

PCZONE

**EXCLUSIVE
REVIEW AND
2 PLAYABLE
DEMOS**

EMPIRES

DAWN OF THE MODERN WORLD™



**EXCLUSIVE
PREVIEW!**

LORD OF THE RINGS BATTLE FOR MIDDLE EARTH

Stunning new RTS
from the makers of
Command & Conquer

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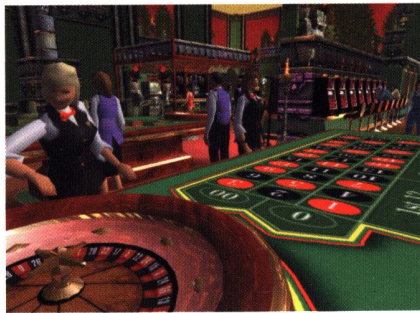
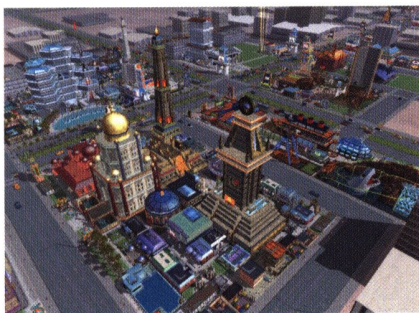
TINY COMPO:
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EMPIRES: DAWN OF THE MODERN WORLD P66

Can *Empires* herald a new dawn for the RTS? Check out our world exclusive review to find out



B.I.G.

"Size isn't everything..."

Back in the bad old days, when PC stood for something other than the world's best games platform, I used to believe this was true. But, like many others washed with the

clear waters of the 21st Century, I now know it to be a lie spun by those who don't stack up.

To prove it, we've produced the biggest issue of the year, complete with seven world exclusive reviews and cover discs that are stuffed with six world exclusive demos. (Not forgetting the full game and expansion pack on the DVD. You know, the one that's already twice the size of the ones you'll find on any other PC games mag in the country.)

And, if that wasn't enough, we've included the first issue of our brand new ZX (Zone eXtra) magazine, which you'll find accompanying ZONE approximately every three months. Each ZX is dedicated to a single game or a single development house, and it's about bringing you behind-the-scenes information you won't read anywhere else. Look at it as the first in a series that you can build into a collection encompassing the finest PC games of all time. (Or as compensation for the fact that our promised cover game, *Half-Life 2*, has been delayed - see page 13 for the full tragedy.)

The soon-to-be-legendary ZX kicks off its tenure with *Unreal Tournament 2004*, the latest version of the shooter that's been ZONE's online tippie of choice since it first burst into our lives back in 1999. The good news is that the office-fave Assault mode is back in, along with vehicles and a massive new game mode, Onslaught, but there's loads more to read about. Check it out, let me know what you think, and then chant with me, 'bigger is always better!' Now if you'll excuse me I'm going to retrieve those spam emails I rashly deleted from my Hotmail account.

Dave Woods
Editor



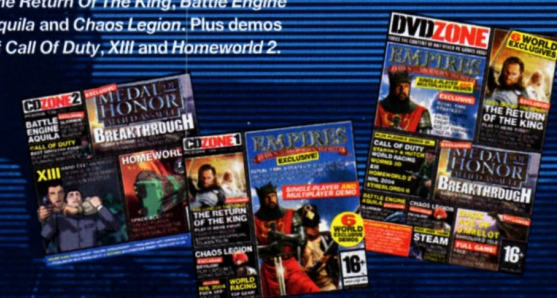
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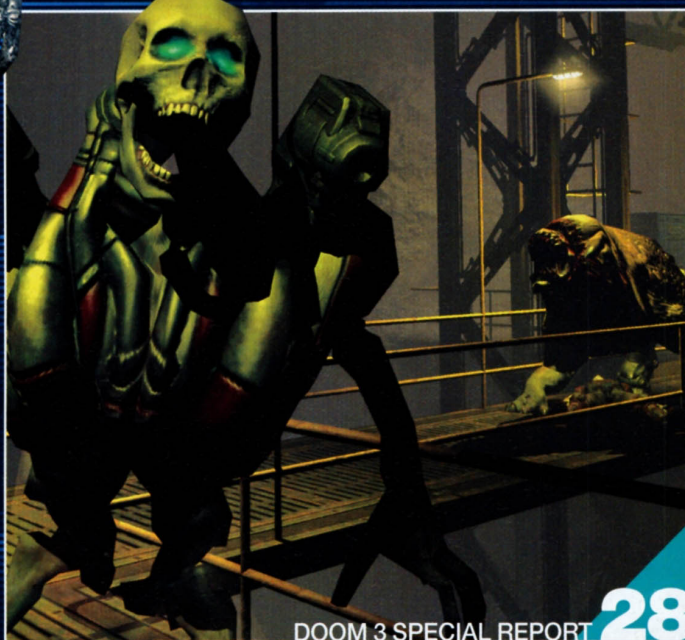
■ **SIX EXCLUSIVE DEMOS FOR YOUR GAMING DELIGHT...**
Two stupendous demos of *Empires: Dawn Of The Modern World* as well as exclusive demos of *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault - Breakthrough* (multiplayer), *The Lord Of The Rings: The Return Of The King*, *Battle Engine Aquila* and *Chaos Legion*. Plus demos of *Call Of Duty*, *XIII* and *Homeworld 2*.

■ **DVD EXCLUSIVE: DVD ZONE**
Free, full 21-day trial of *Dark Ages Of Camelot: Shrouded Isles* and other demos exclusive to the DVD, including *Etherlords II*, *Worms 3D*, *NHL 2004* and *Starsky & Hutch*.

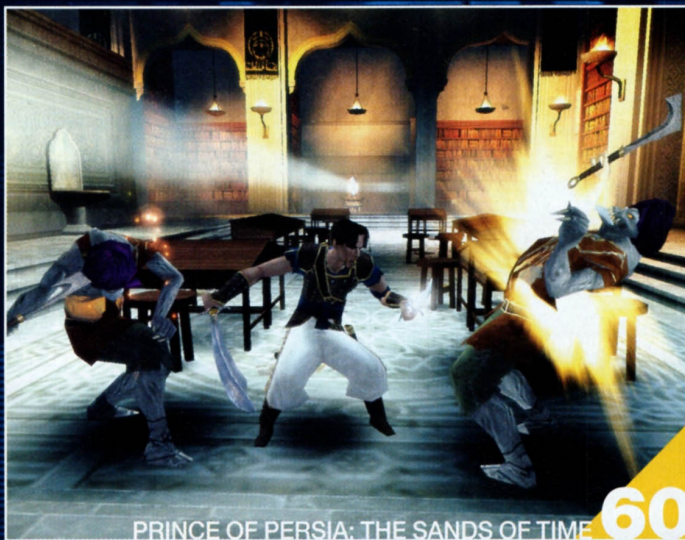




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On sale November 13. Don't miss it!

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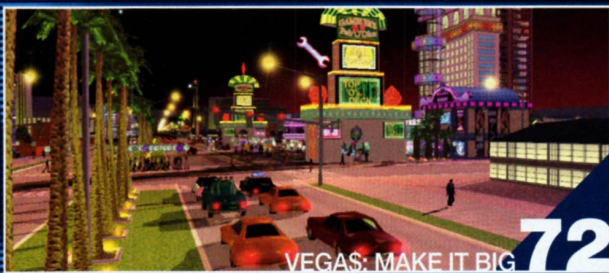
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WIN! **TINY COMPO** Correctly answer this month's cover question and you could win some PC goodies. Send your entry on a postcard addressed to: Tiny Compo (135), PC ZONE, 30 Cleveland Street, London W1T 4JD. The first entry with the correct answer plucked out of the hat wins a mystery prize. The editor's decision is final. Closing Date: November 12, 2003. The winner of our October cover (133) is Karen Williams, who knew that the bald bloke on the front of issue 133 was called Darth Malak. Well done.




PC CD-ROM

PlayStation 2



GAME BOY ADVANCE

NEW LINE CINEMA 

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THE LORD OF THE RINGS

THE RETURN OF THE KING

Live the movie. Be the hero.

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The battle begins at lordoftherings-eagames.co.uk



Challenge Everything

Move over Colin!

RICHARD BURNS RALLY



FIRST Look!

If anyone can catch McRae, it's his archrival Mr Burns. Excellent...

■ NON-DRIVER Steve Hill

ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW

PUBLISHER SCI
DEVELOPER Warthog Sweden
EXPECTED RELEASE DATE Q2 2004
WEBSITE www.sci.co.uk

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Full involvement of Richard Burns
- Ultra-realistic hardcore approach
- Intricate physics system
- Comprehensive driving school

“Slew into a tree at 150mph and you’re looking at an airbag followed by an airlift...”

BEING THE first journalist ever to see *Richard Burns Rally* may not quite be up there with breaking the Watergate scandal, but it's the kind of sacrifice we are prepared to make for you, the PC ZONE reader. The grand unveiling came in a sparse room above a café near Earls Court, and consisted of a lot of men talking a lot of noise. Fortunately, we were able to wade through the technical jargon and bring you the important facts (not just that the bagels were a bit dry).

Colin McRae may rule the world of PC rallying, but one man regularly gets the better of him in the real world, and he has been drafted in to bolster the latest pretender to the rally game throne. As Britain's top rally driver for the past three seasons and 2001 World Rally Champion, Richard Burns is the man of the moment. At the time of going to press, Burns is also leading this year's championship.

SIMULATION STREET

Further spice is added to the new-found gaming rivalry by the fact that McRae and Burns actively despise each other, hissing like jackals whenever they are in the same room. Or at least that's what they want you to think. It turns out that it's all for show and there is a great deal of mutual respect.

That said, McRae has already dismissed Burns' forthcoming game, bracketing it in with the numerous others that have failed to dislodge his.

So how can it compete? Well, rather than take on McRae on his own terms, the



Face notes will be provided by Robert Reid, Burns' co-driver for over a decade.

developers of *Richard Burns Rally* have opted for a radically different approach. Whereas McRae is essentially a pick-up-and-play arcade experience – along with pretty much every other rally game – Burns is attempting to provide a proper hardcore simulation of the sport. To have any chance of competing, players will have to acquire the essential skills at the Forest Rally School, based on a real-life location in Wales, where Burns learned his trade.

ROLL WITH IT

As in reality, should you roll your car during a rally, the crowd will be able to roll it back on to the road enabling you to continue. But that's as far as the generosity extends. Slew into a tree at

150mph, and you're looking at an airbag followed by an airlift, with your rally coming to an undignified end.

According to creative director Patrick O'Lunaigh (who worked on *McRae 1* and *2*): "It makes it a lot more exciting because you know if you make one mistake then you're out, and that's what real rally drivers feel. That's the route we're going down, and we believe it's the right one for this kind of game."

It's a bold approach, but one that could breathe life into an increasingly stagnant genre. We've been playing *Colin McRae 04* recently, and while it's a superb game, it's hard to see where the series has left to go. Enter *Richard Burns Rally*: there's a new cock in the roost. [P]



The championship will consist of six different licensed rallies.



Speed through courses from USA, Finland, England, Japan, France and Australia.



The Richard Burns Challenge Mode lets you try to beat the time of the world champ himself.

ORANGE CRUSH

Dim-witted stewards may occasionally wander into the road, providing a dangerous hazard. Or an easy target, what with the orange bib.

IN THE PINES

Smack into one of these at pace, and you're looking at nil points. No bouncing back on to the track in this game.

SUBARU FOR YOU

Richard Burns won the 2001 World Championship in a Subaru Impreza WRC. He currently drives for Peugeot, but will return to Subaru next season.

CROWD SCENE

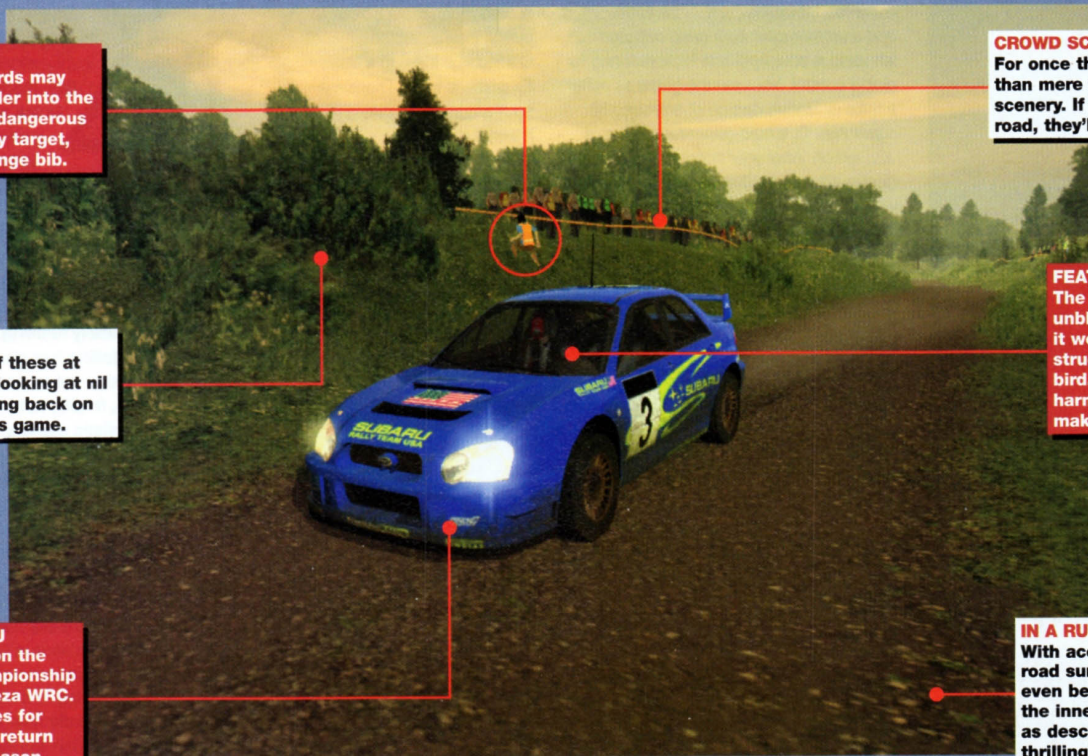
For once the crowd are more than mere two-dimensional scenery. If you roll off the road, they'll roll you back on.

FEATHERED FIEND

The windscreen is unblemished here, but it won't be after being struck by a low-flying bird. No animals were harmed during the making of this game.

IN A RUT

With accurately modelled road surfaces, it should even be possible to use the inner rut like a rail, as described in Burns' thrilling autobiography.





ALL THE NEWS, VIEWS AND RUMOURS FROM THE WORLD OF PC GAMING

BULLETIN

BLACK MESA BLUES

■ ASSOCIATE EDITOR Jamie Sefton

▲ So, *Half-Life 2* has been delayed (see story opposite). A signal has failed on the monorail tracks at Black Mesa and the G-Man and Gordon Freeman are now stranded in Anomalous Materials, cursing the years of government underfunding of their transport system. This is a great shame. Firstly (and bloody obviously) because we'll now have to wait that bit longer to get our hands on the most eagerly-awaited game in PC history. Secondly because I was praying – and I'm not religious – that when Valve broke its announcement of the September 30 release date back in our preview in issue 129, that the date would be met.

We've seen innumerable launch dates for the big games slip over the years, meaning that all of us have started to take every grand announcement of an imminent release with a pinch of salt larger than then the EU salt mountain. I was willing *Half-Life 2* to make that launch date because Valve had waited five years to announce it, and having a company release a game when it said it was originally going to would've eased the pain in the hearts of videogame lovers everywhere. But it was not to be.

We'll just have to shrug our shoulders, roll our eyes and go to bed with exciting images of Head Crabs and Combine Soldiers tumbling around our brains for a few months more.

In Bulletin this month we have an exclusive interview on this page with Ion Storm's Bill Money about *Deus Ex: Invisible War*, brand new shots of *Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow* (page 16), exclusive info on gorgeous FPS *Far Cry* (page 19) and all your regular faves including Emulation Zone (page 15). Sweet dreams.



"Just put the probe down and move away slowly..."



Invisible War's 'retina' HUD in full effect.

DEUS EX - VISIBLE

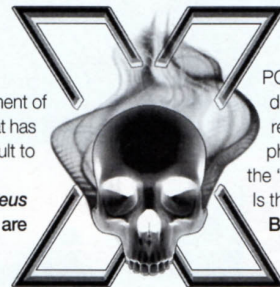
EXCLUSIVE! PC ZONE INTERVIEWS ION STORM TO SHED SOME BIO-MOD LIGHT ON THE UPCOMING MEGA-SEQUEL *DEUS EX: INVISIBLE WAR*

GAMES DON'T COME much bigger than *Deus Ex: Invisible War*. Along with *Doom 3* and *Half-Life 2*, Warren Spector's sequel to the award-winning sci-fi role-playing FPS starring the nano-technology augmented JC Denton, will be one of the absolute-must-have titles of the next six months. *Deus Ex: Invisible War* is set in 2070, 15 years after the first game, when nano-technology is completely widespread and a catastrophic economic collapse has left various socio-political factions vying for global control. You play the game as either a male or female version of anti-terrorist agent Alex D, a next-generation clone of JC Denton. After your home of Chicago is destroyed by a terrifying nanite-detonator, you begin the story under the protection of the TARSUS organisation.

We recently caught up with producer Bill Money at developer Ion Storm's home in Austin, Texas, to discuss just how *Deus Ex: Invisible War* is shaping up...

PCZ: Has there been anything in the development of *Deus Ex: Invisible War* that has proved much more difficult to pull off than expected?
Bill Money: Making a *Deus Ex* game is hard. There are so many ways to play it that it makes accounting for each possible solution very difficult. We get daily reports from our QA department on how they figured out a path or a way

to use a tool that we never thought of. I'm sure we'll be amazed by some of the stuff players will accomplish once they get their hands on the finished game.



PCZ: In previous demonstrations, you seemed really happy with Havok's physics engine – especially the 'ragdoll' effect for characters. Is this still the case?

BM: Having every object in the world behave in a physical way really enhances *Deus Ex*-type gameplay. For example, bumping into a small stack of crates may make just enough noise to alert a nearby guard. Plus, the coolness factor of lobbing a grenade and having it blow crates and barrels all over the place is incredibly fulfilling. The addition of ragdolling has also added to the immersion value, so now when an AI dies, it falls, tumbles or hangs in a realistic manner.

PCZ: Can you use the game's dynamic lighting to your advantage when infiltrating buildings and taking out enemies?

BM: Yes. The player can hide in shadows to avoid detection, turn off lights in areas to change lighting dynamically and use tools like their bio-mod light or flashlight to search badly lit areas. You know the game is working well when you are hiding in a darkened room seemingly safe from detection, when all of a sudden the lights are flipped on by the AI and everyone can see you.



The AI is so advanced, enemies will turn on lights to look for you.



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Latest charts and release dates

PCZ: Could you describe some of the robots and nano-augmented enemies you'll meet in *Deus Ex: Invisible War*?

BM: Spider bots are really cool. They are small bots that are programmed to patrol in cramped spaces. However, one of my favorite bots is the security bot – imagine the family German Shepherd made of black aluminum alloy with a riot shotgun strapped to its back!

PCZ: You've unified the skills and augmentations for your player character into a single system known as 'biomods' for the new sequel. Can you give a few examples of how these futuristic body modifications will work in practice?

BM: In my playthrough last night I was using a Thermal Masking and Bot Domination combo with great success. Thermal Masking prevents bots and turrets from seeing you, so I would use that on approaching the bot, then use Bot Domination to take over that bot. I could then navigate the map as the bot and use its powers to my advantage.

PCZ: Finally, could you give us a sneak preview of the way you can choose different ways to complete mission tasks in the game?

BM: One of the early goals in the game is to liberate a pilot's plane from an underworld henchman (actually a woman). One option is to negotiate with her and pay her off.

Another option is to sneak into her office and hack into her security computer to release the jet. A third option is to disable the security perimeter, take over the turrets that guard the plane and use them to mow down the guards on duty. A final option is to go in with guns blazing and eliminate her and her bodyguards.

I'm sure there are a few other ways around this scenario, but you'll have to play the game to figure them out...

- Publisher: Eidos
- Developer: Ion Storm
- ETA: Winter 2003
- Website: www.deusex.com



The Xen invasion of Earth will have to wait.

HALF-STRIFE

OFFICIAL DELAY LEAVES US GAGGING

ON THE DVD **HALF-LIFE 2** is still the most-anticipated game in the PC's history to date. As you might be aware, the game was supposed to be released on September 30, but just before we went to press – and just six days before the launch date – we got official word of a delay.

No new date has been announced, but Doug Lombardi, director of marketing at Valve has said they are now targeting a 'holiday release'. The very latest rumours flying around have the game set for its public outing on November 14, which isn't that long and perfect for Christmas shopping. If they turn out to be true we should be reviewing the game next issue. We've got our collective fingers crossed.



Half-Life 2 = quality roofing tiles.

- Publisher: VU Games
- Developer: Valve
- ETA: TBA
- Website: www.valvesoftware.com



"Users can actually experience mythological images and states of being; the game is cast in a way that it looks and feels like magic, but it's all working within the psyche"

From The Journey To Wild Divine press release promoting a "game" for inner peace and spirituality. Prices start at \$129.95, including "biofeedback hardware" – we can't wait for the review code.

"Tomb Raider is definitely copying us, rather than the other way around. A lot of people commented on the fact that Tomb Raider is really coming into our territory – we're certainly not going into Tomb Raider's territory"

Revolution's Charles Cecil makes quite certain we don't get confused between Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon and Core Design's Tomb Raider: The Angel Of Darkness. Wonder why?

"Make sure the game code doesn't get to the journalists until three days before their deadlines. That way they hopefully won't realise how shit it is"

Unnamed UK games developer talking to an unnamed UK PR person.

Comic Relief Trio

NEW PUBLISHER DIGITAL JESTERS REVEALS ITS PC GAME LINE-UP

A NEW UK-BASED company is planning to 'float' a 'raft' of titles for PC over the next few months, including yacht sailing sim *Virtual Skipper 3* (Geddit? 'Float' and 'raft'? Oh forget it).

Digital Jesters' other two PC games are the insane loop-the-loop racer *TrackMania* and, most promisingly of all, role-playing game *Rifrunner*. Developed by Larian Studios, who created the rather smart *Divine Divinity*, *Rifrunner* is set in the same universe

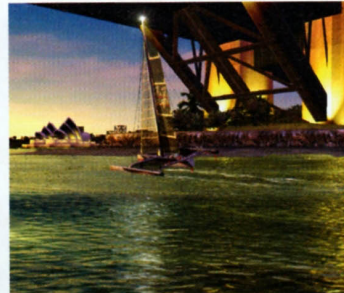
and uses the identical graphics engine but promises a completely new adventure. As a character who has been fused with the soul of a Death Knight, you must lift the curse or spend all eternity hitched to an evil monster – and no, you never even had a decent church wedding. *Rifrunner* is due for release early next year, with the other two Nadeo-developed titles out November 28. Click on to www.digitaljesters.com for all the info you'll ever need.



Rifrunner: Set in the Div Div universe.



TrackMania: French-cars-a-leaping.



Virtual Skipper 3: A real floater.



CHROME

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A TAKE-TWO COMPANY

EMULATION ZONE

BREAKING NEWS FROM THE WORLD OF EMULATION, WITH RETRO REANIMATOR STUART CAMPBELL

WHEN IS A ZX SPECTRUM NOT A ZX SPECTRUM?

Most of the exciting developments in emulation this month have continued to happen away from the PC (the Xbox, the Gameboy Advance and the GP32 are the really happening places for emulation at this precise moment in time), so Emu Zone thought it'd take a look backwards at one of the most interesting and quirky developments in the short history of the field, and one that we'd very much like to see revived one day – Spec256.

In a similar vein to EmuDX, which alert Emu Zone readers will recall from PC ZONE issue 119, Spec256 set out to do a little more than just replicate its target hardware – it set out to rewrite history the way it should have been in the first place.

Sir Clive Sinclair's legendary ZX Spectrum was the most beloved computer ever found within the borders of Her Majesty's United Kingdom, but even its most devoted admirers couldn't help but wince at the machine's primitive palette, which allowed only eight different colours to appear on the screen, and only two on any one



Before: Sabreman gets lost in a jungle of colour clash.

character-sized block. This meant that a yellow sprite walking across a red and white background would either become red and white itself, or would spray-paint the scenery yellow as it passed, in an ugly blocky shape. Speccy owners

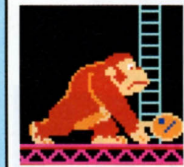
quickly became used to 'colour clash', and clever programmers learned ways to work around it and minimise the effects (while stupid programmers just made all their Spectrum games in monochrome and left it at that). But all the while, Sinclair users cast jealous glances at the otherwise-inferior machines that had none of the Speccy's charm or vast eclectic software library, but whose games didn't look like a stop-frame movie of a drunken graffiti contest. "If only," they pined, "our adored rubber-keyed wonder had a beautiful 256-colour palette and multiple colours per character." And a mere 17 years or so later... well, you get the idea.

Spec256 worked by imposing an interpretive layer between the Spectrum emulation and the actual game code, ensuring that the emulation itself was absolutely true to the original hardware, but could display the graphics in full 256-colours-no-clashing glory. Interpretation code had to be



After: Sabreman reels back, dazzled by the lovely 16-bit graphics.

WHAT IS EMULATION?



By installing an emulator, you can run games that were programmed for different platforms – such as coin-ops – in their original form. The

games come in the form of a ROM (Read Only Memory), which you load into the emulator to run. There are legal issues though, and unless you own the original game, it's often against the law to download a ROM. For that reason, we can't give you links to ROMs, though we can link you to the emulators themselves.

written for individual games, but the results, as you can hopefully see from the screenshots on this page, were stunning, lifting the humble Speccy to displays of visual prowess that easily rivalled later 16-bit machines of vastly greater power, like the Amiga and Atari ST, and showed off the Speccy's graphical sharpness with glorious effect.

Sadly, Spec256 fell into disrepair, and you'll struggle to even run it on pernickety modern OSes like Windows XP. But for its HG Wells-esque glimpse of a world that might have been, it's well worth the effort. [X]

LINKS

www.emulatronia.com/emusdaqui/spec256 – Spec256 homepage, containing emulator and modified game files

EMULATION OF THE MONTH

GALACTIC (AMIGA, 1993)

One of the first titles your emulation correspondent ever covered in his games journalism career was this one. Back in 1991, a Finnish coder by the name of Stavros Fasoulas, who'd made a reputation coding all-action C64 shoot 'em up games like *Sanxion* and *Delta*, moved across to the excitingly powerful new 16-bit Amiga.

His first game for the machine was an action shoot 'em up, but rather than the standard spaceships'n'lasers fare of his earlier work, he set out to create the strange and surreal *Galactic*, which fell somewhere between Williams' cybernetic pyrotechnic nightmare *Robotron* and Taito's cutesy umbrella-toter *Parasol Stars*. *Galactic* was so weird, in fact, that its publisher canned the game, where it remained, finished but unwanted, until the Amiga lay on its deathbed in Christmas 1993.



Umbrellas: perfect in a gem shower.

At this point, a shining knight rode along in the form of obscure Amiga games mag *The One*, which bunged Stavros a few quid to tweak it up and then gave it away on the mag's cover disc. Sadly, those who didn't read *The One* (which was everybody) remained ignorant to the joys of the game, so your delight should be unconcealed when you learn that a handful of diehard Amiga enthusiasts have disinterred *Galactic* from its cover-disc cemetery and transferred it to a file playable on Amiga emulators. Now you – yes, YOU – can enjoy its baffling tormented-Santa-battles-rival-Santa-by-throwing-playing-cards-at-hordes-of-tiny-elves-and-goblins-to-turn-them-into-fruit-and-ice-cream action. You know it makes sense.

LINKS

eab.abime.net – English Amiga Board



Santa's escape was cursory at best.

“Spec256 showed off the Spectrum's graphical sharpness with glorious effect”



Petr Vachozka
CEO & development director
at Illusion Softworks

DEVELOPERS' QUESTION TIME

What PC games are you playing at the moment?

I'm currently caning *Splinter Cell*, *Praetorians* and *Vietcong*.

What was the last videogame you finished?

I mostly play console sports and racing games. I don't have time for much else, to be honest.

What is your favourite game of all time?

It's a three-way tie between *Tetris*, *NHL 93* and *Elasto Mania* (*Action Supercross*).

What are you most proud of in your career?

That I managed to put together a great team of people at Illusion who make fantastic games.

Who do you most admire in the industry and why?

Any team that prefers game quality over quantity, scheduling and budgeting – if they can afford to do so...

What has the PC contributed most to videogaming?

The PC introduced the genre of first-person shooters and is always innovating with massive graphics improvements.

What is your company's philosophy?

Simply to make great games.

What's the best thing about your job?

That there are virtually no limits to what we can do, that we can make the world's best games and reap the rewards for it.

What's the worst thing about your job?

Long working hours and the occasional bad review...

What are you working on at the moment?

We're finishing off *Hidden & Dangerous 2* and two other games for Gathering. We're also working on three other as-yet-unrevealed great new games too.

What's the 'Next Big Thing' in PC gaming?

Better graphics – more and more detail in environments and characters, ie grass, shadows, hair and water, etc. There should also be big moves towards more accurate physics, giving players more freedom, along with stronger storylines and better AI.

Good for the stealth

BRAND NEW SCREENSHOTS FROM TOM CLANCY'S EAGERLY AWAITED *SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TOMORROW*

THE MAN WITH the green torches strapped to his head is sneaking back to the PC for more third-person stealth 'n' shooting action. However, Sam Fisher is not the only agent in *Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow*, which for the first time will feature multiplayer levels in addition to a new single-player campaign.

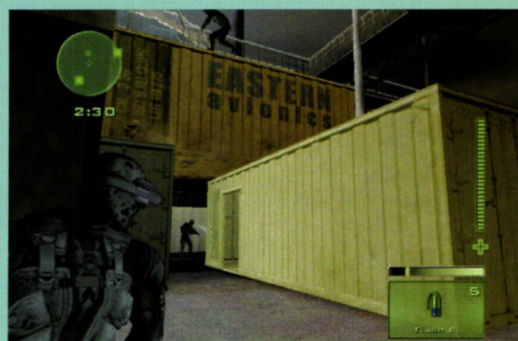
Pandora Tomorrow has an intricate storyline involving the National Security Agency experimenting with a new type of covert units called 'shadow nets' –

highly-trained operatives who are parachuted in when 'one man just isn't enough' to complete a mission. This means you'll enjoy full team-based gameplay, in which you can take advantage of the various high-tech stealth gizmos and new moves, which include the ability to hang by your legs from the ceiling and shoot enemies.

Sam Fisher will have new global locations with which to contend, including the Far East, improved

physics and also more daytime maps, which will feature the additional challenge of avoiding the annoying attentions of bumbling civilians. Check out these exclusive new screens and stay alert in the shadows for updates until the game's release next year.

- Publisher: Ubisoft
- Developer: Ubisoft Montreal
- ETA: March 2004
- Website: www.pandoratomorrow.com



Look at that foliage! One of *Pandora Tomorrow*'s lush locales. In-game action from the new multiplayer mode.

SHARK-INFESTED

NO TEETHING TROUBLE IN BLOODY WATERS: TERROR FROM THE DEEP

JUST WHEN YOU thought it was safe to play PC games, Pineapple Interactive has announced a new third-person action-adventure starring a killer shark. *Bloody Waters: Terror From The Deep* has you stalking the ocean as a *Jaws*-like who has just managed to escape from a transport vessel run by evil scientists.

You can complete missions that involve wreaking revenge on your previous oppressors or roam freely through the ocean baiting fishermen, devouring other sea creatures and launching attacks on unsuspecting human bathers.

"When you bite something you can drag it around, push it, pull it or tear it to bits," says development lead Tim Wharton. "The physics system is all integrated, so if you're biting a buoyant object, it will pull you upwards, or if you're biting something with a 'ragdoll' body attached it will flail around

realistically and bleed. You can also pull limbs off people and use them as projectile weapons against other objects, or flip someone's torso on to a crowded beach."

Players will also have at their disposal the Cult of the Shark, a strange religious sect who worship sharks. The Cult allows you to perform actions on land such as push people into the water and operate machinery to solve puzzles – they'll even sacrifice themselves if you're feeling a bit peckish.

"We also have a lot of cool multiplayer modes planned, including head-to-head challenges such as having to eat a certain

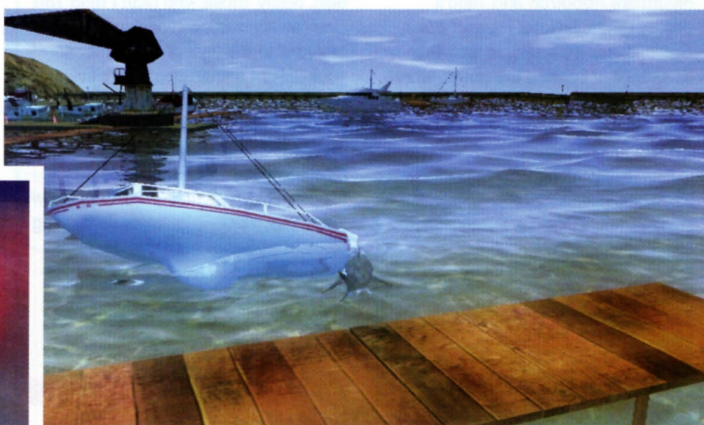
number of humans on a beach within a time limit and also team-play. It's going to be quite a bit different from the type of multiplayer people are used to," continues Wharton.

Bloody Waters: Terror From The Deep is scheduled for a late 2004 release – we'll keep fishing for updates in future issues of *PC ZONE*. Fin.

- Publisher: TBC
- Developer: Pineapple Interactive
- ETA: Q4 2004
- Website: www.pineapple-interactive.com



Yes, but is it better than *Jaws 3D*?



Your shark mutates through the game for more powerful attacks.

Lizards and Warriors

EXCLUSIVE! SUNFLOWERS REVEALS ITS
DINOSAUR-BAITING NEW RTS *PARAWORLD*

PREVIOUSLY RESPONSIBLE for *Anno 1503 – The New World*, German developer/publisher Sunflowers has just given us some rather spiffing new shots of its latest game *ParaWorld* – currently a working title. Developed by Berlin-based SEK, *ParaWorld* is a full 3D story-driven RTS set in a fantasy prehistoric world where humans and dinosaurs co-exist.

"The dinosaurs play a central role in the game," says producer Friis Tappert. "They can be used as beasts of burden, killed and used as food or taken into battle as powerful combat units. At the moment my favourite is the fully-armoured rhinoceros, which moves so gracefully through the land, but when goaded, really gets down to business."

Players choose one of three tribes in the campaign mode, each of which has its own tech trees, weaponry, units and resources –



Michael Barrymore's West End comeback was a disaster.

finding the latter is most important for establishing a settlement and feeding the hungry hordes. "In addition to the normal 'establish a base, scout out and destroy the enemy' missions, there will be loads of variety in the form of rescue, reconnaissance and defensive missions in single-player," continues Tappert. "Also, in multiplayer we'll have everything normally

found in conventional RTS games, plus a couple of interesting innovations waiting in the wings." *ParaWorld* is scheduled for a late 2004 release – we'll keep you posted.

- Publisher: Sunflowers
- Developer: SEK
- ETA: Q4 2004
- Website: www.sunflowers.de/english



'RTS With Dinosaurs' is a better title.



Simon Cowell prepares to savage a mug.



Choose from over 40 cheesy tunes.

Codies Play Pop

MANUFACTURE YOUR OWN CHART SUCCESS
IN CODEMASTERS' *POP IDOL*

YOU'VE WINCED at the terribly flat singing, you've groaned at the awful Britney Spears impressions, you've probably ignored the programme altogether, but no-one can deny that *Pop Idol* has become the ultimate TV talent contest.

Now Codemasters is bringing the franchise to the PC in the form of a simple rhythm-action game. You have to bash the keyboard to match the combination of buttons on the screen to sing as sweetly as, erm, Céline Dion, but if you make mistakes, your voice wavers and you start to sound more like Kelly Osbourne – which could actually be a very good thing, depending on your music sensibilities.

Your performance is then reviewed by the judges, including the acerbic music impresario Simon Cowell, who can praise you or, more likely, slag you off with more than 60,000 phrases. Numerous party modes will also be included so you can torture your neighbours with rambunctious head-to-head competitions, and even a bout of karaoke to disrupt those previously-peaceful Sunday mornings.

- Publisher: Codemasters
- Developer: Hothouse Creations
- ETA: Q4 2003
- Website: www.codemasters.com

TRON 2.0

He has
the right
equipment
to play
this game.

Do you?



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the true meaning of art.



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Let the world know how good you look. Project Gotham Racing® 2 is the next level in racing. Take on anyone, anywhere on the Xbox Live™ service and show them what you've got. PGR™ 2 is as much about looking good as driving fast and with the cars you have to choose from, you have no excuse. Featuring the Enzo Ferrari and over 100 of the world's most desirable cars in which to take chances, earn Kudos points and climb up the rankings. Tear up the streets of over a hundred courses in 10 realistic international cities including Sydney, Chicago, Barcelona, Yokohama and Moscow. With PGR™ 2, winning never looked so good.



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HANGING TOUGH

EXCLUSIVE! CRYTEK REVEALS THE HANG-GLIDER IN BRUTAL FPS FAR CRY



Far Cry's exceptional hang-gliding sequence. You can switch to a first-person view to shoot enemies.

WE RATHER like *Far Cry* here at PC ZONE. Crytek's island paradise shooter has been referred to in the past as "Mario Sunshine with guns" by our Anthony Holden, but now we're going to have to call it "PilotWings with guns" because of the game's magnificent hang-gliding sequences.

We recently had a play of the latest code, which had *Far Cry*'s hero Jack Carver grabbing a hang-glider, leaping

off a very high hilltop and swooping down into a valley where he could let fly with machine-gun fire into unsuspecting enemy troops – very James Bond.

Further on in the level, we also had the opportunity to try out one of *Far Cry*'s vehicles – a fast-moving jeep. After taking the wheel, we motored along the jungle roads before we were spotted by some of the game's super-intelligent baddies, who proceeded to jump into a nearby vehicle

and chase us. *Far Cry* obviously takes much inspiration from *The Island Of Dr Moreau*, so expect genetically-modified enemies to rear their ugly heads in later levels. *Far Cry* is scheduled for release before Christmas – alert Santa now.

- Publisher: Ubisoft
- Developer: Crytek
- ETA: Christmas
- Website: www.farcry-thegame.com

Gangster Rap

TOMMY GUN AT THE READY FOR SPELLBOUND'S *CHICAGO 1930*



Chicago 1930: meet nice men down the docks.



The St Valentine's Day Massacre – feel the love.

CONTINUING WITH our gangster theme in Bulletin this month (*Gangland* on page 17) is the isometric RTS *Chicago 1930*. Developed by Spellbound (creators of strategy game *Desperados: Wanted Dead Or Alive*), *Chicago 1930* gives you a choice of playing the cops or the mob on the eve of prohibition. Managing a team of five characters, you have to complete various

missions, including a hit on a rival brewery as a Mafia goon and the protection of a vital witness as a federal agent. In addition to a smart collection of knives, tommy guns, chloroform and knuckle-dusters, you can give yourself vital seconds during intense firefights using the game's slow motion mode.

Also, in a now familiar nod to depth, you're rewarded with increased attributes

for characters – such as shooting and charisma – at the end of missions. Check out the playable demo on next month's discs – or we breaka yo' leg.

- Publisher: Koch
- Developer: Spellbound
- ETA: November
- Website: www.kochmedia.co.uk

XIII

He has
the right
equipment
to play
this game.

Do you?



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THE MAN WHO KNOWS

GRAND THEFT AUTO III

drove teenagers to kill, according to claims. The incident occurred in Tennessee, America, when William Buckner, 16, and his step-brother, Joshua, 14, opened fire on Interstate 40 last June with a .22-calibre rifle, killing nurse Aaron Hamel, 45, and wounding a woman in another car. In their defence, the boys stated that the idea to fire live weapons at traffic came from the multi-million-selling Rockstar game. Lawyer Jack Thompson has taken up the case, claiming that violent games can warp the minds of youngsters and drive them to murder. Thompson barked: "Nobody is saying that a videogame by itself can turn someone into a mass killer. But the law is that if you make a product that is linked in a chain of events, and but for that link the final tragedy would not have occurred, you are liable. You don't have to have little angels turned into killers."

Entertainment Software Association president Douglas Lowenstein countered: "While videogames may provide a simple excuse for the teenagers involved in this incident, responsibility for violent acts belongs to those who commit them. We cannot comment on the specifics of this case, but instead of finger-pointing at a game played by millions of Americans every day, we should be asking what led to the actions of these two children. Given the science and given the fact that these teenagers had unsupervised access to shotguns and made the decision to fire them on innocent motorists, blaming videogames is misguided and counterproductive."

On a lighter note, the search is underway for The UK's Sexiest Gamer. The final will be held in London and hosted by a celebrity "around the Jonathan Ross level". Details are available at www.sexiestgamer.com. One male and one female winner will scoop the first prize of an all-expenses paid trip to Hollywood. CEO of organisers Gamer.tv Chris Bergstresser stressed: "Speaking as a gamer myself, we're fed up with being labelled as playground geeks and here at Gamer.tv we've decided to dispel this myth by showing that gamers can be sexy as hell." Worst idea ever.

"These teenagers had unsupervised access to shotguns and made the decision to fire them on innocent motorists"

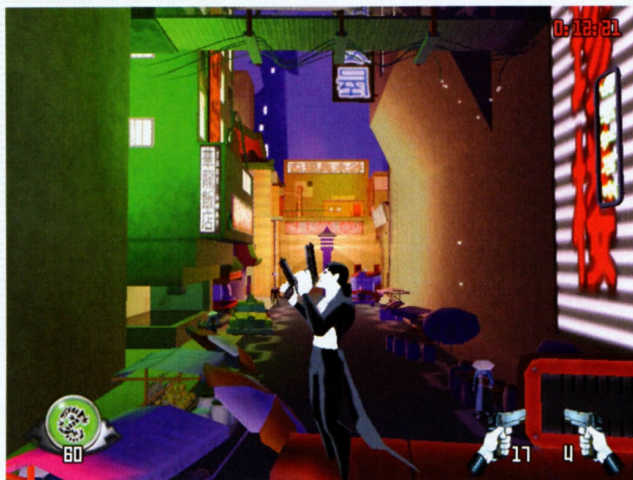
WAY OF THE DRAGON

COMIC BOOK-STYLE KUNG-FU MAYHEM IN IDOL FX'S DRAKE

AFTER UBISOFT'S cel-shaded FPS *XIII* (check out the demo on this month's discs) comes a new comic book-influenced blaster from Sweden. *Drake* is a third-person supernatural shooter set in a stylised Hong Kong with developer Idol FX (currently also coding platformer *Foo* for Singularity Software) basing the game on its recently published comic of the same name.

Drake himself is a member of the 99 Dragons clan and has been resurrected to avenge his death and recover a stolen ancient artefact with magic powers. You can wield two weapons (guns and swords) at once, enjoy close-up mêlée battles and even summon a powerful supernatural dragon to fight alongside you. *Drake* also has a de rigueur Freeze Motion mode for *Matrix*-style slaying and the ability to perform back flips, wall-runs and spectacular somersaults.

Although quite console-ish, *Drake* is a satisfying blast, with a particular memorable sequence involving a



Drake is reminiscent of *Batman: Vengeance* - visually at least.

lengthy shoot-out in a warehouse with fireworks exploding in all directions. Expect a full preview of *Drake* in the next few months - see the Idol FX website for more updates and info.

- Publisher: VU Games
- Developer: Idol FX
- ETA: Q1 2004
- Website: www.idolfx.se



Freeze Motion mode means slo-mo massacre.



Indoor fireworks were never a good idea.

Family Trees

ROLE-PLAYING IN A JAPANESE STYLE WITH THE ROOTS

POLISH COMPANY Tannhauser Gate (developer of MMOG *Mimesis Online*) has revealed its latest project, a single-player RPG in a Japanese graphic style. *The Roots* is set in the Land of Lorath and features a hero who can team up with a party of other characters to take on armies of demonic creatures.

The Roots' title refers to the magical Trees of the Elements that play an important part in the storyline, and also to the fact that the hero has to respect the tradition and history of his world in order to overcome evil. Although the battle system is turn-based, there are real-time elements with the 'Activation Time' bar showing when characters and monsters can enter the fight once more - very reminiscent of Game Arts' excellent *Grandia II*. You can also tweak the fighting styles for each character in your merry band, from extremely defensive to outright attack.

Mercifully, there are no random battles, so those frustrated with *Final Fantasy VII*'s constant interruptions will be mightily relieved. *The Roots* will be released late 2004.



Japanese styling from Poland.

- Publisher: Cenega
- Developer: Tannhauser Gate
- ETA: Q3 2004
- Website: www.cenega.com

COMPETITION



WIN A COPY OF JEDI KNIGHT: JEDI ACADEMY AND A LIGHTSABER!

TEN COPIES OF RAVEN'S ESSENTIAL STAR WARS ACTION-ADVENTURE PLUS LIMITED-EDITION LIGHTSABER KEYRINGS MUST BE WON!

Yahoo! As revealed in our exclusive review in issue 133, *Jedi Knight: Jedi Academy* is the lightsaber game that *Star Wars* fans have been praying to Yoda for, garnering 89% and a *PC ZONE* Essential award. As an apprentice in Luke Skywalker's school for Jedi, you get the chance to wield your own custom lightsaber against Sith Cultists in exotic *Star Wars* locations.

Jedi Knight: Jedi Academy is packed with fantastic set-pieces that'll have you blasting TIE Fighters, riding speeder bikes and controlling AT-STs, as well as hooking you up with famous characters including C-3PO, Wedge Antilles and (yes!) Chewbacca, the loveable walking



carpet/wookiee. Activision has kindly given us 10 copies of *Jedi Knight: Jedi Academy* to give away, plus 10 limited edition lightsaber key rings that will have any *Star Wars* fan drooling like a Rancor. All you have to do to enter is answer this simple question: **What is the name of the forest moon that the Ewoks inhabit?**
A: Earth B: Z'Ha'Dum C: Endor
 Send your entry on the back of a postcard marked 'Jedi comp' to the usual address on the Charts Comp (page 24). Include your name, phone, address and email. Normal competition rules apply. The editor's decision is final. Closing date is November 12, 2003.

Good Cop. Bad Cop

THE UPS AND DOWNS OF A MONTH ON *PC ZONE*

GOOD COP

RTS overload! The exclusive review of *Empires: Dawn Of The Modern World* and the first preview of the new *The Lord Of The Rings* title from the team formerly known as Westwood.



ZX - Zone Extra. Two mags for the price of one! The first in a new series of *PC ZONE* spin-off magazines featuring the world's best games. Your **FREE Issue 1** features exclusive screens and insider info on *Unreal Tournament 2004*.

Reviews, reviews and more reviews. *VegaS: Make It Big, Halo, Breed, Chrome, Silent Hill 3, Commandos 3.* You'd think it was nearly Christmas...

Going to a poetry reading by our big boss **Felix Dennis** at the RSC Swan theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon. Apologies to **Felix** for drinking his wine cellar dry...



BAD COP

No Half-Life 2 review. It'll be next month!

Dave drunkenly challenging our production editor Justine Harkness (yes, a girl!) to an arm wrestling contest - and losing. "It was my left arm!" protested the wimpy Woods. Pathetic.

* **No, really it will be. Really, really.**

Good Cop: **Sapphire.** Bad Cop: **Steel.** From *Sapphire And Steel* - suggested by Joe Kennedy, Preston. Send in your ideas for next month's Good Cop and Bad Cop to win a *PC ZONE* goodie bag!

Zero Tolerance

EXCLUSIVE! LATEST SHOTS ON *ALPHA BLACK ZERO: INTREPID PROTOCOL*

ON THE DVD WE'VE BEEN hot on the trail of *Alpha Black Zero: Intrepid Protocol* since we had a play of this promising futuristic third-person tactical shooter at the E3 games expo back in May. So after hassling Dutch developer Khaeon every day and night with phone calls, emails, homing pigeons and smoke signals, the company finally caved in and gave us a handful of the latest screens and revealed how the game has progressed over the past few months.

"On the graphics side, we have further optimised the terrain to run even more smoothly on different configurations," says technical lead Erik t'Sas. "Plus we've been tweaking the AI for gameplay reasons. We've tried to build in a learning curve that will present you with less trained enemies in the first few levels, then gradually the enemies' firepower and military tactics will increase. So later enemies will use grenades when you try and run for cover, tell others in



Kyle Hardlaw and his merry band of genocidal soldiers. Or are they?

the area where you are and make better use of the surroundings for tactical advantage."

ABZ is set in 2366, when humans have spread to many planets throughout the solar system causing even more strife and pain for the galaxy. As Lieutenant Kyle Hardlaw, you command a hard-as-nails anti-terrorist unit, who must put down rebellious elements on different worlds in mission *Intrepid Protocol*. However, each mission is played in flashback, with your performance



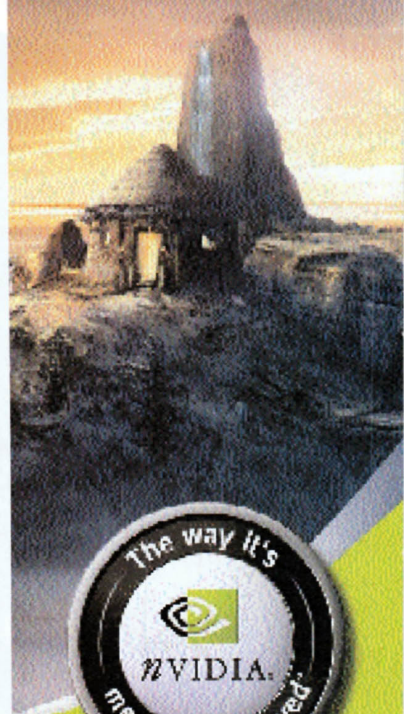
This is one of ABZ's many planets, the Asian-influenced Shih.

judged by a military tribunal, which has to prove whether you are guilty or innocent of the charge of mass murder. We'll have more on *Alpha Black Zero* soon - including an exclusive playable demo.

- Publisher: Playlogic
- Developer: Khaeon
- ETA: Q4 2003
- Website: www.khaeon.com

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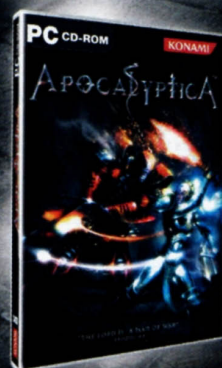
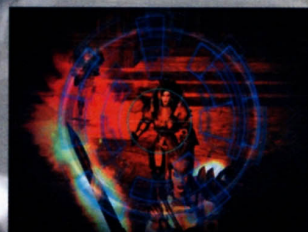
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ROME: TOTAL TV

THE CREATIVE ASSEMBLY – NEW STARS OF BBC PRIMETIME



The Romans break up an illegal outdoor rave near Hadrian's Wall.

BBC2 SHOW *Time Commanders*, which pits a team of four gaming novices against great historical military commanders using the breathtaking *Rome: Total War* engine, has averaged an excellent two million viewers in its first two episodes.

We recently caught up with Tim Ansell, founder, owner and managing director of *Total War* developer The Creative Assembly, and asked him about the programme and where he sees the television/game fusion in the future.

"Lion Television initially contacted us with a view to using *Medieval: Total War* for a television show. When we showed them *Rome: Total War*, I'm sure you can imagine their delight," said Ansell.

But while the game looks stunning on TV, surely Ansell is worried that the tactical naivety of the teams thus far has failed to display the engine in all its glory? "I think the new *Total War* engine's tactics are shown off best by a combination of good and bad tactics," said Ansell. "When the contestants produce sound tactics, they can get the

better of the software. But when contestants execute bad tactics, they find the engine recognises this and punishes them."

Tim also believes that *Time Commanders* and the *Rome* engine will help propel more games into the mainstream and lead to innumerable game-based TV programs – it's certainly boosted the series' sales (see Charts over the page). You can catch *Time Commanders* every Thursday, 8pm, on BBC2 until December 18. Check out www.totalwar.com for game updates.



Air game: *March!* (above) and *Echelon* (right).



HOT AIR

ECHELON: WIND WARRIORS HEADS UP OXYGEN INTERACTIVE'S TRIO OF PC LAUNCHES

OXYGEN INTERACTIVE recently took a breather to drop by the PC ZONE offices and showcase preview code of forthcoming titles *Echelon: Wind Warriors*, *March! Offworld Recon* and *Time Of Defiance*.

Echelon: Wind Warriors is a sequel-cum-stand-alone expansion to the well-received 2001 sci-fi flight sim *Echelon*, set in 2351 and featuring more than 40 futuristic combat aircraft to use in dogfights, bombing raids, reconnaissance missions and various multiplayer modes. *March! Offworld Recon* meanwhile is a B-grade first-person shooter set in and around Mars which involves linking up with your

All team-mates and assaulting an ever-more aggressive line-up of robotic assailants. Finally, *Time Of Defiance* is a boxed edition of the outer space fantasy MMRTS based around the mythical Nespan civilisation. We'll have reviews of all three next month.

- **Publisher:** Oxygen Interactive
- **Developer:** MADia (*Echelon*), HBM (*March!*), Nicely Crafted Entertainment (*Time Of Defiance*)
- **ETA:** October/November
- **Website:** www.oxygenint.com

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CHARTS

In association with **VIRGIN MEGASTORES**

Your one-stop guide to game releases past, present and future. Whether a game is lost, looming or selling like sim-cakes, this is where you'll find it

FOR THIS MONTH ONLY
100% SIMS-FREE!

artTrack

TOP 10



Even if we weren't running a chart bereft of simulated peeps, this *Battlefield 1942* expansion pack would be hovering at the top of the pile with its Nazi jetpacks. Its bizarre vehicular concoctions are a welcome tweak for *BF*'s already superb multiplayer carnage.



BBC2's *Time Commanders* programme (see page 23) has reignited interest in The Creative Assembly's superb *Total War* series, with re-entries at number five and 13. Every PC games player should own a copy of *Medieval* and its expansion pack.

	▲	▼	TITLE	PUBLISHER	SCORE
1	NEW		BF 1942: SECRET WEAPONS	EA	80%
3	▲		CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 4	EIDOS	90%
5	RE		MEDIEVAL: TOTAL WAR	ACTIVISION	90%
6	RE		MEDAL OF HONOR: ALLIED ASSAULT DELUXE	EA	N/A
8	NEW		REPUBLIC: THE REVOLUTION	EIDOS	88%
9	RE		COMMAND & CONQUER: GENERALS	EA	86%
10	▼		GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY	ROCKSTAR	95%
11	▼		MS FLIGHT SIM 2004	MICROSOFT	89%
12	RE		RISE OF NATIONS	MICROSOFT	90%
13	NEW		MEDIEVAL TW: VIKING INVASION	ACTIVISION	88%



With a smattering of bonus discs, soundtracks and general jingle-janglery, EA's WWII cash-cow has broken back into the charts to wring out the last few drops of goodness before *Breakthrough* (see our review on page 88) and *Pacific Assault* are released.



After a few hesitant non-starts *Republic: The Revolution* has finally made it to the shelves. Some love it, some hate it, but everyone agrees that for the time and effort that went into the game (five years) it deserves all the plaudits it can get.

YOUR SHOUT

Have your say at www.pczone.co.uk

What do you mean "100 per cent Sims-free"?! There's *MS Flight Sim!* Drive the little trolley-dollies nuts by making your family fight, throw up in the aisles, and join the mile high club! **bagsabbis**

Re-entries for three great strategy games and *Battlefield 1942* goes straight to numero uno? De-Simming the charts was a good idea then, if only to blind us from the truth... **Wounded_Hamster**

Fixed! A chart without *The Sims* is like a music chart without a boy band. I demand it be bought more. **Toxin3**



TOP 10

1.	TOMB RAIDER: THE ANGEL OF DARKNESS	EIDOS
2.	REPUBLIC: THE REVOLUTION	EIDOS
3.	THE SIMS: DELUXE EDITION	EA
4.	ENTER THE MATRIX	ATARI
5.	MS FLIGHT SIM 2004	MICROSOFT
6.	CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 4	EIDOS
7.	MEDAL OF HONOR: ALLIED ASSAULT DELUXE	EA
8.	COLIN MCRAE RALLY 3	CODEMASTERS
9.	STAR TREK: ELITE FORCE 2	ACTIVISION
10.	RISE OF NATIONS	MICROSOFT

COMPETITION



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 **Virgin Top 10** (see left, and try not to drool). All you have to do to enter is answer the following:

QUESTION: Which famous cigar-smoking leader was behind The Cuban Revolution?

Answers on a postcard to: **PC ZONE** Chart Compo Issue 135, Dennis Publishing, 30 Cleveland Street, London, W1T 4JD. Closing date: November 12, 2003

- 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.
- Please indicate whether you are a current subscriber to **PC ZONE**.

Terms and conditions: 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.

INCOMING!

PC ZONE'S RELEASE SCHEDULE FOR THE NEXT FEW MONTHS. ALL APPROXIMATE MONTHLY DATES ARE CORRECT AT THE TIME OF GOING TO PRESS

OCTOBER

AGE OF MYTHOLOGY: THE TITANS	MICROSOFT
CIVILIZATION III: CONQUESTS	ATARI
CURSE: THE EYE OF ISIS	KOCH MEDIA
EMPIRES: DAWN OF THE MODERN WORLD	ACTIVISION
FIFA FOOTBALL 2004	EA
HALO: COMBAT EVOLVED	MICROSOFT
LIONHEART: LEGEND OF THE CRUSADER	AVALON
NBA LIVE 2004	EA
RAILROAD TYCOON III	GATHERING
ROBIN HOOD: DEFENDER OF THE CROWN	CAPCOM
SILENT HILL 3	KONAMI
SPACE COLONY	GATHERING
STAR WARS GALAXIES: AN EMPIRE DIVIDED	ACTIVISION
THE TEMPLE OF ELEMENTAL EVIL	ATARI
TOM CLANCY'S RAVEN SHIELD: ATHENA SWORD	UBISOFT
VIETCONG: FIST ALPHA XIII	GATHERING
	UBISOFT

NOVEMBER

BEYOND GOOD & EVIL	UBISOFT
BROKEN SWORD: THE SLEEPING DRAGON	THQ
CALL OF DUTY	ACTIVISION
CONTRACT JACK	VU GAMES
DUNGEON SIEGE: LEGENDS OF ARANNA	MICROSOFT
FAR CRY	UBISOFT
FIRE WARRIOR	THQ
GROUND CONTROL 2: OPERATION EXODUS	VU GAMES
HALF-LIFE 2	VU GAMES
HIDDEN & DANGEROUS 2	GATHERING
KNIGHTS OF THE TEMPLE	TDK
LORDS OF THE REALM III	VU GAMES
LOTR: THE RETURN OF THE KING	EA
MACE GRIFFIN BOUNTY HUNTER	VU GAMES
MAGIC THE GATHERING: BATTLEFIELDS	ATARI
MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE	ROCKSTAR GAMES
NEED FOR SPEED: UNDERGROUND	EA
NEVERWINTER NIGHTS: HORDES OF THE UNDERDARK	ATARI
SECRET WEAPONS OVER NORMANDY	ACTIVISION
SINBAD: LEGEND OF THE SEVEN SEAS	ATARI
SOLDNER - SECRET WARS	BIGBEN
STAR WARS: KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC	ACTIVISION
TERMINATOR 3: WAR OF THE MACHINES	ATARI
UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004	ATARI
URU: AGES BEYOND MYST	UBISOFT
WARLORDS IV: HEROES OF ETHERIA	UBISOFT
WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP POOL 2004	JALECO
WORMS 3D	SEGA

DECEMBER

APOCALYPTICA	KONAMI
ARMED & DANGEROUS	ACTIVISION
COSSACKS II: NAPOLEONIC WAR	CDV
DEUS EX: INVISIBLE WAR	EIDOS
GROUND CONTROL 2: OPERATION EXODUS	VU GAMES
LEGACY OF KAIN: DEFIANCE	EIDOS
LORDS OF EVERQUEST	UBISOFT
PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME	UBISOFT
PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 3	KONAMI
THE SIMS ONLINE	EA
WAR OF THE RING	VU GAMES

2004

ADVENT RISING	VU GAMES
BATTLEFIELD VIETNAM	EA
DOOM 3	ACTIVISION
DRAGON EMPIRES	CODEMASTERS
DRIVER 3	ATARI
EVERQUEST II	UBISOFT
JOINT OPERATIONS	NOVALOGIC
MEDAL OF HONOR: PACIFIC ASSAULT	EA
PAINKILLER	DREAMCATCHER
ROME: TOTAL WAR	ACTIVISION
SAM & MAX: FREELANCE POLICE	ACTIVISION
SID MEIER'S PIRATES	ATARI
SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TOMORROW	UBISOFT
THE MATRIX ONLINE	UBISOFT
THE MOVIES	ACTIVISION
THE SIMS 2	EA
TRIBES: VENGEANCE	VU GAMES
TRINITY	ACTIVISION
VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE - BLOODLINES	ACTIVISION
WORLD OF WARCRAFT	VU GAMES
X2: THE THREAT	KOCH MEDIA

MISSING IN ACTION

The war's not over until the last game comes home...

EVERQUEST II

THE SLEEPING MMOG giant that is *EverQuest II* has quietly slipped into a 2004 summer release. Originally slated for a Chrimble release, the more hirsute-chinned among you will have to get +4 Potion of Waiting. Perhaps the gnomes need taming.

- **Publisher:** Ubisoft
- **Developer:** Sony Online
- **ETA:** June 2004
- **Website:** everquest2.station.sony.com



OPERATION FLASHPOINT 2



REPORTS HAVE been flying around that the Xbox version of the original *Operation Flashpoint* is holding the sequel up, which may have fallen back as far as 2005. Codemasters are keeping to the "done when it's done" line and a release date of Winter 2004, but you know what they say about smoke and fire...

- **Publisher:** Codemasters
- **Developer:** Bohemia Interactive
- **ETA:** Winter 2004
- **Website:** www.codemasters.co.uk

BREED

WE WERE expecting to have *Breed* in for review this issue, but the powers that be have decreed that we won't be getting our filthy mitts on it for another month. Never mind though, expect an exclusive review of the futuristic alien-blaster next month and don't miss our preview on page 48.

- **Publisher:** CDV
- **Developer:** Brat Designs
- **ETA:** October
- **Website:** www.cdv.de/english



US TOP 10

1. MS FLIGHT SIM 2004	MICROSOFT
2. TRON 2.0	DISNEY INTERACTIVE
3. THE SIMS: SUPERSTAR	EA
4. THE SIMS: DELUXE EDITION	EA
5. WARCRAFT III: THE FROZEN THRONE	VU GAMES
6. ZOO TYCOON: COMPLETE COLLECTION	MICROSOFT
7. MADDEN NFL 2004	EA
8. DIABLO 2	VU GAMES
9. STAR WARS GALAXIES: AN EMPIRE DIVIDED	SONY
10. THE SIMS: UNLEASHED	EA



MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE

Are you ready for the way of the gun?

BACK IN May, we broke news on the two biggest sequels in the world, *Half-Life 2* and *Max Payne 2*. Both were announced late in the development cycle, both are still well under wraps (this is only the second time journalists have been invited in to look at the *Max* code) and both are looking jaw-droppingly brilliant. Only one is going to ship on time though (see page 13 for news on *Half-Life 2*'s delay) and we're 100 per cent sure we'll be reviewing *The Fall Of Max Payne* in the next issue of *ZONE*. (Well, 97% sure, but that ain't bad.)

As is Rockstar's way, the demo was brief and the company reps were well versed on what they could and couldn't say. The Havok physics engine was the star of the show, with a tech demo showcasing the superb ragdoll effects (every single death is unique), and how you can interact with almost every object in *Max Payne*'s world. Throw a grenade and the objects nearby will react as they would in the real world, albeit in a deliberately cinematic style. Bodies won't be blown to bits but will arc gracefully through the air and crumple into a heap when they hit the floor. Real-life physics might be the new buzzword in gaming, but having seen this demo you could argue they were made for *Max Payne*. Roll on October 24...

- **Publisher:** Rockstar Games
- **Developer:** Remedy
- **ETA:** October 24
- **Website:** www.rockstargames.com/maxpayne2





DOOM 3

SPECIAL REPORT

PART 2

PUB Activision
DEV id Software
ETA When it's done, 2004
(the smart money's on Easter)
WEBSITE www.idsoftware.com

In the second part of our behind-the-scenes *Doom 3* preview, **Anthony Holden** returns to the fray to check out the single-player side of the game and chew the fat with id. Your journey to Hell starts here...

THE YEAR is 2145. Id Software, along with the most powerful computers on earth, has been performing secret experiments in its base on Mars. Tapping into the very fabric of the universe itself – and beyond – id scientists have made discoveries that will forever change human existence. Then something went terribly wrong...

Actually, we're lying. Nothing went wrong. Indeed, every time we travel forward in time to see this titanic shooter sequel we're reminded how goddamned stunning it's going to be. Last issue we traveled to Mars (or was it Texas...?) for a full hands-on with the new deathmatch modes. Now, we're unloading the other barrel, with a look at the magnificently horrific single-player campaign.

For those who've been lost in a time vortex, *Doom 3* is a loose re-telling of the original *Doom* story, pitting a lone space marine against the encroaching forces of Hell, rather embarrassingly unleashed by some boffins tampering with forces beyond their ken. This time, however, id is aiming for a

decidedly cinematic, story-driven experience, roping in sci-fi writer Matthew Costello (*The 7th Guest*) to flesh out the script, and using the tasty new graphics engine to render the most immersive and menacing visuals ever seen in a game.

As lead designer Tim Willits puts it: "With *Doom 3* we are fortunate in that we have this totally new engine; this great technology to create the game around. It means we can deliver an atmosphere and intense, scary nature that has not been seen in a shooter before, and really set a new bar with what a game looks like and feels like."

FACE TO FACE

Before we actually played *Doom 3*, all that was just words. Now that we've experienced it first-hand, however, it's a very different story. *Doom 3* is not just an incredible-looking game, it's the best horror film you'll ever play. From the swinging light strips and starkly cavorting shadows to the shockingly forceful demonic ambushes, the whole thing is meticulously



MONSTER MANUAL

WE ALL REMEMBER IMPS AND PINKY DEMONS, BUT DID YOU KNOW THAT ALMOST EVERY CREATURE IN *DOOM 3* IS BASED ON A BEAST FROM THE



ZOMBIES

Standard-issue *Doom* cannon fodder, zombies were once space marines like us, but they've been mutated into mindless killers by the forces of Hell. In *Doom 3* they come in several shapes and sizes, some with chainsaws or flailing tentacle arms.

IMPS

Ever lovable, Imps throw fireballs at long range, and try to scratch your eyes out if they get up close. The new, improved versions leap around and scale walls like hyperactive chimps, but they will still turn on each other if a stray fireball hits them.

'PINKY' DEMONS

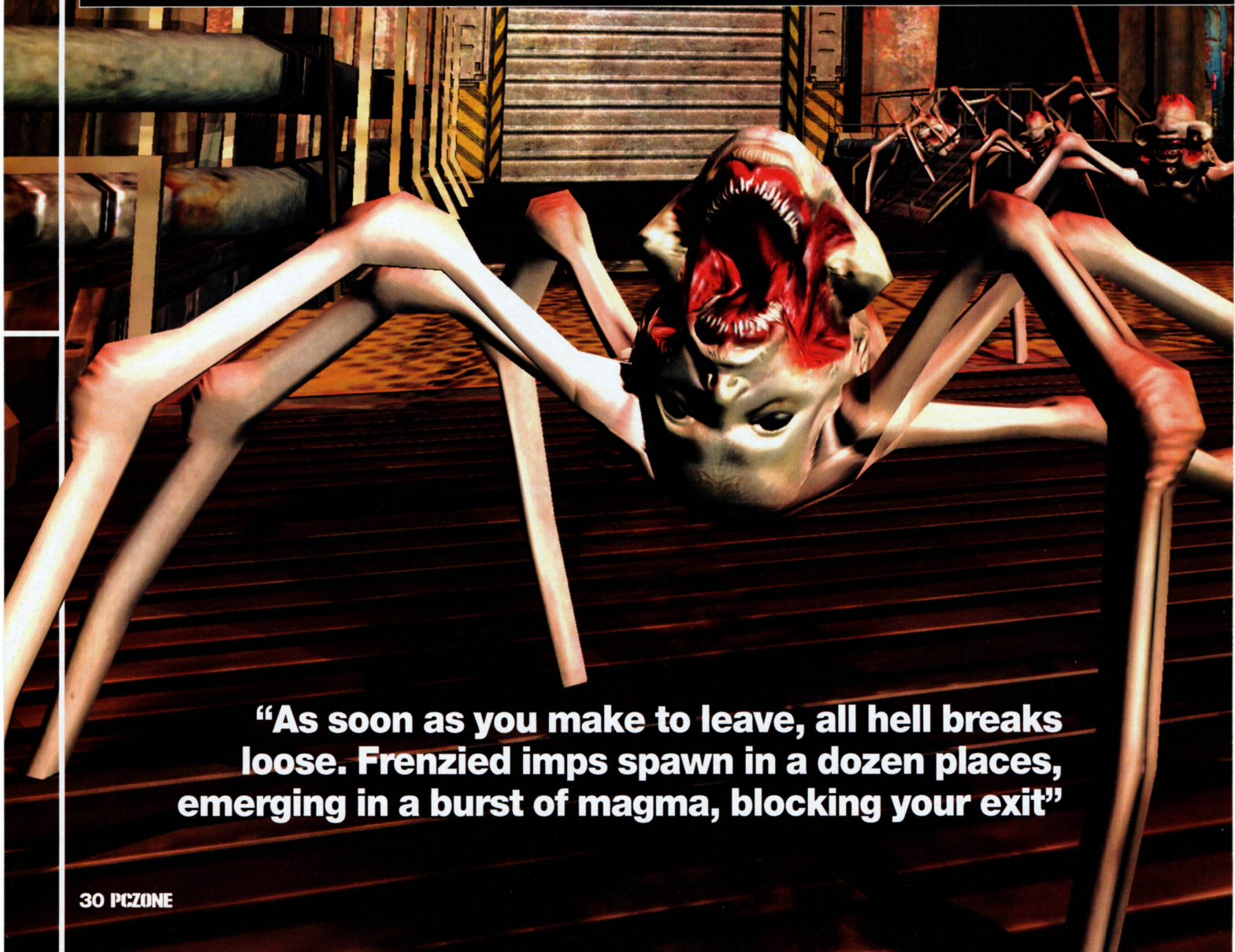
The pitbulls of the netherworld, Pinky Demons are stupid, toothy and relentless. They've become more cybernetic and agile in *Doom 3*, pouncing viciously with their bionic hindquarters and crushing anything in their path, but they're just as dumb as ever.

