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PCZONE

WORLD EXCLUSIVE REVIEW!

JUDGE DREDD: DREDD VS DEATH

DROKK! MASSIVE REVIEW *AND* PLAYABLE DEMO!

HUGE SHOOTER FACE-OFF

DOOM 3 VS HALF-LIFE 2 VS HALO

We've played them all – amazing new screenshots inside!

REVIEWED

CONFLICT: DESERT STORM 2

UFO: AFTERMATH

TRON 2.0

DEFINITIVE REVIEW

HOMEWORLD 2

TINY COMPO: Name the four Dark Judges.

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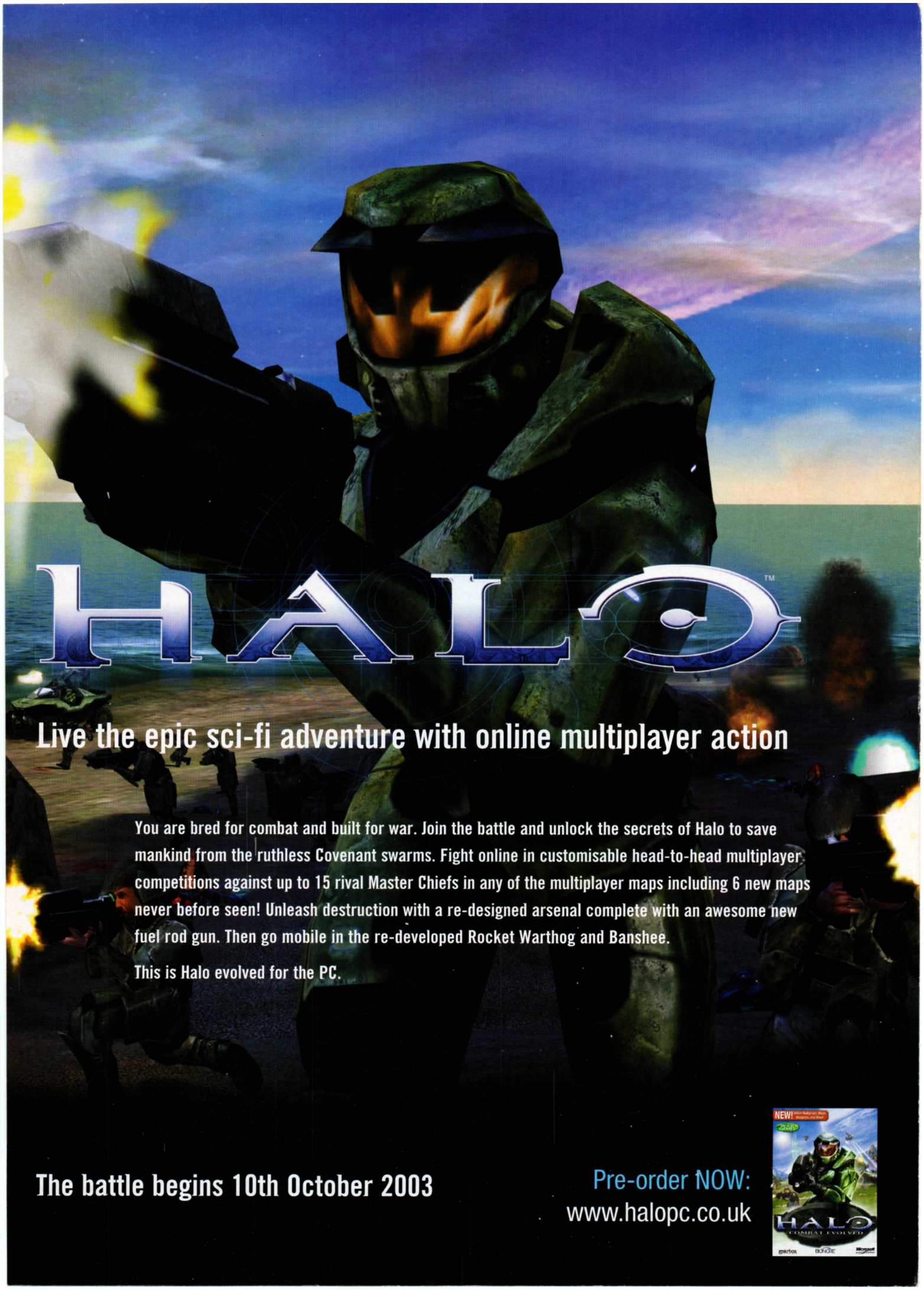
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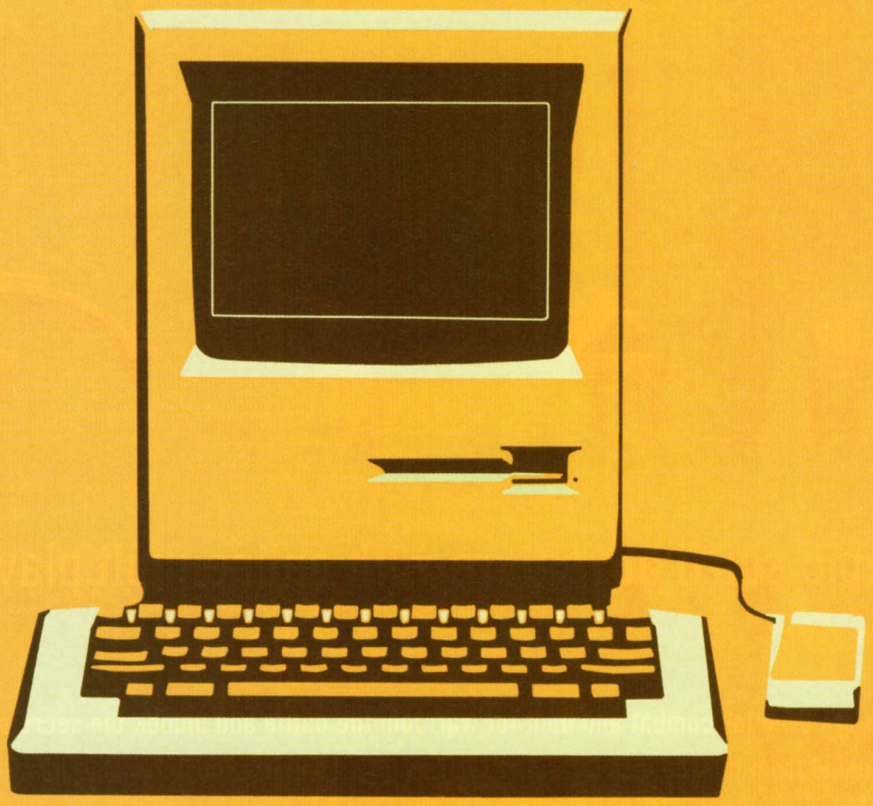

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JUDGE DREDD: DREDD VS DEATH P62

Massive World Exclusive review of this hugely awaited shooter. But will it stand up to *PC ZONE*'s ruthless test pilots?

Smells Like Free Spirit

Perks Of The Job No. 7: Get to see all the biggest games before anyone else in the world. This comes just above the promise of a trip to the forbidden zones of Chernobyl (No. 9) and way below getting so close to Stacey Keibler that I could smell her (No.1), but it's a situation that you get used to. Until something comes along that's so big you can't help but get stupidly excited about it, like *Half-Life 2*.

After finding out it was going to be at the recent ECTS show, I pulled rank and booked myself in to see the game and talk to Doug Lombardi from Valve Software. He wasn't prepared to give away much about the game, but we did manage to persuade him to unleash another batch of screenshots – the only ones that have been leaked by Valve since the launch announcement back in May. Check 'em out on page 36. Excited? You should be because we've got it on good authority that the game's in the final stages of fine-tuning and, if it doesn't hit the shelves on September 30th, it's not going to be far off.

As well as making one of the finest games in the world in 1998 and following it up in 2003 with probably the best game ever, Valve deserves a special pat on the back for gracing the UK with its presence. The final stages of developing a game are full-on 24/7 balancing and fine-tuning, and taking the time out to come and demo the game and answer incessant questions from idiot journalists like myself is over and above the call of duty – but in keeping with Valve's ever-strong commitment to gamers, modders and fans.

It shows that you can, even in this day and age, develop a game with no outside interference and free of the egos that clatter around certain parts of the industry.

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The very latest info and screenshots on the world's most highly anticipated game

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Our exclusive lowdown from QuakeCon in Dallas, with all the hottest info and superb screens from the awesome *Doom 3*. Plus a hands-on playtest...

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■ **DVD EXCLUSIVE: DVD ZONE**
SIX incredible demos exclusive to the DVD, including *Conflict: Desert Storm II*, *Command & Conquer: Generals*, *Commandos 3* and *Aquanox 2: Revelation*
Stunning *Half-Life 2* movies lined up together on DVD video, plus thrilling intro movie from *Deus Ex: Invisible War*

More patches, drivers and movies than you could shake a bigger-than-average stick at!

Dave Woods
Editor

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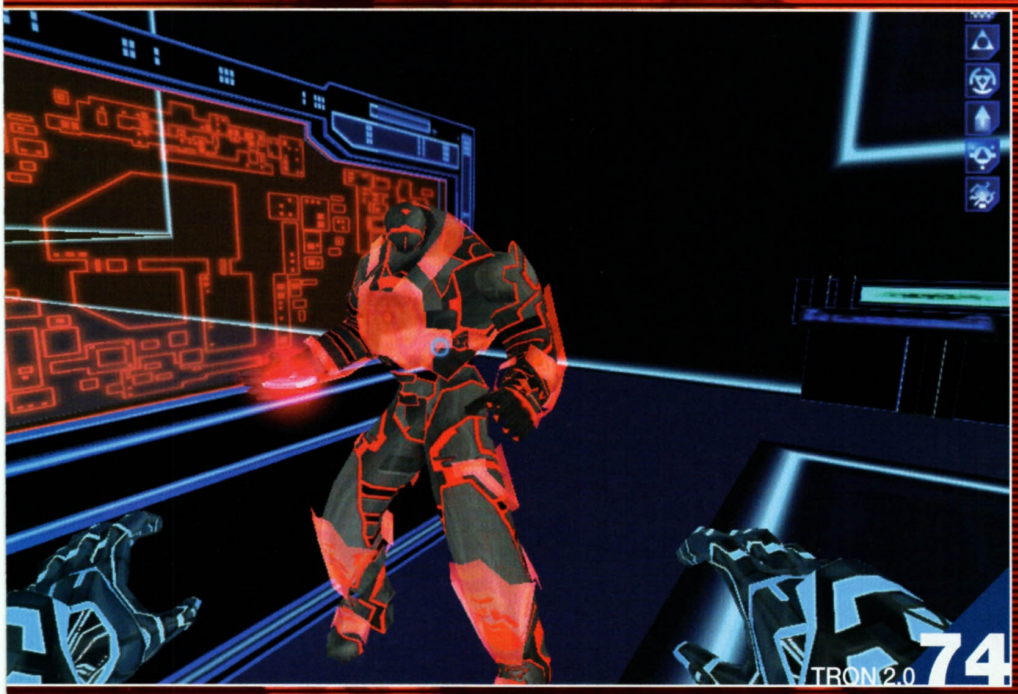

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WIN!

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 (134), *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: October 15, 2003. The winner of our September cover (132) is Jo Phillips, who knew that the game you needed to run the original *Counter-Strike* was *Half-Life*. Well done.

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FIFA

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Spotlight Off The Ball™ Receiving. Invade the space and then defend it. Off The Ball™ Control means that you have to fight over every inch of turf for the good of the team. And risk losing your shirt in the process. Because you need to be strong to get into the best position to receive the ball. And brilliant to bury it.

The most important ball skill is what you do without it.

Spotlight Innovative Gameplay. The enhancements to FIFA Football 2004 don't end with Off The Ball control. In-game Team Management lets you change tactics and call plays in real-time. Plus you can create set pieces and introduce them into the action at the touch of a button thanks to Set Piece Play-Calling. It's a whole new ball game.

Spotlight Career Mode. Assume the manager's role and take your team from zeroes to heroes. The inclusion of lower league teams and stadia brings greater depth to the gameplay, with the added spice of promotion and relegation battles. If you can balance the books and take your team from nowhere to the big time in successive seasons, immortality awaits.

Spotlight Football Fusion. Get even more from FIFA this year with Football Fusion. Import a team from Total Club Manager 2004 and play their games for real in FIFA, then export the result and continue managing. You can create an all-star team in Total Club Manager 2004 and play their fixtures in your new FIFA game. Or export a team from Total Club Manager 2004 not featured in FIFA Football 2004 and play their matches in real-time.

EA SPORTS FIFA FOOTBALL 2004

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FIRST Look!

THE TEMPLE OF ELEMENTAL EVIL

New rules, old school RPG set in the D&D universe

■ **DICE ROLLER** James Lyon

ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW

PUBLISHER Atari
DEVELOPER Troika Games
EXPECTED RELEASE DATE October 24
WEBSITE www.greyhawkgame.com

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- From the creators of the very promising *Vampire: The Masquerade – Bloodlines*
- Utilises version 3.5 of the D&D rules
- Turn-based combat offers more depth
- Different paths throughout the game.

"*The Temple Of Elemental Evil* bears more than a passing similarity to Black Isle's classic output"

ZUGGTMOY. Spugnoir. Ostler Gundigoot. Hezrou. No, we haven't trapped our gentlemen's parts in the cooling fan again. Those far-fetched words merely herald the arrival of another traditional fantasy RPG. Except this one has some pedigree behind it, coming as it does from Troika Games, creators of last year's well-received steampunk epic *Arcanum* and, more recently, the forthcoming *Half-Life 2*-powered *Vampire: The Masquerade – Bloodlines*.

Based on a Greyhawk module from table-top behemoth Dungeons & Dragons, *The Temple Of Elemental Evil* introduces the latest refinement of the D&D rules, now up to version 3.5. To those who couldn't give a flying cleric about that news, this shouldn't matter much because, like *Baldur's Gate* et al, these can generally be ignored in favour of straightforward action. Though aficionados who want to get busy with statistics should still be in their element and hopefully the new rule-set should provide a slightly new slant when converted over to the PC.

Battles are resolutely turn-based, acting at a slower strategic pace and allowing for greater tactical depth. To help, a new interface known as the radial menu has been introduced, which fans out contextual options around a central point with a right click of the mouse button.

FAN-BASED INCIDENT

The story revolves around goings-on at the game's doom-mongering subtitle, the [*deep voice*] *Temple Of Elemental Evil* [*thunder and lightning*]. Erected near the town of Homlett in the land of Flanaess, in the shire of Nulb, which was once headquarters for a malignant cult. Getting too big and evil for their boots they were soon ousted in a mighty war and the temple was knocked down. Switch to the present day and, what do you know, sinister events are starting to occur about the ruins. It's enough to send you off on an epic quest for valour, treasure and to save the free world.

NPCs will react intelligently depending on who you are and how you behave.

Taking that challenge means the chance to pick up to five different player characters for your party. Each member is customisable, created by the standard rolling of a virtual dice to receive stats, picking a class and choosing an alignment. We're promised different paths throughout the game based on these initial choices and ones made while playing. In addition, you're allowed a few companions and pets to help you out. They won't be under direct control but they should assist in battle. In fact, we managed to spot one such party wandering about with a chicken. It didn't last long.

GREY IS THE NEW BLACK

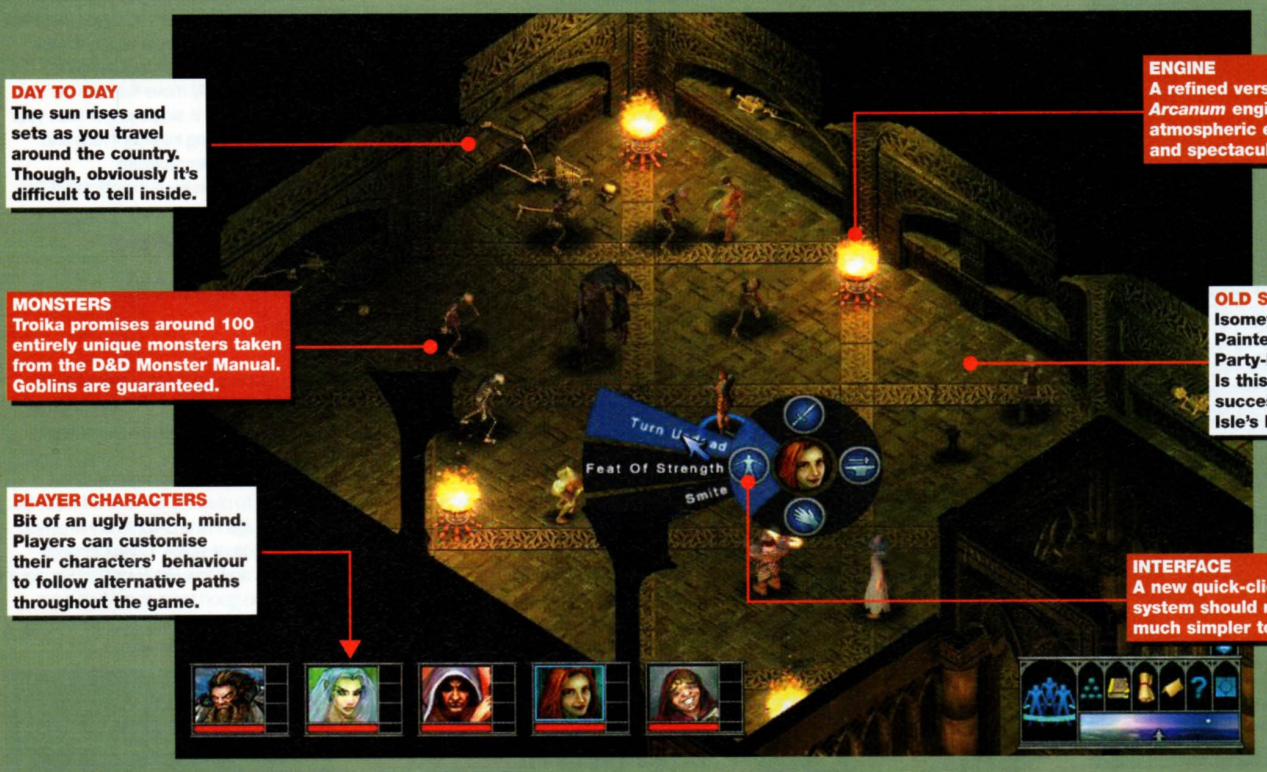
While different endings are enough to tempt replayability, for the true die hard there's also the Ironman mode. In essence, it lumps you with a one-choice pick of stats and the bare minimum of save games. One for the hardy student or unemployed we imagine.

From the look of things, *The Temple Of Elemental Evil* bears more than a passing similarity to Black Isle's classic output. Not too difficult to understand considering the developers come from the same stock. However, with Black Isle straying away from the D&D universe right now, as long as this gets the story and script right, it shows plenty of promise in fulfilling its role as a stalwart swords and sorcery RPG. PCZ

Players cast over 230 different spells in the D&D universe.

You can create your own items mid-game to help you in your quest.

Combat may look good but we're praying that the script lives up to the task as well.



DAY TO DAY
The sun rises and sets as you travel around the country. Though, obviously it's difficult to tell inside.

ENGINE
A refined version of the *Arcanum* engine makes for atmospheric environments and spectacular spell effects.

MONSTERS
Troika promises around 100 entirely unique monsters taken from the D&D Monster Manual. Goblins are guaranteed.

OLD SCHOOL
Isometric viewpoint? Painted backgrounds? Party-based combat? Is this the spiritual successor to Black Isle's D&D reign?

PLAYER CHARACTERS
Bit of an ugly bunch, mind. Players can customise their characters' behaviour to follow alternative paths throughout the game.

INTERFACE
A new quick-click radical menu system should make combat much simpler to get through.

FOOTBALL EVOLUTION

BACK OF THE NET! KONAMI'S *PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 3* HEADS TO PC

***PES3* on PC – our prayers have been answered.**

The PC version will have superior graphics.

HALLELUJAH! This is the news you've been waiting for. Japanese games company Konami is bringing *Pro Evolution Soccer 3* to PC in November. Why are we so excited here at *PC ZONE*? Because – and believe us when we say this – *Pro Evolution Soccer 2* on PlayStation 2 is the best arcade-style footie game ever made, and the third incarnation is shaping up to be even better.

In addition to all the sublime playability and fantastic gameplay modes, the PC version of *PES3* promises to have better graphics than its console counterpart – presumably at resolutions higher than 640x480. As yet there has been no word on whether you'll be able to play online, but Konami's first PC football title – the recently released *International Superstar Soccer 3* – did at least include a LAN option, which bodes well for *PES3*.

THE BEAUTIFUL GAME

For the uninitiated, the *Pro Evolution Soccer* series is so good because, well, it 'feels' like a real football game – that's the best way to describe it. You can play the game straight out of the box, but even after six months, you'll find that you're still discovering hidden moves, employing new tactics and scoring magnificent goals you never managed before.

Although EA's *FIFA* game is gradually improving with respect to the ball control and its passing game, the emphasis is still on goals – with Konami's *PES*, you can have absolutely thrilling nil-nil draws, as well as 5-0 goal-fests.

The way the ball bobbles along the pitch, ricochets off players and bends in the air gives you the feeling that you're playing the real thing. Knocking the ball about the park soon becomes totally intuitive, so that delivering a beautiful weighted chipped through-ball to your forward is just as satisfying as scoring a scorching free kick.

"The *Pro Evolution Soccer* series is so good because, well, it feels like a real football game"

NUMBER 3 ON THE SHIRT

Pro Evolution Soccer comes into its own in multiplayer, but the game has another super-sub on the bench – the Master League mode. This is basically a slimmed down *Champ Man*, where you have the opportunity to pick a team to start in the lower league and work your way up the four divisions by winning games and earning points to buy better players.

We've recently had the good fortune to play an early beta code of *Pro Evolution Soccer 3* on PlayStation 2, which is already packed with a host of improvements over last year's *PES2*. Players now look more like their real-life counterparts, which include famous footballers such as Zidane and Owen, and actually move like them as well. In addition, the AI in single-player sees your team mates making intelligent runs and tackling back under pressure.

PES3 will again have the official FIFPro licence, but Konami is also taking steps to secure players and teams not covered by this agreement, such as the Holland international side.

So, after years of having only EA's *FIFA* series to play, PC owners will finally be able to indulge in the delights of Konami's definitive football series. *Championship Manager 4* and now *Pro Evolution Soccer 3* – it's just too good to be true. We'll have more exclusive news and a hands-on play of *Pro Evo 3* on PC very soon.

- **Publisher:** Konami
- **Developer:** Konami TYO
- **ETA:** November
- **Website:** www.konami.com

FOOTBALL CRAZY

ASSOCIATE EDITOR Jamie Sefton

Firstly, apologies to anyone who doesn't like football, but I really can't contain my excitement any more – *Pro Evolution Soccer 3* is coming to PC! This is a big deal. Anyone who knows their footie videogames is in love with Konami's soccer sim. Hell, I even talked to Jon Hare (creator of *Sensible Soccer*) about this and he reckons the last version of *Pro Evo* is the only football game that's better than his own creation. Also, the *Championship Manager* bods at Sports Interactive are huge fans and have even contributed player stats for previous versions.

The fact that we have mentioned the PlayStation 2 version of *Pro Evo* in our PC footie reviews was because the *PC ZONE* team all play the game regularly and know that so far nothing on PC has ever come within goal-scoring distance of it. *Pro Evolution Soccer 3* on PC is going to mean that (a) this magazine is going to be late every month and (b) EA's *FIFA* series now has a proper rival.

The only dodgy bit of *Pro Evo* is the eccentric presentation, with the last version having West Ham as 'Lake District' and the entire Holland team players named as 'oranges'. But it's the gameplay that truly matters and *Pro Evo* is looking as if it could be the most natural and realistic representation of the beautiful game yet – check out the news story on this page.

In Bulletin this month, we also have screenshots from *Max Payne 2: The Fall of Max Payne* (p18), *Vietcong* expansion *Fist Alpha* (p22) and *Unreal Tournament 2004* (p26), plus all your regular faves including The Man Who Knows. Enjoy.

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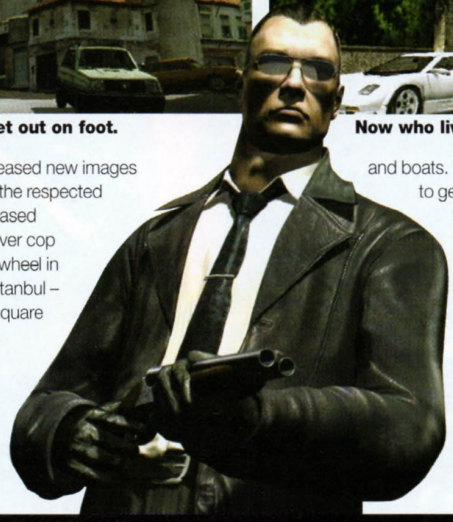
Undercover Brother

NEW SCREENSHOTS FROM REFLECTIONS' *DRIVER 3* UNVEILED

***Driver 3* allows Tanner to set out on foot.**

Now who lives in a house like this?



PUBLISHER ATARI has released new images from *Driver 3*, the third game in the respected driving series from Newcastle-based developer Reflections. Undercover cop Tanner will again be behind the wheel in three cities – Nice, Miami and Istanbul – each containing more than 30 square miles of photo-realistic scenery.

Driver 3 promises to deliver the excellent car physics and collision damage that made the previous games so enjoyable, with the addition of new vehicles, including trucks and boats. Gravel-voiced Tanner will also be free to get out of his transport at any time to walk on foot, steal another car, batter pedestrians or enter certain buildings a la *GTA: Vice City*.

Although *Driver 3* is due on consoles next March, PC owners won't be able to join in the gangster thrills until late 2004. More news soon.

- **Publisher:** Atari
- **Developer:** Reflections
- **ETA:** Q4 2004
- **Website:** www.driver3.com

"If it were up to me, I'd have my army wholly made up of snipers"

Vince Zampella, chief creative officer at Call Of Duty *creator Infinity Ward, talks about his unique WWII strategy.*

"They've ransacked apartments, sent out their 'troops' to urinate on other people's lawns and once drove another player from the game"

Salon.com on the bitter war raging between certain players in The Sims Online. *Vice City has nothing on Alphaville…*

"We spent a lot of time in the* Half-Life *universe, so we know why it's easy to cheat in* Counter-Strike. *We tried to design the architecture in* Halo *from the start to make that less of a problem, but if you really want to cheat, the hardcore guys are going to be able to do it"

Bad news from Randy Pitchford, president of Gearbox, who recently revealed how difficult it is to stop the online cheats.

REVOLTING PEASANTS

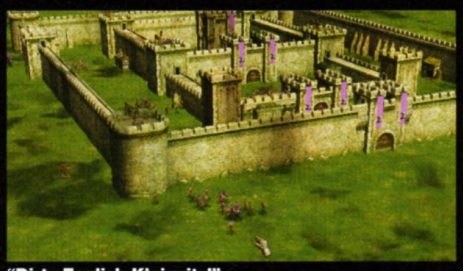
SIEGE MENTALITY IN IMPRESSIONS GAMES' *LORDS OF THE REALM III*

AN ENGLISHMAN'S home is his castle – that's certainly the case with the third release of the popular *Lords Of The Realm* RTS series.

Set in Europe during the Middle Ages, *Lords Of The Realm III* allows you to live out your fantasies as a feudal lord, recruiting large armies, attacking and besieging neighbours' castles to acquire land, keeping the merchant classes happy and using the peasants as handy footstools or wastepaper baskets.

You'll also have to keep a beady eye on the church – if your Christianity rating drops too low, you could be condemned as a heretic and have hordes of angry crusaders storming your lands. As for weaponry, you'll have access to stockpiles of ancient siege technology, such as scaling ladders, battering rams, catapults and mangonels, as well as boiling oil and other nasty surprises for defending your own castle. We'll raise the drawbridge for a preview in the next *PC ZONE*.

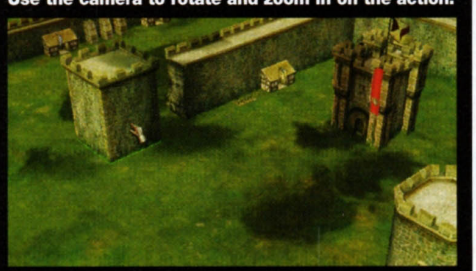
- **Publisher:** VU Games
- **Developer:** Impressions Games
- **ETA:** November
- **Website:** www.impressionsgames.com



"Dirty English K'niggits!"

Use the camera to rotate and zoom in on the action.

Don't upset the priests or it's the Inquisition for you.



Changing Realms: design and build your own castle.

American Conquest
Fight Back

Stand-Alone Expansion

An absolute must for every *Cossacks* and *American Conquest* fan!

----- From Alaska to the Amazon -----

From the makers of *Cossacks*, the hit game series with over 1,000,000 copies sold worldwide!

EUROGAMER 9/10*

"There isn't a great deal I can fault *American Conquest* for – it really is a splendid game"

PC GAMEWORLD.COM 85%*

"Features detailed gameplay, massive battles, and lots of historical depth"

gamespy 80%*

"With all that it has going for it, American Conquest is hard to beat"

GAMESPOT 84%*

"It makes a great addition to any real-time strategy enthusiast's collection"

ign.com 82%*

"A keen sense of history and a wide range of missions give this one broad appeal"

* *American Conquest - Three Centuries of War* was tested.

- Epic Real-Time Strategy
- New mode of game play: 10 "Battlefield" missions in single player and multiplayer
- Captivating real-time battles with up to 16,000 units
- 5 new nations (for a total of 17): Germany, Russia, Haida, Portugal, Netherlands
- 26 versatile missions in 8 thrilling campaigns
- More than 50 new units
- Fighting morale is influenced by victories, defeats, food supplies, equipment and mercenary pay
- Several multiplayer modes for up to 7 players via LAN or the Internet

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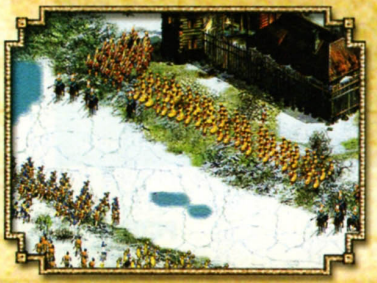
GAME WORLD

PC CD

12+ www.pegi.info

www.americanconquest.com



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EMULATION ZONE

Breaking news from the world of emulation, with retro reanimator *Stuart Campbell*

Even big games like *Giga Wing* run on Xbox MAME.

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 give them to the emulators themselves.

***Cactus Jack*, one of the last big PinMAME titles.**

STATE OF THE EMU-NATION

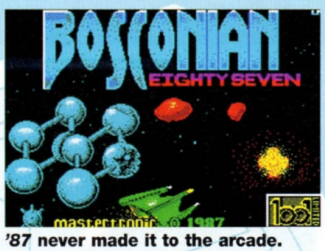
It's been a pretty slow summer for PC emulation, readers. There are a bunch of reasons for this. Firstly, the fact is that we're pretty much nearing the finish line where gaming emulation is concerned. There are almost no game platforms left to be emulated, and with emulation of the current PS2/GameCube/Xbox generation a long way off there's little left for emu authors to do. Name a platform from the 32-bit generation down and you can more or less guarantee there's a near-perfect emulation of it already available, with only the Atari Jaguar still holding out to any significant degree.

Even the more esoteric avenues emu coders turned their attentions to are almost exhausted. Practically every pinball machine is now emulated by Visual Pinball and Visual PinMAME – there hasn't been a significant pinball emu release in months, as there simply aren't any more tables left to do. Similarly fruit machines releases have dried up as there are almost no machines left to emulate (although with fruity emus, there are at least still a couple of hardware standards left to be cracked which will open a new seam of machines if anyone ever does it. However, the fruit-emu coders are such a highly-strung, sensitive bunch that at the moment there seems little prospect of that).

But more excitingly, part of the reason for a slowing of PC emulation has been that authors have turned their attention to virgin territory. Emulation on the Xbox has exploded, with a massive catalogue of PC emus ported across for the benefit of anyone sensible enough to fit a modchip to the bloated Microsoft console. Arcade emus like MAME and Final Burn, and console emus for the likes of the Mega Drive, SNES and N64 all run beautifully on the platform, finally bringing the glories of emulation onto the big living-room TV. And a clutch of emulators have also been brought to handhelds like the Game Park GP32 (see page 118) and (via the magic of the 'Flash linker' cartridge) the Game Boy Advance, so you can carry emulators around in your pocket as well, ensuring that classic gameplay fans can finally be assured of the chance to play *3D Deathchase* or *Super Mario Brothers 3* literally anywhere in the known universe.

It's an absolutely glorious time in history for emulation lovers, but PC owners will have to wait a little while before the beige monster box regains the initiative. Be patient, pals.

"Classic gameplay fans can be assured of the chance to play *3D Deathchase* literally anywhere in the universe"



***'87* never made it to the arcade.**

But boy does it have a catchy tune.

EMULATION OF THE MONTH

***BOSCONIAN '87* (SPECTRUM, 1987)**

Bosconian '87 exists in a very small category within the world of videogames – sequels to arcade games that never saw an arcade but were only released on home formats. Others in this small and elite club include *OutRun Europa* (a bizarre extension to the *OutRun* line which saw the player piloting motorbikes and boats as well as the traditional sports car) and *Renegade 3*, a dreadful follow-up to an arcade game which was awful in arcades but magnificent in its home incarnations (especially the Spectrum 128 version). *Bosconian '87* is so obscure that even its author wasn't entirely sure if it had been a coin-op when Emu Zone asked him, but some quality investigative journalism revealed that the 8-bit computers were the only place this sequel saw the light of day. It's a spiffing little game, adding relatively little to the original game but doing enough to significantly tweak the balance and render it a much more exciting and well-balanced slice of fun. Most notable, though, is the superb music featured on the Speccy 128 version of the game, a tremendously catchy techno toe-tapper that drives you on to complete levels just to hear the level-completed jingle. Maybe if games like this had made it to arcades, they wouldn't be dying now.

THE SOUND OF SUCCESS

FROM NORWEGIAN SPEED METAL TO HILLBILLY PICKIN', PC GAME MUSIC HAS LONG BEEN INCREASING COMPOSERS' CULTURAL CLOUT, REPORTS *PAVEL BARTER*

SPECIAL REPORT

FOR YEARS, GAME music wallowed in an artistic gutter. Lovers of 'real' music chortled at the staccato beeps and dogfart drones emanating from titles like *Jet Set Willy* and *Pac-Man*, while gamers strove to convince cynics that the audible mayhem was instrumental in creating a joyous interactive experience. But the tables are turning, and in 2003 game music is banging on high art's door like the prodigal son who has returned a prince.

As part of a recent games convention in Leipzig, Germany, the Czech National Symphony Orchestra played compositions by veteran game composers such as Yuzo Koshiro (*Streets Of Rage*) and Chris Hülsbeck (*Star Wars: Rogue Leader* series). Music from *Final Fantasy*, *Mafia*, *Medal Of Honor* and *Splinter Cell* were also performed, proving that black suits and PC games make a dashing match. Of course, game soundtracks haven't sold out to Mozart's orchestral minions just yet. Chris Vrenna, of industrial band Nine Inch Nails, wrote the music for *American McGee's Alice* and the band's singer Trent Reznor is busy putting the final nightmarish screeches on id's *Doom III*. Reznor is rumoured to be designing the sound engine with the developers, as well as providing sound effects and the score. "I see the process of game music becoming more professional with each year," says composer Chris Hülsbeck, who worked on dozens of '80s Commodore 64 titles, alongside more recent PC compositions like *Star Wars Battle For Naboo* and *Extreme Assault*. "We may have lost some of the cute playfulness from the very early times, but game sound is much more mature and tailored to the action on-screen nowadays."

Not that the early pioneers of game music were keyboard-bashing buffoons who couldn't find a note in a bank. Far from it. Early arcade classics like *Xevious* relied on digital ditties that remain mind-bogglingly addictive to this day. Rob Hubbard (composer behind C64 classics such as *Ace II* and *Commando*, famed for writing music in ones and zeroes on pub napkins), says that the "limited polyphony of the sound hardware in consoles and home computers forced you to write in a certain style". With the introduction of the 16-bit and 32-bit eras, and the expanded storage capabilities of CD-ROM, videogame music moved into the realm of true composition. But as technology advanced, and consoles went the way of the dodo, a surprising number of composers were left twiddling their thumbs. Allister Brimble, composer behind the *RollerCoaster Tycoon* series, says game music has changed.

***Doom III* – one of a new generation of PC games with a totally original comtemporary soundtrack.**

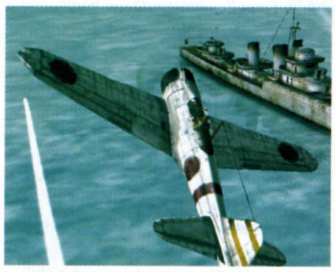
THE HILLS ARE ALIVE...

"On the Amiga you could only play four notes at once. These days most game music is CD-based so there are no limitations," says Allister. These days, the skills required for creating soundtracks are radically different – which is perhaps why fantastic composers from the '90s like Bobby Prince (*Doom*, *Duke Nukem 3D*, *Wolfenstein 3D*) have fallen off the radar. Some, like David Whittaker (from *Xenon 2: Megablast* in 1989 to *Tiger Woods PGA Tour* in 2001), have survived videogame's technological leaps. Others such as Tommy Tallarico (*Unreal 2*, *Spider-Man*, *Messiah*) flourish because of their ability to adapt from one game to the next.

Game composers are increasingly forced to meet the standards of their Hollywood counterparts because bashing out a melody on a Casio keyboard no longer cuts the mustard. For example, over 110 musicians from the Budapest Symphony Orchestra performed Jesper Kyd's soundtrack for *Hitman 2*. However, for EA's upcoming *Freedom Fighters* title, Jesper is being even more inventive. "I decided to mix a modern and electronic sounding score with the emotion of the Hungarian

SCORE DRAWS

***PC ZONE*'S PICK OF THE BEST NEW GAME SOUNDTRACKS**



SECRET WEAPONS OVER NORMANDY

With a 76-piece orchestra plus a 50-person choir, this WWII flight sim promises to make the *Where Eagles Dare* score sound like Pingu.

REPUBLIC: THE REVOLUTION

Australian soprano Miranda Keys, and the conductor behind film scores like *Sleepy Hollow*, will provide the haunting melodies of espionage and intrigue.

DOOM III

With the combination of id's totally demented graphics and Mr Trent Reznor's satanic soundtrack, this game should definitely come with its own couch to hide behind.

GTA: VICE CITY

Guilty of bringing woeful artists like Cutting Crew and Mr Mister back into the mainstream. *Vice City*'s soundtrack is so bad, you've just got to love it.

Radio Choir singing in Russian. The choir symbolizes the emotional strain of war and the electronics give the score a raw, suspenseful, gritty and intense feeling of a battlefield. *Freedom* was written using the creative feeling of games, but it also uses heavy elements of film scoring techniques."

Chris Hülsbeck.

PHAT BEATS

Some contemporary composers switch painlessly between movie and game work. Bill Brown, for example, has penned powerful orchestral scores for films like *Any Given Sunday* and *Ali*, as well as PC titles like *Quake III Arena* and Tom Clancy's *Rainbow Six* series. Andy Brick recorded his compositions for *Sim City: Rush Hour* with The Moravian Philharmonic in Bratislava and was subsequently selected as conductor of the Symphonic Games Music Concert in Germany. He describes the event, and the live translation of game music, as "young, hip, and cutting edge. In a world where major metropolitan orchestras are dying quickly this was an important event. As a genre we are perfectly poised to capture the musical imagination of an orchestral audience that's been terribly neglected".

Fatman, aka George Sanger.

Does the increasing implementation of licensed music in popular titles like *GTA: Vice City* threaten the livelihoods of game composers? The Fatman, aka George Sanger, is one of the industry's infamous composers, having established his Team Fat collective in the '80s and created soundtracks for PC games like *Wing Commander I* and *II* and *The 7th Guest*. "In many games, licensed music acts as a tip-off to the player that the development team is neither confident, competent, brave or dedicated enough to take the sonic opportunity they have. I mean, when you put out a game, you can change the world of audio in a beautiful way. Why would you pass up that opportunity?" *Hitman*'s Jesper Kyd sees the future as allowing room for both licensed music and original scores. "If you have a film about World War II, only using licensed music doesn't really make any sense, since a composer can write music that gives the film the emotional impact it needs. Racing and sport games don't usually have any story, so using licensed music makes sense. To me, it all depends on how important the story is to the game. Since games are becoming more cinematic, the need for soundtrack composers will remain."

Jesper Kyd.

"These days most game music is CD-based so there are no limitations"

ALLISTER BRIMBLE
COMPOSER ON THE *ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON* SERIES

Wannabe game composers have a tough mountain to climb. While the cash for big projects will keep you happily pampered, songsmiths must be as informed about music as programmers are about games. An agent might be a good bet. Four Bars Intertainment represents composers like Inon Zu (*Icewind Dale II*, *Baldur's Gate*) and Clint Bajakian (*TIE Fighter*, *Escape From Monkey Island*). "We create the spin, the sizzle, the smoke and get our clients out there, so that people hear of them, know of them and their accomplishments," says Four Bars CEO Bob Rice. With original game soundtracks now competing in the US Grammy Awards, the songs behind our favourite PC titles are much more respected than in the days of beeps and drones. Just don't expect the *Half-Life 2* theme tune to be knocking Kylie Minogue off the No 1 spot just yet. PM

CALL OF DUTY

War might be ugly, but the soundtrack of this upcoming first-person shooter from Activision, recorded by a 75-piece Hollywood symphony, should prove to be a delight.

"The Gollops have always done one thing. Made strategy games that have the pace of Defender and the brains of Chomsky...Brilliant...Deeply Addictive...Pay, play and slay."

PC Gamer 'Game of Distinction'

86%

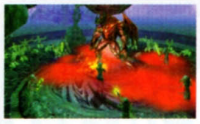
The Best

computer and video games GOLDEN JOYSTICK™ AWARDS 2003

IN ASSOCIATION WITH MTV

The search for the hottest games of 2003 begins this month as the polls open for Dennis Publishing's Golden Joystick Awards. Last year, Jonathan Ross presented gongs, including PC Game Of The Year to *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault*, after more than 30,000 votes online. The first round of voting is now open. Pick your winner at www.goldenjoystick.com before the big bash in London on November 28.

NEVERWINTER FOREVER



Following the release of *Shadows Of Undrentide* (reviewed last issue), BioWare has announced another *Neverwinter Nights* expansion pack. Due out in November, *Hordes Of The Underdark* will feature a new single-player campaign with Epic Level gameplay, allowing your *D&D*-inspired characters to advance to level 40 for the first time.

SPAGHETTI JUNCTION

A new Italian-developed title is hoping to take the chequered flag in the race to be the best Formula One PC game. Developed by Alassoft and Milestone, *Grand Prix Simulator* offers F1 fans the chance to design their own cars and tracks. Although the game hasn't an official F1 licence, the developers believe it'll be the most accurate racing sim yet, in both single and multi-player modes.

NOW THAT'S MAGIC

This month is heaven for role-playing fans, after the announcement of *The Temple Of Elemental Evil* (page 10), *Neverwinter Nights: Hordes Of The Underdark* (above) and now *Magic: The Gathering – Battlegrounds*. Based on the *Wizards Of The Coast* trading card game, *Battlegrounds* features a single-player Quest Mode for your duelist, who can create killer creatures, defence spells and much more. For more info, visit www.mtggame.com.

BULLET-TIME

NEW *MAX PAYNE 2* SCREENS RELEASED AS WEBSITE GOES LIVE

ROCKSTAR HAS unveiled its brand new *Max Payne 2: The Fall Of Max Payne* website and released a new batch of scorching screenshots. As revealed in our world exclusive preview in issue 131, *Max Payne 2* will expand on the original third-person action-adventure, packing in a dark, tragic and violent plot coupled with immense almost photo-realistic visuals.

However, as in the first game, it's the Bullet-Time device that steals the show, with the latest incarnation possessing ultra-smooth slo-mo bullet-spraying effects coupled with brutal Havok 2 ragdoll physics for all the characters on-screen. Developer Remedy is also making sure that the annoying clipping from Max Payne has been eliminated, so bodies will now slump solidly against walls and fall realistically down stairs and off ledges. Check out the website below for updates and an opportunity to sign up for the *Max Payne 2: The Fall Of Max Payne* newsletter.

- **Publisher:** Rockstar Games
- **Developer:** Remedy
- **ETA:** Q4 2003
- **Website:** www.rockstargames.com

Max "Chuckles" Payne relaxes in his office.

"Keep the noise down, I'm trying to sleep!"

Driven By You

GET YOUR GO-FASTER STRIPES WITH *FORD RACING 2*

We're already looking forward to Volvo Racing Challenge...

***Ford Racing 2*. Where's the Capri?**

DEVELOPER RAZORWORKS has almost completed work on its arcade driving experience *Ford Racing 2*. While it doesn't have the Monte Carlo-style glamour of a Porsche or Lotus-branded title, *Ford Racing 2* will include 32 cars from the American company's back catalogue, including the 1955 Thunderbird, the Focus Rally car, the Gran Torino (Starsky and Hutch's favourite) and the SVT Lightning.

A thrash of early preview code revealed a competent – if slightly generic – racing game, with six different kinds of terrain such as Lost World (pyramids and temples), City Limits (San Francisco clone) and Big Country (Grand Canyon) containing 16 varied circuits. The game is zippy enough, and has plenty of jump-in-and-play options, including time trials, elimination competitions and head-to-head duels – although only split-screen multiplayer is included. However, with a mooted pricepoint of around £15, *Ford Racing 2* looks set to become one of the best racers on the market. We'll have a full review next issue.

- **Publisher:** Empire Interactive
- **Developer:** Razorworks
- **ETA:** October 31
- **Website:** www.empireinteractive.co.uk

Daylight Robbery

WE PLAY *ROBIN HOOD: DEFENDER OF THE CROWN*

GAMERS MORE familiar with *Pac-Man* than *Pokémon* may remember an eight-bit 1986 title called *Defender Of The Crown*, an 'interactive movie' set in Robin-Hood England that was very much the *Medieval: Total War* of its day. Well, after the company's phoenix-like rise from the ashes in 2000, developer Cinemaware has now announced the sequel, to be published by Capcom later this year.

Robin Hood with a not-so-merry man.

Robin Hood: Defender Of The Crown retains the original's *Risk*-style turn-based strategy, but expands on the units and weapons available to you in your attempt to conquer 38 territories and defeat evil Prince John. An orchestral soundtrack now replaces the polyphonic blurps of the Amiga version, and the storyline will include cut-scenes featuring Will Scarlet, Maid Marian and other well-known characters from the Robin Hood tales.

However, the other major element of *Defender Of The Crown* was the mini-games, and the sequel has five to enjoy, such as beat 'em up-style sword fighting, siege warfare for flinging rocks at enemy castle walls and a spot of ye olde jousting. A play of the preview code revealed much of what was appealing about the old *Defender Of The Crown*, although the new 3D graphics don't have quite as much impact in this age of bump-mapping and pixel-shading. We'll hopefully have a full review next month.

- **Publisher:** Capcom
- **Developer:** Cinemaware
- **ETA:** October
- **Website:** www.cinemaware.com

HACKER'S HANDHELD

GAMEPARK'S POCKET EMULATION MARVEL

"HANG ON A minute, *PC ZONE*," you may rightly be thinking, "why on earth are you featuring a handheld games console in a PC magazine?" Well, it's simple – the GP32 is based on PC architecture and happens to be the most miraculous little gaming gizmo on the planet. Developed by South Korean company GamePark, the GP32 boasts a powerful 32-bit 133MHz processor, 16-bit stereo sound and a large 3.5" TFT LCD screen supporting 320x240 pixels. However, what makes the GP32 so special is that it can perform fantastic emulations of most past-and-present game consoles such as the Sega MegaDrive, Atari ST and ZX Spectrum, as well as being able to run early PC titles, including *Doom* and the LucasArts SCUMM adventures. All you have to do is hook up the GP32 up to a PC via a USB link to download and store MP3s, MPEG-4 movies and games on cheap-and-available Smart Media Cards.

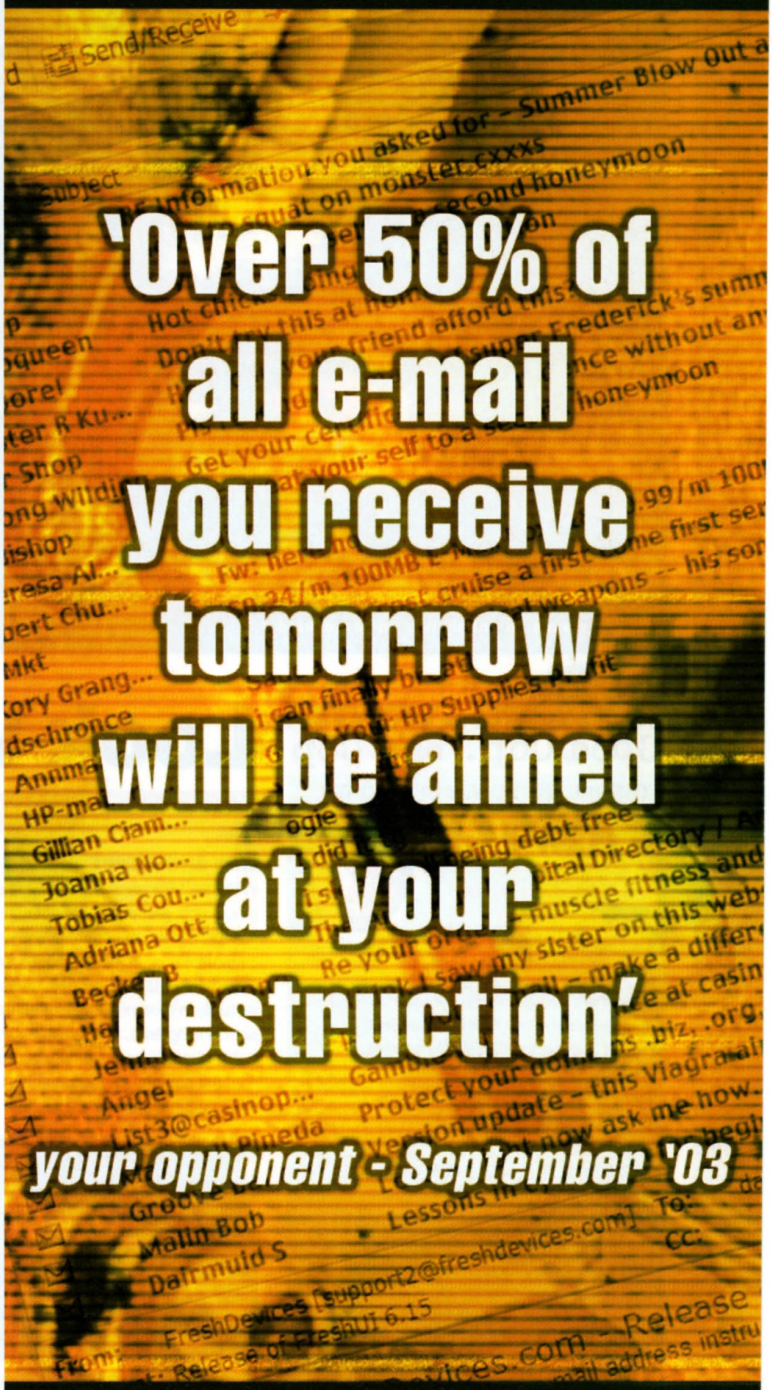
The GP32 can do emulations of most past and present game systems.

You can imagine how good it'll be to play *Manic Miner*, *Elite* and *Sam & Max Hit The Road* on the move, as well as hearing your favourite tunes and watching movie clips after downloading the affordable GP Cinema program. The only drawbacks are the slightly faffy registration process, a confusing interface, and the fact that acquiring ROMs for old console games is in most cases, when you don't own the original titles, highly illegal. However, if you want to find out more for yourself, head over to the excellent fansite www.gp32emu.com. You can buy a GP32 (including a new backlit version) from www.gbax.com, with prices starting at £99.99. For the latest PC emulation news, turn to page 15.

"An addictive game that will have you pining for your next e-mail."

Computer Gaming World 'Editors' Choice' award

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD EDITORS' CHOICE **4.5/5**



The Best

VIOLENCE IS GOLDEN

PAINKILLER IS HERE TO GIVE THE UNDEAD A SERIOUS HEADACHE

POLISH CODER People Can Fly has just released new images and info from its forthcoming limb-splattering FPS *Painkiller*. You play through the game as Daniel Garner, an everyman who was killed in a car accident and now has to get to his wife in heaven by fighting his way through a monster-filled Purgutory.

Painkiller has 24 single-player levels with five weapons that can be used together to create lethal combos, so you can fire an enemy into the air with a rocket launcher, then riddle them with chaingun bullets to do four times the damage. There'll also be various multiplayer modes, including The Light Bearer, where the Quad Damage power-up doesn't wear off until you die. All the frenetic action is wrapped up in the gorgeous-looking PAIN engine, which also uses the latest Havok 2.0 physics engine for ragdoll bodies that explode through the air, wooden doors which splinter apart and stone blocks that topple on to enemies. Roll on 2004...

- **Publisher:** DreamCatcher
- **Developer:** People Can Fly
- **ETA:** March 2004
- **Website:** www.painkillergame.com

Garner wages an unholy war on demonkind.

Watch those gibs fly in this no-nonsense 3D blaster.

Good Cop. Bad Cop

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

GOOD COP

Best discs ever! World exclusive playable demos of *Jedi Knight: Jedi Academy*, *Dredd vs Death* and more!

Konami's *Pro Evolution Soccer 3* – the best arcade-style footie game in the world comes to PC this November.

QuakeCon. Hands-on with *Doom 3* multiplayer. Simply awesome – check out our full report on page 28.

***Half-Life 2*. Enjoying a chin-wag with Valve's Doug Lombardi and grabbing new exclusive screenshots. Go to page 36 now!**

BAD COP

The ECTS UK games trade show falling right on our deadline. Working the whole weekend – it's grrrrrrrrreat.

"Well, what have got here..." Anthony's brush with two aggressive redneck cowboys at a Dallas rodeo on the *Doom 3* trip.

Good Cop: **Bodie.** Bad Cop: **Doyle.** From *The Professionals* – suggested by Simon Merriman, Preston. Send in your ideas for next month's Good Cop and Bad Cop to win a *PC ZONE* goodie bag!

Look Who's Stalking

HOT SHOTS FROM RADIOACTIVE BLASTER *STALKER: OBLIVION LOST*

WHY SHOULDN'T you wear Y-fronts in Russia? Because Chernobyl fallout (your knob will fall out). Despite spawning that pitiful joke, the scene of the world's worst nuclear accident is no laughing matter. The 1986 Chernobyl disaster (actually in Ukraine) devastated the surrounding area, and to this day there is a 30 square kilometre exclusion zone.

That zone has been breached by Kiev-based developer GSC, who put handkerchiefs on their heads (seriously) to take photographs for use as textures in *Stalker: Oblivion Lost*. Based in and around the deserted nuclear power station, the game sees you marauding for artefacts in competition with other Stalkers.

Countless dangers await, and as GSC's Oleg Yavorsky said recently when we caught up with him in London, "The game is about physical and psychological dangers. It's about mutants. It's about radioactivity." *Stalker: Oblivion Lost* could be one of the most original games of next year, and *PC ZONE* has been invited to Chernobyl to take a closer look. Not without a lead cup.

- **Publisher:** THQ
- **Developer:** GSC Game World
- **ETA:** 2004
- **Website:** www.stalker-game.com

Plenty of scope for rat-killing.

First-person action plays a big part.

Welcome to *Wish You Were Here...*

Cockney Rebel

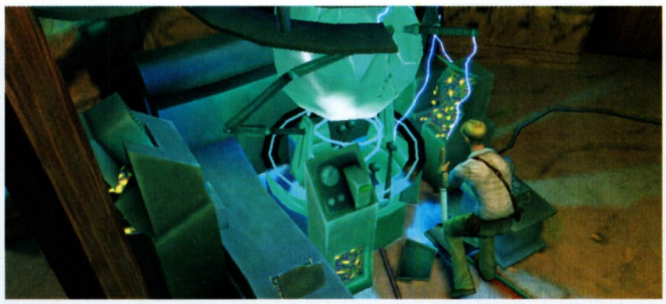
NEW SCREENSHOTS FROM PLANET MOON STUDIO'S BIZARRE *ARMED & DANGEROUS*

***A&D* is from the same minds as *MDK* and *Giants*.**

WE PREVIEWED *Armed & Dangerous* back in issue 130, but having been given an awesome playtest of Planet Moon Studio's forthcoming shooter we felt compelled to convey its quality and goodness once more.

Your character of Cockney criminal Roman has weapons that fire giant sharks and Topsy-Turvy bombs that temporarily reverse gravity, throwing baddies into the air then bringing them back down to earth with a splat moments later. You'll also hook up with bizarre sidekicks – that include the temperamental Scottish Mole Miner – for hilarious tongue-in-cheek banter that Planet Moon wants to be reminiscent of the humour in *Sam & Max Hit The Road*. We played several of *A&D*'s vast levels, one Serious Sam-style where we defended a base against an army of bizarre grunts from a fixed gun position, and another where we flew around on a jetpack, crushing the destructible environments and laughing insanely. It's set to be a winner: colourful, violent and quite, quite mad. More on *Armed & Dangerous* very soon.

- **Publisher:** Activision
- **Developer:** Planet Moon/LucasArts
- **ETA:** Q4 2003
- **Website:** www.lucasarts.com



The new adventure is completely 3D – no more point 'n' click.

TEMPLES OF DOOM

BROKEN SWORD: THE SLEEPING DRAGON

REVOLUTION'S Charles Cecil recently popped into the *PC ZONE* office to show off the latest build of his next-gen adventure, *Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon*. We had a play of new levels set in the Congo, using the direction keys to move lead character George Stobbart around the beautifully-realised 3D environments.

A new context-sensitive interface helps you look, use objects and talk to people, as well as call on your beautiful, French sidekick Nico Collard to help you solve the puzzles. One such example is in an ancient Mayan temple, where George has to make his way across a grid of stone tiles with strange symbols, while Nico has to stand on certain stone triggers to light up a safe path for him – make two mistakes and the ceiling crashes down and crushes George to death.

