a firm believer in buying big brand name products, the quality in most cases is far superior to that of lesser known brands as larger companies do not just slap their name on an OEM product but rather design the technology and build a product around it. The BenQ FP767 is a really sexy monitor, as seems to be the tradition with most BenQ products. It sports a black finish with just the front panel covered in silver. I thought the blue-lit power button was a really nice touch as is the headphone socket also situated here. On either sides of this button you will find the control buttons and at the two bottom corners are the speakers. Speaking of which, I was quite impressed by the sound quality produced by these little guys. On the back of this LCD you will find a single 15-pin VGA port, a three prong power adapter, and an audio connector. The image quality is superb and I hardly picked up any ghosting. I enjoyed the brightness of the LCD as I was able to play DOOM³ without turning up the in-game brightness much.



Value 90 **Aesthetics 95** **Picture Quality 95** **Overall 93**

Plus: Aesthetics | **Picture quality** **Minus:** No DVI port
Supplier: Drive Control [011] 887-8927 **Internet:** www.drivecon.net **RRP:** R3445
Warranty: 3 years



Jetway M1731s

The Jetway M1731s, strangely, is not branded as such, in actual fact it is called the Avidav. Strange I know, but I checked it out on the net and I can gladly say I was not a victim of the old switcheroo. The M1731s, or Avidav as I shall call it from now on, sports a sleek matt black finish. The control panel located at the bottom of the screen features a green-lit power switch in the middle with control buttons on either side. To the left and right of this control panel you will also find a pair of speakers which have surprisingly crisp sound. On the back panel you will find the 15-pin VGA connector hidden behind a removable panel, this panel also covers the power plug and audio jack. Even though this monitor looked great it disappointed in the gaming arena. In the games I played this monitor created fairly harsh ghosting and I could not play games on it for long. Even though this LCD is not great for gaming, it will suffice for basic office or home use.



Value 79 **Aesthetics 85** **Picture Quality 75** **Overall 79**

Plus: Price **Minus:** Bad ghosting
Supplier: Genex Solutions [021] 551-8887 **Internet:** www.genex-sa.co.za **RRP:** R3350
Warranty: 3 years



LG L1720B

It is evident with this LCD from LG that it is one of the market leaders in LCD's. This particular model I received for review is part of the FLATRON range of LCD's. As we have come to expect, the LG is a really elegant looking product with exceptionally clean lines and it sports a black and silver finish. The only thing I did not like as much was the chrome base, a simple silver or black base on which to stand would have looked much better. When switched on, the blue-lit power button looks pretty funky while the hidden control buttons which are situated just below the LCD give the front panel a very clean look. LG has not neglected the back of this LCD. The connectors, a 15-pin VGA port and a three prong power adapter are neatly tucked away behind a removable panel. The most important part of this LCD, the picture quality, is awesome. I was very impressed with the brightness and colour depth of this LCD, it is great for gaming.



Value 89 **Aesthetics 95** **Picture Quality 95** **Overall 93**

Plus: Picture quality **Minus:** Chrome base
Supplier: Axiz [011] 237-7000 **Internet:** www.axiz.co.za **RRP:** R4099
Warranty: 3 years



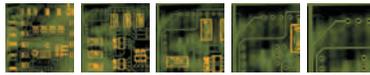
AOpen F1713

AOpen is a brand synonymous with Rectron and it has some superb products in its line up. It seems to be only natural that AOpen produce an LCD and I was fairly impressed with its offering. The F1713 features a silver finish on the front while its back end is black. The front panel sees a blue-lit power button with two control buttons on either side of it. It also features two speakers in each bottom corner and I was happy to see the inclusion of a volume control and headphone socket which is situated at the bottom of this LCD. On the back of this LCD you will find only a 15-pin VGA connector, audio jack, and power socket. Looking at the picture quality I am happy to report that the colour saturation is good and offers enough brightness for games such as the dark DOOM³. There was very little ghosting evident in the games I played, although every now and then your eye would catch the slight blur of the ghosting effect. All in all this is a good LCD and is great for all-round use.



Value 84 **Aesthetics 90** **Picture Quality 88** **Overall 87**

Plus: Aesthetically pleasing **Minus:** DVI port would be welcome
Supplier: Rectron [011] 203 1000 **Internet:** www.rectron.net **RRP:** R3899
Warranty: 1 year



Samsung Syncmaster 710v

Samsung is another of the leading brands in the LCD market and it was with much anticipation that I reviewed this LCD. The Syncmaster 710v does not offer anything spectacular in terms of aesthetics but its beauty lies in its simple design. The entire LCD features a matt black finish and is the quintessence of what an LCD should look like. The control buttons are situated below the front panel which does not distract from the clean lines that this LCD features. On the back of this unit you will find a 15-pin VGA connector and a power connector. Moving onto the picture quality I can happily say that my anticipation was well worth it. The brightness and colour contrast was excellent on the Syncmaster 710V. I found it hard to pick up any ghosting effects in the games I played and colour reproduced in the games were superb. Bundled with this LCD is a CD which contains two applications to help you set up this monitor to optimal colour depth and saturation.



Value 90 | **Aesthetics 92** | **Picture Quality 95** | **Overall 92**

Plus: Great picture quality **Minus:** No DVI port
Supplier: Sahara [011] 542-1000 **Internet:** www.sahara.co.za **RRP:** R3599
Warranty: 3 years



Gigabyte GD-1703DP

Gigabyte is another of Rectron's house brands and is famous for its motherboards and graphic cards. This LCD was another first for me and I am happy to say that Gigabyte's LCD is another of their already extensive product line up worthy of praise. The metallic silver finish of this LCD looks funky; on the front panel you will find the control buttons with speakers on either side of it. On the back of the LCD you will find a DVI port, stereo RCA jacks and a power socket. Because the GD-1703DP only features a DVI port it ships with two sets of cables, a pure DVI cable which has a DVI connector on each end, and a DVI to 15-pin VGA converter, for users whose graphics cards do not have DVI functionality. Looking at the picture quality I was very impressed, the brightness levels are excellent and I only picked up slight ghosting in some games. For the most part though, I experienced a smooth gaming experience and great colour saturation in DOOM³.



Value 90 | **Aesthetics 94** | **Picture Quality 90** | **Overall 93**

Plus: Aesthetics | Picture quality **Minus:** Slight ghosting
Supplier: Rectron [011] 203 1000 **Internet:** www.rectron.net **RRP:** R3899
Warranty: 1 year



Viewsonic VP171b

Viewsonic have always boasted a strong line-up of LCD monitors, sporting the trimmings you'd expect from a state-of-the-art brand. The VP171b is an entry level model, so it doesn't have all the extras you'd see on more expensive monitors, such as USB expansion ports and sound. It uses the very convenient adjustable stand common to this range, with features such as height, swivel, pivot and tilt and also supports both analogue and digital input. With its slick black matt finish and ThinEdge ultra-slim bezel design this monitor is ideal for multiple panel set-ups. Additionally you can detach the base and mount this monitor on the wall. Most importantly, though, is that the power supply is built into the monitor, eliminating the mess of cables and current regulators you'd usually find with a lot of LCDs. In its native resolution the display is crisp and responsive, with very little ghosting.



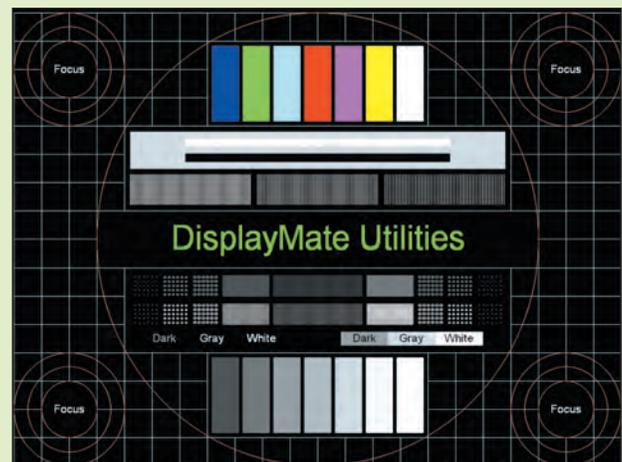
Value 85 | **Aesthetics 89** | **Picture Quality 89** | **Overall 92**

Plus: Reliable brand | Picture quality **Minus:** Not keen on other resolutions
Supplier: Proton Technologies [011] 486 0748 **Internet:** www.prototech.co.za **RRP:** R4500
Warranty: 3 years

DisplayMate

This is a truly great utility for setting up and calibrating CRT's and LCD's. The application includes a myriad of tests which you can use to ensure that your monitor is set-up correctly. DisplayMate works by loading a set of test patterns on your screen followed with detailed instruction on how to read these patterns. You then adjust your LCD according to the instructions. This application is absolutely imperative in ensuring the correct guidelines are followed for configuring an LCD, or CRT for that matter. DisplayMate is also available in an end-user version which can be used by anybody to correctly calibrate their own monitor.

