

It's an arrow and it's got a lump of flame stuck on the end. It can only mean one thing – guard barbecue.

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Ion Storm
PUBLISHER Eidos
WEBSITE www.thief3.com
ETA Winter 03/04

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Continuation of arguably the best stealth series on the PC
- Unreal engine and hiding in shadows? We like.
- The long-awaited return of the infamous moss arrow?
- Developed by Ion Storm. *Thief* fans – this is truly your lucky day.

The great game robbery THIEF 3

At school Keith Pullin used to be called Keith the Thief. Now at long last this pointless and libellous nickname has a purpose

WHEN LOOKING Glass Studios shattered and fell apart in early 2000 it was Ion Storm who ghosted in to smuggle master thief, Garrett, away from the gallows. But there was to be no instant return to roofs and alleyways for the PC's most popular house-breaker. Despite LGS's designs and scripts for *Thief 3* being in a fairly advanced stage, the priority for Ion Storm was *Deus Ex*.

So, Garrett's been skulking in the shadows ever since. It can't be easy standing still for that amount of time; taut muscles burning, breathing slowed to a minimum, resting heart rate virtually cryogenic – but like any good opportunist he's remained patiently poised until the moment to strike presents itself.

And that moment is here. *Thief 3* has finally reached a playable form and guess who's had a cunning pre-E3 look? That's right, yours truly managed to sneak into areas where no other magazine dared go

for a firsthand glimpse of the first-person action/stealth sequel Ion Storm thinks is going to be just as good as *Deus Ex 2*.

STEALING BEAUTY

One of the major reasons for this belief lies in the use of latest Unreal technology. Now, while a lot of FPS fans have serious reservations over the actual gameplay of *Unreal II*, absolutely no one has argued against the engine itself, which, in all probability is about the most gorgeous-looking piece of programming around – and, crucially, makes for some lovely shadows. So, if you're Ion Storm and you've got cash to spend, and moreover your aim is to improve upon the fantastic atmosphere created by the original Dark Engine technology, then quite simply what else can you do but license the very best technology there is?

Still, that alone is no guarantee of success. Thankfully, the *Thief* series has

always been more than just a set of nice looking levels. The first game, *Thief: The Dark Project*, was a tense, edgy thriller and the first real stealth-based FPS to appear on the PC. Its successor, *Thief 2: The Metal Age*, managed to innovate with some great mechanised inventions (like Garrett's mechanical eye) and improved enemy AI that not only sees you, but hears you too. Ultimately, the lure of both games is that if you play them properly, you can complete them without killing a single living thing. In this day and age that really is a rare and pleasant change.

T3's project director and lead designer, Randy Smith knows the third installment will have to possess the qualities that made the first two games so enjoyable.

"The *Thief 3* team is striving to strike the perfect balance between the two. *Thief 3* will have the dark mood and grim atmosphere of *Thief: The Dark Project* while maintaining and evolving the action

THIEF OR ASSASSIN?

DO YOU WANT TO RUN AND HIDE OR DO YOU WANT TO STAND AND FIGHT? IN *THIEF 3* YOU CAN DO BOTH



Go on, he's begging for it.

Many fans believe that the true beauty of the *Thief* games is in the core stealth over violence gameplay, which means you can complete all missions without anyone knowing you'd been there.

Thief 3 continues this tradition, but it also provides more options for players who don't mind being spotted, and crucially who like to have a variety of means at their disposal to ensure their enemy dies very, very horribly indeed.

As Randy Smith explains: "*Thief* is a very open-ended game allowing players to overcome challenges in a variety of ways. Our design philosophy empowers players to make choices about which play style they wish to pursue. This is taken to an extreme in *Thief 3*, as you can play through the entire game ambushing and killing every enemy if you choose, or if you're good enough and you prefer the subtle approach, you can get through the entire game without ever being detected once!"

So, the question is do you want to be a thief or do you want to be an assassin?

