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UK-OK

When you live in a place that manages to do so many things badly it's easy to forget about the good things. I've never worn a pair of Union Jack boxer shorts but I

can say categorically that we churn out the best pop music, create the best comedy and produce the best gaming magazines (*ahem*) in the world.

Then there are videogames. Back in the heady '80s, Britain was producing the best games in the world, with the Ultimate stable churning out stuff like *Knight Lore*, *Atic Atac* and *Jet Pac*, with Matthew Smith coding *Manic Miner* and the sequel *Jet Set Willy* (before disappearing in a plume of smoke never to be seen again) and Jeff Minter starting a lifelong love affair with his llamas.

Since then we might not have produced the most commercially successful games but we have led the pack in terms of quirky, original and groundbreaking titles. You might not be aware of the fact, but there are more than 100 development houses scattered around the UK, and over the next few months we're going to introduce you to all the main players and the rising stars. Flick over to page 28 for the opening salvo.

Luckily though we're not the sort of magazine that dresses in tweed and wanders round with a shotgun telling people to "bugger orf our land..." If we were we'd have missed out on a contender for game of the year, *Unreal II*. We've been waiting patiently for the finished code to drop and in an extremely tense month that involved getting the cover printed and then waiting for finished code to cross the sea from the US to the UK we got it just in time for this issue. We're the only mag in the UK that has reviewed the massive new shooter and although we knew it was going to look the business, we weren't sure how it was going to play. Turn to page 64 to find out for yourself.

Dave Woods
Editor



UNREAL II: THE AWAKENING P64

The most hotly anticipated game of the millennium has arrived. But can it revolutionise the FPS genre? Read our world exclusive review and find out for yourself

COVER DISKS P132



■ 8 PLAYABLE DEMOS INCLUDING...

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■ DVD EXCLUSIVE: DVD ZONE

5 demos not on the CDs, including Soldiers Of Anarchy, Emergency 2, America's Army: Operations v1.50, Knight Rider and an updated Dungeon Siege demo. Plus all the featured mods in ModWatch. For the full disc contents turn to page 132.



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WIN!

THE COMPO NO ONE FINDS Correctly answer this month's cover question and you could win some PC goodies. Send your entry on a postcard addressed to: The Compo No One Finds (126), 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: March 5th 2003. The winner of our January cover (124) is Mr Nigel Taft. Well done.

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**FIRST
Look!**

Football ker-razy!

ISS 3



World exclusive!
**Konami kicks
off with a PC
footie rival to
EA's FIFA 2003**

■ **REFEREE** Jamie Sefton

ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW

DEVELOPER Major A/Konami
PUBLISHER Konami
EXPECTED RELEASE DATE April 2003
WEBSITE www.konami.com

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- First PC football title from Konami
- Developed by respected internal team Major A
- Smooth arcade-style play
- LAN and Online options promised

"BACK OF THE NET!"

When we heard that Konami was working on a PC football title, there were celebrations at *PC ZONE* akin to the moment England beat the pesky Argies in the 2002 World Cup. Although Electronic Arts' *FIFA 2003* is the best footie game on PC yet, the office favourite and root cause of bitter in-fighting among the team is still the sublime *Pro Evolution Soccer 2* on PlayStation 2.

So, here we have the world's first look at *International Superstar Soccer 3* – Konami's

other huge football license and the true pretender to EA's *FIFA* throne. *ISS 3* has been developed by Konami's Osaka-based internal studio Major A, which in the past has produced memorable football games for various consoles including the Nintendo 64 and PlayStation.

Featuring 58 international teams with all the proper player names (apart from the Dutch due to complicated licensing issues) *ISS 3* promises a hugely enjoyable arcade-style kickabout. The early code we played still had a few glitches and occasionally weird ball gravity, but within a few minutes we were passing the ball skilfully between players, pulling off perfect through-balls and scoring spectacular net-bursters. Well, in our opinion anyway.

ZOOM, ZOOM, ZOOM

ISS 3 continues the football game tradition of providing oodles of options for formations and a wealth of player stats such as ball handling and stamina to pore over as you choose your dream team.



In this early code, hoardings plug Major A's *ISS2*.



Press Q for a close-up move.



Scotland prepares to lose again.



Eng-er-land! The atmosphere during games is electric.



You can practice free kicks and more in the Training mode.

However, one of the main differences to *FIFA 2003* that you'll notice immediately on playing *ISS 3* is that it is a much more physical game, with players allowed to shoulder-charge, block and tug the shirts of opponents. There's also a rather cool "Close-up" action move that can be activated during the game when a player on the wing nears the opposition's penalty box. By pressing Q (or an appropriate assigned key on a joypad) when prompted, the camera zooms in to allow your player to perform a trick or feint to skip past defenders and allow a clear run on goal.

This takes a bit of getting used to, but fortunately *ISS 3* includes an excellent Training mode, where you can practice the new Close-up action move, as well as open play, free kicks and penalties. Other modes allow you to set up your own

custom leagues and cups, as well as enjoying a quick friendly match – which is promised will be playable over a LAN and the Internet.

Commentary is ably provided by ITV's Jon Champion and BBC pundit Mark Lawrenson, and while *ISS 3* doesn't seem as graphically accomplished as *FIFA 2003*, the motion-captured animation is excellent and the atmospheric in-game cut-scenes showing managers urging their teams on for example, is spot on.

You can probably tell that we're impressed and rather excited by Major A's *ISS 3* already. Because of an accursed Sony exclusive you won't be able to boot-up (ahem) the rival Konami TYO-developed *Pro Evolution Soccer 2*, but the fact that Konami is bringing its other excellent football franchise to the PC in April, is reason enough to start believing that football is finally coming home. **EW**

BULLETIN

ALL ROADS LEAD

CREATIVE ASSEMBLY LAUNCHES ALL-OUT ASSAULT ON THE PC, WITH ROME:

ALL HAIL THE PC

■ ASSOCIATE EDITOR Jamie Sefton

▲ Hi there. We've got another generous helping of killer PC news this month, kicking off on this page with a peek at the incredible-looking RTS sequel *Rome: Total War*, including exclusive screens and an in-depth interview with developer Creative Assembly's Michael De Plater.

Interestingly, *Rome: Total War* promises similar performance to *Medieval: Total War* on comparable PCs, even though the game can now render 10,000 properly motion-captured soldiers and more detailed terrain. If this is the case, Creative Assembly should be applauded, as it means that those of us with creaking replica oak machines will still be able to go forth and conquer, without having to spend 600 bloody quid (hello NVIDIA!) on the latest polygon-spitting graphics card.

Our special report this month (page 12) investigates whether, as Revolution's Charles Cecil said, that the point 'n' click adventure is dead. Could the genre that spawned such glorious games as *Grim Fandango* and *Sam & Max Hit The Road* be resigned to the great big bargain bin in the sky?

We've also managed to grab the scoop on Koch (it's pronounced "kotch" in case you didn't know) Media snapping up the *Bitmap Brothers' WWII: Frontline Command* (page 20), which despite the delay, is shaping up to be every bit as good as *Z: Steel Soldiers*. Plus, there are fantastic screenshots from *Return to Castle Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory* (page 24), our very cool Emulation Zone (page 19), and the usual scurrilous gossip and spiteful comment from The Man Who Knows (page 14).

As Julius Caesar might have once said: "Veni, Vidi, Vici." Arrivederci.

Medieval: Total War was a revelation on its release last year – a hellishly addictive mix of Risk-style map campaigns and spectacular 3D battles. Now the geniuses at Creative Assembly have announced *Rome: Total War*, a stunning-looking RTS that looks as if it could surpass everything that the previous *Shogun* and *Medieval* games achieved in gameplay and graphics – if you don't believe us, check out the amazing movie on the discs.

Rome: Total War covers the period from the Punic Wars starting around 264BC, through to the rule of Augustus as Emperor of Rome ending around AD14, covering events such as Hannibal's epic march across the Alps, and the gladiator revolt of Spartacus. The ultimate aim of the game is to conquer enough lands so you'll eventually rule as Emperor (Emperor) over a glorious Roman Empire, complete with your face emblazoned on coins, and semi-nude buxom maidens feeding you grapes night and day. Bliss.

You can command Roman, Carthaginian, Egyptian, Greek and Successor armies, as well as the Gaul barbarian hordes, with encounters featuring up to 10,000 motion-captured men hacking chunks out of each other simultaneously. For the inside story on one of the biggest PC games of 2003, we spoke to the creative director of Creative Assembly, Michael De Plater, and grabbed a legion of exclusive *Rome: Total War* screenshots. The die is cast...

PCZ Why do you believe that PC ZONE readers should be getting very excited about *Rome: Total War*?

MDP The technology of *Rome: Total War*



Rome: TW's increased detail means keeping track of battles is much easier.

lets us create truly cinematic and epic battles. We're much closer now to putting players into the action of a movie like *Gladiator*, *Braveheart* or *The Two Towers*. The combination of the detail of the units and the new motion-captured men opens up great new gameplay possibilities. Now you can clearly see the Centurion leading his men into battle, elephants lumbering through formations sending men flying and troops pushing up ladders to storm the battlements.

PCZ *Rome: TW* looks incredible. How have you achieved such impressive graphical results?

