

March 2005

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Volume 18 Number 3

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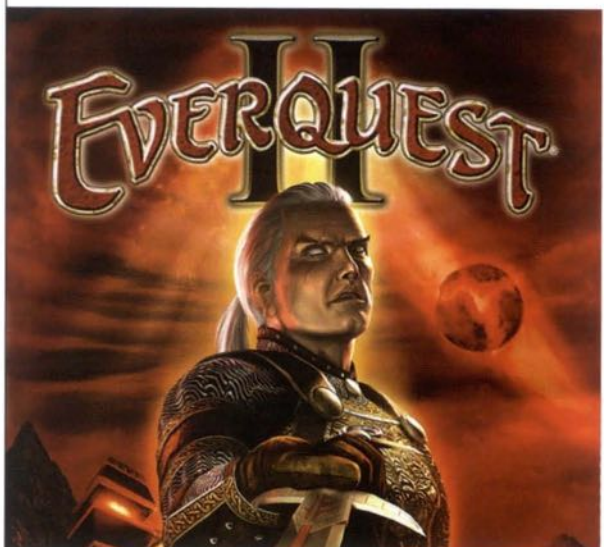
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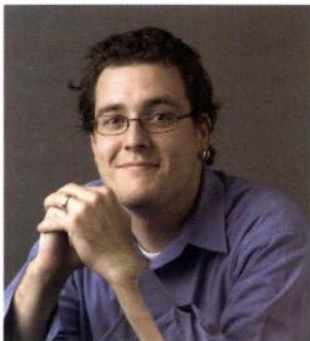
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www.hubcanada.com/TheMagazine

- Cell phones for kids
- Podcasting: The broadcasting revolution
- LeapFrog Profile
- Building the Ultimate Gaming PC: Part Five
- Chewing the Core



Editorial



To quote Bob Dylan – even though I'm pretty sure he would not endorse such a quotation given the context – "the times they are a-changin'." We've likely all

heard the oft-quoted trivia point of videogame sales surpassing movie box office receipts in revenue a few years ago. When this information was first brought to light, it was big news. Videogames had finally made their way out of the wood-paneled basements of yore and into the living room; out of obscurity and into the mainstream consciousness. While still not as pervasive as movies or television, interactive entertainment is catching up and is recognized not only as a huge industry but as a burgeoning art form and a major element of the "digital lifestyle."

With that in mind, we're happy to introduce expanded gaming content in HUB: Digital Living.

For more than three years, Total Gamer has provided an independent voice for Canadian gamers. That voice just got a bit louder with its integration into HUB. Our expanded coverage will continue Total Gamer's mandate to bring the best news, reviews, previews and feature coverage in the world of interactive entertainment to Canadian gamers from a Canadian perspective.

In addition to expanding video game coverage, our regular coverage of all things digital is now more logically broken down and grouped into sections. Wireless, as the name implies, covers all things wireless from portable audio and video players to personal digital assistants (PDAs) and cell phones. Personal Computing brings computer hardware, software and peripheral reviews, columns and features. Home

Entertainment covers the myriad devices that make up the digital living room and the underlying technologies that make it all possible. Digital Imaging offers the latest from the worlds of digital photography and video with tutorials, hands-on reviews and industry news. The Test Lab puts products related to the cover theme head-to-head, testing and evaluating their performance under controlled circumstances.

We hope you'll agree that these changes are for the better and, as always, we welcome your feedback.

Enjoy the issue,
Andrew Moore-Crispin
Editor-in-Chief

Correction: Last month Samsung was incorrectly billed as a Japanese company. It is in fact a Korean company. HUB regrets the error.

Wayne Belzer writes: RE: CES 2005: Cell phones, Feb 2005 I enjoyed reading the article on cell phones, BUT ... It is unfortunate that Canadians do not have the same access to technologies that exist in the expanding world market. Some of the phones featured are interesting, and would be more so, if they were available in Canada. As they are not (currently), I find the article a bit of a teaser. I tried the web site www.hubcanada.com, but was unable to find "more information" on these phones. I appreciate that the spread of technology is sometimes slower than desired, but it would be appreciated if the information passed on to readers reflected these limitations.

A. Leong writes: I'd like to see a really compact (digital audio) player that can be implanted at the base of the brain, maybe connected to the auditory nerves. That would be VERY portable! The only drawback, I suppose would be the potential hassle of going through airport security. [Well, that and having an MP3 player fused to your brain stem. ed.]

Letter of the Month

Congratulations to Cecil E. King whose letter has been selected as our Letter of the Month.

I believe a physical e-book reader is long overdue (and I'm not talking about reading a PDF file on a tablet PC). This gadget will have 4 or 5 e-pages – paper-thin electronic displays that will function much like regular pages of a book. For instance, students will appreciate being able to read text on one page and look at a diagram on the previous or next page. Having multiple physical pages is the key, but since it is electronic, the pages need not be sequential; you can have one e-page display page 10 of the text, another showing page 101, and another 105.

For his letter, Cecil wins a Zling Slot 256MB digital audio player from Z-Cyber (www.z-cyber.net).

This month in addition to your general feedback, we're asking for your thoughts on the question of the month: What gadget or piece of technology do you use most often?

Send us your thoughts and general rants and raves:

letters@publishing.ca

The Letter of the Month will receive a Microsoft optical "S+arck" mouse. Created by cutting-edge designer Philippe Starck, the mouse features a striking ambidextrous "hemisphere" design separated by a lighted strip, resulting in an innovative marriage of form and function. (www.microsoft.com)



HUB

DIGITAL LIVING

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EDITORIAL

Editor-in-Chief Andrew Moore-Crispin
andrew@publishing.ca
Editorial Assistant Erin Bell
erin@publishing.ca
Contributing Editors David Tanaka
Sean Carruthers
Art Director Steven Stoner

Advertising Sales

V.P. Sales Chris Cole
chris@publishing.ca

ONTARIO/TORONTO

Corporate Account Managers Ralph Ventriglia
ralph@publishing.ca
April Lensen
april@publishing.ca

Ad Sales

Karim Rizk
karim@publishing.ca
Vik Deonanan
vik@publishing.ca
Heather Knight
heather@publishing.ca
Sebastien Garnier
sebastien@publishing.ca

MONTREAL

Karim Sahnine
karims@publishing.ca

WESTERN CANADA

Vivian Jin
vivian@publishing.ca
Jason Hay
jason@publishing.ca

Business Group

President Scott Piccolo
scott@publishing.ca
V.P. Finance and Operations Frank Diecidue
frank@publishing.ca
Production Coordinator Christie Swail
christie@publishing.ca
Production Assistant Liz Van Der Wee
Liz@publishing.ca
Circulation Manager Debbie Johnston
debbie@publishing.ca
AR Manager Scott Robichaud
scottr@publishing.ca
IT Manager Steve Quinney
steveq@publishing.ca

Piccolo Publishing Inc (Head Office)

20 Duncan St. Suite 201 Toronto, ON, M5H 3G8
Tel: 416-348-9666 Toll-free: 866-757-0179
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Kid-friendly DVD Easter eggs

If you've heard of DVD "Easter eggs", and chances are you have, then you're likely aware that not all of them are suitable for young eyes.

For the uninitiated, the Easter eggs concealed on many of today's DVDs are hidden treats for movie lovers that serve as a reward for those savvy enough to unlock them. Typically, you need to press a few buttons on the remote to reveal the secret section.

Eggs may be a message from the filmmaker, an alternate ending, a blooper reel, a videogame, and so on. The point is, they're not listed as an extra on the back of the DVD box.

The following are a few kid-friendly Easter eggs to find on movies you likely have in your growing DVD collection.

Shark Tale

Pop in the DVD and from the main menu, press the Left arrow button on the remote and the "No Left Turns" sign will illuminate. Press Enter (or Select on some DVD players) to follow along with a colour storyboard of the hit animated movie. Also, from the main menu, select "Special Features," then click "More." Now, highlight the words "Special Features" and press the Right button on the DVD remote and stars will appear on top of the seahorse. Press Enter to access a hidden "Meet the Cast" bonus section.

Spider-Man 2

This superhero-sized double DVD features three Easter eggs. Here's a good one: Insert the first disc and from the main menu, select "Special Features" and then choose "Commentaries." Once inside, highlight the words "Technical Commentaries Off" but don't press Enter. Instead, press the Right arrow button on the DVD remote, followed by the Up arrow. A yellow spider will appear. Press Enter to watch a funny clip of director Sam Raimi introducing a screener of the movie to a Japanese audience. Who knew he had such a sense of humour?

Freaky Friday

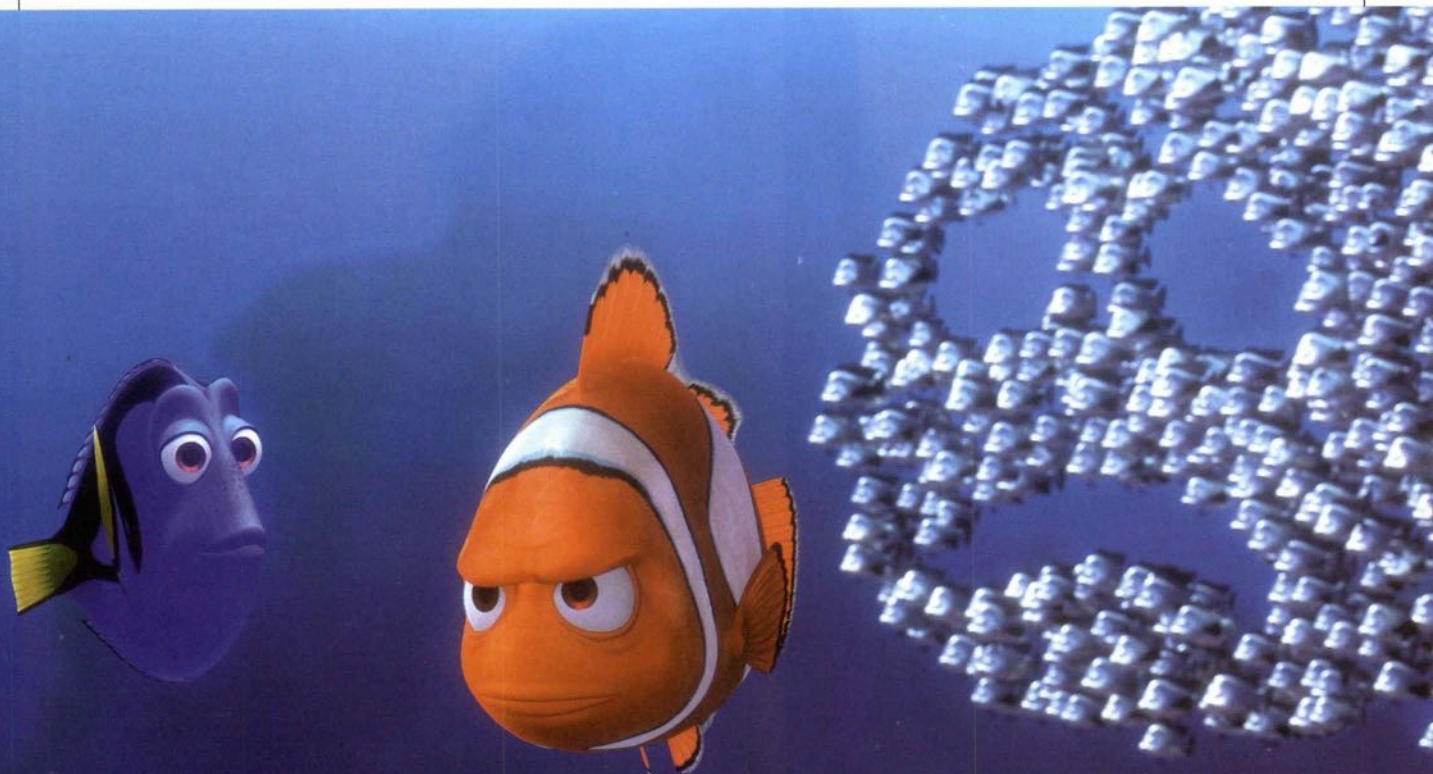
This funny "switch-comedy" film has a few hidden Easter eggs to find. From the main menu, highlight the word "Captions" and press the Right arrow on the DVD remote. The fortune cookie will now be highlighted. Press Enter and the characters on the main menu will switch clothes! This works four times, each with a unique outfit. The second egg can be found in the "Bonus Features" section. Select "Freaky Jams," and once inside, press the Down arrow on the DVD remote until Jamie Lee Curtis' head is highlighted. Now press Enter to watch this veteran actress perform the entire guitar solo from the concert in the movie.

Finding Nemo

This mega-popular animated film features six hidden Easter eggs on its two DVDs. Here are two of them: Insert the second disc and select "Bonus Materials" from the main menu. Once inside, highlight the "Back" arrow at the bottom of the screen, but don't press Enter just yet. Instead, press the Down arrow on the DVD remote. A small green fish will appear. Now press Enter for a funny "AquaScum 2003" commercial. For another clip, enter the section entitled "Mr. Ray's Encyclopedia" and once again highlight the "Back" arrow at the bottom of the screen. Press Down on the remote and another green fish will appear. Press Enter to see Dory in awe of you, before Marlin tugs her away.

Shrek

Two hidden eggs are buried on this double DVD set. Pop in either one of the two discs and select the "Special Features" menu section. Press the Up arrow twice until the Gingerbread Man's buttons turn orange. Now press Enter to read a random Shrek "Fun Fact" – each time you visit this egg, it'll be a different fact. A second egg is on the second disc. Navigate over to the word "Play" but do not press Enter just yet. Instead, press the Up arrow on the remote and a musical note will illuminate orange. Now



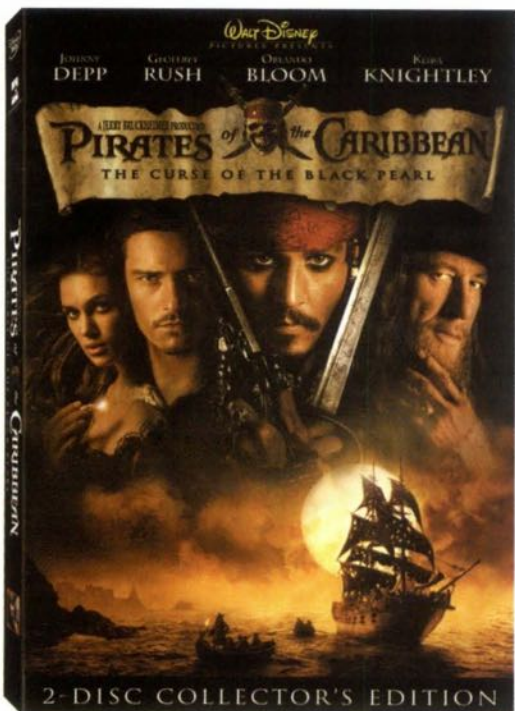


press Enter to view the "Shrek In the Swamp Karaoke Dance Party." Hilarious!

Pirates of the Caribbean

This swashbuckling two-disc set includes many hidden Easter egg treasures, ranging from Japanese trailers of the film to a clever behind-the-scenes look at special effects. For a humorous clip, pop in the second DVD and select "Moonlight Serenade" from the main menu. Once inside, press the Down arrow on the DVD remote twice and one of the skull's teeth will turn bright yellow. Press Enter and guitarist Keith Richards from the band The Rolling Stones will explain why he believes Johnny Depp's portrayal of Jack Sparrow was influenced by his trademark swagger and facial twitches.

By Marc Saltzman



Poppins and tigers and thunderbirds, oh my!