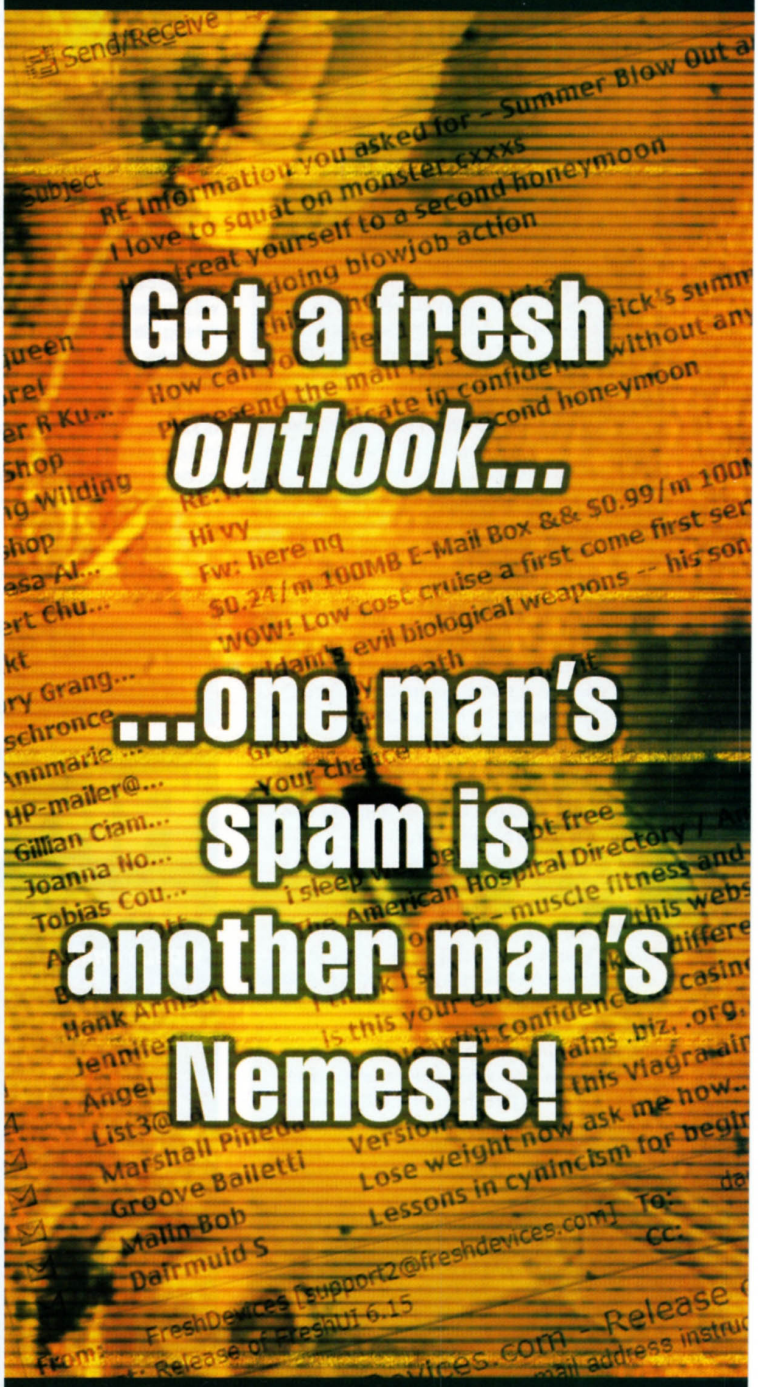
"We're trying to get away from the idea of being able to use every object with other objects to solve puzzles, because that's the way you solved point 'n' click adventures when you got stuck," says Cecil. "The puzzles used to be too obscure. I don't think you can get away with frustrating the player any more – you want to encourage them." Full preview next issue.

- **Publisher:** THQ
- **Developer:** Revolution
- **ETA:** November
- **Website:** www.revgames.com

"What was already an excellent game could be a contender for online game of the year. It's the game e-mail was made for."

PC Zone

87%



The Best

THE MAN WHO KNOWS

ROBBIE WILLIAMS confessed to being chronically addicted to ***Championship Manager 4***, following a mammoth three-day bender. Speaking on **Radio One** to a palpably disinterested **Sara Cox**, the pint-sized warbler admitted: "I had to physically take the CD out of the computer and break it. I really did have to snap it so I could rejoin the real world, because my social skills had gone. I started speaking to people and wondering how their physical level was doing, how their skill level was doing, whether their morale was high or not and what their condition was. And I knew that was bad. It was like when *Tetris* came out and I just saw people as blocks."

Williams also revealed the **harrowing** story of how attempts to bring experienced players to his **Cardiff City** squad were continually rebuffed. "Zola – the board wouldn't allow me to buy him. They wouldn't let me buy Teddy Sheringham as well."

The former **fat dancer** from **Take That** even resorted to **cheating** after eventually being **sacked** for incompetence. Williams wept: "I got upset, so I rebooted the computer as Cardiff's manager again. I went to the Internet and did a bit of cheating. I went to '*Championship Manager 4* best players' and got loads of people from Honduras that are great." The tit.

Meanwhile, a **sick** new war game is set to feature graphic footage of the **Iraq** conflict captured by **US** troops. Developer **Kuma Reality Games** is currently working on ***Kuma: War***, which is due to be released episodically, providing they can find a publisher prepared to exploit human **misery** for financial gain. **Keith Halper**, co-founder and CEO of Kuma Reality Games, boasted: "We have developed an innovative new entertainment genre, combining the best of reality television with high-quality action gaming."

The game will include licensed frontline footage from such media giants as **ITN**, **Reuters** and **Associated Press**, giving an in-depth insight into the war that claimed the lives of **5,000** people, but which is thankfully now over, with **Americans** and **Iraqis** living together in perfect harmony. An expert said: "It's a f***ing disgrace."

"I had to physically take the CD out of the computer and break it. I really did have to snap it so I could rejoin the real world"

FEEL THE FIST

EXCLUSIVE! FIRST SCREENSHOTS FROM *VIETCONG: FIST ALPHA*

CZECH DEVELOPER

Pterodon has emerged from the jungle with new images from its expansion pack to its *Vietcong* first-person shooter. *Fist Alpha* is named after a squad of Special Forces and will offer a new seven-mission, single-player campaign telling the story of the building of the US base at Nui Pek.

Pterodon has apparently been listening to fans of the original *Vietcong* for suggestions, so players will now get to grapple with six additional weapons, such as claymore mines, and will experience more hand-to-hand fighting with the inclusion of machetes and bayonets for close-up kills.

Vietcong: Fist Alpha comes with eight new larger multiplayer maps, including a comprehensive co-op mode for online and LAN team-based assaults. A single-player level editor will be released online after the expansion pack is launched in October. Read our verdict in next month's issue.

- **Publisher:** Gathering
- **Developer:** Pterodon
- **ETA:** October
- **Website:** www.gathering.com

You can almost smell the napalm.

Right on cue

IT'S COINS ON THE TABLE FOR *WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP POOL 2004*

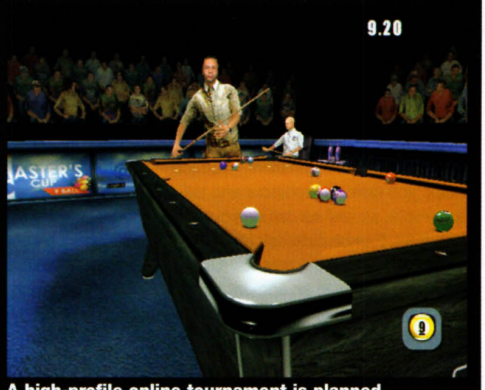
WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP *Pool 2004*, the new pot 'em up from Blade Interactive, is clearly a labour of love. With a husband and wife at the core, an artist with aspirations of being a pro pool player and a Ph.D physicist on AI duties, there's more than your average amount of heart and soul being poured into the game. "We've got the roundest, shiniest balls in the business," grins Blade's Debbie Jones. "And the baize feels like it's got a real nap to it."

Visually, the game is much more satisfying than the team's previous title, *World Championship Snooker 2003* (reviewed issue 131, 78%), while the amount of commentary has increased tenfold.

Like Snooker, *Pool 2004* will feature all the top players of the sport, with true-to-life playing styles, loads of different play modes, trick-shots and fun games. The baize-top action starts this November.

- **Publisher:** Jaleco
- **Developer:** Blade Interactive
- **ETA:** November
- **Website:** www.bladeinteractive.com

Features 12 play modes, including American 9-Ball.



A high-profile online tournament is planned.

Arc Royal

VIVE LA FRANCE! *WARS & WARRIORS: JOAN OF ARC* HURTS THE ENGLISH

AFTER THE platform-leaping of Lara Croft and the vampiric Nazi-killing of BloodRayne comes another action heroine in the form of medieval revolutionary Joan of Arc. Set in medieval France, *Wars & Warriors: Joan Of Arc* is a mixture of real-time strategy, role-playing and third-person hack 'n' slash in environments ranging from forests and mountains to heavily-fortified castles and army compounds.

As Ms Arc you have to slay your way through varied campaigns, acquiring new weapons and fight combos, teaming up with valuable allies and killing as many English troops as physically possible. We've had a play of an early demo version of *Joan Of Arc* and although it's a decent stab at the action-adventure genre, we've yet to be convinced that the sword-wielding French lass can cut it amongst the big boys – let's just hope she shaves her pits…

- **Publisher:** TBC
- **Developer:** Enlight
- **ETA:** Q1 2004
- **Website:** www.enlight.com/joa

Joan can use catapults and other war machinery during sieges.

Take a break from all the mindless slaughter to admire the views. Lovely.

NOVELTY ISLAND

LEGENDS OF ARANNA IS *DUNGEON SIEGE*'S NEW TROPICAL SETTING

DUNGEON SIEGE is to receive an expansion pack this November entitled *Legends Of Aranna*. Developed by Gas Powered Games and Mad Doc Software (previously responsible for the aborted single-player version of *Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory*), the expansion moves to the tropical island of Aranna, where an ancient mystery has remained unsolved for thousands of years.

Legends of Aranna features three main races: the Utraeans, mages who once ruled the island mercilessly; the Hassat, cat-like people who are suspicious of outsiders; and the Zaurask, an aggressive race magically created from lizards.

Each features heavily in the adventure that spans nine areas, ranging from a dense jungle to active volcanoes, and packs in nasty new adversaries, such as Doppelgangers.

Gas Powered Games and Mad Doc are promising better AI for party members, more than 70 new spells – including transformations that can turn mages into huge lava monsters and other creatures – plus new treasures to collect. You'll also be able to take any new characters you befriend into the old Kingdom of Ehb and the Utraean Peninsula in multiplayer games. *Legends of Aranna* will be released in November, priced at £19.99.

- **Publisher:** Microsoft
- **Developer:** Mad Doc/ Gas Powered Games
- **ETA:** November
- **Website:** www.dungeonsiege.com

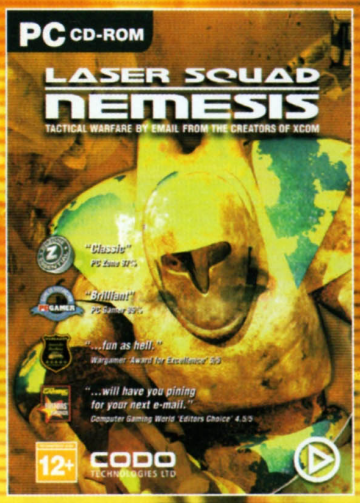
New monsters include Clockwork Beasts. And no, it's not a wind-up.

"Laser Squad Nemesis is an excellent, addictive game, bar none. It's easy to use and fun as hell. The fun doesn't end with the e-mail turns, however. It is constantly evolving, with new features, races, and maps (made with Laser Squad Nemesis's included map editor) being added all the time. The third race, Spawn, was recently added within the last six months for example, while a fourth race, The Greys, are expected soon."

Wargamer 'Award for Excellence'

5/5

Laser Squad Nemesis!



Experience Gameplay for a change…

…as battle commences at a store near you 5.9.03

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The Best

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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

ChartTrack TOP 10

ELSPA

Yes, the little computer people are still bloody well there and consequently *ZONE*'s plans for bloody revolution continue apace. Will the charts ever be rid of this menace? Can anyone stand against the forces of the Sims? Does anyone care any more?

		TITLE	PUBLISHER	SCORE
1	–	**THE SIMS: SUPERSTAR**	EA	59%
2	▲	THE SIMS: DELUXE EDITION	EA	N/A
3	▲	CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 4	EIDOS	90%
4	NEW	MS FLIGHT SIM 2004	MICROSOFT	89%
5	▲	THE SIMS: UNLEASHED	EA	78%
6	▲	GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY	ROCKSTAR	95%
7	▼	WARCRAFT III: THE FROZEN THRONE	VU GAMES	86%
8	NEW	PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN	UBI SOFT	70%
9	RE	THE SIMS: ON HOLIDAY	EA	62%
10	–	WARCRAFT III: REIGN OF CHAOS	VU GAMES	85%

The most comprehensive *Flight Sim* just got comprehensive-er. With added historic features, revamped graphics and oodles of nerdiness, Microsoft bag this month's highest new entry with its latest airbound opus.

Pirates are cool again. It's official. The attachment to the swashbuckling movie may be tenuous, with the God-like Johnny Depp unfortunately absent, but *Pirates Of The Caribbean* still has the ability to shiver the timbers of many a PC owner.

An interesting re-entry for *The Sims: On Holiday*. Clearly feeling guilty about going for sunny holidays in the Balearics while their Sims have to stay at home, the British public are making sure that their virtual friends can go too! Cute.

YOUR SHOUT

Have your say at www.pczone.co.uk

Look at the state of this chart! Games developers should have a rocket up their arse instead of their finger! Where's all the good games, man? The summer drought continues...
TheSpring75

I would say something about how great next month's chart line-up will be, but I'm not sure it will be. No *Half-Life 2*? No big releases? Erk!
VoodooGod

You're not helping my blood pressure posting this drivel every month! If you can't post a nice chart that we can all get behind, just don't bother.
PeachFUZZ

Virgin megastores TOP 10

1. TOMB RAIDER: THE ANGEL OF DARKNESS	EIDOS
2. WARCRAFT III: REIGN OF CHAOS	VU GAMES
3. THE SIMS: SUPERSTAR	EA
4. THE SIMS: DELUXE EDITION	EA
5. ENTER THE MATRIX	ATARI
6. MS FLIGHT SIM 2004	MICROSOFT
7. CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 4	EIDOS
8. COLIN MCRAE RALLY 3	CODEMASTERS
9. STAR TREK: ELITE FORCE 2	ACTIVISION
10. RISE OF NATIONS	MICROSOFT

COMPETITION

Virgin megastores

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. All you have to do to enter the draw is answer the following:

QUESTION: Which real-life porn starlet is credited with a voice-acting role in *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City*?

Answers on a postcard to: *PC ZONE* Chart Compo Issue 134, Dennis Publishing, 30 Cleveland Street, London, W1T 4JD. Closing date: October 16, 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
BROKEN SWORD: THE SLEEPING DRAGON	THQ
CALL OF DUTY	ACTIVISION
CAPTAIN SCARLET: RETALIATION	BATFISH
CHROME	GATHERING
EMPIRES: DAWN OF THE MODERN WORLD	ACTIVISION
HALO: COMBAT EVOLVED	MICROSOFT
JURASSIC WARS: EVOLUTION	4AM
KOREA: FORGOTTEN CONFLICT	CENEGA
LIONHEART: LEGEND OF THE CRUSADER	AVALON
LOCK ON	UBI SOFT
MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE	ROCKSTAR GAMES
MEDAL OF HONOR: ALLIED ASSAULT – BREAKTHROUGH	EA
RAILROAD TYCOON III	GATHERING
SACRED	ASCARON
SILENT HILL 3	KONAMI
SINBAD: LEGEND OF THE SEVEN SEAS	ATARI
SPACE COLONY	GATHERING
THE TEMPLE OF ELEMENTAL EVIL	ATARI
TOM CLANCY'S RAINBOW SIX 3: ATHENA SWORD	UBI SOFT
WHITE DAY	4AM
X2: THE THREAT	KOCH MEDIA
XIII	UBI SOFT

NOVEMBER	
BEYOND GOOD & EVIL	UBI SOFT
CIVILIZATION: CONQUESTS	ATARI
CONTRACT JACK	VU GAMES
FAR CRY	UBI SOFT
FIFA 2004	EA
FIRE WARRIOR	THQ
HIDDEN & DANGEROUS 2	GATHERING
HORIZONS: EMPIRE OF ISTARIA	ATARI
KNIGHTS OF THE TEMPLE	TDK
LORDS OF EVERQUEST	UBI SOFT
LOTR: THE RETURN OF THE KING	EA
MACE GRIFFIN BOUNTY HUNTER	VU GAMES
MAGIC THE GATHERING: BATTLEGROUNDS	ATARI
POP IDOL	CODEMASTERS
PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME	UBI SOFT
PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 3	KONAMI
SECRET WEAPONS OVER NORMANDY	ACTIVISION
SÖLDNER – SECRET WARS	BIG BEN
STAR WARS: KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC	ACTIVISION
TERMINATOR 3: WAR OF THE MACHINES	ATARI
TOTAL CLUB MANAGER 2004	EA
UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004	ATARI
URU: AGES BEYOND MYST	UBI SOFT
WARLORDS IV: HEROES OF ETHERIA	UBI SOFT
WORMS 3D	SEGA

DECEMBER	
AIRBORNE TROOPS	PLAYLOGIC
APOCALYPTICA	KONAMI
ARMED AND DANGEROUS	ACTIVISION
DEUS EX: INVISIBLE WAR	EIDOS
EVERQUEST 2	UBI SOFT
GROUND CONTROL 2: OPERATION EXODUS	VU
HARRY POTTER: QUIDDITCH WORLD CUP	EA
LEGACY OF KAIN: DEFIANCE	EIDOS
MORTYR 2	TBA
STAR WARS GALAXIES: AN EMPIRE DIVIDED	ACTIVISION
THE SIMS ONLINE	EA
WAR OF THE RING	VU

2004	
ADVENT RISING	VU GAMES
AGAINST ROME	BIG BEN
BATTLEFIELD VIETNAM	EA
BLACK9	VU GAMES
BLACK AND WHITE II	EA
BLOWOUT	VU GAMES
DELTA FORCE – BLACK HAWK DOWN: TEAM SABRE	NOVALOGIC
DOOM III	ACTIVISION
DRAGON EMPIRES	CODEMASTERS
DRAKE	VU GAMES
DRIVER 3	ATARI
JOINT OPERATIONS	NOVALOGIC
KNIGHTS OF HONOR	SUNFLOWERS
MEDAL OF HONOR: PACIFIC ASSAULT	EA
NEED FOR SPEED: UNDERGROUND	EA
PAINKILLER	DREAMCATCHER
ROME: TOTAL WAR	ACTIVISION
SAM & MAX : FREELANCE POLICE	ACTIVISION
SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TOMORROW	UBI SOFT
THE MATRIX ONLINE	UBI SOFT
THE MOVIES	ACTIVISION
THE SIMS 2	EA
TRIBES: VENGEANCE	VU GAMES
TRINITY	ACTIVISION
URBAN FREESTYLE SOCCER	ACCLAIM
VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE – BLOODLINES	ACTIVISION
WORLD OF WARCRAFT	VU GAMES

MISSING IN ACTION

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

FULL THROTTLE 2

A BIT OF sad news from the Lucas camp: the sequel to 1995's point and click gem *Full Throttle* is no more. LucasArts isn't saying much, but we imagine it simply wasn't going to be as good as we had hoped. Thankfully, there's still *Sam & Max: Freelance Police*.

- **Publisher:** Activision
- **Developer:** LucasArts
- **ETA:** KIA
- **Website:** www.lucasarts.com

PAINKILLER

THE BIZARRE, mental shooter that is *Painkiller* was looking mighty impressive when we saw it a few months back, but clearly it needs a fair bit of extra tinkering as its October release date has been pushed back. People Can Fly's physics-heavy violent FPS will now be unleashed next March.

- **Publisher:** Dreamcatcher
- **Developer:** People Can Fly
- **ETA:** March 2004
- **Website:** www.dreamcatchergames.com

JOINT OPERATIONS

***PC ZONE* HAS** been pawing at the *Joint Operations* trailer for a few weeks now, cooing at the huge potential of the soldier-stuffed FPS. However, we'll have to wait a bit longer now because the peeps at Novalogic are now set on an early 2004 launch.

- **Publisher:** NovaLogic
- **Developer:** NovaLogic
- **ETA:** Q1 2004
- **Website:** www.novalogic.com

US TOP 10

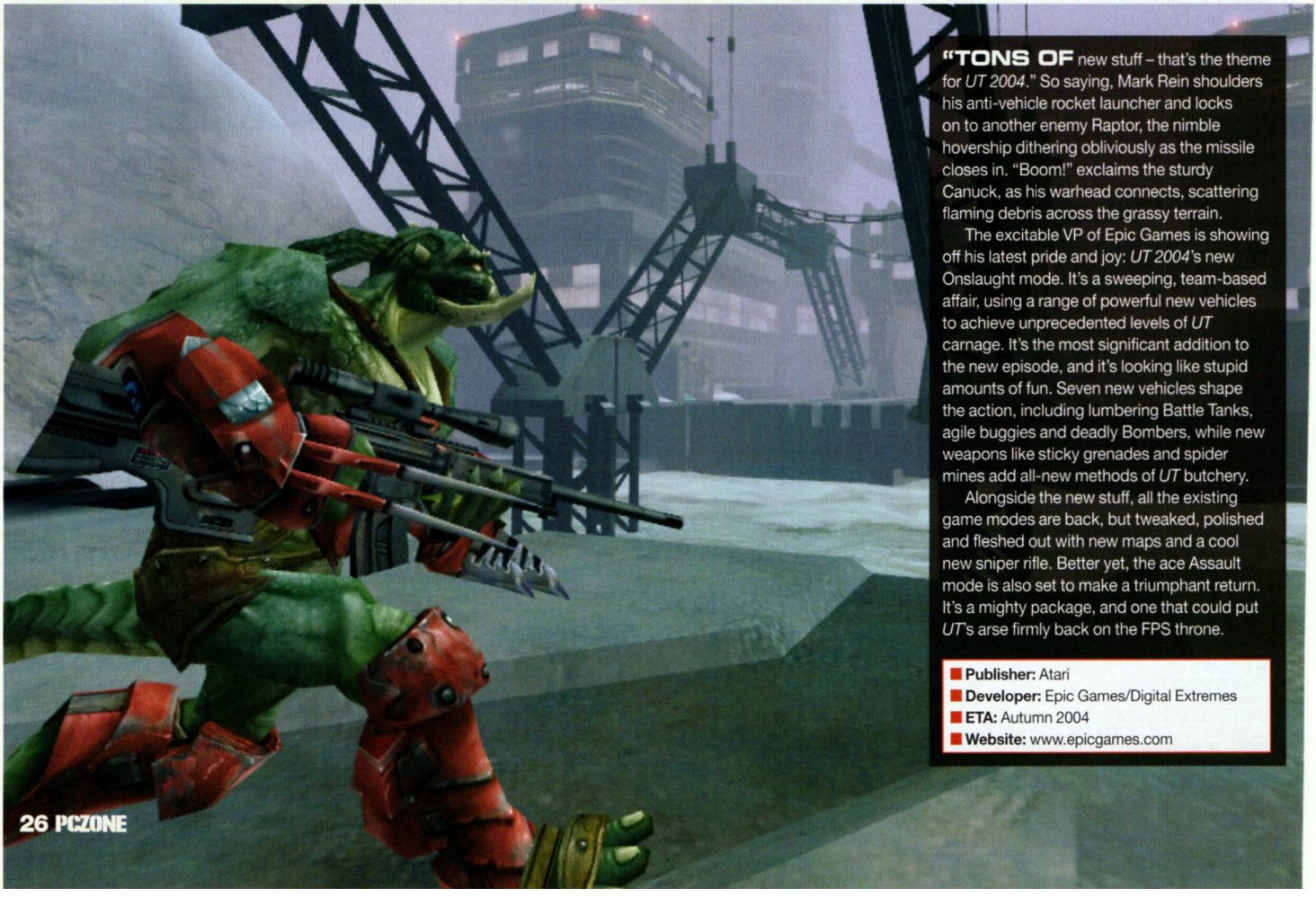
1	WARCRAFT III: THE FROZEN THRONE	VU GAMES
2	THE SIMS: SUPERSTAR	EA
3	THE SIMS: DELUXE EDITION	EA
4	NEVERWINTER NIGHTS: S.O.U	ATARI
5	STAR WARS GALAXIES: AN EMPIRE DIVIDED	SONY
6	WARCRAFT III: REIGN OF CHAOS	VU
7	FINDING NEMO	THQ
8	THE SIMS: UNLEASHED	EA
9	DIABLO 2	SIERRA
10	NEVERWINTER NIGHTS	ATARI

SOURCE NPD Techworld

HOT SHOTS

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004

Destruction has never looked so sweet in the forthcoming *UT* sequel

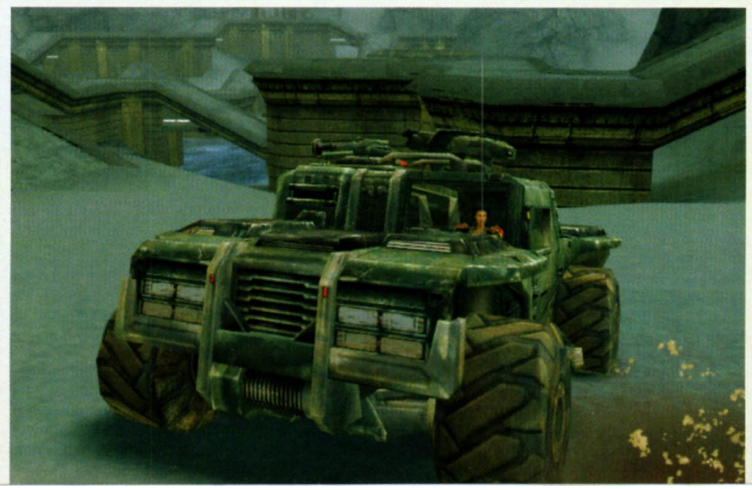


"TONS OF new stuff – that's the theme for *UT 2004*." So saying, Mark Rein shoulders his anti-vehicle rocket launcher and locks on to another enemy Raptor, the nimble hovership dithering obliviously as the missile closes in. "Boom!" exclaims the sturdy Canuck, as his warhead connects, scattering flaming debris across the grassy terrain.

The excitable VP of Epic Games is showing off his latest pride and joy: *UT 2004*'s new Onslaught mode. It's a sweeping, team-based affair, using a range of powerful new vehicles to achieve unprecedented levels of *UT* carnage. It's the most significant addition to the new episode, and it's looking like stupid amounts of fun. Seven new vehicles shape the action, including lumbering Battle Tanks, agile buggies and deadly Bombers, while new weapons like sticky grenades and spider mines add all-new methods of *UT* butchery.

Alongside the new stuff, all the existing game modes are back, but tweaked, polished and fleshed out with new maps and a cool new sniper rifle. Better yet, the ace Assault mode is also set to make a triumphant return. It's a mighty package, and one that could put *UT*'s arse firmly back on the FPS throne.

- **Publisher:** Atari
- **Developer:** Epic Games/Digital Extremes
- **ETA:** Autumn 2004
- **Website:** www.epicgames.com



DOOM 3
SPECIAL REPORT

LIVE FROM QuakeCon

PC ZONE DOES DALLAS

It's hot town, summer in the city, as *Anthony Holden* heads to Texas to play *Doom 3*, chat to id and avoid tha

DALLAS, TEXAS – the jewel of the Lone Star State. What a godforsaken hellhole. Never before have I been shipped to a bleaker, more soulless place to report on a games event (and yes, that includes Slough and Milton Keynes). Like an antiquated videogame, the city is made of single-polygon buildings, their mirrored veneers reflecting a sterile scene of deserted roads and too-neat hedges, the sidewalks occupied only by cops and the occasional blurry NPC – probably packing heat.

The sole distinguishing feature is the trademark Texan excess. Outside, temperatures routinely soar above 100°F, while the mercury inside ducks well below freezing in the ludicrously overzealous air-con. Shopping malls are like small cities. Steaks are the size of your average domestic pet. And everywhere is emblazoned the menacing motto of the USA's largest state: 'Don't Mess With Texas'.

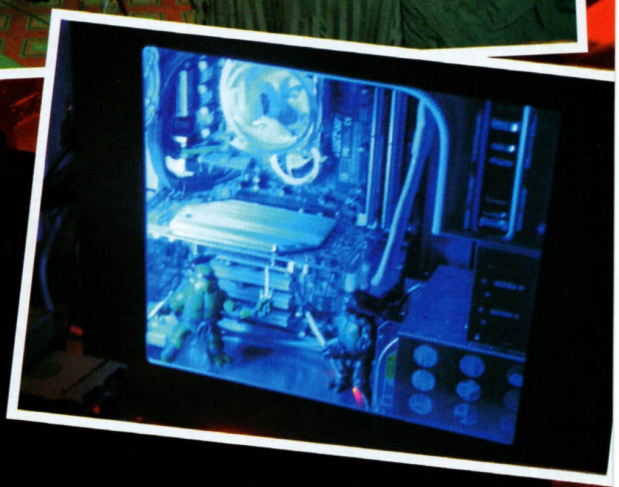
In a way though, this is what we love about America. The more barren, nasty and crime-ridden a city is, the more thriving the corresponding subcultures usually are. Just look at Washington DC, murder capital of the US, and home to the nation's finest punk-rock scene and some of the finest bands ever created.

In Dallas there are no bands (they're all in neighbouring Austin), but this bland metropolis has another, more relevant claim to fame: it's the world's undisputed capital of the first-person shooter.

As ever, prizes were on offer for the most l33t case mod.

RESPECT THE ARCHITECT

Ten-some odd years ago, to coin a Texanism, a revolution occurred in games that you may be familiar with. In Mesquite, 20 minutes from Dallas, a bunch of geeks got bored with the primary culture of incest, rodeos and meat drinks and created *Wolfenstein 3D*, the world's first true FPS. The genre has since held the PC gaming population in thrall for over 10 years, and its godfathers at id Software have remained at the centre of the scene throughout. Other high-profile companies like 3D Realms, Ion Storm, Gearbox and Origin all have their roots in Dallas or nearby



QuakeCon 2003: probably the world's most hardcore LAN event. Staged each year in Texas during the height of summer, we thank the gods for powerful air conditioning.

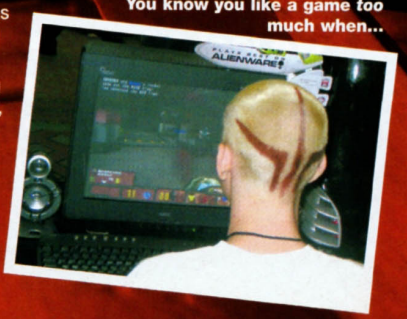
abled Southern hospitality: "You've got a real purty mouth, boy..."

Austin, but only id Software creates a fan frenzy big enough to bring thousands of sweaty gamers to Texas every year, 40kg PCs on their backs, to join in a four-day blowout of gaming mayhem.

If you hadn't guessed, the event is QuakeCon, America's biggest LAN party, games convention and prize tournament; a by-the-fans, for-the-fans affair dedicated to the games of the id stable. The event once again took place in Dallas this August, continuing an eight-year tradition of free fragging, partying and sleeping on floors.

As ever, the focus of the show was the four-day round-the-clock LAN party, or BYOC (Bring Your Own Computer), which took place in a huge ballroom in the sprawling Adam's Mark Hotel. It's unknown if anyone lasted the full 96 hours, though there were certainly a few freakish characters who were keen to try.

You know you like a game *too* much when...



Numbers in the BYOC are estimated to have topped 2,000 at peak, the full logistical and hygienic considerations of which are impossible to calculate. Needless to say, the fact that the event coincided with the New York blackout did not escape the attention of worried-looking hotel staff.

GEEK CHIC

However, as a proud affirmation of geek culture, QuakeCon is unrivalled. Where else could one wear a T-shirt bearing the slogan 'Will Frag For Sex' and still hold one's head high? Respect is key, and it's not just earned on the virtual battlefield. Case-modding is *de rigueur*, and if you don't have a neon light shining out the side of yours then you might as well go home. Extra points are given for doing away with the case altogether, to be replaced with a common industrial or laboratory item, ideally combined with a T-shirt that shows your commitment to the cause. Jokes about Linux are good, or for the true hardcore OG gangster-player, you can't go past a QuakeCon 2002 T-Shirt. Anything pre-millennium and you're a goddamned Jedi.

But the real reason we were there was not to enjoy the delights of a 2,000-strong man-fest, but to play *Doom 3* and

collar the boys from id. We managed both, even sneaking in a few hours playing *Call Of Duty* (genius). The fruits of our labour can be found on the following pages, so saddle up, strap on some chaps and bathe in the 'adrenalin-pumping atmosphere' of the hottest event on the Texan social calendar. PCZ

CALL OF DUTY: MULTIPLAYER MORSELS

***Call Of Duty* is certain to offer some cool team-based multiplayer modes.**

DOOM 3 WASN'T THE ONLY CAUSE OF SLATHERING EXCITEMENT AT QUAKECON 2003

You can check out our latest look at *Call Of Duty*'s amazing single-player campaign on page 54, but as the game was also on show in Dallas, we thought we'd give you a quick update on what we learned about the multiplayer game.

The short answer is 'not a great deal', as Infinity Ward is playing its online hand very close to its chest, but we did glean a few choice tidbits from chief creative officer and all-round good guy, Vince Zampella. "The multiplayer will be a mix of single-player levels and made-to-be-deathmatch levels," confides Vince, "so you can play in the campaigns that you've already played across and some unique levels. We wanted to give you some new stuff, but playing in levels that you've played in single-player is cool because you're like,'Ohh, I've been here, I know this.'"

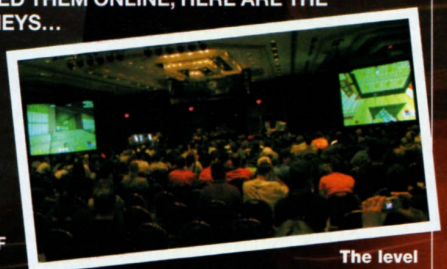
Apart from straight deathmatch however, Vince was unwilling to confirm any other play modes, though when we pushed the issue of a purely tank-based mode (which seems like an obvious choice to us), we were told categorically by Activision: "There's no vehicles in multiplayer." It's a damn shame, but we're hoping our tears of regret will sway the developers to have a change of heart.

We're still hoping to review the game next issue, so all will be revealed then.

AND THE WINNER IS...

JUST IN CASE YOU MISSED THEM ONLINE, HERE ARE THE RESULTS OF THE TOURNEYS...

Alongside the cheerful business of the BYOC, QuakeCon 2003 hosted some world-class fragging tournaments, with competitors coming from all over the free world to try their luck. There was $125,000 up for grabs, spread across the *Quake III* CTF Championships, *Return To Castle Wolfenstein* Team Tournament and the coveted prize for top *Quake III* duelist. The Brits put in a poor show, taking home no gongs, though UK veteran Blokey made it to the top 32 in the *Q3* 1v1. Eventually, however, American contender ZeRo4 clawed his way to the top of the heap, netting himself $20,000.



The level of skill was frightening.

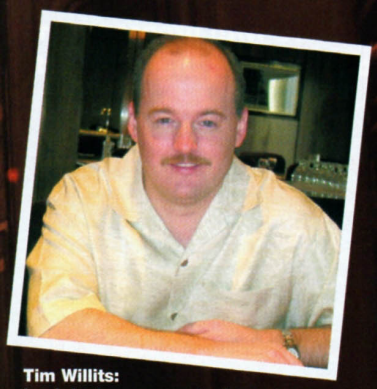
In the *Quake III* CTF, likewise American clan Cloud-9 notched up a victory, while in the *RtCW* Team Tournament, last year's runners-up iNfensus took top honours, the Swedes sashaying away with $3,333 per team member. Which should just about cover their porn bill.

"We looked at the damage values, the hitpoints, the armour, but eventually we realised – we're just lousy shots"

TODD HOLLENSHEAD CEO, ID SOFTWARE

DOOM 3 – HANDS-ON!

***Anthony Holden* plays *Doom 3* multiplayer and shoots questions at id's Tim and Todd, all at the same time**

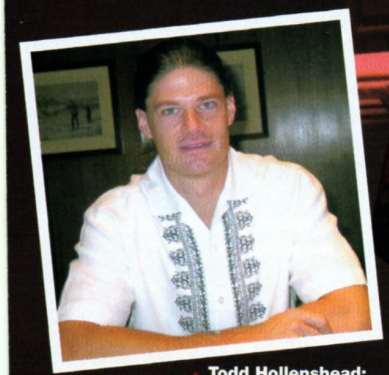


Tim Willits: lead designer, moustache owner.

TRUST IS IN short supply in the games business these days. We've been hoodwinked by mocked-up and touched-up and sexed-up screenshots so many times we barely even trust our own mothers. If Lord Hutton thought he had a sticky web of intrigue on his hands with one dodgy dossier, oh boy, do we have some doozies for him. Who remembers the early screenshots for *PlanetSide*? Or how about *FIFA*? I could go on all day...

Luckily, not everyone sinks to unscrupulous behaviour to get attention for their game. Luckily, not everyone needs to, as *Doom 3* looks very much like the incredible screenshots we've been pushing at you all year. If anything, it looks twice as good in the flesh.

Perhaps more surprising, *Doom 3* also manages to offer one of the most distinctive Deathmatch experiences in years. We had a damn good play at QuakeCon and were hooked within



Todd Hollenshead: business guru, international playboy.

minutes. Even though on paper it's the most basic vanilla DM imaginable, it's possessed of a truly unique atmosphere, thanks largely to the capabilities of the new engine. The intensive use of ambient sound, the cavorting shadows, the pools of darkness, the dynamic, hazard-filled environments – it's quite magnificent. No game has managed to create quite such an intense, furiously alive and often disorienting atmosphere before – certainly not with such conviction and fidelity – and the resulting effect is profoundly novel.

MEASURED BLOODSHED

Only one of the multiplayer maps is deemed playable at this stage, and at least three weapons are still missing, but it's enough to give a very strong impression of the final product. For a start, it's a slower game than we're used to in any current shooter. In terms of character movement it feels slower than *Quake II*, and with support for only four players, it's hardly a manic frag-fest. A winning score in the ten-minute games we were playing at QuakeCon tended to be around 11 frags.

As for the playmodes, these remain stubbornly fixed on four-way DM and a few basic variations. "We plan on having Free For All, 2-on-2 Deathmatch, Last Man Standing, Tournament and 1-on-1," affirms lead designer Tim Willits. "We're not planning on having CTF." However, Tim did mention that the limit on four players is a design decision not a hardware limitation, and the id boys expect an eight-player mod to appear online almost immediately.

The gameplay is also very much focused on close combat, with claustrophobic spaces and frenzied, confused firefights in narrow corridors. Disorienting graphical effects compound the confusion – whenever you take damage, you get a powerful kick and blurred vision, throwing your aim off and making it difficult to return fire. Somewhat shamefully, I also literally jumped at the sight of my own shadow the first few times it danced across the wall in front of me.

You can also cast entire rooms into pitch darkness with the flick of a switch, which is slightly disconcerting in a four-way match, but takes on much greater significance in tense 1-on-1 battles, when hiding in the shadows is a much more tempting option.

***Doom 3*: dark, disorienting and utterly magnificent.**

WEAPONS OF DOOM

***DOOM 3*'S WEAPON SET SHOULD BE FAMILIAR TO EVERY SELF-RESPECTING *DOOM* FAN (WITH A COUPLE OF EXCEPTIONS), BUT THEY'VE ALL BEEN FULLY RENOVATED AND REDESIGNED. LET'S SEE HOW THEY STACK UP WITH LAST YEAR'S MODELS...**

FISTS
The oldest weapon of them all – great for humiliating opponents, especially when you've got the Berserk power-up, which gives 30x melee damage for instant one-hit kills.

PISTOL
Holds 12 bullets, the default weapon. Upgrade as quickly as you can when you spawn with this – the slow fire rate and low damage make the pistol an act of desperation.

SHOTGUN
We love the new shotgun – it has a really meaty feel to it and is extra dangerous in the close confines of the new *Doom 3* maps, though a slow rate of fire and long reload time are its weaknesses.

FLASHLIGHT
Strike a light! You can't hold a weapon and a flashlight at the same time (in the current design at least), but you can twat people with your nightstick for satisfying melee damage.

MACHINE GUN
Sixty rapid-fire bullets per clip and reasonable accuracy too – the new machine gun is deadlier than *Quake II*'s and not to be messed with, though we're yet to compare it to the chaingun.

PLASMA GUN
Oh joy. The deadly new plasma gun is the most impressive weapon we've seen for ages. Visually magnificent, it dazzles the eye and paints the walls with splotchy blue burn marks.

ROCKET LAUNCHER
Holding five impact rockets, the new rocket launcher is chunky and gratifying. Splash damage is perhaps a bit weak at the moment, but rocket jumping is back – big style.

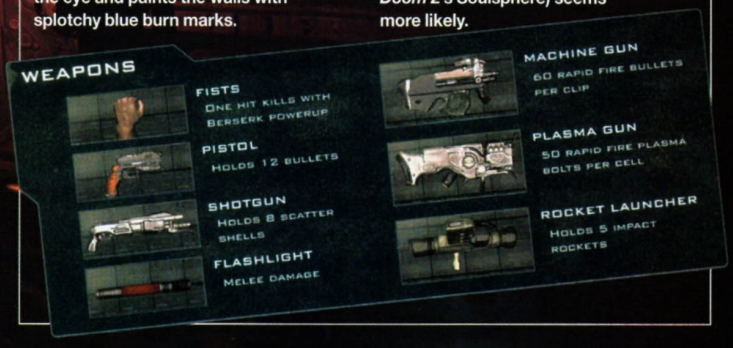
CHAINGUN
Not on show in the current build, the chaingun will have to be super-powerful to distinguish it fully from the nimble machine gun.

BFG
Also absent, the new BFG is an even trickier proposition. Id assures us we won't be seeing widespread server-bans on the weapon as happened with *Quake III*, but balancing could still be an issue.

GRENADES
You've seen them in the video footage no doubt – the new pineapples are of the twist-and-roll-along-the-floor variety, with no sign of a grenade launcher forthcoming.

CHAINSAW
Though not yet ready to be unveiled in-game, the chainsaw is pretty much self-explanatory. Being a melee weapon, we'd like to think the 30x Berserker damage bonus will also apply.

SOULCUBE
The mysterious Soulcube is described only as a 'hell artifact'. Hopefully it's some sort of cool new weapon or trap device, but a simple mega-health (à la *Doom 2*'s Soulsphere) seems more likely.



HELL IN A WELL

"We've contracted Splash Damage to construct the maps, the guys that did such a great job on *Enemy Territory*," continues Tim. "We're still doing all the programming in-house – the special effects programming, the gameplay programming and so on – but they're doing the map design. They actually started the map that we showed at QuakeCon – they brought it to a certain point and then we finished it off."

The map in question has no name at present, but it's a classic small-scale affair with a central hub and several branching corridors. The central room is the power chamber pictured in the background here, featuring a bloody great laser cannon that fires periodically into a cylindrical well. Two platform levels ring the outer edge of the room, inviting rocket jumps and death-defying leaps, but you can also jump down into the bottom of the central hole via a series of rotating three-quarter platforms

(though time it right or the laser will fry yo' ass). This is the key to the entire map, as the sinkhole houses a teleporter and the crucial power-up of the map: the Berserk.

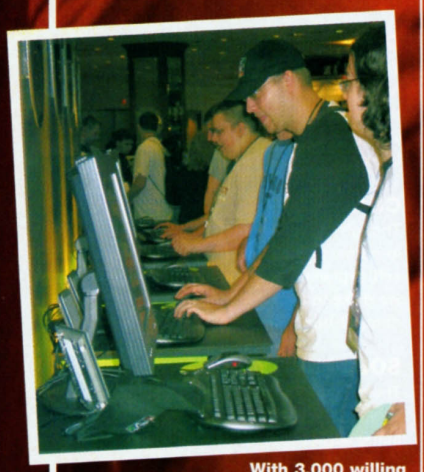
Harking back to *Dooms 1* and *2*, the Berserk doubles your speed and damage, and sends you (literally) screaming around the map on a killing spree. Most importantly, it gives you 30x damage with melee weapons, allowing one-hit kills with fists or, presumably, the flashlight and chainsaw. It's quite a disorientating experience, especially when you don't know your way around the map, but the agonized screams are sure to panic any nearby opponents.

Other pick-ups in the level include combat armour (+50), armour shards (+5), health packs, ammo and, of course, weapons (see boxout on previous page).

PRETTY POLYS

One of the really significant new technical features in *Doom 3* is the per polygon hit detection, which does away with the invisible hitboxes of old in favour of accurate collision detection for every projectile. "This feature had a lot more an impact than we were expecting," admits id CEO Todd Hollenshead. "We've had per poly detection in single-player for a year, but we never realised the full impact of it, of the player no longer being, effectively, a big rectangular cube. A bullet can now go under someone's arm or between their legs, or just whiz by their head. It definitely puts a premium on aiming. The first thing we realised was like: 'Damn, people are hard to kill in *Doom 3* multiplayer. Why is that?' And we looked at the damage values, the hitpoints, the armour, but eventually we realised – we're just missing. We're lousy shots."

Clearly, *Doom 3* is a different breed of multiplayer experience than anything we've played before. Despite not fundamentally changing the pure design brief behind the game, id has found themselves with an exceptional gaming experience simply by virtue of the new technologies at work. Frankly, we don't care why it works. But it does, and we can't wait to play it again. PCZ



With 3,000 willing beta testers on site, id got invaluable feedback on *Doom 3* from QuakeCon.

CARMACK-EDDON

PC ZONE scores a rare audience with programming legend John Carmack, and gets the raw truth about *Doom 3*, the future of graphics engines and why he hates ragdolls...

SOME SAY he's the greatest programmer alive. Others call him a visionary genius who single-handedly drags games technology into the future with his audacious talent. Since we wouldn't know a string of C-code from a string of lean beef snarlers, we could hardly comment on that, but we do know one thing – John Carmack has coded some of the best games ever made. *Wolf 3D*, *Doom*, *Quake* – hell, he practically invented the FPS.

These days, the Mack Daddy of rendering doesn't emerge from his subterranean lair very often, and *PC ZONE* was the only UK magazine to secure an interview at QuakeCon 2003. It's too big for one magazine, so we've had to split it across a couple of issues. Part one starts right here, so without further ado, over to the big man...

PCZ: How close is *Doom 3* to completion?

JC: We're really close. The last level was completed recently, but there's a huge amount of tuning that needs to be done. We've got a few levels, like the ones shown in the demo that are pretty much at the level of polish we're looking for throughout the game. But the other 20-some odd levels are not there yet.

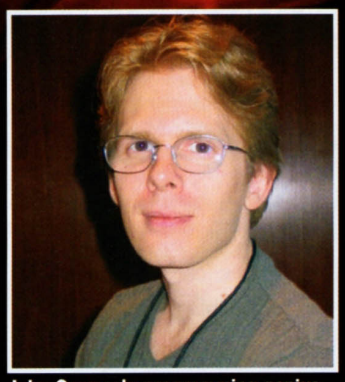
PCZ: How critical are the next few months going to be?

JC: In some ways this is the most important time of development. The tools are all there, everything's at our disposal, everything's basically working. Now's where it goes from being an interesting demonstration of all the technologies to being a fabulous game, and that really does all happen at the end.

I recently counted up the number of things we have to tune between pulling a trigger and hitting something with a projectile, and there's 32 effects that we have going on between there. There's the muzzle flash model, the light from there, the kick of the gun, the kick on the view, the sound on the muzzle flash, the sound on the projectile, the light on the projectile, the particles from the projectile, the pain animation that the monster gets hit by, the knock-back that he gets, the blood spray that comes off of it, the decal that gets put on it, the pass-through that goes on to the wall, the shell that comes out of the gun – you know, it's this huge list. You look back at the really early games where it's like, OK, you had an animation that happened there as a little muzzle flash and then the guy went into a pain animation, and that was it. So, there are a lot of dimensions that we have at our disposal for tuning, and you're not going to get everything perfect, but you feel an obligation to at least try and explore the solution space a little bit to try and hit on the really good things.

PCZ: So is it at the stage now where your personal involvement on the game is a little bit less?

JC: Actually this entire past year I haven't been the most critical person on the team, because the development of the rendering engine went smoother than really any I've ever done before. It turns out that the decisions I made at the very beginning about how the implementation was going to be, what the features were going to be, what the interface was going to be – they were all really good. Normally there's lots of evolution and major changes that go on, but the original architecture for the *Doom 3* renderer has stayed pretty damn constant. Two years ago it was rendering pictures that look basically like our pictures today. One year ago it was feature-complete. This past year has been adding tweaks and some optimisations to things, but really at this point I'm hesitant to make too many major changes because it's really good right now, I don't want to screw it up.



John Carmack: programming genius, rocket scientist, geek icon.

PCZ: What's your main responsibility on the game now then?

JC: I've actually been back in recently doing some more of the game code, which is not what I ever intended to do, but I'm almost sort of twiddling my thumbs sometimes. It's more difficult

"First-person shooters have been good from a technical-challenge level... that's my primary motivation"

JOHN CARMACK PROGRAMMING GOD

How times change: John's earlier works include *Commander Keen 6*, ninja platformer *Shadow Knights* and *Hover Tank*.

now, because in previous games all the code was spawned by me. I wrote the base of everything and then other programmers would take over and extend the things, but I still put everything in its original places so it was easy for me to jump in and quickly diagnose any problems or add any feature. *Doom 3* is the first game that started out with multiple programmers writing brand new code.

In *Quake III* we wound up pulling in a big block of code that Jan Paul [van Waveren, the Dutch programming whiz headhunted by id from the *Quake* editing community] wrote for the bots, but that was an emergency measure at the end, because of the way that whole thing worked out. So there's this block of stuff in *Quake III* that I really know nothing about. But with *Doom 3* we had many programmers writing brand new sub-systems, and I don't necessarily always agree with how some of the things are implemented. So I'm not in a position where I can just jump in and grab anything off the 'to-do' list and go and fix a problem in the game code. But I did recently finally start getting back into carving off some sections of the game code and fixing it up and making it more the way I'd like it to be. I'll probably be doing some more of that. But there's a huge loss in productivity once you go from a project that one person basically created the bulk of to something that has lots of people working on it.

We've had five programmers working almost from the beginning on *Doom 3*, and it might have twice as many features as if I had done everything, but it has like ten times the problems. You pay more labour for more features, but you get features that you wouldn't have got otherwise. The classic case that I'll hold up, as a perfect example of something I wouldn't have done that turned out really good, is the ragdoll physics for deaths that Jan Paul really pushed for. That's the type of feature that I never would have implemented.

PCZ: Why's that? We can't get enough of those kooky ragdolls...

JC: Physics code is among the twitchiest stuff to put into a game engine, because it's not as deterministic and able to be nailed down. It is a pretty significant performance drag, and for two years now in *Doom 3* we've had cases where it's like, 'the game is stuck at seven frames per second, what the hell?' and it's because a ragdoll is stuck and not going into a quiescent state. There's all these sets of problems that I knew would be problems, and were. But they were able to be solved, and now the ragdolls are a good feature.

PCZ: Do you fret a bit about losing a certain level of control over the development process?

JC: I'm at peace with the situation. It was a known strategic decision. For one thing I'm not spending all my time at id anymore, because I'm doing the Armadillo stuff with a good chunk of my time [Armadillo Aerospace, John's rocket science project]. So the company has to get by without me, and even if I was still spending 80 hours a week at id, you'd just eventually reach a point where one person functionally cannot do all the features that you want to have on there.

PCZ: I was talking to Tim and Todd earlier about the involvement of UK developer Splash Damage on the *Doom* multiplayer. How's that working out?

JC: Well, we always knew that we were going to be, intentionally, giving multiplayer short shrift in *Doom 3*. It's a single-player game, that's what we're building everything around, and the multiplayer is going to be present, but not a focus. So it's probably a good thing that we're getting an outside team to go ahead and make it their focus. Otherwise it would have been essentially the level of capability that *Quake II* had, where you had like five levels that were hashed out in a week from somebody. So now we're going to get some good stuff with really good playtesting in it.

PCZ: You've been doing this stuff for more than a decade now, making dark and disturbing first-person shooters. What keeps you going and what keeps it interesting?

JC: Well, to some degree we are trapped by our success. Because we're a single-product company, and we have 20-some odd employees that we pay very well, we don't have the freedom to go off on some complete lark and try some random thing. The products that we spend time on have to have a high probability of success, and they also have to use the same mix of artists, level designers and programmers that we have. It's not in our cards to go and say, 'well, we really only need one designer for this project, we'll fire four level designers'. We just wouldn't do that.

PCZ: Are you ever tempted to try something completely different?

JC: Well, I'm doing Armadillo Aerospace, so yes, you could say the temptation is there on some level [laughs]. Game-wise, I'll occasionally have some random thoughts about doing something different, but the first-person shooters have been good from a technical-challenge level, with the combination of networking and sound with the graphics and the structuring and architecting of the things. It's been rewarding on that level. And that's my primary motivation really – the engineering challenge. Making interesting things work as new capabilities arrive, as the hardware provides it to us.

John's rendering tech brings hell to Earth in ever more convincing fashion...

PCZ: Are you anticipating any media controversy to follow the release of *Doom 3*, as you've suffered with many of your previous games?

JC: I would have thought that stuff had been played out. The media every once in a while is like, 'Hmm, what are we going to do now... Let's pick on violent videogames.' I wouldn't be surprised though. External events again are going to be the driver. If there's any other... ah, Columbine sort of thing, I'm sure it will come up again. I don't think we're going to get too much of it, but I could be wrong. It's not my area.

PCZ: We noticed one undiscussed item on the multiplayer weapons menu – the Soulcube. Can you tell us about this item and any other power-ups we don't know about?

JC: The Soulcube is a hell artifact from the later part of the game. There are some other power-ups that you haven't seen yet, but the multiplayer is not going to have all the power-ups that people expect on there – it's not hugely focused on that. There will be a few other things with some interesting effects, but that's not a focus in the multiplayer. PCZ

***PC ZONE*'s exclusive interview with John Carmack continues next issue, when we get in-depth about rocket science, the future of games and John's experimental new engine concept. *PCZ* 135, out October 16!**

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Race: Erudite

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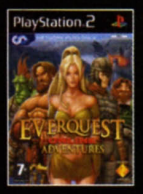

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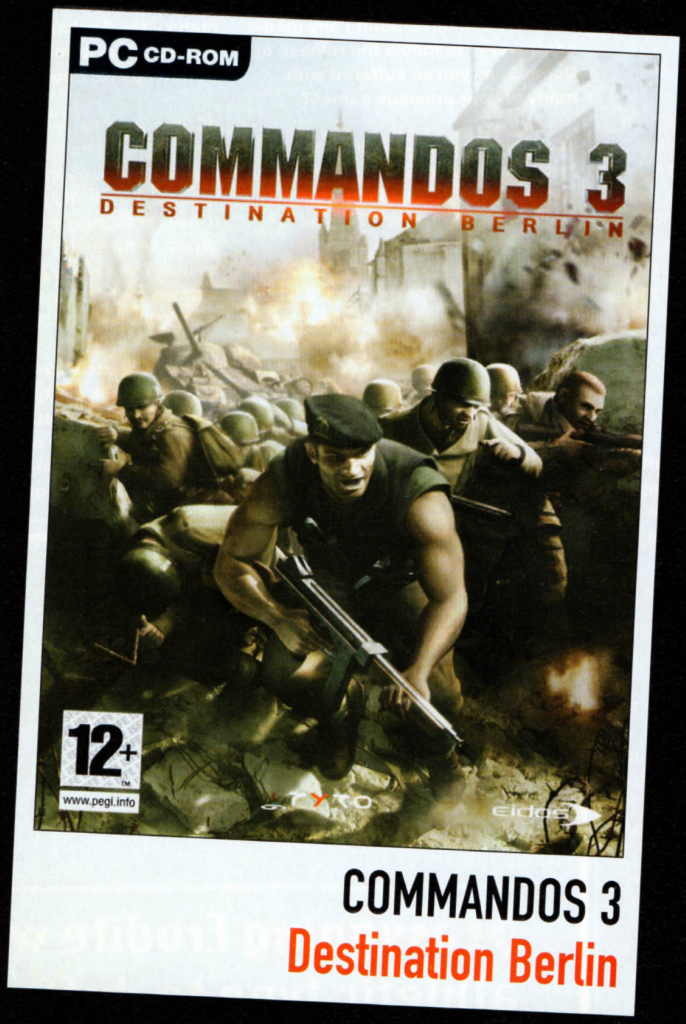

COMMANDOS 3
Destination Berlin

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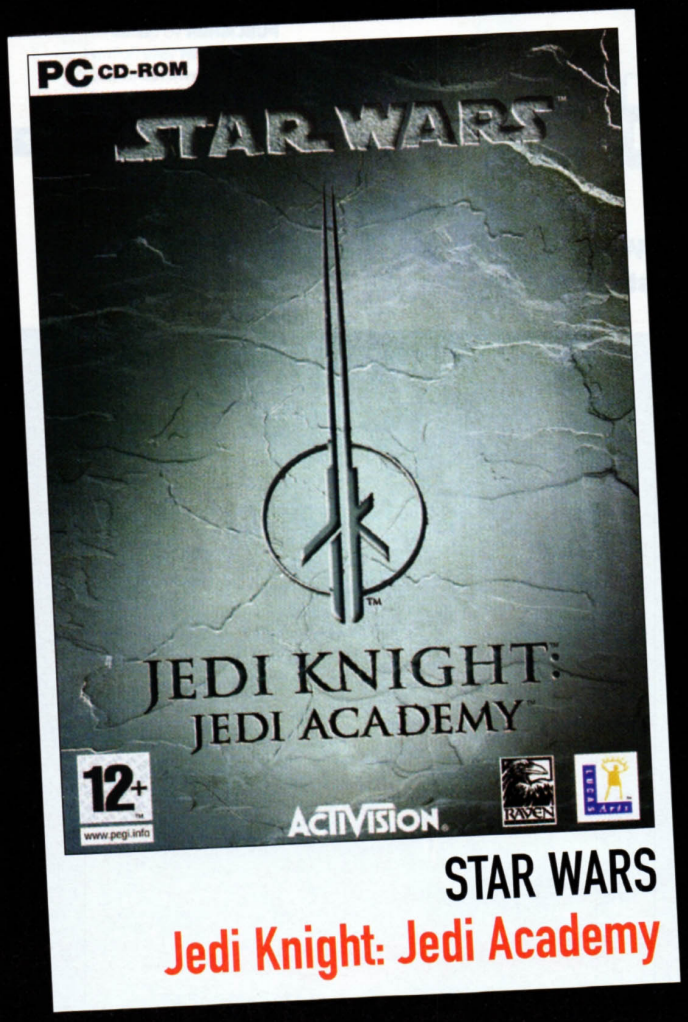

STAR WARS
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The Whole Truth...

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THE DETAILS

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DEVELOPER Valve Software
WEBSITE www.half-life2.com
ETA September 30 (No, really)

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Just a taste of things to come in the epic *Half-Life 2*.

Another game riddled with bugs.

LAST PREVIEWED HALF-LIFE 2 PCZONE ISSUE 130

SEPTEMBER 30. I'm sure, like me, you've cleared your diaries, booked time off work, arranged to pack your partner off to a downmarket hotel and are looking forward to spending the entire week playing the most-anticipated game in the world. Because the game is going to come out on September 30, right? I was at ECTS (the UK's quaint model village recreation of E3) to meet up with Doug Lombardi, director of marketing at Valve Software, and find out. And, although I'd been specifically warned off the subject by a friendly PR person ("Mention anything about the release date and your interview will be terminated immediately."), I decided to take the direct approach.

"So, September 30 then?"

"Yep."

"Definitely September 30?"

"Uh-huh."

"And the release date for *Half-Life 2*?"

"September 30."

"And the game's going to be released on the…?"

"It hasn't changed since you asked me 10 seconds ago."

Damn, this man's good. And in fear of getting the bum's rush I decided to believe that, despite all evidence to the contrary, the game will indeed be on the shelves on the specified date. And move on.

DAD KNOWS BEST

So, if the game's going to be on the shelves in a couple of weeks, I presume that it's finished, that you're just tweaking and balancing? "Yep, yep. Once we've got it to a point that we think is pretty good we'll find out what other people think about it. We did the same with *Half-Life 1* as well. We try to get as wide a range of opinions as possible – for the original *Half-Life* we brought [Valve founder] Gabe Newell's dad in to play the game, a retired air force guy who was in his fifties, early sixties, and had never even looked at a PC, let alone a PC game. Gabe said, 'If my dad can't pick it up and run with it then we're not done.'"

