NAG

SOUTH AFRICA'S LEADING COMPUTER GAMING & TECHNOLOGY MAGAZINE

PC XBOX **360** GBA **DS** MOBILE **PSP** PLAYSTATION 2

QUAKE 4 | THE MOVIES | F.E.A.R. | BLACK & WHITE 2

COVER DVD

Trackmania Sunrise eXtreme

rAge 2005 VIDEOS

4.5GB 7 demos + 22 movies + more

Demos: Cold War | Genocide Demo 2 | Earth 2160 | Soldner: Sec 2 Demo 2 | Trackmania Sunrise eXtreme | X-Men Legends 2.

Movies: Age of Empires III 16 videos | Armored Core 4 | Bomberman 3 Special Forms | Blazzard Interview | Company and Keepers Movies | J.E.A.R. GDI MALEFFEE2 | CSS Liberty City Stories | GTA Trailer 2 | Infernal Trailer 1 & 2 | Infernal TV Ad | Midi clips 2005 videos | Need for Speed Most Wanted | Millwall clips 2005 videos | Prince of Persia 3 Bloodline Diary | Paraxis Force | The Movies | Dead Rising | G-mail | Red Steel | World of WarCraft Expansion | G-team Legends Interview | G-team Legends2 | Flash Movies | Anime Section | Patches | Add-ons | Utilities | Photos | GameLive

Minimum Specification (December 2005): P4-2.4GHz CPU | 512MB RAM | 64MB 8192 Video Card | 1.00GB HDD

c:\ No DVD on the cover? You've obviously been a bad little boy and we all know Santa doesn't bring presents for bad little boys...

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ONE WANTS TO FREE HIS PEOPLE...

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USING SPEED KILLS AND THE EXPANDED
FREE-FORM FIGHTING SYSTEM.

SEIZE THE REINS OF A CHARIOT AND BATTLE
THROUGH THE CITY OF BABYLON.

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AS THE DARK PRINCE.

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BATTLEFIELD 2
MODERN COMBAT™

This is no minor skirmish - this is all-out war.

The award-winning Battlefield franchise finally explodes onto the PlayStation®2 , dropping players into the heat of battle with Battlefield 2: Modern Combat™. The game brings the over-the-top action and excitement of the Battlefield series into the modern era with a bleeding-edge arsenal of vehicles and weaponry allowing for the most extreme "Battlefield Moments" yet.

Battlefield 2: Modern Combat features a propaganda fuelled single player campaign where gamers see both sides of a conflict in one of the most treacherous regions in the world – Kazakhstan. Gamers will plunge headlong into the fog of war and must ultimately choose sides in a furious showdown where nothing is as it seems.

Battlefield 2: Modern Combat also delivers the Battlefield franchise's trademark multiplayer action, delivering fierce 24 player online battles. Fighting for one of 4 sides – the US, the European Union, the Chinese, or the newly formed Middle East Coalition - players armed with the latest modern weaponry and can choose to control any of the 30+ vehicles in the game.

Battlefield 2: Modern Combat also boasts advanced online community features, including full clan support, friend's lists, voice over IP, and rankings and stat tracking.

Battlefield 2: Modern Combat™

Break jaws, slam enemies, and throw massive
objects in Kong's third-person battles.

Use weapons, traps, and your team
wisely to survive in first-person as Jack.

Need for Speed™ Most Wanted

From the creators of the critically acclaimed Need for Speed™ Underground series, Need for Speed™ Most Wanted combines the thrill of street racing and tuner customization with the intensity of police pursuits. Need for Speed Most Wanted challenges you to become the most notorious street racer by exploiting a wide-open environment to elude rivals and cops. Get in the driver's seat of the most sought-after race cars—including tuners, exotics, muscle cars, and other sports cars—and experience high-speed, open-world street racing at its best. Tune your ride, win races, evade cops, become the most wanted.
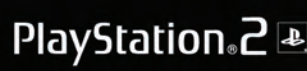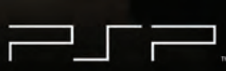
Key features

· Master the art of strategic cop evasion.

· Earn your street rep to climb the Blacklist.

· Customize the look of your ride to manage your heat.

· Tune your sleeper to beat any class of car.

· Take advantage of the dynamic, open world to smoke rivals and cops.

· Take the race online.

THE COPS ARE BACK
THE CHASE IS ON

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NAG
December 2005
COVER DVD

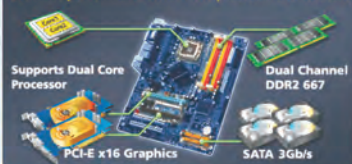Patrick Galloway
Clive Barker's Undying

ED'S NOTE

DECEMBER NAG?
JINGLE YOUR BELLS TO HELL

COVER STORY

THIS COVER STORY IS about as interesting as sour milk, although the office was split between another Quake 4 cover and a F.E.A.R. one. But Quake sells magazines, so in the interests of padding the NAG bank account we went with a cool embossed Quake logo – it's the least we can do for the legend that is Quake. So, instead of dwelling on what isn't interesting, hold onto your boots [hidden clue] for the January issue which should be out sometime in the middle of December – we've got a major scoop next month with our Features Editor flying all the way out to San Francisco to get the story of a lifetime. Okay, it's not that big for everyone – only the Editor really [another clue]. Nothing is going to stop this one. We told James if there's an earthquake to make sure the last thing he does before being crushed by tons of concrete is to send the article, if the plane goes down to throw the DVD clear of the wreckage, if he gets eaten by a dinosaur to enclose the article inside a stainless steel container while inside the stomach of the beast before being digested, if… well you get the idea. He's secretly hoping the plane goes down over a mysterious island with hot girls and an underground bunker.

Keeping us apart

SOMETHING THAT'S BEEN BOTHERING me is this constant chatter about gaming being antisocial. If you need an argument against this kind of idiocy why not take a look at the antisocial situation in our country – we all live behind electric fences and bars and occasionally allow our friends in for the odd Sunday get-together. Most people [not gamers] spend their lives in front of the other entertainment box and although in the same lounge, never say a word to each other. At least if I'm playing Battlefield 2 I'll say sorry when I accidentally take out a platoon of guys on my side with an errant artillery shell. We chat on Internet forums about some really diverse topics. There's a sense of commonality amongst gamers because we all read the same magazines, like the same movies and enjoy the same hobbies. In fact, I think that on a chat per chat scenario we do more communicating than everyone else put together since they've been together. So next time someone tells you you're being antisocial show a little real communication and b1tch slap them.

Issues

WELL THIS ISSUE SEES the first time in a long time that we battled to fit all the reviews in the magazine. We were forced to cut down on previews a little, but games like Quake 4, F.E.A.R. Black & White 2 and The Movies certainly make it worthwhile. It's really great to finally play these games – we've been waiting for them since E3 in May. Not what you'd expect in terms of scoring however and much debate and arguing in the office has produced what you'll read and see in this issue. This was also the first time it became painfully apparent that three or four pages for reviews are just not enough sometimes. Enjoy the games this festive season and make sure when you do get aunty Mavis to spring for that new 3D card she goes big or goes home – remind her that you don't have to visit the retirement home every two months like you do now.

No winner… yet

WE HAVEN'T FORGOTTEN ABOUT the gaming magazine competition and in January we'll definitely have the winner plus some of the other submissions. The reason for the delay is the sheer number of entries we received, and instead of rushing through the whole process, we decided to do it properly. Sorry for the waiting. Besides, this way we ensure you all keep buying the magazine until a winner is announced. ;)

Something you can do for us this Christmas

BESIDES SUPPORTING THE MAGAZINE each month and sending in comments and suggestions on how we can make this rag better, you can also tell everyone you know about NAG and support our advertisers. Make sure you tell whoever you're buying something from that you read about it in NAG so we can continue to get bigger and better, and one day when we're publishing a 200+ page magazine full of 6-8 page game reviews, you'll know that in some small way you made it possible! How was that for a motivational speech? Look, try and see past the fact that by doing this you're going to make us an unstoppable monster that'll rule this industry with an iron fist, demanding ridiculous amounts of respect and love and try and see what's in it for you. I read somewhere that you should use your readership to promote your magazine and I hope I've gone about it the right way.

Anyway, have a good time this holiday season and if you don't celebrate this time of the year why not treat yourself to a present anyway. It's amazing how much some people will discount a graphics card just because it's December.

Michael James [Editor]

GIGABYTE
T E C H N O L O G Y

PURITY...

Inspire Yourself

N411 Zen BooK

Crisp and Wide...
redefines what you will see...

- Ultra vivid display
- Easy grip with wave pattern
- One more wireless connectivity*
- Fully loaded at a mere 2.28kg (5.02lbs)

intel inside
centrino
MOBILE TECHNOLOGY

SPECIFICATIONS:
Intel Celeron M Processor 370
(Celeron 1.4Ghz, 1MB Cache)
14." Wide XGA (1024x768) Color TFT LCD

256MB DDR Memory
40GB HDD
DVD & CD-RW Combo Drive
Microsoft Windows XP Home

* via optional Bluetooth module

14"
16:9

Ins   Del   Pause
Prt Sc   SysRq   Break

- Brighter wider 14" WXGA TFT display
- Slim & light "Zen" style appearance
- Instant music play when power off
- Scrape less cover design

BYTES

FILM DIRECTOR CHANGES PARTNERS

Film director Peter Jackson, renowned for his Lord of the Rings trilogy, has announced

Peter Jackson

that Ubisoft, and not Electronic Arts, will be responsible for the game version of the upcoming King Kong. Apparently Jackson was dissatisfied with the level of input accepted by EA in the making of the Lord of the Rings games. Some sources mention how full of content from the films the games were, but creative direction involves more than just the inclusion of digital assets!

GAMING INDUSTRY PROJECTIONS

Market research firm, Price Waterhouse Coopers, has published an analysis that indicates that videogames will lead the growth of the entertainment industry for the next couple of years. The firm estimates a growth of over 7% per annum for entertainment revenues until 2009, with the gaming sector achieving 16.5%. The largest market will be Asia-Pacific, while the fastest-growing will be Europe. Consoles make up the largest segment of this market in the First World, and the upcoming release of next-generation systems will have significant impact. British company, Informa Telecoms & Media, also published a set of projections. This report forecasts $35 billion in revenue for this year, rising by $20 billion next year - the growth fuelled mainly by the console, handheld and mobile markets. Broadband Internet gaming is also being noted as a major growth sector.

Correction

In the November 2005 issue of NAG Magazine we erroneously omitted a Eurobyte gaming notebook from the Hardcor3 roundup. This notebook will be individually reviewed in the January 2006 issue of NAG Magazine.

THE SIMS 2 HOLIDAY EDITION

EA HAS RELEASED THIS new bundle, which includes The Sims 2 and a selection of holiday-themed items. The additional content revolves around the festive season, allowing players to arrange a visit from Santa and have their Sims decorate their houses or serve up Christmas dinners. Setting up a New Year's party is also an available option. The Sims 2 Holiday Edition contains the original game, The Sims 2, in its entirety, plus 40 new holiday-themed items that allow your Sims to celebrate their holidays in style.

EA AND STEVEN SPIELBERG TEAM UP

These renowned giants in the gaming and cinematic worlds, respectively, have announced a partnership that will yield three games.

"I have been playing EA games for years and have watched them master the interactive format," said Steven Spielberg. "Having watched the game industry grow from a niche into a major creative force in entertainment, I have a great deal of respect for EA's understanding of the interactive format. I'm looking forward to working closely with the team in Los Angeles."

As yet, no further details have been furnished regarding the nature of the games, to be developed at EA's Los Angeles studio, or their release schedule.
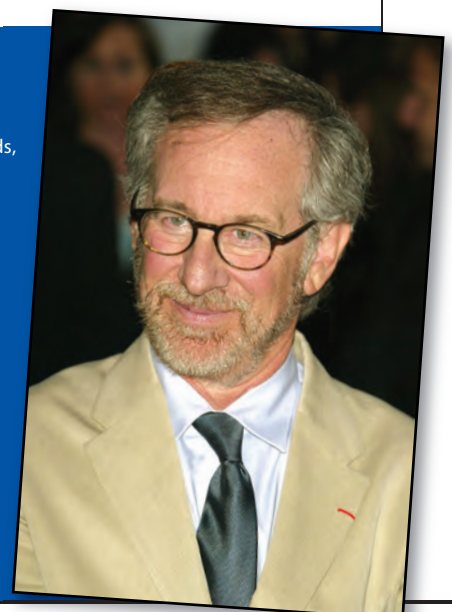
EMPIRE EARTH II EXPANDS

February will see the release of an expansion add-on for Mad Doc Software's Empire Earth II. Titled The Art of Supremacy, the expansion will add new units, battles and campaigns in a variety of locales and historical settings. Additional game modes are being introduced, including Tug-of-War, which will take place across a series of several maps, at each end of which will be one player's home territory – the object of the game is to defeat your opponent on his or her home turf.

"We were thrilled with Empire Earth II, with its reception from the fans and press, with its innovations, and with its take on the series," notes Dr. Ian Davis, CEO of Mad Doc. "Yet there's always something more you want to do, always some way to make a great game even better. We were aching to add the Fealty and Tug-of-War Modes, and I think fans are going to have a lot of fun with these. Those, and the other features we've put into play here, really make the Empire Earth II experience complete."

Other enhancements include improvements to the match-making interface and a new campaign editor.

EA GETS EXCLUSIVE SIMPSONS LICENSE

Electronic Arts has secured the rights to make games based on Fox Television's long-running animated show The Simpsons. EA says it will work closely with Fox's licensing and marketing department, as well as the production company and writers of the show.

"This is something EA's been interested in for years and now game development and technology is at a place where The Simpsons characters and world will really come alive in these games," said Nick Earl, vice president and general manger of EA's Redwood Shores Studio.

COMPUTER GAMES AND VIOLENCE – THE SAGA CONTINUES

The ESA has referenced several recent studies that not only deny any link between computer game violence and its real-life counterpart, but in fact suggest positive, therapeutic effects. This has been prompted by recent attacks on the videogame industry by American activists and politicians. Medical studies, which were quoted, indicate that playing games can help rehabilitate motor functions, particularly in stroke patients, and that immersion in and interaction with virtual environments improve spatial perception. It is ironic that a recently passed legislation, the Violent Videogames Bill, was signed in by the California governor, none other than Arnold Schwarzenegger, the majority of whose films haven't been the most placid, tranquil productions!

WORLD CYBER GAMES MOBILE COMPETITION

FOUR MOBILE GAMERS FROM South Africa have been sent to Singapore to participate in the finals of the mobile portion of the Wold Cyber Games.

"Two finalists were chosen per game with the four official games for the competition being Bruce Lee, Goolie, Mid Town Madness, and Chopper Rescue. For the last couple of months around 5,000 gamers participated in the run up to the finals, uploading their highest scores via GPRS (General Packet Radio Service)," stated David Mole, Exactmobile CEO.

The local winners were as follows: Werner De Lange (36) from Pretoria, for Goolie; Ethen Reuben (27) from Tzaneen, for Mid Town Madness; Christo Janse van Vuuren (23) from Springs, for Bruce Lee; Tammy Brook-Smith (15) from Paarl, for Chopper Rescue. These will be the first local mobile gamers to be awarded national colours from the South African Wargames Union. Colin Webster, President of SAWU (South African War Games Union), says mobile gaming has received full accreditation from SAWU which means tournaments will now be organised. "SAWU will now be looking at the structure of tournaments for mobile gaming so that more value can be added to the people who play in those tournaments. The union will organise provincial and national championships for 2006 and award colours right from primary school colours right up to national colours," he says.

PS3 TO SET THE BENCHMARK FOR DIGITAL ENTERTAINMENT

Speaking at the Tokyo International Digital Conference, Ken Kutaragi said that the Cell processor will be reduced in size to lower power consumption and allow for multi-core architectures. Dual Cells and Mini Cells will be developed, and eventually the Micro Cell will be used to power smaller handheld devices. The Cell processor will allow users to watch multiple HDTV broadcasts at once, and interact with the images by zooming in and rotating them around.

The PS3's capability to run games at 120 frames per second will "become the benchmark for the coming generation of digital life" stated Kutaragi. "At last, a greater interaction with users will be introduced. For example, broadcasting your own video or pictures will become possible and very easy."

VIVENDI TO RELEASE JOINT TASK FORCE

Vivendi has announced an exclusive worldwide agreement to co-publish, market and distribute HD Publishing's Joint Task Force for the PC in 2006 under the Sierra brand.

"Joint Task Force will appeal to gamers worldwide because they can command the front lines in tomorrow's most hazardous war-zones including the Middle East, South America, Central Asia and the Balkans," said Philip W. O'Neil, Chief Operating Officer and President of North America for Vivendi Universal Games. "No other strategy game is as gritty or immediate as Joint Task Force." [www.jointtaskforce.com]

INSIDE KOJIMA'S MIND

Hideo Kojima, creator of Metal Gear Solid, has been publishing a piece of his mind on the Kojima Productions Website since September, and has now started doing the same in English – or rather, his ramblings are translated into English now. The series is titled Hideoblog, and is updated from time to time. His musings cover an interesting range of topics not limited to game development, and sometimes describe his prevailing state of mind. This makes for interesting, if somewhat irrelevant, reading.

On returning to direct Metal Gear Solid 4:

I enjoy creating games. I want to hang on to the creative experience. I only have to prove that I have the willpower to do so. The image of Grandpa Snake is a reflection of the determination of this middle-aged man.

[www.blog.konami.jp/gs/hideoblog_e]

WINDOWS MEDIA CENTER EDITION 2005 UPDATED

An upgrade is now available for Windows Media Center Edition 2005, titled Update Rollup 2, which enables owners of Media Center PCs to stream content to output devices via an Xbox 360, making use of the console's Media Center Extender technology. Other new features introduced by this update include DVD changer support, an Away Mode (which allows the Media Center PC to perform certain operations while in a very low power usage mode), DVD burning improvements and additional HDTV tuner support, allowing up to two programmes to be recorded simultaneously. This update is available through Microsoft's Windows Update service.

"We introduced Windows XP Media Center Edition with a vision to simplify the way people experience digital entertainment on their PC using something as familiar as a remote control," said Will Poole, senior vice president of the Windows Client Business at Microsoft. "Now, Media Center Edition and Xbox 360, together with offerings from hundreds of industry partners, are providing fantastic interactive entertainment experiences that can be experienced throughout the home."

[www.windowsmarketplace.com/mediacenter]

CITY OF HEROES ISSUE 6

TITLED ALONG CAME A Spider, this expansion adds a bridge to the upcoming City of Villains, as well as adding player-vs.-player zones, the latter being to make the two games compatible. In addition, graphical enhancements and new content have been included.

"Issue 6 brings major improvements to City of Heroes and at long last allows player controlled heroes and villains to scrap," said Jack Emmert, Cryptic Studio's creative director. "Now heroes will have a game that looks better and plays better. But what I'm psyched about most is that heroes can use their energies to subdue real player controlled villains that will be lurking about. If villainous players think it's good to be bad, they should remember that crime doesn't pay." [www.cityofvillains.com]

HEROES' VISAS APPROVED

City of Heroes characters on American servers can now be transferred to European servers. Players who experience faster connections with the European servers stand to benefit from this fact. Specific instructions can be found at eu.cityofheroes.com.

FIFTY GREATEST GAMES OF ALL TIME

An annual online poll has been launched which will see the opinions of the gamer reflected in its results. Each year the poll will run for two months from 1 November to 31 December to find the fifty greatest games of all time. Voting is open now at www.greatest50games.com.

Half-Life 2 expansions

Valve has announced a small upgrade for Half-Life 2 titled Lost Coast, which consists of an additional single-player level that shows off new technology being incorporated into the Source engine. The system requirements are listed as being very high, and the Steam interface will warn players with inadequate systems. A full expansion pack, Aftermath, is currently in development.

FlatOut 2

Empire Interactive and Bugbear Entertainment have announced that FlatOut 2 will be released for the PlayStation 2, Xbox and PC in the first-half of next year. The upcoming game will feature even more destructible objects and rewards for causing damage. PC and Xbox versions will support up to eight players in online games, while the PlayStation 2 version will support up to six. Voice communication will be part-and-parcel in all versions.

SO WHAT'S REAL?

The boundaries between reality and virtual reality are becoming ever more blurred, at least in an economic sense. Although most massively multiplayer online role-playing games tend to discourage real currency transactions, the practise is constantly becoming more common. Furthermore, a few such games are founded on the exchange of real for virtual currencies, Project Entropia being a good example. A new record was recently set by Jon "Neverdie" Jacobs, who purchased a piece of virtual real-estate for a staggering sum of $100,000. The virtual resort will allow this player to charge rent for shops in its included mall, and for the 1,000 apartments located on it. The space station comes with a 1,000 unit apartment complex, a shopping mall, sports stadium and night club. Given that this game allows players to redeem game currency for real money, this could prove a valuable investment.

CHIEFS AND PIRATES INCLUDED IN FIFA SOCCER 2006

FIFA Soccer 2006 has recently been released with two additional local soccer teams - Kaizer Chiefs and Orlando Pirates.

"To make the game locally relevant we approached Chiefs and Pirates management, collecting information on the league, teams and individual players for inclusion," explains Wayne Parkinson, business development manager of Electronic Arts South Africa. "The aim is to allow the gamer to interact with the teams and individual players directly during play. We expect approximately 16 million copies of the game will be sold globally so this means increased brand equity for these local teams."

Ensuring promotion of the game on the ground, future releases of FIFA Soccer will contain more local content, while a percentage of local sales will be donated to soccer development funds.

WEB SCORES

Black & White 2 [PC]

NAG [100]	80
GAMESPY.COM [5]	3.5
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	8.2
IGN.COM [10]	8.8

F.E.A.R. [PC]

NAG [100]	96
GAMESPY.COM [5]	4.5
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	9.1
IGN.COM [10]	9.2

Quake 4 [PC]

NAG [100]	79
GAMESPY.COM [5]	4.0
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	8.0
IGN.COM [10]	8.2
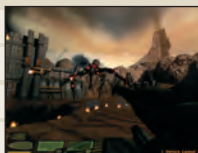
Warhammer DOW Winter Assault [PS2]

NAG [100]	65
GAMESPY.COM [5]	4.5
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	8.3
IGN.COM [10]	8.5

FIFA 06 [PS2]

NAG [100]	80
GAMESPY.COM [5]	4.0
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	9.0
IGN.COM [10]	8.7

Mortal Kombat: Shaolin Monks [PS2]

NAG [100]	77
GAMESPY.COM [5]	3.5
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	7.5
IGN.COM [10]	8.0

NFL Street 2 Unleashed [PSP]

NAG [100]	70
GAMESPY.COM [5]	4.5
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	7.2
IGN.COM [10]	7.8

Castlevania Dawn of Sorrow [DS]

NAG [100]	92
GAMESPY.COM [5]	4.5
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	8.9
IGN.COM [10]	9.3

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

NINTENDO WI-FI AT MCDONALDS

MCDONALDS RESTAURANTS ACROSS THE US will be providing access to Nintendo's Wi-Fi Connection service, with the hardware provided by Wayport.

"This agreement with Wayport will bring countless people together to play games in a single, simultaneous wireless community," said Reggie Fils-Aime, Nintendo of America's executive VP of sales and marketing. "Beginning with free access at participating McDonalds, we have removed one of the major barriers that have kept people from going online to play games."

No word yet as to whether similar arrangements will be made in other territories. Nintendo's upcoming console, currently named Revolution, will also make use of Nintendo's Wi-Fi Connection.

SONY'S PSP MEDIA MANAGER

Sony has released the PSP Media Manager, a one-stop PC application that assists users in getting the files they want off their computers and onto their portable systems. The PSP Media Manager supports a variety of formats including .mp4, .avi, .mpg, .mov, and .wmv for video files, and .mp3, .wav, and .wma for audio. Image formats supported include .bmp, .jpg, .gif, .png, and .tif. Other features include a utility to back up game saves on the PC, as well as a way to find and subscribe to RSS feeds, including podcasts, video blogs, and magazines formatted for the PSP. The software is currently available as a download from the official Sony Media Software site for $19.95. [www.sonymediasoftware.com]

The Matrix Reloaded and Constantine, both starring the legendary **Keanu Reeves**, will be released on **UMD video** at the end of November.

Trials of Atlantis, the Third Expansion Pack for Dark Age of Camelot is now available as a free download to all current and retired players. Players can download the Trials of Atlantis files at www.trialsofatlantis.com/downloads.

2K Games has signed an exclusive worldwide agreement with Sony Pictures to publish and distribute console videogames based on **The Da Vinci Code** film. The movie is being directed by Ron Howard, and is based on Dan Brown's best-selling novel.

Wireless two-player head-to-head action and minigames for up to four players have been confirmed for **New Super Mario Bros.** for the Nintendo DS.

Nintendo has confirmed the release of Electroplankton, True Swing Golf, Super Princess Peach and **Metroid Prime: Hunters** for Q1 2006.

COMMAND & CONQUER THE FIRST DECADE

Scheduled for release in February 2006, Command & Conquer The First Decade will mark the 10th anniversary of one of the largest PC franchises. The special collector's edition will include a dozen Command & Conquer games spanning over the last ten years plus a bonus DVD of commemorative video features including an interview with Louis Castle, who is also co-founder of Westwood Studios the creator of the Command & Conquer franchise. As a special bonus, Command & Conquer fans also have the opportunity to be featured on the exclusive DVD.

"Command & Conquer The First Decade offers RTS gamers a way to relive the history of C&C, and I'm thrilled to see this collection offered in one package," said Louis Castle, VP of Creative Development at EALA. "It seems like yesterday when we were all pleasantly surprised by the way the gaming community wanted to play this new type of strategy game."

The search is currently underway to find the world's biggest Command & Conquer fan that can showcase and prove their undying devotion to the Command & Conquer series via video submission. To find out more information go to www.CommandAndConquer.EA.com.

Command & Conquer The First Decade will combine the following titles:

- Command & Conquer (August 1995)
- Command & Conquer The Covert Operations (April 1996)
- Command & Conquer Red Alert (October 1996)
- Command & Conquer Red Alert The Aftermath (September 1997)
- Command & Conquer Red Alert Counterstrike (March 1997)
- Command & Conquer Tiberian Sun (August 1999)
- Command & Conquer Tiberian Sun Firestorm (February 2000)
- Command & Conquer Red Alert2 (October 2000)
- Command & Conquer Yuri's Revenge (October 2001)
- Command & Conquer Renegade (February 2002)
- Command & Conquer Generals (February 2003)
- Command & Conquer Generals Zero Hour (September 2003)

GALAXIES GETS A FACELIFT

Star Wars Galaxies, massively multiplayer online game will receive an update this month. Additions will include revised character classes, a streamlined interface, real-time clicks, and redesigning of the first 30 character levels. This "new player experience" will be available as a free-to-download, free-to-play standalone game that anyone can download and use to try out the first 10 character levels of the nine new professions.

ON THE HORIZON US RELEASE DATES (SUBJECT TO CHANGE)

RELEASE DATE	GAME	PLATFORMS	GENRE
01 December	AlterLife	PC	RPG
01 December	Playboy: The Mansion - Private Party	PC	Simulation
05 December	WWE SmackDown! vs. RAW 2006	PSP	Wrestling
06 December	The Sims 2	PSP	Simulation
12 December	Gauntlet: Seven Sorrows	PS2, Xbox	Action
12 December	L.A. Rush	PC	Racing
25 December	Nintendogs: Best Friends Version	DS	Virtual Pet
30 December	Armed Assault	PC	Shooter
30 December	Diplomacy	PC	Strategy
30 December	Real World Golf	PC	Sports
30 December	Tony Hawk's American Wasteland	PC	Sports
30 December	Trainz Railroad Simulator 2006	PC	Simulation
30 December	Wartime Command: Battle For Europe 1939-1945	PC	Strategy
30 December	Wild Earth	PC	Adventure
31 December	Beyond Normandy: Assignment Berlin	PC	Action
31 December	Bomberman: Panic Bomber	PSP	Puzzle
31 December	Breed	Xbox	Shooter
31 December	Call of Cthulhu: Beyond the Mountains of Madness	PC, Xbox	Adventure
31 December	Chariots: The First Olympics	PS2	Racing
31 December	Colin McRae Rally 2005	PSP	Racing
31 December	Conspiracy: Weapons of Mass Destruction	PC	Shooter
31 December	Dance Dance Revolution Strike	PS2	Music
31 December	Dead to Rights II	PC	Action
31 December	Deadlands	Xbox	Action
31 December	Dragon Ball Z	PSP	Fighting
31 December	El Matador	PC	Action
31 December	EyeToy Tales	PS2	Other
31 December	EyeToy: Play 3	PS2	Party
31 December	FIFA Soccer 06	X360	Sports
31 December	Galactic Civilizations II: DreadLords	PC	Strategy
31 December	Gooka: The Mystery of Janatris	PC	Adventure
31 December	Gothic II: Night of the Raven	PC	Action
31 December	Gothic III	PC	Action
31 December	Grand Prix 4	Xbox	Racing
31 December	Guilty Gear Isuka	Xbox	Fighting
31 December	Highlander	PC, Xbox	Action
31 December	Invasion	PC, Xbox	Action
31 December	Just Cause	Xbox	Action
31 December	Knights of the Temple	GCN, PC, Xbox, PS2	Action
31 December	Metal Combat	PC	Fighting
31 December	Panzer Elite Action	PC, Xbox	Action
31 December	Private Wars	PC	Shooter
31 December	Shining Lore	PC	RPG
31 December	Shoot to Kill	PC, Xbox	Shooter
31 December	Silent Storm: Sentinels	PC	Strategy
31 December	SingStar '80s	PS2	Music
31 December	Ski Racing 2006	PC, PS2, Xbox	Sports
31 December	SPECNAZ: Project Wolf	PC	Shooter
31 December	SSX 4	DS, X360	Sports
31 December	Street Racing Syndicate	DS	Racing
31 December	Sudden Strike 3: Arms for Victory	PC	Strategy
31 December	Tetris	DS	Puzzle
31 December	Worldwide Soccer Manager 2006	PC	Sports
31 December	Worms	DS, PSP	Strategy

Look & Listen
DVD ▪ CD ▪ GAMES — MP3 ▪ ACCESSORIES

CHARTS

PC Games

#	Title
1	Sims 2 Nightlife
2	Black & White 2
3	FIFA 2006
4	Tiger Woods 2006
5	Half-Life 2
6	Sims 2
7	Fable The Lost Chapters
8	Fahrenheit
9	Grand Theft Auto San Andreas
10	F.E.A.R.
11	CSI Miami Exclusive
12	Dungeon Siege 2
13	Black & White 2 Collectors Edition
14	Prince Of Persia Warrior Within Exclusive
15	SWAT 3

PlayStation 2

#	Title
1	FIFA 2006
2	Need for Speed Underground 2/Burnout 3 Combo
3	Burnout Revenge
4	Tiger Woods 2006
5	Burnout 3 Takedown Platinum
6	Cricket 2005
7	Gran Turismo 4
8	Marvel Nemesis Rise Of The Imperfects
9	Rugby 2005
10	Grand Theft Auto San Andreas
11	Prince Of Persia Sands Of Time/Warrior Within Double Pack
12	Hitman Silent Assassin/Contracts Double Pack
13	Need For Speed Underground Platinum
14	Crash Bandicoot 5 Wrath of Cortex Platinum
15	Ratchet & Clank 3 Platinum

PSP

#	Title
1	Need For Speed Underground Rivals
2	Burnout Legends
3	Tiger Woods 2006
4	Metal Gear Acid
5	FIFA 2006
6	Fired Up
7	Medievil Resurrection
8	Wipeout Pure
9	Everybody's Golf
10	Ape Academy
11	Formula 1 GP
12	Bad Boys (Movie)
13	NFL Street 2 Unleashed
14	Ridge Racer
15	Tony Hawk Underground 2 Remix

DECEMBER AT A GLANCE

3
Gaming
Mayhem Christmas LAN
www.mayhem.co.za

14-18
Competitive Gaming
The CPL Quake 4 Winter Championship
www.thecpl.com

23
Movie
The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe
disney.go.com/disneypictures/

THE CHRONICLES OF NARNIA:
THE LION, THE WITCH AND THE WARDROBE

Andrew Adamson, 38, the highly talented young director of Shrek and Shrek 2, has been charged with bringing the wonderful world of Narnia to life on the big screen, with the release this month of The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe. Upon initially meeting with the producers and Douglas Gresham, the stepson of the late C.S. Lewis who represents the writer's estate, Adamson declared that he wanted to make a faithful adaptation of this much adored work.

"There were rules that I put on myself and rules that the estate probably would have put on me if I had differed from them too far," he says. "But I loved the books so much that I didn't see there was a good reason to change them significantly."

The movie cast includes Liam Neeson, who provides the voice of Aslan the lion and Tilda Swinton as Jadis The White Witch and evil ruler of Narnia who has plunged the land into a permanent winter. Rupert Everett provides the voice of the Fox and Ray Winstone and Dawn French are Mr and Mrs Beaver. The up and coming James McAvoy plays Mr Tumnus the Faun.