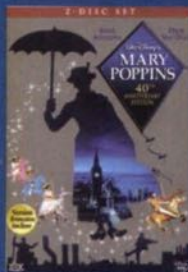
Mary Poppins – 40th Anniversary Edition

www.disneydvd.com Price: \$27.99

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- "I Love to Laugh" set-top game
- Rare behind-the-scenes footage
- Never-before-heard deleted song, "Chimpanzoo"
- All-new animated adventure hosted by Julie Andrews

Perhaps the greatest children's musical to ever hit the big screen, Mary Poppins tells the story of an enchanting nanny who magically makes even the most mundane chores fun. Songs like "Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious", "Chim Chim Cher-ee", and "A Spoonful of Sugar" have been charming children for decades and hold just as much appeal now as they ever did. The 40th Anniversary Edition DVD is jam-packed with features that will appeal to parents and children alike, including instant access to any of the movie's songs, plenty of trivia for Poppins buffs, interactive games, behind-the-scenes footage, and even a lost Mary Poppins song.



Two Brothers

www.twobrothersmovie.net Price: \$27.99

Special features include:

- Several educational mini-documentaries including "Tiger Brothers", "Tiger Trainers", and "Wild About Tigers"
- Commentary and journal by director Jean-Jacques Annaud

These days, if a movie isn't computer animated or doesn't have loads of special effects kids don't seem to want anything to do with it. Two Brothers is the movie industry's latest live action casualty; despite widespread critical acclaim it took in a paltry \$18 million at North American box offices. A story about a pair of estranged tiger siblings who find each other in adulthood and embark on an amazing journey home together, Two Brothers was guided by the expert hand of Jean-Jacques Annaud, director of the classic family movie The Bear. What it lacks in talking toys and raucous humour Two Brothers more than makes up for with its touching story and the noble hearts of its feline protagonists.



Thunderbirds

www.thunderbirdsmovie.com Price: \$27.99

Special features include:

- Exploration of Lady Penelope's gadgets and accessories
- Rehearsal and design footage
- Music video by Bust

Okay, who ordered the big budget Hollywood movie based on a dubious 40-year-old puppetmation TV series? And how much did they pay actors like Ben Kingsley and Bill Paxton to do it? Hopefully not much, since Thunderbirds flopped like a puppet without any strings when it was released last summer.

Still, it's not as bad as you might think. Sort of a hi-tech Home Alone with Spy Kids sensibilities, Thunderbirds focuses on the youngest member of the Tracy family, Alan, as he and his friends try to outfox a group of bad guys who have invaded the Thunderbirds' island intent on stealing their hi-tech vehicles. It's nothing more than mindless entertainment, but kids will be mesmerized by the special effects and parents will quietly admire the surprisingly chic sixties-inspired set design.



By Chad Sapieha

Test Lab: Entry-level digital cameras

Sending the kids off on a March Break field trip with the family's digital camera in tow isn't likely, nor is it terribly smart. Digital cameras are an investment in documenting family happenings and while the pictures the kids took while sitting in a canoe at camp will add some flavour to the family's photo album, it's probably not worth the risk.

As digital cameras keep improving on the high end, the price of entry-level digital cameras falls while the capabilities of said entry-level cameras improve.

HUB tested five entry-level digital cameras that might be suitable for kids. Many of these cameras would also serve as a good introduction to digital photography for the film holdouts in your life.

We asked manufacturers to submit sub-\$200 digital cameras for evaluation. As these cameras are the entry-level in the huge and still growing digital arena and are being evaluated with kids in mind, the criteria they're held to is different than it might be for higher end or even mid-range digicams.

The usual criteria such as megapixel count, zoom capability and the like are still taken into consideration, although when evaluating digital cameras suitable for kids, other factors like durability, expandability and ease of use are at least as important. If an entry-level digital camera isn't simple to operate it likely won't see the constant use it should – the benefit of not having to buy film is practically lost in this case.

In a similar vein, these are also important features to look for in a first digital camera for those people whose VCRs still flash 12:00 – or to update the cliché for the new millennium, for those who still have VCRs. Relative to mid-range and higher end digital cameras, the entry-level obviously makes some sacrifices. Users shouldn't expect, for example, the fast start up or image processing, high megapixel counts, large LCD screens or excellent industrial design their more fully featured brethren boast.

That said, the cameras submitted are for the most part quite capable. They all incorporate a movie mode for capturing short, generally 320x240 resolution clips and while none in this round up give access to aperture or shutter speed controls for fine-tuning shots, many allow users to access exposure settings to raise or lower the exposure value to the shooting situation and in some cases, allow users to choose the virtual film speed to change the way in which the camera captures light.



era that also acts as an on/off switch. With a similar goal in mind, navigating on-screen menus when necessary is simple thanks to straight forward setting names and instantly discernable icons. When selecting a scene mode, a brief description of the mode and its intended use pops up on the screen too.

The catch with keeping things as simple as possible comes in that as users develop an understanding of digital photography, they will likely outgrow the camera's hand-holding style.

With a 3.1 megapixel resolution and Kodak's own quality optical glass, the CX7330 takes sharp and true pictures. Printing maxes out at about a 5x7 print as with other 3 megapixel cameras.

Kodak's EasyShare software is perfect for novices, often using one-button automation to accomplish the most common digital photo fixes. However, the hand-holding style will quickly stymie those who want to grow beyond its confines. It incorporates some fun effects that kids will likely enjoy playing around with and is a pretty powerful photo album and organization tool.

FujiFilm FinePix A330

While too large to fit comfortably in a shirt pocket, Fuji's FinePix A330 is a good entry-level digital camera.

Fuji's A series represents the lower end of cameras in the line and the A330 is the most basic of the lot. It still manages to squeeze in features found in some mid-range cameras however. As shutterbugs run into some of the inherent limitations of the automatic approach to photography and choose to exert more control, they may be tricked by an inap-

propriately labeled "manual" mode. Rather than give users some say in the selection of aperture or shutter speed however, setting the camera in manual only serves to unlock a previously hidden portion of the menu where users can access exposure compensation settings (-2.1 to +1.5 EV) or choose from a wider than average range of white balance presets.

A few different shooting modes allow for some limited fine-tuning in the way images are cap-

Kodak EasyShare CX7330

The name of Kodak's "EasyShare" line gives away its core ideals ...as a product title perhaps should. A central theme with cameras in the

EasyShare line is simplicity; with the CX7330, Kodak has clearly paid a lot of attention to ease of use in the product development cycle.

Selecting a scene mode is an instantly familiar throwback to point-and-shoot film photography. Rather than bury scene selection settings (auto, sport, night, landscape and close-up) in on-screen menus as some other cameras in the lab have, Kodak opted to mount them on a thumb dial on top of the cam-

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Estimated price: \$200
www.kodak.ca 3.2 megapixels
3X optical zoom Battery type: AA
Storage type: 16MB Internal / up to 512MB SD (not included)
Screen size: 1.5-inch LCD

Pros:

- Shot modes very accessible
- Easy navigation
- "Share" function

Cons:

- Particularly blocky design
- Flimsy feel to access doors
- Plastic body feels hollow

Info Box

Estimated price: \$230
www.fujifilm.ca 3.2 megapixel
3X optical zoom Battery type: AA
Storage type: xD Picture Card 16MB included, up to 512MB
Screen size: 1.5-inch LCD

Pros:

- Relatively fast image processing
- Manual control option
- Nice part-metal body

Cons:

- Shooting modes buried in on-screen menus
- Lens cover slide has dead zones

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tured however, including a night mode that will hold the shutter open for up to two seconds, sport for fast action, landscape and macro. Considering the target market for the A330, the fact that Fuji's excellent f-Menu doesn't make an appearance is a disappointment. With it, users would have had access to ISO settings, resolution and virtual film type – standard, black and white and chrome (slide film equivalent) – and been able to make simple changes to the way images are captured on the fly. Like all recent Fuji cameras, the A330 uses xD media for image storage, which features faster write speeds than most older media. However, it also comes at a slight price premium.

The FinePix Viewer software that comes bundled is a good means of cataloguing images, will take care of common photo problems like red eye and can perform simple edits like rotate and crop. However, double-clicking on a photo in Viewer opens Microsoft Photo Editor (standard with most Windows installs) for colour balance, brightness and contrast adjustment and the like. No fun borders, greeting card projects or similar for the kids. ImageMixer VCD software is included, which makes creating a photo VCD or DVD for playback on a standard DVD players a simple process.

Concord EyeQ 4363Z

Concord manages to pack in some features generally found in mid-range digital cameras while keeping with an entry-level price point with its EyeQ 4363Z. That said, it makes some sacrifices relative to some "brand name" entry-level digicams.

At four megapixels, the 4364Z has the highest non-interpolated resolution CCD of the cameras tested. However, the optics contained in the lens

assembly are of lower quality. What this equates to is a higher resolution capture of a somewhat inferior image. When images are displayed on a TV monitor using the included AV cables, when transferred to a PC monitor and when printed, captured images appear slightly washed out.

The 3X zoom is controlled using a rocker switch that is located in a comfortable position when using the rangefinder. The mechanics of the zoom are sur-

prisingly noisy though, and the lens assembly of the unit tested makes a disconcerting "click" when the inner portion of the lens is retracted during zooming.

While the shooting modes have to be selected on-screen, they are accessible and varied. Modes include night for capturing dark scenes using a tripod, indoor, landscape, sunset, snow and a few others.

The camera ships with PhotoImpression 2000 software, a basic image correction program that incorporates some fun projects like greeting card creation. However for novice image editors and younger children, the software may prove a bit too complex, opting for slider bars and numerous menu items rather than the one-button fixes such users desire.

While it certainly has its crosses to bear, the EyeQ 4363Z's higher than average megapixel count and relative low price make a fairly compelling argument. It also comes with a camera case, a unique feature for cameras in this roundup.



HP Photosmart M307

HP's Photosmart M307 tries to keep things simple by dedicating buttons to many of the most oft-used functions; seven buttons sit on the back of the unit along with a zoom rocker switch, power switch and a four-way directional pad. Functions like shooting mode, flash toggle, self-timer and photo sharing sit to the left of the relatively large LCD screen while others surround the screen above and to the right. Somehow the interface on the back doesn't seem cluttered and if purchasing a camera for a novice, they will likely appreciate having plainly-labeled buttons available at a glance.

Picture quality is reasonable when displayed on a PC monitor or printed but generally lacks contrast and often displays grain even when shoot-

ing in daylight conditions. Without the optional HP M-Series Dock (\$45), images can't be displayed on a television monitor.

For beginner users, the HP Instant Share feature follows a simple setup process on the PC and allows for common sharing tasks like printing and emailing images to be automated upon connection to the PC with HP's Image Zone software installed.

The M07 doesn't incorporate HP's excellent guided panora-

Info Box

Estimated price: \$200
 www.concord-camera.com
 4 megapixels 3X optical zoom
 Battery type: AA
 Storage type: 16MB internal / up to 512MB SD
 Screen size: 1.5-inch LCD

Pros:

- Megapixel count
- Numerous shooting modes

Cons:

- Slight shutter lag
- Noisy zoom
- Exposed LCD

Info Box

Estimated price: \$200
 www.hp.ca 3.2 megapixels
 3X optical zoom Battery type: AA
 Storage type: 16MB internal / up to 512MB SD (not included)
 Screen size: 1.8-inch LCD

Pros:

- Larger LCD screen
- Solid, comfortable feel
- Post-capture audio record

Cons:

- Slow startup
- Slight price premium
- Zoom confusingly billed as combination optical and digital



ma mode, which is a disappointment as it's an excellent feature and would be especially fun for kids and compelling for novices. HP's Image Zone software puts the most common image editing functions within easy reach and effectively automates them to a large degree. The M307 is comfortable in the hand; a sculpted wave on the front of the camera feels natural and the zoom functions, shutter and movie recording buttons are easy to use when holding the camera with one hand. The shell itself looks sleek and feels sturdy despite the fact that it's composed almost entirely of plastic. HP's entry level offering gives users a chance to grow in to a few of its more advanced features as users become familiar with the camera and the types of shots it produces such as ISO speeds and exposure value compensation (-2.0 to +2.0EV)

Info Box

Estimated price: \$149.99
 www.benq.ca 3 megapixel
 4X digital zoom Battery type: AAA
 Storage type: 16MB internal / up to 512MB SD (not included)
 Screen size: 1.5-inch LCD

Pros:

- ultra compact
- inexpensive
- Sliding lens cover

Cons:

- No optical zoom
- Slow startup and image processing
- No TV connection or recharging capability

between them. Budding photographers are therefore required to give a lot of thought to the positioning of the camera relative to the subject when the flash is on, as it's even more prone than usual to capture flash glare from surfaces and red eye from human subjects. Unfortunately, the E30's menu systems aren't as intuitive as other entry-level digital cameras, requiring much trial and error navigation while shutterbugs get used to the menu layout.

With only two shooting modes – macro and landscape – and with precious little access to advanced functions, entry-level photographers will likely fast outgrow the E30. As a quick and dirty decent resolution pocket-sized camera though, it does the job.

Conclusion:

For its solid feel, excellent image editing and cataloguing software, price, larger LCD screen, simplicity and room for growth, HP's M307 camera is the clear winner for kids and digital newbies.

By Andrew Moore-Crispin

BenQ DC E30

BenQ, a company whose name is derived from the slogan "bring entertainment and quality to life" recently got into the digital camera game. Its initial offerings in the mid-range digital camera market are surprisingly good – especially for a first attempt – and generally offer a fairly significant price savings over similarly equipped cameras, although the DC E30 doesn't fare as well as entry-level models from other manufacturers in this round up however. That said, at about \$150 and given its ultra-compact size suitable for slipping in to even a small pocket, it could well be a great introductory camera for kids. The most notable feature lacking in the E30 is optical zoom. Instead, the camera incorporates a 4X digital zoom. Also, owing to its ultra-compact size, the flash is mounted directly above the lens with less than 2cm



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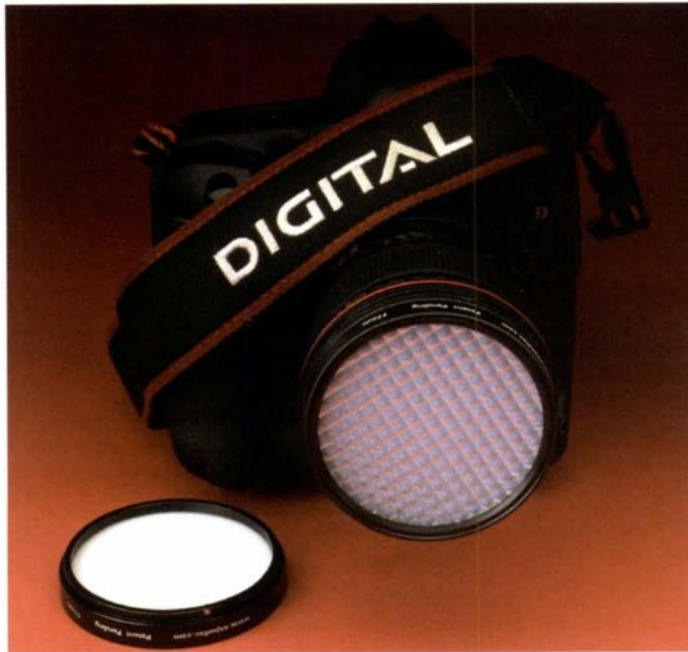
Digital Photography Tutorial 14

Learning to see as the camera "sees"

Part 2 Will the real white balance please stand up

Last month I introduced the idea that what we perceive isn't the same as what the camera records. The camera can only follow the laws of physics and optics, while we humans have a mind full of memories, concepts and beliefs that filter the sensory information captured by our eyes.

Colour is one of those phenomena. A few months ago [Sept. 2004 issue of HUB] I presented photos of the same scene that were taken with the



camera's white balance setting set to auto, daylight, and manual. Which one was the most accurate? A more relevant question is "which one do we like the best?"