And women? "Actually, yes. One of the things with this game and the new characters was to widen it up to more than just white males aged 18-35. We really wanted to see if they could help us get into a female audience."

And if they've got any sense, they will. *Half-Life 2* is still on course to be the game that moves the goalposts. You've probably seen the game running by now – if not check out the footage on this month's DVD – and the brief stint I enjoyed at ECTS, albeit with the same code that we looked at last time, has done nothing to shake my faith.

But what about Valve? The game's been in development since work on the original *Half-Life* ended and five years is a long time to keep a project to yourself without any feedback from outside.

"It's hard to keep momentum and not get freaked out that you're getting lost from the path because you're not showing anyone or telling anyone about what you're doing.

"But, you have these moments, like the first time Jay Stelly [senior software development engineer at Valve] chucked the physics in and we could go into the test maps and start screwing around with a really early version of the manipulator gun, the one you've seen in the movies. So we could pick up bottles and chuck them around – stuff like that gives you a shot in the arm. The same happened when Ken Birdwell (another senior software development engineer at Valve) started chucking the facial animations in and it was like, 'Hey these characters are cool, they can smile and stuff.' And then a couple of days later he chucked the eyes in and it was like, 'We don't know what you've done, but these

CV

VALVE

VALVE SOFTWARE

They might only have developed one game, but what a game. And without *Half-Life* you wouldn't have *Counter-Strike* or *Day Of Defeat*, two mods that Valve decided to release as retail products.

1998 *Half-Life*. It came out of nowhere to become the biggest PC game of all time.

2000 *Counter-Strike*. The biggest online game then. The biggest online game now. Period.

2003 *Day Of Defeat*. Another quality mod gets put in a box and sold for cash money.

September 30

2003 *Half-Life 2*. Because it really is going to come out on that day. No really.

characters look real creepy now.' Those things give you a real lift."

DIFFERENT STROKES

And for me, it's these two aspects of the game that threaten to lift *Half-Life 2* so far away from the chasing pack that it's unlikely anything will topple it (until *Half-Life 3*, of course). Because, while you've seen the movies, what you might not realise is that none of the cinematic events that you're watching are scripted. Doug talks instead about contextual AI, where the non-playing characters are given basic knowledge about the environments they're in and a set of choices based on this. "When journalists first came over to see the game, there was a really good scene we were showing at the time where Gordon was being chased by a guy in a Mech suit. And the player decided to duck into this room and slam the door. Now, that wasn't a critical path for the player. There were multiple ways for you, as the player, to get out of that scene. And if you made that choice, then the Mech decided to put the camera in, trap you and bang the door down. In the old way we would have forced you to go into that room, and the Mech would have knocked the door down every single time. So we're now able to open things up a bit and say, 'If the player does this, then you can do that,' and it becomes more AI than just a canned scripted sequence."

Think of it as exactly how you'll play through the game. With the advanced physics model you'll be able to get through the game by shooting or by using the environment. Doug starts talking about the choices you'll have in *Half-Life 2*, making reference to the *Traptown* demo (which you can find on this month's DVD).

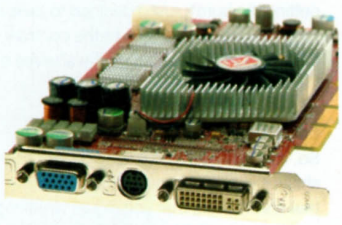
"OK, in this scene we've set a swinging girder down there, we've put the dumpster there on the ledge, conveniently, and then we're going to send in the baddies and it's up to you how to take them out. You know, you could sit on the ledge with your shotgun and take them out one by one, or you could do it the way we intentionally did in the demo to prove you can get through just using physics. What we're hoping is that you play it one way, someone else does it differently. We're hoping to create more discovery and freedom. We're not trying to say to people, 'You're going to play this game three times.' If people want to go back in and check it out again, cool, but we just want to set up circumstances and allow the physics to create a more dynamic range of options."

SEE NO EVIL

Actual specifics about the game – in terms of weapons, story and even characters – are still being held completely under wraps – a deliberate policy on Valve's part

SILVER MACHINE

IT'S THE MILLION-DOLLAR QUESTION: IS YOUR MACHINE GOING TO BE ABLE TO RUN *HALF-LIFE 2* AND IF NOT, WHAT'S THE PRICE TAG?



It might not be necessary, but a DX9 graphics card will enhance your *HL2* experience.

Hardware manufacturers the world over are rubbing their hands together feverishly at the prospect of a boom as soon as *Half-Life 2* hits the shelves, but the fact is that you're not going to need to bankrupt yourself to play the game. Basically, if you've got a 733MHz processor, 128MB RAM and a DirectX 6 graphics card like a TNT 2 you'll be able to reprise your role as Gordon Freeman. All the key aspects of the engine will function at this level – the facial animations and physics engine (two of the features Valve sees as absolutely key to the *HL2* experience) are handled by your processor. If you do have a bit of spare cash though, you really need to invest in a DX9-capable card, which will open up the full gamut of visuals. We'll be doing a round-up with the soon-to-be-released *HL2* benchmark to coincide with our review to help you make the right purchase.

"You play it one way, someone else does it differently. We're hoping to create more discovery and freedom"

DOUG LOMBARDI DIRECTOR OF MARKETING, VALVE

Shoot them in the head, pull the lever or run like bloody damnation. The choice is yours.

SATURATION POINT

WHEN IS NOT ENOUGH TOO MUCH?

PCZ Valve Software? At ECTS with *Half-Life 2*? You've got to be f*** kiddin'! What's that? They're showing the same code that I've already seen at E3? Oh, you've got to be f***** kiddin'! What gives?**

DOUG LOMBARDI The history of marketing in games says: as soon as the thing's signed, announce it; as soon as you get a screenshot, release it. If you're not talking about it then something's wrong, you're trying to hide something. But in the music industry, if you announced a record as soon as someone started writing the first song people would tell you you were out of your mind.

PCZ Or if you released the lyrics line by line as they were being written...

DOUG Right. Immediately after *Half-Life* released, we sold through all the initial copies worldwide and Vivendi was pumping them out as fast as they could make them. Because Gabe and the guys who founded Valve were older guys and not 21 year olds who didn't have lawyers when they signed the deal, they had a contract that said if the first game was successful, they could call the shots from then on. So they said let's not ever talk about *Half-Life 2* until we get really far along, and that started building momentum until we got to the stage where we were saying let's not say anything until we're six months away from shipping it. And once we got down that road we suddenly started to realize that as gamers, every time you sit down and play a game you're like, 'I remember this bit from an article in a magazine.' There's nothing left to experience or discover for yourself and we think that's a real drag.

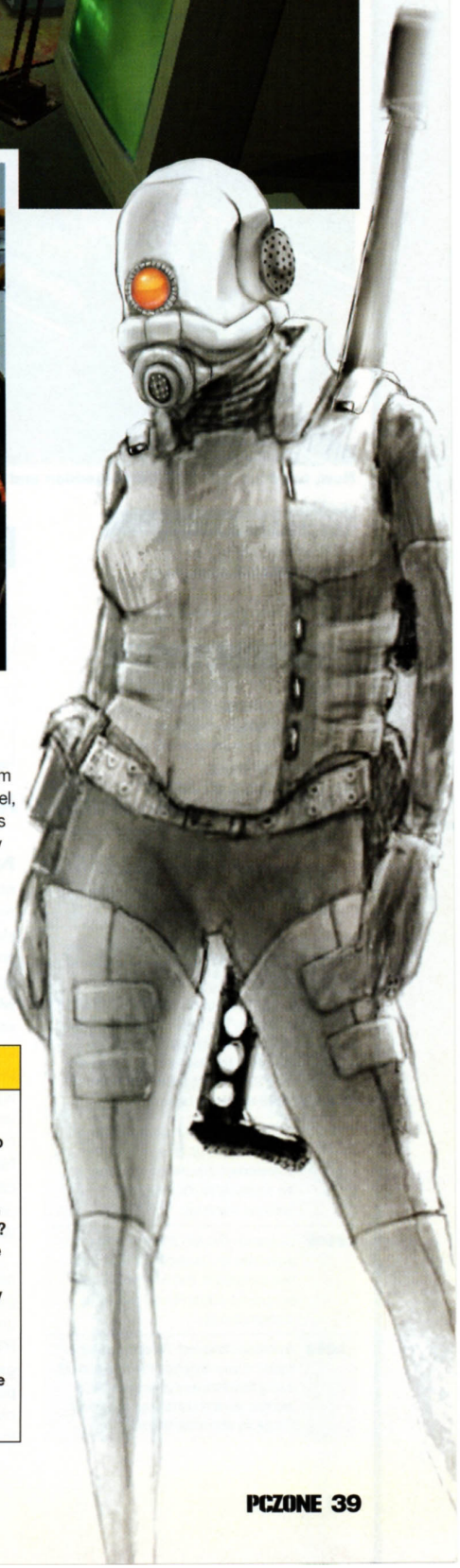
PCZ Cool. That makes total sense. Now, can you tell us a bit more about the stor...

in order to retain the mystery and ensure the game has maximum impact when it's released. Doug did divulge a little about vehicles, confirming that they would all be land-based and would include jeeps and APCs, but he was quick to check himself, reminding us that Valve doesn't want to ruin the game by giving too much away (see Saturation Point boxout). Even so, I did get him to reveal a little more about the places you're likely to see as you're playing the game, as well as the ones you won't.

"Xen wasn't so popular, so we didn't feel... well, you didn't see Xen in any of the demos that we were showing at E3 or ETCS today. So we knew where not to go, and that helps you define where you should go. When you play the game, I think you'll understand more about how you moved from New Mexico to Eastern Europe, and you'll be able to put those pieces together as you play and as Gordon finds out what's been happening between that."

And with that I was yanked away from the screen and dumped outside the hotel, where a large group of teenage girls was loitering expectantly. It was immediately obvious that they weren't there for me (one of the mums threatened to call the police when I started waving and smiling), but the real tragedy is that they weren't there for *Half-Life 2* either – apparently Westlife were staying in the same hotel. If only they knew. PCZ

No Xen – this time the aliens come to you.



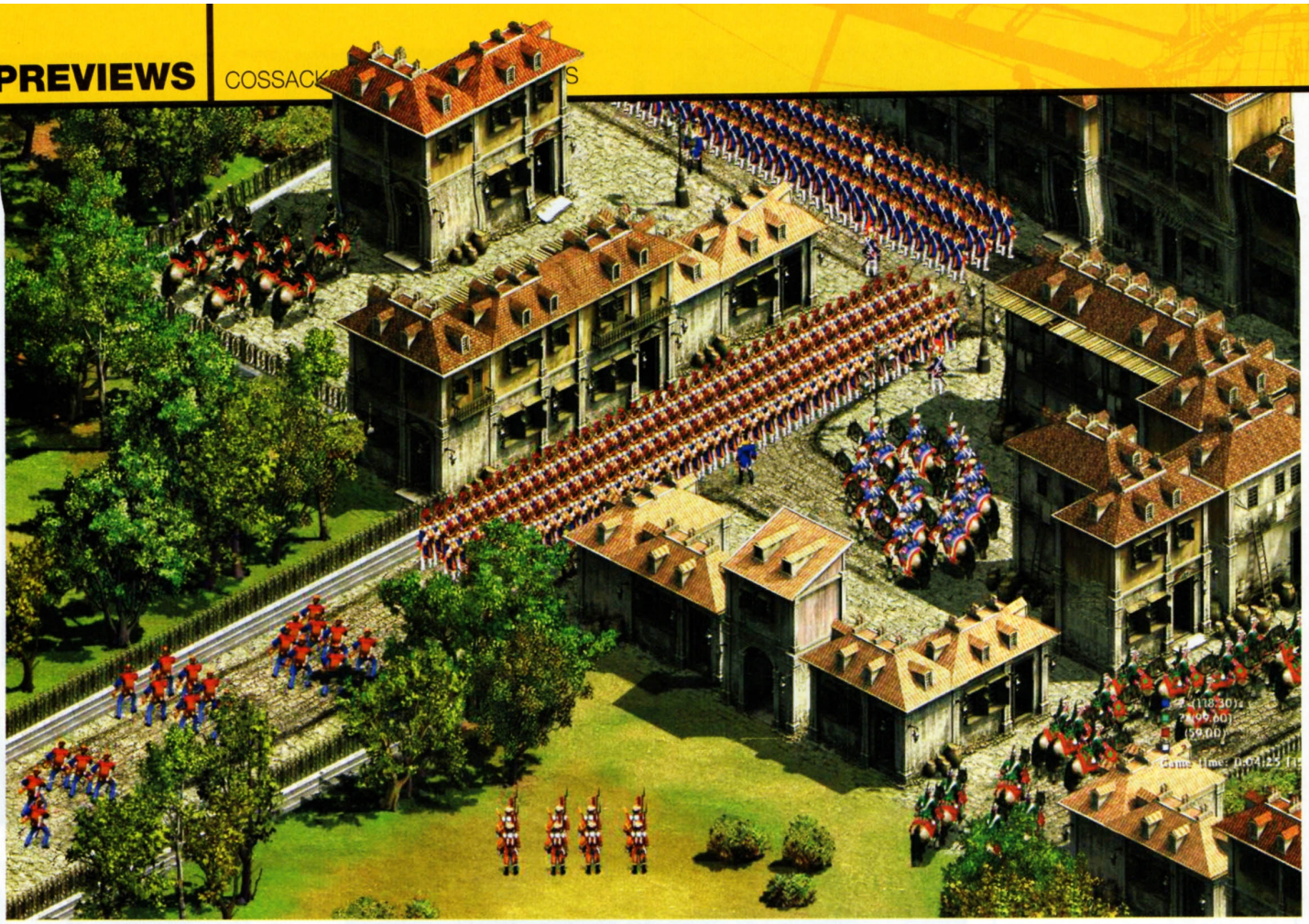
LET OFF STEAM

CHEATS BEWARE – YOUR DAYS ARE NUMBERED

***PC ZONE* hates people that cheat online. Hopefully Steam will wipe them out.**

The original *Half-Life* was hailed as the best single-player shooter and it's still at the top for a lot of people, but part of its legend lies in the multiplayer games that came later. *Counter-Strike* is still the most popular online game by a country mile – the latest figs show that over the past 31 days, over seven million people had played *Counter-Strike*, compared to just over half a million for its nearest rival, *Battlefield 1942*. Who's the daddy?

Unfortunately, as with pretty much every online game, *Half-Life*-powered mods are riddled with cheats and it's killing the games for genuine players. Valve is hoping to stem this by using Steam, its online delivery service that is currently in beta testing. By the time *Half-Life 2* hits the shelves it should be up and running properly, and the concept behind it is simple but hopefully effective. When you're playing a Valve game online you'll be constantly connected to Steam, which can update your code base whenever it feels the need, making it almost impossible to hack. You can find out more about Steam and download the latest version (the only way you can play the latest version of *Counter-Strike*, version 1.6) from www.steampowered.com.



Now, combine this with Carmageddon and you've really got a game on your hands.

THE DETAILS

PUBLISHER CDV
DEVELOPER GSC Game World
ETA Q4 2003
WEBSITE www.gsc-game.com

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Sequel to 2001's massive sleeper hit
- Set during the epic battles of Napoleon's military campaigns
- Up to 64,000 units on a map
- Brand new 3D engine
- Play as six nations with over 150 unique units and 180 buildings

Blownaparte again...

COSSACKS II: NAPOLEONIC WARS

***Rhianna Pratchett* faces her Waterloo in the most populous RTS ever**

NAPOLEON Bonaparte might not have an item of footwear named after him (unlike his eventual nemesis), but he still managed to become one of the world's greatest military tacticians (or a jumped-up little megalomaniac, depending on which history books you read). The vertically-challenged vanquisher also claimed that history was "the version of past events that people have decided to agree upon", so it's unclear how he would have felt about being the star of his own 'historical' computer game. Nevertheless, Bonaparte's celebrated campaigns are about to be recreated with unprecedented fidelity in GSC Game World's *Cossacks II: Napoleonic Wars*.

Like the Tom Jones of computer games, the first *Cossacks* was one of those titles that came out of nowhere and went on to sell millions. The Ukrainian RTS captivated gamers with its historical gameplay (depicting real-life battles), a powerful engine that made the individual civilisations come to life, and – the feature that has come to characterise all of GSC's strategy offerings – the sheer number of troops you could create.

THE EMPEROR'S NEW CLOTHES

Now, *Cossacks* is back, in full 3D no less. The historic setting is still there, this time focusing on Napoleon's campaigns during the early 19th Century. The population count has been stepped-up, allowing for up to 64,000 units on a map simultaneously, and the engine is a shiny new homegrown model.

"*Cossacks II* is a logical continuation of the original game," explains GSC's Oleg Yavorsky. "The previous installment ended in the 18th Century. That's why the early 19th-century setting is very fitting for this game. Undeniably, the Napoleonic era is a very popular period in history, so we thought gamers would find it interesting if we explored that epoch."

CV gsc

GSC/GAME WORLD

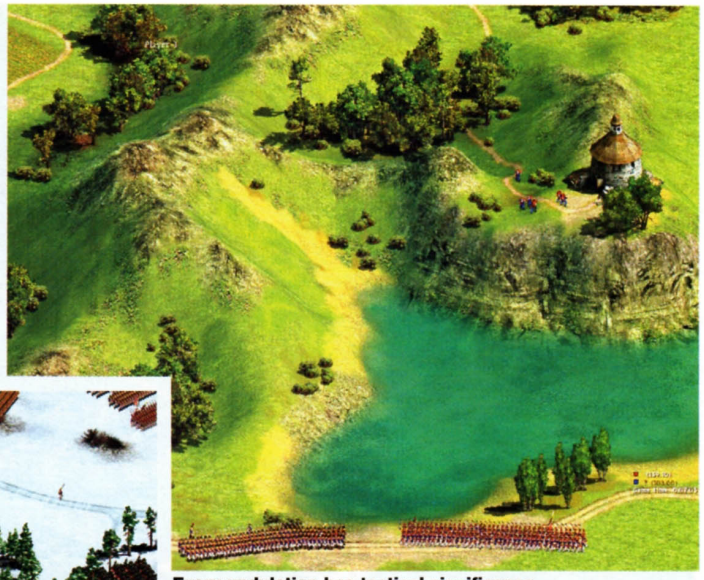
As the Ukraine's biggest games outfit, Kiev-based GSC rose to prominence with 2001's *Cossacks*. The studio is split into two full-time teams, one devoted to strategy games, the other to shooters, including the forthcoming *Stalker: Oblivion Lost*. Here's what the RTS team has been up to...

2001 *Cossacks: European Wars*. *Cossacks* brought us war on an epic scale, with unprecedented numbers of troops on the battlefield (8,000) and great historical scenarios.

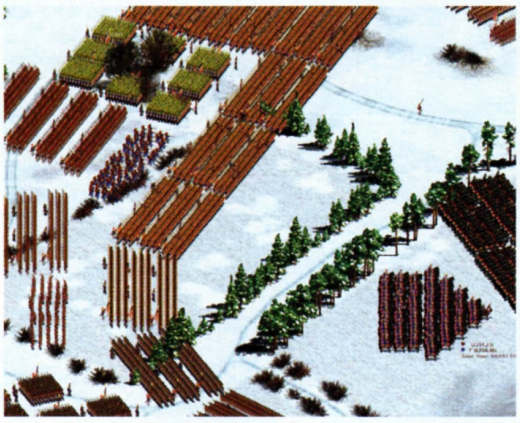
2002 *Cossacks: The Art Of War*. The first expansion for *Cossacks* contained five new campaigns, two new nations and an updated editor. No real gameplay changes though.

2002 *American Conquest*. Sixteen thousand troops at your fingertips this time and set during the discovery of America. Nice touches like ambushes, but essentially *Cossacks* with more feathers.

Attack of the clones.



Every undulation has tactical significance.



Looks like a bunch of old Cossacks to me...

The rise of Napoleon also coincided with a new era of more 'civilised' warfare, with troop formations becoming an important part of military strategies, something the developers are keen to reflect in the game. The 64,000 potential units available will make for some truly impressive formations, while a powerful zoom feature means you'll be able to view your battles in their entire splendour. And if direct intervention at this scale becomes too tiring, you can issue military orders through new commander-in-chief units.

FIELDS OF BATTLE

Many of the battlefield considerations implemented in the *Cossacks* original will return in the sequel, including morale and the need to sustain troops with resources from your economy, along with new features like fatigue, which kicks in if you march units too far. Your weary troops will be forced to rest, making you extremely vulnerable to attacks.

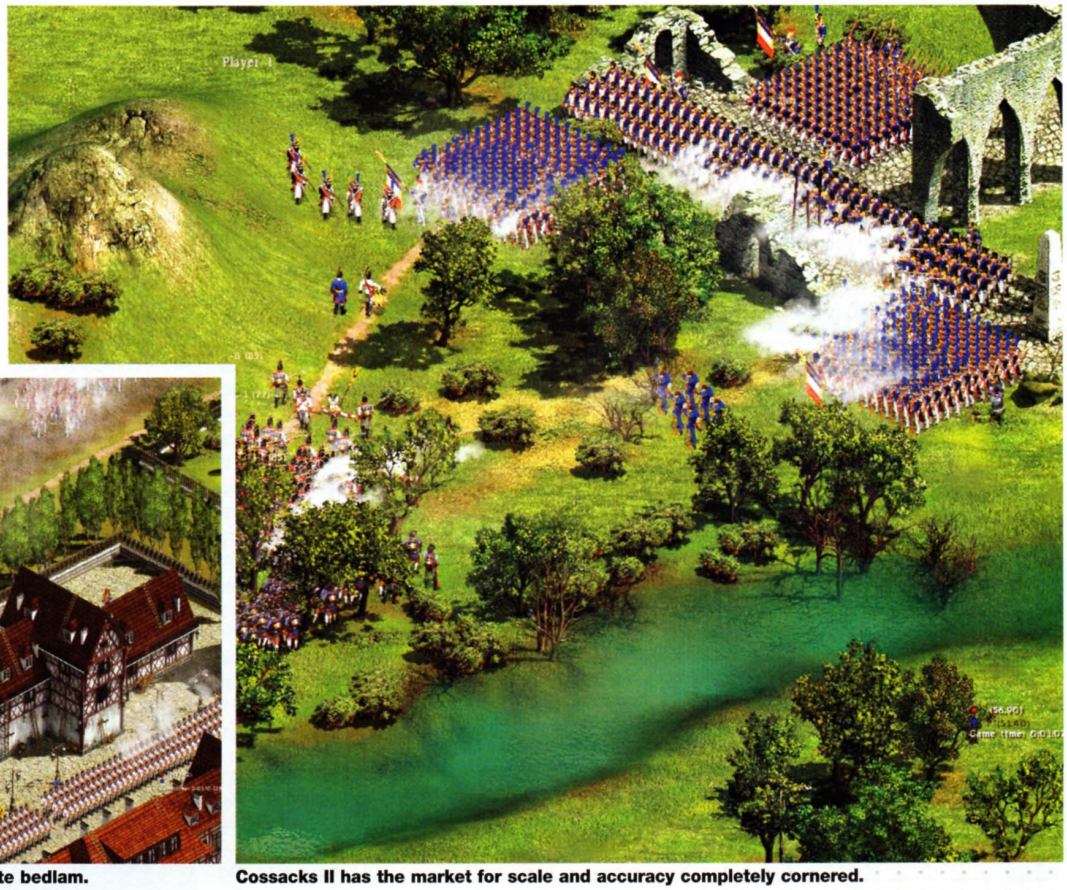
The new 3D engine in *Cossacks II* also means terrain will play an even greater part in your military strategies. Troops will be able to see and shoot further from higher ground (as in the original game), but this time gunnery units won't be able to fire through forests, while cavalry and artillery units will find muddy ground hard going. GSC is also implementing weather effects such as snow and rain, and knowing how they like everything to be as realistic as possible, we wouldn't be surprised if these had some bearing on your troop movement and morale as well.

NATIONAL PRIDE

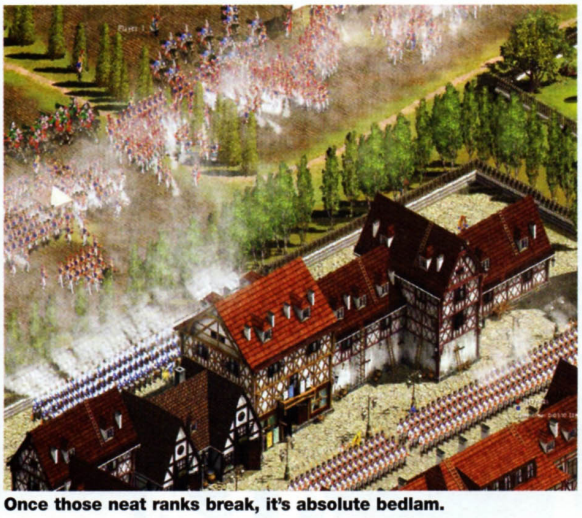
One of the main differences between *Cossacks II* and its predecessor is that while the original contained 16 nations (with another two in the expansion pack *Cossacks: Art of War*), the sequel focuses on just six nations. "Though quite short, the Napoleonic period appears to be an important landmark in history," explains Yavorsky. "The game will feature all the nations that played major roles during that dramatic time: France, Britain, Austria, Russia, Prussia and Egypt. Despite having fewer nations, the overall number of game units will nearly double."

In fact, the number of unique units in the game totals over 150, with the buildings weighing in at an impressive 180. Although some of the architecture will have similar names to those in *Cossacks*, Oleg is keen to point out that, in terms of functionality, they will all be very different.

Units too have been updated to match the period, as Yavorsky explains. "We went a step further while working on the



Cossacks II has the market for scale and accuracy completely cornered.



Once those neat ranks break, it's absolute bedlam.

1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6... 64,000. They didn't lie.

units. The Grenadier, for instance, will be able to shoot, thrust and throw grenades, as previously, but the difference now is that he does not have an infinite number of grenades, being limited to just a handful. When exploding, grenades will generate splinters to damage units nearby. We've also implemented features like realistic bullet physics and friendly fire."

One of the really compelling features of the *Cossacks* world is the way the developers give the economy and military much more of an intrinsic link. If you want to wage an effective war, you need to have the resources to back it up: iron and coal for your artillery, food for your troops and gold to keep paying your mercenaries. A lack of any one of these can turn the tide of a battle against you.

"When exploding, grenades will generate splinters to damage units nearby"

OLEG YAVORSKY GSC GAME WORLD

In *Cossacks II* the economic side has been considerably expanded, adding the ability to set up trade routes between cities and villages under your control.

Players will be able to implement loads of economic warfare, such as creating blockades and employing an economy minister. "The models of resource collecting and production are going to get a bit more complex, yet also more spectacular," reveals Yavorsky. "Manufacturing a cannon, for instance, will take several stages, starting from resource procurement, delivery, moulding the barrel, producing a wooden base and finally assembling all the components into a new gun. Blockading a city to prevent resources from coming into the capital will be another way to win the war, for instance. So, there will be many interesting sides to your economy in the game."

Clearly this level of micromanagement is not for everyone. But if it's historic detail and strategic depth – on a truly immense scale – you're looking for, then you're clearly going to love *Cossacks II*. You've still got a few months to wait before you can unleash the thousands of Napoleonic hordes onto your PC, but in the meantime we'll be bringing you regular reports from the battlefield. PCZ

Why Don't You?...

GIVE US THE CHANCE TO BE A BIT MORE RESOURCEFUL...

One feature that *Rise Of Nations* implemented particularly well was the inclusion of resources outside the usual wood/iron/gold/food line-up. And clearly, this is something that would work well in *Cossacks II*.

As we envisage it, controlling unique resources would give you the advantage over your opponents. So if you secured a good source of fur, you could make clothes that offered your troops greater resistance to the elements and fatigue. If you had access to crystals, maybe you could improve your scientific upgrades.

Controlling unique resources was a great gameplay feature in *Rise Of Nations*.

Consequently, the location of unique resources would become vital areas to capture and defend from enemies. Although the control of such resources would not drastically alter your fate in battle, they would be able to give you advantages your enemy may not be expecting, and give you the upper hand when you need it. It would also encourage players who like to wall themselves into a corner to get out and explore the maps more.

Q&A

OLEG YAVORSKY

GSC's Senior PR Manager Oleg Yavorsky talks about the inner workings of *Cossacks II* and how some of the new features in the game will affect the gameplay.

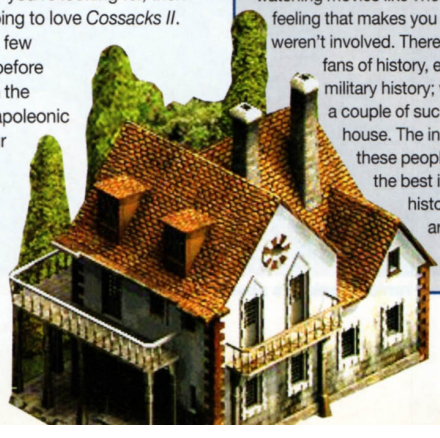
PCZ What do you feel your mistakes were with *Cossacks* and how have you rectified them in *Cossacks II*?
OY We're paying more attention to making the single-player campaigns more appealing. We're also going to add many smaller things that the community is eager to see, such as resource movement, long-awaited female citizens and more.

PCZ You've increased the number of troops in the game to 64,000. Does bigger mean better in your opinion?
OY We mainly want to give players total freedom in regards to the scope of their armies, something they constantly moan about while playing most other strategy games.

PCZ What effects will this have on the gameplay?
OY The large unit limit will give players a completely different and new gameplay experience, where they can cease to care about every single unit and start caring about armies instead. Beyond that, staging historical battles in their true scope seems very exciting to us.

PCZ How will the political events of the period be reflected in *Cossacks II*?
OY As before, we have an in-house historian on board who takes care of all the historic content in the game. Prior to each mission or campaign, the players will get a good insight into the circumstances that preceded the mission events. As we primarily focus on Napoleon's campaigns, the players will learn a lot of interesting facts about his background, plans and ambitions, as well as successes and failures, both military and political. While the game still has to be fun, we'll ensure the information is provided in the best edu-tainment form.

PCZ What do you think it is about historical battles that fascinates players so much?
OY I guess now and then every one of us dreams of going back in time and taking part in one of the glorious battles of the past, as a military leader or a heroic soldier. It's a feeling you get after watching movies like *The Patriot*, a feeling that makes you envious you weren't involved. There are also many fans of history, especially military history; we even have a couple of such buffs in-house. The inspiration of these people serves as the best indicator that historic battles are a great subject to explore.



HOMEWORLD2

OUT NOW!

PC GAMER

"The sequel to the most beautiful space RTS ever. Bigger, better, faster, more."

"A feature-rich experience, packed with planet-boggling attention to detail."

"The sight of a complete battlefleet hyperspacing into view is an awesome sight to behold."

GAME OF THE MONTH
PC GAMER
October 2003

PC ZONE

"The space battles are amongst the most magnificent we've ever seen... It's lavish in detail, rich in gameplay and hugely atmospheric."

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lead programmer STEPHANE MORICHERE-MATTE lead artist DAVE CHEONG
music by PAUL RUSKAY sound design by STUDIO X assistant producer GEOFF THOMAS
producer CHRIS MAHNKEN executive producer DAN IRISH art director ROB CUNNINGHAM
original concept by ALEX GARDEN marketing by THE WEASEL

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THE DETAILS

PUBLISHER Gathering
DEVELOPER Illusion Softworks
WEBSITE
www.hidden-and-dangerous.com
ETA October 2003

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Sequel to a *PC ZONE* classic
- Equip, control and direct a squad of British commandos in 24 sprawling missions from Austria to Algeria
- A mix of tense stealth-based missions and all-out *Battlefield 1942*-style firefights
- Far better looking and not quite as bug-ridden as the original
- Loads of new multiplayer options

CV

ILLUSION SOFTWORKS

Founded in 1997, the Czech outfit partly responsible for the current WWII gaming craze has been busy since its million-selling debut.

1999 Illusion releases *Hidden & Dangerous*, a classic despite the many bugs that infest it. The inevitable add-on *Fight For Freedom* (aka *Devil's Bridge*) follows later in the year (and crashes with equal regularity).

2000 Illusion joins forces with neighbouring Czech developer Pterodon to release disappointing fantasy shooter *Flying Heroes*.

2002 Illusion's second full game is *Mafia*, a story-driven gangster epic that combines violent third-person and vehicular action. *Grand Theft Auto* meets *Goodfellas*.

2003 Pterodon unites again with Illusion (lending both technology and creative assistance) and the Vietnam-based shooter *Vietcong* is the result. A huge improvement over *Flying Heroes*, but not up to the standard of *H&D* just yet.

A visible lack of polys is compensated by superb animations.

If you want to use a German uniform to sneak around, don't shoot holes in it, fool.

Tough as guts...

HIDDEN & DANGEROUS 2

The sequel to one of the most tense, absorbing and frustrating games ever is very nearly complete. *Richie Shoemaker* goes over the top to play it

The hills are alive with the sound of gunfire.

I'M NOT ashamed to admit that when I first saw *Hidden & Dangerous 2* I started dribbling – not out of raw animal lust but much as one does when dozing off in a chair of a certain angle. You can hardly blame me; watching someone crawl through gorse bushes on their belly, waiting while Nazi patrols edge painfully towards your prone squad members... it's hardly the most exhilarating of games to watch.

But then, *Hidden & Dangerous* was always a game that had to be played at length before its rewards were unlocked, and now, we've had a chance to play the sequel. There's still work to be done, but nevertheless I can happily report that *Hidden & Dangerous 2* looks to be every bit the sequel we've all been hoping for.

THIS IS NOW

While the original game was set exclusively behind the lines of the Western Front, *Hidden & Dangerous 2* spans the entire European theatre and beyond. Starting out in 1941, you begin your mission behind enemy lines in Nazi-occupied Norway before heading to the extreme climate of the North African desert to combat Italian and German troops. Interestingly, you don't get to infiltrate Fortress Europe proper until you're well entrenched into the second half of the game, by which time you will have taken on Imperial Japanese forces in Burma and rescued a fancy typewriter from a stricken Nazi battleship.

Gameplay-wise very little has changed. From a pool of around 30 dedicated troops, you can pick up to four soldiers for each mission, only one of which can be directly controlled at any single time. The others you order around via traditional keyboard shortcuts or through the new tactical overview.

Whereas the 3D map in the first game was unintuitive to the point of being useless, this time your troops are as easy to direct from above as in a simple RTS. Drop waypoints, fix combat stances, set movement speeds and awareness levels and then watch the level play itself out before jumping in and taking over when it all goes tits up.

One squeeze and Gunter's history.

One of the features that strikes you when you first play the game is the incredibly detailed animations of your soldiers. By switching to a third-person view you can witness your troops crawl, stalk, run, lean and roll about the terrain in the most convincing manner. The mousewheel selects movement speed (à la *Splinter Cell*), which isn't just instinctive, but adds to the tension and is far more realistic than the usual run/walk keys. As with the original, you can shoot from the hip or aim down the sights, adding immeasurably to the sense of realism and immersion.

Bigger and better than its predecessor in every way, with more missions, added equipment, a substantially improved interface and, of course, a new 3D engine, *H&D2* is looking extremely tasty. Our only concerns lie with the stability of the final game and the AI of the enemy. There wasn't much evidence of any of those dynamic co-ordinated attacks we've been promised, but then it's still early code. Nevertheless, even if it was released tomorrow, *H&D2* would easily do away with young pretenders to the tactical shooter throne, such as *Ghost Recon* and *Raven Shield*. But this sequel has its sights set higher and, given due attention, we're confident it will eclipse its award-winning predecessor in every way. Best get some rest now while you can. PM

As in the original game, you must equip your troops before marching off to war. For those of us without the patience to pore over the penetration values of a Mk II Sten over an M1 Garand, the developers have added an auto-assign system that distributes the best weapons and equipment to those who can make best use of it. The arsenal of pistols, rifles, sub-machine guns and other ancillary equipment is exhaustive, and includes the small arms of Russia, Germany, Italy and Japan, as well as the Western Allies. Unfortunately, there is no flamethrower (as was mooted some time ago), which isn't perhaps such a big deal in the grand scheme of things, but still a little disappointing.

BY LAND OR SEA

On the up side, vehicles are set to take greater prominence in *H&D2*. *Hidden & Dangerous* was often at its best when some transportation could (very occasionally) be commandeered, and although *Battlefield 1942* may have stolen its thunder, the sequel features a host of Jeeps, staff cars, half-tracks, tanks and even two-man submersibles. Not only do *H&D2*'s small fleet of war machines look far more convincing than in any other WWII game, they're more realistically modelled too. Squeeze your entire squad into a LRDG Jeep and watch as your boys struggle to shoot at pursuers, swaying to and fro as they bound across the dunes.

ONLINE AND DANGEROUS

_H&D2_ MAKES A FIRM ONLINE COMMITMENT WITH FOUR MULTIPLAYER MODES

The so-called H&D2 Mode offers a slower, sneakier style of multiplayer action on dedicated small-scale maps. Teamwork will be of the essence.

Throughout the game's development, we've been promised something special for *H&D2*'s multiplayer game. More details have now emerged, and though it seems the original's undervalued co-op mode has been dumped, the developers are going all-out to make up for the lack of online support in the previous game.

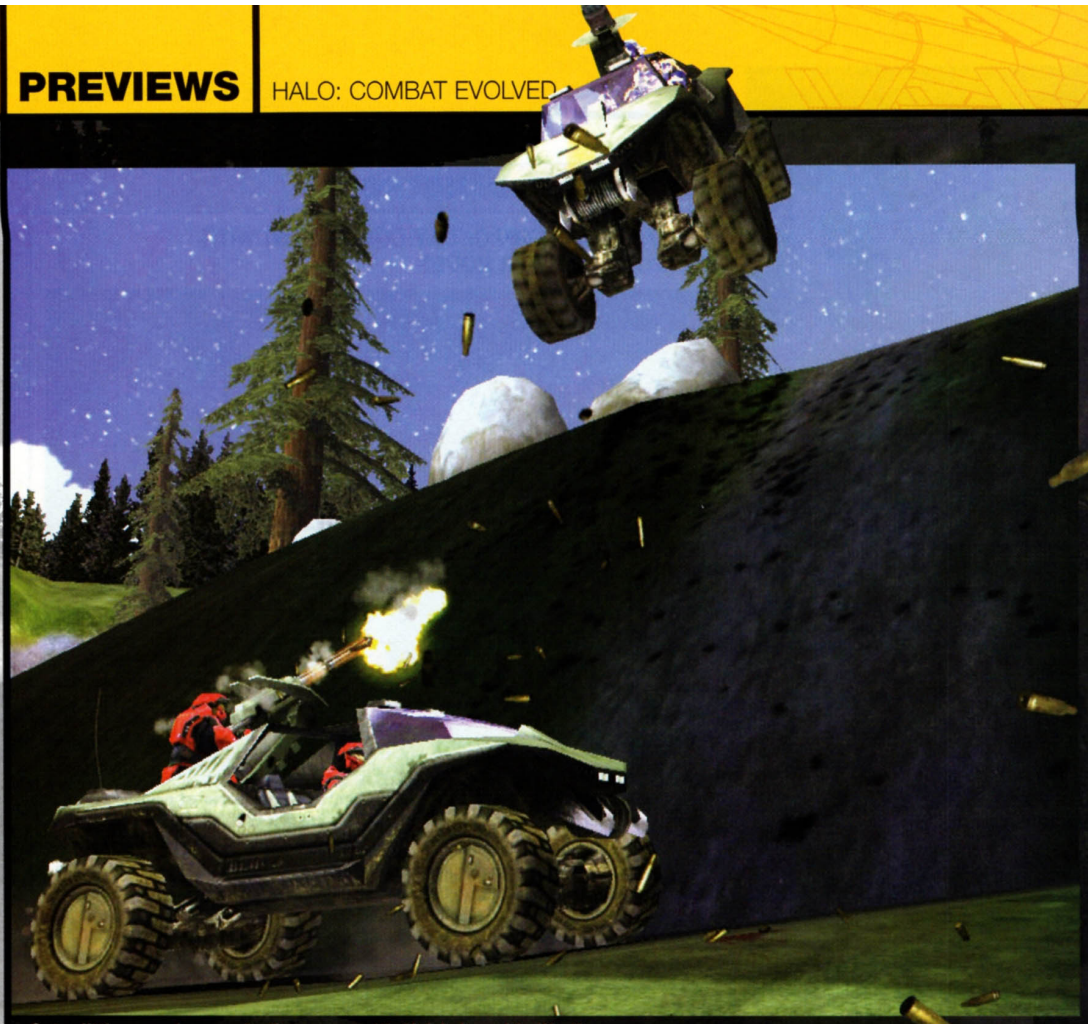
A total of four multiplayer modes are planned: Deathmatch (which seems a bit pointless), Team Deathmatch, Occupation and something currently going by the name of 'H&D2 Mode'.

Occupation mode seems to be a small-scale version of *Battlefield 1942*'s Conquest game, where each side fights on foot or inside various vehicles for control points, the aim being to seize the largest geographical area to win the game. H&D2 Mode, as you would expect, involves much more sneaking around. We had a quick blast playing across a couple of H&D2 Mode maps and they were surprisingly compact and perfectly suited to small eight-player games – a refreshing contrast to *BF1942* massed battles.

It's estimated that by age 30, the average PC gamer has liberated France over 6,000 times.

"Squeeze your entire squad into a LRDG Jeep and watch as your boys struggle"

Shooting, stealth, lock-picking and first aid improve as you progress.



Get a little more bounce to the ounce with *Halo*'s loveable Warthogs.

Above you! *Halo* supports full 5.1 surround sound.

The other lord of the ring...

HALO: COMBAT EVOLVED

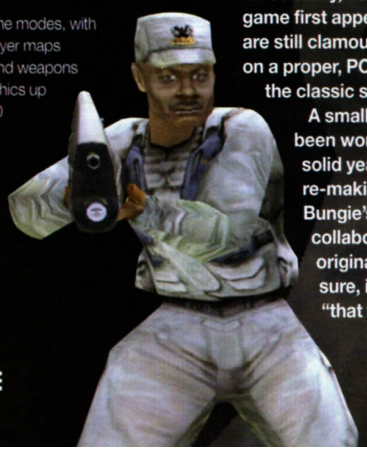
Finally, the lost child of PC shooters is coming home. *Jamie Sefton* goes to the birthplace of the FPS to find out why we should still care...

THE DETAILS

PUBLISHER Microsoft
DEVELOPER Gearbox/Bungie
ETA October
WEBSITE www.gearboxsoftware.com

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- The classic Xbox FPS comes to PC at last
- Brand new online modes, with all-new multiplayer maps
- New vehicles and weapons
- Enhanced graphics up to a 1600x1200 resolution



"*HALO* HAS THE best AI I've ever played with, and I spent three years making *Half-Life* games." So says Randy Pitchford, president of Gearbox Software, as he sits playing a familiar-looking pastel-hued game in his Texas HQ. It's typical of the kind of admiration *Halo* inspires, and just one reason why, nearly two years after the game first appeared on Xbox, gamers are still clamouring to get their hands on a proper, PC-optimised version of the classic shooter.

A small team at Gearbox has been working on *Halo* for a solid year now, painstakingly re-making the game from Bungie's Xbox code, collaborating closely with the original developer to make sure, in Pitchford's words, "that we don't screw it up". The process is nearly complete. The new multiplayer modes and maps are in, the graphics have been overhauled, the gameplay sharpened. And now, confident that they have not, in fact, screwed it up, Randy's letting us play it.

For any hermit-like gamers out there who haven't had the opportunity to play the Xbox's best game, *Halo* is an FPS set on a colossal and mysterious ring-shaped world, casting you as a super-soldier fighting hordes of alien Covenant. When it was released to launch the Xbox in 2001, it immediately staked a claim to the title of best console shooter ever. Back then, it had graphics to match any PC game, along with an enthralling sci-fi plot, superb human and alien weaponry, fantastic vehicles, and, as Randy says, some hugely impressive troop and enemy AI.

Bungie also innovated in several areas of the genre, only allowing your character to carry two weapons at any time, thus forcing you to make strategic decisions on the fly. *Halo* introduced the idea of a gradually recharging shield, a superb convention

"The new multiplayer modes and maps are in, the graphics have been overhauled, and Randy is confident they haven't, in fact, screwed it up"

Floody hell! There's a major plot twist halfway through *Halo*, but we're not going to spoil it for you...

CV gearbox software

GEARBOX SOFTWARE

Based in Plano, Texas, Gearbox made its name making *Half-Life* expansion packs for Valve, but the outfit has also developed original titles including *007: Nightfire*. The team currently boasts over 30 full-time staff.

1999 *Half-Life: Opposing Force* was one of the best-received expansion packs ever created, garnering a cupboard-full of awards and providing Xen-starved gamers a whole new angle on the *Half-Life* story.

2000 You may have heard of this one – *Half-Life: Counter-Strike*. Gearbox did a lot of work on the original counter-terrorism mod when it became an official retail expansion in late 2000.

2001 It's back to Black Mesa for Gearbox's second *Half-Life* expansion pack, *Blue Shift*, featuring everyone's favourite security guard Barney.

2002 *James Bond 007: NightFire* was a solid if uninspired shooter, though Gearbox president Randy Pitchford has suggested that working with a movie licence with such strict guidelines was very hard work.

There are tentative plans to release a single-player co-op mode at a later date.

that added tension as you skulked in the darkness praying that your personal force field would power-up before the next wave of aliens attacked. Plus there were the vehicles, which handled beautifully due to the game's excellent physics model. You could skid around the varied terrain in your three-man Warthog buggy, climb inside a massive Scorpion tank and pound the enemy from afar, or even commandeer the Covenant alien vehicles like the Ghost hover-ship and the Banshee flying attack craft.

With Gearbox's intervention, the single-player game on PC now supports the latest video cards, running up to a resolution of 1600x1200. Mouse and keyboard support goes without saying, as does a proper quicksave function, but Gearbox has also tweaked the gameplay ever so slightly, taking the best bits of the Xbox PAL and NTSC versions of *Halo* to make the definitive version. For example, the sniper rifle, always a favourite, has the less extreme European 8x zoom, rather than the USA's original 10x zoom. "It's surprising how many times we favoured the PAL version," says Pitchford. "It came later, so Bungie had more time to balance things."

SEE THE RING

Halo's multiplayer modes on Xbox were also great, but completely offline – to play with or against friends you all had to cram around the TV like laboratory animals or create a crude network by painstakingly connecting several Xboxes together. Gearbox believes it is about to deliver the ultimate *Halo* multiplayer experience, with a host of original and new multiplayer modes, maps, vehicles and weapons – all playable with up to 16 players over LAN or Internet. "For most of the project we had six people working on *Halo*, with half of those manipulating the network code," says Pitchford of the process of getting *Halo* online. "That's more than we've ever had, and more than any game I've ever known had on that problem, but we wanted to make sure we did it right. Online multiplayer is a vital part of this product."

For existing fans of the game, you'll be glad to hear that all the maps and modes from the original *Halo* are still in the game. So you'll be able to enjoy King of the Hill, Slayer (deathmatch), Oddball (future sport), CTF and Race on levels such as the infamous Blood Gulch, which featured two bases at either end of an open battlefield.

But it's new content that we're really concerned with, and of this there's no shortage. For starters, there are six additional maps designed to cover as many different kinds of multiplayer mayhem as possible. Ice Fields is a snowy map that's as fun in Race as in CTF, causing any vehicles to skid around hopelessly on its frozen surfaces, whereas Timberland is a very open level with lots of cover – perfect for tank combat.

Gephyrophobia ('fear of bridges') is hugely playable and takes place on a central bridge with sniper platforms on either side – great when you take

One of the new weapons is the plasma-firing Fuel Rod Gun.

Halo's giant ring stretches painfully overhead.

control of the aerial Banshee and swoop down between the struts to pick off any enemy soldiers below.

Also new is Death Island, a variation on the Silent Cartographer level in *Halo*, which kicks off with a dramatic *Private Ryan*-style beach-landing among dozens of aggressive Covenant troops. Then there's Danger Canyon, which has a nasty L-shape in the middle allowing you to launch a major assault without the enemy spotting your approach. Finally, there's Infinity, which is a large figure-of-eight that Pitchford says was inspired by a childhood toy called Criss Cross Crash, where vehicles can race around the loop before smashing dramatically into each other in the middle.

The new flame-thrower is great for hosing down intruders inside your base.

FOUR ON THE FLOOR

Crucially, Gearbox has added full vehicle support to all these maps, as well as introducing a new Rocket Launcher Warthog – a buggy packing explosive missiles for powerful long-range strikes. But we reckon the biggest thrill for *Halo* fanatics will be the chance to unleash the firepower of two brand new weapons – the flame-thrower and the Fuel Rod Gun.

The flame-thrower was something that Bungie has wanted to include in *Halo*, but didn't have the time to implement. Pitchford and his team have made sure that this new weapon hurts big time, so just a few bursts of flame will toast any troops nearby in seconds. It works a treat and is great in confined spaces, but is balanced by its range – wielding a flame-thrower makes you hugely vulnerable to snipers.

The Fuel Rod Gun is basically a huge mortar, pumping out devastating plasma shells that can be fired far into the distance. The coward in us had a great time with this weapon when we tried a multiplayer match, as it allows you to stand at the back and shell enemy positions while your teammates surge forward. Both weapons are a hugely welcome addition, offering many new possibilities for team tactics in multiplayer games.

Throw in the fact that you can now take command of many more vehicles on all the maps, and you can have battles that are more intense than *UT 2003*, more tactical than *Tribes* and way funnier than any other FPS out there. "We spent a lot of time balancing the new weapons because we didn't want to mess it up," said Pitchford. "Gearbox and Bungie are ruthless. If there's something we don't like, we're not afraid to say it."

On top of all the gameplay tweaks and additions, the enhanced graphics make a massive difference. All the latest whiz-bang bump-mapping and specular lighting techniques are in place, at resolutions that offer 1,000 times more pixels than the original game. It's like having a new pair of glasses after years of looking through broken Coke bottles.

If there's any remaining worries about *Halo* on PC, it's that the slightly slower pace of the game may frustrate hardcore shooter fans, and the notable lack of a co-op campaign mode (so superb on the Xbox) could significantly weaken the package. However, having spent some time playing the game in an all-but-complete state, there's little doubt in our minds that *Halo* is absolutely still worth playing on PC. With Bungie's groundbreaking creation finally playable online, including new maps, weapons and vehicles, *Halo* PC could be every bit the classic we've been hoping for. PCZ

HALO'S ROCKING MODS

THERE'LL BE NO SHORTAGE OF MULTIPLAYER ACTION IN THE NEW *HALO*

While the multiplayer modes in *Halo* PC will be familiar to fans of the Xbox game, Gearbox is doing everything it can to extend the longevity and variety of online games, offering oodles of options to customise each game type. So, you can opt to have only one life, no shields, customised vehicles and weapons for the Blue and Red teams, friendly fire, infinite grenades, suicide penalties, and loads more. Gearbox will also be releasing mod tools and tutorials online after the game's release, and you can be sure there are hordes of fans out there just desperate to turn their ring-shaped map ideas into reality.

Q&A

RANDY PITCHFORD

We corner the president of Gearbox Software in a desperate verbal skirmish

PCZ How long have you been working on *Halo* PC?

RP Just over a year. We didn't start immediately after the Xbox version shipped, which is one of the reasons why I was surprised to even have the opportunity, but I'm thankful for it. The other thing that's good about it is the latest graphics hardware wouldn't have been out at that time, so we wouldn't have been able to take advantage of a lot of new features.

PCZ Were you surprised that no work had been done on the PC version – after all, *Halo* started out on PC!

RP Definitely. When Bungie got together with Microsoft for the Xbox, they did everything, rebuilding the entire game and making it specific to the Xbox. I ported *Half-Life* to the PS2 and that was hard work, but that was NOTHING compared to this. Everybody says the Xbox is like a PC – that's not true. This is serious hardware and it's completely unique. Taking *Halo* to PC was a very complicated and big job – much more difficult than anything I've done before.

PCZ What's been the major challenge in recreating the single-player game?

RP The challenges have mostly been technical, taking advantage of the new hardware. We've now got these great new video cards, with pixel shaders and so on, which finally surpass what the Xbox can do, which beat any PC at the time of its launch. There's some temptation to manipulate things, but there's a reason why *Halo* is so good and why it leaves the gamer thinking it's the best console shooter ever made. I believe it's going to go down as one of the best FPSs on the PC also. The challenge is not damaging it in any way!

PCZ Have you thought about uncapping the 16-player limit for the larger maps, such as Infinity?

RP It's not related to network code, it's a question of design. We'll see – at the moment 16 players is more than the ideal number. Some upcoming tournaments are going to run the game with five versus five because that's what *Halo* is best suited for. If this becomes an issue later, we can talk about that with mods – the technology doesn't prohibit more players – but it's more about the experience we want to deliver.

PCZ What do you feel will be the next big step in FPS games?

RP Obviously we love cool graphics features – we're all hardcore geeks who love technology – but where we're really maturing as an industry and a genre is our ability to create interactive entertainment. You get to be the hero, and that is so insanely compelling, but we just need to get better at it and get more and more people involved.

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The *CIV* expansion you can play between meals without ruining your appetite.

New resources include tobacco, jade and exotic birds.

Bomb the foreign barbarians at Pearl Harbor.

THE DETAILS

PUBLISHER Atari
DEVELOPER Firaxis
ETA November 7
WEBSITE www.civ3.com

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- New expansion pack for the brilliant *Civ III*
- Nine new historical campaigns
- New, expanded technology tree
- Seven new civilizations, including the Mayans and the Dutch

Culture club...

CIVILIZATION III: CONQUESTS

***Keith Pullin* discovers a new world of action in this timely *Civ III* expansion**

THOUGH GENIUS as a single-player game, *Civilization III* has never quite attained the same levels of excellence on the multiplayer circuit. The main problem with the existing *Play The World* multiplayer expansion pack is it takes just too damn long to play. In fact, the closest you get to a quick online skirmish is a 15-hour marathon. People (at least those with jobs and lives) simply aren't prepared to stick around that long.

Enter *Civ III: Conquests*. This second expansion pack condenses the multiplayer game into a much more manageable time frame, while also presenting a much more 'in your face' single-player experience. In fact, after trying out a few of the game's nine new campaigns it appears that you'll usually have to spare no more than 90 minutes on any of the scenarios.

Historical accuracy, very much a buzzword in strategy games at the moment, is also ramped up in *Conquests*. Campaigns cover such monumental points in history as the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the Mayans' mysterious rise to power in South America and a detailed feudal Japan scenario providing the chance to fight against 18 other clans in a race to become Shogun.

These lovingly crafted chunks of human history boast accurate new technology options, with tech trees tailored to individual civilizations, and painstakingly realistic maps.

Borders and alliances are preset for instant action.

Crucially, they also provide action from the off. There's no pussy-footing around expanding your empire and flirting cautiously with your Neanderthal neighbours. Borders, alliances and all the intricacies that usually take ages to sort out are already established. As a result, gameplay is streamlined to ensure civilizations clash as soon as possible.

In one of the Mesopotamian scenarios, for example, the aim is to be the first tribe to donate a token to the local god, who resides in a nearby volcano. This means beating down all the other tribes in order to reach the top first. Sure, you can rampage through their towns and cities in typical *Civ III* fashion if you like, but it's by no means essential. The new victory conditions are much more varied than before, thus increasing the variety of gameplay and, to a large extent, eliminating that painful endgame drag.

"*Conquests* might just be the expansion pack *Play The World* should have been"

LONG KNIGHTS AHEAD

Other gameplay improvements focus on the units themselves. Again, a lot of it boils down to realism and Firaxis is working hard on making each civilization feel even more distinctive. Japan has kamikaze pilots and ninjas (the latter being a stealth unit), and the South American tribes now have the ability to perform ritual sacrifices. New units like the Knights Templar allow the English to spawn units automatically, while in the Pearl Harbor scenario ships actually bear accurate names before being spectacularly trashed.

All in all, *Conquests* might just be the expansion pack *Play The World* should have been, but we'll have more details when we review the game next issue. PCZ

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YOU WILL UNLEARN ALL THAT YOU HAVE LEARNED.

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Oh, what a lovely war...

CALL OF DUTY

LAST PREVIEWED PCZONE ISSUE 130

The defences have been breached, and other WWII shooters are in full retreat. *Jamie Sefton* plays the FPS that could be about to win the Battle of the Builds...

THE DETAILS

PUBLISHER Activision
DEVELOPER Infinity Ward
WEBSITE www.infinityward.com
ETA November

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- British, American and Russian WWII campaigns with three different characters
- Meticulously scripted sequences to deliver authentic war experience
- Masses of multiplayer options

Stalingrad – one of the meat-grinding Russian missions.

CV

INFINITY WARD

Set up in 2002 by 22 former employees of 2015 (*Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault*), Infinity Ward hopes to make its mark in the gaming world with *Call Of Duty*. After signing a long-term publishing deal with Activision, Infinity Ward is planning to build *Call Of Duty* into a new WWII franchise – if the first game is a hit...

Keeping your squad-mates alive is imperative if you want to win this war.

AS I STUMBLE on to the body-strewn battlefield unarmed, I just manage to catch a glimpse of my brave comrades streaming towards the heavily-defended Nazi positions before the mortar lands. Stunned for several seconds, I stagger for cover as a muted cacophony of machine-gun fire, explosions, shouts and screams rings in my shell-damaged ears. Collapsing behind the remains of a wall, I grab a weapon from the fingers of a victim and make a desperate dash for a doorway in a ruined Stalingrad tenement block.

Sheer panic. It's one of the many emotions you'll experience in the first 30 seconds of one of the Russian missions in the forthcoming first-person shooter *Call Of Duty*. We've been banging on about Infinity Ward's new WWII action title since we broke news of its existence in issue 129, but the rest of the gaming world is now finally decoding the message that *Call Of Duty* is going to be very special indeed.

We recently had a hands-on play of the latest *Call Of Duty* code, including several new levels that previously hadn't left the confines of Infinity Ward's bunker. For those of you who haven't read previous briefings, *Call Of Duty* follows characters from American, British and Russian campaigns over 27 levels, leading up to events that all happen simultaneously on D-Day. "British missions are more about smaller groups, superior intel, and a little more stealth and tactics," says Infinity Ward's Vince Zampella. "Russians are more about body count, about throwing guys out there, whereas the American missions are somewhere in between."

So, rather than being a grizzled American soldier single-handedly winning the war for Uncle Sam, you'll experience the conflict from different perspectives, often backed up by intelligent troops, who will cover your position, return fire and complete important mission-critical tasks.

Sadly, there's no tank-based multiplayer planned.

DRIVE-BY SHOOTING

As a passenger in the jeep in a manic chase through the countryside, you have to shoot any enemies chasing you on motorbikes, occasionally leaning out of the window for a better view. It's exhilarating stuff, as you see your car windows splintering around you, bullets pinging off the bodywork and enemy vehicles spinning off the road and exploding when you hit them where it hurts.

After a fast and furious sequence, you have to flee your jeep as it's cornered in a narrow village alleyway by a hulking German tank. The mission now takes the form of a tense house-to-house battle against dug-in Nazis, as you attempt to find another vehicle in which to escape. Your two squad-mates now start to pull their weight, providing covering fire when you need to make a dash for a safe position, and hotwiring a new car when you discover one handily left behind in a garage. "You can often tell by your team-mates where to head next, so the AI will watch doorways, for example," adds Zampella.