LOST SOULS

Flying Severed Heads From Hell – not just a great name for a film but an apt description for Lost Souls, the flaming skull-creatures that hunt in packs and swoop at you with bone-crushing force. They're a bit fleshier in *Doom 3*, but the concept is the same.

REVENANTS

First seen in *Doom II*, these skeletal green-eyed bastards sport dual homing-rocket launchers, along with a sucker punch if you get too close. In the new account of things, they have a transparent skin that shimmers spookily as they stalk you.



“As soon as you make to leave, all hell breaks loose. Frenzied imps spawn in a dozen places, emerging in a burst of magma, blocking your exit”

CLASSIC DOOM INCARNATIONS? LET'S COMPARE THE NEW WITH THE OLD, AND SEE WHAT MAY STILL BE IN STORE...



ARCHVILE

One of the most terrifying creatures of the original games, the Archvile fires deadly streams of flame and can also bring other creatures back from the dead. We're yet to see the new version in action, but here's what the bugged looks like.

SPIDERS

In *Doom*, there were cybernetic brain-spiders with plasma guns called Arachnotrons. In the new game, there's a bonier equivalent with a human head for a thorax. Known as Trites, these little buggers drop in on mouth-webs and swamp you with numbers.

HELLKNIGHT

They may not have the Satanic hooves or the goat-like horns, but the giant grey demons seen in *Doom 3* are none other than the new version of *Doom*'s original Hellknights. It's not yet certain if they hurl green fireballs at you, but they're every bit as mean.

STILL AT LARGE

THERE'S STILL A FEW CREATURES WE HAVEN'T SEEN IN *DOOM 3* YET. HERE'S A FEW OF OUR MOST WANTED...

CACODEMONS

These floating red butterballs spit blue goop and grin too much. They may be a bit too comical for *Doom 3*.



SPIDER MASTERMINDS

Giant brain-spiders with chainguns – the final boss of *Doom 1*. The evil arachnid genius must be stopped!



MANCUBUSES

These blubber-boys with their dual arm-flamers are on board for *Doom 3*, but they're now saggy-titted females!



CYBERDEMONS

The ultimate *Doom* baddie, the bionic minotaur-demon must appear in *Doom 3*, or it will have a fight on its hands.



constructed to generate an atmosphere of terror. It works bloody well too, and it wasn't long into our playtest before we were shifting our weight nervously and leaping at every stray growl – just as in the original all those years ago.

And yet in gameplay terms, *Doom 3* is very much a typical first-person shooter. There's little we haven't seen here before – the weapons are all remakes of the old *Doom* arsenal (except for the flashlight, which doubles as a club), and most of the monsters are revisions of old favourites as well (see boxout). In fact, the most innovative device is the new interface system. Basically, it allows you to operate switches and computer interfaces simply by looking at them, your crosshair

automatically switching to a cursor pointer when you hover over an interactive panel. Beyond this, *Doom 3* is a bog-standard corridor shooter – on paper at least.

Let me describe a typical scene. You've entered an area of the UAC base that's been

overtaken by Hell, the metallic walls and grey fittings ceding to a Dantean vision of blood-red walls and viscera-strewn caverns. All seems quiet as you locate the item you were looking for – a data stick or some such trifle, to be uploaded to a PDA-like device that holds all your mission information. However, as soon as you make to leave, you somehow awaken a demon, and right on cue all hell breaks loose. Frenzied imps spawn

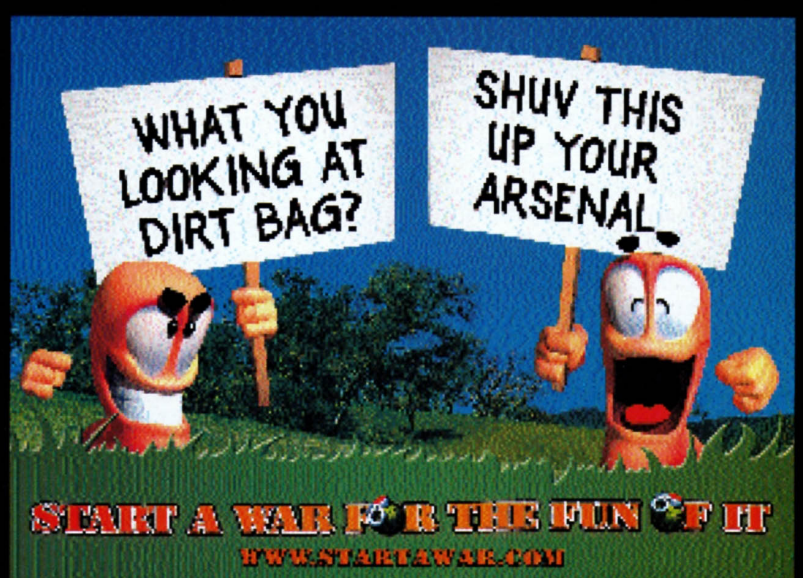
in a dozen places at once, emerging from pentagram-like portals in a burst of magma, pelting you with fireballs and blocking your exit.

UNDERWORLDS APART

There's nothing remotely novel going on here, and yet so intense and mesmerising is the atmosphere created that even this straightforward scene left us in a nervous sweat. It's almost like the

amazing visual design renders moot any questions of originality. In his own way, Tim agrees: "I find it really funny in interviews when people ask, what's the difference between *Doom 1* and *Doom 3*? It's like, dude, have you seen it?"

Certainly, however, there's more going on in *Doom 3* than just shooting zombies. In one sequence you come across a terrified NPC trapped in a part of the base with no power – and no



lights. He strikes a deal with you: he'll lead you through the darkness with his wavering, failing lamp in return for your bodyguard services. Of course you agree, as you can't hold a flashlight and a gun at the same time (though this may change in the final game), and it is really dark out there. Of course, the brutal demonic attacks begin almost immediately, and you're forced into a desperate battle to keep their attention focused on you and not the defenseless NPC, all the while struggling to stay close to the light. Again, nothing we haven't seen before (even *Donkey Kong 64* featured a similar sequence almost four years ago), but effective nonetheless.

Other change-of-pace moments come through the application of the new global 'look and click' interface, as described above. One scene tasks you with removing some poisonous gas canisters from a room by picking them up remotely with a crane arm and dumping them in a disposal unit. Thus ensues a brief mini-game that works like a UFO-catcher machine in an arcade, though with rather less frustrating results.

These, however, are exceptions to the rule – moments designed to break up the move-and-shoot carnage that makes up the bulk of the game. And we can only assure you that this is no bad thing.

A lot of people are concerned there's no game behind *Doom 3*'s stunning visuals – it's just a 'tech demo' for id's new 3D engine. This, however, is totally missing the point. The new engine is the new game. Yes, it's a stunning showcase for the new rendering tech, going out of its way to create an atmospheric and immersive environment with an unprecedented level of detail. And that's exactly why it's going to be great. [X]

CARMACK-EDDON 2

In part two of *PC ZONE*'s exclusive interview, we conclude our chat with legendary id programmer John Carmack, getting the dirt on *Doom 3*, basketball and the future of everything

LAST MONTH, we kept it simple. We shot the breeze with John about ragdolls and hell artifacts, how happy he is with the game and how things have changed since the olden days. But really, we were just warming up. This month, we give the world's most-famous code-jockey the reins, hanging on for grim death as he vents his views on innovation, graphics technology and manned space flight...

PCZ: So, John, id's games have signalled generational leaps in gaming technology more than once. Do you see *Doom 3* as an equally big leap as *Doom* or *Quake*?

JC: Yes. We had a few evolutionary steps where we had *Quake II* and *III* – obvious evolutions of *Quake*. Even though *Quake III* was a completely different rendering engine, it was still in the same paradigm, which was light-mapped worlds and single point-shaded characters.

Before each new game, I take stock of where I think the hardware's going, what we've got now and what's coming out in the time until we release the game. That's what drives the decision of when it's time to write a new engine. It's not like I've got some

John Carmack attempts to destroy us with his burning laser eyes.

brilliant new way of structuring things, it is driven by the external forces. And people who ignore that suffer miserably, like the people who were doing voxel engines right as 3D hardware engines were coming on. So as we went through Q2 and Q3, I was like OK, we're starting to get hardware acceleration here, but can we rely on it, does it fundamentally change the way we do the rendering? And it didn't. With Q3 we were able to say 'hardware accelerated only', but the things we could do with that hardware were still basically the things we were doing in previous generations. We could just do it more concisely, faster, higher colour, all those various things. When it was time to look at the

Doom 3 stuff, I investigated five different directions for rendering post-*Quake III*. Some of them would have given much higher quality renderings of static environments. It's not an exaggeration that we can do photo-realistic renderings of static environments and move through them. But, when you then paste dynamic objects on to those static scenes, they're clearly in this separate plane. You've got your moving thingy and your environment. And I thought it was more important as a game technology, which is about interactive things, that we followed this other opportunity. Instead of pursuing ultimate detail on the environments, we could unify all the lighting and surfaces, which is the big thing for *Doom 3*. So that was the core decision to be made, and I look back at that and, more than any other game I've done, I think those initial decisions and the initial technology layout were exactly right. Looking at things today, there's a clear generational step.

PCZ: What's the next step then?

JC: The next step is actually ready to be written now. Again, driven by external hardware things, we had a couple of important inflection points happen in hardware with the latest generation – the floating-point pixel formats and the generalised dependent texture reads and flexible fragment programming. Those three things combine with floating point buffers to allow us to synthesise any equation by decomposing it into multiple passes.

PCZ: Come again?

JC: Previously, without the floating-point you would always start losing lower order bits of precision because you've done so many calculations on some of these things. Even in *Doom 3* it's a significant problem – it starts showing up as some artifacts that can be pointed out in the game. Even if you had infinitely fast hardware of previous generations, you couldn't do a hundred-pass computation because you've only got eight bits of precision and it'll turn to mud after a certain number of combinations. But with the floating-point calculations you can then arbitrarily decompose this and do, if necessary, hundreds of thousands of calculations. And this is hugely interesting.

PCZ: It is?

JC: Yes. There was an important paper that came out at SIGGRAPH a few years ago by someone at SGI [Silicon Graphics]. He presented one real-time renderer and he presented something that showed



JOHN CARMACK JARGON BUSTER!

A HANDY GLOSSARY FOR THE NON-ROCKET SCIENTISTS AMONG US

He may be the greatest programmer alive, but Johnny C can't half spew out the technical gobbledeygook. In fact, we lost three work experience kids when their brains melted trying to transcribe this interview. As a courtesy to their families (especially the third one – we really should have known by then), we've compiled this patented John Carmack Jargon Buster in conjunction with our resident geek-speak explainer-guy Phil 'Magic' Wand...

RENDERMAN

The rendering standard invented by Pixar (the blokes who made *Toy Story*), used to make blockbuster movie effects in *Jurassic Park*, *Finding Nemo*, etc.

PASSES

A 'pass' in rendering terms is a stage in the process of drawing an image – much like the various stages of painting a watercolour, where you start out with a wash and then gradually fill in all the details. No card can render complex scenes in one go, hence multi-stage rendering. More passes equals more detail and greater realism.

SHADER

A shader is a bit of code that describes a specific visual effect applied to a texture when it is rendered in a game. Since modern 'T&L'-enabled 3D cards handle the transformation and lighting of every

polygon drawn on screen at any time, shaders are uploaded to the card and allow the game code to customise the way the polygons are handled. Hence, you have vertex shaders, which manipulate the transform calculations (equals better animations), and pixel shaders, which allow the lighting of every pixel to be customised (equals *Shrek*-like visual effects in real time).

GENERALISED DEPENDENT TEXTURE READS

A new feature of next-gen 3D cards, dependent texture reads allow the results from one texture render to be treated as an input to the second. In simpler terms, the colours from one are treated as the coordinates for the next. You might use this in rendering something deeply complex such as cloth or skin. The results: greater speed and realism.

FLOATING-POINT PIXEL FORMATS

A float is a number with a fraction after it. So where 239 is an integer, 239.109507 is a float-point number, and as such allows a greater precision. A pixel is traditionally represented in byte (8-bit) format, that is, it's represented by a number from 0 to 255. A floating-point pixel gives a much wider range of values. The DX9 Radeon cards, for example, support up to 128-bit floating-point pixel format. The results: a move towards photo-realism.

FLEXIBLE FRAGMENT PROGRAMMING

A per-fragment programming model, unlike a vertex model, which relies heavily on estimating appearances, allows you to apply bump mapping, reflection and lighting effects to 'fragments' of objects for much higher realism.

the decomposition of Renderman shaders into multi-pass stuff that required floating-point and pixel stuff. It was amusing because I remember people completely discounting that paper, which I think is going to be looked back at as one of the most seminal things in interactive graphics. People were saying the Renderman shader was ridiculous – it took 500 passes to do this simple shader. People just hit this number – 500 passes, and clicked it out of their brain as not relevant. But a pixel in *Doom 3* may have 80 textures combined on to it. Depending on whether things are done completely in calculations or not, it may have up to seven textures per light on each surface. You may have a surface with three lights shining on it, that's 21 textures, and you might have three levels of things drawn behind that, and then you might have 50 shadow planes going between them, so we can pile up over 100 operations per pixel right now. So suddenly 500 for every surface layer is maybe a generation or two away, but it's not that far off. Exponential paces are difficult to come to grips with.

sure that I particularly agree with it. You don't go around constantly coming up with new basketball games. What we have the ability to do is improve the playground you're playing on in these fundamental ways, and it's a good thing.

We've got some neat things where you can control some big machines and do some cool stuff, but it is still a 'running a person around, shooting at things in the world' game, and I didn't want to make it anything other than that. We have vehicle code in there that I know Splash Damage is playing with and making buggies and stuff fly around, but I'm most mistrustful of adding that sort of thing.

PCZ: Now you've got the per-poly hit detection in the game, will all player models have to comply to a strict surface area in multiplayer matches?

JC: It's going to be a factor, because yes, that matters. When we first put it in the game, we took the same damage levels from *Quake III*, and we started playing against it – you just couldn't kill people! They occupy like one-third the surface area of their bounding box, and



John Carmack prepares his escape module as his Dooomsday machine ticks on.

models. People who are playing competitively will probably play with the lock-down original models. But because the multiplayer is peer-to-peer, where you join together at the start, it will have a

rocketry project, Armadillo Aerospace?

JC: We're probably six months behind because of the propellant situation. Here I am, trying to buy \$150,000 worth of rocket-grade peroxide, and here is a big chemical company that's losing money, but are more scared of something happening and being sued. But our sub-scale vehicle is ready to fly and our big vehicle is very close to flight form as well. We bought a Russian space suit off Ebay and we're going to modify that.

PCZ: What's the goal then? Orbit?

JC: We're aiming for the X PRIZE. It's a \$10million prize to launch three people to 100km. You go up, you get 10 minutes of weightlessness in space, and you go through re-entry – it's basically the world's tallest roller-coaster, and you have to repeat it twice in two weeks.

PCZ: Are you going up?

JC: It would be fun, but it's not something I'm really driven to do. And my wife is vigorously opposed to the concept. [Laughs]

“I'm not sure that I particularly agree with innovation. You don't go around constantly coming up with new basketball games”

JOHN CARMACK SPORTS FAN/ROCKET MAN

PCZ: OK... So, do you think *Doom 3*'s gameplay would be as interesting if it wasn't for the new technology?

JC: We decided *Doom 3*'s gameplay is not going to be some wild innovation – it's a first-person shooter. There are a lot of arguments that can be made about game design, and I prefer simplicity and elegance. There are big arguments that happen inside id over 'do we wanna have an additional control for something like this?', and I'm always the one saying we want the minimum number of everything, because I want it to be simple and fun to play.

I think the GUI interaction in the game is really powerful as an interactive paradigm. It doesn't require additional controls; you're interacting with something people are familiar with. Allowing you to interact with complex displays is powerful, much more than adding three more keys to do something.

In terms of the basic gameplay, the first-person shooter is a genre that will probably be around forever now, like flight sims and driving games. There are plenty of branches you can take within that, like pure realism, tournament play, comic action. And I think the push for people to innovate in gameplay – I'm not

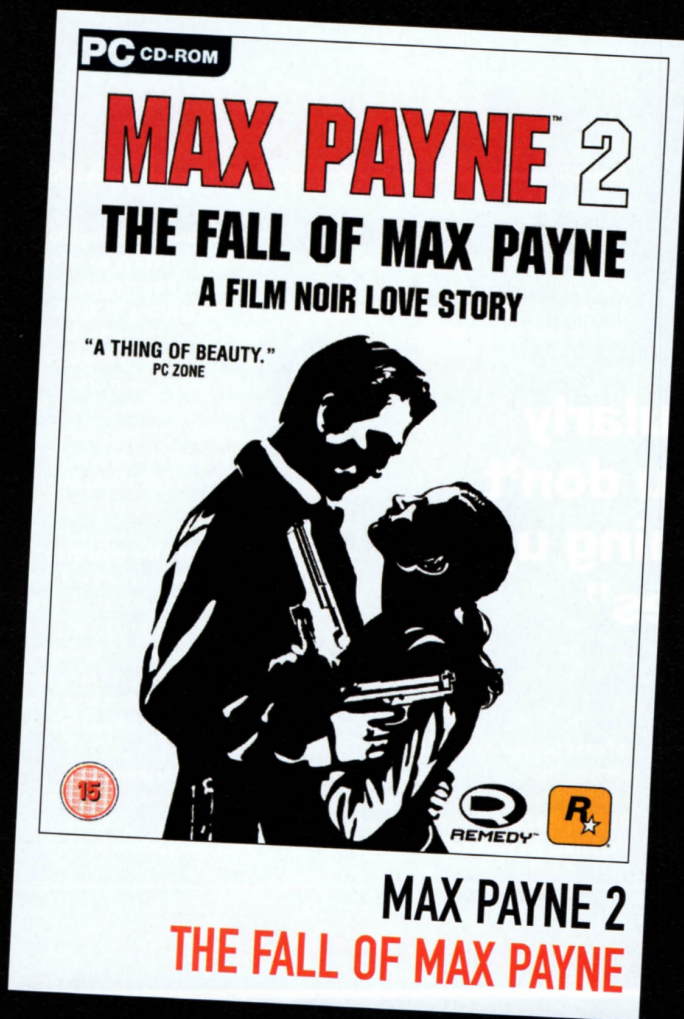
it just takes a long time to hit people. The damage levels have been upped a lot – it probably makes aiming for splashes more important. But yes, it probably will have some effect on the

different general dynamic from the *Quake* servers. You won't see people randomly joining in the middle of a game.

PCZ: From *Doom* to rockets, what's the latest on your experimental



Play More!



This is the second instalment of the award-winning, best selling game which revolutionised the action genre with its use of cinematic combat sequences, ground-breaking use of slow motion and compulsive narrative driven game play. Max Payne 2: The Fall of Max Payne is a violent, film-noir love story. The fierce, yet stylish action sequences and slow-motion gunplay that have become synonymous with Max Payne are back and better than ever. Dark, tragic and intense, the in-depth story is a thrill-ride of shocking twists and revelations. Love hurts. The fans of Max Payne won't be disappointed.

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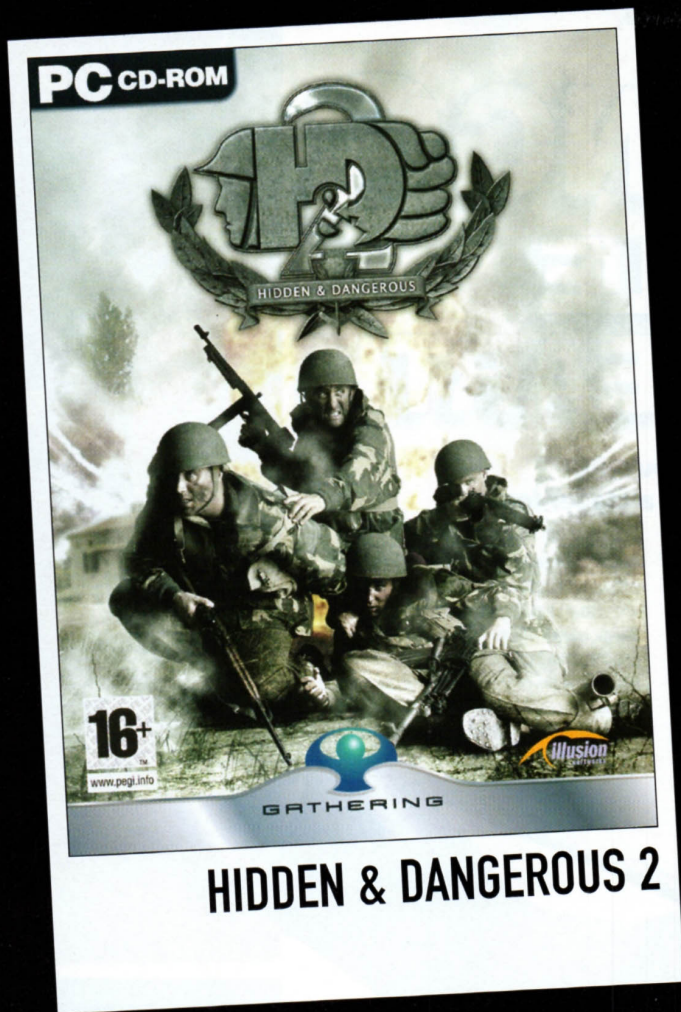
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Four years in the making, Hidden & Dangerous 2 is the follow-up to its hugely successful squad-based, tactical action game predecessor, which notched up over one million sales worldwide. Compete in 23 missions in environments ranging from the desolate winter of the Arctic to the searing heat of the Libyan Desert. H&D2 will immerse you through both single and multi-player modes in the ranks of the SAS as you battle the armed forces of Hitler, Mussolini and the Japanese Empire. Game features improved combat tactics and redesigned multi-player aspects.

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Elvish lives...

THE LORD OF THE RINGS

THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH

Orcs alordy, it's a *LOTR* RTS, if you will.

Steve Hill battles to Middle America for a closer look

IT'S HARD to watch the *Lord Of The Rings* films without thinking of them in terms of a game. Littered with heroes, quests, battles, hacking and slashing, the scope is vast, and has, of course, already been liberally exploited. But a real-time strategy game? Of course. Who hasn't watched the epic battle at the end of *The Two Towers* without wanting to click on a few orcs and send them to a bloody death? Around this time next year, that dream will become a reality, as EA unleashes another *LOTR* game on what they hope will remain a Tolkien-crazed public.

The more you think about it, the more obvious a genre the RTS is, with the *LOTR* universe boasting an array of different units and a slew of ready-made scenarios, such as the battles at Helm's Deep, Ithilien, and Minas Tirith, for

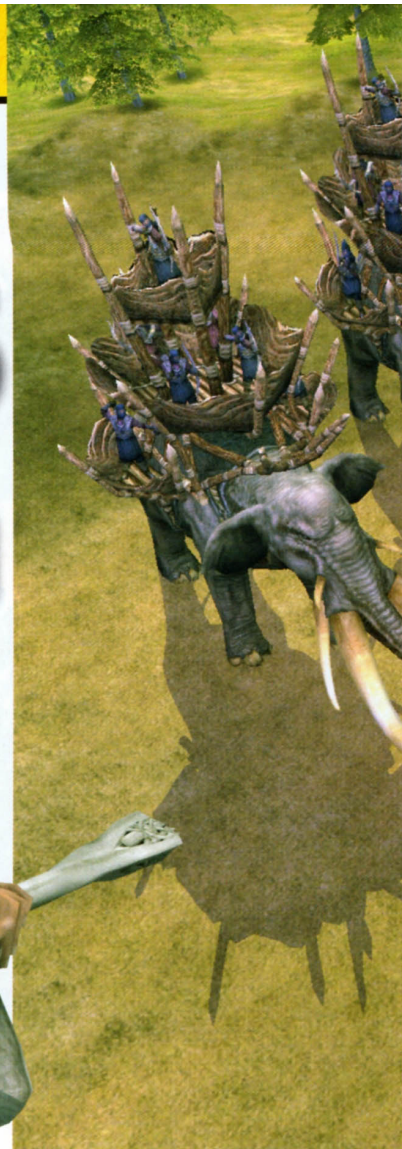
instance. It's actually something of a surprise that no-one thought of it earlier, although Vivendi is working on a similar

concept based on the original books. To EA's advantage is its exclusive agreement with New Line Cinema, affording the developers invaluable access to the movie assets. This includes the exclusive voice-over services of the real actors, as well as actual footage from the three films, ramming home the game's official status.

In the hectic world of RTS games, one name stands head and shoulders above the rest, resonating down the years on the success of a flurry of quality titles. We are, of course, talking about Westwood Studios, the official originators of the genre and developers of the long-running *Command & Conquer* series. However, Westwood is no more, the Las Vegas-based outfit now sadly closed, much to the chagrin of many a press trip veteran.

GAMBLER'S PARADOX

Thankfully, some of the talent was salvaged and taken under EA's expansive wing (the rest presumably now eking out a living in the casinos and strip joints). As well as their vast experience with the genre, the Westwood boys have also brought their *C&C: Generals* engine to the party, and it is a modified version of this that will provide the basis for *The Battle For Middle-Earth*. Executive producer Mark Skaggs is understandably excited: "Remember the first time you got exposed to the fiction of *The Lord Of The Rings*? Whether through the books or the films, remember

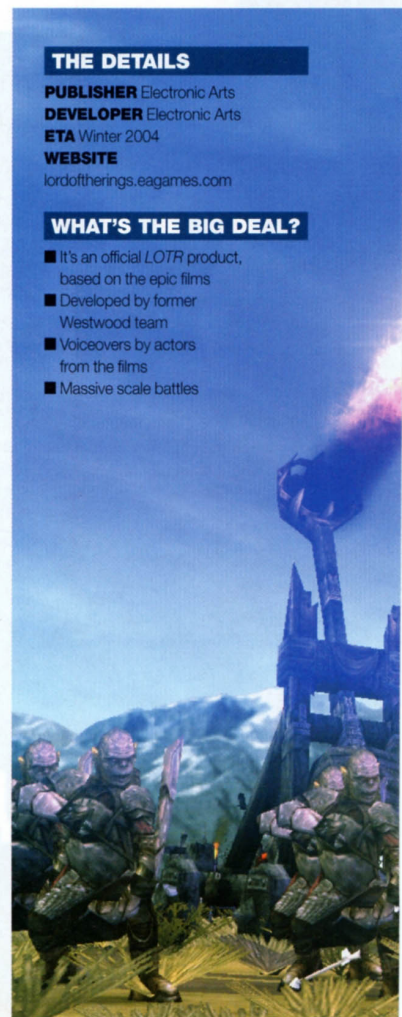


THE DETAILS

PUBLISHER Electronic Arts
DEVELOPER Electronic Arts
ETA Winter 2004
WEBSITE
lordoftherings.eagames.com

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- It's an official *LOTR* product, based on the epic films
- Developed by former Westwood team
- Voiceovers by actors from the films
- Massive scale battles



CV



ELECTRONIC ARTS

Once upon a time, there was an innovative games company called Westwood Studios. Based in Las Vegas, they pretty much invented the RTS as we know it today, but were eventually assimilated by the all-consuming Electronic Arts empire. Many of the employees still dwell at EA, and still make strategy games, and may claim to have worked on the following *Command & Conquer* games...

- 2000** *Red Alert 2* carried on the C&C heritage in highly playable old school style.
- 2001** *Yuri's Revenge* saw a swiftly turned-out add-on put the despotic slaphead at the centre of things.
- 2003** *C&C: Generals* saw the series move into 3D in a largely successful fashion.
- 2003** *Zero Hour* is the first add-on and should be in all good shops now. And some bad ones.

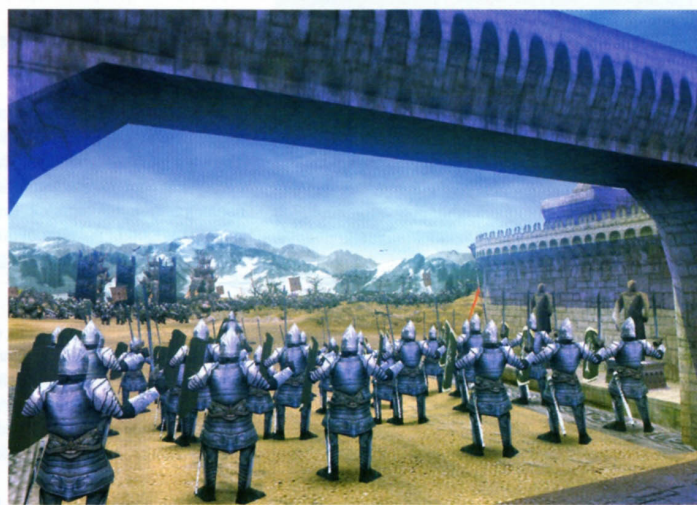


“The orcs come in, I close the gate behind them, dump the oil, open the pit traps, the archers start shooting and everybody dies in ten seconds”

DUSTIN BROWDER
DESIGN DIRECTOR

how exciting that was? The sense that you were there, the wondering what was going to happen next as you turned to the next chapter. Let's break that down a bit and think what is so exciting about it. You've got a great story obviously, classic good versus evil, the fate of the world hanging in the balance. You've got your heroes, the fellowship, you've got epic battles, the landscape, the fortresses and the armies. And finally, you've got the lush living environment, a pervading sense of majesty and magic. Imagine if you could immerse yourself in this world, if you

could get in there and actually play a part, command the battles. What would you do differently, if you were there?”



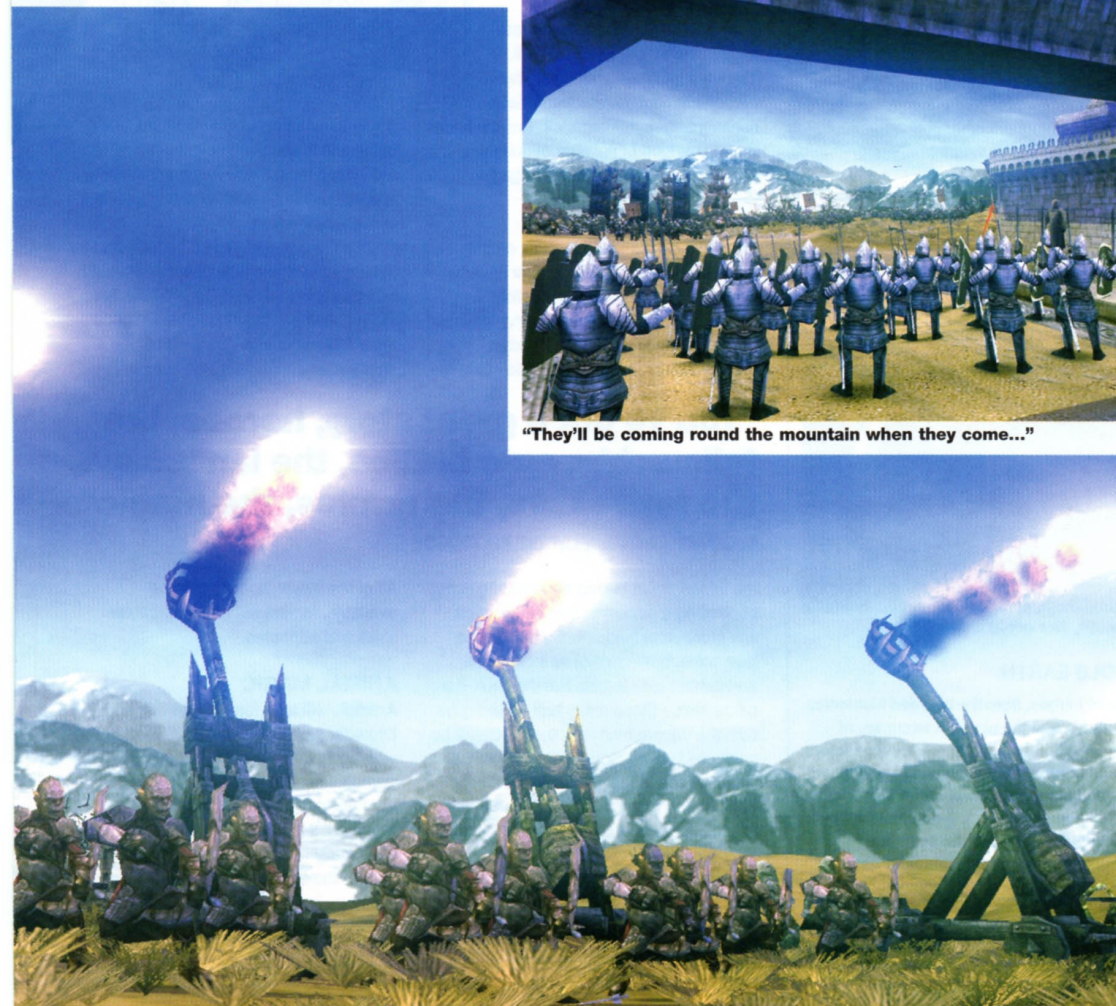
“They'll be coming round the mountain when they come...”

IT'S IN THE GAME

It's a good question, but not one that is readily answerable without knowing exactly what tools you'll have at your disposal. From what we've seen, suffice to say that if it's in the films, it's in the game. Understandably, much of the action is derived from the second film, featuring as it does the epic closing battle. The game will also draw heavily from the forthcoming *The Return Of The King*, which is already being touted as featuring the most spectacular battle scene ever filmed,

namely the attack on Minas Tirith, which will also play a big part in *Battle For Middle-Earth*. As Skaggs says, “Our goal with this game is to create some of the best fantasy battles ever seen in a game. You get to control the films. The sense of being able to control the battles and doing it for the first time is going to make a lot of, not only fans of the fiction, but game players very excited. You're going to see for the first time ever a skirmish between trolls and Ents. How thrilling is that?”

Very thrilling indeed, judging by the demonstration to which we were privy. Despite only being in development since March of this year, much of the combat seems to be in place, and we witnessed an almighty ruck between a firm of trolls



and some of the Ents' top boys – the Ents, of course, being those ludicrous walking trees from the second film. In a merciless onslaught, the trolls actually uprooted static trees and used them to club their mobile counterparts about the trunk and branches. Hoisted by their own petard, the Ents retaliated by grabbing handfuls of rocks and hurling them at their troll aggressors. When they ran out of rocks, chunks of masonry were dislodged from nearby buildings and used as impromptu missiles, as were a couple of passing orcs.

It's this use of the immediate surroundings that the developers are keen to stress. According to design director Dustin Browder: "We want to make sure that the environment physics is really something you can make use of, that you can really do some damage with it



If you can't beat them, launch great balls of fire at them.

WE COULD BE HEROES



Aragorn flat-out refuses to fight to the death, the great daisy.

NOBODY EVER REALLY DIES IN MIDDLE EARTH

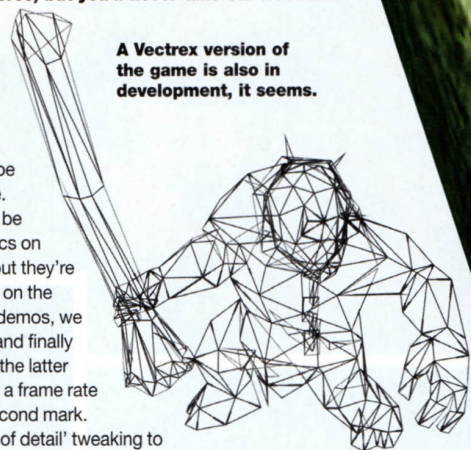
The universe of *The Lord Of The Rings* is all about heroes, from the bearded histrionics of Gandalf to the sword-swinging antics of Aragorn and the pinpoint accuracy of Legolas. It would be folly to overlook this in the game, and all your favourite characters will appear, getting stuck in amid the disposable hordes. Actually having one of them get killed though would contradict the fiction, and quite possibly result in some kind of rip in the fabric of the universe. To avoid such discrepancies, the designated heroes will effectively be immortal, with the caveat that they can be severely wounded and incapacitated, only to bounce back in the next mission, right as rain.

"You can take our orcs, but you'll never take our freedom!"

if you're savvy with how to use it."

The Lord Of The Rings is, of course, all about large-scale battles, and this will be reflected in the game. They might not quite be able to get 10,000 orcs on the screen at once, but they're certainly not shirking on the numbers. In various demos, we witnessed 500, 650 and finally 733 units on screen, the latter example maintaining a frame rate around the 40 per second mark. There's a lot of 'level of detail' tweaking to be done to incorporate the various camera angles, for instance, but the hope is that this kind of number of units will smoothly make it into the final game.

A Vectrex version of the game is also in development, it seems.



BIG-BANG THEORY

Technical issues aside though, simply controlling such a large number of units would appear to be an impossibly unwieldy proposition, something of which Browder is fully aware. As he says, "How do you control this kind of battle? One of

going by whether or not your part of the battle line is shrinking or growing. And then you'll have these reserve troops, like archers and trolls, with which to interfere in this major battle.

"So I'm not going to go in there and try to control all these little guys; that would be insane. We will definitely get the AI to the point where they'll be able to run around and manage themselves successfully in one-on-one combat."

"You've got a great story, heroes, the fellowship, epic battles, the landscape, the fortresses, the armies, the magic"

MARK SKAGGS EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

the things we're talking about doing is not controlling a good many of your troops any more as individuals. So the heroes [see boxout] we control as individuals, and certain elite forces, like the Uruk-hai berzerkers – those crazy half-naked guys with the warpaint all over them – they'll be controlled as individuals. But otherwise we're talking about controlling units as battalions. When you order in these troops, like your orcs and your soldiers, they'll tend to form up these battle lines, and you'll kind of see how things are

All of the major races should be available, replete with their particular skills and attributes.

ANIMAL MAGIC

Animals will also feature heavily, and Browder says, "We've had games before with birds in them, people have done games with sheep in them. Having animals in the world makes it really feel like it's alive. We want to make that stuff really matter and make the world part of the experience."



Makes West Ham v Millwall look like a bunfight.



You don't see that at Whipsnade safari park.



For instance, the huge Oliphaunts will effectively be used as transporters, enabling you to load them up with troops and take them across the battlefield. And if you chuck a few archers in there, they should be able to use the extra height to their advantage and pick off a few foes en route. Other wildlife includes the Wargs, those wolf-type orc-carriers that crop up halfway through *The Two Towers*, as well as the Rohan Horseman and Gondor Knights. The game will also support as

many aerial units as the fiction allows, including, of course, the Fell-beasts, those great big flying dragons.

ENTRAPMENT

Siege warfare figures large in the *Lord Of The Rings* universe, and will also make up a large part of *The Battle For Middle-Earth*. Attacking buildings will involve going at them with catapults and battering rams, as well as attempting to scale the walls, although the inhabitants will naturally fight back with a variety of weapons and traps.

Why Don't You?...

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE RING, SO WHY NOT PUT IT IN THE GAME?

As the entire Middle-Earth universe effectively revolves around the existence of a magical ring, it might be an idea to see it in the game. Admittedly, the ring doesn't feature prominently in the battle scenes, as EA pointed out. However, there must be some way of sneaking it in there, perhaps making you invisible and momentarily giving you some kind of magical powers. If not, how about a multiplayer Capture The Ring mode? Tolkien? Spinning in his grave, you say?



It's not in the game.



Beware trolls bearing tree trunks.



The battle for Middle Earth is about to begin. In a year.

"You really want to make your castle a deathtrap," Browder explains. "You want to make it this fortress that's just doom for your enemies to assault. To even consider entering is suicide for them, so we want to have all kinds of different traps with burning oil and maybe pit traps as you're moving to the base. Say I'm playing as Minas Tirith, I might set up some walls inside my castle, I might have a gate here and a little courtyard around the gate and then I've got a door. That door's open, sort of inviting: 'Maybe you'd like to come into my little courtyard, work your way through my base, see what happens.'

"Then in my towers I've got archers hidden, on the walls I've got boiling oil ready to go, I've got a couple of pit traps in the courtyard ready to go, and the orcs come in and I go 'Screw you!' and I close the gate behind them and I dump the oil and open the pit traps and the archers start shooting and everybody dies in ten seconds or less."

Despite that example, the game will generally offer a slower pace than the tank-based action of *Red Alert 2* or

Generals, enabling more high-level strategic decisions. There will also be some resource management, with wood required to spawn Uruk-hai, for instance, and also liberal use of magic, including the ability to change the weather in order to hamper the enemy.

Multiplayer is also receiving a great deal of attention, and the plan is to steer away from pseudo-Deathmatch maps and develop a more story-led campaign in keeping with the fiction.

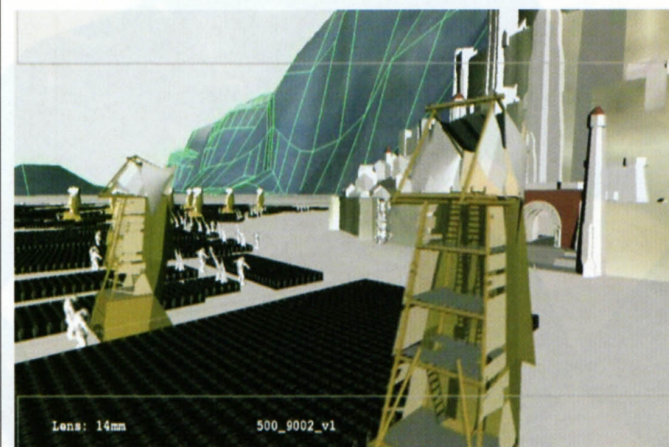
HERE NEXT YEAR

With plenty of development time left, this is one game that we'll certainly be keeping a close eye on, despite being slated for release almost a year after the final movie. That's not something that concerns Browder though, who bullishly claims, "We're making a great RTS game. That's the goal. We want to make the best RTS game we can and *Lord Of The Rings* has been a classic for quite a long time. So I'm not too worried about *Lord Of The Rings* becoming passé." With a game this big, that certainly seems unlikely. [E]



You wait all day for an orc and then 10,000 turn up at once.

TWO WORLDS COLLIDE



The LOTR films: designed in game engines.

WESTWOOD HELPS BRING PETER JACKSON INTO THE 21ST CENTURY

If proof were needed that the worlds of games and films are edging ever closer, during the obligatory visit to the set of the latest film, members of the *Middle-Earth* development team were confronted with the sight of Peter Jackson using a vague approximation of an RTS engine to plan the battles for the final part of the trilogy. He was using the program to shift great swathes of orcs around the screen and set up formations and so forth, chillingly mirroring the early sketches for the *Middle-Earth* RTS. As well as confirming that an RTS was the way forward for the licence, this may have also played a part in getting the concept of the game over to the film bods. Having bunged them a few copies of *Generals* to help with their battle planning, the green light was rapidly forthcoming.



Peter Jackson: a carefully cultivated shabbiness.

"The game will offer a slower pace than *Generals*, enabling more high-level strategic decisions"

Do you know what gets my goat? Trolls.

Can't wait? Don't wait!

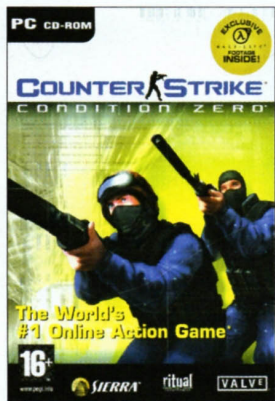


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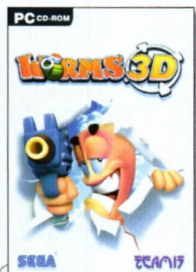
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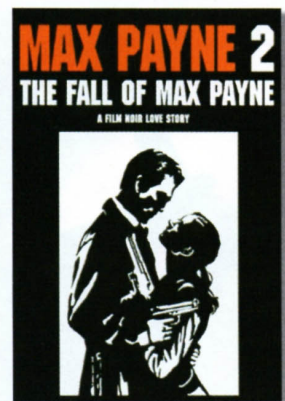
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Gentlemen, start your engines...

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004



The multiplayer favourite returns, turbo-charging the action with tanks, trucks and bloody great spaceships. Anthony Holden takes the wheel

BLUR VS OASIS. *Street Fighter vs Mortal Kombat.* Monkeys on motorbikes vs those really smart dolphins that work for the navy. All the great rivalries of yesteryear, rendered redundant with the passing of time, in much the same way as all human affairs. And so too the long-running conflict between *Unreal Tournament* and *Quake*.

Outgunned by *Counter-Strike*, left for dead by the rise of the new hybrids, the old deathmatch stalwarts no longer rule the domain they forged, forced to scabble for third and fourth place like rats competing for scraps.

Quake, for its part, has bowed out quietly, *Quake 4* now confirmed as a primarily single-player affair. Luckily, *UT* doesn't play that way. The third game in the series, *Unreal Tournament 2004*, is currently nearing completion. It's packed full of new ideas, it's as polished as a brass knocker and it has a whole new generation of online shooters set firmly in its sights.

BIBLICAL PROPORTIONS

UT2004 is set to be the most complete multiplayer shooter package ever assembled. (So much so that we chose it to profile in our first ZX companion mag, which you should find bundled with this month's *PC ZONE*). Extending its remit to include vehicles and new teamplay

modes, *UT2004* is hoping to outgun the likes of *Battlefield 1942* and *PlanetSide* and ride the trend of large-scale team-based gaming. At the same time, the game bolsters its support for all the established fan favourites, offering a shedload of new maps, character models, skins and gameplay tweaks. Add to this all the existing content from *UT2003* and the various upgrade packs, and suddenly you have an all-you-can-eat FPS buffet of extraordinary proportions. Game modes now take in Deathmatch,

THE DETAILS

PUBLISHER Atari

DEVELOPER Epic Games

ETA November 21

WEBSITE

www.unrealtournament2004.com

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Dozens of new maps
- New vehicle-based Onslaught mode
- The return of Assault mode
- All content from *UT2003* included
- Voice-controlled bots

Team Deathmatch, CTF, Domination, Bombing Run, Mutant, Last Man Standing, Assault and the new Onslaught, along with countless mutators, variations and fan-created mods. There's depth and girth here to make any pornstar proud.

We met up with Epic Games this month to play the new game and chat with the lads, who were extremely excited about their big new package. "There were 37 maps in *UT2003*," enthuses Epic vice president Mark Rein. "There's more than 37 new maps in *UT2004*. So, there will be more new content in *UT2004* than in the whole of the previous game. And you get all that in there too."

"It's massive bang for your buck, euro or currency of choice," chips in Jay Wilbur, strategic advisor to Epic Games.

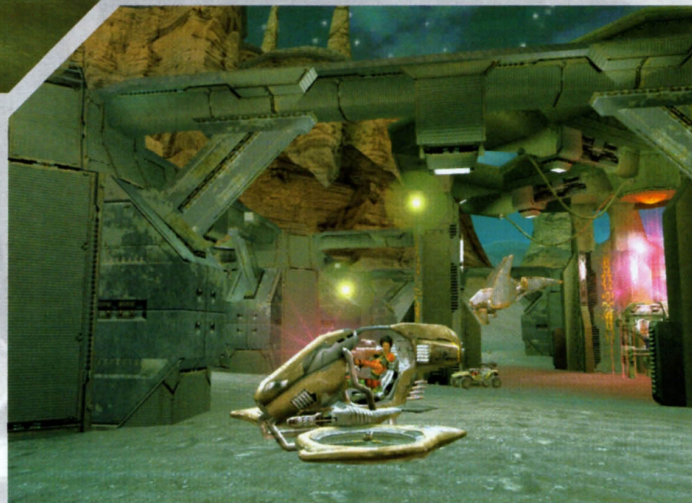
"UT2004 is an all-you-can-eat FPS buffet of extraordinary proportions"

"Plus, we're better now at making maps with this technology," beams Mark. "So all the maps are improvements over those in *UT2003*. It's not just more for the sake of more – they look better, they play smoother. Even our deathmatch maps are our best deathmatch maps ever."

Having only played a couple of the new deathmatch maps, we're hard pushed to verify this claim, though certainly the ones we've seen seemed focused and playable. Some of the maps in *UT2003* lost their way in their desire to



The game is set to be massive, with plans to ship on five or even six CDs.



Convoy, one of the new Assault maps, is a tricky attack on a moving train.

The vehicles are cool, but lack the authentic historical appeal of a BF1942.

show off the graphical clout of the new engine – think of the soaring trees of Tokara Forest and the complex terrain of DM-Antalus. Though stunning, they didn't prove all that much fun to play, and it's this that Epic is clearly trying to avoid in *UT2004*.

A CLASSIC REBORN

However, the real killer content for *UT2004* consists in the two new team-based game modes – Assault and Onslaught. The first of these will be instantly familiar to fans of the original game, as it's a direct remake of one of the old and much-loved *UT* modes. Basically speaking, Assault pits two teams against each other in an objective-led struggle for domination – Team A attacks a series of objectives and Team B

defends them. The key to its popularity the first time round was the cleverly designed maps, which offered a brilliant tactical atmosphere as attackers advanced and retreated through the choke points, inching in fits and starts towards their objective.

This time, the maps are bigger, more dynamic and far more varied in style, at least one actually taking place in space, replete with nimble fighter ships and frenzied dog fighting.

"All of the new Assault levels are designed to represent famous historical battles from the *Unreal* universe," explains Mark. "The Mothership level is a battle

"Onslaught is a team-based and multi-objective-based mode we developed to really show off the vehicles we've put in"

JAY WILBUR
EPIC GAMES



from the original *Unreal*, which takes advantage of some of our space-borne vehicles. It's totally different from anything we've had in an *Unreal* game before. As the attackers you're the humans, while the mothership is manned with Skaarj. At the start you're in a spaceship, while the Skaarj players have a choice of manning turrets or jumping in their own attack ships to fend you off." "The old Assault mode was fast, it was quick," clarifies Jay. "In the new mode there are multiple layers and multiple objectives. In the Mothership level you have to destroy the shield generators while fighting in space, then land in the docking bay. Then you're running around inside the mothership and there's another set of objectives to complete."

Each of the levels also has one or more secondary objectives. In Mothership, once you've breached the docking bay and boarded the ship, you can go and shut the Grav Units off, which causes all sorts of hilarity and headaches for the defenders. It allows the attacking team to float in

CV



EPIC GAMES

Established in 1991, Epic (then Epic MegaGames) made its name with 2D platformers like *Jill Of The Jungle* and *Jazz Jackrabbit*, but is now synonymous with the *Unreal* franchise. The company is based in Raleigh, North Carolina.

- 1992** *Jill Of The Jungle* is released, a 2D platformer that becomes a hit in the shareware scene.
- 1993** Making a departure from platform action, Epic releases *Epic Pinball*, considered by some to be one of the best PC pinball games ever.
- 1994** *Jazz Jackrabbit* sees the company back in familiar 2D platform territory.
- 1998** *Unreal* rocks the FPS world with its gorgeous outdoor environments and cunning AI.
- 1999** *Unreal Tournament* attempts to claim the multiplayer throne.
- 2002** *UT2003* takes the brand to new levels of graphical splendour.
- 2003** *Unreal II: The Awakening* does the same for the single-player side of the franchise.



There are around 24 new character models in the game, and several totally new teams such as the Hellions and Skaarj.

through air-ducts as well as streaming down the catwalks, and a stack of conveniently placed crates starts to drift around as well. In some maps you can create forward spawn points, as in *Enemy Territory*. "We've worked hard to make Assault play longer and cooler," says Jay. "But without losing a sense of focus."

A host of new devices have also been introduced to make Assault as accessible as possible. Each map has a fly-through tutorial (a kind of voiced walkthrough) for complete newcomers, while bloody great arrows point you in the right direction during the game. Best of all though, you

can press the 'N' key at any time to send a small glowing wisp off in the direction of the next objective. Follow the wisp and you'll never get lost again.

CAR WARS

The second new game mode added to *UT2004* is Onslaught, a sprawling vehicle-based affair that borrows ideas from *Battlefield 1942*, *PlanetSide* and *Enemy Territory* while retaining a distinct flavour of its own. Of all the new features in *UT2004*, this is without doubt the most significant, and Epic is doing its damndest to get it right.

"Onslaught is a game type we developed to really show off the vehicles we've put in the game," explains Jay. "It's team-based and multi-objective-based. Each team starts out with a power core, and the two cores are linked by a network of power nodes that spans the map. Your goal is to capture a number of nodes to make a direct chain between your power core and the enemy's power core. Once you've got that direct chain set up you can attack the enemy's core and destroy it."

It may sound complicated on paper, but the Onslaught gameplay is instantly recognisable in practice. It's essentially

THE POWER OF VOICE

EPIC REVIVES THE ORAL TRADITION WITH VOICE-CONTROLLED BOTS

UT2004 features potentially one of the coolest developments in squad-based games in years: voice-controlled AI bots. Put simply, this allows you to forego keyboard shortcuts for commanding AI players, and shout at them through a headset instead. So, if you're about to make a brave dash for an objective, you could turn to your computer-controlled cohorts and bellow: "Alpha, cover me. Delta, attack the objective. Gamma, hold position." Or something like that.

Epic has been reluctant to talk about the feature until recently, as the technology has needed a lot of fine-tuning, but they're now happy to start bragging.

"We considered it absolutely necessary for the new game, but it didn't actually come into fruition until recently," says Jay Wilbur. "You've only got a limited set of commands - it's not like those talking typewriter things where you can train it to understand your voice. It's more like those telephones that you can pick up and tell it 'call so-and-so'. It works really well."

Other games to offer AI voice recognition include *SWAT: Global Strike Team* and *Rainbow Six 3* on Xbox, but *UT2004* is set to be the first on PC. Needless to say, we expect to see more of this type of functionality in the future - not just for giving orders to bots, but issuing a range of commands to the game itself ("open door", "release chaff", "launch torpedo", etc), and eventually, perhaps, having something approaching a conversation with bots. In the meantime, it's going to save a lot of time spent faffing around with command menus.



Bots will actually listen when you yell at them now.

Q&A

JAY WILBUR



PC ZONE lounges with the remarkably mellow Jay Wilbur, strategic advisor to Epic Games, former co-owner of id Software and all-round good guy...

PCZ Is *UT2004* going to be a full-price or a mid-price release?

JW Since this is all the content from *UT2003* plus the same amount again and more, we will price it as a full-price game. But we will reward those who already own *UT2003* with some sort of rebate. If we shipped the new content alone, it would be a full-price game. But we wanted to include the 2003 maps so everyone's games are compatible with each other. If you wrote a mod for *UT2003*, it will still work for *UT2004*.

PCZ Can you run us through the AI improvements in the new game?

JW We've fine-tuned the AI in the Assault, Onslaught and the one-on-one games so that the AI really understands the game types and objectives. When the game is done, you'll be able to go on to a server that's populated 50 per cent bot and 50 per cent human and not be able to tell them apart.

PCZ Do you think team-based play is the way online games are heading?

JW Right now we feel people are gravitating to the two extremes. People are playing a lot of the team-based stuff, but they are also gravitating to the one-on-one maps too. While we'll have maps that are kind of in the middle too, I think you'll find people are gravitating to the maps on the extremes.

PCZ Are there any other avenues you're exploring to expand the appeal of *UT*?

JW Well we've got the voiceover IP stuff [*UT*'s new integrated online voice chat system] that levels the tactical playing field between the teams that have intercom voice communications and those that do not. And from a technical standpoint we've included stuff like software rendering so that people on the low-end of the scale can play the game. You can even install it on a laptop. It won't have the bells and whistles of course...

PCZ Have you got any new ideas for combating cheating?

JW Joe Wilcox (Dr Sin) from the community has been working with us for a couple of years now and one of his main roles is to combat cheating, and, to our credit, we're one of the few games out there that is almost impenetrable. Some of the hacking directed at the OpenGL and card level is really hard to deal with, but we are making efforts even there.



Why Don't You?...

ALL THAT EFFORT AND NO REWARD? GIVE US SOMETHING TO FEEL GOOD ABOUT...

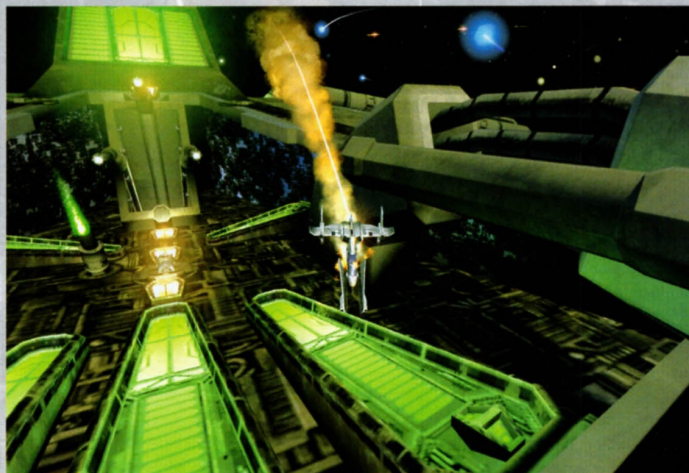
Being the only completely new thing in the game, it's the Onslaught mode that shows the most evidence of roughness around the edges, one notable problem being that of player reward. The current score system (which Epic admits needs a rethink) seems to be based largely on frags, which are very much secondary to the business of winning the game. As it currently stands, you can work your guts out for the good of the team – capturing and repairing power nodes, defending the core, joining the assault on the enemy base – but unless you bag a few scalps along the way your score will still be miserable. When we mentioned this to Epic, their suggested solution was to do away with personal scores altogether, but this seems a bit self-defeating. Instead, why not borrow from *Enemy Territory* with a medal-style system, with rewards for Best Defender, Best Attacker, Best Raptor Pilot and so on? Not only would it make hard-working players feel a bit better, it would do a hell of a lot more to encourage constructive, unselfish teamplay. And that's ultimately what's going to make or break this mode online.

just a more organised, futuristic version of *Battlefield 1942*. Instead of running around randomly trying to control all the points at once, you advance gradually from one side of the map to the other, always knowing which point you need to capture next. To capture an open node you simply run across it, after which it will slowly power up to full strength (though you can use the alt-fire on the link gun to speed it up), and to take an enemy's node you first have to reduce its power to zero by blasting the crap out of it. It's simple, potentially very tactical and already fun.

GIVE ME MORE

Much of the jollity in Onslaught arises from piloting the new vehicles (see boxout), though as there aren't always enough rides to go around, you often find yourself trudging about on foot. This can be frustrating, but there are at least some cool new weapons to keep you occupied. There's the bulky AVRiL, or Anti-Vehicle Rocket Launcher, which is capable of taking most vehicles out with one or two of its homing rockets. There are the sticky

grenades, which can be stuck all over a vehicle or enemy and detonated remotely, and then there are the awesome Spider Mines, undoubtedly our favourite new weapon. These little critters are semi-autonomous robots that can be fired at



Mothership, an excellent new Assault map with a space combat twist.



The new maps in UT2004 are said to be the best ever created for the series.

“The awesome Spider Mines are semi-autonomous robots that come to life when an enemy wanders by”

the ground and left to their own devices. If there are no enemies around they'll sit and wait, but as soon as one wanders in their vicinity they'll come to life and launch an explosive kamikaze attack at their face.

Onslaught is quite a departure from the traditional *UT* gameplay. Without it, and to a lesser extent the recharged Assault mode, *UT2004* would be very much a straight expansion pack. Whether these new modes are enough to challenge the likes of *Battlefield 1942* remains to be seen, though there's no denying they've already produced a lot of laughs in the ZONE office.

Luckily, we don't have to wait long to find out, as the game is very nearly complete. We fully expect to have the UK's first review of *UT2004* in our very next issue, so tune in then for our definitive verdict. [\[X\]](#)

REVING IT UP

ON THE ROAD WITH UT2004

New maps and skins – pah! You can download them for free any time. The thing we're really interested in is the vehicles in *UT2004*'s new Onslaught mode. There are at least two that haven't been revealed yet, including one other airborne vehicle, but here are the ones we've tried out so far. Just hold on to yer hats...



RAPTOR

Described by Mark Rein as “a kind of cross between a plane and helicopter”, the Raptor is a fast, one-man aircraft that packs a hefty punch. The primary fire mode sends out a stream of laser-balls, while the secondary mode is a lock-on missile. In practice, we found it a little tricky to navigate, as it's often reluctant to lose or gain altitude. Nonetheless, it's a good solid offensive weapon.



MANTA

The nimble Manta is already proving to be something of a ZONE favourite. Powered by two downward-pointing propellers, the Manta is extremely fast and manoeuvrable, and has the crucial ability to hop 20 feet in the air (using the jump key) when things get heated. With its rapid-fire laser cannons and hit-and-run quickness, this could prove to be the most important vehicle in the game.



HELLBENDER

A sturdy utility vehicle, the Hellbender is a three-man armoured truck for a driver and two gunners. As such, it functions as a handy troop carrier and robust assault vehicle. It's none too speedy, so is highly vulnerable to attack by the AVRiL lock-on rocket launcher, but is also armed to the teeth. The beefed-up plasma cannon fires floating plasma balls that can be comboed together in devastating fashion.



GOLIATH

The obligatory bloody great tank of *UT2004*, the Goliath is a lumbering beast of a machine. With its punchy, slow-firing cannon it can take out power nodes or enemy vehicles in just a few shots, but is vulnerable to a variety of attacks. The armour is surprisingly weak, and the Goliath will prove to be the downfall of players who see it as a safe haven. Protecting and escorting tanks could prove to be a crucial tactic.

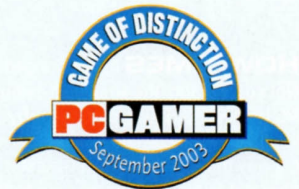
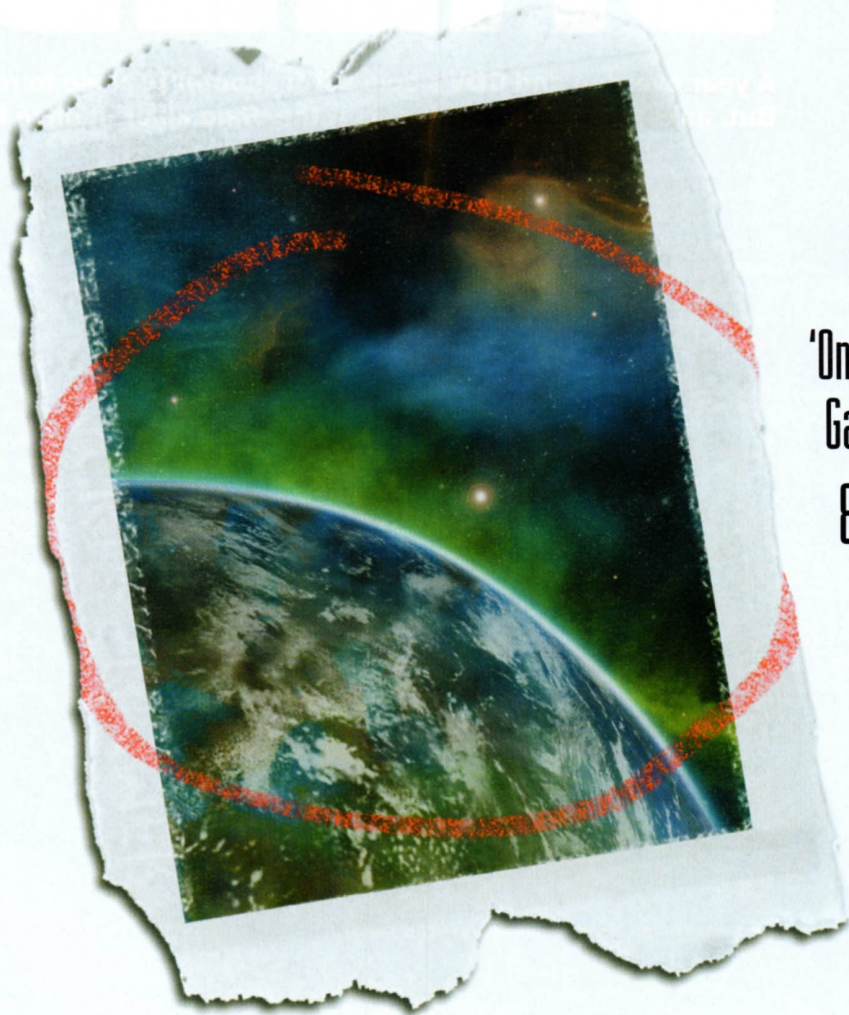


SCORPION

This little buggy is a ground vehicle for one. It's quick and lively, great for doing 180-degree skidding stops in front of objectives, but a punishing physics model means you have to be careful not to flip. In the current build it fires grenades from a launcher on its roof, but Mark assures us this will change before the game ships. Still unbalanced, the eventual utility of this vehicle is yet to be seen.

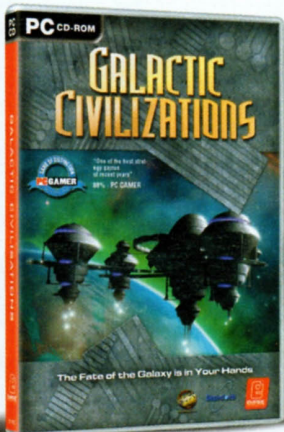
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Mothership connection...

BREED

A year overdue and CDV's epic sci-fi shooter is close to release. But, asks *Richie Shoemaker*, is it the 'Halo killer' it once hoped to be?



HOW TIMES have changed. Not so long ago, the smug self-righteous PC gamer could turn to any scabby-kneed console-owning urchin and reel his way through a list of first-person shooters in the certainty of proving that when it came to quality gaming, the PC was the best machine for the job. While obviously we still think that's the case, *Halo* and, to a lesser extent, the GameCube's *Metroid Prime* have put paid to some of that smugness. It matters not that *Halo* was only temporarily rerouted to Microsoft's Xbox, the point is that, in the main, console FPSs can be every bit as exciting and unique as those that regularly inhabit our PCs, in spite of the obvious control shortcomings.

In an effort to curb this rising menace to PC dominance, the more desperate among the games fraternity have been

for the past year proclaiming *Breed* as the new *Halo*: On the face of it, there are many similarities: a relentless alien menace intent on wiping out mankind, an elite band of genetically-engineered super soldiers standing resolutely against them with various small arms, tanks and aircraft at their disposal, not

to mention a 3D engine that allows for some frantic action across expansive horizons. However while the Brats have made it their aim to go a step beyond *Halo* in certain areas, *Breed* also appears to be very much its own game; freer in its level design and with a cut-down tactical element that makes

it a very different prospect from the long-awaited PC incarnation of *Halo* (see our review on page 80).

GROUND FORCE

Unashamedly, Brat Designs has had to work on the cheap and it is evident that considerable savings have been made in the storyline department. After luring Earth's forces into a battle far from home, an alien hive invades and quickly conquers Earth. However, one ship, the USC Darwin, has managed to about-turn in an effort to save the planet, and it's from orbit that you and your band of GRUNTS (a tiresome acronym that doesn't bear definition) find yourselves stationed, odds suitably stacked against you, with a mission to free the human race from the titular foe.

After a particularly irritating brace of tutorial missions,



For some reason, *Breed* seems perpetually twilit...

THE DETAILS

PUBLISHER Brat Designs
DEVELOPER CDV
ETA October
WEBSITE www.breedgame.com

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- See for miles across 24 vast levels
- Multiple paths to complete each mission
- Combines first-person and vehicular combat across land, air and space
- Command four-man teams in battle

CV



BRAT DESIGNS

Based in sunny Newcastle and with less than a dozen full-time staff, Brat is a small, focused outfit. *Breed* is the company's first game, but together the team have many games already under their belts via stints at Psygnosis (*Armour-Geddon*), Core Design and Acclaim (*Shadow Man*, *Forsaken*).

- 2000** Brat begins work on its proprietary 3D technology, dubbed the Mercury Engine.
- 2001** *Breed* is first unveiled at ECTS 2001 and slated for a Summer 2002 release.
- 2002** All quiet on the *Breed* front.



You can switch between squad mates at will, but how much tactical depth this adds is uncertain.

the game proper begins with your squad aboard a dropship hurtling towards the Azores. Far from offering an idyllic break away from the rigours of war, your first mission is to wrestle a disk from the Breed-infested islands that will help you break their security codes.

Rather than a slow stealthy search, the mission soon turns into a breakneck series of intense skirmishes, with artillery fire pounding you from afar and enemy fighters circling the sky.

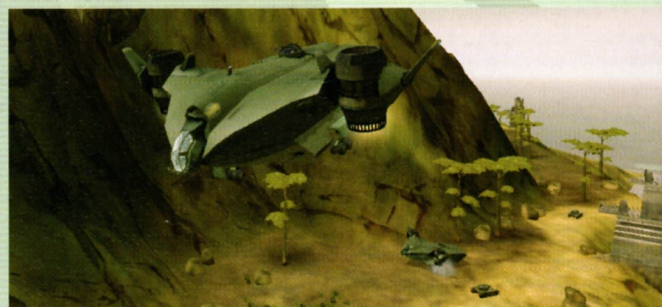
The pace doesn't let up later on. Whether among a squad of four, alone or aboard one of the game's many vehicles, the Breed always outnumber you and the shortest route across the map is often the most dangerous. Yet being so

“Although *Breed* has the potential to be a world-class game, there's an incredible amount of work still to be done”



There are some impressive DirectX 9 graphics effects on display.

MISSING IN ACTION



We hope the seamless dropship transitions will be restored in the end game.

THE FEATURE LIST GETS A TRIM AS THE RELEASE DATE LOOMS

Much has been made in the past of the Mercury engine's in-built ability to seamlessly move the player from orbit to the Earth's surface, yet apart from a couple of cut-scenes, this feature seems to have been abandoned. Other features, like the game's mooted mech-style walker units, seem to have been stripped out too, although there are hints they could make a return in some sort of expansion pack in the not-too-distant future.

large, the maps always offer scope for finding your own method of success: take the high ground and snipe away, sneak through the valleys or search for some abandoned vehicles and make an assault head-on.

UP THE ARSENAL

To aid you in your seemingly impossible quest are 10 weapons; ranging from the standard shotgun and sniper rifle to the 'Atrocity' – a shoulder-mounted heavy machine gun that can lay down an impressive amount of covering fire. By far the most imposing infantry weapon in the game, the Atrocity even scythes through trees in order to lay waste to the advancing hordes. If only they sold them in Argos.

Although each weapon boasts an alternate firing mode, only two weapons can be equipped by a marine at a time – presumably to entice you into using your squad properly and not treating them as extra lives. Most of the weapons, it must

be said, are pretty formulaic – even the Breed arms that become available later – but we were impressed with the standard-issue binoculars with which each GRUNT is equipped. Invaluable when scouting ahead, they also automatically adjust magnification depending on what you are looking at, rather than having to manually zoom in and out. A neat touch.

