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- Super Monkey Ball Junior (GBA).

See inside (page 27) for full listing!

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QUOTE OF THE ISSUE:

"It took them (the developers) two formats
(started off on the PSOne), three years, and
£7 million to make it, and it took Justin - your
average gamer - three nights to finish it."

- Ross Sillifant talks "The Getaway", and the problem with the
industry's obsession over "interactive movies". Page 10 >>>



Nokia V.5 Nintendo!

N-gaging or Engaged?
We check Nokia's rival
to Nintendo's GBA SP!

MADE BY GAMERS

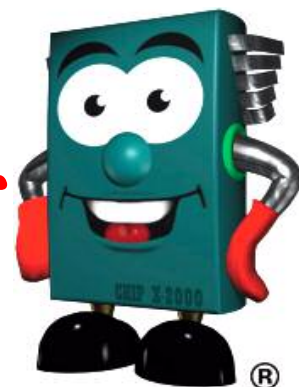
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Welcome to United Games Magazine.

Let us take you on a journey
to the world of underground
games journalism. I'm not
talking Gameboys in dark back
alleys, or a sinister underworld
of "Otaku"s with dodgy Wario
moustaches.

I'm talking about the world
that to most of us is really
quite ordinary - the
purchasing advice of fellow
games buyers,
the voice of the public.

That's what this magazine is
about.

Giving you a voice.
A voice that remains unheard
and not listened to in the
mainstream games press.

And once we've taken you on
this journey, why not take us
on a journey? Turn to the
Community Zone pages to see
how you can help us evolve
into something even greater.

Enjoy the Mag & Video!
Regards - the UG Crew.

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The Getaway: "It took them two formats, three years, and £7 million to make it, and it took Justin - your average gamer - three nights to finish it." - Ross' Rants (Page 10).

What's On the Video?

(Pages 27 - 35)

PC Engine

My Dad once told me a PC Engine was the heart of an IBM. He was fibbing, and here's proof. (Pages 78 - 80)



Mac Gaming

We assure you, not a contradiction in terms. Alexander Hay charts the history of what's possibly the most underrated games platform ever. (Pages 16 - 19)





A to Z:

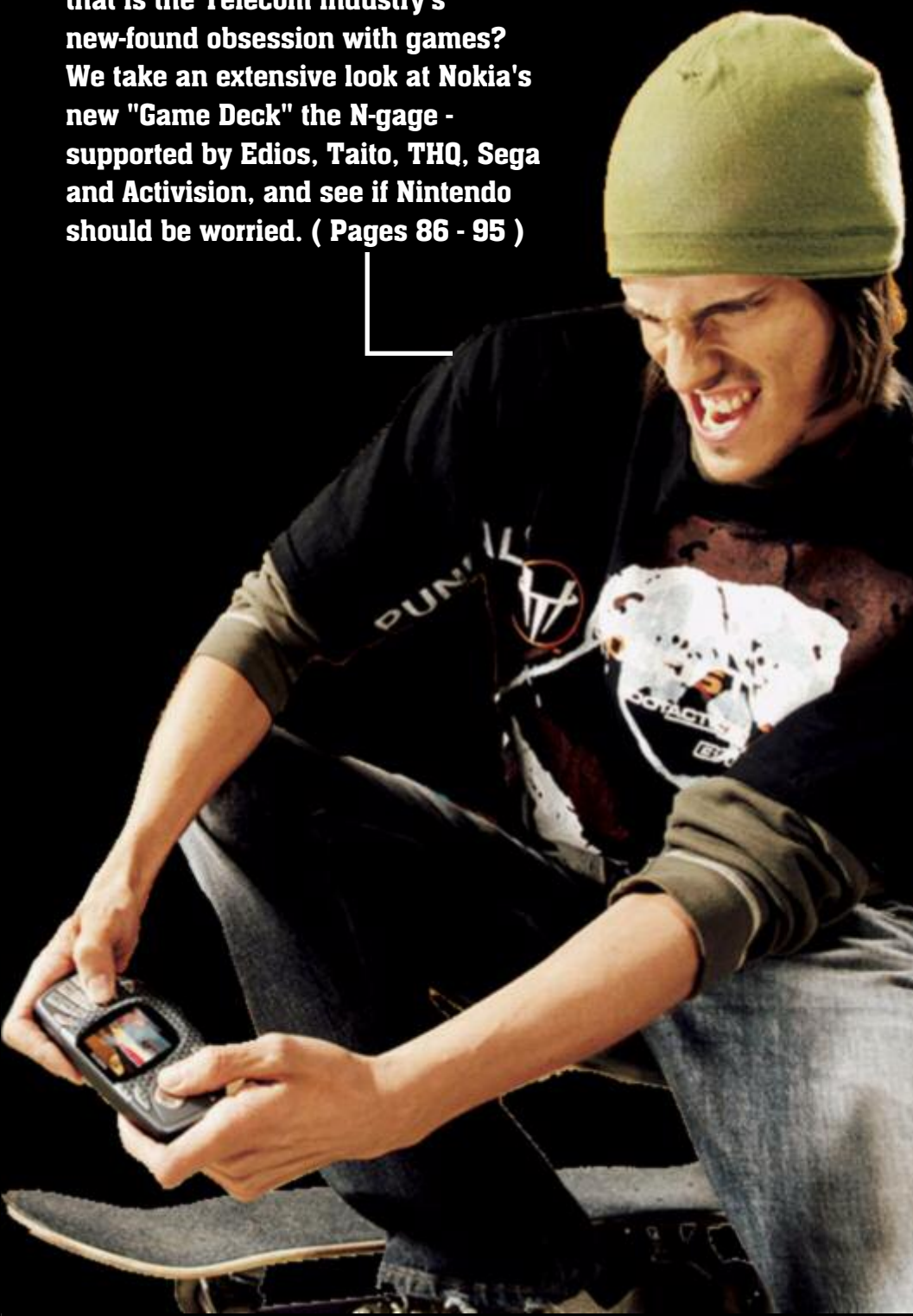
Controversy runs riot in Hooligans.
(Page 60)

Forget Gameboy. Bigger is better. Meet the GameMAN!
(Page 23)

Buy into the identity, with JoyStick Junkies T-shirts, including the official Defender shirt, and ITV1's "True Playerz" Games Stars T-shirt.
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Nokia V.S. Nintendo

Is the Gameboy Advance SP enough to shake off the on-coming threat to Nintendo's portable gaming monopoly that is the Telecom industry's new-found obsession with games? We take an extensive look at Nokia's new "Game Deck" the N-gage - supported by Edios, Taito, THQ, Sega and Activision, and see if Nintendo should be worried. (Pages 86 - 95)



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Community Zone

ABOUT YOU AND THE UG CREW.



■ "MAKE YOURSELF AT HOME...

'COS THIS IS OUR ZONE." -THE STREETS.

Welcome to Community Zone, people. New here? Don't know what we're about? Well, today, I'm gonna be talking about you, and how cool and funky you are. Y'see, the United Games project has been dormant for around a year, but now we're back - we're back with support from Chips, Insane Games, JoyStick Junkies and RetroCollector, but the most exciting aspect has been that we're back - with support from you! Y'see United Games is written by its readers for its readers, we rely on public contributions, and people deciding to get involved and help out with the mag, and whilst this section is primarily

about keeping you involved in all the behind-the-scenes activities, I really want to make the beginning of this section be about one thing - a huge great big thank you to anyone who has helped out with this issue. It's great to be launching a new games mag at such an exciting time for gamers. Finally, I hope you enjoy the whole issue, but please do take the time to read parts of Community Zone, and if you think you can help with anything, or perhaps if you merely want to offer your opinion, then please do get in touch. To quote The Streets yet again: "Let's Push Things Forwards."



United Games @ The Shops

Chips and Insane Games stores have waited patiently for this issue to hit, and now finally it has. A big up to those in Norwich, Bridgwater and also Harrow, for we've now got copies into the Uni of Westminster's Harrow Campus, in Middlesex - so big up to those reading us there. Finally, Gaimz Zone, previously a store in Chippenham, is set to be transformed into a glorious new online games shop. We'll let you know more as soon as we have the details.



UNIVERSITY OF WESTMINSTER

United Games @

In addition to the shops stocking us, we're now also making copies available via the University of Westminster's Harrow Campus Library, so a big hello to ya' all! Also, I'd like to take the opportunity to express my thanks to Ed Woods from the M block and Rod Gliven from Computer Science for helping convert the games footage we received from games PR companies from Beta SP to Mini DV. Also a big up to the Library's Audio/Visual staff Georgie, John and Steve, who helped with DVD conversion. Furthermore our illustrator for this issue has been Rikin, who graduated from Illustration last year, our model is Becky - studying Ceramics, and if you turn to our RetroZone section you'll find a groovy PC Engine feature by Alexander Hay, who just finished his master's at the Uni last year.

But United Games wants to spread its influence further, and is looking to start a society at Uni, to both encourage game review writing, and perhaps to promote that multiplayer network gaming that goes on behind the multimedia lecturer's back in the J Block. We may even hold our own JoyStick Junkies-esque event at the Area 51 nightclub if the concept proves popular. Interested in being a part of it all? Do get in touch - whether you're a writer, illustrator, video editor, musician [we used tracks by Mark and Richard of MXR, and Chris White of Recursion Records for this issue's video], photographer, or just someone who enjoys playing computer games, email:
UnitedGames@game-extra.co.uk.

EDITORS' BRAINSTORM



■ Ben Evans



■ Andrew

"You're gonna start a society?" asked Ben. **"Yeah!"**

"Is it gonna be called the United Soc(k)?" **"Y'what!?!"**

"Lampeter Uni (Wales) has a Battle Society, but they abbreviate it to Soc! So it sounds like they Battle Socks! It's really crap."

"YES! United we stand, in one big smelly Soc(k)! Y'know...this joke works really well verbally..but when you type it down, it's just not funny!"

"Well, at least we tried!!!" said Ben, console-ingly!

Bwoarhaha! That pun worked in writing!

Hahahaha! (Stop it! NOW! Ben.). Soz. =P Got carried away.

VOLUME 2.5: WE ALL CHANGE, WE ALL CHANGE.....

The eagle eyed readers may have noticed the "Volume 2.5" written on this issue's cover. Two point five!?! Well, let me explain. Volume 2 was A4, black and white, and not quite as sleek looking [although everyone loved the preview layout], and since we're now full colour and A5, with improved layouts, we thought it was time for a whole new volume....but not quite....for to be honest, we are inbetween volumes right now, awaiting the launch of United Games "V3", or "Volume 3". We want Volume 3 to be your ideal games mag, so, guess what? We want your input! Give us feedback on this issue, let us know what you think. What do you like? What don't you like? Is there anything you'd like to see changed? Do let us know!

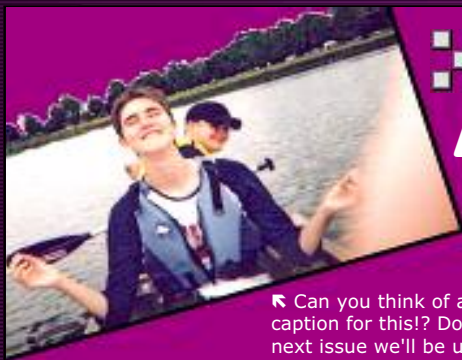
Email UnitedGames@game-extra.co.uk with your thoughts and opinions, or write to us at: **United Games, 6 Cheviot Close, Ramleaze, West Swindon, Wiltshire, SN5 5QD, UK.**

Of course the same questions of "Are we going in the right direction?", "How can we improve?", and "Is there anything we should change?" were first discussed with the people currently on board the United Games Project, and it soon became apparent that not everyone was a fan of the colour symbol system. The main problems seemed to be that they didn't rank games as better or worse than each other, there were always a load of Brilliant Blue games every issue, with other colours rarely used, and the Red Hot was a bit too ridiculously sacred, plus the meaning of the colours wasn't immediate - readers had to turn to a key in the magazine, to see what each one meant. The only reason we had colours in the first place, was because we were a black and white fanzine, and by having

coloured stickers on our reviews, we could boast of being the most "colourful, optimistic, black and white fanzine in the business!", as the intro text to our first ever issue put it. Now we've moved to being full colour however, the colour symbols clash with the format colour-coding. Because Xbox reviews are on a green background, does that make people think Xbox is "Groovy Green"!!? The Team still sees the advantages of colour symbols, but has discussed alternatives such as marks out of five, marks out of ten, percentages, no ratings whatsoever, just a summary box, second opinions, using colours in conjunction with something else to better rank games, and even an extremely original idea of a hexagon shape, whose corners are at different lengths from the centre point, based on the games' qualities. Which idea will we go for? Who knows!? But if you wish to join in the debate, you can. Simply email: uglist-subscribe@yahoogroups.com and ask to join our email discussion group.

One thing The Team did manage to agree on, was a switch from organising gaming reviews according to format, to organising them according to genre. This has had the most impact on our website (www.unitedgames.co.uk), currently being designed by Jazz Morgan, but may also be extended to the magazine, if practical.

The United Games Team will also shortly be holding a BluePrint meeting, to set the blue print for subsequent issues. For details please email UnitedGames@game-extra.co.uk. An exact location has not yet been settled on, but it's likely to be near London (maybe Harrow), or else somewhere in the South West - i.e. Swindon, Bath, Bristol, or nearby, but we're not sure yet.



Ⓜ Can you think of a witty caption for this!? Don't worry, next issue we'll be using shots from games in our compo!

WIN A GAMECUBE T-SHIRT IN OUR CAPTION COMPETITION!

KIM GOES CANOEING: EPISODE 1!

Anyway, we've a black Gamecube T-shirt to give away, so if you can think of a witty quote for this photo, then send it in, and the best caption will be printed next issue, with its author being posted a Gamecube T-shirt. Entries should reach us before June 2nd, and we'll decide who wins, and send the prize out on the 3rd of June. Go on! Get thinking of groovy quotes! Who knows, you might be the only person to enter, and thus win by default.

Email:

CaptionCompo1@game-extra.co.uk

Or write to:

Caption Compo #1, 6 Cheviot Close, Ramleaze, West Swindon, SN5 5QD, UK

Don't forget to include your name and address, so we can post you the prize if you win!

"Tra, la-la!" sang Kim, whilst Edd wondered if he should sue Andrew for stealing his patented space filling techniques from EGN including pointlessly over-length sentences that just seem to go on and on for no apparent reason, and just as you think they're gonna end, they don't, and it's really annoying, isn't it? <Ahem>.

"This looks like a good place to meditate!" said Kim, **"Gasp! What's that camera man doing, jumping out of the bushes!?! Oh nooooooooooooo! And I was just about to reach Samadhi!"**

Compo Terms & Conditions:

We won't share your contact details with any 3rd parties. We'll be too drunk after the first two! Lol. Nah, honestly,

any contact details submitted will be used for the sole purpose of getting in contact / posting prizes, should ya' win!

Team Members, Contributors and Shop Staff cannot enter. The closing date is the 2nd of June. Editor's decision is final.

LETTERS

We're hoping that future Community Zone sections can double as letters pages, so feel free to write in!

If you want to contribute news, features, previews, reviews, etc, then that's possible too! See page 38 for more info.

Snail Mail:

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cz@game-extra.co.uk

SORTS

SHORT, SWEET AND PURPLE

THE ORIGIN OF

SORTS:

We can trace the origin of shorts right back to the dawn of time, when Adam and Eve first decided to clothe themselves with little fig leaves. Of course it was only in recent times that people decided to loose their trouser legs and (Woah there matee. When I asked for you to write about the origin of Shorts, I didn't mean the legs-in-the-open-air wear, fit for the summer and 100m hurdles. I meant this as yet unexplained fanzine phenomena. E.d.) Pardon? You meant what!?! (I meant this section of United Games called Shorts! E.d.) Ah! Well that was an entirely different matter. The concept didn't exist at the dawn of time, and it didn't involve anybody cutting up their trousers. Rather it all began with one man, a Mr Jazz Morgan:

"Shouldn't there be some other way of contributing to United Games instead of writing massive in-depth reviews?" he dared to wonder to himself one day.

It was then that he began to formulate his theory:

"There should be a section for miscellaneous articles, a place for readers to have a rant and rave, and get points off of their chest. It will be a voice for the people that does not discriminate against those who have neither the time nor patience to compose an entire review. It will be a section full of short articles. Behold! Shorts is born!!" declared Jazz triumphantly.

And so it was that from that day forth, people began to send short contributions, about video games to:

**"Put this in your SHORTS!",
United Games,
6 Cheviot Close,
Ramleaze,
West Swindon,
Wiltshire,
SN5 5QD
United Kingdom**

Shorts@game-extra.co.uk

RED CARD SOCCER:

Well I am not a clever man, and I am not able to write that many coherent sentences. Therefore, I have resorted to writing a short review, to avoid a large amount of grammar mistakes (and he calls himself deputy editor! Tsk. Ed). Now the game in question here is 'Red Card Soccer'. I will give you the basic idea, and when I say basic, I really mean the 'whole' idea of the game; like in proper football you have two sides facing each other, and of course you have the football - but wait (!) - there is a twist! You are able to foul the opposition and, unless the referee decides to be a real ass, you can get away with it!

Wow, now you can take your frustration out on the US number 10, and do it over and over again!!

This sounds fun, and for a few games it is fun. You are able to foul in so many different ways and watching them not get up for an eternity makes you feel warm inside. You can even foul the Ref! I'm afraid though, after playing this a few more times, the novelty quickly wears off, and you realise just how crap the gameplay really is. The makers seem to have concentrated on the fouls and on nothing else; you have no control over heading or volleying, you can quite easily score from the halfway line, but find it impossible scoring from six yards out and you can't do snap shots. The game's no good - it's as simple as that. If you want to play a decent football game with the fouling, turn off the free kicks part of I.S.S. or Fifa, and foul away to your heart's content.

~Ben Evans~

TWENTY POUND NOTES. IN CRISP PACKETS.

It's not like anyone thinks they're ever going to win is it? There's no effort involved - you don't see people buying up zillions of crisp packets in the hope of getting that one with the money in, is it? You only ever win through happenstance. It's like - if you're lucky, you'll find a twenty pound note in your crisp packet. "Oh, that's nice". Of course, if you're unlucky, you might not notice it's there, and end up swallowing it or something. But I digress...

The National Lottery isn't much better - it's totally random, and as for those scratch cards, well, you've got your three matching symbols, and you've apparently definitely won one of the prizes on the front, but after you've either paid the maximum charge to an 0900 number, or tried to be cunning

and spent 27p on a stamp, you find that you've won foreign travel vouchers, only applicable on destinations you don't want to go to, at times you don't want to go, that before being valid, require you to buy the tickets at a price you don't want to. Well...how about something you could win, where YOU were in control of how capable you were of winning. Where you could put blood, sweat and tears in, and come out top - where you could get the twenty pounds without purchasing every bag of crisps in sight, and yet it could still prove as exhilarating as any trolley dash.

Think Computer Games. Think Online Gaming. Think Cash Prizes. Who!? Where!?! What!?! How!?! Sorry people, this has been one of those future forecast articles.....

~Andrew Mehta~

BEAUTY & TRUTH IN GAMING:

In "Ode on a Grecian Urn,"

Keats wrote the immortal line:
"Beauty is truth, truth beauty."

Now mathematics is the only kind of Truth that can be proven a priori - from first principles - to be True. Mathematics is Truth, and therefore must be beautiful; as indeed are some of the things that mathematics produce (fractal shapes being an example that springs immediately to mind).

Programming is a creative process, but it also conforms to strict rules. It is, fundamentally, mathematics, and you can determine how "True" it is by looking at how well it works. If it does its job, if it's efficient, if it doesn't have bugs then it can be considered True and hence, beautiful. And video games are programming, of course. The 3D models for levels on Tomb Raider or

Quake can be thought of as huge databases that are navigated through by the player. They possess Truth and Beauty - does this not make them art?

It would be amiss to consider something 'beautiful' based entirely on mathematical concepts - where is the room for human subjectivity and emotion if you're dealing entirely with mathematics? Video games also contain what might be thought of as 'traditional' art in all its subjective glory - drawings, textures, images, and sculptures (in the form of 3D models). Programming comes with its own unique constraints like memory requirements and the ability of existing computers to run the program. It's a creative, human skill. How can it **NOT** be considered an art form?

~Will Jenkins~

SWAG'S CRITIQUE OF WILL:

I would argue that video-games are not art despite being comprised from artistic principles, and I would likewise argue that art and beauty do not equate to each other nor have the same meaning. Am I being philosophical enough for you here? How can beauty be truth in every life situation? I'll even use the obvious example to illustrate: Two people making love can be considered a thing of beauty but if there's no love involved (only lust) then how can that be truth? So in one fell swoop I've just proved your quote wrong. As for mathematics only being able to be proven as truth I can't help wondering whether or not you would apply the same theory to science? And as for your literal statement that maths is beautiful because it's true - I've never heard anything in my whole life which has sounded more ridiculous. Besides, you

haven't in any way established a connection between truth equalling beauty and art. Likewise, not all things which can be considered 'art' of one form or another are beautiful. In that case I could say something like: "Hardcore pornography is artistic and therefore beautiful because it allows people the freedom to express themselves as they please." But, I'm sure you would disagree, no?

I can agree that video-games do indeed contain many different forms of artistic aspects, but these alone in my opinion do not make them art. In a sense you could even say that they go beyond being mere 'art' by allowing other people the freedom to interact and explore the on-screen imagery as the player sees fit.

~Swag~
(de art freak)

SATURN POWER:

I love my Sega Saturn, but I was absolutely horrified when my console's internal lithium battery memory (designed to last two years) ran out. In one fell swoop all my saved game data disappeared. I was left to then track down the rare Back-up Memory Cartridge, which no one bothered to

buy back in the day, yet now fetches around £15 second hand. Ouch. Unfortunately, it was only after buying this that I realised Saturn website www.saturn-planet.com sell new lithium batteries for Sega Saturns for a mere £2.50. Retro heads - get the help you need.

~Andrew Mehta~

INSANE GAMES

DUH!

YOU THICKIE!

Back in the day, Insane Games used to run their own games fanzine - called, guess what(!?!) - Insane Games!!!
<Gasp!> <Shock!>
<Horror!>.

Now we've had a few comments from people who think that United Games should start up an old Insane Games section called "Duh! You Thickie!" which cited inept incidences to critical [comedic] acclaim.

Classic examples include tales of how Ross's Dad ties the end of his farm field's wire fence to an electricity pylon, how Ross got his coat tied up in his car motor, how Stoo from Insanes mixed up some mail order deliveries, and, most classic of all - a tale of a really badly bodged games store robbery, that saw the culprits smash glass with their fists to enter, leave bloodstains everywhere, ignore PlayStation stuff and attempt to make off with cheap Megadrive carts only to pass out at the back of the market from lack of blood.

Whilst we hope none of you are either living a life of crime, or loosing blood due to self inflicted wounds, we nonetheless will welcome stories of the terribly inept, foolish or down right stupid. Send your reports to:

**"Duh You Thickie!",
United Games,
6 Cheviot Close,
Ramleaze,
West Swindon,
Wiltshire,
SN5 5QD.**

In the meantime we'll brush up on libel and defamation law. ;-)

ROSS!

"It took them (the developers) two formats (started off on the PSOne), three years, and £7 million to make it, and it took Justin - your average gamer - three nights to finish it." Ross Sillifant talks "The Getaway", and the problem with the industry's obsession over "interactive movies".

The Getaway just doesn't compare to GTA3 - it's more like Driver. I'll applaud it 'cos of the adult approach (and I don't just mean the swearing, although this does help with the representation of gangster life). They've tried so hard to do a clever interactive movie - one that accurately represents London - which is great - but is it really interesting? Would you care if you were driving about your home town (minus people, cars, etc)? Even if you would, by setting it in London, the appeal has been limited to those living in London. Its taken two formats and two years - I would have thought they'd get some gameplay in there or at least basic controls. Don't get me wrong, it's a decent enough game on its own - but its taken so long and cost the developers so much money, that **they've not only got egg on their face but the entire chicken as well - feathers an' all**, and it appears Sony has already commissioned a sequel! Everyone will buy The Getaway to see what all the fuss is about, but I'm sure it'll be the case that weeks later the shelves will be filled with second hand copies. The game's selling point was that it blurred the boundary between movies and video games, yet to me, it didn't so much blur the boundary as just smear it over and make a complete mess of it.

It's the worst thing since Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty. That game's plot was atrocious, destroying all the previous work Hideo Kojima (the game's creator) had done, for as you start getting near to the end of the game, it all starts getting tits-up....the scanner radar is going pair-shaped, everything is really weird, the Colonel blabs on about growing plants and stuff, and it turns out that 2000 years or so ago, a collectable consciousness took up residence in the whitehouse, and feel free to add whatever new age bollocks you want, all of no relevance to the series whatsoever, serving no purpose other than to destroy all the background plots that have gone before, that had set the tone and scene for the entire series. All this, and just because Kojima couldn't establish himself as a movie director in Japan, so saw fit to destroy the entire series, by introducing a school-boy-jap-wank-fetish of a script, coupled with a boss fight with the Solidious Snake that wouldn't

have looked out of place on my Megadrive. Kojima could have gone with his original idea - a prequel set in WW2 where true commandos came into the fore, where you would have had the whole ultimate soldier / Nazi experiments / secret weapons of the Luftwaffe / V1 + 2 rockets , etc going on, but oh no, we get some white haired prat [Raiden], and a game that was clearly bodged together. Not only was the tanker section blatantly too short, (and too bloody green) but Kojima had over exposed that section before the game was even released [via both the Zone of Enders Demo and a further Official PlayStation Magazine Demo].

Furthermore, the substance given to the game by the Ninja character as well as the fantastic ideas prominent in the prequel (i.e. plug the controller in port 2 to stop Psycho Mantis predicting your actions), seemed to have all been lost. My point being that I wish developers would stop wasting time and resources (and more importantly our valuable money), on coming up with so called "interactive movies" at the sacrifice of basic gameplay, decent controls, and value for money.... Metal Gear Solid 2, Medal of Honour: Frontline, and most recently The Getaway have sadly gone to prove, that whilst games may make vast improvements in terms of their graphical prowess, it's not worth a damn, as we the consumer are being very short changed by developers blatantly not bothering with the basic mechanics of what made us get into games in the first place. Sadly I'm as guilty as any other, as I believed the hype, spent the money, and had the disappointment. **It's almost like the videogame equivalent of a prostitute** - you get all excited, hand over your money to some flashy old tart, it's over in a short while, you're out of pocket, feel dirty and ashamed of the whole experience, and basically you only did it in the first place because all your mates were into it.

To sum up, I don't know who is more guilty; them for producing the games/interactive movies/pants, or us the gamers for constantly buying them, whilst ignoring the few original titles that come onto the market. Is this really progress(?), and if so, at what price?



The Getaway just doesn't compare to Grand Theft Auto 3. Don't get me wrong - it's a decent enough game on its own - but for the length of time spent in development, we'd expect more.



I spent a lot of hard earned money on st-in-gift-wrapping. Metal Gear Solid 2 was supposed to be THE Killer PS2 title - the 10/10 game, PS2 perfection, etc. Thank God for GTA3 or I'd have thought there was more power in a 60W bulb than the PlayStation 2!**

RANTS:



← This issue, *The Getaway*, *Metal Gear Solid 2* and *Medal of Honour*: Frontline all get ranted about by our Ross...

When the Franchise lets you down....

Ask anyone who knows me and they'll say WW2 is possibly my biggest interest (Denise Richards gets 1st place!). Be it books, videos, DVDs, etc - I dunno what it is, but this part of human history holds a wonder for me!

Naturally, as a keen gamesplayer I'm always desperate to play games set in this period, from the 8-bit likes of "Aces of Aces", "Desert Fox", "Beach Head 1 & 2" through to the (2) classic Playstation Medal of Honour titles, that despite being a bit rough'n'ready gripped me in a way Golden Eye never did.

So, I was naturally delighted to hear EA were, at the time, planning two PS2 Medal of Honour games (Medal of Honour: Fighter Command having since been cancelled!!) and when the first in-game footage appeared, well(!), I nearly flooded the place with drool! It looked and sounded bloody amazing! They'd really done their homework, gone beyond all my expectations, and the first D-Day Landing level nearly blew me away! It was the pinnacle of my Medal of Honour experiences and I lapped up every drop of it!

It was somewhat disappointing then, to find that every mission past it felt that little bit lacking, and instead of setting the scene for the rest of the game, that D-day level seemed to build its part up TOO much.

Where was the REAL freedom to explore in the levels? Why WEREN'T my shots hitting home when I had the cross-hairs dead centre on my target? Just why couldn't I DUCK whilst in the back of the truck? **Why put in a sodding mine cart level?** Where was the multi-player? Are these my feet?

"They" always seem to screw it up you know - be it a film, i.e. Robocop or Alien (Look at Robocops 2 and 3, or Alien 3 and Resurrection for instance), or a game (Medal of Honour, or Metal Gear Solid). It's like the more advances in technology, the lesser the product.

There is hope mind! "Frontline" has come to Xbox and Gamecube (I'd have preferred "Allied Assault" myself, but...) and so there's a chance they may have ironed out the flaws for these versions, but all I know is that the Xbox version will have full Dolby 5.1 sound (Nice!) and a sequel is in development for both Xbox and PlayStation 2.

...And Whilst I'm on the subject:

PSOne's "Parasite Eve 2" and "Medi-Evil 2" weren't as good as their prequels, and what on earth happened with PlayStation 2's Wipeout and ThunderHawk games!? Ridge Racer and the Tekken series are going nowhere, Legacy of Kain: Soul

Reaver and Blood Omen games on next-gen platforms have been disappointing, and **STOP UPDATING GAUNTLET!** I mean, am I the only one to think: "My God! It's 2003! We should all be living on the moon or having video games beamed directly into

our sub conscious or somethin'!?" **It's like the future has taken two steps forward, fallen flat on its arse and had progress come running up to it and rub dog s**t in its face before running off laughing: "Catch me if ya' can!"**

I mean, come on folks! We're paying MORE for less!! Time to make a stand!!! Do we want quality software such as Grand Theft Auto 3 / Mario Sunshine / Halo, etc, or new recipes for old tat? Its our choice!

"People's Pole":
(&*\${%! I meant Poll!)

I'd be interested to hear your thoughts (the SANE ones that is - none of the disturbing inner doubt stuff) on the following:

- Are you going to buy a PlayStation 2 Hard Drive?
- Broadband - is it really the future?
- Sony's PlayStation 3, 4 and 5 announcements - all this "cell" crap, what with 5 and 6 using biotechnology. What does it mean for Joe public?
- Loyalty to one console: - surely odd behaviour? It's the games that matter, right? Personally, if Skoda made a machine that had titles such as GTA3, Metroid Prime, Halo, etc, on it, and it looked like a mini washing machine, I would care not, and you?

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[Welcome to our world. Our **United World**. From **public acclaim** [Game Stars] to the quietly **smiling niche** [Mac Gaming] to narcissism in late **capitalism** [Virtual Theories] to page layouts with random **toilet blueprints**. This is **our World**. Our **United World**. And you're **always** welcome. But now, **the news.....**]

News @ BulletPoint:

■ **Namco** have licensed **Counter Strike** and will be featuring the game in their soon to be open **LEDZone** arcade centres in Japan.

■ **Xbox** will have keyboard support for **Phantasy Star Online** after all. Flyers for a free **USB** adapter, allowing any **USB** keyboard to be connected to the console are to be packaged with the game.

■ **Nintendo** have developed a new battery for the **Gameboy Advance SP** that lasts longer. It will be launched in Japan in May, and is expected to be released in the **UK** soon after.

■ **US Florida-based Infinium Labs** are launching a console called "**The Phantom**" in America come December. It's a specifically **broadband device**, with nice specifications but no games at the moment.

Game Star Awards Announced!

If you were watching ITV1 on the afternoon of Easter Sunday, you would have seen Game Stars - a new gaming awards ceremony organised by some of the games industry's big wigs, and Granada TV. Whilst we're really nothing to do with Game Stars, it would be wrong of us not to report on the first time a dedicated computer games show has featured on prime-time TV, so without further ado, for all those interested, here are the winners of each category:

- Daily Mirror People's Choice:** Champ Manager
- Games Radar.com Award:** Halo
- Game's Most Wanted:** The Legend of Zelda
- Best Sports Game:** Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4
- Best Action Game:** GTA: Vice City
- Best Driving Game:** Burnout 2: Point of Impact
- Best Adventure Game:** Metroid Prime
- Best Arcade Game:** Super Monkey Ball 2
- Favourite Game Hero:** Solid Snake
- BAFTA Game of Games:** GTA: Vice City

Most of these were voted for by you, the public, apart from of course, the BAFTA award, which was decided by a group of experts on cultural forms such as film and the arts. It's reassuring therefore, that they didn't have the wool pulled over their eyes by pseudo individualisms (see page 20) choosing GTA:Vice City - a game that not only has decent graphics and sound, but has also been critically acclaimed for its gameplay.

Of course there was also that small case of finding the greatest gamer in the UK, and the title now goes to Ben Hinchcliffe (15yrs, from Scarborough). In a really sad move to make money off the back of this news, if you want to buy one of the True Playerz T-shirts that Ben and co were wearing during the compo turn to the JoyStick Junkies ad on p99. I'm going to have a bath now, because I feel all commercially corrupt & dirty.



From left to right: The presenters of ITV's Game Stars(1), Ben Hinchcliffe from Scarborough won the title of the UK's greatest gamer(2), leaving the games industry to wrestle for its own awards with celebrities such as Johnny Vegas(3), all to a soundtrack provided by the likes of rock band Ash (4) as well as So Solid Crew's Lisa Maffia.

PS3 won't cell.

Far from spelling pessimism wrong, in writing the above headline I am in fact summing up the crux of Ken Kutaragi(aka as the inventor or godfather of PlayStation)'s most recent statements. After all the hype about Cell technology, it has recently been announced that the PlayStation 3 will not use cell technology as previously intended.

The reason? IBM's Cell technology that would have allowed PlayStation 3 to be embedded into all sorts of interesting appliances, etc, won't be ready for firms to use until 2007, and Sony are looking to launch PlayStation 3 for 2005/2006. This is a disappointment for developers looking to get to grips with the exciting potential of cell technology, but many did think the cell idea sounded a bit

far off, so this won't come as a surprise to everyone.

In the meanwhile, Toshiba have closed down a US-based R&D programme that was looking into how the PS2 could be used as a central information hub within the home, with internet rumours suggesting that developments of this nature are perhaps being saved for the PlayStation 3.

Yet more PlayStation 3 rumours centre around the system being set to use Linux. This doesn't mean you'll boot up to a Linux operating system, but rather an embedded form of Linux will be running behind the scenes, a bit like how the Dreamcast used Windows CE, but not quite.

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Transformers: Generation Zero!

A brand new Transformers computer game is being developed by Japanese firm Winky Soft, for release in Japan this Autumn, and what's more, it's based on the original Transformers, as featured in the very first cartoons and comics (although the game is also set to include characters from the movie).

Playable characters include the Autobots Optimus Prime, Jazz, Wheeljack and Rodimus Prime, and the Decepticons Megatron, Soundwave, Starscream and Galvatron, although in-game footage has shown other characters such as Ramjet and Dirge also appear.

The plot-line you play through within the game differs according to what faction you choose to play as - either Autobot Heros or Evil Decepticons. Not much has been revealed at this stage, but from what we can make out from these screenshots, it seems Optimus and

co are out investigating an SOS signal, when they're suddenly ambushed by Decepticons. Cue battle scene.

As you can see from the screens below, the player is able to use Optimus Prime's trailer in its unfolded battle-ready state, which is a nice touch. A radar shows where enemies are in vicinity to yourself, and the standard HP bar indicating health is present, although we're not sure what the EP bar is for yet. In case you're not an expert on Transformer characters, faction icons appear above the enemy characters, allowing you to tell if they're Decepticons or Autobots. It's unclear at the moment, however, how the battles will be contextualised into the game. It could turn out to be a mere mediocre "hack and slash countless enemies" affair, with the TF license merely tagged on. We'll have to wait and see, when it's released on PS2 later on in the year.



From left to right: The title screen(1). Story selection - Autobots/Cybertrons or Decepticons/Destrons(2)? Prime and co are sure the SOS signal came from here(3). Argg! Two Trusts and a Dirge! 'eh? TWO Thrust characters?!?(4). Infogrames have the western release rights to all TF software after buying Hasbro Interactive, so they're the only ones able to bring this game to the west for us. Mind you, there's also a Transformers: Armada game in the works....

Billy's great big egg.

A month or so ago, a release schedule was leaked from Sega, and made for interesting reading. Preliminary dates were given for a number of games, most we were anticipating, but one title stood out on the list as something nobody had heard of before. It simply read: "Giant Egg". Well now Sega have revealed the full details. The game's full title is the rather awful sounding: "Billy Hatcher and the Giant Egg" and it's a brand new platformer for Gamecube, developed by none other than the legendary Yuji Naka and his Sonic Team.

With a title like "Billy Hatcher and the Giant Egg" it sounds almost like a Harry Potter spoof, but all of Mr Naka's games, from Sonic through to Burning Rangers and NiGHTS have always been about high speed action mixed with high score challenges, and Billy Hatcher is staying true to the trend. "[It's]pure Sonic Team magic" said Mike Fischer

of Sega of America, "a dizzying blend of fast action, hypnotic gameplay and one-of-a-kind characters..!"

You're no doubt wondering exactly how the game plays out then, aren't you? Well, you play the role of Billy, who has decided to embark upon a mission of treason against an evil King. In order to rebel, you use what has long since been forgotten - magic. Well... magical eggs at least. You roll these around the carnival-esque levels you explore, and you're able to hatch magical creatures from them, which can help you solve the various puzzles you'll come across, as well as help you fight any foes you may encounter. In addition to eggs, Billy also wears a power suit, and some eggs he finds can increase his abilities. That's about all we know at the moment, but with the game expected to debut at E3 this May, you'll hear more very soon.

Our sources:

- www.gamespress.co.uk,
- www.gamestars.co.uk
- www.sponge.com, www.upwire.com,
- www.thetransformers.net,
- www.tfw2005.com

■ Sega to bring Megadrive 16-bit titles to multiple formats soon. Full range of titles to be unveiled at E3.

■ EA and nVidia have formed a strategic alliance. EA's PC games will plug nVidia cards, and eventually also

contain specific game features and FX exclusive to nVidia cards.

■ The English version of SquareEnix's online Final Fantasy XI is now being beta tested in the US & Canada for PC and PS2.

■ Dance Dance Revolution coming to Xbox Live!

■ Capcom is likely to end Gamecube exclusivity after RE4.

■ Codemasters is making a Pop Idol video game, due Christmas.

■ Playmore is releasing King of Fighters 2002 for Dreamcast in Japan, on June 19th. DC's last ever game!?!



Gen

Next Generation Gaming.

The FUTURE OF GAMING

PlayStation 3

Xbox Live

Broadband Gaming

Next Generation Nintendo

Graphics C



When is a Radeon not a Radeon?

Why, when you've used some clever software to make it to be even more powerful, that's when!

Yes, that's right, a software mod. Over the last few months people have been playing with ATI's Radeon 9500 cards to see what makes them so different from the 9700 range. The answer was, not a lot. Using some clever software created by a man aptly named Wizzard, you can turn your 9500 128mb card into a fully-fledged 9700 128mb. Sounds too good to be true? Well it is, sort of. There have been reports from people who have tried this and gotten graphical glitches.

It appears that ATI are using chips that don't make it to the 9700 grade on the 9500 non pro range. However the demand for the 9500 series and the high rate of yield from the silicon plants themselves, has meant that it looks as if 70% of the 9500 non pro's out there can be software modified to become 9700 without a problem.

So if you've got a Radeon 9500 at home running on an Windows 2000/XP operating system, it might be worth trying. Follow these links for more details:

Converting a Radeon 9500 128mb to a 9700 128mb:
<http://www.xbitlabs.com/news/video/display/news6115.html>

Wizzard's site for drivers, patches and FAQ:
<http://www.maxdownloads.com/~ian/wizzard/>

~Mat Owen~

New Console Hardware!!!

PlayStation 2, Xbox, Gameboy Advance SP, and possibility also Gamecube are all getting new hardware, would you believe?

Firstly, Sony Computer Entertainment of Japan is launching a new PlayStation 2 model, featuring a number of refinements. We don't expect it to look that different, but Sony have managed to make it 400g lighter. The main improvements are its DVD capabilities. It's now able to play more formats, including all the DVD and CD writeable / re-writeable formats. It'll also feature an infra red sensor for use with a remote control. The old iLink connection has been removed from the console...probably because its hardly ever used, but other than that, it's the same PlayStation 2 console we all know and love. The changes have probably been made to make it both cheaper or more efficient to manufacture, and to position it as a better DVD solution

(although one has to wonder if the ability to play burnt DVDs isn't just helping people with PC home studios play their home-made discs, but perhaps providing a platform for movie piracy...hmm....). It's unlikely the cheaper model will mean a cheaper price point to match Xbox's recent price cut, but Sony are looking to begin bundling modems and hard drives free with the consoles, starting in Japan first.

Meanwhile, Microsoft is expected to reveal a smaller Xbox at the E3 games show in Los Angeles this May. It looks likely to be what the Master System II was to the Master System, and what the Megadrive II was to the Megadrive - a smaller, sleeker, cheaper-to-manufacture machine, cosmetically different, but fundamentally the same.

Nintendo, having just announced the Gameboy Advance SP are introducing yet more hardware - but no, it's not another Gameboy, but rather an upgrade of sorts that many people think the Gameboy Advance SP should have been launched with. In short, they've developed a better lithium

battery for the GBA SP that lasts much longer. It's launching in Japan in May, and expected to hit Europe soon after.

There have been online rumours that Nintendo are to introduce a portable Gamecube, but here at United Games we're doubtful about this. The Gamecube is currently fundamentally portable, if you want to go get an LCD screen and the other peripherals needed for mobility, but we think it highly unlikely Nintendo would reveal a portable console as powerful as Gamecube so close to its launch of the GBA SP. Nonetheless, for those of you interested in new Gamecube hardware we can confirm, you may be pleased to know, that the Zelda game & console bundle features a lovely silver platinum Gamecube, as part of Nintendo's Gamecube birthday celebrations (there'll be an office party too, we're sure). Now isn't that groovy?

~Andrew Mehta~

Online Games Consoles.

"The future is online!" cried Sony and Microsoft, whilst Nintendo stood by the side, stroking its gaming beard and going: "Really?"

Alexander Hay sums up the state of online play across the console formats - the here, the now and the coming soon....

PlayStation 2 Online:



Right Now:

So far, PS2 Online has been a hit in the US and Japan. Sony claims that one hundred thousand PS2 fans in Japan have logged on, no doubt helped in part by the success of Final Fantasy XI, whilst in the US, almost two hundred thousand users have signed up already. US users can choose between either a conventional narrow band package, or a broadband service - accessed by way of a special add-on pack featuring a broadband adapter, an online game and a start-up disc with all the software needed and some demos.

Soon:

Despite the option for normal modem-based narrowband in the US, Sony aims to debut PS2's online connectivity in the UK and Europe as a purely broadband experience. The UK will see trials of the broadband system this month. It will then be on sale in Britain later this year. The system will then be let loose on the rest of Europe and Australia. The aim is to make PS2 broadband available through several providers. This is to ensure no one company has a clear monopoly. Plans are also afoot to make the system as secure as possible. This is meant to woo those nervous gamers and firms that Sony may need to win over to make broadband a success.

Those Games in Full...

Online games that have so far been released include SOCOM: Navy Seals. This was developed by Sony's US division. It has sold 400,000 copies so far. EA Sport's Madden NFL 2003 has also been a hit. This brings the famed American Football series to the net. A new PS2 version of Everquest is also due to be released for the PS2, although early indications from the American gaming press indicate it's not likely to be quite the killer app it was for PC MMORPGs (Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games), being described by one American journalist as a glorified chat room. Other games in the pipeline include projects by Activision, Eidos and Capcom (Resi Evil Online! Ed).

Gamecube Online:



Right Now:

The GameCube's modem add-on was first released in the UK on the 7th of March this year. It is unique in that it comes in two versions. The first is an old skool 56k analogue modem. The other is a broadband adapter. Despite the differences in speed, both are on sale for £39.99. Both also need extra subscription fees, but while they both allow online access to Gamecube games, they can not access the web or websites. That is, unless the game being played specifically allows for this. The broadband adapter also requires a separate modem. As an aside the GameCube uses a ready-made network, unlike its rivals who had to start from scratch. It has inherited the Sega Network from Sega's now defunct Dreamcast console. As such, both Nintendo and Sega are investing in the network, which is due to be expanded in the US.

Soon:

Nintendo's plans for online gaming are uncertain, with the firm's strategy - if any - likely to be revealed at E3 this May. Until then, it seems doubtful the modem add-ons will generate much interest at all.

Those Games in Full...

Right now, the GameCube only has one online game. It is Sega's RPG Phantasy (sic) Star Online. This RPG is a conversion of the two Dreamcast games that went before, plus a new GC-exclusive adventure. The game has been very well received, and has given the GameCube modems some much-needed press. But it is troubling that Nintendo has entered the online games market with a third party title. Indeed, it would seem there are problems with the technology being used. There are even reports that the Gamecube's Mario Kart was delayed due to problems implementing online elements. This has led to Shigeru Miyamoto himself admitting there are many problems facing the project and, by implication, Nintendo's own plans for online gaming. So for now, the GameCube modem's fate, like that of the GameCube itself, hangs in the balance.

Xbox Live:



Right Now:

Microsoft has vowed to spend two billion dollars on its broadband service Xbox live. It was launched in the US in November last year, where the starter pack sold out in many stores. It is now on sale in the UK and the starter pack is on sale for £39.99. This includes a headset that allows players to talk online with other users. Also, a starter disc with all the software needed to go online and a one-year subscription to the service. Microsoft's launch on the 14th of March has given it a clear lead over Sony in Europe. It has also got three hundred and fifty thousand users in the US already.

Soon:

Microsoft sees Xbox Live as vital for the console to be a hit. It has plans to achieve this through a mix of heavy marketing and beating Sony to the Euro market. It has also launched the Xbox Live compatibility program. This is meant to make sure broadband access is up and running before Xbox Live is launched in a country. Microsoft has already wooed Europe's biggest broadband providers, like the UK's BT, NTL and Telewest. It also hopes to sign up other providers in Europe as it expands on the continent.

Those Games in Full...

The current X-Box Live game line up is healthy. Games like Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon, Mech Assault, Unreal Championship, Capcom vs. SNK EO and Star Wars: Clone Wars are now on sale or are soon to be released. Microsoft has stated that it hopes to have 50-odd Xbox Live enabled titles available by the end of the year.

~Alexander Hay~

More information on the Xbox Live system can be found on page 26.



Dirty ol' Macs

Why play games on the Apple Macintosh? PCs and consoles have got the games market stitched up between them. Well, Macs have an operating system, graphics and sound that still leaves the PC behind in a cloud of dust. Put simply, the Mac has a hell of a lot of unrealised potential...

And besides, one has always been able to buy a steady stream of games for the Mac. You may have to search that little nook in HMV where the Mac games are ghettoised. But here's the point: that section has always been there and is always fully stocked. Ignore the Mac and you ignore a 'forgotten' market of games and gamers. And you also leave out a small, but important, part of gaming history.

First Daze Here

If nothing else, Mac users have always had some sort of games software to play. In fact, January 2004 will see the 20th anniversaries of both the Mac and the first Mac game. And 20 years of gaming does at least deserve a second look.

But let's get back to that first ever game. It also happens to be one that is still available on every Mac sold today. Puzzle (it



A byte of A brief history

does what it says) - that game so beloved of bored sub editors and graphic design undergrads - has in fact been around since 1984. While very basic, it has the accolade of being the first ever game for the Mac, as well as, quite possibly, the most played. Puzzle was also significant because it was part of the first all-inclusive software package bundled with a computer. It was part of a new approach to computing. Now, thanks to the Mac, you could get the Operating System (OS), Word Processor, Graphic User Interface (GUI), accessories, drivers, applications and add-ons all at once. And the stroke of genius to it was that it was so user-friendly, it could be installed and used straight away. Of course, the concept of a computer that came with an OS, a GUI and all mod cons was later "borrowed" by Microsoft. The rest - they say - is Windows XP history. But Puzzle was still the first game written for this new age of computing AND part of the first OS to realise it. It's also still in print. And if that's not of importance to gaming history, what is?

But another cornerstone of Mac gaming would soon emerge after 1984. Namely, how the supply of games for the Mac, while always steady, was and still is much less than it is for the PC. Game developers could not (and, some argue, still can't) work out how to make best use of the machine. It was too different from the 8-bit computers they were used to. And as the 80s went on, it was much easier to get used to the new 16-bit computers (the Amiga and Atari ST) and the mighty NES console than the Mac. So it was that the Mac would always have less games than was and is usual for such a successful platform.

