

United Games

Quote of the issue:

"THY COOLEST OF TOYS!
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FROM THY WORLD!"

Ross Sillifant.

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Gameboy goes 3D!!

The Gameboy Color(sic) is set to receive its first three dimensional title courtesy of developers Slitherine Software, who we've interviewed this very issue!

NEW DREAMCAST!

Learn all about Pace's new Dreamcast set top box! It decodes E4 and ITV2!

NEW SEGA!

Virtual Fighter 4 on PlayStation 2!
Sonic Advance for Gameboy Advance!
Saturn titles to be converted to PlayStation!
Sega and Namco working together in the arcades!
Dreamcast still going with Crazy Taxi 2, Shenmue 2, Black&White and HeadHunter!!

X-box in X-Gen!

Microsoft's X-box exposed(!), Gamecube News, NUON DVD and Jeff Minter's Tempest 3000, PLUS(!) - can PlayStation 2 really transport you to a third dimension? We ask PS2 owners, critics and industry insiders for their opinions on the machine! All in our new X-gen sub-section!

Competitions!

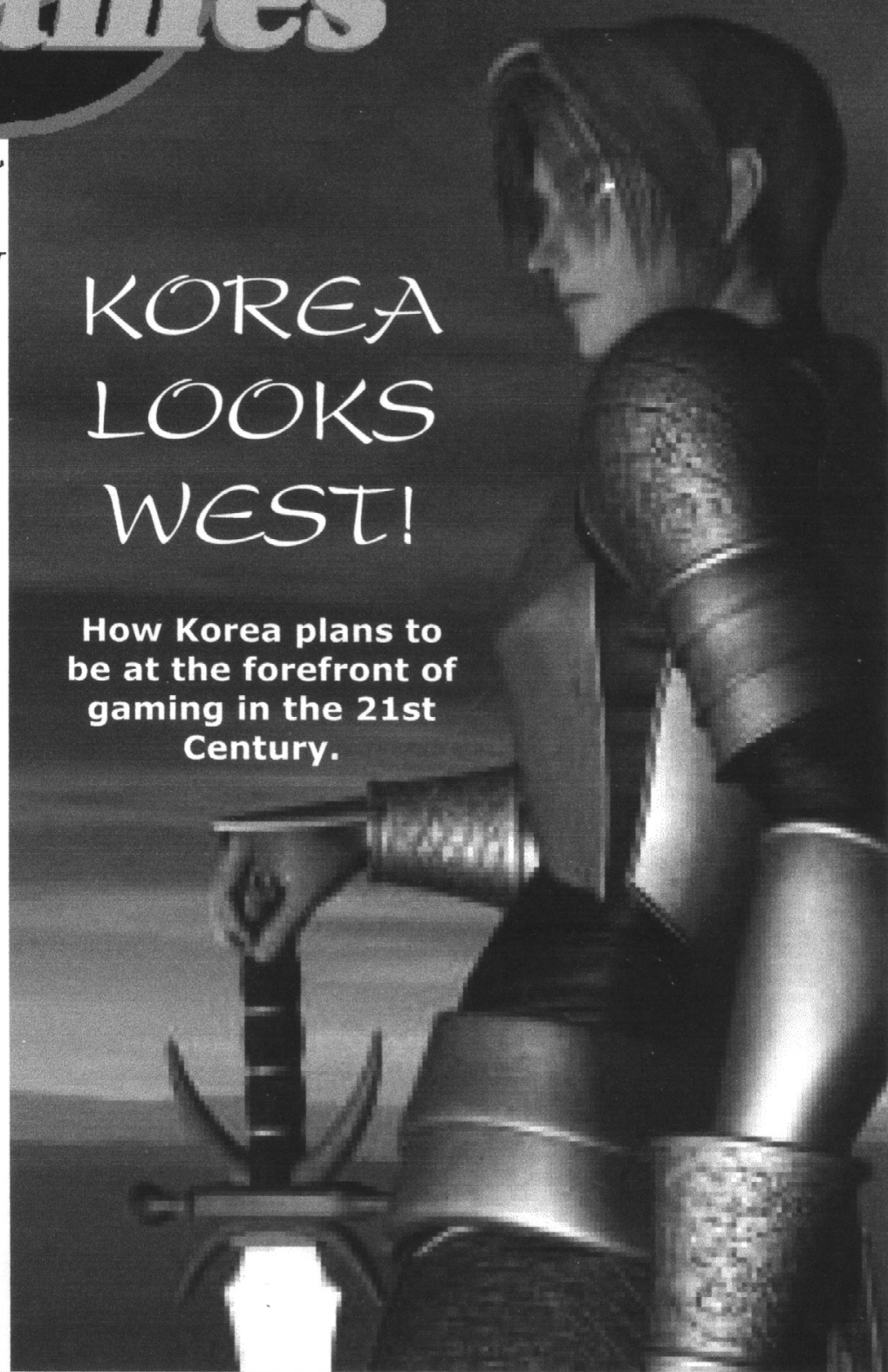
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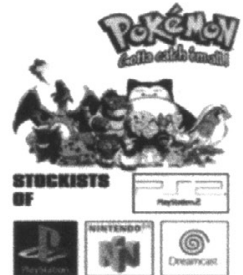
KOREA LOOKS WEST!

How Korea plans to be at the forefront of gaming in the 21st Century.



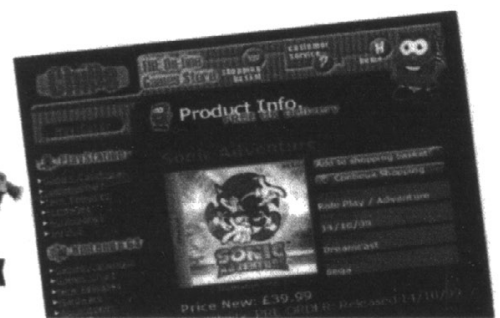
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➤ Welcome!

Gah! This issue is full of so many amazing features that we've totally ran out of room for a welcome message on this contents page! Soz! Anyway, happy reading! **E.D.**

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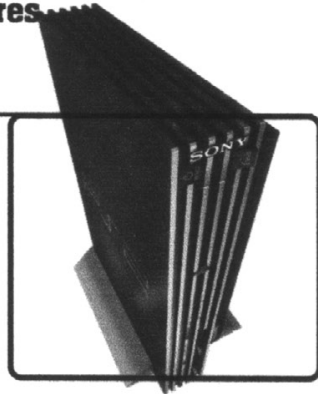
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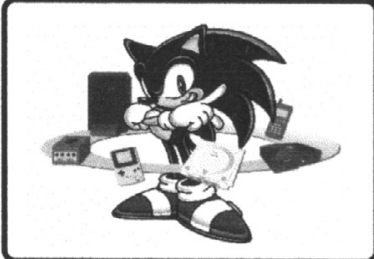
Our main feature explores the growth of gaming in Korea, and details how Korean developers, with help from their government, are planning to export their wares to western shores...

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The Future of Gaming feature continues with our new regular section Xgen - We investigate NUON DVD players, gossip about Xbox and Gamecube, and lavish you with page upon page of UK PS2 coverage!



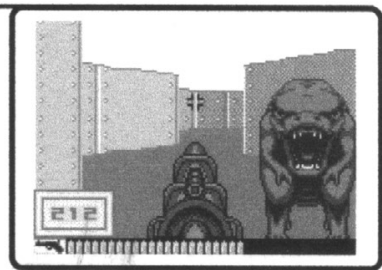
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Sega have undergone a radical change of late. Read all about it in our special "All Change for Sega" feature, which includes details on Pace Micro Technology's new Dreamcast compatible Digital TV Set Top Box.

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They said it couldn't be done, they said it would never work, yet the boffins down at Slitherine Software have only gone and proved everybody wrong! Introducing, the Gameboy's first 3D FPS Title....

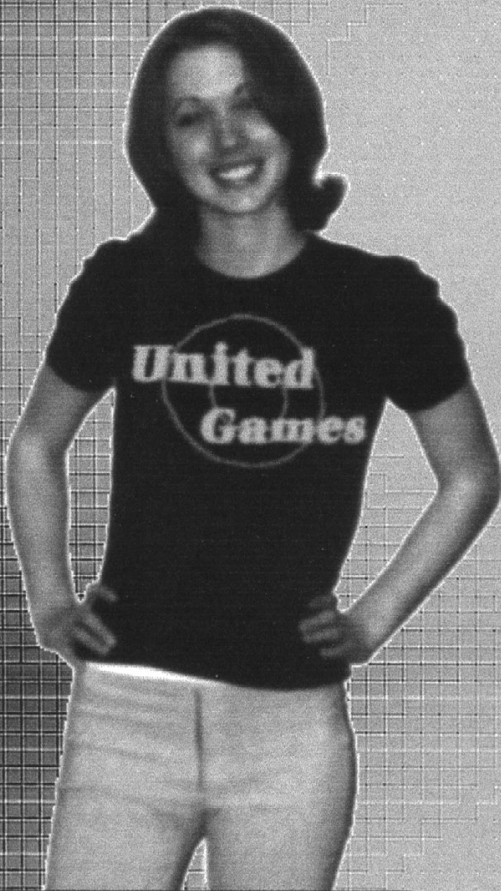


REGULARS!

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- Happy reading, readers!**

Community Zone

Welcome to a brand new section!



New Model!

Everyone say hello to Becky, our new U.G. model-come-mascot. She's the new face of United Games don't you know(?), and as such, you'll be seeing a lot of her over the next few issues, wearing this rather groovy United Games T-shirt. Oh yes.

Hello and welcome to a brand new section of United Games! You'll weep, you'll cry, you'll laugh, shout, and feel the right vibes, even get high. You'll enjoy life and never die - listen and I'll tell you why!

It's about us.

Yes, it's the editorial staff's lame attempt to get intimate with the readership...but wait...come back....that doesn't mean we want to sleep with you - you buffoons... it's just that we want to establish a reader-friendly section to what has, in previous issues, just seemed like a magazine that consisted of a series of articles with no people behind it. So, if it's about us, the writers behind United Games, you may well be wondering why it's called Community Zone (and this is the good bit now...you've waited long enough! E.d.). Well, the answer is

because United Games is written by you too!!

Anyone can pick up a Review Pack, and contribute an article to a future issue.....you can even retain your own copyright should you so chooseit really is groovy stuff.

But Community Zone won't just be about roping you lot into helping out on the 'zine. Oh no, it'll also keep you up-to-date with what's going on in the United Games world - plus, next issue we're hoping to add a letters page to the Zone! Oooh! So, people, welcome to the Zone that's yours.....welcome to....the third place (We can't actually legally say that...I'm sure it violates Sony's copyright laws...hang on E.d.). So sue me. They think I'm mad ("MAD! I say!"), but believe me someone please - Ducks can't speak - they only quack. I'm right aren't I? Oh hang on...that means I'm in the second place again....

United Games goes Bi-monthly! Hmm...chips!

Yes! You read that correctly! Here at United Games we're going to make a commitment to you - and from now on United Games won't be a once-a-year phenomena, but will actually come out on a regular basis!! Groovy or what!?! We think so. But it doesn't end there. We're also starting up a mailing list, so we can let you know when each issue comes out.

People on our mailing list will also learn about

competitions before they happen (for example, a number of people have already entered next issue's win a game competition.... there'll be more on this next issue...it's going to be a good 'un! E.d.), and we're also making plans for a regular newsletter, to start soon!

If you'd like to join our mailing list and get United Games info and updates for free, then just send your name and postal address to:

United Games,
PO BOX 853 (28C)
Harrow
HA1 3YU

It goes without saying that we won't pass your details onto any shady third party organisations, and you're perfectly welcome to ask to be removed from the mailing list at any time, but I'm telling you - you'd be crazy to withdraw, it really is quite groovy.

We're now stocked in the North's most renowned indie games retailer - Chips! It's all thanks to Mr Nick Agar! So, a big "Hello!" to all our new readers at the CHIPS stores - we hope you enjoy United Games as much as our current Computer Exchange and mail order readers do!!

Change of Address!

All of the United Games Crew (apart from Ben - see opposite column) have upped and left for Harrow. Ken commented: "Swindon was great, but there were far too many inflatable clowns." Jazz agreed: "It's not everyday you have a pin in your trouser pockets.". Not everyone has enjoyed the change in scenery, however. Edd commented: "The Island of Beautiful women was one thing, an invasion of inflatable clowns in downtown Swindon was another, but I draw the line at Barney the Dinosaur! And Beast Wars Megatron!?! Where did he come from?". The new address is as follows:

**United Games,
PO BOX 853 (28C),
Harrow,
HA1 3YU**

Letters Page!?!

We want future Community Zone sections to double up as readers' letters pages - so why not put pen to paper and get scribbling? You can write to us about anything - tell us what you think of the magazine, ask the team questions, you could even send in a drawing or two. Just write to United Games, PO BOX 853 (28C), Harrow, HA1 3YU and come next issue, your letter could be on this very page!

Where's Ben!?!

That crazy Deputy Editor with a perverted sense of humour has had considerably less input in this issue, due to the fact that we've moved from Swindon to Harrow, yet I assure you, his crazy bracketed comments will make a come back in the next issue, so all you people had best beware!!

Dearly Beloved....

Maybe you know, maybe you don't, but since the last issue there's been a bit of an in-office love affair going on, and, well, now they're engaged! Who am I talking about? George and Ken of course! They're planning to tie the knot and actually get married in June of this year! We wish them all the best! (And just for your information, despite the name, George IS in fact female - always has been, and always will be).

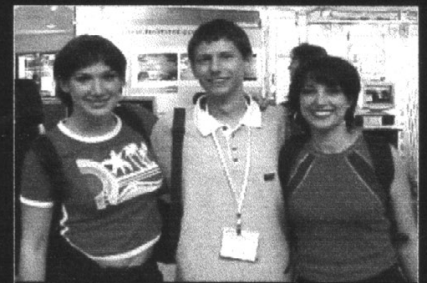
Fanzine Zone:

United Games is a fanzine - a home made magazine created by a group of fans. Do you make your own fanzine? Do you want us to advertise it for free? Send us a copy and we will do - in next issue's Fanzine Zone! If you're a Fanzine Editor, or WebMaster, you may also like to know that you can use some of our articles. See "Licensing Out" on the back page for more info!

THRILLED TO BITS!



Deciding to contribute to United Games can be really groovy, as Mark and James found out when they went with us to the European Computer Trades Show to report on the latest computer and video games! Whilst there they stumbled across none other than the presenters of Channel 4's BITS TV Show, who posed with them in these United Games photos. Many thanks to all the contributors who attended ECTS for us - Mark, James, Ben#2 (aka SWAG) and Mat. Along with the Team Members who attended (Jazz, George, Ken and Myself) you helped us get the articles, we needed!



Mark (top) and then James (bottom) meet Aleks and Emily

It's your mag - so get involved!



"Huh? My mag?"

"Yes! That's right - your mag! You see, United Games is written by its readers, for its readers. Just take a look at our review section and you'll see that many different writers submitted reviews for us this issue."

"Wow. That's clever. How did they do that then?"

"Most of them picked up one of our FREE Review Pack leaflets!"

"Oh, and what are they all about?"

"They explain how our Review System works and also tell you everything you need to know about submitting articles to us!"

"Hmm.. impressive. But how would I get my mitts on one of these things?"

"That's easy! You can either try and get one from your local Computer Exchange or CHIPS store, or, if that fails, just send a self-addressed envelope marked "I wanna Review Pack" to: United Games, PO BOX 853 (28C), Harrow, HA1 3YU."

"Groovy. But I don't always feel like writing reviews. Is there any other way I can get involved?"

"Sure. We've competitions to enter, we're also eager to get you lot to write some letters so we can start our own letters page, and we're also starting up a mailing list, subscribing to which will keep you up-to-date with what's going on at United Games."

"Right! Let me find my pen....."

S SHORTS

Make a statement this
Winter. Get into some SHORTS!

The Origin of

S SHORTS:

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 new 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. "Oh...yeah...and because you've called it SHORTS, we'll have a little cartoon every issue based on the 101 uses of Shorts!" added Andrew. "I know there are 101 uses. I counted."

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,
PO BOX 853 (28C),
Harrow,
HA1 3YU**

Dance Dance Revolution

By Wai Lee Fung

This arcade game is so much fun! You have to stand on a small stage and start jumping to the beat of the music which has three different levels of difficulty: easy, normal and expert.



I really enjoy this game, partially because it's quite tricky. You can't cheat or take a short cut to the next level or anything - you've just got to make sure you don't fail! It costs £1 per game which gives you three songs to dance to, and if you fail on the first song you get kicked off of the stage.

DDR is also quite unique, because by and large you don't get these kinds of games in arcades - for the most part it's the shooting, racing, and combat genres that dominate the scene. Furthermore, DDR is unique in that it's a game which dares you to make a fool out of yourself!

I have been playing DDR for two years now.....it has been improving and improving.....and now I have my own set of DDR to play at home(!), yet even still, the effect in the arcades is much nicer. You get people of all different ages playing the game, too - not just teenagers but females, parents..etc. The game attracts a lot of different audiences which is cool. It's full of fun and excitement!

Unrest in the US?

By NuBlood

Well my nick' is NuBlood. I frequent dricasworld forums (don't you mean Dreamcastworld Forums? E.d.) and I BLAST Sega Of America's sorry, no good a**** for making Dreamcast users in America surf the net with a piece of dog s*** browser made by PlanetWeb Inc. I think Sega is shafting the only country that is keeping their sorry a**** afloat, by letting those in Japan (a place where Sega is failing horribly) surf the internet using a kick-ass web-browser like DreamPassport, and at the same time putting this cheap, bug-riddled, Planetweb s*** off on us Americans!

Has it become Conventional to Defy Convention?

By Andrew Mehta

The PlayStation 2 can stand vertically, and shots of the console in this vertical position really make it stand out, seeming innovative in terms of design, and certainly more distinguishable from the other consoles on the market. But will such striving to be different lead to problems in the future? As games companies strive to make gaming more and more mainstream, attempting to appeal to more demographic groups, thus maximising their market, and hopefully, in turn, their market share, I find myself wondering whether in a years time, a couple, virgin to gaming may hold a conversation in Dixons similar to the following:

Wife: "Shall we go for the DVD player, the Kids Lunch Box, or this massive letter "X", then dear?"

Husband: "Actually, I came in to get a games console."

Keyboard Rant

By Jazz Morgan

When Windows 95 came out, so too did a new range of keyboards featuring windows keys which were placed between the "Alt" and "Ctrl" keys. There was one placed in-between the left "Alt" and "Ctrl" keys, and two between the right "Alt Gr" and "Ctrl". To accommodate them, it's often been the case that the space bar has been shortened. On the left one we have a picture of the windows logo, whilst on the right one the first of the two sports yet another windows logo and the other features a mouse pointer over a menu. Here's what they do. The windows logo ones simply bring up the "Start Menu" and the mouse-pointer/menu key does the equivalent of right-clicking on something - i.e. it brings up the "Pop-Up" Menu. Now, although this may seem useful, just WHY are they there!?!

They get in the way when you're playing old games like Doom, where the "Ctrl" and "Alt" keys are vitally important, and you keep bringing up the windows "Start Menu" by mistake during network games, etc..

I mean, if you haven't got a mouse

attached (uhm, come on - who uses Windows without a mouse...anyone? Anyone at ALL?!?!) then you'd find them useful. But hey - to bring up the start menu, just use "CTRL"+"ESC" - the good old fashioned way! To change applications, just use "ALT"+"TAB" or "ALT"+"ESC". To bring up the "Pop-Up" Menu ...uhm... I dunno, but the most common thing for a right click "Pop Menu" to be used for is "PROPERTIES" which can be accessed by using "ALT"+"ENTER". As you can see, there are plenty of keyboard commands for windows - like "SHIFT"+"ENTER" to explore a folder rather than open it. Just play around with the "SHIFT", "ALT", "CTRL", "ESC" and "ENTER" keys on files and folders and you'll get the picture.

Also, when looking at the properties of a shortcut, it's possible to give it a Keyboard Command. Simply click on the word "NONE" in the "Shortcut Key" field/box and press a letter key. It will then assign "Ctrl+Alt+X" to that shortcut, whenever in windows, with "X" being the letter you pushed. I have "Ctrl+Alt+C" for Calculator and "Ctrl+Alt+D" for the CD Player and so on..VERY useful indeed! The latest thing I have on a keyboard I bought the other week is a power sleep and wake key in the top-right. It lets you put your P.C. into "Power-Management" mode. Very useful if you're nipping out and leaving your P.C. on or something. You can choose what bits shut down from your system BIOS (accessible as you start booting up, usually by pressing "DELETE" or "F2") such as the Monitor, Hard Drive, Floppy Drive, etc. Oh... and now you'll ALL be pleased to know that the EURO (!!!) has got onto the keyboard. It's on the "4" key, to the right of the 4, and is accessible by pressing "Alt Gr"+"4". Oh, and why did they switch the "!" and the "|" around? It's stupid. The "|" should be on the "~" key, (or "Console Key" as any Quake player would call it) and the "!" should be the shift option for the backslash key (\). Okay, rant over. I'm happy with my main P.C. which I have a nice *old fashioned* keyboard for. I guess it's a personal thing, like a bedroom. The more time you spend in there, the more little things you get picky about.

Charisma in Games

By Will Jenkins

Publishers and the public put a lot of stock in the idea of 'charismatic' characters in games. By this I mean well recognized faces, figures and voices that can be used as a brand. Lara Croft is the obvious example here. I imagine most of the western world knows what she looks like and what she represents. Other examples would be the Horned Reaper from the Dungeon Keeper series and the plague of identikit rendered "babes" that followed on from Lara Croft - that Deathtrap Dungeon woman, for example. Cloud from Final Fantasy 7's hair is also a good example. Marketing departments know that a recognizable face and 'personality' are good for generating interest and brand recognition.

But do any of these people have "charisma?"

Lara Croft - not really. She has this long history that you can read about, but all she ever really does is shoot things, push bricks and go 'uff' when hurt. The several iterations of real-life model that have portrayed her have not helped; her face changes every year. Characters that are part of an engrossing plot (such as Cloud, or the Avatar) do tend to develop character as they are continually speaking and developing their personality, right in front of the player. But I think one of the most charismatic computer game characters has gone completely unnoticed and totally unrewarded.

The Command and Conquer infantry unit

has for years humped valiantly into machine gun posts and Obelisks of Light, been crushed under the wheels of tanks and split in two by V2 rockets - never uttering a word of complaint. Indeed, his only vocalisation has been a series of painful screams, and his legacy nothing more than a hunched corpse that decomposes before his companions have even turned around. The genocidal slaughter of these brave soldiers rivals anything else the twentieth century can offer. On computers across the world they died in their millions - possibly even billions - and their replacements still churn relentlessly out of the barracks, each entering the arena of combat with an enthusiastic "Let's go!" wave of the arm. Truly, these two dimensional men are heroes whose selfless sacrifice far out merits the prima donna-ish billboard posings of Lara Croft or the vulnerable-yet-tough vixen approach adopted by Jill Valentine. But we don't see them selling us soft drinks, or even encouraging us to buy their game. They remain true to their only cause; to die swiftly and painfully while 'March to Doom' plays.

101 Uses for a pair of SHORTS: ...

Sorry guys, they're not coming off, no matter how much you twiddle your joysticks!



Number 1: To Sexually Frustrate Males.



[Welcome to our world. Our United World. This issue we explore new games technologies in our X-gen: The Future of Gaming Sub-section, we detail Sega's recent announcements in a special feature, make known to you the world of Korean Games and finally, we find out what people really think of the PlayStation 2 with our special "Word on the Street" feature. Are you ready? Then enter our world...]

News at bullet point:

- Eidos have teamed up with Nokia to produce WAP games based on key franchises. **Gangsters is the first confirmed release.**
- Sega, Sony and Namco are jointly organising a broadband arcade service in Japan based on PS2 technology. **Arcades will get 80GB hard drives and will be capable of broadband online gaming.**
- Space Channel 5 creator Tetsuya Mizuguchi has revealed details of his next game. **K-project is a musical shoot-'em-up with Tempest 3000-esque visuals. Gameplay sees you shoot enemies to make music.**

GameCube Zelda Details Revealed

Revered developer Mr Miyamoto and his work colleague Mr Takano have confirmed that a Zelda game is under development for GameCube and have spoken a little about their progress on the title to website www.armchairempire.com in a Zelda-based interview.

One of the many revelations the interview yielded was that Mr Miyamoto won't actually be directing the next Zelda game, rather Takano will be. Mr Takano was heavily involved with both Ocarina of Time and Majora's Mask so the series is in safe hands. "At this point, Link is running around the screen and looks very cute and adorable." Mr Takano told armchairempire.com. "We have to...work on the details of the storyline, but we first want to see what can be done with the Gamecube Controller."

Mr Miyamoto also hinted that the Zelda title might be able to connect to the Gameboy Advance. "It is going to be a very easy system to connect Gamecube and Gameboy Advance in Zelda or any other game. For example, it could be used to play mini-games." Still it was obvious this was just conjecture.

He did reveal some more solid facts about development though: "At Nintendo's Spaceworld we made some video demonstrations of Link facing off with Ganon. [The] graphics are already completed. There are still quality checks to do for the graphics. [We've also completed work on Link's actions] Now we are working on the different camera angles for the fighting screens."

Sega steal the headlines...

Sega Slashes DC Sale Price!
The price of a Dreamcast has been reduced to a mere £99, following Sega's decision to empty its warehouse of stock. Those currently ignorant of Sega's decision to pull out of the hardware market should read our special feature - "All Change for Sega" now, which can be found on page 28. Sega are still keen to stress that new owners of the console won't be getting a console that's unsupported. Not only has Phantasy Star Online just hit the market, but more hot titles are on the way, including Sonic Adventure 2, Crazy Taxi 2, Black&White and HeadHunter among others.

Sega and Namco collaborate!
Sega and Namco, arch rivals in the arcades, have decided to work together on an Arcade title that plays like a medieval-themed House of the Dead. Called Vampire Knight, the arcade machine's hardware is based on the innards of a PlayStation 2, and so a conversion would seem inevitable.

Sonic on Gameboy Advance!!
We knew Sega were developing for handhelds, and now we can prove it! Below are the first shots of Sonic Advance, ChuChu Rocket and Puyo, Puyo running on Gameboy Advance.



Above: Sonic Advance, Chu Chu Rocket and Puyo, Puyo are all in development for Gameboy Advance!

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Virtua Fighter 4 Revealed!

The first shots of Virtua Fighter 4 have been revealed by AM2!

This game is of particular interest, as it's the first big name Sega game due for conversion to the PlayStation 2.

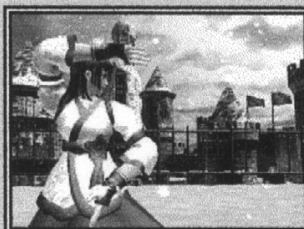
Even so, these shots are from the Arcade machine that's running on the Naomi 2 board - which is based on suped-up Dreamcast hardware. As such, Dreamcast owners can probably expect a conversion too.

The fighters so far revealed are Akira Yuki, Aoi Umenokouji, Kage-Maru, Lau Chan, Pai Chan and Wolf Hawkfield. Even though these are characters from previous games, you'd be forgiven for not recognising a few of them. Sure, Kage still looks like Kage, and Pai and Wolf look pretty much the same, but Aoi has undergone quite a transformation. Whilst she's still as aesthetically pleasing as ever, the new costume this game gives her to wear for two-player battles, may see you not recognise her at first. Changes to Aoi haven't just been cosmetic, though. Her fighting style has also changed, with her now pulling off moves of the Aiki Ju-Jusu ilk. Akira has also changed. Whilst he still uses the same style of fighting, he now looks less like the Akira we're all familiar with, and more

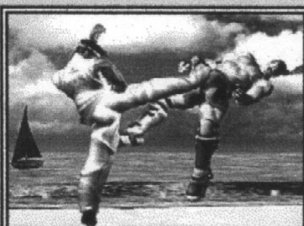
like Capcom's Ryu, especially when in his new white robe.

In fact all the characters now have new costumes for two player battles, although rumour indicates their "Classic" costumes are the default in one player battles.

Control of the characters is once again expected to be of the Defend, Punch, Kick variety, but it's possible that new elements of control may yet be introduced, for the game is still very much work-in-progress. Despite its unfinished status, the graphical detail of shots revealed so far is intense! Stages so far include the classic Beach & Palm Trees environment, a Chinese Temple at Sunset (complete with graphically detailed birds flying through the sky) and a Bavarian Castle surrounded by snow (this stage is absolutely beautiful, and features snow falling as you fight). Characters also show detailed facial expressions, and as in VF3 their clothes ripple, and their muscles visibly stretch and contract during fights. Everything seems so fluid and realistic! Anyway, here are some shots for you to drool over:



Aoi poses in her new gear. Now why can't we all look that good when we don our winter-wear? Anyway, her Aiki Ju-Jusu flirting distracts Kage during his meditation session. "Now you must die!" says Kage, getting up to fight.



The new Ryu-esque Akira poses for the cameras! Wolf shows his outrage at this display of vanity on Akira's part and receives a non-verbal reply. Ouch. I bet that hurt! Akira sends Wolf flying!

■ The Dreamcast is not the only hardware that has been licensed out. Majesco has secured the rights to the Game Gear and has released it in the USA for a mere \$29 (£17). Games currently available are Sonic Chaos, The Lion King, Sonic Spinball, The Jungle Book, Deep Duck Trouble, Caesar's Palace, Super Battle Tank, Aladdin, Pac Man and Ms. Pac Man.

■ Smack-down 3 has been confirmed for the PS2. There will be 78 styles of matches, 35 Super-stars and over 1000 different moves. Furthermore, players will be able to rush opponents as they enter the ring, enjoy a six-man Tag Team option, and distract the ref.

Our sources: www.armchairempire.com, www.dreamarena.com, www.famitsu.com, www.fgnonline.com, www.game-online.com

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Microsoft's X-box: Good News

Despite the PlayStation 2 euphoria that occurred during Christmas, the new year is all about Xbox, for that's what we got, as soon as we put down our cans of beer (or Keg in Ben's case), hoovered up the confetti from our party poppers, finished off the oranges in our stockings, and turned our attention once again to games reporting. Xbox news has been everywhere grabbing both good and bad headlines.

One of the first things that became evident to regular visitors of Microsoft's own Xbox website was that the Xbox specification had been downgraded. The games console - Microsoft's first venture into the video games hardware market - was originally going to have it's graphical capabilities powered by a 300Mhz Nvidia Chipset, but just a few weeks ago, Microsoft changed this to a 250Mhz chipset. The actual CPU still runs at 733Mhz, making it's sheer number crunching power more than a PlayStation 2 and Gamecube combined, but nonetheless critics took the opportunity to sneer, as it means that the Xbox's polygon generating capabilities have been reduced from 300 million per second, to 125 million per second. Microsoft hit back by saying: "Initially, we thought that a 600MHz CPU and a 300MHz GPU was

Bad News

about right.....

Now that...we've got games up and running on NV20s, we learned a bit more about the production and the manufacturing, and we decided that the 250MHz combined with the 733MHz is really the right balance." So it's all about price and ease of manufacturing then, 'eh? Oh, and yes, 125 million polygons a second is still impressive.

Another piece of bad news

is that us European gamers aren't going to be getting the machine this year - while - get this - the rest of the world will. The main reason for this is that Microsoft doesn't want to repeat Sony's mistakes of launching the machine before there's enough consoles available to meet demand. They've given themselves manufacturing breathing space, and will be able to correct any problems that occur with regards to supply and demand in America and Japan first, when the console launches in October, and then worry about us later. Still, all things considered, it's a great loss that we won't get the console until 2002 when the machine is grabbing all the headlines this year. They'll also be missing out on another Christmas season, providing PlayStation 2 with a great sales opportunity!

Still, the Xbox Europe team were confident this was all worth while: "The demand for Xbox is so high that we have revised our forecasts and we feel that we can ship many more units this way....the main thing is that we announce a launch date and stick to it."

The recent explosion of Xbox news hasn't been all negative however. Microsoft recently unveiled the machine at the Consumer Electronics Show along with a few game demos and these have really impressed.

One of the first demos that was demonstrated was by J Allard, a Microsoft employee who helped conceive the Xbox console. The actual game that he demonstrated was a title developed by British coders Argonaut, led by the greatly respected Jez San. This guy used to be well known for complex space flight games that used 3D graphics - he coded Starglider for the Amiga, and created Starwing for the Super Nintendo. However, more recently, he's unfortunately remembered for the character Croc over these monumental achievements. The game being showcased was Malice, which is an Xbox exclusive.

It's a puzzle/action adventure game (y'know, wander around, put a key in a lock, push a few blocks, hit things with a hammer!) that casts a loveable yet strong female character called Alice who, like Amy in Sonic Adventure, sports a great big hammer. There'll be no bottom-bashing here then, it seems, just good old fashioned D.I.Y. appliances - and you don't get more old fashioned than a Hammer. <WHACK!> That's the way to do it!

J Allard guided Alice around the inside of a detailed 3D room, that had a real industrial feel to it. Cogs moved in the background, steam rose from certain sections and machinery whirred and hummed. It was all extremely detailed and the way the building was dimly lit added to the atmosphere. J Allard then came across a key, and guessed he could use it on a strange contraption on the floor of the building. So he made Alice carry it over to the contraption, and sure enough it proved the right thing to do, for we were treated to a real time cut scene in which the contraption whirred, hummed, and shook a little before activating a huge bronze robot. It was becoming obvious that J Allard hadn't had any experience with this demo prior to the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) presentation as he chuckled a little, and accidentally said aloud - "Hmm..I wonder what now? Maybe if I jump!" and J Allard made Alice jump, and immediately found that the robot copied Alice's moves. As a spectator I couldn't help feel that this was Argonaut giving their own unique tribute to Microsoft's earlier Raven demonstration video, which was shown last year, and featured a lady called Raven performing martial arts and having a huge robot stand behind her copying all of her moves. J Allard then proceeded to run through Alice's moves including a hammer smash - which did nothing as the robot did not have a hammer, and two distinctly different types of jumps, the highest of which yielded unexpected results - seeing the robot jump high in the air and get stuck between two industrial poles!

Honestly, this did not look like it was supposed to happen! But the physics of the game must be so real that it became possible! Impressive, but probably quite embarrassing for Mr Allard. "Ooops..sorry about that." he apologised "Okay, maybe that demo's over for now....."

The other demo was of Munch's Oddysee, the third edition of the successful Oddworld series. This was quite impressive, but didn't look much better than the likes of PlayStation 2's Rayman Revolution, graphically speaking. Obviously the scenes were a lot darker, though, and more atmospheric, such is the nature of the game. In fact one of the first scenes of this demo looked almost as good as the Full Motion Video featured in the first two games! J Allard's key point was that on the original PlayStation, the development team weren't able to do their vision of Abe's world justice in 3D and had stuck to a 2D, albeit beautiful, form of presentation. On Xbox however, they had been provided with the ability to realise Abe's world in complete 3D. Despite the fact that the game had graphical finesse and looked quite promising as a title, selling it purely on the fact that it was 3D didn't do it for me. The wow factor of such an accomplishment was all used up when Nintendo launched the N64 with Mario 64, I'm afraid. The transition from 2D to 3D has never been as jaw-dropping since. Not that Mario 64 still looks graphically amazing today, but rather, that milestone has been passed. We care not if it's 3D or 2D but whether it's any fun or not. Like I've said - Oddworld looked a lot of fun, but telling us it's 3D doesn't really do it for us Journalists any more. Still the fact that the development team finally had the confidence to make Oddworld 3D (look at Bomberman, for instance, which has never translated well into 3D) tells us something about what the hardware is allowing developers to do. "Oddworld Inhabitants [the developers]... have an incredibly detailed vision..." commented J. Allard. "...and that vision is so big that they really felt they could only bring it to life on the Xbox".



"The Xbox is everything The Rock is. Cutting-edge, powerful, exhilarating, and ... coming out this year!" said The Rock, in a PR blunder!

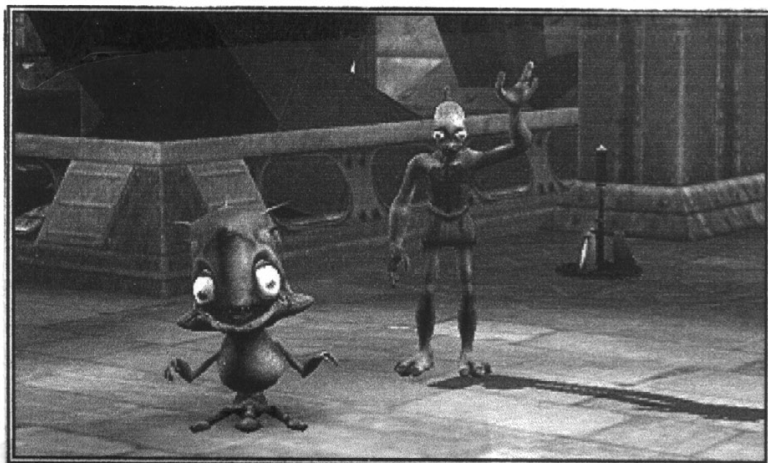
What happened next surprised everyone. It started with an explosion of bass, and then some really loud music, that kept blaring: "The Rock!" out of the speakers. Nope, it wasn't Delakota, it was WWF Superstar "The Rock". He had come along to promote Xbox. However, whoever wrote his speech made a really ugly mistake. We all got scared as the Rock told us what he and the Xbox had in common. "The Xbox is everything The Rock is. Cutting-edge, powerful, exhilarating, and like The Rock, it will be the most electrifying thing coming out this year!" Rumours about the Rock's sexuality began to spread until The Rock squashed them with his fist and this sound-bite, given to MsXbox.com later on in the day: "The Rock will be coming out in THQ's new Xbox game - WWF: Raw is War!". Aaah...so that's what he meant. Great news for Wrestling game fans then!

Indeed, the Xbox is really looking like a strong format, with games companies falling over themselves to develop games for the console. Whilst there are currently only a handful of confirmed game titles being released for the machine, there are over 200 developers and publishers working away on Xbox projects. Amazing isn't it? EA are looking to bring the likes of KnockOut Kings and SSX to the format, whilst Tony Hawk's Skateboarding is also reported to be appearing on the console. Surprisingly, Xbox versions of PlayStation Megahits will also be appearing on the machine. There'll

be the likes of Crash Bandicoot X, Metal Gear Solid X, and Silent Hill coming to the machine, with current rumours also indicating that the hotly-tipped P.C. title Mafia will also make an appearance on the machine. Lots to look forwards to then? Indeed. For now though, you'll just have to contend with these shots of the two games that were on show at CES. Enjoy!



OddWorld: Munch's Oddyssey



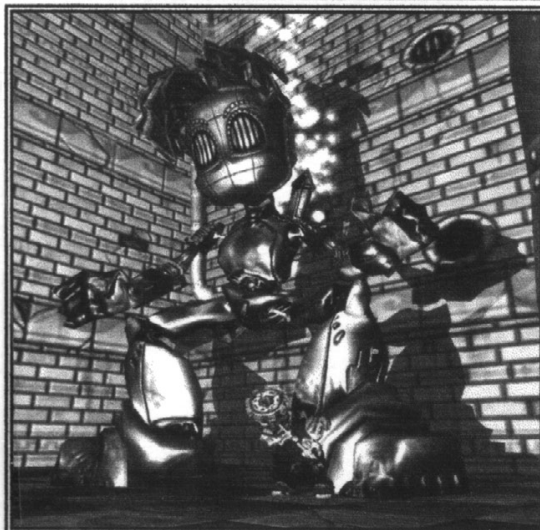
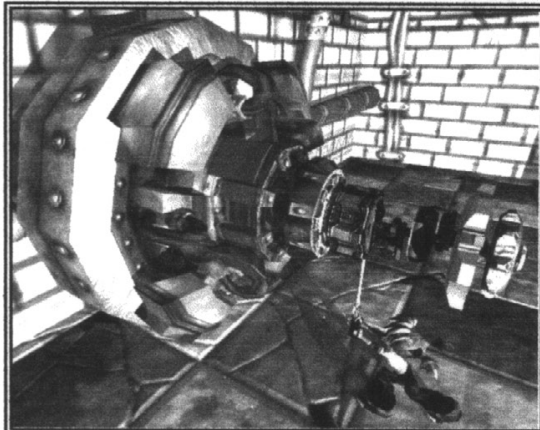
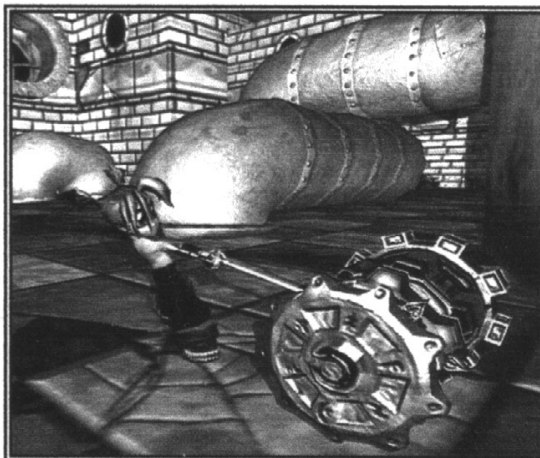
Meet Munch (left) and Abe (right). The character animation really gives the characters character. Abe's waving his hand in the air about something....

Hmm....I wonder what that lever in the background does?

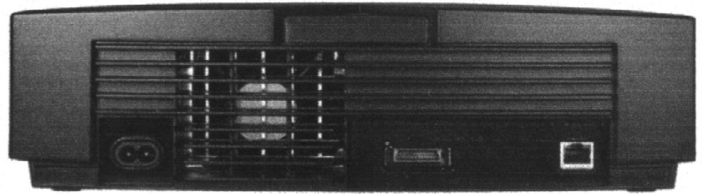
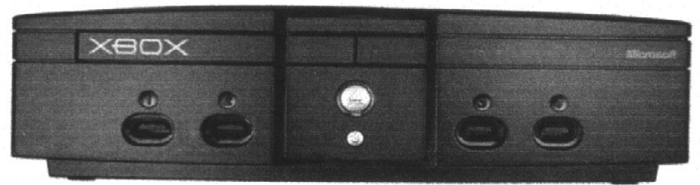


Abe tip-toes quietly away, suggesting the game will require you to use stealth in parts. The 3D engine that Oddworld Inhabitants (the name of the game developers) have created sees the neon sign behind Abe act as a light source, lighting up characters and objects in different ways and casting realistic shadows upon them that realistically change as they move.

Malice:



Malice is being developed by Argonaut. These people are also working on a voice recognition game for Xbox...but that's another story(!). Malice sees you take control of a lady called Alice who wields a powerful hammer, much like Sonic's Amy. In the demo she manages to activate some clockwork-esque machinery, activating a giant bronze robot!!



The Machine Itself:

Gone is the beautiful looking, standing silver X design, and in its place is a console with an aesthetic that's been met with mixed feelings. Some say it looks sleek, and high tech, others say it looks like something from the eighties, and not a very good something at that, but weather you're thinking "Eww..." or "Hmmm..!", it's not going to change. This is what the machine looks like, with Microsoft arguing that the Standing letter X would have been too impractical to be placed in the lounge or the bedroom. It wouldn't have fitted under the bed, and it might not have fitted beneath the majority of people's TV sets. So if you're not amazed by the aesthetic of the machine, console yourself with the new design's practicality.

In fact Microsoft have taken quite a practical role to developing the Xbox - they did a lot of customer research, and one of the practical elements they're boasting about is the length of the control pad wire. You needn't sit on the floor to play games any longer. The Control Pad's wire is approximately 2 metres long, which means you can be playing games from the comfort of your sofa. The controller itself boasts six buttons on the front, so there will hopefully be no problems with Beat-'em-ups, like there have been on the PlayStation and Dreamcast, and, as expected, the controller features both analogue and digital direction control, and much like Sony's Dual Shock controller, it has an inbuilt rumble feature. Bill Gates also mentioned during the CES unveiling, and I quote: "The game controller itself has expandability with two of these slots up in the front." Pictures of the controller reveal no "Slots" at the front of the controller, but a few hand notions that Bill made as he said this, implied that what he was actually referring to was the ability for the left and right wings on the controller to expand slightly - allowing the controller to feel comfortable in a variety of different hand sizes. Still, we're unable to say if this interpretation of what Bill said is 100% correct until we actually get our hands on the controller itself.



The back of the machine, features a digital connector which outputs the console's image. You'll then have to make sure you get the right wire, as a variety will be available, including leads for PAL transmissions (RF/ Aerial - What we use), HDTV (High Definition Television), and S-video among others. "Not everyone will have a HDTV, but this thing is ready for them when they get it." commented Bill. "The resolution here, is really unbelievable." The Xbox is also supposed to automatically detect the resolution and adjust the output appropriately, so you won't have to select 50 or 60Hz as on some Dreamcast titles...it will go to the optimum transmission type by default. The Machine also boasts an Ethernet port which will be the console's ticket to broadband connectivity.

Finally, the machine will be able to play DVDs, but this inbuilt feature will only be unlocked when you purchase a remote control device at an additional cost (we're guessing £10-20). The Xbox has also been designed without any country lock outs, which means by default, Japanese titles will play on UK machines without chipping. However, country codes may exist in the actual software itself - it will vary from game to game, depending on who the publisher is and what they've decided.

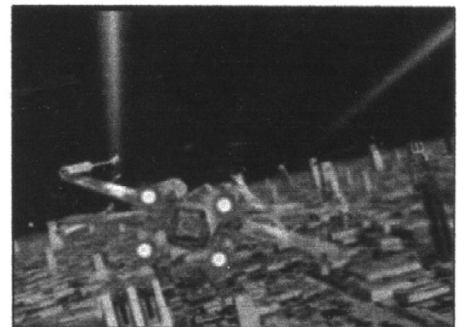


Out this July in Japan, and yet still shrouded in secrecy....