The game should also be out this month on DS, GBA, PC and PS2, with a GC and Xbox version to follow in March 2006.

GRAND THEFT AUTO COMES OUT TOPS

The annual Golden Joystick awards this year saw over 200,000 UK gamers voting for their favourites in nineteen award categories. The event, now in its 23rd year, has become one of the game industry's biggest award ceremonies.

Select winners of the 2005 Golden Joystick Awards are:

PlayStation 2 Game of the Year – Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas

GameCube Game of the Year – Resident Evil 4

Xbox Game of the Year – Halo 2

PC Game of the Year – Half-Life 2

Best Film-Based Game of 2005 – Resident Evil 4

The Sun Online - Online Game of the Year – World of Warcraft

Publisher of the Year - Nintendo

The Game One Gaming Innovation of the Year - PSP

Hero of 2005 – CJ from Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas

Villain of 2005 – Officer Tenpenny from Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas

The Girl's Choice for 2005 – The Sims 2

Unsung Hero of the Year - Fahrenheit

Nuts Magazine's Ultimate Game of 2005 - Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas

MULTIPLAYER

CPL WORLD TOUR:
TWO STOPS, TWO WINNERS

DUE TO THE CANCELLATION of the China and Germany stops of the Cyberathlete Professional League World Tour, we have been treated to two make-up events in one month. The first of these, replacing China, was held in Singapore on 15 and 16 October, and the second a week later in Milan, Italy.

The Singapore competition was all Fatal1ty, who walked through the upper bracket like a dandelion in the breeze. But the biggest surprise was that he did not have to beat Vo0 in order to do it. Vo0, the Dutch multiple champion, lost out to the up-and-coming British player Zaccubus in a shocking upper bracket quarter final. With the win, Zaccubus became only the third player to have beaten Vo0, confirming that his fourth place finish at the UK stop was due to more than luck.

However, his tournament ambitions were cut short by Italy's Stermy and Canada's Gellehsak, after a controversial CPL rule breach saw him forfeit several games. Vo0 did not lose again until the grand final against Fatal1ty, where he won the first set 2-1, but was defeated 2-0 in the decider. Stermy took third place on the podium, with Gellehsak just behind in fourth.

"It was a very exciting win in Singapore," said Fatal1ty. "I really wanted to win this one on Creative's home turf, since Singapore is the home of Creative Labs, one of my licensed partners."

In Milan the following week, it became clear that Fatal1ty had not yet managed to overtake Vo0, but that the two were driving right alongside each other in the fast lane. Vo0 had a less-than-smooth run in the early stages of the tournament, but advanced to the upper bracket final after a brief scare against Zaccubus, which this time he won in three close maps. He then beat Fatal1ty 2-0.

In the lower bracket, Ztrider, the Swedish hopeful, mimicked Zaccubus' performance and took Fatal1ty to three maps, but was unable to pull through and had to settle for third. Fatal1ty proceeded to the grand final with Vo0, where he took the first set 2-0, but lost 2-1 in the decider.

After the final stop in Chile in the last week of October, Falat1ty will be one of 32 players who have qualified to compete in the Grand Finals in New York on 22 November.

Current World Tour Standings:

1.	Sander "Vo0" Kaasjager (Netherlands)
2.	Johnathan "Fatal1ty" Wendel (USA)
3.	Benjamin "Zyz" Bohrmann (Germany)
4.	Allesandro "Stermy" Avallone (Italy)
5.	Alexander "Ztrider" Ingarv (Sweden)
6.	Stephan "Stelam" Lammert (Germany)
7.	Andrew "Gellehsak" Ryder (Canada)
8.	David "Zaccubus" Treacy (UK)

[www.cplworldtour.com]

ESWC ANNOUNCES GAME LIST FOR 2006

THE ELECTRONIC SPORTS WORLD Cup is an annual international tournament hosted by the French organisation Ligarena. Like WCG, it is an event for which South Africa holds local qualifiers, sending the winners overseas to compete. E-sportsmen across the globe look to ESWC's game lists as an indicator of titles likely to be supported by the major tournament organisers. That list has now been announced, a little earlier than expected, and shows one interesting addition, Quake 4.

Supported at ESWC 2006 will be:

- Quake 4 (1v1)
- Counter-Strike 1.6 (5v5)
- Counter-Strike 1.6 Female (5v5)
- WarCraft III: The Frozen Throne (1v1)
- Pro Evolution Soccer (1v1)

[www.esworldcup.com]

ASUS Motherboards Deliver True SLI Graphics Performance

Enjoy 32 PCI Express Lanes with A8N32-SLI Deluxe and P5N32-SLI Deluxe

The ASUS A8N32-SLI and P5N32-SLI motherboards, supporting the most powerful processors from AMD and Intel, respectively, adopted several unique technologies to provide users the best video performance and cool and quiet computing operation.

↑ 2-Slot distance :
Provides better airflow to ensure reliable system stability

True Dual x16 SLI - More performance now. Even more later

Unlike previous SLI-ready motherboards that come with two x8 PCI Express slots, two full-bandwidth, 16-lane PCI Express links ensure maximum graphics performance for next-generation GPUs and games. Compared with dual x8 SLI solutions, the dual x16 platform delivers up to 10% efficiency improvement.

Current 3D games have just begun to experience the performance limitations of current dual x8 SLI systems. The next generation games will present more detailed and higher resolution textures that stress the necessity for even higher graphics bandwidth.

Fan-less Designs -
Stack Cool and Copper Heat Pipe

The fan-less designs bring effective and noiseless cooling to counter the heat generated by components. Watch movies, listen to music and play games, and enjoy the peace and quiet. System damages from fan failure is also a thing of the past.

The copper heat pipe directs heat generated by the chipsets to the heatsink near the back I/O ports, where it can be carried away by existing airflow, while STACK COOL 2 effectively transfers heat generated by the critical components to the other side of the specially designed PCB (printed circuit board) for fast heat dissipation.

8-Phase Power design

With the 8-Phase Power design, power modules operate at 15°C lower than conventional power solutions to provide a cool computing environment. Lower temperature also results in lower fan speed for quiet operation and better stability during overclocking.

↑ 8-phase design operate at 15°C lower than conventional power solution
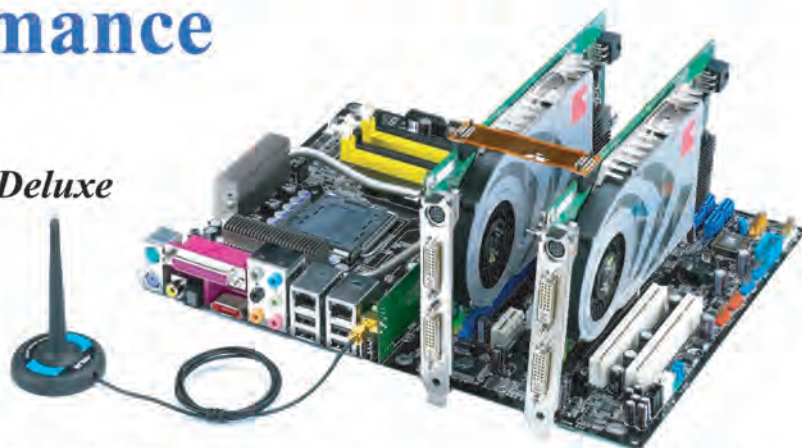
↑ Effectively transfers heat to the other side of the specially designed PCB

The 8-Phase Power design reduces input ripple current and output ripple voltage, keeping the CPU and power modules from high power stress to lengthen component lifespan. Furthermore, it has the advantage of quick transient response. It acts faster than 4-phase power designs to stabilize output current and voltage. This is especially critical when the CPU requires immediate current support when under heavy workload.

Optional fan bundle for water-cooling systems

The optional fan is designed to provide sufficient airflow over the CPU power modules and chipset area when water-cooling and passive cooling solutions are utilized, ensuring effective heat dissipation for the entire system.

SOUTH AFRICA SENDS MIX TEAM TO SINGAPORE

IT IS RATHER UNFORTUNATE for the local gaming community that the World Cyber Games Grand Final – arguably one of the biggest events on the e-sports calendar – tends to take place during the high school and university exam period. The year 2003 saw one such occurrence, where our Counter-Strike representatives, Team Evolve, were unable to send Jannie "Hellhound" van Niekerk and Shaun "Deathsbane" Marx, two of their best players. The same fate has now befallen Identity Gaming, the winners of this year's qualifier. Only one of their players is going to Singapore.

As it turns out, four players from the top two teams are available, and in this light South Africa will be sending a combination of teams: Evolve, Identity, and to make up the fifth member, Bad Habit Boyz. Thus, the team for the WCG Grand Final 2005 will be: Tyrone "Explicit" Lautre (Identity), Jannie "Hellhound" van Niekerk (Evolve), Kevin "Silencer" Murphy (Evolve), Clayton "Destroyer" Nieuwenhuizen (Evolve) and Jaco "Solid" Visage (BHB). Solid was chosen as the fifth member by Hellhound, the acting captain of the South African squad.

Some local observers have expressed concern about the team's chances in Singapore, but the more optimistic have been quick to point out that the 2003 mix team performed relatively well in spite of the community's negative predictions. It should also be remembered that South Africa was one of only two countries to run Counter-Strike: Source at their qualifiers, while the rest of the world stuck to the older version 1.6. This added familiarity with the new game might prove to be a significant advantage for our local players.

The groups have already been drawn in the WCG's characteristic random style, but thankfully they have turned out to be well-balanced this year. None of the top international teams will be playing each other in the first round. Each of the sixteen groups consists of three teams, with only the top team advancing to the single elimination round. South Africa shares a group with Evil Geniuses from Canada and the as-yet-unqualified team from Greece. The tournament gets underway on 16 November.

[www.worldcybergames.com]

QUAKE 4 BEGINS

THE MOST ANTICIPATED GAME in electronic sports history has finally arrived - Quake 4. Within hours, community reviews, demos and trick-jump videos were surfacing on the major international Websites, and a few days later, two new competitive maps and a mod for tournament play had already been released. Quake 4 channels on Quakenet IRC were quickly becoming the most populated on the network, and, mirroring the international scene, #q4 on South Africa's Shadowfire IRC network exceeded even the Counter-Strike channels in number of users.

Millions of duels, team deathmatches and capture the flag matches are being played across the world. Players are discussing the game into the early hours of the morning, and the general consensus is: "We like it." The Quake 4 community is currently expanding faster than any before it. Signups for the CPL Winter 2005 qualifying event broke every record possible, with all 64 spots filling up in less than half an hour. This unprecedented interest forced the CPL to increase the tournament to 128 players, and then again to 256. In all cases, the allocated spots were taken within several minutes.

Quake 4 seems to hold a curious attraction for gamers from all backgrounds, and almost every known star from the past three years is on the CPL's attendee list. Painkiller professionals Vo0, Fatal1ty, Ztrider, Stermy, Stelam and Zyz will compete for the first time with Quake III legends Cooller, Czm, Fox and Toxic, Quake II greats Purri and Immortal, and Unreal Tournament 2004 champions Forrest and Combatcarl. The celebrated Zero4 (Quake III winner of WCG 2001) is even rumoured to be making another gaming appearance.

On the local front, Arena 77 has confirmed that it will be hosting tournaments for Quake 4, with the first being held possibly as early as next month. The game will no doubt feature heavily at the ESWC 2006 qualifiers, and probably at rAge 2006. There has been no official word as yet from the World Cyber Games, but a poll regarding game selection appeared on their Website with the option 'Quake series', and we can only guess what that means. Channel #q4 on Shadowfire IRC, the official home of the South African community, intends to facilitate online leagues and exhibition matches in the near future. If these early efforts are anything to go by, we may be in for a long and enjoyable run of the next major deathmatch game.

[www.quake4game.com]
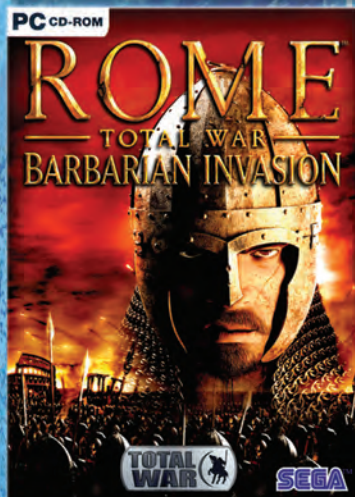
If you have a next-generation offering on the horizon, you're entitled to be concerned about game content, but artist David Cheong is keener than most to ensure that the style and artistry we deserve is part of the package.

DAVID CHEONG
RELIC ENTERTAINMENT

I T'S ALWAYS GOOD TO talk to the people responsible for creating the games we play. But it's often the case that the higher up the ladder you go to get the information you're after, the more likely you are to come away with a heap of words that sound suspiciously like they'd been inserted into the interviewee's head by a PR person. That's why we relished the opportunity to chat to Relic Entertainment artist David Cheong. There is not a corporate line in sight, but a true passion for the feel and content of games is obvious…

"I was classically trained in fine art and I took animation at college," Cheong begins. "I do come to videogames from a fine art direction, though." We imagine it must be tough squeezing substance into games when some publishers simply push for 'me too' titles and speedy money-spinners. "Well, what I look out for are games that have a certain character and style," he continues. "I've just finished playing Destroy All Humans! and I loved it. I mean, it's great to play and it is set in the Fifties – the style is great. Having that kind of art direction really appeals to me. As far as influences go, I find a lot of mine in films and animation, especially Japanese animation." This isn't surprising, especially when you consider his role at Relic. But then Cheong displays more passion for the artistry of products than most we've met in the past, so we decide to discover his favourites. "I'm old-school in that respect," he admits. "The pinnacle of Japanese cartoons for me – and it's telling my age a bit – was Star Blazers. It's the only time I got up at six in the morning just to watch a cartoon."

We're surprised. As previously mentioned, he's certainly not the first developer we've come across who draws influence from Japanese animation, but most tend to yell the words 'Princess Mononoke' at us for for a while. "I do love Miyazaki films," he admits. "But I've only seen as far as Spirited Away. I haven't had a chance to catch that 'somebody's moving castle' one."

This appreciation for the art contained within games is certainly refreshing, and it immediately strikes us that Cheong would be the perfect person to quiz on the 'style over substance' debate, that's been raging on in one form or another since games like Myst started cropping up. "I don't even see Myst as a game," Cheong says bluntly. "It's more like a toy – an art toy. For me a game is something that actually requires game designers to create mechanics. Myst could be created by art alone. A real game is something that has dynamics, rules and an internal structure that propels the vision of the art. That's where I make the distinction."

Of course, it's likely that with the introduction of next-gen machines, the line between the two will become blurred, and it seems that we will be given the best of both worlds. Cheong agrees fully. "It's really exciting," he says. "With all the next-gen software the graphics are amazing, but the bonus is that they are all actually proper games as well. The situation now is that the level of detail is on a par with pre-rendered computer graphics from the early nineties, and it's only going

> " The pinnacle of Japanese cartoons for me – and it's telling my age a bit – was Star Blazers "

to get better."

Of course, Relic has a great interest in the next-gen market, as its current project The Outfit will be launching early next year. And as if he needed to prove his point concerning next-gen graphics to us, he fires up a demo and, sure enough, The Outfit currently looks stunning. He certainly seems more than pleased with the way it's turning out, and tells us with a wide grin that, "Everything is finally locking into place." But where does he see the next-generation machines heading once all the 'oohs' and 'aahs' over pretty visuals have died away? "My vision for the next couple of years is that next-gen games are going to focus on photo-realism," he tells us. "They have the graphical strength to do that, and everybody wants to exploit this power. Also, as the hardware matures, you're going to see more risks taken with art direction. It happened with both the GameCube and PlayStation 2 before. At first it's all graphics, but eventually people get used to fancy looks, and new ideas start to surface. That's the time I'm really looking forward to…" **NAG**

OPINION

DOMAIN OF THE_BASILISK   BY ANTON LINES

Popularity vs. Professionalism

MANY PEOPLE ARE SURPRISED to learn that rocket jumping was actually a bug. Its first appearance was an exploitation of Quake I physics – completely unplanned by id Software. The same is true of strafe jumping, bunny hopping and plasma climbing. In fact, virtually all elements of the trademark Quake-series movement were mistakes. In an interview leading up to the launch of Doom 3, John Carmack called Quake III Arena his biggest failure. And this leads me to the obvious question: does id Software even have the foggiest idea what they're doing?

Well, yes. The straight answer is that Carmack and company know exactly what they're doing. The comments about Quake III were made with regard to commercial viability, and in this sense the game really was id's greatest failure. Simply put: it was far too hardcore for the mainstream market.

Newbies and professional gamers are fundamentally at odds with each other. Everything that makes a game fun for the casual player makes it frustrating for the professional. A casual gamer enjoys a bit of randomness, simple movement, straightforward maps, and weapons which are easy to use and cause a lot of damage. In other words, he or she wants a moderate learning curve. There's nothing wrong with this, but it's wholly unsuitable as a competitive platform.

This is why Counter-Strike is so popular, and also so flawed in the tournament environment. It is the only game where every international competition is won by a different team, and usually an unexpected one. Even the teams widely regarded as the best in the world find it impossible to achieve consistent results. Nonetheless, Counter-Strike remains the casual multiplayer game of choice. Newbies do not feel completely overwhelmed by the established players, and so keep coming back for more. A game like Quake III, on the other hand, can scare off any potential newcomer within a few minutes.

Quake III was a failure because it was as close to perfect as any game has ever come. The unskilled had no chance in multiplayer match-ups, and worst of all, the game had no real single-player. Newbies were not catered for. And here's the thing about newbies: they are where the money is. Doom 3 was a massive success, even though its multiplayer was abysmal. Much

to the dismay of competitive gamers everywhere, id Software has also approached the much-heralded Quake 4 from this point of view. id has no intention of making the Quake III mistake again because it cost them money.

Let's conclude then, with a look at the new game which has everybody talking. The biggest complaint amongst the professional scene is the obvious lack of balanced maps. There is not a single out-of-the-box Quake 4 map which satisfies the requirements of tournament play. Naturally, the two most popular arenas online are The Fragging Yard (1v1) and Lost Fleet, which are coincidentally also the most unsuitable.

But it must always be remembered that developers and professional gamers have opposing interests. Developers want to cater to the largest possible market, while professional gamers want what doesn't appeal to the mainstream. It's hard to blame the developers, considering the harsh reality of the commercial world - the competitive market is simply not large enough yet to be profitable. It's therefore up to the competitive community to adapt the game for their own purposes. Even the great Quake III Arena would not be complete without the ZTN map series and the OSP tournament mod.   **NAG**

> "Newbies and professional gamers are fundamentally at odds with each other. Everything that makes a game fun for the casual player makes it frustrating for the professional."

Bite the hand

SOUTH AFRICANS ARE, IN general, apathetic. Note: I said apathetic, not pathetic. While there is only a subtle difference between the two, there is a difference none the less.

I make this broad sweeping insulting generalisation because it's mostly true. South Africans will gladly take what they're given with little fuss, instead of bothering to ask for things like quality, support or a general improvement in services.

In local gaming, there are companies and individuals who offer services to the gaming public. My lawyers warned me that I can't mention names, but they know who they are.

These services are often lacklustre, banal and ran utterly ineptly. Yet, despite this, the gamers lap it up as if it's ambrosia flowing freely from heaven. Well, stop it, damn your eyes. You gamers out there, quit blindly following whatever two-bit service just happens to have a server for a game you like, and stop advocating specific download services with inane zealotry just because "there isn't better".

It's amazing how quickly people running these services will resort to the "well, there aren't alternatives, so just take what we give you" when confronted with complaints about quality of service. Is it too much to ask if they have an ETA on their manager's common sense?

Then again, I know that my verbal ministrations here are falling on contextually deaf ears.

If you so much as whisper a complaint against certain services, you're quickly shot down with "it's free, stop complaining" then buried six feet down under a mountain of "you don't support local stuff, so screw you."

It's true. I make no big secret of it. I have no 'Proudly South African' gene, I don't wear khaki shorts nor do I know our national anthem. I don't buy local products just because someone purports that 'local is lekker'. I support and purchase things based on quality, not just because a misguided sense of national pride tells me to. What this means is that nine times out of ten I don't purchase or support local products or endeavours simply because, well… they're not up to scratch.

Now don't get me wrong. I understand the function of national pride, and how its low-level mind-control is needed to keep a nation happy. National pride is there to remind people why they support their government and pay their taxes. It's there to lull people into a false sense of community security. That's cool, I'm hip with that.

But there are limits to national pride and how much of it can be used to gloss over low quality service. Just because someone slapped a sticker with our flag on a product or next to their company name doesn't mean you should instantly rush out and throw money at them or their stockholders. Hell, even if the product or service is free, that doesn't mean you should just bend over and take one for the team for the sake of supporting local stuff.

You're not helping anyone if you keep supporting the wrong things. Free doesn't mean you should accept nonsense, local doesn't mean you should compromise on quality and national pride shouldn't prevent you from making informed choices.

Rather support those who put in the effort, do a good job and actually produce, regardless if they have a 'Proudly South African' sticker or not. **NAG**

> " I support and purchase things based on quality, not just because a misguided sense of national pride tells me to. What this means is that nine times out of ten I don't purchase or support local products or endeavours simply because, well. . . they're not up to scratch. "

5 REASONS TO GET THE NEXT ISSUE OF
# SA COMPUTER MAGAZINE

Motherboards - in depth

Graphics cards - overclocked

MP3 players - tested

Virtual currency - exchanged

Digital rights management - investigated

ROBOTICS: THE DAY THE ROBOTS CAME

As robots become more intelligent and more mainstream, they are moving out of the factory and into other areas of our lives

ON SALE 7 DECEMBER 2005

BY JAMES FRANCIS

OPINION

Surviving on the cutting edge
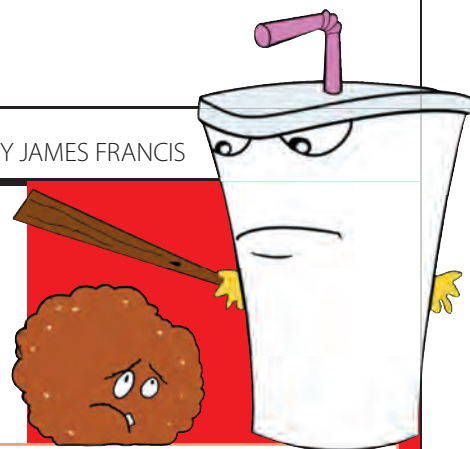
A FEW COLUMNS BACK I told you the PC is falling behind the ever-growing console market. I still stand by that. I think the PC's role as a mainstream gaming device is gone - at least until hardware becomes affordable enough for regular users to keep their machines up to date. The PC has recently been a topic of debate, specifically with the rise of the powerful next-gen consoles looming, and I'm definitely not alone in my perception. But with debate come a lot of opinions and informed insights, many of which paint the PC with a slightly different brush than we'd think. I'm definitely not backing out of my opinion, but the topic has certainly broadened.

One thing that seems core to the PC's current stature is its position as the technology pusher. One thing a PC can maintain is the cutting edge of technology, though at a price. But there clearly are those who are willing to pay for the privilege. This means that by the time the generation after this one arrives, it will take a lot of its queues from the PC hardware market. I'm not sure how vibrant this aspect will remain as media PCs move into living rooms. In that case, the PC will have to rely heavily on the specific genres that it can do best. RTS isn't going anywhere (but I do think devices like the DS will encroach into that market with nifty touch-screen displays) and the latest batch of first-person shooter titles have me reeling. Quake 4 is impressive and Serious Sam 2 turned out to be what we wanted. Call of Duty 2 and Brothers in Arms: Earned in Blood actually take WW2 shooters a step up. And then there is F.E.A.R., arguably the best FPS since the first Half-Life. Console FPS titles are a breed onto themselves and you shouldn't regard them as any lesser than the PC genre. But the FPS seems to be getting out of the rut it's been stuck in for the past few years (bar such gems as Far Cry).

In Japan the PC also seems to be pulling its weight. According to Edge's coverage of the JAMMA arcade event in Japan, PC boards are helping companies like SEGA revive the Japanese arcade industry, since the technology can be kept more up to date when designed. DirectX boards are particularly popular because Japanese developers like the platform and it makes porting of games easier. There's a certain irony in PC technology fuelling a new wave of arcade titles, but the Japanese arcade market is both very cut-throat and pretty lucrative once you can entice people to put money in your machine. SEGA's main revenue stream remains its arcade business. In that kind of an environment you have to make sure you are on the most powerful and versatile hardware on the market. Until the 360 and PS3 arcade boards arrive, that means the PC will still be a big player even after the consoles get to the party.

So my criticism of the PC still stands. But it's not quite dead yet. The PC still has a role to play as the forefront and highly turbulent frontier of gaming technology. If only it had a more vibrant indie budget game market (something companies like TellTale Games are trying to breach with the recent Bone game), then it would be a whole different ballgame. **NAG**

> " One thing that seems core to the PC's current stature is its position as the technology pusher. One thing a PC can maintain is the cutting edge of technology, though at a price. "

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INBOX

EVIL LETTERS

FROM Johan
SUBJECT Crazy Frog Song

Please put this on the cover DVD of the new NAG.

No. It sucks. I can never understand how people [not gamers, the general public and obviously you] latch onto simple mindless things like this and then want it stuck on everything. It's not like we all used to live in caves and swing from trees you know. **NAG Ed.**

FROM WJB
SUBJECT A Question

I subscribed recently to NAG and I would like to know why in all of your reviews it never says what happens in the game? Do you guys only play the demo or are you trying to make us curious about the game's content? A good example is that I still do not know what the story in Half-Life 2 is and the game has been available for more than a year. I bought the game and I'm currently trying to install it. Another example is your review on Pariah. Nowhere does it say what you are playing. I suggest you include more of the plot and story in your reviews.

The reviewing process is a little complicated for a magazine because we're limited by space, so only the most pertinent topics are covered. For example, in the Black & White 2 review the game mechanic is important enough to discuss in-depth with extra boxes about the creature, the miracles and wonders to make up the balance. I do feel most magazine reviews are a little short. But on the upside, because you're forced to condense the experience into a few hundred words, it presents a much clearer picture of the overall game – if you really want to and have the time, patience and energy, you can also read the 10,000-word long Internet reviews that cover every

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tiny detail in-depth with 500 screenshots in tow. In this age of information overload, the reason I prefer magazines over the Internet is the condensation of important information. Because we have limited space we're forced to pick 20 screenshots out of every 500 we take, and much like the text we're more careful and selective about what we use. We also try not giving away the plot in the game because uncovering the story should be part of the fun. **NAG Ed.**

FROM George
SUBJECT Grievous Complaint

If ever I had a tough letter to write, this is it. My challenge is to convince you that NAG respects nothing and no one. Without going into all the gory details, let's just say that there is something grievously wrong with those less than ambitious New Age freeloaders who make conditions far worse than could ever have been the case without your extremism-orientated efforts. Shame on the lot of them! If NAG succeeds in its attempt to develop a Pavlov reflex in us, to make us afraid to justify condemnation, constructive criticism, and ridicule of it and its ignorant, odious ranting, it'll have to be over my dead body. You probably know exactly what I mean. This is not rhetoric. This is reality. *[Snip, mindless ranting goes on for a while, ED].*

Sometimes crazy people send us mail. Imagine if our advertisers knew the kind of crackpots they were spending their money on to try and talk to. I shudder. **NAG Ed.**

FROM Cliff
SUBJECT Hey look dad, there's postman Michael James

If Michael James is reading this he is probably thinking about himself driving through the wonderful gaming metropolis of Nelspruit, on an expensive all expenses paid trip in his new BMW drinking French champagne and greeting all the Mazda 323 drivers who play Counter-Strike and regularly stuff chicken feathers down their AMD CPU coolers. Well, in amongst all that, when do you guys reply or even check your e-mail inbox? I myself and quite a number of my friends have also sent in about 20 letters to NAG to ask them questions about things or for the most eclectic SPCA sponsored chicken foot scratch. Well, that was from the 27th of July, and neither of us has received a response. OK, I understand that you guys are busy with the other 270 (more or less?) letters from the rest of South Africa, but still how long does your so-called 'letter answering system' take to answer the mail? If there is a question you guys cannot answer, please let us know, or at least tell us where to get the info from. You guys are so busy you even forgot to put the badger in the August issue – I mean, surely that is something you check. I spoke to my friends and other NAG readers and they say that they won't worry about writing to you guys anymore, as there is no point. Do you guys

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even read half the letters or are they just deleted to the 'spam folder'? If you want to publish the letter please send us the reply, and then tell us that you'll put it in the magazine, or don't bother at all with the whole letter thing.

So you think getting bitchy is the route to published fame? It's not. But in this case I felt something had to be said. You say you and your friends have sent in 20 letters and never received a reply - highly unlikely. I reply to every item of mail I get unless it's obvious rubbish from a moron. Just so you know replying to letters isn't an exact science and it just takes time as my 'system' with letters is a little flawed. For example, this letter was sent early September and now it's only going into the December issue. This pattern does change throughout the year and sometimes I'll only slip a few weeks behind. Sometimes, when it all gets too much, I just delete a whole batch to 'catch up'. At least I don't use an automatic reply system and actually take the time to cut and paste the same thank you message over and over - unless something needs to be said. Well I guess this reply in print puts your theory out the window and if this is exactly the kind of reaction you were baiting me for, then well done. I rose to the challenge and you won. The other question I have for the general audience is this: does everyone really expect to get a reply from a magazine they sent a letter to? Send mail to letters@nag.co.za with your comments… but please don't expect a reply until June 2006. **NAG Ed.**

FROM Chevron7
SUBJECT an Idea

Since NAG is a gaming magazine, why not have a section where readers can ask for help when they get stuck in a game. Obviously you'll only print the most common problems. I thought of this while trying to find a walkthrough for Another Code: Two Memories. Just after the puzzle, where you blow the dust off the painting, there's a door that needs a code and I have absolutely no idea where to find it. I've tried overlaying the two paintings but I'm still stuck.

We'd love to do something like this, but it'll mean hiring a whole human to answer the phone and look up stuff on the Internet, and considering that nobody is going to pay money for something they can do for themselves in seconds, this concept is about as useful as a submarine made out of cork. **NAG Ed.**

FROM Some Reader
SUBJECT Price

What would be a better buy – NAG, Windows Magazine or PC Format?

Why don't you rather get Decision Making Monthly instead? Then if you make a bad choice you can sue them and not us. Just remember one important thing: don't take sweets from strangers. **NAG Ed.**

FROM Garth
SUBJECT Anti-anti-violence campaigners

First, I would like to congratulate the staff at NAG for the production of a great magazine, with the exception of Miktar Dracon's illegible column.

The foundation of this letter, if you did not get the subject, is the people who have problems with violent games. I love you all! You give me some of the best laughs that I have all week. So once again, thanks. But of course, one can always have too much of a good thing and this has to be it!

Issue after issue (I don't remember any without) there has been at least one raving extremist who demands to know "why age restrictions aren't enforced?" or "why is there so much blood in games today?" The answer to the first question, if only you would think for a second, is another question: who should be doing the enforcing? An age restriction is there as a, listen closely now, guideline (sorry for the CAPS but some people just don't get it) [Don't worry I took them out, Ed]. It is not the responsibility of the distributor to enforce the age restriction, but rather that of the parents. If I were a toddler (referring to Robert's letter from the September issue) and my mom busted me with Doom 3 she would kick my lily white ass! Who gives the kids the money and doesn't check what the hell they bought! Therefore stop whining to NAG and go complain in the YOU about what is plainly a social problem. The answer to the second question was plainly explained by the Editor in the September issue: supply and demand. I love violent games and the market caters for people like me. So the issue can be summed up in one wise saying: "If you can't stand the heat get out of the kitchen" - more plainly said, "If you don't like the food then you can go hungry."

So you write to complain about too many letters in NAG about who is responsible for enforcing age restrictions and violence in games in general by writing to NAG with a letter about violence in games? **NAG Ed.**

FROM Rudolph
SUBJECT console PATCHES?

No one can deny that the trend nowadays after a new PC game has been released is to anticipate the public-making of one or more patches for said game [trend? Ed]. This is all fine and well for people owning a computer. But what about those in possession of a console? Surely the games released for the PlayStation 2 and Xbox are not without their share of bugs and added features. I don't own a console, so I was just wondering if and how this issue is handled. I imagine Xbox Live would be a viable means of distribution as well as the Internet for PS2 owners, but I'm not sure if this is the standard or even if it's done this way. Thanks for a great a magazine and keep up the good work!

When they find a bug in a console game they call it a hidden feature and everyone tries to ignore it. **NAG Ed.**

FROM A Gaming Question
SUBJECT Jean

I know a myriad of people asking the same question and I'm sure you guys at NAG will know the answer. Why is it that so many PC games come to consoles, but not nearly enough console games come to the PC? For example, I know many people who would love to own a PC version of the latest Mortal Kombat or Grand Turismo 4 or even the more recent Final Fantasy games, and these are just a few examples. However, if you look at console games, many of them have originated on the PC, such as Grand Theft Auto, Quake III or Medal Of Honor. Now I know many people will say that there's not a large enough market for console games to come to the PC, but that is simply not true. The market is everywhere. If the consensus is asking the same question I'm asking, then obviously there is a market for it. And besides, console to PC emulators exist for a reason. The reason is that PC gamers want the games from consoles.