[www.displaymate.com]





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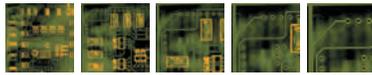
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Vantec NexStar external drive enclosure

The Vantec NexStar external 3.5" drive enclosure offers both USB 2.0 and Firewire connectivity options for users requiring, or simply wanting, a mobile mass storage device. Featuring both USB and Firewire might be superfluous to PC users; Mac addicts will appreciate the inclusion of the IEEE 1394 interface. In terms of device construction itself, the NexStar's combination of plastic with thin metal covers is neither the most robust nor the most fragile enclosure I've had in to test. Performance of the encased drive remains adequate as well, with the conversion interface sapping little in terms of data throughput as we've come to expect from such products. With its optional plastic foot attached, this Vantec offering does look stylish though. If you must have external, mobile storage capacity to connect to both USB and Firewire-equipped desktops however, the NexStar will satisfy these requirements without feeling like it and your enclosed hard disk are in danger of being damaged.



Plus:	Firewire and USB, with both cables included in package
Minus:	Construction not as robust as the SilverRiver unit
Supplier:	Frontosa [011] 468 4724
Internet:	www.frontosa.co.za
RRP:	R545.00
Reviewer:	Russel Bennett

Thermaltake SilverRiver 5.25" drive enclosure

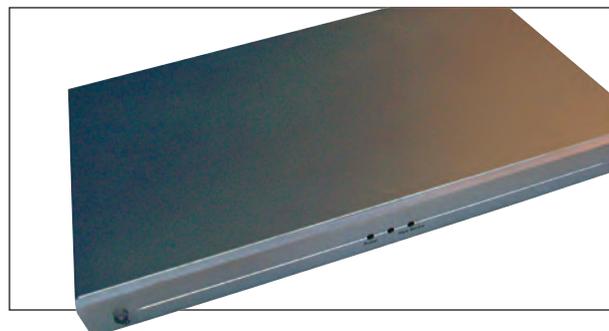
No cheap plastics here whatsoever, the Silver River feels like it's been hewn from a solid block of aluminium, and sports a striking brushed aluminium finish complete with large Thermaltake script splashed across its top cover. Also included are the power supply and a USB cable to connect the unit to your system. Apart from simply providing a means to turn your standard IDE hard disk into a portable mass storage device, this particular example has also been designed to house an IDE CD, CDRW or DVDRW optical drive, transforming your conventional device into a mobile removable media product in minutes. Solid construction with quiet but effective built-in cooling, and the ability to turn any conventional IDE device into a mobile storage solution make the SilverRiver an excellent product to select if mobility is a requirement.



Plus:	Aluminium construction not only looks good but feels very robust, aids cooling
Minus:	A bit large perhaps Only USB 2.0 connectivity
Supplier:	Corex [011] 707 5000
Internet:	www.corex.co.za
RRP:	R 550.00
Reviewer:	Russel Bennett

Pinnacle Show Centre

I know a lot of you out there are like me. After years of PC use, you've accumulated a ton of media files, music movies and photographs in digital form, which you seldom watch because there are always better things to do with your system. But what if you could play these files on your home entertainment setup, listen to music on your stereo and watch movies on your TV, without even the hassle of moving and connecting your actual box? Pinnacle Systems Show Centre product appears to deliver the goods on this score. A proper little appliance, easily stylish enough to slot in between your DVD player and hi-fi unit, that uses the PC as a server through which it can access and play these media files. Simply plug it into your TV, connect the supplied LAN cable (both a patch cord and a crossover are supplied) or perhaps take advantage of the included WLAN adaptor to access the data without cables at all. Oh and of course add a chunky remote control with all the functions and relatively easy navigation required to do it all from the comfort of the couch... It all sounds very utopian really. OK so the Media Centre software needs to be installed and run on the PC, and the claim of automatically discovering media files isn't exactly accurate as you need to import these files into the application first. Or you can specify a watch folder, which pulls any compatible media placed in this folder into the database automatically. And it supports MP3, WMA, WMV, DivX, XVID, MPEG 1 and 2, JPG, Gif and PNG files. The thing is that codecs change all the time, and media files are seldom encoded using the exact same version especially when you're talking AVIs. So lots of files, even if they are all XVID movies for instance, won't play on the Show Centre as they're encoded using a different build version. This gripe doesn't apply to audio, photograph or WMV files, but then the quality of this Web-friendly compression isn't very good especially when being piped to a TV. In addition, to play back audio files or CD's (which are converted to MP3s first), your stereo must be plugged into the "B" audio channel. It won't play through your TV, already connected through the "A" channel. Even with these limitations, it's a really cool product. And if you have the patience, the application can slowly convert unrecognized media files into a useable format anyway, and even burn these converted movies straight out to SVCD, CD or DVD. Like Pinnacle Studio, it's clearly a video business application that's been converted for home use.



Plus:	Easy access to media files Nice on-screen user interface
Minus:	The varied codecs in use today can confuse it Audio playback requires a stereo
Supplier:	Pinnacle Systems
Internet:	www.pinnaclesys.com
RRP:	TBA
Reviewer:	Russel Bennett

Asus K8N-E Deluxe Athlon 64 motherboard

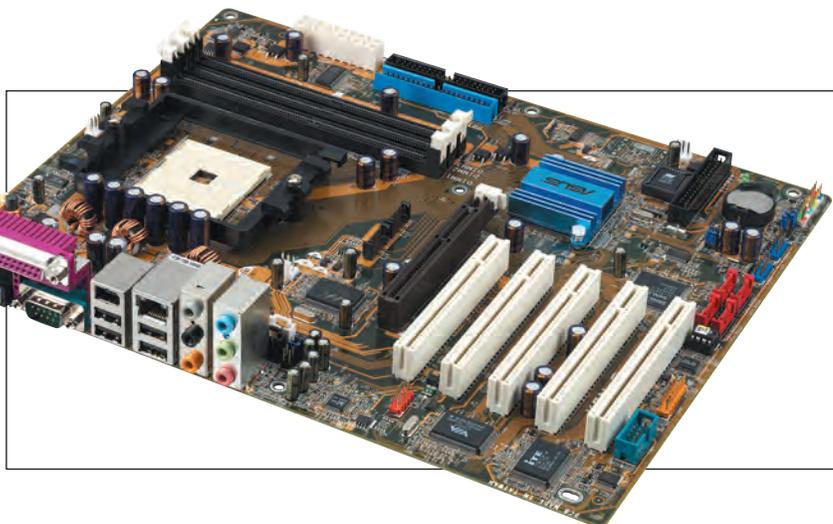
After the Intel 9xx chipset boards supplied by Asus which I tested last month, the Athlon 64 K8N-E Deluxe bundle on review here looks rather anaemic. All that you need is included in the box however, namely two IDE ribbons, four SATA cables, and various backing plates housing the additional USB and Firewire ports. The board itself is also rather average-looking with few special features or additions immediately apparent. There are now six SATA connectors, four of which are combined into a Silicone Image SATA RAID solution, five PCI slots, one AGP slot, and a mere three spaces into which to plug DIMM modules. Integrated onto the board itself is a Gigabit LAN port, four USB and one Firewire connection, and the array of audio connectors that are needed as this is an 8-channel integrated audio solution.

Featuring the nForce3 250GB chipset, this Asus offering incorporates an extensive BIOS which provides the user the freedom to over-clock any component of the system they might wish to, right down to being able to clock the frequency of the AGO bus up to 75 from the standard 66 MHz. Memory and CPU clock speeds and core voltages can also be altered for those ardent over-clocking enthusiasts out there. With an Athlon 64 3500+ processor in place, it is still the RAM speed

which is most immediately impressive about these 64-bit offerings from upstart chip maker AMD. Even higher than the last, identical CPU which I tested on an older main board from the same manufacturer, the K8N-E scores a faintly ridiculous 6200 MB/s of data throughput on the memory subsystem. This added performance is slightly peculiar as the memory controller is actually part of the CPU, and therefore performance should remain the same on any platform. I can only deduce that the latest nForce chipset implements the HyperTransport bus slightly better to unlock these few additional MB/s.

More importantly the system remained stable even when I began toying with over-clocking procedures, within reason of course, although it must be noted that while an adequate audio solution the integrated sound on this Asus board really doesn't compare with the Azalea system utilised in the latest offerings from Intel.

This Asus offering clearly demonstrates that the Athlon 64 architecture is rapidly moving into the mainstream market, and is a solid platform on which to run this 64-bit solution with good configurability, even if it doesn't shine out as being anything particularly special or unusual.



Plus: A solid platform, even when fiddling with frequencies | nForce 3 chipset gives excellent performance
 Minus: Pretty vanilla apart from the chipset

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

RRP: TBA
 Reviewer: Russel Bennett



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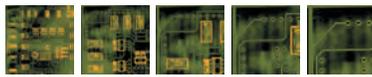
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The A-DATA RB2 is a USB 2.0 flash disk designed following A-DATA's RB1 Flash disk. RB2 has all the characteristics of waterproof and shock resistance as RB1, but with the colorful angel boy and angel girl pattern. The look of RB2 successfully creates a characterized image.