N i n t e n d o GAMECUBE

Well, you know what's going down with Sega and Microsoft - and we've a special feature on Sony and their PlayStation 2 - but what's going on down at Nintendo? They're beaver away on a selection of Nintendo GameCube launch titles. Yes, the GameCube is scheduled to be released in Japan this July so that people can, as Mr Hiroshi Yamauchi, head of Nintendo, put it: "...enjoy GameCube on their Summer Vacation." So if the console's due so soon, why do we still know so little? Sure we've been shown the console and the available accessories, read its specifications ..but the time comes when you need to see some games.

Of course, that's not to say that no software has been seen running on the GameCube. Falcon 5, developers of the original Rogue Squadron provided a brilliant playable Star Wars demo for the machine at Shoshinkai: The Nintendo Space World Show. Players got to fly about in an X-wing, dodging laser-fire and taking out a number of gun turrets. Whilst acting as a perfect show-case for GameCube, showing it was capable of real immersive gameplay, brilliantly detailed landscapes, and having millions of polygons on screen [there were laser towers, enemy craft, plus lasers as individual polygons - coming from all angles, keeping you on your toes, forcing you to keep dodging laser fire] and generating a full orchestral sound-track [Stereo sound just made it seem all the more realistic...I've never been so awe-struck by sound from a game before...there was a certain grandeur about that Star Wars music that just brought the whole experience to life], despite all this, there's still no news as to whether it is ever to become more than a mere Show-case. Either way, the demo is definitely proof that Falcon 5 have their development kits, and we can confirm that they're working on a title called Thornado which is a new version of their old Turrican shoot-'em-up.

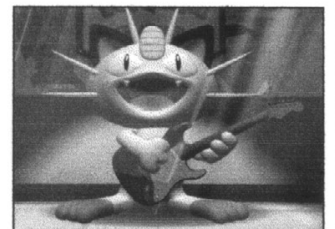


Dodge that laser fire!



But games may well be a problem. The machine is due to launch in July in Japan with a mere five games and in October over here with just seven titles, although skeptics reckon us Europeans may have to wait until 2002 before we actually see the machine (although this is just a rumour - officially, Nintendo will be trying their best to get the GameCube over here for Christmas). Even so, Nintendo are known for high quality games, and so, as with the Nintendo 64, it could be quality over quantity again, which is no bad thing. Everyone went crazy over the original N64 launch, despite it only launching with three games. I mean if one of the launch games turns out to be a Zelda title, I won't need any other games - I'll be so engrossed for so long! ☺!

Nintendo are definitely known to be bringing their famous characters to the platform. A Mario title of some sort seems extremely likely. There's also a chance that a Waverace sequel could grace the format too (WaveRace64's "Follow The Dolphin" level was also shown running on Gamecube hardware at Shoshinkai, better rendered and featuring some amazing water reflection effects!) and a Pokemon title has already been confirmed, and said to have connectivity features. Whether this means it has online features, connecting to the internet in some way, or whether this means it can connect to Gameboy Advance, we're not sure. It could be the latter though, as a Pokemon Gameboy Advance title was confirmed at the same time. Still, we still don't know if the Pokemon title will make it to launch. Nintendo is keeping us all very much in the dark.



It looks likely that EA will also be developing for Nintendo's GameCube. "GameCube is going to be an important platform in the next generation. You can surmise that we will be there when it is launched." commented a spokesperson for the company. There were also some rumours going around that EA Canada - the team responsible for PS2's successful SSX game had got their mitts on Nintendo's GameCube and found it to be more powerful than they had expected. Reports circulating on the internet cited the GameCube Development kits as capable of producing 17 million simultaneous polygons per second with minimal effects, and five million with all effects switched on and eight levels of texturing applied. If these rumours are true then the GameCube may just be more powerful than Nintendo let on in their original specifications.

Finally, Capcom have confirmed that they will be bringing Resident Evil to the brightly coloured kids lunch box, and it's also rumoured that Rare will be bringing the once N64-bound Dinosaur Planet title to GameCube, along with a certain sequel to a certain Ms-Dark-starring game....hmm....



PlayStation 2: The Third Place

PlayStation 2 Hits the U.K.:

Yes!! It's in the U.K. at last - although in short supply, which proved a tad troublesome over Christmas. Still, Sony are doing their best to counter shortages, with their managing director going on record to say that a further 400,000 consoles will be made available between now and March the 31st. So, if you want to get in on this next batch, you'd best head down your local retailer and enquire about pre-ordering (Yes, it's true, they're still in too short a supply for it to be sold off-the-shelf! Either that, or its become Sony's policy to only make the machine available through the pre-order scheme).

So what's all the fuss about?

The original PlayStation was and still is the best selling home console ever, and totally dominates the gaming market. PlayStation 2 is the sequel if you like, the bigger, better, pricier (!!) older brother, and since Sony dominated the games market with the original PlayStation, bringing games to the mainstream market, everyone's hoping that PlayStation 2 can replicate the original PlayStation's success. Whether it will or not, well, only time will tell, the PSOne, after all, continues to sell well, and new pricing policies are seeing its product range diversify. The Dreamcast is also pulling some stunners out of its hat at the moment, with games such as Metropolis Street Racer and Shenmue, whilst the N64 is enjoying a remarkable turn of fate thanks to Pokemon and another Zelda title. Still, there's a lot going for the machine - its hardware is superior to anything currently available on the market, it plays DVDs and there's a wide range of games available, with shed loads more to come. Here at United Games, we're especially jubilant about the machine, since we won it in a competition, and so haven't had to pay a penny! Aren't we a jammy lot? However, despite the fact that the office is awash with PS2 euphoria, we're still the only games magazine that sees through Sony's hype and tells it like it is. Although we've yet to bring you any reviews [we only just got our PS2 this week], we've done the next best thing, and tracked down a number of PlayStation 2 owners to help bring you a games round-up. What you're about to read, is truly, the word on the street.

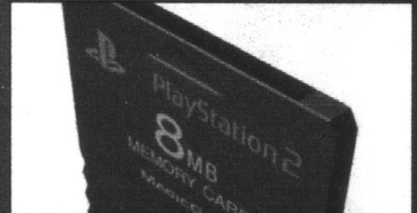
PlayStation 2:
The epitome of expensive
consumer goods



The Console itself costs a hefty £299. The price compares well with other DVD players - yet for a games console - this is a lot of money.



Two Player fun requires another controller. If you've a PSOne, you're in luck - as the old controllers work. If not, eek(!) prepare to shell out another £30.



Want to save your game? The PS2 8MB Memory card will set you back £20. We think old PSOne cards work, but haven't tested them yet.



Want to play something to showcase the new machine? That'll be £50, thank you.

So, PSOne owners'll have to fork out £364 before they can enjoy, whilst everyone else will need to fork out £414 to fully appreciate it. Don't even mention the vertical stand...

The People

Everyone knows that Sony's had problems meeting demand for the PlayStation 2 - the hardware is currently THE most sought after piece of consumer electronics. Gamers want it, but not all Gamers have managed to get their hands on it! Presented here, however, are the lucky few, who paid the money, filled out the forms, then paid some more money, and are now savouring the delights....



SACHA

(Right) →

This guy was paranoid we were trying to steal his PlayStation 2, so he didn't talk to us much. I think Fernando did manage to get it in the end though, whilst I distracted him. No, hang on, I didn't mean to type that....
He bought: Smugglers' Run, Silent Scope and Tekken Tag Tournament.



ANDREW BUCKLEY

(Right) →

We may have shocked him with our flash (you what?! E.d.), but he shocked us first - spending £600+ for a U.S. import machine. "I've got the money - why not?" he said. No forms, no fuss. He just walked out with a machine under his arm, muttering something about hooking it up to some projector thing he's got. Jeff Minter eat your heart out. Feel My Way V.S. NUON Virtual Light Machine!
He bought: Dynasty Warriors 2, Timesplitters and Tekken Tag Tournament.

The word on the street.

Now that the PlayStation 2 has landed on British soil, are gamers jubilating at the sight of it, or are we about to witness some kind of Sony back-lash, from consumers? United Games investigates....

"It seems there are a lot of people who aren't taking well to the PS2," commented Jazz, summing up the somewhat luke-warm reception the PlayStation 2 has been receiving of late. "I don't know anyone who is actually 'pro' PS2. I know plenty who are 'anti' PS2 and a scattering of people who don't mind the mistakes Sony have made with it, but don't care 'cos they're not getting one anyway, much like myself...." Of course the £300 price tag may well be the reason why Jazz isn't terribly fussed about

getting a PlayStation 2, add to that the fact that he's quite happily engaged in a selection of P.C. and Nintendo 64 titles and is playing a few of his neighbour's Dreamcast titles in-between. What's there to lure him, and indeed, any other gamer, to PlayStation 2? Well, a console's selling point is often its games, yet the PS2's current offering of titles, although graphically impressive, show us little we haven't seen before. As Fernando puts it: "The PS2 is a good machine, but it needs better games. Nearly all the games are just re-workings of existing games. What it needs are some new games." and New Games are exactly what the PlayStation 2 will be receiving, for even though the mass market has yet to

decide if it's the machine for them, the games developers decided long ago. There are currently over 250 games in development for the PlayStation 2, with new titles being announced every day. "Metal Gear Solid 2 should be good," commented Fernando, rubbing his grubby little mitts together in gleeful anticipation. He still advises those interested in PlayStation 2 wait a while though: "by then we might actually have some decent new age games." Of course, that's not to say that all the PlayStation 2 games released thus far have been mere mediocre offerings. There are a few diamonds in the rough. Ryan Stigall did well for himself buying SSX, Timesplitters, and Madden 2001, at launch: "SSX is a solid game, that's surprisingly deep for a snowboarding game. Timesplitters cuts through all the crap and throws you in the middle of ten enemies with a gun to kill them all with - it's fast, crazy and a blast to play! As for Madden 2001, it's the best game I have. Period. Gameplay is a

MORRIS J BROWN

← (Left)

You know this guy ISN'T gonna be taking his machine for granted! Look at the joy on the man's face...summing up the whole PS2 euphoria. Or something like that. He bought: Fantavision, Ridge Racer V and Moto GP. "I'm a bit of Racing fan.." he confessed...



FERNANDO

← (Left)

We caught this guy trying to sneak off with his, without paying. "When you print the photo - don't let on I nicked it, okay?" "Sure." we replied. "We won't mention it in the write up at all." Oops. He bought: Silent Scope, Tekken Tag and Timesplitters.



STEVE THOMAS

(Right) →

Stevie was glad he had pre-ordered his PlayStation 2: "I didn't even have to fight any grannies for it." he allegedly said, somewhat relieved. He bought: Dynasty Warriors 2, Ready-2-Rumble and Timesplitters



LIZA SMITH

↑ (Above) ↑

The only lady we saw buying a PS2 on launch day turned out to be buying it for someone else. Gah. What happened to all the Female gamers from the days when Gameboy Tetris and the Master System's Sonic the Hedgehog had them all fixated? Are they still out there? She bought: Dynasty Warriors 2, Ready-2-Rumble and Tekken Tag Tournament.

little slow but its flawless graphics and countless features see it dominate its genre."

So does United Games recommend these games? Well, we won't have any reviews for you until next issue, but our PlayStation 2 has been in the office for about three days now (this is why we don't have any reviews for you yet - we've only just managed to get our grubby mitts on the machine), and SSX is the most played game on the demo disk. We were quite relieved to find that the game handled okay, as when we play-tested a work-in-progress version of the game at the European Computer Trade Show, there were a number of control glitches that made controlling your snowboarder quite a feat, which in turn hindered people's enjoyment of the title. We asked Taz, who's been playing SSX since launch, if there were still any control problems evident within the game: "After much playing I've found that it only gets twitchy once you've maxed out your snowboarder's

statistics, thus encouraging a lighter touch on the joypad as you get towards the end of the game (and then have to start over with a new character). So it's still the best launch title by far. Think Wipeout on a snowboard. (Ordinarily I'd say Japanese Ridge Racer V for best launch title - crap versus mode notwithstanding, but then I'm heavily Ridge Racer biased)." So, with EA having removed all the control glitches, I think we can safely say that SSX is a safe buy. It's not 100% fun-focussed like Steep Slope Sliders, but it's a good 80% fun-focussed, with the other 20% of the game being more about challenge, making you want to play again and again, and get that little bit further each time.

Ryan also did well to snap up Timesplitters, which has received top reviews from a variety of sources. "It's certainly a good game to have when you've got your mates round, so you can scream 'You b*****d! You shot me in the back!'. Ahhh... those nights of

playing Doom on a network just come flashing back." commented Fernando, who also got the game at launch.

However, Fernando wasn't quite as lucky as Ryan, for he didn't find all the PS2 games he bought at launch to be quite to his liking: "I found the overall game play in Silent Scope abysmal," he confessed "It just seemed to take forever to get anywhere. What this game needed was the rifle you got in the arcades. It must be me, but I haven't got the patience for this game. I just couldn't get into it - give me Time Crisis any day! I've since swapped Silent Scope for Dead Or Alive 2. Yes, I like fighting games." Indeed it seems the man does, for besides Dead or Alive 2, he also owns Tekken Tag. For many, this was the game that had them salivating over the preview pages of games mags, the game that saw them save their pennies in eager anticipation, the game that would justify the (£300) asking price of the console, for all who saw it were bedazzled: "Tekken had

the best graphics I've seen on a home console - absolutely staggering visuals!" exclaimed Andrew Crane, of Retrogamer fame. Fernando was also impressed with the title, calling it a "Good all-round fighter". Even still, it wasn't quite the killer app everyone thought it would be. "It isn't a progression in terms of gameplay from Tekken 3." admitted Andrew, whilst Fernando criticised it for being too easy. "I finished it in a day (Well I do have the other Tekken games). Still the bowling game is cool." Nonetheless, it's quite alarming to think that games which cost fifty-odd quid can be completed in little more than a day.

Still, one of the advantages of buying a PlayStation 2, however, is the fact that you can benefit from the extensive library of PlayStation One games - most of which retail for considerably less. I've never owned a PlayStation, yet now I've a PlayStation 2, I'm already looking forwards to playing PlayStation One titles such as Cl2 and Incredible Crisis. This is also good, in that if you've sapped all your funds on the machine itself, and yet already have a collection of PlayStation One games, you can still have some fun trying them out on the new machine. "It was fun playing old PS games on the PS2 with smoothed textures an' all, even if the 3D was glitchy." admitted Andrew Crane, after a games playing session at "evil" Dave's. Of course, there's also the option of using your PlayStation 2 to watch DVDs as well - if you rent one out from Blockbuster, you can have a cool night in, for a mere £3 or so rental charge. "I've used my PS2 as a DVD player and it kicks my first-generation DVD player's ass!!" enthused Ryan Stigall. "The biggest difference I noticed is that it booted up my DVDs' menu screens in half the time I am used to."

However, an industry insider, who has asked to remain anonymous slated the PS2's DVD's functionality: "PSX-2 IS OFFICIALLY the WORST DVD player ever!!!!" he screamed. "Sony have knackered the machine by stopping any RGB [red/green/blue] output of the DVD footage (only games will output in RGB)... In other words ANY NTSC disc will play in Black And White even if the machine is mysteriously chipped!" RGB is considered to be the highest quality output available, and yet DVD movies, when played through a PlayStation 2, can't benefit from the extra richness this output method brings, even though PlayStation 2 games display fine in RGB. Sony justify the removal of DVD RGB output, by saying that it prevents the highest quality of DVD footage being pirated to VHS. Sony have still been criticised, however, since most DVD players keep RGB DVD output, and yet prevent VHS copying by using Macrovision - a technology that scrambles the image should it be played through a VCR. Still, no RGB output is what we've got. "The PS2 is bundled with a composite Scart lead," explained Andrew Crane "and that's really annoying, because if you've just bought a state-of-the-art games machine, you want the best picture quality. Trouble is, if you use a RGB Scart lead on the PS2, games will run fine, but DVD films will only output the green part of the signal. So I recommend using an S-Video connector on your PS2, if your TV accepts S-Video." Of course, you can just use the Composite SCART lead that's provided. The lack of RGB output, is a loss for the PS2, but it's not a great loss, as non-techie people probably couldn't tell the difference between the composite output of Audio/Visual (AV) and RF (Aerial) leads and the higher quality output of RGB Scart. But what's all this about NTSC disks being played in black and white?

Our anonymous industry insider, had this to say on the subject:

Mr Anon Writes.....

Right(!), well, there are actually three different UK PS2s! The ones I have played with WILL NOT output any RGB DVD signals no matter how much jiggery-pokery you do with the AV lead. Svideo is your best shot, but surprise, surprise(!) Sony's RRP for their Svideo cable is £20! The composite cable provided in the box is incapable of giving most TVs an NTSC signal that they can render in colour - the odd high end TV can cope - most can't.

I believe the DVD drive and the chipsets have separate region locks, however one type of the UK machines has a built in hack due to a cock-up (although this is just a rumour - I'm not sure I believe it...). Lord knows how one tells... but I guess that it's a very small number of units out of the 300-350 thousand that have entered the UK up until this week. If the region lock is defeated, any NTSC signal outputted via the composite SCART in the PS2's box will display in black and white on most TVs, and an RGB SCART gives green tinted output as stated in the PS2 manual - this is allegedly due to the fact that the PS2 has no Macrovision and the green tinting is a way around that to meet the standard DVD specs. I have yet to test the system using an Svideo lead.

BE WARNED! The discs currently floating around (Space Ace, Dragons Lair I & II and Time Machine) are encoded in NTSC and play black and white on UK PS2s, but they do play, so are therefore kinda compatible....

Mr Industry Insider certainly didn't seem very impressed: "The fact is that the DVD experience is watered down on a PS2 even compared with budget players like the Encore or Wharfedale. In other words, for the moment, a bundle of a Dreamcast and a low-end DVD player will give you:
A) Better Games
and
B) Better DVD playback."

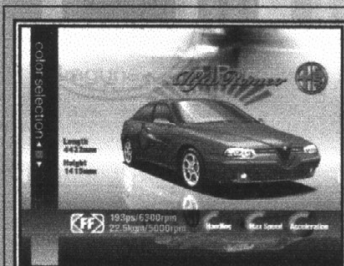
Still, not everyone will be looking to play foreign DVDs on their machine, and not everyone is pedantic enough to have a problem with composite output, which still gives a good quality picture, the output being only marginally worse than RGB. "As an entry point for DVDs it's not too bad."

Coming Soon...

To make up for the lack of PS2 reviews this issue, we've decided to provide you with write ups on some of the more eagerly anticipated titles coming to PS2 owners soon!

GRAN TURISMO

T H R E E - A S P E C



Without a doubt, the first thing that strikes you about Gran Turismo 3 (formally known as Gran Turismo 2000) is the sheer beauty of the graphics. You could quite happily take a still from any moment in the game, and hang it on your wall as art.

The graphics are tangibly more solid than anything seen on the Playstation, and that includes the CGI intros from the first two Gran Turismo games. But to really appreciate the graphical finesse of the title, you have to stand back and look at it, admire the way the light filters through the trees of the forests, how the sun sets in the distance of the hills, how the different quality of tarmac lights up in a variety of different ways. Then there are the cars themselves. They are more than photo realistic, in fact the only thing that seems to come close is going to a motor show and looking over the barriers at the freshly waxed vehicles.

And then, of course, there is the driving experience.

Ah. Oh dear. I was hoping for something..... a little more. It's not that the cars handle badly - far from it. It's just that they handle and feel exactly

the way they did in Gran Turismo 2. In many ways this is no bad thing, there was nothing really wrong with the handling in GT2, but for people who expect something more for the £300+ they have paid for the Playstation 2 and Gran Turismo 3, they may well be disappointed.

In fact, that's the feeling I get from Gran Turismo 3 - one of disappointment. Yes the graphics are very, very nice indeed. Yes there will be a selection of new cars. Yes you will be able to link up 3 Playstation 2's and have 6 player games. But it seems more like a polished Gran Turismo 2, what Gran Turismo 2 should have been in many ways. There are no new gameplay options, or game structures and the car list has been downsized to just 150.

It is very much a safe upgrade of the Gran Turismo formula, a tried and tested formula that will undoubtedly pour money into the Sony bank. I just wish they would be a little more adventurous with the series.

**Based on an ECTS Play-test.
Written by Contributor Mat Owen**



METAL GEAR SOLID 2

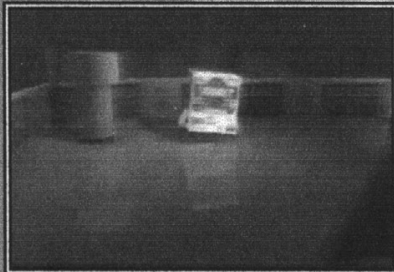
Sons of Liberty.



The original Metal Gear Solid did wonders for Konami. No longer would they be known simply for the likes of Castlevania, Super Parodius, Vandal Hearts and Probotector (Yay! Probotector!). They now had a modern PlayStation classic - a game that all critics seemed to agree was a brilliant game. Here comes the inevitable sequel - more of the same, then? Maybe - but we know you're all thirsty for more, and since the brilliance of the original has yet to be bettered, maybe it'd be this sleek new PlayStation 2 title that'll steal the crown the original still holds.



New additions to the game include a tranquillizer gun that allows you to put your enemies to sleep - however, the cunning thing is that they don't instantly pass out - rather it takes time for the tranquillizer to set in, and this introduces a new degree of strategy to the game, as parts of the game will require you to get the timing just right so that officers pass out in certain places, or by certain times. Also new is the hero's ability to interact with bars - jump over them, hang from them - these are just some of Snake's new abilities!



Newly released screenshots also reveal that Snake can become invisible...but in the screens thus far revealed, his presence is given away by a cardboard box which has landed on his head. Is Metal Gear Solid's AI clever enough to tackle your invisibility in this manner, or it just bad luck that sees this occur? All will be revealed come the release of Sons of Liberty.....

Screenshots (top to bottom, left to right): Guards chase your invisible-yet-foolishly-wearing-a-cardboard-box-for-a-hat-self. Nice reflection effects on the floor...but what use is that when a guard's pumping lead into your boxed self? Assuming that you're dead (enemies always assume - they never check to make sure), they head down the stairs to attend other duties. God job for you - your invisibility has just ran out! The box collapses open, you're bleeding...badly...



Street Fighter EX3

The Third incarnation of Akira's popular Street Fighter EX series for Capcom (known to some as Street Fighter 3D) makes it's debut exclusively to PlayStation 2. The game was originally a Japanese launch title, so it was strange to find that it wasn't available over here upon launch. Here at United Games, we're guessing that Capcom must have spent some time touching it up prior to the U.K. release, for the Japanese version was slightly criticised for A) Being too easy, and B) suffering from bouts of slow-down from time to time - this is not what people expect of PlayStation 2 titles. Of course the slow down was due mainly to the amount of on-screen action. You may be aware of this, you may not, but Street Fighter EX3 allows for up to four characters to be on screen at once. Things can sure get hectic.

We haven't had any experience of the U.K. version of SFEX3, but we can tell you about our brief experience with the Japanese title. From the get go there are Seventeen characters available - Balrog (known as Vega to us in the West), Blanka, Chun Li, (C.)Jack, Dhalsim, Guile, Hokuto, Ken, Nanase, Ryu, Sakura, Sharon, Skull-o-mania and Zangief - plus two new characters - left and right player versions of a fighter called ACE. This is supposed to be you - a character whose statz can be built up in Character Edit Mode. There are also seven secret characters to be discovered throughout the game.



The game boasts a series of different modes - Original Mode, Arena Mode, Character Edit Mode, Training Mode and Option Mode. Original Mode is a one player game that sees your character start with a low rank, which can then be built up by taking on a number of opponents [in some cases as many as three at once!], and Character Edit Mode sees you build up the ability of ACE, whilst Arena Mode is the traditional one-on-one action we all know and love...well, actually, I lied. For whilst Arena mode does make way for some cool one-on-one action, it also makes way for some crazy two-on-two action when you select the much talked about new addition to this series - the Arena mode's Tag mode. Tag mode works by allowing each player to pick two different characters, so that when one becomes exhausted, the other can act the part of the cavalry, and jump into the fight tag-team style, and help out. You can tag at any time during a match by holding down all four shoulder buttons, or, if you've selected "Semi-Auto" as your Partner Setting [you get to specify the Partner Setting at the beginning of a match - either Manual, or Semi-Auto] then you'll automatically tag should your playable character reach a near-death like state.

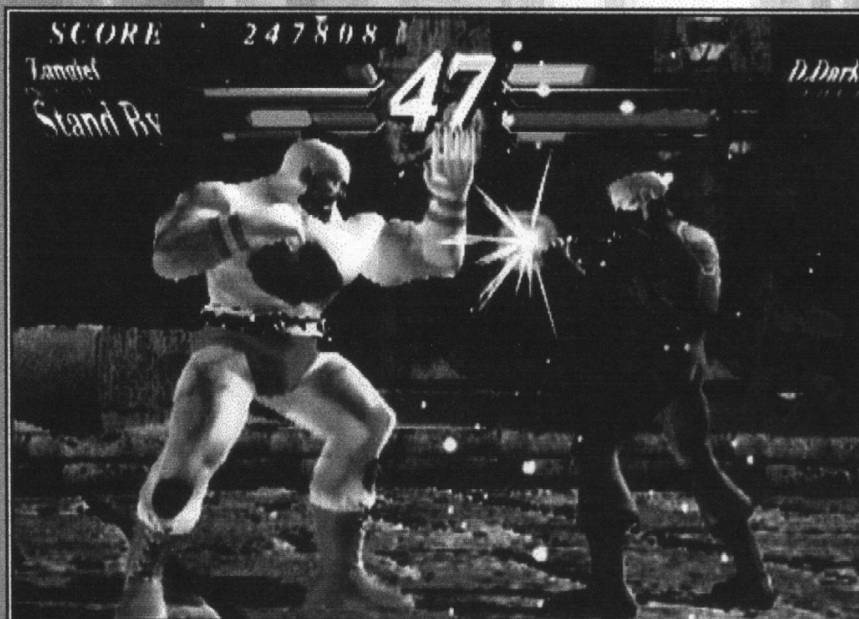
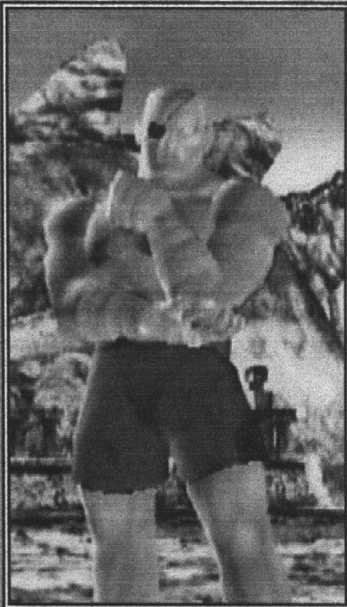
Tag mode can be a complete and utter laugh, as George found out when she managed to have a brief playtest of the title. Being a bit of a Nintendo devotee, however, meant she wasn't familiar with the Street Fighter EX series. "The first thing I thought when I saw it was, 'Oh no! They've made Street Fighter 2 3D! The b*****ds!' But it's not...it's still 2D, but with 3D polygon graphics." Indeed, the game made quite an impression on her, even to the point where she commented she might get a PS2 just to play it. She played as Ken most of the time, and managed to kick some serious ass. I think I can only recall one person managing to beat her that day. Way to go. "It's a lot easier to pull off some of the special moves, as opposed to the old SNES version." she commented. This could be partially due to the fluid nature of the game. Some of us had played previous SFEX titles, and noted that this new PlayStation 2 EX title was a lot smoother than past incarnations, not only in terms of the graphics, but also in the way the game handled. Guile's Sonic Boom was just laughable though. It was tiny, in comparison to him, and looked little different from the old SNES animation, so it was really funny to see an opponent, about to pull off a flashy move, with lots of special coloured lighting and pyrotechnic-esque light displays, to be stopped by this little blue thing flying across the screen. It may be small, but it does have power, and this led George to comment on how playing as Guile was like picking the Retro character, and really harked back to the old skool.



Of course old skool is all well and good, but you got a PlayStation 2 for some truly impressive moments, and SFEX3 gladly provides you with quite a few. Firstly, when certain moves are performed, the camera moves in, or changes angle, for dramatic effect. There are, of course, more subtle graphical touches, such as character shadows, and clothe-rippling animations. These are in sync with a character's movement animations, and do not act upon any virtual wind, but nonetheless, still look impressive. Also, when a two player game is over, the screen erupts into flames, and a three faced golden God-like statue comes to the fore, with the words "K.O." printed on the screen in large red letters.

Perhaps the most impressive and memorable moment of our playtest, however, was when someone performed an astounding pile driver with Zangief. Usually, when performed, he grabs an opponent, soars into the sky (with the camera staying on the ground, looking up - providing dramatic effect) and then we see him fall back down and crash to the ground, still clutching his opponent. However, on this occasion, Zangief didn't stop at the sky. We saw him go higher and higher, then there were flames on the screen, and then he went even higher, and suddenly we were presented with a picture of the globe, with Zangief climbing even higher into space! He suddenly stopped, and began his descent, (What? Surely there's no gravity in space! E.d.), and when he finally crashed back down again, the ground burst into flames, and his opponent was dead. Now that's what I call impressive.

Overall, given the right atmosphere, Street Fighter EX3 can be a real hoot in two player mode. Indeed George found the game loads of fun, although if you're used to the likes of Fighters Megamix, Dead or Alive, Virtual Fighter, etc, etc - any game that uses the Guard/Punch/Kick control system, it may take you a while to adapt to Street Fighter EX3's control system. The one player mode is also pretty cool allowing you to unlock a series of secret characters, but as one-time CVG editor Paul Davies told us: "It's too easy to unlock the extra characters though. I got the characters myself, in about 10 minutes. Dead easy. Still a cool game though." The fact that the U.K. version has only just been released, could mean that Capcom have spent time increasing the difficulty for the European market, but until we've actually got our mitts on the game, we can't be sure. If you know, write in to us, and we'll print your comments next issue. Until then, this game seems pretty groovy if you want some fab two player matches against your mates. I wouldn't get it for just the one player mode however.



Sony?

[i n t h e s a m e
s e n t e n c e ?]

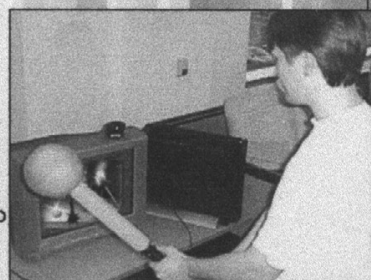
INNOVATIONS ?

D i d I h e a r y o u c o r r e c t l y ?

Many of the criticisms levelled at the software currently available for PlayStation 2 is that it's uninnovative. We've seen it all before. Sure, we've never before seen it looking this amazing, but we have seen it all before. Well, those critics may well be pleased to learn that Sony has been busy in its R&D labs and HAS come up with an innovative technological breakthrough that could, should game designers make use of it, lead to entirely new ways of playing videogames on your PlayStation 2.

So what have Sony's R&D labs developed that's so amazing? Well they've made it possible for users to control on-screen action via the use of various real-life props. United Games was lucky enough to see a demonstration of this technology at the European Computer Trade Show. A Sony employee demonstrated how, by moving a large foam wand, he could control an on-screen wand that hovered above a cauldron - depicted on the PlayStation 2. This was blinding stuff, and it wasn't a bluff either, for people were encouraged to come forwards and have a go at a bit of wand-waving for themselves. So, if there wasn't anyone behind a curtain, pulling levers, then just how was the program able to sense the object's movements? The biggest visible clue was a Web Camera - which was plugged into the PlayStation via its USB socket. Simple enough, but how does one camera manage to sense a 3D object? Surely you need more than one camera - in the same way that we need two eyes in order to have a sense of depth? Well, Sony Europe's Research and Development division that created the demo got around this

problem, because they had the foam objects tailor made, and so were able to tell the PlayStation 2 software what colour and shape to look out for. This does mean that problems can occur if you're wearing clothes of a similar colour to the foam game-prop, but Sony have chosen very saturated colours in order to reduce the likelihood of this being the case.



The scarily innovative foam-waving demonstration from a just plain scary grey moustached man...help!

It's as yet unknown if any developers are working on PlayStation 2 software which takes advantage of this technological breakthrough, but all you P.C. owners may be interested to know that similar technology has been made available on the P.C. platform recently courtesy of Intel. It doesn't use foam props, but rather - your own body parts! Many of you, however, may be saddened to know that it's part of the "Intel Play!" range and as yet only works with a selection of kiddie-orientated mini games (for ages four and up!). Still, what's a gamer if not a big kid trying to have a laugh? Go on. Indulge yourself. You know you want to. ☺ !

Win A PlayStation 2 T-shirt!

Yes Indeedly!

We've a PlayStation 2 T-shirt up for grabs! All you have to do to get your mitts on it, is answer the following question:

Hypothetically speaking, let's say the T-shirt was so ridiculously large that it proved impractical to wear. What would you do with it? (By the way - you're not allowed to answer "Give it away in a United Games competition" - 'cos that's already being done....).



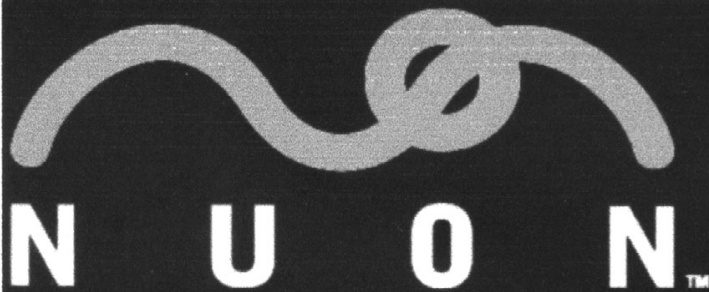
Send your answers to:

"I'd give it away in a different competition!",
United Games,
PO BOX 853 (28C),
Harrow,
HA1 3YU
or email us at:
ps2compo@game-extra.co.uk

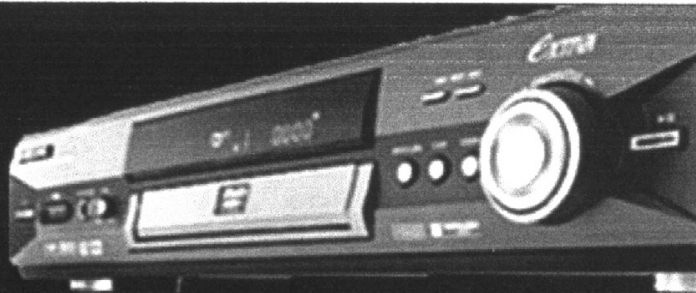
You will need to supply

a means of contact (e.g. postal address or email address), so that we can get in touch with you, should you win. Remember, we won't pass any contact details provided onto any third party companies or individuals. The winner will be decided by the editor, whose decision will be final. Oh - and check the terms and conditions of entry in EndZone (at the back of the mag). I'd add them here, yet I'm running out of space...gah...see?





NUON™



What is NUON?

'Eh? NUON...what's all that about then? Well, NUON has been set up by a Cambridge-based company, VM Labs, in order to exploit the DVD market.

You see, in order for DVD players to be able to read and understand the data on a DVD disc, they need to decode it, and the decoding is done by an MPEG 2 decoder. What VM Labs have done is to engineer a piece of circuitry that not only has an MPEG 2 decoder on board, but also some dedicated games hardware. Now the makers of DVD players have an option. Should they put a standard MPEG 2 decoder in their DVD player? Or, for more or less the same cost, put NUON technology...also capable of internet surfing and games playing into the DVD player? Do you see how that works? NUON is fast becoming a "Why not?" option for many DVD manufacturers.



Traci Lords signs a selection of DVDs at the NUON stand at E3.

Cambridge hits the USA

(...rather hardly, over the head, with a big fat NUON DVD player).

PlayStation 2 wasn't the only games-playing product to be released in the US over the festive season. The first ever NUON DVD players also hit retail, taking the form of the Toshiba SD2300 and the Samsung Exvita N-2000.

"The Toshiba is selling much better than the Samsung thanks to the Toshiba name, and the wider availability," commented Kevin Manne, editor of the independent NUON-dome website. "I think that if the Samsung was available at brick-and-mortar retail establishments that sales would be much higher," he added, pointing out that the majority of NUON sales were taking place online. Still, a quick trip to VM Labs' official website, reveals that over 60 American retail chains are stocking NUON enhanced DVD players.

"NUON is still a very new product to the market," commented Kevin Manne. "It will be a while before it catches on to mainstream popularity, but if VM Labs keeps up the pace it's got going now, we're all in for a good ride with our NUON players."

So just what pace have NUON set? Well, we're pleased to report that the past few months have seen a stream of interactive titles released for the NUON DVD players in the US. Fans of VM Lab's Atari Jaguar will probably be intrigued to know that Tempest 3000, coded by the legendary Jeff Minter of Llamasoft is just one of the titles currently available.

"T3K is finished," comments Jeff on his website "And, you know, it feels rather strange... today is the first day I've woken up and not had anything to do to Tempest today. And after... what's it been? A couple of years, at least... that feels really odd....I'm sitting around here listening to Underworld and feeling faintly bemused :-)."

Jeff also coded the format's unique Virtual Light Machine, which generates euphoric patterns of light as visual accompaniment to your audio CDs. The stunning visuals morph and modify themselves according to variations within the song, and thanks to the random element that plays a part in how the patterns are formed, you'll never see the same pattern twice.

"I found out the other weekend that taking the VLM and a video projector with you goes down very well at parties :-)... The power of very loud techno music and a wall-sized VLM display running the "Overdriven" bank is not to be underestimated :-)."

But the Nuon DVD player isn't just about playing games and generating fancy light displays, as the name suggests - it's also a DVD player, and a very



The Yak himself under the spotlight of the Virtual Light Machine!

good one at that. Whilst PlayStation 2 puts games first and foremost, the VM Labs Lads are, besides attempting to lure interactive entertainment companies into developing for the platform, attempting to get the movie moguls behind them also. They've sponsored media events like Trauma TV's film festival TraumaDance (viewers of late night Channel 4 TV should know this one!), and their appearances at electronic trade shows has seen movie celebrities turn up to support their cause.

It must have all paid off, for a new generation of NUON enhanced DVD titles are being released in America by Fox Studios, the first of which is Bedazzled. Special Edition DVD which features a host of extra features, such as multimedia details on set design, and a Fashion Show of Elizabeth Hurley's Wardrobe.

Even with standard DVDs, NUON is impressive, with the ability to zoom in times twenty(!), with no loss of clarity. Then there's the smooth picture searching - both forward and back and the Samsung machine can even apply strobe effects to your films.

NUON also grants users Internet access, via the Mosaic web browser, and just recently, VM Labs have announced plans to introduce broadband capabilities to the machine. With internet facilities, there also comes online gaming. So far the only online game we've seen is a game featuring dogs playing cards. Quake 3 it ain't, but then they've got to start somewhere.

NUON is set to be the next big thing in the world of DVD, with Samsung and Orient both launching their players in Europe this summer, and whilst its graphical capabilities may pale in comparison with the latest consoles' capabilities, with games emerging from the likes of Jeff Minter and innovative titles such as TAKS' FreeFall and Tatio's Power Excavator, it could really spice up gamers lives.

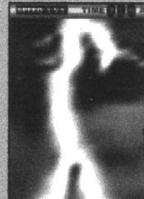
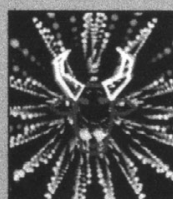
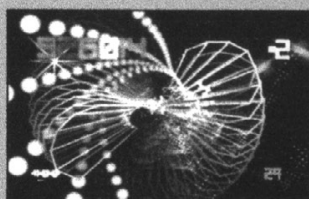
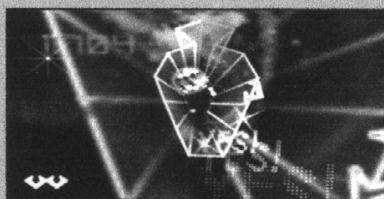


"Show me

Whilst the NUON technology will provide added functionality to DVD players, with sharper images, improved picture searching, extreme zooms, and added interactive functionality, what we're really getting excited about at United Games are the interactive entertainment titles. Yes, people - by interactive entertainment, I do of course mean games!

But why should we be getting so excited? Sure, the 128-bit Nuon processor should, if we go by bitage alone, be able to stand up to the likes of PlayStation 2 and Dreamcast...but oh no...Nuon is a DVD player first and foremost. It has the capacity for games, it will definitely be about games [amongst other things], but it makes no attempt to provide any dedicated game chips to rival the graphic synthesizers and what not, found in the current range of next-gen games consoles. The games, so far, look 32-bit. So why are we so excited about them?

There are two reasons. Firstly, although there have only been a handful of titles released so far, the titles that have been released are extremely innovative and original. Games such as FreeFall by TAKS (Total Arkade Software) feature entirely new gameplay ideas - well implemented, and refreshingly different to all that stale pap that's rearing its head on PlayStation 2 at the moment (no I'm not biased, there are some great games in the pipeline, but things are looking quite dull on PS2 at the moment). I mean come on - Tatio is



TEMPEST 3000!

Tempest 3000 is Jeff's sequel to his much revered Atari Jaguar update/remix of the classic Tempest shoot-'em-up. Gameplay remains true in essence to the original - you control a claw at the end of a three dimensional web. Well, I'm calling it a web, for that's what it looks like, but it's perhaps best described as a series of lines that all head into the screen, disappearing at what artists like to call a "vanishing point". The patterns formed by these lines create the impression of 3D lanes, and it's along these lanes that various enemies and nasties travel, from the vanishing point, towards you - you being a small claw at the end of a particular lane.

Using the left and right controls, you can control which lane you're in, and a tap of the fire button, sees you able to shoot along the lane you're in, zapping any enemies within it. Of course, in Tempest 3000, they're shooting back, so you'll be required to nip into empty lanes temporarily, just to dodge incoming fire.

Time is also a factor in these games, so you'll find yourself constantly trying to figure out if you should go clockwise or anti-clockwise around the web of lanes, to get to your enemy - the quickest route often being the most preferable. All of this is great addictive fun, yet Jeff Minter's remix of the classic game also sees the game become an audio visual experience. Whilst playing, you'll be treated to an array of psychedelic effects that light up the screen in all sorts of fancy ways. The audio is spot on too. There are a total of nineteen tracks - twelve of which are remixes of tracks from Tempest 2000, with the other seven tracks being original material composed by Ian Goddard (aka T[NT]), Andre Meyer and James Grunke. The lights and music complement each other perfectly from an observer's point of view, but just how easy it'll be to play a game with all those visual effects going off though, remains to be seen. Either way - it looks like being a blast!

FREE FALL 3

This game has an extremely original concept. The game casts you as a police person of the future, yet that's a future in which the growth of the earth's population has meant architects have turned to the skies, and the creation of levitating cities in order to house the people of earth. Yet this is no heavenly, floating-cloud kingdom, for mafia mobs seek to take control of these cities. There are lot of sinister going-ons - and it's up to you and your squad to police the skies! What this amounts to in terms of gameplay, is a strange hybrid of the flight simulator and shoot-'em-up genres.

Although you've 360° control of your character, this game does not play like the P.C.'s Descent series, for you're only human, and humans can't fly. Nope, in this game, laddie - you're falling! You're hurtling towards the earth at 100mph, having to dodge spinning blades, and evade enemy fire. But you're also the only law and order this future sky-based metropolis has, and it's law and order American style - so you'll be doing more than hitting these nasties over the head with truncheons, and whilst it would be absolutely

What other games will there be to look forwards to

Well, Tatio are bringing

a conversion of their classic Space Invaders to the format, in the form of Space Invaders 2001, and they're also porting across PlayStation puzzler, Bust-a-move 4. Then there's the previously mentioned conversion of the innovative Power Excavator Arcade

Game (coming to an Arcade near you soon!) as well as Tatio's RC de GO (like Bust-a-move 4, this is also currently available for PlayStation - published by Acclaim) coming to the format. Cinemaware are also converting the atrocious Dragon's Lair, which no serious gamer would ever want to play

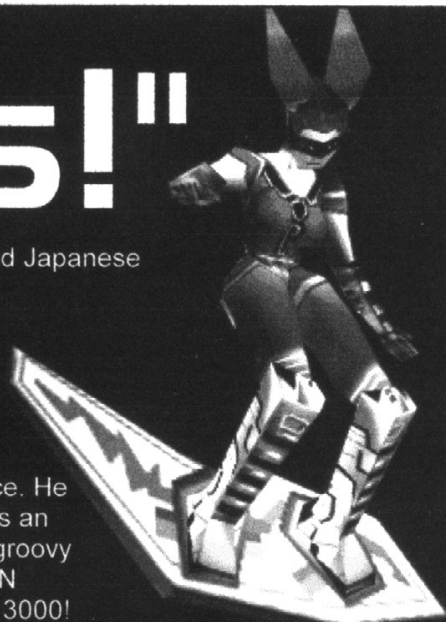
[beware - it's out for PlayStation 2 - avoid - avoid!!], whilst Cyan are busy converting both the Myst and Riven adventure games, although there's as yet no word on a Myst 3: Exile conversion [this is coming to Mac as well as P.C. by the way!]. Eclipse Software are also bringing Iron Soldier 3

the Games!"

releasing Power Excavator on the machine - a conversion of a newly released Japanese Arcade game based around JCB Power Shovels! Now there's originality.