"*Call Of Duty* is as authentic as possible without hurting the gameplay"

VINCE ZAMPELLA
CHIEF CREATIVE OFFICER, INFINITY WARD

Hits are per pixel, with localised damage and hundreds of character animations.

Next up, Infinity Ward loaded up a plucky British mission, based on the historical D-Day assault on Pegasus Bridge, where soldiers were silently flown in using gliders made of aluminium and wood to take and hold this critical position. "You want to be immersed and believe it's real, so we used real uniforms, weapons and the Pegasus Bridge for modelling and to get the distances involved," says Zampella. "We did a shoot where we rented all the WWII weapons, fired them and filmed them to gauge how the guns kicked and reloaded, and took pictures for texture and dimensions, then recorded the audio. *Call Of Duty* is as authentic as possible without hurting the gameplay."

STIFF UPPER LIPS

The mission begins with you and your Para chums on board a glider just before it crash-lands a few hundred metres from the bridge. You're soon spotted and begin a hectic raid on the German positions, backed up by dozens of troops throwing grenades, shooting guns and sniping distant rooftop Nazis. Staying prone is essential at this point to make sure you're less vulnerable, as shrapnel and bullets whiz about your head like angry mosquitoes.

Playing this level was great fun, but just as we thought we'd reached the height of the action, we were told by our plum-in-the-mouth British sergeant to "Tally ho, old boy" and capture a flak cannon. After a manic dash through the battlefield, I managed to take the enemy's huge flak gun and begin firing shells at their positions, taking chunks out of buildings and sending Nazis hurtling into the air with the force of the explosions. Fantastic stuff. Infinity Ward mentioned this was not the only stationary weapon, and that you'll be able to get your hands on others, including a four-barrelled anti-aircraft gun.

We've only scratched the surface of *Call Of Duty* with this preview. Infinity Ward's single-player missions range from spectacular *Private Ryan*-style set-pieces with more than 100 Russian soldiers fighting individual battles alongside you while Stuka bombers dive down for attack, through to exhilarating tank missions in snow-covered Eastern Europe and stealthy solo missions in which sniping from distance is the only way of destroying air defences without alerting the Nazis.

SEEK AND DESTROY

However, Infinity Ward also revealed for the first time some of the planned online multiplayer modes, as well as confirming that there would be a bunch of dedicated multiplayer maps. As well as basic Deathmatch, team modes will include several objective-based games such as the self-explanatory Seek and Destroy, as well as Retrieval, which involves stealing or defending a vital piece of equipment. Frankly, we can't wait to get hold of the finished *Call Of Duty*, which barring a catastrophic last-minute retreat on the scale of Dunkirk, looks set to demote *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault* to second-best WWII shooter of all time. We'll find out with our definitive review next month. PCZ

Crucially, you can aim down the sights of all the weapons.

Pegasus Bridge – Britain's finest hour.

Q&A

VINCE ZAMPELLA

Infinity Ward's chief creative officer briefs us on our upcoming mission…

PCZ What is Infinity Ward's philosophy as a games company?
VZ Anything is possible. We have a lot of talent and we allow them the freedom to have input, so that everybody is heard. Sometimes we have arguments over it, people will fight, but that's the passion that drives the process forward. At the end of that we make up and we make the best game possible.

PCZ How can you keep *Call Of Duty* cohesive without one central character?
VZ One of the central ideas of *COD* is that you're not just a super-soldier, you have a squad around you and you really interact with other people. If there's no personality to all these characters then you don't care about them. That's why we've secured a writer named Michael Schiffer (*Crimson Tide*, *The Peacemaker*) for the script. He went through the script and breathed some life into the characters in the game, making all the dialogue more believable.

PCZ Have you used ragdoll physics in *Call Of Duty*?
VZ To get better control, we hand-animated all of the deaths with an enormous number of different ones. However, when shot characters fall, they do orientate themselves to the surface, so they don't stick out of stairs and so on. With ragdoll stuff you get that cool falling to the ground, but they don't generally look as good, because they get that floppy-limbed effect. The trade-off is whether you want a better-looking death with bodies just orientating on the surface, or the death to look not as good, but the laying on the ground to look better. For me I think the death animation is more important. Once we can blend the two, that'll be perfect.

PCZ Do you have plans for your next game?
VZ It's one step at a time at the moment. We're building the *Call Of Duty* brand and we need to make this a solid hit first. This is the calling card for the franchise, and for our company. It needs to be 100 per cent.

The best thing about *Chrome* is undoubtedly the scale of the environments. It takes the fun of sniping to a whole new level.

Rise and shine...

CHROME

Paper bag and paint in hand, *Anthony Holden* gets a cheap high with this free-roaming sci-fi shooter

THE DETAILS

PUBLISHER Gathering
DEVELOPER Techland Software
ETA September 19
WEBSITE www.chromethegame.com

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Mixture of tactical shooting and *Deus Ex*-style cybernetics
- Huge environments with complete freedom to roam
- A range of futuristic vehicles to pilot
- 14 missions with loads of gameplay variety

CV

techland

TECHLAND SOFTWARE

You may not have heard of them, but Techland is quite a force in its native Poland, with fingers in distribution, publishing, marketing and, of course, games development. The company was established in 1991, but the development side has only been ramped up in the last few years, concentrating on cartoonish kids' games (*Indiana Jack*, *Pet Soccer*) and racing titles (*Speedway Championships*, *Pet Racer*). Here's a few other memorable moments...

2000 Techland releases both *Mission Humanity*, an uninspiring *C&C* clone, and *Crime Cities*, a cyberpunk-themed aerial shooter that won fans with its *Bladerunner* stylings.

2003 Earlier this year, the boys shipped *FIM Speedway Grand Prix*, a dirtbike racer built on the *Chrome* engine.

2003 *Xpand Rally*, due later this year, is another racer built on the *Chrome* renderer, this time focusing on the world of high-octane, illegal rally driving.

WHERE I COME from, the practice of glue-sniffing, or deliberately concentrating and inhaling domestic solvents for the purpose of getting high, is commonly known as 'chroming'. *Chrome*, on the other hand, is a tactical first-person shooter from Poland, which has nothing to do with huffing paint till your eyes bleed, but it does have one or two things in common with its sleazy homonym.

You see, while chroming is clearly not an ideal fix, it's a hell of a lot cheaper than a fold of Peruvian flake, and a whole lot more intense than a round of beers with your mates. And that's what *Chrome* is all about. It's not a Class-A shooter by any means, but it works hard to make up for it with a unique repertoire of gun-toting action and a street price of just £20. And it might just get the job done.

TAKE A DEEP BREATH

The game kicks off in deep space. You are Bolt Logan, a tough-as-nails mercenary and bounty hunter, on a mission to steal some data from a fortified installation with your heavy-handed partner, Hertz. Touching down on the planet Zorg (yes, Zorg), the first mission sets the pattern for the rest of the game, with a mixture of expansive outdoor environments calculated for long-distance sniping, and claustrophobic indoor sections marked by narrow metallic corridors. It's an uneasy start to the game, as you're hastily introduced to mechanics such as searching bodies, managing your inventory and setting waypoints on a pop-up map. The free-roaming gameplay is initially curtailed by the presence of your annoying partner, but fortunately things soon improve and the game settles in to some serious planet-hopping action.

The plot of the game is pure space opera – evil mining corporations, sinister galactic plots, a love/hate romance between a hardhearted rogue and his sharp-tongued companion. After a narrow escape on Zorg, it's a year-long time lapse, returning to find a tougher, more experienced Logan with a fresh new set of cybernetic implants and a score to settle. It's silly sci-fi stuff, but sets the scene nicely for what is to follow.

Judging from the build of *Chrome* we've been playing (which is around 90 per cent complete), a few things are immediately apparent. For starters, the broad outdoor environments are clearly going to be this game's strong suit. The freedom to roam across wide-open grasslands, mountains and forests is

***Chrome* as in dome.**

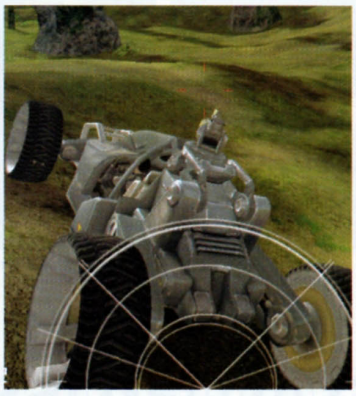
Your range of cyber abilities grows throughout the game.

YOU SNEAKY LITTLE...

CHROME IS ALL ABOUT BIG GUNS AND WIDE-OPEN SPACES, SO TREAD CAREFULLY

Sinper towers are a unique challenge.

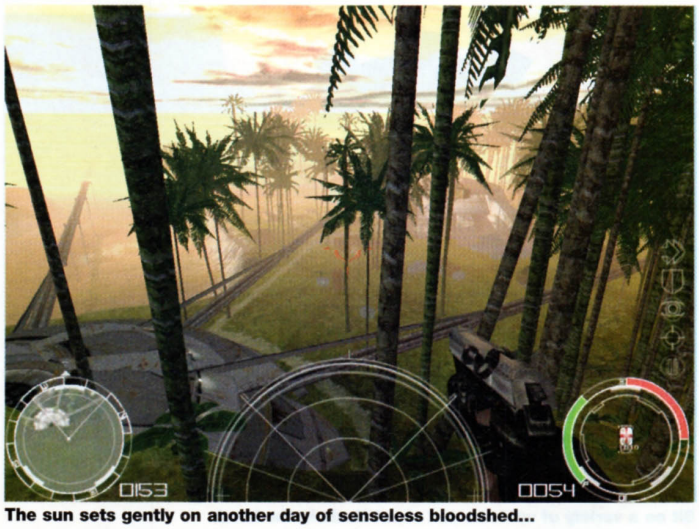
One of the things *Chrome* does very well is push you to use the expansive outdoor terrain in the game to your advantage, forcing you to think about things like cover, lines of sight and elevation. One clever gameplay device that's repeated throughout the game involves a sniper's nest and a lot of deliberately placed rocks, the guard tower placed in such a way that you have to take it out before you can proceed. To get in range, you're faced with a large exposed area of ground – the perfect killing field for a sharpshooter. But look! By an uncanny stroke of luck, there's a series of boulders, hillocks, trees and ditches you can zigzag between until the gunman is in your sights, hopefully giving him only a few chances to pepper you before you nail the sonofabitch. It's a basic idea, but one that works well, forcing you to exercise a bit of patience and giving a nice feeling of reward when you get your man.



Bolt's buggy.

Enemy scout walkers will give you all sorts of headaches.

On-rails shooting sections give you a chance to rest your brain.



The sun sets gently on another day of senseless bloodshed...

fantastic, allowing you to approach each target from any angle and with any tactic in mind. The sniper rifle is a hefty one, and combines with the huge draw distance to produce some magnificent headshots, while the long-range combat helps to disguise some fairly basic AI patterns. The *Chrome* engine is also much better at rendering stunning natural environments – gorgeous sunsets and magnificent tropical forests – than it is man-made ones. And on top of all this, outside is where you get to drive the many vehicles in the game, which range from combat buggies to scout walkers to twitchy hover-speeders.

NEUROMANTIC

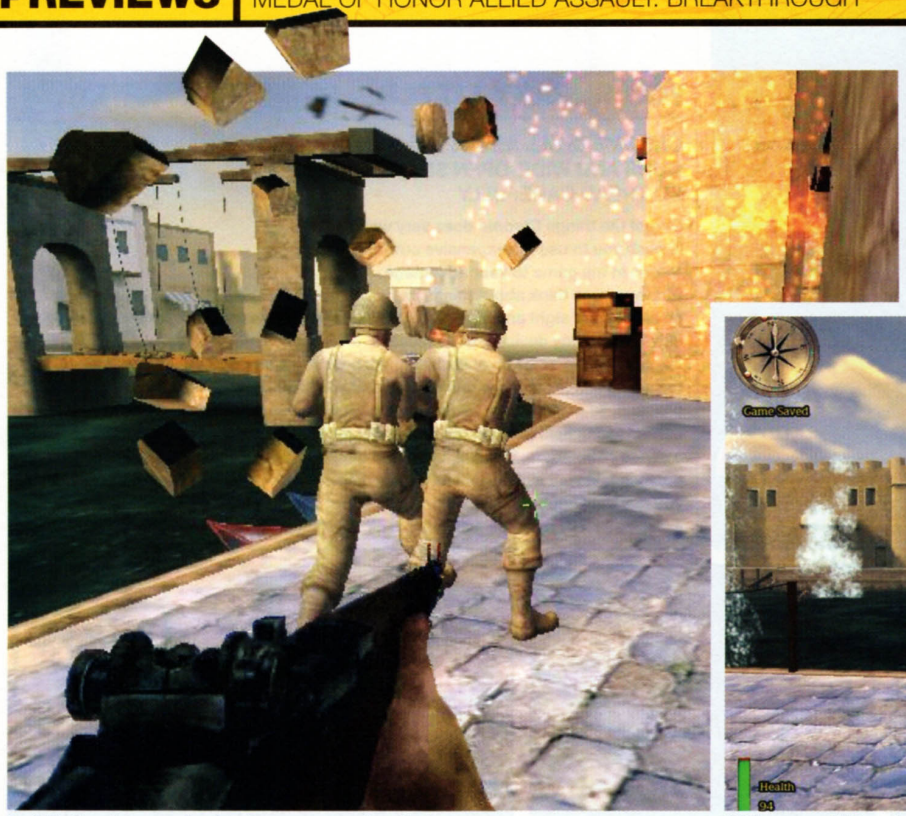
The basic gung-ho action is also spiced up by the inclusion of a *Deus Ex*-style implant system that offers you a variety of cyber-enhanced special abilities, such as improved aiming, recoil reduction, speed, strength and heat vision. These must be used sparingly, especially in the early stages, as you risk overloading your neural system, which results in a temporary dizziness/blackout effect. However, using your cyborg skills is essential, and the various abilities add a satisfying layer of interest and strategy to the FPS gameplay.

Inventory management too is all-important. You've got a limited number of inventory slots for weapons and items – only one primary weapon and one handgun can generally be carried, along with an assortment of grenades, health packs and ammo. You have to search dead bodies to keep yourself in supplies, with a basic *Diablo*-style drag-and-drop system used to organize things. Clearly, you'll drop your standard Uzi, machine gun or shotgun in favour of a sniper rifle the first chance you get, but you'll have to ditch it again for a more appropriate weapon before you enter a building.

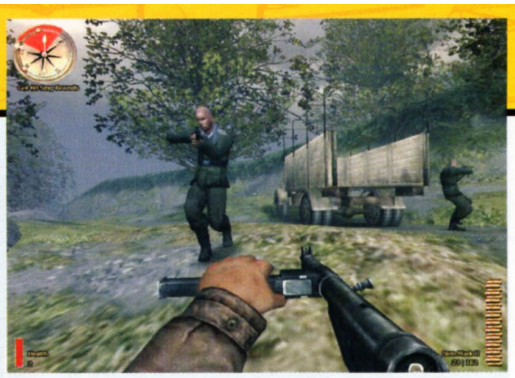
STUCK ON GLUE

Having played several of the near-complete levels, we've been increasingly entertained by *Chrome*. The indoor bits are currently a bit tedious, but the free-roaming outdoor sections are shaping up excellently. The variety of gameplay also can't be faulted – in addition to the indoor/outdoor dynamic, you've got a smattering of on-rails sequences, vehicles and boss battles, as well as a generous selection of mission objectives. Certainly the whole thing has a very low-budget feel to it – the cut-scenes are bad, the voice acting laughable – but there's plenty of satisfying action to compensate. If the developers can only beef up the repetitive indoor gameplay before the game ships, we could be looking at some hospital-grade stuff here and not just a quick back-alley wheeze on a spray can. Check out the exclusive *Chrome* demo on our cover discs and judge for yourself. PCZ

"The free-roaming outdoor sections are shaping up excellently"



And that's why you should always wear a hardhat.



No, wait, I can't quite see the whites of his eyes.

"Off you go, I'll be right behind you."

The Italian job...

MEDAL OF HONOR ALLIED ASSAULT: BREAKTHROUGH

***Dave Woods* sates his addiction with the second *Medal Of Honor* expansion**

THE DETAILS

PUBLISHER EA
DEVELOPER TKO
ETA September 26
WEBSITE www.mohaa.ea.com

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Second expansion to *Medal Of Honor*, still the best PC shooter
- Intense missions from the word go
- Much longer than *Spearhead*
- New 'Liberation' game mode

YOU'VE GOT to admire EA. Nothing if not consistent, their ethos of building up a name and then flogging it for all it's worth has brought in millions of dollars and a place at number one in the publisher's league table. *Medal Of Honor* is the latest franchise to whet EA's financial appetite and despite losing most of the original development team to Infinity Ward (home of *MOH* rival *Call Of Duty*), they're ploughing on with *Breakthrough* – 11 single-player missions spread across Italy and Africa, along with nine multiplayer maps and a new game mode, Liberation (think Jailbreak for *Quake III*).

CAMEL'S TOE

We've been playing some pre-Alpha code of the game, which shows there's still plenty of work to be done, but there's enough going on to suggest that *Breakthrough* might well turn out to be a cracking play. There are the obligatory new weapons and vehicles (like the Carcano rifle and a British bazooka-style weapon called the PIAT) and the visuals look as good as ever. But it's the philosophy of developers TKO that reeled us in from the off.

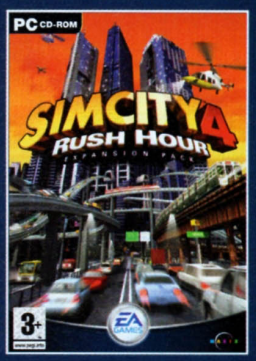
The very first mission plunges you into a massively intense firefight in the Kasserine Pass, hampered by a sandstorm and the fact that you've only just installed the game and thought you were going to get a few minutes to acclimatise. Reminiscent of the Omaha Beach landing, the first thing you do is panic and sprint for cover, before inching forward and ridding the world of a few Germans, then getting in a tank and letting rip at bunkers and machine gun nests. As a means of getting your attention it works, and the action doesn't really let up from that point on. Later missions see you storming a fortress in a rowing boat (stop laughing at the back!), fighting running battles through Italian vineyards and ending up at Monte Battaglia where the Allies are outnumbered 100 to 1 – just in case the rowing boats and vineyards had given you the impression the developers had gone soft.

Some flaws remain: it's criminally hard in places (were the Germans really that unerringly accurate, and if so why did they lose the war?), the driveable vehicles haven't materialized (TKO got them working but not to a decent-enough standard), the squad-based parts are pretty erratic and it's still as linear as join-the-dots. But, even at this early stage, it plays brilliantly and the developers seem to have succeeded in making every mission memorable and intense, rather than just concentrating on one or two set pieces. If the next few weeks are spent balancing the difficulty level and tweaking the AI rather than pissing away time playing the new multiplayer maps, *Breakthrough* could well succeed where most other expansion packs fall. PCZ

Sit on a variety of vehicles and shoot Nazis in the head.

CITIZENS,
START YOUR ENGINES.

YOU'RE IN CONTROL OF THE ROAD, RAIL, AIR AND WATERWAYS. AND YOU HAVE THE KEY RING TO PROVE IT. MAP OUT YOUR CITY, THEN MAKE YOUR FINAL MARK AS MAYOR. CHOOSE FROM PLANES, TRAINS, FERRIES, HELICOPTERS OR TANKS TO GET YOUR SIMS ON THE MOVE. BUT MAKE SURE YOU PLAN THE FLOW OF TRAFFIC CAREFULLY. BECAUSE IF THE TRANSPORTATION NETWORK BECOMES GRID LOCKED, YOU'LL ONLY HAVE YOURSELF TO BLAME.



SIMCITY™4 RUSH HOUR EXPANSION PACK REQUIRES SIMCITY™4 TO PLAY. BOTH GAMES INCLUDED IN THE ALL-NEW SIMCITY™4 DELUXE EDITION.

PC CD-ROM

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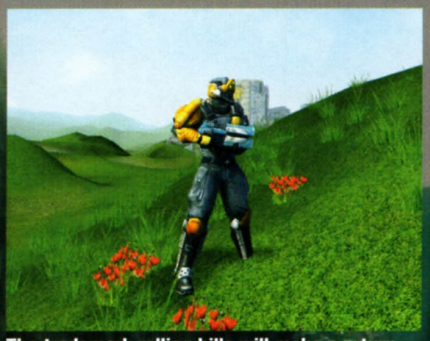
EA GAMES

Challenge Everything

uk.ea.com

Now, two (or three) tribes can go to war in ruined, urban environments.

It's either a big gun, or a gigantic pair of pliers.



The trademark rolling hills will make a return.

The Trouble with Tribals

TRIBES: VENGEANCE

Will Porter tries to write a _Tribes_ preview without a reference to the hits of Frankie Goes To Hollywood. With limited success

THERE ARE two schools of thought on *Tribes* games. The first, smaller group finds them as addictive as a purple fruit-pastille filled with crack. When they log on to the gigantic multiplayer Capture The Flag battles they delight in the free-roaming 3D landscapes. They've mastered the art of 'skiing' and using the physics and contours of the terrain to launch themselves at the enemy, and know everything about every conceivable tribal warrior from their favourite colour to the serial codes stamped on the inside of their armour. They were also horrified when Dynamix, the erstwhile developer of the series, was shut down in 2001.

The second school of thought joins a game of *Tribes 2* and doesn't even have time to say, "Cool! I've got a jetpack," before being shot in the head by a pre-pubescent American from a distance of one and a half miles. So they play *Counter-Strike* instead.

This is where Ken Levine and his band of merry men at Irrational Games come in. Famed for creating the awesome *System Shock 2*, Irrational suggested that what the *Tribes* universe needed was a strong single-player element that would introduce the newbie to the physics, tactics and mentality of a seasoned *Tribes*-hack. A solid solo experience that wouldn't be a glorified tutorial or *Battlefield 1942*-esque experiment in single-player drabness, but a game that would stand on its own two jet thrusters and plunge disc-launchers into the mainstream.

We took a trip to Irrational recently to check out the new game, interrupting Ken Levine's breakfast to ask him how the hell he intended to jam all of the intricacies and character classes of *Tribes* multiplayer into a solo FPS. Initially, we learnt that Levine puts a remarkable amount of sugar into his porridge. Secondly, we saw that the way *Tribes: Vengeance* is dealing with narrative is nothing short of revolutionary. "Why do all games follow a straight 'beginning, middle, end' chronology?" he

THE DETAILS

PUBLISHER VU Games
DEVELOPER Irrational Games
ETA Q4 2004
WEBSITE www.irrationalgames.com

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- With a little perseverance, the *Tribes* games are among the most addictive and rewarding games online
- Huge new single-player element – a lot more than just an intro to multiplayer
- Groundbreaking narrative style: leaping between stories, times, people and places like an FPS *Pulp Fiction*
- From the same stable as the superb *System Shock 2*

CV

IRRATIONAL GAMES

Working out of Boston, USA and Canberra, Australia, Irrational Games is responsible for some of the finest single-player thrills that money can buy

1997 Irrational is founded, with many of the staff harking from Looking Glass Studios where they developed *Thief: The Dark Project*.

1999 *System Shock 2* is released to huge acclaim. The space station-based FPS scares the bejesus out of all who play it and seamlessly blends the RPG and shooter genres.

2002 *Freedom Force* is released, a nifty tactical RPG that lets you play with your own superheroes, fighting the powers of evil.

"Fly my hawkmen! Fly!"

"We've included Tribal combat as a sport in the universe"

KEN LEVINE
IRRATIONAL GAMES

The *Unreal* engine can produce some snazzy indoor environments.

Yet again, Keith was on bridge-guarding duty.

asks, shovelling on sweetener like a crazed diabetic. "We thought about movies like *Pulp Fiction*, where the camera tells the story as it wants to be told: going between different people, different times and different places. We've put our focus on one family whose story spans 20 years, with the narrative going back and forth in time to cover it. Within this you'll be able to play as six or seven different characters."

YOU WHAT?

So, in one mission you could be playing a second-class citizen, a Phoenix Tribesman, fighting for your life in a bad-ass suit of heavy armour, while in the next you could be seeing through the eyes of a six-year-old imperial princess. "She's being chased by these bad guys," continues Levine as he excitedly reaches for a spoon. "She hasn't got any guns or armour, and at one point she gets a jetpack. Seeing as she's so small, and she's got a rocket strapped to her back, the physics are way overpowered for her. It's quite a ride!" What's even stranger is that the non-linear timeline means that a few levels earlier you will have played as this same character when she is around 20 years older. It's bizarre, we know, but it looks like it's going to work.

Speaking of mixed up chronology, *Vengeance* is actually a prequel to the two previous *Tribes* games, with Irrational wanting to develop a section of the *Tribes* back-story that wouldn't need reams of fanboy knowledge to get into. This timeframe, untouched by any of the other 12 games set within the *Tribes* universe, has given Irrational a lot of freedom in terms of narrative, but has also had a huge effect on the design and aesthetics of the game.

"We wanted to represent the first generation of what you know as *Tribes* technology," says Levine. "It's a bulkier technology, where you see more of the mechanics on the surface – it's like seeing the difference between a biplane and a 747. Jetpacks will be spewing out black smoke, stuff like that. It's all about functionality."

UNREAL CITY

The use of the *Unreal* engine means that this won't be the only change in the way *Tribes* struts its stuff. The trademark rolling green hills will still be there, but there are incredible new styles of map such as abandoned, ruined cities with decaying skyscrapers that will stun even the casual *Tribes* fan with its potential for online carnage. Another mouth-watering prospect is levels set in huge arenas specifically designed for the skiing, sliding and other three-dimensional tomfoolery that sets *Tribes* apart from the conventional strafe 'n' shoot mentality. "We've included Tribal combat as a sport in this universe now," explains Levine. "One of the characters is actually a sports superstar, the David Beckham of the *Tribes* world. You play as her in the context of a championship match in an arena with all these amazing slopes and skating surfaces."

So far, so good. But we all know that if Levine's crew bugger up the multiplayer then thousands of outraged *Tribes* fanatics will leave their rooms, blink in the daylight and hang him from the nearest streetlamp with a mouse lead. Even the suggestion that the fabled disc-launcher might have vertical discs instead of the established horizontal sent shockwaves over the Internet. Levine knows the risks, but is saying approximately chuff-all about online play until they have more than a 35 per cent build to show us. From the maps we've seen, though, it should be something pretty special. The Irrational lads have been in close contact with the *Tribes* online community, desperate not to disappoint their fanbase, and have even hired a prominent member of the mod-community to be their lead multiplayer designer.

The direction in which Levine and co are taking the *Tribes* franchise is undeniably risky, and if the game doesn't please either the newcomer or the old guard then they're truly up Shazbot-creek without a Burner. But Irrational certainly has the talent to pull it off, binding an epic and revolutionary story with a vastly under-appreciated style of gameplay. As long as they keep the hardcore appeased, it looks like they're on to a winner. PCZ

SKI SCHOOL

A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO *TRIBES* PHYSICS

For those of you who think *Tribes* is just a shit TV show from Downunder, think again – there are many things that make *Tribes 2* stand out from the FPS crowd. Primarily there is skiing: the art of continuing to press the Jump key as you slide down a hill. In this way you build up momentum, and if you aim for a slight hillock or bump and use your jetpack at the right time, you can fling yourself into the atmosphere at quite ridiculous speeds and elevations. In fact, *Tribes* is one of the few games in which the old-fashioned rocket-jump is still king. In this way *Tribes* is a lot like a sports game, in that you hone your movement and reactions the more you play and however good you are, there's always room for improvement. Plus it's one of few online games that actually succeeds in eliciting teamwork from its participants. This is why *Tribes* is good. Sermon ends.

REVIEWS

THE DEFINITIVE LOWDOWN ON ALL THE LATEST PC GAMES

ROOM FOR MORE

■ **SENIOR REVIEWS ED** Martin Korda

It's begun. The lull before the madness. The calm before the storm. The cliché before the next cliché. What am I on about? The lack of games to review before the Christmas rush, of course. Happens every year. Regular as, err... well, Christmas I suppose.

Not that I'm saying this month's crop of contenders doesn't stack up in the reputation stakes. Kicking things off we've got a game we've been tracking for quite some time now – *Judge Dredd: Dredd vs Death*.

Resident moaner Steve Hill spent a week at developer Rebellion's offices playing it, holed up overnight in a run-down hotel, gleefully booked for him by a cackling PR man who'd claimed it was the second-best hotel in Oxford. On his arrival at the roach-infested pit, Hill flew into a fit of rage and texted said PR man the following: "You've really excelled yourself this time. No mini bar, no porn, no room service and the bar downstairs closes at 10pm."

Naturally, we all had a hearty laugh at Steve's expense (apart from Steve) and knocked 45 per cent off the game's score as a result of the poor lodgings. (Note to the paranoid among you – that last bit was made up. It was more like 50 per cent.)

Next up is *Homeworld 2*, the brain-mangling 3D space strategy game. As a result, Keith Pullin has been suffering from space sickness all month – which means either he loved it or he's a professional who goes beyond the call of duty, sacrificing his life for the good of the magazine. So that'll be the first one, then.

Other notable names include *Tron 2.0*, *Battlefield 1942: Secret Weapons Of WWII* and *Conflict: Desert Storm II*. Which just goes to prove that quality really can overshadow quantity. Unless, of course, you're forced to spend five days and nights in a crap hotel. Right Steve?

Will *Judge Dredd: Dredd vs Death* lay down a new law for the FPS? Find out our judgement on page 62.

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*.

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

What are you currently playing? *Warcraft III* and *Raven Shield*

What do you believe should be made illegal? Deadlines

JAMIE SEFTON

What are you currently playing? *Jedi Knight: Jedi Academy*

What do you believe should be made illegal? Boy Bands

JUDGE DREDD
Laying down the law

HOMEWORLD 2
The legend returns

RE-RELEASES
Older games at new prices

FEEDBACK
Where you air your opinions

DEFINITIVE REVIEWS

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INCLUDING *CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER: SEASON 00/01*, *PROJECT IGI*, *EUROFIGHTER TYPHOON*, *WARLORDS BATTLECRY II* AND MANY MORE.
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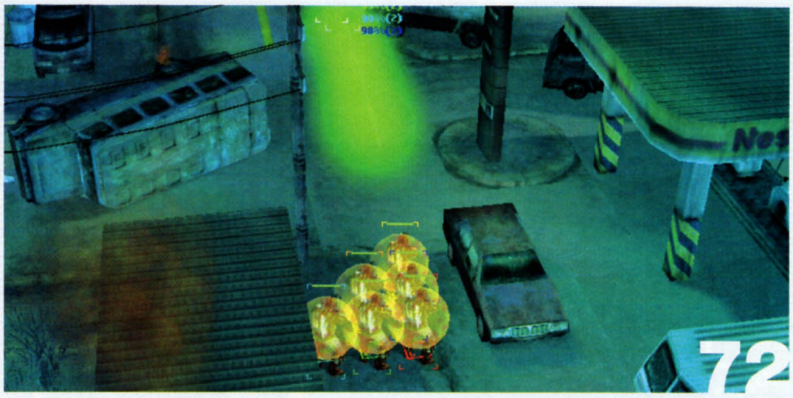
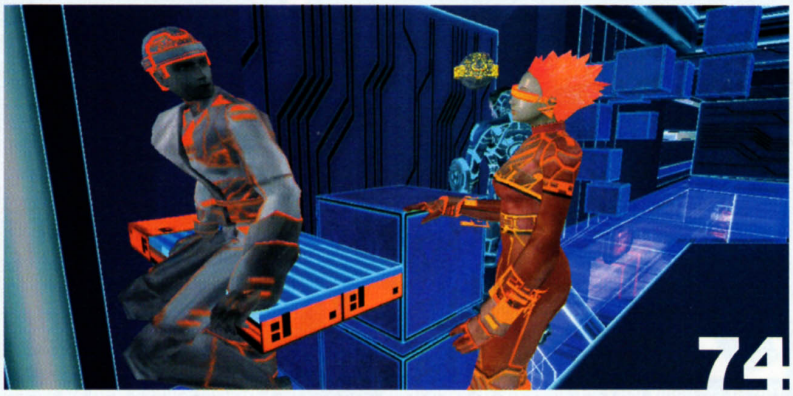
YOUR VIEWS, REVIEWS AND OPINIONS ON THE LATEST GAMES





MARTIN KORDA
Tron 2.0
Vegetarianism

ANTHONY HOLDEN
Doom 3 multiplayer and *Call of Duty Beta*
I don't know, but Dave Woods should be locked up for some of the stuff he's got on his HD

PAUL PRESLEY
Conflict Desert Storm II and *Mafia*
High Wycombe

WILL PORTER
Nina: Agent Chronicles, *Half-Life* and *Jedi Academy*
People taking the piss out of farmers. We like being bumpkins.

STEVE HILL
Windows Pinball
Red Bull

KEITH PULLIN
Homeworld 2 and *Deus Ex*
Fat people parking in disabled spots outside supermarkets

The AI certainly isn't the best we've ever seen.

The Lawgiver comes with six different types of ammunition.

JUDGE DREDD: DREDD VS DEATH

£34.99 | Pub: VU Games | Dev: Rebellion | ETA: October 17 | www.dreddvsdeath.com

REQUIRES PIII 700, 128MB RAM and a 32MB DirectX 9 compatible 3D card **DESIRES** PIII 1.2GHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB DirectX 9 compatible 3D card

The crime is life, the punishment is death. *Steve Hill* is judge, jury and executioner of a shooter that fails to do itself justice

UPROOTING A much-loved character from the pages of a comic to the screen of a PC is a route that is fraught with danger. It's a similar quandary to that faced by moviemakers when directing the film of a book. People generally scoff, saying they preferred the book, primarily as the vision it paints in their minds is vastly different from that of the hapless film director. The transition from comics is slightly smoother, thanks to the visual pointers offered by the paper medium (in the form of great big pictures of the characters and settings). However, if the fat owner of the comic shop in *The Simpsons* is anything to go by, comic fans are likely to be even more precious, crying like babies at any perceived slight on their favourite read.

Either way, *Judge Dredd* developer Rebellion has taken no chances with authenticity. In fact, it liked *2000AD* so much that it bought the company. *2000AD* is, of course, the (ahem) futuristic comic that has been delivering galactic thrills since its inception in 1977, arguably completing the cultural trilogy offered by that momentous year which also yielded both *Star Wars* and the Sex Pistols.

Launched into a marketplace that's largely catered for by stiff-upper-lip war stories or juvenile capers, *2000AD* was literally out of this world, successfully warping the minds of a generation reared on *Whizzer & Chips* and *Warlord*. As much good science fiction is, it was, in essence, a dark satire on modern woes, although for pre-pubescent boys, the appeal was far more rooted in the guns, gadgets and extreme violence.

Central to this approach was *Judge Dredd*, which first appeared in issue two and has been there ever since, dispensing his inimitable brand

IN PERSPECTIVE

NO ONE LIVES FOREVER 2
Reviewed Issue 122, Score 93%
If you like a bit of stealth to go with your action, look no further.

ALIENS VS PREDATOR 2
Reviewed Issue 110, Score 93%
If it's tension, excitement and fear you're after, try this.

DREDD

of justice to the 400 million inhabitants of Mega-City One, the sprawling metropolis that spans the entire eastern seaboard of the United States.

Not one for the subtle approach, Dredd tends to shoot first and ask questions later. As such, he's an almost perfect character for a game, something that Rebellion was aware of when it acquired *2000AD*, moving the comic into the building adjacent to its Oxford development studio and rapidly beginning work on the game.

Two years of hard labour has now come to a head and, if you haven't worked it out yet, we are in the vicinity of a first-person shooter, the most obvious use of the licence (although we did have high hopes for a tile-based strategy game).

You are Dredd and you are the law, helmet firmly affixed, and Lawgiver (Dredd's gun) in hand. As the name suggests, Dredd's old adversary, Judge Death, is up to his old tricks, made all the more difficult by the fact that he can't be killed because he is already dead. Before you catch up with him, though, there are more mundane matters to deal with, such as protesters and graffiti artists (aka scrawlers).

PERP ALERT

The first mission gives you a chance to get to grips with arresting perps (perpetrators), something that is important due to Dredd's Lawmeter; in effect, an inhibitor that stops you becoming too trigger happy. Make a few arrests and your Lawmeter goes up; kill some innocent people and it plummets rapidly. Should it drop too far, you'll fail the mission and special judges will be sent in to take you out. It's a reasonable idea and one that forces you to use a little restraint.

If you do feel the urge to pistol-whip a vagrant, you still can, but it's best not to get too carried away. As well as keeping a check on the violence, the Lawmeter has a secondary purpose in that it contributes to your rating for each mission. On completion of each level, you are awarded the rank of either Cadet, Rookie, Street Judge, Senior Judge or Judge Dredd himself, with success rewarded by the unlocking of multiplayer elements as well as arcade levels.

Each mission consists of primary and secondary objectives, with the former required for completion and the latter contributing toward your ranking. There is generally a button or lever to press, and its location is indicated via a rudimentary waypoint system, offering the general direction and number of metres to the target.

Something of a simplistic approach, it does at least forgo a lot of aimless wandering, although we can't help thinking it was introduced more for the benefit of console owners, with the game receiving a cross-platform release. In fact, the console origins are writ large all over the game. For example, bereft of the joys of an analogue pad, Dredd has only one pace, namely running. Fortunately, the lack of stealth elements don't make this much of a problem, plus it is useful for getting around some of the larger levels.

GIVES YOU WINGS

PRODUCT PLACEMENT SHOCKER

In Mega-City One, Red Bull is illegal, and so it should be, as consuming more than two cans causes you to shake like a dog shitting glass. This is reflected in the game (the illegality, not the shaking), with illicit crates of the stuff to be found down the docks, plus other various bits of in-game branding, such as Dredd crushing a can beneath the wheels of his Lawmaster in the intro. Red Bull was happy to have its product in the game, and the publisher was happy to take its cash. It's the future.

Drink that lot and you'll be up for a week.

Is it hot in here, or is it just me?

Quick-save-happy PC gamers may balk at the lack of the feature, replaced instead by a series of checkpoints, although somewhat perversely there is also a slow-save option.

MEGA-CITY NONE

Probably the largest console crime is the city itself which, despite being home to some 400 million people, is often more reminiscent of a wet weekend in Slough. Traffic is virtually non-existent, and the people who are onscreen are generally directly related to the mission.

The whole concept of a living, breathing city is not one that applies to *Judge Dredd*, with the missions taking place in well-defined, self-contained areas. Many of those areas will be familiar to fans of the comic,

Billy? Billy is that you? There's something different about you. Have you lost weight?

Tense, nervous headache? Try a shotgun.

Looks like a classy establishment.

Stay off the doughnuts.

"If you do feel the urge to pistol-whip a vagrant, you can, but it's best not to get carried away"

such as The Halls Of Justice, Penitentiary and Undercity, eerily packed with crumbling 20th-century artefacts in a *Beneath The Planet Of The Apes* style. The Smokatorium also makes up one of the levels, demonstrating just how spot-on some of the ideas in *2000AD* are, with the city's smokers confined to an airtight dome, an eerily prescient prediction of the fate of the nicotine addict. See also the Fatties, grotesquely obese citizens who carry their girth around with the aid of a stomach-bearing wheel. All of this is captured in fine detail by the bespoke Asura engine, which provides some colourful locations and impressive effects.

Ragdoll physics is a term that is bandied around, and *Judge Dredd* utilises it to the maximum. Even corpses that have been burned to a skeleton can still be gleefully shot around the floor, the limbs bending in a macabre fashion. The game certainly doesn't hold back on the violence, and blood is liberally sprayed around with aplomb.

Watching enemies burn to death after shooting them with an incendiary bullet is a harrowing experience.

Much of the death and destruction is meted out by Dredd's Lawgiver, which comes with six types of ammunition, each allegedly more useful in certain situations. Standard ammo enables you to despatch enemies with short controlled bursts, and is good enough to take out the average street punk.

Armour-piercing is self explanatory, although a couple of rounds will take down one of the vampires that crop up regularly. Ricochet is a clever lift from the comics, enabling you to bounce bullets round a corner – useful for clearing a room, although it's a bit of a hit-and-miss affair.

Incendiary is great for anyone who enjoys watching people burn to death, although it's far from instant as enemies will still flail at you for a few seconds while on fire, something that if it ever happened in real life would leave you permanently traumatised. Hi-ex ammo is a good all-purpose option, generally taking out enemies with one shot, although it's best used at long range, as at close quarters you can often end up killing innocents, or even yourself.

INFLAMMABLE MATERIAL

Finally, Heatseeker can be handy in both single and multiplayer, although the bullets don't pack much of a punch.

In addition to the Lawgiver – which Dredd always carries – the Justice Department issues the Arbitrator shotgun and LawRod assault rifle. These and enemies' weapons can be swapped in a *Halo* style, with Dredd able to hold the Lawgiver plus one other, although he's also packing a few smoke grenades, which generally force enemies to surrender.

Various approaches can be made when tackling perps. For instance, if you shoot the leader's head off, the rest of the gang will be more inclined to surrender. Arrests can also be upped by shooting the weapon out of a perp's hand, or by crippling him with a leg shot, with the AI reacting accordingly. There are, in essence, three main types of enemy: vampires, who come at you in a set pattern; zombies, who shuffle inexorably in your general direction; and death cult leaders, who stand and shoot, plus some general cannon fodder.

The AI is far from perfect, though, and many perps have little sense of self preservation, making it something of a duck-shoot. They also manage to become somewhat confused and can often be found wrestling invisible demons like a Stella-fuelled tramp.

Likewise, the other judges aren't a great deal of help, and there is no real sense of teamwork. That said, you can

WALKTHROUGH →

ARRESTED DEVELOPMENT

HOW TO MAKE AN ARREST IN THREE EASY STEPS

1 Instead of killing the perp, just carefully shoot the gun out of his hand. This will have the dual effect of disarming him and making him squeal like a stuck pig.

2 Now sobbing like a baby, the perp will drop to his knees and surrender like the yellow-bellied coward that he is, begging for mercy and pleading to be spared.

3 Clink, clink. Slap on the bracelets. "You're nicked, son." In this case, the perp will be spending the rest of his natural life in an iso-cube. Jurrr-stice…

MISSED OPPORTUNITY

SIT ON A FAT CHOPPER

Riding Dredd's bike would have added much-needed variation.

If the question 'name something associated with Judge Dredd' were ever to appear on *Family Fortunes*, the chances are at least a few people would pipe up 'the Lawmaster', Dredd's absurdly tyred motorcycle on which he patrols the streets of Mega-City One. And while it is regularly seen in cut-scenes, at no point are you given the opportunity to actually straddle it, which would have been good, if only to prove that it would be impossible to corner with tyres that fat.

Prance all you like, you're still gonna burn.

£2 for 30 minutes? Rip-off!

SECOND OPINION

RICHIE SHOEMAKER

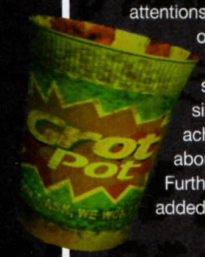
The engine seems nice, the characters look the part, but fundamentally something's not quite right with the game. My major gripe is that *Dredd* seems to be a fairly standard FPS that is saved mainly by having Judge Dredd pounding the streets. What the maker should have done is create a game around the character rather than squeeze the character into a standard genre. And the game itself feels a little on the console-ish side as well, which doesn't help matters much. What's here is entertaining to a point, although very short-lived. And while you won't be particularly disappointed by the game, don't expect to be hugely gripped either.

pair up with a buddy and play the game co-operatively. You won't really need to, though, as any vaguely experienced FPS player should be able to tear through the 11 levels in the space of a weekend.

Fortunately, there is more to the game than just the story mode, as success in the missions opens up a series of arcade levels, many of which are as good as – if not better than – their narrative-led counterparts. Freed from the constraints of the plot – and indeed the Lawmeter – many of these are unrestrained bloodbaths, allowing you to really let rip with the available hardware.

Zombie Apocalypse, for instance, provides a decent homage to the work of George Romero, subjecting you to hordes of the undead with a trusty shotgun for company. As anyone who has ever attended one of former *PC ZONE* News Editor Mallo's Zombie Movie Nights will be only too aware, one zombie is no bother; the real trouble comes from the weight of numbers as they attempt to overpower you quicker than you can behead them.

A further arcade level, Visiting Hours, sees you trying to protect a clutch of hostages from the attentions of a prison full of marauding vampires, something I singularly failed to achieve, despite about 20 attempts. Further longevity is added by the array of multiplayer options, with the standard concepts augmented by some decent *2000AD*-specific ideas



PROG ROCK

That's pretty much your *Dredd vs Death* then, an old-school first-person shooter steeped in the history of *2000AD*. Releasing such a straightforward shooter so close to *Half-Life 2* could be considered commercial madness, and Rebellion will be relying on the good faith of *2000AD* fans if it is to make an impression. Fans should be duly satisfied, though, as there is enough detail to appease even those who seal their old issues (sorry, progs) in plastic sleeves.

Flicking through the comics now, though, the world of Dredd is a particularly dark place, something that the game doesn't always capture accurately. While the voice of Dredd himself is suitably authoritative, some of the Dark Judges can come across as a bit camp, adding something of an element of pantomime to the proceedings. In fact, it could be argued that the universe of Dredd has been reduced to a mere computer game.

Clearly this guy's too busy keeping the peace to eat.

That would be overlooking the good, old-fashioned, gratuitous violence though, and the mindless fun to be had in shooting off heads, burning people alive or simply smacking them upside the face with the butt of your rifle.

If you've ever wanted to be Judge Dredd for a couple of days, this is your chance. Clearly the best Dredd game ever, it definitely surpasses Gremlin's side-scrolling platformer by some distance.

It may not be a revolutionary, game by any means, but it's certainly good fun. Look at the pictures, play the demo and make your mind up. PCZ

So this is the wonderful Felicity, Bob. I thought you said she was blonde?

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✔ Faithful to the Dredd universe
- ✔ Relentless action
- ✔ Extensive multiplayer options
- ✘ Ropy AI
- ✘ Story mode is very short
- ✘ Very console-ish in parts

78

You are the law (for a couple of days)

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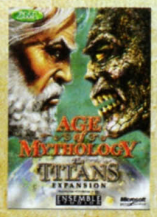

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"Follow him!" shouts George. "No, follow him!" argues Barney. "Oh my god I've been shot," weeps Bob.

When ships explode – they do it in style.

Red Arrows? A bunch of girls. This is what you call flying...

HOMEWORLD 2

■ £34.99 | Publisher: VU Games | Developer: Relic | ETA: September 26 | homeworld2.sierra.com

REQUIRES PIII 833, 256MB RAM and a 32MB OpenGL or higher 3D card **DESIRES** P4 1.4GHz, 256 MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

We always had an inkling that *Keith Pullin* was from another planet. At least now he's found his home in this epic 3D space-based RTS

PC ZONE ESSENTIAL

THE ORIGINAL Homeworld was a game of stunning playability and originality. As well as those cute little glowing trails behind the spacecraft, it took space strategy games to a whole new level by immersing the player in a 3D environment where you could move on both x and y axes. It was a groundbreaking concept that won countless awards, including one for bravery for rescuing a six-year-old boy out of a well. Actually, we could be wrong about that last part.

The plot of *Homeworld 2* continues pretty much where events left off in *HW*. After the Taiidan were defeated, the Hiigarans returned to their homeworld with the hyperspace core. There, they began to build a new mothership and, as luck would have it, it's a project they complete just as a new threat known as the Vaygr attacks.

It's at this point the action kicks in with you assuming control of the mothership and whisking it away to safety. From here on in it's off into the big black yonder to find out what the Vaygr want and to then utterly destroy them regardless.

You can customize the colour and motif of your ship to anything you want.

IN PERSPECTIVE

STARMAGEDDON
Reviewed Issue 119, Score 74%
It's a struggle to tell this apart from the original *HW*. Look harder though and you realise *HW* does everything from gameplay to graphics just a little bit better.

CONQUEST: FRONTIER WARS
Reviewed Issue 109, Score 82%
Played across numerous systems all linked together via wormholes, *Conquest* is certainly different. Definitely worth a go if you want some freeform exploration with your combat.

SAME AGAIN PLEASE

Emulating the success of *HW* was never going to be easy. So, in taking the safe option, Relic has decided to keep the gameplay pretty much as it was. The linear, mission-driven plot puts the onus on massive battles against hundreds of whirling fighters and giant dreadnoughts.

In some sense this qualifies *HW2* for admission in the 'is this just a glorified expansion pack?' debate. That said, the level of thought and detail that's gone into *HW2* is imperious. And we're not just talking about the paint jobs on the fighters or a few rib-shaking explosions – it's the inner workings of the engine that moves the *HW* universe forward.

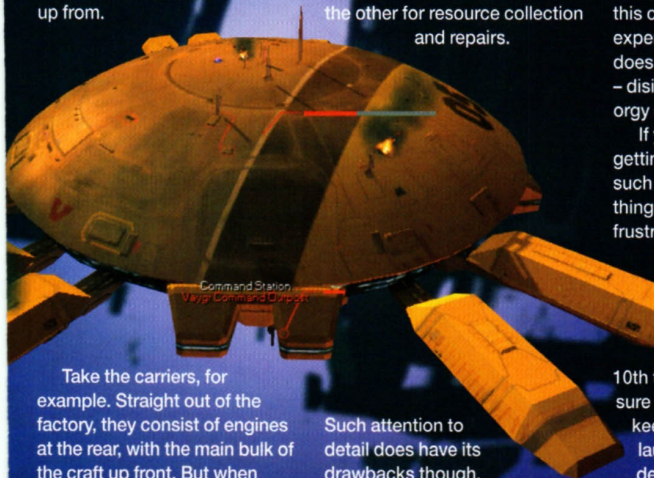
"Ship AI is none too ropey. Your fighters know exactly when to break off an attack and most units will automatically pursue targets"

Ships look impressive and carry lots of onboard facilities.

The game starts with you jumping in the hot seat of the mothership.

SECTIONED

HW2 presents a tactical twist on the space combat genre by having spaceships comprise of various destructible sections. Essentially, the larger a spacecraft, the more destructible components it is made up from.



Take the carriers, for example. Straight out of the factory, they consist of engines at the rear, with the main bulk of the craft up front. But when upgraded, additional nodes like fighter and frigate manufacturing facilities, resource collection modules and more can be bolted on to the shell. The impressive thing about this is that ships do take on individual characteristics both visually and in their attack role. This lets you hone your fleet extensively. You can have two capital class ships – one specialising in marine frigate deployment (handy for taking control of enemy vessels) and the other for resource collection and repairs.

Such attention to detail does have its drawbacks though. Destroying larger craft like the carriers is a tough and complex assignment. Launching bombers and gunships at it until there are so many plasma trails around they merge into one big glowing ball of string is not always the best idea. The most effective method is to target the most important areas first (such as the engines and ship production facilities) and then take the bloody thing to pieces bit by bit. For a seasoned pro this can be a highly rewarding experience, especially when it does finally – and spectacularly – disintegrate and explode in an orgy of pyrotechnical theatre.

If you're not so keen on getting down and dirty with such combat intricacies, things can get confusing and frustrating – not too mention downright bloody irritating. When you've just restarted the mission for the 10th time, and you're still not sure why that Vaygr carrier keeps mysteriously launching fighters at you despite the fact you've just blown away its fighter facility, it's not so easy to go all gooey-eyed over a few fireworks.

HW2 is certainly not for novice strategists. OK, it does feature a tutorial covering all

FIXTURES AND FITTING

The bigger they are, the harder they fall.

GO FOR THE HOTSPOTS AND MAKE SURE THE BIG GUNS DON'T GET THE UPPER HAND

The amount of upgrade options, research possibilities and the sheer number of ships available in *HW2* is impressive. You'll certainly never be short of a few gadgets and gizmos to try out on those persistent Vaygr.

HW2 really comes into its own though by introducing destructible body parts components. In terms of combat this means you have to specifically target a certain area of the spaceship as opposed to just offhandedly blasting at it. To successfully take out a big lumbering capital class ship, you should first go for its ship-building facilities, then its engines, then its resource collection module and then finally attack the main hull. Do that and your life will be much easier. Fail to do that and *HW2* will eat you alive.

Lined up, souped up and ready to kick some Vaygr arse.

Here the background is moody, but overall it's an area of the game that disappoints.

Watch out for automated guns hiding in asteroids.

SECOND OPINION

RICHIE SHOEMAKER

Unlike Relic's original, *Homeworld 2* is about as groundbreaking as a plastic spoon. The epic space battles, immersive storyline and beguiling soundtrack are all here, but the fresh youthful excitement of the original game has been lost. In its place is a more considered and comfortably appealing game that in terms of graphics, accessibility and the all-important interface is a far more enjoyable game. Some fans will be disappointed that Relic has done little to push the RTS boundaries this time around, but most – myself included – will be happy just to launch themselves back into the fray and see Relic back on track.

aspects of interface and control, but it never elaborates too much. The lack of a difficulty setting doesn't help either. Like it or not, your choice is hard, hard or hard.

The skirmish mode is slightly more generous. There are three settings from which to choose here, with around 10 maps to try out. And take it from us, the most effective tutorial you can give yourself is to stick around here for a few hours playing on the easy setting. At least you get more time to work things out and see what goodies you can produce – oh, and it's good practice for multiplayer too.

Back in the campaign, free time is unheard of. The AI is cunning and rarely employs rush tactics. Instead, it wears defences down with wave after wave of measured assault. Defensive tactics are just as calculated; it will not hesitate to throw down half a dozen or so heavy gun platforms just to protect its resource collectors.

WOBBLY PLASMA

Individual ship AI is none too ropey either. On the whole your fleet respond well to situations. Fighters know exactly when to break off an attack on a frigate to engage an incoming fighter threat, and most units will automatically pursue targets if they are close enough. Equally, a destroyer set on defensive stance will not speed towards a lone approaching enemy fighter.

The AI does get a bit bilious when you start targeting individual sections of a ship. On one occasion our squadron of bombers eliminated a carrier's fighter facility and flew straight back to base without attacking the rest of the ship. OK, so their mission was to destroy that particular target, but smarter pilots would have tucked into the engines for good measure.

Unit selection and movement is also unpredictable at times. Moving ships into unoccupied space (and there's a lot of it) can sometimes send them shooting off in the weirdest directions. Using the right mouse button is especially problematic with the developer somehow contriving to place the commands 'rotate camera' and 'move' on the same button. Luckily, if you enter 'sensor' mode, you can zoom out to get a better view of the play area and partially avoid that problem.

One thing you can't avoid is cut-scenes interrupting you when you're in the middle of dragging a movement arrow through space. It wouldn't be so bad if the narrator of these cut-scenes (and the hand-drawn movies between each mission) didn't sound so suicidal. Thank god for the Esc key.

WE JUST CLICK

Despite getting occasionally tangled up with itself, *HW2* still possesses that most crucial of 'Just One More Go' gameplay qualities. Eventually, there even comes a time when everything clicks into place. You discover it actually takes surprisingly few bombers to take down a carrier – they just need plenty of fighter escorts; the importance of mobile refineries; understanding the movement interface... Suddenly it all makes sense.

If you can reach that point, then *HW2* becomes one of the most thrilling and absorbing strategy games on the PC. Of course, some will dismiss its gameplay as too similar to its predecessor's and we probably wouldn't argue. On the whole though, *HW2* has enough ideas, detail and challenging qualities to keep even the deadliest space strategist entertained for a long, long time.

"Despite getting occasionally tangled up with itself, *HW2* still possesses that 'One More Go' quality"

MISSED OPPORTUNITY

These days people argue over anything, even little rocks.

HELLO? HOMEWORLD? IS THAT YOU?

Well, where do we start? We were really hoping there would be a bigger emphasis on trade this time round, but once again that idea seems to have floated away into deep space. A campaign that you can play from either side's perspective would also have thrilled many *HW* fans, but alas, once again the campaign can only be played from the Hiigarans viewpoint. Even the presentation and style of the cut-scenes during and between missions remains virtually identical to *HW*. Ultimately the real missed opportunity here is giving *HW2* its own identity. Still, it's probably quite happy to hang on to the coattails of its illustrious forbear.

Damien Hirst would be proud of this.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✔ Staggering visuals
- ✔ Detailed combat system
- ✔ Loads of ships and upgrades
- ✘ Difficult to get into
- ✘ Too similar to *Homeworld*

81

Hanging on to the plasma trails of success

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DESIRES P4 2GHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

***Mark Hill* gives those aliens a taste of their own arse-probing medicine**

FEW GAMES are certain to melt old-timers into a sticky puddle of nostalgia as much as *UFO: Enemy Unknown* – the first and best in the legendary XCOM series. Offering a different angle on the most clichéd of all gaming premises (Earth is invaded by aliens and you must stop them), it was a turn-based strategy of massively addictive proportions to rival *Champ Man* for sleepless nights. There were a couple of sequels – the last proper one, *Apocalypse*, all the way back in 1997 – before it disappeared like everything else beloved by us anti real-time strategists. We were finally going to get an update a few years back, when the Gollop Brothers (the brains behind the original) started work on *Dreamland Chronicles*. The game got canned, the brothers moved on to *Laser Squad Nemesis* and XCOM-heads everywhere wept bitter tears – until Czech developer Altar Interactive landed the job, that is.

But enough with the history lessons. What matters is how *Aftermath* stands up right now. And I can tell you right now, it is impressively erect. Not that I was convinced straight away, mind you. Despite the warm glow of recognition you get upon first seeing the world globe on the main strategy screen (an XCOM staple), *Aftermath* has little of the charm that *Enemy Unknown* possessed in such vast buckets. After the first couple of hours and half a dozen missions, it seemed the cynical snarl etched on my face was doomed to be permanent. Twelve hours later and I could have posed for another feature article on gaming addiction: no sleep, gaunt eyes, poor diet and even worse hygiene. Those damn aliens had got me again.

It's easy to see why, really. *Aftermath* has its fair amount of flaws, but no one can take away the things that make XCOM truly great: the very best technology research, RPG character development and world expansion, all wrapped up in a succulent apocalyptic *X-Files* scenario.

"Your soldiers improve all the time through experience and training in a variety of skills"

IN PERSPECTIVE

MEDIEVAL: TOTAL WAR
Reviewed Issue 120, Score 90%
The best strategy game currently on the market, *Medieval* may not be as turn-based (though you can pause) and with no RPG bits, but the *Risk*-style map gives it the same tactical/strategic balance.

GHOST RECON
Reviewed Issue 110, Score 84%
If you want proper 3D action for your squad-based missions, *Ghost Recon* also has a (very toned down) RPG system for your soldiers.

UNREAL-TIME

As the title suggests, your job isn't to repel invading alien forces as much as finding a way to kick them out after they've succeeded in making Earth their new home. You start off with only a couple of bases and two soldiers, but already there are plenty of things to do. You have to begin researching new technologies to combat the aliens, investigate what's going on, send off jets to down UFOs and go on tactical missions. Since downing saucers is pretty much automatic (with success depending on research), the meat of the game is the 3D missions, and you will be underwhelmed when you first start playing them.

Like *XCOM: Apocalypse*, the action isn't so much turn-based as real-time with lots of pauses, and it's these pauses that are the first cause of irritation. Reaching a waypoint, seeing an alien, running out of ammo and a plethora of other things all trigger a vocalisation from your soldiers, after which the camera automatically moves to them. This means you can't take two steps without a cacophony of voices and constant interruption as the camera flies off in all directions. You soon realise you can filter most of this, but you'll need a couple of missions before you

The inside of an alien ship. No, I can't tell what's going on.

The missions take place in 3D. Sadly, they don't look too good.

Battles between your jets and UFOs are resolved automatically.

