WORLD EXCLUSIVE REVIEW & DEMO

MEDAL OF HONOR ALLIED ASSAULT

It's official – this is the best shooter money can buy

EXCLUSIVE REPORT

PLANETSIDE STAR WARS: GALAXIES

Sony Online: the biggest name shows us the biggest games

TINY COMPO:
Which famous film director
was involved in the making
of *Medal Of Honor*?
YOUR COVERMOUNT IS MISSING

"THIS GORGEOUS 3D REAL-TIME STRATEGY GAME PROMISES TO BE A HUGE HIT WHEN IT RELEASES EARLY NEXT YEAR"

PCGAMEPLAY

"A REAL-TIME STRATEGY GAME THAT IS TRUE TO ITS ROOTS – SIMPLE, INTUITIVE, ENGROSSING AND THOROUGHLY 3D"

PCZONE

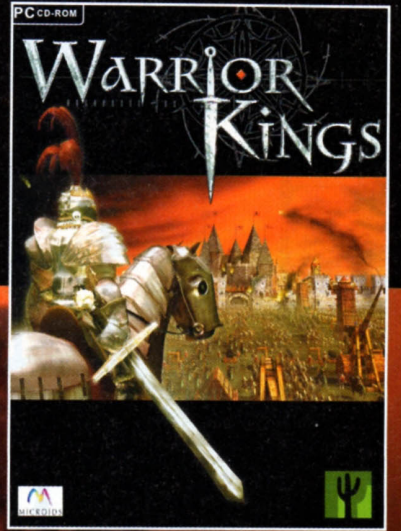"THE STRATEGY GAME WE'VE BEEN WAITING FOR"

PCFORMAT

"A MERRILY CHAOTIC MIX OF SHOGUN, C&C AND AGE OF EMPIRES THAT SPORTS EASILY THE MOST IMPRESSIVE IN-GAME RTS VISUALS WE'VE YET SEEN."

PCGAMER

"GAMERS SHOULD BE SHARPENING THEIR FAVOURITE AXES IN READINESS FOR ITS RELEASE"

STRATEGY PLAYER NOW INCORPORATING STRATEGY GAMES

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ONLINEZONE

IT'S GAMING FOR THE MASSES www.zone.co.uk #12 FEB 2002

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SONY ONLINE

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EVERQUEST: SHADOWS OF LUCLIN
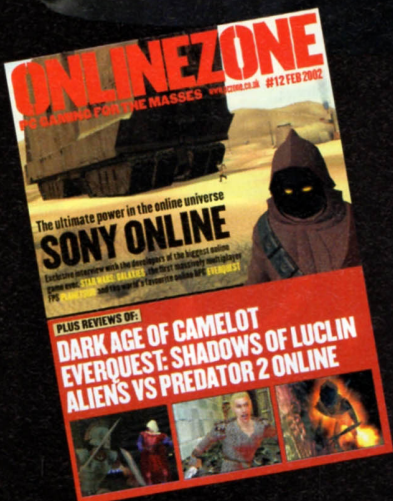ALIENS VS PREDATOR 2 ONLINE

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

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ON THE CDS
FULL DETAILS **PAGE 124** ▶

WORLD EXCLUSIVE DEMO
MEDAL OF HONOR: ALLIED ASSAULT
PLUS SINGLE PLAYER DEMO

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WIN THE **TOP 10 PC GAMES** SEE THE PC ZONE CHARTS **PAGE 20**

PAGE 112 WIN A PACKARD BELL PC Plus copies of Sky Sports Football Manager

THE COMPO NO ONE FINDS Correctly answer this month's cover question and you could win some PC goodies. Send your entry on a postcard addressed to: The Compo No One Finds (112), *PC ZONE*, 30 Cleveland Street, London W1T 4JD. The first entry with the correct answer plucked out of the hat wins a mystery prize. The editor's decision is final. Closing date: Wednesday February 6 2002. The winner of our November cover compo (issue 110) is William Doyle from Bournemouth, who wins a lovely little something from the *ZONE* prize cupboard.

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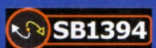
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THE REAL THING

There are two distinct strands of games – think of them as two kids at school. The first is the class joker, disinterested in events that are occurring outside the bubble of the classroom. In the classroom he makes the rules and does what he wants, when he wants, how he wants. The other is the brains of the class, able to ingest and regurgitate facts and figures, in the knowledge that the real world and a firm handle on it is the key to long-term success.

The PC delivers both in almost equal measures but it's the pioneer of the latter, and its cutting-edge hardware is finally beginning to reach the point where the real world can be replicated – not perfectly, but enough to provide immersion and a suspension of disbelief. That doesn't mean that gamesy games are going to die out. There'll always be a place for brash colourful fantasies that play by their own rules – and the world would be a drab place without them.

But there are certain games and genres where realism is the key to the future. *Hidden & Dangerous* was one of the first games I played where I actually felt attached and where consequences seemed to matter. It was far from perfect but the blueprint was there. The sequel to that is hopefully going to be released in 2002 and that looks like upping the stakes again. In the meantime there's *Medal Of Honor*.

> **❝I'm proud of the fact that we've managed to bring you the world's first review of *Medal Of Honor*❞**

When I saw the game for the first time at E3 I was convinced that it was going to be something special, and I've had my fingers crossed since, praying that the developers kept the project on track. And because the game's been a bit of a personal obsession with me, I'm proud of the fact that we've managed to bring you the world's first review of the game and the world's first look at the single-player demo.

The realism factor might put some people off but if you base a shooter in the real-world, using real-life events, then surely the game has got to feel real. *Medal Of Honor* might not be an accurate representation of life in World War II and it might not be the best-looking game in the world but in my opinion it's a defining moment in the FPS genre and it's a perfect example of what the PC does best. Don't take my word for it though. Check out Richie's review on page 46 and then tackle the huge mission on our cover disc.

And talking of cover discs we've also got the perfect antidote to the horrors of the real world. *EverQuest* is probably the best online RPG in the world and although you'd have had to shell out the best part of £35 to get the software a couple of years back, we've teamed up with Sony to give it to you for nothing, along with a free trial period so you don't have to spend a penny before deciding whether running round a virtual world in a tunic is for you. 2002 couldn't have started with a bigger bang.

Dave Woods
Editor

⊘ *Medal Of Honor:*
It's better than
peeling spuds.

2 GAMES
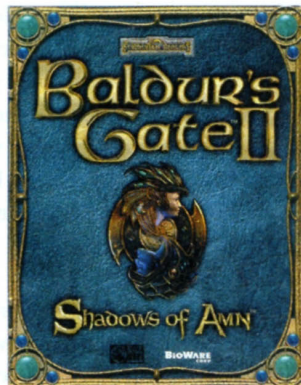
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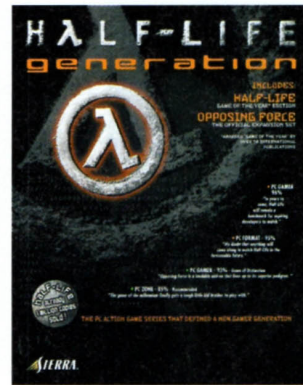
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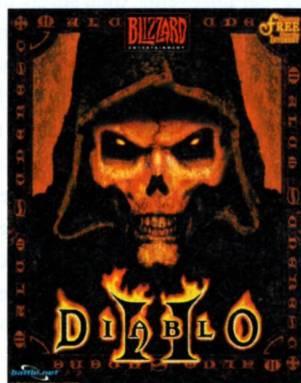
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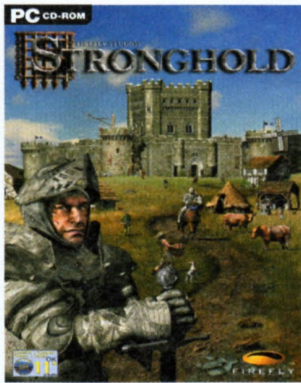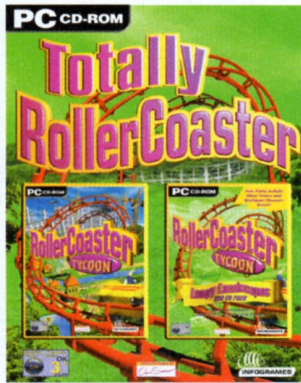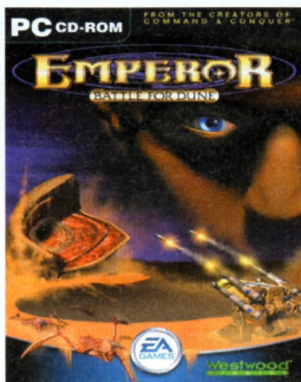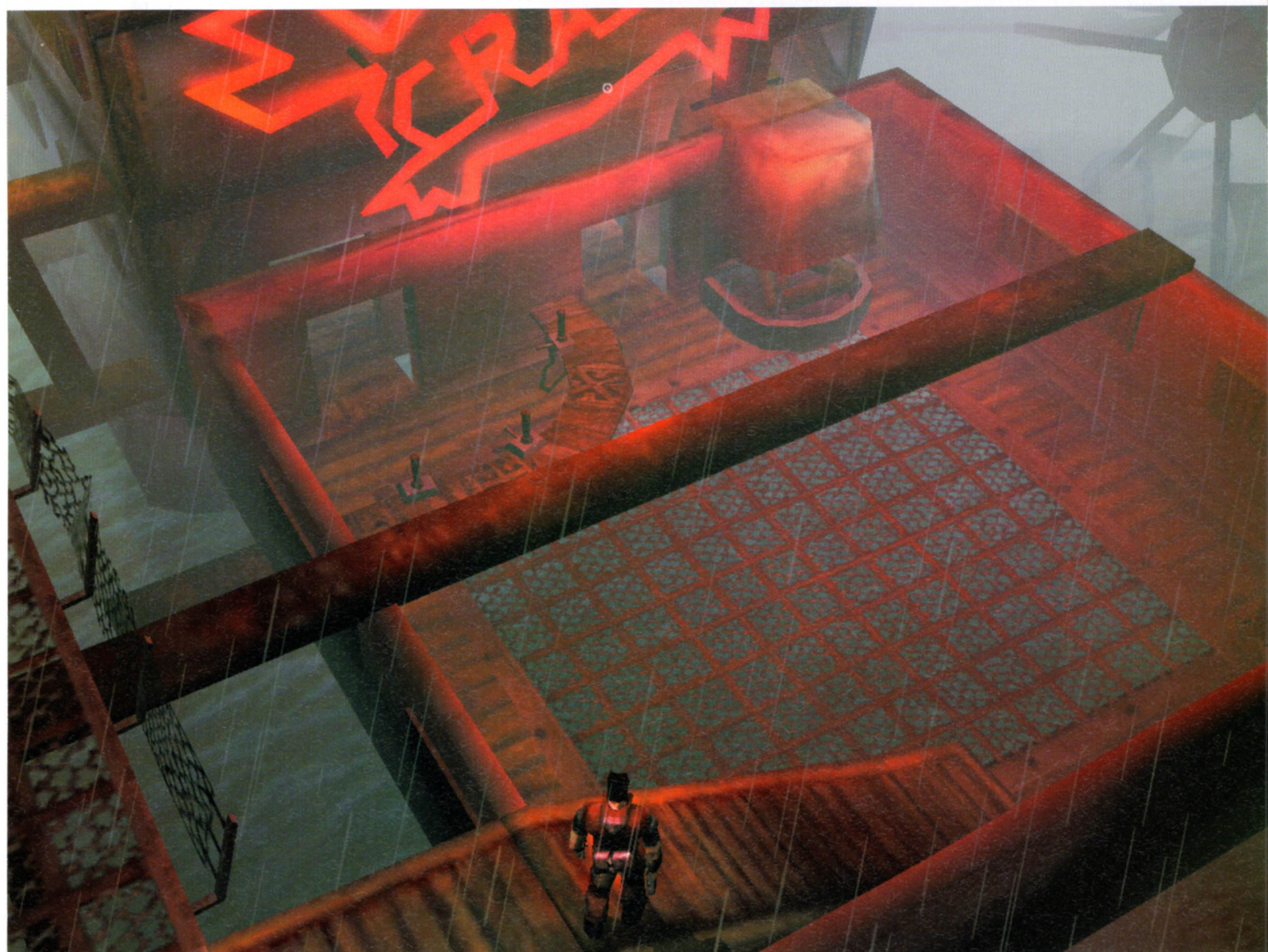
TOP STORY

Don't lose your head...

WARDOG

ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW

DEVELOPER Rebellion
PUBLISHER TBC
EXPECTED RELEASE DATE Autumn 2002
WEBSITE www.rebellion.co.uk

IN SUMMARY

Wardog is Rebellion's first game to tie in with *2000AD* since it acquired the much-loved stable of comics last year. Although the game was started first, *Wardog* has now become a popular *2000AD* strip that has received lots of positive feedback from readers, even winning over some of the more sceptical fans.

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

Even if the game didn't sell particularly well, Rebellion proved with *Gunlok* that they could provide an unusual take on the RTS genre, and we're hoping they can do that and more with the RPG. With the promise of highly sophisticated AI and an undoubtedly rich storyline, it looks entirely possible.

Fresh from the pages of 2000AD

⭐ **BOMBER GIRL** Rhianna Pratchett

If your enemies feel threatened they will get their mates, or a bigger gun.

Explore the world and uncover your past.

The sophisticated engine will create rich 3D environments.

With 2000AD writers on board you can be assured of a top notch story.
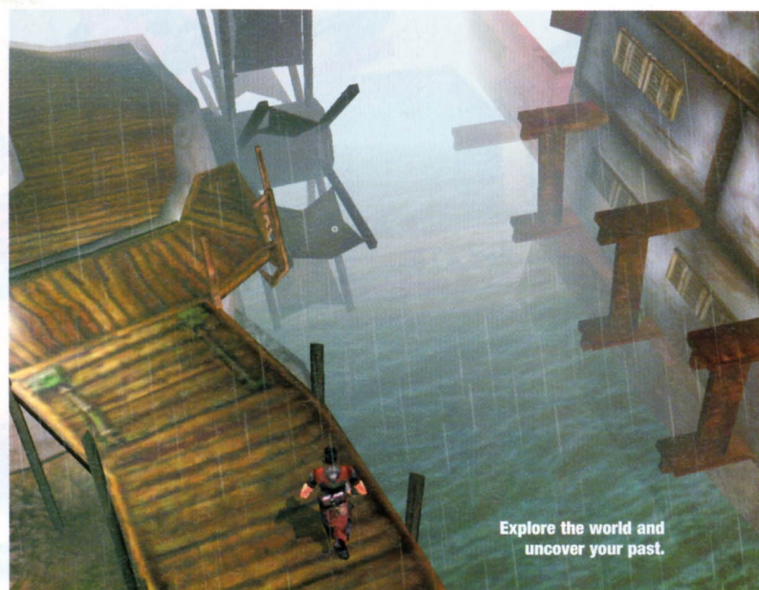
You know the kind of hangover vodka gives you? Where you stagger around like you've got a bomb in your head, waiting for the explosion where you crumble to dust from the top of your head down in humorous cartoon fashion? Well spare a thought for poor old Jack Wardog, because he really does have a bomb in his head, and without even a sniff of Smirnoff.

"The game revolves around traditional mission-based gameplay, with a sophisticated 3D engine and a strong narrative backdrop"

If you hadn't already guessed, Jack is the star of forthcoming 3D isometric RPG *Wardog*, currently in development at *AvP* developer Rebellion. We recently traipsed up to Oxford to see how Rebellion paints the future in their sci-fi/fantasy role-player, and found something not unlike our present, with humans living a precarious existence in a world threatened by groups of religious fanatics and paramilitary organisations.

With no recollection of his past, Jack Wardog is a slave in this world, an unwilling mercenary at the mercy of a cranial implant in his brain, a bomb set to explode if he doesn't carry out the wishes of those with their fingers poised over his countdown button. The game revolves around traditional mission-based gameplay, with a sophisticated 3D engine and strong narrative backdrop created with the help of several 2000AD writers. "We've taken our knowledge of 3D that we developed in *Aliens Vs Predator*," claims Rebellion's CEO Jason Kingsley. "We put it to work in making a believable, smooth-running, visually exciting world in full 3D and added to that the compelling RPG gameplay that comes from so many well-known titles."

A key part of Jason's vision is the game's AI. Traditionally strong AI has been more of an issue within the RTS and FPS genres than RPGs, but role-playing fans are increasingly unwilling to settle for simple pause, point and click mechanics, which rely much more on the size of your weapon than the size of your brain, or indeed your enemy's virtual noggin. Luckily, from what we saw of the current *Wardog* code, the AI looks like it will be the game's strongest and most innovative feature.

"The AI is very, very sophisticated and this will come out in the gameplay," claims Jason. "Different characters have different opinions of both Wardog and other characters in the world. It will be possible to start a fight between two bad guys that has them fighting each other rather than you at first. Alternatively, a lone character that you end up attacking may well run off and get his gang to come back and beat you up. Characters in the world will be *alive!*" A bold claim, and one made by many others before him. Let's just hope that Jason is a man of his word. **PCZ**

Never say never again...
NO ONE LIVES FOREVER 2

ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW

DEVELOPER Monolith
PUBLISHER VU Games
ETA Christmas 2002
WEBSITE www.lith.com

IN SUMMARY

Cate Archer is a gorgeous spy fighting it out in a cheesy '60s James Bond world. The first game offered lots of excellent gadgets and nifty ideas, but somehow didn't manage to make it work. The new Jupiter engine and improved AI will change all that.

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

After *AvP2*, we're waiting for Monolith's next grand gesture with bated breath. What little information they've given us seems to indicate they're going to correct everything we didn't like in *NOLF* and make it a title to watch out for next year. Of course, if you're one of the many who loved the first game you won't need any more convincing.

Cate Archer's back to right the wrongs wrought by her first game

⭐ **SHAKEN NOT STIRRED** Mark Hill

Among the enemies are evil ninjas and, apparently, evil mimes.
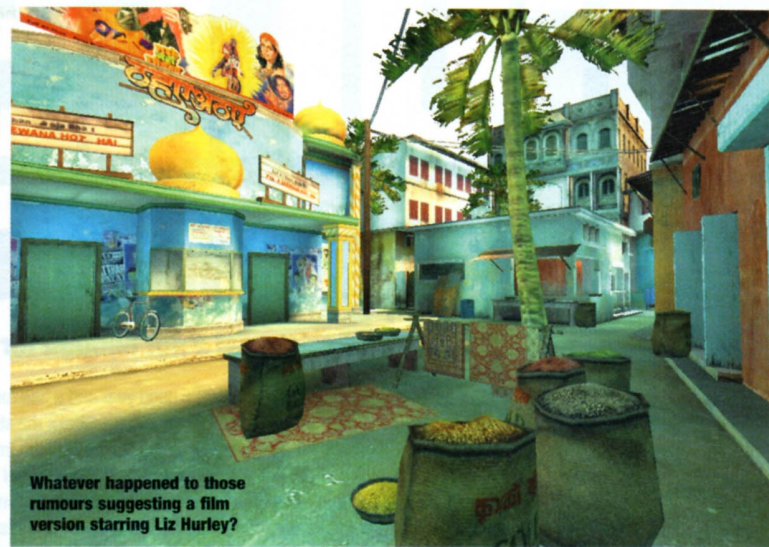
Whatever happened to those rumours suggesting a film version starring Liz Hurley?

The new levels are massive and put those in the first game to shame.

Enemies will not only act more realistically, they've also been given proper facial expressions.

T he original *No One Lives Forever* was a subject of some controversy when it was released early last year. But it had nothing to do with in-game violence. It's because we thought it was rubbish.

In theory, it should have worked a treat. James Bond gadgets in a tongue-in-cheek *Austin Powers*-like setting with a similar feel to *Soldier Of*

66Rather than the ultra-linear move 'n' shoot experience of the original, *No One Lifes Forever 2* includes a much greater emphasis on stealth99

Fortune sounded like a dream ticket. But, somehow, it all fell apart in the execution. Of course, many disagreed with us. Where we saw rubbish AI and repetitive and simplistic levels, some of you saw great AI and superlative graphics. But the real reason there's a sequel has very little to do with quality anyway. The first game sold

very well, and that automatically qualifies it for a second run-out.

And what a sequel it promises to be. Monolith has recently raised the bar in first-person shooters with *Aliens Vs Predator 2*, and we have every reason to believe they will realise the full potential of the superspy setting this time round. Especially when they have stated that they are "aiming to create an engrossing, original, cohesive experience in the spirit of *No One Lives Forever*, but not necessarily in its image."

Once again you take on the role of the curvy Cate Archer, fighting the evil organisation HARM and averting the end of the world. The latest high-end LithTech engine, going by the name of Jupiter, will guarantee a stunning visual experience, but it's in the

gameplay and AI that we're expecting the most significant improvements. Rather than the ultra-linear move 'n' shoot experience of the original, *NOLF 2* (or *The Operative 2: No One Lives Forever* as it's apparently to be known) includes a much greater emphasis on stealth. Avoiding enemies will be an integral part of the game, and to aid you in that task Monolith is introducing the ability to lean around corners and disappear into hiding places. The levels will certainly lose their cardboard-box appearance and should offer the kind of interactive environment *Deus Ex* would be proud of. Not only can you create a disturbance (by, for example, knocking a bottle or startling a pigeon), you can even unscrew light bulbs to create darkened areas. It might not have the beardy appeal of putting out torches with water arrows in *Thief II*, but it

could start a lot of "how many *Quake* players does it take…?" jokes. The main improvement though, should be in the enemies, who are more intelligent and react far more convincingly. That should make them more satisfying to kill, don't you think? We don't think we'll be disappointed again. PCZ

BULLETIN

Shooting frenzy

● **NEWS EDITOR** Anthony Holden

Unreal 2, Unreal Championship, Unreal Warfare, and now *Unreal Tournament 2.* If you're confused about all this, don't worry, so were we when we heard the news. Is *UT2* just a PC version of *Unreal Championship,* or another name for *Unreal Warfare?* No it's not, it's the real thing, a genuine sequel to one our favourite multiplayer shooters of all time. It's a shame we couldn't show you the pics, though having had a quick look at the (admittedly early) images, I have to say I'm not as blown away as I expected to be. Quite a few changes appear to have been implemented since the original game, and I'm not entirely sure they're all for the better. It will also be very interesting to see how the multiplayer in *Unreal 2* and *UT2* stack up, and whether or not they can coexist. We're still reeling from seeing *Unreal 2* in action last issue, and this is clearly the more significant of the two games. By a long shot. At the moment, of course, we're already enjoying a long overdue resurgence of compelling FPSing, both single and multiplayer, with the emergence of *Medal Of Honor* and *Wolfenstein,* not to forget *AvP2.* After such deeply atmospheric, intelligent and compelling offerings, do we really care about another twitch shooter like *UT2?* Well, yes, the fact that we still enjoy the odd game of *Quake III* means that we probably do. But the bar has definitely been raised by this latest generation of shooters, and every FPS development team should be taking serious notes. Elsewhere in Bulletin, read how the industry is finally starting to sit up and listen to *PC ZONE.* Find out how on page 24, right next to The Man Who Knows, which I should just remind you is the best insider column in the business. Ever.

The bots are back in town

Unreal 2 not enough for you? Try *Unreal Tournament 2* for size

You wait a good year and a half for one *Unreal,* and then two come along at once. That's the startling news that's just come from the States with the imminent announcement of *Unreal Tournament 2,* the sequel to one of the best multiplayer games ever. We weren't expecting this, especially as *Unreal 2* is priming itself to deliver both a full-blown single-player experience and various multiplayer modes out of the box. So where does *Unreal Tournament 2* fit into the equation?

For a start it's being developed by Digital Extremes, the team that coded the first *Unreal Tournament,* and as with *Unreal 2* Epic Games is keeping a close eye on proceedings to ensure that the highest quality is maintained. Using the latest *Unreal* engine, as featured in our exclusive *Unreal 2* preview last issue, *UT2* is going to sport huge outdoor arenas. This was one of the unique selling points of the first game, and something id has never really managed to replicate with its *Quake* franchise.

Another key feature that comes courtesy of the new engine is super-realistic character models. *UT2* is set to put the frighteners on the competition with the same level of detail as *Unreal 2,* meaning hair that moves, eyes that can track movement and a variety of stunningly designed races. Expect a slew of new weaponry to slot alongside the o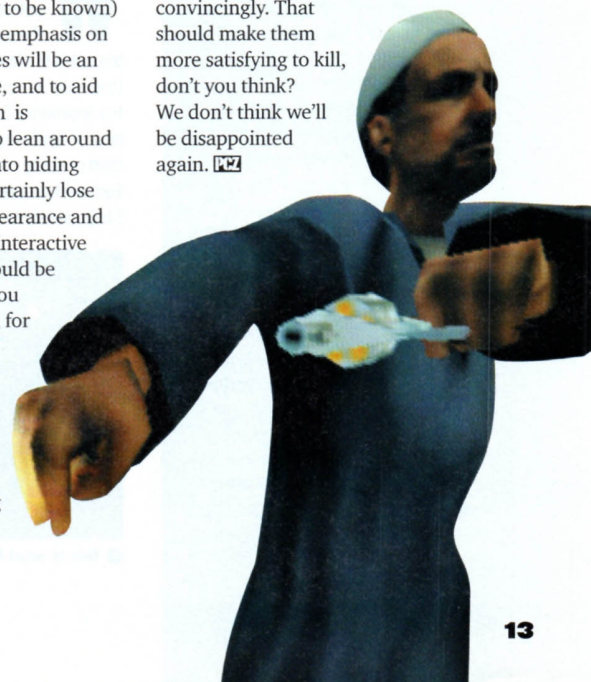ld favourites as well. Bots will of course be present, and can be expected to show an even higher degree of real-life behaviour – impressive considering the original *UT* bots are still some of the smartest around.

Unfortunately there's an embargo in place which means that we can't print screenshots until next issue, but from what we've managed to glean there are going to be a couple of big surprises in store, one of which might be the fact that you won't have to rely on your legs to get around the super-large levels. All will be revealed next month, along with the first in-game visuals, but if you can't wait that long check out www.pczone.co.uk on January 13.

Digital Extremes • ETA autumn 2002 • www.unreal.com

The dream lives on

Dreamland Chronicles resurfaces as *UFO: Freedom Ridge,* minus the Gollops

What a funny old place the games industry is. In issue 102, we reported the cancellation of one of our most anticipated games of the time, *Dreamland Chronicles,* the incredible-looking 3D strategy title that was to revive the spirit of classic *X-COM* outings such as *UFO: Enemy Unknown.* Originally in development at Mythos Games, home of *X-COM* and the legendary Gollop brothers, the game was suspended due to lack of funds and various publisher shenanigans, which ended in a rash of nasty rumours including the suggestion that a cheap Eastern European developer was being sought to replace Mythos. Suspiciously enough, the game has recently resurfaced as *UFO:*

Freedom Ridge (working title), now in the hands of Czech outfit Altar Interactive (*Original War*). No new artwork has been made available since the announcement, but we're told that many changes and improvements are to be made to the original vision. Altar has been quick to claim that Julian Gollop will be taking a consulting role on the project, though Julian claims no knowledge of any such relationship. The situation doesn't inspire much confidence, but we're glad to see this fantastic title re-emerge nonetheless, and we'll have more details for you in the near future.

Altar Interactive • ETA Christmas 2002 • www.altarinteractive.com

⊙ This is what it looked like last time we saw it...
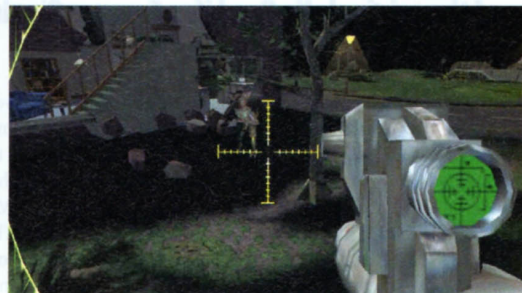
⊙ ...but who knows what Altar has in mind for the game.

Aggressive expansion

Inside GSC's *Cossacks* add-on pack and next title *American Conquest*

With its epic 8,000 unit battles and historically accurate feel, *Cossacks: European Wars* was the surprise RTS hit of 2001. In a typically timely manner, there's now an add-on pack on the way, *Cossacks: The Art Of War*, and we recently had a chat with GSC's Sergiy Grygorovych to see how it's shaping up. He gave us a detailed first-hand look at the imminent expansion, as well as GSC's next major RTS outing, *American Conquest*. He also confirmed the existence of *Cossacks II*, to be set in the Napoleonic era and powered by a brand new in-house engine, but we probably won't get a look at that until E3.

So what about *The Art of War*, then? Well, it's an RTS expansion, so you should know that means more of everything and a bunch of minor gameplay enhancements that the developer wanted to put in the first time around but didn't. So while there are no particular surprises, it's definitely an impressive package. The single-player experience has been enhanced with 30 new missions across five campaigns for Prussia, Austria, Saxony, Algeria and Poland, as well as six new single missions. Six new multiplayer battles are in there, and two new nations have been introduced, Bavaria and Denmark, as well as new buildings and units, with six new ships including the gigantic Victoria (based on Nelson's Victory). There's also plenty more ground on which to shed enemy blood, as the largest maps are now 16 times larger than the original *Cossacks* maps, and it takes the transport ship (the slowest unit in the game) one hour and 40 minutes to cross from corner to corner. *Cossacks* fans will be able to get their hands on *The Art Of War* from February 8.

However, probably more exciting than this is GSC's next big RTS *American Conquest*, currently scheduled for a Christmas 2002 release. Built on an enhanced version of the *Cossacks* engine, the new game boasts an even more impressive unit count than *Cossacks*, Sergiy insisting that up to 64,000 units can take part in its massive battles. The game will cover over 300 years of American history, chronicling the discovery of

the New World, the fall of the Mayan and Incan Empires, various colonial wars and the War of Independence in the United States.

Like *Cossacks*, *American Conquest* will contain a pleasing variety of playable nationalities, presently numbering 12, including England, Spain, the Netherlands and also indigenous races such as the Algonquians, Hurons and Delawares. Each side will have their own buildings, units and technological and economic development, which will be in line with those possessed at the time in real life. Unlike *Cossacks*, units will gain experience in battle, which will grant them certain new abilities. Sergiy also tells us that they are hoping to include features such as the ability to enter buildings and defend them against attackers for extra bonuses.

The multiplayer side of the game is currently designed for up to seven players, and as with Cossacks: The Art of War, players will be able to compete for global rankings.

↑ *The Art Of War* features new formations for cavalry and the ability to link formations.

↑ *American Conquest* uses a tweaked version of the *Cossacks* engine.

We thought the troop numbers in *Cossacks* was huge, but if that wasn't enough, with the estimated number of troops available in *American Conquest*, it will actually be possible to have on-screen battles with numbers comparable to the historical battles on which they're modelled. Put that in your pipe and smoke it.

GSC Game World • www.gsc-game.com

Trappers delight

Hi-tech vehicular action with all the trappings in *nTrap*

Unlikely as it may now seem, there was once a time when the supremacy of the standard foot-based FPS was seriously threatened by a curious breed of 3D, go-anywhere, rotatey-shooty vehicle-based FPSs, pioneered and epitomised by Parallax Software's disorienting classic *Descent*. The genre has been next to dead for some years now, but given enough late nights and caffeine, a desperate newsman might go so far as to suggest that a revival of sorts is on the cards. Recently we've seen *Comanche 4* (*Quake* with choppers), *Aquanox* (submarine *Quake*) and now Austrian developer AGD Software's impending vehicle-based action game *nTrap*.

Instead of just taking FPS action underwater or into the air, however, *nTrap* goes all out,

allowing you to explore vast indoor installations, plumb the black depths of the oceans and soar into orbit and beyond. Piloting a range of craft such as spaceships, air fighters, submarines and hovercraft, you'll take the role of an nTrapper, a high-tech security agent trained to recover information stored inside living subjects, calling on you to use a variety of non-lethal weapons and trapping devices to take your quarry alive.

The most impressive aspect of *nTrap* at this stage is without doubt the stunningly accurate simulation of real-world physics enabled by AGD's in-house Magrathea Simulation Engine. Admittedly the results may often be imperceptible – how much of an impact on gameplay will you register from the fact that light energy correctly diminishes with the square of

⬆ The outer space and underwater bits look OK too.

distance, or that waves are caused by the wind blowing over the ocean surface? Nonetheless, the attention to detail is still appreciated. More momentous things like Geo-Mod-esque terrain deformation (of any surface) and the movement of every object,

vehicle and weapon according to true real-world physics are of far more consequence, and are sure to create a remarkably convincing and intuitive game-space.

AGD Software • ETA TBC • www.agdsoft.com

⬆ How you will mass your troops with such a close perspective is unclear.

⬆ Post-apocalyptic landscapes. Don't you just love 'em?

Resistance is useless

Yet another post-apocalyptic 3D RTS in *Natural Resistance*

The trend to set war-themed games in present-day political hotspots has proven increasingly ill-advised of late, so it's probably just as well that Berlin-based developer Silver Style has chosen a near-future post-apocalyptic setting for its forthcoming 3D RTS *Natural Resistance*. Of course the fantasy setting hasn't stopped them from stuffing their game full of real-world tanks, choppers, APCs, jeeps and all sorts of other military hardware, and gives them the handy freedom to mix and match military units from any decade and any national defence force. Luckily they all look

pretty damn nice too, with a high level of detail and plenty of cool weapon effects.

Other than looking reasonably pretty, the game appears to be a fairly by-the-book RTS outing. You're the leader of a small but well-armed group of survivors of an indeterminate catastrophe, and it's up to you defeat several rival groups and generally click and drag the world back towards peace and harmony. While the camera is highly manipulable, the viewpoint appears to be closer to the action than your average RTS, some scenes even depicting indoor gameplay. Telltale green health bars

hovering over units betray a certain Westwood influence, though the look of the game generally is far more gritty and realistic than any *Red Alert* clone.

While we haven't seen enough of the game to determine whether it has the potential to take the Westwood boys on at their own game just yet, we're hoping that *Natural Resistance* will actually be different enough to make such comparisons redundant.

Silver Style Entertainment • ETA early 2002 • www.silverstyle.de

TECHHEAD

Breakthrough security technology, a spying webcam and invisible keyboards

⊙ **MORE TECH THAN THE MUTHA FREAKIN' NASDAQ** Carlos Ruiz

PRINT 'N' SCAN

Your fingerprint could replace all your computer passwords in one stroke

A Florida-based company is putting the finishing touches to a fingerprint-scanning device so practical that it could soon be introduced across a wide variety of computers for security purposes. Semiconductor maker AuthenTec were at COMDEX to demonstrate the EntrePad AES3500, which uses a square sensor array measuring just 6.5mm by 6.5mm to scan the fingerprints.

The device's patented TruePrint technology sees through the skin's surface and scans a subsidiary layer, where the true print resides. This eliminates the possibility of dirt, grime, skin conditions or the ageing process affecting the accuracy of the reading.

A start-up identification request would be particularly useful in the case of laptops or palmtops, should they fall into the wrong hands. However, the complete migration of all your passwords to a single fingerprint would mean seamless access to email and confidential documents with the implementation of the device on a futuristic-looking mouse.
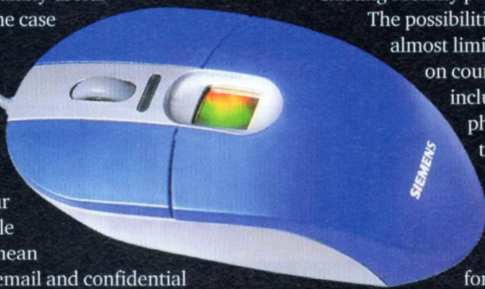
Indeed, Siemens have already come up with such a peripheral based on the technology in question, and they are making the benefits clear: speed and ease of use, no more lost or forgotten passwords, no more possibility of anyone else accessing your privileges. That solves a few problems, then.

With the ID Mouse, you simply place your fingertip on the sensor below the buttons to authenticate yourself to applications, a network or even Web-based environments. It's a plug-and-play device compatible with most operating systems, and the company offers a software development kit that lets third parties incorporate the ID Mouse into existing security programs.

The possibilities of EntrePad technology are almost limitless, as it could easily be used on countless other electronic devices including car door locks and mobile phones. If you want to get in on the craze a few years ahead of schedule, the ID Mouse Professional will set you back around £100. Check out www.siemens.com/biometrics for more information.

CAMERA ACTION

The new PC-CAM 600 from Creative does it all…

Webcams are usually owned by people who purchase their PCs complete with every possible accessory thrown in as part of the deal, but now there's a genuine reason to go out and spend hard-earned money on one. Multimedia giants Creative has announced the PC-CAM 600 multi-mode PC camera, which functions either as a digital camera, webcam or AV recorder.

When used as a portable digital camera, the sleek and compact unit takes photos of up to 1.3 Megapixels (or 1280x960). The 16Mb of memory holds 20 pictures at this resolution, or 85 images at 1024x768. If quantity is the name of the game, 200 images can be stored at bog-standard 640x480 resolution. There is also an intelligent strobe flash that eliminates 'red eye' syndrome.

The PC webcam function allows you to easily create mini-movies at 352x288 resolution, complete with realistic colours and smooth, full-motion video and audio, which you can save on hard disk or send via email. There is even a neat 'spy cam' feature that automatically records after motion has been detected in front of the unit. And last but not least, there's the videoconferencing.

The obligatory USB connection allows for easy installation and connection, while a swivel stand and wrist strap are also included, together with four AAA batteries. A software bundle includes packages for Web publishing and photo editing, and the unit itself is available in a silver or blue finish.

It seems like good value at around £100, especially if you don't already have a digital camera and wouldn't mind an average one for a knockdown price. Aside from the rest of its features, being able to film unsuspecting intruders using the spy-cam option is probably worth the asking price alone.

⬆ **Does it need to look that curvy? We think not.**

Grandia than ever

Console excellence comes to the PC with *Grandia II*

The first *Grandia* is without doubt one of the finest console RPGs of all time. While the better entries in the *Final Fantasy* series remain the most epic and consuming games of their kind, they can't hold a candle to *Grandia* when it comes to humour and sheer sugar-candy charisma. Although not a sequel in terms of plot, *Grandia II* was certainly the spiritual successor to the classic original, with equally engaging characters and a similarly rich game-world, if not quite matching it in terms of depth. The combat system, which seamlessly blends real-time elements into the traditional turn-based formula, is widely recognised as one of the finest ever realised. The sequel also benefited from superb and vibrant 3D visuals and a faultless translation that featured genuinely humorous moments.

The English version of the game originally materialised on the Dreamcast early last year, where it was promptly overshadowed by attention-grabbing RPGs like *Phantasy Star Online* and *Skies Of Arcadia*. Happily, the classy role-player is set to appear on our monitors very shortly courtesy of developer Game Arts, where a graphically enhanced and fully keyboard-enabled PC version is fast approaching completion.

History suggests that this sort of game will find few friends in the PC world, but if you're even thinking of delving into the realm of cute Japanese RPGs, this definitely won't be a bad place to start.

Game Arts • ETA March

⬆ Spectacular spell effects are of course *de rigeur*.

⬆ As are giant magic crustaceans.

Hippy gamers should welcome the opportunity of becoming a tree.

The levels are truly immense.
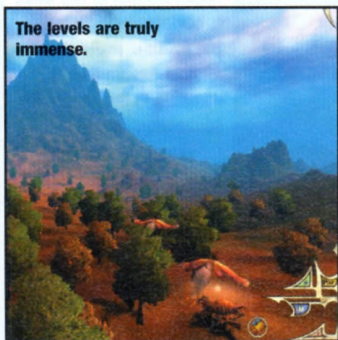
There will be a choice of three dragons types.
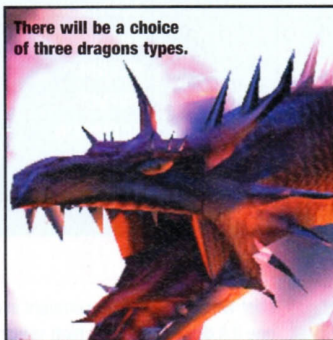
I, dragon

Make the earth move in quirky Russian action-RPG
I Of The Dragon

Well, the name might be a little odd, but take a closer look at this newly announced third-person outing from Moscow-based Primal Software and you'll realise it's no laughing matter. There's some serious technology going on behind these screenshots, and the potential for quite an astonishing game.

Set in an atypical fantasy land, the game is essentially action-based but shot through with strong RPG elements. You enter the gameworld as some kind of guardian force summoned to protect a peace-loving people from an invading horde of ravening beasts, which sounds simple enough, especially as you're given the body of a young dragon to inhabit for the purpose. As a dragon you will of course be able to fly around on your leathery wings, set fire to entire forests with your dragon breath and employ more than a hundred different magic spells. Many of these take advantage of impressive terra-morphing algorithms

in the game's engine, enabling you to level mountain ranges, raise volcanoes or rip the earth asunder, all in real-time. Towers and cities can also be summoned up from the earth or razed to the ground at your whim, all of which suggests an astounding and hugely satisfying level of control over your environment.

To top it off, you're also able to transfer your essence from the dragon into any other living thing in the game – be it human, ravening monster or unassuming garden shrub. The purpose of the latter is not yet altogether apparent, but we assume that the RPG side of the game will emerge through the need to inhabit and interact with specific characters in the game, each with unique abilities and magic powers.

Primal is clearly doing something very different and ambitious with *I Of The Dragon*, and we'll be sure to keep you updated on progress.

Primal Software • ETA TBC • www.primal-soft.com

CHARTS

Everything you need to know about which games are selling by the shedload. Plus the buzz on the streets – where you tell us what's hot and what's not

Who would have thought – a Christmas cash-in that's actually rather good.

THE Virgin megastores TOP 10

DEC	XMAS	TITLE	DEVELOPER	PUBLISHER	SCORE
1	1	HARRY POTTER PHILOSOPHER'S STONE	KNOWWONDER	EA	80%
5	2	CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER: SEASON 01/02	SPORTS INTERACTIVE	EIDOS	92%
6	3	THE SIMS: HOT DATE	MAXIS	EA	71%
NE	4	RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN	GREY MATTER	ACTIVISION	88%
2	5	CIVILIZATION 3	FIRAXIS	INFOGRAMES	86%
3	6	ALIENS VS PREDATOR 2	MONOLITH	VIVENDI	93%
4	7	EMPIRE EARTH	STAINLESS STEEL STUDIOS	VIVENDI	80%
7	8	STAR WARS: GALACTIC BATTLEGROUNDS	LUCASARTS	ACTIVISION	84%
10	9	ZOO TYCOON	BLUE FANG GAMES	MICROSOFT	48%
9	10	MS FLIGHT SIMULATOR 2002/2002 PRO	MICROSOFT	MICROSOFT	86%/88%

THE ChartTrack TOP 10

DEC	XMAS	TITLE	DEVELOPER	PUBLISHER	SCORE
1	1	HARRY POTTER – PHILOSOPHER'S STONE	KNOWWONDER	EA	80%
NE	2	THE SIMS: HOT DATE	MAXIS	EA	71%
NE	3	RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN	GREY MATTER	ACTIVISION	88%
2	4	CHAMP MANAGER: SEASON 01/02	SPORTS INTERACTIVE	EIDOS	92%
9	5	THE SIMS	MAXIS	EA	86%
5	6	FIFA 2002	EA SPORTS	EA	63%
3	7	CIVILIZATION 3	FIRAXIS	INFOGRAMES	86%
NE	8	EMPIRE EARTH	STAINLESS STEEL	VIVENDI	80%
7	9	ZOO TYCOON	BLUE FANG GAMES	MICROSOFT	48%
NE	10	STAR WARS: GALACTIC BATTLEGROUNDS	LUCASARTS	ACTIVISION	84%

Compiled by Chart Track © ELSPA

WIN THE ENTIRE VIRGIN TOP 10!

Once again, *PC ZONE* and Virgin have teamed up to give you the chance to win every game in the current Top 10. All you have to do to enter the draw is answer the following simple question:

QUESTION: What's the name of the developer responsible for *Return To Castle Wolfenstein*'s multiplayer side?

Just answer the above question and send it on a postcard, along with *all* the information requested, to the address below.

✪ Please include your name, address, daytime phone number, email address, job title and company name (and age if under 18).

✪ Please tell us if you do not wish to receive details of further special offers or new products from other companies.

✪ Are you a current subscriber to *PC ZONE*?

Answers on a postcard to: *PC ZONE* Chart Compo (CPCZ1A), Dennis Publishing, PO Box 154, Bradford BD1 5RZ. Closing date: Feb 6 2002

COMPETITION

THE BUZZ ON THE STREETS

I bet *Wolf* would've gone straight in at number one if it didn't have such high spec requirements. *Champ Man* and *The Sims* aren't just popular because they're accessible or non-threatening for the mainstream, it's because they'll bloody well run on the average family PC. I tried the *Wolf* multiplayer test on my machine and it was as jerky as a slab of dried beef on a dude ranch. I'm sure many people had the same experience and knew better than to shell out for the full game.
Bobo Raskins

RTCW at 3!? And where is *AvP2*? Is a nation of suckers buying the obvious cash-ins? It annoys me when quality titles are released after a long wait and are out-charted by mindless rubbish!
*_Psy_*

If there was justice, *Return To Castle Wolfenstein* would have a run at the top spot that would make *The Sims's* look like a weekend in Skegness. But no, it's been beaten by *Harry* bloody *Potter*.
Ugeine

I don't mind *The Sims*, and I've heard the *Harry Potter* game is all right, but where in the blue hell is *Aliens Vs Predator 2*? I bought it on your recommendation, and it rocks, and it's not even in the top 10 any more!
uncle_torso

WHAT!? *Castle Wolfenstein* not at the top? Look at *Wolf's* graphics! Beaten by a film take-off? Next there'll be *Lord Of The Rings* at the top, as the film is supposed to better than *Harry Potter*. What is the PC Games industry coming too?
Dark_Lord1

CHART COMMENT

BASED ON CHART TRACK TOP 10

Times were an id-branded FPS would steamroll all opposition, but with *Wolf* in third place those days are clearly over. Now the charts are ruled by snot-nosed brats and their casual-gaming parents, by blinkered footie fans and invisible legions of loyal strategy gamers. Of course, it's possible that word got out early that *RTCW* isn't quite the genre waypoint everyone was hoping for (and the comment about spec requirements in The Buzz is certainly valid), but the brilliant multiplayer should ensure that it remains in the charts for some months yet.

The other worrying thing is the continued presence of *Zoo Tycoon*, which is below par even for the predictable genre in which it resides. There are clearly a lot more frustrated zoo keepers in the gaming community than we initially envisaged.
Anthony Holden

RETRO CHARTS

1 YEAR AGO
1 **Who Wants To Be A Millionaire** (Eidos)
2 **Champ Manager 00/01** (Eidos)
3 **The Sims** (EA)
4 **Red Alert 2** (EA)
5 **Escape From Monkey Island** (Activision)

2 YEARS AGO
1 **AOE II: Age Of Kings** (Microsoft)
2 **FIFA 2000** (EA)
3 **Theme Park World** (EA)
4 **MS Flight Sim 2000** (Microsoft)
5 **FA Premier League Manager 2000** (EA)

5 YEARS AGO
1 **C&C: Red Alert** (Virgin)
2 **FIFA 97** (EA)
3 **Encarta 97** (Microsoft)
4 **Flight Sim 6** (Microsoft)
5 **Tomb Raider** (Eidos)

Kill crush destroy

Bedroom coding brings monster B-movies to life in *They Came From Hollywood*

Forget empire-building, city-building and all that bollocks – we all know that destroying stuff is far more fun, and so clearly do Octopus Motor, the two-person development team behind forthcoming action/strategy game *They Came From Hollywood*. Taking its inspiration from B-grade monster films of the '50s and '60s (specifically those of obscure cult hero Harold Haxton), the game basically gives you the chance to be a big bastard monster with a natural urge to destroy stuff. Which fortunately corresponds nicely with our true urges. The action is viewed from a 2D isometric perspective, and combines the exuberant *Rampage*-style pleasures of crushing cities and eating people/cars/trees/military units with the need to strategically manage the demands and appetites of your creature.

There are ten monsters to choose from, such as Thorax: The Giant Mantis and The Gob From Uranus, six US cities to crush and four different time periods to choose from. You can also customise your monster with extra destructive powers such as death-ray eyes and contamination trail and create endless new cities to destroy with the random generation function.

The development duo at Octopus Motor are taking their DIY ethic to an extreme, even insisting on publishing the game themselves to ensure full control over the final product. The game will therefore only be available by mail order through the website below.

Octopus Motor • ETA Spring 2002 • www.theycamefromhollywood.com

Your monster has food and destruction requirements which must be administered.

A body count meter measures success.

The Tin Behemoth vs the nuclear age.

EMULATION ZONE

Stuart Campbell heads out into the world and finds a place where no platform is out of reach

Emulation of SNK's once-state-of-the-art arcade and home console the Neo Geo has been thought to be a done deal for the last couple of years. Emulators like NeoRage X and MAME perfected the emulation of 98 per cent of Neo games ages ago, and the few titles that remained were off limits, due in part to heavy ROM encryption on some of the games, and because of the emulation community's self-imposed embargo on more recent releases which might still be commercially viable (new Neo games were still being launched in arcades last year).

However, a couple of recent events have combined to remove these restrictions, to exciting effect. Firstly, SNK finally shut up shop a couple of months ago, after some difficult years including the failed launch of the Neo Geo Pocket Colour handheld (which we'll be covering more in a future issue). And secondly, some hard-working emu coders finally cracked the monster encryption on the newer titles (some games comprised 25Mb of actual game code and 60Mb of encryption data), and on SNK's closure swiftly released emulators to run the newly-cracked code.

↑ It's complete and utter cartoon carnage in *Metal Slug 3*.

↑ Not a good time to get your mashed potatoes out.

↑ If you're wondering, Emu Zone is the one in the big explosion.

And splendid code it is, too. Neo games now playable on your PC for the first time include Capcom's excellent vertical shooter *Strikers 1945*, cute horror platformer *NightMare In The Dark* and the latest edition of SNK's long-running beat 'em up franchise, *King Of Fighters 2000*. But the shining jewel is *Metal Slug 3*. Actually the fourth game in the all-out-blasting series, *MS3* continues in much the same vein as the previous games, but it refines and tweaks the formula (every level now has several alternative secret routes and shortcuts, and you get to control a wide variety of vehicles, from a submarine and a robot exoskeleton to a giant ostrich), and cranks up the action to a near-ridiculous degree. The beleaguered player is under such constant assault that the first time we played it, it took 50 credits to reach the end of the game's five stages. Fortunately, thanks to emulators like Kawaks and Nebula (Kawaks is the more user-friendly, but Nebula is slightly more stable), and assuming you can handle the mammoth downloads (up to 80Mb) required for the game, you can now get some advance practice in for the unlikely event that an arcade within 100 miles of your house has this tremendous game running. SNK's demise was a tragedy for fans of classic 2D arcade action and old-skool gameplay values, but now you can at least keep the memory, if not the company, alive.

LINKS

◉ Latest Kawaks and Nebula downloads – cps2shock. retrogames.com

VISUAL PINBALL TABLE OF THE MONTH

ATTACK FROM MARS

Recently the recipient of a major Visual Pinball graphical makeover, Bally's *Attack From Mars* is a superb pinball game which was sadly underexposed on its release in 1995 (although it did do well enough to spawn a sequel, *Revenge From Mars*, on the last-throw-of-the-dice Pinball 2000 system, which failed to save Williams/Bally from closure). Fast-moving and easy to grasp, *AFM* offers the player lots to do on its deceptively open playfield, and fabulous, orchestral audio thanks to the pioneering DCS sound system. It's funny too, as the evil Martians keep up a dialogue with you right the way through the game and the booming narrator does his best to encourage you to defend the Earth and take the battle to the bug-eyed weirdos' home planet. (Mars. Obviously.) Another great showcase for the power of VP.

LINKS

◉ Attack From Mars table – www.hippie.net/shivasite/files/special/afmrc1x.zip

◉ Visual Pinball homepage – www.randydavis.com/vp

↑ Go on, beat 21 billion, then.

↻ Mock not my ridiculous John Lennon mirror-shades lest i smite thee.

Loyal follower

Rally your posse for *Disciples II: Dark Prophecy*

There we were thinking that that *Heroes Of Might & Magic IV* was going to be the next big word in fantasy-themed turn-based strategy, when out of nowhere comes a rash of uppity pretenders ready to beard the big leaguers. In this very issue, *Etherlords* (p.67) has smacked gobs with its unexpected excellence, and we'd be only too happy for Strategy First's forthcoming *Disciples II* to do the same.

Subtitled *Dark Prophecy*, this is the sequel to 1999's *Disciples: Sacred Lands*, which was actually a minor hit despite having seriously ropey graphics. Fearful of disturbing their success formula, Strategy First is taking a straightforward 'bigger and better' approach to the sequel, offering the same basic campaign structure, isometric view and pyrotechnically charged battle sequences (but without the ropey graphics). Each of the four playable races – the Empire, the Mountain Clans, the Legions of the Damned, and the Undead Hordes – will have their own campaign with seven missions apiece, along with a bunch of standalone quests, multiplayer modes and a campaign editor. That ought to keep you quiet for a bit then.

Strategy First • ETA Q1 2002 • www.disciples2.com

↻ If you thought *Zoo Tycoon* was exciting... ↻ Henry Ford eat your heart out.

Career driven

The management genre rolls on with *Car Tycoon*

Yet another industry falls under the relentless shadow of business management simulation, this time the target being the automotive business. *Car Tycoon* will put you in charge of a fledgling car company with just one factory and one showroom, and challenge you to overcome up to three AI rivals to achieve market domination. Through 40 different scenarios you'll tinker with the development and design of your cars, R&D, advertising, the stock market and even a little industrial espionage. There'll also be a standard Sand Box mode, allowing you to choose a time setting between 1950 and 2000 and tycoon away to your heart's content.

While the concept is sound, we can't help but feel that the safe approach taken by the developer is something of a wasted opportunity. What someone really should do is a game where you're a sleazy used-car salesman – think Bill Paxton in *True Lies* – using every scam in the book to flog shoddy motors, dodge lawsuits and score chicks. Now where did I put the number for Monte Cristo...?

Vectorcom development • ETA: Q1 2002 • www.cartycoon-online.com

The Man who KNOWS

SEXUAL INTERCOURSE: NO KNOWN CURE

PC ZONE has inadvertently stumbled across a sick **ring of filth** that has exposed thousands of innocent gamers to graphic carnal acts such as frotting, rutting and penetrative sexual intercourse. Using the **Internet**, evil pornographers have targeted role-playing fans, mysteriously concentrating on devotees of games developed by Canadian outfit **Bioware**, recently parted from publisher **Interplay**. The twisted scheme was revealed when *ZONE* accidentally printed the wrong address for a *Neverwinter Nights* website. Typing in the offending URL instantly transports the unwitting surfer to a site offering the self-explanatory delights of **Wet 'n' Young Sluts**. Further investigation revealed that a slight misspelling of *Baldur's Gate* opens up a page featuring an array of amateur videos, offering stronger content than the average *You've Been Framed* entry. The slight misspelling of popular websites is a tactic that has previously afflicted companies such as **Yahoo** and **Microsoft**, but it has now struck deep into the heart of the games community. Meanwhile, experts are investigating rumours that subscribers to farmyardsecrets.com are appalled after being subjected to the sordid world of wizards and goblins.

Self-styled hardman **Andy McNab** has signed a four-year deal with **Rage Software** to create games based on the former **SAS** soldier's alleged war heroics. Virtually indistinguishable from his surroundings, and surviving on a diet of shrubs and beetles, McNab hissed: "I've been approached by quite a few games companies over the years, but Rage's work really knocked me out. We share the same attention to detail and commitment to absolute authenticity. I am really looking forward to working together with them on this project." It is believed that a series of 3D military action games will be developed, with McNab providing technical and creative input. Rage recently reaped the benefit of another celebrity's technical and creative input with console game *David Beckham Soccer*, crashing into the charts at number 40, to the despair of shareholders.

A further celebrity endorsement has been terminated before it even began, with cartoon rocker **Ozzy Osbourne** being dropped from fantasy action game, *Black Skies*, currently being developed by **iRock Interactive**. Apparently, Ozzy was bumped due to financial constraints, as well as the inherent difficulty of finding a publisher for a game endorsed by a man who once ripped the head off a bat with his teeth. The game, which features some kind of creature-based aerial combat, has now been renamed *Savage Skies*. Ozzy, who was once so drunk that he attempted to murder his wife, has yet to break his silence.

And finally, an eight-year-old boy was shot dead by his 12-year old brother in an apparent re-enactment of a scene from the Nintendo 64 game *Operation Winback*. Guess where? God bless America.

The original artwork from the books will be used to inspire the look of the game. Probably.

Making it happen

The Way Of The Tiger project unveiled, and it's all thanks to us

Here at *PC ZONE* we don't like to blow our own trumpets, generally preferring to get others to do it for us, but sometimes we just can't help ourselves. So please pardon the rude ejaculation, but we've bloody well done it again. One of our favourite long-running Bulletin slots, Waiting To Happen, has once again forecast the development of an actual game (*Judge Dredd* being the last one), and this time there's not a shred of coincidence involved. Way back in issue 97, we ran a Waiting To Happen piece on *The Way Of The Tiger*, demanding that the classic series of role-playing books be turned into a game. We've recently found out that ever since that issue, *TWOTT* co-creator Mark Smith has been working day and night to secure the rights to the books back from the publishers, a task at which he has now succeeded. What's more, the game we've all been waiting for is now officially in pre-production at *Warrior Kings* developer Black Cactus, where Jamie Thomson, Mark's co-author, is a big cheese.

"Without the article in *PC ZONE* I would probably never have come back to the RPG world and the books would have continued to moulder on the shelves at home," Mark confessed when we chatted with him recently. "But when Jamie and I began to realise how much enthusiasm there is out there for *The Way Of The Tiger*, we knew that we really should make it happen. After all, who are we to ignore the demands of *PC ZONE*?" he laughed.

The premise for the game is truly ambitious, hoping to blend elements of stealth-based action, party-based RPGing, pitched RTS battles, diplomacy and management of a city state. The idea is to take the ninja protagonist straight from the books and explore all the different facets of his character – from solo assassin and adventurer to warlord and statesman. The game will use Black Cactus' *Warrior Kings* engine, the versatility of which Mark believes makes it perfectly suited to his hybrid RPG concept.

While potentially fraught with difficulty, Mark's vision is a conscious attempt to rethink the RPG and restore the ideals of freedom and imagination that were the defining strengths of pen-and-paper RPGs in the first place. However, he also assures us that there will be a strong emphasis on narrative in the game.

"As a long-time player, game designer, and storyteller I know that a strong storyline is what gamers need." And if one thing is for sure, Mark and Jamie know how to spin a good yarn.

Needless to say, we'll be keeping a close parental eye on their new game, and will bring you an exclusive look as soon as there's something to see.

Black Cactus • ETA TBC • www.blackcactus.com

Kill your TV

Fahrenheit hopes to be the first game we tune into every month

The concept of episodic gaming has been threatening to take off for some time now, but for some reason no one has been able to take advantage of its obvious appeal. Ambitious French developer Quantic Dream, creators of *Omikron: The Nomad Soul*, is the latest to become enamoured with the idea, and is committed to being the first group to make it work.

Dubbed *Fahrenheit*, its new episodic project is a third-person adventure in which you play multiple characters involved in a mysterious ritualistic murder case (including one of the killers, though he was in a trance at the time…). The plan is to release one new episode every month, available either by download or in standard boxed form.

Rather than simply creating a game and releasing it piecemeal, the developers are hoping to replicate the success and audience loyalty of TV serials, with a heavy emphasis on compelling, suspense-filled narrative and depth of characterisation. The promise that the actions you perform with each of the characters will have significant consequences on the narrative is heartening, though we fear the range of actions available may be somewhat stunted. In fact, given the claims of an invisible interface and broadly accessible gameplay, we wonder how much of a game will be in this 'interactive TV series' at all.

Quantic Dream • ETA April • www.fahrenheitgame.com
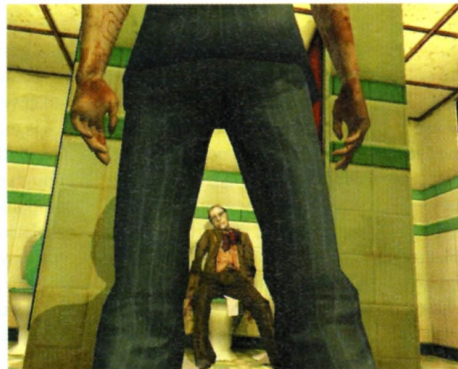
⬆ Looks like he won't be in episode two.

⬆ Would you give up your weekly dose of *Ground Force* to play this?

This place crawls...

Shoot a nuke down a bug hole in *Lost Legion*

If we were in the mood to make a contemptibly reductive statement about this game, we'd probably describe it as *Starship Troopers* meets *Ghost Recon*. Or at least that's what it wants to be, with its squad-based tactical FPS action and desolate bug-planet setting.

Lost Legion is the debut title from Dutch developer ZZiCT Entertainment, and as you can see from these rather barren screenshots, it's still very much in embryonic form. However, the ideas driving the development seem sound enough, with promises of a *UT*-style menu system for issuing orders to teammates, along with *Ghost Recon*-style on-the-fly waypoint setting. Extremely tough enemies and realistic human vulnerability will force a reliance on ranged weaponry and tactical avoidance, and an assortment of mission types including recon, rescue, alien capture and search and destroy should create plenty of variety.

The developer's corporate website is disturbingly frank about its intentions with *Lost Legion*, stating that it aims to "tap into the current market trends of outdoor scenarios, teamwork based action, realistic damage and fear-inducing atmospheres." Hopefully that's just the money men talking and the developers themselves do not bear such a cynical attitude, or else we can safely expect another FPS clone destined for the bargain bin.

ZZiCT Entertainment • ETA TBC • www.legiongame.nl

LAN ROVER

Steve 'Scalper' Randall knows where the (LAN) party's at

For many years, I spent a lot of time wondering about various things to do with computing. Does *Crimson Skies* truly rock in multiplayer? (Yes.) How fast is the Geforce3 when running *Quake III*? (Bloody fast.) Is it worth me getting a 21in monitor? (Yes but don't bring it to a LAN cause it weighs a ton.) All these questions and more used to weigh on my mind, causing stress and reducing workplace productivity.

That was before I discovered the joys of LAN parties. There's always somebody at a LAN party with the latest piece of kit, and they always want everyone to see it. So if you're wondering about a purchase and want to see it in action, get yourself to one of the following LANs – someone will be more than happy to share their knowledge (and show their kit off) to you.

✪ I start this month with my own Hallowed Ground LAN in Mile End, London – officially from 27-28 January. Book in advance and it's £25, £30 on the door. Prizes this month from Microsoft while we give EA a break till the next LAN. More details at www.hallowedground.co.uk

✪ Also for £25 and again in London is the LAN at www.cyberplex.net. It runs from 10am on January 19 until 6pm January 20. They have a dedicated site for up to 64 people.

✪ £25 seems to be the going rate this month as it's what you'll be asked to pay if you want to go to the LAN being held in Corby, Leicester by the guys at www.gamehedz.net. They'll be playing *Counter-Strike*, *Quake III*, *Unreal Tournament* and any game you can find someone to play against. It's a two-day event, and it's taking place January 26-27.

✪ Finally, in Bourne End, Bucks on February 15-16 is the LAN hosted by www.lanse.co.uk. For only £15 it's the best value LAN this month.

If you're hosting a LAN and you'd like us to mention it here, then let me know at least two months in advance with details of costs, numbers, prizes and location. I can be contacted at stevie@arsenalfc.net.

Don't look at me, I'm trying to blend in.
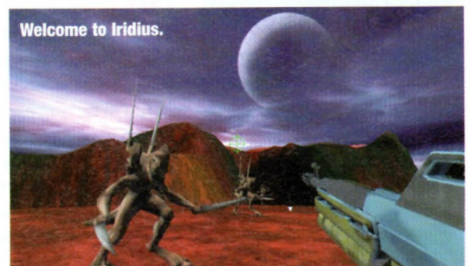
Welcome to Iridius.

MAILBOX

Feel the need for a rant? Then grab a pen, write it down and put it in the postbox addressed to us. If it's interesting enough we'll print it

⭐ ANSWERED BY Dave Woods

SUPER PRIZES TO BE WON

PC ZONE is giving away not one, but two of these wonderful GameVoice contraptions from Microsoft to the writer of the Star Letter. If we don't consider any of the letters to be worthy we'll just keep them for ourselves. Using the GameVoice, you can communicate with other players online and give yourself a massive advantage over the Luddites who have to stop and type instructions. They're priced at £49.99 each and are worth every single penny.

BLEEM RIP

Two questions to ask you wonderful people at *ZONE* towers. Can someone please tell me what has happened to bleem.com. Or indeed just Bleem! in general. All they have on their site is a picture of a tombstone saying 'Bleem RIP' with Sonic the Hedgehog crying. So, as I can take hints, I gathered that this may well be the end of Bleem!, but why?

Also, can someone, perhaps your good selves, start a campaign to get *ISS Evolution* released on PC – even your editor has stated that the game kicks *FIFA* into touch. Come to think of it, even *ISS Deluxe* on the SNES does. We've had some really dodgy PSone converts, like that fish thing for instance. Why can't we have the decent football game the PC deserves?

Mark Tillcock

⭐ Bleem! (an emulator that lets you play PlayStation games on your PC or Dreamcast) finally went out of business and, after the legal challenges presented to them by Sony, we were surprised they lasted so long. We can't say for sure, but we wouldn't be shocked if the software turns up in the public domain before long. As for *ISS*, never say never, but I can't see it getting released on PC any time soon, nor *Gran Turismo*, *Tekken* or all the other classics that drive console sales.

GAME OVER, MAN!

Woo hoo! Finally an FPS that stands up to *Half-Life* and, in my opinion, beats the hell out of it. I'm talking about *AvP2*, by the way. The fright factor has left me mentally scarred, I can't go to sleep anymore. They're watching me... coming out... oh man... don't let them get me. Anyway,

great game. Buy it, anyone who hasn't already.

Oh yeah, why is *Max Payne* in the FPS column of the Top 100? It's clearly not an FPS, so why's it there? Got to be going now, 'cause they mostly come out at night... mostly.

Mr_Sting

⭐ Ah, you see, we've changed the category to 'shooters' in honour of Mr Payne and the obligatory

clones that come in its wake, because the game is the same as an FPS (all you do is shoot things), it's just the camera angle that's changed.

MEAN PINBALL

I just wanted to write and say thanks for your regular Virtual Pinball tables in Emu Zone. I love all sorts of games, but pinball was my first love and now most of the companies

have gone bust. I read about the people complaining about you covering emulators, but this is exactly why we need it. If pinball tables don't make enough money to keep companies afloat then emulation on the PC is the only way the medium is going to be kept alive.

I'm busy building my own table, but it's rubbish. If it ever gets any good I'll send it in to you, but I wouldn't hold my breath if I was you.

Tony Green

DODGY REVIEWS?

I've just seen an ad on the back page of issue 110 for *Empire Earth*, which was reviewed the same issue, and saw a quote from *PC ZONE*. Does this mean you send your reviews to the publishers for approval before printing them, suggesting that if they're not happy you'll change the text? That said, I reread the review and could not find the quote from the ad in it. Do you not check the ads in your own publication?

Fritz

⭐ Sometimes publishers phone us up to get quotes from a review to go on a box or an ad. Other times they just take quotes from a preview and quite often don't ask our permission. Remember *Daikatana*? We hated it, but the publishers managed to drag a quote from a preview from years back that suggested otherwise. Cheeky, but not illegal unfortunately. The moral is look for our reviews before buying. And no, we don't send publishers reviews for approval – we'd end up with an extremely thin magazine.

LIAR, LIAR, TONGUE'S ON FIRE

I know I'll probably end up with egg on my face, but I think you're a load of liars. I've just had the latest issue of *PC ZONE* and seen the screenshots for *Unreal 2*, *Colin McRae 3* and others and just don't believe these are in-game shots. You've been showing us shots of *FIFA* for years with close-up highly detailed models and when the game comes out it still looks rubbish. I've always said that I

> ❝Why have developers turned their backs on shareware, preferring to give us 'demos' instead, which last about five seconds?❞
>
> **RJ HAWORTH ON SHAREWARE VS DEMOS**

don't believe in ghosts and I won't until I see one, well the same applies to your new games. So there.

Duncan R

CHRISTMAS CARD COMPO UPDATE

Thanks to everyone who sent in Christmas cards for our competition. Almost every inch of our wall is taken up now and our sister mags *C&VG* and *PlayNation* are looking pitiful with a couple of flimsy PR cards between them. (We obviously haven't told them that you're sending cards in to try to win a PC and not because you love us.) Anyhow, they're still pouring in so we thought we'd hold off announcing the winner until next month, giving us time to put the shortlist of ten in front of the panel. We're also trying to get a few runners-up prizes sorted as well as some of you have obviously spent days creating your masterpieces.

GISSA JOB

I'm going to get straight to the point. (Oh, OK I think your mag's brilliant.) How do I get a job on *PC ZONE*? I love games and my writing is competent, and I'm just about to go to university to take an English degree. After I've finished this my ideal job would be on your magazine, doing whatever (making tea, acting as a footrest for a member of staff, etc, etc). The question is, what do I do about it? Is there anything I could do to improve my chances? Am I doing the right degree (I couldn't find one on reviewing games for a living)? Should I drop out and dedicate my whole life to pestering you? Please help.