This meant that gamers were not so keen on the Mac, leaving it firmly in its tech head niche. Of course, this is still the

case today, but no one has STOPPED writing games for it either. Also, it is worth remembering that both the Mac and Mac gaming have been surviving this drought now for almost three decades.

This meant the rise of another Mac tradition- the port-over. Companies just could not get to grips with the damn thing. Also, the Mac games market was not as big or profitable as elsewhere. So they found it to be more quick, easy, cheap and lucrative to port over a game from another platform.

One of the first games to be ported over was Wizardry, by Sirtech. This aged Bard's Tale-style RPG was originally a hit on the Apple II. But it also made it onto the Mac with no difficulty. (As an aside, many Mac games were in black and white up until the early 90s...). The now long gone label Polarsoft also claimed to have released the first commercially available game for the Mac in 1984. This was a text adventure called Transylvania. Another old war-horse in gaming, Star Fleet I, also turned up on the Mac, this time in 1985. Microprose released many of its mid-80 games for the Mac, including Pirates and Gunship. Sierra also ported over games for the Mac, such as the Space Quest series. SSI, also now gone the way of all flesh, began to port over games for the Mac in the mid-80s. These included the company's Dungeons and Dragons tie-ins, like Pool of Radiance. But it also released many of its wargames like North Atlantic '86. Infocom's many classic text adventures graced the Mac too, such as the Zork series and Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy. Even early chapters of Origin's Ultima series were released. But it should be said that later sequels have not been seen anywhere near the Mac ever since. The Atari/Don Bluth cartoon arcade games Dragon's Lair and Space Ace also surfaced on the Mac towards the end of the 80s. The likes of Cinemaware's Defender of the

Crown; Broderbund's Prince of Persia and Ancient Art of War; Tetris (of course...), Sim City and Battle Chess, amongst other greats from the 80s, all reared their heads on the Mac too.

This is not to say that all Mac games at this point were port-overs. Then as now there was always a small supply of Mac-only games. The highlights of this era were Crystal Quest and Daleks. These were two simple games that were single screen but very addictive.

Most interesting of all, Mac-only gaming helped launch one of today's best software designers. Jonathan Gay, creator of Macromedia's Flash, did in fact make his programming debut on the Mac, writing Airbourne in the mid 80s. This was in fact the first Mac game to have digital sound. Gay also went on to write two Mac classics - Dark Castle and its sequel Beyond Dark Castle before he went on to bigger, better things...

Apple gets Stewed

...Alas, the Mac games scene didn't. Co-founder Steve Jobs left under a cloud of acrimony in 1985. From that point on, inept management ran Apple. The new order that replaced Jobs was old school in a corporate sense. (One president - John Scully - was a former CEO of Pepsi-Cola for example). But it did not know how IT companies (and their employees) worked. As time went on Apple began to flounder. In a sense then, much of the 1990s can be seen as a 'Lost Decade' both for the Mac and Mac gaming.

But Mac gamers had other crosses to bare too. The main threat was the PC. In the late 80s the market had been flooded with cheap IBM clones. This glut did of course cost IBM profits. But it also meant

the Apple:

of Gaming on the Mac.

By Alexander Hay.

that the platform was spread far and wide. Rival manufacturers forced the cost of PCs down and so made them a hit with users. The PC also benefited from Microsoft's cheap easy-to-use software, which aped the Mac's OS, but at a cheaper cost. So it was that the public came to prefer PCs simply because they used them more. Software and hardware companies saw this untapped market and took note. They boosted their output of games and game-friendly add-ons like sound and graphic cards. The Mac, meanwhile, was too much of an unknown quantity and too expensive to buy and repair for most gamers.

This cost the Mac a lot of would-be owners. Gamers, after all, can make or break a format. Alas, Apple's management did not realise this. They did not market the Mac to gamers. Instead they sought a more adult 'upmarket' image. Apple focussed on the Mac's specs, and tried to sell it as a machine for professionals. After all, the Mac was already the workhorse for the Desktop Publishing (DTP) and graphic design sectors. But this niche, while one that Apple could depend on, was too small. The PC not only won over gamers but the equally important office market too. The Mac, meanwhile, found itself stuck on the margins.

Of course, this meant the supply of games began to dry up for the Mac. As Mac sales fell so the market for Mac games shrank as well. Developers ditched the Mac in droves to jump on the PC games bandwagon, which kicked off in the early 90s and has not stopped since. For the Mac, meanwhile, its brief games boom of the 80s and early 90s was over. Mac sections in game shops became increasingly small. They often vanished altogether or were reduced to a tiny corner of the shop. (As anyone who visited a large Virgin megastore or HMV around this time would

have seen). It seemed the Mac was in terminal decline, and Mac gaming was going down with it.

But there was a hint of light amidst this utter gloom. It was down to one game: Marathon. Marathon was released in 1994, the product of the now-legendary Bungie software. It was a first person shooter where the player took up the role of a lone security officer. The aim of the game was to retake a crippled colony ship from an alien race called the Pfhor.

Marathon was unique in many ways. Technically it was akin to Doom. But the game also had many new features. First of all, it was probably the first gaming phenomenon in its own right, which started on, rather than being ported over to, the Mac. The game was a huge hit and still has many fans to this day. And the game was also cutting edge. Here for the first time was a first person shoot-'em-up with a fully fledged 3D engine and the ability to move up and down as well as forwards, back, left or right. The game also had a complex plot that did in fact have an effect on the game. The goal was not to just make it through the levels but to actually recapture the ship. Marathon had another new spin on the genre too - bystanders. Players now also had to deal with human colonists (or 'BOBs'). Usually, they just got caught up in the crossfire and got splattered. But the BOBs also had limited dialogue, and could be 'talked' to in a simple sort of way.

These factors all marked a new chapter in 3D games. Players could now interact with characters in the game and actually had to pay attention to the plot as well as shoot the foe. Other companies followed Bungie's example and began to develop their own next generation shooters. To see where games like Half-Life, Red Faction 2 and Unreal II learned how to have

stories, work in 3D and not insult the player's IQ, then look no further than Marathon. Of course, PC fans tend to ignore Marathon's contribution to the genre, but then they would...

Indeed it was seen as proof that there was still life left in the Mac. The machine still had potential and could play host to ground-breaking software. But this alone would not save the platform.

Macs to the Max

Real salvation, as it were, took place in 1996. Apple bought NeXT and in doing so gained the services once more of NeXT's owner... Steve Jobs. He soon became acting CEO and began to make many changes. At the MacWorld Expo in Boston 1997 Jobs announced he was buying out clone licenses. Originally, these were meant to repeat the success of the IBM by giving the customers cheap clones. But this strategy had been a failure, and had brought no extra profits. Instead, the clones had not attracted new Mac owners. They had in fact lured Mac users away from Apple's own high-end computers, eating into its profits. Jobs also announced he had signed a deal with Microsoft to cross-licence their software in exchange for Apple stock. Also, that an out of court settlement had been drawn up over claims that Windows was a rip off of the Mac's Graphic User Interface. This meant the Apple could now have access to popular software and could become profitable again. This also meant both extra investment and new users. All of this boded well for Mac gaming. The Apple was further helped by Jobs' decision that year to sell his company's products over the phone and the net directly to the customer. This was another useful innovation, making Macs far more accessible to new users. This also meant more Mac gamers and so more Mac games.



Classics such as Peter Molyneux's *Black & White* have been ported over to Mac.



Bungie's *Marathon* was so popular, that it spawned two sequels, creating a trilogy.



Now Bungie are owned by Microsoft, but Destineer are porting *Halo* to Mac for us.

But the main big shift was in 1998 with the arrival of the iMac. This was a Mac aimed at the low end of the market. That is to say, it might not have been a high performer like previous Macs but it was cheap and so more appealing to the masses. It was a big success, and soon became the biggest selling computer in the US market. Today it remains popular and is fast becoming a true icon in home computing.

And while Apple has suffered somewhat recently - its sales have been uncertain since 2000 and it posted its second consecutive loss in January of this year - this can be seen as part of the general downturn in the IT industry that has been the case since the end of the nineties. Indeed, now the Mac seems healthier than it has for a decade now.

This means, of course, that the number of games for the Mac has gone up too. Right now, games like Soldier of Fortune II, Return To Castle Wolfenstein, The Sims, Medal of Honour, Unreal, Aliens vs. Predator 2, World of Warcraft, Black and White 2, Star Trek Elite Force 2, Sim City 4, Master of Orion III and Worms Blast have either been released for the system or are about to be. The port-over market is as healthy as it has ever been, and seems to be gathering pace if the current volume is anything to go by.

Mac-only games, while (as ever) a bit thin on the ground, keep on being released too. Coming soon is MacSoft's Dungeon Siege, a vast RPG that has received much pre-release hype. Meanwhile, Mac-only classics like Spaceward Ho! keep on selling and spawning sequels (Spaceward... has in fact reached number 5 in the series). And then there is Bugdom - a 3D platformer which

comes bundled with all new iMacs. It has acquired a cult following and is about to spawn its own sequel.

The main Mac software developers right now include - of course - MacSoft, which has been one of the biggest developers over the last few years. Its port-overs for the Mac include the Civilization series and Unreal. Also of note is Ambrosia Software, which produces not only a large number of cheap and cheerful Mac games but also a lot of utilities for the format too. Aspyr media handles a lot of port-overs like Tony Hawks' Pro Skater 3, Harry Potter and The Sims. So does the UK-based label Feral, with games like Max Payne and Championship Manager 4. MacPlay - a division of Interplay - is another port-over specialist. It has handled titles like No One Lives Forever and Baldur's Gate II. Bold By Destineer, meanwhile, is noted for bringing Age of Empires II and Links to the Mac. And, irony upon ironies, Bungie, seen as saviours by some Mac gamers and users, have now been taken over by... Microsoft. It is now developing games for the X-Box and has already unleashed that gleeful gore-'marathon' (ho-ho-ho), Halo. Which just goes to show that the Mac experience is nothing if not ironic, and that goes for the games too.

An apple a day...

So why should gamers buy Macs? Anything that has lasted this long, under pressure from both the PC and every other major games platform in the last 20 years should get some respect. It is a machine that still has a lot of untapped raw potential just waiting for some games developer to come along to take advantage of it. Indeed, the Mac is now as the PC was 15 years ago - a sleeping giant in gaming circles, but with huge potential. Both machines were not designed with games in mind, but both share a flexibility and a raw accessibility that has made one great and could yet do the same to the other.

And if the Mac has anything else going for it, it's the loyalty of its users, which verges on the religious. Mac users are obsessively proud of their computers, and rightly so. This means that the machine will always have at least some support for it, come what may. It has had just about every major game in the last decade released for it. And it has been home to a few gaming classics of its own (namely Marathon and Spaceward Ho! etc.). And the Apple Mac is arguably the best home computer format in existence, so the question should not be "Why play games on the Mac?" It should be "Why Not?"

~Alexander Hay~



Multiplayer roleplaying action in MacSoft's Dungeon Siege - exclusive to Mac!

Help Chart The Future



So you've had a history lesson on Mac Gaming. Where now? Where else, but the future?

United Games, as an alternative source of games journalism is very keen to extend its coverage of Mac games, but being literally written by gamers, for gamers, we need you - the Mac Gamers - to write in with your reviews.

For details on how to contribute, please turn to page 38. For details on our plans for the next issue, email us:

UnitedGames@game-extra.co.uk

VIRTUAL THEORIES



Introduction:

Taking a BA in Media Studies, I increasingly witnessed a plethora of media studies theories applied to Film, Cinema, TV, Music, Radio, and the Internet but never to computer games. As editor of United Games, I decided it was time to see how these theories could relate to computer gaming, and so the idea for a Virtual Theories section was born - applying academic media studies theories to computer games. This issue we take the theories of Theodor Adorno and see how they can be applied to computer games.

Of course these are just theories, and even Adorno had his critics to face. We'd be interested in what you think of these theories. Comments, questions, queries or arguments can be sent to: UnitedGames@game-extra.co.uk

Gaming Academia is really taking off in the UK at the moment, with many Universities now expanding to cover gaming in their remit, and serious academic work being carried out on gaming. Whilst this section is starting out by applying Media Studies theories to computer games, we'd welcome any contributions from other fields of expertise (psychology, sociology, economics, actual game studies, etc), be they theory based, or research based. You're also welcome to write stuff off the top of your head. We once found an essay on one of the iMacs in our University library about the artistic merits of Rez, that seemed very interesting. If you think you have an idea for a future Virtual Theories section, then email us to talk about it: UnitedGames@game-extra.co.uk

Pockets:



Nintendo recently held an exhibition on the history of pockets, to celebrate the launch of the Gameboy Advance SP. Celebrities were there for the launch party, and got to wrap their grubby mitts around a few GBA SPs as well as learn about the evolution of the pocket, its role in fashion, and, erm, details on pocket contents of famous people as they died, e.g Kurt Cobain and Abraham Lincoln.

Case Study One: Theodor W. Adorno applied to Computer Games.

WHO

Theodor Adorno was a member of the Frankfurt School in Germany, which upped and left Germany during the Second World War, taking refuge in America. Caught between seeing their own country succumb to a fascist dictatorship, and at the same time being quite scared by the rapid capitalism and commercialism of America, they sat around philosophising about society, economics, and so forth, writing books and papers, and generally wallowing in the academic lifestyle.

Adorno is most well known for his theories of media consumption, relating to how classical music is much better than pop music (in his opinion), and that people are being duped by buying the same musical formulas being rehashed over and over again. This criticism centred around the notion of pseudo individuation.

Theodor Adorno also analysed media consumption in a capitalist society he saw as mainly fuelled by narcissism - which, despite its dictionary meaning of self-love, he used to describe the average punter's desire to find some form of compensation for the fact that society always results in you never getting your money's worth. This interpretation of narcissism was influenced by Freud's theory of instinctive needs, that must be satisfied, met with the fact most consumer goods attempt to satisfy some need or other, and thus convince us that there's a point to buying them.

TODAY I WILL

.....apply Theodor Adorno's theories of pseudo individuation to games, citing examples as diverse as Harry Potter, Jinx, Command and Conquer Generals and Devil May Cry, and then I will apply Theodor Adorno's analysis of the psycho-dominance of the culture industry and theories of narcissism in late capitalism to Ross Sillifant's rants about The Getaway, Medal of Honour: Frontline and Metal Gear Solid 2 that graced Community Zone this issue, in his Ross' Rants section.

THE CONCEPT OF PSEUDO INDIVIDUATION

Pseudo individualism, revolves around rehashed ideas that are passed off as new products. It was originally applied to music, - in particular Jazz and Pop. Jazz in particular - often appears to sound improvised, but improvises within safe

boundaries, whilst we all know about manufactured pop, and similar forms of song structure.

Now whilst the play mechanics of Devil May Cry were a much needed breath of fresh air for the survival horror genre - giving the game the type of quick-paced frenetic action usually associated with a Capcom 2D beat-'em-up, did anyone notice that a large proportion of tasks revolved heavily around the "get key, open door" style of play? Only it was never a key, and never a door. It was the obelisk of light to be placed in the monument, it was the sword to be placed in the statue, the cog on the bridge, the lion's head at the lions door, professor plum in the conservatory with the rope, ...oops...sorry...but you get what I mean. You were essentially getting an object and taking it some place, but the tasks were always dressed up as an adventure scenario. Still, one has to say, the game was anything but crap. Was it that such tasks, repeated over and over are fun? Or was it the zombie-bashing inbetween tasks, and the challenge to fulfil some of the tasks within set time limits that helped?

STANDARDISATION

Well, a lot of Adorno's theories attempt to explain why there is so much standardisation and pseudo individualism in the culture industry. Standardisation is partially explained using Marx theories that revolve around economics, and one has only to look at how much GTA3 and GTA:Vice City have sold, and how suddenly all the other games companies are churning out similar games (Dead to Rights, The Getaway, etc) trying to cash in on the popularity of the genre. The same happened when Metal Gear Solid showed us how popular the stealth genre could be, and now we've got everything from Splinter Cell to Sly Raccoon, and even Lara is trading in her Tomb Raiding in order to creep about a city as a fugitive. This is met by consumers' desire to see new titles as offering something different. No one's gonna buy a new game if it's identical in every way to one they already have, and this is where pseudo individuation came in - the titles had to have differences that would distinguish them in the market place...but they had to play similarly to other titles.

We're always complaining about the lack of original titles, but even with books, if someone likes one book, they'll hunt out stuff by the same author. And likewise, if someone enjoyed Tekken 3, they might figure they'll enjoy Tekken 4. And at £40, however nice the idea of Puzzle Kings' ZooCube may sound - you're staying away from the unknown. Hence, we see sequels or brand cash-ins (i.e. Harry Potter), etc, everywhere.



REGRESSION

But Adorno's theories go one step further. His worry is not so much with what the market is doing - as we all know however overlooked original titles become when up against whatever is stealing the media limelight at the time, they're still out there, if you wish to buy them - but instead he was concerned with us - you and me - as the audience. In his musical criticisms, he put forth the idea of regression in listening.

Regression implies reverting to a previous state, and he used it to explain how consumers would find most pleasing songs whose composite musical algorithms are akin to the listener's "earliest musical experiences, the nursery rhymes, the hymns he sings in Sunday school, the little tunes he whistles on his way home from school" (*On Popular Music [1941]* - page 24). The idea is that when we were first exposed to music - the musical algorithms [basic patterns of notes] inherent in those tunes became almost a kind of grammar for understanding music, and music that is more akin to our own ideas of musical patterns or algorithms are the types of music we come to prefer. Not only does one not have to concentrate so hard when listening to a piece - with a house track, there may only be a short melody to remember, whilst classical pieces can be very long, varied, etc and composed of many different parts (although as we can see with Beethoven's 5th Symphony, particular musical algorithms and hooks can be popularised by being taken out of context, and placed in the background of 30 second adverts, resulting in the simple part that does: "Der-Der-Der-Der, Dom-dom-dom-dom" becoming engraved in the minds of millions), but moments of predictability or vague similarities to previous works heard, can also result in a mental gratification.

COGNITIVE SCIENCE

Cognitive Science academia attempting to investigate links between music and human emotion noticed that pauses during a musical part could cause tension, and continuation and conclusion of the part could result in relief. If we combine this with Adorno's Media Studies theories on Regression in Listening, we can understand that a certain amount of pleasure can be derived when we find the music adheres to our mental concepts of musical algorithms, and does exactly what we expect. Think about playing in a band. It's vital to jam together as much as possible, because this allows band members to form a common understanding of what musical patterns are present, which allows the bass guitarist to predict what the rhythm guitarist is likely to do next, or what signs to look out for when the drummer is about to perform a crescendo. This

enables the band to be able to improvise, helping make a live moment come together.

PROFESSIONAL AESTHETICS

We can also see the active pursuit of standardisation in home musicians. They strive to sound "more professional" which ultimately results in their music becoming less unique, and more akin to their musical influences - the songs they look to for a definition of what "professional" is in terms of audio aesthetics.

PLAGIARISM ASIDE

Pseudo individuation then, is about using the theory of regression - and how there are some basic musical phrases that appeal to people who have heard similar some time before - and dressing it up differently enough to either evolve that sound, or at the very least, avoid copyright infringements. But blatant plagiarism aside, whatever music a musician is inspired to compose is influenced by whatever he has heard, even if only subconsciously. Only by random orchestration, or interfacing with computers without any idea of what the tune is going to sound like at the end, is one able to come up with something truly original (Theodor also gave another definition of narcissism - that being that only someone 100% self-absorbed could come up with an idea that was not in any way inspired or influenced by someone or something else).

QUESTIONS

Bringing these theories back to consumption habits, we can already see these theories proved true in today's society - the wave of 80s retro nostalgia, as well as regression in reading, as a kids book - Harry Potter - is successfully re-marketed to adults to mass success. So what of gaming? We've seen the re-emergence of retro games. But is this because we like to play the same things over and over again, or is there something in these old gaming titles that isn't in contemporary titles? Do we play them for the memory? Do we play them for the fact they were our earliest gaming experiences, and the basis on which we have formed all understanding of gameplay? Do I love Megaman 2 so much merely because it was the first console game I owned? Adorno criticised regression in listening, saying of listeners that they: "...fluctuate between comprehensively forgetting and sudden dives into recognition" (*The Essential Frankfurt School Reader* - page 286) - an explanation for those sudden moments in musical performances when the musician(s) just seem to hit the spot.

Sony Sponsored Academia

Sony recently held a series of academic gaming seminars at London's Institute of Contemporary Arts, as part of the hype behind the game Primal, which looks like Tomb Raider but with moodier graphics and a side-kick to help the main heroine (pseudo individuation anyone?). The main thrust of the event was an exhibition of in-game and concept art, ran alongside two competitions - one for University students to win a paid for work experience stint at Sony's Cambridge Studios - developers of the game (and also responsible for C-12, and Medi-Evil 1 + 2), and another competition for the general public, to win the game Primal and a PlayStation 2.

The seminars were thankfully more than just plugs for the game Primal. Monday the 7th of April, saw the development team show all the artistic processes in game development, from concept artwork through to in-game digital imagery, whilst Tuesday the 8th of April saw the British Cultural Heritage pay tribute to gaming, and more precisely how it contributes to Britain's culture. On Wednesday the 9th, things got even more interesting with a careers workshop, featuring panelists from games recruitment agencies Lis Welsh Search & Selection, Aardvarkswift, Datascope and Networking People, followed a few hours later by a seminar on women in the games industry, with speakers as diverse as Aleks Krotoski of Channel 4's BITS fame, and Katie Ellwood - scriptwriter on *The Getaway*, it focussed on how women are making their mark in what has (in the past) been seen as a male dominated industry. United Games hopes to have a full report on these seminars soon - either online or in our next issue. So watch this space.

Art freak?

Devastation is a FPS set in an apocalyptic future, and Novalogic are promoting it by holding an online graffiti drawing compo for a £1000 cash prize. Check out: www.devastationgame.co.uk/graffiti for more info.

Key Concepts:

Regression = going back to a previous state.

Regression in the context of Media Consumption = watching children's programmes from yester-year, listening to music akin to your earliest musical experience, reading Harry Potter.

Pseudo (prefix) = purporting to be, but not really.

Individuation = the process by which something is made different to others.

Pseudo Individuation = The process of making something appear to be different, when it's actually fundamentally the same. I.e. manufactured pop bands, or the graphics over gameplay debate within games.

Narcissism:

Be warned! There are many different academic theories of narcissism.

- 1) Narcissism, based on the Greek myth of Narcissus who fell in love with his own reflection indicates self-absorbed vanity.
- 2) In female spectator-ship film & cinema theory, it refers to how when a camera eyes up a lady, men appreciate the attractive aesthetic, whilst women are encouraged to care about their outward appearance, and want to look like the glorified actress.
- 3) Lacan Psycho-analysis has narcissism refer to the love inside us all, and how it resides with us before we learn to project it outwards onto others.
- 4) Lacan Mirror Phase theory interlinks narcissism with ego formation during various stages of child development.
- 5) Narcissism has been linked with misrecognition and alienation as the basis of desire to possess something that, like a reflection, remains illusive - you can't reach out and touch it.
- 6) Finally, we get to Adorno's first use of narcissism. He combined the idea with Freud's Instinct theory to describe how in late capitalism, we are more concerned with ourselves than others, and are motivated to buy products that satisfy our needs.
- 7) Adorno also saw artists, criminals and philosophers as able to resist industry's psycho dominance, but really also hoped that a narcissistic, self-enlightened individual might succeed in actually opposing the cultural industry's psychological dominance. Hence another definition of narcissism as being so self-absorbed that one can come up with an entirely different and innovative alternative to current industry offerings.

Further Reading:

If you're interested in a more in-depth reading of Adorno's views on the culture industry, we recommend the following books:

- > *The Culture Industry Revisited - Theodor W. Adorno on Mass Culture* - by Deborah Cook [Rowman & Littlefield Publishers]
- > *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader* - edited by Andrew Arato & Eike Gebhardt [Continuum]

GAMING REGRESSION

But is there a regression in games playing? Certainly, we've seen a rise in retro gaming, but whilst some have returned to old classics for nostalgia, still others argue that older games represent a purity of gameplay not there in games of today, whilst people picking up on Adorno's theory may argue that game play is still there in today's titles - but buried beneath a sea of pseudo individualistic features such as cinematic cut scenes, plot-lines, and so forth. Take the expelliarmus spell in Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets - it is essentially a pseudo individuation of pong, playing as a tennis match [shots are fired at Harry, and he has to hit them back towards the sender, and keep it going a number of times until someone fails to get the timing right].

SHAME BENEFITS

But there's an element of regression and pseudo individuation that takes on a whole new context when Adorno's theories are applied to computer games. For whilst Adorno may criticise mass music consumption, arguing that consumers: "cannot stand the strain of concentrated listening and surrender themselves resignedly to what befalls them, with which they can come to terms with only if they do not listen to it too closely." (The Essential Frankfurt School Reader - page 288), with computer gaming, we can see that gaming conventions, as opposed to music conventions, bring the benefit of a shared understanding for game control and other codes and conventions of the art form, that allow players of TA and WarCraft games to easily get to grips with Command and Conquer Generals, for instance, and vice versa.

Take the 3D adventure game. I've flat mates who aren't into gaming that much, and when shown a three dimensional game, they initially had too much trouble getting to grips with controlling the character within three dimensions, let alone acting out whatever role the game scenario would have you play. Yet with a game of 2D Saturn Bomberman, which features simple 2D controls, and one action button, they were immediately into the game, finding it very accessible. These are the games I grew up with, and helped create my basic understanding of how games worked. If the games market is to expand to new users, surely such entry level games will be needed?

Adorno's disposition was that he preferred musical products that were mentally engaging, bringing into one's mind new musical ideas, as opposed to music that cashed in on your appreciation of current song structures, and popular music conventions. It was the difference between high culture products and mass culture / populist products. Chances are, if Adorno was still alive, and you handed him a copy of Tekken 4, he'd probably exclaim in horror: "But this is just like Tekken 3, only with more fighters and moves!"

Which brings us nicely onto an analysis of Ross' Rants, with Theodor's other theory - Narcissism in late Capitalism, and psycho dominance!

PSYCHO DOMINANCE

The psychological dominance part of Adorno's theory points to the way children are influenced more by the media than their parents. The theory is that children no longer internalise parental authority, and instead do as wider culture, and media fuelled consumerism promote. An individual's conscience may be shaped more by plot-lines on TV dramas than morals parents instil.

NARCISSISM IN LATE CAPITALISM

Narcissism in late Capitalism, links into Sigmund Freud's Instinct theory of instinctive needs - and combines it with the way most products are advertised as satisfying our needs. Therefore, the theory goes that we instinctively seek to satisfy our own needs by buying into products. This links into psychological dominance by the culture industry - that is film, music, TV, and more recently, computer games, that sees the industry able to: "...control individual consciousness at the level of motivations" as Adorno puts it. Ross Sillifant recently spoke to me about how he might give up on games journalism, on the basis that he felt no matter what he wrote, it would make little difference to what the consumer buys. He felt like the masses were motivated to buy whatever the hype told 'em to, and so The Getaway sold on the back of Grand Theft Auto 3 and Vice City, whilst being a lesser product, and an endless run of sequels with only pseudo individualisms as opposed to new gameplay continued to dominate the charts. In fact, looking at Ross' Rants, we can see this as the main complaint - consumers swallowing the hyperbole for mere re-packaged games that take a proven gameplay idea, and stick on pseudo individualisms - better graphics, new missions, story-lines, characters, etc, whilst failing to advance the gameplay (the thing reviewers, and it would seem developers also, find so hard to put their finger on - what makes the game fun). Whilst in the meantime, Ross can be seen as narcissistic according to Adorno, who saw Narcissism in late capitalism as about being: "...nothing but the individual's desperate attempt to compensate at least partially for the injustice that no one ever gets their money's worth in the society of universal exchange."

DISUTOPIA

We've heard the benefits of pseudo individuation - building codes and common conventions that allow players to get to grips with gaming more easily. For someone who has grown up with platformers, Jinx seems very unoriginal, and whilst cheerful, stripped of its pseudo individualistic features of jolly music and colourful graphics, it really is quite basic, but as someone's first ever platformer, it is a brilliant introduction to all the codes and conventions you'll find in other titles (move blocks to open door, jump from platform to platform to proceed, jump on enemies' heads to vanquish them, etc), and economically, the games industry needs to push itself forwards, extending its market reach, even if it means focussing on safe sales of pseudo individualistic titles, and building up standardisation, making for easy to pick-up-and-play titles as opposed to developing radically new gameplay ideas that take time and effort to appreciate, but as Ross asks: "Is this the future of gaming? And if so, at what price?"

IN JEFF WE HOPE

Adorno's only optimism was in the form of a hope that one day, a truly self-absorbed, narcissistic individual, influenced only by their own mind, would come up with something radically different, and rebel against what everyone else was doing, and so it is that we wait with baited breath for Jeff Minter's Unity for Gamecube. But here's a question - will it just be Tempest meets Virtual Light Machine (VLM), with Llamas as the main form of pseudo individualism? If so, he'll certainly have pulled the wool over all our eyes! Ho-ho. Sorry, couldn't resist that one. So are you better off with a 2nd hand Jaguar, VLM and Tempest 2000, or a Gamecube with Unity? United Games will look out for your narcissistic interests and let you know!



A deviant discourse towards miniturization GAME MAN

Forget the Gameboy Advance SP. Jeff Hermann decided to build a giant Gameboy, dubbed "GameMan" for his major project at the University of California, San Diego, describing it as: "...a juxtaposition of technology's need for compactness and portability, with society's craving for the 'biggest and the best.' "

Jeff built the case himself from wood, then set an old PC up inside it, running a gameboy emulator. A number of buttons at the bottom of the cartridge slot cause different games to be loaded, when pressed, and the buttons are "pressed" so to speak, when giant cartridges are lowered into the slot. Each cartridge is shaped slightly different, so that it pushes down on a different button. The GameMan measures a little over three feet. For more info visit: <http://gameman.loungespot.com/>



A new view on game violence

Its often been the case that people concerned about the increase of violence and crime in society, have come down with some harsh criticisms of violent media - in particular - violence in games. It's an old, old topic, so rather than debate past issues, I want to make a point that should shed some light on why it's always people who don't play the games that make the complaint.

When you watch a film - violence portrayed on screen is raw violence in your face. When you play a game, certain actions appear as violent to those not used to games, and a genre convention to those playing the game. Let's take an extreme example. Harry Potter: The Chamber of Secrets. I'm in a beautifully detailed room. The graphics make it look absolutely amazing, and I want to explore every nook and cranny of it. Now I've two choices - I can press the X button to search...this is good at getting Every Flavour Jelly Beans from, er, book-shelves, of all places, - or I can jump around shooting everything with my wand - this is good for getting chocolate frogs out of glass jars, which increase your health. Now, it's very easy for someone to say: "This game encourages vandalism" - because the game mechanics require you to smash a glass jar on a shelf

with a flippendo spell, just to get a chocolate frog. But the fact of the matter is - you're not being a vandal when you play the game - you're exploring a world the game developers have created. So gamers think: "Explore", and non-gamers are thinking: "Be a vandal".

We can't argue however that violence is solely a coincident of gameplay structure and mechanics, however. Some games - in particular war simulators - are marketed as being able to give us that war experience without the real life casualties. The planning, the strategy, the cerebral challenge, the victory, the failure, the experience. Now war's got to be ugly, and isn't something I'd agree with glorifying, but fans of war sims know who they are, and how rewarding implementing successful strategies can be. Like a good game of chess, no less.

And the defense for such games arises from the fact that these titles allow for users to live out their wartime fantasies without facing the grim harsh reality of real war. In fact, it was this line of thought that led Mikel Reparaz to start an online campaign to buy

George Bush a PlayStation 2 and a copy of SCI's Conflict: Desert Storm, back in 2002. The campaign and petition was a resounding success, and he had soon raised enough money online to buy the console and games for Mr Bush, and in November 2002, sent the package off to the whitehouse, with a letter asking that they: "...accept these gifts and use them, rather than the lives of Iraqi civilians and our U.S. servicemen, to fulfil any militaristic fantasies."

Unfortunately, whilst we can see Mikel got Level #1 right, he didn't count on the end of level boss that is bureaucracy on Level #2. Recently chasing up where the console had got to since being posted to the whitehouse, the lady on the phone explained they had a serious backlog problem, due to the security screening process of incoming items: "We are still receiving things from 2001!" she told him. Nonetheless, the online protest and petition at least showed us that even before the conflict started, some Americans were opposed to it. For those interested, the website is still live at <http://www.evilninja.net/buybush.htm> and recently featured an April fools day Saddam campaign.



On The Shelf:



Top to bottom: *Zelda: The Wind Waker*, *Super Monkey Ball 2*, *Phantasy Star Online Episodes I&II*, *Animal Crossing*, and *Zoocube*.

Gamecube:

May 3rd means *Zelda*.

The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker surprised everyone when first unveiled due to Shigeru's decision to opt for cel-shaded graphics as opposed to striving for a more realistic representation of Link's world, but *Zelda* always has been about fantasy, and the visual technique allows the game to boast better characterisation, have a bigger personality, and it also, to me at least, feels like life has finally been breathed into those top-down-2D scenes and characters of the old *Zelda*, so the *Zelda* vibe is definitely there, and if that wasn't enough, graphically enhanced versions of both the N64 title *Zelda: Ocarina of Time*, and the 64DD-based "previously-only-seen-in-Japan" title *Zelda: Master Quest*, along with a whole load of game footage of up and coming GC titles feature on a limited edition bonus disk, that's free for those who pre-order the game on it's own, or those who decided to buy a special limited edition platinum Gamecube & *Zelda* bundle pak. Contributor Adam has had some experience with the Japanese version: "It's very fun," he commented "there are some whacky characters in there - i.e. the Elvis impersonator that dances in front of a lone grave on top of a hill". Yes. Say no more. In the meanwhile, Jazz has been getting to grips with **Super Monkey Ball 2**: "Some people prefer *Monkey Ball 1*, particularly because of the popularity of the *Monkey Tiger* mini game, where you all took it in turns. In *SMB2*, however, everyone launches their gliders at once, so it can be a bit hard to see what's going on." Jazz went onto explain that *SMB2* featured new mini games, whilst the games from *SMB1* had been tweaked, and whether these tweakings have improved them or not is down to personal taste: "There are six new games however, so you really can't complain. Some of those are cool. Plus the one player game is now far more bizarre than in *SMB1*." Jazz would recommend the sequel over the prequel: "There's more to do," he claimed, "plus you can take the levels in any order," - which you couldn't do in the first game.

Phantasy Star Online is also now available on Gamecube, but online play after the first free month is charged at £7 a month, and you'll also need to buy a modem. "I can't be bothered to pay a license or buy a modem" said Jazz, who has broadband access at home, "I just play

multi-player" he said, claiming it was still a decent game to have even if you weren't going to go online with it. "It's still decent," he said, as Dave arrived eager to play the game again. "There's more chance of finding rare items with more people playing," he confessed, "but offline has more rewards" he said, referring to the aspects of multiplay that open up upon one player completion. "If you're after something unique though I'd recommend **Animal Crossing**" he suddenly mentioned. *Animal Crossing*? It's not exactly "On the Shelf" here in the UK, but you can still get it. "It's an American Import," Jazz revealed. "However, you'll have to play it everyday - at least for an hour or two - but the thing is - you'll want to. It's very addictive." The game essentially sees you living in a virtual town, that can be saved to a single Gamecube memory card. "Your mates should get it too, and then you can go and ruin their garden, and wreck their town..." Jazz said, a strange gleam in his eyes, before he calmly pointed out that you shouldn't let your *Animal Crossing* memory card fall into the hands of anyone you didn't trust. It's only possible to save the one town to the one memory card, but within that town there are four characters, so four people can share the town. If you want your town folk to visit another town, you just place a friend's memory card in port 2, and suddenly there are two towns in the game, and you can visit your neighbouring town. "The towns are randomly generated," explained Jazz. "Ours ended up with apples, but our people were asking for cherries, so we kept making random towns until we got one with cherries." There's more to each town than random fruit growth however: "Random characters move in and out of the houses and towns, or write letters...there's lots going on around..." said Jazz: "Like fishing....bugs, nets and butterflies which you can take to the museum...and then there are these fossils, that..."...before we cut him off. We wanted to talk to Dave, about GBA.

Gameboy Advance:

Dave, or perhaps I should say: "Sephiroth" has recently been playing **Zoocube**. "I got it free - from a friend" he tells us. "It's alright, and quite entertaining actually," he told us, before adding: "Pretty addictive too." The gameplay revolves around shapes that drop down from a multitude of different angles and attach themselves to

Games Round-up

the sides of your cube. You've got to rotate this cube in order to match pairs of the shapes. "It's unique," said Dave "and a good puzzle game. Certainly a breath of fresh air, as it's not another Tetris clone." So what is it about this puzzle game about falling shapes that differentiates ZooCube from all the "Tetris Clones" as Dave had put it? "The shapes attach to this cube, so you've got to be constantly spinning it," revealed Dave, "you can shuffle the shapes stacked up on the sides of the cube - so what's at the top can go to the bottom, and vice versa, and there's also an 'Accelerate' move where you lock onto an incoming piece, which'll see it land on your chosen cube side, irrespective of what side is facing which direction, enabling you to be free to turn...so you're constantly, spinning, juggling, accelerating, etc". So is it worth the money? Dave was unable to answer this since he had got the game for free, confessing to us that he couldn't afford £30 at the moment. "It's not gonna be the game to make you love the Gameboy Advance, but it's good to pass the time, and if you have it, it is fun." Hm. Sounds like a mellow yellow.

PlayStation 2:

We were pretty miffed we hadn't got **Devil May Cry 2** for review this issue, so immediately asked Chaz what he thought of the game: "It's alright actually. I was playing it just earlier. The graphics are a step forward, but not a huge step...but the good thing about the game is that it's just more of the same really, and so far looking good..." A nice summise, so we decided to ask him about the bloody **Mortal Kombat**: "It lacks staying power," he told us. "It's a good addition to a games collection, but lacks the longevity of the early Tekken games. Its got quirky features, the graphics are good, and it's easy to pick up and play." So what else has Chaz been playing? Well, he did have an opportunity to review **Tenchu 3** for us this issue, but went with Dark Angel in the end. "I'd been putting off Tenchu 3," he told us, "in case I suddenly thought: Oooh no! I should have done a review of this instead!" But what did he think when he finally did get around to playing it? "It's a bit easy," he told us "the bad guy's AI is rubbish, and although a really good game it's a huge opportunity missed. After Tenchu 2 was a let down, I hoped 3 would get it right, and it's enjoyable, but whilst early on in the game you can't sneak around without setting off all the baddie AI really easily, further on in

the game there's no real challenge. The graphics and controls are okay, but it could have been a helluva lot better." Chaz revealed. "It's a unique genre too - there aren't many similar types of game, so it's a bit of a shame really."

So was he glad he had reviewed **Dark Angel** for us instead? "Ahhh...good old PMT Mode...." he reminisced, before reminding us it was a short yet fun game, that was also "cheaper than most games". Full review on page 53! We also went onto ask Chaz what he thought of **The Sims**. "It's the Sims - 'nuff said." He wanted us to leave it at that for comedy effect, but we pushed him to say more. Contributor Rob had already mentioned to us how it was perhaps best suited to PC, and that since buying it for his PS2, he hadn't played it a lot. Chaz was adamant however, only muttering something about a blatant cash in (presumably on the popularity of the franchise) before reaffirming his previous position: "The Sims - 'nuff said."

PC:

"Ooh-ohh! **Command and Conquer Generals...**" started Chaz, at which point we had to stop him. Dave Burford's done the full review on page 61, so we didn't wanna know. "Tell us about **Championship Manager 4**" we asked. And so he obliged us, submitting this short article, that unfortunately arrived too late for us to cram into Community Zone's SHORTS section:

OK, the new champ man does exactly what it says on the tin - you manage a championship team! All the expected updated team data and transfer windows are here, along with a more detailed interaction between manager and club (concerning training and the media). This is great if you've bought one of the last two champ man's and were getting board in the narrow parameters, but it's not so good for the newcomers who could easily be overwhelmed.

In-match can be the same old text but there is also a 2D coloured splodge of a pitch which shows your tactics 'live' as it were, which is pretty cool. A major word of warning though, all champ man games are notorious for slow down. If you have less than 256MBs of RAM and well over a gig's worth of processing power TURN OFF THIS OPTION, as it will slow the day-to-day running of the game down infuriatingly.



Top to bottom: Devil May Cry 2: Dante, DMC2: Lucia, Tenchu: Wrath of Heaven, Final Fantasy Origins, Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon.

On the Shelf...continued:

Suffice to say, playing as a premiership big-boy is the easiest way of getting into the game, and remain posted for a more detailed review hitting the website in a few weeks when I've got to grips with a new computer... COME ON STOKE!

In case you couldn't tell, Chaz is from Stoke.

PSOne:

Final Fantasy Origins is the latest release for the format, but actually contains conversions of two NES games, but as the title suggests, they are the first ever Final Fantasy games - Final Fantasy 1 and Final Fantasy 2. Never before released outside of Japan, UK gamers can now finally get to grips with these NES classics. Both games have been graphically improved, now resembling 16-bit SNES-esque graphics as opposed to the lesser detailed and more bitsy NES graphics of the original. We hope to have a review for you next issue.

In the meantime, Jazz and the Bristol posse have been getting to grips with **Dancing Stage Euromix - Party Edition**, which for those who don't know, centres around on-screen dancing instructions which you copy by treading on the correct areas of a dance mat. "Don't even try it if you're fat and lazy!" warned Jazz. "I was so knackered it was unbelievable!" Jazz didn't get the official dance mat but "...the knock-off one with the pink and blue colour coding the wrong way around," which he didn't seem to find a problem. "You just have to know where the squares are and then step on them" he told us. "The mat's pathetic - really thin and made of cloth, yet you can't break it at all, and it doesn't slip or get scrunched. They're only £10 so you could get two!" But what of the actual game? "We prefer the tracks in the arcade version," Jazz told me, "Party Edition has more tracks, but is missing some of our fav' tunes from the Arcade." Meanwhile, Chaz is still playing Pandemonium which is well old now. "It's great!" he told us. <Ahem>. Could he really be the games jester?

Xbox Live:

Xbox Live seems to have gone down really well with those currently using it, but there have been some problems

with people unable to get it up and running: "Connection is really hard, especially for us USB users. I've had it for one week, spent loads of money on it and still haven't connected yet," revealed a somewhat troubled JJ from Croydon. Quite a scary situation, but Rick Stirling assured us that for the majority of people, set up was easy enough: "USB modem setup is a doodle," he told us, in stark contrast to JJ's statement: "The online guides provided by Microsoft themselves make it easy to get online." Indeed, we found a lot of advice about getting Xbox Live up and running online, with both official advice from Microsoft, and people also giving friendly advice to each other on the Xbox web forums. But when it's up and running, what's it actually like?

"The players are usually fun, and it's great to play against other humans" Rick told us. Matt aka Graveyardbandit agreed: "...the gameplay is great," he told us, "...although the headset breaks a bit easily. My sister just broke mine, which is annoying as I heard it's expensive to buy new ones." He wasn't the only one to complain about the headset - Rick spoke up too: "My only gripe about Xbox Live is that I don't find the headset comfortable. That might just be me though." Nonetheless, the headset was also a cause for praise as it enables players to speak to each during games! "The ability to chat with people from around the world is amazing, and you get to kill them too!!!" exclaimed Funky Dude, a strange gleam in his eye. Games wise, Funky Dude recommended **Unreal**, but did admit there were a few problems with players using cheats online. "Try **Ghost Recon**" advised Russ, "Recon makes you think and with people yelling at you to get down, you can't go wrong."

Indeed, Ghost Recon has turned out to be the killer app for Xbox Live, although PC owners might not see much new on offer bar the ability to communicate with players through the voice communicator headset. "Playing the co-op missions on Ghost Recon with three good mates is brill," agreed Rick, "you can scream at them, and not only don't they care, but unlike the AI, they'll sometimes even listen to you!". Meanwhile, Rick was equally enthusiastic about **MotoGP**, calling it a "scorchingly good racing game, and the league tables make it even better."

It was generally accepted however, that **Whacked** was a game to be avoided. "Whacked..? Yuck..!" as Rick so elegantly put it. **Capcom V.S. SNK 2** is also playable on Live, and according to Rick is a decent enough title, that "rekindles the days spent playing StreetFighter 2 in the arcades."

Rezia hadn't broadband, but had nonetheless managed to get Xbox Live up and working with an ISDN connection. "...gaming is clearly laggy," she noted, "I wish I could get broadband where I lived!!" She was nonetheless upbeat about the whole experience however: "The price is right - at the cost of a game it's perfectly affordable," she maintained, "and what you get with the pack, and the experience you encounter when playing is unlike anything else!" Rick agreed: "Its is fun. Playing against humans, playing in a group of mates from around the country, against another group of people is much more fun than you can imagine!" before going on to point out that you could really disregard console, broadband connection and game costs anyway, because you'd have those irrespective of Live: "I already had Ghost Recon and Moto GP, so that didn't cost me £80 for online play - that was £80 in games I was already playing, that had additional online features. The only cost is the £40 a year for the subscription. I see that as the same as the charges that BT, NTL, British Gas, NPower, or Thames Water or whoever charge you each month/quarter/year. "It's worth every penny!" insisted Funky Dude, obviously impressed. Nonetheless, he did advise a degree of caution: "Just don't tell the Missus how much it REALLY costs...!"

Xbox:

"Oh my God! I'm in love." said Ross about **Panzer Dragoon Orta**. "It might be an on-rails shooter, but oh what beautiful rails!" he exclaimed. "Bloody hard," he added, "but there's something so very Japanese about it that just works." Ross also liked **Kung Fu Chaos**, saying it wasn't original (it's like a supped up Power Stone game) but it doesn't take itself seriously, and ends up just being a laugh. **Shenmue II** however bored him. "It hasn't aged well, and the voice acting is awful." It's too realism-based for its own good.

THE United Games V i d e o

As non-descript as a white labelled vinyl, is the white plain sleeved video attached to this magazine. Let's shed some light on it for you.

It's an entire hour long.

It contains footage of some of the best games around at the moment, as well as titles to look forward later in the year.

It doesn't merely focus on the big boys either, with a fair share of Gameboy and PSOne footage, as well as a Swan-song to the now defunct Dreamcast, and a trailer for an internet backyard wrestling federation - EPW. Of course, it's still packed with footage of all the hottest titles for Gamecube, PC, PlayStation 2 and Xbox, and such

is the video's depth and breadth of game footage, we felt somewhat obliged to provide you with this guide to what's on the video.

So make sure the tape is rewound, and the counter set to 00:00:00 people, 'cos here's the counter position run down of the United Games Video:

Quick Reference: [Counter Digit Representations: HOURS : MINUTES : SECONDS Total Running Time Approx 1 hour and 3 minutes!]

00:00:20 - Video Starts (Intro)

00:01:06

Xbox Footage Starts

00:01:26 - The Difference

00:03:24 - Halo 2

00:06:02 - Xbox Live Concept Ad

00:09:36 - Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball

00:12:24

Gamecube Footage Starts

00:12:30 - Metroid Prime

00:13:45 - Nintendo Mix Starts

00:13:45 - Resident Evil

00:14:46 - The Magical Mirror

00:15:05 - ClubCube #1

00:15:33 - StarFox Adventure

00:16:48 - Mario Party 4

00:17:12 - ClubCube #2

00:17:51 - Doshin The Giant

00:19:03 - Tony Hawk Pro Skater 4

00:19:23 - ClubCube #3

00:20:03 - Godzilla

00:20:47 - TimeSplitters 2

00:21:33 - ClubCube #4

00:21:59 - Mario Sunshine

00:22:58

PlayStation 2 Footage Starts.

00:23:17 - Broken Sword 3

00:24:58 - Kingdom Hearts

00:28:31 - Silent Hill 3

00:31:53 - Tomb Raider: Angel of Darkness

00:34:36

PC Footage Starts.

00:34:54 - XIII

00:37:57 - Splinter Cell

00:41:50 - Beach Life

00:43:22 - Commandos 3

00:44:27

Dreamcast Swansong Starts.

00:44:27 - Shenmue 2

00:47:48 - Rez

00:50:04

PSOne Footage Starts

00:50:20 - Metal Slug X

00:53:11 - Firebugs

00:55:54

Gameboy Advance Footage Starts.

00:56:14 - Metroid Fusion

00:58:08 - Super Monkey Ball Junior

01:00:03 - Tomb Raider: Prophecy

01:01:23

WebWatch Starts

01:01:38 - EPW Trailer

01:02:41 - Credit Roll

01:03:20 - Video Ends.