Unlike more realistic squad-based shooters, *Breed* issues you with a pre-ordained squad. Losing team mates is no big deal since being genetically brewed from fleshy tea-bags, GRUNTS can be replaced cheaply and quickly – as long as one of your squaddies survives to fulfil the objectives, the next mission is unlocked and a full complement of men assigned.

GENERAL ALERT



“I've drunk more beer, pissed more blood and banged more quiff than all you numb-nuts put together.”

BASIC TRAINING WITH COMMANDER CLINT

Before launching into the game proper, you're required to complete the usual round of training missions, these set within some sort of virtual reality à la *PlanetSide*. Basic movement, shooting, weapons and vehicles must be mastered before the campaign itself is opened up and it's here you get to meet your grizzled commanding officer, a testosterone-fuelled all-terrain hero who has obviously spent much of his life smoking Old Navy and watching *Heartbreak Ridge* – clearly not the sort of bloke to see the funny side if he were on the receiving end of the old bucket-of-water-on-top-of-the-door trick.



At the moment, *Breed's* best tactic is to run at you spraying laser fire.

Orders are reserved to just a few: "spread out", "snuggle up", "hold fire/let 'em have it", "wait here", plus a selection of basic formations. If you were hoping to be able to crawl along the grass telling your AI-assisted chums to rummage through their rucksacks, prepare yourself for a disappointment. Just because you're fighting alongside team mates doesn't mean this a realistic simulation of small-scale warfare. There are no waypoints to set, you can't scramble any lower than your knees and looting alien corpses is totally off the menu. Instead what *Breed* offers is instantaneous combat, with literally dozens of enemy Breed troopers coming at you at any one time.

Of course not all the missions are set on terra firma. A couple put you in the seat of the Falcon Fighter, a VTOL craft equipped with a chaingun, dumbfire rockets, guided missiles and some rather tasty bombs. Circling the island's strating columns of Breed infantry is one of the game's highlights, but later on you also end up flying through space as you defend the Darwin from a surprise attack

– where those rather tasty bombs can be turned to excellent minefields.

With other vehicles to drive, like APCs, buggies and tanks, Brat has very wisely adopted a streamlined control system in which the same keys you use to fight on foot are utilised when behind the wheel or in the cockpit. Like *Battlefield 1942*, it is the aircraft that are the trickiest to master.

TIME IS RUNNING OUT

Although *Breed* has the potential to be a world-class game, considering it should be close to completion by the time you read this (a review is a cert for next issue), there's an incredible amount of work still to be done in terms of weapons-balancing, sound, AI and general mission-tweaking.

Most worryingly of all, while the engine allows you to see incredible distances, enemy units seem to pop up out of nowhere, making the feature totally redundant – though in fairness this is one fault we're assured will be corrected. The engine itself is pretty sound however. The ability to render

Why Don't You?...

GIVE THE BREED A BRAIN



Alas it's probably too late to ask Brat Designs to rewrite *Breed's* script from scratch and get someone other than a second-rate Clint Eastwood impersonator to act it. Instead may we suggest that they concentrate on the AI of the alien Breed themselves, as if the Beta build of the game is anything to go by, the Breed are only marginally more intelligent than a 21st-century Space Invader. There's no evidence of any group AI at all – the enemies simply spot you and run towards your position, and if you happen to hide behind a rock, they simply wait for you to pop your head above it. What makes them a tricky enemy to overcome is their sheer weight of numbers and if the developers are hoping such a tactic will hoodwink us into thinking they have crafted a challenging game they are very much mistaken.



Always said those tanning booths were bad for your health...



The game changes pace frequently, but is still fairly linear.

GO FORTH AND MULTIPLAY

IT'S BATTLEFIELD 2042 AS BREED HEADS ONLINE

Games like *Tribes*, *Battlefield 1942* and, more recently, *PlanetSide* have already very successfully combined first-person and vehicle-based combat, yet none of these have been quite so impressive offline as they have been on. Our hope is that *Breed* will fill that gap and offer a decent multiplayer game to boot. Of the three modes of play, Assault is by far the most promising, offering a spin on the much-missed Assault mode of *Unreal Tournament*, combined with a heady array of vehicles and *Breed's* trademark vast environments.

(Unfortunately for *Breed*, *UT 2004* is about to come out with both vehicles and an updated Assault mode – see our preview page 42 and our exclusive supplement mag ZX – so it may have had its niche gazumped.)

However, most innovative of all are the planned mothership battles, which would see Breed and USC forces facing off across space with teams of infantry being ferried around to take out the motherships from within.

such massive levels and countless units without so much as a hiccup is an impressive feat and, though at times the levels seem overly angular, in the heat of battle such complaints become quibbles. The water reflections are quite beautiful and the vistas across snow-bound levels, particularly the weather effects, are magnificent. The snow-filled blizzards ravaging the game's bleak hillsides later in the game are without equal.

But the question remains: does *Breed* have the muscle to out-*Halo Halo*? Despite the expansive levels, the clever switch from land to space-based levels and squad-level tactics, our preliminary verdict has to be a negative. However with time to spare and with effort applied in the right places we can see ourselves eating our words. Brat Designs has some fresh ideas and certainly isn't short of talent; we only hope it's not too late to make the right changes.

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Ka trouble...

FORD RACING 2

Steve Hill is your Escort as we focus on this Capri-cious yet af-Ford-able sequel



Collect the bonuses to keep your lap time down.

THE DETAILS

PUBLISHER Empire Interactive
DEVELOPER Razorworks
ETA October 31
WEBSITE
www.empireinteractive.co.uk

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- 32 licenced Ford cars
- Eight different game modes
- Wide variety of tracks
- Split-screen multiplayer



Pickup dust.



That wibbly-wobbly effect represents the slipstream.



Oval racing adds to the mix.

DO YOU remember the original *Ford Racing*? Of course you don't. Nobody does, except perhaps a few people who worked on it. Lost amid the monthly morass of driving games, its route to the bargain bins was swift and undignified. So what has Empire decided to do? Forget about it and move on? Of course not. They've drafted in a different developer (Razorworks of *Total Immersion*

Racing fame) to knock out a sequel. And from our extensive playtest there wouldn't appear to be a great deal of work left to do, as *Ford Racing 2* looks as good as done.

So what are you going to get this time round? From what we've seen, a great deal more bang for your buck, particularly as the game is set to retail for less than a tenner. That's nothing. In fact you could probably have earned it by now if you

weren't sitting on your arse reading magazines all day. (Quality mags aside.)

MUSTANG SALLY

Thanks to the exclusive deal with Ford, the game will feature 32 of their vehicles from 1949 onwards, including Mustangs, Thunderbirds, F-series pickup trucks, exotic concept cars and 200mph stock cars. There's even a category called Movie Stars, offering a range of cars made famous by films and TV shows. So if you've ever wanted to have a spin in the Mustang that Steve McQueen drove for the famous 1968 car chase in *Bullitt*, this is probably as close as you're going to get. The cars on offer stretch to the present day and beyond, with the inclusion of so-called 'future classics' such as the beefed-up Ford GT.

There will also be a great deal of track variety on offer, taking in race circuits, city-based tracks, off-road jangle action and even oval speedways for some pseudo-Nascar action.

As for game modes, *Ford Racing 2* keeps on giving, offering a generous octet of driving challenges. Standard Race is self-explanatory; Elimination involves

the last two cars dropping out each lap; Duel sees you take on a different challenger each lap; Drafting requires you to drive in your opponent's slipstream; Driving Skills has you steering through a series of gates; Seconds Out (our current favourite) sees you collecting time bonuses to keep your lap time down; Racing Line requires you to stick to it like shit to a blanket; and, finally, Time Attack is simply you against the track.

Something of a bumper package then, and one that is already looking like a vast improvement on the original, which PC ZONE had to go out and actually buy before we could review it. This time around, preview code has been readily available, and Empire's confidence appears to be well-placed, despite the reduced price tag. Bargain hunters will be able judge for themselves soon. [A]



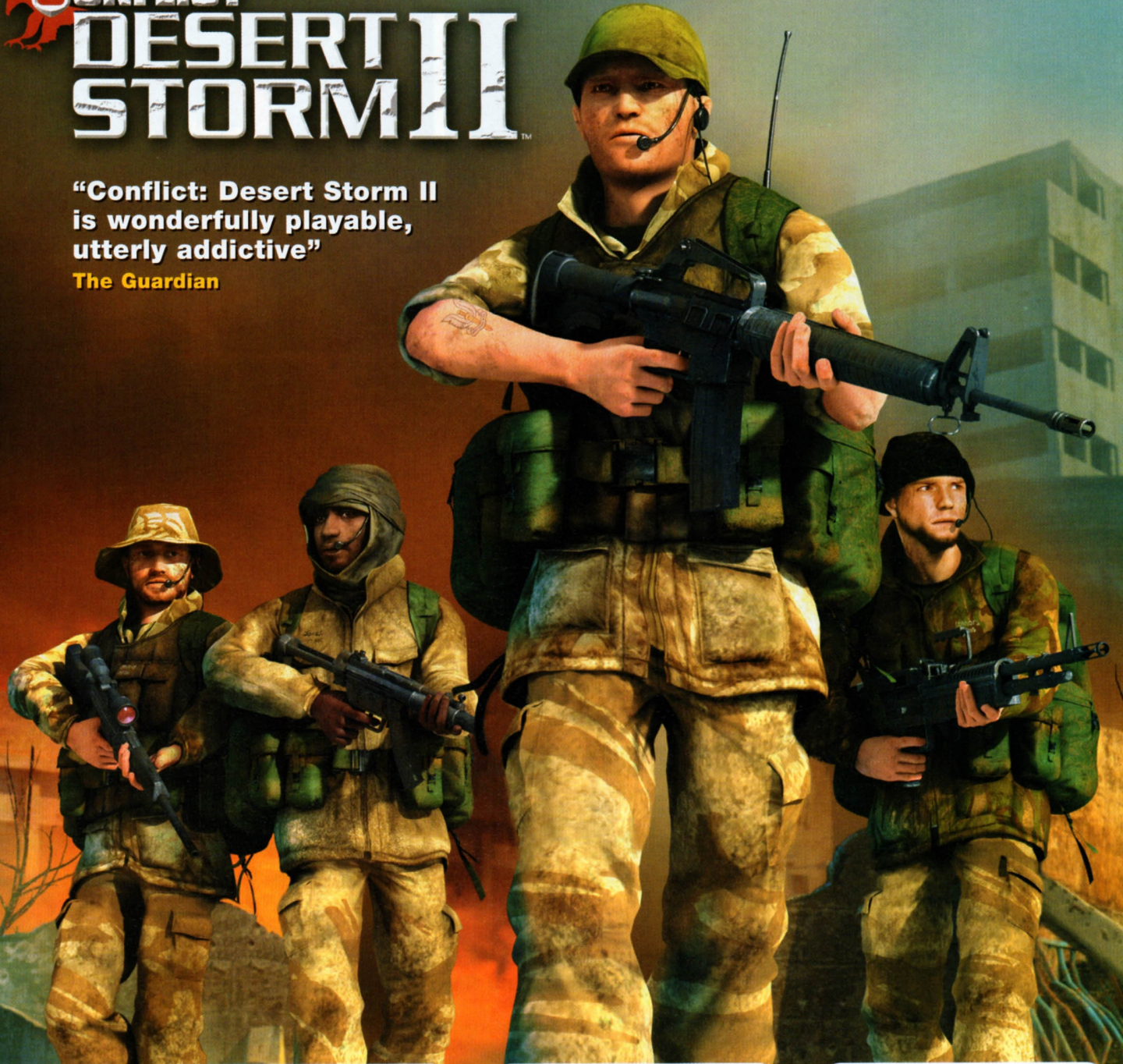
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The Guardian

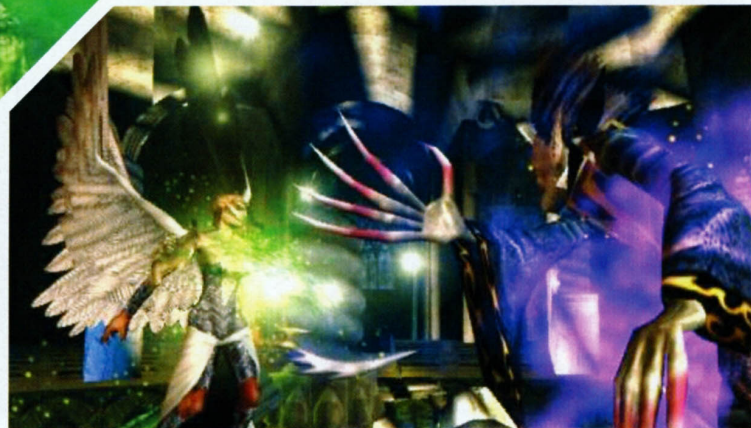


BACK FOR SOME UNFINISHED BUSINESS!

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GAMES



"I'm not going to change my nappy. I'm not, I'm not!"

It may look silly to the uninitiated, but this is addictive stuff.

THE DETAILS

PUBLISHER Atari
DEVELOPER Secret Level
ETA Christmas
WEBSITE www.mtggame.com

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Based on the amazingly addictive *Magic* collectable card game
- Innovative mix of arcade action and strategy
- Loads of spells and possible combinations
- Download new spells and creatures from the Net

CV

SECRET LEVEL

SECRET LEVEL

Founded in 1999, San Francisco's Secret Level has spent much of its life converting the Unreal engine tech for use in console development. The team has only produced one actual game to speak of, and *MTGB* is its first real foray on to the PC.

2001 Secret Level handles conversion duties on the Dreamcast version of *Unreal Tournament*. Not a bad job either.

2002 *Star Wars: Jedi Starfighter* is a good fun Xbox space blaster. Not especially groundbreaking, but a competent effort for an original debut.

2003 *MTG – Battlegrounds* heralds a new age in online beat 'em ups on the PC. Maybe.

Gather around fiends...

MAGIC: THE GATHERING BATTLEGROUND

Keith Pullin throws away his 'Milkmaids Of Sweden' playing cards for a deck covered in goblins and flaming swords...

THE TERRIBLE mistress that is games addiction has been cited by many a broken-hearted wife/girlfriend to be a major reason for separation. Usually, the suspect is the likes of *Champ Man* or the all-consuming *EverQuest*, but another, lesser-known threat was MicroProse's 1996 strategy game *Magic: The Gathering*.

A friend of mine was once so hopelessly addicted to *MTG* that his girlfriend finally gave him the choice of "It" or her. He chose *MTG*. Was he upset? Not a bit. Some things in life are just more important.

MTG the computer game (as well as its various add-ons, updates and the later online version) was itself based on Wizards of the Coast's *Magic* collectable-card game, a kind of Pokémon type trading phenomena but with spells. [More like Yu-Gi-Oh! then? – Ed]

First appearing in 1993, this 'hobby' game now boasts more than six million players worldwide.

Now, San Francisco-based developer Secret Level is aiming to cement *Magic*'s world domination by introducing PC gamers to *MTG: Battlegrounds*, a strange new hybrid of one-on-one arcade action and real-time strategy – with online play. Think of it as *Street Fighter 2* but with spells instead of kicks and punches.

Battlegrounds is played in one of two modes: Quest mode or Arcade mode.

Playing through the Quest unlocks new spells which can be used to create a custom spell book that you can use in Arcade mode or take online

to challenge other players. The whole beauty of *Magic* is the way the player can choose from a near-infinite variety of strategies depending on the spells (or cards) they have in their deck.

SPELL IT OUT

As Jeffrey Tseng, Secret Level's creative director, explains: "Each of the 70 spells in *Battlegrounds* is based on a real card in the *MTG* card game. Of those spells, 35 are creatures and 35 are sorceries, instants or enchantments."

Spells are also split into five different coloured schools of magic. Black is naturally associated with the darker arts and includes pain-inflicting spells and the ability to summon the undead. White, on the other hand, calls upon such venerable wonders as healing and summoning holy monks to fight your battles. Sitting somewhere between





The aim is to reduce your opponent's life from 20 to zero.

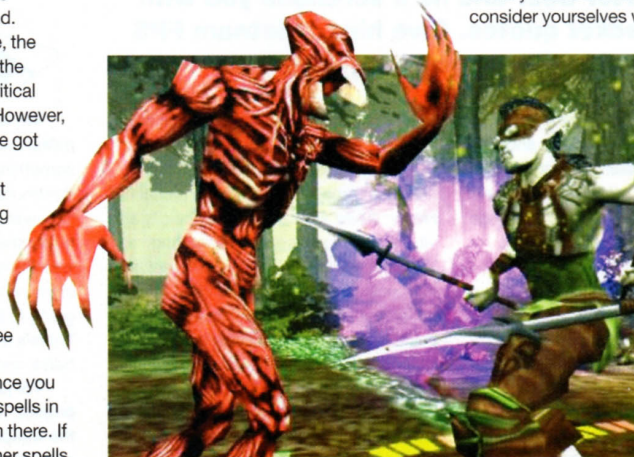


There's no rest for the League of Justice.

"With plans already in place for downloadable spells and arenas, Battlegrounds is undoubtedly a fascinating proposition"

you to choose the locations of your spells in your spell book, so you can put the spells you need fast access to (like Counterspell) in convenient positions."

With plans already in place for downloadable spells and arenas, *Battlegrounds* is undoubtedly a fascinating proposition. Feelings among the *Magic* crowd are mixed, though, and hardcore duellists claim a more arcade-orientated game will remove the *Chess*-like strategy element. That may well happen, but from a PC gaming perspective the fusion of gaming styles means we might have something that can be truly classed as unique. Girlfriends, consider yourselves warned. [E]



Ronaldinho's teeth make a cameo appearance.



"I crush your knight with my Smug Purple Hands of Doom."

Q&A

JEFFREY TSENG



We challenge Secret Level's creative director to a magical duel of words...

PCZ How did you decide which cards to include in the game?

JT Narrowing spells down was really tough. We've tried to include some of the popular spells from the card game, but you'll also find we've included some more obscure spells that are very powerful. The card game has thousands of cards to choose from, so it may seem like 70 spells isn't enough. However, we're continually amazed at how much depth there is.

PCZ What's the most amazing spell?

JT Each colour has a few spells that are really spectacular. Red has *Inferno*, which deals six damage points to all creatures and wizards, the ground then cracks and lava begins to spit up out of the cracks and there's a huge explosion. There are also some impressive creatures such as the *Avatar of Might*. This massive creature tramples almost any other creature in its path on the way to pounding the enemy duellist.

PCZ Will *Magic* veterans be treated to any new duellists?

JT We created many unique duellists that you'll encounter both in *Quest* mode as well as *Arcade* mode. You'll also be able to use these duellists when you create your own spellbooks with the spells you've gained in the *Quest* mode. The most powerful duellists in the game are legends who players of the card game will be familiar with, like *Akroma*, *Maraxus* and *Ihsan's Shade*, to mention a few.

PCZ Why do you think the whole *Magic* concept is so suited to a PC game?

JT We like to think of the *Magic* videogame as one expression of the *Magic* universe, just as the card game and books are other expressions of that universe. The basic idea of duellists battling through the interactions of their spells is unique and ends up being an amazing fit for the videogame. *Battlegrounds* is a unique blend of fighting and strategy.

black and white is the remaining trio of red, blue and green, which cater for the spells that aren't necessarily good or evil. "An interesting creature is the Krovikan Vampire," muses Tseng. "When a Krovikan Vampire destroys a creature, that creature comes back into play under the Krovikan Vampire's control and attacks the enemy duellist." All cards tend to have a counter spell though; it's just a question of whether you have it in your deck. Here, for instance, a white dispel conjuration would almost certainly halt the vampire threat.

FIGHT CLUB

Bouts take place in one of 16 arenas with your duellist facing off against another human or AI-controlled opponent. Each arena has a specific theme and 15 of them tie in to a specific colour. For example, the *Drake Rookery* is an arena associated with blue, and is set on an island. Your wizard begins each contest with 20 health points and a mana pool that drains each time you cast a spell. Powerful spells cost more mana, so the key is to use your deck wisely or alternatively make frequent dashes for the mana fountains that bubble forth around the edge of the arena. The winner of the contest obviously is the wizard left standing at the end. With so many spells available, the ability to quickly select one with the minimum of fumbling will be a critical factor in the game's playability. However, Secret Level is convinced they've got that part of the game right. "We tried at least five different control schemes before choosing the current one," recalls Tseng. "We were very concerned with the speed of choosing spells as well as simplicity. We divide the spells in your spell book into three different categories: creatures, sorceries and enchantments. Once you choose a category, you see the spells in groups of three and choose from there. If you need to flip pages to see other spells, you can do that easily. We've also enabled



Absent-mindedly, the gunner reaches to play *Ride Of The Valkyries*.

THE DETAILS

PUBLISHER VU Games
DEVELOPER 2015
ETA Q3 2004
WEBSITE www.2015.com

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- It looks, feels and sounds astonishingly realistic
- Fellow marines that you actually give a shit about
- Faithful to the actual history of the Vietnamese conflict
- Fully integrated co-operative play

CV

2015

2015

Based in Tulsa, Oklahoma, 2015 specialises in 3D action games with high levels of interaction and strategy.

1997 2015 is set up by president and CEO Tom Kudirka and work begins on *Wages Of Sin*, the official add-on pack for Ritual's *Sin*. Many people thought it was better than the original game.

2002 After two years of development, *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault* is released and swiftly becomes one of the best-selling games ever.

2003 A huge shake-up at 2015 results in 22 key developers leaving the team to form Infinity Ward, and the *Medal Of Honor* franchise leaving to take up residence at EA. The remaining crew rally their resources and start work on *Men Of Valor* (any similarities to *Medal Of Honor 2* are purely coincidental).



As in reality, air-lifts play an important role.

Ain't war hell?

MEN OF VALOR: VIETNAM

Feed *Will Porter* beer and he'll serenade you with *Full Metal Jacket* quotes. Give him a Vietnam FPS to preview and he'll love you long time

I'M SURE, like me, many of you have drunkenly leapt into bushes shouting stuff like "Fire in the Hole!" or "Doc Jay and Eightball are wasted!" at unsavoury hours of the morning. Hell, a friend of mine once did it up at St Andrews in Scotch-land only to find Prince William staring at him like he was a 'Nam-obsessed madman. All of a sudden, game developers have got wind of this market and are queuing up to show us exactly what it's like to be in 'a world of shit'. *Men Of Valor* is a leading member of this offensive, fighting off competition from *Battlefield Vietnam* (see our online preview on page 124), *Vietcong* and er, *Line Of Sight: Vietnam*.

Indeed, this could be the game that truly puts the 'oo' back into 'poontang'.

Men Of Valor is a squad-based FPS from the company that gave us *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault*, the authenticity and vibe of which are legend. Recreating Vietnam, of course, is a very different and far messier proposition, and 2015 has pulled out all stops to take us there. From the slogans stencilled on the back of Flak jackets and the '60s rock blaring out of APCs, right through to the gunners leaning out of helicopters spraying the jungle and shouting, 'Git some you stinkin' bastards!', it's immediately clear that 2015 has nailed the atmosphere of 'Nam.

"We wanted to do another historical military shooter, but felt it was time for something different," explains John Whitmore, director of development. "We wanted to feature groups of men rather than individuals, and Vietnam was the natural choice. In the jungle environments, the fighting style was going to be different from WWII. There's a very different kind of battle and gameplay flow.

"We just got really excited about the project," adds Whitmore. "The music, the weapons, the helicopters, the crickets chirruping at night. We all got really jazzed about the idea."





"Guys, can you give me a hand? I've dropped my keys somewhere."



Johnny was livid at losing musical chairs again.



It may look rural and peaceful, but it's just full of potential communists.

The player takes the role of Dean Shepard, a young African-American who joins the Marines and is sent to Vietnam in April of 1965. The action religiously follows the path of the war: starting with fairly low-key patrols and seek-and-destroy missions in and around Danang, it moves on through the many and various victories and defeats of the US. You'll fight in Operation Starlight, the first major ground battle of the war, you'll root out underground supply caches and tunnel networks in the VC-held 'Iron Triangle', and after a fashion you'll find yourself in and around Khe Sanh, fending off the VC's Tet Offensive. 2015 has really done their homework on this one.

Some people (like me) would have cobbled together a Vietnam game from repeated viewings of 'Nam movies, with the vague hope of crow-barring in a line like, "You climb obstacles like old people f--k!" Whitmore and his gang, on the other hand, have gone to newsreels, period accounts, veterans' letters and history books as well as doing a huge amount of research on climatology and the flora and fauna of South East Asia.

About half the game will take place in the jungle proper, 20 per cent in ruined cities and the rest in a variety of rice paddies, bases and VC tunnels. The story, which is generally relayed

"If one of your guys gets shot, they'll be calling out to make sure a letter gets home to their wife"

JOHN WHITMORE
DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT, 2015

through Dean's letters home to his mum, revolves around the relationships within the squad and the perils they face as the war drags on. Meanwhile, Dean's brother, Jamie, adds even more tension to the mix by being a general screw-up; incapable of coping with Marine life and liable to be in need of a daring rescue come the endgame.

RUMBLE IN THE JUNGLE

To convey how the atmosphere of male camaraderie, violence and potential death is conjured up in *Men Of Valor*, it would perhaps be best to describe a typical scene. You and your squad are travelling along a dirt track through dense shrubland; from an FPS point of view you are one of the black guys laying grief on

RACE RELATIONS

MEN OF VALOR MAKES A COMMENDABLE STATEMENT WITH LEAD CHARACTER DEAN SHEPARD

Men Of Valor is set to be a landmark in that it is one of the first games to feature a black main character. Aside from movie tie-ins such as *Blade 2*, we've scratched our heads and can't think of too many similar examples, not in an FPS anyway, and as such 2015's efforts are highly laudable. "The African-American experience was an extremely large part of the war," points out John Whitmore. "White people were fighting alongside black people for the first time in Vietnam, and a lot of prejudices were overcome. You still feel its impacts today." So pats on the back all round at 2015, though whether a black character will be used in the boxing and marketing of the game is a different matter entirely. Certainly, we couldn't obtain an image of Dean for this piece and had to go with this generic chap. VU Games, the ball is in your court.



That twig ain't foolin' nobody, buddy.

the white guys, telling them they couldn't ever be a 'brother' with you back home. The language is full-on, as you'd expect from soldiers fighting in a real war. Suddenly the APC stops, and a tingling feeling tells you something is about to kick off. A peasant is trying to move a stubborn cow off the road, so a marine climbs down and has a lengthy argument with him. You hesitantly scan the tree line for an attack while your less-observant comrades continue arsing around. Just when your tension levels are beginning to ebb, the marine on the road takes a step back and explodes into chunks of meat. Suddenly bullets are flying, you're all cowering behind the APC with your squad-mates screaming, "Charlie's everywhere!" Then the counter-attack begins...

NO TIME TO BLEED

As you can tell, the scripted sequences in this game are something special, but the realism in your fellow marines is top notch too; and it's not just the voice-acting, the '60s slang and military lingo that does this either. "You see your guys taking cover, covering their heads and getting suppressed," says John. "They're not supermen marching through the jungle shooting everything they see. Their first reaction is not wanting to get shot - self-preservation. If they do get shot they'll be calling out to you to make sure a letter gets home to their wife or something. They all have at least one death sequence; it gets really emotional.



You get to meet stimulating and interesting people of an ancient culture, and kill them.

And if a guy can't make it to the end of the map then that's one less guy to watch your back." Eventually you'll also be promoted to a rank that allows you to give basic flanking, defensive and offensive commands, so you may well end up sending your newfound buddies to their early deaths.

It's currently unclear if there'll be a huge number of driveable vehicles in the game, although rumours abound of a thrilling motorbike chase through the jungle. You'll definitely be riding a variety of jeeps, APCs, 'Mules' and speedy patrol boats.



The concept of 'making stuff explode' gets another airing.

you can probably make out that 2015 is striving to give both an accurate view of the war and a wide variety of ways to make a head explode.

TATTERED FLAGS

But how about the politics? How can you make a game out of a conflict that even when viewed alongside the vast catalogue of meaningless wars available to us, never really made any sense? "No matter what you feel about the war, it's difficult to argue that Vietnam was as much a threat to the world as, say, Nazi Germany," says John. "Having said that, the bullets they were firing were just as deadly to you and your friends as they were in WWII. The encounters you found yourselves in were just as important to you and your friends because if you made it out then you made it home alive."

Of course, the true horror of battle will never be captured in a videogame,

"2015 is striving to give an accurate view of the war and a wide variety of ways to make a head explode"

weapon reads like the Christmas list of an aspiring dictator: M14 Battle Rifles, M-16s, Communist SKS with folding bayonets, AK47s, the TT3 pistol, a variety of rocket launchers and a range of sub-machine guns from the Thomson to the PPSH 41. This list of death-bringing machinery may mean nothing to you, but

thankfully, but *Men Of Valor* looks set to pull off the rare trick of pumping some emotion and feeling into the warzone, while leaving the fun intact. And if it can even get close to the quality of *Allied Assault*, then it has every chance of doing for Danang what *MOH* did for Omaha Beach. **EW**

Why Don't You?...



If you have to trudge through the jungle, you want your mates with you...

LET US FORM OUR OWN JUNGLE ASSAULT TEAMS...

Co-operative play, the most criminally ignored of all multiplayer modes, is making a welcome return in *Men Of Valor*, but in the version we saw only two players could fight alongside each other. How good would it be to have six or seven players taking down VC NPCs over the Net? AI may be getting better and better, but you can't beat fighting alongside real people.



After crotch-rot and jungle-chap, back ache was the GI's worst enemy.

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AGE of MYTHOLOGY The TITANS EXPANSION

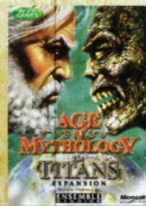


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Time keeps on slippin'

PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME

A classic of yesteryear returns to breathe new life into 3D platforming. If only it could do the same for *Chris Anderson*

THE DETAILS

PUBLISHER Ubisoft
DEVELOPER Ubisoft Montreal
ETA December 5
WEBSITE www.prince-of-persia.com

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Fantastic acrobatics and character animation
- Time warp feature for unique approaches to gameplay
- High on entertainment, low on frustration
- Ageing platform game mechanics ditched completely

CV

UBISOFT MONTREAL

Birthplace of *Splinter Cell* and *Raven Shield*, Ubisoft's vast Montreal studio is their biggest and (we reckon) best, with over 400 full-time staff.

1996 French publisher/developer Ubisoft forms new studio in Montreal, Canada, which quickly gets to work pumping out kiddie fodder for Disney and Warner.

2001 Having acquired Tom Clancy's *Red Storm* outright, Ubi shifts development of *Rainbow Six* series to Montreal and reinvents Clancy with *Splinter Cell*.

2002 Ubi gets together with *Prince Of Persia* creator Jordan Mechner and work begins on *The Sands Of Time*.



You'll be beating the birds off with a shitty scimitar.



When negotiations break down...



"Whaddya mean you don't recognise me? I was one of 1989's most-loved game characters..."

WHEN WAS THE last time you picked your PC up and threw it out the window (without opening the window first)? Or perhaps you can remember the last time you stood up and walked away from your PC, stopping only to glance back and yell abuse at it before walking out of the room in disgust. Or maybe you can remember picking up a very large axe and hacking the offending PC to pieces with an evil grin on your face? No?

If all of this seems alien to you, clearly, you have never played the original *Prince Of Persia*. While *POP* is quite rightly recognised as one of the best platform games of all time, it is also less fondly remembered as one of

the most frustrating game experiences ever. Not just bloody tough, it also had a punishing time limit in which you had to complete the thing, and you couldn't even save in some levels. One poorly timed platform leap, one failed run-jump or unblocked sword attack, and it was game over, a disappointing splat noise the only reward for your gargantuan efforts. It says a lot for the playability of the game that despite all this it still earned a place in the all-time greatest platform game hall of fame.

Fast-forward to 2003, just when we all thought the series was dead and buried, and a new, reinvented *Prince Of Persia* is nearing completion. Despite our original trepidation, it's looking

genuinely brilliant, with all of the elements that made the original great and none of the hair-tearing frustration. Even better, we have a preview copy...

PRINCE OF PERFECTION

Ubisoft Montreal, the development team behind *The Sands Of Time*, very obviously made a few important decisions before starting work on this title, for this is a platform game unlike any other. The stop-start-run-die gameplay of old has been replaced with a far more thought-provoking experience, in which you are faced with a set of puzzles and given time to think about how to overcome them and, more importantly, are never

unfairly punished for getting them wrong. The sheer simplicity of such an approach is a miracle in itself, and you have to wonder if the platform genre would have disappeared as quickly on the PC had this approach been adopted before.

Foremost among the devices used to ease frustration is the rewind function. Using the power of a magical dagger, this ability enables you to literally turn back time in the game, retracting any disastrous movements and allowing you to escape certain death. It may sound cheap, removing some of the inherent challenge of the gameplay, but in practice it works brilliantly.





There's no shortage of variety of foes.

For one thing, the device is not unlimited, and you can only manipulate time when you have some of the eponymous sands of time stored in your magical dagger. You collect sand by killing enemies, so in a sense you have to earn your temporal abilities with blood and sweat, making it feel like less of a cop-out when you're forced to use them.

What's more, many of the wall-running, chasm-leaping antics are so bloody tricky that you can only be expected to take a couple of attempts to nail them. Try running across a wall, springing off, grabbing a pole, spinning round that, jumping and grabbing a ledge a few times in quick succession and you'll see what we're talking about. Better still, the rewind function actually looks great as well, adding a nice cinematic feel to proceedings.

KNIVES OUT

Apart from rewinding short bursts of gameplay, you can use your trusty time dagger to slow down or accelerate the speed of the game at crucial points, like when you have to evade a nasty set of spinning death-blades. You can even use it to freeze enemies, which is useful when you're vastly outnumbered (a regular occurrence). This adds new elements to the gameplay and variety in how you approach dangerous situations.

In addition, should you manage to die by throwing yourself off a parapet while your sand-gauge is at zero, you're given the option of resuming the level from a point not far before you died. Indeed, the entire game is geared towards making you think about the problems ahead of



Fights are as dramatic as they are visually impressive, but you'll rarely come across a fair one.

you, instead of worrying about exactly timing a running jump. As a result, even the most cack-handed of gamers should have no problem making progress in *The Sands Of Time*.

Whether this ultimately makes the game a bit unchallenging is uncertain. Certainly it's hugely enjoyable in its current form, and there's plenty of satisfaction to be had just in trying to keep your momentum as you run, roll and leap through the levels. The emphasis, as we've said, is on thinking your way out of situations rather than sheer manual dexterity; on solving the game environments rather than merely coping with them. In this way, as well as in the general feel of the sprawling, interlocking palace environments, the game is strongly reminiscent of *Ico*, the PS2's most beautiful and elegant platformer. We've said it before, but



Drinking water replenishes your health.

THE FINEST PORT



There's some impressive views to be had...

PRINCE OF PERSIA STARTED ON THE PC... AND IT'S DAMNED GOOD TO HAVE IT BACK

While undoubtedly a console game in spirit, *The Sands Of Time* sits remarkably well on the PC. The keyboard/mouse control system is similar to that of *Splinter Cell*, with standard WASD keys controlling movement, a free camera controlled with the mouse, and the mouse-wheel governing your speed. There's a first-person view (though in typical action/adventure fashion you can't move in first-person), along with a stunning landscape view that zooms out to give you a perspective on your location within the palace complex.

With such a good translation of *Prince Of Persia* coming to PC, perhaps we'll even see a revival of the platform genre on the beige box. With games of this quality, we certainly wouldn't be complaining.





“Character animations are superb, the game world is lavish and the all-important gameplay is fun with a capital F”

there's just no getting away from the comparison. The difference is, you'll have just as much fun playing with the fantastic acrobatics in *Sands Of Time* as you will beating the beautifully designed levels.

LEAP OF FAITH

The combat is also great fun, though again the watchword is simplicity. Devastating attacks can be pulled off with ease, and the main challenge is in the sheer numbers of enemies you'll face. So you can leap over an opponent's head and slash him on the way down with a simple attack-jump key combo, but you might land in the middle of three other enemies ready to gut you.

The result of this stripped down gameplay style is a game that's most definitely 'fun' throughout every level. The gameplay is so fluent and the controls so intuitive, you can run confidently from one part of a level to the next without worrying about falling into a giant hole, which some clever-

clogs programmer put there to display his sense of humour to the world.

There are pits, but you can see them before you get to them. There are traps, but you can see them before you plunge headlong into them. There are enemies, but you always spot them in advance, giving you a chance to prepare yourself mentally when you notice a huge mass of them standing together nodding knowingly in your direction.

Help in difficult situations also comes in the form of Farah, a wily and seductive princess who becomes your unwilling partner in crime. She comes equipped with a bow, and she's pretty useful with it too. She can even pick off a couple of baddies while you catch your breath and prepare yourself for another scrap.

The Sands Of Time may well be a work in progress, with a few finer details yet to be ironed out, but if the current build is any example of what the finished game will be like, we say bring it on. The character animations are superb, the game world is lavish and well-realised, and the all-important gameplay is fun with a capital F. In fact, this could be the first truly great platform game on the PC for years. Look out for the full blow-by-blow review next month for our final word on this potential classic. [24]

MOVE YOUR BODY

THE *PRINCE OF PERSIA* FRANCHISE IS FAMOUS FOR PROVIDING CONTROL OVER THE MAIN CHARACTER. *THE SANDS OF TIME* NOT ONLY CONTINUES THIS FINE TRADITION, IT EXPANDS ON IT MASSIVELY. HERE ARE A FEW EXAMPLES OF HOW YOU GET AROUND IN THE GAME...



JUMPING

Well, you knew this one was going to be in there, right? The difference with *SOT* is you are not punished for bad timing. There's no need to position your character to make pixel-perfect leaps, so the time-honoured platform tradition of making you repeat jumps over and over each time you die does not exist in this game. Knowing when to jump is important. Figuring out where to jump is important. It really is that simple, and it's this approach to game mechanics that makes *SOT* such a joy to play. Thinking man's platform game? You got it.



CREEPING

Navigating ledges is one of the most dreaded aspects in platform games. In *SOT* it's easy as pie. There is no danger of falling off. Even when you try to cock things up royally, the prince will often cling to the nearest ledge, giving you a second chance to climb back up and find another way round the problem. It's another example of the game encouraging you to think of what to do next, instead of how to do it. It's safe to say this is one of very few platform games that doesn't adhere to the opinion that difficult key combinations are the only way to provide a challenge.



DROPPING

Many of the puzzles in the game require you to navigate areas in which the environment is falling to pieces around you. Often you are given visual clues as to where to go via cut-scenes, but sometimes you can tell just by watching changes in the landscape. Climbing up, down and around parts of the landscape is a huge part of the game. Again, the game never punishes you for getting things a bit wrong, unless you do something really stupid and just leap blindly into the abyss, in which case death is pretty much what you deserve.



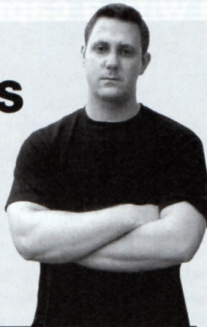
RUNNING

Yes, you can run along the walls, as well as up the walls, something you'll find yourself doing a great deal - even when it's not strictly necessary. Hell, it's fun! You can also spring off the wall at any point, hurling yourself across yawning gaps in precarious undie-soiling fashion. The seamless fluidity of the animation is at its best in scenes like these, indeed the animation is so good in *SOT* you'll often find yourself slowing down time just to admire the view a bit more closely. It's really that good.

REVIEWS

THE DEFINITIVE LOWDOWN ON ALL THE LATEST PC GAMES

SO IT BEGINS



■ SENIOR REVIEWS ED Martin Korda

▲ Told you so. Well that's assuming you read last month's column in which I boldly predicted that this month we'd see an avalanche of games turning up for review. And would you believe it? They have.

Scanning down this month's list I think you'll agree that in terms of reputation, it's the strongest review line-up we've seen for a while (not an easy feat by any means), with some of the year's most hotly awaited games finally putting in an appearance.

Empires: Dawn Of The Modern World, *Halo: Combat Evolved*, *XIII*, *Mace Griffin Bounty Hunter*, *Commandos 3: Destination Berlin*, *Silent Hill 3*, *Fire Warrior* and *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault - Breakthrough*. And that's just for starters. It could almost be called the Real Madrid of review lists. A collection of Harlem Globetrotter proportions.

That is, of course, until you look at the list of games we're expecting next month, which is currently looking like including *Half-Life 2*, *Unreal Tournament 2004*, *Max Payne 2: The Fall Of Max Payne*, *Call Of Duty*, *The Lord Of The Rings: The Return of the King*, *Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time*, *Hidden & Dangerous 2*, *Far Cry*, *Breed*, *FIFA 2004* and *War Of The Ring*. Of course, knowing the games industry, half of those will probably slip to Christmas 2137 anyway, so don't get too excited just yet.

Anyway, back to the here and now. With a collection of games like this, you'd probably be thinking this would be the highest-scoring issue of the year. But, we're sorry to say, you'd be wrong. Brand name and reputation mean nothing in these pages. Big names don't necessarily mean big scores, and smaller games with less hype can often turn out to be just as good, if not better, than their much-hyped counterparts. But which ones? As ever, there's only one way to find out...



Will *Empires: Dawn Of The Modern World* bring about a new era for the RTS? Find out on page 66.

THE ZONE SCORING SYSTEM

Some people (mainly games publishers) say that our scoring system is harsh. It's not. It's honest and built around the seemingly outdated idea that 50 per cent is an average score. Likewise, 70 per cent is a good score, anything above 80 per cent is excellent, and 90 per cent and above is a Classic (see below). Talking of Classic awards, don't expect to see one every issue as we don't chuck them around like confetti.

OUR REVIEWERS

We think our reviewers are the best in the business. Each one is a specialist in numerous genres and will have played every major release, so no game is judged in isolation. We also make sure the right game gets

reviewed by the right person, which means you won't see Steve Hill reviewing an RPG and we won't let Rhianna loose on *FIFA 2003*. You can have your say on the games and our reviews as well. If you have a comment to make, please email your views to letters@pczone.co.uk and entitle your email 'Feedback'.

ONLINE REVIEWS AND REVIEW UPDATES

We review a lot of games before they go on sale, and if there are no public servers running before we go to print we won't second-guess how the game's going to play online. Instead, you'll find dedicated online reviews of all the major releases in our regular Update section. This is also the place where we take a fresh look at games we think have changed significantly – as is the case with persistent online games or through major patch releases.

OUR PCS

We test games on a variety of systems so we can report how they perform in the real world. All our reviewed games are played on the manufacturer's minimum specification, as well as our own top-end rig – the Area-51 from *Alienware* (below).



Only games that score 90 per cent or more receive the coveted Classic award. The best of the best.



The second tier award for games scoring between 80 and 89 per cent. Essential purchases.

MEET THE TEAM



DAVE WOODS

Counter-Strike V1.6 and *Tiger Woods 2004*



JAMIE SEFTON

Halo: Combat Evolved

What are you currently playing?

What's the most stupid bet you've ever placed?

Betting £10 on Nasty Nick to win *Big Brother*... 10 minutes

Three pence on Leeds Utd winning a game



66

EMPIRES: DOWNTIME
Epic historical RTS



80

HALO: COMBAT EVOLVED
Better on the PC?



114

RE-RELEASES
Older games at budget prices



117

FEEDBACK
Where you air your opinions

DEFINITIVE REVIEWS

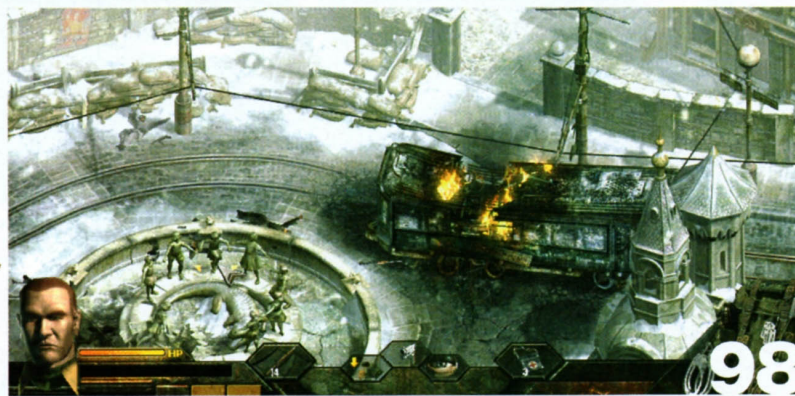
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MARTIN KORDA
Mace Griffin: Bounty Hunter



ANTHONY HOLDEN
UT2004 preview code



PAUL PRESLEY
PlanetSide



WILL PORTER
XIII and PlanetSide



MARK HILL
Halo: Combat Evolved



KEITH PULLIN
Empires and Deus Ex

£10 on a two-legged blind dog with no nose

That society would descend into a *Mad Max*-style battle for survival after the Millennium bug hit

I once bet on a horse that was already dead. Not that I knew that at the time, of course

My housemate bet me that I wouldn't lick a manky teatowel we found under the sofa. I won

Spain to win anything. Like it's ever going to happen. Euro 2004 anyone?

Tim Henman to beat Pete Sampras at Wimbledon

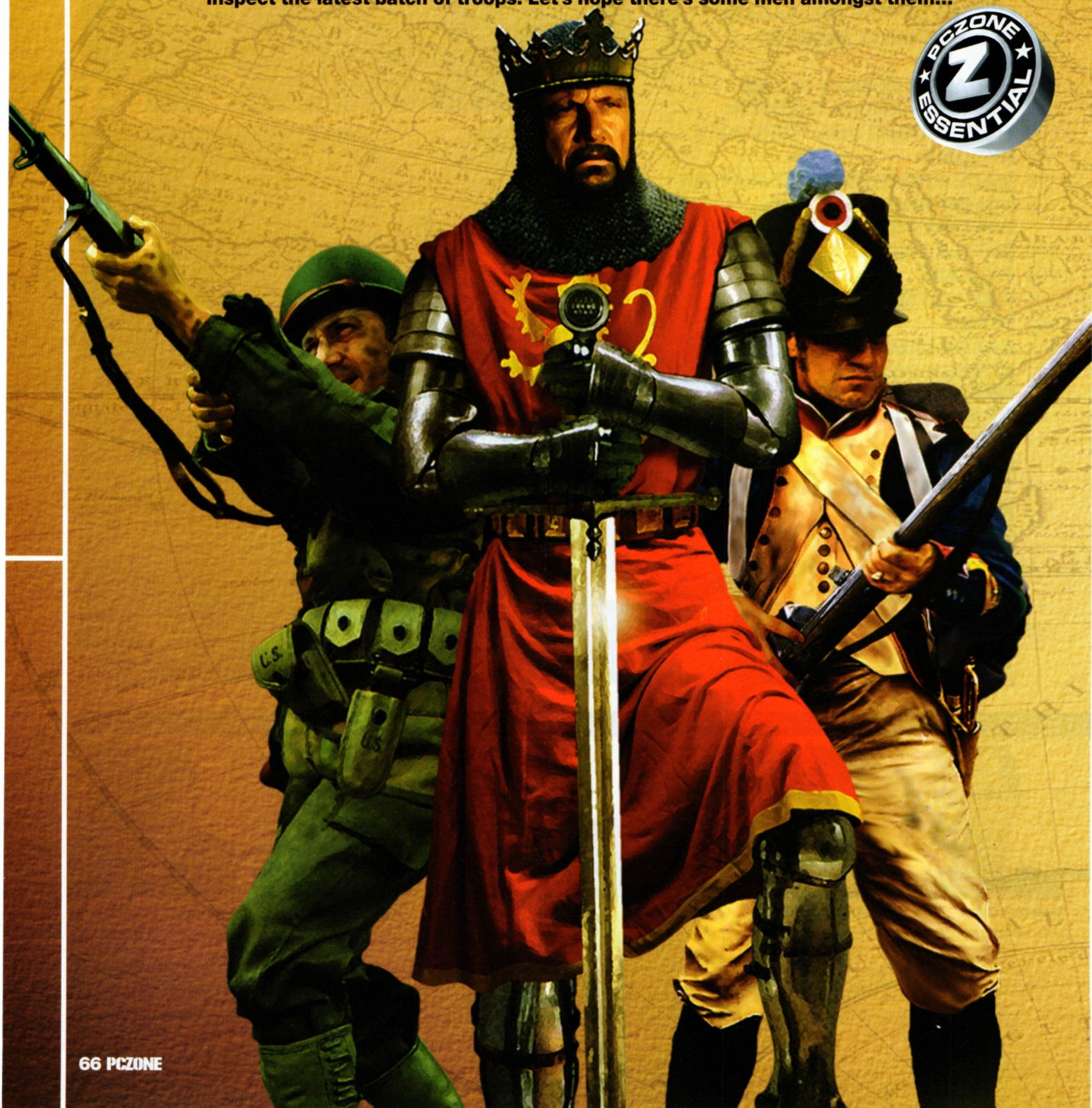
EMPIRES

DAWN OF THE MODERN WORLD

■ £34.99 | Pub: Activision | Dev: Stainless Steel Studios | ETA: October 31 | www.empiresrts.com

REQUIRES PIII 600, 128MB RAM and a 16MB DirectX 9-compliant 3D card DESIRES P4 2GHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB DirectX 9-compliant 3D card

Keith Pullin, veteran of a thousand historical campaigns, dusts off his riding crop and prepares to inspect the latest batch of troops. Let's hope there's some men amongst them...





No, it's not a band of travelling gypsies - it's an invading army.



Objectives:
 ● Secure Messina's Docks
 ● Optional: Destroy the German prospects.
 Mouse-over objectives for info

The push towards Messina docks hits a snag.



Objectives:
 ● Bring Capt. O'Reilly to Col. John Waters
 ● Take out the Luftwaffe Airfields
 ● Optional: Free Additional POWs
 Mouse-over objectives for info

● Left click to select a particular unit.
 ● Ctrl left-click to de-select a unit.

The trousers that inspired the Geneva Convention.

INPERSPECTIVE

RISE OF NATIONS

Reviewed Issue 129, Score 90%
 RON is *Empires'* closest competitor. Some dissenting voices claim the lack of a campaign means battles deteriorate into a war of attrition. We say shut it.

AGE OF MYTHOLOGY

Reviewed Issue 123, Score 90%
 Like *Empires*, AOM is a character-based campaign affair with its fair share of strange units. Ultimately though, AOM feels fresher and is much easier to play.

SOMEONE better have a word with the King of Korea. Surely sending oxen laden with explosives trundling into enemy villages is not good for PR. The country's Buddhists will be shuffling from foot to foot with barely concealed rage. Then again, as long as it deters the neighbours from occupying Korea, what does it matter if a few monks get uptight?

King Philip of France is no angel when it comes to animal rights either. Although hurling

(mostly) dead cows over castle walls isn't quite as severe as strapping gunpowder kegs to an ox, it's still disrespectful to the deceased's family/herd.

So, throughout history, it would seem that in order to be a successful leader you had to know how to treat your cattle. Apart from General Patton, of course, who thought his troops *were* cattle.

Those of you who have been following the progress of Rick Goodman's (*Age Of Empires*,

Empire Earth) latest offering will know that *Empires: Dawn Of The Modern World* is a real-time strategy game with a distinctly historical tone. For those who have stumbled upon this review with no previous knowledge of the game, don't fall asleep yet - *Empires* is not as stuffy as you might think.

Developer Stainless Steel has made considerable efforts to relate the events of yesterday in as alternative a manner as possible (as illustrated by

"Hurling dead cows over castle walls isn't as severe as strapping gunpowder kegs to an ox"

the aforementioned exploding beasts of burden). What this means is that as well as being able to create units that, frankly, even the most experienced fantasy writer would be hard-pressed to dream up, you get to employ special abilities that are, to put it mildly, stretching the boundaries of plausibility.

GREAT MAUL OF CHINA

Chinese Taoist sorcerers, for example, can summon volcanoes that erupt from the Earth's crust in a crunching, groaning display of destruction. The Chinese, apparently renowned for their off-the-wall battlefield tactics, even treat their enemies to enormous fireworks displays that leave them gaping at the sky in astonishment before assassins run up behind them and slit their conveniently tilted throats. Nice.

But the most outrageous event of all occurred when an American ranger called for an



artillery strike and it actually hit a valid military target. You could almost imagine the wounded civilians in the hospital opposite leaning out the windows giving an ironic thumbs-up.

Despite Stainless Steel assuring us time and time again that these units and special abilities are all based on 'historical documents' (of the *Galaxy Quest* kind no doubt), we remain somewhat sceptical of their authenticity – not that it matters. Such peculiarities are a major reason why the game is so enjoyable; the mixture of fantasy and reality is absorbing and you're never quite sure what nonsense will be thrown your way next – and that has its charm.

Variety is something *Empires* contains plenty of and the choice of three campaigns verifies this. Richard the Lionheart's campaign is set in the Medieval Age (the

earliest age in the game) and predominantly features pouring boiling oil over the Franks.

The second campaign follows the trials and tribulations of the Korean Admiral Yi Sun-shin as he fends off the advancing Japanese and Chinese hordes towards the end of the 16th Century.

And last, but by no means least, the third and final campaign focuses on General Patton's momentous push through North Africa into Europe during World War II.

ADEPT ADAPT

All of these campaigns have a distinct style and the chances of completing the WWII campaign are slim. You have to adapt your strategy to fit in with not only the age but the nation under your control.

A PUZZLING DECISION



Sink or swim?

THERE ARE SOME TRICKY DECISIONS TO BE MADE ALONG THE ROAD TO VICTORY...

In an attempt to maintain variety, *Empires* occasionally throws a moment of pure puzzle-solving at you. Here, for example, you have to get four characters across a river in a boat that only carries two people. The only problem is some of characters don't get on particularly well so you have to make sure those ones are not alone on the boat together. It's hardly rocket science figuring out the answer, but it makes for a pleasant diversion from killing Japanese pirates for a while.

The campaigns are well put together with cut-scene scripts and voice acting of the highest calibre. The only niggling problem we had was with the editing. The plots often flip from one character to another without warning. The Korean campaign became particularly confusing, especially when the King and a few ministers had a bit of a disagreement over who did what, where and when to the Japanese. Maybe

moments like these are for genuine historians only. These bewildering moments are more than compensated for by some very well constructed scenarios. Gameplay is not simply a case of constantly building up a massive army mission after mission. Indeed, in all three campaigns you don't have access to the full spectrum of units and abilities until at least two thirds of the way through – which is usually around mission five or six. In a lot of situations you have to

In Patton's campaign, for example, you get a cut-scene dialogue advising you to push on to a certain island where you can obtain gold to pay a particular division so they become active again. While not professing to know every logistical detail about armoured divisions in North Africa, we have a feeling this is the developer's way of highlighting the fact that funds weren't inexhaustible during WWII and, furthermore, they were bloody hard to procure and had to be used wisely.

"The campaigns boast cut-scene scripts and voice acting of the highest calibre"

make do with the units you start with and that, of course, means plenty of stealth missions and using the natural geography to your advantage.

As well as using this method as a bit of a hook for the player insofar as you're encouraged to play on to 'unlock' new gameplay features, we have a suspicion that this is, once again, dictated by *Empires'* desire to stay as historically accurate as possible.

There are disadvantages in this gradual introduction of features though. At times you just want to let rip and open up with everything you've got. But, like we said, in the campaign mode you can't do that until you're well into the story.

Thankfully the skirmish mode provides exactly that kind of gung-ho gameplay. Here you find all your usual choice of options relating to which nation you want to control, which age



Those Germans aren't there to build sandcastles.



The three campaigns are challenging and diverse.



Cut-scenes are created using the in-game engine.



Shooting down planes as they land is a great way of destroying airfields.



Clench buttocks firmly, hold gun at an awkward angle and advance towards enemy.

you want to start and end at, a dozen different map styles, a choice of five difficulty settings (the campaigns have only three) and a range of other knobs and buttons to fiddle around with. There's even an 'action' mode that pushes everything along – from resource collection to tank construction – just a little bit quicker. It's a welcome escape for those who've tired of the restrictive feel of the campaigns.

VILLAGE IDIOT

So far so good then; *Empires* manages to cram in a hell of a lot while maintaining an appeal for hardcore and novice strategists alike. But no game is entirely free from strife and *Empires* has its share.

There are times when the path-finding AI seems to curl up into a little ball and refuse to co-operate. It's also infuriating the way a villager/subject/peasant (depending on your nation) can get stuck on parts of maps if you're not careful about where you build your towers and walls.

But aside from the occasional lapse the AI is generally pretty good. Foraging-type units show an acceptable level of foresight in automatically assigning themselves to collect resources once they've finished constructing a building. It's not quite up to *Rise Of Nations* but it certainly means you're not chasing after idle workers.

Military units too are eager to pursue their foes to the

ends of the earth. However, that does cause a few problems, especially when that airfield you were so keen to 'convert' with your engineers has already been destroyed by your Sherman tanks, who show no signs of military intelligence when it comes to capturing strategic targets.

WE ARE NOT THE SAME

According to Stainless Steel, one of the reasons *Empires* was going to be better than other RTSs was down to the

significant differences between the nations on offer.

We hear this a lot. In fairness to SS, though, they really have managed to pull it off. Playing as the Chinese is totally different from playing as the British. Whereas we Brits like to set up little villages and stay in a place we can call our home, the Chinese are more nomadic. Their town centres are wagons that can be loaded up with resources and moved from one part of the map to another.

Totally eradicating a Chinese settlement is extremely difficult – they just keep popping up all over the bloody place.

Playing as the Russians also takes a bit of getting used to. Their airforce is particularly worthy of mention simply because it's so bloody awful. A Russian WWI bomber is so useless it usually runs out of fuel before it reaches its target. That said, if you advance to WWII the combination of the T-34 and KV8 tank is virtually unstoppable.

MISSED OPPORTUNITY (O)



Sadly, veteran troops have no advantage over newbies.

THERE'S NO SUBSTITUTE FOR EXPERIENCE. SO WHY IS THERE NONE HERE?

With the wealth of experience the Stainless Steel team has in creating RTSs, it's surprising that certain obvious features are mysteriously omitted. Why, for example, can't all the units in the game gain experience and improve throughout the battle? OK, some special units, like the SAS, do become veterans after they've killed a certain amount of foes, but they are few and far between. It would be great to create a unit and then nurture him all the way through the war until he eventually turns into some kind of John Rambo super soldier.



100 per cent historically accurate. Honest!



Now now lads, keep it light.

CRUELTY ZOO REVISITED

WHO WOULD HAVE THOUGHT WAR WOULD LEAD TO SO MANY BOVINE CASUALTIES?

If you were a cow in Medieval times or an ox in the gunpowder age, it would be worth running away from the battlefield as fast as your clumsy legs would carry you. Cattle were seen as nothing more than expendable meat, especially to the Koreans, who saw them as some kind of suicidal beef bomber. Thankfully things have improved in modern times – it's only the dogs who have to watch their backs these days.



Wonder what the RSPCA would think of this?



AA guns are very important, as this town has just discovered.

graphical styles, causing horrendous colour clashes not seen since the days of the ZX Spectrum. Models such as the trees are beautiful and sway in the wind convincingly, but when a platoon of poorly drawn Russian mortars rolls up next to them the resulting effect is one of garish repulsion.

At least the sound is up to scratch. In fact we'd go as far as saying the acoustics are among the best you'll find in any PC game. Machinegun fire is superb and the wrenching, cracking sounds as buildings splinter and collapse send a shudder down your spine. If only the graphics had been afforded such attention to detail as well.

ONE CLICK OR TWO?

The much-vaunted one-click upgrade feature of *Empires* is another aspect of the game that doesn't live up to expectations. As far as we can tell, it's actually three clicks anyway; the first click is to start researching the upgrade,

the second is to activate the upgrade and the third is to choose the unit type on which you wish to use the upgrade. Rather than simplify the process it actually confuses it.

In fact this is a part of the game with which we struggled constantly to come to grips. Even construction upgrades seem to appear in the strangest sub-menus. A lot of time is spent scanning through the different types of buildings to find the upgrade you want – and that is often critical time lost. Why can't you update your towers by clicking on a tower? Why can't you upgrade your farms by clicking on them? And so on.

Because of this unerring knack to put the upgrade you most want in the most inaccessible place possible, the interface takes a lot of getting used to. OK, once you've been playing for a few days, you start to decipher these idiosyncrasies, but there's no denying it's a pain in the arse in the meantime.

So, with the British, French, Germans, Russians, Americans, Koreans and Chinese to choose from, there's plenty to get your head round. Admittedly you cannot play as all of these nations in the campaigns, but when it comes to matching up in the skirmish mode, there are very few RTSs around (with the notable exception

of *Rise Of Nations*) offering such balance and diversity. One thing that is noticeable, however, is the variation in graphical quality between the nations. Whereas the latter-day civilisations, like the Americans, boast lovely gleaming tanks, aircraft and battleships, others such as the medieval English with their blocky horses and swordsmen are not so hot. But then you could probably level that accusation at most of the game's visuals. *Empires* seems to possess many different

SECOND OPINION



KING KORDA

Sorry Mr Goodman, but I'm afraid you're turning into a bit of a one-trick pony. Granted, that trick may be standing on a beach ball while playing a violin with your front hooves, but, like an ageing nag that's been round the 'novelty act' circuit a thousand times, it's beginning to wear a bit thin.

Apart from a few interesting ideas, such as stealth-based missions and a few novel units, there's little here to differentiate this from the core look, feel or gameplay of *Empire Earth*, which itself borrowed heavily from *Age Of Empires*, the game that made Rick Goodman famous.

Graphically it's poor compared to the likes of *Medieval: Total War* and *Warrior Kings: Battles*, and while the sound is excellent, a few good voiceovers and a nice tune don't make a great game. If you love *Age Of Empires*-style gameplay, then *Empires* has more than enough going for it to warrant you checking it out. For those seeking something new though, look elsewhere.

So, how does it rank against the other RTS big guns? Well, *Empires: Dawn Of The Modern World* is up there in terms of storytelling, diverse scenarios and choice of nations, but aside from that it doesn't leave you reeling in slack-jawed wonder.

Sure, it's a very absorbing game, and you have to admire the way it, like *Civilization*, goes some way towards making history entertaining. Take that away though and it doesn't do anything truly outstanding or innovative in terms of gameplay. For those kind of exceptional qualities look no further than *Medieval: Total War* or *Rise Of Nations*. [X]

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Great variety of nations
- ✓ Novel unit types
- ✓ Well-written campaigns
- ✓ Good mixture of scenarios
- ✗ AI occasionally throws a wobbly
- ✗ Lacks new ideas

83

Engrossing, but lacks a killer instinct



Don't you hate it when you get to the beach and all the best spots are taken?

Halo Invades PC



HALO

Live the epic sci-fi adventure
with online multiplayer action

You are bred for combat and built for war. Join the battle and unlock the secrets of Halo to save mankind from the ruthless Covenant swarms. Fight online in customisable head-to-head multiplayer competitions against up to 15 rival Master Chiefs in any of the multiplayer maps including 6 new maps never before seen! Unleash destruction with a re-designed arsenal complete with an awesome new fuel rod gun. Then go mobile in the re-developed Rocket Warthog and Banshee. This is Halo evolved for the PC.

NEW Multiplayer Weapons

NEW Multiplayer Vehicles

The battle has now begun

Order NOW:
www.halopc.co.uk



BUNGIE gearbox POWERED BY gameSpy Microsoft game studios

Make It Big does well to avoid anything resembling a spreadsheet.



VEGA\$: MAKE IT BIG



■ £29.99 | Pub: Empire Interactive | Dev: Deep Red | ETA: October 17 | www.vegasmakeitbig.com

REQUIRES PIII 700, 128MB RAM and a 16MB 3D card
DESIRES PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

It's glitzy and glamorous, just like the real thing. But is Vega\$: Make It Big any good to play? Make way for the God of Gamblers, Steve O'Hagan

GAMBLING'S a mug's game, innit? You only need pop in the local bookmakers on a Tuesday lunchtime and look at the faces of the washed-up detritus inside to see that. Take fruit machines – a recent PCZ Emulation Zone exposé (Issue 132) revealed how the damned things are rigged to steal your cash. And with more chance of lightning striking your bell-end than of you winning the jackpot, we all know the national lottery is stupidity tax: the more stupid you are, the more you pay. All of which points to the fact that the way to make a fast buck is to open up some kind of gambling

establishment. Provided the Mafia doesn't take you out into the desert and beat you with baseball bats for muscling in on their patch, surely it's a licence to print money? Time to find out.

CITY OF ANGELS
Vega\$: Make It Big gives you the chance to be an entertainment mogul in that hedonistic Mecca, that neon oasis of depravity, that Taj Mahal of tackiness known as Las Vegas. But this is not just about gambling. Remember, the City of Lights is the home of never-ending appearances by Elvis and Tom Jones, exotic dancing and heavyweight boxing events, as well as monolithic casinos. So your job is to offer the whole shebang – you've got to build the hotels, bars, restaurants, nightclubs, shops

"A Texan oil baron arrives in town. Have you got the facilities to appeal to his opulent tastes?"

INPERSPECTIVE

CASINO EMPIRE

Reviewed Issue 122, Score 39%
Looks like dross next to *Make It Big*, and concentrates solely on what goes on inside the casinos. At least you can play a few rounds of poker with the guests.

ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON 2

Reviewed Issue 123, Score 80%
The absolute don of hardcore sim/tycoon games, this is as detailed and as addictive as they come. Design your own torturous rides and then watch those kids puke!



Watch the punters lose all their cash.

and other facilities that will not only bring the punters to your lot to haemorrhage money, but will then keep them there.

The choice of buildings to construct is vast. Although not the easiest to get to grips with at first, the panel of buttons, tabs and scroll bars that squats at the bottom of the screen does a decent job of making finding what you want as easy as possible. Though it's a little workaday and lacking in invention, at least this interface is logical and offers few irritating inconsistencies.

THE GOLDEN FLEECE

Any tycoon game worth its salt presents you with important decisions from the word go. As your buildings go up in *Make It Big*, you already have to think about connecting them to each other and the crowded streets where the punters await with paving. Flashy, expensive stone is used to chaperone visitors from bar to restaurant to casino and then back to the hotel.

Bog standard tarmac suffices to provide your cleaners,



Graphically, it's the most impressive tycoon game yet.

CASTLES IN THE SAND

SAVE YOUR FAVOURITE CASINO DESIGNS FROM THE SANDBOX MODE FOR USE IN THE MAIN GAME

As far as game structure goes, there are two modes - Campaign and Sandbox. Sandbox gives you free reign to simply build. The added attraction here is that any casinos constructed in this mode can be saved and then bought as an out-of-the-box fully functioning facility in the campaign game.

The Campaign mode gives you tasks in competition with the other magnates on the strip. These goals - attract a certain amount of VIP visitors, break a certain profit margin by a certain point, build a certain amount of structures before a time limit - are, to be frank, a little run of the mill and will be over-familiar to genre veterans. And with only a dozen or so scenarios in the Campaign, it's a little on the short side.



Create your ideal casino in the Sandbox mode.





Five thousand people – and you can milk them all.

mechanics, security staff and electricians access from their offices and workshops you've cunningly built away from the glossy façade of eateries and watering holes so the noise and smell from their activities won't upset Joe Public. While you can build purely for your own aesthetic pleasure, even these apparently minor opening concerns illustrate the interrelating factors that need consideration if you want to be a real player on the strip.

Pretty soon you'll have gigantic, garish signs advertising

your attractions (lower-end customers can't resist bright flashing lights), and extravagant gardens and rows of palms around your art gallery and museum (increased beauty and calm levels help please more sophisticated visitors roused by the cultural attractions). Your hotel now has a bellboy and high-roller suites (a must to lure passing VIPs), while overpriced magic shops lurk beside your ever-popular magic show (those families are so easily fleeced, aren't they?). Getting the hang of it yet?



Go on everyone, bet a bit more. You could be a millionaire with one roll of the dice.



MISSED OPPORTUNITY



Sadly, you don't get to gamble yourself.

MULTIPLE MISSES?

There are two obvious things that the developer of Vega\$ has opted to leave out. The first is the absence of a multiplayer mode. Now this is nothing unusual in the tycoon genre, but seeing as *Make It Big* has such a competitive aspect with the AI tycoons working against you, maybe this should have been expanded into a fully-fledged multiplayer mode. But then again, is this something tycoon game fans would be interested in anyway?

The second thing is the chance to have a go on your own poker tables and slot machines. But then again, why would you want to rip yourself off in your own casino?

CUSTOMER SERVICE

Success comes from knowing your customer. And since there can be up to 5,000 punters divided into 20 types of citizen wandering the strip at any time,

people leaving your resort are complaining of lack of access to vital facilities – time for some re-routing work.

But none of this punter-luring occurs in isolation. In most

up every now and then. An earthquake might wreck power supplies for a period of time or a famous and exceedingly wealthy Texan oil baron might arrive in town with his fortune burning a

“In most scenarios you will be up against other developers, all vying for fun-seekers’ bucks”

this is easier said than done. From trailer-trash hicks with a handful of dimes, through casual tourists and families, up to European aristocracy and Japanese businessmen, each individual is rated for a number of feelings, the most pressing of which is denoted by a thought bubble hovering over their heads. But more useful than the individual stats are the aggregate information screens.

Here you might find that there is a preponderance of stag parties in town, meaning strip shows (no, you don't get to see any norks!), bars and nightclubs would be a wise investment. Or maybe you'll discover most

scenarios you will be up against other developers, all vying for those fun-seekers' bucks. So why are hardly any of those families that are in town visiting your lot? Maybe that flashy dolphin show and rollercoaster combo up the road is proving a bigger draw. Why has that retired basketball star taken a room up at your rival's hotel? Maybe it was the lure of the wave pool and sports betting suite. It's not exactly like playing a multiplayer game, but it does lend an angle of community and competition that many games of this ilk lack.

And to further keep you on your toes, random events and unforeseen circumstances crop

hole in his fat wallet. Have you got the facilities to appeal to his opulent tastes?

INTERIOR DECORATING

And to think that all of this is to talk only of what goes on outside the casino. *MIB* is almost two games in one, as unlike any other building in the game, you have to build your casinos both inside and out.

Which is where, for a while, Vega\$ begins to overwhelm. There you are, just having finished constructing an elaborate plot of retail outlets and entertainment facilities that would provide enough for a standalone game in most

quarters, and you're being asked to do the same again in microcosm inside your casino.

Almost as many options as any available on the surface are also available for the insides of your gambling dens. Slot machines, poker and blackjack tables, roulette wheels, sports betting lounges – practically every form of gambling known to man, short of cockroach racing, is available.

All manner of furnishings, bars, buffets and entertainments – not to mention the cleaners, cooks, cashiers, croupiers and mechanics that keep them operating – have to be attended to. And this is where the less hardcore of tycoon game fan will probably get his coat.