Once you get hold of some alien weapons, the fun really begins.

Those damned aliens have driven off all the tourists.

Make sure you choose your research subjects carefully.

know what you need switched on. The second annoyance is that your soldiers' voices are unbelievably irritating, boasting some incredibly idiotic accents. Add to this a restrictive 3D camera and outdated graphics, and you can see why there's no love at first sight.

I THINK YOU'RE GROWING ON ME

Luckily, *Aftermath* gets better with every passing moment. The more bases you capture (you can't build any) the more missions there are, and the more varied they become: kill a certain number of aliens, rescue a downed pilot, infiltrate a crashed UFO, capture alien bodies for autopsies or live ones for experiments and interrogation… This has a knock-on effect for the things you can research and, as your weapons and armour grow and improve, the missions become more enjoyable. The information your research uncovers keeps you wanting to find out more and, most satisfactory of all, your soldiers improve all the time through experience and training in a wide variety of skills and attributes.

Soon enough, you find yourself not caring what's happening in the real world. All that matters is that you complete one more mission and maybe recover a more powerful laser rifle this time. Or that your best soldier reaches his potential in every area. Or that you get enough bases to expand to other continents and thus get to see different backgrounds for the tactical levels. And then you discover there's an alien biomass spreading across the globe, which you have to research and stop before it consumes you. Oh, and you start developing psychic abilities. And could you just go away so I can play some more?

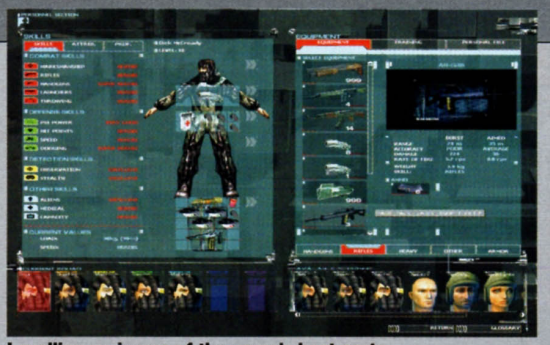
It might not have *Enemy Unknown*'s charm and there are some annoying niggles (those voices, poor pathfinding), but there's more than enough here to keep the XCOM spirit alive. Let's hope we don't have to wait so long for the next one. PCZ

YOUR MURDEROUS LITTLE BABIES

THEY'RE RUTHLESS KILLERS. BUT YOU'LL GROW TO LOVE 'EM

Few things are as addictive as levelling up (how else to explain the popularity of *Diablo*?) and there is great satisfaction in developing your own set of characters through a variety of missions, watching them improve in the areas you want them to. You end up growing so attached to your favourites, not even their intensely irritating voices can stop you from mourning their deaths. But dying is what new recruits are for. For everything else there's the reload button.

As you can see, there are tons of skills to work on, from marksmanship to healing and stealth. What weapons and gadgets you kit your men out with will also have a great impact on the missions. And add even more to the dressing-up-Barbie fun of it all.



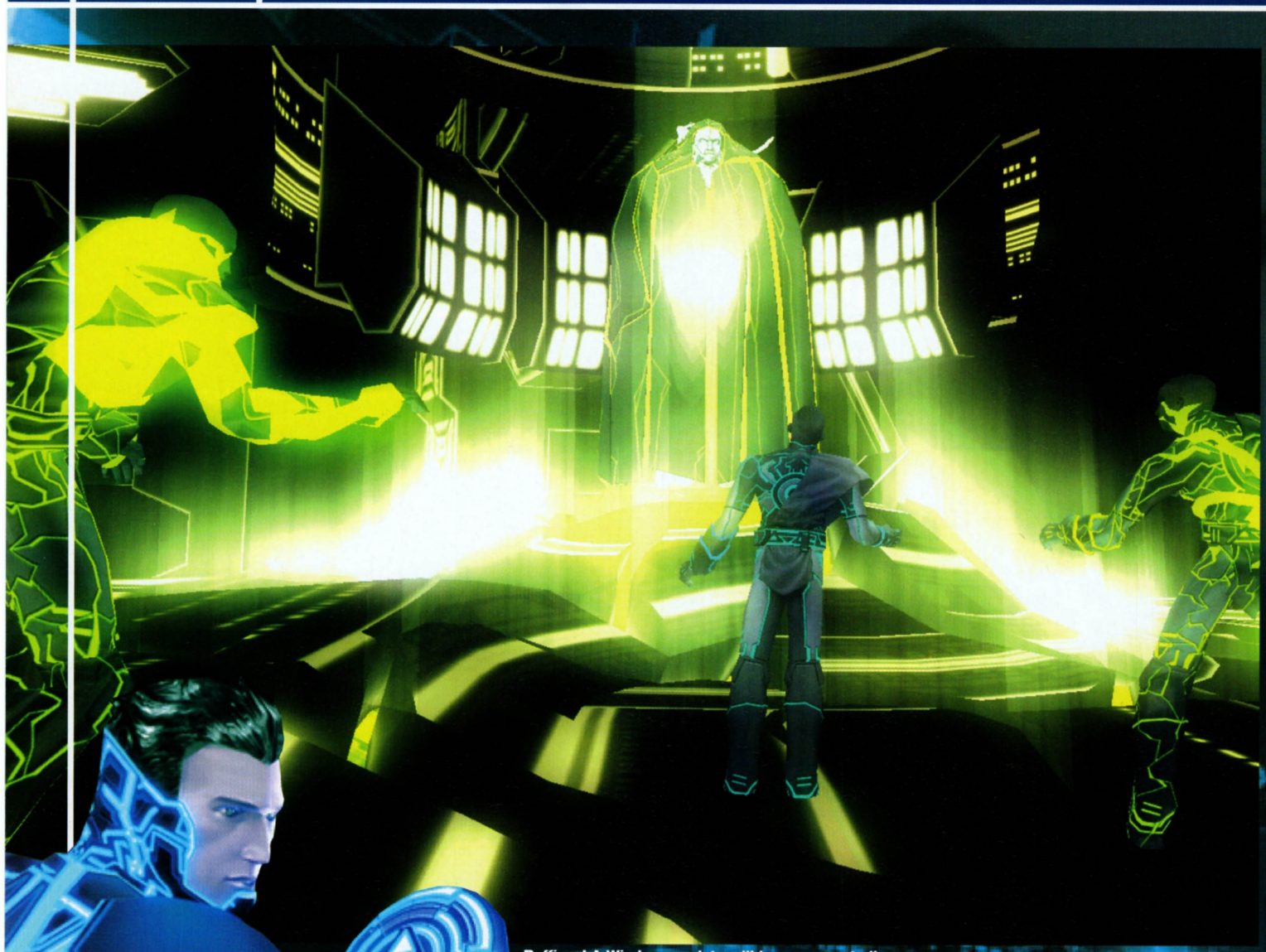
Levelling up is one of the game's best parts.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✔ RPG development
- ✔ Great research tree
- ✔ As addictive as ever
- ✘ Not a great looker
- ✘ Tactical missions could be better
- ✘ Annoying voices

82

Utterly enthralling, despite its flaws



Ruffians! A Windows update will have you sorted!

TRON 2.0

■ £29.99 | Pub: Disney Interactive | Dev: Monolith | ETA: September 19 | www.tron20.net

REQUIRES PIII 500, 256MB RAM and a 2 32MB card
DESIRES P4 1GHz, 512MB RAM and a 64MB card

Master Control Program told *Russ Fischer* not to side with the user in this FPS movie spin off. He didn't listen

PC ZONE ESSENTIAL

INPERSPECTIVE

NO ONE LIVES FOREVER 2
Reviewed Issue 122, Score 93%
Same engine, totally different game. One of the best shooters currently around, and plenty of humour too.

STAR TREK: ELITE FORCE II
Reviewed Issue 131, Score 74%
A great example of the wrong way to approach a sci-fi franchise. This looks like *Star Trek*, but is missing both inspiration and soul.

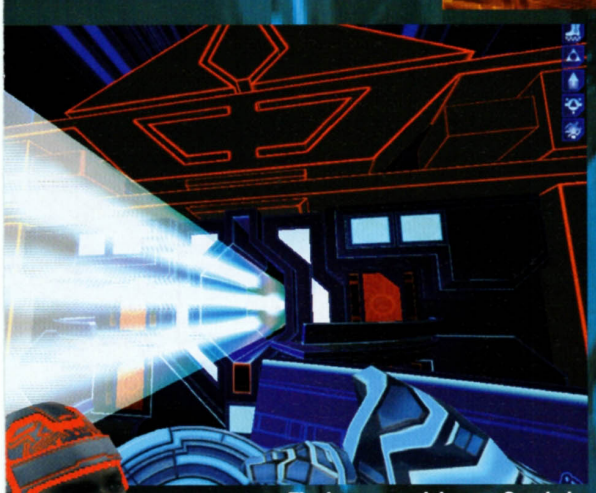
WHO NEEDS the next big thing? We've only scratched the surface of most genres, because the focus is always bigger, better, and more. There's a constant need to reinvent the wheel, and it's a bore. Look to Hollywood for guidance – this year of glorious, stupefying, high-tech rubbish should be a warning to all. I'll go with picking a story and telling it well anytime. Which brings me to *Tron 2.0*, which has a beautifully unified design, a decent storyline and the humour and good sense to carry it all off.

LITTLE BY LITTLE

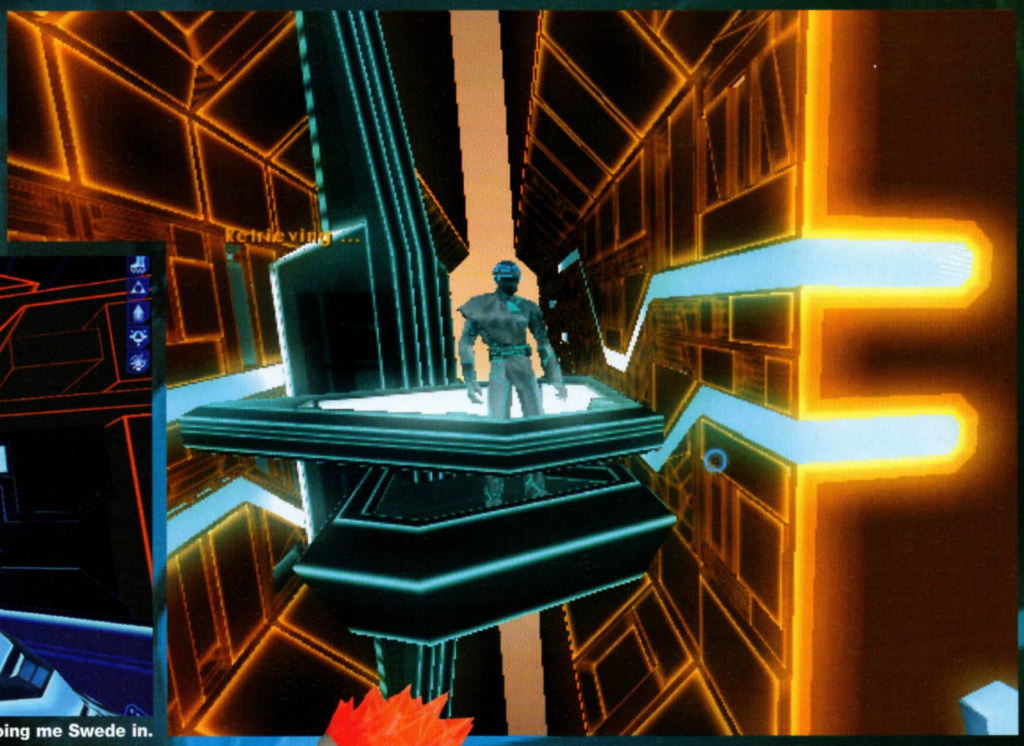
The hero is punk programmer Jet Bradley. His father (film hero Alan One) has been kidnapped while working on matter digitising algorithms, and before long, Jet finds himself doing the binary bop, ie he gets digitised into a computer. Suddenly, he's battling against system resources and corrosive green viral agents, leading to deadly crossfires and plot twists galore. The storyline is superbly acted and well scripted, and tackles both the mystery behind Jet's father's kidnapping, and Jet's own unravelling conflict within the computer system.

The graphics are some of the most attention grabbing in memory. It's one thing to throw

"Just when you think you're going to get bored of the visuals, something new surprises you"



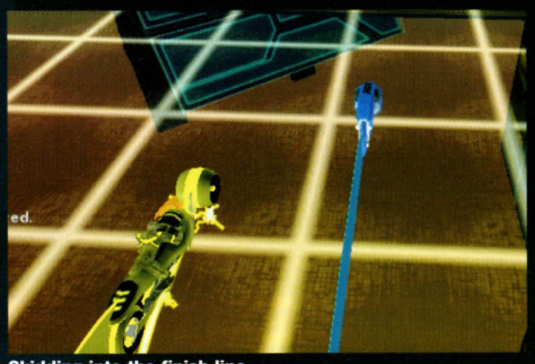
The lasers are doing me Swede in.



"What are you on, mate? Got any Olbas oil?"

BETTER THAN DUCATI

IT SEEMS NO-ONE IS SATISFIED WITH HAVING *SNAKE* ON THEIR MOBILE, SO NOW IT'S A MADDENINGLY ADDICTIVE MINI-GAME...



Skidding into the finish line.

The lightcycle grid plays a small part in *Tron*'s single-player storyline; despite an early appearance, you won't see too much of it. That's why it's also a multiplayer option. It's simple, really. Use your super-fly cycle, either Classic or Super, to leave a standing colour-coded trail into which other racers can crash. Assorted pickups are laid out in miserly fashion. The controls take a bit of practice, because you've got to set a good camera view while not dying. But you can only turn left or right, love – how hard can it be?

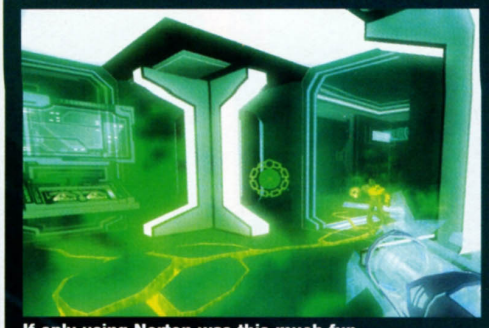
together a bunch of neon lines and geometric surfaces, but quite another to create a believable world out of it all. The use of light and negative space has never been used to such great effect. Soaring vistas have become almost cliché in the FPS genre, but *Tron 2.0* manages to approach these in an all-new way. Just when you think you're going to get bored of the visuals, something new surprises you.

The film *Tron* had incredible geek appeal, and fans will find a lot to like here. The ICP Kernel deadpans, "Broaden the search criteria," while you pull off core dumps, permission sets and I/O protocol. Viral attacks corrupt your weapon and defence subroutines, adding another level to combat. Every traditional element of the FPS works perfectly without breaking character. Meanwhile, memorable film elements are seamlessly blended in every frame. Are the Wachowski brothers listening?

GETTING INTO IT

Granted, *Tron*'s influences are obvious. Derived from *Deus Ex*, the character/inventory screen is a treat, allowing you to view and upgrade stats, manage skills via subroutine installation and even defrag corrupted storage blocks. It's quite elegant, with a lot of very approachable info. This feature also allows you to tackle levels in slightly different ways, as you can improve your stats in all kinds of ways, ranging from stealth to combat. Meanwhile, the archive bins dotted around each level are full of downloadable pickups and are reminiscent of *Tribes*, but securely tethered to *Tron*'s basic premise. Regardless, it feels like an original setup, even if it's not.

Jet's game disc is stunning. For those that don't know, this is the primary weapon from the movie, a Frisbee-like weapon which can both kill and deflect enemy attacks. Upgrades allow it to amplify attacks, snipe and fire multi-disc volleys. And the pace at which it moves is simply phenomenal. Blocking shots requires snap timing, and the zoom mode can be difficult to escape. Apart from these minor niggles though, there's



If only using Norton was this much fun.

Gazing toward the digital horizon, one's virtual life seems so insignificant.

Do not approach the enraged guards empty-handed.

little else to complain about. There are also a host of more conventional, yet still upgradeable FPS weapons to use, but I'd have been more impressed if Jet had only the disc to rely upon. There's little need for anything else.

Your deadly Frisbee isn't the only one. Individually, ICP enforcers are easy targets. But three or more produce a swarm of disc fire able to take you out in seconds. Bomb-toting viral agents are equally relentless. Luckily, friendly fire really is your ally, and with half a dozen discs bouncing through a room, enemies inevitably take each other out.

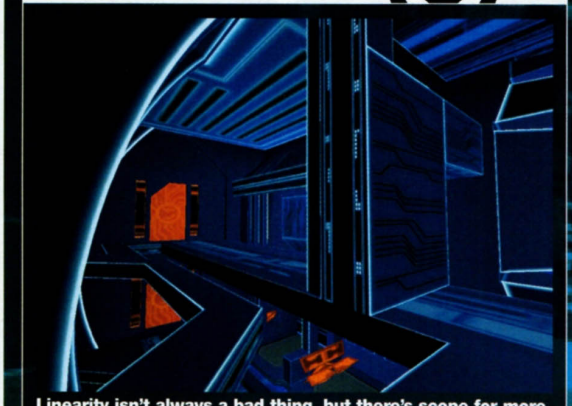
NON-FATAL ERRORS

One downside is the relatively small crew of enemies. ICP redshirts, viral loonies and an occasional airborne patrol drone are your primary foes. *Tron* embraces the notion that throwing new bad guys into the mix every other level isn't necessary. It's a nice idea, but more character models, even driven by the same AI, would have been welcome.

Meanwhile, despite the seemingly flat textures, extensive geometry makes *Tron 2.0* a bit of a resource hog, so don't even think about running it on a minimum spec system.

The framerate issues are a shame, because in every other respect *Tron 2.0* is a neat piece of work. Nearly everything the game tries is accomplished with style and apparent ease, and quality and originality is evident throughout. Once public servers are running, we'll be first in line to try the disc tournaments and light-cycle grids which come as their very own sub-games. Until then, we'll stay busy burning our retinas with gorgeous neon geometry in the single-player campaign. PCZ

MISSED OPPORTUNITY



Linearity isn't always a bad thing, but there's scope for more.

IN CYBERSPACE EVERYONE SHOULD BE FREE

While it's a common niggle with shooters, *Tron 2.0*'s RPG elements and setting would have been the ideal opportunity to introduce some more freeform gameplay. Granted, you can configure yourself to be able to tackle certain tasks differently, but a branching story offering a choice of which new computer system to jump to at certain points would have offered some more variation to proceedings, and made this novel shooter stand out even further from the crowd.

SECOND OPINION

MARTIN KORDA

I watched the movie for the first time about six months ago. It was utter muck. Perhaps if I'd seen it 20 years ago, my feelings would have been different. So it was with a certain amount of trepidation that I approached *Tron 2.0*. I shouldn't have worried.

Monolith has once again produced a magnificently polished product, lassoing the best parts of the film (lightcycles and the disc arena), some challenging FPS gameplay and excellent RPG elements, and tying it all together with its usual panache and attention to detail. The plot is solid, if unspectacular, but is helped by some pretty competent acting performances, while the action – once you get used to the fairly novel set of weaponry – is near-perfectly paced.

Granted, there could have been more enemy types, and the visuals certainly take some getting used to, however Monolith has triumphed in their attempts to keep the graphics true to the film, but varied enough to maintain interest. If you want a break from the usual FPS dirge, you'd do well to check this game out. It's more fun than it looks.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✔ Simply stunning presentation
- ✔ Discs and light-cycles are hotter than leather
- ✔ Solid storytelling through exciting gameplay
- ✘ Jittery performance on low-end specs
- ✘ Could use more varied models

83

Looks great, plays well – a refreshing FPS.

MAX PAYNE™ 2

THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE

A FILM NOIR LOVE STORY

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PC
CD ROM

18
TBC

REMEDY™

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CONFLICT: DESERT STORM II

£29.99 | Pub: SCi Games | Dev: Pivotal Games | ETA: Out Now | www.conflict.com

REQUIRES PIII 800, 128MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card **DESIRES** Something in the region of a P4 with oodles of RAM and a 128MB 3D card

Blood, death and sand. *Paul Presley* reports from the front... of the sofa, watching the war on telly

IN MY heart of hearts, I can't help but feel that with *Conflict: Desert Storm II* I should probably be dancing naked around the bonfire of negativity, throwing burning sticks of hate on to the rising flame of critique. It is, after all, an extremely linear arcade shooter masquerading as a deeper, tactical, strategic military simulation, and nothing, nothing, gets my goat more than arcade mutton dressed up as simulation lamb.

Yes, I should be tearing strips from its hide, but frankly it just doesn't deserve it. It doesn't deserve unilateral praise either, but as a way of passing a few hours, there are worse options.

STORMIN' IN

You may remember the original *CDS*: an extremely yellow game, based mostly on controlling four SAS troopers (or Delta Force operatives if you wanted the Americanised experience) blowing up SCUD missile launchers in the deserts of Iraq during the first UN foray into Saddam's playpen of death.

CDSII is set during the same timeframe, with the same soldiers. Fewer SCUDs, though, and more variety.

"The whole game is still very much on rails"

Rescuing trapped soldiers, destroying communications facilities, escaping from capture – and barely a sand dune in sight. A couple, maybe, but the developer has listened to feedback from the first and really made an effort to keep things interesting this time round.

What's not so good is the actual structure of these levels. Once again, you have the illusion of freedom on offer here, something heightened by the ability to give orders to all four of your squad-mates at once, all of whom sport much more impressive AI than that found in many other games of this ilk.

It's not freedom in the *Operation Flashpoint* 'do what you want, go where you want' manner. It's more, 'choose the best way of getting round that corner and only that corner'. The whole game is still very much on rails, which brings the whole

INPERSPECTIVE

DELTA FORCE: BLACK HAWK DOWN
Reviewed Issue 128, Score 52%
Similar squad-based, modern-day tactical soldiery, but with barely a redeeming factor in sight. Shoddy AI and uninspiring levels. Best avoided.

OPERATION FLASHPOINT
Reviewed Issue 125, Score 93%
If you're going to do modern-day combat, you might as well do it right. *Op Flashy* is yet to be bettered, and probably never will be (until the sequel).

Good job we've got third-party insurance.

Brixton high street is trickier to cross than ever.

£27 a month Direct Debit. £28 standard. Offers end 30/09/03. Free month credited in quarterly bill. Standard connection £30, modem £50. Subject to availability, and survey. Minimum 12 month term. BT line req

International Catch, live from Baghdad.

thing crashing down to an arcade level quicker than putting the word Extreme in the title.

DUDE, IRAQ

As long as you can live with the overall shallowness of it all, there is a lot to admire here. The action is relentless and challenging, even if enemy spawn points are obvious to locate and further break down the immersion factor.

The control system, initially as confusing as the Greek legal system, becomes second nature quickly, even if it's mostly just used as a way of positioning your team to set up effective 'kill zones'.

The enemy AI works as well as your own team's, with bad guys making good use of cover, lobbing grenades to try to pin you down and generally behaving like the ill-trained Iraqi soldiers they represent.

Ultimately it's an improvement over the previous game – a million light years better than *Delta Force: Black Hawk Down* – but it's still nowhere near as involving as *Operation Flashpoint*. Oh, and *Hidden & Dangerous II* should piss all over it – if it ever shows up. PZ

A quick visit to www.pczone.co.uk before the bomb goes off.

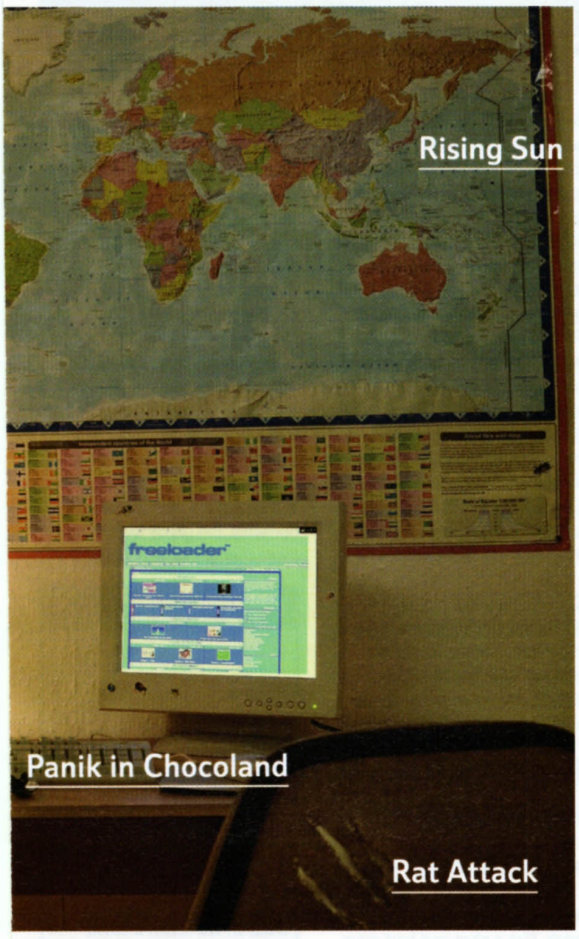
Anyone got an explosive arrow?

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✔ Stronger overall story than original
- ✔ Less SCUD hunting than before
- ✔ Better enemy AI
- ✔ Engaging fire fights
- ✘ Very linear level structure
- ✘ Shallow overall experience

77

Competent arcade fun, but nothing more



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KOREA: FORGOTTEN CONFLICT

■ £29.99 | Pub: Cenega | Dev: Plastic Reality Technologies | ETA: October 17 | www.koreaforgottenconflict.com

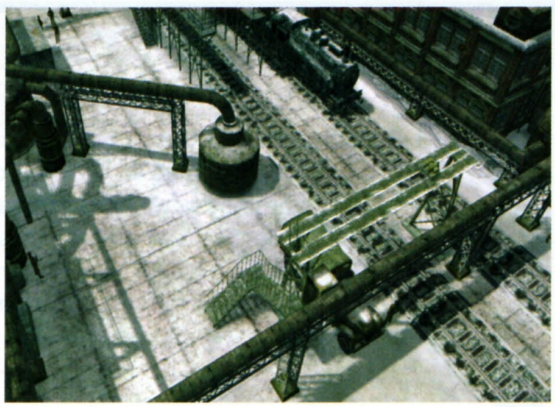
REQUIRES P4 1.5GHz, 512MB RAM and a 16MB 3D card
DESIRES P4 1.5GHz, 512MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

Daniel Emery wanted a steady Korea in publishing. Instead, he had to review this _Commandos_ wannabe

Enid Blyton's _Four Go Mad In Korea_ never made it to print.

Tutorials, though simplistic, give you the gist of the game.

Some top-notch graphics. Clearly, I'm lying.



Cut-scenes make full use of the game engine.

THEY SAY imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, so Pyro Studios (creator of the legendary *Commandos* RTS series) should be tickled pink by Plastic Reality Technologies' new RTS.

In fairness to the Czech developer, it's given credit where credit's due. The opening lines on its web page say, "It is similar in style to the *Commandos* series, where the player takes on the role of leader of a small group of military specialists." Nice one – it's not often you see developers crediting their influence.

So, as you've already guessed, *Korea: Forgotten Conflict* is an RTS set in Korea, with the same gameplay style as *Commandos*. Now, there may be some among you – either coming out of cryogenic storage or hitting puberty – who may not have heard of *Commandos*. So here's a very potted description:

Instead of command and conquer gameplay – where you mass-produce large numbers of military units for unrestricted warfare – you're given a finite (and small) number of specialist troops, whose task is to do XXX with YYY, without becoming RIP. Skill, stealth and a bit of luck are the order of the day. It's hard but incredibly addictive, and there have been few imitations of note.

Korea: Forgotten Conflict is, indeed, an imitation; but with some rather obvious differences. While the *Commandos* series had you slogging it out during WWII, this one – as the name would suggest – has you fighting the North Koreans, Soviets and Chinese during the Korean War of the early 1950s.

The game kicks off with some simple tutorials. However, if you don't complete each step exactly as instructed, you'll find that it doesn't progress to the next step – rather annoying if you've found a better or more novel way of achieving an objective.

"The irritations don't just limit the gameplay; they wreck it"

There are also issues with the control interface. To move your squaddie, you need to left-click the mouse (LMC). And to perform an action – loot body, open crate, search box, etc – you need to right-click (RMC). This would be simple enough, but the interface isn't intuitive. If you run up to a box (LMC), then try to open it (RMC), you'll often find you're not standing on exactly the right pixels, so you constantly have to repeat the process till you are. You end up playing a mouse version of *Track and Field*. A far easier solution would have been for the soldier to run up to an object and search it by just right-clicking on it once. Duh!

OFF COURSE

Sadly, this problem also applies in combat – trying to run into position (LMC) to fire a weapon (RMC), only to have the target move a fraction while you're doing so is infuriating.

And if that weren't enough, the AI pathing still needs serious work. Fire a shot and bad guys come running at you from all directions, but try to scarper and you'll invariably end up charging into a jeep or running in a demented circle and ending up dead as a dodo. This spoils what would otherwise be an excellent game.

There's no doubt the concept is top-notch, but the irritations don't just limit the gameplay; they wreck it. With any luck, the developers will patch these annoying features – in which case *Korea: Forgotten Conflict* will definitely be a game to play this autumn. But based on what we've seen currently, the game will annoy more than it'll please. PZ

IN PERSPECTIVE

COMMANDOS 2
Reviewed Issue 108, Score 91%
Much like *Korea*, only better, harder, set during WWII and 10 times more rewarding.

DESPERADOS
Reviewed Issue 103, Score 82%
Similar to *Commandos 2*, only not quite as good, a bit easier and set in the Wild West.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✔ It's *Commandos* in Korea
- ✔ Hard – but not too hard
- ✘ Some poor camera angles
- ✘ Not the most intuitive control system
- ✘ Weird AI

64

Still in no-man's land

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BATTLEFIELD 1942: SECRET WEAPONS OF WWII

PCZONE ESSENTIAL

£19.99 | Pub: EA | Dev: Digital Extremes Canada | ETA: September 5 | www.battlefield1942.com

REQUIRES PIII 500, 128MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card
DESIRES PIII 800, 256MB RAM, 64MB 3D card and an ADSL Internet connection

FULL VERSION OF BATTLEFIELD 1942 REQUIRED

The Internet's finest battlefield turns experimental and bizarre. *Richie Shoemaker* unpacks his gimp suit...

With 16 new additions there are now 46 vehicles to choose from.

The Michael Owen of the battlefield.

DESPERATE times call for desperate measures, and with massive enemy armies swelling across two fronts, supplies down to a trickle and a civilian population close to panic, there was no more desperate time for the Third Reich than the closing months of WWII. Unless the German High Command could create a weapon so devastating its mere presence would rout the enemy, the Nazi regime was doomed. So they unleashed the Natter, a jet fighter so fast nothing in the sky could touch it, loaded with rockets that could decimate entire squadrons of bombers in one pass. Unfortunately taking off was impossible without specialised ramps. Landing was out of the question and, in the air, by the time the enemy squadrons were spotted, they were usually in the rear-view mirror. Doh!

NOVELTY BAG

It may seem a curiously out-of-place contraption to add to *Battlefield 1942*'s already exhaustive line-up of vehicles, ships and aircraft, but the developers have seen fit to base this, their second expansion, on WWII's more interesting war machines, most of which never got off the drawing board let alone the ground.

To complement the novelty of taking to the skies aboard a giant boomerang, the developers have also included a number of weapons and vehicles that, in hindsight, I wonder how we ever got by without. Proper British weapons are added at last, as well as a stealthy commando raft and the wonderful motorbike and sidecar. The Engineer class is much more useful too, with the Allied sapper able to equip a shotgun, while his Axis equivalent now has a grenade rifle as part of his arsenal.

Secret Weapons is not for everyone: fans hoping for added realism will see the game's more experimental curios as novelty items – which they are to some degree, yet they require a level of skill to master that will challenge even veteran *Battlefield* players. It could also be argued that with rockets, heavy artillery and grenade launchers going off, the humble foot soldier has been overlooked. To which we say if you want pitched infantry battles buy *The Road To Rome*. *Secret Weapons* is where the machines take over.

SINGLE ISSUES

Our biggest concerns are with the single-player game. The AI transformation from being laughable to acceptable is admirable, but seeing as these maps are made for 32-plus players, having computer bots filling the player slots often slows the game down to a crawl. The AI follows narrow paths through the various maps and, while their aim has become more realistic from the original game, the challenge isn't in beating the enemy but learning the lay of the land.

What we like best is the fun factor. Whether intentional or not, *Secret Weapons* is laugh-out-loud funny to a far greater degree than the grim realism of say *Road To Rome*'s Monte Cassino level. The variety of the maps also merits a special mention, with objective-based missions on a par with *Enemy Territory* and missions where amphibious vehicles often hold the key to unlocking an entrenched enemy. All in all, this expansion is suitably different from the last add-on to warrant purchasing, but – as if you needed reminding – only if you play online. PCZ

IN PERSPECTIVE

PLANETSIDE
Reviewed Issue 131, Score 82%
Expensive, expansive and ruddy good fun, this online wheely-shooter beats *BF1942* when it comes to tactics, but for instant accessibility, value and variety we'd go for the WWII 'em up every time.

RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN: ENEMY TERRITORY
Reviewed Issue 131, Score 89%
No vehicles, no aircraft, but class WWII action via the *Quake III* engine and, best of all, it's utterly free. Objective-based missions make this a slightly different bag to vanilla *Battlefield 1942*, but for small-scale skirmishes it can't be beat.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✔ Much more variety than *The Road To Rome*
- ✔ Fantastic new maps
- ✔ Fun new vehicles and aircraft
- ✘ AI is processor hungry
- ✘ No dedicated single-player campaign
- ✘ Hardly the most realistic WWII game available

80

Unique, expansive but lacking in single-player

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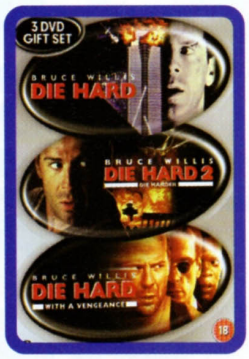

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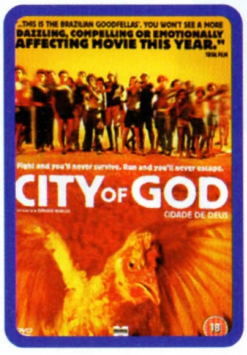

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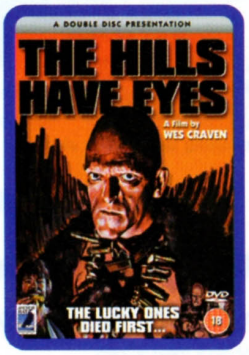

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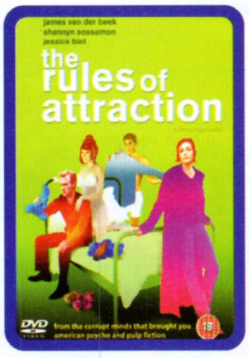

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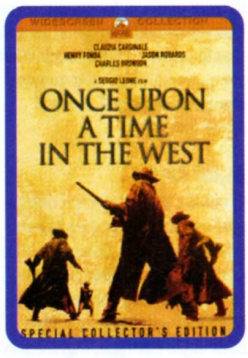

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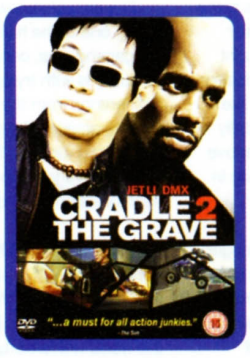

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Cradle 2 The Grave

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NHL 2004

PCZONE ESSENTIAL

■ £29.99 | Pub: EA | Dev: EA Sports | ETA: September 26 | www.ea.com

REQUIRES PII 400, 64MB RAM and a 16MB 3D card
DESIRES PIII 800, 128MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card

After years of minor upgrades, *Mark Hill* is shocked to find a proper sequel to the undisputed king of hockey sims

I'M WRITING this in the middle of a heatwave, sweat stinging my eyes and thought processes slowed down due to safety restrictions. It feels like there should be a hypnotically slow ceiling fan spinning above me and Marlon Brando lying in the corner babbling about some horror or other.

Only one thing has managed to cool me down. No, it's not *NHL 2004*, great though its depiction of ice rinks are and refreshing as its simple yet addictive gameplay is. It's the bag of frozen peas I've stuffed down my underpants. But let's talk more about the game.

INPERSPECTIVE

NHL 2003
Reviewed Issue 121, Score 81%
Still well worth a look at a budget price, but now part of the old guard of hockey games.
BAG OF FROZEN PEAS
(Issue N/A, Score N/A)
Highly satisfying method of decreasing body temperature, once your testicles have got over the initial shock.

The annual review of *NHL* is hardly one of the highlights of my gaming year, concerned as it usually is with trying to spot a difference from the previous edition, praising the gloss and fast-paced fun and, finally, advising everyone to buy last year's version on budget.

REAL EVOLUTION

For once though, instead of taking *NHL 2003*, refining it slightly and sending it out into the world with a hefty price tag and a new number on the end, EA Sports has gone for a complete redesign.

It might look identical in many respects but there is a real difference in the way it plays, with much more accessible gameplay. It takes time to master, but you do feel more in control than in any previous incarnation. For hardcore players there are new levels of realism, from the AI and puck physics to the tactical options. Multiplayer has been improved too (you can now create online clubs) though there still seems little point in playing someone you can't scream and laugh at.

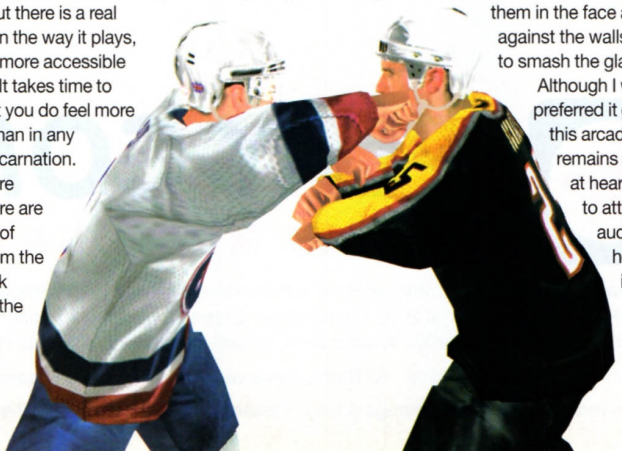
SLAP SHOT

Crucially, the most important part of hockey has been given an overhaul: the violence. While previous titles ended up being little more than *Pong* with men, *NHL 2004* reintroduces *Slap Shot*-style carnage. Fights don't take place randomly any more and you can grapple and throw punches in an occasional mini-game, while being able to trip players during the match itself, as well as elbow them in the face and crush them against the walls hard enough to smash the glass panes.

Although I would have preferred it go further down this arcade route, *NHL* remains a simulation at heart. It's not going to attract a new audience, but for hockey fans this is a worthwhile upgrade. PM

For a different challenge, take control of just one player.

You can import your own MP3s to replace the dull nu-metal.



PCZONE VERDICT

- ✔ Decent AI
- ✔ Host of options
- ✔ Very different from the last one
- ✘ Becomes repetitive after a while

82

A proper sequel and a real improvement

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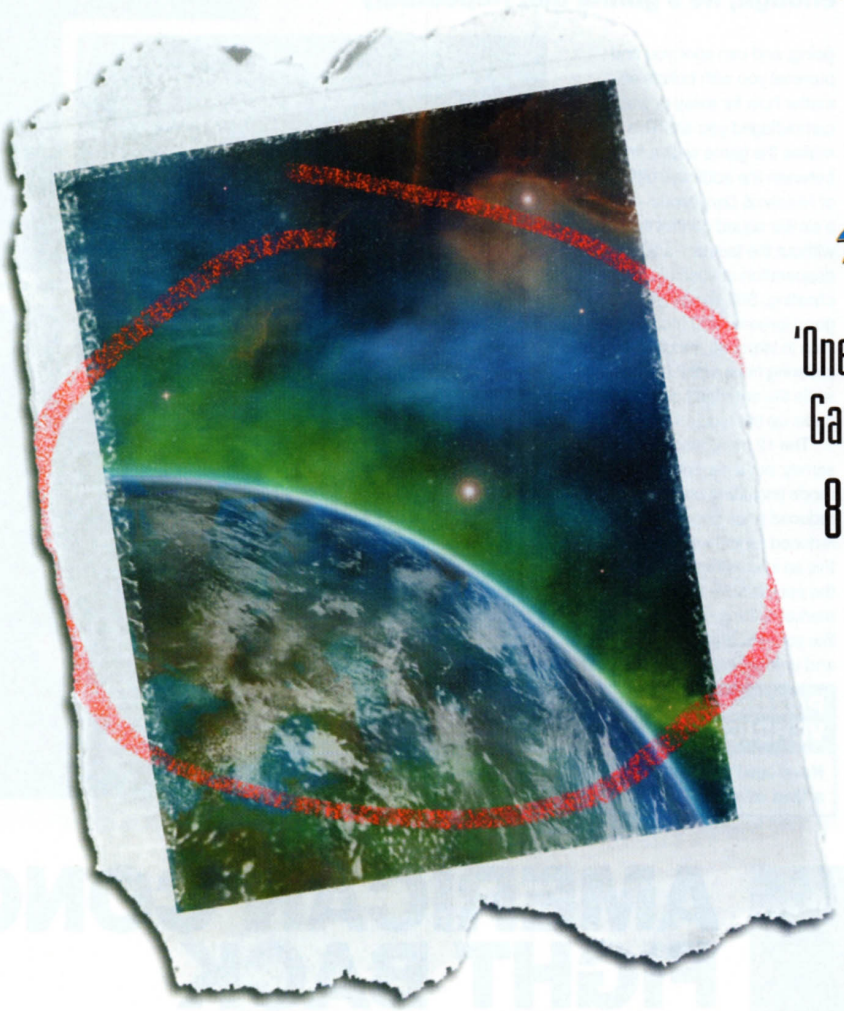
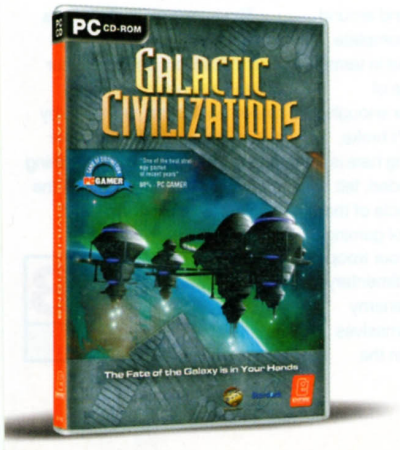


GAME OF DISTINCTION
PC GAMER
September 2003

'One of the best Strategy Games in recent years'
88% PC GAMER

GALACTIC CIVILIZATIONS



The year is 2178 and the galaxy is evolving at an alarming pace. Years ago, human scientists introduced a new technology, the "Hyper-drive", which vastly improved interstellar travel, but instead of forging closer bonds throughout the galaxy, communication between civilizations has ground to a halt. Colonization and a battle for supremacy have become the primary goals...

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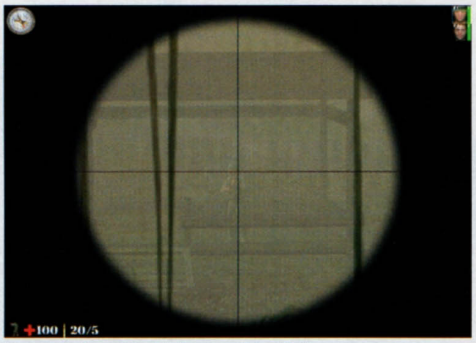
LINE OF SIGHT: VIETNAM

■ £19.99 | Pub: Atari | Dev: nFusion | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PII 450, 64MB RAM and a 16Mb 3D card
DESIRES PIII 1GHz, 256Mb RAM and a 64Mb 3D card

***Mark Hill* is welcomed back to the jungle for some more FPS action. And sure enough, he's gonna die. Repeatedly**

Up a creek without a paddle. Or boat.



Ear piercing, the high-speed ballistic way.

NOW THAT THE taboo has finally been breached we're awash with average Vietnam titles, and *Line Of Sight* is far from the worst of them. It also sports what can only be described as an ironic – maybe even sardonic – title considering the visual prowess of the Vietnamese soldiers.

It's hard to judge how good their AI is because you hardly ever see them. They, however, are blessed with every AimBot going, and can spot you and pummel you with bullets no matter how far away or well camouflaged you are. This makes the game walk a fine line between the addictive difficulty of *Hidden & Dangerous* – it has a similar squad control system, without the tactics – and utter desperation at such blatant cheating. Still, the jungle looks good (greener and more realistic than in *Vietcong*, though suffering from a lack of variety) while the emphasis on stealth racks up the tension.

The 12 missions are a bit samey, but a decent multiplayer mode (including co-op) and the reduced price (though not as reduced as in the States) make this an interesting alternative to the pre-*Half Life 2* dross the FPS market is filling up with. If you like your shooters slow-paced and unforgiving, it's not too bad.

PCZONE VERDICT 69

Hard and samey, but not a line of shite

You will die a lot, and not know a lot about it.

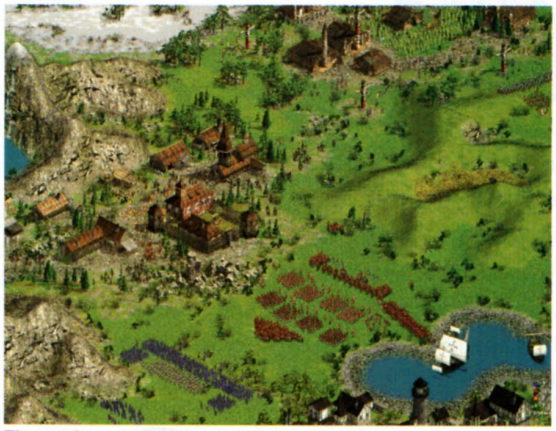
The cannon fodder lined up to spell F***.

AMERICAN CONQUEST: FIGHT BACK

■ £34.99 | Pub: CDV | Dev: GSC Game World | ETA: August 29

REQUIRES PII 450, 64MB RAM and a 16MB 3D card
DESIRES PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

Sam Kieldsen* goes a-plundering with Cortéz and friends in this standalone expansion pack to *American Conquest



The engine can handle 16,000-troop battles.

ALTHOUGH *Fight Back* is billed as an expansion pack for *American Conquest* (reviewed in *ZONE* 126), it doesn't actually require that you own the original game. Given the similarity between the two, and the fact that *Fight Back* costs £35, this is probably a good thing.

But perhaps we're being a little unfair, as the game does feature eight new campaigns and ten single missions, as well as the classic random map skirmishes. It also introduces the Battlefield mode, which sets two ready-made armies against each other, eliminating the laborious and time-consuming activity of having to build them up yourself.

Five new nations and around 50 new types of unit complete the list of additions, but in terms of gameplay it's a case of business as usual. Fair enough, you might say: if it ain't broke, yadda yadda. The thing here is, many people, us included, felt there were many aspects of the original that fell short of gaming perfection. The AI of your troops, for example, is still rudimentary: they either chase the enemy or stay put, letting themselves become pincushions in the process. During a large battle you find them wandering all over the shop.

The learning curve remains steeper than the walls of the Grand Canyon, and after your entire army has been nearly wiped out for the tenth time by a native raid, you just feel like giving up and playing something a bit more forgiving. Fans of the original will appreciate *Fight Back*, but that's about it.

PCZONE VERDICT 68

More of the same

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The game world is alive with detail. Not.

Some awful physics make death a constant companion.

DARKENED SKYE

■ £19.99 | Pub: Oxygen Interactive | Dev: Boston Animation | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PII 350, 64MB RAM and an 8MB 3D card
DESIRES PIII 500, 128MB RAM and a 16MB 3D card

***Mark Hill* eats some coloured pills**

IT'S NOT easy to get excited about a game created as a sort of promotion for Skittles (owned by Mars), especially when you realise it was released in the States over a year and a half ago. For its UK outing, the sinister sweet endorsement is reduced to a small gameplay element (you collect Skittles to power spells), leaving us with an ugly, dated and rather flat action/adventure.

It's funny that Skittles should also have sponsored the greatest TV show on Earth: they produced those annoying ads for the Sky showings of the mighty *Buffy*. Funny because the main character here is supposed to be a feisty, kick-arse girl and there are some pathetic attempts at knowing, self-referential humour (for example, "We can't do this puzzle till later. I know because I read the script. I mean, I had a sacred vision"). At the same time it tries to sell a story about magic coming from rainbows and wizards actually called Merlin.

But we're used to clichéd fantasy settings and witless jokes. What really grates is the annoying gameplay – which has you jumping a lot and swinging a stick a lot – and a quirky 3D engine with a fish-lens feel that isn't quite disorienting enough to make you forget the cardboard plainness of the graphics. There are also some insultingly simple puzzles, and yet I still found myself lost and wishing it was all over. Twenty quid can buy you a lot of Mars bars...

PCZONE VERDICT 40

Bland, boring and forgettable

HEAVEN & HELL

■ £29.99 | Pub: CDV | Dev: Eigelb | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PIII 800, 64MB RAM and an 8MB 3D Card
DESIRES P4 1.4GHz, 128MB RAM and a 16MB 3D Card

***Daniel Emery* gets to live out his godlike delusions in this childish strategy game**

HEAVEN & HELL is yet another god sim pitting good vs evil in a battle to conquer the hearts and minds of the people. But unlike *Populous*, there's very little in this game to hold your attention for long.

It should, in theory, be lots of fun. Starting off with a solitary prophet (complete with long white hair and obligatory beard), you send him off to villages to increase your deity's following.

There are shades of *The Sims* here, as preaching is just a load of 'technobabble' (imagine listening to the Smurfs on fast forward) along with some icons that have no relevance to the game. It's supposed to be set in 1500BC, so why he's talking about aeroplanes, dead fish and umbrellas is anyone's guess.

'Ark' the herald angels sing.

Couple this with some unfunny dialogue and you'll be reaching for the nitrous oxide before you hit the second map. "Don't get distracted by sheep on your travels," oh ha bloody ha-ha [Escape] [Quit].

If that wasn't bad enough, the game mechanics make no sense whatsoever. Standing in one part of the city preaching will have zero effect – move one pixel to the left and suddenly you have a plethora of converts. That's not fun, it's damn annoying.

The game may be pitched at gamers but, in reality, it's ideally suited for kids aged 8 to 12. Simple gameplay and even simpler jokes. This would be fine if the developers put a reasonable price on the game. But they haven't – at £29.99, it seems the only true prophet in this game is the profit margin.

PCZONE VERDICT 25

Make it stop

Up above the streets and houses...

Converting people is more miss than hit.

Not exactly pushing your graphics card to its limits...

WORLD RACING

■ £19.99 | Pub: TDK | Dev: Synetic | ETA: September 19

REQUIRES PIII 800, 256MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card
DESIRES P4 1.4GHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

***Steve Hill* gets some more driving practice**

IF YOU'RE GOING to release a PC racing game that won't be lost in the crowd, you need to come up with something original. What you don't need to do is set the first track in Area 51, the mythical Nevada airbase beloved of conspiracy theorists. However that's exactly what *World Racing* has done, thus mirroring the efforts of a slew of previous turkeys. This pretty much sets the tone for the rest of the game, which – location-wise at least – throws up every cliché in the book.

Otherwise, it's standard fare, featuring 100 or so cars and a variety of terrain. The road races are reasonably dull, hampered by a lack of speed and some mundane handling. The off-road sections are slightly more interesting; minor thrills are achieved when the vehicles momentarily leave the ground or, in the modern parlance, catch air. Furthermore, fans of German Grand Prix tracks will be pleased to learn that the game features a truncated version of the Hockenheim circuit, a luxury not afforded to the earlier Xbox release.

This choice is a reflection of the game's heritage, as it was indeed developed in Germany, and as such features an array of badly drawn drivers, which serves no other purpose than to give it a cheesy European feel.

One of the tracks is set in Area 51, replete with stereotypical flying saucers.

There is some kind of convoluted career mode in place, not helped by an irksome menu system, and while there's nothing fundamentally wrong, it's not a game we can ever imagine playing again.

PCZONE VERDICT 54

German

This is what we'd like to do to the developer of this game.

NINA: AGENT CHRONICLES

■ £19.99 | Pub: City Interactive | Dev: Detalion | ETA: Out Now

"EXCELLENT! LET us hope that major reinforcements don't not come," mutters Nina, the Polish-woman-in-a-bra-with-a-gun, as she kills yet another Taliban warrior. Her mistranslated lines, with a supposedly sexy accent that lands somewhere between an Austrian Janet Street-Porter and Michael Caine after a hard day of drinking paint, hardly register a flicker of excitement. And you won't either.

Nina: Agent Chronicles is a pretty lame excuse for an FPS. Its main selling point is the top Polish model who plays Nina (A real girl! With breasts and everything!). This pretty much tells you exactly how the game is going to play: stupid enemies, gunfire that sounds like '80s rock drumming and a replay value of absolute zero.

Slight salvation can be found in a few nice graphical touches and a reliance on some intuitive puzzles rather than gun battles, but ultimately Nina isn't worth your time or your money.

Will Porter

PCZONE VERDICT 47

SMASH UP DERBY

■ £19.99 | Pub: City Interactive | Dev: City Interactive | ETA: Out Now

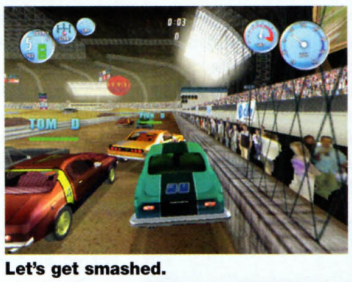
IN A PERFECT example of 'does exactly what it says on the tin' gaming, *Smash Up Derby* is a game in which you race in derbies and smash up cars. It isn't rocket science, but there are loads of tracks available and a fair number of cars to unlock.

Problems arise in the intelligence of your opponents, which is variable at best. One minute they can be competently forcing you into a concrete wall, the next they'll be completely flummoxed by the proximity of a small grassy bank. Meanwhile, the damage you inflict on others seems pretty much arbitrary, and handling often gets frustrating.

If you're a racing fan, you'll find greener pastures in *Midnight Club 2* or even the old *Destruction Derby* games. *Smash Up Derby* is fun, but you couldn't find a more average game if you tried.

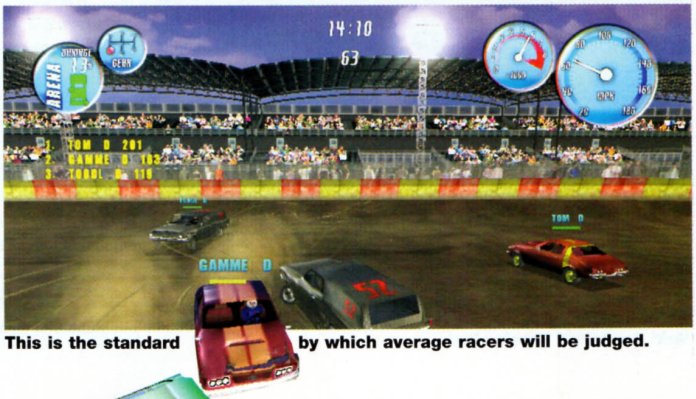
Will Porter

PCZONE VERDICT 50



Let's get smashed.

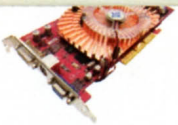
AI is sporadic at best.



This is the standard by which average racers will be judged.

LABS TEST

Mid-tower cases - 7 of the best and most stylish on test



LABS TEST

Clash of the titans - 5 Radeon 9800 Pros vs 5 GeForce FX 5900 Ultras

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CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER SEASON 00/01

■ £4.99 | Pub: Sold Out | ETA: October 17

FOLLOWING THE superb but bug-ridden *Championship Manager 4*, many regulars have reverted to *Season 01/02* while the patches stack up. This is that game's predecessor, and as such is the second update of *Champ Man 3*. Confused? It doesn't matter. Long-term addicts will already own this, and will have long since moved on.

However, if you've never dipped your toe in the *CM* waters, this is an ideal starting point, and a heady reminder of the addictive nature of the game (this review was several days late). Improvements to the previous incarnation include enhanced player feedback, live league tables and an increase in the number of playable leagues to 26, none of which will really matter to first-timers. All you really need to know is that this is an entire world of football in which it's possible to lose yourself almost indefinitely; mentally coming up with the most pitiful reasons as to why you should keep on playing, despite the debilitating effects.

The fact that the squads are out of date may prove a deterrent, but actually adds some novelty factor, enabling you to attempt to rewrite history, as well as taking a few pointers from real-life events. As such, it's a good idea to snap up any young players who went on to prove themselves in the interim, as their success will quite likely be replicated. Still an immense game, and for five quid you could be playing this for years.

Steve Hill

PCZONE VERDICT **85**

Believe it or not, this man once tried to fight Steve Hill.

PROJECT IGI

■ £4.99 | Pub: Sold Out | ETA: October 17

IF YOU TAKE the acrobatics out of *Splinter Cell* you have the basis for the original *Project IGI*. Your mission is to sneak into huge outdoor bases, invariably located in a remote valley in Eastern Europe, and to complete your mission without alerting any bad men with guns. You inevitably do, though, so another objective is to kill as many of them as you can.

In hindsight, *IGI* isn't quite as stealthy as it seemed the first time around, and the AI hasn't truly stood the test of time either. It's still a great game though; the levels are well designed, the guns are eminently powerful and there's still no greater gaming satisfaction than standing on one of the omnipresent terrorist water-towers with a sniper rifle and making the heads of evil-doers explode.

Limited saves = loads of tension.

The main accusations levelled against *IGI* are the endlessly repeated buildings and interiors (guilty) and the lack of save points (not guilty). What's the point in a stealth game if you can save after every tricky bit? Dying ten metres from your goal and having to start again is an integral part of the *IGI* experience, and for a mere fiver it's a frustration you can well afford.

Will Porter

PCZONE VERDICT **74**

EUROFIGHTER TYPHOON

■ £4.99 | Pub: Sold Out | ETA: October 17

FUN. REMEMBER that? It was one of those concepts that was outlawed in the great emotional involvement purge at the end of the 20th Century. For years, the world of flight sims had been a closed book to all but a minority of obsessive statisticians, slavishly ensuring that accurate flap angling and precise rotor spooling were more important than stuff 'sploding real good. Then, just as Rage was showing the world that flight sims could be fun thrill-joy rides, just as *Eurofighter Typhoon* threw away complexity and still retained a nice flight model but had things exploding all over the place with dramatic music and camera angles et al, just as things were looking up, basically, the bloody genre all but died. Typical.

Up, up and away.

ET was never meant to be anything other than a fun roller-coaster ride in a near-future combat environment. Iceland has been invaded by the Russian military desperate to get the latest copies of Björk's new album before it hits the shops, and only you and your small band of UN fighter-pilot jocks stand in their way.

It looked good, still does (sort of) and plays well. Occasional waiting around for something to happen does grate, but it's a small price to pay to put a smile on your face.

Paul Presley

PCZONE VERDICT **80**

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Gangsters 2 **is as unpleasant to play as it is to look at.**

GANGSTERS 2: VENDETTA

■ £4.99 | Pub: Sold Out | ETA: October 17

GANGSTERS 2 gained a couple of respectable review scores when it was first released. We, on the other hand, gunned it down – and it was, without question, the right decision.

Based upon the classic underworld clichés of corruption, revenge and silly names, *Gangsters 2* is nothing more than a glorified version of *Monopoly* minus the excitement of being the shoe.

The real-time strategy element to the game (if you can call it that) revolves around muscling in on every business the town has to offer by ordering your team of hoodlums to shoot dodgy looking individuals with Tommy guns before moving on to the next town, where you do the same.

