



TRIBES: VENGEANCE

By Lord Niloy

Requirements: 1GHz CPU, 128MB RAM, GeForce2 (64 MB) or equivalent video card

FLYING around in rocket-powered armour is cool. At least, that's always been the philosophy behind the Tribes franchise. For those unfamiliar, it's a first-person shooter series that straddles the line between Unreal Tournament and Battlefield 1942 with one major difference: everyone gets a jetpack that facilitates soaring and sliding along the z-axis, letting gamers reach places they could only dream of in other games of the type.

I've played a lot of the "best of the best" shooters out there. Games like Half-Life, Quake 2, and the original Doom series. I've been playing these games almost as long as I've been playing video games as a hobby. So I was a little casual when I first sat down to take a sneak peak at the new game that Irrational Games and Vivendi Universal Games have put together. A little title they call Tribes: Vengeance.

In the first ten minutes I was hooked. This game

went from being something I was vaguely interested in to the top of my must have list. Vengeance is a wonderful game on many, many levels. The single player game was so involving that I first sat down to get a feel for the game I didn't stop for almost 4 hours. The graphics are wonderful, and the controls handled extremely well. I can't remember the last time I was this impressed with a game.

Flying with the jetpack worked like a dream. The controls were so responsive I was pulling stunts (and surviving) that I wouldn't have tried on older games. Even more impressive was the computer AI. The levels are designed on a 3D scale. Things are rarely linear, which means the AI has to adapt for changes in height as much as it needs to adapt for changes in direction. I was awestruck when I first got into the area levels of the single-player game. The AI was bounding over hills, taking flight to avoid missiles and other area-effect weapons, and giving me hell.

Unlike other game series that try to create a driv-



ing reason for why the carnage exists, Tribes: Vengeance created a believable story for why the universe is the way it is. I've seen movies with less plot than Vengeance. Being able to play through multiple levels as different characters gives the player a greater sense of immediacy. Instead of reading some text or listen-

ing to some recorded speech talking about what happened you know. After all, you're the one who dared the impossible. There's even one spot where the player gets to play two different characters in the same level.

As I immersed myself in the goals of infiltrating and eliminating an illegal Tribal base on one of the Empire's planets, I was manning the guns of one of our drop ships as they circled the area looking for a safe place to land and let our ground troops for the assault on the base. It was a fun change from the run and gun action that had so far been presented to me. Action is what the game is all about and the developers have given the already fast game play of Tribes a turbo boost by incorporating some new features and weapons. One of the new features that will make the difference between high scores and frequent respawning is skiing. When running over the crest of a hill, hold down the space bar and tiny jets in your suit's boots engage to propel you over it. Practice and proper timing of jump jets gets you a boost of speed and help you fly further than you normally would. A grappling hook can also be used to swing your way around tight areas or bring yourself up close and personal to an enemy player. Also scattered around some maps are jump pads that anyone who has played Quake III will recognize. These emplacements will fling your player forward giving you a bit more range and speed as you jet your way across the map. During the arena levels I got to see several different options the game has

available for cooperative team play. Games like capture-the-flag are a gaming standard, but the "fuel rounds" were just as much fun. Running around the landscape finding hidden "fuel" reserves to bring back to the team depot was a challenge. Even more difficult was stealing fuel from the opponents while trying to defend your own depot from thieves.

The graphics are run on an enhanced Unreal Engine and come across as crisp and clear. I was especially taken with the level design that the developers put into the game. Everything is colour coded, which is entertaining, but there are also architectural styles for each of the major cultures in the game (Imperial, Phoenix Tribe, and Blood Eagle Tribe.) Each culture has their own armour design to go along with their buildings, and each is unique. The graphics were not as awe-inspiring as the very latest graphics engines can render (like Quake 3) but they were still impressive. My machine had (almost) no problems rendering everything perfectly.

Tribes: Vengeance joins the growing list of titles that you have to add to your collection for 2004. It finds its niche by providing great multiplayer action, allowing it to join the ranks as an alternative to Unreal Tournament 2004. While the character animations in the single-player cut scenes detract from the overall product (I guess Doom 3 spoiled me), Irrational Studios should be applauded for translating the action and intensity of the game into a mostly satisfying setting.

The beginner's guide to incredibly good anime

character and dramatic pacing remains really really good. And those transforming fighters are just the coolest things ever. The series is rather long (85 episodes) but it IS worth it; simply put, there's life before Robotech, and then there's life after it.

The Grave of the Fireflies is the single greatest war story I've ever seen. Ever. In any genre. With all due respect to Spielberg and the rest of the world, this is the most moving portrayal of war it has been this particular person's privilege to see. The story is based on a novel by a WW-II survivor in Japan, and is so infinitely sad and beautiful that it defies description. This is too grand an experience to be missed.

Action, comedy, style, and the best director ever combined to make Lupin III: The Castle of Cagliostro the greatest Lupin feature ever, and probably one of the most entertaining adventures possible. The dialogue is witty and the stunts zanier than Mr Bean, with damsels in distress, cars driving up walls, and an ending Disney copied... need we say more?