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Rockfire Rhino Fantast

Quite often games ported from console to PC, such as anything from the Tony Hawk series or even the recent I-Ninja PC port just don't translate well to keyboard control. In a scenario such as this, what one really needs is a good game-pad. Such hardware is unfortunately usually quite expensive, but that's where Rockfire's range of gaming peripherals comes in handy. The Rhino Fantast is essentially a PlayStation 2-style controller, mimicking Sony's button-layout as well as dual analogue approach. Any PlayStation 2 game ported to PC is thus instantly at home with the game-pad. The Fantast is a good quality game-pad, sturdy but its surface is too smooth. A coarse surface on a game-pad helps with perspiration, a smooth surface ends up feeling sticky and uncomfortable. This aside, DirectX vibration support is a welcome feature in this price range of game-pad, unfortunately it seemed quite finicky about when it would work. While the driver reported the vibration working perfectly (the model we got to review had a problem with its left actuator however), often games would simply not utilize the feature.

The driver itself is functional, allowing you to test each of the 10 buttons, both analogue sticks, the 8 directional hat (digital pad) and of course the two 'hidden' buttons (clicking the analogue sticks down). Sporting 'Dynamic Calibration', theoretically you never need to calibrate the game-pad. In practice however, often the game-pad misjudges the centre of the analogue sticks, causing you to constantly veer left or right in games, an issue resolved only by installing the driver again. Future driver updates might resolve this issue.

The actual fidelity of the game-pad is reasonable. It seemed unperturbed by the stress-testing involving hectic driving games and managed to survive the button-mashing of fighting games with dignity. The range on the analogues was entirely sufficient for racing games, letting you slide around corners smoothly and with a lot of control. Platform games and other titles that require precise control of a character proved the sensitivity of the analogues to be sufficient while the digital directions made short work of shooters and such.

Overall it's hard to believe that a game-pad of this quality can be sold so cheaply, and still include the more pricy option of vibration. Hopefully Rockfire will continue this trend by releasing even better quality game-pads at reasonable prices, but for now the Rhino Fantast is simply the best value for money deal you can get.



Plus: Affordable Sturdy Functional	Minus: Included drivers need a lot of work
Supplier: Naked IT [011] 482 5493	RRP: R 199.00
Internet: www.nakedit.co.za	Reviewer: Miktar Dracon

BenQ Joybee 110 Digital Audio Player

It's quite stylish really; its curves and backlit display perhaps a little kitsch for some. You hang it around your neck on the loop provided, put the slightly average ear-phones in your ears and then listen to music (MP3 / WMA). The Joybee seemed slightly slower than normal at transferring files to/from it via the USB cable but was quite capable of playing music for extended periods (10+ hours). No batteries required, it charges when plugged into the USB port. The voice record function produces surprisingly high-quality recordings, the 256 MB version of the Joybee is capable of saving up to 3,000 minutes of recording (provided you don't have it full of your own music already). Support for voice commands is an interesting touch on a well rounded, if expensive MP3 player.



Plus: Good for dictation A good MP3 player	Minus: Price
Supplier: Esquire [012] 657 1111	RRP: R 949.00
Internet: www.esquire.co.za	Reviewer: Miktar Dracon

Rockfire PSX/USB Bridge Adaptor

Game-pads have been expensive of late, which is where the Rockfire PSX USB Bridge comes in incredibly handy. If you own a PSOne or PS2, then you've already got a very good game-pad, it just lacks that tiny thing to make it work as a game-pad on your computer. The PSX USB Bridge is exactly that tiny thing required, and we can't be happier with it. Extremely well priced, bordering on ridiculously cheap almost, it includes everything you need to use your PSOne or PS2 controller (or steering wheel) on your PC using a USB port. The driver included is very functional, allowing you to check that every button and analogue stick works, as well as the vibration function (which is fully DirectX supported). A blessing for those of us who enjoy using game-pads on PC.



Plus: Cheap!	Minus: No analog detection on buttons
Supplier: Naked IT [011] 482 5493	RRP: R 99.00
Internet: www.nakedit.co.za	Reviewer: Miktar Dracon

CoolerMaster Hyper 6

Heat-pipe cooling technology has rapidly become the convention in aftermarket cooling solutions, as each manufacturer races to outdo its competitors in packing the most heat-pipes to augment conventional radiator fins efficiency. This CoolerMaster Hyper 6 is the first unit I've witnessed with no less than 6 heat-pipes running directly from the core up through the gargantuan, all copper heat-sink itself. And it keeps your CPU cool I can assure you, particularly under load. While temperatures at idle weren't particularly impressive, full load clearly shows the Hyper 6 to be more efficiently cooling my P4 chip to the tune of some 5 degrees C. However this performance has some serious drawback. While its size makes it impressive to the eye, it weighs in at a portly 1 kg exactly, making the Hyper 6 a risky proposition to install. Should the



retention clip fail, that's an awful lot of copper to go crashing onto your graphics card and whatever else might come into its path and such a fall is sure to be catastrophic to your system components. What's more the included fan is a noisy sleeve unit rather than a roller-ball, and while it is claimed to be optional for the best cooling possible it ought to be mounted. Great cooling, frightening risks.

Plus: Very efficient at dissipating a lot of heat
 Minus: A 1kg cooler puts a lot of strain on the retention clip, and if it should fail your system is trashed

Supplier: Rectron [011] 203 1000
 Internet: www.rectron.net

RRP: R 440.00
 Reviewer: Russel Bennett

AceCad Acecat 302

Seeing as how many of our readers are artists we thought we'd give the Acecat pen and graphics tablet a quick whirl. Features include the cordless and adjustable pressure sensitive pen for changing colour density, line width and opacity, while drawing, writing or signing. While it does claim to have graphic capabilities, it doesn't really compete with tablets like the famous Wacom device range; how-

ever, it does serve as a great entry level pad for artists.



Plus: Nice "introduction" to working with tablets
 Minus: Not very feature rich

Supplier: Frontosa [011] 468 4724
 Internet: www.frontosa.co.za

RRP: R280.00
 Reviewer: Walt Pretorius



BTC 16x DVD±RW Drive DRW

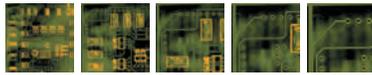


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Logitech Driving Force Pro

I have long been a fan of Logitech products, and have found their gaming peripherals to be especially good. That goes even doubly so for their steering wheels. However, while the choice of producing a line of steering wheels for the PS2 is a rather obvious one, I have always approached these devices with a touch of dubiousness. They basically fall into two categories - the type that you have to clamp to a coffee table and mangle yourself into a position that you can comfortably handle both the wheel and the pedals in, or those strange "lap-top" types that require you to hold the wheel with your thighs while you play, trying not to let the wheel movement interfere with pedal control (and trying not to disembowel yourself with your elbows.) The new Logitech Driving Force Pro falls into the former category (let's call them "coffee table clampers".) The wheel itself is very stylishly designed, with a comfortable grip area, fairly generously sized pedals (complete with a great carpet clamp built into the base) and a rubber grip area for greater comfort. Typical PS2 controls are situated on the wheels face, so that you can navigate menus and the like with relative ease. The wheel also features a 900 degree rotation (which is thankfully limited by most games) and a very sturdy clamping system, as well as an arcade style "tiptronic" style gear lever. The whole lot connects to the PS2 via a USB connector. This is a very sweet wheel indeed. It is sensitive and accurate (making for far better driving control than a normal PS2 controller) and is solidly and stylishly put together. And, thanks to PS2 wheels becoming more and more common, most driving titles that are coming out these days support it.

Choosing to purchase a wheel to use with your PS2 is a good move if you are a driving enthusiast with some carpentry skills (to build a reasonable rig to clamp the wheel and pedals to.) However, logistically, they can be difficult (if you can't use a hammer and nails) because of the fact that most people do not have suitable surfaces in front of their TV. If, however, you decide to go with the wheel option, this is probably the best one you're going to be able to find. Once again Logitech have established themselves as peripheral leaders across the spectrum of the most popular gaming platforms available in South Africa.



Plus: A truly excellent wheel	RRP: R 1 200.00
Minus: Clamping options	Reviewer: Walt Pretorius
Supplier: Logitech	
Internet: www.logitech.com	

ViewCatcher

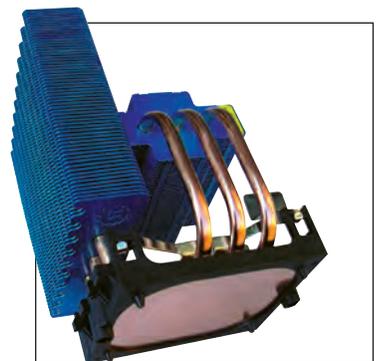
With a few notable (and expensive) exceptions, digital cameras are generally lacking in one field - zoom. Most offer a paltry 3x zoom, and often this is digital, as opposed to a better quality optical. The Viewcatcher binoculars are a different kettle of fish. These stylish rubber coated 8x32 binoculars have a built in digital camera that allows you to take 1600 x 1200 (max) resolution images of distant objects. At 2.0 megapixels, you shouldn't expect premium quality, though. They're a bit gimmicky, but are a nice toy to take along for bird watching or game viewing.