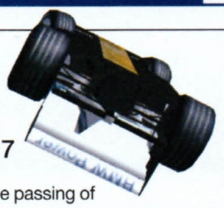
Gangsters 2 is also riddled with inexplicably poor programming. If you attempt a drive-by shooting and miss, you have to wait until you reach a junction before driving back to try again. The AI is quite simply atrocious. There are even points where wanted criminals run away from the FBI but forget they are actually running towards the police station into the arms of waiting cops.

OK, there's a half-decent musical score, but that's hardly a reason to buy it – even for a fiver. Avoid *Gangsters 2* like it was a Kray with a meat cleaver in an East End boozer.

Keith Pullin

PCZONE VERDICT **30**

F1 2001



■ £4.99 | Pub: Sold Out | ETA: October 17

THERE WAS A period when Formula One games seemed to appear about every 15 minutes. Electronic Arts was predictably in on the act, and this was one of its trademark updates. As such, it's a highly glossy affair with immaculate presentation, celebrity voice-work (well, Jim Rosenthal) and all the trimmings associated with an EA Sports title.

Refreshingly, it's also highly playable, capturing both the drama and mundanity of the sport in a pleasingly detailed fashion. At the time it was a great leap forward graphically, to the extent that a large number of PCs couldn't hope to run it. With the passing of time, that problem has been assuaged.

Clearly, if you're bothered about teams and drivers being up to date, then there are other (pricier) games that are more current. But if you simply want a decent F1 game that you can pick up and play, then this will do the job. With a versatile array of options – both arcade and simulation aspects are catered for – and a decent wheel (or PS2 pad adapter), there's a lot of mildly intense fun to be had.

Steve Hill

PCZONE VERDICT **72**

Good interest rates apparently.

WARLORDS: BATTLECRY II

■ £9.99 | Pub: Focus Multimedia | ETA: Out Now

SOME GAMES are truly addictive and *Warlords: Battlecry II* is one of them. OK, so it looks like shite and it sounds like a baby in a food mixer, but the fact is it's still immensely playable, even if, like me, you've 'completed' it about a dozen times already.

The secret is a totally non-linear, almost board-game-like ability to make each game different from the last. Coupled with 12 races (elves, dwarves, goblins etc) and an ingenious game structure that fuses RTS, role-playing and turn-based strategy into a unique gaming proposition, and you have something that's a joy to play over and over again. Of course, it helps that it's so bloody easy to get into and unlike some games of this type you're not bombarded with pages of confusing statistics. *Battlecry II* gives you only what you need and then encourages you to think carefully about what you are going to do with it.

***Warlords* in real time.**

Graphically, it's not the best.

Veteran goblin goons with a love of clans and a bewildering array of modifiers may find it all a bit basic. But for those seeking a fun fantasy game for less than a tenner – well, you can't go wrong really.

Keith Pullin

PCZONE VERDICT **78**

LEFTOVERS

PLEASE, SIR, CAN I HAVE SOME MORE?

To wrap things up, let's talk some trash. Or leftovers if you prefer. *Three Kingdoms: Fate Of The Dragon* (Sold Out, £4.99, October 17) isn't just a long title. Beneath its pug-ugly visuals lies a half-decent oriental RTS. Look past its unoriginal core-gameplay and focus on its large array of multi-functional units and you start to realise that at five pounds, it may be worth a crack if you've really nothing better to do with your time, or your cash. 60 per cent.

Once again we're saddled with a *Need For Speed* game in Replay. This month it's *Road Challenge* (Sold Out, £4.99, October 17). One of the weaker games in the series, some ridiculously unmanageable cars and a lack of oncoming traffic do little to make me want to recommend this one. So I won't. 48 per cent.

***Worms Blast* (Focus Multimedia, £9.99, Out Now) is what happens when you try to cross *Worms* with *Puzzle Bobble*. You end up with the characters and weapons of *Worms* but none of the vindictive, turn-based hilarity. 59 per cent.**

If you like your hardcore strategy games then I've got a couple of beauts for you. Or not, as the case may be. *Europa Universalis II* (Focus Multimedia, £9.99, Out Now) is a massive, historically accurate turn-based strategy game with more options than your average automated phone system. However, with a steep learning curve and some dire graphics, be prepared to invest plenty of patience. 68 per cent.

Three Kingdoms.

Finally we have *Destroyer Command* (Focus Multimedia, £9.99, Out Now). Have a look to your right and you'll see how ugly it is, although you may have to squint to make out anything at all. Set during WWII, you command a fleet of destroyers, and spend hours looking for U-boats. When you finally find them things improve both in terms of entertainment and graphics (the battles are in 3D blandovision), but ultimately it's a painful experience. Avoid, unless you like endlessly directing seamen all over a giant map. 50 per cent.

Martin Korda

Europa Universalis II.

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FEEDBACK

***Martin Korda* sifts through your views on the latest 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.

COLIN MCRAE RALLY 3

REVIEWED ISSUE: 131
SCORE: 86%

What we thought

"Have I got eyes like piss-holes in the snow from playing it non-stop for a week? Yes. Yes, I believe I have."

What you said

I was expecting *CMR3* to be more of the same, but having played the game at a friend's house, I was convinced about parting with my hard-earned cash and buying my own copy. I love the career mode, although I wish there were more variation in what cars you can drive. I was also a bit let down by the real-time damage, which looks good but doesn't impact on handling much. Apart from these two problems, I like it very much.

Morten Lund

Colin McRae Rally 3 is the best rally game I've ever played. Fast, furious and fun, I'd recommend it to anyone. I also think it's the best driving game out this year, but still not as good as *Grand Prix 4*.

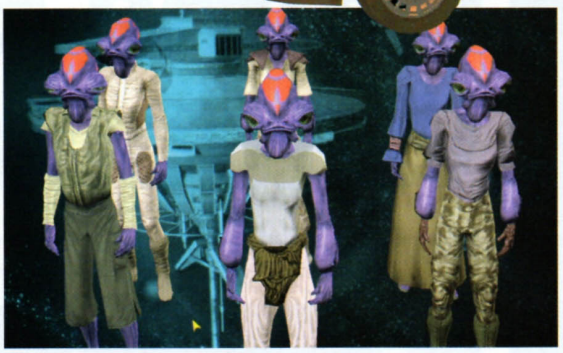
Simon P

I just wanted to let you know that I totally disagree with your verdict on *Colin McRae Rally 3*. And, by the looks of things, so do nine out of 10 rally game enthusiasts. This game is pathetic and only deserves 70-75 at the very most. The handling has hardly improved since the last game, the damage model is ridiculous (you can see the damage during replays, but you will hardly feel it on the handling) and the tracks are a joke. Your car still looks as if it's about a metre tall, while the tracks are way too wide. Were I a paranoid fool, I'd say Steve Hill was paid by Codemasters. But now it's obvious he should simply stick with *Champ Manager 4*.

Kestas

Comment

We think *Colin 3* is one of the best racers of the year, offering some seriously addictive racing and a great career mode too. Codemasters has attempted to move the series somewhere slightly new and, as far as we're concerned, they've done a damn fine job, while still retaining the old magic of the last two games. And two out of three *PC ZONE* rally game enthusiasts seem to agree.



Hands up if you think *Star Wars Galaxies* is bug free.

STAR WARS GALAXIES: AN EMPIRE DIVIDED

REVIEWED ISSUE: 132
SCORE: 67%

What we thought

"*EverQuest* fans and gamers familiar with the online experience will doubtless find some value in *Galaxies*, particularly as Sony fixes, improves and tweaks away. Who knows? In a year, it might be a worthwhile experience for all of us."

What you said

Star Wars Galaxies looked like a pretty damn decent game at first, but as it progresses, it seems to get worse. I wish Sony had released a finished game that was worth paying for. Because games aren't cheap. I hope it's sorted before it goes on sale here in England. If so, I'll be a very happy camper. Not that I camp or anything, you understand.

Jarek Szenher

I think your review of *SWG* was a bit harsh. Your claim about it being 'difficult for newbies' didn't seem to affect me. Given that *SWG* is my first MMOG, I think I can be considered a newbie.

Secondly, when you say it punctures the *SW* vibe when a Wookiee says, "Hey Dude", I disagree. Sometimes it's nice to know that the walking teddy bears have a human face behind them. It is, however, quite buggy. Although new patches will not only fix these but add things like player cities. 78 per cent would be fairer.

Giles Strachan

Comment

The majority of games these days are bugged on release. In fact, we've almost come to expect it. But when a game is more bugged than an insect collector under MI5 surveillance, we're nowhere near as understanding. There's still no word on a UK release for the game, but let's hope that when it finally does make it over here, it'll be considerably better than the US release.

"I hope *Galaxies* is sorted before it goes on sale here in England"

JAREK SZENHER VOICES THE OPINION OF EVERY BRITISH ONLINE GAMER

TOMB RAIDER: THE ANGEL OF DARKNESS

REVIEWED ISSUE: 132
SCORE: 68%

What we thought

"Clearly, The *Angel Of Darkness* has its fair share of problems. It's unfinished and unadventurous, one of the buggiest games ever released. However, it's still *Tomb Raider*, with all the sporadic charm, frustration and classic 3D action that entails."

What you said

I'm horrified. This game is buggy, annoying, boring and hard to play. What happened to the Golden Age of Lara? It's the start of the Dark Ages for her. Hope the film is better.

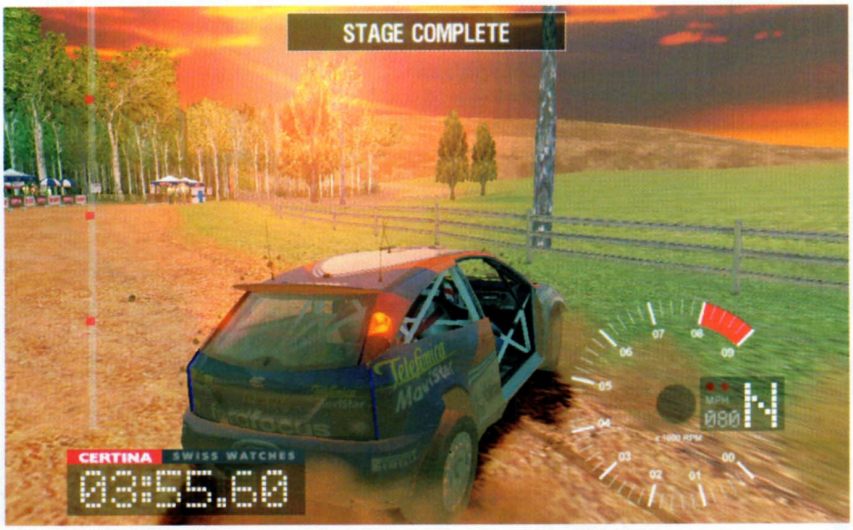
Mark

How could Eidos release a game this bugged? When I saw it at No 1 in the charts I thought it must be good. I don't think I've ever been more wrong about a game. It feels six months short of completion, and rushed. What a shame that a once-great series has stooped to such lows.

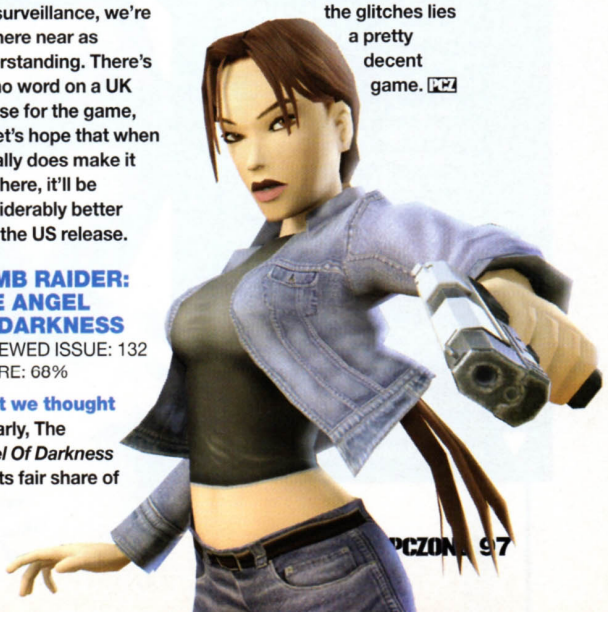
Paul Roper

Comment

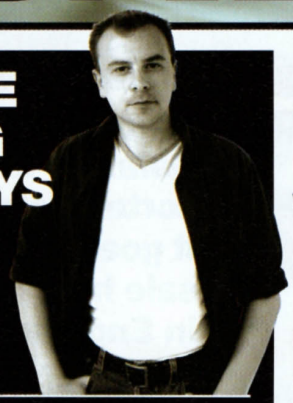
If this game was any more bugged we'd have had to call in the exterminators. Shame, as underneath the glitches lies a pretty decent game.



Two out of three *PC ZONE* readers think *Colin McRae 3* is a top rally game.



THE BIG BOYS



ONLINE EDITOR: Paul Presley

Sitting at the desk with my Starbucks extra-rich coffee (added cream), the hollow memories of my many anti-corporate tirades ringing through my head like the ghosts of ideology past, I can't help but muse on how, of the many things age brings to life's dinner party, the alteration of perspective is perhaps the most surprising.

During my reign as Britain's leading gaming commentator (1988-2003 inclusive), I've come to champion many a neglected classic, undeterred by lack of mainstream publisher support. Anything free of marketing constraints and wallowing in artistic integrity has been like nectar to my soul. Huzzahs to the underdog, huzzoos to the fat cats.

Except now I'm older and wiser, I've come to realise that sometimes the establishment gets it right. Take Sony. Now't more establishment than that, yet *EverQuest* has been one of the biggest MMOG successes of the past 50 years, responsible for more broadband subscriptions throughout Europe than any amount of hardcore lederhosen porn. Consequently, yours truly rushed back from the recent ECTS event to bring you the latest look at *EQII*, the biggest sequel in MMOG history.

Biggest, that is, except for one. Another brand synonymous with online role-playing is *Ultima Online*. EA and Origin recently hosted a special event in San Francisco to announce the next incarnation of the MMOG that started them all. Can they hack it now the marketplace is bigger than ever? Check out our lead story for the answers.

Yes, I'd love to still be the wild revolutionary of my youth, but you know what? Those white chocolate mochas taste too damn good.

Ultima Begins A Virtuous Odyssey

EA AND ORIGIN REVEAL THE GAME THAT ISN'T *ULTIMA ONLINE 2*

All that fur produced horrible levels of static electricity.

Santa discovers who's naughty and nice.

TWO YEARS AGO, Origin Systems and Electronic Arts pulled the plug on *Ultima Online Worlds: Origin*, better known as *UO2*. Many a rumour told about how and why the title went down, but whatever the realities may have been, *Ultima* fans felt screwed. Origin cogitated. Dragging out an oft-revamped but obviously six-year-old engine seemed like a bad idea. As did planning the migration of an already satisfied fan base. So instead, it mega-tweaked the latest Unreal engine, rejigged some of the gaming concepts and gave birth to *Ultima X: Odyssey*. The end result has just been unveiled to a hungry public at a dedicated event in San Francisco and it's looking absolutely spectacular.

UXO isn't trying to do what its contemporaries are already doing –

"It's designed to give you the swords 'n' sorcery fantasies you've always wanted"

providing huge but largely static worlds of hugs, hot chat, hunting and hooters. Instead, it's trying to be an MMOG that has many elements of a single-player game, from tailored quests to real-time combat.

The private parts are areas that spawn as you enter them to participate in a quest (or consensual duel) and disappear when you leave. This should all but eliminate the queue of players waiting for the third Beholder that appears every three days and drops a quest item four per cent of the time. It also stops unwelcome 'griefers' from disturbing your playing experience.

The so-called Odyssey Adventure System is the core of the quest engine, aiming to provide structured but mostly non-linear challenges, whether it's an epic

Highlighting the perils of drunk tattooists.

104
EVERQUEST II
Norrath: The Next Generation

106
LINEAGE II
Korea does MMOGs and Goths

108
AO: SHADOWLANDS
First review of the add-on

112
GETTING STARTED IN...
Negotiating *Neocron* for newbies

That'll need re-pointing.

Quick, use the rolled-up newspaper of K'Tharrg +4.

The Judith Chalmers camouflage scheme goes horribly wrong.

adventure or a simple little quest for those of you with real lives, relationships or football to follow. It's also designed to make your online adventuring more of the exciting swords 'n' sorcery fantasies you've always wanted, instead of just turning you into a virtual lumberjack or rat killer.

An old *Ultima* standby also makes a return in *UXO* – the eight Virtues. Skill points give you levels, but Virtue points advance your character toward the ultimate goal of becoming the Avatar. As you progress through each of the eight Virtues, you unlock associated bonuses and powers, including the ability to create adoring disciples. In-game cults are but a step away.

In a number of RPGs, crafting items (weapons, armour, chairs) can be a pretty high-profile activity. Not here. Instead, you can imbue your items with stat modifiers, which improves and, in essence, levels them – similar to gem and rune placement in *Diablo II*. Then you can concentrate on the quests that come to you as you master the extremely good-looking combat system.

If EA pulls this off, it'll be pretty amazing, but it hopes to emulate real-time combat by handling lag in such a way as to make the latency completely transparent to the player. It'd be easy to say, "Yeah, don't hold your breath," if the San Francisco demo didn't look as though it's actually working. Ultimately *UXO* is more about adventure and combat than about working the level treadmill. And we won't know if it works until this winter.

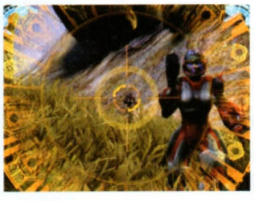
- **Publisher:** Electronic Arts
- **Developer:** Origin Systems
- **ETA:** Winter 2003
- **Website:** www.uxo.ea.com

THE ONLINE SHORTS

GLEANING THE FACTS FROM THE GLOBAL RUMOUR MILL

ENEMY BELOW

The perennial punch-up known as *PlanetSide* is about to get its first expansion pack, Sony has announced. *Core Combat* will take the battle deep beneath the surface of war-torn Auraxis, offering newly discovered alien weapons, vehicles and cities for those skilful enough to find them. Look for it this October.



UNREAL 2 BETA

Atari is accepting applicants for the upcoming *Unreal 2* multiplayer expansion pack. Similar to *Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory*, the add-on is to be a freebie, adding class-based team warfare to the single-player game. New weapons and vehicles are promised. Register at www.betatests.net to be in with a chance.

EVE UPDATED

The corporate space cadets of *EVE Online* are finding their lives forever altered. Developer CCP has begun a series of in-game events, introducing the Jovian alien faction to the scene, altering the political landscape and adding new ships, weapons and the like. More details and an exclusive competition next month.

EQ EVOLVES

Rejoice Norrath-lovers, for *EverQuest Evolution* has been announced. It's a special edition boxed set, containing vanilla *EQ*, plus every expansion pack so far and a set of collectable maps. Unfortunately, it's currently only a US product, on sale for US$29.99, but *EQ* completists among you might be able to find a willing importer.

WEBGAME OF THE MONTH

WHY PAY TO PLAY WHEN THE INTERWEB PROVIDES FUN FOR FREE?

MORNINGTON CRESCENT (parslow.com/mornington)

As with the best legends, the genesis of *Mornington Crescent* is lost in doubt. Some argue that it precedes Chess, played by Persian kings, now forgotten by all. Others contest its roots are in pre-war military life, a way for soldiers far from home to maintain links to their youth. Some say it was just a way for Peter Cook to piss off David Frost in a pub during the '60s.

Whatever the case, *MC* transcends class, can be played with equal skill by lords and labourers, requiring nothing more than a willing adversary and a place to sit away from the intrusions of modern life.

Yet for many, *MC* is still a closed book. Its world of Fanthorpe Openings, semi-lateral bypassing

All the triple shunting and lateral tokens you could ask for.

and Dollis Hill loops remain as foreign a concept to most as the intricacies of keyhole surgery or pro-celebrity badger tossing.

Luckily the Internet is on hand to reclaim the game for the 21st Century. Many sites offer games for both newcomers and veterans, although one of the best takes its inspiration from the popular wireless show *I'm Sorry I Haven't A Clue*. *MC In Outer Space* offers vanilla *MC*, a lengthy pro game that has been running nearly four years, and other word-based diversions. It's perhaps the best way of engaging your creativity and stimulating your otherwise flaccid brain cells. No bad thing in these dumbed-down days.

Movement animations will depend on terrain.

DEVELOPER DIARY

DRAGON EMPIRES

PETER TYSON, Codemasters

"When the producer and his boss come to your desk, it's always wise to look as busy and as organised as possible. Unfortunately I work in a games company, so a desk littered with CDs, sweets, *Thunderbirds* figures and a model Zero (to remind people how deadly I am in *Battlefield 1942*) probably doesn't give the right impression. But all things are relative, so I take solace in the knowledge that I look more organised than the guy who's covered his monitor in stickers of fruit or the *Final Fantasy* figurine collector, which is just as well, as I had to demo the current state of the game and act professional (a tough call).

"Luckily, we just cleared some major bugs this week, so everything was running smoothly. My character, a healer, who it turns out through some random chance looks exactly like Kim from *24* (no bad thing), ran up and down hills with ease and wielded different weapons without problems. Now the beta is running, we can take a little time to enjoy the world we've made. It's great fun to climb up a mountain and see the clouds drift by or to walk through a forest and come across a spider scuttling around in the bushes.

"One thing we're trying to achieve is to add a strong sense of realism to the world, so you will

"My character turns out to look exactly like Kim from *24* (no bad thing)..."

see your character lean forward when you go up a hill, or even scrambling up using their hands if the terrain gets really steep. Archers who are higher than their foes will do more damage, and the temperature changes healing and energy recovery rates. We believe details like this add so much depth and interest to the world that the work to put them in is repaid many times over.

"Meanwhile, the beta testers are also having a great time exploring and fighting. The game is simple right now, but constantly having pieces added to it. Despite this, the game is still fun and very beautiful. Soon I'll be working on a new and exciting gameplay video showing off the beta, which with any luck will be out (www.dragonempires.com) as you read this. Look for it on the website and tell me what you think. I welcome your feedback. Till next month."

Camelot Heads Undersea

MOISTENED BINTS LOB SCIMITARS IN MASSIVE *DAOC* EXPANSION

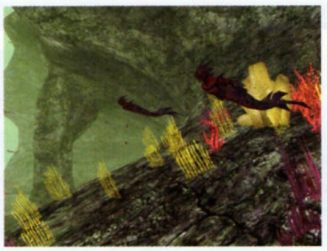
WHILE LEADING historians may well argue the veracity of the idea, according to Mythic Entertainment the Arthurian legend is closely related to that of Atlantis, fabled lost city of dodgy plumbing. To help prove this point, *Trials Of Atlantis*, the biggest expansion pack yet for *Dark Age Of Camelot*, is to be released later this year.

Until now, most *DAOC*ers have been content to simply invade each others' realms and generally loot, pillage and plunder away. The *TOA* pack opens a new gateway from each of the three realms to the sodden lands, promising great power to those brave enough to face the titular 'Trials'.

Along with the added quests, weapons, magic, skills and so on, *TOA* also brings a massive graphical upgrade to the existing realms, improving landscape texturing, making trees more realistic than ever and generally upping the visual ante all round.

There will also be three new playable races to explore – the Hibernian Shar, the Midgard Frostalf and the Albion Half Ogre. All three will join the other races in the new aquatic movement modes, introducing swimming, boating and, presumably, floating-like-a-corpse to the MMOG for the first time. *Trials Of Atlantis* is slated for a winter release and we'll be taking a closer look soon.

In the meantime, if this has whet your appetite for some medieval mayhem then have we got news for you! Whatever you do, whether it's saving lives as a professional trampoline builder or brightening people's days by slipping an extra French fry in with their Happy Meals, make sure you book plenty of holiday time next month as *PC ZONE* (and only *PC ZONE*) will be bringing you the total MMOG package. *Dark Age Of Camelot* plus the *Shrouded Isles* expansion will be nestling warmly on our cover discs, along with a whole month's subscription to get you fully acquainted with the swords 'n' sorcery action. What other mag is this generous, I ask you?



A touch of rising damp, but otherwise sound.

Domes. Never a good idea. Just ask Mayor Ken.

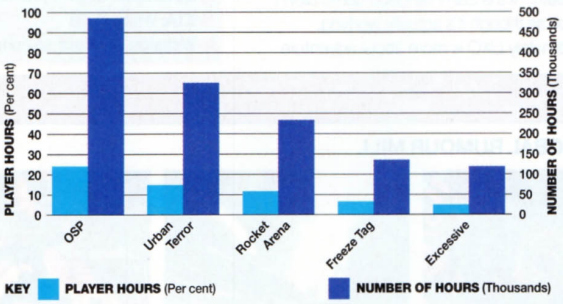
- **Publisher:** Wanadoo
- **Developer:** Mythic Entertainment
- **ETA:** Q4 2003
- **Website:** www.trialsofatlantis.com

STATZONE

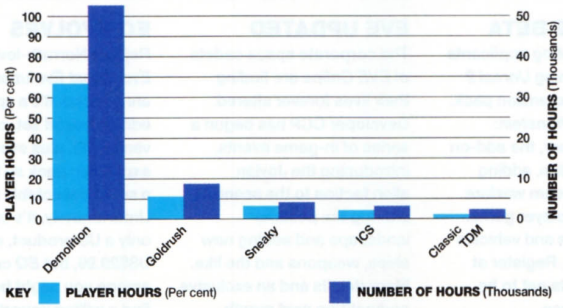
A LOOK AT THE NUMBERS SHAPING YOUR ONLINE WORLD

ALL DATA SUPPLIED BY: ESPORTS.net

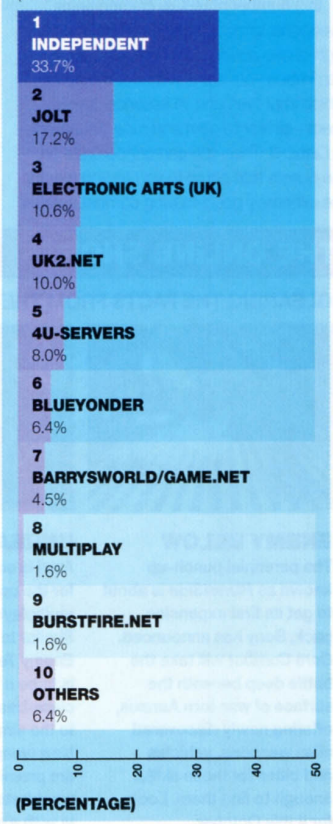
TOP FIVE *QUAKE III* MODS (WEEK ENDING AUGUST 19, 2003)



TOP FIVE *SOLDIER OF FORTUNE 2* MODS (WEEK ENDING AUGUST 19, 2003)



MOST POPULAR UK FPS SERVER PROVIDERS
(WEEK ENDING AUGUST 19, 2003)



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EXCELLENCE DISPLAYED

WELCOME TO MY WORLD...

RAND MILLER, *Uru: Ages Beyond Myst*

IT'S GOOD to have a plan. For Rand Miller, CEO of Cyan Worlds, Inc., who is currently building *Uru: Ages Beyond Myst*, that plan is to provide meaning. "Our philosophy is different to other MMOGs," he explains shrewdly. "We're not necessarily concerned about 'real estate', about building vast expanses to hold masses of people. We're interested in crafting very realistic environments that have a history to them. Where every aspect is there for a reason."

Fans of the *Myst* series will know exactly what he means. Anyone who's ever dipped into the fantastical worlds created by Miller and co will be familiar with the rich tapestries and detailed histories that helped captivate millions of gamers for the past decade. "From our point of view, we're more concerned about the realistic nature of things than maintaining 60 frames per second," says Miller. "The core of our engine was built to maintain a pretty high frame rate, but we're not shooting things and battling. We've gone for detail in the places instead."

Uru is about exploration. You can discover the myriad picturesque worlds by yourself, delving into the mysteries of an ancient civilisation, or team up with groups of fellow travellers and explore the constantly expanding world together online. It's almost like taking a holiday online.

"We have this 'ages' concept, which gives us lots of diversity," says Miller, describing the structure of the game. "Our intent is to pack lots of interest into small amounts of space, rather than having large areas of plain sand or repeating trees. *Uru* is full of interesting things at almost every step."

These worlds are forever growing as inspiration hits the team. "It seems that everything we see and read becomes a seed for a whole new place," reveals Miller. "I might go on vacation to an amazing spot, see a particular tree, take a picture, and that tree becomes a seed from which to build a whole world, to create a whole story. We love exploring the stories behind things. All of life's stimuli gives us fertile soil to grow those seeds."

This expansion is the key to the team's philosophy. Miller is adamant that online gaming should be less about community and more about content. "People respond to having something new every day. There's always something that will surprise you when you enter *Uru*. People are used to that with television, movies and books – thriving on wondering what comes next. We're using that same approach for online gaming."
Prepare to book your tickets this November. PCZ

"Everything we see becomes a seed for a new place in *Uru*. I might be on vacation, take a picture and build a whole new world from it"

RAND MILLER
URU: AGES BEYOND MYST

- **Publisher:** Ubi Soft
- **Developer:** Cyan Worlds, Inc.
- **ETA:** November 2003
- **Website:** www.urulive.com

Girl's got balls; little higher up that's all.

"Bad Muffy. Not on the carpet. That's a bad giant scorpion."

A dark elf and a goblin man thing. Together they fight crime!

It's grim up Norrath in...

EVERQUEST II

It's back to basics for the most massive of massively multiplayers. *Paul Presley* discovers an intimate side to Sony's sequel

THE DETAILS

PUBLISHER Ubi Soft
DEVELOPER Sony Online Entertainment
ETA June 2004
WEBSITE www.everquest2.com

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Private group encounters creating a more streamlined playing experience
- More flexible character creation system
- Group and combination skills providing more tactical combat
- Social experience rewards non-combative play

SIZE ISN'T everything, it's what you do with it that counts, is the forlorn cry of the under-endowed male. It also happens to be the guiding principle behind Sony's return visit to the hallowed, some might say sacred, world of Norrath – a land that needs no introduction to the half a million *EverQuest* players who have been happily killing rats, orcs and goblins for the past five years.

"*EverQuest II* is getting back to basics. Small, intimate, meaningful play." So says Bill Trost, senior game designer and the man whom the aforementioned half-million gamers would happily fellate at the drop of a helmet, such is the pleasure he's given them over the years. Luckily, Trost's interests lie firmly with the sequel he and his team are busy attempting to create for early next year. "We're looking at small groups, four to six players getting together, having adventures and making a real impact on the world. The experience of *EverQuest*, as it has developed over the last five years, has been to expand into a more broad, more epic type of experience."

This involving experience means deep storylines and the kind of private encounter technology that's starting to make appearances in games like *Mythica* and *Final Fantasy XI: Online*. Except that Trost sees more uses for the tech than simple dungeon hacks.

"We're using that technology in quests, sure, but also in specific instances. Like for player housing," he explains, while taking us on a guided tour of the reworked city of Freeport. "We have free-standing structures that contain secure, private interiors. These are going to be highly sought after because they're limited in number. Buying them isn't just based on money though. You have to earn and maintain enough social status within the city to get one."

CV SOE

SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT

Sony has led the way in the MMOG world ever since *EverQuest* went live in 1999. Even with the sequel looming, the original *EQ* is still more popular than any of its rivals

1999 With the PlayStation proving to be a horrible, horrible failure (ahem), an alternative source of revenue was needed. *EQ* proved to be that source.

2001 A couple of uninspiring attempts to spread its wings (*Cosmic Rift*, *Infantry*) and a raft of *EQ* expansion packs.

2003 *PlanetSide* marks the first MMOG to sport real-time FPS action. *Star Wars Galaxies*, although released early and buggy, proves to be every Jedi wannabe's dream.

"Hmmm, did I leave the iron on?"

This is the other main area of change *EverQuest II* is introducing – social experience. Players can rise in rank and ability as much through contributing to the world and the betterment of their race, city and factions as they can by hitting things with magic sticks. "We're reinforcing to the player that they're part of this world, part of their society and, like any society, there are responsibilities associated that have to be maintained if they want to reap the benefits."

JERUSALEM

With the new graphics engine now firmly in place, these benefits look better than ever. Trost concludes the tour of Freeport with a jaunt around a stunning-looking guild house. (Player guilds can also own property – the bigger and more flamboyant demonstrating the guild's standing within the city's structure.) Then he loads up the new Norrath's other major city, Qeynos.

"We wanted Freeport to feel very urban, with a definite Mediterranean style," says Trost, as the progress bar zips across the screen. "Meanwhile Qeynos is more open, with a more pastoral, English countryside sort of feel to it." Although with all the ogres, trolls and gnomes potentially running about it's probably more akin to Leeds than Lincolnshire.

A breathtaking Leeds though. The new Qeynos is like Simon Scharma's wet dream. Tudor buildings, village squares, ornate marble statues and bloody great castles and towers, reaching into the sky like the giant phallic symbols they are.

"We have a realistically modelled spatial sphere," says Trost, as he pans up along a particularly tall turret. "The sun moves through the sky and casts light on to the moon. The moon goes through phases, the constellations drift through the night sky." He's a proud man and it shows.

This kind of detail also helps out when adding content to the game world. "On certain days of the year there's a celestial event that happens in Qeynos," Trost says, coming to rest at the base of a marble figure. "If you stand in a way that the top of a statue's sword lines up with the central tower of the main castle, a solar eclipse happens right at the tip. We'll be having a festival take place on these occasions in the city, and anyone who's here at that time will be able to earn social experience for participating."

COUNTRY FAYRE

Time starts running out for our tour and Trost stops short at conjuring up a gang of zombies to show off the battle engine, partly because the combat system isn't fully in place yet and mostly because he knows he'll get mullered.

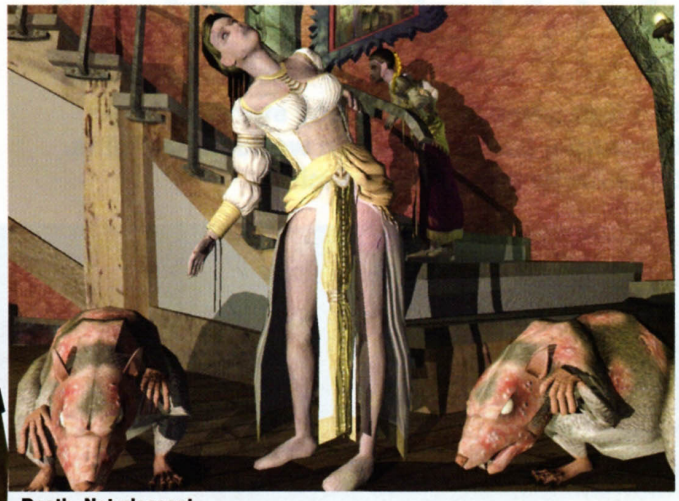
"Encounters are made up from logical groupings of NPCs which can function and operate tactically as a unit," he explains by way of absence. "When a group of players engages them, that encounter locks down to that group exclusively. That lets us set up really tactical battle situations. We know what the capabilities of four to six players are and with the option of having others joining in at will no longer there, it enables us to explore lots of interesting tactics, along with making the abilities of the players much more tactical in their nature."

Tactics like this also depend a lot on the types of skills in which players choose to specialise. "You can combine skills and 'knowledges' to customise your characters," he says. "Combining long sword knowledge with high slashing techniques opens up an advanced fighting move that stuns your opponents along with damaging them."

Trost is hoping this more concentrated style of gameplay is what will draw those players who found *EverQuest* too daunting towards this sequel. Both games will still run side by side (more *EQ* expansions are on the way), but *EQII* is definitely emphasising content over sheer size. Women in general may not respond to such boasts, but gamers? That's another matter. PZ

THE FINAL SOLUTION

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU DIE? SONY STILL ISN'T SURE



Death. Not pleasant.

"We still don't have a firm design on death," admits Trost, when pressed on in-game fatalities. No surprise really. Handling death is a tricky measure, having to balance fairness, while avoiding penalising the player so much that he gives up in a huff.

"It's a tricky problem," he agrees. "We want it to be meaningful. But that means the players need to have a level of respect for the world. You have to establish that it's a believable place, that the opponents you're fighting have minds and they should be respected."

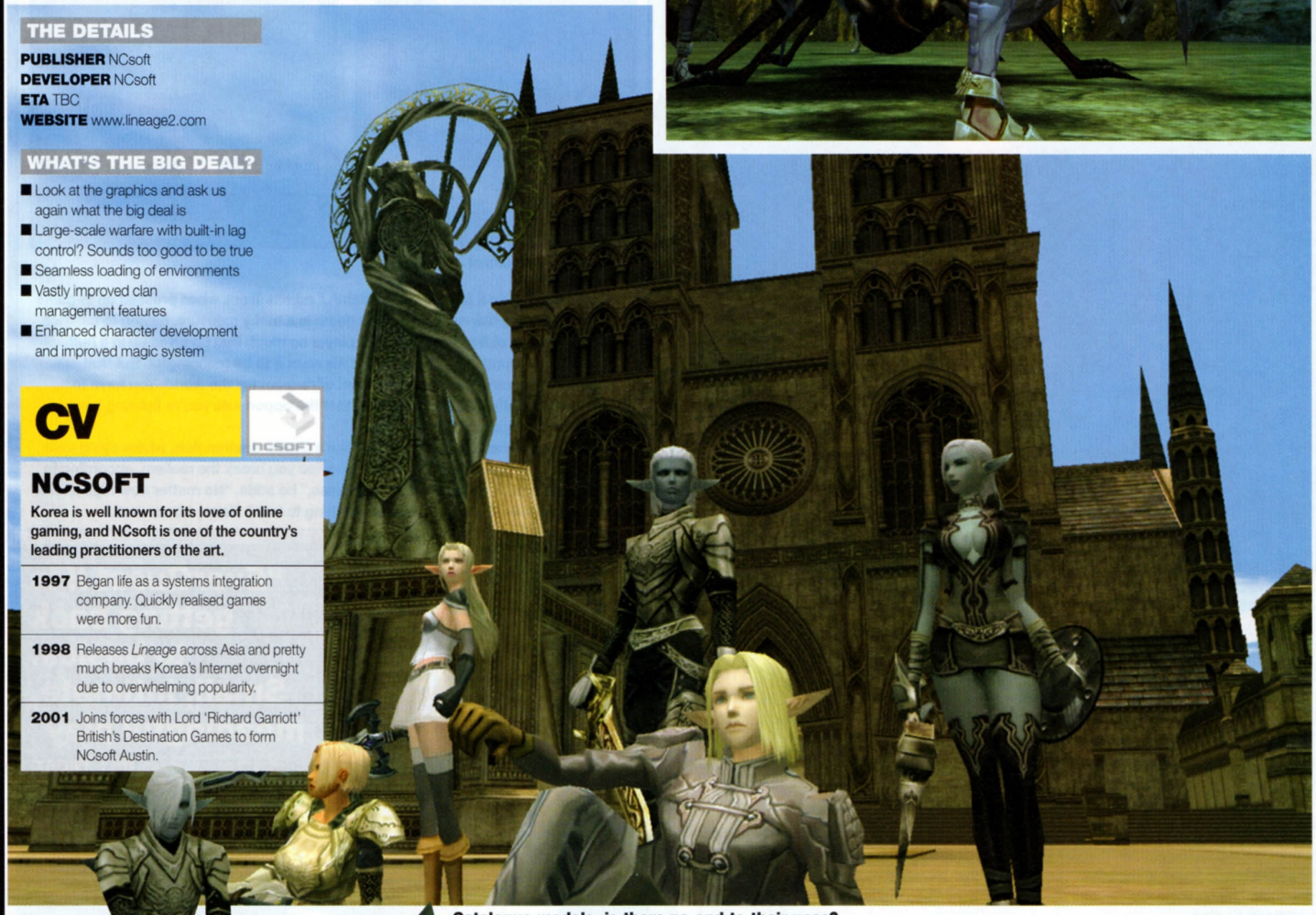
Similarly, you can't just make it feel like a *Quake* deathmatch, where dying just means a quick respawn with no loss, otherwise you break the realism, according to Trost. "Death can't ever become meaningless," he adds. "No matter how high a level the player reaches, it should still be something to fear." Never a truer word.

"Intimate? Not bloody likely."

Get on the Seoul train...

LINEAGE II

The first game took Korea by storm and now the sequel has the western world in its sights. *Chris Anderson* opens his mind



THE DETAILS

PUBLISHER NCsoft
DEVELOPER NCsoft
ETA TBC
WEBSITE www.lineage2.com

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Look at the graphics and ask us again what the big deal is
- Large-scale warfare with built-in lag control? Sounds too good to be true
- Seamless loading of environments
- Vastly improved clan management features
- Enhanced character development and improved magic system

CV

NCSOFT

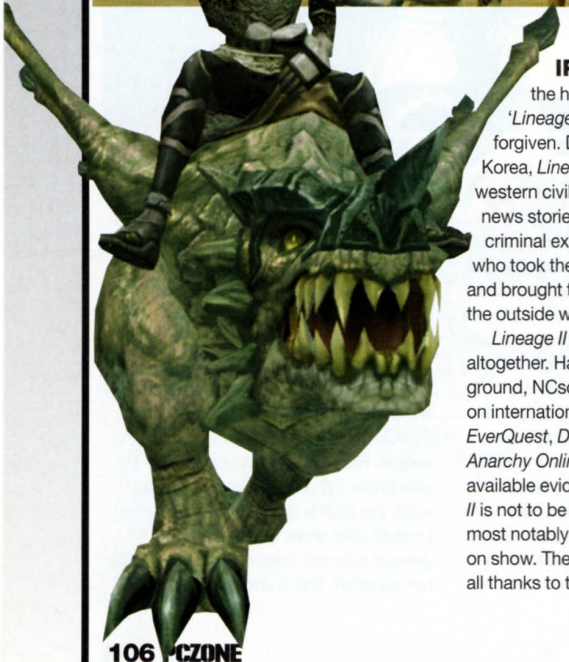
Korea is well known for its love of online gaming, and NCsoft is one of the country's leading practitioners of the art.

1997 Began life as a systems integration company. Quickly realised games were more fun.

1998 Releases *Lineage* across Asia and pretty much breaks Korea's Internet overnight due to overwhelming popularity.

2001 Joins forces with Lord 'Richard Garriott' British's Destination Games to form NCsoft Austin.

Catalogue models, is there no end to their uses?



IF YOU'RE looking at the headline above and thinking '*Lineage* who?' it's OK, you can be forgiven. Despite huge success in Korea, *Lineage* never made waves in western civilisation, apart from a few news stories centred around the real-life criminal exploits of some of its players who took the game a little too seriously and brought their in-game grudges to the outside world.

Lineage II is a different prospect altogether. Having conquered its home ground, NCsoft is now looking to take on international heavyweights such as *EverQuest*, *Dark Age Of Camelot* and *Anarchy Online* with this sequel, and all available evidence suggests that *Lineage II* is not to be taken lightly. This is evident most notably in the quality of the graphics on show. The luscious visual overhaul is all thanks to the latest version of the *Unreal* engine, with the move to 3D from the original game's 2D roots completing a transition to cutting-edge technology that the series desperately needed.

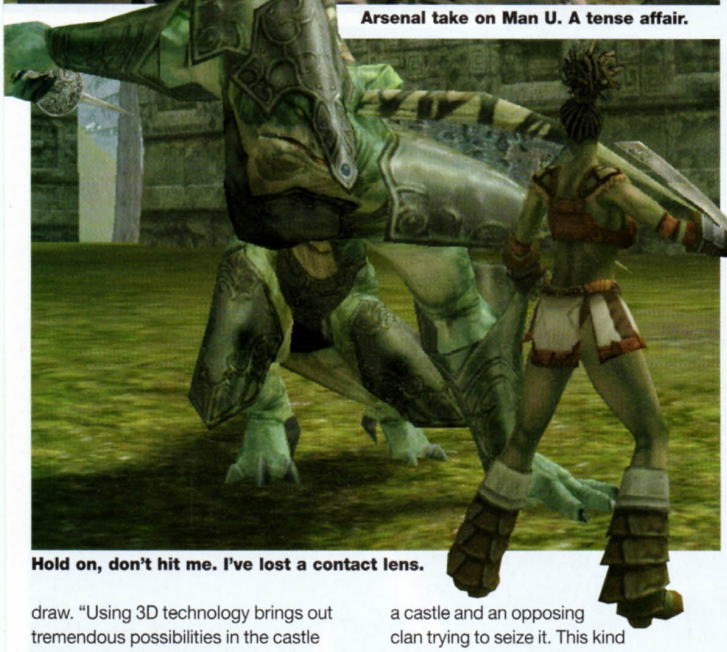
As our readership in Korea is limited at best, you're unlikely to be familiar with the original game. *Lineage* was a standard fantasy-based online RPG in which you could choose between magic, melee and stealth characters. While it stuck pretty firmly to the traditional skill increasing and levelling up template for these things, the ultimate goal was to join a clan and wage war on others, challenging their territory and buildings. Think of it as a streamlined *EverQuest* with siege battles and clan wars as its primary focus and you wouldn't be wide of the mark. *Lineage II* has a similar focus but gives you a greater choice of characters, skills and activities and wraps it all up in a 3D blanket.

"PvP will involve massive battles, pitting clan against clan"

RAOUL KIM
LEAD DESIGNER, NCSOFT

Which is all well and good, but what incentive will there be for gamers to drop the time they invested in all the other MMOGs to start anew in *Lineage II*? We tracked down NCsoft's lead designer, Raoul Kim, who believes the unique implication of siege warfare will be the big

Arsenal take on Man U. A tense affair.



Hold on, don't hit me. I've lost a contact lens.

draw. "Using 3D technology brings out tremendous possibilities in the castle siege system," he says. "The colossal castles in 1:1 scale allow strategic posts to be set up on castle ramparts or watch towers, adding diversity to combat styles. 3D technology also makes it possible to use large-scale castle siege weaponry and new strategic moves such as catapulting over the castle rampart."

KILL PEOPLE FOR FUN

Just as *Lineage* relied heavily on PvP, so too does the sequel. The dangers of pure and open PvP in games of this type are well-documented, with many players shying away as a result. NCsoft is sticking to its guns and hoping to prove the world wrong. "In a limited sense, PvP will mean individual against individual, while in a larger sense, it will involve a massive battle, pitting clan against clan," says Kim. "In large-scale group battles, two clans may fight one another or form alliances to beat larger, more powerful clans, and then wage war on the battlefields. Battles break out between a clan claiming ownership of a castle and an opposing clan trying to seize it. This kind of massive-scale PvP system requires countless strategies and represents an important and unique feature of *Lineage II*."

Listening to Kim talk about the PvP aspect of the game, it sounds almost word for word a description of what will surely be *LII*'s most direct competitor: *Shadowbane*. While *Shadowbane* suffers from unimpressive graphics due to an ageing game engine, it proved there is most definitely a market for PvP titles, having impressive server figures ever since the game was released.

'All together now, YMCA...'

MAKE WAR, NOT LOVE

FORGET PLAYER VS PLAYER, *LINEAGE II* IS AIMING FOR GAME VS GAME COMBAT

Lineage II, in common with _Shadowbane_, is a continuous battle for territorial control with players vying for supremacy in strategic regions and, along with their clan members, attempting to take control of as much land as possible in order to use its resources. This is the heart and soul of a pure PvP environment, and it works very well indeed in _Shadowbane_, making the game world feel alive, real, dangerous, and challenging. Unfortunately, that's just about all there is in that game. _Lineage II_ is bringing a lot more than PvP and siege warfare to the table and as a result, should attract more gamers in the long term. Even _Planetside_ is likely to lose subscribers if NCsoft can pull this off. Fight, fight, fight...

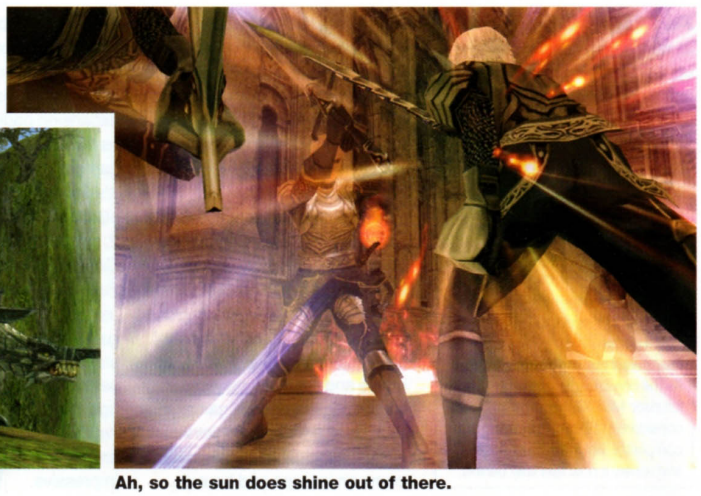
All this, and no lag. We'll believe it when we see it.

OUT OF THE SHADOW

While it's hardly likely that *Lineage II* will suffer similar complaints about its graphics, there are other aspects about it that suggest *Shadowbane*'s days may be numbered. The quest system, for instance. "Our quest system is more than just a collection of simple task-fulfilling functions," says Kim. "*Lineage II* offers everything from tutorial-style quests for newcomers and basic quests for rewards, to much more elaborate quests designed to thoroughly captivate the players and bring them into the world of *Lineage II*."

With its excellent graphics and the lure of large-scale siege warfare, there is much to get excited about with *Lineage II*. Even the ever present threat of lag should hopefully be eliminated as the game will lower graphical quality automatically on the fly during very large battles, ensuring players with low-end machines won't be watching the action almost frame by frame.

Additionally, seamless loading of environments (as opposed to the zone-loading style used by games like *EverQuest*) will add to the atmosphere and sense of realism, and while *Shadowbane* may well be looking nervously over its shoulder at this game, we think *EverQuest* and the like should also be advised to keep an eye on what looks like a very promising addition to the genre. PCZ



Ah, so the sun does shine out of there.

ANARCHY ONLINE: SHADOWLANDS

■ £19.99 | Pub: Funcom | Dev: Funcom | ETA: Out Now | www.anarchy-online.com

REQUIRES PII 300, 128MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card **DESIRES** At least 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

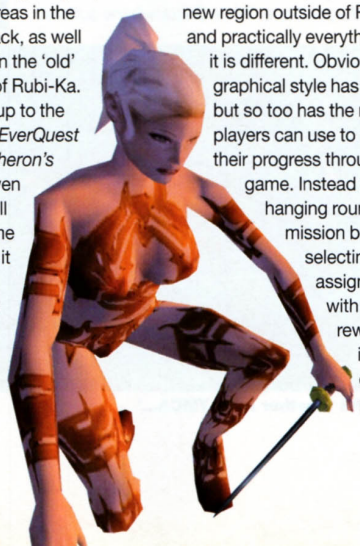
They asked for anarchy, and they got it with *AO*. *Chris Anderson* looks for lessons learned

***Shadowlands* has a much darker feel than the original game and creatures look less 'comedic'.**

AS SUCCESSFUL launches go, *Anarchy Online* is up there with the third generation telephone network, Channel Five and the space shuttle Challenger. With *Shadowlands*, the first official expansion for *AO*, Funcom is out to prove it has learnt its lesson and hopes to win back the respect of gamers who left in droves after the initial bugs and crash-fest.

First impressions, we're pleased to report, are favourable. The dreaded memory leak of old has disappeared (cause of more fatal errors than a heart surgeon with the shakes), and all areas of the expansion we explored were stable and perfectly playable – something the original game took quite a while to achieve.

Aesthetically everything has come on in leaps and bounds. *Shadowlands* brings with it many new ground and environment textures, which greatly improve the all-new areas in the expansion pack, as well as the areas in the 'old' game world of Rubi-Ka. It's not quite up to the standards of *EverQuest 2*, or even *Asheron's Call 2*, but given Funcom is still using the same game engine it started with several years ago, the new visuals are pretty impressive.



OLD WORLD, NEW WORLD

Shadowlands opens an entirely new region outside of Rubi-Ka and practically everything about it is different. Obviously the graphical style has changed, but so too has the method players can use to make their progress through the game. Instead of hanging round mission booths selecting assignments with juicy rewards, in the expansion pack you are encouraged to explore and find adventure – conquering newly-discovered playfields by playing through whole series of quests and unlocking brand new ones.

There are seven new areas in total, all apparently inspired by the circles of Heaven and Hell in Dante's *The Divine Comedy*. You also have a new city to start in (some nice apartments are being offered to early subscribers), which puts you in mind of every daydream of Tokyo you've ever had. These new areas give the game a focus that's been badly missing, providing a level of linear structure that keeps you going. At the same time it

IN PERSPECTIVE

EVERQUEST: NEW DAWN
Reviewed Issue 125, Score 87%
If the future bores you, *EQ* is still streets ahead of other fantasy games, though this could all change soon with many big titles on the horizon.

NEOCRON
Reviewed Issue 124, Score 85%
As the only other successful futuristic MMOG, *Neocron* is considered to be *AO*'s closest competitor, but in terms of depth and variety it now falls way behind.

The graphics are quite breathtaking in places.

offers enough diversity and sub-questing to keep the most ardent of players happy for a long time to come.

The sub-quests are to be found in the new static dungeons, which bear no resemblance to the cut-and-paste efforts found throughout Rubi-Ka's previous missions. Each is unique and hand-crafted and they serve to provide *AO* with a new level of depth, something sadly lacking in the original game.

This is Funcom's answer to the oft-repeated player forum cries for static dungeons, and a good answer it is too. With the option of playing *AO* in the traditional way or by heading out to the wilds of the *Shadowlands* for a more open-ended and rewarding experience, Funcom is giving you the best of both worlds and it's this kind of variety that re-affirms *AO*'s position as the closest competitor to *EQ* in the genre.

QUEST FOR STORY

While the storyline in the original game has its own appeal, it never had that much significance since you weren't forced to follow it. *Shadowlands* integrates the story with the new quests, drawing the player in, and rewarding exploration of the world at large. It deals with the two types of beings inhabiting the new lands – the 'redeemed' (who are aligned with Clan members on Rubi-Ka) and the 'unredeemed' (who are aligned with Omni-tek). Most of the new quests centre round the struggle between these two entities, and supporting your faction is now more important than it ever was before. Players have to be careful where they raise their faction in the new areas as it will directly affect their progress throughout the expansion pack.

There are also new 'perks' (or skills, if you want to be English about it) to gain, along with the ultimate form of bonus – the Shadowbreeds. Effectively these are hugely powerful self-transformation spells, bestowing immense combat bonuses on players. However, they will only be available to players who gain sufficiently high rank with their faction – something that's not going to happen overnight, take it from us.

New textures greatly improve the visuals.

As MMOG expansions go, *Shadowlands* is one of the most impressive we've seen in a very long time. It shows the darker side of Funcom's initial vision of a futuristic world and, as a result, is more atmospheric and downright eerie than the world of Rubi-Ka. With the inclusion of new static dungeons and the heavy bias on exploratory questing and raising your faction, *Shadowlands* brings a welcome new experience to *AO* players, for whom life in the existing game was starting to wear thin. While heavy-duty competition is just around the corner in the shape of *EQ2*, *Horizons*, *World Of Warcraft* et al, this expansion leaves *AO* in great shape for the foreseeable future. PCZ

"As MMOG expansions go, *Shadowlands* is one of the most impressive we've seen"

A CLASS APART

TO BUFF OR NOT TO BUFF

The Shade fails to see light.

Shadowlands introduces two new professions, the Shade and the Keeper. Of the two, the Keeper is the class that has more in common with traditional *AO* professions. The Keeper is a tank with good group-improving powers, and as such is easy to understand and simple to play. By stark contrast, the Shade still remains something of a mystery. At its core it's a light melee class, not unlike the martial arts profession already in the game. But the Shade uses debuffs (draining powers) to wear its opponents down. This makes it a group-dependent class which means soloing is going to be very difficult. Also, nanos (spells) and armour for this class are not exactly in abundance. To be honest, the Shade gives the impression of still being largely unfinished. Time will tell how players adapt to it, and ultimately how useful (or not) it will be in the greater scheme of things.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✔ A whole new world to explore
- ✔ Vastly improved terrain graphics
- ✔ Static dungeons and open-ended exploration
- ✔ Heavy bias on quests in the new areas
- ✘ May not stand up to looming competition
- ✘ Noticeable lag in some areas

80

Dark, atmospheric and hugely challenging

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 *PC ZONE* 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 *Wolfenstein: 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.

Future games being played will include perennial Internet favourites such as *Quake III*, *Medal Of Honor*, *Soldier Of Fortune II* and that old warhorse of the genre, *Counter-Strike*.

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 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 giving the winning team no less than five top-of-the-range video cards, while the winning solo player will walk off with the very latest whizzbang gaming PC! We also have prizes for each of the round winners – a year's free subscription to the indomitable *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 listed below.

What are you waiting for? This is the chance to prove your chops to the whole *PC ZONE* world! Log on to www.pczone.jolt.co.uk and get fragging. To coin a phrase, it could be you...

SIGN UP AT www.pczone.jolt.co.uk TODAY!

HOSTED BY jolt online gaming

SPONSORED BY GAINWARD www.gainward.com

Get 'em on the run in *UT 2003*.

FIGHT CLUB

FIRST RULE OF FIGHT CLUB: *PC ZONE* OWNZ JØØ

WE'RE BACK! Yes Fight Club returns after our mini-sabbatical, refreshed and fighting fit. Our recent bout on *Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory*, while fraught with technical hitches, proved a welcome distraction from the ageing *Counter-Strike*, although our team skills left a lot to be desired. Luckily a star amongst you rose up to lead us to glory in the shape of DesoLatioN – teaming up with Paul "IR Baboon" Presley for a particularly dominating display during Siwa Oasis. Other merciless killers amongst you were DaReal and the aptly named Decimator.

We're giving you a bit of forward notice for the next couple of FFAs, as you'll see to the right. You'll also spot that we're varying the games a little. Most of you agree that *Counter-Strike* has had its day now, so any suggestions for future games are welcome at the usual address. And yes, we'll be as keen to sample *Half-Life 2*'s multiplayer aspects as you are once it's released.

The *PC ZONE* public gaming servers have had a bit of an overhaul too. We've added *Monkey Strike*, *Enemy Territory* and *BF1942 Desert Combat*, and *Natural Selection* has been upgraded to version 2.0. All the details are on the Zonegames website, where the world and his wife are waiting to blow you away. Log on now and join the mayhem!

COME & 'AVE A GO! www.zonegames.co.uk for all the info

UPCOMING FREE-FOR-ALLS

THURSDAY OCTOBER 9
6.30pm – 9pm
Battlefield 1942

THURSDAY NOVEMBER 6
6.30pm – 9pm
Day Of Defeat

THURSDAY DECEMBER 4
6.30pm – 9pm
Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory

LAN ROVER

IF YOU'VE GOT A LAN, *STEVE 'SCALPER' RANDALL*'S YOUR MAN

With just three events this month, either the summer sun got too much for you all to do any planning and organising or LANs aren't what they used to be. Still, here's where the parties are this month.

■ Racecourses seem to be the new venue for LAN events, and since Insomnia have Newbury sewn up the people at GameOn MidLAN have opted to host their next event (their 51st) at Uttoxeter Racecourse, Staffordshire. It starts at 7pm on September 26 and goes until 5pm September 28. Not many spaces left so book quickly and send your £35 in to secure your spot. Details available from www.gameon.co.uk.

■ www.badlanrising.com are hosting their 15th LAN from October 17-19 in the Marton Hotel and Country Club, Middlesbrough. It has space for 150 attendees who will be gaming from 4pm on Friday until 6pm on the Sunday. Admittance costs £30 for the three days, which includes a raffle ticket for a sweet new case, fan or light. All details from the website.