Using a fixed white balance setting such as "daylight" will get you close, but the manual white balance feature allows you to more finely tune your setting. This is because the daylight setting of your camera is set to around 5,500 degrees Kelvin but daylight colour temperature varies throughout the day and from one location to another – anywhere from 4,500-10,000+ degrees Kelvin. To get the whites right, it's best to take a manual reading.

Finding a pure white object in a scene isn't always easy, and using a sheet of white bond paper, or the special target cards available from well-stocked photo stores, while tried and true, isn't always convenient. One solution I have been using comes from ExpoDisc Corp (www.expodisc.com). It is a highly tuned white balance filter that attaches to the filter thread on your lens. It's an expensive product, ranging from US\$100-\$150 depending on filter size (a budget line is available for US\$20 less). However, using it is simple: attach it to the lens, take a manual white balance, remove it, and start shooting.

Using a correct white balance setting will help you create more accurate colour in your photos, which is highly desirable in many cases. For example, I sometimes document artists' paintings, and reproducing the colours accurately is a paramount goal.

Having said that, sometimes using an "incorrect" white balance setting creates a more pleasing photo. This is the brain at work again, moderating what the physics of vision brings in. With pictures of people, for example,



we tend to be more forgiving of – or even prefer – shifts toward the warm side of the spectrum. Portrait photographers will use warming filters to make the subject appear rosier or tawnier, and we interpret it positively as a healthy glow. Outdoor photographers too might attach a warming filter or UV filter to take some of the blueness out of a landscape photo.

One of the benefits of digital photography is that you don't need a bank of filters to tune the fixed colour temperature of a roll of film. Digital cameras have a number of temperature settings programmed in. Try shooting outdoors with the white balance set to incandescent, and vice versa. Try taking a white balance reading using a pale pink card or a pale blue one as a target.

Alternatively, you can tune your colour after the fact in an image editor. Some include special filters designed to reproduce the effects of existing photographic filters.

By David Tanaka

Designers show and tell their Photoshop skills

Photo Retouching with Photoshop: A Designer's Notebook

Author: Anthology of various writers,

translated from French by Marie Laure Clec'h

Published by O'Reilly ISBN0-596-00860-0

Paperback, 96 pages

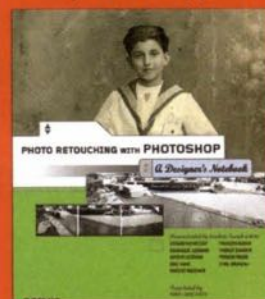
Price: \$36.95

While this book does provide a procedural approach to photo retouching it's at a professional level. If you are an intermediate Photoshop user and are looking for further inspiration, this book could prove useful.

The book highlights one retouching project from each of nine French designers. The first chapter covers a retouching project involving a 100 year-old family photo but most of the other examples involve

commercial projects. Two examples are creating a haunted house matte used in a horror movie and creating an ad for beauty products.

The projects themselves are interesting, while the techniques – for example, glamorizing skin tones, performing digital plastic surgery or building composite images – are ones that would be useful in a commercial environment.



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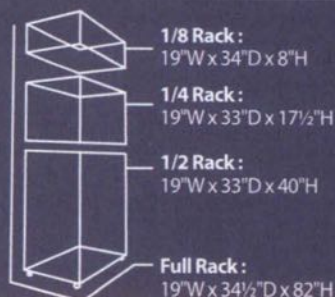
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Building the Ultimate Gaming PC: Part Five

Last time on Building the Ultimate Gaming PC: "With trembling hand and bated breath, I pressed the Power On button..."

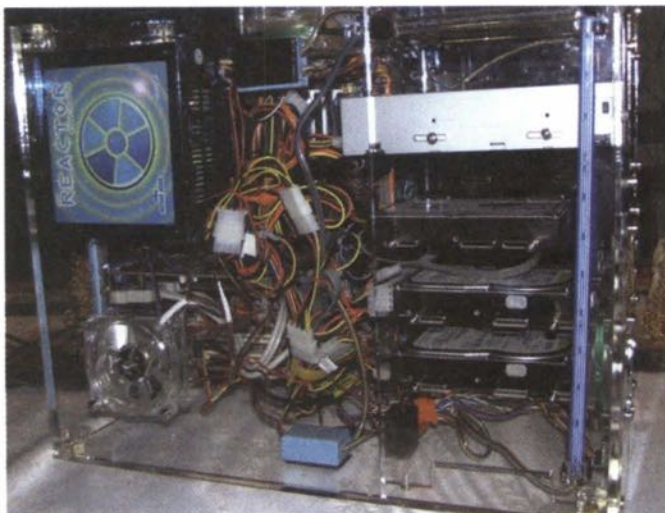
And now this month's exciting conclusion (for a recap of previous installments, visit Hubcanada.com):

The PC now known as Mutant came on! That's right! It worked! First time! Hot dog! It powered up no problem! Flashing lights, glowing fan covers and all! Granted, the resulting light show looked like a circus midway on speed, but Mutant worked!

Loading Windows XP Pro was similarly painless – at least, as painless as installing Windows XP ever is. In fact, the only time the software installations got tricky was with some of the kids' combat-related games. The reason: Windows Pro XP is a multi-user system: We set it up with an all-powerful Administrator account plus individual family user accounts of lesser power. Unfortunately, some of the kids' games would only work if played with full Administrator privileges. When you're trying to keep your kids from changing your settings, this can prove to be a problem. As a result, some of these games can only be played when Dad or Mom is around.

Performance

Together, Mutant's Intel 3.6 GHz Pentium 4 EE (Extreme Edition) CPU chip and Mutant's Abit μ Guru AA8-3rd Eye motherboard rock! The performance



on this machine is astounding: no hesitation, just solid speed and performance. I particularly like the Abit external "Guru Clock" that lets you monitor the system's performance and temperature – a very worthwhile device indeed. It's also nice to know that Guru Clock's "Quick OC" overclocking option – you can push a button to ramp up your CPU speed – is always at hand. However, so far Mutant has been running so fast that I haven't needed to use it.

Overall, I have no complaints about Mutant as the Ultimate Gaming PC. All of the components – the Intel CPU, Abit mobo, ATI Radeon video card,

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Corsair XMS DDR2 memory, Western Digital 10,000 RPM and Maxtor 7,200 RPM hard disks: Plextor external DVD-RW, Logitech keyboard and mouse, and Altec Lansing 5.1 surround system – have performed without a single problem. I have also been impressed by the 17-inch Samsung flat panel monitor we started with, and the 19-inch AG Neovo LCD monitor subsequently sent to us by RadioShack; both work well for gaming. Meanwhile, the Mutant Mods case does look pretty cool with all its flashing lights, although sometimes I have to shut them off to keep from getting a headache. Still, they are a very sharp addition, and the Mutant Mods clear plastic case does look pretty spacey. My only regret is that I was unable to get the clear-fronted internal CD-

RW/DVD-RW drives that I was seeking; it seems that they are no longer made because the clear plastic wasn't strong enough. The Plextor internal PX-716A CD-RW/DVD-RW that just arrived may do, because it comes with a removable (and thus paintable) bezel and optical disk tray cover.

Lessons learned

Having completed my first PC in years, I am astounded by how much easier it is to build such systems these days. The components fit relatively easily, and the software goes on without too much fuss. This said, there are a few things I learned from this experience that I would like to pass on:

First, be sure to look over your case and components before you build, to figure out how they go together. Otherwise you'll end up in the position I did in Part Four, when I had to remove the internal hard drive tower to install the drives. In fact, I lost a number of hours from repeatedly removing the power supply to put other items in place.

Second, don't be surprised that different books will tell you to install different components at different times. For instance, one will tell you to put the motherboard in first, while a second will insist that the drives should go in first.

Recently, I started building a media centre PC using the Intel D925XCV mobo that was originally slated for Mutant (until the Abit AA8 came in). I was somewhat surprised to see Intel's advice to install both the memory and CPU before even putting the mobo into the case! (This said, I do recommend Maximum PC's "Guide to Building a Dream PC". This is a great book for the beginning PC builder.)

What should you do? Given the problems that I had installing the drives inside the Mutant Mods case, I would scope out your project based on the

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limits of your case. For instance, if you're up against an internal tower, as I was with the Mutant Mods case, put the drives in first before adding the mobo. But if your case doesn't have any accessibility problems, put in the power supply, mobo and CPU first, followed by the memory, video card, and then the drives.

Third, keep some spare computer screws on hand, because you never know when you'll need them. Meanwhile, be sure to keep your parts neatly stored either in resealable plastic bags or bottles, because you never know

when a cat might walk through your work site.

Fourth, before you close up the case, be sure to double-check all of your connections. Is the CPU fan plugged in, and are its blades unencumbered by wires? Are the memory cards clicked into place? Is the video card seated properly? Did you plug the USB and FireWire connections into the right pins? Did you connect the power supplies to all of the drives? Does the case close cleanly, without pinching any of the wires? Basically, it makes sense to do a mental walkthrough of the computer's insides, repeating each step of the installation visually to make sure you didn't miss anything.

Finally, is it really worth the extra money to buy top-end components? If you can afford to, the answer is definitely yes! If you can't, then shop carefully to get what matters. For instance, if you're a gamer, get a decent quality video card with its own onboard CPU. This will ensure that your video doesn't stutter or drag. Meanwhile, if you like a big display but don't have the money for a large flat panel, get a big CRT monitor instead. As for the flashing lights, LED-illuminated LCD covers, and clear plastic case sold by Mutant Mods? Although they're not essentials, I find that they really do add to the fun of my Ultimate Gaming PC. This is why I have quietly slipped a Mutant Mods Red Meteor Bubble Tube inside the home media center PC I'm building now. The Bubble Tube adds some sparkle and activity that peeks through the black metal case's fan grills every now and then.

The bottom line: as I have proved, any average person can build their own Ultimate Gaming PC these days. Computer components have become so easy to work with, and software has improved so much, that what used to be impossibly daunting has become moderately challenging. Besides, nothing impresses your kids like building your own PC.

By James Careless

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PC music making - a newbie's guide

For many people who walk into a music store hoping to start a home studio, the experience is completely intimidating: Walls of keyboards, racks of expensive modules and mixing boards, and of course wires everywhere.

The fact is that to start a basic, barebones home studio for recording audio all you need are three simple components: a PC with a soundcard, your instrument of choice, and a simple software program for recording, mixing and editing your tracks.

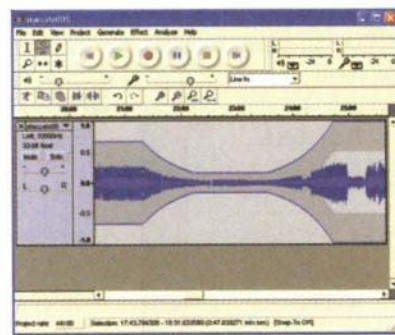
Recording audio into a PC can be as simple as plugging an electric instrument or microphone into the soundcard and hitting record on Windows' built-in sound recorder, found under the Accessories > Entertainment tab in the Start menu and titled, conveniently, "Sound Recorder." Of course, if you actually want to work with more than one track at a time and "overdub" parts over top of each other, you're going to need a more advanced mixer/editor program. But we're getting ahead of ourselves ...

Plugging in

All standard PC soundcards have multiple jacks ("ports") at the back of the machine: the microphone jack, the line-in (used to plug in any sound source, from a keyboard to a CD player) and the line-out (headphone/speaker jack). Certain soundcards may have other jacks, such as additional line-outs and the digital out, which supports 5.1 surround sound and digital speakers.

Plug microphones into the mic input and instruments like electric pianos and guitars into the line-in. MIDI keyboards can be recorded as audio tracks by plugging them into the line-in as well.

Some converters might be required here to turn one end of the 1/4-inch patchcord cables used for guitars and keyboards into the



smaller stereo mini jack required for the back of the soundcard. These stereo minis can be purchased cheaply for about \$10 or less. Some keyboards may also have stereo separation (separate left and right speaker out-

puts). In this case, you need a Y-adaptor to lead from the L and R into the single line-in cable heading into the line-in jack. Failing that, use the L channel, as most keyboards use that channel for monaural ("mono", or single-channel) output.

More advanced soundcards have front-mounted input modules located in one of the computer's bays that typically have 1/4-inch line-ins right out front, which cuts down on the hassle tremendously. These link up internally within the computer case to help process the audio. Some even have bonus features, like FireWire inputs. (Although, if you've bothered to invest in such a sound card you're likely way ahead of this tutorial already!)

Software

Audio mixing/editing software will allow you to record multiple

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audio tracks that can be layered on top of each other to form a complete piece of music. These programs can be as expensive and complicated as you want them to be. [For some high-end options, check out the sidebar.]

A good starter program is one called Audacity (audacity.sourceforge.net), an open source (read: free) program that takes up only 7.2 MB on your hard drive. The program lacks many of the bells and whistles of more advanced programs, so not only is it less confusing and therefore perfect for beginners, but it's also not so much of a resource hog.

Of course, the more components you add to your studio, the more quality you'll be able to squeeze out of your recordings. Tempting as it is to splurge on a lot of gear, however, it's pointless if you don't know how to use it. Master the basics first.

By Erin Bell

Software alternatives

For the deeper of pocket, here are links to the downloadable trial demos of three high-end mixer/editors. If you like what you've tried, however, be prepared to shell out a few hundred dollars for the real thing.

Adobe Audition

<http://www.adobe.com/support/downloads/main.html>

Ableton Live 4 demo

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4002WLM1 \$1369 15.4" XGA/P-M 1.6G/512M 60GB/DVD+/-RW/LAN Modem/Wireless/XP-Home (XP PRO +\$60)	All system parts are upgradeable / Dealers are welcome					
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Value Barebone Series

MB: Giga Byte GA-8S661FXM-RZ SIS661FX chipset
 RAM: Kingston 256MB DDR 400MHz
 FD: Sony 3.5" 1.44M IDE
 HD: Maxtor 40GB IDE HD 7200rpm 2M
 Video: SIS 616FX Chipset
 Optical Drive: LG 8525B 52x32x52 CD-RW
 Sound: Onboard Sound
 Lan: Onboard 10/100 RJ45 LAN
 Case: Mid-Tower (3316-04) with 300 ATX P/S
 (Optional: Operating System, KB, Mouse & Monitor)

Celeron D320 **\$379** Celeron D330 **\$409** P4-3.0E GHz **\$529**

Platinum 775 Series

MB: Giga Byte GA-8I915PDual Intel 915P
 RAM: Geil 1.0G PC3200 Dual Channel Kit (512MbX2)
 FD: Sony 1.44M Floppy Drive
 HD: 160GB Maxtor DiamondMax SATA Drive
 Video: Giga Byte Radeon x300SE 128M DVI/TV out
 Monitor: Acer 1714CB 17" LCD 0.297mm 350:1 14ms
 Optical Drive: LG GSA-4160B 16X DVD±R/RW
 Audio: Onboard C-Media High Def 8 Channel Audio
 Lan: Marvel 8001 6 Channel Audio
 Case: Mid-Tower (CAS-534) with 400W P/S
 KB: Microsoft Wireless Keyboard
 Mouse: Microsoft Wireless Optical USB Mouse
 Speakers: Creative SBS 2.1 350 Speakers & Subwoofer
 (Optional: Operating System)

P4 520 2.8E Ghz **\$1509** P4 540 3.2E Ghz **\$1599**

Diamond 775 Series

MB: Giga Byte GA-8S661FXM-775 SIS661FX chipset
 RAM: Geil DDR PC3200 512MB (Dual 2x256)
 FD: Sony 1.44M FLOPPY DRIVE 3.1/2"
 HD: 80GB Maxtor DiamondMax 133
 Video: Onboard SIS616FX chipset
 Monitor: LG 1705K 17" 1280x1024 60Hz .27mm
 Optical Drive: LG 4480B 48x10x40x16 DVD/CD-RW
 Audio: Onboard 6 Channel Audio
 Lan: Onboard 10/100 LAN
 Case: Mid-Tower (CAS 534) 400W P/S
 KB: Black PS/2 Keyboard
 Mouse: Black Optical USB Mouse
 Speakers: Creative SBS 2.1 350 Speakers with Subwoofer
 (Optional: Operating System)