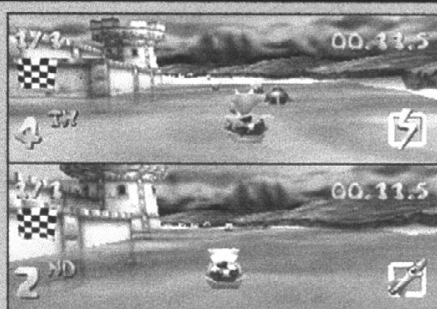
The second reason for our anticipation of NUON DVD players, is that Mr Jeff Minter and Llamasoft are backing the machines. Jeff Minter is a legendary games programmer, who developed a load of games featuring Llamas, Camels and Sheep for the C64, including Attack of the Mutant Camels, Megagalactic Llamas Battle at the Edge of Time and Sheep in Space. He also coded the only Red Hot game for the Jaguar - Tempest 2000, which was an update of the classic Tempest Shoot-'em-up with trippy lighting effects, and groovy music. It was instantly recognised as a classic by all who played it, and NUON marks Jeff's return, and also, the return of Tempest - in the form of Tempest 3000!

There's also something extremely British about NUON. It's made by VM Labs, who are based in Cambridge. Its killer app has been produced by the sheep and llama loving Jeff who hails from Wales. FreeFall - another top NUON game has been coded by TAKS (Total Arcade Software) who also hail from Britain, and Hasbro Interactive [based in Middlesex] are also supporting the machine [although their titles will come out under the Infogrames label now that they've been taken over].



050 A.D.!

hilarious if this game gave you an "Anvil-dropping" power-up, I'm afraid the only way to go is with your blaster. Even still, shooting your opponents proves very satisfying, whilst your continual descent adds a rush to the whole experience, that's just not present in other shoot-'em-ups. FreeFall has already been criticised for its awkward controls [HPI are bringing out some new Nuon controllers that will hopefully resolve these problems] but those that have played still say that whilst control issues do initially lead to frustration, perseverance is rewarded. We haven't played this game ourselves yet, so can't verify that, but it's the word on the net. The game has also been highly praised for its high quality DVD intermissions, that add to the plot somewhat. Even still, it renders the main characters in a fairly simplistic way, so as to not show up the in-game graphics, which despite being adequate, aren't exactly jaw-dropping. Whilst Tempest 3000 provides NUON with a well crafted title the industry is familiar with, FreeFall represents the new and original side of NUON.



MERLIN KARTING!

There once was a Karting Game for the Jaguar called Atari Karts. It was coded by Miracle Designs and bore quite a resemblance to Vivid Animations' take on Mario Kart - Street Racer. Yet Merlin Racing, Miracle Design's latest title for NUON, is less of a Mario Kart clone, taking its inspiration instead from the Brill Blue scoring Diddy Kong Racing. Not only are all the characters cute little animals, not only do they race around colourful stages, but the game actually plays similarly, with an adventure mode that sees you having to defeat bosses in special races, obtaining keys and collecting "Zystral Crystals" in order to progress. The graphics look similar to those in Spyro 2 on the PlayStation - simple, yet extremely smooth and colourful. Most racing games suffer from pop-up, yet Merlin Racing overcomes this problem by way of clever track design, with your horizon constantly being reduced by



sharp corners and various twists and turns within the track. The various characters you can race as are also supposed to exhibit slightly different characteristics - I'd imagine some therefore, take longer to accelerate than others, yet may have a faster top speed - as is the case with Bowser in Mario Kart 64.

Merlin Racing also features a groovy two player mode, with players able to choose between horizontal or vertical split screen. We'd imagine the two player mode could lead to some right laughs, and no doubt playing against your friend whom you haven't fully explained the controls to (always works that one ☺ !) will come as much welcomed relief to pitting yourself against the CPU, as word has it that with all the keys and Zystral Crystals to obtain, this game poses quite a challenge.

on the NUON format then?

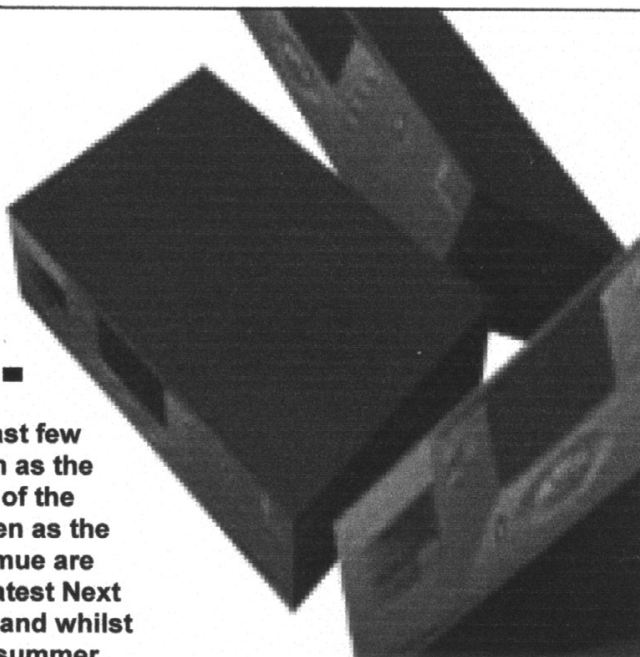
to the format [1 and 2 originally appeared on the Jaguar], whilst Infogrames, who recently bought out Hasbro Interactive, are releasing classics such as Breakout, as well as games based on Hasbro's family board games - The Game of Life and Monopoly.

Finally, Pangea software are converting their 3D platformer, Bugdom [for Mac and P.C.] to the Nuon format.

There's certainly lots to look forwards to. NUON may be about DVD movies first and foremost, and certainly, I'm not going to be getting a machine

just to play Monopoly, but with the return of the Yak, [aka Jeff Minter] and the innovative game concepts on offer in TAKS' FreeFall 3050 A.D., NUON should definitely be something to keep your eye on, when the first European NUON-compatible DVD players are released this summer.

All change for Sega...



Sega have seen turbulent times over the last few years, with dodgy Megadrive add-ons such as the Mega CD and 32X and then the fateful tale of the Sega Saturn. However, Dreamcast was seen as the saviour of the company. Games like Shenmue are detailed enough to be comparable to the latest Next Generation games machines such as PS2 and whilst there was a dearth of software during the summer, this Christmas saw many of my friends pick up a console, with a whole load of groovy games - such as Jet Set Radio and Quake 3. Such friends would probably feel their stomach churn, if they read what I'm about to tell them: Sega has just recently announced that it will cease production of the Dreamcast at the end of this fiscal year. That's March, folks. That's March. It seems Dreamcast was too little, too late, and it's the console that's been blamed for Sega's four years of consecutive loss.



The Japanese Ad campaign for Dreamcast made it obvious that Dreamcast was Sega's last attempt to turn a profit.

The shareholders must be appeased, and appeased they have been, for Sega is becoming a fully fledged third party games company. And as for Dreamcast? The Dreamcast is undergoing a radical transformation!

When the last of Sega's Dreamcasts sell, replacing them on the shelf will be Dreamcast compatible Set Top boxes, for Sega have licensed out the Dreamcast Technology to British-based Pace Micro Technologies. They've created what they think is the ultimate games machine. It's a Dreamcast, yet it also features a high capacity (40GB!!) Hard drive, and broadband internet access....plus...and get this(!)...the ability to decode digital TV.

Now you can watch ITV2, Channel 4's new E4, BBC Choice, BBC News 24, etc, just by getting this new redesigned Dreamcast. You won't have to subscribe to Sky, or On Digital, etc. Yet, if you do

subscribe to those, or other services already - there's good news, as Dreamcast may well be made available through those companies. You see, Pace is the company that makes BSkyB's set top box, On Digital's set top box, Telewest's Set top box, NTL's set top box...in fact it makes nearly all the leading digital TV companies' set top boxes(!), and they're currently in talks with companies such as Sky, to make these Dreamcast enabled home entertainment centres available to subscribers.

"You will have the basic entry boxes supplied for free or heavily subsidised, and then the higher specification boxes at an extra cost."

hypothesized Andrew Wallace, Marketing Director at Pace Micro Technologies, foreseeing how a possible deal could work (although presently nothing has been set).

Pace are marketing the new box with the help of a roadshow, that goes on tour across the U.K. at the

SEGA on

Other Formats:

Gamecube and Xbox:

Sega is currently in negotiations with Nintendo and Microsoft with regards to developing for their Systems, but Sega Japan has confirmed that they already have their development environments for the Gamecube and Xbox set up in anticipation.

Gameboy Advanced:

- >Sonic Advanced
- >Puyo Puyo
- >ChuChu Rocket

PlayStation One:

- >Sega Saturn Classics
- (as yet unspecified)
- >Sonic the Hedgehog.

PlayStation Two:

- >Virtual Fighter 4
- >Space Channel 5
- >Sakura Wars
- >Two Tsuku titles

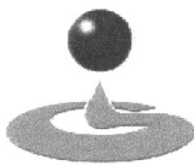
Out to impress the world.

On the 2nd of July 1999, the Korean Game Promotion Centre was officially opened. Its purpose? To thrust Korea into the competitive global market of computer games. The risks are high, but with the market currently valued at \$10 billion dollars - with analysts predicting that that figure will double during the course of the year, they are risks Korea's willing to take, for the games industry is seen as the most profitable area of the new information-based economy, an economy that Korea want a stake in.

Above: Kim from Lineage, the Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game currently taking Korea by storm. Its creators NCSoft have Xbox development kits...

About the Korean Game Promotion Centre.

The Korean Game Promotion Centre was set up by the Korean Government's Ministry of Culture and Tourism to help promote Korea's games industry. The Centre, also known as Gaming Infinity, was officially opened in July 1999. Its purpose is to nurture the domestic games industry and help promote its wares overseas, with the overall aim being to establish Korea as one of the top three games producing countries by the year 2003. Can they overtake Japan? Will they become more reputable for quality games than Britain currently is? Only time will tell...



KOREA GAME PROMOTION CENTER

The Korean Game Promotion Centre have a special logo (pictured above) which they often couple with their slogan "Game Infinity". The swirly pattern is supposed to be the letter "G" for "Game" and the way it swirls upwards is supposed to represent Korea's constant striving to become globally renowned for producing high quality games. The Red Dot (rendered lovingly here in Black and White) is supposed to be the epitome of their achievements, whilst the actual slogan "Game Infinity" is supposed to sum up the infinite evolution of the games industry. Symbolism to one side, though, the logo looks nice - which is what matters most.

"[The] Games industry has high value" commented Mr Jae-whan Sung, President of the Korean Game Promotion Centre (KGPC) "and its potential for growth is also enormous compared with any traditional industry." The Centre is striving to make Korea one of the top three game producing countries by 2003 - quite a task, but the centre is not naive and realises it will take a lot of work "A toddler who has just learnt how to walk can tumble when he tries to run. We at the centre keep that in mind and are not in a rush." states Kim Sung Hyun, Chairman of the KGPC.

Still, despite the Centre's recognition that making a name for yourself in an extremely competitive market takes time, the Centre has already made considerable progress since it first opened a year and a half ago.

The centre was immediately recognised internationally due to high profile stands at computer game trade shows such as ECTS (The European Computer Trade Show) in London, E3 (The Electronic Entertainment Expo) in America and TGS (The Tokyo Game Show) in Tokyo, Japan. With the help of the Korean Game Promotion Centre, various

Korean Games companies were given the opportunity to show off their products to an international audience, and this allowed them to make inroads into international markets.

For example, at the 1999 ECTS show, GC-TECH entered into negotiations with Infogrames with regards to their fishing title "The Fantasy of Fishing", which has since been released in the U.S. "When we lacked funds, the Game Promotion Centre helped us advance

overseas." commented GC TECH's President, Lee Jung-hak.

More recently, at the ECTS 2000 event back in September, it was Expotato's "Come On Baby!" title that was raising the interest of overseas companies. The Korean Game Promotion Centre were also exhibiting their wares at the recent Milia 2001 event in Cannes, France.

Korea haven't been content to just attend other countries' games exhibitions though, oh no. Last year they went a step further and actually organised their own. Known as the Korean Amusement World Game Expo or KAMEX for short, the event was open to both the Korean Games Trade, and the general public and featured 400 game booths show-casing games from 74 Korean Companies, and whilst the public got engaged in the various activities occurring during the exhibition

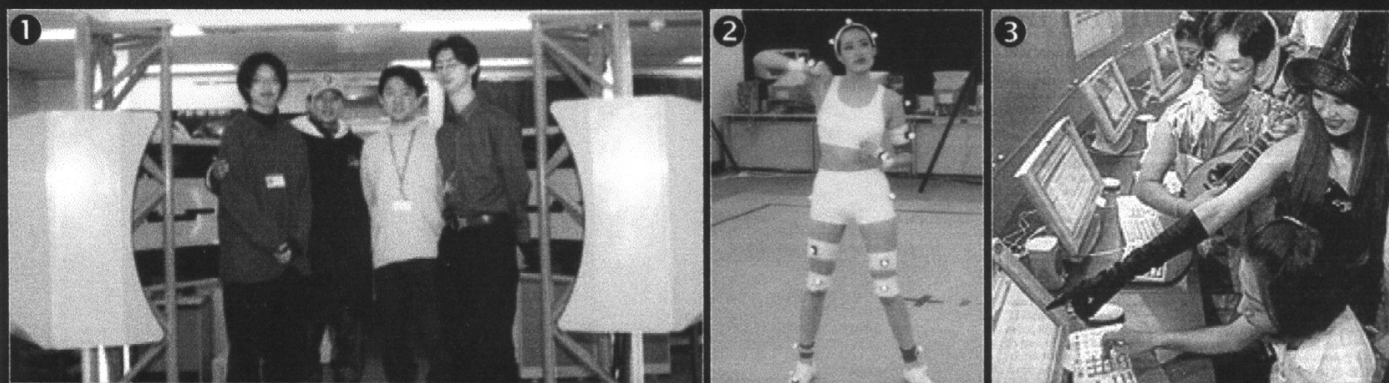
(such as game character face painting(!!) for instance), officials from Taiwan and Japan were treated to briefings by a series of Korean Developers, eager to secure capital investment deals.

The Centre has also helped enthusiastic games programmers set up their own companies by helping them out with company registration and capital support. Loans are also made available to companies operating with the Promotion Centre's assistance, should they require extra cash to complete a product. A selection of Korean Games companies have also been declared Venture Companies by the Korean Government, making them exempt from tax - which is always a nice thing. ☺ !

Developers supported by the Games Promotion Centre are also given full access to the Centre's facilities which include a 3D scanner which enables real life people and/or objects to be scanned

into a computer and rendered in full 3D. a Motion Capture Studio which allows the actions of live actors to be captured on computer and used to animate game characters, a music studio for composing original game sound-tracks, and a video editing suite for incorporating video footage into games, or for producing promotional videos.

The Centre has also strived to promote gaming education and research. It boasts it's own Game Academy where students can enter onto a three year course in the art of computer game programming, planning and design, and has also encouraged Universities across the country to make courses in game design more readily available. The Universities have responded favourably, as the courses prove quite popular, and just recently, Sejong University has established the first post-graduate course in Korea on the subject of Computer Games.



(1) A Korean Development Team decide to scan themselves using the centre's 3D scanner - just for a 'laff like!

(2) Here we see the Korean Game Promotion Centre's Motion Capture Studio being put to use. Special cameras pick up the light reflected by the small balls attached to her body, and the recorded information is used to animate computer generated characters.

(3) KAMEX 2000 saw people dress up as games characters.

Encouraging Competitiveness Among Korean Developers:

British strength lies in the entertainment industry. From the Beatles through to Tomb Raider, we've made our mark in this global industry, with award winning music and interactive entertainment titles. Yet none of these prevailing British Industries have received government aid - and in the case of the British computer games industry, not even recognition! Instead, our government decides to invest loads of money into national flops such as the Millenium Dome, as well as heavy investments into manufacturers - that, after receiving nice large cheques, decide to up and leave our country due to currency exchange problems. The British film industry is one element of the British entertainment industry that is receiving funds, with national lottery money being handed out to budding film directors nationwide. However, whilst some films funded in this manner have made it (e.g. Billy Elliot), others have sapped a lot of money from our government without even so much as breaking even. Perhaps it's a good thing then, that in the British Games industry there is no monetary backing from the government, forcing British games designers to make great games - guaranteed to sell on quality alone. It's a tough market, and only the fittest survive - as such, here in Britain, only the fittest exist. The rest are dying slowly, or else making WAP games. ☺

So in Korea, where Government money is being thrown at games developers, how do they ensure that the actual games content comes up to scratch? How do they get companies to compete with each other? Well, firstly, let's put this into context - Korean developed games are unleashed onto the Korean gaming public, and as such, it is true to say, that like in Britain, it is the market that decides who the winners and the losers are, but even so, besides these natural market forces, the government also encourages quality by holding various competitions, awarding companies with various accolades for developing quality titles and for coming up with original game concepts or scenarios. These awards are respected and sought after, and help motivate games developers to produce great games. The award for innovative game concept also encourages originality - something that this industry, awash with samey sequels, is very much in need of.



Developers KID'N'KID are presented with an award for their development efforts.

Wired Korea, Wired World....

"The year 2000 demonstrated a full transition in the [Korean] game world from offline games to online games." - Suh Beom-seok, The Korean Times

If Korea are aiming to be at the forefront of the games industry in the 21st Century, then it helps for them to have something which no other country has. Something that can be offered to the rest of the gaming world. Something that Korea excels at, something that foreign companies turn to Korea for help with. Korea do have something of this ilk, for they can boast of a nationwide network of P.C.s with broadband (i.e. very, very, very, high speed) internet access. Add a bunch of brilliantly crafted online multiplayer RPGs and RTS games into the mix, and you've got yourself a thriving online games industry.

"Korea has become the fastest growing market on Battle.net and has overtaken the United States as the No. 1 market in the world."

Battle.net Online Servers.

Whilst 3.5 million households in Korea have a broadband internet connection at home, it's not the home environment that's driving the online games industry in Korea. Rather, it's a series of Internet Cafés known as P.C. Bang. These P.C. Game Rooms, as they're also sometimes referred to as, are home to

the latest online multiplayer hits. You simply take a seat and start gaming. The service isn't free, but for a mere 500 won an hour (approximately 28p), it's definitely cheap enough to hold mainstream appeal!

Whilst it was originally StarCraft that had Korean Gamers hooked, it's currently Korean developed titles Lineage and Fortress 2 that are hot property in Korea. Lineage has definitely got a hold on the market - more so than Pokémon has over here. The game is a Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game, or MMORPG for short and sees you take the role of a character within a medieval environment. You can socialise with other players, form clans, engage in battles and collect magical rings and other such items.

"Lineage operates via remote computer servers. This enables players to constantly meet new counterparts that are accessing the Internet. By doing so, the game has evolved into a new society in the virtual world," said Kim Taek-jin,

the chief executive officer of NCSoft - the Korean Company that created the game. Lineage is an amazing achievement, allowing for up to 100,000 players to be playing simultaneously. The game's popularity was initially helped by it being distributed for free, although as it began to take off, NCSoft introduced a

fee-based subscription - a method of payment which has yielded great returns for the company.

"At a time when dotcom companies continuously disappoint their investors due to a lack of profit-making business models, the success of Lineage's creator, NCSoft Corp., is irrefutable proof that the dream of hitting the jackpot is still possible."

commented Kang Rok-hee, an Internet analyst at Daishin Securities. Indeed it seems the game has been really popular with gamers. It has fantasy elements, you needn't save up \$40 before you can play the game and the online society within the game makes it extremely social - attracting female gamers as well. Lineage isn't set to be a one hit wonder, either. Its been designed as a serial, with the game split into twelve episodes, only six of which are currently available in Korea. The game relies heavily on its in-depth plot in order to get gamers anticipating the next part. "Many game characters come with complex background stories, as opposed to the rather simple likes of the Mario Brothers or

Gaming as a recognised Sport:

Online gaming in Korea isn't just about spending some spare time at a PC Bang centre though - oh no. In Korea, as in America and other countries, gaming is also recognised as a sport, and people who get good at online gaming have the choice of becoming games professionals - playing games for a living and getting sponsored by companies to attend various game competitions (and walking away with the cash prizes if they win). These Pro Gamers (Pro for Professional) become almost mini celebrities - for instance, when the Korean Game Promotion Centre organised the KAMEX 2000 games event, they arranged for autograph sessions with professional gamers to take place. Here in the U.K. we don't really have such celebrities, although there was a time when "Macca" Mcandless of Game Zone, Sega Zone, P.C. Zone and, er, The Daily Telegraph's "Connected" fame went onto GamesMaster and proclaimed himself to be the best Quake player in Britain.

Anyway, we had our shot at securing Online Multiplayer fame when the Korean-based Company BattleTop arrived in the U.K. in September of last year and held a massive online gaming competition under the roof of the Millennium Dome. The event helped launch BattleTop's British Internet Gaming League (which you can join today by visiting <http://www.battletop.com>) but it was also a qualifying match to see what gamesplayers would represent us at BattleTop's main event - the World Cyber Game Challenge, held in Yongin, Kyonggi-do, Korea. Unfortunately, whilst seventeen U.K. gamesplayers went forth to Korea to represent the U.K., after having proved themselves worthy at the Millennium Dome, they didn't even win any runner-up medals for us. The games that players were competing at were Fifa 2000, StarCraft, Age of Empires 2 and Quake 3, and Korea seemed to clean up most of the awards themselves, quite befitting, seeing as they hosted the event. Even still, the Americans managed to prove themselves as the best Quake 3 players, and Sweden and the Netherlands also scored quite highly in the challenge. Here are the full results:



It's not just the boys of Korea who are professional gamers. The ladies like getting in on the action too. The above picture is of Pro Gamer Lena Lee.

Age of Empires 2:		Fifa 2000:		StarCraft: Brood War:		Quake 3:	
1st	Jung Myung Jin (Korea),	1st	Lee Ji Hun (Korea)	1st	Park Tae Min (Korea)	1st	John Wendel (USA),
2nd	Huang Yu-Kuei (Chinese Taipei)	2nd	Pak Jin Hyung (Korea)	2nd	Jang il Suk (Korea)	2nd	Oskar Liungstorm (Sweden)
3rd	Lee Jae Baek (Korea)	3rd	Lee Ro Su (Korea)	3rd	Anker Jacob Scharm (Netherlands)	3rd	John Hill (USA)
4th	Jacob Fredrik Lallerstedt (Sweden)	4th	Cho Baek Kyu (Korea)	4th	Chang Suk Jun (Korea)	4th	David Ygb (Sweden).

The World Cyber Game Challenge was just the beginning, however, for this year sees the first official World Cyber Games event (scheduled to take place in December 2001 with prize money of up to \$300,000 to be won). It's like the Olympics, yet it's for gamers world-wide! For more information visit <http://www.worldcybergames.org>!



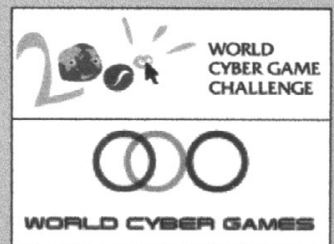
Only 19 and winning 6m Won! Dongwoo Kim at Korea's Millennium Challenge event.



The best Quake 3 player in the world. John Wendel(USA).



Battletop organise a series of game competitions in Korea. Here we see one of them in progress!



Last year's WCG Challenge was just a warm up. This year the games happen for real!

Donkey Kong." explains Kim Taek-jin of NCSOFT.

The game has also had its fair share of obsessives. Since the game is focussed very much around characters' and clans' territorial control, the desire to possess certain artifacts that allow for more control and better success within the game is extremely high among gamers, and has reached a point where players have realised that they can actually charge real life money (as opposed to the game's own cyber money) for highly desired (and relatively rare) game power-ups and magical rings. In an article in the Korean Times, one player, a 22 year old Student called Lee Choon-han, claims that magical rings have been exchanged for as much 300,000 Won

(approximately £164). In the same way that Western Gamers might pay highly for the privilege of owning the Rare Pokémon Mew (which, incidentally, contributor James has had four times...don't ask...) so too are these magical items sought after.

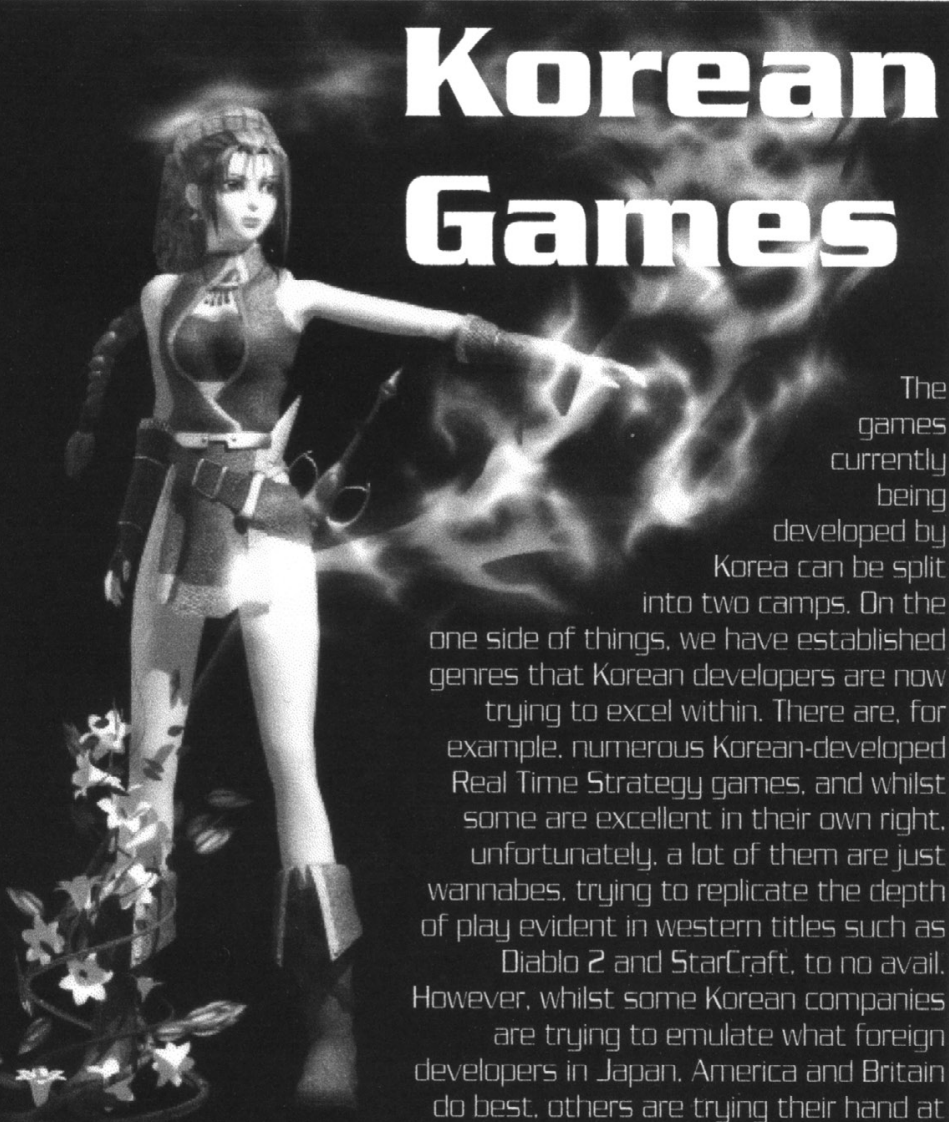
The national success of Lineage in Korea, however, would most likely not have been possible if it hadn't been for the network of PC Bang Games Rooms dotted around the country, providing all demographics with cheap access to online gaming, and so, in a way, the context in which Koreans experience games can be partially blamed for the success of online gaming. Whilst here in the U.K., despite the four control ports of the Nintendo 64 and the mad multi-player gaming sessions the machine and key games have made

way for, gaming is still seen as a solitary activity - something done on one's own in one's spare time. Yet the fact that in Korea, many gamers would get out of their houses and nip off down to the local PC Bang Games Room to experience online gaming has led it to be seen as a far more social activity, even if, once there, you're glued to the screen. The PC Bang phenomena has extended the online games market in Korea, with games now appealing to more demographics and age groups than ever before. "...recognition of the game industry has been greatly changed over several years." commented Jae-whan Sung, President of the K6PC.

Korean Games

Indeed, the PC Bang phenomena has been so successful, that plans are being made to export the phenomena to foreign markets. Already PCCW, a Hong Kong Telecoms company that recently merged with Jaleco, a developer of Japanese arcade games, have made plans to export PC Bang to Japan. Their aim is to install 2,000 PC Bang Game Rooms in and around Tokyo, Japan by 2002, and the Korean Game Promotion Centre are to provide online games to be played at these branches. PCCW's efforts, however, could be under threat. It seems the future really is about online gaming centres, as PCCW aren't the only company trying to establish such a phenomena in Japan. Heavyweights Namco, Sega and Sony have just recently announced that they are planning online arcade centres in Japan, based on the PlayStation 2 architecture [see "News at Bullet Point" on page 8]. Will PC Bang be able to compete with this? We'll just have to wait and see.

The question remains, however, will online gaming centres rear their heads in the U.K.? Our contributor James Haggard did experience something similar to a PC Games Room last Christmas, when Flipside.com opened a male creche in London, with the idea being that wives could leave their husbands in an online games room whilst they went to shop for Christmas Presents, but the centre was only open for a short while, and had quite a sexist pitch, as you can plainly see, although when I say that I'm not implying I especially enjoy shopping in a stereotypically camp kinda way. [Although come October I might be caught carrying a purple Gamecube home by its ...er...handle]. Oh - if you readers want a Flipside.com T-shirt, the first one to write in clearly stating that they want one, gets one. Anyway, the PC Bang format games room currently can't take off nation wide here in the U.K. as although BT have enabled broadband connections to take place in major cities such as London and Glasgow, they've still yet to make the entire U.K. telephone network capable of high speed, broadband internet access. The lack of PC Bang style games rooms have meant that Korean companies specialising in the creation of online games are having to apply different strategies to western markets. NCSOFT, the makers of Lineage, for example, are seeking to use Microsoft's Xbox and its broadband capabilities to support a western release of the Lineage series. More on this elsewhere.



The games currently being developed by Korea can be split into two camps. On the one side of things, we have established genres that Korean developers are now trying to excel within. There are, for example, numerous Korean-developed Real Time Strategy games, and whilst some are excellent in their own right, unfortunately, a lot of them are just wannabes, trying to replicate the depth of play evident in western titles such as Diablo 2 and StarCraft, to no avail. However, whilst some Korean companies are trying to emulate what foreign developers in Japan, America and Britain do best, others are trying their hand at new game ideas, and so there's also a lot of fresh material coming out of Korea, stuff that other countries may never have thought to attempt. "The 5000 years of Korean history and culture are an important resource for the games industry," commented Kim Dong-Hyon, of the K6PC. "A little bit of effort based on such history and culture is enough to equip Korea with international competitiveness."

The wise words of Kim would have us believe that the cultural riches of Korea are a source of inspiration for the games designers currently responsible for Korea's more innovative titles, but whilst we can clearly see that inspiration was taken from Korea's history in Seven Years War - an RTS game based on ancient Korean Fighters, you've got to wonder what their culture's like if it inspires them to create arcade machines you can physically hit [Isn't hitting an Arcade machine a tendency of all cultures, world-wide? I do it all the time, especially when they won't give me my money back, after I loose, which I seem to have an annoying habit of doing, Ben]. [Andrew wrote that - all lies, Ben]. An Arcade machine you can physically hit is just one of their many arcade innovations. I've had Arcade players tell me recently that they're loosing interest in the arcade experience due to a lack of original ideas. Even Sega and Namco's latest, collaborative, effort - Vampire Knight is merely another House of The Dead, just with a slightly different setting, so it's refreshing to see new Arcade ideas coming out of Korea.

Over the next few pages we'll be looking at examples of Korea's new gaming innovations, and we'll also stop hyping up releases we haven't played and instead reveal to you our impressions on a series of Korean Games that we actually have had experience with. Groovy.. no? Hmm...yeah, I thought you'd agree...!

Innovations....

Actual Fight!

Actual Fight is a beat-'em-up like no other - it does away with the traditional joystick and six buttons arcade cabinet, and instead provides a selection of coloured cushions, allowing for you to dish out a series of physically exhausting yet extremely stress relieving blows to the machine. Yes - you actually hit the Arcade Machine!

"Come on then, if you think you're hard enough!"

Whilst the likes of Street Fighter and Virtua Fighter, et al ask you to pick your own character to play as, this game breaks the tradition - instead you're asked to pick your opponent. So who are you? Well, the idea is that you are you - for all the action in this game takes place from a first person perspective. The game doesn't rely on mere brute force however - applying too much of that could see the machine collapse (if you're hard enough), rather the emphasis of this game is on quick reactions. Each of the pads on the machine (positioned adjacent to your feet and fists - making it easy for you to attack them) are colour-coded, and when you come up against your opponent, he won't hit you. Not at first. You get the first blow.

"Come on! Make me mad! REAL mad!" he's probably thinking. Then an icon representing a move will flash up on the screen, maybe the colour blue, indicating a fist to the left. This indicates you've to hit the blue pad on the left. Do it, and do it fast, because you've only a small window of opportunity to get your opponent. If you hesitate - i.e. fail to make the appropriate hit within a certain amount of time, then your opponent swings at you - causing you damage - so the aim of the game is to be quick. Bam! Bam! Bam! Get in there. And that's more or less all there is to it. Great for stress relief, and much more satisfying than twiddling your joystick.

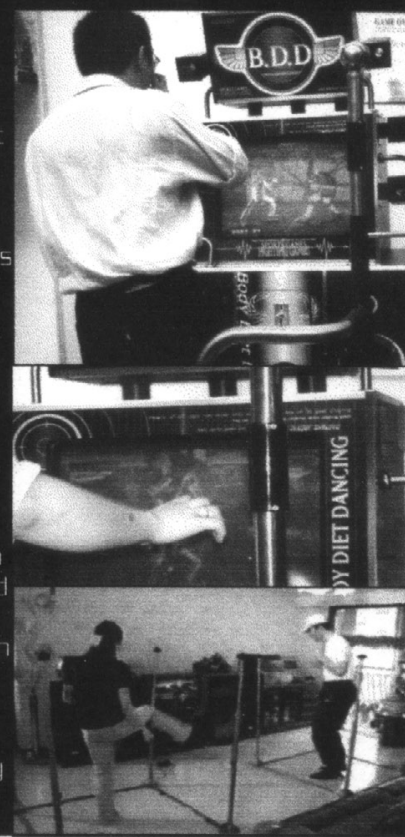


Body Diet Dancing - The Virtual Ring!



The Virtual Ring is an amazing piece of technology developed by Bestsoft. It basically allows your movements to equate to moves within computer games. It's a substitute for a Joystick. There's nothing new about Virtual Reality machines that translate your movements into game commands, but such technology has always been quite expensive with compatible games few and far between. However, BestSoft's product is unique in that it's not only relatively cheap, but has also been designed to work with existing games. At the European Computer Trade show, the technology was being demonstrated using Namco's Tekken fighting game. Whilst at the show, BestSoft were demonstrating the Virtual Ring Arcade Cabinet, the technology is also available as an accessory for console games. We've seen footage of it plugged straight into a PlayStation.

The machine is essentially a square ring with four corner posts that share 24 motion sensors dedicated to detecting your body movements. Simply stick your leg out, and watch Nina kick on-screen. Very groovy stuff. BestSoft have also dubbed this technology "Body Diet Dancing", for they see it as having great potential in the health industry, allowing people to play games, keep fit, and loose weight. It may sound crazy, but these Koreans are serious. They've conducted a few experiments and found that playing Tekken using B.O.D. burned through 600 calories an hour. That's 100 calories more than running. Hmm...whatever its fitness value is, BestSoft's Body Diet Dancing technology, aka "The Virtual Ring", sure looks like fun.



Innovations....

GP32 Internet!

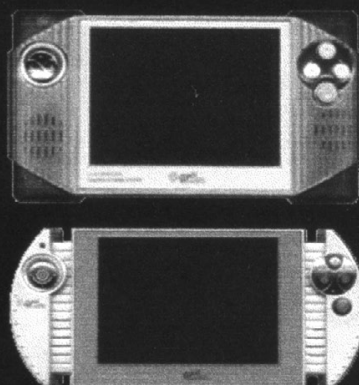
The GP32 is a new 32-bit handheld games console looking to start a fight with GameBoy Advanced! It's being released this summer in both Korea and Japan, and if successful may come to these shores too! But what's innovative about that? A new handheld? Whoopy-doo. Well, whilst the idea of a portable games system has been had before, GamePark's new GamePark 32 Internet gaming console boasts a load of innovative features.

Firstly, whilst the Gameboy Advance connects to Gamecube - a console that isn't even out yet, the Game Park's GP32 can be connected to the common P.C., and can use the format as a base station. Games can be run on P.C. and GP32 at the same time, so if you get your mitts on a two player game you don't necessarily need two GP32s in order to play it - one of you can take control on P.C. Furthermore, GP32 are hoping to use the internet as a means of software distribution, so once your GP32 is connected to a P.C. you can download brand new software into your machine.

The Console also supports multiplay. This can be with up to four other players with GP32s who are in the vicinity, by utilising

a special add-on accessory that allows game signals to be transmitted through the air (a bit like the Gameboy Colour's infra red port), or, alternatively, multiplayer gaming can be experienced through the internet, using a server, which can be accessed via a dial up connection through a mobile phone, or, once again, through your P.C..

The whole P.C. link-up plays a major part in Game Park's strategy, for they've ambitions to get their Software Development Kits (which at the moment include a mixture of hardware and software) down to just software, which they can then give away for free. Their dream is for gamers to be able to code their own GP32 titles and then download them to their game machines, or even upload them to their website, and sell them through the internet! Inspired by Linux, they're trying to make everything they do open source. As if this wasn't enough, they're also currently working on an emulator for the machine that will allow it to play Gameboy titles! This machine could really turn out to be something! But GamePark need to hurry up and get a move on, or else Gameboy Advanced will have had too much of a head start!



There are two case designs for the GP32, and both will be available in a variety of different colours, come the machine's launch. Which do you prefer?

Specifications:

- > CPU 32Bit ARM RISC CPU
- > COLOUR STN-LCD SCREEN
- > ROM 8MB
- > SDRAM 8MB
- > 16bit PCM SOUND with 4 CHANNEL MIXING
- > General Midi Compatible (128 instruments, 500 percussions)
- > 320x240 Screen Resolution
- > 3.8 inches screen size (larger than GBA!)
- > Front Lit Screen
- [can browse web in the dark]
- > TV Tuner in development
- > Takes two AA batteries (lasting approx. 10 hours).
- > Connectable to P.C., WAP phone, or GPRS device.

Break it like it's Brixton!



Even the games currently under development for the GP32 are quite innovative, and include a game about BreakDancers, or B-Boys and B-girls as the game calls them, which goes under the name of "ShowDown!". It's kind of an RPG-style experience, for you have to develop your character's skills, but there are a series of mini games you have to undertake in order to achieve this goal, like making deliveries for people on roller skates, which, judging by the screens looks almost like a portable Jet Set Radio! Other games include NeoPanzer, a game

about lots of tanks with lots of firepower, Highmoss, a Zelda-esque Role Player which up to four players can play simultaneously, Little Wizard - a wacky beat-'em-up almost Capcom in style, which centres around apprentice wizards and features certain comedy attacks (turn your enemy into a bunny, or yourself into a cactus plant so that you can eat the bunny!) and Dungeon and Guarder, a side scrolling beat-'em-up with a Knights-in-shining-armor twist. Gamepark themselves are busy developing ten titles for launch with the system, whilst a further ten are being prepared by third parties. When the machine finally launches - we'll be sure to let you know, and we'll keep you posted on any developments regarding a western release. In the meanwhile, you can find more information at <http://www.gamepark.co.kr>



From left to right, top to bottom: HipHop character raising in "ShowDown", Adventure RPG "Highmoss", side scrolling fighter "Dungeon and Guarder" and Oceanic adventure "Kissi 'n' Kimi"! Just a selection of the titles to be made available for the GP32.

Korean Games we've actually played!!!

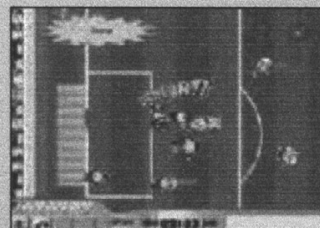
[All in the name of research....]

Kangjin Soccer:

Playing this game brought back memories of playing Nintendo World Cup on my old 8-bit NES. Don't get me wrong - it's not a game full of blocky sprites suffering from sprite flicker, but rather, it's a charmingly simple and captivatingly fun title. At first glance it doesn't look much - modern gamers may stick their noses up in the air and sneer at its 2D graphics. "Why isn't it 3D?" they may well ask. Why indeed. Adamsoft - creators of the game, are renowned for three dimensional games, and have even created their own 3D game engine known as Sigma 3D, but as Kangjin Soccer is their first foray into the online market, they decided to keep things simple, concentrating on the programming behind the graphics that enable the game to be played with multiple players online. Of course, that doesn't mean they've neglected the game play....it can be extremely fun to play, although it's probably the type of thing you'd be playing in a series of quick bursts inbetween editing a games mag (heh, E.d.), than something you'd stay up all night with. The game requires you to pick from a number of amusing looking cartoon characters, with whomever you pick representing you on pitch. Just prior to the game, it's also possible to enter a chat room, to have discussions with your team mates -

other players who will be playing this online game alongside you. Then, you get straight into the game. There are the usual pass, tackle and shoot buttons, but if you really want to get the upper edge, try running diagonally - it sees you move at a faster pace, and it becomes easier for you to dodge the opposition who are trying to steal the ball from your feet!

The game is available for free by downloading it from <http://www.adamgame.com>. The green button on the website downloads it and the orange one connects you to the server to play. Even still - we don't recommend you get it. We played the game at the KGPC's stand at the European Computer Trade Show, where it was already set up and running smoothly. Downloading it yourself, when all instructions are in Korean, could be a problem. We recently tried downloading it from <http://www.adamgame.com>, yet were absolutely confused by the Korean options and weren't able to get into the actual game. There's this menu button that we reckon is supposed to start the game, but the last time we clicked on it, it actually crashed our P.C. - so seriously, we recommend you wait for an English version - coming soon!

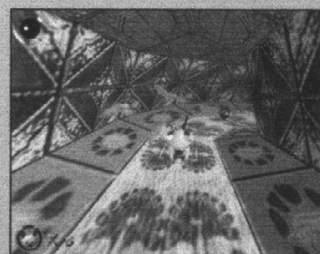
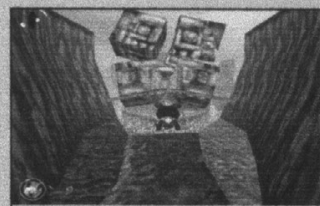


Toby 3D:

Now we've some good news here, and some bad news. The good news is that a playable demo of this game is available for free on the internet at creator Animedia's website (<http://www.animedia.co.kr/english/index.htm>). A free game demo to download? Sounds pretty sweet doesn't it? Well unfortunately, the demo of Toby 3D (aka Toby 2) has a few problems and unfortunately, unlike Kangjin Soccer, these are gameplay problems. Now correct me if I'm wrong, but for a game that seems to be targeted at kids, what with cuddly rabbits and bears as characters, and a bright and colourful game world to explore, you wouldn't expect too much hassle, would you? Yet Toby 3D makes something as simple as using Toby's spinning attack on an enemy extremely frustrating! Especially when taking on robots, who often hit you with their projectile heads before you're able to do anything! The landscape you get to explore is also jam packed with moving blocks and Mario-64-inspired personalised cement slabs which like to collapse on top of you. This means you've to constantly be aware of what's around you, something that's not always possible with the dodgy camera views. What's more, control can be an issue too. The game exhibits the Resident Evil method of control, so "Up" equals "Forwards" regardless of which direction you're facing. This

means you have to take time lining yourself up in the right direction, before you can hit "UP", to bomb off like a headless chicken in that direction. The only trouble with this method of control is that you don't always have time to line yourself up. Even when you do, it's hard to control your direction whilst bombing around like a headless chicken (someone said that in a previous issue....who was it? I love it! Headless chicken! Brilliant! E.d.) and so it's often the case that instead of running into that area that shelters you from boulders, you instead run into a nearby wall, and get run down by the very boulders you sought to avoid!

The demo also sees you having to collect gold keys, only, I've collected all three in the playable level, and still don't know what to do with them, or where to go next. To Animedia's credit, the game isn't all bad. They've been able to create a decent 3D world without the need for game graphics cards, and some of the camera angle problems can be overcome by using the Q,W,A and S keys on the keyboard to change the camera view. Yet even still, I hope the finished product didn't ship like this, because whilst this demo made way for a few piss-taking laughs at first, it didn't really impress us much. It had potential, but was just too frustrating, and ultimately pointless.