However, working with emulators can be tedious. Others would then say the answer is to just buy a console. People will have their own opinions about gaming on the PC and gaming on a console, but the truth is you will never convert all people to gaming on only a single platform – the variety is just too great and the variety is growing. I'm not suggesting that every console game and every arcade game should come to the PC, but at least all the popular ones should. And all popular PC games should go to the console as well. What's wrong with sharing all games amongst all platforms if the demand is there?

The reasons, mostly good ones, range from licensing issues and exclusivity between formats, ease of developing for the consoles and the target market. If you consider the relatively small PC market, there's little point in developing a successful console game on the PC versus the income it'll generate. Also, not all console games will translate well to PC. Fighting games usually require the deft use of a controller, something that doesn't translate well into a keyboard and mouse configuration. Besides, any self-respecting PC gamer should also own at least one console – especially when the next-generation versions hit. **NAG Ed.**

FROM S0liTaRy SA
SUBJECT Lanning in the future

Here's an odd question. Will the LAN be 'cool' and 'popular' in the future, or will it be as it has always been - for the educated, interested gamer? You must understand, I'm taking this question seriously, because I seem to see a path that may lead gaming at a LAN to that level of popularity around the world, and all it takes is for certain companies to take the push. I'm not saying LANs are not very popular even now, rAge and WCG have proven that they are. But let's admit it; going to a LAN has never broken the ice when it comes to attracting the great population

of zombie sheep that is our race. After the invention of the 'nerd' sometime in the 1980s, it almost became certain that the LAN would be frowned upon by the wider world, but I think where a PC LAN has failed, something else has made it. A craze still sweeping people from their lives to the lives of gamers is the console – the console has broken the wall between our small percentage of gaming folk and the wider world. The PC is still the 'nerd machine', but when it comes to having a PlayStation 2, it is almost a fashion accessory. Ask anyone (bar PC zealots) and they'll say they either have or want a PlayStation 3, Xbox 360 or (dare I say it?) a Nintendo Revolution, and they all think they will rock, will come with great features and will take up at least four years of that person's life. If consoles stay so popular in the future, then wouldn't it be right to say that going to a LAN would become popular?

Somehow I just can't see 700 gamers arriving at rAge with their PlayStations. The LAN is still very much the domain of the PC, but they also said we'd never need anything more than 20MB of hard drive space. **NAG Ed.**

FROM Stephan
SUBJECT Availability: October issue

How does your distribution work? I went to Exclusive Books, CNA, and Incredible Connection at Tygervalley Shopping Mall, Bellville, Cape Town on Monday 26 September 2005 (at 19:00 prior to closing) and none of them had the October issue. CNA and Incredible Connection had no magazines, while Exclusive Books still sold the September issue. Is the October issue available, do certain provinces/stores enjoy priority, or is the 'News Box' on your Website incorrectly stating availability?

Usually [I use this word carefully] the magazine is on shelf between the Tuesday [rare], Thursday [common] and the Friday [complete distribution] of the week specified.

There are many thousands of magazines and thousands of retailers involved, so this process is as exact as it's ever going to be and that's not very. I hope this helps. **NAG Ed.**

a conversation with the man who makes GODS

Recently, the NAG staff briefly mused on the classic titles we'd like to see sequels or follow-ups to. In-between cries of Rise of the Triad and Flashback were the names of several Bullfrog titles. Bullfrog? It's probably not surprising that the majority of new gamers have never heard of arguably the finest British and one of the best international developers in gaming history. That's because the studio has long since disappeared under an Electronic Arts buyout and Peter Molyneux himself eventually left the house to form Lionhead.

But the new studio hasn't quite gotten gaming hearts pumping the same way classics like Theme Hospital, Dungeon Keeper, Magic Carpet, Syndicate and Populous did (to name a few). This season's hottest simulation title, The Movies, might change our perception, though, and signal a return of Molyneux to an age where games weren't just judged by the units they moved off the shelf.

In a quick but exclusive interview with NAG, Molyneux talked about the new games, the challenges for today's games and his upcoming title Project Dimitri.

"I honestly believe that innovation shouldn't be restricted to any specific area, but innovation is needed from us as developers in all aspects to create more and more realistic worlds."

Fable (2004)

Black & White (2001)

Dungeon Keeper (1997)

Theme Hospital (1997)

Hi-Octane (1995)

Three titles for release in relatively quick succession are not what Lionhead fans are accustomed to. Was this intended, or a coincidence? What are your hopes for Black & White 2, Fable: The Lost Chapters and The Movies?

This was not planned, but the result of our desire not to release games until we are happy with them. But it has meant that it has been a phenomenally busy time at Lionhead with virtually every person at Lionhead in crunch mode simultaneously. The best part of this period is that all three games are amazing and we hope that everyone enjoys playing them.

To date, Lionhead has applied its hand to the God-sim and RPG. Would you experiment with any other genres if the right concept came about?

Absolutely. In fact, The Movies is really a life simulation, so that shows we are not afraid to experiment. In fact, at Bullfrog we released a number of different genres such as shoot-'em-up with Magic Carpet and RTS with Dungeon Keeper. So I think that Lionhead would consider developing a game of any genre so long as we could think of the right angle.

Details on the next wave of Lionhead titles have been kept under wraps with only a brief mention of Project Dimitri. Could you divulge a little for us on this and what the near-future holds for Lionhead?

Sorry, I really can't say too much at the moment, except that in Project Dimitri you get the chance to relive your youth, whatever it might have been, and that I think it is an extremely exciting concept.

Comments attributed to you at the Leipzig Games Convention regarding the Nintendo Revolution have sparked interest amongst forums and blogs. Have you been witness to Nintendo's vision and do you believe it will offer the 'revolutionary' gaming experience that many are hoping for?

I think the Nintendo controller is an extremely exciting development and that it is very likely to start a revolution, as it represents a new way of controlling games. And in that sense, it's far more likely to change the way games are designed than faster hardware, as it means we can create games which are just not possible with existing controllers.

Purely in terms of creativity, the industry at large appears to be stuck in a bit of a rut. Do you think this will change and what do you believe will spark this, new hardware, publisher policies, etc.?

Inevitably, when you get to the cusp of next generation hardware it always seems like we get stuck in a rut. There are lots of reasons why creativity is especially important for the next generation games - new

controllers, the fact that many of the new machines will be online, and the realisation that our audience expects us to raise our game, means that you will see some stunning games and some big leaps forward as we become familiar with the new hardware.

Digital distribution and episodic content have been buzz-words in the videogames industry for longer then we care to remember. Is this an area that Lionhead has any interest in? Will being able to extend a title's life-cycle along these lines change the way developer's think about games?

Well, the possibility of digital distribution is a fantastic opportunity, but we have yet to see it taking off in a really big way. But when it does, I'd love to see Lionhead games becoming available this way.

Aspects such as real-time physics and constantly evolving AI are becoming significantly important in videogames. What areas do Lionhead see as providing the means to continue forward and keep innovating?

I honestly believe that innovation shouldn't be restricted to any specific area, but innovation is needed from us as developers in all aspects to create more and more realistic worlds. But we also need to innovate on the ways in which games are played in these fantastic settings, and that is really the bigger challenge. This means that we are going to have to innovate in all areas, but I would single out AI as a key area of ensuring that next generation games really are next generation playing experiences.

Shifting over 1.5 million units and with The Lost Chapters having been recently released, surely you've begun to think about a next-gen sequel to Fable? Additionally, can we ever expect B.C to make a return?

I am sorry, but I just can't comment on this at the moment.

Your relationship with Microsoft appears to be very cosy. Can we expect this to continue on the Xbox 360, or are you looking at all next-gen formats with equal appreciation?

Microsoft is a fantastic publisher and is the natural home for Fable and its future. Lionhead is also developing for other formats and will have close relationships with the relevant parties.

What's the balance and importance for Lionhead in establishing franchises and creating original concepts?

The freedom to create original concepts is the reason why we founded Lionhead, but we also value the freedom to re-visit those concepts and improve, refine and add to them.
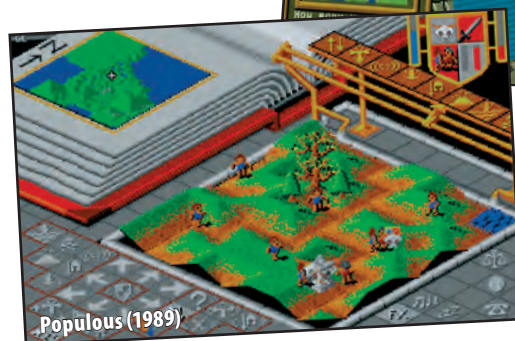
Magic Carpet (1994)

Theme Park (1994)

Syndicate (1993)

Powermonger (1990)

Populous (1989)

"The freedom to create original concepts is the reason why we founded Lionhead, but we also value the freedom to re-visit those concepts and improve, refine and add to them."

2005 GAME AWARDS

Cliche? Trite? Old? Boring? Yes, Game Awards are definitely the biggest shams in the industry and really just a way for the industry to pat itself on the back. But here at NAG we've long since stopped caring about what WE thought the best games of the year were. No-one can agree, anyway. So once again it's up to the NAG readers.

Head over to the NAG 2005 Game Poll and put down your choices for the best games of the year - anything that appeared from January to December in the magazine. Then give your reason why you loved it - the best comments make it into the magazine.

And what can you win? Nothing. Isn't the chance to have a say enough? Probably not, but there you have it. Besides, if you DON'T vote, who knows what might win...

Visit **awards.nag.co.za** and choose your winners. Entries close 5 January 2005, so get to it!

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PREVIEWS

Civilisation IV

The preview code we received, though buggy, has a lot of potential. The overhaul of the interface might put old hands off, but it's actually a major improvement on the game.

Ninety Nine Nights

Microsoft has its work cut out - still - to capture the Japanese market. Fortunately the 360 will have a slew of Japanese developed games to lure gamers in. Q Entertainment's Ninety Nine Nights is part of this stable and has been wowing audiences with its huge combat scenes and stunning graphics.

GTA Liberty City Stories

The PSP still lacks that 'killer app' that will catapult it into the hemisphere it's been eyeing all this time. Grand Theft Auto is the ticket and for good reason: half the NAG office wants to buy a PSP just for this title.

THIS IS WHERE IT starts going downhill. After the December/ January period, the game drought sets in and gamers are left wanting for the next big set of game releases. But fortunately with so much new hardware on the scene, 2006 might differ as publishers rush titles out. Thanks to the flood of titles released now, space is an issue so the previews are a bit less. Still, take a look at what's coming up...

ONIMUSHA: DAWN OF DREAMS

DEVELOPER Capcom   **PUBLISHER** Capcom   **PLATFORMS** PS2   **RELEASE DATE** TBA

Gone are the numbers! The Onimusha series lives on, though. This time around, the game is set 15 years after the former. Expect better visuals and AI as well as a larger world. The major gameplay change comes in the form of an ally character that you pick. Players can order this character to attack, defend and so on, plus switch between characters during the game. No telling on whether two gamers can play the game this way, which would make a nice addition to the series.

GEKIDO

DEVELOPER NAPS Team   **PUBLISHER** NAPS Team   **PLATFORMS** PSP   **RELEASE DATE** TBA

NAPS Team might be Japanese, because we've never heard of Gekido. But the game has appeared on the PlayStation, Game Boy Colour and Game Boy Advance. It's a fighting game of some sort, seemingly in a fantasy setting, and NAPS promises that the PSP game will shift gears on the series significantly. It even promises to overhaul and change the fighting genre. What kind of fighting? We'll know soon, since it is coming to Europe at least.

JUMP

DEVELOPER Gizmondo   **PUBLISHER** Gizmondo   **PLATFORMS** Gizmondo   **RELEASE DATE** TBA

Parkour is that heady sport where the urban environment is your playground. If you have ever watched a video of a bunch of guys running up walls, jumping through staircase railings and making death-defying jumps across buildings, that's Parkour. The Gizmondo is getting a game based on the sport and while it looks shoddy (and we don't intend getting a Gizmondo), it's a nice idea and seeing something like this on, say, the PSP would be excellent.

THEY HUNGER

DEVELOPER Black Widow Games   **PUBLISHER** Black Widow Games   **PLATFORMS** PC   **RELEASE DATE** TBA

Fans of the original Half-Life might remember They Hunger, a great series of mods in which players had to traverse a world filled with zombies. Well, it's walking dead time again as the team behind the project announced They Hunger using the source engine. It will be a low cost title, though, and you can probably get it through Steam when released. Perhaps we'll see another decent looking game from the Source engine other than Half-Life 2 (and Dark Messiah).

VIETCONG 2

DEVELOPER Pterodon   **PUBLISHER** 2K Games   **PLATFORMS** PC   **RELEASE DATE** Q4 2005

By the time you read about it here, the game will probably already be out. And there is no doubt that die-hard fans, who fought through the original and expansion, are aching for some more seriously tactical and hardcore jungle action. If Vietcong 2 simply follows in the footsteps of the series, revving up the realism and AI along the way, it can't lose. Here's hoping the series wasn't dumbed down to pull in more fans.

X-MEN LEGENDS II

DEVELOPER Raven   **PUBLISHER** Activision   **PLATFORMS** PSP   **RELEASE DATE** Q4 2005

The PSP version of Raven's X-Men Legends sequel is looking pretty good. The developer isn't listed as responsible for this version (no-one is, it seems), but if the game has the solid gameplay of the first title, plus support for multiple players connected together, this could be a big hit. It's looking really good, so this is bound to be a hit in some form. Is the PSP game drought finally coming to an end?

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

F.E.A.R.

It rocks. Don't even wait for our review. Just go and buy the best single-player FPS since Half-Life. Then, when you've had enough of the action and creepy little girl, try the best multiplayer since Half-Life. Once that's done, start begging Monolith to make Blood 3 with this engine.

Black & White 2

A big animal, a worshipping populace and a few wars to win – it's almost Black & White Redux. B&W 2 isn't as much a sequel as a reworking of the first to give it more of a game feeling. Unfortunately, the creature training has been dummied a bit, but it saves the chore of guessing what it has and hasn't learned yet.

Pursuit Force

"Once you get into it, it's fun," the reviewer explained. We nodded and watched him fall off another car. It looks difficult but cool at the same time. And we know PSP players are so desperate they'll try anything once.

VITAL INFO

■ **Platforms**

PC PS2 XBOX NGC 360

■ **Developer**
Neversoft

■ **Publisher**
Activision

■ **Supplier**
MegaRom [011] 234 2680

■ **Genre**
3D Action

■ **Release Date**
Q4 2005

Wild Action meets the Wild West in this open-world shooter

GUN

COWBOYS ARE PROBABLY AS popular as dinosaurs. These are relics from the past we can't seem to get enough of. It might puzzle some why the antics of powdered-wig royals from the 17th century don't garner the same appeal, but maybe that's because they lacked guns or large teeth. Gun makes it obvious that Neversoft's first original title in nearly ten years meets one of the criteria. The boys that made us scream at the Tony Hawk games are heading to the bad-ass Wild West. Players take on the role of Colton White, a trained hunter with a few names to check off his list. When someone attempts to assassinate his father on a steam ship dad throws Colton overboard, but not before giving him a medallion and revealing that he isn't his father. Then the ship explodes, so the assassination turns out to be successful. Colt heads for Dodge City to find a prostitute whom his dad said could help him.

This is pretty much where the action starts. If you are aching for some over-the-top gunplay set in an authentic Western setting, Gun might be your ticket. Colt takes on scores of bad guys in Gun, clearly because someone wants him dead. The game itself plays off in an open world, so Gun subscribes to emergent gameplay mechanics. To further the story, play the main missions or go kill some time in the numerous side quests. These aren't as obvious and demand that the player explores the world, talks to characters and visits locations one hears about. But even without these, there seems to be an abundance of stuff to do for that authentic dirt-in-your-teeth Wild West feeling. Activities include gambling, train robberies, rustling cattle, befriending Indians, hunting down robbers and, of course, causing saloon brawls. Hell, if you want to shoot

someone, sending them flying backwards through saloon doors, you can.

Colt is well equipped for his journey. Combat takes place on foot or on a horse. Shooting wrists will let the target drop his gun, while hitting ankles will disable a bad guy. Rag doll animation helps things looking right, so launching an arrow into a rider's head will see him tumble off his horse quite differently than three bullets to the gut. Still, it can get overwhelming, so the obligatory bullet-time (called Quickdraw here) is in place as well. This will allow Colt to take lightning-fast shots against multiple opponents. Quickdraw recharges on how well you play, so headshots are key here. Neversoft is toying with the idea that players can create chain combos in Quickdraw by hitting multiple targets accurately.

The focus is entirely on the single-player experience, so there won't be any multiplayer. Scripted events will be a large factor in driving the story, but this will be balanced by the non-linear game world. You can literally ride off into the sunset if you want, but you might discover a camp of hardened, cactus-eating bandits when you get there.

Let's be frank; Gun doesn't look that great, but the game is trying to do a large amount of stuff in a diverse game world. So, just like the GTA titles you can't judge this game on its visuals because the gameplay will do most of the talking. While you can't have your own beans cook-out in the desert (then again, we don't know that you can't), Gun is likely to keep you busy for a while when it's released. Knowing Neversoft, it will also be highly playable and pretty addictive.   **NAG**

Firstlook

Too spectacular? Silicon Knights finally realises its combat game on the 360.

TOO HUMAN

IN THE LAST TWO years Microsoft has been going around gobbling up prime studio real estate. Bungie, creator of Halo, was a big one, as were the purchases of former Nintendo loyalists Rare and Silicon Knights. The latter you'll remember for the excellent Eternal Darkness on the GameCube. But it took over six years for machines to get to the level to handle Too Human, a game first announced for the PlayStation, then the GameCube, then the Xbox and now, finally, the 360. The reason for this seems to be what the game is about: combat against hundreds of opponents on a massive battlefield.

In Too Human players take the role of Baldur, a cybernetic god who has to defend mankind against an onslaught of AI

killing machines. With talks of Cylons, Borgs and D'aleks aside, the name refers to the god being too human. As such, our metallic deity can upgrade himself as the game progresses, giving him new abilities and improving current ones as well as change how he looks.

But what is it? It's the first in a trilogy. In the first game an ancient machine forces the god's hand by creating and arming an army of marauding machines which want to take out all things fleshy. As things are with gods, you don't have an engineering department that can handle this, so it's time to get hands-on. Silicon Knights wants to create the ultimate combat action title here. A major feature is that the ranged and melee combat will transition seamlessly, allowing players to make huge and devastating combo attacks against large numbers of opponents. Since you play a god, assume lots of hapless bad robots being flung to the far corners of the screen as Baldur drives down into a group of them. Basically, things ought to be larger than life with scores of bad guys, large bosses, and a main character that can bitch slap the entire orc army from Lord of the Rings back into their hole.

A change from the normal 3D convention is that players won't have any control over the camera. Silicon Knights refer to the set camera angles in Eternal Darkness - here it helped elevate the suspense of the game. In Too Human the camera will apparently select the most cinematic point of view for players to best view the action, though if this will work remains to be seen. Eternal Darkness was a survival horror with slow gameplay, so it makes sense there. But how an action title will carry itself when players have to rely on the game to determine their point of view remains to be seen. One advantage of this,

though, is that both analogue sticks can be used in combat. The fighting system will be contextual-based, and similar to games like Prince of Persia, player attacks will depend on where they stand, what attack they use and what direction it is in - for example, slamming a foe against a wall because there is a wall. This shows that the game wants to go beyond the conventions of button-bashing found in 3D action titles. To keep things looking good, Hong Kong action choreographers have been hired as consultants on the combat styles and animations. On top of that, Silicon Knights says the animation frame count is well beyond any other game out there. Expect some silky-smooth moves in the final.

The game will ship with Live support and SK's Denis Dyack hints at a Diablo-style system. Too Human is the first in a trilogy and players will be able to take their god from the one game to the next. But before that happens, Too Human first has to be a success. With Silicon Knights behind it, we're willing to put our money on this 360 god-stomper.   **NAG**

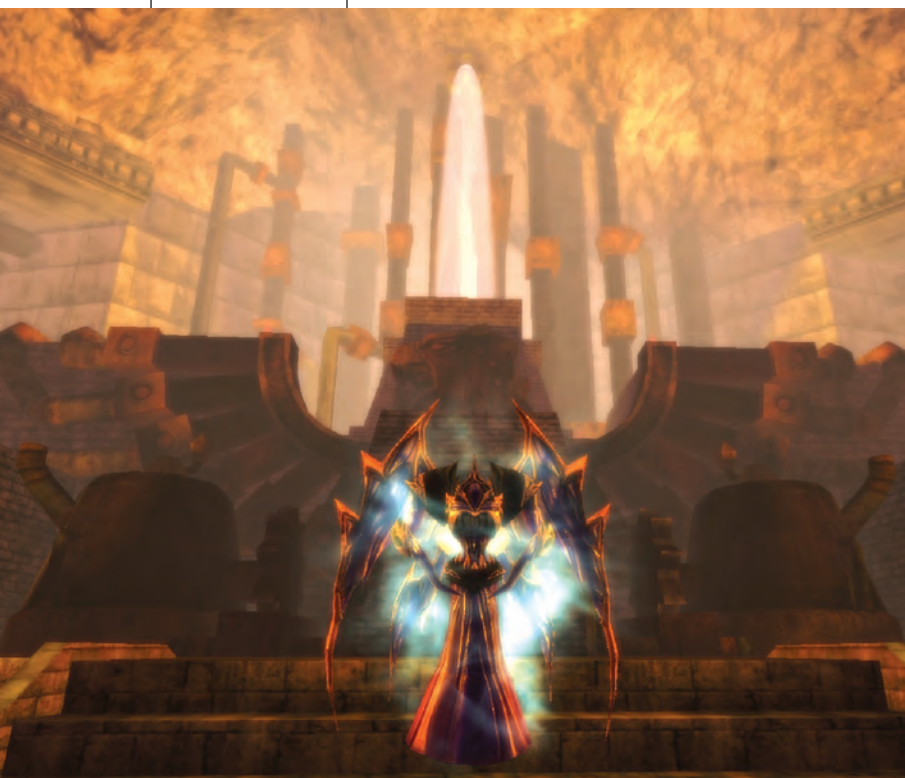*In contrast to these screens, Too Human is likely to be very action-packed.*

The popular turn-based game is turned into an action RPG

MAGE KNIGHT APOCALYPSE

THERE ARE STILL TWO very active sides to gaming: the digital variety and the old-school class of tabletop, pen-and-paper RPG and collectable card games. Some have made the transition fairly well. Magic the Gathering Online is very popular, but mostly because the digital cards are as valuable as the real ones (and interchangeable). Dungeons and Dragons has been slow to capitalise on its popularity, but on the other side is the excellent transition Warhammer, recreated from its turn-based origins into a no-holds-barred RTS title. So can Mage Knight do the same?

If you don't know it, Mage Knight is the flagship series in a new range of 'click' tabletop figures, all aimed at making the tabletop gaming experience less rigid and easier to get into. Instead of the stack of manuals needed, the rules are straightforward and things such as speed, damage and attack ratings are all controlled by a dial at the figure's base - damage is dealt by turning the dial. It's a fun and fairly cheap game to get into. But like Warhammer, its turn-based structure had to go if it wanted to become a serious digital title. Fortunately, Namco saw this and instead aimed the upcoming Mage Knight game to be an action RPG in the vein of Dungeon Siege.

Players create a five member party out of the five classes that will be in the game (so far the Dwarf , Rifleman and Vampiress have been revealed) and then set off to stop the current epitome of evil: the five-headed Apocalypse Dragon and his marauding army. Clearly this is going to be a tough job, and beating up a lot of monsters before you get to the final guy is going to be the order of the day as you upgrade your character. Taking a leaf from Dungeon Siege (though obviously punting it as 'new'), there is no real level system – instead, everything is focused towards character skills. This also means that anything a character does contributes to his or her stats in some way. Swinging a heavy sword will improve the strength rating; though using an overly heavy sword will make the attacks less effective. New skills as well as current ones can be found and improved at trainers in towns.

Mage Knight comes into the world in a few ways. This is actually the Mage Knight universe, so players of the original will run into some familiar stories and areas. But even if you don't follow the Mage Knight campaigns, you are sure to recognise the monsters. These have been modelled after the detailed figurines and definitely look the part. The focus is on the upcoming Apocalypse campaign in the tabletop game, so the PC title will also feature new monsters from this set.

So far though, it's all up in the air whether you should care about the game at all. It's just another action RPG based on a popular franchise. But the five player multiplayer sounds like a lot of fun. Up to five players can join in a party and finish the game or try out deathmatch. Once again it's nothing new, but these are almost always fun.

Another idea from Dungeon Siege is that the world will only load once and stream, thus not interrupting the flow. It also scalped Diablo's Hardcore mode, though called Serious mode, where you can play with a character. But once he dies he's gone forever. There is freshness here: the camera will be very movable, allowing you to view the action from the top down, all the way to the character's eye level.

Namco has slowly been dabbling more and more in PC games. These haven't been the best, but they showed potential. With Mage Knight, if done right, the studio has a chance to break into the market. And we'll lose a few weekends of our lives.   **NAG**

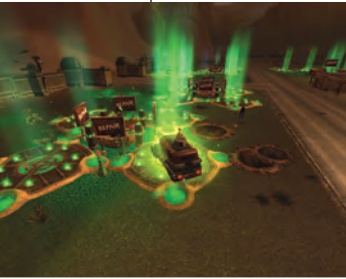*It's Mageknight, but the game clearly wants to appeal to a wider audience*

AUTO ASSAULT

FOR A WHILE, ALL the MMO market had were takes on the fantasy genre. Here and there some studios pushed the concept a bit further into sci-fi and such, but it was still essentially fantasy RPG in a new jacket. Eventually some more original games such as Puzzle Pirates and Planetside entered the market, some not doing as well as others. In the MMO market you put a lot on the line, but it's a lucrative business

if you get it right. And clearly as the world's connectivity and bandwidth grows, there's an ever-expanding potential market as well. Not everyone wants to don tights and pretend they're an elf. Some of us want real games where stuff explodes at high speed.

One movie concept criminally underused by developers is that of Mad Max. Not a Mad Max game per se, but anything

that involves driving in a post-apocalyptic wasteland, salvaging parts and fuel for your rig while fighting off dangerous road gangs and privateers. Just like in Mad Max! Net Devils saw the need here and they are hard at work on Auto Assault, a game all about surviving in such a harsh world.

There aren't any story details yet, but the world is divided into three races: humans, mutants and Biomeks. Each side has its advantages, disadvantages and own technology. There are three regions in the game. While border areas act as PvP combat zones, the majority of missions will stay inside a player's territory. But nothing stops you from mounting a raid party and heading over the border for some hit-and-run action. Despite the differences in technology, Auto Assault will let players salvage nearly anything and, depending on the skill level, reverse-engineer the hardware to be able to build a new one. Such things can also be repaired and used again. Skills will make up a major part of the game and players will be able to combine skills to build new hardware or create combinations of hardware that can be used or sold. Salvaging will be a big part of Auto Assault, but that's what you'd expect. A dynamic loot system will keep things fresh in this respect: loot stats are tweaked according to who finds the original piece, which essentially means that everyone carries unique gear and salvage.

A new thing the game plans to bring online is advanced physics in an MMO, as well as a persistent and destructible environment. Usually, buildings in a persistent online game are mostly for scenery as you can't really do anything with them except get in, on top and behind. In Auto Assault buildings and certain areas can be destroyed. But if players return to the spot later, they won't find the same building re-spawned. It could have been rebuilt, another side or group could have built something else, or it just remains a scorched patch of ground.

While the regions are kept apart as mentioned, players won't be restricted from moving in them. But it could prove fatal looking for fights that way. The arenas serve as an alternative. Here all players can compete against each other in fights, races and other activities, winning cash and gear as

well as some useful reputation boosts. Here and on the open road, each nation also has a unique ability that lasts for a short amount of time, but can sway the outcome of a battle. The humans have an impenetrable force field, while the mutants create a very fast and damaging energy pocket around their cars. The Biomeks can turn into big robots. These abilities, though, depend on whether you have the right upgrades to your rig and how strong they are. Players can build custom upgrades and it appears that the classes can steal each other's special abilities and install them on their own rigs.

It's very hard to gauge how well an MMO will do. Unlike normal games, a fresh idea in the MMO world might spell the game's doom. But there has been a growing boredom with conventional online games and if done right, Auto Assault could be one of the new wave of games to get players interested again.   **NAG**

Mad Max meets World of Warcraft? It could be brilliant...

SilentCool and ReverseCool
Noiseless Cooling from ASUS Graphics Cards

EAX800 Series

System acoustics plays a major role in providing an enjoyable computing experience, especially with more and more people using PCs for TV, movies and music. Who would want to hear the fan spinning at the end of a great movie or during a classic rock song? A good graphics card is a must-have if you want to turn a PC into a multimedia machine, but that just means another fan and more noise.

You're all in luck today, because I'm going to introduce two new high-performance yet fan-less graphics cards, the EAX800 Silencer and EAX700 Silencer. Either one of them can single-handedly rescue your PC from further noise pollution.

EAX800 Silencer and SilentCool

SilentCool adopted two innovative designs that enabled high-performance video performance without a GPU fan. First of all, it's the large heatsink, which significantly increased the heat exchange area for absorbing heat away from the GPU and copper heat pipes.

Optional cooling module entends to the exterior and lowers GPU temperature by another 6°C

Patented swivel joint enables the stacked fins to rotate 90°away from critical components.

Hidden heat pipeEffectively transfers heat from the heat sink to the stacked fins.

Rotate fins away from critical components

Secondly, fins are mounted on a swivel joint that rotates up to 90°. Depending on the locations of critical components such as the CPU, mosfets or capacitors, you can rotate the fins away from these areas for optimal heat dissipation. An additional cooling module attached to the heatsink and extends to the exterior of the PC further lowers GPU temperature by another 6°C.

EAX700 Silencer/TD/256M and ReverseCool

ReverseCool intelligently positioned the VPU (video processing unit) and heatsink on the backside of the graphics card, placing them directly in the airflow path of the CPU fan to everage the CPU fan's cooling capability.
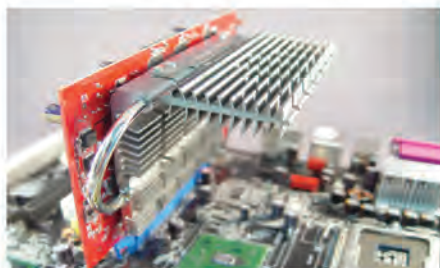
Open clamshell heatsink for enhanced ventilation.

The heatsink, besides providing huge space for heat exchange, takes on a clamshell architecture. It opens up just like a flip phone, allowing cool air to reach every part of the heatsink for enhanced ventilation.

No Fan, No Noise

With SilentCool and ReverseCool, noise no longer has to be a byproduct of effective cooling, and high-performance graphics cards will never again ruin your PC entertainment experience. For effective heat dissipation and powerful video performance, I wholeheartedly recommend ASUS' EAX600 Silencer and EAX700 Silencer/TD/256M graphics cards.

EAX700 Silencer.

TEST DRIVE UNLIMITED

I F YOU PLAYED THE original Test Drive you have your credentials as an old-school gamer. The series has since gone into a bit of a downward spiral. It eventually hit rock-bottom and started digging. Okay, that's not entirely fair, but Test Drive has been handed its 'thanks for coming' prize several times by games like Need for Speed and Gran Turismo. But it is the original exotic street racer and twenty years on it looks like the series is making a decent comeback. Straight to the obvious: Test Drive Unlimited is looking stunning. The power of the next generation consoles is definitely most evident in the

first batch of racing games. Test Drive moved its locale to the island of Hawaii, giving players access to over a 1,000 miles of open road. You can drive anywhere in the game at your leisure, trying out your car or spotting nice places to start a race. An open world in a driving game has been with us before, but those games tended to make it a more functional exercise. The locales on Hawaii have been created to be vast, lush and varying. To paraphrase the Gran Turismo marketing line, in Test Drive you will sometimes just drive for the view.

But this isn't a Sunday afternoon drive simulator on a tropical island. Racing is how you gain new and better cars and properties. The game will have set events that players can take part in, but races can also be declared at any spot and customised using around 50 game rules. These can be implemented in the single-player or uploaded online for some real racing. Apart from that, in Underground style, both the player and AI drivers can initiate a random racing event by simply signalling other drivers as they pass them.

To keep the ideas a bit fresher, or at least give you enough incentive to race, there are over 126 vehicles, including bikes, to unlock and buy in the game. These come from licensed brands such as Lamborghini, Ducati, Aston Martin, Mercedes, Saleen, Shelby and Jaguar. But as is the norm with anything that touches official car brands, there isn't a damage model for those meaty smacks against guard rails. Test Drive Unlimited isn't an arcade racer. Reports indicate that it isn't exactly on par with Gran Turismo, but the physics engine demands more

careful and realistic driving. Thus, simply flooring down a straight and then punching the brakes on a corner, hopefully to create a drift effect isn't going to cut it. And while there isn't an evident damage engine yet, you will pay for repairs.