P4 520 2.8E Ghz **\$869** P4 540 3.2E Ghz **\$969**

Platinum 939 Series

MB: GigaByte GA-K8NF-9 nForce4 chipset
 RAM: Geil 1.0G PC3200 Dual Channel Kit (512MbX2)
 FD: Sony 1.44 Floppy Drive
 HD: 160GB Maxtor SATA Drive
 Video: GigaByte Radeon X300 128MB DVI TV-Out PCI-X
 Monitor: Acer 1714CB 17" LCD 0.297mm 350:1 14ms
 Optical Drive: LG GSA-4160B 16X DVD±R/RW
 Audio: Onboard 6 Channel Audio
 Lan: Onboard Gb LAN
 Case: Mid-Tower (CAS-534) with 400W P/S
 KB: Microsoft Wireless KB and Mouse Combo
 Speakers: Atec Lansing 121 2.1 Speakers System
 FREE: 5 CD Clips Magnetic Organizing System W.Q.L.
 FREE: RF Dino Joystick
 (Operating System Optional)

Athlon 64 3200+ **\$1549** AMD 64 3500+ **\$1649**

Diamond 754 Series

MB: GIGA BYTE GA-K8VM800M VIA K8M800 chipset
 RAM: Kingston 256MB DDR 400MHz
 FD: Sony 1.44M Floppy Drive 3.1/2"
 HD: 80GB Maxtor EIDE 133
 Video: Giga Byte 9250 128M 8x AGP TV Out
 Monitor: LG 1705K 17" 1280x1024 60Hz .27mm
 Optical Drive: LG 4480B 48x10x40x16 DVD/CD-RW
 Audio: Onboard 6 Channel Audio
 Lan: Onboard 10/100 LAN
 Case: Mid-Tower (CAS-534) with 400W P/S
 KB: Black PS/2 Keyboard
 Mouse: Black USB Optical Mouse
 Speakers: Atec Lansing 121 2.1 Speakers system
 FREE: Mouse Holder
 FREE: 5x 9 CD Organizer Rack
 (Operating System Optional)

Athlon 64 2800+ **\$819** 3200+ **\$909** 3700+ **\$1279**

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Intel Pentium 4 LGA 3.0Ghz 1mb cache, **Asus** motherboard P5GDC Deluxe, **1GB DDR2 533 mhz** memory, **Seagate 160GB 7,200 rpm SATA2** drive, **ATI All in Wonder X600PRO** PCI-E 256mb, **Viewsonic VP171B-2 17" 8ms LCD**, **Liteon 16x DVD Writer** Dual Layer, **Antec Sonata Super Quiet Case**, **Logitech Keyboard** and **Optical mouse**, **Altec Lansing 2.1 speakers**, **Windows XP Pro**, Onboard 8 Channel Digital sound, Firewire, 1000 LAN, USB2, SATA, Twin RAID controllers
As listed (#Q57443) **\$2069.00**

POCKET PC'S

HEWLETT PACKARD
Ipaq 1710 (266MHz, 25mb, Bluetooth) 288⁹⁵
Ipaq 2210 (400MHz, 64mb, Blue/WiFi) 457⁹⁵
Ipaq 2415 (520MHz, 64mb, Blue/WiFi) 532⁹⁵
Ipaq 2750 (634MHz, 128mb, Blue/WiFi) 606⁹⁵
Ipaq 3115 (300MHz, 52mb, Blue/WiFi) 430⁹⁵
Ipaq 4350 (400MHz, 64mb, Blue/WiFi) 585⁹⁵
Ipaq 4700 (624MHz, 2mb, Blue/WiFi) 689⁹⁵
Ipaq 4700 GPS Kit (Ipaq 4700 VGA, Bluetooth GPS receiver, charger, Canadian & US maps) 1035⁹⁵
Ipaq GPS Bluetooth mapping add-on 362⁹⁵
Ipaq Keyboard Folding/Bluetooth 124⁹⁵

ASUS
A730 (533MHz, 64mb, 640x480 colour, Blue) 608⁹⁵
A730W (533MHz, 64mb, 640x480 Blue/WiFi) 726⁹⁵

PALM COMPUTING
Zire 31 (200MHz, 16mb, Colour) 175⁹⁵
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Tungsten E (126MHz, 32mb) 234⁹⁵
Tungsten T5 (416MHz, 160mb, Blue) 459⁹⁵

MP3 PLAYERS

Lexar LDP-600 with FM tuner, voice record, and FM radio transmitter 256mb/512mb 134⁹⁵/178⁹⁵
Creative Labs Muvo TX FM 256mb ... 122⁹⁵
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Creative Labs Micro N200 512mb ... 166⁹⁵
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2580 Photo 2400x4800 motorized 189⁹⁵
3170 Photo 3200x6400 211⁹⁵
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4870 Photo 4800x9600 546⁹⁵
4870 Photo Pro 4800x9600 728⁹⁵

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Intel Pentium 4 LGA processor at 3.0Ghz 800mb 1mb cache, **Asus** motherboard P5GD1-VM with onboard video and PCI Express slot, **512MB DDR 400MHz** memory, **Seagate 80GB 7,200 rpm SATA** drive, **LG Electronics 1701 17" 25ms LCD**, **Intel Video controller 900**, **LG 52x CD Writer**, **Deluxe mid tower case**, **Logitech Internet keyboard**, **Optical mouse**, **Onboard digital sound**, **USB 2**, **10/100 LAN**, **Windows XP Home**
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LASER PRINTERS

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ML1740 (17ppm/800dpi) 243⁹⁵
ML2250 (22ppm/800dpi) 255⁹⁵
ML2251N (lan/22ppm/800dpi) 436⁹⁵
CLP500 (colour/20/5 ppm/1200dpi) 550⁹⁵

SAMSUNG Multifunction
SCX4216F (print, scan, copy, & fax) 458⁹⁵

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1012 (15ppm/600 dpi) 228⁹⁵
1320 (22ppm/1200 dpi) 473⁹⁵
1320N (lan/20ppm/1200 dpi) 594⁹⁵
2420 (28ppm/1200 dpi) 624⁹⁵
2420D (28ppm/1200 dpi) 732⁹⁵
2420DN (lan/28ppm/1200 dpi) 999⁹⁵
2430TN (lan/28ppm/1200 dpi) 1110⁹⁵
2430DTN (lan/28ppm/1200 dpi) 1217⁹⁵
4250 (43ppm/1200dpi) 1033⁹⁵
4250N (lan/43ppm/1200dpi) 1420⁹⁵
4250TN (lan/35ppm/1200dpi) 1668⁹⁵
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4345MFP (print, scan, copy, & fax) 3018⁹⁵

acer Notebooks



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Acer Centrino Notebook
Intel 2.0Ghz Centrino, 1024mb, 100gb drive, 15" wide display, Windows XP, ATI X700, Wireless LAN, DVD Writer AC-8104WLMi-XPX \$2686.95

Acer Tablet Centrino PC
1.7Ghz Centrino, 1GB memory, 80gb drive, 14" Touch display, Windows XP Pro, WLAN, DVD Writer AC-TMC303XMI \$2477.95

Acer Pentium 4 Notebook
3.2Ghz P4, 512mb memory, 80gb drive, 17" Wide display, Windows XP Home, WLAN, DVD Writer AC-AS1804WSM-H \$2076.95

Acer AMD SP Notebook
AMD SP 2800+, 512mb memory, 40gb drive, 15" display, Windows XP Home, WLAN, CD/Writer + DVD AC-AS1362LCI-XH \$1111.95

Economy Computer Systems

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Intel 2.4Ghz Celeron Processor, **Asus** motherboard AS-P4SP-MX, **256MB DDR** memory, **Seagate 40GB 7,200 RPM**, **Acer 17 inch** monitor, **Chenbro case**, **LG Electronics 52x CD Writer**, Internet keyboard, mouse, powered speakers, **Windows XP Home**, Onboard Digital sound, 100 Lan, USB 2.0, Video As listed (#Q56365) **\$647.00**
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200GB with Seagate drive, 8mb cache, 7,200 rpm (#GT-MINI200PRO) 229⁹⁵
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Rackmount File Servers

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As listed (#Q56249) **\$1188.00**

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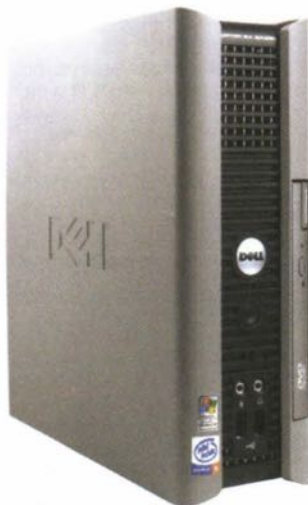
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First Glance

Dell Optiplex desktops

Dell's recent refresh of its line of corporate desktop PCs keeps with the unique requirements of business applications. The Optiplex series is designed for fast deployment, easy diagnosis of problems that may arise and, thanks to the European Union's increasingly strict environmental guidelines, more eco-friendly disposal when the time comes. Four LED status indicators allow IT service personnel to quickly diagnose 24 possible hardware malfunctions and colour coded release levers and sockets allow for tool-free switching and upgrading of components.



By nearing adherence to the EU's Reduction of Hazardous Substances before the July 2006 deadline (which calls for a reduction in environmental hazards traditionally associated with electronic components, including lead, bromides and mercury), the Optiplex takes an important step toward the lead-free desktop machine, which Dell says drastically reduces lead content as compared with even current generation machines.

Casio Exilim Zoom additions

Casio may not be the first company that comes to mind when thinking digital cameras in Canada, however the company has been quietly rolling out good product all the while.

The latest additions to its Exilim Zoom line are the EX-Z750 and EX-Z57, two consumer-level digital cameras set to hit retail shelves in April at estimated prices of \$550 and \$490 respectively (from US\$449.99 and US\$399.99).

Both models incorporate a large LCD screen that dominates the back of the cameras; the EX-Z750 has a 2.5-inch screen where the EX-Z57's clocks in at 2.7-inches but sacrifices the optical viewfinder found in the other model. The cameras feature 7.2 and 5.0 megapixel resolutions respectively and boast fast startup, write speeds and picture preview and negligible shutter lag – at .01 seconds from release to record, the company says.



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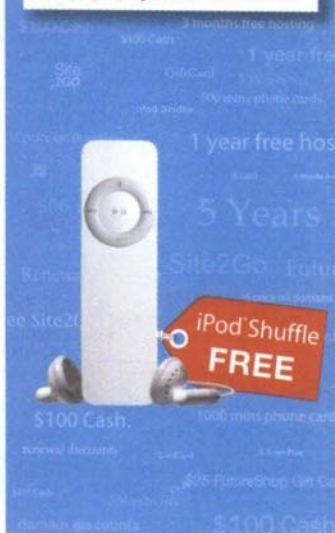
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Digitizing your music

One of the perennial challenges of this new digital age is how to get your old audio favourites into digital format. Perhaps the powers-that-be haven't decided to release your favourite Foghat album on CD yet. Maybe you've just got a twenty-year-old audio cassette of your kids singing "Itsy Bitsy Spider" that you want to use to embarrass them in front of their new husband or wife. Whatever the reason, you want to turn those old memories into MP3s or CDs

Method 1: Kickin' it old-school

There are two main ways to get your old audio files into your computer. The first is to hook the audio source directly to the audio input found on your sound card. There are sound cards such as the Creative Audigy

Platinum series, each of which has an internal or external box with additional audio input connectors, including RCA connectors for hooking up home audio components.

If you have an old-school sound card, all is not lost: most sound cards feature a 1/8-inch jack for audio input. Typically, what you'll need is an adapter cable that has a 1/8-inch stereo plug on one end and two RCA connectors on the other; this will allow you to hook directly to components like a cassette deck, VCR, or other similar component. Many amplifiers also have RCA connectors with audio outputs, typically marked as something like "tape rec" (because they're supposedly designed to your connected cassette deck to record from other components); you can often hijack one of these outputs, allowing you to capture audio from anything that's connected to your stereo, if it's close enough to the computer.

Hooking directly to a turntable can be a bit trickier, for a few reasons. The first big problem is that the signal coming directly from turntables is very quiet, and a direct connection into your PC (using adapters and cables, of course) typically yields sub-optimal results. The second is that many turntables require grounding, and unless you can properly ground the turntable, that signal - already quiet - may be overwhelmed by a buzzing noise. Depending on how dedicated you are to digitizing your old LPs, you may want to consider buying a new turntable with its own built-in preamp, because it should solve both problems. Radio Shack has a model for about \$150; we used the \$180



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Satellite P30	P4 2.4GHz	17" Wide	1Gb	80Kw/Lan 80GB/DVD-RW	\$2499
Tecra A2 XPro	CEN 1.6GHz	15" TFT	512MB	80Kw/Lan 40GB/CDRW/DVD	\$2149
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PowerBook G4	1.52GHz	15.2" TFT	256MB	80Gb/W/Lan/Md/Combo	\$2479
PowerBook G4	1.33GHz	17.0" TFT	512MB	80Gb/W/Lan/Md/Combo	\$3549

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Sony PS-LX250H. Both of these turntables have a switch under the platter that allows you to turn pre-amp on, allowing you to record directly into a PC, or to hook up to a modern amplifier without a Phono input.

After you've gotten your hardware in place and your line levels are set, you're ready to start recording. If you've ever used the built in Windows sound recorder, you already realize it's a piece of crap, so it's time to look for an alternative.

Before you go buying a new piece of software, check to make sure you don't already have a better audio recorder pre-loaded onto your system as part of your audio card's software bundle. Creative often includes a lot of bonus features in its audio card software bundles, including a sound recorder and a wave editing application.

There are a number of applications for recording, editing, and cleaning up audio files, many of which can be found online in free trial-versions at software sites like download.com or TUCOWS (tucows.com). If you want to pay for a more professional solution, you can opt for something like Sound Forge (US\$400, www.soundforge.com), but there are plenty of alternatives.

One of the best programs for audio cleanup is Enhanced Audio's Diamond Cut series (www.enhancedaudio.com). The entry-level DC Millennium package is free for ten days, so you can see if you like it, and after that you can unlock it for US\$59 (around \$70). Depending on how much you want to spend, you can get basic models that remove a few limited types of noise, all the way up to versions that will help you re-sculpt the entire waveform at a very granular level.

Getting organized

If you're feeling lazy, you can simply capture the album in big chunks: one side = one big audio file. If you're feeling ambitious, you may want to take

Staying on the level

No matter what type of audio gadget you're trying to connect directly to your computer, audio input level can be a problem – sometimes it's too low, sometimes it's too high. And for some, the problem will be no audio at all. The solution to most of these problems lies in your system's volume control.

With most Windows-based PCs, there should be a volume control application in the bottom right-hand corner of your screen. If you double-click it, it should bring up a multi-bar mixing panel with a list of all of the active inputs and outputs. You should be able to adjust these using the slider bar – tap it upwards using the mouse to increase the volume of an input source, and tap it down if your input source is distorting. If you can't hear your input at all, check to see if its "Mute" control is checked. If it doesn't even appear on the mixing console, you may need to add it by clicking the options menu and selecting "properties". This should bring up a ton of unused volume control options – look for the one you want and check it to add it to the console.

the larger sound file and break it into smaller chunks, correlating to individual tracks.

Once the tracks are all split up and saved into their individual audio files (either MP3 or WAV), you can then drag them individually into your CD-burning software, and rearrange them to fit into the proper running order, or into your own special Editor's Cut of the album.