Not only is this second tier of management going to be too much fuff for a fair few, but after the razzle-dazzle and visual splendour of the great outdoors, having to come inside and choose wallpaper, tell cleaners to pick up litter and wall off toilets so the smell doesn't perturb your customers all over again can feel a little mundane.

DID YOU NOTICE THE 3D VISUALS?

We've steered clear of it for as long as possible, but it's time to talk a while about *Make It Big's* prized asset – the visuals. Now this is one engine that really does its job well.

Easy to manipulate, with zooming, panning and rotating an absolute breeze – and without any stuttering or juddering – the engine can handle up to 5,000 individuals wandering around simultaneously. They sit on benches, they play slot machines, they gather round poker tables – and you can get your camera right in their faces.

Shadows from every structure follow the course of

the sun as it rises and sets. Cars meander through the traffic system, stopping at red signals. Lights illuminate their surroundings when night falls – your decision to use all red lamps around your infamous nightclub lending it an impressive seedy hue.

Celebrities arrive at your resort complete with their entourage. Buses stop and disgorge another wide-eyed cargo of willing tourists. Helicopters take off and land from your helipad – it captures exactly the right feel for the game. You feel like you are in

a little digitised Vegas – a pixelated patch of non-stop hedonism. A jamboree of bright lights, luminous colours and gaudy structures. It wouldn't cut it in the world of first-person shooters, fair enough, but it does a magnificent job here.

LEAVING LAS VEGAS

So it looks good and it plays good. But as we've alluded to, the imagination and flair of the 3D engine are matched by a slight lack of the same in the gameplay. Yes, it's a thorough and detailed sim, but it rigidly sticks to the principles of the genre, lending it a familiar feel.

This is sure to have an impact on longevity for tycoon fans, already jaded from having to place too many litter bins, construct endless kilometres of walkway, and form carefully positioned toilet facilities in the vicinity of drinks vendors.



Dump the kids with a tattooed serial killer and hit the tables.



Themes for your resorts include Jurassic Park, Inca Temples and Ancient Greece.

WALKTHROUGH →

FAMILY FORTUNES So you want a taste of how to make things work in *Vega\$: Make it Big*? Your mission is to rope in a bunch of those families swamping the strip. Here's one way of going about it...



1 First off, you need a cheap hotel for those skin-flint fathers and the 16-year-old Mr and Mrs Smiths to indulge in, and a head office to allow you to build the right attractions.



2 Dolphin shows, shark pools, wave pools, fast food joints and soda bars: both Mum and Dad and the kids go crazy for this stuff. A nice little earner – just keep it clean.



3 Inside your casino, less is more: Mrs Mid-West Housewife isn't a poker player. Go for cheap slots and offer prizes like this family sedan to keep 'em happy.



4 Et Voila! Watch those suckers flock. Hang on, what do you mean you're not happy? Dammit – forgot to install bins and bogs. Better get it sorted – my belly's aching.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Recreates the glitz and glamour of the real thing
- ✓ You've got AI tycoons to deal with
- ✓ Almost two games in one
- ✓ Thousands of punters with minds of their own
- ✗ A little bit by the numbers
- ✗ Maybe too detailed for some
- ✗ Building inside casinos less exciting than out

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The best tycoon sim money can buy

It's lipstick, and it tastes of fruit. Genius.



House sharing can be hell.

Graphically, *Silent Hill 3* trounces the console version.

SILENT HILL 3

■ £29.99 | Pub: Konami | Dev: Konami Computer Entertainment Tokyo | ETA: October 31 | www.konami-europe.com/silenthill3

REQUIRES PIII 1 GHz, 256MB RAM, GeForce3 Ti/Radeon 8500 3D card and 4.7GB hard disc space
DESIRES P4 1.4 GHz, 512MB RAM, GeForce4 Ti/Radeon 8500 3D card w/64MB VRAM and a USB GamePad controller

We'd fear for anyone's sanity after playing this psycho-shocker survival horror, but Steve O'Hagan's mad as a coot anyhow

DREARY American shopping malls are ungodly hell-holes at the best of times. Coffee shops full of people acting like they're in *Friends*, faceless fast-food joints, the words 'have a nice day' ringing in your ears. So when *Silent Hill 3* takes this frightening scenario and throws in hideous gibbering demons, wall-to-wall blood and grime, and a nightmarish caterwauling din piping through the Tannoy, you can imagine it's not pretty.

But such twisting of familiar situations into grotesque parodies of their earthly selves

will be nothing new to fans of the *Silent Hill* series, quite probably the most gloriously deranged of all survival horror games. And this latest offering, migrating over from the PS2, will not disappoint in the 'that sure is some crazy shit' stakes. But, somewhat disappointingly, neither will it surprise with its near-identical gameplay and slightly uninspired approach to puzzle solving.

MY BONY HEATHER

This time out the lead character is Heather, an everyday skinny teenage girl in obligatory short skirt and high boots (this is a Japanese game, after all). After waking up from an horrendous nightmare, a man harasses her in the local mall. She takes refuge in the toilets, but when she emerges Heather finds the mall has turned into a trans-dimensional vision of hell, populated by a menagerie

of bizarre mutants. Things happen that way in *Silent Hill*.

Gameplay remains unchanged. Much wandering and map reading typically leads to a puzzle or a locked door barring your way. Finding the items necessary is a matter of walking up to anything that

"All kinds of fleshy appendages protrude from grossly misshapen hides to test your credulity"

looks unusual and hitting action to search it. Of course, all of this is done under the watchful glare of a host of creatures – both lesser minions and boss monsters – that have to be shot, stabbed and beaten into a bloody pulp if you are to survive.

WHERE THE HILL...?

Helping Heather make sense of her new surroundings is best done with a GamePad, mimicking the original console

game control method. A mouse and keyboard combo is clumsy, nigh-on ruining the gameplay. But even with a pad, the controls are hardly a joy as the 'rotate and move' system is about as innovative these days as Tupperware. This system is well in need of an overhaul

and lends the game a slightly antiquated feel.

Despite such misgivings, you still soon find yourself drawn into *SH3*'s particularly unnerving world, largely because of its uniquely disquieting atmosphere. From the freaky fairground of Heather's nightmare to the dilapidated tenement blocks of *Silent Hill* itself, the mood of impending doom seldom relents. The locations are

uniformly grim. Heather's feeble pocket torch struggles to strip away the inky blackness, out of which a new, more hideous assailant might stumble at any minute. Creative use of camera angles, subtle perversions of everyday sights and a nerve-grinding score all contribute to

the impression that what you're playing is the brain-child of David Lynch and George A. Romero.

DESTROY ALL MONSTERS!

A hallmark of the *Silent Hill* series are some of the most disgusting and bizarre aberrations of nature that ever wore the title of 'monsters'. And *SH3* doesn't disappoint. Oh no. All kinds of fleshy appendages protrude from

INPERSPECTIVE

SILENT HILL 2: DIRECTOR'S CUT
 Reviewed Issue 126, Score 84%
 One of the best games of its kind.

THE THING
 Reviewed Issue 121, Score 80%
 Team-based and not as scary as this, but well worth a look.



"Mum, you said we were having chicken tonight."



That must have been one huge nosebleed.



Will someone get that boom operator outta my shot?

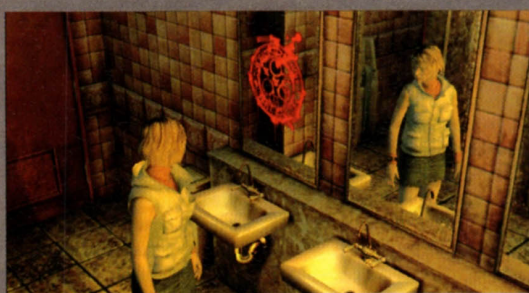


Heather gets ready for the 100m killing sprint.

A NEW HILL OF BEANS?

SO WHAT'S CHANGED SINCE THE CONSOLE VERSION? NOT A HILL OF A LOT

Silent Hill 3 is essentially the same as its console prototype. In fact there are only two real differences for this PC outing. One: the high-res graphics put anything the PS2 can produce to shame – provided you have a decent graphics card. Two: you can now save anywhere, rather than at specific save points. An improvement? Very much a moot point in our book, with trigger-happy quick-savers losing that sense of nerve-jangling tension console players get when health runs low. There's no multiplayer, there's little replay value – we'd like to see a little more in our console conversions. But that's just us.



Not much has changed for the PC version.

grossly misshapen hides. Slavering, jabbering, chattering fiend after fiend lumbers from the shadows, yet another incredible distortion of nature to test your credulity. And as you apply your boot to their brains and they lie twitching on the floor, you'll feel not a jot of remorse – these things don't deserve to live, dammit!

Combat in *Silent Hill* games has never been a matter of finesse. One button is used to mindlessly smash your enemy with whatever implement comes to Heather's hand, be it a steel pipe or the incongruous medieval spiked mace, as well as to fire the odd gun you get your hands on. This simplicity was never an issue in previous games where encounters were infrequent and their crude brutality suited the everyday feel of the characters. But here the designers have increased the incidence of the scraps, putting a strain

on your patience with the repetitive dust-ups.

SAW POINT

All of which is exacerbated by the ill health in which we find the game's puzzles. Survival horror games traditionally thrive on fiendish problem solving, forcing the player to pierce through a fog of adrenaline and fear to defeat the conundrums that bar his path. But here the answers to your problems fall into place as easily as a jigsaw marked 'for ages three and up'. Typically, the object needed to complete any given brain-teaser will be handed to you on a plate a few rooms previous, and all you need do is shuffle up to the puzzle in question and click to make things happen.

So in one sense *SH3* is another fine slice of demented survival horror. But in another it's an unambitious update that retains the core features of the

franchise without stamping its own mark on the series. We loved *Silent Hill 2*, despite its obvious console roots and gameplay limitations. But what's really scary is that if the next installment doesn't show a lot more innovation, its review scores will likely be truly horrifying. **PCZ**

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Horrifying atmosphere with loads of gore
- ✓ Awesomely grotesque monsters
- ✓ Uncompromisingly grim
- ✗ Too much brainless combat
- ✗ Straightforward puzzles
- ✗ Archaic control system

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Superb atmosphere can't mask a lack of inspiration



Finding useful stuff to put in your inventory is a rare event.



It looks like a puzzle, but it isn't. *Lionheart* doesn't have any.

LIONHEART: LEGACY OF THE CRUSADER

■ £29.99 | Publisher: Avalon Interactive | Developer: Reflexive Entertainment | ETA: Out Now | www.lionheart.blackisle.com

REQUIRES Pill 700, 128MB RAM and a 4MB 3D card **DESIRES** 256MB RAM and a 16MB 3D card will help load-times and scrolling

Several legends from the past meet a game from the past. **Chris Anderson**, a man with a sordid past, checks out how it stacks up against the current crop of RPGs

RICHARD the Lionheart, Shakespeare, Nostradamus, Leonardo da Vinci... that lot... they're all in here, lending historical ambience to a game that takes a reasonable stab at being true to the time period in which it takes place. However, historians of the time failed to record that way back in 1192, when Richard the Lionheart and Sultan Saladin were going at it for territorial control, one of Richard's advisors persuaded

him to perform an ancient ritual that created a dimension rift called the Disjunction, which unleashed a whole army of goblins, trolls and other fantasy types upon the world.

Historians may have missed this momentous event, but Reflexive, creators of *Lionheart*, did not. Which, of course, means that you're tasked with taking on the aforementioned evil creatures from the Disjunction and stopping them getting their greedy mitts on a variety of holy relics.

It's all pretty standard fantasy fare, but with none other than Black Isle Studios lending their blessing to this game you would have thought something special was in store. At least that's the theory...

2D OR NOT 2D?

That is the question, and in *Lionheart's* case the answer is unfortunately "2D", as it features a flat 2D isometric backdrop, restricted further by a maximum resolution of 800x600.

The poor presentation suggests that the designers are stuck in the past.

With the

likes of *Morrowind* taking the RPG genre to new highs, *Lionheart* just looks dated, basic and unappealing.

Combat is no more convincing than the dated visuals, with a real-time combat system never making allowances for the often overwhelming number of enemies on screen, meaning that the mostly frantic battles are incredibly difficult to handle, especially early in the game. Combat can be paused and you can change weapons or spells, but you can't stack spells up, nor can you target enemies while the action's paused.

Further compounding the issue are the companions who can join your party. There's no way to give them orders outside of telling them to follow you or to stay behind, so how they behave in battle is left largely to chance. Also, there are several annoying crash bugs, although a patch should be out by the time you

read this. Be sure to check the website for updates.

With so many things going against it already, *Lionheart* would appear to be facing an uphill struggle, however it's well equipped in several other areas.

FROM HERE TO INFINITY

Lionheart is a strange amalgamation of *Baldur's Gate II's* quest-heavy approach and *Fallout's* open-ended skill system. However, while *Lionheart* has neither the slick and convincing interface of the Infinity Engine games, nor the complexity of the *Fallout* series, it works on other levels by marrying simplicity with well-presented quests and convincing dialogue. At the outset of the game, you're given a single character to control (you can make your own custom character too if you so choose), and introduced to your spirit guide which is your source of magic in the game.

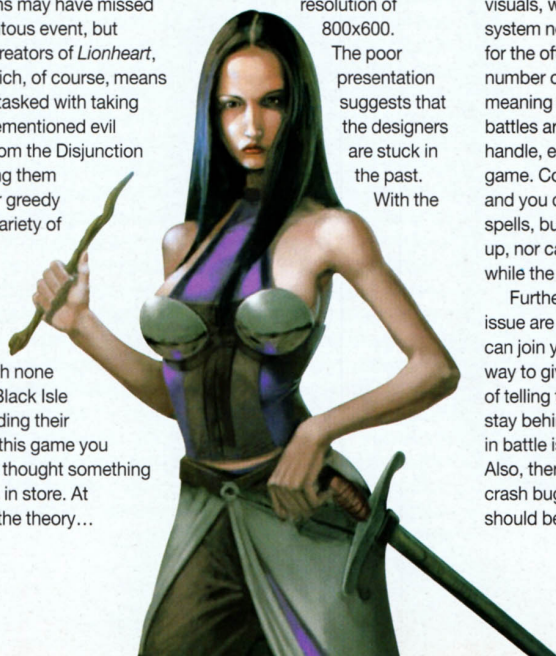
INPERSPECTIVE

BALDUR'S GATE II

Reviewed Issue 96, Score 85%
This is still the ultimate turn-based fantasy RPG. For sheer variety it has no equals in the genre.

PLANESCAPE TORMENT

Reviewed Issue 86, Score 87%
It's weird, it's twisted, it's brilliant. When the employees of Reflexive go to sleep at night, this is the game they dream of making.





Some great quests are found in the game's early stages.

Spell effects are functional, rather than spectacular.

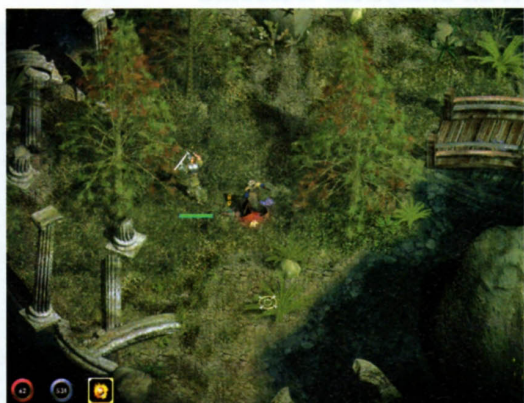


A friendly ghost needs your help to find his legs.



Your spirit guide is your source of endless waffle... sorry, I meant magic.

GAME OF TWO HALVES



It's not quite *Diablo*, but at times it comes close.

PROOF THAT WHAT GOES UP, MUST COME DOWN

The first half of *Lionheart* is spent almost exclusively on the completion of quests. The second half is spent almost entirely in *Diablo*-esque style combat. If you hate either of these playing styles with a passion, be warned that *Lionheart* will force both on you at different points in the game for lengthy periods. It's fair to say the game would have received a higher score if there was more of a balance between the two play-styles, mixing them up sporadically, rather than segregating them to separate halves of the game. It almost feels like two separate teams were working on each half, which mars what could have been an excellent RPG.

"*Lionheart's* strongest point is in the number and diversity of its quests"

The SPECIAL skill system first used in *Fallout* is used here too, giving you the same kind of flexibility of character customisation as in that legendary series. And while this system has been simplified for *Lionheart*, the skills and spells are very clearly presented, making leveling up and skill point allocation a joy to behold. The system falls somewhere between *Fallout* and *Diablo*, if you can imagine such a thing.

Lionheart's strongest point however is in the number and diversity of its quests. In the starting town of Barcelona, you'll instantly find a multitude of these, with much of the first half of

the game being spent here. This also proves to be *Lionheart's* best part, since there is a distinct lack of quests later on when it turns into a combat-heavy dungeon romp in the lead-up to the finale.

Ultimately, whether or not *Lionheart* proves to your liking will depend very much on your expectations.

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

In honesty, the Black Isle endorsement of *Lionheart* is probably the worst thing that could have happened to it as it's not nearly as deep or polished as the Black Isle classics. Despite this, it's still a fairly enjoyable game. If you can see past the dated presentation

and the somewhat awkward and badly realised combat engine, you'll find *Lionheart* to be an undemanding and enjoyable experience. If, however, you insist on nothing but the best and you want another *BGII* or *Planescape Torment*, do yourself a favour and give this a miss. [E]

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Tons of quests in the first half of the game
- ✓ Well-written dialogue
- ✓ Open-ended skill system
- ✗ Dated graphics and presentation
- ✗ Pointless companions
- ✗ No 'true' turn-based option

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RPG-lite that entertains but rarely thrills





Even two years on, the AI is exceptional.



The warthogs are a little floaty and flip too readily.



The only good Covenant is a dead one.



Squad mates provide the illusion of teamwork, similar to *Medal Of Honor*.



The alien weapons have a nicely otherworldly feel to them.

HALO: COMBAT EVOLVED

£34.99 | Pub: Microsoft | Dev: Bungie/Gearbox | ETA: Out Now | www.microsoft.com/games/halo

REQUIRES Pill 933, 128MB RAM and 32MB 3D card DESIRES P4 2GHz, 256MB RAM and 128MB 3D card

The game Xbox stole from us finally comes home. **Mark Hill** gives it an analytical welcome

INPERSPECTIVE

MACE GRIFFIN BOUNTY HUNTER

Reviewed Issue 135, Score 76%
If you want a varied shooter with a bit of space shooting thrown in, this recent console hit is worth a bash.

PLANETSIDE

Reviewed Issue 131, Score 82%
Another shooter with vehicles and large-scale action, but online only.



The music, sound effects and voice acting are all excellent.





The Covenant Elite get a real rage-on when you shoot them.



Ghost ships are a joy to control.



A bit of circle-strafing works wonders.



Active camouflage gives you a stealthy edge.

THERE IS A distinct smell in the air, of damp earth and electricity charges, of anxiety, excitement and anticipation. The calm before the proverbial storm. There's been a dearth of great games this year (if you want to be harsh, this century), particularly in shooters. I'm not talking about good games, I'm talking about true greatness, about the kind of experience that stays with you forever, and which is so depressingly rare.

But now we're on the cusp of what should be a new era. We're about to be shaken out of our tired routines and undemanding complacency. The leap is nearly here. I'm talking *Half-Life 2* and *Deus Ex: Invisible War*, of course. So why should we give a damn about a console game released way back in ancient 2001?

YOU'RE LATE

It's been called one of the best games of all time, on any platform, by too many people to ignore. It's also by rights a PC game, stolen under our very noses to give Microsoft's console some proper street credentials. And boy was that a good move by them. Because the truth is that while *Halo* was an exceptional console game, it

is merely a very good PC game; and one that loses its way so spectacularly towards the end that you may end up cutting it short and starting again.

You'd think being given the opportunity to play it with mouse and keyboard – which, no matter

in the future. But what it actually does is set it side by side with every other shooter on the PC.

And, while there is undoubtedly a multitude of truly great things about it, there is, in fact, very little that we haven't seen many times before.

team up with other marines. There's no stupid platform jumping, no ridiculous big bosses and no running around looking for keys to open doors.

It draws you in superbly – Bungie clearly following *Half-Life's* example in many ways.

“The outdoor levels are huge and spectacular, yet require amazingly short loading times”

how well the console controllers are implemented, is the only way to experience any first-person game – would make it a better title. After all, this was the reason I gave up on the Xbox version after a while, knowing the PC one would be along some time

In case you need some words of introduction to the whole thing, *Halo* takes place (for the most part) on a ring-shaped world full of aliens; the big draw being the massive landscapes, the use of vehicles and the large firefights where you

And once you're off the opening ship level and taste the fresh air of the planet, with large seas stretching out over the horizon and green hills rolling under a blue, starlit sky, you begin to see what all the fuss is about. There's something very

satisfying about seeing dots moving in the distance and being able to drive right up to them, until their big, ugly alien faces are right on the end of your gun.

The outdoor levels are huge and spectacular, yet require amazingly short loading times. Once you're there, you occasionally get a “Loading...” message, much as you did in *Half-Life*, but it's over in a blink and you barely notice it.

The graphics are not state of the art by a long stretch, especially the character models, but one of the first niggles we face is the system requirements. Turn down all the graphical options and you might get away

HALO EVERYBODY

AT LAST, HALO ONLINE

The online part of *Halo* is probably the most important in its PC incarnation and, while it's a bit of mixed bag, there's some good fun to be had here, and this is the best reason to own the game.

The only modes worth bothering with are the team ones, since Solo Deathmatch is like a less fun version of *Quake III: Team Arena*, until people get into vehicles, when it just becomes a bit of a mess.

Get a team behind you though, and driving while someone else controls the gun-turret or co-ordinating flying attacks turns out to be a blast. It's not in the same league as *Battlefield 1942* and doesn't provide the continuity of *PlanetSide*, but with plenty of options and some excellent maps this could tide you over until those *Half-Life 2* mods inevitably start taking over the world.



Death by the new flame-thrower in *Halo* multiplayer.



The Covenant have a range of silly Muppet voices – hardly the most terrifying of foes.

with the minimum spec, but even then the frame-rate is choppy. You need a grunting beast with one of the latest cards for real smoothness. Something you'd expect from *Doom 3* maybe, not *Halo*.

COMBAT UNEVOLVED

Superb though the open spaces might be, the levels do become a tad repetitive, and they're complemented by rather flat and unimaginative interiors in bases and ships.

But one of the biggest praises of the game was always the enemy AI. They run away



These bastards are tough to kill.

MISSED OPPORTUNITY



You get to ride plenty of vehicles in multiplayer. If only it was co-op.

TAKING SIDES

The most obvious missed opportunity has to be the chance of making a much bigger splash had it been released two years ago as a PC title. Besides that, I would have liked the vehicles to be much more integral to the experience, and the so-called twist when another race is introduced nearly ruins the whole thing.

However, as a PC game, the biggest missed opportunity is the lack of a co-operative mode, easily the most enjoyable thing on the console version. Still, Gearbox is making sure the modders get busy, so there's still hope.

when a grenade is thrown, the little ones get scared if you impress them, they hide behind objects, run at you when you're reloading, co-ordinate their attacks. It is, in other words, all well and wonderful. The problem we had is it was all put in the brains of rather faceless aliens, and the best AI is the one that makes you feel you're playing against human opponents. These look like aliens and

behave like aliens, and once you recognise their patterns, they're easy to predict and you soon get tired of them. The small grunts are particularly irritating, causing little damage and speaking squeaky cutesy English that doesn't exactly inspire awe or terror.

Now, you may want to skip this paragraph if you're obsessive about spoilers... but some way into the game another race of aliens is introduced, and the AI is thrown out the window. Suddenly, the orchestrated sophistication is forgotten and it's pure *Doom*-time. Very disappointing.

MOTORHEAD

By far the best part of the game is the vehicles, which, though they take some getting used to, are a pure joy. The Warthog jeeps bounce about while the gunman hangs on for dear life and whoops like a rodeo driver, and the tank is by far the most satisfying I've ever driven in a game. Sadly, there are not quite enough of them.

When they do appear, they provide a real tactical element, adding another option to what is already a very open approach to battle. Taking on a big fight with a hovercraft will be very different than going in with a rocket launcher or a sniper rifle. And, since you can only ever carry two weapons at one time, this tactical side is present throughout.

HALO GOODBYE

Saving is restricted to checkpoints, but you can save as many as you like (whereas you had a limit on the Xbox), and they appear so often that it's never really an issue. One console hang-up that's noticeable though is the massive crosshair, not exactly conducive to sharpshooting, and rarely providing you with a sense of skill when hitting an enemy.

At least the real reason for its PC incarnation, the online mode,



Nothing like a nice quiet day at the beach.

SECOND OPINION

JAMIE SEFTON

Halo is undoubtedly one of the best games I've ever played. On its Xbox release two years ago, Bungie's futuristic FPS re-defined many aspects of the genre, with innovative shield-regeneration for the player character, the restriction of carrying only two weapons at once, superb NPC and enemy AI and the groundbreaking physics engine that threw ragdoll bodies around and made driving the ground and air-based vehicles so satisfying. Single-player was awesome but the multiplayer mode was utterly fantastic – even packed in around a TV with four friends squinting at the split-screen action.

Gearbox has done a perfect conversion of the single-player game – now complete with mouse/keyboard control instead of the Xbox's burger-sized pad – but it's the multiplayer that makes *Halo* on PC such a lip-smacking proposition. With the addition of new maps, vehicles and weapons, *Halo* comes into its own online or over a LAN.

The only downers from me: the pace is somewhat slower than the likes of *Quake III* or *Unreal Tournament 2004*, plus the eagerly-awaited sequel *Halo 2* is out on Xbox in the next few months. But, if you've never played *Halo* before – buy it. Trust me, you won't be disappointed.

is very playable and provides as much vehicle-use as you could want. Just don't expect *Halo* to live up to the hype. And with those PC heavyweights just around the corner and *Halo 2* scheduled for spring next year on Xbox, this could soon become little more than an also-ran. Even if it is a very good one. [A]

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Massive levels
- ✓ Fantastic vehicles
- ✓ Good AI requiring tactics to beat
- ✓ Fun online
- ✗ High spec requirements
- ✗ Repetitive levels

84

Still great after two years, but not that great

Slam cross-courts — cross-country.
 Drop shots just over the equator.
 It's a game of tough love.



Microsoft
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XIII

■ £34.99 | Pub: Ubisoft | Dev: Ubisoft |
ETA: October 31 | www.xiii-thegame.com

REQUIRES PIII 700, 128MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card
DESIRES PIII 1GHz and 256MB RAM should do it

Will Porter wanders into a comic book that's got a bit more death, guts and murder than his weekly copy of *Dandy*

THIRTEEN. The Baker's Dozen. Unlucky for some, but still a regular fixture at bingo. It's certainly unlucky for Steve Rowland, because he's been washed up on a beach with a distinct lack of memory, a plethora of bodies piling up around him and people wearing spectacles pointing at him and claiming that he's assassinated the President. Worst of all, he's suffering from a rare skin condition that makes him look like he's fresh from the pages of a slinky, ultra-violent Belgian comic book. Still, worse things happen at sea, eh?

INPERSPECTIVE

NO ONE LIVES FOREVER 2
Reviewed Issue 122, Score 93%
The comic-book feel is used to good effect in this fantastic spyfest.

DREDD VS DEATH
Reviewed Issue 134, Score 78%
Another comic-turned-shooter, but with a lot less flair and elegance.

As you can see, *XIII* looks the business. The cel-shading looks fantastic and there are pointers everywhere to remind you that you're in a comic-book; a lot like Ang Lee's ho-hum *Hulk* blockbuster. When you fire a dart into someone's neck you get three comic book frames of the poor fella getting pierced at the top of your screen along with a dramatic written scream

Can't we just sit down and talk about this like civilised people?



Take me hostage!

RPGs and choppers: great combo.

of "Arghhhhhh!" When you shoot someone off a cliff they tumble to the firmament with a streaming exclamation of "Nooooooo!" behind them. When a grunt fires a rocket at you, the actual frame of the scene you're in jangles all over your monitor.

So is it a simple gimmick or an evolutionary innovation? Well, it's a gimmick

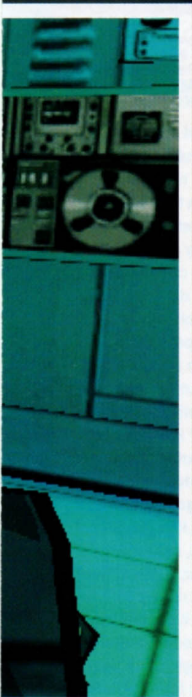


"Who loves ya, baby?"

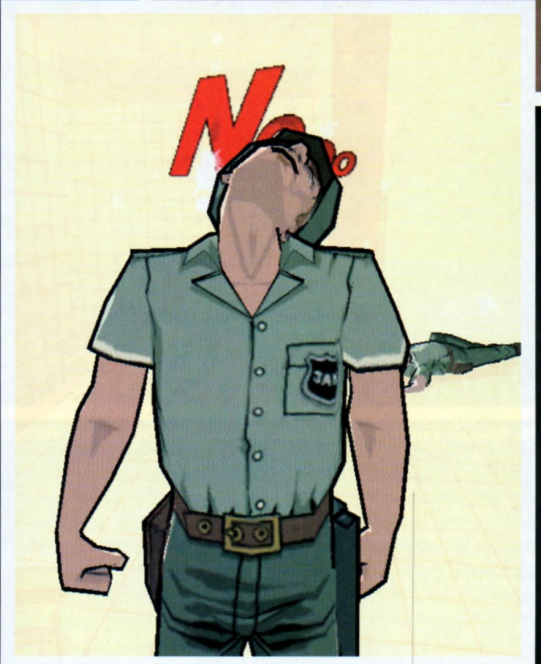
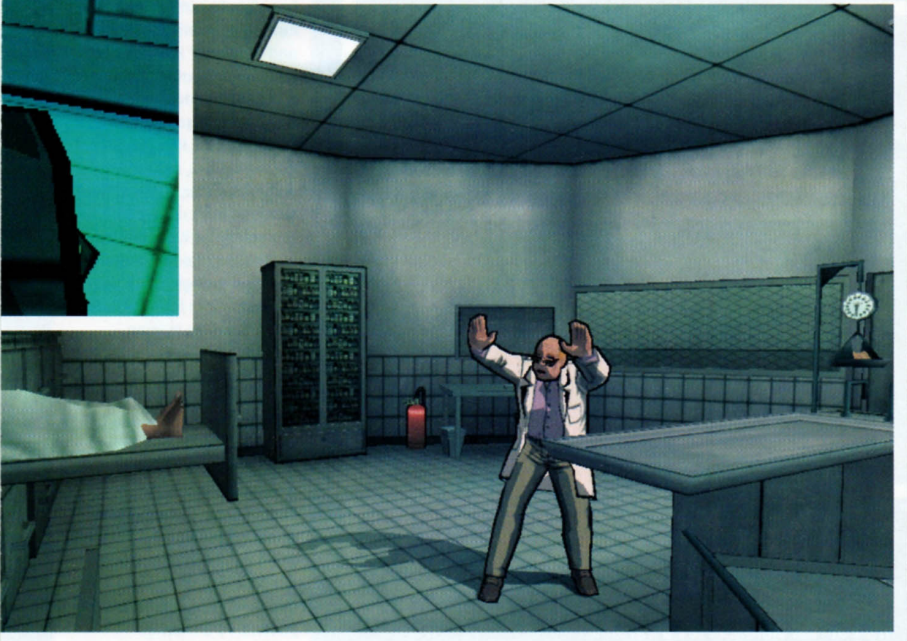
obviously, and it's one already perfected in the '80s *Grange Hill* title sequence, but it's still entirely worthwhile. The comic book stylings get intrusive on occasion, but everything else works so well that after a while you simply don't notice the clever animation or the words plastered over the screen during someone's death throes.

You get so used to it that if you were to actually leave the house to buy a packet of tic tacs from the newsagents, you'd be wondering why the word 'Ching!' failed to appear over the till in giant orange letters. So the gimmick doesn't last, or rather it just becomes the norm.

The visual style and flair of *XIII* may be its selling point, but what the screenshots fail to show is the sheer ingenuity of the way in which it tells its conspiracy-laden story. The tale



Decomposing corpses in canyons can be marvellous habitats for earthworms and field mice.



"Take what you want! But leave me my collection of dead people!"

Barney's trip to the chiropractor proved less than successful.

itself isn't an original one, it's the plot of *The Bourne Identity* with cel-shaded knobs on: amnesia, trained killer, mysterious tattoo, key to a secret bank vault. But *XIII*

hazy. You stagger to your feet and the lifeguard points in the direction of her car and you sway towards it, making painfully slow progress across the sand. Then, out of nowhere,

You're on a ship and men are chasing you. You get shot and plunge into the water. Then, as suddenly as it appeared, the flashback is gone and you're back on the beach. You see the bright blue sky, and then the red of the lifeguard's lovely bum as your viewpoint tumbles to the ground on the sandy beach.

Throughout the game, this type of narrative tomfoolery actively engages you, making you slump back in your chair regularly and think stuff like, "Hang on a minute. I can trust him, but he thinks I'm someone else. Maybe he's hiding

something because he knows the truth. Or maybe not..."

You're drip-fed nuggets of information wherever you go, from the conversation of NPC passers-by to the occasional document you pick up and peruse. The game never tells you exactly what is going on or who you can trust until it really has to. Most of the thinking is up to you.

The joy of *XIII* is that it continually surprises you with

neat touches, and these little gimmicks are what keep you hooked. You can take someone hostage, for example, and the police will back off and hold their fire while you wave a pistol menacingly at the poor soul you've just nabbed. Meanwhile, you can knock out civilians and security guards with chairs, trays, bottles and a variety of other household items should you need a non-lethal approach to problem solving.

These little teases of gameplay genius aren't flogged to death, they only appear once in a while, and it means that variety is always top of the agenda. Even smaller stuff, like the faint shell-shock effect and deafness you get when a rocket explodes nearby, urges you deeper and deeper into the game. *XIII* is a magpie of games and films, and it isn't ashamed of it. It steals the good bits from everything else

doesn't simply use the plot as a device to bookend otherwise unrelated missions, in the way that a game like *Soldier Of Fortune* might, but instead uses the game engine to tell an extremely good story. Cut-scenes are kept to a minimum and you are made to think about what's going on without it being chalked up in giant letters and underlined in red: this is the *Half-Life* mode of story-telling.

Take the opening scenes, for example; you wake up on the beach with a lifeguard standing over you (a female lifeguard in a red swimsuit with big hooters obviously). Your health is at 50, the graphics are blurred and

you have a flashback in which you remain in complete FPS control yet everything is grey, clouded and tinged with an unreal haze of brightness.

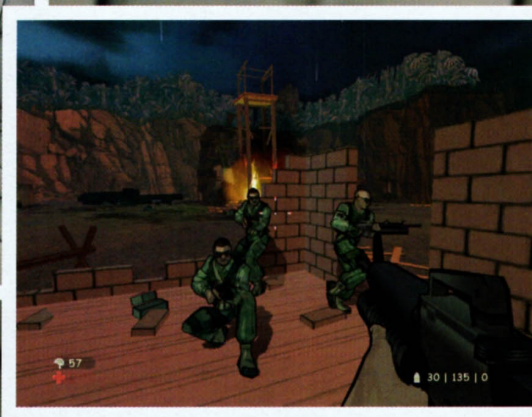
PISS OFF SPOOKY!

AGENT MULDER, BATMAN AND A LADY RAPPER JOIN FORCES

The worst thing about *XIII* is David Duchovny, who voices your character with less enthusiasm than he did back when he read grotty letters about architects shagging strippers to his dog in *The Red Shoe Diaries*. Rapper Eve fares a lot better as Jones, your sidekick, while (rejoice!) Adam 'Sixties Batman' West kicks ass as your trustworthy general.



Rapper Eve voices gun-toting tottie.



SECOND OPINION
MARTIN KORDA

Look at it. Just look at it. It's got to be rubbish right? Well, actually, no, it doesn't. And it's not. In fact, *XIII* is a pretty enjoyable shooter that admirably manages to hang on to its comic book roots without deteriorating into cheddar cheese.

While the presentation is slicker than an oil spill, I can't help but feel that lurking beneath the 'Bams' and 'Kapows' is a pretty standard shooter. OK, so the plot is presented in a novel way, but things that really count for me, like the AI and weapons, are fairly unspectacular, while killing enemies isn't nearly as rewarding as it should be.

There are some superb touches though, such as taking people hostage and using them as human shields, excellent gadgets and the endearing ability to knock enemies out by introducing their heads to wooden chairs.

XIII is by no means the best shooter I've ever played, but while the graphics take some getting used to, it's different and entertaining enough to deserve a look in an already packed FPS market.

"Mr Woods! You're staying there till you've finished your editorial!"

and makes one gigantic mother of a 'good bit'. It has the grappling hook from *Zelda*, the wire-sliding from *Splinter Cell*, the body-hiding of *Thief* and the combined plots of *JFK*, *Face/Off* and *The Bourne Identity*. If the bit where you're in the ducts of an icebound military base,

sitting above the cell of your kidnapped commander and listening to the conversations beneath you doesn't scream 'This is *Metal Gear Solid!*' at you then... well... you've obviously never played *Metal Gear Solid*.

It's not real violence. It's a cartoon!

So it steals, it steals in abundance, but it's good enough to get away with it; any game that essentially recreates Sarah Connor's escape from the Asylum in *T2* is fine by me.

There are problems though, and they're fairly big ones, with the word "Arghhhh!" hovering above them in big orange letters. The AI is 'someone just shot my best friend in the head but I'll pretend not to notice' bad. Some of the baddies are so inept that a gunshot 20 metres away won't even make them flinch, and for a game that relies on a lot of stealth this is not a good thing.

Baddies do pick up the ammo from dead bodies when they run out, but they never feel half as real as they should. The stealth works most of the time, but it errs more on the side of frustration than excitement. In a wide open space the hazy AI means that it's all too easy to just run around and shoot everyone before they hit an alarm, but in an enclosed space (like the

submarine in which you find yourself trapped) your enemies are liable to slam an alert buzzer if you nudge a desk 50 metres behind them. It's confusing and it's frustrating, but I suppose it's also why God created the quicksave button.

YOU'RE NICE & PRETTY
XIII is stylish, clever and beautifully put together. Some

will say that behind the gloss and the plot-twists the game itself is relatively shallow, but the gloss is so good that it doesn't really matter: it's like having sex with Cameron Diaz and then complaining that she didn't have anything intelligent to say about the works of Plato.

If you like realism, seriousness and existential thinking then you might be better served elsewhere; if you want a game that makes you smile and a good story well-told then *XIII* is your lucky number. **PCZ**

MISSED OPPORTUNITY



In 1066, Harold had started a worrying trend.

BATTLE OF SKILLS

XIII has an abortive stab at character development with skills that you unlock as the game progresses, but only ever tells you you've got them on the menu screens. It's really quite bizarre. The best of them allows you to see the 'tap tap tap' of nearby enemy footsteps, but the rest are anodyne things like breathing underwater for longer. You can't help but feel as if they gave up on this idea halfway through development but never bothered to get rid of it. If they had tightened it up it would have undoubtedly been a better game.



PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Looks awful purdy
- ✓ Innovative and variable gameplay
- ✓ Great story-telling
- ✗ Some dodgy AI
- ✗ The (un)charismatic Mr Duchovny

83

Slick and stylish. Violence is beautiful

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A TAKE-TWO COMPANY



He must have seen a cockroach on the floor or something.



Crates? In an FPS? Who would have thought it...



First one to blink loses an arm.

MEDAL OF HONOR: ALLIED ASSAULT BREAKTHROUGH

■ £19.99 | Pub: EA | Dev: EA Los Angeles/TKO Software | ETA: September 26 | www.mohaa.ea.com

REQUIRES Pill 450, 128MB RAM and a 16MB 3D card DESIRES Pill 800, 256MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card

Can EA reheat the *Medal Of Honor soufflé*? asks Mark Hill

MEDAL OF Honor was always a fantastic game. In fact, almost two years after its release, it's still sitting proudly at the top of the shooter category in our PC ZONE A-List (page 160). Its atmosphere was, and still is, unparalleled, and in the magnificent beach landing mission, it boasted arguably the best level yet seen in a first-person shooter, stunningly capturing the visceral feel of real-life warfare in a way no other game had managed.

The only real criticisms that could be levelled at the game was that it had a fair amount of visible spawning and the fact that enemy soldiers seemed to not possess AI so much as robotic homing eyes, which allowed them to see through thick fog, trees and even walls.

PADDING

The game's first expansion pack, *Spearhead*, didn't quite stack up to the same levels of excellence, and

although it had plenty of merit, it was also padded out with a lot of relatively average levels – a trait for which add-on packs are notorious.

And, sure enough, what we get with *Breakthrough* is a load of not-so-memorable missions that do nothing to improve on the awesome original and mostly retread old ground.

It's a very good shooter, of course. The question is: wouldn't you prefer to play *Medal Of Honor* again,

using savegames to skip the boring parts, rather than fork out 20 quid for a lesser experience?

However, *Breakthrough* starts off intriguingly enough, with the first of 11 single-player missions taking place in a chaotic desert level. While the novelty of parading around blindly in a sandstorm wears off fairly quickly, the sense of a big war with loads of people involved – and lots of 'em dying – going on around

FULL VERSION OF MEDAL OF HONOR: ALLIED ASSAULT REQUIRED

you is as present and as horrifying as ever. There's gunfire, blood-curdling screams, shells exploding with limb-tearing force and orders being shouted.

MEDAL OF DOOM

But of course, this is not a realistic war recreation and you're soon facing legions of Nazis alone in true Rambo-style. After the *Call Of Duty* demo doing such a good job of making you feel part of a team, it's a bit disappointing to go back to the usual FPS "one man against the world" motif. In later levels especially, it really does descend into *Doom*-like

INPERSPECTIVE

MEDAL OF HONOR: ALLIED ASSAULT – SPEARHEAD

Reviewed Issue 123, Score 82%
The first expansion pack and yet more of the same. We still think you should stick with replaying the best levels of the original though.

BATTLEFIELD 1942

Reviewed Issue 121, Score 78%
AI is nonexistent in single-player, but the multiplayer mode still provides the finest WWII action you can find on the PC.



Who goes there? Friend or foe?



The Nazi field-hopping finals soon turned ugly.



There aren't enough opportunities to fight alongside teammates.

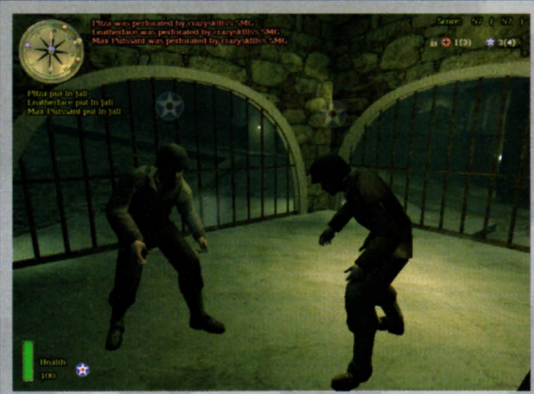


Chafing claims another victim.



Not as good as *Allied Assault*, but still fun.

BREAKOUT



Prison wrestling. Not a pretty sight.

NEW MULTIPLAYER ANTICS

Arguably the best reason to splash out on this add-on is the online mode Liberation, which is essentially *Medal Of Honor's* take on one of our favourite *Quake III* mods, Jailbreak. Players killed are put in jail and must wait for their teammates to rescue them – the first team to get all of the opposition in jail wins. It makes a nice change but it's hardly groundbreaking and is nowhere near as suited to *MOH's* slower style of play as it is to the lightning-quick *Quake III*. Another multiplayer addition is the introduction of a minesweeper class. You get to use one during the single-player campaign and it's even duller than it sounds. In fact the screenshot we took of it was so boring we refused to print it.

mindlessness, as you are forced to litter the screen with hundreds of dead enemies.

Before that there are some good settings to visit, though never anything to compare with the original's standout moments. There's a great scene in Italy where you have to cross a Venice-type river while bullets and bombs drop around the spectacular architecture. Then there's the time aboard a battleship, when the bomb you've planted goes off before you can leave and you have to shoot your way out of the capsized ship, floors acting as walls and fire coming from all sorts of disorienting angles.

"It descends into Doom-like mindlessness, as you are forced to litter the screen with dead enemies"

Other moments, however, are memorable for all the wrong reasons. In one level you have to take out wave after wave of tanks from the first floor of a building using a mortar, trying to calculate the trajectories of the shells as speedily as

possible, and dying many, many times in the process. It's the opposite of fun.

A PLAGUE OF CHEATS

There are some excellent in-game cut-scenes in the best *Half-Life* style, in which you'll see lots of things going on around you, such as the wounded being carried about, synchronised explosions and the like. And it's great to hear Italian voices for a change when you're fighting Mussolini's fascists.

But it all too often feels like a straight line to the objective, killing everything that moves and swearing at the old dirty (and much more noticeable)

tricks the game uses to make things more difficult. The AI is as unnatural and X-ray sighted as ever. Enemies still appear out of nowhere and sometimes keep respawning until you've



activated the next script. You don't always get the right weapon for the job and ammo can become so scarce as to be ridiculous.

But most annoying of all is the sheer number of enemies in later levels that just keep coming and coming. It's less about skill than about stamina at this stage. Especially since you get another of the overused mounted machine guns with which to pick them off.

At least you needn't worry about it being too short. It goes on for a fair while, and you'll find endless days of shooting mayhem

are to be had, even if you're a *Medal Of Honor* veteran.

With *Pacific Assault* looking like the step toward *Medal Of Honor* sorely needs, and the *Call Of Duty* demo already proving that the *MOH* developers who formed Infinity Ward have made considerable progress, *Breakthrough* feels like a bit of a let down, and a bit dated to boot. If you do take a punt on *Breakthrough*, expect to be vaguely entertained and fairly challenged. Just don't expect to feel the kind of thrill you felt when you played the magnificent original. [C]

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Still some great FPS action
- ✓ Authentic Brits and Italians introduced
- ✓ Great in multiplayer
- ✗ Seen it all before
- ✗ Mechanics too transparent
- ✗ Cheating AI

77

Not the breakthrough we were expecting

TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2004

£34.99 | Pub: EA Sports | Dev: Headgate Studios |
ETA: September 26 | www.easports.com/games/tigerwoods2004

REQUIRES PIII 333, 128MB RAM and a 16MB 3D card
DESIRES P4 2GHz, 256 MB RAM, 64MB 3D card and an ADSL Internet connection for online play

No, it wasn't Keith Pullin whacking golf balls at David Blaine in his Perspex box, but he's willing to give it a shot after practising on this

TIGER WOODS is currently experiencing a bit of a dip in form. The former king of the swingers looks as capable of winning a golf tournament as Tim Henman is of winning Wimbledon. On the other hand Electronic Arts' yearly tributes to the woody one have been steadily improving ever since Headgate Studios took over development in 2001. And the latest offering, *Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004*, continues the trend in style.

TOUCH THE SKY

Unsurprisingly, most of the advances are mandatory graphical and commentary updates. From tee to green, all 18 courses bristle with vibrancy;

birds fly overhead, twigs and leaves drop from swaying trees and random crud blows along the fairways. Even the flagpoles bend in the breeze.

Then there are the waves crashing against the cliffs at Pebble Beach, the early morning mist creeping through the trees at Sahalee, and the traditional horizontal rain at St Andrews. In

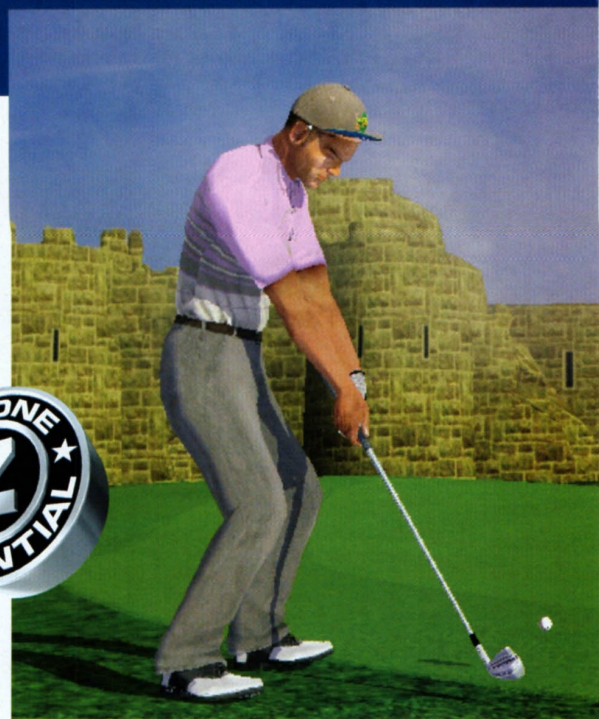
REAL MEAT

Where *TW2004* really outclasses its predecessors in terms of actual gameplay is in the character generator and career mode. Starting out as a novice, you work your way through five tours to eventually reach the master tour, where you take on the likes of Tiger, Colin, Jesper and dozens of other PGA and

"The real challenge comes when you play in a hurricane, preferably blindfolded"

fact, take *TW2003*, increase the sheen by ten per cent and voila – time for EA to count its beans...

European tour professionals. When you first embark on your career you can barely swing



No windmills? No water-slides? This place is rubbish...

a club. As you progress you enter tournaments, take lessons and soon end up knowing the difference between a chip and a pitch, and punch and a putt (try saying that after a few pints in the clubhouse) and, more importantly, how and when to employ them effectively.

The tournaments themselves come

in two different flavours – World Tour and well... Tournaments. The World Tour events consist of mini-matches like longest drive or closest to the pin through to standard 18, 36 or even 72 hole events. The idea here is to gain experience so

you can enter a Tournament against computer opponents in which you can win money



Tiger Woods attempts to strangle himself in frustration.

INPERSPECTIVE

LINKS 2003

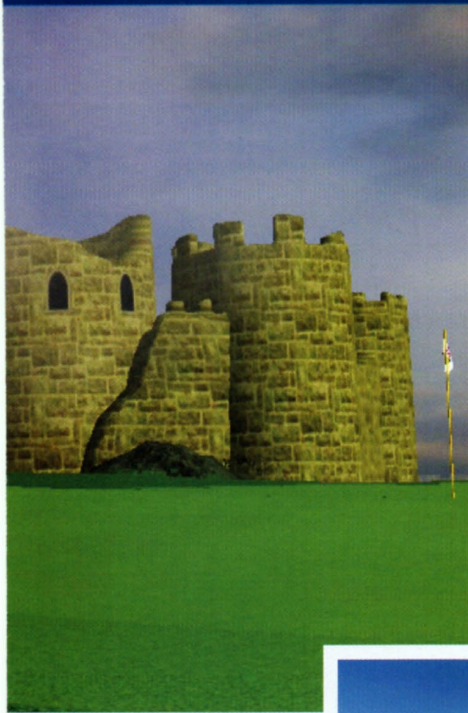
Reviewed Issue 123, Score 82%
If you want a simulation instead of an arcade game, this one's for you.

TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2003

Reviewed Issue 124, Score 81%
TW2004 improves on last year's offering in most ways – but not hugely. It's no surprise really, is it? It's what EA does best. Bless 'em.



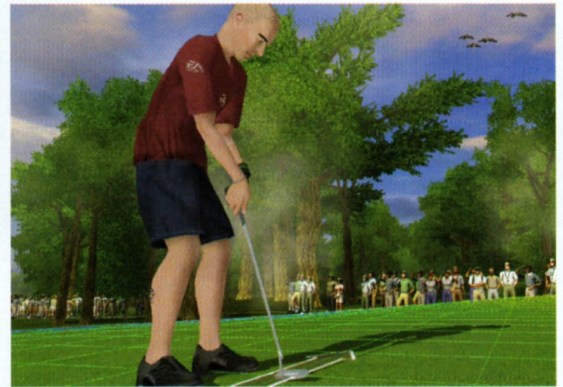
That's it, now lift your head, spread your legs and don't forget to wiggle.



Even the spectators are modelled in 3D.



The courses really are devastatingly beautiful.



Some joker's only gone and drawn a chessboard on the green.

and purchase Attribute Points. These can then be allocated to certain skills, so you can customise your playing style. As you improve, you graduate through the tours, learning new skills (like power shots and spin shots) and earning more cash so you can further hone your technique and style.

ARCADE FRENZY

The great thing about all this is it takes the emphasis of the game away from simply wandering around a field whacking a small ball to and fro, and instead allows quicker games with more achievable short-term goals. Setting aside an hour and a half for a round is not necessary – some mini-shootouts last no

more than five minutes. On one hand this is great, on the other it means *TW2004* has exactly the same problem as *TW2003*: it's just too arcadey.

And this is where some critics may round on it. We mentioned

earlier that the *TW* series has gradually improved over the years. It's noticeable that this fine-tuning of playability has come at the direct expense of technical realism.

SCHWING

It's fair to say that TrueSwing (a pioneering Headgate invention first seen in *PGA 2000* that lets you control your club by moving it with your mouse) has now become the standard control method for all golf games and has undoubtedly made the actual feel of hitting the ball more realistic, but at what expense?

An experienced TrueSwinger can hit the ball perfectly virtually

every time. Sometimes it feels like the computer is guiding the ball along a wire towards the hole for you. The only real challenge comes when you play in 'Simulation' mode on the expert setting, in a hurricane, preferably blindfolded – you might start notching up a few bogeys.

The point is *TW2004* is a fantastic game and great fun to play for hours and hours on end. And yet somehow you can't help feeling that as the *TW* series

progresses it's being made easier for a wider audience while alienating real golfers. Sure, it's preferable to *Links 2003* as entertainment goes, yet Microsoft's offering is still the best simulation of golf out there.

The question you have to ask yourself then is this: Do I want to be entertained or do I want to be challenged? Make your mind up about that and you've made your mind up about which game to buy. **PCZ**

FACE THE FACTS

FRANKENGOLFER HITS THE FAIRWAYS...

TW2004 is the first EA Sports product to offer the 'Game Face' character generator. This nifty (and highly amusing) piece of kit allows you to conjure up golfers in your own image or create new ones. It's not just the face you can work on either, entire bodies can be hewn from silicon to create your ideal golf partner, and you don't have to rob graves to do it. However, it's a shame that the shape of your golfer doesn't directly relate to the type of player they are. It would have been nice to have, say, a golfer with plenty of upper body mass (like Korda) being able to hit the ball further than a wimpy player (like me). An idea for 2005 maybe?



Making your own golfer is much more fun than it sounds.



Surely a pink and lime-green combo would be more authentic?

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Immersive career mode
- ✓ Courses feel 'alive'
- ✓ Superb 'game face' generator
- ✓ Great choice of tournaments
- ✓ Easy to get into
- ✗ Still too arcadey
- ✗ Too expensive for what it is

81

Still spectacular but much of the same

After being sacked from *PlanetSide*, Rodney eked out a living as an evil henchman.

CHROME

■ £34.99 | Pub: Gathering | Dev: Techland Software |
ETA: September 19 | www.chromethegame.com

REQUIRES PIII 900, 256MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card

DESIRES P4 1.5GB, 512MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

"Oh baby, you're so *Deus-Ex*." Anthony Holden gets down to business with a plagiaristic little number from Poland

INPERSPECTIVE

DEUS EX

Reviewed Issue 93, Score 94%
Chrome owes much to this classic RPG-shooter. If you like the sound of cybernetics and gunplay, but with a cracking story and open-ended game design, go straight to the source.

SOLDIER OF FORTUNE II

Reviewed Issue 118, Score 92%
If token RPG elements in a shooter leave you cold, and you'd rather just have lots of brutal firearms to play with, we strongly urge you to track down this magnificent gorefest.

TO STEAL a poignant moment from *Jackass: The Movie*, it's always worse when your parents say: "I'm not angry with you, I'm just disappointed." It's a crushing moment, sure to scar a young mind for life, and not something I ever thought I'd find myself repeating. And yet, having spent the last week playing Polish first-person shooter *Chrome*, I now have some inkling of what drives parents to such ends. *Chrome* hasn't just let us down – it's let itself down.

We're not going to yell at it or lock it under the stairs with no dinner, we're just going to slowly shake our heads and mutter words of deep dismay: "All that potential, gone to waste... what did we ever do to deserve this?"

To be fair, *Chrome* hasn't shoved a toy car up its arse and headed for the x-ray clinic, but it has committed some equally grievous acts of stupidity, ruining what might otherwise have been a splendid free-roaming shoot 'em up.

CHROME ON THE RANGE

Of course, we always knew *Chrome* was going to be a bit B-grade. It's from an obscure Polish developer, based on a proprietary rendering solution built to serve multiple titles in multiple genres. It's defiantly low-budget stuff, with production values worthy of a Troma film, a storyline knocked up on the back of a greasy serviette and voice acting to make Keanu Reeves cringe.

However, there was always one thing that threatened to lift

Chrome out of the murk of plagiarised shooters, and that was its wide-open outdoor environments. Not only huge, the game levels are frequently breathtaking, the forests alone setting new standards for dense and realistic foliage. Twinned with a powerful sniper rifle, the broad countryside offers a joyful freewheeling killzone, allowing you to stalk your opponents like so many hogs and pluck their lives away from exceptional distances. Strangely, however, this type of



That's one hell of a tyre pressure gauge you've got there.



Try as you might, you can't shoot down the damned buildings.

action only comes in fits and starts, and is largely overshadowed by some truly miserable chunks of turgid corridor bashing.

Opening with an introductory/training level on the planet Zorg, the game introduces you as Bolt Logan, a rugged space mercenary in the Han Solo mould. After a tour through the game's various hybrid quirks – searching bodies for items, managing a limited inventory, plotting destinations on an electronic map – the game makes its first huge error by setting the bulk of the first level indoors.

Immediately, you're into hackneyed room-clearing territory. Move through a series of identical rooms full of static enemies, hack security systems with a simple 'Memory'-style mini-game, and quick-save repeatedly to avoid the pain of repeating even a single step of the journey. It's wretched stuff, but incredibly it's a mistake that recurs throughout the game.

THICKIES

The real problem, other than the drab interiors and uninspired design, is the diabolical AI. Harking back to a more

innocent age, the enemies in *Chrome* are stupider than backyard wrestlers. The best you can hope for is that they'll run towards you in zigzag fashion, but only when you're outdoors. Inside, they might, if you're lucky, walk up and down a straight line, or perhaps duck (completely randomly of course), but generally they're rooted to the spot and dumber than rocks.

The game attempts to compensate for this in several ways. Firstly, by making the enemies ridiculously tough. As soon as you enter their field of awareness – vast for enemy snipers – they'll rain gunfire at

you, with unerring accuracy. Secondly, by emphasising sniping and ranged combat, although this is really just a lucky side effect of the large outdoor environments.

What results is a game that's both extraordinarily difficult and unnecessarily punishing. There's little more infuriating than being killed repeatedly by enemies that are stupid yet inordinately deadly. No matter what the packaging says, cranking up enemy accuracy and health does not make *Chrome* a tactical shooter, not by any stretch of the imagination. What's more, the levels are long, complicated



You can't deny it's pretty.

SCAMMERS

DON'T BE FOOLED – THEY REALLY ARE THAT DUMB

Like a monkey smoking a cigar, the game's primitive AI will occasionally try to dupe you into thinking it's more evolved than it is, with hilarious results. Throw a grenade anywhere in the vicinity of an enemy and he'll yell "Grenade!", at which point you'll back off and find cover, naturally expecting him to hurl the offending pineapple back at you. However, after a few times, you'll realise such prudence is unnecessary – a peek around the corner will reveal the enemies doing their best statue impression as the hand-grenade fragments into their testicles.

They have a few other phrases they like to bandy about – "enemy hit", "I'm wounded" and so on – but it's really just noise. It might be designed to give the impression there's some team communication going on with the AI, but quite clearly there's not.



"Ooh, a grenade. Maybe if I just turn my back it'll go away."

and arduous, often leaving you guessing how to proceed and where to find the one elusive security card that will open the door to the next area. Even the fun of sniping begins to wear thin after a while...

BIONIC BANDIT

Other problems are more difficult to put a finger on. On the one hand, *Chrome* tries to do too much, attempting to be both a tactical shooter and a free-roaming, outdoor *Deus Ex*. Ideas cribbed from ION Storm's

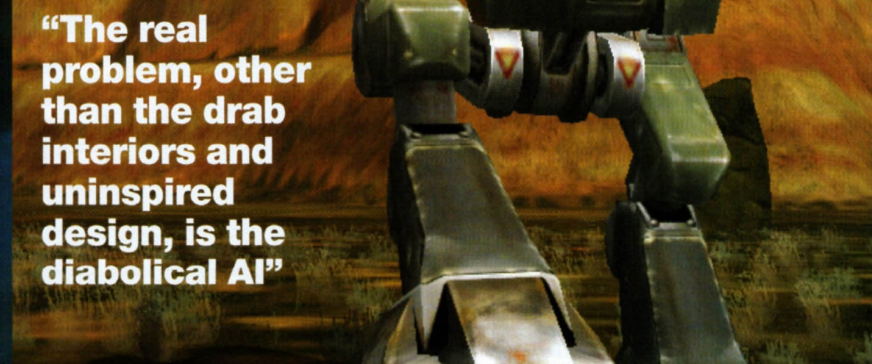
masterpiece include cybernetic implants, an RPG-style inventory, multiple-choice endings and a dense conspiracy-laden storyline.

(Once again the parent in us waggles an accusatory finger: "If *Deus Ex* jumped off a bridge would you do it too?") Unfortunately, all these things are implemented in clunky inelegant fashion.

Take the cyber-abilities. Several of the eight skills obtained throughout the game are either useless or next to useless, and come into



In the future, all dinosaurs will have beards.



"The real problem, other than the drab interiors and uninspired design, is the diabolical AI"

The boss battles are low points in a game with no shortage of low points.



An early pic from *Bonanza: The FPS*.



Unbelievably, your walker can't shoot someone at that angle.



Satan's own ladders...

SECOND OPINION
DAVE WOODS

Like Ant I had high hopes for *Chrome* that were mercilessly dashed on the rocks of incompetence – almost every feature that could have made the game great only serves to highlight the flaws. Like the vehicles that just don't handle well enough to be included. And the limited inventory that means you can only carry one weapon of note. AI? Come on, don't even pretend you put any in. Instant deaths, when you haven't even had time to register from where you're being fired-on is not, I repeat not, fun. And in a few hours of play I've made a list of other problems that could easily have been fixed. *Chrome* had potential, and there's nothing I want more than an unknown shooter to rise from nothing and relax the stranglehold the big boys have got on the genre. Unlike other B-grade shooters, *Chrome* tried to be different and ultimately ended up paying the price.

forgive the crap script, the appalling voice acting, the long load times, the derivative ideas, the awful AI, the terrible indoor sections – maybe even the ladders. As it's not, we can only advise you to wait for *Far Cry*, which looks set to have all the best features of *Chrome* and more. Sorry *Chrome*, but it hurts me more than it hurts you. [C]

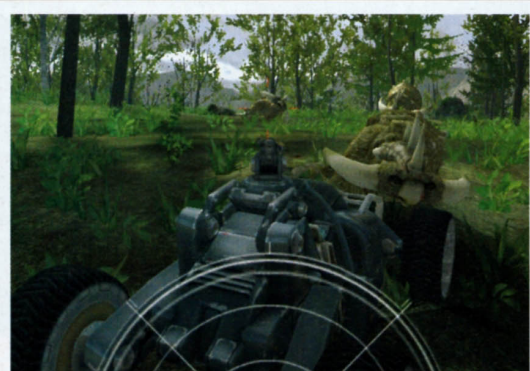
PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Huge, free-rambling environments are a sniper's paradise
- ✓ Good variety of action with vehicles and cyber-abilities
- ✗ Miserable AI
- ✗ Indoor sections are terrible
- ✗ Stupidly punishing
- ✗ Arsehole ladders

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A poor man's *Far Cry*

MISSED OPPORTUNITY



These are the same people making *Xpand Rally*? God help us.

WHY ARE CHROME'S VEHICLES SO RUBBISH?

While clearly I've painted *Chrome* as one big missed opportunity, the chance that's really gone begging is the vehicles in the game. You do get to drive buggies, hover-speeders and two types of scout walker through the course of the missions, but the handling on all but the buggy is nigh on unmanageable. A quirk in the walker design means you can't shoot anything outside of a narrow set of distance and elevation parameters, making them largely useless, and the speeders are simply rubbish.

If they'd been done well, the vehicles could have elevated *Chrome* to a whole new level, as the large game environments verily beg to be explored by wheel, wing or even rudder. Developer Techland actually specialises in racing games, and has built both a dirtbike game and a high-speed rally game on the same engine. Why some of this expertise was not brought to bear on *Chrome* is a mystery.

Once again, you only have to look to *Far Cry* (see page 19) to see the potential for vehicles in this type of game – jeeps, speedboats, even hang-gliders have been thrown in, and it's looking all the more magnificent as a result.

play so infrequently you'll forget they even exist. And you have no choice of which implant to obtain and when, as new abilities are added at random intervals. You also have such a ridiculously low 'neural overload' threshold that you can only use the skills for a few seconds at any time. They're not completely without value by any means, and the slo-mo 'Reflex Booster' is crucial towards the later stages, but the whole system is ill thought out.

But probably the most annoying feature in this whole flawed game is something so small, so seemingly innocuous, I can't believe I have to mention it – the ladders. These innocent devices are so hatefully implemented in *Chrome* that trying to step off them in any direction inevitably means falling off, repeatedly, and often to an

instant death. Having almost smashed my fist through my monitor several times when this occurred, I'd have to advise against buying *Chrome* at least until a patch appears to remedy this heinous glitch.

FINAL CONFLICT

In the final measure, *Chrome* is a mixed affair. When you're allowed to rove freely in the delightful outdoor environments, the game is fun, with a sense of liberation rarely seen in a shooter. Even if some sections are poor, there's still a good degree of variety, with everything from on-rails turkey shoots to stealthy forest incursions, along with vehicles, cybernetics and what-not. The problem is that this is only half the story.

If, as we were assured was the case when we previewed *Chrome*, the game was going to be less than £20, we could to some extent



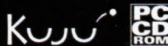
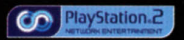
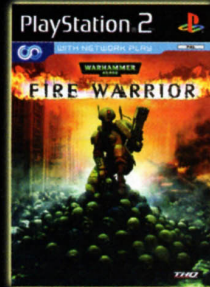
IT IS THE 41ST MILLENNIUM.
THERE IS ONLY WAR.



YOU ARE KAIS, A FIRE WARRIOR.
FIGHT TO SURVIVE THE NEXT 24 HOURS.

'WHO NEEDS HALO?' - 91% PLAY MAGAZINE

'YOU'RE GOING TO CREAM YOUR PANTS' - 9/10 P2



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READ THE AWESOME FIRE WARRIOR NOVELISATION FROM THE BLACK LIBRARY, IN ALL GOOD BOOKSHOPS!

MACE GRIFFIN BOUNTY HUNTER

£34.99 | Pub: VU Games | Dev: Warthog | ETA: September 26 | www.huntthetdown.com

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 128MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card DESIRES P4, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

Martin Korda loves shooting things in outer space. Mace Griffin is all about shooting things in outer space. A match made in heaven if ever we saw one



Despite shipping on the Xbox first, *Mace Griffin: Bounty Hunter* makes for a decent PC first-person shooter/space combat game.

MACE GRIFFIN.

It's possibly the single most ridiculous name in gravely voiced, moody FPS hero history. They may as well have called him Cudgel Pigeon. Or Pepper-Spray Partridge. Bludgeoning-Instrument Lark maybe? Or even Sceptre Hawk. Actually, I like that one. In fact, from this point on, I want you all to call me Mr

INPERSPECTIVE

FREELANCER

Reviewed Issue 128, Score 84%
If it's space combat you're after, this is the best money can buy.

HALO

Reviewed Issue 135, Score 84%
If it's console-influenced shooters you're after, then check out our review of *Halo* on page 80.

Hawk. Or Scep if you're a friend. Clear? OK, let's move on...

ONLY THE RICH AND THE STUPID

With beginnings like this, it was inevitable that Mace would struggle in life, as this futuristic shooter-cum-space-combat hybrid so clearly shows. Mace, an intergalactic ranger, has found himself a nice little cushy job keeping the peace outside of intergalactic McDonald's fly-throughs. Nothing lasts forever though.

Before long, he's banged up for ten years for his alleged part in an alien conspiracy to destabilise the peace (Wimpy are suspected). A decade of falling for the old 'pick up the soap, ranger-boy' trick can do strange things to a man, and on his release Mace can think of

nothing more than wreaking revenge on those who set him up. (And whether he will stay true to Big Bad Bill now he's out of the slammer.)

Mace's plan is far from flawless though. No ship, no money, no job. Is our hero doomed to failure? Will he have

to beg on street corners, lying to terrified passers-by that his car's run out of petrol and could they just lend him a pound so that he can get home? As if.

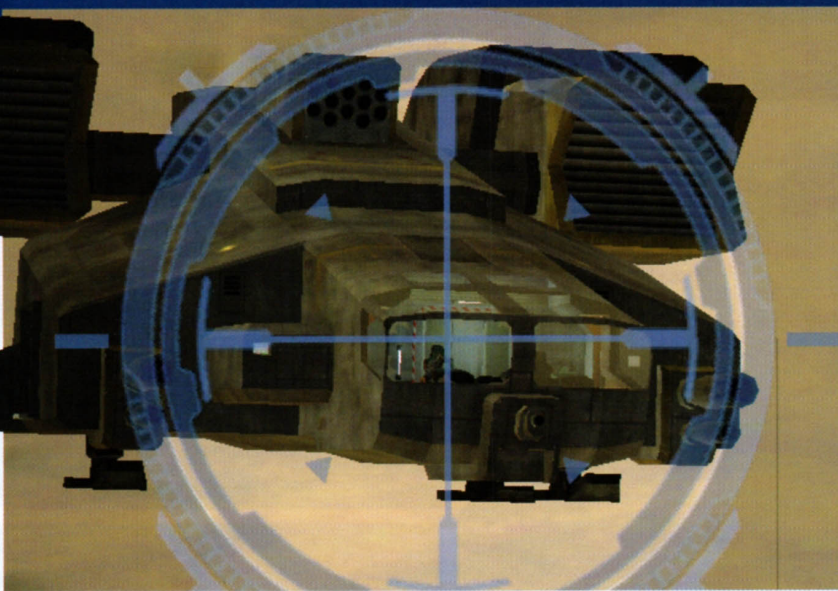
HERE COMES THE PAIN

So starts the shooting. Setting himself up as a Bounty Hunter for a ruthless fish-faced businessman, Mace sets about scouring the universe for fun-sized chocolate-covered coconut bars (not really) while embarking on a series of lung-lurching, heart-stopping levels. Naturally these eventually lead to the guys who set him up, and generally require you to shoot everyone who's not you.