This could be costly because another perk of the game is that you can customise your cars using the official manufacturer catalogue. Eden hasn't suggested how many parts we can expect, but it should be a lot if Test Drive expects to compete against other exotic racers. Apart from these changes players can also buy apparel and storage locations. There will be rare exotic parts that can be traded online. Unlimited's focus is strongly on online play and the trading and racing mechanics that the game has built in.

One feature that caught our eye is that the detailed interiors will have car radios. Yes, you can stream music from your 360's hard drive to it as well as from a networked PC. So if you really just want to take your new Lamborghini for a ride along the coast while listening to a new album you just got, you can do that.

Predicting how racing games will do is tough, since you not only need a good game, you need something that appeals over and above other games out there or else the stoic driving fans won't bite. Has Test Drive Unlimited got the punch for it? With the next Gran Turismo only due with the PlayStation 3 and Project Gotham Racing 3 as the only other immediate next-gen racer on the way, the time seems right for Test Drive to take back some of its kingdom. Here's hoping the game holds up to those ideals.   **NAG**

REVIEW

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105

AWARDS CRITERIA
In case you didn't know yet...

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

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

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

Platform
Platforms are described using icons rather than just plain old words. For those of you who don't know (shame on you) they are, left to right, top to bottom: PC, Playstation 2, GameCube, Xbox, PSP, Game Boy Advance, DS and mobile.

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

One of the best FPS titles ever made

96

AWARD
NAG
OF
EXCELLENCE

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F.E.A.R.

IS F.E.A.R. ICONOCLASTIC? IN a way, yes. But judging from the varied reaction around the game, it will need some explanation. Even the reaction around the NAG office has been mixed. There are gamers who love the game and then there are gamers who simply don't get it, or rather don't get into it. F.E.A.R. is very much an experience in terms of a first-person shooter. But its credentials as an excellent game can hardly be in dispute when you survey the large amount of jaded gamers who love playing it. Jaded and FPS are almost synonymous.

The PC shooter market has made some significant shifts in the past few years, producing games that break the conventions around traditional FPS models. The traditional 'kill everything' formula has been simplified by titles like Serious Sam and Painkiller to a straightforward carnage romp, without 'get the key' objectives getting in the way of what should be pure, heavy action. Squad-based games have advanced in leaps and bounds as well. Rainbow Six and Ghost Recon have done a lot in terms of creating streamlined, but detailed and involved, interfaces that let a player control his or her squads with ease and precision. Republic Commando shifted this slightly, giving a more point-and-click simplicity to such proceedings. Brothers in Arms took it a step further, removing the 'lone gunner' element and forcing players to strategically use squads to beat the enemy. On that tangent, war shooters have also made a lot of headway in terms of pushing the environment and atmosphere of a mission. In a war shooter there isn't a heavy focus on the story element (you're always a soldier who has to do something that will aid your country's war effort), but the feeling of being on a battlefield has gone from a gimmick to an art form, thanks to games like Call of Duty and Medal of Honor.

We don't need to stop there. Shooters have had several major landmark moments. Half-Life was a major shift towards story- and situation-driven gameplay, while Far Cry introduced a lot more into the genre, especially the concept of more non-linear approaches (the Xbox-based Far Cry Instincts takes this even further). Finally, there are the more intelligent breeds like System Shock and horror themed masterpieces such as Clive Barker's Undying. While old school and familiar concepts are still fun, there are a lot of new ideas out there. But more importantly, there is a lot of reinvention of classic ideas. When you look at all of this, it's pretty easy to declare F.E.A.R. as the best shooter since Half-Life. But that's a tall order and likely to be a controversial declaration. So how about we explain what makes F.E.A.R. so special?

First, it's important to note Monolith's name behind this project. New gamers might not know the studio too well, but several of its games stand fairly prominently in FPS lore: Shogo, Blood, No One Lives Forever and even the experimental (but overall impressive) T.R.O.N. Lith's problem has generally been with the Lithtech engine, a fair contender but one that quickly fell under the shadow of the giants, Quake and Unreal. While not all of its games used Lithtech, Monolith still inherited a legacy it didn't really want. When F.E.A.R. was first showed to us two years ago at E3, the developers quickly corrected any assumptions that their new game would use Lithtech. It might still - the engine development was outsourced to another team – but whatever it's called, the code powering F.E.A.R. brings Monolith well and solidly into the FPS spotlight. No more technology legacies to bemoan. Monolith games have always had a strong atmosphere element to them and this comes across perfectly in the new title. In fact, if you have to play F.E.A.R. for one reason, play it for how it feels.

You play as a new recruit to F.E.A.R., a special government team sent into

John was always a messy eater...

F.E.A.R. has some incredible and creepy scripted events

Like to wade in blood?
That happens a lot here

situations that are too dangerous for conventional measures, usually involving some kind of project that the government would prefer keeping under wraps. In this case the bad guy has taken psychic control of a thousand clone troopers – highly advanced combat specialists who have been bred to shoot first and never bother asking questions at all. The game starts with a very basic mission order: execute Paxton Fettel, the lead antagonist. Logically, if he's dead, the soldiers lose their psychic commander and stop shooting at everyone. Being part of a government project, you are sent in to do the dirty work. As a new operative, your colleagues are sceptical of your abilities, but as your commander said: "His reflex scores are off the charts." Yup, you are something special and the game quickly brings this premise home with flashbacks to your past.

This is where F.E.A.R. begins to earn its Half-Life credentials. With the exception of a few game-engine cut scenes, everything happens as you play. The story is driven though scripted events, strange flashbacks, incoming transmissions and narration with characters. It's actually very subtle and the final plot isn't Pulitzer material. But that never was the intention. "We wanted to create an action movie experience," explained one of the developers at the unveiling. Back then it sounded like a great idea. Now it's become a great game. Don't you love it when developers actually live up to their promises?

Taking on cloned hordes is going to be a tough job, but you are up for it. Call it a gimmick, but the proverbial 'bullet-time' makes a dashing entrance in F.E.A.R. Some shooters have toyed with this mechanism, most recently the Resurrection of Evil expansion, but F.E.A.R. quickly demonstrates the difference between a gimmick and a real game enhancement (it's how you use it). To understand this you need to understand F.E.A.R.'s world. At face value it looks terrifically bland: grey office corridors, murky maintenance passages, steam pipes and safety railings – there's a lot of this around. In terms of vibrant, varied locations F.E.A.R. doesn't score that highly. But that doesn't matter, because we're here to tear the scenery up. Using decals to synthetically 'destroy' a level (a trick last used to such an involving level by Half-Life and its blood and blast decals), battles in F.E.A.R. quickly become furious and aggressive. Bullets slam into walls, breaking off bits of plaster and sending dust into the air. Watching the dust settle is quite a literal experience. This is combined with the game's world physics, so chairs can go flying, boxes get thrown across a room and the bad guys make unexpected forward flips as a grenade detonates at their feet. In Die Hard we hardly cared about the stairs John McClane used; we were waiting for the gunfights. F.E.A.R. takes the same approach – enemy encounters are what define the game.

F.E.A.R. MULTIPLAYER

IT'S UNUSUAL FOR NAG to look at the multiplayer features of a game in a review, but this was inevitable. The deathmatch quickly grabbed our attention when the multiplayer demo was released, and it quickly garnered a following eager for the final game's version. Thankfully it didn't disappoint.

F.E.A.R. deathmatch will, once again, take you back to Half-Life, in more ways than one. The Half-Life elements are back in terms of more tactical combat and weapons that go beyond the cliché of finding the rocket launcher or rail gun first. It's a combination of running around the level and looking around corners – storming out with guns blazing is likely to get you killed. F.E.A.R.'s weapons tend to come in two modes: very accurate and wide spray. In the conventional run mode, your bullets aren't as accurate and while they still do a lot of damage, the fire isn't as focused and the recoil makes it tougher to stay on a target. Tapping shift places you closer to the gun, making it far more accurate, but then your character walks. These aren't new to FPS games, but in F.E.A.R. it is executed well and gives a tactical edge to playing the game. Also, we finally have a replacement for the HL trip mine: the proximity mine.

F.E.A.R. also scalped a system from Half-Life's cousin Counter-Strike. While there are weapons to pick up in a level (often powerful but low on ammo), players select their weapon beforehand. The server can ban certain weapons (as some are far too powerful), but it means that you don't spend time trying to find that or this powerful gun. The one you spawn with is usually up to the job, which means players focus on killing, not searching for something to kill with. Finally, throw in the melee attacks (which kill in one blow, regardless of

But we are talking about cloned soldiers here, so if our man was a run-of-the-mill rookie recruit, he won't survive what has already killed several special forces soldiers. The bullet-time effect, referred to as Reflex time, allows you to use your assaults more tactically. Complimenting this is a set of melee moves such as a scissor kick, roundhouse kick and punching with your rifle – all of which can kill an opponent in one blow. Your abilities tie into the story, but that's not really important. It counts when you have six soldiers and a heavily armoured unit walking around a courtyard – all to compliment your 20 points of health and two remaining ammo magazines. Slowing down the action makes you much more accurate, which counts when you are dealing with enemy AI that, once again, surpasses the benchmark set by Half-Life's marine squads. Far Cry came close, but F.E.A.R.'s soldiers are clever, devious and love trying to flank you, leap out of windows and throw grenades at camping players. This limited the variation of types of enemies the game has; F.E.A.R. prefers sending familiar opponents against you in different settings. Fighting a squad of marines in the basement of a processing plant is different to encountering them in a room of cubicles. So once again, forget where you are and what it looks like. The bad guys and the destruction sowed while taking them out is what matters.

At this point of the game's release, most readers will know about F.E.A.R.'s horror theme. Not to give away too much, this is definitely a good reason to play the game, though the experience isn't quite pushed as far as it could go. Still, thanks to some clever optical tricks and strategic use of the soundtrack, the game smoothly switches from an action extravaganza to something far more horrible. Unfortunately the scary bits never physically threaten your character like the soldiers do, but it creates a lot of the atmosphere and carries most of the story. There are some truly creepy moments and others that are just plain unnerving.

This might not be your type of game, but in terms of what it does; F.E.A.R. is a classic for the FPS genre. There is so much that could have gone wrong but didn't. It delivers a lot of action, fuelled by cool melee moves and a great feeling of destruction. Unfortunately it's a bit of a machine killer and playing the game at lower details will rob it of most of its charm (though the nice Pixel Doubling feature allows lower-end machines to push most of the advanced eye candy). Still, if you have the hardware, you like shooting at clever opponents, you love seeing the destruction you bring and you want an interesting story to back it all, you have to play F.E.A.R. Like we said; the best shooter since the original Half-Life. Now to hope Monolith makes Blood 3... **NAG**

Not everything here makes sense - just be prepared to shoot

armour) and you have the makings of a very intense and action-packed deathmatch session.

The game also has team deathmatch and CTF, as well as elimination for all the modes (which can be described as Counter-Strike without the cash or objectives). Slo-Mo brings the bullet-time effect into matches – a character can grab the Slo-Mo grenade, which then starts charging, but he is also marked across the map, allowing other players to track him down.

F.E.A.R. deathmatch is insane and chaotic – a refreshing change from the clinical feel too many FPS matches have acquired.

The absolute pinnacle of the management genre

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EDITOR'S NAG CHOICE

Experience the highs and lows of being a movie mogul

THE MOVIES

IT CERTAINLY MUST HAVE looked like an insurmountable project at its conception. One can only imagine what Lionhead Studios must have thought, right after committing to creating possibly one of the most ambitious games yet - a game in which you can make a movie, any kind, with actors of your design without needing to understand complex tools. The entire idea inspires, yet one has to wonder just how it would be possible to create a game of such vast scope.

Lionhead had the answer, and it has arrived in the form of The Movies.

One could easily split The Movies into two parts. On the one side is the sleek, polished management game where you embark on a century-long quest to become the ultimate movie-mogul, complete with top-ranking studio and star-studded actors. On the other side is the flexible, powerful movie making tools that allow players to create their own movies complete with sound, dialogue and special effects.

Both sides interact with each other on a base level, namely the Studio Lot and Actors/Directors, as you need a studio to film in and you need actors and directors to bring your script to life.

The management side of the game can be played to completion without once having to write your own script, which allows the more management-focused players to enjoy the game without having to labour over the creative endeavour of making a movie. Instead, they hire the right people for the job, which is the core idea behind the game itself.

Starting with an empty lot in the early 1900s, players build required buildings and (at first) only a single studio lot where a movie can be filmed. People will queue outside buildings where they can be hired. Picking up a person lets you drop

him/her inside the right 'room' on the blueprint of the building, creating either an Actor, an Extra, a Director or a Janitor, depending on where you drop the person. Blue light trails appear once you've picked up a person or object, showing you the most logical (but not always the best) thing to do with that person or object.

Since you run a movie studio, you obviously need to release movies. Placing scriptwriters in the scriptwriting office will have them labour away writing a (randomly generated and often humorous) script. Once the script has been written, you drop it on the casting office where you assemble the required amount of actors, extras and a director. Once the script has been rehearsed, the people involved will run to the relevant set and begin filming. Once filmed, you release the movie by placing its reel on the production office, and just like that, your movie gathers attention and even gets reviewed by the critics. What they have to say about your movie influences your actors, directors and even the overall opinion of your studio lot. The critics, like the general population, are influenced by events in the world. As the timeline (at the top of the screen) progresses, events happen that change the likes and dislikes of the audience who sees your movies. If you pay attention to these events as they happen (they are also announced by the in-game radio presenters), you can release a movie that rides the popularity of an event, or takes advantage of a disaster.

Your staff members all have their moods and much like in The Sims, you need to keep them happy. Your actors and directors can get stressed if they work too much, or bored if they don't work at all. Stress leads to substance abuse which can impact negatively on the filming of your movies, or make them more popular depending. The paparazzi might even take advantage of your drunken actors, taking a quick photo that boosts their popularity but drops their mood.

Like any good management game, The Movies starts off simplistic with only a few actors, a few sets and very little to maintain. As the game progresses, you need to juggle a growing inverted pyramid of concepts that all influence each other. Thankfully, The Movies is one of the most genial management games this century, helpful almost to a fault but sly in presenting true challenges to the player.

Those who like to take a more direct participatory role in creating the movies their studio releases (or those who just want to make their own movies), will find that the Advanced Script Editor, which lies at the heart of making custom movies, is both simple in concept but powerful in practise.

You cannot directly direct your actors (walk here, say this, turn, wave), but instead choose a set (train station, sci-fi bridge, etc.) and then a relevant 'scene' that plays out. Scenes are many and varied. You can make everything from a kung-fu movie to a drawn-out epic love-story Western… set in space. Scenes may have sliders where you can change certain elements, such as the intensity of a fight or the emotions of the actors, but

in general the movie making process is an interlocking jigsaw puzzle.

How you outfit your actors dramatically changes a scene. A dramatic scene with tense facial emotions obviously wouldn't work well if you outfit your actors with latex alien heads, but it might be hilarious regardless. Each costume has a wide array of sliders letting you adjust the costumes to your taste (one such slider is the 'rank' slider on the military costume, which actually adds/removes stars and rank bars from the costume when adjusted). There are vast amounts of costumes in The Movies, for each genre of movie. Certain scenes may also use props such as guns or horses, which can be swapped and replaced at whim (but you cannot add a prop to a scene that doesn't have one - for example, you cannot 'give' an actor a gun in a scene). You can also adjust the lighting on a set, or add special effects such as fog or rain. While the sets themselves may not be adjustable (you cannot change the wallpaper of a room), you can add decorations to a set to make it more unique to your movie.

You may not have ultimate control over everything in the movie making process, but it's how you combine elements together in your own unique way that makes your movie different from someone else's.

You can edit your movie in post, adding sound effects, fades and other elements. You can even record your own dialogue in-game with a microphone and then assign it to an actor, who will lip-synch perfectly to the spoken words.

As time progresses in the story mode of the game, technology becomes available either naturally or early if you research it (to get a leg up on your competitor). Things like stereo sound, digital filming, CG-effects and such allow you to make more complex movies with better quality, but also add to the atmosphere of the game.

Starting your career with only black and white and no sound, then later finally reaching digital cinematography complete with special effects, camera booms and stereo panning is highly rewarding, giving a true sense of progression. Your movie making is limited to the technology you've researched and what era you're in, even in the Sandbox 'I just want to make a movie' mode which allows you to start a game with a fully-built studio lot and lots of money.

It may annoy some that they can't load up the game and instantly make a movie with the best effects and film quality, but it makes sense in the spirit of the game. Your movies not only represent your creativity, but also your ability to manage your assets to support your creative investment.

Everything in The Movies is so vast, interactive and fine-tuned it would be impossible to summarise succinctly, other than calling it one of the most well thought-out games of the year. **NAG**

Our selection of movies which were created whilst reviewing this game can be found on the Cover DVD this month.

ONLINE DIRECTOR

Once you've made your movies you can even upload them to the official The Movies Website from within the game, where you can enter them into competitions, share them with friends and get them reviewed. You get credits for doing this, with which you can purchase new costumes, sets and other elements for the game which will be downloaded the next time you start up the game and click on the online section.

A competent shooter that lacks the kind of innovation we've come to expect

79

QUAKE 4

PVT MILAGE
Viper Squad

80
218

125

100

NOBODY CAN DISPUTE THAT Quake is legend and it's hard to improve on an experience that only actually exists as a collection of nostalgic memories. You can certainly still play the original Quake today, but it will never quite compare with your first time. This is also true when considering everything else in the Quake universe that has come from the id Software workshop. Making Quake 4 the game everyone wants was always going to be a tricky job, and in an odd move this responsibility was handed over to Raven Software [with id Software overseeing]. You might remember Raven for the excellent Soldier of Fortune series and the Star Wars: Jedi Knight sequels. Raven's been using id Software technology for many years and has developed its relationship with the masters of Doom to such a point that id Software decided to hand over baby Quake 4, nappies and formula and told Raven to bring it back when it came of age.

DING DONG

AS A SINGLE-PLAYER GAME, Quake 4 falls somewhere in and out of the big guns club with varying degrees of success and failure – a clichéd mixed bag of goodies. The main problem with the game is that it's not remarkable – the kind of remarkable we've come to expect from id Software. The fact that id didn't actually develop the game might or might not have something to do with this. Also, the fact that the gaming audience they've been building the experience for has matured and in the growth period has been spoilt with many increasingly superb titles that have taken this beaten genre and pushed it further than anyone would have thought possible. Think back to the lush jungle settings and intensity of Far Cry or the desolate adventuring of Half-Life 2 and the excellent Nova Prospect level from the same game. It also has some very competent and current competition in the form of F.E.A.R. and upcoming games like Unreal Tournament 2007, Prey and Hellgate: London. So into this very crowded and varied genre with heaps of history and nostalgia comes Quake 4.

All the things wrong with Quake 4 come from all the things that made it right a few years ago. Raven Software has made the perfect sequel to Quake II, except it's arrived late and the doorman won't let it into the party. Gamers have long since matured beyond the run and gun, push button and underground bunker navigation game dynamic. These elements had us cheering and hollering in Quake II, but are now limp and tired. Quake 4 still hangs onto its legacy of indoor gaming with only a handful of 'outside' missions mostly involving vehicular combat or riding on vehicles while shooting at enemies. Concepts that were innovative and exciting a few years ago are now only being explored in limited ways in Quake 4, and it's not like Raven doesn't know how to do outside [Soldier of Fortune] or vehicles [Jedi Knight]. Raven's just failed to take these breaks from the standard game dynamic to a new level – mandatory in light of what everyone else is doing. These limitations aside, the game is still an intensely rewarding experience that somehow manages to slot well into the current market by unashamedly giving players plenty of guns and action and a healthy dose of nostalgia.

Playing as Matthew Kane [member of the elite Rhino squad] it's up to the player to perform an integral role in a new invasion on the Strogg home world [the Strogg are the bad guys and want humans for their body parts and you have to destroy them – story wrapped]. Players familiar with the previous game will feel right at home. This game picks up where Quake II ended and instead of playing a lone marine tasked with saving mankind, this time you've got company. Although not present for the whole game, your squad members come and go - some dying, others ordered to stay and protect a location you've just fought to capture. At any point in the game you're either on your way to friendly soldiers, having left them or accompanying them on a mission. You will either have a single technician

to protect or be leading an entire squad into battle – it's different each time. The squad artificial intelligence is smart enough to stay out of your way, but also dumb enough to always charge into firing – something the more careful player will find rather distressing. There are no squad commands such as 'stay here' or 'provide cover fire', so they are essentially useful and useless all in one package and only serve to push and pull the story along and to take out the odd enemy. That said, there's no doubt that the game would have been a dull affair without this distraction. Next to gunning enemy Strogg at your side, some members of your squad can heal you and others can repair your armour – simply walk up to the corresponding squad member and unlimited health and armour is but a click away, usually followed by some sarcastic comment to be more careful next time. Occasionally they'll also 'upgrade' your weapons – this is a nice feature and such upgrades range from increased magazine capacity to being able to penetrate multiple enemies with a single railgun slug. The squad interaction, constant radio chatter and impromptu on-the-fly mission briefings all keep reminding you that you're part of a larger picture which works well in the context of the game – a complete contrast from the lone marine dynamic in Quake II. The alien planet the game plays out on is exactly that – alien. A great amount of work has been done by the level designers and artists to create one of the best alien environments you'll ever see, but this comes at a price. The level design seems to oscillate between epic architectural masterpieces, gruesome metal human hybrid

devices and doors and corridors, and let's not forget all the lifts. The amount of vertical movement in Quake 4 will turn a weak stomach inside out. So, on one hand expect breathtaking 'set pieces' of incomprehensible alien machinery and technology and on the other expect long walks through a maze of corridors and doors. The textures mostly look like something you might find on the set of Alien mixed with a little Borg cube here and there, and all of this inside the stomach of something as unpleasant as machine and flesh intertwined, blended together and then allowed on their separate ways again. The game is also dark, not scary dark in the way Doom 3 was, just creepy enough to keep you on the edge, and in some sections expect to crawl around on your stomach while unknown creatures grunt and bang on the walls – very unnerving. It also doesn't help that the torn up remains of human soldiers seem to litter these particular sections with increasing frequency. Some might argue that the game is too dark, but the use of light only serves to maintain atmosphere and a keener edge to the usual corridor crawling. As mentioned, on occasion you'll escape the dungeon questing and get out into the open. These 'outside' missions occur frequently enough to break up the game dynamic and even allow players to enter vehicles for a little serious firepower application. You'll get to ride in a tank and mechanised walker unit both equipped with devastation firepower at the cost of mobility, and at other times players will find themselves on the back of a truck with a machine gun and an endless supply of lead. In general, these trips outside are fun but lack any meaningful interaction – much like a school outing to a brewery. The outdoor environments seem barren compared to the dark and almost cluttered indoor sections, and offer up no real challenge in terms of enemy encounters. The heavy firepower available to the player turns the game into an arcade shooter on rails and again, like the implantation of squads to the Quake universe, seems to just be there because every other shooter has some kind of vehicular action included in the box. Quake 4 also uses sound to great effect. Alien and human radio chatter keeps the game pace up as urgent and sometimes desperate transmissions from across the battlefront keep popping up at random. This urgency is sometimes fuelled by ambient noises from around the complex. Enemy creatures roar and bang on whichever structure you might be in, you'll hear scared or screaming human soldiers and hissing and creaking as the Strogg world works its magic on your ears.

MULTIPLAYER

AFTER PLAYING THROUGH THE first-person section you can give the multiplayer a run, although many people will probably forgo playing the single-player game all together and only play the multiplayer – but there are no computer controlled players (bots) for you to practice against, a big negative. Considering that many players will only play the single-player section once and then the multiplayer component for months or years to come, it would have been nice to have separate installs for the multiplayer and the single-player versions.

To accurately summarise: the multiplayer is Quake III with better graphics, a slight speed decrease and a few new weapons. Some maps from Quake II and Quake III have been reworked for Quake 4 - nostalgic brownie points all round for this idea. Anyone expecting anything more than a competent replacement for Quake III is going to be bitterly disappointed as radical changes to the game dynamic, epic levels, and innovative game modes were never on the cards.

This is Quake III deathmatch in 2005, nothing more. The levels on offer are relatively simplistic, nothing like some of the better maps from past games. It would have been excellent to see one or two original Quake levels in the mix, but this is something for the fans to work on. Is it everything everyone has been waiting for? Not exactly. It's a clear cut replacement for Quake III.

What else were you expecting? As a bonus, now you can finally delete your Quake III directory.

IT'S GOOD... BUT

QUAKE 4 IS A solid game. Sometimes it feels that the enemies are too remote and too busy fighting your squad members for you to really get involved, at other times you'll be running backwards firing multiple shotgun blasts into a charging enemy. You'll be glad that you have squad mates during some sections while in other areas the room seems crowded. The outside bits are a great diversion, but come without any real innovation or excitement. All the levels have great sections, but getting there can be a tiresome plod. You become a Strogg during the game which is a cool idea, but all the benefits to this are only skin deep with minor augmentations and a cool orange outfit. The weapons are satisfyingly competent but offer nothing really new. There are some good enemy characters [especially the bosses], but on the whole they're too easy to kill and don't feature enough artificial intelligence to really make you sweat, rather relying on numbers, speed and surprise attacks to overwhelm. The multiplayer is competent in every department but lacks that something special to set it apart from the rest of the pack. Quake 4 is full of great moments, but the in-between bits are where it falls a little flat. If you enjoy action first-person shooters and would like to visit far and distant alien worlds just to blow the green out of everything that moves, then make sure you buy this game – you won't be disappointed. If you've played F.E.A.R., Half-Life 2 and Far Cry and enjoy shooters, get it anyway – just don't expect it to blow your socks off.   **NAG**

Black & White 2 is a truly excellent game marred by easy to fix design flaws

80

BLACK & WHITE 2

*Here your army
is taking over a
town*

YOU'RE A GOD. IT'S a great job: flexible hours, some light paperwork and plenty of executive perks. Perks like having a divine hand for example - name one other profession [pirate and evil Japanese movie monster excluded] where you can pick up screaming villagers and toss them out to sea with a flick of your wrist.

Black & White 2 is all about being a god, bringing up a pet creature, building impressive cities and waging war on your enemies… or peace. It's up to you.

Your godly self is represented in the game as a disembodied hand that you can use to move across each of the nine islands the game is played out on. You can also pick up rocks, trees and people and interact with your creature [slapping or scratching]. A menu bar has been added to the sequel and besides being rather clumsy and tedious to use, features all the essential information and tools you'll need to play the game.

Black & White 2 is mostly all about building and growing a town, keeping your people happy and winning lands. The building and managing of towns is a major part of the game and is linked to everything else you do. You can play the game as an evil god or a good god - the basic difference is how you decide to win each island. If you build an impressive city, you will eventually convince every other person on the island to join your town thereby winning peacefully, or you can go at it hammer and tongs by building armies comprising of melee, ranged and artillery units and pounding your foes into submission. This simple, but fundamental, difference makes all the difference to how you play the game, because it changes the focus from building an impressive town to building a large army. Essentially Black & White 2 caters for both types of player – warmongers or city

Peter Molyneux (34)   Unemployed
Happiness   -0.98
Mood   Depressed
Health   100
Tribe   Norse

builders - and as such your alignment will differ. It's important to note that you'll still have to keep your city running well, because creating armies requires conscripts and plenty of food. So essentially you can't escape making trips to the town planning department in order to play the game. Additionally, the final island requires the use of armed forces which ruins all the good you've done from the start.

Throughout the game you are guided by your conscience [good and evil] represented onscreen by two advisors. Each will present a different approach to each problem and depending on your actions, your alignment will change. Being so pivotal to the game, the task of city building is simplified by the use of a number of smart innovations, and unlike the complexity of other city building titles with endless menus and statistics, Black & White 2's most challenging aspect is deciding where to put everything and what to build next based on the desires of your people. You have a town centre in the game that fulfils the role of information hub with four plinths. One, the alignment plinth, indicates your alignment [good or evil], represented by a fountain of water or a flame. Depending on your actions in the game and the more benevolent or good you are, the higher the fountain column will grow. Next is the information scroll. Holding your hand over this scroll will reveal essential information about your town, its people and how impressive your town is. The other two plinths represent what your people desire [more free time, breeding, or in some extreme cases, mercy] and the other represents the desire for resources [ore, grain, manna and wood]. The height of the plinth indicates the urgency of the desire. In the middle of the town centre is a

MIRACLES & WONDERS

I S THERE ANY POINT to being a god if you can't unleash death and destruction upon all you survey? Black & White 2 features a few tidy miracles and not the water to wine kind either – although that might have proven useful on those long boring Sundays. You can cast a water miracle [good for watering crops and putting out fires], a heal miracle, a shield miracle for protecting those within its area of influence, a fire miracle [best for showing unwanted enemies the door], a lightning miracle for those times when the smell of burnt enemy soldier hair is too much to bare and finally a meteor miracle [raining rocks of fiery death?]. Yes please. To cast these miracles, you need manna which is generated by worshippers at your altar. Unfortunately, in the game the fire miracle is so effective at killing entire platoons of enemy soldiers that there's very little need to build walls around your town – still fun though. The bigger guns such as the volcano, earthquake and hurricane are different from miracles as they have to be purchased using tribute and then built in your town and then worshipped for a while until they're ready to 'fire'. These immense structures are extraordinarily expensive, resource hungry and time-consuming to use, so expect to only buy one during the whole game and then expect to only fire it twice. If you want the volcano you're going to have to cough up a million tribute points – no small fee. It's really a pity that the game design limits the frequent use of wonders. But that said, it wouldn't have been much fun playing the game if every ten minutes another enemy volcano erupted in the middle of your town.

platform that indicates the desire for progress [different types of buildings required at that moment, a home, a wall or a field of grain, for example]. The town centre is an excellent visual tool that'll tell you exactly what your people want without having to navigate menus. And to simplify the process even further, blueprints for all the various buildings can be dragged directly off the town centre and placed wherever you want. The other three 'resources' in the game are influence, impressiveness and tribute. Influence governs the size of the area you have influence over, so you can only build and destroy, cast miracles and express your godly whims within this area of influence. Influence increases in proportion to the size of your establishment and population, so it grows as your city does. Impressiveness is also linked to building your city, so the more buildings you place and build the more your impressiveness total increases, and the more likely you are to persuade other tribes to abandon their villagers and join yours. Tribute is earned by completing sub-quests and winning lands. This is the game's currency and can be used to purchase new buildings, miracles and even toys for your creature. As you go along you'll be able to purchase

CREATURES

IN 'GUINNESS WORLD RECORDS 2006' it is stated that the creature artificial intelligence in Black & White 2 is the most complex character in a computer game. This is rather puzzling and entirely based on the fact that the creature's mind grows from 6-7K up to 500K. The book also refers to the game as Black & White II instead of 2 – pedantic, but it goes to illustrate not everything written is true. The creature is certainly smart, but instead of having a child to raise like in the original game, in Black & White 2 your creature is just an elaborate toy that responds to your inputs – much like a remote controlled virtual pet. It's true that this is essentially what it's supposed to be anyway. But if you have played the original, you'll quickly find teaching and using the creature this time around a much more simplistic process, instead of the mixture of joy and depression that came with the first. The original Black & White creature was an unpredictable entity that would quite happily either eat a rock or smash your villagers with it. Training in the first game required a much more hands-on approach and had you constantly watching the creature for errant and undesirable behaviour. This new 'upgraded' creature features thought bubbles that tell you exactly what it's going to do, such as 'I'm going to play with that toy!', at which point you can zoom in and praise him for playing with toys by rubbing him with your disembodied hand or striking him with quick left and right swings to tell him not to play with toys. The more you praise or punish it, the more or less inclined it'll be to perform that specific activity again – this is represented by a slider that indicates its approach to that activity in the future. These sliders stay the same throughout the game, so once you teach it something it'll remember it. There's a menu that lists all its thought processes and attitude towards them which you can tweak at any

time – effectively removing the mystery, frustration and rewards of being in charge of a creature whose thoughts and personality are unknown to you. Other than this, the dynamic between the player and the creature and the creature and the game world works very well, and newcomers to the Black & White universe will enjoy this interaction immensely. Depending on how you teach your creature, it'll become good or evil, something you can visually appreciate – good creatures sprout flowers wherever they walk and appear lighter and if they're good enough will even glow ethereally, while evil is the opposite. Controlling this alignment is something you can do by influencing behaviour such as teaching your creature that eating villagers is evil. This alignment can differ between the player and the creature which can make for an interesting dynamic. From a virtual pet perspective, the creature is extremely animated and 'real'. It'll look sad when depressed and when happy you'll find it carrying its teddy bear around and playing catch with its giant beach ball. A very well trained creature can actually run and manage your whole town. Overall an enjoyable interactive experience, but certainly not something to put in any record book.