Plus: Handy 2-in-1 device Good binoculars	
Minus: Not the greatest camera	
Supplier: Esquire [012] 657 1111	RRP: R 1 300.00
Internet: www.esquire.co.za	Reviewer: Walt Pretorius

Thermaltake Fanless 103

Building a system without the hum of fans permeating the air is a new art in the world of PCs, the problem of course being the lack of a passive cooling system capable of keeping a CPU from burning itself up under load. Enter the Thermaltake Fanless 103 6-heatpipe passive cooler. Although the manual does point out that a case fan is still required, this product incorporates no noisy fan and therefore generates no noise pollution itself. The Fanless 103 does still need some refining though in my opinion. Although it's impressive that Thermaltake have produced a passive solution able to keep an unstressed system sufficiently chilled, gamers will quickly discover that under load this offering doesn't quite cut the mustard, as my P4 chip got steadily hotter until I called "Uncle" at 66 degrees C. It ought to be adequate for an office environment in which quiet is imperative.



Plus: Totally silent CPU cooling	RRP: R450.00
Minus: Doesn't handle load well Not a over-clocking or hardcore gaming solution	Reviewer: Russel Bennett
Supplier: Corex [011] 707 5000	
Internet: www.corex.co.za	

Thermaltake SubZero4G TEC cooler

Thermo-electric cooling (TEC) technology is not new to the PC world, but certain problems like condensation have relegated them to the hardcore DIY segment of the market willing and able to work around such issues. Thermaltake are now bringing this technology to the consumer space with the SubZero4G. By passing current through a thermo-electric unit (or Peltier) made of dissimilar conductive materials, heat is moved from one side of this ceramic construction to the other. By then attaching a heat-sink to the hot side to dispel this temperature, the opposite face gets correspondingly colder. This is oversimplified but we're pressed for space... The SubZero4G is the best CPU cooler I've tried to date. With this Thermaltake offering installed even stressing the CPU never saw the temperature sensors register as high as the 32 degrees C my own



Gigabyte cooling unit maintains when idle. What's more it's almost completely silent! If you need an outstanding cooling solution for your gaming machine but aren't sure about the complexities of water cooling, this is the unit you've been looking for. Highly recommended.



Plus: Keeps a CPU cooler than any non-water solution I've ever tested
 Minus: A little expensive, although ultimately worth the money

Supplier: Corex [011] 707 5000
 Internet: www.corex.co.za

RRP: R 550.00
 Reviewer: Russel Bennett

Time For Music Life 256MB MP3 Watch

USB MP3 players are swamping the market, every company trying to get their foothold in what is fast becoming a saturated and expensive sector. The Time For Music Life MP3 Watch is an interesting attempt at combining an MP3 player with an object most people use on a daily basis, the watch. Using a small USB

cable (cable extension is included in the box) you can easily transfer MP3s to the watch or pull off recordings you've made with the watch's microphone. The watch itself is slightly bulky and feels a bit too heavy initially, but one gets used to the weight. All the standard features of an MP3 you would expect are there, though the volume control is slightly chunky in the respect that it adjusts the volume in 'steps' instead of smoothly. The headphones included with the watch are well designed and have high sound fidelity. Considering the price tag, it's a coin flip if something like this appeals to you or not.



Plus: Convenient | Fast USB transfer rate
 Minus: Bulky | Pricey

Supplier: Esquire [012] 657 1111
 Internet: www.esquire.co.za

RRP: R 1 100.00
 Reviewer: Miktar Dracon



Vantec Nexus NXP-301 Fan & Light Controller Tweak with Style!



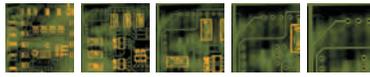
COREX
 IT DISTRIBUTION DYNAMICS (Pty)Ltd

The Nexus NXP-301 Fan & Light Controller combines the functionality of fan control and cold cathode light activation into one single unit. It offers 3 separate channels, which can be adjusted to allow full control of the fan ranging from FULL SPEED to COMPLETELY OFF. This will cut down or eliminate unnecessary noise level by reducing the fan speed. The light activation function support 2 cold cathode lights. By adjusting to either ON, OFF, or SOUND ACTIVATED, it allows you to have full control of how you want to light up your case. Housed in a stylish aluminum casing designed to fit in any standard 5.25" drive bay with ultra-bright LED, the Nexus NXP-301 fan & light controller is the mod you have been waiting for!

Distributor of



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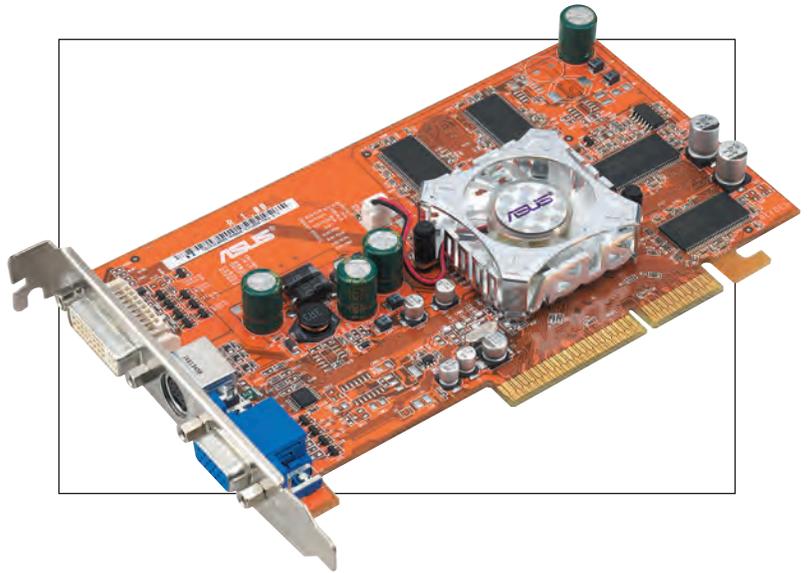


ASUS A9550 Gamer Edition

It's difficult to write about a new video card, since there are so many flooding the market at a time and there seems to be only miniscule differences between those of the same bracket. The ASUS A9550 Gamer Edition is, in all regards, a good card. It may not be the supreme top of the range but it performs amiably under most scenarios. Recent games such as DOOM³ and Far Cry had no problems running at medium resolutions (800x600 or 1024x768) with detail set to maximum (with the exception of anti-aliasing), keeping a good 40 - 60 frames per second.

The card has a standard VGA Connector, a TV-out Connector and a DVI output, allowing for diversified display connectivity. As far as bundled software goes, it's pretty much standard fare with the

exception of a lack of bundled games. As expected, the driver that comes supplied with the card is sub-standard; upgrading your driver to the newest release is paramount. For its price, the A9550 is a good 128MB DDR card, a sensible purchase if you need something that will suffice for standard gaming at standard levels.



Plus: Decent video card
Minus: Not overly powerful

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

RRP: TBA
Reviewer: Miktar Dracon

Unique Gaming Case

I've given up arguing case aesthetics. These days you get cases in every visual flavour, so trying to judge a new model on its visual appeal is pointless - especially since every case I've ever taken to a LAN has elicited different reactions from everyone.

Looks don't matter, but space does and that's why I like this particular piece of chassis. While it's still just a standard midi-tower case, featuring standard drive bays (four for each size) with screw less latches, I liked its stockier feel. The case has a bit more breadth than most, making it great to work in. This also compliments the Manga-like front design, complete with a pulsating head crystal (for your HDD light) and a blue visor that likes doing a variety of light tricks - most of which actually look very cool.

It's also a very cost-effective buy, since you'll get a 400W PSU included in the bundle. Considering that this isn't a bad case in itself structure wise, that's not a bad deal. There are a few detractors, though. It's not for high-end machines, as the low amount of wires on the USB and Sound FSB cables indicate. The latter also doesn't reach all the way to the back of the motherboard - in this case I couldn't plug in my front-side sound. Fan bays are also limited and there's no front Firewire port. As a mid-range case at a good price (especially with the PSU included) it's a good buy, providing you like the face design. Buy it for your anime-mad cousin.



Plus: Roomy for its size | 400W PSU included
Minus: Short FSB cables | Limited aesthetic appeal

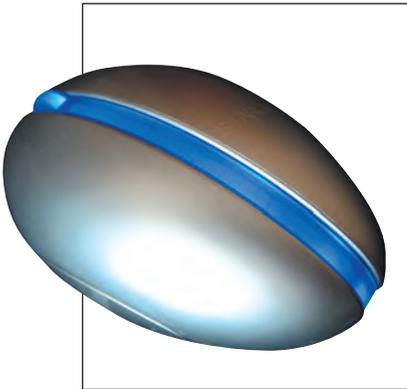
Supplier: Esquire [012] 657 1111
Internet: www.esquire.co.za

RRP: R 720.00
Reviewer: James Francis

MS S+arck Mouse

Described as "a unique mouse with modern aesthetics that will speak to new people and continue advancing the peripheral industry in terms of design," this mouse was designed by Phillipe Starck, and is the latest addition to the Microsoft peripheral stable. And it certainly is pretty... which is just about where it's usefulness as a gaming device stops. It might look good, but this uncomfortably low and irritatingly "clickable" mouse has obviously been put together more for looks than functionality and comfort. It would be far more at home in a

yuppie's office than at a LAN. While it features great technology in terms of its unusually blue-lit optical system, the mouse is just not user friendly. It is far too low for comfort, and the slightest pressure results in one of the buttons being clicked. Nice idea, but it needs work.