If only you could see this guy in motion – life of the party.



The medieval-industrial vision of the series continues.

stealth gameplay that was emphasised in *Thief II: The Metal Age*."

Of course, Randy is underselling things a little here, as the opportunities for 'evolving' that gameplay are immense, especially given recent developments in real-world physics technology. Indeed, one of the most amazing things about *T3* is the way you can manipulate the objects around you. Imagine – you're sniffing around a room you shouldn't be in and you hear footsteps coming up the corridor. Rather than panicking and jumping out the window into the moat, why not carefully push a table, barrel or anything you can get your thieving little mitts on across the door to block it? With any luck the over-curious guard will think the door is locked or jammed and leave you to your job.

This kind of interactivity is a double-edged sword of course – especially when mixed with the newly-honed AI. If you're

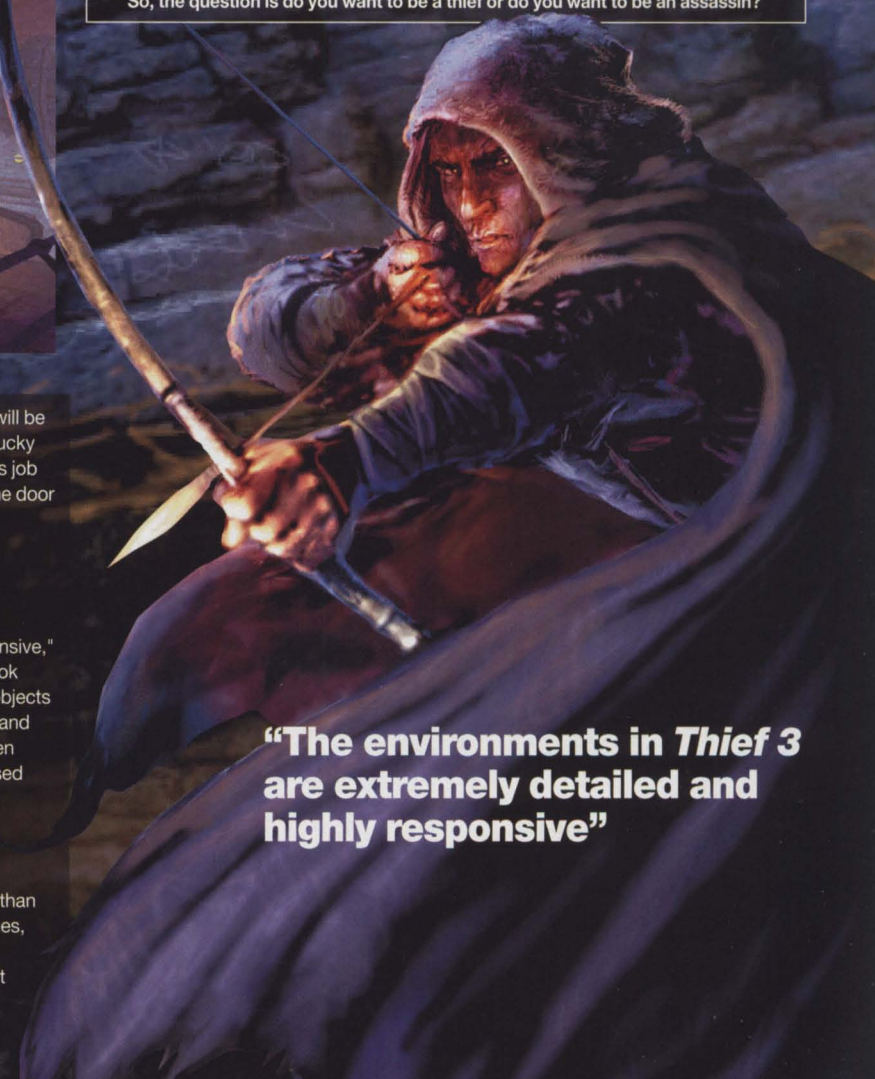
lucky the not so determined guard will be duped by your trickery. If you're unlucky and that particular guard is doing his job properly, you might suddenly find the door crashing inwards with five Hammer guards standing in the doorway.