Chris Hughes

✪ We get loads of letters and emails like this every month, but the sad fact is there's no magic formula. A degree helps, as with any job, but it's not essential. You need commitment, enthusiasm, a love of games and a way with words. If you're deadly serious, send us a sample of your work (a review of a game you love) but we get so many we can't promise to reply individually. If you're that good we'll be in touch.

SHARE YOUR WARES

I've been meaning to get this of my chest for a while now. Why have developers turned their backs on shareware, preferring to give us 'demos'

instead, which last about five seconds? I remember when I got *Doom,* the shareware version – the first chapter was fantastic and as soon as I finished it I got a paper round and saved up enough cash to buy it. So, to celebrate times when demos were worth having, I think you should do a feature on shareware and freeware to show us what's out there.

RJ Haworth

✪ Quite a few of you have asked about this and, as

> ❝What I want to know is how a game manages to go from £30 down to £4 in a matter of weeks. What can you get for £4?❞
>
> **PETE SIMMONDS ON SECOND-HAND GAMES**

we're going to be kicking off regular features next year, we promise we'll take a good look. I agree to a point about shareware. The way *Doom* was marketed

⬆ *Doom:* worth every penny of your hard-earned paper-round wages.

was fantastic, but not all demos are short-lived. I'm still trying to finish the *Medal Of Honor* mission on our cover disc.

WORTHLESS

How come games are almost worthless the minute you buy them? I bought *Red Faction* (don't laugh), decided I didn't like it very much and took it back to a shop that buys and sells second-hand games. They offered me £4 for it. £4? It's hardly worth the bus fare into town. What can you get for £4 these days (apart from a copy of *PC ZONE* of course). What I want to know is how a game manages to go from £30 down to £4 in a matter of weeks. I went back the next week and they were selling copies for £12 which seems like quite a steep mark-up to me. My mate's got a console and he gets a far bigger percentage of the original cost. So not only do we have to wait for games to get converted from consoles but we have to put up with second best in other areas as well. It feels a bit like Britain compared to the rest of the world – paying more for jeans, CDs, etc. I say it's time to fight back. I just don't know how.

Pete Simmonds

✪ There's a lesson to be learnt from your

sorry tale – make sure the games you buy are good. £4 for a nearly new game is a desultory offer but shops like that have to cover their backs and allow for eventualities like not selling a load of stock. I mean, who's going to buy a second-hand *Red Faction*?

EQERS STRIKE BACK

Just a quick answer to Mr P Black (Letters, *PCZ* 111). No Mr Black, not everyone who plays online RPGs takes themselves too seriously, but with 400,000 people playing games like *EverQuest* you're bound to find the odd weirdo. And in terms of meeting new people, I think your friend was trying to say that you need to work as a group to achieve things in the game. I wouldn't say *EverQuest* guilds were any different from *Counter-Strike* clans. Having played both, I've had the piss taken out of me more on *Counter-Strike* for having a bad game by people who take themselves far too seriously. Also, you don't need to group with people to play *EverQuest* if you don't want to.

You say that paying £10 per month is an issue. I've played games for years on all formats and in the last year I've spent a lot less on games, only buying the really good ones, thus saving more than I spend on *EverQuest*.

So, before I take myself too seriously I'd just like to say that *EQ* is good if you like that type of game, *Counter-Strike* is good if you like *that* sort of game. And if you don't like my point of view, stop complaining about what other people think and get a life.

Andrew Staffor

FUN!

Love the mag and I've been reading you for years, but one thing's been nagging away at the back of my mind. You seem to take games extremely seriously, and can be mercilessly critical on a game that's got a few faults, probably because you get to play everything and lose sight of the bigger picture. Have you forgotten that your readers only buy a few games a year and are usually happy with what they get as long as it's not a complete load of pants (and helping us avoid the really bad games is one area that you're really good at)?

You do a lot of retro stuff, so you must remember the days when you'd go down the shops, buy a tape and play it for weeks whether it was the next big thing or not. Not every game needs to be a classic, or original and innovating, it just needs to be fun. And I've got a couple of games that only scored in the 50s in your mag that have kept me entertained for ages. What's my point? Just remember why you're reviewing games and don't be obsessed with breaking new boundaries.

Glynn Harris

✪ Things have changed a lot since the good old days when games cost less than a tenner.

The reason you don't buy many games these days is that they cost about £30 each and we try to make sure you don't waste your money. We're glad you enjoyed games that scored modestly – our scoring system takes 50 as an average and certain games definitely appeal to certain people more. Our reviews are also pretty detailed and we tell you why we think a game is scored how it is. And we always rate a game on how much fun it is to play. *Mr Driller* got a massive 80 per cent and yet it only sold a few thousand copies. If you want good old-fashioned fun, go and buy that, there should be quite a few copies lying around your local games shop.

PRISO

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Wide Games
PUBLISHER Codemasters
WEBSITE www.widegames.com
OUT End of June

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Classic stealthy action gameplay
- Tension realised without recourse to weaponry
- Faithful rendition of Colditz
- Couldn't be more British if it tried
- Gordon Jackson can't screw it all up at the end

Playing the do or die card, it's
NER OF WAR

Paul Presley tunnels out of Castle Codemasters to bring you the latest on their prison camp epic

Aww, I thought Steve McQueen was going to make the jump this time. I trust you were all watching ITV's showing of *The Great Escape* on Christmas Day during your break from school/work/the dole queue? If not, how dare you even think of calling yourself British? Rectify the situation immediately by renting the DVD/video or sending me a fiver care of the usual address. (*How will that rectify...? Never mind – Ed.*)

One thing's for sure, a group of about 20 or so game developers in Brighton would have been watching it in-between mouthfuls of dry turkey and burnt stuffing. That's because they're the team from Wide Games, presently readying themselves for a June release of *Prisoner Of War*, a WWII prison camp action/adventure steeped in the finest traditions of the genre. Escape committees, tunnel dirt up the trouser legs, bushy moustaches,

dressing up in disguises, friendly guards susceptible to a bite or two of chocolate – everything that made the war the fun-packed romp that it was turns up in the game.

ROLL CALL WITH IT

"The thing that separates it from most other action games," says Carl Jones, executive producer of the game, "is that the player doesn't get hold of any guns or weapons. The challenges in the game aren't about whether you use a rocket launcher or a sniper rifle to kill the enemy. That's meant coming up with a whole load of different gameplay mechanics."

Those mechanics hark back to an old Spectrum classic, which in turn owes much to the classic board game *Escape From Colditz*, although *POW* isn't directly based on either of them. "It's about the adventures of a US air pilot, Captain Stone," says Jones of the updated plot. "The Germans are using the POW camps to mask secret

CV

The mini-map only shows the areas you've already discovered.

weapons technology development and other plans they don't want the allies to know about. The reason they're using the camps is because they're fairly certain the allies won't bomb their own men, it's a human shield over their work. Your job is to find out what they're up to, sabotage things as best you can and then, obviously, escape the camp and move on to your next mission."

Although a prisoner, Stone is free to wander around certain parts of each camp as he pleases – providing he doesn't enter a restricted area, miss one of the twice-daily roll-calls, or be seen after lights out. Which is where the very real, very palpable sense of tension comes from. Merely avoiding guards is one thing – avoiding the guards while trying to get from one side of Colditz to the other, with only a minute or so before your absence from evening roll-call is discovered and a camp-wide search is held certainly gets the old heart pumping.

YA VEJ LUBLO

Not that those guards are any pushover mind you. "They have several main senses modelled," says Jones. "The sense of sight works on the amount of light the player is in, the speed the player is moving at and the cross-section of your character model." Which means that the best course of action is to go slow, remain low and try not to glow. "There's also a complex object collision system at work," Jones continues, "using all manner of line-of-sight calculations to work out whether the guard can see enough of you to determine that you're not just a shape in the darkness. Plus we've something called a crowd occlusion system. If I'm running away from a guard and run into a crowd of POWs, they'll help me out by mingling all around so that the guard loses me among the throng." Hearing works on similar principles, using loud noises to mask quieter ones, such as lightning strikes to drown out any loud bangs you have to make.

The senses are matched by equally proficient levels of AI. Individual guards all have patrol routes (that can be altered by

out of the way!

💵 x 97
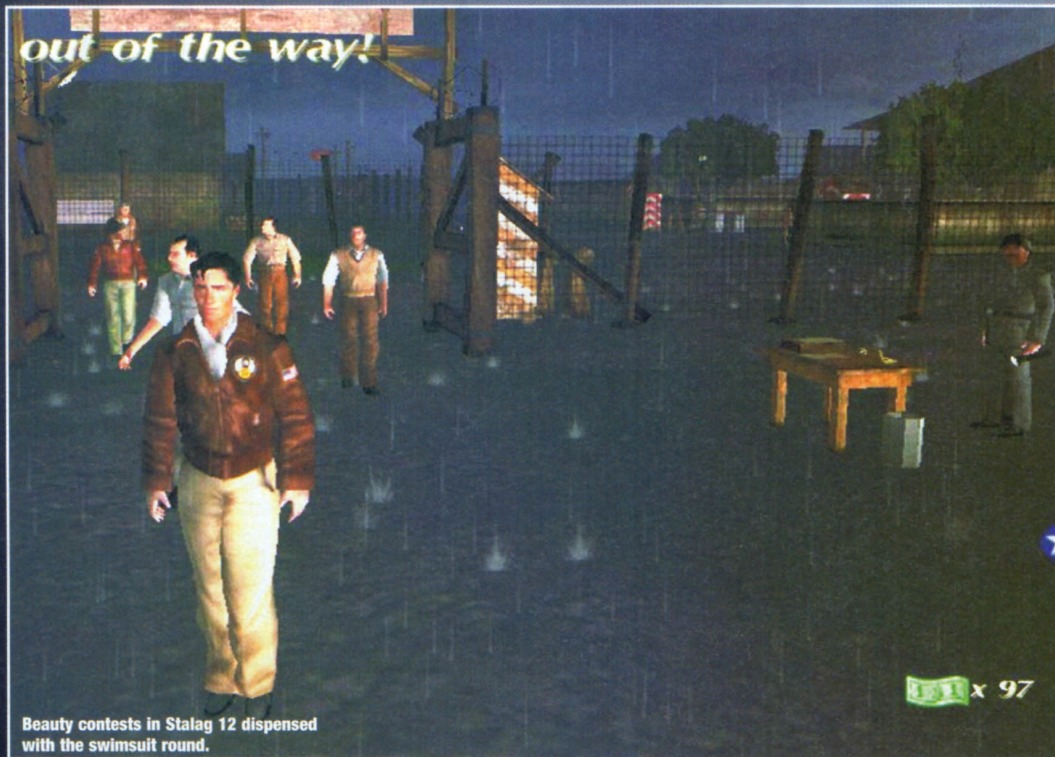
Beauty contests in Stalag 12 dispensed with the swimsuit round.
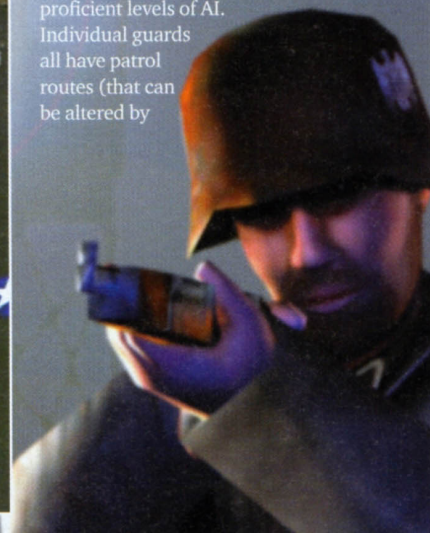
You can't hide forever, so keep on the move to avoid being caught.

WE CAN WIN THIS

Fans of the film/TV documentary/hundreds of books/board game will be pleased to know that Wide Games have kept things as authentic as possible

Art often imitates life and in some cases can create far more bizarre and imaginative situations than any number of game designers could ever hope to. "Some of the things the prisoners got up to was pretty amazing," says Jones, warming to the subject of his research. "Things like the glider they built in the attic of Colditz. We've used a lot of the real-life escapes in the game."

Finding out about the prisoners' antics wasn't as hard as it may seem, despite the survivors getting fewer in number

each year. "We did a lot of research online and at the Imperial War Museum, grabbing anything we could get our hands on. Original artwork by the prisoners, journals and diaries, anything really" says Jones. Not to say they didn't try to go straight to the horses' mouths that is, but contacting actual ex-prisoners isn't as easy as it sounds. "The Imperial War Museum tried to set up a Q&A session with some of the people that escaped from both Colditz and the Stalags. Unfortunately, and this is the sad thing, they're so old now that they've had to postpone three or four times because they've just not been up to it. There are only about six left now and they're all over 95, so it doesn't look like we'll get the opportunity. We're still trying but..."

Still, what was available to Carl and the team has proved to be invaluable, as has several trips to the actual castle in Germany, now a museum undergoing renovation. "It was supposed to be the ultimate in escape-proof camps," says Jones, "and the Germans had this fantastic plan where if you escaped a number of times from other camps you were obviously someone to keep an eye on, so they put you into Colditz. What they didn't realise was that within about six weeks they'd manage to assemble the very best escapers in the whole war all sitting in one room planning the most outrageous escapes." Makes you wonder how they managed to catch anyone in the first place, doesn't it?

⬆ The *ZONE* boys try a spot of escapism of their own.
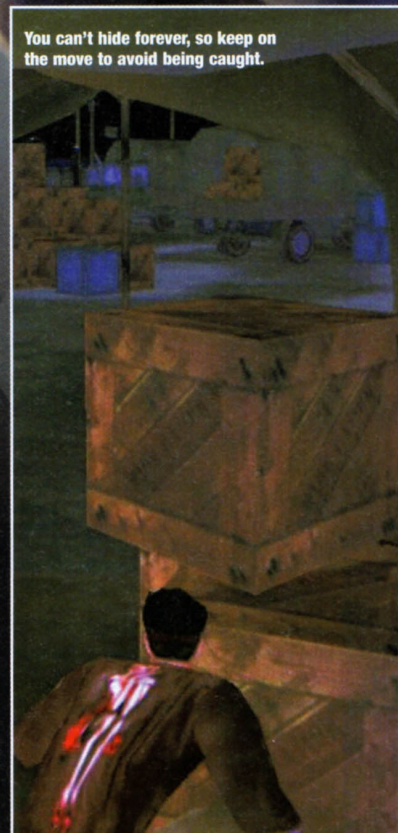
acute enough players – we won't give away how), but can work together as teams if the alarm is raised. "If the guards have an inkling that you're in a location they'll search it more thoroughly," says Jones. "The best tactic therefore is to find a hiding place, wait for a guard to move away from where you're hiding, then quickly run out and try to find another hiding place away from where he is. It's only the most skilful players that will be able to do that though."

Finding a good hiding place isn't easy either. "The AI is more than intelligent enough to figure out that if it sees you climbing into a cupboard

> **Fellow POWs aren't dumb visual aids. Each prisoner has their own AI level and provides a function to exploit**

then you're in that cupboard," explains Jones. "If you're not seen climbing into it then it might still search it but we define the search points with the tools we have. We try to make them sensible enough so that if a guard is told, "the POW has disappeared in this area, search it," then they'll see that the obvious places to search are in the cupboards and under the tables and so on. They won't do anything stupid like just walking around a room, looking at it, then leave."

Those fellow POWs mentioned earlier aren't simply dumb visual aids either. Each prisoner has their own AI level, and provides some function or another that Stone can exploit. Mini-games, such as gambling, can provide

x 30

the player with currency that in turn can be used to pay for goods, services or even to act as decoys. "It could even be that a player who really likes the role-playing side of things wouldn't have to do much of the stealth action at all, but instead goes around the camp collecting money then pays the other POWs to do most of the work for him," reveals Jones.

SHUT THAT DOOR
Although there are only three camps in the whole game, the varied nature of the missions and the plethora of in-game activities are expected to keep things interesting. Plus the three camps are all very varied in style and constantly have new areas opening up with each new mission. Initial Stalag, boot camp-style huts and fences eventually give way to the imposing Castle Colditz, which immediately throws up gameplay challenges of its own. "Colditz is very different from the other levels," explains Jones, "very much the kind of *Metal Gear Solid*, hiding in cupboards, sneaking down corridors sort of thing. It's a lot harder for the player to get away with things because there won't be as much space to run to and there are a lot more guards all over the place."

It's a faithful recreation of the infamous castle, from the peeling wallpaper in the corridors to the ironwork railings on the balconies. Of course, that also includes the various tunnels and secret corridors that existed, not all of which were actually discovered by the Germans.

From a technical point of view, such enclosed locations does throw up the immediate question of camera placements, ruiner of many an otherwise fine game. "We're using a combination of different camera systems," says Jones. "We can set up dolly cams, fixed-point cams, cams with their own AI that can follow the player around and cams that can follow fixed paths at certain times. What we're prototyping at the moment is a free-floating internal cam with its own AI that will figure out the best positions on the fly. But when rooms get quite small and poky it's almost impossible to do that so that's when we switch to the fixed cameras." Which helps when things need to take a dramatic turn.

PHAT TUNES
The drama is aided by the game's music. It's not just the Germans keeping tabs on you in *POW*, even the audio knows what you're doing. Some of you may remember LucasArts' old *Monkey Island*-era iMuse system –

music that changed pitch, harmonics and tempo to match the on-screen action – but it's been a long time since anyone has really started experimenting with the technology in today's DirectX environments.

"We happened to find an individual who was fascinated by what could be done with DirectMusic," says Ed Daly, managing director of Wide Games. "He was able to just get his whole head around non-linear music composition

– an alien concept for most composers, who are used to one note following another. It's still a relatively unproven technology and there are only a few games that have done some okay things with it. But nothing particularly spectacular that's proved its potential or made as much use of it as Microsoft had hoped."

That man was one Ciaran Walsh who, surrounded by a bank of mixing desks, MIDI keyboards, microphones

Next: Evening Meal

Day 0 Hour 0

"Is this where I sign in for the rest cure?"

Watch the barbed wire, those are your only pants.

Current: Lights Out
Next: Morning Roll Call

Day 8 Hour 1

x 97

Searchlights can be taken out with a well thrown rock.

x 88
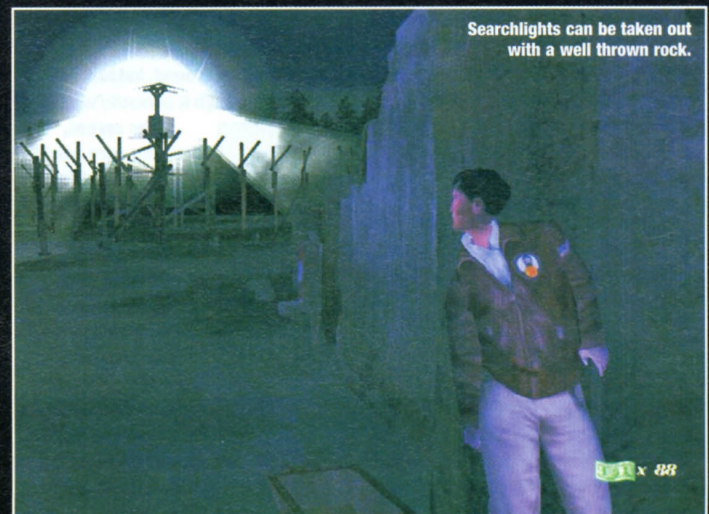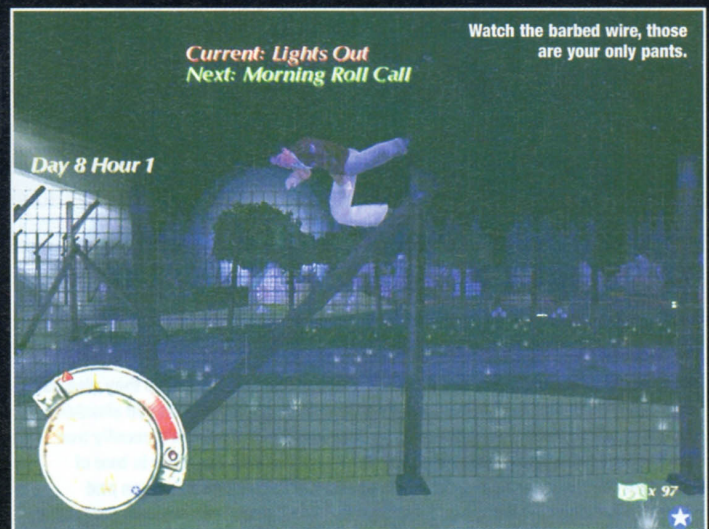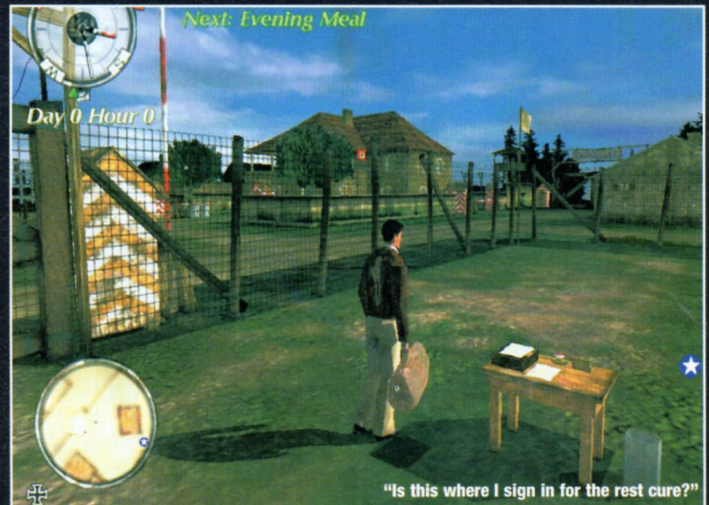
Luckily you're not alone. Fellow prisoners provide all sorts of help.

Those guards aren't so bad if you keep your nose clean.

Top-hole, what-ho, bally good show and all that.

Wing Commander James Temple-Smithson:
By jove, we've got to stop them! With a weapon like this, Jerry will be able to strike at the very heart of allied territory.

Windows and keyholes provide a valuable glimpse of the outside world.

Next: Breakfast

Day 0 Hour 10

THE WORLD ON HIS BACK

When is a game not a game? When it's also a showcase for a powerful game creation engine.

They say that behind every great man is a better woman. Of course they also say that noisy farts don't stink, the customer is always right and that you shouldn't mix beer with spirits so what, really, do they know? That said, it's usually true that behind every great game is pretty smart engine and the same is true of *Prisoner Of War*. Long before the aforementioned tale of prison camps and derring-do existed, the boys and, er, boys of Wide Games were creating what they feel is the game engine to end all game engines.

"We wanted to ensure it was flexible, that it could be used for lots of different genres," says Ed Daly of ATLAS, the all-encompassing set of tools that powers *POW*. "We can have characters driving or flying or running around, indoors and outdoors. Pretty much any scenario we think of runs through it perfectly well."

Jones agrees, "We can very, very quickly produce playable games. At the moment we like to say that we can take any kind of character or action game that's out there on the shelves today and we can emulate a playable version of it in about two weeks. There aren't a lot of game types that are closed to us."

Essentially, ATLAS is a suite of tools that lets you edit just about everything you can think of – cameras, objects, scripts, cut-scenes, AIs, mission objectives, character interactions, gravity, physics, quite literally anything in the game – all from simple on-screen menus and without the need to rely on heavy programming skills. "When we built ATLAS we wanted to make sure that as much control over the game as possible was in the designer's hands," explains Jones, "because they're the guys that have to come up with all the challenges. In the past we found that everything was being controlled by the programmers. If you wanted anything changed in a level it would mean the programmer would have to rewrite the code."

This ease of use has already attracted outside interest, but Wide Games aren't quite ready for it to go commercial just yet. When asked about the possibility, Jones just smiles sheepishly and mutters something about resources, having to set up dedicated support offices and a million other factors but, noticeably, doesn't deny the possibility outright. Britain's answer to id, Epic et al? You never know…

⬆ Building a house, ATLAS style.
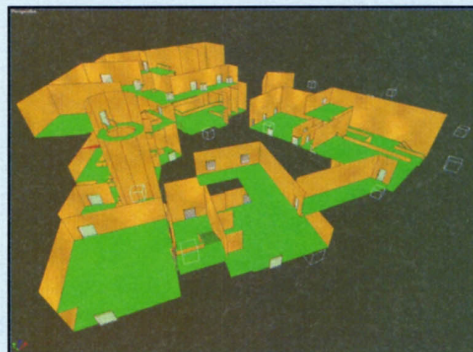
⬆ Make a note of those secret passageways.

Next: Lunchtime

Day 5 Hour 14

Keeping a low profile is key to victory.

Next: Assemble For Evening Roll Call

You can't drive them, but you can crawl under them.

Day 13 Hour 22

x 45

Next: Morning Exercise

Day 0 Hour 12

Pretend you're a gargoyle, maybe they won't spot you.

and speakers, sits alone in his studio several doors down the street from the rest of the *POW* team, but is as integral a part of the overall atmosphere of the game as the artists. Wide Sounds is an offshoot of the main company, set up as an independent music studio specialising in something called interactive music.

"A certain type of music naturally springs to mind when you see the type of game *POW* is," explains Walsh. "It has to be orchestral-based, very movie-like. But we wanted to do something dynamic with it. So I came up with the concept of using lots of small component pieces of music and using the DirectMusic system to pull them all together and to extrapolate different variations of each piece, removing layers and changing the tempo to create different levels of intensity. You can then take each of these small 30-second chunks of music, tie them together as needed and create, say, ten or 20 minute pieces of music." Which basically means that as you sneak through the game, the music, while retaining the overall theme, will change to suit the mood of the action. Much like any decent movie score, only changing dynamically depending on what's happening on screen – light and airy strings when you're just getting up in the morning, through to dramatic chords when the hunt is on and the tension is high.

SNEAK TO WIN

Maintaining that tension is the key to the whole game. The player needs to constantly feel as though he's on the verge of being caught if the game is to succeed. There is a precedent – games such as the *Thief* series, *Metal Gear Solid*, *Hidden & Dangerous*, *Project IGI* and *Ghost Recon* have all shown that there's a market for more measured and thoughtful approaches to the action shooter genre. What Jones and his team at Wide Games is hoping to prove is that you can take the concept one step further and do away with the weapons aspect altogether. Are they mad? Will they get away with it like James Coburn's fake Aussie of hope? Or will they, like Steve McQueen and his ill-fated motorcycle leap, end up on the twisty barbed wire of fate? We'll find out in June. PCZ

Family fortunes...

MAFIA

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Illusion Softworks
PUBLISHER Take 2 Interactive
WEBSITE www.mafia-game.com
OUT April 2002

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- It's the game version of every classic gangster film that ever was
- Driven by a deep and absorbing storyline
- From the talented chaps behind *Hidden & Dangerous*
- Stunning attention to detail

CV

illusion softworks

ILLUSION SOFTWORKS

Although they've released several titles, it was through *Hidden & Dangerous* that Illusion became made men.

1997 Illusion Softworks is formed in the Czech Republic

1999 *Hidden & Dangerous* is released to huge critical and commercial success.

2000 *Flying Heroes*, a flight-based action shooter, is released, as is *Fight For Freedom*, an add-on pack for *H&D*

2002 *Mafia* and *H&D 2* are both currently nearing completion. *Chameleon* and another mysterious project will be revealed later in the year.

Richie held a gun to *Anthony Holden*'s head while Dave assured him that either his brains or a two page preview would be on these pages...

The more we see of Mafia and the closer it comes to completion, the more we find ourselves asking why this game hasn't been made before. The brutal underworld of organised crime has always held our fascination when rendered on screen, from *Little Caesar* right through to *The Sopranos*. We've always been drawn to the tough charisma of the wiseguy, the untouchable, the made man – vengeful, vicious and cold-blooded, yet governed by his own intractable code of ethics. Many games have attempted to capture the allure of this secret world before, but it only takes a few minutes with *Mafia* to realise that they have all failed where Illusion Softworks is apparently set to succeed.

While the concept of the game is simple enough – a third-person gangster action game with a strong narrative focus – the key to *Mafia*'s appeal lies in its deeply cinematic atmosphere and astonishing attention to detail. For starters there's the game's environment, the fictional city of Lost Heaven, a 12 square mile living, breathing recreation of 1930s America. Loosely based on the New York and Chicago of the time, Lost Heaven bustles with traffic and brims over

> **You can't pick up as many weapons as you want – you can only carry one huge weapon, and you can't hide it**

with detail, from its shady bars and whorehouses to the working train network and winding roads of the surrounding countryside.

FOR RESPECT

While it's a pleasure in itself just driving around town in one of the game's 60-odd lovingly recreated period cars, this, as we've said before, is no free-roaming, do-as-you-please *Grand Theft Auto* with a Tommy Gun. If you want to go out on the street and beat someone to a pulp with a baseball bat you can, but it's not what the

game's about. The real strength of the game is its narrative, which, while allowing plenty of freedom of execution (often literally), essentially takes you from one archetypal Cosa Nostra set-piece to another. Some missions even pay tribute to specific scenes from classic gangster cinema, such as *The Godfather*'s revolver in the toilet/public assassination scene. "The whole storyline is very close to something like *Goodfellas*," confesses lead designer Daniel Vavra, "though most of the missions are based on real events that happened in the '30s. It's just the story of a man who joins the Mafia and what it's like to dance with the devil, what trouble it leads to."

Set over a period of eight years, the story is told in retrospect, as your character Tommy confesses his biggest crimes to Lost Heaven's senior detective. Along the way Tommy and his best friend Paulie handle a variety of business for the Salieri family, including car theft racketeering, mob hits, blowing up a whorehouse, smuggling bootlegged liquor and the occasional car chase.

DRIVERS DREAM

A mission will often begin with a visit to the family mechanic, who progressively teaches you how to break into each type of drivable car in the game, ranging from slow taxis and delivery vans to swift roadsters and sleek prototype vehicles like the Pierce-Arrow Silver Arrow. The better the car, the longer it takes to break into and the greater the risk of detection, with theft time represented by a standard 'loading bar' device. While the cars may not be correctly badged and named for licensing reasons, each is accurately modelled on a real vehicle, and handles according to one of the most complex and painstaking physics models in any game, ever. Just in case we were dubious about this, Daniel showed us the massive list of specs governing each car's performance, taking in steering behaviour, gear ratios, aerodynamics, suspension, weight and centre of gravity, and enough other variables to make any F1 buff's driving leathers visibly tighten.

Having just been shown how Tommy gets a little fatter as the game progresses through the years, I half-joke that Tommy's newfound girth might throw off the delicate car-handling. "Yes! It does, really!" Daniel

"Watch it bud."

"Yes I see the problem here, it looks like your pipes need cleaning."

He pulls a knife, you pull a gun – that's the Lost Heaven way.

exclaims with delight. "Tommy's weight makes the car physics behave differently. A passenger will throw the centre of gravity off a little. With three characters in the car you'll really notice the slow-down in acceleration." On top of this, cars handle differently on different surfaces, bodywork deforms convincingly, the player is even wounded by car collisions. Now that's attention to detail.

GAT, STEEL, TOOLIE, PISTOLA

Getting back to the mission at hand, the next stop after the mechanic will probably be the family weapon specialist, who tools you up according to the needs of each job. "There's about 12 different types of weapons in the game," enthuses Daniel, "from hand-to-hand combat weapons like knives and baseball bats to small revolvers, magnums, Tommy Guns and other machine guns, sawn-off shot-guns, rifles, grenades, even some sniper rifles for one or two missions." Unsurprisingly, each weapon is accurately modelled on a real-life equivalent.

"We have a slightly different inventory from other games," continues Daniel. "You can't pick up as many weapons as you want – you can only carry one huge weapon like a machine gun or shotgun and you can't hide it under your suit, so if you walk the streets with a shotgun the police will go after you, or people will panic and maybe use a public phone to call the police."

The police and other enemies in the game haven't been neglected either, displaying some of the finest AI we've seen since, well, *Medal Of Honor* actually, but it's still bloody impressive. "Enemies have many different states of mind. Once alerted to your presence – say somebody hears something strange – he will warn the others who didn't hear it. Once they actually see you they will take cover and co-operate in groups. When they get really pissed

they will attack differently and scream different things at you."

If you haven't got the picture by now, there's a hell of a lot going on in *Mafia*. The huge and lovingly crafted gameworld is matched only by the carefully constructed narrative thread, and at this stage it's hard to see how the game could possibly fail to entertain. The only potential disappointment could be the multiplayer side of things, which on initial release will only consist of racing with the games many cars and 12 circuits carved out of the existing environment. That said, Daniel did mutter something about add-ons and patches, "maybe something like *Counter-Strike*, gangsters vs police or whatever." Sounds a lot like an offer we can't refuse. **PCZ**

"That bloke in the hat shop told me no one else would have one of these."

It's a fantasy thing...
WARRIOR KINGS

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Black Cactus
PUBLISHER Microids
WEBSITE www.blackcactus.com
OUT February 2002

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Large battles over a beautiful 3D landscape
- Hugely tactical terrain
- Incredibly flexible tech tree
- Engrossing storyline
- Huge mythical units fight alongside and against traditional ones
- Siege warfare and open battles in equal measure

King for the day _Martin Korda_ gets to grips with Black Cactus' forthcoming epic RTS

We see a lot of potential in this one. In fact we have done for about the last 18 months, during which time, Black Cactus' RTS _Warrior Kings_ has been passed from one publisher to another like an unwanted child with a special, but potentially unrecognised gift. For a while, _WK_ disappeared from the scene, ditched by Vivendi and left floating on the brink of the gaming gutter, before Microids came along and picked it up, wiped the grime from its folds and tried desperately to revive it. A couple of months ago we were led to believe the game would be reviewable, only for the code to be snatched from beneath our noses like a mucus strand by a probing tongue. However, things appear to be well on track for a February release, so I toddled off to Black Cactus to have an exclusive playtest of the latest code. And this is what I saw...

PLAYING FOR MONEY

Warrior Kings is Black Cactus' first project, and as first attempts go, they've set themselves a gargantuan task, seeking to meld epic battles and siege warfare with an extensive research tree and a deep-running economic vein. Nick Ricks, who has

⬆ "Doesn't that wife of yours feed you John?"

previously worked on _Dungeon Keeper_, talked me through the game, and wasn't in the least surprised when I instantly drew comparisons to _Shogun_. On closer inspection, the gameplay also bears many similarities to _Battle Realms_, with resource management

buildings, so when you collect your resources from rural areas, they're delivered by cart to the city. It's only when they reach the city that they actually enter your stocks. So you need to carefully guard your wagons and position your rural structures

66 Its exaggerated, undulating landscapes would make a silicon-stuffed beauty queen feel inadequate 99

playing an integral role in the strategic aspects of the game.

"_Warrior Kings_ has very strong economic elements," says Nick. "We've tried to create a sense of rural and civic

intelligently, because it takes peasants time to transfer resources from the farms to the villages." He promptly helped me build a prosperous economy, dotting various buildings

⬆ Mythical units fight alongside and against tradional ones.

WAY OF THE WARRIOR KING

Choose your own career path

When a bestselling author turns into a games developer you know you're in for a good story, and that's exactly what Jamie Thompson (founder of Black Cactus) has gone and done. Having written the brilliant _Choose Your Own Adventure_ series, as well as _The Way Of The Tiger_ with Mark Smith (for details of his new project turn to page 24 or keep reading to find out more about this one), Jamie has turned his attention to penning the storyline for _Warrior Kings_. And it goes a little bit like this.

You're a king in a fantastical medieval world, where ruthless warlords fight for control of the land. It's your duty to unite and rule over this world by any means at your disposal. But at some point you're forced to choose between a path – Imperial, Pagan or Renaissance. The path you choose will shape both your destiny and the future of the land you hope to unite. The story progresses via in-game cut-scenes and spoken narrative between missions, and if Thompson's previous work is anything to go by, the plot should be an absolute corker.

⬆ "Come on you greedy bastard, it must be our turn on the horse by now."

⬆ "You go first lads, I've got a bad back."

⬆ The mutant shot-putting contest soon turned into a disorganised farce.

around a stunning 3D landscape with rolling hills and dense forests. Farms needed to be placed with care, by first identifying the most fertile areas of the landscape to allow for maximum production. Different areas of the land proved to be more plentiful than others, a factor which will hugely influence the positioning of any city, as well as the speed with which resources can be gathered.

I WANT TO BE A TREE

It wasn't long before carts were transporting resources from the rural areas to the urban settings. It was time to start building up an army. Unlike most RTSs where you have a choice between two or maybe three different tech trees, *Warrior Kings* offers you a highly flexible route to customise your unit choices to your style of play.

"Rather than having two separate tech trees like *C&C*, we've decided to let the player start as an unaligned starting group," explained Nick. From those you can develop in three different ways. If your style of play is aggressive, then your best bet is to pick the Pagan race, because they have a lot

of upgrades very early on in the game. Their units are cheap to produce and do a lot of damage, although they can't take that much damage themselves. There are certain stages of upgrade. If you go down a pure alignment path, then you're very concentrated in what you can do. However, you can build the most powerful units your alignment allows. On the flipside, your choices will be far more limited. If you mix alignments, you get much more choice, but less access to the more powerful units."

As I played through several different levels, I tried these varying options. Of the three sides, the Pagans are by far the most aggressive, while playing as Celestial throws up a plethora of defensive possibilities. If you're of a more economically driven disposition, then the Renaissance side will be the one for you. This last group also has the added advantage of possessing gunpowder, and I watched smugly as my huge wheel-mounted cannons annihilated a group of enemy Abadon demons (the Pagan's most powerful

unit), later trouncing a bunch of Arch Angels (the top Celestial unit) with a far smaller group of the very same creatures I'd just given a kicking to. Needless to say, *Warrior Kings* is still in need of some balancing.

LOOK AT THE BUMPS ON THAT

WK's most notable feature is its hugely exaggerated landscapes, which although beautiful, can look slightly odd, with the type of undulations which would make a silicon-stuffed beauty queen feel positively inadequate. However, it soon becomes apparent that the landscapes are a weapon in themselves, making tactical troop deployment essential if you're to get the upper hand in a battle. A substantial height advantage can prove deadly, especially if you have a collection of experienced archers on it. I asked Nick if there were any other ways of garnering a tactical advantage, and how this impacted on the game generally.

"We wanted a way of representing the game other than through simple bonuses. So we gave different attributes to certain units, which come into play depending on circumstances. For example, if a group of archers is approached by a group of slower-moving, but more

powerful units, then they'll automatically fire, then back off, then fire again. You'll then need cavalry to outrace the archers."

GAME FOR A CHALLENGE

Unfortunately it's not all positive. *WK* has several glaring issues which need addressing if it's going to fulfil its promise. While the 3D engine is for the most part excellent, all too often units become camouflaged by the terrain around them or obscured by buildings. This makes them hard to see, let alone distinguishable from a distance, which causes particular problems in the heat of battle. The rotating map also needs work, as it's so disorientating you often end up heading in the wrong direction. Nick assures me that these issues are being resolved. Lets hope they are.

Only time will tell if *Warrior Kings* ends up growing into the highly successful, all-encompassing and well-respected RTS that it threatens to be, or whether it will end up back in a ditch, smelling of its own piss and smattered with cider-laced vomit, rejected by its community for its failings and forced to eke out a meagre existence by hiring itself out to travelling businessmen for a palmful of loose change. We'll let you know how it all turns out next month. Maybe. **PCZ**

Winter Olympics? Where? When?
SALT LAKE 2002

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Developed by same team as BAFTA-winning *Sydney 2000*
- Exclusive International Olympic Committee licence
- Six official events
- BBC commentators
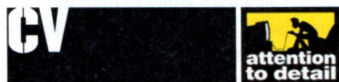
ATD

With a heritage stretching back to *Super Sprint* on the Atari ST, these are their most recent PC titles

1996 *Blast Chamber* – a curious 3D puzzle adventure game, notable for being one of the first PSX conversions to hit the PC.

1999 *Rollcage* – addictive futuristic racer that got a mixed reception, and a sequel a year later.

2000 *Sydney 2000* – won a BAFTA

2001 *Ducati World* – a poor motorcycle sim and a strangely enjoyable kiddie racer *Lego Racers 2*.

Steve Hill puts on the thermals and gets a face full of snow

It may be more renowned for dubious marital practices and land speed records, but Salt Lake City is hosting the Olympics. Not the proper Olympics, of course, that was Sydney 2000, as replicated in the game of the same name. This is your winter variety, where unpronounceable Scandinavians get sunk up to the nuts in white powder over a series of obscure events.

Developers Attention To Detail have had a long hard look at those events, and selected around half a dozen for your delectation. So what are we looking at? Curling? Luge? Nordic Ski? Nope, the six official events are Men's Alpine Skiing Downhill, Women's Alpine Skiing Slalom, Men's Two-man Bobsleigh, Women's Freestyle Skiing Aerials, Men's Ski Jumping K120 Individual and Men's Snowboard Parallel Giant Slalom. Try saying that lot after eight pints.

All six events seem to involve some form of sliding downhill, so what were the criteria for selection? We asked ATD programmers Steve Wilcox and Justin Eames, who replied as one:

"Some events transfer into gameplay far better than others. We tried to use the events we thought we could really inject some fun into. The bobsleigh was the one we were worried about but with a bit of effort it's turned out to be one of the best
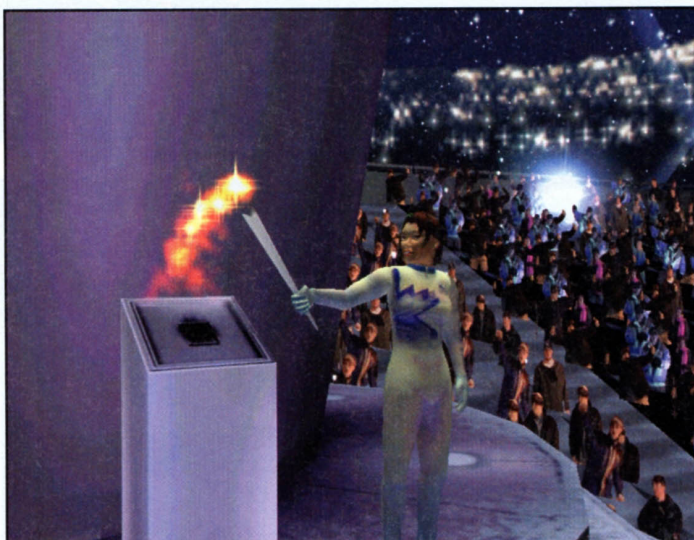
Let the games commence.

events. It's effectively a mini-racing game – you adjust your line on the course to accelerate and brake so you can find the optimal racing line – plus

"The Eagle" Edwards? How will that translate to a game? Well, according to ATD's programmers: "Ski-jump is all down to timing and

> ## We injected as much of the vertigo feel as we could, so you get a little taster of what it must be like up there

you've got to make a good start, just like the event in real life!"

But what about ski-jumping, a sport last given major coverage by the risible antics of goggle-eyed buffoon, Eddie

making fine adjustments, much as it is in real life.

We injected as much of the 'vertigo feel' as we could at the start, so you get a little taster of

"Bob, bob, bob, bob..."

Close your legs and pray.

what it must be like up there preparing for a jump."

FINGER BOBS

Of course, Olympics-based games are traditionally associated with hammering the keyboard like a crazed ape, a heritage that stretches back to *Daley Thompson's Decathlon*, the ruin of many a ZX Spectrum. This rather primitive form of gameplay made up the bulk of *Sydney 2000*, but for *Salt Lake 2002*, ATD claims: "We've tried to tax the player with more than just button-bashing skills, this time you need quick reflexes, pinpoint timing and good hand-eye co-ordination. Though there is the occasional bit of bashing required to get you off to a good start in some events so don't put the plasters away just yet."

If you played – or read about – *Sydney 2000*, you may recall that extreme attention to detail (pun intended) was paid to accurately recreating the various environments, to the extent of taking thousands of digital pictures of the various stadia and so forth. Well, the same process applies to *Salt Lake*, while the embittered programmers were kept in a darkened room.

"Two members of the art team went over to Salt Lake at the start of development. They took hundreds of pictures and loads of video footage of the courses and the structures while they were being built. Also we had world class athletes from each of the disciplines visit us on site to give us expert consultancy on each event. These celebrities also donned a motion capture suit and provided all the animations for the game. If you play the game and the video side by side it looks remarkably similar, we're really pleased with that!"

If anything, they've gone even further this time, as environments have been created using satellite imaging technology, with terrain accurate to two feet in height.

The Olympic licence has also enabled them to model the actual courses and building structure, as well as replicate the television coverage. As ATD say: "We even had the

⬆ He really should have gone to the toilet earlier.

⬆ At least he's not vomiting.

⬆ Can you guess where the games are being staged yet?

that it's competing with those types of games, screaming: "Not at all! *Salt Lake 2002* offers a unique combination of events designed to fully recreate the Olympic atmosphere and competition structure. But this is a game after all, so we used some exciting music to add a degree of adrenaline."

66 Olympics-based games are traditionally associated with hammering the keyboard like a crazed ape 99

television camera positions and shot sequences so we've based the replay cameras on the sort of thing you'll actually see when you watch it on TV. That's all really important when you're trying to get the player to really feel like they are there!"

DREAM ON

With *Salt Lake 2002* featuring snowboarding, it's tempting to bracket it with the slew of extreme sports titles. However, ATD vehemently deny

The game will also feature the BBC commentary team of former Olympic Skier Graham Bell, and Stuart Storey, whose voice bears a freak resemblance to Alan Partridge's. But that's the kind of calibre you start to expect from the official game of the Winter Olympics.

As ATD say, "Having the official license has attracted the famous athletes and many other sporting bodies to help us create a game which allows you to live the Olympic Dream..."

We've played. It seems alright. PCZ

⬆ No moustache required.

Oi!...KINGSLEY, WHAT'S

Death might be the end but in *Dredd Versus Death*, Rebellion CEO Jason Kingsley is Dredd and loving it. *Judge Pratchett* presiding

One of the game's more friendly and likeable characters.

↑ Judge Death: The undead entity dental floss was made for.

Y ou grow up reading a comic you love, you then grow up a little bit more and make lots of money and have tremendous fun making computer games with a company you founded with your brother. You then buy the aforementioned comic. The comic is *2000AD*. The lucky bastard is Rebellion's CEO Jason Kingsley.

When Rebellion purchased *2000AD* last year, the gaming world waited with bated breath to see what this Oxford-based company would do with the finest comic franchise to ever come out of the UK. The announcement of a Judge Dredd game was inevitable, as the square-jawed, helmeted one has become something of a long-established poster boy for *2000AD*, if not for die-hard ADers but for the outside world too. A FPS was a pretty safe bet as Dredd never performs better than when he's at the right end of his lawgiver gun.

Picking Dredd's opponent was the most difficult part, as Dredd is unlikely to be nominated for the Most Eligible Bachelor of the Year award – let's just say the man doesn't make friends easily. In the end the honour fell to a character who's only had seven solo *2000AD* cover appearances. He's got a thing about ripping out hearts, he's got even more teeth than Julia Roberts and he's back from the dead (again) to entertain you. He's Death. Judge Death. The result? *Dredd Versus Death*.

Are you nervous about taking on such a big franchise and such a beloved character as Judge Dredd? In a word, yes! Very nervous. I've been reading *2000AD* since I was 14 years old from issue one, so I'm a fan of the character myself. I think everybody here is a fan as well. We own and publish the comic, we own the characters and we've re-launched the magazine and that's going really well. Now we've got the game and we can go in a slightly different direction. We have the freedom to do really more or
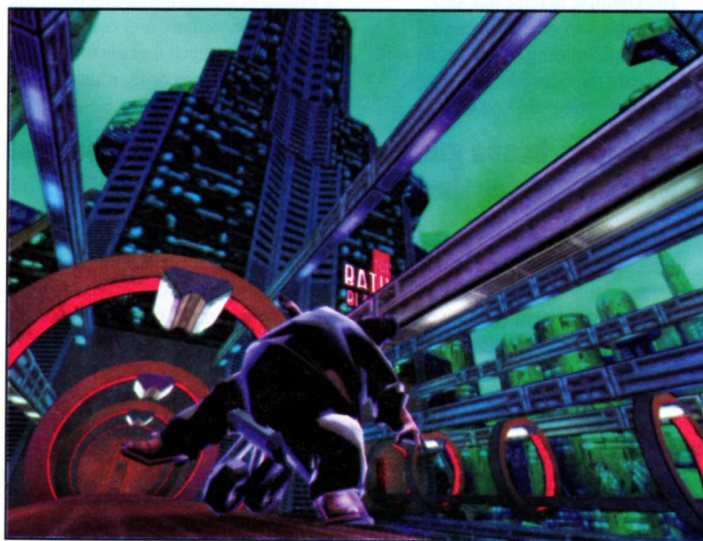
↑ With the aid of their belly wheels, fatties are surprisingly nippy.

YOUR GAME?

> **❝I've been reading *2000AD* since I was 14 years old from issue one, so I'm a fan of the character myself❞**
>
> JASON KINGSLEY, CEO, REBELLION

less what we want. We've got a hell of a task, and we want to be straightforward and honest with the hardcore Dredd fans and also get other people interested in the character and the comics.

What aspects of Dredd's world are you hoping to bring out in *Dredd Versus Death*?
We really want to make sure that the game fits in with the slightly dark, slightly satirical look of life today, which is really what the *2000AD* world is a commentary on. When you think about all the surveillance issues happening, identity cards, people having no right to appeal, you can see that Dredd's world is getting closer and closer in some ways, which is a little scary. We want to bring that dark side out but we also need to make it approachable for the mainstream consumer, for people who are not necessarily big fans of Dredd or don't read the comic. We want to make sure they can go "yeah I get that" rather than having too many in-jokes.

What do you hope the game will offer hardcore fans of *2000AD*?
They'll be a very strong storyline, as we're working as much as we can with Carlos Ezquerra and John Wagner, two of the divisional creators behind Dredd. They want to be involved – whether they have time is another thing. We want to use them as much as we can to make sure the story and feel is authentic. We are going to try and write the storyline in two layers, so on one level it's fun for people, it's a good story, even if they don't know who Dredd is, and on another level there'll be quite a lot of story references for the hardcore fans.

So will you be consulting the fans about the possibilities for the game?
We won't be actively consulting them. If you ask ten fans you'll get 12 ideas for games! I have to admit that I do
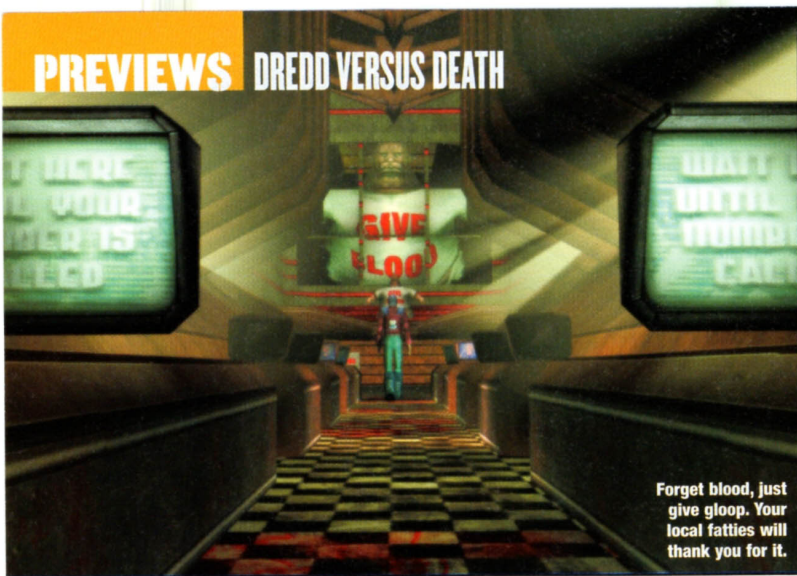
Forget blood, just give gloop. Your local fatties will thank you for it.

lurk on the forums and newsgroups. We have to be careful because some of the hardcore fans are very noisy online, but they're not really representative of the mainstream. There are lots of fans who are silent and just like what we do. Fan feedback is important but often there are business realities as well that we have to look at. We're primarily running a business and we've got to keep the funds coming in so we can keep the comics coming out. We take notice of fans, and we definitely listen even though we don't always agree!

Why did you choose Judge Death as the bad guy and what other characters can we expect to see in the game?
Judge Death is a particularly strong character from a gameplay point of view in that he can never be killed, he can only be captured. He can inhabit different bodies so we can play around with the gameplay mechanisms there. He comes from a parallel dimension called Deadworld, and as a character he holds a mirror up to Dredd because he believes that crime is committed by the living, therefore life itself is a crime, so we're all guilty from birth. He also has his allies, the other Dark Judges: Fear, Fire and Mortis, and I think they will probably be in the

REBELLION

This Oxford-based company started out in 1994 creating games for the Atari Jaguar

1999 *Alien vs Predator* Despite the fact they didn't develop the sequel, Rebellion still holds the accolade of making one of the scariest games of all time.

2000 *Gunlock* This futuristic RTS was an attempt by the company to add a little flavour to strategy games. Unfortunately it turned out to be hard to get into and easy to leave alone.

2001 *The Mummy* The normal movie spin-off fare, uninspiring in everything apart from sound and best left buried.

game. Cassandra Anderson and Mean Machine will almost certainly appear. I'd like to bring in all types of characters from the various storylines like the Fatties, the Uglies and Max Normal the pinstriped freak, who's weird because he's so normal. But what we've got to do is focus down on what would make a good game and what would work in terms of the story.

So will you actually be able to play as Judge Death?
No. I don't think we're going to go with the 'play as the bad guy' angle, because I don't think we have time.

But *Alien vs Predator* showed that it was more fun to play as the bad guy didn't it?
But Dredd's not a good guy, Dredd's not a hero. He's not flying around saving babies from burning buildings, he's actually arresting ordinary people and putting them in prison for a long time. Up until now we have focused on Dredd, but maybe players could play as Death in cheat mode. But I think you're probably right, it would be quite interesting to play as Death and it might be what people expect with our *AvP* heritage. I'll pass it on to the team!

Mega City is a very claustrophobic, overcrowded place, hence the need for swift justice.
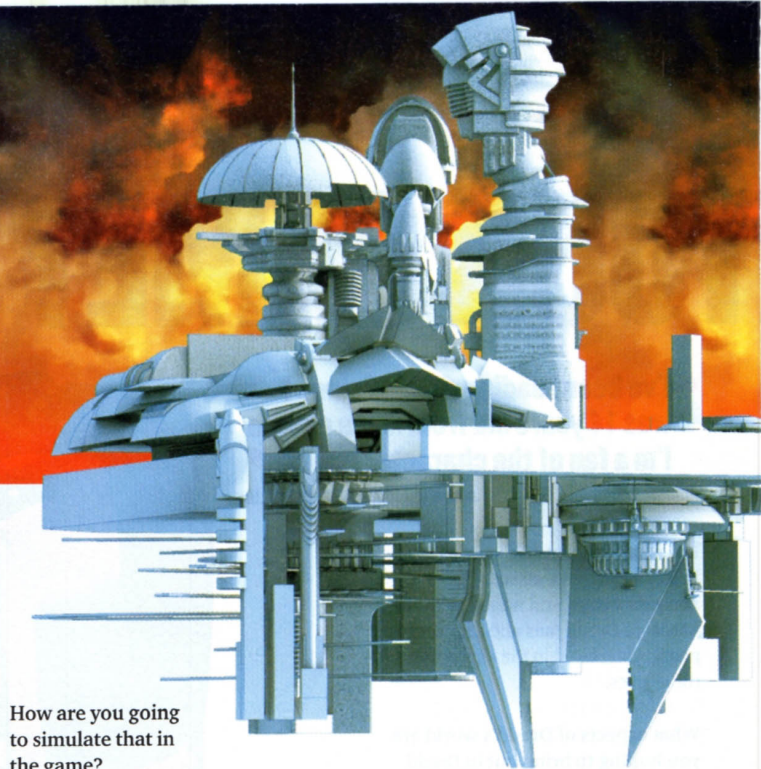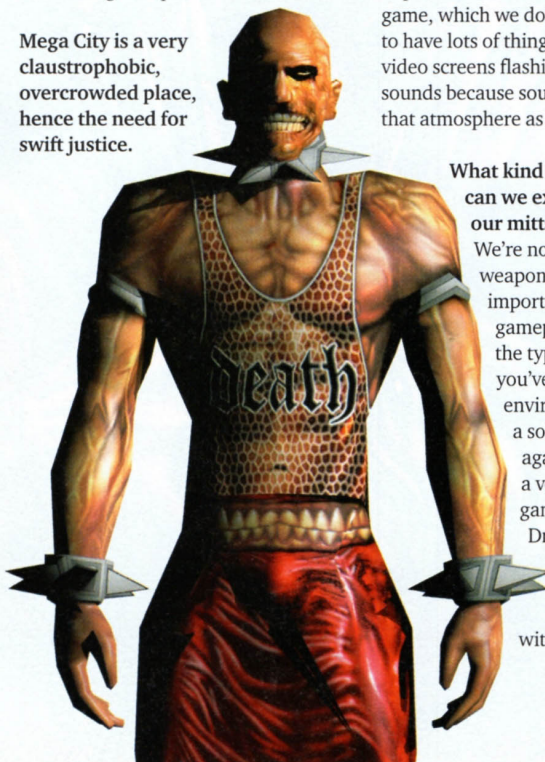
How are you going to simulate that in the game?
That's one of the challenges. How do we make a player feel like they're in a living, breathing Mega City? It's a tough one. Our engine can cope with effectively as many polygons as you can throw at it, but we can't model a whole city. People are going to recognise the various areas like the Halls of Justice, and I'd love to use

places like the Curse Earth and the Under City. What I don't want to do is have a place that is crowded with 200 people that aren't relevant to you. Crowds are good for looking interesting but in terms of gameplay if you have any more than four or five targets on screen at once it's almost impossible to tell which one you have to prioritise and it becomes an arcade game, which we don't want. We want to have lots of things flying by, lots of video screens flashing and lots of sounds because sound can give you that atmosphere as well.

What kind of weapons can we expect to get our mitts on?
We're not really going for a weapons fest – what's important is that the gameplay is strong and the type of weaponry you've got suits the environment. You're not a soldier, fighting against the enemy; it's a very different gameplay type to that. Dredd's lawgiver gun will probably be modelled on the mark two version, with about six

settings: standard, execution, hotshot, grenade, armour piercing and ricochet. We'll probably use things like Stumm Gas and riot foam, and we're also playing with the idea of introducing a stun ray. Boing (a spray-on rubber coating that solidifies into a giant ball) will probably also be in there because it's the only thing that

> ### **"I'd like to bring in all types of characters like the Fatties, the Uglies and Max Normal, the pinstriped freak"**
> **JASON KINGSLEY, CEO, REBELLION**

can encapsulate Death. They'll probably be heavy ammunition as well to take on things like droids and Manta Prowl Tanks. We've got lots of things to play with, and we have the freedom to invent new weapons.

How will the gameplay be structured?
It will be mission-orientated. The exact nature of the levels and the storyline has not been worked out yet; we're working on the gameplay, the engine and the technology, we're still a long way off yet. You won't be able to just go through the game shooting willy-nilly – you won't be able to just 'shoot' the bad guys, because you might not be able to justify it. You might just have to shoot them in the leg and arrest

Rebellion are trying to capture the comic atmosphere as much as possible.

Fans can see a 3D Mega City 1 recreated as part of the MTV Riot awards next year.

⬆ Fans of *2000AD* will recognise most of the locations.

them, or sometimes you just have to kill them! You're a judge, you're not a mercenary soldier. The key point is that you have to work within the law, that's your character. Instead of having a score, you might have a number of years in solitary confinement or in an Iso-Cube to dispense. Maybe you'll have to decide on the sentencing and if you're too lenient, you have to go for re-education and you lose. If you're too harsh, the SJS will come and 'talk' to you and you may lose the game that way. We want to get that slight parody.

There will be a very strong multiplayer side, but we haven't decided how it will work exactly. It might be Judges against perps or mutants, or Judge against Judge. There's so many things you can do in Dredd's world. (The conversation then deviates briefly about the possibilities of a Boing multiplayer level.)

You've designed the engine for *Dredd Versus Death* from the ground up. How is it going to enhance the game?
One of the key points for us with the engine we used wasn't just to make another renderer that looked realistic. We wanted to maintain the painted, slightly heightened realism of the comics. It doesn't have the flat 2D look of a toon renderer, it's fully texture-mapped and we're also using rim lighting. We're trying to go one step beyond a toon renderer and create something that gives it a flavour all of its own. It's like we did in *Alien vs Predator*, we had our own lighting, with fully destructible lights in the game, facial animation, slow modes and so on, which all worked well for us. We've got to take that one step

further. We've got to get that crazy lighting, that twilight that the city sometimes has at the very bottom, where it's dark because the sun doesn't get down there. It's all about building up atmosphere for the player

What other games are you working from *2000AD*?
We're working on a Rogue Trooper game. He's one of my favourite characters. There's also our RPG *Wardog*, which was started as a computer game at the same time as a comic strip, but he's still a young character in terms of development. There loads of great characters and settings to choose from.

What other genres apart from the FPS and the RPG would suit the *2000AD* world?
An RTS would be quite good, some kind of apocalypse war. Or a Judge Dredd game without Judge Dredd, like 'Sim Mega City'. It would be like *The Sims* but in a Mega City block with all the bizarreness that goes on, like the 84 per cent unemployment! You could do a racing game, with Lawmaster bikes, or Manta Prowl tanks – we're not planning on any of this yet though. Hey what about Fatty-belly wheel-racing? Gut-barging or bite-fighting? You could have all the fighting from *2000AD* and things like eating competitions with eating for volume and eating for speed! Games like 'Sky Surfing', 'Areoball', 'Inferno'. Maybe your readers can suggest stuff on www.2000Adonline.com.

You heard the man. PW

The smooth rendering engine will make curved objects like these wheels actually look realistic.
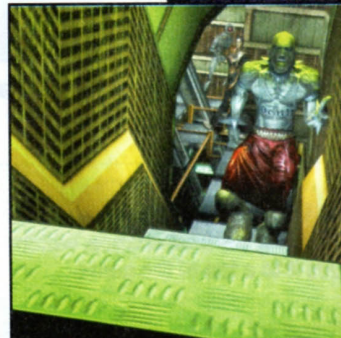
⬆ The 'getting them stuck at the bottom of the stairs' trick doesn't work.

REVIEWS

First-person Shooter War

⊕ **REVIEWS EDITOR** Martin Korda

Ironic, isn't it? Possibly the greatest reviews head to head we've ever had ends up being between two games based around the largest war of all time, WWII. *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault* (page 46) and *Return To Castle Wolfenstein* (page 52) are two titles we've been following with great interest for quite some time now, and the result of this epic confrontation was more than a little interesting to say the least. All you have to do to find out who won is turn over to the next page and start reading...

...but before you do that, some words about some of the other games on show this month. It's strange, but our February edition is usually somewhat short of reviews, with most hitting the shelves in time for the Christmas rush, while the inevitable stragglers are usually mopped up in our January issue. Not so this year. In fact, some might argue (and I might be one of those people) that this month's reviews section sees one of the finest line-ups ever in one issue. *Serious Sam: The Second Encounter* (page 56) finishes off our triple bill of shooters, and while it may not appear to have as much clout as the other two, you'd be ill advised to simply pass it by, especially as it's going for a bargain price of £20.

But look, there's even more virtual excellence for your perusal. How about the superb expansion pack to one of last year's best games, *Black & White* (page 78)? From the looks of things, Lionhead has taken on board the main criticisms of the fans (too much micro-management), something that is always refreshing to see in this turgid age of rehashes and developer arrogance. Nope? Not interested? OK, OK. How about the surprisingly entertaining *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (page 68). We thought it was going to be just another poor cash in, but believe it or not we were left pleasantly surprised by what we found. And speaking of surprises, turn-based strategy fans should skip all the FPS blurb (after all, FPSs are too hectic and don't give you enough time to think, right?) and head to our *Etherlords* review (page 67) for a rare piece of good news. No scrap that, excellent news. Anyhow, enough from me, there's a war to be fought. Now turn the page and get reading, soldier...

MOST WANTED... DRIVING GAMES

GP4
Infogrames • ETA March 2002

GRAND THEFT AUTO
Take 2 • ETA March 2002

F1 RACING CHAMPIONSHIP 2
Ubi Soft • ETA Q1 2002

TOCA RACE DRIVER
Codemasters • June 2002

LOOSE CANNON
Ubi Soft • ETA Q2 2002

THE ITALIAN JOB
SCI • ETA Q2 2002

WORLD SPORTS CARS
Empire • ETA Q2 2002

CRAZY TAXI
Empire • ETA Q2 2002

COLIN MCRAE RALLY 3
Codemasters • ETA Christmas 2002

F1 2002
EA Sports • ETA Christmas 2002

WHERE TO CALL

Having trouble finding any of the games listed in the reviews section of the magazine? Here are the numbers you need to call:

Acclaim 020 7344 5000 • **Activision** 08705 143525 • **CDV** 020 8880 4144 • **Codemasters** 01926 814132 • **Eidos Interactive** 020 8636 3000 • **Electronic Arts** 01932 450134 • **Empire Interactive** 020 8343 7337 • **EON** 0700 4366344 • **Infogrames** 0161 837 8000 • **Interplay** 020 7551 4222 • **Koch Media** 01256 707 767 • **Microids** 01908 223 377 • **Microsoft** 08457 002 000 • **Midas** 01279 858000 • **Novalogic** 020 7324 8900 • **Rage Software** 0151 237 2200 • **Take 2 Interactive** 01753 854 444 • **THQ** 01483 767656 • **Ubi Soft** 01932 838 230 • **Virgin Interactive** 020 7551 4266 • **Vivendi** 01189 209100

MEET THE TEAM

All *PC ZONE*'s reviewers are experts in their field. We like to give every game that comes in for review the best chance, which is why we give it to a fan of the genre

War, what is it good for?

WHAT DO OUR SCORES MEAN?

90-100% If a game receives a Classic award in *PC ZONE* you know that it's going to be brilliant. We reward originality and innovation, but we also rate games that take an existing genre to new heights. It's the experience that counts – if it delivers top-notch entertainment, we'll stamp it with our seal of approval and you should go out and buy it.

Z PCZONE CLASSIC

80-89% We don't give out 90% scores willy-nilly and this means that there's a mass of superb games that miss out on the Classic rating. This is where the Award of Excellence comes in, an accolade for a game that we believe is far superior to others in the genre.

PCZONE AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE

70-79% Our reviews are much more than just a number at the end. If a game scores in this category it's well worth a punt and provides quality entertainment, but make sure you read the text to see why we didn't think it was worthy of an Award of Excellence.

50-69% We score all our games from a full percentage which means that a score of 50% is an average game – worth considering if you're bored with life and there's no football on the television. Take this closer to the 70% mark and you're looking at a quality game with the ability to impress.

20-49% These games just about manage to keep their heads above the excrement, but only just and shouldn't be considered unless you've exhausted every other avenue. Why should you waste your time playing games that are sub-standard or below average? You're better off with one of our cover discs.

0-19% Incompetence, sloth or just a desire to cash in and make an easy buck? Either way, there are no excuses for these games. Avoid at all costs and if possible make a mental note of the developer's name and stick it on your blacklist.

PCZONE PANTS

DAVE WOODS
GENRE Shooters, arcade
CURRENTLY PLAYING *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault*

Absolutely nothing

RICHIE SHOEMAKER
GENRE Action, strategy
CURRENTLY PLAYING *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault*

Say it again, hurgh!

MEDAL OF HONOR
Is this the best shooter of all time?
P.46

SERIOUS SAM 2
Yet more brawn and no brains
P.56
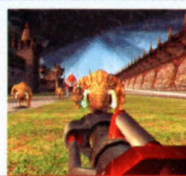
FEEDBACK
Your views on the latest games
P.102

REALITY CHECK
Steve Hill holds on for dear life while trying powerboating
P.104

REVIEWS POLICY

We're on this planet to serve you. You need to know which games are worth buying, which ones are worth considering for a rainy day and which ones you should point at and laugh. For that reason, *PC ZONE* works a little differently to any other games magazine.

FINISHED CODE
We only review finished code which is released by the publisher. On occasions this means reviewing from gold masters, but this still means that what we see is what you get in the box.

HONEST REVIEWING
If there are problems with a game we'll tell you about them even if it means falling foul of some of the big names in the industry. We're not in print to serve as an advertising tool to publishers or big name developers with an ego problem, we're here to give you our honest opinions of a game.

THE REVIEWERS
Our reviewers are the best in the industry both in terms of experience and ability. We also make sure that every game is reviewed by an expert in the field. You won't find an RTS being reviewed by an FPS fan, and you can be sure that the person reviewing a game has played all the benchmark titles and knows how each game stands up in the face of the bigger picture.

THE MACHINES
We test out the games we review across a variety of different machines and graphics cards. In our office we have access to a wider range of machines from the lowly P233 to the 1.4GHz behemoth. If we spot any aberrations between developer claims and real-life testing we'll let you know.

ONLINE GAMING
We review a lot of games before they go on sale, which means that it's impossible to properly review the online side of a game simultaneously. Instead of taking a wild guess, or testing it on the comfort of the office LAN, we'll wait until servers are running and then revisit the game in our dedicated online section.