Plus: Looks pretty...
Minus: ...until you have to use it

Supplier: Microsoft
Internet: www.microsoft.co.za

RRP: R340
Reviewer: Walt Pretorius

Chronos Hi Five 5in1 DV

This is the newest hand held DV cam from Chronos. It's a useful little device, but you're hardly going to be shooting feature films on it. One advantage is that it more than doubles the length of time you can film over other camcorders, thanks to its MPEG-4 file format - up to 112 minutes on a 256mb SD card. Aside from being a camcorder, this device also features MP3 playback, sound recording and digital still camera functionality at 3.0 megapixels. It's a fairly sturdy device, with a clear flip out LCD screen and relatively simple controls. It may not be the best DV cam money can buy, but it is handy for catching your little brother in compromising positions and publishing the resulting film to the internet.



Plus: Handy | Longer recording times
Minus: Not the best cam around | A little expensive

Supplier: Esquire [012] 657 1111
Internet: www.esquire.co.za

RRP: R1 000.00
Reviewer: Walt Pretorius

CD Library II DC-300

Looking more like a dejected computer out of an old 50's movie, the CD Library II DC-300 is an interesting way to keep your CD collection pathologically neat. With a 150 CD holding capacity, what sets the CD Library II apart from just shoving your CDs into CD folders, is that the Library can interface via a USB cable with your PC. A robust if slightly finicky application lets you catalogue your CDs and then, with a click of the mouse, ejects the CD from the Library. If you don't have your PC on, you can still go to a specific CD by entering the right number on the Library, or just browse through the spool using arrow buttons. The initial arduous task of entering each CD one by one into the Library is easily redeemed due to the sheer organized-ness of it all.



Plus: Methodically organise your CDs
Minus: Database application cumbersome

Supplier: Frontosa [011] 468 4724
Internet: www.frontosa.co.za

RRP: R1 299.00
Reviewer: Miktar Dracon

CD Library II DC-101

Tired of searching for CDs? Well, with a little effort you can catalogue your 150 favourite disks and have them ready at the click of a left mouse button, thanks to this device. It's a great way to keep track of CDs and DVDs. The device is fairly sturdy (although a good knock may have it in pieces) and features a lockable door to protect your valuable property. It takes a while to set up (getting 150 CDs listed on the PC is time consuming) and is stackable, so that more than one can be used at a time. Although it is the smaller, lower end unit of the product range, the only improvement (as far as music CDs go) that I can think of would have been a built in CD player...



Plus: Convenient way to keep 150 CDs organised
Minus: Not a CD player

Supplier: Frontosa [011] 468 4724
Internet: www.frontosa.co.za

RRP: R1 119.00
Reviewer: Walt Pretorius

news

a critical course in anime

The Minneapolis College of Art and Design in the USA is offering a course in the critical appreciation of anime. It is not uncommon to be able to study the art at American universities, but the academic side is frequently neglected.

The course entails a series of lectures in much the same way as English literature is taught at tertiary level. Entitled "Schoolgirls and Mobilesuits: Culture and Creation in Manga and Anime", the course counts towards a degree credit and features the following lecturers: C.B. Cebulski, Associate Editor, Marvel Comics; Dr. Marc

Hairston of the Centre for Space Sciences at the University of Texas; Theresa M. Winge, Cosplay Fashion Show Director at the University of Northern Iowa; and Dr. Susan Napier, Professor of Japanese Studies at the University of Texas. Topics covered include: Japanese popular culture and cyborg theory; a history of Hayao Miyazaki and Studio Ghibli; and the gender (re)interpretations of Rumiko Takahashi.

"Digging deeper into the art and analysis of manga and anime, [the course] will take a look at the artists, editors and academics

involved in the work and wonder of manga and anime," explains course co-ordinator Frenchy Lunning. The course kicked off on September 24th. For more information contact:

continuing_studies@mcad.edu or visit the website: www.mcad.edu/anime.



review

While the idea of an apocalypse on New Years Eve 1999 has lost a little of its impetus since the rather uneventful dawn of the 21st century, this did not stop the artists at CLAMP studios from adapting their highly successful 1999 end-of-the-world film "X" for television.

Having chosen a theme that had been dealt with numerous times in the past by entertainment industries all over the world; they needed to approach the subject in a different way to make it stand out. As such, they chose to adopt a mythological tone and view mankind's so-called final days as a sort of parable.

The series is widely regarded as superior to the film, and features more detailed histories of all the main characters. Most notable is Kamui Shiro, the reluctant hero of the story, who was born with the destiny of having to choose between saving or destroying the planet. Pulling him in both directions are the forces of "good" (the Dragon of

Heaven) and "evil" (the Dragon of Earth), personified by a large percentage of the supporting cast.

Initially, he shuns his role in the apocalypse, but is forced to take sides when he discovers that his close childhood friends Fuma and Kotori (brother and sister) will be directly caught up in the conflict.

While CLAMP's intention may have been to offer something new to the millennium-drama genre, the series comes across as old hat. While it is quite different by Western standards, it follows many established anime norms and so becomes extremely predictable for the seasoned anime audience. The characters are varied to a degree, and one could say there is something for everyone, but they are still highly stereotypical. On a positive note, however, the series is worthwhile entertainment and quite addictive, and its notions of good and evil are explored in a reasonably original way.

Format: Series (24 episodes) **Age Restriction:** PG 10
Availability: www.amazon.com - \$215.84 excl. shipping (8 DVDs)



x:tv

music.

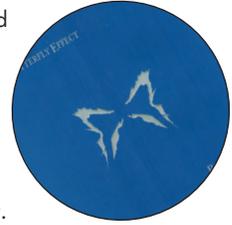
For a limited time, you can get this band's second album along with their first (Born a Lion.) Canadian based raw hard rock is what you will find here... reminiscent of a more golden age of rock. Great stuff if you like hard rock!



We sweat blood
Danko Jones

Begins Here
The Butterfly Effect

Here's a band that is either laid back metal or heavy easy listening - I can't decide. Either way, if you like your music slightly heavier and full of passion, check this band out. Not every one's cup of tea, but give it a listen... you may like it.



dvds.

If you suspend any knowledge you may have about Greek mythology, then Troy is a very enjoyable film. With a vast scale and sweeping visuals, Troy is a true epic about (you guessed it) the Trojan War. When Helen of Troy deserts her husband with the Trojan Prince, all of Greece goes to war against the city state. Brilliant performances by Brad Pitt and Eric Bana make this film great!



Troy
2 disc set | Nu Metro

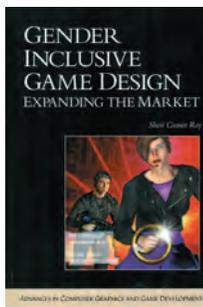
The Day After Tomorrow
2 disc set | Nu Metro

When global weather patterns shift unexpectedly and violently, the entire human population is threatened by the return of a new ice age. Great special effects and awe inspiring scenes deliver all the expected thrills. This is a good movie that will depress the hell out of you for the first half, and then gets a bit too forgiving during the ending.



books.

Gender Inclusive Game Design
By Sheri Graner Ray • Price TBA



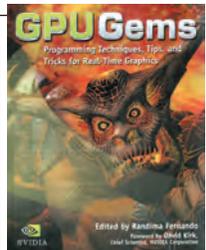
Gender Inclusive Game Design is a rare gem amongst a range of game development books. Sheri Graner Ray, who is the founder of Sirenia Software that is dedicated to developing games for girls, has written this non-technical game development book. In it, she discusses issues to assist developers understand the differences between how men and women approach games. In fact, for a game design book, there is nary a mention of code or even programming languages. No, Graner Ray uses this book to highlight the importance of designing games that women would find fun to play. Divided into 13 chapters, she takes the reader on a journey through game development spanning several decades. Being a developer and keen gamer herself, she gives a fascinating

insight on how women deal with a host of challenges and how (the majority) would deal with different kinds of games. Her chapter on Reward and Gameplay is especially interesting to read as it showcases just how important it is to take a different perspective into account when developing a game. Also, the chapter looking at the evolution of female game characters shows just how the industry is changing to accommodate an increasing number of female gamers. All told, Gender Inclusive Game Design makes for a fascinating read. The fact that it focuses more on social and development issues rather than proper code makes it accessible to a range of readers. If you like your game reading slightly more intellectual, then give this book a try.

When compared to Gender Inclusive Game Design, GPU Gems falls in the opposite end of the spectrum. This graphics programming tome covers practical real-time graphics techniques as experienced by developers who are at the forefront of their field. Edited by Randima Fernando, who is the manager of developer education at nVidia, GPU Gems immediately draws attention to the real-world experience of its contributors. In fact, any programming book containing tips and tricks from developers at Industrial Light & Magic, Cyan Worlds, nVidia and Softlab-NSK should be taken seriously by programmers and graphic designers. Unfortunately, no one from ATI contributed but considering this is in all but name an nVidia-sponsored book, it is not all that surprising. Of course, being a graphics programming book, it does mean that the reader will have to be a pro-

grammer or graphics designer or even have a definite interest in this area. Being a part-time graphics designer myself, I found this book to contain a wealth of useful design theory. However, it also contains a host of code to illustrate different tricks developers can use. Broken into six parts all specialising in different fields of graphic design, GPU Gems can almost be considered to be the definitive design book. It discusses everything from effective water simulation to real-time stereograms. What is more, the contributors are all experienced hands at what they do and it comes across like they enjoy imparting their knowledge to the reader.