LET'S GET PHYSICAL

"The environments in *Thief 3* are extremely detailed and highly responsive," affirms Smith. "We're using the Havok physics engine, which means that objects bounce and collide very believably, and they make very realistic sounds when they do so, sounds which can be used to distract guards – or make them suspicious."

So, as previously mentioned, although it's now a lot easier to interact with more objects than either of the previous two *Thief* games, it's just as easy to be caught out by the game's agile realism. And it's not

"The environments in *Thief 3* are extremely detailed and highly responsive"





just sound and movement that's benefited from this total overhaul. A proud Randy Smith enthuses: "We've got an advanced system to handle breakable objects, and you can watch objects fracture into their component parts, such as a barrel which breaks into boards and O-rings."

Don't think this is all just fancy aesthetics either. Once a barrel like this breaks up you can then pick up a bit of wood and knock out an enemy in the same way you might use a blackjack. Just like in the real world, what you do with objects you discover or create is limited only by your imagination. (Just don't end up in the pages of bizarreinserctions.com...)

LIFE'S A BITCH

So, what about the story then? What new evil does our hero face this time? Well, to cut a long story short, Garrett finds out from the Keepers (his old mentors) that a new Dark Prophecy is almost upon the City. Unsurprisingly Garrett's name seems to appear prominently in that prophecy. Being the wily fellow that he is, he decides that maybe this time he might actually take it seriously. After all, the last time he scoffed at the fanciful notions of the Keepers he ended up losing an eye. Thus the world-weary, cynical and downright selfish thief embarks on a quest to end these problems that plague his dreams of a quiet, uncomplicated life of plain old nicking stuff.

RATS THE SIZE OF HORSES

HOW MANY TIMES WOULD A GUARD HEAR YOUR ELEPHANT-LIKE ATTEMPTS AT STEALTH AND DECLARE THAT "IT MUST HAVE BEEN A RAT"? WELL, THOSE DAYS ARE GONE...



He may look thick, but he topped his class at grunt school.

Yet, despite the main quest, *T3* again retains the open-ended nature of its predecessors and presents a seductive list of potential targets to test your clandestine skills. Churches, castles, shops, dungeons, ancient ruins, banks, prisons, museums and mansions are all there for you to explore, break into and callously rob blind.

But let's not forget the basics either. Like *Thief* and *Thief 2* there are plenty of doors, levers, buttons, lights, elevators and other objects that keep this busy world ticking over and feeling authentic. And, of course, Garrett as a master thief is constantly making use of his environment – whether it's squatting behind the

The guards in *Thief 3* will amaze you with their variety of clever responses and shrewd behaviour. For example, the AI's have increased ability to reason about their environment. They pay attention to and may decide to respond to open doors, extinguished torches, suspicious shadows and other evidence. They even notice when loot has been stolen or when their mates are missing.

They are also far more paranoid and suspicious than before. They search extremely thoroughly when they go into a room and will check everything from behind furniture to the inside of chimneys. Simply crouching in a corner and waiting for them to pass does not work. If a guard is coming your way in their sweep of the room, you have to double back to someplace they've already searched.

Truly these guys are MENSEA candidates, and to outwit them you will have to be fleetier of foot than you can possibly imagine.

furniture, climbing into the rafters, picking locks, or putting out torches, there's no shortage of ways to 'get into character'.

For us, getting into character invariably means spraying a variety of weird and wonderful arrows around the place. In fact,

one of the things that always rather amused us was the moss arrow – used to create a soft, noiseless path across an otherwise percussive floor. Has Garrett finally sussed the idea of taking his tap dancing shoes off instead of firing this



The choice of approaches to each situation promises to be generous. In this case, will you extinguish the torch with an ice arrow or try to sneak past the guard?