Somewhat cartoonish in style, the console influences of



Anyone for steak?



Smile, you're on Candid Sniper Scope.



The space combat is fast and furious.

SHIELDING THE BALLS



Feeling blue?

FORGET BODY ARMOUR, WHAT YOU NEED IS ONE OF THEM THERE ENERGY SHIELDS BOY

To help you survive the often overwhelming odds, you're equipped with an energy shield that protects your body from attack. While it doesn't take much to whittle down, it does regenerate (much like *Halo*), meaning that with some clever hide-behind-a-wall-while-it-regenerates tactics, you can take on a slew of enemies and still come out on top. Of course, many of them have shields too, but you're a better shot. Well that's the plan anyway.



Mace Griffin are clear to see, with no save functions except automatic ones. But despite often having to retread large sections of Mace's great Bounty bar hunt (due to falling off a ledge like a cack-handed idiot [yes, *that'd be me*] or getting shot to pieces by AI, which provides some stiff opposition when it spies you – rolling, strafing, taking cover and even bitch-slapping you round the face when it gets close enough), you never feel like grinding your back teeth into a fine powdery pulp through agonising molar-gnashing frustration.

Griffin's major strength lies in its sheer entertainment value. Challenging, but not frustrating. Clichéd, but presented with a sheen even Mr Muscle could admire his biceps in. And while some of the dialogue is so wooden it'd need to cover itself in varnish before venturing out

“AI provides stiff opposition – even slapping you round the face when it gets close”

in a thunder storm, the presentation, rousing music, bullet-riddling action and brain-teasing (but not brain-liquefying) puzzles make this one of the best packages we've seen since the last time Anna Kournikova bent down to pick up a tennis ball.

Attention to detail is also a major plus point. Enemies crash to the ground when at the receiving end of a shotgun blast, rising groggily to their feet in a vain attempt to resume hostilities as you finish them off with a swift burst of heavy machine gun fire. Stop shooting just short of turning your opposite gunslinger into a lead statue and you'll see them flailing wildly, caught in the throes of death, finger still clamped on the trigger of their wildly firing gun.

STIFF UPPER HIT

Pity then, that the polish is patchier than a ship full of pirate captains. Approach an enemy from the side and shoot, and they'll often just stand there like the living dead, before rapidly turning into the dead dead. Stumble across some comrades and they'll ignore you, with no *Half-Life*-like interaction allowed. And, while it's clear *Mace Griffin*

is desperately trying to be a Western in space, why do pretty much all of the NPCs have to sound like they should be called Cletus and live with their sister and their 12 kids in a trailer? Rednecks In Space would have been just as apt a title as Bounty Hunter.



Two games in one. And they're both great.

Space combat makes up about 20 per cent of the game, and is part of the reason proceedings remain fresher than a Shake and Vac-ed carpet. Controllable either by mouse or by stick (that's joy, not wooden), the simplicity is offset by the sheer number of enemies.

Much like *Freelancer*, it's pacey and punchy, packed with twists and intergalactic gladiatorial laser jousting of the most basic yet entertaining calibre. And while space-combat veterans will brush these sections aside like an irritating gnat, FPS fanatics will find it a welcome respite from the ledge-jumping, alternate-route-finding blast-outs of the ground-based firefights.

Mace Griffin. Truncheon Stork. Club Flamingo. Call the game what you will, but you

can't detract from the fact that this is an entertaining ride.

It's not up there with *Halo* or *XIII*, this month's Essential shooters, but if they're sold out, you could do a lot worse than buy into *Mace*. [EW]

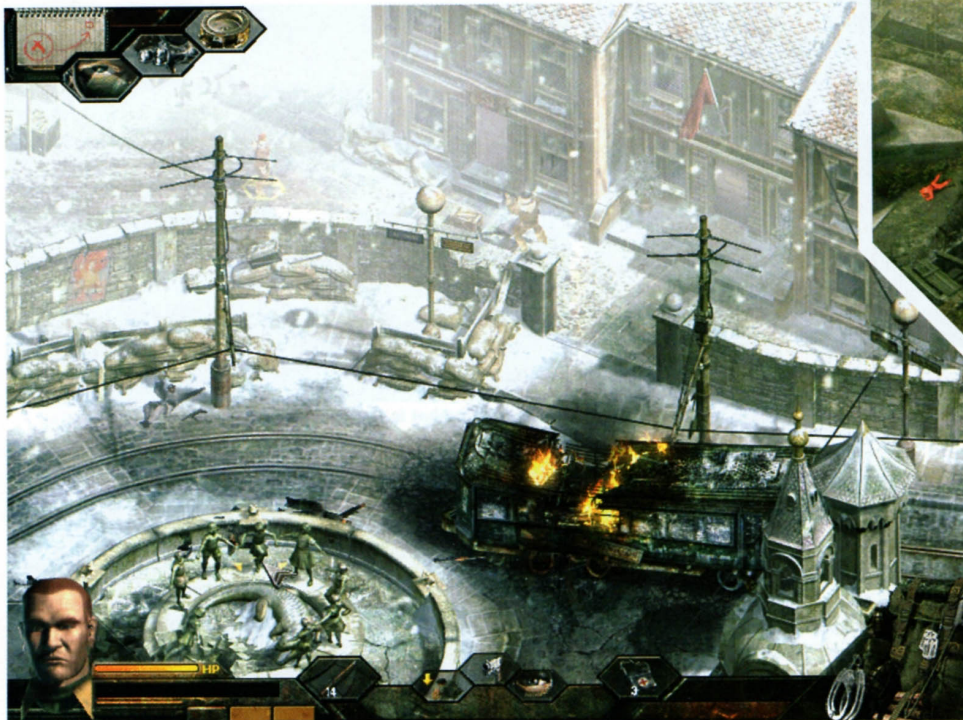
PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Great FPS action and solid space-combat elements
- ✓ Challenging but not frustrating
- ✓ Generally solid and intelligent AI
- ✓ Rousing soundtrack
- ✗ No NPC interaction
- ✗ Some ropery AI moments

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Dumb name, decent game





Crap weather and a train that won't leave. You sure this isn't England?



In terms of gameplay, little has changed since C2.

COMMANDOS 3: DESTINATION BERLIN

£34.99 | Pub: Eidos Interactive | Dev: Pyro Studios | ETA: October 10 | commandos3.pyrostudios.com

REQUIRES PIII 700, 128MB RAM and a 16MB 3D card DESIRES P4 1.6GHz, 256MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card

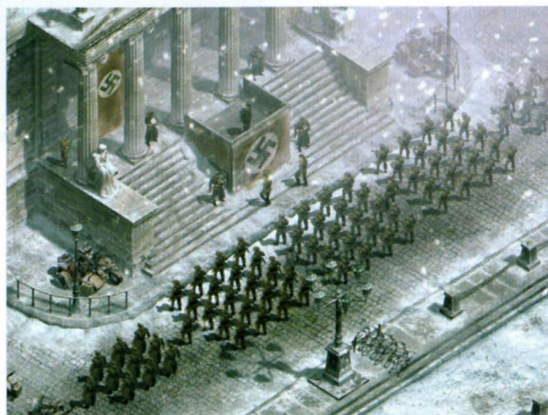
After months of rigorous training, **Mark Hill** is ready to sit on his arse and play the latest **Commandos**

WHEN THE main men behind the awe-inspiring *Commandos 2*, Spanish duo Gonzo Suarez (lead designer) and Jon Beltrán (lead programmer), left Pyro Studios to form their own company, quite a few eyebrows were raised at the prospect of another sequel. Was this going to be just a last attempt to extract some more cash from one of the biggest-selling PC series in history? Could a rudderless team come up with enough surprises to match the infinite little touches of genius that marked C2 now the visionaries had left?

The announcement of a multiplayer mode seemed a clear indication that Pyro were going to push the concept as far as they could in this last instalment (for more on this see the Axis Vs Allies panel), but as we're concentrating mainly on the single-player campaigns in this review, the answers to the above questions would have to be 'sort of' and 'not really'.

INSIDE AND OUT

In case you're new to the series, *Commandos* is less a strategy game than it is a mindbending series of puzzles, where you have to figure out a way of completing missions while coordinating stealthy attacks, distracting guards and timing your actions to perfection. The only real novelties here are



Hands up who actually wants to be here?

slight improvements in the AI and more weather effects (plus the online mode, of course). The graphics are disappointing in that the resolution is still fixed at 800x600 and there's very little to distinguish it from the previous title. The only noticeable improvement is the new interior 3D engine, that allows more zooming and rotating than before. Even here though, should you get up close to a

character (for example, when looking through a window to see a soldier standing right in front of you) you are treated to some shockingly low-res textures.

CANNON FODDER

Still, *Commandos* really is all about gameplay over graphics, and C2 managed to be breathtaking by the sheer detail of its levels. But there's nothing here to compare to the incredible

beauty and variety of that game, and the colours and buildings all end up looking a bit samey, despite the three campaigns being set in Stalingrad, Central Europe and Normandy. Where are the gorgeous Pacific islands, with their exotic plant life and piranha-infested sky-blue waters from the previous game? Or the architectural marvels of Far Eastern missions and incredible recreations of the Eiffel Tower and Colditz Castle?

The only thing that comes close to being that memorable is the Omaha beach landing. This is a massive and very clever map, where you have to use the same tactics the Allies employed in real life: get lots of footsoldiers massacred to make slow but steady progress. For once, stealth is cast aside and it's full-on action. You can even get a character to grab a giant machinegun from its tripod and wander around in pure Rambo style. The level works well, and provides the one note of difference from what is otherwise a re-tread of old ground.

INPERSPECTIVE

COMMANDOS 2: MEN OF COURAGE

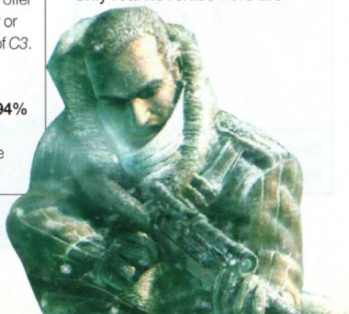
Reviewed Issue 108, Score 91%

A masterpiece with so much to offer you can only pity those too lazy or scared to try it. Get this instead of C3.

MEDAL OF HONOR: ALLIED ASSAULT

Reviewed Issue 112, Score 94%

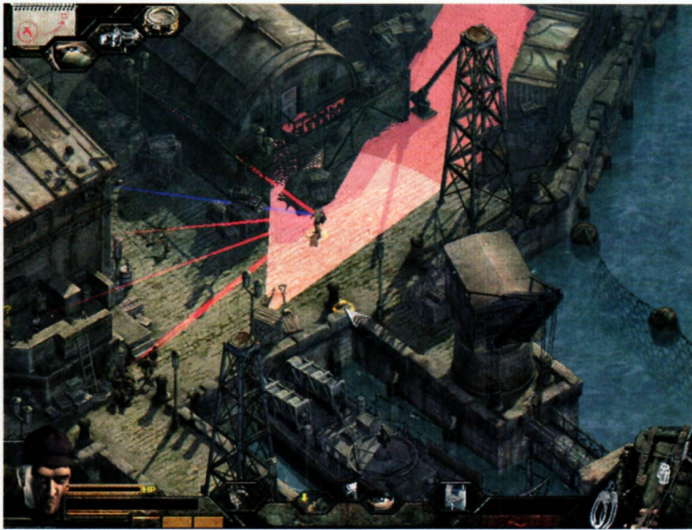
If you want to experience the beach landing in a more intense way, *MOH* is the way to do it.



Don't Adjust your eyes...

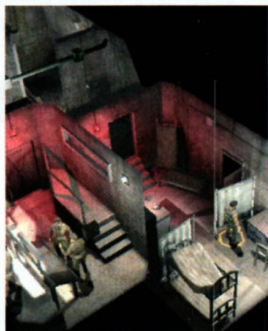
INNOVATION IN CREATION

"You can grab a machine gun and wander around in pure Rambo style"



We've been in worse spots, but not many.

AXIS VS ALLIES



Will C3 multiplayer catch on?

SO WHAT'S ALL THIS MULTIPLAYER LARK THEN?

The online games carry both deathmatch and CTF options, as well as co-op against AI opponents. You can choose to play with either the Allied Forces or standard commandos, the former offering eight types of troops to choose from: gunman, rifleman, medic, engineer, bazookaman, grenadier, paratrooper and submachine gunner.

It will be interesting to see whether such a thinking tactical game, which is based around beating recognisable AI patterns, will take off in multiplayer. Look out for a dedicated multiplayer review in our online section very soon.

There are other niggles, such as the objectives not always being clear and the need for more shortcut keys. There are fewer commandos too. No beautiful female soldier and, most disappointingly, no dog. On top of that, the sniper, thief and diver are all underused, after being so cleverly deployed last time.

JUST. ONE. MORE. GO

The difficulty level is on a par with *Commandos 2*, although the introduction of some time-limited objectives is not at all welcome, pushing frustration levels over the edge.

Most of the time the mix between tear-your-brain-out difficulty and satisfaction is just right though. Nearly every problem and every level looks impossible at first glance, until a bit of deep thinking and a lot of trial and error (you're likely to wear the quicksave and quickload buttons out) lets you figure out a way, leading to laps of honour around your room when you succeed (well, at least

in my room). In the end, C3 feels more like an expansion-pack than a proper sequel, the fact that it took me only three days to complete it (compared to the seven or eight it took to finish C2) strengthening this argument.

So there you have it. The single-player game is as addictive as ever, but offers little new and can't touch C2 for variety, detail, immersion and imagination. [2/5]



PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Mechanics still very enjoyable
- ✓ Great Omaha level
- ✓ Addictive as hell
- ✗ No real improvements
- ✗ Pales next to *Commandos 2*
- ✗ Not enough variety

79

Expansion pack disguised as a sequel

Saitek
www.saitek.com



The scale of the battles and the sense you can influence the outcome, lifts the game above the ordinary.



Transform into a jet and terrorise giant airborne foes.



The devastating Vulcan Cannon: screen-clearing power.

BATTLE ENGINE AQUILA

■ £29.99 | Pub: Atari | Dev: Lost Toys | ETA: November | www.battleengine.com

REQUIRES PII 700, 128MB RAM and a 32MB DirectX 9 compliant 3D card

DESIRES P4 1.6GHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB DirectX 9 compliant 3D card

Big shiny metal robots? Keith Pullin gets a HUD on

THERE YOU are merrily shifting crates around in your trusty mechanised loader when suddenly you're offered the chance to pilot the meanest, nastiest piece of military hardware in the navy. Well, you'd be a fool to refuse, especially when the offer comes replete with a gun pointed at your head. Thus begins your new life as the reluctant pilot of the spider-like *Battle Engine Aquila*.

I KNOW YOUR GAME

Although *BEA* is, without question, a superbly programmed blaster, you can't help feeling a pang of disappointment. We know that the PS2 and Xbox versions of the game won many fans with slick presentation, bombastic action and character-driven story, but this is the PC, and PC games generally try to offer more

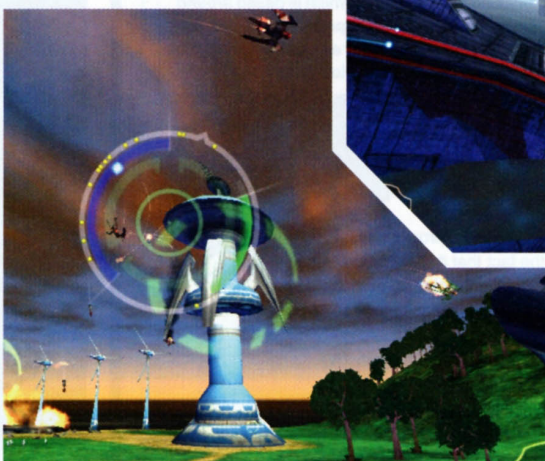
to accommodate an older and more thoughtful breed of gamer. However, that's not to say the game isn't immersive and, as PC games go, it still has plenty to offer.

Piloting a scampering, ordnance laden behemoth with a natural hatred for anything that appears on the radar as a red dot, your mission is to eliminate those dots. There's a fantastic sense of scale to the battles that rage around you, and you really do feel like you can turn the tide of these conflicts in your side's favour. Indeed, *BEA* is a thrilling ride from start to finish.

ARACHNOPHOBIA

Your ability to transform into a jetfighter (the big spider tucks its lanky legs underneath) and swoop around the sky is another boon to the gameplay. It's certainly more satisfying pumping a salvo of rockets into a bomber and watching it plummet to the ground than it is mucking about in the dirt shooting tanks.

The gameplay is further enhanced by sea missions in which you launch from a

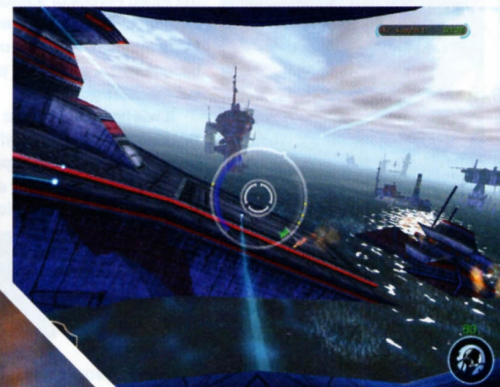


No strange pastel-coloured totem is safe from the Battle Engine.

carrier and attack opposing battleships. In these instances there's added pressure to complete the mission quickly and return to your carrier before your energy depletes

and you plop into the ocean. Other avenues of variety include the ability to select one of three configurations for your Battle Engine, depending on the type of mission, as well as a choice of three pilots.

From a visual standpoint *BEA* is not dissimilar to *Gun Metal*, which by sheer coincidence is also reviewed in this issue (see page 112). In fact, when you get behind the HUD and start playing, *BEA* is still not too dissimilar to *Gun Metal*, full stop. But



The most enjoyable missions take place over water.

ultimately the superior class of Lost Toys' offering does shine through. *BEA* is raucous fun for a few days, especially if you can hook up with a few mates on multiplayer, but don't expect to be in the pilot's seat this time next month. **EV**

INPERSPECTIVE

GUN METAL

Reviewed Issue 135, Score 62%
Erm, virtually identical in every way, but in essence a poor man's *BEA*.

HOSTILE WATERS

Reviewed Issue 101, Score 87%
Action at heart but with more than a hint of strategy - *Hostile Waters* has the brains and the brawn.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Non-stop action and huge battles
- ✓ Looks great
- ✓ Good sense of scale
- ✗ Short-lived
- ✗ Lacks variety

78

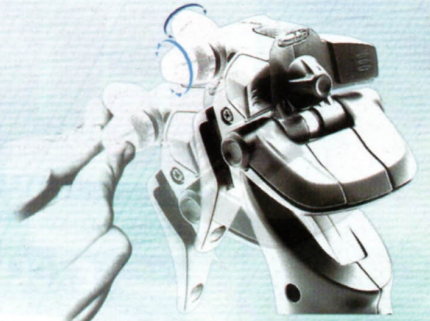
A thrilling, if slightly simplistic, blastathon

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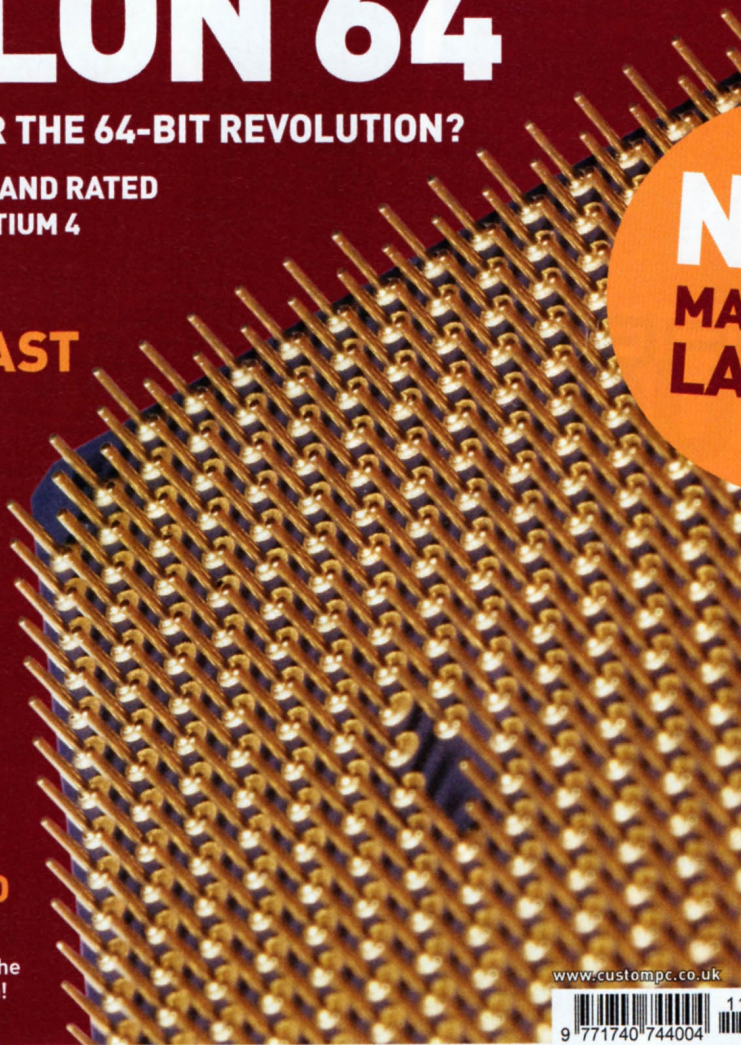
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Stairway to heathen.



The locations are beautifully rendered.



Magic isn't as satisfying as a big axe.



Dragons: a breath of not-so-fresh air.

NOW WE'LL admit that occasionally there's a certain amount of skepticism that surrounds console-to-PC ports. That's not because we don't like our consoles, but because developers don't always acknowledge that hardcore PC gamers are often looking for something a little different from their console cousins.

Starbreeze Studio's *Enclave* is a prime example of developers porting a console title that doesn't entirely fit the PC, which both adds to its charm and its niggles. The basic premise is a hack 'n' slash adventure, in a

ENCLAVE

■ £29.99 | Pub: Atari | Dev: Starbreeze Studios | ETA: September 12 | www.enclavegame.com

REQUIRES PIII 600, 192MB RAM and a 16MB 3D Card
DESIRES P4 1.5GHz, 256MB Ram and a 32MB 3D Card

Rhianna Pratchett walks softly and carries a big stick

similar vein to *Severance: Blade Of Darkness*. The storyline won't set the world on fire and is a typical sword and sorcery tale: good versus evil, monsters and magic, and buxom women in spiky armour... you know how it goes.

ranged characters on both sides. Instead, you're just given different things to hit.

However, each path offers its own missions, several of which have nice crossovers. For example, in the Light campaign you have to protect a merchant

crossing an enemy infested village, but if you tread the Dark path you have to hunt and kill him.

A THING OF BEAUTY

The best thing about *Enclave* is the superb graphics. Even though the scripted bookshelf/rocks/glass-falling incidents and the sheer linear nature of the missions make you feel a bit like you're on a Disney World ride, the atmospheric soundtrack, full of distant screams and moans, lends itself well to creating a tense

environment, especially in some of the Dark missions.

There's not much style to the fights themselves, and collision issues and occasional sloppy enemy AI can sometimes make them quite frustrating. There's also a distinct lack of multiplayer, which given the power of the engine could have been made to work quite well in a similar way to *Rune*, and would have added a great deal of longevity to the game.

As ports go, *Enclave* isn't too bad. It's pretty and energetic, yet it lacks the sophistication, depth and polish needed to truly satisfy a PC audience. [C]

INPERSPECTIVE

SEVERANCE: BLADE OF DARKNESS
Reviewed Issue 98, Score 87%
Severance manages to pull off the console/PC mix better than *Enclave*, with lots of combo fighting moves, interaction with the environment and loads of gore. Getting a bit dated now though.

NEVERWINTER NIGHTS
Reviewed Issue 118, Score 91%
More hack 'n' slash-oriented than previous BioWare games but with much more in-depth and traditional RPG elements. A detailed magic system and a deep storyline.

JOIN THE DARK SIDE

There is both a Light and a Dark campaign to play through, and you start each as a specific character, unlocking a variety of other characters and weapons as you complete missions. As far as game mechanics go, the path you choose doesn't directly impact on the way you fight, as there are both melee, magic and

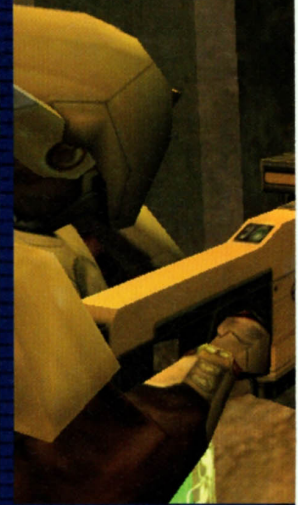


PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Looks impressive
- ✓ Sounds good
- ✓ Two campaigns to play through
- ✗ Very linear
- ✗ Collision problems
- ✗ No multiplayer

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Pretty dumb fun



"Hey you, stop slacking and get these damned boxes tied up."

WARHAMMER 40,000: FIRE WARRIOR

■ £34.99 | Pub: THQ | Dev: Kuju | ETA: October 3 | www.firewarrior.com

REQUIRES PIII 800, 128MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card

DESIRES P4 1.4GHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D graphics card

Being the only member of the PC ZONE team to ever step inside a Games Workshop store and not walk out terrified, Richie Shoemaker is the perfect candidate to review Warhammer's first-ever shooter

THE ROAD to becoming a fully-fledged *Warhammer* fanatic is long, expensive and arduous. The Cult Of Games Workshop not only requires its acolytes to devour and eventually regurgitate its many rule-sets, but to buy and lovingly paint hundreds of lead figures before war across the bedroom carpet can even begin.

It takes more than a subscription to *White Dwarf* magazine and a proficiency in the art of drybrushing to get into the inner circle.

High priests in waiting must become one with all of the GW realms, they must befriend the hardcore regulars at their local GW temple (check out www.games-workshop.co.uk to find your local branch) and cultivate a liking for metal in all its musical and physical forms.

And for your utter devotion you will be forever rewarded with the 'Curse Of Nurgle' – bubbling acne and the lingering pong of Cheesy Wotsits and white spirits that will shadow you to your doom.

ATTIC ATTAC

Crudely daubed in acrylics and tissue-wrapped, my own collection of miniatures rests peacefully in dog-eared boxes somewhere in the loft – never to see the light again. I was one of the lucky ones, I managed to get out long before acquiring the cheese-ball whiff and an ear for Napalm Death. But the pull of *Warhammer* is still strong despite being clean for a decade.

IN PERSPECTIVE

MEDAL OF HONOR: ALLIED ASSAULT

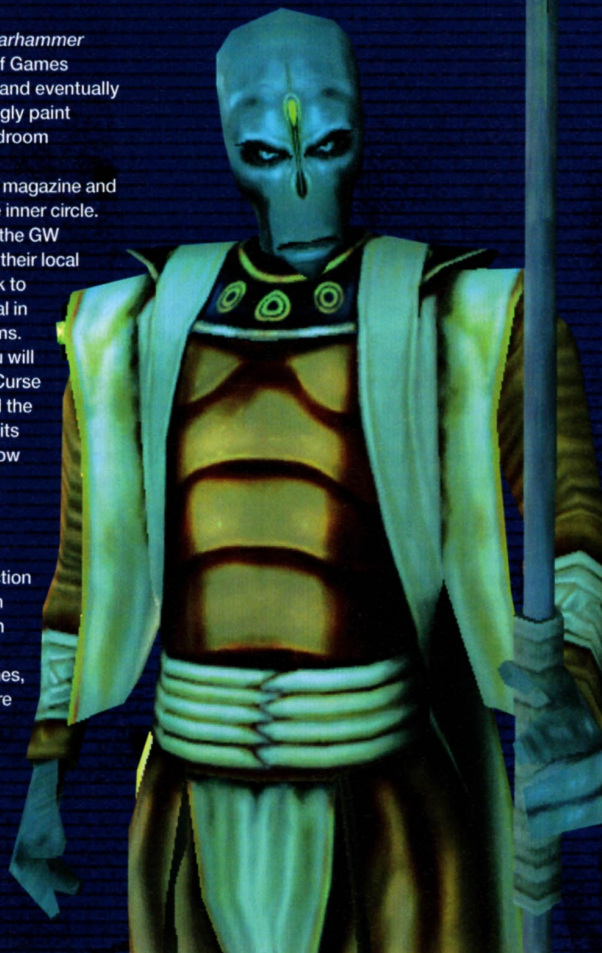
Reviewed Issue 112, Score 94%

If you prefer your shooters a bit more life-like with well-scripted AI and exceptional mission design, then this is the best money can buy, and offers far more of a challenge than *Fire Warrior*. It's not often we give out scores like this.

JUDGE DREDD: DREDD VS DEATH

Reviewed Issue 134, Score 78%

Based, of course, on the continuing adventures of *2000AD*'s favourite son, Rebellion's comic book-inspired adventure is another example of a console-styled FPS of a classic British-born licence, only done better.



Faced with the prospect of playing *Fire Warrior*, I honestly feared that it would turn me back down the dark path. Fortunately for the sake of my personal hygiene and the eternal love of a good woman, *Fire Warrior* – the first FPS to be set in Games Workshop's 41st-century war-torn universe – is far less demanding than its tabletop brethren, requiring only a cursory knowledge of the *40K* universe and a modest PC to get started.

Curiously, rather than focusing its attentions on the genetically-altered heroes of the Imperial Space Marines, the game casts you as Kais, a fledgling Tau soldier of the Fire Warriors caste about to undergo on-the-job training. The first mission is to spring a high-ranking agent from an Imperial prison, but over the course of 20 missions it becomes clear that it is the entire Tau race that needs liberating, as ever, from the boundless clutches of the hateful Imperium. Yep, it's one-man-army-saves-galaxy-despite-insurmountable-odds time again.

While the aim of the game is obvious, the storyline does try to twist the plot, at least enough to bring in various enemy units to battle.



Mind the windows!

Imperial troops, Commissars, Space Marines, a Dreadnought and even the omnipresent Chaos legions turn up at various points, all of which will please the *Warhammer* faithful no end, seeing as they've never been given the 3D game treatment before.

20 SECONDS TO COMPLY

Just as pleasing for the same reason are some of the maps; burning Predator tanks lay scuppered in desolate trenches, while later on you get to stalk the corridors of an Imperial Battleship. The weapons too are faithfully recreated, from las-guns, blowtorch-style melta-guns, all the way to bolters and a missile launcher – plus a couple of fixed cannons for good measure. Unfortunately, while the weapons look convincing enough to please the *Warhammer* faithful, FPS veterans with not a care for the licence will find most of them lacking real punch and, early on especially, rather flimsy and ineffectual. Even when you get the chance to pick up a new weapon there is always something faulty; the M16-style machine gun, for example, has a muzzle flash that practically whites-out most of the screen.

Thankfully, rather than having to rely solely on your arsenal of weapons, you do at



The weapons, although fairly varied, fail to satisfy.

least occasionally find yourself fighting alongside other Tau Fire Warriors, some of whom lay down suppressive fire, while

“All other Warriors – without exception – die within 20 seconds of you meeting them”

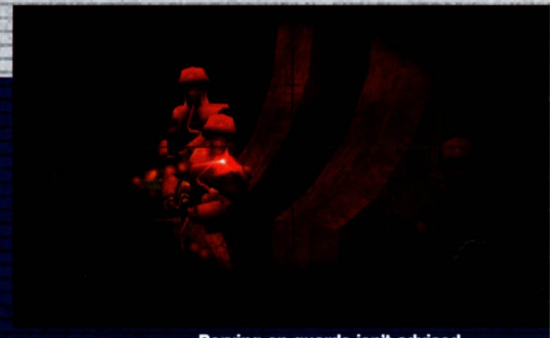
others must be protected while they open locked doors. Regardless, all without exception die within 20 seconds of you meeting them.

Without wanting to appear elitist, the problem with *Fire Warrior* is that it was designed from the outset as a console

shooter. Apart from the obligatory high-resolution textures and a rudimentary online mode, very little has been added to make use of

the PC's power. The levels are linear and tight and almost exclusively set through corridors or trenches.

As a result, combat is gratifyingly intense, if somewhat samey. The 3D engine provides for a decent level of detail on some of the characters too, but against this are the common problems that blight many a console shooter: dead bodies that fade away, a complete lack of scenery interaction, no shadow



Perving on guards isn't advised – especially in a red light district.

effects and some shockingly basic character animation.

Worst of all the console hang-ups is the AI, which is predictable and slow to react, as if the game still thinks you are playing with a joystick. Enemy soldiers love nothing better than to funnel through a doorway into a hail of grenades, and when they do kneel down to take a shot, a quick sideways dodge is enough to avoid their fire.

MODEL BEHAVIOUR

And of course there are the two standard console features we PC players must endure: not being able to define key settings in-game and no save feature, except for the usual checkpoints. Thankfully most of the levels are compact so frustration is kept to a minimum.

Fire Warrior certainly isn't the worst shooter to grace our screens. If you can stick with it through the first faltering levels





SECOND OPINION

MARTIN KORDA

Unlike Richie, my adolescent years weren't spent painting lead models, so I know or care little for *Warhammer* and its many offshoot tabletop wargames. I do, however, know a good first-person shooter when I see one, and while there are some nice scripted moments to enjoy and a fair few enemies to dispatch, I think I can safely say that *Half-Life 2* has got little to worry about from this game. The controls are twitchy, the weapons feel lightweight and the developers have fudged things so that the enemies are more bulletproof rather than more intelligent. If seeing Space Marines is more important to you than gameplay then I'd say go ahead and buy it, otherwise check out the far superior *Halo* (page 80) instead.

You wouldn't shoot an unarmed ugly guy with a stupid name, would you?

you'll discover there is in fact a very enjoyable game to be had, offering a suitably dark storyline and a brisk pace of non-stop undemanding action. The FMV cut-scenes are few, but high quality, the dialogue competently delivered by the likes of Tom

Baker, Brian Blessed, Burt Kwouk and Sean Pertwee, and the sounds of gunfire are meaty and atmospheric.

FANATIC FURORE

Easy to grasp, *Fire Warrior* is a game that seems to have been

created more for *Warhammer* fans than FPS veterans. However even those who love *Warhammer 40,000* with Cheesy Wotsits-smelling adoration may soon tire of the game, as once you look beyond the universe it's impossible to ignore the fact that there's little more than a run-of-the-mill FPS lurking beneath.

Compared to the likes of *No One Lives Forever 2* and *Medal Of Honor*, it comes away looking dated and shallow. Had Kuju the time, money or inclination to tailor the game more for PC tastes, it might have been a different story. As it stands, however, we can only recommend it to those game-starved fans who've had to wait an eternity to see the models they pore over brought to life in 3D for the first time. [M]



"The problem with *Fire Warrior* is it was designed as a console shooter"

HOLDING OUT FOR A HEROQUEST



Let's hope *Fire Warrior* is the first of many 40K games.

IS THIS THE START OF A BEAUTIFUL FRIENDSHIP?

For a setting so visually rich and geographically vast, the number of computer games that have been based in the *Warhammer 40K* universe has been criminally few. *Space Hulk* remains the ancient benchmark, but of course that was based purely on the boardgame of the same name, itself a barely disguised dice-based reenactment of *Aliens*. The wider world of GW's sci-fi gameworld (a universe that is essentially *Lord Of The Rings* In Space – with orks, ogres, dwarfs humans and elves all dressed in power armour and wielding lasers), has barely been touched upon, but for a brace of passable turn-based strategy titles. The overlooked truth is that far more so than *D&D* or any other licence you'd care to mention, *Warhammer 40,000* could lend itself adequately to any style of gameplay, whether it be RPG, RTS or squad-based shooter. Hopefully *Fire Warrior* won't be the last 40K computer game.



No, this isn't the prequel to *XIII*.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Easy to get into
- ✓ Faithful to the licence
- ✓ Lots of enemies to gun down
- ✗ Repetitive and fairly unconvincing animations
- ✗ No quicksave
- ✗ Predictable AI

68

Colour-by-numbers console FPS – strictly for 40K fans only

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A lot of guns and no mistake.



Greenpeace strike again... in The Future! (Dan-daaann!)

FUN IS a fantastic thing. Nothing else quite manages to chase off the workday blues and inject pleasure into your lives quite like Having Fun. Some games around here wouldn't know fun if you Sellotaped their eyes to giant balloons with pictures of rabbits and clowns on them. It's all 'reverse the genetic splicing machines before Armageddon' and 'defeat the evil lord of horrid things with your manly chin and cold, hard stares'. Pah! Make things 'splode, crack a joke or two, job's a good 'un.

Yager is exactly that. A game of sheer fun from start to end. Flying about in some typical sci-fi world, not taking things

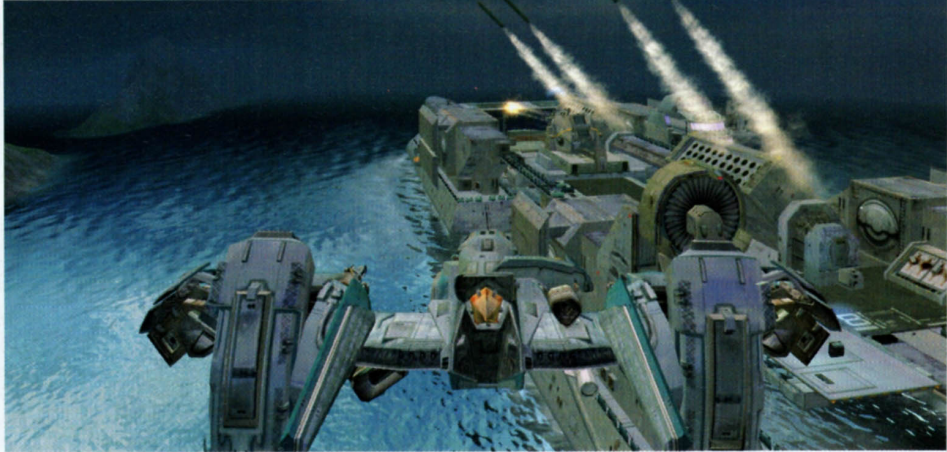
seriously for a moment. The more you play, the more you grin – just as it should be.

Simply put, you're a mercenary pilot, trying to earn a few yen from the local military, scooting about in your futuristic hoverjet thing and shooting pretty much anything that moves. It's gorgeous to look at and easy to play. And it's fun. In spades.

OOH, AH, CANTONA

To give you an idea of how far into its cheek Yager has its tongue planted, there's a moment during one cut-scene when a character quotes Eric Cantona (as in ex-Man Utd, seagulls chasing the trawler boat, kung-fu kicking, footballer Eric Cantona). Which, for a game based in The Future concerning the adventures of a freelance combat pilot shooting robots, is pretty good going.

At times Yager comes across like a really well-written comic book, with quality dialogue and a suitably pot-boiled plotline. The dynamic between the central character – Magnus Tide – and his hostile leading lady provides some



"Launch phallic compensation tubes one thru' four."

YAGER

■ £29.99 | Pub: THQ | Dev: Yager Development | ETA: Out Now | www.yager.tv

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card
DESIRES P4 2GHz, 512MB RAM and a 128MB 3D card

"It's fun time," yells Frank Skinner every week on telly. Paul Presley knows the feeling as he grapples with this shooter

of the funniest in-game banter I've heard for a long time.

Everything about the game's setting just seems to work – Tide's infectious good humour transferring through the screen and into your gaming experience.

And what an experience! OK, we're not looking at the finest game ever made (that would be *Operation Flashpoint*, says me, but *Half-Life*, says you), but as arcade-based hover-flying shooter things go, Yager continually delights.

The action begins at a sedate pace – shooting lumbering hulks that barely move – but quickly moves on to waves of zippy bad guys with Neo-Fascist overtones.

HOVER-FLYING

Sure, you're not always entirely clear as to what the hell's going on – mission briefings are often hazy at best and the handling of your floaty-ship isn't always the easiest (especially when you switch from the helicopter-style 'hover' mode into the full-on 'jet' mode). But it doesn't matter a fig since there's almost always going to be a smile on your face as you play (except when you're gnashing your teeth after succumbing to the insane difficulty level for the thousandth time and realising the last save point is miles back).

The levels are for the most part brilliantly paced, and the level of freedom is balanced just perfectly between free exploration and linear guidance. But mostly it's that spirit of enjoyment that

keeps you coming back time and again. One annoyance is that the multiplayer modes are seemingly offline until further notice, meaning that once Yager is over, it's over. The replay factor isn't the highest. But while it lasts, what a ride. **[A-]**



PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ A visually rich world that grips your interest
- ✓ Action-packed
- ✓ Amusing banter between main characters
- ✓ Just plain fun
- ✗ Ship handling could be better
- ✗ Mission objectives can often be hazy

83

Loads better than you're thinking

INPERSPECTIVE

FREELANCER

Reviewed Issue 128, Score 84%
 More 'one man, one ship, The Future (dann-daaann!)' type stuff, only in proper space and much more open-ended. Recommended.

X – BEYOND THE FRONTIER

Reviewed Issue 82, Score 90%
 The 'deep' space game. Remember *Elite*? This is the natural successor for the 20th Century. The sequel should be here early next year.



PC CD-ROM

S² Silent Storm



"Your troops vault walls, crawl under obstacles, holster and reload weapons, and gush blood when hit"

"The fact holes can be blown through walls and floors means your tactical options are expanded astronomically"

"the devil is in the detail in the engine, and what a well animated demon it is"

PCZONE



Battle commences 26th September

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JoWood Productions



Whatever the hell they are, they don't mess about.

CHAOS LEGION

■ £29.99 | Pub: Capcom | Dev: Capcom | ETA: November 14

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 128MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

DESIRES P4 2GHz, 512 MB RAM, 128MB 3D card and an eight-button gamepad

It's time for Keith Pullin to face his demons in this action/adventure console conversion

WITH MY PC I accept thy console hack 'em up. With my sword I slice thee into tiny pieces. OK, so *Chaos Legion* is not the pinnacle of innovation, but a day of flailing combos and irrepressible swordplay never did

anybody any harm (apart from the hordes of mechanical spiders, mutated zombie things and other such demon spawn you find haemorrhaging at your feet).

CL gives you the opportunity to remove your brain for a while,

and you can easily find yourself getting sucked in to the simple third-person action. Visually, the game is a splendidly dark affair, and the valiant attempt at Manga-meets-Hammer House characterisation and storytelling



"Damned spiders in my soup again!"

is another reason to persist. There's even a bevy of gruesome end-of-level bosses that require a modicum of skill to overcome.

RPG elements also limp into the fray, though whether a choice of 'Legion' (a demonic sidekick that rushes around slaying those you can't be arsed to) and simple attack and defence power-up options qualify as role-playing is debatable. Still, in terms of presentation, there is little to fault.

However, *CL* is a frustrating affair, and purists will require more in the way of variety – especially for 30 notes. But if you're willing to be whisked along in a non-stop blur of monster-mashing then *CL* unashamedly delivers.

PCZONE VERDICT **69**
Wicked for a day

KORSUN POCKET: DECISIVE BATTLES OF WWII VOL 2

■ £29.99 | Pub: Just Play | Dev: Matrix Games | Out Now

THERE ARE two sorts of hex gamers in this world: those who play for fun and those who think they're Hitler, Napoleon or some other short-arsed megalomaniac who got their arse kicked in Russia. Strategic Simulations' utterly fantastic *Panzer General* series combined hex-based gameplay with simple icons and a hint of RPG. It was the perfect hex game and the sales figures reflected this. But few have come close and most hex developers have stayed rooted in the past with a straight 'boardgame-to-PC' conversion. And these, to put it bluntly, cater for those with a Napoleon complex. *Korsun Pocket* falls into this category.

For starters, the icons are appalling, requiring an encyclopaedic knowledge of the NATO icon system to decipher, which is baffling considering *Korsun Pocket* is

set at the end of WWII. Of course you can click every bloody tile to find out what's what – assuming you can make out the badly pixelated images. There's no point-sensitive help menus or an easy-to-understand interface – the entire game looks like it was designed by a monkey on amphetamines. Even the combat system features dice. This is 2003 not 1990!

If this was some cruddy shareware package it wouldn't be that bad, but *Korsun's* been designed by Matrix Games, which released the fantastic (and free) strategy game *Steel Panthers* a few years ago. So what happened? We'll never know. Let's pray they go back to producing good games, with good gameplay.

Daniel Emery

PCZONE VERDICT **20**



It may try to copy *Diablo*, but it's nowhere near as good.

THE FATE

■ £29.99 | Pub: 4AM Entertainment | Dev: Tronwell Software | Out Now

WHERE THE brilliant *Diablo* series is repetitive and addictive, *The Fate*, from Korean developer Tronwell Software, can only be described as repetitive and boring in its attempts at trying to ape Blizzard's hack'n'slash.

Diablo's online popularity proves there is a market for good team-based hackers, which is what *The Fate* is trying to be, as it allows you to control three characters through a typical RPG 'magical sword' quest. Sadly, the characters are all pretty bland with limited spells and abilities. The levels are also dull, with recurrent monsters. Weapons and armour are basic, even compared to the original

Diablo, and are only distinguishable by varying stats and colours.

There are a couple of nice touches, like being able to refill your health potions, but the woes, such as the poor AI of your team and the lack of a quest log, outweigh them. The manual has been translated poorly and it doesn't include enough basic info. The script is slightly better, although it clashes with itself and the manual over spelling: Is it Loni? Lony? Rony? Who knows? Who cares? This is an uninspiring and shoddily translated effort, don't let it be your fate.

Rhianna Pratchett

PCZONE VERDICT **35**



See? You don't need a good video card.



Technicolour yawn.

GUN METAL

■ £19.99 | Pub: Zoo Digital | Dev: Yeti Studios | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 128MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

DESIRES P4 2GHz, 512MB RAM and a 128MB open GL 3D card

Keith Pullin steels himself for a giant robot orgy

GUN METAL IS a good enough game, and in the initial surge of excitement it's easy to get carried away into believing this could be something special. Stomping through a debris-strewn battlefield in a giant robot, launching missiles at everything that moves, it's the sort of thing that has a special place in every gamer's heart.

Certainly it looks and sounds the business, in fact when it comes to presentation *Gun Metal* is a very polished article. But if you look under the chassis of this hulking great beast there's little to back up its explosive aesthetics.

No cunning twist, no mysteries and no frills. This is pure old-school arcade gaming – just a big lumbering robot armed to its hydraulic eyeballs with fancy shooters and rockets. *Gun Metal* is back-to-basics blasting of the most uncomplicated kind. There's even a respectful little nod to *After Burner* when you transform into a fighter jet and perform barrel rolls to escape missile locks. Unfortunately, the overly sensitive flight controls ruin what could have been an outstanding feature. As a straight

choice between taking to the skies and staying on the ground, the latter tactic remains the most playable option.

There's no argument that *Gun Metal* does the relentless onslaught theme well, but the exhilaration eventually turns to tedium, especially if you harbour hopes of at least a hint of strategic stimulus.

If ever a game had a £9.99 straight-to-budget vibe about it, this is the one. Sadly, it's twice that amount.

PCZONE VERDICT

62

Shiny lumbering automaton



It may look exciting, but the thrill soon wears off.



You probably want to take a step back.



Enemy accuracy isn't always this bad.



Big ships = more guns.

TITANS OF STEEL: WARRING SUNS

■ £24.99 | Pub: Just Play | Dev: Matrix Games | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PII 400, 64MB RAM and an 8MB 3D card **DESIRES** PII 450, 128MB RAM and an 8MB 3D card

Hex strategy meets MechWarrior. Daniel Emery tries to jump-start the engine



Troops roll forward – fog rolls back.



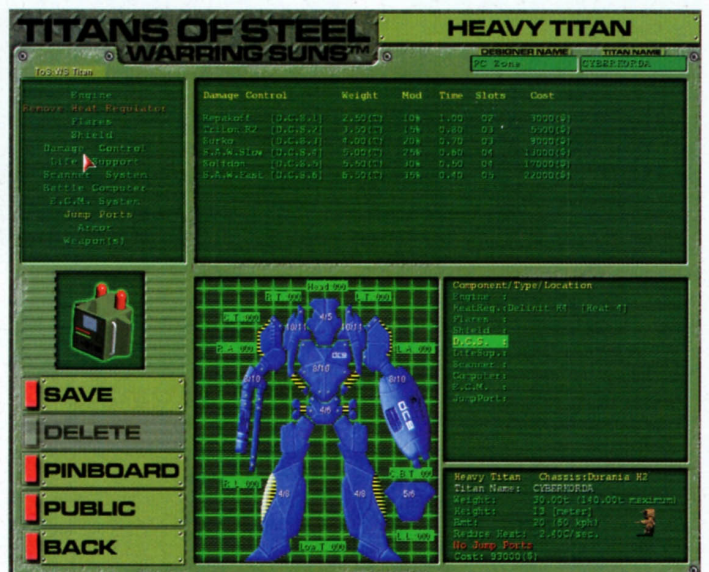
Like a nightmare from 1991.

TITANS OF STEEL, the latest strategy outing from Matrix Games, puts the 'bore' back into boardgames. The premise of the game is simple: you command a squad of between one and four mechanised war machines fighting on a hex battlefield against anything up to three computerised opponents. What's more, the game allows you to build your own customised vehicles – thus making your own compromises between speed, armour and technical ability.

It all sounds rather good on paper. The reality, though, is a lacklustre affair that's little more than another boardgame-to-PC conversion, which makes practically no use of what a computer can offer – smart

AI, good graphics and intelligent gameplay. In fact, the only difference between it and a boardgame is a pathetic animation during movement/combat, a very cheesy thrash-rock track during installation and the vehicle construction section.

Now, the last bit is noteworthy – making your own personal mech fighting machine is fun and the developer has put in a reasonable database of things to tweak. But once you hit the battlefield, all this evaporates. The changes you've made produce hardly any difference visually and all the other perks – improved AI, better weapons, etc – end up being no more than simplistic combat modifiers. *Titans Of Steel* is a wasted



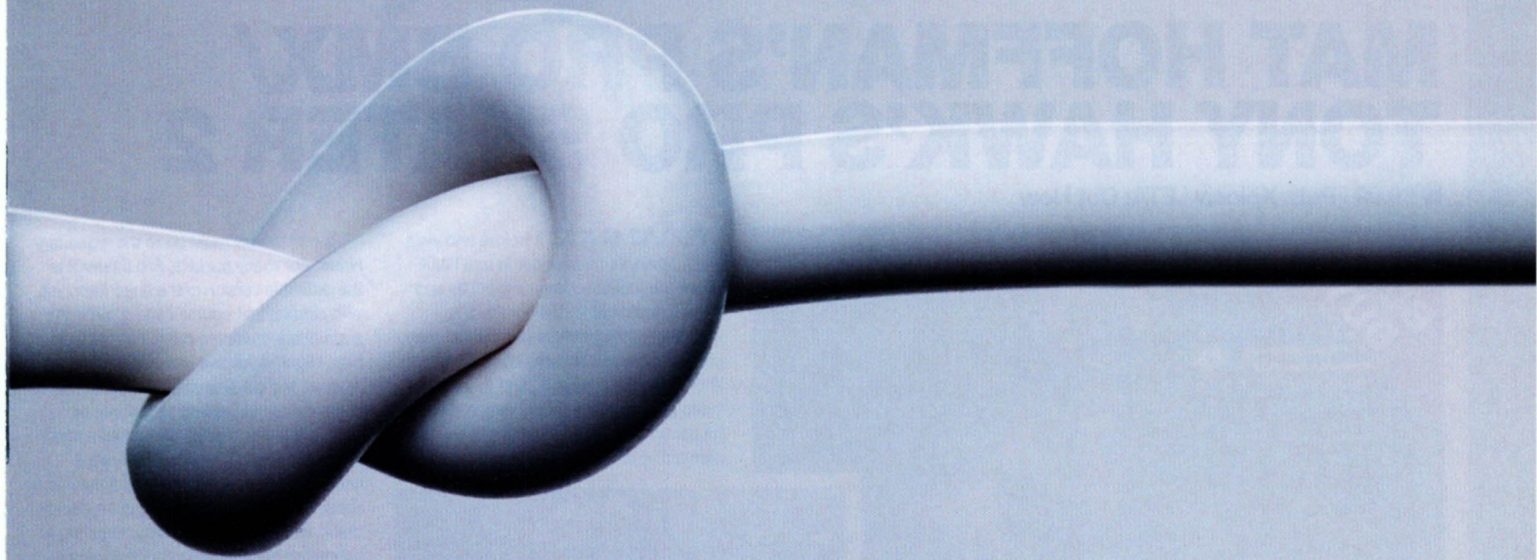
The customisation section shows some promise.

opportunity and is unlikely to appeal to any discerning hex-gaming fan. The developer could have produced a gem; instead it's an arthritic anachronism.

PCZONE VERDICT

38

Zzzzzzzzz... Zzzzzzzzzzz...



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REPLAY

The place to go when you've got no dough



MAT HOFFMAN'S PRO BMX/ TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 2

■ £9.99 | Pub: Xplosiv | ETA: Out Now



Mat Hoffman is Tony Hawk 2 on two wheels, but not as good.

WE'VE SAID it before and we'll say it again, but skateboards and BMX bikes – respective icons of the '70s and '80s – have never had it so good. A mainstay of the Jackass generation, they provide a natural accompaniment to long shorts and angry music. And, of course, video games. So for both disciplines to be paired for a less than a tenner is something of a dream ticket.

Top of the bill must go to the legendary Hawk. For many pundits, *Pro Skater 2* is the definitive version of the huge franchise, with simple, fast courses and a blistering soundtrack spanning punk, hip-hop and pop. Highly addictive, it's as playable now as ever, and will test your manual dexterity to the full as you pull off all manner of improbable – and absurdly named – tricks.

Mat Hoffman's *Pro BMX* follows a near-identical style and format. It may lack some of the subtleties, but is still a decent crack, and by no means easy, requiring a concerted effort to unlock eight courses. Also blessed with a quality soundtrack, it spans the best part of 25 years, from the sublime genius of The Stone Roses to the Hoffman-fronted 20 Minute Crash.

For the price of a music CD, you get two top-notch compilation albums, plus one-and-a-half brilliant games. Get it got.

Steve Hill



One of the best console ports in PC gaming history.

PCZONE VERDICT

84

RAINBOW SIX – ROGUE SPEAR

■ £9.99 | Pub: Xplosiv | ETA: Out Now

ROGUE SPEAR, along with its other *Rainbow* relatives, must have broken records for the amount of times it has been re-released in compilations, boxsets and budget versions. If anyone was going to buy it, chances are they've already bought it. Four times. Which means only cavemen with newly streetmarket-bought Pentium 233s are going to give this a sniff.

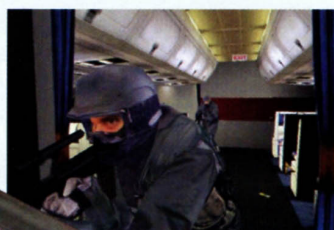
Rogue Spear was never about graphics. It is now an affront to the sighted, while its clunky interface and tedious pre-planning make it a museum piece. Times have moved on, specifically to the excellent *Raven Shield*, the latest in the long line of Tom Clancy-ers.

If you're still interested (ie you're one of those cavemen and have never heard of the *R6* series) and can pretend the 21st Century is something that only happened to other people, there is a solid tactical counter-terrorism shooter in there, where you get to control a team of experts on missions to rescue ambassadors, rid power stations of terrorists and other such wholesome activities. Just make sure you stay away from those complex pre-mission planning screens.

Mark Hill

PCZONE VERDICT

68



Old, but still fun.



Why are all kids' characters a bunch of freaks?

RAYMAN 2

■ £4.99 | Pub: Focus | ETA: Out Now

THE PC isn't exactly famous for its platform escapades, or for decent kids' games, which is probably why something as average as the *Rayman* series has managed to survive on the grey box. In its favour is the surreal eponymous hero, missing arms and legs, but not hands and feet, and an explosion of colour to brighten even the dullest monitor.

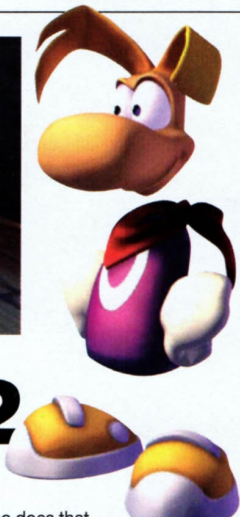
Still, despite the sequel's move to full 3D, this is no *Mario 64*, and while the succession of jumps and puzzles will hardly set hardcore gamers spinning, it also proves a bit too tricky for the kids to whom it would ultimately appeal.

So who does that leave then? Ageing gamers with battered old PCs who want to pretend they're cool skoolkids with a console? The graphics might have wowed the playground four years ago, but it really only leaves two categories of buyers: those with annoying young relatives who wish to see them eating their keyboards in frustration or destitute *Rayman* fans who have been begging since 1999 and have just got together a fiver in pennies.

Mark Hill

PCZONE VERDICT

60



COMBAT FLIGHT COLLECTION 2

■ £14.99 | Pub: Xplosiv | ETA: Out Now



How gamers used to fly. So last century.

THE BEST way to prove to your Atari PlayCast-owning console lickspittles that the PC is, was and forever shall be the dominant platform of choice for graphic prowess used to be to load up the latest flight sim and cackle like a bastard as their faces blubbed with salty tears when they realised they would never witness such marvellous polygon texturing and their

lives were not worth the jam you flick from your fingernails. Then pass them the razor blades and direct them to the basement.

Now, of course, the flight sim has gone the way of the text adventure, the integrity of Premiership football executives and democracy. And compilations like *Combat Flight Collection 2* aren't going to arrest that. Each game is taken from the days before graphics were invented, and other than the two helicopter sims – *Apache vs Havoc* and *Comanche vs Hokum* – there's little in the way of interest. *Combat Flight Sim* (and the two add-on packs that it comes with) is worthwhile for collectors, otherwise it's a flaccid and uninspiring package that you can easily live without. It's the 21st Century, people. Move on.

Paul Presley

PCZONE VERDICT

38



"Get the wheels in line! Go! Go! Go!"

MOBIL 1 RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP

■ £4.99 | Pub: Focus | ETA: Out Now

BEFORE Colin McRae's stranglehold on the genre, the *Rally Championship* series was all the rage, enjoying years of unfettered success. This fifth incarnation is arguably the best, taking realism to extremes by recreating 420 miles of actual track, as represented by the on-screen Ordnance Survey map. So if you've ever fancied an extensive tour of the hedgerows of the British Isles, it will be a very exciting prospect.

However, it's not an approach that suits everyone, and the authenticity can count against it, shifting it from a fun game into simply driving a car for a very long time. With even the shortest stages

clocking in at over ten minutes, a degree of commitment is required. You'll also need to concentrate – if you don't heed the pace notes you could find yourself lost in Wales. And while the scenery is pleasant enough, it is beginning to look dated.

Compared to *Colin McRae 3*, the handling feels somewhat lightweight, but the damage model is impressive enough, with the car losing major organs over the course of a difficult stage. A massive game, and if you get sucked in, you'll certainly get your fiver's worth.

Steve Hill

PCZONE VERDICT

74

RACE COLLECTION

■ £14.99 | Pub: Xplosiv | ETA: Out Now

WHAT A package (as the actress said to the bishop). A bumper sextet of racing games, four four-wheeled and two two-wheeled. So is it six of the best? Of course not. It's a mish-mash of titles chucked together in order to snag the unassuming petrol-head who values quantity over quality.

Pick of the bunch is *Total Immersion Racing*, to which we're ashamed to admit we may have been slightly harsh in the past. Given lots of time, it's actually a tight little racer, with a nod towards simulation as opposed to arcade spills. The same can't be said for *Sega Rally 2*, which is essentially one long powerslide, and *Supercar Street Challenge*, which is sullied by rubbery handling and ropey AI. *Ford Racing* takes it back to the racetrack, but is really no great shakes.

As for the two-wheeled contingent, it's headed up by the classic *Motocross Madness*, something of a revelation in its day due to new-fangled 3D hardware, but now



Slip sliding away in *Sega Rally 2*.

looking very dated, as is *Edgar Torrenteras' Extreme Biker*, basically a slightly inferior imitation.

Something of a mixed bag then, but if you don't mind average graphics – or you have a dodgy PC – there should be something here to maintain your interest.

Steve Hill

PCZONE VERDICT

70



LEFTOVERS

▲ PLEASE, SIR, CAN I HAVE SOME MORE?

All right, all right you lot, before you get too excited by the number of games in this month's column, let me ruin your misplaced enthusiasm by telling you how crap most of them are. Don't say I didn't warn you...

First off, *Myst Masterpiece Edition* (£4.99, Focus, Out Now). Static-screened old-school adventure game of the most turgid kind, the sort of game most self-respecting gamers wouldn't wipe their backside with if they went for a dump in a public loo and suddenly realised they'd run out of log rag. That's about the size of it. Of course if you've never played a game before in your life, you'll probably love it. 30 per cent.

So, on to *Sid Meier's SimGolf* (£9.99, EA, Out Now), a mildly amusing god-game with twee graphics where you create and run your own golf courses. If you buy this, expect fun for a day, followed by a rapid decent into tedium. 60 per cent.

What about *Grandia II* (£9.99, Focus, Out Now), a sloppily ported Dreamcast Japanese-style RPG, featuring an excellent combat system but a plot cornier than a Kellogg's factory? 62 per cent.

The Settlers III (£4.99, Focus, Out Now). Ancient. Cutesy. Semi-hardcore RTS. Still mildly fun if you're stuck in a temporal vortex and own a PC that can only count up to 14 (with prompting). Otherwise, not much cop. 60 per cent.

Cricket 2002 (£9.99, EA, Out Now) isn't much better. Although fun at first, the jollity soon wears thinner than an anorexic, with repetition setting in and boredom following. 59 per cent.

Finally, *Global Operations* (£9.99, EA, Out Now), one of the poorer team-based shooters of the last few years. Best played online, the overriding problem is that no one is. Which makes the whole process of marching down the shops, buying the game, marching back, installing it and firing it up a bit pointless really. You're better off saving your energy. 57 per cent. See? I did warn you.

Martin Korda



Sid Meier's SimGolf.



Cricket 2002.



Global Operations.

"...a great looking sci-fi blaster..." GamesMaster



PC
CD
ROM



"Beautiful" Edge

"A game so cool even the Fonz wants to play it." IGN.com

YAGER

STARRING MAGNUS TIDE SARAH McDAVID GUNTHER VAN BERG
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DEVELOPMENT

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FEEDBACK

Martin Korda delves into the mailbag to sort through your views on the latest batch of games to hit the shelves



IT'S YOUR SHOUT

Feedback is here to offer you a platform to have your say about games we've reviewed over the past three issues. Whether you totally agree or utterly disagree with us, we want to hear from you. And all you have to do to get your views in print is send an email to letters@pczone.co.uk with 'Feedback' in the subject line. Please try and keep your views to less than 100 words. Anything longer will not be considered or may have to be edited for size.

STAR WARS JEDI KNIGHT: JEDI ACADEMY

REVIEWED ISSUE: 133
SCORE: 89%

What we thought

If being a saber-wielding Jedi is what Star Wars is all about, then this could very well be the best Star Wars game ever.

What you said

I thought your review of *Jedi Knight: Jedi Academy* was brilliant. It really pushed me over the edge in deciding to preorder the game. I also agree that the lightsaber staff is the only way to go. I agree totally with the missed opportunities section, especially the part about how cool it would be to sever your opponents' limbs and hurl them at the enemy. I do not agree with the score you gave it, it should be at least a 91. A great review anyway, thanks for publishing it.

M Dakin

What a great game *Jedi Academy* is. I haven't enjoyed a game this much in a very, very long time, and I simply couldn't pull myself away from it. However I think your score



Jedi Knight: Jedi Academy has singularly failed to rouse your rancour.

was a little on the harsh side. I think the game deserves at least 93%. Raven has done a superb job in improving on the last game, and the lightsaber battles and Force powers make

shouldn't rush out and buy it, unless you've already taken our advice and done so. You clever people, give yourselves a pat on the back... unless of course you've accidentally

anyone who's sick of playing the same predictable RTS rubbish.

Mr C Glennon

The amount of detail is amazing. You can watch every single action your faction members carry out, such as banging on the door of your rival and sending thugs into his house to carry away his TV, VCR, etc, before loading it all into a van and speeding off down the road, leaving your victim with nothing - mwahahaha. It's one for the intellectuals all right. It's about time they made a game worthy of my superior brainpower.

escaped-monkey

"About time they made a game worthy of my brainpower"

ESCAPED-MONKEY

this, in my humble opinion, not only the greatest Star Wars game ever, but one of the best games I've ever played.

H Stokes

Comment

We've yet to receive a single negative letter regarding *Jedi Academy*. The game only just missed out on a Classic award because we felt it was too similar to its predecessor. But that's not to say you

severed off both your arms with a lightsaber.

REPUBLIC: THE REVOLUTION

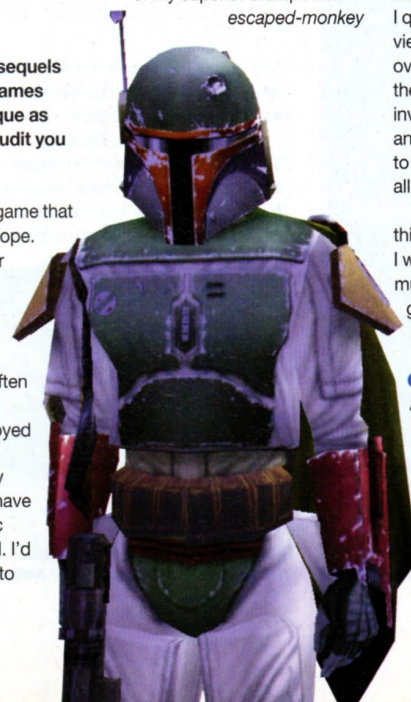
REVIEWED ISSUE: 132
SCORE: 88%

What we thought

In a world of identikit sequels and genre cash-ins, games that dare to be as unique as this deserve every plaudit you can throw at them.

What you said

Finally, a new strategy game that dares to push the envelope. Credit has to go to Elixir Studios for having the courage to try something new. Even though it's a flawed masterpiece, as is so often the case with original games, I've hugely enjoyed playing it. Unlike many other so-called strategy games, you genuinely have to think from a strategic perspective to succeed. I'd recommend this game to



Although the game has many faults, these are easily outweighed by its sheer brilliance. I'm not really a strategy fan. In fact before now, *Championship Manager* was the closest thing I've got to strategy. But *Republic* is the type of game you can sit and play for hours, considering each and every action and then deciding whether it's really worth the resulting repercussions. However, the learning curve is quite steep and it's not as freeform as I'd hoped. But it's still a great game. It would have made an excellent multiplayer game too.

B_L_C_Bob

I bought *Republic* a few days ago, and have spent some time trying it out. My opinion sits somewhere between those of the two guys who reviewed the game, Paul Presley and Keith Pullin.

I think that there's a good game in there, but it takes a lot of work to get into it. The longest single sitting I've played was two hours, and even after this, I didn't find I could get into the game.

I felt that there wasn't much control over political leanings. I was hoping that I could lead my party in the style of the Soviet Union, but this isn't possible. One thing I definitely agree with from the review is that the 3D engine is wasted. I quickly stopped using this view and just stayed in the overhead city view. I did find the game a little repetitive too - investigating areas, canvassing and running poster campaigns to take over the areas was often all I found myself doing.

I don't think I'll be keeping this game, despite the fact that I was looking forward to it so much. While I can see there's a good game in there, I don't feel I'll be able to get into it.

DarthMorbus

Comment

As expected, your opinions are divided on this game, but interestingly enough, not quite as much as we expected. We recently spoke to Demis Hassabis about his game, and he hinted that he'd like to make a multiplayer patch. Here's hoping. [X]



Republic's early sales and feedback have been pretty positive.

YOUR ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO THE WIRED WORLD OF ONLINE GAMING

ONLINE ZONE

A BIT OF FUN



ONLINE EDITOR: Paul Presley

▲ People often say to me, "Presley, you're a lucky old bugger. Playing games for a living. Such fun. Certainly beats the 19-hour days I have to put in down t'pits digging for the fabled lost treasure of the Sierra Madre."

And they're right, of course. I have it ridiculously easy. People actually pay me fat wads of cash money to SIT ON MY ARSE AND PLAY GAMES. Hahahahahahaha. If it wasn't for the fact that I'm an institution around here I might actually have to go out and earn a living somewhere. Doesn't bear thinking about.

What continually baffles me is why so many other people take this 'industry' so damned seriously. I mean, it's games. Playthings. We're not inventing new forms of heart surgery or blasting men into outer space. We're designing, making and writing about ways to kill made-up zombies in virtual arenas. It's all I can do to stifle my laughter whenever I see someone wearing a suit around here. But they do. They treat everything with such buttock-clenching seriousness that you could cut yourself on their pomposity. Franchise this. License that. Endorsements left, right and centre.

Which is why I find events such as i17 (see news story, right) so refreshing. It's the human face of gaming. The side of the industry that we so often forget is the most vital element of them all. No gamers, no games. No games, no shiny Ferraris parked out the front of your million-pound mansions. Simple as that.

OK, I know I was banging on last month about the establishment being cool and groovy and that, but it's all a question of balance. Besides I'm fickle. I just go where the laughs are. Simple as that.

Ph33r And L0ath1ng in Newbury Racecourse

1,000 GAMERS, FOUR LONG DAYS AND MORE PIZZAS THAN DAVE'S FREEZER



Pizza and coke - staple foods of a LANner.



A relatively clean and tidy first day.

NO ONE IS pretending these things are glamorous. Picture a thousand guys like you (and it is mostly guys. There are women here - girlfriends, partners, relatives, desktop wallpaper models - all handily summed up with the phrase 'long-suffering'). But mainly it's men. And pizza boxes. And giant cooling fans, spending four days straight seated in a giant hall, bereft of either ventilation or natural daylight (both anathema to the hardened LANner).

needless showing off). Apart from the usual *Counter-Strike*-athons, mammoth *BF1942* sessions and all the other usual deathmatch shenanigans, erstwhile MMOG shooter *PlanetSide* was the big draw - Ubisoft kindly providing temporary trial accounts to anyone that asked and Sony producer Dave Georgeson giving demonstrations of the title throughout the weekend.

Tournaments held during the extended weekend crowned champions

Spread across three floors usually reserved for bigwig bookies and horse-racing VIPs, these LAN parties resemble a giant IT call centre staffed by sweating adolescents. The difference being the random cheers breaking out from different areas of the hall, signifying a kill, a match win or the successful sighting of an incoming pepperoni slice. In truth everyone involved has the time of their lives, and it's these sort of events that truly hammer home how much joy this hobby called gaming brings to our lives. To be a part of i18 this November, hop on over to www.multiply.co.uk and sign up for a slot.