Method 2: Dedication

Of course, the big downside of the first method of rolling your own CDs



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from your old LPs is that it can get pretty time-intensive, both in terms of the editing and the setup.

If you want to skip the hassles of figuring out how to hook up your audio equipment to your sound card – or if your computer doesn't actually have any audio inputs – you may want to consider a dedicated solution. When you get a product that's designed specifically to capture audio from external sources like turntables and tape decks, you know you're getting a product that already has all (or most) of the connectors you need to do the job, so you don't have to spend so much time worrying about your configuration and whether or not you have all of the adapters needed to hook up the necessary



components to the PC.

Typically there will be recording software for capturing the audio to the PC, and an audio editing application so you can trim your audio tracks to the right length and remove things you don't want. If you're picking up a dedicated solution aimed at capturing vinyl, you'll also typically get some form of basic audio restoration, or filters that will help you remove pops, clicks and other noise associated with old records.

It's true that an all-in-one solution will give you rather basic versions of each type of software included, with more limited functionality than you'd find in professional-level application. Still, they typically do a pretty good job, and if you're going through the process strictly to capture the memories rather than to provide a pristine digital version, you should be fine with one of the all-in-one solutions.

By Sean Carruthers



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Chewing the Core

The biggest news of late in the Apple world is the ongoing speculation of an Apple-Sony merger. Could all these mumblings, combined with the presence of Sony CEO Kunitake Ando appearing at January's Macworld keynote be the telltale signs of an upcoming more in-depth working relationship between the two companies?

With Apple stock currently skyrocketing from a strong product lineup and healthy sales, financial giants Merrill Lynch have gone on record predicting that an Apple/Sony partnership could form around an iTunes-like online

movie store that would use the new Apple H.264 video compression codec and stream Sony and Pixar movie content.

Merrill Lynch have also rated Apple stock as a "Buy It" hot stock. When you do the math, I'm sure Sony wants a piece of Apple – the iPods, the proven qualities of OSX for video editing. Sony after all is more or less the king of the DV world, and I'm sure it would love to ditch Windows on its VAIO computers – remember VAIO stands for "video audio integrated operation" after all!

I'm sure Apple would also benefit from Sony's audio and video experience and product development team.

New PowerBooks

On the first of February, Apple made additions to its flagship PowerBook line. Contrary to the rumour mill, the refresh did not include a jump to G5 processors, however the new machines do contain some impressive new technologies.

The first is a new patented scrolling track pad. Using two fingers on the notebook's track pad instead of one, people can use one finger to scroll and the other finger to click. There have however been reports on the Apple technical forums about static causing some interference with these new pads.

Apple's other new patent-pending technology is called "sudden motion sensor." The PowerBook integrates a tri-axis accelerometer to detect sudden changes in speed. If the notebook is dropped, the PowerBook will lock its hard drive in order to protect data. This is somewhat similar to the notebook protection feature on IBM's Thinkpad laptops.

Bluetooth 2.0 EDR (enhanced data rate) has also been included in the new PowerBooks. Bluetooth 2.0 boasts transfer speeds of up to three times the rate of regular Bluetooth, which saves precious battery life.



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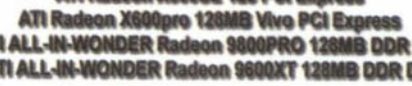
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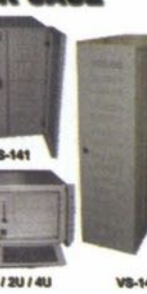


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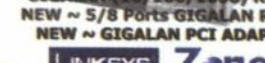
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The 12-inch and 15-inch models now come with a 1.5GHz G4 processor, and all machines ship standard with 512MB of RAM. The 15-inch units with the standard superdrive are configured with a 1.67GHz G4 processor and now come with the backlit keyboard, which is reported to be brighter than the previous generations.

The mammoth 17-inch PowerBook will now come with a 1.67 GHz G4 processor, 8X superdrive and a huge 100GB hard drive. With the Ati Radeon 128MB video card, these units are now able to drive Apple's flagship 30-inch cinema display.

Pricing and further info can be found at www.apple.ca.

Tiger OS

The Apple World Wide Developers Conference will take place June 6 to 10th in San Francisco. The 2003 conference was the launching point for the PowerMac G5s, and this year looks like a solid bet for the release of OS 10.4 (Tiger). Interested in attending? Tickets are US\$1295 if you purchase before April 22.

Speaking of Tiger, Apple released a developer build 8A369 version of the next generation 64-bit operating system that still contains several minor glitches and bugs that need to be ironed out. One of the biggest bugs that is being addressed is the hiccuping in improperly rendered windows and incomplete spotlight indexing that can occur when users are upgrading from OS 10.2 to 10.4.

iTunes on your cell phone?

It's true. Motorola's RAZR E1060 phone will sport Apple's iTunes as its default music client. Motorola noted however that iTunes will not be the

only player supported, and hinted at support for Real Networks RealAudio as well.

Be careful flaunting that iPod!

Reports have been surfacing for some time about escalated iPod muggings! The portable music players have become such a hot commodity that thieves have learned to spot the telltale white iPod headphones and unfortunately do whatever they need to do to acquire the iPods, in some cases resulting in serious injury. The best advice is to secure your player with a belt clip and perhaps even use different ear buds. Better safe than sorry!

While on the topic of security, Apple has released Common Criteria Tools 1.0. The tools are an "internationally approved set of security standards which provide a clear and reliable evaluation of the security capabilities of information technology products."

The Common Criteria has been adopted by 14 nations, allowing users from other countries to purchase information technology products with the same level of confidence, since certification is recognized across all complying nations.

Apple has also said that organizations including the United States government are requiring Common Criteria as a determining factor in purchasing decisions.

Cross platform audio/video conferencing

Just a quick note that the latest version of AOL Instant Messenger will now work 100 per cent with Apple's iChat for flawless PC to Mac audio/video conferencing and chatting.

By Jason Justin

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Students blog to learn

A York University professor's innovative use of blogging in the classroom is leading to some surprising discoveries about learning and student motivation.

Nadine Wettlaufer asked students in her fourth-year Cultural Theory through New Media course to submit regular web log entries, accounting for 25 per cent of their final grade. In their blogs, students were encouraged to reflect on assigned readings and in-class discussion as a way of becoming more engaged with the material.

"It's a way to make students write short musings week to week. It gives me a feel for whether students understand that week's lesson and how they're feeling," says Wettlaufer.

That much, she was expecting. But she didn't anticipate the impact assigning blogs would have on her students' motivation.

"Students will sometimes do extra blogs, spontaneously, because they can. It's sort of an unexpected bonus that people are that invested in," says Wettlaufer.

Student Ehsan Akbari speculates that his fellow students invest in blogs because they're a good way to personalize lessons and make them more meaningful.

"A [term] paper is more about proving your point. But blogging lets you say, 'This is what this theorist says and this is how it affects my life.' It makes me complete my thoughts and helps me focus my thinking," he explains.

Indeed, the combination of personal musings in a public space seems to be a powerful motivator.

Wettlaufer finds students will often visit each other's blogs. "They do get quite involved in looking at each other's stuff and there's a good-natured

rivalry," she says.

Student Liz Kerrison says checking out each other's work can also give greater insight.

"Even if there is a class discussion, not every student contributes so it is interesting to note their opinions through the exploration of their work," says Kerrison.

This is not the first time York professors have used blogs in the classroom, but Wettlaufer believes this may be the first time blogs have been assigned in a theoretical course. She says that prior to her course, professors have used them in lower level technical courses to give students something to create web pages about.

While her experience with blogs has been good, Wettlaufer still insists that her students write a term paper – on paper. She's discovered they make fewer mistakes in spelling and grammar when they hand in something on paper.

"I don't know what it is, but you do have to reinforce that even though it is blogging and online, I still expect students to use sentence structure properly and to use spell check," says Wettlaufer.

And she cautions that blogs have their limits as a teaching tool.

"It's a very trendy topic. I wouldn't suggest everyone go out and use it. Clearly you have to support it technologically, and as an instructor one would have to be familiar with blogging," she says. "People should not feel pressured to work outside their comfort zone."

By Sharon Oosthoek

Excerpt from a student's blog:

Am I a cyborg? I have glasses. I have piercings; I have metal on me, through me. Around me. I communicate more with phones, computers, internet, signals, radio waves, webcams and images than I do through just hands and mouth...

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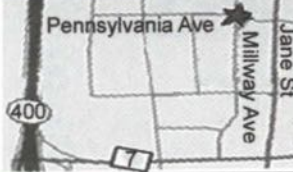
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Canuck kids surf the wireless wave



The Sony Ericsson Z500 is a fast, fun phone that offers great music, smooth messaging and a variety of skin covers.

It wasn't that long ago that mobile phones were a luxury, owned only by important business people and deep-pocketed gadget geeks.

Now it seems like everyone has one, from your grandma to the kid who delivers your paper.

In fact, just under half of our population has a cell phone, and the biggest and quickest growing demographic is young people. A TrendsCan study conducted in 2004 found that 52 per cent of all Canadian youths have their own mobile phones.

Why do so many kids feel the need to be wirelessly connected? According to Colleen McClure, director of marketing for Motorola Canada, "It's no big secret: kids want to fit in and have what their friends have. And their friends have cell phones."

But it goes a bit deeper than that. Patrick Hadsipantelis, director of marketing for Fido Canada, says that his company has researched the needs of young Canadian cell phone users, and like everyone else kids just want a convenient way to communicate with the people in their lives. "Based on feedback from our Youth Advisory Board, youth want to stay in touch with friends and family," Hadsipantelis says.

Kids can't get a cell phone just because they want one. Wireless service providers require that customers be at least 18 years old to sign a contract, which means parents need to give

their permission. As it turns out, the issue of parental consent usually isn't a problem; Moms and Dads are not only signing wireless

service contracts for their kids, but in many cases it's also their idea.

"In an era where personal safety is an issue for everyone, mobile phones are viewed as a precautionary safety measure by parents around the world," says Cherie Gary, a spokesperson for Sony Ericsson North America. Mobile phones provide a means to keep track of your children. Wondering why your 16-year-old daughter isn't home from the dance yet? Just give her a call.

Cell phones also let kids contact their parents in the case of an emergency. Toronto father Sandy Sullivan once received a call while at work from his eleven-year-old daughter who had been separated from her friend's family in a neighbourhood shopping mall. "I found the cell phone number of her friend's mom and managed to get them all back together again," says Sullivan. "Probably nothing

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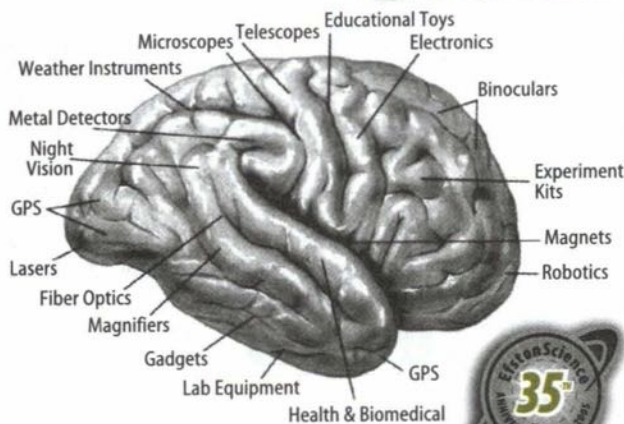


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Wireless

would have happened to her, but that one call made me feel as though I'd made the right decision when I got her the phone."

While kids and their parents may agree on the security benefits of a cell phone, they don't always see eye-to-eye when it comes to shopping for one. Youth are driven by phone styles and features, including removable skins and the ability to play games, while parents tend to be satisfied so long as their children have a working, reliable phone.

Hadsipantelis also notes that conflicts tend to come up between parents and their kids over what he calls their "wireless allowance". Many parents pay the phone bills, so they try to restrict the amount of time that kids spend using their cell phones.

One way around the wireless allowance issue is to shop wisely for a service plan. Some Canadian service providers have begun marketing family packages that allow members of the same family an unlimited number of calls to each other. (See sidebar.)

While most phones and service plans are still primarily targeted at adult users, the wireless industry is beginning to pay keen attention to today's youth market. "Motorola is very intrigued by, excited with and respectful of the youth market," says McClure. "They are forward-thinking, fast-paced, educated customers who crave both quality and fun — as long as it's cool."

By Chad Sapieha

The Motorola V551m Much Music Edition is great for kids who like music, allowing them to download exclusive Much Music content including screen savers and ringtones.



Wireless plans

The best way to manage your children's wireless phone bill is to choose a plan that suits their needs.

Some service providers, including Rogers and Telus, offer family plans that allow two or more people to share an account for as little as \$35 per month (plus access fees and additional features). These plans provide virtually unlimited talk time between all members of the family, free local calls on weekends, and a pool of shared weekday minutes that all family members draw from.

While unlimited family talk time sounds appealing, some kids don't spend much time on the phone with their parents and siblings, in which case a plan that provides free talking between customers of the same service provider might be a better bet — assuming all or most of your child's friends use the same service. Fido popularized this type of plan with its Fido-to-Fido promotion, but Rogers has a similar service as well.

Some service providers allow users to attach additional lines to existing accounts. Fido subscribers, for example, can add an extra line for only \$15 per month. It only comes with 50 weekday minutes per month, but with the free Fido-to-Fido plan kids and

their parents can call each other as much as they like.

Cell phone games

All major Canadian mobile service providers have a section on their Web site devoted to downloadable cell phone games. From puzzle classics like Snood and Bejeweled to sports games and even miniaturized versions of console videogame favourites (Prince of Persia, The Lord of the Rings), there are literally hundreds of games to choose from that, when purchased, can be downloaded directly onto the phone. Just keep in mind, however, that not all of them are kid-friendly — Sexy Poker 2004, for example.

Cell phone games cost between \$2 and \$7, plus a small additional download fee. Telus offers the unique option of "renting" a game for a limited time at a slightly reduced price.

The trick is to make sure the game is compatible with your particular handset, so be sure to check the Web site's compatibility chart before making a purchase.

V.Smile Pocket

This Fall, VTech will be following up its V.Smile TV Learning System (an entertainment-oriented videogame console for young'uns not quite ready to handle an Xbox, GameCube or PS2) with a portable companion, the V.Smile Pocket.

The battery-operated handheld has a 320x240 LCD display and large buttons specially designed for kids aged four to eight. In addition to being an "on-the-go" device, it can also connect to the television.

The V.Smile Pocket plays all of the V.Smile's proprietary "smartridge" game paks, which teach aspects of either language, math or science using popular characters like the Care Bears, Winnie the Pooh and Blues Clues.

Upcoming smartridge releases are set to include Dora the Explorer,



Sesame Street, SpongeBob SquarePants and Finding Nemo, which will bring the smartridge library up to around 30. The V.Smile Pocket is expected to cost around \$110 (from US\$89.99).

Visit www.vtechkids.com for more information.

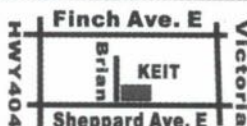
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Podcasting: The radio revolution

Handheld video players are changing the way people watch television by letting them transfer TV shows and watch them on the go. A similar revolution is now taking place in audio broadcasting, but it's not just the medium that's changing but the message as well.

This new phenomenon is called "podcasting". A podcast is an audio broadcast that people can pull off of the Internet in MP3 form and play on a digital music player at a later time. The whole process can be automated in a similar manner to receiving RSS blog feeds into an email inbox (podcasts are in fact delivered by RSS feeds that contain audio "enclosures" – large file attachments.)

The first step is downloading an aggregator program such as iPodder (ipodder.sourceforge.net). Once installed, you can sign up for various podcast feeds by browsing sites like Podcastalley.com. Once you've subscribed to the podcasts of your choice, the program will automatically scan each feed for new material and download it into a folder. Certain aggregators send the MP3s to iTunes so that whenever an iPod syncs with iTunes, the new podcasts will be automatically transferred. However, podcasting isn't iPod-exclusive. The podcasts can be transferred to any MP3 player, or listened to straight from the computer onto which they've been downloaded.