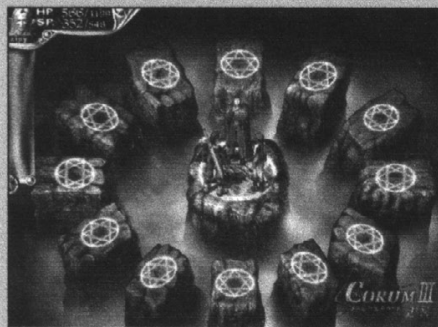
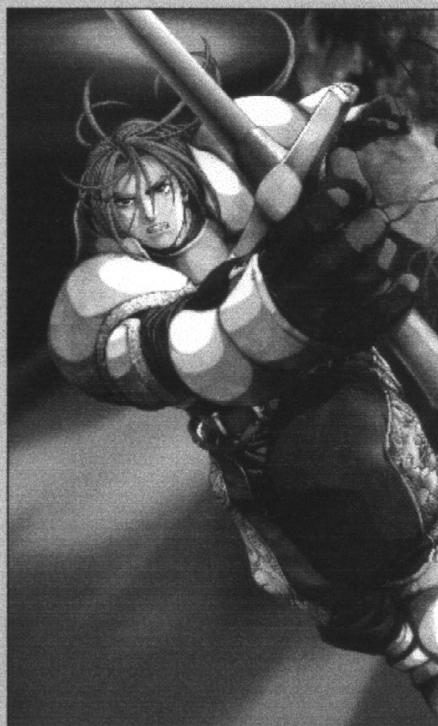
Corum 3: Chaos of Magic

From the mediocre offerings of Toby 3 then to the absolute brilliance of Corum 3. This game is GOOD! What can I say? Along with TV Star (from Monte Cristo/Electronic Arts) this is the demo game I play the most on my P.C. It's a 2D action-based RPG that makes money and experience one and the same thing, so earning lots of money by doing errands in the various towns you'll come across helps raise your character's level. As such, it's best to do as many errands as you can before you leave towns to face monsters and other nasties, as the higher the level of experience you obtain, the higher your maximum health becomes. Carrying out errands isn't something that detracts from the main action of the game however, as the errands themselves are extremely enjoyable and often have their own story thread which can prove quite interesting, and even amusing. For example, in the first village you visit, after registering at the Adventurer's Guild, a kind of errand-running agency that'll pay you for helping the villagers, you get to choose from a list of errands. Some of these include visiting Ranford in order to collect, and then deliver some letters to two different females in the town (ooh...something fishy going on there), yet if you go to visit Beroa first, who is another person who has requested the service of the Adventurer's Guild, then he reveals to you that the father of Karen, a lady he is in a secret relationship with (secret due to the lack of parental endorsement which is in turn due to an argument between their families), is forcing Karen to marry Ranford. Beroa knows that Ranford is a good-for-nothing womaniser, and fuelled by both a desire to see Karen with a better man, and by a touch of jealousy, he asks you to do some letter switching. The game then gives you a choice, you can either switch Ranford's letters, and stir up a bit of trouble, ultimately disgracing the old man, and helping Beroa and Karen stay together,

or you can deliver them to the correct addresses, and reject Beroa's proposal. In this way then, the game gives you quite a bit of freedom, as well as a chance to replay the game later on, taking different options.

The game's battles are also highly entertaining. It's all very hack'n'slash, with sword stabs to the enemy making a satisfying flesh-squelching noise. Don't feel sorry for them - they would have hacked you to pieces and then barbecued you - the fiends! At least you're sparing them the humility of being coated in ketchup and stabbed with silverware, before being given a free guided tour of your esophagus. Besides the normal sword attacks at your disposal you can also unleash a magical projectile by holding down the attack button. It takes a while to charge, but can prove extremely useful, especially when you wish to fight your enemy from a distance. The game also features Dungeons, which I'm glad to say that, whilst being quite challenging, still prove loads of fun! You will die quite a bit - especially when you first start off, but each time you tackle the dungeons you'll find yourself getting a little bit further, which is how it should be. Frustration is also reduced due to the intelligent positioning of save game places.

Overall, Corum 3 is a brilliant game. I just wish it was available here in the U.K. - as I'd not hesitate to recommend it to you. It may well have seen a western release (maybe in America), as the demo I played had been (quite admirably) translated into English (although the subtitle on the title screen was still in Korean), yet I've never seen it on the shelves or heard of a U.K. release. It's a shame, as this is a brilliant game, even if, despite the current trend for 3D adventures, it's represented in 2D.

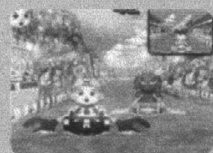
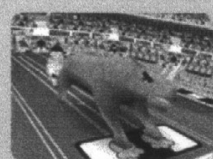


Whilst we've only played as Kaen, the young knight, a further two characters become playable during the game.

"Come on Baby!":

"Where ever did a game get a title like that from?" you may well be wondering. The answer is most likely from the shouts of the crowds that accumulate around this arcade game - a game that pits baby against baby in an "Athlete Kings"-esque series of sporting events. Yes, it's button-bashing madness with a comical twist. Whereas the likes of Athlete Kings and Track and Field had us throwing javelins, jumping hurdles, and doing the 100m sprint, this title sees us propelling rhinoceroses across sand pits in the hope of knocking down triangular formations of Sumo Wrestlers that stand at the foot of the sand pit. Yes - this is a crazy, wacky game, but it's a game you'll appreciate on so many levels. Firstly, there's the sheer addictive fun of participating in competitive events against either a friend or the CPU. The adrenalin really gets going as you furiously bash the big, brightly coloured, made-to-be-bashed action buttons! Then, secondly, there's the sheer wackiness of it all, that coupled with the brightly coloured graphics, and amusing character animations, make the game strangely alluring, and extremely enticing. Watching two people play the Slapping Hero event is just hilarious. It's like a face-off of the nappy-wearing, dummy-sucking one year olds, with the looser wailing like the baby they are! Getting involved yourself is even more fun!

This game really has great potential, and it just HAS to be released in Western Arcades - not getting it over here would be criminal! Criminal do you hear me?! (Blimey, Not so loud, E.d.). Developers Expotato are actively seeking western publishers for the title, and had negotiations with European companies at ECTS 2000, so fingers crossed - we may see this one soon.



Korea's Western Advance!



Korea are developing titles, but just what's the situation with regards to their arrival on western shores? Are Korea advancing yet?

If Lineage is such a fantastic success over in Korea, a country which is seeking to export quality titles to the rest of the world, you would have thought that it would be due over here imminently. The fact of the matter is that whilst Lineage has been exported to other Asian territories such as Taiwan, the developers have decided to take a different approach to the game's proposed western release. Over here in the U.K., as well as over in America, there isn't a nation wide phenomena similar to Korea's PC Bang under which the game originally flourished. Furthermore, whilst Online Games have fast superseded offline games in Korea, online gaming in the west still only accounts for about five percent of the market, and furthermore, whilst 3.5 million households in Korea have access to Broadband [with even more people accessing broadband via their local PC Bang], you and I both know that, especially here in the U.K., online gaming is still very much a narrowband experience.

As such, NCSOFT are forming an alliance with Microsoft and their Broadband-network-compatible Xbox games console to provide Lineage software for the machine come launch. The Xbox may just have found its answer to Phantasy Star Online.

AdamSoft - creators of CyberCup, OhMyBaby and Kangjin Soccer are also hoping to bring their products to western shores. Cyber Football [a 3D multiplayer football sim] definitely looks like it could be a hit in the west, however, with broadband only just starting to take off over here, it could be a while before that particular title hits our market. Even still, Adamsoft are very keen to promote their wares overseas. "We will

be expanding offensively in the international markets through the worlds biggest game exhibition E3 and other prominent events."

declares their website. E3 or the Electronic Entertainment Expo as it's also known, is America's computer games trade show, and is currently scheduled to take place this May at the Los Angeles Convention Centre. They're also currently working on plans to promote Cyber Cup by holding an international game league which'll act as a kind of world wide gaming competition, operating via the internet.

There have, of course, already been a number of Korean Games that have been published overseas. A few years back [1999], Jamie System Development, a Korean based company developed a 3D shoot-'em-up game called Xtorn 3D that was released in over 11 western countries via the internet and was even available from Dennis Publishing's PC Zone Magazine website. Ahh.....the Zone mags....now that takes us back...the Cartridge Family was better than the Comedy Antics of the Team will ever be....but I digress, we're talking about Korea here.

Another Korean games company who has been exporting titles to the west for some time is Phantagram. They have offices in both the U.K. and America, and have been exporting their Korean developed games even before the Korean government's game promotion initiatives begun! Their latest title, Kingdom Under Fire, was released around Christmas [i.e. in December]. A playable demo was also released on...urg...it pains me to say this, because here at United Games we like to view Games Domain Offline as our arch enemy [they're in colour, and they're for free... whimper... we're in black and white, and we're made at a loss... those jammy gits actually make a profit. Anyway, I digress...we're a better read! =)], but yes, Games Domain had a playable demo of the title available for download at their website [<http://www.gamesdomain.co.uk>]. The game attempted to mix two of Korea's most popular

game genres - Role Playing and Real Time Strategy. However, according to our PC co-ordinator Jazz, Kingdom Under Fire didn't rate too highly with the critics, and could only be described as an Average Grey at best. Oh dear.

Virgin have also released Korean games in the U.K. in the past. In March of last year they gave us Hazard - an RPG for the P.C., however, once again, it didn't score at all well with critics, and proved to be an incredibly mediocre experience. Oh dear. Korea - what are you playing at? And Virgin - why did you choose to publish this instead of the amazing Conum 3?

Things may be set to improve however. Come On Baby is an amazing arcade title, and Infogrames had negotiations with the Developers, Expotato, at the European Computer Trade Show 2000. This isn't the first time Infogrames have shown interest in Korean Developers. They also had negotiations with GCTECH with regards to The Fantasy of Fishing - a Korean Arcade game that was exhibited at ECTS, and they're currently enlisting the Korean-based GC TECH to help create a Duke Nukem arcade game.

There could also be more Korean-Infogrames collaborations as pages on Infogrames' financial website describe how Infogrames will invest in Korea and Taiwan in order to ensure it can create quality content on next generation games systems. Hmm....

It's still very clear that Korea have a long way to go, and whilst a trickle of Korean Games are making it over to our shores, a sudden flood of titles isn't imminent. However, it's likely that with the steps being taken, given a couple of years, Korea could well be in a very powerful position within our industry. Even still, throwing government money at an industry doesn't necessarily result in great games. For great games take great minds, and great coding talent. So for now Korea is not advancing, but rather brandishing her weapons, getting together innovative ideas and making sure she's loaded with brilliant games, all in preparation for the battle of tomorrow. It'll be a goodun!, I'm sure.

A United World Feature.

EMPHEMERAL FANTASIA



From the makers of BeatMania and Vandal Hearts, comes a sort of hybrid - if you thought Link and his Ocarina were something, you should hear this pixie-eared guy on his mystical guitar!



Konami are perhaps best known for Metal Gear Solid on PlayStation, and Geomon 64 on Nintendo 64 (they also made the groovy Probotector games, for those who remember) and so it was interesting to see a Role Playing Game from them on PlayStation 2.

Perhaps we shouldn't have been so surprised though. After all, they were responsible for some of the first PlayStation One RPGs to be released in the West - namely Vandal Hearts and Suikoden, but whilst these games were top stuff in their own right, they never seemed to reach the dizzy heights of their Zelda and Final Fantasy counterparts. So, what do we make of this - Konami's latest foray into the world of Role Playing? Well, for starters, this game has to impress, if only for it's eye-catching aesthetics. There aren't many special graphical effects employed, but the sheer quality and richness of the picture definitely impresses. But since nearly all PS2 games are graphically delectable I'm sure you'll be more interested to know how the game plays.

Well, it's at this point that I remind you that Konami are also the company responsible for BeatMania - a groovy musical game that appeared on the original PlayStation. Well, it would seem that some of the rhythmic gameplay inherent in that title has been ported across to Ephemeral Fantasia. Much like Link (star of Nintendo's Zelda series) carried an Ocarina (a woodwind musical instrument) around with him that enabled him to overcome certain obstacles within the game, the main character from this game (a travelling musician called "Mouse") also possess a musical instrument. Shaped like a guitar, the strange red object is played in a similar fashion, but the main difference is that the instrument seems to be an integral part of the game - and as such, you're in possession of it from the very beginning of your adventure (and yes, you can use the Guitar accessory that Konami brought out with Guitar Freaks to control it!)



Yet the musical elements that come into play aren't the only feature that look to make Konami's Role Playing offering rise above the mediocre. Much like the Dreamcast's

Shenmue, Ephemeral Fantasia makes use of time of day. During playable sections of the game, there's always a clock in the top right corner of the screen, which players will find themselves consulting on many an occasion. Certain events only happen at certain times of day, likewise, certain characters that you need to talk to will only be available to speak to you at certain times of day. The time factor, therefore, has a direct bearing on what occurs within the game, allowing the plot to develop in unique and individual ways. based on decisions made by the player.

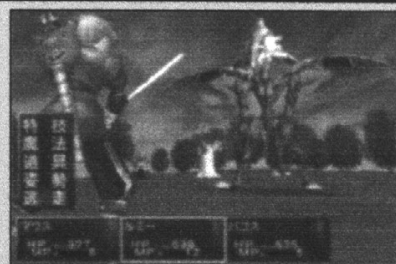
Despite the fact that you initially control a character called



Watch it mate! You know you're no match for me and my sword fish!



*"I'm telling you! You've spilt custard on your top!"
"Where exactly?"*



Come on then Dragon, if you think you're hard enough!

The Experience...

My experience of the game saw me arrive via boat at a place that's name was so Japanese, I couldn't read it. In fact, I couldn't read any of the text within the opening real-time cut sequence that was rolling when I first picked up the controller, but I got the gist of what was going on - I was being introduced to a very nice (albeit computer generated) lady, who was leading me from the harbour to my accommodation and also showing me where the town was on the way. Soon I was at my own apartment, and able to gain full control over my character. Control was similar to most games of this ilk, but in addition, the shoulder buttons and triangle button allowed you to stray from the typically isometric view point, by way of manipulating the camera angle. Another nice touch was the compass and clock face which was ever present throughout the playable sections, taking residence in the top-right hand corner of the screen.

After familiarising myself with the controls, and exploring my room (the latter of which, I regret, yielded nothing...oh well...) I ventured out of my apartment looking for action, adventure, and realms of Japanese text! I soon came by the latter as I triggered another real time cut scene that saw me introduced to Royalty. Despite the fact that Japanese characters evident in the text that was reeled off were meaning little to my englishified Wernicke's area of linguistic comprehension, my brain still managed to fathom out what was going on. The sequence showed an attractively rendered female Queen (complete with Crown) take centre stage, seating herself at her throne, and engaging in dialogue with those present. At first I assumed they were discussing the tax bill, yet it soon became all too obvious that I, a humble travelling musician (and part time thief - better not admit to that one in front of Royalty) was the centre of conversation and the Queen was dying to hear me play. Ooer...I had only picked up the controller, and yet already I was seen to be fit to play for royalty. The pressure was on.

Now this was the tricky bit. I've a music keyboard and computer at home, and I often jam with my guitar-playing mates, so I like to think I've a pretty good sense of rhythm, yet when it came to playing before the Queen - embarrassingly enough, I was all over the place! Notes were appearing on a grid to the left of the screen, in the colours red, green and blue. It seemed obvious that when a red note appeared I should press a button equating to the colour red - preferably within the rhythm of the tune, but the worst bit was that I didn't know which button equated to which colours! (Damn good excuse there, mate. Ed.) After much button-bashing, strangely enough, it turned out that the three colours equated to one particular shoulder button, one particular action button and one particular direction button - right, I believe. You can imagine, therefore how hard it was to try and figure out, as I pressed each button in turn trying to suss out which button equated to which colour. Geez...maybe the control system is easy once you're used to it, but personally, I couldn't help feeling that it could have been designed better. Still, it seemed fun (once I got going), and afterall, when it comes to games, that's what matters most.

Mouse, you'll meet more characters throughout the game, who decide to join you on your quest. You can lead as many as ten characters into battle. Impressive no? Battle Sequences are, as one might expect, turn based, with all the usual menu options, allowing you to attack using magic or your own characters' special ability, or else employ an item. Oh yes(!) there's also an option that enables you to run away. Very convenient if things get a little bit nasty. The game also employs an "Action Counter System". We're pretty much in the dark about this feature at the moment, yet we know it's linked to the red vertical bars that appear in the same box as your green, horizontal HP (Horse Power/Health Points) and MP (Magic Power) bars. Chances are when it peaks, or maybe when it depletes (!?!) your character will launch some kind of Counter Attack. Still, that's just a bit of guess work on our part. We've yet to see exactly how it works.

Overall, Ephemeral Fantasia looks set to be a real corker of an RPG. Despite the fact that I initially had a hard time getting to grips with the music controls, a positive impression was made and I still think that Ephemeral Fantasia is one to look out for.

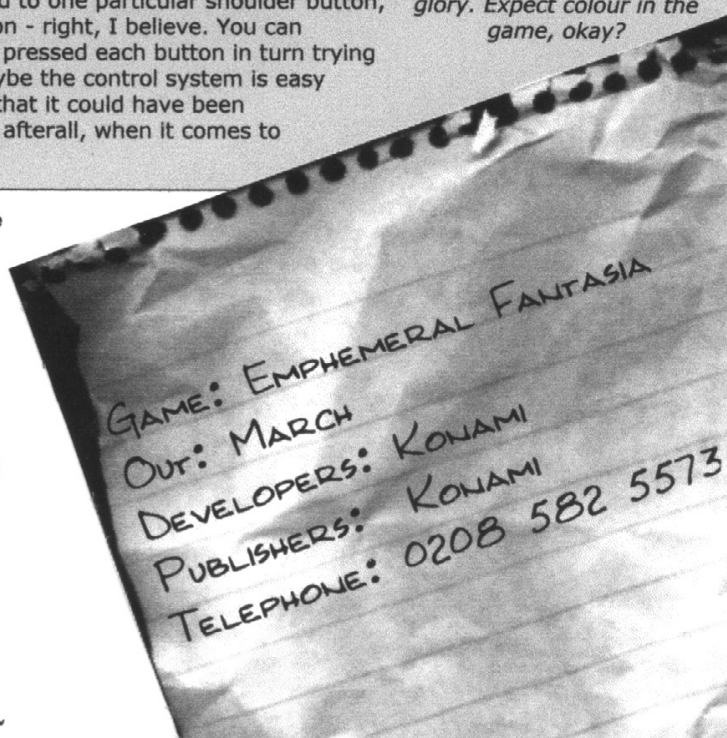
~Andrew Mehta~



This is Zeharupolis, who greets you when you first arrive at the island.



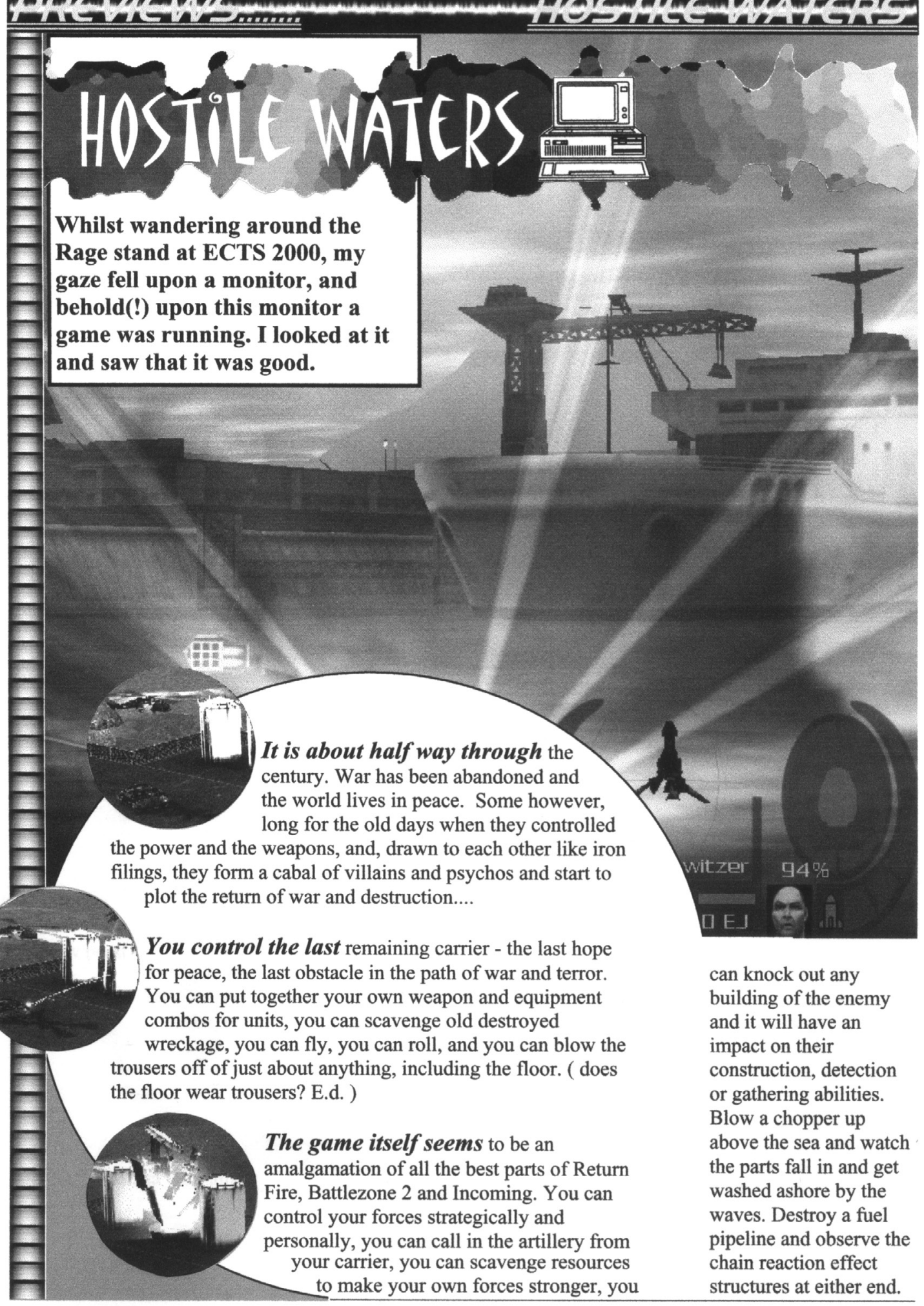
The Green-haired Queen in all her...er..Black and White glory. Expect colour in the game, okay?



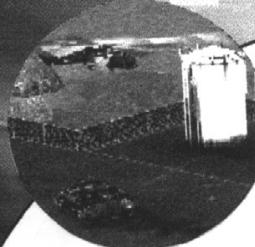
HOSTILE WATERS



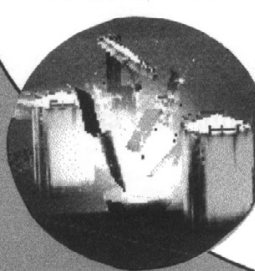
Whilst wandering around the Rage stand at ECTS 2000, my gaze fell upon a monitor, and behold(!) upon this monitor a game was running. I looked at it and saw that it was good.




It is about half way through the century. War has been abandoned and the world lives in peace. Some however, long for the old days when they controlled the power and the weapons, and, drawn to each other like iron filings, they form a cabal of villains and psychos and start to plot the return of war and destruction....



You control the last remaining carrier - the last hope for peace, the last obstacle in the path of war and terror. You can put together your own weapon and equipment combos for units, you can scavenge old destroyed wreckage, you can fly, you can roll, and you can blow the trousers off of just about anything, including the floor. (does the floor wear trousers? E.d.)



The game itself seems to be an amalgamation of all the best parts of Return Fire, Battlezone 2 and Incoming. You can control your forces strategically and personally, you can call in the artillery from your carrier, you can scavenge resources to make your own forces stronger, you



can knock out any building of the enemy and it will have an impact on their construction, detection or gathering abilities. Blow a chopper up above the sea and watch the parts fall in and get washed ashore by the waves. Destroy a fuel pipeline and observe the chain reaction effect structures at either end.

HOSTILE

WATERS



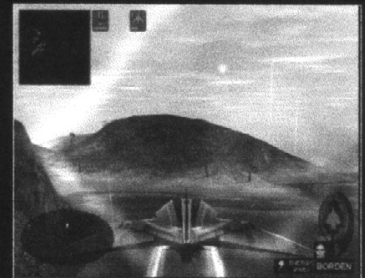
Attention to Detail

The attention to detail in this game is remarkable. Every polygon has a shadow, and an advanced physics engine lends the game that extra ounce of realism. If you are large you can push smaller vehicles off of cliffs (teehee) or blow up the ground in front leaving a hole they can't get out of!

A day and night feature is also extremely effective, as use has to be made of night vision, and night battles are a lot more tricky because of this. The game is absolutely visually stunning, and it handles as smoothly as a baby's bottom. (Pardon?! <Looks worried> E.d.)



Take control of the Hornet Helicopter - and wreck some havoc!



Ooooh! There's a plane too(!)

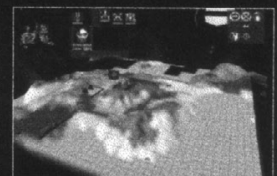


North by North West: Moderate

Qualms are few, but the fact that you seem to be only allowed a few units means that massive armies confronting each other is ruled out, you just have to kick arse. Units seem to have a straight line of sight mechanism in place so if they can see you then they shoot at you, but when I hid behind a small building a big tank that was following me just stopped and waited, because it couldn't see me. It would have been a lot more impressive if it had come round looking for me.



The Carrier goes down - game over.



The Strategic elements take place in the Carrier.

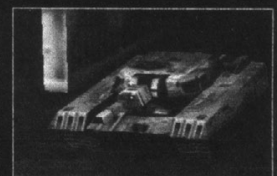


Aiding Fleet Ponder

Multiplayer mode does not currently support co-operative play, although I was told that they where looking into this, and were thinking of releasing a co-op patch as was done with System Shock 2. However, due to the release date having been put back, the chance of the mode being included in the game at launch is now a lot more likely.



More Hornet action - lock on and fire!



Roll with the tanks!

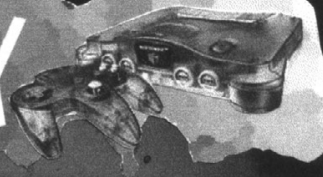
Attention to detail is a major factor in Hostile Waters, and despite the press release claiming otherwise, the game looks like it needs a monster computer to make use of all its graphical features. The development Team do still have a little while left to optimise it though, and you never know, maybe the specs are telling the truth for once!

To sum up, it's brash, it's loud, it's detailed, it's fun, and it's beautiful. I am buying this game the second it touches the shelves in March 2001.

~Mark Butler~



CONKER'S BAD FUR DAY



Meet Conker. On a Bad Fur Day.
Makes you wish there was a Head
and Shoulders for squirrels.....



Many thought it would be just another cutesy game from Nintendo, doomed to anonymity amongst the horde of other cutesy games from Nintendo.

Well, they were at least partially right. The game may well be cutesy, but doomed to anonymity? Hardly! For Conker's Bad Fur Day is trying its very best to be the first cute squirrel game to bag itself an 18 certificate. But how, I hear you ask, will it accomplish this? Well, to be frank, it's f@*%ing rude and as gory as sh%£. Yes, Conker utilises many such delights of the English language (with the exception of the "F" word, which is always beeped out). I think that I can safely say, however, that I have not laughed at a game so hard - ever.

Not only does the game bid for adult audiences along these lines, but you will never before have seen so many squirrels maimed in such a gory manner as occurs in one of the levels of CBFDD. We see the poor little blighters assault a beach "Saving Private Ryan" style, and get totally shot apart by their evil teddy bear enemies. The door clangs down at the front of the landing craft, and soon bits of squirrel are flying all over the place!

Up on a beach, a lost-looking squirrel bends down to pick up his arm, staggers on a little, and then has his head promptly perforated by teddy gun emplacements!

Another level finds you captive of a big mean caveman, who is paranoid about the size of his, uh... bone, and egged on by his cave girl (who stirs things up by saying that you, Conker the Squirrel, claim to have a bigger bone than





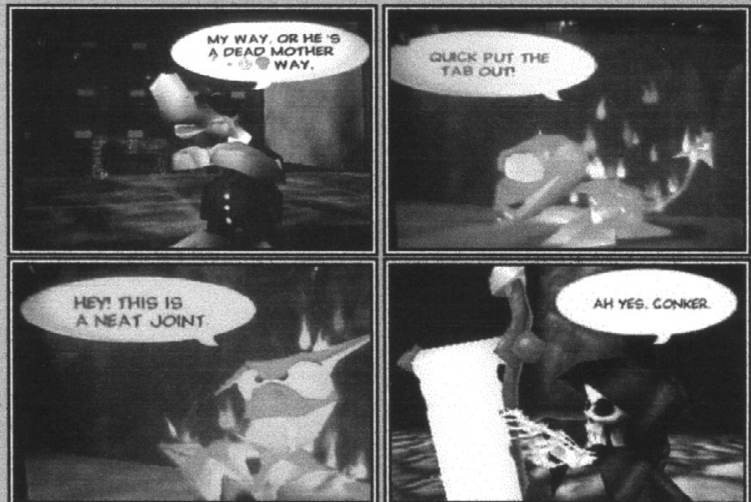
*If you go down to the park today,
you're in for a big surprise.....
Squirrels with massive guns.
You have been warned.*

"Is it multiplayer?" I hear you cry!

Well, now you mention it, I think I noticed a few multiplayer modes available. On the demo I played, only a few of these worked but the multiplayer menu had a few interesting options such as "War", "Raptor", "Heist", "Tank", "Beach" and of course the inevitable "Death Match". Heist seemed to be a capture-the-flag style game, Beach was an "assault the base" type affair at night time, while Death Match is self-explanatory. I am glad to say that I had a lot of fun playing in multiplayer, as if you do not have many friends (like me) you can make up numbers with computer controlled characters. Also, the variety of weapons is superb. There are adjustable-zoom sniper rifles, rocket launchers, gun emplacements, chain saws, samurai swords, machine guns and baseball bats, and how can I forget the flamethrowers? I just can't. There's nothing like running around decapitating squirrels and mowing down sinister little teddy bears with huge gun turrets.

On the more technical side of things....

The game looks and feels much like Rare's other games of the genre (i.e. Donkey Kong and Banjo-Kazooie/Tooie). It doesn't support the expansion pack (yet?) which I think is a bit of a shame as, especially in multiplayer, you notice the customary N64 fuzziness, which makes using such trinkets as the sniper rifle a little harder as details can be hard to pick out. However, this could have just been down to the game's un-finished state. The game also contains a lot of speech, which is impressive seeing as it's a cartridge-based game. Other sound effects are also clear and in just as "good" (ahem!) taste as the rest of the game.



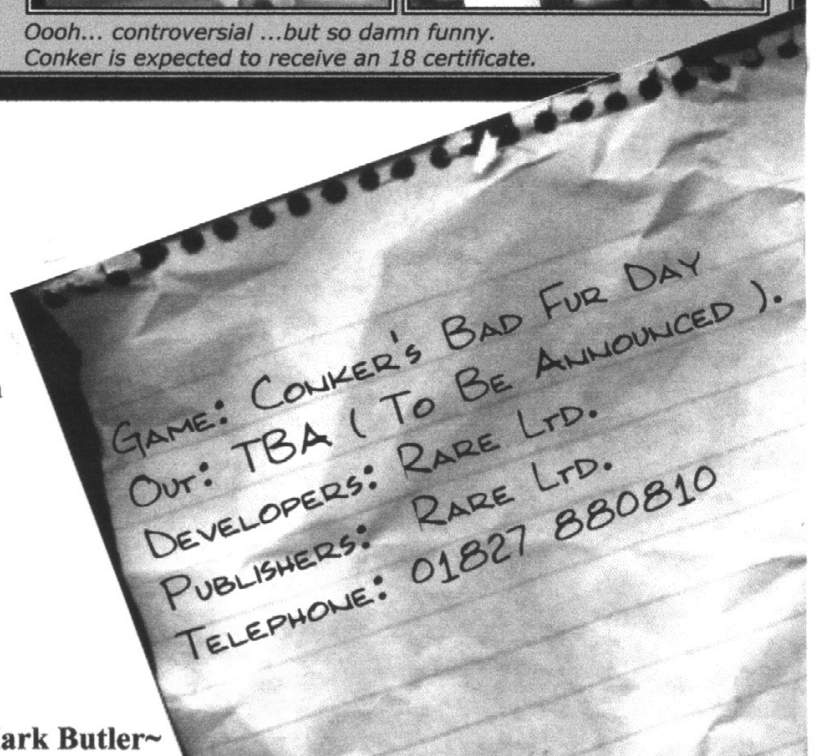
*Oooh... controversial ...but so damn funny.
Conker is expected to receive an 18 certificate.*

him) comes to exact justice on you. The only way you can defeat him is to have your dinosaur steed (which you hypnotised into helping you earlier) repeatedly bite him in the short and curlies.

Last but not least, there's the classic level in which you get completely paralytic and have to defeat some flaming demon types by - get this - weeing on them. The game is full of ingenious cheek and toilet humour such as this. I love it.

Oh and one last thing to note :- in this game even dying has its humour value. Don't laugh at Gregg the Grim Reaper, he's only doing his job. Bloody cats.....

~Mark Butler~



HEADHUNTER!



Developed by Swedish coders, Amuse Software, HeadHunter is a Dreamcast exclusive that so impressed the bods at Sega, that they decided to publish it as if it were one of their own. They were impressed. Should we be?



HeadHunter is blurring the boundaries

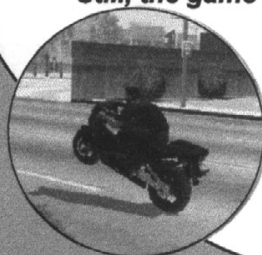
of computer game genres, attempting to mix racing, adventure, explorational, espionage, battle and multi-player elements into one whole. The game takes place in a realistically-sized fictional California, and at first the game seems to resemble your average adventure game - with the location exploring element seeming similar to Resident Evil. There are various buildings to explore, including a luxurious abode - complete with Swimming Pool, as well as more underground locations such as warehouses and so forth. Each location is also rich in graphical detail, and since the backdrops are all real-time generated, it's hoped this will make way for more interaction - i.e. searching through cupboards, or peering beneath things.

However, I mentioned you were exploring a REALISTICALLY sized California...well, you're not going to be able to get from A to B on foot, if you're trying to play this game in thirty minute bursts, now are you(?), and this is where the racing element comes into play. Jumping onto your bike, you're able to race to your next destination, whizzing through tunnels, and over-taking traffic on the open road. It's as yet unknown whether there'll be any Road Rash-style motorbike combat, but it might be an idea for the developers, as it could really put the heat on things.

Still, the game is already of a violent nature. Whilst there has been no footage of blood, guts or gore (although a screenshot was released showing a man dead on the floor - your character crouched nearby - maybe to retrieve an item) you are equipped with a gun - and somebody's head is clearly being hunted, so combat is inevitable - at least on foot, if not whilst racing. Yet it's not a case of barging in with your guns a-blazing. This is not a shoot-'em-up, and as such stealth is encouraged throughout the game. In one part of the game, there's a radar in the corner of the screen, allowing you to anticipate your adversaries' moves, whilst another part of the game sees your VMU double up as a pager, with secret

messages being issued to you, to help you in your quest [whatever that may be - see above right].

Of course, I doubt you'll be using espionage in the multi-player battle mode, choosing instead to gun down your friends like the stinkin' pigs they are. The multi-player mode isn't just limited to the living room either, you can also connect to Dreamarena for online multi-player bliss. But Amuse software aren't content with providing gamers with just one multi-player mode, based on the combat elements within the game, oh no, they've gone and given us some top multi-player biking action to boot, with an



Plotting to kill or find the truth?

Back in November last year, Sega posted a news item on Dreamarena about HeadHunter, claiming that it was a game set in a future in which the selling of various body parts had become a lucrative black market enterprise. They claimed that the main hero of the game was a Bounty Hunter, whose duty was to supply this new black market with the dead bodies they sought. However, a few weeks after it was posted, the press release was promptly withdrawn. Then fan sites started reporting that the game in actual fact was set in California, in the year 2019. They claimed that the Head Hunter wasn't a Bounty Hunter, but rather a Law Enforcement Officer for a California that had become an oppressive tyrant-led state, who begins to question the authority and ethics of those he is subordinate to, and heads on an investigative mission to find the truth behind the hegemony.

Here at United Games, we were, of course, a bit bemused by all this - two plot lines? Which one was true? Like cats falling for curiosity (or, er...something. E.d.), we dared to dial the phone of Sega and seek the truth (dared...dial....Sega....seek...ooh! Double points for alliteration! E.d.).

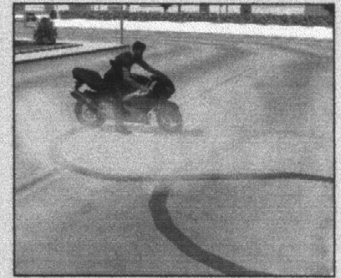
"I'll just check the file on that one. Hold on a minute please" said one of the P.R. boffins, as he trundled over to what sounded distinctly like Beethoven's 5th Symphony [yeah, I was on hold - love that music!]. After the concerto had finished, a dismayed voice told me nervously..."er...that bit has been blacked out.". Obviously someone from Amuse had crept in during the night and crossed everything out with a big, black, felt tip pen. (Or scribbled for a good five minutes with a little small one). "But you know how Jet Set Radio is set in a fictional Tokyo?" "Yes,.. " we replied.

"Well I can confirm HeadHunter is set in a fictional California." Ah...so maybe the California based plot is correct? "I don't think either plot you've found are totally accurate." commented the Sega spokes-person. "What's happened is that there's been a lot of conjecture about the plot based on the video footage we've shown, and the connotations of the title, but nothing has been confirmed."

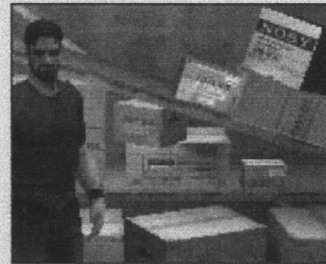
United Games suspects that the blacking out of the plot at Sega Europe, and the removal of the press release from Sega's official website, means that the plot is currently being revised. Indeed, soon after the press release was withdrawn, a series of new shots reared their head on the Internet, showing a slightly re-styled Head Hunter. Still, it's strange that for a game that looks almost Shenmue-esque in parts, and is supposed to feature heavy adventure elements, we still don't know anything about the plot.



Ahh...lots of cupboards - and a fridge! Let's hope you'll be able to rummage through them for items!



Let those tyres burn! A figure eight is made in skid marks. Control....control...don't take me for no sucker - bad ass!



Ahh..."Nosy" warehouse boxes...instead of "Sony".. ..get it...Nosy? Ohh.....the humour! The wit! The Brilliance!



The Radar (top right) helps warn when dodgy geezers approach. Here our hero uses caution - taking cover.



Our hero races through a Ridge Racer-esque tunnel, overtaking fellow motorists in order to get to the nearest hotel in the fastest possible time. Upon his arrival the Hotel Security give him a bit of grief. "Behold my gun! Now let me through before I get REAL nasty!" he threatens, leaving them little choice but to oblige. Finally, he makes it through to the gents! "Ahh...bladder relief!".

Okay, okay....so we made that all up - but at least we didn't try to pass it off as the actual plot, which remains unconfirmed.

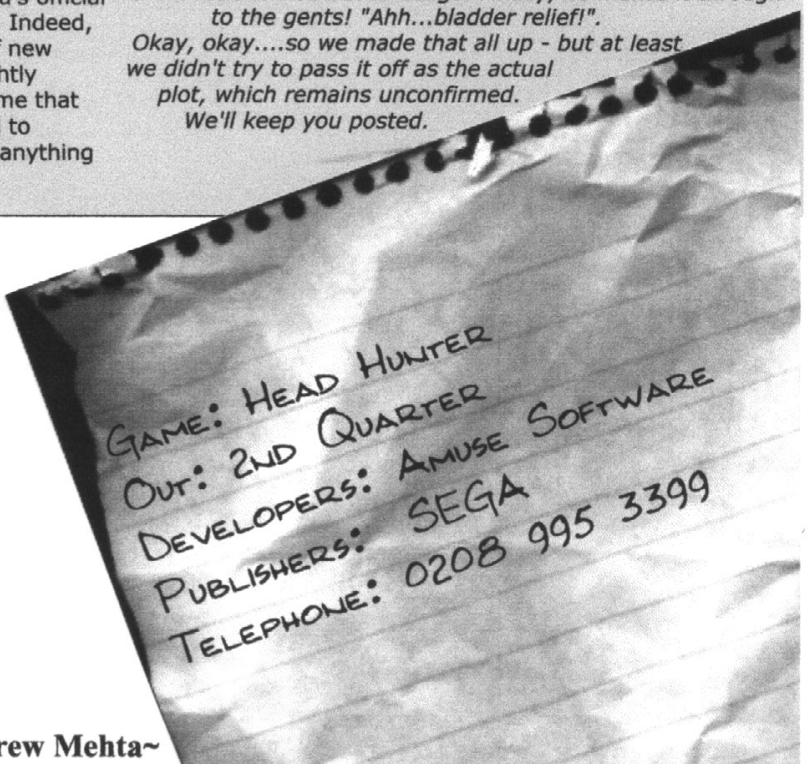
We'll keep you posted.

adrenaline-pumping race mode!

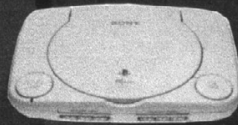
The Swedish are indeed an ambitious lot - so would it surprise you if I said that Amuse's ambitions don't stop there? They're also planning to make elements of the game upgradable by downloading files to your VMS from their website! Amuse have so far confirmed that players will be able to download new weapons, AND new characters to play as. Whether these characters and weapons are just limited to multi-player mode, or whether it's possible to build up a team of characters in one player mode (as is common of the RPG genre) we don't yet know - we'll have to wait and see, but United Games will certainly keep you posted.

All in all, HeadHunter is a game that has amazing potential, yet at the end of the day, its success will depend on how well the various gameplay elements blend into one, and, perhaps more importantly, how fun each element is. Still, skidding about on that bike does look a laugh. Here's hoping for a goodun', then, come the second quarter!

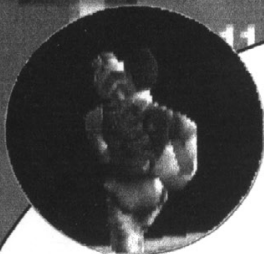
~Andrew Mehta~



[(-12)]



Sony Cambridge bring a chilling vision of distopia to the PSOne. An intelligent shoot-'em-up; High on adrenalin, action and sense of duty - for you are Mankind's last hope.



Entire cities have succumb to the vicious ground force of an alien invasion, and now stand as ghost towns. Where you lived, worked, played - the environments you have known all your life - rumble at your feet. Welcome to Sony Cambridge's apocalyptic vision of the future. A future in which Mankind has been made slave to Alien will - cybernetically mutated into zombies of flesh and metal - re-programmed with one objective - to annihilate their brothers, their sisters, their mothers and fathers - fellow humans who are fighting back as earth's resistance. You are part of that group. Playing as Lieutenant Vaughan, you have the experience of the armed forces behind you - you are a warrior - Earth's last hope - but there is also another advantage. You are human. These were once your cities. The game is on your turf. You know where to run to, you know where to hide. You know how to fight. Use these skills. Save the world.

Playing C12 for the first time, I began to fear that the game would take a rather linear approach to level design, as for the first few moments of the game, I had simply been progressing down a straight street, which despite containing lots of graphical variation, with several landmarks along the way, was seeing me head in a straight line. However, when I reached the end of the street, much to my horror (I was still trying to evade enemy laser fire) I was greeted by a dead end. This forced me to explore my surroundings more, and low and behold, it soon became obvious that I could venture into the surrounding buildings. Some contained a few power-up items, others more enemies to deal with, and after a bit of explorational play I managed to find my way into a new area of the level. This made the

game seem much more realistic, as it makes you view the game environment as just that - an environment, that lends itself more to real life city architecture than to a level design. I felt like I was exploring a war torn city - not a premeditated level design cooked up by a geezer in Cambridge with a PlayStation development kit. In this sense then, the game became plausible and immersive, yet you barely notice - taking for granted the realism and concerning yourself more with the actual play, such as using the strafe button to despatch a cyborg that's been firing at you from a watch tower on the other side of a deep ravine.





(C-12)

(Control-12)

The action takes place from a third person perspective, yet this changes when you hold in the right shoulder button, in order to strafe. You see the game's control system is quite unique. As per usual you can use the directional pad to manoeuvre your character, and as one would expect there's a shoot button, an action button (by default this makes your character crouch, but it can be used for other actions later on in the game), but besides all these seemingly standard controls, the control method's uniqueness lies in the Strafe button. You see, whilst you are perfectly welcome to run around with your gun, pressing the shoot button when an enemy is within range, a lot of them are hard to lock onto when it comes to targeting. Holding in the strafe button, however, not only helps you to lock your sights onto the target, and stay with it, but it also sees the view switch to a 2nd person perspective, otherwise known as a "Just behind the shoulders" viewpoint. This makes it much easier to target enemies on roof-tops, and also gives the game a different feel to most...it's like you're running about, and when an enemy is within range, you quickly switch to strafe mode, and <wham!> it's like you're playing Virtual Cop or House of The Dead. However, due to the lock-on nature of using the strafe, you're not exactly free to move the crosshair.

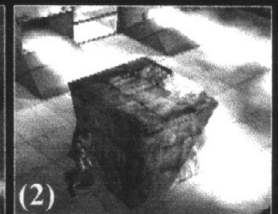
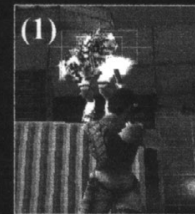
(Carnage-12)

I mentioned earlier that there's a shoot button. Well, you'll be glad to know, another button lets you throw grenades at your enemies...which is a damn site easier than shooting if they're positioned on high roof-top ledges. Such enemies you won't see until you use the strafe button to lock onto nearby enemies, such is the point of view of the game camera, yet you will know they're there beforehand as not only do they bombard you with laser shots (and yes, you do see the lasers shooting about on the screen!!).

but you can also spot their red lasers which help them to aim...this is quite helpful, as you can see where the enemy will be shooting next, and take steps to dodge...it also keeps up the pace, and keeps you on your toes. There's no stopping, or you may be targeted.