DISAGREE?
After all this you might still disagree with us. If so then write in and complain to our Feedback section, which is where we give you the chance to have your say and where any rumblings are answered by the individual reviewer.

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MARTIN KORDA
GENRE Action, strategy, sport
CURRENTLY PLAYING AvP2, RTCW and Medal Of Honor
Large countries bullying smaller countries into submission

ANTHONY HOLDEN
GENRE FPS, action/adventure, arcade
CURRENTLY PLAYING Medal of Honor and Mafia Beta
Winning presidential elections

RHIANNA PRATCHETT
GENRE RPG, RTS, adventure
CURRENTLY PLAYING Neocron
Mortuary attendants

JAMES LYON
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CURRENTLY PLAYING Indiana Jones And The Infernal Machine
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STEVE HILL
GENRE Management, sport, arcade
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CHRIS ANDERSON
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MEDAL OF HONOR:

Z PCZONE CLASSIC

Life's a beach and then you die, again and again and again. And *Richie Shoemaker*'s loving every goddam minute of it

So there you are, crammed into a tin can landing craft with a dozen other GIs. Few, if any, will live to see another day. Your boat lurches over the slate-grey dunes of the English Channel, countless others alongside it, diesel engines choking through the waves towards the beach; pocked with craters like waiting graves, each guarded by skeletons of rusting metal and rotting wood.

Then the storm begins, sea erupting with artillery fire as you hear the distant sound of whizzing shells decreasing in pitch as they come ever closer. Louder, one screams nearer, destined to claim one of the hundreds of small tightly-packed boats, the one alongside yours, throwing bodies and twisted metal into the air.

Like doom-laden warnings, columns of water signpost the way and as they fall away into the incessant mist the beach crawls ever closer, breaking waves calmly lapping the landing obstacles, dead bodies among them. As the boat reaches its final destination and lodges into the shore, on cue the machine guns open up, raking the water and pinging off the hull as quietly as rain on a window. A second later the ramp falls into the foam, the dead bodies of those once safe behind it helping it on its way.

So begins Omaha Beach, the third mission of *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault*, the interactive equivalent of *Saving Private*

ALLIED ASSAULT

Ryan's first half-hour and one of the most frustrating, intense and replayable missions ever devised for an action game: Frustrating because you will die seven thousand million times while playing it, replayable because you won't care, and intense because despite the fact there is no one to shoot at for most of it, there is so much going on everywhere you really do feel part of what's going

on around you. As you dart between the obstacles on D-Day's most infamous beach, you'll see soldiers being gunned down by

❝ You will die seven thousand million times while playing it, but you won't care ❞

heavy machine-gun fire, explosions ripping through entire squads and countless dozens of troops wading waist-deep

through the water to their eventual deaths. You'll hear officers urging the others on, wounded men screaming for medical attention and even one poor soul with his head in his hands muttering to himself, no

doubt having blown a sizable portion of his chocolate rations into his urine-soaked underpants. Needless to say, never have I had to replay a level so many times without wanting to put my fist through the screen.

You'll realise long before landing in Normandy however that *Allied Assault* is far from being a one-trick pony. The

Omaha Beach mission, while by some degree the most spectacular of the lot, certainly isn't the best, not if you were to judge it on how quietly you can sneak around or how quickly you can aim and shoot. Getting from your landing craft to the cover of a bunker requires more good fortune than judgement, which is ➡

⬆ "Come on chaps, cheer up. How about we sing a song?"

⬆ "Last one out's a big sissy poofter."
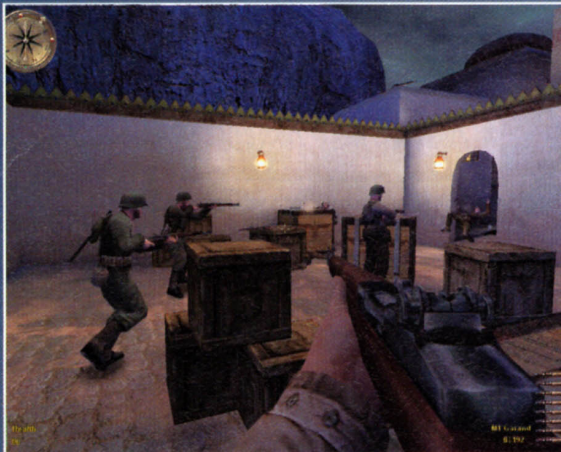
⬆ They're a bit keen this lot. It might be their undoing.

precisely what makes it such a refreshing change. But we're getting ahead of ourselves.

ACT SURPRISED

Medal Of Honor tricks you a little at first. As part of a crack unit of US Rangers, you begin the game in the back one of two trucks on your way to infiltrate a German base in North Africa in preparation for the mini D-Day assault known as Operation Torch. So you're sitting there with your digital buddies, thinking to yourself how very Half-Life this all is, expecting to be taken for a ten-minute drive across the desert, perhaps even see a few credits float across the screen or Gordon Freeman sneak into a cave, when all of a sudden the truck behind goes boom and you're running into a German camp outnumbered and without much in the way of surprise on your side. From that moment on Allied Assault is constantly throwing spanners into your best-laid plans, little twists in the action that help keep you on your toes despite being safe in the knowledge that whatever happens, the good guys win the war. Whether you are sneaking around barrels or charging through a ruined village, you come to realise that absolutely anything can happen. Well, not anything. No pizza delivery boys turn up for instance, that would be silly, but you may be creeping through a rain-soaked village clearing the way of snipers, when all of a sudden you bump into a lost group of GIs pinned down by a Tiger tank. In another mission you are sent to blow up a field of anti-aircraft guns, then thinking you've finished and deserving of a commendation, dozens of stormtroopers come bounding through the hedges and take residence behind sandbags or lay down out of sight in a crater.

The surprises don't stop there. Early on you'll find yourself in the back of a Jeep firing at everything that moves and even anything that doesn't. Then there is the tank you'll find yourself driving around later on in the game. The surprise here isn't that you get to drive a tank – you can do that in dozens of games, more astonishing is just how damned easy it is to control the thing and again how it neatly breaks up the pace of the game.

Even greater successes have been made elsewhere when it comes to the interface. Throwing grenades has never been easier since pressing the secondary fire button initiates a short throw. Crouching and sneaking around can be set to toggle rather than having to strain to keep the keys pressed down, and considering the greater level of realism in the game as a whole, there are less keys to master than in Wolfenstein. As in so many other areas of the game, the interface and the movement is spot on – realistic, yet intuitive.

⬆ The compass shows you the direction to your next objective.

SECOND OPINION

Dave Woods prefers the real deal

It's funny isn't it? We've been banging on about Wolfenstein for the past 12 months and when it finally arrives it's completely overshadowed by another WW2 shooter. MoH is different. It's realistic (without ever being unplayable) rock-hard (in places) and the best shooter I've played to date (and I've played them all). In my opinion, if you're going to put a shooter in a real-world environment it's got to play realistically and this is where Wolfenstein falls down, although there will be some who prefer the arcade attributes of id's excellent old-skool shooter. The giveaway is that for the past couple of weeks the office has been reverberating to the multiplayer sounds of MoH – Wolfenstein hasn't had a look-in. Unlike Martin, I wasn't convinced that AvP2 eclipsed Half-Life, and I'm glad now that I hedged my bets. There is a new leader in the FPS stakes and there's not a chest-burster in sight.

↑ "Schnapp!"

↑ Unlike *Wolfenstein*, you actually get to explore a U-boat.

↑ Much as I'd like to report I took this position single-handed, I was in fact cowering in the bushes at the time.

PUTATO MASHERS

There are three reasons why *Half-Life* is still a great single-player game; It had a great story, it was full of surprises and singularly raised the standard of AI far above its contemporaries. On those first two counts, *Allied Assault* easily makes the grade and in some cases raises the bar still higher. There are of course no extraterrestrial monsters to contend with, nor will you have to worry about timing your jumps to insane levels of perfection or flicking the right switch, but to make up for such things *Allied Assault* features hundreds of Nazi soldiers to kill. And, like *Half-Life*'s legendary adversaries, they are a tough bunch of hombres, even early on.

man, but if there is another way to avoid being blown to bits, they'd rather not run into your line of fire if they can at all help it. They throw grenades of their own course (and difficult to see they are too), but it's the fact that the enemy has a less than perfect aim that adds to the experience, although as you would expect, a German sniper is rather handy with his particular weapon of choice. The only completely predictable enemies are the guard dogs, which is fair enough.

But the AI isn't completely whizzer and chips. The most telling disability that the enemy seems to be afflicted with is poor hearing. In a great deal of cases the Germans will be reluctant to empty the barracks unless

> **Whether you are sneaking around barrels or charging through a ruined village, you realise that anything can happen here**

The difference here is that there is no distinction between the German soldiers, be they in Afrika Corps garb or dressed in the imposing black of an SS Stormtrooper. Whereas in *Half-Life* you knew by looking at your enemy what strategy they would employ to try and eliminate you (a Marine would, for instance, lob a grenade your way before running to find his chums), here they feel much more rounded. If there is cover to hide behind, the guards will use it. Moreover, if he is being pinned down behind a wooden crate, a German soldier would rather fire blindly in your general direction than poke his head up for you to put a hole in it.

Chuck a grenade into a room and of course the enemy will run screaming like a girl who's just seen her first picture of a naked

someone sounds the alarm and the sound of gunfire nearby – especially echoing indoor for some inexplicable reason – seems not to trouble those who might otherwise be polishing their jackboots. On those missions later on however where stealth is required, or where you might have to don a German uniform, when the alarm is eventually pulled the Hun practically come out of the woodwork. In those cases it really becomes a tense battle, as you find yourself cornered and a grenade floats into the room.

FRIENDLY FIRE

While most of the time you'll be fighting alone through *Medal Of Honor*'s 20-odd levels, countless times you'll have Allies to fight with you. Most of the time they

will be regular soldiers, but that's not to say they are of the standard of the usual conscripts to this type of game. If anything, the AI of your allies is more impressive than your enemy's, especially since you can't order them around. Aim your weapon at a door and your new friend will move around you and ready his weapon to cover the same area. Even better is that even in tight corridors, your allies rarely get in the way if you want to make a fast exit and if you run off they will happily follow you at a safe distance. In one level I was stupid enough to run into open space overlooked by snipers. Rather than follow blindly my squad held back, picking their way through the relative safety of the rubble rather than take my crackbrained route. Obviously I expired before they did. On another occasion I

found myself pinned down by a machine-gun nest: low on health I was trying to crawl into the trees for some cover when my fearless companion charged forward and did the business. I was of course eternally grateful and lent him the use of my sister.

It goes without saying of course that you can make use of the heavy machine guns, and though it would have been rather enjoyable to get behind the anti-aircraft guns and take a pop at a few planes, the weapons in the game are for the most part well implemented. The pistols both look and feel rather pathetic compared to *Wolfenstein*'s, but the standard-issue rifles are fantastic. I don't want to appear all fetishistic about this, but my personal favourite is the US M1 Garand, supposedly the first combat semi-automatic rifle and

far superior to the German equivalent. Of course, all the weapons are modelled on real-life counterparts and extend to include the trusty Thompson submachine gun, MP40, Springfield sniper rifle, the bazooka and the hefty Browning Automatic. Rather than running around picking up every weapon in the game until by the end you have more butts slapping around your thighs than Lisa Riley, you are handed out weapons depending on the mission at hand, occasionally 'chancing' across the odd Panzershreck lying against a trench wall. Additionally you'll be rifling corpses for ammo and health kits rather than scanning for secret rooms filled with treasure, and again it all helps feed the realism while keeping the arcade feel. One nice touch is that rather than issue you with a →

SOUND JUDGEMENT

Alive with sound and music

Music is so bad in most games these days that to my eternal shame I turned it off before I even started the playing the game. – you know how it is. Thankfully I realised the error of my ways before too long and found the music suitably atmospheric, even if the main theme is a little too similar to *Deep Space Nine*. I left it looping quite happily for a good few hours. But I turned it off again, simply because I much preferred the ambient sounds which are excellent, from the distant crackle of gunfire and birds singing to lapping water and driving rain. Often you will hear something and wonder if something is moving nearby, only to find you are tracking a battle raging miles away. But it's the in-level sounds that are the best; all the weapons and vehicles are of a typical high standard and though we can't vouch for their authenticity we did watch *Saving Private Ryan* a couple of times. It may well be that the developers sampled the weapons (since Spielberg is also behind the *Medal Of Honor* franchise). Walking across different surfaces yields realistic sound effects, such as crunching snow, but the icing on the cake is the voice-acting. Rather than use camp German accents speaking English (à la *Wolfenstein*), here you get the real 'donner und blitzen' stuff, each line delivered to Hollywood standards. The same is true of course with the American voices, which we're grateful to point out, are less pronounced and gung ho than you would expect.

⬆ Explosions will throw sand and bodies into the air.

⬆ From the ambient sounds to the voices, the audio is superb.

knife, you can pistol-whip your enemies. It's of course of little use unless you're sneaking around, but again different to most games.

Additionally German guards will try and club you with their rifle butts and rather damaging to your health it is too.

THE LOOK OF LEISE

Graphically *Medal Of Honor* is stunning. Though rather spartan on the interiors of buildings, there is plenty of detail all over the place, with plans and documents left on desks for example, or glasses on shelves and suchlike. Head to head with that other *Quake III*-powered World War II game, we have to admit *Wolfenstein* just about shades it, but it's a close-run thing. There are some beautiful touches that *Wolfenstein* could do with though; the amazing explosions when shells hit the ground with earth thrown into the air, being one. Best of all is the whiteout effect when you're picked out by a searchlight, look into the sun, or run in front of a vehicle at night. OK, so it's no big shakes, but it adds a little to the atmosphere.

There are other areas *Medal Of Honor* excels in: The vehicles – from jeeps and half-tracks to tanks and fighter planes – are all far more convincing than in *Wolfenstein*, and though *Wolf*'s characters are more varied and detailed in the way they look and move, *Medal Of Honor*'s rural locales are a great deal more enjoyable to explore than *Wolf*'s pointy outdoor levels.

Though *Allied Assault*'s numerous characters all seem to have the same hamster-faced looks, that doesn't mean they're not worthy of closer examination. It's not something you'll notice at first, but under heavy fire troops will look visibly afraid, and if you manage to surprise a guard before putting a bullet in his head, you'll see the fear in his eyes as it dawns on him that

he is about to become your latest victim.

I may be asking too much at this late stage, but this is something that perhaps the developers could have taken further. Going back to the D-Day mission – if you turn around in the boat, you'll notice how shit-scared the guy behind you is, so much so that you really do feel sorry for him. While it's an unexpected bonus to be able to enjoy such emotional attachment to a computer game character in a game such as this (minimal though it is), the developers could've made more of this by having that same guy be part of your team in a previous mission. Then when he eventually has his arms torn off by a random shell, you'll be even more wracked with guilt that you couldn't have done

⬆ 'I wouldn't go in there, someone's left a tea bag.'

⬆ 'That's right Mr Bund, you are going to die.'
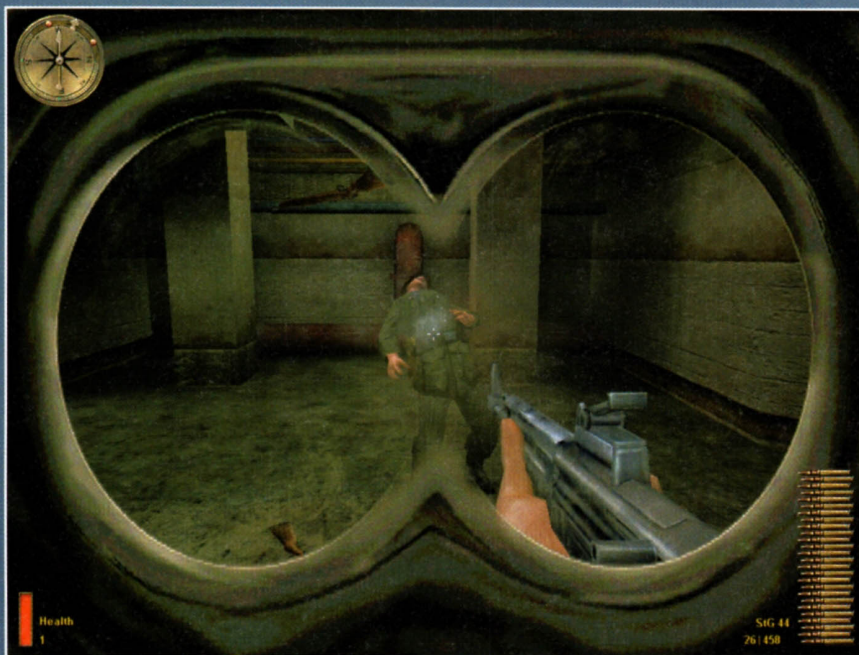
⊕ The gas mask is a laugh to run around in.

⊕ You can't drive the Jeep, but check out the mounted machine gun.
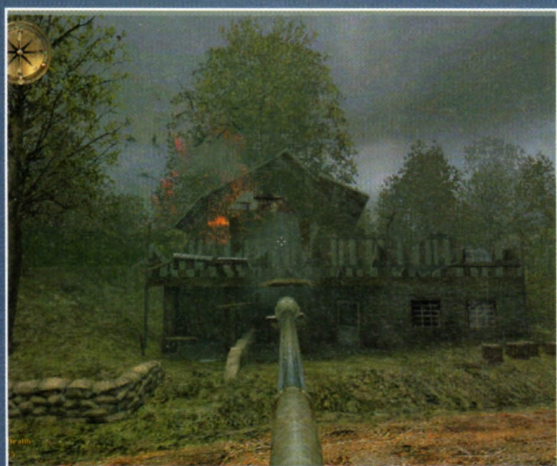
⊕ Driving the tank is one of the most fun levels in the game.

anything to save him. Ah well, maybe next time.

ENEMY AT THE GATES

If there are any other faults then they are mercifully few. Cut-scenes are almost non-existent - though you do get the odd CG mission briefing. The intro movie is pretty dire as well. But the biggest disappointment by far is that the game lacks a final mission to compare with Omaha Beach. Like me, I'm sure that it's the Omaha Beach mission you'll be most looking forward to reaching, and after it's completed you'll understandably be hoping for something similarly epic for the finale. It would be unfair to say that *Medal Of Honor* empties its magazine too early, but it's unfortunate that like *Wolfenstein* and *Half-Life* before it, the final escapade is something of a letdown, not in this case because it's a particularly poor mission, but because the game comes to

rather an abrupt end without much warning. All you want to do after finishing the game is play more. A mission pack is of course in the works, but for me it can't come soon enough.

Thankfully the multiplayer game more than makes up for the protracted wait we'll have to endure. As per usual, you get deathmatch, team deathmatch and objective-based games. We have to say the two deathmatch modes are pretty darned good, even with just two people. Of course, if there are only a couple of players then don't expect all-guns blazing fragfests: *Enemy at the Gates*-style sniping is the order of the day here, and on those levels set across burnt out villages, they can be anxious and maddening affairs even though scores are unlikely to reach double figures. Unlike the single-player game you can lean side to side (and others can see you lean as well), and you can only have

one main weapon to complement your standard-issue sidearm, adding an almost class-based feel to the proceedings.

Though not quite as heavily focused on teamplay as *Wolfenstein*'s multiplayer game, *Allied Assault*'s objective-based games are no less exciting. The maps are far more open as a rule, and the Omaha Beach multiplayer game certainly gives its *Wolfenstein* equivalent a run for its money. We actually prefer *Allied Assault*'s multiplayer game, just because it's easier to get to grips with since it's not wildly different to the way the single-player campaign works. No doubt in time some bright spark will add driveable vehicles to create a *Tribes*-like experience and we rather hope that they will. For now though, we are more than happy that we have a team-based lunchtime experience to rival *Counter-Strike*.

UNCONDITIONAL SURRENDER

Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault has now set the new standard by which future action games will be judged. What it lacks in puzzle-solving and originality it more than makes up for in pace and action, and while most other developers have been trying to better *Half-Life* by emulating it, the developers of *Allied Assault* have instead taken inspiration from outside the confines of PC gaming. They have instead focused the action on the successes of the new breed of console-styled shooters like *Halo*, and even the ground-breaking

achievements of *Medal Of Honor* on the humble PlayStation.

It is a stunning and invigorating experience, easily the best first-person action game since *Half-Life* and for me personally, a better all-round game than Valve's genre-defining debut. We said in our 2002 preview round-up last issue that this year there would be a game to knock *Half-Life* from its lofty mount – I just didn't think it would be surpassed so early on. If you

> **"You'll notice how shit-scared the guy behind you is, so much so that you really do feel sorry for him "**

like, for your money you get the best bits of *Half-Life*, *Opposing Force* and *Counter-Strike* in one easy-to-use package, in a game that is far superior graphically and one that almost everyone will be able to relate to.

But just as movies can't be judged by their special effects, so too it is the good rather than the great games that are valued for their graphics, story or AI. In this respect, while you can forever debate the worth of *Medal Of*

Honor's various features, what you'll leave the game with are treasured memories of classic moments. In *Half-Life* it might have been seeing a scientist fall down a lift shaft, or the time you took down your first helicopter. In *Medal Of Honor* it will be being chased unarmed by a pack of dogs through the snow, running from a falling building just bombed by your own planes, or trying to throw a grenade out of a window, only to see it hit the

frame and bounce back in front of the wardrobe, blow the door open and have a dead German soldier slump onto the floor. Moments like these occur in each and every level, and it is the mark of a truly exceptional game when you can recount them months afterwards. And you will, believe me. **PCZ**

IN PERSPECTIVE

Controversially, we think *Medal Of Honor* is the best example of first-person action on PC. Had it arrived in December, it would have been the leading contender for Game Of The Year. If you're into WWII action make *Wolfenstein* your second choice, otherwise stick with *Half-Life*.

Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault
▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬

Return To Castle Wolfenstein
▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬

Half-Life
▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬

Hidden & Dangerous
▬▬▬▬▬▬▬
▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬

TECH SPECS

MINIMUM SYSTEM Processor PII 450 **Memory** 64Mb RAM **ALSO REQUIRES** 16Mb 3D accelerator with OpenGL support, 500Mb hard drive space **WE SAY** 600 MHz CPU, 128 Mb RAM plus a 16Mb 3D card at least

PCZVERDICT

⊕ **UPPERS** Exceptional mission design • Endlessly replayable • Well-scripted and very clever AI • Keeps you on your toes • Some great graphical touches • Intuitive controls that just feel right • Unrivalled voice acting

⊝ **DOWNERS** Lacks a big finale • *Wolfenstein* generally looks better • All guns and no puzzles

94 Superbly designed and one of the most polished PC games in years

RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN

★ £39.99 • Activision • Out now

Medal Of Honor is officially great, but how does Wolfenstein stack up against it, and that other game… Richie Shoemaker goes behind the lines

PCZONE AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE

Hopefully you'll be reading through our reviews this month in sequence. At the least I hope you've read the *Medal Of Honor* review before you came here. It's important because although both games are first-person shooters set during World War II and have the *Quake III Team Arena* engine chugging behind them, they're poles apart in one aspect. At the end of the previous page I was talking about moments, and how *Medal Of Honor* is filled with memorable scenes. *Return To Castle Wolfenstein* by comparison has few classic moments. Sneaking

over-the-top weapons and monsters and a damn fine multiplayer addition. But, apart from the clever storyline, it doesn't do anything new apart from look neat. Simply put, *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault* is a superior game in almost every way. That is not simply an opinion, that is a fact.

But that's not to say *Return To Castle Wolfenstein* doesn't put up a brave fight: Graphically, it makes hitherto unrealised use of the *Quake III Team Arena* engine, characters are as detailed as any on show in any other game (even *Medal Of Honor*) and the range of environments, from within Nazi Germany's greatest fictional stronghold, to Norwegian sub pens and Bavarian villages, are diverse and packed with detail.

It's almost a shame you can't cease hostilities, pick up a guide book and visit the wartime locales

Burn, baby, burn.

'I'm really sorry, I should have knocked.'

❝**As much as it is a 21st century game, its gameplay roots draw nourishment from a far more simple age**❞

around the village killing generals is fun, as is the adventure in the Chateaux afterwards. The first encounter with the undead is a frightening experience too, but equally there is the frustration of coming across the game's 'boss' creatures to temper these – enemies of no intelligence from, which you must run, dodge and expel practically every clip of ammunition to eradicate. Don't get me wrong; *Return To Castle Wolfenstein* is an excellent game; a fantastic old-skool shooter with a high body count, great graphics,

at your leisure, perhaps even stop off at a café for a pastry and a double decaf latte along the way.

BACK TO THE OLD HOUSE
Fortunately for the sake of gameplay, *Return To Castle Wolfenstein* is less a stroll around sites of historical interest and more to do with killing germans, be they alive or undead. For those with an interest in such things, Castle Wolfenstein abounds with its own historical sense of importance, purely because in 1992 it was the setting for what is

now the first ever first-person shooter, *Wolfenstein 3D* – the game that started this whole kill-crazy genre off in the first place. In the years since id's genre-defining game, things moved on quite considerably and though we look through the same tired eyes, the

Castle is unrecognisable from the one we visited nearly a decade ago, the renovations undertaken by Gray Matter have paid off.

It's under the shine of the graphics that *Wolfenstein* betrays its influence; outdoor sneaking around and AI reminiscent of

Project IGI, desiccated undead corpses and swooping corporeal skulls from *Raiders Of The Lost Ark* and *Frankenstein* cyborg killing machines. But it's from *Half-Life* that *Wolfenstein* takes the stars of its cast, redressing *Half-Life*'s relentless marines in

he smoke effects
e fantastic.

182

84   43   20

Not the most effective
weapon, but a real looker
all the same.

34   0   276

The cut scenes early on set the
scene, as you find yourself with a
rare opportunity to escape.

espite evidence to the contrary,
hese brutes can leap like gazelles.
pparently they can put away a
ew pints as well.

"Depending on your preference, Wolfenstein's stealth-based missions will either be a chore or a joy"

BLACK FOREST CHATEAUX

We wouldn't be giving much away if we said the story involved secret Nazi experiments into resurrecting the undead and plans to create an army of cyborg zombie monsters, all of which you may or may not eventually put a stop to. As the basis of an action game it's a damn good story, combining WWII realism and survival horror fantasy, with you as all-terrain hero B.J. Blazkowicz uncovering secret documents, tracking down generals and generally causing havoc behind the lines. Unfortunately over the seven episodes, the story is dragged out so much that if it wasn't for the variety in the game's environments and wonderful cut-scenes, it would be all too easy to lose interest and head home.

There are plenty of quality moments for sure, but they are scattered inconsistently early and later on, leaving the middle bit empty of purpose. Worse still is you are given objectives before each mission and then you carry them out, which is fine, but there are few surprises to be found; no sudden change of plan that might see you backtracking through a horde of pursuers or finding a way around a recently collapsed tunnel. Saying that, it would take an idiot to get lost in *Wolf's* more compact levels and on those missions where stealth has gone out the window, the game rarely lets up in its furious pace.

Depending on your preference, *Wolfenstein's* stealth-based missions will either be a chore or a joy. In terms of balance

Wolfenstein is a game of extremes; for three quarters of it you'll be hopping around all guns blazing, the rest you'll be hunkering down behind barrels, sniping sentries and stabbing generals between the shoulder blades – there's no real middle ground here. But as a pause in the relentless action, the stealth missions do help to break things up and towards the end where you'll be assassinating a quartet of officers, stealth and action are combined superbly well as you burst into the chateaux before the final showdown.

CRY WOLFENSTEIN

What certainly lets the game down is the AI. While soldiers will run for cover to reload, occasionally throw back the odd grenade (since they don't seem to have any of their own), or hold back in numbers for you to take them on, they soon become easy to suss out. Though the enemy has an overly keen eye, most would appear to be hard of hearing, with soldiers in the next room oblivious to gunfire erupting around them. But it's these human opponents that are the most exciting to take on and compared to *Half-Life* there are loads of them. It's to the credit of the level designers also that just the right amounts of ammo and weapons are left lying around to add to the challenge.

The more exotic creatures especially are far too easy to figure out; their strength only being the ridiculous number of bullets they can soak up and the ordinance that they deal out. In

German paratrooper uniforms and outfitting it's acrobatic Black Ops in the leather cat suits and stilettos of the all-female SS Paranormal Division.

But plagiarism is no bad thing in this case. For one, *Half-Life* owes its existence to *Wolfenstein 3D*, a debt that has simply been called in. For another, *Return To Castle Wolfenstein* is just so much fun that you soon forget about the similarities and the deficiencies.

As much as it is a 21st century game, its gameplay roots draw nourishment from a more simple age, where you fight alone against automatons, finding hidden areas and weapons stashes and killing anything that gets in your way. New and old have been combined to great effect, although with the over the top WWII setting, the game feels more like a homage to *Allo' Allo'* than it does, say, *Band Of Brothers*.

No, it's a panzerfaust apparently.
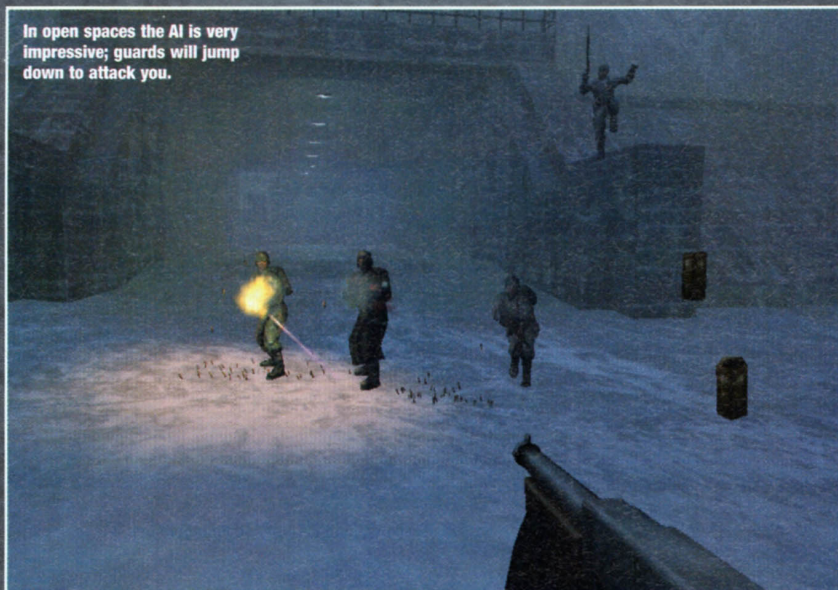
In open spaces the AI is very impressive; guards will jump down to attack you.

SEPARATED AT BIRTH

We shall say zis only once....

Fans of BBC sitcom 'Allo 'Allo will recognise a couple of faces from the show turning up in *Wolfenstein*; Herr Flick seems to have aged a bit to play uber-baddie Deathshead, while affable Helga Geerhart has undergone cosmetic enhancement as an army of leather-clad SS ladies. If anyone can spot any other similarities (apart from B.J. Blazkowicz's uncanny resemblance to my mate Joel), feel free to send them in.

Deathshead   Herr Flick

Helga   Nazi dominatrix

Everyone seems to have a fine set of gnashers, you can usually spot guards at night by the gleam of their pearly whites.

essence the Nazi 'Super Soldiers' and legless X-Creatures are little more than better-looking versions of the lumbering and dim-witted boss creatures from *Doom*, where so long as you have enough firepower and keep moving, you'll dispatch with ease. Needless to say, after nearly 20 hours of gameplay, the very last of your enemies is so easy to eliminate it's a wonder he was left to last. It's a shame that last single-player experience will leave you feeling both relieved and somewhat cheated.

FIRING SQUAD

Of course *Wolfenstein* wouldn't be much of a first-person shooter without weapons and in this area there are plenty of ways to put holes in the enemy and you even get a couple of hand-guns that serve a useful purpose once you've got your hands on more lethal ordinance. All beautifully

CAN WE KICK IT?

Wolfenstein puts the boot in

Borrowed from *Duke Nukem 3D*, *Wolfenstein* allows you to use your size twelves to smash radio equipment and kick in doors, and if you bind it to your right mouse button, it becomes easy to burst into rooms and deal instant death to hordes of screaming Nazis. Be careful though if you want to surprise your enemies, if they hear you kicking they'll be ready and may even run off and set off the alarms.

modelled, it's the machine guns that will be most used, the best of which is the US Thompson, ammo for which is hard to come by. By far the most useful weapon however is the german Paratrooper rifle, which can lay most soldiers with two shots and comes complete with handy scope. Add to that two sniper rifles, one of which is silenced, and later on the panzerfaust and two experimental weapons. As a

whole, they each have a purpose, and you'll be switching between them all in each level. But the star of the show graphically is the flame thrower, which apart from filling rooms with deadly plumes of flame, looks by far the best weapon of it's kind to date. Unfortunately it's only really useful against the undead, you only need a quick squirt to swiftly send them back from whence they came.

I AM AN OINTMENT

Rather than include deathmatch levels, *Wolfenstein*'s multiplayer game is all about teamplay. Similar in scope to the popular *Half-Life* mode Day Of Defeat and infinitely better looking, *Wolfenstein* offers a range of class-based mission, with Allies taking on Germans without a boss creature or zombie in sight.

Three multiplayer game modes are available; Objective, Stopwatch and Checkpoint. If you've played the multiplayer test that was released a couple of months back you'll already have had a taste of objective-based games, which involve one team blowing through doors, stealing documents and destroying radar towers,

You can shoot out the searchlights, but the Germans don't seem to mind

The lip-synching is amazing.

Sometimes you just have to get up close and personal.

SECOND OPINION

Martin Korda joins the war effort

I wanted to love RTCW, I really did, as I was a huge fan of the original. I wanted to be able to cradle it to my bosom and look at it with heartfelt glances of adoration. But I can't. That's not to say it's not good, it's just not nearly as great as I'd hoped or was led to believe it would be. The early levels left me monumentally un-gripped, while I ran around linear corridors kicking open doors with a bandy leg and shooting an endless stream of babbling Nazis with a dull collection of weaponry. Thankfully, things do pick up considerably later on, with some great set pieces and superb moments of tension lifting the excitement to heart-popping proportions. But unfortunately it's never consistently good, with high points coming more as sporadic waves than a consistent flow. Yes, it does look great, some of the AI is excellent, (enemies strafe, take cover, run away and kick grenades back at you… sometimes), and once it finally gets going, the story is fairly entertaining, but for some reason the whole experience fails to satisfy in the way that it promises to. Thankfully though, the multiplayer games are superb, and will probably be the one aspect of the game which prolongs its shelf life. It could have been a Classic, I wanted it to be a Classic for the sake of the FPS genre. Sadly it's not, but despite the criticisms, it's still one of the best scary FPSs out there.

Those floating skulls are actually rather scary.

weaknesses and they work well together, with squads more than happy to flock around lifesaving medics.

In terms of the soldiers and the weapons available, things are much more real here than in the single-player game and you would be forgiven for thinking it was created by a totally different developer – which it was.

finish. *Wolfenstein*'s animated and more varied opponents, especially later on, rely too heavily on fire as opposed to brainpower.

The story too is paced quite poorly and while the tension remains throughout, there are too many instances where you'll be playing a level and hoping for it to end so you get to the next.

Return To Castle Wolfenstein puts on an impressive show of strength through sheer firepower, but *Medal Of Honor* easily manages to outflank it, and deal the final blow. **PCZ**
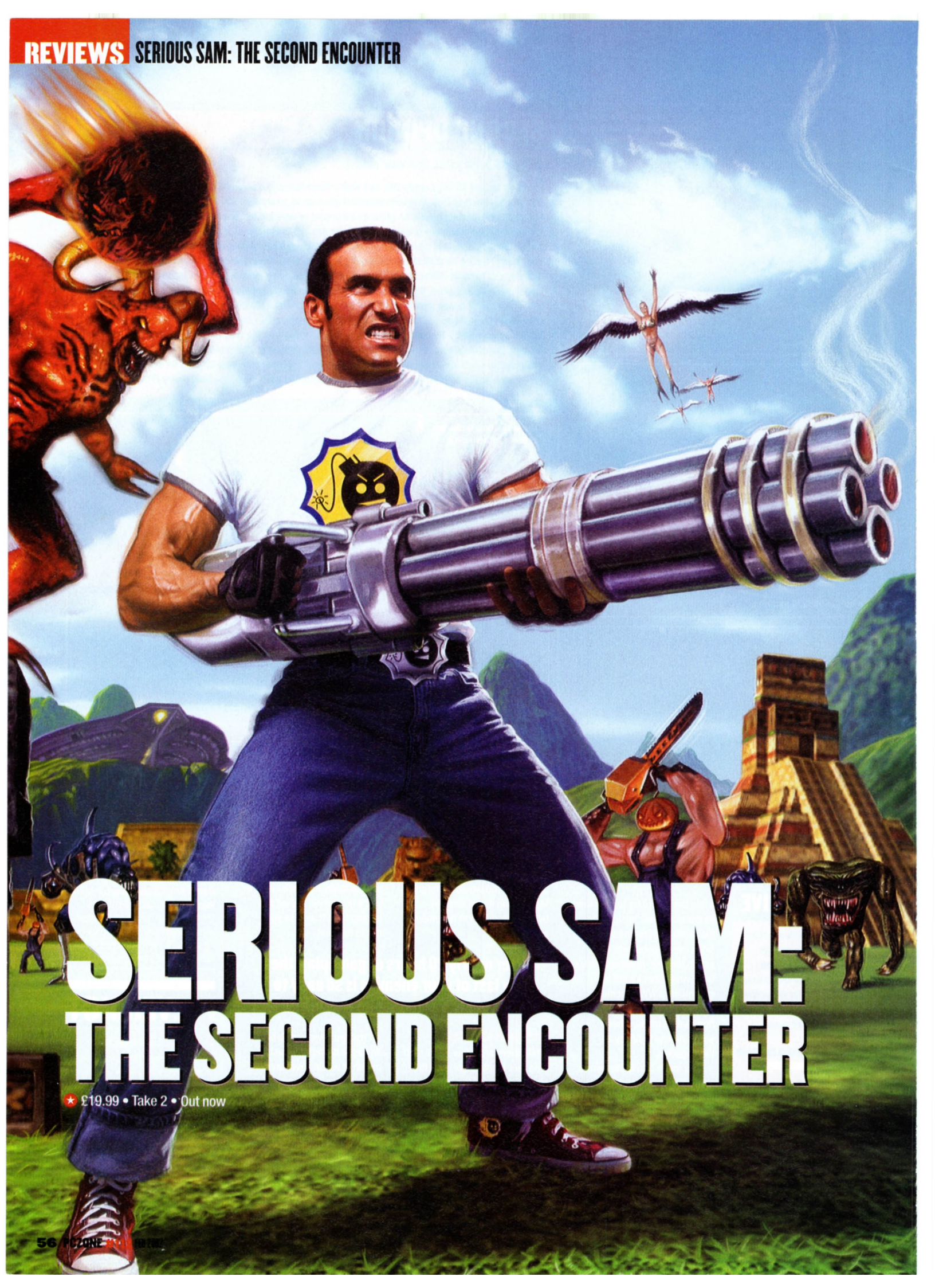
TECH SPECS

MINIMUM SYSTEM Processor PII-400 **Memory** 128MB **ALSO REQUIRES** 16MB video card and 1.2 GB hard drive space **WE SAY** Even a 1Ghz processor will stall if you don't have at least a GeForce 2-standard graphics card

INPERSPECTIVE

Wolfenstein is certainly one of the best FPSs of the year, but with Medal Of Honor soon to hit the shelves you'd do well to hold on to your cash for a bit. For FPS or WWII fans it's a must, but if you only buy one FPS, get Medal Of Honor

RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN

HALF-LIFE

RED FACTION

ALIENS VS PREDATOR 2

MEDAL OF HONOR: ALLIED ASSAULT

while the others try to stop them. Stopwatch mode basically is the same, with teams switching sides every round with the aim to beat the previous team's time, while Checkpoint is essentially a WWII-themed version of *Unreal Tournament*'s Domination mode, where your side has to bagsy all the flagpoles.

In a move of relative genius, most of the eight multiplayer maps are based around levels from the single-player game. The focus on teamplay dynamics is enhanced by the class system, where you choose to be a Soldier, Engineer, Medic or Lieutenant. Each class has its strengths and

66 **After nearly 20 hours of gameplay, the very last of your enemies is so easy to eliminate it's a wonder he was left to last** 99

WHO WON THE WAR?
While there are a few *ZONE* staff who feel *Wolfenstein* is on the short side, I'm of the opinion it's a couple of levels too long.

While I admit it looks the business indoors, it doesn't quite match *Medal Of Honor*'s lush outdoor levels, *Wolfenstein*'s level design is its greatest caveat and a predictable experience from start to

Had we reviewed *Return To Castle Wolfenstein* last month, it would have fared much better. As a sequel, it surpasses its originator, retains much of it's humour (though an appearance of Hitler himself would have been appreciated), and much of the game is damn good fun. But it certainly ain't no classic, despite the quality multiplayer game.

PCZVERDICT

UPPERS Impressive graphics • Action-packed • Tense, atmospheric and occasionally scary • Great team-based multiplayer game

DOWNERS Inconsistent and predictable • Drags on a bit • Not enough puzzles

88 Brilliant yet disappointing

SERIOUS SAM:
THE SECOND ENCOUNTER

★ £19.99 • Take 2 • Out now

He's serious, but he's not called Sam.
Martin Korda dives into the fray.

PC ZONE AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE

One of these days, someone will write a really good ending for a FPS. After all, you think you'd be entitled to some sort of fanfare-ridden, stunningly rendered ten minute cut-scene which generally tells you how great you are, as means of a reward for being so damn heroic. Wouldn't you? But ooooooh no, that's too much to ask, isn't it, developers? Hmmm? You lazy bastards. I mean once you've saved the world from inevitable doom, rescued the human race from a hideous, subjugated existence and limped home, propped up against your rocket launcher and having had your nose blown off by a stray fragment of alien skull, all you're generally given is a 'well done' and an ill-thought-out ending. If you're

EDITOR INTERVENTION

Wait a minute? You mean you want me to elaborate? Really? But I've told you pretty much everything there is to know. Like I said, it's a highly entertaining shooter, which is a slight improvement over the last game. What more is there to say? It looks nice. It's got great music… errr… etcetera. How about I just fill the rest of the space up with a self-indulgent rant about the games industry, a cynical train of thought about lack of originality and the bleakness of a society consumed by virtual worlds in a bid to escape its own. No? Shit. OK, here goes then…

IN DETAIL

Lets start with the *Serious* engine then, which – and let's be honest here – is what makes this game what it is. What sets it apart from the myriad of other linear shooters out there is that you're rarely pitted against just a handful of opponents. That's because the *Serious* engine doesn't just churn out stunning

⊕ And smile for the camera. Work it baby, work it.

> **The *Serious* engine fills the landscape with legions of enemies who incessantly attack you until you or they are dead**

lucky. No surprise then that that's exactly what you're given when you stagger your way through to the end of *Serious Sam: The Second Encounter*. Thankfully though, the preceding action is anything but disappointing.

GETTING SERIOUS

Picking up from where Sam 'Serious' Stone, left off in his last, overly short outing, *Serious Sam: The Second Encounter* sees you dropped off in Egypt for a second dose of alien blasting. And that's about it as far as the plot goes. Which means all that's left for me to do now is to tell you about the action and that'll be me done. *Serious Sam: The Second Encounter* is a linear, fast-moving old school FPS in the mould of *Doom*. A superb engine is used to render massive open landscapes in which you engage dozens of rabid enemies at one time with an excellent selection of weaponry and power-ups, while solving a set of rudimentary puzzles. It provides excellent entertainment in small doses and is great fun in co-operative multiplayer. If you buy it, you'll enjoy it. That's it, I'm off home…

landscapes, it fills them to brimming point with legions of enemies who incessantly attack you until either you or they are dead. Scattered around these vistas are copious amounts of ammunition, health, armour and power-ups. It really is as simple

and basic as that, but it doesn't claim to be anything else. And that's precisely why it's so entertaining. Don't believe me? Well shut your eyes (but not now so that

you can't read this dummy) and picture this…

SEEING IS BELIEVING

You enter a valley that funnels down to an open field housing three majestic temples. The

sun beats down on you as you cautiously make your way forwards, growing ever more suspicious of a distant tremor that tarnishes the tranquillity that surrounds you. And then it

happens. Just a couple of specs at first. Distant dots posing no real threat. Slowly they begin to loom, gradually

metamorphosising into a sea of enemies. You quickly pick off a few with your sniper rifle. But there's too many of them. You unleash a spray of bullets from your mini-gun and watch the approaching foe disintegrate. But still it's not enough. You switch to your flamethrower as they close in, charring them to a pile of blackened ashes as they rake at your eyes and throat. In the clamour, they set fire to one another. Then suddenly, the unrelenting and predictable attacks are interrupted as two rockets thud into your back. Wheeling round, you see a wave of huge mechanised creatures (Bio-Mechanoids) stomping towards you. And you're down to just your shotgun. From above comes a squawk. You look, barely in time to wheel away from the aerial attacks of diving Harpies, dodging and weaving like a matador in a ringful of bulls, picking off enemies as they skid to a halt and lose their footing in a desperate attempt to turn and attack again, and cutting down every creature to finely chopped mince until once again you're left with nothing but the tranquillity of the scenery in front of you. I think you get the picture.

WHAT'S NEW?

So what's changed from the first *Serious Sam* then? Well, I'm not going to lie to you, not a huge amount. A handful of new enemies (chainsaw-wielding madmen with pumpkin heads; devils that fire flaming balls of destruction etc.); a few new

⊕ I'm red hot and ready for some luvin'.

↑ The action is non-stop, frenetic, arcade mayhem.

↑ "Here Benji. Whoooooo's a good boy then."

weapons and power-ups, the inclusion of simple puzzles, more multiplayer options and maps, reams of boring blurb about all of your enemies and about five or six times as much playing time. And that's about it. Puzzles usually come in the form of crude and easily negotiable traps, but while over-simplistic, they do add an amusing diversion from the action while remaining simple enough to prevent

frustration. Most of these involve a modest grasp of timing and co-ordination to negotiate, while puzzles often constitute little more than jumping around in order to hit some switches, which allow passage to the next part of the game. However, one of the best parts of *The Second Encounter* is its abundance of secrets which range from hidden areas rammed full of power-ups and ammo, to hilarious moments

NOVELTY TRAPS

It's not all just shoot, shoot, shoot you know

In a bid to make *Serious Sam: The Second Encounter* somewhat more interesting, developer Croteam has included several traps and set pieces to keep things interesting. Sadly, none of them are in the least bit original, although they should at least make you smile. Or failing that, smirk, you sour-faced joyless git. Anyhow, these include navigating gaping ravines by using giant fans to propel yourself up and forward to the other side (stolen from *Messiah*), wind tunnels which push you onto spikes (vaguely novel), timed runs through traps in order to avoid getting squashed, impaled, burnt (ripped off *Indiana Jones*) and a superb bouncing level where the floor acts as a trampoline for you and your enemies, so that you're all bouncing around shooting at each other (*Tomb Raider* movie anyone?). Still, it's all good for a laugh.

↑ Bouncy, bouncy, bouncy, bounce.

↑ Pest control services *Serious Sam* style.

when you think you've uncovered something good, only to be attacked by a swarm of miniature ankle-butting werebulls, bio-mechanoids disguised as trees or rocket-firing snowmen.

There's also been some effort to make *SS: The Second Encounter* slightly less mindless. The inclusion of a sniper rifle gives you an alternative to simply rushing towards an enemy while emptying your load. Surveying a landscape from behind a rock with the sniper scope can often be beneficial, as it allows you to pick off powerful creatures without ever having to engage them face on. The flamethrower is another excellent addition to your arsenal, as once you set fire to an enemy, they'll keep burning till they're dead and set fire to any other creatures they come into contact with. Finally, there's a chainsaw (pretty self-explanatory really) and

the Serious Bomb, which annihilates every creature in the vicinity, (useful, but hardly fun).

GAME OVER

And that really is about all there is to say. The inevitable and unfeasibly large end-of-level bosses will have you momentarily worried, and the higher difficulty levels are just about impossible. But the simple fact remains that *Serious Sam: The Second*

offer in terms of thrills, you'll probably find you soon get bored if you play for too long on your own. Most of the enemies are identical to the first game, and they're not nearly varied enough for a game as repetitive as this.

It's hard not to think that this is the game the first one should have been, and is more of a director's cut than a true follow-up. It's ideal for a daily half-hour blast, excellent fun when played

❝The simple fact remains that this is little more than a longer version of the original with a couple of new ideas❞

Encounter is little more than a longer version of the original with a couple of new ideas. And after you get over the novelty of having hundreds of enemies attacking you at once, and realise that that's fundamentally all the game has to

co-operatively and the frenetic action and the sheer scope of the battles are unparalleled by any other FPS. We've also been assured that it's going to ship for a mere £19.99 (after the last-minute price hike debacle of the

⬆ "OK, I give up. Why do they call you pumkin head?"

⬆ "No, I'm not in the least bit pleased to see you."

⬆ This is one of several new enemy types you'll come across.

⬆ "Daaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaad."

STUPID HEROES

There ain't no hero like a Take 2 hero

Take 2 is starting to build quite a sizeable collection of smart-arsed, idiotically named heroes with an annoying habit of spewing out glib one-liners which are less funny than a Bob Monkhouse after-dinner speech. So far we've had Duke Nukem, Max Payne and Serious Sam, but what will be next? How about a stooped-over, shuffling old pensioner with a walking-stick shotgun called Minimum Pleasure, who gets confused in a New York minute by getting on the wrong bus, and ends up wandering into the badlands while looking for his house? The action would be in real time, with Minimum permanently trapped in bullet time to simulate his arthritic movements and non-existent reactions. During random points of the game, his gammy knees would sporadically give way, allowing him to pull off stunning diving shots seconds before he hits the floor, breaks his hip and is told he has to wait a year for an operation. The action would be interspersed with a stream of unfunny one-liners which Minimum would bellow in a half-deaf stupor, including: "No respect these young 'uns", "Colostomy!", "I could do with a sit-down", "Mustn't grumble" and, "Oooooh yes, that's a lovely cup of tea thank you Mildred." Then again, perhaps not.

INPERSPECTIVE

If you read this magazine from cover to cover, you'll already have come across two far superior FPSs in the form of *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault* and *Return To Castle Wolfenstein*. *Alien vs Predator 2* and *Half-Life: Generations* are also must-buys for any FPS fan. However, none of these offer frenetic arcade-like battles against huge amounts of enemies. The only other game that does is the prequel to this one, now available for less than a tenner.

Serious Sam: The Second Encounter	▬▬▬▬▬▬▬
Serious Sam	▬▬▬▬▬▬
Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault	▬▬▬▬▬▬▬
Aliens Vs Predator 2	▬▬▬▬▬
Half-Life: Generations	▬▬▬▬▬
Return To Castle Wolfenstein	▬▬▬▬▬▬

previous game we asked for a cast iron guarantee), and you can't say fairer than that. Buy it, enjoy it, but whatever you do, don't expect anything ground-breaking or you'll end up sorely disappointed, and I don't just mean with the ending. **PCZ**

TECH SPECS

MINIMUM SYSTEM Processor PII 300 **Memory** 64Mb RAM **ALSO REQUIRES** 3D card **WE SAY** PIII 500, 128Mb RAM and a 32Mb graphics card

PCZVERDICT

⬆ **UPPERS** Huge battles • Frenetic action • Superb multiplayer options • Great music • Amusing moments • Much longer than the first game

⬇ **DOWNERS** Too linear • Too much like the last one • Too repetitive • Quickly loses its novelty

83 *Serious Sam*: the **Director's Cut**

AN ADRENALINE PUMPED
ACTION ADVENTURE

LUCASARTS ENTERTAINMENT COMPANY
PROUDLY PRESENTS:

STAR WARS™
STARFIGHTER™
on PC

PC CD ROM

MAT HOFFMAN'S PRO BMX

⭐ £29.99 • Activision • Out now

Motocross expert *Steve Hill* attempts to get his thrills on the bicycle version

They may be icons of the '70s and '80s respectively, but the skateboard and the BMX bike have never enjoyed a greater profile than they do today. With 200 channels of crap to fill, it's as easy as pie to stick a camera on some goatee-bearded mook as he flails about on a child's toy. Crank up the testosterone tunes and you've got yourself a programme. Videogames have definitely played a supporting role, and it's fair to say that the *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* series is nothing less then a phenomenon. The Hawkster may have been an idol to a generation of skate punks, but it's the game that brought him recognition among the unwashed masses.

HAWK THE SLAYER

Activision will be lucky to achieve a similar response with *Mat Hoffman's Pro BMX*, but they've followed a similar blueprint, beginning with the endorsement of a major exponent of the 'sport.' You'd probably step over him if he was face down in the gutter, but Mat "The Condor" Hoffman is no less than ten-time World Vert Champion. We have to admit that's news to us, as we were led to believe that ten-time World Champion Dave Mirra was the main man when reviewing his *Freestyle BMX* some months ago. We can only assume that 'vert' refers to the vertical ramps that proliferate the Hoffman game.

With that cleared up, it falls to us to inform you that *Mat Hoffman's Pro BMX* uses the *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* engine. Considering we are now on the third Hawk game, it's not exactly cutting edge, but it's perfectly functional, as evinced by the success of that game.

COVER VERSION

And that's all you really need to know. It might sound lazy to call this *Tony Hawk's* on two wheels, but that's exactly what it is. It's all there, the tricks, the combinations, the random button pressing, the excruciating bails (falls) and the accompanying splash of blood. The format is identical, but instead of collecting videos, you are now required to earn magazine covers

> ### "The music is an essential part of this type of game, and *Hoffman* doesn't disappoint"

to open up further levels, of which there are eight including both a sewerage plant and an abandoned tube station. If that's not enough, you can design your own levels, using the 3D real-time park editor.

The music is an essential part of this type of game, and *Hoffman* doesn't disappoint, offering an eclectic mix of old, new, angry and chilled. Contemporary hip-hop lurks alongside the likes of obscure '80s punk band, Bad Brains, and there's even an airing of the Stone Roses' classic *Fool's Gold*, the Grooverider mix, no less. It all adds up to a quality package, which probably won't change the world, but may well rock yours for a while. **PCZ**

PCZVERDICT

🔺 **UPPERS** Angry music • Addictive gameplay

🔻 **DOWNERS** Tricks can be fairly random • Causes blisters

70 BMX Bandits

The 736th episode of *Superman* really was one too many.

SCORE 35445 1:21 SPECIAL SUPERMAN 736

INPERSPECTIVE

The Hawk has really set the precedent for extreme sports, and the success of that game inevitably overshadows this one. But if you specifically want a BMX game, this is the one, comfortably beating Dave Mirra and his freestyle shenanigans.

Mat Hoffman's Pro BMX

Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2

Dave Mirra Freestyle BMX

⬆ All the stunts you'd expect to find are here.

SCORE 17905 0:49 SPECIAL TOOTHPICK 535
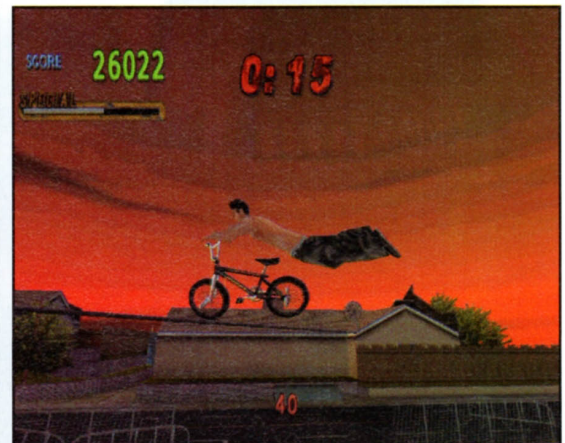
⬆ You're supposed to sit on it you fool.

SCORE 26022 0:15 40

COMANCHE 4

⭐ £29.99 • NovaLogic • Out now

Paul Presley embarks on a "very special review"

Does anyone know if Ernest Borgnine is still alive? No really. I mean, I think he is. He did a voiceover bit on an episode *of The Simpsons* a while back and I think I saw him in some cameo bit on a US sitcom recently (although that might have been Dom deLuise). But then again I'm also sure I saw his name pop up in one of those Oscar-night montages of the yearly dead. I dunno. Can anyone write in with confirmation either way?

Reason being, if he is dead then I'd like to dedicate the rest of this review to his memory – a first for any games magazine I think you'll agree. And the reason is that *Comanche 4* is as close to being an *Airwolf* simulator as the gaming world has ever managed – bar a little remembered title called *Interceptor* on the Commodore 64 back in the '80s Oh, and the actual *Airwolf* game, also around that time. But you know what I mean. This one's for you Dom… er, I mean Ernest.

ACTUALLY, ISN'T IT ERNST?

You know how people are always banging on about how difficult helicopters are to fly? Bollocks. I've flown one in real life, they're easy. You barely have to move your fingertips to get them dipping and twisting and swooping and rolling (er, forget that last one) so full marks to NovaLogic for recreating that level of simplicity with the innovative borrowing of the now traditional FPS control system – ASWD to move and mouse to turn. Piece of proverbial.

In fact, it's the control method that most hammers home the point that *Comanche 4* is not to be taken seriously. Flight sim enthusiasts were huffing and puffing behind me as I played the thing in the office, but this isn't for them. *Comanche 4* is aimed at the action crowd. It's an arcade game with knobs on. And it works perfectly well.

Not only do the controls make life easy for all, but the missions scream "ARCADE" at you with the ferocity of a mad lunatic shouter at an Olympic Noise Making event. Scripted up the wazoo, you won't find a hint of dynamic campaigning or mission branching. It's all Hollywood-type hero stuff, too. Rescue the Italian president's limousine from terrorists, protect a luxury yacht from pirates, work for the CIA on secret infiltrations. Seriously, NovaLogic might as well have slapped a big "Based on TV's *Airwolf*" sticker on the box and upped the sales figures.

LOOKS GOOD TOO

Along with the voxels, NovaLogic has dropped its frankly ludicrous claim to be a simulation expert. As I predicted a year or so ago with one of the many F-22 titles, the company has finally come clean and admitted that it makes arcade games. Nothing wrong with that, and nothing wrong with *Comanche 4* either. It's exactly what it says it is on the tin – a thrilling action game about modern helicopters. Mr Borgnine would have been proud. Assuming he's dead. **PCZ**

> 66 *Comanche 4* is aimed at the action crowd. It's an arcade game with knobs on 99

Water effects include ripples, downdraft and mating koi carp.

Why do terrorists have the best toys?

There's a big emphasis on ground detail.

TECH SPECS

MINIMUM SYSTEM Processor PIII300 **Memory** 64Mb **ALSO REQUIRES** 8Mb 3D card **WE SAY** 750Mhz at least, with 128Mb RAM and a top-end 3D card is really needed

INPERSPECTIVE

Helicopter sims, eh? It's all "Look at me, aren't I serious," and "Go away child, I'm a grown up game". Not *Comanche 4*. NovaLogic finally admits to making action games and it's all the better for it. Trouble is there aren't that many other action helicopter games around. Still…

Comanche 4
████████████████

Comanche Gold
████████████

Comanche Vs Hokum
████████████

PCZVERDICT

⬆ **UPPERS** Simple arcade action • Looks pretty and works smoothly • Mission editor

⬇ **DOWNERS** Nothing particularly long lasting about it • Repeating failed missions can be a pain • Later stages are nearly impossible

78 Good old-fashioned arcade fun, no more no less

All very 3D-graphics-card-ish, don't you think?

TZ-Drifter 1

'Water' way to go! (That's terrible – A Reader.)

"My engine's stalled. Can you give me a bump, mate?"

AQUANOX

⭐ £29.99 • Fishtank Interactive • Out February

There's never been a great game where you get to shoot things underwater. *James Lyon* finds another one that's sleeping with the fishes

Forty-three people contributed their voice-acting skills to the making of *Aquanox*. Forty-three people are responsible for turning an almost-decent underwater shoot 'em up into an intolerable endurance test. It's not that it's bad – it's worse; it's 43 people having just come bottom in their How To Act Badly class, willing to humiliate themselves and display their lack of script-reading talents to the public. Forty-three people who should hang their heads in shame.

Let's put it another way: despite what people tell you,

presentation is a major factor in how much you like a game. If you're going to waste away your single-player campaign making the shoddiest exposition scenes ever committed to CD, people like me aren't going to be very happy. "But, surely," you say, "you can skip them?" Why, yes of course you can. Pre-mission talks can be put to an abrupt stop, neatly missing out all plot points that spew from the mouths of the non-animated cartoon characters who populate the underwater cities, getting you right into the thick of the action. In fact, I'll fill you in, and tell you the plot right here and now, shall I? Well, as it happens, you play a mercenary called Emerald Flint in a 27th century politcally unstable undersea world, full of powerful corporations who you can hire your services to. However, it was around this point I started to switch off in the face of misplaced pauses, mispronounced words and mangled accents.

Of course, some would say I should just turn the sound down

and read the words instead… tch, I mean, really. If I wanted to read a plot filled with clichéd, inexplicable character introductions and no clear direction, that'd be the first thing on my mind.

GET TO THE ACTION
Yeah, yeah. Most people don't care about the story. They just want to shoot at things with the guns, torpedoes and lasers. But why? Being as you can count the

"I've got a certain theory about these types of game: space shooters are more popular"

number of aquatic PC blasters on the fingers of one-and-a-half hands, I've got a certain theory about these types of game: space shooters are more popular y'see. Everybody loves to circle and spin around and about that blackened void targeting enemy craft and blasting them into the infinite depths of the universe. (Actually, it's less 'blackened' and more purplish-greeny red since those new-fangled 3D cards came out, but I digress.) They just can't get

enough of those games. Nevertheless, nowadays, the market's becoming saturated, and nobody in their right mind is going to buy a lacklustre genre game when they could be buying their *Freespaces* and their *X-Wings*.

Thank the Lord, then, for diversity! "Hurrah!" went the developers as they realised they had the entire underwater genre almost to themselves in this day and age. "It's not set in space, so people will think it's unique and different and won't notice that it's just the same as everything else. That way, we can put out an unoriginal shooter and sell it off the back of the reputation of an admired predecessor while shaming its name in the process."

That game, for those not up to speed, being *Archimedean Dynasty*, which at least had the audacity to be made five years ago when there weren't so many games – *Aquanox* being nothing more than a graphical update that hasn't made any concerted attempt to move with the times, by any great shift. Best make do with the explanatory text, then.

THE ACTION
Taking its cue from the first game, the action in *Aquanox* plants itself less in the simulation and more in the arcade field, simplifying the controls as much as possible in order to concentrate on the fighting. It's essentially the same, but somehow here it doesn't always work. Being underwater, control of your craft naturally feels a lot different than it does in space, implemented via either joystick or the ASWD/mouse

Lima I

1728 m

Walker-Pipe

Nameless:
We want to live! We'll destroy your hypocritical existence! Darkness! Eternal night will be our home in the sea. A new human race will rise... Water... breathing! It will all belong to us, because we are the truth! You are the lie, the disease and the dead-end of evolution! Your new military base and your soldiers will be the first to be devoured!

It sounds worse than it looks.

How convenient that you can't see very far ahead in these darkened waters.

Harper: Target sliced and diced!

Another day, another explosion.

Destroy Bomber as fast as possible

ONCE IN A GREEN MOON

It could just be me, but last time I checked the sea was blue. Why then, in the name of all that is holy, is it coloured a sickly shade of green throughout the entire game? The sea is blue. Blue! We learnt that in nursery. What? Do they want to tell us that the sun's purple now? These are obviously the same people who designed Walker's crisp packets. Typical.

[Actually, the green hue is a perfectly natural phenomenon caused by short-wave sun rays, scattered by tiny particles in the ocean. The rays are turned blue in this process, though when mixed with yellow phytoplankton commonly found on the coastline, they subsequently go green. – A Passing Marine Scientist.]

Yeah, well, it still looks rubbish if you ask me.

The sea. Five years ago.

The sea. Today.

combo. Free from the powerful levels of inertia, you can strafe, FPS-style, around your enemies and give them a right good kicking. It's a set-up that feels a little too familiar since I'd often find myself trying to pedal backwards instantaneously as in a game of *Quake*, say, when I was still speeding forward. There are no gradients of speed to select from; you have to either keep your finger constantly on the accelerator button or leave it off. The handling of the ships often feels sluggish, too. Granted, this is partly to do with the effects of water and gravity, but who wants that when we could be having fun instead? It is ironed out a little when you get the faster models of ship, but that means wading through 20 or so missions, in crafts that respond with little enthusiasm to your whims.

Targeting is achieved with only one button. This was never a good idea. There's no differentiation between targeting your friends, enemies or buildings unless you have them dead in your sights. Couldn't these people at least have conceded a 'Target next enemy' button? Hasn't anybody learned anything since the days of *X-Wing*? Contrary to popular (ie not my) belief, it doesn't make the game any more challenging; it just makes it tedious. Weapons are nothing to write home about and you can't even select the torpedoes you want out of the different ones bought, having to fire them off in order. The enemy AI is adequate, if a little too reliant

on sitting in one place and shooting you head on. Missions are the standard fare of patrol, protect, escort (along with four – count 'em! – instant battles) with no opportunity to improve with scores or medal accolades. And, well, that's about it, really.

DAS BOOTYLICIOUS

And sure, all things considered, with everything wrapped up on the CD and played out on your monitor, it isn't too bad. I mean, it's adequate enough. There's nothing that deems it unplayable and the casual fellow could muddle through it without any real trouble.

Thus, let it be damned. For being yet another game to fall to the level of staid averageness that blights this industry. They may have used this game to show off the graphical capabilities of the GeForce 3, but playing it's a different matter. Fans of *Archimedean Dynasty* will probably be the first to pound their keyboards in fury when they discover nothing has been done to improve on the formula. The rest will nod their heads, grimace at the speech and move onto something better. Yes, it's OK, but I never want to play it again. PCZ

TECH SPECS

MINIMUM SYSTEM Processor PIII 500 **Memory** 128Mb RAM **ALSO REQUIRES** 16Mb 3D card and 800Mb HD space **WE SAY** 32Mb 3D card

PCZ VERDICT

⬆ **UPPERS** Don't get many underwater shooters these days • Nothing really bad • Stunning graphics.

⬇ **DOWNERS** Atrocious speech • Unfocused plot • Linear structure • Nothing original about it

58 Average shooter, average score

ETHERLORDS

⭐ £TBA • Fishtank • Out February

A turn-based strategy game that doesn't look pants? "I don't believe you," says *Chris Anderson*

PCZONE AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE

Heroes Of Might & Magic, Warlords I-III, Civilization. All of these games have something in common aside from the obvious fact that they are all turn-based strategy games. Each one of them treats combat almost as an afterthought, and indeed some of them seem to go miles out of their way to ensure that their combat sequences are as dull and unexciting as is humanly possible. The old argument – that games of this nature don't rely on combat, and strategy is all-important – is an argument that should be treated with the contempt it deserves. Yes, games of this nature rely on strategy for their appeal. No, the combat scenes don't have to be obscenely bad just because they are part of a strategy game.

Developers Fishtank would appear to agree with me on this particular point. *Etherlords* is indeed a tactical combat game with resource management elements similar to its peers in the genre. However, the similarity ends abruptly at this point. The combat scenes in *Etherlords* are not only challenging and thought-

> ❝The combat scenes are not only challenging and thought-provoking, the 3D battle visuals are absolutely stunning❞

provoking, the 3D battle visuals and animations are absolutely stunning. This feature alone is revolutionary given the half-arsed excuses for combat that are prevalent in every single game in this genre.

WE COULD BE HEROES

The premise behind the game is a simple one. As one of four races, Kinets, Uitals, Chaots or Synths, you must collect resources (for spell ingredients), and guide a group of Heroes across a map. You kill enemy heroes and monsters in one-on-one battles, gaining experience and levels, and finally conquering enemy castles to ensure victory. It's

nothing you haven't seen or done in *Heroes Of Might & Magic* and other games of this ilk, but everything about *Etherlords* exudes style and polish and shows a very obvious effort from Fishtank to create the most compelling and visually striking turn-based strategy game on PC. The sheer scope for tactical variety is staggering, and helps prolong *Etherlords'* shelf life well beyond that of many of its counterparts, while the five levels of difficulty, 64 highly customisable heroes to enhance and develop, and two extensive campaigns also add greatly to its longevity.

AGE-OLD QUESTION

Whether this is enough to convert non-fans of the genre remains to be seen. As addictive and polished as *Etherlords* is, underneath the glossy exterior there still lies a turn-based tactical combat game (which is enough to prompt the word 'geek' from many RTS fans). That said, it's a damned good one, so if you're a fan of the genre you owe it to yourself to have this in your collection. **PCZ**
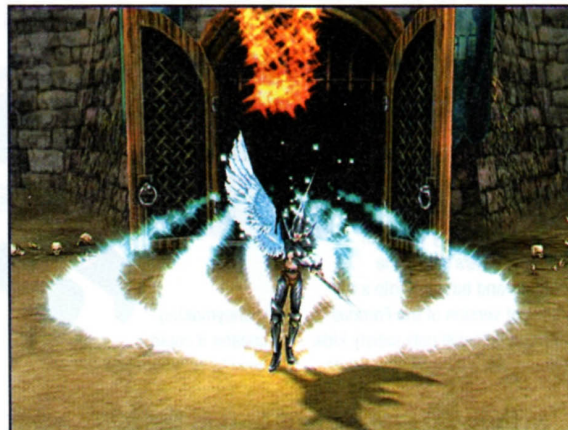
⬆ Spell-casting never looked so good.