ZOOM

NEEDLESS TO SAY, THE graphics engine, while not the prettiest on the market, certainly is powerful, allowing for extreme zooming and panning of the whole island. The level of detail is also significant as you can zoom right down and count how many ants occupy any particular piece of land.

more impressive buildings [the amphitheatre, for example] with tribute, and thus increase your influence and impressiveness. This might all sound incredibly complicated, but the smart use of the town centre, other visual indicators and tutorials will have you building mighty empires within the first few hours of play.

The game's an immensely fun and rewarding experience, but is far too easy to complete once you figure out that the fire miracle is a super weapon capable of decimating entire platoons just as they reach your influence boarder. This is disappointing, as a proper challenge would have added longevity to the game, and there's no difficulty level to adjust. It seems that the artificial intelligence is quite content to send platoon after platoon to their demise. The sub-quests are a decent break from the game and will see you hunting the island for statues or simply following a pattern of drum beats. There's so much to this game. It's more of an experience than a simple game, but at the end of the day it seems that to become more accessible to a wider and less adept gaming audience, the developer has taken a little magic away and replaced it with menus and buttons, and in the process has created an excellent game, not an exceptional one. **NAG**

A wonderful blend of game and comic, especially for fans

70

Painting the town black as Venom is highly enjoyable

ULTIMATE SPIDER-MAN

EVERYONE WANTS TO DO whatever a spider can. You know it, we know it. So, without further ado, let's go do whatever an Ultimate Spider-Man can.

Fans of the Ultimate Spider-Man comic book series will feel right at home inside the 3D representation of Peter Parker's hometown complete with all the locals featured in the books. The game's plot continues where the comic series ended and faithfully progresses the utterly engrossing Ultimate plotline. Where the game innovates is in how it strings the plot-threads together. You don't just play smart-mouth Peter, but also the dourer Eddie Brock and his unfortunate 'symbiotic' partner Venom. You get to see the story from both sides, giving you a pleasant deviation from the one-sided 'The Hero knows best' norm. But this won't surprise anyone familiar with the comics, as the Ultimate Spider-Man series is renowned for innovative storytelling.

Both characters have distinct combat systems, and this is where the game may start to fall apart for some (especially when playing the PC version). The control scheme for both Spider-Man and Venom can be vexing at times, seemingly requiring eight fingers on the left hand just to achieve certain moves. It's nothing that can't be fixed with a decent gamepad, but that's not always possible. Once over that hurdle however, the combat becomes kinetic on both character's counts. Spidy's fluid acrobatic moves are a joy to watch, while Venom's brute-force allows for a more up-close bash.

The glue in-between the missions and critical points is certainly the energetic and utterly noteworthy animated comic panels that progress the story. Penned and illustrated by the comic book authors, Brian Michael Bendis and Mark Bagley, they have authenticity as well as a lively vibe that carries the game further than expected.

If only the mission structure could have followed the wonderful trend set by the cut-scenes and visual styling. Instead of being vibrant and entertaining, most of the missions become monotonous and entirely tedious due to the reuse of objectives and a lot of 'race against the clock' objectives. Fans will be drawn forward regardless with the promise of meeting pretty much the largest ensemble of comic book characters in a game to date, whereas the casual players will be quickly put off by the tedium and steep difficulty curve, especially the boss characters. **NAG**

Tweaked just in the right places to make it better

85

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AWARD
NAG
OF MERIT

Get ready for more nail-biting squad fighting and fire fights

BROTHERS IN ARMS: EARNED IN BLOOD

L ET'S CUT TO THE chase here. If you are one of those gamers who bemoan the constant stream of World War 2 titles, oblivious to the suggestion that it's a game culture onto itself, then you'll certainly not think anything of Earned in Blood. The Brothers in Arms games have by now established their focus on authenticity. The first game wasn't bad at all and really gave the feeling of being in a war, albeit one in which you never had ammo, yet still needed to direct squads across maps crawling with enemy troops. In Brothers in Arms, unlike other war shooters, you don't go head-on with the enemy on your lonesome and rely on your crack aim to do the talking. Instead, players are handed one to two squads (and sometimes a tank) which can be directed across the map. But it's not a matter of just pointing them in a direction. You have to be in the thick of the action, making decisions on the fly that could cost you a squad if mistimed or misjudged. Your troops are also really just for suppressing the enemy. Often it is your job (with or without a support squad) to flank the enemy and take them out.

Earned in Blood follows the same premise and ties into the original game, though you play as a different character involved in other missions during the D-Day campaign. Once again a lot of the characters are based on actual soldiers and the locations are closely modelled on the locations in Europe (and how they looked during the war). This time round Gearbox made a few changes, though, which have enhanced the game significantly.

The most obvious is one that changes the game dynamic completely. Players are now able to get ammo from their soldiers (providing you don't run out when you're out there on your own). This means that players can provide decent cover fire, something that was lacking from the first game. It changes how you play the game, because now you can fire at a German squad, forcing them to duck and giving your guys the chance to run for a better spot. This was doable in the first game, but ammo was scarce. It never made sense, since the game already imposed a huge aiming handicap on the player. The unlimited ammo makes up for this and gives players a real role in the squads.

This feature alone makes the game worth it. If you enjoyed the first game, get this. The same goes for tactical fans. The play style is still a bit too linear and more freedom of movement would have allowed for new approaches. But for what it is, Earned in Blood is engaging, tough and frustrating in a good way.   **NAG**

VITAL INFO

■ Platforms
PC

■ Suggested Retail Price
R 299

■ Developer
Midway

■ Publisher
Midway

■ Supplier
Ster Kinekor Games
[011] 445 7900

■ Genre
Action Horror

■ Age Restriction
18+

■ Minimum Specs
Pentium 3 800MHz
256MB
4x CD-ROM
NVIDIA GeForce 2™ Video Card
3.5GB HDD

GIGABYTE
T E C H N O L O G Y

Games reviewed on
Gigabyte machines

Gory, violent and not really that scary. Unless sour milk frightens you...

THE SUFFERING:
TIES THAT BIND

THE FIRST SUFFERING GAME, a title billed as a survival horror, became popular because it was pretty violent, gritty and quite action packed. It had its flaws and never attained real classic status, but those who played it enjoyed the gruesome nature. Now our man is done with jail and after taking care of the business there he heads to his home neighbourhood. Do you really want to know a lot about our protagonist Torque? Well, you will as the game series delves further into his crime, his past and the ongoing interest the demon Caleb seems to have with him. Torque is in Baltimore and a whole bunch of demons have followed him, giving the developers the chance to rehash a lot of the creeps that appeared in the first title. But technically, there are more spaces to traverse as you are in a city. Still, the level design keeps things pretty cosy in terms of location sizes and the 'city' feels more like a backdrop than an institution. The locales themselves are fairly cramped and claustrophobic. But that's what you'd want with a scary game. So is Ties That Bind a scary game?

Yes and no. Yes, it has moody music, creepy monsters, spooky levels and obligatory flashes of something horrible. But the game tries too hard

and this ends up hurting the whole package. On the one hand it's not exactly scary. It'll get you on your nerves, but the frequent gore, the over-kill of cut-scenes and constant images being flashed over the screen breaks the suspense. So let's assume the game isn't supposed to be scary. Unfortunately the fright-a-minute structure means you really fight against a few monsters. Then all of a sudden you are fighting a lot of them in one scene – the game can't decide if it wants to scare you or encourage a monster massacre. A full-blown action approach could also have come across if it weren't for cut-scenes every few minutes. The story seems intriguing, but one tends to stop caring when it gets told to you more often than the bits you play.

The interface is solid and apart from a simplistic melee system the game isn't bad. Graphically it's fair. The story is quite intriguing and you can see what the developers tried to do. But it's got too much getting in the way of having a good time and on top of that it can't even decide what it is. There are moments that will make you jump, but this isn't Resident Evil.   **NAG**
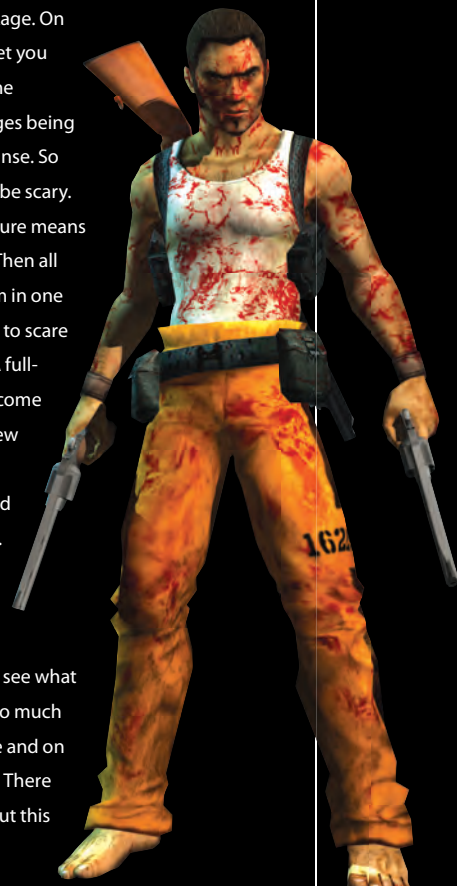
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Although not revolutionary, this add-on pack greatly enhances Dawn of War

65

*These are VERY
bad news!*

DAWN OF WAR: WINTER ASSAULT

*Below: Parts
being delivered
for construction
of a Baneblade*

WHEN RELEASED ABOUT A year ago, Warhammer 40000: Dawn of War was highly successful, but in a short-lived manner. It soon became apparent that the play dynamic was shallow, with ideal play following an optimal formula, so games tended to play out in nearly identical fashion. Another criticism, this time from a single-player standpoint, was the fact that only one campaign was offered, for Space Marines, with the other factions being ignored completely, except as targets.

When the first rumours of an expansion pack began circulating, it was said that Imperial Guard and Tyranids would be added as playable sides. Sadly, the Tyranids have made no appearance in this add-on, but the Imperial Guard is here. This faction emphasises infantry in the early game, and infantry mobility throughout.

Most Imperial Guard buildings can be garrisoned with infantry, affording these units protection while allowing them to carry on fighting from within, so long as they have ranged fire capabilities. Furthermore, buildings that can be garrisoned are linked with a tunnel network, and units can be transferred from one to another, much like the Webway Gates of the Eldar. This is very handy for mobility purposes, as well as for responding to surprise threats from unexpected directions.

A welcome fact is the inclusion of two campaigns, Order and Disorder, and each features two of the factions. So while playing Order, players will command Imperial Guard and Eldar forces (with cameo appearances by Space Marines). Orks and Chaos make up the Disorder campaign. Interestingly, Relic has implemented a basic version of a branching campaign, leading to alternative final missions. Furthermore, players can expect to control two factions over the course of some of the missions. The campaigns consist of a few missions each, but these are long and very challenging. In fact, even at the lowest difficulty setting, from as early as the third mission, veteran players can expect to be replaying scenarios repeatedly before getting them right.

In addition to a new faction, the expansion adds a new unit or two to each existing side. The Space Marines get the Chaplain, a leader unit; Eldar gets an infantry unit, good against vehicles and Orks get a heavily armoured infantry unit and the Mad Dok leader unit. These additions tend to fill holes that were identified in the various factions.

Winter Assault also brings with it a wealth of new skirmish/multiplayer maps, and these are very welcome as the original selection was very limited. Many of the maps retain a cramped, claustrophobic feel, implying "fight or die – there is nowhere to hide!"   **NAG**

A solid, enjoyable RTS experience with excellent graphics and neat multiplayer features **81**

VITAL INFO

■ Platforms
PC

■ Suggested Retail Price
R 320

■ Developer
Reality Pump

■ Publisher
Zuxxess Studios

■ Supplier
Devon Systems [041] 365 0258

■ Genre
RTS

■ Age Restriction
12+

■ Minimum Specs
Pentium 4 1.5GHz
512MB RAM
2x DVD-ROM
1.5GB HDD

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You can quickly grow an alien army from humble drones into terrifyingly destructive alien units .

EARTH 2160

REALITY PUMP HAS IMPROVED on Earth 2150 and released Earth 2160. And once again, it has superb visuals. The capabilities of modern graphics cards are skilfully tapped to create a simply gorgeous RTS scenario. Explosions are nicely done and structures and units look great even when zoomed close up to them. Even the quirky, but fun, first-person mode you can go into on any of your units is dodgy, but nonetheless cool.

You have four races to choose from. In the single-player mode two of these are locked until you complete the game with the first two choices. Naturally, in skirmish and multiplayer engagements all races can be chosen. The single-player story is pretty uninspired, with adequate but bland voice acting par for the course. Even the objectives of your missions aren't very original. But, the factions and their units are something of a step away from the norm – one is a bog-standard humanoid race, there's a high-tech female-only race, a band of mech-obsessed fighters and the Aliens.

These guys basically made the game for us, although in multiplayer there have been balance complaints as the Aliens can be pretty unstoppable. You start with two basic units, one flying and one ground-based. These units must be moved close to a resource pile, and their energy gradually generates. Once the bar is full, they can either replicate themselves or morph into more advanced units – complete with an awesome bump-mapped cocoon springing up

around the unit, whichever choice you make.

From these humble beginnings you grow an army. You have no base, although your units can be morphed into guard towers for some fixed defence. Flying units morph from replicators into zippy fighters and finally awesome heavy cruisers. Ground units are far more varied, ranging from simple alien grunts to devastating beasties with crippling firepower.

Although largely less original, the other factions are just as much fun to play. The game has a wide range of features. Each race, bar the Aliens, sports a massive research tree and superb multiplayer options. The ability to save multiplayer games is one pretty unique bonus, and Earth 2160 is a drop-in RTS even allowing a joining player to take over from an AI player at any point!

Earth 2160 is a great package. It has everything you could want from an RTS, with some innovative details and fantastic visuals, and manages to pack an impressive amount of features while remaining a whole lot of fun. **NAG**

WORLD OF WARCRAFT
www.worldofwarcraft.com

BLIZZARD CAN DO NO wrong, especially if you believe the sales, hype and fan boys. When Blizzard announced that they'd be taking their Warcraft universe into the realm of the almighty MMORPG (Massively Multiplayer Online RPG), it's safe to say that there was a general chorus of hallelujah with only slight murmurings of dissent along the lines of "Why not Starcraft instead?"

The overall reaction to the news of World of Warcraft was positive, but then again everyone knows Blizzard could put their logo on underpants and these would sell like hotcakes.

If you're an avid Blizzard or Warcraft supporter, then you have no need to read what will be written here. You probably already have WoW and enjoy being a level 60 demigod, or you're on your way to go purchase the game now. I won't be writing this monthly account in the form of avid praise - there is no need. Instead, I'll be examining WoW critically, making sure everyone knows what they're going to be getting into if they decide to forsake their loved ones, careers and pets and move to Azaroth.

Beginnings:
World of Warcraft is sold in a box. You need to buy the retail copy to be able to play the game. There is no 'download online' solution. Once you have a copy of the game installed and are ready to play, there are two ways to go about getting access to Azaroth. The first is by using your credit card. The second more appealing method is by purchasing timecards. Timecards, once scratched in the right place, reveal a code that you can enter to purchase a limited amount of time, usually 30 days or more. This avoids using credit cards and all that jazz and is generally nice and hassle free, much like purchasing cellphone airtime. Timecards will (according to sources) be available locally once World of Warcraft retails here, but this has yet to be confirmed.

Once you've entered your code or credit card details, the patching begins. Quite a few patches have been released for World of Warcraft - around 200MB. Before you can play, the game will have to download all the patches first.

Characters:
World of Warcraft has eight playable races: Dwarves, Gnomes, Humans, Night Elves, Orcs, Tauren, Trolls and Undead. Each race has unique racial traits and specific playable classes. The races are further divided into two warring factions as per the Warcraft universe: Alliance and Horde. You can only talk to, group with and create guilds with players from your faction. Certain zones, areas and cities in the world may be friendly to one faction, yet hostile to another. Additionally, certain quests can only be undertaken by a certain faction.

So, if you're going to join up with friends, first make sure you know what faction they are from. Also make sure you know which region they play in (US or Europe), as the two regions are on separate servers. Each region is also subdivided into realms (sub-servers, if you will), with each realm isolated

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· Control panel
· Virus scanning
· Spam filtering (SpamAssassin)
· Webstats
· Webmail
· Custom error documents
· 25 Group mails

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from the others. So, you'll have to play on the same realm as your friends too.

But if, like me, you're initially going it solo, then the game will ask you a few questions and pick the best realm for you according to your specifications. Certain realms encourage role-playing and others have full PvP (player vs. player), where you need to tread lightly and avoid the higher-level characters that exist only to kill new players (newbies).

I picked the bovine Tauren and chose Warrior as my class (a good choice for newcomers, as the Warrior is the easiest class to play). The classes available (depending on what race you pick) are Paladin, Rogue, Priest, Hunter, Warlock, Druid, Warrior, Mage and Shaman. The class you pick determines what spells or skills you can master. Each class has its own specific set, but may share the odd spell or skill here and there with another class.

Killing time:
Being Tauren, it put me in the Horde faction. The game opens with a specific cut-scene showing your starting town and then proceeds to give you a few tips on what to do next via exclamation icons at the bottom of the screen.

Controlling your character in WoW is easy. You use the arrow keys or 'WSAD' keys to move around while your mouse steers your view. Right clicking on things interacts, while left clicking gives you information or presses buttons.

In most MMORPGs (unfortunately) the initial section of the game, often referred to as the 'newbie area', involves large amounts of tedium. World of Warcraft is no different. For a few days, expect to do nothing more than run around killing X amount of Y as per requests from the various NPC (non-playable character) quest-givers. Completing the quest (which usually involves killing 10 of a creature type), lets you pick your reward from a list of items, as well as gaining a bit of XP (experience).

Experience (both meanings) is why we're playing World of Warcraft, so be sure to kill, kill and then kill some more. Use the money gained from killing things to buy bigger weapons to kill more things. As you gain experience your character will raise in level, becoming stronger and giving you access to more skills and/or spells.

I spent around eight hours killing nameless creatures, satisfying the whims of the quest-givers. I expect to leave the newbie area soon, which should lead to more exploration and possibly more interesting quests.   **NAG**

NEXT MONTH: More interesting quests, levelling, skills and other MMORPG-type things.

Mortal Kombat at last makes a successful and enjoyable transition to the action genre

77

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Let me see if I can't get rid of that headache. With death!

MORTAL KOMBAT: SHAOLIN MONKS

THIS IS NOT THE first attempt Midway has made at translating the ever-popular Mortal Kombat franchise to the action-brawler genre, but it is certainly the best. Still having painful memories of the horrendous PS1 title, Mortal Kombat Mythologies, we were at first very sceptical of the concept behind Shaolin Monks, but Midway has in fact succeeded remarkably well.

Set between the events of Mortal Kombat I and II, Shaolin Monks initially presents you with a choice of playing as Liu Kang or Kung Lao as you proceed through the typically absurd storyline, which features appearances from all the characters present in Mortal Kombat I and II, as well as a few from later titles in the series. The majority of the game sees you fighting against countless fairly generic enemies, though better known characters frequently appear as bosses, and some can even be unlocked for use in the story mode as well as in the rather basic versus mode included in the game.

As you despatch of your foes, provided you don't kill them using the plentiful environmental traps, you gain experience points, which can be redeemed to unlock additional moves and combinations for your character. As expected, all the characters' trademark moves are available, though the execution of these has been greatly simplified for the sake of the fast-paced play dynamic.

Also available are fatalities, which can be executed after filling up your fatality meter by performing combos on your opponents. In addition, there is a myriad of bonus content including artwork and bonus characters, that can be unlocked by collecting red 'koins' scattered throughout the environments, many of which are quite subtly hidden and some of which can only be found in the cooperative mode. Speaking of which, that is certainly the mode in which the game is meant to be played, provided you have a friend willing to donate a fair amount of time to the endeavour. The story mode is, in fact, on the short side, though much backtracking and repeated play-throughs are necessary to unlock all the bonus 'kontent'. As an action-brawler, Shaolin Monks manages to be easily accessible and entertaining to anyone, though it will undoubtedly hold far greater appeal for devotees of the Mortal Kombat mythology. If you are such an individual, it's a travesty to miss out on this title. If you're just looking for some mindless, bloody fun, you can't go too far wrong with Shaolin Monks either. **NAG**

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Not a major leap from last year's version, but still the best golf title out there

77

VITAL INFO

Platforms

PS2

Suggested Retail Price
R 399

Developer
EA Sports

Publisher
Electronic Arts

Supplier
EA [011] 516 8300

Genre
Sport

Age Restriction
3+

Minimum Specs
1-4 Players
536KB memory

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I think it hit the tree, Jim.

TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 06

CAST YOUR MIND BACK to Tiger Woods '05, an excellent title that some would say had one distinct problem – it was too easy. Fast forward to today and in Tiger Woods '06 we still have a quality game with slight alterations. But has the challenge increased sufficiently?

EA has tried to respond to the quandary of being accessible to the pick-up-and-play brigade as well as those who take things a tad more seriously. EA has come up with two 'major' changes to gameplay as this year's selling point. The first modification was brought in as a result of the biggest gripe of '05 – the simplicity of putting. Thankfully, gone are the days of the pointless 'Caddy Tip' and 'Tiger Vision' features, which all but ensured a successful putt. In their place is an effective grid-format that outlines the pace and elevation of the green, so common in other golf titles but now used for the first time by EA. It works well but for one bizarre detail. The player is also allowed to view the perfect putting line, which turns out to be so beneficial that it not only overshadows the grid system, but nullifies its entire purpose.

The other major modification is that the second analogue stick can now be used to pinpoint what part of the ball to hit. The intention here is to create fades, cuts and spin, but the reality is that it is seldom, if ever, needed.

In fairness, these changes have added another dimension to the title, however minimal, but it remains too easy.

Disappointingly, it actually feels more like you're playing an add-on to the '05 version instead of a brand-spanking new game. Even the crux of the title, the 'Rivals Mode', feels like a mere extension of the player challenges from '05 (though, in a nice touch, the player is transported back in time with suitable clothes and equipment made available for each era).

Despite all this apparently harsh criticism, Tiger Woods '06 is nevertheless a very good game, especially for the newcomer. Fantastic new courses have been added, there are numerous game modes to take part in, it is presented beautifully and launching the ball around the splendid fairways is genuinely fun.

Yet, if the franchise hopes to maintain its success, more fundamental changes to gameplay will have to be made. For now though, the title still remains worthwhile.   **NAG**

FIFA's best effort is a huge, absorbing mixture of action

80

He dribbles! He dodges! He's comitted!

FIFA 06

TALENTED SOCCER PLAYERS ARE an ungrateful lot. Quite happy to lend their faces to that year's respective FIFA title and accept EA's generous handouts that habitually follow, they then, with much discretion, lock themselves up in their mansions and settle down to a session of Konami's Pro Evo series. It has always been that way: Pro Evo's lauded for its outstanding gameplay and realistic physics while its EA counterpart, although consistently a top seller, is never fully accepted by the hard-core gaming element.

With FIFA 06 though, EA has seemingly changed tactics and adopted an attitude of "if you can't beat 'em, join 'em." Suddenly things seem a lot more 'Pro Evo-esque', including being able to map the controls in exactly the same way as its rival. The result is a far superior soccer game to any of FIFA's predecessors. The controls are now a delight as long crosses, nutmegs, through balls and swerving shots are quite easily mastered. The new 'on-the-fly' tactics and mentality adaptor is a great innovation, allowing the user to respond to what is happening in the match without ever leaving the action. Teams also react to how well they 'feel' they are performing in a particular match – a feature that has a significant and positive effect on gameplay.

But it's not all sweet out on the pitch. Ball physics are frustratingly unrealistic, the player-selection control system still needs a lot of work and the AI is a tad shoddy with a distinct lack of intelligent player runs.

But FIFA 06 makes light of these deficiencies with several features it can at least claim to truly own. The 'Fan Shop' will delight with reviews of seasons gone by as well as biographies of the game's greats. And then there's the manager mode. Though it could never be compared to the Championship Manager series, it is an enjoyable little mode that imposes the nagging issues of everyday football on the player. It's a good diversion from the action on the field and, if results are not going your way, you can always step onto the pitch and sort things out yourself.

On the local front, Sowetan giants Kaizer Chiefs and Orlando Pirates make a welcome FIFA debut this time around, adding a bit of local spice to the mainly European fare.

This year, pretty-boys Ronaldinho and Rooney are the faces of the game, and one has the feeling that this time they'll forget about that other soccer game for a while and enjoy the best title in a FIFA series that stretches back an incredible fourteen years. **NAG**

Immersive, rewarding and incredibly entertaining videogame experience – Hulk Smash! **85**

Not the friendly green giant. Nope.

AWARD
NAG
OF MERIT

THE INCREDIBLE HULK: ULTIMATE DESTRUCTION

TO ACCURATELY PORTRAY THE brute strength of such a character as the Hulk in a videogame is undoubtedly a tall order. But developer Radical has done exactly that with Ultimate Destruction, and the result is very, very pleasing indeed. Based on the comic book series rather than the movie, Ultimate Destruction features a number of characters instantly familiar to Hulk fans, including the Abomination (also known as Emil Blonsky), Doc Samson, Mercy and giant 'mechs', affectionately dubbed 'Hulkbusters'.

Even more pleasing to fans will be the fact that although Bruce Banner features in the storyline, the play dynamic exclusively features the Hulk. The game is presented in an open-plan fashion, reminiscent of Spider-Man 2, giving you free reign over a city environment, as well as the 'Badlands' desert area, with numerous voluntary missions available in addition to storyline missions. Ultimate Destruction, in fact, quite accurately sums up this title.

Using a variety of moves that can be purchased with Smash Points, earned by completing missions, as well as by inflicting assorted mayhem on your environment, the Hulk can ride jets to the ground, create earthquakes, leap hundreds of metres and even level entire buildings.

Excellent graphics, a superb score and almost impeccable voice acting, combined with a play dynamic that actually makes you feel like you are controlling a creature as powerful as the Hulk, make for what is undoubtedly one of the best superhero titles around.   **NAG**

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A lustreless retread despite its interesting setting

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DARKWATCH

THE PLAYSTATION 2 HAS a noticeable lack of decent First-Person Shooters, with the exception of the sterling Time Splitters: Future Perfect. Unfortunately, Darkwatch doesn't contribute enough to the genre to consider it a noteworthy addition to the PlayStation 2 FPS line-up.

Set in a Frankenstein-like theme of a Vampire Western, you play a robber turned hero who trudges through the undead using an assortment of weapons to make them more dead. There is the occasional deviation from the norm, usually in the form of a horseback chase or moral choice which determines your eventual outcome, but on the whole Darkwatch is much like its lead protagonist - generic and entirely uninteresting.

What Darkwatch does manage to achieve however, is an impressive array of technologies on the aged PlayStation 2 hardware. Enemies have the appropriate rag doll effect when shot, floundering and flopping accurately and rather approvingly. Shooting an enemy in the foot causes a violently satisfying lurch from the hapless zombie or vampire, while barrels and other environmental trimmings react accordingly to explosive blasts.

Weapons can be augmented using either Light or Dark powers depending on your choices at certain moral crossroads, though these augmentations come across as little more than fluff to try and spice up an otherwise entirely ho-hum experience. **NAG**

A surprisingly entertaining fight through impressive amounts of enemies

80

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A little known fact about Romans: They knew kung-fu.

SPARTAN: TOTAL WARRIOR

IT'S ALWAYS NICE WHEN, in a game, the player controls a lead character whose sole reason for existence seems to be to turn the tide of epic battles. Few games achieve this feeling better than Spartan: Total Warrior. Massive battles featuring legions of detailed warriors engage in dynamic, pitched combat where you, as the driving force behind a warrior who has mastery of the art of war, influence the battles directly.

The combat system itself is simple yet deep. Combination attacks, melee and missile weapons as well as blocks, shield charges and evasive, all build up a fun yet functional experience where you don't feel as if you're button-mashing your way through the game.

The battlefields are richly detailed and vary greatly as you progress, though some come off as a little less than impressive when compared to others. The final showdown actually occurs in one of the liveliest, detailed and expansive environments we've seen in a while: the Imperial Coliseum in Rome. Other games have used the Coliseum as a stage, but never this well.

The weapon you choose, the objective you pursue and how you approach the battles all influence the eventual outcome. Making a poor choice can lead to disastrous results, but the checkpoint save system thankfully minimises frustration.

A touch short, a little too difficult in places, as well as not the type of game everyone will enjoy, only slightly detracts from what is overall an utterly enjoyable experience. **NAG**

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- Display Area: 376 (w) x 301mm (h)

RRP: R2795

Standard 3 Year Warranty on all CMV monitors.

Please contact these companies for sales:
Nexxon Computers: 012-667 1191
PC Logic: 011-331 9846
Frontier Electronics: 011-608 1809
Computers Only: 011-466 4060
Inter Computers: 011-894 7453
Wizardtronics: 011-699 6015

CMV is distributed in South Africa by:

Golden Nest Electronics
Tel: +27 11 466-3485. www.gne.co.za

VITAL INFO

- **Platforms**

PS2

- **Suggested Retail Price**

R 399

- **Developer**

Rebellion Software

- **Publisher**

Novalogic

- **Supplier**

MegaRom [011] 234 2680

- **Genre**

FPS

- **Age Restriction**

16+

- **Specifications**

1-4 Players

89KB memory

Analogue: Sticks only

Vibration compatible

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DELTA FORCE: BLACK HAWK DOWN

DELTA FORCE: BLACK HAWK Down, a port of the 2003 PC title, is yet another addition to the already overpopulated tactical shooter genre, and it unfortunately does little to separate itself from the myriad of other similar titles available. Based loosely on the events of the early 1990s in Somalia, Black Hawk Down sees you assuming the role of the commander of an infantry squad, though this is about the extent of the storyline presented by the game. Your job, quite simply, is to shoot at anything that moves, with the lack of any reasonable motivation presumably not being important to your character. The game plays much like any title in this genre, with the most unique feature being the ability to upgrade your characters' attributes as you progress, as well as being able to unlock new weapons. The value of this is, however, quite limited, since the game is in fact easy enough to beat without going to all the additional trouble that these tasks involve. In fact, that is perhaps the game's greatest downfall. Dated graphics and uninspiring sound would be forgivable, if the game presented at least a modicum of challenge, but even that is absent, owing to extremely shoddy artificial intelligence. The end result is an ugly looking game that quickly becomes very tedious and repetitive. There are much better polished titles available in the genre. **NAG**

VITAL INFO

- **Platforms**

DS

- **Suggested Retail Price**

R 360

- **Developer**

Konami

- **Publisher**

Konami

- **Supplier**

Nintendo [011] 256-7760

- **Genre**

Action

- **Age Restriction**

7+

- **Specifications**

1 Player

Controllers: 1

Multiplayer / Wi-Fi: Yes

AWARD NAG OF EXCELLENCE

CASTLEVANIA: DAWN OF SORROW

CASTLEVANIA: ARIA OF SORROW for the GBA, released earlier this year, is widely considered to be the best Castlevania in existence. It was indeed, until Dawn of Sorrow came along. Sequel to Aria of Sorrow, once again you follow Soma Cruz in an attempt to prevent the evil lord and master Dracula from being resurrected. This time, you infiltrate a cult base that just happens to be a towering replica of Dracula's castle. Trite, but it works.

The gameplay mechanics are relatively unchanged from Aria of Sorrow: a polished 2D side scrolling action platformer, where each new ability you gain from defeating a boss allows you access to new areas. Dawn of Sorrow takes little advantage of the touch-screen capabilities of the DS, but using the top screen as a permanent view of the map is indispensable. As you defeat enemies, you sometimes gain their soul, which in turn is an ability - these can be traded wirelessly with other DS owners.

Dawn of Sorrow is one of those rare titles, one which is more than the sum of its parts. The incredibly noteworthy musical score, crisp graphics and technically stunning special effects all serve to augment an already polished and involved experience. Fans of the series won't be disappointed in the least, while newcomers might find themselves inexplicably drawn into the lengthy quest to best the faux-tower of Dracula. **NAG**

Fun arcade football mixed with off-the-wall acrobatics

70

VITAL INFO

■ **Platforms**

PSP

■ **Suggested Retail Price**

R 361

■ **Developer**

EA Games

■ **Publisher**

Electronic Arts

■ **Supplier**

EA Africa [011] 516 8300

■ **Genre**

Sport

■ **Age Restriction**

3+

■ **Specifications**

1 Player

Multiplayer / Wi-Fi: Yes

Memory: 100KB

NFL STREET 2: UNLEASHED

SOUTH AFRICANS MAY CONSIDER Football to be an 'inferior version of Rugby'. After all, they wear padding. Logically though, the padding exists for a very good reason. Football is already a violent sport, and EA has seen fit to take it beyond reason with its Street series, especially with Street 2: Unleashed.

Players play Football, naturally, but also defy gravity, run up walls and generally pull off insane acrobatics that are helpfully detailed in the automatic highlight-reel. The game itself plays solidly, the mechanics fun and not too complex.

Up to four players can play on a single PSP unit in a variety of game modes, though the multi-PSP/multi-UMD Wi-Fi matches are a lot more entertaining. All the locally unknown NFL superstars are represented as expected from an EA license.