MDP By having brilliant programmers and by building the engine very precisely to the requirements of the game features. The team had to write every piece of the technology from the ground up this time, and the effort has really paid off.

PCZ But won't the graphics require an über-PC to run the game properly?

MDP No. At this stage the performance is comparable with *Medieval* in that if you have the same number of troops in a battle running on a comparable PC, it'll be about the same – which is pretty amazing given the detail of the soldiers in *Rome: TW*. Also, the technology is very scalable, so even on the minimum spec machine it will still be genuinely playable.

PCZ What kinds of new troops, weapons (and even animals!) will you have under your command?

MDP There are more than 100 new units, including troops like war elephants, scythe chariots and war dogs (or Devourers). Each specific faction in the game has a smaller unit list than they do in *Medieval: TW*, numbering around 20, but we want to give

CA GIVES US THE HORN

MEDIEVAL: TOTAL WAR – VIKING INVASION PREPARES TO LAND

As well as *Rome: Total War*, Creative Assembly is preparing to release an expansion pack for *Medieval: Total War* this spring entitled *Viking Invasion*. According to development director Mike Simpson, "the basics will work as they always did, but there'll be many new features added to many parts of the game."



■ Eight new Viking-era factions including Saxons, Mercians, and Picts, each with exclusive units, and an all-new campaign map of Britain to fight over.

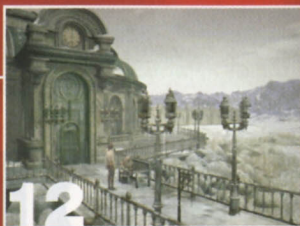
■ A new battle deployment screen that allows you to organise your army and any reinforcements.

■ New artillery features such as flaming catapult missiles.

■ Taverns and Brothels can be upgraded to produce Assassins and Spies.

■ Three new playable factions and unit types for the original starting dates in *Medieval: Total War* – the Aragonese, Hungarians and Sicilians.

■ A new technology tree for the Viking era allowing construction of Dark Age buildings such as Drinking Halls.



SPECIAL REPORT
Are point 'n' click games dead?



X-MEN: WOLVERINE
Marvel-ous action adventure?



EMULATION ZONE
Classic games given new life



PC ZONE CHARTS
Latest charts and release dates

TO ROME

TOTAL WAR. EXCLUSIVE SCREENSHOTS AND INFO!

each faction a more distinct flavour and to make the differences between different cultures more pronounced.

PCZ Will there be more detail in the city assaults? Can you line the walls with archers, for example, or offload burning oil onto the poor souls below?

MDP Everything you've mentioned and more. When you're under siege you can sally out to attack, bring in relieving armies and even conduct 'counter-sapping' with your engineers. If you're assaulting a city you can storm it with ladders and siege towers, smash the gates with battering rams, attack with artillery, or undermine the fortifications with sapping points.

PCZ What other additions have you made to the 3D battle tactics in *Rome: TW*?

MDP Well, we can now differentiate some individual soldiers in battle, so the General with his bodyguard is a unique unit with the ability to issue group-level commands and send messages to allied armies. Also, some units now have specific skills, so Roman Legions can form a testudo (tortoise) formation, which is virtually impervious to arrows. Units can now carry a range of weapons, throwing javelins at the enemy before closing in for hand-to-hand combat.

PCZ How will the *Risk*-style turn-based strategic map elements differ from other *Total War* titles?

MDP I think that the new campaign map is a big step forward and that the link between the two halves of the game is much stronger. Now rather than having a 'board game' style regional map, we have a tile-based

continuous map of Europe. Each tile represents one battlefield and you can zoom down to these at any point to see mountains, forests, volcanoes and stuff. Plus you can also see the effects of your upgrades such as building roads or forts. We're attempting to add some fun gameplay to the manoeuvring of armies, but being careful not to increase the overall complexity of the game.

PCZ So there's a stronger correlation between the 3D battlefield and the campaign map?

MDP Definitely. For example, you could attack an enemy army from the south and call for reinforcements to come in from the west. When you start the battle your reinforcements will actually arrive on the correct flank, and the time it takes them to get there will be based on the distance they had to travel. Also, the freedom of movement on the map allows you to move armies through the territories of your allies, which makes it easier to co-operate with them to set up joint attacks or defences against mutual enemies.

PCZ Can you give an example of the new Senate missions?

MDP The Senate is a little bit like a gang in *GTA III* in the type of missions they'll give to you and the rewards you get. For example, you could be asked to conquer an enemy city, assassinate an enemy of Rome, or build a great temple to increase the glory of the Republic. The thing is that you don't have to take on the missions, and you have to keep in mind that your long-term goal is to become Emperor, which is going to mean crushing the Senate...



Now you can actually watch your troops clamber up siege ladders.

PCZ Finally, if you had to choose, what would you say is your favourite bit of *Rome: Total War* so far?

MDP The thing I'm most pleased about is the performance of the engine and the system spec. However, in terms of my favourite part of the actual game, I have a top five: siege towers reaching the walls and men storming the battlements; huge cities ablaze and lighting up the night sky; a

charge of heavily armoured elephants smashing a legion; huge Barbarian hordes stretching to the horizon; and building my city on the campaign map, then zooming down to gloat over it!

■ Publisher: Activision
■ Developer: Creative Assembly
■ ETA: Q3 2003
■ Website: www.totalwar.com

DESERT ISLAND DISK

PIRATES OUST DICTATOR AS TAKE 2 ANNOUNCES *TROPICO 2: PIRATES COVE*

REMEMBER TROPICO? Of course you do. The banana republic sim that boasted obscure non-linear RTS gameplay strewn with geopolitical and ecological ramifications. Put frankly, it was not exactly everyone's idea of a hot, steamy paradise.

The sequel, *Tropico 2: Pirates Cove*, currently being developed by Frog City (*Imperialism 1 & 2*), is a RTS/god game that's heading in a slightly more pleasing direction. This time, as the title suggests, you must build up a thriving pirate community on a hidden island and then set about plundering nearby settlements.

Although the main gameplay emphasis lies in expanding your

hedonistic Utopia upon a foundation of stolen booty, there's a fairly unique RPG angle too. By giving your pirates what they require (ie, rum, gambling, wenches and silly hats), their skills and ability to terrorise increase.

Tropico's surreal humour remains, featuring, among other things, pirate overseers whipping slaves with wet towels, she-pirates going for manicures, and one-armed lumberjacks. Look out for a rum-soaked preview next month.

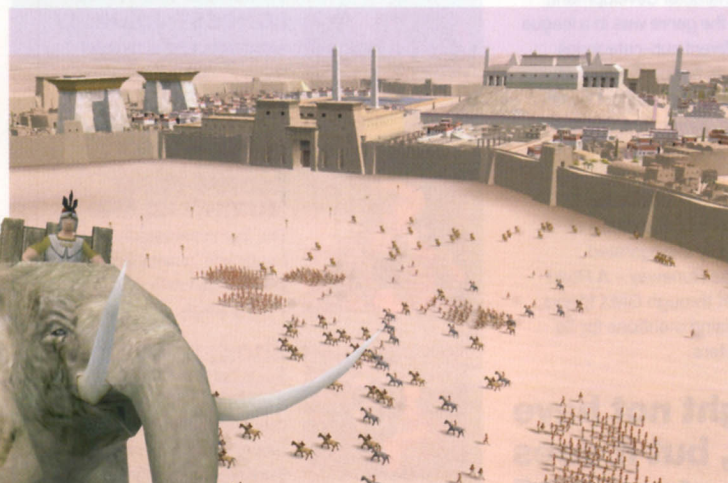
■ Publisher: Take 2
■ Developer: Frog City
■ ETA: April 15
■ Website: www.frogcity.com/t2



Plundering ships is vital for success.



Grog keeps your pirates very merry.



Terrain such as deep sand can now slow down troops.

MISSING THE POINT?

RUMOURS OF THE POINT 'N' CLICK'S DEMISE MIGHT BE A LITTLE HASTY. THERE'S STILL LIFE LEFT IN THE OLD DOG, REPORTS PAVEL BARTER

SPECIAL REPORT



Pendulo Studios' forthcoming point 'n' click adventure, *Runaway – A Road Adventure*. Could it save the genre?

THE PASSING OF a genre is sometimes mourned but more often celebrated. Who really misses progressive rock, fluorescent socks, eight-track tapes or mullet hairstyles? Still, it came as something of a shock when Revolution Software's Charles Cecil, creator of the *Broken Sword* series, announced that, although adventure games would live on, the point 'n' click genre was "dead".

Around the world, adventure fans dropped their mice in horror, while others paid no attention whatsoever because they were busy combining a rubber chicken with a pulley (one for you *Monkey Island* aficionados). Also, numerous developers in the midst of creating new point 'n' click titles thought: "No one told me it was dead."

Will the genre be missed? Charles Cecil, who's on the brink of releasing *Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon* – the first game in the series that ventures into 3D – is not so sure. "The popularity of adventures has waned over the past five years and I believe this is because the point 'n' click genre feels passé to the modern gamer, although this is not true of the adventure per se," he says.

Before we give the last rites to the wheezing old husk of point 'n' click though, perhaps we should cast our minds back to when the genre was just a young scamp.

Point 'n' click, this is your life...