"Picture a thousand guys bereft of ventilation and natural daylight. Paris Fashion Week it ain't"

Paris Fashion Week it ain't. iLAN17 - the latest multiplayer gaming extravaganza held thrice-yearly by Multiplay - it is.

For four whole days, Newbury Racecourse was home to the largest gathering on UK soil of hardcore gaming fanatics (Italy holds a 100,000-player event apparently - but frankly that's just

of all the usual titles, although for the small minority who managed to keep going non-stop for the entire four days, the only reward was a warm bed waiting back home (and a shower, hopefully). And for the perpetrators of the 'Golf Course Incident', condemnation for all involved. Disgraceful.



Accommodation is strictly DIY.



The ZONE drones, ready for action.



An event for all ages.



Counter-Strike proves a popular draw.



122

HORIZONS

Playable dragons from Atari



124

BATTLEFIELD VIETNAM

EA's rumble in the jungle



134

GETTING STARTED IN...

A Tale In The Desert laid bare



139

NEVERQUEST

Party time in Shadowlands

THE FORCE IS WITH US

STAR WARS GALAXIES RELEASED IN EUROPE - AHEAD OF SCHEDULE

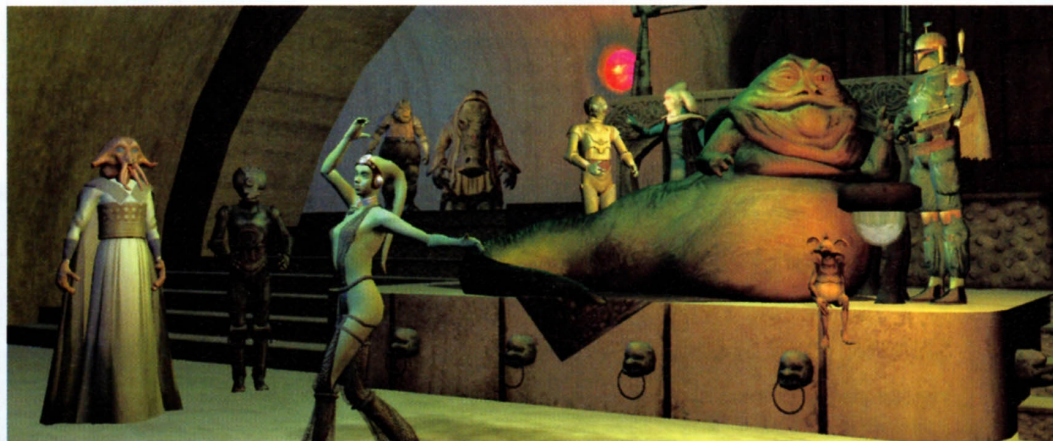
EXPERTS HAD predicted Christmas. The industry grapevine had said no earlier than 2004. Our own sources at LucasArts even suggested that there would be at least 12 months before anyone outside of the US would get their hands on it. But despite it all, and in a manner not unlike the game's pre-emptive Stateside release, *Star Wars Galaxies* has been announced for Europe - due to arrive on our local shelves ahead of schedule on October 31.

Pre-orders are already flying in to places like Amazon, Game and Play.com, and with the original US version becoming one of the fastest-growing MMOGs in history (300,000 users and growing), it's a sure bet that interest will be equally high in the rest of the civilised world.

Initial complaints about bugs, server instability and content issues have been continually addressed by LucasArts/Sony since launch, and the European divisions are boasting a stable infrastructure on which to build. We'll be taking a detailed look at *SWG* once the Euro servers are up and running.



'Storming' (geddit?) all over a European server soon.



No one throws a party like Jabba - bringing his entourage to Europe this October.

EXCLUSIVE TO PC ZONE READERS - DARK AGE OF CAMELOT TRIAL

GIVE THE MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER MEDIEVAL MARVEL A TRY WITH OUR SUPERB 21-DAY OFFER

ON THE DVD With the *Trials Of Atlantis* expansion pack winging its way towards us, we thought we'd give you lucky MMOG maniacs a chance to catch up on everything *Dark Age Of Camelot* with an exclusive free 21-day trial period.

We've teamed up with the fine folks at Mythic Entertainment to put the core engine for the medieval realm-combat classic, plus the recent *Shrouded Isles* expansion pack (adding three new continents to explore, along with a host of new character classes), on our DVD this month. All you have to do is pop it in your drive, install and enjoy.

You'll find all the connection and registration details on page 160. So take up those swords, mount those trusty steeds, laugh contemptuously in the faces of mud-caked peasants and fight your way to glory! For three weeks.



PC ZONE ups the antler with an amazing three-week freebie.

WEBGAME OF THE MONTH

WHY PAY TO PLAY WHEN THE INTERWEB PROVIDES FUN FOR FREE?



MINDER (www.minder.org)

"I could be so good for you. Love you like you want me to. Ooh ooh-ooh ooh ooh. I'll be so good for you." Not only a lovely hymn, but also the words Dennis Waterman would belt out every week to millions of adoring fans during the opening credits of *Minder*. Who could fail to watch in rapt attention as he and "Arfur" Daley would slowly circle a white Ford Capri for no good reason, before setting off on some half-baked scheme to make them both "millionaires" by this time next year. (That was *Del Boy* - Ed)

Such was the grip *Minder* had on the nation that merchandising spin-offs were everywhere. Lunch boxes, Christmas annuals, deely boppers, saucy underwear and, ultimately, the ZX Spectrum computer game. It was brilliant. Okay, it received the worst reviews since time began. And even the developer disowned it as a "mistake", but I prefer to



Minder: A nice little earner.

think of it as ahead of its time. Think *Elite*. In a Jag. You ARE Arthur Daley, buying and selling your way around the East End. Rubber wet suits, tins of plastic pimples, cardboard *Blue Peter* presenters - anything and everything could be traded, including items you didn't already have, leading to manic races against time as you try to get Terry to find the goods.

It was my most favourite game from the whole of the '80s and, blessed be, if someone hasn't gone and transferred it to the Java environment and made the whole thing playable via the web. Lovely jubbly. (That's *Del Boy* again - Ed) Ahh bollocks to it. I preferred *Lovejoy* anyway.



Undead monsters are the future.

DEVELOPER DIARY



DRAGON EMPIRES

PETER TYSON, Codemasters

"Monsters are fickle creatures. One minute they are happily under your control doing your bidding and then the next they are rampaging around the landscape or drifting through the air in a most inappropriate way. Well, so the artists tell me, as they work to create the monsters for our world.

"From an early bestiary of only a dozen creatures, our stable of the bizarre is steadily growing to encompass hundreds of monsters and variants. For some reason, the undead are particularly featured in our menagerie, with undead versions of many creatures able to be found wandering the lands. My favorites so far are the zombies, who shuffle in a very convincing manner, and our skeleton lords with their decaying clothes and regalia. We also have many other undead, including wolves, deer and even an ostrich-like bird that reminds me of the aftermath of a night at KFC.

"Each monster plays an important part in *Dragon Empires* and the various monsters will be described in our lore and

"We have an undead ostrich bird that reminds me of a night at KFC"

game back-story. Some are native to the world, but many are not and may have their own goals. "As well as monsters, we have bandits and strange cults, one of which believes in reaching enlightenment through removing their own senses one by one in bizarre rituals. Wielding strong magic, the most 'enlightened' of this cult will be quite a gruesome force!

"It has been fun to see the imaginations of the artists set loose to create a huge variety of creatures. As I write, our legendary Kittahs, winged cat-like beasts, are hovering around in-game as an artist checks to see they are working well. Like a swarm of nectar-drunk bees they drift back and forth with the breeze totally failing to convince anyone that they are the least bit threatening. It would seem a bowl of milk and a scratch behind the ears would probably placate them at this time.

"However, the team informs me that once the AI and combat code is fully implemented, they and all the other monsters will be terrifying. I believe them, but still advise people to carry some Whiskas just in case. Until next month!"

The EVE of a new dawn

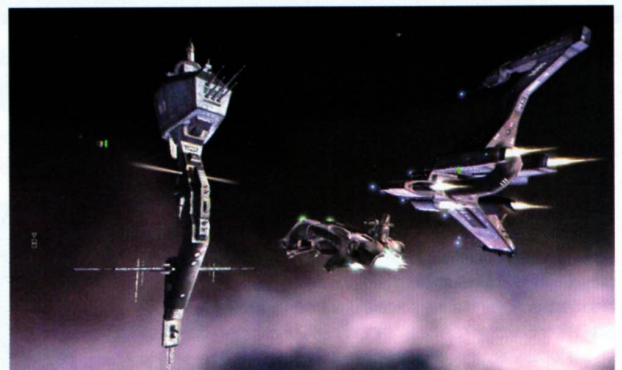
NEW CONTENT OPENS THE EVE UNIVERSE TO WIDER APPEAL

DEPENDING ON your viewpoint, *EVE Online* is either the finest thing since sliced *Elite*, or the slowest thing since the wait for *Elite 4*. Either way, you'll be pleased to hear that the *EVE* universe is currently undergoing a major content upheaval, designed to attract new players and shake things up for veteran space cadets. The practical decimation of one of the game's major races has caused a power vacuum in the galaxy. Alliances between major corporations are changing political landscapes and trading routes.

From a gaming point of view, the coming months will see a host of changes, from new ships (such as the highly armed 'elite frigates') to customisable mining platforms (a boon to the dedicated entrepreneur fed up of constant pirate attacks) to the long-awaited player-built stations.

According to our man in the space lanes, these changes have made the game far more combat-oriented than ever, with over 60 epic ship battles taking place. So, if all that has fired your thrusters and you feel like signing up, enter our superb competition (see right).

- **Publisher:** Crucial Entertainment
- **Developer:** CCP Games
- **ETA:** Out Now
- **Website:** www.eve-online.com



Player-built stations will add visual variety.

COMPETITION: WIN 50 DAYS OF EVE ONLINE

In honour of the universe-shattering action now taking place within *EVE's* star systems, developer CCP has given us TEN prepaid gamecards, offering the lucky holder FIFTY days of free *EVE Online* playing time. To win one, just answer the question below:

Where is EVE developer CCP based?
A: Norway
B: Iceland
C: Neptune

Send your answer on the back of a postcard to: *EVE Online* Comp, PC ZONE, 30 Cleveland Street, London W1T 4JD. Closing date: Wednesday November 12, 2003.

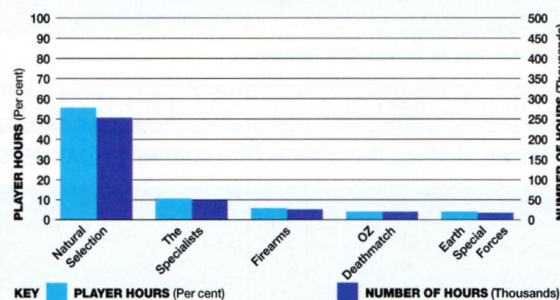
(Terms and conditions: Winners will be notified by post. No cash alternative. Prizes not necessarily as shown. No correspondence will be entered into. All the usual competition rules, conditions and restrictions apply. As do the rules of attraction. And the laws of gravity. Except in space. The editor's decision is final.)

STATZONE

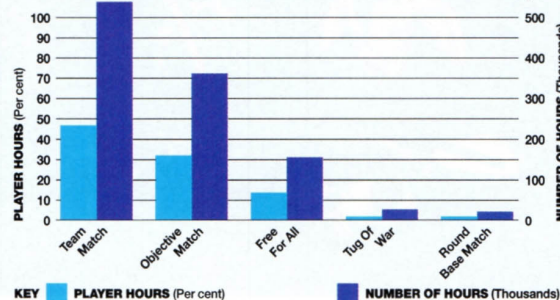
A LOOK AT THE NUMBERS SHAPING YOUR ONLINE WORLD

ALL DATA SUPPLIED BY: ESPORTS.net

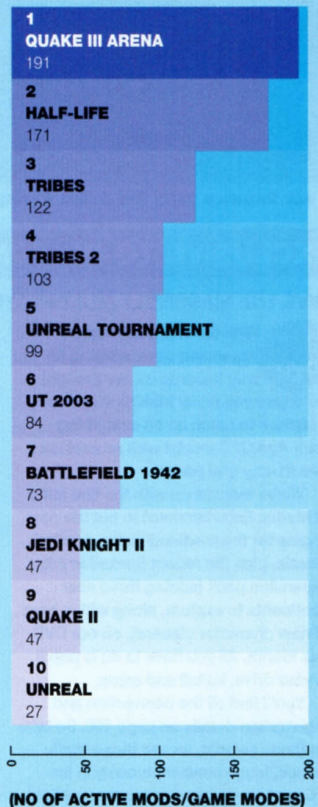
TOP FIVE NON-COMMERCIAL HALF-LIFE MODS (W/END SEPT 11, 2003)



TOP FIVE MEDAL OF HONOR MULTIPLAYER MODES (W/END SEPT 11, 2003)



MOST VIBRANT GAMING COMMUNITIES (MONTH ENDING SEPTEMBER 11, 2003)



WELCOME TO MY WORLD...

DAVID COHEN, *The Saga Of Ryzom*


SINCE THE genre started, MMOGs have been able to point to many sources of inspiration, from Egyptian mythology to classic space operas. Fair to say that precious few have been inspired by long-lasting British television personalities. Until now. *The Saga Of Ryzom* counts among its various influences the work of popular funnyman Bobby Davro... er, sorry, that should be the popular naturalist behind classic series such as *Life On Earth* and *Wildlife On One*.

"*Ryzom's* world was inspired by many things, from the works of David Attenborough to Frank Herbert to Miyazaki [director of *Spirited Away*], right down to the single pieces of moss you can find in a forest." So says *Ryzom's* producer and Nevrax's CEO, David Cohen, although his initial desire comes from a very simple piece of wish fulfillment. "It grew out of the frustration of not being able to 'exist' in the worlds described in books. Nothing's better than creating a MMOG for a total sensory immersion inside a fantasy world – and the great thing is that unlike with a book or a movie you're not alone."

The world in *Ryzom* strays from many traditional MMOG norms, not least in the area of ecology. "Atys is a vegetal world where men are not the dominant species," Cohen explains. "The environment is something very difficult but very exciting to tackle." The visual style is extremely skewed towards the naturalistic side, with ecosystems ranging from deserts to jungles to lake districts. Technology is virtually nonexistent,

with the inhabitants relying on the abundance of flora for almost all things. It sounds like a hippie's dreamy paradise, but having such intricate ecologies presents its own set of problems.

"They're hell to code!" exclaims Cohen. "A particular environment contains terrestrial creatures that are not allowed to enter water, aquatic creatures that are supposed to stay where they belong, and gameplay exploits that you have to think about and prevent. You don't want players who can go underwater and come out to try and hit people or creatures above the surface while they're hidden underwater, and vice versa, for example."

Still, the effort is worth it. Visually *Ryzom* is nothing short of breathtaking. Environments change according to seasons, landscapes can be affected by player actions, even the plants can interact with the players, and not just in a *Day Of The Triffids* style. Budding horticulturalists can experience the natural joys early next year. 

"Ryzom was inspired by many things, from David Attenborough to Frank Herbert to the single pieces of moss you can find in a forest"

DAVID COHEN CEO, NEVRAX

■ Publisher: Wanadoo
 ■ Developer: Nevrax
 ■ ETA: 2004
 ■ Website: www.ryzom.com



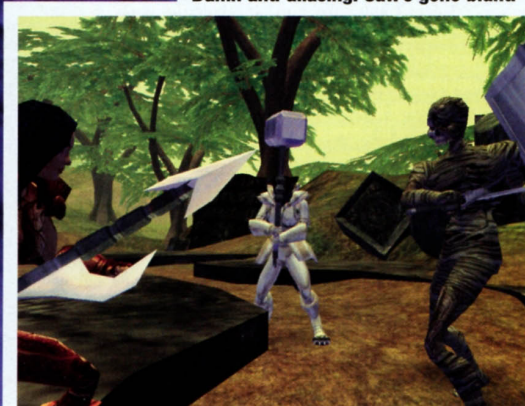
It's not easy being green. Unless you're this guy.



Weight Watchers gets competitive.



Damn anti-aliasing. Saw's gone blunt.



Rock Paper Scissors goes extreme.

It's time to expand your... HORIZONS

Atari is hoping to set new standards in the MMOG arena. Paul Presley hopes it won't 'drag-on'...

MENTION DRAGONS

to the average man on the Clapham omnibus and you're in for one of two reactions. Either, "Dragons! Cool. Coolest of the cool. Wanna see my collection of 20-sided dice?" or it's, "Dragons? Pshaw, away from me you fiend. I pour scorn upon you and your geeky kind with your D&D ways. And besides, what the hell are we doing on an omnibus in the 21st Century?"

Atari is hoping that *Horizons*, Artifact Entertainment's first foray into the MMOG genre, will attract the attention of the former rather than the latter, thanks to the inclusion of playable dragons. As in dragons, right, that you can play. You may whoop or shudder now, according to taste.

"The dragons are cool," says *Horizons'* creative director David Bowman. A world filled with fire-breathers wouldn't be much cop, so a measure of balancing has been necessary. "Dragons start as juveniles and can only breathe fire at a single

opponent. Since they don't get to use the millions of different weapons, shields and other equipment, they instead place them in their hoards. A hoard's value provides benefits and is one of the prerequisites in qualifying for the Adult Rite of Passage."

Once passed, flight and widespread fire-breathing come into play. "There is also an Ancient Rite," adds Bowman, "allowing larger dragons, higher flight and frost, acid or electrical breath attacks."

GROUND-POUNDING

Artifact is keen to stress that *Horizons* isn't just about the dragons - other races have unique abilities too. "I believe many gamers will try playing a dragon," Bowman suggests, "but, as we are seeing in our beta testing, the other eight living races are also cool and popular in varying ways." Yeah, but none sound like Sean Connery.

On the face of it, *Horizons* seems like just another standard swords 'n' sorcery role-playing affair. Standard *EverQuest*.

THE DETAILS

PUBLISHER Atari
DEVELOPER Artifact Entertainment
ETA November 2003
WEBSITE www.istaria.com

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Dragons as playable characters, living among floating boulders in the sky
- Player-built communities with in-game guild interfaces
- Land can be bought, sold and built within a seamless world
- Comprehensive character class system (including confectioners!)

CV



ARTIFACT ENTERTAINMENT

Staffed by veterans of the gaming industry, including some of the brains behind *Asheron's Call 2*, *Myth*, *Dungeon Siege* and *Total Annihilation*, Artifact is focused purely on the world of MMOGs.

1999 Founded in order to create proprietary massively multiplayer gaming technologies. Work begins on an engine called Evolution.

2000 Worked on technology for use with real-life military communities. We could tell you more but Artifact would have to kill us. Then you.

2001 *Horizons* commences production, providing a showcase for the team's technology.



No more huff and puff nonsense...

“Buying land and developing your personal little empire is a key aspect to life in the game world of Istaria”

But beneath the surface there are plenty of original ideas at work, the biggest of which being property development. We're not quite talking the world's first massively multiplayer online estate agency or anything, but buying land and developing your personal little empire is a key aspect to your prosperous life in the game world of Istaria.

LOCATION, LOCATION

“Many games have restricted players to one pre-built building or the player community is actually a zone, separate from the rest of the world,” explains Bowman. “I understand the technical limitations that make this necessary in other games, but *Horizons* has seamless



“I couldn't borrow a cigarette by any chance, could I?”

player-built communities with players making the choice of which buildings they want and deciding their positions and orientation on the property. You can construct as many buildings as you can fit and afford on property.”

Neither is it simply a pile of plots on a barren farmland in generic locales. “It was essential that the world of Istaria be truly three-dimensional,” says Bowman. “The magic of the dragons allows their communities to be crafted from immense boulders suspended in the sky. Entire cities are



Ray Harryhausen lives.

As far as story content goes, *Horizons* is somewhat vague at present. There's the usual 'looming evil sweeping across the land' malarkey, although Bowman assures players that the world will be a dynamic one, constantly updating with new content. “We can, and will, change the world in real time around the players,” he urges. “This will not be done capriciously but will reflect the ongoing story and the player's impact on the world, while creating massive events that sweep across an entire continent.”

The extensive list of careers hints at a deeply involving game (players can travel along any job path at will), from standards such as paladins, rangers and sorcerers, down to specialists like tailors, miners and confectioners (Chocolate Eclair +3, anyone?). There are also game-specific job paths such as Flame Disciples, Bloodmages and Chaos Warriors.

Mainly though, it's the dragons that Artifact is relying on to pull in the punters. With the November release date still looking firm, it'll have barely half a year to find its feet before the big one, *EverQuest II*, arrives on the scene. Then we'll see whether Bowman and co manage to pass their own Adult Rite of Passage. [X]

on floating islands, which ancient magic has brought into being.”

FREQUENT FLYER MILES

Istaria also benefits from being a seamless world, rather than a series of pre-loaded 'zones'. Travel from one majestic location to another takes place in a fluid manner. Or, as Bowman rather fancifully describes, “When you descend into the dwarven city of Aughundell, tunnelled into the rock of the world, you don't enter through a portal or some other zone-hiding device. You walk through the mighty main hall and directly into the depths of Istaria.”



“I've... (puff) got to get... (pant) new friends... (gasp)”

BETA OFF DEAD

THE TESTING STAGES FOR *HORIZONS* HAVE PROVEN TO BE A BOON FOR ARTIFACT

The standard practice for any new MMOG is to run a number of closed beta sessions – sessions that journalists aren't allowed anywhere near. In fact most have extensive sign-up sheets and non-disclosure agreements to sign that include outright “are you a filthy hack?” questions that cause alarm bells to ring and SWAT teams to descend upon you should you accidentally tick ‘yes’.

Horizons has currently held three such sessions, with Bowman and the team learning bundles along the way. “The beta phases have been great in helping us refine our policies and procedures,” he says. “We are just entering the first full content feedback phase and we'll see many changes in advancement, loot, quests, combat, community building, interface, etc, as a result. We've already added many features to the interface as a direct result of player feedback.” So get over to www.betatests.net and make your mark on the gaming world.

The horror, the horror...

BATTLEFIELD VIETNAM

"Charlie's on the wire, I can smell him." Steve Hill sniffs out the facts



America encapsulated in a single picture.

THE DETAILS

PUBLISHER Electronic Arts
DEVELOPER Digital Illusions Canada
ETA Spring 2004
WEBSITE www.eagames.com/official/battlefield1942/editorial/vietnam.jsp

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- The *Battlefield* series goes to 'Nam
- All-new game mechanics and graphics engine
- 64-player mass jungle warfare
- Period music that can be played from the helicopters



THE VIETNAM War may have been one of the more shameful periods in American history, but it's made for some great films and music. The games industry is finally catching up, and if brown is the new black, then 'Nam is the new World War II. This year sees a flurry of titles released, from the gung-ho violence of *Vietcong* to the risible torpor of *Platoon*. Online, it's been a mixed bag, and turning atrocity into multiplayer entertainment is *Battlefield Vietnam*, which comes with the heritage of the *Battlefield 1942* series,

about to spawn its second add-on in the shape of the fanciful *Secret Weapons Of World War II*.

However, *Battlefield Vietnam* will be a standalone game, a fact that has already caused murmurs of message board dissent. Electronic Arts is keen to stress that the game represents a sizeable leap forward. Producer Reid Schneider told us: "One thing we really want to emphasise is it's not just *Battlefield 1942* with a Vietnam look to it. It's an all-new game. It's a new type of guerrilla warfare in terms of focusing it around Vietnam, and some of the ways we're doing that is through trench warfare and booby traps. Another key part of the Vietnam experience was napalm, so that was something we felt we needed to integrate into the game. One of the other key elements of Vietnam was, of course, airlifting, which really changed the way battles were fought."

CV



DIGITAL ILLUSIONS

A Swedish outfit with a long and varied history, which recently saw the formation of Digital Illusions Canada, responsible for *Battlefield Vietnam*. Here are some highlights...

- 1995** *Pinball Illusions* is the third of their classic trilogy and tops the all-format chart.
- 1998** *Motorhead* is a very fast racing game (and a hoary rock band).
- 1999** *STCC* is an acronym for the Swedish Touring Car Championship.
- 2000** *Rally Masters* provides a decent alternative to *McRae*.
- 2000** *STCC 2* is a non-awaited sequel.
- 2002** *Rallispport Challenge* is more rallying goodness.
- 2002** *Battlefield 1942* proves a massive online hit.
- 2003** *Battlefield 1942: Road To Rome* is its first add-on pack.



where a pile of logs is rolled on to some hapless US troops, crushing them like woodlice.

By way of riposte, the Americans will be carrying some heavy armoury, and this is an area that has received a great deal of attention, with EA admitting the first-person shooter elements of *Battlefield 1942* weren't as strong as they could have been. To this end, the guns in *Vietnam* will be far more dynamic, offering subtleties such as bullets being fed into the chamber, and even reloads based on actual field data. Also, the weight of weapons will have some bearing, with a heavy gun enough

BIGGER, BADDER, LOUDER

Those battles were fought between the mighty US war machine and the have-a-go heroes of the North Vietnamese Army. Something of a mismatch, you might think, but Digital Illusions is doing its best to ensure there is some kind of balance. Deciding which side you choose to fight for will inevitably lead to a vastly different gameplay experience, with the Yanks buzzing around in hi-tech helicopters, and the Vietcong trying to escape on an old Vespa scooter. Clearly, the NVA will benefit from better use of the terrain, and we've seen one of the booby traps in operation,



The unluckiest sky diver in the world.



Giant Vietcong soldiers were a constant threat.



When congestion charging attacks.

to marginally slow a player down. Ultimately though, as producer AJ Marini says: "What we wanted to do is make sure the player firing this weapon feels like they're firing an actual gun, it's not just a cool weapon in the game."

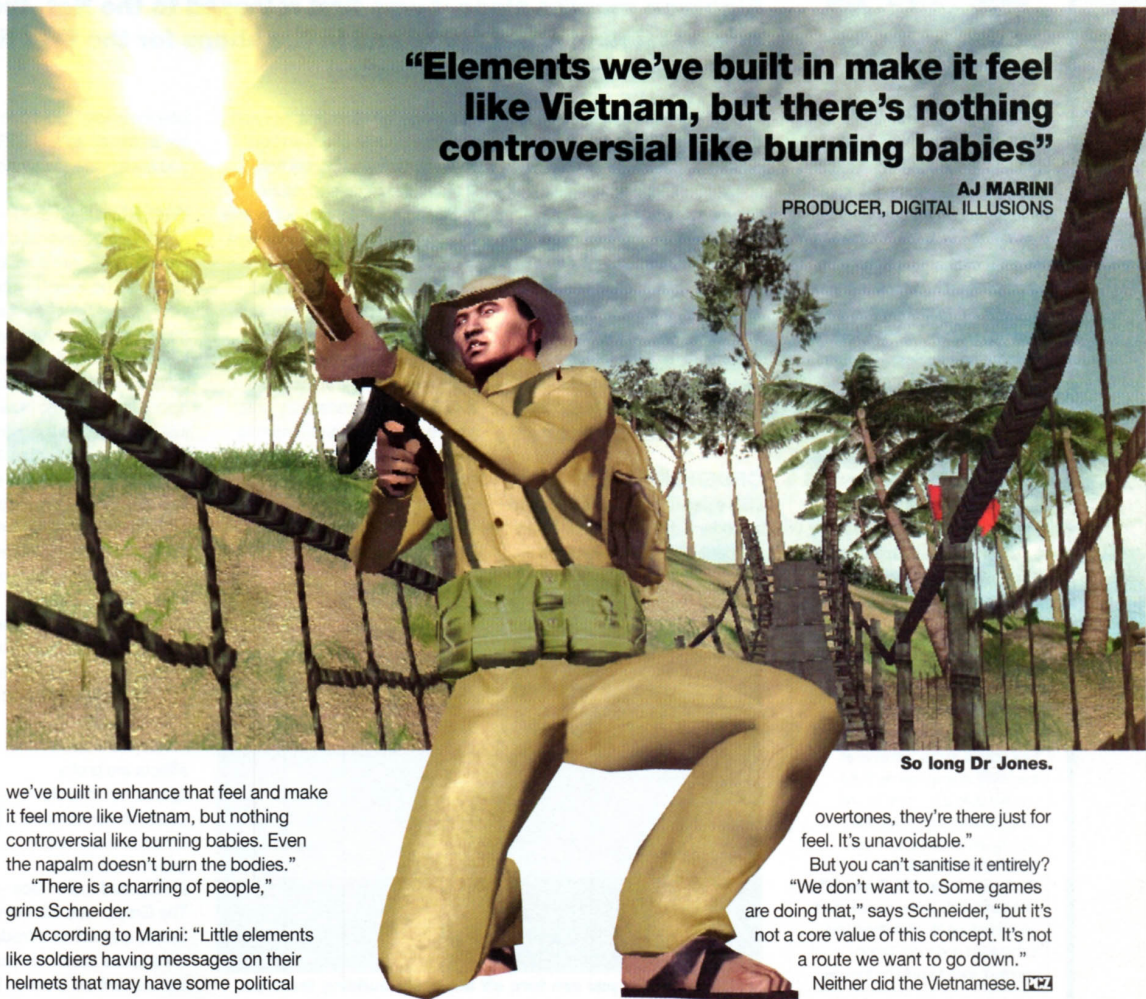
HOORAY FOR HOLLYWOOD

Vietnam veterans and war historians aside, the vast majority of people's concept of the conflict comes from the movies, and this is something the game is hoping to exploit. According to Schneider: "One of the key focuses was trying to deliver what people understand as the Hollywood experience of Vietnam. So the game is designed to look, sound and feel in line with what people know, which covers everything from the way it looks to the sounds of the guns. We're using Hollywood for inspiration, but it's not a blueprint or something we feel we have to do."

As for the moral issue of setting a game in Vietnam, Schneider is adamant: "I think you face the same issues with a game set in World War II. Obviously this war was a lot more controversial, but we're focusing on the fun aspects of it. We definitely won't put anything in there that could be even construed as remotely offensive."

So you won't be able to wipe out villages full of children?

"No, no, no, no, no," both producers cry in unison, with Marini continuing, "That's not part of the *Battlefield* franchise. Somehow in *Battlefield 1942*, the whole idea of World War II was very heroic and almost comic book. This is definitely a grungier war, so elements



"Elements we've built in make it feel like Vietnam, but there's nothing controversial like burning babies"

AJ MARINI
PRODUCER, DIGITAL ILLUSIONS

So long Dr Jones.

we've built in enhance that feel and make it feel more like Vietnam, but nothing controversial like burning babies. Even the napalm doesn't burn the bodies."

"There is a charring of people," grins Schneider.

According to Marini: "Little elements like soldiers having messages on their helmets that may have some political

overtones, they're there just for feel. It's unavoidable."

But you can't sanitise it entirely? "We don't want to. Some games are doing that," says Schneider, "but it's not a core value of this concept. It's not a route we want to go down."

Neither did the Vietnamese. [E]

MUSIC SOUNDS BETTER WITH HUEY

NO FOOTAGE OF VIETNAM IS COMPLETE WITHOUT A ROUSING SOUNDTRACK REPRESENTING THE ERA



"How much is that doggy in the window, woof woof..."

Thanks to Hollywood, many '60 and '70s standards are inextricably linked with the war. *Apocalypse Now* would have been a different film without the music of The Doors, and seasoned late-night TV viewers will recall The Rolling Stones' *Paint It Black* providing the rousing intro for the 'Nam-based series *Tour Of Duty*.

Battlefield Vietnam isn't about to miss out on such a crucial area of the atmosphere, and EA is in the process of licensing some 20 tracks from the era. While the list hasn't been finalised, the

version we saw featured The Kinks' *All Night And All Of The Day* as a placeholder. Hopefully, you'll be able to add your own MP3s, as we'd find it highly amusing to drop Agent Orange while listening to The Chemical Brothers.

All good stuff, but the clever part is that other players will be able to hear the music blaring out from your helicopter, meaning that a fleet of Hueys will be able to send Charlie scattering to the strains of *Ride Of The Valkyries*. We can't wait.



OK, it's not C&C, but just try to stop playing it.



Deploy your forces to best effect (although painting them gold doesn't help).

LASER SQUAD NEMESIS



■ £12.99 (includes three months subscription, US\$7 per month thereafter) | Dev: Codo Technologies | Pub: Just Play | ETA: Out Now | www.lasersquadnemesis.com

REQUIRES PII 200MHz, 64MB RAM, 40MB free HD space, valid email address DESIRES That'll do it, to be honest, but an 8MB graphics card won't hurt

Eighteen months since it was first released to the Net, the new version of LSN is here and in the shops for the first time. Richie Shoemaker is still hooked

WE'VE all been there at seven o'clock in the morning, waiting by the front door, hoping for postie to launch a salvo of birthday cards stuffed with fivers through the letterbox. Very often the anticipation would have to be prolonged past our birthdays as the latest postal strike wound itself up, but we camped on our doormats regardless, hoping... waiting... knowing.

Alas, as the years roll by the relatives you remember our special day become fewer, the envelopes arrive lighter and as a consequence the giddy anticipation of youth gives way to sullen acceptance, as another year passes, marked only by timely reminders of unpaid bills.

And where we might once have found solace sorting through our digital mail, increasingly our spam-jammed inboxes have become as depressing a place to frequent as our front doors, with daily invitations for penis enlargements, dozens of second-hand jokes and offers to make millions sitting on our fat arses. If it wasn't for *Laser Squad Nemesis*, I would have ditched *Outlook Express* years ago and retrograded to carrier pigeon.

ORDER SKIRMISH

LSN relies simply on two players, a modem and a first-generation 3D card. One player issues a

challenge, another accepts and over the course of a few days their handpicked troops fight it out to the bitter end, each receiving and carrying out orders through their regular email client.

Giving instructions is as simple as selecting units and setting fire orders and movement waypoints for your squad. When you're happy with your commands you test them out and fine tune if necessary until you're ready to submit them to the game server. Since the turn files are tiny, online time is naturally brief and although the wait for the next turn's email can be drawn out to the point where

interest is lost, most games are as frantic as any RTS you could care to mention.

WHERE BE GREYS

LSN's boardgame mechanics belie its addictive simplicity. There are no inventory items to worry about, just how best to make use of each unit within each ten-second turn as you position your troops to counter opponent's tactics. However, just because the mechanics of the game are simple it doesn't mean victory is easy to come by – a poorly co-ordinated strike or a soldier not set to cover his comrades' advance could quickly bring on a crushing defeat.

Graphically, *LSN* is no stunner, but each unit has a retro B-movie charm that is hard not to like. Necessity has meant music is nonexistent and sound effects are pretty sparse but they do a good job nonetheless. If we have any major gripes it's that the anticipated fourth race – The Greys – are still being tested and will be introduced via a future patch. Undeniably the wait will be worth it. [72]

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Finely-balanced units
- ✓ Fantastic value
- ✓ Deceptively simple gameplay
- ✗ Flat maps
- ✗ Functional graphics and sound
- ✗ League system doesn't carry much incentive

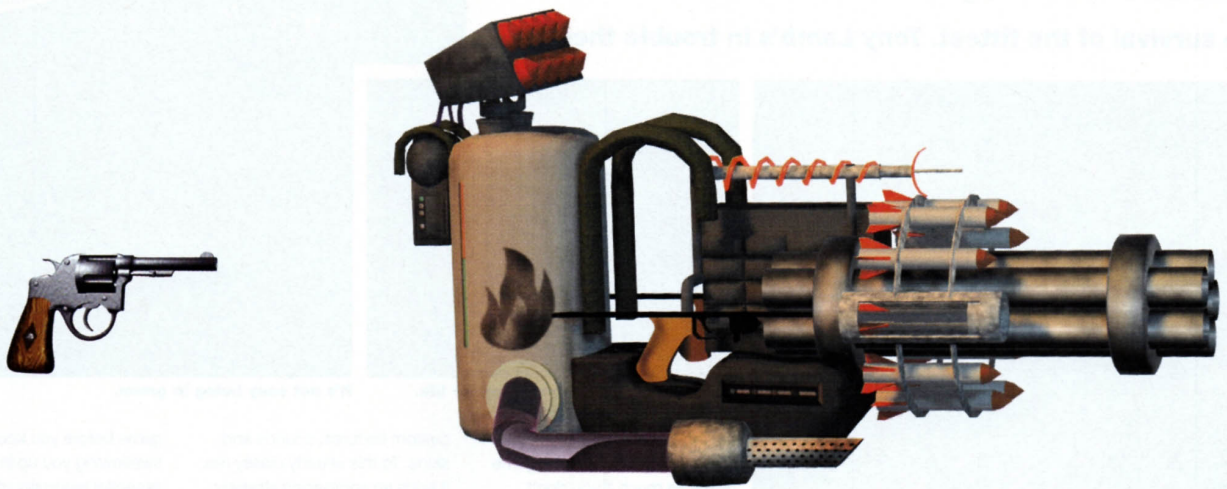
87

Unrivalled, both in gameplay and value for money



Luddites among you can turn off the basic building textures.





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GameXtra from One.Tel gives unlimited dial-up access and an extra long 6 hour cut-off period to make sure your gaming isn't interrupted – the ideal way to perfect your fragging. Alternatively, if you're looking for a connection that's up to 10 times faster than dial-up, that lets you use your phone at the same time, Broadband from One.Tel is just £27.99 a month. And because One.Tel have been recognised as the UK's Best Consumer Internet Service Provider at the ISPA Awards 2003, you can be sure you'll get the best possible service and support.

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NATURAL SELECTION V2.01



ON THE DVD SIZE 119MB REQUIRES Full version of Half-Life
www.natural-selection.org

TOTAL CONVERSION

It's the survival of the fittest. Tony Lamb's in trouble then



"Nice to meet you. Can I get you a coffee?"

A mutant space rhino is a pet for life.

It's not easy being in green.

THIS stunning multiplayer-only strategy-cum-shooter mod would have Charles Darwin spinning in his butterfly collections if he saw it. Still, *Natural Selection* is an apt inheritor of the phrase he first coined, taking elements of the most popular gameplay types around – strategy and

first-person fragging – and combining them to make a very different but extremely successful new breed. It's a bit of an oddity, but also a real triumph, kicking ass and showing what the ageing *Half-Life* engine can do when pushed. The latest version of *NS* continues the themes of *Version 1.0*, adding more maps along the way and generally refining the experience. Yet again, reading

the manual is a must – you won't enjoy or contribute to the game nearly as much if you don't. So take the time to soak it up. Find out about how the marine commander takes charge. Learn how to help your alien buddies respawn faster and use the hive 'mind' to see your human enemies. You won't regret it. *NS* is very reminiscent of *Aliens Vs. Predator*, with phenomenal atmosphere, visceral in-ye-face firefights and an outstanding range of

custom textures, sounds and skins. To this already classy mix it adds an engrossing strategy element that pulls you into the

game before you know it, swallowing you up in the essential teamplay of the marines, or setting you loose with the autonomous killing-machine freedom of the aliens. It's a heady combination of base-building, resource gathering and tactical planning so beloved of armchair generals with trigger-squeezin' bloodlust. You couldn't ask for better. **PCZ**



PCZONE VERDICT 89
 The natural choice (ho ho)

THE SPECIALISTS V2.0

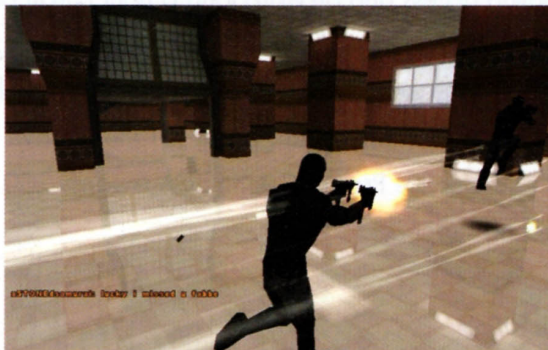
ON THE DVD SIZE 121MB REQUIRES Full version of Half-Life
www.specialistsmod.net

TOTAL CONVERSION



Thanks to all this bullet time, Tony Lamb feels he's special too...

PUMPED with adrenaline, you chase your wounded opponent down a dimly lit corridor, spent cases ringing as they hit the floor, bullets ripping the air by his head. Another round catches him, he staggers and you close in for the kill. Stumbling, he feints left and appears to run straight up a wall, slow-mo twisting in mid air. Suddenly a pair of Uzis materialise in his hands as if from nowhere and he riddles you with a blinding hail of 9mm rounds at point-blank range. As your lifeblood seeps from your broken body, your disembodied voice gargles in your ears: "What the f--k?" This is *The Specialists*, a mod that blends the familiar team deathmatch combat idea with a raft of tasty true-to-life



Good old bullet-time. This year's lens flare.

weapons, neatly crafted environments and an action-packed kung-fu-style madness that's straight out of *Hard Boiled*, with touches of *The Matrix* and *Crouching Tiger* thrown in. It's quite mad and you really couldn't pack any more tricks

into a mod if you tried. The sheer range of moves and ideas on display would make the Romanian gymnastic squad proud of the stunts you can pull off – rolls, dives, jumps, backflips, the lot. Add in the power-ups, movie-themed



"Say hello to my leedle friends."

maps, customisable weapons, bots, slow-motion effects (love those *Matrix*-esque bullet tracks), multiple game modes and the rest, and what you have is a maelstrom mix of hardcore deathmatch action. As a break from the pseudo-realistic likes

of *Counter-Strike* et al, this is about as much fun as it's possible to get. **PCZ**

PCZONE VERDICT 85
 Fast, furious and fit

SPELLFORCE

THE ORDER OF DAWN

BE EVIL...

soon, the time will come when the
power of one may change the
destiny of many.

... BE GOOD

FOR BETTER OR FOR WORSE...

- innovative game design: the unique mixture of rts and rpg elements offers a BRAND NEW game experience.

- click'n'fight: this revolutionary control system guarantees instant action, the best possible overview and complete new tactical possibilities in battle

- 6 RACES humans, dwarves, elves, dark elves, orcs and trolls that can be use simultaneously to build settlements and fight battles

- more than 30 different enemy races, from cowardly goblins to powerful demons and dragons

- a multitude of spells, divided into different categories of magic (white, black, elemental, etc.)

- persistent game world with continuous, gripping storyline and myriad sub-quests

SORCERY ERUPTS NOVEMBER 2003



www.spellforce.com

PHENOMIC
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DEVELOP LIGHTNING REACTIONS... WWW.JOLT.CO.UK

WARNING: www.jolt.co.uk runs FREE public servers. Jolt accept no responsibility
in the eventuality that you are slaughtered mercilessly - time and again.
JOLT ADSL low latency connection an advantage.



UNDERWORLD BLOODLINE V2.0

ON THE DVD SIZE 31MB REQUIRES Full version of Half-Life
www.sonypictures.com/movies/underworld

TOTAL CONVERSION

The only secret underground society Will Porter ever joined was the Tufty Club



You look a bit peaky. Have a pie.



The Underworld. Otherwise known as Derby.



Not Kate Beckinsale, but she'll do for now.

IT'S AMAZING how many covens of mythical beasts there are these days, all having huge nocturnal gun battles outside your local branch of Dixons without any regard for regular citizens like you or me. But no one ever sees them, not even extra-keen milkmen. All we have to go on are guff films like *Underworld* to prove their existence. And the promotional

Half-Life mod of course. As an advertising gimmick this is certainly a clever and cheap one: employ the coders of a well-known *Half-Life* mod (in this case the superb *They Hunger* trilogy) and get a direct feed into nerd bedrooms worldwide. The basic premise is that the bullet-ridden war between the Vampires and the Lycan Werewolves is coming to

an end, both needing to capture a human known as the Hybrid from the other's lair and ensure he doesn't get shot in the head before he's safely stowed away in their possession. The mod lands somewhere between traditional 'capture the flag' and *Counter-Strike*-style NPC hostage protection and, while inherently relying on its players knowing what they're up to, is refreshingly

different, even if capturing a hybrid is bloody difficult. The weapons feel a little too much like pneumatic pea-shooters to us, but there are some (distinctly non-kinky) whips and the like available. Levels are uniformly excellent, even if there are only a measly four on offer, and see you fighting around moving trains, giant factory furnaces and

old-school CTF opposing ice palaces. *Underworld* won't set the world on fire, but it is a well-designed distraction that'll snuggle neatly in your mods folder for a few months.

PCZONE VERDICT **74**

Good levels, bad guns, ugly film (lovely Kate)

MONKEYSTRIKE V1.2

ON THE DVD SIZE 42MB REQUIRES Full version of Half-Life
www.monkeystrike.com

TOTAL CONVERSION

King of the swingers? Paul Presley apes around

NOW, THERE is no stronger advocate of the comedic power of monkeys than I. Why, even my very online gaming name is taken from the animated master of maniacal mayhem that is IR Baboon (you really should invest in The Cartoon Network for the good of your soul). Yes, number one rule of comedy – monkeys are funny.

That said, even the Power Of Simian feels a touch forced in *Monkeystrike*, one of the more offbeat *Half-Life* mods out there. As with a lot of the high-concept total conversions that get made these days, there's the initial thrill of the new – the various monkey classes, the splatter guns and colourful cartoonish levels. But a few games in and the novelty wanes, highlighted by the distinct lack of active servers.

Kudos must be given for the effort though, notably in the types of games it offers. Sure, Deathmatch is pretty standard, but Fruity Sacrifice puts one in

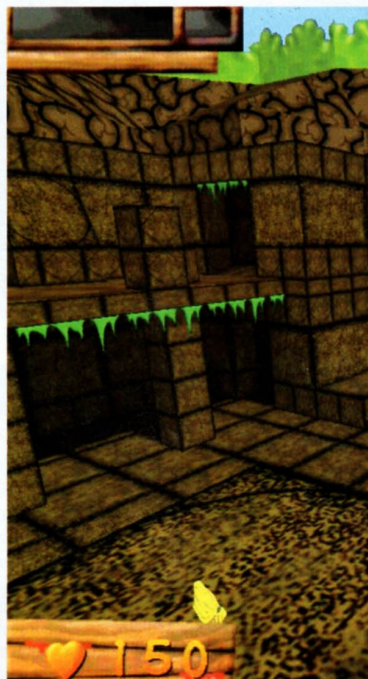
mind of the multiplayer modes in that old Nintendo 64 classic *Diddy Kong Racing*, capturing fruit and preventing others from stealing it (although without the planes that made the console version such fun).

It's all a bit obvious though. Plenty of opportunities for subtle comedy have been passed over (no *Planet Of The Apes* references or 2001-monoliths for instance). Of course that makes it fun for kids, but again the lack of public interest server-wise is limiting the mod's appeal.

Bottom line is that *Monkeystrike* is a novelty, nothing more. Monkeys may indeed be nature's clowns, they're just not quite the natural choice for first-person shooters.

PCZONE VERDICT **67**

Beneath the planet of the apes



Capture the banana. Ah hah!



HIGHSCORE

PCZONE READERS' CHALLENGE

WIN BIG PRIZES!!

Sign up today to prove your skills to the world. The bits of it that read *PC ZONE* anyway...

THE CALL has been answered! Seeing the tournament ladders filling up with eager combatants is a sight to make even the hardest of hearts melt with frag-anticipating glee. As the sign-ups for the *PCZ Readers' Challenge* continue to roll in, it's obvious that everyone is keen to prove themselves as the best in the business when it comes to virtual fighting.

Of course if you've been dragging your feet all this time, don't fret. There's still plenty of time to get involved. All you need is a team of five to enter either the *Enemy Territory* or *Day Of Defeat* ladders, or just your own good self to take on the *Unreal Tournament 2003* competitors. Just pop over to www.pczone.jolt.co.uk for all the registration rules and current standings.

Remember, the *PC ZONE Readers' Challenge* will be crowning both the greatest solo player and the finest team reading these words. Over a series of four

SIGN UP AT
www.pczone.jolt.co.uk
TODAY!



three-month rounds we'll separate the wheat from chaff out there, ending up with the eight clans and four soloists going head to head in our Grand LAN Final.

Prizes will be awarded to each round winner, with the eventual victors taking home the top prizes. Thanks to Gainward, we'll be providing the winning team with no less than five top-of-the-range graphics cards, while the winning single player will walk off with the very latest gaming PC! We also have prizes for each of the round winners – a year's free subscription to *PC ZONE* plus the game of their choice.

Registration is as easy as pointing your web browsers at www.pczone.jolt.co.uk and joining the ladder of your choice. Teams are restricted to five players per side and the tournament is open to UK residents only. The full list of rules (including game-specific rules) can be found at the *PC ZONE/Jolt* website mentioned above.



Not quite a one-man army.



Communication is key in *Day Of Defeat*.



Come on love, this is no time for a lie-down.



Stand by your men in *Day Of Defeat*.

LAN ROVER

STEVE 'SCALPER' RANDALL PLANS THE LANS THIS MONTH

■ The guys at www.clanmob.org are hosting GOR 6 for 30 of you from November 14-16 at £21 each. Although at that price these popular LANs are probably already full. Still you can get on the list for any cancellations at the above website.

■ *Insomnia 18* also takes place from November 14-16 at Newbury Racecourse (see page 118 for a report on i17). Primarily it's for 600 players but they will expand to 1,000+ if they have the call for it, so you won't have any probs. Details and sign up at www.multiplay.co.uk.

■ I've terribly vague memories of a sordid stag party in Blackpool not so long ago, so I was intrigued to see that www.wolfan.com have named their next event (the fifth) "Blackpool Bound". From the evening of November 28 and ending no later than 8pm on November 30, it's literally five minutes from the promenade – so plenty of alternate entertainment if you get fed up with playing games. It costs just £20 for the full event for up to 60 people and you can stay in a room at the event from just £15 a night.

■ Best name for a LAN party this month goes to the organisers of www.collateral-lannage.com. At a cost of £30 for the weekend, they have a 63-player event from 10am on November 7 through to 1pm on November 9. In a well-organised first event, they not only have bunk beds (£5 extra), they even have showers.

■ If you're organising an event, let me know with two months notice by emailing me on scalper@ggjan.co.uk. Until next month, Scalper out.



FIGHT CLUB

FIRST RULE OF FIGHT CLUB: PC ZONE OWNZ JØØ

THIS MONTH we proudly bring you the highlights of our last Fight Club – the epic *Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory* punch-up. As you can see it was an action-packed affair, with more than one of the *ZONE* boys favouring the flamethrower over more conventional weaponry. Didn't stop us getting massacred, but at least we weren't cold.

■ We're still looking for your suggestions for future Fight Clubs. The *PC ZONE* forum on our official website (www.pczone.co.uk) recently ran a survey asking about your most-anticipated first-person shooters not called *Half-Life 2*, so make sure you get your votes in and we'll know which of our big guns to start polishing for the eventual online carnage coming our way.

■ The big news in the Fight Club world this month is the upcoming redesign of the ZoneGames website (www.zonegames.co.uk). Version 2.0 will be THE place to be for all your online gaming needs. Full server listings, message forums, real-time chat and reports of each Fight Club as they take place. We'll bring you more details once the new site goes live, but for now the original site is still the place to go for all the connection details for our public *Counter-Strike*, *W:ET*, *BF1942*, *TFC*, *MonkeyStrike*, *UT2003* and *Natural Selection* servers.

■ Important news now for *PlanetSide* warriors. We're no strangers to the never-ending fight for power on Auraxis here at your pugilistic *PC ZONE*, with most lunch times and post-working hours spent fighting for the New Conglomerate cause. Some time in the new year we'll be looking to host a *PlanetSide* Fight Club night, working with you guys for a change rather than simply shooting at (and being shot by) you. Look for 'MajorSpiffing' on the Werner server sometime soon for more details.

COME & HAVE A GO!
www.zonegames.co.uk
 for all the info

UPCOMING FIGHT CLUBS

THURSDAY NOVEMBER 6

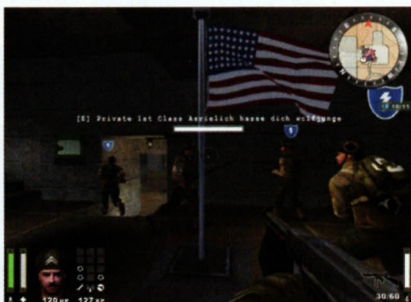
6.30pm – 9.00pm
Day Of Defeat

THURSDAY DECEMBER 4

6.30pm – 9.00pm
Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory

THURSDAY JANUARY 8

6.30pm – 9.00pm
Battlefield 1942



It's all about the teamwork.



ZONE designer Jamie Malcolm gets cookin'.



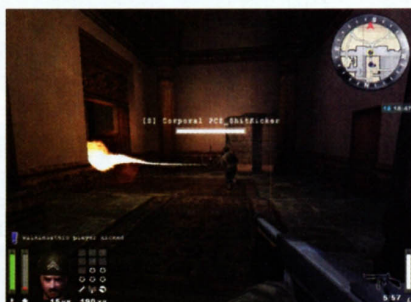
Our readers show us what they're made of.



Young Will Porter leads the gold rush.



Our Anthony can never resist a BBQ.



Art editor Phil Clark turns up the heat.

GUILDHALL



▲ FEELING LOST AND ALONE?

Looking for that special group of someones to share your love of group gaming? Wanna, to be blunt, be in my gang? Check out some of the guilds and clans currently recruiting members and soon you too could find happiness, togetherness and a sense of belonging.

CLAN British Armed Forces (BAF)

CONTACT --BAF--Razor

WEBSITE www.bafsquad.co.uk

MAIN GAMES *Delta Force: Black Hawk Down*

DETAILS BAF are looking for committed *BHD* players. You must live within the EU and have a mature personality. You **MUST** have the required software: ICQ instant chat messaging program and Roger Wilco with a working microphone. Please get in touch to arrange a tryout. ICQ Razor on 167755422.

CLAN <MwD> Meet with Death

CONTACT nifty@clan-mwd.co.uk

WEBSITE www.clan-mwd.co.uk

MAIN GAMES *Counter-Strike*

DETAILS Meet with Death is a UK-based C-S clan, who are looking for skilled players with a mature attitude. Join us on our server 195.20.108.15:27045 for some serious action.

CLAN RS Red Squadrons

CONTACT highcommand@redsquadrons.org

WEBSITE www.redsquadrons.org

MAIN GAMES *Ghost Recon*, *BF1942*, *MOH*, *Bridge Commander*, *ST Armada 1 & 2*, *SFC 1, 2 & 3*, *OP* + others

DETAILS Red Squadrons was formed in 1998 as a *Star Trek* clan. We have now ventured into other games, in a new section of the clan called the Marine Divisions. We currently have 10 gaming divisions with members from all over the world, numbering approx 135 in total. We look forward to seeing you.

CLAN [PARA247]

CONTACT Glenn "WhoFlungDung" Campbell

WEBSITE www.para247.com

MAIN GAMES *Day Of Defeat*, *C-S*, *Anglo-American DOD* and *BF1942 Desert Combat*

DETAILS We are a friendly clan who want good people more than good players. We play in the OGL ladder but want to get a pure British squad too. We have three servers (247 Charlie/Rotation/Practice+Match) and numerous *BF1942/DC* servers. Website has 'Application' link with all the details.

CLAN +NATO+ – Not Another Teen Organisation

CONTACT NATO_Ozzy – head of communications

WEBSITE aa-nato.org

MAIN GAMES *America's Army Operations*

DETAILS We're currently looking for experienced 18+ *AAO* gamers to join our EU Division. We were the first and most well-known team in *AAO*, we have even taken part in demonstrations for the US Army and Pentagon. Please take a look at our website and fill out the recruitment form.

CLAN GWUK

CONTACT AssassiN

WEBSITE gamesworlduk.elixant.com

MAIN GAMES *Return To Castle Wolfenstein*, *Jedi Knight 2*, *Unreal Tournament 2003*, *Counter-Strike*, *Warcraft 3: Frozen Throne*, *C&C: Generals*

DETAILS We are looking for members who are good at a wide range of games, not just those listed above. We are spread out across strategy and FPS, so we cater for just about everyone. We are looking for team players and you will have to pass a trial to be accepted.

To feature in Guildhall simply send your details and no more than 50 words describing your group to online.zone@pczone.co.uk (subject line: GUILDHALL) or to Guildhall, *PC ZONE*, 30 Cleveland Street, London W1T 4JD.

Getting started in... A TALE IN THE DESERT

A MMOG that focuses on community and creation is a refreshing change, but it's one that's full of complexities. Put down that sword as *Rhianna Pratchett* tells you how to do it Egyptian style



CITIZEN SMITH

1 If at first you don't manage to find a mentor, don't fret. You can still become a citizen of Egypt all on your own if you spend 90 minutes in the game and complete a few tasks. Keep an eye on the hint box in the bottom left-hand corner. Use the icons in the top right of your screen to collect grass (when dried, this forms straw), slate, mud (found near water) and sand. Use the F3 map to locate a nearby school of architecture (SArch) and go there to learn stone blade fabrication and brick rack construction.



SECRET SEVEN

2 Much of the game is focused around the seven disciplines of man: thought, worship, conflict, art, the body, architecture and leadership. The ancient Egyptians believed that if man achieved perfection in all seven he would live forever. You don't have to go quite that far – you can choose to follow one path as far as you can, or just dabble in all seven on a general basis. Each involves very different tasks, from learning acrobatic moves through other players as part of the body test, to competing in sub-games when you decide to follow the path of conflict.



BACK TO SCHOOL

3 Scattered around Egypt are schools and universities devoted to the seven disciplines. At schools you can learn skills for a price and at universities you can learn other skills for free and also teach them to other players (universities also give out more free stuff if you sign up). Universities are sparser than schools and the skills they have need to be opened up by communities in the surrounding area donating materials. This means that not all universities in a certain discipline will have the same selection of skills on offer, so be prepared to do a bit of travelling.



TALK LIKE AN EGYPTIAN

4 Joining guilds and establishing communities is a vital part of the game. Not only will it give you friends to talk to and get help from, it will also provide you with trading contacts and information on upcoming events. Every time you apply to a guild, your membership has to be agreed by a guild elder. Once accepted you'll get a brand new chat window per guild. Many guilds also have their own buildings and resources for members to use and run their own projects, and of course there's always the option of forming your own guild.



FLAXABILITY

5 Secure yourself some basic flax seeds from a School of Art. When you sew these, the growing plants will need weeding (let the weed overrun if you need more seeds) and sometimes watering. Rot flax in water, via your special menu, and use the rotten flax in a hacking rack or flax comb to make tow, lint and straw. Load these into a distaff and spin them once to make twine and thread, or twice to make rope. Put thread and twine on a loom and you can make canvas and linen. Look out for other seeds with greater yields.

ANY OLD IRON

6 Mines are used to extract ores such as iron, tin and lead, and other materials like limestone, silver and gems. To find suitable materials, you need the dowsing skill from a University of Art. As you run, you can click on your red dowsing icon and start to detect what's in the area. What you find depends on your perception level. Gem mines are easier, and you can build them anywhere, although it's not advisable to build them too close to other structures. The type of gem you find will be randomly decided at the moment you build the mine.



HEAVY METAL

7 Crafting bricks and boards from the land is all very rural, but unless you've got some good hard metal behind you, you're not going to get very far. Metal ores, which you find from mines, can be smelted into useful metal in giant ore infernos and furnaces. Ore infernos run on petrol and therefore cause a lot of pollution so you'll often find them deep in the desert, away from buildings. You can then use the metal in forges and casting boxes, along with charcoal, to make all manner of things from axes and shovels, to gears, nails and brass plates.



EAT YOUR GREENS

9 It sounds a bit like *The Good Life*, but growing your own vegetables is an important part of the game as they are used in many ways, aside from in cooking. Carrots and cabbage can be grown on grass and require regular watering. Cabbages make cabbage juice and also feed beetles, while carrots can be used to catch rabbits in the wild and also feed the little critters when you've got them home. Onions, garlic and leeks grow only on sand and onions are used to feed your sheep. Leeks are vital for creating ash in bonfires, used in glass-making.



ANIMAL FARM

10 Even if you start on your own you can still get yourself some animals for company on those long, lonely Egyptian nights. Sheep are found randomly in the wild, as are rabbits, and they will need special pens and constant food to thrive. Eggs are also occasionally found in trees and can be hatched in coops. Camels are trickier and need to be lured with vast quantities of straw. One camel comes to the pen in an area that has the most straw each night. Cobras, a new addition to *ATTD*, also need luring with little fluffy bunnies.



THE GOOD FOOD GUIDE

8 All food in the game has its own positive and negative statistics that relate to strength, focus, perception, endurance, dexterity, constitution and speed. Using a kitchen, you can combine foods and increase your stats for a short period of time to help you do things like carry more and recuperate faster. Each ingredient also has its own taste and can be combined to create tasty dishes that increase your gastronomy points, which in turn pushes up your permanent perception level. Visit the Nileside Cafe, which is run by a team of players who have created over 270 recipes.



Publisher: eGenesis
Developer: eGenesis
Website: www.attd.com
 (free download)

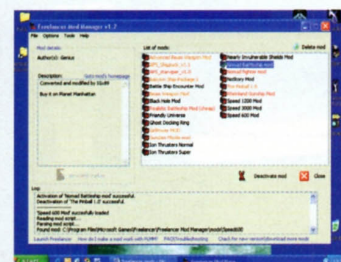
COMMUNITY CHEST



FREELANCER

Keith Pullin flies around the web to uncover what gamers really think of Microsoft's epic space opera

One reason why the *Freelancer* community is so busy is because fans have so many ways to improve the game. The ease with which it can be modified using the editing tools means virtually anyone can customise the sound, graphics and gameplay to suit their tastes. Subsequently, the web is bursting with new mods boasting everything from *Babylon 5* ships to funky new costumes for Trent and Juni. If you've banished the Nomads and you're looking to get some extra mileage out of your thrusters, take a look below and get sucked into a whole new universe of opportunity...



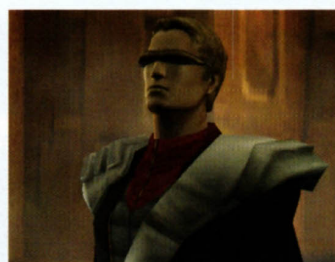
FREELANCER MOD MANAGER V1.2 (UTILITY)
www.lancersreactor.com

To download and run *Freelancer* modules you have to install this nifty little utility. Then all you have to do is load the modules into it (by double-clicking on them once they've been downloaded), activate them and launch the game direct from this program to see the results. Simple.



ANGLEWYRM'S TRADING SPREADSHEET (UTILITY)
www.lancersreactor.com

The most common question in the *Freelancer* community is: "What's the best trade route?" This *Excel*-only spreadsheet lists all trade routes in the game and breaks the information down into sections, showing the best commodities to trade, as well as distance/profit margin ratios.



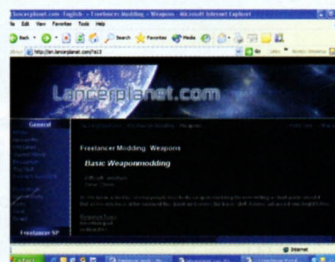
THE NEXT GENERATION: 1.6 FINAL (SINGLE PLAYER MOD)
www.planetirg.net

Of all the mods available, this one boasts the most sweeping gameplay changes. With 57 new ships, 250 new weapons, a choice of new identities (bounty hunter, pirate, smuggler et al), costume changes and more, it's a feast of spacey fun. Oh, and it's nothing to do with *Star Trek*.



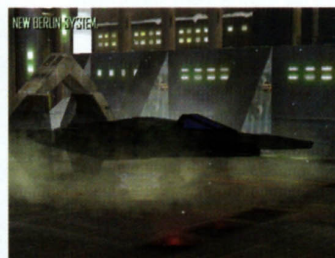
STARSHIP ENTERPRISE V2 (SINGLE PLAYER MOD)
www.lancersreactor.com

Get over to the Sheffield Station in Manchester and you board TV's most enduring spacecraft. Classed as a fighter, the *Enterprise* is surprisingly nimble on its thrusters, and with six guns, two turrets, a 500 tonne cargo hold and 15,000 hit points, it's well worth taking for a spin.



LANCERPLANET.COM (WEBSITE)
en.lancerplanet.com

Fed up simply playing with other people's mods? Think you can do better? Then look no further than this excellent website. With a range of mod-making utilities and comprehensive tutorials on how to use them, you'll be reshaping *Freelancer* before you can say, "Juni, get yer kit off." Nude patch, anyone?



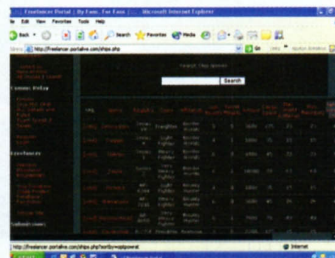
BABYLON 5 SHIP PACKAGE (SINGLE PLAYER MOD)
www.lancersreactor.com

Still smarting at the axing of *Babylon 5*? Never fear. Immerse yourself in it all once more by installing this mod. It offers 29 new ships to choose from, but beware: some of the larger cruisers are on the pricey side – we're talking two million credits for a *Narn* cruiser – ouch.



APS SHIPPACK V2.0 (SINGLE PLAYER MOD)
www.sperling.retail.dial.pipex.com/astralprime/

This mod adds the *Starviper* very heavy fighter and the *Cougar* heavy fighter. Look for the *Starviper* on Planet Denver, Colorado, and the *Cougar* on Planet Curacao in the Cortez System. Both are excellently designed – and relatively cheap. A new freighter is in there too.



FREELANCER PORTAL (WEBSITE)
freelancer.portalive.com

Stop by this site if you fancy delving deeper into the *Freelancer* universe. The fan written fiction does a great (if obsessive) job of fleshing out the game's characters and locations. Look out for downloadable combat videos, details of handy trade routes and statistics on every ship in the game.

AN
ANCIENT
CONSPIRACY,

A
BROKEN CODE,

AN
UNSOLVED
MURDER

THE
ULTIMATE
ADVENTURE

BROKEN SWORD

THE SLEEPING DRAGON

PC
CD
ROM

X
XBOX

PlayStation 2



THQ

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ONE MUST FALL BATTLEGROUND

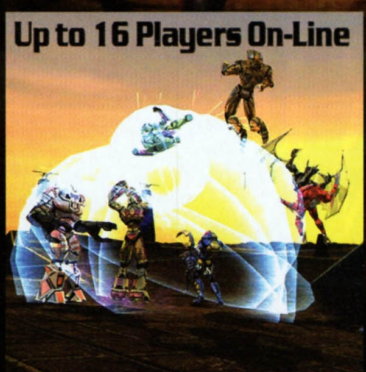


"Battlegrounds seems to take the elements of first-person shooters that make them so much fun for large multiplayer games and combine them with fighting game mechanics."
- Game Spot

"...OMF is well on the way to being the best fighting game to be released on PC..."
- GamesDomain

"I am truly looking forward to OMF: Battlegrounds and the multiplayer aspect alone is going to be something to keep a keen eye on."
- UGO

Put Down The Machine Gun, This Takes Real Skill



www.gmxmedia.net



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GAME
 www.game.uk.co
Out 14th November

STEVE HILL'S NEVERQUEST



The continuing adventures of Steve Hill take him to *Anarchy Online: Shadowlands*

ORGANISE a dinner party in a virtual world. That's what they want me to do. 'They' being *PC ZONE*, and me being the hapless berk prepared to humiliate himself online on a monthly basis. Thus far it's been a fairly easy ride, with tasks involving little more than wandering around some godforsaken future world attempting to talk to the natives. But a dinner party? I actively hate dinner parties. On the mercifully rare occasions I am forced to attend one, I inevitably find myself sat opposite a witless dullard who has as little interest in my moribund existence as I have in his: "You haven't been to India? You really should, it's amaaazing..." As for organising one, having never done it in the real world, I don't fancy my chances in a pretend place that I've never seen before.

That place is Rubi-Ka, and the year is 29475AD (how do they make it up?). To be more specific – thanks to the *Shadowlands* expansion pack – I'm in the floating city of Jobe. Not only that, but I have a luxury apartment, part of a modern development with excellent panoramic views of the city. A superbly appointed desirable residence, it would

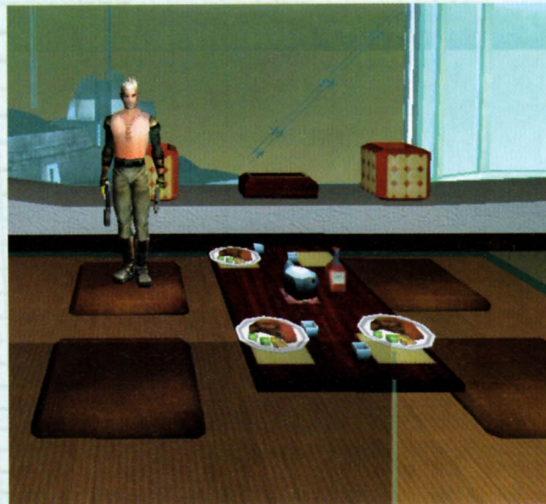
"I have a superbly appointed desirable residence – a good place to stage an orgy"

be a good place to stage an orgy, let alone a dinner party. Not everyone is afforded such lavishness; in fact, you actually have to attain at least level five before you're even given somewhere to live – not exactly a socialist ideal.

WHAT'S MY NAME?

So what have I done to deserve such fortune? Not actually a great deal. Like a fluffer in a porn film, Presley has been building up my character in preparation for the real talent to take over. Through the mystifyingly traditional method of killing small animals, he has managed to attain a social standing where I can afford such a plush apartment. It's a somewhat bewildering approach, akin to a shit film where the lead character wakes up and has no idea who he is. How did I get here? What's my name? Well, Presley got me here, and my name is Chroni.

Having taken in the delights of my new gaff, and had a stroll on the balcony, I head out on to the streets. Presley has actually told people to hang around outside at the appointed time if they're interested in coming to the party. The first person I speak



Steve's winning personality pays off.

to doesn't seem to have got the message though, and in response to my polite invitation, Sharon Goldman curtly replies, "I don't know what you're talking about?" It's a sentiment echoed by Denise Sosnowski, along with a terse, "Huh?" The identical responses – and the fact that they're standing there doing nothing – suggest that I am talking to non-player characters. Error.

POP & CRISPS

I sheepishly make my excuses and attempt to find some human players, generally recognisable by the fact that they're tearing around like blue-arsed flies and will scarcely give you the time of

day. Sharthel doesn't seem too busy, so I politely suggest that he comes upstairs for some food and drink (Presley has even been down the shops and stocked up). "No thanx," comes the reply. "Why not?" I ask. "Trying to make sense of SL ATM," says Sharthel. Pause, blank look. Might as well be Greek. Fair enough, your loss.