GPU Gems
Edited by Randima Fernando
Price: R765.95 (excl. delivery)



books supplied by

role-playing.

opinion

filling in the blanks

A good GM can do anything with the given medium of the role playing game that he is running. However, there are always times when players manage to get completely off track, making the life of the Game Master a veritable hell for the few hours that he is desperately struggling to keep his game together.

A good number of years ago, a prominent gaming role playing magazine (I forget which one) stated that if you map the dungeon, players will find a way out. Map the kingdom, and they will find a way to the next one. Map the continent, and they travel to another one. Map the world, and they figure a way into outer space. This is gospel.

Players have a way of getting the best laid plans all screwed up as they do what they feel their characters should be doing. To this end, a good GM must be able to think on the fly, and plan for as many eventualities as possible. When you are planning your

campaign initially, go into as much detail as you possibly can. This way, if the players throw you a curve ball, you may have something to cover it in your planning notes - always handy. However, as stated before, players have the ability to get exactly where they're not supposed to (because you haven't planned that bit of the game.) This is when the skill of "winging it" comes in very handy.

Rule one: don't panic. If you let the players know that they have you "cornered," they will go for the throat - taking every advantage they possibly can in a situation where you have little control. So keep that old GM poker face going. Don't let them smell your fear.

Next, keep the tone of the game. If you have to suddenly throw in a bunch of new characters because your characters managed to find somewhere that didn't actually exist (in game terms) until a few seconds ago, make sure that these new characters (and the place) fit the feel of the

game. A glaring difference will make it obvious that you are making things up as you go along.

Be logical when handling the situation. Sudden changes in GM thinking are also a dead give away.

Most importantly, though - make notes. Jot down the details of elements you are making up as the game progresses. Then, between sessions, go flesh out and plan the new bits. This will lend consistency to your game, as well as aide in that whole "preparing for every eventuality" thing.

If the players really have you over a barrel, don't be afraid to call a five minute time out (say you need the toilet or something) and go think about what's going to happen next.

Remember, though, that these things happen, and you should let them. A GM who is too restrictive limits the fun the players are having, and won't be a GM for very much longer.

review

exalted

Yet another role playing game with a manga flavour gets a look this month. This time around it's Exalted from White Wolf studios. This game uses the tried and tested White Wolf system made popular by the World of Darkness series, but does not belong to that series. Instead, it forms part of White Wolf's Age of Sorrows, a more fantasy like setting than the rather current WOD. Exalted allows players to take the part of characters with awesome abilities. In other words, it's a power-gamers dream game. There is no way to play this game without power gaming, in fact, and even the most experienced GM is going to have trouble keeping over-zealous gamers in check

while running an Exalted game. Imagine something along the lines of Princess Mononoke (for setting) crossed with Dragon Ball Z (for over the top action) if you want a mental picture of what we're dealing with here.

This game is certainly taste driven, and most role players will find it a little hard to swallow (while those that like all out action over character driven substance will probably love it.)

On the upside, the core rule book is now available as a set, with a few other source books and a mouse pad bundled for good measure.

Try it before you buy it (if you can find a group playing it, that is...)

Exalted Core Book
Approx. R400



Supplied by Outer Limits (011) 482 3771

自然



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comics.

Small Gods
Image Comics
R 21.50



In the near future, almost one percent of the population is psychic - enough people to make the scientists accept them as real. The US however demands that all Telepaths be registered and they are not allowed into the police force after all - if you can invade people's heads maybe you made them commit the crime. Our hero, Owen, is a policeman, legally in the force, and he can see the future. Then he meets up with a criminal who recognizes him as a telepath as well as a precognitive. Suddenly the good cop risks a lot of time in jail while a criminal stands to walk free and sue the police for a lot of money: how far will the good guy go, to do the right thing?

Venom vs Carnage
Marvel Comics
R23.50



Old favourites from the Spider-man world return together in a story of violence, bloodshed and pregnant fathers. Once there was a parasitic creature called Venom - with a human host to move around it became a major thorn in Spider-man's side. Then it met another Symbiotic entity called Carnage. And before they knew it, Carnage was pregnant. There's nothing quite like an emotionally, unstable psychopath. Now Venom wants the child, while Carnage is determined to get rid of it. Expect lots of action, strange happenings, Spider-man, oh and the very, very sexy black cat.



Anime Play
Hirameki
R96.95

The magazine for anyone who has any interest in manga of any form! There are interviews with writers and artists of both the written and filmed forms of the subject, as well as tons of artwork will keep those who don't read happy too. And for aspiring artists: tips and hints for drawing in the manga style.

If you are new to the Manga universe, you will find plenty of suggestions of the comics to read, and the movies to watch, along with details of the creators, and what other things they have done.

Included with each issue is a CD with clips of new movies, stories and games in the development stage. Read this magazine and be educated.



Remote
Tokyopop
R88.95

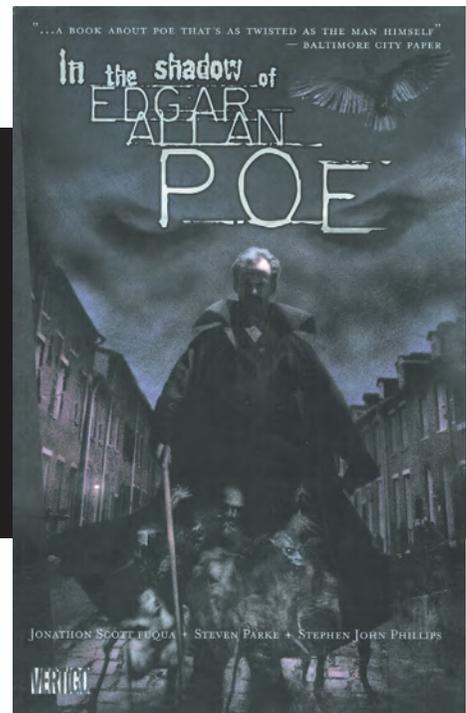
Kurumi Ayaki was a meter-maid and a virgin, but she had plans. She has met the man she wants to marry, and she resigned from her job to become a full time housewife.

Then she found out her fiancé wasn't as rich as she thought he was. When she asked for her job back, she was moved to a new unit. Now she is the eyes and ears for a specialist detective who cannot leave his room. They specialize in solving strange crimes. In fact the first crime Ayaki gets to investigate is a killer clown who leaves clues with his victims. It's a race against time to stop the killings, while at the same time Ayaki has to get used to being a strong, independent woman. Nothing like the homebody she thought she was going to be.

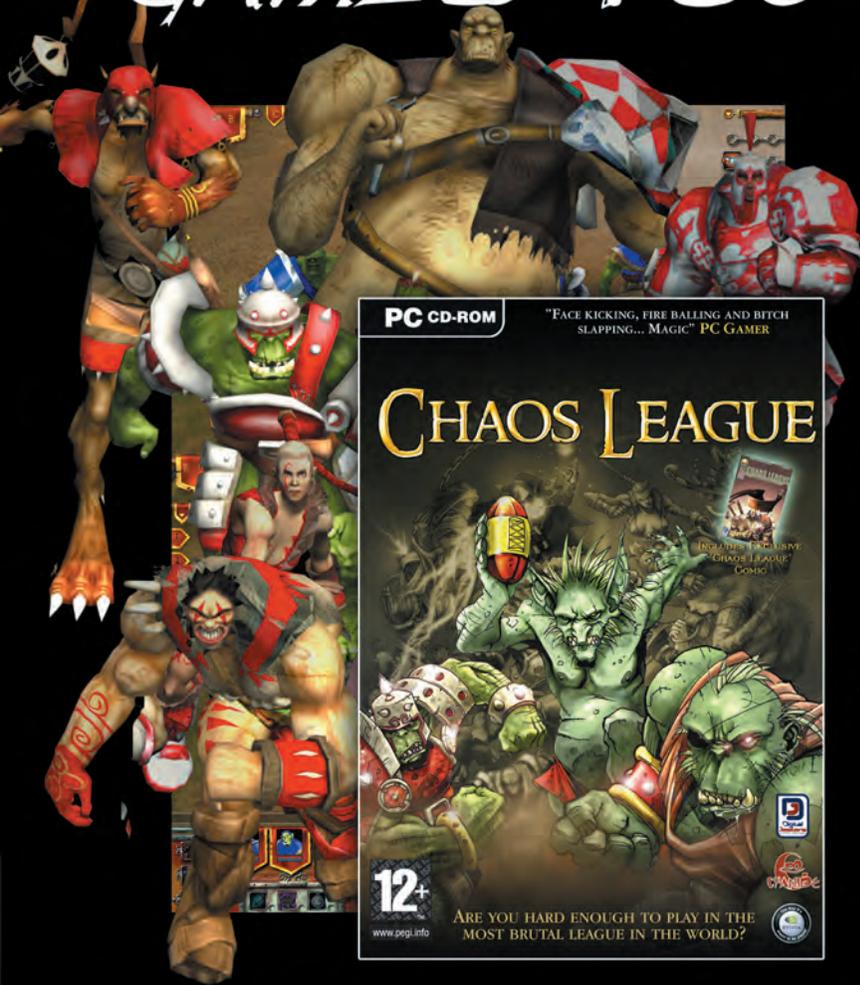
graphic novel

Supposedly the long lost diaries of the Master of horror fiction, Edgar Allan Poe, this graphic story portrays the life of the troubled author as he walked the thin line between genius and insanity. Even if the story of such a tortured mind is not enough to attract fans of Poe, the photographic art that goes along with the words is pure brilliance. More so than even a film, you will be there in the doom-laden America of the nineteenth century. You will truly see what a gift and a terrible curse the imagination can really be. This one will leave you exhausted, but well satisfied.