■ Hallowed Ground XVI will be kicking off on Friday October 17 until 6pm on Sunday October 19. Not too many spots available for this regular £30 event in Mile End, London, so you'll need to book up early if you want a chance of playing one of the many new multiplayer releases this month. Details available at www.gglan.co.uk.

■ If you're organising an event, let me know with two months notice at scalper@gglan.co.uk.

Till then, Scalper out.

Things are looking up in the *Day Of Defeat* ladder.

Show them who's boss in *Enemy Territory*.

FIX... PLANETSIDE

EACH MONTH WE ASK OUR READERS TO OFFER THEIR ADVICE TO THE FACELESS MULTINATIONALS CREATING OUR VIRTUAL GAMESCAPES. THIS MONTH... HOW WOULD YOU IMPROVE *PLANETSIDE*?

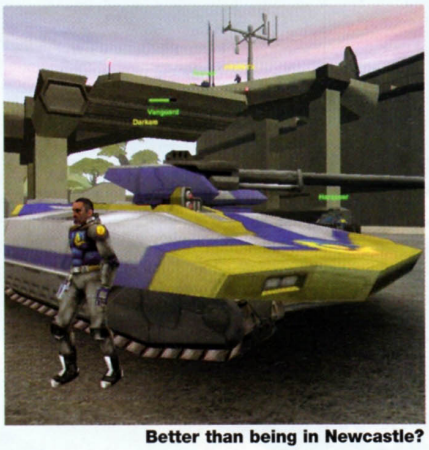
FROM Toomuchsparetime
Add drugs like PCP. They double health, speed and durability and triple strength, but the next day troops are half dead.

FROM Keith_DG
A roadmap to peace always helps to increase hostilities.

FROM Nb_nmare2
+5 Holy Flamethrowers ought to do it.

FROM Redroller
Let one side actually win!

FROM Mrstu1
Turn the gameworld into a virtual Newcastle.



Better than being in Newcastle?

NEXT MONTH How would you fix... *Star Wars Galaxies*?

Email your answers and contact details to online.zone@pczone.co.uk, with a subject line of "Fix... *Star Wars Galaxies*" or send them to Fix... *Star Wars Galaxies*, *PC ZONE*, 30 Cleveland Street, London W1T 4JD. A *PC ZONE* goodie bag for any we print!

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 +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 II*, *Unreal Tournament 2003*, *Counter-Strike*, *Warcraft III: 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.

CLAN [-BHF-] Brummies Having Fun
CONTACT [-BHF-]-Paul
WEBSITE www.brummies.cjb.net
MAIN GAMES *Counter-Strike*, *Digital Paintball* (*Half-Life* mod)
DETAILS We are an up-and-coming clan that currently has 15 members and is recruiting more. We are in the Enemy Down league and would like to start playing more friendly matches. If you are interested, email brumfun@blueyonder.co.uk. Check out the website for more details.

CLAN =AKA=Club
CONTACT =AKA=CPL= Lpoolboy
WEBSITE www.aka-club.net
MAIN GAMES *SWAT 3*, *Ghost Recon*, *Vietcong*, *PlanetSide*
DETAILS We used to do everything in *SWAT 3* and as a result are excellent co-op players. We've just recently started our *PlanetSide* division and are looking for new members. Check out the website for all the details and on how to either join us or challenge us to a match.

CLAN =British Tactical Forces=
CONTACT =BTF=WO2-Airjammer
WEBSITE www.btf-clan.co.uk
MAIN GAMES *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault*, *Battlefield 1942*
DETAILS We've just split into two divisions, one sticking with *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault*, the other forming a new *BF1942* division. We need players for both divisions, so to join either check the site, email enlist@btf-clan.co.uk or try the #btforces IRC channel on Quakenet (irc://irc.quakenet.org/btforces).

CLAN Clan [707]
CONTACT contact@clan707.tk
WEBSITE clan707.tk
MAIN GAMES *Counter-Strike*
DETAILS We are a UK based *Counter-Strike* clan who have the mantra "fun but focused play". We enjoy playing regularly together but have a focus on where we want to go: ie to climb *Counter-Strike* tournament ladders such as Enemy Down. Visit our recruitment page if you share a similar vision.

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.

THE RIGHT SERVER

1 The server you choose to play on dictates the official language spoken in-game, but more importantly has future ramifications for the amount of characters you can create on this server. Of the three English-speaking servers, Pluto is the only one that limits you to one character on the server. While this might be a good choice for people who want to role-play, it's not a practical choice if all you want to do is have fun and make characters on the server where you know people. Choose Saturn or Uranus, both of which give you four characters per server.

CLASS SELECTION

2 There are four main classes to choose from which are then divided into subclasses, all of which further customise your character and affect their starting statistics. The class you choose here should depend on your style of play. Think of the Psi Monk as a magic user, which can be tailored to offensive or defensive (with healing powers), the Spy is a great choice if you want to focus on trade skills, the Tank is the way to go for in-your-face combat, and the Private Eye does not specialise in any one area but is a good all-rounder.

FACTION IS IMPORTANT

3 The faction you choose at the start determines which NPC guards will be friendly towards you, and which will shoot you in the face. Choosing your faction for role-playing reasons based on the in-game description is not a good idea. Be warned, other players in the game of opposing factions will shoot you on sight. For beginners, choosing a faction with a lot of friends in the city is a good thing. City Admin is a pretty good choice for this, and you will see a lot of PvP action later on with this group.

USE YOUR TOOLS

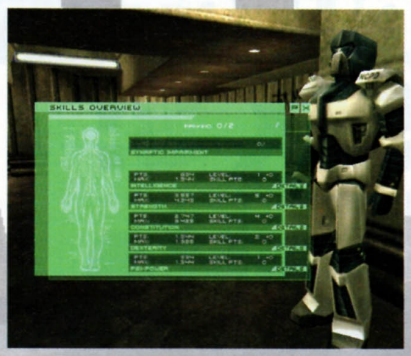
4 Getting around in *Neocron* can be a pain, particularly in the city. Press F9 to bring up the Navray and get used to using it. You'll always know where you are with this tool, and although the maps are useful (particularly the minimap, which shows you where you are going while you are moving), the location finder is even more precise and brings up arrows on the screen which will guide you to your destination. Use this tool until you feel confident with the environment and can find your way around without help.

Getting started in... NEOCRON

The world of *Neocron* can be a strange and confusing one for beginners. *Chris Anderson* has a few tips to help increase your short-term life expectancy

L33T SKILLZ

5 As you gain experience, you'll get points to spend however you see fit. While we'd all like to be highly skilled at research, hacking, implanting, repair, and everything else we think might be handy, truth is it's not going to happen. Once you reach level 50 in a particular skill, putting further experience points into it will be very costly. So decide right from the outset as much as you can where you want to excel. If you really want a trade skill, just choose one and pump it up to the absolute max before considering working on another one.



COPING WITH LOSS

6 Unless you intend to spend the entire game hiding in your apartment, you're going to die at some point. When this happens, you'll drop all but one of your items. Whatever is in the first slot on the quick bar on the right of the screen will be retained when you die, so use this for any item you really don't want to lose. While it's tempting to just buy all your things back via the Gene Replicator, this will get expensive as you go up in rank, so get used to going back to loot your things yourself.

BLUEPRINTS ARE YOUR FRIENDS

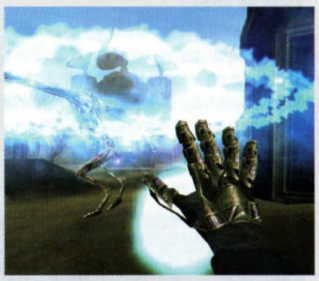
7 Unless you are planning to raise your own research skills, you will need the help of a dedicated researcher to make blueprints of your important items. This ensures that if you lose anything really vital you can take the blueprints to a constructor who will build them for you, providing you have the correct ingredients. You can save a lot of money this way, so make it a priority to get to know a good researcher.

BULLETPROOF MONKS

8 Psi Monks can take two very different paths in *Neocron*, so if you choose this class it's important to know where to spend your skill points. It's not possible to reach a happy medium between offensive (APU) and defensive (PPU) spells, so don't spend skill points on both. If raw power is what attracted you to the class, go full-on offensive and get mild defensive spells later. If you are more of a team-player and want good healing abilities, go defensive all the way.

LE CHIP – OUI OR NON?

9 The only sensible answer to this is NO! While keeping your Law Enforcer (LE) chip in will prevent other players in the game attacking you, it prevents you from joining any clans. There is also an experience penalty for players who choose to use the LE chip to opt out of PvP. Take it out straight off. Even at lower levels, learning how to survive against other players is a good thing, and there is less danger of having your sexuality questioned.



KNOW YOUR LIMITS

10 Try to complement your time spent in combat with time spent learning a useful trade skill (such as research, construction or implanting). This will help you immeasurably later in the game, and it also makes the early stages far less tedious than they might be. Avoid joining a clan until you have experienced the *Neocron* world for a while and have come to know the good and bad clans on your server. A bad clan can ruin your game experience very fast. That's about it. Good luck runner, you're going to need it.

COMMUNITY CHEST

RAINBOW SIX 3: RAVEN SHIELD

***Richie Shoemaker* creeps around the bushes that hide the *Raven Shield* scene**

Just as Sara Lee is the name you look for down the frozen pie aisle, you can only be sure you have the finest tactical action game when it bears Tom Clancy's name on the box. *Raven Shield* heralded something of a departure, not perhaps in terms of gameplay, but in switching to the *Unreal* engine Red Storm has gone all out to ensnare the mod community away from *Half-Life*'s ageing architecture. Just five month's since the game's release and already dozens of maps and a handful of mods have appeared.

ON THE CD DVD **INTERNATIONAL ARMBAND PACK (SKINS)**

www.fileplanet.com/files/120000/123134.shtml

While *Raven Shield* is meant to be an international game, you don't see many Brazilians practising their ball skills in the field. Thankfully, this pack of 75 armbands features many of the countries hitherto unrepresented in the game.

ON THE CD DVD **SUBWAY (MAP)**

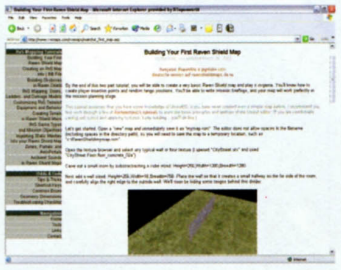
www.silvermods.com

Perhaps not as claustrophobic or dingy as our local tube station, this varied yet compact map has been earning several awards. To give you some idea of how highly regarded it is, the creator has since been shipped from his native Sweden to Montreal to join the *Raven Shield* development team full-time.

ON THE CD DVD **SHOOT (VOICE APP)**

clans.gameclubcentral.com/shoot

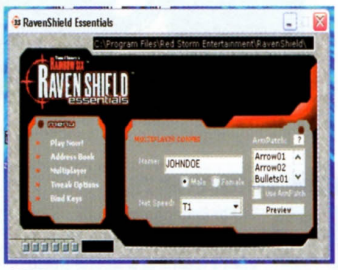
Although not specifically for *RS*, *Shoot* is one of the few voice-recognition programs available for free. So rather than having to remember the key to order 'cover me' you can shout it instead. Download from www.theplatoon.com/ravenshield and the *Raven Shield* voice commands will already be set up for you.



ON THE CD DVD **RVS MAPS (FANSITE)**

www.rvsmaps.com

If you're one of those people who can think in 3D (and by definition be able to navigate your way home successfully after 13 pints of Tanglefoot), then you may be interested in this exhaustive site that gives tutorials for those of you wishing to make your own *Raven Shield* maps.



ON THE CD DVD **RSESSENTIALS V1.3 (UTILITY)**

www.pingwhore.com/#2227

As the name might suggest, *RSE* is something of a must-have if you play *Raven Shield* on a regular basis. Not only does it check any servers that might be running, but you can tweak your configuration settings, re-define keys and even join multiplayer games without having to fire the game up first.

ON THE CD DVD **PLAYROOM (MAP)**

www.metrocast.net/~twinkie1/

There are, of course, dozens of maps available covering the usual gamut of locales: a few Iraqi desert maps, Afghanistan, the usual urban hellholes like Swindon etc. *Playroom* is a little different in that you are fighting across a bedroom floor, sniping behind Lego bricks and hiding behind plant pots. Class.

ON THE CD DVD **DELTA FORCE SKINS (SKINS)**

www.the3kings.de

It's still early days and though there are few gameplay tweaks available, we've still yet to see any full-blown total conversions for *Raven Shield*. What you will find however are uniforms, and these *Delta Force* fatigues are some of the best around. Now you too can pretend to be Chuck Norris.

ON THE CD DVD **THE PLATOON (FANSITE)**

www.theplatoon.com

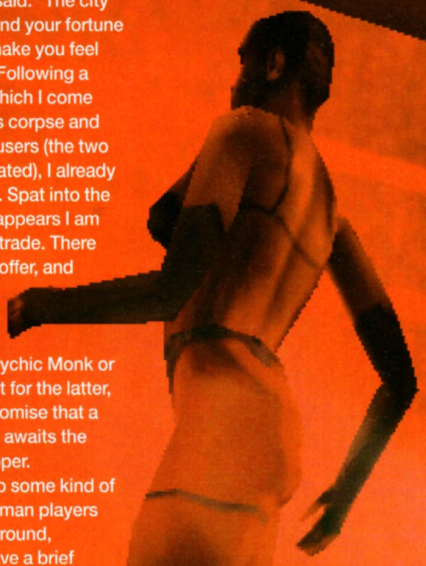
If you're a fan of Tom Clancy games then you should already be a frequent visitor to this excellent website, which devotes itself to news of downloads, clan matches and anything else vaguely related to *Raven Shield*, *Splinter Cell* or *Ghost Recon*. You can even find a database of *RS* gun stats. Smart.

STEVE HILL'S NEVERQUEST

The continuing adventures of online sceptic *Steve Hill*. This month: *Neocron*

"WELCOME to Neocron," they said. "The city where you can find your fortune and which will make you feel at home soon." Following a tutorial during which I come across a whore's corpse and buy a pair of trousers (the two events are unrelated), I already have my doubts. Spat into the 28th Century, it appears I am going to need a trade. There are only four on offer, and faced with Spy, Genetically Engineered Human Tank, Psychic Monk or Private Eye, I opt for the latter, largely on the promise that a playboy lifestyle awaits the successful snooper.

Spawned into some kind of holding area, human players are thin on the ground, although I do have a brief chat with a member of the development team who suggests I talk to the Non-Player Characters upstairs. They're slightly more helpful, and one even offers me a job, asking me to hunt down four renegade robots. Seems easy enough, and I set out on my debut quest with vague optimism and Harrison Ford in my mind.



"There's a shutter above a coin slot and it appears I am in a two-bit nipple peep show"

CRAB KILLER

No sooner have I left the compound than I discover one of the errant androids and attempt to terminate him with extreme prejudice. Consulting my inventory, I go at him with what appears to be a potato peeler – an ambitious move – and am promptly clubbed to the ground to die an early death.

Respawned into the radioactive wasteland, it's a windswept wilderness strewn with decaying industrial structures and abandoned vehicles – much like the Thames Estuary. Spotting a trio of shadowy figures, I cautiously approach and proffer a courteous, "Evening all." The reply is less friendly: "Get lost, I'm on a break." They turn out to be three cleaners on a fag break, and I'm about as welcome as a turd in a swimming pool.

Wandering the barren plains alone, at my lowest ebb for several minutes, I rummage through a rusty box, pocketing a broken glass and some old wire. So much for the playboy lifestyle. I'll be swigging on meths before long.

STREET LIFE

Finding my way back to where I started, a Civil Advisor suggests I go out and kill small animals. Anyone familiar with my rat-slaying exploits in *EverQuest* should be able to guess my response. Nonetheless, three dead crabs later and tedium is setting in. Seemingly doomed to a lifetime of crustacean slaughter and begging for virtual coins, I am overjoyed to spot another human player. Decoril is his name, and English doesn't appear to be his first language, as the following exchanges suggest: "This face sounds me... ja ja ja... do you know how can I give vehicle parts to the man?"

Unfortunately, I can't help, but Decoril does prove useful, leading me to the Gene Replicator; in essence, a teleporter through which I can get to the city. Outrageously, I am stung for 1,000 credits to get back to my pad. Should have just got a black cab.

Restless and in need of entertainment, I hit the streets, making my first tentative steps into the squalid city of Neocron. A tramp tells me to "bugger off". In search of some much-needed R&R, The Pussy Club sounds promising. It's a hellish tube ride away, but if the adverts are anything to go by, it should be worth it. With funds low, I drop into a pawn shop and sell a bag of small limbs that I found earlier.

There's no cover charge at the club though, and after a cursory word with the madam I stroll in. Apart from surly gun-wielding bouncers ("leave me alone you tosser"), it's deserted and there's a distinct lack of its primary commodity, save for a porker in a girdle and a dead-eyed slapper wearing bits of string. Something for every taste ("I like 'em BIG"). There is, however, a metal shutter above a coin slot and it appears I'm in a two-bit nipple peep show. In for a penny, in for a pound, I chuck 50 credits into the slot and prepare to feast my eyes. Seconds into the act, the shutter slams down and the show is over. I pump more money in, but it's the same every time and sadly I run out of cash.

PRO NO-GO

Staggering into the street, a whore refuses my business (it's turning into a press trip), so I stumble into Club Veronique, where they're giving it out for free. The four strippers even let me shine a torch at their arses, although they get jumpy when I inadvertently pull out a knife.

Probably a good time to leave, especially as the alarms are going off and the bouncers are getting nearer. I head outside where a street fight is taking place between a man in a pinstripe suit and a hooded character with a light saber. Attempting to keep out of the way, my mobile phone goes off and, in the confusion, I am caught in the crossfire, left to die in the gutter. Sickened, I turn the computer off and head into the whore-ridden neon hell of Soho. Wait a minute... PCZ

"Would you like chipped or sliced?"

Don't fancy yours much. Don't fancy mine either.

I only asked if they wanted spuds.

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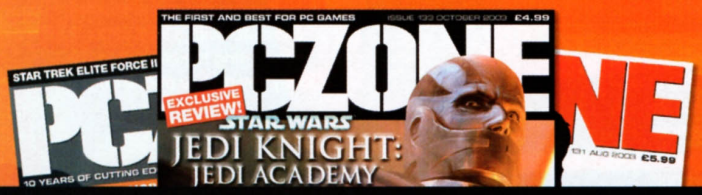

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HARDWARE

ALL THE LATEST NEWS AND REVIEWS FROM THE WORLD OF PC HARDWARE

BUY CHEAP BUY TWICE

■ **MAN IN THE SMOCK** Phil Wand

▲ A whole bunch of different video cards have been through Wandy's magic mangle this month, the first of which was Leadtek's top banana, otherwise known as WinFast A350TDH Ultra GeForce FX 5900 Ultra 256MB MyVIVO TV-Out DVI. Duly installed and powered up, the results were a lot snappier than the silly name – it also looked quite stunning, the whole card coming wrapped in a silver casing with chrome fans set at slight angles to one another. With a street price of £370 it seemed like good value, until benchmarks showed that it was identical in performance to Creative's 5900 Ultra – with a street price of £360. Tricky.

Then came the Asus V9950 Ultra. The presentation of the V9950 is superb, from the cardboard box to the neat elastic strap that holds the CDs in their bundle. The software is elegant, the performance is up with others of the same ilk, and the feeling you have is of trustworthiness – everything in the package is of an undeniable, unaccountable quality. Despite it being pretty much identical in performance to the Leadtek and Creative, and £30 more expensive, it'd open my wallet.

Over the years I've compiled a long list of stuff for my mental A-list, which includes companies like Asus, ATI, Eizo, Fujistu, Hitachi, JVC, Logitech, Mitsubishi, and a growing list of others. Each one has proven themselves over the years, and it's experience with them that helps me cherry-pick the right hardware here. So much is so good these days, and with key components sourced from only a few manufacturers it's important to ask more than how much and how fast. Buy cheap, buy twice; buy right, buy once. And don't you forget it!

▼

WALK AND SHOOT...

Gaming laptops have landed, but will they ever take off?

HUNCH YOUR shoulders, then rotate both hands so that your fingertips are pointing at one another. Adopt a squint, drop your head into your chest, and lean forward at a 35-degree angle. Clamp a Nokia to one ear by crooking your neck, and start making repeated upside-down, come-hither movements with your index finger. Congratulations, you now know what it feels like to use a laptop.

Alienware's striking newcomer, known only as the Area-51m (see page 122 for the desktop review), bears the famous Roswell face and features an upgradeable graphics module that allows users to swap out the old and slot in the new when it becomes available. This sort of flexibility is pretty much unheard of in laptop circles, with any lids-off, screwdriver-twisting hanky panky normally the strict preserve of manufacturers and their appointed agents. An expensive upgrade path is one of the many reasons gamers have avoided the mobile market, so Alienware may be on to a winner here.

Although prices have yet to be announced, the Alienware Area-51m is already scoring orders – and it's not hard to see why.

But, despite all the stigma and obvious limitations of notebook PCs, several big names are lining up gaming-oriented portables in time for this Christmas, including Alienware and Dell. Whether these new products succeed depends largely on price. Notebooks are traditionally expensive affairs, costing between 50 and 75 per cent more than their immobile counterparts, and given that neither Alienware nor Dell systems are known for supermarket prices, it'll be interesting to see how they're marked up.

"An expensive upgrade path is one of the many reasons that gamers have avoided the mobile market"

The Area-51m is available in two screen sizes, 16.1-inch UXGA (Ultra XGA, capable of 1600x1200) or 15.4-inch WSXGA+ (Wide SXGA+, capable of 1680x1050), and comes with support for digital 5.1 surround sound – though quite how you're supposed to enjoy multi-speaker Dolby while on the move is not clear. As with most new laptops, it features built-in wireless so you can keep up with EverQuest developments while waiting for your club class flight out of Washington Dulles.

BURNIN' DELL

With a suggested price of $1,699 (about £1,100), Dell's forthcoming Inspiron 8600 isn't quite as beefy, but is assuredly fast enough to deal with today's most demanding shooters. With a 128MB GeForce FX Go5650 on board, Intel's 1.7GHz Centrino processor and 15.4-inch WUXGA (Wide UXGA, capable of 1920x1200), it certainly seems to have been rigged for more than spreadsheets and presentations. Described as a "dream machine" for multimedia enthusiasts, and "powerful enough to play graphics-intensive games", it lacks the Area-51's verve, ultimate power and in-yer-face styling.

TO SUCCEED OR NOT TO SUCCEED

Whether laptop gaming takes off comes down to price, performance, battery life and ergonomics. Gamers are a notoriously fussy lot, and if they find that the keyboard makes their wrists hurt, or that the battery raises a mid digit after 30 minutes of abuse – half an hour being the average match length – then there's not a hope in hell of them buying into the concept.

What laptop manufacturers mustn't forget is the virtually unnoticed predominance of Shuttle PCs. They're everywhere, and as well as remaining almost as portable as notebooks, offer much greater scope for customisation – owners have a huge choice of graphics cards, memory, and processors. PCs are predicted to get much smaller over the coming years, and the Shuttle shows us why.

REVIEWS
The Boomslang is back

PC REVIEWS
Two flashy new rigs rated

DEAR WANDY
Doctor W is here to help

BUYER'S GUIDE
The best kit, the lowest prices

State Of Play

AMD and NVIDIA lose a little in the battle for market share

FIGURES RELEASED last month from market watchers show how Intel dominates in both processors and graphics, and how once-troubled ATI is inching closer to arch-rival NVIDIA. In separate reports, statistics showed that Intel now enjoys between 79 and 83 per cent of the desktop CPU marketplace, with AMD trailing at 16 per cent. Overall, processor shipments have fallen by three per cent, a higher than expected drop, with only the mobile segment showing signs of life. When the overwhelming majority of today's games will run on a 1GHz chip or less – the world's most popular online shooter will breeze along with 500MHz, and all-time best-seller *The Sims* requires nothing more exciting than a 233MHz Pentium II – it's not hard to see why home users are sticking with what they already have.

In the graphics arena, things aren't so clear-cut. Taking every video product into account, from integrated solutions to standalone cards, Intel has a good lead with 32 per cent of the market, followed by NVIDIA with 27 per cent – a drop of five per cent – then ATI with 21 per cent. However, when it comes to the kind of card you can buy from high street stores, NVIDIA enjoys close to two-thirds dominance and ATI less than one-third. This is mainly due to the entry level segment, where the influential GeForce brand accounts for almost three in every four sales. That said, high-end buyers are thought to be switching to Radeon, thanks to the prominent failure of the FX 5800 and the excessive price of the current 5900 – dominance at the very top of the video performance league can only help haul up the rest of the ATI range.

With both GPU manufacturers planning to update their model range before Santa arrives, and with *Half-Life* certain to fuel a buying bonanza, it'll be interesting to see who makes the biggest gains.

"It's not hard to see why home users are sticking with what they already have"

DRIVER WATCH

ON THE DVD

Make a date with your next driver

HAVING MOANED last month about the lack of driver updates from the NVIDIA camp, cue an update to the Detonator FX drivers – and an official stamp of approval from Futuremark (3DMark03). Version 45.23 has improved image quality, performance and compatibility, and arrives almost three months to the day since the previous version was made available for download. Other jumps in numbering include VIA's Hyperion 4-in-1 drivers, Intel's INF install and NVIDIA nForce. Check the installation notes and history before blindly installing – if it ain't broke, don't fix it.

MOTHERBOARD

MANUFACTURER	NAME	DESC	RELEASED	SIZE	WEB
Intel	INF Update	5.0	14-Mar-03	1.38MB	support.intel.com
NVIDIA	nForce	2.03	30-Jan-03	29.5MB	www.nvidia.com
SIS	AGP	1.1.6a	02-Jun-03	5.3MB	download.sis.com
VIA	Hyperion	4.48	24-Jun-03	1.4MB	www.viaarena.com

GRAPHICS

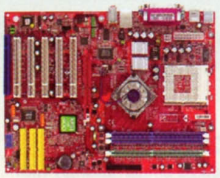
MANUFACTURER	NAME	DESC	RELEASED	SIZE	WEB
ATI	CATALYST	6.14.10.6368	15-Jul-03	6.52MB	www.ati.com
	Control Panels	6.14.10.5021	15-Jul-03	5.20MB	www.ati.com
NVIDIA	Detonator FX	44.03	14-May-03	18.8MB	www.nvidia.com
Matrox	Parhelia	1.04.01.003	05-May-03	8.68MB	www.matrox.com

SOUND

MANUFACTURER	NAME	DESC	RELEASED	SIZE	WEB
Creative	Audigy 2 WDM Drivers	DriverPack 3	09-May-03	6.88MB	uk.europe.creative.com
	Audigy EAX ADVANCED HD Perf	Beta	07-May-03	13.96MB	uk.europe.creative.com
	SB Live!	AC3 fix	03-Jun-03	2.12MB	uk.europe.creative.com

SNIPPETS

MSI IN FORCE



MSI sent a K7N2-Delta motherboard for testing. I decided to build an AMD system around it, using a Barton XP2500 with Akasa cooler, Connect3D Radeon 9200, TwinMOS memory, and a SATA Seagate Barracuda. Even factoring in the retail price of the motherboard (£88), I've spent just shy of £500 putting it all together. It performs extremely well, only faltering on big titles with slightly silly resolutions. MSI's nForce2 board is superbly packaged, containing all the bits and bobs you need to hook everything to it, and boasts the world's most amazing integrated sound card. If you've got the cash to spare, and fancy a second games machine for your home network, an Athlon machine based around the K7N2 makes a lot of sense. www.msicomputer.co.uk

Q FOR COOL

The Keyboard Q comes from the people famous for cooling products, Cooler Master. It's slightly smaller than your average keyboard, with the keys compressed into a tighter space, laptop style, and could be something that might take some getting used to. That said, it is without doubt one of the most elegant looking peripherals I've seen – available only in brushed aluminium, it's the perfect compliment to a brushed aluminium case. www.coolermaster-europe.com

MORE CREATIVE

Creative Labs has recently posted its worst sales in nine years, but at the same time managed to pull a US$23.4 million profit out of the hat. The company has gradually moved away from what it started doing – making soundcards for PCs – and is now diversified in a number of different markets, including speakers and MP3 players. What's of note is that the Singapore firm plans to push over 90 new products between now and next June, including its first 7.1 speaker set. europe.creative.com

MOUSE

MYSTIFY RAZER BOOMSLANG 2100

■ £49.99 | Manufacturer: Terratec | Phone: 01252 870726 | www.terratec.co.uk

A Boomslang is an African tree snake. Now you know

SOME years ago, I struggled embarrassingly with a Razer Boomslang. It had the knack of making my *Quake* character look like he had a neurological disorder – team mates and enemies alike would back away as my crazed marine reeled at ceilings, heaved at the floor, ran into walls and continually blew his own face off.

Not soon after, the company that made Boomslang ran into financial trouble and somehow I felt strangely vindicated.

Here we are again, though; the infamous rodent now being sold by Terratec. And it's no surprise to find that it remains odd to hold, weird to look at and backwardly non-optical. The first question everyone asks is, "How do you hold it?" Like them, I have no idea – there's no tutorial and no obvious place to park your palm. You end up with shuffling fingers and taut knuckles – a nervous crab on a plastic pebble. And although the mouse takes huge gulps of data for improved accuracy, it feels no more precise than any ball-free Logitech.

Gamers are always on the lookout for ways to improve their performance – whether it's with a bigger graphics card, a grippier mouse mat or even the right drink. And while this will furnish you with plenty of kudos, I'm not sure it'll make you play better.

Forget the specs; if you can't get comfortable, that's it. Game over. Modern mice are an accepted shape, a shape that has improved and evolved over years of people using them. But the Razer is a one-off – geared toward small hands and slight, twitchy movements. Anyone who has large hands or uses large hand movements will feel painfully clumsy. If you must have one, do take it for a test drive first.

PCZONE VERDICT

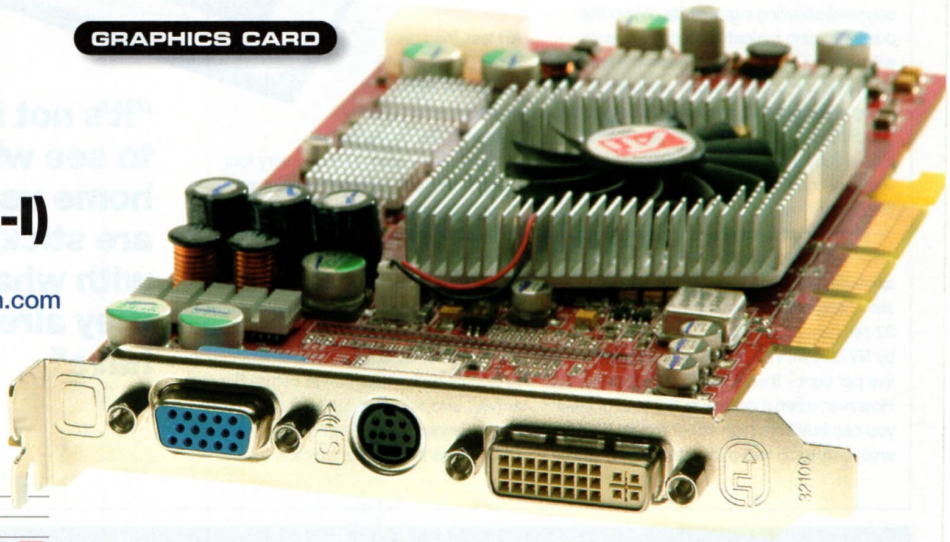
- ✔ Boasts 2100 dpi precision
- ✔ Left- or right-handed configurations
- ✘ An acquired shape
- ✘ Rubber buttons make you smell of johnnies

73

Quirky and overrated

ATLANTIS 9800 PRO (256MB TV-OUT DVI-I)

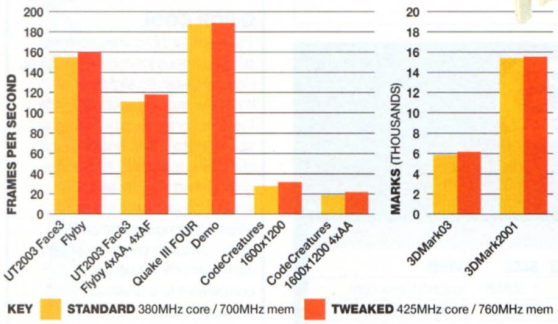
GRAPHICS CARD



■ £399 | Manufacturer: Sapphire | Phone: 01793 423830 | www.sapphiretech.com

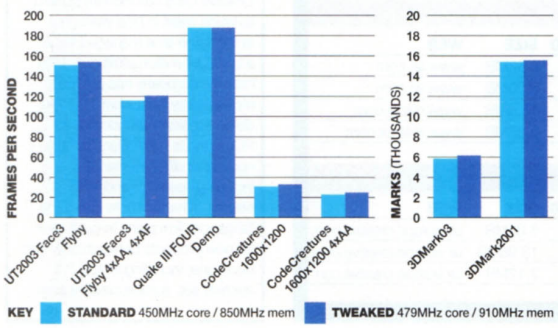
The Radeon that ate all the pies, but is it worth its weight in gold?

ATLANTIS 9800 PRO 256MB
3.06GHz PENTIUM 4 HT, WINDOWS XP, 1GB RAM



KEY **STANDARD** 380MHz core / 700MHz mem **TWEAKED** 425MHz core / 760MHz mem

3D BLASTER 5 FX5900 ULTRA
3.06GHz PENTIUM 4 HT, WINDOWS XP, 1GB RAM STANDARD



KEY **STANDARD** 450MHz core / 850MHz mem **TWEAKED** 479MHz core / 910MHz mem

WELCOME to the mother and father of all Radeons. It's also my long overdue induction to the world of Sapphire – the Hong Kong company was one of the first to commit to a manufacturing and distribution relationship with ATI and now produces around two million cards each month. The package on test includes a good selection of audio and video cables for hooking the 9800 to your TV, plus power cables, PowerDVD, PowerDirector, *Soldier Of Fortune II*, *Return To Castle Wolfenstein* and Redline, Sapphire's own overclocking utility.

When upside down in the AGP hole, the card is a visual dead ringer for a 9700 Pro, requiring only a single slot and sporting a disturbingly teeny fan. Considering the hot-rod R350 matches or exceeds NVIDIA's NV35 in some benchmarks, you'd expect it to look a little more intimidating.

When it comes to overclocking, the card is something of a troublemaker. Using the supplied Redline utility, the Sapphire was propelled successfully into 5900 Ultra territory, but twice after rebooting it presented a corrupted display.

There's no doubting the 256MB 9800 is a great card, but one of the reasons the Radeon range has always triumphed in tests is its price. Where a top-of-the-line GeForce will haemorrhage more than £400 from your bank account, a vanilla 9800 Pro can be had for about £280 (the only obvious difference is that it's 128MB slimmer than the GeForce). Yes, the FX missile is ultimately faster but no, the lead it has is pretty much invisible to the naked eye in everything bar *Doom III*. The question is, do you really need double the memory? Sapphire's 256MB version is surely one hell of a performer, but when it's fattened up and wearing an identical price tag to a 5900 Ultra, it's not that special.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✔ Does Mach 3 up hills in second gear
- ✔ Effortless power in every game
- ✘ Most expensive Radeon variant
- ✘ 128MB version still champ for value

84

Up with the Ultra, but not worth the premium

GLOBAL DOMINATION STRATEGY

MASSIVE ASSAULT

www.gmxmedia.net/massiveassault

"Massive Assault is definitively a great potential game and it's on a way to become a great turn-by-turn strategy game. Perhaps the best ever, who knows?"
-- Jeux PC

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-- Gamespy.com

83% -- Christian Computer Game Reviews

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www.game.uk.com

gmx media

WARGAMING.NET

Out 17th October

AREA-51 EXTREME

GAMING PC

■ £2,399 | Manufacturer: Alienware | Phone: 0800 279 9751 | www.alienware.co.uk

Big, green and muscular – the Alienware is a hulk of a PC

YOU'D think that Lamborghini had sent me a Murcielago, such was the level of fuss. Has it arrived? Can I have a look? Is it really fast? When can I have a go? How much does it cost? You're joking?

Alienware's monster turned up in a black container the size of a filing cabinet and required two people to lift it from its womb. It's a substantial tower case, standing a half-foot proud of everything else on test in the room, but the first thing you notice is its colour. The Area-51 is available in lurid blue, purple, silver and black – mine was green. A hideous, in your face, metallic chartreuse green that defiled everything from the cooling fan to the keyboard and alien-branded mouse. And it looks great.

A PEEK INSIDE

A swing-off panel on the right-hand side reveals a 3.2GHz P4 (800 FSB) processor on Intel's D875PBZ motherboard, 420W PSU, 1GB Corsair XMS RAM, BFG Technologies FX 5900 Ultra, Audigy2, DVD-ROM, 52x32x52 CD-R/W, 120GB hard drive and a 56K modem, each component neatly installed and cable-tied where appropriate. Along with the two CD drives, front-panel units include the Audigy2's external bay and a dead handy multiple-slot card reader.

When it comes to performance, the Area-51 is one of the fastest things on rubber feet, notching up some neck-snapping scores in UT2K3 and the synthetic benchmarks, and feeling delightfully brisk in XP Pro when opening applications, copying files and doing all the mundane stuff that people do when they're not jumping about in games. The only criticism is of the 5900 Ultra, which, although pace-settingly quick, renders scenes in an undeniably suspect quality. And when viewed alongside those painted by a 9800 Pro (see opposite), the difference is rather stark.

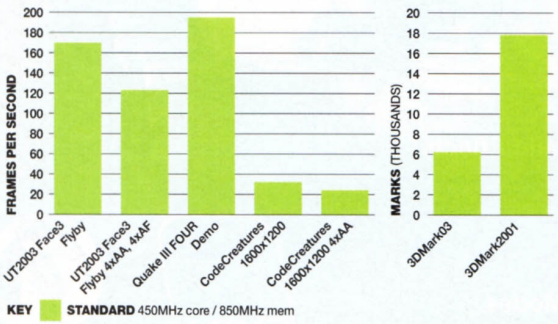
GREEN ROUND THE GILLS

There are a few complaints, some of which would be addressed under the system's comprehensive warranty, some of which would not. Falling into the latter category is the Area-51's case. While unique to Alienware, it makes the system a right bugger to transport. Picking it up is like bear-hugging a hippo, carrying it involves people rushing ahead to open doors, and putting it in your car involves blankets and pillows to stop the plastic edges and long-grip screws from making the upholstery look like Freddie Krueger's bed linen. While that's something we couldn't fix, the grief-stricken keyboard was. Ours came with two keys stuck down, making games behave oddly until I noticed the problem, and I had to prize them both off with my patented Acme stuck key remover (ie, a spoon).

CONCLUSION

The Area-51 is a unique size, shape and colour, with performance as arresting as its price – and a price that omits the monitor. But if you're looking for the ultimate PC that'll last years before it looks or feels dated (and one whose specification you can tailor to your exact requirements), it's pretty hard to recommend anything else. Included in the cost is 24/7 technical support on a toll-free number, an upgrade package that allows every owner to have new hardware installed at trade prices, password access to support areas of the Alienware website with interactive support forms, plus a rugged warranty and 14-day, no-quibble returns guarantee (if you don't like it, send it back for a refund). The company's motto is, "Build it as if it were your own," and I'd go along with that. Along with your system you get a nicely presented ring-binder with support CD-ROMs and warranty information, plus an electronic copy of your PC's exact specifications and burn-in results – a rubber stamp of authenticity, your ownership and its individuality. Like buying a Rolls-Royce instead of a Renault, both of which get you from A to B, it's down to you to justify the huge difference in cost. In so many inexplicable ways, the Alienware is worth it. PCZ

AREA-51 EXTREME 3.2GHz PENTIUM 4 HT, WINDOWS XP PRO, 1GB RAM



PCZONE VERDICT

- ✔ Punchy little bastard
- ✔ Support, warranty, returns guarantee, you name it
- ✘ Unwieldy case, stuck keys
- ✘ Monitor not included

89

Expensive, but an experience

MAXX 4DV P4 3000

■ £1,799 | Manufacturer: Special Reserve | Phone: 01279 322779 | www.maxxpc.com

Nice gear, nice price and, yes, it'll run *Half-Life 2*

PCZONE EDITOR'S CHOICE

GAMING PC

ALTHOUGH it lacks the Rolex-standard street cred of the pearlescent green Alienware, Special Reserve's MAXX is a less expensive and more generous package – it comes with a rather fetching Hercules Prophetview 17" flat panel and Videologic ZXR-500 5.1 speakers.

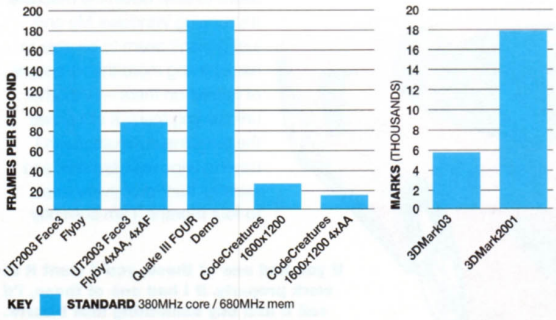
Like the Area-51, the MAXX features Intel's D875PBZ motherboard, but with a slightly less ballsy 800 FSB Pentium 4 3.0GHz, plus 1GB RAM, 120GB hard drive, DVD+RW drive, DVD-ROM drive, Connect3D Radeon 9800 Pro 128MB, Audigy2, and the must-have 56K modem. Special Reserve argues that the writeable DVD route is a more preferable one than CD, and I'd agree – a blank compact disc simply doesn't have the same hangar-like capacity for transporting or safeguarding the average MP3 collection, let alone all the demos, movies, images and other paraphernalia that slop into modern machines down a broadband connection. So the DVD+RW drive is something of a bonus for anyone wishing to move or back up a large amount of clobber.

COOL BLUE

The MAXX case features the COOLPC mod kit, meaning it gains a clear acrylic side panel, illuminated CPU fan and cold cathode blue lighting. Flubbing the overall appearance of the system are the two DVD drives, both of which come in regulation greyish-brown, which clashes alarmingly with the Stealth Bomber colour of the case. Then again, they're both hidden behind the front panel and aren't on public display.

Case modding really isn't my scene, and the blue light is seriously distracting when the case is on the test bench and in your peripheral vision.

MAXX 4DV P4 3000 3.0GHz PENTIUM 4 HT, WINDOWS XP HOME, 1GB RAM



KEY ■ **STANDARD** 380MHz core / 680MHz mem

But, still, if you're proud of your gutsy PC I can see the attraction in making it your centrepiece. It's just a pity there aren't much guts to show these days – with so much trickery integrated into modern motherboards, and single hard drives now large enough to do the work of doubles or triples, tower cases show more empty slots than full ones. You almost expect it to echo in there. And if you ain't got it, why flaunt it?

MAXXIMUM THRUST

Although the MAXX didn't go totally nuts in the benchmarks, it put on an impressive display of power. The 3DMark2001 result of 17,894 is the highest I've seen on a stock clocks system – higher even than the Alienware – and those of you playing older titles like *Counter-Strike* will be able to reach silly frame rates at resolutions higher than your monitor can handle. *Battlefield 1942* and *Unreal Tournament 2003* are both smoother than glass, even with a checkmark in every detail box, and it's obvious that the PC will be more than capable of withstanding the onslaught of *Half-Life 2* and *Doom III*.

CONCLUSION

The MAXX deserves praise for delivering everything in one package. Not only do you get a decent Pentium machine, you get a fast-response 17" gaming panel with surround sound speakers and a subwoofer thrown in. The one fly in the ointment is Microsoft's Wireless Optical Desktop which, although beautiful to look at and a delight to use, doesn't quite cut it in action games. The MS hardware feels weighty and leaden, and lags slightly. While this isn't a problem in XP Home's desktop, if you're tuned into your game it's something that'll nettle you over the course of an evening.

At the LAN party test, where we drove both the Alienware and Special Reserve systems, the one comment about the latter was that it didn't 'feel' right – swapping out the keyboard and mouse made everyone happy.

The Area-51 has cabled, Logitech-derived peripherals, and no complaints arose. Mind you, that's a very minor complaint of the MAXX, and I dare say Special Reserve will be happy to furnish you alternatives should you want them. Visit one of their shops and ask. PCZ

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✔ Plenty fast enough for all your gaming needs
- ✔ Includes sub-20ms Hercules LCD and 5.1 speakers
- ✘ Keyboard and mouse not suited to games
- ✘ Miserly warranty sends out the wrong signals

91

Much bang for your buck

DEAR WANDY

Trouble with your hardware, can't control your software? Write to our resident brain-man for expert PC advice. No job too small

■ **RICH TEA BISCUIT:** Phil Wand

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 sent to us, we are unable to offer personal replies. Sorry.

Pansy power!

LEAVE OFF THE GEFORCE

Q Every time I read your magazine I see people saying how terrible the GeForce4 MX is. I have one, and I haven't had any trouble. At all. Either I'm very lucky or, well, I guess it's not that dreadful! Before my current PC I had a 3dfx Voodoo2 and its a damned sight better than that. It can play the *Breed* demo, *GTA: Vice City*, and *GTAIII* with details on medium or high.

The only game it struggles on is *Battlefield 1942*. My friend has an AMD Athlon 1GHz with a GeForce4 Ti4200 and, compared to my Athlon XP 2200+ with GeForce4 MX420, his is more jerky running *GTA: Vice City* whereas mine is smooth as glass. I'm happy with it and it serves me well.

Jon Hatchett

A NVIDIA's GeForce4 MX is something of a viola tricolor hortensis (pansy to you, guv'nor) but it's certainly not "terrible". Very little hardware is these days, even the entry-level models proving quite handy in popular games – and as you correctly noted, you just need to make sure you've got the detail slider hovering over 'medium' rather than banging up against 'maximum'. Nice things aside, the MX was a shameful example of NVIDIA exploiting the GeForce4 moniker, suckering unaware punters into believing they were buying a successor to the GeForce3 – which it wasn't – and that's why I'm rude about it. As for your friend's system, it's hardly a fair comparison, and if you want to see the difference between the two cards, you need to plug his GeForce4 Ti into your machine. I guarantee that it'll be demonstrably faster than your MX420.

MARKED DOWN

Q I recently upgraded my computer to the following: 3GHz P4, MSI NEO-FIS2R, 768MB DDR333 Micron memory, 3D Blaster 5 5900 Ultra 256 (44.03), Audigy and XP home. Now my system seems quite slow compared to similar spec machines – I've seen one with 4,000 more marks. I only get 14,400 in 3DMark2001, 270fps in the original *Quake III* Demo 1, and only 156fps on Antalus flyby in *UT2003*. I've changed the drivers and reinstalled DirectX. All AA and AF is off as is v-sync, but nothing seems to work. Any ideas? On top of this, I've found my CPU temperature rising to 65C° when playing games, and my machine always seems to be crashing. I installed an SLK 900 heat sink and Vantec Tornado fan. This has made no difference – something I find rather odd. My case is a Thermaltake Xaser V1000D and is well aired. No one seems to be able to sort this prob.

Lee Woodward

A I receive a healthy number of letters from people complaining that their PC can't match published benchmarks, despite the system costing more than a fortnight at Claridge's. More often than not, the scores they see are pretty close to what you might expect from the hardware configuration, but there's an obvious shortfall and it narks them like it narks you. It's like blowing a couple of mortgages on a Ferrari Enzo and getting 0-60 in five seconds rather than four. Quick, granted – but not quick enough. If when you opened the bonnet the car was coughing oil and sounding like two skeletons bonking in a biscuit barrel, the fault should be readily apparent and easy to fix. But when it's hesitating slightly at 7,500rpm you could spend months and months trying to track the problem down – and it's the same with the PC. All I can do is go through some ideas. The first is to look at your memory configuration – 768MB RAM tells me you don't have a pair, and thus there's a high chance that what you do have is mismatched (check the product page at www.msi.com.tw for exhaustive details on memory configurations for your board). As you clearly want the best of everything, my suggestion would be to hang up the 333s and dress your 800MHz FSB Pentium with a pair of matched DDR400 modules for dual channel configuration. I'd also drop your Detonator drivers back from 44.03 to 43.45, and double-check that you're running the board's 1.6 BIOS as earlier versions aren't to be trusted. In doing all this, you may well find that the crashing problems disappear. As for the temperature, if you find that changing the Intel heat sink and fan for a superior model yields no change, it's either an old BIOS (ie the motherboard is reporting the temperature incorrectly) or, more likely, that you haven't used a smear of heat compound between the sink and the processor. But in any case, 65°C is not excessive. Remember that, unlike its AMD counterpart, the Pentium 4 will deliberately throttle itself back if it gets too hot, so there's next to bugger all chance of you actually doing any damage.

SHARE AND ENJOY

Q A few months ago, I managed to convince my dad to get Telewest Broadband when it became available in our area. It's connected to our main machine by a USB cable, and all was fine until I tried to set up connection sharing. The sharing mechanism just wouldn't work at all, so I asked several friends about it. They suggested I set my connection up to use another NIC – as I had a spare network card, I took their advice and immediately tried installing it. This caused lots of hardware conflicts so I uninstalled the card and removed it. But now I can't get my Internet sharing working and was wondering if you could help me with this? My second problem is how much my games seem to slow down my machine. It's running Windows Me and just doesn't seem to be able to hack having more than a couple of games on there – even after uninstalling them, it still slows the machine down so much I have to wipe my hard disk and reinstall Windows every three to four months. I am currently

"Windows Me is nasty and antiquated, once you delete it from your hard drive your life will improve"

If you had one of these, you'd want it to work properly. If I had one of these, I'd sell it and buy something less bizarre.

"It's like a thin piece of plastic sheeting, but when taped to a desk or other surfaces, it's like the best mouse pad ever"

BULLDOG SINGING THE PRAISES OF THE TEFLON NON-STICK COOKING MAT

running an Intel Pentium 4 with 256MB RAM and a GeForce4 64MB graphics card. Any help you could give me with any of these problems would be great.

Sam Foley

A Microsoft Internet Connection Sharing, or ICS for short, first appeared in the second edition of Windows 98 and remained a bit of a blonde until someone slapped it into shape for 2000 and XP. So it's no surprise that ICS on your copy of Windows Me croaked a few error messages and now refuses to start. In isolation, a problem such as this isn't necessarily fatal, and I was getting myself worked up to hammer out a few hundred words on how you could get the thing firing on all cylinders once again. But then you went and said that your whole system was dragging its heels, like a basset hound with angina, and on top of it all needed reinstalling three times a year. Sam, you just saved me from starting my Windows Me system – a fearful task, more hair-raising than opening the Ark of the Covenant – and I fall upon my knees and thank you profusely for it. Put another way, you're in need of an upgrade to 2000 or to XP. An easy answer but a deadly serious one nonetheless. Windows Me is nasty, antiquated, and an acronym for myalgic encephalomyelitis – once you delete it from your hard drive your life will improve immeasurably. You won't need to reinstall Windows every ten minutes and, critically, the ICS wizards actually do their job rather than balls things up. At this juncture I should say that what you really want is a way to share your Internet using a hardware rather than a software solution, and I'd put a Zyxel Cable Sharing Gateway on your Xmas wish list pronto. See www.zyxel.co.uk for full details.

Don't forget a domain name isn't actually yours, you just lease it.

DOMAIN PAIN

Q I registered a co.uk domain name with a UK ISP a few years ago and I'd now like to move the domain to another provider. The trouble is that my current ISP wants to charge me £39 for something called 'IPS tag transfer'. I have no idea what's involved, or whether this is something I can perhaps do myself. Could you please help out here?

Tom

A Nominet is the official manager of every domain name ending in .uk, and an IPS-TAG – the acronym was created by Nominet's predecessor, the UK Naming Committee, and nobody seems to know what it stands for – is a short alphanumeric code that uniquely identifies one of its registration agents. There are currently more than 3,400 of them dotted around the globe, each of whom have the authorisation to register .uk domains through Nominet, the IPS-TAG being assigned to show which domains are 'theirs'. Now, it's extremely important to understand that you never actually buy any domain name but merely agree that you can use it for a subscribed period. You have a contract with Nominet and additionally a contract with the agent you used to register it. And this is where it can get messy. Some service providers will charge you an arbitrary amount to release the tag – in other words, to relinquish control of the domain name to another agent – and it's up to you to keep an eye out for this kind of small print. If you ask me, it's an altogether dubious practice, the fee they charge being a transparent attempt to lock you in to their contract rather than someone else's. And £39 is a truly ridiculous amount for what amounts to no more than two minute's work. But wait, before you haul out your credit card, all is not lost – for less than half that amount, Nominet can make the change for you. Lesley Cowley, managing director of Nominet UK, said: "Only a very small number of registrants who choose to move to a different agent have difficulty in doing so. In the majority of cases moves are carried out automatically at no charge, but occasionally an ISP will refuse to release a domain name." So how much? "If registrants are having problems, they can ask Nominet to make the transfer on their behalf. This costs £15 (+VAT) in order to cover the cost of providing the service, but it does mean that even if there is a dispute and an existing registration agent refuses to release a domain name, registrants can still go ahead with the transfer with Nominet's help. We suggest anyone who is having a problem contact our customer support department on 01865 332211." Note that if you're moving domain names because you're relocating web space, you can ask your provider to change the domain's name servers rather than its IPS-TAG. This is almost universally free and simply changes the 'destination address' of the domain name. More information at www.nic.uk.

WANDY'S TOP TIPS

Teflon: a not so sticky situation, apparently.

BORN SLIPPY

Mouse pads? Don't bother! Try this instead. Go to your nearest supermarket and find the cooking and kitchen supplies aisle – you know, the one with the grease proof paper and stuff. There you should find something called a Teflon Non-stick Cooking Mat, they're apparently all the rage at the moment. It's like a thin piece of plastic sheeting, but when taped to a desk or other surface it's like the best mouse pad ever. It loves optical mice, the Teflon surface means balled mice won't grip. Anyway, there you have it, a £2 mouse mat that's not only the best ever but is guaranteed for five years and is the size of a football pitch.

BullDog

Wandy says: I just had to try this stupid idea. And it works, even with the ball mice I have. The feeling of 'slickness' you get from an optical mouse is almost sublime. All the mats I looked at were large enough to mean you'd never run off the edge, and if you fix the sheet to a piece of cardboard, such as the one that forms the back of feint-ruled pads, you can take it with you to LAN parties and such. Fifty pounds!

Send in your Top Tip to Dear Wandy and win yourself £50.

DEAD ALERT

Q I've managed to get *Red Alert* working with my copy of Windows XP, and I've bought some more for my friends as they love it too. The trouble is that I can't do a network game as it doesn't have the option. Could you tell me what is wrong please?

Matthew

A If the network option isn't selectable, it's because you don't have the IPX transport installed – earlier instalments from Westwood's *Command & Conquer* series used IPX for networking rather than TCP/IP, and IPX isn't installed by default. In Windows XP you need to right-click on your Local Area Network Connection and select Properties, then click the Install button in the dialog that opens and select Protocol from the list. Choose IPX/SPX/NetBIOS Compatible and OK-button your way back. Make sure every client on your network has the IPX protocol installed, and you're away. Have fun, but don't forget to try *Total Annihilation* – it's by far and away the better multiplayer experience.

Visit Wandy on the web at www.dearwandy.com

***Command & Conquer* and *Red Alert* both rely on IPX for multiplayer networking.**

WATCHDOG

Another month, another onslaught of complaints from customer support-starved readers. Nothing makes our tails wag more...

■ **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

EMAIL Alternatively, email us at letters.pczone@dennis.co.uk with the subject heading 'Watchdog'

READ ME!

If you are writing into complain about a product, please supply us with your full name, address and **contact number**. With PCs, make sure that you also include all **purchasing details** such as reference and invoice numbers.

THE ACCUSED

BT

freeserve

DELL

GUILTY UNTIL PROVEN INNOCENT

DACS A LOT...

Regular readers of the Watchdog column may recall Daniel Westall's complaint back in issue 132. He was none too happy about broadband being unavailable in his area and, subsequently, the 'second line' that BT installed for him for his online gaming. Running like a knackered old dog, this second line only managed a pathetic 28.8K. He then asked BT to disconnect it, only to find that the original line was now running at the same tragic speed.

Daniel reckoned that this was all down to DACS, a process used by BT to create a 'second line' without actually creating a... err... second line – it just splits the existing one. Well, you may recall that we did ask for BT to comment but they didn't get back to us. But another reader did with some serious allegations: "Basically, if you order a second line off BT, they will always DACS your existing line by default," explains Peter Secchi, "because it's much easier and cheaper for them to install and maintain than to give you a real second line that is separate – but they can charge the same price thus increasing the profit margin substantially."

He goes on to explain that most people never notice as second lines are usually voice and/or fax, and if modems are on them, it's usually for limited use: "On the odd occasion that it does throw up a problem, BT can turn round and say that you have had an extra line set up as per their contractual agreement blah blah blah, so no, you can't have your money back."

Peter goes on to explain that this is all a rather shady practice by BT to cut costs. He does say that there is a way to guarantee when you ask for a second line, that you actually get one instead of a split line: "Insist on having Caller Display as this service can't function on a DACS box," reckons Peter. "And if you already have a DACS box and aren't happy with it, like Daniel Westall, BT must remove it and return the line back to its original state in order for Caller Display to work. If you insist on having Caller Display on both lines then again BT must give you a 'real' line in order for Caller Display to work. And the charge is the same as DACS!"

We sent Peter's lengthy list of allegations to BT. They confirmed that Daniel Westall's DACS box was removed on June 2nd and that his phone line is now back to normal. As for Daniel's broadband issue, BT told us that Daniel's exchange is indeed not enabled yet because a trigger level of 200 is required – your area has 109 at the time of going to press, Daniel. So fingers crossed.

As for the thorny issues raised by Peter Secchi, BT offered the following statement: "DACS was a cost-effective and reasonable approach for second lines, especially given that our requirement is to provide a service at speeds of 28Kbps," they say. "However, times have changed and we will remove a DACS from a customer's line (within reasonable limits) should they have an issue with speed, regardless of the speed they are currently able to achieve. Where the customer's data speed falls rather than increases as a result of this, we can arrange to reprovide the line over DACs."

OK, but in the meantime, any other readers experiencing problems with their second line should drop us a line – and we'll forward them on to BT to get you properly sorted. It would be our pleasure.

Pigs can fly. Not convinced? Stranger things have happened.

"Please don't DACS me..."

HALF-PRICE BROADBAND SHOCKA!

A sticking point for many of us wanting to hop onto the broadband bandwagon is simple – it's still too darn pricey. £30 a month still makes some of us understandably baulk at the idea. But for one 'lucky' reader, a more reasonable £14.99 is possible. No, really.

Jeff Dean subscribed to BT Openworld Broadband back in April 2001. While he was being charged £14.99 for his old Internet service, he was fully expecting that amount to double once he had switched over to broadband: "After a few months of checking my credit card bill, I noticed that I was still being charged the old amount," explains Jeff. "I gave BT a call and they confirmed that the change to my account would be happening soon but not to worry as the charges would not be back-dated – I would only be charged the £29.99 from the date the change was made on my account."

Sounds good to us. But the problem was that the months continued to roll by with Jeff only being charged £14.99 a month – despite Jeff emailing them. Sounds great, doesn't it? Well, there is a catch: "Around November 2002, I received a telephone call from BT," recalls Jeff. "They informed me that it had come to their attention that I had only been paying £14.99 for my broadband access and that I owed them around £350."