MORE OVER PAGE →

00:00:20

Video Starts:

Ahhh..the eerie piano, the sweeping pads, the smoky glowing lines...it's all very exciting isn't it folks? See if you can spot the name of your local indie retailer, and as the UG logo comes into view, take the time to make yourself nice and comfortable, in preparation for the rest of the video.

Incidentally, the music for the title sequence was licensed from MXR, who create strange dark dance tunes about paying income tax! Check 'em out at <http://www.mxr.org.uk>

00:03:24

Halo 2:

There was sooo much hype surrounding the original Halo game, and it was a fine game indeed, however, as Will's review of the original Halo this issue reveals, there was still nonetheless potential for improvement, and Halo 2 looks set to improve on the original in a number of ways.

First up is the introduction of online multiplayer action. "All the magazines are going crazy about it!" commented Ross, one of our resident Xbox experts, "It's like when Unreal Championship came out for the Dreamcast" he adds, reminding us of how high hopes had been for Sega's online service. Nonetheless, the premise of a proper online multiplayer experience via Halo 2 and the Xbox Live service sounds extremely appealing - if only broadband could get going properly in the UK. Given the current high prices of broadband, as well as the fact that there are areas of the UK still not able to receive broadband connections, the majority of our readers (currently playing multiplayer Halo via a LAN network perhaps?), may be more excited to learn about the refinements to the gameplay.

The graphics engine being used in Halo 2 also features dynamic lighting, and Bungie's environment designer Chris Carney, influenced by a friend's architectural work hollowing out volcanoes to form natural observatories, through which light pours, has seen him attempt to emulate this effect for Halo 2.

Whilst we assume solo play to take a similar structure to the original Halo, Halo 2 introduces new gameplay elements to its multi-player modes. All the old multiplayer options are still present, no fear, but in addition squad-based tactical play is possible utilizing Xbox Live's voice communicator to work as a team, in much the same way as Raven Shield does. Of course System-Link and split screen multiplayer modes will still exist, but Bungie are really hyping up the Xbox Live's



00:01:26

The Difference: Commissioned by Microsoft, this short film was the natural choice of material to start our video off with, just because it features no games footage whatsoever, and makes it look like our video is going to be a proper movie. The piece boasts a very cool aesthetic, albeit depicting quite bizarre happenings. People obtaining multiple eyes, ears and hearts from a box? Ahh...that'll be the advert's way of trying to say we should all see more, hear more, feel more, and play more. It's the way of the Xbox apparently.

I use the words "refinements",

because Halo 2 isn't set to present any radical departure from the prequel, but rather is set to be bigger and better - and far more intense. The events aren't taking place on a thin alien ring/halo in space, but rather planet earth, and Bungie have been dropping hints that besides the Covenant (who are attacking earth in order to repair their pride at having been defeated by you in the original Halo) won't be the only enemy faction in the game. This could point to a clever plot twist, but beneath the pseudo individuation, the truth is it means new enemies, and if you're gonna take on new enemies, new weapons certainly help, so I'm pleased to be able to say that Master Chief's arsenal has been boosted, and in addition to his own weapons, he can also steal the weapons of defeated enemies. There are also twice as many vehicles to ride, which hopefully will mean twice as much outdoor fun. The game boasts an entirely new graphics engine though as well, and as such, even the old vehicles have been redesigned with more detail. In fact, even though we had thought the Halo 2 trailer featured on this video was just your usual introductory FMV (full motion video), Bungie are claiming that this entire sequence is rendered in real-time by the Xbox - perhaps it was recorded to tape at a higher resolution or something - because we are stunned.

possibilities, and Jaime Griesemer, head designer of the sequel, has gone on record to describe his vision of how far they plan to take the Xbox Live functionality: "I don't want to ruin the surprise," he teases, "but imagine the essential 'Halo' single-player experience: pitched battles between the humans and the Covenant, massive vehicle and infantry engagements. Now imagine that every combatant is an actual person playing over Xbox Live!"

Sounds exciting, but if you don't have a broadband connection, rest assured that Bungie aren't neglecting the single player mode. They're upping the enemy AI, and the way enemies have independent conversations between each other is being expanded upon, with there even being the chance of some celebrity voice actors getting in on the action too (however, rest assured Bungie are going for actor suitability as opposed to fame). The game will also, perhaps rather obviously, feature an all new soundtrack, yet will still include a few remixes of memorable originals. As for how much fun it is, or whether Will's criticism of boring corridors is going to be addressed(?) - we're completely in the dark, as Bungie have not yet come up with a playable demo. For now Halo 2 looks like the typical sequel - more of the original, made bigger, and better, with added Xbox Live functionality.

00:09:36

DoA: Xtreme Beach Volleyball:
Tecmo have taken the top stars from their popular 3D beat-'em-up series, Dead or Alive, - namely the females with bouncing breasts, and have placed them in their own beach ball simulator. A case of Mario Tennis, with females? Well, it would seem that the attractive ladies featured in the title aren't just graphical icing on a basic beachball game of a cake, but are rather stars in a "Fantasy Sports Title" that involves building and maintaining relationships, and, er, gambling. (Check out our review on page 43 for more details). It's simply amazing that home games consoles are now able to generate computer graphics that look so human. Watch the video and you'll see what I mean - the animation and detail is breathtaking. It's not really photo realism (sometimes they look like Barbie/Cindy dolls), but characteristically real enough to prove aesthetically pleasant to the male audience it is so blatantly aimed towards.

00:13:45

Nintendo Mix:

WARNING!!!

In the first few opening seconds the scary skull from Resident Evil appears, with blood dripping from its mouth. We do advise caution.

I'm not saying our younger readers are pansies - when I was about eight years old, I watched "They came from Mars" and I was perfectly fine. Until I went to sleep, at which point I ended up having nightmares about actors in bad alien costumes. So know yourself, and what you can handle, and bear it or skip past it as appropriate. <Phew>. Who said Nintendo were all mushrooms and piranha plants!?!

Our Nintendo Mix features a variety of top Gamecube titles, such as Resident Evil, Mario Sunshine, StarFox Adventures, Mario Party 4, Godzilla, etc, interspersed by footage from the ClubCube events that occurred around the time of the machine's launch last year.



00:06:02

Xbox Live Vision:
Hooray! More Xbox adverts! And this one has a stereotype-exploiting punch-line! Hurrah! This really gives you a strong idea of the potential for Xbox's Xbox Live service, and amply demonstrates the way use of the voice communicator can really enhance the experience. However, none of the footage shown is of actual Xbox Live games, so don't go looking for WorldCup Warriors nor Chrono Warriors Tournament on store shelves - 'cos they won't be there. Nonetheless, this promotional piece proves extremely entertaining for a piece of propaganda, and successfully sets the mind alight with ideas for what online console gaming could really mean.

00:12:30

Metroid Prime:

Hailed by games magazines as THE game for Gamecube, the game that people were initially worried wouldn't do its predecessors justice, has more than excelled itself. Adam has reviewed the game for us on page 67 awarding it our prestigious Red Hot award no less! You take the role of Samus, yet whilst screenshots may lead you to think this is a first person shooter, in actual fact there is a heavy emphasis on exploration, with it playing out as more of an action packed adventure game from a first person perspective. Witness how in our footage Samus rolls into a ball to get to certain areas, has to utilise platform jumping skills in three dimensions, etc, as well as deal with incoming enemies.

Broken Sword 3: Sleeping Dragon:

Broken Sword 2 was voted last year as the fifth best game ever released for PSOne. It has not been the best selling, but this fact nonetheless shows that fans of the series are still very much passionate about the game (enough to vote for it anyhow), and hence the powers that be at Revolution, have been working on the third game in the Broken Sword trilogy. Broken Sword 3: Sleeping Dragon.

The footage on our video starts off with a montage of highlights from the previous games, which were ultimately 2D point and click adventures, before finally revealing the all new Broken Sword 3 - controversially perhaps, rendered and controlled in full 3D. At a press conference last year, Charles Cecil, a kind of father-figure for the series at Revolution Software, proclaimed that the point'n'click genre was dead, and that the 3D adventure genre was the direction in which to take the series. "It has more potential than any other genre," he declared. Whilst this may worry fans, it's worth noticing that although there has been a shift to 3D, the look and feel of the original 2D games has been retained, using what Revolution describe as a dual texturing and radiosity graphics-engine, where two textures are applied to the in-game graphics - the first is hand-drawn, giving the game its cartoon-esque appearance, and the second is a texture

how best to solve each situation you find yourself in, so perhaps in a way, despite the 3D overhaul, the game is staying true to its cerebrally challenging roots, as well as featuring, as with previous titles in the series - a strong storyline.

Nonetheless, Broken Sword:

Sleeping Dragon (Kinda a nice combination, don't ya' think - your sword has broken, but the dragon's sleeping, so it doesn't matter, etc....lol....) will see elements of action-orientated gameplay sit alongside the main adventure-themed proceedings. They've tried to keep the depth of plot, and the great characterisation of the main protagonists from previous games (influenced, Charles Cecil confessed, by Japanese RPGs) but add in extra action elements to make the game seem more fast and furious.

in the village, as opposed to the farmer's fields, but who knows? The game won't be with us until October - but we'll tell you then, okay?

Still, in the meantime, we can give you some examples of how the game will play. With the shift to a 3D game engine, Revolution have opted to give you direct control, citing feedback from players of the GBA version of Broken Sword, who apparently felt "shackled" by the point and click approach. So it'll be a matter of pointing the analogue stick in the position you wish to move in, and interacting with the environment directly as you would in any other 3D adventure game.

Revolution have tried to cover three main areas of gameplay - that of exploring the 3D world you're in, doing a bit of detective work, and using stealth (please don't groan, I know we've had a lot of stealth recently!). The beauty about Broken

map with lighting information. They then applied radiosity lighting in addition to that, which softly bounces light off of surfaces. These techniques, centred around manipulation of lighting, give the game a look somewhere between the sharp polygon renderings we're used to, and the cartoon-y cel-shading. It almost has a cartoon feel without looking like a cartoon. Hard to explain perhaps, but I hope these screenshots, and indeed the video footage demonstrate what we've got here. Revolution were after style, not realism, and with dual texturing and radiosity, they've given the game engine a similar aesthetic to the distinctive animation style prevalent in the original two titles for PSOne. The styling has also meant they've been able to put more expressive facial emotions into the game - notice how George's eyebrow raises in the footage - a nice expression that couldn't have been as pronounced if they had taken a more realistic approach in terms of the aesthetics.

But graphics aside, I'm sure you're anxious to know how the game plays? Well, there are generic gameplay sections, but you've different options available to you when attempting to overcome any obstacles. This makes it still very much a cerebral game, as you have to figure out

The plot goes that George Stobbard, a photo journalist, pays a visit to a professor with a perpetual motion machine. But strange goings on are afoot. A shooting reveals there's some secret so important that those who know the answers would rather be killed than tell, and it's all got something to do with a legend of a sleeping dragon, that no matter the cost, mustn't be awakened, or else the whole world will be in peril! Revolution are keeping a lot of the plot under wraps still, but the game will feature the return of characters such as Nico Collard (who you also get to play as) as well as three or four other characters from previous games. There's also a villain called Suzaro. Revolution were going to bring back Dvion, but refrained from doing so, as they felt that a lot of new comers to the series may not know the previous history of the game. Nonetheless, a new female character called Petra will play a role in tying up some of the loose ends from the last game, in particular, relating to the issue of geometric energy. It's all quite mysterious, but then solving the mysteries will be half the fun of the game(!), and what's more, you get to solve 'em in locations as diverse as the jungles of Congo, eerie castles in Prague, the back-streets of Paris....and...wait for it....the farmer's fields of Glastonbury. Yep. You heard us right. Although we just guessed the farm fields bit...in actual fact it's more likely George and Nico will be hanging out

Sword 3, however, is that all these elements combine. Charles gave us the example of being chased by a dog. Should you decide to run up a wall, the dog will stay on the ground - barking up at you, and soon all the guards will also gather at the foot of the wall! The idea is that the world will react sensibly to how you play the game. To keep things exciting, there are also certain events that occur in a similar manner to how Quick Time Events occurred in Shenmue, for instance - when Nico is in danger of being run over, you've to be quick enough with your button presses to save her.

But with all these action-based additions, are Revolution going back on their adventure roots? Charles Cecil confessed to admiring LucasArt's classic point and click adventures, but recognised Revolution Software were heading in an entirely different direction, but he has a particular vision and is sure the 3D approach will pay off. He's seen point and click games creating their own grammar over the years - a specific way of thinking when it comes to getting out of problematic situations - and because of this some of the answers to puzzles could become really obscure, making the game inaccessible to anyone but the most ardent point and click



fan, and yet of course, making the puzzles easier in order to accommodate for newbies to the series, may have resulted in fans finishing the game too quickly. Although in the short term, the move to 3D may be a shock to fans of the series, in the long term, Charles Cecil hopes such a form will keep both ardent fans and potential newcomers alike fully engaged. With this new approach, puzzles needn't be obscure to be harder, and exploration, stealth, action events, and so forth, all make for a bigger adventure that's more enjoyable - as you can enjoy engaging with these practises, instead of staring at a static screen and getting frustrated.

And what of the screen? The dual-texturing and radiosity approach makes for some superb lighting, that results in the characters and scenery being better fleshed out than they are with a flat cel-shading effect, and the developers

00:24:58

Kingdom Hearts:
Square is renowned for quality role playing games, and Disney for classic franchises, and this unison seems almost too good to be true. If you're worried about Donald Duck, Goofy and co, somehow subverting classical Square proceedings, you have only to watch this trailer to witness how Square's characters are seamlessly submerged into the Disney fantasy. Of course Square is now Square Enix, having merged with Enix, and word has it they're ready to start work on Kingdom Hearts 2, hoping to build it into a series of games, and are just waiting for the green light from Disney. In the meanwhile here's (the Cheshire cat) smilin' at you kid!



have capitalised on this by featuring cinematic camera angles, ala Resident Evil. The developers of course know what is going on in each scene and so have made sure the viewing angles do not hinder gameplay, but you'll perhaps nonetheless be pleased to know that as soon as an element of danger comes into the fray, the camera quickly switches to an behind-the-shoulder viewpoint, allowing you run around like a headless chicken in an attempt to avert said danger.

The game will be released in October this year, appearing on PlayStation 2 first, quickly followed by PC (which will feature joypad support, but also allow for control via keyboard and mouse). Since the game has been created using Renderware - a development tool that allows for work to be easily ported over to any of the main next generation consoles, there is also the possibility of Xbox and Gamecube conversions, though these may follow a fair while after the initial PS2 and PC releases. Charles Cecil believes he's currently got the strongest development team he's ever had in his 20 years of experience, and is no doubt looking forwards to showing off their combined creative efforts, when the game is released later this year. We're looking forwards to it.

00:28:31

Silent Hill 3:

Dark, moody, foreboding. Welcome to the shopping centre. Silent Hill breaks away from "Distraught husband without wife, exploring disutopic holiday resort" and focuses instead on a teenage girl called Heather, who, I guess having money to burn, decided to "go shopping". Could it get any more stereotypical? Wait - here's something you wouldn't expect - the shopping centre suddenly goes all dark, and monsters can be seen lurking in the shadows! What's going on? Well, we're still talking stereotypes, but now we're talking about Silent Hill 3 - as ever more of a psychological thriller than the cheap B-movie horror thrills of Resident Evil, and not so much scary as.... un-nerving. So, as I was saying - dark, moody, foreboding - welcome to Silent Hill. This is what you can expect, backed up by prophecies about roles some lady thinks you have to fulfil, in order to be "...the one that will lead us to paradise, with blood stained hands...". Creepy or what? The UK is getting a world exclusive release date of May the 23rd...and if you love the music in our video footage, you'll be glad to hear a game soundtrack is planned too, although at the moment the soundtrack is only scheduled for an American release, keep a look out for it in case it turns up over here later too. In the meanwhile, enjoy the footage, and sweet dreams!!!

00:31:53

TombRaider: Angel of Darkness: Why are all our favourite gaming heros being framed?

First it was Mario, being framed for polluting a holiday result, then the star of the Getaway being framed for the murder of his wife, and now Lara's been framed for the murder of her own mentor, in Tomb Raider: Angel of Darkness.

Now a fugitive on the run, jumping around ancient ruins in tight tops, and short shorts, couldn't be further from her mind....instead Lara is now in an urban environment, trying to evade arrest.

We played an early version of the code late last year that saw you start off in an alleyway. Police are nearby, and it only takes one to shine a torch light on you, for it to be "Game Over", as we found out, when, seeing a dog, we tried to, in true Lara tradition, kill the thing. Only we had no guns, and ended up setting it off barking, which called the police, which....eek! You can see where it all led, can't you?

A second attempt then.

Yes. Okay...waking the dog was a bad idea...so despite that route looking quite like the main way forward in the game, I decided to look for an alternative path. Climbing onto a box of sorts, I was

00:34:54

XIII:

Cel-shading strikes again. This time in the form of a first person perspective shooter dubbed XIII. Gasp!

But wait! Did you realise that this game is actually based on a popular European comic series/graphic novel going by the same name, and that they chose the cel-shading style based on that, and not just because cel-shading is the current "in thing" (and for those who don't know, by cel-shading, I mean the effect pioneered by Jet Set Radio where 3D rendered graphics can be displayed as if a 2D animation - a technique also known as 2.5D for obvious reasons)? What if I told you that the comic aesthetic was encouraged even more by use of "AAAAAAHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!!!!!" speech exclamations when you attack soldiers? By cut scenes that take place in comic strip boxes on the page/screen, and so forth and so forth? No? Doesn't do it for you? Okay then. The game's got some top ideas. It utilises stealth. Okay, so this has also become fashionable of late, but there's a certain section where you're hiding behind a corrugated metal wall, and a soldier's approaching....but get this...as you hear his footsteps, you also see the words: "tap, tap, tap..." appear on the screen, allowing you to use his footsteps as a means to know how far he is from you, and work out when to pounce. Nice stuff. You can also interact with the scenery. Pick up a chair, and use it as a weapon why not? If you're really stealthy, you can even do a "Hitman", and approach a soldier from behind, before grabbing them around the neck. You can then either dispatch of them (a sudden tightening of your arm on their neck, and - snap! =P), or



able to reach a higher platform, and from there could perform a tricky jump onto a high-up ledge. I say a tricky jump as it did take several attempts, mainly due to camera angle problems. As you see, unlike previous Tomb Raider games, the proportion of the game I played, featured set camera angles...much like in the classic Resident Evil games, where cameras were fixed, and you walked out of the frame to switch to a new angle. For the most part, this wasn't a problem, however - merely this one jump, which once made, revealed more balconies, window sills, and wall ladders, etc, to allow to me sneakily progress upwards. I was really impressed by this, mainly because despite the focus on stealth, the game hadn't lost its tricky platform-jumping quality, and since this wasn't the most obvious route to take in the game, I was impressed that it was possible to go off the beaten track in this way - any game that encourages exploration and alternative routes gets the thumbs up in my book. I finally made it as far up as seemed possible to go, and managed to sneak through an open window into a small room. Er...only I didn't really see much in there. Time to go back down, perhaps? Unfortunately, Eidos seemed to have neglected to include a parachute to help with my inept platforming skills. A missed jump, and I plummeted to the ground, from the dizzy heights of a fourth floor balcony. Lara didn't make it. Sorry guys. Now you know who the real murderer is!! (..and I would have gotten away with it too, if it wasn't for you pesky kids!). (Calm down Andrew. Ed.).

else hold them hostage to try and get out of a tricky situation, or perhaps use them as a human shield.

From what I've been telling you, you may think it's stealth all the way, but you CAN go running through levels guns blazing - it's just not known how far you're likely to get. Take this level that takes place at a cargo bay. There's a mass of troops assembled on the floor of one of the hangers you're in. Your exit is the massive entrance behind them. You can run down, shoot at a load of them, and then try and peg it out of the entrance. I tried. I got out, but didn't find shelter fast enough, and as soldiers flooded the playing field, I panicked, and soon perished. Another attempt then. Time for a different strategy perhaps? Well, this level is intriguing because right above the gathered troops is a crane...holding a massive crate. A quick trip to the crane control room...wow...only one soldier. A quick draw later, and it's you who's at the crane controls. Time to drop that crate on your adversaries, yes? Well go ahead then. Suddenly you're okay with loosing the stealth approach, and simply waltzing straight out of the hanger, for your enemies have been taken care of. Nice.

Whilst we're speaking of "nice", let's use that, and a few more adjectives such as "gorgeous", "stylish" and "well wicked" to describe the visuals, yes? Not only is the comic book look replicated exceedingly well, but there's one level that takes place upon a rocky cliff near the sea. Not only are the water effects done really well, but a beautiful sunset, that lights the sky up in a haze of purple and red, can induce awe.

The game was scheduled to be released last month across all formats - with PC and Xbox versions leading, and Gamecube and PlayStation 2 versions to follow, but the game has recently been pushed back, and is now scheduled to be released across all formats simultaneously in September.

00:37:57

Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell: Splinter Cell must be the pinnacle of stealth gaming. Staff writer Ross Sillifant has described it as "...everything Metal Gear Solid 2 should have been and more!" whilst our editor, not having played many stealth games before, found the proceedings very engrossing. Move through moody atmospheres, take in your surroundings, assess the situation, dispose of adversaries quietly and promptly. Hide the bodies. Tip-toe past security. Pick the locks. Don't know who's in the next room? Shove a microscopic camera under the door, and have a look. Splinter Cell isn't based on any particular Tom Clancy book, but the creators worked with the author to get a game that could act as the epitome of what Tom Clancy is about, and Splinter Cell, having delivered to Xbox gamers last year is now on PC and PS2 with a Gamecube version to follow on the 6th of June, being released alongside a portable version made especially for Gameboy Advance. See *Handheld Kingdom* for more info on page 82.

00:43:22

Commandos 3:

Destination Berlin:

The commandos series has sold more than 3 million copies world-wide, and now development studios Pyro are bringing **Commandos 3** to us this summer, no doubt hoping to replicate the success of the previous two games. So what does this second sequel bring into the fray?

Well, firstly, Pyro have introduced a new graphics engine featuring fully rotatable 3D landscapes - just check out our video footage to see what we mean. In addition elements of the gameplay have changed. The levels are now smaller, yet more action packed because of this. To compensate, each of the smaller levels are part of a large overall campaign, so can be seen as small elements of one large whole if you will. The campaigns on offer are based in Central Europe, Stalingrad and Normandy - with you able to tackle any of those three campaigns in any order you desire. Shenanigans include storming the Gestapo's headquarters in Berlin, fighting on the eastern front, and even reliving the D-day assault on Omaha Beach.

00:44:27

Shenmue II:

A sequel to one of the most ambitiously realistic games of all time, and European Dreamcast owners got the only official English language version - subtitled as opposed to voice acted, true, but with lessons learnt from the first Shenmue, this sequel played faster and more fluidly. The franchise has now moved on to the Xbox, with a fully voice acted Shenmue 2 conversion, and a special movie disc telling the story of the original DC Shenmue.

00:41:50

Beach Life:

Beach Life is ultimately a holiday resort sim. You get to manage your own holiday resort, but as well as all the managerial type duties, you also have to ensure the tourists are having a good time. Said tourists are highly characterised, making for some amusing occurrences, and there's even a voyeur mode specifically for observing their antics, and taking screenshots of any funny moments. In this way, Beach Life attempts to merge the best elements from managerial simulators with the human element evident in The Sims. It's not all watching tourists though - you've to plan your resort, then build it, then manage it, and keep everything running. In addition there's a Campaign mode that pitches you against particular scenarios one after the other, to see how well you cope. There's also a freeform mode, however, that pretty much lets you do your own thing. A free demo is also available online at www.eidosinteractive.co.uk However, be warned - it weighs in at 124MB, so may be too big for some people to download.

The game looks set to keep players on their toes, as bombing raids constantly re-shape the landscape, sometimes effecting your strategy. You can imagine it now can't you? "Quick! Take cover in that building!" <KER-BLAM!> (said building gets bombed by passing plane) "Er, what building...sir?", "Okay, forget it then," although it's likely that besides the disappearance of buildings, bombings may also result in problems stemming from having to deal with rubble, and difficult terrain. That's not the only new element of gameplay being introduced however. Players will now have to deal with scenarios that simply never occurred in the previous Commandos games, such as assaults and ambushes from small pockets of resistance, as well as...wait for it....end of level bosses. Yes. Heh. That videogame favourite. <Wink>.

The missions in one player mode are now strung together by what publishers Eidos are calling a "strong" narrative, relayed via way of "cinematic" mission briefings. Sounds intriguing. Veterans of the series may take more interest however in the addition of a multiplayer deathmatch mode for play across the internet or a local area network - a first for the series.

The game is due to hit the shops sometime this summer, and we'll be sure to let you know more about the title nearer the time! Until then, enjoy the footage!

00:47:48

Rez:

United Games.... Artists...ahhhhh!

Caught you out there! Nope, United Games didn't develop Rez, "United Games Artists" did, and what an accomplishment it is! It's a unique audio visual experience, that revolves around the simple principle of shooting things whilst automatically moving forwards. The cunning bit is that every sound effect (from firing your weapon to the sound enemies make as they are shot) contributes to the game soundtrack - building on the sounds in the background. It's not just button bashing either - as the game encourages you to actually hold down the fire button, glide it over several enemies at once to "lock-on" to them, and then release the button - shooting four enemies in a row like this makes a fancy little tune, plus it also results in more points. It premiered on Dreamcast but is now also available for PlayStation 2. A slick, and stylish on-rails 3D shoot-'em-up, able to be enjoyed as both a shooter and a unique audio visual experience.

00:53:11

Firebugs:

Firebugs! Wahey! This game is harmlessly fun enough, but far, far, far, far, far too easy, as our review this issue explains. Nonetheless, you get to drive around futuristic tracks, in vehicles known as Firebugs - which are both capable of effortlessly driving up walls and on ceilings, as well as being equally able to unleash a variety of weapons upon unsuspecting race opponents to devastating [yet aesthetically gorgeous - due to the pyrotechnics involved] effects.

Of course despite the game's low difficulty, as soon as we became overly self conscience from hitting the video record button as we played the game, we lost our leading position ...still note how we gain it back at the very last moment with relative ease.

Altogether now:

"We...Are...Atomic....Super Sonic...."
(Oh crumbs, don't start that Bombfunk MCs stuff again! Ed.). Lol.



00:50:20

Metal Slug X:

Metal Slug is an old skool platform shoot-'em-up from SNK, but is memorable not only for its intense shooting and platforming action, but also for the fact that its got a sense of humour, as we hope this video footage demonstrates. The series has always had a bit of a cult status as it has previously only been available to play in the arcades, or else on the expensive NeoGeo console. A top Saturn conversion was made, but unfortunately, it never saw a general release in the UK, so we got really excited about Virgin Interactive's PSOne release "Metal Slug X" as it looked like the best Metal Slug game yet, and here it was appearing on a machine we actually had access to, and with an official UK release too.....however, unfortunately, Virgin Interactive have run into big financial trouble, and the future of this release has been thrown into question. So what can we say? If you really want a piece of Metal Slug action without going the route of Japanese Saturn import games, or expensive NeoGeo consoles, we suggest you scour the second hand market for a NeoGeo Pocket Colour handheld, with Metal Slug, which contributor Ian Tucker once described as: "Bloody good fun" awarding it no less than a Brilliant Blue.

00:58:08

Super Monkey Ball Junior:

It's not just the Nokia N-gage that's capable of 3D games. The Gameboy Advance does a remarkably good job of it too, especially with this Super Monkey Ball conversion from Sega / Realism, dubbed Super Monkey Ball Junior. As you'll be able to see from the footage, the gameplay revolves around steering a ball with a monkey in it, around various courses, (as you would a marble in one of those wooden tilting maze games) picking up bananas on your way to the exit and trying not to fall off the edges, which can be trickier than it sounds.

By and large, the game is a faithful port of the original Monkey Ball game for Gamecube, but features a number of new levels and an extra mini game (Monkey Duel - ultimately a race between two players to see who can complete a course the fastest). Our friends over at www.sponge.com have been getting to grips with the title over the last few days, with writer Jay claiming that his fears that there would be problems controlling the playing field (which you tilt in order to roll the Monkey Ball in the correct direction) with a D-pad as opposed to Gamecube's analogue stick proved unfounded. "It translates well," he claimed, "and although quite frustratingly difficult to begin with, is soon mastered.". Recommended.

01:01:38

EPW:

Our Spider friend from WebWatch presents a trailer for a backyard wrestling federation that broadcasts Free-For-All (as opposed to Pay-Per-View) wrestling shows, featuring "The Posse" - hence the show's name - Extreme Posse Wrestling, or EPW for short! Despite sounding very scary and violent, the matches are orchestrated by Christians with morals, feature no swearing, and are less about violence than skillful choreography. The show also takes a light hearted approach to plot lines and character development. Just who is the Masked Man? Why is daRobb obsessed with Campino sweets, and what on earth is a "jobber" like Chickenwing Z doing in the tournament with an imaginary tag team partner, as well as occasional assistance from an adulterous banana? There's only one way to find out folks...



00:56:14

Metroid Fusion:

Platform shooting action returns, in the form of Metroid Fusion! Okay, so it's not quite an Elevator [Elevator Action Returns reference/joke], but it's nonetheless cause for celebration. Dragonfire has done a review on this title for the Games Jester on page 85, shedding light on how the game combines slick graphics, a deep plot, well balanced boss fights and addictive gameplay. The only thing to watch out for is that expert gamers may find themselves completing the game a little quickly. This is compensated for however by a number of hidden items existing within the levels, and collecting all of these on your way through the game can be seen as the real challenge this title represents. Turn to page 85 for more info.

01:00:03

Tomb Raider:

The Prophecy:

Whilst Lara may have turned all stealth on us, with the upcoming Angel of Darkness for PlayStation 2, this Gameboy outing of hers sees her in her more conventional role as a Tomb Raider...exploring ancient ruins in the search for artifacts, pushing blocks, jumping between platforms, and of course, shooting wolves. The "Prophecy" angle is quite simple - there's been a prophecy that magic is set to return to humans, and yet because of this, the humans may place themselves in peril. As such, Lara travels to the ends of the earth to secure three stones that would have otherwise triggered divine retribution for re-discovering magic. Spooky stuff 'eh? Of course, it's just the background for some Tomb Raiding action, and whilst we haven't had a chance to get to grips with this title yet, word on the net is that the gameplay is quite basic, with little tension or challenge. So don't expect too much.

01:02:41

Credits

Get Funky with Point Blank Production's Tetris Remix.

01:03:20

The End

THE TEAM

They've eaten the inhabitants of the Island of Beautiful Women, they've foiled the invasion plans of inflatable clowns in down-town Swindon, they've teamed up with Rainbow's Rod, Jane and Freddy and turned Zoids' Red Horn The Terrible into Zippy, and now they're trying to get rid of some kids who're causing trouble in the back garden...prepare to meet the Team!

Ben Evans: Humour Editor



■ Ben Evans

"**Wow** - where's Ken?" asked Ben. "He's given up on the gaming world, denouncing the violence in modern day computer games." said Jazz. "So where is he now?" asked Ben "No - don't tell me - he's gone out to become a mature, hardworking cog of society?" "No, he's out the back starting up his own wrestling league!" said Andrew. "So hold on, he's denouncing one form of make-believe violence and starting up a league of another?" exclaimed Ben. "Only so he can train those EPW

friends and cohorts of his to do suplexes and pile drivers so that he can take them over to the US and conquer the world!" laughed Will. "Yeah, but he has also become a strong pillar of society." said Kim sticking up for her husband in her own strange way: "When you're as big as Ken is, you can hold up half the milky-way - single-handed!" "Hey! You don't have to be big to hold up half a milky way - unless you meant the constellation as opposed to the chocolate bar...!" pointed out Ben.

"That's enough about Ken, he's moved on and we have to make our year's issue" snapped Andrew. "Wow, it's that time of year again?" asked Ross. "Yes, so what has everyone got?" Andrew looked around inquisitively. "Well, I have a picture of me in a canoe!" Kim said enthusiastically. "Good, and what's the story?" asked Andrew. "Nothing, I just like the photo." "Hold on everybody, what's that noise coming from the back garden?"

Ross Sillifant: Staff Writer



■ Ross

"**If there's gonna be any shooting I've got to get me rest!**" piped up Ross all of a sudden. The Team just looked puzzled, and, ignoring Ross, went outside to check out the garden activity - and what a sight befell them! There was Ken surrounded by twenty-odd youngsters all wearing T-shirts with "Mucky Pups" emblazed upon them.

As the Team grew nearer the brats were heard to be chanting:

"Sweet and cuddly is our little pup, when it gets too excited, we have to clean up, follow the trail, of dirty paws, until you find a puppy - is it yours?"

"Is it b*****ks!" commented Ben. "I'll get me Yellow Pages," said Andrew, shaking his head. "Not them again..." muttered Ross...

"I've got a fantastic idea!" said the next writer, "I'll take over!!"

Andrew Mehta: Editor & Layout



■ Andrew

"**There ya' go!**" said Andrew with his yellow pages. "Andrew, what on earth are you doing?" quizzed Kim. "No - look! Here! In the Yellow Pages! An advert for Mucky Pup Cleaner Ups! They're obviously here to help Ken with the garden work!" "You mean this really shabby looking area is our garden?!" "I never even knew we had a garden," said Jazz. "I never even knew I was gonna be in this issue of United Games!"

said Edd Morris, poking his head out from one of his Warwickshire University library books. "Oi you! Get back to your studies! NOOOOOWWWW!" yelled Alexander, who was still enraged at having lost his job writing for Kerrang. "I've gone from 100 word reviews in a national music magazine, to a cameo appearance in a truly bizarre editorial story in a non-commercial fan-magazine". Kim just glared evilly at Alexander. "Y'know," she said, "Not everyone here realises we

can't pay them. So keep your mouth shut, an' I reckon we can have 'em working for at least another month before they realise..."

Ross, who had been quite chilled out until this point suddenly started going a little crazy: "Right! I've 'ad me rest! And I've got me wizard's wand! Let's Flippendo the little buggers, spin 'em round, and then throw them out of the garden!"

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We'd like to also express our gratitude to the following websites and shops:

www.cube-europe.com - Tim, Franklin and Jav

www.diehardgamer.co.uk - Stoo

www.pennyarcade.com - Mike / Gabriel

www.sponge.com - Richard and Stefan

www.xboxaddict.com - Anthony

CHIPS, Norwich - Adam

Insane Games - Stuart

Full credits can be found at the back of the magazine, whilst contributor credits and photos are on the next page>>>

Will Jenkins: Staff Writer



■ Mr Jenkins

There was a stunned silence.

"All right, calm down," said Kim, thinking Ross had overheard her earlier comment about pay, to Alexander. "I'm sure Andrew's got some spare change he can give you."

Andrew fumbled in his pockets.

"Yes, here you go. Twelve pence, a bus ticket and . . . some lettuce? Why am I carrying lettuce around with me?"

"I don't care about the bleedin' pay!" shouted Ross. "Wait. Wait, yes I do. Yes I DO. But those kids - look at the

mess! The time for talk is finished.

We've given those people more than enough warnings. We must be resolute now. Ken is an evil genius with access to chemical cleaning materials and he WILL use them unless we stop him."

There was a confused silence.

"Ross," said Andrew, delicately, "What the flying fudge are you talking about?"

"I've had enough of you bleedin' heart liberals!" hooted Ross, and with a flourish he produced an ornate wizard's

wand from his trousers. It had a knob on the end. He pointed it threateningly at the assembled crew, who took a step back in fright.

"Easy now . . ." said Ben, holding his hands up in a placatory manner. At that moment Edd poked his head around the corner. "Does anybody want - LAWKS! He's got a wand!" He vanished from sight, his retreating footsteps echoing down the hall. "Now," said Ross. "To business!"

Jazz Morgan: WebMaster



■ Jazz

As Ross took a drastic pose before the office window, the rest of the team, having retreated into the office, took cover behind whatever they could find; a desk, a bean bag; Andrew even found an old typewriter to cower beneath (probably used to produce the last issue of United Games - sorry Andrew! Heh).

"Somebody - do something, quick!

Kim, didn't you do some sort of martial art?! KICK HIM in the head! Kill him!

Stop the war! Killing Ross will cause less bloodshed..." Will's ranting was cut off by United Games' female

element: "Don't be a fool, my kung fu is useless against his magic wand. My tiger style is strong, but his dragon spirit will surely flay my guts and cause lots of flashing lights. Besides, if I use that style, you do realise that Tokyo will be utterly destroyed - thus destroying the entire world?" Kim snorted, and added after thought, "Anyone who's ever watched any anime knows that, silly." Jazz suddenly started to shiver strangely, and then he stretched out his hand towards Kim. "Giiiive it to meeee. It's mine! My property. My...preciousss. Plus, it's the

only thing we can use against the wand." Everyone looked. Everyone stared.

"Oh heck, give him your ring already, Kim! This has gotten way too weird. Besides, I am starting to lose track of where we're up to, what with all the political back chat and the silly references to fantasy novels." muttered Ben#2 (aka Swag). Standing tall (not a hard thing to do in her case), Kim brandished her ring towards Jazz. "Here..." she said, reaching out in slow motion, "Take it..."

Kim Kaze: Staff Writer



■ Kim Kaze

Jazz took the ring, his eyes gleaming strangely. Everyone else ducked, except Swag and James. Swag was too busy staring into space and smiling, probably unaware of the mortal danger he was in(!), whilst James was laughing and searching through the United Games stock cupboard for 'sidekicks' while no one was watching. Except the writer of this part of the team story, of course...

At once, the ring lit up in a dull, pink-ish glow. He lifted it up towards the wand Ross held in his hand.

I shall strike thee down with mine Elton John prowess!" cried Jazz, as the

ring gave way to an awesome beam of light, enveloping Ross in pinkness. There was a flash, then a bang. Other even cheaper and more overly used sound effects followed, until eventually... Ross emerged, coughing and spluttering. The wand was dust, destroyed by the terrible power of the Elton John ring. He was covered in an odd pink-ish ooze and ... laughing!

"Man, I love you guys. And I love Edd, and Andrew, where are you? Wow, real friendship!" Ross started to hug everyone, as the fever spread.

Hugging and laughing began to fill the office. Suddenly, Ken walked in, followed by his group of young people.

"What the heck is going on in here? Do I even want to know? You gaming addicts had better speak up, before I 'Mash Splash' every last one of you!"

The entire team stared at the group who'd just come in. Then, in unison, they all cooed: "We wuuuuuuuu yooooooou! Give us a kiss!" And thus, Ken fled back to his EPW Arena, the youngsters in tow. EPW was smitten, but not destroyed. What would happen next? Join us for our next exciting adventure right here, in England, U.K! (Oi! That's enough of the EPW plugs young lady..! Tut. Ed.)

PC:

Hooligans p60.

C&C: Generals p61.

Moonbase Commander p64.

The Sims Unleashed p65.

GC:

StarFox Adventures p66.

Metroid: Prime p67.

WrestleMania x8 p70.

TimeSplitters 2 p71.

DC:

Ikaruga p72.

Phantasy Star Online: V2 p73.

Bangai-o p76.

More:

On the Shelf p24.

Circle of the Moon p84.

Metroid: Fusion p85.

Red Card Soccer p08.

You're Awesome!



Quite simply, we couldn't have done it without you! United Games is made by gamers for gamers, and we've got to thank the sixteen contributors below who contributed to this fabulous issue, bringing the total number of writers for the issue up to 22! Our highest number yet!

Adam has judged Metroid Prime worthy of a Red Hot colour award on page 67, whilst Alexander has contributed two excellent features - the History of Mac Gaming on page 16 and Retro Zone's PC Engine feature on page 78. Andrew Crane has helped the Games Jester once again with a Circle of the Moon review for Gameboy (p84), whilst Anthony Ingrassia has given us an extended version of www.xboxaddict.com's Dead or Alive: Xtreme Beach Volleyball review (p43). Top bloke Atif Hussain has already convinced a few Swindon-ites into getting ISS over Fifa, with his ISS2 review (p52), whilst Chaz has not only given us the word on Champ Manager 4 (p24), but has also teamed up with his mate Dave to fill us in on Dark Angel (p49). DaRobb has managed to control his Campino fetish long enough to write us a Wrestlemania x8 review (p70), whilst David Burford stayed up late into the night working on our C&C:Generals review (p61). Dragon Fire took time out from running riot with insane ramblings on MSN, to write a really top Metroid Fusion review (p84), that has seen him finally declared as sane - honest, whilst Franklin Hughes from www.cube-europe.com wrote what sounded like an Average Grey review of StarFox Adventures, only to give it a Mellow Yellow award in the final analysis (p66). Justin bought Spec Ops 4, and now he's telling you exactly why you SHOULDN'T (see p59), before also shedding light on an oft overlooked game, that can prove very engrossing (Panzer Front - p58). Mat Owen has some tips on upgrading your Radeon graphics card in Xgen (p14), whilst Rikin travelled to the Handheld Kingdom to draw portraits of His Royal Highness King Duncan, and, er..his Gaming Jester! Rob, has, oh-dear....waited FAR too long for his Phantasy Star Online Version 2 review to appear (p73), but it's finally here - coinciding nicely with the launch of Gamecube and Xbox versions (p75), and Swag, shrewd gamer that he is, has done the business on Quantum Redshift (p47). Respect. Oh - plus he's also been debating videogames as art (p09), with Mr Jenkins.

So what now? Well, why not read through the next few pages and learn about how to write for United Games Magazine? There's also a box-out on submitting other articles besides reviews, over the page - such as news stories, features, previews, or shorts. We'll be planning a new issue soon, but we're always looking for new content, anyway, especially now we've a website! Go on! Get involved! Y'know you want to, and then it might be your picture appearing here next issue! Imagine that!



ADAM FAIRCLOUGH



ALEXANDER HAY



ANDREW CRANE



ANTHONY INGRASSIA



ATIF HUSSAIN



CHARLES OKELL



daROB



DAVID BURFORD



DAVID SHELDRAKE



DRAGON FIRE



FRANKLIN HUGHES



JUSTIN PAWLEY



MAT OWEN



RIKIN



ROB



SWAG aka BEN DANIELS



Do you want to do a review? Well here's how then! This is called the standfirst/blurb and is a little introduction to the review that catches the reader's eye. Make it interesting, okay?

These columns are reserved for your main review. Do not use this space to describe the game's many secret levels or extra characters or what happens when you collect so many stars (although you can mention this). Leave all the gameplay options and the like for TAKE A CLOSER LOOK (an optional section explained on the next page). Rather, just focus on whether the game is any FUN or not. State how much fun it is, what is appealing about the game and what gets you coming back to it. What are its bad points? The things that spoil it? Or what makes it really special??

As well as saying how good the game is, we like to encourage our reviewers to explain what elements make it so good. Okay, if you've said it's a game that some will love and others will hate, go on to explain what type of people will love it and what type of people will hate it. What makes people love it? What makes them hate it?? Also, try and describe what it actually feels like to play - describe a part of the game, putting the reader right in the middle of it, so it's almost like them having a play test. Many people don't trust reviewers. They've recommended a game, but they haven't explained why it's so good.

Is it the fast paced action? If so, why is that fun? Is it the rush from high speeds, the challenge involved in over-taking, the satisfaction of beating a friend?? The colourful graphics, the addictiveness?? Explain what makes the game special to you.

Starting and structuring a review can be dodgy. We've reviewed a lot of games so usually plunge head first into it. I'll edit it anyway, but sometimes after you've finished it, a quick read-over reveals you could have written better. Don't be afraid to re-draft, although you don't have to.

I usually start a review by briefly explaining what sort of game it is, or perhaps comparing it to another title just to get the ball rolling ("But do you really want this when you've got Gran Turismo?? Well, on the one hand it offers....., but it doesn't offer..... as found in Gran Turismo", etc, etc).

Remember, at the end of the day, a reader wants: 1) to know whether he/she should buy the game, and 2) to have a good read. So, humour comes second - but make it a close second - we'll always edit out jokes that are too corny. At the end of the day it doesn't matter if you haven't explained all the levels or the different costumes or the involving plot, or the sound or graphics (all this can be left for the "Take A Closer Look" section), but as long as you've answered the all important question: **Is paying £xx and playing the game FUN??** Remember to take into account value for money.

Finally you'll be wanting to do a summary and give the game a colour symbol (explained elsewhere).

GETTING ARTICLES TO US:

It's a simple post-or-email-it affair, but let's not forget all the things you'll want to include. Although we only really need the article(s) you've written, if it's possible, we'd appreciate a photo, or a photocopied photo for us to put next to the introductory standfirst/blurb, above.

Your article will remain your intellectual property, but if you want to be fully credited when we print it, please include your full name, and if you want us to be able to get in contact with you, should a third party wish to use your copyrighted article, then also include a means of contact (this is optional). This could be an address, phone number or email address.



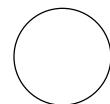
Needless to say, we keep all such information confidential. Explanations of both Copyright matters and this "Licensing Out" can be found on the next page. United Games wishes to thank in advance all you great people who are contributing! Your works will appear either on our web site, or in our fanzine...maybe even both!

Note: Due to reasons of space, we can't guarantee that all articles submitted will be published in an issue of United Games magazine. But every article submitted will be available through our internet and postal article archive service. The United Games Article Archive is an archive of articles that can be sent off for via the post, or viewed on the internet at www.unitedgames.co.uk Alternatively, write to our address for a list of available articles and postage costs.

~Your Name Here~

A Summary really just sums up your review and is a small comment that best describes the game.

For instance: "A good solid blaster!", "Racing action at its best!", or: "It smells bad."



Colour Symbol!?!
(COLOUR GUIDE PAGE 40)

Take A Closer Look



TAKE A C



So what is this bit? Well, it's an optional extra. You don't have to do a TAKE A CLOSER LOOK section when you review a game, but you can, if you want to.....



Take A Closer Look is always a good place for screenshots (above), and box-outs (above right).

YOUR COPYRIGHT:

What's all this copyright nonsense about then?

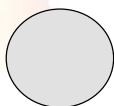
Well, you see, if you're kind enough to contribute to United Games, (i.e. send in a review or other article) then,

when we print it, we acknowledge your copyright (the article remains your intellectual property) and yet take the fact that it has been submitted to us as permission for us to use it.

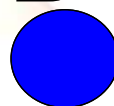
Guide to Colours:

dull:

bright:



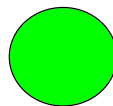
Average Grey - Ho hum average. Nothing really wrong with it, but nothing remarkably right with it either. Best avoided simply because there are better games of a similar ilk available, giving you more for ya' money.



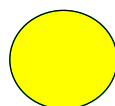
Brilliant Blue - Brilliant fun - no doubt (no diggidy). Get it. This is usually our highest recommendation.



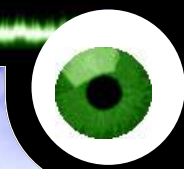
Black Ash - Don't buy it. Trust us. These games are only fun if you never put 'em in your console, but instead use the game discs as Frisbees. And who wants to pay £40 for a dodgy Frisbee?



Groovy Green - Not everyone's cup of tea, but there's something in it that makes it that little bit special. This could be a love it or hate it game, or one that appeals specifically to a niche fan base. Often highly addictive, or the hardcore gamer's choice.



Mellow Yellow - You really can't go wrong buying a Mellow Yellow game. They're nice, pleasant and often good value for money. They might not prove to be the bee's knees, but they'll still sit happily in your games collection with no qualms.



loser look

Take A Closer Look is a visually intensive box-out orientated double page spread about the game. Unlike the review, the writing doesn't have to flow, but can be split up into various boxes, and spread around the page, or coupled with screenshots and artwork as captions, with the basic idea being to just take a closer look at the game. So the possibilities can be endless!

You can talk about game mechanics, i.e - if it's a racing game what are the courses? If it's a Role Playing Game(RPG), how does the battle system work? If it's a beat 'em up what new tactics or counters have been introduced? If it's a game that

revolves around mini-games, you can tell us a bit about each of the mini-games on offer. You may also explain secrets that open up too. Are there any secret characters / courses / bonuses / cheats that open up when you've completed a particular challenge?

Maybe you could do character/vehicle profiles, describing what it's like to use each character or vehicle, highlighting ones that are best for beginners and ones more adept players could get to grips with. You could also choose to take a typical screen and explain what all the digits and bars represent. It's up to you.

Take A Closer Look is essentially everything that you wanted to say about the game that wasn't appropriate to the review. The review is supposed to explain whether the game is any good, give reasons for judgements made, and explain whether it's worth the money, and how long it's likely to last, etc. Take A Closer Look on the other hand, can talk about fab new features, the in-depth plot, characters, levels, attention to detail in the graphics, what bands are on the soundtrack, how clever the Artificial Intelligence is...whatever...it is up to you...there really are no rules about what goes in this section...it's completely up to you, so have fun! =)

We'll use the rest of this mocked-up Take A Closer Look to Take A Closer Look at submitting articles!