⬆ *Etherlords*: as addictive as it is impressive.

⬆ Glossy on the outside, beardy on the inside. Well, you can't have everything.

⬆ Yes it looks great, but combat gets very challenging in later missions.

⬆ The Hogwarts hall in all its magnificence.
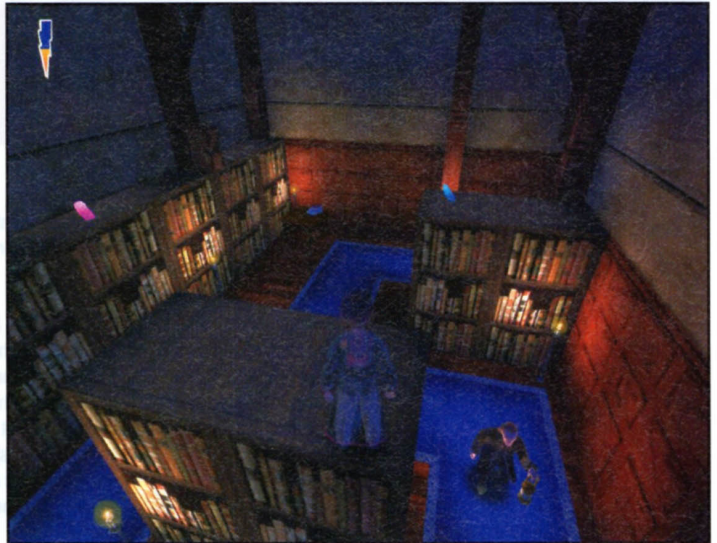
⬆ If Filch finds him, he'll end up HP sauce.

HARRY POTTER AND THE PHILOSOPHER'S STONE

⭐ £29.99 • Electronic Arts • Out now

It might reek of cash-in opportunism, but *Mark Hill* finds this great kids' game is better than the film

PCZONE AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE

It's easy to hate Harry Potter. The whole phenomenon has clearly got out of hand, with the media circus surrounding the books turning into nothing less than mass hysteria with the release of the film. And yet, despite it all, I can't help declaring myself a massive fan. I resisted bravely at first, nauseated by rows upon rows of people reading the bright red books on trains, tubes and park benches. The kind of people who haven't touched a book since Noddy, whose idea of an intellectual challenge is reading the *Daily Mail* instead of *The Sun* or, even worse, the kind of people who only read whatever everyone else is reading – whether it's *Bridget Jones' Diary* or *Captain Corelli's* (bloody) *Mandolin*. Now I've read all the books twice (disguised under a Will Self hardback jacket if the reading was done in public) and am firmly under the spell of J K Rowling. But let's get one thing straight: no matter how much the critics rave, the film adaptation is merely competent. They've taken the *Star Wars* feel of the novels and turned it into a big budget version of the *Famous Five*, which will only satisfy kids. The curious thing is, that while the game is still aimed squarely at children, it's also rather good.

DIRTY HARRY
All credit must go to EA for not turning this into the shameless moneymaking coaster it could have been. When you consider that a PSOne version was released simultaneously, it's amazing that this is a great looking PC title which, though it does have strong console roots, has been developed as a separate product. The mere fact that you can redefine your keys and use the mouse lets you know right from the start this is not just a console port.

The core of the gameplay is a sort of stripped down *Tomb Raider*, combining platform jumping, elemental puzzles and a few sub games to keep things interesting. While the plot follows that of the book, most of the game is structured around learning spells and putting them into practice. You attend classes, "learn" the spells by tracing their symbols with your mouse and complete an obstacle course challenge after each lesson. It doesn't sound like ground-breaking entertainment, but two things elevate it above the standard platform game: the recreation of Hogwarts and quidditch. You can read more about the recreation of the wizard sport in the side panel, but it's the school environments lifted out of Rowling's pages that catch your immediate attention. The game has been developed with inside knowledge of the film, and so most characters look and even sound like the actors who portray them, but Hogwarts seems to come alive much more clearly here. The excellent

> 66 **While the plot follows that of the book, most of the game is structured around learning spells and putting them into practice** 99

IT'S A SNITCH

The quidditch matches are a game in their own right

Whenever Harry pops on to a broomstick, the game transforms into a fast and exhilarating ride, with the total freedom to fly where you want. The quidditch matches can seem very chaotic at first, and catching the golden snitch might feel more a matter of luck than skill, but once you get used to it the wizard world's premier sport is extremely good fun. And you can have a go whenever you like once you've unlocked it in the main game. Flying also provides some of the best sub-sections: chasing Malfoy through some woods in full *Return Of The Jedi* style and catching the winged key towards the end.

Once you've grabbed the little bugger don't let it go.

⬆ According to the manual, if Harry "faints", you have to start from your last save.

⬆ This is the dog's bollocks. Actually, it's the dog's heads.

⬆ Just like the hover bikes in Endor Forest. Almost.

⬆ Defeating Voldermort is not an easy task.

⬆ Learning new spells can get you house points too.

graphics help, of course, and remind me of the kind of sumptuous interiors to be found in *Clive Barker's Undying*. In fact, in some respects, this is like a children's version of that game. The architecture, the use of spells, the simplistic (almost automatic) puzzles, the platforms hovering over great voids and the extreme linearity all bring to mind that other EA title.

A KIND OF MAGIC

The simplicity of the game isn't a real criticism, though. The storybook style that introduces the game and occasionally links segments together makes it very clear what age group it's aimed at. So although most of you will find it too easy (there's even an option to make all jumping automatic, for crying out loud), you should remember it wasn't designed for Quakeheads. The old-school platform elements reinforce that idea. You can collect Bertie Bott's Every Flavour Beans and wizard cards, most of which can be found in secret passages and other hidden areas. There is certain room for exploration, but not the kind of free-roaming you'd expect had this been aiming to be a more complex and sophisticated experience. There are also moments that require real skill. The broomstick flying sections can be quite tricky and you even have to resort to stealth in one of the levels.

The Philosopher's Stone, the first of the books, is the shortest and simplest. But as the

> **"The core of the gameplay is a sort of stripped down *Tomb Raider*"**

characters get older, the books become more complex. We can only hope that future games (and films) will reflect this. What about a *Zelda/Deus Ex* hybrid for *The Goblet of Fire*? You never know. **PCZ**

TRUE LIES

The game is much more faithful to the novel than the film

Not only does Hogwarts feel right, the Weasley twins are as they should be and there is more than one quidditch match. Peeves, the resident poltergeist is restored, as is the potion test right before the final confrontation and Harry's visit to the forbidden tower to deliver Norbert the dragon to Ron's brother trying to avoid Mr Filch.

⬆ Peeves shows us his stuff.

⬆ The potions test is here, but not in the film.

IN PERSPECTIVE

Evil Twin and *Rayman 2* are worthy platformers, while Lara is always guaranteed to entertain if you haven't already had enough for her. For a more adult use of spells, see the downright scary *Undying*.

Harry Potter

Tomb Raider Chronicles

Clive Barker's Undying

Evil Twin

Rayman 2

TECH SPECS

MINIMUM SYSTEM Processor P266 **Memory** 32Mb RAM **ALSO REQUIRES** 3D card **WE SAY** It's worth investing in a good 3D card to get the full beauty of it

PCZVERDICT

⬆ **UPPERS** Great graphics • Faithful to the book • Simple but engaging gameplay • Excellent voice acting

⬇ **DOWNERS** Very linear • No real depth • Limited appeal for hardcore gamers

80 Buy it for your younger brother. And let him have it when you're finished

BATTLECRUISER MILLENNIUM

⭐ US$49.99 (from www.3000ad.com) • 3000AD • Out now

As a boy, *Paul Presley* always looked to the stars and dreamt of being among them. Would *Battlecruiser Millennium* fulfil his dream or turn into a nightmare?

Oh for heaven's sake. How hard can it possibly be to simulate the entire universe in a game, fill it with dozens of alien races, set up a fully working dynamic real-time galactic economy, introduce a workable combat system and then add a persistent online aspect? I mean, it's only the universe for goodness sake. It's not like we're talking rocket science or quantum physics here.

Even though the space sim genre is littered with the corpses of noble yet failed attempts to take the once-great *Elite* blueprint and expand it into a game for the new millennium, people still aren't giving up. The original *Elite*-man himself, David Braben, is beavering away on *Elite IV* like some sort of games-designing beaver. Microsoft has got Erin Roberts chained in their basement somewhere, churning out finished code for *Freelancer*. And a chap called Derek Smart has just finished the latest version of a long-running series called *Battlecruiser*. And just to make sure people know that this is a space sim for the new millennium, it helpfully includes said word in the title. How nice.

THE SKY AT NIGHT

On paper, *Battlecruiser* sounds like the best thing since sliced *Elite*. The game every space sim fan has been after since the galaxy was first invented by Sir Patrick Moore in 1973. *Battlecruiser* essentially puts you in the command seat of a Starship Enterprise-style vessel, filled with crew members, fighter craft, shuttles, probes, mines, missiles and everything else you could ask for. You can swan about the universe trading away in an *Elite* stylee, upgrading your ship's systems, buying better weapons and making more money. You can be assigned missions by the military. You can just go exploring the inky blackness of space if you really want. It's up to you.

Not only that but planets can all be visited, either by transporting down or flying off in a shuttle. Squads of marines can be sent down to the surface in *Star Trek*-style away teams, doing battle with enemy forces, taking over enemy bases or just colonising unclaimed areas. You can even pop down yourself, entering a basic FPS-mode of the game, running around on foot, driving around in vehicles or flying around in jetpacks (that can also be used in space). Whatever you feel like doing basically.

PAPER MOONS

All of which sounds superb. On paper. The problem is the game itself. For a start it's bugged to hell. It took me about two days just to get the game to work for more than 20 minutes at a time without crashing back to Windows. If you can get past the bugs you soon see that while the potential for a mammoth game is there, the actual implementation – not to put too fine a point on it – sucks.

Too much of the game appears rushed or unfinished. There are dozens of alien races but only campaigns for the Terran military or insurgent forces are included. You can choose an interesting-sounding career as a scientist or diplomat, but then you don't get anything scientific or diplomatic to do in the game. And why would anyone want to be a trader if you're given a ship with no defences whatsoever (and no ability to acquire any)? What are you going to do if you're attacked? Which you will be, often. Usually with no warning. Plus every attack inevitably ends up with you taking intruders on board your ship, who then run around trying to sabotage your systems, kill your crew and steal your shuttles. Which is fair enough if you could do the same. But no. Again, a rushed idea that wasn't fully thought through.

As is the FPS mode. A potentially great idea but wasted through a lack of things to do other than fight enemy bases and a needlessly complicated tactical system – why can't marine forces be issued group orders? Why do they just stand there taking hits until you tell them to fire back on the surrounding enemy?

This is just the tip of the iceberg. *Battlecruiser* is full of elements like this, all of which make the game no fun whatsoever. And that's before you even think about the constant machine-crashing bugs.

LOST IN SPACE

Battlecruiser's biggest problem lies with Derek Smart himself.

Several years ago the man had the kernel of a good idea, a plan to out-Elite *Elite*, to out-Wing Command *Wing Commander*, to out-Imperium Galactica… (we get the idea – Ed.). The only trouble was Smart wasn't quite as up to the task as he has led himself to believe.

Smart often boasts about the fact that his is a fully independent company, not beholden to publisher demands. However, one of the benefits of having a publisher can be the feedback that comes with the territory – developers often get too close to their products and can't see the flaws. Unfortunately, Smart simply hasn't taken on board anyone else's opinion or criticism and the game suffers as a result. Hence *Battlecruiser* comes off looking ill-thought-through, amateurishly coded and riddled with holes.

> **On paper, this sounds like the game space sim fans have been after since the galaxy was invented by Sir Patrick Moore in 1973**

Stations can be used for trading, repairs or conquest purposes.

There are dozens of ship types to choose from, depending on your career.

FLOATING VIEW OF EMP/MIL STANDARDSETARGET DRQ/MIL MAJORIA) HEADING 2921REGIONMAJORISS2

⭐ WALKTHROUGH

TO INFINITY AND BEYOND

Battlecruiser Millennium sets itself up as a freeform, open-ended, go-anywhere, do-anything, be-anyone space sim. But there are a few complications… You can't cross the final frontier just like that

1 You start by choosing your character profile. Plenty of races and career paths to choose from… which would be great if the game truly catered for anything other than the Terran military option.

2 There she is, your beautiful new ship. A full complement of crew, escort fighters, shuttle craft and that. The galaxy is your oyster, as they say. Let's take a milk run to Mars.
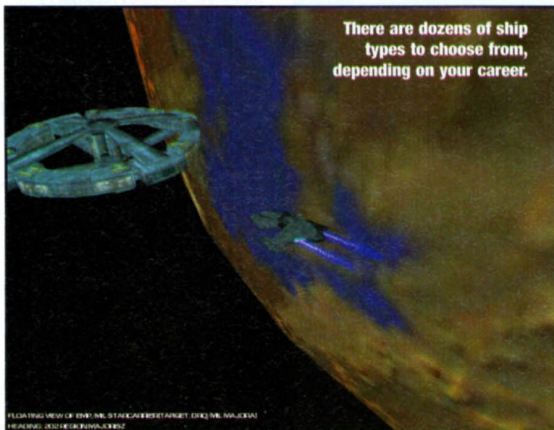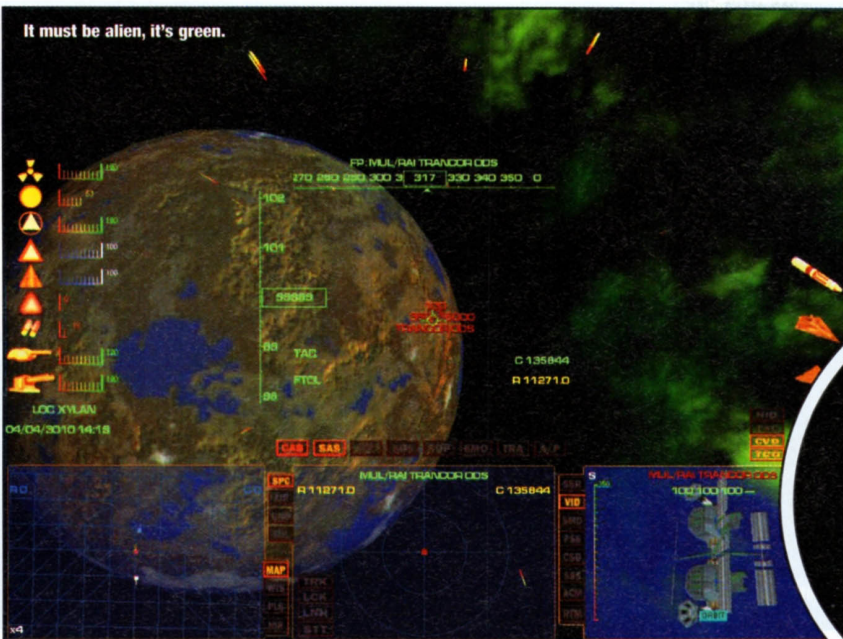
It must be alien, it's green.

CLOSE, BUT NO CIGAR

Flicking through the manual, reading Smart's comments on the official website, even just looking at some of the options and tactical screens in the game all give the impression that *Battlecruiser* should be something really special. But that in itself isn't enough to warrant praise or adulation. After all, any *Elite* fan worth their salt will at one point have whipped out a pen and paper and jotted down ways to turn the basic Bell/Braben skeleton into the ultimate computer game (I know I have).

While Smart certainly warrants praise for having attempted to make an impossible dream come true, no one can really come away from *Battlecruiser Millennium* and say he's achieved his goal. Hell, you're lucky if you can come away from *Battlecruiser Millennium* not wanting to put your fist through the screen in frustration. There could have been a great game in here, but it just isn't worth the hassle trying to find it. Wait for *Elite IV* instead. **PCZ**

Plenty to see on the ground, just not much to actually do.

Even in space, the dreaded lens flare can get you.

Ground forces even stretch to naval forces.
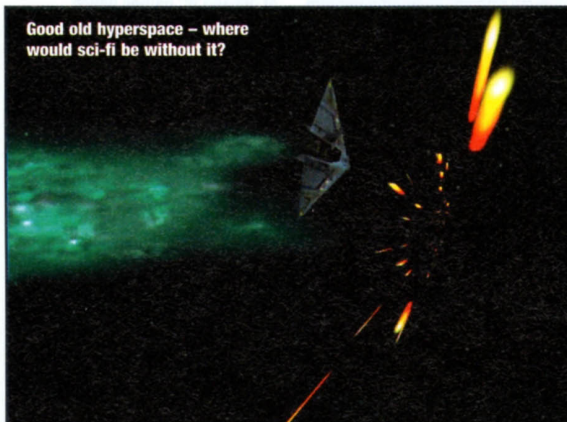
Good old hyperspace – where would sci-fi be without it?

3 Locate the jump point to your destination, lock her in and enter hyperspace. Other side of the solar system here we come!
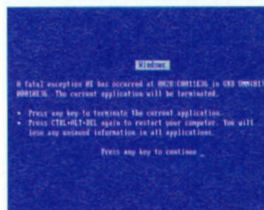
4 And, er… well yes. This is how 90 per cent of your *Battlecruiser* sessions will end. Guaranteed. Even with the patches. Save your game on a regular basis kids!

Shuttles and fighters provide some variety.

INPERSPECTIVE

The last time we met *Elite* (in the shape of *Frontier: First Encounters*) it didn't fare too well, but this was down to shoddy publisher shenanigans more than anything else. Despite not having a publisher, *Battlecruiser Millennium* is just as shoddy. Oh well. Just keep playing *X* until the next wave of space sims come along.

Battlecruiser Millennium

X – Beyond The Frontier

Edge Of Chaos: Independence War 2

Starfleet Academy

Frontier: First Encounters

TECH SPECS

MINIMUM SYSTEM Processor PII 300 **Memory** 64Mb RAM, 16Mb 3D card **ALSO REQUIRES** You *must* have DirectX 8.1 installed and the very latest drivers for your video card **WE SAY** At least a PIII 750Mhz with 256Mb RAM, and get the latest patches from www.3000ad.com

PCZ VERDICT

⬆ UPPERS Plenty of scope • Pretty comprehensive • If you want to do something, chances are you can

⬇ DOWNERS Dreadfully unstable • Badly implemented game features

45 Not worth the hassle

"Three years ago, we might have been impressed, but nowadays it all looks a bit Channel 5"

00000

Nice little gaff.

The graphics are impressive on higher detail levels.

00298

Pilot an assortment of vehicles.

Borrowed time.

00000

Do your best to wipe out humanity.

00000

INCOMING FORCES

⭐ £19.99 • Rage • Out February 1

Steve Hill saves the world, after a fashion

Technology can be a slippery beast, with today's news all too rapidly becoming tomorrow's chip paper. So it was with the original *Incoming*, the arrival of which coincided with the first wave of new-fangled 3D cards. After years of playing PC games which consisted of little more than shifting pixellated blobs around murky environments, this was a brave new world of crisp contours and colours. Rage was quick to capitalise on it, and *Incoming* received plaudits – not least from this magazine – far in advance of what a fairly basic shoot 'em up merited. Another pyrotechnic Rage title, the aptly named *Expendable*, was even described by Paul Presley as possibly the greatest game ever made, words that must haunt his every waking hour, particularly as they were cruelly emblazoned across the front of the box.

We're older and wiser now though, and while *Incoming Forces* still wreaks of Rage's trademark graphical showmanship, it has elicited little more than a disinterested shrug from passers-by in the glorified penny arcade that is the Dennis Publishing basement. With World War II being waged on the *ZONE* network, and the constant hum of *Pro Evolution Soccer* from the *PlayNation* hub, a minor space shooter sequel has proven little more than a footnote, the sound of one man clapping.

THE HUMANITY

Set 20 years after the original game, long-distance space travel is now the norm, and as a back-up for any pending genocide, humans are looking to propagate across the galaxy, specifically in the home worlds of the so-called Kaiyodo. However, in a twist set to stun the *Incoming* faithful, you play a member of said Kaiyodo, protecting your manor from the oppressive swathes of humanity.

A variety of craft are available, both ground- and air-based, with a slew of missions covering staple tasks such as protecting a building or escorting a convoy. Throw in some pseudo-*Star Wars* music and functional cut-scenes,

and you've got yourselves a run-of-the-mill shooter, albeit one hampered by some fairly murky controls, such as attempting to steer a sluggish tank while simultaneously controlling the turret. A host of ostentatious camera angles are available, although all bar the first-person view are largely useless.

Incoming Forces is by no means unplayable, but without a recognisable universe and little in the way of atmosphere, there's not a great deal to compel you to plough through the missions, unless of course you get some kind of kick from slaughtering humans. Three years ago, we might have been impressed, but nowadays it all looks a bit Channel 5. Still, at least you can pick it up for under 20 quid. **PCZ**

IN PERSPECTIVE

It might sound shallow, but simply having the *Star Wars* licence elevates ostensibly similar games to the realms of something you'd want to play. Ultimately, *Incoming Forces* is pretty faceless, as was its predecessor.

Incoming Forces

Incoming

Star Wars: Battle For Naboo

Star Wars: Rogue Squadron

TECH SPECS

MINIMUM SYSTEM Processor PIII 500 **Memory** 128Mb RAM **ALSO REQUIRES** 16Mb 3D card **WE SAY** PIII 750 and a 32Mb 3D card

PCZ VERDICT

⬆ **UPPERS** Reasonable graphics • Lots of missions

⬇ **DOWNERS** Irksome controls • Weapons are puny

65
Average arcade antics

WILL YOUR MATE BE STUNNINGLY GORGEOUS?

PC CD-ROM

BLACK & WHITE

creature isle

Find out who your Creature really is
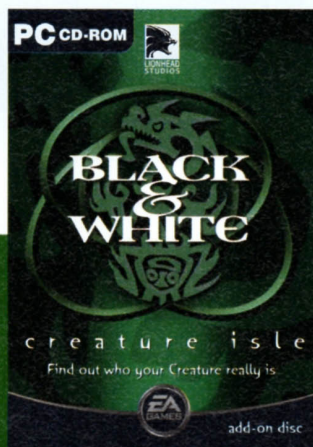
add-on disc

www.bwgame.com

OR WILL SHE HAVE A 'GREAT PERSONALITY'?

Introducing Creature Isle, the official add-on disk to Black & White™, the PC gaming hit of 2001.
You'll have to woo, win and mate with a mystical Creature by passing a series of fearsome trials,
including a test of fatherhood. The only question is, will she be a beauty or will she be a beast?

Find out who your Creature really is

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MASTER RALLYE

⭐ £24.99 • Microids • Out now

Steve Hill may not be the master, but he can at least spell rally

A s the pictures – and the curiously spelt title – suggest, this is yet another addition to the PC's inestimable canon of rally games. You won't find a Toyota Corolla or a Honda Civic here though, as the game is based on a 5,000km cross-country schlep between Paris and Moscow. Clearly, such an undertaking requires more than a glorified boy racer-mobile, and the vehicles here are sturdy affairs, boasting equally chunky names such as the Tommek Dirtbeast or the Draghov Imagino. Quite.

CROSS COUNTRY

Built for comfort rather than speed, the emphasis is on maintaining momentum over the wilfully hazardous terrain. Although there is a vague course to follow, it is often barely discernible from the surrounding scenery, and knowing where you're going is something of a challenge, with only the rough direction hinted at via a supposed GPS system. Furthermore, rather than the *de rigeur* co-driver of other rally games, pace notes appear in the form of somewhat cryptic schematic diagrams, the deciphering of which is almost a game in itself.

FLIP YER BUGGY

It's a wide-open affair, with multiple paths available to the adventurous driver. The numerous short cuts present something of a quandary; whether to stick to the beaten track or go native, risking damage to your buggy. Shaving tenths of a second off at each bend does seem a little irrelevant when you can simply thread across the fields, although it is perversely gratifying to see your

AI opponents take the same slightly dishonest route.

As for these opponents, a maximum of three are offered, and races can be lonely affairs if you get off to a particularly good or bad start. There are a shedload of rallies to compete for though, with some infuriatingly addictive checkpoint and challenge modes.

It's actually a surprisingly good game, even more so considering developer Steel Monkeys' heritage consists solely of an allegedly educational *Bob The Builder* title. *Master Rallye* will inevitably get lost amongst the off-road detritus, but is well worth seeking out. PCZ

INPERSPECTIVE

It's questionable whether *Master Rallye* can be directly compared to any of the games on this list, given that it's something of a hybrid of all of them. In fairly exalted company, it comfortably manages to hold its own.

Master Rallye

Colin McRae Rally 2.0

1nsane

Screamer 4x4

PCZVERDICT

🔺 **UPPERS** Robust driving model • Fairly addictive • Large amounts of terrain • Variety of modes

🔻 **DOWNERS** Bleak scenery • Obscure pace notes • Generic lounge-core tunes • Redundant handbrake

72 Meaty, beaty, big and bouncy

00:07:83
4TH
RECORD TIME 00:00:00
SPLIT TIME 00:00:00
STEPHEN HILL
"Bagsy the yellow car."
MPH 2 044

1ST **"A shedload of rallies to compete for, with some infuriatingly addictive modes"**
00:02:80
RECORD TIME 00:00:00
SPLIT TIME 00:00:00
STEPHEN HILL
"Ta-ta, yer shitter…"
MPH 2 043

2ND
01:03:54
RECORD TIME 04:36:19
SPLIT TIME 00:00:00
STEPHEN HILL
Even the replays are vaguely watchable.
MPH 1 012

1ST
00:54:01
RECORD TIME 00:00:00
SPLIT TIME 00:00:00
STEPHEN HILL
MPH 2 047

2ND
00:53:99
RECORD TIME 00:00:00
SPLIT TIME 00:00:00
Two-player action from the game they're all calling *Master Rallye*.
MPH 2 036

GOTHIC

⭐ £29.99 • Xiacat Interactive • Out now

An RPG? Stats the way, uh huh, uh huh, I like it, sings *James Lyon*

Truth be told, we don't always get as long as we'd like to review the more complex 'takes six months to complete' type game. Which makes it all the more interesting that I asked for a couple more days for this 'un. Why? Well, it's because I've been playing for a good while now and, er, nothing's really happened. I've completed tasks, killed animals, bought armour… that's about it. Meanwhile, I'm still waiting for the plot to reach over and grab a-hold of my gaming plums. And yet, despite that, there's something else to it…

This is standard RPG fare: you're stuck with no skills or name in a swords and sorcery fantasy world. A prisoner, cast – crimes unknown – into an expansive domed colony, you start your

latter, accomplished by hunting, is one of the most unnecessarily dull parts of the game. You're woefully weak at the start (not that the tricky combat controls help). To this end, as it takes an age to pick up enough experience points, you're left hacking at small animals for much longer than necessary. Couple this with the fact there's not much in the way of diverting sub-quests and you've got a lot of time a-wasting.

IT'S MORE NEO-BAVARIAN, IF YOU ASK ME

So why keep playing? Because you can see the potential. Literally. The almost load-free 3D engine allows impressively seamless exploration of the beautiful scenery, and some of it really is worth seeing. You know what dangers await in the furthest

It's not all good. There's some noticeable fogging and pop up.

"So, did you paint that yourself?"

> 66 **You're left hacking at small animals for much longer than necessary** 99

adventure with an important letter to deliver and a rusty pickaxe. To its detriment, *Gothic* doesn't give too much away in terms of plot. In fact, the beginning runs less on excitement and more on exploration of your surroundings, to a point where you're almost convinced they've forgotten all about you. Your initial tasks involve trying to join one of three camps and amassing cash. The

corners of the map, but it's just a question of your skill, or lack of it, that sets you back. Of course, without this aspect, *Gothic* wouldn't be half as good, since, as said, it's not one to go for any kind of dramatic foreshadowing on its own. And believe me, things do start to get much more interesting later on.

This comes at a price, mind you. You're going to be doing a lot

of walking. There's potential for teleportation later on, but expect to find your finger constantly depressed on the forward key. Secondly, places can seem a little empty: coming across NPCs or worthy treasure outside main locations is rare. Finally, it takes ages to load on slower systems.

Cracking map aside, there's not much that sets *Gothic* apart from other RPGs. Sticking to every cliché in the book, it's sedate nature and slightly unbalanced difficulty level count against it. Yet, I still want to play on. Mostly because I want to see more of the picturesque landscape. History won't be too kind to it, but at a time when semi-decent 3D fantasy RPGs are thin on the ground, you won't be too disappointed if you're prepared to adopt a modicum of patience. **PCZ**

IN PERSPECTIVE

Think *Drakan*, without the dragons. *Anachronox* recently showcased an RPG with a slightly quirkier style. *Severance* is more action but bears similar action elements. As does the buggy *Ultima IX*, which is probably its closest relative.

Gothic
▬▬▬▬▬

Anachronox
▬▬▬▬

Severance: Blade Of Darkness
▬▬▬

Drakan
▬▬

Ultima IX
▬

TECH SPECS

MINIMUM SYSTEM Processor P400 **Memory** 128Mb RAM, 32Mb **ALSO REQUIRES** 3D Card **WE SAY** P500 and 256Mb RAM for high detail

PCZ VERDICT

⬆ **UPPERS** Fantastic engine • None too short • Massive landscape to explore

⬇ **DOWNERS** Takes a long time to get anywhere • Tricky control and combat system • Far too much repetitive levelling • Not enough sub-quests

74
You've seen it all before, but it does look good

No atmosphere and very poor visuals.

You can adjust the formation of individual divisions.

There are 16 historical army formations to choose from.

↑ Japan in all its feudal glory.

TAKEDA

⭐ £29.99 • Xicat Interactive • Out now

Keith Pullin grabs his sword and gets ready for some sizzling samurai action. Well he tries his best to anyway…

So, you're into strategic Japanese feudal warfare and you fancy a change from *Shogun: Total War* right? Well, whatever you do avoid *Takeda* because this docu-game of the life of the ancient Japanese warlord Takeda Shingen is about as entertaining as eating a puffer fish's liver.

DESTINY CALLING

Unlike *Shogun* there is no resource management, and you never get the option to choose which territory to conquer next. Instead you simply fight your way through a campaign of more than 40 battles pulled from a set

"Complete player humiliation is the only true goal of *Takeda*"

overhead map of Japan. Occasionally you get to answer 'yes' or 'no' to political questions relating to marriages and alliances with other Lords – but even this has little impact on the outcome. In fact, I reloaded certain parts of the game and tried different answers to these yes/no dilemmas and as expected the story never changed.

When you get down to the dirty business of spilling blood there are some enjoyable moments – although these are rare and only occur when a battle is being won. Losing battles is usually the way things go here. A typical skirmish consists of watching your soldiers get utterly annihilated.

However, complete player humiliation is the only true goal of *Takeda*. After losing a battle you have to attempt exactly the same scenario again, but with half the soldiers you had before. If there's little chance of winning the first battle, you don't stand a chance in hell the second time around.

SOMETHING FISHY

The battles really are a huge disappointment. Hundreds of tiny indistinguishable units (can you believe the minimum resolution is 1024x768?) run around on a battlefield of green baize amid thick banks of fog. It would be nice to think this 'fog of war' increased *Takeda*'s atmosphere. Indeed, we'd love to paint a mental picture for you filled with images of samurais whirling through the mist beheading all and sundry to the soundtrack of *Carmina Burana*. Alas, if only the game *was* that atmospheric.

In this case the fog simply reduces both visibility and gameplay to virtually zero.

Takeda will claim that its real strength lies in its multitude of battle formations. The reality is it doesn't really matter whether you're employing a Dragon, Tiger, Fish or Serpent manoeuvre on your foe. Basically, if you're going down, you're going down and it's usually due to a combination of superior enemy numbers and a dodgy interface rather

than any sort of tactical ineptitude on your part.

In short, continue your life as if you'd never heard of Takeda Shingen. You've managed this far without him, and your reputation will remain honourable and glorious if you stick to *Shogun*. **PCZ**

TECH SPECS

MINIMUM SYSTEM Processor AMD K6-2 200Mhz **Memory** 64Mb RAM
ALSO REQUIRES 1Gb HD Space and 4Mb video card **WE SAY** PIII 600 with 128Mb RAM

INPERSPECTIVE

A sad, bad attempt at offering an alternative to *Shogun: Total War*.

Takeda

Myth 3

Shogun: Total War

100 Swords
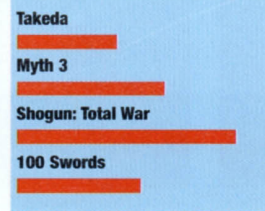
PCZVERDICT

🔺 **UPPERS** Initially novel • Some warlike sound effects • Two-player multiplayer
🔻 **DOWNERS** Tiny graphics • No resource management • Little variety • Lacks atmosphere

40 Dishonourable and dishevelled

BLACK & WHITE: CREATURE ISLE

⭐ £24.99 • Electronic Arts • Out February • Requires original *B&W* to play

There's only one God and his name's *Keith Pullin* would you believe

PCZONE AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE

OK, let's be honest. *Black & White* requires time – lots and lots of time, and *Creature Isle* is no different, albeit in a slightly different way. As the title suggests, *Creature Isle* is in fact all about the creatures. Excessive village micro-management is a thing of the past here, and with only three villages on the entire island you can concentrate on teaching miracles and actions to your two creatures (yes, two – but more on that later), instead of spending hours impressing good-for-nothing lazy villagers.

so your own creature can also become a member of the coveted Brotherhood of Creatures.

TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS

So what sort of teasers await you? Well, not far into the game a large talking horse asks you to tend his special crop for him. Now unless your slow-witted students have learnt the water miracle, your equine friend's crops will wither and die. Other trials require you, the land's only god, to cast a few miracles of your own. The bad-tempered race against the tortoise for example can only be won once you've impressed a certain village and obtained the handy 'freeze creature' miracle.

While admittedly varied, a fair few of these trials are actually quite dull. The bowling game and marbles contest take far too long; the aforementioned crop-growing

opposed to any kind of moral concern for those involved. The alignment-altering outcomes of *B&W* have been axed in favour of a method that's, well, much more black and white really; in *CI* you either win or lose – there is no in between and there is very little good or evil.

CHICKEN AND EGG

As mentioned earlier, part of the novelty of *CI* is the fact that there are two creatures to train. Without

going into too much detail, your creature comes across an egg from which a chicken called Tyke hatches. Tyke learns by simply watching what your supposedly educated creature does. In reality it just doesn't happen that way.

Frankly, little Tyke is a total pain in the arse. He plays with his toys instead of watching your creature perform miracles and then falls asleep when he's tired himself out. Actually getting him to learn anything can be a

nightmare especially if your own creature is not in a teaching mood.

What's more, it appears that the only reason Tyke is even here (any trial can be completed without him) is so that your creature can attract a mate by displaying his exemplary fathering skills. Don't expect any hardcore farmyard sex mind you; your prospective shag stays well hidden, watching progress from afar and analysing whether old 'fatso' will even be an appropriate

> 66 **The bowling game and marbles contest take far too long; the crop-growing trial is a contender for dullest game of the year** 99

Nearly all your time on this godless rock will be spent 'at school' or completing the game's 25 trials set by the 20 creatures (known as the Brotherhood) who live there. Basically the more miracles your dynamic duo learn, the more trials they are capable of completing. Ultimately you need to complete every test on the isle

trial is a serious contender for dullest sub-game of the year and the hide-and-seek wolf trial is as simple as it gets (you have to find a wolf who thinks he's invisible but actually isn't).

The trials are also more action-based than before and generally require nothing more than nifty mouse skills as

Two large apes eyeing each other up.

Clicking by large trees or rocks will make the Creature relieve his bowels (if he needs to).

TREASURE ISLAND

Creature Isle is all about fun and games. In all there are 25 trials to attempt and here are just some of them...

Marbles
Throw balls into a target area to score more points than your opponent. Marbles is simple in theory, yet there are subtle tactics and skills involved, and it'll take a while before you win a match.

Bowling
This classic game requires perfect mastery of *B&W*'s throwing interface. Once you've got that sussed you shouldn't have too much trouble beating the champion cow.

The Race
Your race against the tortoise is one of the best trials in the game. You can only win by using a combination of potion miracles on the tortoise. However, some combinations are better than others.

The Rescue
In order to rescue a bear at the top of a mountain you must avoid the blind hermit and his pack of wolf guide dogs. One method of completing the trial is to turn invisible, though there are others...
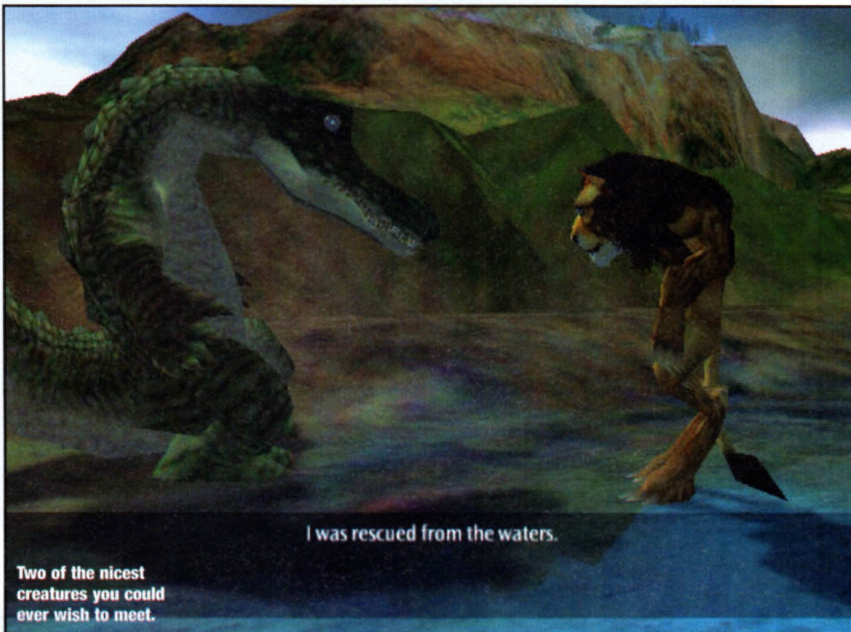
I was rescued from the waters.

Two of the nicest creatures you could ever wish to meet.
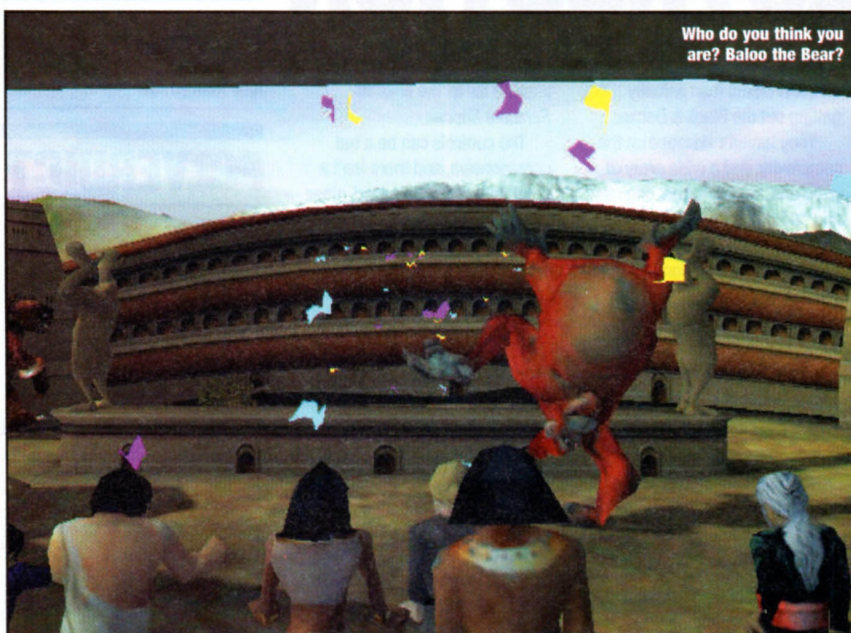
Who do you think you are? Baloo the Bear?

Another happy day at the bowling alley.

Oh, excellent!
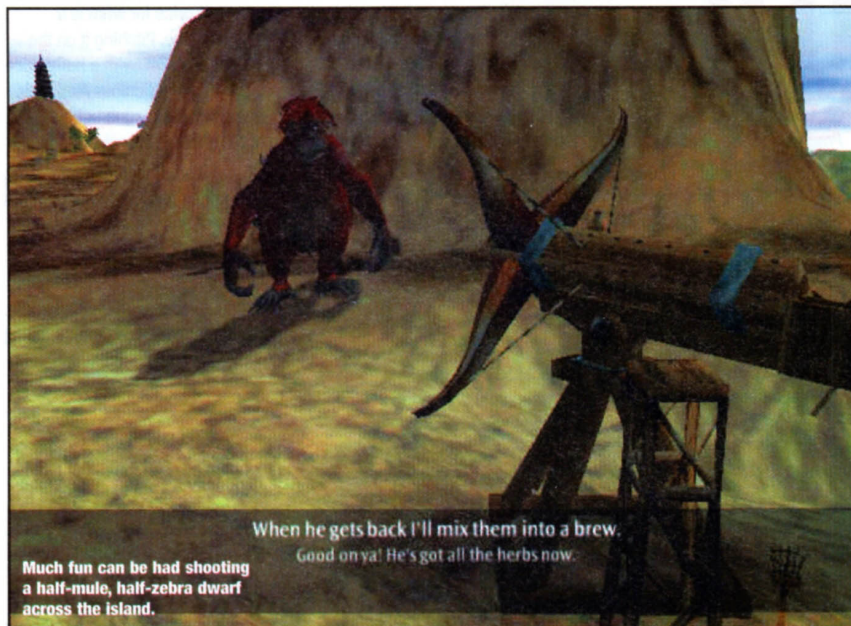
When he gets back I'll mix them into a brew.
Good on ya! He's got all the herbs now.

Much fun can be had shooting a half-mule, half-zebra dwarf across the island.

mate. In fact, the chances are your poor beast won't even get a sniff of action unless he possesses the paternal genius of David Beckham.

WAITING FOR A SIGN

CI does contain other subtle changes that set it apart from *B&W*. Your creature can now construct towns by learning the skill from one of the Brotherhood, and there are new miracles such as the creature speed-up miracle. The lack of other Gods also means defensive miracles like spiritual shield and physical shield are no longer needed.

Actually, it's quite weird not having an enemy to fight. The resulting peace and tranquillity coupled with the extra time spent pissing about with your creature definitely gives *CI* much more of an RPG feel than *B&W* ever had. Unfortunately, it also means that

at times it lacks direction. You almost wish a god would appear and start hurling fireballs just to spice things up.

Still, as an add-on pack *CI* is significantly different from *B&W* and will delight those who are gagging for that extra *B&W* fix. However, more important than that, *CI* manages to successfully switch the primary gameplay emphasis from micro-management to creature – and judging from the feedback that we've received at *ZONE* this was the most sensible move Lionhead could have ever made.

So, the future of *Black & White* now lies solely and firmly in the incapable hands of our own beloved creatures. God help us all. **PCZ**

TECH SPECS.

MINIMUM SYSTEM Processor P233 **Memory** 32Mb RAM **ALSO REQUIRES** 650Mb HD space **WE SAY** PIII 650 with 128Mb RAM and 32Mb 3D card

PCZVERDICT

⬆ **UPPERS** Creature AI improved • Less micro-management • Loads of amazing new creatures • New miracles • Interesting variety of trials

⬇ **DOWNERS** Creature pet is difficult to teach • Some trials are simple or just dull • No other gods • Expensive

85 Undivinely excellent

Don't mess with the house robots.

Two words: borrowed time.

ROBOT WARS: ARENAS OF DESTRUCTION

⭐ £29.99 • BBC Multimedia • Out now

3-2-1-activate. *Steve Hill* gets out of bed

It's probably unfair to condemn all *Robot Wars* contestants as potential serial killers, but there's something undeniably unnerving about their wet-lipped enthusiasm. The default thousand-yard stare doesn't help, hinting at a solitary existence of unfulfilled desires, with only a fridge full of pancreas jam for company. Despite this nagging doubt, the programme remains the most watched on BBC2, something of a national disgrace considering it is often preceded by *The Simpsons*.

Four million virgins can't be wrong though, and this game arrives with a ready-made audience. Why get your hands dirty tampering with your mechanical behemoth in the shed when you can do it all from the safety of your PC? It's certainly easier to build a robot by clicking on a few boxes than actually getting out the Black & Decker.

They haven't skimped on the complexity, and a wide array of weapons, armour types, engines and so forth are available, enabling you to build up your rudimentary automaton into something more impressive. The authenticity continues into the arena, with the ubiquitous Jonathan Pearce providing his unique brand of commentary, maintaining a foothold in the games industry that stretches back as far as the original *Sensible Soccer*.

The controls can be a tad unresponsive, and there isn't a great deal of skill involved, other than luring opponents into either the pit or the jurisdiction of the house robots. Some variety is added by the inclusion of a number of fantasy arenas other than the television studio, but ultimately the game is only a marginal improvement on actually watching the programme.

PCZ VERDICT

☺ **UPPERS** No Craig Charles • Quite authentic

☹ **DOWNERS** Sluggish action • Grating commentary

56 Heavy metal

F/A–18 PRECISION STRIKE FIGHTER

⭐ £29.99 • Xicat • Out now

Daniel Emery gets a very strong sense of déjà vu with this little flyer

The F/A-18 strikes again.

OK, lets cut the crap. *F/A–18 Precision Strike Fighter* (F/A18PSF) is a four-year-old game, re-boxed and repackaged. So while the blurb on the box screams "the most incredible graphics available today," the reality is different. The publishers call it a new release, but closer examination reveals in microscopic print that it's an 'enhanced' version of *F/A-18 Korea* (published in 1997, scoring 90 per cent in *PCZ* 61.) Sure, they've tacked on some clouds and smoke but that hardly makes for a new game. It's more a nice facelift. The game is based on the F/A-18 Hornet, a carrier-based fighter plane, which served as both an air-to-ground attack and air-to-air combat role. The flight models are still as slick as they were back in the '90s and the learning curve isn't too bad for novices. But the game is defiantly pitched at the enthusiast rather than the casual gamer. However, four years on, it doesn't seem like a single bug from the original has been corrected, including a carrier that remains stationary. In fact, the list of faults is endless.

What's more, the manuals are scans of the original, tucked away on the CD as Acrobat files. No key guides to keep next to the PC, no easy reference if you're stuck. Total arse. And buried on the CD are a host of user created missions downloaded from the Internet, with not a jot of info from the publisher Xicat on how to install or run them.

The only way we can describe *F/A–18 Precision Strike Fighter* is a scam. Xicat should be charging a budget price for what is a budget game. Pitching it on the new release list, with a hefty price tag is totally ridiculous Avoid this game like the plague until it ends up in the bargain bin.

⬆ The training videos. Be still my beating heart.

PCZ VERDICT

☺ **UPPERS** A 'remake' of what was once a classic game

☹ **DOWNERS** More like a rehashed re-release • Overpriced • Full of bugs

30 A scam

ATLANTIS III: THE NEW WORLD

⭐ £24.99 • Acclaim Entertainment • Out now (DVD/CD)

James Lyon plays a game that would be better off at the bottom of the sea

PCZONE PANTS

Oh dear. The *Atlantis* series seems only to have gained its modicum of sales success due to its striking similarity to the depressingly well-selling *Myst* games. And if you thought *Myst III* was bad enough, this third-rate clone makes that look like a venerable masterpiece.

There's a grain of truth in that, but for all its faults, at least *Myst III* was competently structured, making some kind of sense in its own context. *Atlantis III*, on the other hand, couldn't have been more sloppily constructed if it was designed by absinthe swigging chimpanzees with serious concussion. The difficulty level is close to minimal, requiring less actual thought and more endurance to get through the thing. An early puzzle, for example, resorts to nothing more than sweeping your cursor around a room in order to find a tiny object hidden in a darkened corner. Most others need you to find the connection between about three objects at any given time, lending little in the way of non-linearity, or challenge for that matter. The plot, too, makes absolutely no sense, veering tediously from one location to the other with little explanation of what's actually going on. Even the lead character seems thoroughly bored, what with the amount of enthusiasm that goes into her and everybody else's acting. And... ooh. It's just rubbish.

It's a hopeless aspiration, but let's hope that with this arsedrop of a game we finally see some kind of drastic change for the better in this godforsaken genre. (*Never going to happen – A cardigan clad mother.*)
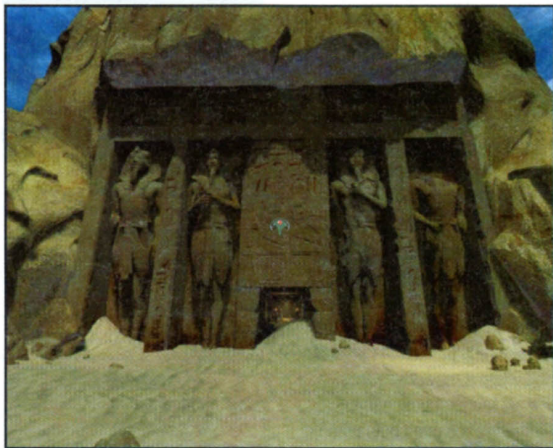
⬆ What's it got to do with Atlantis? Almost nothing, actually.
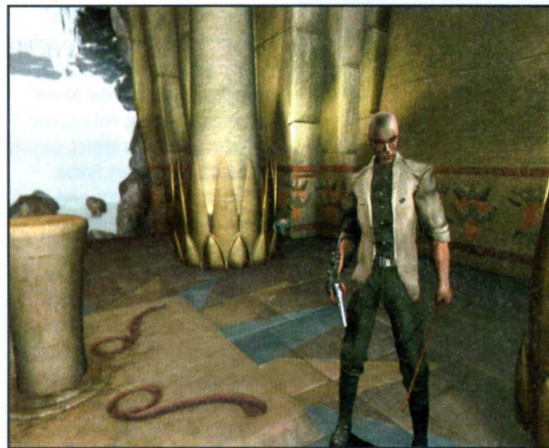
⬆ Nice to see old Hitman getting the work in between his own games.

TECH SPECS

MINIMUM SYSTEM Processor P333 **Memory** 32Mb RAM **WE SAY** P500, 128Mb RAM and a 16Mb 3D card

PCZVERDICT

⬆ **UPPERS** Cor! Pretty pictures!
⬇ **DOWNERS** Poorly designed puzzles • nonsensical plot • constant crashing • a bit dull

19 You can't polish a third

SPACE HASTE

⭐ £9.99 • Midas Games • Out now

As part of a new initiative, *Steve Hill* has to review a game with the same initials as him

In the year 2525, if man is still alive, game developers believe he will be partaking in hover races. It's scarcely the most original of concepts, and indeed one that has sparked a minor conspiracy theory. Cynics believe that some racing games were never intended to involve hover-vehicles, it's just that the developers were unable to implement the wheels properly, forcing a change of focus at a late stage in the project.

Paranoid ramblings, clearly, and if Midas want to release a 23rd century racing game featuring hovercrafts with modified classic car chassis', that's their business. And that's exactly what they've done, with all the requisite speed boosts and so forth that one would expect from the genre. So far, so *WipEout*, except it's a far more leaden experience, and that includes the music, which is nothing more than a barely discernible dirge.
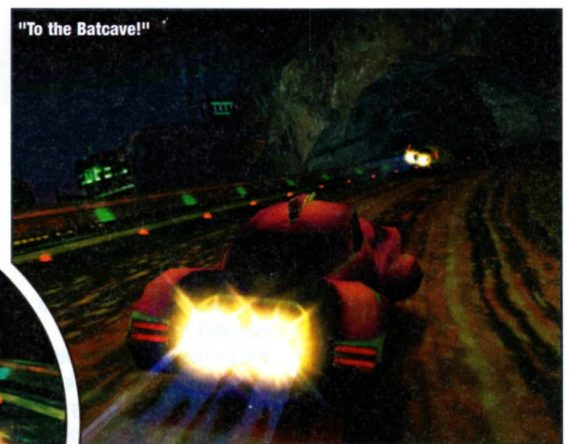
While the graphics are no great shakes for the PC, they could probably still hold their own against any of the so-called super-consoles, although the *Blade Runner*-esque cityscapes pile on the clichés. By way of vague originality, your craft increases in speed lap by lap until it's barely controllable, making qualifying for the next race a tricky business.

Space Haste is at best a mild diversion, but for ten quid you can't really complain. Unfortunately, it'll be forgotten by the time you turn this page.

"To the Batcave!"

American Graffiti meets *Blade Runner*. Nobody wins.

TECH SPECS

MINIMUM SYSTEM Processor P266 **Memory** 64Mb RAM **ALSO REQUIRES** 4Mb 3D card **WE SAY** P400, 128Mb RAM, 16Mb 3D card

PCZVERDICT

⬆ **UPPERS** Passable graphics • Fast moving
⬇ **DOWNERS** Tired concept • Rank music

47 More space, less haste

SUPERCAR STREET CHALLENGE

⭐ £29.99 • Activision • Out now

Steve Hill in driving game shocker

London… surprise, surprise, it's raining.

Los Angeles, City of Angels, and pink cars.
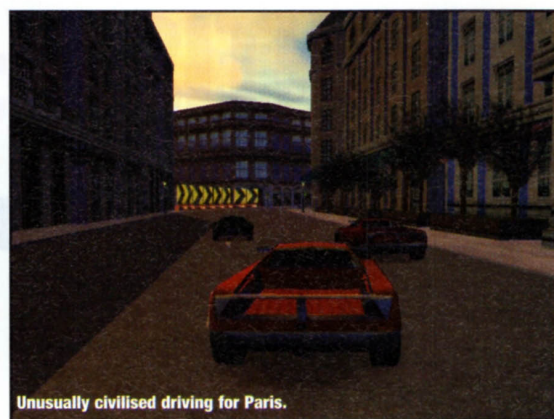
Unusually civilised driving for Paris.

Another day, another driving game, this one following the current trend of setting the action within the confines of an actual city. However, *Supercar Street Challenge* features not just one city, but a veritable septet, namely London, Los Angeles, Rome, Turin, Munich, Monaco, and Paris. So are they all perfectly replicated? I don't know, I've never been to Turin. The rest bear a passable resemblance to their real life counterparts though, taking the usual path of throwing the major landmarks around with gay abandon.

The obvious reference point is *Metropolis Street Racer* on the Dreamcast, although it has to be said that this comes nowhere near the subtlety and originality of that game. The racing is an uninspiring affair, with very little attention seemingly paid to the handling of the cars. It's a turgid experience, with no real sense of speed or excitement.

As well as the default vehicles, there's an option to design your own car, but it's fairly superficial and does little to lift the game out of the mire. *Supercar Street Challenge* is just about playable, and while it may offer some appeal to a first time gamer, ultimately you can't help wishing they hadn't bothered.

TECH SPECS

MINIMUM SYSTEM Processor PII 350 **Memory** 64Mb RAM **ALSO REQUIRES** 16Mb 3D card **WE SAY** Double everything for any kind of detail

PCZ VERDICT

⬆ **UPPERS** No thinking required • You can turn the music off • You don't have to buy it

⬇ **DOWNERS** Leaden handling • No sense of speed • Poor engine sounds

41 Exceptionally average

THE SHADOW OF ZORRO

⭐ £29.99 • Cryo • Out now

Mark Hill applauds his candidate for game of the year. Only kidding

PCZONE PANTS I remember spending a weekend way back in digital prehistory playing a Zorro game on my Amstrad 464. It wasn't a very good weekend. The game was a crap version of the far superior Bruce Lee where a masked dot zoomed across the screen and didn't do much else. Well, fifteen years later and the dot has mutated into an impressive polygon model but the gameplay has actually taken a turn for the worse. We can skip little niggles like transplanting the story from it's rightful Californian setting (back when it belonged to Mexico), to Spain. We can even forgive the ludicrous combat method where cursor directions appear on screen and you have to press the buttons quickly. After all, the game is aimed at a wide console audience and the rather tasty *Shenmue* on the Dreamcast employed a similar method. What we can't let pass is the most inept control system we've ever come across and gameplay that takes *Tomb Raider* and lands it on its arse. Not that we could get far enough to discover any hidden depths. The controls are such a donkey it's like performing brain surgery with your feet. With socks on. Underwater. You have to rotate and move forwards (moving backwards isn't even an option) while trying to spin the god-awful camera with the mouse or put up with facing the wrong way constantly. Guards are everywhere, either sleeping like lifelong narcoleptics or screaming at you like maniacal retards. And, get this, running them through with your sword just knocks them unconscious for a minute or so, making the already difficult exploration impossible. Zorro means fox in Spanish, but this is about as cunning as one of Baldrick's plans.

Someone should hire the animators of the main character and put them to good use.

The cursor pressing is a real test of skill.

TECH SPECS

MINIMUM SYSTEM Processor P400 **Memory** 64Mb RAM **ALSO REQUIRES** 8Mb 3D card **WE SAY** Buy an Amstrad instead

PCZ VERDICT

⬆ **UPPERS** Great animation for El Zorro • Looks like a proper game

⬇ **DOWNERS** The controls, the camera, the gameplay • Oh, and the sound

18 A polished turd. And they said it couldn't be done…
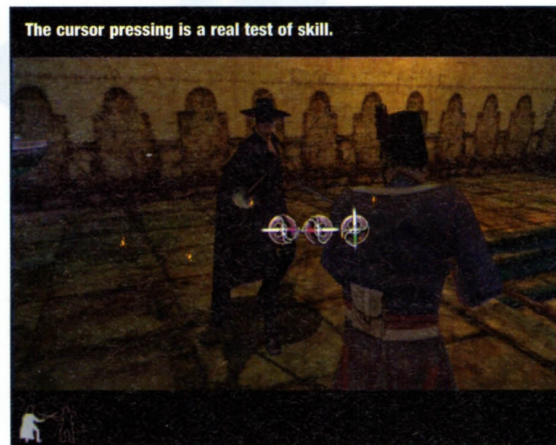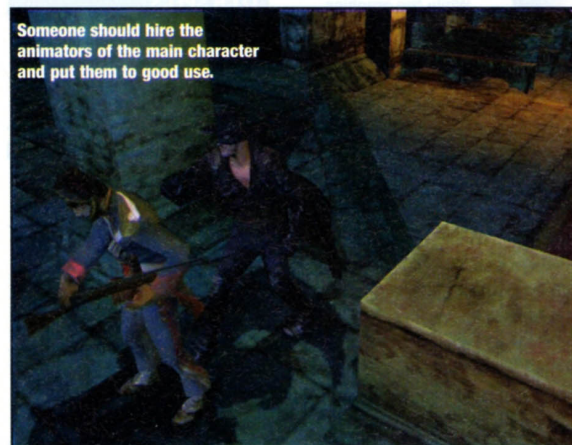
ONLINEZONE

PC GAMING FOR THE MASSES

www.pczone.co.uk **#12 FEB 2002**

The ultimate power in the online universe

SONY ONLINE

Exclusive interview with the developers of the biggest online game ever, **STAR WARS: GALAXIES**, the first massively multiplayer FPS **PLANETSIDE** and the world's favourite online RPG **EVERQUEST**

PLUS REVIEWS OF:

DARK AGE OF CAMELOT
EVERQUEST: SHADOWS OF LUCLIN
ALIENS VS PREDATOR 2 ONLINE
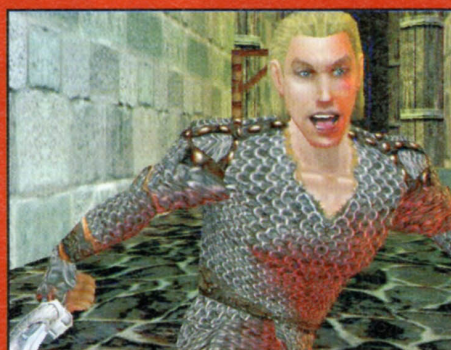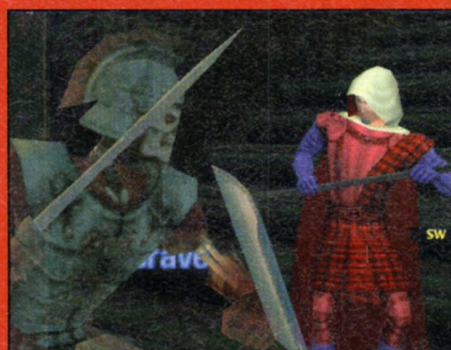
A NICE CUPPA

The biggest name in online gaming has opened its doors to *PC ZONE*. I talk of course about Sony Online Entertainment, the force behind the phenomenally successful beardy-weirdy online role-playing game *EverQuest*, which if you haven't noticed already is nestled in its entirety inside one of the CDs taped to this very magazine. Admittedly it's not my cup of Earl Grey, but *Planetside* most certainly is, and along with the little-known online RPG based on that obscure '70s sci-fi flick, forms a part of our massive look ahead at Sony's new games. In terms of cups of tea, there should be something for everyone. Mine runneth over already.

We couldn't fit everything into this issue of Online Zone, so if you're looking for your Beginners' Guide to *EverQuest*, we've had to move it to page 126. What we have managed to squeeze in is the full review of the latest and greatest *EverQuest* add-on *Shadows Of Luclin* on page 94. And lest you think Sony has somehow bought its way onto these pages (thanks for the PS2, guys), let me just point out that the latest challenger to its online throne, *Dark Age Of Camelot*, is finally poised for a UK release and we reckon it's easily up there with *EverQuest*. Check out the review on page 92 if you need further convincing.

Which leaves me only to hint at what's coming in next month's Online Zone: Reviews of *Sky Sports Football Manager* and *Laser Squad Nemesis* and full playtest of *Counter-Strike* wannabe *Global Operations*. Plus some other stuff.

Richie Shoemaker
Richie Shoemaker
Online Editor

CONTENTS

EVERQUEST STARTER'S GUIDE P126

HOW WE SCORE ONLINE GAMES

You'll notice our Online scores are out of five. This is partly to avoid confusion with scores in the main *PC ZONE* reviews section and partly so we don't have to decide between giving a mod 63 or 64 per cent, plus it looks nice. Five stars means great, and one doesn't. It's pretty simple really.

PCZVERDICT ☑
★★★★★ Excellent
★★★★☆ Very good
★★★☆☆ Decent
★★☆☆☆ Not bad
★☆☆☆☆ Bad

⬆ The gorgeous graphics should turn a few heads.

⬆ An unprecedented level of in-game support has been promised.

ATHANASIA

The latest MMO offering from Korea

All those who read our news feature in issue 109 will know that Korea is not only the home of game-inspired truancy, kimchee and televised *Starcraft* contests, but is the unrecognised capital of online gaming. At present all eyes are on Richard Garriott and Korean MMORPG Lineage to see if the world's most played online game can be sold to a Western audience, but back in Seoul it's business as usual. The latest online game set to emerge from the thriving scene is eye-catching MMORPG *Athanasia*.

The debut title from developer Isonic Online, *Athanasia* is a fantasy-themed persistent world with an emphasis on spectacular arcade combat and lovely effects-laden 3D graphics. In fact, it could be one of the best-looking MMO games to date, with an advanced 3D engine based on level of detail scaling, complex animations for every combat manoeuvre and eye-popping spell and particle effects.

Beyond mere prettiness though, the game boasts a fairly standard RPG structure built around levelling up and character development, trade skills and party-based questing. The game does promise to introduce novelty in some areas, such as the complex magic interaction system, which causes simultaneously cast spells to react in a variety of unpredictable ways. The typically Asian styling and apparent animé influence is also likely to set it apart from the likes of *EverQuest* and *Dark Age Of Camelot*.

Athanasia is expected to have entered open beta in Korea by the time you read this, and should launch commercially in the Spring, at which time Isonic will promptly begin work on the English version, to potentially launch by the end of 2002. For more info check out Isonic's new English website at **www.isoniconline.com /eng/index.html.**

LOST CONTINENTS
Massively multiplayer Indiana Jones style

In the increasingly crowded realm of forthcoming MMO games it's rare to find one that truly departs from the norm of traditional fantasy or dark sci-fi. Even rarer is one with such a compelling setting you feel sure it will set a trend for many future entries in the genre, but that's exactly how we feel about newly announced online game *Lost Continents*.

Billed as a massively multiplayer online action adventure game, *Lost Continents* takes the pulp fiction of the '30s and '40s as its inspiration, aiming to recreate the romantic and adventure-filled tales as a historical setting. Think Indiana Jones or Tarzan and you're definitely on the right track. Slated to launch some time in 2003, the game will initially offer an African/Egyptian setting for you to explore, complete with trap-riddled tombs, ancient civilisations, secret societies and the occasional dinosaur. Uniquely, developer VR1 is also planning to incorporate 'Private Zone' technology, which allows groups players to go on private, customised sub-adventures with no fear of hindrance from other players. All in all it's a compelling mix, and one that we'll be taking a much closer look at down the line. Check it out at http://lostcontinents.vr1.com.
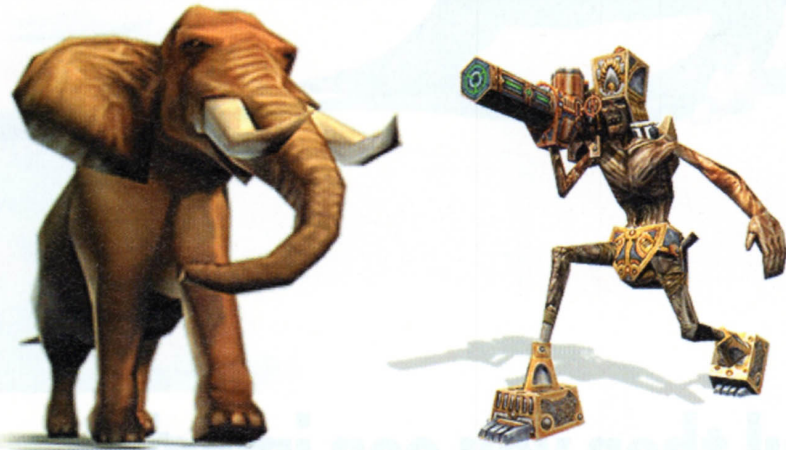
MIDGARD FROZEN
Anarchy on- and off-line for Norwegian developer Funcom

Oslo based Funcom, developer of troubled MMORPG *Anarchy Online*, is in a bit of strife at the moment, and has been forced to put its next massively multiplayer world on hold. According to the company, the Viking themed *Midgard* hasn't been cancelled, just postponed while all efforts are put into *AO*. However, 30 staff have been put on indefinite 'temporary leave' until *AO* can recover from its post-launch slump.

As anyone who has frequented the world of *AO* will know, the trouble all began when Funcom launched its ground-breaking online game too early, exposing early adopters to extremely buggy code that frequently rendered the game unplayable. Despite rectifying most of the major flaws in the game within the first few months of going live, *AO* has struggled to shake off its poor reputation with gamers. Funcom is now launching into a renewed marketing push to try to restore faith in its product. We reckon it deserves a second chance.
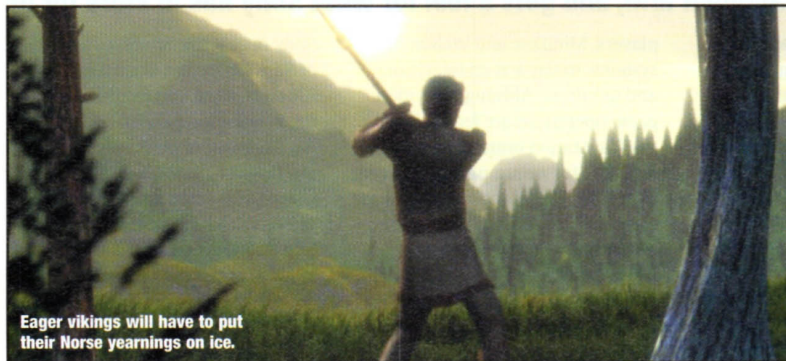
Eager vikings will have to put their Norse yearnings on ice.

MODWATCH
Tony Lamb dishes up the latest news from the world of mods

Not surprisingly, the release of *AvP2* has led to a major upsurge in related mods, and while most *AvP2* add-ons are still in the planning stage, there are a lot of skins, sounds and third party maps for the first game. One of the best websites to start at is www.planetavp.com/lvmods, which is stuffed full of goodies of all sorts. Just released is the *AXP* mod for *AvP Gold*, which adds several new characters, capability tweaks and weapons (see www.planetavp.com/lvmods/avp2/axp for details), and the [GdCM] Unofficial ModPack which is a monster effort with new maps, skins, HUDs, textures and more. Check out www.planetavp.com/lvmods/gdcm/download for info and installation notes. Another top class site is www.avpcenter.com and we've managed to squeeze a small *AvP2* mod from there onto our cover CDs this month. The mod changes the flame-thrower to be more focused and meaner looking. Have a look at www.avpcenter.com/downloads/mods for this and a bunch of other tasty treats.

There are also some new mods this month for *Operation Flashpoint*, from ex-*Rogue Spear* mod creator OrionIV. His *Urban Ops* mods can still be found at www.planetrainbowsix.com/lcm but the new focus is at www.opflashpoint.net which has a good selection of missions available. The first two missions, inspired by Vietnam flick *Platoon*, are on the CD this month.