The medium of podcasting is brand new – it was in August 2004 that former MTV VJ Adam Curry began experimenting with the technology and built the first podcasting aggregator, iPodder. It didn't take long for others to flock to the idea; currently there

are more than one thousand podcasts listed on Podcastalley.com.

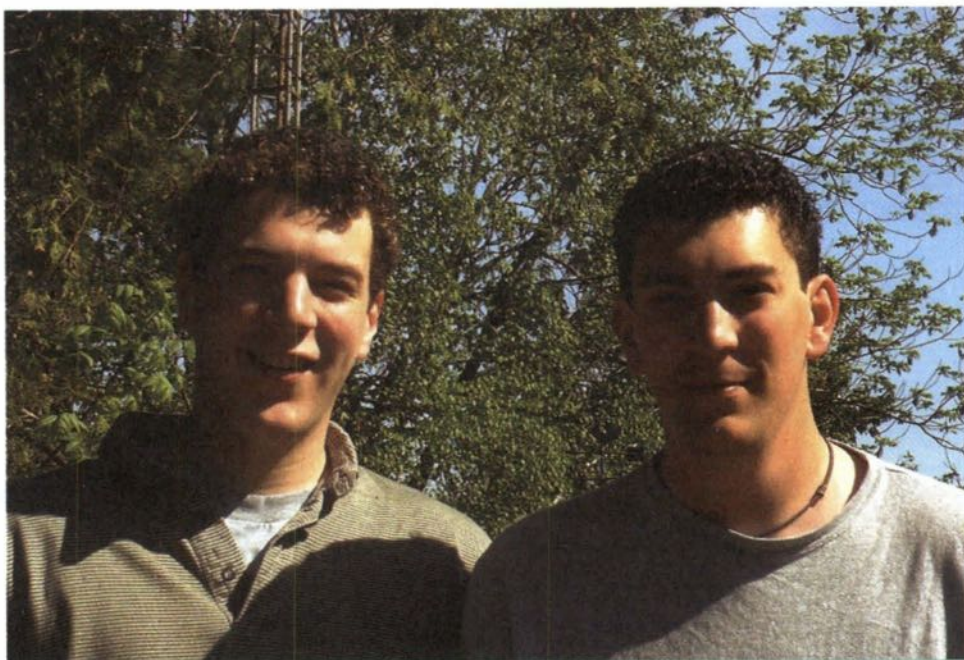
For the listener, podcasting has several advantages over traditional radio. David Slusher, the South Carolina-based host of the Evil Genius Chronicles podcast (evilgeniuschronicles.org), sums it up best by saying, "the programming conforms to me, not the other way around."

Unlike radio, podcasting isn't limited to a specific time or geographic location. Instead of having to set aside 6:30pm on Wednesdays to listen to a favourite radio program, for example, listeners can download podcasts and listen to them whenever it's most convenient.

One of the most refreshing aspects of podcasting is the spontaneity that results from its flexible format. "You can do a 72-minute show one day and a 31-minute show the next, if you wanted to," says Slusher. "You can play entirely different music from one show to the next, or play no music and just talk. In a normal radio show you don't generally have the ability to do that. You know, 'normally this is Best of 80s, but today we're going to play all Gregorian Chant.' You can't do that. It doesn't work that way."

The cheap cost of producing podcasts benefits both the podcaster and the listener. Andy Skinn and his brother Matt, both graduate students at the University of Calgary, began recording their weekly sports podcast, The Skinny on Sports (andyskinn.com/skinny), in November.

The brothers record using a pair of inexpensive microphone headsets plugged into the back of a



Calgary brothers Matt and Andy Skinn host the weekly 10-minute sports podcast "The Skinny on Sports" (andyskinn.com/skinny).

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computer and an open-source software called Audacity. They then use another free program called WordPress to post the finished product to their web site for download. "The most expensive thing is getting your web server set up to have enough bandwidth on it to handle all the downloads that you're going to be get-

ting," says Andy.

The fact that podcasts are so inexpensive to produce means podcasters don't have to rely on advertisers for funding, which allows them to explore less lucrative but interesting niche topics that would be impossible to market on commercial airwaves. "There are many seemingly small groups of people interested in one subject. These markets are rarely addressed or considered by people who need to sell millions of bottles of soda via the airwaves or whatever," says Phillip Torrone, host of the Engadget podcast (podcasts.engadget.com). "But with a podcast, I can talk about installing an HD TV card in a Linux box for an hour and tens of thousands of people around the world actually find that interesting."

By Erin Bell

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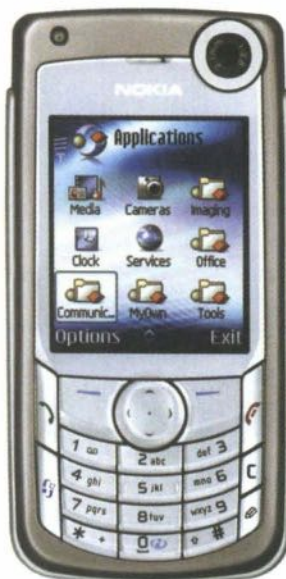
New @ 3GSM

This year's 3GSM World Congress cell phone trade show held in Cannes, France netted a flurry of new product announcements from the major players in mobile.

Among the announcements: Motorola's chic RAZR V3 was shown to the world, as was the company's first 3 megapixel camera phone. RAZR is a wonder of design using a chemically-etched number pad, an internal antenna and advanced metals like aircraft-grade aluminum. These advances combine, Motorola says, to make a phone that is just 13.9mm thick. The ultra slick RAZR design unfortunately doesn't stretch across the entire line, however. RAZRWire is the name given to a line of accessories co-designed with Oakley; a Bluetooth 2.0 earpiece is tacked onto some otherwise decent looking sunglasses. The earpiece itself looks like a fast



food meal toy or any number of spy gadgets aimed at kids. Sony Ericsson has said that camera phones are so last year, claiming that this year will be the year of the audio player phone. In line with this statement made before the show, the company is leveraging the Sony part of its name to



release branded Walkman cell phones with large storage capacities and expandability for music files and PC file transfer capability.

Nokia announced three additions to its Series 60 line incorporating Push to Talk, VGA cameras for video calls, audio messaging and large displays varying across the new product line. Samsung, Philips and Panasonic were in on the act too.

LG, while not directly drawing a line in the sand as a challenge to Nintendo's monastic rule of handheld gaming (smart move) nevertheless unveiled the SV360 handset, whose clamshell opens to reveal a distinctively videogame-oriented directional pad and input button configuration bracketing a pretty standard number pad and a top-mounted 2.2-inch LCD screen. The SV360 incorporates

motion sensors that the company says allows for game input on screen by moving the phone in the real world. Capable of pushing one million polygons per second according to the company, the SV360 is conceptually quite capable as a game platform. Many of the phones and accessories didn't come with clear North American street dates; look to HUB for firm dates, price points and hands-on product testing as available.

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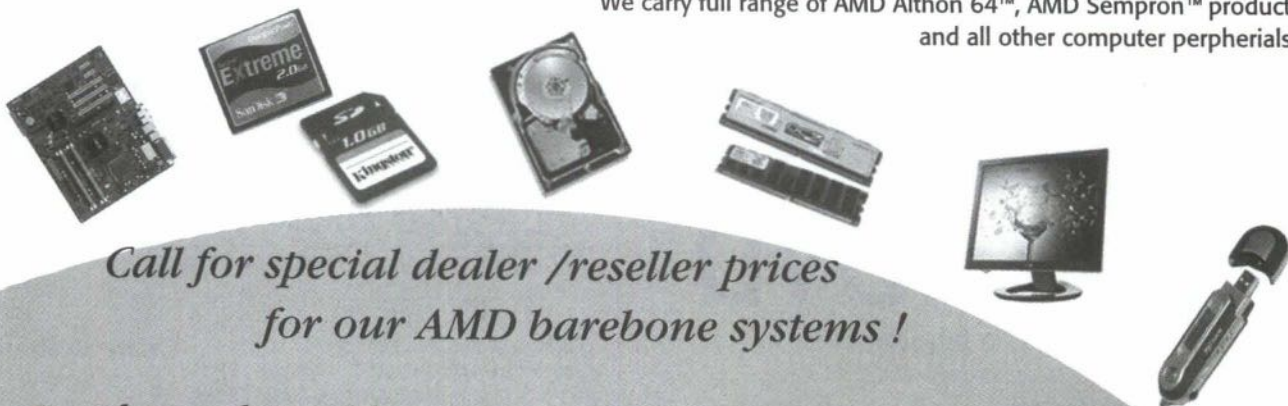
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


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If you have a notebook, it's not all that easy to upgrade your audio in an elegant way. Generally, the audio component is integrated right into the motherboard, so getting better sound has typically meant a bulky external solution ... not exactly a great choice if you want to keep things tidy.

Creative has now shrunk down the Soundblaster Audigy 2 ZS into a size small enough to fit into a PC Card form factor, which means that upgrading your audio can now be as simple as sliding the Audigy 2 ZS Notebook into one of your notebook's free PC Card slots. In doing so, you're sliding in a card that processes 24-bit/96 kHz audio with a signal-to-noise ratio of 104 dB, and which can handle external speaker sets up to 7.1 surround sound. The catch is that Audigy only works in a Windows-based notebook with a Pentium III or better processing power.

The slimming down of the Audigy doesn't occur without some complications, unfortunately. The end of the card features two 1/8-inch jacks, and a spot for an edge-connected dongle. Of the two 1/8-inch

jacks, one doubles as microphone input and digital input, and the other one doubles as headphone output and digital output. The speaker connectors are all broken out at the end of the edge-connected dongle. Unfortunately, because the two 1/8-inch jacks are built

Pros:
24-bit/96kHz audio, surround sound up to 7.1, digital in/out

Cons:
Windows only, edge connector potentially breakable, card edge may block a PC Card slot

right into the end of the card, it means the protruding end of the card is thicker than the PC Card itself. Like many other PC Card devices with protruding end, this one sticks upwards, which means you can only use it in the top slot of your notebook. If you already have another PC Card device with a protruding end that similarly sticks up – a WiFi networking card for example – you'll only be able to use one of them at a time.

Though this problem might have been solved by breaking the two

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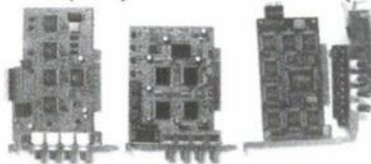
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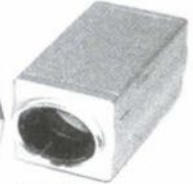
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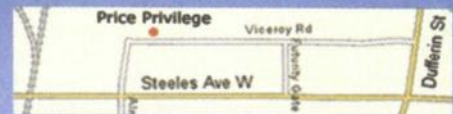


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1/8-inch jacks into extra connectors on the dongle end, that brings up the issue of the dongle itself. While space is saved by opting for a dongle, the connection is more fragile. It's easy enough to envision a situation where you could knock the edge connector with your hand, a cup of coffee, or with any of the junk that tends to accumulate on your desktop – one hard whack, and the dongle may be out of commission.

On the plus side, the sound quality is excellent. It's even THX certified, so with a good set of speakers you'll be able to play back your DVDs in a room-shaking fashion. The Audigy features audio inputs as well, which makes it a great companion for those who want to record their own music in 24-bit/96kHz quality onto their laptop. The big problem here, really (provided your notebook is powerful enough to support hard disk recording in the first place) is the fact that there's only one input on the card, which

ends up doing double duty as both the digital and analogue input. That means you'll only be able to use one of them at a time – either microphone or optical – and you'll need to make sure you've purchased all of the relevant adapters in order to properly capture your input sources.

The card comes with Creative's MediaSource software as a bonus, which allows you to rip your CDs into MP3 files, play back media of various kinds (both audio and video), and catalogue your media collection. The software also allows you to burn CDs.

Though it's not perfect, the SoundBlaster Audigy 2 ZS Notebook is still a great way to add high-quality audio to a notebook computer. Whether you only use it at home for watching DVDs, or take it on the road to perk up presentations, it's a powerful little card.

By Sean Carruthers


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Move over Kermit there's a new frog in town

Buying an electronic toy for your kid used to be a lot simpler: daughters got talking dolls and sons received remote control cars.

It's no longer so easy.

Toy store shelves are now filled with all manner of technological doodads, and more and more of these tech toys are plastered with labels professing their ability to give kids a head start by teaching things like arithmetic and reading.

Some technology-infused educational toys are just phonies, developed by companies with little pedagogical know-how simply hoping to cash in

on the educational toy craze, while others are proven products crafted by teams of learning professionals and technology innovators. How can consumers tell the difference? The easiest way is simply to find a trusted brand.

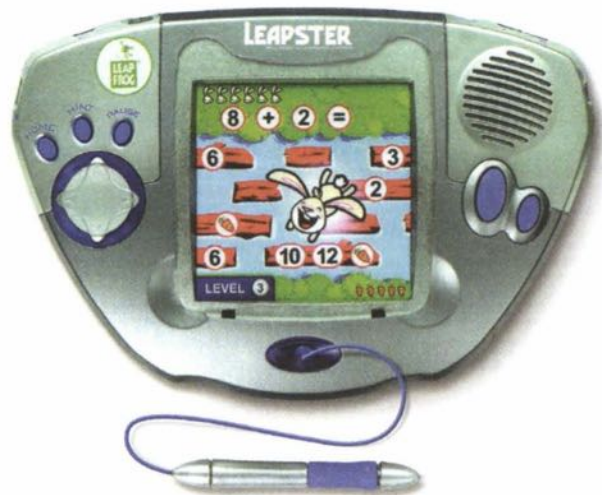
California-based LeapFrog Enterprises Inc. is one of the most respected names in the technology-based educational toy industry. LeapFrog's first product, an interactive book-reading machine called the LeapPad, came out ten years ago and has since gone on to sell more than 20 million units worldwide.

Since LeapPad, the company has gone on to manufacture a wide variety of first-rate electronic learning products, including the Learn and Groove Activity Table that lets infants experiment with music, the Imagination Desk Learning Station, which teaches kids about letters and numbers as they colour, and the Leapster educational videogame system, released just last year in Canada.

Christian Schindler, the company's Ontario-born international marketing manager, says LeapFrog's success is due to the simple fact that the company's creative minds know what makes a good educational toy. "We have over 500 talented producers working on products at LeapFrog, and a quarter of them are former educators," he says.

Another reason for LeapFrog's success is its focus. Schindler says that the market for electronic learning toys has grown by as much as 30 to 40 per cent in recent years, while growth has been stagnant in most categories of traditional toys. LeapFrog's pioneering efforts in and dedication to making technology-based educational toys has placed them at the head of the table in their industry.

A prototype of LeapFrog's latest product, the Fly "pentop" computer, was



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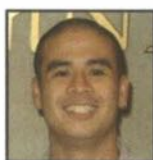
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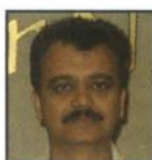
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recently unveiled to Canadian media in Toronto. To the casual observer the Fly simply looks like a fat pen with a tiny speaker, but when used in tandem with specially encoded "flypaper" it becomes much more: draw a calculator and tap the buttons to do math, write a word in English to have it translated to French or Spanish, or sketch a keyboard and tap the keys to make music.

LeapFrog has also developed software for the Fly that corresponds with North American educational curricula. For example, the Fly can help students with math problems by providing hints as they scrawl out long division or multiplication problems. "The Fly is one of the best examples I've seen of marrying technology and educational content," says Schindler.