FREE LICENSING OUT:

Now, here comes the tricky, but oh-so clever and cool in a kind of sneaky way bit: If anyone sees your article and wishes to use it in their own fanzine, then they can write to us and ask for permission from the copyright holder (that's you!). We'll then write to you, asking whether this person is allowed to use your article (and if you have any particular provisos or conditions, etc). Geddit?

Don't worry, we won't disclose your address to anyone.

Of course, for this to work, we're going to need a way to contact you should anyone want to use your article. If we don't have your postal address, email address, or phone number, we'll endeavour to contact you through the fanzine, but failing that, we'll give up. More info on licensing can be found on page 96.

OTHER ARTICLES:

- **Previews:**
A preview is basically about describing an experience with a yet-to-be-officially-released game, and conveying your initial impressions. Did it seem any good? What's to look forwards to when it's released? Any interesting game features, new ideas or cool looking levels to look forwards to?
- **News item:**
If you've got a hot piece of gaming gossip, let us know! Just write the news story, or tip us off!
- **Feature:**
You are completely welcome to write any feature related to gaming and/or computers, you wish! Anything from "Your guide to computer jargon" to "The history of Pac-man!" You decide what you wish to write!
- **Shorts:**
Shorts can be anything, from a quick rant and rave about something, to mini half-page reviews! Alert people to a bad game, tell a few game-related jokes. As long as it's short, it qualifies.

intense:

Red Hot! - If you own the system this game runs on, you MUST own this game, and if you don't own the relevant system, you should consider buying it, just to experience this! It's the idyllic "Best Game Ever", or "Killer App". Only a select few have ever been declared Red Hots by the UG crew.

ALL CHANGE?

What do you think of our colour symbol system? We're looking to make some changes to it, perhaps moderate, perhaps really radical! Turn to Community Zone for more information, or email uglist-subscribe@yahoogroups.com and ask to be added to our United Games email discussion list. Remember! This is your magazine, and we want to evolve to be in keeping with what you the readers want!

All contributions should be posted to:
United Games, 6 Cheviot Close, Ramleaze, West Swindon, Wiltshire, SN5 5QD
 or emailed to: UnitedGames@game-extra.co.uk



Coming some twenty years after the film, the game based on John Carpenter's cult classic movie "The Thing" finally appeared, promising to fans of the film eagerly awaiting something in the way of a sequel, to take up the plot from where the film left off. This game, therefore, had a lot to live up to and promised to be more than your "run-of-the-mill" survival horror game. But was it? Ross Sillifant investigates...



The opening first hour (and it must be said) is indeed an opening link from the ending of the film, as you and your team are dropped into the (seemingly) deserted antarctic base & it soon becomes apparent just why all contact was lost & the fight for survival is on.

Gameplay revolves around a good mix of exploration, (minor)puzzle solving, and of course, shooting! What differentiates it from, say, Silent Hill or Resident Evil, is that you're not on your own. Once you've convinced others you are human (either by doing a blood test or shooting any attacking creatures) and on their side, eager to help (give 'em a gun and they'll be like putty in your hands) call upon the help and support of the medics, troops, and (essential) engineers.

The medics heal you and other team mates, but seem oddly incapable of healing themselves! Troops provide often essential firepower and the engineers are your prime concern, as whilst you can fix minor electrical problems, [i.e. fuse boxes], you'll often be stumped by a blown junction box or whatever that'll need an engineer to mend before progress can be made. Given the situation of what has happened and what is happening on the base, I found this to be a much preferable way of doing things than "finding keys".

If your chaps become too afraid, they'll lose the plot - from becoming twitchy and nervous, to puking their guts out. Worse cases can even see them having a heart attack and keeling over, or putting a bullet in their own brains. So, as well as your own survival, the survival of others is often just as paramount!

By good use of "thought" bubbles, you're never in much doubt as to what's on your team mates' minds. The A.I seems good, if not amazing (with members of your team getting paranoid and freaking out if they become too afraid), and oddly enough, the medics & engineers provide just as good covering fire as the troops. The control interface for commands, whilst not

upto, say, that of "Conflict: Desert Storm" is nonetheless simple to use.

It's also clear that a lot of thought has been paid to details - i.e. from the great graphics and sound (cool snow and fire sound effects, and fantastic use of Dolby 5.1) to the way you approach the game proper. Whilst you can happily dispose of the smaller, spider-like "Things", larger foes must be sufficiently weakened and burnt via the flame thrower. Also, if you stay outside too long you'll freeze to death!

The camera angles, often a bane of this type of game, are actually well thought out . Reasonable auto-aim helps combat, the "boss" characters are excellent, the plot is decent enough to get you involved and the music is very well implemented - keeping in line with the original film score - wahey(!). John Carpenter himself also makes a cameo appearance!

So what's wrong with (this) Thing? Well, I can't help but feel, that with a little more time in development and a tad more playtesting, this could've been the definitive survival horror game.

The paranoia aspect then? Well, I'd liked to have seen a lot more made of it, because as it stands, it hasn't been given more than a brief implementation - for I couldn't give a bag of rats if my medic or engineer were infected, as there was 80% chance they'd still fix me up or sort out a problem, and the fact I'd given them a gun wasn't a problem, as the minute they turned to run, they'd drop the gun.

The blood tests, other than to convince characters you are on their side, are utterly useless as you can get the all-clear on a blood test and then the fricker would mutate before you. All very scripted.

Control-wise, whilst it's easy to order your guys around, combat isn't so well done as it's ruddy annoying trying to switch from say a shotgun to a much needed flame thrower. Surely a play test or two would have brought this up?

There's NO on screen health bar for you(!) - an odd omission and it doesn't help combat. Mind you, Resident Evil and Silent Hill suffered the same. Is it a survival horror thing!?!

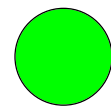
Re-starting from your last save is made unnecessarily difficult by the only two options being to either restart the entire level or quit to main menu. A PS2 port over problem as it doesn't seem to use the Xbox Hard drive in the best way possible.

Some of the tension elements are also spoiled by cut scenes showing the critters advancing upon you, which breaks the survival horror rule you see, ahhhhhhh!!

But despite these qualms, "The Thing" is a decent survival horror title, with enough individual elements to make it stand out from the crowd. It's also a far better use of a license than some games of late (what have you done to Bruce Lee, you utter b****ds!!!!?!). Essential for fans of the movie, like myself, who will want to see it all through to the end (and it's the first Xbox title I've seen to support HDTV!), but it still betrays its PS2 port-over roots at heart, as little real use is made of the hard drive.

~Ross Sillifant~

A decent survival horror title that'll prove essential for fans of the movie, but non-fans might prefer the Silent Hill games.



Groovy Green!
(COLOUR GUIDE PAGE 40)



Our favourite Dead Or Alive lovelies are scantily clad on a tropical beach, bending, stretching, and hopping around for our visual pleasure, all due to a volleyball tournament...!

What drives this game??

Well, I've thought about this for some time, (because it really isn't the volleyball), and I think I have the answer...

TESTOSTERONE! Not that that's a bad thing mind you...

Full HDTV 480p support

plus the sort of high quality visuals we have come to expect from the Dead or Alive series make for a really pleasing combination. The locations are colourful and well detailed, the water is fantastic, and sunsets have never looked better! Bottom line: if the graphics weren't this good you wouldn't spend all this time trying to buy those "Barely There" swim-suits for your babe of choice. The character movements during matches are fluid and accurate, and dives into the sand are depicted perfectly - sand being kicked up just so(!). I can't help but feel this game will prove a graphical show piece for gamers when they want to show off the Xbox's graphics, yet unfortunately you can't help but feel like a stalker just from watching Christie stretch on a lounge chair pool-side...is this wrong?

The game supports Dolby Digital, and features a soundtrack that we all probably know by heart now (see the clip on the video). Nonetheless, there's nothing overly fancy

here. Thank goodness for the "Custom Soundtrack" option, then! Load up your favourite tune and watch Tina do a dance for you on the private beach!

DOAXBV is confusing

because it does have some entertainment value, albeit a voyeuristic one. It certainly doesn't play as I thought it would, playing more like an RPG than a volleyball game. If you're a fan of simulations or RPGs you may enjoy this game more than others because of the character profiles you need to understand in terms of gift giving and such (asking someone to be your Volleyball partner isn't that simple - you need to shower them with gifts). Conversely, if you're a sports fan looking for a volleyball game you may well be disappointed. Admittedly, with a little finesse and different pressures applied, you do eventually realise the volleyball is well balanced and intuitive. You can master jumping serves, and fake spikes resulting in dinks just over your opponent. The Volleyball isn't super deep, but more than adequate for this sort of game.

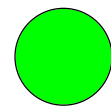
Personally, I found the Casino to be by far the most addictive part of the game, and whilst the hopping game could be seen as simplistic and dull, it nonetheless gives you time to watch your character hop around in a bikini!



Some will find DOAXBV entertaining, whilst some will prefer not to admit they even own it! I think the developers should concentrate on the volleyball game more next time however, - they can keep the bathing suites. So is it worth the booty?? Sorry, bad pun... My best recommendation would be to rent it first or borrow it from a friend, and see if this hybrid of voyeurism and money earning mini-games is up your street.

~Anthony Ingrassia~

DOAXBV is more of a guilty pleasure than an extreme volleyball game. Rent it, get your DOA girl of choice in that micro-bikini that costs a mint, gamble away thousands in the casino and judge for yourself.



Groovy Green!
(COLOUR GUIDE PAGE 40)

Take A Closer Look



■ Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball gives you two modes to play with: Exhibition mode and Zack Island!

Exhibition Mode:

If you're really interested in playing multi-player volleyball (maximum two players) hang around the exhibition mode.



Zack's Island:

Now for what is supposed to be the main game...Zack's Island:



■ The premise is that Zack got rich and bought an Island, and is now having a volleyball tournament with all his old DOA buddies....well, the female ones that is. You're on Zack's Island for 14 days, and in that time, you'll need to make cash by playing volleyball.



■ Oh, hang on! Volleyball(!) - that's what we're here for right? Well, you'll need to convince one of the other DOA gals to be your volleyball partner then, because it's two on two in matches. Simply asking them won't do either, so you need to shower your perspective team-mate with gifts available at the Island's shops.



■ You get bonus cash for good plays and big cash for wins. Of course this doesn't stop your partner from ditching you after one or two matches, so you'll be back at the shops trying to buy more presents for the gals. Mind you, all the ladies are fickle and may just toss those \$5000 sun-glasses into the ocean, so choose your partner wisely if you can.

■ You get up, make some money pool-side, or from the casino, spend it on gifts in hopes of getting a partner and by the time you have talked to a couple of gals (and been turned down) the day is over and you go back to the hotel. You have no choice - you need to go back at night, however you can visit the Casino for as long as you want before going to bed, but when you do finally retire, it'll be a matter of starting the entire process all over again the next morning.



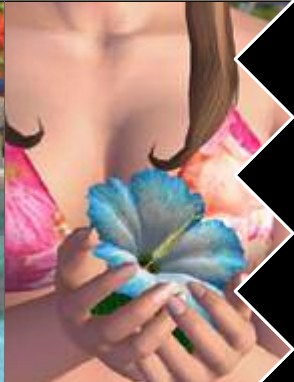


■ This mode sports a very simple control method, simply use the left stick to move your babe of choice, and the D-pad for ball direction. "A" is for serving, blocking, and spiking, whilst "B" is for receiving and tossing (set), and that's really all there is to it.

■ The problem is, I found myself not really playing that much volleyball, but instead generating an income from the pool-side "Hopping Game" in which you need to time your jumps onto square floatation pillows lined up across the pool. Speed and accuracy (hitting every float) earn you more cash.

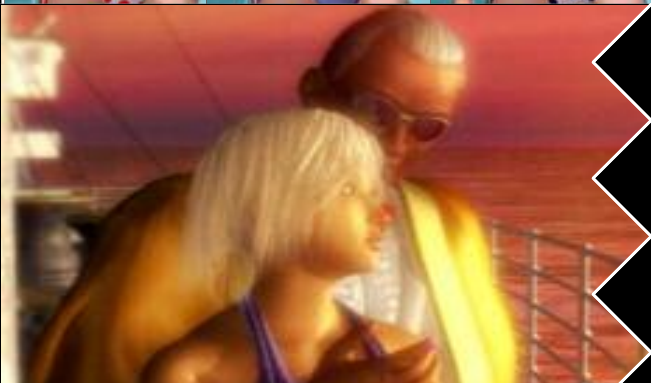


■ Another enjoyable method of earning cash is by visiting the Hotel Casino, where you can indulge in Roulette, Black Jack, Poker, and Slots. The Casino is very realistic in terms of gaming rules and actually a lot of fun.



■ The goodies range from flowers to diamonds, and I even came across a prototype XBOX! But the main place to shop in DOAXBV is the Sports Shop which carries the most aesthetically pleasing swimwear around.

■ The items in all the shops change on a daily basis, so you do get quite a few surprises. You can purchase anything you can afford and give anything as a gift to snag a partner, and once you're partnered you can finally actually get down to some volleyball!



■ You also get mystery presents from Zack every night, which you can open or keep packaged and give them to someone else. The items you collect can be kept in your item interface that consists of your outfits (bathing suits), objects, and, er.. items.

■ It could take you quite some time to get all the objects available in this game, more time than is given to our character...

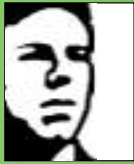


■ Resting by the pool is also a feature of the game (the clock is still ticking on the day whilst you rest)...I call it the "Gawking" mode. Check out your DOA babe of choice from multiple angles and you can even zoom in to check out those big beautiful... <cough><cough> ..."eyes".



■ On the 14th day you're off of the Island and your vacation is over. Some of the characteristics of your vacation remain as you continue a new two weeks with another character.

■ Wash, Rinse, Repeat...



Halo. A crap game? Or the best game? Or a decently fun enough romp that people got just a little bit over excited about?

It's common knowledge that you can buy the press. It's no coincidence that every game with a double-page advertisement in PC Gamer will score above 90%. The gaming press is the willing whore of gaming publishers, more than happy to write glowing previews and reviews to generate interest in AAA titles, all the while hiding under the aegis of 'journalistic impartiality.'

"So what's new?" It's just that I find the big Halo circle-jerk the most damning indictment yet that the paid review press are just craven hookers, extending a pale and skinny thigh in the direction of whatever they're told is the next big thing. Perhaps I am wrong. I am, after all, not a published writer. I don't know what it is like in the industry. But I am a reader, and stupid though I may be I can spot trends. Halo is just the tip of an over-rating iceberg.

I don't hate Halo. It has its moments, and some of them are sublime.

As the game progresses you'll learn exactly what Halo is and why it was built, but I won't spoil that for you because the plot is engrossing, and during the boring bits it was the only thing that kept me playing. Never underestimate the power of epistemophilia - the desire to know.

What does Halo get right? Lots. Lots and lots. Bungie already have a superb pedigree, with the acclaimed Marathon series on the Mac and the epochal Myth, as well as the perhaps-not-so-great Oni. It's a very, very pretty game to look at - especially the outdoor parts, with rolling hills, beautiful waterfalls and fantastic sky effects. The indoor architecture is solid as well, with attention paid to making the various installations seem functional, even seeming to obey laws of architecture. Textures are generally realistic and appropriate to the environment.

The weaponry is, if not very original, at least imaginative. The standard assault rifle is one of the most enjoyable of its type to fire, and remains effective throughout the game. All the requisite types are here - shotgun, plasma rifle, rocket launcher - but they just feel right, somehow. It's very hard to explain, but basically: if you shoot something point blank with a shotgun you expect it to die, whatever it is, and this is what happens in Halo. Some of the Covenant carry portable shields (like electric versions of the ones medieval

knights carried), and if you shoot one of these at close range, the alien won't die - but the force will knock it to its knees. In addition you can hit people with the butt of the weapon, so if your magazine runs out it is sometimes easier to just run up to them and whack them. The noise is satisfying, the animation makes it look solid, and they tend to crumple to the floor in a very realistic manner. This is all good stuff. There's a subtle auto-aim system which directs your view towards enemies if you are firing at them, making circle-strafing a lot more intuitive.

The enemies, like the weapons, tend to be generic types that we've seen iterations of in a dozen other games. The Covenant remind me a great deal of the Xen aliens from Half Life (Halo owes a lot to Half Life in terms of development of story), and the Flood are perhaps the best example seen yet of the 'swarm' variety (the Flood are another alien race that you'll encounter). They're squishy and organic and easy to kill, but there are a lot of them. The shotgun was designed to splat these, and it's hilarious fun to blast their rotten limbs off their torsos and then club them to the floor. Mortally wounded Covenant will attempt to run away, making it much easier to shoot them in the back. Nothing, however, will stop the inexorable advance of the Flood. Covenant will also communicate between themselves in strange but understandable English, which serves little practical use but does increase the realism. And also the humour, when the little ones run away, arms flailing, shouting "They're everywhere!"

Control is straightforward enough. The left analogue stick controls which direction you walk in, the right which direction you look in. Anybody used to first person shooters on either console or PC will get used to this very quickly. Complaints about the X-Box's controller's STUPID BUTTON LAYOUT aside, the controls don't really hinder or help the gameplay. They're sufficient.

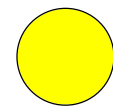
The story advances through scripted cut-scenes, like Half Life, which are granted as 'rewards' once you pass certain points. As I said earlier, it's this desire to know what happens next that kept me playing. Despite all my earlier praise, Halo has one major flaw: it's boring. Let's put it this way; the writers earned their pay more than the level designers. While the outdoor parts are

typically good fun, you will have to fight your way through miles upon miles of identical corridors and rooms to get to them. I'm not kidding; miles upon miles. I'm also not kidding; identical. It's hard to convey in type just how boring this is, or just how much there is. For every twenty adrenalin-filled minutes cruising around in a jeep with one of your marine buddies manning the machine-gun, running circles around the hapless bad guys and drilling them full of holes, you spend about an hour and a half plodding through corridors, rooms, more corridors, shooting everything you see until you get bored and just start running through. It's that bad. When all is said and done, Halo is only just above average. It has a lot of features that set it apart from others of its ilk like the variety of driveable vehicles, the beautiful graphics and special effects, and the plot - which is actually interesting - and does a lot to keep you coming back. But at the end of the day it's just too easy to get lost amid the endlessly multiplying tunnels, all of which look the same, and say, "Ah, screw it. I'm going outdoors." And friends, that is **NOT** why we play video games.

~Will Jenkins~



Halo still isn't the quantum leap in first person shooters that the rabid box-quotes and reviews would dearly like you to believe. Yes, it is polished. Yes, it is pretty and, yes, it is fun. But we've seen it all before, and taking into account the rapid increase in gaming technology, we've seen it done better.



Mellow Yellow!
(COLOUR GUIDE PAGE 40)



Let's just get one thing entirely clear right from the start of this review, the name of this game is so inconceivably weird that I'm only going to refer to it as QR for short. Okay?

Clearly someone was

having a drastic case of severe brain clutter when deciding what to call this game. But it doesn't matter because after you begin playing what is quite probably the fastest, best and most enjoyable future racer to date, you won't find yourself caring about the dubious title ... much.

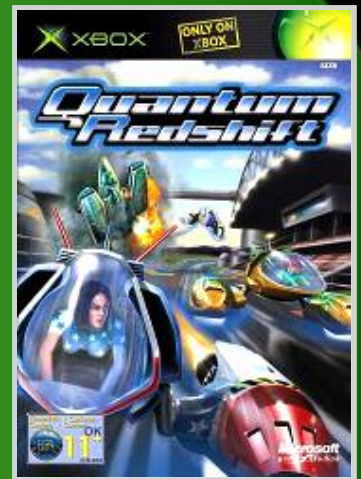
QR is another game to add to the list of Xbox exclusives which could not have been made for any other format and consequently is all the better for it. Coming from a relatively new developer who go by the name of Curly Monsters, the team behind the game included some of the original team members responsible for creating the first two Wipeout games on Psone. So it's nice to know they've made games of this type before but just because Quantum Redshift is an exclusive Xbox title does that actually make it any good? Well, the good news is that if you've played any of the Wipeout games before and were a fan of the series, then chances are you're going to love playing this. And before any comparisons with Wipeout Fusion on PS2 are drawn QR accelerates at speeds which leave Sony's offering for dust. From the moment you pick up the pad and start playing QR (especially if you're a SRAJ [Speed-Rush-Adrenalin-Junkie] like me), it's easy to tell that this game is going to be a lot of fun.

Graphically QR is

stunning to look at with expertly designed courses and gorgeous scenery, which passes by your piloted hover-craft at an incredible rate. Playing the game is a bit like the first time you remember strapping yourself into a roller-coaster with an unmatched level of anticipation. It's the thrill of the race, the insanely fast speeds you can reach on harder difficulty levels, the beautiful scenery and locations and the intense nature of "to-the-death" racing which makes QR so fun and satisfying to play.

Be fore-warned though as it has a VERY steep learning curve and if you're not prepared to stick to your lasers when selecting master difficulty you WILL crash and burn ... frequently. Personally, I relish the challenge which selecting the master difficulty offers, but this may not be to some player's liking or taste. My only other major gripe is that the CPU players can at times seem unfair as it's all too easy to lose a race on the final lap. Although this adds to the challenge/frustration even more it would have been much better if you didn't have to come first on every track in order to progress.

For a futuristic racing game there's actually a surprising amount of depth to be had in the way you can play. Do you go for

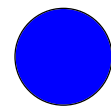


the lead at the start of a race hoping you can keep ahead of the pack or do you go for kills and try to take out the opposition?

One final plus point is the music tracks provided by JXL of 'A Little Less Conversation' fame. Although all music is of the usual house, trance and techno variety it's good to see a developer favouring licensed tracks over their own. All in all Quantum Redshift is fast, solid, smooth racing fun which plays as good as it looks and is well worth dishing out £40 odd quid for.

~Ben "Swagman" Daniels~

If high-speed, fast-paced and furious future racing is your thing, then you need to buy this game like Sony need a new ad campaign.



Brilliant Blue!
(COLOUR GUIDE PAGE 40)





The Chamber of Secrets is Harry's PS2 debut, so just what can the wizard do with 128bits?



I bought this game the same day as I saw the film in the cinema, and so as I booted the game up for the first time, the feeling of magic and excitement brought on by certain colour schemes and orchestral music, and the grandeur of a high quality cinematic production, began to grow inside of me.....

And the game kept up the pace. The opening moments of the game seemed very reminiscent of my cinematic experience, giving the impression that a quality game lay ahead.

Now my first concern was the training level. This is what kicks in first of all, and it gives you ample opportunity to get to grips with the controls. However, some fundamental elements are taken for granted. The game presupposes you know how to do a flippendo, for example - itself one button push, true, but in a way, I felt the training happened quite fast - which wasn't a problem since I had played the prequel, but I almost felt like the game assumed I had played the prequel.

Now my early thoughts on the game was that it was a reasonable adventure, seasoned with the magic that a license such as Harry Potter would imbue it with. I thought there were things in the title that showed how weird things have got in the computer game world - for instance, diagon ally was rendered extremely realistically, yet suddenly, shooting barrels in the street could reveal coins that were the same size as your physical self!! And there was also something extremely unsettling for an anti-drugs rave fan such as myself, to find that the bookshelves of the library could be searched not for books, but for "Beanz". True, these are every flavour jelly beans, but the way Harry Potter's face lights up, and the way he enthusiastically cries out: "Beanz!" is quite alarming...and what may I ask are Beanz doing in a library?! Has it all been a cunning rouse?

But these points were harmless enough, and just criticisms of popular gaming conventions. Overall, the game was shaping up to be - not ground breaking - but pleasant and entertaining enough.

However, then I got to Hogwarts. Don't get me wrong - the fight against the whomping willow proves an entertaining challenge that requires a combination of careful platform action, and out-witting of a boss - but once actually at the school, that's where a lot of the games problems really began to show, hindering my enjoyment of the title.

Now I've always disliked the idea of boarding school, and unfortunately, Hogwarts seems to end up sharing the negative connotations I have of them, for the game suddenly becomes structured around "days". Every day you have to wake up in your dorm, before running downstairs to start your adventure. It sounds like a small thing, and it would have been only a small matter, true, until

coupled with the fact that loading times frequently crop up between sections of the game and last, on average, between 20 and 30 seconds.

Imagine then, a day when you're on the Hogwarts grounds near to the Quidditch Pitch, but, the day has come to its end, so it's off to bed. You can therefore either run off to bed, or simply end the day by pressing the "X" button from the pause menu. Unfortunately, no such menu shortcut is available when you wake - and upon making your way downstairs to the dorm, you find you've got a big Quidditch match on, so it's out of the dorm, and towards the main staircase. Cue 20-30 second loading time....then you have to find your way down seven flights of stairs (granted, there is an alternative route, but it mainly consists of a similar amount of running time, albeit with snake-y death threats echoing about the passageway). Then you get to the ground floor, and it's through the door to the main foyer. Cue another 20-30 second loading time. Walk out the front door. Cue another 20-30 second loading time. Now you're on Hogwart's grounds...run across a very large field for a few minutes, until you get to the Quidditch Pitch. Enter. Wait another 30 seconds for the match to load. Do you see? We started near to the Quidditch Pitch, and if it wasn't for the day-based system of the game, we'd have been able to go straight to the game, with only the one loading time. As it were we've wasted about five minutes (and a total of 2 minutes in loading times!) getting there. You have no idea how annoying this can be.

So the game requires patience. But is it all worth it when it loads? Well, Harry Potter is an odd game because it consists of a variety of gameplay elements that are strung together by the world of Harry Potter and the storyline of The Chamber of Secrets. One of the most glorious elements of the game is getting to fly on your broomstick around the castle, and find remote places to land, in the search for lost items, that once returned to their owners, can earn you precious house points. The music is simply glorious, and coupled with the flying action proves to be a tremendously uplifting experience (unless you steer Harry straight into a wall, which kinda spoils things - hoho!) but even this is mared by the fact, the majority of the items, once found, have to be taken to the Gryffindor common room - so the problem of getting between A to B and having to put up with annoying loading times is still prevalent.

That's not my only gripe with the game, though. When you first come to the staircase, and realise each of the seven landings have classrooms to explore, you feel quite overwhelmed - what a relief it is, then, to find that a certain number of classrooms are repeated. I.e. if you open a chest and take an item from it on one floor, a few floors up, you'll find a room that looks exactly the same, and features an open chest with the item having been taken. Two doors leading to one room doesn't spoil the game, but does make it seem kinda rushed.

The Quidditch matches were great fun in The Philosopher's Stone on PSOne, but here, whilst still entertaining, they don't seem to be quite as fun-based for some reason, and an interesting new turbo feature usually results in travelling too fast to effectively steer, although you do eventually get used to it. Throwing knomes can be mildly entertaining - with you usually given specific targets to hit, the expelliarmus spell makes for some fun tennis action, and there's plenty of sneaky stealth bits in the game too, which are good at creating tension although as ever can sometimes be annoying and frustrating. Some more traditional level-type game structures also exist, and playing through these, complete with their bosses (from the whomping willow to the massive snake) does create a favourable impression of the game....but....

...my main problem with The Chamber of Secrets was, despite the accomplished production, I didn't really enjoy playing it. Flying about Hogwarts and searching for items was immensely fun - but this gameplay element was only a small part, and for the rest of the game, I was kept entertained, but not particularly enthralled. For fans of Harry Potter - you'll no doubt want this in your collection, and it isn't a bad game, but as someone who wasn't a Harry Potter fan, yet was pleasantly surprised by the way the Philosopher's Stone game won me over, I think it's very clear that whilst The Chamber of Secrets is a decent effort, EA's "The Philosopher's Stone" has already done Harry Potter better justice.

~Andrew Mehta~

Completest Potter Fans will be happy to add this to their collection, but The Philosopher's Stone was more fun, and whilst this game has its moments, overall, whilst not bad, it's not especially compelling. I can think of better ways to spend £30.

Average Grey!
(COLOUR GUIDE PAGE 40)



Dark Angel hits PS2 - It's time to whoop some ass - babe style!!!



We all know James Cameron is a geezer, and hell, we've all drooled over "MAX", but after enjoying the hit "Dark Angel" on TV, you'd still be forgiven for being a tad unsure about slapping down 30 of your hard earned English nuggets (hmm..nuggets...Ed) on a game that could easily be a shameless cash in. This is where I can help however. Anxious though I was as my debit card was swiped at the till (third time of asking - phew!), I was nonetheless sure that this was going to be a very playable game, a title that was destined to be either over-hyped by the mainstream media, or totally ignored as yet another "slap-a-license-on-an-average-game-to-ensure-sales" production.

To clarify, this is an action/adventure type game, hoping to replicate some Tomb Raider esque success in the kickass babe department, only this time there's a reliance on feet 'n' fists rather than guns 'n' tits! Think Lara Croft meets Jacki Chan and you're on your way!

After snapping open the box, only to discover the disc was missing, I was somewhat disappointed, until I discovered my house-mate had stolen it and was holed up in his room attached to his PS2 via his umbilical cord (controller to you and me), getting a head start on the gaming experience... a mouth-watering prospect considering the pedigree of Sierra and indeed Radical. Could this be another thoroughbred from their stable... or a lame donkey?

I forced Dave to re-boot and sat waiting to be astounded by what surely should be an impressive opening sequence. This was, after all, James Cameron. What more could one ask for than, say, er, a bit more than what is actually delivered(?), but no matter...things were bound to improve as the game started...yes?

Not to bore you with all the details (read the manual if you haven't seen the series) but the story quickly fits into place. Renegade mutant warrior type 'MAX' (voiced by the on-screen actress, as is 'Logan' - her surveillance specialist) escapes from soldierdom and heads off into the big wide future post a successful terrorist attack... (no, not 2000 but 2019 to be exact!) to find love and save the world from bad people - standard really.

Just for you readers, me and Dave chose not to wuss out, and got to grips with the game on 'normal mode' (there's also "I'm frightened, don't hurt me" and "I eat nails for breakfast - bring it on!" modes available).

After a bit more story you are given a mission. This is a level-based game with tasks to complete in each level. In a very Siphon Filter manner you get a list which you can check back on and which gets ticked off as you complete each bit. During the levels extra tasks are added by Logan as (in true Metal Gear fashion) you communicate from the field to a know-all

computer geek hiding in some building or other miles away from any danger - nice.

The combat system is rewardingly fluid to pick up - no unnecessary complications (which makes for a welcome change!), and for the first time since Streets of Rage we have swarms of baddies randomly running about on screen just begging for an ass-whooping, which one dishes out with ease (enjoying the extra little moves thrown up as a reward for relentless button-bashing), and of course this is all followed up by a quip of some kind from our heroine. (As a female James Bond element this works in the TV series, but gets a little tedious in-game, after a few hours, since there is a limit to what can be said to emotionally put down a game-baddie without getting repetitive).

As the levels progress one must enter into combat a little more cunningly than the gung-ho wade-in fashion of Dave, since a large number of baddies equals one REAL fight on your hands. On the plus side it also means pick-ups. "HEALTH, GIVE ME HEALTH!!!!", & "Phew, thanks just-been-nailed-type bloke-y!"

Once you die (which you inevitably will as you hone the skill of keeping half an eye on your energy) the game does have the annoying habit of putting you waaaaaay back at the start of the level - since saving is only possible at the end of each level, the lesson is - DON'T DIE!

Levels do vary from the purely 'whoop ass in a time limit' to 'sneak around - then whoop ass'! Dark Angel is both frustrating and rewarding. The game feels tedious after the first few levels, but with perseverance you'll get to the more dynamic tasks after boss baddie number one; where you'll REALLY need to perfect your 'throttle the sod' technique in order to progress with your ass in tact.

Good features include a smattering of interactive scenery (somewhat expected on PS2 titles these days) and the rage / speed / sneak modes. The bullet-time wall jumps and tumbles add a dimension of satisfaction not achieved in a lot of similar espionage based games. The 'danger' meter is another interesting screen tit-bit, turning red if enemies are around.

The graphics are indeed impressive, but no more than one would expect from the PS2, and it is a shame that there isn't a little more freedom and depth of scenery to go and find pick-ups or extra baddies to bash.

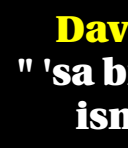
I hate to keep comparing this game to other titles - such as Urban Chaos - but it is a sad fact that there is little innovation in this genre of gaming. Nonetheless, Dark Angel promises to be a good game and delivers. It is a game where you can get out what you put in. You may choose to use combos (and trust me, you should) or you can just go through kicking and punching in a rather basic manner.

It's a fairly linear game which appeals to me since I don't think there are enough of these types of easy-to-pick-up titles available on the world's premier console (or on any current platform to be honest) but don't get me wrong, pick this up and you'll easily lose yourself for a few hours, which is well worth the wedge I'd say!

~Chaz & Dave~

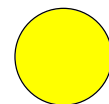


Chaz says:
"Although lacking in real story and depth, this is an excellent introduction to the action/adventure genre for all ages. For those Metal Gear hardened fanatics it also provides a welcome distraction from whatever essay you should be doing!"



Dave says:
" 'sa bit Matrix isn't it?"

Together:
"Mellow Yellow baby, yeah!"



Mellow Yellow!
(COLOUR GUIDE PAGE 40)





JAMES CAMERON'S DARK ANGEL

Gimme Extra...

James Cameron's Dark Angel offers a few innovative features as an interactive entertainment production, which isn't often the case with licensed game titles.

A trailer for the Dark Angel series is included - not to provide information to the possibly bewildered gamer mind, but actually to sell the DVD box set. Nice. Shameless, but nice!



In the 'BONUS' section of the DVD is a 'gallery' of 33, errr... absolutely pointless pictures of our heroine - fabulous!

There are also interviews with cast/creators and crew - where they relate to this mythical place and made-up characters of the future - sheesh, give us a break! IT'S NOT REAL PEOPLE! Although, if you don't know much about the story and the series, watch this for all the information you may (or may not) want.



If this wasn't enough for ya', the next bonus is an extract from the book - 'Before the dawn'. 155 pages from two chapters to be exact. It would seem that FOX aren't satisfied with selling you the game, promoting the DVD box set - but also want you to buy into the book, not that I'm against reading, or promoting products, but to call this section 'BONUS' as opposed to 'BLATANT ADVERTISING' is somewhat misleading.



AND FINALLY there is an interview with the stars as they 'do' Japan (in a promotional sense, obviously), posing for photos, answering set questions in that classic Hollywood style and referring to James Cameron as 'Jim'. Lovely. Complete drivel, but lovely.





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Many Moves...



This game does get a little repetitive, and lacks rewards early on. Perseverance is worthwhile however, since there are many different moves with which to whoop the ass of your fellow man (or mere human as is actually the case - MAX is genetically enhanced after all).

Rage with the Machine...

In-game mode 'rage' is enabled after dishing out (or receiving) a sufficient pasting - you then become super super-human. Quickly re-dubbed 'PMT' mode, this state allows one to dish out all kinds of figure-crushing pastings to any number of baddies. Careful in the use of this however, since it is a very handy tool and the bar you build up only lasts for a while before it is depleted.



Sneakers don't Run...



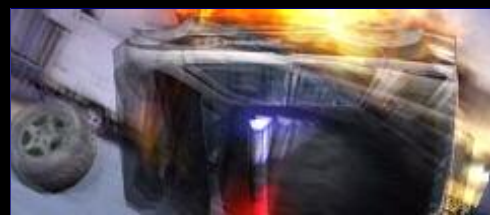
'Sneak' mode becomes invaluable during the game, so it is advisable to perfect the controlling of this particular skill in the early levels where baddies aren't so rife and don't have guns! [**HINT - use triangle to throw gun-toting baddies since this makes them drop their guns!**]. Watch that you don't accidentally use the 'burst of amazing speed' function available every 5 seconds or so, as this can truly ruin the element of surprise(!), and since re-loading a level can often take a fair while, having to start again due to arousing an army's suspicion is somewhat undesirable!

Take out the Boss...



Btw...the bosses are actually like MAX, as in mutant human warrior types with special powers. They're not literally beetles, and bears, etc. But they glow blue to make up for that.

There are five bosses in Dark Angel (but Stingray appears twice - so six then). Beetle is a little guy who appears unexpectedly about 20 minutes into the game. After losing (which you will first time around) you'll be relieved to find that you don't need to do the entire level again, merely re-attempt the boss until you kill him - phew! This is actually quite easy - merely keep your distance and then move in as obvious opportunities arise to....WOOOP AZZ! The other bosses appear at non-standard points in the game, and they all require the same tactics to be defeated - keep away, then kill! You will eventually meet 'Gecko', 'Bear' and 'Stingray' (twice) and if you stick with this strategy you can't go far wrong. As a little (painfully obvious) twist, you also fight someone you came to liberate (a bit like He-man and She-rah: Secret of the Sword then? Ed.)...but don't feel too bad, as upon defeating them you'll find....well, you'll find out....





Football mad? Then this is the game for you, reckons Atif Hussain...

Say you've never played this game before, and you think you're just gonna pick up the controller and see if you can win - it ain't gonna happen. Pro Evolution Soccer 2 is an extremely challenging game. When I first played it, I actually lost my first game - although admittedly it was just a mess about; I wanted to see how I could cross the ball, set up goals - y'know, just to get a feel for the game. There are five stars of difficulty settings, with one-star being the easiest, then two-star isn't so bad, three-star gets a little harder, and four star is definitely harder. I won't even mention the fifth star setting - you get the idea. But fortunately, you also get to select whichever star setting works best for you.

I really enjoyed the challenge presented by this game. It made proceedings all the more fun. It's a hard game, that's not easy to score goals in. It takes some skill. I had to practise a lot before I became good. Whilst the likes of WorldWide Soccer on the Sega Saturn made it relatively easy to score goals, when you play games like Pro Evo 2, the game feels all the more realistic due to the greater challenge involved.

The challenge evident in matches also makes them more intense. When you think to yourself "You're gonna win it" you still don't really know if you are or not. When playing for sometime, you'll also find the computer responds to the strategy you're using, so you have to constantly change your tactics - the computer controlled teams really defend!

The game also proves a laugh in two player mode, and yet the challenging gameplay still isn't lost. My friend and I had a game recently, and it ended up in a draw. I was really surprised!

There's a wide variety of tournaments when playing in one player mode, which keeps things interesting. You can do different things in the game - take for instance when England played Brazil in the World Cup match - well in Pro Evo 2 I had a go at this match, to see if I could avenge our defeat, and I won! This is also another thing that makes the game so appealing - you can play the teams from the World Cup and wreak revenge - like with England V.S. Argentina or England V.S. Brazil.

The game has international teams, and some of the best club teams from around the world. Teams like Manchester United, other teams from the European Side and there are also South American teams.

The game has different competitions as well such as International Cup Knockout, European Cup Knockout Tournament, African Cup, American Cup, Asian Cup, Konami - Umbro Knockout Tournament, Group League Tournaments, Round Robin Tournaments, and more. Also the numbers of the players are all up-to-date. For example, with Manchester United, Barthez is Number 1, Beckham Number 7, and Veron Number 4. The only team that hasn't got their names in is Holland, and whilst the stadiums are in the game, and modelled on their real life counterparts, they unfortunately have made-up names.

When it comes to penalties, free kicks, corners, etc, you get to choose which player takes them. This brings a bit of strategy into play, as each player has different skill ratings, and it can make quite a difference, depending on whom you choose.



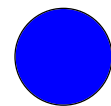
Overall, Pro Evolution Soccer 2 is a challenging game, but the challenge only makes matches all the more intense, drawing you into the gameplay, with the player's reactions to scoring reflecting your own satisfaction (they celebrate - doing aeroplanes and jumping in the air - I haven't seen anyone do cartwheels yet though!☺).

One player mode is worth persevering with for the rewards you receive. You get secret teams from completing the one player mode (one example being the 1966 England Team). I won't give much else away - I don't want to spoil it for those of you who haven't played this yet, suffice to say, the secrets don't stop there!

You can't compare it to Fifa. Fifa is soooooo easy to score goals in. I gotta admit, Fifa may have the original name but it just doesn't compare. I don't know why people like Fifa - it is good, but ever since playing Pro Evo 2 I've lost all interest in it. For Pro Evo 2 is the best football game - better than any of the previous football games I've played.

~Atif Hussain~

If you are a real footie fan this game is for you.



Brilliant Blue!
(COLOUR GUIDE PAGE 40)



Maybe it's because he was mentally scarred there the last time, that Ross is foolish enough to venture into Silent Hill once more...

The original Silent Hill will always have a special place in my head (next to wernicke's area by any chance? Ed.), a true Playstation classic which (along with Metal Gear Solid) made Konami a force to be reckoned with!

Capcom had taken the survival horror genre outta the (P.C.) hands of the "Alone In The Dark" series and re-invented it, bringing it into a new era. But as damn fine as Capcom's Resident Evil games are, they're in the likes of hollywood zombie fests; lots of gore and "cheap" jump moments. Chilling, bloody, classic and surreal.

"Silent Hill" however, took a different, darker, so, so much more disturbing path. It hit on a whole new level. The psychological level. Yes it had the same kinda mix of puzzle solving, fab cut scenes and, er...bad voice acting, but the two were radically different. Silent Hill tackled many a taboo subject. Black magic, child abuse, drugs, etc. The plot was ever evolving and you were drawn ever deeper into the game's nightmare-ish world.

I played the NTSC version to completion (good ending) and then did the same for the PAL version but never did manage to make it through the "UFO" ending (in the first game there were five very different endings, based on your success and/or failure in the game...this is also true of the sequel) so, when I heard of a sequel for PS2, I was on tender hooks. I was desperate to have this game, and preview shots, as well as so many lush (DVD) trailers had just made me hunger for this game all the more. But could Konami deliver the goods a second time around? You betcha!

The key strength of the Silent Hill games is that, unlike in most survival horror games, you're not some "special forces", "private eye", "hotshot cop", etc, guy/girl stranded in a nightmare, but rather you're an ordinary guy confused by the world he finds himself in and desperately trying to find a way out, whilst maintaining his sanity.

Harry Manson (from the first game) found himself in Silent Hill after a car crash, but you as James Sunderland (the star of this second game) are drawn there also, receiving a letter from your wife. NOT such a big deal, until you're made aware she's been dead for three years!!!

So, after the opening scene, there's a whole world of hurt and nastiness between you and escape. Can it really be your wife who's written to you and just who are these weird people you encounter and why are they here and what is their role?

Those of us familiar with the original game will welcome an old friend - the fog! Whilst it was "in" on the PSOne for technical reasons, it was SO effective at creating an atmosphere, that Konami just had to keep it, only this time it's real! The fog's no longer "flat" and dull, but so real, being thin and then thick, billowing, obscuring your vision, reaching out to you, hiding creatures of menace, etc. Konami have also kept a few other fav's from the original. The radio has been kept as an early warning system but it hisses and spits and crackles, all the time adding to the tension! The puzzles, which caused many to tear out their hair have also been kept, but along with a choice of difficulty for gameplay, also lets you select a level of difficulty for the puzzles! A very welcome move!

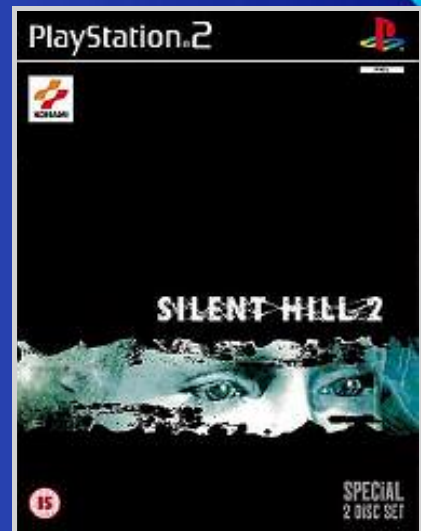
The controls (either 2D or 3D) may seem a little confusing at first to newcomers and the camera angles a little awkward, but its only as you get deeper into the game that you become aware of just how deliberate the camera angles are. You're not supposed to have ample time to spot a shambling zombie amble its way towards you (no offence Capcom!) but the horrors are hidden in the fog and the darkness. You're always aware something is out there - you can hear it scrabbling away, you can "sense" it. It knows you're there - but you can't tell where it is.

Konami have really gone to town with the graphics, here. The whole place has a filthy dirty obscene look to it. They've even added a filter to darkened scenes for a grainy look that yet further immerses you in the game. Also, whilst the creatures you encounter may lack variety in numbers, they're probably the most disturbing, grotesque and damn right sick I've yet to see in a video game! Graphically, Konami have really played with your senses! Half human in appearance i.e legs with shoes etc, all creatures have that slimy dank appearance to them, their skin glistening off your torch light. Motion capture was dropped in favour of coded animation to exaggerate the perverse movements.

I've been affected by sound effects and music in games for years, ever since the humble SID chip on the C64, but the advent of the PSX led to a new era, from the atmospheric music of Xcom (in game) to the disturbing "Baby Crying bit" in Doom, my feelings whilst playing a game were heightened by the audio. The original Silent Hill was up there, but with the added power of the PS2, Konami have been able to experiment even further using their new "S-Force" 3D sound technology, you get a full 3D surround sound experience using two standard audio channels and as I've touched on before, the effect is both wonderful and most eerie! The first game to actually give me goosebumps! Weird noises, muffled screams, shrieks, moans, scuttling noises, etc, all mess with your head. You know you're gonna have to enter that room or take a few steps more, but you dare not contemplate what you'll find upon entering, etc. Truly edgy stuff!! Also, note must be made of the music! Wondrous and in-game, second to none, Konami's musicians make fantastic use of the piano, etc, throughout. The Ambience and atmosphere created is second to none.

The game may well be re-treading familiar ground, and Konami haven't tampered with the original formula to a huge degree, but I didn't find this in anyway to be disappointing, and I didn't find myself revisiting the same locations as in the first game (a fault I did have with "Resident Evil 3"), indeed it felt good to be "home" again - I was to a degree being shepherded to where "they" wanted me to go (lots of doors, etc, are locked, boarded up etc) but this isn't a freedom-of-the-town kinda game; hell has come to visit and you're caught dead in the middle of it! You have NO idea what went on before you arrived, but it looks like the town's inhabitants came worse off - there are bloodstains everywhere, corpses lie slumped on the ground, walls are smeared with blood, etc. Whatever hit the town kicked ass and here you are, lost and confused, with a torch, a radio and pitiful weapons to see you through!

Big may indeed prove to be beautiful but you'll often encounter yourself aimlessly wandering, not too sure of what to do next, so a walkthrough may be needed by some to avoid frustration - playing detective and persevering with the puzzles and using what logic you can muster proves worthy as you come face to face with a few survivors, odd in both character and reasons



for being there. Truly - they are a mixed bunch! A devious little girl, who claims to have been a friend of your wife, a fat, simple-minded yank, a very unstable lass who likes knives, and oddest of all the sexy Maria who is a dead ringer for your late wife!

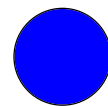
Where the gameplay and audio/visual all come together is in the effect the game has on you whilst you play. It really is the work of a few twisted minds. They've hit on the fact that we do have a darker side to each of us, and have deliberately perverted the very things we normally associate with the continuing cycle of life - i.e. safety, healing, and yes, SEX. The game really plays on your nerves, as soon as you come across the pyramid headed demon with a whacking great "Clever!". He's there, behind bars, not moving. He knows he can get you when he wants and then.....he's gone, soon to re-appear and after watching what he does to the female monsters you encounter...yuck! (Homage is even played to many a classic horror film).

This is a very adult orientated game, it has its flaws, but overall, never have I seen a game have so much attention paid to it during development! Vomit, excrement, rape, murder, psychosis, dismemberment, wicked children, brains splattered over a hissing TV set!?! It's all in here and in for a reason. NOT a game kids(!) and I for one, at the tender age of 28 am appalled at Konami for producing for the adult end of the market.

It's scary, disturbing, flawed, twisted, but overall damn compelling. I don't want to give too much away as that would spoil the game, but it truly is an unmissable experience, if your head can handle it.

~Ross Sillifant~

Well, personally, I'd like to give it a Red Hot, but the few flaws, adult theme, etc, put it right at the top of: -



Brilliant Blue!
(COLOUR GUIDE PAGE 40)



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Sony is still ardently supporting the PSOne, and Jinx is a new platformer that launched earlier this year. But is it something PSOne owners can be proud of?

The answer is a resounding yes. It could have been oh so different if a platformer of this calibre had launched onto the PlayStation around the time of Mario 64, stealing some of the limelight, as whilst Jinx is not the genius master piece Shigeru Miyamoto's Mario 64 is, I certainly haven't had as much fun with a platformer as I have with Jinx since those nights of staying up late to find stars in Mario 64.