In the Shadow of Edgar Allan Poe
Vertigo
R 125



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SEGA

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board games.

review

warcraft

At one point I thought that board games of the strategy kind had been replaced by PC titles. In the early days, a number of PC titles took the lead from these board games - and then overtook them. Now the shoe is on the other foot, with PC titles influencing and inspiring board games. Take the WarCraft Board Game, for example. Based on Blizzard's WarCraft 3, this game is for two to four players, and uses a stylised version of the computer version's play dynamic. The game is well produced, with wooden and cardboard counters, as

well as "press out" style board pieces. A collection of cards is also used by the game, to define upgrades, represent effects and that sort of thing. Because of the dice rolling element, the game is far more "random" than the PC version, but is nonetheless a great amount of fun to play. Its simple approach allows for fairly complicated strategies to be formulated easily. It's basically Risk a-la WarCraft, but features surprising play depth.

WarCraft
Approx. R459 (incl. shipping)



review

lord of the rings: the confrontation

This board game introduces some interesting elements to the whole strategy board game idea. At first glance, it is a very simple game for two players only. But, after playing for a while, the complexity of the game shows itself in an unexpected place... One player controls the forces of good, while the other the forces of evil. They move markers towards each other - these markers contain concealed character information that only the controlling player can

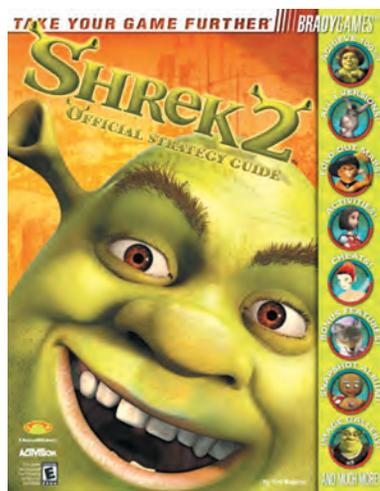
see. Additionally, cards are also used. But the true beauty of the game comes to the fore not in the movement of pieces, but in the bluffing element that defines the play dynamic. Players can try to outdo each other with bluffs and sneaky tactics to gain the upper hand in the situation. This high quality game is a must for strategy fans who like their playing experience to be less than honest!

Lord of the Rings: The Confrontation
Approx. R279 (incl. shipping)



Supplied by www.boardgames.co.za

strategy guide.



The multiplatform title Shrek 2, based on the movie of the same name (naturally), may not have been the most enthralling of games but it certainly had a tangible and unexpected depth. Typical of BradyGames, the Shrek 2 strategy guide has just about every conceivable bit of information you could want, if you want to get 100% out of Shrek 2. Overall the guide is as one would expect, with detailed walkthroughs as well as guides on how to get everything in the game, and rounded off with smaller activities such as crossword puzzles for when you just don't feel like playing the actual game.

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PlayStation.2 

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Prophecy www.prophecy.co.za

South Africa's oldest and wisest gaming site is alive and kicking! With new bustling forums, a large following of hardcore gaming fanatics and regular news feeds, it's a great place to call your local gaming home, providing the somewhat intimidating design and in-depth discussion of games and hardware doesn't scare away less experienced browsers. And while you are there, tell Warcow he's a clown who gets dressed by his mother. Feel the love!

One Mod Predicta onomy.com/blue/predicta.html

Building a PC into a funny case has been done. We've seen PCs built into Macs, suitcases, shoeboxes and even a guitar. But there's something really cool and impressive with this mod, where someone built a PC into an old Philco Predicta television, which were made between 1958 and 1960. We're inspired, so we're building a PC into an old lawnmower we found. It might even cut the lawn itself...



Traffic Flirt www.trafficflirt.co.za

So you saw someone very good looking in a car across from you in a traffic jam, where it's estimated we spend around 98% of our lives, and you'd like to send them a compliment. Well, if they are registered here, you can. And

if you are, someone can send you an anonymous text, complimenting you on your head and shoulders. There's not much point here (unless you tell someone to look at the car next to them), but we like the idea.

Wrecked Exotics www.wreckedexotics.com

No, it's not a photo gallery of foreign people getting really drunk, but something far, far worse. Let's say you bought yourself a nice new Lamborghini Murcielago for a few million, but a small accident leaves it completely wrecked. Well, apart from crying (either you or your insurance will), you can snap a picture of it and send it to this site. A lot of people already did, ranging from BMW M3s to Austin Martins, Ferraris and even a few Roll Royce models. Truly a shame...

World Standards users.pandora.be/worldstandards/

Where exactly do they drive on the right hand side of the road? What power supply works where? If I go to Paraguay, will I be thinking in metric or imperial? These and other questions keep us up for days at end, so a site like this, which goes out to explain a lot of the differences in the world (such as the different number plate systems, paper sizes and so on), is very useful. If anything, it's sure to settle a few arguments.



Flash Spotlight Madness Combat www.madnesscombat.com

One man and his quest: to kill the Sheriff. Then it becomes a quest to kill the clown. In-between you have thugs, agents, zombies and Jesus. This is going to be one hell of a ride... and it is! Madness Combat is a novel twist on the popular 'stick men fighting' theme and it is quite violent, but very entertaining and well done.

Warning: contains animated gore and excessive animated violence.

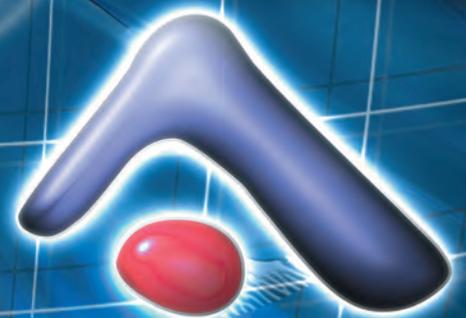


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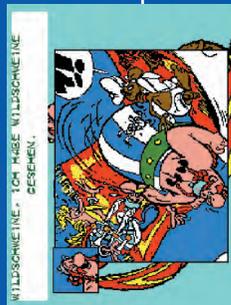


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Obelix [1983]

Asterix and Obelix do the thing they love best – beating up Romans. This little game focuses more or less on that aspect as you use Asterix to stun Romans and Obelix to take them out using menhirs.



Asterix and the Magic Carpet [1987]

Based on the book of the same name, basically it was a static adventure game, you follow scenes from the comic book, making decisions on what to do, with the occasional action sequence filled in.



Asterix [1993]

Obelix is captured by the Romans (what's the chance of that happening?) and his best friend Asterix is to the rescue in this quaint side-scrolling game. Visit a variety of locations and beat up Romans.



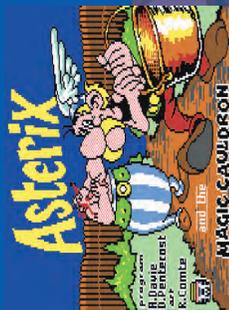
Asterix and Obelix take on Caesar [1999]

Based on the French film, you play as Asterix in this side-scrolling game, out to defeat the Romans and the sneaky counselor Detritus after they kidnap Getafix. This time the developers opted to use photo graphics from the film instead of the traditional drawn style.

Love them or hate them, but the French have given us two of the most memorable comic characters in the world. They had a few games too...

Asterix and the Magic Cauldron [1986]

An action-platform game, it follows the plot of the book of the same name. Play as the duo as you recover the seven pieces of the cauldron used to brew the magic potion in, before the Romans invade your village!



Asterix: Operation Getafix [1989]

Getafix falls ill and you need to head out and find the ingredients to cure your druid, else he can't make the valuable magic potion to keep the Romans at bay.



Asterix & Obelix [1994]

The duo heads to the Windows platform as you play one of the characters, or use both when you invite another player to play along and find artifacts spread over several European cities.



Asterix Mega Madness [2001]

So who is the best sporting Gaul in the village? That's what this game wanted you to figure out as you chose from a variety of the Gaulish village's inhabitants and took part in various sports events and mini games.