"Fans of the series will be delighted at the amount of new stealth options rammed into the game"

this is just the start of what you can achieve with T3's shadows.

One of the coolest ideas of the stealth system in *Splinter Cell* was the way you could (supposedly) change where shadows appeared and even create them yourself, though in effect this just meant shooting out light bulbs everywhere you went. Believe us when we say this idea is taken to a whole new level in *Thief 3*, with more direct control over light and shadow than we have ever seen before. If there's light streaming in through a window, you can actually stack furniture up against the window and watch the shadow slide across the room.

HOPE IN THE SHADOWS

Garrett clearly has a lot to come to terms with, and fans of the series will be delighted at the amount of new stealth options rammed into the game. It's no wonder Ion Storm is just as excited about this as they are about *Deus Ex 2*. After seeing it for ourselves we fully understand why. The game looks sure to exceed the quality of the first two games combined – not bad when you consider that it wasn't so long ago the *Thief* series looked as doomed as the developer that gave birth to it – not to mention vastly extend the reach of stealth-based gameplay.

You'll be able to get your sticky paws on *Thief 3* this winter. In the meantime, keep your good eye fixed on *PC ZONE* for more exclusive updates. **[E3]**



Grab the edge of the rug and... yank.

arrow into the floor? It's a question we put to Mr Smith who, after assuming we were taking the piss, simply reminded us that Garrett can tip-toe slowly across a room if he doesn't want to use his secret weapon.

Talking of secrets, we're sad to say the rest of the gadgets and weaponry in the game are also strictly under wraps at this stage. Our probing in this direction was met with a cheeky smile from Mr Smith

and a rather unhelpful response of:

"We've put a lot of thought into broadening Garrett's toolkit and refining his trusty weapons and gadgets from the previous games." Make of that what you will, though close inspection of our screenshots may reveal a couple of available weapons...

Of course, Garrett has spent most of his life in the shadows and *T3* presents no

change in this department. In fact, due to the *Unreal* engine's capacity to squeeze out some fairly tasty volumetric real-time shadows, he spends more time than ever lurking with intent.

For example, we saw a guard holding a torch walk down a hallway with columns on either side. As the guard passed each column, long, stretching shadows were cast onto the floor and walls. Needless to say the effect is absolutely mind-blowing. In terms of gameplay it's pretty impressive too. Hiding behind one of the columns, you actually have to edge around the base of it to stay in the darkness.

In another area, a huge pendulum at the top of a clock tower casts a moving shadow on the floor as it swings back and forth. The only way Garrett can move from one side of the room to the other undetected is if he hugs the shape of the shadow as he shuffles along. It's incredible to behold, and yet staggeringly

STEALTH GOLF

THE ANCIENT ART OF GOLF IS AN UNTAPPED WELL OF STEALTH ACTION, AND HERE'S WHY...



The fairways will be safe once more with Garrett lurking in the rough.

So where do we go now with the whole stealth genre thing? We've got *Metal Gear Solid*, *Splinter Cell*, *Project IGI*, *Hitman* – all games about angry young men killing people. If you ask us, it's starting to get a bit samey, and if truth be known the only real hint of originality in this whole mix is *Thief*, which ironically is the one that started the whole thing off.

No, we need a change. What we need is a stealth golf game. It's no secret that I'm a bit of a fan of the ancient and noble game, and I'm convinced it could be combined with sneaking around killing people to brilliant effect. What with teenage hoodlums stealing your ball when you slice into the woods, and non-members sneaking onto the course when there's a gap in play, there's surely plenty of scope for some stealthy action there. You could call it *Thief 4: Dirty Pikey Ball Thieving Tossers*.

Come on Ion Storm, you know you're just a teeny weeny bit interested...



Would you trust a man with hands this big?