Nonetheless, I should warn you - Jinx is far from revolutionary. In fact it's quite standard. Push blocks to open doors, jump on enemies' heads to kill them (press jump once to jump, and again whilst in the air to butt 'em with your bottom), and unlike Mario 64, you cannot go anywhere nor do anything. The gameplay is very linear. Levels are very much boxed in, as they were with the likes of Croc, et al, but in a way this only serves to make the game more impressive, as the level design has been well thought out and implemented. It's like they're working within limitations, and doing a damn fine job.

Whizzing through the early levels with relative ease, it was easy to underestimate Jinx, and I thought it might be quick to complete like Firebugs. It wasn't. But here's the clever thing about Jinx - it's really balanced. Most games see you either whizz through them super fast, or else leave you stumped and frustrated on a particular part of the game you can't seem to get past, without much pulling out of hair, and gnashing of teeth, etc. But Jinx maintains an amazing balance between letting you fluidly progress through the levels at a merry old pace, and yet still feeling that the game is presenting a challenge. Some of the levels can be very much trial and error too, meaning even the most experienced platform gamer will need to learn elements of the level's layout before progress will be possible. Clever graphical techniques attempt to make

the boxed-in levels appear more spacious than they literally are, so that some levels can initially seem a bit daunting, but once you've gotten your bearings, you soon feel more secure, able to proceed on your merry way...

...and Jinx - the main character from whom the game takes its name - does indeed proceed on his "merry way". For this is a very merry game. We've talked about pseudo individualisms in this issue's Virtual Theories section, but it has to be said that the pseudo individualisms of the graphics, music and sound just breathe so much life into this game. I first started playing on a day I had fallen ill, with a one-day tummy bug that had seen me vomit a few times. Playing this game, with its bright cheerful graphics, and merry catchy tunes really helped me take my mind off what had been up until then a quite depressing day. Even once I was better, I found the merry music in particular (and Jinx's animated sway to it) really able to incite a degree of careless merriment into proceedings, which helps make the platforming action less about "I'll do this if it kills me, dammit!" and more about "Wheeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee!! Here I go on my merry way!!! Ho-ho-ho!", which is ultimately a more fun way to approach the game - you don't get scared you're going to fall, or stressed about loosing a life so much. It's a very chilled out game, and Jinx is a chilled out Jester, with a funky hat.

When I first got Jinx, I thought it might be a game patronisingly targeted at younger PSOne players, but rather, it adopts the Mario approach of simply being a good game that should appeal to all ages, regardless of the fact it's bright, colourful and happy. I mean, we all need a bit of sunshine in our lives right? It's still not as grand a title as the pinnacle of platforming that is Mario 64, with the developers quite limited by the PSOne hardware, and areas being very much small boxed in levels (albeit very well designed small boxed in

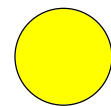


levels), but it has that same careless happy vibe to it, and whilst Jinx as a character, isn't as hip or cool as Sonic, he nonetheless makes for a much brighter, happier game than the likes of Gex 3D, which despite being accomplished, lacked that happy vibe.

Overall Jinx is exactly what it looks like - a cheerful platformer. It won't last you for ages, but it's easy to get into without being too easy to appreciate. It poses a challenge without slowing down any of the action, levels are boxed-in but well designed, and the game gives you reasons to re-visit past areas discovering extra sections, items or tasks to perform. The graphics are well polished, and despite the music getting very repetitive, it's so jolly and merry you may not have the heart to turn it off. Jinx isn't gonna change the world. It's nothing new, nothing revolutionary, and it won't go down as a classic in the history books - its been released too late in the PSOne's life for that, but at a cheap price, if you like platformers, and wish to be happily entertained for a few weeks, you could do far worse than getting this. Ultimately it's a safe buy. You can't really go wrong with this.

~Andrew Mehta~

**It's a Mellow Yellow
all round: Bright,
Happy, Cheerful,
and a safe buy for
gamers of all ages.**



Mellow Yellow!
(COLOUR GUIDE PAGE 40)



It might be the PS2 that's hogging the limelight somewhat now, but United Games certainly hasn't forgotten the PSOne, and neither would it seem have Sony, who've launched Firebugs - a brand spanking new PSOne release that I found buried beneath a load of cheap oldies in my local games shop....

Stickers. It comes with free stickers. =)

Sorry.

Just had to get that out of my system.

<Ahem>.

Firebugs sports a groovy artistic aesthetic, that leaves you wondering whether you've just purchased something extremely stylish, deserving of the same respect that Jet Set Radio's cel shading received, or perhaps, just maybe, you've purchased a product whose super deformed characters have been designed to appeal to kids. Well...there I was anyhow, standing in line for the till at my local games store, watching an eight-year-old in front of me purchase the latest Tom Clancy game, and there was me - 20 years old, buying Firebugs. "Er...I edit a games fanzine. We have to review the latest releases across all formats...so..." I explain, not knowing whether to be proud or ashamed of my purchase. For a sales person, the check-out assistant is rather re-assuring: "It's supposed to be quite good - like a cross between Wipeout and Mario Kart," he explains.

So feeling a little better about my purchase, I continued home, and once there, eagerly tore away the plastic wrapping, and opened the game case. "Wow! Stickers!" Yes. Stickers are groovy. And Firebugs stickers are both groovy and aesthetically cool, sporting the previously mentioned artistic style. "eh? A plug for Bombfunk MCs?!". I can't remember the last time I tuned into the charts. Hard Dance internet streaming, and late night Radio 1 sessions with Gilles Peterson have made me more aware of the eclectic likes of Matthew Herbert, HomeLife, The Streets....and of course oldskool Happy Hardcore, and suddenly I wondered if this was the equivalent of finding Britney Spears on a Wipeout Game. Or Xbox sponsoring Robbie Williams. =)

"Oh no," explained my mate from Finland. "They're on Sony's label. They were in the charts a few years ago, but

they've run into trouble, their new material having barely made an impression over here in the UK. It's more likely they're in the game because they need every plug they can get." Suddenly feeling ashamed for being so self conscious, I let the stickers, the soundtrack, and the super deformed aesthetic pass over me (and besides, Super Deformed is actually cool in Anime....and PVC Transformers figures. Lol), and got stuck into the game.

And do you know what?

It was fun.

For four hours.

Was it that after these four hours the game waned a bit? Got a bit boring? A bit repetitive? No. The game had me gripped all the way through. But that's my point. Four hours in and I had completed it.

Now when I was a kid, we had to wade our way through Zelda on the NES, and I STILL can't find Gannon in the Death Mountain level, and I swear I've been in every room of that darn dungeon. In fact I even have the compass so I know where Gannon is - but I can't get to him (send your tips to Andrew@game-extra.co.uk) but Firebugs...wow...four hours.

It's not that there aren't a large number of tracks - there are plenty here, it's just that the CPU characters are so incredibly easy to beat. Two weeks after owning the game, I came third for the very first time - ever. Every other time I had come first, albeit on a few occasions (probably about 10 or so) I had come second.

However, the difficulty does increase ever so subtly as you work through the last few tracks, and the initial easiness of the game lends you to complete and utter disbelief if you come anything but first. "What!?! " you'll exclaim. "This is one of the easiest games EVER, how on earth did I just come second!?!". You start to feel ashamed. Miffed even. It's like being beaten in an arm wrestle by your younger sister. Your pride is at stake. You pause the game,



and select "Quit Race". The game forces you to stare at a few screens that show your "2nd" position in big letters ...you quickly skip these to get to the screen that lets you start over. "Right! This time we do it right!" you say, and it's then that the game's really got you. Sounds intense. It can be. But five minutes later, your pride is repaired, and there's not much left to do.

So what about on two player mode!?! Well...the great thing about this game is it's immediately accessible. "Do you want a go?" I asked Julio. "Noo...I'll probably drive into all the walls or something silly..." replies Julio. "No mate...you CAN drive into the walls. You can drive up them, around them...geez...even on the ceiling!!!" But it was Risto who took up the 2-player challenge in the end. "Don't diss Firebugs. It's cool man." he said, following his first (and only) triumph over me that night. But even still, whilst 2-player mode was an entertaining distraction, it wasn't long before Risto, with a slightly crazed look about him, begun his chant for Bomberman, which still remains the best multiplayer title I own. And I got that for a mere three quid.

~Andrew Mehta~

Firebugs is a fun enough game, but over far too soon, so for £20, you might want something that lasts a bit longer.

Average Grey!
(COLOUR GUIDE PAGE 40)

Take A Closer Look



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FLYING IN THE FACE OF PHYSICS:

As a futuristic racing game, Firebugs places you in a number of surreal environments, many of which exhibit neon lights and funky textures, but besides these factors perhaps leading to an initial disorientation, it's most probably the ability to drive up walls and even on the ceiling that could lead you to dizzy moments. Relax. Once having mastered control of your racer, you don't need to go up walls if it's not your style, but for those who enjoy such reckless driving - go ahead. It's fun, and whilst in most courses doing this results in the camera twisting dizzily about, or you being able to dodge a missile, or overtake someone in a sneaky manner (or perhaps you've mis-steered, and are driving up the walls instead of going straight!?!) on one particular course, driving up a curved side, can result in soaring extremely high into the sky - curving up an invisible wall of sorts, which results in you maintaining a position on track despite your airborne antics - before crashing down... (and get this)....STILL in the lead. Not intentional we assume, and it also appears to be the only track with this quirk, but nonetheless extremely satisfying. As for all you casual gamers out there - time to tell you what you want to hear: If your steering isn't all that - don't worry. You don't bang into the sides in this race, you actually end up doing impressive loop-da-loops, so onlookers will think you're a pro showing off. =) Topper! (Actually...I preferred the Beezer...Ed.)

TRACKS >>>

There are a number of different tracks in each of the themed worlds, with the tracks varying according to which league you're competing in, and whether it's a qualifying match or the finals. The themed areas, however, are as follows >>>

LEAGUES:

There are three main leagues - Phoenix League, Aura League and Sonic League which you play through in order. Each one is that little bit harder than its predecessor, but nonetheless, never pose an impossible nor frustrating challenge, and can be completed within a reasonable amount of time.

There's also a progress report under the options menu that tells you what else you've got left to do in the game. Of course, once all the leagues have been completed, you're able to enjoy a variety of new games in the Bonus section.



Archipelago: Supposed to be a chain of linked islands, these tracks feature lots of cobblestone floor textures, and a healthy dose of plant life by the track side. Some nice red or blue tunnels too.



Sky Port: Suspended roads in the air - and extremely neon coloured roads at that.



Droid Gardens: This place features lots of thin twisting red tracks, with a few cave-entrance-esque arches and features ramps in key places. Try and stay on track.



Aerial City: Whilst the name might imply a similar setup to Sky Port, the Aerial City tracks have more in common with your parents' taste in interior decorating. Oddly enough, textures such as wood varnish, reminiscent of dining tables, and white lace, reminiscent of doilies, plus china whites, and garnish green tunnels, all appear. Well...at least on the qualifier tracks. Some of the finals are a little more tasteful, and even allow for some big air, but still things are dominated by pinks and purples. Hmm....purple...



Terrain Dunes: My personal favourite, and also featured on the video, this area, mainly composed of sand dunes, makes Firebugs seem more like beach buggy racing, and also features some funky tunnels to twist around.



Firebugs features music performed by the **BOMBFUNK MC'S** taken from their latest album "Burnin' Sneakers".

Ah-ha! So here are the two Finnish musicians (Bow and Gismo of Bombfunk MC's) who hoped backing this game might boost their profile. Is the music groovy? Overall, yes, but then you release all but two musical tracks have been composed by Ben Ackerman - one of the developers and the man responsible for sound, music, and some level design and artwork too. Pretty impressive? Well, when listening to the songs in the Firebugs Jukebox [where all in game music is accessible] Ben Ackerman's efforts seem a bit bland and repetitive - yet when actually in the race they capture the spirit of Firebugs perfectly.

As for the Bombfunk MC's contribution, it comes in the form of two tracks taken from their "Burnin' Sneakers" Album - namely "Put your hands up", and "We are Atomic". Both have traits of clubculture in them, yet sound incredibly poppy, more suitable as party music perhaps as opposed to hardcore raving. It's easy to confuse Ackerman's efforts with Bombfunk's, at least initially, thinking "Hmm...so this is what Bombfunk MC's sound like..." whilst in actual fact listening to Ackerman's work, until a distinctly Bombfunk MC's track final does actually kick in, and you find yourself humorously amused by their effort.

WEAPONS:

Weapons really do add a lot to the game, keeping you on your toes. I've never been much of a weapons person in these futuristic racers, but here I found the weapons system easy to get into, and beneficial to exploit. You start races with two empty weapon bays - one on the left and one on the right, and when you race over power cells (multicoloured balls of light dotted about the race tracks) you acquire a random weapon, which is stored in one of your weapon bays. The right shoulder button unleashes the weapon in your right bay, the left shoulder button unleashes the weapon in your left bay, so it's all very straight forwards. However, initially you'll be trying out every power-up as soon as you get it, as opposed to using them strategically, simply because you're not told what each weapon is - but rather each weapon is displayed as an icon, and it can take a while to learn what each one is. We've played the game quite a bit, however, so for your convenience, here's a run down of what each weapons icon represents:

CHARACTER SPECIFIC WEAPONS:



Character Specific weapons are colour coded yellow, and are specific to each character/driver. I play Kami most of the time, so am used to using her Ice Blades (1) - sharp things that come out of the sides of her wheels, and if used against the side of another car can send it into dizzy disarray, disorientating its driver (damn, I love alliteration! Ed.). Other weapons, however, include Gismo's Corkscrew Missiles (2) - a straight-forward weapon - literally, BOW's S.W.A.R.M. Rockets (3) which can be targeted at specific cars before unleashed, Karrie's Morning Star (4) - which rams vehicles to one side, and Zero's Plasma Cannon (5) - which slows opponents down.



OFFENSIVE WEAPONS:

These instruments of destruction are colour-coded red.



Blast Radius:

After a while of charging up, this baby unleashes a devastating half sphere of destruction....good to use when cars are all around you - effectively destroying all on screen in one fell swoop. Groovy. Also good for taking out that car just behind you, itching to over-take.



Statis Beam:

This is a really funky and powerful weapon that streaks across the screen in a glowing straight line of twisted blue and white light, taking out any enemies in front. The beam can also be charged, by holding in the relevant shoulder button, and then releasing it, as opposed to just giving it the usual tap. One thing I do find a bit miffing about this weapon is the way it has a tendency to unbalance Kami's vehicle when fired, usually resulting in my vehicle falling over backwards. Check out our video to see what I mean. *Ahh...the sheer power...I just can't handle it!! Aiiiiieeeeeee!* Btw - this weapon is awarded every time you do a "perfect lap" and are in either first or second position thus far in the race.



Leader Missile:

Beep....beep....beep...beep..beep..beep.beep.beep,beep,beep-beep -beep-beep-beep...KER-POW! You can hear the beeps of this homing missile (which automatically targets whoever is in the lead) ahead of its arrival, and boy does it send a shiver down your spine if you're in the lead. Hope to God your next power cell contains a shield, or without it, your only hope of escape (if you're in the lead) is to drive up a wall or ceiling at the last minute, in some awfully disorientating attempt to dodge it.



Time Warp:

Apparently it slows down other vehicle's cars. However, I've never had this weapon before. It's only award to those who do a "perfect lap" and yet are in third, fourth or fifth position in the race. Er...well...for the many months I have owned this game for, I have never ever come third, fourth of fifth. So it's all uncharted territory for me ya' see.

DEFENSIVE WEAPONS:

These are mainly colour-coded blue, but Worm Hole, whilst still classed as defensive, is red.



Worm Hole:

This is a weird circle that after charging up, kinda disappears, giving you a slight jump forwards. It's supposed to enable you to leap frog opponents, but you need to line up an opponent within the circle for it to prove most effective, ultimately resulting in you trading positions with them.



Shield:

A most treasured item. Get this whilst you're in the lead, and any threat posed to you (i.e. leader missile or otherwise) can be nullified. Don't worry....buddum-buddum...be happy...buddum-buddum!



Turbo:

Ah-ha! Speed burst! A great way to catch up if you're behind. Watch out for some later levels, where every single power cell contains a turbo power-up, making for some truly frenetic racing action. Altogether now: "Put your hands up. WHOOP-WHOOP. Put your hands up!" & "We ...are... atomic...!" (Oh dear God, not even the Finnish finish like that! Ed.)

SECRETS REVEALED!

So if apt players are going to whizz through Firebugs with no problems - and even the casual gamer, make steady progress over a week of 10 minute play sessions here and there, what's there to look forwards to upon completion?

ALTERNATE VEHICLE:

After so many races with a particular character you unlock a different coloured vehicle for them.

ER...IS THIS IT?

Well no....there's actually a Bonus Area that features an array of extra game modes that are opened up upon completion of various elements of the 1-player game. The thing is, you might be a bit slow in spotting their appearance, for upon start up, the game usually takes you straight to the track selection menu for the one player mode, and it's only by backing out a few menus that you are able to notice that your one player endeavours have actually opened up some brand new challenges!

BONUS MODE IN FULL:

CHARLIE'S MODE:

This is the first bonus area, and is actually playable before you've completed any of the one player challenges. It is essentially a chance to race on a track designed by one of the readers of the Official PlayStation Magazine - Charlie we presume - and whilst the track is a wee bit short, and seemingly non-spectacular, it's the time challenge, number of laps, and well balanced competing racers that make it absorbing to play. Can you maintain your lead over 10 laps? Actually....with Firebugs being pretty easy...don't answer that...

DESTRUCTOR MODE:

All out mayhem, it would seem - as an endless supply of road weapons are provided to you - AND your competitors - so watch out! Racers can start in utter chaos, with explosions everywhere, and there are moments where you have to battle to get back in the lead following a severe explosion. With 10 laps, one might think that anything can happen, but generally, the first three or so prove entertainingly challenging, whilst subsequent laps tend to induce a coy smile as you become quietly confident the race is in the

bag - streaks ahead of the other racers (finally), and enough shield pick ups, to avert any missiles that come your way.

SLEDGEHAMMER MODE:

KER-BLAM! This mode is absolute mayhem, and THIS is the sort of decent challenge you've been after with Firebugs - and it's good for wasting ten minutes or so whenever you feel the urge to engage in the Firebugs experience. It's like the Destructor mode - an endless supply of weapons, with no need for pick-ups, only now your weapons change after a few seconds, if you don't use 'em. This mode seems sheer chaos at first, and indeed, as soon as "Go!" flashed up on the screen at the beginning of the race, nearly every car blew another car up, but with skill and a bit of luck you can once again find your way to the lead. You'll need more effort to maintain pole position than in Destructor Mode, and the course is pretty groovy as well with a nice tunnel section to spin round, but if you get a string of turbos towards the end of the race, you might find yourself racing the last few laps out of the total of ten, with little or no visible competition. Streaks ahead.

ELIMINATOR MODE:

After a grace period of three normal laps, the Eliminator Mode starts to kick out the player that comes last on each lap. After a total of seven laps then, only one player is left standing, and thus proclaimed the winner. Maybe Firebugs wouldn't feel so much fun if it was actually challenging, but I tell you, this mode, despite being a good idea, and proving mildly entertaining in practise, is once again so easy that no one who has completed enough of the one player mode to unlock this will have any trouble avoiding elimination.

ICEWORLD MODE #1:

At last then - a real challenge in Firebugs. This time it's not coming from improved AI , but actually from the terrain! IceWorld brings a new dimension to play - try and drive normally in wintery weather conditions. The snow is initially beautiful to behold, but soon you'll just be concentrating on driving straight! It becomes very easy to swerve and so forth, but

the gameplay's balanced, in that, due to every collectable power up on the track being a turbo, those without the patience can merely point their car in the direction they wish to travel, and then turbo off in that direction. The turbos also provide the kind of power needed for anyone wishing to power slide. A real test of skill, control wise.

ICEWORLD MODE #2:

If you thought the falling snow in Mode #1 looked nice...prepare to be dazzled by white mist effects on this second snow track, that's essentially an ice laden fly-over. The suspended circuit features a fork in the road, allowing you to race on a short inner track or a wider outer track. Only if you've been skillful in your controls can you access the inner track, and navigate it without falling off the edge to your doom, and when you first set out you think it's gonna be a long challenging drive based on trial and error. But no. What could have potentially been a great track is far too short, looping over after the first and only corner challenge. Pretty much like the whole of Firebugs - nice to look at, a good bit of fun, etc, but only a very short-lived distraction, that leaves you wishing there was more.

Kami



Bow - Bombfunk MCs



Gismo - Bombfunk MCs



Zero



Karrie



The character artwork is absolutely awesome, and a good excuse for us to show each of the characters....



The outcome of WW2 is in your hands my son! Use your planning skills (it's just like RISK really); and try not to worry too much 'cos you'll be dead within 3 seconds!

This is very much a niche title, for strategy fiends, WW2 freaks and those who love their armour!

The biggest problem with Panzer Front is that the unprepared will weep tears of blood when they boot up, select a real WW2 battlefield, get the mission brief, maybe glance at the tactical map, and then die as soon as they move. If you want fulfilment from this title you'd better get swotting up on real tank tactics - you know, like hiding behind a wall for a whole ten minutes while what seems like the entire opposing force trundles into range.

Now when you've got to grips with the game (especially the map screen) and have sorted out how to give orders to your unit, you can get quite into Panzer Front. You've got 25 battlefields covering all of WW2, and loads of authentically modelled tanks. I would advise playing on the "Veteran" setting from the start as this provides the best controls and features more realistic damage, yet the difficulty level is not increased by selecting this setting. Also remember that in wars people do die, so write it into your tactics! Just as long as its not you doing the dying, who cares?!

The only other title that compares to Panzer Front is Hidden & Dangerous (PC, DC, PSOne), where you have a team to control and a complex tactical map to master; one that lets you plan, advance, retreat, attack etc. Also, in both games, your buddies will follow your orders in a lemming-like fashion. "Sir we are taking hits, we need to move"! Now this is all well and good if you are playing brain-washed Nazi-drones, but for God's sake(!), if you're being shot at, move at your own discretion! It is also just as easy to die from foolish misadventure and cock-ups as it was in H&D, or get lost in the vast maps.

You can engage in Russian, German or US missions, and there is also a more fantastical selection of tanks available in the form of "Turbo Tanks", which extends the life of the game a treat. You can play the missions in any order you wish, and although I would have liked to have seen a more linear story mode of sorts, such a feature would have meant pure torture because you'd be doing one mission for about four weeks and it would take about a year to finish the game....

You get some nice ordnance to toy with: Turret-mounted machine gun (a la Band of Brother's Shermans), anti-tank rounds, high explosives and your

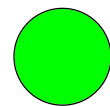


trusty binnos (Hmmn.... not really ordnance). The sights on the main guns can be hard to get to grips with (i.e. "Which bit is the cross-hair??") and fogging in the distance can cause problems when you are shelling a tank which is in actual fact behind a hill you can't see, meaning you haven't even scratched the thing.

Now from all my guff you must think I hate this game, but you'd be oh-so wrong, for I am a WW2 armour-loving tactical game fan; for all of its down falls, if you fancy seeing if you could cut it in war, this will sort out your hollywood-fuelled dreams. If you liked H&D you'll like this also.

~Justin Pawley~

Purist strat action. You'll either hate it or love it. Panzer Front conveys a WW2 battlefield well on what is now an eight year old piece of gaming kit.



Groovy Green!
(COLOUR GUIDE PAGE 40)



Have you played any of the other Psone versions of Spec-Ops, and have seen this game nestled happily on the shelf and wondered if this latest addition could be a rip-roaring third person shooter, taking you on a revenge mission against a terrorist cell? Then you really should read this review before parting with your cash...

First up, I think it should be pointed out that the title of the game would be more accurate as *Spec Oops!* It appears for some reason that the programmers have taken a graphics engine that has been fine tuned over the past three games, and dumped it in the bin, only to replace it with some half-arsed jerk-athon of fuzziness.

You start off with the basic training section, and when I say basic - I mean basic! You have to walk your little bloke along a yellow line on the floor, and then when you get to the next training point you are congratulated on your walking prowess! You then move onto the weapons training, but as all the weapons except the grenades self aim it's a bit pointless; and after a couple of grenade miss-chucks you should be able to bowl for Australia. So all you have to do is press the right buttons and follow the yellow lines - it's about as much fun as being a traffic warden!

The main body of the game is spread over the entire globe much like the other games, but the view point detracts from the feeling of "being there", and any tension is lost because the enemy AI (Artificial Intelligence) is so bad. There is an option for turning up the gore level, but with such crude visuals it seems a bit pointless.

You see things from an isometric view; there is no first person view! If you use your sniper rifle or binoculars you just get a longer

range with the isometric view but with a sniper scope or binocular shape patched over it. However there is a free view mode. Simply press the square button and low and behold an uncontrollable camera is yours! Move the D-Pad slightly to the left or right and it whooshes off at the speed of sound, you cannot see a thing!

I suppose that the crux of the matter is this: the last game, *Ranger Elite* was a brilliant little soldier-'em-up. You had control over two men and you could play co-operative mode which really made the title stand out. It was viewed from a true third person perspective and you could get first person views from the sniper rifle and binoculars. The game was set in real world environments that were challenging and felt real. You had the choice of different specialist soldiers, and if one got killed that was it until the next campaign, you'd lost him.

ALL of this has been lost in *Airborne Commando*. You feel detached from the action, the enemies are very stupid, and I also think it is slightly unrealistic to have one chap running around the world taking on whole armies.

I do feel bad about this, but I can find only one redeeming feature in this game - the mine and trip wire detection is a masterstroke! If you find a piece of land you think may be mined, you have to lie prone then slowly move about prodding



the earth with you're combat knife. When you discover one, it pops out of the ground and is made. If you happen upon a trip wire you have to find the explosive end and then adopt the same tactics as for the mines, only this time you get a code pop up in the form of control pad symbols which you then have to press on your controller within a time limit or else you're as dead as a Delta Force Operative!

You get real life weapons yes, but they all self aim, where is the fun in that? I was also proud to be given a promotion straight after training!!

So at the final summing up: a rubbish addition to an otherwise good collection of Psone Spec-Ops games. It feels like it has been rushed out in order to get some easy money out of Psone owners who are desperate for new games. All in all a waste of cash and time. Steer clear at all costs; no wonder this wasn't in the Official PS Mags - it stinks(!), but thankfully we're here to warn you!!

~Justin Pawley~

A good series ruined by a rushed out lump of dirt.

Black Ash

(COLOUR GUIDE PAGE 40)





"Here we go, here we go, here we go! We're all looking for chicks who'll bl..."**

Hooligans: Storm over Europe (a game about football hooliganism) was one of those games, that regardless of how well it actually played, was always going to be talked about, simply due to its shocking content, and would no doubt sell units on its "rated" sticker alone.

Even still, the game is original. The basic concept of the game is to build up your Hooligan army in each zone of Europe and to then maintain control using money, beer, drugs, sex and violence. It's not exactly a Real Time Strategy game (RTS) and it's not exactly a God sim either. In fact, the only games that spring to mind when I try to think of comparative titles, are, strangely enough, "The Settlers" and "Populous".

Starting with the "Pros", the game boasts some strong characterisation, led by powerful (although arguably foul & unacceptable) acted scenes that crop up as video links between the levels you play through. The in-game sound is also very good and appropriate for the setting. The game also lets you do pretty much anything to the area that your men are within; very few things cannot be broken, thrown or attacked. There's also a tutorial that is fairly explanatory and gives you a good feel of what you'll be up against in the main game - namely surly characters full of devious plans, exhibiting violent behaviour and a wily ability to get their own way. The gaming interfaces (load screens, option menus, etc...) look good and are easy enough to use. Not everyone's cup of tea maybe, but nothing ever is, is it?

It's also refreshing to see that the characters actually respond to what you tell them. None of this "give-'em-a-command-and-they-might-do-it-sometime-this-year" nonsense. If your leader starts a chant or goes across to give a rival gang a right kicking, the followers or supporters close by (or who are grouped with the leader) will at once break into disjointed, drunken song ... or alternatively start giving some rival hooligan a damn good kicking!

You can also hurl bricks. That's always a good thing. How many games allow you to throw bricks at stores or pensioners, or indeed at objects like benches and shatter them? 'EH? 'EH?! You startin' somethin'? Fink you're 'ard or somethin'? You oughtta' watch your mouth mate!

<Ahem>! And on that note, I'll move onto the cons (and sadly, there are quite a few!).

Firstly, and most glaringly obvious of all; is the fact that this game is appalling in terms of moral selection of language, video, in-game play and general all round ethos. Making excuses for it is pointless - it was made to be offensive, crude and hardcore and its pulled all that off quite well. The makers certainly were not out to make any apologies for their decision to put this sort of material into the game and why should they - it is

what they were trying to do! Of course many people (especially parents and older gamers) would argue that their choice was wrong and that this game should be sealed in concrete and dumped in the north sea (to quote Blackadder). However, the recent success of other similarly controversial titles such as the morally hollow GTA 3 on the PS2 have proved that wether or not you agree with kids as young as five button bashing their way through serious crime, death and abusive language - it sure sells copies.

However, no game should be judged purely on its moralistic content (unless writing a "moral gaming" article). Therefore, my second gripe has nothing to do with morals at all, but rather the speed at which the game runs at.

It drags. Maybe it's just me, my P.C. settings (although that should all be in order) or some force from above slowing the action down, but personally, I found the way the game played to be rather like walking through a swimming pool with weights on your feet. It takes hours to get anywhere on the map / game screen. The men just seem to move slowly whether as a group or alone. The game started to feel pretty monotonous after the excitement of the first ten minutes had worn off, so no awards for longevity, either, I'm afraid.

You rob a store, get money, shout a bit, get more popular at the local bar, then run out of cash, rob another store, etc... Many RTS games suffer from there technically being only a few things you need to do to progress onward, and if you do nothing but those things, it soon gets dull. We've all seen it happen; hundreds of tanks being endlessly churned out of a weapons plant. That is how the operation of your men begins to feel after a level or two on Hooligans.

But what about the fights? The sounds are pretty amusing, I must say, but other than that, the action is all rather slight, small, and at the end of the day, it's no Street Fighter brawler. Don't buy this game if you're looking for a violent game, because the only real up-close-and-personal violence Hooligans offers is of a verbal nature [i.e. violent language].

The opposition also kick the living sh*t out of you, no kidding. I mean, even level one is tough unless you cheat - the opposition are flooding the streets near your target (the Stadium) and getting there alive is nigh on impossible. So if you bought this game thinking you could just run rampant in the streets and raise some hell, forget all that; both the rock solid Police and the rival gangs are ready and waiting to pee all over your parade.

You don't need this game in your games collection. You won't miss it. It does contain a certain novelty value yes; and also proves quite original in many ways. It sounds nice, looks fair and the interface is acceptable. But nowadays that simply isn't the criteria for a must-have title.



You aren't grabbed, you aren't laughing until you cry and you certainly don't come away with clean ear-holes either.

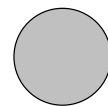
I wanted to love this game; I wanted to recommend it. Come on; the makers gave me free beer, they're a top notch bunch! But in total honesty, the best I can say is rent it, have a laugh, then take it back. Much like Constructor, this title had a lot of potential and was kinda' slick and original, but fell over on some basic issues of gameplay, lastability and monotony (tied in with shots of impossibility on certain levels).

~Miss Kim Kaze~

WIN!!WIN!!WIN!!WIN!!

George doesn't want this game any more, so we're giving it away in a competition! To enter, you must be over the age of 18, and able to think up a fitting use for the game disc if not to be used to install the game. In short, we're asking you to tell us why you want it, and the best answer gets it. Further details at the back of the mag (page 96)! And remember - sometimes when you win, you actually lose, and sometimes when you lose, you actually win. Ed.

I've seen a lot worse, but you don't need this. The game is grey in every way; it promises so much but delivers a snacky food that burns your mouth and leaves you thinking: "Er...ok. That did nothing for me."



Average Grey!
(COLOUR GUIDE PAGE 40)



Oh look! It's a new Command and Conquer game! But this time it's dressed to kill!

Smack ! Bam! It's here - the widely anticipated addition to the Command and Conquer universe. Talked about for quite some time across the various newsgroups and forums online. When the first screenshots starting appearing people started sniggering, saying: "You expect us to believe that these shot are of actual in-game graphics? Pah! You've touched this image up! We ain't stupid!". Well surprise my friends(!) - Westwood had not been deceiving anybody! Those really had been screenshots, and now, after all the hype, the game is finally with us...

With most RTS games, you're a side and you're fighting battles. So for one RTS game to be better than the other, it's really about how inventive they can be with the new units and level design and how *nice* they can make it look. It's like with online frag-'em-ups - you run, you shoot, you earn points. The only way one can better the other is by thinking of a new style of match (like team-based, capture the flag, and whatnot...) and ultimately to make it look nicer than the competition.

Generals quite blatantly atm is the nicest looking RTS on the market. No doubt. They are also being inventive with their units (being able to build a bunker on my tank which men can climb inside of and shoot out from whilst under the cover of the bunker is a really nice touch, I like that) but in the same way they are SEMI-restricted by their almost realistic approach, i.e. whereas some of the weapons are futuristic in their own sense and contain a little bit of fancy say (like the flame throwing tanks) they are largely all "believable". Generals is bound by a sense of believe-ability (whereas something like TA was set in a far off universe and allowed you to see much weirder and stranger things). So when Generals is inventive AND believable it really counts for something! :

I'm going to award Command and Conquer Generals a brill blue, as it is a fantastic accomplishment. It looks so nice and I really do have lots of fun playing it, but the main question that I'm looking forwards to finding the answer to, and which really defines whether a game is a Brill Blue or a Red Hot is: "Will it withstand the test of time?". TA, for example, when released, was the TOP of its genre. There was NO other RTS game like it. It was the first 3D RTS (even though the camera was non-rotatable) and it just pioneered. But the main thing to rant and rave about with TA is that even though it's years old now, and given the fact that it's now unsupported as Cavedog went bust, it's STILL fun to play and it still has a thriving online community who are constantly releasing new units and things for it (I went and downloaded some just yesterday, and they had been uploaded that same day!).

That question is impossible to answer at this stage though, as it all depends on what

Westwood do with Generals. Will they keep releasing upgrades and patches? Will they release, say, a monthly map pack and maybe a few new units? Or will they do their usual and make one, or maybe two, expansion packs and that's it? It's also about what "The People" decide to do with it. Will they make maps for it? Will some people band together and make a thriving community for it? Will they start making their own mods for it? Games that can be experienced to the full like TA will NEVER get old because as long as someone is still making something for it there will always be something new. The best I can claim for Generals is that it has the potential to be like that. It came with a map editor which is the first step for any game wanting constant re-playability value and I'm pretty sure I read somewhere they made the game 'mod friendly'. If that's the case and the community pick this up then you have a forever lasting game on your hands. But "The People" can be brutal. Take the Dreamcast: FANTASTIC system, totally underrated and the community just didn't take an interest (okay, so it was mostly Sega's fault, but...) and it flopped. Or take the game Oni. One of the best 3rd person action games I've ever played, it even won PC Gamer's Game of Distinction Award - yet still "The People" somehow managed to just overlook it. It never became much. When I meet people today who haven't played it I'm like: "(!!!)Nowadays it's only £10/£20 quid in a bargain bin! GO GET IT YA' FOO BEFORE I THROW YOU HELLUVA FAR!"

But I suppose you're more interested in Generals ... well, it has that something. It's very polished, looks fantastic and plays well. The little details everywhere just merge together to make one big sticky ball of classness. Someone, somewhere, will disagree with EVERYTHING I have said, because there is ALWAYS one (even if you Red Hot something, there's still one). One of its biggest problems is that should I want to say to someone "Go buy this game straight away!" I probably can't as they don't have the system specs for it, and upgrades aren't cheap. It's easy with Dreamcast or Saturn games, as those consoles cost about the same as a game does nowadays (side track: aren't GBA games SO over priced?!?!) but with next gen consoles and PCs it's rather a hard call to make. Some people who love RTS games for example may complain about the C&C style control system (left click select, left click initiate command) for example, simply because they like the Craft style games for its control system. But many people complain about the Craft style of games too because they like the C&C style ones, so go figure (would be nice if there was an option one day to switch between the two).

But Generals is nonetheless fun to play, so you'll come back again when you're next bored. Also, the game tech is forever advancing as you go through, with each mission offering bigger and better units and weapons. You'll want to progress just so you can see what the next



new toy will be. Also, as your Generals' Rank goes up, you get to purchase new things. For instance, you can upgrade your artillery strike to 24 shots instead of 12 - also *new* things start appearing in your Generals menu which leaves you with actually rather hard-to-make decisions of whether you want to upgrade something you already know about or whether you want to try out something completely new which you're not used to. The game does build up an element of anticipation wondering what's going to come next, which is just like wondering what Santa's going to bring. But some missions are hard and will probably take a few attempts, and then you end up the other way, feeling like: "Darn it, I'm going to do this mission! I will, I will, I will!"

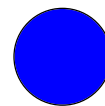
Good games are naturally fun, so it's hard to put a finger on what makes Generals fun, but besides the satisfaction of seeing your own tactics and strategies win out, and the fun of having new tech toys to play with, Generals is fun to play because of the varied styles of level. Some have you running about with your troops blasting things, some have you sneaking about stealthily. Also unexpected things keep happening, like the first time I saw a train track I was like "Oh! That's nice." and ran over the fence with my tanks and started going across the track to the other side. Then, all of a sudden, this train comes storming down the track and crashes into my little army blowing most of them up(!) :P

To all those with the processing power I suggest you go get this game unless RTS games really are not your style. Still, if you have disliked RTS games in the past, this may well be the one to convert you!

~Dave Burford~

Take A Closer Look

If you have the system for it, go buy it!



Brilliant Blue!
(COLOUR GUIDE PAGE 40)





:::REAL TIME STRATEGY FOR BEGINNERS:::

Taking into account the fact that no one seems to read manuals nowadays (lol) - you may feel a little strange at first - but it's all about getting your head around the fact that with RTS games, you point and you click. That is your basic control system (completely forgetting about things like grouping your units etc). With RTS games, the hard work goes on inside your head - deciding where to move units and what they are going to do, etc. Planning in realtime if you will. You just translate that into "pointing" and then "clicking". If you were playing a game where you WERE a tank, you would have to navigate the terrain, not crash into objects or anything and all that monkey. With an RTS, you are not a tank, but you order a tank to do something. If you tell it to move then the tank driver worries about how to get there and avoids any obstacles independently, so there isn't a lot to figure out. When you select a unit, the toolbar changes to reflect what that unit can do (as with anything you select). When you hover over an icon it will tell you what it means. Maybe it's move or attack. Also it will display the name - something like: "(a)ttack" - the (a) signifying that if you wish, you can press the "A" key on the keyboard to select this ability rather than clicking on the icon. Depending on what you're doing, your mouse cursor changes to reflect what is about to happen. For example, if you hover over a unit, it will give you a square cursor to say "Yes, you can select this". If you have one selected and you're hovering over terrain it will be a green cross-hair type cursor to say, "Click here and I will move here." (or it will have a red circle if that terrain is not passable / reachable) and if you hover over an enemy with a unit selected, then it will give you a red version of the move cursor to show that you are about to initiate an attack command if you click there. All these little hints make it very easy to get to grips with (and is a basic thing belonging to all RTS games - it's amazing how much information a simple cursor can relay ;P). An average person should take about five minutes to figure out this cursor system as it's so simple. The training mode will teach you the basics of play and it does it in simple terms. There's nothing really complicated in the training mission. So basically, as long as you know how to use a PC (i.e. press a key to make an input and move your mouse to move a cursor) you should find it pretty easy to slip into. Just imagine being in your windows environment, click an icon to select, and then imagine (requires a vivid imagination!) that when you click somewhere on your desktop your icon walks off to that point. It really is that simple :).

TECHNOLOGY TREES

Tech Trees are a system used by most RTS games in one way or another. As you advance, more gets offered to you. When you are hacking apart the games (hehe) and making your own levels or whatnot you find the levels have a tech level property, usually with a max of 10, with each level offering you more of the available units as it gets higher ya' see. Thus the tech level. So it's not unique, but the point is you still want to see what THIS game is going to offer you next. Being new and the latest and with everything looking so nice, you generally have high expectations of it, and by the end of the game you expect some pretty decent looking super weapons. The kind like in TA - when you fire off a nuke and suddenly everything explodes and you can't help but chuckle at the carnage you just caused XD. So far, Generals has not disappointed me - my latest addition being this super tank with two very big barrels and optional extras to build on it, be it a bunker (which 5 marines can get inside and fire out on things) or a chain-gun turret, etc.

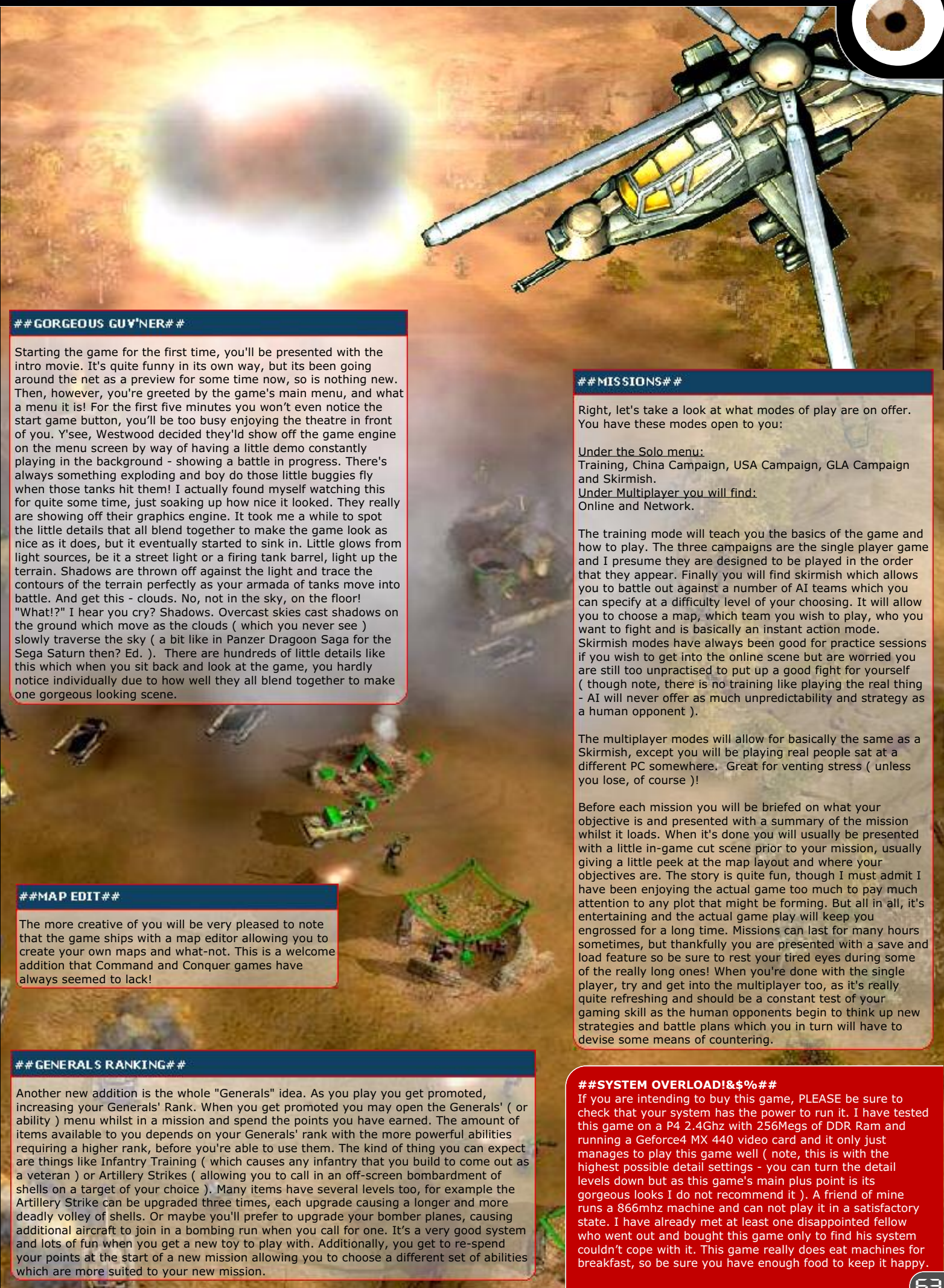
CONTROL HQ

Any Command and Conquer veteran should be right at home with how the game plays. The basic controls haven't changed. Left click selects, left click issues commands, right click de-selects. Grouping is done in the original Command and Conquer way with Control & Numeric to group a selection of units and then just the Numeric to select the group. They've borrowed some ideas from other games as additions though which I'm very happy to see. Double-clicking a unit selects all of that unit type. Pressing a number to select a group once selects it, twice centres the screen on it. As far as the build menus go, well, they've jumped off the traditional Command and Conquer style and gone for the now more commonly used style. No longer do you have one menu with all your units and buildings available for building listed. Now the menu (which is now on the bottom of the screen instead of the right) changes its options depending on what you have selected. Buildings are built by units (much like in the Craft games or Total Annihilation) rather than one construction yard and to build units you select the corresponding building (like a barracks for building infantry) and you can queue up the build order (exactly like in the Craft games). I'm not sure how some of the diehard Command and Conquer loyalists will take this, but personally I like it. I was always rather fond of the original Command and Conquer way, but this is by no means a "bad" change and I'm quite happy with it.

THREE FACTIONS

Generals revolves around three sides: China, USA and the GLA. The first two are self explanatory, the last you may not be familiar with. GLA stands for the Global Liberation Army, and are basically the terrorists who play the role of "the bad guys" throughout the game. Each side has its own campaign to play, with each successive mission getting slightly harder and pushing you further up the tech tree in good ol' Command and Conquer style. But in many ways Generals has began to walk a slightly different path to the other Command and Conquer games, the most noticeable change being the ability to upgrade units and abilities. The various craft games (e.g. Warcraft, Starcraft, etc) are famous for such a system - build a research centre and upgrade your units etc, etc. But it's not so familiar to Command and Conquer players. The various upgrades are found in different buildings for different units, there is no one research centre as some games may offer. For example, China's War Factory boasts the Chain Gun upgrade allowing Chain Gun weapons to do +25% more damage. Some die-hard original Command and Conquer players may raise an eyebrow at this, but really, it's a good thing! Trust me.





GORGEOUS GUY'NER

Starting the game for the first time, you'll be presented with the intro movie. It's quite funny in its own way, but its been going around the net as a preview for some time now, so is nothing new. Then, however, you're greeted by the game's main menu, and what a menu it is! For the first five minutes you won't even notice the start game button, you'll be too busy enjoying the theatre in front of you. Y'see, Westwood decided they'd show off the game engine on the menu screen by way of having a little demo constantly playing in the background - showing a battle in progress. There's always something exploding and boy do those little buggies fly when those tanks hit them! I actually found myself watching this for quite some time, just soaking up how nice it looked. They really are showing off their graphics engine. It took me a while to spot the little details that all blend together to make the game look as nice as it does, but it eventually started to sink in. Little glows from light sources, be it a street light or a firing tank barrel, light up the terrain. Shadows are thrown off against the light and trace the contours of the terrain perfectly as your armada of tanks move into battle. And get this - clouds. No, not in the sky, on the floor! "What!?" I hear you cry? Shadows. Overcast skies cast shadows on the ground which move as the clouds (which you never see) slowly traverse the sky (a bit like in Panzer Dragoon Saga for the Sega Saturn then? Ed.). There are hundreds of little details like this which when you sit back and look at the game, you hardly notice individually due to how well they all blend together to make one gorgeous looking scene.

MAP EDIT

The more creative of you will be very pleased to note that the game ships with a map editor allowing you to create your own maps and what-not. This is a welcome addition that Command and Conquer games have always seemed to lack!

GENERALS RANKING

Another new addition is the whole "Generals" idea. As you play you get promoted, increasing your Generals' Rank. When you get promoted you may open the Generals' (or ability) menu whilst in a mission and spend the points you have earned. The amount of items available to you depends on your Generals' rank with the more powerful abilities requiring a higher rank, before you're able to use them. The kind of thing you can expect are things like Infantry Training (which causes any infantry that you build to come out as a veteran) or Artillery Strikes (allowing you to call in an off-screen bombardment of shells on a target of your choice). Many items have several levels too, for example the Artillery Strike can be upgraded three times, each upgrade causing a longer and more deadly volley of shells. Or maybe you'll prefer to upgrade your bomber planes, causing additional aircraft to join in a bombing run when you call for one. It's a very good system and lots of fun when you get a new toy to play with. Additionally, you get to re-spend your points at the start of a new mission allowing you to choose a different set of abilities which are more suited to your new mission.