Further disinterest follows, and I finally resort to standing outside my apartment shouting: "Party here, now. Pop and crisps." Amazingly, there are no takers, and I storm off in a huff, taking out my aggression by helping Paladinlord kill a Deceitful Weaver (spidery thing). Relishing the taste of blood, I have a stab at a Barking

Chimera (dog thing), but he gets the better of me and I back off swiftly.

INVITE ONLY

Back to the task in hand, I beg Zubzero to come upstairs. Seemingly impressed, he says, "Can you invite friends into your apartment already?" He is on the point of agreeing, but then says, "I am on work." I assure him that I'm not going to try anything funny, and he says, "OK I believe", but then mysteriously emits an "eeeeeeek" and promptly runs off. "Dickhead," I curse.

I am getting nowhere, and things aren't helped when a message appears informing the citizens of Rubi-Ka that the server is about to go down for a client patch, and that it'll be offline for five hours. Now racing against the clock, I stand outside my door pleading with anyone who passes: "Free food and drink!" What is wrong with these people? Rapidly approaching the end of my tether, I scream, "Do any of you miserable f---ers want to come to a party?"

Finally, a response, and MaxwellX agrees to come up for a bit. "Follow me," I say, but he can't get inside without an official invitation. In desperation, I press the INV tab, which brings up the inventory, and in the confusion he is gone. With time almost up, I go home alone, crawl into the luxury bath and attempt to drown myself. [X]

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HARDWARE

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■ GUSHING Phil Wand

As friends, family and colleagues will attest, I'm something of a grouch. There are a zillion things in life that rankle me to the point of loathing, and if everyone around me hadn't tuned my rants out years ago, I'd be an awful lot worse than I already am.

It's OK, I'm not about to present you with my 100 top peeves. I really don't want to turn this column into my very own Room 101 for fear of sounding like Jerry Seinfeld – chiefly because Jerry Seinfeld is as about funny as getting stoned with rocks by angry villagers (*You're fired Wandy – Ed*). No, what I want to do is try and explain some of the scores you've been seeing over recent months. It's time to reassure you that I haven't donned rose-tinted spectacles, taken backhanders from a dozen hardware vendors and deliberately mislead you all in an attempt to fill up my loft and garden shed with hardware bribes.

You won't believe it, of course, but everything that comes to me for review eventually has to go back. No sooner had I tested our award-winning Hitachi flat panel, than Hitachi demanded its return. It's a superb product, they of course know it, and they'd like some other journalist to tickle it under the chin and make itchy-coo noises as well. Why did I rate it so highly? Because it richly deserves the praise, there's really no other reason. More than that, I actually missed it when it was taken away from me – what more proof do you need?

"I haven't taken backhanders from hardware vendors... everything eventually has to go back"

Radeon frightens the Half-Life out of FX

ATI a country mile ahead of NVIDIA in the frame rate stakes

VALVE TOP DOG Gabe Newell stunned the audience at ATI's recent Shader Day event with his presentation on *Half-Life 2* and DirectX 9. In it, he explained how *Half-Life* will take advantage of a wide range of previously unseen DX9 features, including soft shadows, high dynamic range lighting, and improved full-screen anti-aliasing, to take the biggest step towards cinematic gaming we've ever seen. If you downloaded the most recent Source technology showcase video (you can also find it on this month's

Win one of these, plus *Half-Life 2* copies, on the opposite page.

On the frame-rate bar charts, the ATI product line-up appeared as a city skyline towering over NVIDIA's suburbs – the 5200 Ultra and 5600 Ultra dipping into bungalow-like single figures. The reason Valve and ATI have become so closely linked – *Half-Life 2* will be bundled with Radeon family cards – is because Gabe wants to be involved in relationships that are "in the best interests of our customers", and given the startling difference in performance, ATI were the obvious people to hang out with. "The Radeon 9800 Pro is unquestionably the choice for showing *Half-Life 2* at its best," he enthused. Given the numbers, we'd have to agree.

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

Today's video cards have what's known as Vertex Shaders and Pixel Shaders. These are small, supremely fast programs that are compiled and run on the graphics chip directly, thus requiring zero processor time, and they're used extensively to produce render effects, such as bump mapping and shadows. Valve's problem – and it is a problem that has cropped up elsewhere – is that NVIDIA hardware isn't as quick as ATI hardware in executing their latest, most complex shaders. It would seem that the GeForce hardware simply doesn't have what it takes to deal with them, and there are a growing number of benchmarks highlighting the FX's weaknesses when exposed to DX9 features.

Before you run down the shops for a Radeon, Valve's solution has been to 'dumb down' the way *Half-Life* talks to GeForce cards, effectively reducing its precision in order to haul up their low frame rates. New Detonator sets may redress the balance without the need for



such drastic remedial action, but Gabe isn't hopeful. It would seem that the problem is much deeper than drivers.

NVIDIA HITS BACK

The response from NVIDIA came fast: the figures to which Gabe had referred were "invalid" because they used an outmoded driver, and that the more intensive DX9 code used in the *Half-Life 2* test had no obvious benefit on image quality. Which is strange, considering how much of the company's GeForce 5900 Ultra marketing push was concerned with how the card's updated shaders would usher in a new dawn of cinematic gaming.

Whatever the truth is behind the poor performance figures, it's irrelevant. This is phenomenally bad press for NVIDIA, and the only way they're going to regain the confidence of gamers is to knuckle down and release an entirely new product line-up. At one major gaming portal, a poll asks: "Buying a new graphics card today?" and of tens of thousands of responses, 90% said ATI. Come in, number 5900, your time is up...



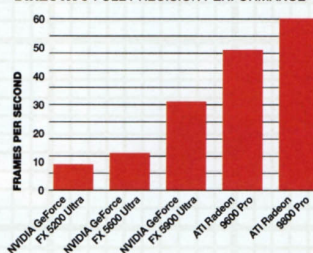
The 9600XT comes with Valve's seal of approval.

DVD in glorious telly-o-vision), you'll have witnessed these things with your own eyes, and if you're a gamer with a pulse, you'll be as impatient and as excited as a three year old on Christmas morning.

GEFORCE GOTCHA

The big news that had everyone hunched over laptops and messaging on mobiles was the fact that you need to have ATI hardware to enjoy *Half-Life 2* at its movie-like best. Gabe was unequivocal, straight talking and unbiased. Valve's internal benchmarks showed that even the most expensive GeForce variants were left for dead by cheap Radeons; the 9800 Pro clocking in with twice the number of frames the 5900 Ultra could handle, and the mid-range 9600 Pro card, yours for around the £150 mark, stretching out an embarrassing lead over £400 FX monsters.

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TFT REVIEWS
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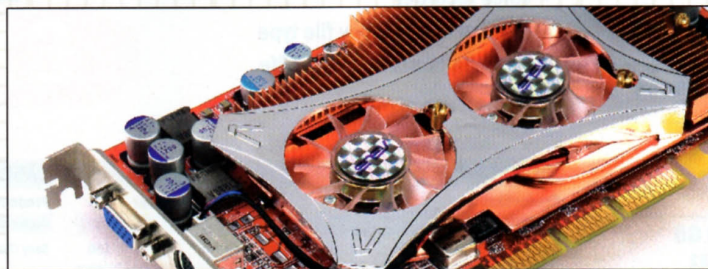
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The best kit, the lowest prices

ASUS GET RADICAL

One in every six desktop PCs sold last year was based on an ASUS motherboard. Now ASUS plans to dominate the video market with a new range of ATI hardware

ALL HAIL the mighty Radeon 9800XT, king of video cards! Marvel at its 412MHz core clock, 730MHz memory clock and 256MB RAM. Witness lesser cards gather at its feet to pray. See the ASUS badge and rejoice, for if Mummy and Daddy can stretch to it, this is gonna be the card for gaming and the card to have in your December stocking. Every one of these R360-based bastards will be bundled with *Half-Life 2*, reaffirming the fact that Valve and ATI are very much 'loved up', and adding weight to recent benchmarks (see opposite) that show Radeons outperforming GeForces by a factor of two.

Typically for ASUS, its new range of cards feature a slew of trick features. Arguably the most innovative of these is GameFace, which inserts a live video feed via the ViVo connector directly into your game, allowing you to see and hear team mates, pull faces at newbies, or perhaps just watch the snooker. Related to this is *SmartDoctor 2*, a tweaker's nirvana that includes hardware monitoring and dynamic overclocking, and whose control panel is superimposed - you can make



The R9800XT includes ViVo, twin low-noise cooling fans, and all-copper heat sinks.

changes to the way your Radeon runs while still in the game.

Look along the range of five cards and the news gets even better. The 9600XT borrows ASUS's neat ideas from its bigger brother, bundles *Half-Life 2*, and looks likely to steal the midrange performance crown from the 9500 Pro (see chart). It all comes down to street price, but in terms of bang for your buck, this will be the card to beat them all. We'll be including the ASUS range in our huge video card round-up next issue, so check back here November time.

"The GameFace feature inserts a live video feed, allowing you to see and hear team mates and pull faces at newbies"

ASUS	9800XT/TVD	9600XT/TVD	9600SE/TD	9200SE/TD	9200SE/T
Core Clock	412MHz	450MHz	325MHz	200MHz	200MHz
Memory Clock	365MHz DDR	325MHz DDR	200MHz DDR	166MHz DDR	166MHz DDR
Memory Size	256MB	128MB	128MB	128MB	64MB
Bus Standard	AGP 2X-8X	AGP 2X-8X	AGP 2X-8X	AGP 2X-8X	AGP 2X-8X
VGA Output	15-pin D-sub	15-pin D-sub	15-pin D-sub	15-pin D-sub	15-pin D-sub
TV Output	S-VHS, composite	S-VHS, composite	S-VHS, composite	S-VHS, composite	S-VHS, composite
DVI-I	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
2nd VGA	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No

WIN A RADEON!

We have a 9800XT and a 9600XT to give away, courtesy of ASUS

You've seen them, read about them, and popped wood at them - now's your chance to win them. We have an ASUS Radeon 9800XT and an ASUS Radeon 9600XT, complete with copies of *Half-Life 2*, to give away to a couple of smug readers. All you have to do is tell us the core clock speed of the ASUS Radeon 9600XT. Send your entry on a postcard addressed to: ASUS Comp, PC ZONE, 30 Cleveland Street, London W1T 4JD. The first correct entry plucked from Wandy's bowler hat wins the 9800XT, the second wins the 9600XT. Please include your name, address, phone and email. The editor's decision is final. Closing date is November 12, 2003. Good luck!

DRIVER WATCH



Time for an update? One look at our chart will tell you

MOTHERBOARD

MANUFACTURER	NAME	DESC	RELEASED	SIZE	WEB
Intel	Chipset Software Instal' Utility	5.0.2.1003	27-Aug-03	1.4MB	support.intel.com
NVIDIA	nForce	2.45	29-Jul-03	10.4MB	www.nvidia.com
SIS	AGP	1.1.6a	02-Jun-03	5.3MB	download.sis.com
VIA	Hyperion	4.49	20-Aug-03	1.4MB	www.via.com/tw

GRAPHICS

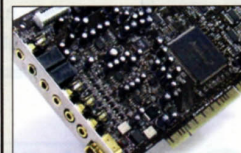
MANUFACTURER	NAME	DESC	RELEASED	SIZE	WEB
ATI	Display, Control Panel, WDM	CATALYST 3.7	04-Sep-03	24MB	www.ati.com
NVIDIA	Detonator FX	51.75	23-Sep-03	10MB	www.nvidia.com

SOUND

MANUFACTURER	NAME	DESC	RELEASED	SIZE	WEB
Creative	Audigy 2 WDM Drivers	DriverPack 3	09-May-03	6.88MB	uk.europe.creative.com
M-Audio	Revolution	5.10.00.0051	04-Sep-03	10MB	m-audio.com

SNIPPETS

BIG FAT EIGHT



After months of waiting, Creative Labs have finally launched their 7.1 audio card, the £99 Sound Blaster Audigy 2 ZS. With full THX certification, the eight-channel device permits "precise speaker calibration for optimum acoustic immersion through the THX Console". In other words, there's a control panel with speakers on it. The £199 Audigy 2 ZS Platinum Pro includes an external I/O hub and is aimed at musicians. Of interest to gamers is the fact that the new card supports EAX 4.0 ADVANCED HD effects, and may well beat our Editor's Choice M-Audio Revolution when it comes to new titles like *Half-Life 2*. A rematch has already been scheduled. europe.creative.com

GREETS3

Graphics stalwart S3 is set to make a comeback with its all-new DeltaChrome DX9 range. The DeltaChrome F1 is the daddy of the line-up and is pegged to rival the performance of the 9800 Pro, the S8 will tackle the FX 5600 and Radeon 9600, and the S4 goes head on with the more budget-oriented cards, such as the FX 5200 and Radeon 9200. Notably, most DeltaChromes draw hardly any current from the PSU and require passive cooling only - they could be excellent partners for ABIT's new DigiDice (see below). If the pricing is right and the drivers are solid, and that's what S3 are emphasising in their launch blurb, it should hit home hard. www.s3graphics.com

FLUFFY DICE



ABIT have announced the DigiDice, a miniature PC with two HDDs, two ATAPI device trays, plus an AGP and PCI slot. The device includes 5.1 audio, onboard LAN, a patented 25dB cooling system and comes with its own backpack. Other features include extensive hardware monitoring and 6-in-1 slot integrated card reader, plus overclocking of up to 3.06GHz P4 chips via a front-mounted rotary knob, which also operates multimedia functions like DVDs, CDs and MP3s. This is the future of the home PC. www.abit.com.tw



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- ▶ VGA connection

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- ▶ Buffer size 2 MB
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Maxtor S-ATA 300 GB

SKU/Itemnumber: 119032

- ▶ Maxtor IDE ATA-133
- ▶ 5400RPM
- ▶ MaXLine II, 2 MB cache

£ 235



HP iPAQ H5550 Pocket PC

SKU/Itemnumber: 119566

- ▶ XA255-400MHz
- ▶ Bluetooth,WLAN
- ▶ SDIO, 128 MB memory

£ 480



Fujitsu Siemens LOOX 600

SKU/Itemnumber: 112189

- ▶ PXA250 400MHz,
- ▶ Bluetooth,IR,SD
- ▶ CF II,64 MB

£ 329

Panasonic SV-SD85

SKU/Itemnumber: 120206

- ▶ Ideal for sports
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MAINBOARDS

Productname	SKU/Itemnumber	£
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Abit IC7-MAX3	119657	180
MSI KT6 Delta-FIS2R	119290	95

CPU's

Productname	SKU/Itemnumber	£
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Intel P 4 2,8 Boxed PC800	117321	225
AMD MP2200+	113096	94

MEMORY

Productname	SKU/Itemnumber	£
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Corsair XMS4000 512MB	119608	150
Twinmos 512MB w/Winbond	115491	85

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Productname	SKU/Itemnumber	£
Upgrade Kit Intel 2,4GHz	111923	285
Upgrade Kit XP3000+	118126	310

GRAPHIC CARDS

Productname	SKU/Itemnumber	£
Asus V9520 GeForce FX5200 Home Theater	119998	130
Sapphire Radeon 9600PRO Fireblade Edition	117826	135

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Productname	SKU/Itemnumber	£
Cooler Master ATC-610 M-ATX	113409	140
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Productname	SKU/Itemnumber	£
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THE HITACHI

CML174SXW is pretty much everything a gamer could want from an LCD screen. At just five kilograms, it's supremely light and portable, making it a joy to lug to and from LAN parties. With a typical response time of 16ms, the panel updates fast enough to satisfy the twitchiest arcade freak. And with D-Sub and DVI inputs, both analogue and digital folk will be happy.

Contrast is 400:1 (the figure is the difference in luminance between a white square surrounded by black ones) and

the resulting image quality is very fine indeed, certainly enough to banish any thoughts about hanging on to old phosphor. The CML174SXW's brightness is rated at 260 candelas per square metre – bright enough for the home and the brightest monitor on test. Consider that LCD is naturally brighter than CRT anyway, and you have some idea just how startling the Hitachi can be. Speaking of light – the lamp life is rated at more than 40,000 hours, or the equivalent of four and a half years of continuous use.

Our tests in *Battlefield 1942* and *Unreal Tournament 2003* proved that the Hitachi is capable of displaying fast moving images without a hint of smudge. Picture quality is superb, with high contrast and vivid colours. Watching a film on DVD is a similarly enjoyable

experience, and one that reminds you why CRT sales are declining. Indeed, the handsome Hitachi was the first truly convincing flat panel product I'd experienced, something that helped it win our coveted Editor's Choice trophy, and if you cast your eyes over the reviews of other screens here, you'll see it gets to keep its title. Just

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Speed, image quality, inputs
- ✓ Ultra-slim profile, good-looking too
- ✓ Available in ivory or black
- ✗ No height adjust

93

An exceptional screen for gamers



TFT

SPECIFICATIONS

SCREEN SIZE	17 inches
RESOLUTION	1280x1024
RESPONSE	16ms
CONTRAST	400:1
BRIGHTNESS	260cd/sqm
VIEW ANGLE	H160, V160
WEIGHT	5kg
CONNECTIONS	D-Sub, DVI

PROPHETVIEW 920 PRO

■ £300 inc. | Manufacturer: Hercules | Phone: 0208 665 1881 | europe.hercules.com

An LCD that still looks good when it's turned off



THE previous generation ProphetView 920 was a good screen at a great price. In updating it, Hercules understood that a unique appearance, fast response time and top-quality image reproduction were the keys to success with gamers, and on the outside nothing much has changed. True, the

garish, gripped-knob purple colour has now been changed to a jet black (which is more in keeping with modern PC design), but everything else external is as it was before.

On the inside, the ProphetView's guts have grown a few extra muscles, their response time down from 25ms to 20ms and the contrast ratio

up from 350:1 to 430:1 – only the LG offers more in this area. Pottering around the Windows desktop, it's pretty much a dead ringer for its predecessor, but in games the difference is marked. There's no obvious afterglow and the pictures appear more intense than before.

The new ProphetView 920 PRO is a solid solution for any style-conscious gamer. It's a substantial piece of kit to look at, and with high contrast, high brightness and a fast response time, it's pleasing to the eye in every sense – in gaming tests, the Hercules was a dead ringer for the Hitachi in terms of colour and clarity.

One problem, highlighted by people leaning over it to examine the picture, was the stand's propensity to shake if the desk was nudged. Another potential gotcha is the thickness of the

screen surround – if you plan to run them side by side in dual-monitor mode, your desktops will be over 10cm apart from one another. But given that few gamers will adopt this configuration, that's a very minor complaint and certainly not something that affects the unit's excellent score.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Image quality, speed
- ✓ Predominantly metal construct
- ✓ Undercuts most rivals
- ✗ Boomerang stand susceptible to wobbling

85

Fast, fashionable and keenly priced

SPECIFICATIONS

SCREEN SIZE	17 inches
RESOLUTION	1280x1024
RESPONSE	20ms
CONTRAST	430:1
BRIGHTNESS	250cd/sqm
VIEW ANGLE	H170, V150
WEIGHT	6kg
CONNECTIONS	D-Sub (DVI available Oct)

AT LAST, TV WORTH WATCHING

Slim and sophisticated, the new ProLite C480T 19" LCD TV fits seamlessly into any home or office as a dedicated TV or as a PC driven entertainment system.

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- 3 years on-site warranty



FLATRON L1710B

TFT



■ £359 | Manufacturer: LG Electronics | Phone: 01753 491500 | www.lge.co.uk

Perhaps the best quality 17-inch panel on the market

WITH A response time of 16ms, the LG screen matches the pace of the Hitachi, and its image quality is every bit as good as our award winner – it's actually slightly better at showing tiny variations of colour and shade. Like the ProphetView, the unit's construction is sturdy but, as with the Hercules, it's slightly unwieldy to carry about and can suffer from the shakes if your desk and floorboards aren't flatter than a billiard table.

SPECIFICATIONS

SCREEN SIZE	17 inches
RESOLUTION	1280x1024
RESPONSE	16ms
CONTRAST	450:1
BRIGHTNESS	250cd/sqm
VIEW ANGLE	H160, V140
WEIGHT	6.6kg
CONNECTIONS	D-Sub, DVI

The Flatron's contrast ratio is the best on offer here, and combined with low response times, gaming images are pin-sharp and really rather sweet – *Unreal Tournament 2003* darts around the 17-inch pitch without a hint of blurring. Indeed, if this test were on image quality alone, the LG would probably win.

If you're after a flat monitor with a built-in USB hub, and want a product whose quality and performance are every bit as good as our Editor's Choice, the L1710B is ideal – just as long as you don't mind its slightly higher price or appearance. I'm not quite taken with its angled stand, which is a good few centimetres deeper than the Hercules and Hitachi, nor do I like the colour scheme, as silver and grey is not in keeping with the beiges and blacks of desktop PCs. That

said, these things aren't enough to discourage me from awarding the L1710B Recommended status in the Buyer's Guide.

There are others worth checking out as well, like the LG Flatron L1710S, which is cheaper but lacks USB, and also the new L1720B, which promises to steal the ProphetView's fashion crown.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Response time and contrast
- ✓ Top-notch picture quality
- ✓ Looks like it belongs in a bank
- ✗ Too many small buttons

89

Nitpicking means it trails by a few points



FLATRON L2010P

TFT

■ £1,099 | Manufacturer: LG Electronics | Phone: 01753 491500 | www.lge.co.uk

Can I keep it can I keep it can I keep it can...

TEETERING on the edge of excess, the 20.1-inch LG is utterly wonderful and a must-buy for flat panel exhibitionists. Hauled from its box, initial impressions are that the thing really ain't so big or heavy, but when you park a keyboard and a mouse in front of it, sit down and crank up the resolution to 1600x1200, it suddenly assumes the dimensions of a Vagon constructor ship. With a height-adjustable stand, you can further exaggerate its size by cranking it up and tilting it forward so it looms over you like a Heathrow departures screen – it's then that you start to hear Freudian compensation jokes.

In terms of viewable area, the L2010P is roughly equivalent to a 22-inch CRT, and in terms of speed, its 16ms response time matches the very fastest panels on sale. It also integrates a USB hub and can pivot clockwise – though for gamers this feature is little more than a gimmick.

The big Flatron was never going to win this test as it's simply too pricey to be a serious contender. However, it remains

more than capable of painting the fastest games without signs of afterglow, and though the overall picture quality isn't quite a match for its smaller sibling, colours remain strong and the contrast ratio is high enough to put it pretty much on par with the Hitachi. And let's not forget that graphics-intensive games like *Battlefield 1942* are so much more enjoyable on a substantial monitor. The downside is that if you're in a room playing against friends on a LAN, they can't fail to see what you're up to – sit in a corner facing out, that's my advice.

PCZONE VERDICT

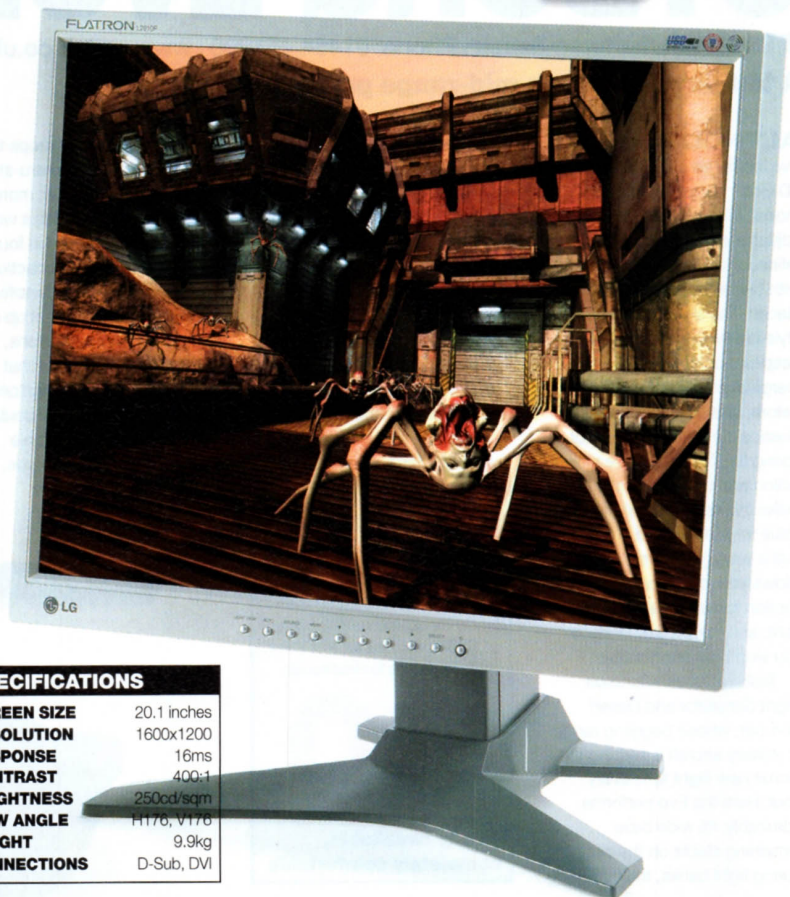
- ✓ Big resolutions, all-round quality, speed
- ✓ Total respect from your friends
- ✗ A kidney transplant costs less
- ✗ They're going to take it away from me

80

Have one if you can afford one

SPECIFICATIONS

SCREEN SIZE	20.1 inches
RESOLUTION	1600x1200
RESPONSE	16ms
CONTRAST	400:1
BRIGHTNESS	250cd/sqm
VIEW ANGLE	H176, V176
WEIGHT	9.9kg
CONNECTIONS	D-Sub, DVI



R440 FORCE FEEDBACK

■ £55 | Manufacturer: Saitek | Phone: 01454 451900 | www.saitek.co.uk

Don't let the wacky looks put you off

SAITEK products are renowned for their bionic appearance, and the R440 wheel is no exception. Which is a pity, because any driving fan keen to duplicate the ergonomics of a real car will be put off by something that looks like it fell off the back of a GameCube.

In actual fact, the USB wheel is an adequate size, nice to hold (rubber overlays aid grip at the '10 to 2' position) and the pedal set is a revelation. Suspended and hinged at the top rather than at the bottom, it feels totally convincing underfoot and doesn't slide about in the middle of a game.

Grand Prix 4, *Live For Speed* and *Colin McRae 3* were chosen for testing, and at this point it's worth noting that Saitek don't include games with their products – they seem to share my view that bundled games are mediocre affairs and serve only to bump up the price.

Performance in each game was excellent and the wheel was suitably accurate, with feedback ranging from gentle buzzing to shakes powerful enough to make you lock your grip but not generate noise or wobble the desk.

ROAD RAMPAGE

Despite unconventional looks, the R440 is a top choice for a number of good reasons. The first is that it feels right. It's all very well having an official-looking replica, but if it lacks meatiness or if the buttons are all in the wrong place, you'll be better off using the keyboard. On the Saitek, there are two buttons under each thumb, meaning you can use them without taking your eyes off the road, plus nicely weighted paddle shifts for gear changes. And as already noted, the design of the pedals is second to none.



STEERING WHEEL

I didn't like some of the weak plastics. Metal would certainly raise the price, but the desk clamp felt flimsy – considering you need to go super tight to prevent the wheel from jumping

around, it's rather insubstantial. I'm also not convinced that the neck of the column, where it meets the binnacle, will last in the hands of a hot-tempered driver. But we'll see.



PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Rewarding to use, comfortable to hold
- ✓ Good button placement and pedal design
- ✗ Some bad choices of plastic
- ✗ Console looks, pointless LEDs

82

Driving fans rejoice!

CYBORG EVOLUTION

■ £34 | Manufacturer: Saitek | Phone: 01454 451900 | www.saitek.co.uk

A top-line stick for a mid-range price

ALTHOUGH the Cyborg Evo looks like a lesser Cyborg 3D Gold, it's actually the latest model, offering yet more adjustments, a relocated and refined throttle lever, together with bigger buttons in better places. The sleeker, low-key style is a welcome change, despite making the stick look marginally less exciting than before, and the soft-touch plastics combine with perfect spring tension, a positive trigger action and damped throttle to make this new stick unbeatable value for money. Add in the fact that a worm gear arrangement allows you to tilt the whole head section forward, back, left and right, and there's little chance you won't get comfortable.

Tests included *Microsoft Flight Simulator* and *Desert Combat*, whose bogging range of military aircraft is helping to recruit new flight fans every hour. Here the Evo performs admirably, its wide base remaining stable on the desk during tight banks, the twist-grip

rudder invaluable for outmanoeuvring opponents in dogfights – yes, it's much better than using the mouse. And with the throttle now centred at the rear, you can change speed and reach all four base buttons without having to lift an arm.

GET A GRIP ON IT

The Evo retains all the best-seller features of its predecessor, including the ability to reposition the hand rests for small or large hands, and left- or

right-handedness. It drops the cluttered feel and Subaru-style gold paint for a fresher, more modern look, and adds a worm gear to pivot the head in four directions. A USB connection plus Smart Technology software means it's a cinch to set up and use the five thumb buttons, trigger, eight movement hat switch and four base buttons – plus shift keys serve to double up the number of available button functions. Welcome, our new Editor's Choice.



JOYSTICK



PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Amazing features and quality for the price
- ✓ Can be adjusted to fit any hand
- ✓ Sleek looks, nice price
- ✗ Makes others feel inadequate

90

Totally tweakable, completely comfortable

INTRODUCING THE NEW AREA-51^m™

Exclusive Design • Innovative Upgradeable Graphics



THE FIRST NOTEBOOK WITH USER UPGRADEABLE GRAPHICS

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DEAR WANDY

Wandy gets lost on Packard Bell's website, makes disparaging remarks about the Xbox, and is home in time for tea. Genius!

■ NEEDING GLASSES Phil Waud

LET IT ALL OUT

Share your techie or gaming-related problems with us, and we, in turn, may well share them with thousands of readers via these very pages in a big communal love-in-type thing.

Write to Dear Wandy, PC ZONE, Dennis Publishing, 30 Cleveland Street, London W1T 4JD.

Email Address your letters to us at wandy@dearwandy.com with the subject heading 'Dear Wandy'. Please note: while we can assure you that we read absolutely every techie query and love letter sent to us, we are unable to offer personal replies. Sorry.

SYSTEM DESIREMENTS

Q I'll cut to the chase. What do I need to run *Half-Life 2* and *Doom 3*? We've all read the reports and rumours about these two games, and although neither developer has admitted that its software requires a super computer to run, we all know that it will help. At the moment I have an AMD Athlon XP 1600+ on an ASUS A7N8X motherboard coupled with 512MB DDR RAM and a GeForce4 Ti4800SE. I'm led to believe this will run both games with details scaled down. Soon I'll be getting an Athlon XP 2600+ with either a 256MB Radeon 9600 or a 256MB GeForce FX 5600. Do you think this will run both games with the details up at a reasonable level? Also, which of these two graphics cards do you recommend? This is a problem on a lot of people's minds, and I'd be very grateful to hear what you have to say about it.

Tom Heard

A The honest answer to this, and to the million other letters I receive on the subject each month, is that I don't know. Sorry! I've not played *Half-Life 2* and can't say what processor or what video card you need underneath it all to make it look 'right'. But a little detective work online reveals some good pointers.

The first and most obvious clue is Valve's E3 video – the world-famous show footage that started all the hoopla. The machine powering the clips was a Pentium 4 3.0GHz Dell XPS mounted by a Radeon 9800 Pro, and it should be quite comforting to think that the hardware required to recreate your very own E3 booth at home isn't unique nor is it prohibitively expensive (the XPS retails in North America for \$2,600, or about £1,600).



What's it going to take to run this bastard? Not much, it seems, but for maximum detail you're gonna have to call NASA.

The second snippet takes the form of interviews with several Valve luminaries. A few weeks back, we talked to Doug Lombardi and asked him if the new *Half-Life* would 'push' system requirements. Doug's response was that you could run the game on an "800MHz processor with 128MB memory". If it won't run on an old Pentium, and requires more than 128MB RAM, he would have said so.

Given these details, I think it's safe to say that your current 1600+ machine will be more than capable of running *HL2*, and that the 2600+ you have planned will be a stride in the right direction. The faster you go, the better it looks and feels, and that's true for any software you buy.

In answering your final question, I should point out that Valve have relentlessly pushed ATI as their hardware of choice (back to the interview, and Doug is quoted as saying, "Folks who want the ultimate experience will want the latest ATI card."), and with a Radeon as our reigning champ, it'd be wrong for me to recommend anything else.

PACKARD HELL

Q Under the Display tab in Microsoft's DirectX Diagnostic Tool (*Start, Run, dxdiag* – Wandy), it tells me: 'Hardware accelerated DirectX3D 9+ is not available because the display driver does not support it. You may be able to get a newer driver from the hardware manufacturer.' I've just installed DirectX 9.0, and now this has come up. I'm running a P4 2GHz Packard Bell iMedia 5070 with a 40GB hard drive, and my chipset is Intel SIS 650. I was hoping you could tell me how to correct this and if I should upgrade to a better graphics card to play upcoming games like *Jedi Academy*, *Black & White 2*, and *Deus Ex: Invisible War*. Any info would be fantastic.

Geoffrey Simpson

A Firstly, I'd like to congratulate Packard Bell on a lame and confusing website. A simple search for 'iMedia 5070' revealed no hits, despite it being a recent product, and a search for both 'sis 650' and 'sis650' yielded bummer all. Frustrated, I decided to search for rudies and was surprised to find both 'shit' and 'arse' located one document each. And no, I ain't

kidding – try it yourself at support.packardbell.co.uk.

Having exhausted my swear vocabulary, I managed to click randomly to a page entitled 'SiS650 / 651 display drivers' (funny how the search engine missed it) and that's what you need, Mr Simpson, sir. The error you're seeing in *dxdiag* highlights an incompatibility between the new version of DirectX and your old video drivers. If you update your system using the link on the labyrinthine Packard Bell site – follow the trail through Support, My PC support, Downloads, Desktop, iMedia (bizarrely, there are six buttons labelled 'iMedia', so be sure to choose the one that looks most like your system), then Driver, and finally Video – you should see the error disappear. Note, however, that some drivers will never talk with DirectX 9 properly, and if that's the case, you'll need a new video card. If you're looking to play games such as *Black & White 2*, I'd recommend it. And next time you get your cheque book out, go get a feel for a manufacturer's support site before buying their products – it may become a lifeline when things go wrong.

ALL LUBED UP

Q With regard to a noisy cooling fan, maybe the device just needs a bit of extra lubrication after all the hard work it has been doing? In the very

If your CPU fan sounds like it's on its way out, replace, replace, replace!



"I opened up the case and gave the cooling fan a thorough blast of WD-40"

STEVE DARKE



Say, anyone get the idea that Wandy doesn't like consoles?

"The trouble with consoles is the hardware comes with 'warranty void' stickers"

hot weather recently I had exactly the problem you described with my P4 cooling fan – it was starting to make grinding noises at boot time as it got itself up to speed. It was the one that came in the box with a 2.66 GHz P4. The CPU temp didn't go above 50°C although the fan was working much harder – up from its normal 2,400 to 5,000 or so. To get to the point, I opened up the case, laid it on its side, and gave the fan a thorough blast of WD-40. While I was at it, I gave my Geforce4 fan the same treatment, as that card was also getting rather warm. Thought this was worth a go, as there is no way WD-40 will harm any of the electronics. Problem solved, and it's been whirring away contentedly ever since!

Steve Darke

A There are two sorts of people: those who swear by WD-40, and those who swear at it. You can probably guess that I fall into the latter category. Its original purpose in life was to displace water (hence the WD), and I remain wholly unconvinced that its lubrication skills are mad enough for something as crucial as a processor cooling fan. Even if it did have the oily power of Castrol GTX, it'd simply attract dust. PCs are notorious dust traps and anything coated in oil would glue up over time. I'm also not sure how safe it is to hose aerosols directly inside your case, as solvents and propellants in the spray could have a less than desirable effect on important stuff like thermal compound and your porn collection. Consider that a rattling fan is the audible result of worn bearings, and that WD-40 is simply 'filling the gaps' and eliminating the noise – it's not prolonging the life of your cooler, merely silencing it. For the sake of a few quid I'd stick to my advice of replacing the unit and keep

the WD in the garage for releasing rusty bolts and starting mopeds on damp mornings. It simply isn't worth the risk of using it on computer hardware.

GETTING COCKERY

Q In response to Anon's Xbox to PC linkup problem in PCZ #133, the only solution is a VGA box from somewhere like www.consoleplus.co.uk (although I find an RGB SCART to widescreen format TV much better for *Halo*). And while we're on this subject, saying you know 'nothing' about the Xbox but telling us 'there's no reason to own one' is a bit contradictory. Anyone with a modicum of networking knowledge can get one playing DivX movies, MP3s and emulators, all in their front room, not to mention class games that are miles apart from the PC – *Burnout 2*, *Soul Calibur II* and *Jet Set Radio Future*. And you'll be playing *Doom 3*, eh, despite the fact it isn't out for six months and with no idea how good it'll be? Just stick to the PC advice, Wandy.

Guy Cocker

A The trouble with the Xbox, or the PlayStation 2, or the GameCube, or indeed any console, is that the hardware sealed inside them comes with 'warranty void' stickers bunging up the screw heads. Where PCs are constantly evolving, consoles are stuck in a time warp. In the case of the Xbox, it's saddled with yesteryear graphics and a 733MHz Pentium, or about the same computing power as a clock radio. And look what happens when you nick top-selling console games and put them on a real computer. Take *Grand Theft Auto*, which not only became 100% more playable (whatever anyone says, you totally cannot do first person with a lousy gamepad) but better to look at and more involving – plus

there's cool stuff like making your own radio stations with music from your MP3 library. And because the PC is, among many things, a class development environment, coders can write mods to enhance and expand their favourite games (in the case of *GTA*, it's a stunning piece of work from www.mtvc.com that turns the game massively multiplayer. Gives me the horn just thinking about it).

So my advice to anyone considering buying a console remains: think long and think hard about lashing out the cash when you could be saving up for PC kit instead. If you have the budget for both, fine – but if not, keep it in the piggy.

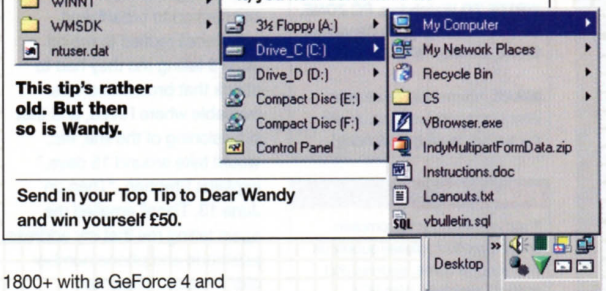
NOS DA COUNTER-STRIKE [WELSH FOR 'GOODNIGHT COUNTER-STRIKE']

Q I've been having a spot of trouble with *Counter-Strike*. My PC is an AMD Athlon

WANDY'S TOP TIPS

Short and simple this month. Right-click your taskbar, open the Toolbars menu, and click Desktop. Lo and behold, a new Desktop menu entry appears at the bottom of the screen, jostling with your Quick Launch bar. Not particularly exciting, but check this: not only can you see what's on your desktop at any time just by clicking, you can also browse the contents of your whole PC as Start Menu-like entries. When you've found what you want, left-click to launch it, or right-click for options. And you know,

this has pretty much halved the time it takes me to find stuff. Additionally, and this is what I think is the neat bit, you can drag and drop one or more files on to the toolbar which then appears on the desktop. If like me you use a flat-screen monitor and work full-screen most of the time, you rarely get to see your desktop – but with the Desktop toolbar providing a direct link to it, you now don't have to.



This tip's rather old. But then so is Wandy.

Send in your Top Tip to Dear Wandy and win yourself £50.

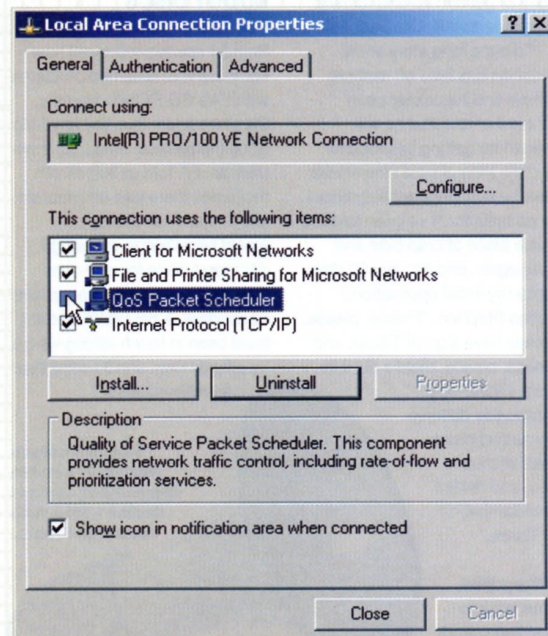
1800+ with a GeForce 4 and 56K modem. Every time I try to connect to a server, a message pops up saying 'NETSEND PACKET ERROR: WAESNTR' and *Counter-Strike* promptly shuts down. Can you please tell me how to solve this problem?

Chris, Wales

A WAESNTR is an error indicating that the stream of data from your machine is written in Welsh rather than English, and the *Counter-Strike* server you attempted to join has crashed in its

attempts to translate it. Okay, so I'm pulling your leg. There is no such error as WAESNTR, so take a slap for writing it down wrong. What you actually mean is WSAEINTR, which is Windows telling you it screwed up talking to a remote machine. I'd suggest you're either running a firewall such as ZoneAlarm, which you should turn off before launching *Half-Life*, or you're using Windows XP, and in which case you should disable the QoS Packet Scheduler by right-clicking on your dial-up connection, choosing Properties, and deselecting the relevant checkbox. If that doesn't work, I'd ensure you shut down other network programs like ICQ or MSN before playing, and you update your system using windowsupdate.microsoft.com. Failing that, it could be a chipset driver issue (you don't say what motherboard you have), or something fundamental like a broken Windows install or wrong DLL (WSAE errors are generated by the WinSock library). The quickest way around this is to remove all your network components from the Windows Setup section of the Add/Remove control panel, then reboot, and drop them all back in again. ☑☑

Visit Wandy on the web at www.dearwandy.com



The QoS Scheduler, one of the prime candidates for WSAEINTR errors while playing *Counter-Strike*.



WATCHDOG

They came. They saw. They liked. They bought. Then they got ripped off. And wrote to us. Time for the consumer to bite back...

■ WRITING THE WRONGS Adam Phillips

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!

Don't worry - we're here to help when you're at the end of your tether. If you've got a consumer issue that needs addressing then drop us a line.

WRITE TO Watchdog, PC ZONE, Dennis Publishing, 30 Cleveland Street, London W1P 5FF, UK.

EMAIL Alternatively, email us at letters.pczone@dennis.co.uk with the subject heading 'Watchdog'.

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.

THE LONG HAUL

Sixty days and counting, and still reader Stephen Orr is reeling from the shock and awe induced by ISP Tiscali's seemingly diabolical customer service. All he wanted was to upgrade his Tiscali Net connection to broadband.

"Tiscali replied to me on June 9 telling me they had to check that broadband was available where I lived, and that provisioning of the line, etc, would take around 15 days," explains Stephen. "Then on June 13, Tiscali emailed me again telling me that my address, postcode and phone number didn't match. They then requested that I send them the correct details. I duly sent them the same details again as they were correct in the first place!"

With that sorted, he was told on June 23 that it would take ten working days to get him up and running with broadband. Two weeks later and Stephen was still waiting. He emailed them but heard nothing back so he mailed them again. And again. Finally, on July 22, Tiscali actually managed to mail him, telling him that it would take... ten working days to get him up and running with broadband. Oh. Dear.

To cut a long story short, Stephen has fired off multiple emails and has either been ignored or told that he will indeed be getting broadband shortly. Now almost nine weeks later he is understandably about to go ballistic: "I've been told the same piece of crap over and over again, and it's now 60 days since my initial application," fumes Stephen. "Please, please, please have a go at Tiscali, and please, please, please put it in print. I think they thoroughly deserve some bad press. Best wishes to you, and hellfire and damnation to Tiscali."

Crickey. Well, your wish is our command, Stephen. Off we trotted to

Tiscali, who offered up the following reason for the complete cock-up in customer service: "Mr Orr's broadband order was initially rejected by BT as they said the postcode didn't match his telephone number. This was an error in their systems and his order was resubmitted."

They have, however, apologised to you, Stephen, "because there was an internal Tiscali administrative error that delayed his order being provisioned".

[Is that what they mean by a euphemism? - Ed]

They say, though, that your broadband service has been live since August 21: "In light of this delay and as a gesture of goodwill to Mr Orr, we are offering him one month's free broadband subscription in the form of a credit to his account," finishes the company.

Hmm, certainly a step in the right direction, but Watchdog believes that Stephen should receive two month's worth of free broadband to match his 60 days of customer misery.

DODGY DISCS FOLLOW-UP

Regular readers will recall how some punters have had problems with EA's CD-ROMS. Namely, the discs seem to enjoy cracking all by themselves, rendering them useless. EA told us last month that while there was no problem per se with their discs, they would be willing to exchange damaged discs for new ones without a surcharge as a gesture of goodwill. A couple of readers have been in touch asking where exactly they should send their knackered discs.

We asked EA to give us the skinny: "They should return their discs to: Electronic Arts Ltd, Attn: Customer Warranty, 2000 Hillwood Drive, Chertsey, Surrey KT16 0EU."

EA pointed out again that those of you sending in discs "should also include a covering note explaining how the damage occurred, their return address and either a contact telephone number or email address. We will examine the disc and replace it for free if it appears that no misuse has contributed to the failure".

In the meantime, we had an email from a reader with another theory about those mysterious cracks appearing on *Battlefield 1942* CDs: "It happens when two CDs are put in the same DVD box in the same holder mechanism - but it only happens with the DVD boxes that have 'ying-yang' shaped grapples. The remedy to this problem? Don't put two CDs in the same grapple!"

SPLINTERED SOUND

Pity the poor sound effects and music guys who work on videogames. While mags and punters alike froth at the mouth about the latest graphics and frame rates, the massively important element of sound is rarely dwelt upon for too long. Games such as the now legendary *Splinter Cell* would be a shadow of their former selves without expert sound design.

And talking of SC, one reader has already learnt this lesson the hard way - Ben Young has been trapezing, crawling and neck-snapping his way through the classic title only to come across a distinctly unstealthy sound problem: "When I fire my weapon on the fourth level, the sound goes into a screeching frenzy," explains Ben. "I have to quit the program to shut it up! This happens every time."

Now Ben has spent hours trawling through Ubisoft's site and forums looking for a solution, and he's been sending off emails to the tech support division. He's



Sam Fisher found the stealth work impossible on Ben's machine and has now moved into more suitable areas of work...

yet to hear bugger all back from them though so he's understandably a little miffed.

So over to Ubisoft: "Firstly please accept our apologies for the delay Ben has experienced in receiving a reply from our technical support," offers a spokesperson. "We have recently re-structured our support site and I understand there have been a few teething problems."

They go on to offer a potential solution for your sound 'wobbles', which Watchdog has forwarded on to you, Ben. Please let us know if they work. If not, the kindly bods at Ubisoft have also furnished you with a direct contact to one of their tech experts.



If anyone else out there is suffering similar problems, then let Watchdog know and we'll pass the relevant info on to you as well...

BT PHONE HOME

BT? Being... generous? Lordy, lordy, lord! Yes, even that monolithic corporation can be known to throw caution to the wind and offer exceedingly tasty gestures of goodwill. You may recall that Jeff Dean wrote into Watchdog on the verge of a consumer breakdown - he had signed up for BT Openworld's broadband service but was only being charged half price for it.



THE ACCUSED



GUILTY UNTIL PROVEN INNOCENT

SAINTS NOT SINNERS

▲ THEY WANT TO HELP. THEY WANT TO GIVE YOU THE BEST. YES, THERE ARE SOME COMPANIES WHO SEEM TO... CARE ABOUT THEIR CUSTOMERS...?

This is a strange one – a customer who's happy that he *didn't* get what he wanted from a company? Erm, over to reader Andrew Knight: "I recently ordered a new PC from Aria," explains Andrew. "I then received a call from them saying that there was a problem with the motherboard working with the featured processor. They asked if they could try using another board instead of the one I'd chosen. As the price was slightly less and it still had all the features I wanted, I agreed."

Andrew then got a call the next day saying that the problem was actually most likely down to the non-branded DDR memory he

had ordered. Would he mind switching? Of course not, says Andy.

"This kind of thing continued for around a week, but every step of the way Aria would phone me and keep me 100 per cent up to date with what was happening – sometimes resulting in two or three calls a day."

Admittedly, his PC ended up costing 60 or so pounds more, but Andy's not bothered – he's delighted that the company kept him fully and frankly informed of his PC's status throughout the whole build process. And needless to say, he's absolutely besotted with his new machine.

Despite constantly pointing this out to them, BT seemed to ignore the problem.

Understandably, Jeff dropped us a line because he was very worried about receiving a up-to-date bill from BT one day, saying that he owed a mortgage-sized amount of money in arrears. We contacted BT who said they'd sort it all out and there was nothing to worry about.

Then Jeff sent us an update: "BT's press office telephoned me last Tuesday saying that you'd contacted them on my behalf and apologised for what had been happening," he explains.

Jeff subsequently received a letter from them confirming what had happened and that seeing the mistakes had been down to BT, they would not be asking Jeff to pay any of the arrears. "They again apologised and told me that my account was all in order and that monthly payments would start being charged from next month," says a chuffed Jeff.

Which means that Jeff has saved literally hundreds of pounds thanks to BT. And, of course, humble 'ickle Watchdog as well...

DABS DILEMMA

Gareth Myles is regretting the day he got 'upgrade fever', as he calls it. "Two weeks ago, I shopped around for a new processor, motherboard, sound card and speaker system," he explains. "Dabs is a company I have used over the years and I have been pleased by the results."

The products swiftly arrived and with the aid of a tech-head chum, Gareth installed his new goodies. Unfortunately, when he

flicked the machine on, nothing happened. His mate deduced that the motherboard or processor had to be faulty.

"I searched the documentation for a phone number without success," recalls Gareth. "The next day at work, I browsed their site only to find out they only deal with customers online. I could not email them as my pop3 account and home Internet were unusable due to my computer's lack of operation."

So Gareth spent days driving between a local broadband box and his home, detailing in several emails what the problem was to several different customer service operatives.

"It has been six days now," Gareth fumes. "I feel that nothing has been done and Dabs cares even less about correcting the problem. If they'd had a phone, I am certain I would have had my replacement gear by now. It is obvious they want to cut out any hassle from customers."

Harsh words indeed, but are they justified? Over to Dabs, who offered their side of the

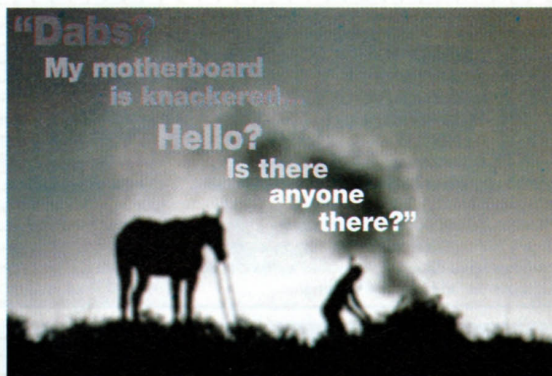
story: "The order to which Mr Myles referred contained four different products," the company explains.

"It seems that the returns process in this case took longer than normal as we were not able at first to identify which of these four items Mr Myles wished to return."

They claim their customer support team replied to each of Gareth's emails on the same day they were received "to request this information so that a Returns Authorisation number could be raised. Unfortunately, it was not readily supplied".

Dabs then claims that on August 27, it finally received the necessary information and an authorisation number has since been raised and issued: "We apologise for any inconvenience the faulty goods have caused," says Dabs.

As for your complaint about the lack of phone support, Dabs points out that it is an Internet-only retailer "and as such, all communication with our customers is indeed handled electronically". ☑



In desperation, one reader turned to smoke signals to try and contact Dabs, but to no avail. They accept email queries only.

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BUYER'S GUIDE

Our in-depth guide to making your hardware buying decisions as easy as pulling in Tenerife

Gone are the three categories of old, and in their place are three new ones. Editor's Choice is the class champ, the product that will satisfy all of you, no matter what

you play. Our Recommended product wears a silver medal, not quite as triumphant as the outright winner, but a very worthy alternative. Finally, the Also

Consider product is one we believe you should look at before settling for one of the other two – it may just tickle your dipple. If you feel we've got something wrong, or

just want to add your tuppence ha'penny, mail letters@pczone.co.uk. If we act on your suggestion, we'll be certain to shower you with gifts. Promise.




◀ **EDITOR'S CHOICE** ▶ ▶ **RECOMMENDED** ▶ ▶ **ALSO CONSIDER** ▶

MOTHERBOARD	 <p>IS7 (INTEL) STREET PRICE £278 MANUFACTURER ABIT Computer TELEPHONE N/A WEBSITE www.abit.com.tw</p> <p>Huge performance coupled with a huge sigh of relief from your wallet. Although the IS7 uses Intel's Springdale chipset, essentially a restricted version of its Canterwood sibling, Abit's motherboard supports P4 800/533/400MHz CPUs with Hyper-Threading, and up to 4GB of Dual DDR. It also features onboard LAN, six-channel audio, and IEEE 1394 FireWire. Proof you don't need to spend over a ton for a top-rank motherboard.</p>	 <p>K7N2 DELTA ILSR (ATHLON) STREET PRICE £90 MANUFACTURER MSI TELEPHONE 020 8813 6688 WEBSITE www.msi.com.tw</p> <p>Featuring the nForce2 chipset with the FSB wound up from 333MHz to 400MHz, the K7N2 Delta provides AMD die-hards with extra shove from a faster system bus and up to 3GB of Dual DDR memory. Although Barton-cored Athlons aren't a patch on their Hyper-Threaded opposite numbers, boards, such as the K7N2 Delta, close the gap. Other features include dual IEEE 1394 FireWire and automated BIOS updates.</p>	 <p>875PNEO-FIS2R (INTEL) STREET PRICE £150 MANUFACTURER MSI TELEPHONE 020 8813 6688 WEBSITE www.msi.com.tw</p> <p>A high-end P4 Canterwood board, the Neo features some truly remarkable features, including dynamic overlocking – the hardware jumps on the throttle the moment you open applications – and automated BIOS updates using MSI's own Live Update software. Other features include IEEE 1394 FireWire, six-channel audio, onboard LAN and support for Dual DDR. Build quality and overall packaging are excellent.</p>
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PROCESSOR	 <p>P4 3.0GHZ STREET PRICE £340 MANUFACTURER Intel TELEPHONE 01793 403000 WEBSITE www.intel.com</p> <p>For an additional £160, you could order the three-litre chip's big brother, the 3.2GHz, but we don't think the extra thrust justifies the price hike. With Hyper-Threading enabled, the 3.0GHz Pentium delivers a jaw-pounding power hit from twin processors and an 800MHz front-side bus. With a decent motherboard and some fast memory, products such as this make <i>Doom 3</i> and <i>Half-Life 2</i> seem all the more plausible.</p>	 <p>ATHLON XP 3000+ BARTON STREET PRICE £218 MANUFACTURER AMD TELEPHONE N/A WEBSITE www.amd.com</p> <p>Let's not forget who drove Intel into rolling out key features such as Hyper-Threading. AMD's Athlon successfully shocked its Santa Clara rival into releasing technologies that were originally pencilled for the next Pentium. And although any 3.0GHz HT on paper makes the Barton look like a distant runner-up, it remains a great chip at a great price. Paired with a decent video card, it's a high-quality solution.</p>	 <p>P4 2.4GHZ STREET PRICE £145 MANUFACTURER Intel TELEPHONE 01793 403 000 WEBSITE www.intel.com</p> <p>For little more than £200 you can have our Editor's Choice motherboard and a Hyper-Threading Pentium 4 chip running at 2.4GHz with 800MHz FSB. Drop in our favourite Radeon 9800 Pro video card, and instantly you have a balls-on machine that's ready and willing to tackle the next generation of gaming. If you're building a local games network and want big machines for small money, look no further.</p>
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HDD	 <p>WD1200JB 120GB STREET PRICE £90 MANUFACTURER Western Digital TELEPHONE N/A WEBSITE www.westerndigital.com</p> <p>Many of you will view a 120GB HDD as an extravagance, but with games getting longer and broadband getting wider, a hangar-like hard drive gives you plenty of room for mucking about. You'll also bring that never-ending quest for more room to an abrupt end. The price is just right, and the performance second to none. Like the DiamondMax Plus9, the WD1200JB features an 8MB cache and a speed of 7200RPM.</p>	 <p>DIAMONDMAX PLUS9 80GB STREET PRICE £60 MANUFACTURER Maxtor TELEPHONE N/A WEBSITE www.maxtor.com</p> <p>The mid-sized Maxtor is for everyone: large, fast and not that expensive. Most users will find 80GB more than adequate for work, play and downloading requirements, and those greedy for more gig can jump a size up. The Fast ATA, 7200RPM drive includes Maxtor's Shock Protection System and Quiet Drive Technology, but for the Serial ATA version, expect a £20 premium.</p>	 <p>RAPTOR 36GB STREET PRICE £106 MANUFACTURER Western Digital TELEPHONE N/A WEBSITE www.westerndigital.com</p> <p>If you don't need a deep hole for your data, or if you intend keeping your dirt on a separate drive, the 10,000RPM Serial ATA Raptor makes the ideal foundation for your primary partition. It's wickedly fast, perhaps the fastest HDD available yet, and although designed for server environments, provides gaming desktops with the kind of warp-nine, low access times that make any application more nimble.</p>
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GRAPHICS CARD	 <p>128MB RADEON 9800 PRO STREET PRICE £270 MANUFACTURER Crucial TELEPHONE 0800 013 0330 WEBSITE www.crucial.com/UK</p> <p>Being put in the shade by an FX 5900 Ultra doesn't make the 9800 Pro any less of a nutcase. With 128MB of quad-channel DDR memory, a 380MHz core clock, full DirectX9 compliance and AGP8X, the 128MB Raddy usurps every rival bar the baddest NVIDIA card. And Crucial's kit is shockingly good value. Anyone wishing to turbocharge their gaming need look no further.</p>	 <p>3D BLASTER FX5900 ULTRA STREET PRICE £384 MANUFACTURER Creative Labs TELEPHONE N/A WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com</p> <p>How could we not praise the world's craziest video card? The 256MB 5900 Ultra is hugely wide, eerily quiet and hauntingly smooth at big resolutions. If you want your games to ooze hydraulic efficiency, and have some serious dosh, look no further. NVIDIA's high revving, low noise NV35 is everything the 5800 Ultra should have been. The only downside is the price.</p>	 <p>EXCALIBUR RADEON 9000 PRO STREET PRICE £83 MANUFACTURER HiTech TELEPHONE N/A WEBSITE www.hitech.com.hk</p> <p>Our Best Budget buy for some months now, the Excalibur from ATI partner HiTech is plenty card for little cash. At less than £85, you get a 64MB, 275MHz DDR Radeon that's easily the best value card in its sector – drop one of these diminutive fellows into an old donkey and suddenly a whole raft of hungry titles including <i>UT 2003</i> or <i>Battlefield 1942</i> become a reality.</p>
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SOUND CARD	 <p>REVOLUTION 7.1 STREET PRICE £88 MANUFACTURER M-Audio TELEPHONE 0871 717 7100 WEBSITE www.m-audio.co.uk</p> <p>Although it lacks a few of its rivals' gamer-friendly features, including hardware DirectSound and a joystick/MIDI port, the Revolution more than makes up for any deficit with a truly astonishing quality of sound. Unique technologies enhance your enjoyment of games, music and movies. The software is straight-talking and boasts a familiar look and feel, making the card a delight to work with.</p>	 <p>AUDIGY 2 PLATINUM EX STREET PRICE £150 MANUFACTURER Creative Labs TELEPHONE N/A WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com</p> <p>A quantum leap from its predecessor, the Audigy 2 offers a boggling range of pro-gamer and DVD features, including 6.1 surround sound, EAX Advanced HD, Advanced Resolution DVD-Audio and 24-bit/96KHz recording – it was the first card to gain THX certification from LucasFilm. If you appreciate the immersive experience offered by high-fidelity surround sound, the Audigy will give you an experience like no other.</p>	 <p>AUDIGY 2 PLATINUM EX STREET PRICE £150 MANUFACTURER Creative Labs TELEPHONE N/A WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com</p> <p>Offering the same core features as its little brother, the Platinum Ex is guaranteed to perform and sound like no other card. The external breakout box is a boon for serious listeners, and includes standard audio connections and volume controls. The big Platinum also offers dual SB1394 FireWire ports and optical links, a stereo RCA input, plus MIDI In and MIDI Out mini-DIN sockets.</p>
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 **World's Most Powerful VGA ever...**



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EDITOR'S CHOICE RECOMMENDED ALSO CONSIDER



MX500
STREET PRICE £34
MANUFACTURER Logitech
TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127
WEBSITE www.logitech.com

Although it comes with a tail and doesn't have the same substantive feeling as the battery-reliant MX700, the MX500 remains a solid product and a solid performer in all games. It features Logitech's MX optical engine, mouse wheel (plus two additional buttons either side to aide document navigation), a task-switcher button, and two thumb buttons that speed up web navigation.



OPTICAL MOUSE BLUE
STREET PRICE £20
MANUFACTURER Microsoft
TELEPHONE 0870 601 0100
WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/uk


If you've ever been boggled by the number of buttons on a mouse, and have fond memories of a time when three clickers and a wheel were all you needed, Microsoft's blue rodent is the perfect peripheral. It's nice to look at, nice to hold and, as any veteran FPS gamer will tell you, three buttons is all you need. Plus the latest optical technology means it works anywhere.



MX700
STREET PRICE £47
MANUFACTURER ACTURER Logitech
TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127
WEBSITE www.logitech.com

Sporting the MX optical engine that made Logitech famous with gamers, the MX700 is essentially an MX500 with its tail lopped off. A cradle keeps your desk tidy and acts as a recharger for the unfettered rodent – making the mouse more attractive to people who don't do batteries. It's a touch pricey and we remain unconvinced that going cordless is worth the extra stash.

MICE



INTERNET NAVIGATOR
STREET PRICE £21
MANUFACTURER Logitech
TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127
WEBSITE www.logitech.com

The Internet Navigator lies absolutely flat on your desk, a trademark Logitech design that makes it look sleeker and 'feel' nicer. There's a scroll wheel along the left edge and a raft of customisable function keys to make trawling the web a cinch – you no longer have to swap back and forth to the mouse, and instead can leave your hands over on the keyboard. Once you browse this way, there's no going back.



OFFICE KEYBOARD
STREET PRICE £28
MANUFACTURER Microsoft
TELEPHONE 0870 601 0100
WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/uk

Forget what you've learned about Microsoft software – their hardware is always of an exceedingly high build quality and, despite problems with early Intellimouse rodents, extremely durable. Shortcut buttons you think you'll never use soon become second nature, especially when reconfigured to suit your way of working, and once you learn the enhanced layout you'll never go back to tapping on anything else.



PRO KEYBOARD
STREET PRICE £50
MANUFACTURER Apple
TELEPHONE 0800 039 1010
WEBSITE www.apple.com/uk

If you think we're mad for including an Apple keyboard, think again. Anyone looking for a Rolls-Royce keyboard, and who can live without all the additional buttons, scroll wheels and assorted paraphernalia, need look no further. The Apple Pro plugs straight into your USB port and, with the help of third-party utilities, disguises the fact that it was designed for computer illiterates with fewer than two mouse buttons.

KEYBOARD



CYBORG EVO
STREET PRICE £34
MANUFACTURER Saitek
TELEPHONE 01454 451900
WEBSITE www.saitek.co.uk

A welcome new look for Saitek, and the welcome addition of a four-way adjustable head, larger buttons, plus a meaty damped throttle at the back of the base. As with all Cyborgs, the sculpted hand-rests can be repositioned ambidextrously and will suit all hand sizes. An eight-way hat switch, five thumb buttons with trigger, four base buttons and a shift key to double the possible combinations make this a winner.



CYBORG 3D GOLD
STREET PRICE £18
MANUFACTURER Saitek
TELEPHONE 01454 451 900
WEBSITE www.saitek.co.uk

A former Best Buy, the Saitek stick is renowned for the way it can be taken apart and put back together to fit your hand perfectly, and also for its ambidextrous nature – lefties as well as righties can get to grips with it. It features seven fire buttons and, like the Sidewinder, has eight hat buttons, a lever throttle and a twist grip for controlling the rudder. At this price you'd be daft not to.



HOTAS COUGAR
STREET PRICE £249
MANUFACTURER Thrustmaster
TELEPHONE 020 8665 1881
WEBSITE www.thrustmaster.co.uk

The John Holmes of joysticks. Based on the flight controls of an F-16, sturdy metal construction makes it feel like no other peripheral. With 28 customisable buttons, 18lbs of resistance built into its springs, programmable hat switches and an adaptive action for the separate throttle arm, it transforms any flight simulation and is the ultimate toy for wannabe pilots. It's ten times the cost of a regular joystick, but is in a class of its own.

JOYSTICK



INSPIRE 5.1 5300
STREET PRICE £50
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

The Inspire furnishes you with five satellite speakers, a sub and a wired remote control. All are sleek looking, solid feeling and great sounding. The bass is clean, the middle and treble crisp, and although power output doesn't climb into three digits, the amp provides more than enough oomph. Added to which, there's support for enhanced 5.1 surround sound on EAX titles. The only downside is that there's no headphone jack.



Z-640
STREET PRICE £80
MANUFACTURER Logitech
TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127
WEBSITE www.logitech.com

Logitech has patented the pressure-driver design of its subwoofer and we can hear the difference. For the money, the clout is simply amazing – bassheads among you will love it. Higher frequencies don't disappoint either, the 5.1 sounding almost as clean and inviting as the Inspire 5300s. Unlike the Creative set, the Z-640 has a headphone socket, but it's not conveniently sited. Shame.



MEGAWORKS THX 5.1 550
STREET PRICE £235
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

Successor to our Best Performance winner, the Megaworks 550 is a pretty stunning 5.1 setup featuring five 70W capsule-shielded satellite speakers, a 150W wood subwoofer, and a wired remote with a separate headphone socket. Built to THX standards the sound quality is superb in both DVDs and games – Creative's BASH system providing 500W of burst power that'll make you leap out of your seat.

SPEAKERS



CML174SXW
STREET PRICE £330
MANUFACTURER Hitachi
TELEPHONE 01628 585000
WEBSITE www.hitachidigitalmedia.com

When it comes to flat panel, fast-paced gaming, response times really count. And the CML174SXW has one of the lowest response times in its sector – a mere 16ms. It also delivers top-notch image quality, weighs in at just 5kg, and comes in colours that'll match your kit. If you're looking to make the move from CRT, and action games are a priority for you, the handsome little Hitachi is the obvious choice.



FLATRON L1710B
STREET PRICE £345
MANUFACTURER LG Electronics
TELEPHONE 01753 491500
WEBSITE www.lge.co.uk

This 17-inch panel came within a gnat's guff of knocking our Hitachi favourite from the top spot, but its slightly fatter price tag (from the addition of a USB hub), plus inconspicuous silver and grey trim saw the L1710B lose out. But don't think it's a distant second place – things are as close as a kiss, the LG offering marginally better picture quality and matching the Hitachi for speed. Yet another nail in the CRT coffin.



VISIONMASTER PRO 514
STREET PRICE £490
MANUFACTURER Iiyama
TELEPHONE 01438 745 482
WEBSITE www.iiyama.co.uk

Boasting a 22in Mitsubishi Electric DIAMONDTRON tube, 0.24 mm AG pitch and flicker-free refresh rates at immense resolutions, the Iiyama is a truly breathtaking sight on your desktop – not least because it gobbles so much of it. The big VM also features a typically comprehensive on-screen menu, USB hub and audio connectors. At 1600x1200, the display is rock steady at 110Hz and is ideal partner for gaming.

SCREENS



APPLE IPOD
STREET PRICE £419
MANUFACTURER Apple
TELEPHONE 020 8210 1000
WEBSITE www.apple.com/uk

There are loads of MP3 players on the market but everybody wants an iPod and the new version is even smaller (in size) yet bigger (in capacity). It weighs less than two CDs and can store up to 7,500 tracks, and as a bonus the supplied headphones are top notch as well. The speedy Firewire interface (you'll need a suitable connection) and remote control rounds off a totally class act.



ARCHOS JUKEBOX MULTIMEDIA
STREET PRICE £316
MANUFACTURER Archos
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.archos.com

While it may never win any awards for aesthetics, the Jukebox Multimedia from Archos is the Swiss Army Knife of media players. Handling one of the widest selections of file types, the player can even play back a selection of video formats including DIVX. The sound is fantastic, but the bundled headphones are shite. And it's cheaper than the mighty iPod.



MUVO
STREET PRICE £60
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.europe.creative.com

The MuVo is one of the smartest gadgets we've seen. It comes in two parts, a USB key that plugs into any system running XP (without drivers), and a battery housing. Plug it into your PC and you can back up your documents. Drag a few MP3s onto the drive and when you snap the two halves together and plug in some headphones you've got one of the smallest MP3 players on the market.

MP3 PLAYER



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MAILBOX

Everybody needs to let off steam occasionally, and we're here to listen...

■ KEEPING IT REAL Dave Woods



ROCKIN' ALL OVER THE WORLD

What's going on with *Operation Flashpoint 2*? The original *OPF* is my favourite game. In fact I now have my own league (www.tntleague.com), which is growing into one of the biggest in the *OPF* community. Despite its age, the game is still regularly played by masses of people, but I can't recall seeing any details about the sequel in your mag, even though the game was announced a couple of months

ago. Come on; give us a sneak preview of the sequel to THE best war game out there!

Marshal Law

As soon as there's anything to see on *Operation Flashpoint 2* we'll be there. The original was 'discovered' by PC ZONE when it was still masquerading under the name of *Flashpoint 1985: Status Quo*, and we're going to be the first UK mag to break news of the sequel. We're still waiting for confirmation from our sources exactly when that's going to be.

FOOTBALL'S COMING HOME

I've always thought *FIFA* was frustratingly shite but being a PC gamer there wasn't really an alternative – until my friend introduced me to *Pro Evolution Soccer 2* on the PS2. I heard it was good but I didn't realize it was going to be that good! It's an incredible attempt at recreating the beauty of the most treasured sport in this country.

The news that *Pro Evolution 3* is going to come out on the PC is the best news I've heard, bar the imminent release of *Half-Life 2*. Perhaps this will be the football game PC gamers deserve and it might even spur the *FIFA* developers to make some radical new changes.