The old faves get a look in too with Beta 2 of ace WWII mod *Day Of Defeat* for *Half-Life* edging ever nearer. Visit the website at www.dayofdefeat.com for some new screenshots and the latest news on this fantastic mod. The *Sven Co-Op* mod is also due an update and can be found at www.svencoop.com. Anyone with an interest in the American Civil War will want to read all about Gettysburg: The Last Breath at www.planethalflife.com/gettysburg, and first class *H-L* bot The Akimbot is now happily fragging unsuspecting gamers in its version 2.0 guise. This bot works in a whole range of *Half-Life* mods including *Action H-L*, *Counter-Strike*, *The Opera*, *Existence* and many more. Go to http://akimbot.nuclearbox.com/ for details.

Quake III fans will love the ever-increasing selection of skins to be found at www.planetquake.com/polycount and will definitely want to grab version 3.21 of the *Alliance* mod (www.planetquake.com/alliance). Also worthwhile is *The Dark Conjunction* – a single-player TC no less – for *QIII*, which is due for beta release and can be found at www.planetquake.com/tdc.

There's also news on the impending Beta5 of *Neo Cairo* for *UT* at www.planetunreal.com/teamorbit and Beta 3 of *Airfight UT* at www.planetunreal.com/airfight. They're both great mods and essential for anyone who likes variety in their *UT* gameplay. Worth a look too is *Thievery UT*, which is basically *Thief* in the *UT* environment. Read up on that one at www.ttlg.com/thievery.

And finally (and inevitably), www.planetwolfenstein.com is up and running and looking good.

Planes and tanks in *UT*. That's crazy talk.
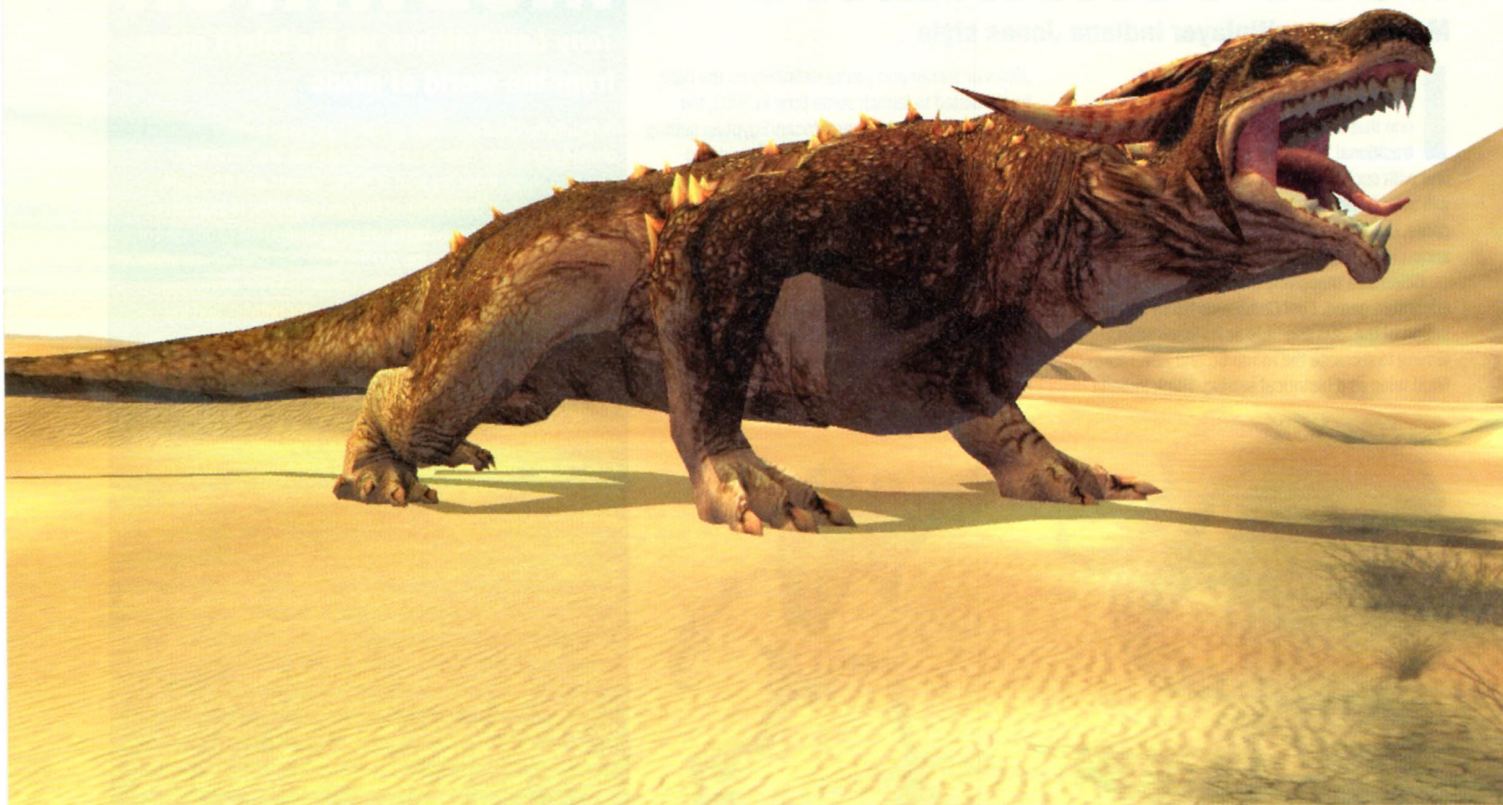
More powerful than you can imagine...
SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT

Phil Wand talks to key people at the Japanese multimedia giant's online entertainment arm, and gets a feel for what Sony has in store for us

L ike so many Far Eastern manufacturing giants, Sony has its fingers in a number of pies. With more than $58 million in sales in 2001 alone, it is the world's second-largest consumer electronics firm and is ranked number six in the Forbes Global Most Admired Companies. It makes a wide variety of products, from semiconductors and batteries through cameras, DVD players, MiniDisc and Walkman systems, to flat-screen televisions and monitors. Although its video game operations are fed mainly by the PlayStation brand, which today accounts for a thumping 10 per cent of overall sales, Sony's idea of home computer entertainment goes far beyond the console.

Back in 1995, Sony Online Entertainment came into being as the Internet presence of Sony Corporation America. Separately, Sony Interactive Studios – a division of Sony Computer Entertainment America, what you would know as the PlayStation people – started development of massively multiplayer games in their San Diego production studio. Sony Interactive changed their name to 989 Studios soon after and began to focus exclusively on games for the PlayStation, with the PC division establishing itself as an independent company – initially called Red Eye

but later becoming Verant – at the end of 1999.

989 Studios retained the rights to *EverQuest*, partnering with SOE for hosting, billing, bandwidth, and general management of the game's interface. 989 also partnered Verant for customer support, server maintenance, and new game content. SOE then contracted Verant for several additional online games, most notably *Sovereign* and *Exodus*, and 989 contracted for *Planetside*. Since Verant was working exclusively with Sony divisions, Sony decided to reacquire the company during 2000. (*Is there a quiz on this at the end? – Ed.*)

With the corporate musical chairs at an end, we decided to take a closer look at the company whose upcoming titles look set to catapult online gaming to even dizzier heights. First stop on our tour is the office of the president...

KELLY FLOCK
PRESIDENT, SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT

PCZ Until recently, multiplayer features were nearly always

thrown in as an afterthought. Who at Sony had the vision to create multiplayer-only games?
KF Multiplayer and online games have been a staple of PC game publishing since the beginnings of the industry. I worked on *Modem Wars* for the Commodore 64 in the mid '80s while at EA. I was also involved in the first *MechWarrior* online game with Kesmai, as well as the retail version of *Air Warrior*. Most of us in the games business have always loved online games and linked games on computers.

With the increased storage and processing power of the Pentium in the mid '90s, and the explosion of Internet connectivity, it was a natural evolution to look at online-specific games as a viable market. 3DO had limited success with *Meridian 59* which arrived shortly after we'd started *EverQuest*. Later, *Ultima Online*

achieved an unprecedented level of success, but we knew that with *EverQuest*'s advanced 3D graphics and greater consumer friendliness in both content and theme that the game could win through.

The title was first proposed to me by John Smedley back in early 1996: we had already made great progress on our first Internet online research and development game, *Tanarus*, and both of us believed that the next step in role-playing gaming was to create an immersive world with room to expand and host thousands of players.
PCZ *EverQuest* is now a household name across the entire planet,

but how successful have your other titles been?
KF We're still very proud of our first online game, *Tanarus*, even if it wasn't commercially successful. We think of it as a success because, without it, we could not have tackled the much more ambitious *EverQuest*. *Star Wars Galaxies*, under development for LucasArts Entertainment, looks remarkable and reunites many of the core developers behind *Ultima Online*. *Planetside* promises to take the first-person action game to the next generation by supporting massively multiplayer firefights, and *Sovereign* strives to do the same for the RTS.
PCZ When you think about the future of SOE, Verant and online gaming in general, what comes to mind?
KF I cannot imagine a world in five or ten years without a huge market for online games. I think online games could very well become the single largest gaming category, and in our opinion all gaming households will see Internet connectivity as a must-have feature on both PCs and consoles. There's no guarantee that SOE and Verant can continue to be the creative and technology leader, but we believe that we have the right ideas in development and the most experienced online game developers working for us.

↑ *Shadows Of Luclin* is the latest *EverQuest* expansion.

WHAT IS IT?

When you play *EverQuest*, you decide who you want to be and what you want to do. Think of it as a computerised, fantasy version of reality, where you can devise your own persona and live life as you please.

WHO PLAYS IT?

There are over 400,000 active players, and while many are keen to stereotype EverQuesters as sad losers with no friends and little life beyond the phosphorous blaze of their monitors, the fact is anyone can play it and enjoy it.

WHY WOULD I WANT TO PLAY?

It's harmless, virtual world escapism for fantasy and role-playing fans.

HOW MUCH DOES IT COST?

The software is on our cover CD, but after your free trial it costs US$9.89 (£6.90) per month, US$25.89 (£18.06) for three months, or $49.89 (£34.80) for six months.

ARE THERE ANY RIVALS?

Check out *Ultima Online* (www.ultimaonline.com), or *Asheron's Call* (www.asheronscall.com).

GORDON WRINN

ASSOCIATE PRODUCER, EVERQUEST

PCZ Gordon, I'm afraid to ask the groaner you've been asked a thousand times before: will there ever be a sequel to *EverQuest*?

GW I hope so, since I would like to play a second-generation *EverQuest*. As to the specifics of what the future has in store for the *EverQuest* franchise, only time will tell.

PCZ It's going to be hard to better the world's favourite MMORPG, but you're going to have to do it. How, in your view, can the current game be improved?

GW Content is what drives people to play *EverQuest*. Providing more things for players

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PCZ Developers must make their software run on today's technology. What will the hardware advancements of tomorrow mean for online gamers?

KF I don't see massively evolutionary leaps like we've had for the past 15 years. Now that 3D graphics, analogue control, and digital audio are the norm, we can expect to see refinements, from speech recognition to higher levels of detail to larger worlds. These are all substantial improvements over the relatively rudimentary state of game technology today, but we're not going to see the same speedy advancements we've had in the past.

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to do – more adventures for them to have – is probably the best way to make the game better. We'll always be looking for technological, gameplay and artistic improvements for the game. *Shadows Of Luclin* shows the kind of things that are possible: improved graphics, a whole bunch of new content, some long-sought-after gadgets (like horses), along with new game mechanics in the form of Alternate Advancement. But at the heart of any good role-playing game is the challenge of new adventures.

Of course, during the process of creating a new expansion, we always

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come up with plenty of interesting things that we'd like to try out, but we don't have time to do everything. Combine the creativity of our designers with the input of our players and we find that there is always something that can make *EverQuest* more interesting.

PCZ What prompted the move to install a European server? Will we now see foreign language versions of the game and, if that's the case, how will players integrate with the existing community?

GW There has always been a strong European presence in *EverQuest*. It was a logical next step to place a server in Europe to try to give those customers a place to gather and a better connection. We are still looking at ways of allowing customers to see *EverQuest* in their native language.

Luckily, *EverQuest* is a fantasy world. It's a place where the rules and differences of our real world can be put aside and new rules and societies created. This makes Norrath a pretty good place for people of different cultures to get together and hang out. Integrating with other players only requires learning the language and societal rules that have come to life in *EverQuest*. Yes, learning all the new words and abbreviations that have

> ❝One of the most gratifying things is knowing that there are so many people playing❞

GORDON WRINN, ASSOCIATE PRODUCER, *EVERQUEST*

become a part of the game over the last two years is a pretty daunting task. In fact, some might consider it a unique language in itself.

PCZ You have close to half a million people playing the game. Do you ever feel nervous about introducing updates that affect so many people at the same time? Has anything ever gone wrong?

We always try to be careful when making changes that affect our customers. Not only are there a lot of *EverQuest* players, they tend to be passionate about the game. One of the most gratifying things about working on the title is knowing that there are so many enthusiastic people playing. But that also makes it that much more important to be certain about changes when we bring them in.

Sure, things have gone wrong. When you are working with a complex system, any change has the potential to cause a problem in a place you were not expecting. Technical problems happen, but it is important that we continue to push ahead and never become complacent. Sure, we worry all the time about the seemingly infinite number

Almost looks too good to be true, doesn't it?

↑ Officially the coolest thing ever.

of things that can go wrong, but we are driven to try to improve upon what we've already done.

PCZ Many online gamers enjoy the thrill of twitch shooters like *Quake* and *Half-Life*. How would you go about persuading one of them to give *EverQuest* a go?

GW These are different games with different play styles to *EverQuest*. But if you're into teamplay, there is a lot that might interest you about *EQ*. Though the opponents on most servers are non-player characters (NPCs), there is definitely a feeling of accomplishment when your group or guild succeeds in defeating a particularly difficult dragon. Joining a guild or bringing your FPS guild along with you brings the same camaraderie as playing in a clan.

RICH VOGEL
DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT, STAR WARS GALAXIES

JOHN DONHAM,
SENIOR PRODUCER, STAR WARS GALAXIES

PCZ *Star Wars. Online.* Let's be honest here: you're going to break the Internet. How are you going to cope with demand? Will there be a European server as with *EverQuest*?

RV/JD Well, I hope we do. Seriously, SOE has a lot of experience with *EverQuest* and this is not our first MMO. Our network operations group and platform group are fantastic. They are responsible for making sure our servers are up and the demand does not overwhelm our service. Of course, the development team has to make sure our game code can handle the load as well. The good thing about that is we have a lot of experience in doing this.

? ☒

TURNING JAPANESE

A few things you never knew about Sony

★ The name Sony derives from the Latin word 'sonus' meaning sound, and the English phrase 'sonny boy'.
★ Sony started life as Tokyo Telecommunications Engineering Company, repairers of the humble phonograph.
★ In 1972, Sony received an Emmy for the development of Trinitron, the first time a consumer product was given the award.

★ Sony was the first Japanese company to offer its stock in the US.
★ The world's bestselling album, Michael Jackson's *Thriller*, is on Epic Records, part of Sony Music Entertainment.
★ Sony Corporation received more than 1,300 new patents in 1998.
★ Columbia TriStar Motion Picture Group is a wholly owned subsidiary of Sony Pictures Entertainment.

Strategy is more important than 'twitch' skills on Norrath. Nobody should really expect to play *EverQuest* in the same way that they would anticipate playing *Quake*, nor should they expect to find it exciting in exactly the same way. We wouldn't try to convince anyone that playing our game would replace that burning need to own someone in an arena. But working with friends to push your way into the heart of a dangerous dungeon and defeat a great enemy, barely escaping with your lives and your enemy's treasure… well, that too has its rewards. And of course if that doesn't do it for you there's always *Planetside*…

→

Look! Scout Walkers! Oh mama.

> "LucasArts specifically requested that we don't just go and do *EverQuest* in space"
>
> RICH VOGEL, DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT, *STAR WARS GALAXIES*
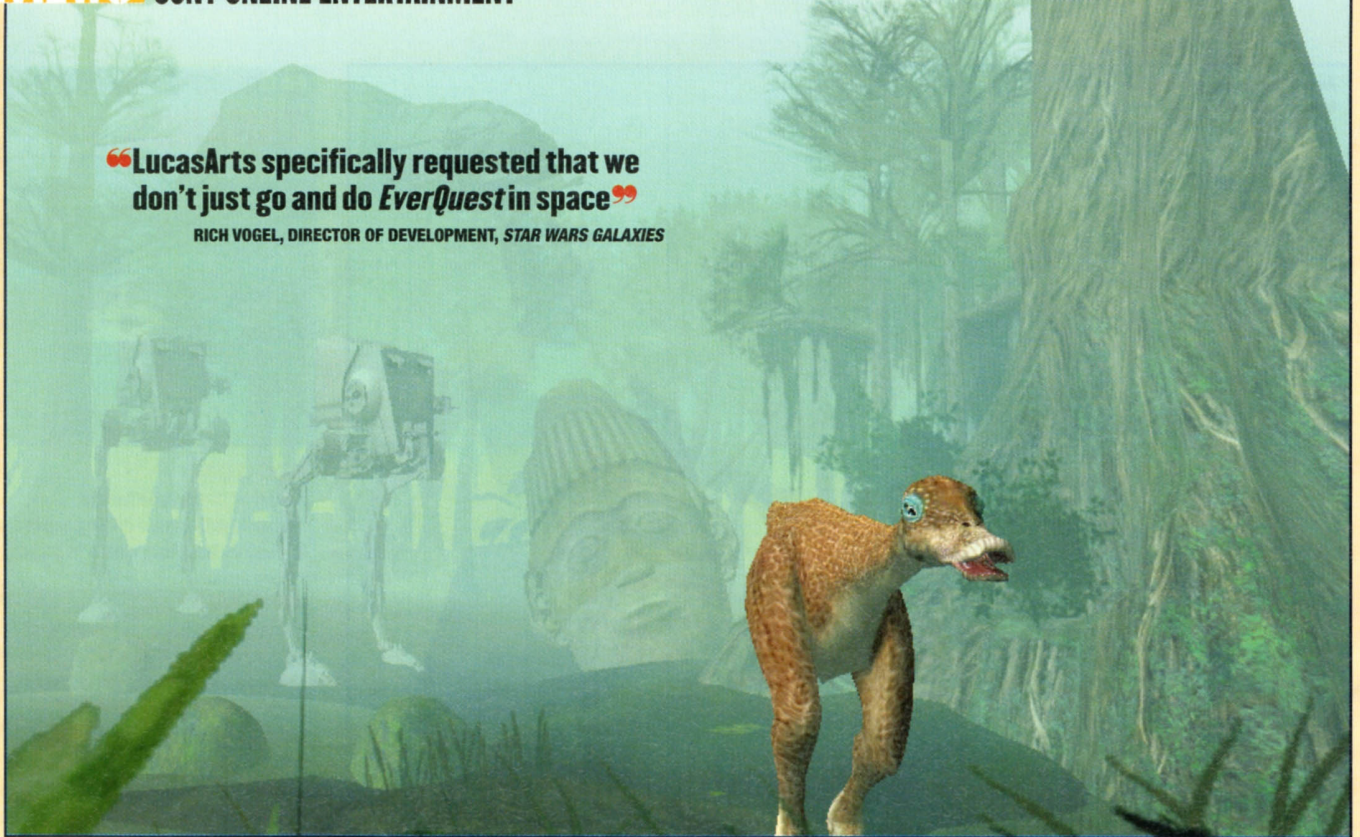
FAQ

STAR WARS GALAXIES

www.starwarsgalaxies.com
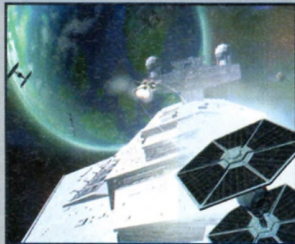
WHAT IS IT?

The *Star Wars* universe recreated in a virtual online world, developed by the people behind the two most popular MMPORGs – *EverQuest* and *Ultima Online*.

WHO PLAYS IT?

The game is due for launch in 2002. It has been designed to appeal not just to *Star Wars* fans but also to existing online role-players. The *Star Wars* setting provides huge scope.

WHY WOULD I WANT TO PLAY?

Why wouldn't you want to play?

HOW MUCH DOES IT COST?

Nobody knows exactly how much it'll cost, but you're likely to pay for both the box and monthly subscription charges.

ARE THERE ANY RIVALS?

There are other MMPORGs, but there is only one Star Wars.

Several of our programmers came from *Ultima Online*.

PCZ We hear the game is set in the classic era, at the same time as the original *Star Wars* trilogy. Does that mean we won't see characters from *Phantom Menace* and the upcoming *Attack Of The Clones*?

RV/JD The *Phantom Menace* and *Attack Of The Clones* take place about 30 years in time prior to the original *Star Wars* trilogy. This means by having the setting in the classic era, we are able to use content from all of the movies. We've used content from *The Phantom Menace* and *Attack Of The Clones* already, and the game will have everything we can incorporate from these movies, in addition to the classic trilogy.

PCZ You have key developers from *EverQuest* and *Ultima Online* working on the new title. Will it not be just '*EverQuest* in Space'?

RV/JD No, in fact LucasArts specifically requested that we don't just go and do *EQ* in space. They made that very clear when we started development on this project. Our game is a completely different experience. We have a skill-based system not a level-based system and we have both PVP and PVE in our game.

PCZ What is the role of LucasArts in the project?

RV/JD LucasArts participates in many ways in the development of *Star Wars Galaxies*, as well as providing us with

support as our publisher. They review our designs for continuity issues, and they provide input into the design goals. They provide all the sound effects and music for the product, provide marketing support, and work with our website

community leaders to regularly publish content to the game Web pages.

PCZ The screenshots look absolutely stunning, but will the gameplay remain fluid? This is the number one worry for anyone with a modem...

RV/JD We want to push the envelope of online games, not only graphically, but also with unique gameplay that has never been seen before. We're confident in our ability to deliver on both accounts. Our early tests have shown success in delivering quality graphics at a fluid frame-rate on a computer which is substantially slower than what you could buy today. When we ship next year the situation will only be better, as computers and graphics cards will have increased in power.

↑ Those who grew up collecting *Star Wars* figures will be in heaven.

PLANETSIDE

www.station.sony.com/planetside

WHAT IS IT?
A massively multiplayer, first-person shooter in the *Tribes* and *Team Fortress* mould. The game features 13 continents, each measuring 64km square.

WHO PLAYS IT?
Action gamers who want to break the boundaries imposed by 16-player teams and 30-minute games.

WHY WOULD I WANT TO PLAY?
It allows you to participate in an action game that expands and develops after you log off.

HOW MUCH DOES IT COST?
No pricing has been determined as yet.

ARE THERE ANY RIVALS?
Although not massively multiplayer, check out *Tribes* (tribes2.sierra.com).

DAVE GEORGESON

PRODUCER, PLANETSIDE

PCZ A futuristic, first-person shooter set in a massively multiplayer world... the obvious parallel is *Tribes*. What makes *Planetside* the better game?

DG *Planetside* is a totally different experience to *Tribes*. *Tribes* is all about jump-jets, free inventory, and 30-minute games. The teams tend to be small and hardcore, perhaps between eight and 14 people, and the games have strict rules. *Planetside*, on the other hand, is an immersive, huge world with a planetary economy and three different Empires that have hundreds of people in each of them on any given world server.

Folks will certainly still organise themselves into smaller, more manageable outfits, but they'll always be part of something bigger: a critical difference between this and other games. The battlefronts in the world will be sprawling as well. Taking and holding

Hundreds of players per map. Get that, hundreds!

territory will allow tactical thinkers room to flourish as well as giving twitch players the fast action they crave. And the game will never end. The fact that the war rages on even when you are logged off will make folks want to check up on it constantly. It should be a blast.

PCZ Are there any vehicles? What about other crowd-pulling features that we might not have seen in existing online titles?

DG What would a world-encompassing war game be without tactical vehicles? We have air and ground vehicles. I can't get into details about the individual vehicles yet (we're still making decisions), but we have dropships, APCs, fast-attack ground vehicles, tanks, and small fliers. In regards to how we're different than other online titles, well, quite simply, there isn't anything out there like us. The fact that the game is player-skill-oriented, rather than stat-skill-oriented makes the experience, and the game surrounding that experience, totally different.

For instance, when you play *EverQuest*, you level your character up and you can hit monsters more easily and for more damage as you get older. In *Planetside* you still get experience, but it's used to acquire certifications that allow you to do different things. How good you are

with those weapons or items is entirely up to how you use them. In other words, you can play a totally different game. I know that sounds subtle, but if you think about it a bit, you'll see that it quickly cascades into all sorts of ramifications through the game and makes *Planetside* a unique experience.

PCZ Is *Planetside* going to be based around missions and goals, or are gamers pretty much left to their own devices?

DG Players absolutely have free will. However, it's in the game's best interest that players are always able to get involved "where the action is". So we have a Job/Mission system that lets people know where the hotspots are via a system that actually lets other players in your empire decide what jobs have the highest ranking/most importance. This does two things really well: it gives players some control over where the fronts are moving, and gives them the ability to find out what that Empire's commanders want done. Players can also accumulate money and experience through the job system, so it's all self-reinforcing as a mechanism.

PCZ What about NPCs or bot players?

DG This is a player-driven game. As such, there are currently no human AIs. We have plans for other AI in the game, but they are not human and don't participate in the Empire situations. There will be more details on this subject at a later date.

PCZ If you were given 50 words to sell *Planetside* to someone who already plays a team-based shooter such as

Tribes, Unreal Tournament or *Team Fortress*, what would you write?

DG Take *Counter-Strike*, combine it with *Delta Force* and *Tribes 2*, put it on a continuously running, 24/7 world with a thousand other people co-ordinating constantly to wage war, and you've got something that comes close. PCZ

SOVEREIGN

sovereign.station.sony.com

WHAT IS IT?
Sovereign has been variously described as a cross between *Diplomacy*, *Civilization II* and *Command & Conquer*.

WHO PLAYS IT?
The strategy and role-playing elements of the game mean it appeals to the same kind of people who play *EverQuest*.

WHY WOULD I WANT TO PLAY?
Because you fancy a bit of a change from *EverQuest*.

HOW MUCH DOES IT COST?
No pricing has been determined as yet.

ARE THERE ANY RIVALS?
EverQuest (www.everquest.com).

Finally a MMORPG with decent graphics.

DARK AGE OF CAMELOT

⭐ US$12.95 a month • Koch Media • Out now

Daniel Emery finally gets the chance to road-test the game that wants to out-beard EverQuest

While the sane part of the world's population waits for *Star Wars Galaxies*, Internet and RPG junkies are being spoilt rotten. And the thing that is getting them hot around the collar is Mythic's new MMORPG, *Dark Age Of Camelot*. But first, a little history.

OK, way back in the mists of time, there was a game called *MUD*. It stood for *Multi-User Dungeon* and was a text-based adventure. You know the type. "you are in a room with 4 doors."
">North"
"You are in a room with one door"
">South"

"you are in a room with 4 doors"
">South"
"you are in a hall. There is a giant walrus"
">attack"
"The walrus hits you for 287 damage. You are dead"
">exit"
">Syntax Error 1045"

However, what made *MUD* different from the other games around was that you weren't alone. While *The Hobbit* on the Spectrum and *Colossus* on the BBC had you solo in a nasty world, with *MUD* there were literally thousands of other people playing at the same time. And they were almost all students. You see, *MUD* was too big for the average microcomputer and instead lived on University mainframes. There

then followed a running battle between players and the University IT managers. With the huge number of users, the servers went down faster than a lady of ill-repute, and the colleges were not amused.

POTENTIAL MARKET

It wasn't until the mid '90s that games companies really cottoned onto the fact that this was a vast, untapped market, and that a first-person graphical way of playing an RPG might be a good idea (rather than using text). Several attempts were made to corner this market – *Meridian 59*, *Asheron's Call* and *Ultima Online* were some of the more successful. But it was Verant's *EverQuest* that really

set the genre alight. At its peak, *EverQuest* boasted over 90,000 players at any single given moment. Which is both very impressive and very worrying at the same time.

That was two years ago, and until recently Verant were the unchallenged masters of the MMORPG. But now a David and Goliath

> **Mythic has copied all the good bits from other games and ditched all the stuff that used to piss people off**

battle is raging. Mythic has finally launched *Dark Age Of Camelot*, and it has taken the gaming world by storm. And unlike all the other games, this one isn't set in some mythical place like Norrath or Britannia. It's set in Europe. Britain, Ireland and Norway to be precise.

The first thing you notice

about the game is the graphics. Now, this isn't *Unreal II* or *Return To Castle Wolfenstein*, but for an MMORPG it's the best we've seen yet. If you've been playing *EverQuest*, it does take getting used to. All the other games generally run at 640 x 480, so having a game run in high res (and fast) feels weird at first. But enough of the eye candy. What's the game like?

LEARNING FROM OTHERS

While the older games kind of 'happened' then evolved over time, Mythic has been able to – well let's not beat about the bush – copy all the good bits from other games and ditch the stuff that used to really piss people off. For example, in most RPGs you have to quest. This means you are given a task, and then trot off slaying monsters and generally risking life and limb for a reward. And the reward was generally so

⬆ "Come here you pansies. I'll bite your ankles off."
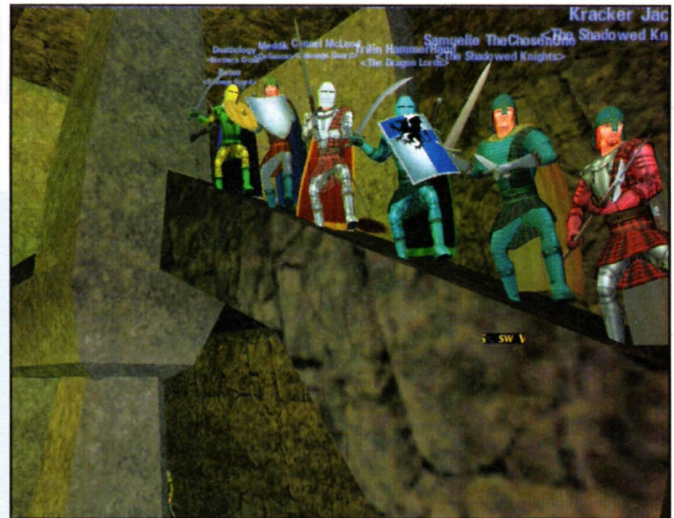
⬆ We're the knights of the round table... etc.
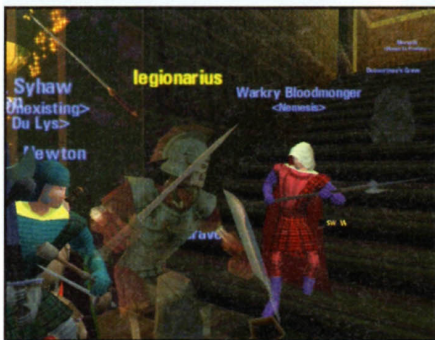
⬆ Some more stupid names.

⬆ None shall pass.

⬆ "Now don't do it again."

TRADE SKILLS

Learning a trade is a skill you should master

As well as hunting and questing, most MMORPGs have what are called trade skills. In a nutshell, this allows players to create their own armour and weapons (rather than having to buy them from merchants and/or loot them from dead NPCs). While this is nothing new (*Ultima Online* was the first to do this), *Dark Age Of Camelot* has something the others don't – siege weapons – which can only be made by players.

Catapults, battering rams and assault towers – they're all there. If you are going to try attacking another realm's castle, you had better be damn sure you've got some in your army. As well as demolishing fortifications, the catapults make for some devastating attacks on the ground troops (you can load them up with burning pitch). However, they are very slow and the reload takes an age, but this adds a whole new dimension to *DAoC*.
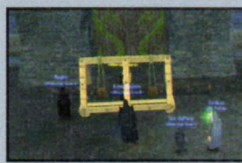
crap that you wished you hadn't bothered. So the game just turns into a hack 'n' slash fest with scant attention paid to

the quests by either the players or the developers. Not so *DAoC*. While some of the quests are time-consuming, the reward is

far better than if you'd just spent the time playing 'spank the wood elf'. So a big thumbs up there.

Another major gripe is 'twinking'. This is where a high-level player will kit out an 'alt' (another lower-level character he also plays) with an assortment of high-level gear he has but doesn't use himself, and then run about generally being a pimp. In a co-op environment this just leads to occasional bouts of jealousy, but in a player-versus-player environment this gives the alt a massive advantage, and is seen by most as cheating. Mythic has got round this problem by creating level bands for pieces of equipment. In a nutshell, different pieces of armour are optimised for players of a certain level. If you have some armour that is designed for a level ten player and you are level 20, it won't be much use to you. On the other hand, if you have some armour that is designed for a level 30 and you're 20, you'll break it fast. So fast, that the benefits will be very short-lived. OK, we admit this isn't perfect and someone

could just keep buying more, but it's an expensive hobby. Again, some good thinking.

But where *DAoC* really comes into its own is in the player-versus-player concept. Or more to the point, team versus team. The game has three different realms. These are Hibernia (Ireland), Albion (Britain) and Midguard (Norway). While you learn the ropes of the game and build your character, you are fairly safe from hostile humans. But once you get to level 30, you can cross into the other realms and do battle with like-minded individuals. At the time of going to press, Mythic is reworking the pros and cons of the player-versus-player element. Whether it will involve characters getting some real benefits (apart from the fun aspect) is still open to debate. But we like what we see so far.

WORTHY CHALLENGES

We could drone on about the sound effects, atmospheric lighting, the interaction with NPCs, the large number of armour, weapons, player classes and the very short patch

times, but if you've played any RPG you'll know exactly what we mean (and the screen shots explain the rest). Even the price is reasonable compared to other commercial RPGs. In fact, the only fly in the ointment of an otherwise great game is the fact that the map areas are still quite small when compared to the likes of *EverQuest*. There are still a small number of bugs as well. *EverQuest* had two years of evolution to get where it is today, and by the time *DAoC* gets there, we'll probably all be playing *Star Wars Galaxies*. But it's still a worthy addition to the MMORPGs out there. **PCZ**

EVERQUEST: SHADOWS OF LUCLIN

✪ £19.99 • Ubi Soft • Out now • www.everquest.com

EverQuest gets a technology upgrade. The catch? You'll have to upgrade too, as *Chris Anderson* discovered

The Ruins Of Kunark and *Scars Of Velious* expansions undoubtedly added immensely to the *EverQuest* universe in terms of new zones, quests, and items. But *Shadows Of Luclin* takes the *EverQuest* experience to an entirely new level in the form of a complete technology upgrade, and you better believe us when we tell you this is no minor upgrade. A brand new graphics engine has been implemented, which takes advantage of high-end videocards that support hardware transform and

absolutely awful, but thankfully you can turn any of the new character models on and off as you see fit. Additionally, armour and weapons have been given a facelift and now look far more realistic as a result. In terms of presentation, it's fair to say that *Shadows Of Luclin* is a huge improvement on the *EverQuest* of old, but as always, there is a price to pay for such things…

UPGRADE, OR STEP DOWN

SoL needs 256Mb RAM as a minimum requirement, and a videocard that supports hardware T and L (most of the more recent NVIDIA cards

⬆ You can customise your appearance on this screen.

> **"A brand new graphics engine has been implemented, which takes advantage of high-end videocards"**

lighting, bringing *EQ* into line with modern-day single-player games in terms of visuals for the first time in its history. New high polygon character models with hi-res textures for all races and classes also play a big part in the transformation of Verant's ageing online RPG, although some of the new character models are questionable to say the least. In particular, Erudites look

support this). Even with this spec, you will still have problems. This review was conducted on an Athlon 600 with 256 megs of RAM and a GeForce2 Pro, and the game was still very choppy, in both the old zones and the newer ones in Luclin. The problem is most noticeable just after zoning from one place to the next as the game struggles to load all the new textures into

memory. It's not uncommon to be frozen in places while your screen jerks all over the shop. Then it gets tedious as you wait for the game to calm down and free up memory.

In reality then, to play *SoL* properly you will need at least 512Mb of RAM in your system and a high-end GeForce card. A Pentium III wouldn't do any harm either.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

You're probably wondering at this point if *SoL* is really worth all the hassle. Well, that's not such an easy question to

answer at this point. The new visuals are good, but they're not that good, and the new character models have received a mixed reception in the *EQ* community with many people taking full advantage of the option to revert their character models to the way they were pre-*Luclin*. Then of course there are the many bugs and performance issues that come with the release of any Verant expansion, but in fairness Verant has been addressing any game-stopping issues from day one of *Luclin*'s release with an almost endless

stream of patches, so we fully expect the game to be stable for most users by the time you read this review. The main issue here is how the new quests, weapons and items introduced with *Luclin* will affect the game, but as was the case with previous expansions, that is something which will only become clear when players have had a chance to explore the new lands and find out what new items are available to them (a process which always takes at least a few months). Given Verant's track record, we are confident

⬆ "I'm not lying when i tell you it was this big."
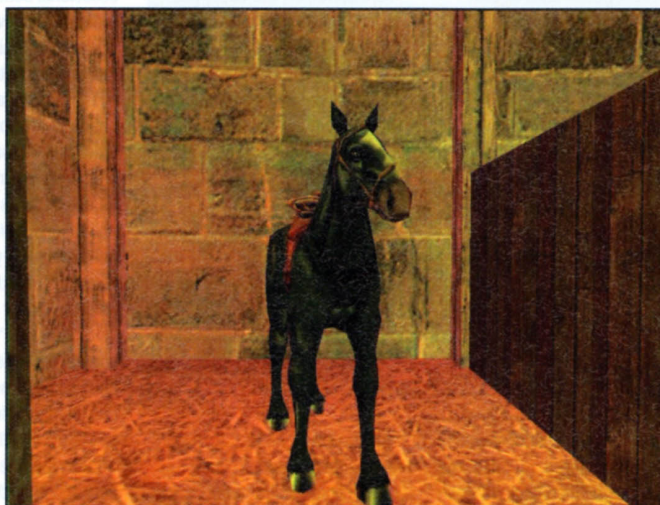
⬆ Yes, you can now own a horse, but at a price (the cheapest one is about 10k).

↑ Some of the important NPCs in the old world have also been remodelled.

players can choose to put experienced gained from battle into an alternate pool with which they can access new skills. This effectively means that level 60 players who previously got nothing out of a battle except loot will now be able to customise their characters to a large extent using the AA system. The more cynical among you may see this as yet another way for Verant to prolong the life on your character and keep you playing (and paying) longer, but let's face it, it's better than nothing. Many new spells and the ability to customise your characters by choosing facial features and hair colour also go a long way to making *SoL* good value for money.

TEST OF TIME
Overall then, *SoL* brings a hell of a lot to the *EQ* gaming experience. How it matches up to previous expansions in terms of new items and weapons only time will tell. We will bring you an update to this review in a few months' time to give you our definitive verdict.

PCZVERDICT
① **UPPERS** All-new graphics engine • Customisable characters • New player race and class

② **DOWNERS** Very high system requirements • Long zoning times • No level cap increase

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★★★★☆

An essential buy if your PC is up to it

players will slowly uncover many new weapons and armour items that considerably enhance your existing characters. Such was the case with *Kunark* and *Velious*, and so we have no reason to believe *SoL* will be any different, even though initial item-drops have proved to be largely disappointing. (We expect this is because people have yet to

reasonable spellcasting ability, and they can also summon pets which makes them pretty good at soloing in the wilds. The new race comes in the form of the Vah Shir, a race of cat people who have made their home in the new city of Shar Vahl (this is where you start the game if you create a Vah Shir Beastlord). Many high-level players will be disappointed to discover that

66 The new race comes in the form of the Vah Shir, a race of cat people 99

get to the higher level zones to uncover the best items.)

WHAT'S NEW?
Apart from the technology upgrade, *SoL* brings a new race and playable character class to *EQ*. The Beastlord is a class with strong fighting skills and

Verant has not raised the level cap with *SoL* (60 is still the highest level you can attain in the game). Verant has, however, gone some way to appeasing high levels with the introduction of an Alternate Advancement system. Using this new system, high-level

↑ "OK, own up which one of you two did this to my sword."
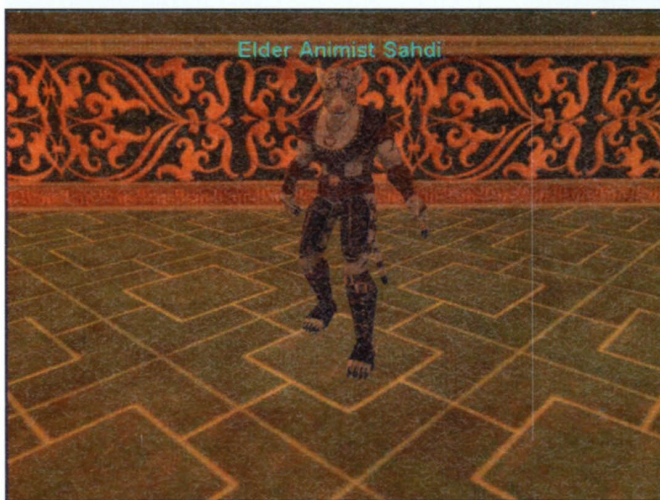
↑ Meet the Vah Shir, an all-new playable race.

↑ "Look, I've told you before, stop bugging me."

← US TAC MOD

⊙ Needs full version of *Rainbow Six: Urban Ops* • www.planetrainbowsix.com/dtd/page_15.htm

Tony Lamb gets tactical on this mod's ass

There's no denying that the Cocobolo Ops team really know how to fabricate a classy mod for *Rogue Spear*. A little while ago when we looked at their *Official SWAT* mod, we were blown away by the level of detail crammed into it, and sure enough, the *US Tac* mod doesn't disappoint either, maintaining the same near-frenzied attention to the subtleties of the weapons and uniforms. There are some 90 firearms, no less than six Special Ops and Response teams featured, new muzzle flash effects, a new interface, new sounds and lots of fun with the enhanced AI that the Cocobolo team have given to the Tango in-game opposition.

The maps are the standard *Urban Ops* campaigns, but the Tango's new-found intelligence will make your life more difficult this time around. It's

also worth remembering that the Cocobolo mods usually hit the sweet spot in multiplayer anyway, so once you've revisited the single-player missions and gawped at the lovely guns and spiffy uniforms you'll be wanting to get a LAN session going or get online and find some cannon fodder.

This is another top-class mod from Cocobolo Ops. New maps would be nice, but *Rogue Spear* aficionados and special ops wannabes alike will love the way the game has been enhanced. Great stuff.

⬆ Check out the glint on that muzzle.

PCZVERDICT ☑

⊙ **UPPERS** Great detail and realism • Tops for multiplayer

⊙ **DOWNERS** No new maps

★★★★☆

One for the realism nuts

⬆ *US Tac* is a quality mod from start to finish.

⬆ A stunning weapons selection from *US Tac*.
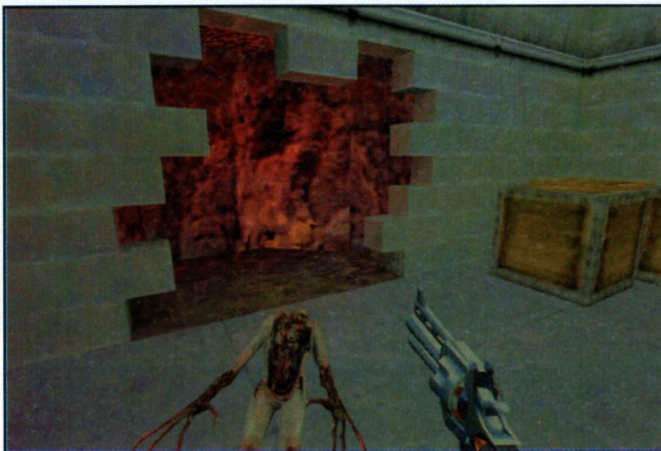
⬆ Zombies break through walls to get you.

⬆ For a maintenance man, you're pretty good with an automatic weapon.

CASE CLOSED

⊙ Needs full version of *Half-Life* • www.planethalflife.com/caseclosed/

Tony Lamb gives his final verdict on another *Half-Life* mod

Case Closed is a single-player mod for the eternally youthful *Half-Life* which, despite its age, is still flying the flag when it comes to fan – and mod – support. What sets *Case Closed* apart from the crowd is that it lets you see the game from a rather more menial angle. Here you're no egghead scientist or gung-ho security guard but instead find yourself in the role

of mild-mannered janitor Bob Dewey. If it all sounds a bit drab, the action quickly kicks in, as you swap your floor mop and bottle of lemon-fresh disinfectant for a gun or two. What begins as a normal working day goes to hell as aliens start appearing and dropping goo on your nicely polished floors. Unfortunately for you, the grunts also decide you're surplus to requirements and will do their best to frag you on sight. Don't expect an

easy ride either – these guys are plenty annoyed and braying for blood.

That, in a nutshell, is what *Case Closed* is all about. Unlike *Azure Sheep*, there's no sexy heroine to rescue and the world isn't going to be too sad if your janitorial corpse ends up as an alien's snack, but at 33Mb unzipped, the mod is a nice compact add-on that will give you 17 new levels, lots of grunt-fighting action, some neat set pieces and the news that much

of Black Mesa is rusting to pieces underneath its funky brushed aluminum facade. Hong Kong Phooey eat your heart out.

PCZVERDICT ☑

⊙ **UPPERS** New maps • Loads of action

⊙ **DOWNERS** No plot • Nothing radical whatsoever

★★★★☆

A neat little single-player add-on

ALIENS VS PREDATOR 2

⊛ £29.99 • VU Games • http://avp2.sierra.com/

Aliens vs Predators vs Marines online. *Martin Korda* finds out who comes out on top

It's one thing being frightened by a game when playing it single-player, and a whole different thing when you're playing online against a bunch of jumped-up self-obsessed gits, intent on insulting you unless you play the game exactly how they view modes along with an array of long-distance weaponry to take out your opponents.

This style of play works best in *AvP2*'s Hunt mode, where a set number of Predators take on a higher ratio of marines. However, once a Predator is taken down, he and his assailant swap places. And you

66 Contrary to popular belief, you can spot a cloaked predator fairly easily 99

demand. *AvP2* is no exception. And while its online game types are highly varied, and for the most part extremely entertaining and tense, it's nothing short of baffling (not to mention off-putting) when somone starts having a go at you for remaining cloaked when playing as a Predator. Surely that's the point of playing as one, utilising stealth, thermal imaging and infrared

can only score points as a Predator. Hunt is best played on the larger, erratically lit levels, and playing as a marine can become incredibly tense as you mistake friendly blips on your motion sensor for the enemy and start firing wildly into the night. Contrary to popular belief, if you look carefully enough you can often spot a cloaked Predator fairly easily, but holding your nerve as you

desperately try to take them down is a totally separate challenge. Playing as an outnumbered Predator is even more enjoyable, as you're required to think tactically if you're to survive, especially against some of the well-organised teams of marines I came across online.

WHEN THREE TRIBES COLLIDE

DM and TDM games vary in quality, and rarely work as well when there are three sides (marine, Alien and Predator), providing far more satisfaction when two races go at it. Surprisingly, Aliens often appeared to have the edge over the other two, as well-organised groups of drones would literally scythe through

the opposition, utilising their sheer speed and agility (wall-walking is an invaluable skill to master), while their pounce attacks seem a little too powerful. Perhaps some further balancing is required to even things out.

Survivor and Overrun games are rare, but often entertaining. The first is ultimately a last-man-standing competition, while the latter is a team based round-game not too dissimilar to *Counter-Strike*, where races must annihilate the opposition in order to score a point. However, both seem to wane in interest fairly quickly (not helped by the dearth of servers), and it struck me as surprising that the excellent Evac games (marines must get to a dropship, aliens must stop

them), rarely had more than one server running it at a time.

There are unfortunately two concerns which blight this otherwise entertaining online shooter. Firstly, lag. Even with an ADSL connection this proves troublesome and makes close-up combat virtually impossible for anyone still chugging away on a 56K modem. The second problem lies with the small choice of maps, which are for the most part, fairly uninspiring.

It's unlikely *AvP2* will challenge *Counter-Strike* as the king of online shooters, as its complex, tactical nature will put many casual gamers off. But there's plenty of variety on offer, and you'll soon find yourself carried away by the tension of it as you sneak up behind someone, and vindicate your playing style by ripping their head off with a well-placed wrist blade swipe. **PCZ**

⊕ What a stunning tail you have.

⊕ "OK... put... the mop... down."
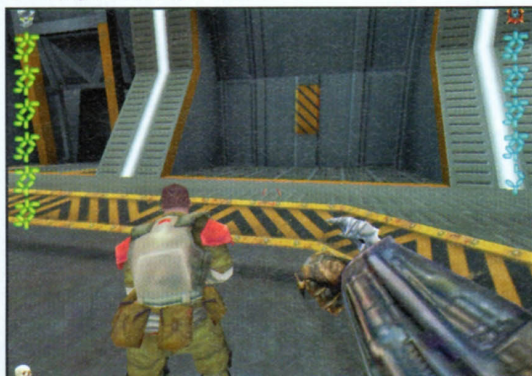
⊕ "Excuse me, could you pleast direct me to the Gentlemen's room?"

⊕ Catch a Predator in the open and he's easy pickings.

PCZVERDICT ☑

⊕ **UPPERS** Three races to play • A different approach with each race • Varied game types • Tense gameplay • Scope for teamwork

⊕ **DOWNERS** Too much lag with 56K modems • Too few quality maps • Some chipping problems

★★★★☆

Lagging excellent

READERS' FREE-FOR-ALL

Martin Korda reveals who reigned supreme in our December FFA.

Another month, another Readers' Free-For-All, another success. As ever the quality on display was of the highest calibre, despite some dubious camping tactics from us ZONE boys on our favourite map Militia. (Just for the record though, we're camping because we're making regular trips to the bar, not because we can't play as well as most of our readers.) The December 3rd Free-For-All produced more Star Players of the Month than on any previous occasion, and here is the list of last month's best players (in no particular order).

Mendax?|Void, -[CSA*DsX.eu]-, -=[Robot_M@fia]=-Bean!, [USD][HGD], [GM] Martin [GUN], The Incomplete Lemon, [U.K.C|Lunaticdie], **=nolimit=**, [TNC]Spoil-Sport, [SSIS]-Old-Age, Loony UK, [GM] Samierez, Balline and [GM] $scre@m[FTM]. Well done to you all. If you fancy getting a mention on these pages then come along to our next free-for-all on February 4th and see if you can match this lot. And if you don't fancy CS, then why not jump onto our Return To Castle Wolfensein server instead? It's a brilliant multiplayer game.

Entries for the PC ZONE Online Twats Award have started trickling in, with a mixture of the sublime and downright awful. However, there was one entry that stood out, it's from Eoin Whelan of Co Donegal. This is it, unedited: "Here are two names I say (one of them iz mine but): 1: {*SuCk-My-SeNtRy*}. I use dat one for TFC, even thought it has no meaning in CS... I know, im pathetic. 2: 9IncH*neLLy he said he woz from Scotland. I don't know if ya can send me da prize I deserve cuz im in ireland but lets hope so."

Unfortunately, and despite the fact that both names are almost deserving of an OTA,

Don't fancy playing CS? Then why not jump onto our Wolfenstein server instead?

neither are quite as stupid as those in the Free-For-All above. However, for overall online speak and because you made us laugh we're going to give you a prize. As for the rest of you, keep those entries coming in to **letters@ pczone.co.uk** with the title 'Online Twats'. You never know, you may be the next lucky winner of this most unprestigious of compos.

FREE-FOR-ALL

**Monday February 4
7:00pm – 10.00pm**
FREE-FOR-ALL
**RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN
AND COUNTER-STRIKE SERVERS**

KNOW YOUR ENEMY

Dave Woods	**KID UNKNOWN**
Richie Shoemaker	**ZAPATERO**
Martin Korda	**NAMELESS ONE**
Anthony Holden	**SHOKUPAN**
Colin Mackleworth	**M.A.C.H.I.N.E**
Matthew Cheshire	**BURNSIDE**
David McCandless	**MAQUA**
Paul Presley	**I R BABOON**
Phil Clark	**SHIT KICKER**
Mark Hill	**LEATHERFACE**

PC ZONE Free-For-All   ?×

GETTING CONNECTED

Get ready for some hot fragging action

Fancy a challenge? Here's a chance to get your arse whipped by joining our Free-For-All. We'll be running one Counter-Strike server and one Return To Castle Wolfenstein server to give you a bit of choice. To join the Counter-Strike FFA, from the opening Counter-Strike menu click 'Play CS' then 'Internet Games' and 'Filter'. Check the box for 'Are In My Favourites List'. Click 'Filter' click 'Add Server' then type: 195.149.48.59: 27016 to join the server. You should now see a server called 'PC ZONE Challenge'. Double click. The password is pczone.

To join the Return To Castle Wolfenstein server, start up the game then hit the "tilde" key on the keyboard to bring down the console (this key is below "Escape", and to the left of "1" on most keyboards) and type: /password pczone then hit return and type /connect 195.149.48.58 and hit return again and you'll be connected.

Servers will be available for practice from 12noon. Maps will cycle every 15 minutes to give everyone a chance to play. If you have any problems connecting, telephone 020 7388 0004 on the day of the challenge.

HAVE A GO   ?×

PC ZONE GAME SERVERS

Provided by www.games-world.net

The PC ZONE game servers are now more popular than ever and to ensure only PC ZONE readers can play on them, we've decided to password them all. Don't worry though, every month we'll be printing the password you need to get fragging.

Quake III: Arena Public Server #1 – 194.93.134.24.27966
Quake III: Fortress Public Server #1 – 194.93.134.24.27968

Counter-Strike Public Server #1 – 194.93.134.49:27015
Counter-Strike Public Server #2 – 194.93.134.49:27020
Counter-Strike Public Server #3 – 194.93.134.51:27015
Counter-Strike Public Server #4 (PC ZONE map pack) – 194.93.134.51:27020

Unreal Tournament Public Server #1 – 194.93.134.52:7787
Unreal Tournament Public Server #2 – 194.93.134.52:7777

Team Fortress Classic Public Server #1 – 194.93.134.50:27015
Team Fortress Classic Public Server #2 – 194.93.134.50:27020

Password: bat

S.W.I.N.E

⭐ £29.99 • Fishtank Games • Out February

There's nothing like the smell of bacon in the morning, says *Keith Pullin*

George Orwell's *1984* was a prophetic, nightmarish vision of a future world, where technological advance gives rise to a flawed and creepy utopia. *Bladerunner* was similar in its fascinating depiction of a paranoid society. Even *Planet of the Apes* could be seen as another example of this 'what if' scenario, but with monkeys.

In *S.W.I.N.E*, the future sees pigs and rabbits engaged in a bitter war for carrots. There are no morals or meaningful metaphors in this futuristic vision though. Instead, there's just a bunch of animals, in tanks, reeling off wisecracks and blowing each other to pieces.

Players familiar with *Z: Steel Soldiers* will feel instantly at home. The humour is very similar and the lack of resource management means *S.W.I.N.E*'s focus is well and truly with the battles. Each unit gains experience the more enemy units they kill and there's also the tricky matter of resupplying, refuelling and repairing to cope with. Yet despite these commendable tactical subtleties, *S.W.I.N.E* is limited by having only 12 different units per side. Subsequently the action becomes predictable and repetitive very quickly indeed.

Graphically the landscapes and the units are astonishing – yet there is a price to pay for this. You actually need more memory to play *S.W.I.N.E* (the manual recommends a whopping 192Mb!) than you do to play *Return To Castle Wolfenstein*. Even your graphics card needs a minimum of 32Mb of on-board RAM.

So, *S.W.I.N.E* is a decent enough game for a while and looks fantastic. If on the other hand you need an upgrade to play it – go for *Z: Steel Soldiers* instead.
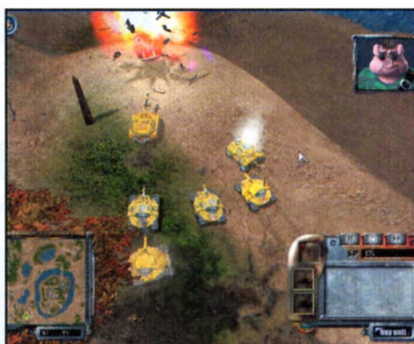
⬆ Only ten units per mission allowed.

⬆ You get to play as pigs or rabbits, which is great.

TECH SPECS

MINIMUM SYSTEM Processor PII 466Mhz **Memory** 96Mb RAM **ALSO REQUIRES** 900Mb HD space, 32Mb 3D card **WE SAY** PIII 1Ghz, 192Mb RAM, absolute top-of-the-range sound and graphics cards

PCZ VERDICT

⬆ **UPPERS** Looks and sounds wonderful • Relatively amusing • Decent gameplay – for a day or two

⬇ **DOWNERS** Lacks variety of units • You'll need a ridiculously high-spec machine for this one

61 Good, but needs some serious grunt

⬆ Not the best place to park a boat.

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER QUIZ

⭐ £19.99 • Eidos • Out now

SKY SPORTS FOOTBALL QUIZ

⭐ £19.99 • THQ • Out now

Two football quizzes in one month? *Dave Woods* reckons it must have been Christmas

The fact that both of these games turned up too late to be reviewed before Christmas suggests to us that the publishers weren't expecting Classic scores. With that in mind we thought we'd lump both of these together, saving us space and pointing you in the direction of the best and definitive football quiz. On paper it seemed like it was going to be easy. *ZONE* loves *Championship Manager* because it provides almost endless hours of fun for £24.99. This is the complete opposite of *Sky Sports*, which charges the same for a month of second-rate entertainment. A home banker for sure, or so I thought.

The truth is that each is actually after a different market. *Championship Manager Quiz* is unbelievably hard – there's a few easy questions thrown in to tip the balance (where do Manchester United play their home games?) but most are just anal (what colour undercrackers was Teddy Sheringham wearing when he scored his seventh goal for his school football team?). Salvation comes in the format of the game whereby you answer questions to pass and shoot, in a 90-minute thriller against the clock. *Sky Sports* by contrast has a wooden Kirsty Gallagher, better graphics, easier questions and more game formats. Sadly, both commit the cardinal sin of repeating questions (despite boasting 4,500 and 11,000 for *Sky* and *CM* respectively).

At the end of the day though, and after a particularly scrappy game, *Sky Sports* offers more. Still, there's only ever been one quiz that's really tried to do something different on the PC, and that's *You Don't Know Jack* (which is still worth buying if you see it in the shops). It might not be about football but then again, if you're an avid footie fan you won't have the cash to buy either of these anyway, squandering your money as you do on overpriced tickets, rotten pies and the obligatory monthly subscription to *Sky Sports*.
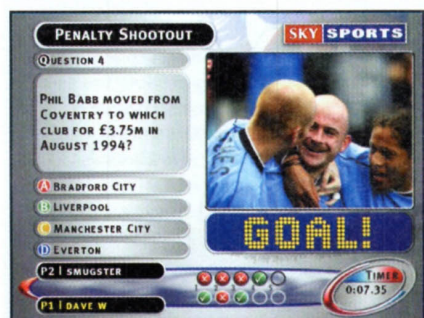
⬆ *Sky Sports Quiz*: not looking so smug now are you?

⬆ *CM Quiz*: it doesn't look as flash as *Sky Sports*.

PCZ VERDICT	CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER QUIZ	78%
PCZ VERDICT	SKY SPORTS FOOTBALL QUIZ	78%

BUDGET ZONE

Feeling the strain financially? Check these out for a bit of light relief

⭐ **SEARCHING FOR LOOSE CHANGE** Rhianna Pratchett

SEVERANCE: BLADE OF DARKNESS

BEST BUY

⭐ Codemasters • £4.99 • Out now

PCZONE AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE

Severance may have seemed from the outset to be your usual basic 3D RPG hack 'n' slash fare. But after finding yourself hopelessly embroiled in a three day Wagnerian opera of violence, accompanied by the sweet serenade of blade meeting flesh and an aerodynamic display of severed limbs, you soon began to realise that there was something more going on under the surface.

It might be the elegant almost balletic fighting system, which employed more than 250 different moves across four different characters (Amazon, Dwarf, Barbarian and Knight) not to mention the vast array of weaponry, which included more than 100 objects, and relied quite heavily on a sick imagination to find weapons. A well-placed dismembered arm can be lethal after all.

Severance gears you towards truly epic battles, even if it ivolves getting lost in the meandering level design of the 17 enormous stages, before you find them. With a complicated interface that takes a good few days to accurately get the hang of, this game certainly isn't for beginners. While *Severance* doesn't make mindless violence any more acceptable, it does make it a whole lot prettier to look at.

PCZVERDICT 85%

⬆ "It's just you and me pal."

⬆ Ahhhh, yes, let the blood run free.

Dodgems in pick-ups.

1NSANE

⭐ Codemasters • £12.99 • Out now

Probably the best way to describe *1nsane* would be redneck racing with a bit of sumo wrestling thrown in. Not just trucks, but a massive array of vehicles from articulated lorries to hover mowers can be driven into the ground (very often with only two wheels and half a chassis remaining) in this off-road smash 'em up racer.

1nsane might be a shallow game, but then who needs depth in a racer? What you get is pure, simple entertainment. In various single-player modes you take part in championship events with different goals to achieve, but it's the multiplayer that's the most rewarding. It may not be realistic, but when it comes down to simple fun, you can't go wrong with *1nsane*.

PCZVERDICT 73%
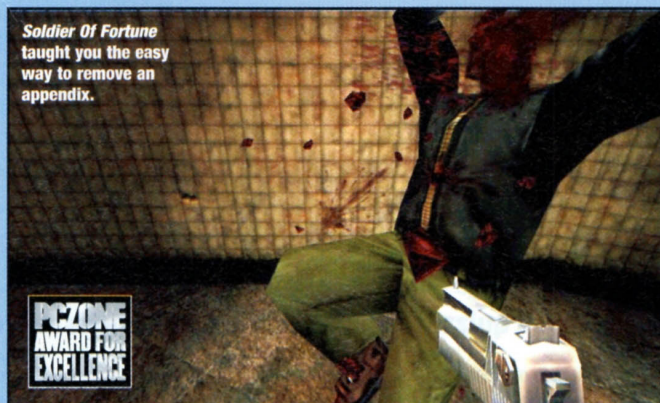
Soldier Of Fortune taught you the easy way to remove an appendix.

PCZONE AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE

LOCK 'N' LOAD

INCLUDES: SIN, SOLDIER OF FORTUNE PLATINUM EDITION, KINGPIN, SPEC OPS II AND SPEC OPS III: OPERATION BRAVO)

⭐ Digital Sales Limited • £34.99 • Out now

We've got a big bucket o'carnage this month with this *Lock 'N' Load* selection box of five classic FPS titles. *SoF* is easily one of the most gruesome computer games of all time, turning accurate shooting into blood spattering art form and with the new platinum edition you get loads more extras, including new multiplayer levels. Close behind it in the violence stakes is *Kingpin*, where aside from the continuous swearing, the lead pipes and baseball bats do all the talking.

Sin might be gratuitously misogynistic but as far as strong storylines and believable characters go it's up there with the best. If you're a frustrated SAS or Green Beret wannabe then you'll love the atmosphere and realism of *Spec Ops II* and *Spec Ops II: Operation Bravo*.

PCZVERDICT 84%
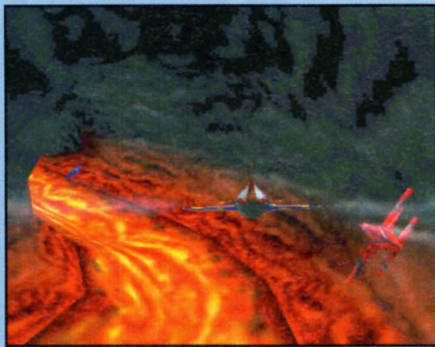
⬆ Up, up and awaaaaaay...

PLANE CRAZY

✪ Focus • £9.99 • Out now

It may sound like a Gene Wilder/Richard Pryor spoof about hapless airport attendants but *Plane Crazy* is in fact a fairly enjoyable airborne racer. With three World War II style planes to choose from, the object of the game is to fly through the lovingly crafted courses, picking up the power-ups as you go, while leaving the other guys sniffing your exhaust fumes.

Don't be fooled into thinking this is in any way, shape or form, an interesting take on the flight sim genre, as far as realistic aeronautic physics go, it feels more like you're flying a teapot on a wire than a plane. Unfortunately, it's also lacking in that all too important sense of speed that really gets the adrenalin pumping. *Plane Crazy* looks good, and is probably ripe for a re-make, but it could have been so much more.

PCZVERDICT 60%

⬆ This is excitment for some people.

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 2 • MANIC KARTS • SPACE CLASH: THE LAST FRONTIER

✪ Sold Out • £7.99 • Out now

Space Clash might be bringing up the token bit-of-fun-but-nothing-new RTS side of this pack, but possibly it's worth it for the retro value of *Championship Manager 2* alone. Unfortunately *Manic Karts* didn't live up to developer Manic Medias previous mildly entertaining *Super Karts*, choosing to go with limited tracks and a dodgy control system, which means you spend more time off the road than on it. The only redeeming feature of the game is the ability to be able to bribe officials into altering your score.

PCZVERDICT 53%

DOMINION: STORM OVER GIFT 3

✪ Sold Out • £4.99 • Out now

With the exception of *Daikatana* it's difficult to remember too many bad Edios games. Unfortunately, the lacklustre *Dominion: Storm Of Gift 3* falls sadly in the great big bin of below par RTS games. In your role as galactic commander of one of four races you land on the surface of the alien planet Gift 3 in search of a messiah with incredible powers. On release *Dominion* didn't offer RTS fans anything new and it certainly hasn't gotten any better with age.

⬆ Yet another samey RTS.

PCZVERDICT 35%

WORMS • ZAP! THE ALIEN • MONTENZUMA'S RETURN

✪ Sold Out • £7.99 • Out now

Worms is one of those all time great multiplayer titles, and probably the best ever use of a sheep in any computer game. Although graphics and weaponry have improved the gameplay has remained the same, if you've never met these squeaky fellows there's no better place to start. The exclamation mark after *Zap's* name should warn you immediately to stay right away, while *Montezuma's Return* is no *Tomb Raider*, it should while away a few fun-filled hours.

⬆ Oh, go on, give him a hug.

PCZVERDICT 65%

⬆ This is definitely not in the highway code.

GRAND THEFT AUTO • CHASM: THE RIFT • ARMOR COMMAND

✪ Sold Out • £7.99 • Out now

Here we have an overly complicated and rapidly ageing RTS in the form of Armor Command, while *Chasm: The Rift* made the big mistake of trying to pitch itself as being better than *Quake*. Definitely the best of this bunch is *Grand Theft Auto*, which was obviously intended to be the computer game version of *Police, Camera, Action*. A believable and versatile environment, and even if the cars don't drive like proper cars, it gets your blood pumping and the tunes are nice and loud.

PCZVERDICT 63%

⬆ *Starcraft* clone anyone?

DARK COLONY • OUTLAW RACERS • ARMY MEN

✪ Sold Out • £4.99 • Out now

Unfortunately *Army Men* was born into a *Command & Conquer* saturated gaming world, otherwise it might have held a more long-lasting appeal. It's also unfortunate that the game was pocked with gaping flaws, including clumsy controls, disastrous AI and lousy aiming. *Dark Colony* is probably the best of a bad bunch of RTS games on offer this month, while *Outlaw Racers* is a good concept, but it's just horribly executed.

PCZVERDICT 40%

FEEDBACK

One of the biggest games of the year, gets one of the biggest responses. *Martin Korda* sifts through your opinions

ALIENS VS PREDATOR 2

REVIEWED *PCZ* #110, Christmas 2001
SCORE 93%

What we said

"Whether *AvP2* is better than *Half-Life* will, in the end, come down to personal choice. And for me that choice is this. If I had to play one, I'd play *AvP2* – but it's a bloody close call... *AvP2* may lack the wide variety of enemies of *H-L*, and yes, *Half-Life* did do all this first, and in some departments better. Three years ago. But we mustn't be afraid to move on, especially when a game this good comes along, and as games journalists and gamers, we must have the courage to overcome the fear of saying so when something appears that can stack up to what has now become a virtually untouchable game."

What you thought

Well done *PC ZONE* for another spot on review. *Aliens Vs Predator 2* is superb, without a doubt the most frightening and atmospheric game I have played. Cheers lads

for pointing me in the right direction to a classic, yet again.
Matt Jones (aka mooncalf29)

✪ I have just played one of the scariest games ever, *Aliens Vs Predator 2*. This game is so dark and scary I am going to be sleeping with the light on tonight. It beats any other game I have played. I may regret saying this, but I think this even surpasses the master of all FPSs, *Half-Life*. There, I've said it. Now go and buy this game before you become one of the people who misses out on a gaming experience like no other. Sweet dreams.
Sean Roalfe

✪ Well I never. For once, I've really been pissed off. I was looking forward to my new issue of *ZONE* a little more than I normally do, as I knew the review of *AvP2* would be in it. I wouldn't usually buy a game before I read your review but this time I changed my mind. I had already bought and completed the Marine and Predator missions in *AvP2* before I read your review. I also knew that you would be so far up

it that not even a small nuclear device would prise your pathetic excuses for genitalia out of it. Martin Korda was in my opinion right with a lot of what he wrote, but better than *Half-Life*? No way.

AvP2 is well worked. It has its moments. The levels are well made. The tension as you enter a room and hear a Predator was enough to make me soil

my pants so much that I now wear nappies. However, the AI for the human guards is rubbish. I even encountered Aliens that get trapped behind stair railings, and so make easy targets. You fight a Predator only once properly and he is hard as nails. (When you play as a Predator, however, you are picked off after taking only a handful of pulse rifle rounds). As for the story, it could have been amazing, but again I felt let down. It has great potential, but from what I have seen, the developers appear to have considered it an afterthought.