Its predecessor was the text parser, hailing from the dark ages of the late '70s and early '80s. This all but lost art form, stressed story and imagination over technology and graphics (which was just as well as they were bollocks back then). Stories were written in first-person, thrusting the player into the role of protagonist, and required you to type "look in box" or "hit goblin" a lot.

Inevitably the games would respond with "I can't do that" or "I don't know how to 'f*** off'", but just before you were about to hurl your PC out the window from sheer frustration, along came *The Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy*. Created by author Douglas Adams (RIP) and Infocom founder Steve Meretzky, it was both exciting and mildly insane, sold more than 350,000 copies and heralded a glut of text-based adventures.

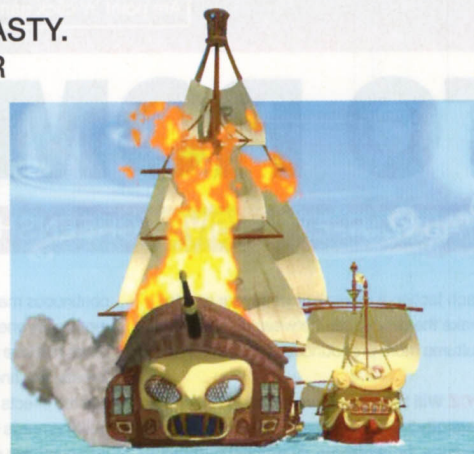
THE WONDER YEARS

By the late '80s, technology had caught up with adventure gaming and the golden era of point 'n' click began. The genre's templates were as follows: guide your character across a pre-rendered 2D background; combine items and use them on objects visible on screen; talk with everyone you encounter – even the dull ones; think laterally and solve puzzles.

With games such as *Monkey Island*, *Broken Sword*, *Gilbert Goodmate*, *Myst* and *Gabriel Knight*, point 'n' click titles sold by the bucketload and received more sequels than *Harry Potter*. With strong character development, great scripts and lush graphics, the genre was in a league of its own, providing enough different sub-categories to appeal to any gamer. There was horror (*Sanitarium*, *The Dark Eye*, *Amber*), humour (*Monkey Island*, *Day Of The Tentacle*), fantasy (*Discworld*, *Simon The Sorcerer*), mystery (*Tex Murphy*, *Sherlock Holmes*). And that's just scratching the surface.

So where did it all go wrong? Um, according to fans and developers, it didn't. In fact, the death of point 'n' click appears to be mildly exaggerated. Pendulo Studios is set to release *Runaway – A Road Adventure* in February in the UK through GMX Media, and it's already receiving promising mentions for its decent story and exotic characters.

"Point 'n' click might not have copped it just yet, but it does have a nasty cough"



LucasArts was once king of the adventure.



Syberia: a French point 'n' click (shudder).

PC ZONE'S HALL OF FAME

SOME OF THE BEST PC POINT 'N' CLICK ADVENTURES EVER CREATED BY MAN



DISCWORD NOIR

Terry Pratchett's game has a corrupt world, full of deceit, betrayal, crime and vice. Just another day in the PC ZONE office, then.



SAM & MAX HIT THE ROAD

Based on a Steve Purcell comic, this is the best adventure ever to star a dog detective and a hyperkinetic rabbit-thing.



LONGEST JOURNEY

A complex tale of parallel worlds to match *Wizard Of Oz* or *Alice In Wonderland*, with a soaring soundtrack and inspired voice acting.



ESCAPE FROM MONKEY ISLAND

The fourth instalment of LucasArts' piratey adventure was packed with deliciously cheesy gags.



BROKEN SWORD: SHADOW OF THE TEMPLARS

Charles Cecil's first *Broken Sword* adventure featuring the Knights Templar.



Myst III: Exile – we said in the review it was “more static screen mundanity”.

Pendolo developer, Rafael Latiegui, is not impressed by reports of the genre's demise. “It might not be in its best moment but it's certainly not dead. Games like *Syberia*, *The Longest Journey* and *Runaway* prove it. The advantages of point 'n' click is that the player uses an incredibly friendly interface and the game still looks the way many users want their games to be,” he says.

“Point 'n' click has proven that it features good, intuitive gameplay,” continues an equally peeved House of Tales developer Martin Ganteföhr (creator of *The Mystery Of The Druids* and forthcoming *The Moment Of Silence*). “Every person that has ever used a computer will immediately understand what to do and that's a great thing. It's not a ‘dead’ concept. That would be like saying ‘paper books are dead’.”

French company Microids is one of the foremost developers of contemporary adventure games, having released *Amerzone*, *Syberia*, *Post Mortem*, *Road To India*, *Zero Zone* and *Murder At The Museum* in recent years. “I've been in this industry for 15 years now and have heard many times that the point 'n' click genre was dead,” says Olivier Fontenay, vice president of development and game producer. “We all know it's wrong. It's a minor genre but it does exist, even if the media do not usually review or like most of these games.”

MIS-ADVENTURES

Fans of the genre are even more adamant that it's getting a bum deal from both the industry and media. Randy Sluganski, Pittsburgh-based editor of Justadventure.com says: “Let's be clear on one thing, few adventure gamers that I know ever complain about combining items, clicking hotspots, etc. The majority of these complaints always seem to emanate from reviewers who aren't fans of the genre... It would be just as easy for me to complain that I don't like a strategy game because it's too complicated. Is this justifiable? No.”

OK, so point 'n' click might not have copped it just yet, but it does have a nasty cough. Although *Syberia*, *Post Mortem* and *Runaway* are some of the most recent titles to hit the shelves, they are in a minority. As developer Tom Sarris said back in issue 124 of *PC ZONE*, even LucasArts – once point 'n' click pioneers (with groundbreaking titles such as *Sam & Max Hit The Road*) – are moving away from a point 'n' click style.

Charles Cecil's theory that “the interface, which was the genre's strength for so long, is too inflexible to adapt for 3D” is undoubtedly correct. But, like it or not, a market still exists for fans of the good old-fashioned linear point 'n' click 2D adventures.

“I don't like navigating in real-time 3D,” says author and *Gabriel Knight* creator Jane Jensen. “I think requiring the player to navigate a camera or move around with the keyboard is too cumbersome. I'd be more inclined to go with a point 'n' click system trying to incorporate difficulty with puzzle design and perhaps a bit of text entry.”

Fads come and go, and while adventure fans and developers agree that evolution is a large part of the gaming experience, it could be story-telling techniques that are in need of an overhaul. Perhaps these games should be marketed in places like bookstores, allowing them into the mainstream. Many fans, it seems, are content to continue being served by a simple interface. Point 'n' click is dead, long live point 'n' click!



Gabriel Knight breast-feeds his baby.



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THE MAN WHO KNOWS

THE VIOLENT FANTASY world of *Counter-Strike* has spilled over into real life, culminating in a mass brawl and near fatal shooting. According to reports, a fight broke out between rival clan members at a California cybercafé. Between five and eight shots were heard, and one participant was hit in the leg, causing warm arcs of leaking life-juice to stain the sidewalk like so much crimson piss. The incident happened at at the San Fernando Internet Café following a clan-based tournament involving the popular terrorist simulator. An eye-witness squealed: "They threw a chair at someone's head, then two people started running, and that's where they pulled out a gun and started shooting." It is not known who won the tournament.

Meanwhile, the average life expectancy of cybercafé users fell further following the death of yet another gamer in the Far East. The third incident of its type in recent months, the latest fatality involved a 28-year-old man who collapsed and died following a mere six-hour session of *Diablo II*. Doctors believe the lengthy period of time sat in the same position caused fatal thrombosis. Either that or he died of boredom.

Tragically too late to save that particular victim, an Antipodean boffin has warned of the dangers of too much gaming. Professor Barry Taylor of Otago University in New Zealand has claimed that playing games for extended periods can damage your joints (just skin up beforehand, surely?). The egghead revealed that it is dangerous to play games without a break, and has suggested an unlikely regime of one hour on, and one hour off. Taylor lisped: "With some children it can start a vicious cycle where you start to get pain, and they stop you moving that particular joint. Then you start to get a frozen shoulder, or wrist." That's not games, Doc.

Further sully of the shining image of interactive entertainment comes from a Welsh man with a girl's name. Following recent high profile shootings, Labour MP and culture minister Kim Howells issued a broadside against violent games. Speaking in oversized chip wrapper, *The Independent*, he blasted the perfectly harmless hobby, accusing games of creating a "pornography of violence" and of "playing to the lowest common denominator, which is a kind of vicarious pleasure in spilling blood."

He added: "I don't think a child is going to turn out a killer or more violent as a consequence of playing games, but it's the acceptance of that heartlessness that's at the centre of all those kind of games, the joy of shooting innocent bystanders or running them over in a car." Wuss.

"A man of 28 collapsed and died after a six hour *Diablo II* sesh"

SPACE AGE

ALL ABOARD *HARBINGER* FOR A SCI-FI ROLE-PLAYING BLASTER

FOR THE PAST few months it's been as quiet as the farthest reaches of the solar system regarding Silverback Entertainment's action-packed RPG *Harbinger*. But then the silence was broken as product manager for publisher Dreamcatcher Games, Brian Gladman, recently chatted to *PC Zone* about this promising sci-fi epic.