John Fouracre

Despite the fact that it's a PS2 game, we play *Pro Evo* all the time (in fact it's probably the single best reason to own the console) and, like you, can't wait until *Pro Evo 3* hits. Don't miss next month's issue in which we feature an exclusive lockdown on the PC conversion.

ZONE IS GOOD N'KAY

It's been six months since I bought PC ZONE – it was the 10th Anniversary issue – and I've just been to the newsagents to buy a rival title (my regular, sorry) only to find that the back cover was ripped. Being a man of principles, I'm not paying a fiver for a ripped mag, so I picked up ZONE instead and have spent the past few hours reading it.



Pro Evo 3 on the PC? Happy days are here again.

Reading it lots, in fact. And I am astonished. It's improved loads and loads. The introduction of Online Zone really bolsters the back of the mag and the numerous other things you've brought in make a real difference too. Mr Cursor is back, and he's still incredibly funny.

The reviews and previews have made the corners of my mouth curl upwards numerous times, in particular the *Jedi Academy* review. I've been reading it very, very slowly, just savouring the delights of a games review done properly. It's probably the best review I've ever read. It gets all the information across, but it's astonishingly funny.

In fact, generally everything is just very funny. Reality Check? Hilarious. The drinking feature? Hilarious. So much of the issue is out-and-out funny. It's really, really brilliant and it's literally the first mag in months that is lively, exuberant and makes me smile like a moron just at the thought of it. So, thank you, you now have a new subscriber. A very happy one.

Chris Parker

We don't normally print letters like this because we don't like to blow our own trumpets (I tried once and put my back

out for weeks), but this made us feel all warm and goey inside. And yes, I've checked with Anthony's mum – she has assured me she didn't write it.

BLIND DATE

I'm a 30-year-old man who loves to play computer games, but I'd just like to ask, what the chuff is up with release dates? I might be getting a bit past it but I still look forward to new and exciting games being released and always keep an eye on shipping dates, only to be let down consistently. What happened to sticking to schedules? Surely other products have to keep to a set time frame? Sort it out! If you're going to give out a release date, STICK TO IT.

Ian Astley

You tell 'em. It's the bane of our lives too! How would they like it if we said our next issue was on sale November 13 only to hit the shelves two years later?

SHEEPSKIN

I've just got round to playing the demo of *Champ Man 4*. I knew I wanted the game before I tried the demo, but I thought I'd have a little nose around and can only say that the beautiful game just got über-beautiful. Is it worth

The *Operation Flashpoint* sequel has been announced, but it's not going to be ready until 2004/05.



GOT SOMETHING YOU NEED TO GET OFF YOUR CHEST? WRITE TO...

MAILBOX, PC ZONE, 30 CLEVELAND ST, LONDON W1T 4JD, OR EMAIL LETTERS@PCZONE.CO.UK

WIN!
A TOP
SOUND
CARD

■ The Letter of the Month wins a spanking new soundcard courtesy of the lovely people at Creative Labs. The Audigy 2 ZS soundcard supports surround sound up to 7.1 channels and offers the best all-round gaming performance. We just hope you have tolerant neighbours.



“While Steam blocks cheating and piracy, it seems to be cutting poor narrowband users and single-players out of the loop”

RICHARD ‘GORY’ WATSON

buying though, or is there going to be an imminent 03-04 update with all the latest stats? I really want the game, but if a version is being brought out for the current season then there isn't much point me shelling out. Is an update in the works?

Ryan Seabury

There is an update in the works and it's going to be out in November, so hold on to your cash until then.

LET OFF STEAM

As a poor but enthusiastic CS player, I've been following the development of Steam with both interest and annoyance. While it theoretically blocks both cheating and piracy (which I'm all for), it seems to be cutting poor narrowband users and single-players out of the loop. First of all, it states that to play the upcoming *Half-Life 2*, you need to verify your CD-Key online.

OK, so most people have got an Internet connection, but what if I'm playing from Uni, where the majority of ports are blocked and Steam can't access an outside line? I'm in more trouble than a married man with his sister-in-law's knickers in his pocket.

Secondly, all games are updated through Steam. Again what about the poor narrowband users who get cut off by their ISPs every two hours? I hope they have a download manager that saves progress. If you check out the Steam forums there are some very good points raised by genuinely concerned people.

Richard 'Gory' Watson

We've said for a while that cheating is ruining online games and since the full release of Steam we've played the likes of *Counter-Strike* online without any evidence of foul play. That's not to say it's perfect, but once Valve fixes the teething problems we reckon Steam could prove to be a very good thing. In the meantime we're going to have an in-depth look at Steam next month.

THE NEXT BIG THING

Wow. I've just finished watching the *Half-Life 2* movies and I am impressed! It's difficult to get excited over games before they're out - beautiful screenshots are great, but I always think, "I bet it doesn't look that good in-game."

But the movies are stunning. The AI looks genius and if this is actual game footage, *Half-Life 2* is going to be out of this world. However, it wasn't the thought of *Half-Life 2* that had me reaching for new boxers - it was the possibilities for other games. Can you imagine *Allied Assault* with this level of detail and AI? The Normandy landings with *Havok* ragdoll physics? *Half-Life 2* is the first step in true immersive gaming and the game we'll look back on in 10 years as the one that changed it all.

Paul Johnson

And that's the good news. The bad news is the game has been delayed - see unlucky page 13 for the full story. [12]

LETTER OF THE MONTH



Matthew Hughes swears *Max Payne* didn't make him smash up that phone booth, nor the granny inside.

KIDS ROCK

I'm writing to complain about the image you and your readers have of today's youth. I am 12 and you saying that all kids are skin-headed, alcopop-drinking scallies is totally wrong. In Mailbox, in issue 124, Kev Pick says, "you may not be able to admit it but there are some kids who cannot handle violence" and "entertainment has a real effect on children". Well, Mr. Pick, the main effect that entertainment has on children is that they experience enjoyment - enjoyment that is usually reserved for adults only. What the hell do you think we are, freakin' idiots who play *Max Payne* and become junkies? And what about what you said in the Crime Supertest? "Kids seem to be getting worse crime-wise" is totally offensive. Granted, kids commit crimes but not as many as adults. When have you ever heard of a 12 year old playing *GTA3* and running over pedestrians? You want to prevent us from playing games but you play them and are influenced by them. We have no right to vote like you. We have no right to make a stand on what we believe is wrong, but you do. Just admit it, it's not the age that's relevant but the person.

Matthew Hughes

I'm totally against censorship but I do believe that games, like films, should be regulated. If you're an adult I don't care what you watch, but I think that certain games and certain films should be for adults only. (So that developers/directors can cram in as much sex and violence as possible, obviously.) Anyway, here's a new soundcard for your troubles, it should help keep you off the streets.

BACKCHAT

▲ THE BEST OF THE CHAT FROM THE PC ZONE FORUM THIS MONTH. GET INVOLVED AT WWW.PCZONE.CO.UK



Who needs military tactics when you're on the telly?

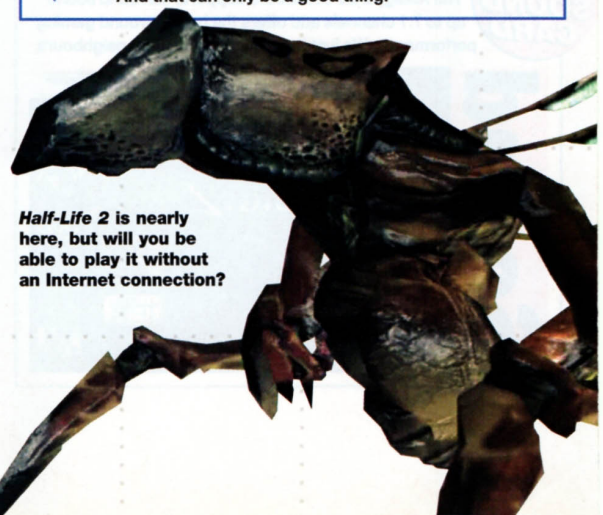
It seemed like a wonderful idea. Take the engine from *Rome: Total War* and pit two teams against each other on primetime TV, one made up of real living people and one headed by the greatest generals in history. Brilliant. Except the producers forgot one crucial thing. Some people are exceptionally thick, as the viewing public found out one fateful night in September. As a quick précis: the human team had 10,000 troops, the AI opposition had 60,000. The humans started on a hill surrounded by forest protecting them, and were told not to engage. What did they do? Marched half their troops down the hill and started fighting. Legends. And that was just the start, as picked up by some of the more tactically savvy readers on the ZONE forum.

DarthMorbus was too troubled by what was going on to wait until the program had finished before logging on to the forum: "Anyone else watching this *Time Commanders* now? Am I the only one who thinks that they're going to lose this battle? They don't seem to have any concept of military tactics. Suggesting giving up the high ground and wanting to put their archers into the middle of a tortoise formation."

hahnchen couldn't have agreed more: "It's the first time I've watched it and as soon as that stupid guy in the yellow shirt said 'let's split up', I knew there and then that it was all over." In fact, Mr Yellow Shirtman, as he's now affectionately known in the ZONE office, wasn't getting any support from anyone. **da_housecat**: "Aye I watched it. They were rotten, man! I just don't think I can put into words how bad they were!" **DarthMorbus** could: "One of them said if they didn't have their archers at the front they'd be shooting their own men - it made me despair."

But cutting through the mistake-a-thon, *Time Commanders* has achieved two very important goals. One, it proves that gamers, ie you, are far more intelligent than people who've never played games (like Mr Yellow Shirtman), and two, it's going to turn a population on to the brilliant *Total War* series, à la **davetsutton**: "Watching this show has really got me keen to try the *Total War* games. I haven't played any of them so far, but I'm going to now. There seems to be a lot more strategy involved than in the build and rush RTS games."

And that can only be a good thing.



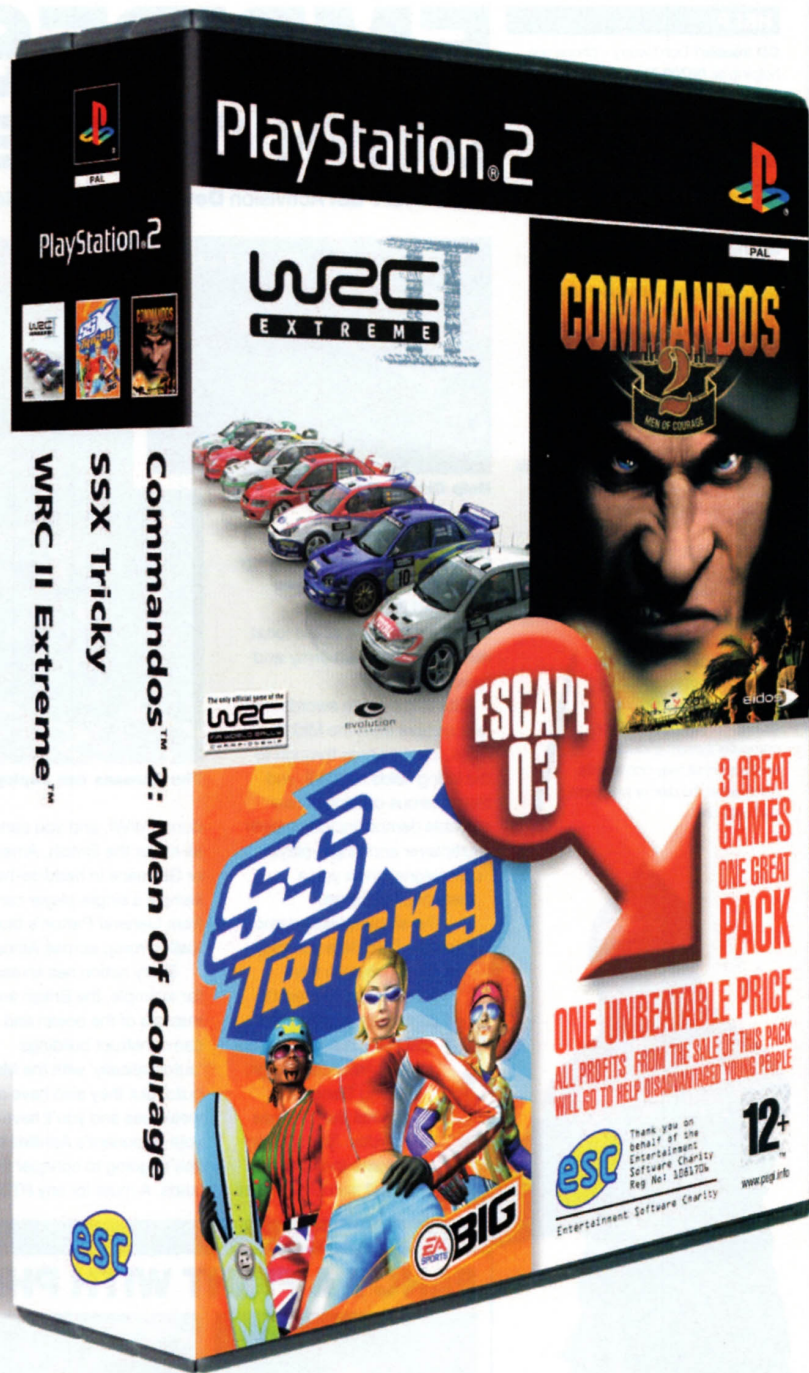
Half-Life 2 is nearly here, but will you be able to play it without an Internet connection?

TIME FOR ACTION

ESCAPE
03

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PlayStation 2

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DISC PAGES

DOUBLE-TROUBLE!

The PC ZONE DVD is now double-sided, which means you get twice as much content as before. If you can't find what you're looking for on the DVD, close the PC ZONE disc browser and turn the disc over.

WORDS Will Porter and Dan Emery
DISCS Gareth Lowndes

HELP!

CD trouble? Don't worry – phone our helpline on 08700 711482. The line is open weekdays between 9.30am and 5pm, and Saturday from 10am to 2pm, or email pc_zone@interchange.co.uk. **BEFORE YOU DIAL...**

If you are calling the helpline:

- If possible, have your PC operating and near the phone when you call.
- If this is not possible, note down all relevant information – ie system type, soundcard, RAM and so on – plus the nature of the fault.
- Have a pen and paper to hand, so you can jot down the relevant info.

MINIMUM SPECIFICATION

■ You need at least a PIII 600MHz or equivalent, with a GeForce 2MX 32MB graphics card and 128MB RAM (256MB recommended for Windows XP users) to run the software on these discs.

DISCLAIMER

■ This disc has been thoroughly tested at all stages of its production. However, it's always wise to use a virus checker on any software before running it.
 ■ Dennis Publishing Limited cannot accept responsibility for any loss, disruption or damage to your data or your computer system (including hardware) that may occur while using either the disc or programs and data on it.

EMPIRES: DAWN OF THE MODERN WORLD

SINGLE-PLAYER AND MULTIPLAYER DEMOS (SECOND SP DEMO ON DVD ONLY)

CD1/DVD Pub: Activision **Dev:** Stainless Steel **Reviewed:** Issue 135, 83% (page 66)



Help Dick rout Frenchie.



The Koreans can deploy a range of special units, including exploding oxen and bomb-slingers.

Our cover game this month, *Empires*, is a fantastic strategy game that follows the time-honoured RTS tradition: found a city, harvest the local resources, build an army and head off to battle.

Starting off with swordsmen and archers from the Middle Ages, it progresses through to the killing fields of WWII, and the generous offering of two playable demos (including both multiplayer and single-player campaigns) gives you a taste of all the ages.

The single-player demo (on the DVD) lets you play a single mission from Richard the Lionheart's campaign, fighting the evil French and one from the Korean Campaign, helping General Yi against the Chinese hordes. The second demo (on both the CD and DVD) is set

during WWI, and you can play as either the British, Americans or Germans in head-to-head, or sample a single-player campaign from General Patton's blood-fuelled romp across Africa.

Every nation has an asset – for example, the British are masters of the ocean and can construct buildings 'automatically' with the Mason's guild. But they also have a weakness and you'll have to find your opponent's Achilles heel if you're going to conquer the lands. A must for any RTS fan.



"Haha. Your horse wears a skirt, English pigdog!"

WALKTHROUGH →

FANCY A FIGHT WITH PHILIP? Fire up the DVD demo and head for the trouble...



1 Select troops by drawing a box round them with the mouse and click on the location on the map – in this case, where the French King awaits.



2 On the way, you're warned by local natives that bandits are causing mayhem. Ha! It'll take more than that to scare Dickie Lionheart.



3 Lo and behold, there they are. Highlight your troops and click on the enemy to make them auto attack. You should make short work of 'em.



4 And then you're face to face with King Philip of France. The Gallic swine doesn't look happy to see you either. Let the battle commence!



EXCLUSIVE



Giant troll with mace versus old man with stick.

THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE RETURN OF THE KING

CD1/DVD Pub: EA Dev: EA

We guarantee this stunning exclusive demo will get your mouth watering for the final chapter in the *LOTR* trilogy – it's jaw-droppingly beautiful and absolutely bloody mental. Taking control of Gandalf, it's your job to fend off the hordes of Sauron from Minas Tirith, ensuring that at least 200 hapless Gondorian maidens make it safely up to the next level of the city.

There are a few archers to help you in this quest, but it's primarily a case of

hacking, slashing and fireballing the onslaught while admiring the sheer number of beasties and women on screen at any time. Waves upon waves of archers, orcs with maces, orcs with swords and (whisper it) a couple of angry mountain trolls will be aiming to turn Gandalf the White into Gandalf the Dead (again), so your task is hardly easy. For a fast-paced arcade blast with the olden-day spirit of *Golden Axe* you can't go far wrong with this...

WHITE MAGIC

HE'S NOT JUST AN OLD MAN WITH A STICK, Y'KNOW



GANDALF THWACK

With your big wooden staff you have many and varied swiping moves at your disposal. Though to be honest, a bit of button tapping still does a lot of good.



GANDALF BLAST

Just to prove he's pure magic, pressing the shift key will stick your wizard into fireball mode. Make sure you're not in an orc's striking distance and let rip!



GANDALF CHUCK

A few barrels full of burning spears conveniently lie around the grounds of the castle. Wander up to them, tap the use key and plant them into the chests of your foe.



GANDALF STAB IN THY CHEST

If your enemy is injured and lying on the ground whimpering, then it's your duty to stick your big stick straight through his beastly heart. It's the kindest thing to do.

"a sure contender for being
the best space trading
game of all time"

EURGAMER

X² THE THREAT

SHAPE THE UNIVERSE. LET IT SHAPE YOU.

KOCH
MEDIA

MEDAL OF HONOR: ALLIED ASSAULT - BREAKTHROUGH



CD2/DVD Pub: EA Dev: TKO Reviewed: Issue 135, 77% (page 88)

There are many and various virtual ways in which you can recreate the carnage of WWII without the annoyance of actually risking your own blood decorating the scenery. Most recent among them is the superb multiplayer option bundled into the latest *Medal Of Honor* expansion, so here's a neat little taster of what you can expect.

One ruined European town is provided for your gunplay: crumbly, jagged and perfect for sneaking, sniping and blowing holes. Within this are seven weapon classes for you to choose: rocket launchers, shotguns, rifles and snazzy-looking mine detectors are all there waiting to be plundered and abused.

If you're not in the mood for a simple team killathon, then

there's an objective mode buried that sees the allies attempting to nick some vital documents (Hitler's shopping list or something) that will be vital to the war effort. Either way, it's a lot of fun, so get online, get the war paint out and get shooting.



Take that ya big panzerfaust.

Yet again, Herman was hogging the gun emplacement.

BATTLE ENGINE AQUILA

CD2/DVD Pub: Atari Dev: Lost Toys Reviewed: Issue 135, 78% (page 100)

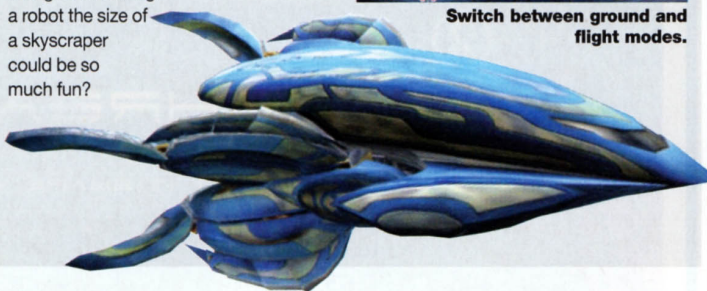
Is it a plane? Is it a tank? Or is it a giant robot-plane-tank thing? All of the above. In this exclusive demo you can take to the skies as you blast the hell out of the enemy attackers. It may be fun to stride over the landscape in a contraption not unlike an end-of-episode *Power Rangers* mega-contraption, but remember to defend the shuttlecrafts at the start of the game as their demise will also signal the end of your game. Otherwise, follow the commands of your captain, gaze down at the tiny soldiers running around and let rip with your arsenal. Who would've thought controlling a robot the size of a skyscraper could be so much fun?



Mindless shooting on a grand scale.



Switch between ground and flight modes.



CHAOS LEGION

DVD/CD1 Pub/Dev: Capcom Reviewed: Issue 135, 69% (page 111)

If you've always wanted to fight a horde of crabs with metal blades for legs, then here's your chance. Another exclusive with *ZONE* this month is Capcom's crazy soul-charged beat 'em up *Chaos Legion*. Through a collection of *House Of The Dead*-style streets, it's your task to clear up a collection of spiny monsters to prevent any undue harm to the land of the living.

To help you in your quest you have a friendly blue insect the size of a small bungalow, who can be summoned up by a tap of the space bar, and tons of special moves and combo malarkey. Fast, frenetic and quite clearly Japanese, you could close your eyes and believe that your beloved PC has metamorphosed into a PS2. Scary stuff.



Green spiky crab things from hell. Best served cold.

CALL OF DUTY

CD2/DVD Pub: Activision Dev: Infinity Ward



More intense than snorting pepper.



Exploderize the enemy!

Ever since we broke news of this stunning shooter on our July cover we've been following the game with rabid interest. Our enthusiasm looks set to pay off, with the imminent release of the game – you can see why we've been getting so worked up in this full single-player mission. The simple word 'atmospheric' can't quite sum

up the feeling you'll get charging through the smoke and shrapnel, with dead cows littering the battlefield and snipers slinking around the rubble of a once-beautiful French town. At your side is a squad of worthy comrades, screaming at you to give covering fire as you run toward the enemy line. Nothing short of essential.

XIII

CD2/DVD Pub: Ubisoft
Dev: Ubisoft Reviewed:
Issue 135, 84% (page 84)



Baywatch viewing figures have slumped.



Knifefights: fun and colourful.



Piers, penny arcades, bullet wounds...

Gimmick or Innovation? You decide for yourself by sampling Ubisoft's cel-shaded shooter. There are two levels here, both showing off the comic-book stylings of the game with various events and scenes played out in frames in the corner of your screen. The first takes place on a deserted beach, deserted apart from an array of cartoon gunmen that is, and the second deep within an enemy base. We especially liked embedding throwing knives in the heads of the enemy, but to be honest we're a bit strange that way.

HOMERWORLD 2

CD1/DVD Pub: VU Games Dev: Relic Reviewed: Issue 134, 81%

One intrepid ZONE reader rang us up to double-check the release date of Relic's strategic space odyssey because he had booked a week off work and was worried the date might have changed. True story. *Homeworld* had gripped him by the balls and would not let go. Will the sequel have the same life-sapping effect on you?

Try out these two single-player missions and have a blast with the two multiplayer maps, but if you get hooked don't go blaming us...



Deep space: strangely compelling.

PLUS... DEMOS OF NHL 2004 & WORLD RACING

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PC:ZONE

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Microsoft

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*Many users see more than six months battery life. Energizer batteries are recommended.

DVD EXC

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THE ESSENTIAL SELECTION

The PC ZONE DVD is now double-sided. On one you've got all the new content, flip it over and you'll find the Essential Selection, the best demos and mods the world has ever created, along with all the patches, drivers and utilities you need to make your PC a shrine of gaming goodness.



FREE
21DAY
TRIAL!

It's on us: PC ZONE readers can bag three weeks of dragon slaying for nought.

DARK AGE OF CAMELOT INCLUDING SHROUDED ISLES

DVD Pub: Wanadoo **Dev:** Mythic Entertainment
Reviewed: Issue 128, 78%

We're too damn good to you here at ZONE. This month we've teamed with the good people at Wanadoo to bring you 21 days and (k)night in the world of *Dark Age Of Camelot*. Nights. Knights. Camelot. Geddit? Sigh, please yourself.

Before you can wend your merry way online though, you'll need to install the software from our DVD and register for an account. Simply head on over to www.camelot-europe.com/fr/op/pczone/register.php at any point from October 16 to November 13 and fill in the online form to obtain a login name and password. You'll also need to enter a valid email address.

Once the game is installed, simply click on the *DAOC* desktop icon, ignore

the request for a CD key (you don't need one for our free trial) and wait while the automatic patching process brings you bang up to date with the current build. Then it's as simple as entering your login details and selecting the 'LOTHIAN' server to play on – the free trial isn't available on any other server.

All things being well, you now have 21 days to sample the delights of *DAOC* for yourself. Unfortunately, once the trial is over your account and characters will be erased, so make sure you use the time to get as full a flavour of what's on offer as possible. Then you can decide if you want to go full-time in the world of that stupid Arthur keeng and all 'is seelly English ker-nights.

PLUS ETHERLORDS II, STASKY & HUTCH, WORMS

EXCLUSIVES

GO TO PAGE 116. FOR FULL CONTENTS SEE BACK OF THE BOX

FULL
GAME
EXCLUSIVE



I'm gonna chop me some goddamned wood.



If you've never tried a MMORPG before, now's the perfect time.

DVD VIDEO

As well as the latest tech-demo from the *Half-Life 2* universe, we've got the first in-game footage from the *Splinter Cell* sequel and tactical shooter *Alpha Black Zero*, along with a trailer for the soon-to-be-released *Max Payne 2*. Just stick the DVD in your DVD player, settle back and crack open the popcorn.



Soon you'll be able to splatter this fellow all over the wall.

3D AND THE LATEST PATCHES AND DRIVERS...

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Reinvented Wheel - NEW Tilt Wheel Technology lets you scroll vertically and now side-to-side, smoother and faster than ever!



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*Battery average more than six months battery life. Longer battery life is needed.

THE PCZONE A-LIST

◀ SHOOTERS ▶

MEDAL OF HONOR



They say the line between films and games is blurring, and after you've clawed your way through the maelstrom of the Omaha beach landings here, you'll have forgotten on which side you're standing. It may not be the best-looking shooter around, but for sheer immersion and intensity you can't beat the brilliant level design, the challenging AI, the lavish period detail and those beautifully scripted set-pieces.

PUB EA DEV 2015
PCZ ISSUE 112

◀ STRATEGY ▶

MEDIEVAL: TOTAL WAR



A sequel to the stunning *Shogun: Total War* (now available on budget), *Medieval* offers everything its predecessor did and a whole lot more. Adding to the massive 3D battles and turn-based *Risk*-style strategy map are a multitude of new options, both diplomatic and military. Breathtaking in every way, strategy games just don't come any better than this.

PUB Activision
DEV Creative Assembly
PCZ ISSUE 120



NO ONE LIVES FOREVER 2

Style, stealth and magnificent set-pieces are the order of the day in this excellent spy sequel. It looks brilliant, it's well designed and genuinely funny – and it doesn't treat you like an idiot.

PUB Black Label Games DEV Monolith
PCZ ISSUE 122



HALF-LIFE: GENERATIONS

Unchallenged for three years, *Half-Life* redefined its genre with a cracking atmosphere and a compelling plot. It now comes bundled with the excellent *Opposing Force* add-on pack and the world's favourite mod, *Counter-Strike*.

PUB Vivendi DEV Valve Software
PCZ ISSUE 71



UNREAL II

In terms of visuals, this is the absolute pinnacle in the world of the FPS. What's more, the arsenal of weaponry at your disposal is imaginative and satisfying to wield, while the sound effects, music and voice acting all exude quality too.

PUB Atari DEV Legend Entertainment
PCZ ISSUE 126



UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2003

Not a million miles away from the last *UT* title, *UT2003* does however make leaps and bounds graphically. With finely balanced weapons, smart bots and diverse maps it's the reigning king of speed fragging.

PUB Atari DEV Digital Extremes
PCZ ISSUE 122



MAFIA

From the makers of *Hidden & Dangerous* and just as compelling, this game borrows from every great gangster film ever made. Tense missions, superb atmosphere and great AI – it's a classic in every respect. Badabing!

PUB Take 2 DEV Illusion
PCZ ISSUE 119



JEDI KNIGHT: JEDI ACADEMY

The latest saber-em-up from the Lucas stable is an absolute winner; think fights with Boba Fett, double-ended light sabers, customisable characters and even the opportunity to turn to the Dark Side. Ace.

PUB Activision DEV Raven
PCZ ISSUE 133



SOLDIER OF FORTUNE II

The bloodiest shooter in the world is back, but this time there's a brilliant game covering beneath the carnage. Sublime AI is the chief culprit and if you can stomach the violence this is a must buy.

PUB Activision DEV Raven
PCZ ISSUE 118



TRON 2.0

NEW ENTRY A beautiful FPS with intriguing RPG elements and visuals that dynamically extend what we saw in the '80s sci-fi romp. The action is fast, with loads of light-cycle races, and you get a big Frisbee to hurl in people's faces.

PUB Disney Interactive DEV Monolith
PCZ ISSUE 134



BATTLEFIELD 1942

Even though it features a disappointing and heavily bugged single-player campaign, *Battlefield* is one of the most compelling team-based multiplayer games ever. A must-have for any online shooter fan.

PUB EA DEV Digital Illusions
PCZ ISSUE 121



RISE OF NATIONS

One of the most addictive and satisfying strategy games to land on our desks in ages. Its unique perspective, great gameplay and all-round freshness make *Rise Of Nations* a title worthy of our prestigious Classic award.

PUB Microsoft DEV Big Huge Games
PCZ ISSUE 129



AGE OF MYTHOLOGY

The *Age Of* series goes 3D in Ensemble Studios' best strategy outing to date. Great gameplay, superb attention to detail and a strong storyline give this an unparalleled sense of atmosphere, plus it includes a decent map editor.

PUB Microsoft DEV Ensemble Studios
PCZ ISSUE 123



REPUBLIC: THE REVOLUTION

This highly original take on the machinations of political upheaval in Eastern Europe has split gaming opinion down the middle, but we think it's a fascinating, educating and unique piece of gaming history.

PUB Eidos Interactive DEV Elixir Studios
PCZ ISSUE 132



WARRIOR KINGS: BATTLES

Warrior Kings was one of the most compelling and diverse RTS games we'd seen. This second chapter, which focuses around skirmish play, offers more units, varied tech trees and challenging AI generals.

PUB Empire Interactive DEV Black Cactus
PCZ ISSUE 128



COMMAND & CONQUER: GENERALS

The C&C series comes of age in this 3D orgy of scud missiles, daisy-cutter bombs and nuclear strikes. *Generals* is a superb-looking game with well-designed sides that offers fun in spades.

PUB EA DEV EA Pacific/Westwood
PCZ ISSUE 127



COMMANDOS 2

There have been a few imitators of the squad-based strategy of *Commandos* but none have come close to this sequel. If, like us, you loved the first game, you'll love this massive, preposterously detailed follow-up even more.

PUB Eidos DEV Pyro Studio
PCZ ISSUE 108



HOMEWORLD 2

NEW ENTRY The interface to this epic space combat RTS might be a bit intimidating for rookies, but *Homeworld 2* definitely deserves a place in our hall of fame. Staggering visuals and gripping strategic manoeuvring make it addictive.

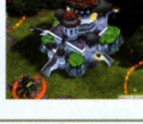
PUB VU Games DEV Relic
PCZ ISSUE 134



WARCRAFT III

While not a huge departure from the original, *Warcraft III* is an extremely enjoyable and polished package. The storyline is brilliant and the multiplayer action dangerously addictive. Simple, solid entertainment.

PUB VU Games DEV Blizzard
PCZ ISSUE 119



ETHERLORDS

This unexpected gem might just be good enough to convert those who immediately associate 'turn-based' with the word 'geek'. The visuals and sound are stunning, the tactical variety truly staggering – fantastic stuff.

PUB JoWood DEV Nival Interactive
PCZ ISSUE 112

Welcome to the **PC ZONE A-List**, the definitive buyer's guide for all discerning PC gamers. The games that grace these pages aren't just good, they're the best of the best in their respective genres, and our list is continually updated to show how each game stands in relation to its peers

◀ **ROLE-PLAYING GAMES** ▶

DEUS EX



Warren Spector is one of the true visionaries of the computer game medium, and this is his magnum opus. Combining the finer elements of *Half-Life*, *System Shock 2* and *Thief*, *Deus Ex* is an RPG of complex beauty and a true revolution in computer gaming. The fascinating sci-fi plot and amazing attention to detail, combined with unparalleled player freedom, are just some of the reasons why *Deus Ex* is a landmark in gaming.

PUB Eidos DEV Ion Storm
PCZ ISSUE 93

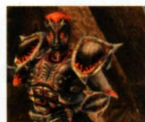
◀ **ACTION/ADVENTURE** ▶

SPLINTER CELL



At long last we've got a new king of the action adventures with the Tom Clancy-influenced *Splinter Cell*, and a new crown prince of stealth in the form of the über-flexible Sam Fisher. *Splinter Cell* features the perfect blend of action, structure and pace, combined with some of the best visuals and set pieces around. No self-respecting gamer should miss out on this.

PUB Ubisoft
DEV Ubisoft Montreal
PCZ ISSUE 125



THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND

One of the most impressive RPGs we've seen in years. A massively open-ended world full of beautiful visuals, superb depth of gameplay and innovative character development make this a classic that will keep you totally absorbed.

PUB Ubisoft DEV Bethesda Softworks
PCZ ISSUE 117



NEVERWINTER NIGHTS

The makers of the epic *Baldur's Gate* series prove they are still a leading force in the world of RPGs with this glorious hardcore 3D adventure. It features great single and multiplayer options, along with a very accessible toolkit.

PUB Atari DEV Bioware
PCZ ISSUE 118



PLANESCAPE: TORMENT

An incredible game from Black Isle, using the *Baldur's Gate* engine. With a compelling story, well-scripted dialogue and the best character development we've seen in any game of its kind, this is a dark, adult scorcher of an RPG.

PUB Interplay DEV Black Isle Studio
PCZ ISSUE 87



DUNGEON SIEGE

Graphically brilliant, massively enjoyable and highly immersive, *Dungeon Siege* is one of the best RPGs to date and only misses out on a Classic because of the shortcomings in the narrative.

PUB Microsoft DEV Gas Powered Games
PCZ ISSUE 115



SYSTEM SHOCK 2

Definitely one of the most 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 with the lights off if you're hard enough.

PUB EA DEV Irrational Games
PCZ ISSUE 80



BALDUR'S GATE II

The original *Baldur's Gate* was hailed as one of the best story-driven role-playing games ever. The sequel isn't vastly different, but it's bigger, better and still extremely addictive. An essential for anyone interested in PC role-playing.

PUB Interplay DEV Bioware
PCZ ISSUE 96



DIVINE DIVINITY

This epic RPG contains the action of *Diablo II* combined with the storyline of the *Baldur's Gate* series, not to mention about 200 hours of gameplay in a huge fantasy world. The name may be a bit silly, but the gameplay certainly isn't.

PUB CDV DEV Larian Studios
PCZ ISSUE 121



FREEDOM FORCE

Control your own group of superheroes in this immersive and fully destructible comic book world. It may not be the most sophisticated and bearded of RPGs, but *Freedom Force* is unadulterated bubble-gum fun at its best.

PUB EA DEV Irrational Games
PCZ ISSUE 115



GOthic II

If you're willing to dedicate some time to it, this vast RPG is worth your pennies. Its sweeping landscapes are a delight to explore. It takes a while to get going, but the incredible level of immersion more than makes up for it.

PUB Atari DEV Piranha Bytes
PCZ ISSUE 132



GRIM FANDANGO

If you've followed LucasArts from the early days of *Monkey Island*, *Sam & Max* and *Day Of The Tentacle*, this is a must. The scripting is impeccable, while sublime graphics and brilliant humour ensure it's top of its genre.

PUB Activision DEV LucasArts
PCZ ISSUE 71



SILENT HILL 2: DIRECTOR'S CUT

Survival horror games have truly come of age with this superbly creepy and atmospheric offering from Japan. From the lovingly-smeared blood and grime to the terrifying use of ambient sound, it's a class act.

PUB Konami DEV Konami
PCZ ISSUE 126



METAL GEAR SOLID 2: SUBSTANCE

A convincing PC conversion that adds tanker-loads of side-missions, training stages and unlockable characters to the PS2 original. There's too much waffle, but it's still an excellent third-person sneakfest.

PUB Konami DEV Konami
PCZ ISSUE 127



SOUL REAVER 2

While this latest episode in the saga of Raziel takes few risks with the action/adventure formula, it's a consummately constructed example of the genre, with a compelling storyline, satisfying combat and excellent puzzle dynamics.

PUB Eidos DEV Crystal Dynamics
PCZ ISSUE 111



DISCWORLD NOIR

Although the point-and-click adventure game is dying, *Discworld Noir* is still very much alive. It's darker in style than previous *Discworld* games and all the better for it in our opinion.

PUB Atari DEV Perfect Entertainment
PCZ ISSUE 79



THE THING

Drawing on some brilliant raw material from John Carpenter's classic horror movie, this survival action horror picks up the story where the film left off. It's one of the best film spin-offs around, with tense atmosphere and good gameplay.

PUB Black Label Games DEV Computer Artworks
PCZ ISSUE 121



PRISONER OF WAR

One of the most original games available with a light-hearted setting and an atmospheric soundtrack, which makes it more of an adventure than an action title. *POW* makes a refreshing change from the usual mass slaughter fare.

PUB Codemasters DEV Wide Games
PCZ ISSUE 121



HITMAN 2: SILENT ASSASSIN

The revamped *Hitman* engine is nothing short of breathtaking, blessing the sequel with gorgeous graphics that fit well with the refined controls and superb AI. *Hitman 2* is solid and enjoyable with a great sense of gameplay freedom.

PUB Eidos DEV IO
PCZ ISSUE 121



ENTER THE MATRIX

It may be console-oriented, its graphics may be dated and *Reloaded* could've been better, but it's still *The Matrix* through and through. It features excellent FMVs and great Bullet-Time kung fu moments.

PUB Atari DEV Shiny Entertainment
PCZ ISSUE 130

◀ GOD GAMES ▶

BLACK & WHITE



Although it had its critics, we still stand by our original verdict. Peter Molyneux's vision is pure and the design of the game both breaks boundaries and serves as a blueprint for the future. The add-on *Creature Isle* is also available, which cuts down on micro-management and lets you guide your creature through a variety of mini-games. Overall we think it's pure genius in a box.
PUB EA DEV Lionhead Studios
PCZ ISSUE 100



CIVILIZATION III

Civilization III sticks to the same compulsive gameplay that made the first two games so popular. Die-hard *Civ* fans will relish the improved visuals and animation, while the new user-friendly interface makes the game accessible to the first-timer. Brings to mind the maxim 'if it ain't broke...'

PUB Atari DEV Firaxis Games

PCZ ISSUE 111



GHOST MASTER

Take your team of ghosts into the town of Gravenville and solve some otherworldly problems, scare a few mortals and bag yourself some new team mates in this innovative spook 'em up that's one of the freshest and funniest games we've seen for a long time.

PUB Empire Interactive DEV Sick Puppies

PCZ ISSUE 130



THE SIMS

Revolutionary at birth, the concept has since been diluted through numerous add-ons and an unhealthy long stay in the charts. It's now little more than a cash cow for Electronic Arts, although you can't help but admire the strength of community and the fact that it's still selling by the bucket-load.

PUB EA DEV Maxis/EA

PCZ ISSUE 87



CAESAR III

Starting from scratch, you've got to build a majestic Roman city and ensure a harmonious life for your citizens by balancing their work, health and entertainment needs. So what? So it's probably one of the most utterly absorbing and addictive god sims in existence. *Hail Caesar*.

PUB VU Games DEV Impressions

PCZ ISSUE 70



EMPEROR: RISE OF THE MIDDLE KINGDOM

This intricate game comes from the same stable as *Zeus* and *Caesar* – and they know a thing or two about city building. There's a massive amount of gameplay and more than 50 missions spanning seven historic campaigns. As well as the economic considerations, you'll have to follow feng shui and the Chinese zodiac.

PUB VU Games DEV Breakaway Games

PCZ ISSUE 121



ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON 2

As utterly absorbing as its predecessor, *RollerCoaster Tycoon 2* once again revolves around designing and managing your own theme park. This version also allows you to design individual rides, and includes a handful of real-life coasters. Detailed and addictive.

PUB Atari DEV Chris Sawyer

PCZ ISSUE 123



SIMCITY 4

The latest outing of the best-selling city-building sim goes 3D. Unfortunately there are no huge leaps forwards in gameplay, but there are plenty of features, such as regional cities, imported characters from *The Sims* and a terrain editor to keep you occupied.

PUB EA DEV Maxis

PCZ ISSUE 125



MONOPOLY TYCOON

This mixture of the classic board game and a *Theme Park/SimCity*-style building sim 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.

PUB Atari DEV Deep Red

PCZ ISSUE 110



DUNGEON KEEPER 2

The ultimate 'it's good to be bad' game, *Dungeon Keeper* was a great idea and *DK2* takes the essence and humour of the original, corrects all the mistakes, vastly improves the graphics, and adds a myriad of new features that build wisely on the original concept.

PUB EA DEV Bullfrog

PCZ ISSUE 79

◀ FLIGHT SIMS ▶

IL-2: FORGOTTEN BATTLES



Much of what has been improved with this sequel to *IL-2 Sturmovik* has been done under the virtual bonnet of the game. *IL-2: Forgotten Battles* features improved AI, more accurate flight models and more of a realistic overall experience, plus more campaigns and even more planes. All of this adds up to an exhilarating flying experience. Put simply, we think *IL-2: Forgotten Battles* is one of the finest flight sims ever to grace our screens.

PUB Ubisoft **DEV** 1C: Madox Games

PCZ ISSUE 128



MS FLIGHT SIM 2004: A CENTURY OF FLIGHT NEW ENTRY

Another dose of sheer authentic aerial quality from the gods at Microsoft, with revamped weather systems, a beefed-up terrain generator and loads of historical planes for you to career around in.

PUB Microsoft **DEV** Microsoft

PCZ ISSUE 133



BATTLE OF BRITAIN

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!

PUB Empire Interactive **DEV** Rowan Software

PCZ ISSUE 103



FALCON 4

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.

PUB Atari **DEV** Microprose

PCZ ISSUE 72



B-17: THE MIGHTY 8TH

B-17 reproduces the experience of piloting a World War II bomber. Just about everything is covered, from planning missions to dropping bombs. A must for WWII and realism freaks everywhere.

PUB Atari **DEV** Wayward Simulations

PCZ ISSUE 96

◀ MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ▶

EVERQUEST



EverQuest keeps going from strength to strength and now has a total of five expansion packs. One of the best of these, *Planes Of Power*, provides a multitude of simplifications to help newcomers, while adding lots of new worlds for high-level characters to explore. It's a truly beautiful and captivating game that has claimed the souls and social lives of thousands of people the world over.

PUB Ubisoft **DEV** Sony Online Entertainment

PCZ ISSUE 117



PLANETSIDE

Truly the mother of online battles, *Planetside* is a never-ending war among three armies and waged across several continents. Superb squad battles, stunning vehicles and atmospheric visuals make for a remarkably immersive experience.

PUB Ubisoft **DEV** Sony Online Entertainment

PCZ ISSUE 131



EVE ONLINE

Eve Online is as beautiful as it is complex, oozing style from every pixel. Choose from four unique races and explore the *Eve* universe with its unparalleled scope for adventure, interaction and trade.

PUB Crucial **DEV** CCP

PCZ ISSUE 130

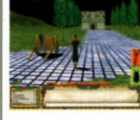


ANARCHY ONLINE

A beautiful MMOG with detailed environments and a huge selection of armour and weapons, which all add up to make an immersive title. Many of the bugs have been ironed out and the latest update offers a slick gaming experience.

PUB Funcom **DEV** Funcom

PCZ ISSUE 114



A TALE IN THE DESERT

No guns, no death, just the peaceful rolling dunes of ancient Egypt. This bizarre, yet beautiful MMOG sees you attempting to build a utopian society, farming camels and progressing through the seven tests of man.

PUB eGenesis **DEV** eGenesis

PCZ ISSUE 133

MULTIPLAYER MODS ▶

COUNTER-STRIKE (HALF-LIFE)



Despite the slightly lame single-player release, it seems that *Counter-Strike* will always be the mod that rules the Earth. The popularity of this terrorist versus counter-terrorist mod shows no sign of abating, and there are few PC gamers who don't have a mental map of the troublespots of *de_dust*. At one point there were more CS servers than every other online game put together, and it isn't going to leave us any time soon.

WEB www.counter-strike.net



DESERT COMBAT (BF 1942)

This *Battlefield 1942* TC focuses on desert-based conflicts from the last decade, playing through scraps like the original Desert Storm and the troubles in Somalia. It's extraordinarily popular, and really rather good.

WEB www.desertcombat.com



NATURAL SELECTION (HALF-LIFE)

This superb *Half-Life* mod sees marines squaring off against the aliens in various sci-fi environments. With the marines working in teams and the aliens acting like mentalists, the variety in gameplay makes this a sure-fire winner.

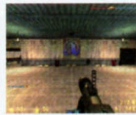
WEB www.natural-selection.org



DAY OF DEFEAT (HALF-LIFE)

This atmospheric, highly realistic and superbly designed *Half-Life* mod covers various battles from deep within WWI. Its different character classes and superb arsenal of weapons add to authenticity, fun and general carnage.

WEB www.dayofdefeatmod.com



TEAM FORTRESS CLASSIC (HALF-LIFE)

A great *Half-Life* squad-based action game with nine classes, a wide variety of weaponry and many map variations. The action focuses on infiltrating enemy bases, and the frantic gameplay requires more manual dexterity than most.

WEB www.planetfortress.com/tfc

3D ACTION / STRATEGY ▶

OPERATION FLASHPOINT GOLD



Now available with the tricky *Red Hammer* add-on, *Flashpoint* has become to tactical action what *Half-Life* was to shooters. Fight on foot or in tanks, fly planes or even direct an entire platoon, this game is total war – in your face and on a massive scale. The graphics are an acquired taste, but they convey a sense of wide-open warfare perfectly. It's the ultimate military simulation, with a stunning atmosphere and superb missions.

PUB Codemasters **DEV** Bohemia Interactive

PCZ ISSUE 104



RAVEN SHIELD

All the style and presentation you would expect from a Tom Clancy game, from the realism of the weapons down to footprints in the snow. A tactical and atmospheric game that can be frustratingly tricky at times.

PUB Ubisoft **DEV** Ubisoft Montreal

PCZ ISSUE 127



HIDDEN & DANGEROUS: DELUXE

This revamp of *H&D* removes all of the infamous bugs from the original, as well as including three extra campaigns. There's been a lot of work put in to improving the graphics and modding fans will relish the new editor that ships with this edition.

PUB Take 2 **DEV** Illusion Softworks

PCZ ISSUE 115



HOSTILE WATERS

A brilliant RTS/action game you can play purely strategically or up close and personal. Inspired by the 16-bit classic *Carrier Command*, it's just a shame there aren't any multiplayer options.

PUB Rage **DEV** Rage Software

PCZ ISSUE 101



GIANTS: CITIZEN KABUTO

This mammoth and original 3D action/strategy game includes RTS, RPG, real-time and third-person shooter combat elements. It's also rather funny and features near-naked women with blue skin.

PUB Interplay **DEV** Planet Moon Studios

PCZ ISSUE 95

DRIVING GAMES ▶

GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY



PS2 owners will finally stop gloating when they see *Vice City's* glorious PC incarnation. *GTA3* was an incredible crim-sim, so incredible that it was hard to see how it could be improved, but the freedom and variety of its follow-up is blinding. Whether it's carrying out its remarkably inventive law-breaking missions or just shooting pedestrians, *Vice City* is about as close to gaming perfection as you can get.

PUB Rockstar Games **DEV** Rockstar North

PCZ ISSUE 131



GRAND THEFT AUTO III

It may have been overshadowed by its younger brother, but *Grand Theft Auto III* remains as awesome as it ever was. It's a great spin on both driving and shooting genres and you'll still love its noisy orgy of violence and speed.

PUB Rockstar Games **DEV** Rockstar North

PCZ ISSUE 117



COLIN MCRAE 3

Featuring some of the best handling we've ever seen, as well as an excellent new career mode, *Colin McRae 3* is a must-have racer. Driving conditions are realistic, the tracks are varied and the detail overwhelming.

PUB Codemasters **DEV** Codemasters

PCZ ISSUE 131



GRAND PRIX 4

You won't find a more accurate racing sim. Graphically lush and full of anal detail, Geoff Crammond's latest effort offers in-depth telemetry and a staggering number of options. *Grand Prix 4* is leading the grid in the world of racing sims.

PUB Atari **DEV** Simergy

PCZ ISSUE 119



MIDNIGHT CLUB 2

This high octane illegal street-racer is immense fun, with all the cars, ramps and upgrades that you could imagine. With a top soundtrack to boot, this is one of the most addictive driving games on the market.

PUB Rockstar **DEV** Rockstar North

PCZ ISSUE 133

SPORT ▶

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 4



A major revamp for the legendary football management series that sees the introduction of a new top-down match engine, which lets you watch how your players are performing – and it works like a dream.

Championship Manager 4 is as life-sappingly addictive as it ever was, and the only real downside is the reduced transfer market activity, which is thanks to the financial crisis currently gripping football.

PUB Eidos **DEV** Sports Interactive

PCZ ISSUE 128



VIRTUA TENNIS

Who would have believed that this console favourite would translate so well to the PC? Its control interface is supremely intuitive, while the AI is massively challenging. Best of all, though, are its truly sublime multiplayer options.

PUB Empire Interactive **DEV** Hitmaker/Strangelite

PCZ ISSUE 114



TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 3

This third edition of Tony Hawk's classic skateboarding game is an absolute joy to play. It features enormous levels, more interaction than ever before and a totally kick-ass soundtrack.

PUB Activision **DEV** Neversoft Entertainment

PCZ ISSUE 98



VIRTUAL POOL 3

Easily the best cue-based game around, *VP3* features some near-perfect physics and excellent graphics. The career and multiplayer modes are highly entertaining, and a superb tutorial will have you clearing up in no time.

PUB Interplay **DEV** Celeris

PCZ ISSUE 99



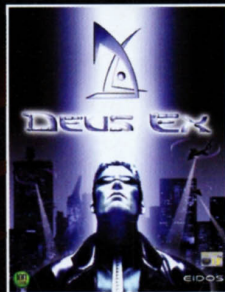
FIFA 2003

This latest offering in the *FIFA* series seems to have been influenced by *Pro Evolution Soccer 2* on the PS2. *FIFA 2003's* immaculate presentation, realistic players and solid gameplay make it the best football game on the PC.

PUB Electronic Arts **DEV** EA Sports

PCZ ISSUE 122





GAMES THAT CHANGED THE WORLD

DEUS EX

Secret agencies, cybernetic augmentations and chucking Triads out of nightclubs – it can mean only one thing. Keith Pullin logs back on to the legendary RPG phenomenon

GAME Deus Ex
PUBLISHER Eidos
DEVELOPER ION Storm
RELEASED 2000

INFLUENCED *Deus Ex* has had an impact on many games since its release three years ago, though the true scope of its effect is destined only to become apparent in the next 12 months. We've just started to see a wave of titles coming out that have clearly been conceived in the wake of *Deus Ex*, from first-person RPGs like *Vampire: The Masquerade – Bloodlines* to cyberpunk shooters like *Chrome* (reviewed page 88).

DX has also upped the ante when it comes to player-driven plots. *Morrowind*'s astounding non-linear gameplay is a good example of this. With any luck the forthcoming *Thief III* and, of course, *Deus Ex: Invisible War* should prove equally liberating.

PROFILE



NAME Warren Spector
CV Warren began working at TSR in 1987 where he wrote and edited role-playing supplements, boardgames and novels. He moved to ORIGIN Systems in 1989 and worked with Richard Garriott on *Ultima VI*. After a short stint at LookingGlass, Warren joined ION Storm in 1997 where he has overseen the *Deus Ex* and *Thief* franchises.

ROLE ON DEUS EX Designer, producer and director

FIRST GAME WORKED ON *Ultima VI*

WHERE IS HE NOW? Studio Director at ION Storm



NAME Jay Lee
CV Jay's gaming career began in 1995 on the horror adventure *Phantasmagoria*. He contributed to various Sierra titles before moving to ION Storm in 1998. Now firmly ensconced, he has worked on *Deus Ex* and other IS games, including *Dominion: Storm Over Gift 3* and *Thief III*.

ROLE ON DEUS EX Lead artist

FIRST GAME WORKED ON *Phantasmagoria*

WHERE IS HE NOW? Jay is currently working on *DX: Invisible War*. He does a bit of everything but is mostly focused on visual effects.

I WAS AT a friend's wedding recently and found myself chatting to a folk singer. After a while the conversation got around to what I do for a living...

"What a fantastic job!" exclaimed the tree-hugging folkie, squirming uncomfortably in his hemp tunic. "Are you reviewing anything now?"

"Not really," I replied. "But I am writing a sort of retro article about an old PC game."

"Which game?" he asked.

"Um, well, I doubt you've heard of it," I stammered, realising my shameful nerdish tendencies were about to be exposed. "It's kind of cultish. It's called *Deus Ex*."

"Bloody hell!" whooped the hairy straw-stomper. "That's the best game I've ever played!"

It transpired that this musician, who torments hay bales with his pitchfork of sound every weekend, was prone to unleashing a similar wave of destruction on secret government agency Majestic 12. It was only then that it dawned on me: *Deus Ex* is a game with true universal appeal. Here is someone with no interest in cyberpunk, bionic augmentations and conspiracy theories and rarely plays video games, and yet as far as he's concerned *Deus Ex* is the best game ever.

THE FUTURE IS HERE

"I've had plenty of non-gamers tell me *Deus Ex* introduced them to what games can do," agrees Warren Spector, *Deus Ex* creator. "To put it simply, the fact that you can play through the game in a bunch of different ways, solving problems violently, non-violently or bypassing them completely, is a big part of *DX*'s appeal. The fact that you feel like you're doing something more significant than 'Saving The World From Alien Invasion' or something equally goofy, sets it apart."

Whether the game's actual plot of 'Saving the World From a Deadly

Man-made Virus' is significantly different is a matter for further debate. What isn't open to argument though is the fact that *Deus Ex* is indeed a class apart.

As an RPG, its ability to appeal to both novice and hardcore gamers is unique. Aside from the deeply immersive and brilliantly scripted non-linear game design, it's the sheer stylishness of *Deus Ex* – from JC Denton, the UNATCO agent out to uncover the truth, to the Gibson-esque sci-fi setting – that really makes such a compelling alternative to your usual slew of fantasy RPGs.

VISION OF BEAUTY

Jay Lee is a man who admits to being *DX*'s lead artist. "I did a little bit of everything," he says, modestly.

"Jay's selling himself short," retorts Warren. "He spent hours talking with me about the overall look of the game and then turned to our concept guys to sketch a horrifyingly vague vision. He created and managed the schedule for the entire art team. On top of all that, he proved himself to be one of – if not *the* – most versatile artist on the project. He did object creation, figure modelling, texturing, animation – I bet he literally touched every piece of art before it went in the game!"

With dozens of characters and locations, as well as hundreds of usable objects ranging from plasma weapons to pinball tables, *Deus Ex* remains one of the most interactive games around. Admittedly, an impromptu game of basketball in a junkie-infested concrete courtyard has no real bearing on the outcome of the mission, but it does offer the player a sporting diversion and a smug reminder of the game's exceptional realism.

"All I wanted to do was create a believable world," recalls Warren. "One based on the real world, as we live in it, as it might be in 10 or 15 years. Where the idea really came alive though, was when

“There are a million problems to tackle before gaming matures as a medium. I just want to be a part of helping it grow up”

WARREN SPECTOR
STUDIO DIRECTOR, ION STORM, AND *DEUS EX* CREATOR



A grunt states the obvious.



Hey, even heavily augmented cybernetic agents need to unwind.

we layered in all the conspiracy stuff. The world of *Deus Ex*, though clearly inspired by William Gibson in part, actually owes more to *The X-Files*.”

STOLEN PLANS

When it comes to games, *DX*'s influences are varied. *Underworld*, *System Shock*, the *Ultima* games, *Half-Life* and old console RPG *Suikoden* are just some of the titles Warren and the team 'discussed' during development. Curiously though, the PC's other cyberpunk thriller *Syndicate* never even entered the conversation. Although everyone at ION Storm had played Bullfrog's classic, the feeling was that *DX* was just too different in both design and gameplay to benefit from any of *Syndicate*'s features.

"I'll tell you what really got *Deus Ex* going though," beams Spector. "*Thief*. I love *Thief*. It's one of my favourite games, but I was hugely frustrated by the team's decision to force players to sneak. I just kept thinking, 'What if I'm not good enough to sneak? What if I want to fight my way past obstacles?' You have to be a better game player than I am to succeed at that. I had to make a game that gave players more freedom to choose their own

play style. *Deus Ex* was the game that resulted from that nagging frustration."

BREAKING DOWN

Warren's ambitious vision meant production was not always plain sailing. Ensuring that the numerous twisting routes through the game made sense proved distinctly tricky for the team.

"Luckily," reveals Warren, "we had lead writer Sheldon Pacotti, who worked with the design team to ensure that the player-driven experience made sense. Without him we would have been in a world of trouble."

Playing through the game, you can spot the areas that must have caused angst. At the start of the Hong Kong mission, when you're in a hangar at the top of the Versalife skyscraper, you get the chance to kill a room full of soldiers in a number of inventive ways. You can pop them off with a sniper rifle from an air duct; you can plant mines around the doorway and then lure them out; or, alternatively, and most cunning of all, you can blow up some gas canisters in the ventilation shafts and watch as the noxious cloud seeps into the room through the air conditioning and asphyxiates them all. There are many

more ways besides, and from a gameplay perspective it's great. But from a design point of view? You guessed it – it's a nightmare.

"There's this point you get to where you have a playable game that's not a lot of fun to play and breaks in a hundred ways," groans Warren. "Those are the moments when you just bang your head against your desk and moan, 'Why do we always have to do things the hard way?'"

Throughout development, the team had a ceaseless series of changes and redesigns to contend with as well. "Our original implementation of skills and augmentations, which I thought would be great fun, ended up being lifeless and leaden," laments Warren. "So, Harvey Smith [lead designer] did a quick and terrific redesign."

The non-linear construct meant every team member had their own thoughts on

what should be in the game, and that in turn led to frosty working conditions. At one stage the designers wouldn't talk to the programmers, the programmers wouldn't talk to the artists, and Warren wouldn't talk to anyone.

"I tried to force the designers to implement a story they ultimately convinced me could not be told using our existing tools," recalls Warren. "Also, I wanted simple, mostly non-interactive conversations with simple, binary choices for really big moments, but the team convinced me that more traditional PC RPG-style conversations would be more appropriate. There were hundreds of things like that."

Somehow it's difficult to imagine *DX* having the same resonance had it contained the thrilling-sounding binary-based choice system.

A WELCOME CHANGE

When *DX* was finally released in 2000, it was virtually unrecognisable from the game that was originally conceived. And yet Warren believes that the most important gameplay elements were still intact in the finished game.

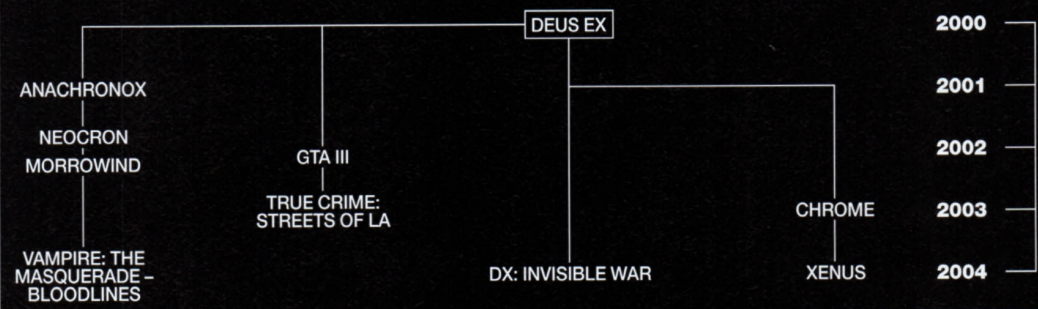
"I wanted *DX* to be a game about character development," he enthuses, "where each player's character choices resulted in unique gameplay experiences. I wanted each player to tell his or her own story, in the context of a plot we created, in a world that seemed like our own. The fact that the skill and augmentation systems didn't work the way I originally thought they would, or that you don't get to build a base of operations in the game, that's trivial."

Upon its release, the team were unsure what to make of their creation. "After we finished," says Jay, "I was a little uncertain but very hopeful at the same time. There was definitely that feeling of, 'Hey, we just might have a hit here.' But when you work on a project for that period of time, you're just not sure if you're being biased one way or the other."

Warren too was nervous: "I remember talking to the team when we were done, saying, 'If people compare our combat to *Half-Life*, our stealth model to *Thief* or our RPG elements to the BioWare games, we're sunk; if people get the fact that they can *decide* what kind of game they want to play, we'll rule the world..."

FAMILY TREE

DX hasn't exactly triggered a flood of cyberpunk RPG-shooters – yet – but you don't have to look far to see where it's left its mark



Needless to say, people got it – they got it in a big way. For some it's a straight toss-up between *DX* and *GTA3* for the honour of the greatest game ever made. And yet strangely for such a phenomenally successful title there have been few direct clones.

One possible reason for this is that most developers simply aren't prepared to bust a gut in the way that ION Storm did. These days the risks are higher than ever before. One late game coming in over budget can spell curtains for a rising studio.

Warren agrees: "Most developers are too smart to try to tackle the stupidly difficult problems posed by simulation-driven gameplay and player-driven experience. In the end, it's easier, and in some ways more compelling for game developers to author player experience, the way movie-makers or novelists control

their users' experience. It's certainly easier to craft powerful emotional moments in more traditional, linear story games."

BELLS AND WHISTLES

For an actual cyberpunk adventure in the same mould as *DX* we'll probably have to wait for none other than the sequel *Deus Ex: Invisible War*. And after that? Will the *DX* series still be around in ten years time?

"If the *Deus Ex* series is still going in ten years from now I hope to heck I'm not associated with it!" laughs Warren. "I love that world but I don't want to keep mining the same ideas in the same game world forever. I think we'll keep building on the *DX* gameplay concepts – introducing more compelling human characters through better non-combat AI and more facial and body language-driven emotion as well as even cooler, more freeform stories."

"Certainly we want to reach an ever-larger audience," continues Warren, "with more accessible gameplay. Heck, there are a million problems to tackle before gaming matures as a medium. I just want to be a part of helping it grow up."

And do you know what, Warren? We want you to be a part of it too. In fact, right now at a folk music festival in deepest Dorset there's a man wearing bells on his ankles who can think of nothing he'd like more. Now that's a wider audience. [X]



Rumours of big black silent helicopters abound...

THE FUTURE OF FPS

WHERE TO NEXT FOR OPEN-ENDED FIRST-PERSON CONSPIRACY-BASED ROLE-PLAYING SHOOTERS?

Of all the gaming genres, the first-person RPG/adventure is the one closest to all-out revolution. Put simply, there is no way the first-person shooter can prosper without gameplay becoming more sophisticated. What's fascinating though is the way that ION Storm seems to be one of the few companies to recognise this, or at least make significant steps forward – *Deus Ex: Invisible War* and *Thief III* are among the most promising examples currently in development, and will no doubt pave the way for others.

Otherwise, it's Troika's forthcoming *Vampire: The Masquerade – Bloodlines* that shows the most potential for progressing the genre. Indeed, we've said before that this freeform RPG-shooter has every chance of being *Deus Ex* with fangs. Oh, and then there's *Half-Life 2*, which looks like it could be OK too...



"Do not feed the bots!"





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“The plot is risible, the interface dire and you don’t even get to see much flesh”



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RETRO ZONE

SEPTEMBER 1990

Will Porter had a sheltered childhood, and cruel parents who wouldn't buy him a decent computer. Thankfully his friends' parents were rich and careless...



A schlong time ago in a galaxy far away.

SEX OLYMPICS

The rise and fall of Brad Stallion & His Big Thruster

IN THE echoing corridors of forgotten gaming there is a row of shelves even more dusty and unkempt than the rest – it is here that the sex-adventures



Brad's proud ship, the Big Thruster.

of the late '80s have been laid to rest. With an almost presentable front man in the form of Leisure Suit Larry, scores of diabolical games shifted units simply due to words like 'dripping' and 'tits' strategically placed on their dirty boxes.

Out of all this dross, no games were more dire than the three in the 'Brad Stallion & His Big Thruster' series: *Sex Vixens From Space*, *Planet Of Lust* and *Sex Olympics*. Thankfully, sex games these days are pretty much nonexistent outside of Japan, mainly because the Internet allows us to conjure up hooters direct from central Asia without having

to win a round of poker. Back in the day, though, rubbish text adventures could be shackled together with little or no thought and diabolical text parsers (ie you had to write stuff like 'FEEL BOOB', which wouldn't work, so then get out a thesaurus and try out a million other ways of saying the same thing until you struck gold with 'FEEL BOOBS').

Sex Olympics broke the mould slightly in that it had a point and click interface, but the basic plot of 'I'm Brad Stallion, I'm going to have sex with loose women – in space' remained. Notable for having command options like 'screw',

'kiss', 'jerk off' and a cohort of pixelated women's faces with which to interact, *Sex Olympics* is undoubtedly the worst game in history. Its plot (a shagging competition between Brad and the evil Dr Dildo) is risible, the interface is dire and you don't even get to see much flesh. I guess it's a good job that PC owners get a lot more sex than they used to, eh? Or at least have broadband connections...

THE BEST OF THE REST



GREMLINS 2: THE NEW BATCH (Atari/PC)

It may well be the greatest movie sequel in living memory, or at least it was to ten-year-old boys at the time, but *Gremlins 2* was unsurprisingly guff. You had to wander around identikit corridors, eat burgers and shine torches at badly animated gremlins. A prime example of 'let's bodge up a platformer, gamers are stupid and won't notice it's rubbish'.



NORTH & SOUTH (PC/Amiga)

A gem of a two-player game that played out cartoon battles based around the American Civil War. In a skirmish you could swap your control between cannons, cavalry and infantry. Cool platform beat 'em up sections were also used whenever you tried to take your enemy's forts or trains. Due to its competitive nature, most two-player games would end in blows and/or a broken keyboard.



XENON 2: MEGABLAST (PC/Atari/Amiga)

The mere mention of the Bitmap Brothers vertical-scrolling shooter makes the *ZONE* lads go weak at the knees. With crazy upgrades in 'Colin's Bargain Basement' and Bomb The Bass on music duties, hazy memories of misspent youth still hang on its every laser blast. *ZONE*'s resident man-mountain Martin Korda gushes: "There were these centipede things, and it was just so good." Wise words.



MONTY PYTHON'S FLYING CIRCUS (PC/Amiga)

Playing as a Gumby (in Python-speak: a very silly person) and armed with a prize fish, the *Monty Python* platformer was as good as it was just plain weird. You had to collect tins of spam to exchange for parts of your own brain, while having the odd argument with John Cleese. It's proof, if ever it were needed, that they really don't make 'em like they used to.

NEWS

GAMING NEWS FROM SEPTEMBER 1990

- A group of nerds working for a firm called Softdisk Publishing create a game called *Invasion Of The Vorticons*. This was the first outing of Messrs Carmack, Carmack and Romero who would go on to revolutionise PC gaming through the bastion of greatness that would become known as id Software. Praise be.
- The Sega Megadrive is officially launched in the UK at a whopping £189.99. *Altered Beast*, the game bundled with the system, is a bit mawk. But people buy it anyway.
- *Mad Dog McCree*, a rubbish wild-west B-movie with a lightgun attached to it, is released in the arcades. Punters wisely ignore it.
- A bunch of techies in Switzerland, perhaps fed up with developing cuckoo clocks, create something called 'the web'. It never caught on.

NEXT MONTH

REVIEWS EXTRAVAGANZA

UNMISSABLE REVIEWS OF...

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004

MAX PAYNE 2:
THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE

PRINCE OF PERSIA:
THE SANDS OF TIME

CALL OF DUTY

THE LORD OF THE RINGS:
THE RETURN OF THE KING

BREED

HIDDEN & DANGEROUS 2

FIFA 2004

PRO EVOLUTION
SOCCER 3

COMMAND & CONQUER:
ZERO HOUR

AGE OF MYTHOLOGY:
TITANS

...OH AND WITH A LITTLE LUCK...

HALF-LIFE 2

**EXCLUSIVE
DEMOS**

**PRINCE OF PERSIA:
THE SANDS OF TIME**
**MAX PAYNE 2:
THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE**
BREED
**PRO EVOLUTION
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VEGAS: MAKE IT BIG
CHIGAGO 1930
PAINKILLER

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ILLUSTRATION Jamie Malacoin

<Familiar theme tune, audience applause>

G-MAN Wonderful memories there Barney/354. Now we turn to your final hours in Black Mesa. Gordon. Following the explosion, concussion, panicked flight and near-death emergency surgery, you found yourself

wandering a deserted corridor when you heard THIS all-too familiar voice...

V/O Grraaarrghhhhi!

GORDON (joyful surprise) You've got to be kidding!

G-MAN Yes, you haven't seen him for five years since he tried to claw open your stomach... COME IN BOB!

<Audience go wild, mutated scientist lurches towards Gordon, who grabs his crowbar and feigns an attack. They pause, then embrace>

BOB I love this guy! Without Gordon, I'd still be living in a unified hive mind existence back on Xen.

GORDON (tearfully) When I caved in your skull, I felt like I lost a workmate but gained a friend...

G-MAN Gordon Freeman, this is your Half-Life!

<Familiar theme starts again, credits roll, Barney is dragged off-camera by a barrack...>

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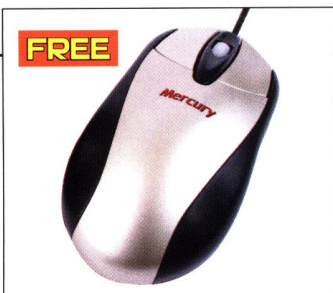
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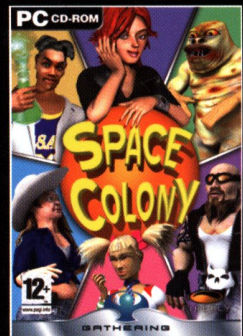


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