Schindler explains that the Fly is part of LeapFrog's grander strategy to retain the company's consumer base as it grows older. "There are all sorts of untapped opportunities in [teen] and adult learning," he explains. "The Fly is our first opportunity to appeal to an older segment of the population in Canada." A video demonstration of the Fly even hinted that the device may eventually have applications geared towards university and graduate students.



Though LeapFrog is expanding its horizons, consumers need not fear that the company will lose sight of its mission. Schindler states that LeapFrog will always remain focused on providing technologically innovative and entertaining ways to learn. "We look at ourselves as an education company; we simply use technology and toys as our medium," Schindler explains. "When you take educational content, enable it with technology and make it fun, amazing things happen."

By Chad Sapiha

LeapFrog products

LeapPad \$49.99


LeapFrog's very first product remains its most successful. The LeapPad is an interactive book-reading device that sees kids using a stylus to interact with pictures on the page to engage a narrator or begin playing games. Books (along with their corresponding cartridges that plug into the LeapPad) are sold separately.

Leapster Multimedia Learning System \$99.99


Think Game Boy, but a little bigger, a bit sturdier, and much more educational. Featuring both original LeapFrog characters and third party licenses like SpongeBob SquarePants, Shrek, and The Incredibles, Leapster games entertain kids while teaching things like spelling, math and science.

Baby Tad \$34.99


An ideal way to introduce infants to LeapFrog products, Baby Tad is a huggable, squeezable plush frog that lights up, plays songs orchestrated specifically for a baby's ears, and even includes a simple learning game. Parents can also program Baby Tad to play songs that will lull their children to sleep.




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Note Zapper

Note Zapper from PG Music (www.pgmusic.com) is a simple software application designed to help children overcome one of the most challenging hurdles of piano playing: learning how to read music. Wanting to give kids an alternative to stuffy dictation books, Note Zapper makes a game out of identifying the notes of the bass and treble clefs.



The screen is set up like a typical music staff, and notes scroll by corresponding to whichever song has been selected (there's a range of classical, folk and children's tunes to choose

from). When the note enters a special target area, the player has to "zap" it by pressing the corresponding key on either the connected MIDI keyboard or by using the mouse to click the on-screen piano keyboard replica. Players are given encouragement and advice by a little companion similar to the MS Word paperclip, who sits at the top of the screen and comments things like "Good" or "Miss" in a child's voice. Both the tempo and length of the songs can be adjusted, and there are several difficulty modes. While Note Zapper is a decent tool for practicing note recognition (and even covers key signatures up to six sharps or flats), it's really only for beginners. The range only extends to one ledger line beyond the musical staff, and since the notes all appear as detached eighth notes, Note Zapper won't teach your kids about rhythm or time signatures. Note Zapper costs around \$35 (from US\$29).

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Road trip paraphernalia for our first digital phase (circa 2000) included the Barbie laptop (still going strong), an old VTech keyboard bought for \$1 at a garage sale (VTechs last a long time), and Fisher-Price's original Pixter.

Phase two, when our eldest daughter was old enough to balance Dad's laptop on her lap, was digitized kids' TV programs. You know, Arthur and Dora squeezed onto a CD. At around the same time, we tried out Leap Frog's LeapPad and Fisher-Price's TouchPad – two gizmos that brought new meaning to the word reading. However, they tended to be somewhat awkward for car and plane travel, and the actual paper factor can be a tad difficult.

With the world converging on smaller and smaller gadgets that can do everything, no wonder kids are now getting technological devices that do it all, too. Where children's use of home technology previously centred around the PC and TV, now I find my daughters spending just as much time on the couch, or in the car, with a handheld smart toy or video player.

Boston, here we come!

On a recent trip to Boston, my junior assistants were given three new-to-market handheld kids' devices. Two are designed specifically for kids; the third we took along just because it seemed so smashing we had to give it a try.

A word of advice before you travel: Make sure you have plenty of batteries, or that the device can be plugged into an AC adapter.

Hasbro VideoNow

Ages 6 and up www.hasbro.com/videonow Price: TBA

"Wow, this is cool!" were the first words uttered by my testers when they put on their earphones and plugged into these video-playing devices.



Like many gadgets available today, the VideoNow has a proprietary disk format (in this case, disks that are slightly smaller than regular CDs), so that you have to purchase Hasbro's content to use with the device.

And there's the rub. Although all three testers loved the players – the size, the colours (especially the neon green toddler unit), the headphones, as well as the content (about four disks each on that trip) – that just wasn't enough.

In a world where Mom and Dad are busy downloading images and music, surely the next generation of VideoNows, if such will exist, will have to be capable of sucking some entertainment off of, say, the television or the Internet.

Mattel JuiceBox

Ages 8 - 12 www.juicebox.com Price: \$89.99 (extra media cards \$25-30)

It's that awesome juice-being-sucked-out-of-a-box sound (for a sample, go to juicebox.com) that has kids in a fit as they boot up this portable video player. After that, it's more of the same – little proprietary media cards to watch specific television cartoons.

For one of my testers that was enough, but the other two were not happy with the content available at the time of testing, and the Juice Box, like the VideoNow, will need a large library to compete – which could get expensive for Mom and Dad.

Fortunately, the MP3 Adapter Kit makes it possible to download tunes, which put my testers in Cats heaven. Plug it into the car stereo and you have, well, almost an iPod but without the storage capacity. Which brings us to...

Creative Zen Portable Media Center

All ages www.creative.com/PortableMediaCenters Price: \$699.99

Although this product was way beyond our price range, we decided to include it because it does all of what the previous two players do and then some, and does not involve proprietary software.

So at that price, what's the bonus? Content, content, and more content. The Portable Media Centre lets you take videos, TV shows, music and photos with you wherever you go.

While this might be a bit time consuming for parents who would rather not be saving television shows and transferring them to the player, consider the fact that this device will never grow old (well, not as quickly as the others), and will let you expand content endlessly (In fact, they say it can hold up to 9,000 songs and 85 hours of movies).

While the other devices thrilled, this was the keeper. On the other hand, at this price point it will tend to remain no more than a birthday wish.

Nintendo Game Boy Advance Video

All ages www.gba-video.com Price: \$89 (video cartridges \$20 - \$30)

We didn't have this toy with us for testing, but suffice to say it shows the expanding video-on-the-go options.

The same GBA (Game Boy Advance) handheld used to play video games can be easily converted into a video player. Just plug the proprietary video cartridge into the slot and pick from a selection of television cartoons.

Or, travel to Japan and get a GBA Movie Player that lets you play your own recorded movies and video. No information on when that perk will find its way to Canada.

By Mara Gulens

Zipit wireless messenger

www.zipitwireless.com

Price: around \$120 (from US\$99)

If there's a constant battle in your household between those who want to use the PC for work and those who want to use it so they can chat with friends, there may be a solution.

The Zipit is a stand-alone clamshell-style chat device that connects to your wireless home network using 802.11b WiFi and allows you to make a direct connection to MSN, AOL Instant Messenger and Yahoo all at the same time. Because the Zipit makes a direct connection, the good news is that you can even use it when all of the PCs in the house are turned off.

After the Zipit is connected, all of your online friends appear in a window that pops up every time you hit the button with the Zipit logo, with small icons denoting the different chat services. Unfortunately, you can only chat one-on-one with specific friends; the Zipit doesn't support multi-user chat mode.

Though the Zipit has a QWERTY-configured keyboard, it's definitely not set up for touch-typing. The rubberized keys wiggle a bit when you press them, and you have to be very firm or your letter may not register ... it's best to take your time with the keyboard. And while some of the punctuation is one-touch, things like the question mark, exclamation point and the numbers require you to shift into alt-mode.

You can easily tell which mode you're in by looking at the top of the screen. There are three letter-icons: A, C and S, for Alt, Control and Shift. The Alt and Shift modes both have two steps: tap the Alt or Shift key once and only the next character will be affected; tap it twice and it goes into Alt-lock or Caps-lock mode. There are a number of buttons along the top too; three are dedicated to standard emoticons, and three can be set up with your own emoticons. The previous and next buttons let you flip between your open windows, allowing you to chat with a number of different people at the same time. There's a headphone jack on the back so you can chat quietly.

The Zipit uses a built-in rechargeable battery for power. Even though it's only a monochrome LCD display, the WiFi send and receive will certainly eat up battery power, so if you're a marathon chatter, you may want to stay close to an outlet.


While a few things could be improved – a sturdier keyboard and a backlit screen, perhaps – the Zipit Wireless Messenger may be just the thing for reducing friction in the household.

By Sean Carruthers



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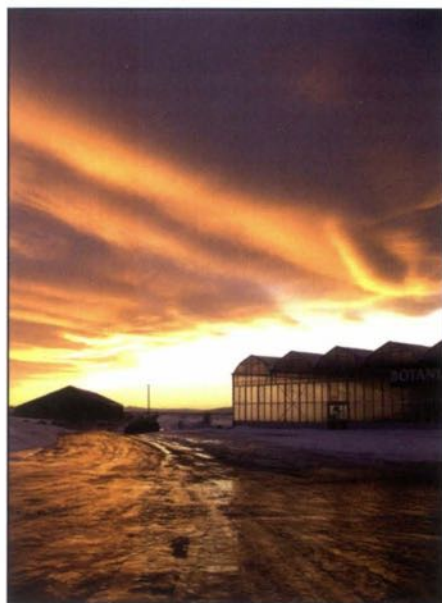
Congratulations to **Dana Aszalos** whose image was selected from among the great shots submitted for the March "Ice" themed bi-monthly Photo Spree contest.

Dana used a **Panasonic Lumix DMC-FZ10** to capture the picture titled "Icy Road" and resized it using **Adobe Photoshop 7.0**.

For submitting the winning image, Dana wins a **Lexmark P315 Home Photo Printer** with an eye-catching 2.5-inch colour LCD screen for quick and easy PC-free photo printing. The display is also put to use in PC photo printing, displaying on-screen image previews and a count-down timer.

Thanks to everyone who submitted pictures for consideration. We love checking out the pictures you send in. Unfortunately, there can only be one winner and it's always a difficult decision.

This bi-monthly Photo Spree contest theme is "Spring is in the air." Now that the ice is melting and Spring is in the air, get out your digital cameras and shoot! Keep those pictures coming!



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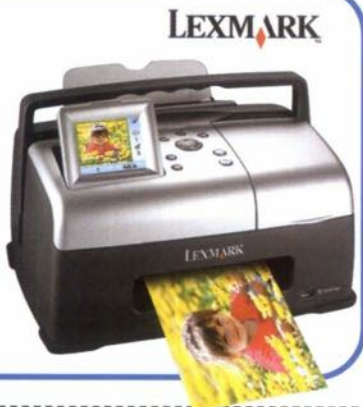
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Submit your photographs, along with the information from the form below, by April 22, 2005. You can submit up to three photographs, all of which must be accompanied by a submission form. Entries must be submitted via email. Files should be no bigger than 500 KB and no smaller than 300 KB. One photo per email.

Contest Rules: Prizes must be claimed by May 20, 2005. Winners must provide valid identification upon claiming prize. The prizes awarded are not transferable and cannot be redeemed for cash. To enter and to be eligible to win, persons must be residents of Canada, and not employees or be domiciled with an employee of Piccolo Publishing, its affiliate companies, or advertising or promotional agencies. The winners will be selected by HUB on April 23, 2005 from among all eligible entries received on or before contest close date. Winners will be contacted by telephone or email. In the event that they cannot be contacted within the first week following the contest another entrant will be selected. All entries become the property of HUB and may be used in subsequent advertisements for the contest. All entries must be submitted by their artist and must be original work.

HUB's Photo Spree contest form. All submissions must contain this information. Send to contest@ppublishing.ca

Deadline: April 22, 2005

Name:

Address:

E-Mail:

Phone Number:

Age:

Occupation/School:

Title of Entry:

Camera Used:

Software Used:

Geek + EverQuest II = ogre named Shroogia

I'm a geek. I try not to look and act like one most of the time, but when my wife has to walk into my games room and tell me that six hours spent in the role of a nine foot tall ogre is quite enough for the night, there's little denying it.

If role-playing can be considered a hallmark of the geek, then EverQuest II is likely the pinnacle of geekdom. The sequel to one of the most popular and influential role-playing games in the world, EQII provides players with a persistent world filled with thousands of human- and computer-controlled characters roaming about massive environments. Players can take on the roles of Elves, Halflings, Dwarves, and a variety of other classical fantasy species, carrying out missions by themselves and with the

help of others. It's the very definition of open-ended gameplay, allowing players to go anywhere, do anything, and be anyone they want.

After picking up the deluxe special edition (which comes in a velvet-lined tin and includes a canvas map and a special collector's coin, among other goodies) and spending a small fortune to upgrade my PC to ensure it met the game's demanding



technical specifications, I sat down and played for an entire afternoon and evening, getting up only for Doritos, soda, and bathroom breaks.

I began by creating my character: a giant, mean-looking, spiky-haired female ogre I called Shroogia. Character fashioned, I soon found myself aboard a ship, watching beautiful ocean swells bobbing around the hull and learning the basics of the game through a helpful tutorial that explained fighting, questing, and inventory management.

Eventually we landed on the Isle of Refuge, training grounds for EQII newbies. I quickly discovered how to use a forge to craft useful items, then set about defending the island's sole fort from invading marauders. I joined my first quest group here — simply a matter of accepting an invitation or right-clicking on another character and asking him or her to join you. Working together we laid waste to enemy strongholds and took down the despicable Orcish leader Grimgosh.

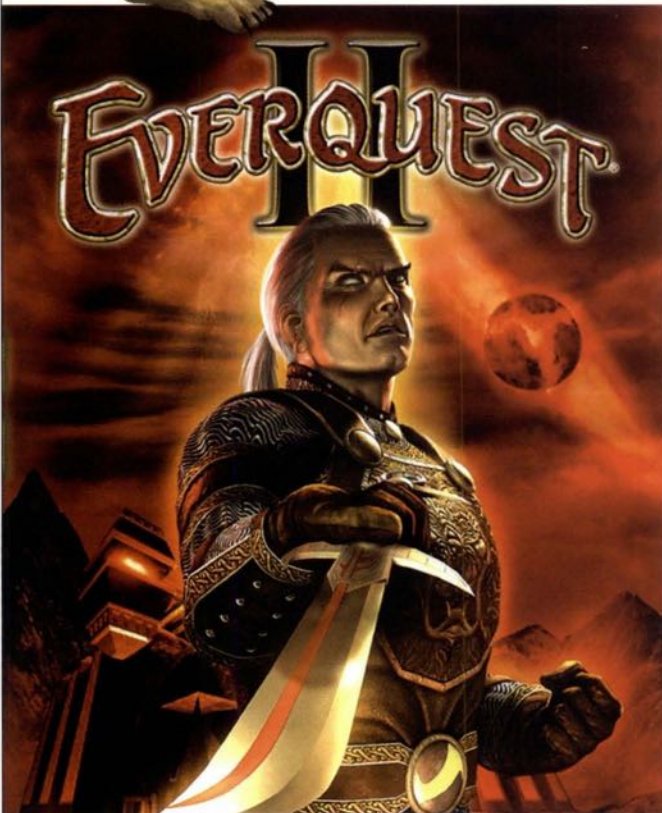
Before leaving the Isle of Refuge, players are forced to choose a life of good or evil; the former will send you to the beautiful, moral city of Qeynos, the latter will dispatch you to the wicked and twisted town of Freeport. Ogres are one of the game's few inherently evil species, so I wasn't given the choice. Off to Freeport I went.

I've now spent dozens of hours in Freeport, exploring its dark alleys and surrounding countryside, and have spoken to hundreds of NPCs to find quests that allow me to make money and earn experience. I'm just now starting to get a clear picture of the scope of Freeport, its boroughs, and its sewers. Much of the outside world is still off-limits to me, as the creatures occupying these lands would make short work of my level 16 character.