"While *Harbinger* brings all the RPG stuff you expect, such as quests, inventory management, NPC interaction, trading and stuff, I think the thing that most people will love about the game is the art direction and the animations," enthuses Gladman. "The Silverback guys have done an outstanding job melding 2D graphics with 3D acceleration. The game just looks so cool!"

Harbinger is set on a massive warship populated with various nasty alien races such as the Vantir, which is travelling the universe cleansing planets of civilisations and experimenting on the unfortunate survivors in strange laboratories. As one of three escapee characters (a human, a robot called the Gladiator and an energy-harnessing creature called a Culibine) you must scavenge technology and weapons to ally with treacherous warlords, complete dangerous missions and advance the labyrinthine plot.

Silverback has designed the battle system in *Harbinger* to be very accessible, with a left click on the mouse for a primary ranged attack, and a right click for secondary melee attack. "The neat little twist is the targeting system," continues

"*Harbinger* is set on a massive warship populated with various nasty alien races"



Enemies include the Bowel Horse. Jesus.

Gladman. "For example, if you're being attacked by a squad of Vantir, you can start firing on the closest one, then move your cursor to another enemy. When your initial target is destroyed, you'll automatically target the second enemy, which is really handy during frantic firefights."

In development for over two years, Gladman believes that *Harbinger* will bring a real freshness to the RPG genre on its launch later this year. "Personally, I'm tired of slaying dragons with my +12 Sword of Truth. I much more enjoy firing at robots with my +8 Plasma Rifle!"

- Publisher: Dreamcatcher Games
- Developer: Silverback Entertainment
- ETA: Q2 2003
- Website: www.silverbackgames.com



Go West

CONQUER THE OLD FRONTIER IN WILD WEST RTS AMERICA II

AH, THE IRONY. Americans would call them the greatest enemies of freedom in the 20th Century, and yet here they are, a bunch of Germans and Russians, re-telling US history for our filthy, decadent Western consumption.

The company is Exortus, a Russo-Germanic axis of evil, aka developer of fine real-time strategy games, and their current devious scheme is a good-looking 3D RTS called *America II*.

Looking something like *Highland Warriors* in the Wild West,



You'll have to combat random outlaws such as Billy The Kid.

the game's set in the time of cowboys and indians, swift-wristed gunslingers, smallpox, and wagon trains full of frontier spirit. Five different sides are playable – Apache, Comanche, Mexican, Americans and the miners, each of which having their own single-player campaign.

Our favourite aspect of the game so far is the humour and imagination of the many unit types, which include a busty miner's wench who can charm her way into

enemy compounds and even 'raise the morale' of her compatriots.

There's also a sixth non-playable side made up of outlaws such as Calamity Jane who appear in all multiplayer games, a feature designed to stop sneaky players from using that most annoying of tactics: the 'rush'.

- Publisher: Data Becker
- Developer: Exortus
- ETA: Summer 2003
- Website: www.exortus.com

? TRUE OR FALSE
A cowboy's Ten Gallon hat was a Stetson that could hold up to ten gallons of water.
(answer below)

FOGGING HELL

MYSTERIOUS MONKS AND SINISTER WEATHER? WELCOME TO *MISTMARE*

NEW INFORMATION has been unearthed about the forthcoming action role-playing game *Mistmare*. As an inquisitor monk known as Isador, you must hunt down a murderer suspected of being the antichrist in an alternative medieval Europe that is like a gothic version of the reality, shrouded in a strange, unearthly fog.

"The people are living in a terrifying world," says David Modic, CEO of developer Sinister Systems. "Whenever someone wanders into the fog, it produces horrific creatures made from the person's darkest nightmares. The monsters either drive the person insane, or kill them."

Mistmare begins with Isador possessing very basic skills for sword fighting and spell-casting, but you can develop these attributes during the adventure to make yourself more powerful. "Almost anything Isador does has some

"Whenever someone wanders into the fog, it produces horrific creatures made from the person's darkest nightmares"

quantifiable effect on his stats," continues Modic. "If he, for instance, hack 'n' slashes all the time, he becomes really proficient in that area. He can also interact with different objects, so if he tolls the Bells of Vivacity in a nearby church for example, his agility, stamina and speed increase." The Bells of Vivacity?

The spell system promises to be unique, allowing Isador to unleash frightening musical chords against enemies to destroy their sanity, which is apparently very similar to the effect of playing Westlife's latest caterwauling at full

volume. "Isador also has a special weapon called the Sharpness of Scythe which allows him to trap nightmare creatures into crystals scattered across the game and release them again as minions fighting on his side." We'll hopefully have a full preview of *Mistmare* in next month's bumper birthday *PC Zone*.

■ **Publisher:** Mindscape
■ **Developer:** Arxel Tribe/Sinister Systems
■ **ETA:** March 7
■ **Website:** mistmare.arxeltribe.com



Mistmare's full of nightmarish monsters.



"I'm an inquisitor, get me out of here!"



Players can twist time to their advantage.

SHORTS

SPECTOR IN DA ZONE



Featured above is one of the latest screenshots from Warren Spector's eagerly-awaited sequel to *Deus Ex*. The futuristic first-person adventure *Deus Ex 2: Invisible War* is set 20 years after the original title, and according to Spector himself, will feature a totally re-designed player interface and phenomenal gameplay. You can find out much more about DX2 in next month's *PC Zone* when we'll have the world's first hands-on playtest, brand new never-seen-before screenshots and an exclusive interview with Spector himself. Don't miss it!

MORE-CRAFT III

Magical creatures rejoice! Blizzard has announced that an expansion pack for *Warcraft III* is planned for release sometime this year. *Warcraft III: The Frozen Throne* continues the war in Azeroth, and bestows each race with an extra hero and a bunch of new units. Other exciting features include an advanced world editor, new multiplayer maps and three new tilesets. More soon.

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HUNGRY LIKE THE WOLF

TASTY NEW SCREENSHOTS OF THE ACTION GAME *X-MEN: WOLVERINE'S REVENGE*



Wolffy is helped by a telepathic link with Xavier.



Mark "Luke Skywalker" Hamill does voice-overs.

AS THE SECOND *X-Men* movie nears its May 2 launch date, Activision has just released new PC screenshots of its upcoming third-person action adventure *X-Men: Wolverine's Revenge*. Focussing on the popular *X-Men* character of Wolverine – played by Hugh Jackman in the films – the lupine superhero has only 48 hours to battle a sinister organisation for the antidote to a terrifying X-Virus.

As Wolverine, you can make spaghetti of your enemies with the trademark adamantium claws, as well as call on other powers during a fight, such as being able to heal yourself in seconds. Slapheaded professor Charles Xavier is always on hand to offer advice, plus you can team up with other brutal X-Men such as Beast to take on the evil Magneto and his cohorts in both stealth and action-based levels.

Developed by Livesay Technologies for the PC, *X-Men: Wolverine's Revenge* will be smashing its way onto PC in May when we'll find out if its x-cellent or a complete howler.

- Publisher: Activision
- Developer: Livesay Technologies
- ETA: May
- Website: www.livetech.com



A wolf from behind? No thanks.

TRUE OR FALSE
One of Wolverine's biggest Marvel enemies is actually The Incredible Hulk.
(answer below)



“What can I say? We're undeniably late and we know it. We've switched engines a couple of times, and we've started over a couple of times. We've made some mistakes and we've learned from them.”

3D Realms chairman George Broussard after receiving a Vapourware of the Year award for Duke Nukem Forever from *Wired* magazine. Five years in development and counting....

“I'd love to make a game that didn't include a single weapon! I'm so bored with virtual violence...”

Deus Ex creator Warren Spector gives peace a chance.

“Whatever is hottest on the streets will always attract a small number of idiots... Films and computer games glorify guns far more than music and have a wider impact.”

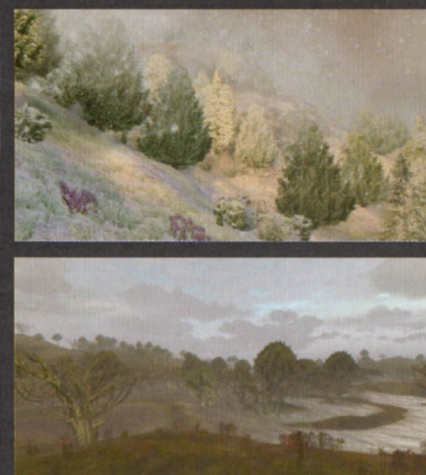
BBC Radio 1Xtra DJ Iyare passes the buck on allegations that rap and garage music make gun culture more attractive.

WOT NO DRAGONS?

CODEMASTERS UNVEILS ENVIRONMENTS FOR *DRAGON EMPIRES*



You can just make out a dragon behind the fourth tree on the left.



LOOKING AT these peaceful, pastoral screenshots of *Dragon Empires*, Codemasters appears to be preparing a beautifully detailed fantasy world ready to be laid to waste by fiery monsters this autumn. The online multiplayer game will feature clan-based combat, where you'll be able to forge or break alliances with other tribes and interact with a dynamic economic and political system.

Codemasters promises that you'll be able to travel through the different terrain types seamlessly, and that the environments will be teeming with detail such as individually-animated trees and water that realistically reflects the sky in real-time.

Of course, as well as nature-spotting, you'll have to watch out for the terrifying dragons that will be swooping down to join in on the action over the next few months as Beta testing commences. Incidentally, if you'd like to take part in these early playtests, you can register online at the *Dragon Empires* website below.