Half-Life was epic. In scale, graphics and most importantly, its story. A great game must immerse you in the world it is trying to create. Just looking good does not cut it. *AvP2* has many qualities. But as Richie Shoemaker says in the second opinion, *AvP2* is not groundbreaking.

I agree very much with what Martin says at the end of his review: We must not be afraid to admit when *Half-Life* is knocked of its throne. However,

conversely we must not consider every big name FPS that hits the shelves as the next *Half-Life*. So what if *HL* is still the best? Just because nothing has yet beaten it is not the game's fault. It is down to developers trying to copy what Valve did instead of coming up with something innovative.

Sorry to rant. Your mag is class, but I am worried that my beloved *PCZ* is becoming easy to predict when handing out Classic awards. I hope that this Christmas cheer will be short lived and soon you'll be miserable as sin again. Cheers.
kboon

✪ Brilliant, brilliant, brilliant,

She's behind you... oh no she's not.

AvP2, one of the scariest games of all time.

Martin Korda was right when he said that it would come down to personal choice when deciding whether *AvP2* was better than *Half-Life*. And my choice is that it most definitely is.

I've never written to Feedback before, simply because no game in the past few years has made me feel passionate enough, until now. The AI is good, the level design great with superb lighting and detail. The graphics and sound are also great, with the Monolith boys pulling out all the stops and the Lithtech engine looks mighty impressive. But where would all that be if you didn't feel any emotion when playing? This is where *AvP2* really shines, with the storyline and atmosphere really drawing you in, and for me at least, more than *Half-Life* ever did. If you like FPSs, go and buy this now and you'll remember what it feels like to

play a good FPS, and realise what we've all been deprived of these past few years.

Lee Garindan

✪ Once I read your review on *AvP2*, I thought that I must get the game. After installing it, I got into playing as the Predator, at which point, the tiny little cogs in my head started turning, and I thought, "Wow". It's great fun bashing people's heads off and taking them as trophies. But then the section of cogs in my head that control my loyalty to *Half-Life* started turning. All I could think was, could this be better than *Half-Life*? And I came to this conclusion. No. It is just as fun and entertaining, but in *AvP2* you don't have the satisfaction of pulverising a soldier and seeing all the blood where he lies. However, being able to cut up your enemy in *AvP2* as a Predator is quite fun. It's also loads of fun

to run across walls and chasing after little scientists who shit themselves in front of you as you stand over them when playing as the Alien. The graphics are good and the fear factor is quite high, which is a huge bonus. *Half-Life*?

> **"If you like FPSs, go and buy *Aliens Vs Predator* now and you'll remember what it feels like to play a good one"**
>
> *Lee Garindan* is pretty pleased with *AvP2*

You call that scary? Hahahaa. So *AvP2* is now tied first with *Half-Life* as the number one FPS, and I feel sure it will remain a No 1 game. Let's just hope the add-ons are better than *Blue Shift* was.

Lewis Labram (Grim Fandango Maximus)

✪ I have been a reader of your magazine for two years now, during which time *PC ZONE* has helped me choose some truly

great games, and I have always trusted the *ZONE* team for their honest comments, until I read your review of *AvP2*. To even mention this pile of poop in the same breath as *Half-Life* is, quite frankly, outrageous. After reading your review and seeing your award of a *PC ZONE* Classic, I rushed out to buy the game, but boy was I in for a shock.

A tired storyline, with some truly dreadful scripting, poor AI and just two days to complete the marine level (the best of a bad bunch), I was left wondering what was going on. Personally, I would have given the game about 78 per cent, and I certainly don't buy games that only get 78 per cent. The free demo you gave away was very bad, so I wonder how many loyal readers went out and wasted £30 on this game only to be truly disappointed. A very sad day for *PC ZONE*.

Paul Matthews

✪ I just had to let the guys at

the best games mag in the world know what I thought of *AvP2*. Brilliant. Superb graphics, superb sound and excellent mission design are just some of the features that make *AvP2* the best FPS since *Half-Life*. But what really makes *AvP2* a must for every serious gamer is the gameplay. Furious action with aliens charging towards you at full pelt as you frantically try to re-load, not knowing when you will be attacked next, scary. Not only is *AvP2* a superb FPS, it's quite possibly the scariest game ever, (*Alone In The Dark 4* may just beat it in that department). The decent story line adds to

this tremendous title, and with three different characters to play as, it should satisfy even the most hardened gamer in terms of longevity. The only downside I can see is the endless stream of drunken pub arguments that will no doubt surface. Is *AvP2* better than *Half-Life*? I don't know, but I will say that if *Half-Life* was the best, then *AvP2* is most definitely in its face now.

Richard Bamborough

Comment

Every time we give out a *PC ZONE* Classic, we're inundated with letters of varying opinions, but not since *Black & White* have we had such a passionate response to a review. Your replies have not only been hugely varied, but on the whole, superbly argued, with opinion split about 70/30 (a proportion which we've tried to represent on these pages) in favour of the game. In fact, it has been surprising just how many of you think that *AvP2* is as good if not better than *Half-Life*. However, a fair few of you have been highly critical of both our review and the game. As we said, it's down to personal choice and preference, and it's at times like these that Feedback really comes into its own, as it's always good to hear a wide spectrum of opinions on big name games. Like we said, *AvP2* is not groundbreaking, neither is it the perfect FPS, but it is supremely entertaining, stunningly immersive and chillingly terrifying. And if there are two things that the majority of you do agree on, it's that *AvP2* is one of the top two FPSs of all time, and one of the scariest games ever. Now if that's not an endorsement of its quality, then I don't know what is. PCZ
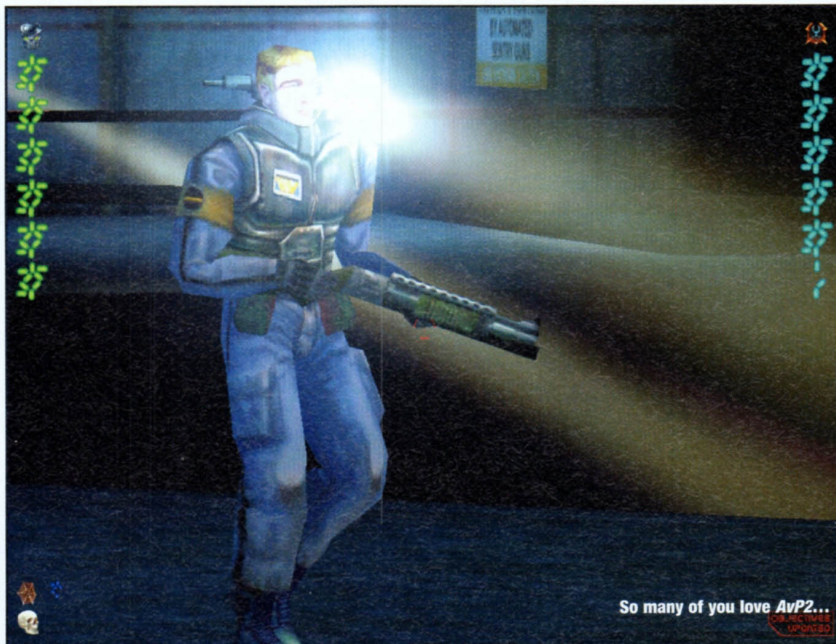
So many of you love *AvP2*...

...some of you don't.

REALITY CHECK:
POWERBOATING

The intrepid *Steve Hill* takes to the high seas, and tries not to spill his guts

In this world, there are the haves, the have-nots, and the have-yachts, and you're never going to make it into the latter category (unless you're a games developer). While millionaire playboys cruise round St Tropez in high-velocity craft, the greatest water-based thrill you've ever had is hiring a pedal-o for half an hour in Tosser Del Mar. Face it, the closest you're going to come to driving a speedboat is sitting in front of your PC playing some poxy game.

Not me. I've done the real thing, risking life and limb in a selfless quest to see how it compares to the virtual experience. Look, there I am, having fun, fun, fun. It isn't easy being this miserable, you know, but I've never been happy – it's not in my contract. A man has to

make a living though, and today's chore sees me taking the helm of a top-of-the-range powerboat. If you've ever flicked to Channel Four while waiting for *Football Focus* of a Saturday morning, you may have seen the very craft, as these are the models that are raced in the Offshore Powerboating Championship, a pseudo-celebrity competition of minor repute. In fact, the previous incumbent of the boat that I'm in was none other than TV's Jamie Theakston, described by the man currently at the wheel as not being in the best physical shape.

MAN IN A BOAT
That man at the wheel is 37-year-old Steve Curtis, a suave seadog with an unprecedented three world titles to his name. He's agreed to teach me how to drive

a boat – if that's the correct term – and to do so we've come to The Solent, a piece of sea off the South Coast of England. With lifebelts attached, Curtis opens up the throttle, immediately shattering any illusions.

Skimming along a sun-kissed beachfront may seem like a graceful pursuit, but in reality it's like sitting in a wind tunnel while being whacked on the arse with an outsized cricket bat. Water is said to display the same solidity as concrete under certain conditions, and this hardness seems to be translated directly to my coccyx. Under advice, I wedge my feet against the seat in front and adopt a bestial squatting position, much like a man who has fouled himself and is awaiting assistance. It's a mild improvement, but other areas of

the body continue to suffer, and the chocolate éclair I wolfed down after lunch now appears ill-advised.

In summary then, it's a bleak grey day, scenery consists of a fume-belching factory on the

> **❝Under advice, I adopt a bestial squatting position, much like a man who has fouled himself and is awaiting assistance❞**

Isle of Wight, I am in fear of drowning or injury, and am suffering rectal pain and nausea. The glamour.

NEVER GET OUT OF THE BOAT
As with most things though, it's far more enjoyable when you're in charge, and the driver's seat is actually considerably more

comfortable. Controlling the boat is a doddle, with acceleration imparted via a foot pedal akin to that of a dodgem car. There's also something called a trimmer, which regulates how far the hull of the boat sits out of the water.

Other than that, it's quite straightforward – you simply steer where you want to go.

Instructed to turn left, I naturally ease my foot off the throttle, whereby I am severely reprimanded by Curtis, who informs me that it is deemed extremely bad manners to slow down. Wrong though it might seem, it's possible to maintain

REAL

VS

NOT REAL
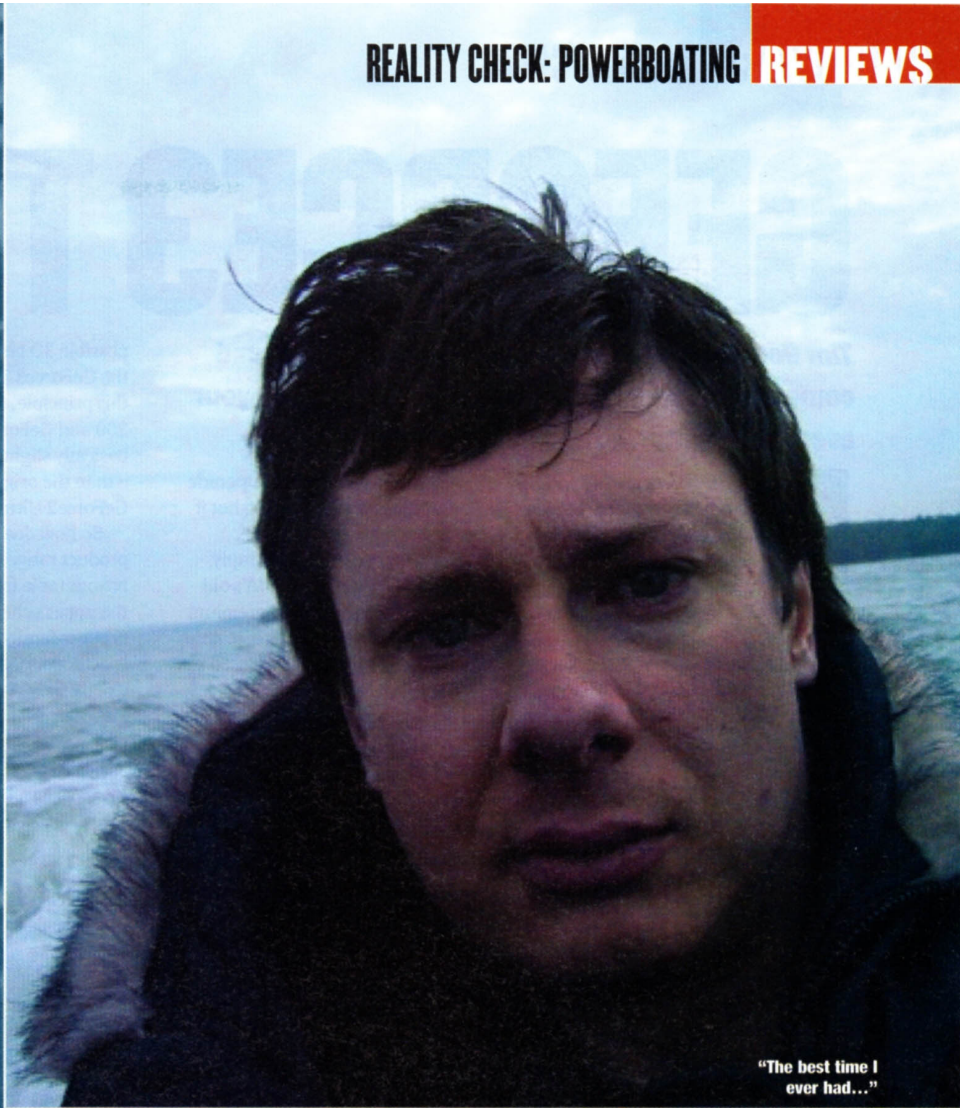
"The best time I ever had…"

full speed during all but the sharpest of turns.

The sea is an unpredictable mistress though, and it only takes a rogue wave to remind you that you're not actually playing a game. Perhaps it's the erratic nature of the ocean that has restricted the number of realistic water-based games, although if they were entirely accurate they might not be that much fun. Without any torpedoes, and in the absence of an organised race, there isn't actually a great deal to do. It might seem ungrateful, but after half an hour of messing about on the water, I am almost bored, longing for the sanctuary of bed and Teletext. I attempt to liven things up by aiming directly for the Eddie Jordan boat, but correct the path long before anyone's life is in danger.

It might provide a short-term rush, but ultimately a powerboat is an uncomfortable, inconvenient form of transport. So the next time you see a leather-skinned Lothario cruising along with a glass of champagne, bear in mind that he's paid a small fortune to have a sore arse and an unsteady stomach. For a sliver of the cost, you're better off sticking to playing games. PCZ

HOW REAL IS... HYDRO THUNDER?

Thunderbolt and lightning, very, very frightening...

In the sense that the boats can virtually fly as they tear around the exotic scenery collecting turbo boosts, it's not very real at all. The water model is fairly complex though, and the boat bobs up and down in a fairly convincing fashion. In fact, play it long enough, particularly in the first-person view, and you do actually begin to feel mildly nauseous, just like you probably would if you spent too long on a normal speedboat, which isn't necessarily a recommendation. That said, for five notes this is actually a decent little racer, and probably the best the PC has to offer in terms of powerboating games.

⊙⊙⊙⊙⊙

⬆ Hydro Thunder will make you seasick in first-person mode.

HOW REAL IS... THAMES RACER?

London calling...

Again, the gimmicks come thick and fast, with the ability to fire rockets at your opponents and leap out of the water at the push of a button erring on the side of fantasy. Certainly, I wasn't given the opportunity to blow anyone up while I was racing in real life. A semblance of authenticity is added by the inclusion of recognisable landmarks, although all but the most slack-jawed yokel will immediately discern that their locations bear only nominal comparison with those of their real-life counterparts. As for the water physics, it's a brave attempt, but tends to feel like sailing through a rather unruly broth. That'll be the Thames then.

⊙⊙⊙⊙⊙

⬆ Where are the torpedoes when you need them?

GEFORCE3 TITANIUM

Tim Ponting checks out a pair of GeForce3 Tits and comes to the conclusion that they're more than your average handful…

NVIDIA is a company with product diarrhoea. I mean that in the nicest possible way – every six months something 'faster and better' or 'fast and cheap' is released, making its previous products redundant, overpriced, or both. While this is undoubtedly good news if you're just about to upgrade your graphics card, it's not so hot if you've just done so.

Titanium cards are not simply today's equivalent of NVIDIA's old 'Ultra' boards, which used premium parts for both the graphics core chip and memory chips, and whacked up the clockspeeds to give the best possible 3D performance. While the the GeForce3 Titanium 500 follows this principle, the GeForce3 Titanium 200 and GeForce2 Titanium are both basically slightly slower – but cheaper – than the original GeForce3 and GeForce2 Ultra respectively.

So how does the current NVIDIA product range pan out? Check out the boxout table for a quick overview of the upper echelons of the GeForce product family. In terms of specification, the pecking order is clearly GeForce3 Ti500, GF3, GF3 Ti200, GF2 Ultra, GF2 Ti, GF2 Pro, as can be seen from the combinations of core and memory clockspeeds – the faster, the better. The good news is that all the Titanium chipsets are manufactured using a new 0.15 micron process, allowing a better yield for NVIDIA (they have to throw less away) and higher clockspeeds delivered more reliably. This translates into lower prices for all three parts compared with the original GeForce3 and GeForce2 chips – hence users get more bang for their buck.

CREATIVE LABS GEFORCE3 TITANIUM 500

⭐ £320 inc VAT • Creative Labs • **www.europe.creative.com**

PCZONE BEST BUY

Most of the Titanium cards we've seen look pretty much identical – here we've tested Creative Labs' version. When buying, make sure you shop around carefully – this card, complete with TV out, has been the cheapest Ti500 on sale online in certain stores, but the most expensive in others. At the time of writing, you should expect to pay no more than £300 street price for such a board, although it can't exactly be called cheap, even at this price point.

If you move on to the graphs and check out the benchmarks, you'll no doubt come across some interesting issues. Running the usual *Quake III Arena* Open GL test demo in either 16-bit or 32-bit, you see that at resolutions below 1024x768 on our testbed machine, the frame-rates don't really increase, peaking at around 130FPS. This is because its 1GHz Athlon processor is at last being stressed more than the videocard – frame-rates aren't improved at 640x480 because it's already drawing polygons as fast as the game can supply them using the given CPU. We'll shortly be upgrading the machine specification, so we'll no longer suffer a processor bottleneck in future. At higher resolutions, you can see that the frame-rate begins to drop off, but

nevertheless stays a blistering 90 to 100 frames per second running at 1600x1200 in either 16- or 32-bit colour.

Considering that two years ago we were struggling to hit those frame-rates at 1024 x 768, it's an amazing step forward. For the eagle-eyed who are checking out our review of the original GeForce3 card, you'll also see what a massive improvement there is at higher Open GL resolutions. This is both down to the higher component ratings (especially the memory, though it's a small increase)
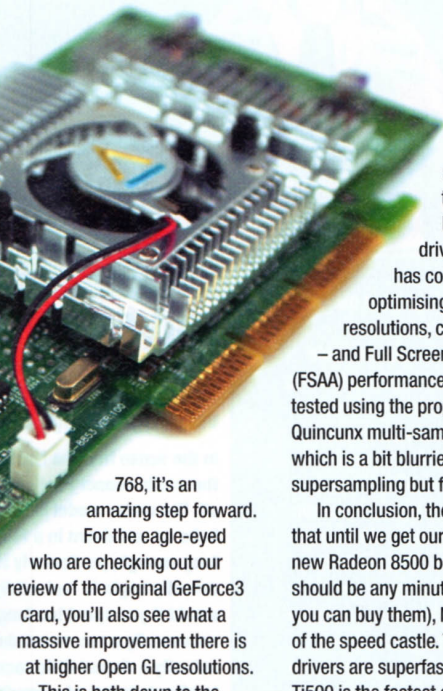
and, significantly, to the new Detonator XP driver. NVIDIA has concentrated on optimising the higher resolutions, colour depths – and Full Screen Anti-Aliasing (FSAA) performance. This was tested using the proprietary Quincunx multi-sampling system, which is a bit blurrier than 4x supersampling but far faster.

In conclusion, there's no doubt that until we get our hands on the new Radeon 8500 board (which should be any minute now since you can buy them), NVIDIA is king of the speed castle. The new drivers are superfast, and the Ti500 is the fastest of the fast.

PCZVERDICT **90%**

BENCHMARKS

Just how fast are the new cards?

Tested on 1GHz Athlon with Abit-KT7A motherboard, 384Mb PC100 RAM, running under Windows 98SE. Older Via drivers used for stability purposes. NVIDIA Detonator XP 23.11 reference drivers installed for both cards.

Due to differences between hardware and software set-up, these results are not comparable to those in the original GeForce3 review or other articles.

We also tested both cards under DirectX 7 and results were surprisingly poor – make sure you upgrade to DX8 even if your game doesn't require it!

16-bit DX 8.1 3D Mark 2001

16-bit OpenGL Performance
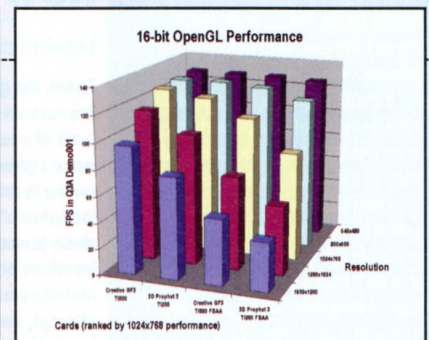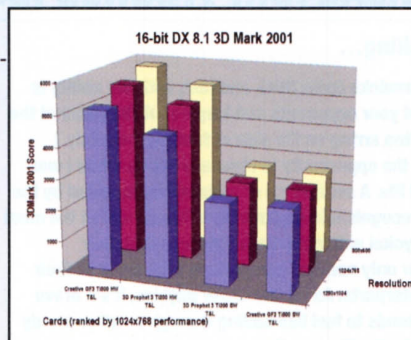
500 AND 200

> **"Titanium cards are not simply today's equivalent of NVIDIA's old 'Ultra' boards"**

At the time of writing, most of the online vendors clearly haven't grasped the nettle yet – the older, and slower, GeForce3 is being sold in some cases for more than either the Ti500 or Ti200. However, once vendors go into GeForce3 clearance mode, you may well find it a comparative bargain. In this article, we take a look at two GeForce3 Titanium cards – the Creative Labs GeForce3 Titanium 500 and the Hercules 3D Prophet 3 Ti200 to see how they stack up.

TECHNOLOGY

NVIDIA's own literature claims that the GF3 Tits "bring two new features to end users: shadow buffer technology and 3D textures." This is not strictly true: these features can actually be enabled on any original GF3 card by updating to the latest Unified Driver Set (Detonator XP 23.11, tested here).

The new features add new functions to the nfininteFX engine. 3D textures are particularly exciting: developers can now add a depth-related function to their textures, allowing them to make 'hollow' textures solid. The examples given by NVIDIA include veining running through a marble block and volumetric fog effects (where the 3D textures allow the density and pattern of the fog to vary with its 'depth', such that bits of objects within the fog that are closer to you are clearer). There are also certain clever techniques available to programmers that can animate lots of tiny 2D objects using 3D textures to make them look 3D without using millions of polygons and crucifying frame-rates.

Shadow buffering is a technique used to increase the complexity of the shadows that can be displayed on screen practically. First, a 'map' is created of the shadows cast by each lit object on screen. These are then stored like textures in the shadow buffer for re-use later, making the whole drawing process more efficient. As a result of this, more realistic light and shade effects become practical – such as softened shadow edges using filtering, and shadows cast by a complex-shaped object on itself.

HERCULES 3D PROPHET 3 TITANIUM 200

⭐ £219.99 • Hercules • 020 8665 1881 • **www.hercules-uk.com**

The Titanium 200 cards run at a relatively modest 175MHz for the core GPU (Graphics Processing Unit) and 400MHz Double Data Rate (DDR) for the memory. This compares with the original GeForce3 running with a 200MHz core and 460MHz DDR memory. Since the processors are otherwise functionally identical, it's clear that the Ti200 slots in below the GeForce3.

However, with the arrival of the new Detonator XP drivers, we actually see better performance in many cases from the Ti200 than we saw from the original GeForce3. This pretty much justifies claims from NVIDIA that Ti200 offers 'equivalent' performance to the 'original' GeForce3. But bear in mind that once you load GeForce3 with Detonator XP drivers, it flies: and in the unlikely event you can pick

one up for close to the price of a Ti200, you'll be laughing.

Comparing like with like, we can see the performance of the Tits head to head. In common with most NVIDIA processors running the 3D Mark 2001 benchmark with the software T&L enabled, the scenes are so complex and CPU intensive that it's the processor that holds up the show – it's so busy setting up the polygons, so slow at handing the fully transformed and lit scene off the GPU, that the graphics card just pumps it to screen at pretty much the same speed no matter what the resolution is.

Using hardware T&L, things pick up markedly – and again the Detonator drivers help a great deal. At 1024x768 in High Detail mode, the Dragothic section of 3Dmark 2001 hits just under 37 frames per second on our testbed machine in 32-bit colour, 63 frames in the Low Detail variant. This compares with over 52 and 93 frames per second respectively for the
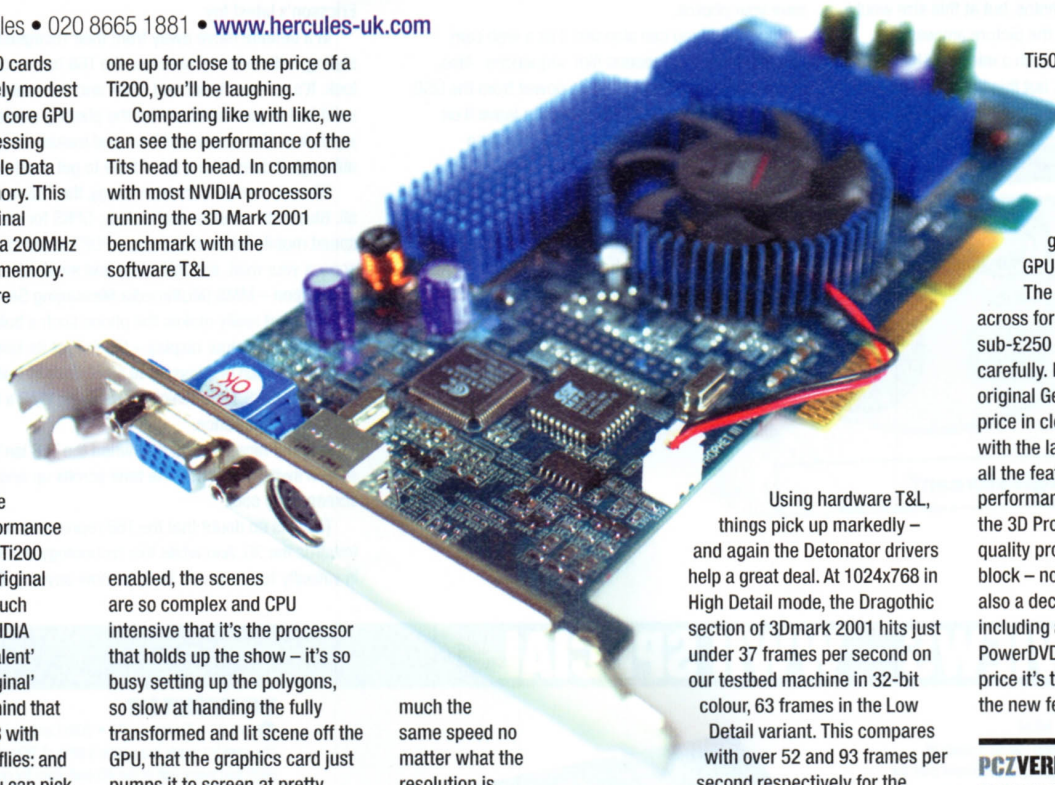
Ti500-based card, whose greater memory bandwidth and improved theoretical fill-rate gives it a strong upper hand with games that hoover GPU power like these.

The street prices I've come across for these cards put them sub-£250 – but shop around carefully. If you come across an original GeForce3 at a similar price in clearance, snap it up – with the latest drivers you get all the features and better performance. Having said that, the 3D Prophet 3 Ti200 is another quality product off the Hercules block – not only with TV out, but also a decent software bundle including a tweaking utility and PowerDVD – and at the right price it's the cheapest way into the new features of DirectX 8.

PCZVERDICT   **82%**

↑ Caption

↑ Caption

THE FAMILY TREE
GeForce3 family

	Titanium 500	GeForce 3	*Theoretical Titanium 200
Core clockspeed	240MHz	200MHz	175MHz
Memory clockspeed	500MHz	460MHz	400MHz
Memory Bandwidth *	8Gb/sec	7.36Gb/sec	6.4Gb/sec

GeForce2 family (excluding MX)

	Ultra	Titanium	*Theoretical Pro
Core clockspeed	250MHz	250MHz	200MHz
Memory clockspeed	460MHz	400MHz	400MHz
Memory Bandwidth *	7.36Gb/sec	6.4Gb/sec	6.4Gb/sec

GADGETS

More bright and shiny things to make you happy

L'ESPION

✪ £39.99 • Digital Dream • 0800 389 7404 • **www.digitaldreamco.com**

If stingy Santa didn't bring you that digital camera for Christmas, then maybe now is the time to bite the bullet and buy your own. And before you start complaining about the cost, take a look at this tiny bundle of fun.

More Bond than Brosnan, the L'espion is a fully functioning digital camera that hangs off your key ring. About the size of a box of matches, it still manages to squeeze on a couple of buttons, viewfinder and even a USB socket. There's no LCD display for previewing photos, but at this size would you really be able to see the picture anyway?

As you'd expect from such a midget, it has only got 2Mb of memory, but this is enough for 80 shots at low resolution – and it is low. At just 176 x 144 pixels you're not buying this camera for its photographic capabilities. And, as there's no flash, it will only operate in strong light.

So what exactly are you going to buy the L'espion for? Well, how about just good old-fashioned entertainment? Take it out with you and you'll be fighting off friends desperate to have a go. And when you get back to your PC, simply plug in the USB cable, and it automatically asks where you'd like to save your photos.

Incredibly, you can also use it as a web cam and for making 10-second film sequences. Also, because the camera gets all its power from the USB connection, you can leave it on for as long as you are using your computer.

The L'espion not only proves that the best things come in small packages, but that fun really can come cheap. Enough clichés, just buy one and see for yourself. ✪✪✪✪✪

ERICSSON T68

✪ £179.99 with contract • Carphone Warehouse • 0808 100 9250 • **www.carphonewarehouse.com**

While we don't expect you to rush out and upgrade your mobile every time we rave about a new phone, we do urge you to consider the possibility of digging deep in your pockets for Ericsson's latest toy.

In a definite move away from their recognisable flip-open styling, with external antenna, the T68 has a completely new look. It's very compact and sleek and the rubber back gives it a solid feel in your hand, unlike the plasticy predecessors. The joystick is also a new addition, and makes navigation easy, although it does take a bit of time to get used to.

When it comes to its technology, the T68 really does have it all. Bluetooth wireless technology, GPRS for instant, high-speed mobile internet access, a POP3 email client, so you can access your mail, and the latest and most advanced messaging application – MMS (Multimedia Messaging Service).

But what really makes the phone such a bobby-dazzler is its large, 256-colour display – the first of its kind on the mobile market – which displays up to eight lines of text. It also supports GPRS, all of which make using WAP a totally new, and enjoyable experience.

Another nice touch is that when the T68 isn't in use, its screen switches off and the time scrolls up and down the screen. Very cool.

There is no doubt that the T68 represents the first real step towards the 3G. And while this technology don't come cheap, it is virtually future-proof. Well, for now anyway. ✪✪✪✪✪

DVD REVIEWS – WWII SPECIAL

THE GREAT ESCAPE

✪ £14.99 • Certificate PG • MGM

The 4th July celebrations, James Garner's stash of contraband, Steve McQueen going all Evil Knevil over the wire… everyone remembers at least some of *The Great Escape*, since of course it has been on TV more times than Barbara Windsor.

Based of course on a true story, it tells of the biggest prisoner breakout of WWII. As is usual for action films of the era, you've got your all-star cast, an unforgettable theme tune and wonderful cinematography that doesn't rely on CG effects.

Aside from James Coburn's grating aussie accent, there is very little to dislike. From a generally light-hearted first half, the film picks up into a tense action drama where even after repeat viewing you'll be willing Richard Attenborough to make a run for it at the end. If nothing else it's worth buying to get a few tips before *Prisoner Of War* escapes in June.

EXTRA FEATURES Trailer, '*Return To The Great Escape*' documentary ✪✪✪✪✪
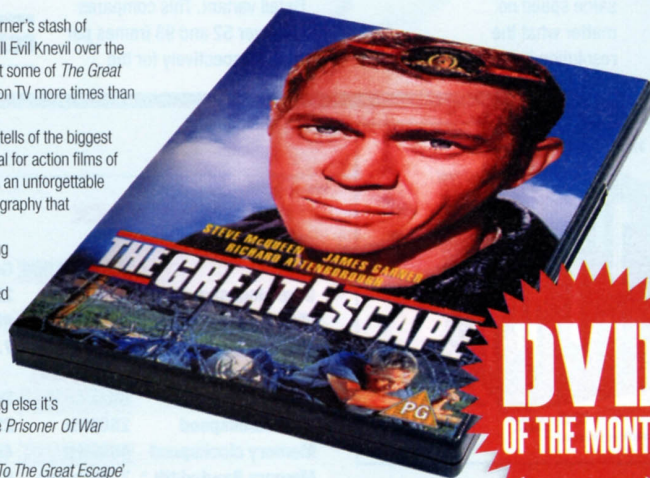
DVD OF THE MONTH

THE LONGEST DAY

✪ £18.99 • Certificate PG • 20th Century Fox

The cast list reads like a Who's Who of '60s Hollywood and as much as each and every one of the 40-odd stars try and take centre stage, it's the scale of the movie that hogs the limelight. Considering three directors were involved, the film hangs together well and the film is a fine synopsis of the book on which it is based and tells almost every story there was to be told about the events around the 6th June 1944, from the paratroop drops before the invasion to the British and American landings. We even get to see the blunders made on the part of the German High Command. The D-Day action may well have been bettered by *Saving Private Ryan*, but as the saying goes; they don't make 'em like this anymore. Nor are they ever likely to again.

EXTRA FEATURES Trailers, 'D-Day Revisited' documentary ✪✪✪✪✪

ARMARI R850-2GHZ

✪ £1996.33 • Armari • 020 8993 4111 • www.armari.co.uk

If you want to know how to future-proof yourself throughout the whole of 2002, read-on. Intel might already be talking about stupid speed increases over the coming years, but at the moment this is the pinnacle of performance for pounds. Not strictly a gadget as such, although it is the base that all other gadgets fit into, this PC sports a set of specs that's guaranteed to make you green with envy.

Inside the practical, if slightly dull, casing is a GeForce 3 graphics card (which we've just heard is going to be replaced by the new Titanium 500 at no extra cost), the brand new Best Buy Audigy soundcard, combined CDRW/DVD drive, and a whopping 60Gb hard drive. The quality components are kept up with a Logitech mouse and keyboard, and a 19-inch iiyama monitor.

Benchmarks were suitably off the scale, with scores in Direct 3D (7625 at 800x600 and 6875 at 1280x1024 in 3D Mark 2001) and OpenGL putting it at the top of anything we've tested. The real question is do you need this much power? Most games will run fine on something half the speed, and you know that price drops will be announced as soon as you've fired this machine up and played your first game. Still, if money is no object, who are we to stand in your way? ✪✪✪✪○
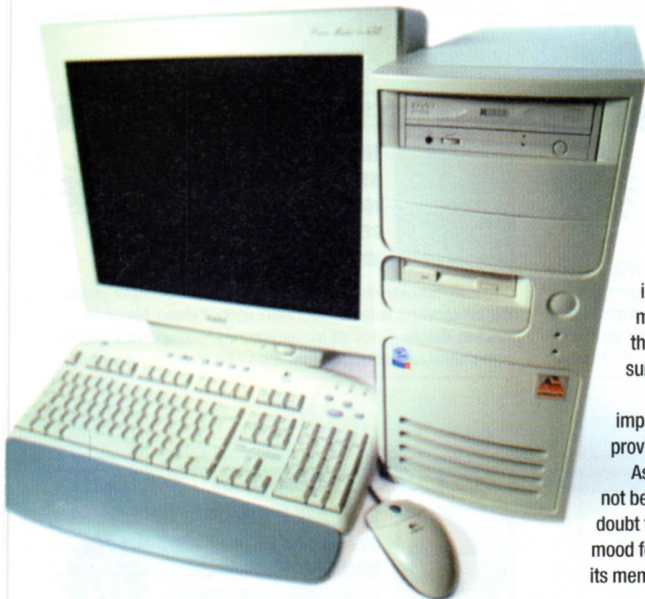
SAITEK TOUCH FORCE OPTICAL MOUSE

✪ £39.99 • Saitek • 01454 451 900 • www.saitek.co.uk

The mouse is one of the cheapest components of your PC and a decent one is an absolute must if you play games. RPG, RTS and FPS games are almost unplayable without a sensitive and accurate mouse, and yet most gamers don't bother changing the one they get with their PC. Why? Simply because most PCs ship with a Microsoft mouse as standard and, with few exceptions, they're the best.

This one offers a couple of things over and above your standard Intellimouse. For a start it's optical which means no moving parts (and thus no cleaning) and increased sensitivity. Then there's the 'force feedback', vibrations which can be set to trigger in standard Windows applications and games, although at present *Black & White* is the only one that's programmed to take advantage of the technology. Some might say (us included) that that's because it's a bit of a gimmick that doesn't work – after half an hour of using Windows with the thing we turned the vibrations off and never wanted them on again. That doesn't mean you should ignore Saitek mice, we just think you should go for the non-vibration version, the Optical Mouse Pro (a tenner cheaper at £29.99), which we reviewed in issue 110. ✪✪✪○○
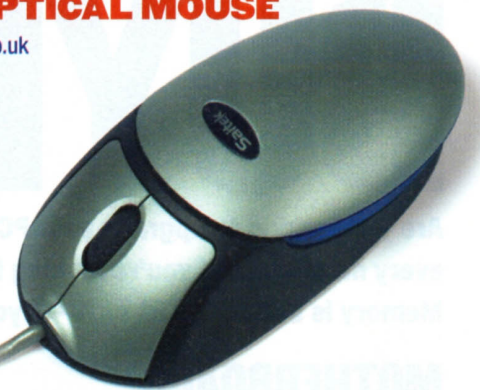
POGO

✪ £299 • Pogo • 020 7961 4100 • www.pogo-tech.com

For some months now the *ZONE* office has heard talk of a mythical creature. One that looks like nothing else on planet earth and that can transmorph from a GSM phone to an internet tablet, email provider, games console, MP3 player and organiser.

And at last that myth has become a reality as we've finally got our hands on the Pogo. Daft name, but one that somehow suits this funky-looking little device, made on our own fair shores. Kings Lynn, if you're interested.

Its key offering is full-colour access to the internet, which is as fast as a standard 56k modem. Add to that it's a 3.8-inch screen, and for the first time we can honestly say that mobile surfing is a pleasure, rather than a chore.

Downloading email from the net is equally impressive and it means that the Pogo really does provide communication on the go.

As it does entertainment. Its choice of games may not be the most mentally challenging, but there's not doubt they are highly addictive. But if you're not in the mood for gaming, just sit back and enjoy your MP3s, via its memory card slot. And although you can't download on the hoof from the web, we're told this is in the pipeline.

Another great idea is that all data entered is stored on a central server, so if you lose the device, your diary and address book can be easily retrieved. Let's just hope Pogo doesn't go down, taking your contacts with it. ✪✪✪✪○

BUY ONLINE FROM www.amazon.co.uk amazon.co.uk

STALINGRAD

✪ £12.99 • Certificate 15 • EV

A platoon of German soldiers find themselves facing a bitter winter in Stalingrad. From what was supposed to be a glorious victory signalling the end of Stalinist Russia, the German army are soon facing defeat. Surrounded by Reds and destined to join the two million dead, the platoon decide to fight their way out, against the orders of their superiors.

While you don't see the scale of the bloodshed here, the suffering endured by the foot-soldiers is superbly captured by the producers of that other great German war movie, *Das Boot*. Unfortunately the quality of the picture seems to have suffered in the transfer to DVD and considering there are no extra features to speak of, a hunt for the video might be your best bet. Yet Stalingrad remains one of the best war films of the last decade.

EXTRA FEATURES
Trailer, picture gallery
✪✪✪○

SAVING PRIVATE RYAN

✪ £18.99 • Certificate 15 • Paramount

When it comes to blockbuster movies, no-one can make them quite like Stephen Spielberg. Special effects, stomach-churning sentimentality and Tom Hanks – they're all there in abundance, and as a throwback to the classic war films of the Sixties and Seventies, Ryan is a damn fine film, far superior to *Pearl Harbor*, overdosed as it is on nineties pretty-boy soppiness. The legendary opening 30 minutes are without doubt some of the most harrowing war scenes ever shot, the other 90 even more so for all the wrong reasons. If after playing the *Medal Of Honour* demo you're waiting for the full game's D-Day sequence, this will get you in the mood.

EXTRA FEATURES Trailers, 'Into The Breach' documentary.
✪✪✪✪○

PEARL HARBOR

✪ £15.99 • Certificate 12 • Touchstone

We thought this would be a good time to put aside churlish objections, swallow our pride and do something we vowed we'd never do – watch *Pearl Harbor*. Predictably it was a tragic mistake. Maybe, just maybe the film would have something going for it in the cinema, and the big budget battle scenes are fantastic, but they're sandwiched between one of the dullest romantic love triangles we've had the fortune to sleep through.

The only other reason to watch it is so you can pretend that World War II was won with grit and daring rather than two great huge explosions courtesy of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

EXTRA FEATURES The making of Pearl Harbor, Pearl harbor: The Japanese Perspective.
✪○○○○

BUYER'S GUIDE

Are you looking to upgrade your PC? Since we've started this Buyer's Guide, prices have dropped consistently every month, and if you're looking for a bit of extra zip, you can get it for a lot less than you might have thought. Memory is dirt cheap as well – if you're still labouring with less than 128Mb RAM buy some now

MOTHERBOARD

BEST BUY
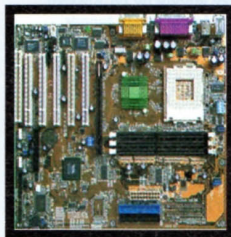
ASUS A7V266-E
STREET PRICE £155 inc VAT
MANUFACTURER Asus
TELEPHONE N/A   **WEBSITE** www.asus.com

£159 £155

After the rather lacklustre performance of VIA's first DDR chipset, the KT266, we are now seeing boards trickle through featuring the much improved KT266A. The Asus A7V266-E will take PC2100 DDR memory running on the ultra-fast 266MHz bus and should represent a hefty performance hike over the previous Best Buy based on the older KT133A chipset. A fast hard drive controller, six USB slots, optional six-channel audio on board and full support for Athlon XP processors rounds up an excellent package from a reliable motherboard manufacturer.

BEST BUDGET
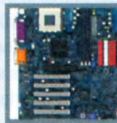
GIGABYTE GA-7ZXR REV 3
STREET PRICE £92 inc VAT
MANUFACTURER Gigabyte
TELEPHONE 01908 362700
WEBSITE www.gbt-tech.co.uk

The GA-7ZXR is similar to the ABIT KT-7A-RAID, taking Socket A Athlon processors to 1.4GHz and offering support for up to 4 ATA-100 RAID and 4 ATA-100 IDE devices. It even has four-channel audio on board courtesy of the Creative Labs CT5880 PCI chipset.

PROCESSOR

BEST BUY
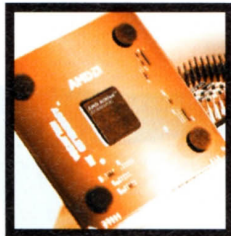
AMD ATHLON XP 1700+
STREET PRICE £146 inc VAT
MANUFACTURER AMD
TELEPHONE N/A   **WEBSITE** www.amd.com

£149 £146

The Athlon XP processors are named after the clockspeed of Intel processors it claims to beat. The 1700+ actually runs at a clockspeed of 1.47GHz, and with new so-called QuantiSpeed architecture, more on-chip cache and souped-up 3DNow! instruction set, it offers superb performance in a range of applications – not least games. While the 1800+ is currently the fastest processor in the range, the 1700+ is good value for money. Ensure your Socket A motherboard has an updated BIOS and correctly rated components to run an XP processor before you fork out.

BEST BUDGET
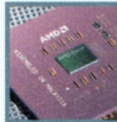
DURON 1000
STREET PRICE £61 inc VAT
MANUFACTURER AMD
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.amd.com

£69 £61

Durons are basically Athlons with smaller Level 2 (L2) processor caches. This still compares favourably with Intel's ageing Celeron chip cache structure. Besides, Duron still has the blistering Floating Point Unit (FPU) mathematical calculation speed, making it a top processor for gamers.

HARD DRIVE

BEST BUY

SEAGATE BARRACUDA ATA IV 60GB
STREET PRICE £120 inc VAT
MANUFACTURER Seagate
TELEPHONE 01628 890 366   **WEBSITE** www.seagate.com

We have a new Best Buy hard drive – the 60Gb Seagate Barracuda ATA IV. The IBM Deskstar 75GXP drives are looking a bit long in the tooth alongside this modern beastie. Although it's a 7,200 RPM drive, it runs both cooler and quieter than its peers. Fully loaded with a 2Mb cache, the performance is solid across the board, both in terms of average seek times and sustained data throughput. We recommend the 60Gb drive on the basis that it seems pretty good value for money, though the range also offers 20, 40 and 80Gb variants.

BEST BUDGET   NEW ENTRY

SEAGATE U SERIES 6 40Gb
STREET PRICE £74 inc VAT
MANUFACTURER Seagate
TELEPHONE 01628 890366
WEBSITE www.seagate.com

£78 £74

The U Series 5 drives are now pretty much unavailable, but is replaced in the Buyer's Guide by its own replacement. The U Series 6 drive has much the same spec as the Series 5, but runs quieter and cooler. We've also uprated capacity to 40Gb – this is great value.

MONITOR

BEST BUY

IIYAMA VISION MASTER PRO 510 22in
STREET PRICE £628
MANUFACTURER iiyama
TELEPHONE 01438 745482   **WEBSITE** www.iiyama.co.uk

I've been a devotee of iiyama products for years – both my monitors at home are iiyamas, both are comparatively old, yet as good as new. The Vision Master Pro 510 has a stunning 22in screen. The tube is a Mitsubishi Diamondtron NF (Natural Flat), arguably the best-performing flat-screen CRT for the money currently available. Of all the large-screen monitors we've come across, it's the best all-rounder, with a tight focus right to the screen corners and fabulous colour purity. It also features iiyama's own Anti-Glare coating, and a maximum resolution of 2048 x 1536.

BEST BUDGET

HANSOL 710P 17in
STREET PRICE £160 inc VAT
MANUFACTURER Hansol
TELEPHONE 01252 360400
WEBSITE www.hansol-uk.com

For the budget-conscious gamer in need of a monitor, Hansol is a company well worth a look. With a fabulously low price, it will handle 1024 x 768 with a vertical refresh rate of 85Hz, and 1600 x 1200 at a creditable 75Hz. There's not a lot that'll touch this for the money.

GRAPHICS CARD

BEST BUDGET

VIDEOLOGIC VIVID!XS 32MB
STREET PRICE £92 inc VAT
MANUFACTURER VideoLogic
TELEPHONE 01923 277488
WEBSITE www.videologic.com

The new Kyro II chipset blows its slower Kyro brethren to smithereens at 175MHz clock speed as opposed to 115MHz. The 32Mb Vivid!XS replaces the Hercules 3D Prophet 4500 as Best Budget Buy – but only just, there's barely anything to choose between the two.

NEW ENTRY

CREATIVE LABS GEFORCE 3 TITANIUM 500
STREET PRICE £294 inc VAT
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A   **WEBSITE** www.europe.creative.com

Of the 'new' Titanium products from NVIDIA, the pick of the bunch is the 500, as it's the only one that gives better performance than its predecessor, the plain ol' GeForce 3. The core clock has been upped to 240MHz from 200MHz, and the memory now runs at 500MHz (DDR) as opposed to 460MHz. Not only that, but the new 0.15 micron manufacturing process makes the cards cheaper to produce too. Creative's clearly blasted ahead in the latest round of ZONE benchtests – and since we've yet to see the new Radeon cards, they're out of the picture…
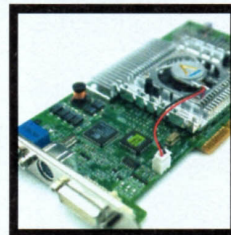
SOUNDCARD

BEST BUDGET

HERCULES GAMESURROUND FORTISSIMO II
STREET PRICE £36 inc VAT
MANUFACTURER Hercules
PHONE (020) 8686 5600
WEBSITE www.hercules-uk.com

This four-channel audio card represents excellent value for money and its DirectSound 3D support is gib-tastic. You can even get four channels of surround sound from your DVD movies with a special version of PowerDVD!

BEST BUY

CREATIVE LABS SOUND BLASTER AUDIGY PLAYER
STREET PRICE £82 inc VAT
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A   **WEBSITE** www.europe.creative.com

The SonicFury gets pipped to the post by the excellent new Audigy Player from Creative Labs. Successor to the very successful Sound Blaster Live! series, the Audigy has an audio engine four times as powerful, excellent audio quality, and a range of features that makes it the most versatile all-round gaming/music/dvd sound card. EAX Advanced HD adds a range of new 3D audio features, though it'll be a while before games filter through with support for the more esoteric options. It's about £20 more expensive than its main competition, but well worth it.
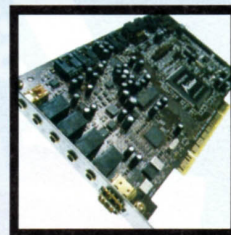
SPEAKERS

BEST BUDGET   **NEW ENTRY**

HERCULES XPS210
STREET PRICE £40 inc VAT
MANUFACTURER Hercules
TELEPHONE 020 8665 1881
WEBSITE www.hercules-uk.com

This small but perfectly formed 2.1 speaker set is cheap – but doesn't sound it. With tone controls and stereo enhancement, it's an ideal solution for desktop gaming. The satellites and subwoofer are well matched, giving a decent overall sound. And adorned in royal blue, it looks the part too…

BEST BUY   **NEW ENTRY**

KLIPSCH PROMEDIA 4.1
STREET PRICE £299
MANUFACTURER Klipsch
TELEPHONE 0031 314 383 699   **WEBSITE** www.klipsch.com

Take your pick for Best Buy between the stunning Klipsch 4.1 THX-approved speakers and the cheaper long-term favourites Sirocco Crossfire from Videologic. Both represent great value for money, but the Klipsch edge it in the listenability stakes, hence their new entry here. They're beautifully made, sound amazing and are the first speakers that can split your ears just as well as the Crossfires. You'll find no better speaker set-up for watching DVDs and playing games on PC.

CDRW DRIVES

BEST BUDGET

TEAC CDW58EK 8X8X32
STREET PRICE £72 inc VAT
MANUFACTURER Teac
TELEPHONE 01923 225235
WEBSITE www.teac.co.uk

I've just had to buy a load of CD/RW drives and these Teac drives were dead cheap, easy to install and have worked without a hitch. Bearing in mind my first CD-RW drive cost me well over £250 and was flaky and slow, these babies are a good deal. Shop around and you're laughing…

BEST BUY

PLEXTOR 16/10/40A
STREET PRICE £115 inc VAT
MANUFACTURER Plextor
TELEPHONE +32 2 725 5522   **WEBSITE** www.plextor.com

We've been running Plextor CDs, DVDs and CD-Rs for years in our machines and they're a) bulletproof and b) fast as anything you'll get within a few quid of the asking price. This is a brand new drive that is dead fast, offers Sanyo Burnproof technology and is competitively priced alongside some good contenders from Yamaha and Mirai. It comes with WinOnCD (nowhere near as good as Nero but proven) and offers CD-R, CD-RW and fast CD-Read performance. I'd upgrade, but my ancient SCSI 6x Plextor CD-R still cuts the mustard – three years on…

JOYSTICKS

BEST BUDGET

SAITEK CYBORG 3D GOLD
STREET PRICE £45
MANUFACTURER Saitek
TELEPHONE 01454 451900
WEBSITE www.saitek.co.uk

Saitek's current generation of sticks are fabulous. The Cyborg Gold is a top-line USB stick that excels across the board. The design is superb, both strong and adjustable – even lefties are catered for – and its response and accuracy are unequalled, even among more pricey competition.

BEST BUY

MICROSOFT SIDEWINDER FORCEFEEDBACK 2
STREET PRICE £62 inc VAT
MANUFACTURER Microsoft
TELEPHONE 0870 601 0100
WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/products/hardware/sidewinder/sidewinder.htm

Force-feedback products aren't everyone's cup of tea, but nothing comes close to the SideWinder FF2. It's a huge, heavy tabletop affair, with the power transformer built into the base. An infrared sensor causes the stick to leap to attention when you grasp it. The force-feedback routines work extremely well – mainly because the motors are so powerful. If more games made better use of the technology, it would be a must-have piece of gear.

WIN A PACK

SKY SPORTS FOOTBALL MANAGER
you'll never play alone
www.nisports.com

AND ONE OF 10 COPIES
SKY SPORTS FO

Sick as a parrot, on me 'ead, and other great footballing

Football management. S'easy, isn't it? Except unless you're a failed footballer, or your dad's the chairman, you've got absolutely no chance of proving you can do it in real life. And that's not fair. So, we teamed up with Sky Sports and Packard Bell to bring you the chance to take part in the first massively multiplayer online football management game where you can pit your skills against wannabes across the world.

With *Sky Sports Football Manager* you play against thousands of other managers live and online across the Net, with the chance to take your favourite team to glory in the wonderful world of cyberspace. Dabble in the transfer market, set strict training regimes and plot on-field tactics – it's just like the real thing, except you won't get paid hundreds of thousands of pounds to sit on your arse and make hand gestures while chewing gum (that's promised for

version 2.) Check out more on the game at www.nisports.com and you could earn the right to hold the coveted Sky Sports Football Manager of the Year.

THE PRIZES
Ten winners will win a copy of *Sky Sports Football Manager* with three months free subscription, along with a load of *Sky Sports Football Manager* merchandise. (Bags, flasks, radios, footballs, pens and wallets.)

WIN!

ARD BELL PC

OF
OTBALL MANAGER

clichés are within your grasp… Read on and live your dreams

If you're the lucky first prize winner you'll get all of the above and a cutting-edge Packard Bell imedia PC. At the heart of this PC is an Intel P4 1.8Ghz processor, 256Mb, 40Gb hard disk, superb 17in colour monitor, GeForce2 MX 400 graphics card, 64Mb of video ram and DVD and CDRW drives. The imedia is perfect for all sorts of games, but especially *Sky Sports Football Manager*, as you'll find out if you win. If you don't

believe us, check out the website at www.packardbell.co.uk.

To prove that you've got the credentials and you know the right people, all you've got to do to be in with a chance is send us a photograph of you and a footballer holding a copy of *PC ZONE*. The more famous, the better your chances of winning, but photos from any level of football will be accepted. All entries will be

scrutinised and any fakes rejected (unless of course no real ones are forthcoming, or the fake's so good we can't spot it). Send your photo in to the following address:

Football Crazy
PC ZONE
Dennis Publishing
30 Cleveland Street
London W1T 4JD

The closing date is February 6 2002. Photographs will not be returned.

✪ Only entries that satisfy the criteria and arrive before the closing date will be entered into the prize draw. Winners will be notified by post. No cash alternative. Prizes not necessarily as shown. No correspondence will be entered into. The editor's decision is final. All the other usual competition rules, conditions and restrictions apply. And all that. Phew!

THAT WAS THE YEAR THAT WAS...
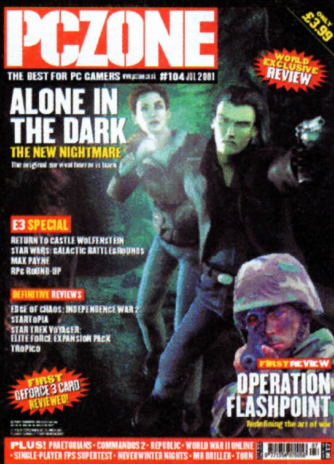
Another year gone... another year nearer the grave.
Was it worth it? Join us for a nostalgic look at the year
history will remember as 2001

Happy Birthday
PC ZONE
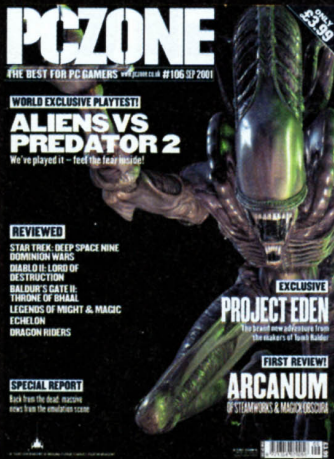
2001, eh? Acknowledged by pretty much everyone as 'a quiet one', it wasn't a bad year all things considered. There were a couple of genuine classics, a few unexpected surprises, a few games that sold by the truckload despite being hated by anyone who calls themselves a gamer, and a surprisingly long list of triple-X turkeys. Even now in this age of two-year lead-times and million dollar budgets, some games limp out so fundamentally flawed you can scarcely believe teams of 20-plus worked on it. How could a media giant the size of Simon & Schuster continue to think anyone would buy rubbish like *Panty Raider* or Dreamworks feel a franchise like *Jurassic Park 3* warranted nothing better than the dumbed-down *Danger Zone*?

Fortunately, the small-fry saved the day. Say hello to *Serious Sam*, winging its way from the almost unknown Croteam. Huzzahs too for Vicarious Visions, for proving with *Terminus* (#93/86%) that you don't need a team of dozens to create carnage in space. And pay tribute to Peter Molyneux, who though huge of reputation, still thinks small when it counts. *Black & White* may not be everyone's idea of a great game, but for vision and purity nothing this year could top it.

JANUARY

With games working to ever longer lead-times, the epidemic of Christmas slippage seems to be getting worse every year. Once games were delayed by a few weeks, now they slip for months at a time – meaning January was almost devoid of decent PC software. Codemasters kept its sterling rep alive with the gory, but ultimately forgettable, *Severance – Blade Of Darkness* (#98/87%) and that was about it.

January was also the month when Sega finally cut its losses and pulled out of the hardware business forever. At the time some thought this would mean classics like *Shenmue* reaching the PC sooner without the distractions of Dreamcast. This now looks unlikely, but news did come in late on in 2001 that Empire was going to bring *Virtua Tennis 2* and *Crazy Taxi* to the PC, and there's always hope that – if successful – this could action the conversion of other Sega classics.

FEBRUARY

Very much a month for the PC market to gloat as rival gaming platforms continued to wallow in the mire. PS2 owners were whingeing ever louder about not having any decent software, while the WAP bandwagon which had so many predicting a new generation of mobile gamers, ran out of steam with slow take-up and games that wouldn't tax a ZX Spectrum. Meanwhile NVidia unleashed its new monster (-priced) graphics chip, the GeForce3, which is now coming down in price and finally delivering on its promise of next-generation graphics. At the same time Microsoft was feeding the rumour mill with tales of Xbox being three times as powerful as PS2. Ah, hype... don't you just love it?

On the games side, we had the surprisingly excellent *Hostile Waters* (#101/87%), although Rage soon discovered that spending years developing a stunning mixture of RTS and FPS counted for less than one solitary screenshot of David Beckham with demonic eyes.

MARCH

Slippage continued to pepper the month with unexpected gems. The excellent *Giants* (#95/85%) finally made it out, adding wit and a heavy dose of cockney to the usual mix of blasting and dodging, but destined to be overshadowed by a similar game all too soon. Also out was *Cossacks* (#101/89%), arguably the next big step in an exceptional year for RTSs, combining *Shogun's* massive armies with the playability of *Age Of Empires*. This turned out to be the biggest surprise hit of the year. The fact that it got to number one and stayed there took everyone by surprise, even its publisher CDV, although a modest games mag was in the know enough to risk sticking the unknown hit-to-be on its cover. Talking of *PC ZONE*, we turned 100 this month.

Sobering news came with the collapse of Napster – finally forced by record companies to filter those free MP3 files, resulting in 70 per cent of its audience disappearing within a fortnight. Some might say a fitting end to an acknowledged den of thieves, but others continue to mourn the service, although forcing Napster to effectively shut its doors only succeeded in passing the baton to other peer-to-peer software. When will they learn? At least one good thing came out of it – Metallica had the last drop of credibility sucked from the group with a penchant for lawyers and a healthy disregard for their fans.

APRIL

Surprise comeback of the year fell to *Z: Steel Soldiers* (#101/90%) from former 8-bit heroes the Bitmap Brothers. Alas it failed to perform much better in the shops than its shamefully overlooked prequel, proving that the non-*ZONE*-buying public really is incapable of spotting a good thing even when it swears at them in a robotic voice.

Not so blinkered was Infogrames who, in a classic piece of opportunism, released the excellent *Desperados*. Basically *Commandos* in stetsons, it showed that a good rip-off usually beats a worthy sequel that takes forever to arrive – a trick repeated in the same month by *Serious Sam* (#102/81%). Unashamedly based on the original *Doom*, but still hitting the PC like an explosion in an adrenaline factory, it emphasised just how hard the makers of *Duke Nukem Forever* should kick themselves for letting another wasted year go by. The two biggest events of the year so far were just round the corner though. First was the launch of GameBoy Advance, Nintendo's new fix for 120 million GameBoy owners. Early software was impressive and, at about 10 per cent the cost of developing for PS2, made you wonder how Nintendo got away with cornering such a lucrative market for the best part of 15 years. Then the year's most influential game finally appeared. After well over a year of ecstatic pre-hype, some thought *Black & White* (#100/95%) failed to live up to epic status – but its reign at the top of the charts was undoubtedly well deserved. Check out our review of the ➔
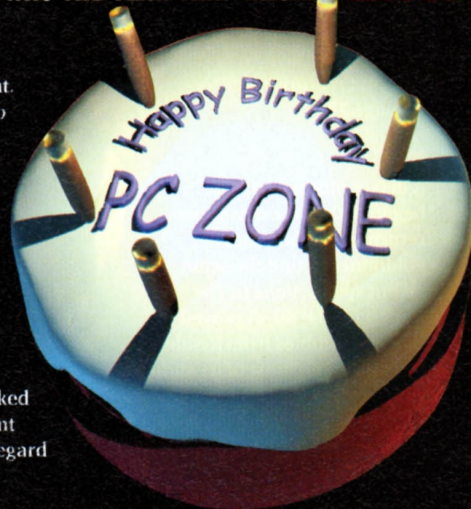
MAY

A disappointing summer began with some developers returning to abandoned goldmines to find the seam all but spent. *Alone In The Dark 4* (#104/80%) proved that the zombies from *Resident Evil* had eaten most of its audience years ago, while *I-War 2* (#104/83%) became the latest of many games to just miss the magic of the 15-year-old *Elite*.

More worrying signs emerged from the online sector, with both Barrysworld and later Gameplay running into severe financial difficulties. Both emerged with new buyers but the writing was on the wall that bankers were expecting pay-offs from their dotcoms and losing nerve fast. Even Freeloader.com had to sell up, and if you can't get love by giving games away for nothing, what hope do you have?

JUNE

June saw the excellent *Operation Flashpoint* (#104/90%) adding open-ended gameplay to the usual yomp-'em-up formula, while Mucky Foot took liberties by nicking all the best bits of *Theme Park* and throwing in a few comedy aliens to produce the amusing *Startopia* (104/76%). Meanwhile, Microsoft was quietly cornering more PC talent and forcing it to kneel to the mighty Xbox. Would games like *Halo* ever see the light of day on our favourite machine? We know the answer to be yes now, but only after its exclusive reign on Xbox has forced hundreds of thousands of addicts to stump up the money to buy the console. Expect to see other classics follow the hardware-exclusive route over the coming years. Sour grapes? Pah, we've got *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault.*
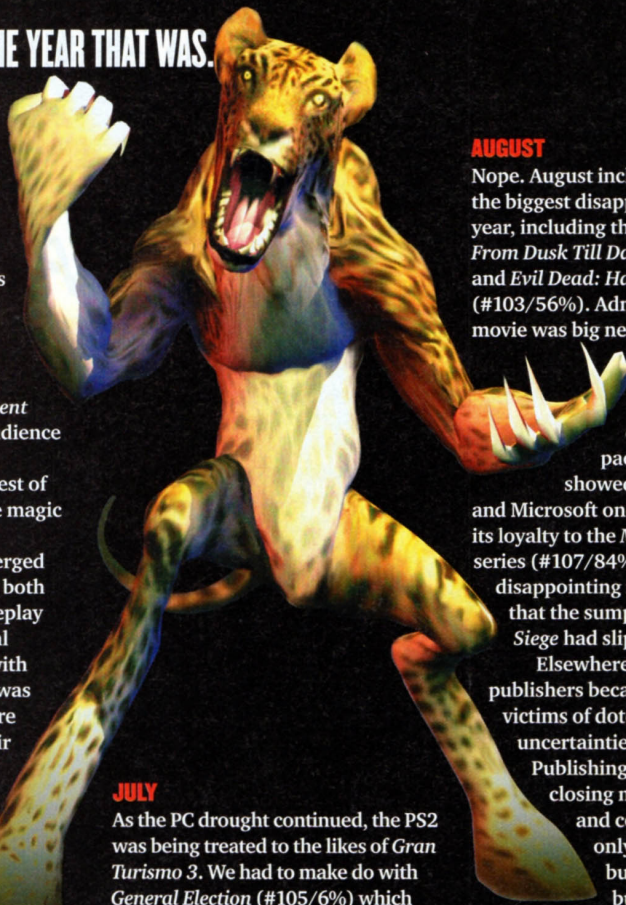
JULY

As the PC drought continued, the PS2 was being treated to the likes of *Gran Turismo 3*. We had to make do with *General Election* (#105/6%) which Martin Korda neatly summarised: "You'd get better value for money if someone dropped a turd in a DVD box and charged you for it."

Equally perplexing are those games which failed spectacularly the first time, and then proceeded to make all the same mistakes again. Hopefully, the *ZONE* score of 55 per cent received by *Gangsters 2* might persuade Eidos to invest more wisely in future.

Fortunately, there were scraps of talent around, and the near-miss that was *Anachronox* (#105/83%) hinted better times might be ahead.

AUGUST

Nope. August included some of the biggest disappointments of the year, including the twin turkeys *From Dusk Till Dawn* (#108/58%) and *Evil Dead: Hail To The King* (#103/56%). Admittedly, neither movie was big news anymore but both deserved better than this. Fortunately, an excellent mission pack for *Shogun* showed up (#105/83%), and Microsoft once again proved its loyalty to the *MechCommander* series (#107/84%) while disappointing millions with news that the sumptuous *Dungeon Siege* had slipped to 2002.

Elsewhere computer publishers became the latest victims of dotcom and high-tech uncertainties with Future Publishing laying off staff and closing magazines left right and centre. It seems not only were people buying less games, but also less magazines about games. Needless to say *PC ZONE* weathered the storm. Well, you're reading this aren't you?

SEPTEMBER

Given what happened on the 11th, it's hard to remember much else about September. Gone are the memories of a surprisingly lame ECTS show, where everyone of note stayed away and everyone else wondered what all the fuss was about. In fact, with tepid releases like *Who Wants to be a Millionaire 2* and the stupefyingly bland *Myst 3*, the month was already a write-off even before the real tornado hit.

After the 11th uncertainty set in as games proved far less mind-blowing than real events appearing on the news. The US tragedy brought a rush of delays (*World War 3*, *Spider-Man*, *Rainbow 6: Black Thorn*) and an undignified witch-hunt for Microsoft over its patently harmless (and guilt-free) *Flight Sim*. Several papers showed their complete lack of a handle on the subject with hysterical and badly-researched pieces on the subject.

The same events may also explain why the killer title of the summer, *Max Payne* (#107/90%), enjoyed so brief a grip on the charts – perhaps as the gung-ho values it celebrated became so fundamentally (albeit temporarily) out of place. All in all, very few people lamented the passing of summer 2001.

OCTOBER

Commandos 2 finally limped into view after ages in no man's land, and appeared on the covers of all three PC gaming magazines simultaneously. It then promptly overran the compound fort with its massive levels and gorgeous gameplay. Also back was *Championship Manager 01/02* (#108/92%) and *Red Alert: Yuri's Revenge* (109/80%) – proving beyond doubt that you can not only flog a dead horse but make it win races too.

The biggest launch of the month, however, was *Windows XP* – roundly condemned by rivals (for bundling MP3 ripping and image-editing software) and consumers (for forcing them to register their product online). Which just goes to prove that poor old Bill can't win. It's enough to make you stick two fingers up and launch your own console!