LEGACY

Asterix & Obelix

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"Roger. Over."
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RAMPAGE

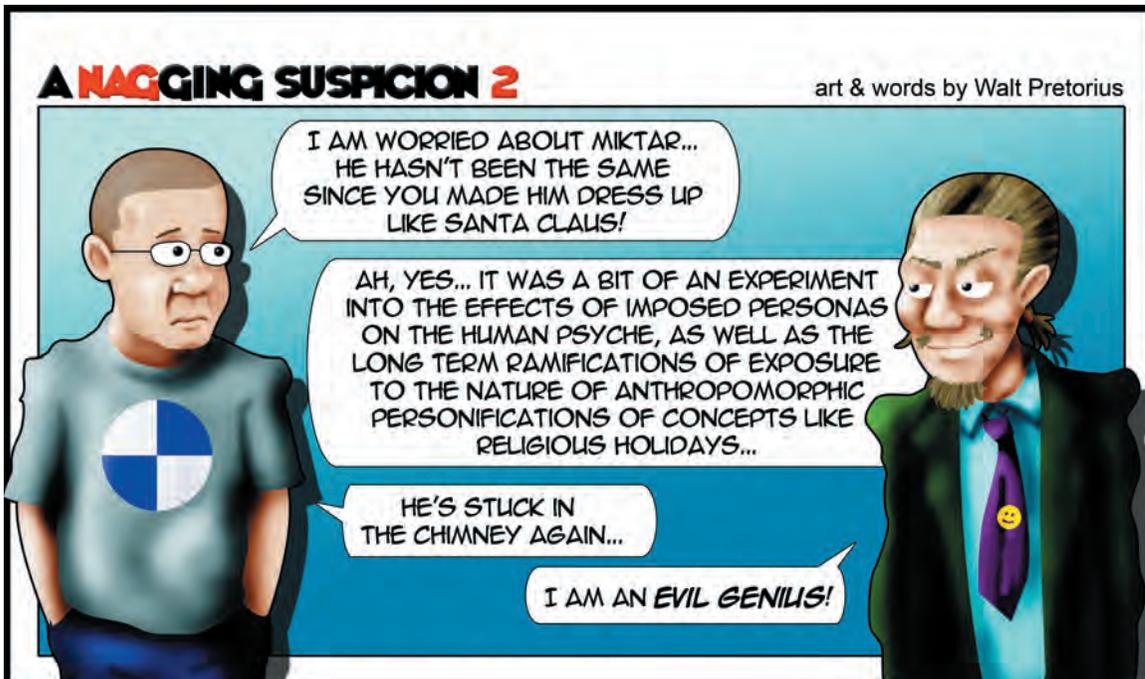
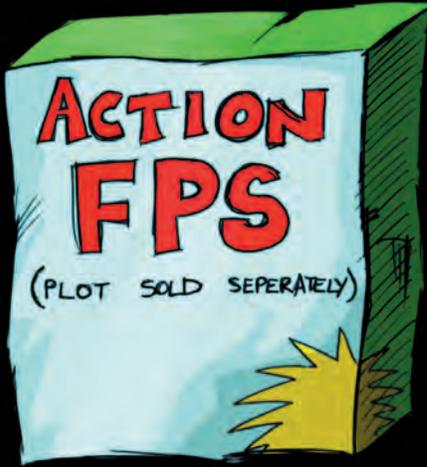


LOST THE PLOT

Ever thought that FPS Action titles seem a little lacking in terms of plot?

Many people want to create games, and so I have decided to, for once, be helpful, and provide them with a useful tool for writing the story line of an action FPS title... these are obviously popular money makers, because everyone is making them. So, for your basic plot premise (you will have to fill in the details) just select any of the options below...

You are a [(a) marine (b) ex-marine (c) orphan who's parents were marines] living on [(a) a tropical island (b) a space station (c) Mars] working as a [(a) marine (b) scientist (c) tour guide]. Suddenly [(a) a gate to hell opened, and everyone died (b) aliens invaded, and everyone died.] You are the only survivor because [(a) you were unconscious when it happened (b) your superior training allowed you to get out of the situation (c) you were slacking off having a joint behind the warehouse when it all happened.] Everyone around you was killed by [(a) demons from hell (b) aliens from Turdulon V (c) high grade top notch mercenaries who just happen to be too dumb to find you, even though you're wearing a bright red shirt and stand six foot five in your socks.] Your mission now is to [(a) traverse the depths of hell in a jock strap and takkies, armed with a blunt Swiss army knife and a case of ammo you don't have the weapons for (b) crawl through dank and musty forests carrying more guns than even an elephant could manage (c) crawl through endless air-ducts and hidden passageways, avoiding enemies so thick that you could prance in front of them screaming "Hey! Shoot me!" and they still would do nothing] in order to find the One Thing that can save mankind. The One Thing that could save mankind is, of course [(a) a demonic device that has remained hidden for centuries until some dude dug it up and sort of instantly figured out how to work it, based on inscriptions in a language he can't read (b) a serum that will prevent the whole world from turning into horribly genetically modified, flesh eating monsters with weapons grafted onto their bodies (c) a plot for an action FPS that is actually original and half way decent.] But, before you can find the One Thing, you must first defeat [(a) a hugely impressive but essentially wussy demon that couldn't hit the broad side of a barn at three feet with a shotgun (b) an evil mastermind genius that was smart enough to invent a device to conquer the world, but dumb enough to leave all those handy key-cards lying around (c) a horde of angry gamers who have realized that the hype was just that and that your game actually sucks butt.] The End.



Disclaimer: We can't tell you what you want to know here because we don't know what you want to know which is why you won't know what we know.

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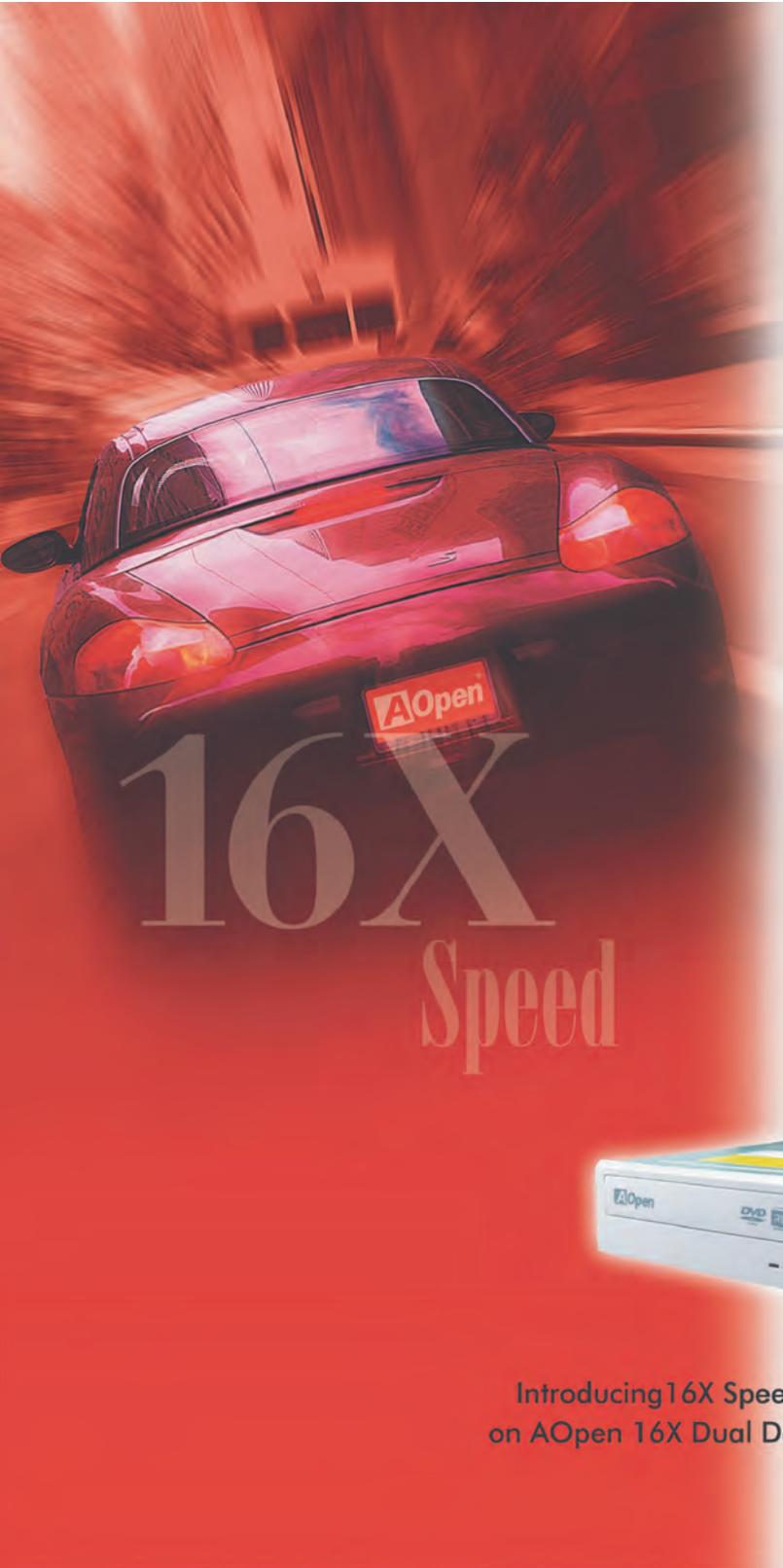
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