- Publisher: Codemasters
- Developer: Codemasters
- ETA: Autumn 2003
- Website: www.codemasters.com/dragonempires



COMPETITION

THE SIMS ONLINE

WIN COPIES OF *THE SIMS ONLINE* AND A STATE-OF-THE-ART GAMES PC WORTH OVER £1000!

First Prize: Advent Games PC plus a copy of *The Sims Online*

Runners-up Prizes: Four copies of *The Sims Online*



Advent PC specs:

Processor P4 2.66GHz | **Memory** 256 DDR
Hard Drive 60Gb | **Multimedia** 16xDVD and 40xCD-RW
Graphics 64Mb GeForce 4, MX | **Monitor Size** 17in

THE SIMS ONLINE is the latest blockbuster PC release to feature Will Wright's army of little computer people. Now thanks to Electronic Arts, we're offering you the chance to win one of five copies of the game, with one lucky reader also grabbing the top prize of an extremely desirable Advent Intel Pentium 4 2.66GHz games PC worth more than £1000! (See specs above for details.)

Developed by Maxis, *The Sims Online* finally takes the popular franchise onto the Net, where you'll be able to join other *Sims* addicts and build huge virtual communities. As your chosen Sim, you'll be able to flirt, date and host parties online, hopefully

creating a successful business along the way (such as a Muscle Beach or a Haunted Dungeon) to earn cash to buy cool stuff and enjoy an even

healthier social life. Unique new additions to *The Sims Online* include the ability to chat live online with thousands of other players and club together with *Sims* friends to buy a communal house. For the full definitive review turn to page 72.

Fancy your chances? Well, to enter the competition all you have to do is answer the Sim-ple (do you see what we did there?) question on the right and send it on a postcard to the usual PC ZONE address.



WHAT IS THE NAME OF THE CURRENCY USED IN THE SIMS GAMES?

- A: Groats
- B: Simoleans
- C: Euros

Send your answer on a postcard, along with all the information requested, to the address below:

■ Please include your name, address, daytime phone number and email address (and age if under 18).

■ Please tell us if you do not wish to receive details of further special offers from companies other than Dennis Publishing Ltd.

■ Please indicate whether or not you are a current subscriber to PC ZONE.

Send your entry to: *The Sims Online* Competition, PC ZONE, 30 Cleveland St, London W1T 4JD. (Closing date: Thursday, March 6, 2003).

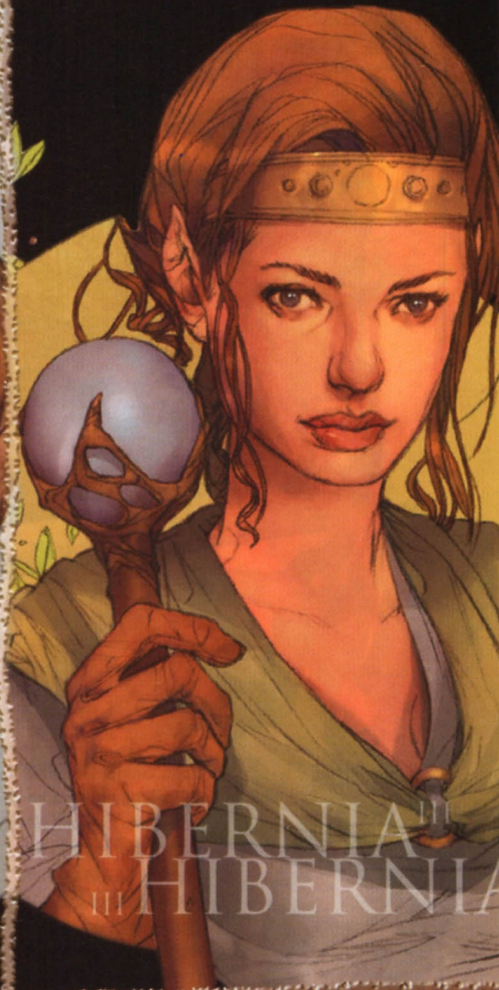
Terms and conditions: Winners will be notified by post. No cash alternative. Prizes not necessarily as shown. No correspondence will be entered into. The editor's decision is final. All the other usual competition rules, conditions and restrictions apply.

THE WORLD IS AT WAR, NOW CHOOSE YOUR CAMP

Protect the Realm
of King Arthur

Put terror in
the heart of
your enemies

The Elves and
the Celts,
are guardians
of life



ALBION
ALBION

MIDGARD
MIDGARD

HIBERNIA
HIBERNIA

available in february, the first official expansion, Shrouded Isles



thousands of players throughout europe, 15 races, hordes of monsters and quests fully localised in french

EMULATION ZONE

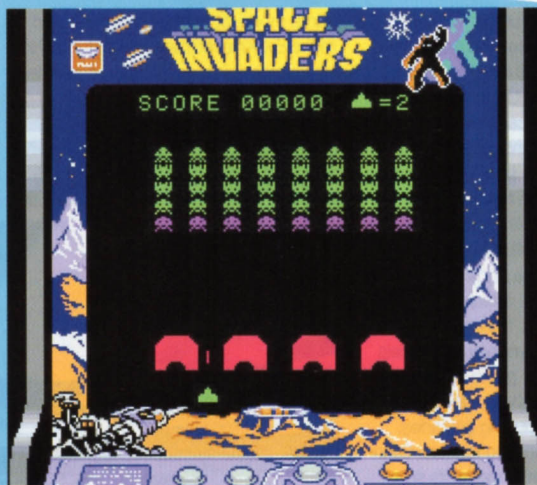
Breaking news from the world of emulation, with retro reanimator **Stuart Campbell**

WHEN THE WORD 'SUPER' WASN'T JUST FOR SPIFFS

One of Nintendo's weirder ideas, and one which the company has just revived for the GameCube and GBA, was the Super Game Boy. In 1991, just as the first wave of popularity for the original mono version of the handheld was beginning to wane, Nintendo came up with a strange piece of hardware that plugged into the cartridge slot of a SNES console and enabled gamers to do something which had previously been the preserve of magazine reviewers – play Game Boy games on a TV screen.

Not only could you now enjoy your GB games in big-o-vision, but the SGB also offered a variety of cosmetic enhancements. Games now came with elaborate screen 'frames', but more excitingly – these were the days long before the GB Color, remember – also offered rudimentary colour schemes, which could be customised to your personal taste. So if you wanted to make Mario into a little blue chap in Rupert-the-Bear dungarees, you could. Weirdo.

Still more impressively, some Game Boy games even squeezed proper SNES



Some games attempted to recreate the feel of the arcade... ...others tried to make your TV look like a handheld again.

titles into the tiny GB cartridge alongside the GB game itself. *Space Invaders*, when played through the Super Game Boy, offered not only the enhanced Game Boy version of the game, but also a full SNES port with full-blown SNES graphics and sound. (The SNES version of *Space Invaders* was never released in the UK, in fact, so the GB cart with a

Super Game Boy was the only way you could legally play it here.)

Most GB emulators overlook the features of the Super Game Boy, but at last there are a couple which do this bizarre peripheral justice. Best of them is BGB, a well-implemented GB emu in its own right, but which also offers full SGB functionality. Only about 70 games ever

took full advantage of the SGB's powers, but all the ones that did offer up examples of the kind of loving attention to detail that you only ever seem to find in Japan.

LINKS

www.tomaatnet.nl/~steendijk/bgb/ – BGB homepage

EMULATION OF THE MONTH

KIKAIQH (CAPCOM, ARCADE, 1998)



Hey, you could have someone's eye out with that.

Speaking of the Japanese, if there's one thing our gaming pals on the other side of the planet love (more than schoolgirl-dating games, obviously), it's giant robots whopping the bejeezus out of each other. Most 'mecha' games are all but impenetrable to normal sane people, but this one really does stand out as being comprehensible.

Kikaioh is at heart a pretty standard one-on-one fighting game, but instead of poncy little kung-fu kicks and weedy rabbit punches, the 1000-foot-high pre-fabricated protagonists get to hurl colossal missiles and devastating atomic grenades at each other in

ludicrously over-the-top bouts of metal monster mayhem that'll bring a smile to the face of even the most sceptical beat 'em up hater. Even if you have no clue what you're doing, just thrashing away at the fire buttons is enough to provide near-endless amusement as the lumbering behemoths swing million-ton metal fists at each other in such a hugely kinetic manner that static screenshots just can't do them justice. It's brainless in every sense, but no less fun for it.

LINKS

www.emuhype.com
– Zinc emulator homepage



Milton Keynes, tomorrow.



VISUAL PINBALL UPDATE

For much of 2002, the Visual Pinball community was hijacked and crippled by an obnoxious bunch of wreckers who drove away most of the scene's most talented authors in an acrimonious ego war which looked like it might destroy the superb pinball emulator altogether. Happily, the crisis has recently been averted by the creation of a new home for the VP community, to which most VP authors have now returned, and from where they've been bestowing fantastic recreations of arcade pins on grateful silver-ball fans once again. Pinball lovers should hurry along there.

LINKS

www.vpforums.com
– Visual Pinball community homepage



Pinball: Not just for Americans.



Martyn Brown, development director of Team 7

DEVELOPERS' QUESTION TIME

What PC games are you playing at the moment?