(Concentrate-12)

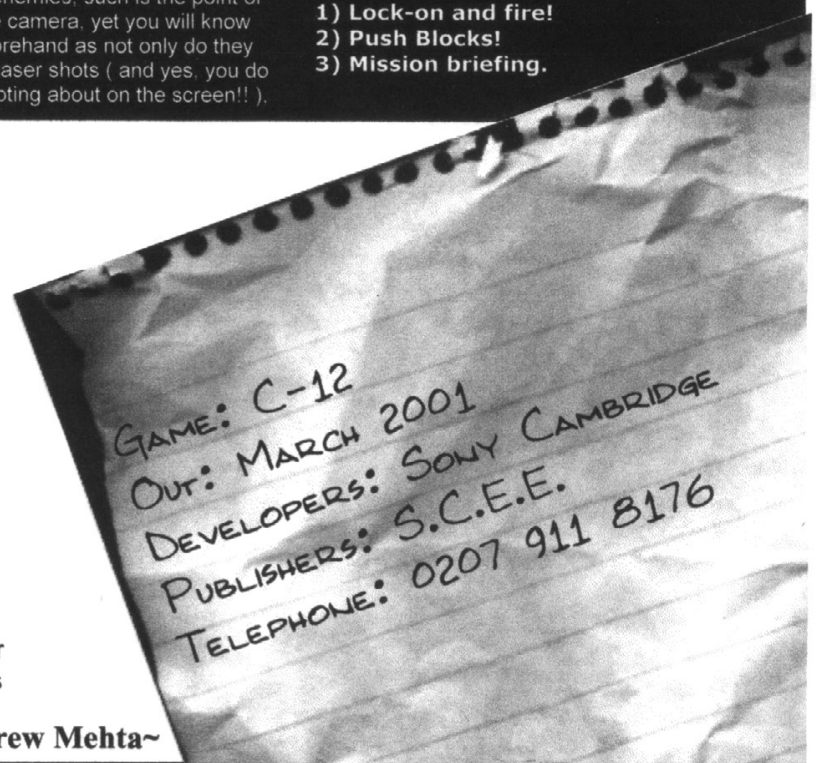
Despite the impressive laser effects, and strafe controls, C-12 isn't just about shooting, for the game also has heavy explorational and puzzle elements. For instance, in one section of the game, Vaughan has to pass through an alley whose walls are gushing out boiling steam through large vents. In order to get past, Vaughan has to push a series of blocks over the vents, thus sealing them, and allowing him to pass. The crouch control isn't just for ducking either. It's ideal for creeping through air vents and such like in order to access extra areas within a level. Furthermore, at the start of each level, a realtime cut scene sets you a mission - the level I played seeing me have to rescue a fellow resistance member from the Aliens. Only by fulfilling your mission requirements will you be able to finish the level.



- 1) Lock-on and fire!
- 2) Push Blocks!
- 3) Mission briefing.

The Cyborgs may be your main enemy, for the most part, but get past the puppets and you will be able to face off the aliens pulling the strings. I mentioned earlier that I came across a ravine-esque divide whilst playing the game. After despatching all of the sources of laser fire that had been shooting at me from where I stood, not knowing where to go next, I proceeded into the ravine-like gap, upon which a massive black beetle-esque craft of alien design descended upon me. It was at this point that my playtest came to an abrupt end, as I was defeated. Had I doomed all of mankind in the process? No. I shook my head, and told myself: "It's only a game. You can have another chance at saving mankind when the game is released for PlayStation in March." I consoled myself with this thought, and moved on.

~Andrew Mehta~



THE

TEAM

After the Team successfully foiled the Inflatable Clown's plans of taking over the world (well, the bookies at least) they all headed back to the office to celebrate. We join them as the editor pops open the old vintage 1897.....



Humour Editor: Ben Evans:

"Oh, Mr Thethersby! Why we feeble women are in awe of you men. You are our heroes! Why I feel my bosom heaving with excitement at what has just happened, don't you think fair Sir?"

"Fancy a sh*g?" replied Mr Thethersby.

What's this readers? Have the team travelled back in time and ended up in a costume drama-esque scene?

"Wow! This looks exactly like a scene from a BBC costume drama!" exclaimed Ben.

"Get off the bloody stage!" shouted a fat ugly pompous man.

"Oh(!), sorry William Hague. I didn't realise you did this sort of thing, although I suppose as you are so crap at politics you would want to try your hand at something else."

Suddenly a smiling man came onto the scene and put his arm around William Hague.

"That's Tony Blair!!" said Andrew, some what shocked. "But you two are sworn enemies!"

"In public we are, but really, we enjoy nothing more than me taking William up the....."



Editor: Andrew Mehta

".....back slide at the Oasis Swimming Centre!"

"Yes, we might not do much in politics, but we always make a big splash at the Swimming Centre!"

"Er....." said Andrew.

"Care to join us??"

Andrew's mind flicked back to the BBC's Teletubbies series, and he suddenly cried out a Dipsy sound-bite: "RUN AWAY!!!!!!!!!!!!!" and toddled off down the old country garden, to see whether Jamiroqui wanted his hat back, or at least if NuNu had any Teletubby Custard. He soon found Mr Jamiroqui, looking rather disorientated in the Garden Maze. "I've lost LaLa!" he said. "Wait-! What's that?" Both Jamiroqui and Andrew (now magically transformed into Dipsy - oh dear) stood as still as could be, pricked their ears, and listened out for any sign of LaLa.

"Bwoarhahaha!!" came the evil laugh of Tony Blair, through the maze hedges!!

"Oh dear!!!" said Dipsy.

"Indeed, we must save LaLa!" replied Jamiroqui.

"No, it's not that."

"Then what?"

"My TV is stuck on Venessa, I've suddenly gained 200 pounds...and it's not of the money variety!"

Regardless, they moved on. Venessa interviewed a series of Chefs, while Dipsy peered around the corner, to see if the coast was clear.

"Velocer Raptors at 12 O'clock!" he shouted.

"Nonono!! Walking with Dinosaurs isn't on until 20:30....."



N64 Co-ordinator: Edd Morris

And so the UG team's hallucinogenic dreams continued.

As Dipsy ran, ran, ran, from the Velocer Raptors, the dream world turned green . . . blue psychedelic . . .

. . . and finally morphed into a garden with mystical carousel. As the Magical Roundabout turned, Dipsy ran onto the scene, slowly evolving into a rabbit with the

face of Edd - this rabbit was Dylan. As Dylan plucked a string on his guitar, creating "a mellow tune", Dougal, Florence and Zebedee

appeared on the scene.

"What's this?" said Dougal. "What? What? What's the rabbit doing, again?"

"Crazy . . ." replied Dylan, engrossed in his tune, and then promptly fell asleep.

"Shouldn't he be hopping, or eating carrots?" said Florence.

"Hmmm..." replied Dougal, thinking of sugar.

"Time for bed!" said Zebedee.

The thoughts of sugar remained with the UG team as they shifted from this dream to the next, laying sprawled across the UG office floor, with only silver paper and a TV guide as company.



PC Co-ordinator (and ruler of the known universe): Jazz

(What? I'm supposed to carry this on? I think vodka is needed to continue a theme like this! <Slots on a VR helmet, programmed to "stoned">. Sweeeet...)

Oh yes - the world of the magic roundabout was certainly a bizarre one. Unfortunately, someone heard the name bizarre being mentioned by Zebedee, with regards to Dougal's humorous name. No sooner said, than a giant foot fell out of the sky and squashed the lot of them.

"Ahhhh!" yelled the team as they dived for cover from some smaller falling body parts(!). "The Monty Python foot has killed them all! Now who will we shoot at in little homemade PC games?" With this tragic realisation falling upon them, they all fled away from the roundabout, and took cover in an old barn. Andrew, tired from all his Editor-like jobs, tried to take a quick nap on the floor.

"What?" he exclaimed, "The floor's plastic - like a giant button! We must be on Button Moon!" Woah there readers! Who remembers that then?! The team all beat on Andrew with Mr Spoon for causing this horrible Childrens' TV deathtrapped universe (Hey! Ben started it! E.d.). Then, slowly but surely, they stopped, one by one, as they all began to hear the same noise.... a faint "Thud ... thud ... thud ...". "Ooooh no!" said George.

"Ahhh balls!" added Edd.

They all made their way to the barn entrance and peeked outside to see their worst nightmare. The ULTIMATE EVIL of childrens' TV everywhere.

"Run for your liliives!" yelled Jazz ... "It's BARNEY!!!!!!!"



Arcade Guru: Ken Flatt

Barney then began to whirr and click, and promptly transformed into Beast Wars Megatron, who loomed menacingly over the gathering public. They all pointed up and shouted: "Oh no! Godzilla has invaded!"

Megatron, extremely unimpressed by this, started to go on a killing spree.....



National Correspondent:

George Morgan (aka Kimakaz)

George stepped out onto the top of a sky scraper near to the carnage, and began stroking her chin in a characteristically evil manner. "So then....it seems we have a problem...yessss..."

"What?! How *dare* you steal my lines, insolent flesh creature!" came the voice of Beast Wars Megatron / Barney who promptly began charging towards the office building, tail flashing around like a battle-blade. "Rahhhhhhhh!" he added for dramatic effect.

With a smirk, George knew; the battle was over.

"Ok!" she yelled, posing dramatically, "We need FIREPLACE power - NOW!"

Without further warning, the holo-projector image of the office block turned off, revealing Megatron to be on a collision course with a huge fireplace, just like the one at home where George had burnt that Barney key-ring (ALIVE!!). Screaming and unable to stop his charge, Beast Wars Megatron / Barney met a flamey death as his charge ended in the fireplace. George was laughing, until Andrew pointed out: "You got told off for melting the key-ring, what do you think will happen now you've killed the REAL Barney?!!!"

George made a 'whoopsie' face. "Never mind...at least I got to show off my Power Ranger like yelling!"

CONTRIBUTORS!

United Games is written by its readers for its readers, so it hasn't just been our dedicated contributors have gotten in on the act too, by getting their mitts on review packs and



Andrew Crane



Ben#2 aka SWAG



David Burford



James Haggart



Kelvin Valters



Mark Butler



Martin Haracz



Mat Owen



Patrick Crane



Paul Golf



Staff Writer:

Ross "Mad Grey" Sillifant

"Well, trust you lot to leave it to an old man, to get you out of a fix..." muttered Ross, (who had, up to that particular moment, been engrossed in a particularly lovely dream about BABYLON 5's Lyta Alexander). "Roit(sic)!

Lets be having ya! Ah-ha! You see, what you have here is your classic CHILDHOOD TV MEMORIES FANTASY, clashing with your own Fav' things! Yet not one of you have mentioned THE FLUMPS, HEADS&TAILS, RAINBOW, THE INVADERS - STARING DAVID VINCENT. Shame on you! Still, as a man who can....."

The team began to get restless. What were these strange things he spoke of.....? A few people started to shake their heads, whilst Andy nervously cleared his throat: "Er, Ross...."

"ENOUGH!" cried Ross, "FOR BEHOLD(!), FROM AN ERA LONG GONE, BUT NOT FORGOTTEN, I SUMMON THEE, THY COOLEST OF TOYS! COME FORTH! UNLEASH THY POWER & BANISH EVERY CAMP, GOBOT-LOVING MUPPET FROM THY WORLD!" A black square (tiny at first) appeared & rapidly grew in size. Ross was in a trance. The team shrank back. What madness would the mind of an old man, such as the "Mad Grey" bring forth?

Then, the very ground beneath them shook! For in his madness, Ross had called upon the mightiest of them all - "REDHORN THE TERRIBLE!", whose appearance, and indeed sheer size, came across as some nightmare unison of T-rex and machine that was laden with weapons! Redhorn gazed upon the team. Ross, by now several inches off of the ground, turned to the team and said "WHAT IS THY BIDDING? MY MASTER?".....



Staff Writer: Chris Butterworth

The team, dazed and bewildered by the antics of the 'Mad Grey', remembered that whilst hiking through the Viridian Forest of the 1980s, they had caught Rainbow's very own Rod, Jane and Freddy inside a Pokéball.

"SINGING POWER NOW!" Without any regard for their own safety, the team unleashed the trio of terror who instantly gave anybody within a 30 yard radius a zip for a mouth and yellow fur! "AHHHH!" Andrew squirmed at the thought of becoming Zippy; living a life of Geoffrey-controlled movements and having talking bears as friends, but as luck would have it, it was Ross and RedHorn the Terrible who spawned the yellow fur. Acting quickly, Chris zipped up Ross' mouth as tight as possible, only to realise moments later that because of the absence of a nose and the fact that oxygen therefore needs to be inhaled through the mouth, the 'Mad Grey' was suffocating. Flashbacks of desert islands filled with beautiful women, and childhood memories of him dancing and singing "We're off to Button Moooooooon!" filled Ross' troubled head before he crashed to his knees and passed out!

A number of the team pointed at Ross, who now lay slumped over his U.G desk. "It sounds like he's been having a bad dream.....he keeps muttering strange quotes..." commented Chris.

"I'll just get out me Yellow Pages....." muttered Ross, as he fell to the floor.

"Shall I wake him?" asked Chris.

"No...he's only just arrived back from the Island of Beautiful ladies - he's probably jet lagged. Just warn the cleaners not to trip over him on their way in."

"Right-o. I'll get my chalk." said Chris, being just plain cheeky.

GAH!

Will you look at this uninspired page layout! Sorry, the story was sooo long, and yet so cool, I couldn't bring myself to reduce it! So I had to cram it all in, at the cost of some snazzy Team Page designs. Soz. And ooooh! Look at those contributors! All they've had mentioned is their name! We had planned to have a paragraph about each of them...but...we just ran out of space!

Anyway! Listen up!

We're desperately after PlayStation One and Two reviews for the next issue, so if you're able to help in anyway, please get in touch (see Community Zone for our address). We're also currently looking for a PlayStation 2 reviewer to join our Team, so, who knows, if your contributions are good enough, you may find yourself taking part in the comedy antics of the team next issue!

team that have helped to create this awesome issue, all of these submitting articles. Cheers people!



Peter Jordan



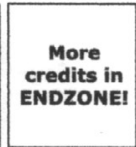
Taz Anastassi



Tom.



Will Jenkins



More credits in ENDZONE!

Colour Symbols!

Here at United Games we don't rate games out of 100%, or out of 10, or even out of 5!!! Nope, we don't rate games at all, we award them colour symbols! So, you'll want to know what each colour means won't you?



Red Hot!!

"If you own the hardware this runs on, you MUST get this game. If you don't, you should consider getting it!"

EXPLAINED: A Red Hot is not given to a game to say it's good. It's given to a game to tell people "THEY MUST BUY THIS"! A game everybody loves, is the best thing since sliced bread, and nobody will have any regrets buying. Obviously only a select few ever receive this accolade.



Brill Blue:

"Brilliant!"

EXPLAINED: An excellent game. Brilliant. This is usually the highest recommendation, with the red hot only reserved for ever-so-special games.



Groovy Green:

"We understand not everyone's cup of tea...but there's something in it that makes it oh-so special!"

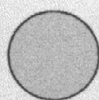
EXPLAINED: This could be a love it or hate it game, an acquired taste, or perhaps a game you hate...but can't stop playing. Maybe it's a "one for the fans" that, say, Star Wars fans will lap up, but the rest of us will dislike. All in all it's a classic "Great...if you like this sort of thing!" type of game.



Mellow Yellow:

"An all round nice game, you can't go wrong with"

EXPLAINED: This is basically a "safe buy". It'll please most people, is good value for money, and whilst not necessarily the bee's-knees, will still fit snugly into your gaming collection with no qualms.



Average Grey:

"Nothing wrong with it, just nothing right either."

EXPLAINED: Ho-hum Average. Not good, yet not terrible. Best avoided simply because there are so many better games available.



Black: Burn it.

"Don't buy this game!"

EXPLAINED: Be careful when awarding blacks, in case it's just an acquired taste - it may appeal to some. True blacks appeal to no-one. A complete waste of money.



Set in the near future metropolis of "Tokyo-to", Sega's vision of the future is a refreshing change from your usual Blade-Runner-esque vision of the world - no cyberpunk here my laddie! You're smack bang in the centre of a three-way gang war(fare) zone! Drive by shootings? I think not! The word on the street is graffiti, your Turf has been invaded, & you've gotta grab your skates, spray cans, etc, and spray your way!

By Picking up the various spray cans dotted around the various districts, you must "tag" your mark in order to show those rival punks who's da man(!), and if that's not enough, you also get some outstanding "tag chases" where you've got to pursue rival gang members and spray them nice! Of course "The Babylon" (i.e. police) aren't gonna just sit back and watch, oh no! They start off mild enough - i.e. get caught and you'll be getting a beating, but soon they send in SWAT Teams, riot cops, a "Super" who takes the "Dirty Harry" aspect a bit TOO far and get this(!) - eventually the Army are called in using Tanks & Helicopter Gunships! 'Reasonable use of force then!

The gameplay is nigh-on

impossible to pigeon hole, but think of a cross between "Tony Hawk" and "Crazy Taxi" and you'll be half way there. The urban districts you get to roam free in have all been lovingly crafted and boy(!) does it show. Just about everything has been made so you can tag it, and it pays off a treat when, deep into a "Tag" a tear gas grenade explodes at your feet, you're confused, the Babylon close in for a bit of bother and you then peg it, slam down a stair case, flip like a madman up a set of stairs, do a phat mid-air jump onto a neighbouring building, slide down a pole and get back to where you were to continue

your tag, with the rozzas left eating your dust!

The first thing that hits

everyone who plays this are of course the visuals! Using cell-shading (as seen in "Wacky Races") you feel you are involved in a cartoon, running in 2D and 3D. Words fail to describe the effect it has on you, and still shots can NEVER hope to do it justice!

The sound is equally on par! A fantastic megamix of hip hop and outstanding commentary. All this means ONE thing - it could only be a SEGA game! It reeks of a sense of style you'd never see on a rival machine, it's Sega at their finest!

One aspect I personally was concerned about was the analogue control - I needn't have worried! The game is SO user-friendly it's a joy. You're eased into the action via a tutorial and then, before the game "proper" begins, you must copy various "punks" before they feel you're worth joining [the punks become playable characters, you see?]. There's nothing to spoil your enjoyment here, which is how it should be!

Overall, this is THE most FUN I've had in a video game for years!! It reminded me of why I took up video



Jet Set Radio is more than just an aesthetically pleasing audio-visual delight. Scratch the surface and it seems a fun game. Get deeper into it, however, and you'll find it's more than fun. It's brill blue!

games in the first place! Backing such unique gameplay are of course the audio-visual delights, but they are just the icing on an already rich and moist cake. The UK version improves on its Japanese cousin by featuring additional areas and characters. What more can I say? It's fantastic! It's FUN. It's NOT a sequel! Just buy it!! I implore you! If not, don't blame me when the fun and originality has left the games market. PlayStation 2 might well turn the sales race, but with games like this Sega are laps ahead!!

Text ©2001 Ross Sillifant. Layout ©2001 Andrew Mehta. Jet Set Radio is © Sega Corporation, 2000.

A lack of multiplayer mode combined with the lack of difficulty for some, (sadly) prevents me from giving it a "Red Hot" but I'm tempted...but it gets a blinding, sharp...



Brill Blue



Deciding whether a game smells or not is always a risky job. Andrew gets close to Rush 2049, and, showing no regard for his nasal passage takes a daring sniff! Brave lad....

I've never been one for racing games myself, so I was surprised to find myself getting into this game so much, but Rush 2049 proves to be one of those games that demands your attention. The pounding dance music and lush futuristic visuals entice you into playing, and help create an adrenalin rush, but although you may pick up the controller, intent on just spending a few minutes whizzing around a track, the chances are, as the game progresses and the difficulty rises, you'll be spending far more time than you intended attempting to master each track. For as you progress through the one player circuit mode (which makes up the bulk of the one player game) the tracks steadily get more and more demanding, with the speed of your opponents increasing, and effects like fog requiring you to know the corners that are approaching off by heart. All this means that you'll be far more pedantic in the way you play the game, pausing the game, and selecting "RESTART RACE" from the pause menu, every time you foul up. You see, unlike other racing games, Rush 2049 isn't just about going around and around a track, it involves taking corners at the right angle, sticking to the inside lanes where possible - taking corners gradually instead of sharply, to prevent speed-reducing skids. In short, you really need to be skillful at each track in order to master it. Even the shortcuts that are available, require some dare devil jumps, that take time to master.

The fact that so much skill and strategy is involved in coming first means that when you do achieve that prestigious first place, you feel immensely satisfied for it was your own sweat and tears that got you there, and it's the satisfaction that makes for the addictive quality. It's not like other addictive games that you constantly think about playing, rather you play Rush 2049 initially due to its appealing aesthetic. The lush visuals and pounding dance sound-track give it a "get-up-and-go" feeling, that makes you want to play it just to start your day in a positive mood....but when your attempt at completing the track goes Pete Tong (wrong), that's where the addiction kicks in, for you will not leave the game until you've completed the track, for doing so is to concede defeat.

Unfortunately, not everyone will take to the challenge of one player circuit mode. It does take a while to master the tracks, and it's not until you master them that you actually appreciate them, and so, when I first played the game, I found myself wondering why I was even bothering with it. It was only by persevering that the game opened up to me. In this respect then, you need a lot of patience to be able to play this game, as well as enough time to really get into it. Although it looks like a brainless racer, there's really quite a lot involved.

However, the game isn't all about a demanding race challenge, other modes such as Stunt Mode and



Battle Mode provide the kind of instant fun that you'll need to convince yourself you haven't made a bad purchase, when first you get this game. Launching off of ramps, trying to steer mid-air with your wings, and pulling off loads of stunts in stunt mode is extremely satisfying stuff, and battle mode, which sees two or more cars equipped with weapons career around an arena trying to decimate each other, is loads of fun! However, it's unfortunate that this mode only works with two or more players, so you'll only find yourself playing this when friends call around.

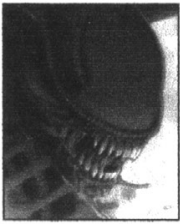
Overall, Rush 2049 is a game to consider. If you've constantly got game-mad friends around, they'll love the battle mode, and if you've got the time and patience to get to grips with the one player offerings, the game can be really rewarding. If you lack both patience and game-mad friends, however, Rush 2049 might not be the game for you.

Text ©2000 Andrew Mehta. Layout ©2001 Andrew Mehta. San Francisco Rush 2049 is © Midway Games West Inc. Published by Midway Games Ltd.

**It's good stuff,
but not for
everyone.**



Groovy Green



Back from the Island of Beautiful Women (see our 1998 issue), Ross shows he can handle three characters at once in the innovative shoot-'em-up that is MDK2!

The original MDK was released back in 1996 on P.C. CD-ROM where it obtained "Rave" reviews and the usual "impossible to do on consoles" comments. Nonetheless, a PSOne conversion was carried out and it was pretty much spot on! However, despite the large amount of very favourable press the game was getting, it fell flat on its face, sales wise! Indeed, having spent time on BOTH P.C. and PSOne versions I wasn't overly surprised. Sure, graphically the game was spot-on, and it had loads of pioneering ideas / features, but it just didn't grip me.

So, here we are then, with a new millenium, new console and crikey(!), new development team, carrying a sequel no less! Hmm...doggy things sequels. Either they take a series from strength to strength (ala Resident Evil), or else turn out to be merely the same old tat ill-disguised as a "Stunning New Edition!" (ala Tomb Raider, Fifa, Need for Speed, etc, etc...).

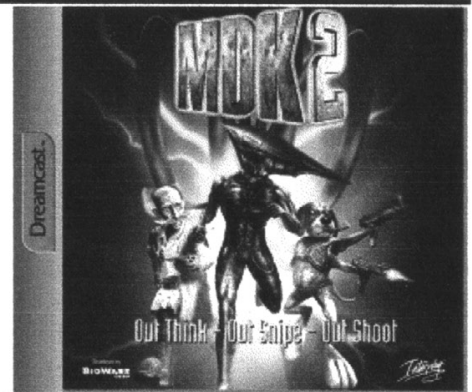
Still, being an open minded person, I thought I'd give MDK 2 a try, and indeed, it did impress. The first thing to strike me was the sheer quality of the opening few minutes and then also the 60Hz option, the fantastic "comic book" setting & style, and - what's this(?) No! It can't be! A sense of humour?? OH YES! Hmmm! This looked like it needed a much closer looking into!

The storyline is not only very well written, and played out via the intro and cut-scenes, but is also an essential part of the game! It seems that NO sooner had you defeated the Alien Fighters from the first game than a second wave appeared! So, more of the same then? Well, a small "yes", as indeed, a lot of the ideas have been carried through, but a ruddy huge "NO!" as this time around you're not just restricted to one character and one style of gameplay.

Allow me to elaborate. In the original game, you controlled Kurt, the Janitor-turned-hero (unwillingly btw), with "Max" & "The Doc" being mere onlookers so to speak. But THIS time the game is based entirely around the exploits of all three(!), and the action and plot constantly revolve around the actions taken by (and reactions caused by) fellow team members. Each has three levels specific to them and without spoiling the game too much, the final level lets you decide who you feel is best to finish the task once and for all!

Be warned though(!), although you get three types on offer they share one thing in common! They are ROCK hard, i.e. rock that has a titanium core and diamond coating type hard. Sure, at first you're "The Man" cutting a swathe, etc but you will soon be shouting "AAAAAGH!!!" along with the rest of us, as one ain't taking prisoners! But having perseverance is the key, as it's then and only then that you begin to realize and appreciate the sheer scale and thought that's gone into the whole game! Each individual enemy has its own type of personality - smug g*ts, Vinny Jones types, those suffering from terminal flatulence, etc, and they along with the defense systems are mean mothers! However, it's when you come across the Bosses that you begin to realise just what evil and twisted genius lies behind their creation. I mean hey(!), these guys didn't just pack a light "weekend" bag for the weekend invasion, hell no(!), for the Bosses are HUGE, armed to the teeth, devious and brilliantly thought out - and yes, very tough!

You can really sense that the game has been lovingly crafted. The graphics just ooze quality, some of the very finest I've yet to see on D.C.(!) mixing a comic book style & look with a gritty "Aliens" type atmosphere, whilst adding a touch of "Carry On Films" to the whole affair.



Sure, it sounds odd, but it does work! And NO noticeable pop-up, slow-down, etc.. and by Gods(!) decent camera angles that actually work! A bane of every 3D game I've ever played on any system I've played, banished!

This game really surprised me. Despite its difficulty level, I just had to keep on with this one. It grabbed me by the head and shoulders and made me sit bolt upright! Sure , it got my pulse level racing, with its pixel-perfect game play, but I just felt so involved with the thing! Odd as it sounds, I needed to rescue me' mates, slaughter some, and get the world put to rights!

It seems that this game got the fresh approach it needed, the new team, Bioware, have worked wonders. The three characters approach means the game is never in danger of going stale!! The bottom line is, if you've got the perseverance for it, you'll be richly rewarded.

Text ©2000 Ross Sillifant. Layout ©2000 Andrew Mehta.
MDK2 the game is ©2000 Interplay/Bioware.

Final score? Well, I'd like to award it a "Brill Blue", I really would, as it is "Brilliant!", but (sigh) that difficulty level, it's gonna make or break 'em! So....it's gonna get...



Groovy Green.



For the Megadrive, Climax Entertainment gave us the classic **LandStalker (91% Sega Zone)**, for the Saturn the superb multiple-ending **Dark Savior (sic) (4/5 CVG)**. Now they bring their RPG-making skills to the Dreamcast, in the form of **TimeStalkers**.

TimeStalkers was THE game I was looking forwards to alongside *Grandia 2* and *Shenmue*. When I was reading the average reviews that Evolution got, I was thinking: "Just you wait, just you wait until *TimeStalkers*, *Grandia 2* and *Phantasy Star Online* come along, then Dreamcast owners will have RPGs to boast about!" However, it's clear now that I was wrong to group *TimeStalkers* alongside such great name games as those. *TimeStalkers* isn't crap, you'll be pleased to know - it's just weird. Very weird.

It's not that it's weird to play. It's a very straight forward game, and plays much more like a familiar, traditional RPG than the likes of *Shenmue*, say. In fact, I'll admit that *Shenmue* has gone virtually untouched due to this game. Now that's weird. Why? Because I would not recommend this game to anybody. Not for £40. You can do better than this, for your money.

Right! Time to do some explaining. First of all - on initial impressions, the game seems a mess! The graphics look pathetic in places when viewed close-up (i.e. during cut-scenes) as they've clearly been designed to be viewed from a distance. This graphical simplicity, coupled with no continuous design/theme within the main landscape, creates the impression that this is an unfinished game, perhaps rushed to market. But it's not. The lack of continuous design is deliberate, for the game revolves around an enigmatic plot that sees different landscapes, from different parallel worlds, come together to form some kind of metaphorical patchwork quilt of a game world, which turns out to be a higgledy-piggledy mess. But the sheer diversity means you can be slagging off the graphics totally, then go down the clock-tower, and run down a hill, and have your breath taken away as you explore a real-time scene featuring some ruins and a waterfall - with graphics that rival the pre-rendered offerings of *Final Fantasy*. This sums the game up perfectly - one moment you think it's crap, the next, you find yourself pleasantly surprised.

Yes, with TimeStalkers it's a constant battle between negative impressions and positive ones which sways your judgement back and forth like a banana palm tree in a gentle, tropical, breeze. Why not a full on gale? Because you're never swaying to extremes. It's not a game you'll hate and then love. Rather you're definitely swaying somewhere in the realms of mediocrity. So, it'll be getting an *Average Grey* then will it? Well, maybe, but I've also half a mind to give it a *Groovy Green*. It's not as fantastic to fans, as, say, *MegaMan X3* was, but there's a certain amount of "ARRG! I'll do this if it kills me!" addiction in it, which can keep you coming back.

There's a predictable pattern to gameplay in this title. You've a game world to

explore - chatting to characters, visiting shops, etc, and then you get to enter a dungeon, at the end of which is a boss which you must destroy. Then you're treated to a cut scene in which a new game world appears. You go off and explore it, chatting to the characters within - and there you have it, we've come full circle. Repeat ad infinitum. Whilst the plot and new world segment revelations are something to look forwards to and enjoy (the main hero, *Sword*, is really skeptical, witty, and full of attitude - questioning everything the game tries to throw at him - which is very refreshing for an RPG character, plus the worlds that appear are always so varied, you never know what to expect - and the occupants are always quite witty! Hear a junkie say crazy things whilst getting high, meet the kid in the newsagents who is always treating it as a library, and receive a business card from a *Sega Soya Bean Plant* employee!), but the dungeons can be a real drag, as they get in the way of your enjoyment of the game world. They can be quite a slog, you see. Even if you're doing well, and making steady progression, it'll still take you an hour at least - as such you end up playing the game in bursts of an hour to an hour and a half. Not everyone is going to have that much time.

So what are the rewards for this time you give up? Well...you get to enjoy a newly revealed game world, and, when you first get into the game, chances are you'll also get an extra character to play as, which can be groovy....but...ohhh...at the end of the day, slogging your way through a dungeon allows you to move onto another dungeon. Whoopee. The Dungeons aren't completely boring. In fact you'll really get to appreciate some of the strategy involved. There's something so brilliantly satisfying about maxing out *Rao's* strength and then defeating an enemy with a single punch. Playing as *Pyra* is groovy too...you're constantly watching your statistics, healing when your health is low, weighing up your spells' hit rates on enemies in order to determine which all-party attack to use on four of them at once. There's a lot going on - but it's all an endurance test, and the annoying thing is that it's not about you doing badly, or you doing well. It all comes down to luck. It can be sooo frustrating, to be doing so well, and then just get killed over something silly, or just insane. I was once kicking ass with *Rao*, laying into my enemies, killing them with just one punch each. Sweet. Then I come across these really easy to defeat monsters, so I think: "Yeah, I'm game for that." and start a battle, only to be cursed with paralysis, and have to sit there and watch my character get knocked from 30 HP to 0 HP by a series of wimpy little characters doing 1 HP damage per turn. It's all extremely frustrating, and when you fail a dungeon, you just don't see why you should bother to attempt it again. You're not enjoying this - you're not doing this for fun - you're merely doing this to progress the story...and the story isn't so terribly involving that you MUST know



what happens, so maybe a lot of you would just give up on this game, and not bother. But it gets under my skin. I knew I could beat those wimpy monsters that got me that time - so I befriended a *Cure Fruit* and hit the dungeons again - and completed it eventually. But even still, you're investing a great deal of time and effort for little return.

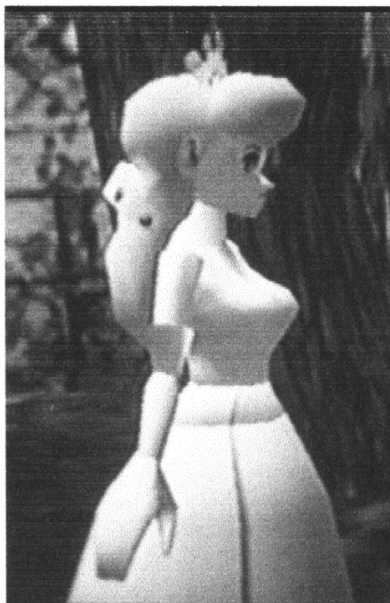
If you get this game, you'll be initially miffed by no in-game speech, a graphical aesthetic that implies it's unfinished, cheesy yet hummable MIDI music, and you'll also be initially confused by all the menus and features the game dungeons boast. However, with a little perseverance you'll find the game witty, enjoyable in parts, but also a test of both time and patience, that yields no gratification - only a relief that it's over and then an annoyance it's coming again. To be fair, though, you can get into the swing of things - there are elements one can really appreciate (especially in battle). But it's not rivetting, and you're paying £40 for a rather mediocre experience. This is Dreamcast. *Phantasy Star Online* is out. *Grandia 2* is due soon, and for twenty notes more you could get a Saturn with *Climax's* absolutely stonkingly brilliant *Dark Savior (sic)*. *TimeStalkers* is alright, but even to a massive *Climax* fan, it just doesn't offer enough for the asking price.

Text&Layout ©2001 Andrew Mehta. *TimeStalkers* is ©1999 Sega Enterprises Ltd. The character *LadyStalker* is ©Climax.

Climax Entertainment were once great. However, they slipped into the realm of mediocrity with *Blue Stinger*, and now *TimeStalkers* has confirmed our worst fears - they've moved into a nice semi-detached there (complete with rotating washing line) and they don't intend to move out into critical acclaim any time soon.



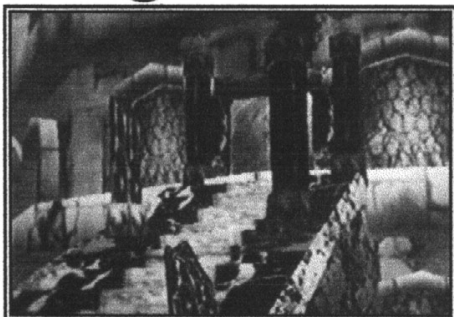
Average Grey



The Plot:

The plot seems completely shot away, maybe even lazily initiated - for when you first begin your adventure, the whole plot is basically that nobody know what's going on. What has happened is that whole streets, castles, space stations, etc, have been ripped for their time and dimension and transported to the game world - all interlinking into a patchwork-quilt of a game world. Each of the playable characters that entered this world did so by opening a mysterious book (Riven anyone?) and upon their arrival were greeted by someone called "Master" who told them that they were a hero, and told them to help get everything back to normal by entering the dungeons and defeating the dungeon bosses. This seems, straight forwards, RPG stuff. Yet the main character, Sword, is full of attitude that he unleashes upon "Master". It's so refreshing for this to happen. Y'know, you expect Sword to go along with it all, but he develops his own conspiracy theory about the Master, suspecting him of engineering this weird mesh of worlds. It's all confusing, it's all weird, and it's your job to get to the bottom of this. However, you'll get to the bottom of this in cut scenes you can't control. What you basically do in the game is not piece clues together, but experience an endurance test of sorts which pits you against dungeon, after dungeon of horrible nasty monsters, determined to prove your mortality. But it's a game, you've infinite lives, AND a save option. Try, try, try again, my friend, to master those dungeons....good luck!

Playing the Dungeons:



A foreboding Dungeon Entrance.

The main game graphics really turn out to be secondary to the tiny green map that appears at the centre of the screen during Dungeon mode (toggle the map on and off with the D-pad). When I'm playing TimeStalkers, I'm not concentrating on my character running along the corridors of the dungeon, rather I'm concentrating on the little yellow arrow that appears on the green map, and I'm turning corners like it's a racing game with an overhead-view. How sad am I? But there's a reason for my concentration on the map. Basically, as you wander around the dungeons, unexplored regions are shown as grey, explored regions as green, and regions that hold secrets show up as orange. When you come across an orange square on the map, the idea is to press the "X" button, which results in that square being searched. This often reveals secret collectable items that'll come in handy later on in the dungeons or in battle, however, orange squares can also be home to dastardly traps. Traps are annoying, because you can't see them coming. You're just walking along, and suddenly you're told you've trod on a button and you've to loose 30 health points. This can, if your HP isn't high, lead to immediate death. Yet the search button not only searches the map square that you are in, but also adjacent ones. It's therefore advised, that when you visit a room within the dungeon [corridors hardly ever feature traps so you only need worry about the room-esque sections of the dungeon levels] it's always best to press the search button

whilst standing just in front of the next square. This helps check if the coast is clear - and has saved me from a fair few hidden traps before!

Enemies also wander the dungeons, as one might well expect, and defeating them earns you experience that in turn enables you to raise your character's level, something you'll definitely need to do if you want to beat the end of dungeon boss, for raising your level helps make you stronger, plus some characters' special attacks and/or spells can only be utilised once they've passed a particular level. For instance, Pyra can't use her "Heal" magic until she's reached Level 2.

Obviously level 2 is quite a low level, so you'd be forgiven for thinking that you'd get your character up to that level and then not have to worry about not being able to use Heal ever again. However, TimeStalkers is different to most RPGs in that each character starts at Level 1 at the beginning of each dungeon. Even if you build up your character's experience so that he/she is virtually unbeatable, when you go onto the next dungeon, or even redo a previous dungeon, you'll start at Level 1 again. Even so, your characters total experience throughout the game isn't totally ignored. Through constant play you can increase the rank of each playable character. Whilst they'll still start dungeons at Level 1, with no experience, if they're of a high rank they may have more skill, attacks or spells at their disposal, and their health and magic bars may have increased slightly.

Random Dungeons!

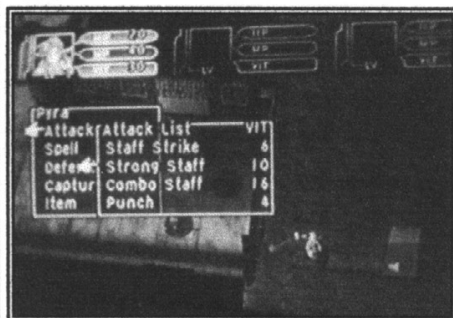
Each Dungeon that you visit is randomly generated, yet ironically, because of this, each Dungeon feels extremely similar to the last. Allow me to explain. There seems to be a dungeon-generating algorithm at the heart of every dungeon you visit, and it randomly dictates whether the next square on the map is going to be a piece of straight corridor, an entrance into a room, a right turn, a left turn, a T-junction or a "Replenish Energies here" room, etc, etc, and since it's obvious that each dungeon is based on this algorithm they only vary cosmetically. You're always going to get either a room, a corridor or a left/right turn. Differences between levels, therefore, become extremely cosmetic. One Dungeon will feature corridors that look all brown, gritty, and cave-esque, while another will have corridors

designed to look like street alleys. But both dungeons will have corridors. It was all enough to make me extremely excited, when I found part of a room had a small amount of water in it, for me to splash through - such a subtle cosmetic difference seemed to be so refreshing. It was nothing really, but the dungeons had been so bland, that it suddenly seemed like something great. Heh. The feeling didn't last.

The random element also controls luck. Going to the "Down Town" dungeon with Pyra is really quite possible once you're at level 2 or above, yet raising your level (which requires about one to two battles) can be piss easy or insanely difficult depending on what enemies have been randomly selected to populate the first level of the dungeon. For instance, I've visited downtown, and been able to destroy a few small worms to get my level high enough to take on the more powerful enemies, however, on some occasions, I've faced the more powerful enemies straight up, and been killed straight away. So the random generation angle also makes you think: "Well, it was a difficult dungeon that time around, but I bet if I play it again it'll be populated by far easier enemies to start off with!" This of course, persuades you to attempt the dungeon again.

Engaging in battle!

Despite the game's overall mediocrity, you can really find yourself getting into the battles, and the reason this is so is because you constantly feel in control. There are three stages to making your move during a battle. First you select what to do (Attack, Defend, Use a Spell, Move, etc,) then you decide what type of attack, defense, etc to take, and then you decide what character your decisions apply to.



Pyra selects the Strong Staff Attack!



The Joys of Exploring!

The joys of exploring each new segment of world that appears within the game lies partially with chatting to the characters that inhabit them. The game's script is extremely well written, and whilst the overall plot is no where near as engaging as the astounding Panzer Dragoon Saga, the style in which characters' sound-bites are written proves witty, intelligent and entertaining. Visit a modern day Japan's newsagents, and you'll find people standing by the magazines, reading anime comics and games magazines for free. Enter the shop as Rao, and overhear the shop assistant and the store manager debating about whether they should serve a weird Lion Beast complete with furry mane. They do in the end, but it's a real surprise for them when you initially show up! There are weird men in purple pyjamas who study each new world that appears and give a description of it. Our civilisation was described as being extremely advanced and yet, oddly, more consumer focussed than any other culture he had come across. Quite profound statements that got me thinking about modern society. There are also irritating characters, like the bossy, vain Captain Hawk with the cheese smile who "thinks" he's all that with the ladies. He won't stop bothering the realm's professor about some lame Geist Powered Toothbrush that he reckons will make him incredible attractive. Basically, all the in game characters have personality.

Lets say you decide to attack your enemy. You'll select "Attack", where upon a sub-menu will appear, listing a variety of different attacks your character is capable of performing. You select an attack. Then you're given the opportunity to select which enemy to attack (this is fairly straight forwards in one-on-one battles, obviously, but sometimes you'll be facing four or even eight enemies at once!). Now the great thing about selecting an enemy is that you have to highlight an enemy first - and when you highlight the enemy, various statistics about them are displayed. These include important statistics such as how much health they have left, how much damage the attack you've chosen is expected to do, and how likely it is that it'll penetrate their defenses. So, let's say you've selected an attack, you've highlighted a troll as your target, and you're about to hit A to confirm your selection....well, take a pause for a moment and look at those statistics. Let's say that their health is 14, and your attack is expected to do 9 points damage. Maybe you should go back and select a different, more powerful attack method, or maybe use a spell instead? You're constantly trying to figure out during battles how to kill the most enemies in the least amount of moves - so fighting amounts to selecting each attack, and observing how much damage it'll do, and then going for the most effective means of destroying the enemy. Of course, there's also the hit rate, which is the statistic that reflects how likely your hit is to take effect. Sometimes it's better to knock 9 points off of an enemy twice, if the weaker, 9 point attack, is more likely to penetrate their defenses, rather than risk wasting a turn in battle on a more powerful attack that your opponent might be able to block. Still, if you're low on HP, that might be a risk you're willing to take.



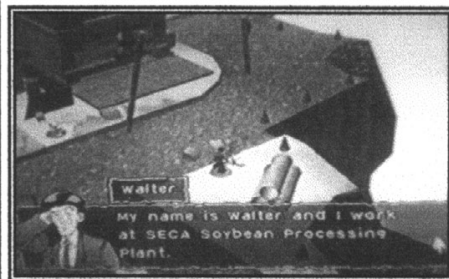
Is the enemy hidden behind a wall? Just check his statistics - you'll be okay!

The displaying of statistics is also helpful in another, less strategic way. Each dungeon is randomly generated, and sometimes, you're positioned in such a way that you're fighting an enemy you can't see, due to a wall being in the way. However, because of the appearance of statistics and a little photo picture of the enemy when you go to select who to attack, the fact that your enemy is behind a wall doesn't prove impractical to you whatsoever. Nice.

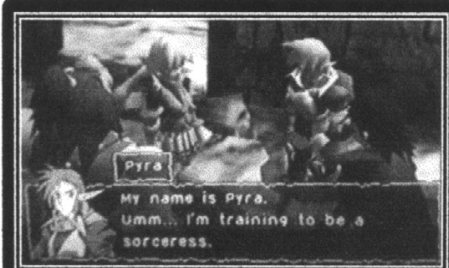
Tame the Monsters!

When in battle, alongside options such as "Attack", "Spell", "Movement", etc, there's also an option labelled "Capture". This allows you to catch a monster pokémon-style, and save it inside a small canister. You can then take it back to a Monster Farm and either download it to your VMU, allow it to graze in a special in-game grazing area, or else make it your ally.

When a monster becomes your ally, they're able, once released, to assist you in battle. At first I was a bit scared to try using the monsters I had collected, as they seemed quite weak, and I was scared they'd die straight away, however, their levels can be raised too, and some of them can become very powerful. Controlling them is easy. It's virtually exactly the same as controlling your own character, only the types of attack and so forth available on the menu differ in accordance with their different abilities. Having an extra character or two to help you battle is really a good idea, as it allows you to take two turns during battle - one for you, and one for your monster - as opposed to just the one, so it basically amounts to two strikes for the price of one. What a bargain! Still, whilst in the dungeon, you've a hunger meter, which depletes steadily throughout play, and is also partially depleted whenever you search an orange square. When your hunger meter reaches rock bottom, your health starts to deplete, so it's always best to collect lots of tasty and savory fruits, which replenish your hunger meter. However, the problem with having monsters is that you've more characters to feed, and especially in the latter levels, food can become scarce, so it's always best to start off with just the one monster, or else you could find one of them starving to death!