MISSIONS

Right, let's take a look at what modes of play are on offer. You have these modes open to you:

Under the Solo menu:

Training, China Campaign, USA Campaign, GLA Campaign and Skirmish.

Under Multiplayer you will find:

Online and Network.

The training mode will teach you the basics of the game and how to play. The three campaigns are the single player game and I presume they are designed to be played in the order that they appear. Finally you will find skirmish which allows you to battle out against a number of AI teams which you can specify at a difficulty level of your choosing. It will allow you to choose a map, which team you wish to play, who you want to fight and is basically an instant action mode. Skirmish modes have always been good for practice sessions if you wish to get into the online scene but are worried you are still too unpractised to put up a good fight for yourself (though note, there is no training like playing the real thing - AI will never offer as much unpredictability and strategy as a human opponent).

The multiplayer modes will allow for basically the same as a Skirmish, except you will be playing real people sat at a different PC somewhere. Great for venting stress (unless you lose, of course)!

Before each mission you will be briefed on what your objective is and presented with a summary of the mission whilst it loads. When it's done you will usually be presented with a little in-game cut scene prior to your mission, usually giving a little peek at the map layout and where your objectives are. The story is quite fun, though I must admit I have been enjoying the actual game too much to pay much attention to any plot that might be forming. But all in all, it's entertaining and the actual game play will keep you engrossed for a long time. Missions can last for many hours sometimes, but thankfully you are presented with a save and load feature so be sure to rest your tired eyes during some of the really long ones! When you're done with the single player, try and get into the multiplayer too, as it's really quite refreshing and should be a constant test of your gaming skill as the human opponents begin to think up new strategies and battle plans which you in turn will have to devise some means of countering.

SYSTEM OVERLOAD!&\$%

If you are intending to buy this game, PLEASE be sure to check that your system has the power to run it. I have tested this game on a P4 2.4Ghz with 256Megs of DDR Ram and running a Geforce4 MX 440 video card and it only just manages to play this game well (note, this is with the highest possible detail settings - you can turn the detail levels down but as this game's main plus point is its gorgeous looks I do not recommend it). A friend of mine runs a 866mhz machine and can not play it in a satisfactory state. I have already met at least one disappointed fellow who went out and bought this game only to find his system couldn't cope with it. This game really does eat machines for breakfast, so be sure you have enough food to keep it happy.



Whilst you're unlikely to find **Moonbase Commander** on the UK's highstreets, Will Jenkins explains why, for those into pure strategic action, it's well worth tracking down an import copy online...

There's something about Moonbase Commander that makes me think of Worms. Everybody remembers Worms (I remember Gorillas in Qbasic myself. Ed.), or they ought to, and everybody remembers how well it bonded simple design, compulsive gameplay and deep strategy into one cohesive whole. Worms was straightforward enough for even the most crack-addled, slum-dwelling scrolling-shooter fan to understand (Did you just call me crack-addled!? What does that mean!? I'll let you off the slum-dwelling thing though, 'cos my bedroom does need a tidy! Ed.), but its various well-balanced weapons and random terrain meant that to truly master it would require months of training. In a monastery. In the Alps.

The point is that it was fun. Moonbase Commander does a square job of reaching the balance that Worms had, requiring once again the skill to aim and shoot, to calculate trajectories in the face of wind, and also the ability to plan and strategise. Simple to understand but difficult to master, it's an engrossing game that will happily consume all of your free time if you let it.

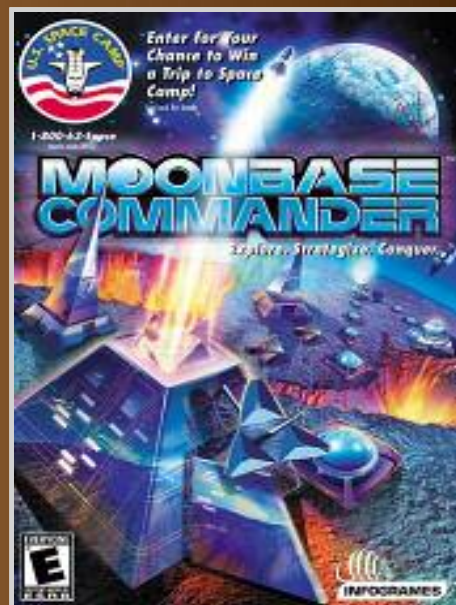
It's a top-down strategy game. It's unashamedly two dimensional, but it's still a nice looking game. Its cartoonish simplicity is strangely endearing, and even low-end systems should have no trouble running it. Each faction within the game (there are four, but they're functionally identical) has a specific style which applies to its units and its interface. The music is a

forgettable techno beat that quickens its pace whenever there's a fight afoot, and the sound effects are as simple as the graphics - rockets whoosh, explosions kerplode, and virii make computer noises. The whole game uses easily recognisable visual and audio symbols which is what makes it so easy to understand, but don't be fooled - there's more than enough complexity beneath the surface to give it long-term appeal.

It is predominantly a multiplayer game, but finding opponents online can be tricky. It hasn't had a UK release, and it seems nobody in America bothers to play it much. Gamespy Arcade is a good bet, but even then be prepared to not see anybody at all in the Moonbase lobby. The best method is to arrange to play with a friend, and then pick up any extra players who might be lurking in Gamespy.

Even if you can't get a match there's still a good single player mode. You're presented with a series of challenges, some of which are stand-up fights against the AI (Artificial Intelligence), others with certain themes. The AI is quite devious and will introduce you to tricks you might not have thought of. It's certainly no pushover and, in a radical move, doesn't seem to cheat either.

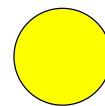
The one way in which the game falls down is the fact that it's perhaps a little too well balanced. Two player games with equal opponents can last for dozens and dozens of rounds and they can get a little tedious as your two



respective war machines lock into synchronization like two cogs, each of you unable to break out of your entrenched position, giving-and-taking the same piece of territory over and over until one of you screws up or has a sudden moment of genius. This is easily solved by simply roping in a third player (real or AI) to introduce an element of instability. The only hurdle that remains to prospective Moonbase Commanders is getting hold of it, but as it's only \$15 in America, importing it would make it the same price as a budget game in the UK.

~Will Jenkins~

It's a breath of fresh air, a game that will remind you of the good 'ol days when it was all about the gameplay. This doesn't come on six discs complete with pewter figurine and won't bring your system to its knees. Recommended.



Mellow Yellow!
(COLOUR GUIDE PAGE 40)



The question you have to ask yourself is this; which is more important? Hygiene or social happiness?

Do you go for a quick breakfast in that short, defining period between the alarm bell's peel and the ride for work's arrival? Or do you hop in the shower and stroke the cat? These scenarios and many, many more await your micro management expertise in the The Sims Unleashed (the fifth official expansion pack building on the original title).

As a fan of the original Sims game and an avid player since then, it seemed obvious that not only was I going to review this add-on pack, but I was going to like it. This automatic assumption couldn't have been sillier though; I deliberately didn't purchase 'House Party' or 'On Holiday' because they didn't grab my attention as bringing anything really new to the game that was of interest to me. So Unleashed had to be better than 'just another add-on pack'. It had to renew my world.

As a cat owner, pets appealed to me as a new way to be 'addicted' to the game play. To be honest, that's what the Sims has always been about if we scratch beneath the glossy surface; addictive game play. You find yourself forgoing mealtimes so that your Sims can eat, or failing to go out on an evening because you're busy setting up your Sim with that elusive date he or she needs in order to get a family friend and therefore, a better paid job, and if you're thinking all this sounds sad, you obviously haven't played The Sims before, for anyone familiar with the franchise will already know just how addictive the whole experience can be.

So what about this add-on pack, then? Well, clearly it gives you a truck-load of new objects and options. Pets, untamed animals, new shops, the ability to create your own shops/commercial lot, and lots of other little treats.

So we have more objects and options than ever before. You can have kittens playing Unleashed - literally (at least your virtual cats can - Alex)!

But that's not all. Five new career tracks sporting fifty new job titles between them, plus new ways to make cash which include growing your own garden produce and canning some (or all) for sale. Alternatively you could just eat healthily but who wants to do that when you can order pizza, 'eh?

Take your pet into town to get him trained by the professional, sick your dog onto an annoying neighbour, buy collars and squeaky toys or just laugh as your two dogs and cat get into a comical, cartoon-like dust-cloud battle outside by the bins with the local racoon pack leader; a fierce and hilarious character who will...I won't spoil it for you.

Your day disappears into the world of the Sims. When they eat, you become hungry; but typically will forgo food in order to get your

Sim to bed in time to be up for work the following morning. You just want one more charisma point to get that next job promotion, and so there you'll be, into the small hours ... trying to get your Sim to stand in front of the mirror and rehearse.

Why bother? I have the original?

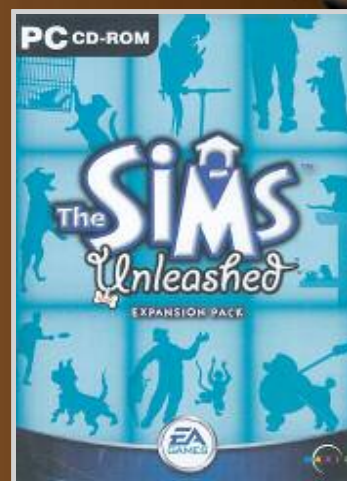
If this is you (i.e. you have the original, and don't see why you need an expansion pack) then firstly you need to realise what the Sims actually is. It's a virtual world where you play God, choosing what happens to who and effecting the lives of your Sims. Therefore, God needs to have the very latest in sim-pleasing and assisting technologies; and the original game simply doesn't have that many objects, options or careers for your Sims to get involved in/with. You need Unleashed as opposed to Hot Date or House Party because for the first time, a Sims add-on pack has taken a giant leap forward rather than a stumble. If I had to pick any single expansion pack to own of this game, Unleashed would certainly be it. The concept of pet buying and rearing has changed the Sims forever and definitely for the better. The only test will be of you; can you handle everything, or will all your bars be red?

Ever since Hot Date, the Sims add-on packs have been much more dynamic and trusting in design. Calling a spade a spade, Livin' it Up/Large, House Party and the Deluxe Edition (The original game combined with Livin' it Up) were just large cases containing more skins, jobs, tiles, textures, items and objects. House Party at least brought to the boil the concept of 'bringing new ways for your Sims to live'. Only in Hot Date did we see new aspects to the game begin to appear (going Downtown on dates) and On Holiday compounded that with being able to take your Sims away somewhere nice. Hot Date was the first Sims add-on pack to take you beyond the neighbourhood and into a new playing realm; in this particular case, Downtown.

But Unleashed really has transformed the face of the neighbourhood as well as adding Old Town to your off-neighbourhood experiences. Your neighbourhood has become a town, a network of eight neighbourhood screens with 40 lots. Every aspect of the game has been added to and changed with this add-on pack, which is why I recommend that all Sims gamers purchase this particular add-on without delay.

Newbie?

If you've never had any version of the Sims before, but think you might like to try your hand at a micro management game, I still recommend getting Unleashed with your copy of Deluxe Edition or the Sims original. Why? See how big your Sim world can really be. Start as you mean to go on, learning how to shop and how to carefully balance the life of your Sim.



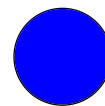
Beyond pathetic?

What about if the Sims has never appealed to you? You're one of those people who think the game is played by five year olds and mothers; surely all the serious, teen to adult gamers are busy fragging each other with rail guns, not trying to score with the local beauty queen on the Sims?

Well, you'd be wrong. Dead wrong. I am convinced that anyone, if they just opened their mind to the possibility that it could all be quite a good laugh, can enjoy the Sims. However, if you are determined to maintain your masculine image as the frag emperor, death-from-above or all-round-rock-hard-Jedi-master-of-death-match goreplay, the Sims Unleashed probably doesn't have enough changed material from the original game or previous add-on packs to change your mind. If this is you then wipe the kibbles off your visor and walk away. But never fear; Doom III isn't too far away! In the mean time while you're waiting impatiently, the rest of the world will be enjoying the Sims Unleashed.

~Miss Kim Kaze~

This is a truly amusing, absorbing and fun game, and only the die hard, 'fun-is-for-pussys' sort could fail to chuckle at it.



Brilliant Blue!
(COLOUR GUIDE PAGE 40)





O riginally expected for the N64 under the name "Dinosaur Planet", this title fell off the N64 release list only to re-appear as a GameCube title with the Star Fox licence added to it. Its also Rare's first and last GameCube title now that they've been bought by Microsoft. So what has the addition of Fox McCloud done for the game? Has it brought something new to the Star Fox universe and added to the gameplay, or was it simply done to give the game more hype and boost sales slightly? Franklin Hughes, from Cube-europe.com tells it like it is.....

We all heard the rumours that this game would be as big as and similar to Zelda, with up to eighty hours of gameplay first time round, and would span two Gamecube discs, but upon opening the box we can certainly say it only comes on the one disc. But what about how the game plays? You must take the role of Fox McCloud to find four magical SpellStones to stop the planet from blowing up and six Krazoa Spirits to bring the planet back together and restore peace....

StarFox Adventures sports some of the best real time graphics seen on the GameCube so far. The worlds are all full of detail and life and very vibrant with some amazing scenery and detailed textures that all come to life with brilliant lighting effects, whilst the fur effect used to render the fur on characters such as Fox and Krystal will make your jaw drop with amazement.

Yet if you go into this game expecting a long hard epic adventure then you will be very disappointed. The puzzles are very easy as is the game on a whole. If you do get stuck you can call on Slippy for tips, sometimes he'll keep them a bit vague leaving you to figure it out, but more often than not he flat out tells you what to do and spoils it. The game itself is totally linear which means you can't really go off and explore the world before you if you get bored or stuck. All you're doing is moving from one objective to another, find SpellStone, return SpellStone, find Krazoa Spirit, return Krazoa Spirit and repeat. In the beginning you will think that the game is very big as it will take some time and work before you find Fox's first major item- a SpellStone - which you must then return to its Force Point Temple, which again takes a lot of time and play. After that you must then find Fox's first Krazoa Shrine to free a Krazoa Spirit and then return it to the Krazoa Palace and this too will take some time. But after that you just see the rest of the game fly by. There are four SpellStones, two of Fire and two of Water and two Force Point Temples, one for fire and one for water. So after you've been through each temple with the first stone you'll fly through it with the second.

The combat system tries to be similar to that of Zelda on the N64 with a few flashy combos thrown in, but this makes it just far too easy and dull. Once you've your staff, if an enemy is nearby you'll lock onto him, and whilst landing your very first hit might take some timing,

once done, all you have to do is continually "bash" the A button to start a combo and finish him off. Pointing the control stick in different directions makes Fox do some fancy moves and combos but a lot of these, although cool to look at, are in fact weaker than the standard A-bashing combo. This leaves battling SharpClaw enemies feeling very dull and almost like a chore. After your first few fights, every time you see another SharpClaw enemy, you'll be like: "Oh, no, here we go again!" There's really no skill involved in the combat, except with landing the first hit, and the only time battling feels like battling is when you come across a boss. It's just a shame there are so few of them. When I came across the first boss I really enjoyed fighting it and trying to figure out what to do, and couldn't wait for the next!

There are five Arwing levels in the game (i.e. flying sections), but you'll have to play some of them a few times during the course of the game. These prove a great little break from walking around on the planet and are used to transport Fox between the main planet to one of the four fragments of planet that have broken off and are floating in orbit. These stages are great and may be a bit of a teaser for Namco's forthcoming Star Fox Armada. However they're very short, very easy and have little variety from each other which is a shame. Also Rare have dropped a few of the Arwing's abilities from Lylat Wars. Gone are the charged-up laser, target lock, somersault and 180° degree flip (but there is no "all-range" in which to use that one anyway). This seems to take away from the Arwing stages, especially for those of us who remember Lylat Wars and will instantly know how to get to grips with Arwing controls (as they feel so similar to those of Lylat Wars).

The storyline starts off good and looks to develop well as you go, but (there's always a but) ends very poorly. I don't want to spoil anything so I won't go into detail but the game's ending was very fast, not exciting and comes nowhere near to even equalling expectation of what may happen. It's like little or no thought or imagination was put into it. Like the developers came in one day said: "What can we do with the ending?", and quickly knocked it together in five minutes. Another thing that spoils the game is when you need to find something new to continue to the next part of the game, say an upgrade for your staff, you are basically told where you can

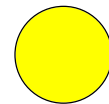


find it or just given it at the point that you're going to need it as is the case with the money bags. Also there's no searching for maps - you can actually buy the maps for all areas in a shop. All you have to find is the money, so you could have the map for an area long before you ever get to go there. When you reach a point in the game that allows you to take the Arwing to a new area in orbit of the planet, you'll need to find fuel cells for your Arwing, but if you don't feel like searching you can just go and buy them. It's things like this that make the game too easy, and take away a lot of gameplay in terms of exploring.

This game had potential and could have, no - **should have** - been a classic. It had been in development for what seemed like forever and on playing the game I can say that maybe it still needs more development time, as clearly too much time was spent on making the game look good. Not enough time was spent really thinking about the story or the gameplay in my opinion as should have been the case. The game is nonetheless beautiful to look at and the controls easy to get to grips with, but unfortunately these factors are overshadowed by the unchallenging gameplay and less than gripping story. It was a great idea but although it took so long to come out, I have to say, it does feel very rushed in the end. Rare most certainly did not leave us with a classic but a very mediocre game that is far below the standard we expect from them. If this is a taste of how their other projects were going, all graphics and little substance, then maybe selling Rare was a good choice for Nintendo to make.

~Franklin Hughes~

If you're looking for a quick piece of enjoyment, SFA could be it, just don't expect too much.



Mellow Yellow!
(COLOUR GUIDE PAGE 40)



Met+roid (pron. meh-troid) noun
 Intergalactic space-born parasite with the
 unique ability to drain energy from anything,
 including living creatures...

Back in 1989 a game with an unusual name was released on the NES. The game had you controlling female bounty hunter Samus Aran, who looked like a crazy-legged foetus. The game was to be the first in a series of classics. The game was of course, Metroid, the brain-child of the Gameboy's inventor (Gunpei Yokoi). Fourteen years and several two-dimensional sequels later, the first 3D representation of the game is released, but how well does the gameplay-defining mix of exploration and platforming translate onto the GameCube? Will we ever get to see Samus' face? And is it worth stealing from your Grandmother to pay for the game? All will be revealed.....*

First off, I cannot stress enough, that you can't really categorise this game as a First Person Shooter (FPS), as the game is more about exploration. Sure, there are plenty of enemies to shoot, but they play second fiddle to the main style of the game. Metroid: Prime has created its own sub genre - the First Person Explorer. Not since Mario 64 has a game made such a good transition from 2D to 3D. Everything that made the earlier Metroid games so great remains. It's not every day that a game as good as this comes out for a console, with gameplay to die for, graphics to make you wet yourself and controls that will soon have you kicking space pirate ass. What more could you want? Uni-cycling Alsations?

Controlling Samus is a piece of cake once used to the simple controls. You'll soon find yourself getting straight into the action - jumping form a platform to dispose of a swarm of deadly insects, only to then be attacked by an invisible alien who jumps down from the rafters like some sort of wire-fighting kung-fool, who subsequently feels the painful part of your "Wave Beam Cannon". This is Metroid Prime. The most beautifully crafted masterpiece to hit any console in a long, long time. Throughout this whole game you will be stunned by the array of graphical effects employed, whether it be the wormhole-type heat distortion that follows your missiles, or the array of different visor views you have, this game takes eye candy *TO THE MAX™*.

But as we know, eye candy doesn't make for a good game on its own. You need gameplay, and thankfully, Metroid has droves of it. Ever wondered what that gooey stuff on the Metroid disc is? It's gameplay - Metroid oozes it. Metroid Prime does not only ooze gameplay, but is like a sponge - a gaming sponge - for once you start to play it you will be so totally absorbed by it, you could just shrivel up and die without noticing (health hazard: sponges do this to you. Try using flannels in future, for softer, smoother looking skin. Ed.). Whilst playing, you ARE Samus. You see through her eyes - so much so, that occasionally if the lighting is right, your face will be reflected on the visor. Or when you use the X-ray visor, you can see all of the bones in

Samus' on-screen hands. My favourite effect is that when Samus is in low light, her suit has a gunmetal silver colour, but as the room becomes better lit, it gets more colourful. It's neat little touches like this that draw you right in to the game. The game ain't no push-over either, it provides you with a meaty challenge, filled with some huge bosses and there is plenty to collect once you have finished the game too.

Since finishing Metroid: Prime I have had a bit off an identity problem. I sometimes answer my name as Samus, and it even went as far as me trying to roll into a vague ball shape upon seeing an air vent the other day, but this just led to someone thinking I was having some sort of deadly stomach cramp, and calling an ambulance. Let that be a warning to you all!

If you are worried about tedious, fiddly, frustrating platform jumping sections in this game then fret no more. The game has near-perfect jump physics meaning you'll virtually never miss a jump or jump too far, and if that wasn't enough, later on in the game you get a double jump that makes it even easier.

Not since the legend of Zelda on the N64 has a Nintendo game managed to combine such stunning graphics, with such sublime gameplay that will suit anybody down to a T. Regardless of how much time you spend playing the game at a time, it will always be an enjoyable experience, whether you play for half an hour, or 3 hours at a time. It's more of a "sit-down-and-get-absorbed" game than a quick arcade blast, true, but is nonetheless extremely appealing. You can play the game as you like, with the freedom to either run away from most enemies, or take them on. You never feel like you are being forced through the game, but rather, you always feel like you are doing what you want to.

It's not a FPS. There's no multiplayer. It wouldn't really have worked either due to the combat controls being pretty much: lock-on, strafe around, and dodge. Nor should you expect the usual FPS conventions such as stealth sections. The game is essentially about getting from A to B to find an upgrade, or solve a puzzle, or to find a boss. The way you get given cryptic clues when searching for some items makes it seem a little like a treasure hunt. Then there's the way you feel so alone on the planet (you never hear any talking), as well as the satisfaction of working out the attack patterns for (or weaknesses of) a boss, and finally besting it, to be awarded a new upgrade to go and try out.

Some games have the "just one more go" factor, but this game has the "just one more upgrade" factor. There are areas that you KNOW you can only access with a specific upgrade (because you started with most of the upgrades, but got stripped of them after the tutorial level), and this, as well as wanting to know what is behind the colour-coded doors you can't open

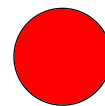


yet, is quite a pull, especially as the game allows you to see the doors before you can get in, building anticipation. I often found myself staying up late, promising myself sleep after I had got to a certain area, only to make myself another promise after I had achieved my goal.

I swear that after a small amount of time playing the game, you start to see things differently. You won't be looking for items, but instead you will be looking for hidden routes and clues to secret areas. Even just moving from place to place is fun - you can run, walk, roll, jump or swing from area to area whilst you gawk at the scenery. You never have to worry about ammo, as it is infinite, (apart from missiles, which are dropped off by most enemies, and can be refilled at your ship). Everything is incredibly well thought out, from the physics on the double jump, to the way you can suck items towards you by charging up your weapons. It's only a few times in a decade that a game as good as this is made. Everybody should have the chance to play this. It's unlike any other game currently available. It's different. Any time you think about buying a game, stop(!), take a deep breath and think about what you are going to buy and put it back on the shelf. Then pick up Metroid Prime instead. If you don't have a GameCube, I seriously suggest you get one. You should be able to pick up a limited edition bundle pack which includes a GameCube, Metroid Prime and a limited edition Plate for the lid of your GameCube, all for the bargain price of £129.99.

~Adam Fairclough~

Worth buying a GameCube for, and if that means you have to steal from your grandparents, then so be it.*



Red Hot!

(COLOUR GUIDE PAGE 40)

Take A Closer Look

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*I, Adam, do not personally endorse theft from grandparents (unless of course, they happen to be really boring grandparents, in which case stealing from them is just fine with me). (Perhaps as Editor, I should point out that United Games Magazine will not be held responsible for the actions of anyone foolish - or perhaps in this case wise enough - to steal from their grandparents to the ends of purchasing Metroid Prime. "Respect the aged!" sung Pulp, and although I prefer a bit of DJ Vibes myself, I nonetheless on this occasion concur with J. Cocker. Especially since it prevents your grandparents from suing us, and making more money than you could ever steal, in terms of compensation. Er...<ahem>. Don't let me give you any ideas now, 'eh, readers? Ed.). Want to use this article? See page 96!



Introducing...



Metroid Prime.

The game starts with a basic level that lets you get to use all of Samus' abilities. It's a great introduction to a game which has a gentle learning curve, and features most of the game's main gameplay features. You even get to take on a boss creature and a couple of the game's main enemies; the space pirates.

The Main Game World:

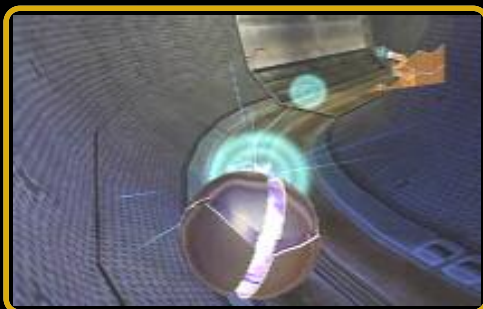
Soon you move on to the main game world, which can only be described as bloomin' enormous! Just like Duracell batteries, it goes on and on. As you progress through the game you will visit many uniquely stunning areas, which range from lush green forests, to frozen tundra and alien temples. Not only is the world in which you play beautiful, but it is totally seamless. There is barely the slightest whiff of loading time during the whole game, not a loading bar in sight nor a static image to gawk at while you wait. The power of the GameCube is really on demonstration in Metroid: Prime. The frame rate's smoother than a baby's bottom, and the game never even stutters once.



Raining - Just like good ol' Blighty!



Let it snow, let it snow, let it snow!



Transform and roll out(!)...oh no, hang on...wrong Prime!



Holding in "A" allows you to charge your blast!

Weapons:

There are four different weapon varieties (all of which don't need any kind of ammo), and each one is mapped to a direction on the C-stick. You can also charge up any one of the weapons just by holding in the fire button. Here's a quick run-down on your tools of destruction in the order that they are found:



PowerBeam: Your basic blaster, which corresponds with the colour yellow, can be upgraded with the Super Missile.



WaveBeam: A widespread electricity based beam that has a slight homing ability. The Wavebuster Upgrade gives it the ability to fire a big ol' beam of electric goodness.



IceBeam: Says exactly what it does on the tin. This baby can freeze enemies if charged up, which then leaves you open to blast them with another weapon, or tap Y and fire a missile at that alien.



PlasmaBeam: The daddy of all the Metroid weapons, this baby fires a beam of red hot burning plasma, that can cool those evil space pirates quicker than a George Foreman Grill, and twice as healthily. The upgrade provides you with a flame-thrower that can cause a whole world of pain.



Taking Control:

Controlling Samus has never been easier. The game dropped the dual analogue control system in favour of just using one stick to move. Holding L enables you to lock on to an enemy, and once you are locked on you don't turn left or right but rather circle around the target instead, and this allows you to take on light-footed space pirates with the minimum of effort. Holding R switches you to manual aim mode, which can be handy for shooting switches that are high up. The C-stick changes between the four weapon modes that you have available to you (providing you have found the weapon upgrades) and the D-pad switches between the four visor modes you can find.

Sounding Off:

Keeping it true to the style of the previous games, there isn't any talking. This maintains the impression of being alone at all times. Quite how they are going to keep in the spirit of this with the soon-to-be-made Metroid Movie, I don't know, but as long as there isn't a ker-A-zee robot with the voice of Eddie Murphy, it shouldn't turn out that bad. Music is created on the fly by the GameCube, meaning that it fluidly changes from one tune to another without any kind of gap or overlap. Many of the original pieces from earlier games have been remixed, which provides unobtrusive and atmospheric ambience. The various noises of water and the creatures seems authentic enough, although I haven't ever been attacked by a giant rock monster before, so pardon me if I don't know exactly how it should sound!

Scanning:

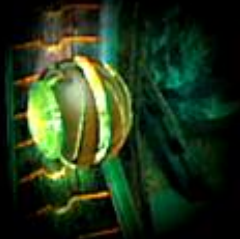
In each different area of the world, there is a different selection of fauna and wildlife to see, all of which can be scanned for information. By tapping left on the D-Pad, you will switch to scan mode. You can now see the orange scan icons. Now if you lock on to them using the L-Button, you will download information about the creature / plant / object. Doing this allows you to discover the weaknesses of enemies. This is also the main way the game tells its story. By scanning the various computers that are inside the enemy structures, you start to find out what the game is all about, and this method of revealing story details makes for a very atmospheric game. During one part of the game, you will scan a sign saying "Do not bring your pets to work. Failing to comply with this rule will result in immediate execution." only then to discover a computer record of the space pirates' many failed attempts to copy your morph ball ability. It is these sorts of details that give you an extensively detailed insight into the world of the enemy. The scanning system works in a way quite similar to that of reading notes in the Resident Evil games, but if you don't fancy reading them, just don't scan them - anything that is required to be scanned is shown as a red scan object, so it is entirely optional.

Suit Upgrades:

Throughout the game you will be provided with many upgrades to your suit, all of which will help you progress that little bit further in the game. Most of them even provide you with a snazzy lookin' cosmetic upgrade too. Here are just a few of them:



MorphBall: Lets you roll into a tiny ball that can roll down pipes and through narrow passages. When in this form you can drop bombs which let you blow up obstacles in your way, and can also help you jump.



SpiderBall: Gives your ball that alloy-wheel look and adds the nifty ability to be able to roll along walls and ceilings.



Grapple beam: The grappling hook returns! This handy tool allows you to swing like the king of the jungle from certain points in the level. In the words of Tarzan:
"AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHAAAAHAAAA
AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!"



Gravity Suit: Lets you move through water as if it was thin air.



Energy Tank: Gives you one extra block of health storage - you're gonna need 'em!

Visor Upgrades:

The four different visors give you different vision modes, that allow you to do all sorts of incredibly useful things, but more importantly, they look proper bo'!



Combat Visor: The standard visor mode allows you to see everything that is visible with the naked eye.



Scan Visor: Lets you see and scan the scan icons. You can't shoot using this visor, but a simple tap of the fire button (A) will quickly have you back in combat mode.



X-ray Visor: Fairly self-explanatory this one. It allows you to see through objects, as well as giving you the gift of seeing spectral entities and invisible platforms.



Thermal Visor: Probably the coolest (no pun intended) of all the visors, it allows you to see anything that is warm in nice bright colours - handy for spotting wire fighting Kung-Fools in the rafters. It can also be used to spot hidden switches and see invisible enemies.



Forget Hell-in-a-Cell. EPW's "Da Robb" takes it to the Cube, for WrestleMania x8....

When *WrestleMania x8* was first announced for the GameCube, many fans of the Nintendo 64's portfolio of wrestling games were quite disappointed to learn that THQ had chosen "Yuke's" - the developer of the well-known SmackDown series, to take the spot-light for the small Cube instead of "AKI" - the development team behind the popular No Mercy game for the Nintendo 64. Naturally, most assumed that *WrestleMania x8* would therefore simply turn out to be a clone of the SmackDown games, which generally speaking, featured faster gameplay and didn't adapt to quite as many sports entertainment angles as the No Mercy titles had done. Nonetheless, this hasn't really proven to be the case. In fact, *WrestleMania x8* plays out as a mixture of the two franchises, featuring core gameplay mechanics that are similar to SmackDown's, but with bits and pieces of No Mercy thrown into the mix to make the gameplay seem realistically slower and more deliberate. So if you were expecting this game to play as a straight continuation of the No Mercy series, you might be slightly disappointed to learn that it doesn't. Yet based on its own merits, the game still delivers an entertaining experience.

Wrestling game fans may well be wondering how the speed of the wrestler's motions has panned out then, as SmackDown played quite fast, and No Mercy quite slow, and the different speeds made a MASSIVE difference to the gameplay of each title. (When the wrestler's moves are executed relatively slowly, your reaction time is more relaxed, but faster games such as SmackDown require faster reaction times from the player). Well, No Mercy fans will be glad to hear it's not as fast as SmackDown, and yet, at the same time, it's not as slow as No Mercy. Don't let this put you off however! Overall, the speed they've settled on for the gameplay, whilst perhaps taking a short while to adjust to, is very sound, and really can't get much better.

The game offers a selection of different match options and plenty of stipulations as well, notably more so than the likes of WWE RAW on the Xbox. The match options vary, from Normal One-one-one, Tag matches, and Handi-cap matches, to insane Hell-in-the-Cell and Cage matches, not to forget the popular Ladder and Table matches! You won't get bored picking match-types with your mates! There's ALWAYS going to be something there that proves enjoyable for different types of wrestlers, and whilst most people tend to go on to "Path of a Champion" mode straight away to get titles, it's more entertaining to go on exhibition mode with your mates, where you can choose any match-type you want!

That's not to say going for titles is boring. Whilst playing through a series of similar match types can get repetitive, it can also prove extremely satisfying. How so? Well, it's fun to be able to pick your favourite wrestler, and use him in "Path of a Champion" mode to make a hero

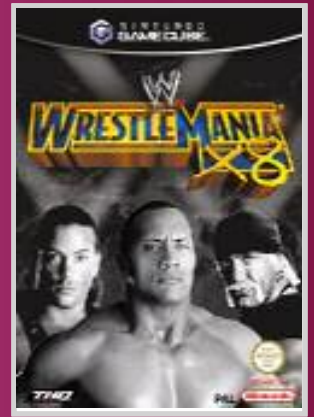
out of him. My favourite character is "The Hurricane" and I really enjoyed using him to win the light-weight title. But trying to use someone you don't like in real life, doesn't really work so well when playing on "Path of a Champion" mode, as you don't care so much about the character's status, and as such, using a character you don't like in a series of repetitive normal matches, can get boring, very quickly, as the element of satisfaction is lost. Likewise, if you're not into the sport of wrestling, it's boring to just pick a random guy, a random title to go for, and just wade through all the matches, yet still fun to delve into exhibition mode, where you can set your own match type, create your own rules and experiment using different characters. Exhibition mode proves to be just quality, and where the real fun of this game lies. The sheer variety of different arenas & wrestlers you can choose to use, combined with the choice of stipulations and rules you have available to you provide a seemingly limitless source of fun and enjoyment!

The fun evident in this game isn't so much to do with pulling off various moves, but revolves more around the challenges presented by the gameplay. The challenge of sittin' with a mate and bein' the first one to climb a ladder and get to the top, for example.

However, I'm sorry to say that the in-game sound really lets this game down! It has tinny fake noises for the ring ropes when a wrestler is moving them, and it sounds NOTHING like a rope being stretched, but, oddly enough, rather like a goat being kicked up the backside (sounds like they had fun getting their samples then. Oo-ar! Ed)! Yes. It's not a pleasant noise - and that's my point! Also, the cheering of the audience during the superstars' entrances could be better timed, as there are about one or two cheers at the start, then nothing for the rest of the Wrestler's entrance video(!), and unlike No Mercy on the N64, when you use a taunt in this game during a match, you get no response from the crowd, which is kind of annoying.

Some of the animation can also get pretty glitchy, as in - one second you're being pinned, and the three-count is about to occur..... and then, following your mad button bashing to get up, the superstar pinning you kind of 'floats' off of you, with no visible sign of you having kicked out! This is stupid, as there's no graphical representation of your resistance, and yet a 400 pound giant just seems to 'slip' off of you and thus not win the match. The good thing, however, is that this doesn't happen when YOU are in control of the pin. But any how, as far as graphical realism goes, this is a real glitch!

There are also noticeable problems with the computer controlled character's A.I. (Artificial Intelligence). In Tag Mode your computer-controlled partner often tends to get beaten up pretty easily, and since you have no control over your partner's actions, you have to

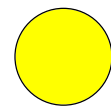


patiently wait on the ring apron and outstretch your hand to signify that you want to tag back. There's also a tendency in multi-wrestler matches for all the wrestlers to gang up on you instead of fighting each other, making it hard to get an offensive going.

Overall, Nintendo wrestling game fans are more likely to enjoy this title than followers of the SmackDown series. *Wrestlemania x8* offers a similar amount of entertainment value as No Mercy did on the N64, but is still worth getting, should you own No Mercy already, for the sake of having a Gamecube wrestler - plus there are some noticeable differences between the games. Compared to RAW on the Xbox, the game plays ultra fast, but compared to SmackDown 4 on the PS2 it's a walking dinosaur. SD4: Shut Your Mouth features faster gameplay, is more detailed, and gives you a greater variety of game options and characters - but hey(!), this ain't a SmackDown review, and if it's a fun wrestler for the Gamecube you're after, you really can't go wrong choosing this game, as it's ALWAYS entertaining to continuously beat your mates time and time again. It absolutely ROCKS(!) in multi-player mode. For one-player champion mode, however, don't expect it to be a complete joyride.

~EPW's "Da Robb"~

This game is certainly good value for money! If you've got the cash, and have been pondering for sometime over whether to purchase this, then hesitate no more! Get it. You won't regret it.



Mellow Yellow!
(COLOUR GUIDE PAGE 40)



The Gamecube finally gets its defining First Person Shooter, developed by Free Radical, whose staff include the same people that originally developed Goldeneye at Rare.

It's a multi-format title though, and was obviously developed for the lowest spec next generation machine (the PS2), yet it stands up perfectly well regardless...

TimeSplitters 2 eschews the realism that seems to be a requirement of shooters these days. The characters are unashamedly cartoony, madcap creations and there are a lot of them as each time period that you'll travel in has a different set ranging from 1930's gangsters to construction robots from the future. The story has you travelling back in time to stop dastardly aliens known as Time Splitters from monkeying around with Earth's history. Each level takes place in a different time period and a lot of attention has been paid to making the levels atmospheric, even if the plot leaves something (coherency) to be desired.

Level one sees you at the foot of a Siberian dam, circa 1990, in a direct homage to Goldeneye. That's about the only concession to realism you can expect, as later levels will see you assisting the Hunchback of Notre Dame in rescuing some disturbingly curvaceous lovelies, or filling the oversized white space-boots of the Flash Gordon-esque Hank Nova as he finds himself in the middle of two warring alien tribes.

The level design is good, but you really need to play it on Hard to appreciate this as Easy and Medium tend to rely on straightforward running and gunning through the level, half of which you won't need to see as it's not in your objectives list. The Notre Dame cathedral level is particularly weak, although I must say that the stained glass windows look simply lovely when you smash them. When it's good, though, it's very good. The falling snow and wind in Siberia is perfectly depicted, whistling past you, little snowflakes occasionally sticking to the camera. Neo Tokyo copies the inimitable near-future style invented by Blade Runner - the glow of neon obscured by falling rain, and wet

pavements reflecting the illuminated storefronts. Bloody cameras everywhere that you have to avoid too, of course. There's even a police spinner (if you don't know what a spinner is I suggest you get some culture, immediately) cruising the streets, and it's sublime to glance down the street and see it floating ominously toward you, red-and-blue lights flashing, forcing you to duck into a doorway until it passes.

Music deserves a special mention because it's just so good. Rare games always had outstanding music - they had ways of making the awful SNES and N64 sound chips (well... the N64 didn't even have a dedicated sound chip, so the processor had to shoulder the burden of making awful noises and terrible music) do things you wouldn't ask your sister to do, even if you hated her. From sweeping strings and 1930's swing to industrial-techno, the music is atmospheric, stirring and well suited to whichever level it appears in. And what would be the point in firing enormous weaponry if it made a "Blorpblopblopb" sound? Unless it's the Unreal Tournament BioRifle, I mean. Guns go bang with such a sharp, realistic report that it's guaranteed to have the criminal element among you jumping in shock, wondering if the police have found them once again.

All this and the single player story mode is just the tip of the iceberg. There are literally dozens of game modes to keep you occupied for days at a stretch. Like Goldeneye, Perfect Dark and many others, not everything is available to you when first you turn on the game. You must complete single-player Story, Arcade and Challenge levels to unlock options like cheats, extra multiplayer characters and levels and the all-important Silly Hats. This is where you really get your

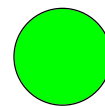


money's worth. Completists (those who, like me, always wondered if there was a super-super-secret last cheat in Goldeneye to fill the last empty spot on the cheats list) will spend many happy hours attempting the more difficult challenges in exchange for a cheat we'll never use or a Silly Hat we'll never wear.

It is, in short, a mammoth undertaking, but it's never anything less than good fun. It's frustrating sometimes, but in that good way when you just have to play again. Just one more game . . . and suddenly it's 4:00am and everybody's in bed and it's just you and a screenful of monkeys with watermelons, and you wonder what you're doing with your life and you vow you'll never waste as much time again, you will in fact go straight to bed and have a productive day when you get up to make up for your lost time. . after just one more game. Yes, it's one of those games and I think we all know what to do when we hear about one of those games. We rush out and buy it, immediately.

~Will Jenkins~

Just short of genius, but still an excellent game with something for everybody and plenty of replay value.



Groovy Green!
(COLOUR GUIDE PAGE 40)





After the frenetic exploits of Bangai-o, Treasure return with Ikaruga - the Dreamcast's last game in Japan. But is it worth picking up a copy on import? Will Jenkins tells it like it is....

Starting this review, it's hard to know what to write. If I go by the premise that good behaviour should be rewarded, I ought to write a really glowing review. After all, it's a pretty daring idea - to resurrect the vertical scrolling shooter in its pure form, resisting the temptation to add dozens of exciting new features like "3D," much like they did with Tetris' many bastard sons. I can picture the scenes in the office when the idea was first mooted - "What? You can't be serious! Gamers just won't play in two dimensions any more!"

Nevertheless, Ikaruga was made. What's it about? Don't know. It's all in Japanese, you see. After one very particularly involved session I deduced, from staring at the background scenery, that you fly off your aircraft carrier and through the sky and then over a city and then up to some refinery thing and then into some kind of mining plant, and then I don't know because I died at Chapter Three. I wasn't playing very well. But in basic terms it's that most simplistic of games, the vertical scrolling shooter.

It brings some fresh, new, (but strangely appropriate) ideas to a tired, tired old genre. Your ship has two 'modes,' - a light and a dark mode. Light mode has light shields and light weapons. Dark mode has dark shields and dark weapons. Enemies that come at you will shoot either dark or light energy. The appropriate flavour shield will absorb that energy and add it to your energy store. The wrong flavour will get you blown up. Dark enemies are most vulnerable to light weapons, and vice versa. "Hmm," you say. "Interesting." Well, it's when you've got a dozen light enemies and a dozen dark enemies, all buzzing around the screen and all shooting at you that it gets really interesting. Absorbing energy adds it to your energy store, which powers your smartbomb weapon. The game encourages heavy use of the smartbomb, which is a very pretty starshell burst with little glowing energy streamers that home in on enemy ships. The more energy you had stored, the bigger it gets. The game also encourages you to perform "Chains" by sequentially destroying three enemies of one colour, as many times as you can. Chaining multiplies the score you get for destroying the baddies. I think so, at least - it's all in Japanese, you see.

It's sodding hard. Theoretically you could probably play through the whole game in about fifteen minutes, but I'll never be able to prove this because I'll never - never - be able to beat it, not even on easy mode. And on hard mode I can hardly beat the first level. It's a question of learning, to the finest detail, the enemy attack patterns. As you get better and better you'll use the shield's ability to absorb energy more and more, timing your guns so that they're most efficient at killing the enemy waves, but it still takes a lot of practise. There's absolutely no randomisation though; the game's attack patterns are always the same. Ikaruga targets the hardcore old-skool crowd who like to practise their skills over and over, honing their scores on a few choice tracks or levels, always aiming to shave milliseconds off their lap time or boost their top score by a few points, and want the games to be damn hard so that laymen appreciate their hard work and effort. Finicky perfectionists, in other words (Like me then, Ed.).

It's a very pretty game. Your ship looks bad-ass, like an avenging angel (or devil, depending on what shield you're using). The enemies are all highly technical looking machines which, if you look closely, are all subtly themed depending on the background passing beneath you (city, waste refinery, whatever it happens to be). As an added bonus they shoot (comparatively) huge blobs of brightly coloured glowing energy - another 2D shooter staple. When you blast them they disappear in a satisfying orange cloud of fire. The bosses are impressive, and as you'd expect get more and more impressive as the game progresses. I bet the final boss is some huge monster that goes through about a dozen pattern mutations before you can kill him, but of course I'll never survive to the final boss.

When bosses go down they do so in style. Great gouts of orange flame spewing from their gun turrets. And the levels are just gorgeous, I honestly can't heap enough praise on them - especially the later ones. They're difficult to get to but definitely worth the effort. Fortresses in the sky, concrete trenches bristling with obstructions and gun turrets, cities, refineries, they're all represented in minute detail and they all look real, like they actually could exist

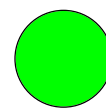


somewhere in the future. There's even a 2P mode, where another player controls a second ship. The game doesn't get more difficult to compensate for the second player, but 2P does have its own difficulties - your ships are quite large and you'll have to jostle for space sometimes. There are dozens of nice touches, like the aforementioned theming of the enemies, or the way your ship physically flips over when you change mode.

But whether you like it or not depends purely on whether you're old skool enough, basically. Are you the kind of person who sits glued to certain courses in racing games for hours on end? Do games that encourage pedanticism [such as Tetris, or even Bangai-o] appeal to you? If you answered "Yes", then this is a good game for you. Just flick it on and sit there hunched over your joypad, staring at the screen, a little trail of dribble running down your slack chin. If you don't play like this, however, you'll find Ikaruga strangely unsatisfying, even for short, random blasting sessions. The enemy attack sequences are never varied, so unless you're actively attempting to learn them it's quite a boring game. So what do I do? As I said earlier, Ikaruga is an excellent piece of work and a good stab at a tired genre, and good behaviour ought to be rewarded . . . but, well . . .

~Will Jenkins~

**...you'll know
if you want it.**



Groovy Green!
(COLOUR GUIDE PAGE 40)



Phantasy Star Online was the first Dreamcast game I played online, and it proved to be an incredible gaming experience. Then, a year on, Sega stopped manufacturing Dreamcasts, and shifted its attention to other gaming formats, yet it seemed befitting, that one of its last Dreamcast games was an update to one of its most successful online titles. Rob tells us what made PSO2 so good, and what Gamecube and Xbox owners have to look forwards to....



I say "update" because Phantasy Star Online Version 2 (from here on referred to as PSO2) is an add-on disc of sorts, albeit one that doesn't require you to own the original game as PSO2 contains all of the original game's content. Of course it wouldn't be called "Version 2" if nothing new had been thrown into the mix, and Sonic Team, to their credit, have added a whole host of new features for the PSO veteran to enjoy, whilst there is now even more on offer for the newcomer!

For those of you who are unfamiliar with the game, PSO can be played in either an offline or online mode. Offline mode sees you choose from one of four character types who all use different weapons and have different abilities, whilst when playing online you connect to the network and team up with three other players to take on enemies.

So, what's fun about Phantasy Star Online? Well, if you put aside the game's offline mode, there is nothing better than going online, meeting up with friends and killing monsters!

There are a number of side quests that can either be downloaded and played offline, or, alternatively, the game disc itself has a huge number of quests in it. The one remaining option is to play the online quests. Each quest is unique and has a different goal or objective. Some require you to collect badges and items to be traded for a special weapon, others require you to compete in order to be given a weapon as a reward. These quests not only require you to kill monsters but some of them also offer puzzles which team members must solve together. An example of this can be a force-field blocking a path or item. One player must wait by the force field, while the other two activate a switch simultaneously, which then lowers the force-field. A few of the quests have references to Sonic Team games and some feature classic Sega characters such as Sonic the Hedgehog. One particular quest allows for you to change the music to that of other Sonic Team titles.

Clever use is also made of the DC's internal clock. At certain holiday seasons, the spaceship is given a make-over and themed music plays. For example, at Christmas, trees and jingle bells replace the normal theme music.

It's these little touches that keep the game interesting, so in this way, the quests are part of the key to longevity as from time to time, Sonic Team add new quests to play online.

The best thing about this game is the team-work aspect. Some of the quests require you to all work together to achieve the goal. The same is required of the new challenge mode which requires four team members to work together and trade potions and weapons to defeat the enemies. The ultimate goal is an S Rank Weapon that you can name yourself and it is also more powerful than the usual weapons.

Games such as these have, in the past, nearly always been played alone but by adding an online aspect, Sonic Team has created a world populated by many different people from around the world. It is easy to make friends and if you are a new player many people online will help you level up and give you new weapons to make you stronger.

Unlike Final Fantasy, the battles in Phantasy Star Online take place in real time, which allows all players to attack enemies at the same time.