Ranma 1/2 is quite possibly the funniest animated feature since, ah, the original Looney Tunes. And it's got tons of action too, to boot; and the cast is the epitome of eccentricity.

A kooky premise, and truckloads of kung fu, romance, action and incredible humour. And it's just so much fun to watch people transform into... uh... a whole lot of other things when doused with cold water...

Animes so good they're classics in the making: Rurouni Kenshin is the definitive samurai experience. Bar none. THE story of one man atoning for a dark past with a lifetime of protecting the weak, backed with beautiful artwork, fluid animation, great plots (except for the filler, of which there's sadly a bit too much) and a cast that you can't help but love.

Cowboy Bebop: Incredible artwork, even more incredibly believable characters, cool heroes, cooler villains, hot heroines, incredible soundtrack and the best ending possible ever. And supertanker loads of style. The thing is, Bebop is so good that it's best that we don't start on it, because it's going to be nigh on impossible to stop.

Vision of Escaflowne is the best fantasy anime I've ever seen. A plot that is intricate, fast paced and a dramatic roller coaster ride you're not likely to ever forget. And beautiful, detailed artwork with rich colours and a style that'll set you thinking Dungeons and Dragons before you can blink. Did we mention the drama, the action, the romance and the incredible soundtrack yet? No? Well, now we did.

Refer to Robotech above for reasons for why this sequel, Macross Plus was so anticipated. Read on and discover that this 4 episode feature (also released as a single film) is even better than it needed to be - artwork, music, action, and plot wise. And we loved the characters for every instant that the director didn't want us to hate them, which means most of the time. A five star ticket to the action superhighway,

with enough of everything else to rock.

And the hottest of the newest things to watch: Samurai Champloo and Naruto. Samurai Champloo has style and a punkesque groove to the way the show goes AND the animation to go with it.

The whole thing hasn't been aired yet but what has, has the whole world of anime fans on their toes. Naruto is FUN taken to a hitherto unseen height, and is packed chock-full with action to satiate people who thought Die-Hard was over before it started.



SITES UNSEEN

By Niloy

Happy New Year, guys. I'm giving out Gmails as a new year's gift to my fellow surfers. The first four to ask for a Gmail will get one. As for the new year, Sites Unseen will undergo some major modification pretty soon. And check out my blog at niloywrites.blogspot.com

Best of photojournalism 2004

http://www.nppa.org/competitions/best_of_still_photjournalism/2004/

Shortened link: <http://tinyurl.com/3m3pv>

The biggest news stories of the year are always accompanied by photographs. It's no surprise, then, that the collection of photos from the recipient of the Newspaper Photographer of the Year award include an image of Iraqis defacing a Saddam Hussein mural. Or that the second-place winner's entries feature photos of an Iraqi prison. But some of the best photos in newspapers, magazines, and on the Web don't accompany the big stories. The photojournalists featured in the National Press Photographers Association competition have captured amazing flights, local heroes, and heart-stopping rescues. The winning photographers in over two dozen categories offer thousands of pictures that are sure to move, amuse, and enlighten you.

G33KY G00GL3

<http://www.google.com/intl/xx-hacker/>

One of the countless reasons why Google rocks.

Clean your soul, online

<http://www.comeclean.com/>

Confess and see other people's confessions.

Old-Computers.com

<http://www.old-computers.com/>

Most of us readily associate the names Apple, IBM, and Compaq with computer hardware. But do you know the names Acorn, Luxor, or Eagle? Starting in 1973 with R2E's Micral, a computer with a processor speed of only 108 KHz, this site archives over 500 old computers. Rounding out the "old"

machines is Amstrad's PCW 16 from 1994, a robust computing wonder that clocked in with 16 MHz and an operating system named Roseanne. This homage to defunct hardware shows how far computing power has come in the past few decades.

10-year-old arrested, handcuffed over scissors

<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/6699151/>

Apparently, she also had a sharply pointed pencil.

Avenge yourself in the New Year!

<http://www.revengelady.com/>

Annoying co-worker got you down? Recently got dumped by a physically attractive but intellectually shallow person? Don't get mad, take a nice little revenge. Dispensing time-worn tips on the fine art of getting even (and then some!), in this site the Revenge Lady offers advice with a smile. The Q-and-A column ("put a mouse trap in his desk") is the real draw here, but you'll also find a handy guide to the rules of revenge and a life-affirming list of top-ten revenge stories. And remember, "Let your creativity blossom. Don't go for clichés like putting gum in important papers. Yawn. Be original. Enjoy yourself. Give your mark an experience they'll never ever forget."

Cartoons and their skeletons

<http://michaelpaulus.com/gallery/character-skeletons>

Shortened link: <http://tinyurl.com/54tqe>

In this "The Skeletal Systems of Cartoon Characters," the illustrator has boldly imagined the calcite cores of beloved cartoon favourites. As you might guess, most of these characters sport some seriously strange skulls. Witness the gaping eye sockets of Buttercup from the Power Puff Girls. Note the hypertrophied mandible of Fred Flintstone. Gaze in awe at the bizarre frontal lobe of Betty Boop. And who knew that Pikachu's tail had vertebrae? This exhibit clearly debunks the myth that toons are all the same under the skin. niloy.me@gmail.com