This guy works for Sega Soybean Processing Plant. Oh the humour - the wit! Yes. Exploring & chatting is fun!



Part of The Posse!

Sword is the main character in TimeStalkers. However, he's not the only character within the game. As you progress you'll meet more people who help you on your quest, and you'll eventually build up your own little posse of heroes. However, you don't take all these heroes around at once, like you do with your monsters, rather you select which one to play as, controlling one at a time. Each character has unique characteristics that require a slightly different style of play. Still, it's not just a matter of selecting a character and having them become your favourite, as you get to grips with the style of play they make way for; rather, you'll find yourself forced to use different characters as some prove better at tackling certain dungeons than others. So if you're constantly failing at a particular dungeon, it's sometimes a good idea to change character, and see if that helps.



After three years of cutesy games pouring onto Nintendo's 64-bit console, we finally get an 'adult' game, and it comes in the shape of Resident Evil 2. But is this conversion as good as it was hyped up to be?

If you told your friends around about a year ago that the Playstation hit Resident Evil 2 would be coming to a Nintendo console, they would have simply laughed at you. However, it's actually happened! The combined efforts of Capcom and Angel Studios have surprised nearly everyone, since they've managed to fit what was previously a 1.2 Gigabyte game (on 2 CDs) onto a 64 Megabyte cartridge. Everything from the lengthy FMV clips to the high quality sound-bytes have been included in this game along with a few extras (mentioned later on in this review).

Resident Evil 2 is set in a mid-western town called Raccoon City which was like any other city until a large corporation known as "Umbrella" arrived. A matter of months after their arrival, strange mutated creatures began to appear at random locations throughout the city, attacking and killing any people who dared to oppose them. Unfortunately those who died at the hands of these creatures died only to rise again a matter of hours later, as mutated creatures themselves! How? Well, you see, the residents weren't ever really killed, rather they were infected with a deadly virus known as the G-virus - capable of turning people into Zombies upon contact!

Unfortunately the zombie rate has well and truly gone through the roof by the time the main characters of the game (Leon and Claire) arrive on the scene. In a desperate attempt to seek safety, Leon and Claire hurry to the Police Station, to learn that nowhere is safe...

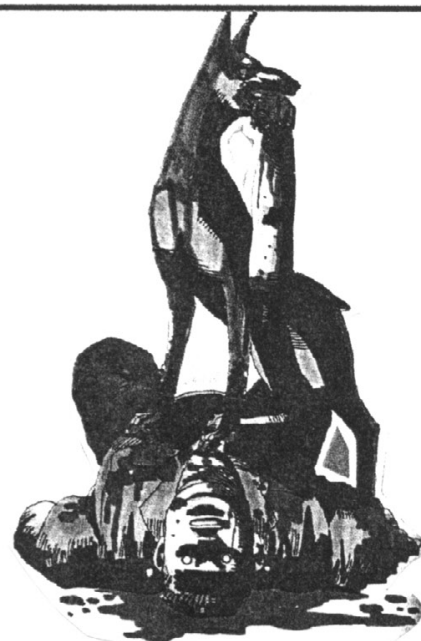
Even though Resident Evil 2 is an old game, it is still as scary as when it first appeared on the Playstation. Throughout the game you'll find a number of shock-scenes that really take you by surprise, such as when you first see a Licker burst through a magic window in an interrogation room. No matter how many times you play this game, you are bound to jump at least once. I know I have, or am I just a whimp? The reason why this game can be quite scary is because there is a set camera angle, which means that you can't avoid anything that might make you jump. For example, I found myself wandering down a narrow corridor, but the camera was facing towards some boarded up windows. As I ran past them, some zombie arms burst through and grabbed my character. Another tell-tail sign of when something scary is going to happen is when the very atmospheric music builds up, and then fades out, allowing for something to happen, before returning to normal.

To be honest, Resident Evil 2 isn't very difficult. This is because the game isn't very large, since most of the space on the cartridge has been taken up by the large number of FMV sequences and cut-scenes. What makes the game easier is that both of the main controllable characters practically take the same route through the game, save for a few areas which open up for one character and not for the other. There are also different items for Leon and Claire to pick up as well as slightly different enemy locations (i.e. Leon walks into a room, which is full of zombies munching on a corpse, whilst when Claire visits the same room, it's devoid of Zombies, but she bumps into Leon!).

Resident Evil 2 is divided up into four scenarios. In actual fact there are just two scenarios to choose from, but you have to play both scenarios with both characters, hence it feels more like four. Personally I prefer the second scenario. This is because the first scenario is a bit on the easy side. Whereas there is more happening in the second scenario, the real difference is that you start the game on the other side of the truck crash and have to proceed to the police station through the back way. By going this way you learn why there is a crashed Helicopter at the back of the building. Furthermore, in the second scenario you are stalked by the Tyrant (the boss in the first game). He has been sent in by Umbrella to clean up the mess the G-Virus has caused (read: kill zombies and lickers), but instead he decides that you look dead too and goes after you! He's also been sent to obtain a G-Virus sample. Put it this way - good ol' Tyrant is tamer this time round.

The artificial intelligence is what you would expect in a game of this genre. Most games nowadays have enemies retreating when the going gets tough, but a zombie is obviously not going to do this. They're going to keep walking towards you, determined to munch your brains. What impressed me most is that you can unload entire clips on certain zombies, and they'll still get up after playing dead. And what with there being a limited supply of ammunition in the game, putting all zombies and mutants down for good proves quite a task.

The N64 conversion of Resident Evil 2 features sixteen extra files to collect throughout the game. These files make the game rather annoying to people who only own a Nintendo 64. This is because these extra files link the plots of Resident Evil 2, Resident Evil, Resident Evil 3 and Resident Evil: Code Veronica together, and this makes it rather expensive for the player to know what these files are going on about as only by splashing the cash on a



The mother of all Survival Horror games - now on Nintendo 64.

Playstation and Dreamcast (and their Resident Evil games) can they be fully understood.

Resident Evil 2 uses the N64's Analogue Stick, however the controls of the game are terribly awkward. This is because the game is still programmed to use the D-pad rather than the analogue stick, so it's still UP = forwards, even if you're facing left.

Overall I think that Resident Evil 2 is an excellent addition to the Nintendo 64's range of quality titles. The main game may be short lived and can be completed within 20-30 hours, but it's still an experience worth having. However you can't say you've completed the game until you have received a grade A for both characters on both scenarios, and completed the Tofu (!) and 4th Survivor missions, yet even after you've done that, you'll go back to play the game again. After all, what's more satisfying than shooting a member of the undead until his/her arms drop off?

Text ©2000 Peter Jordan.

Layout ©2000 Andrew Mehta. Resident Evil 2 the game is ©2000 Capcom Co., Ltd.

Resident Evil 2 may be an ageing game, but it's definitely up there with the likes of Bond, Mario & Link.



Brill Blue



The name's Dark. Joanna Dark. Not licensed for a Bond game.

Nintendo and Rare have certainly been hyping this game up, that's for sure. You don't have to be a gaming fanatic to have noticed the countless sneak previews and inside teasers that have been fired at the fans for the past two years or so. But is it really as hot as Nintendo gurus 'Rare' claim?

Well, for starters it is based on the original engine (that is the programming framework) used to create the smash hit 'Goldeneye' game for the N64 many moons ago, and anyone familiar with the 007 title will immediately notice the similarities in terms of the general look and feel of the game.

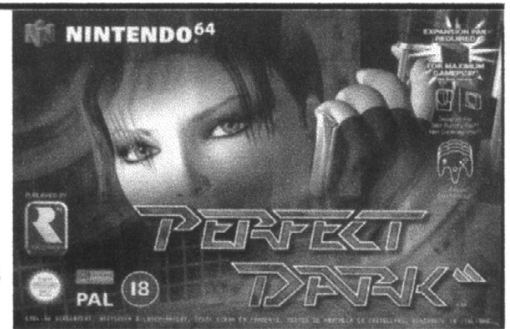
Even still, the graphics have been enhanced considerably; to the extent that the game requires the included memory expansion pack for your N64 in order to shoot your way through the single player missions.

There is some tasty artwork on the textures and some pretty skilled level design, coupled with an impressive armory of sampled speech and sound effects. I'm currently about ten or so missions in (on the hardest difficulty mode - as always) and I vouch for what seems to be building up to be a great story line. Your objectives are always very plot-based, which helps to bring the game to life by involving you, the player, in the story surrounding the missions and not just in the gun-swinging action. I was particularly engrossed by an early escapade involving a raid on an enemy building to steal a particular something (no give-aways here). The combination of weather effects, explosions and fast paced action really got me caught up in this one, and I found myself playing it a few times over. You start by trying to sneak around the guards (of all the silly ideas) but inevitably you'll get spotted by a security droid or something and be plunged into an ammo-sucking fire fight against a crack team of corporate peons. Such fights can be very reminiscent of Goldeneye (veterans may at this point remember holding up in the corner of a room with only one entrance and picking off the bad-guys one by one as they entered). To a certain extent, this sort of "camping" remains. The A.I. (Artificial Intelligence), however, is not as naive as in Goldeneye, and if a particular attack strategy proves unsuccessful, the lackeys try new tricks (such as ambushing) to get at your blood.

I was pleased to find that movement is much more fluid in Perfect Dark than it is in most other FPSs on the Nintendo 64 (such as Duke Nukem and Turok: Rage Wars which were to some degree spoiled by slow movement speeds). I was also surprised that Rare managed to fit so many speech samples and sound effects on the cartridge, along with all the detailed graphical data. I find all too often that games are released with messy or un-finished looking graphics (Body Harvest was a prime example of this - a game with

exceptional gameplay spoiled only by it's limited graphics set), and that conversations are confined to text boxes. However, Rare seem to have done a fine job with Perfect Dark, and the audio's even comparable with what I listen to on my souped up P.C.! Even so, whilst we all know Rare's reputation for outstanding MIDI, the musical tracks in Perfect Dark aren't quite up to their usual standard, and whilst good, can get a little repetitive after a while. The tracks are definitely a mark above the average, but not a prime example of Rare's capability in the realms of rhythm.

Despite the impressive appearance, smooth gameplay and involving plot, the most engrossing aspect of this game has to be its tasty-as-you-like weaponry. Perfect Dark keeps many of the old guns of Goldeneye under different names, but also adds a truck load of new and improved toys, many of which have clearly been contributed by our good friend Elvis (play the game - you'll understand). The walter PPK (or PP7 as Goldeneye had it) is now the Falcon 2, a jolly little piece of work with a meaty bullet sound and high accuracy. Fan favourites such as the RCP90 and AR33, have returned upgraded to RCP150 and AR66, each gun boasting a secondary fire option which'll double your fun in any killing spree. In fact, there seems to be no end to innovation with some of these weapons. At one end of the spectrum, you have the Laptop gun - a high velocity machine gun, conveniently shaped as a laptop computer. When you want to cause some havoc, simply press the button and paint the walls red! This one offers the groovy secondary fire option of mounting it on the wall as a sentry gun and watching the enemy come like lambs to the slaughter. At the other end, we have the unique 'Farsight XP120', which in all my gaming days, I have never seen a gun quite like. Instead of finding your enemies, then blasting them in the conventional way, the Farsight will do it all for you. Simply hold down the target button ('R') and the sight will zoom through the walls with a 60s-style colour scheme, locate and lock onto the nearest bad-ass, and wait for your command to shoot, allowing you to kill him from the other side of the level through about 50 metres of concrete. This gun unbalanced multiplayer a little though, as Jazz and Swag found out the other evening when I got to it first and spent the next ten minutes picking them off as they respawned, rushing frantically to get a gun, then get me with it. I'm not sure how much was down to the gun's bias or the simple lack of gaming aptitude sported by my associates (nice long words, total twiddle, I remember no such event. Jazz). We also enjoy shooting the weapons out of guards' hands and watching them beg for mercy, as well as creeping up behind an unsuspecting chap and blasting him in the head at point blank with a high velocity shotgun. The impact detection is fantastic. Shoot someone in the head, and it'll satisfyingly snap backwards or forwards, spraying his brains all over the wall. Unload



your clip into a guy's kneecaps, and watch him crawl around for a while before bleeding to death.

Perfect Dark does have its share of downers though. There are some bugs, particularly with grenades (sometimes you're not able to pick them up, or else you'll throw them in one direction, and the explosion'll happen a mile off) and also, occasionally a vital objective item will go missing through a wall while you're pushing it(!). The A.I. , although enhanced considerably since its James Bond days, can still be a bit stupid at times - still, stick the game on Perfect Agent difficulty first time round (like me), and you won't have the time to notice it.

All in all, this is most definitely the best FPS on the Nintendo 64, yet it still doesn't beat the fun factor of playing Super Smash Brothers with a group of friends. If you're one of those people who loved Goldeneye, then this'll make your day. If you feel you can't cope with things being rocketed, blown up, blasted, hacked or jumped on, then stick to Yoshi's Story and go home, otherwise this is a must for any N64 owner willing to pay the asking price. (The expansion pack is included in all packages that I have seen, although for those who already own a pack, there are some places which sell the game on its own).

This game gets a "Groovy Green" in my book. I'd award it a "Brilliant Blue" were it not for my close affiliation with P.C.s. I see a lot of first person shooter games, and by far the best technical games are on the P.C. , and that does mean I have to be tight-fisted with my awards. So there.

Text ©2000 Paul Golf. Layout ©2000 Andrew Mehta. Perfect Dark is © 2000 Rare Ltd.

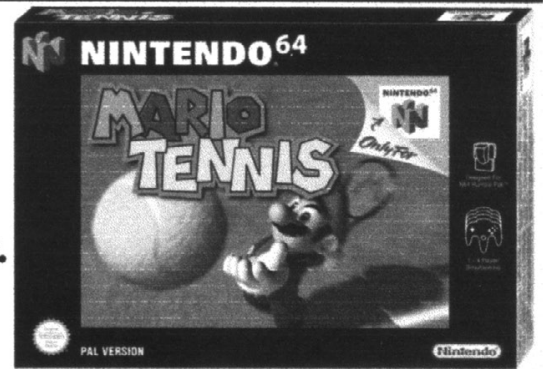
This game surpasses all my expectations for a console FPS, and has kept me going with some solid gameplay, and a graphical finesse that any console should be proud of.



Groovy Green.



Have you all gone mad?" exclaimed Andrew to United Games contributors Dave and Ben#2. "Yep. Totally raving bonkers..." confirmed Ben#2, also known as Swag. "Indeed," continued Dave a.k.a Sefhiroth "and it's all over a Tennis Game. Mario Tennis. We're mad for it!" "Hmm...Robinson's Special R....." said Andrew, off to get a drink.



What is it with tennis games?

Two or four guys/gals hitting a ball backwards and forwards. Sounds pretty plain. So why do we always say "One more try!" until we pass out? It's because it's simple. And simple equals addictive, which is exactly what this game is - addictive. Unless you have a pet hate for tennis, you WILL like this game.

I picked up the controller, jumped into a multi-player game with some friends and didn't have a clue what I was doing. Button smashing started and the fun began. This game's pick-up-and-play quality is a large plus point that few games contain. You don't have to bore yourself with a manual before playing, just simply pick up the pad and you're away!

Of course, there is more to it. Advanced techniques can be learnt. Super Smash Hits are just one way in which the game can be spiced up a little. Special combinations of buttons also yield different types of swings which

cause the ball to vary in speed, height, distance and even colour, and if ever you should get bored of the game, then you can simply change the game mode. For besides normal Tennis, there is also the highly addictive Ring Shot Mode. This mode sees you and your opponent battle it out to score points by hitting the tennis ball through rings which randomly appear across the tennis court. When either you or your opponent get the ball past the other player, rather than getting the normal score, you get awarded how ever many rings were totalled. Then the ring kitty is reset to zero and you're off again. This mode makes for a fine multi-player game that will have either you or one of your friends screaming "Yessss! Hah!" whilst the other one screams: "Nooooo!!".

Multi-player is not this game's only plus point, though. The single player is just as addictive - trust me. With varying levels of AI difficulty, you can have a fun game that is not too easy and not ludicrously difficult. You also earn more players as you battle through the single player mode. So, when its all

added up, the single player mode is as rewarding as it is fun, and when you back that up with the fact that the multi-player mode supports up to four players (all against all or else in teams) and also take into consideration all the various modes of play, PLUS your favourite Nintendo characters back to claim their rightful fame, what you have is the recipe for a top computer game. All Nintendo had to do was stir and bake. Served chilled (pun), this game will last you for all time. I've still yet to get bored of this title. The only problem with the single player mode is that you tend to end up shouting at your N64 when playing some of the harder AI players. Just try to remember - they aren't real, okay?

All in all, this game is fantastic. Definitely one to buy. Its pick up and play value ensures you'll be enjoying it from the moment you get it home. The single player rewards will have you playing more and more just to earn the extra gear and learn the advanced techniques as you go along, while the multi-player mode will have you playing it for months or even years after purchase. Terrific value for money!

Review Text ©2001 David Burford. Second Opinion Contributed by Ben#2 / SWAG ©2001. Layout ©2001 Andrew Mehta. Mario Tennis is ©2000 Nintendo Co, Ltd.



Ben#2's Second Opinion:

It's a phrase which is almost as worn out as your Dad's old smelly socks, but Mario Tennis really is the best console tennis game to have ever come out on any system. Designed and developed by the same people who gave us Mario Golf (Camelot), this is essentially an update of the all-time SNES classic Super Smash Tennis, but with all of your favourite Mario characters including Mario, Baby Mario, Luigi, Peach, Toad, Yoshi, Boo, Wario, Paratrooper, Bowser and a couple of new additions to the gang.

For the first time we also get to see Wario's evil looking cousin Waluigi in action. The animation on all of the characters is simply superb as they take lob shots, power shots, wide shots, smash shots, slice shots and

volley shots during frantic back-and-forth-over-the-net action. At first you might be forgiven for thinking that Mario Tennis is a little on the easy side. However - get to Star Cup in Championship mode and you'll soon understand that it has far more depth than you first thought. In order to beat the computer AI at this difficulty level you will need to engage in some real tactical game playing!

Each set of characters (based on type) come with a different strategy for winning, and it's determining their strengths and weaknesses that will allow you to progress. With such a wide range of characters, gameplay modes and courts, a superb multi-player mode and simplistic controls (which are easy to learn yet difficult to master), Mario Tennis will keep you going for months.

"A recommended purchase - Buy it!"

~ Ben#2 ~

"Simply put, Brill Blue."

~ Dave ~



Brill Blue



sequel from Nintendo is a rare thing - but when one arrives, it's truly beautiful. Here's the proof...!

Nintendo must have thought it a waste to develop such a revolutionary game engine for use in "The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time" (released in 1998) and then never use it again. Maybe that's why Majora's Mask came to be. It's not just a lazily-produced "more of the same"-type add-on sequel to Ocarina of Time, however. It's a proper Zelda game in its own right, and, many might say, the highest point of the series so far.

The basic gameplay mechanics are the same as seen in Ocarina of Time. Players familiar with the title will be at home with Majora's Mask in no time at all - but newbies may experience some difficulty. That's as there is no obligatory training mode explaining the nuances of combat, the control system, or "Z Targeting" (a method used to "lock onto" objects, useful in combat, communication and exploration). This seems like some kind of terrible oversight from Nintendo, but, with effort and frequent consultation with the manual, it is possible for new players to get to grips with the system. Even so, this is an important warning to make.

The rewards for finally earning the control system, however, are great. Zelda: Majora's Mask takes place in an almost bewilderingly huge and fully explorable, graphically rich world - the land of Termina. Hear the sea lapping in the distance? You can gallop there on a horse and visit the Zora people, in the ocean. See the swamp? You can take a boat cruise through it, snapping photos, and you can visit the Deku Scrub palace - where they're keeping a monkey, accused of treason, captive. Whatever you dream of doing, you can do, in the world of Termina.

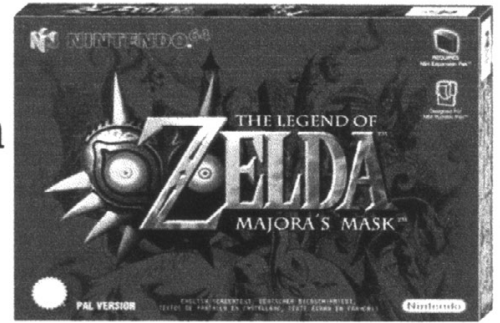
Majora's Mask places much more of an emphasis on exploration that its predecessor did. You'll spend far more time meeting and helping characters, than you will completing puzzle filled, baddy-laden dungeons. Afterall, the game only features four dungeons, yet the world outside of the dungeons is huge - providing much scope for exploration! The fact that game is more exploration based than dungeon based is no bad thing. As a videogamer who enjoys exploration and meeting new characters,

I've found Majora's Mask to be a joy to play, but the game also retains appeal to those who get a kick out of solving awesome puzzles and mastering combat systems; For the puzzles in Majora's dungeons are truly ingenious - shooting arrows at stalagmites to crack open ice platforms, for instance. Likewise, the boss characters are incredible - and the improved Ocarina of Time engine means that huge numbers of smaller enemies are able to attack you all at once - meaning you'll have to be great at combat to do well.

The Dungeons give the game real meat, whilst the explorational elements give the game its depth. Adding to the depth of play is a time factor. You have 72 hours to save the world, with one diageitic hour correlating to a minute in real life (see over page for more info on this). As time flows, characters travel about the world, and their personalities change as armageddon draws ever closer. For example, the postmaster goes about his duties throughout Clock Town, running to and fro between postboxes as you play, and yet, hours before amageddon, you'll find him sobbing in his house, due to his knowledge of his world's impending doom. Some black-market shops only open at night and some charcters are nocturnal. The time angle gives the game depth - and an emotional angle too. You'll become involved with characters, as you see their lives unfold before you. One of the major aims in the game is to complete the Bomber's Notebook by helping out every character with a problem - for example, you will care that the Anji, the Inn Girl, has been jilted, and so you need to persuade her fiancée to re-consider.

Majora's Mask is therefore a truly involving game - through the explorational angle, and the emotional angle, you'll feel like you are a part of Termina - and that's what makes the game so special. The dungeons are truly ingenious also, and each represents the very best that today's videogames have to offer - they are brilliantly designed and thought out. But the game is not without some critical flaws.

The main grumble is with the saving system (see "Time Management"



It's not a princess you're saving this time - it's an entire world!

section over page). It simply does not work as well as it should. Okay, so it makes saving an intellectual challenge, which is a nice idea, but it quickly becomes frustrating. It is repetitive. To do well in the game (especially when in the dungeons), you'll need to play in chunks of an hour and a half or more. Any less and you'll be going over, over and over old ground - which quickly becomes very frustrating. I don't know how many people could, or would be willing, to play games for an hour and a half or more at a time. And, if you play for any less, the repetition really will frustrate you.

My other gripes are directed towards the control system. There needs to be a training system - and the control system itself needs to be tweaked in some way. Controlling Goron Link proves tricky, yet when you come to take control of Zora Link, things soon go from tricky to frustratingly fiddly. Majora's Mask is already frustrating at times and these control issues only serve to heighten the amount of frustration evident in the game.

Even so, Majora's Mask is unreservedly brilliant. It is involving, deep, ingenious and graphically huge - it'll take you over 50 hours to see everything it has to offer. It is also truly emotional - you will begin to care about the characters in it. And that emotional angle is something that, or course, all games of today should be aspiring to provide.

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**Unreservedly
Brilliant!**



Brill Blue

The heart of the game:-

Skull Kid has always had an aptitude for mischief, and was befriended by Tatli, and her brother Tael (both faeries), on one stormy afternoon in Termina. Skull Kid always liked to play jokes, and when the mysterious Mask seller came past, he stole a mask from his bag - for a laugh like. This mask was the Majora's Mask - used by ancient tribespeople in hexing rituals, and, consequentially, it was evil.

When Skull Kid donned the mask, he too became evil. He lured Link into the parallel world of Termina by kidnapping Link's horse (and best friend), Epona. When Link tried to follow, Skull Kid turned him into a Deku Scrub and left him stranded in Termina - but Tael, one of the two faeries, befriended Link, and with the help of the Mask seller, Link managed to regain his original form - and his Ocarina - the Ocarina of Time.

When Link plays the Ocarina, he can travel back through time. And that's a good thing, as he needs all the time he can get to save the world of Termina. That's as Skull Kid has performed an incantation to force the moon to fall to the earth, destroying everything, in three days time. It's up to Link to prevent this Armageddon.



Time management:-

Link has 72 hours to save Termina - but hours in Termina seem to pass in minutes, our time! Time flows continually throughout the game, so while you play, morning becomes afternoon, the sun sets and it becomes evening, and then night draws in - but remember(!) there are only three days until the impact of the moon! However you can, at any point (as long as you possess the Ocarina of Time) play the "Song of Time", and warp back to the beginning of day one. All the major stuff which you've accomplished is saved but smaller things - like the number of rupees (the main currency) you've collected, puzzles completed, keys found, conversations had, etc, aren't saved. Of course, this flouts the laws of time totally and is really confusing if you stop and think about it.



More positively, you can now play the "Song of Soaring" on the Ocarina to warp to any area you've visited, instantly - meaning that some of the frustration of the ground-hog-day-esque saving system is eased. But the game still becomes frustrating through the saving structure.

The system of time is also quite clever as characters' personalities and actions change according to the time of day, or depending on how close they are to Armageddon. So, you can only go to certain shops at night, you can only pluck mushrooms in the morning, and, you'll only find two gymnasts dancing in East Clock Town at night of the first day...

But, should you ever run out of time, at the end of the night on the third day, the moon will crash into the earth.. and as the music chimes, and a huge fireball falls towards the land, you'll feel very saddened at the imminent doom of the land... pitying all the characters that live in it (most of whom you've met and got to know).

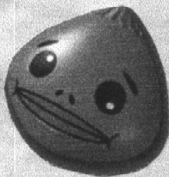
The Masks:-

Masks are at the heart of the game, and, by donning them, Link gains the power needed to accomplish certain tasks or talk to certain people. Three of the main masks bestow Link the power of other characters, and all the other masks can be used to solve puzzles - and to please others.



THE DEKU MASK:

The Deku mask, when worn, turns Link into a cute Deku Scrub. Small and nippy, the Deku Scrub can hop across water, launch himself from the air via Deku Flowers, and can, er, blow lethal snot bubbles through his nose. Tasty. At the start of the game, Link is imprisoned as a Deku Scrub, and the first major task is to escape this body by finding the Ocarina of Time.



THE GORON MASK:

When Link dons the Goron mask, which contains the spirit of a dead Goron leader, he becomes one of these burly-yet-cute yeti-like characters. Brilliantly, as a Goron, Link can curl up into a ball and roll really fast, which is a truly exhilarating experience - especially when he has to face a certain boss...



THE ZORA MASK:

Wearing the Zora mask will turn Link into a Zora "Merman". As well as being able to swim and dive to great depths, Link can utilize awesome electric and boomerang attacks in this form, which despite proving very fiddly to control, have devastating effects!

But not all the Masks Link comes across turn him into other characters. Donning the "Mask of the Great Fairy" sees hidden faeries automatically fly up to him. Cool. Rather more humorously, another mask - one of "Keaton" (i.e. Pikachu), once worn, sees Link receive instant appreciation from all the kids - but if Link wears it in the presence of adults they're not so impressed. When wearing certain masks, people will respond to you in different ways, and the powers bestowed with each mask are essential in the completion of certain tasks - and so, therefore, masks are the key to the ultimate completion of the game.

The characters:-

The characters in the game often have plenty to say, (conversation being triggered by a quick tap of the "A" button when you're near to a character) and, thankfully, most of what they have to say is in well written English [no dodgy translations here then. E.d.]. What's unique about conversing with the in-game characters, however, is that the amount of information they give you may vary depending on what mask you're wearing when you speak to them. Also, each character has a number of special guttural noises which they make whilst speaking to you. Some are humorous, some are hilarious, some are truly camp, and others are vaguely sexual (someone in another room listening to Honey & Darling's vocal gestures might assume that they're doing more than just having a chat with you! Eee gad!). Still, it's a real joy to speak to everyone and gather all the clues they have to offer!

Early on in the game, you'll earn the Bomber's Notebook and in it you should record the details of any troubled person that you might meet. The Bomber's Notebook will then tell you when it's a good time to go and speak to them again. At these recommended times, they might give you an item, something might happen, or someone else might come and talk to them. By using the Bomber's Notebook effectively to help you solve all the problems of the characters you meet, you'll collect many items which you'll find useful on your quest - and you'll meet many new friends, too.





Westwood's new release, **Red Alert 2**, comes as the fourth instalment in the ground-breaking **Command & Conquer** series. Unlike **Tiberium Sun** (the sequel to **C&C**), **RA2** is intended as sequel to the smash hit **Red Alert**....

Once again you're given the choice to play as either the brutal Soviets or the law abiding Allies who are fighting for freedom (hmm...do I sense Western bias here? E.d.). The game is centred around the Soviet invasion of the United States, where the evil dictator General Romanov, and his mind-controlling sidekick Yuri, plan to command and conquer all.

For fans of the original this is a must have and without doubt the best RTS around making up for the disappointing **Tiberium Sun**. However, whilst this may be the latest instalment in the series very little has changed and the game maintains a familiar feel to it. The voxel engine used in **TS** has been refined allowing for better looking battlefields, which have also been made more interactive. You can now garrison civilian buildings by sending your troops into them, thus allowing you to fire at enemies unharmed. There are also small additions such as police cars roaming around streets, outdoor cinemas and recognisable landmarks such as the Statue of Liberty all of which help to create a more realistic atmosphere.

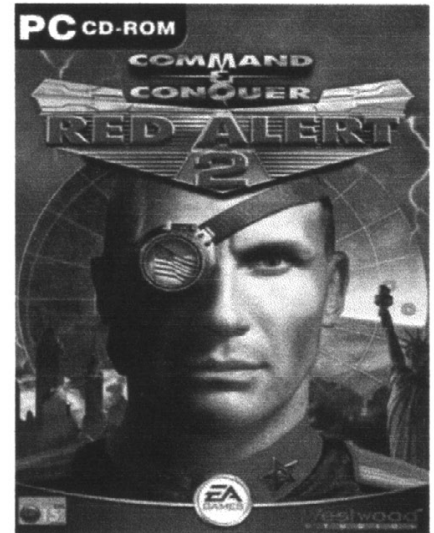
Of course there are many new units to play around with, such as the **Mirage Tank**, which has the ability to disguise itself as a tree or the **Soviet Kirov** airship, which carries heavy payloads of destructive bombs and is able to withstand obscene amounts of damage. Some units from the original also remain,

but most notable is the inclusion of dolphins and squids to the player's naval arsenal.

There are many new exciting structures, which help keep the balance of the game on a knife-edge. Structures such as the **Allied Weather Machine** have the ability to cause mass destruction over a large area by producing a storm over an area of your choice. However the Soviets may reply with a devastating nuclear warhead, eradicating all in its blast radius. Even after the bomb hits you are not safe as the nuclear fall-out continues to destroy infantry and damage structures for a short time afterwards.

All in all, Westwood has finally succeeded in producing two very balanced sides in which anything can happen with the click of a mouse.

Where the game really excels is the superb multiplayer mode, in which epic battles can be fought against friend or foe. As usual there is the skirmish mode allowing you to get some practice should you need it. But what makes the game really stand out is the inclusion of country specific units giving certain advantages to that particular nation. For example if you prefer playing as the Soviets you can choose between **Russia**, **Korea**, **Cuba**, **Libya** or **Iraq**. Each have their own unique unit, such as the **Korean Black Eagle Fighter Jet** or the **Cuban Terrorist**. Each unique unit makes selecting



Now there's more to command and conquer. Fans should lap it up, and non-fans give it a chance, so argues Martin. It may be more of the same action, but it offers more than its predecessors.

your side that little more difficult and careful planning is necessary when considering the opposition.

Without a doubt **Red Alert 2** is the best out of all the **C&C** series and will provide endless hours of play. However it is fair to say that this isn't a dramatic technological advance in gaming, but rather a well polished version of the most successful RTS game ever.

Text ©2000 Martin Haracz. Layout ©2001 Andrew Mehta. "Command and Conquer: Red Alert 2" the game is ©Westwood Studios. Published by Electronic Arts.

For those who've experienced the game before this is a must have, for those who haven't, go buy it now and I assure you, you wont regret it!.



Brill Blue



Brand New Metal Discovered To Be Just Iron With Some Colourful Paint On It!"

If you don't have a long and interesting heritage, a rich and diverse background filled with exotic people, places and names - make one up. The Windsor family did. Mechwarrior also did, although, to its credit, it has never pretended that its made-up history (which consists of future events, anyway) is real. Mechwarrior games take place far into the future, using futuristic technology - but its time-lines and stories are written like medieval fantasy, with clans, wolves and tunics no less.

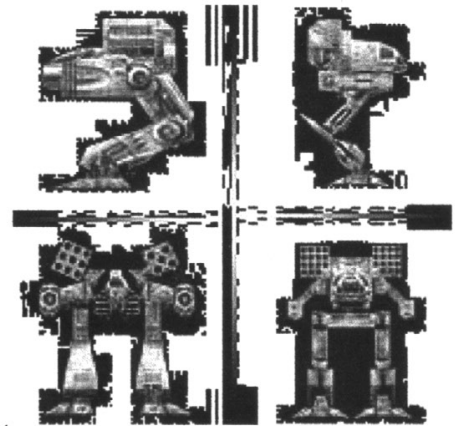
Thumping around the countryside in a giant robotic exo-skeleton is no doubt the dream of many an earth inhabitant. For to a human, a tank is a formidable miniature fortress, as solid as a mountain and about as hard to destroy as one too. To a battlemech, however, a tank is merely a pesky little remote-controlled car - easily trod on. But this is, in a way, the problem that plagues all battlemech games. It's all about perspective. Although you are allegedly in this huge war machine, it doesn't feel like you are towering over the landscape. You don't feel like a mighty behemoth. And this is because pretty much everything else you fight is also a mighty behemoth. You never really interact with anything much smaller than yourself, except the occasional doomed platoon of tanks. It would be a lot more exciting if the mechs were just a small part of the army, and the bulk of it was infantry and tanks, standing at least a hope in hell of damaging you (which they currently do not).

Nevertheless, Mechwarrior 3 does look far prettier than any of its predecessors, even if the landscapes are plain and sparsely decorated. Hey(!), at least they have texture maps now. The battlemechs themselves are also more elaborate than before, with more detailed texturing and models, and more variety in your mech loadout and weapon choice. But . . . it's not enough. Although technically I should compare Mech3 with its brothers within the genre (Starsiege, Shogo: MAD) inevitable comparisons arise between these and first person-perspective shoot-'em-ups. FPSs look nicer. FPSs have more incidental details and scenery. Maybe, you might argue, robotic exo-skeleton games don't have these details because, technically, they're all too small. Balls. The cities are composed of huge blocks with simple

window texture maps and the rolling hills and cliffs have about two polygons each. (So memorable details are pretty sparse in this game then? E.d.) Well, not exactly, maybe it's not all that bad. One area, towards the start of the game, sees you trample your way through a fishing village. There are even little people running around! (Groovy. E.d.). Yes, however, throughout the rest of the game you're fighting in boring, uninteresting terrain with hardly any detail. (Oh dear. E.d.). I'm sorry, but I'm totally underwhelmed.

Still, I would be doing the game a grave injustice if I didn't say it was fun to play. Because it is. Customising your mech loadout, trying different configurations and playing with the weapon balances all prove very rewarding. Like a football manager, you try out different strategies, give your lance-mates different mechs and weapons, add or remove heatsinks and armour, try to balance weight, heat generation, long and short range ability and weapon power before entering the fight to test out your new arrangement to see how it works. Some levels have more open space than others, so you need to adjust in favour of ranged weapons. Other levels require you to fight at close ranges, and still others feature a mix - so you need to be prepared for all eventualities. You can also, to a limited extent, use the terrain to your favour. Missile craters and such like can be utilised in a sort of 'hull down' position, and cliffs and buildings can be ducked behind to avoid incoming missiles.

The AI could have used some mental stimulation, though. Your lance-mates cannot be trusted to defend your mobile field base - in fact, they suck. They can't be trusted to do anything. They will stand there, allowing themselves to be shot if they have not specifically been told to go take out the target. In lieu of any other orders, they will follow you around, taking pot-shots at any targets of opportunity that come into range. But they won't go roving on their own. Nor can you split them into groups and give these groups other orders. The mechanism for ordering them about is clunky and unintuitive. Mechwarrior 2 had an excellent variety of orders, and the ordering system - while not great - was still better than this one. A game like this really needs a system like the old Gunship 2000 one, whereby you could actually tell your wingmen to go and



complete mission objectives for you. Hell, even a simple "Search and Destroy" option would have been nice. Nope, all you have is, "Follow me", "Attack My Target", "Defend My Target", and "Repair at MFB." They're too stupid to peel away if they are taking critical damage, and the MFB must be re-deployed manually after every repair.

The enemy fares little better. It makes no attempt to concert attacks and the scripting is simple and easy to bend to your own will. I don't seem to recall enemy mechs even making use of torso twisting. They seldom act as a group (and if they do, it's just because, by coincidence, they are attacking the same target). Improved AI to overcome these problems isn't too much to ask, and such requirements have been met in the past - so why should we put up with such niggles now? We shouldn't. Mechwarrior 3 is a fun game, but it is not worth the price and it should and could have been a great deal better. Bah.

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**Fun but ultimately
pointless. If it was
erased from time,
nobody would really
miss it.**



Average Grey.



I s it a bird? Is it a plane? No. It's a crossbreed!

So what exactly am I barking on about with all this talk of crossbreeds? Well, you see BattleZone 2 comes across as an amalgamation of the First Person Shooter (FPS) and Real Time Strategy (RTS) genres. But the question remains - is BattleZone 2 a horrifying mutant of a crossbreed, or a wonder born of the forging flames we call creativity? Read on...read on....

The basic premise/concept of the game has been taken from the old, old tank game, BattleZone (We're talking Retro Games here folks!). A couple of years ago this game was given a lovely 3D revamp, which I'll refer to from now on as BattleZone 1.

BattleZone 1 was a flying frenzy of tanks and guns, yet had a unique strategy element that managed to balance so well with the action. BattleZone 2 attempts to build on this great achievement, which it does manage to do to a certain extent.

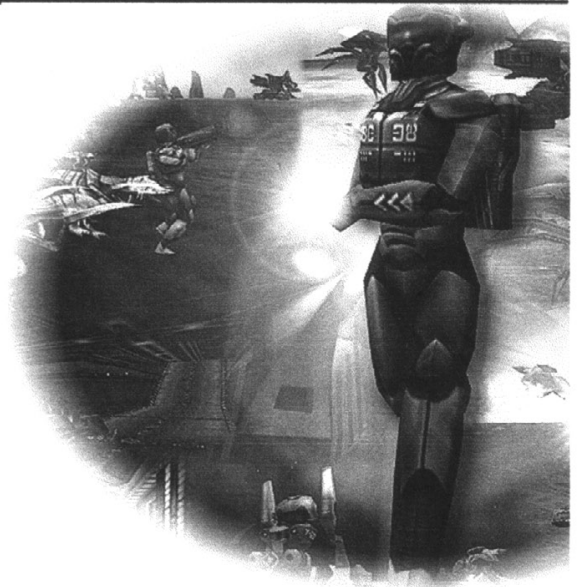
The game involves you, an officer in the ISDF, caught up in a struggle between Human and Scion. You can run around on foot, enter buildings, get into vehicles, plant bombs, command squads, construct bases.....a hefty amount of cool sounding stuff to do, don't you think? But does this sequel manage to keep the beautiful balance of action and strategy that the original game had? Compared to the last BattleZone game, the strategy element seems to have been toned down a bit with the action, for the most part, having been toned up.

However, this increase in action is not so much as to change the style of play, and there's plenty of appeal for both RTS fans and frag seekers. So, rather than coming down on one side of the fence, and saying it is not strategic enough, or involves too much thinking for straight frag seekers, I will say it still manages to offer something to fans of both qualities, and therefore should be enjoyed by both.

Graphically BattleZone 2 is really, really, really (etc.) good looking. Lovely water reflections, beautiful skies, luscious landscapes, majestic trees, scary monsters - it's all in there. And yes, I did say scary monsters. BattleZone 2 also includes fauna, which depending on its size will leave you alone until you are tank-less, and then try to munch you, or just try to munch you straight off! There's a good amount of variation in the graphics as well. Planets vary from rich jungles, to dusty deserts. From ice planets, to dark worlds of strange architecture. I can safely say that BattleZone 2 is the most beautiful game I have seen in recent times. You will require a 3D accelerator though, and it does run a bit slow on my PII 400 (64Mb RAM) P.C., with anything more than moderate detail levels.

Sound wise, if you have a sub-woofer, and neighbours, turn it down as the tank rumbles are plenty hefty (we like plenty hefty!). I have had many a request for me to turn the sound down from those in the room next door to me, even after I took my woofer off the wall :P. There are the usual morbid speeches at the start of every mission, which is a bit depressing, even if they're not half as bad as those in BattleZone 1. We also observe the appearance of little audio clips to supplement the briefing, which is nice. However the sound that occurs when your base is being attacked led me to have disturbing flashbacks to my days on the tills at the local supermarket. All in all, BattleZone 2 seems to introduce little new on the sound front, save for a few nice rumblings, which is a shame in my opinion.

Multiplayer can often be the undoing of a game, but in BattleZone 2 it proves a lot of fun. The strategy multi-player games seem to be the best, with the death match levels being the worst as they can be a bit too large. Overall, the multiplayer modes are pretty



good, but they do have their faults. Bases, are far, far too hard to kill, and often the multiplayer games can get boring if both sides play defensively, so, uh, don't.

Admittedly, this game has its problems. It seems to need a monster PC to run and the mouse can prove a little jumpy in sniper mode, making it hard to snipe. The A.I. could also be improved in my opinion, but perhaps I'm just being fussy. This game is good because it is fast paced and strategic. There are so many things to do and such a huge variety of attributes and styles that I don't have enough room to list them all in this review. BattleZone 2 is also worth buying if you have the original, as it is different enough to make it worth the investment, but retains enough likeness to satisfy BattleZone stalwarts.

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**If this game was a dog,
it would be a mongrel,
a large mongrel with
big teeth and large
pointy claws. Don't
mess with it.**



Brill Blue



Will has gone and done the unthinkable, and awarded a game a Red Hot!! Is Deus Ex REALLY that amazing? Read his review, and then head on over to the Take a Closer Look showcase for a more detailed analysis, complemented by some of the U.G. Team's own opinions.

Hands up if you pronounce Deus Ex as "Deuce ex."? Well, you shouldn't. It's pronounced "Day-us ex," and the term means "Of God," which could well be read as a description of the game, as the way the game plays - well, it seems almost a godsent to gamers. Furthermore, if God was to play any P.C. title - this would be the one he'd choose. He would have a system that could run it with no slowdown, which would only serve to make playing the game even more heavenly.

The whole planet is getting bored with first person shooters, even those of us with 19" (and up) monitors. They have a certain visceral, jump-in-and-shoot emphasis, but so do whores, and who thinks of lasting relationships with whores? (That's a great comparison Will. E.d.). The one-night-stand approach is exemplified by two of the most recent and successful shooters - namely Quake 3 and Unreal Tournament. Unlike Doom, which was structured to last for weeks, Q3 and UT focus on short, action packed sessions with no drawn out combat. You fire it up, you shoot things for a little while and then you get bored and do something else. Deus Ex takes the versatile Unreal Tournament engine and grows a completely different First Person Shooter out of it. It owes an awful lot to System Shock 2 in this respect, but it is a lot more than even System Shock 2 was. And System Shock 2 was phenomenal.

It is a true irony that John Romero took three years to use an existing engine and make an average FPS with 'some' RPG elements, which are implemented very crudely and do not affect the game in any large way and yet was still hyped long after interest had died out, while Warren Spector (Producer of this title) used a newer engine and took less time to make a game that is everything Daikatana was supposed to have been and, what is more, did not masturbate his own ego with self-congratulatory advertisements which, in the end, shot him in the foot.

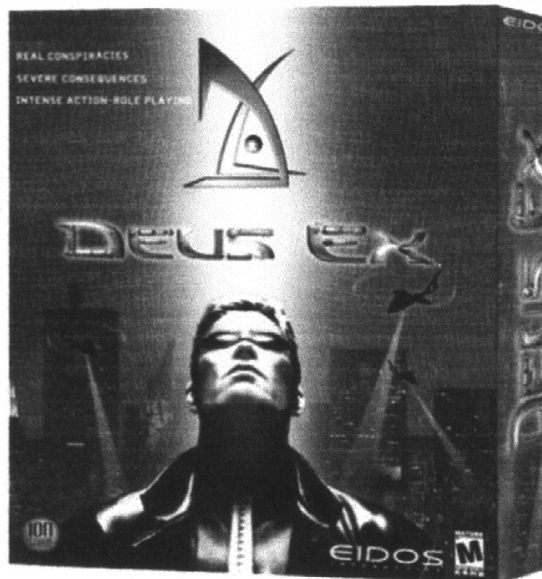
Deus Ex sees you step into the large combat boots of JC Denton, a stocky man with a gravely voice. He is one of the first of a new line of super-cops, modified with 'nano-augmentations' designed to increase physical prowess. The game starts off with the terrorist group NSF attacking the headquarters of UNATCO (the UN's anti terrorist arm) and JC has to stop them all alone, as a test of his new augmentations. Plot-wise, I really cannot say any more without spoiling it. It loops and weaves in a manner that parodies all the conspiracy theories you can think of, and yet

remains deeply convincing. A lot of thought has gone into it, and unlike System Shock 2, the damn box art doesn't spoil most of it! There is no 'big surprise' as such, but a series of changes that see your role radically alter as a series of extenuating factors are filtered in via cutscenes and character interaction.