Finally, the BAFTAs managed to correct some of last year's howlers by at least recognising some decent games. *Max Payne* got Best PC Game and Peter Molyneux won just about Best Everything Else. On other fronts, the Christmas trends were emerging with *Harry Potter* already
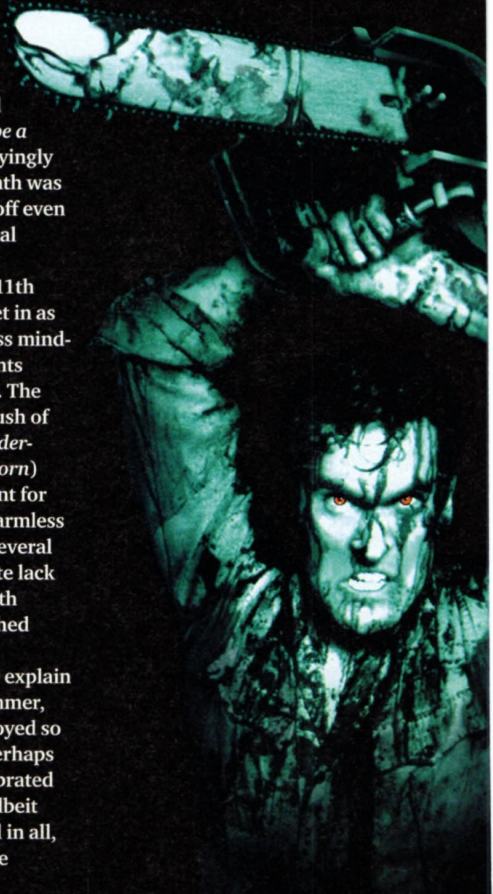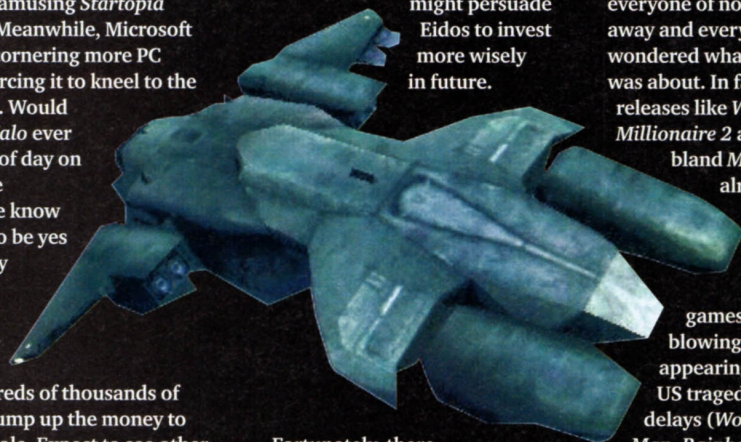
⬆ Going… going… back.
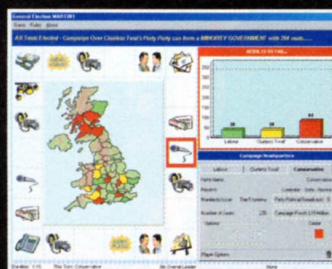
⬆ Just one question: Why?
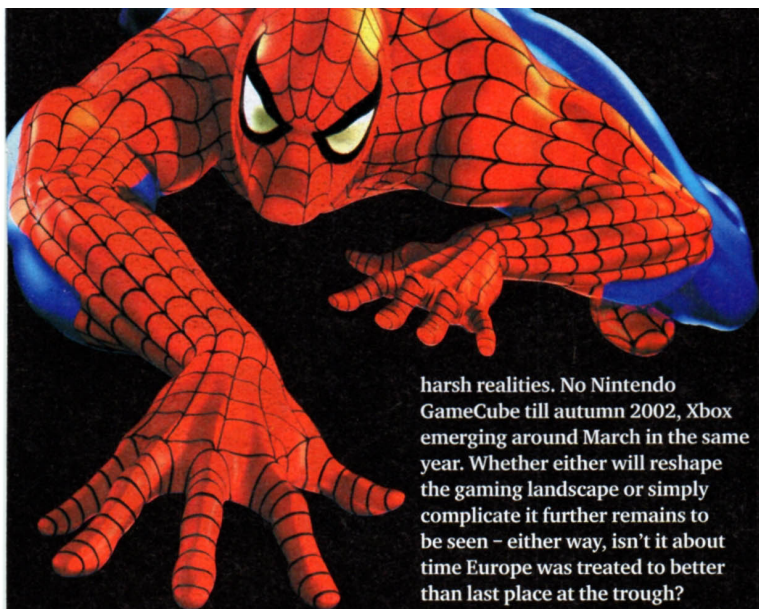
looking unstoppable for Toys, Books, Movies, and (courtesy of Electronic Arts) videogames. Snoop Dogg summed this up best by asking: "Who is this motherf*****?"

NOVEMBER

As the crucial year-end sales approached, publishers geared up their big releases. All the usual suspects were there (*FIFA 2002*, *Civilization 3*) but first blood was drawn by another surprise entrant. Sierra's *Empire Earth* (#110/80%) crowned a year of spectacular RTSs by combining swathes of historical fact with a silky smooth 3D engine. In the same league (and some might say surprisingly for a Star Wars RTS) was *Star Wars, Galactic Battleground* (109/84%), combining all the familiar units with the creaky but still functional *Age Of Empires* engine. OK, so it's a bit long in the tooth, but we still love *AoE* and the *Star Wars* update is well worth the cash if you're a fan. Slightly more surprising was the appearance of something based on a 70-year-old board game. *Monopoly Tycoon* (110/78%) took real liberties with its venerable model, fashioning a game which was part *Sim City*/part *Theme Park* but still unmistakably Monopoly.

As always, though, European gamers were facing up to other harsh realities. No Nintendo GameCube till autumn 2002, Xbox emerging around March in the same year. Whether either will reshape the gaming landscape or simply complicate it further remains to be seen – either way, isn't it about time Europe was treated to better than last place at the trough?

DECEMBER

December was supposed to be the month of *Wolfenstein*, but id's ruling about only reviewing from boxed copies after the game has gone on sale means that we've only just managed to get a review in this issue, around a month after everyone who wants it has bought it anyway. The good news (or bad if you're from id) is that we've been able to rate it up against *Medal Of Honor*, showing you which one is best. The upshot is if Wolfenstein had arrived a month before it would definitely have scored better. Up against *Medal Of Honor* there's only one winner. And although it's only the start of 2002, we're convinced this is already a contender for Game of the Year. It's got stiff competition though as titles like *Unreal 2, Medieval, Jedi Knight 2* and possibly *Duke Nukem Forever* are ready to square up to it. We can't wait.

And that was 2001 – a 21st-century wake-up call for sure, but not for the reasons we expected. When terrorists use real planes to blow real buildings apart, developers undoubtedly take heed. Are more thought-provoking games about to make a comeback, or will the big bang be heard once more when the dust settles? Stay tuned for the next 13 issues to find out. PCZ

Game of the year 2002? Already?

PC ZONE GAMES OF THE YEAR

Last year I was mostly playing...

DAVE WOODS
Max Payne
A tricky choice this year. There was no obvious standout but I loved *Max Payne* despite acknowledging its obvious shortcomings. The length turned out to be a blessing in disguise – I actually got to finish a game for the first time in years.

RICHIE SHOEMAKER
Operation Flashpoint
It's one thing to have ambitions, quite another to actually live up to them. *Flashpoint* however did, combining in-vogue military combat with dozens of vehicles over land, sea and air. The fact that I still play it today is testament to its enduring brilliance.

MARTIN KORDA
Aliens Vs Predator 2
It left it late, but it was soooooo worth the wait. *AvP2* turned out to be one of the most atmospheric and scary games of all time, and offered three excellent games in one package. A true classic and the first FPS ever to seriously challenge the mighty *Half-Life*.

ANTHONY HOLDEN
Wolfenstein
The single-player FPS may have struck back after a long holiday with the likes of *AvP2*, but it is the multiplayer experience that finally dragged us away from the twin temptations of *Quake III* and *Counter-Strike* that wins for me. The single-player mode is OK, but Nerve's hugely atmospheric multiplayer is the real success, brilliantly refining the team-based formula to create the most compelling gaming experience of the year.

RHIANNA PRATCHETT
Cossacks
This was one of the unexpected successes of last year, *Cossacks* came out of nowhere to take the strategy world by storm. It was beautiful, comprehensive and veered between being challenging and bloody hard. With a possible 8000 units it gave us military carnage on an epic scale.

TOP 10 GAMES OF 2001

As scored by *PC ZONE*

Black & White	95%
Aliens Vs Predator 2	93%
Championship Manager 01/02	92%
Commandos 2	91%
Operation Flashpoint	90%
Max Payne	90%
Z: Steel Soldiers	90%
Il-2 Sturmovik	90%
Cossacks	89%
Wolfenstein	88%

Gender bender

⊕ **ENDZONE EDITOR** Rhianna Pratchett

It may be a wee bit predictable for a girl to write about females and gaming, but then those of us in this industry are, unfortunately, few and far between, which is one of the reasons behind my decision to take the reins in this month's comment on page 146.

There's a great deal of crap talked about girls and gaming under the pink saccharine banner of 'Girl Gamers'. Sadly the perpetrators are often female themselves. Usually it's girls who have become so tangled up in their own 'girl power' rhetoric that they are hindering rather than helping us more 'serious' gamers. I've certainly managed to gain more respect from my male friends for being able to play a computer game well, and ultimately beating their friends, than being able to make a three-course meal. Although this probably says more about the company I keep or the quality of my cooking than anything else!

In Retro Zone (page 140), Jason Moore takes you back to December 1984, when real fun originated from crimped hair, Babychams and songs with hand-claps. Meanwhile, Mark Hill talks to Peter Molyneux, the man behind the massive, if somewhat controversial, hit *Black & White* in Talking Heads on page 138. Peter gives us the lowdown on his thoughts about the hype, the disastrous bug issues and his dreams for the future of the *Black & White* world.

YOUR HOSTS

Adam Phillips

Phil Wand

CHEATMASTE

For all those dirty rotten scoundrels

⊛ **MISTRESS OF EVIL** Rhianna Pratchett

NEED HELP?

If your problems persist, all you need to do to solve them is…

WRITE TO Dear Rhianna/Cheat Master, *PC ZONE*, Dennis Publishing, 30 Cleveland Street, London W1T 4JD

EMAIL letters.pczone@dennis.co.uk with **Dear Rhianna** or **Cheat Master** in the subject line

RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN
Activision

Create a short cut to the game on your desktop, right click and select 'properties' add '+set sv_cheats 1' (no quotes) in the 'Target' line and OK it. If this doesn't work when you bring down the console screen in the game, add a blank 'user.cfg' file with the line 'set_cheats 1' (no quotes) to the 'main' part of the RTCW folder. Launch the game from the short cut. Use '~' to active the console screen and add the following cheat codes:

/god	God mode
/give all	Gain all weapons and armour
/noclip	No clipping
/no target	Enemies don't attack
/give armor	Gain all armour
/give health	gain health
/give stamina	Gain stamina
/nofatigue	Unlimited stamina
/kill	Suicide

STAR WARS: GALACTIC BATTLEGROUNDS
Activision

TARKIN	Destroy all enemies
SKYWALKER	Win mission
FORCEFEED	+1000 food
FORCENOVA	+1000 nova
FORCE CARBON	+1000 carbon
FORCE ORE	+1000 ore
FORCE EXPLORE	Reveal map
FORCEBUILD	Fast build
FORCESIGHT	No fog
DARKSIDE#	# = 1-8 to destroy opponents
SIMONSAYS	Simon, the killer Ewok

ZOO TYCOON
Microsoft

Set in-game stats Open the 'Economy.ctf' file with notepad/word pad, which you will find in the 'config.ztd' file. Change the number on the 'cKeeperCosts' line to lower the salaries of your keepers, and on the 'cZooDoo Recycling' line

⊕ The force is strong in *Battlegrounds*.

to increase your profit on your recycling. To start with more money, edit the number on the 'MSMaxcash' line of the 'zoo.ini' file.

Instant money
Press 'Shift+4' to gain an instant $10,000
Exhibit naming
Let the game name the exhibit first, then go back and edit it as follows:

Name exhibit 'Xanadu'	Get the unicorn
Name exhibit 'Cretaceous corral'	Get the triceratops
Name exhibit 'Microsoft'	Double donations

Visitor name changing
Change the name to the following:

John Wheeler	Gain all animal shelters
Adam Levesque	Gain all animal care buildings
Andrew Binder	Gain all animal buildings

STUPID COMPETITION

Where cheating and pointlessness are qualities to be admired

So you fancy yourself as a bit of a cheat master do you? Well, here's your chance to prove it by entering our Stupid Compo. All you have to do to enter is send us your most pointless cheats. If we think your cheat is stupid enough, we'll not only print it and your name, we'll also send you the most ridiculous prize we can find in the *PC ZONE* prize cupboard.

Please send your cheats, with the title Stupid Compo, a brief description of what they (allegedly) do, along with your name and address, to letters@pczone.co.uk.

Make sure you include all your correct details, so if you win we know where to send your special prize. This month's winner is George Procopiou from Watford with his stupid cheat for *Rainbow 6: Rogue Spear*. During the game, hit 'Enter' and then type '1-900' and all your men will start breathing like 40-a-day asthmatics – truly, nay, spectacularly pointless! George will doubtless be the envy of all his friends with his prize – a worm farm (sorry, worms not included).

DEAR WANDY
Wandy parts the clouds of confusion
P.122

TALKING HEADS
Talking *Black & White*, bugs and hype with Peter Molyneux
P.138

RETROZONE
Back to the days of ankle socks and salt 'n' shake crisps
P.140

EXTENDED PLAY
Maps and missions for *AvP Gold*, *Sudden Strike* and *Sudden Strike Forever*

from the bodies, but there's a maximum of two or three syringes per corpse.

NEW YORK RACE
Wanadoo
Type the following in as player names:

SHALEA	Unlimited energy
YXINYEDO	Unlocks all tracks/difficulties
NIKITA	Unlocks bonus cars
BIGWOLF	Unlocks all cars in beginner mode
OELITA	Unlocks all cars in Pro mode
POOLWOOL	Unlocks all cars in Expert mode
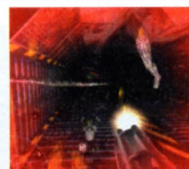
Hank Howie	Gain all zoo staff research
Alfred H	Birds appear and scare people
Russell C	Fences deteriorate 100%
Zeta Psi	Random vomiting

CODENAME OUTBREAK
Virgin Interactive
To add health press the '~' to bring up the console window and type in 'xenus'. This adds a syringe to each corpse, which will give you a 10 per cent health increase. You can repeat this cheat when you have removed the syringes

KOHAN: AHRIMAN'S GIFT
Ubi Soft
Press 'Enter' and then enter any of the following codes to activate the cheats:

goons	Summon cheater company
demons	Win mission
rentakohan	Random Kohan amulet
scene 24	Reveal map
pyrite	Free gold

NEED FOR SPEED: PORCHE 2000
EA
Add the following codes as player names in the 'create player' option to get these cheats:

Dakar	Get rally physics
Smash Up	Destruction derby mode
yragyraG	All cars have 933 physics
feargerw8	Heavier cars
Gulliver	Small R/C cars
fuzzyfuz	Cops on tracks in quick race mode

AQUANOX
Fishtank
Add the command-line parameter '-redrum -stendek' to the start line in properties. Enter and press any of the following during the game to active the cheats:

F7	God Mode
F8	Invisibility

F10	Mission complete (auto)
F11	Mission complete (manual)
F12	Mission failed
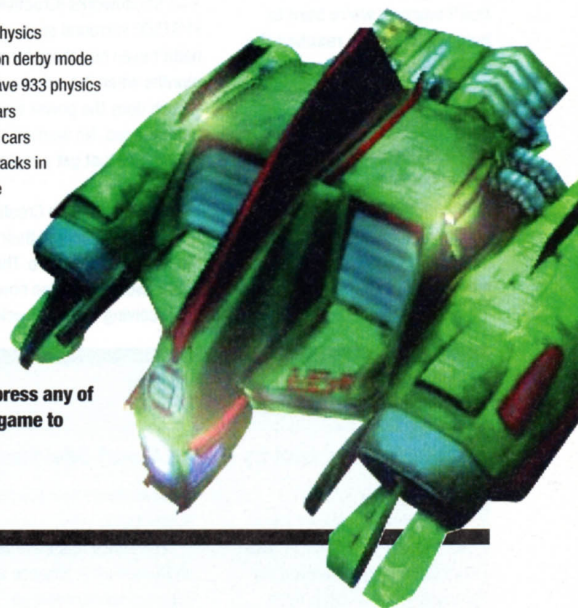
DEAR RHIANNA

Rhianna Pratchett dries your gaming tears

PAYNE IN THE END

Q Please help me. I have been stuck for four months on the impossible 'Secret Finale' in *Max Payne*. None of my friends can do it and despite my best efforts the seemingly infinite amount of men armed with jack-hammers get the better of me. Is the level actually impossible? Are there infinite amounts of men? Can you help?
Josh Bird, email

A This is an extremely tricky level, but not impossible. There's limited ammo so you need to conserve it as much as possible. You don't want to go too far into the main room, either side of the computer is a good spot, but don't go any further forward. Make sure you keep strafing and side-rolling as you shoot until the guys are all bunched up. Then you want to try and make a run, or more accurately a roll, towards the area the guys are emerging from, where you'll find a small corridor. Strangely you should now find some of your

weapons have unlimited ammo and if you position yourself in the middle of the corridor it's much easier to take the guys down as they start following you. They'll often bunch up, so take out groups of them with your M79 and you should have no more problems.

A BIRD IN THE HAND

Q Can you please help me with *Atlantis 3*. I have picked up the scarab beetle from psychopomp but can't seem to get any further. I've been trying for three days, please help me!
Patrig, email

A You need to make sure you've got the little wooden bird, which if you haven't you will find in the previous room at the bottom of the left-hand pillar. It's very well hidden, so drag your mouse pointer carefully across it until it turns into a pick-up icon. Talk to the pyschopomp about the bird and then use the bird on the open passage to be transported into the next area.

DEVIL MAY CARE

Q I need help for *Diablo 2: Lord of Destruction*. I had to erase it, but I kept the saved files on my computer. Now that I have put it back on my system, the files aren't recognised. I have placed them in the correct directory, with no joy. I had files

from the pre-expansion *Diablo 2*, and they work fine, it's just the expansion ones.
Ayaz Aleem, email

A It sounds like your saved games were from a patched-up version of the expansion, which may explain why they don't work. Patch up the expansion to the level of your old one and see what happens. Alternatively, if they were online characters, the Blizzard server may have deleted them if you haven't accessed them for a few months.

PARADISE LOST

Q I have run into a problem playing *Rollercoster Tycoon*. On Trinity Islands, no matter how many info kiosks I have, I can't seem to stop my people from getting lost! I have my maps on 10p and I've already got a huge chairlift system, but it doesn't seem to help. Hopefully you can!
Anon, email

A If it's only the odd person, you probably shouldn't worry. However, if you're receiving lots of complaints, make sure your paths are as simple as possible. If your guests have too many path options they can easily get lost, so try and get them from A to B as quickly as possible. Check you haven't got any dead ends or large paved areas as these will add to the confusion. Also, make sure your kiosks are evenly spread out.
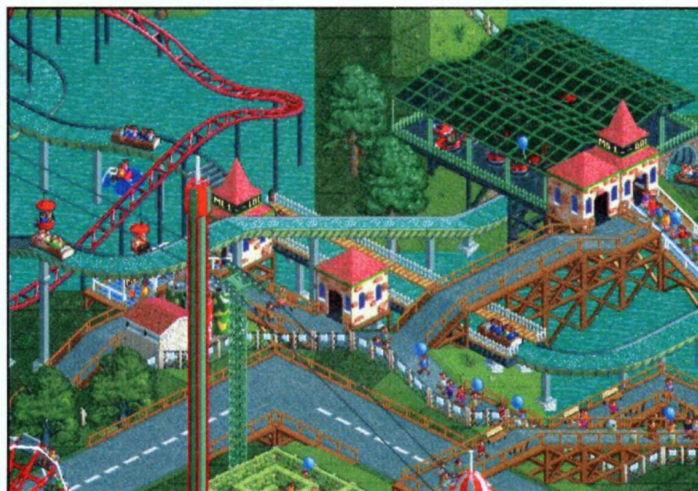
⬆ Build simple pathways in *Rollercoaster Tycoon*.

WATCHDOG

Nine times out ten, being a consumer is a pleasure.

Meet the one tenth for whom it has been a nightmare...

⭐ **FIGHTING THE GOOD FIGHT** Adam Phillips

Q I own a set of Cambridge Soundworks (Creative) FPS1500 surround speakers. I hadn't even had them for six months when the volume control (which does the power too) went pear-shaped. No worries, I thought, I'll just get a replacement from Creative.

I first went to the Creative website and followed their 'Contact Us' procedure. This was about two months ago now. After not receiving any feedback whatsoever, I decided to fax them but heard nothing from them.

I'm pretty sure that it wouldn't be such a big deal to order the replacement part from Creative, but trying to get through to them is the problem. The haven't even bothered to get back to me. I'm disappointed in Creative's lack of effort as far as a reply is concerned. It's left me with the impression that they don't give a rat's ass about you after you've coughed up the money.

I haven't rung them as I don't want to run up a massive telephone bill. I'll now probably write a letter because as the Royal Mail adverts say: 'Nothing gets through like a letter!' Come on Creative, where's my support?

Chris Flowers

A Watchdog sent off your complaint to Creative and John Moseley, their marketing manager, came back with the following response: "I can advise that our customer services team is in contact with Mr Flowers to ascertain exactly how he contacted us via email and which fax number he used for his second attempt," offers Moseley. "This investigation will help to prevent situations like this and ensure that our customers' queries do not go unanswered in the future. We have also sent a replacement volume control as per the two-year warranty period on this product."

DEALT A DAB HAND

This letter was sent by reader Stuart Davidson to Dabs.com. It has been edited due to space restrictions

Q On October 27 2001, I ordered an AMD Athlon 1600+ processor and a PC case from Dabs.com. I received the processor but no case, even though my wife had stayed in all day. I took the next day off work to wait for the case – this was now three days after dispatch. By lunchtime there was no delivery so I called customer services.

The representative informed me that the courier had attempted to deliver the case on the Wednesday and that no one was in. He said he would attempt for it to be delivered again that same day. Come 5.30pm and no courier.

By Sunday I had not received the case and decided to email Dabs.com to get some answers. When their response finally came, it informed me that I did not accept delivery of the item on Wednesday and that because of this, the item would be returned to Dabs.com and I would be refunded. I was told that my comments had been passed to a manager. During the wait for an answer, I emailed further questions relating to the above order and a new order. Today I received my 'reply' from your manager Karen Shallicker:

"With regards to the query you logged with our Customer Service Team.

"I have been advised by Parcelforce that they attemptedwas delivery on November 1.'

The above response was sent on November 9. Strange that the case actually arrived on November 8 delivered by our normal Royal Mail postman with a subsequent order!

On November 5, despite the above concerns, I ordered an ATI Radeon 7500 graphics card. I ordered from Dabs.com as you were the only company that I could find in the whole of Britain to have it in stock.

At the time of my order, the website stated 'four in stock'.

> **"The rest of the customer's questions are rhetorical, presumably designed to get us to pay him some money"**
>
> THE UNCYNICAL DAVID ATHERTON, MD, DABS.COM

The next day I received an email saying that the item was unavailable and that stock wouldn't be available until around November 22. I went to your website to see if I could find a similar product and noticed that the price of the ATI 7500 had dropped by £25. I checked my order and the value still stated the higher price!

Later that night I went onto the Internet to search for another retailer to buy from. Two matches were found, one of which was Dabs.com. I clicked the link and was taken to your website showing one in stock! I checked my order but it still said it was awaiting stock. I went back a screen and I was able to order this item. This was delivered on November 8 along with the PC case.These are the concerns I want answers to – firstly, regarding the PC case:

1. Why was the parcel not delivered on the specified day and why was no delivery note left?

2. Why was no attempt made on the Thursday to deliver the parcel as I was informed? If an attempt was made, again why was no note left?

Secondly, relating to the graphics card:

3. Why was I not allocated one of the four in-stock ATI 7500s?

4. Why was my order not reduced in price when the price dropped on your website? The goods would have been dispatched after the price drop.

5. Why was I not allocated the one card that was in stock later that night? Presumably I would still be waiting on my existing order had I not made a new order for the card.

Thirdly, the issue of your Call Centre and email responses:

6. Do you honestly believe that you currently have sufficient staff? I have tried most of this week to contact customer services – the least number of people in the queue each time I have called has been 21. I have called at various times each day. The highest number waiting when I called was 36.

7. I have spent considerable time in your call queues over the last few days. Your queue has cut me off after 40 minutes on at least two occasions.

8. Why have I never received a correct or complete response by email, even from a manager?

9. Why does it take so long for you to reply given that I receive the 'message delivered' note almost instantly?

10. What do you consider appropriate compensation for all the inconvenience caused? I would appreciate a breakdown of what you might consider appropriate compensation for each of the following:

10.1. The time I have spent writing emails.

10.2. The time I have spent in call queues, now well over four hours (some of that on my mobile) which were never answered or I was cut off.

10.3. The inconvenience of taking two days off (one for my wife and one for me), to wait on packages that never arrived.

Stuart Davidson

A We approached Dabs with the letter and your queries to get their feedback. David Atherton, MD of the company, got back to us sharpish and apologised for "this reduction in service. Occasionally a parcel does arrive a day or two late. Parcelforce did attempt to deliver the next day, but it seems they did not try again immediately. On the question of stock allocation, Dabs.com takes nearly 3,000 orders a day, and inevitably when only one piece of stock is available, it can be sold elsewhere between loading the stock screen and placing the order. Our order status screen, which can be accessed within five minutes of ordering, shows the up-to-date situation. We regret this inaccuracy but this could happen with any e-tailer on a low-stock item."

He also offered some more detailed answers to some of your extensive questions:

"1. Parcelforce told us they had attempted delivery on November 1. I cannot say why they did not subsequently deliver and why it was eventually delivered by Royal Mail (Parcelforce's sister state-owned organisation). Customers demand free carriage, and Parcelforce is cheap. Very occasionally errors like this happen.

He says that Creative sincerely regrets the inconvenience caused to you and would like to stress that they place the highest level of importance on after-sales customer support.

"A fundamental part of this support is our comprehensive e-service suite of support options – although we also understand that some customers may actually prefer to talk to someone on the telephone."

Moseley then goes on to list the various services they offer: next-business-day response to emails in all major European languages; telephone support in all major European languages available from 9.30am to 6pm (technical support telephone number for UK residents is 00 353 1 4333200); self-service support knowledge base available 24/7/365, in five languages; fully localised Technical Support section which can be found on their website (www.europe.creative.com) and an 'interactive TextCHAT facility' in English.

In the meantime Chris, your volume control problems should have been resolved. PCZ

READ ME

If you are writing in to complain about a product, please supply us with your full name, address and contact number. With PCs, make sure you also include all purchasing details such as reference and invoice numbers. It means we can resolve your problems much quicker.

Dabs.com is planning to introduce a premium (i.e. chargeable) service using another carrier to avoid this kind of event.

"2. Our website stock levels are updated almost in real time but we inevitably get orders occasionally overlapping:

14:00:00 – Customer 1 clicks on product to show stock level.

14:00:05 – Customer 2 is just about it to put in his basket.

14:00:10 – Customer 1 sees 'free stock = 1'

14:00:15 – Customer 2 puts into basket and buys.

14:00:20 – Customer 1 puts product into basket, product is back-ordered.

"With over 1,000 users online at any one time, these things can happen. I cannot think of a definite solution. Most e-tailers don't even show quantitative stock levels online!

"3. Our background stock second pass allocator runs every few hours. Again, with constant access to our site, it's possible for things to occasionally go wrong.

"4. Regarding price reduction – prices change all the time. The contract is made at the price on screen. Customers would be very quick to complain if we altered back orders when there was an increase. This is standard practice throughout all e-tailing. Sometimes the new lower price is only available on new stock to be delivered later (i.e. our buy-price drops on future orders)."

These all seem like reasonable answers, Stuart. As for your remaining questions, this is what Atherton had to say:

"The rest of the customer's questions are rhetorical, presumably designed to get us to pay him some money."

Oh dear. After making relevant and useful points about the first four queries, Watchdog feels that Dab.com's attitude towards the remaining questions is not up to scratch. While Stuart does ask for compensation in question 10, to dismiss his other queries in such a manner is not on. After Stuart's comprehensive allegations of the distinctly underwhelming customer service provided by Dabs.com, it seems utterly relevant that he should ask pertinent questions about how the department is organised and run.

⏻ Is this all our disgruntled reader is really after? Dabs presumes so...

DEAR WANDY

Every month our resident quack reads your letters and solves your problems. Think you know better? Write in, sound intelligent, win yourself £50

🔴 **VETERINARIAN** Phil Wand

GOT A QUERY, DEARIE?

Send us a query or a top tip and you could pocket £50.

Share your techie or gaming-related problems with us, and we, in turn, may well share it with thousands of readers via these very pages in a big communal love-in-type-thing. And as an extra incentive, we're offering a cool £50 to the reader who sends in the most interesting query or toppest tip every month. No, really. Send as much relevant information as you can.

WRITE TO Dear Wandy, *PC ZONE*, Dennis Publishing, 30 Cleveland Street, London W1T 4JD

EMAIL Address your letters to us at letters.pczone@dennis.co.uk with the subject heading Dear Wandy

Please note: while we can assure you that we read every techie query sent to us, we are unable to offer personal replies. Also, please do not phone. Thanks.

STOP THIEF

Q I have recently designed a program for my Principal. I cooked a CD-R with the software and handed it to him. The problem was that he copied it and I got nothing in return. I was wondering if I could copy-protect using my CD writer and, if so, would you be able to tell me how? I would be very grateful if you could help me.

Alan McCarthy

A The short answer is... no. If you were able to nobble the format of the disc, to mark it indelibly as yours, anything you put on it would have to be able to recognise that fact. So you'd need to rewrite all your software to look at the CD, check for the electronic watermark you made, and complain noisily if it wasn't there. There are numerous products on the market that do this for you but they rely on copies being pressed from a glass-master and not fried on a home CD burner. They are prohibitively expensive – prices start at a whopping US$5,000 – and are used almost exclusively by commercial organisations. No copy protection system is infallible anyway, so my advice would simply be to get something in writing from anyone wishing to use your software before they use it. A signed cheque, for example.

HALF-STRIFE

Q I've just finished down-loading *Counter-Strike* 1.3 on my Packard Bell Pentium 233MHz, 64MB RAM, 56K modem, 2Mb memory graphics and 2Gb HDD. But I can't get it working. It installs fine, but the problem is, when I go to play on the Net or LAN, or even go to the console, it just exits straight back to the Windows desktop. What should I do? PLEASE HELP ME!

Anon

🔴 One answer to the problem of software theft.

A *Counter-Strike* bombing out in such a graceless fashion isn't too common an event – it happens, but not with the regularity you describe. So it's time to start afresh. Remove *Half-Life* from the Add/Remove Programs control panel – remembering, of course, that if you want to keep your existing configuration you'll need to make a copy of the CONFIG.CFG files from the valve and cstrike subdirectories. Next, delete the topmost *Half-Life* folder together with everything beneath it (the uninstaller leaves a whole load of nonsense behind in its wake). Reinstall *Half-Life* from the original CD, make sure it works and, if so, install Counter-Strike. The latter will work if the former does; if not, it's

> **"How can I improve my computer? It's only six months old and already it looks like the hamster inside has stepped off its wheel"**
>
> **JAMES JONES, TRAPPED IN WINDOWS 98 HELL**

almost certainly down to your hardware setup. All the major components within your machine are verging on the antique, and this won't help reliability for modern gaming.

DIRECTXORCIST

Q I've been getting DirectX error messages for the past month whenever I try to play games, sometimes making them impossible to load. The error messages say, "This pre-release version of DirectX has expired." It seems that the beta version I have is DirectX 8.1 – as I am unable to install a previous version over the top, my game playing life is now complete hell. I have contacted Microsoft support many times, but have only ever received emails saying things such as "we do not offer support from the UK website" or that I have "written to the wrong department". I cannot seem to find any way of getting around this problem and am seriously considering reinstalling my whole system. Please help.

Oliver Aynsley

THE DIRECTXORCIST

🔺 "The power of Microsoft compels you!" Oliver Aynsley learns you mustn't ever trust beta software.

A There's a valuable lesson here for everyone: don't ever install beta software unless you've read all the small print and are happy with the fact that it may fudge your whole system. And let me be frank here: there is no reason to use a beta version of DirectX unless you're a hardware manufacturer or a games developer. What's more, removing Microsoft's multimedia programming interface is a tricky business, especially version 8.0 and above, and so you'll need the help of a third-party tool to help you. Visit www.google.com and enter DirectX 8 Uninstaller into the search box – anything you find will be strictly unofficial, so make sure you have a backup of everything prior to running it. If you want the latest version of DirectX 8.1, which in theory should overwrite the moaning beta you have, go to www.microsoft.com/directx.

🔺 The HP 9900ci combines a DVD reader and CD writer in one drive.

CLICKETY CLICK

Q I want to upgrade my computer. It has a 550MHz CPU and 64Mb RAM on an MS-6167 motherboard (I'm getting a new chip, so am not really bothered about upgrading the mobo). I want to add 256Mb, but can I upgrade past the 1Gb that we were told was its maximum? Secondly, the machine has a Pioneer DVD-114, which makes odd noises. I put the CD in, it starts up, then the CD stops and starts clicking like the disc surface is scratched – but it does this with every CD whether new or old. Strangely, the trouble goes away after five minutes or so but freezes up the whole system and is very frustrating, particularly when it does it in the middle of *Half-Life* or *Quake*.

Sam Spinks

A Your MSI board gets top marks for stability, and should give a few more years enjoyment with a faster CPU under the hood. A little research reveals that this board's RAM ceiling is 768Mb – not the 1Gb you were told – so be careful if you decide to really splash out (although the most dedicated home gamer shouldn't need more than 256Mb). I've noted that the BIOS date for your system is likely to be 30-Sept-99, and the latest BIOS update is 30-Aug-00 giving support for the AMD Thunderbird 800 and 850. So make sure you visit www.msi.com.tw/support/bios /more.php before bolting down new bits. As for the Pioneer DVD-114, I've seen at least three complaints of clicking noises for this product – check the web and you'll see others. My advice would be to send the product back to Pioneer for repair, and take out your frustration on them by buying from a different manufacturer next time around. The Hewlett-Packard 9900ci gives you the ability to access DVDs and write CDs in one drive, and so gets a Wandy thumbs-up.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Q I have a Voodoo3 3000 AGP card – why can't I enable AGP Texture Acceleration in DirectX? At first I thought it was because of my old Celeron-based motherboard, but I've recently bought a new GA-7IXE4 mobo with a Thunderbird chip and the problem is still not solved. Help me please.

Sanctoon, via email

A Interesting. I have a Voodoo3 3000 AGP system here running Windows 2000 and have exactly the same trouble – I'd just never noticed it before. Here's what I did: I reinstalled the official 3dfx drivers and upgraded from DirectX 8.0a to DirectX 8.1. I clicked Start, hit Run, typed DXDIAG and clicked OK. I selected the Display tab and looked at the three accelerator options halfway down the page. As with yours, mine is disabled and can't be clicked. Normally there are two reasons why you're not able to use Texture Acceleration: the first is that the card simply isn't compatible – typically that it's PCI and not AGP. We both have AGP cards, so that ain't it. The second is that the drivers and/or DirectX are corrupted or plain old, which mine clearly aren't. So I'm stumped. It looks like the card simply won't handle it, and I'll give £50 next issue to the first person to tell me why.

FLAT ERIC

Q I am in the middle of buying a new PC as my lowly Pentium II is somewhat dated now. I am seriously thinking of investing in a flat screen monitor because of all the space I don't have. However, a friend has recently informed me that they suffer from refresh rate problems in games – and so my question to you is, how true is this comment and, if it is true, how bad and noticeable is the refresh rate?

Name Supplied

A Refresh rate refers to the number of times your screen is redrawn each second. For regular CRT screens, this refers to how many times the electron guns sweep the glass to keep the image glowing steadily on the phosphor at the other end. If the rate is below 75Hz, the image appears to shake and flicker and can be uncomfortable on the eyes. For modern, active matrix LCD screens, pixels are winked on and off electronically to deliver a flicker-free image – instead of redrawing the whole screen, only the portions that need to change are updated. Thus the term 'refresh rate' is rather meaningless. The best advice is to get a demonstration of one in action: the sexiest flat panel setup I've seen yet is the IBM T540, capable of maintaining a maximum 1024x768 resolution with astonishing clarity, stability and brightness: products such as this represent a quantum leap forward for home users. If I were considering buying a new screen, I'd take a long hard look at going the flat route.

HOME TUNE

Q What is the easiest, cheapest way to improve performance of my computer? It is only about six months old, and already it looks like the little hamster inside has stepped off the wheel. Even *Unreal Tournament* lags – offline. I have an 800MHz processor, 256Mb RAM, 30Gb hard drive, NVIDIA GeForce 32Mb AGP graphics card, all running under Windows 98.

James Jones

A I hate Windows 98. I loathe every single byte of it. It is a truly hateful, nasty excuse for an operating system, and once you've binned it, you'll breathe a sigh of relief like the first crap after a month of constipation. All my machines that run Windows 98 and ME get bogged down after only a month of hard use. They start to stare at you blankly when you ask them to do the simplest things, like open Explorer or shut down, and they thrash and grumble when asked to do more. Reinstall Windows and the problem disappears – making this the cheapest route to more power, but one that doesn't last long. So I'd suggest spending a little cash on an upgrade to Windows 2000 Professional. You have a decent enough processor, the right amount of memory, plenty of drive space and a half-bitching graphics card. In all seriousness, the right thing to do is free them from their chains by taking the W2K route.

ONTHECD

⭐ **DISCS** Matt Cheshire **WORDS** Rhianna Pratchett

The full version of *EverQuest*? Have we gone mad? Check out page 126 for the start of our huge beginner's guide

💿 DEMOS

MEDAL OF HONOR: ALLIED ASSAULT

WORLD EXCLUSIVE

EA · Disc 2

Best game ever? It's impossible to say but *Medal Of Honor* is certainly up there, and finally puts to rest the wandering spirit of *Half-Life*. Expect to see the legend 'better than *Medal Of Honor*' appearing on gaming covers the world over for the next few years. (Or at least until *Jedi Knight 2*, *Unreal 2* or *Duke Nukem Forever* get released sometime this year.)

This exclusive single-player demo gives you a massive mission from the full game, where you have to find and destroy the Nebelwerfer, a six-barrelled rocket projector that's defending an approach route and making things awfully difficult for your boys to get through.

Along the way you'll run into a small platoon of allies who help you in the fight against the Nazis. You can't give out orders directly but you'll find the AI is more than adequate, and your friends will naturally seek out cover and take out more than their fair share of opponents. There's no friendly fire, which means you don't have to worry about stray bullets, but the mission's not easy. We'd suggest playing on Normal, using your sniper rifle to clear a path before steaming in with close-range weapons to keep moving through the village. Play this and if you don't agree with our score we'll give you up for a court martial.

CONTROLS

Forward	W
Back	S
Strafe Left	A
Strafe Right	D
Primary Attack	Mouse 1
Secondary Attack	Mouse 2
Walk	Left shift
Use	E
Reload	R
Next Weapon	Mouse wheel
Lean Left	Z
Lean Right	C
Quick Save	F5

⬆ We won't spoil the surprise.

⬆ These are your boys. Don't make them do all the work or you'll end up going solo.

⬆ This is one of the biggest, hardest and best demos we've ever given away.

MASTER RALLYE

Microids · Disc 2

CONTROLS	
Accelerate	A
Brake	Z
Turn Left	Left arrow
Turn Right	Right arrow
Gear up/Gear down	Up/Down arrow
Horn	Space
Change view	Del
Rear view	Page down
Rescue Car	R

More an off-roader than a racer, *Master Rallye* is based on a real-life cross-country ten-day trek, across harsh terrain including mountain ranges and dense forests. With miles and miles of glorious landscapes to zoom around in, this demo gives you the chance to try out two vehicles over two routes.

⬆ Pack your canoe and head for banjo country.

⬆ There are massive amounts of countryside to explore.

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER QUIZ

Eidos · Disc 2

As far as quiz games go this one is trickier than most, even if you do know your football. Perfect for those annoying football enthusiasts who think they know everything. Here's your opportunity to prove they don't.

CONTROLS Keyboard
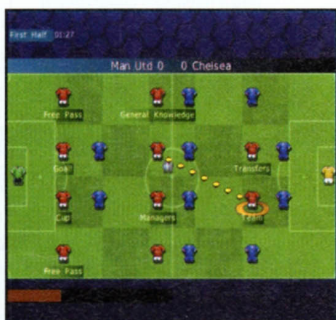
⬆ Answer the question, pass, shoot and score.
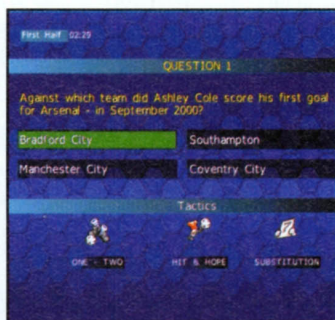
⬆ Use your lifelines if you're not sure of the answers.

SONY ONLINE SPECIAL

On disc 1 you'll find the full version of *EverQuest* and three other Sony Online games. Turn to page 126 for a massive beginner's guide to the world's biggest and best RPG.

⬆ Pigs are very intelligent, apparently.

S.W.I.N.E.

Fish Tank · Disc 2

Watership Down proved what vicious bastards rabbits really were. *S.W.I.N.E.* takes that one step further with an RTS game featuring wisecracking rabbits versus ill-tempered pigs. *S.W.I.N.E.* looks great and favours warfare over resource management, even though it is rather limiting in terms of units. This demo features the fourth mission in the Rabbit campaign.

CONTROLS			
Attack	A/Right mouse button	Move camera	Arrow keys
Move	M	Retreat	R
Return	Fire T	Pause	Space
Select	Left mouse button	Save	F2
Cease firing	H	Load	F3
Use unit's special ability	X	Quicksave	F6
Hold position	S	Quickload	F9
Pursue enemy	C		

MODWATCH — CD2

U.S TAC Mod for Rainbow Six: Urban Ops

Case Closed for Half-Life

EXTENDED PLAY — CD2

Turn to page 142 where the *Tony Lamb* delivers you the cream of *Alien Vs Predator Gold* maps, tools and mods, as well as the best in missions and maps for *Sudden Strike* and *Sudden Strike Forever*.

PATCHES — CD2

PC Zone Patches Database
Operation Flashpoint v1.30
SWAT 3 GOTY v2.1
Codename: Outbreak v1.0
Soul Reaver 2 Patch
S.W.I.N.E v1.4
Serious Sam – The First Encounter v1.05

Shogun: Total War v1.12
Baldur's Gate II: Throne of Bhaal v26499 Beta
Commanche 4 Update 8b
Red Alert 2: Yuri's Revenge v1.001
Empire Earth 1.0.4.0
Zeus: Poseidon v2.1

EverQuest®

BEGINNERS' STRATEGY GUIDE

The world of *EverQuest* can be very unforgiving for novice players. *Chris Anderson* has spent more time in there than he would care to admit, so why not follow him through your first 15 levels? You know it makes sense

Whether or not you have any experience of role-playing games (online or otherwise), it's a fair assumption that you have heard of *EverQuest*, Verant's insanely successful online role-playing game. You may have been wondering what all the fuss is about then. In essence, *EverQuest* is not wildly

different to standard role-playing games. Choose a persona from the races and classes on offer, take on a variety of beasties of increasing difficulty, and kill them to earn money and experience to gain levels. It's as simple as it gets really. Everyone starts at level one; kill enough monsters and you will gain enough experience to advance to level two, and so it goes right up till

level 60 (the highest level you can achieve). With new levels you often gain new skills and the ability to learn more advanced and powerful spells. It's fairly standard RPG fare then, with one very important distinction: you are playing online with other people. This is the key to *EverQuest*'s ongoing success, and while there are similar titles available now, *EverQuest*, as far as we are

concerned, remains the online RPG of choice by quite some margin. The only way you're ever going to find out what makes the game so damned playable and addictive is to have a go at playing the thing yourself. To this end we are giving away a version of *EverQuest* on this month's CD, and better still, we're even going to show you how to play it.

PREPARE YOURSELF

Before we begin, you need to make sure you have installed the game from our cover CD (see installation instructions on page 142) and fired up a connection to the Internet. You will need at least a 56K modem to play *EQ* properly, and a minimum 64Mb RAM if you don't want it to chug all over the place. Assuming you are connected to the Internet (follow

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⭐ WALKTHROUGH

EVERQUEST: THE FIRST 15 LEVELS

The purpose of this guide is take you through the early levels of the game and teach you the basic game mechanics. The druid class is a great class that's easy to play, and Kelethin is one of the best starting points in the game. You don't have to use this guide, but if this is your first time playing, life in *EverQuest* is likely to prove very confusing for you if you don't. Use this guide in conjunction with the information boxouts on these pages. Onward.

1 You have entered the world of *EQ* and found yourself in Kelethin, the city of wood elves. Take a little time to look around your immediate environment. Right-click your mouse and hold it down to look around (this will be familiar to anyone who plays first-person shooters) and press the left mouse button to move forward. Try to locate the druid guild shown in the screen shot. When you find it, left-click the door to open it, and walk in.

2 The druid guild master will be right in front of you. His name is Heartwood Master. This is the place to come when you want to learn new skills or buy new spells. Press 'i' to open your inventory. You will see a note and two spell scrolls (right-click and hold on each of them to see what they are). Left-click the note to pick it up, then left-click on the guild master to give it to him. He will give you a tunic in return.

your browser instructions to achieve this if you don't connect automatically when your PC starts), launch *EverQuest*, enter your user name and password (these are both decided by you when you first create your account), and you will be taken to the server screen. At this point, it would be wise to choose a server with many experienced players so if you need help in-game you will have no problems. Choose Karana, Mithaniel Marr, or Bristlebane, and log in. You will be taken to the character select screen, but since this is your first time playing you won't have a character to play with yet. We're going to make one right now.

For the purpose of this guide, we have decided to use a druid, since they are the most versatile class in the game, and one of the easiest to play. The other advantage is you will start the game in a city that is relatively easy to navigate, so you won't get completely lost every five minutes. Click on 'create character' and you will be taken to the character creation screen. Choose 'wood elf' as your race, and 'druid' as your character class. You will also have ability points to distribute. Put the maximum you can into 'wisdom', and the remaining five points into 'strength'. Druids rely on wisdom ➡

CONTINUED ➡

3 Press 'i' to open your inventory again and left-click your tunic to place it in the chest slot (it doesn't offer much protection but it's better than nothing). Left-click your club and put it in the primary weapon slot. Press F10 till you see the main screen and press spells to go to your spell book. Left-click each spell and left-click again on any slot in your spell book to memorise them, then left-click each one and click them into your spell bank on the left to have them ready for use.

❝The only way you're ever going to find out what makes the game so damned playable and addictive is to have a go at playing the thing yourself❞

FULL VERSION
ON THIS MONTH'S
COVER CD

WALKTHROUGH

4 Find location 11 on the map below. Get in the lift, descend to ground level. Turn right, then straight to the guard (if you get into trouble run to the guard). Left-click your name, then left-click your two spells to cast them on yourself. Skin like wood protects you, minor healing will heal you.

5 Bloody bats. Left-click on one to target it, then press 'a' to auto-attack it with your club. Your red health bar on the right will let you know how much damage you're taking, and the bat's health will go down in the unlikely event you land a successful hit with your club. You'll kill it eventually.

6 Once you've clicked the bat, right-click its corpse to see if there's anything to loot on it. If there is, pick it up by right-clicking on the item on the left. This one has some bat wings. Don't sell bat wings, or skeleton chips when you get them. Keep them and sell them in stacks of 20 to higher-level players who need them for spell ingredients. You can do this in the ooc chat channel (see It's Good To Talk for info on how to do this).

KELETHIN LOCATION KEY (More maps at www.eqatlas.com)

1 Abandoned platform with loom

2 Lift to ground (Orc Lift), merchants selling food and other goods, inn

3 Merchants selling Elven food items and other goods

4 Tavern selling alcohol, merchant selling plate armour

5 Merchants selling racial alcohol, common gems

6 Abandoned platform

7 Tavern selling alcohol, merchant selling plate armour

8-Upper (Connects to platforms 5, 6, and 7): sparkling glass with merchant selling metals and rare gems, merchants selling elven food, oven

8-Lower (Connects to platforms 3 and 11): pottery and fletching supply merchants, warrior guild

9 Heartwood Tavern

10 Hut selling food. Connected platform has tavern
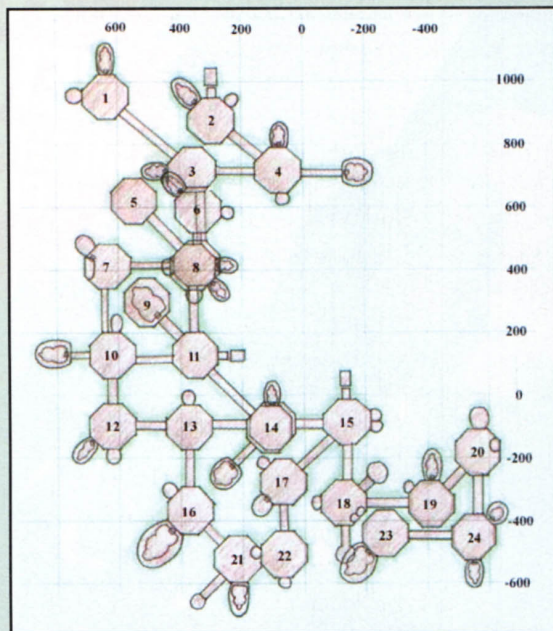
11 'Priest of Discord Lift', merchants selling medium armour moulds, sheet metal, food and other goods

12 Bank, merchant selling potions and crystals

13 Platform with rangers

14-Upper (Connects to platform 13): abandoned platform

14-Lower (Connects to platforms 11 and 15): packwearers selling bags and boxes, bard guild across bridge

15 Lift, merchants selling food and other goods, sewing kit, patterns and instructions

16 Faydark's Champions – Ranger Guild

17 Inn selling food and other goods, forge, merchant selling potions and crystals, chain mail patterns, weapons

18 Merchant selling leather armour and sewing patterns, merchant in hut selling bags and boxes

19 Inn selling food and other goods

20 Shop selling blacksmithing books and container, weapon, and file moulds, merchant selling cloth armour, pottery wheel and kiln

21 Soldiers of Tunare – druid guild, brew barrel, bridge connects to bilrio's Smithy selling sharp and blunt weapons, medicine bags

22 Merchants selling chain mail armour and boots, also Fier' Dal Forge

23 Scouts of Tunare – Rogue Guild, sells throwing weapons

24 Trueshot bows selling fletching (arrow) supplies, merchants selling fletching (bows) supplies, tavern and ranger spells

Priest of Discord
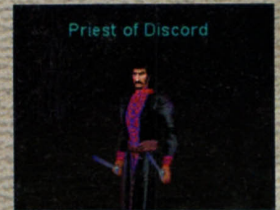
7 Keep killing things in this area and you will eventually go up in level (you will get a message telling you so). When you get to level 4, try selling some things to get a little money by going up the lift near the guard and right-clicking the merchant to sell to her. Go back to the druid guild (21 on the map) and buy some spells. Make sure you get Snare and Burst of Flame first, then head back to the guy in this picture (11 on the map). Make sure he is right in front of you, then head straight past him.

8 You will arrive here, at the orc lift (2 on the map). There's a hill behind these guards. Walk up it and look for stray orcs. Before engaging, right-click any orc you see. If you get a blue message the orc's around your level. Yellow he's dangerous, red, well, forget it. Make sure you have Snare and Burst of Flame memorised, target an orc and cast Snare. Press 'a' to attack, and cast Burst of Flame till you run out of mana. If you can, get a group together to take them on (see Altogether Now boxout).

to determine how much mana they get (you need mana to cast spells), and strength can never hurt since it determines how much you can carry, among other things. All you have to do now is choose a name. Chances are strong that every name you choose will be rejected unless you choose something off the beaten track. If you can't get the game to accept a name you like,

just click on the fantasy name generator button and the game creates a name for you that will be accepted. If it sounds totally ridiculous (they usually do), keep clicking this button until you find a name you can live with, then click 'next' to accept your default deity, then 'next' again to launch the game. Congratulations, you have created your first character and are now ready to make your

way in the fantasy world of Norrath. Follow me…

WHERE DO I GO FROM HERE?
There are so many places to see in *EverQuest* they would never fit into the six pages we have allocated here. If you just want to see the world and travel round by boat to places you've heard of, you can. Ask people about interesting places they have seen

and make sure it will be safe for you to travel there at your current level. Visit www.eqatlas.com for detailed maps and information on all the places in the game, or www.eq.castersrealm.com, for just about anything you might need to know, including detailed descriptions of every spell, and where to get them. If you've got the 'level bug' and want to increase your level as fast as you

can, then you'll have to buy the *Ruins Of Kunark* expansion so you can travel to Lake of Ill Omen. (LIO is a huge outdoor area where it's easy to find a group and the experience comes thick and fast. Go there at 16 and you'll hit 24 before you know it.) Wherever you go, don't forget to take time out to get to know your fellow travellers. After all, without them, there would be no *EQ*. Enjoy. **PCZ**

9 This is Orc Hill – it's to the right of the path that goes from the orc lift. Most people round levels four to six will hunt here, but only in groups. You can get to level six easily here if you can find a good group of people to hunt with, and the orcs drop coin and weapons and armour, a lot of which you can wear yourself. Stay round this area till level six, then you're on the move again, to far more dangerous territory.

10 At the back of Orc Hill you will find the entrance to Crushbone. The orcs here are higher level and hit pretty hard, but you'll have no trouble in a group. You can probably even take them yourself if you have bought your level five spells. (Buy Burst of Fire and Gate first. Gate is very useful – cast Gate in a safe place and you will be taken to that location when you die.) You can get to level seven pretty quickly here, or higher if you fight just inside Crushbone in a group.

IT'S GOOD TO TALK

There are various means of communicating with other peeps. Hit Enter and type your meaningless blab, and anyone in your near vicinity will hear it. Type /ooc to access the out-of-character channel – this is how you speak to everyone in the current zone you are in. This is a good way of finding a group e.g. '/ooc Level 5 druid looking for group'. If you get a response in purple text, press 'r' then write your message and the other person will get your response back. To talk to someone in private, press 't' then enter their name followed by a space, then your message. If you want to annoy the shit out of the whole zone you're in, press Enter followed by a space and your message. This will send your message out to the whole zone in big red letters. Expect some colourful replies if you do this too often.

ONLINE ETIQUETTE

As in real life, people who play games online will treat you pretty much how you treat them. If you are rude to them, they will be rude back. If you help them, they will (mostly) help you back. You don't, strictly speaking, have to role-play your character in *EverQuest*, but you will find that if you role-play moderately people will be more likely to give you whatever you may be asking for. For example, the spells Spirit of Wolf (makes you run faster) and Clarity (brings your mana back faster) are always in big demand. You are more likely to get Clarity from an enchanter if you say: "Can I trouble you for Clarity please?" than if you blurt out "need clarity" at someone. It's all common sense really.

11 It's time to start making some decisions. You can get to level 15 right here in this very zone, fighting first outside then later inside this castle, or you can move on. In the interest of variety, we're going to move somewhere more interesting. Head back outside (if you're still in Crushbone) and hug the wall to the right. You will eventually come to an opening, walk through (you'll get a loading message), and you'll come out in Butcher Block.

12 This is a big zone with lots of stuff to kill, most of which should be a cinch for your level (assuming you left Crushbone around level seven). Wander around and practice right-clicking goblins and crabs to see how they compare to you in level. If they consider (con) yellow or red, don't go near them, otherwise have a pop. When you've had enough, go back to the path you saw when entering Butcher Block and follow it all the way to the dock.

13 Wait here for the boat to arrive, and jump on it when it comes. Boat travel is pretty much essential until you get higher level and can cast Gate (transport spells) to get around. That's one of the advantages of playing a druid – most classes will either be paying druids to transport them for the duration of their *EQ* life, or sitting here waiting for a boat – just like you are now.

14 The boat will take you to the docks in Freeport. Freeport is a very big city, and you will get hopelessly lost here. Go to www.eqatlas.com and check out the maps of the area. Freeport is an excellent place to buy and sell armour and equipment. The bank in North Freeport is always teeming with people selling their wares. Hang around a while and watch what people are selling – you will get great items very cheap here if you are patient. Finally, make your way to the west gate (pictured here), then head west till you zone into East Commons.

15 This is a good area to solo in for your current level. Have a wander round and 'con' everything and have a go at anything that cons blue. Yellow cons will have you for breakfast in this zone. If you can, get into an orc camp group (like the one pictured here). It's very fast experience and the loot's not bad either. You can live happily in this zone (or North Ro) till you hit 12 or 13. From there, you can hit 15 and beyond in Oasis which is just off North Ro. By this time you should have developed a feel for how the game works. Feel free to start over and try another class, or keep going with the character you've got. One thing's for sure, if you're not hooked by now, you never will be.

CLASS DILEMMA

Of all the things people argue about in *EverQuest*, one of the most common is which class is the best. In truth, there is no 'best' class, but they are all good for different things. Choosing a class you think you will enjoy is far more important than choosing one which you think is 'the best' at something. Here is a brief rundown of each class to help you make up your mind

BARD

Bards are hugely enjoyable to play at lower levels, but quite a challenge at higher levels due to having to choose and switch to the 'right' song in the heat of battle. Bard songs have beneficial effects on their party members, and detrimental effects on enemies. Not the best choice for solo players, but indispensable in a group.

CLERIC

The best healers in the game, obviously. This is perhaps not the most exciting class to play. A lot of time is spent sitting on your arse meditating so you can heal, but at higher levels clerics (alongside enchanters) are guaranteed a place in groups above all other classes, since you simply can't enter high-level zones without them.

DRUID

Masters of travel (they have the widest selection of group transport spells in the game), and easily the most versatile class in the game. Druids are arguably the most enjoyable class to play in *EQ*, but there isn't much they can do that can't be done better by another class, and consequently they struggle to find groups at high level. One of the best solo classes in the game though.

ENCHANTER

A hugely enjoyable but challenging class to play, enchanters are not the best class to try with your first character. You will never get bored playing this class at any level, since they have sole responsibility for controlling enemies so your party can take them out one by one. Enchanters, alongside clerics, are the most desired party members at higher levels.

MAGICIAN

While their arsenal of spells contains many powerful damage spells, mages lose out to wizards in terms of sheer instant destruction, but they can summon powerful pets to fight by their side and help out mêlée classes in their party when they get in a spot of bother. Not a hugely popular class, but for some people that in itself will make them an attraction given that half of Norrath seems to be populated with druids.

MONK

Heavy damage front-line fighters, monks (with the exception of warriors) are the best pure mêlée class in the game. Their ability to feign death means they can often bring back single monsters to their party, which is indispensable in situations where you have two or more high-level beasties hanging round near your group (bring them all, count to five: party dead).

NECROMANCER

At the risk of sounding biased, this is a fantastic class to play. No class can solo like a Necro can. They can summon skeletal pets to take hits for them while they cast fear and slow spells on opponents. They can even heal themselves by draining their opponent's life force, and give their own mana to other party members when they're running low. The only downer is it's an evil class so you're disliked in most cities, but when they're so much superior to other classes in the game, who cares? Let's face it, they're class (*well that wasn't a bit biased at all – Ed*).

PALADIN

The noble class. A great class for would-be role-players, paladins are fairly competent in mêlée combat, and come with a reasonable assortment of spells too. Paladins were considered under-powered until the recent changes to mêlée classes, and are once again a viable class to play if you want to throw a few spells about while hitting people on the head.

RANGER

A close-combat version of the druid without the travel spells, rangers are competent front-line fighters, and they get some of the best druid spells into the bargain (most noticeably Spirit of Wolf, which is one the most coveted spells in the game). One of the better classes to play as your first character, rangers, like paladins, have also benefited from the recent changes to mêlée classes.

ROGUE

Don't even think about soloing with this class, the forte of the rogue is manoeuvering behind their opponent and backstabbing them for huge amounts of damage. Consequently, this is a great class in a group (a well-equipped rogue can dish out serious damage), just don't venture out on your own or you'll have it handed to you.

SHADOW KNIGHT

A great choice if you want to play a mêlée class that has spells that actually make a big difference in battle. Shadow Knights get many Necromancer spells, albeit diluted versions, and a pet too (although SKs tend to use their pets mostly as a distraction when soloing). This is our personal favourite from the hybrid classes, but be warned that like the necromancer, it's an evil class and you will be unpopular in many cities you visit, making it difficult at times to buy supplies and equipment.

SHAMAN

This is a criminally underrated class. Shamans can make a huge difference to any group

they join, with spells that make mêlée fighters do more damage and hit harder and faster, and have spells that slow down enemies and generally cause mayhem in the ranks of whatever you are fighting. A great class that's easy to play but difficult to play well.

WARRIOR

If you want to play EQ without thinking, ever, this is the class for you. Warriors are the best mêlée class in the game with no exceptions, and all you have to do to be good at it is press 'a' when you see a load of monsters, then run off back to your group, who will then jump upon them and give them a good seeing to. We're joking of course – a good warrior knows what level enemy their group can handle, and how many. If spellcasting doesn't do it for you, this is your class.

WIZARD

Wizards have the most powerful damage spells in the game. If you like pretty lights and big explosions going off every time you cast a spell, get your wizard robe on and get casting. Wizards soften up enemies with big damage spells so mêlée classes can finish them off. A great class for those of you who want to sit at the back and cause havoc up the front.

ALTOGETHER NOW

Check the ooc channel often to see if anyone is looking for someone around your current level to group with. To invite someone to your group (or to make one), target them and press enter and type/invite. If you are invited to a group, just accept the invite when it's offered. To talk to other players in your group press Enter and type /g followed by your message, or just change your chat mode to Group on the main screen (left-click the chat panel).

ARMOUR AND EQUIPMENT

The armour and equipment you start off with will be pretty naff. As you progress in level and face tougher monsters you will need better equipment. This is not too important at lower levels, but from about level ten you will need to upgrade. Watch the ooc channel for people selling things you can use, or go to Freeport regularly to buy stuff outside the bank at bargain prices. Don't be afraid to ask in ooc what equipment you should buy for your class – you'd be surprised how many people will be glad to give you advice. If you're a spellcaster you need to watch your pockets so you can buy new additions when you level up. A level 14 druid without Spirit of Wolf, for example, would be the cause of much amusement all over Norrath.

PCZONE TOP100

Welcome to the definitive buyer's guide for all PC gamers. The following games are the best 100 games money can buy, split into genres to make your purchases even easier

Have you got money burning a hole in your pocket? If so, make a cheque or postal order payable to *PC ZONE* and we'll forget about writing the mag and get ourselves down the pub for a good drink-up. If you're not feeling altruistic then perhaps you might want to buy yourself a game, but which one? How can you sort the *Unreal Tournaments* from the *Daikatanas*? Relax, this is where the *PC ZONE* Top 100 comes in handy.

Every game listed here is worth buying. If you're a fan of a certain genre you can head straight for your favourite games, which are ranked in order of brilliance. Some of the games might be a bit long in the tooth but that shouldn't put you off. Most of the old-timers have been re-released on budget and you'll be able to find the rest pretty cheap if you shop around.

The rules are simple. Each month we review a load of games. If any of them are good enough to enter the Top 100 they take their rightful place and the bottom one in that particular genre is consigned to the dustbin

never to return again. As games are always improving, we re-evaluate all the titles in a genre every time there is a new entry.

Each month we'll also show you the games we think are the Top 10 of all time. This month our dedicated freelancer Mark Hill gets the chance to talk about all the games that he plays when he should be writing stuff for the mag.

WHEN WE SAY CLASSIC, WE MEAN IT

If a game gets a Classic rating (90 per cent or above) in *PC ZONE* you know it's going to be pretty spectacular. Unlike other organs, we don't shower Classics around like confetti at a royal wedding and you won't find one in every single issue. In fact, from all the games released in 2001 we only

awarded eight classics in total and some of these have been regraded to bring them in line with new releases.

Classics have to have something a bit different. They have to take the genre to new heights or impress with originality. For this reason you should also pay special attention

to the games that receive our Award Of Excellence (80-89 per cent). When we say excellent, we mean excellent, and if you're a fan of the genre these games fall into you won't be disappointed. Put your faith in us and we won't let you down, and that's a promise.