PSOV2 is at times a perfect game and its positive aspects do help you to overlook its flaws. For instance, one complaint is that the offline mode gets repetitive and is not varied enough to keep you playing it over and over, yet the game's online mode should be the real reason for buying this game, so such a fault is mostly easily overlooked. The game also lacks a lock-on feature, meaning that when trying to shoot enemies you may end up missing, however, there is a tactic you can apply to overcome this, and once mastered, it no longer becomes a problem. Furthermore, not being able to lock on to enemies also gives other players a chance to provide back-up if you can't turn around fast enough.

Being able to play this game online has created an interesting problem. Certain groups of people have become tired of the game and have taken to using cheat codes to increase their enjoyment of the game. This does create headaches for the legitimate player, because of the effects these codes have on the game. They cause a variety of unwanted effects while you are

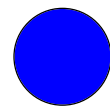
playing online but in the time that the game has been around, Sonic Team have looked at the situation and introduced new cheating safeguards, that can detect if a code is in use. Using cheat codes will usually result in either a one day ban, or, for constant code use, a permanent ban. Thanks to this, the problem is not as widespread as it once was, and the individuals who cheat can be easily avoided provided you play with only people you know you can trust.

Overall PSO2 is a ground breaking console game that has deservedly won several awards and has brought together people from all over the world. The level design is excellent, featuring forests, caves, mines, ancient ruins, and two new areas - a palace and a spaceship. With Gamecube, Xbox and PC versions planned, it appears that the adventure has only just begun, but the Dreamcast version was there first and to miss out on this ground breaking game would be a great shame!

~Rob~

Take A Closer Look

What are you waiting for? Get it now! Get online and make some new friends. Trust me - you won't regret it.



Brilliant Blue!
(COLOUR GUIDE PAGE 40)



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:: Game Story

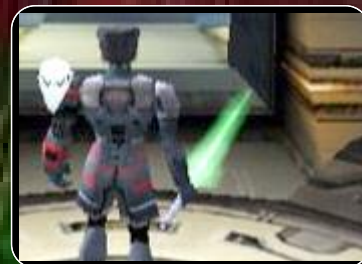
The in-game storyline for Phantasy Star Online revolves around a ship that was sent to colonise a planet. Everything had been going well until the ship with the colonists in attempted to send a communication from orbit. At that point, the planet was rocked by a huge explosion. In response, Pioneer 2's Captain launches an immediate investigation and you are just one of the many mercenaries sent to investigate the cause.

The story is carried on through the subplot in which the captain's daughter also went to the planet to investigate, yet disappeared. You will find recorded messages from her throughout the levels, and these help develop the plot, but the story is ultimately let down by an ending that doesn't really explain what happened to the captain's daughter.

:: Character Classes

At the start of the game you select a character from four different types of character classes: Hunters, Rangers, Force and Androids. Hunters are proficient with all types of swords and daggers, and can also use some guns. Rangers can use all guns and most swords. Force characters rely on

magic for their special attacks and defense and can also use some swords and guns. Android characters can use most of the guns and swords but are unable to use magic, and therefore, during combat, are forced to rely on magic users for healing.



:: Rise to the Challenge...

A new feature of Version 2 is the ability to level-up to 200. To help with this, Sega has added new enemies and redesigned levels for a bigger challenge.

The most noticeable addition is a dragon that attacks using ice magic. The style of this level includes the Aura Borealis (Northern Lights) which is an amazing graphical achievement.

:: Playing Offline...

The game is made up of four areas each containing two or three subsections, which feature a boss fight at the end. There are also a huge number of separate missions which can be undertaken, leading to the acquirement of rare items.

You proceed through the four areas the game has to offer. Once you have completed all the subsections and defeated the bosses you are treated to the brief ending sequence. When you next play an area, a new difficulty level will have opened up.

You start with normal and upon completing it, this opens up hard. Each time you complete the new difficulty level you unlock a new one (hard is followed by very hard, very hard by ultimate difficulty, etc). This affects what levels you may play through when online. You can only play the levels you have unlocked offline when you have created a team online.

The main problem with offline mode is that upon completing all quests which have to be finished again on all new difficulty levels, there is nothing more to be done offline, except for any additional quests you might download when online (there are a few of these available for the UK version, but the majority are downloaded from the Japanese servers, and as these are not translated, a walk through is sometimes needed). The offline mode may seem big but it does become a little boring and repetitive if you don't compliment it with the online mode.



:: Playing Online...

When you connect, you can either log onto a gaming server to play with other people online, or else you can merely choose to download a quest onto your memory card to play later, offline. If you choose to log onto a server, you'll be greeted with a list of ships (which in Phantasy Star Online, equate to game servers) and be asked to select a territory. Once you've chosen between Japanese, US and European territories, you then get another list of ships for that particular area. Gaming servers in Europe, for example will

be shown as "EU - Ship name". Some of the ship names have humorous overtones, especially the Japanese servers which were named after characters from Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream".

Once you've selected your server, you're taken to the lobby where you can see other players, chat with them, and ask them if they want to play a game. You usually chat via typing, but if they speak another language, it's also possible to communicate using a



::Multiple Versions

::DREAMCAST

Despite the fact the Dreamcast is no longer supported by Sega, Phantasy Star Online is. However, a lot of ships(servers) have disappeared. There are still many Japanese servers to connect to, but there is only one American server left. The UK is a little better, with three servers still supporting online play. So it's still possible to buy a Dreamcast and PSOV2 second hand, and get connected.

::GAMECUBE

The Gamecube version contains everything from the Dreamcast's PSOV2 but in addition throws new character classes, quests, and a whole new GC-exclusive adventure (episode 2) into the mix. To play online, however, you'll need a hunter's license, which comes to approximately £7 a month (although the first month is free). For those who either don't have a modem, or don't want to loose £7 a month, Sonic Team have also included a 4 player split screen mode, allowing you to work co-operatively as was true of online play with the Dreamcast version - albeit in a non-virtual way, with your team mates in the same room, huddled around your Gamecube and TV.



Of course, if you do want to go online with the Gamecube, you'll not only need the game and the Hunter's license - you'll also need a modem, and both narrowband and broadband variants are available at retail, along with other peripherals you might find useful - such as keyboards for typing (although this isn't necessary, it can prove faster for us typists than using the word menu).

::XBOX

The Xbox version has yet to be released at the time of writing, but word has it, no keyboard will be made available. The game will use the voice communicator exclusively [although the word menu might still be there]. [**UPDATE!** This has changed! See news at bullet point on page 12!]. In addition, the game is set to boast the same enhancements as the Gamecube version - new character classes, areas, a whole new adventure (episode II), a split screen mode, etc, and, unfortunately, a Hunter's License - as Sega didn't like the Xbox Live system, and have chosen to operate without it, and charge you their own fee - rumoured to be similar to that of the current £7 Gamecube charge. We can't help feel this is a little miffing if you're paying for Xbox Live as well. Of course, if you're currently enjoying the year's FREE subscription that comes with the Xbox Live starter pack, it's not quite like paying twice, is it? The Xbox version is due May, and the likelihood is, like the GC version before it, it'll come with a month's free online play.



word select option, where they select key words in their language, and the game shows you the corresponding key words in your language, thus overcoming the language barrier. The lobby is used as a chat room, but it's also the place where you can decide to team up with people to play one of the many game modes. One of you will have to set up the team, and be the Team Leader. It's the Team Leader who's responsible for making all the decisions, and if you play in battle or challenge

mode, then they're responsible for the settings (i.e. changing the conditions in battle mode).
When playing online with other people, you can play the normal mode (essentially the same as a one player game, albeit with four players working together), the challenge mode (which consists of nine challenge arenas, that have to be completed in order to increase your rank) or battle mode (which is the death match mode).



Bangai-o has seemed to dominate the bargain bins and second hand shops for some time now, but is it worth investing in? Andrew Mehta reports...

When I first got this game, I was distinctly non-impressed, suddenly putting its prominence in second hand shops down to the fact that it must have been part exchanged a zillion times for something better. Now I know many people these days seem to be allergic to 2D aesthetics, but as a fan of the Megaman series, I was looking forwards to some hardcore blasting action, irrespective of graphical style, but even I felt the initial title and menu screens were lazily constructed, which initially made me feel the developers didn't care much about the game. But of course, at this early stage "I didn't get it". A few weeks on, and I would...

The game gives you two heroes to switch between - Riki and Mami, and each has a different weapon. Riki has homing missiles and Mami has bouncing bullets. It was when I came to a level that required use of the bouncing bullets, that my judgement came crashing down on this game even moreso. The walls of the level were cleverly arranged so that your bullets would bounce off key corners, and take out enemies just around the corner. So I was progressing bit by bit, and taking out the enemies, etc, ricocheting bullets at just the right angle, and then there was this one corner where I wasn't perfectly aligned to do this from the ledge I was on. The only way to take out the enemy, (whose laser fire was blocking my path) was to hover in the air just above him - which required risky taps of the "up" button offset against gravity's downward push, and to me, this just seemed like bad level design.

But I hadn't really got the game at this stage either. In actual fact, I was soon to discover that the level design was in fact absolute genius. At this point, however, I wasn't having much fun, felt like I had wasted a tenner on a lazily produced game, and resolved to take it back to the store and get my money back. But of course, lazy git I am, that didn't happen, and after a bit of a break, I finally sat down with the game again, and gave it another chance. And - oh-my-gosh(!)...if it only wasn't the BEST GAMING EXPERIENCE I'VE HAD FOR YEARS!!!

Graphics. Graphics aren't so integral to gameplay, yes? But I tell you - the Dreamcast's lighting effects as applied to on-screen bullets are not only beautiful to behold, but they glow in such a way that if you've been playing the game, and then you close your eyes, you'll see those lights on the back of your eyelids. If you go to sleep, you'll dream about the levels. That's what the lighting effects do. And as a dreamer, I've a constant urge to realise dreams, hence the way this game's graphics got emblazoned onto my mind, saw me encouraged to come back for more.

The tackiness. I spoke of a lame intro screen. In fact, it's worse than "To The Earth" - an 8-bit NES Zapper game. How? They couldn't

have made a screen look this naff on Dreamcast unless it was DELIBERATE, and indeed it is. It's in keeping with the retro-styling and humour of the game. There are info stations dotted about levels, where your characters interface with a lady called M to learn information on the level, and it's here the wacky plot unfolds...Riki asks why he can't just dodge around the bullets...the answer? The game is 2D. Riki concedes: "The beautiful world of 2D. The tension is getting good. Three cheers for Bangai-o!"

Wackier proceedings are afoot...you set out initially to avenge your father's beating at the hands of the Kosmo gang, only to find in a later level that your own father turns against you. Any particular reason? Jealousy, and the fact he happened upon a ship with big guns and wants to try it out on you. "Well said father. Let's get on with it!" cries Riki with utter contempt for his eccentric dad.

Even a spoof of Capcom's Black Ryu from Street Fighter 2, can be found, as a version of Riki with a head band and lipstick appears. "If you disappear, I will be the real one! The Black Riki!" he taunts. "[But]After Game Over, won't there be a new game?" points out Riki. "Once again, that is true." concedes Black Riki.

And what of the level design? Well, I had been playing like the pedantic fool I was - taking it slowly, picking off enemies one at a time. This was good for me, as I hadn't been sure how to act when totally overwhelmed by enemies on screen, so had been taking it slowly, picking them off one by one and slowly progressing through levels - and this works very well on some of the levels. But other levels require you to simply zoom across the screen, and press R - which detonates a mass bombardment using your current weapon, and the more hits you procure, the more of these bombardments you're able to trigger again. There was this one level I had been absolutely stuck on, spending a couple of days trying to slowly take out the enemies as they approached, but eventually, in every case, I became overwhelmed. Finally, in a state of despair, I just zoomed across the level all guns blazing, ignoring most of the enemies, and to my utter disbelief I had completed the whole mission in under a minute. This wasn't bad level design - this was the game teaching me the effectiveness of a new strategy. For some levels require you to pick off key targets one at a time, and advance slowly forwards, and others encourage you to just go absolutely raving bonkers with missile bombardments. The previously mentioned level designed for bouncing bullets becomes a synch when you let rip with a bombardment of bullets down one of the narrow corridors, which sees your bullets hit almost every conceivable angle as they bounce along on their merry way.

The way you have to figure out the best way to tackle each level, and yet the way it is accomplished in terms of intense shooting action

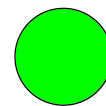


is just great. When you first see the game running, with oodles of bullets on the screen, you won't have a clue HOW you're ever gonna deal with that sort of bombardment, but you do. With your eyes wide open, or using your own firepower as a shield, destroying bullets before they can touch you, you're constantly kept on your toes, and the whole thing makes for an extremely exhilarating experience, that finally culminates in immense satisfaction upon completing that level. And what better way to celebrate, than a picture of Ultraman knocking out Godzilla?

To put it simply - Bangai-o is an intense action packed game, that initially may seem a bit daunting, but once gotten into is absolutely sublime. It's refreshing to find a game that doesn't take itself too seriously, makes fun of itself, contains a healthy dose of humour, and genuinely gives the impression that the programmers had a good time making it. Unfortunately, whilst the one player game, with 44 levels will last you a while, once exhausted the game becomes a "beat your own score" type of game, and it's baffling that with the Dreamcast's online connection, there's no online score board, with scores to beat, thus you're left to beat your own score, which isn't exactly that much of a lure for me personally, plus whilst each level proves challenging the first time you encounter it, once completed, you know what you're doing and zip through it at an astounding pace. So all in all, absolutely brilliantly intense, a good piece of hardcore, adrenalin-fuelling gaming, but it's likely to take you a while to get into, then take you on an absolutely amazing and addictive gaming experience for a few weeks, and then leave you exhausted yet satisfied, but perhaps only ever picking up the controller again to reminisce how good the levels were the first time around (although bonus game options such as invincibility do allow you to focus on combos).

~Andrew Mehta~

One of the best gaming experiences I've had in a long time!



Groovy Green!
(COLOUR GUIDE PAGE 40)

Retro Zone



Oh the irony of a new retro console!

Just released in the UK (having been available in the US for some time now) is the Atari TV Game system, that takes 10 Atari VCS / 2600 games and stores them all within a self contained games console that takes the shape of a classic Atari JoyStick. The unit only has one wire coming out - for connection to your TV, for as far as power goes, it will happily run off of four AA batteries. The ten games built into the system are Asteroids, Adventure, Missile Command, Centipede, Gravitar, Yar's Revenge, Breakout, Real Sports Volleyball, Circus

Atari, and Pong. Whilst the conversions of Adventure, Asteroids, Missile Command and Centipede have proved favourable, the console has been criticised in the US for forcing games such as Circus Atari, Pong, Breakout, etc, that were designed for use with the paddle controller, to be played with a joystick controller, which makes them more frustrating. Even still though, as the unit retailed for under \$20 in the US (about £15) it was seen as incredibly good value for money. No UK RRP has been set, but Argos have 'em for £24.99



Egghead's latest adventure sees him chase after Aliens....



...and reclaim the retro games of his that they took to planet Zog!

Brand New Spectrum game released!

Not everyone might be able to recall the Egghead series, as it only ever saw the light of day on the cover of Crash Magazine, but with said magazine being a firm favourite at the time among Spectrum owners, perhaps there are indeed a few of you who recall the series. The first Egghead game was released in 1989 and the editor of Crash fell in love with it, placing it on one of the magazine's coverdisks. It was quite graphically basic, but the gameplay was spot on. Programmer Jonathan Cauldwell was thus encouraged to create a sequel, and the product - Egghead 2 (released in 1990), with impressive full colour graphics as well as spot on gameplay went down a hit with Crash readers, yielding lots of positive feedback. Well, now, thirteen years on, Spectrum fans should be glad

to hear that Egghead 3 has just been released. Yes - it's a brand new Spectrum game(!). You can buy the enhanced tape version to play from your tape recorder, down your compu-link wires to your faithful Spectrum, for just £1.99 + 99p P&P, with the game being sold via www.cronosoft.co.uk - a new website specialising in selling BRAND NEW Spectrum releases. Alternatively, if you haven't a spectrum, or don't particularly fancy loading games from screechy tapes, then programmer Jonathan Cauldwell is offering the Beta version of the game as a *.TAP download which will work on most Spectrum emulators available for PC. See his website: <http://members.fortunecity.com/jonathan6/egghead/> for more details, plus info on a new shoot-'em-up, due soon!

Retro CD now online!

RetroCollector (a gaming guide for retro dealers that evaluates how much retro games are worth now), has launched as a brand spanking new website, at: www.diehardgamer.co.uk

To promote the launch of this groovy new site, we're giving away their last CD issue free with this magazine! Yes, that's the CD on the cover! Hungry for more? Then head along to: www.diehardgamer.co.uk





Confession of a Defender Virgin.

Wow. Aren't Retro Games just

so cool nowadays!?! It seems to be really something to name drop the likes of Space Invaders and Defender into conversations, and magazine retro sections are all the rage, as alongside gaming T-shirts and JoyStick Junkies esque events, it seems retro chic. But different generations have different gaming memories. For me, it all started with the Spectrum rubber keys - a second hand machine my neighbour ditched on me...in the...<gulp>...early nineties.

Indeed, this is the confession of a Defender virgin. There I was at JoyStick Junkies, the legendary Defender arcade cabinet in front of me. Editor of "United Games Fanzine" I was expected to know my stuff. But Defender was a title that was dominant in Arcades before I had even been born. "Ha! You weren't even around then!" scoffed A Mr Stuart Tracey (who's fab RetroCollector CD should have come free with this very issue). "I remember when it first came out. I was only six at the time, mind, but I remember it..." as I said, I was ignorant of a legend.

Now Retrogames have been popular for sometime, so it may not have been too hard for me to have found some emulation, or maybe home conversions, or a cheap rip off, and gotten into it. But I didn't. Well...there was one exception. A PC game called Starray that cost me £1, and perhaps for that price I shouldn't have expected much, but oh-my-gosh, did it ever lead me to resent sideways scrolling shooters. Why!?! Because you flew left or right, zapping aliens, but never seemed to get anywhere! I never made progress on that game. I would zoom about for ages, zapping aliens. Maybe the idea was just to get a good score, but I kept waiting...kept wishing I'd reach some form of end of the level, or for there to be something else to do, but alas. 'Twas not to be. And so, whilst still harbouring interest for hardcore shooters (Bangai-o on Dreamcast rocks!), I was totally put off of Defender types.

But JoyStick Junkies was to change all that.

"Look at this guy!" said a by-stander, "He keeps losing!". Fortunately, he wasn't speaking of me, but rather his mate, currently playing the machine. "And he can't handle it. Look - he keeps getting annoyed - but he keeps playing." of course this by-stander was slapping the HYPER-SPACE button half way through all of the player's goes, displacing the ship's position on screen, and resulting in the death of his mate. Probably the most annoying thing you can do whilst someone is trying to play the game. After a while of tiring of his mate's Hyper-space-button-pushing antics (imagine trying to pin the tail on the donkey, only your friend won't stop spinning you around - that's the equivalent of hitting the hyper-space button a zillion times during your mate's go - very disorientating!), the joystick was passed over to myself. "Yeah..show us how it's done mate!".

Of course as a newbie to Defender, I had a lot to figure out first before I could impress, and so my first go was far less than extraordinary. First I had to get to grips with the controls, and the joystick that only controlled up and down - not left and right. To move along, you had to hit an accelerator/thrust button, and if you wanted to turn around, you had to hit a reverse button next to the joystick. Then there were two extra

THE PC

"BONK 'EM FAST! BONK 'EM HARD! BONK 'EM ANY WAY YOU CAN!" ...screamed the quite

obscene 1989 slogan used to sell a game called "Bonk" in the US.

They didn't get the irony.

In Japan and the UK the game was better (and more sensibly) known as "BC Kid". And it was one of the best games available for a fine little console known as the PC Engine.....

Picture the scene: It's spring 1988. You're reading Computer and Video Games magazine. On the news pages they're raving about a small white console hot from Japan. It outguns the current NES and Sega Master System consoles on every count. It's hailed as the first 16-bit console. And just as raved over is a conversion of Irem's classic shoot-em-up R-Type - one of the first big hits on the system...

...and what a system it would prove to be! The PC Engine (PCE) was only a bit bigger than a packet of KP Skips, but nonetheless its processing power dwarfed every console that had gone before it. Ironically, the console actually used the same Z-80 processor that the NES and (strange but true) the Amstrad CPC(!) had used. However, the Z-80 in the PC Engine worked in union with a 16-bit graphics chip, and such a double-act allowed it to display up to 64 sprites with a palette of 256 colours on the screen at any one time. Impressive for its day. There was also a decent (for the time) processor speed of 7.16 MHz, and the machine had a whole Megabyte of RAM.

Rather than use cartridges, the PCE took RAM cards or "HudCards" as they were called. These were like the RAM cards used on the early Master System, but of course had more memory. The PCE's chips were first developed by Japanese software house Hudsonsoft (hence the name "HudCards"). Hudsonsoft would later bless the PCE with a number of classic games such as BC Kid and Bomberman. It was NEC, however, that took up the console and released it in 1987. A mere year later the PCE became the first console to have a CD-ROM add-on released, and other add-ons followed - like a rapid-fire game pad and, oddly enough, an add-on that turned your PCE into a mini-karaoke machine!! The PCE was also the first console to have a dedicated 5-player multi-tap, allowing the PCE to host some of the best multi-player games ever made.



Engine



As time went on, NEC released new versions of the PCE, such as the PC Duo, PC Supergrafx and a large, bulky version for the US market called the Turbo Grafx. This was identical to the original PCE, but had a larger casing. NEC thought the US would not like such a sleek, small thing as the PSE. So they made it as big and brutish as could be. BC Kid (above) then became Bonk, and he was soon Bonking about for all he was worth. The farce didn't last for long however, as the Turbo Grafx flopped. A costly laptop version and a handheld also did the rounds in Japan, with varying success.

What makes (and breaks) a console, however, are its games, and the PCE had classics by the truckload. Alongside the previously mentioned R-type and BC Kid titles, were the likes of Dungeon Explorer, Outrun, the superb pinball simulator Alien Crush. Vigilante. Y's Books 1, 2, 3 etc. Forgotten Worlds. An excellent conversion of Capcom's Strider. Shinobi. Street Fighter II Championship Edition. And...Chan and Chan. This was a bizarre game (Japanese of course) that had its salarymen-type characters farting at their enemies(!). Even still, the PC Engine's real strength lay in its library of shoot-em-ups. Its 16-bit graphics chip allowed it to have the large number of sprites on screen needed to make a good shooter work. Galaga 88, Darius, P-45, Truxxton, Parodius, Pop 'N Twin Bee.... even Taito's 1990 re-spray of Space Invaders graced the system. It is of course sad that the end of the PC Engine, in the mid-90s, took place at the same time that the shoot-em-up faded away as a genre. But perhaps the best game the PC Engine engine had to offer was, is, and shall always be ...Bomberman!

For those who don't know, Bomberman is a maze game viewed from above. The player moves his sprite about the maze. He throws bombs at the other 'bomberman'. They are in turn trying to do likewise to him. If the bombs did not hit a 'bomberman' straight away (and blow him up), they had a timer that would run out after a while. The bombs would then blow up and take everything in their part of the maze with them. The game was at its best when up to 5 players would play simultaneous - trying to destroy one another - for a laugh. Of course, Bomberman was later released on many platforms, from the NES to the Saturn. But it was on the PC Engine that Bomberman was first seen, and where it was arguably at its best.



buttons - fire, and smart bomb. With the controls learnt and my fingers in the right places, I nervously tapped the thrust button, - tapping only - so as to slowly edge my way along the screen, and managed to Zap a few aliens. I had, however, heard from Retro mags that humans were involved in the game somehow, and did indeed recognise some strange things at the bottom of the screen which may well have been humans.

"Defender! Cor Blimey! I haven't seen one of these machines for years!" exclaimed a guy who I will from now on refer to as the Defender Veteran. "Well...wanna show us how it's done?" I asked, relegating the joystick, thinking it wise to observe his tactics. "Sure," he replied, taking control of the joystick, and zooming about at high speed zapping aliens - although admittedly - after a minute or so, exploding in glorious (albeit pixelated) techni-colour. =). "So what's the deal with the humans?" I venture to ask. "Well...you've gotta shoot the aliens before they get to the top of the screen with 'em." Now I had observed some bizarre human/alien cross breed enemies in the game, and was quite perplexed at how to shoot at them without destroying the human inside the alien. "You just shot an alien with a human!" I exclaimed, upon seeing the Defender Veteran take one of the hybrids down. "Yeah," he responded, like it was no big deal. Apparently, that's the enemies the aliens transform into when they get to the top of the screen successfully - and it's too late to save 'em. "Just shoot everything. When it comes to the humans, you've gotta stop the aliens from picking them up in the first place...like here..." and low and behold, there was an Alien that was dragging one of the pixelated men from the bottom of the screen to the top. BLAM! We shot the alien ...but the human was falling...an attempt by the veteran to catch him..but.."Gah! Too late!"

And then it was my turn again, and finally I knew what I was doing. Armed with the wisdom bestowed to me by the veteran (although still not comfortable with the reverse function - so decided to operate for the most part in one direction) I whizzed through the vector drawn landscape, and recognised that this game was actually cooler in the modern day. I mean, in a pub in the 80s, maybe I would have been playing it with Madonna or Michael Jackson coming over on the pub's loud speakers, but as I flew over the vector landscape, the jagged line, reminiscent of a musical wave form, suited the drum and bass playing perfectly. An audio visual adrenalin rush from a retro game!?! Yes. Those graphics may be simple, but they're iconic (and retro chic too - for those readers who have been reading this waffle right from the beginning! Hooray! Don't worry...I'm right here with you...we'll make it to the end, it's gonna be okay, alright? Trust me. I'm a [lexical]doctor. Ed).

Of course I also managed to zap a few aliens, and using the landscape map at the top of the screen, could zoom off to areas where Aliens were fast approaching humans at the bottom of the screen. Suddenly it was obvious why the game was called Defender - that was me that was - I was the Defender of humans up and down the breadth of the jagged line landscape. I felt important, I felt proud, I felt....mighty embarrassed every time I blew up. But at least unlike in Starray, I wasn't flying right pointlessly fighting my way through a never ending wave of aliens, with no sign of getting anywhere; rather, I had finally learnt why the classic was a classic. Visually iconic, tactically engaging, and also a source of shoot-'em-up satisfaction.

■ **Defender has recently been re-released on GBA, and a new 3D version is available for GC, PS2 +Xb.**

■ **JoyStick Junkies are a lifestyle gaming brand that hold game themed pub/club nights in London. For more info, visit www.joystickjunkies.com**

All this nostalgia is very well. But what, you may ask, makes the PCE worth getting blurry-eyed about moreso than any other retro console?

➤ **The First Super Console:**

Well, to begin with, it was the first 'super console' seen in the UK. Up until then, consoles fell into two camps: The blocky things in mahogany cases getting dusty on top of your cupboard, or the backward world of the Nintendo and Sega 8-bits, which meant as much power as a C64 at twice the price and half the choice in games. The PCE had, after all, turned up only three years after the great console market meltdown of 1984, and the stigma of being unhip and out of date still clung to "home entertainment systems". But the PCE changed that. Now consoles could be something you would really want. They were 'cool' and cutting edge. You could talk about them at work or in the playground without being laughed at. True, this only applied to the small number of people who knew about PCEs at the time, but this new view of consoles stuck, and it spread through UK gaming culture. The PC Engine's hype helped get everyone in the UK used to the idea of a super console, and so it paved the way for the Megadrive, the Gameboy and the Super Nintendo.



➤ **Encouraging Imports:**

We can also thank the PC Engine for Grey imports. Until it arrived, there was little call for MSX clones and dim NES games from the US. In those days it was either an official UK release or nothing at all. But the PCE whipped up the demand for consoles from foreign shores. All the shops needed to do was bring in the supply. Computer shops could now make a good living from selling the PCE to buffs, often at a high price, but the demand kept coming, and soon the dealers would diversify. Since they could see a market, thanks to the PCE, they dared to import Megadrives, Neo-Geos, the first handheld consoles, etc, etc... This helped the UK public to have a greater choice than what was offered by the retail 'mainstream'. They could buy the latest goods from Japan straight away, and this in turn helped build a healthy following for consoles long before their official releases. It can be argued that the grey import market helped build up the Megadrive and Super Nintendo's pre-release following. This gave Nintendo a strong base on which their official releases could build. If the grey market had not been there the super console could have taken longer to find success in the UK and might not have been as widely anticipated. And of course, we still get our foreign Gamecubes and Xboxes from the shops that are still open because they started selling PCEs in the late 80s.



➤ **Pioneering CD-ROM Technology:**

So the PCE was influential. But its legacy extends beyond even this. As the first console to have a CD ROM add-on, the PCE broke new ground, and where it went, others followed. Sega brought out its Mega-CD add-on for the Megadrive, and for the first time CD console software was available to the British public - not just the tech-heads who could afford to shop at the specialist import shops. This helped the public get used to the idea of CD-based consoles and so eased the way for the next generation consoles. Such as, of course, the first Playstation (itself a by-product of an ill-fated Nintendo-Sony collaboration on a Super Nintendo CD-ROM drive to compete with the Mega-CD). The rest, as they say, is history.



So, if the NES was the defining moment in the early 1980s, then the PCE set the way for the late 80s and beyond. From then on Consoles were not just toys but at the cutting edge of style and technology..... *and where would we be without Bomberman and Bonk?*

NEC back in the game?

NEC have returned to producing games. They've recently set up a new development studio in the US, dubbed NEC Interchannel, with the aim to produce games for the latest formats such as Gamecube, PS2 and Xbox. The studio's first project is a racing game called Tube Slider for Gamecube, that takes the future racing angle of F-zero. Nonetheless, it's speculated that the new studio may also draw on NEC's extensive back catalogue and treat us to some retro remakes in the near future. Watch this space.

Two new SEGA Compilations!

Got a Gamecube? Well, you may well be interested in the Sonic Mega Collection, a kind of Sonic All-Stars, in the vein of Sonic Jam, featuring versions of the Megadrive classics Sonic 1, Sonic 2, Sonic 3 and Sonic and Knuckles, plus Dr Robotnik's Mean Bean Machine puzzler thrown in for good measure. But it's not just Gamecube owners getting a slice of the retro package. Out now for PC is Empire Interactive's Arcade Collection, that sees - for a mere £14.99(!) - some more contemporary Sega classics such as Virtua Fighter 2, Virtua Cop 2, Sega Rally Championship, Virtua Tennis, Sonic 3D and Sonic R all packaged together. We've played Sonic R before on the Saturn, which was a great laugh, although the two player version was mared by a close draw-in distance. This isn't the problem with the PC version, which happily manages even four player split screen! Sonic 3D is that isometric adventure which whilst solid probably isn't considered classic Sonic...but Virtua Fighter 2!? Virtua Cop 2!? Sega Rally Championship!? Are you SURE you want to go around car boot sales and second hand shops, getting old Saturn classics, when here are some of the best served on a platter? Who needs wellies? [Thinks of Bewitched Belinda...hmm.. wellies + jumpers...]



Free Retro Games!

Infinite Frontiers is an online fan community that focuses on popular domains of fandom, such as Transformers, Star Trek, Amiga Computers, and...computer games! To cater for the latter, they've recently added a new segment to their website that allows free retro games to be downloaded, only unlike all the technically illegal ROMs, and pirated software out there, everything on this site is all legal and above board, as they seek to establish links with publishers who have games to offer.

So far, there's a healthy collection of Amiga games for those of you still using Commodore's machine, but rest assured, there's a fair share of games available for PC as well, as well as links to Amiga emulators should PC owners fancy some of the Amiga offerings. They've also managed to secure a deal with Jeff Minter's software house, Llamasoft, allowing them to host Jeff's original C64 classics, such as "Attack Of The Mutant Camels". Take a gander at what they've got at: <http://www.infinitefrontiers.org> It's all free, so why not?

Exhilarating Games:

This issue's review of Bangai-o for Dreamcast, really got me thinking about old skool shooters, and in particular, my all time favourite gaming series - Megaman. Now not everyone is sold on the concept of Megaman, admittedly - so fair play to 'em. I think the main complaint from non-Megaman fans was that Capcom were merely making money from old rope - with Megaman 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, X, X1, X2, X3, etc, all being quite similar in principle. Well, having first completed Megaman 2 on the 8-bit NES (it being one of my all time favourite games) all I wanted was more of the same...it left me thirsty dammit, so I had no worries about subsequent games merely offering more of the same...but the reason I wish to mention this series now is for the reason that I've found the Megaman games I've played in the series to be extremely exhilarating. Megaman is perhaps the only game that can physically exhaust me. How so? Megaman's mega cannon - his standard weapon can be a great little weapon if you hammer the fire button super fast to get as many bullets out as you can. You're also limited to a set number of bullets you can fire in quick succession - in Megaman 2 he fired in batches of three (I think it was a similar case with Megaman X3), but if a bullet was taken off screen for some reason, like, oooh...let's say it hit your target...then you could hammer out another shot within the split second....so for bosses like Gravity Beetle on Megaman X3 or something, I'd get close to him, and hammer out a zillion bullets. Standing right next to him, virtually every bullet I shot hit him, and was absorbed, allowing me to fire another bullet, and another, and another....fudge the technique of holding down the fire button to charge up a single powerful hit, I was doing far more damage by being down on my knees in front of the TV, and holding the controller in my left arm, shaking/vibrating my right arm and hand so that it tapped the fire button at a ludicrously fast rate.

Of course there was more to it - jumping around, avoiding his attacks, etc, but when the Boss finally exploded in a shower of blue light, my sigh of relief and feeling of pride was not just based on the skill I had deployed, the tactics used, but the reward of the physical exertion, and the break I could finally give to my aching arm. (Ben thought of a wanking joke, but I've vetoed its inclusion on moral grounds. Ed.)

I'm sure you don't have to go through this type of technique to defeat the Gravity Beetle - but my point was - doing so was fun! (Ben thought of another wanking joke, but I've vetoed its inclusion again. Ed.). And there are other classic games that require a lot of effort too. (Ben thought of yet another wanking joke, but again I have vetoed its inclusion! Ed.) Athlete Kings on the Saturn was a brilliant Olympic style game, with events such as long jump, hurdles, javelin, etc, all of which required extreme amounts of button bashing. Likewise Konami's Track'n'Field game for Playstation required much button bashing, and very often different players used different button-bashing techniques, to get the speed of their running up to scratch. Mad stuff.

So where is the physical exertion in today's games!?! Well, whilst older gamers might love to do a Cranky Kong (Donkey Kong Country reference) and scoff at today's gamers, merely pressing "X" every couple of cut-scenes, the truth is, today's gamers are probably exerting more effort in their play than before. Whilst the days of waving joysticks in the air are long behind us, thanks to the proliferation of the joypad (or are they gonna be back with Atari's new joystick based retro system!?!) we're seeing new peripherals such as dance mats for the likes of Konami's Dancing Stage, mean that gamers today aren't just limited to sore thumbs and aching arms, but can go the whole hog and end up with aching legs and tired feet too! Altogether now: HIP-HIP-HOORAY!

So if you thought the sore thumbs and aching arms of hardcore shooters back in the day was exhilarating, just remember people today are now - quite literally - jumping up and down for their exhilaration kicks. Maybe. <Looks around>. Has anyone actually played Konami's recent Dancing Stage Mix....does someone wanna write a review of it!?! Anyone!?! Turn to page 38.

~Andrew Mehta~

Handheld Kingdom



"Welcome to the Kingdom!"

One day, King Duncan of the Handheld Kingdom was sat on his royal throne, talking with his royal delegates about important royal matters, when all of a sudden the games jester came running into the throne room, arms flailing about the place.

"Good grief Games Jester! Compose yourself!" urged King Duncan,

"Whatever is the matter?"

"Your Royal Highness! It's one of the garden games! Its got terribly out of hand!"

"A handheld game, gotten terribly out of hand?! This simply will not do! Not in my handheld kingdom!" announced the King, standing tall, and flinging his royal robe over one shoulder.

"Take us to the Garden! Let us see what this problem is, and if we cannot solve it!"

and so the Games Jester led the King and his royal delegates through to the Royal Garden.

"Don't say I didn't warn you!" cautioned the Games Jester, as they approached the Garden Maze.

"Hissssssss!" came the sudden sound, as suddenly, a snake's head protruded forth from the maze hedgerow.

"Good gracious! I don't remember our garden snake being that big!!" exclaimed the King.

"That's exactly the problem sir, the more numbers it picks up, the longer and longer it gets! It keeps bumping into its own tail too! And it's scaring away all the Royal Gardeners!"

"Tut-tut! This simply will not do!"

"Indeed! But whatever can we do to change the larger than life reptilian face of gaming on the Royal garden grounds?" **Continued opposite...**



Stay Sharp, look lively.

The Sharp GX10 is one of the first platforms to use the new Vodafone Live technology.

Sharp's GX series have mainly been about combining phone functionality with that of a digital camera - enabling users to send multimedia messages, featuring pictures they've taken, as well as basic text messaging. The GX10 ups the ante on GX predecessors with a bigger screen (albeit heftier price tag), and new found gaming functionality. But how does it actually play? Contributor Chaz, managed to swipe his mate's (lost your mobile phone? Email: Chaz-might-have-it@game-extra.co.uk) long enough to both avoid legal allegations and to have a good go on a couple of downloaded games.

"They were fairly good." he said, describing his experiences with both an old skool shoot-'em-up and a

separate driving game, he had tried out. You don't buy games for the GX10, but rather download them, with it costing so much per download. So is it expensive? "Well, my mate's got a £190 phone bill, and I don't really think he cares. He keeps downloading ringtones and stuff..."

Hmm...scary.

What could be seen as annoying is that there's only so much memory on the phone, and whilst once you've downloaded a game, it's yours - with it sitting in the phone's memory, once the memory has become full, you may need to delete old games in order to download news games....and then if you want that old game back afterwards, you'll have to pay to download it for a second time...

Even still, it's not all bad, as Chaz explained: "I've got an Atari Lynx, Gameboy Color(sic) and Gameboy Advance - the latter being colourful rubbish, for until Spyro The Dragon came out, I really felt it was a bit naff and hated the design of the thing, but when I checked out my mate's GX10, well, I think it was the first time since having picked up the original Gameboy back when it first came out, that I found I was turning my body whilst I was turning corners in the driving game...although I dunno if that's a good thing, heh." So what's the final word on phones like the GX10 that are able to run downloadable Java games such as those available through Vodafone Live?

"It's a bit of a fiddle, but it's the next thing on from Snake. They've made that jump."

SplinterCell Link-Up.

Ubi Soft are launching Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell on Gamecube and Gameboy Advance simultaneously on June 6th, but these titles aren't just related to each other by way of the Tom Clancy franchise, and the timing of their release dates. Nope. They're linked to each other in another way. A quite literal way, and since you've probably already guessed how due to the picture and headline we've used, I'll hold it a secret no more - you can link your Gameboy Advance up to your Gamecube for extra features! Firstly, when the Gameboy Advance is linked up, you can use it as an extension of Sam's radar-esque map, the OPSAT, but you're also able to hack computers and trigger weapons (including the wall mine) remotely.

In addition, there's a new weapon in the Nintendo versions called the Sticky Bomb that can be controlled in this way also. But as well as the GBA enriching the Gamecube experience, the Gamecube can enrich GBA play. By completing the Gamecube version, you're able to gain access to a further five levels within the Gameboy Advance game. Top stuff 'eh? The GBA adventure is entirely 2D, but UbiSoft say it's still possible to lurk in the shadows and wait with baited breath for guards to pass, so they've tried not to lose any of the game's tension, although battles with key characters will occur, creating key action scenes. We'll give you the full lowdown nearer the time of release.



Jazz's Ringtones:



"Do you want to write an intro to your Ringtone section?" asked Andrew, pleased that Jazz had submitted some funky ringtones for Nokia handsets. "Not particularly," said Jazz, quite honestly. "Just write something about what they are, that they only work for Nokia phones in composer, that they're made by me and not got from elsewhere so aren't official or anything, and that the readers are welcome to make their own, or change them, etc." "Ah-ha!" exclaimed Andrew. "I tricked you there! Did you see what I did? Did you?! I got you to introduce the section!!!" "Okay...." said Jazz slowly, backing away....

ZELDA: 112bpm 4c1 8f1 16c1 4c1 8- 8f1 16f1 16g1 16a1 16#a1 4c2 8- 8c2 16c2 16#c2 16#d2 4f2 8- 8f2 16f2 16#d2 16#c2 8#d2 16#c2 4c2 8- 4c2 8#a1 16#a1 16c2 4#c2 16- 8c2 8#a1 8#g1 16#g1 16#a1 4c2 16- 8#a1 8#g1 8g1 16g1 16a1 4b1 16- 4d2 4c2 2c1 4c1	TETRIS: 112bpm 8a1 16e1 16f1 8g1 16f1 16e1 8d1 16d1 16f1 8a1 16g1 16f1 8e1 16e1 16f1 8g1 8a1 8f1 8d1 8d1 8- 16f1 8f1 16a1 8d2 16c2 16#a1 8a1 16- 16f1 8a1 16g1 16f1 8e1 16e1 16f1 8g1 8a1 8f1 8d1 8d1
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WORMS: 140bpm 8c2 8d2 4e2 8g2 8g2 4g2 8f2 8e2 4d2 16c2 8d2 8e2 8d2 8- 4c2 4d2 16c2 8d2 8e2 4a1 4c2 4d2 16c2 8d2 8e2 4d2	RAW IS WAR: 112bpm 16c1 16c1 16c1 16c1 8d1 16c1 8#d1 16c1 16c1 16c1 8e1 8e1 16c1 16c1 16c1 16c1 8d1 16c1 8#d1 16c1 16c1 16c1 8e1 8e1
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Eidos Mobile:

Eidos have got some Tomb Raider: Angel of Darkness ringtones, screensavers and backgrounds for use with Nokia, Motorola and Ericsson phones, available from www.eidosmobile.co.uk exclusively to UK mobile phone users.

No....wait....you have to pay for them. Each item is £3. Think about that. I know. 300 penny sweets. Hmm....black jacks....

Handsets compatible with Eidos' Lara goodies:

Nokia: 3330, 3510, 3510i, 3530, 3650, 5100, 6610, 6650, 6800, 7210, 7650, 8910i.
Motorola: T720.
Ericsson: T300, T68i!

...continued...

"Vaybe I can be of velp."
"Who are you!?!"
"I am Voda. Voda vone. Von Russia. Vee 'ave vound a much, much vetter vay zu du things."
"I thought it was the Germans who spoke like that, not Russians?"
"Nein. Das ist nicht richtig. Der Russians "voda vone" sagen!"
"Yeah, but Vodafone is a British company, so why the Russian accent?"
"Vee-'cos Voda vone begins vith "V"...and also vee-'cos of zee creative license of zee writer of ziss piece."
"Ahhh! So this is all fiction!"
"But it is inspired by reality!"
"Ah-ha! That explains why I'm all twisted!"
"Vi vill ving you vuch vetter games vor your garden entertainment. Vehold! Vodavone Vive!"
"Yer what!?!"
"Vodavone Vive!"
"Oh crumbs...you're saying Vodafone Live aren't you!?! Wow! This looks interesting!"
"Zee Snake is no more, zoo can zake zim zu the zoo."
King Duncan gave a heavy sigh. "<Sigh>. I knew it might come to this one day. Come on, you loyal, royal snake... I'll escort you to the Zoo! We'll have a procession in the streets as we lead you there....trumpets blowing, red carpets laid out before you...and lots of confetti action..."
"Er..King Duncan..." interrupted the Gaming Jester.
"Yes?"
"The Snake's just swallowed the Royal Swan(!)"
"Not my...oh-dear-God! Not my Wonder-Swan! Not my Royal Bandai WonderSwan!!!"
"Zoo not veari!" said Voda, swapping her Russian dress for a karate outfit and samurai sword: "Zee VonderSwan has only died in the East. Et vas never launched in zee vest."
"Of course not! If it was in me vest, I would have surely felt it, when getting changed this morning!" said the King, beating his chest!
"Vie vorumber!" said Voda, attempting to say "Aye Corumba!" in despair.
"But I cannot forgive the Royal Snake for eating the Royal Swan! It's no longer my Snake...it has turned into a monstrosity! Destroy the beast!" commanded the King. Suddenly, a thousand Monkeys inside a thousand balls (in full 3D thanks to Realism's programming for the Gameboy Advance...) came tumbling down towards the Snake...who swallowed most of them whole.
"Gah! That's my entire army of Super Monkeys bested in one fell swoop! Is there no stopping this creature?"
"Voda Vone Vive. Use Voda Vone Vive. It is better than zee Snake Nokia game."
"Hang on....Royal snakes have never lived this long, nor gotten this big before....surely something odd is going on?" quizzed the Jester.
Suddenly, everyone realised what was going on and were surprised they hadn't thought it the case earlier. They all turned their heads towards the corner of the garden, for, as usual, in the corner of the garden was the Royal Inventor, beavering away inside his inventor's shed, only now they could see that wires from his shed were going straight into the Snake!
Striding over to the shed in quite a fury, the King burst open the door. "Mr

Rustle-It-Up, what have you been doing this time?" he demanded of the inventor, who could be seen cowering over various mobile phone and gameboy technologies. "Forgive me sire! 'Twas Nintendo! They wanted me to develop a new longer lasting ion lithium battery...but before using it in their precious new Gameboy Advance SP, I thought I had better test it out on something that wouldn't cause any problems, and I had my mobile on me y'see, so thought I'd try it out with a game of Snake...!!!"
"Vee Vad!!!" exclaimed Voda, trying to say "Eee Gad!"
"VinVeed...er...I mean indeed", answered the King, "I'm very disappointed in you Mr Rustle-It-Up, and to show your repentance, I give a Royal decree that you shall be made to compensate by rustling up an army of Junior Super Monkeys!"
"Super yet Junior?"
"Er...yes!"
"Very well."
"And if you succeed at this task, I will honour you with a new Royal title: Mr Rustle-Super-Monkeys-Up"
"Wouldn't it make more sense to call me Mr Rustle-up-Super-Monkeys?"
"No. The King's word is final!"
"But there's a wee little brat here who hangs around the garden, and he's sure to add various rude comments to the end of me title, like..."
But regardless of the inventor's attempts to negotiate a better Royal title, the King was no longer paying attention. An army helicopter was raising a frightful noise outside.
"What on earth!?! Is someone about to attack the Royal Castle!?!?" wondered the King, whilst Voda suddenly started acting hysterical:
"Voooooooooooooooo!!! Vitvis Vokia!!! Vive is voommed....vive is voommed!!!" began Voda, acting hysterical.
"Control yourself woman! For the wee balance!" cried Mr Rustle-It-Up, reaching for a wet fish...
But then, before the Helicopter even landed, a lady in tight shorts jumped out from the side of the vehicle, did a mid-air roll, and then landed on her feet, standing tall and proud on the Royal Garden turf completely unscathed.
"You look a little odd lady!" commented the King "Good grief! I can see your arse from here! And your legs are light shaded...and...<gasp!> you've...round things on your chest...!!! You must be 3D!"
"Vell Vi am 64E!" said Voda, mistaking the conversation for one about Bra sizes.
"It's Lara Croft, people, although I'm sure I need no introduction!" she announced, proudly.
"But aren't you off finding the three magic stones to prevent the prophecy of mass destruction coming true, for Gameboy Advance?"
"Er...no...that's the pseudo 3D Lara...y'know, the 2D cardboard cut-out that used to sit in the Royal Foyer, greeting visitors and tourists as they arrived?"
"Oh yes...."
"So why are you - fully fleshed out 3D Lara - here?"
Lara didn't answer straight away, rather she cocked her twin pistols, turned around, and shot the Snake. "Nokia's moved on." she said. "And so have I. I've come to get N-gaged! Now where's my wedding dress?"



Wahey! I got GAME, you got GAME...we all got a whooooole lotta GAME...boyzzz....! Toot-toot!



Games Jester



HELLO THERE MY GROOVY CITIZENS!
We've had a piffing two gameboy reviews this issue - cor blimey!!

And how come no one has reviewed any mobile phone games, or little funny LCD thingies you sometimes find in your stocking at Christmas?!? Whassa' matter - scared no one wants to read about Snake on your Nokia, 'cos it's as old as a 286 laptop with DOS, Qbasic and a copy of Qbasic Nibbles - the Snake of its day! Ahhh...and what days those were... 286 laptops...back then this was called the Suitcase Kingdom!! An' dat's dee honest truff guv'!

To have your reviews appear in the handheld kingdom simply email the games jester at:

gamesjester@game-extra.co.uk

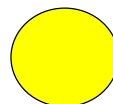
Or write to:

**United Games, 6 Cheviot Close,
Ramleaze, West Swindon,
Wiltshire, SN5 5QD**

CastleVania

Circle of The Moon

Format: Game Boy Advance *Mellow Yellow!*



More vampire-slaying

action from one of Konami's cash cow franchises. Like the superb "Symphony of the Night" for the PlayStation, this side scrolling adventure has a slight RPG influence, with such concepts as hit points,

level-ups and spells thrown into the mix, although admittedly, only the collectable card spells really add anything to the gameplay. Dispatching random enemies allows the player to collect cards that give you weapon-boosts and spells to cast once combined. These spells aren't really needed to complete the game, but add some interest to proceedings.