Sim Golf. I had a stint at *Warcraft III* and also *Age Of Mythology*, but I keep going back to *Sim Golf* because it's something I can dip in and out of. I love *Sid Meier's* stuff – I met him once at E3 and was a bit awe-struck.

What was the last game you finished?

I was one play from finishing *Ratchet & Clank* on PlayStation 2 at Christmas, but my 19 month-old son managed to erase my save! Before that it was perhaps *GoldenEye* and *Zelda: Ocarina Of Time* on the Nintendo 64.

What is your favourite game of all time?

That's nasty. I'd probably say *Civilization* (in its many versions/forms). I've probably put the most hours into it. Too many, really.

What's your proudest career moment?

Aside from collecting the Publisher of the Year award from Jonathan Ross at the Golden Joysticks in 1993, it's probably when my first game on the ZX Spectrum was reviewed in *Crash* magazine in 1985.

Who do you most admire in the games industry?

Another nasty one – you're making a habit of this. I've got to say probably *Sid Meier*, for his dedication to balanced gameplay and software that's almost endlessly approachable and enjoyable.

What has the PC contributed most to videogaming?

I'd probably say accessibility and flexibility. I like a lot of the PC community-based titles, which allow players to contribute their own material and share it with others. Only the PC makes this possible.

What is your company's philosophy?

We have great pride in trying to create very playable, crafted games which will be socially playable (either locally or online) and offer almost endless replayability.

What's the best thing about your job?

Undoubtedly working with some terrific, intelligent, inventive and creative people.

What's the worst thing about your job?

Running the studio. It's perhaps when things don't work out, when I've had to bite the bullet on projects and can them, or even worse on the few occasions when I've had to let people go – that's not pleasant.

What are you working on now?

Worms 3 and another title I can't mention.

What's the Next Big Thing for PC?

It would be nice to see the PC as a consistent platform, instead of this techno-race, but I think it's really going to be a convergence of a number of technologies – broadband and super-fast processors, etc.

Pole Position



INSANE CAR COMBAT FROM CRACOW IN ARMOBILES

POLISH GAMES company Ganymede Technologies has announced its intentions to release a new smash 'em up racing game in the UK this year. *Armobiles* is a fast, arcade-style combat title where turbo-enhanced techno vehicles battle it out in single-player and multiplayer missions in a split-screen mode and across LANs.

Set in the year 2009 (whoa! – steady on chaps...), the game signs you up with the Armobile Squad, a military organisation who have the unenviable task of transporting dangerous materials around the globe. The game offers you a choice of six cars, each equipped with different weapons including grenades, machine guns and homing rockets. Other James Bond-style enhancements such as shields and invisibility generators can be made use of too.

Courses range from a mad dash around the Nevada desert, to a fight to the death in an old German submarine base, with a honed physics engine that boasts realistic damage and pick-up-and-play handling. In addition to racing, *Armobiles* will also offer an explosive Demolition Derby mode as well as a

Jump mode for pulling off stunts that'd make Evil Knievel mess his costume. No UK publisher yet – we'll keep you posted.

■ **Publisher:** TBC
 ■ **Developer:** Ganymede Technologies
 ■ **ETA:** 2003
 ■ **Website:** www.Ganymede.com.pl



The game also includes a driving school to hone your *Armobiles* skills in.

BROTHERS IN ARMS

EXCLUSIVE! BITMAP BROTHERS' WWII RTS GETS NEW PUBLISHER



AI soldiers are able to ambush you.



WWII:FC supports four players online.



Powerful visual effects are promised.

IN LAST month's *PC ZONE*, we mentioned that little had been heard of real-time strategy game *WWII: Frontline Command* since it missed a proposed release date last autumn and was removed from publisher Codemasters' website. Well, it appears that the promising Bitmap Brothers title has since been picked up by another publisher, Koch Media, who is lining up a new launch day in May.

WWII: Frontline Command is a fully 3D RTS set just before the 1944 D-Day landings, and features 25 single-player and ten online multiplayer missions. "It's very comprehensive but also very simple to pick up and play," said creative director Jamie Barber to *PC ZONE*. "There are two skill levels that can be played – Recruit mode is very arcadey, whereas Veteran mode will test even the most hardcore of PC gamers."

Missions take place in numerous European locations and vary from eliminating specific enemy targets, to rescuing people from POW camps and

recovering important documentation and intelligence information. Your troops have a morale rating, which basically means the more you look after your fellas, the better they'll perform in battle. "They'll be boosted by taking out the enemy, and will suffer if too many of their mates die in front of them," continued Barber. "When morale reaches a maximum they will enter 'Hero' mode, and when this happens soldiers with grenades can take out tanks in one go, for example."

WWII: Frontline Command could be a mighty strategy title for the Bitmaps, but why all the publisher/release date shenanigans? "I could tell you," added Barber, "but then again I know what happened to M16's David Shayler..."

? TRUE OR FALSE
 The Bitmap Brothers' isometric action adventure *The Chaos Engine* never spawned a sequel.
 (answer below)

■ **Publisher:** Koch Media
 ■ **Developer:** The Bitmap Brothers
 ■ **ETA:** May
 ■ **Website:** www.bitmap-brothers.co.uk

VIVA LAS VEGAS!

MONOPOLY TYCOON DEVELOPER DEEP RED GAMBLES ON VEGAS: MAKE IT BIG

AFTER THE announcement of the Konami/Hothouse Creations *Casino, Inc* in last issue, another UK developer – Deep Red – is entering the gambling establishment business with *Vegas: Make It Big*. Does this mean there is going to be a bloody Mafia-style power struggle for control of the PC's casinos?

Well, Deep Red certainly has the pedigree when it comes to real-time cash-making sims, having developed the acclaimed *Monopoly Tycoon* and

most recently, *Beach Life*. Your job in *Vegas: Make It Big* will be to build a casino and keep it ticking over with gambling tables, semi-nude showgirls, breakfast bars and strip-joints.

You can adopt suitably kitsch decor for your joint from one of ten specially-created themes including Mayan pyramids and Japanese neon. But Deep Red is also planning to provide gamers the tools to create their own vision for the ultimate Vegas experience – PC

ZONE is already looking forward to running the Elvis Presley casino, complete with slot machines that pay out with cheeseburgers. We'll have more money-shots of *Vegas: Make It Big* and a hands-on preview very soon. Thankyouverymuch...

- Publisher: Empire
- Developer: Deep Red
- ETA: June
- Website: www.deepred.co.uk



"There are triplets in my casino. Get them out."



Your joint will have to compete with others on the strip.

Good Cop. Bad Cop

THE UPS AND DOWNS OF A MONTH ON PC ZONE

GOOD COP



Unreal II – the exclusive review. Stunning.

Playing an early version of Konami's *ISS 3* for PC. Finally, we have a rival to *FIFA*.

Yes! Telewest Broadband for finally giving Angry Sefton his cable TV back – with free Sky Sports!

Martin and Rhianna's Best of British photoshoot on page 28.

BAD COP



The Sims Online managing to knacker three of our PCs. Little digital bastards.

The pain! Returning to the gym after Christmas/New Year excesses.

UK games company **Rage Software** going into receivership. RIP.

PC ZONE's favourite local greasy spoon that closed down then re-opened with new owners who struggle even to make decent buttered toast.

Good cop: **Dempsey** Bad cop: **Makepeace** (from *Dempsey And Makepeace* – sent in by Jim Griffiths, Lancaster). Send in your suggestions for next month's Good Cop and Bad Cop to win a PC goodie bag!

PC ZONE WANTS YOU!

JOB VACANCY: EDITORIAL ASSISTANT

DO YOU WANT to work for your favourite games magazine? Because we're on the lookout for someone with a passion for games and supreme skill with words.

You'll be expected to...

- Write clear, concise and witty copy.
- Pitch in with general day-to-day running of the mag.
- Help with admin and paperwork.

Formal qualifications to degree level are beneficial but not essential (education to A-level standard is a requirement), but you must be enthusiastic, know your PC games inside out and have the ability to work in a small team while under pressure.

If this sounds like your cup of tea (and yes, you'll be expected to make these on a daily basis too) then send a sample review (no more than 250 words) for a game that you've particularly enjoyed in the last six months, along with a CV and covering letter (stating current salary if applicable) to Dave Woods, PC ZONE, Dennis Publishing, 30 Cleveland St, London, W1T 4JD.



BEAST MASTERS

The latest screens from hybrid online RTS/action game *Savage*

MULTIPLAYER-ONLY title *Savage* appears to be nearing completion, and we've got these brand new screenshots fresh from the good ol' US of A to prove it. *Savage* takes the traditional elements of real-time strategy but instead of using computer AI-controlled troops, adds online human players.

The game is set in a brutal world where battles are raging between humans armed with advanced technological weaponry, and beasts who can call upon nature and magical powers. You can choose to play as a commander or a footsoldier. As the former, *Savage* becomes a complex RTS, where you have to manage resources and troop deployment, taking care not to send too many of your online comrades to their deaths, and risking them voting you out.

In the action mode, you have to obey your commander's orders and co-ordinate attacks against enemies in third-person combat with other online grunts. If *Savage* manages to successfully meld the two genres, it will be worth hunting down – although developer S2 Games has yet to seal a UK publishing deal in the UK.