The PSP version even includes some new content not found in the big-brother PS2 version, namely Style Standoff, Style Point Challenge and a few other game modes.

Progression through the career mode rewards with the usual assortment of unlocks and other paraphernalia, though you really need to be interested in American Football to get the most out of NFL Street 2: Unleashed. On its own merits as a game, it does fairly well and is fun to play, though it might not appeal to the local market. **NAG**

A passable, chirpy adventure title that lacks innovation

70

Like any good adventure, you always find useful stuff everywhere

You picked up the glasses!

ANOTHER CODE: TWO MEMORIES

THE NINTENDO DS IS a bed of quirky titles mostly due to the fact that developers seem unsure of what to do with the new stylus-based input the handheld provides. Another Code may not be the best example of the capabilities of the DS, but how it approaches the adventure genre on the diminutive console is certainly perky. *[Perky? Ed]*

You play a girl called Ashley who sets off to an island to find her father who has been doing research on human memory. The theme of 'memories' plays a strong role in the plot and even the later puzzles, which works well and is implemented with a modicum of class.

Movement is achieved either via the D-pad or by holding down the stylus where you want to go with regards to the overhead 3D viewpoint. The birds-eye view of the game represented on the bottom screen works, while the top screen shows a first-person render of the area you're on. Characters appear on the top screen during dialogue, while conversation choices are poke-able on the bottom screen.

No one's come by this place

The path is blocked by all these rocks.
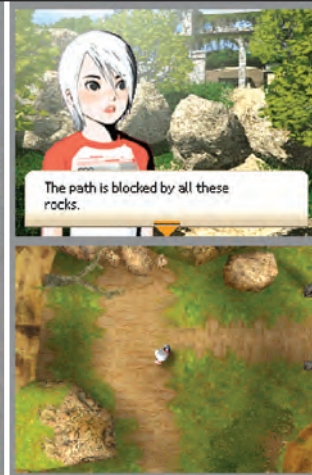
As with most adventure games the staple of Another Code are the puzzles. Taking advantage of the DS' unique features, the puzzles involve the touch screen, dual screens, microphone or even the stereo sound, and sometimes all of the above at the same time. The lateral nature of some of the puzzles may infuriate some (one puzzle where you have to stamp a letter involves closing the DS to make the stamp, from your inventory on the top screen, 'touch' the letter on the bottom screen), but on the whole Another Code is a great game to spend some time with. (Also called Trace Memory in other regions.)   **NAG**

A fun distraction yet lacks worthwhile depth

69

YOSHI: TOUCH & GO

ONE COULD CONSIDER YOSHI: Touch & Go the practical technology demo that eventually resulted in the awe-inspiring Kirby: Canvas Curse (DS). There are eerie parallels in ideas and gameplay between Touch & Go and Canvas Curse, but Yoshi's title comes off second best.

Touch & Go is essentially two styles of game: a vertical scrolling exercise in predictive movement, and a horizontal platformer. Players use the stylus to draw clouds in the sky to either direct Baby Mario away from enemies, or to provide platforms for Yoshi to walk across. You can also circle enemies with clouds to put them in a burst-able bubble. Prodding Yoshi makes him jump; tapping the screen makes Yoshi throw eggs at that point.

Uncomplicated, sure, but the lack of depth, especially with regards to the game modes, sells this title short. Aside from the time-trial and endurance modes, there really isn't much to the
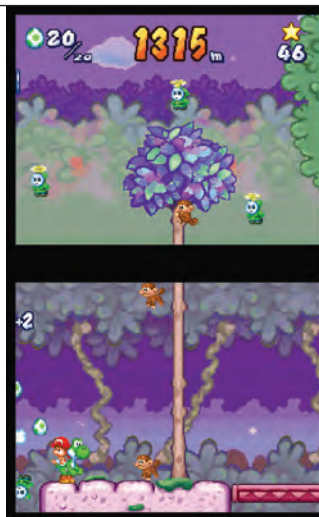
game. The Wi-Fi versus mode lets you compete against a friend, which is quite cute, especially since you can see your opponent's progress on the top screen, but it quickly loses its appeal.

The game might have been aimed exclusively at kids with its cartoon-like graphics and childlike marketing, yet the difficulty curve of the game stair-steps steeply, resulting in endless frustration as you battle your own inability to comprehend what needs to be done fast enough.   **NAG**

VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

PSP

■ Suggested Retail Price

R399

■ Developer

Bigbig Studios

■ Publisher

SCEE

■ Supplier

Ster Kinekor Games

[011] 445 7900

■ Genre

Racing

■ Age Restriction

12+

■ Specifications

Multiplayer / Wi-Fi: Yes
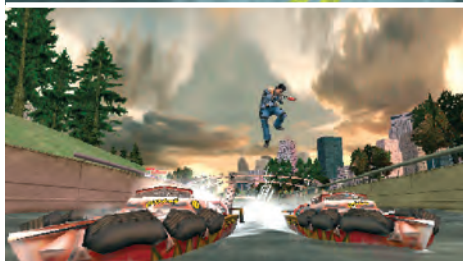
Memory: 80KB

Whoooooweeee!
Hijackers sure
got fancy!

PURSUIT FORCE

DEFYING THE LAWS OF physics, gravity and other rather important forces that keep the real world from exploding, disintegrating or careening off into space is not a new thing for games. In fact, one could say it's been overdone a little. Pursuit Force also lets you defy important physical laws, but at least it lets you do it in style.

The main goal of Pursuit Force is to bring justice to five gangs, spanning 30 missions which are in turn spread across five visually distinct districts. As you race along the track, the player uses the rather unique ability to leap between vehicles. Leaping from car to car is easy and entertaining, especially the ducking and dodging required when landing on an enemy car as they proceed to shoot at you. Once the driver has been taken out, you can take control of the car.

The only real setback about Pursuit Force is the unfortunate penchant the game has for escort missions. Escort missions are never fun, not in any game and not unless you're a masochist. Pursuit Force has a lot of escort missions or the 'catch up and save X people in cars before they get destroyed' style missions. These missions are infuriating and not even the death-defying leaps from car to car (or helicopter) can make them fun.

Ignoring those missions, Pursuit Force is an inspired game that could have benefited greatly from a cooperative wireless mode. **NAG**

Addictive and fun

92

NEW YORK NIGHTS

CAN YOU SURVIVE THE big city? As an Alabama boy you have the chance to make it in the Big Apple, but you have to do that before mom's prepaid rent runs out. This means getting a job. But survival in the city isn't just about making money, you need friends too. Using basic stats to determine your character (which is pretty customisable at the start of the game), you communicate with potential friends, chat about topics, do training for your stats (for example, a stint on a treadmill will raise your health), perhaps even court a significant other and above all make money. Pay the rent, make friends, get a job and have a ball in New York, or it is back to Alabama. This kind of addictive simplicity is great for a mobile platform. New York Nights is likely to outlive any current game on your phone. Fans of games like The Sims should definitely give it a try.

VITAL INFO
■ **Platforms**
MOB
■ **Suggested Retail Price**
R 50
■ **Developer**
Gameloft
■ **Publisher**
Gameloft
■ **Supplier**
www.thumbtribe.co.za
[031] 202 4266
■ **Genre**
Sim
■ **Download Code**
SMS: tribe 20339 to 40014
*NB:make sure you leave a space after the word **tribe**.*
Check www.thumbtribe.co.za for phone compatability and downloading instructions.

AWARD
NAG
OF EXCELLENCE

Polished but the controls can be a problem

75

FIFA 2005

WELL, YOU CAN'T BEAT FIFA as a popular franchise, so the mobile versions were inevitable. 2005 sports 16 international teams and several game modes, including a quick match and a full tournament section. This is one title that will demand some time, as it's not that easy. The game AI in the starting sections is fairly forgiving (at least they missed a lot of goals), because FIFA's one problem is the size of phone keypads. While not impossible, it will take a bit of practice to navigate your team effectively to win. After that, there still remains the mastering of penalty shootouts, a savage and quick way to win or lose a game. If you can get to grips with the controls or your phone's keys can be pressed quickly, FIFA 2005 is fun to get into. But the controls can also really hamper the game, and anyone with a small phone might want to give it a miss.

VITAL INFO
■ **Platforms**
MOB
■ **Suggested Retail Price**
R 20
■ **Developer**
iPlay
■ **Publisher**
EA
■ **Supplier**
www.thumbtribe.co.za
[031] 202 4266
■ **Genre**
Sport
■ **Download Code**
SMS: tribe 10324 to 40014
*NB:make sure you leave a space after the word **tribe**.*
Check www.thumbtribe.co.za for phone compatability and downloading instructions.

Bland and unimaginative

VITAL INFO

■ **Platforms**

MOB

■ **Suggested Retail Price**

R 50

■ **Developer**

Dhruva

■ **Publisher**

iPlay

■ **Supplier**

www.thumbtribe.co.za

[031] 202 4266

■ **Genre**

Sport

■ **Download Code**

SMS: tribe 10332 to 40014

*NB:make sure you leave a space after the word **tribe**.*

Check www.thumbtribe.co.za for phone compatability and downloading instructions.

MARIA SHARAPOVA TENNIS

SO MANY TENNIS CHAMPIONS, so few games. If you watch tennis you might know who Ms. Sharapova is (she won Wimbledon once). You might also guess that this is essentially a cash-in title. Take our star through the tournaments and collect prizes from around the world. Or head into a quick match for some immediate tennis action. Variation comes in the form of the type of surface of the court and who you play against. At least that's the theory. In reality the surface seems to have little to do with how far the ball goes. The gameplay is also simply a matter of running to where the ball is heading and hitting a button at the right time. You can do different types of strokes, but these are tricky to get right and usually not worth the effort. Thanks to this and a lack of depth (or encouragement to try something more complicated) the game is tedious and unimaginative. It might get tennis fans going, but in terms of a game it's lacklustre and quickly gets old.
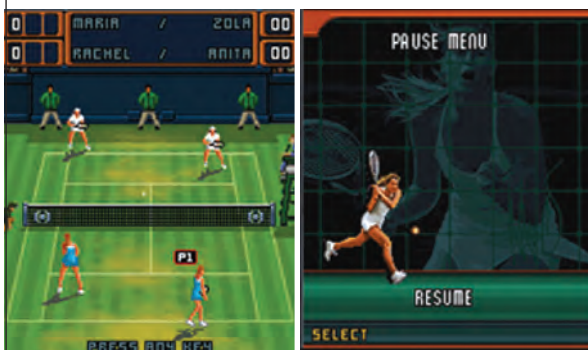
A bit lightweight, but still ahead of the rest

VITAL INFO

■ **Platforms**

MOB

■ **Suggested Retail Price**

R 50

■ **Developer**

Gameloft

■ **Publisher**

Ubisoft

■ **Supplier**

www.thumbtribe.co.za

[031] 202 4266

■ **Genre**

Action

■ **Download Code**

SMS: tribe 20351 to 40014

*NB:make sure you leave a space after the word **tribe**.*

Check www.thumbtribe.co.za for phone compatability and downloading instructions.

KING KONG

IT'S A GUESS, BUT the King Kong game might have been made by the same crew behind Ubisoft's Splinter Cell mobile titles. The games share a few similarities, all of them good, which help transform King Kong into a fun game for a mobile phone. It's a side-scrolling platformer in which players will take both Kong and Jack's roles, depending on the level. With Kong you beat up dinosaurs, make huge leaps and climb up cliff faces. Jack is stealthier and his combat will remind players of Splinter Cell. The game has a few new elements, such as tapping a key repeatedly to achieve something. Graphically it looks as good as your phone will allow it to be. The lack of a roaring sound for Kong is a bit strange, but the game is enjoyable, reasonably challenging and compact enough for a good mobile experience.

TECH NEWS

Another PSP upgrade

A new PSP firmware upgrade has been released by Sony, designed for the PSP-1001 model, which is the one released in Japan and the US. European users are discouraged from implementing this upgrade, as its compatibility is not guaranteed, and are promised their own upgrade at some point in the future. The upgrade introduces enhancements to video handling, including the LocationFree Player, a software utility that allows users to access a home-situated LocationFree Base Station (separate accessory) via the Internet, facilitating watching TV or movies.

JOYTECH'S XBOX 360 RANGE

Joytech has announced a range of officially licensed peripherals for the Xbox 360 which is to be released concurrently with the console's launch. The Neo Se is an alternative, wired controller with an illuminated Guide button and Integrated Communicator Port, allowing a headset to be connected to it. The Nitro Racing Wheel features design elements consistent with those of the Neo Se, also featuring a backlit Guide button and built-in Communicator Port. The Control Center aims at allowing the Xbox 360 to be the centrepiece of a home entertainment system, allowing up to six audiovisual playback devices to receive media from it. As well as accepting input from the console, the Control Center features a mind-boggling array of other input ports, allowing it to coordinate all audiovisuals in a home theatre system. A range of Face Plates will also be available, allowing users to customise the look of their consoles. Se Headset Communicator is a headset with built-in microphone, allowing real-time two-way communication. The Digital AV Cable offers several digital connectivity options, and provides high signal fidelity by dint of its gold plating. The Digital VGA Cable allows the Xbox 360 to be connected to a PC monitor or other display with a VGA input.
[www.joytech.net]

MAXCARE UMD CLEANER

This new product is a thorough UMD cleaner that is also capable of repairing minor scratches. The device is powered by batteries or the PSP's power lead. [www.max.tv]

NEW RADEON X1800 GRAPHICS CARDS

With the introduction of ATI's X1800 graphics processor, and the more affordable X1300 and X1600, several manufacturers have released cards powered by these chips. Info-Tek's offering is called the GECUBE Radeon X1800 and features 512MB of GDDR3 memory, while both Gigabyte and Sapphire have released comparable products. The X1800 GPU's technologies include: 90-nanometer manufacturing process, ultra-threaded core, 512-bit ring-bus memory controller, Shader Model 3.0 support, Parallax Occlusion Mapping (which uses real-time ray-tracing as its foundation) and Crossfire Platform support – ATI's answer to NVIDIA's SLI. Crossfire makes use of a technique called 'supertitling' to share the processing load between multiple graphics cards.

PSP GIGA PACK

Sony is introducing a new bundled pack, the PSP Giga Pack, which contains a PSP console, battery pack, AC adapter, USB cable, PSP stand for hands-free viewing and, most notably, a 1GB Memory Stick PRO Duo, vastly improving over previous packages' storage capacities. [www.yourpsp.com]

NEW GIGABYTE MOTHERBOARD

Gigabyte has adopted the European Union's Restriction of use of certain Hazardous Substances (RoHS) directive, and has released the first RoHS-compliant motherboard. The company is also reviewing the composition of all other elements, right down to packaging. This first RoHS-compliant motherboard is the GA-8I945P-G-RH, and its salient feature is its Intel 945P Express chipset. Other features are those one would expect in a full house Pentium (LGA775) motherboard, including DDR2 667 support, two PCI Express ports and Gigabit LAN. The boards will become available this month. [www.rectron.co.za]

CREATIVE I-TRIGUE L3800

This is a new 2.1 speaker system for use with PCs, laptops and, ideally, Zen portable players. The styling features brushed aluminium and a remote control for both the speaker system and any Creative Zen player. The system provides sound output power of 48 Watts RMS. I-Trique L3800 retails for around R1,400 through Annex Distribution.

Silent-Pipe II

Gigabyte has developed a second generation of its Silent-Pipe cooling technology. Designed for use with the company's graphics cards, this system makes use of metallic pipes and natural airflow to draw heat away from sensitive components, thus reducing overall noise generation. [tw.giga-byte.com]

1GB flash memory chips

Spansion, a joint venture by AMD and Fujitsu, has announced the world's first 1GB single-chip flash memory. This high-density chip is manufactured using a 90-nanometer process, and commercial production is expected to begin by the end of the year.

TECH NEWS

3DMarkMobile06

Futuremark has released 3DMarkMobile06 Developers' Edition, a 3D performance benchmarking tool for evaluating embedded OpenGL ES 1.0 and 1.1 mobile hardware. This version is designed to be of use to developers, as well as to other sectors such as game reviewers. The application subjects hardware to gruelling tests and furnishes results in frames per second, polygons per second and texels per second. "3DMarkMobile06 features future workloads and game programming technologies that consumers will run in next-generation mobile 3D hardware," said Tero Sarkkinen, Executive Vice President of Sales and Marketing for Futuremark. [www.futuremark.com]

New graphics memory from Samsung

Samsung has developed new RAM for graphics cards, called GDDR4. Prototypes are running at 2.5Gbps, which is around 56% faster than current GDDR3. The company hopes to introduce versions running at 2.8Gbps by the end of the year, with mass-production commencing by April or May. The architecture has been kept virtually identical to that of GDDR3, to allow an easy transition.

BLAZE PSP TO TV PROJECTOR

This simple yet highly useful device from Fire International clips onto a PSP handheld console and provides AV connections to a TV, projector or other such display. It becomes available this month, though local availability may take somewhat longer.
[www.xploder.net]

ARCHOS GMINI 402 POCKET MULTIMEDIA CENTER

This is a sleek but powerful new upgrade to the Gmini 400, which was released last year. It is fitted with a 20GB hard drive, and can play MP3, WMA, protected WMA, MPEG-4 and WMV. Its USB port allows transfer of media to and from a computer, and it can connect to a TV for video playback. It is compatible with Microsoft's PlayForSure download and subscription services, and supports auto-synchronisation with Windows Media Player 10. Optional accessories include a car adapter, protective case, remote control and double headphone kit. [www.archos.com]

LEGAL ACTION AGAINST APPLE OVER IPOD NANO

A class action suit has been filed against Apple Computer over the iPod nano's manufacturing standards. This action has been prompted by the portable player's tendency to be scratched too easily, eventually rendering the screen unreadable. Controversy has abounded regarding whether the device really is more prone to scratching than previous models, but this does not appear to have impacted the device's popularity, with demand exceeding current supplies.
[www.apple.com]

IPOD NANO CASES

Belkin has introduced three form-fitting cases for the iPod nano. Offering different carrying and attachment methods but all boasting accessibility to all the ports, these are the Carabineer Case, the Flip Case and the Folio Case.
[www.belkin.com]

STEEL SERIES STEELPAD 5L

This is a high-end mouse pad that consists of several layers. The bottom is made from hard plastic, ensuring the pad's shape integrity. Above that is a soft rubber foam layer that provides some 'give', thus giving an impression of softness. Finally, the top layer is cloth-covered plastic, offering a smooth, flat surface with the pleasant soft feel of cloth.
[www.liquidgaming.co.za]

IBM MICROPROCESSOR POWERS XBOX 360

A custom-designed microprocessor built by IBM for Microsoft's Xbox 360 console is in production at the company's New York fabrication plant and at Chartered Semiconductor Manufacturing in Singapore. Werner Lindemann, Executive: Systems & Technology Group of IBM South and Central Africa, says the specialised chip, featuring customised and enhanced IBM intellectual property, was designed and developed by IBM and Microsoft to meet the requirements of the next-generation Xbox 360 console.

"The Xbox 360 chip set was designed from the ground up specifically for high-definition gaming and entertainment," says Todd Holmdahl, Microsoft's corporate vice president, hardware for Xbox. "Working with IBM gave us the flexibility to design a processor to give game developers the kind of targeted power they need to make great games."

The chip features a customised version of IBM's 64-bit PowerPC core. The chip includes three of these cores, each with two simultaneous threads and clock speeds greater than 3GHz. It features 165 million transistors and is fabricated using IBM's 90-nanometer Silicon on Insulator (SOI) technology to reduce heat and improve performance. The chip's 21.6 GB/s Front Side Bus (FSB) architecture was customised to meet the demanding throughput and latency requirements of the Xbox 360 gaming platform software. [www.ibm.com]

HEDGEHOG CONTROLLER

NubyTech has announced the release of its Shadow the Hedgehog controller for PlayStation 2, which is officially endorsed by SEGA. [www.clubnubytech.com/shadow]

RADEON R520 ARCHITECTURE AND THE GₑCUBE X1800 XL MAKE THEIR DEBUT

EVER SINCE JUNE THIS year, ATI has been on its back foot in the eternal GPU war with NVIDIA, as its fastest single card offerings have been hammered by the 7800 GTX, while NVIDIA continued to dominate the multi-GPU war with SLI. ATI answered with CrossFire, but this technology failed to materialise in retail outlets.

5 October 2005 was meant to change all that, well the single card market at the very least, with the arrival of the latest R520-based cards from ATI dubbed the X1000 series. Unfortunately the launch has been slightly marred by the fact that ATI didn't actually release its real 7800 GTX competitor, the X1800 XT. We had one of the first X1800 XL cards available in the SA market on test, from manufacturer GeCube. But before we put it through its paces, it is worth pausing to get some details on the brand new R520 architecture, as it shows off the new direction which ATI engineers want to take the GPU market in.

Like its R420 predecessor, the latest architecture is built on 16 pixel shading units in pipelines consisting of four shaders each. R520 adds a unit dubbed an 'Ultra threaded dispatch processor' to this layout, which is basically the GPU equivalent of HyperThreading on Intel processors. Each shader command is broken up by the dispatch processor into threads which it

then feeds out to the 4 x 4 pipelines for execution. The basic premise behind this model is to ensure that the shaders are utilised more efficiently and clock cycles are not wasted waiting for one shader instruction to be completed, even if that instruction is itself waiting for the necessary texture data to be retrieved from either the built-in graphics RAM or system RAM. This componentisation of pixel shader instructions also helps the R520 with its new support of shader model 3.0, as this newer implementation incorporates support for dynamic per-pixel branching in the execution of shader calculations. With each shader capable of handling 128 threads at a time, and the integrated Branch Execution Unit which eliminates the need for the GPU to determine which branch each pixel being processed belongs in, this change should yield more efficient output particularly at high resolutions with post-processing effects applied for maximum image quality. This threaded architecture suggests that future ATI GPUs may well be moving to dual core architecture, following the lead of the CPU vendors.

The remainder of the R520 architecture has largely been upgraded in accordance with the requirements of shader model 3.0, which means it isn't actually that different from

VITAL INFO

■ **Pros**
Excellent showing especially with FSAA on

■ **Cons**
First-generation teething issues; HDR problems; Driver issues; Murdered in the market by its pricing

■ **Supplier**
Sonic Informed
[011] 880 2684

■ **Internet**
www.sonicinformed.co.za

■ **RRP**
R4999

■ **Reviewer**
Russell Bennett

R420. Performance is also boosted from the older chipset through the creation of a high-speed ring data bus for the graphics memory subsystem, 256 bits wide in each direction for a total bus width of 512 bits. And finally, the move to a 90nm manufacturing process means that the clock frequency of the latest GPU can be bumped up somewhat - 500MHz in the case of this XL while the XT, due soon, will run at a very healthy 625MHz. Are these features enough for ATI to reclaim the top spot it enjoyed so convincingly with the 9800 and then X800 range? Only a thorough benchmark run can confirm or deny that!

First the synthetic benchmark suite, 3DMark05. Running at 1,024 x 768 with no FSAA and no anisotropy, the X1800 XL was in fact initially a little disappointing, particularly compared to the Legend 7800 GTX we were testing it against. This comparison may be a bit unfair as the XL is targeted at the more mainstream 7800 GT, not the GTX. But on price these two cards are more evenly matched than XL vs. GT, as the newness and relative scarcity of the ATI offering mean that it is launching at a premium price point.

On standard resolution, with no pixel-sharpening enabled, the X1800 managed 7,140 3DMarks - the GTX scored 7,678. Pushing the resolution up showed the newer card gained no benefit from its more advanced architecture purely as a result of higher resolution. The 24-shader GTX kept pace with the more efficient 16-shader XL right up to 1,600 x 1,200, where the cards managed 5,689 and 5,094 respectively.

Only when antialiasing and anisotropic filtering were brought into play did the R520 start to show its hand, matching the GTX head to head at each resolution with FSAA on four passes and anisotropy maxed out at 16. At 1,600 x 1,200 the GTX was still just ahead with 4,078 with the XL trailing by exactly 100 points. Excellent performance from the XL, and a good sign that the XT with its 125MHz core and 250MHz (multiplied by two as it is DDR) RAM frequency advantages will retake the performance crown when we can actually get hold of one.

Although synthetic benchmarks are a decent indication of what a

card will do, performance in real-world gaming titles are the most important element of any GPU benchmark. As this is a new-generation card, we decided to conduct our real-world gaming tests using predominantly new-generation games and therefore 3D engines. Only Far Cry remains of the older titles, as the CryTek engine is still a really flexible gem. F.E.A.R. includes a nice built-in performance test, Serious Sam 2 should demonstrate how well each card handles HDR (High Dynamic Range) lighting, while Quake 4 will reveal OpenGL capabilities.

Quake 4 was up first. It's clear from this title that the X1800 has not gone any way towards addressing the NVIDIA dominance of OpenGL titles, as the 7800 GTX soundly thrashed the newcomer every which way in Quake. At 1,600 x 1,200, Ultra Quality and with 4-sample antialiasing turned on, the NVIDIA was 8fps ahead of the XL running the same detail settings one resolution down, at 1,280 x 1,024. On an even footing with the same detail settings just mentioned, but both at 1,024 x 768, the GTX was pulling 68.6 to the 51.1 of the Radeon card.

But the CryTek engine was up next, and here the X1800 struck back, just edging the GTX for the win with a 1,600 x 1,200 score of 42.5fps with antialiasing and anisotropy maxed out, compared to the 42.1 of the GTX. The two cards ran neck and neck at every resolution detail combination available on this title, although interestingly, HDR failed to work at all on the new ATI part despite it having 64-bit registers available for HDR computations (compared to the 128-bit wide HDR registers in the GTX).

Serious Sam 2 really shows off HDR very nicely, and Serious Sam 2 with HDR on is probably the best advert for buying a high-end card we've seen to date. While the NVIDIA card has a weakness connected to HDR, in that it cannot have this feature and antialiasing enabled simultaneously while the R520 theoretically can, it was again the XL which disappointed by failing utterly to render the gorgeous HDR effects.

Again the GTX took the lead, and despite the evidence in 3DMark05, it actually widened the margin with post-processing effects maxed out. At 1,600 x 1,200 and 4 x FSAA, the GTX beat the XL by 12fps with a score of 48, while at the same resolution without FSAA it managed 55 to the ATI's 50.

F.E.A.R. is an absolutely stunning new-generation engine with a built-in benchmarking tool which handily separates the performance at each setting into FPS 'zones'. In addition to minimum, maximum and average framerates for the run, it shows the percentage of time spent at an unplayable less than 25fps, between 25 and 40fps, and above 40fps. Patched to the latest version, 1.2, this title again favoured the NVIDIA

offering at higher resolution/quality settings, but interestingly ran better on the XL at 1,024 x 768 with 4-pass FSAA and 16 x anisotropy. This particular contest was called as a draw, although the higher performance by NVIDIA at more taxing settings got the nod for this card, but only barely.

Despite being outperformed by NVIDIA in most of these real-world tests, the X1800 XL was really competing in a technically higher league here, although in pricing the two compete pretty directly. Compared to its direct rival the 7800 GT, the XL would no doubt perform much better, and we believe a clear winner in that contest would be pretty tough to call, even though the XL seems to run so close to the higher-end GTX here. That said however, the X1800 XT really ought to have the grunt to depose of the 7800 GTX relatively convincingly. It might not be quite as emphatic a win as we expected of the new ATI chipset, but those extra MHz ought to make it enough.

The GeCube X1800 XL has proven itself as an excellent 'budget' high-end card. Some of the problems we encountered do disappoint, like a few rendering issues that cropped up in Far Cry, and the refusal to render HDR lighting which will undoubtedly be fixed in the new driver. Speaking of which, for these benchmarks the X1800 was run using modified Catalyst 5.8 drivers included in the package, as the latest Catalyst 5.10 and even previous 5.9 packages downloaded from the ATI homepage wouldn't recognise the X1800 as a card which required the Catalyst package - another strange quirk.

With such a small performance delta, this battle will be waged on price. And on that basis, we think the 7800 GT (or even GTX which can be bought for sub-R4K now), will continue to dominate the installed base, while the highest GPU performance rank will be firmly taken over by the forthcoming X1800 XT.   **NAG**

SILVERSTONE STRIDER ST60F

AS THE POWER REQUIREMENTS of hardcore computer users, running cutting edge technology or merely massive amounts of peripherals and devices, increase, it's nice to know companies like Silverstone are keeping pace with these needs. After all, without a good power source the most expensive hardware is rendered completely useless.

This unit, dubbed the Strider, but officially designated the ST60F, is really all about excess. Thumping out a massive 600W of APC-corrected juice, the Strider should have the legs to support even the most extreme of gaming rigs complete with some disco globes offsetting the tube lighting to a tee.

In fact, we didn't have the hardware to even cause the Strider to break into a sweat. No surprise considering Silverstone has gone the whole hog and built this PSU with no less than four 12V rails to make sure that the power (600W) is delivered in the most stable form possible.

Aesthetically it's quite a pleasing unit. At the bottom of the box lies a quiet 120mm fan to keep things cool, with a mesh grille for ventilation covering the entire front face of the unit. Closer inspection reveals this venting to consist of even larger holes than lesser Silverstone units, hinting that dispelling air may be a primary concern in the cooling process of the Strider.

Open up the box and you'll see why. Those quad rails make for a really packed interior, with only narrow channels for air to flow through. That said, the unit's thermal signature never became an issue, even with a pretty power-hungry system configuration.

The entire rear end of the Strider is covered with connectors. This 600W monster is entirely modular and you attach cables to these connectors as and when you add a device needing another power jack or connector type. They're even intelligently separated into groupings with IDE Molex connectors taking up the first four slots on the PSU - SATA and PCI Express connectors are positioned alongside the larger motherboard connectors.

Although the cables are sleeved for a cleaner appearance as well as improved case airflow, it's still quite a mess with everything connected to the Strider that can be connected, thanks to the sheer cabling volume. There is a ton of options here: eight IDE, four SATA, three PCI-E, two floppy disk power connectors, and the ubiquitous 24-pin and 4-pin plugs which power modern platforms.

Slip out the ones you don't need however, in our case two of the PCI-E cables, two of the IDE (four Molex connectors in total), and one SATA power cable, and suddenly you have a system providing just the power needed with very little cable clutter. Marvellous.

The performance of this Silverstone Strider was faultless. Even under the load which we could induce, GPU pulling maximum juice while both optical drives were accessed as well as one PATA and one SATA hard drive in operation, not once did the power provided to the system fluctuate more than 0.01V.

The Strider offers the best of all worlds in PSU terms. Okay, it isn't absolutely silent, but it's unobtrusive and provides gargantuan amounts of electricity without any signs of ripple whatsoever. And it has great cable management built-in thanks to the modular design. Buy one if your system is one step short of an enterprise server in terms of power-hungry internals. It won't fail you, even under extreme conditions. **NAG**

VITAL INFO

■ **Pros**
All the power capacity you could need;
Modular cabling

■ **Cons**
None

■ **Supplier**
Naked IT [011] 678 1288

■ **Internet**
www.nakedit.co.za

■ **RRP**
TBA

■ **Reviewer**
Russell Bennett

ZALMANN FATAL1TY FS-V7 VGA COOLER

ZALMANN HAS INTRODUCED ITS own Fatal1ty branded products in the form of its FS-C77 CPU cooler and the FS-V7 VGA cooling system.

Immediately the size of this product strikes you. It features a much stylised flower heatsink (a Zalmann trademark) with a large 80mm fan mounted on it to aid its GPU cooling efforts. In fact, this arrangement not only promotes improved cooling of the GPU itself, but coupled with the included RAM heatsinks and less obstructed airflow qualities of the main flower heatsink, assists with cooling your entire VGA part.

Installation of the V7 is not particularly tricky, provided your card has the mounting holes it requires. We're normally sceptical of installing VGA coolers, but this one really wasn't particularly worrying at all on our Sapphire X800 Pro AGP.

Fan speed of this Fatal1ty cooler is not variable like most modern stock GPU cooling solutions are. Basically, you can either have it running in performance mode or quiet mode, depending on which connector you use to power the fan - either a 12V or 5V connector respectively.

Plugged into our system using the 12V connector, the V7 was noisier than the standard ATI reference cooler previously used by our card, but it did offer around a 6ºC lower VGA temperature under load. With the 5V connector the unit was quiet, very much the same as the stock system on our Sapphire, while operating temperatures remained similar. In fact, thanks to the variable speed of the standard cooler, the card actually ran a bit hotter after extended periods of operation with the flower heatsink installed.

As far as fundamental benefits go, there are little to be had over a decent stock cooling system.   **NAG**

VITAL INFO

Pros
Looks funky;
Cools effectively

Cons
No temperature adjustability

Supplier
Frontosa
[011] 466 0038

Internet
www.frontosa.co.za

RRP
R 419

Reviewer
Russell Bennett

POWERCOLOR X800GT

TARGETED AT THE MID-RANGE market, the X800GT has made quite a bit of noise internationally due to its great performance vs. affordability factor. It is also targeted to compete with NVIDIA's GeForce 6600GT and GeForce 6800LE graphics cards, and so far it has been putting up quite a fight.