The actual game structure has obvious influences from Nintendo's classic Super Metroid (for the SNES). Unlike the earliest of CastleVania adventures, the game is based in one large castle rather than broken into separate stages. Dead-ends in the game map become explorable as more special abilities are collected, and thanks to the map system, you are never unsure about where you should be exploring next.

Konami's designers have also added some replay value to the game, for after completing it the first time around, you are able to play through the game once more as a Magician, Fighter, Shooter and Thief, each with unique attributes. It's a good idea, although play may well become monotonous as the game's map remains the same.

CastleVania's difficulty level is pitched slightly unevenly. Save points are liberally scattered around the castle, which is good for CastleVania novices, as the player never feels 'unsafe' or cautious about exploring new parts of the castle. However, CastleVania

purists may complain that the edge has been taken off a usually rock-hard series of games. Only the enemy boss encounters really offer the player a challenge, and could put off some less able gamesplayers relatively early on.

Presentation wise, everything is fine. The graphics are well-drawn and interesting enough not to be bland, although there is a noticeable lack of sprite scaling effects to anyone who enjoyed Super CastleVania IV. One problem that players have encountered is that the colours used are generally too dark and murky, given the nature of the GBA's screen. Unless you have an Afterburner-modified machine, or are getting a GBA SP, I recommend playing in direct sunlight, or with a strong light nearby. The music is mostly functional, with nothing of note apart from a few nice samples.

All in all, there's nothing's classic, ground-breaking or massively exciting in this game, but it's well designed and solidly good entertainment. Anyone after a dependable 2D platform adventure can't go wrong with Circle of the Moon, and I highly recommend this to CastleVania devotees. GBA players in general would be advised to give this a go, especially as most retailers have been discounting this version of CastleVania recently.

Written by Andrew Crane. Text ©2002.

"Anyone after a dependable 2D platform adventure can't go wrong with Circle of the Moon."



If it wasn't for those great balls of fire, the world of CastleVania might be very dark indeed!



Gibber! The back drop's changed!





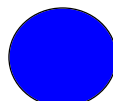
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Hey!
A big thanks to
penny-arcade.com
for this top comic
strip!

Metroid Fusion

Format: Game Boy Advance



Brill Blue!



Metroid. Ever since the release of the first game on the NES that name has been associated with a quality gaming experience. Even though the anticipated N64 version never appeared, we've been treated to this gem of a GBA game in the wait for the first 3D instalment. To anyone who knows nothing of Samus Aran and her exploits, her games are basically about running around in a large suit of battle armour (love

the shoulder pads) while annihilating alien scum with a huge arm-mounted cannon. Of course, there IS a plot behind all this, but it usually takes a back seat to the actual gameplay.

Unlike the recent surge of updated SNES games that the GBA has been swamped with (some of which are very good, mind) this is a completely original game, made specifically for the Advance. Admittedly, comparing the graphics between this and the SNES version ("Metroid III: Super Metroid" for all you fact-fans) reveals only a slight improvement in the visuals, but they're still beautiful nonetheless. Samus now has even more animations, bringing her to life like never before, and the animation on the enemies is first-class too (dodgy slime-zombies aside). All of the areas of the game have a specific look, bringing the varied environments to life. Although quite dark in some places, it's no Castlevania, so you can see what you're doing easily enough!

The sound, despite the limitations of a puny speaker, is superb. Every area, situation and boss suits the varied soundtracks perfectly, creating a great atmosphere. Some of the sound effects are pretty wicked too, especially the echoing footsteps of the deadly SA-X (more on that later...).

Fortunately, this game's bite is just as good as its bark, with a surprisingly deep plot and excellent controls just adding to the addictive nature of the platforming blaster that lies at the heart of Metroid Fusion. The plot is involving and adds buckets to the background of all Metroid games. It's set after Metroid III, when Samus returns to SR-388 with a research team to investigate the native life-forms (the surviving ones, that is). She comes into contact with a previously unknown organism (later named X) which infects her in a rather fatal way. In the nick of time a cure is found in the form of some preserved Metroid DNA, saving her from doom and giving her the handy ability to absorb future X-parasites. Unfortunately, infected parts of her suit had to be cut away before she was cured, so she's gone and lost all her abilities, meaning you have to get them back. Add to this the mysterious explosions on the research lab and you've got somewhere to start your adventure.

Unlike previous adventures, you are not completely alone in your quest. You are accompanied by a computer who hands out hints as to what to do and where to go next, as well as pushing the plot along. Admittedly, this does take away some of the sense of exploration, and it does make proceedings somewhat easier, but it's a tool that's been used well, and still gives plenty of scope for you to do your own thing.

A few old enemies return (go Ridley!), but they are joined by a huge variety of new ones, ranging from the stupid hoppers to the infuriating gold space pirates. The bosses are spectacular as always, challenging but not impossible, involving quite a bit of thinking and a whole lot of blasting to despatch them. The game's main antagonist appears in the form of the SA-X, a super-powered evil clone of Samus at the peak of her abilities, whose main purpose for most of the game is to turn up at key points and generally scare the bejesus out of you.

Unfortunately, Metroid Fusion has a rather large flaw. It's short. I'll admit to being a rather shoddy gamer, but nonetheless I managed to complete the game in about 10 hours. It is possible to complete the game in under two hours with everything done, which seems rather a waste of £30. However, doing this is not nearly so easy as it may appear. It'll take you a while to find every single hidden item, plus the fact that the difficulty level isn't exactly super-low. Most people will complete the game with only about 70% of items collected, so there's a lot of incentive to go back and find everything or shave those final minutes off of your score.

So, to round up, Metroid Fusion is a fantastically put together game that is great fun to play, but it could be a bit short for the expert gamers out there. However, I would recommend this to any and all Metroid fans, plus I reckon people who've never heard of it before should definitely give it a go.

Written by "DragonFire". Text ©2003

"A brilliant and enjoyable game, despite its shortcomings (excuse the pun)."

MORE METROID

Gameboy Advance Metroid Fusion on the video @ position 00:55:54.

Gamecube Metroid Prime on the video @ position 00:12:30.

Gamecube Metroid Prime Review in the mag @ page 67.



Samus gets a little help from the Nav' room, but then she's out there on her own, against big green things! Btw - be sure to check out position 00:55:54 on our cover video to see this and other gameboy games in action!



N o k i a v e r s u s N i n t e n d o



In the first Quarter of 2003, Nokia made a key announcement. Executive Vice President Anssi Vanjoki stood before a crowd of leading journalists, and announced: "Ten years ago I was...introducing Nokia's first GSM handportable - the Nokia 1011. That started a very big era for Nokia and for the wireless industry, as this hand portable telephone became an everyday product. Today, ten years after that, Nokia is announcing its entry to a new business arena...the games market..."

And so it was, that Nokia unveiled its ambitious plans for its new Nokia N-gage "Game Deck" to the world. Of course, eagle-eyed journalists may have noticed a few press releases made before Christmas last year that gave details of a new platform with games support from Sega, but Sega have long been known to support many mobile platforms, and there was nothing to separate the announcement of the game device back in November from the stories we had all heard about GPRS games content, and Motorola's A009 (covered in United Games back in 2001) among others.

However, the press conference that took place early this year showed selected games journalists just how serious Nokia were about entering the games market - with Nokia looking at launching the machine here in the UK in time for Christmas and with support from the likes of Eidos, Taito and Activision, who along with Sega, would bring key titles such as Tomb Raider, Bubble Bobble, Tony Hawk Skateboarding and Sonic to the machine, it looks like Nokia could give Nintendo a run for its money.

Nokia has certainly dominated the mobile phone industry and gained itself an aura of cool. Whilst the likes of Ericsson were baffled at why their top services weren't being bought into, they had failed to catch onto the small and sexy gadget fashion trend direction Nokia had laid down.

Nintendo, hasn't, however. With the Gameboy SP, it is tapping straight into that trend before Nokia use it to compete. It is targeting a new demographic with the GBA SP's marketing, whilst still maintaining respect from its current audience, and if you didn't experience "Zelda: A Link to the Past" during the SNES days, perhaps

you might enjoy getting familiar with the title now, whether you have a stylish new GBA SP, or whether your machine is landscape and purple - if there's one thing Nintendo know, it's games.

Nonetheless, one should note we are VERY excited about the Nokia machine - bringing competition to an otherwise monopolised market. For whilst this article is geared towards pitching the Nokia N-gage against the GBA SP, that's just our journalistic urge to contextualise industry events in a way that makes for a gripping feature (see? You haven't stopped reading yet... ...cunning 'eh? Nonono...wait...come back!! Ed.). As Nokia's Vanjoki stated in his address to the gaming press:

"...we are not just going after a business where we are going to start a bloody market fight, but we are going in there by introducing an extension possibility for the whole games industry by making online, mobile gaming, a new feature."

, so Nokia therefore hopes to push the whole mobile gaming scene forwards, with online features, and that, my friends, can only be a good thing for the games industry, and of course, us consumers.



Has Nintendo finally met its match?

Here in the Handheld Kingdom, we like to think all handheld subjects are equal, but nonetheless, it seems it's the Gameboy that has dominated the Kingdom, and indeed the whole world, of handheld gaming. The recent Gameboy Advance Special Project, or SP, marks a new re-design for Nintendo's flagship money earner, designed to extend the demographic. Surely the machine is going from strength to strength...or is it defending itself from an incoming threat?

For years now, the telecoms companies, following the boom in mobile phone sales, have attempted to get in on the games market. Nokia introduced the world to Snake and Snake 2 - not an original title, true (it had appeared in many guises previously, not least as Nibbles - with Microsoft's Qbasic and MS DOS package), but nonetheless, it proved mobile phones could be home to reasonable attempts at interactive entertainment, and soon "WAP" and "J2ME" were all buzz words, and the mobile games market was seen as a new opportunity for growth in the games industry. Companies like Motorola would show off new devices such as its A009 which we reported on back in 2001, that had graphics to rival the Gameboy Color(sic), and yet looked more like a pocket calculator. <Ahem>. Indeed. The A009 doesn't seem to have done a lot. Other companies such as Orange have attempted to get gaming going on the current mobile devices, but with online distribution methods, hefty connection charges, and primitive gameplay at the end of it all, just in the same way your office worker will sit there playing Solitaire on the PC, as opposed to go through all the hassle of smuggling the latest graphics kit into work just to play Command and Conquer

Generals, so too your mobile user, finds they're better off with a quick game of Snake whilst they wait at the bus stop, as opposed to faffing around with all the kerfuffle of a costly connection to play an online WAP game, that's merely mediocre.

Of course, one of the main problems plaguing mobile operators has always been the distribution model for games. In Orange's case, games are accessed through an online portal, the connection to which gets charged to your phone bill. Motorola's A009 presented the idea of free games, with banner advert textures in the background to pay for them...something that never really took off.

What are Nokia doing then? Well....it's quite simple. If you want a game, you can pop into a games shop and buy one.

It comes on a slim card, called a MMC (MultiMedia Card) which is a bit like the PC Engine's old games cartridges, and this slots into your Nokia Game Deck much in the same manner as a Gameboy Cartridge slots into the back of a Gameboy. Easy Peasy.

So what about online connectivity? Nokia aren't ignoring it, but ala Xbox Live, this won't initially replace retailers with direct distribution models. Much like Splinter Cell, you'll have the opportunity to download extra levels, or bonus features for an already shop-purchased game.

"There is this possibility of online services and the ability to download additions whilst you are mobile, really unleashing the innovation to the developer", explained Nokia's

Executive VP Anssi Vonjoki, at the press conference. He also envisaged easy access to hints and cheats: "...for two euros or so, an operator can easily deliver you a nice solution for how you can cheat your way forward..." he explained, giving an indication of the specialist game helplines that may be set up.

By now, you should realise that we're not talking mere Snake-esque games, or even primitive yet addictive puzzlers, such as Tetris (although the N-gage could handle both of these types of games with its metaphorical arms metaphorically tied behind its metaphorical back, with metaphorical rope). Nope, we're talking 3D Tomb Raider. Yes. Incredibly, with the machine only capable of 4,096 colours on screen at any one time, it would appear to pale in comparison to the Gameboy's rich graphics engine, capable of displaying up to 32,000 colours simultaneously, yet the fact remains, the Nokia N-gage can do polygons with ease.

Of course developers such as Pocketeers Inc have been demonstrating 3D engine code running on the Gameboy Advance for sometime, with polygon racing, FPS, and football demos all up at their website. However, publishers have yet to strike any game deals with these hardworking Gameboy 3D specialists, and despite a version of Doom from Activision, and pseudo 3D games such as Tony Hawk and Harry Potter (the latter using an isometric view), we haven't seen much in the way of GBA polygon pushing power.

One problem that certainly hindered the Gameboy Color(sic) game Tyrannosaurus Tex (an innovative 3D FPS for the Gameboy Color[sic], made in a similar vein to 3D Monster Maze) from being published and brought to shops, was the fact that games publishers thought it was too expensive to manufacture, taking up a large and costly 24MBit cartridge, and with no license attached, or even recognisable brand name, despite its innovative style, big wigs just didn't want to take the financial risk the game presented.

Of course Tyrannosaurus Tex did originally have a publishing deal with Eidos, but Eidos changed tact, dropping all GBC titles that didn't have a license, and Tyrannosaurus Tex became doomed without a publisher.



Snake-Tastic:

Nokia is keen to point out that it has sold 250 million mobile devices with either Snake or Snake 2 onboard, and their market research shows that everybody at some point has tried their hand at a quick game of it. The point in case being that Nokia is introducing gaming to a wider audience. Indeed, none of the current games consoles have managed to shift in such numbers.

At the Nokia press conference, the Eidos representative was pressed during a question and answer session for his view on the high cartridge cost / low profit margin model presented by

Gameboy Advance, and how Nokia compared: "I think it's too early to talk about the cost of cartridges and so on, but certainly Eidos itself hasn't done any GBA publishing (or Gameboy Color publishing for that matter) itself - we've written things off, in part because of the terms of the business model, in the past. We're not making that decision with the N-gage. So I can't really say more than that at this stage. But the business model is more attractive."

Oddly enough, despite publishers seemingly falling over themselves to sign up big names like Sonic and Lara Croft to the machine, the actual code monkeys more commonly known as the games developers (the people who sign contracts with the publishers, and do the hard work of making their games for 'em) are a bit skeptical about the N-gage. They've all had their hands burnt by assuming mobile phone gaming was the future a few years back, and it just didn't take off in the way many people had hoped, and as opposed to seeing this as a contender in the handheld console market place, merely see it as another gadget like the A009 doomed to obscurity. However, Nokia are doing their best to woo developers, with software development kits being made freely available, and by adopting the conventional shop-shelf approach of distributing games claim that the bridge between consumers and content is ...well, sorted, really. With regards to the criticism that the N-gage could turn out to be obscure - well, Nokia have responded by saying they don't produce any mobile device unless they expect to sell millions (and with the N-gage, they do indeed expect to sell millions), that they've a very "exciting" marketing campaign lined up, and the N-gage will have a presence in games shops as well mobile phone outlets. Ambitious stuff, but will consumers go for it?



Vertical Screen:

Not since the good old days of the Vectrex console has a games machine had such a vertical screen, although fact fans will of course want to point out how Atari's handheld Lynx console was capable of being played upright with the screen facing sideways, yet only a few titles ever utilised this feature of the machine (the main one being the puzzler "Klax"). In Nokia's snowboarding game, the vertical length of the screen allows you to see a fair way into the distance, whilst I'd imagine it'd also make split screens feel less cramped...although it's more likely two player games will require two Nokia's linking up, either via bluetooth or via online networks, but here's a question - will we need two copies of the game (a major annoyance with GBA 2-player games)?



Nokia is expecting consumers to be far more confident with their brand, buying the N-gage not just on the basis of its games potential, but, as Vonjoki put it, "...very much on the trust that the consumer is putting in us as the technology brand - making mobile devices other than the games device." The theory goes, with Nokia, you'll know that the game deck isn't going to die at the hands of its own creators, in the way Sega cut support for its own GameGear, or the way SNK's new parent company dictated the NeoGeo Pocket should only be supported in Japan, leaving us UK gamers in the lurch. Nokia argue therefore that consumers know they can trust Nokia as a company, and that the brand won't let them down. But will it? The issue here is, the hardware market for mobile phones is extremely different to that of console hardware. Sure, the Gameboy Special Project (SP) is a new piece of kit, but

Deja Vu?

So The Gameboy Advance was all multi-coloured and nice and bright, and now the Gameboy Advance SP is all sliver, sleek and stylish, as Nintendo try to push the market forward. So what? A change in image? But haven't we seen this all before? The Gameboy was a slab, drab, brick, to be blunt. Yes, it may well have garnered a sense of retro cool nowadays, but what was really cool was how back in the mid-late nineties Nintendo launched the Gameboy Pocket - here was a sleek, trimmed down silver model. Actually...more or less identical to the GBA SP, bar the inability to fold in half, plus of course, back then, the device was still monochrome, and couldn't handle SNES ports either. Before long, the Gameboy Pocket hardware was made available in a variety of different colours, similar, perhaps to how the Gameboy Advance SP is also available in metallic black and purple (Gamecube anyone?). So really...GBA SP...big woof. We've seen it all before. But we still want one. ^_^.



under the bonnet it's exactly the same, whilst mobile phone hardware has been evolving far more rapidly, and beneath the bonnet too, as well as merely cosmetically. Then there are changing network standards to keep up with too. New models of mobile phone come out all the time, but whilst we've seen a fair few Nintendo upgrades - from Gameboy, to Gameboy Pocket, from Gameboy Pocket to Gameboy Color[sic], from Gameboy Color[sic] to Game Boy Advance, and now finally Gameboy Advance SP, the hardware has remained the same long enough for developers to get to grips with the current format's offerings, and for consumers to have confidence that they're buying hardware that's not going to be obsolete as soon as it's out of the box (a problem with the PC market). So do Nokia understand the way the console hardware market works? And if the machine is to double as a phone, are they going to attempt to compete with rival phone makers who are constantly introducing new models?

Well, the answer is that Nokia are attempting to make the N-gage future proof. Although it's quite curious that Nokia hasn't released details of any main processor's clock speed, the device's CPU is supposed to be fast enough to easily cope with any future demands made on it, as the networks widen in bandwidth. It is, after all, able to do sprite scaling and polygon rendering pretty sweetly, so handling code for new network standards and widening bandwidth shouldn't be a problem. In fact, on the contrary, as better network standards emerge, more online functionality is likely to be seen in games released for the N-gage, adding to its unique selling point. Still, straight out of the box it's an impressive Tripple band GSM 900 / 1800 / 1900 GPRS phone. So plenty fast for now then.

At the Nokia press conference, one developer spoke of how the internet had revolutionised PCs, and sees the same

happening with online handheld gaming, pushed forwards by Nokia. Nintendo, of course, haven't done loads of online stuff, and are renowned for questioning the benefits of online gaming as a business model. It's likely that whilst Nokia look back at the history of the PC, and believe history will repeat itself with the N-gage being enriched by the internet, Nintendo on the other hand will no doubt look at what Nokia does, and watch closely for any mistakes, before learning from them, and repeating Nokia's approach later, albeit without the errors, having learnt - via observation - from Nokia's mistakes. Or will they? Whilst online multi-player fun would be something very groovy, Nintendo have been slow introducing this to GameCube, let alone Gameboy, not to mention the fact they show little interest in web browsers and email programs for their products. It's a GAMEboy. It just does games.

Still, the Gameboy's games market is a bit of a weird one. There aren't many specialist games mags covering the format, and multiformat mags that review Gameboy games, keep their reviews short and at the back - and unfortunately, even United Games can be accused of this (this is something we are looking to amend, but need YOU the readers to send in your reviews to help). Of course the Official Nintendo Magazine does give a lot of coverage to the Gameboy, but hey(!), it's officially sponsored by Nintendo, so you never can tell. These factors, combined with the fact the Gameboy's market penetration puts it firmly in the realm of mass market product, means people don't get their Gameboy games on the back of any consensus from specialist press, and instead, rely on brand names they can trust. That's why we see so many Gameboy games riding piggy back on the hype of same-name popular home console games - one assumes the Gameboy Tomb Raider will be as good as the PlayStation title, one hopes Gameboy Splinter Cell will be as engrossing as its big brother, and the new

portable version of Grand Theft Auto 3 has also been whetting gamers' appetites recently, but as we found with Perfect Dark, a brilliant game on home console doesn't always turn out so well on Gameboy, although luckily, most poor games on Gameboy are merely mediocre - not so much awful, as simply "okay, but could have been better". With the cost of cartridges still quite significant for what is supposed to be a machine aimed at the younger end of the market (although we all know Gameboy is played by all ages), and with Nokia planning to retail its MultiMediaCards (their equivalent to cartridges) at similar prices to what competitors are charging for their games, it's no surprise that people choose to "play safe" when it comes to buying games. With the likes of Zelda: A Link to the Past, if the games press and Zelda franchise don't help, you can at least recognise, via word of mouth, that it is a port of an extremely successful Super Nintendo title from the mid 90s, and therefore, ultimately a "safe buy".

Whilst Nintendo profits from this state of affairs in some regards (able to cheaply turn out SNES classics that sell on their past fame, since cartridges can't be copied game piracy is low, Nintendo get to charge publishers a license fee for releasing GBA games, etc) they have become aware of the problems (the constant use of licensed characters and familiar brands on every single title, plus the withdrawal of publisher support by the likes of Eidos and others). Note how at the Nokia press conference, the Eidos spokesperson criticised the terms of the Gameboy's business model in the past. This is because Nintendo have recently revised the pricing structure for publishers wishing to release Gameboy games, making the Gameboy a more appealing platform for them.

And this isn't all Nintendo are doing. The launch of the GBA SP could be seen as a way of preparing for the on-coming threat



groovy chick:

Nintendo seem to be addressing the issue of their image somewhat more now (at last). Gamecube launched with all the pizzaz of a kids' lunch box, and although a tie in with Bang-on-the-door's Groovy Chick would have no doubt made it an uber stylish cubic handbag, Nintendo did nothing to address the "Nintendo is for kids" tag which had seemed to degrade its previously enjoyed SNES-fuelled status of cool. Remember - even kids are style conscious. Well, now, never fear, we can all play Kirby's Adventures in Dreamland on a high tech silver gadget "just for men". The GBA SP is like Sure, only it doesn't smell.



from mobile telecommunication companies such as Nokia, by both consolidating - and simultaneous expanding - the current Gameboy market. Nintendo is strong in the handheld field. But it's making itself stronger, with the launch of the GBA SP being just the beginning.

"The quality of the Game Boy Advance SP experience and the targeted media approach will deliver some outstanding results"

claims David Gosen (pictured above) - Marketing Director of Nintendo Europe. "With the launch of Game Boy Advance SP, Nintendo will be able to place their gaming expertise into the hands

of new users who value outstanding design and cutting edge technology...players who may not have held a handheld console since the days of Tetris."

Marketing spiel aside then, Nintendo aims to push things forwards, extending its reach into the world of the gadget loving older gamer - the people most likely to buy a Nokia N-gage later this year, perhaps? Would they still do so after already having shelled out on a Gameboy Advance SP prior, though? That's the question.

So whilst Nintendo claim they've been working on the GBA SP since June 2001, it nonetheless doubles up as a piece of hardware, that, image wise, could ensure Nintendo remains the dominant force in mobile gaming, in light of impending competitors such as Nokia.

Of course, it's not just all image. The SP's screen features a front light, eradicating the GBA's visibility problems. There's also a lithium battery in the thing allowing you to charge up the console as you would a mobile, overnight, with the battery then

lasting you all day. The GBA SP is the first Gameboy machine to prove practical to pocket. It measures approximately eight by eight centimetres in shape, and is only two and a half centimetres in depth when folded. The very fact it can fold means that unlike the N-gage - the screen gets protected. All this is only marred by the inability to plug in headphones without first purchasing a special adapter.

Of course whilst the GBA SP isn't just about image, a lot of it IS about image. Even the black and purple variants of the machine have a metallic finish, so they too relay a sense of sophistication and cool. Nintendo have also got their creative advertising agency Leo Burnett to enlist the skills of photographer Rodolfo Agromonte Martinez, for the advertising campaign (see below), they've booked cinema ads to run with Matrix: Reloaded and X-men 2, and are spending over 10million Euros on their advertising campaign. "This is a far-reaching pan-European strategy to target a highly mobile, media-savvy group." explained David Gosen, who once did a Leisure & Tourism course at Surrey. ^_^.



Pocket size + Rechargeable battery + Screenlight



The second best thing to do in the dark.

Nintendo GAMING 300

GAME BOY ADVANCE SP for men

Get Ready To Engage...

Activision, Eidos, Taito, THQ and Sega, have all pledged support to the N-gage, and are currently feverishly working on titles for launch in Q3/Q4. Yuji Naka was beamed into the press conference via a live satellite feed, and after apologising for his mere virtual presence went on to explain how he was very excited about the potential for Nokia's new machine. "I expect Nokia will do very very well in this new area," he predicted.

Yuji Naka's Sonic N is making an appearance on the Nokia game deck as a launch title, and looks pretty solid, but your standard fare, with Sega admitting the title, akin to the mega successful 2D Sonic games that first appeared on the Megadrive, Master System and Gamegear, won't feature any online multiplayer features.

Moto GP from THQ will however. "We're currently working on up to four-person at the moment, so you can race Valentino Rossi against Kenny Roberts, or any of your favourite riders, so, for us, it's quite exciting to be able to do that on a mobile games device."

Meanwhile Tomb Raider was a half house. Whilst the game wasn't going to contain any multi-player features itself (as pointed out by Eidos' representative - two Laras just isn't going to work and: "...who wants to be the dog that gets shot?") but the game won't be without online support, with talk of a supporting online community, allowing you to interact with other players.

In the meantime, Nokia itself is creating games, and its in-house team are trying to make sure their titles show exactly what can be done with the hardware, so their snowboarding game, for instance, will be designed to be played multi-player over bluetooth.



When going through menus, and such, this "Rocker" controller acts as five buttons in the one - hit the arrows to go up, down, left, right, or press the middle to make your selection! When playing games however, the Rocker becomes an eight way directional pad - your standard left/right & up/down controls, plus diagonal control thrown in, in-between. Kinda looks like the D-pad on Sega's old Master System controllers, doesn't it? Albeit it's silver...

The screen is taller than it is wide, with a resolution of 176 pixels wide by 208 pixels high, which strikes us as a little weird, but hopefully it should prove okay. Easier to see the horizon in 3D games, we guess, and speaking of better visibility - get this - the screen is back lit. No more visibility problems. Even the Gameboy Advance SP, although now clearer is only front-lit. Well done Nokia. You know what we like.

The key pad is the key to using Nokia's device as you would a normal phone. Dial the number you wish, put phone to ear, and away you go! However, when it comes to playing games, you'll see the 7 and 5 keys are marked orange - these keys become the N-gage's equivalent of Gameboy's A and B buttons - your main action buttons!

FM-Radio! Use the Radio button to tune into your favourite stations!

Music! This button is for accessing the N-gage's MP3 features, and unlike the GBA SP, the headphone socket is normal. Funky.

Pressing this button allows you to take a screenshot of where you are in the game, for you to send to your mates. Good for making game-themed postcards / pictures messages, or perhaps showing a mate of yours how you really are further than them in the game, or have a higher score, etc. Impressive stuff.

MultiMedia Cards (MMCs) fit in a slot at the back, and will be the medium games will come on.

Nokia reckon the N-gage's batteries will last an entire day, before running out - however, their specs are a bit sneaky, with that full day not including solid 12-hour gaming, but rather an average use of the device as a normal phone for a few hours, then as a games machine for a few hours, then as an MP3 player, etc, etc...



BLUETOOTH MULTI-PLAYER:

Bluetooth is a technology that allows for wireless local networks to occur within a radius of ten metres, and doesn't suffer from the problem of needing to be pointed in the right direction, as has plagued infra-red. Think of multiplayer gameboy titles, but without the need for any link-up lead or other such wire, and you should get the idea. "The N-gage ...[can present]... a game experience that is very different to the game experiences we can have today...when you are engaging another player with this device, and you are having it in a face to face context. You are not only enjoying the electronic joy that this product is bringing you, but you are also enjoying the physical presence and body movements and the reflections that your gaming partner is giving to you." stated Vonjoki. I don't know about enjoying friends' body movements, but I do wonder if Ben, who is known for throwing Joypads about if he loses at a home console game, will ever throw a costly game-device-come-mobile-phone-come-MP3-player-come-radio, and if he did, who'd catch it, and would they give it back? Heh-heh. We're really hoping that Nokia won't be absolute misers like Nintendo, and make us buy four copies of a game before we can enjoy its four player mode, or else multi-player gaming of this ilk might get expensive.

SNOWBOARDING



We've seen this game running and can verify it CAN look as impressive as the two shots Nokia released above, however, we've also taken our own screenshot (right) - which shows how some blue arrow textures on the snow can get very blocky when viewed up close. Nonetheless Nokia's "SnowBoarding" stands up well when compared to old 32-bit titles such as Cool Boarders (PSOne) and Steep Slope Sliders (Saturn).



Sonic-N



Sonic is also scheduled to be making an appearance, in the form of Sonic-N. We'd like to stress that the screens below are from a demo video that zoomed into the action a bit. Expect more to appear on screen in the final version.



Nokia's ad campaign manages to combine stylistic fashion photography with gaming graphics. Above we see someone leave a normal office elevator only to step out into a FPS corridor. Other adverts include controlling a computer rendered sports car in a multistory car park, entering tomb-raider-esque ruins, or playing games in the lounge, whilst the view from the window turns to space.



King Duncan's Royal thought for the day:

::STUBBORN NINTENDO::

Nintendo is the undisputed market leader in the handheld market. Nonetheless, its rivals so far have been the likes of Atari, Sega and SNK, which whilst good at games, haven't a brilliant track record on hardware. Sega pulled the plug on the Gamegear themselves so they could focus on Megadrive and Saturn in 1995 (so ultimately it was Sega, not Nintendo, that killed the GameGear), whilst Atari, despite being the main force in gaming during the early 80s, were in a sorry state by the time they launched the Lynx, with only the ST to be proud of (although niche console enthusiasts may be pleased to know a trickle of Lynx games are still released via Telegames, ardent supporters of Atari's other failure - the Jaguar). SNK may have made it with their NeoGeo Pocket, but the machine wasn't given a fair chance when the company was bought out by new owners, who decided they would limit the machine to Japan only, leaving UK NeoGeo Pocket gamers in the lurch.

Nokia isn't an SNK, and it isn't a Sega. It is - like Nintendo - a market leader. Nintendo should be cautious. Just as Sony was a market leader in music, and spread its expertise to games, so too could Nokia push mobile gaming forwards. Nintendo should learn from history, and not underestimate the power of Nokia. We're not saying Gameboys are going to be made redundant when the Nokia N-gage launches. The Gameboy, after all, is second only to the PS2 in terms of market penetration, and Nintendo are renowned for quality gaming. But Nintendo has overlooked key competitors before with an air of arrogance and contempt, and the threat from Nokia should not be ignored.

Play Off:

At the end of the day, it all comes down to how the machines actually play. We spoke to spong.com's Richard Oxer - who's had a GBA SP since the Japanese launch, and Stefan Walters who had a hands on with Nokia's N-gage following Nokia's London press conference....

"It's absolutely bloody fantastic," declared an enthusiastic Richard, referring to his GBA SP which he promptly took out from his pocket. "It's even smaller in the flesh!" he exclaimed. "I kinda expected my hands to be cramped, because it's quite narrow, but that hasn't been the case." Small, compact, yet comfortable? Good news surely. "It's quite heavy," he conceded, "...about an inch thick...". He then went onto explain how the battery couldn't be removed, but rather it comes with a recharger you connect to the mains, with it taking about three hours to fully charge, before lasting between eight to ten hours, with the front light activated.

"It is a front light. If you tilt the screen you can see the light shining right up the whole thing," he pointed out. Early

word on the street was that the GBA SP was to be back-lit, but nope, that remains the reserve of the Nokia N-gage. Nonetheless, the GBA SP's front light does overcome the GBA's old visibility problems.

Then we came to the issue of volume. "It's louder," claimed Richard, whilst we heard the classic Mario coin noise, as he booted up the machine, with him also pointing out how at times it could get a "...bit distorted." Whether this is just a trait of the earlier Japanese machines, we don't know, but what we do know is high volume and no basic headphone socket is going to drive a lot of extra sales of

the GBA SP socket to headphone socket connector lead, which means Nintendo, and peripheral companies, are going to earn a bit more extra money on the side, especially if you need to play quietly in schools, the office, or library.

The Nokia N-gage, which also doubles as an FM Radio, and digital music player (AAC & MP3), thankfully features a standard headphone socket. But sounds aside, what of the games?

"Sonic-N...is a re-work of Sonic Advance, we think" explained Stefan, "It looked really good and well coloured." Even still, Stephan did experience a bit of a stutter during play, with the action dropping down to a mere 15 frames per second or so. Strangely, this was nothing to do with the speed Sonic was moving at - indeed, when Sonic was zipping along at top speed, all was well, so it's possible the problem was just an early code bug of sorts.

Nonetheless, Stefan seemed to notice in almost all of the demo games he got to play, a kinda detached

feeling to them: **"...that Java feel, although it's not a Java game. That slight detached feeling that mobile phone and PDA gaming imparts was present..."** he confessed.



Nokia's N-gage can only display 4,096 colours on screen at any one time.

You wouldn't think much of it, would you?

Especially not on paper, when compared with the Gameboy's ability to display up to 32,000 colours (8x as much!). You'd be surprised, then wouldn't you, if faced with this specification on paper, you then found the Nokia N-gage hardware capable of PlayStation ports? Well, it would seem colour limitations are not to be confused with graphics limitations, as part of the game engine for Nokia's first Tomb Raider outing (rendered in full 3D) has been lifted straight from the original Saturn and PlayStation build - the programming code behind the original hit. Stefan, was certainly

impressed: **"Someone said it featured better light sourcing than Mario Sunshine. What was really funny, was that it was true."**

Stefan also got a chance to see how effective the N-gage's bluetooth connection was, with a go on Taito's Puzzle Bobble VS. "Unfortunately, it seemed to be a remake of the Java version available for Vodaphone Live, and suffered the same detached, slow feeling. But it still worked, and worked well." Early days then surely?

"The real revelation was Eidos' Tomb Raider" explained Stefan, "which was presented in full 3D - a great surprise to all...If Nokia can shake that detached mobile gaming feel, and it looks like it will, then the N-Gage, if it's reasonably priced, is a serious contender."

Watch this space.

Specification Comparison:

N-GAGE
NOKIA

GAME BOY ADVANCE SP

Large colour screen with proper back-light.

69.7mm wide x 133.7mm long x 20.2mm deep.

Weight 137g

Back-lit Screen.

Resolution = 176 x 208 pixels.

Up to 4,096 simultaneous colours.

Battery Life= 3 to 6 hours of gaming (depending on game type), 2 to 4 hours of talk, 150 to 200 hours of standby time, 8 hours of music, 20 hours of radio.

Bluetooth technology for wireless multiplayer gaming.

Triple band GSM (900/1800/1900), GPRS mobile phone.

Series 60 platform and Symbian Operating System.

Multimedia messaging (MMS).

Digital Music player (AAC/MP3).

Stereo FM radio.

Nokia Audio Manager PC SW for managing own music files.

Comprehensive range of applications; e-mail and personal information management.

XHTML browsing.

Java™ application support.

Connectivity: Calendar synchronization with PC, USB for music file and application download.

Pocket size & foldable with flip-top screen.

82mm wide x 84.6 long x 24.3 deep.

Weighs approximately 143g.

Integrated LCD screen light.

Resolution = 240 x 160 dot. Display Size = 40.8mm x 61.2mm.

Up to 32,000 simultaneous colours.

Built in rechargeable Lithium Ion battery giving 10 hours of continual game play (18 if the light is off) with approximately 3 hours of recharging time.

Supports up to 4 players with Game Link cable.

32-bit CPU with embedded memory.

Available in three metallic colours (silver, black and blue).

Compatible with virtually all existing Game Boy & Game Boy Advance games.

N-GAGE
NOKIA

Games in Development:

Bounce,	Sonic N,
Doom,	Space Invaders,
Kart Racing,	Super Monkey Ball,
Pandemonium,	Taito Memories,
Puyo Puyo,	Tomb Raider,
Puzzle Bobble VS,	Virtua Tennis,
Red Faction 2,	Virtually Board
Sega Rally,	Snowboarding II.

Release Dates:

Officially, Nokia have stated the machine will be launched in time for Christmas 2003, however, internet rumour has suggested that's only in other European countries, and that a UK release date of Q2 2004 is more likely.

N-GAGE
NOKIA

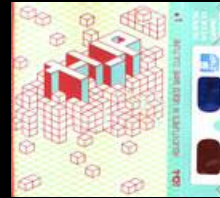
FANZINES:

PASSION

United Games is

currently non-commercial (i.e. we don't make any money), and is written by fans, for fans - so in this sense we're a fanzine, as opposed to a magazine.

We've evolved quite significantly from our earlier badly photocopied efforts, and I'm pleased to report that fanzines in general have increased in quality. Whilst the likes of EGN and RetroGamer were great in their day, we're now seeing the likes of **Blessed Magazine** and **1-up Media** taking alternative games journalism in exciting new directions, whilst **Graham** is managing to get a foot in the door of the commercial games magazine industry down in New Zealand, with "Press Start" Magazine! **United Games reports, on the other quality titles in the world of games fanzines...**



BLESSED

Jointly edited by Michael French and Dan Croucher, this games fanzine takes a semi-serious tone, focusing on gaming culture. This means it's full of insightful and thought provoking articles, as well as industry related debates. Nonetheless, these top quality features and editorials feature alongside a number of humorous cartoon strips, the result of which is a well balanced publication that you can both sink your teeth into (metaphorically speaking of course), and have a chuckle over. Plus it features some really impressive cover-art, as you can plainly see... To find out more, or to see a selection of example pages in PDF format simply visit their website, at: <http://www.blessedmagazine.com>, where you can also subscribe for the modest sum of £7 (Note - this is the UK&Ireland price. European subscriptions are £10, and other international subscriptions are £12) . Those of you without online access (all three of you), should fear not though! Orders are also accepted via post. Just send a cheque, made payable to "Blessed Magazine" to: Michael French, 16 Latchington Court, 26 Forest Road, Walthamstow, London E17 6JT, UK, Or: Dan Croucher, Basement Flat, 13 Oriental Place, Brighton, BN1 2LJ

1-UP ZINE

1-UP is... Adventures in video game culture. A new zine about how and why we play. It's about video games as a way of life, not just a pastime or private addiction. Stories about triumph and defeat, losing quarters, staying up late, and being invincible. Not your little brother's game mag; no cheats, codes, or centrefolds of virtual vixens. 1-up revels in video games as a cultural experience and as art; blinking lights, blip bloop music, and a million ways to approach "gameplay." Issue #3 is due later this month, and will be over 80 pages!! In the meanwhile, back issues #1 and #2 are available for ten american dollars each, or \$20 dollars together. Cheques should be made to Raina Lee and sent to: P.O. Box 361135, Los Angeles, CA 90036, USA. Alternatively, and perhaps easier for us UK people, it's possible to pay through the internet using PayPal. For more details, please visit Raina's website at: <http://www.1up-zine.com>

The Other Stuff:

Here are some bits we didn't have space for anywhere else this issue:

Hooligans Competition:

Wahey! Win an "AVERAGE GREY!" game. Sounds a bit boring? Well, we're awarding the game to whomever can come up with a more entertaining use for it...OTHER than playing it...so come on! What's it fit for? Drinks Coaster? "The only thing to fear is not havin' a coaster upon which to place ya' beer?" The most original idea wins...so come on...what would you do with the game CD if we sent it to ya'? The deadline for the competition will be June 2nd, and entries can be sent by post or email. See our contact details to the right. Don't forget to include your name and a means of contact [phone, email or address] so we can get in touch with you should you win.

Private Policy:

Whether you're writing in to Community Zone, submitting a review, or entering a competition, your contact details will never be passed onto any third party contact. It's not what we're about. So chill. =)

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Seen an article you like? Want to use it in your own magazine or website? Well, the majority of content in this magazine is copyrighted to the author, however, United Games can liaise between you and the original author should you wish to ask their permission to use the article. Any terms and conditions to licensing, and whether it is free or charged, will be purely up to the author, and no doubt open to negotiations. Writers should note that we will not disclose your details to any enquiring third parties, but will act as a go-between until you feel comfortable speaking to each other independently .

Seeking freelancers?

Perhaps it's not the articles you're interested in, but the talent of the individual writer. Once again, by contacting United Games, we can pass on any messages to the individual writers. Just send us an email, or write to us.

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WEB WATCH



Well hello there Spider, how's it going?

Quite alright, thank you Becky.

Found anything of interest on the web, for us?

Yes indeed. I've had a good scuttle round and picked out quite a few sites our readers should like.

Sounds pretty good, Spider. Are you going to tell us about 'em?

But of course...

[www.epwuk.com/]

EXTREME POSSE WRESTLING:



Now this is odd. A group of friends - some of whom are Team Members of this fanzine evolved drunken sofa-cushion fights at New Years Eve parties into an internet backyard wrestling federation, not adhering to the pay-per-view system (PPV), but rather starting their own system - free-for-all (FFA). The result is a series of internet downloadable video clips, that prove thoroughly entertaining and engaging.

If you've a narrowband internet connection, and video files take too long to download, then the website also allows you to order a CD through the post, with the video clips on. Andrew got one of these from Ken, so I decided to ask him about it: "Well, I mean I'm not even into wrestling," he confessed, "but I enjoyed it as the storyline got to me. Just who is the masked man? Just why does DaRobb keep going on about Campino sweets, and just - *what on earth* - are my mates in Keynsham doing!?!".

The clips prove extremely entertaining, featuring witty commentary from J Gronsmer (that blue toy monster that used to come with orange handcuffs), interesting storylines, a healthy mix of intense and engrossing wrestling matches (i.e. the extremely well balanced and choreographed Corporate Ken V.S. DiveFire match), and just plain daft matches [usually involving comedy character Chickenwing Z and his imaginary friend as tag team partner]. Despite the violent associations of wrestling, the majority of Extreme Posse Wrestlers are Christians, who keep both the action and language tasteful. So go on - get melted!

I see you,



Ah! I was so chuffed to appear on this issue's United Games Video! Me an 'ickle Spider! I'm really poorly animated too! You haven't seen anything quite like my funky walk! Check out position 01:01:23 on the video to see me! I reckon my funky catch-phrase is gonna be all the rage: "I see you!". Forget the niceties, Bruce Forsyth can eat his heart out!

TOP STREAMING MOVIES:

ENTER THE PIKACHU *Pikachu meets Jackie*

"Chad" in this hilarious little short, cleverly acted out as a badly dubbed live action fight with a plush toy.

<http://www.rawtv.com/flicks/enterpik.htm>



ARCADIA:

Violence in the Media turned on its head. A boy living in a rude and violent society dodges local laser fire from pixelated aliens to get to the Arcade centre, where he gets high scores for letting old ladies in front in the post office queue, and politely wishing passers-by "Good Morning!" in a gentlemanly fashion. It starts off as merely mediocre, but then it really picks up, and has a superb ending. Top stuff! RealPlayer / RealOne is required for this streaming movie.



Large Version (Broadband):

[pnm://media.channel4.com/filmfour/2000/arcadia_lg.rm](http://media.channel4.com/filmfour/2000/arcadia_lg.rm)

Medium Version:

[pnm://media.channel4.com/filmfour/2000/arcadia_md.rm](http://media.channel4.com/filmfour/2000/arcadia_md.rm)

Small Version [fastest to download] =

[pnm://media.channel4.com/filmfour/2000/arcadia_sm.rm](http://media.channel4.com/filmfour/2000/arcadia_sm.rm)

Alternatively, visit the FilmFour Shorts page at www.filmfour.com.

[www.nintyweb.co.uk]

NINTY WEB:

Did anyone ever wonder what happened to N64 Zone - a popular Nintendo fanzine that used to grace the pages of N64 Magazine's Fanzine Farm a few years back!? Well, its editor Peter Jordan has moved onto bigger and better things - namely this website. It's called Ninty Web, and gives you all the Nintendo news, previews, reviews and so forth you could ever possibly need. The site features a simple yet clear-cut, sharp-edged design, that's easy to navigate, and easy on the eyes when reading. Check it.

Recommend a web site...

If you know of anything on the internet worth featuring in this section, have a site yourself you want plugged, or have an interesting article for us related to the internet, then get in touch by emailing UnitedGames@game-extra.co.uk or writing to: **United Games, 6 Cheviot Close, Ramleaze, West Swindon, Wiltshire, SN5 5QD**, and who knows(?), maybe it'll be in the next Web Watch!

END ZONE

So...welcome to the end. It's all over.
Or is it?

A phone call with Ross, and I happened to mention our Halo review, which outraged him. "Will's talking about the boring library section," he told me, admitting that part was as boring as Will said, but he nonetheless insisted you couldn't knock the game on that alone. "AI has never been better, controls fluid, there may be too much repetition on indoor areas, but outdoors...well..." he told us. At the same time, however, he conceded that Will's Halo might be his Metroid Prime. Ross couldn't believe we gave it a Red Hot, saying he'd have given it a Mellow Yellow. "It is frustrating due to one or two flaws in the gameplay mechanics" he claimed, speaking about having to re-scan a boss every time you re-attempt him. "This is made more frustrating due to having to switch visors, when all you want to do is kick the ugly mother's arse to the seven corners of the cosmos, and after the 15th time you begin to wonder how this got past the playtesters, as you no longer care about scanning 100% of the game, yet that's the only way to get the true ending...and when I'm getting knocked off platforms for firing the wrong coloured weapons..." he went on. Needless to say, we're considering featuring second opinions in the next issue.

But enough of Ross's Rants, for this is the groovy section within which I get to waffle about anything. Firstly...WALKERS! What HAVE YOU DONE to Smith's Square Crisps!? It did take me a while to adjust to the new recipe, (I can imagine Smiths executives resiliently taking the original recipe to their deathbed [read: MBO meeting], but why on earth are you replacing every other crisp in the packet with a piece of plastic? And what have you done to Salt and Shake? Different flavour, and your famous big packet/few contents ploy. It won't work. I'm going to stick to Cheese Cheddars. And Sea Salt.



<Ahem>. We may have found something for "Duh You Thickey!!". Chaz was running late for work recently, so decided to take a short cut down a country lane. Didn't see another car coming until the last minute, so swerved onto a bank...where upon his car rolled over eight times....his mother's wine bottle smashed into his face, his sister's PC fell out of the boot, knacker the hard-drive and messing up all her coursework, and now his step Dad's favourite car is totalled. Suffice to say, he ended up very late for work, due to injuries, etc, but thankfully is still alive and well.

Still...I'm running out of space, so I had better tell you what's next for United Games. The answer is V3. Think of this Volume 2.5 as the pen ultimate volume - V3 will be the ultimate. But we can't do it without you. We need your feedback on the issue and what you think / thought. Email us at UnitedGames@game-extra.co.uk and help us evolve into your ideal games magazine. We'll also soon have a website up at <http://www.unitedgames.co.uk> so check that out for project updates. We're also in the process of attempting to organise an innovative new gaming event using inflatable architecture! But in the meantime, it would seem I must leave you. But remember people - stay United. Peace & Lovism to you all. Cheers & Ciao.

Below Left to Right: "It looks like a giant f***y!" exclaimed Wayne. www.colourscape.org.uk is cool.

← Left - The Games Jester isn't just a cartoon character drawn by Rikin - he's real and here's the proof!



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Richard, Jav and Stefan
(sponge.com),
Franklin, Jav & Tim
(cube-europe.com),

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(pennycade.com),
Simon Byron
(Bastion / BHPR),
Steve Merret
(Rocket PR),
Manab Roy (Ubi Soft),
KidzBiz, RetroCollector,
Graham (Press Start).
I just know I've
forgotten someone.
You hate me don't you?
Please don't. Scribble
your name in here:
.....



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Skinny small (32")
Medium (42")
Large (44")
X-Large (48")

HOW TO BUY ONE

Either:

1) Phone our credit card hotline, Backstreet International on **02077002662**.

Please quote United Games.

2) Send a cheque payable to **Joystick Junkies Ltd** to Joystick Junkies, 765-767 Harrow Road, London, NW10 5NY.

3) Visit:
www.unitedgames.co.uk/joystickjunkies/

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