Ahhh . . . character interaction.

Anybody remember the phrase, "Sure, let's team up. Didn't want to die alone anyway." Character interaction is a staple of the RPG genre. Creating other 'players' with different motives is very important for atmosphere, removing the sense of isolation prevalent in most first person shooters. It is always you against the odds, right from 'back in the day' when we were all determined to escape the evil clutches of the Nazis. The popularity of CTF and team deathmatch is testament to the human animal's desire to operate as part of a group. We do not like to exist in isolation. And, as we play games as a way of vicariously living a life more exciting than our own, it is a wise developer that tries to populate their game with believable NPCs (non-playable characters). This is the key facet of the RPG that has so far eluded the FPS. In the original System Shock, the rest of the crew were already dead by the time you got there. More or less the same is true of the sequel. It has previously been only true RPG games that have attempted to develop interesting characters to interact with, but Deus Ex has them by the score. In addition to plot-relevant characters there are plenty of miscellaneous punters milling the streets and alleyways who will all have something to say. If you are discrete you can listen to them having conversations with each other (although these are usually scripted, which makes quite a difference to Half-Life's impromptu guard-scientist arrangement: "It appears the containment system has completely failed." "Do you think they're still out there?" "You said that already." Actually, it wasn't all that bad).

Ever so often a game comes along that keeps me up until 3am. Total Annihilation did it, I'm fairly certain X-Wing did it, possibly C&C did as well. System Shock managed it, so did its sequel. Deus Ex can now be added to the hallowed halls of games I did not want to put down. When I wasn't playing it, I thought about playing it. I played almost solidly for more than a week. I calculate that I got at least thirty hours of play out of it on the first run-through, and I fully intend to play through it again - not only to try a different style of play, but also to



see what some of the different consequences to choices I made are. There are a myriad of opportunities to do different things - you might kill someone, or you might run an errand for them, so the scope for continual replay is there. And while it is not as broad a choice as Westwood's seminal Blade Runner game (which has at least six endings, and storyline branches like a mangrove thicket) it still allows for multiple run-throughs.

Bluntly, Deus Ex is great. It is involving, challenging and innovative. It is fun and it is gripping. It is a game the likes of which have never been seen before, one that, at this present date, is almost flawless. It is a rare gem, a truly outstanding title that no mere words will be able to do justice to. It is crafted with skill and insight by experienced developers who obviously love the genres that they are working in, and requires utmost respect.

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Published by EIDOS INTERACTIVE.

I will say it once - you must buy this game. If you do not, you will be missing out on the finest experience that computer gaming currently has to offer.



Red Hot!!

DEUS EX



Character Building:

Remember how I said that Deus Ex featured a few traits of the RPG genre? Well one of the shared traits is that of character building. There are two different ways in which you can "upgrade" yourself, so to speak.

Method One:

Simply progress through the game, visiting important locations and talking to important people. This earns you "Skill points" which, when you have enough, can be redeemed for improvements in certain skills - lock-picking, electronics, weaponry skills and so on. You can also earn yourself extra points by exploring, by completing sub-missions and by taking varying routes. More often than not a subtle approach to solving a problem will be rewarded with more points than a blast-everything-in-sight approach.

Method Two:

The other way to improve is by finding nano-augmentation capsules. These are dotted sporadically throughout the game and usually require some effort to take hold of. Once in your possession you can add certain augmentations to your character - bullet-proof skin, cloaking, the ability to see through walls, etc. These augs need to be switched on and off, however, and using them will drain your bioelectric energy. In addition there are a limited number of spaces for these augmentations, so you must pick and choose which you think will suit your method of play best. At their lowest levels most of the augmentations have limited usefulness, but they can be upgraded via upgrade canisters (which are like gold dust). The pursuit of nano-assets is almost entirely up to you. Rarely will they be handed to you on a plate, you must explore and assimilate information from NPCs to find them.



How fast can you run?

The readme file says to expect Unreal Tournament-like performance. Don't believe it. Deus Ex requires an utter beast of a system. My Cel500 at 563 TNT2U 192Mb has no problem with UT at 800x600 with 32 bit colour. Deus Ex at 640x480 at 16 bit slows it to a crawl when there is more than two people on screen, especially if they are shooting at me. This means it is not advisable to get into big fights on a slow system, as the frame rate becomes dire. But (and this is important) - it is worth it.



Facing the enemy :

Fair Odds ?

JC Denton is not a walking tank. A couple of bullet hits will kill him. A single sniper round to the head will drop him, a nearby explosion will splat him, fast-moving pieces of machinery will effectively end his existence. By comparison the bad guys are pretty tough. Usually it will require more than one shotgun pellet to kill them, or at least a good upper-body knifing. That is, unless you can take them by surprise.

The element of surprise!

If the bad guys are unaware of your presence they will be a lot easier to kill - it's the difference between trying to puncture body armour and slicing someone's throat. How to take them by surprise? Ahh, another game in itself (Thief, actually). Use shadows. Don't make noise when you move (by either moving slowly or by using certain augmentations). Be accurate. I am not sure how many damage locations there are for characters, but they can usually take a lot more damage to the torso than the head.

Artificial Intelligence :

The enemy are not stupid. They will hear your footsteps and come to investigate, they will sound alarms to call reinforcements. Their attack patterns are perhaps a little uninspired, as they tend to stand and shoot - although they will try to retreat if you wound them badly enough. After you have 'triggered' them by making a noise or attempting to kill them, they will follow you and attempt to find you if you hide before eventually giving up and returning to their patrol route (usually with some phrase like, "He's miles from here by now," or, "They say this guy can just disappear, when he wants to.") Their return to patrol routes has been criticised as being unrealistic, but it is necessary from a gaming point of view. If they did not give up eventually, it would be impossible to escape a noisy and damaging firefight.

Red Hot or Brill Blue ?

The Standard :

Here at United Games we like to thoroughly interrogate reviewers who use the scared Red Hot. A colour symbol that is used not to recommend people buy a game, but to tell them that they MUST buy a game. I've a P.C. myself, yet I've no Deus Ex, so if Will's review is to be taken seriously, I should, despite not really liking the FPS genre, sacrifice some money and purchase this supposedly amazing game, which is guaranteed to captivate me. Sorry, Will, I just don't buy it. What's so great about it?

"The key reason for Deus Ex's success," commented Will " is the way it seamlessly merges genres that might have been considered incompatible. It takes the very best of both RPG and FPS games and creates a hybrid superior to anything that either genre, on their own, could manage. Role playing is never more immersive than when you see it from the eyes of your character, shooting things up is never more enjoyable than when you know you're doing it for a reason, for a goal more complex than 'Find red key - find red door'."

So the game's got depth? While that may be something new for the FPS genre, it's nothing new in general. I've got Shenmue downstairs, and a Saturn with Panzer Dragoon Saga. Both have incredible depth. What makes the depth in Deus Ex any more special?

"The total is more than the sum of its parts." continued Will " When you enter the world of Deus Ex, you can more or less effectively shut out the reality around you and become submerged in this strange, exotic fantasy. And as all video games are, in the final analysis, only about escapism, any game which excels at this should be in any gamer's collection, regardless of their preferred genre. Any game that makes you completely forget the time, the date, your job and your family - for days on end - must surely be at the pinnacle of the gaming experience. No matter how much your reality might suck, nothing is going to help you forget about it like Deus Ex. It's like some kind of wonderful drug."

So the game's appeal lies mainly in the immersive aspect. Yet does it immerse all who play it? Mark still thinks Deus Ex is great, but admits: "I'd have given it a Blue, personally." Even still, he says he recognises how it could be a Red Hot: "I can see why Will would give it a Red and I can go with that." he said "My room-mate, for instance, was totally obsessed with the game for a month, trying out all the different augmentations, etc. He loved it!" We quizzed Mark on why he wasn't quite as captivated as Will had been:

"Well, it's down to - A) my short attention span, B) The fact that I lost interest in the storyline when it annoyed me [conspiracy stuff annoys me sometimes - it's a matter of taste I guess], and C) the physics or how it moved...I don't know...something didn't seem quite right."

So perhaps Deus Ex is immersive for those who can spare the time to be immersed? People with patience. Yet Mark also goes onto claim that the freedom of the game means this isn't necessarily the case:

"The game itself requires a little patience if your attention span, like mine, is roughly the size of a hamster's. However, if you want quick thrills you can always just say, fudge morality and keeping casualties low, and get out a huge gun and go wading in on easy mode or something. Although you'll die a lot more, there'll be a lot more happenin' and jumpin' than when doing all that stealth business =)." Our P.C. Co-ordinator, Jazz agrees:

"It's only slow if you're being stealthy and crouching. If you're the trigger happy type feel free to stand, run and blow people away - if you think you can keep the ammo!"

He goes onto praise the game's freedom: "You're always given different ways to do things, orders to do them in, and basically you can normally always play the way you like to, and feel at home in being the character yourself...."

"Put it this way," he continues: "Shenmue was much more linear and what you do was less up to you than in Deus Ex, and that's saying something."

Jazz finishes by saying: "Bung in the cerebral exercise along with the movie-like plot to keep you curious and you'll really have a hard time putting this down, and if you do, you'll be thinking about different ways to do the next bit until you get back to playing it!"



The Dawn of the Dead" immediately springs to mind as you start playing Resident Evil 3, not just because of the multitude of the undead which immediately assault you, but because of the increased scale of the whole affair.

Those who have played the previous incarnations of Resident Evil and think they've seen it all before, will be pleasantly suprised to find a few new additions that enhance the overall gaming experience.

Where as in the first two Resident Evil games, the majority of the action took place within one or two buildings, the third installment of the series ups the ante somewhat by introducing more outdoor areas - namely city streets infested with all sorts of nasties.

Familiar settings remain for veterans of the series, with the player arriving at the local police station near the beginning of the game. This is also where we're first introduced to one of the nice new features of the game. In previous versions of Resi, there was a definite feeling of being rail-roaded into a particular course of action. Now while this linearity still unfortunately exists to a certain degree, there is now a new choice system within the game. As you arrive in front of the police station for the first time, a large monster arrives and generally causes you to spill any refreshments you have within your proximity. Suddenly the action pauses and two options appear; the action stays frozen just long enough for you to read the options and then it starts up again, forcing you to make the choice under the pressure of time. While this system still doesn't give you the freedom that some would like in an adventure game, it adds considerably to the experience.

Other nice new features include the ability to shoot objects in the scenery and have them effect the game in some way, and the long overdue ability to do 180° turns quickly. Anyone who's played any of the other Resident Evil games will know how annoying it is to turn a corner into a dark alley full of zombies and flail about wildly with the controller while your on-screen persona idly meanders around on the spot as you turn blue. Now however, a quick tap of backwards and run will have you perform a hasty 180°

turn so you can leg it to a safe distance before introducing them to "Mr Shotgun".

The main game system is very similar to the previous two versions, featuring pre-rendered backdrops with fixed camera-views. Whether this bothers you is a matter of taste. I personally preferred the nice polygons of Silent Hill with its spooky 'organic' camera movement, however some people prefer the finer detail of pre-rendered graphics. In this case, I guess "you pays your money and you takes your choice". One side affect of the pre-rendered graphics, however, has always been the loading speed. Now while once again there has been an improvement since the previous title, the familiar opening door sequence remains. This is another point which causes some debate between gamers. One group, which I have to say I agree with, feel that the doorway sequence, which appears while the game is loading in the next screen, seriously breaks up the flow of the game and detracts from the (admittedly brilliant) atmosphere. The other point of view being that it is barely noticeable after a while, and doesn't spoil the game at all. Again, it's up to you how much this sort of thing bothers you. The delays I experienced were generally between three to seven seconds and I have to say didn't bother me too much, although they can start to grate when you have to go a long way across the map.

A new system for the ammo allows you to use gun-powder and the ammo-tool to make your own types of ammo. The more powerful ammo needs more gun-powder to make, so everything becomes a trade-off between your various needs at different points in the game, and to a certain extent, your style of play.

At the end of the day it has to be said that Resident Evil 3 is a good game. However, if you're one of those people who disliked the previous versions then this probably wont be sufficiently different to win you over. The major gripe that people had (slow loading times) is still



The client wasn't pleased with his facial. Lawyers claim that even if the degredation of his face could be defended, the defense never had any right to overly mutate his right arm.

"It's just as good that I'm left handed!"

present but the adventuring elements are still as good, if not better, than previous versions.

If you're a fan of the series then you'll love Resi 3 - it has everything from the previous titles with some nice new touches which really improve the game. However, if you are not a fan, or if you're just looking for a first footing into survival horror, I would recomend Silent Hill, as for me it manages to retain a far higher level of both tension and fear.

Text ©2000 Tom. Layout ©2000 Andrew Mehta. Resident Evil 3 the game is ©2000 Capcom.

**"Creep softly, but carry a big gun."
If you're a fan of the RE series then you'll love it, otherwise you might be better off looking for a copy of Silent Hill, which I still think is a marvellous game.**



Groovy Green



Square's Vagrant Story has been much hyped, but is it really worthy of a "perfect" score?

I am the first to admit that I lack discretion when it comes to Squaresoft games. I would, in all probability, purchase a bucket of urine if Square's subtle, white and red logo were attached to it. But this game came with extra credibility: a perfect, 40/40 review score from the notoriously finicky Japanese gaming weekly, Famitsu (this was only the second time such a score was awarded to a PS game, the other being Metal Gear Solid). But can any game be perfect? Of course not, and Vagrant Story is by no means the closest game to perfection in existence.

The plot is superb. You take the role of Ashley Riot, a knight of Parliament who is sent to the local Duke's Manor to deal with a hostage situation. Pursuing the leader of the cult group responsible for the incident, Ashley shoots him through the heart... only to see him rise and escape. The rest of the game is largely concerned with the pursuit of this fellow, named Sydney, and uncovering the political truths behind the incident at the manor.

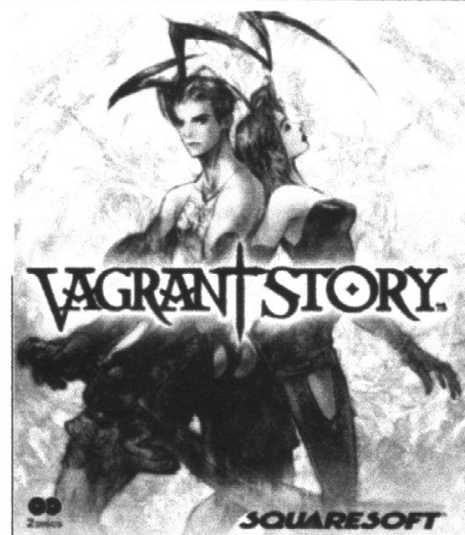
Square still stick stubbornly to their lack of speech, preferring text bubbles. In fact, this works well in Vagrant Story, since it allows you to read at your own speed, whereas often in games with a lot of cut-scene speech (e.g. Metal Gear Solid) you often miss important revelations or instructions.

Graphically, the game is excellent. A lot of time has clearly gone into making every area highly detailed (although the dark environments all get a bit samey

towards the end). The music is atmospheric, if not particularly memorable.

The gameplay combines a number of genres. There is a bit of platform-hopping and a lot of block-puzzling, but first and foremost it is an RPG. The weapon and armour system is very stat-heavy, but worth persevering with. You are able to create your own weapons, armour and shields from materials found in the game, and combine them to create stronger items.

The battle system is unique. Upon encountering an enemy, a press of the circle button brings you into Battle Mode. Pressing circle again freezes the game and brings up a wire-frame grid showing the range of your weapon. Should a foe fall inside this range, you may attack them. Should your attack be successful, a further well-timed press causes another attack, and so on. However, every attack you make increases your "Risk": an increase in Risk decreases your accuracy in Battle. The battle system is slick and fun, but gradually becomes a little predictable; you long to do just a bit more than hack, hack, hack. The magics in the game are spectacular, but rarely much use (with the exception of the healing spell), which leaves you with little to do beyond exploring and killing. In fact, that is my chief complaint: the game lacks variety. You go from one place to another place mowing down enemies and solving the odd puzzle: no amount of cunning plot can disguise this. Every element of the game is polished to a tee, but there aren't enough elements: no sub-games, no significant choices to



Vagrant Story - awarded an almighty 40/40 by Japanese games mag Famitsu!

make, no alternate endings and no respite from the go-here-do-this formula. This sort of linearity is a minor flaw really, but it is made all the more noticeable by the lack of any brightness within the game (the only outdoor sections are a town full of evil soldiers, and a haunted forest). It's all so unremittingly dark and depressing.

Vagrant Story is still an excellent game, and because it straddles genres it has a wide appeal. RPG fans should snap it up without hesitation, and adventurers of all description should give it a try. But I cannot whole-heartedly recommend the game: the linearity and lack of variety within may put off many gamers.

Written by Kelvin. Copyright-free! Go on - nick it!
Layout ©2000 Andrew Mehta. Vagrant Story the game is ©2000 Square Co Ltd.

**Top stuff for your
RPG fan, yet the
linearity and lack of
variety may put off
other gamers.**



Groovy Green



A year on and does Gran Turismo 2 still have what it takes to impress, even at £19.99?

When we're constantly bombarded with high resolution graphics and massive polygon counts, it's easy to forget the impact the first Gran Turismo game had on the games industry as a whole when it made its debut. It changed the way people viewed racing games. It achieved on a grand scale what had only been achieved in small amounts before that. It was, without doubt, a killer app. It was then with some trepidation and bated breath that the world awaited Gran Turismo 2 - what delights would it hold? The answer wasn't quite what everyone was expecting.

Even a year on from its initial release, Gran Turismo 2 still proves extremely playable, featuring excellent car physics and boasting an unprecedented number of cars. The tracks too, are well designed and fully thought out, making for some excellent races and challenges. It's worth noting, also, that to this day, no game has come close to matching the number of cars replicated in Gran Turismo 2; even the forthcoming Gran Turismo 3 will not reach the same figure.

Coming on two CDs, Gran Turismo 2 offers you the choice between Arcade treatment and GT mode. My suggestion to anyone purchasing it would be to slip in the Arcade disk first, sit back and let yourself be treated to the truly lovely CGI intro with a re-mixed version of the Cardigans' "My Favourite Game" providing the perfect soundtrack. After that frankly breathtaking intro the Arcade disk offers you a choice of classes, cars and tracks to race around in either one player, two player or time trial mode. The Arcade mode is very well structured and offers anyone new to the Gran Turismo experience a chance to ease into and get accustomed to the "do"s and "don't"s of racing high-powered, and not so high-powered, cars. In fact the Arcade mode plays so well; you might wonder why there's need for a GT disk.

That's before the GT disk sucks you into its world and refuses point blank to spit you out.

The GT mode of Gran Turismo throws you into a world where you can pick some of the finest and quirkiest cars from a wide variety of the world's car manufactures and drive them around some of the best designed courses in video game history. The game physics of the Arcade mode are turned to full realism mode and when you eventually buy/win a car with 800 bhp and take it on the track, you will know just how hard 800 bhp vehicles are to control.

You start with 10,000 credits in GT mode and get to choose any car you can afford. This will no doubt be second hand and from one of the Japanese manufactures since they are the only ones to offer second hand cars. What you

choose will very much be up to personal taste, but to help your choice there's an info button for each car, which tells you all about its history, quirks and performance. Once you've settled on a car, you might want to tune it up to some degree with the cash you have left, which opens up a whole new learning curve for those who have never dabbled in car tuning. Personally, I advise starting with the tyres.

After all that you can get to the track and race. Or can you? If you're new to the world of Gran Turismo you will have to go to the license test centre and acquire a racing license through a series of tests. If you have the first Gran Turismo you can download your old B and A license tests and race with some impunity.

So, finally. You've got the car, tuned it up some, got the license to race with, and you've got to the track. Congratulations! You can now race, and, most likely, lose. But don't be put off - use the small amount of money you won, tune your car up some more and go back to race. Eventually your skill and car will improve to the point that you win, and so you progress to the next challenge..... When you win a race, you will be treated to a prize car. These can vary from the useless to the sublime. Most will be sold for more profit; others will be raced to win more profit.

And that is the basic gameplay structure of Gran Turismo 2's GT mode. Without doubt this is an excellent game. However it is not without its faults.

First of all, there are the license tests. They prove to be mind-numbingly difficult and virtually impossible to master unless you have a very limited social life and limitless patience. By mastering I refer to getting all gold in each license test. There are some truly great prize cars to be won by doing this, but I do not think the ends justify the means.

Then there's the music. The racing music itself is rather good, featuring some exclusive re-mixes of some well-known tracks. However the menu music, is, frankly, appalling. It can best be described as Japanese cheese rock; whilst at worst...well...editorial forces forbid me from writing the words, I'm thinking - but I think you can guess what I'm getting at. It's bad, okay? When a game is as menu driven as Gran Turismo 2 it can be a major turn-off shifting through the menus while your eardrums are being assaulted in this manner. Thankfully there is an option to turn all the music off. And believe me, you will!

The game structure also suffers somewhat. Although the game plays very well indeed, your direction through it seems very loose and whimsical. With the choice of special races, championship races, endurance races



and rally races, the player may well be at a loose end with regards to what to do or where to turn. The licenses, of course, guide you into which races you can enter, but finding them may take time.

Then, at last, we come to the graphics. When Gran Turismo game out originally it was breath-taking. Nothing quite like it had been seen before on a home system. With Gran Turismo 2 it can feel at times that the designers have tried to do too much with it. The resolution seems lower, grainier than before, and in fact a little slower. The tracks suffer from break up in replay mode, which detracts from the whole event. When you play rally mode, you notice that it looks better somehow - a little more solid and quicker. In fact rally mode plays quite differently from the main game. The replication of driving on a loose surface is done very well (but it does take a lot of getting used to) which makes it a shame, then, that the rally mode, in the end, feels very tacked-on indeed.

However, for all its faults, which do stop Gran Turismo 2 being the killer app its predecessor was, there can be no question of its lastability. To this day, I am still playing Gran Turismo 2; there is an awful lot to get out of this game.

Text ©2000 Mat Owen. Layout ©2001 Andrew Mehta. Gran Turismo 2 the game is ©Polyphony Digital / SCE.

**An excellent game,
let down by some
minor flaws.
No doubt of its
lastability.
Well worth the price
when new, a bargain
now.**



Brill Blue



American Bad-Asses, Stinkfaces, The Peoples Elbow, too much bad rock music, mullets, coffins, cages and tables can mean only one thing - the circus that is the WWF is back on the Playstation and it's bigger than ever!

There's certainly a lot to do in this game! You've got a huge variety of different WWF stars (50+) and many different types of matches to put them in - one on one, tag team (regular & tornado), hard-core, anywhere fall, handicap, king of the ring, royal rumble, survivor, cage, iron man, slobberknocker, triple threat, fatal four-way, I quit, special referee, casket, battle royal, with managers (please can we have this in all sports games?), tables, hell in a cell, ladder, time limit title and, my personal favourite, tables-ladders-chairs, ("Tables, Ladders, Chairs" and "Hell in a Cell" are two modes that really need user configurable action replays as you can get some really impressive and insane moves once everybody starts using everything properly).

WWF Smackdown offers nowhere near the same amount of complexity as rival fighting titles StreetFighter and Tekken do, but despite this, there's enough countering and strategy involved during matches (and far less button bashing) that proceedings are kept interesting which in turn makes things easier to pick up and play for anyone, regardless of whether they are wrestling fans or not.

You've got striking moves, grappling moves and a counter button which are dependant on where you are in relation to your opponent, whether they are standing or not and whether you are in a position to launch an aerial attack. Many of the basic moves are the same depending on your wrestler's style, varying only in strength or speed, but you see that in the WWF that's on TV anyway so it's not too much of a problem. The main thing you'll need to learn is the positioning required for specials and how to manoeuvre your opponent to where you need them to be - if you're a fan then this proves no problem, but even if you're not a fan, it doesn't take long to suss out. Once you've got the hang of your favourite WWF Superstar you'll find the matches boil down to wearing down your opponent using a variety of moves/weapons which helps build up your Smackdown meter allowing you to get some finishing moves going, but there seems to be good progression between the difficulty levels so once you've left 'easy' for 'normal' and then in turn 'hard' you'll find the AI wrestlers become a lot more proficient at countering and outmanoeuvring you, making for some tough matches.

The Pay-Per-View, Taunt, and excellent Superstar Creator modes make Smackdown 2 a very complete package that'll keep you busy for a long time. The Creator mode in particular is probably the most complete I've seen in a console game so far -

Tony Hawk's Create-a-Skater was good, but this is much better!

The only gameplay problems you'll find are in multiplayer matches where it's all too easy to:

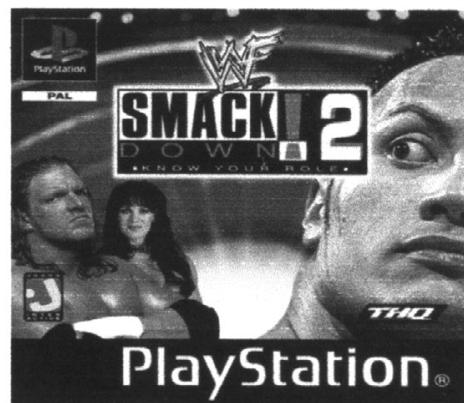
- A) hit your partner, and
 - B) be facing the wrong way and take a bit of a beating.
- Hmm - just like the real thing then!

A lack of on-screen referee to distract is also disappointing. One player mode does its best to keep you involved in all the feuds and backstage brawls, but being able to pick your own feuds would have been better - it's good, but there's still room for improvement. However, four-player matches in Smackdown 2 are top-notch multi-player fun when tables and other assorted weapons get involved, it's almost up there with Bomberman!

If Smackdown 2 has one major problem, though, it's that every little thing takes so long to load. I suspect that this is one game that would definitely benefit from being run on a Playstation 2 with PSOne disc speed set at "FAST". My Japanese PS2 does wonders for StreetFighter Zero 3's loading times - UK and US machines should do the same for Smackdown 2 as well.

The graphics are pretty smart - while they don't move at StreetFighter Zero 3 speeds or with the smoothness and realism of Tekken they do move convincingly and are well put together and textured. The wrestlers' various trademark moves are animated particularly well and from what I know about them, seem to be accurately replicated - The People's Elbow and The Worm are every bit as ridiculous here as they are in real life. The wrestlers also look reasonably like their real-life counterparts. About the only real problem in the graphical department is the obvious polygon glitching when characters of different sizes grapple or come up against other objects like the ropes - the usual problems you'll find in most Playstation beat 'em ups.

The sound effects are excellent, with slapping, and floor-stomping making everything sound harder! There's the crowd noise, entrance themes etc. - almost everything you'd expect from the WWF experience. Almost. Unfortunately there isn't any sort of commentary and there isn't a whole lot by way of wrestler catch phrases, I'm afraid. Still, I'm hoping that the inevitable PS2 Smackdown will have more speech. WWF fans will know what I mean when I say that having Jerry Lawler and Jim Ross at ringside



giving some sort of move-by-move commentary, with excited outbursts when something over the top happens, will boost the atmosphere immensely.

I'm going to stick my neck out on this one and give it a United Games "Brilliant Blue" for the following reasons:

- i) The bottom line, is that it's fun to play - especially in multi-player mode!
- ii) There's actually a beat 'em up (of sorts) in there. It's more than a random button basher with a nice shiny WWF exterior.
- iii) For a game that started out as 'Toukon Retsuden', in Japan with a load of unheard of 'serious' Japanese wrestlers, it's done well to be converted into such a great pick-up-and-play type game with mainstream appeal due to the recognizable licence that's been overlaid on top of the gameplay.

And finally...

- iv) SmackDown 2 is a proper game with real depth and "Tony Hawk 2" / "StreetFighter Zero 3"-type levels of thoroughness, guaranteed to keep you busy for a long time!

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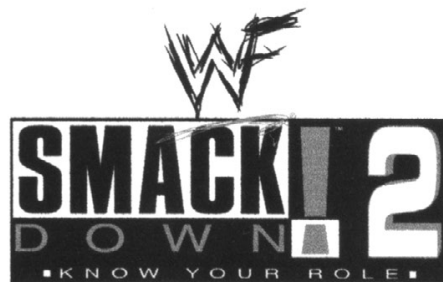
As someone who has avoided the whole WWF thing (particularly the games) for years I was really surprised by Smackdown 2 and recommend it, both to WWF fans and everyone else who likes a good on-screen brawl.



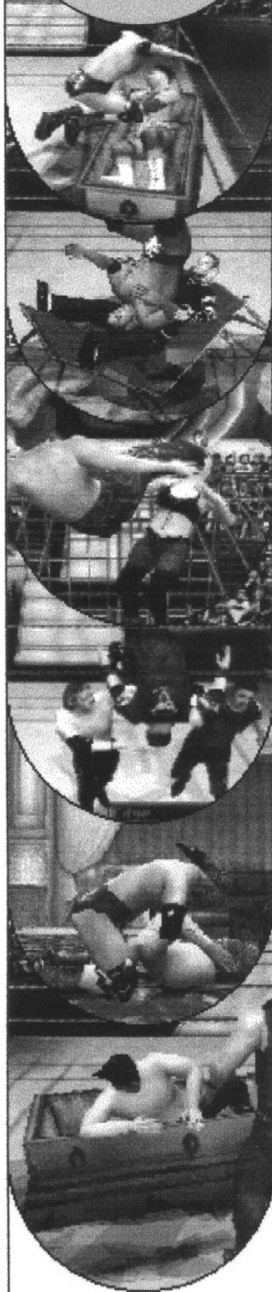
Brill Blue

SD2 MATCH

DESCRIPTIONS



There are a variety of different match options within SmackDown 2, which could get a tad confusing. Well bid bewilderment goodbye - act like a pro', act like you know (what a cheesy rhyme E.d.), with United Games' breakdown of the various different matches:



One on one:
Fairly straight-forward, this one.

Tag team - Regular:
One person in the ring at a time.

Tag team - Tornado:
All four wrestlers in the ring at once.

Hardcore:
An "anything goes" brawl complete with weapons!

Anywhere Fall:
Backstage fights in a variety of locations.

Handicap:
You versus two to three opponents or vice versa.

King of the Ring:
Knockout tournament in which you can progress to the finals.

Royal Rumble:
You versus multiple opponents with you having to throw everyone else out to win. No floor-pins or "K.O."s here, mate, oh no.

Cage:
The goal's to win - either by a floor-pin or by climbing out of the cage.

Iron Man:
Try to pin and KO your opponent as many times within the time limit.

SlobberKnocker:
This plays like a sort of time limited survival mode. You've to attempt to last the time limit without getting pinned whilst at the same time, attempt to pin and/or KO as many opponents as possible.

Survivor Mode:
This mode makes way for hardcore style matches against multiple opponents.

Triple Threat:
Three wrestlers enter the ring, with whoever claims the first pin winning.

Fatal Fourway:
The same as the Triple Threat, only with four wrestlers instead of three.

Battle Royal:
Face over thirty opponents!

I quit:
Fight until one of you can't continue and says so into the microphone.

Special Referee:
Get another wrestler to referee the match, and interfere. Or don't interfere. It's up to you.

Casket:
Beat your opponent into a coffin (beat them with the coffin if you like). Knock them out, and then close the coffin lid on them to win the match.

Hell in a Cell:
The cage now has a roof! Throw your opponent off the top of it or slam them through it!

Time Limit Title:
Beat your opponents before the timer counts down to zero to win a belt.

Tables:
The only way to win this style of match is to drive your opponent through a table.

Ladder:
Climb the ladder to grab the belt suspended above (or just have fun using it as a weapon or to launch yourself at your opponent).

Tables-Ladders-Chairs:
As above, but with chairs too. Wondering how it all comes together? Easy! Check it:
1) Beat your opponent senseless with a chair,
2) Put them on a table,
3) Climb the ladder, and finally...
4) Launch yourself at them to break the table, your opponent's back and(!), if you're using a move like the Senton Bomb (i.e. head first) probably your own head as well!!

With Managers:
As with all WWF matches involving a manager, you'll have to watch out for what they are doing as well as keeping an eye on your opponent. Smackdown 2 tends to send Managers straight into the ring, giving you two opponents to face, however once you've thrown the manager out of the ring they'll stay there and try to pull you out too or else attack you, should you get thrown outside of the ring during the match. For those not in the know, Managers are usually wrestlers (or wrestlers in training, girlfriends/friends of the wrestler) who take it upon themselves to promote their 'protege' and ensure they win their matches by cheating - distracting the referee at crucial moments, tossing chairs and other assorted weapons into the ring etc. It's not all bad though. A current WWF gimmick is the "good" manager/friend - an example of this is Lita working with the Hardy Boys (good guys) - when the "evil" wrestler or their manager starts their usual routine of distracting the ref. etc, she'll usually take it upon herself to climb to the top rope and launch herself at some seven foot monster with a drop kick or flying headscissors, thus ensuring that the other team's cheating backfires on them. This sort of thing has always been popular in the WWF and helps build up the storylines and feuds of the whole thing.

SELF CONTROL:

I'm not 100% certain about this, it isn't listed in the US version's manual, although it seems to work: If you hold in R2 during a tag team match your wrestler will face the same direction as you are pressing on the D-pad, whereas without doing so, by default, you tend to circle around whoever is closest to you (so that you're constantly facing them), which can be a bit of a problem when you forget to press R2, and, facing the wrong way, end up smacking your partner by mistake.

SEASON MODE

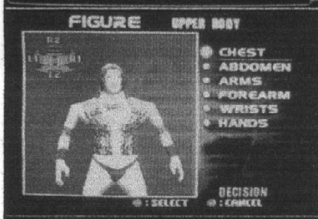
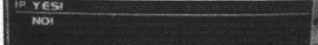
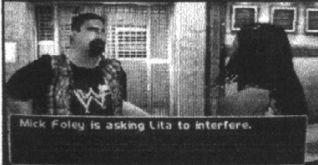
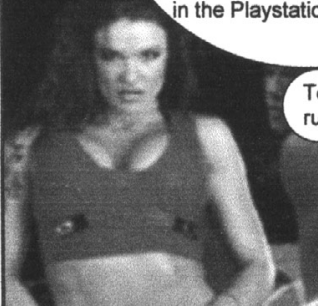
The soap-opera style storylines are an important part of WWF. They set various wrestlers against each other in order to build up the hype for the WWF's pay-per-view events. Smackdown 2, whilst enabling you to build up feuds for your own character, also runs separate storylines in the background. This is all cool stuff that helps get you more involved in the game, but it also reveals the lack of speed in the Playstation's CD drive.

This is what you can expect:

- Singles matches turning into handicap matches as someone comes in and interferes.
- People asking and offering to interfere (you get given a yes/no option to either decline their offer or take it up).
- Backstage fights between matches.
- Hiring the APA (Acolytes) to attack someone (this option doesn't seem to happen as much as the rest of them).
- Matches being changed mid season due to backstage attacks or deal making.
- WWF Diva beauty contests. These aren't interactive so I'm not sure how they work.
- Non-interactive arguments between wrestlers in and out of the ring.

This is what I've seen so far and looks like the basic stuff, but hopefully Smackdown 2 will throw some more surprises at me as I get further into the game.

To give you a taster of how it all comes into play during the game, here's a run down of my play as Lita in Season Mode, up to Year 3:



Year 1:
A brief feud with the MacMahon family that started off with me pushing Stephanie MacMahon (and her husband, Triple H) around backstage, running into interference in matches with Shane Macmahon, both from him and against him with Shawn Michaels. This feud ended with Lita putting Vince MacMahon through a table at a pay-per-view event. Year 1 also saw the return of Stone Cold Steve Austin and Triple H versus Cactus Jack in a Hell in a Cell match.

Year 2:
I had Multiple feuds against Chyna and Eddie Guerrero, Kaientai (a Japanese tag team) and Christian & Edge, as well as fighting with Chris Benoit backstage between matches.

Year 3:
My feud with Christian & Edge continued into the third year, but the Rock helped out once or twice. I hired the APA (acolytes) to beat up Kurt Angle after he beat me in a triple threat match. I also saw Triple H attack the Undertaker and steal his belt. I've also been involved in a feud with Dean Malenko which saw a few back stage fights between matches. I also used the Stable Manager option to form an alliance with Jackie, and, working as a tag team, took the girls to Wrestlemania where they won the tag team titles from Christian & Edge! The Undertaker and Triple H also concluded their feud here, with a win for the Undertaker in a cage match. The Dudley Boys came out to the ring and taunted Lita (myself) & Jackie, which set things up for a feud in year 4....



CREATE-A-WRESTLER!

There's so much to this mode that I could probably do an entire article on it alone! Experimentation is the best way to get to know Create-A-Wrestler. However, there are a couple of things to take note of here:

- When selecting between 'Male', 'Female' and '??' - '??' is probably the best option to go for as you can then enter your creation into any title belt competition.
- Maxing out your wrestler's height may look cool when they tower above Kane, but bear in mind that some of your striking attacks will go straight over your opponents' head.
- As you progress through season mode you'll start unlocking new objects, body parts and move sets, so if you couldn't find a certain move before it's always worth editing your wrestler again to see if it's turned up.
- What the manual (US version) doesn't explain too clearly is that the "Logic" attribute sets how your wrestler will behave as part of a tag team when they aren't under your direct control.

A t r o



THE ZAPPER!

The Zapper was the old 8-bit Nintendo console's light gun accessory. Being a gun, it featured a trigger button, however, this was the only button it featured. Some games that used the gun (such as Operation Wolf) featured more than one way to shoot and so would require gamers to use the control pad in conjunction with the Zapper. This could be a bit awkward at times, so more often than not, players tended to just stay with the one method of fire accessible via the Zapper's single trigger. The strangest thing about the Zapper, however, is the fact that it won't work unless it's put in the second controller port - this is true even of games that don't require the controller to be in port one for menu selection. Hmm....very st-range...

How it Works:

The Zapper plugs into the second controller port on the 8-bit NES, and draws it's power from the console - so there's no need for batteries - thank goodness! (Does anyone remember Acclaim's wireless controllers? They required four AAA batteries for each controller! Erk! Crazy 80s battery consumption!). The Zapper works by means of infra-red. We're not sure how, but somehow, it is able to report back to the old 8-bit Nintendo, the screen co-ordinates your gun was pointing at when you pressed the trigger. Y'see Zapper games are all about aiming. It's unfortunate then, that you can't sit back in your sofa, and still get an accurate aim with the Nintendo Zapper. Nonono....for what from your point of view seems accurate, is often rejected by the NES from a distance....so despite the long chord, you'll nearly always be playing Zapper games near to the screen. I believe the situation is slightly improved if you have a modern TV, but on our old TVs...we're on our knees in front of the Tele with an aching arm!

The Nintendo Entertainment System (NES for short) was a marvellous console in its hey-day, bringing classics such as Super Mario Bros and Zelda to gamers when first released, and continuing to deliver great titles such as Kirby's Adventure and the multiplayer madness that was Micromachines, in the later years of its life.

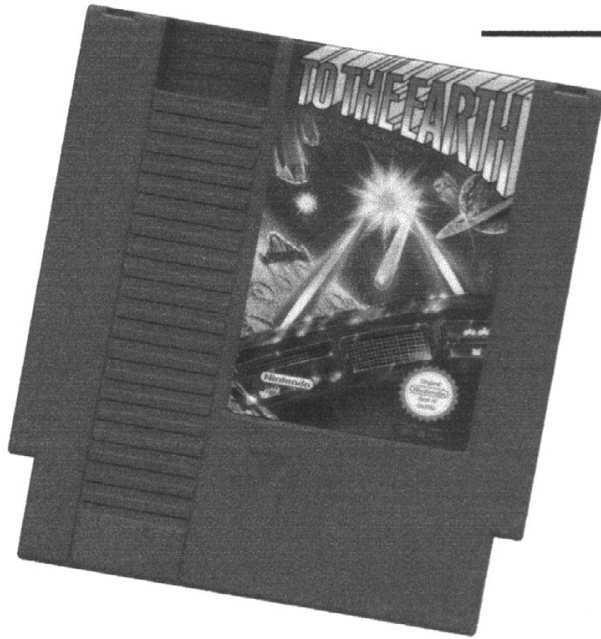
Despite these classic titles - the most memorable thing about this classy grey shoe box was the Zapper peripheral that was made available for it during the eighties. It's funny really, as the grey phaser gun was only compatible with a scattering of titles - the likes of GumShoe, Bayou Billy, and - the game that became synonymous with the Nintendo Zapper - Duck Hunt.

I'm sure the majority of past NES owners out there are already getting watery eyes, as they reminisce about shooting little pixelated ducks and having their pathetic attempts at aiming mocked by a cheeky, sniggering dog. Yes, indeed, Duck Hunt is the game every Zapper owner remembers. Yet I never had Duck Hunt. But I did have a Zapper, and a top game that utilised it. No, it wasn't Gumshoe, nor was it Bayou Billy. It was called "To The Earth", and it is perhaps the only Zapper game that doesn't sell itself on novelty alone - there's solid gameplay at it's core!

It's the year 2052 and the inhabitants of earth have been attacked by the dastardly Rogassians (an alien race whose name sounds suspiciously familiar to our very own "Mad Grey" alien - Ross. Hmm...I wonder...). They've unleashed a deadly bacteria on the inhabitants of earth, and the human race is dropping like flies - facing extinction. However, it's known that Neptune is home to an anti-bacterial agent that can fight the disease. As you're positioned at Neptune's Allied base, the duty of delivering the anti-bacterial agent to earth is given to you. However, the aliens are aware of your mission, and seek to prevent you from reaching your final destination. Of course, they haven't reckoned on you being a crack shot - something you'll need to be in this game, if you're ever to make it to the earth!

To The Earth is appealing, and in many ways enjoyable, but the enjoyment you can get from playing the game isn't anything to do with any fun factor that's prevalent throughout. Rather, To The Earth's appeal lies in the fact that it's incredibly engaging once gotten into, and is suitably challenging. The way the energy bar works - depleting should you miss a target, and increasing every time you successfully destroy an alien craft, projectile or asteroid, sees trigger-bashing discouraged, as you have to be selective about what you can actually hit. This in turn leads to you developing your own strategies for tackling the enemy. For instance, you may find yourself prioritising incoming bombs over ships, as the bombs damage you, but passing spaceships bare no threat. Alternatively, if you are unable to fend off a stream of incoming bombs, you may decide it best to focus on the ships launching the bombs, because they're easier targets - and ships successfully targeted sees your energy bar increase - counter attacking the decrease brought about by the bombardment of your ship by alien bombs.

The title also proves extremely engaging during times of low-activity - when not much is happening on-screen. You see, enemies start off as single pixels and then scale to a larger size as they approach, and this means that when things have died down a bit, your eyes are still fixed on the screen, gazing at the star-filled background - looking out for a star moving in a different direction, or at a different speed to all the rest of the stars. <Bam!> There's something incredibly satisfying about shooting a tiny pixel disguised amongst the stars, and seeing it cause a huge blue explosion and a satisfying "Kradam!"-type sound effect. What's even more satisfying is being so quick on the ball, that you manage to take out a whole line of ships when they're only one pixel or so large. This can save you a lot of grief, as once ships become a certain size, they'll start firing bombs at you, which you have to dispose of ASAP, or else they'll hit you, and you'll take damage.



I hope you can see what I'm talking about here. It's not a fun game, yet it proves extremely engaging, as you formulate strategies, study stars, get to know each and every move the enemies are going to make.... (well, this is an 8-bit game, with enemies moving in set patterns, patterns that can be predicted because they're the same every time. Maybe the first time you play, a space ship will zoom in from the left, taking you completely by surprise, yet the next time you play, you could be expecting it, and you may even manage to take it out while it's still just a pixel in the background!!! Extremely Satisfying!). Then there's the element of challenge. The learning curve is just perfect - you get a little bit further with each go, and the mission never seems impossible. Indeed, there are only four levels! To Uranus, To Saturn, To Jupiter, and then To the Earth [which is split into To the Moon and To the Earth]. As such, you're always thinking: "Oh, come on - I can do this - I know I can!". I mean, four levels sounds soooooo easy....but it's not! And therein lies the challenge, and therein also lies the addiction - for you know you ought to be able to do it. The satisfaction element is also great. You know when you're doing well, and if you're not doing well, you know why, and can address the situation. Nothing's down to chance - it's down to your personal endurance and concentration, which makes it all the more satisfying when you do well.

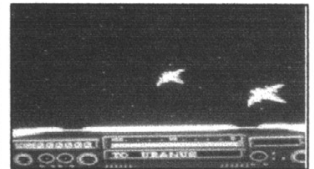
To the Earth is not, however, a game one lusts after, and when not playing, longs to play. This is weird, as the game does seem addictive whilst you're playing - if you don't do well at first, you'll want to try, try, and try again. But pack it in for dinner, and you won't be itching to get back to it. So, it's a bit of a mixed bag. If you've got it, it can be appreciated and is really cool and groovy. It's definitely a solid blast, and is much deeper than most of the NES Zapper games. In fact NMS [The old name for the Official Nintendo Magazine] gave the game 80%. Not an amazing rating I know, yet it was the highest a Zapper game ever received in a review. All in all, if you see it going cheap somewhere, and you've got a Zapper [you need one to play it], it may well be worth consideration. However, if challenge isn't your thing, and you're just after a laugh, you'd be better off with something like Micromachines, Kirby's Adventure or Battletoads and DoubleDragon - The Ultimate Team, all of which are far more fun-focussed. They may not be Zapper games, but they sure do deliver the goods.