As citizen of Freeport I've made certain to refuse any missions with even a hint of altruism and have gone to great lengths to seek out quests involving inherently evil acts, such as beating merchants and assassinating rebels. However, I've recently accepted a mission to betray my city. I'm keen to know if the game will actually allow me to leave Freeport and begin working for Qeynos — I hope to bring my own patented brand of immorality and mayhem to that town of goody-two-shoes. Unfortunately, I'm at least three or four character levels away from being able to successfully undertake the tasks associated with the betrayal mission, and, as is the case for most massively multiplayer online role-playing games, going up a single level in EQII can take many hours.

But I won't give up. As a game reviewer I'm often forced to place my journeys through EQII's cities and countryside on pause in order to explore other video game worlds, but there are few games that have kept me coming back the way EQII has. I expect that I'll be exploring new lands and hooking up with old pals in EverQuest II for months — perhaps even years — to come. Like I said, I'm a geek.

By Chad Sapieha





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NBA Live 2005

Publisher: EA Sports Developer: EA Canada Platform: PC

Not all basketball games are created equal. Developed by Electronic Arts Canada, NBA Live 2005 is a slam-dunk sports simulation that excels in every department – from the unprecedented ball control and wealth of solo and multiplayer options to the stunningly real graphics and sneaker-squeaking sound effects.

And not only is it less than \$20 but because this popular console game is now available on the PC, you can play as or against your favourite NBA team while cruising at 30,000 feet.

New to the series is something the game makers call “freestyle control,” which in plain English means you can control the movement of the player and the ball a lot easier than in past games. It feels much more intuitive, whether you’re dribbling, deking out opponents, pulling off gravity defying dunks or working your defensive plays. That said, rather than using the computer keyboard, an inexpensive USB gamepad is highly recommended. Also new to the franchise is a deeper Dynasty mode that challenges you to



take your team through 25 consecutive seasons. Other additions include the introduction of an All-Star mode (complete with slam-dunk contests and three-point shoot-



outs), new motion capture animations, a killer hip-hop soundtrack, and the ability to customize a player’s face, body and clothing from a seemingly endless supply of options.

Gamers who want to play against a friend can do

so on the same PC or via the Internet. Online play works smoothly; simply join or start a game in the game’s lobby, pick the team you want to play and take to the court.

There are a few niggles in NBA Live 2005, such as AI defense that can be a bit wonky at times (e.g. leaving big open gaps or jumping prematurely to block a shot). Another beef: you can’t download an updated team roster, therefore the Toronto Raptors still has defector Vince Carter.

Minor shortcomings aside, b-ball fans in search of the quintessential basketball game won’t find a better offering than NBA Live 2005. Its slick presentation, fun gameplay and multiple game modes make it the most well-rounded and polished pick for laptop or desktop PCs.

By Marc Saltzman

INFO BOX

★	-Realistic sim	★	-Computer-controlled defense can be dumb	ESRB E
★	-Great graphics	★	-Can't update team rosters	
★	-Many modes			
★	Final thought: Interactive PC basketball at it's best - whether you're itching to alley-oop at home, work, school or on the road.			

Worms Forts: Under Siege

Publisher: Sega Developer: Team 17 Platform: PC



Incase you’ve never played any of the deliciously silly but challenging Worms titles, these turn-based strategy games pit two squads of worms against one another, each of whom must use wacky weapons to blow the other team off the map.

As the name suggests, Worms

Forts: Under Siege now adds a defensive component as players must build towers, walls and ramparts to protect your four-worm platoon. Other structures must be built, such as hospitals (to heal the wounded) and research facilities (to devise bigger and better weapons).

Along with a typical war arsenal of grenades and missiles, bizarre weapons include exploding caribou, crazy monkeys and a “homing pigeon” who flies



into enemy territory and then nose-dives into their stronghold. Laugh all you like (and you will) but the game requires a lot of tactical savoir-faire to successfully demolish the enemy – and now, the enemy’s base. A tip: Consider wind speed

and direction when firing projectile weapons if you want to win on one of the outdoor levels. Once missions are completed, Worms Forts: Under Siege unlocks new weapons, buildings, fort styles and environments. This PC version of the game includes many single-player modes (campaign and quick matches, for example) as well as support for “hot-seat” play for up to four players on the same PC or Internet play for online gaming.

The biggest issue with the game is some awkward camera angles that can make it difficult to gain a clear view of your worm’s environment. The 503MB PC version of the game can be downloaded at trygames.com and played for free for 60 minutes before being given the option to purchase and own the game for \$32. PS2 and Xbox versions are also available for \$30.

More fun than a can of worms and barrel of crazy monkeys, Worms Forts: Under Siege is perfect for strategy nuts with a good sense of humour.

By Marc Saltzman

INFO BOX

★	-Great concept	★	-Some awkward camera angles	ESRB T
★	-Many game modes	★	-Slight hiccups in animation	
★	-Good tutorial			
★	Final thought: A fun and funny strategy game.			

Tork: Prehistoric Punk

Publisher: Ubisoft Developer: Tiwak SAS Platform: Xbox



Tork is a pretty standard action/platform game, but it's executed well and has a few frills that raise it above "by-the-numbers."

You play the titular prehistoric punk out to rescue your father from Orgus and his evil tribe. You have a club to whack foes, bolas to pick them off at a distance, and you can also shapeshift into various creatures, like an armadillo or the powerful giant blue yeti. This will give you extra powers to attack things or get around.

After a few initial levels of whacking obstacles and foes, you are sent to a hub area where you can try out different worlds in the order you choose. The usual themes are presented – canyons, snow, lava, and so on. Extra variety is added by throwing in a time-traveling gimmick. You will also visit medieval and modern-day settings. As a result, you get a variety of monsters

including prehistoric critters, cavemen and robots.

The game looks pretty good, and the levels have a few nice visual splashes. The winter levels have avalanches with nice particle effects, and you can occasionally see a nifty reflection of Tork on the icy surfaces. Sounds are cartoony but crisp – every smack feels right.

Most of the above will feel familiar, as will some of the



complaints. The camera can be a little finicky, and your control over it is feeble. However, it isn't an issue all that often. I am pretty pleased with the checkpoint system though. First, they put in lots of them, so the game is not frustrating. Plus, you register a checkpoint by whacking a gong. Fun.

There is nothing revolutionary about Tork, but it's a competent platformer, and it is usually priced lower than a typical Xbox game. If you haven't done this kind of game in awhile, give it a shot.

By Jason MacIsaac

Oddworld Stranger's Wrath

Publisher: EA Games
Developer: Oddworld Inhabitants
ESRB: Teen Platform: Xbox Star rating: 4

The fourth game in the once-popular Oddworld series is a strange fusion of fantasy, science fiction and old spaghetti westerns.

In this action-adventure, gamers play as the Stranger, an alien bounty hunter hired to track down a host of bizarre outlaws. Even more odd is the Stranger's "live ammunition" – little critters that are fired out of a gun: Stunkz, for example, emit a poisonous gas while Stingbees can be fired in rapid succession like a machine-gun before swarming the outlaws.

The Stranger accepts missions from the Bounty Store and then follows a map to track down fugitives such as Filthy Hands Floyd or The Looten Duke. If successful, the Stranger collects the cash reward for bagging the baddie, which can be used to purchase better weapons and items at the county store.

Most of the game's tasks, such as running, climbing ropes, jumping across chasms and engaging in fistfights, are in third-person perspective. But players will also need to toggle to a first-person view to look through binoculars, target enemies with a double-barrel crossbow or activate a faraway switch with a projectile. Oddworld Stranger's Wrath is a lot more action-heavy than past Oddworld titles, but it's just as humorous and entertaining. And the "live ammunition" gimmick works. Xbox gamers in search of an intense, character-driven shooter will have a blast with this wacky adventure.

By Marc Saltzman



INFO BOX

Good	-Frequent checkpoints	Bad	-Weak camera control
	-Ability to morph into cool creatures		-Not very different from other platform games
★ Final thought: A decent game, but it's definitely a rent-first kind of title.			



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Mercenaries

Publisher: LucasArts Developer: Pandemic Studios Platform: PS2, Xbox



Finally, a game that performs as advertised: if you see it, you can indeed annihilate it in Mercenaries. A take-no-prisoners third-person shooter from Pandemic Studios, makers of Full Spectrum Warrior, the title is sure to strike a chord with any self-respecting, red-blooded male. Why? Because everything

dies, disintegrates or explodes in spectacular fashion once you train an assault rifle or anti-tank weapon on it. And the more you ravage the sprawling outdoor landscapes wherein engagements are set, the additional money you make. The kicker: the larger one's cash reserves are, the greater the frequency with which ammo and weapons drop and air strikes or bunker buster bombs can be summoned at whim.

Even the story is electric; a coup's been launched within North Korea and, as one of three heavily armed soldiers of fortune, you're called in to capture a rogue general and his top aides. Tracking down and apprehending



the wanted parties, designated as a deck of 52 playing cards, is a challenge. But tougher still is the need to play different sides of the conflict to accomplish your mission. Between the Allies, Chinese, Koreans, and Russian Mafia, you've got a wide range of potential con-

spirators. Choosing business partners is a sketchy affair, though — while you may gain additional support in the field, you also run the risk of alienating former associates. Therefore players must exercise extreme caution while wandering the 3D war zones.

Though audio-visually solid, it's the actual gameplay where the affair really shines. Whether jacking tanks, trucks or SUVs (any vehicle's fair game) or watching as support helicopters are unceremoniously downed by enemy rockets, the action never fails to impress. The upshot: it's as if you're doing



battle throughout a living, breathing world. Taking a fairly basic premise — kill absolutely everything that moves — and adding considerable depth, shoot ... this puppy blows conventional run-and-gun romps to smithereens.

By Scott Steinberg

INFO BOX

	-Destructible landscapes -Huge range of vehicles and weapons		-Occasionally lengthy load times	
	Final thought: It's a dirty job, but someone's got to do it: specifically, you.			

The Getaway: Black Monday

Publisher: SCEA Developer: SCEE (London) Platform: PS2

You know how most games make us want to skip through the story sequences and get straight to the action? The Getaway: Black Monday, the sequel to 2003's lukewarmly received The Getaway, is the exact opposite. I found myself enduring clunky gameplay just to get back to the game's surprisingly gripping story, which focuses on a London cop with a dark history and a reputation for being a loose cannon. Black Monday's dialogue is tight, hip and compelling, the acting is Hollywood quality from start to finish, and the movie sequences are expertly framed and blocked. In short, Black Monday's story outshines its game play by a country mile.

There are two distinct forms of play in the game: driving and shooting. The driving levels see players navigating the streets of London as they tail sus-



pects, engage in high-speed chases, and ferry policemen to crime scenes. Unfortunately, most of these missions are dull, requiring players to do little more than dodge traffic and return a bit of



gunfire en route to various destinations. Black Monday also fails to provide satisfying driving physics; more often than not the player's car simply gets pushed to the side of any obstacles it hits rather than bowling them over or getting stopped cold.

The action levels aren't much more fun than the driving. Artificial intelligence simply doesn't exist in Black Monday; cops and criminals just stand around ignoring each other or carry out scripted actions that lead them to certain death.

Worse than the AI, Black Monday's camera always seems to move in the wrong direction at the wrong time, and the player can only swing it about sixty degrees to either side rather than all the way around. This frustrating camera made the game's epic length shoot-outs — which involve lots of peaking through doorways and peering around corners — aggravating enough to make me start pulling out my hair (and that's an activity I really can't afford to engage in).

By Chad Sapieha

INFO BOX

	-Snappy British dialogue -Dark, gritty story		-A nasty, nasty camera -Unrealistic driving collisions -Poor artificial intelligence	
	Final thought: It's not much of a game, but there might be a decent movie in here somewhere...			

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Zoo Keeper

Publisher: Ignition Entertainment
Developer: Buddiez Inc. / Success Corp.
ESRB Rating: E
Platform: Nintendo DS
Star rating: 3.5

A blatant rip-off of the popular PC/cell phone puzzle game Bejeweled, Zoo Keeper merely swaps gem stones for animals. The goal of the game is to create strings of three or more like animals by swapping the places of adjacent critters on a square game board.

While Zoo Keeper is undeniably a copycat, it does sport a few changes that make the tired, repetitive Bejeweled formula feel fresh. For example, the zoo master provides quotas for each type of animal, forcing players to strategically manipulate the board to capture the animals they need. Zoo Keeper also antas up a wide variety of game types, including standard, quest, endurance and time attack modes, as well as wireless head-to-head gameplay using a pair of DS systems and a single cartridge.

But Zoo Keeper's most evident improvement over Bejeweled is its presentation. While Bejeweled has an aesthetic of lame gems and generic music that could only appeal to schoolmarms, Zoo Keeper appeals to a younger, hipper audience with its bizarre, square-shaped animals, fast, arcade-like music, and deliciously disconcerting Japanese-to-English translations ("I don't think this is your thing. Decreased by 50%! Decreased by 300 points. Now you get 300 points. You are a failure.").

By Chad Sapieha

Good:
Highly stylized visuals and music

Bad:
Gameplay is a direct rip off of Bejeweled

Final thought:
It's no Tetris, but it'll do until Nintendo sees fit to bring the granddaddy of puzzlers to the DS.



FIFA Soccer 2005

Publisher: EA Sports **Developer:** EA GAMES **Platform:** N-Gage



EA's soccer blockbuster FIFA 2005 works well on the N-Gage and puts the system's ample buttons to good use. Depending on the context (attacker, defender or goal-

keeper), players can pass, shoot, sprint, lob the ball, or hard tackle. Though things like being able to deke and do fancy footwork are absent, FIFA 2005 does strike a nice balance by offering a move-list that has enough variety to remain engaging but not so many choices as to be overwhelming.

The game's attention to detail would be impressive on a console, let alone a handheld. There

are more than 500 teams to select, with up-to-date rosters and uniforms representative of virtually every professional league imaginable. The field can be affected by various weather conditions, and a vocal stadium crowd reacts to the action with groans, cheers and singing. In-game animation is fluid, and the N-Gage handles the instant replays and other 3D sequences well.

New to the 2005 edition is the excellent Career Mode, which lets you take on managerial duties of a chosen team through five seasons and work to achieve the goals set out for you by management.

With matches that last mere minutes, FIFA 2005 is the perfect pick-up-and-play soccer experience, and one of the N-Gage's strongest titles to date.

By Erin Bell



INFO BOX

★ ★ ★	Good	-Impressive depth -Intuitive controls	★ ★ ★	Bad	-AI somewhat easy to manipulate	EVERETT ESRB E ESRB
	Final thought: An accessible game that even non-soccer fans could appreciate.					

The Legend of Zelda: The Minish Cap

Publisher: Nintendo **Developer:** Capcom **Platform:** Game Boy Advance



The Legend of Zelda: The Minish Cap is unlike any Zelda game in recent memory in that an outside developer was responsible for its creation. Capcom has done an excellent job of recreating the classic

feel but has added its own creative flair, which helps to keep the concept somewhat fresh. As the title hints, the Minish Cap is an important



part of the gameplay. By donning the hat found fairly early on, Link can shrink himself using portals

scattered strategically around the world. Shrinking down sometimes leaves Link as a miniature in the regular sized world, allowing him to go places that the full-sized Link can't squeeze into. At the same time, it can also impede his travels by turning a tiny pebble into an immovable boulder, for example.

The new gadgets and tricks at Link's disposal will delight fans of the series. Minish Cap is true to its roots but at the same time manages to

expand on the formula.

By Andrew Moore-Crispin

INFO BOX

★ ★ ★	Good	-Shrinking opens interesting possibilities -New gadgets	★ ★ ★	Bad	-Won't sway non-fans -A few overly frustrating puzzles	EVERETT ESRB E ESRB
	Final thought: For fans of the series, Minish Cap is worth its weight in gold.					

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