He was told that he would have to pay off the outstanding amount but thankfully at only £10 a month. Jeff then asked for a letter to be sent to him to confirm the arrangement. And guess what? "Again I waited and nothing happened, apart from the fact that the £14.99 was no longer being debited from my credit card!" Says Jeff. "I'm starting to feel sick when I think about all the money I owe BT."

While some readers might want to egg Jeff on to take advantage of BT's piss-poor billing department, Watchdog can fully understand why Jeff is so worried about amassing a huge debt. We dropped BT a line who told us: "BT Openworld has a process in place for customers when they upgrade from our dial-up account to a broadband account," they stated. "Clearly in this instance, the process was not fully implemented, and we are currently investigating how this could have happened."

They say that they have expressed their sincerest apologies to you, Jeff, and are currently on the blower to you to resolve this situation once and for all. And to your satisfaction. Let us know if this is not the case...

MOUSE MOAN

That's the trouble with knowing about PCs – whenever a family

SAINTS NOT SINNERS

YES, THEY DO EXIST – COMPANIES THAT... CARE. NO FAINTING AT THE BACK, PLEASE!

Well, it's been quite a month for complaints about broadband so Watchdog was delighted to find a reader with something positive to say about the 'future' of online gaming. Over to you, Harry: "I had ADSL installed at home using Pipex and it worked perfectly so I decided to have it done at my restaurant too."

Unfortunately, the service wasn't as good. "It didn't work very well – dropped lines, failures to connect etc," says Harry. "So I got in contact with Pipex support who are excellent – their staff are knowledgeable and informed; they returned my calls; they returned my e-mails, and they sent BT out three times at no cost to myself."

He also didn't have to repeat the technicalities of his problem every time he got a new tech member on the blower, because Pipex apparently has its admin side well sorted too. Ultimately, it turned out that the problem was with the USB hub that Harry was using but "they didn't take the piss out of me and I wasn't spoken to like I was a moron. I'd recommend Pipex to anyone."

Pipex – one company making our 'arry a very happy punter...

member or chum needs a new one, they come running to you. Or in this particular case, Mike McSherry, who recommended a Dell PC to a needy mate.

"On delivery, I noticed the digital camera was missing," explains Mike. "I eventually contacted Dell who, to their credit, sent one within a week. I then found out some weeks later that the mouse included was just a cheap ball type – it was meant to be an Intellimouse."

Dell told us that their customer care department has now spoken to you "and apologised for his experience and have now reached a resolution which the customer is satisfied with".

As far as your issues with actually getting hold of their customer services department, Dell offered the following: "We admit there is always room for improvement, and are reviewing the way customer queries are handled and are implementing new tracking methodology and tools to ensure that our customers continue to receive the highest standards."

FREESERVE FOLLOW UP

Another follow-up from a reader about a previous complaint – this time from Pete Edwards. He was having horrific problems with his ping rates while online gaming, leaving him wondering why on earth he was shelling out for Freeserve's ADSL service. After being initially told by the company that it was his PC's fault, it transpired that the problem was actually a broken filter, according to Freeserve.

Well, Pete wrote back to us with his version of events: "Yes, the problem has been resolved with the aid of a BT technician," explains Pete. "He told me that the preliminary test at the exchange on the line showed an "Out of Range" error and too much noise and interference on the line to sustain an ADSL connection."

The technician then installed a laptop in the master BT socket and ran further tests with the same results. "When he inspected the RF filter, which is a box attached to the master socket box (not the ADSL filter), the technician noticed that it was an old type installed many years ago in many homes in this area," says Pete. "This was replaced and, well, that was it. Now not only can I sustain a 1Mbps or 2Mbps connection, but should the technology exist I could have up to 6.4Mbps!"

Pete was told that there are still thousands upon thousands of these old RF filters out there dropping connections regularly. Being a top fella, Pete now wants fellow *PCZ* readers to be aware of the issue: "Hopefully now they will not have to go through seven months of what I did to find out that a piece of equipment worth about four quid will probably sort them out!"

Indeed. And also, the above sheds a rather different light on Freeserve's claims that Pete's filter was merely 'broken'... PCZ

"I have found that it takes a huge amount of time to get through to the relevant department or person"

MIKE MCSHERRY, HE'S NONE TOO HAPPY WITH DELL'S CUSTOMER SERVICE

He contacted Dell but was told that if there was anything wrong with the contents of the delivery, the punter had to state so within seven days after delivery. Mike's obviously not happy with the situation or with Dell's customer service: "I have found that it takes a huge amount of time to get through to the relevant department or person," he fumes. "Again, not great customer service in my opinion!"

According to Pete, four of these guaranteed him great service from Freeserve...

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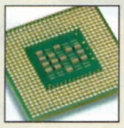
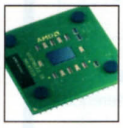
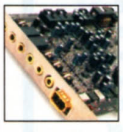
BUYER'S GUIDE

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	**IS7 (INTEL)** WAS £80 NOW £78 **STREET PRICE** £78 **MANUFACTURER** ABIT Computer **TELEPHONE** N/A **WEBSITE** www.abit.com.tw 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.	**K7N2 DELTA ILSR (ATHLON)** **STREET PRICE** £90 **MANUFACTURER** MSI **TELEPHONE** 020 8813 6688 **WEBSITE** www.msi.com.tw 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.	**875PNEO-FIS2R (INTEL)** **STREET PRICE** £150 **MANUFACTURER** MSI **TELEPHONE** 020 8813 6688 **WEBSITE** www.msi.com.tw A high-end P4 Canterwood board, the Neo features some truly remarkable features, including dynamic overclocking – 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.
PROCESSOR	 **P4 3.0GHZ** **STREET PRICE** £340 **MANUFACTURER** Intel **TELEPHONE** 01793 403000 **WEBSITE** www.intel.com 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 *Doom 3* and *Half-Life 2* seem all the more plausible.	 **ATHLON XP 3000+ BARTON** **STREET PRICE** £190 **MANUFACTURER** AMD **TELEPHONE** N/A **WEBSITE** www.amd.com 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.	**P4 2.4GHZ** **STREET PRICE** £145 **MANUFACTURER** Intel **TELEPHONE** 01793 403 000 **WEBSITE** www.intel.com 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.
HDD	**WD1200JB 120GB** **STREET PRICE** £90 **MANUFACTURER** Western Digital **TELEPHONE** N/A **WEBSITE** www.westerndigital.com 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.	**DIAMONDMAX PLUS9 80GB** **STREET PRICE** £69 **MANUFACTURER** Maxtor **TELEPHONE** N/A **WEBSITE** www.maxtor.com The mid-sized Maxtor is a drive for everyone: it's large, fast and not that expensive. Most users will find 80GB more than adequate for their 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 if you want the Serial ATA version, expect a £20 premium.	**RAPTOR 36GB** WAS £117 NOW £112 **STREET PRICE** £112 **MANUFACTURER** Western Digital **TELEPHONE** N/A **WEBSITE** www.westerndigital.com 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.
GRAPHICS CARD	**128MB RADEON 9800 PRO** **STREET PRICE** £270 **MANUFACTURER** Crucial **TELEPHONE** 0800 013 0330 **WEBSITE** www.crucial.com/UK 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.	**3D BLASTER FX5900 ULTRA** WAS £399 NOW £384 **STREET PRICE** £384 **MANUFACTURER** Creative Labs **TELEPHONE** N/A **WEBSITE** uk.europe.creative.com 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 one downside is the price.	**EXCALIBUR RADEON 9000 PRO** **STREET PRICE** £83 **MANUFACTURER** HiTech **TELEPHONE** N/A **WEBSITE** www.hitech.com.hk 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 *UT 2003* or *Battlefield 1942* become a reality.
SOUND CARD	**REVOLUTION 7.1** **STREET PRICE** £88 **MANUFACTURER** M-Audio **TELEPHONE** 0871 717 7100 **WEBSITE** www.m-audio.co.uk 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.	 **AUDIGY 2** WAS £86 NOW £84 **STREET PRICE** £83.50 **MANUFACTURER** Creative Labs **TELEPHONE** N/A **WEBSITE** uk.europe.creative.com 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.	**AUDIGY 2 PLATINUM EX** **STREET PRICE** £160 **MANUFACTURER** Creative Labs **TELEPHONE** N/A **WEBSITE** uk.europe.creative.com 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 anyone serious about their listening, 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.

MSI World's Most Powerful VGA ever...

Worldwide No.1 VGA Card Manufacturer

MICE

EDITOR'S CHOICE

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.

RECOMMENDED

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.

ALSO CONSIDER

MX700
WAS £53 NOW £47
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.

KEYBOARD

EDITOR'S CHOICE

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.

RECOMMENDED

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.

ALSO CONSIDER

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.

JOYSTICK

EDITOR'S CHOICE

SIDEWINDER FORCE FEEDBACK 2
STREET PRICE £52
MANUFACTURER Microsoft
TELEPHONE 0870 601 0100
WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/uk

Everyone who uses the Sidewinder ends up loving it. As suggested by its name, the Microsoft stick features force feedback – as well as a rotating handle, an auto-cannon button, throttle lever, and a fully programmable eight-way switch array on the top of the knob. Top-notch build and a decent size base make it the choice of virtual pilots everywhere.

RECOMMENDED

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.

ALSO CONSIDER

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.

SPEAKERS

EDITOR'S CHOICE

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.

RECOMMENDED

Z-640
STREET PRICE £60
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 its not conveniently sited. Shame.

ALSO CONSIDER

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.

SCREENS

EDITOR'S CHOICE

CML175SXW
STREET PRICE £335
MANUFACTURER Hitachi
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.hitachidigitalmedia.com

When it comes to flat-panel, fast-paced gaming, response times really count. And the CML175SXW has the lowest response time in its sector – a mere 12ms, or about half that of most rivals. It also delivers a good, clean image, and is nicely priced. If you're looking to make the move to CRT, and games are a priority for you, this skinny little Hitachi is the obvious choice.

RECOMMENDED

MULTISYNC LCD1760NX
STREET PRICE £380
MANUFACTURER NEC Mitsubishi
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.nec-mitsubishi.com

Amazing build quality, bright and clear image, radiant colours, height-adjustable stand, low 16ms response time, and all for a very reasonable price. Products like the NEC LCD1760NX sound a death knell for old-fashioned phosphor. Not only do they now come close to matching the visual performance of a CRT screen, they're affordable, elegantly designed and take up hardly any desk space.

ALSO CONSIDER

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.

MP3 PLAYER

EDITOR'S CHOICE

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.

RECOMMENDED

ARCHOS JUKEBOX MULTIMEDIA
WAS £330 NOW £316
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.

ALSO CONSIDER

MUVO
WAS £67 NOW £60
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.

MAILBOX

Everybody needs a good rant occasionally, and we're here to listen...

■ **KEEPING IT REAL** Dave Woods

ALIENWAREZ

You're always going on about Alienware and I admit they make pretty good systems, but I can't see how the ridiculous prices can be justified. You can get better PCs elsewhere and for about £500 less. Alienware PCs might be built by gamers for gamers but the profit margin is huge and I think they're taking the piss.

Craig Bilner

On paper it does look like Alienware is charging a lot for its PCs, but you're paying for a service well above the norm. For a start you're buying into free 24/7 dedicated gaming support – if you can't get a game working then Alienware will – but there's much more under the surface. Check out www.alienware.co.uk for more info and turn to page 122 for the latest review.

You're paying for more than the machine when you buy an Alienware PC.

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 Platinum has been firmly ensconced in our Buyer's Guide since its release, and is the best gaming card you can currently buy.**

THE PRODUCERS

I might be completely out of my depth but I was playing a game (no names mentioned) the other day and, although I was really enjoying myself, there were a few flaws that ruined what would have otherwise been a spiritual experience. The problems were to do with the interface and the dialogue – surely these could have been ironed out easily if they'd been picked up early enough? Thinking back, loads of games I've played have suffered from the same annoying glitches and flaws – the actual games themselves are normally genius, but they're always let down by stuff that should be easy to fix.

My question is, do developers employ games testers to evaluate the games as they're being developed? Or are they just there to pick up the bugs at the end? And does anyone want to give me a job? I'm good.

Graham Wright

It's the producers' job to make sure a game is on track and that any potential problems, like the ones you outlined, are ironed out quickly. It doesn't always happen unfortunately, and we're with you – some games suffer from very annoying flaws that could and should have been ironed out.

THE GOOD LIFE

WANTED! Games journalist for *PC ZONE* magazine. Ability to swear, drink like a fish, fight (online only), typing five wpm desirable. Unquestioning acceptance of freebies and the lifestyle of a high roller essential.

Hope it's chips, it's chips...

What a tough life you've got. Playing games, getting sent on trips so you can compare real-life situations with their gaming counterparts (paintballing, winter sports in Canada, driving tanks over Ford Escorts, live role-playing in Kent), not forgetting the *PCZ* equivalent of a school trip to Alton Towers, an all-expenses-paid jolly to E3 in Los Angeles.

Please may I have a job? Or at least an assignment to check out how 'realistic' Lula Virtual Babe is...?

Gary Pettecrew

We get this all the time. People mistakenly thinking that we've got it easy, that our job's a right laugh, that we don... oh sod it, you're right.

CAMPAIGN FOR COMPACT DISARMAMENT

Dear *PC ZONE*,

With your superior knowledge, I thought you might be able to answer the following question: Why don't games come on DVDs? Loads of games are coming out at the moment with three or more CDs – it's like the bad old days when games used to come on hundreds of floppy disks. Surely by now everyone's got a DVD drive?

Matthew Hart

You'd be surprised. We still do separate CD and DVD issues, although we're pumping out more DVDs each month. I agree it's a problem – game demos are getting bigger and bigger, and it's getting to the point where we can only fit three or four demos on each CD. The answer is a really cheap upgrade, about £30-£40 at the last count. So here's the call – if you haven't got a DVD drive get one now. You'll make everyone's lives a lot more pleasurable.

TOUCHING CLOTH

I was reading Emulation Zone in issue 132 when I noticed the name on the letter you'd sent to Parliament – the Rev. Stuart Campbell. Am I right in thinking that 'Rev.' stands for Reverend and does this mean that Stuart a man of God? If so, what's he doing gambling anway?

Joe Storey

Stuart Campbell is indeed a Catholic Priest, and believe me gambling is the very least of their vices.

VICE CITY

Drinking and gambling in one issue? I don't consider myself a prude but I'd imagine a lot of young people read your magazine and I think it's wholly irresponsible to glamorise activities that can lead to addiction and ruin. Saying that, I took your advice and had a few pints before challenging my mates to a game of *Counter-Strike* for cash. I won and am now considerably better off than I was before I read *PC ZONE*, although I'm thinking of going down the bookies after

"I think it's wholly irresponsible to glamorise activities that can lead to addiction and ruin"

AND WE COULDN'T AGREE MORE WITH **SIMON LANGHORN.** REALLY.

I've written this and betting all my money on a no-hoper. You see what you've started?

Simon Langhorn

You think you've got it bad? We had to join the local casino for the purpose of that feature, and we're now fully fledged members of a gambling den that's just round the corner from our offices and open 24 hours a day. It's a nightmare.

RAVEN HAVEN

I used to play *Quake* on a LAN at work and it was brilliant. Then I moved online and lasted about two weeks before giving up because of lag, cheats and people just being tossers. Last week I upgraded to a 512k connection and played *Counter-Strike*, only to hit the same problems.

Then I picked up *Raven Shield* and decided to give online gaming one more chance. What did I find? No-one cheating, people helping you out when you go a bit wrong and, even though it was my first night of playing, I was asked back for a Friday 'lets kill loads of terrorists' fest with the same five players. Brilliant and what a refreshing change.

Dave (Letch)

Friends reunited: *Raven Shield* online.

LETTER OF THE MONTH

DRINKER'S HUMP

Having read your article on drinking and games (issue 133), I would like to add some of my own observations. I've been a gamer for over 20 years and have spent a few evenings enjoying a glass of wine or a few cans of lager whilst commanding forces on my PC. I've found that while playing strategy games, such as *C&C Generals* and *Tiberian Sun*, I have, as the number of units consumed increased, become much bolder in my use of units, both in defence and attack. I start as a considerate commander, who nurtures and looks after each unit as a precious resource. However, as the alcoholic units increase, my devotion is soon replaced by the desire to crush the enemy, regardless of losses.

Supporting these observations is the paranoia participants felt during your feature. Somewhat similar to the suspicions aroused by the generals of WWI, when disasters such as Gallipoli came to public knowledge. The pride felt at certain moments during the game play; pride echoed in the pomp and ceremony parades the generals held throughout the war. And finally the aggression your teammates experienced towards the end. Similar displays of bold, violent behaviour can be seen in the broad-sweeping attacks executed towards the close of WWI – generals sending units into the guns of the enemy, all in the name of victory at any cost.

"My round, lads. What are you having?"

Being an historian, I soon realised there was a parallel to our behaviour and that of the generals of WWI – most, if not all, must have been drunk, either with power or, more likely, alcohol.

Julian Baldwin

We set out to prove that drinking helps/hinders your gaming prowess, and we've stumbled across the answer to one of history's most closely-guarded secrets. How about that?

CHEAT OR L33T?

I've been a hardcore gamer for two years, and lost girlfriends and promotions because of my dedication. I regularly get accused of cheating and it's a real insult because I've worked really hard to get as good as I am, but now I'm starting to get banned from servers as well. Has online paranoia reached the point where anyone with skill is now a cheater?

It's got so bad that the other day one of my own teammates kept killing me at the spawn point, yelling over the mic: "Turn off your hax noob!" I've seen the same treatment dished out to others.

I understand that cheats are ruining online gaming, but what are we supposed to do? Play badly deliberately? Can you think of a solution?

Jacques Theron

Two letters which prove that, as far as online gaming goes, it's not necessarily what you play but the people you play with. When you find people/servers you like, stick with them. If people know you and know how good you are, they'll know you're not cheating. PM

Skilled or dirty cheats?

BACKCHAT

THE BEST OF THE CHAT FROM THE PCZONE FORUM THIS MONTH. GET INVOLVED AT WWW.PCZONE.CO.UK

After last month's scientific proof that drinking in moderation can aid your gaming performance, the forums were awash with winos keen to chuck their ideas in the still. **Davetsutton** agreed with our scientists: "I've found that a few beers before/during a *Quake 3* session can get me on top of my game, but I've attempted games like *Splinter Cell* while under the influence and, despite my heroic battle cries, I usually only succeed in unloading a round into the ceiling before I'm gunned down like the fool that I am."

***PCZ*'s very own anomaly, Will Porter.**

Csdaveuk, on the other hand, is thinking of giving up *Quake* and becoming a Quaker. "Let no-one be in doubt, I am the king of *Street Fighter II*. I'm like a dual dextrous digital deity, operating at crystal speeds far beyond your understanding. Buoyed by this confidence, I challenged a group of wannabes to a few rounds for money. Knowing my superiority to the simians, I decided to enjoy my winnings in advance and imbibed a respectable amount of Newcastle Brown Ale. However things then went a bit wrong. When I say 'a bit wrong', it was more like I'd never played *SF2* before, never seen an arcade game, that I'd been born with no hands or fingers and I'd only had some transplanted on 10 minutes before we started playing."

Crackity-Jones then came on to prove that in any argument there's going to be combatants in every corner: "I've had many of my best (and most successful) gaming moments while totally wrecked." Good for you.

After being labelled an anomaly in the drinking feature, *PC ZONE*'s **Will Porter** tried to claw back some credibility: "Apparently I demonstrate, and I quote, 'a similar amount of ineptitude whether inebriated or sober'. Hmmf. They chose two out of three games that I've hardly ever played and then judge me?" Actually, Will, it was more down to the fact you were disqualified for chundering after two pints.

Escaped_monkey tried to draw an analogy between certain genres and drinking. "I think some games have instinctive controls, especially racing games, which are easy to play when drunk. Games where you have to think about what you're doing are harder when clattered." Maybe, but we're not sure drinking and driving go hand in hand.

But enough of the brain stuff, it's far funnier to focus on young **Will Porter**. The final word goes to **R0zm4n**: "Two pints and he chundered? Ahahahahah! (Picks himself off the floor, sews sides back together.) Dodgy pizza my arse!" We couldn't have said it better.

DISC PAGES

■ **WORDS** Paul Presley, Dave Woods, Anthony Holden and Will Porter
■ **DISCS** Will Porter

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.

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 is always wise to use a virus checker on any software before running it.
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STAR WARS JEDI KNIGHT: JEDI ACADEMY

CD1/DVD Pub: Activision **Dev:** Raven **Reviewed:** Issue 133 (89%)

Follow the bear...

ZONE HQ is proud to present one of the best demos you will play all year, if not your entire gaming career: Two huge levels zapped straight from the heart of *Jedi Knight: Jedi Academy*. This is the kind of demo that gets us sweaty, some of its gems are pure geek-manna sent down from nerd-heaven.

First off: THREE sabre styles! Single, dual and Darth Maul style. What's more is you get to choose your blade colour and handle, as well as your sex, race and clothing, before jetting off to Tatooine and fighting with Chewbacca in the Mos Eisley spaceport. There are plenty of Force Powers to play around with, especially in the vast Jedi Tomb level where they are noticeably souped up. After all, there's nothing better than using Force Push to send an enemy tumbling into an abyss, is there?

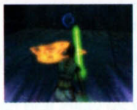
If you get stuck remember Force Sense can show the way, but other than that, load this beaut up and get slashing.

FORCES FOR COURSES

Force Lightning A skill for those teetering on the Dark Side. Force Lightning is fairly cosmetic at lower force levels, but it's still a hell of a lot of fun to use.

Force Speed A must for Saber combat, Force Speed gives you more slashes per minute, greater control and adds an element of *Max Payne* to proceedings.

Force Grip Not particularly useful in the middle of a huge battle, but vital if you are a fan of cracking windpipes and hanging people over high ledges.



Force Sense A top addition to the catalogue, Force Sense shows you what enemies are waiting around the corner and can get you out of dead ends.

JUDGE DREDD: DREDD VS DEATH

CD1/DVD Pub: VU Games **Dev:** Rebellion **Reviewed:** Issue 134 (78%)

Dawn of the dead.

Borag Thungg readers. If you'd care to lend us your ears for a minute, we've got an important announcement to make. As you know, here at *PC ZONE* we like to be tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime, and after a hard day sweeping perps off the planet there's nothing we prefer to do than kick back and practise our heavy-handed approach on the streets of Mega-City One. We'd like to invite you to join us on our latest mission: followers of Mega-City One's Death Cult are rumoured to have knowledge of the occult ceremonies needed to give the Dark Judges the power to possess specially prepared bodies, thereby regaining their powers. You need to make sure this doesn't happen.

He definitely belongs in an iso-cube.

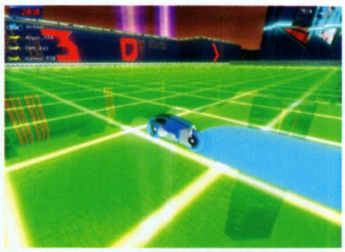
You've got your trusty Lawgiver and you can pick up alternative weapons, but you don't have to shoot your way through everything you encounter. You can challenge anyone on the streets and they might surrender, but if they start getting a bit feisty you can force them into submission by shooting their weapons out of their hands or by killing some of their companions. If all else fails, a head shot usually does the trick.

Watch your Lawmeter though (on the right of the HUD). If you kill innocents or perps who've surrendered, you'll take the pain here. If your Lawmeter runs out, Mega-City One will send the Judges after you. Good luck and Splundig vur Thrigg.

TRON 2.0

CD2/DVD Pub: Disney Interactive
Dev: Monolith **Reviewed:** Issue 134 (83%)

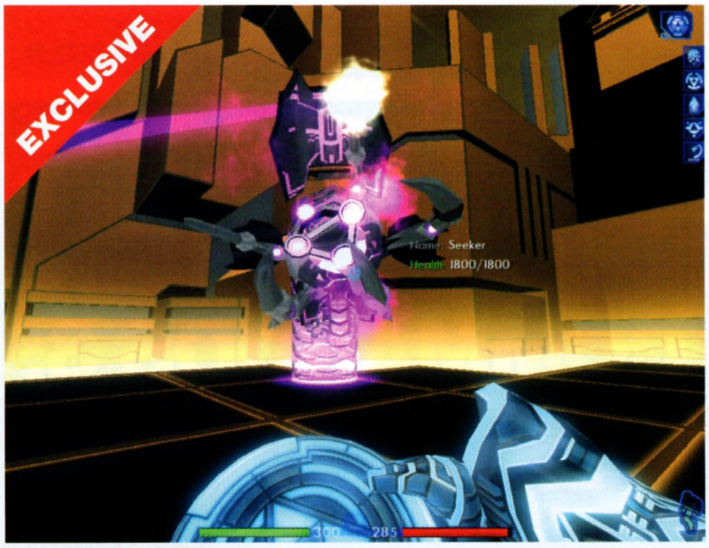
If you've ever wanted to leap into your motherboard and give McAfee And Norton a hand when they're bashing viruses, here's your chance, a boss level from *Tron 2.0* and a few light-cycle chases thrown in for good measure. The light-cycles, which are presumably what a game of *Snake* would look like after a few tabs of LSD, are pretty easy, but fun and frantic nevertheless.



The glorious light-cycles.

In FPS mode, meanwhile, you can kill the Seeker (the giant worm thing) with an impressive variety of weapons, ranging from your trusty disc to an infected ball-launcher. But after every succession of blows you rain down be warned that it will conjure up a pile of good-for-nothing.exe files that have been programmed to shoot you straight in the autoexec.bat.

There are a number of different weapons and armours, known in Tron-speak as 'subroutines', that you can boot into your system if you fancy a bit of variety during your battle. But beware: the handily placed orange cubes that you can take cover behind have a nasty habit of disintegrating under enemy fire. Also, before you log off, make sure you've checked out the impressively cinematic credits reel.



Tackling the Blaster Worm head on.

Bridge Over The River Zorg.

CHROME

CD2/DVD Pub: Gathering **Dev:** Techland Software

If you're going to steal, you might as well steal from the best, and *Chrome* does just that, borrowing liberally from *Deus Ex* to produce a free-roaming sci-fi shooter packed with cybernetic implants and an RPG-style inventory system. The difference is *Chrome* is all about wandering around bloody great islands and forests picking people off with a big old sniper rifle. The action is solid and varied, and if you can keep a sense of humour through the diabolical voice acting, it's a good fun blast.

The game casts you as Bolt Logan, a space mercenary *en route* to Zorg to retrieve some stolen data for the Octolab Corporation. (Hint: Skip the crap intro cut-scene, we've told you all you need to know.) Once you touch down, a short tutorial introduces you to all the salient features of the interface and inventory, and if you sit through this you'll pretty much be sorted. Remember to keep your head down and take it slow – this is a tactical shooter, and the enemies will kill you in a millisecond if you rush in like George Bush.

Wide open spaces for sniping.

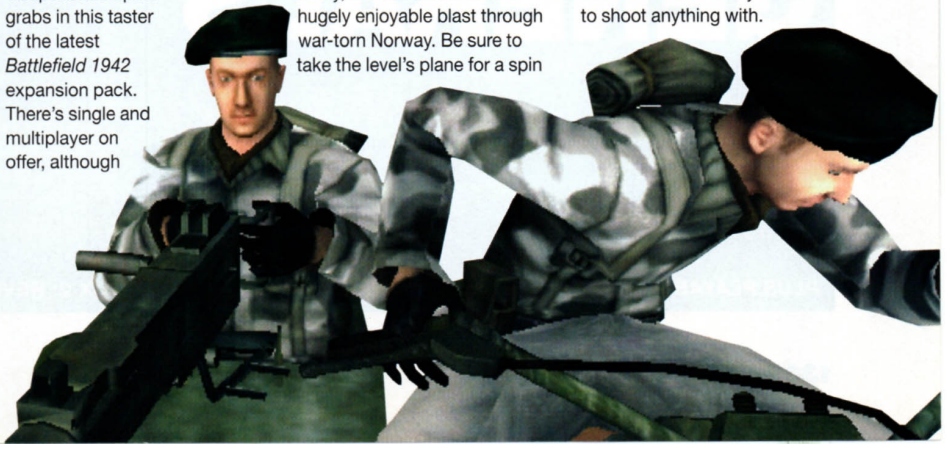
And riding buggies.

The not-so-secret tank.

BATTLEFIELD 1942: SECRET WEAPONS OF WWII

CD2/DVD Pub: EA **Dev:** DICE **Reviewed:** Issue 134 (80%)

A snowbound map and a host of new vehicles and weapons are up for grabs in this taster of the latest *Battlefield 1942* expansion pack. There's single and multiplayer on offer, although – as per usual *1942* standards – the single player bots aren't too canny, in what amounts to a hugely enjoyable blast through war-torn Norway. Be sure to take the level's plane for a spin – it's basically a rocket with wings and huge fun to fly, even if it's ridiculously hard to shoot anything with.



USA, land of the free.

And home of the fat.

FREEDOM FIGHTERS

CD1/DVD Pub: EA **Dev:** IO Interactive

It looks like all those years of right-wing paranoia were right. The Ruskies have taken over the US of A, and only a bunch of blue-collar vigilante warriors can put an end to their pinko, Vodka-swilling activities.

This team-based shooter may not be particularly complicated, you only have three commands to issue to your soldiers, but it's still fast, action-packed fun. If you can stomach the flag waving, give it a go.

SILENT STORM

CD1/DVD Pub: BigBen **Dev:** Nival Interactive

Hmm, definitely a gauge I, with added turbo-drive.

If you like your violence calm and calculated, *Silent Storm* should fulfil all your turn-based desires. Whether you're clearing a town of Nazi scum or trying to take over an Allied train with some Axis ne'erdo-wells, *Silent Storm* looks to cater for sedate tacticians rather than frenetic mouse-pumpers. Make sure you have a bash at the tutorial before launching yourself into battle – the interface system takes a little getting used to, but other than that, go and bag a few Nazis.

***PLUS... THE WORLD'S FIRST FOOTAGE FROM* DEUS EX: INVISIBLE WAR, *A ROLLING DEMO OF THE FORTHCOMING SPACE OPERA* X2: THE THREAT *AND LOADS OF MAPS AND UTILITIES FOR* RAVEN SHIELD**

DVD EXCLUSIVES

ONLY AVAILABLE ON *PC ZONE*'S DVD EDITION. TO SUBSCRIBE TURN TO PAGE 116. FOR FULL CONTENTS SEE BACK OF THE BOX

THE ESSENTIAL SELECTION

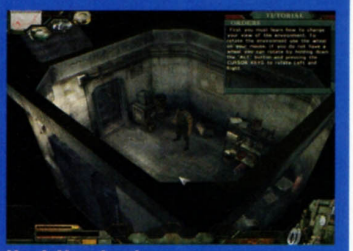
Your DVD is double-sided. All the new content is on one side – flip it over and you'll get The Essential Selection, including the 10 best playable demos from 2003, the 10 best mods of all-time and all the drivers, patches and utilities you need to reach gaming nirvana.

Ka-Pow!

COMMANDOS 3: DESTINATION BERLIN

Pub: Eidos **Dev:** Pyro

A swarthy Irish Green Beret, a sneaky Frenchman and a terribly clever 'stiff upper lip' tutorial voice take on the forces of the Nazi Rail Service in the latest *Commandos 3* demo from Eidos. The jump to 3D makes it all look a bit nicer, but this is still *Commandos* through and through. Fun, addictive, frustrating and really f**king difficult.



Hard. Very hard.

COMMAND & CONQUER: GENERALS

Pub: EA **Dev:** EA Pacific/Westwood

The demo may have sailed in yonks after the game's release, but if you haven't had a bash at the latest *C&C*, here's your chance. There are two full levels here, one with you playing as the heavy-handed Chinese military and the other starring their terrorist nemesis, the mentalist kamikaze GLA faction. The demo flows with the verve and panache we have come to expect from the EA/Westwood stables, and naturally the missions on offer are superb.

DVD VIDEO

DEUS EX: INVISIBLE WAR

Terrorists, nanobots and women with shiny eyes: how can we not be excited over this hot new intro sequence from Eidos' forthcoming sci-fi extravaganza?

HALF-LIFE 2

Just to push the excite-o-meter up a few more notches, we've collated all of the *Half-Life 2* movies so you can marvel at Freeman's forthcoming adventures. If this doesn't flick your switches there's something wrong with you.

***PLUS PLAYABLE DEMOS OF* CONFLICT: DESERT STORM II, AQUANOX 2: REVELATION, WINGS OF HONOR *AND* MADDEN NFL 2004**

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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

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

NEW ENTRY 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** LucasArts **PCZ ISSUE 133**

SOLDIER OF FORTUNE II

The bloodiest game in the world is back, but this time there's a brilliant game cowering 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**

ALIENS VS PREDATOR 2

If we rated games on atmosphere and tension *AvP2* would've been the highest-scoring game ever. The multiplayer game and 3D engine brought the score down, but for scares nothing can touch this three-way fragfest.

PUB Vivendi **DEV** Monolith **PCZ ISSUE 110**

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**

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

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 throughout 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**

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**

COSSACKS: EUROPEAN WARS

There are 8,000 troops at your disposal in this historically accurate RTS. Smooth unit movement, a 3D landscape with real physics modelling and great graphics and sound make it truly absorbing. An essential purchase.

PUB CDV **DEV** GSC Gameworld **PCZ ISSUE 101**

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

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 Ubi Soft **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 beardy 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**

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 Ubi Soft

DEV Ubi Soft Montreal

PCZ ISSUE 125

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 tankerloads 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 superbly realistic 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 unhealthily 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 bucketload.

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

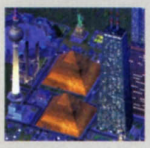
This intricate game comes from the same stable as *Zeus* and *Caesar* – and they know a thing or two about city building. There's a massive amount of gameplay and more than 50 missions spanning seven historical campaigns. As well as the economic considerations, you'll have to follow feng shui and the 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 as well as including 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**

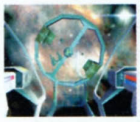
SPACE COMBAT

FREELANCER

The first game in years to actually make an effort to refine the space simulation genre, even if it doesn't manage to radically re-shape it. *Freelancer* combines the epic open-endedness of the classic *Elite* world with the combat immediacy of the *Wing Commander* series. It also mixes in a well played out (if somewhat short) story and gorgeous graphics to create a thoroughly engaging and very atmospheric experience.

PUB Microsoft **DEV** Digital Anvil

PCZ ISSUE 128



X – GOLD

The spirit of *Elite* lives on in this massive trading epic, in which you must buy and fight your way back home to Earth. It rewards patience with variety and months of absorbing gameplay. Deeply hypnotic and beautiful rather than tense and frenetic.

PUB THQ **DEV** Egosoft **PCZ ISSUE 82**

TERMINUS

Who says the days of bedroom programming are over? *Terminus* proves you can make a great game on your own if you have the talent and passion, and we reckon it just edges out the mighty *FreeSpace 2*.

PUB www.macgames.co.uk **DEV** Vicarious Visions **PCZ ISSUE 93**

FREESPACE 2

Following in the footsteps of *Wing Commander* and *X-Wing*, *FreeSpace 2* offers fast-paced dogfighting action all the way. With an epic story and amazing graphics, it suffers from being a bit short-lived if you don't play online.

PUB Interplay **DEV** Volition Inc **PCZ ISSUE 84**

EDGE OF CHAOS: INDEPENDENCE WAR 2

This title is likely to appeal more to the die-hard space simmers, but *Edge of Chaos* still goes some way towards advancing the genre. Its graphics and absorbing, freeform gameplay are inspirational.

PUB Atari **DEV** Particle Systems **PCZ ISSUE 104**

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 Ubi Soft **DEV** Sony Online Entertainment

PCZ ISSUE 117

PLANETSIDE

NEW ENTRY Truly the mother of online battles, *Planetside* is a neverending war involving three armies. Superb squad battles, stunning vehicles and atmospheric visuals make for a remarkably immersive experience.

PUB Ubi Soft **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

NEW ENTRY 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

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
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. Its extraordinarily popular, and really rather good.
WEB www.desertcombat.com

NATURAL SELECTION
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
This atmospheric, highly realistic and superbly designed *Half-Life* mod covers various battles from deep within WWII. Its different character classes and superb arsenal of weapons add to authenticity, fun and general carnage.
WEB www.dayofdefeatmod.com

TEAM FORTRESS CLASSIC
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 Ubi Soft **DEV** Ubi Soft 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. *GTA III* was an incredible crim-sim, so incredible that it was hard to see how it could be improved upon, 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 the 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
NEW ENTRY 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

ULTIMA VII

Considered by many to be the best of the *Ultima* series, *Ultima VII* was a game of such incredible depth and quality it will never be forgotten. *Chris Anderson* unlocks the legend

It's an absolute bloodbath. Or maybe it's a party...

The famous murder scene. This is where it all began.

Britannia, as seen in all its glory in *Ultima VII*.

GAME *Ultima VII*
DEVELOPER Origin
RELEASED 1992
INFLUENCED *Ultima VII* paved the way for many games that followed. It was the first role-playing game to feature realistic NPC schedules, huge detailed cities and towns and dialogue trees with multiple-choice answers. *Baldur's Gate* is perhaps most notable for its *U7* influences, and only varies from Garriott's original vision for *U7* in how combat and magic is handled, but the underlying roots of the game are very similar.

PROFILE

Richard Garriott was the brains and creative force behind the *Ultima* series, all the way from *Ultima 1* to *Ultima 9 Ascension*, the last game in the series thus far. He is currently working on *Tabula Rasa*, a massively multiplayer RPG which aims to unite the complex scripting and concentrated action from single-player games with the freeform nature of multiplayer games. Richard is also responsible for *Ultima Online*, which is still regarded as the most complex and in-depth MMORPG to date, so hopes for *Tabula Rasa* are very high indeed.

NAME Richard Garriott
ROLE ON ULTIMA VII Lead Designer
NOW WORKING ON *Tabula Rasa*

WAY BACK in 1992, when the average PC game still looked ugly as sin and dialogue consisted largely of occasional one-liners, Richard Garriott and Origin set about creating a game that would take not only RPGs, but PC games in general to the next level. The results are legendary in PC gaming circles. *Ultima VII* remains one of the most extraordinary accomplishments in PC gaming history, taking technological leaps and bounds that were thought impossible at the time. Graphically it was a joy to behold, while complex and interwoven plots and genuinely interesting dialogue put the game light years ahead of other titles in its genre.

Ultima VII was more than a game, it was a huge and complex world to explore and, most times, get lost in due to the sheer size of the environments. Huge cities, small towns, countless landmarks, vast wildernesses inhabited by all manner of creatures – *U7* was an exercise in exploration and discovery, as much a journey as a game.

This in itself is remarkable, and yet not particularly conducive to providing gripping gameplay. However, coupled with perhaps the most believable and true-to-life characters ever seen in an RPG, *U7*'s vast game world came to life, captivating players to the point that it's still considered one of the most addictive games ever made.

"For me, *Ultima VII* represented the pinnacle of fully interactive virtual worlds," says Richard 'Lord British' Garriott, the mastermind of the *Ultima* series. "It was likely the last fully-realised *Ultima*, and thus in many ways the best. After that, the publisher push to 'ship now or else' began to interfere with the pure visions I had through *Ultima VII*."

A WHOLE NEW WORLD

Part of this pure vision was a revolution in terms of depth of interaction in a role-playing game. For the first-time, NPCs had believable (and often highly amusing) dialogue, built into complex dialogue trees with multiple-choice answers. It created the most immersive and convincing role-playing environment gamers had ever seen, and established the conventions of communicating with NPCs that are still seen in RPGs today. Of course, few games manage to pull off the tricky balancing act of *U7*, which drew the player into a believable environment without becoming repetitive or overtly verbose.

Creating such a detailed world was no small feat but, according to Richard,

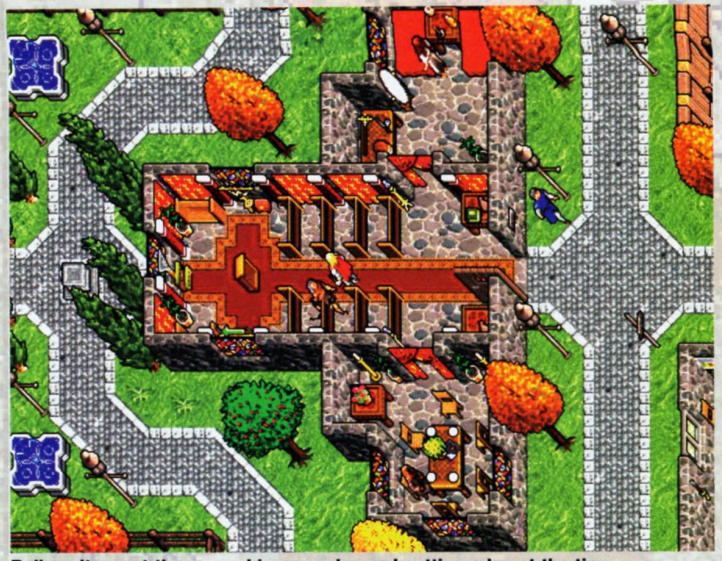
THE FUTURE

WHERE TO NEXT FOR DEEP AND INVOLVING FANTASY ROLE-PLAYERS?

***Ultima X: Odyssey* is a MMORPG, so more like a sequel to *Ultima Online*.**

The current heavyweights in the fantasy RPG genre are *Morrowind*, *Baldur's Gate 2* and *Neverwinter Nights*. There's no news of a sequel to any of these as of yet, and nothing on the horizon that appears poised to beat them, but as it happens the first details have just been released of a new *Ultima* game, *Ultima X: Odyssey*. It's a massively multiplayer affair on the way from EA, so is actually a sequel to *Ultima Online* rather than a new solo quest. Check out our story on page 98 for more.

However, this still leaves the question of where the single-player fantasy role-playing genre is headed, and for the answer we really have to look to *Baldur's Gate* creators BioWare. The Canadian RPG masters have two secret new projects in the works, neither Star Wars nor D&D-based, that they are preparing to reveal to the world. Expect more details on this development next issue.



Believe it or not these graphics were beyond cutting-edge at the time.

Mail-order bride catalogues have come a long way since the old days...

there were remarkably few compromises made in the game's development. "As with all the games I've developed, there were many things that changed during development, and many more ideas than we had time to put in, but nonetheless the element of *U7* I'm most proud of is its completeness."

Of course, with a project of this magnitude, there were some difficulties to be faced, often arising from the fact that the game design was pushing into virgin territory. "We did face problems when bringing the towns in the game to life," smiles Richard. "Principle among these was the sheer magnitude of the towns. Just managing that many features and keeping them all connected was all but impossible."

Somehow though, they managed it. The experience amassed on the preceding *Ultima* games had sharpened the creative team at Origin into a deadly-efficient RPG machine, and development proceeded remarkably smoothly. The production process was by now second nature, allowing more time and energy to be channelled into making the best possible game. "We had a very talented group of developers," agrees Richard. "We would spend many late nights working hard and 'partying down'. In fact, my fondest memory of making *U7* would have to be the all-nighters with the team – a giddy time to be sure!"

However, every success story has its skeletons in the cupboard, and *U7* is no exception. As fate would have it, the biggest problem the game faced was not of its own making – *Ultima VII*, like all PC games of technological note released in the early '90s, had a common enemy...

DOSSING IT

Despite the huge success and critical acclaim the game received on release, there's one thing for which *U7* will be remembered that Richard would perhaps rather not recall – it was an absolute bugger to run. The problem was, Origin was renowned for pushing the technology envelope with all of its games, and *Ultima VII* was no exception. Outstanding graphics (for the time) and excellent sound all came at a cost in hardware terms, but when *U7* was released there was an even bigger barrier to contend with.

Those of you who were playing PC games in 1992 will know exactly what we're alluding to here: DOS, hated scourge of all PC gamers at the time. Struggling constantly with system files and memory managers was part and parcel of the *U7* experience, particularly if you had one of those 'strange' soundcards such as the Gravis Ultrasound, and *U7* became a topic for discussion in game magazines as much for the mysteries of its technological challenges as the beauty and depth of the gameplay. Richard admits: "We always shot high for hardware needs, but we usually demanded more in the end than we intended at the beginning!"

This of course made no difference to the huge following the game amassed, who were quite happy to spend as long as was necessary to take on DOS and tweak the hell out of their startup files.

But if gamers thought they were lucky when *Ultima VII* first appeared, they had a treat in store, as they literally only knew the half of it. So rich and complex was the world created in *Ultima VII* that it actually overflowed into an entire second chapter, dubbed *Ultima VII: Serpent Isle*. Part one

of the saga, *Ultima VII: The Black Gate*, was a sprawling epic in itself, with a game environment that dwarfs many of today's offerings for sheer size and attention to detail. But only a year after *The Black Gate* first appeared in 1992, *Serpent Isle* took the story to its conclusion in magnificent fashion. This second chapter made no attempt to change the winning formula of the first part, concentrating instead on introducing new characters and plot elements.

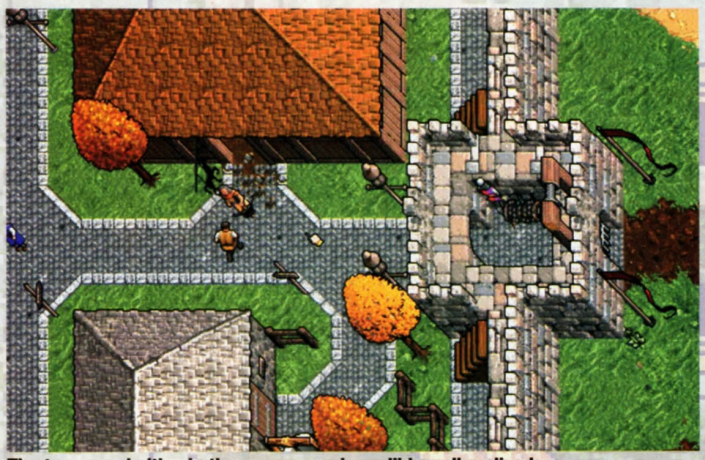
SPREADING OUT

An expansion for *Black Gate*, *The Forge Of Virtue* was also snuck out between these two releases, and *Serpent Isle* received its own expansion in due course in the form of *The Silver Seed*. All four of these episodes played their part in expanding one of the best stories ever seen on PC, and it's the game's masterful storytelling, more than any technical achievement, that will be remembered in years to come.

It's now generally accepted that *Ultima VII* is the last great single-player *Ultima* game. Prior to the release of *U7*, each game in the series had become progressively better than its predecessor, culminating finally in *U7*, the ultimate *Ultima* experience. After this, *Ultima VIII* introduced a more arcade approach to the series, and dropped the party-based approach that was so popular in *U7* for a solo approach. However, while *U8* was seen by many as an excellent game (if somewhat out of place in the *Ultima* canon), *Ultima IX: Ascension* split the entire community straight down the middle. Apart from the many bugs that plagued the game from release, the depth of gameplay that had previously been the hallmark of the series was sadly lacking.

It's now doubtful that we will ever see another true *Ultima* game. Richard Garriott has moved on to a new company and new projects, and the rights to the series now reside with mega-publisher EA.

It seems a shame that the series that had so many gamers enthralled for so long finished in such an anti-climatic fashion with *Ascension*, but Richard Garriott has left his legacy with *Ultima VII*, perhaps the greatest story ever told on PC. PCZ



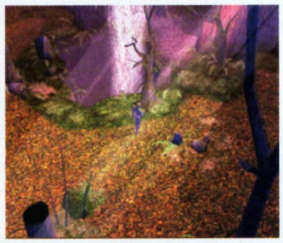
The towns and cities in the game were incredibly well-realised.

***Ultima VII* was a high watermark for NPC interaction, but killing them was fun too.**

"It's the masterful storytelling that the game will be remembered for"

ULTIMA VII REBORN

EVER DREAMED OF RELIVING *ULTIMA VII* WITH TODAY'S GRAPHICAL STANDARDS? HERE'S HOW...



It's a painstaking reproduction, and is looking fantastic.

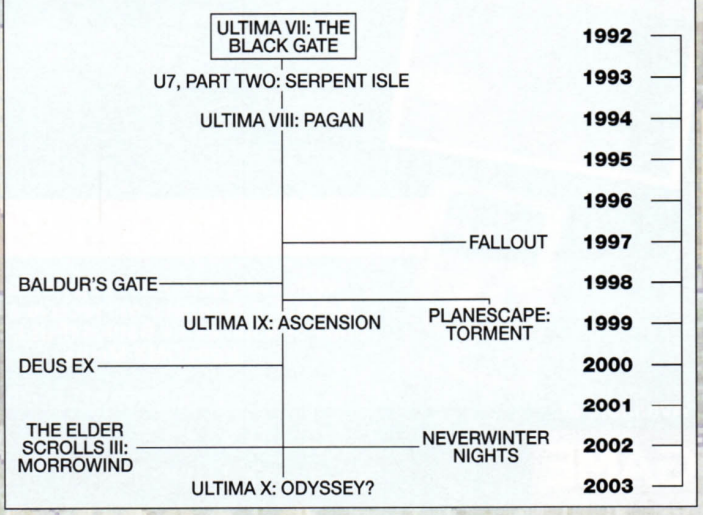
Black Gate Remixed is a hugely ambitious project in development by Mike Morrato, a 26-year-old systems engineer from Denver, whose love of *Ultima VII* has inspired him to recreate *The Black Gate* (the first of the two *Ultima VII* games) in its entirety using the *Neverwinter Nights* toolset. Mike plans to keep the original feel of the game intact, and to add some improvements of his own where he felt the original was lacking.

Needless to say, with the *NWN* engine in place the project is looking excellent, and Mike's passion for the original game promises to bring out the best *Ultima VII* had to offer. You will need to own both the original *Ultima VII* game and *Neverwinter Nights* if you want to take advantage of the mod, but it's a small price to ask.

He's currently working alone but is open to offers of assistance. Take a look at his site: nwn.morrato.com and send him an email if you want to get involved in this excellent mod.

FAMILY TREE

***Ultima VII*'s influence over today's RPGs is so far-reaching that just about any of the top games in the genre have attributes that can be traced back to it. In particular, *Baldur's Gate* and *Planescape: Torment* are great examples, since both feature dialogue and storyline heavily, and place great importance on character background and interaction.**



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Brief

In Squad Assault: West Front., you command troops in both the Allied and German Armies of the West Front of World War II in an immersive full 3-D continuous time environment. Squad Assault: West Front. features detailed models for all the major armies that fought in France in 1944, including American, German, British, Canadian, and Free French.

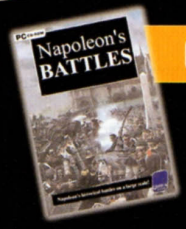
For those who prefer traditional turn-oriented play, a user defined auto-pause feature for order entry and battlefield assessment allows for a more thoughtful game. A 2D overhead map view with order entry is also available for those who prefer to see the battle from above.

Once the battle starts, the virtual soldiers you command respond with real reactions to the combat situations around them. This psychological modeling combines with unsurpassed detail in terrain, weather, weapons, vehicles, and armor penetration to make Squad Assault: West Front. a riveting recreation of World War II tactical combat.

Multi-player options for head to head play via TCP/IP / LAN are included.

Features

- Continuous time / Timed play World War II 3D strategy game.
- User defined auto-pause.
- Company level tactical setting with the emphasis on small unit tactics.
- Detailed combat system.
- Detailed armor model.
- Detailed psychological model.
- Detailed terrain model based on topographic maps of the real terrain.
- Multi-player action for head to head play.
- Historical and hypothetical scenarios.
- Operations and dynamic campaigns allow long replay ability.



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You could tell a Bitmap game just by looking at it.

RETRO ZONE MARCH 1991

Games about the Gulf War, Arnie reprising his role as the *Terminator*... *Richie Shoemaker* finds himself temporally confused

GODS

Another Bitmaps classic, praise be

UNLIKE the enigmatic Ultimate/Rare programming houses, The Bitmap Brothers was a British company that managed to appear coolly distant and not at all nerdy – even when they tackled the typically uncool and inscrutable subject of ancient Greek mythology.

As it had previously done with the likes of *Xenon* and *Speedball*, in *Gods* The Bitmaps took a deceptively simple concept and embellished it with a depth of gameplay that was hard to fathom until you were wading neck deep in it.

A side-scrolling platform adventure that featured all manner of beasties, weapons, treasure and puzzles. What gave it the Bitmap seal of excellence wasn't just the rich sonic and visual style that characterised all its games, but aspects in the AI and puzzle design that went a stage further than anything else. For instance there were ghoulish enemies traipsing about that learnt by your technique – mighty impressive considering we're talking about a game that predates *Sonic The Hedgehog*.

Agreed by fans to be The Bitmap's finest game (although *Speedball 2* still gets my vote), *Gods* remains a platform classic, easily on a par in terms of design and intuitiveness with the likes of *Super Mario* and *Tomb Raider*. The fact that it was created for us lowly keyboard gamers made it all the more special.

"It's impressive considering we're talking about a game that predates *Sonic The Hedgehog*"

***Gods* is a platform classic. Respect.**

THE BEST OF THE REST

MIDWINTER II: FLAMES OF FREEDOM
(Atari ST/Amiga/PC)
The sequel to Mike Singleton's groundbreaking 3D adventure was bigger though not necessarily better. The premise was much the same with you out to bring the locals to your cause using planes, cars, submarines and even balloons. Ultimately, though, it was years ahead of its time and was too much for the hardware to handle.

F-15 STRIKE EAGLE
(Arcade)
Who could have guessed that the popular and successful computer flight sim would make a decent transition to the arcades? Mind you, the simulation had been stripped down to allow for more spectacular arcade sequences and arguably there wasn't much else out there either. And there was a Gulf War going on... yes, maybe that had something to do with it as well.

KILLING CLOUD
(Atari ST/Amiga)
3D was the new 2D and while it would be some time before hardware acceleration would make an impact, there were a number of games that made up for their visual crudity with innovative and unique gameplay. This one had you playing a futuristic copper, capturing and then interrogating wanted felons in your hover bike. Heady days.

MEGAMAN II
(NES)
Capcom's pint-sized killing machine returned to the fray against Doc Wily. Not much had changed from the 8-bit platform hero, save for the usual round of new levels, weapons, power-ups and the non-linear way you could circumvent end-of-level boss characters. However, despite being light on innovation, the game was bursting with charm and playability.

NEWS

GAMING NEWS FROM MARCH 1991

- The Bitmaps release *Gods*, *Speedball II* is ready for the Atari ST and the original *Speedball* makes a successful transition to the Sega Master System.
- Commodore has been showing off its new machine, a console called the CDTV. Nolan Bushnell, Atari founder, says it "will truly change the way people learn and are entertained". Wrong.
- Activision announce it may be closing its UK operation due to the hardships of world recession. Today it's one of the biggest game publishers in the world. How fortunes change.
- Rumours abound that Sid '*Railroad Tycoon*' Meier's next game will be something called *Civilization* and will encompass 4,000 years of world history. Sh'yeah, like, as if!

NEXT MONTH

UK EXCLUSIVE REVIEW
HALF-LIFE 2
THE GAME!
THE REVIEW!

PLUS EXCLUSIVE REVIEWS

HALO
COMBAT EVOLVED

EMPIRES:
DAWN OF THE MODERN AGE

EXCLUSIVE DEMOS

HALO
X2: THE THREAT
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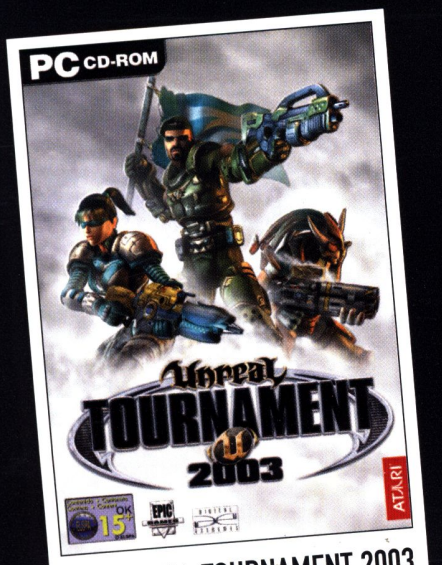

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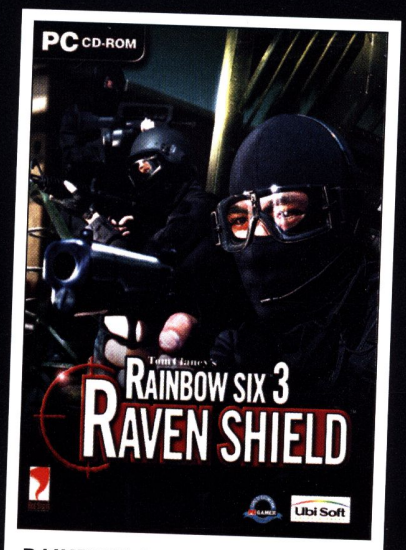

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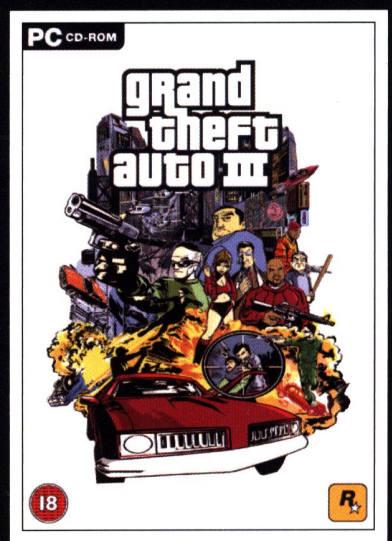

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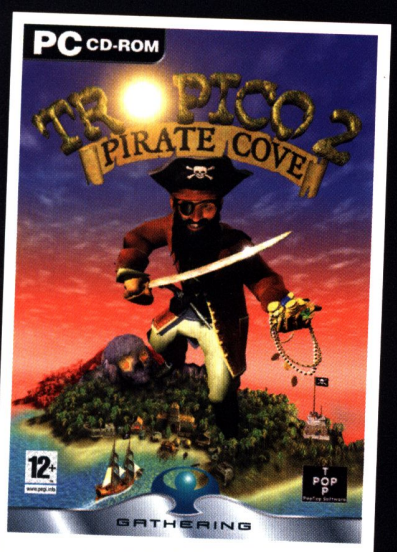

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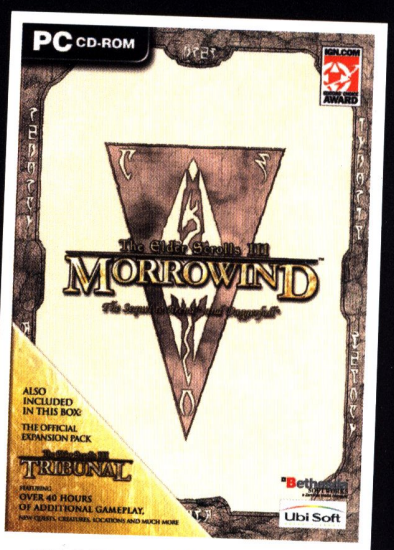

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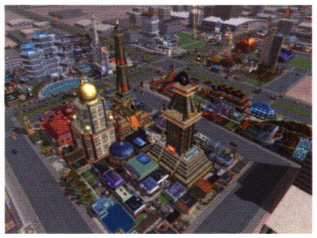

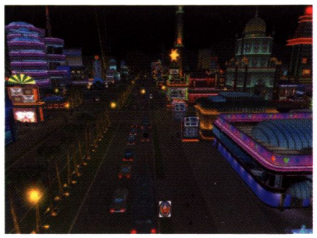

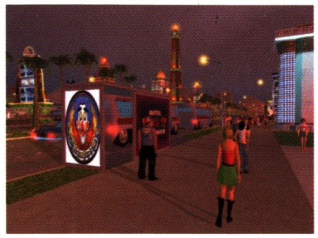

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