Taking Advantage:

The Zapper's accuracy is aided by the plastic moulding of the gun. That is to say that the signal from the Zapper comes out from the gun turret, and moves directly forwards. But what, if the moulding wasn't there? The signal would go everywhere. Jeremy Daldry from Game Zone (father of PC Zone, sister of Sega Zone and child of Yours Sinclair) took up the theory, and used it to devise a cunning cheat that could be used with any Zapper game: "Simply purchase a hacksaw and cut the end of your gun off. You now have a sawn off phaser which hits everything. Thanks to ME for that cheat, it's great isn't it?" mused Jeremy. "(No. Ed.)" replied the then-editor, Jackie Ryan. "Oh, and Dennis Publishing will not be held responsible for anyone who is foolish enough to try this cheat." ...and neither will United Games!



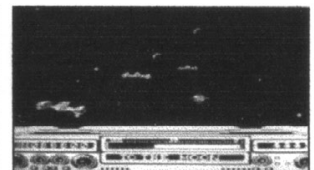
The title screen comes complete with an unforgettable theme tune!
Do,de,do-do-do-do, der do-de-da-da!



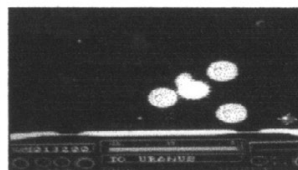
Two Space Ships sweep down at you. Shoot 'em for more health, miss 'em for less, or just let them be. It's your choice.



The good guys protecting earth in the attract sequence.



Three ships swoop down - this time dropping fast spiky bombs! These WILL hurt!



Level 1's end-of-level boss. Cook those Marshmallows! You've a "kill-all" power-up too! (Right, above dashboard).



Asteroids are predictable, only a few actually risk hitting you, so pick 'em off, and get some health!

Next Issue:

Next Issue, we'll be going "Back In Time" with Rob Hubbard and Chris Abbot's third CD compilation of remixed classic Commodore 64 game sound-tracks!

Ha

Game Gear Returns!

It was a dark, cold, desolate night in the handheld Kingdom, and whilst King Duncan lay all snug in his Royal Bed, tucked away in the safety of his castle, outside, sinister goings-on were afoot. Two gangsters had smuggled themselves over the border line and entered the Handheld Kingdom in order to cause some mafia mayhem in Eidos's WAP conversion of the P.C. hit Gangsters. "Are you sure this is a short cut to our point of rendezvous?" asked one of the gangsters, as he gave his partner a leg-up over the wall of the Kingdom's church graveyard. "Totally," replied his partner, from atop the wall "Not only that, but the graveyard is completely devoid of Royal Patrols - not a copper in sight! Now give me your hand and I'll pull you over." They were soon both walking through the Handheld Kingdom's church graveyard, rather chuffed that they had managed to sneak into the Kingdom without a spot of bother. However, they were just passing the grave of GameGear when they heard a strange rumbling sound: "What's that!?" asked one of the gangsters. "Don't be so flippin' paranoid! It's nothing! Probably the wind!" "But it sounds like a stampede of some sort...listen...can't you hear it? It's like a stampede of... of...blimey(!)...elephants!" "Don't be so flaming ridiculous! We're in a medieval kingdom's Church graveyard, where are elephants going to come from!?" however, no sooner had the gangster opened his mouth, than a grave spewed forth a young lion cub followed in hot pursuit by, would you believe it(!?) - a stampede of elephants, who proceeded to completely mow down the two gangsters.

Obviously, when elephants are stampeding about in a medieval kingdom it doesn't go unnoticed, and soon the King was informed and galloped off on horse back along with his Knights and Cowboy Tex to where the Elephants were last reported to be, with the intention to round them up like cattle.

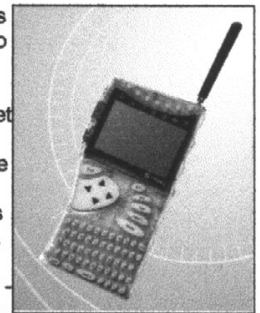
By the morning all the elephants had, thankfully, been rounded up, but the King still didn't know where on earth they had come from, until, that was, the Vicar came to complain about a grave robbing incident. "Either the tombs have been robbed, or the GameGear, Sonic Chaos and The Lion King, amongst others, have come back from the grave!" "With stampeding elephants around, it could easily be the latter," said the King. "But let's get the police down to the graveyard anyway, to check things out," said the King. Soon, the Royal Police force were at the church's graveyard. "Hang on..." said one of the officers, noticing two gangsters getting to their feet and brushing themselves down. "Aww...bloody 'eck! Coppers!" said the Gangsters, realising who was present before them. "You shouldn't be free yet!" said the police officer, getting out his handcuffs. "You're supposed to still be in development! Come on! Let's be 'avin' ya!" he said, cuffing them and taking them away. However, whilst the Police were dealing with the Gangsters, the Elephants had been let loose, and along with Sonic Chaos and the Game Gear, had caught a plane to the United States of America. See page 8 for full story.

Handheld

Kingdom

On yer Cybiko!

A new handheld games console with added email and MP3 functionality has already sold 500,000 units in the US (where it retails for \$99), and is due to be launched in the U.K. later this year. At first glance, the Cybiko Inter-tainment Computer, as it's known, might not look as groovy as a Gameboy Color(sic) - the machine's output only being in black and white, yet it's already got 170 games available for it - and the exciting thing is that all these games are free....you simply download them from the internet, into the console. Add to this the fact that the machine can be used a dictionary, an email machine, a multi-lingual phrase book, a calculator, organiser, address book AND an alarm clock, and the thing starts to sound really exciting. AOL were certainly impressed, and have invested substantial funds into the venture - funds that will be spent launching the machine in Europe this year - so look out for this all-in-one gaming gadget when it becomes available late this year. It should be cool.



MOTOROLA GOES GPRS ENTERTAINMENT CRAZY!

Motorola will be releasing the U.K.'s first GPRS mobile communications device towards the end of this year - and guess what - they're currently busy trying to lure games developers into developing for it!!! For those not in the know, GPRS stands for General Packet Radio Service and is pretty much the same as WAP, only it's much faster, making online, mobile, gaming much more feasible than it currently is. The GPRS device in question is Motorola's A009 - great name, huh readers? But apparently "It's fast, it's formidable, it's fun. It's capable of delivering a new level of global games play..." according to Motorola's promotional literature for the machine. Indeed, here at United Games, we've seen one of the machines in action, and think it does have potential, for whilst the machine itself looks more like a calculator than a games machine, the demo software we saw running on the hardware show-cased the screen's clarity and colour palette. The A009 is capable of displaying 256 colours, and the simple platform game we saw running looked comparable to some of the Gameboy Color's(sic) efforts.



A shot of Brian's hand. Oh, and two A009 devices.

The chances are that games for the platform will be available to us, the consumers, for free, with developers seeking to earn revenue through advertising. How? Well, the A009 has been designed to allow small adverts to be displayed within games. The demo platform game that we saw featured signs in the background advertising various services, for example. We'll keep you posted on A009 developments over the next few issues, in the meanwhile check out our rather blurred photo of a Motorola employee called Brian holding an A009. That's his hand on the left, that is.

SEGA GAMES ON iDEN!

Motorola currently have a series of phones and wireless devices available in America and Japan that are able to use the internet to download basic computer games into their on-board memory. These games can then be played offline, which means that you can play them without incurring any per minute call charges. These iDEN devices, as they're known, are of particular interest to us as the first device launched came with an inbuilt game called Borkov, programmed by none other than Sega, who are currently known to be working on a further four titles for the format. Borkov is a puzzle game that requires you to remove blocks in a matrix to match a changing pattern. "We are pleased to be working with Motorola, the leader in software-upgradeable wireless phones," said Hideki Sato, Representative Director and Vice President of Sega. "Users will now be able to play Borkov and download other Sega games from the Internet to their Motorola multi-service phones." Hmm... tasty, but Sega aren't the only game company backing Motorola's new range of mobile communication devices. UIEvolution are also planning to bring Space Invaders to the format. Even still, whilst the line up of games look tasty, we've still no information on when these iDEN devices will become available in the U.K.. We'll keep you posted.

GameBoy Advance:

The Japanese Launch Draws Ever Closer!

Yes indeedy(!), the Gameboy Advance launches in Japan in March - that's next month folks! For those who don't know, the Gameboy Advance is the sequel hardware to Nintendo's mega-successful portable games machine - the Nintendo Gameboy. The new machine is powered by a 32-bit central processor, is backwards compatible with existing Gameboy and Gameboy Color (sic) games, and can be linked up to a maximum of three other machines - allowing for some groovy four player matches! Mario Kart Advance is currently the most anticipated title, and is likely to be available upon release, whilst other groovy games include the likes of Mario Advance (an updated version of Super Mario Bros 2 - originally for the 8-bit NES - some saw the screen shots and were hoping that it was Mario Allstars, but alas, 'twas not the case...) and F-zero Advance.

Despite the 32-bit processor, titles so far seem to bare resemblance to the 16-bit SNES days, what with updates of classic SNES titles rearing their heads. However, UK Developers Graphic State have just recently claimed to have made a developer's tool for the GBA that allows games developers to get 3D functionality. They reckon games such as Tomb Raider and even Quake will be possible on the machine. Personally, we reckon that the screen size might make 3D games a little impractical, yet it'll still be nice to see what they can come up with.

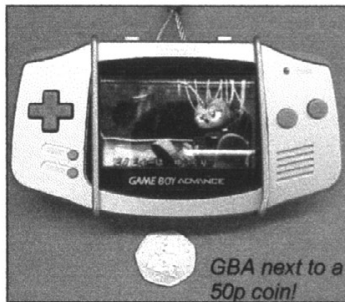
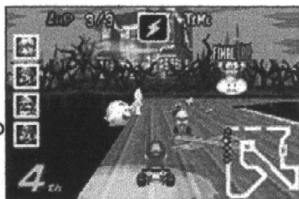


Jammy James plays Gameboy Advance!!

As we roamed the vast expanse of the Nintendo Stand at ECTS2000 our tired

little eyes flew around to catch a crowd of people gathered round the Holy Grail that is the GB Advanced!!!! You can imagine our delight too, when we found out that not only was the machine available to play on - so was the promising Mario Kart Advanced!

Naturally, we were soon in the queue awaiting our turn, and when our turn finally came we were pleasantly surprised to find that the demo was actually a Multi-player demo! We promptly clapped our grubby little hands around the GB Advanced, our faces shining like newly



GBA next to a 50p coin!

The Gameboy Advance looks set to be a really strong platform, with sixty games so far confirmed for the format, including the likes of Wario Land 4 from Nintendo, a new Monster Rancher title from Reed Ditto, Pac-man Advance and Tekken Advance (Tekken!) from Namco, and even Sega's Sonic is gracing the format!

Along side classic franchises and well established genres, there's also promise of new gaming experiences. Kuru Kuru Kurui is an innovative new puzzle game that sees you guide a rotating stick through a level, complete with jagged edges that you must refrain from making contact with. This is a very absorbing game, with the same kind of tension as that classic fairground game where you have to guide the metal hoop around a wire.

The Japanese launch of the Gameboy Advance will see it released in three different colours - all of which resemble the GameCube's primary colour scheme. There's a purple one with white buttons, a white one with purple buttons, and a transparent purple one with white buttons..

The Gameboy Advance launches in Japan on March the 21st, and in the US and Europe this July, still, we've been jammy enough to have played it already. Check out contributor James' first impressions of Mario Kart Advanced below, as gleaned from his experience of the title at ECTS....

polished babies' bottoms (isn't there a law prohibiting the use of that metaphor!?! Ed.)!!!! With the four GBA consoles linked up to each other, we started the race! The sounds were superb! It was as if a miniature Mario was standing on your shoulder whispering sweet nothings into your waxy ear! (Hmm...must have been loud to get through all that wax. E.d.).

The real appeal of the title however, lay with the simplicity of the gameplay, and with fast responsive controls, a smooth frame rate, and a number of happy little tunes that I couldn't stop humming all day, Mario Kart Advanced proved itself to be the best multiplayer game I have ever had the pleasure of playing on a handheld console! Its definitely got me looking forwards to the release of Nintendo's new handheld console, that's for sure!

What up with W@P?



WAP itself has taken a beating from the media over the past year and, at this stage at least, it's not hard to see why. The vast majority of utilities available through WAP can be accessed more cheaply - and, heck, more quickly - via Talking Pages, and, at the minute, the WAP technology simply can't support the high standards which we've come to expect through our experiences on the internet - the only WAP output is black and white lists without sounds. It's time consuming and frustrating to type in web addresses, and WAP has ridiculous loading times and high charges - typically 10p/minute with leading WAP networks Orange and BTCellnet. However, both companies are currently offering WAP promotions - Orange is offering all users free WAP at weekends, up to 28th of February, and, if you've just signed up to BTCellnet, you'll be lucky enough to have WAP free for three months. Funky. So, with all these free WAP minutes, mobile gaming might be a good idea...

Be prepared however. You'll need a handset with as large a display as possible (or it'll make your eyes bleed) and you'll need patience - with download speeds of 9.6K/sec (fax machines are 14.4K, most computers faster than 56K), it takes some time to download even a pixelly picture through WAP. Therefore, the majority of games are simply text based romps - rudimentary Astro Dancer sees you exploring an abandoned Space Ship, the Marie Celestial (clever, fnnnr) to find out what's happened to the crew. Puzzles in this are hardly brain taxing but it's a fun hark back to those days of retro gaming - but still far too slow and basic for any discerning gamer of today, and too shallow for hardened retro-players.

Merchant Traders is an interesting concept, which works quite well on the WAP format - primarily text based, your aim is to become a successful merchant in the Mediterranean through selling products for the best prices possible. It's a nice idea and works well on WAP screens, as it actually requires you to think a bit with your business strategies - whereas most other text based adventures wouldn't even stretch the brain power of a grazing cow - either that or the puzzles are totally obscure and so impossible. It's a WAP game with sufficient depth and complexity - and the only one, as far as I've seen.

WAP board games - all 18384 odd of them - should be given a miss due to the fact that they're virtually impossible to play (tiny screens, long loading times and fiddly controls soon take their toll), and whoever thought that a game like Connect Four could be played through WAP was most definitely wrong, simply because I've never yet come across any WAP game with artificial intelligence which is actually, er, intelligent.

All in all, then WAP is a bit of a miss. Merchant Traders might be the only portal-available title which is vaguely alright (but still, troublingly, nowhere near as good as Snake, free, on any Nokia phone), but all in all, most of the games are all a wasted opportunity - text based romps aren't sophisticated enough today, and, er, seeing as mobile phones are so ideally suited to multiplayer titles, why are all WAP games I've found for one player alone? The WAP market looks set to evolve quickly over the coming months but, for the time being at least, my considered opinion is to stick to Snake. Or that Quatropoli game on my phone which is virtually impossible.

-Edd Morris-



TYRANNOSAURUS TEX

The change over from PlayStation One to PlayStation 2 is going to be a slow one. Even Sony have said that they don't expect everyone who got PSOne to rush out and buy PlayStation 2 - not at first anyway. There is however, a company that has managed to seamlessly upgrade its console hardware, without losing any customers to rival formats. The talk of seamless hardware upgrading may lead you to believe I'm talking about the P.C. - but you'd be wrong, for I'm not. Rather, I'm referring to Nintendo, and the transition from Gameboy to Gameboy Color(sic).

Helped in part by the Pokémon craze, its been a very smooth transition indeed, but is the splash of colour all that the Gameboy Colour can offer? U.K. based Slitherine software think otherwise, as they've embarked on creating something truly special for Ninty's little colour handheld. It threedefines the capabilities of the console - and no, that wasn't a spelling mistake - it was a deliberate type error, for Slitherine Software have only gone and developed a 3D title for Gameboy! Ladies and Gentlemen, this is history in the making. This is Slitherine Software's Tyrannosaurus Tex.

Focussing on the antics of an adventurous Cowboy called Tex, the game takes the form of a first person perspective shoot-'em-up with high colour, static cut scenes acting as enjoyable intermissions between levels. The in-game action takes place in a maze-like environment consisting of multiple corridors and rooms, which are actually created in full 3D using polygons! Polygons on the Gameboy Colour? Yep. You had better believe it! The game isn't 100% 3D though. The actual characters, enemies and pick ups that you come across within the game are all represented by sprites, yet these scale in size depending on how close you are to them, which helps to maintain the three dimensional quality of the game. It's a similar technique to that which was used in classic P.C. games such as the original Doom, Wolfenstein 3D and Duke Nukem 3D.

Since the game world in Tyrannosaurus Tex can, at the most basic level, be described as a maze, one might envisage it all being a tad claustrophobic, being a true "corridor" game, in which you're always enclosed, and whilst it's true that there are no outdoor sections, and that the game at times can get atmospherically claustrophobic (especially when a T-rex looms over you), overall, you don't feel that you're constantly hemmed in by walls, as each room that you visit within the maze varies in size with a fair number of the rooms being quite large. Unfortunately, the larger the room, the more enemies are usually packed within it, so who knows, maybe when you finally get your mitts on this game, you'll develop a preference for the smaller rooms!

As one might expect the gameplay on offer in Tex's adventure is similar to that found in most First Person Shoot-'em-ups (FPSs). If something's moving, then shoot it! There are the obligatory door/key puzzles that tax the grey matter a little, but even that's considered standard fair in FPS games nowadays. However, Tex does present an original twist to the genre that can effect the level of

LEFT/RIGHT:
The left and right arrows on the directional pad (d-pad) by default rotate your character through 360° (full 3D then) and are basically used for turning around.

UP/DOWN:
The up and down d-pad controls equate to forwards and backwards, respectively.

SELECT:
The Select Button is used to cycle through all the weapons you're holding. It's quite convenient, as you can be selecting a weapon whilst running, which proves vital when you're trying to get to that harpoon in order to slay that T-rex that's hot on your heels!

START BUTTON:
Pressing Start pauses the game and displays an overhead map of the playing field. You're able to scroll through it too, looking back at where you've been, and planning where to head next. Very handy in some of the more disorientating mazes.

B BUTTON:
Holding down "B" changes the function of the left and right arrows on the d-pad. Whereas normally, these controls would see your character turn around, holding down "B" and then pressing them sees you strafe left or right - side stepping slightly in the respective direction. Basically, this amounts to your crosshair target moving left or right. Very handy for targeting. Up and down still equate to forwards or back, though, for in Tyrannosaurus Tex, you don't have to worry about the height of your target. Groovy, no?

A BUTTON:
The "A" button is your fire button! Give it a quick tap or hold it down for a more powerful attack (see separate box-out entitled "CHARGE!")!

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challenge the game posses. Much like Sega's Sonic the Hedgehog, in which anyone could whizz through the levels, but only a pro could do so, collecting all the Chaos Emeralds along the way, Tex presents an optional challenge that makes for two different styles of play. On the one hand, you can act like Sonic whizzing through the level, and just try and survive the levels that developers Slitherine have conceived. If this isn't challenging enough though, you can attempt to complete the level AND collect a secret Rune hidden within. It's not just a matter of leaning on a polygon wall and accidentally triggering ancient machinery into opening up a secret room within which lies a Rune, however. Whilst it is true that the Runes are located in secret rooms, in order to get to these rooms, you first have to collect a selection of diamonds. Some of these will litter the path of the maze, yet some of these diamonds reside in their own secret rooms and have to be discovered by way of solving puzzles, and revealing hidden doors. Yes, indeed, only when you've successfully found all the diamonds in a level, can you stand a chance of finding the Rune. But what's the point? What's the incentive? Why should we care? Why should we bother? (gah...rhetorical question overload... ffffrriiittttzzzzlangggg! Hmm, what an inconspicuous and totally irrelevant Metropolis reference. E.d.)

Well the reason you should care is because obtaining the Runes is the only way to get the best out of multi-player mode (hmm...multi-player - yummy E.d.). You see, when you first get the

game, you're only able to play as Tex in multi-player mode, and furthermore there's only one arena to choose from. Each player can select the same character - so only having the one character to play as doesn't mean you can't play two player at all (although bare in mind that for two player gaming you will need two gameboys and two copies of the game) but you'll be limited to Tex V.S. Tex battles. However, by collecting the Runes in one player mode, you're able to obtain extra characters and even whole new arenas to play with in the two player mode! Pretty funky no? Of course, all this may be wasted on you if none of your friends get this game upon it's release, leaving you with no choice but to stick to the one player mode. Even so, we reckon your Gameboy owning mates would be daft not to at least consider purchasing this hardware-pushing title. With the Gameboy scene currently dominated by mere mediocre offerings, Tex looks set to be the diamond in the rough we've all been waiting for! Even so, collecting Runes isn't a complete waste of time to those who are unable to reap the joys of two player battles due to lack of friends with Gameboys who have the game, a lack of friends with Gameboys, or just a lack of friends period, for the number of Runes you've collected also effect how the one player mode ends! Yes! There's an alternative ending! A great incentive for finding them, if ever there was one.

Besides all the tasty polygons and scaling sprites, Slitherine have also jammed a series of High Colour cut-scenes into the Tyrannosaurus Tex

Game Pak(sic)! What this means is that when the game is finally released, you'll be experiencing cool comic-strip-esque intermissions between levels. Yes - the game actually has plot, and whilst, as in most First Person Shooters, it isn't integral to the gameplay, it does justify certain scenarios. For example, some of the levels have a time limit imposed on them (these timed levels tend to have less enemies to kill and less puzzles to solve, being more about you trying to find your way out of a maze as fast as possible) and are often justified by a scene-setting cut-scene that reveals that the mine you're exploring is set to cave in, or something similar. See? It's not vital information, but it helps set the scene.

All in all, Tyrannosaurus Tex looks set to be a winner. It's a genre that's never been seen on the Gameboy before, yet it has enough innovative touches incorporated into it to make it seem worth purchasing even in the light of the more graphically complex P.C. titles of the same genre. The sheer grooviness of a portable FPS on Gameboy, plus the terrific sensation of being chased down a corridor by a massive T-rex should make for some groovy laughs. The game's definitely got potential. But how much fun is it? We just don't know, and we won't know, until it's finally released, and we're able to get our grubby mitts on it. We're excited, definitely, but we'll reserve our judgement until we've had a chance to thoroughly play the game. Until then, save your pennies - just in case. This game proves there's more to Gameboy than Pokémon.

There are two types of behaviour programming behind the enemies in Tyrannosaurus Tex. You might think you're in for an easy ride when you first play this game and come across enemies programmed to follow a set path, only attacking you if you get in their way, but prepare for a bit of role-swapping as you discover the enemies programmed with the second behaviour pattern. Slitherine haven't dubbed these second batch of enemies "Hunters!" for nothing. Giant robots, and even a massive T-rex reminiscent of the one from that ZX81 retro classic "3D Monster Maze" give chase to you during the game, seeing the hunter (you) become the hunted. Scared? You will be. You'll have to sprint around like a mad buffoon, trying to find a harpoon. Just don't, whatever you do, let the T-rex chase you into a room full of more enemies...or even a dead-end! Gah! This is the adrenalin rush. This is the excitement. This is the challenge. Face those hunters like the man/woman you are. I believe in you. Good luck!

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The multiplayer mode has been very carefully balanced. Playing as the T-Rex, one might think you'd have everyone at your mercy, but the giant dinosaur can only attack with his claws, and cannot pick up the weapons scattered throughout the level. The Hover Robot also can't pick up any extra weapons, and is very vulnerable to Laser fire, yet he proves extremely agile to control - being the fastest of the characters available. The Tank boasts extreme fire power - starting off with a grenade launcher, yet this takes time to reload, and whilst the Close Combat Robot can pick up a selection of different weapons, it's very vulnerable to laser fire. As you can see then, Slitherine have given each different character their own strengths and weaknesses, so you won't just be choosing characters on the basis of their graphical style, but rather on the style of gameplay they make way for [For example, if you choose T-rex, you'll be running around chasing your opponent down corridors, yet if you're the Hover Robot, a style of hit and run may be best].

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The Colt:

This is the very first weapon that's available to you, and you'll always be able to use this gun, even when out of ammo, (although it will fire a little weaker if this is the case). The gun does reasonable damage to the likes of Dinosaurs and Robots, and whilst you'll start off with just the one colt, you get to pick up a second during the game, effectively doubling your fire power, as you learn to use both simultaneously. Sweet.

Harpoon Gun:

The harpoon gun won't work on the likes of Robots, but it's extremely adept at dinosaur annihilation. The great thing about the harpoon, is that for the few seconds between you firing, and the harpoon hitting its target, you're able to control the direction of the harpoon thanks to a unique guidance system. It's not always possible to correct a complete miss, due to the small amount of time you have to control its direction, yet nonetheless, the feature can prove extremely useful at times.

The Laser Gun:

This gun works especially well on Robots and such like - overloading their circuits, ensuring their complete and utter obliteration. Very satisfying stuff, yet the laser's high ammo consumptions means that it must be used sparingly, or else you may not have enough ammo when you need it most.

T-Rex Claws:

These can be pretty lethal, yet playing as the T-rex, you need to get really close to your opponent, before you can use them. You'll have to do plenty of laser dodging then, to get close enough, yet believe us, it's worth it. There's something scarily satisfying about leaping on your prey and clawing it to death. Er...um...you can lock me up now. =)

The Ultimate Weapon!?:

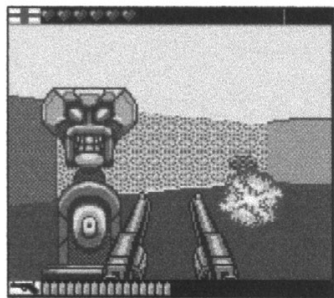
As you can see, each weapon has its own weak point - the Colts aren't that powerful, the Harpoon isn't effective against robots, the Laser uses up ammo quickly, you need to be close to an opponent to use the T-rex's claws....etc, etc..no doubt when you finally get to play this game you'll long for a weapon that does it all. Well here's the good news, if you play the game thoroughly enough, you may just come across a certain secret weapon, the power of which is sure to astound. It's out there people....all you've got to do, is find it! Good luck!

"There's Shooting, and THEN, there's Shootin'!"

As one might expect, a tap of the fire button is all that's needed to..erm...fire. Simple, yes? Well, whilst most of us would have been fine with Slitherine leaving it at this, they haven't. There's another method of attack. By holding down the fire button, and then releasing it, each weapon gives off an alternative shot. The Laser, for instance, outputs a continuous blast beam when you hold in fire. It's extremely lethal, yet players are discouraged from using it constantly as it consumes a lot of ammo.

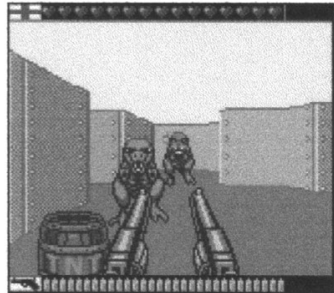
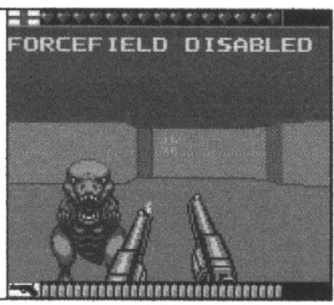
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The two killer robots in this rather large room aren't your only problem - what's that in the background? A Force-field?

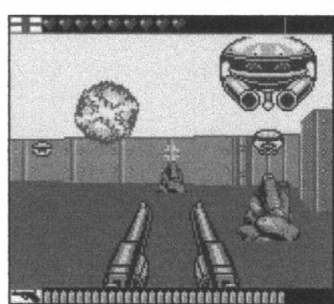
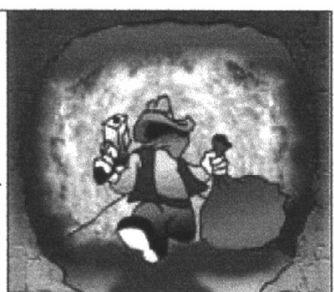
Clever you, you've managed to disable the force-field, but enough with the celebrating - strafe left and shoot that Dino Tex!



Two Dinosaurs to deal with now 'eh?

Hmm...I wonder if you can use that barrel of TNT to your advantage somehow...

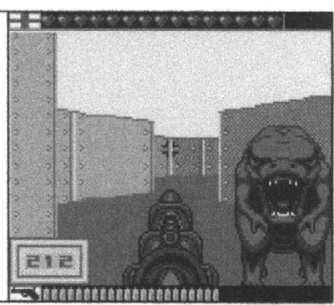
This is an actual Gameboy Color(sic) screenshot! It's part of one of the High Colour cut scenes. Hmm...I'm impressed.



Gah! Annihilate those speedy little hover 'bots!

The Dreaded T-rex!

Joey Voice: "Hey! Who you roarin' at?"





United Games Interviews the Development Team responsible for this epoch making title!

We're really chuffed to be granted an audience with you, as Tex is really getting a lot of media attention - particularly on the net for its graphical innovations - innovative in style considering the usual 2D nature of Gameboy titles, at least.

Was making the game 3D a deliberate attempt to make a bold statement, or was it an idea spun off of an initial gameboy design?

Ben - Yes, we wanted to make a game which would really surprise people, show them something on the Gameboy which they thought was impossible. We're all fans of first person shooters and we thought it would be great to play 3D deathmatches on the Gameboy, in places where you can't take a PC.

Hearing the title, and seeing a selection of the screen shots, I immediately thought - "3D Monster Maze". Were any of the team inspired by this now revered ZX81 classic?

Ben - I learnt to program on the ZX81, and although I never owned a copy of 3D Monster Maze, I used to see the screenshots in all the magazines. It looked awesome! When we were designing T-TEX and we were thinking of what kind of baddies to populate the levels with I immediately thought of the big T-Rex from 3D Monster Maze!

Since you're the first to have developed a 3D Gameboy title, I'm given the impression that 3D coding for the Gameboy Colour is a pretty arduous task. Is this the case, or is it just that other companies have lacked the ambition and gone along with a myth that it's an impossible feat?

Iain - I think other people just thought it wasn't possible and to be honest they were nearly right! Its taken a long time to develop, but we are extremely pleased with the results.

If it is so difficult, what compromises have had to be made, or what obstacles presented themselves to you during development, and how did you overcome them?

Ben - The biggest obstacle which has reared its head time and time again is the

speed of the Gameboy. It really is a very slow processor, so it has been a great challenge making sure the game runs at a fast pace, and that things don't slow down when there are too many baddies/fireballs/pickups etc... on the screen. After many, many hours of hard work we've managed it though!

Are there any plans to license out segments of the code to other developers to enable more 3D games to emerge?

Iain - We don't have any plans for this at the moment, but its not something we would rule out.

Tyrannosaurus Tex certainly looks the part, and is a technical accomplishment, but how does the gameplay match? Roaming around a maze could easily get very tedious. What interesting gameplay elements have you incorporated to raise Tex out of the realm of mediocrity and enable it to receive critical acclaim?

Ben - Guns, lots of different guns. Lots of different power-up orbs, including mega-damage and invisibility (allowing you to sneak past enemies). Different pickups like keys and diamonds, explosive barrels which actually destroy the scenery and reveal secret locations(!), teleporters to whizz you around the levels...too many features to list!

Iain - What makes a great first person shooter is a combination of technology and level design. The first step was to get the engine in place and then to add all the features Ben mentions above. The next step was to lay out the levels in a way that is fun and challenging. New features are introduced to the player as they progress through the game to keep it interesting. There are also lots of shortcuts which, if the player takes them correctly, will make levels much easier to complete. For example, there's one level where there are a bunch of dinos being held back by a force-field. There is a button that releases the force-field, but if you let them all out at once you are likely to get overrun. It is possible to take them all down, but it's very difficult! To make it easier the player can search for ways to release them one at a time... but that's enough of a clue :-)

You've put a lot of effort into the story, and your website even boasts an online comic strip intended to build up to the release of the game. How much of an emphasis has been based on the plot? Is it merely a nice distraction/interlude or will the plot form an integral part of the gameplay?

Iain - In first person shooters the story is very rarely an integral part of the game (well the good ones anyway!), so I'd be lying if I said it was integral, but it is more than mere icing. As you progress through the game, events in the story are reflected in the missions you play. We treat the story as a reward for the player. Some people are not interested and will skip through to the next level, but we're very attached to Tex and hope many of the gamers out there will get attached to him too!

What have you personally been involved in during the game's development - how much sleep have you lost, how long is your hair, how many Pot Noodles have you eaten your way through, and do you sleep in a sleeping bag in the office, as the stereotype of a coder may have us believe?

Iain - I'm the producer. I actually left Eidos to join Slitherine as I thought the game was so good :-)

Ben's the programmer, so he's the clever one. Dan and Fad are the artists. Dan does all the comic and story book art and designs the characters, while Fad is an old-school pixel artist who refuses to work in more than 16 colours and on anything bigger than 32x32 pixels :-)

Mike is the level designer. As for longest hair, that would have to go to Ben. I had mine all chopped short about two years ago. Ben did not have a day away from work except Christmas day for over a year, and during that time his hair exploded in all directions! He's recently had a hair cut, but he did bear a strong resemblance to the wild man of Borneo before then :-)

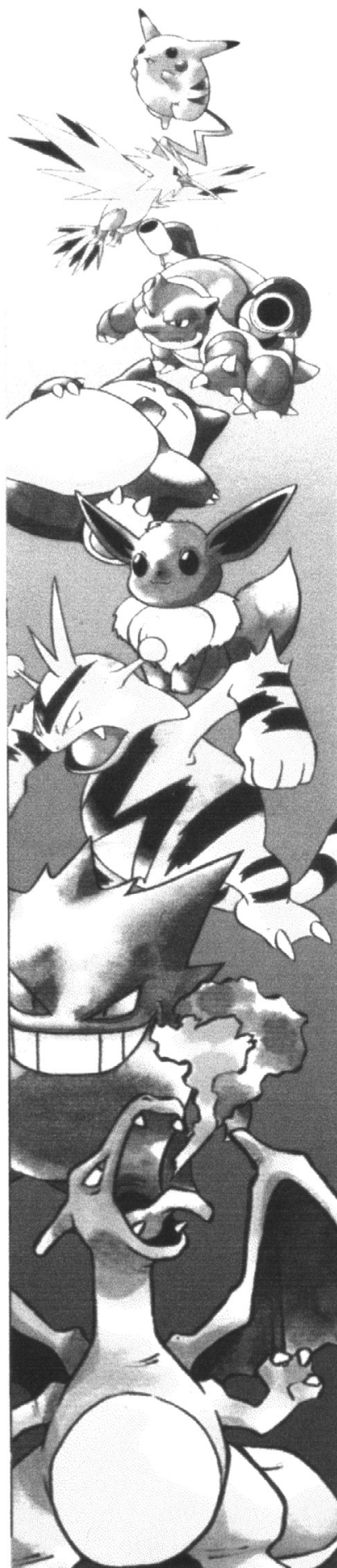
In general all the programmers I know are tall and skinny with short hair, except when they're not let out of the office for a year! We have an office in Lincolnshire where Ben and Dan work, but me and Fad both work from home and communicate by e-mail, phone etc. Ben was sleeping in the office some nights and definitely ate the most Pot Noodles, although my bedroom is actually my office so I sleep at the office every night :-)

Do we know who's to publish the game and when it's to be released?

Iain - I cant say at the moment, but we should know more very soon.

Oh - and finally, is there anything else you want to tell our readers?

Iain - For more information or to check out our great online comic strip, head over to our website at www.slitherine.co.uk .



POKÉMON

Gold & Silver

James Haggar tells you what you need to know!

Learning to tell the Difference:



So what differences are there between the new Gold and Silver versions of Pokémon, and the Red, Blue and Yellow versions that we're all so fond of?

Well to start with, the silver and gold incarnations feature more impressive graphics, with the battle scenes in particular seeming the most graphically enhanced. The story line has also been improved, and you no longer play as Ash but as a new Pokémon trainer whose name you're able to choose.

The game also features both night time and day time scenarios, thanks to a built in clock that you set when you play the game for the very first time. This adds a new dimension to the gameplay, as you can only catch certain types of pokémon in the day, whilst others can only be caught at night. This adds to the life span of the game.

What about the new Pokémon?

The Gold and Silver versions of Pokémon ups the total number of collectable Pokémon to a massive 250. This includes the original 150 from the Red, Blue and Yellow versions. We've also reason to believe that there will be a secret Grass Type character that will only be available from download centres - a bit like Mew was in the Red, Blue and Yellow games, but we've yet to hear confirmation of this. Out of the extra one hundred pokémon that we know will be new to the game, some are brand new, whilst others are evolved versions of older characters. Still others are non-evolved versions of older characters. You see there are three stages of Pokémon evolution - pre-evolved, normal, and evolved. For example in Gold and Silver you can get Pik who evolves into Pikachu, and then finally Richu. The Pokémon in Gold and Silver also have a sex (!!!) meaning that you can catch a male and female and make them breed to get a new type of Pokémon. You literally have to put the two pokémon (who must be of the same species) into a kind of Pokémon Brothel, and then wait for an hour, (remember the time function?) by which time an egg will have appeared out of which will hatch a pre-evolved Pokémon character of the species that the parents were. The fact that you can't cross-breed keeps the number of Pokémon species set, yet there is still a point to breeding. Say you have two Pichus, yet are missing a Pik from your collection, well...a female and male Pikachu will be able to provide you with a Pik after mating.

Pokémon can also now be made to hold special items, that give them special abilities or help or hinder them in some way. If a Pokémon is equipped with the Fast Claw object, for example, they can get the first attack every go during battle, whilst characters equipped with the Stone item are prevented from evolving. This helps keep your Pika Pika, for collecting purposes. Ahhh....the joys of eternal youth.

Whilst asking loads of questions at ECTS 2000, I also found out that the Pokémon Gold and Silver cartridges are to introduce new types of Pokémon into the game such as Egg, Steel, and Dark, as seen in the trading card game.

So when is it out?

Pokémon Gold and Silver is currently set to be released in Europe this Easter, but the American import is currently up for grabs from specialist retailers.

END ZONE



Our model Becky also features on our websites.

Welcome to the end.
Welcome to a new beginning.

We're finally back after nearly a years silence. We've hit you with this bumper issue made by our dedicated team, as well as sixteen of our readers, and the great thing is, we're not about to vanish for another year as has previous been the case. The next issue is already underway, and what an issue! We'll have our first PlayStation 2 reviews, a massive feature on Computer Game Sound-tracks and Musicians, Music based games, and even RetroZone will be taken over with a review of Back In Time Volume #3 - the third in a series of compilations of remixed C64 game sound-tracks. I'm sorry to say that the next issue will have less pages, but I'm also glad to say it, because less pages means that the issue takes less time to create, which means the first few pages we produce aren't out of date by the time we produce the last few pages (unfortunately, with this issue, this has been the case to a certain extent).

Perhaps the most exciting thing about the next issue, however, is that we'll be staging our "Win A Game of Your Choice!" competition (plus we'll also be giving away a teddy bear in a completely unrelated promotion - but more on that next issue!!). Some of you readers have already entered the competition via our website. Speaking of our site, it's undergoing a major refurbishment, and is set to re-launch in a month or so's time.

For those not in the know, we run two sites. [Http://www.unitedgames.co.uk](http://www.unitedgames.co.uk) is about this magazine you're reading - boring stuff like where to buy us, what our address is, how much we cost, ordering back issues, blah, blah, yawn, yawn, whilst <http://www.game-extra.co.uk> is our unique gaming service - a massive archive of computer game articles! Use it to contribute to the next issue of United Games, to read articles as they're submitted to us, to use un-copyrighted articles in your own website or fanzine, or to ask permission from copyright holders to use copyrighted articles. You can even get articles posted to you as well! It's our Game eXtra service - and it's a little bit special.

Websites aren't everything though. We're a print and postal service first and foremost, and hey(!) if you've been reading Community Zone, you'll already be aware that we've a mailing list you can be put on. The idea is that we send you a flyer whenever a new issue of the magazine is out, so you can nip off to your local indie to get it for a pound, or else order it by post for the rather more expensive £1.70 (oer...). We're also currently contemplating starting a newsletter but this is very much at the ideas stage at the moment, so we'll have to see. Game eXtra - the online archive of gaming articles we're working on also currently operates by post. You can contribute to the archive by sending off for a Review Pack (see Community Zone) and you can also order individual articles to read. For a list of available articles simply send a S.A.E. to:

Give me a Game eXtra List, PO BOX 853, Harrow. HA1 3YU.

Anyway - the issue has ended now. That's it. Stay United, and thanks for reading!

~Andrew Mehta~

Competition Rules and Regulations:

"No, no...look I'm sorry..."
"Awww...but...but..."
"No! No...it's not gonna happen!"
"Please...<whimper!>"
"No! You can't enter the competition!"
"Why not?"
"Because you're a Team Member!!!"
"Oh, well what about my mate Mat?"
"What? Mat Owen? Nononono.... he contributed to this issue! He's not allowed to enter!"
"Well, how about Taz or Nick Agar then?"
"What!?! Computer Exchange or CHIPS staff aren't allowed to enter!"
"So let me get this straight - Team Members, people who have contributed to this particular issue, as well as Computer Exchange and CHIPS staff aren't allowed to enter the Pokémon or PlayStation 2 T-shirt competitions?"
"Totally...you've got it."
"Oh come on Mr Editor...!!!"
"No! The Editor's decision is final!"
"Oh...that's another term and condition you've cunningly sneaked into this dialogue. Clever."
"Why thank you. Have we covered all the points now?"
"Yep, that's it."
"Groovy, now get out of that PS2 T-shirt and stop playing with Pikachu! Someone's gotta win all that stuff!"
"Oh, yeah...sorry....."

United Games Private Policy:

Whether you're entering a competition, sending off for a review pack, joining our mailing list or just writing in to share your thoughts on the issue - any personal information (such as your name and address, etc) won't be passed onto any shady third party companies.

We reserve the right to print any letters received in a groovy new letters page if it's funky enough, okay? Sweet. Of course if you'd rather we didn't, or you'd like a special nick name to be used when it's printed, just say so in your letter.

All text & layout is ©2001 United Games unless otherwise stated. Kelvin's Vagrant Story review is NOT copyrighted. Feel free to plagiarise it. United Games is usually made on a non-profit making basis, however, this issue has been made at a loss, because we're all slightly crazy. United Games is from the makers of: T.C.P., Ultimate N64 Fanzine, Mania, DangerZone, EGN, EGNCity.com (visit their website now!), Exploding Carrot, Transformers: The Lost Chronicles (<http://www.melted.com/tlc/>), NGT and from those that helped with INSANES and Atari Entertainment Magazine. Note-worthy contributors to this issue include Andrew Crane who was a frequent contributor to Retrogamer Fanzine, and Peter Jordan who used to edit N64 Zone Fanzine.

A SPECIAL NO THANKS TO "IB" WHO TOOK THE COOLEST PIECE OF POKEMON MERCHANDISE WE HAD (A Wiggly Tuff Plush Zipper - i.e. a glow in the dark Popple-esque Pokémon) DOWN TO THE STUDENT BAR AND FAILED TO RETURN IT. Parts of United Games were designed as tributes to Game Zone - the best Games Magazine ever. [Others may fondly remember it's predecessor - Yours Sinclair]

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The end? Or a new beginning?

Pace Micro Technologies (the makers of the new Dreamcast Set Top Box) told United Games that retail options for the machine will be left in the hands of the supplier. So, if say, BSKyB choose to utilise this digital decoder, where ever Sky make the machine available from is where you can get it. As such, the chances are that the box will be sold at stores used to handling digital decoders (i.e. Comet, Toys R Us, Currys, Granada, etc.). Whilst this will allow Sega games to reach a new market, its absence from the shelves of the likes of Game, E.B., and of course your local CHIPS or CEX will no doubt see it no longer considered alongside the likes of PS2, Xbox and Gamecube. Still, no retail plans have yet been made - so we could be in for a surprise. Indeed, at the time of going to press, Pace haven't even announced a supplier of the hardware, although negotiations with several companies have been taking place.

"It's been turning a lot of heads," a spokesperson for the company told United Games, "We've had demos in New York, Denver, Los Angeles and then also in London, and we've been showing it to broadcasters and cable operators on both sides of the atlantic as well as analysts and journalists. Everyone that we've shown it to has been very enthusiastic, so we have great hopes for this technology." Yes, it would seem that Pace are optimistic, believing they can attract new audiences and still appeal to game enthusiasts: "Pace is very excited about this new partnership with Sega. It's going to be offering new opportunities for a wider audience to access games - people who would traditionally not go out and buy a stand-alone games console, and yet it's also providing a new way for games enthusiasts to access the latest games from Sega."

It's as yet unknown whether there will be a GD-ROM disc drive in the new machine within which to place your current DC games, or whether games will be

distributed exclusively via a broadband internet connection and stored on the hard drive. You see, contrary to what you might think, despite the technology to manufacture the new DC set top boxes being in place, Pace have confirmed that they haven't actually been made yet (the above picture is just a mock-up). This is because they usually produce set top boxes to the design of the broadcaster that will be using them, and as I've already mentioned, negotiations with broadcasters are still taking place. If it turns out that there is no GD-ROM drive, then it's most likely that owners of the new Dreamcast-compatible set top box would only be able to enjoy Dreamcast games under pay-per-play or pay-per-game payment schemes which will see the games downloaded via a broadband internet connection, onto the machine's hard drive. This direct selling of the games will hopefully mean cheaper prices and help combat piracy, yet it could be annoying if the machine lacks a GD-ROM drive, as it would mean that owners of the machine wouldn't be able to take advantage of any bargain deals on Dreamcast games down at their local games shop, but rather would have to pay their television broadcaster for the privilege of downloading a game.

Despite the announcement of the new set top box, the original Dreamcast console is still available. It's been reduced to a mere £99, as Sega seek to shift their remaining stock (they will officially stop manufacturing the console at the end of this fiscal year - i.e. March the 31st), and with class games available, and more on the way for at least another year, it still looks like a good deal. Even still, unless this set top box takes off, it looks like the glory days for Sega have passed...at least on the hardware side of things...for as far as Sega's software is concerned, a new age is dawning. Sonic is coming to PlayStation. People across the land are smiling.

Full Report on Page 28