Z PCZONE CLASSIC

SHOOTERS

HALF-LIFE: GENERATIONS
BENCHMARK GAME PCZ #71 · 93%

☸ *Half-Life* redefined its genre and stood unchallenged as the greatest shooter of all time for exactly three years. It has a cracking atmosphere, a compelling plot and some of the best AI ever coded. Better still, it's now bundled with the excellent *Opposing Force* add-on pack and the world's favourite mod, *Counter-Strike*. All in all, this is still the best FPS package out there.
PUBLISHER Vivendi · 01189 209100

ALIENS VS PREDATOR 2 PCZ #110 · 93%

☸ The game that finally stacked up to *Half-Life*. The AI is superb and the atmosphere is terrifying, while the action and plot are perfectly paced and masterfully executed. No shooter fan should be without it.
PUBLISHER Vivendi · 01189 209100

MAX PAYNE PCZ #107 · 90%

☸ It's not big and it's not clever, but for style and content *Max Payne* receives top marks. The character animations and soon-to-be-copied-by-everyone Bullet-Time mode are the real stars, it's just a shame it only lasts a few hours.
PUBLISHER Take 2 Interactive · 01753 722900

UNREAL TOURNAMENT PCZ #81 · 89%

☸ Played over a network or the Internet, *Unreal Tournament* is more than a match for *Quake III*'s multiplayer, with a combination of well-designed maps and diverse gameplay. The single-player mode might be too short, but it's still going to be more than a challenge for most.
PUBLISHER Infogrames · 020 7738 8188

QUAKE III ARENA PCZ #87 · 89%

☸ The biggest brand name in PC gaming is back. The sheer speed, intensity and unrelenting action of *Quake III* make it an essential purchase for all shoot 'em up fans, but sadly the lack of variety prevents it from topping *Unreal Tournament*.
PUBLISHER Activision · 08705 143525

CLIVE BARKER'S UNDYING PCZ #101 · 84%

☸ This atmospheric game is one of the most unsettling FPSs we've seen. The graphics and superb sound will have you leaping out of your seat. Here's hoping Barker's contribution will help push the future of narrative and gameplay forward.
PUBLISHER Electronic Arts · 01932 450134

PROJECT IGI PCZ #97 · 82%

☸ Combining the action of *Soldier Of Fortune* with the stealth of *Metal Gear Solid*, *Project IGI* is the thinking man's FPS. It features vast, open landscapes, and its clever changes of pace and espionage-oriented storyline will keep you engrossed throughout.
PUBLISHER Eidos · 020 8636 3000

STAR TREK VOYAGER: ELITE FORCE PCZ #94 · 80%

☸ The first single-player game to use the *Quake III* engine, *Voyager* offers enough thrills to please even the hardest Trekkie-haters. A new scripting system and some clever CPU team-mates give renewed credence to solo play in this increasingly multiplayer genre.
PUBLISHER Activision · 08705 143 525

SERIOUS SAM PCZ #102 · 80%

☸ *Serious Sam* is a game that's seriously good fun. You get more monsters than you could ever wish for – they come out of the walls, the floor, pretty much everywhere. A good old-fashioned, arcade-style shooter, with a liberal dose of humour.
PUBLISHER Take 2 Interactive · 01753 722900

GUNMAN CHRONICLES PCZ #97 · 78%

☸ While comparisons to *Half-Life* are inevitable, *Gunman* contains more than enough nuances to stand out on its own merits. With a superb array of weapons, intense battles and a gripping atmosphere it's a must-have for any fan of the genre.
PUBLISHER Vivendi · 01189 209100

STRATEGY

SHOGUN: TOTAL WAR: WARLORDS EDITION
BENCHMARK GAME PCZ #89 · 93%

☸ Command huge armies and engage in epic battles, assassinate generals and conquer your way through feudal Japan. This edition further improves the game's stunning 3D engine and also lets you play as the Mongols. Copious in-game options never get in the way of the instant playability of the game. *Shogun* will blow you away.
PUBLISHER Electronic Arts · 01932 450134

COMMANDOS 2 PCZ #108 · 91%

☸ There have been a few *Commandos* imitators but none have come close to this sequel. If you loved the first game, you're going to love this World War II strategy game even more. One of the most richly detailed games we've ever seen, absolutely massive, and brimming with ideas.
PUBLISHER Eidos Interactive · 020 8636 3000

COSSACKS: EUROPEAN WARS PCZ #101 · 88%

☸ There are 8,000 troops at your disposal in this historically accurate RTS. Smooth unit movement and a 3D landscape with real physics modelling make it truly absorbing. With great graphics and sound effects to boot it's an essential purchase.
PUBLISHER CDV · 020 8880 4144

Z: STEEL SOLDIERS PCZ #101 · 87%

☸ *Z* will re-ignite your passion for strategy games with its fast-paced in-yer-face action that allows you to get down and dirty from the off. The AI is superb, and as it's entirely mouse-driven, it's simple and easy to get into. What more could you ask for?
PUBLISHER EON · 0700 4366344

BATTLE REALMS PCZ #111 · 86%

NEWENTRY Emerging from the quagmire of all too similar RTS games this is a genuinely groundbreaking strategy game. It has its flaws, which include a tedious plot, but the great use of sound, visuals and gameplay shine through.
PUBLISHER Ubi Soft 020 8944 9000

AOEII: GOLD EDITION PCZ #84 · 85%

☸ It might not be radically different from the original, but sometimes evolution is just as good as revolution. In *AOEII*, the gameplay is honed to perfection with balanced units and strong single- and multiplayer campaigns. Forget the hype of *Tiberian Sun* and try this classic RTS.
PUBLISHER Microsoft · 0845 5700 2000

GROUND CONTROL PCZ #92 · 85%

☸ RTSs are increasingly dropping resource management in order to concentrate on strategy. *Ground Control* pulls this off with flair, gorgeous looks and a brilliant camera. If you're after a 3D strategy title but don't fancy samurai, this is the answer.
PUBLISHER Vivendi · 01189 209100

SUDDEN STRIKE PCZ #96 · 85%

☸ *Sudden Strike* mixes WWII action with a heavy dose of realism in order to create a compelling RTS. Its clever resource management, huge selection of units and separate campaigns make it a must for RTS fans looking for something a bit different.
PUBLISHER CDV · 020 8880 4144

HOMEWORLD: CATACLYSM PCZ #96 · 84%

☸ Relic's mission to improve the already superb 3D RTS *Homeworld* has proved to be a great success. The *Homeworld* universe has been expanded, providing a more elaborate storyline and greater scope for tactical options than its predecessor.
PUBLISHER Vivendi · 01189 209100

STRONGHOLD PCZ #110 · 84%

☸ Build a prospering town, defend it and then try to overrun neighbouring strongholds. That's the basic premise of this highly entertaining RTS. Challenging but easy to pick up, it's let down by the lack of a fog of war option.
PUBLISHER Take 2 Interactive · 01753 722900

ROLE-PLAYING GAMES

DEUS EX
BENCHMARK GAME

PCZ #93 · 92%

☺ Warren Spector takes the finer elements of *Half-Life*, *System Shock 2* and *Thief* and weaves an RPG of complex beauty that revolutionises computer games. A fascinating sci-fi plot and complete player freedom are just some of the reasons why *Deus Ex* is such a landmark wonder.
PUBLISHER Eidos Interactive • 020 8636 3000

SYSTEM SHOCK 2
PCZ #80 · 90%

☺ Definitely one of the most compelling, original and disturbing games to hit the PC, *System Shock 2* manages to successfully mix the genres of role-playing, action and adventure into one. Play it in the house on your own with the lights off to prove how hard you are.
PUBLISHER Electronic Arts • 01932 450134

VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE REDEMPTION
PCZ #92 · 88%

☺ This amazing RPG is a treat to play. An epic storyline, tactical combat and great acting and music more than make up for the fact that it's a linear hack 'n' slash game at heart.
PUBLISHER Activision • 08705 143525

THRONE OF DARKNESS
PCZ #109 · 88%

☺ An enjoyable party based, strategic hack 'n' slash from the developers of *Diablo*. Take command of seven samurai as they fight their way through feudal Japan on a quest to overthrow the Dark Warlord. Beautiful and bloody.
PUBLISHER Vivendi • 0118 9209100

PLANESCAPE: TORMENT
PCZ #87 · 87%

☺ An incredible game from Black Isle, creators of *Baldur's Gate*. It's a dark, adult scorcher of an RPG. Moreover, the character development is the best we've seen in any game of its kind and the story is compelling, with well-scripted dialogue.
PUBLISHER Interplay • 020 7551 4266

BALDUR'S GATE II
PCZ #96 · 85%

☺ The original *Baldur's Gate* was hailed as one of the best story-driven role-playing games ever. Although this sequel is not vastly different, it is bigger, better and extremely addictive. *Baldur's Gate II* is a must for all RPG fans.
PUBLISHER Interplay • 020 7551 4266

ARCANUM
PCZ #106 · 84%

☺ Whether you play through as a mage or a techy, you'll still find *Arcanum* hugely entertaining. Don't let its looks fool you – it has a great plot and flexible character development. A massive and addictive game.
PUBLISHER Vivendi • 0118 920 9100

ANACHRONOX
PCZ #105 · 83%

☺ The release of *Anachronox* proves *Deus Ex* wasn't a fluke for Ion Storm. OK, it's not as good, but it's an interesting and genuinely funny game in its own right, and we don't get to say that about many games. Well worth a punt.
PUBLISHER Eidos Interactive • 020 8636 3000

MAGIC & MAYHEM: THE ART OF MAGIC
PCZ #107 · 80%

☺ This hugely playable game includes a handy 3D camera, along with the type of gameplay that made the first *M&M* so addictive. A must for fans and RPG newbies.
PUBLISHER Virgin Interactive 020 7551 4266

FINAL FANTASY VII
PCZ #66 · 80%

☺ Despite the release of *FFVIII*, we still rate this earlier episode in the series above it. The story is better, there are more sub-games and the whole thing is more involving, especially if you like Japanese-style cartoony graphics. And it's now on budget release.
PUBLISHER Eidos Interactive • 020 8636 3000

ACTION/ADVENTURE

GRIM FANDANGO
BENCHMARK GAME

PCZ #71 · 88%

☺ If you've followed the successes of LucasArts from the early days of *Monkey Island*, *Sam & Max* and *Day Of The Tentacle*, this is a must-buy. Sublime graphics and genuine humour ensure it's a classic of its genre. A word of warning: it's bloody hard and, if your mind doesn't work laterally, you'll be playing it until the day you die.
PUBLISHER LucasArts • 020 7368 2255

DISCWORLD NOIR
PCZ #79 · 87%

☺ Although the point-and-click adventure genre is dying, *Discworld Noir* is still very much alive. It's darker in style than previous *Discworld* games and is all the better for it in our opinion, particularly if you're not a fan of Terry Pratchett's zany, off-the-wall humour. Don't miss it.
PUBLISHER Infogrames • 0161 8278060

SOUL REAVER 2
PCZ #111 · 86%

NEW ENTRY Undoubtedly the best in the *Blood Omen/Soul Reaver* series, with a great, twisting storyline and an incredibly satisfying combat system. Don't be put off by its console roots because it's one of the best action adventures around.
PUBLISHER Eidos • 020 8636 3000

SEVERANCE: BLADE OF DARKNESS
PCZ #98 · 86%

☺ Anyone who doesn't mind being splattered with the kind of gore rarely seen outside of *Soldier Of Fortune* will find much to like in *Severance*. But it stands out from the usual hack 'n' slasher with its amazing engine and console-style combos.
PUBLISHER Codemasters • 01926 814132

THE NOMAD SOUL
PCZ #83 · 86%

☺ Distinctly odd, but original nonetheless, *The Nomad Soul* is a huge, intricate world populated by lap-dancers and David Bowie. At turns adventure, beat 'em up and platformer, it's insanely ambitious and almost manages to pull it off.
PUBLISHER Eidos • 020 8636 3000

HITMAN: CODENAME 47
PCZ #98 · 85%

☺ Bringing back memories of *Leon* and *Day Of The Jackal*, *Hitman* recreates the cool excitement of carrying out a contract. Snipe from rooftops, disguise yourself in your victims' uniforms and walk away from explosions with calm elegance.
PUBLISHER Eidos • 020 8636 3000

PROJECT EDEN
PCZ #107 · 85%

☺ You control four variously skilled operatives in a nightmarish future metropolis that is as predictable as it is innovative. The combat and AI may be somewhat dull, but the varied puzzles and raft of cool gadgetry make up for it.
PUBLISHER Eidos Interactive • 020 8636 3000

INDIANA JONES AND THE INFERNAL MACHINE
PCZ #84 · 83%

☺ LucasArts moves away from the point-and-click genre and into *Tomb Raider* territory for its latest Indy game, with the adventure elements still in place. Not bad, but not for traditionalists.
PUBLISHER Activision • 08705 143525

ESCAPE FROM MONKEY ISLAND
PCZ #98 · 82%

☺ One of the hardest skills to master when developing a game is the ability to make your audience genuinely laugh with you rather than at you and, undoubtedly, *Escape From Monkey Island* is one of the most genuinely funny games to come out in the last couple of years.
PUBLISHER Activision • 08705 143525

METAL GEAR SOLID
PCZ #96 · 82%

☺ Although it's been ported pretty much identically from the console version (with a few graphical improvements), *MGS's* tense gameplay, well-designed levels and variety of challenging bosses makes it stand out from the majority of similar PC titles.
PUBLISHER Microsoft • 0845 7002000

RACING GAMES

COLIN MCRAE RALLY 2.0

BENCHMARK GAME

PCZ #98 · 85%

✪ With all the rally games available it was always going to be interesting to see how *2.0* would fare. Unsurprisingly, it blows away the competition. The graphics are superb, the detail all-encompassing and the car handles beautifully. If you have been waiting patiently for the definitive rally game, this is definitely it.
PUBLISHER Codemasters • 01926 814132

BUDGET

RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP XTREME   PCZ #110 · 85%

✪ This equals *Colin McRae 2* as the top PC driving game, but the fact that it costs three times as much means it doesn't quite claim top spot. It plays beautifully and even comes with online options. An essential rally game.
PUBLISHER Actualize • 01477 544 455

MIDTOWN MADNESS 2   PCZ #96 · 84%

✪ Buckle up for some high-speed action, as you race around London and San Francisco in this sequel. You won't find a more entertaining arcade driving game. The original *MM* was a belter, but with more cars and races and improved controls, *MM2* is now the daddy.
PUBLISHER Microsoft • 0845 7002000

F1 2001   PCZ #109 · 83%

✪ The most versatile F1 game to date, with a full-on sim mode and an arcade setting for those who can't hack it. It looks great as well, but it comes with a huge caveat – if you want to see it as intended you're going to need a hefty machine.
PUBLISHER Electronic Arts • 01932 450 134

BALLISTICS   PCZ #111 · 82%

NEWENTRY So you thought *WipEout* was fast? Well, welcome to a new concept in pure racing. It only has seven tracks, but it has an unparalleled speed, with a simple control system that keeps the emphasis on the pure racing dynamics.
PUBLISHER Xicat Interactive • 020 7437 1442

GRAND PRIX 3   PCZ #94 · 80%

✪ This F1 title displays all the customary Crammond perfectionism. The detail is amazing, which makes it all the more puzzling as to why there is no teamwork. Don't expect much more than a 3D accelerated *GP2*, but if that's what you're after you'll love it.
PUBLISHER Infogrames•0161 8278060

BUDGET

LE MANS 24 HOURS   PCZ #87 · 79%

✪ Although not quite as challenging as the race it's based on, *Le Mans 24 Hours* is a driving game for skilful players who know their brakes from their elbows. You can even get involved in a rewarding career mode, culminating in the famous race itself.
PUBLISHER Infogrames • 0161 8278060

INSANE   PCZ #97 · 78%

✪ Primarily an online racing game, *Insane* allows you and your friends to indulge in some off-road racing mayhem in a range of different vehicles. Its wide selection of races will have you in hysterics, but the novelty does wear off pretty quickly.
PUBLISHER Codemasters • 01926 814132

NEED FOR SPEED PORSCHE 2000   PCZ #90 · 78%

✪ Not as good as hooking up with your mates at the arcade, but still a damn good conversion of a damn fine game. Forget realism and concentrate on flinging your car around the track as fast as you can. Who needs depth when racing is this exciting?
PUBLISHER Electronic Arts • 01932 450 134

RALLY MASTERS   PCZ #89 · 77%

✪ Rally games tend to blend into one another quite seamlessly. After all, the cars look exactly the same and they go round the same tracks. *Rally Masters*, however, offers the all-important feel of a great driving game together with loads of options and some tasty graphics.
PUBLISHER Infogrames • 0161 8278060

GOD GAMES

BLACK & WHITE

BENCHMARK GAME

PCZ #100 · 93%

✪ One of our joint top games of all time, *Black & White* is worth the hype and more. Hundreds of challenges through wondrous landscapes, packed full of spectacular AI-enhanced creatures and some genuinely original ideas. Sell your friends and family if you have to, but get a copy of this game. Pure genius.
PUBLISHER Electronic Arts • 01932 450134

CIVILIZATION III   PCZ #111 · 86%

NEWENTRY *Civ III* sticks to the same gameplay and addictiveness that made the series so popular. Die-hard fans will relish the improved visuals and animation, while newbies will be encouraged by the new user-friendly interface.
PUBLISHER Infogrames • 0161 8278060

CALL TO POWER II   PCZ #98 · 84%

✪ *Civilization II* is one of the best games of all time, but that doesn't mean it doesn't need updating. It might not have the official *Civ* endorsement, but *Call To Power II* still retains the spirit of the game, while polishing almost every aspect of the gameplay.
PUBLISHER Activision • 08705 143525

THE SIMS   PCZ #87 · 84%

✪ This offers a staggering amount of possibilities. Essentially, you create your own person, or family, and guide them through the ups and downs of life. It's the definitive docu-soap and makes for compelling gameplay.
PUBLISHER Electronic Arts • 01932 450134

BUDGET

CAESAR III   PCZ #70 · 82%

✪ Starting from scratch, you've got to build a majestic Roman city and ensure a harmonious life for your citizens. So what? So it's probably one of the most utterly absorbing and addictive god sims in existence. Hail Caesar.
PUBLISHER Vivendi • 0118 920 9100

BUDGET

SIMCITY 3000   PCZ #74 · 81%

✪ Ten years on, *SimCity* remains as addictive as it ever was. Little was broken, and little was fixed. With new buildings and an enhanced transport system, *SimCity 3000* is a must for old-timers and new addicts alike.
PUBLISHER Maxis/EA • 01932 450134

ZEUS: MASTER OF OLYMPUS   PCZ #97 · 81%

✪ From the creators of *Pharaoh* and *Caesar III* comes this intricate yet hugely playable micro-management god game. It is highly addictive, but suffers slightly from its lack of multiplayer options and a poor combat system.
PUBLISHER Vivendi • 01189 209100

BUDGET

ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON   PCZ #75 · 80%

✪ Pack out your own theme park with the most fiendish rides your imagination can conjure up. From rickety wooden dippers to *Nemesis*-style, white-knuckle gurners, *RollerCoaster Tycoon* is hugely addictive. Be warned.
PUBLISHER Infogrames • 0161 827 8060

MONOPOLY TYCOON   PCZ #110 · 78%

✪ This mixture of the board game and *Theme Park* is an admirable attempt at something a little different. Played in real time, the aim is to make as much money as possible. Great fun for a while, but it quickly becomes repetitive.
PUBLISHER Infogrames • 020 7738 8188

BUDGET

DUNGEON KEEPER 2   PCZ #79 · 75%

✪ *Dungeon Keeper* was a great idea. *DKII* takes the essence of the original game, corrects all the mistakes, vastly improves the graphics, and doses the myriad of features with a wise hand. And it keeps us very happy indeed.
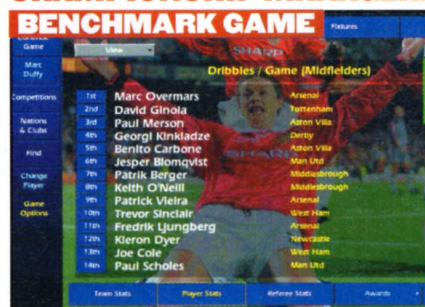**PUBLISHER** Electronic Arts • 01932 450134

SPORTS

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER: 01/02

BENCHMARK GAME

PCZ #108 · 92%

✪ This update for the greatest management game ever sees the series consolidate itself as the best footie management game available on PC. This time around the new features include masked attributes (forcing you to scout for talent), updated team and player stats as well as all the new rules that FIFA has imposed on us. Buy it and kiss life goodbye.
PUBLISHER Eidos • 020 8636 3000

TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 2   PCZ #98 · 88%

✪ *Pro Skater 2* is an unbelievable experience. The sense of speed and balance is uncanny, and there is almost as much satisfaction to be had from pulling off an acrobatic new move as there is from watching your skater break all his bones as he smashes his face against the concrete.
PUBLISHER Activision • 08705 143525

VIRTUAL POOL 3   PCZ #99 · 85%

✪ *VP3* has the perfect physics and graphics of its predecessors plus some cool new features, including multiplayer options, career mode and training videos by pool diva Jeanette Lee. It's the best pool sim you can buy, and it's almost as good as the real thing.
PUBLISHER Interplay • 020 7551 4266

FIFA 2001   PCZ #97 · 83%

✪ Once again the FIFA franchise gets its yearly makeover. There are only minor improvements over the last version, but it's still the best football game for the PC. The player animations and presentation are spot on, but we can't help feeling there's a better football game to come.
PUBLISHER Electronic Arts • 01932 450134

SUPREME SNOWBOARDING   PCZ #85 · 83%

✪ Snowboarding is not a sport you'd expect to captivate a PC audience, but this game gives as exhilarating an experience as you could hope for without the risk of breaking a leg. Oh, and all the streetwise attitude you'd expect is there too, of course.
PUBLISHER Infogrames • 0161 8278060

TENNIS MASTERS SERIES   PCZ #110 · 82%

✪ The best tennis game on the PC so far, but only by a whisker. While the control interface isn't quite as intuitive as *Open Tennis 2000*, the AI is far superior, and the diversity of opponents is much more varied and entertaining.
PUBLISHER Microids • 01908 233 377

PGA CHAMPIONSHIP GOLF 2000   PCZ #92 · 82%

✪ It's really not much different from last year's title, but this edition has enough subtle tweaks to make it a worthwhile purchase. It also has the best control system we've seen in what is definitely the best golf game available.
PUBLISHER Vivendi • 0118 920 9100

NBA LIVE 2000   PCZ #85 · 81%

BUDGET

✪ As slick as always, but what makes this special is the inclusion of teams from the '50s onwards, comedy haircuts and all. It's not quite as immediate as *Inside Drive*, but is a more complete simulation of the sport all round.
PUBLISHER Electronic Arts • 01932 450134

OPEN TENNIS 2000   PCZ #92 · 80%

BUDGET

✪ Not since Super Tennis on the SNES have we had so much fun hitting a ball over a net. After some initial reluctance, the whole office stopped fragging and started lobbing. For a near identical version with slightly better AI, it's worth checking out *Roland Garros French Open 2001*.
PUBLISHER Cryo • 0121 250 5070

NHL 2002   PCZ 110 · 79%

✪ Even though it's much the same as its predecessor with a couple of extra bells on, *NHL 2002* combines realism with frenetic arcade action. Not for the faint-hearted, but ice hockey fans and arcade game fans will love it.
PUBLISHER Electronic Arts • 01932 450134

3D ACTION/STRATEGY

OPERATION FLASHPOINT: COLD WAR CRISIS

BENCHMARK GAME

PCZ #104 · 90%

✪ The most anticipated military game of the year was worth all the hype and more. This squad-based shooter can be played in both third- and first-person and is the ultimate military simulation package, with a stunning atmosphere and superb mission structures. Lock yourself away because this game deserves your full attention.
PUBLISHER Codemasters • 01926 814132

GHOST RECON   PCZ #110 · 86%

✪ A superb squad-based shooter, which masterfully combines tactics and action. The levels range from wide-open landscapes to claustrophobic city streets, in what is a stunning evocation of special forces warfare.
PUBLISHER Ubi Soft • 020 8944 9000

HIDDEN & DANGEROUS   PCZ #79 · 86%

BUDGET

✪ You don't get a second chance in a real war, and *Hidden & Dangerous* is the game that comes closest to putting you in the middle of hell on earth. It grabs you by the balls from the first mission and doesn't let up.
PUBLISHER Take 2 Interactive • 01753 722900

HOSTILE WATERS   PCZ #101 · 86%

✪ A brilliant RTS/action game you can play purely strategically or leap into a unit and get up close and personal to the action. It's just a shame there aren't any multiplayer options though. Why make love when you can make war?
PUBLISHER Rage • 01512 372200

GIANTS: CITIZEN KABUTO   PCZ #95 · 84%

✪ This mammoth and original 3D action/strategy game includes third-person shooter, RTS, RPG and real-time combat elements. It also features a superbly balanced multiplayer option and almost naked women, which usually makes for a good time.
PUBLISHER Interplay • 020 7551 4266

SWAT 3: ELITE EDITION   PCZ #97 · 83%

✪ AI doesn't come much better. The spectacular graphics and command system come alive here. Although not as fun as *Counter-Strike*, it's more realistic, and features five new maps and countless weapon configurations.
PUBLISHER Vivendi • 0118 920 9100

ROGUE SPEAR: BLACK THORN   PCZ #110 · 81%

✪ Although the graphics engine is looking dated, this is the best *Rogue Spear* outing to date. Featuring nine new linked and suspense-filled special forces missions, even veterans of the series will be challenged to their limits.
PUBLISHER Ubi Soft • 020 8944 9000

SPEC OPS 2   PCZ #84 · 79%

BUDGET

✪ When *Spec Ops 2* came out it challenged *Hidden & Dangerous* for the top spot. The game puts you in charge of a four-man green beret squad intent on staying alive and shooting the enemy in the head. Incredibly realistic, with top-notch sound.
PUBLISHER Take 2 Interactive • 01753 722900

RAINBOW SIX GOLD PACK EDITION   PCZ #81 · 79%

BUDGET

✪ A landmark game in third-person action strategy games that was only surpassed by *Hidden & Dangerous*. Take control of your elite anti-terrorist squad, plan your missions ahead and indulge in some old fashioned killing. Also contains the *Eagle Watch* add-on pack
PUBLISHER Take 2 Interactive • 01753 854 444

WARGASM   PCZ #71 · 76%

BUDGET

✪ Famed for its flight sims, DID finally delivers an action game only it could produce. With helicopters, APCs and hapless infantry running about, this is as fast-paced as a tank game could be – and it's even better to share.
PUBLISHER Infogrames • 0161 827 8000

FLIGHT SIMS

IL-2 STURMOVIK
BENCHMARK GAME

PCZ #110 · 90%

✪ Combining an incredible atmosphere, sound and visuals with possibly the most realistic flight model to date, *IL-2* puts you behind the stick of a number of stunningly reproduced WWII combat planes. The attention to detail is breathtaking and the easy-to-use editor allows endless months of replayability. A must-have for any real combat flight sim fanatic.
PUBLISHER Ubi Soft · 020 8944 9000

MS FLIGHT SIM 2002
PCZ #111 · 88%
NEWENTRY With more polish than previous versions, this professional edition offers players more planes, extra flight logging and improved graphics.
PUBLISHER Microsoft · 0845 7002000

BATTLE OF BRITAIN
PCZ #103 · 88%
✪ Allow yourself to be immersed in one of the most exciting and realistic combat flight sims around. The action is non-stop, the skies are crowded and the flight models actually 'feel right'. Tally ho!
PUBLISHER Empire Interactive · 020 8343 7337

FALCON 4
BUDGET
PCZ #72 · 87%
✪ We waited patiently for years for this title to arrive, and the good news is that, for once, we weren't disappointed. *Falcon 4* features incredible 3D-accelerated graphics and a dynamic campaign structure.
PUBLISHER Infogrames · 0161 8278060

B-17: THE MIGHTY 8TH
BUDGET
PCZ #96 · 85%
✪ *B17* reproduces the experience of piloting a WWII bomber. Everything's covered, from planning missions to dropping bombs. A must for WWII and realism freaks.
PUBLISHER Infogrames · 0161 8278060

SPACE COMBAT

X – GOLD
BENCHMARK GAME

PCZ #82 · 87%
✪ The spirit of *Elite* lives on in this massive trading epic from Germany, in which you must buy and fight your way back home to Earth. The combat side of the gameplay may not be the best on offer, but with goods to trade and races to discover, it rewards patience with variety and months of play. This title is deeply hypnotic and beautiful, rather than tense and frenetic.
PUBLISHER THQ · 01483 767656

TERMINUS
PCZ #93 · 86%
✪ Who says the days of bedroom programming are over? *Terminus* proves you can make a great game on your own if you have the talent and passion. It just edges out *FreeSpace 2*. Available from **www.macgames.co.uk**.
PUBLISHER Vicarious Visions · www.vvisions.com

FREESPACE 2
BUDGET
PCZ #84 · 85%
✪ Completely different from *X*, *FreeSpace 2* offers fast-paced dogfighting action all the way. It boasts a superb interface, an epic story and amazing graphics, but it's a bit short-lived if you don't play online.
PUBLISHER Interplay · 020 7551 4266

EDGE OF CHAOS: INDEPENDENCE WAR 2 PCZ #104 · 83%
✪ It's likely to appeal more to die-hard space simmers, but *Edge Of Chaos* still takes steps to advancing the genre. Its graphics and absorbing free-form gaming are inspirational.
PUBLISHER Infogrames · 0161 827 8000

X-WING: ALLIANCE
BUDGET
PCZ #77 · 81%
✪ At last. Fly the Millennium Falcon in the final episode of the long-running *X-Wing* series. Certainly the best-looking *X-Wing* game to date, *Alliance* is slow at first, but boy does it pick up later on.
PUBLISHER Activision · 08705 143525

ALL-TIME CLASSICS

Refusing to give in to nostalgia, *Mark Hill*'s favourite PC games are the ones he can still play now without having to say: "Well, it was great at the time…" In no real order, here they are…

DEUS EX (PC)
✪ This prodigious combination of RPG, FPS and adventure is the pinnacle of computer entertainment so far. It gives you the freedom to play how you choose, develop your character how you want and drive the multilayered plot in different directions. A landmark that, together with the brilliant *System Shock 2*, should pave the way for the future.

PLANESCAPE: TORMENT (PC)
✪ The *Hamlet* of computer games, this is the best RPG on any platform ever. It may look like *Baldur's Gate*, but the quality of the writing is so high, you forget you're playing a game. The Nameless One is a complex character, whose quest through a fantasy world will keep you spellbound. It's a tragic tale but, unlike *Hamlet*, it's also very funny.

HALF-LIFE (PC)
✪ As a pure arcade experience, this still delivers more "wow" moments than any other shooter. It no longer seems the movie-like extravaganza it was first hailed as, but I could keep fighting forever. The mighty *Counter-Strike* ensures it has the longest lifespan of any game, and with *Condition Zero* round the corner, it's not just about multiplayer.

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER (PC)
✪ Unlike some purists, I believe the latest version is always the best one. Statisticians calculate the average person spends a third of his life asleep, but I reckon I've spent a quarter of it playing *Champ Man*. I didn't even like football before I started playing, now I know the strengths and weaknesses of every player in the world. Well, nearly.

DAY OF THE TENTACLE (PC)
✪ Remember when adventure games were funny and ingenious? Anyone with half a brain should buy this bundled with the also rather splendid *Sam & Max* (not as a good a game but even funnier), and I curse the day the success of *Tomb Raider* ended the golden age of adventure games.

HIDDEN & DANGEROUS (PC)
✪ Sod the bugs, this is still an extraordinary game. It recreates like no other the thrill of playing soldiers, running around with your mates and pretending to shoot Nazis in *The Guns Of Navaronne*. The atmosphere is spot on and the whole thing works so well you can forgive its flaws. The sequel should be a stunner, too.

THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND (PC)
✪ This might seem a give-in to nostalgia but, although it does look extremely ropey now, *Monkey Island*'s gameplay hasn't aged one little bit. It was so far ahead of its time, we haven't even arrived there yet. The sequel isn't quite as original, but it is definitely just as good.

XCOM: ENEMY UNKNOWN (PC)
✪ The curse of modern gaming is real-time. For me, strategy is all about thinking carefully about the next move, and turn-based games have a special magic about them. This, despite being the first in the series, is still the best. Considering the state of the turn-based market it looks like it's going to stay that way.

TIE FIGHTER (PC)
✪ Until *Galaxies* comes out, this still embodies the *Star Wars* films better than any other game. Instead of playing a galaxy-saving hero, you're just another pilot drone working for the Empire, and it's this shift in perspective that allows it to make its recreation of the *Star Wars* universe believable. Still the best space combat sim for my money.

TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 2 (PC)
✪ A surprise inclusion perhaps, but this superb PSOne conversion is pure, exhilarating fun. Skating means nothing to me in real life, but this elevates sports games to a new level. It's only problem is my girlfriend likes it as well and I'm not the sharing type. The sequel will be, along with *GTA3*, the best console conversion ever. I hope.

TALKING HEADS

The man behind *Black & White*, a massive title that has divided opinion like no other in recent history, is always ready to discuss the state of the game industry and his own position in it. Read this. You might learn something

★ **DUNGEON KEEPER** Mark Hill

Peter Molyneux is one of the heavyweights of the games industry, a true pioneer that continues to shape the way we play games. He is the man responsible for classics *like Theme Park, Populous, Magic Carpet* and *Syndicate*. We talked to him about both the success and criticism of *Black & White*, the highs and lows of his illustrious career and his plans for the future.

Black & White provoked huge reactions, both good and bad, when it was released. What did you think of these reactions?
Well, there was a big reaction to the number of bugs in the game. There were a few serious bugs which got through despite the testing, and it's an issue I take very, very seriously. It's a huge game and it broke my heart that these issues coloured the judgment of a lot of people. But we've fixed that now, and the reaction we've had all over the world is amazing.

The feedback we've had in the mag indicates that some people didn't enjoy it because they were expecting something completely different.
I don't think people realised what sort of game it was. All the previews in magazines couldn't quite explain what it was exactly and the game started hyping itself. People started expecting things that weren't in it. This is why we've done *Creature Isles*

(the first expansion pack for *B&W*) we're giving the fan base what they want to see in the game. The plan for the sequel is to increase the god aspect of the game and let the player do more. There is a long-term plan for the story of *Black & White* to go on for many years. The good thing is that the massive success of the game – it has sold 1.5 million copies – means we have the chance to work on these things and improve on everything that players didn't like.

What about yourself? You've been involved in *Black & White* for a long time. Are you working hands-on on the sequel or moving onto another project?
Jonty Barnes is the one who is going to carry on the *B&W* series. I'm still going to be there helping, but we've formed a company called Black & White Limited solely to concentrate on that product. While I'll still be involved, I'm going to be working on a different game, codenamed *Dimitri*. All I can tell you about that at the moment is that it's not a god game.

Without giving too much away, what type of things would you like to explore in future titles?
I'm really keen on taking AI an awful lot further and making gaming worlds more real. We now have the technology to create worlds that we can recognise, not just some strange fantasy land. I'm interested in being cutting edge in physics and 3D

graphics. Most people who know about the idea behind *Dimitri* think it's totally insane. But the thing about the games industry at the moment is that we're just on the verge of doing loads of exciting things, especially in graphics. We're approaching such realism that you won't be able to differentiate game environments from reality. We can also create proper materials, like cloth and carpets, which may sound very trivial but will have an enormous impact on how games feel.

Where do you stand on the debate about single-player stories and online multiplayer games?
If I could go back and do it again I wouldn't have released the multiplayer aspect with *B&W*. There is so much to the single-player game that most people ignore the multiplayer. I would rather have made the multiplayer side separately, because they're very different experiences.

Are there any other games you've seen in development that have caught your eye, that are pushing the boundaries?
Not really. The things that have really got me excited are the new graphic technologies discussed at recent developer conferences, meaning that games will be able to look much more natural. Most games have a plasticine look about them, but now we can make a

The *Creature Isles* expansion pack, has been developed keeping the demands of fans in mind.
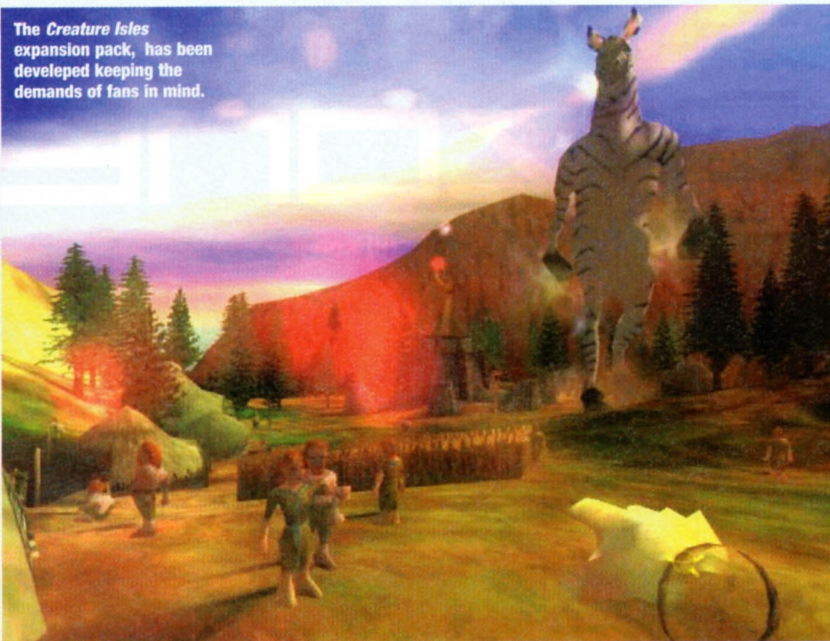
Black & White divided the opionion of both fans and critics.
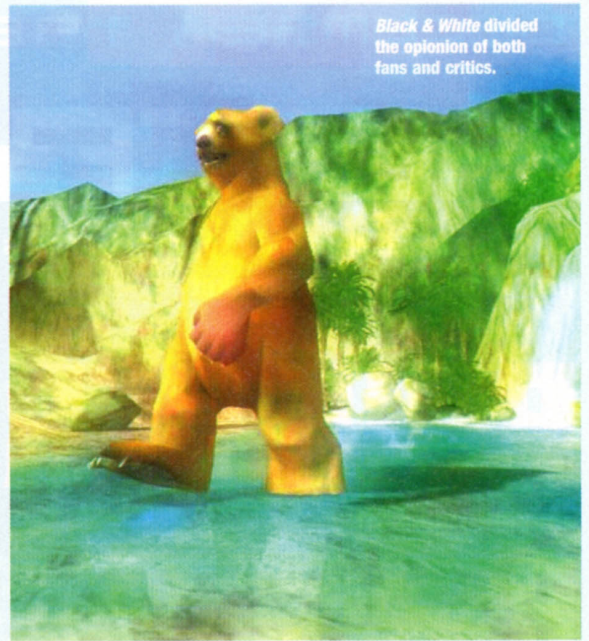
Lionhead is doing a roaring trade these days.

1 5   0
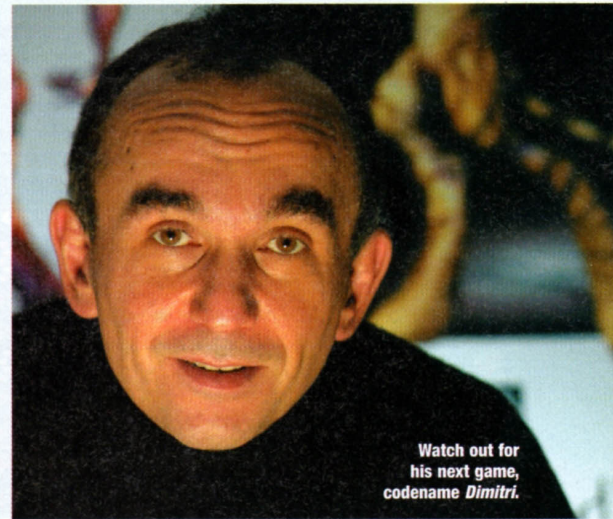
Watch out for his next game, codename *Dimitri*.

face that does really look like a face, with cracks and wrinkles and spots and stubble. The best thing I've seen in a game recently is the bullet time in *Max Payne*. It's a great game mechanic that has turned it into quite a unique shooter.

Do you think that an obsession with graphical perfection will get in the way of gameplay?
That's always the risk. When you're developing a game it's so much sexier to work on a piece of physics or some graphics than it is on gameplay. Gameplay is the least exciting thing for a developer to do. You have to be very careful to keep focused on it and not be too distracted by the technology.

Don't some games benefit from an unreal, properly 'gamey' aesthetic?
Of course. I'm completely addicted to the original *Super Mario* on GameBoy. You always have to remind yourself that the mechanics of the game are the most important thing. But then again, bullet time is a mechanic which couldn't have worked without today's graphics. The challenge is to come up with original mechanics that fit modern technology.

How do you feel about all the god and strategy games that have so closely followed and expanded on your original ideas?

It's flattering. But what it tells me is what a poor job I've done, because people have taken my concepts and made better games with them. I feel I have a great responsibility because of my position. There's no excuse for the bugs in *Black & White*.

Bugs are usually down to the myriad combinations of hardware that gamers use all over the world. Has this had any bearing on your decision to move towards consoles? And do you see the new wave of consoles, especially the PC-like Xbox, killing off the PC?

> ❝**When you're developing a game it's so much sexier to work on a piece of physics or some graphics than it is on gameplay**❞

Well, I haven't said that *Dimitri* isn't on the PC. When I said that about working with consoles two years ago I was talking about *Project Ego* (the Xbox title being developed by the Lionhead satellite studio Big Blue Box). I wasn't talking about my own future direction. The Xbox and the PC are totally different machines. Despite all the hardware similarities they are completely different because one has a joypad and one has a mouse. There are games that can never ever exist on a console, like *The Sims* or deep RPGs like *Baldur's Gate*. There will always be games that

are totally groundbreaking on the PC and games that will be totally groundbreaking on the consoles.

You don't see a danger of developers dumbing down PC games so they can release them on console then?
That would never work. We're doing an Xbox and PlayStation version of *B&W*, and it's turned out more like an RPG which you play through the creature. I've tried to faithfully port PC games in the past to consoles and it never works. It just ends up being frustrating, because a mouse can go anywhere while a joypad is more linear.

What do you think of the demise of Bullfrog, the company you founded in 1987?
It is sad. It's still going to exist as a label, but Electronic Arts wanted to take it in the direction it's gone. I think the industry is poorer now there'll be no more *Theme* games.

Are you happy then with the *Theme Park* sequels?
Well, you always have to say you're happy with your friends' work.

Read into that what you will. Whatever direction Peter decides to take *Dimitri* in, it's clear he will continue to inspire and innovate. In the meantime, you can look forward to the *B&W* expansion *Creature Isles*. PCZ

DECEMBER 1984

RETRO ZONE

Jason Moore takes us back to when luminous socks were trendy and you could still see your crisps through the packet

BOULDERDASH

Get your rocks off

Boulderdash may sound like the kind of language used by safari-suited hunters when they miss a target, but in the videogame sense, *Boulderdash* does exactly what it says on the tin (well, cassette case). With inspiration drawn from *Dig Dug* and *Miner 2049er*, the game was a clever mix of digging and collecting. You played Rockford, a strange mutated alien who was good at shifting mud, and the

gameplay revolved around clearing a path in the earth to move through the level while collecting the diamonds to open the exit.

Impenetrable boulders got in your way and you often ended up at the wrong end of a landslide. The clever positioning of rocks and diamonds provided the main challenge, but later levels introduced wandering enemies that could only be disposed of with an expertly timed falling rock. While graphics and sound were never more than

satisfactory, the innovative layout of each level left you hankering to see the next.

The success of *Boulderdash* spawned four sequels, a level designer, and an arcade version courtesy of Exidy. *Crystal Mines* by Atari took the level design ingenuity further, while Namco's arcade smash, *Mr Driller*, takes the format back to its simplistic roots. *Boulderdash* serves as a stark reminder that pure gameplay will always outweigh flashy graphics and 3D effects.
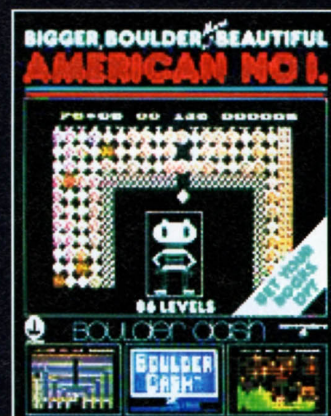
⬆ Rockford, an '80s hero.

⬆ It's simplistic yet very addictive gaming.

⬆ How many hours did you lose to this game?

THE BEST OF THE REST

MONKEY MAGIC
(C64)

Unfortunately Pigsy, Sandy, Fishface and the lady boy priest didn't appear in this game, perhaps because Solar software sadly didn't bother getting an official licence for their game based on the cult Japanese TV series. The action was a mix of flying on your magic cloud and finding Holy Scriptures within simple platform areas.

PERILS OF BEAR GEORGE
(Spectrum)

Cheetah's first ever game saw you take command of George the bear, in a quest to eat enough food to survive hibernation. The apples falling from the trees had to be caught in your mouth as you traverse pitfall style screens. Surprisingly, the graphics were well designed but the game lacked any real challenge.

RAID OVER MOSCOW
C64, Spectrum, Amstrad

Access followed up *Beach Head* with another military attack against the Russians. *Raid Over Moscow* retained the clever mix of interlocking sub games but turned the difficulty level up by about ten. Tough flying sections interspersed the strategy stages to great effect, but frustration prevailed as you tried to unlock the unseen mini-games.
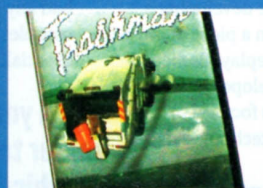
TRAVEL WITH TRASHMAN
Spectrum

New Generation was so blown away by the success of its original rubbish-picking game, they quickly created a sequel. This time you travelled between seven countries, picking up crisp packets in Spain or beer cans in Germany. While the ideas are certainly fun, this was a pale imitation of the original game.

ANCIPITAL
C64

Jeff Minter has long been renowned for his weird take on videogames, and this title had you searching a huge maze in search of the five goats of power (yes, goats). Each room was filled with enemies to be shot to pieces in familiar psychedelic style. And, as you'd expect, there were plenty of camels in there too.

TAPPER

Make mine a double

There is a definite market for the perfect game to play after you get back from the pub. In actual fact, *Tapper*, a Bally/Midway arcade conversion, was probably designed to be played at the pub. You played a bartender, whose responsibility was to keep the customers of five different drinking establishments happy. The customers ranged from sportsmen, cowboys and even space creatures, but if you kept them all happy, they would eventually leave and hopefully drop a tip. Once you emptied the bar you'd move onto other locations, including a Wild West saloon, a punk rocker bar, and a jock bar, which was full of irate Scots. The bonus level saw the aptly named Soda Bandit shaking up six of seven bottles, then mixing them round and you had to choose the right one to win points and avoid being covered in fizzy drink. Underneath *Tapper*'s cartoon-style graphics and humorous content lies a simplistic arcade game, which was entertaining in the short term, but didn't demand your attention for long.

⬆ Mug flinging at its best.

⬆ Scarily some of the beers were as big as the characters.

⬆ Amazingly successful considering how simple it was.

« STOP PRESS »

GAMING NEWS FROM DECEMBER '84

✪ This month saw the biggest line-up of film and television licensed games ever seen, as the industry built itself up for the Christmas rush. Elite's new deal with Warner Bros saw the *Fall Guy* and the *Dukes of Hazzard* finding their way on to UK computers. Datasoft had *Bruce Lee* and an adventure based on the soap opera *Dallas*, while Activision drafted in David Crane to write a game to accompany their *Ghostbusters* licence. Scraping the bottom of the licence barrel were CRL with *Terrahawks* and Martech with *Eddie Kidd Jump Challenge*, though the latter was by far the most suited to videogame interpretation.

✪ New company Domark launched themselves in style with an amazing adventure game. *Eureka* was made up of five interlocking adventures, written by *Fighting Fantasy* writer, Ian Livingstone. Needless to say, the most exciting aspect of the launch was the whopping £25,000 prize for the first person to complete the adventure and unravel the mystery within.

✪ The first game for Sinclair's QL 16-bit computer was announced. *D-Day* was based on the classic Games Workshop role-playing game, and promised to be a strategy affair. Not exactly the arcade game Sinclair needed to sell their next-generation machine.
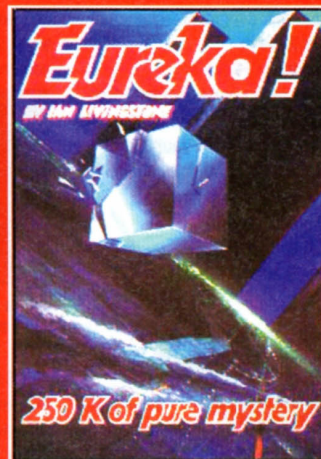
✪ The electronic entertainment arm of Parker Brothers shut down, with bosses deciding to leave the games industry in light of the imminent US videogame crash. While early '80s console games like *Frogger* and *Empire Strikes Back* provided huge hits for the firm, the company's failure to back computer formats could be blamed for the downturn.

⬆ *Eddie Kidd Jump Challenge* wasn't the worst of the adaptations.

⬆ 250K was a lot back then.

FORMAT WARS

Mattel's Intellivision was the latest victim in the format wars, with the price cut to £45 in an effort to clear them from the shelves. Mattel certainly advertised, but the Intellivision, with its pre-1980 specification and lack of quality games, never

made its mark in the UK. The newest format on the block was the Enterprise – a Z80-based computer with 64k and 672x512 resolution. Unfortunately only two games had been announced for the machine, and neither used the Enterprise's cartridge port, instead being supplied on cassette. The big news this month was the price cut of the Atari 800XL. At £169 the computer undercut the Commodore 64 and with its four sound channels and 256-colour display chip, it finally began to establish a user base in the UK.

TOP TEN UK GAMES

DALEY THOMPSON DECATHLON
Ocean – Spec/C64

ELITE
Acorn – BBC

BEACH HEAD
Access – C64

MONTY MOLE
Gremlin – Spec

JET SET WILLY
Software Projects – Spec

SHERLOCK HOLMES
Melbourne House – Spec

FULL THROTTLE
Micromega – Spec

FRANK N STEIN
PSS – Spec

CHILLER
Mastertronic – C64

KOKOTONI WILF
Elite – Spec

Jason Moore is the editor of the Retrogames magazine
www.retrogames.co.uk

EXTENDEDPLAY

Reawaken your addiction to gore and get your adrenaline running freely again with our bunch of freebies for *AvP Gold*. If that isn't enough, your tactical taste buds will get a tweak from this month's add-ons for *Sudden Strike* and *Sudden Strike Forever* as well…

ALIENS VS PREDATOR GOLD

Rebellion's hit first-person shooter capitalised on the popularity of the Predator and Alien(s) movies and brought bug-hunting on a big scale to the PC. Faster than you could say "mind the xenomorph", we realised that while *AvP* wasn't going to be the best FPS game around, there was no questioning it was the scariest – a title it's held onto until its sequel was released a few months ago. The game positively drips atmosphere and whether you choose to be a space marine, an Alien or a Predator there always seems to be something bigger, nastier and more bad tempered than you around. Stay frosty people.

⭐ **Rebellion Map Pack 1**
Author: Rebellion
Filename: avpgpaks.exe
Size: 26.2Mb
Rating: ⭕⭕⭕⭕⭕
A map pack courtesy of Rebellion and Fox Interactive themselves. A mix of skirmish and multiplayer maps that are sure to keep you on your toes, trigger fingers itchy and nerves jangled to hell. They're all top class and while some of the interior designs won't be to everyone's taste, you won't forget them in a hurry either…

PIRANESI & PIRANESI (C) One for *Quake* fans with a distinctly medieval feel to it. Named after a 17th century architect and designer whose bizarre layouts often involved stairs and platforms going in all directions in a sort of tongue-tied 3D, Piranesi is an exercise in enclosed gloom and an out-and-out splatterfest once you get going. Lots of dark corners for aliens to hide in makes this a map for brave-hearted marines only.

⬆ **A little bit of Laura Ashley would go down a treat in here.**

CONFLICT & CONFLICT (C) Corridors galore in this map means lots of unexpected battles and close-quarter scrapping. You'll need to keep your wits about you if you're going to take this one on as a marine as the layout is riddled with ducting and small passageways that only Aliens can move along. Atmosphere is also strong in this map, which has a nest-like ambience to it – many walls show signs of an Alien presence and you know they can't be far away.
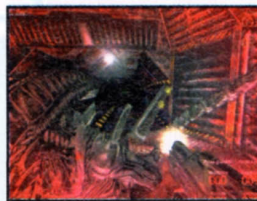
⬆ **Eat high velocity death and don't think about complaining.**

BANE & BANE (C) Another map that favours the Alien's style of fighting (don't they all?) with two floors, four rooms and a few corridors to try to survive in. At the far end of the first floor is a waste disposal well and you can expect to find your dismembered corpse regularly taking up residence in there. This well links around the map with air ducts so small only the Aliens can get through most of them, although the main tunnel back to the first floor rooms is big enough for humans. No doubt the Aliens know that too.

⬆ **Fall down there and you're alien fodder.**

AZURE & AZURE (C) You'll find yourself in one large room with nowhere to run to. In the middle of the room is a spinning blue crystal that sits above a huge pit. Don't fall or let yourself get blasted into the pit – you'll wind up a small and bloody splat at the bottom. Keep moving and watch out for the changing light effects that enemies can hide in as they creep up on you.
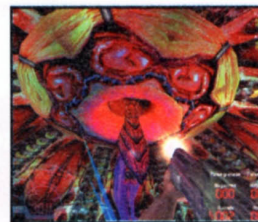
⬆ **Azure is wild design taken to the max.**

LAST STAND AND LAST STAND (C) A strange map with a cross-shaped layout and a raised area at the end of each spur. Go up the ramps and you'll find a selection of goodies for the Marines at the top of each one. The raised tops of the ramps give a good view of the room, but the Aliens have access into and around the room via a set of passages so watch out.

⬆ **The tops of these ramps hide goodies – get there fast.**

STORAGE & STORAGE (C) A large and complex map with one huge room full of obstacles, stairways and ramps. There are lots of places to hide and fire from but while this might protect marines from the Predator to some extent, it's still no help against the Aliens that can climb in any direction. But there are a lot of good vantage points, so you have a better chance here than in most maps.

⬆ **Storage is an ideal Deathmatch environment.**

BLEAK AND BLEAK (C) Two levels to fight in and the whole place looks like many of your companions have fought (and probably been slaughtered) here before. A large, curved corridor joins the two levels and offers at least some chance to run away if you get into trouble in one level or the other, although enemies often move fast enough to make this opportunity negligible. Detail has been kept to a minimum here but you might well find your own bloodstains add some colour and highlight to the décor.

⬆ **As the sole survivor your future is definitely bleak.**

FOSSIL & FOSSIL (C) A great map that incorporates some of the most memorable elements from the *Alien* films. The surroundings are best described as "Biomechanical" and if you can imagine walking through a horrendous black skeleton then this is it. There are even dead pilots in the ship and a trip around

JUNGLE

Armor 100

Skirmish in the jungle map is not a good idea.

the lower levels will reveal civilians trapped in cocoons to be hosts for the Alien's horrible brood. Not a good map to play just before going to bed…

⬆ The original spaceship pilot from Alien puts in an appearance.

FLESHBOX & FLESHBOX (C) "The stuff that nightmares are made of" is a good description of this map. A bleeding heart in the middle of a large map, heavy sci-fi influences, and surroundings to chill you to the bone. If you like raw flesh then you'll love this map, but otherwise be very, very afraid…

⬆ Flesh would be a red-paint salesman's dream.

● Rebellion Map Pack 2
Author: Rebellion
Filename: avpgpak6.exe
Size: 10.1Mb
Rating: ⬤⬤⬤⬤⬤
More goodies from Rebellion and Fox.

JUNGLE & JUNGLE (C) A great map but near impossible to survive for long in skirmish mode. Predators won't find enough firepower to take out the hordes of Aliens, and marines won't be able to fire and dodge fast enough to

save their skins. This is a map for deathmatch instead. The jungle textures are convincing (with the limitations of the game engine) and the layout carefully crafted to give each species some suitable terrain and hiding places.

⬆ Jungle is another top class deathmatch map.

STORAGE XL Rebellion took their already enjoyable and challenging Storage map and stuck it on steroids to create Storage XL, which is almost the same layout – but much bigger. This works more in favour of the Alien as he creeps up on his ever more nervous prey, but there are at least plenty of weapon packs laying around for the trigger-happy marine to hopefully save himself with. No skirmish mode unfortunately.

● AvP Tools
Author: Rebellion
Filename: avptools.zip
Size: 10.3Mb
Rating: ⬤⬤⬤◯◯
Rebellion's own development tools used in the creation of mods, maps and goodies for *AvP* and *AvP Gold*. These aren't the easiest tools to use (which goes to explain why full-blown mods are so thin on the ground) and sadly they were only made public shortly before *AvP2* was released, but as the *AvP2* tools are still under lock and key you might want to cut your *AvP* modding teeth on these.

NEON MACHINE & NEON MACHINE (C) An ever more luridly coloured set of tunnels and passageways, each stuffed full with aliens in skirmish mode. Fighting as a marine will really give your nerves a workout – even if the eventual end is the same. The Predator sadly just doesn't have a chance here so stick to the marine class, grab every weapon in sight and try to put off the inevitable slaughter for as long as you can.
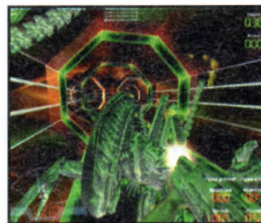
⬆ Neon Machine is a mental rollercoaster of underwear changes.

● PST Mod Pack
Author: Claud Dudek
Filename: PSTModPack.zip & PSTRestorePack.zip
Size: 1.6Mb & 1.1Mb
Rating: ⬤⬤⬤⬤◯
Installing this mod pack isn't entirely straightforward but the author has tried to make it as user-friendly as possible. You'll need to use the patch installer file to get it to work (patchinstaller.zip), and the restoration file to return your copy of *AvP* to its unmodified state (PSTRestorePack.zip), but the effort is worth it. The mod will give you a new set of weapons for the marine, new taunts, three brand new in-game characters and three new HUD's as well as a new menu.

ETHEREAL & ETHEREAL (C)

MAP OF THE MONTH AvP

A map to make you feel small, insignificant and very vulnerable. Imposing stonework and rusty pipes make up your surroundings, although there are only two main rooms for you to worry about. Keep well away from the holes at each end of the map, as the fans inside them will efficiently chop you to pieces whichever species you belong to. The corridors here twist and turn alarmingly which make it very easy for Aliens to lay in wait.

In Ethereal, the walls come alive.

Imagine the heating bill in this place.

SUDDEN STRIKE & SUDDEN STRIKE FOREVER

As the French and Germans extend the olive branch of supposed Euroland friendship towards us, here's the game to remind us that we weren't always the bestest of buddies after all. Forget about resource gathering, get your tanks, soldiers, air support and paratroops together and go kick some Euro-butt. After all, they're going to make it illegal sooner or later…

✪ Allied Power Realism Mod (for SSF)

Author: AlliedPower
Filename: aprm_forever_uk.zip
Size: 47.5Mb
Rating: ⊕⊕⊕⊕○

At 47Mb this is a huge mod for *Sudden Strike Forever* that has far too many features to list here. It includes new units, soldiers, weapons, vehicles and buildings, plus new animations and sound files, a new level, bug fixes, tweaks to the experience and damage systems and much more. The readme.doc file is nine pages long.

↑ Use your firepower wisely in the Allied Power Realism Mod to weaken your enemy with minimal risk.

✪ Real Warfare Mod (for SSF)

Author: Otcho
Filename: realwarfare41eng.exe
Size: 6.2Mb
Rating: ⊕⊕⊕⊕○

A great mod that adds a host of new features to the game with everything from new weapons, new units and vehicles, modified explosions, tweaked weapon accuracy and impact to a new single-player mission, a demo map (where AI will fight AI) and more.

↑ RWF is enjoyable desktop warfare.

✪ Retreat from Stalingrad (SSF)

Author: Robert Haasdijk
Filename: retreat.zip
Size: 99Kb
Rating: ⊕⊕⊕⊕○

Stalingrad has been the subject of a couple of films and books recently, so here's your very own chance to re-enact the horror of that historic battle. You command a beleaguered German army group and as the Russian forces tighten their grip the garrison has one remaining avenue of escape – a bridge over the Volga. You hold the bridge but there are Russians on the other side and your task is to break through their lines to meet up with the bulk of the German forces. Once this is done you have to capture a Russian-controlled airport and start to evacuate. Needless to say, the Russians don't want you to leave.

↑ The Russian winter is Christmas-card pretty, but it was hell for the soldiers who fought in it.

✪ Sudden Strike Version 1.2 Patch

Author: CDV
Filename: suddenstrike_v1_2a_patch_e.zip
Size: 2.1Mb
Rating: ⊕⊕⊕⊕○

The version 1.2 patch for the English version of the original *Sudden Strike* game offers enhanced GameSpy support and the opportunity to enjoy the many third-party add-ons available. Previous patches created conflicts with some mods so use this patch to bring yourself up to date.

✪ Vorrundenkarte (SS map)

Author: CDV
Filename: vorrundenkarte.exe
Size: 495Kb
Rating: ⊕⊕⊕⊕○

A multiplayer map from CDV that was used for a *Sudden Strike* championship in Germany.

THE BEACHES OF PIEMOND (SUST FOREVER MAP)

MAP OF THE MONTH — THE BEACHES OF PIEMOND
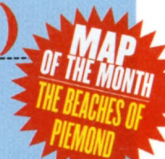
Author: Robert Haasdijk
Filename: beaches.zip
Size: 137Kb
Rating: ⊕⊕⊕⊕○

This is a large summertime map with several mission elements in which you take command of Allied troops against the Germans. You'll begin with a small number of commandos and have to co-operate with local French resistance elements to destroy the German shore batteries. When this first mission is achieved, your paratroops and the resistance fighters will attack a German-held airport in preparation for the main beach landing. Get everything right, and the main force will liberate the town, but get it wrong and both you and the town will take a pasting.

What a pretty farm. Shame to blow it to bits really…

Enemy aircraft caught on the ground at Piemond make inviting targets.

NET ADDRESSES

SUDDEN STRIKE

www.camel-box.de/sudden/indexeng.htm
Camel-box is a top resource for *SS* and *SS Forever* goodies. This is the English-language section.

www.suddenstrike.co.uk
Homepage for the *Sudden Strike* UK Championships, which was won back in October at The Playing Fields by Guderian.

www.suddenstrikeonline.de
A great website for *SS* fans with both English and German content. Lots of news, mission and map downloads, clan information and game tips.

www.haasdijk.demon.nl
Homepage of Robert Haasdijk who created the SS Forever maps this month. Find more goodies and links on his page.

www.cdv.de/english/_index.html
Website for *Sudden Strike* publishers CDV with company info, games details, patch downloads and more.

www.suddenstrikemaps.com
Lots of maps for *SS*, *SS Forever*, the Real World mod and Allied Power realism Mod. In German, but bang up to date.

ALLIED POWER REALISM MOD

Rockets take out unsuspecting infantry from a distance.

COMMENT

In the great battle for sexual equality in the gaming arena, does the term 'girl gamer' do more harm than good?

⭐ NOT A GIRL GAMER Rhianna Pratchett

There are a few circumstances where the question 'So what's it like being a woman then?' can be answered with anything other than 'quite good now that the scars have healed'. However, the computer games industry (and indeed gaming as a whole), is still an arena where being female is still something of a novelty, and like any other novelty, having written a chick-lit novel about a young woman's battle to weigh only slightly more than a gnat and rid the world of fat-free ice cream while waiting for Mr Right...

The piece will positively vibrate with righteous indignation about an industry emblazoned with images of buxom wenches with cleavages you could launch planes off, and how these are not good role models for

Lara Croft: is she off-putting to women or just an ass-kicking chick?

> **"Yeah, some guys will probably insult you if they find out you're female, but that's because some guys are dicks"**

someone always has to paint it pink and give it a catchy name. In this case the popular phrase is 'girl gamer', a hideously cutesy label, which always strikes me as something that would be emblazoned across Geri Halliwell's chest because she'd once been seen in the same room as a PS2. I may be betraying my 'cyber-sisters' here, but I hate it.

GIRL'S WORLD

Now I'm all for girls playing games, I'm even for girls banding together to form clans and websites, although I draw the line at using 'z' instead of 's' (game girlz, girlz who play gamez, etc). Come on, that surely went out with a/s/l! 'Girl Gamer' isn't used so much by girls who are actually serious gamers, because they're usually too busy playing games to worry about defining themselves to the rest of the world. Instead, it's touted around in articles with undertones like: 'Girls... they're playing games now, good grief aren't they doing well? They'll be asking for the vote next!' More often than not though, the term is bandied about by young ladies on their first *Guardian* assignment, with the qualifications of

young women. Yes, developers tend to create games for an almost purely male demographic and this is something that needs to be addressed. The women may be rather well endowed, but at least they are usually kicking some ass, which has to count for something. But how come we don't see more agitated young men putting pen to paper about how it's unfair that guys in computer games have muscles like watermelons, chins like bricks and the ability to shoot accurately while wearing shades? Besides I've never met a man who has Duke Nukem or Serious Sam as a role model, with the possible exception of Martin Korda.

But this testosterone saturation of the industry and its various outpourings wasn't always the case. In the late '80s and early '90s there were many more women in the games market, writing for and indeed editing games magazine. Christina Erskine is one such example, the former editor of *PC Review*. So what's changed? Well many may argue that the industry has become more specialised and now requires writers to have a greater degree of background
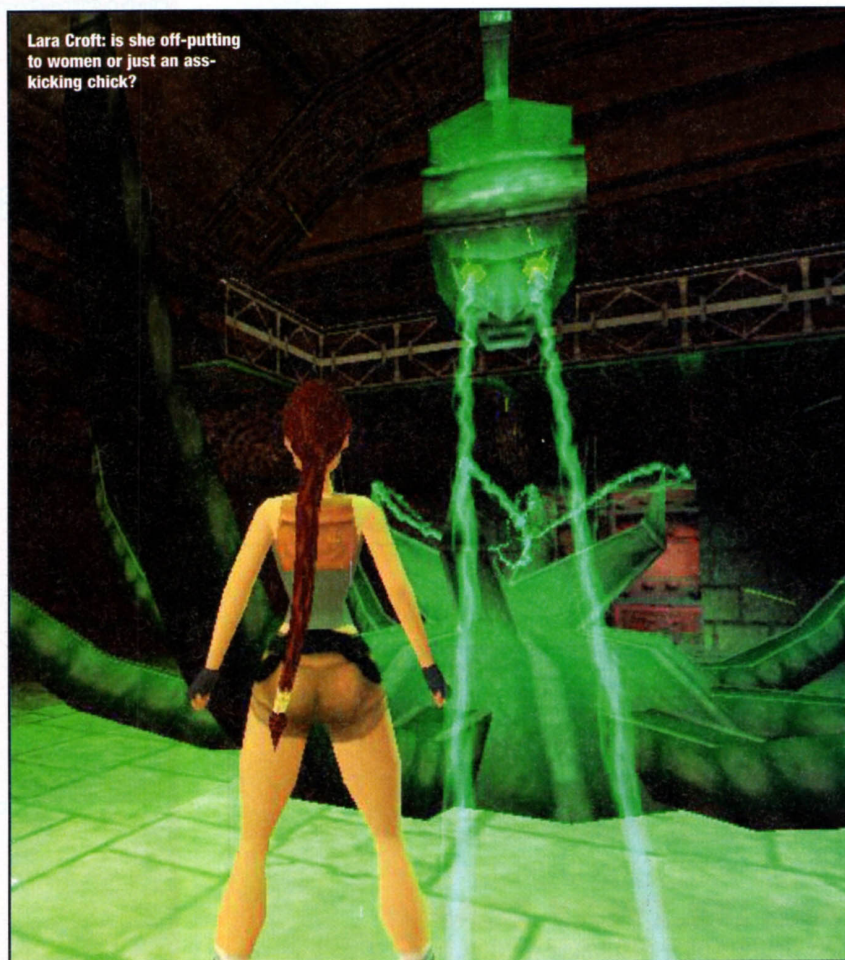
knowledge and expertise in their subject than, let's be honest here, is seldom possessed by women.

GIRL POWER?

Regardless of this, I'm still not sure where some people got the idea that prefixing something with the word 'girl' is striking a blow for women everywhere. It just stinks of that particular brand of über-militant feminism that puts gender before anything else, at the cost of completely obscuring any valid viewpoint. 'We're girls, we're girls, we're girls, oh bugger what was it we were suppose to be doing anyway?' But then that's probably 'girl

power' for you. What the hell was that anyway? It seemed to consist of waving your hands in the air and screeching very loudly, or waving your hands at cameras and screeching very loudly. Calling ourselves 'girl gamers' is just another example of self-segregation when what we should be looking for is integration. No one feels the need to label themselves gay gamers, black gamers or boy gamers so why should being female be any different? It isn't. You play games, you're a gamer.

Lots of girls complain that they get abuse online because they're female, which puts them off. I too have been on

the receiving end of it. But let's face it, online gaming pulls no punches. It's not something you can be precious about, so you're better off leaving your gender at the door and getting on with the business of actually having fun. Yeah, some guys will probably insult you if they find out you're female, but that's because some guys are dicks, and believe me, they say a hell of a lot worse to each other. To put it simply, if you're a girl and want to be accepted in the game-playing arena then you need to stop focusing on the fact that you're a girl and start focusing on the fact that you're a gamer. PCZ
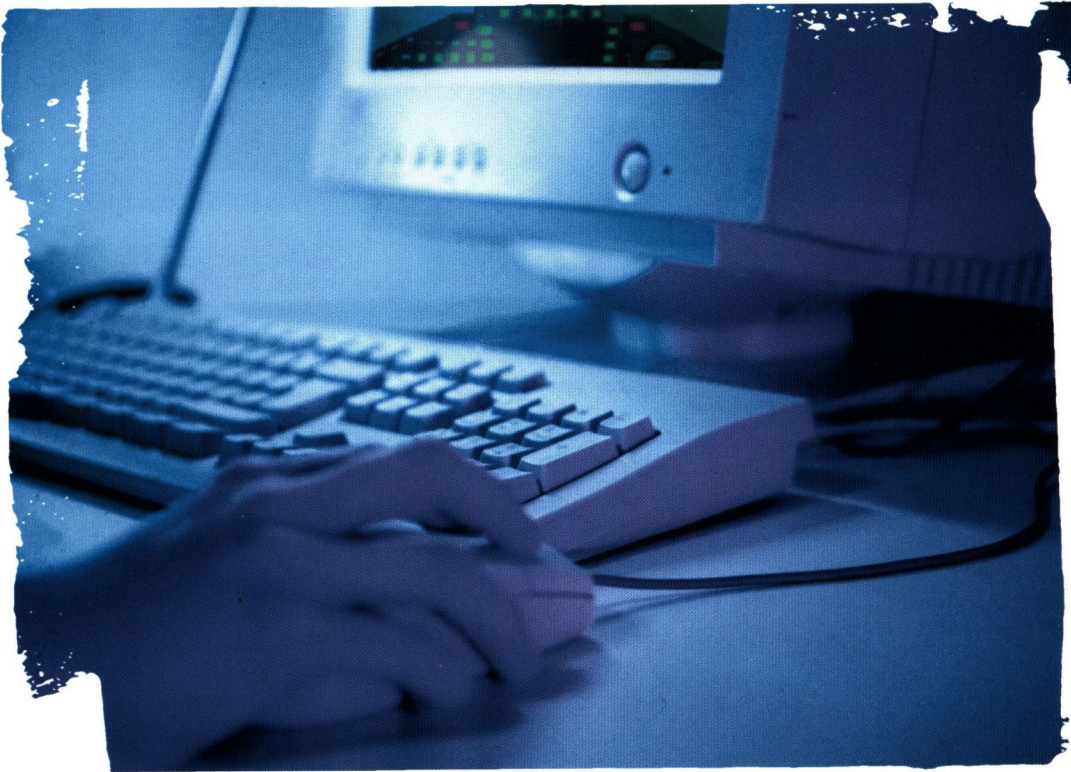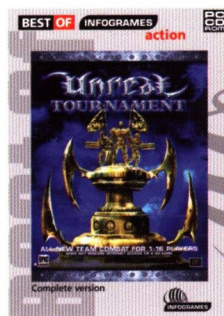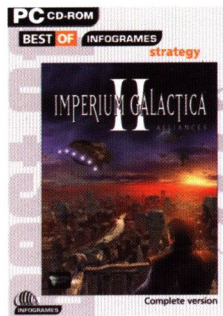
FRANK HERBERT'S

DUNE
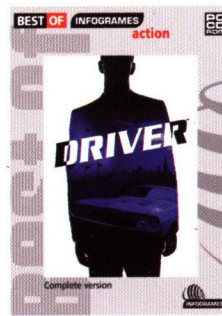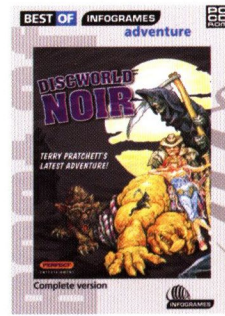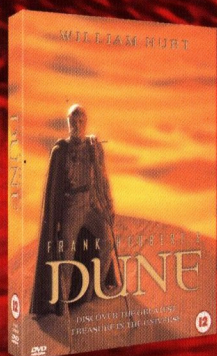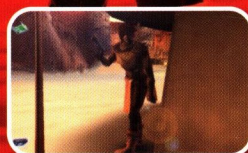
"The game is in 3D and the graphics are stunning…"
Daily Record

"Cryo has finally rediscovered its lucky charm in the Dune license'
PC Zone

"The level of detail is truly astonishing, as are textures and quality of animation. This really is one of the most technically accomplished PC titles we've seen"
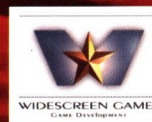*Spong.com*

Frank Herbert's mini-series available on DVD

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