The X800GT uses the same GPU (R480) than that found in the high-end X850 graphics cards, but it has only eight pipelines unlocked as opposed to the 16 pipelines available in the X850 series of graphics cards. Therefore it runs quite a bit slower than ATI's top of the range card, but consumers have reported that this card is very overclockable. The only problem regarding overclocking it is that the extra eight pipelines cannot be unlocked, yet.

The card we received for review is the PowerColor X800GT. It has a core clock rating of 475MHz, while it uses 256MB of GDDR3 2.0ns RAM which runs at 980MHz. It is interesting to note that unlike some of its high-end counterparts, the PowerColor X800GT doesn't require an external power source. This is due to the fact that the R480 core is not running at its maximum, so it doesn't need a lot of power to operate. We installed this card in one of our Intel-based machines which features a 925x Intel motherboard with a 3.4GHz Intel Pentium 4 processor and 1GB of DDR2 533

RAM. We also installed the latest Catalyst 5.9 drivers on our Windows XP SP2 installation. Overall, we were very impressed by the performance of this card. It handled most of the games we played without any problems, even on their highest settings. We only detected frame drops and lag on games such as F.E.A.R. - which requires high-end components if you run it on its highest settings. The first benchmark we ran was 3DMark05 version 1.2.0. At 1,024 x 768 we ran the default benchmark and achieved a score of 3,955, while at 1,280 x 1,024 3DMark05 produced a score of 3,199. Moving away from synthetic benchmarks, we were very impressed with the performance of the ATI X800GT when playing Battlefield 2. We played Battlefield 2 in single-player and multiplayer mode and measured the average framerate during both. At 1,024 x 768 the average framerate the card produced was 50.85fps and at 1,280 x 1,024 the framerate dropped slightly to 41.2fps. Half-Life 2 is another popular game for benchmarking and using the default settings in Bench'emAll, the PowerColor X800GT achieved an average framerate of 35.3fps at 1,024 x 768 and 30.3fps at 1,280 x 768. After having used this card for close to two weeks during our gaming, we are delighted to report back that it is definitely one of the best mid-range cards we have used to date. **NAG**

VITAL INFO

■ Pros
Great performance vs. price factor;
Quiet operation;
No external power needed

■ Cons
The last eight pixel pipelines cannot be unlocked during overclocking

■ Supplier
ATI

■ Internet
www.powercolor.com

■ RRP
TBA

■ Reviewer
Regardt van der Berg

MOBY OPTICAL GLASS MOUSE PAD

MOUSE PADS COME IN all shapes, sizes, and materials. This one happens to be glass. Now normally, optical mice have issue with clear and reflective surfaces. But this pad claims to be designed for an optical mouse and so shouldn't have tracking problems. Also, since glass is quite smooth, it should be a nice surface for gaming.

Well, none of the above holds true. With a Logitech G5 laser mouse, there were tracking issues. Moving the mouse above a certain speed resulted in no registered movement at all. The speed at which this occurred wasn't very fast, and would likely happen fairly often in gaming with 180 degree spins. An infrared-based Razer Diamondback faired a bit better, but the surface was still a bit draggy and it was nearly impossible to move the mouse a small increment from rest consistently.

Our office mousepad connoisseur, who spent almost two years testing surfaces to settle on a polished porcelain tile with a salt and pepper pattern that costs about R10 at Tile Africa, was unimpressed. Porcelain is reported to be smoother than glass and harder than steel, and at least the former is true in this case. The mouse felt draggy on the glass, and the tracking issues made it unsuitable for gaming and even frustrating in Windows sometimes.   **NAG**

VITAL INFO

■ **Pros**
Looks nice

■ **Cons**
Unsuitable for gaming; Useless with high end laser mice

■ **Supplier**
Frontosa
[011] 466 0038

■ **Internet**
www.frontosa.co.za

■ **RRP**
TBA

■ **Reviewer**
Toby Hudon

RAZER COPPERHEAD

IN THE WORLD OF gaming mice, there are really only two names that most people instantly think of, Logitech and Razer. For some time, these two have been battling to produce the perfect gaming mouse, and their latest entries have just appeared. The Copperhead is Razer's answer to Logitech's G5, which is the only other 2,000dpi class mouse available at present.

While 2,000dpi might sound impressive, what really matters is how well the mouse performs during gaming. There is actually little reason for such a high optical sensitivity, as it just means decreasing sensitivity in games to compensate. One can argue that this leads to a finer grain of precision, but in reality there's very little noticeable difference. Razer claims to top Logitech with a 1,000Hz USB polling rate vs. the G5's 500Hz, but this is also virtually unnoticeable in actual use.

In terms of the physical mouse itself, there is little difference between the Copperhead and Razer's midrange Diamondback mouse. The 'zero-acoustic ultra slick Teflon feet' do seem to have slightly lower drag and stickiness at rest than even the Diamondback, but this is fairly minor. The top of the mouse is a matte finish instead of the glossy plastic on the Diamondback, which some people might appreciate for improved grip, and the back of the mouse is a hair taller as well, which might fit some hands slightly more comfortably. Like all Razer mice, the Copperhead is symmetrical, it works equally well for right and left handed gamers.

What's missing is the answer to the Logitech G5's weight cartridge system. Razer claims the Copperhead supports weight modification, but this is only with the optional pro-

tools, which are sold separately. From the looks of it, only overall weight will be adjustable, and not balance and centre of gravity like the G5. This is a glaring omission, as we found that to be the biggest overall advantage of the G5, and a far bigger innovation than a 25% increase in DPI.

There were also some issues with drivers. Windows would often boot up and not detect the mouse. Razer's own drivers would sometimes complain, and could not detect the mouse properly in some USB ports. These problems might be solved by an updated driver, but that remains to be seen.

In the end, the Copperhead is a nice mouse, probably one of the most responsive we've ever tested. It works well on any surface, and for lefties, this is as good as it gets. However, it's not a match for the G5, and there's little to warrant its significant price increase over the 1,600dpi class Diamondback. **NAG**

VITAL INFO

■ Pros
Low friction;
Very responsive;
Can be used left-handed

■ Cons
Driver issues;
Weight adjust sold
seperately;
No balance adjust

■ Supplier
Proton Technology
[011] 466 8888

■ Internet
www.razerzone.com

■ RRP
TBA

■ Reviewer
Toby Hudon

LOGITECH PLAYGEAR AMP

LOGITECH SEEMS TO BE a bottomless source of PlayStation Portable peripherals and add-ons, quick to fill any conceivable gap in the market with their habitually high-quality products.

The PlayGear Amp is a set of portable speakers for the PSP (or anything with a headphone jack out for sound, really), designed for easy travel and as a stand for the PSP. It is not, unfortunately, a docking station for the PSP and cannot recharge your PSP.

Arriving in a travel case which measures roughly 30cm long, 10cm deep and 10cm wide, the PlayGear Amp nestles snugly into the split compartment of the travel case. The other half is for storing the AC adapter, audio cables and PSP cradle clip.

Setting up the speakers is a no-brainer. Pull them out, extend the chrome support, twist the speakers out from their prone positions and plug in the audio cable and AC adapter for power. You can also use batteries for power, with the grouping of triple-A batteries capable of running the speakers at medium volume for longer than the PSP can hold out, which is rather impressive.

The specialised micro-driver speakers deliver a surprising amount of power and clarity. While the speakers may not have much in the way of low or high ranges or any kind of bass, the midrange it delivers is crisp and clear.

On the whole, the PlayGear Amp is a welcome addition to the PSP if you're the type to watch movies on your handheld and don't feel like using headphones (or want to watch a movie with someone). While audiophiles might not like the lack of low/high range, the average consumer will be impressed by the sound fidelity. In terms of weighing cost versus output, the PlayGear Amp is actually quite useful, not just for the PSP but also if you want an audio solution for your laptop, Nintendo DS or iPod.   **NAG**

VITAL INFO

■ **Pros**
Good battery life; Clear sound

■ **Cons**
Not a docking station

■ **Supplier**
DCS [011] 466 5099

■ **Internet**
www.logitech.com

■ **RRP**
R 699

■ **Reviewer**
Miktar Dracon
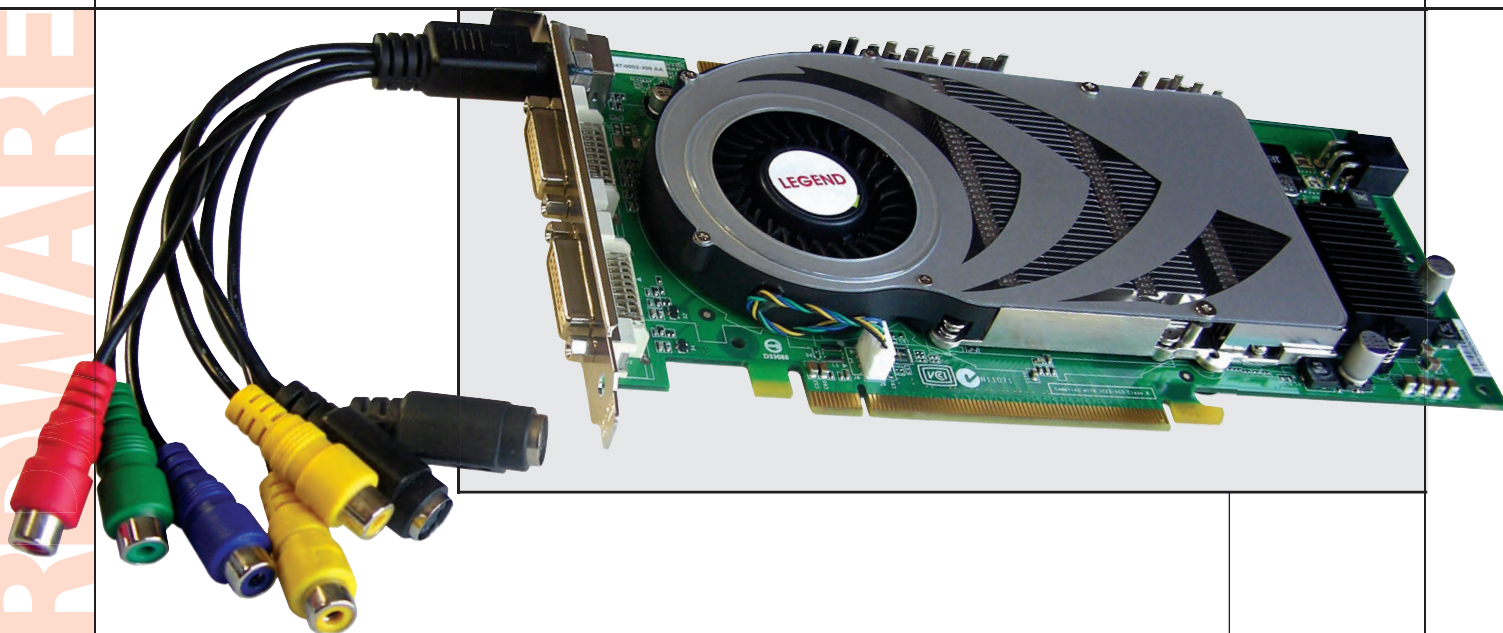
LEGEND GEFORCE 7800GTX VIVO

THERE'S NO DOUBT THAT NVIDIA's 7800GTX is the 3D chip to beat this holiday season. ATI is likely to put forth a strong contender, but ATI's work is cut out for it. While we've already reviewed several 7800GTX-based cards, this one shows that not all are created equal.

First, it must be said, this is the highest unmodified overclocking 7800GTX we've seen to date. We searched the Internet for hardware reviews and benchmark databases to try and prove it wrong, but every higher reported maximum clock speed we found involved enhanced cooling. One or two other brands could just about match the core speed, but none could touch the memory speed. The Legend board clocks a 430MHz core and 1,200MHz RAM by default, and we were able to achieve a perfectly stable 490MHz core and 1,400MHz RAM, even in our sweltering office that produces internal case temperatures of over 50°C most of the time. Higher results did pass RivaTuner's internal tests, but resulted in artifacts. The highest passing settings varied with ambient temperature, but reached as high as 500/1,475. For those of you waiting to see if there'll be a 7800 Ultra, you might not need to wait any longer if you're a moderately skilled modder. An aftermarket cooling kit that probably costs less than an Ultra card's expected price premium would likely reach a stable 500/1,500, which would be our guess for a default clock speed should NVIDIA release a faster 7800 chip.

That would be impressive itself, but there's more. This is also a VIVO card, and thus supports both video in and video out. The bundled cable adapter has S-video and composite in and out, and HDTV component out. The quality of both input and output is superb and surpasses even some midrange dedicated capture cards in quality. The VIVO system can make use of the 7800's hardware-accelerated de-interlacing and video processing module for stunning results. The output rivals the input, producing some of the clearest TV output we've seen on a 3D card.

By now you're probably wondering what the catch is. There isn't one. Legend is an Australian based OEM that manufactures its own memory, flash memory and video cards, and has recently started distributing its products in South Africa. Legend doesn't sell directly to the public, only to distributors, and mostly smaller ones. As we can see from the maximum speed of the memory and the quality of the VIVO, which is so often an afterthought on high-end 3D cards, Legend is producing a high quality product. The only thing this card lacks is a software bundle, as it only comes with drivers and PowerDVD5. However, Legend representatives told us their focus is on lowering costs and improving quality, not bundling outdated games nobody really cares about anyway. Their suggested pricing could put this card as low as R3,999 (retail), making it one of the cheapest 7800GTXs on the market as well as the fastest.

Benchmarks

The test system was an Athlon 64 3200+, clocked at 2.4GHz, with 1GB DDR400 (stock speed) running NVIDIA 81.85 drivers. Game tests were done in 1,600 x 1,200 with 8x anisotropic, no AA, max or ultra quality on all graphics settings, and no soft shadows in F.E.A.R.

Stock 430/1,200 setting:
3DMark05: 7,636
Doom3 demo 1: 90.9fps
F.E.A.R. performance test: 28 min., 48 avg., 92 max.; 0% <25fps, 45% 25-40fps, 55% > 40fps.

Overclocked at 490/1,400:
3DMark05: 8,601
Doom3: 97.6
F.E.A.R.: 31 min., 54 avg., 107 max.; 0% < 25fps, 20% 25-40fps, 80% > 40fps.   **NAG**

STEEL SOUND 5H PRO GAMING HEADSET

EVER HEARD OF THE Steel Series and its Steel Sound range of audio equipment? Although these products aren't cheap, they're no rip-off either. They're very good, probably the best you'll find as a gamer.

We have the 5H USB version on review here. That means it's the headset itself with regular audio jacks, and these plug into a very convenient converter to USB which also happens to be a sound card. You can get these headphones without the USB card, but it does make some things easier.

Although Windows XP, with SP2 installed, detects and installs drivers for this card as it is plugged in, the package does include a driver disc which you can install if you like. The official driver software admittedly comes with a lot more features, but for some reason generate a tiny amount of feedback-like vibration through the speakers. Negligible, but if you're a gamer, do you really want your game to sound like it is being played from an orchestra pit?

This 5H set really gets the job done when it comes to audio performance. Both plugged into the USB sound card and directly into my SB 24-bit, these headphones produced fantastic sound. The simulated surround audio signals generated by the included card are superb, bass is astoundingly 'boomy' considering it has only the air between the headphones and your ear to oscillate, and they are easily loud enough to deafen you in a dramatically protracted length of time.

They are also very comfortable with good padding (clamped firmly to your head, but not so tight as to cause any discomfort even after hours of gaming immersion), and seriously long cables so the wire will never really get in your way. There's an integrated volume control at hand, which also incorporates the toggle switch to activate or deactivate the built-in microphone. Oh we forgot to mention the microphone… That's because it's concealed on a flexible boom, which can be pulled out of the left earpiece when needed and shoved back in when it's not. It's a really neat idea, but the uncertain feeling you get when pushing that flex connector back into the headset is the weakest aspect of this whole package – everything else feels light but as solid as if made from granite. The microphone was necessary for the headset to have any gaming cred today. Such a massive variety of games are enhanced by using the Web as a medium for voice, either through built-in modules or external apps like TeamSpeak, that no gaming headphone today can be missing this crucial piece. The one integrated into the 5H set is another example of a very high-quality piece of audio equipment.

The headphones are very convenient for mobile gaming, as well as late-night-at-home gaming. The incorporated go anywhere soundcard helps for one, and the fact that the headband itself detaches from the headphones for safer packing is the cherry on top.

If you want or need a 'for your ears only' PC audio system for whatever reason, get this one if price isn't a big deal. It just rocks. **NAG**

VITAL INFO

■ Pros
Superb audio quality; Neat portability features; USB sound card

■ Cons
Retractable flex microphone arm feels prone to breakage

■ Supplier
Soft Trading ApS

■ Internet
www.steelseries.co.za

■ RRP
R 842

■ Reviewer
Russell Bennett

GET YOURS
BEFORE THE ENEMY DOES.

HARDCOR3

PUT YOUR LIGHTS ON

THE FESTIVE SEASON IS upon us and because Christmas lights seem to be everywhere, we thought it would be a great idea to see what lights are available for your PC. This month we made our test machine light up like a Christmas tree, so hopefully Santa will bring us a NVIDIA 7800GTX. *[Who writes this stuff? Ed.]*

Case lights are the basis for any case modification project. It is not just a funky effect to draw attention to your PC, but it can also be used creatively to shift the focus to a particular piece of hardware such as a graphics card or your motherboard. Generally speaking, case lights draw very little power from your power supply, but it is highly recommended to have a power supply above 350W, especially if you have reasonably new hardware or high-end components installed. As with most case mod accessories too much "bling" is a no-no, so use your lights creatively. Do not try and get every colour of the rainbow inside your case. Pick a colour and build a theme around it, less is more or so they say. So unless you want to go for that "overkill-look" install your case lights selectively. In all honesty though, case lights are funky and no mod is complete without at least one CCFL. They are also one of the easiest of the case mod products to install, so if you do not have a single light in your case, go to your local PC shop now and buy one, it's an order!
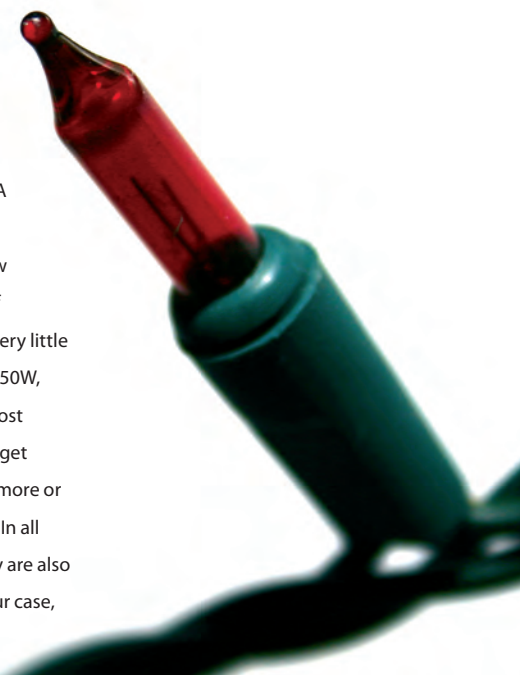
XMOD NIGHT MAGIC

The XMOD Night Magic is a rather interesting case light. It actually looks more like a string of blue pearls. The Night Magic string consists of 20 LEDs which are encased in silicone to create quite a unique looking light. It can be placed inside your case or even around the frame of your monitor or chassis. Because it is encased in silicone it is bendable into almost any shape, and if 20 LEDs are not enough, you can daisy chain the Night Magic lights. The only downside to this kit is that it doesn't ship with anything to stick it to your case.

OVERALL
70
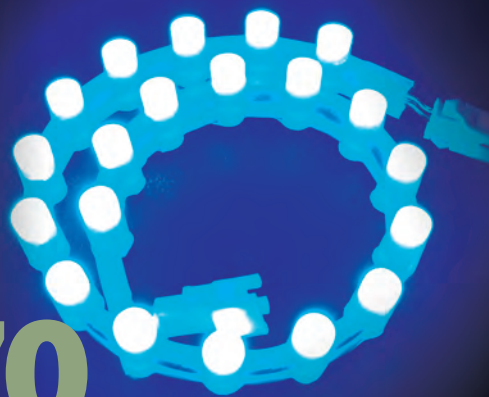
VITAL INFO

■ **Plus**
Who doesn't like a string of lights?

■ **Minus**
Used incorrectly it can look cheesy

■ **Supplier**
NakedIT [011] 678-1288

■ **Internet**
www.nakedit.co.za

■ **RRP**
R99

VALUE	COOL FACTOR	EASE OF INSTALLATION
70	70	70

BUBBLE LIGHTS

These two products are very similar. The longer of the two is called the Bubble Light and features a Perspex tube which has been moulded with air bubbles on the inside. It features a Blue LED on the one end which, when switched on, creates a cool water-like effect. The other, shorter one is called the Light Sabre and features two short Perspex tubes which have also been moulded with air bubbles. The Light Sabre features three coloured LEDs which create various colours as they flash. Both kits come with an inverter, PCI bracket with on/off switch and Velcro to fasten it to the inside of your case.

OVERALL
78
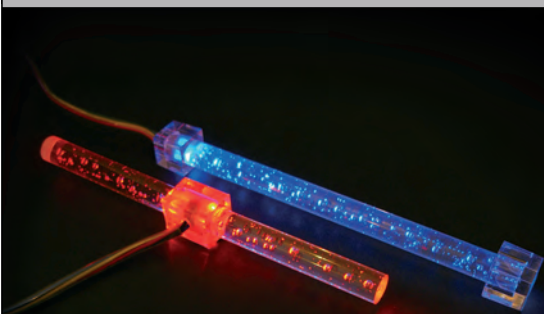
VITAL INFO

■ **Plus**
Easy to install
Small size means that it can easily be mounted outside your case

■ **Minus**
Bubbles are not for everyone

■ **Supplier**
NakedIT [011] 678-1288

■ **Internet**
www.nakedit.co.za

■ **RRP**
Bubble Light: R69
Light Sabre: R69

VALUE	COOL FACTOR	EASE OF INSTALLATION
75	70	90

SPEEZEE CCFL

CCFLs (Cold Cathode Fluorescent Lights) are one of the first modding accessories computer enthusiasts used to mod their computers. Basically, it's a cathode tube (available in various colours including UV) and lights up the inside (or outside) of your case. No case mod is complete without a CCFL, and this month we look at Speezee's offering. Each CCFL comes with its own inverter and some Velcro to stick it in any position inside your case. These CCFLs also feature a PCI bracket with a built-in switch, making it easy to switch the CCFL off.

SPEEZEE COLD CATHODE FAN

This product's name is a bit confusing as the kit doesn't include a fan. Instead, it's just a round CCFL designed to be screwed onto an existing 80mm fan. The kit includes the round CCFL, mounted in a special housing allowing it to fit onto an already installed fan. The inverter, bundled with this kit, also allows for two devices to be connected, so you can either add another one of these or a regular CCFL. The Cold Cathode Fan CCFL is very easy to install and looks great in a case that doesn't already have a CCFL. It can look cheesy if you already have a couple of lights installed in your case.

POWER EYES

Every so often, a really simple yet funky case mod accessory comes along that every case modder should have. This month we look at one that has been available for a while now, but very few people actually know about it. Power Eyes is a little circuit board designed to fit inside a four-pin power connector (over the pins). Once installed, it lights up and effectively turns your dull-white power connectors into aesthetically pleasing light emitting connectors. Each pack contains five circuit boards and comes in a variety of colours.

OVERALL
90

VITAL INFO
■ Plus
Turns dull power connectors into funky light emitting connectors
Price
■ Minus
Very difficult to remove once installed
■ Supplier
NakedIT [011] 678-1288
■ Internet
www.nakedit.co.za
■ RRP
R35

VALUE	COOL FACTOR	EASE OF INSTALLATION
90	90	90

EL STRING SATA CABLE

This just goes to show that you can mod virtually every piece of computer equipment. The EL String SATA Cable is a 45cm SATA (Serial ATA) cable with an EL light running through it. The effect created by the EL String SATA Cable is quite funky and will look great in any case, but the bulky inverter and added cables, necessary for the EL String to work, could be annoying if you already have a multitude of cables running through your case. A solution would be for the manufacturer to allow you to use an existing inverter (such as the one used for a CCFL) to power the EL String in this SATA cable.

OVERALL
78
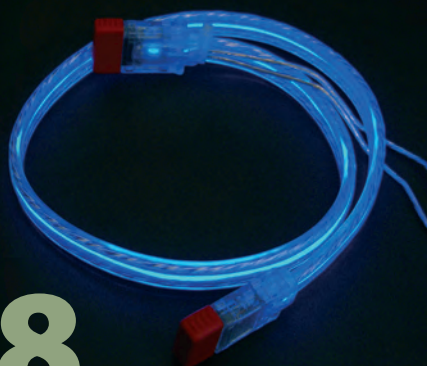
VITAL INFO
■ Plus
No more boring SATA cables
■ Minus
Requires bulky inverter
■ Supplier
NakedIT [011] 678-1288
■ Internet
www.nakedit.co.za
■ RRP
R79

VALUE	COOL FACTOR	EASE OF INSTALLATION
70	85	80

THERMALTAKE XROUND CABLE

Similar to the SATA cable, this IDE cable is a regular 48cm IDE cable with an EL String running through it. The entire cable is made of translucent plastic with the EL string spiralled around the cable. The only downside with this product is also the fact that it requires a bulky inverter, which is not ideal if you already have a fully modded case, unless of course you're particularly good at hiding the cables inside your case. If you want a subtle light effect in your case this would be ideal.

OVERALL
78

VITAL INFO
■ Plus
Looks great if it is the only light in your case
■ Minus
Requires bulky inverter
■ Supplier
Corex [011] 707-5000
■ Internet
www.corex.co.za
■ RRP
R162

VALUE	COOL FACTOR	EASE OF INSTALLATION
70	85	80

THERMALTAKE TRUELIGHT

Thermaltake has done it again. This time they took an ordinary memory heat spreader and added lights to it. A heat spreader is designed to dissipate the heat produced by the memory module. Generally it consists of two heatsinks which sandwich the actual memory module. This particular model does just that, but it also has five built-in blue LEDs that are controlled by a button on a PC bracket that fits onto the back of your case. This button allows the Thermaltake TrueLight to switch between eight different flash modes, and you can also switch it off by holding the button in for two seconds.

OVERALL
83

VITAL INFO
■ Plus
Cools your RAM while creating a cool lighting effect
No inverter required
■ Minus
You would generally need two of these and each needs its own power connector
■ Supplier
Corex [011] 707-5000
■ Internet
www.corex.co.za
■ RRP
R162

VALUE	COOL FACTOR	EASE OF INSTALLATION
80	90	80

ANTEC ILUMINATE COLORS EXTERNAL

The iLuminate mini tubes have been around for a while, but Antec redesigned them slightly. The iLuminate Colors plugs into a USB port and its inverter doubles as the control panel for the lights. You can toggle the mini light tubes between seven different colours, and you can set them to activate on sound. This product is also marketed to PS2 owners, allowing them to mod their consoles using these lights - although that would make the PS2 a little difficult to carry around. This kit comes with adhesive pads allowing you to fasten the lights and the inverter to your PC or PS2.

ANTEC ILUMINATE BLUE EXTERNAL

The iLuminate Blue is not a true CCFL. Instead of a Cold Cathode Tube it uses LEDs on either side. Sadly, this creates a dark spot in the middle of the tube which doesn't look particularly good. Antec also aims this product at both PC and PS2 users as it uses a USB port to power the LEDs. The inverter box also doubles as the control panel and you can set it to activate on sound. Bundled with the kit is a set of adhesive pads, and as with the iLuminate Colors, the cable length can be annoying if you don't manage to hide it.

THERMALTAKE Y CABLE

The Y Cable is not your basic power cable splitter. Not only is it covered with UV reactive mesh, but it also features LEDs in each of the connectors. These LEDs light up when power runs through the cable, creating a rather interesting effect. In order to get the best out of this cable though, it is recommended that you also install a UV light in your case. Once the UV light shines on the cable, it creates an almost eerie green glow which looks really stunning if you only have UV lights in your case.

OVERALL
86

VITAL INFO
Plus
Cable reacts to UV light LEDs in power connectors light up
Minus
Requires UV light for full effect
Supplier
Corex [011] 707-5000
Internet
www.corex.co.za
RRP
R67

VALUE	COOL FACTOR	EASE OF INSTALLATION
80	90	90

ANTEC ILUMINATE BLUE INTERNAL

The iLuminate Blue Internal is a novel concept, but its implementation is not ideal. This product consists of three components: first is the light tube which includes six blue LEDs, next is the external controller, and lastly is the PCI bracket which acts as the inverter and allows you to connect the external controller. This controller basically controls the light and it features a volume control for the sound to light feature. The downside to this product is that the LEDs are not great for lighting the inside of your case, and the external controller feels a little finicky.
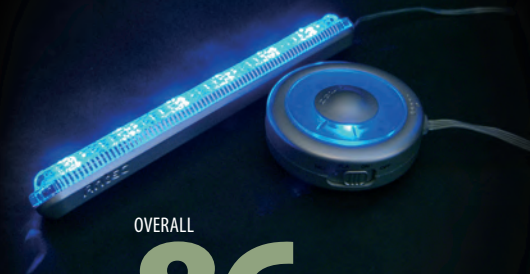
OVERALL
86

VITAL INFO
Plus
Internal lighting with external controller
Minus
External controller feels finicky
Supplier
Frontosa [011] 466-0038
Internet
www.frontosa.co.za
RRP
R230

VALUE	COOL FACTOR	EASE OF INSTALLATION
80	90	90

OVERALL
73

THERMALTAKE PSU FIREBALL

If it's in your PC it can be modded, and this product proves it. The Thermaltake PSU FireBall is basically a sticker that you stick on the side of your Thermaltake PSU. You then connect its inverter to a power connector and the sticker lights up - the different parts of the sticker actually light up in succession. The effect is great, but it was designed for a Thermaltake PSU. The inverter box, which has a switch built in, is also rather bulky. This mod is definitely not for everyone, but if you have a windowed case and a Thermaltake PSU then consider this mod.

VITAL INFO
Plus
Works well. . .
Minus
. . .but works best on Thermaltake PSUs
Supplier
Corex [011] 707-5000
Internet
www.corex.co.za
RRP
R90

VALUE	COOL FACTOR	EASE OF INSTALLATION
70	70	80

VANTEC SPECTRUM FAN CARD

More than a simple light for your case, this fan card is actually very useful. The Spectrum Fan Card consists of two 70mm fans which will cool the PCI cards in your case. You can even install it below your VGA card to boost the air that circulates below it. Each of the fans on the Spectrum Fan Card has four bright LEDs which look rather stunning in a dark corner of your case. Another great feature about this card is that it has a speed controller which is accessible from the back of the case, should you wish to lower the RPM and thus the noise produced by the fans.

OVERALL
90

VITAL INFO
Plus
Cools your components and circulates the air in your case
Minus
Can be noisy
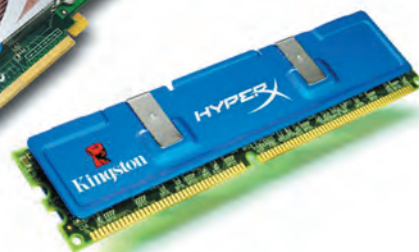**Supplier**
Rectron [011] 203-1000
Internet
www.rectron.net
RRP
R116

VALUE	COOL FACTOR	EASE OF INSTALLATION
90	90	90

Ultimate Gaming Speed

The Ultimate enthusiast platform

True Dual X16 SLI

The A8N32-SLI Deluxe motherboard supports dual PCI Express x16 slots running at full speed to liberate graphics cards from the narrow bandwidth platform of x8 speed only. With ASUS' innovative designs to bring out the real potential of NVIDIA nForce4 SLI X16 chipsets, gamers can easily enjoy faster graphics performance and higher video quality today, and be ready for the even more demanding tasks of tomorrow!

NVIDIA SLI™ Technology

Delivers up to 2x the performance of a single GPU configuration for unparalleled gaming experiences by allowing two graphics cards to run in parallel. The must-have feature for performance PCI Express graphics, SLI dramatically scales performance on over 60 top PC games

HyperX Memory

High Performance HyperX DDR2 & DDR memory is geared towards PC enthusiasts, specifically engineered and tested for higher speeds and includes an aluminium heat spreader for thermal diffusion.

VANTEC SPECTRUM UV LED FAN

UV seems to be the craze these days, and if you only have UV lights in your case, you can be guaranteed to turn heads at your next LAN. These 80mm Vantec fans are the perfect addition to such a case and even if you only have a set of these, the effect is mind blowing. The Spectrum UV LED Fan is made from UV reactive plastic and also has three UV LEDs built in. When your PC is switched on, these LEDs 'light-up' the plastic and create an awesome glowing effect. As far as noise go, these fans are whisper quiet and are recommended for every case modder.