- Publisher: TBC
- Developer: S2 Games
- ETA: 2003
- Website: www.s2games.com



Fight on the frontlines or sip coffee back at HQ. Up to you.

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



Will *The Sims: Unleashed* ever be toppled? For the fourth month in a row, the animal-loving people simulator is the best-selling PC game in the UK. Not only that, but another *Sims* game *Hot Date* has re-entered the chart at number eight!



Although it's down one place from last month, the *Medal Of Honor* expansion pack is still doing the business at number three. *Spearhead* is packed with new Nazis to kill and missions to fulfil, as well as a new multiplayer mode called Tug of War.

	TITLE	PUBLISHER	SCORE
1	THE SIMS: UNLEASHED	EA	78%
2	THE SIMS: DELUXE EDITION	EA	N/A
3	MEDAL OF HONOR: AA – SPEARHEAD	EA	82%
4	AGE OF MYTHOLOGY	MICROSOFT	90%
5	THE SIMS: ON HOLIDAY	EA	66%
6	RE WARCRAFT III: REIGN OF CHAOS	VU GAMES	85%
7	RE MEDAL OF HONOR: ALLIED ASSAULT	EA	94%
8	RE THE SIMS: HOT DATE	EA	71%
9	RE GRAND THEFT AUTO III	ROCKSTAR	95%
10	RE MAFIA	TAKE 2	92%



At number six, *Warcraft III* has the highest placing of five re-entries in this month's top ten. The Blizzard-developed RTS is still selling well and the announcement of an expansion pack (see page 15) will only add to the title's long-term popularity.



Rockstar's magnificently violent action game *GTA III* makes a welcome return to the charts at number nine, with the *Vice City* sequel set for release on PC later in the year. Interestingly, another superb PC crim-sim *Mafia* has also just made a re-entry.

YOUR SHOUT

Have your say at www.pczone.co.uk

"Turn the table upside down and it looks more respectable. Hopefully some of the big games this year will finally remove *The Sims* from the chart. I foresee *Champ Man 4* going in at number one and staying there a long time."
MonkeysMan

"If I was bringing out any game at all, I would call it *The Sims* just so it would chart. No one interested in your newest *Might & Magic* regurgitation? Call it *The Sims: Dress Up And Play Dungeons And Dragons*."
C8ken

"Roll on *Splinter Cell* to take it's rightful place as the king of the castle! Developers of this game take note – you HAVE the power to knock *The Sims* once and for all out of the Charts!"
Jason_6780



TOP 10

1	AGE OF MYTHOLOGY	MICROSOFT
2	JAMES BOND 007: NIGHTFIRE	EA
3	THE SIMS: UNLEASHED	EA
4	HARRY POTTER: COS	EA
5	THE LORD OF THE RINGS: TFOTR	BLACK LABEL
6	FIFA 2003	EA
7	MEDAL OF HONOR: AA – SPEARHEAD	EA
8	ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON 2	INFOGRAMES
9	COMBAT FLIGHT SIMULATOR 3	MICROSOFT
10	MEDIEVAL: TOTAL WAR	ACTIVISION

COMPETITION



Win the entire Virgin Top 10!

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

QUESTION: What is the name of the final book in JRR Tolkien's *The Lord Of The Rings* trilogy?

Answers on a postcard to: PC ZONE Chart Compo (CPCZ03A), Dennis Publishing, PO Box 154, Bradford BD1 5RZ. Closing date: March 6, 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

FEBRUARY

AMERICAN CONQUEST	CDV
ANNO 1503	EA
BREATH OF FIRE IV	CAPCOM
CASINO, INC	KONAMI
COMMAND & CONQUER: GENERALS	EA
DINO CRISIS 2	CAPCOM
GROM	CDV
HEARTS OF IRON	KOCH MEDIA
IGI 2: COVERT STRIKE	CODEMASTERS
INQUISITION	WANADOO
MEGA MAN X6	CAPCOM
PRAETORIANS	EIDOS
SHADOW OF MEMORIES	KONAMI
SILENT HILL 2: DIRECTOR'S CUT	KONAMI
SPLINTER CELL	UBI SOFT
TOCA RACE DRIVER	CODEMASTERS
TRAILER PARK TYCOON	JALECO
UNREAL II: THE AWAKENING	INFOGRAMES

MARCH

AQUANOX 2: REVELATION	JOWOOD
BLITZKRIEG	CDV
CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 4	EIDOS
DELTA FORCE: BLACK HAWK DOWN	NOVALOGIC
DEVASTATION	NOVALOGIC
ECHOLON: WIND WARRIORS	OXYGEN
GI COMBAT	MINDSCAPE
GOTHIC II	JOWOOD
INDIANA JONES AND THE EMPEROR'S TOMB	ACTIVISION
IRU: TALES FROM THE EDGE OF THE WORLD	MICROIDS
JURASSIC PARK: OPERATION GENESIS	VU GAMES
O.R.B.	MINDSCAPE
POST MORTEM	MICROIDS
RAINBOW SIX: RAVEN SHIELD	UBI SOFT
RAYMAN 3: HOODLUM HAVOC	UBI SOFT
RISE OF NATIONS	MICROSOFT
STRIKE FIGHTER	JUST FLIGHT
THE GREAT ESCAPE	SCI
THE SIMS ONLINE	EA
TRON 2.0	DISNEY
VIETCONG	TAKE 2
WARRIOR KINGS - BATTLES	EMPIRE
WILL ROCK	UBI SOFT

APRIL

APOCALYPTICA	KONAMI
CHASER	JOWOOD
FREELANCER	MICROSOFT
METAL GEAR SOLID 2: SUBSTANCE	KONAMI
REPUBLIC: THE REVOLUTION	EIDOS
TROPICO 2: PIRATE COVE	TAKE 2

MAY

COLIN MCRAE RALLY 3	CODEMASTERS
CRUSADERS - BATTLE FOR OUTREMER	WANADOO
HARBINGER	DREAMCATCHER
ISS 3	KONAMI
LOTUS CHALLENGE	XICAT
SOLDNER - SECRET WARS	JOWOOD
STALKER: OBLIVION LOST	CDV
STAR TREK: ELITE FORCE II	ACTIVISION
TOMB RAIDER: THE ANGEL OF DARKNESS	EIDOS
X-MEN: WOLVERINE'S REVENGE	ACTIVISION

TBA

DEUS EX 2: INVISIBLE WAR	EIDOS
DUKE NUKEM FOREVER	TAKE 2
BLACK & WHITE 2	EA
GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY	TAKE 2
HALF-LIFE 2	VU GAMES
HALO	MICROSOFT
MACE GRIFFIN BOUNTY HUNTER	EA
MAX PAYNE 2	TAKE 2
QUAKE IV	ACTIVISION

MISSING IN ACTION

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

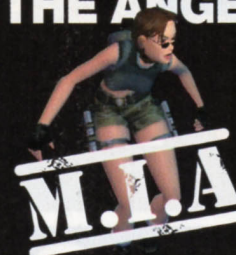
SPLINTER CELL

AFTER OUR world exclusive review last issue, Ubi Soft has delayed the release of its stealth 'em up until late February. Why? Well, the game's finished, but apparently the company wasn't happy with graphics card compatibility and copy protection.

- **Publisher:** Ubi Soft
- **Developer:** Ubi Soft Montreal
- **ETA:** February 28
- **Website:** www.splintercell.co.uk



TOMB RAIDER: THE ANGEL OF DARKNESS



LARA CROFT is looking like she's going to stand us up for the second time. Yep, although Eidos is still officially clinging to a February release, we haven't even seen preview code of *The Angel Of Darkness* yet. Our guess is the earliest you'll see the curvy action heroine returning to the PC is May.

- **Publisher:** Eidos
- **Developer:** Core Design
- **ETA:** Q2 2003
- **Website:** www.tombraider.com

STAR TREK: ELITE FORCE II

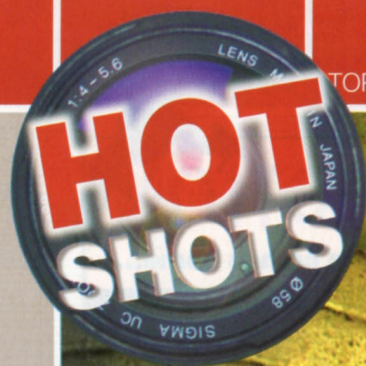
THE VOYAGER has managed to get lost in the deepest reaches of space, with its March release having gone down a black hole. Developed by Ritual (also currently working on *Counter-Strike: Condition Zero*), *Elite Force II* should be with us by early summer.

- **Publisher:** Activision
- **Developer:** Ritual Entertainment
- **ETA:** Q2 2003
- **Website:** www.ritual.com/ef2



US TOP 10

1	THE SIMS: DELUXE EDITION	EA
2	THE SIMS: UNLEASHED	EA
3	ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON 2	INFOGRAMES
4	HARRY POTTER: COS	EA
5	ZOO TYCOON	MICROSOFT
6	WARCRAFT III: REIGN OF CHAOS	VU GAMES
7	THE SIMS: ONLINE	EA
8	MEDAL OF HONOR: AA - SPEARHEAD	EA
9	THE SIMS: VACATION	EA
10	AGE OF MYTHOLOGY	MICROSOFT



WOLFENSTEIN: ENEMY

THIS STUNNING FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER IS THE FOLLOW UP TO LAST YEAR'S WORLD WAR II EPIC AND LOOKS SET TO BE THE LEADER OF THE PACK...