OVERALL
90

VITAL INFO
Plus
Whisper quiet operation
UV LEDs built in
Minus
Looks best in a case with only UV lights
Supplier
Rectron [011] 203-1000
Internet
www.rectron.net
RRP
R54

VALUE	COOL FACTOR	EASE OF INSTALLATION
90	90	90

THERMALTAKE CASE FAN FIREBALL

As with most case mod hardware, the Thermaltake Case Fan Fireball can look cheesy if used in a case with lots of lights already installed. Essentially, this product is an 80mm fan with red, green and blue LEDs. What makes it unique though is the Fireball sticker on the fan guard that bundles with this fan. This sticker lights up and creates a spinning effect on the Fireball graphics. Sadly though, the inverter required by the Fireball sticker is rather large and can be unsightly in the case. The inverter box also features an on/off switch, but it doesn't disable the LEDs on the fan itself.

OVERALL
73
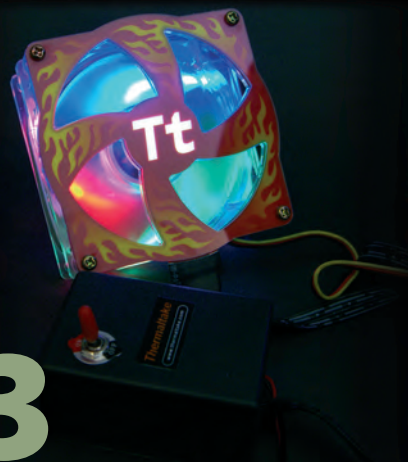
VITAL INFO
Plus
Fireball effect looks great
Minus
Larger inverter
Can look cheesy in a heavily modded case
Supplier
Corex [011] 707-5000
Internet
www.corex.co.za
RRP
R165

VALUE	COOL FACTOR	EASE OF INSTALLATION
70	70	80

LED THUMB SCREW

The thumb screw's main purpose is to allow you easy access to your PC without the need for a screwdriver. XMOD International took it one step further and built an LED into it. The effect is great, but it can be tricky to install and it has some limitations. Each thumb screw features a single LED and has a thin cord sticking out the side. These cords then connect to a PCI bracket which has special pins that are accessible from the outside of the case. In the kit you get six LED thumb screws which have various lengths of cable.

OVERALL
78

VITAL INFO
Plus
Looks great if installed properly
Minus
Cable is unsightly and prone to hook onto something as it hangs behind your PC
Supplier
NakedIT [011] 678-1288
Internet
www.nakedit.co.za
RRP
R49

VALUE	COOL FACTOR	EASE OF INSTALLATION
80	80	75

LAZER BEAM LED

There are numerous light mods available for your PC that will illuminate a large area inside your case. This is great for the most part, but there are a few cases where people want to highlight a specific feature inside or outside the chassis. Enter the Lazer Beam LED. This great little light is built on an adjustable base and shines a fairly bright beam of light onto any spot you point it at. It can also be creatively used outside of your case, as its cable is neatly covered with black plastic. On the plus side, this light doesn't require a bulky inverter and simply plugs into a free four-pin power connector.

OVERALL
90

VITAL INFO
Plus
Directional LED makes it easy to highlight a specific feature in your case
Minus
Could have been brighter
Supplier
NakedIT [011] 678-1288
Internet
www.nakedit.co.za
RRP
R49

VALUE	COOL FACTOR	EASE OF INSTALLATION
90	90	90

Power of 2 GPUs on 1 Card ASUS EN7800GT Dual Scores 11,138 on 3DMark05

The latest VGA (video graphics acceleration) platforms such as Nvidia's SLI(Scalable Link Interface) and ATI's CrossFire have taken 3D gaming by storm, offering powerful video processing with systems that support simultaneous operation of two high-performance graphics cards.

ASUS' EN7800GT Dual took this concept one step further by incorporating two GPU (graphics processing unit) on a single graphics card. The all-new graphics card, powered by two Nvidia GeForce 7800GT GPUs, registered a score of 11,138 on 3DMark05 and 23,203 on 3DMark03 benchmarks, a clear demonstration of the card's video processing capability.

⬆ 2 GPU on 1 graphics card

External power supply enables stable overclocking

Stable power source is critical when running such a powerful graphics card, especially during overclocking.

The EN7800GT Dual come equipped with an independent, external power supply unit to free itself from sharing the same power source with the CPU, optical drives and other power-hungry components. Moreover, you no longer have to open up the case and take apart the system to upgrade the power supply units in the future.

⬆ External power supply unit

Industrial design excellence

The ultimate gaming PC needs to be both beautiful inside and out. ASUS' award-winning industrial design team created the fan guard for functionality and aesthetics. With so many people using see-
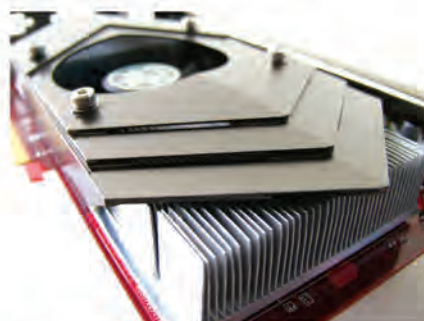
⬆ Cool fan and heat sink design

through casings these days, it's important to improve airflow and ventilation around the graphics card while making your system look that much cooler as well.

Conclusion: More Power on 1 card

With dependable power source and innovative fan guard design, the EN7800GT Dual offers industry-leading video processing capability without affecting system stability. If you take pride in your gaming experience, whether it's high-quality graphics or a cool looking system, then look no further than the all-new ASUS EN7800GT Dual. Only 2,000 units are available worldwide. Don't waste time. It's first come first served.

⬆ Serial number included for this very special graphics card

GAME.DEV
CONTROL SCHEMES

EVERY GAME REQUIRES INPUT. It wouldn't be a game if there was no way for the player to interact with what was taking place on screen. This month we'll take a brief look at eight different control schemes and how to implement them in Game Maker. These are by no means the only ways to have your players move around, but they do address most of the common control issues.

This article uses the 'ControlSchemes.gm6' file on this month's DVD. Open it with Game Maker 6.1 to illustrate the concepts we'll cover while you're reading. Each different control implementation is kept as general and customisable as possible. Certain variables are set when each method is initialised, and these variables can be changed while the example is running to allow you to see what possibilities exist. Simply hit a number from one to eight in the example to change the current control scheme.

The bracketed names of the objects in the example that use each control scheme are given in each heading. Open them and feel free to play around with your own ideas.

1: Top Down Controls (1_TopDown)

THE STANDARD CONTROL SET for many 2D games is to use the arrow keys to move left, right, up and down on the screen. This is nice and painless to implement in GM. To move up and down we change the object's Y position, moving left and right means a change to its X position. The amount we change the position by determines our speed. In this case, a custom 'movementSpeed' variable (initialised during the object's Create event) is used to store the amount so that it can change on the fly to make the object slower or faster, allowing for power-ups, sticky goo, etc.

You'll notice that before changing the object's position in the Left, Right, Up and Down events, we check to make sure that the new position won't result in a collision with a solid object. Only moving the object if it's 'safe' to do so prevents it from running through walls, provided the wall objects are set to be **solid**.

2: Platform Movement (2_Platform)

PLAYER MOTION IN A platform game usually consists of standing on objects, moving left and right, jumping and falling when there's nothing to support the player. Once again a 'movementSpeed' variable is used to determine how fast the object moves, but it's joined by 'jumpSpeed' (which controls how far the object jumps)

and 'fallingGravity' (which controls how fast the object falls).

Making the object stand on platforms or fall if it's in midair is slightly involved. Firstly, this decision must happen every frame, so it goes into the Step event. Secondly, we make liberal use of the Set Gravity action to accelerate the object downwards (direction 270 in GM). To determine if the object is 'standing' on something, we simply check to see if a collision would occur at the position the object would be at if it suddenly started falling: 'x, y + fallingGravity'. If there is a collision, it's standing on something solid and we set the gravity to 0. If there's no collision then there's nothing below it and we set the gravity to 'fallingGravity' and our object plummets. Finally, we limit the object's vertical speed **(vspeed)** to stop it from falling too fast and shooting through platforms.

Moving Left and Right is exactly the same as in the top down example, but jumping demands attention. So the Up event is changed to set the object's **vspeed** to the same value as 'jumpSpeed'. We only want the object to jump when we know it's standing on something, so we elegantly do the same 'solid below' test as in the Step event before starting the jump. To stop the object from hovering above platforms, when it collides with an obstacle we tell it to Move to a Contact Position and set the **vspeed** to 0 so that it won't jump up through platforms.

This is a basic but powerful implementation of a platformer system. To see how powerful, try setting 'fallingGravity' and 'jumpSpeed' to negative numbers and see what happens!

3: Turret Control (3_Turret)

A TURRET IS USUALLY STATIONARY and rotates to point towards the mouse cursor, or some other object. The variables 'turretLength' (to control how long our turret barrel is) and 'reloadTime' (which should be self explanatory) are given to you to change, but they're not strictly necessary.

Deciding which direction the turret should point in is trivial. We simply set the object's **direction** variable using **point_direction (x, y, mouse_x, mouse_y)** to make it face the mouse cursor every Step. Drawing the turret's barrel is an interesting mathematical exercise. To calculate where the end of the barrel should
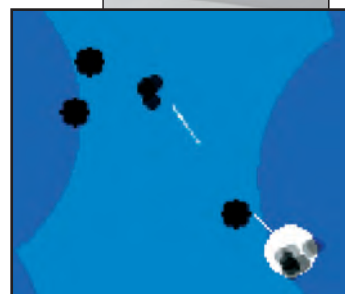
1

2

be, we use the 'turretLength' value, multiplied by the sin and cosine of our **direction** angle to calculate relative X and Y positions. Finally, a use for trigonometry! Sin gives us the proportion of the 'turretLength' that affects Y, while cosine gives us the corresponding X proportion. It's not as confusing as it sounds, honest. Take a look at the Draw event to see how it works.

We've added in a simple firing system and some enemies for you to blast away at. Don't get too carried away with the action though, the next scheme is a lot more fun…

4: Mobile Turret Control (4_MobileTurret)

ADDING THE TURRET AND top down control schemes are surprisingly easy as the logic for each is very self-contained. The arrow keys now move the object around the screen, while the turret always points towards the mouse cursor. Changing the Left, Right, Up and Down events to something more familiar, like CrimsonLand's 'WASD' control scheme, is something you can easily do on your own. Enjoy blasting away at those generic enemies!

5: Thrust Movement – Keyboard (5_KeyboardThrust)

2D SPACE GAMES ARE often difficult to create, thanks to the way that we expect spaceships to move. We expect ships to have a 'maximumSpeed', turn with a specific 'turningSpeed', have a certain amount of thrust and possibly to experience some kind of friction. Feel free to play with these values to find specialised modes such as frictionless or inertia-less movement.

We've given our ship a 'facingDirection' variable to keep track of the direction that we need to apply thrust in and it's this variable that the Left and Right events edit. If you look at the Sprite the ship uses (triangleSpr), you'll notice that we've used the rotation-animation trick from the October article to make the ship always face the right direction by setting **image_single** accordingly. To prevent against a nasty bug that this can cause, we have to first test the new direction to see if it causes any collisions. We can only use it as our new 'facingDirection' if it doesn't, otherwise the ship could get stuck as it turns through obstacles.

There's a wonderful little function in GM, **motion_add (dir, speed)**, that adds speed to an object in the given direction. The Up event uses **motion_add** to apply our ship's thrust in the 'facingDirection', or reverse 'facingDirection' in the Down event. We make sure that the ship always uses the correct sprite frame for its direction, as well as limiting the ship's speed in the Step event.

When the ship collides with an obstacle, we decided to halve its speed and make it bounce off. This was just what we chose to do. You can replace this with whatever you want.

6: Thrust Movement – Mouse (6_MouseThrust)

CONTROLLING A SPACESHIP VIA the keyboard can be slightly confusing, especially when the ship is facing down and the turning keys seem to do the opposite of what you'd expect. This control scheme behaves exactly like the keyboard thrust scheme, except that instead of using the arrow keys to turn the ship and apply thrust, the ship always faces the mouse cursor and the mouse buttons apply thrust when held down.

The logic and variables are exactly the same as the previous scheme - we've just changed Up into a 'Global Mouse -> Left Button' event and Down into 'Global Mouse -> Right Button'. The turning logic has been moved to the Step event this time as all we do is use the **point_direction()** function.

7: Move Towards Mouse (7_MouseFollow)

THIS SIMPLE SYSTEM JUST 'Moves towards a point' (in this case the mouse cursor) every Step. If the object collides with an obstacle, it just bounces off and tries to move towards the mouse again. The only interesting logic here is the **min (movementSpeed, point_distance(x, y, mouse_x, mouse_y))** that we use to pick the smallest possible distance to move: either the movement speed if we're far from the cursor position, or the actual distance to the cursor if it's close-by. Note that this can be zero and thus the object stops when it gets to the cursor.

8: Move To Mouse Click (8_MoveToClick)

MANY ADVENTURE GAMES RELY on this mechanic. It could also be the base for an RTS movement system too. All we do is using the 'Step towards point (Avoiding obstacles)' action every Step to move our object towards a target position. When the left mouse button is released, we simply set our target position to where the mouse cursor is. You can safely ignore the pretty click effect code.

Behind the scenes:

YOU MUST HAVE NOTICED that the objects we explain here all have 'ControlledObject' as their parent. That's just so the rest of the code in this example can create a trail of movement and change the type of the object according to the number you press, and isn't essential in your games at all.

The Obstacles group contains objects that the player can collide with. The rest of the objects in the Other group are there for the purpose of illustration or manipulation and aren't essential to the controls. Now stop trying to break the example and go use these control schemes in your own games! **NAG**

EYETOY: KINETIC

WE ALL KNEW IT was going to happen sooner or later. It doesn't take a genius to spot the inherent health and fitness capabilities of the Sony EyeToy and its arm-waving, body-jiggling style of games. Nike Motionworks teamed up with Sony (in other words, Sony threw the biggest cheque it could find at Nike) and created a product that not only looks professional, it acts it.

Supplied by: Ster Kinekor Games
Internet: www.eyetoykinetic.com
RRP: R 359

This is not a game!

Kinetic is more a fully featured training and fitness programme, and less a game. While the exercises themselves may follow a gaming template, rest assured, the workout you receive is on par with the most professional solutions. You can either build a custom routine using exercise modules from the four zones, namely Cardio, Combat, Toning and Mind & Body, or you can embark on the 12 week fitness programme, where the game chooses your routines and adjusts them accordingly based on your performance.

Warm-up / Stretch

Each routine begins with an optional but highly recommended holistic warm-up where the thinking behind Tai Chi, Yoga and other types of meditative or martial arts is used to get the blood flowing and the oxygen pumping. After each routine, the game also suggests an optional stretching routine, since the muscles are warm after exercise. The personal trainer you pick (either male or female), guides you through the warm-up and stretch, giving suggestions and reminding you of things you need to do, to get the most out of your workout.

Combat Zone-01

The Combat Zone contains the most high-energy, kinetic exercises which usually involve kicking or punching things until they break. These routines are fun and can leave you completely exhausted very quickly, especially if you've never done a lot of exercise before. Kinetic does a wonderful job of making you feel powerful, even if you aren't. Kicking or punching the balls in this specific exercise usually results in a meaty explosion that makes you feel as if you've utterly destroyed the ball.

Combat Zone-02

Often, the Combat Zone contains exercises that seem almost impossible, especially at low fitness levels. Kinetic does not penalise you for failure, you cannot 'Game Over'. Instead, your progression slows and the game makes note of it, adjusting your next routines to better suit your fitness level. The personal trainers are enthusiastic and supportive, giving you good advice on how to improve your stance, health and posture so as to get the most out of your exercise.

Mind & Body

The Mind & Body zone contains relaxing routines that work your grey matter more than your muscles. One such exercise requires you to break several beams at the same time using your hands and feet, the pose you need to take to achieve this requiring pre-planning and good balance. At the end of the day, it's a combination of routines that gets you the most out of the game, and only with regular exercise and participation will you reap the benefits of Kinetic. It's wrong to think of Kinetic as a game, as the benefits from 'playing' it make it something much, much more.

by A.J. Kock

Ghost Talker's Daydream
Exposing the truths

SAIKI MISAKI IS NOT your ordinary young woman. The fact that she has a large following as a dominatrix at the local S&M club has nothing to do with it. Even the fact that she has a lack of hair on her special place, which is a big concern for her, has nothing to do with it. Her ability to communicate with the dead on the other hand, does make her special.

If you think that talking with the dead is a cool ability to have, you should spend some time with Saiki Misaki. She will show you otherwise. Since she was just a little girl, Misaki could see and talk to the dead. Some of them are just lost souls who have yet to realise that they are no longer part of the living, while others are malevolent ghosts who have tremendous anger toward the living. Meeting one of these will send most people running down the road, never to look back. Because of Misaki's ability, her father sends Kadotake Souichiro to convince her to be a consultant for his organisation. He is the head of the special government organisation that investigates and deals with supernatural events. If it weren't for the big bundle of dollars in Soichiro's hand and the fact that she wouldn't mind a bit of a break from her S&M job, she probably wouldn't have agreed.

Partnering up with Kadotake Souichiro, Misaki makes time in-between her S&M sessions (she is just too popular to be taking breaks) to venture into the world of the dead. With so little time between jobs, Misaki ends up wearing her sexy S&M outfits on her missions, leaving the usually disciplined Souichiro speechless most of the time. Why Souichiro is actually working for this unit is a mystery because he has a fear of ghosts. So much so that he waits in the car while Misaki goes in to investigate. Maybe he is trying to overcome his fear with some direct behavioural therapy. On the other hand, he is good at kicking real people's butts and made it his personal goal to protect Misaki - if he can stop himself from being mesmerised by her presence. Their first case leads them to a woman who wants the death of her sister and daughter investigated, after the police ruled it as a double suicide. The truth begins to unravel as Misaki starts to communicate with the troubled dead.

Ghost Talker Daydream is a four-part anime based on two of the stories featured in the manga series Teizokurei Daydream by Saki Okuse and Sankichi Meguro. You may expect the story to be your average anime with ghosts, sex, humour, perverts and action, but it isn't. Looking past the odd characters (as you would come to expect from most anime), in Ghost Talker's Daydream you realise there is a lot more beneath the stereotypical covering. Ghost Talker's Daydream exposes our social facade, which hides a world filled with unhappy souls - living and dead. **NAG**
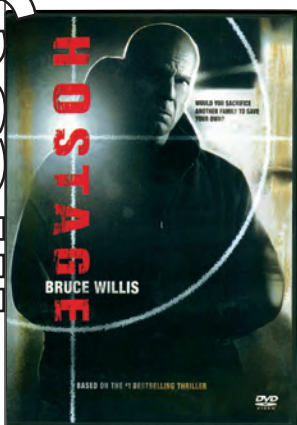
HOSTAGE

BRUCE WILLIS STARS AS Jeff Talley, a former hostage negotiator with the LAPD who moves to a small town after a hostage negotiation had gone terribly wrong. Talley is the local police chief in a town in which crime is almost non-existent. Talley suffers from PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) because of what happened in LA and has trouble expressing himself to his wife. Then, on a bright sunny day, all hell breaks loose in Talley's town. Three bad-ass punk teenagers take a rich family hostage in their mansion. One of Talley's cops is gunned down by one of the teenagers. It's time for action. But, everything is not as straightforward as it seems. The owner of the mansion is a front man for setting up shelf companies and offshore accounts for some underworld characters. The said underworld characters take Talley's wife and daughter hostage, and Talley must retrieve an encrypted DVD with account information from the besieged mansion in order to secure his family's release. But, as numerous felons have learned through the years now, don't upset Willis and don't mess with his family. He will go into 'Die Hard' mode and kick your ass. Talley is the perfect character for Willis. He gets to be the mean, lean adrenalin junkie we all love and he also has to show a softer side when his family gets involved. It's actually a treat to see him as a bearded hostage negotiator combing his beard while talking to a hostage taker earlier in the film. The movie is well directed and riveting and the plot solid. Cinematography is excellent, especially during the pyrotechnical scenes in the mansion. Hostage gets NAG's stamp of approval.

GAME OVER

THE BLURB ON THE cover of this book calls it "The 'Bible' of the interactive gaming industry" and when you first pick it up, it seems a mite pretentious. As you get into the book though, you realise that this is exactly what the book is.

David Sheff leads us on a tour through the beginnings of the videogame industry as he follows Nintendo from its well-established roots in playing cards, right up to the dawn of the N64. Though the main focus is on Nintendo, he visits as many of the important people and companies of the time as is humanly possible: Nolan Bushnell, Atari, Namco, Shigeru Miyamoto, EA, Sega, Tetris, Sony, 3DO, and the list goes on. Open this book at any page and you'll learn something startling about a name you recognise in the industry.

Sheff's writing is fast-paced and immediate, turning business into a cutthroat adventure and pulling the reader on a ride that sheds light as it thrills. The only issue with the book is the way he seemingly jumps around in time to follow each thread of events from start to finish, but the momentary confusion is quickly ignored as the new story unfolds.

As any sort of gamer interested in the industry, you owe it to yourself to read this book. The insights it gives into the state of our industry are astounding and reasons why certain things are the way they are that we simply take for granted. It's an excellent read. [www.amazon.com]
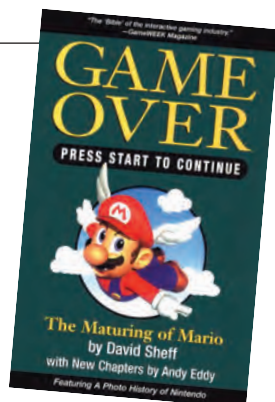
PERMANENT RECORD:
The Very Best of Violent Femmes

QUICKLY NAME SOMETHING MILWAUKEE is famous for. Difficult? That's because Milwaukee's not famous for anything except for Violent Femmes. In the early 1980s the newly established Femmes had to resort to playing in the streets because clubs shunned them, as nobody in the underground music scene was ready for the style they pioneered. But eventually the Femmes went mainstream (finally got accepted) and are the reason why "We love American music." Permanent Record is a compilation of the best Femmes songs throughout the years. It features tracks from 1983 to 2000.

Some of the more well-known tracks on Permanent Record are 'American Music', 'Blister in the sun', 'I Held Her in My Arms' and "Add it up'. Permanent Record suffers from so-called 'Best Of' syndrome as not all the tracks on the album are good or memorable. But, enough of the songs are and we still "Love American music."

BON JOVI:
Have a Nice Day

YOU EITHER LOVE BON Jovi or you don't. Or, having loved them at one stage and having grown out of it, you don't like them that much anymore and hope that they would just silently disappear. But, as sure as the truth is out there, they'll be back. And this time they are back with 'Have A Nice Day'. The album opens with the title track which, despite having been killed by radio overexposure, is a rather decent track. Some other decent tracks such as 'I Want To Be Loved', 'Welcome To Wherever You Are' and 'Who Says You Can't Go Home', which is a sing-along pop song, round off the album. The album is not without its flaws, with the saccharine sweet over-the-top sentimental 'Bells Of Freedom' a prime example. Will you still be listening to this album in a year's time? We don't think so.

Busta Rhymes:
Everything Remains Raw

ORIGINALLY RELEASED ON DVD in 2004, Busta and the Flipmode Squad give what fans consider one of their most "electrifying performances to date."

Filmed at the Celebrity Theatre in Phoenix, Arizona, the sold-out concert is split into songs via the menu (naturally). The UMD (like the DVD) contains some nice extra trimmings such as a Gallery and some interviews.

As with most of the DVD to UMD conversions of late, as the PSP gains momentum as a handheld media centre, the UMD has nothing new over the original DVD version. Its sound quality has actually been lowered from 5.1 surround to plain stereo to accommodate the PSP's hardware.

That aside, Busta Rhymes delivers what the fans want on this UMD, and with most music genres, you have to appreciate that specific genre to get the most out of it. Busta's odd mix of ragga-influenced rap/hip-hop is certainly unique in one sense, but may come off as uninspired to those who never liked his work in the first place.

Dr. Dre, Ice Cube, Snoop Dogg and Eminem:
The Up In Smoke Tour

IF YOU TAKE THE angry-faced Dr. Dre, the dour Ice Cube, the expressionless Snoop Dogg and angry-white-boy Eminem and put them all on one stage, you're either going to have the biggest hip-hop performance ever, or a rather melancholic compilation of stereotypes.

The Up In Smoke Tour UMD, which is just a direct port of the original DVD release, can be conceived as one or the other, depending on your musical taste.

If you're a fan of the genre and enjoy the lyrical ministrations of the big-name artists on the UMD, then you won't be disappointed. All the major songs from each artist are here, including 'The Real Slim Shady' and 'We Be Clubbin'. Each song has a short introduction clip showing either ravenous fans before the concert, or amusing backstage antics. The entire tour is split up song for song in the menu, so you can skip directly to the section of the artist you like, or just watch the whole tour in one go.

If you're not a fan of Ice Cube, Eminem, Dr. Dre or Snoop Dogg, then you obviously won't get any enjoyment out of this UMD. The Up In Smoke Tour was entirely developed for fans, so it won't pull in any newcomers - not that it needs to.

On a personal taste level; the entire Tour was energetic and fun with the exception of Eminem's performance, which seemed entirely unmotivated and lacklustre. Perhaps he felt too much the odd one out.
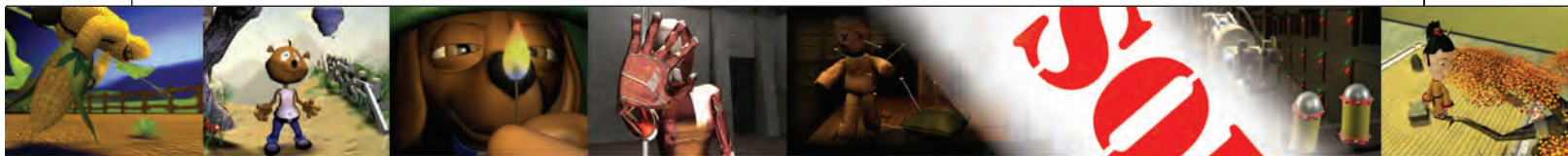
Bohnanza

Price: R 170 | www.boardgames.co.za

BOHNANZA IS A NON-COLLECTIBLE card game that revolves around players growing crops of beans. Yes, beans. Different kinds of beans: from green beans to coffee beans to the highly prized blue bean. The box itself contains 150-odd cards, each card representing a type of bean that can be grown and a small rulebook. From two to seven players can participate in a game. That said, the more participants, the better.

Each player starts off with five randomly dealt cards and two fields, taking turns to plant and harvest different bean crops. After sufficient money has been made, a player can purchase a third field, thus increasing the amount of crops a player can grow and harvest. Player interaction focuses on players trading bean cards with each other, and the active player also has the option of donating bean cards to other players.

Players plant crops and trade, with the game ending when the draw deck has been exhausted for the third time. The winner is the player with the most money. Whilst this may sound stale and boring, the game is a careful management of resources, of determining what and when to plant, as well as when to harvest crops in order to maximise your yields. Trading and negotiation plays an important part, yet one has to be careful as a careless trade with your opponent can give him/her the card that will yield a high-return crop.
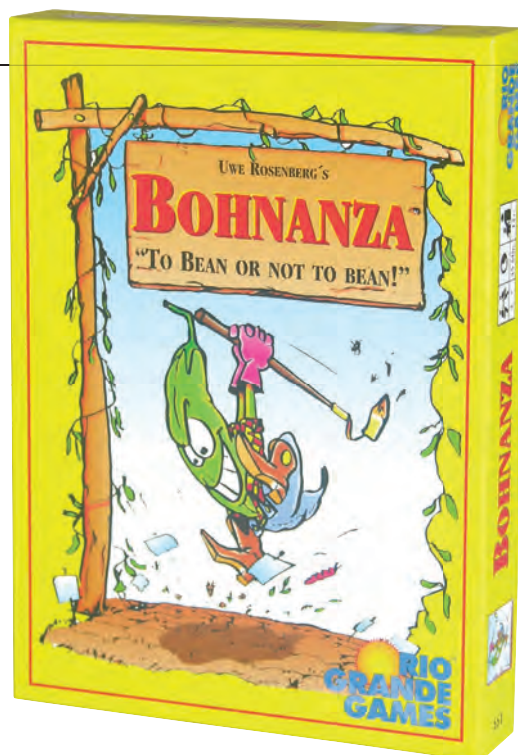
Bohnanza is a family friendly game for those people who like games with a high level of involvement between players.

Star Wars Risk

Price: R 469 | www.boardgames.co.za

STAR WARS RISK IS the latest flavour of Risk and uses the recently released Clone Wars film as the basis for the game. Risk is a light war game where between two and six people battle for total control of the world. It uses very simple mechanics, and the mechanics are often the reason why Risk is derided by 'serious board gamers' as being too chance-based. Another problem with traditional Risk is the length of a game. Games can stretch on and on as the last two players wage a war of attrition.

That said, whilst one can play Star Wars Risk in the traditional manner, it would be a waste of the game. The game shines with the added Star Wars flavour - from the little plastic gaming pieces to the board design, additional cards and mechanics. The additional mechanics allow the player more control over the outcome of a roll to a limited degree. For example, a player can build fighters that will allow him/her to re-roll dice rolls which came up as a '1' in a battle.

The other change is that players represent two groups, namely Separatists and Republic as opposed to all players being in a free-for-all against each other. Thus all players stay involved in the game, rather than the knock-out style in classic Risk.

The third big change to the basic game is the implementation of Order 66 - a mechanism that changes some of the rules of the game in the favour of the Separatists as well as potentially totally changing the balance of power in the game. This also serves as a natural way of controlling the game time, thus removing one of the bugbears of the original Risk.

Star Wars Risk is a fun, light board game that has a lot based on chance. Do not expect intricate strategies in this one. But that is after all not what this game is about.

Perfect Dark Zero
www.perfectdarkzero.com

THE FLAGSHIP GAME OF the 360's launch line-up has revamped its Website. Go visit Joanna Dark's apartment and get some more details on the lass and the upcoming prequel to Perfect Dark. You also get to check out her rack – gun rack, that is. Don't mess with this lady; she'll hurt you in ways that would make Vikings run for their lives.

Get Fluid
www.fluid.nl

THIS IS THE MAIN Website for a Dutch design firm into all things – from installations and ads, to custom software and nifty Flash interfaces. The site itself is very slick and interesting, but head over to the games section and try the Duck and Tower games to see some excellent Flash in action.

The Xbox site
www.xbox.com

AMAZING! THE SITE THAT never changes finally did. In terms of an official site for a game platform the Xbox site sucked, because it was always out of date and couldn't be bothered with any non-Microsoft games. The slick new redesign bodes of better times ahead. This might actually become a useful info hub for the 360.

GAME OVER

BADGER HUNT

EACH MONTH WE HIDE the badger somewhere in the magazine [usually a screenshot, but we don't always play fair]. You need to find him and if you do you'll get a cool prize sponsored by our new best friends [see above]. Send your sighting to [ed@nag.co.za] and use the subject line [Santa Badger]. Why Santa Badger? Well I'm glad you asked, this month he's wearing an ill-fitting saggy crotched Santa outfit so expect him to be hiding really well because he's embarrassed.

November Badger Hunt winners [p83]: Bernard & Simone

CAPTION OF THE MONTH

EVERY MONTH we'll choose a boring, odd or peculiar screenshot from any random game and write a bad caption for it. Your job is to come up with a better [funny] caption. The winner will get a free game from Vivendi Universal Games. Send your captions to [ed@nag.co.za] with the subject [December Caption].

RULES: (1) If you don't use the correct subject line, your mail will be automatically filtered by our spam software and deleted. (2) If you think sending in 20 captions for the same screenshot is how you want to play the system, then put them all in the same mail or we'll keep the top one and delete the rest. You probably won't win anyway because you can't follow simple instructions. And people who can't follow simple instructions don't deserve to win things.

Sponsored by VIVENDI UNIVERSAL

December contest
NAG's LAME ATTEMPT: "I've lost my keys! Has anyone seen my keys?"

November Winner
"The Sims Hairdresser game just didn't seem to sell well this year…" - Richard Petersen

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2-BIT (c) 2005 NAG MAGAZINE

ARE YOU USING THAT MOUSE? I NEED TO PRACTICE MY SHOTPUT…

OH-KAY… THAT WASN'T ODD AT ALL.

I GOT IT!

AH!

FWOOSH!

AAAAUGH!

WHAT? IS IT THE HAT?

I LIKE MY FIREMAN'S HAT.

WOW. THAT WASN'T EVEN 10 MINUTES. WHAT'D YOU DO, MIKTAR?

NOTHING…

I WAS JUST HANDLING SOME FLAMING ON THE NAG FORUMS.

LOOK AT HER GO!

WHOA, SHE'S FAST! I BET SHE COULD RUN TO THE TAKEOUT PLACE AND BE BACK BEFORE THE FOOD IS COLD.

WHY DO YOU THINK I HIRED HER?

SHE WAS THE BEST AT THE 100M DASH ENTRANCE EXAM.

NEXT MONTH: UNADULTERATED!

My name is Matthew Kane…

On PSP™
this December

GAME