WHILE SOME SCEPTICS have called it a stand-alone expansion pack, *Enemy Territory* proved to be anything but during a recent three-hour playtest. In fact, even the term standalone is something of a misnomer, because whereas in most FPSs you play as a lone-wolf all-conquering hero, in *Enemy Territory* you're the leader of a squad of highly trained WWII army specialists, encompassing all the character classes from *Return To Castle Wolfenstein*'s multiplayer game, as well as adding a new spy class unit. The spy class character will be able to steal an enemy's clothes and infiltrate enemy bases without detection. An intuitive command interface will allow you to concentrate mainly on the action as you blast your way through to a Nazi super-weapon threatening to sway the course of the war.

But that's only the half of it. UK based developer Splash Damage has been brought in to concentrate solely on the multiplayer side of things. And from what we've seen so far it's looking pretty damn impressive, with teamwork and co-ordinated attacks integral to the team's success, in missions ranging from escorting tanks, infiltrating enemy bases and knocking out anti-aircraft guns to clear the way for bombing runs. It's all looking promising and we'll be bringing you a more in-depth look at this exciting FPS in the very near future.

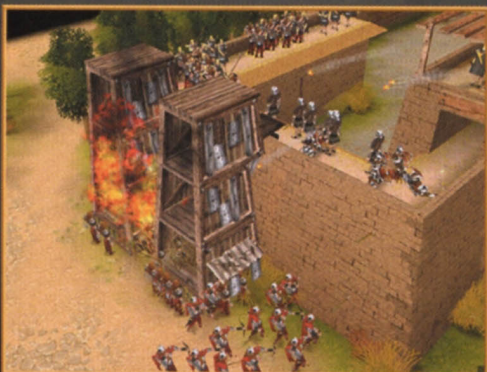
- **Publisher:** Activision
- **Developer:** Mad Doc Software/Splash Damage/id
- **ETA:** Summer 2003
- **Website:** www.maddocsoftware.com and www.splashdamage.com



TERRITORY



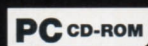
For the glory of the Empire...





PRAETORIANS

OUT 28th FEBRUARY



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THE BEST • ~OF~ BRITISH



When it comes to games development the Brits take some beating. So in the first of many monthly expeditions to uncover the cream of British games development Martin Korda says "Tally Ho!" and travels to...

GUILDFORD



FIVE THINGS YOU NEVER KNEW ABOUT... GUILDFORD

- It's a bloody expensive place to live
- Gary Carr from Mucky Foot holds the proud accolade of being the only man in Guildford to down a bottle of ketchup, eat a candle and a packet of fags and live to tell the tale.
- Favourite haunts for Guildford developers include pubs such as The Tup, Five And Lime, The Star and The Drummond (for those who haven't already been banned).
- Anthony Holden believes Guildford is a rustic village full of in-bred sheep farmers.
- So does Dave Woods.

"THE JOURNALIST HAS got to dance. Come on journalist, dance!" Had the proposition come from a five-foot-nine-blond I would have been tempted. However, the offer to gyrate on the dance floor like an epileptic gibbon with a pissed-up, bearded, six-foot-six-inch bloke was somewhat less appealing. But before I could decline, he had me by the wrists and was dragging me through the crowded pub as I struggled futilely, like a dog trying to take a piss on a passing lamp post when its owner's in a hurry to get home. Panic set in. Just as I was about to look him in the navel and demand my arms back, two hairless gorillas in suits (bald bouncers) inexplicably dragged my dance partner out of the establishment, followed by a herd of baying, bearded games developers, bristling with bolshiness induced by ten hours of necking Stella Artois and red wine.

This was the climax (which I'll explain all about later) of a whirlwind three-day tour of the UK's game development capital,

Guildford. Yes, Guildford, where many years ago in a small office above PJ Hi-Fi a developer called Bullfrog (ring a bell?) started a trend of games development companies setting up in the area. Since then, the area has flourished and attracted some of the country's most talented developers. And I got to visit them all...

WEDNESDAY

10.30am, outside the Odeon cinema. Rain lashing down like a hail of arrows, while shell-suited toothless simpletons shamble into the warmth of the cinema, brandishing buckets and mops, fixing me with the kind of looks usually reserved for suspicious brown stains on a bed sheet. My guide for the day, PR whiz Alison Beasley, was running late. No matter, we had the whole day to visit developers Kuju and Lost Toys, whom I would come to realise by the end of the day have between them more talent than a Swedish beauty pageant. A nudey one, of course.

KUJU

While you muse over the carnal delights of that thought, I'm going to fast-forward a bit, past Alison arriving, our drive to Kuju and into their boardroom, where I was met by a jovial Jonathan Newth, managing director of the company, and technical director Julian Davis. For the next hour we discussed all manner of subjects, ranging from the company's future plans for the PC, their commitment to mobile gaming, Kuju's expansion (they already have three offices and almost 150 employees) and the future of the PC. As it turns out, Jonathan is one of only two UK representatives who sit on the Microsoft DirectX advisory board, and was set to fly out to the US that afternoon to do just that. Speaking on the future of DirectX and the PC's graphical capabilities Julian said, "With DirectX 10 and the next generation of graphics cards, we're hoping there'll be no limitations on the amount of textures you'll be able to have on screen." Coo, now that is beginning to sound impressive.

After that, I was taken through two of Kuju's impending PC releases, the promising *Lotus Challenge* and *Trainsim.net*, before departing edified, though rapidly succumbing to meat withdrawal symptoms and longing for the restaurant in the heart of Guildford where we were to meet up with Lost Toys.

LOST TOYS

Darren Thomas and Glenn Corpes are both directors of the smallish but ever growing Lost Toys. Currently comprised

KUJU

PC GAMES CURRENTLY IN PRODUCTION

Fire Warrior
Lotus Challenge
Trainsim.net

We chat to...
Director Jonathan Newth



PCZ Tell us a bit about the history of Kuju...

JONATHAN Four of us originally had a company called Simis. We sold the company to Eidos. From 1995 to 1998, we were an internal studio of about 35 people there. We made *Team Apache* and *Team Alligator* to name just two games. In 1998 we took the studio back out of Eidos. So March '98 was the beginning of Kuju.

PCZ What are your plans and opinions on the future of the PC?

JONATHAN We're platform agnostic, so as long as the PC is a viable platform, we'll develop games for it. Our goal has always been to make broad-based games which can be played by anyone and everyone. We want to continue to work with the biggest and best publishers, and



Fire Warrior is a promising FPS set in the *Warhammer 40,000* universe.

to consolidate our position in the PC market and on other platforms.

PCZ Why do you think the Guildford area is still such a hotbed of games development?

JONATHAN It's a good place to recruit new talent as there's a university here. After a couple of developers set up here, others followed. But ultimately it's mainly down to the Bullfrog connection.



Ian Baverstock and Jonathan Newth.

of 18 people, they've just released the critically acclaimed *Battle Engine: Aquila* on X-Box and PS2, and are looking for a publisher for the near-completed PC version (see our First Look last issue). After the game he was working on at

Bullfrog, *Indestructible*, was canned, Glenn set up Lost Toys with Darren. "We wanted to create the games that weren't really possible to produce at Bullfrog," explained Glenn in a low voice lined with years of experience. And in *Battle Engine:*

Aquila, which I was later shown by Glenn and his hospitable team, they have a game on which they can truly build a reputation. Interestingly enough, every game which Lost Toys creates is always done on PC first, even if it doesn't lead as the retail platform. I asked the quietly spoken Darren why they didn't just develop straight on the lead platform? "It's much easier to test

LOST TOYS



The PC version of *Battle Engine: Aquila* is almost complete.

PC GAMES CURRENTLY IN PRODUCTION

Battle Engine: Aquila

We chat to...
Director Glenn Corpes



PCZ Tell us a bit about the history of Lost Toys...

GLENN In late 1998, the project that I was working on at Bullfrog, *Indestructible*, was

canned. Me and few other guys then set up Lost Toys in order to create the kind of games that weren't really possible to produce at Bullfrog. The first game we did at Lost Toys was *Moho* and for the past two years we've been working on *Battle Engine: Aquila*.

PCZ What are your opinions on the PC market?

GLENN The PC is the ultimate gaming platform. Out of the three versions of *Battle Engine: Aquila* (XBox, PS2 and PC),

the PC one is the best. The problem with the PC is the controller. Many PC gamers think that mouse and keyboard is the only way to play games. The depressing thing is that with a platform that's as open as the PC, it seems to go down just a few narrow routes. If the PC was seen as the fastest possible console, then you might see a bit more innovation.

PCZ Why do you think Guildford and the surrounding area remains such a major games development area?

GLENN Piss-ups are organised every couple of months among the Guildford developers. It's this community which has kept people and developers down here.



The talented Lost Toys team.



LIONHEAD AND BLACK & WHITE STUDIOS

PC GAMES CURRENTLY IN PRODUCTION

Black and White 2
The Movies

We chat to...
Director Peter
Molyneux



PCZ Tell us a bit about the history of Lionhead...

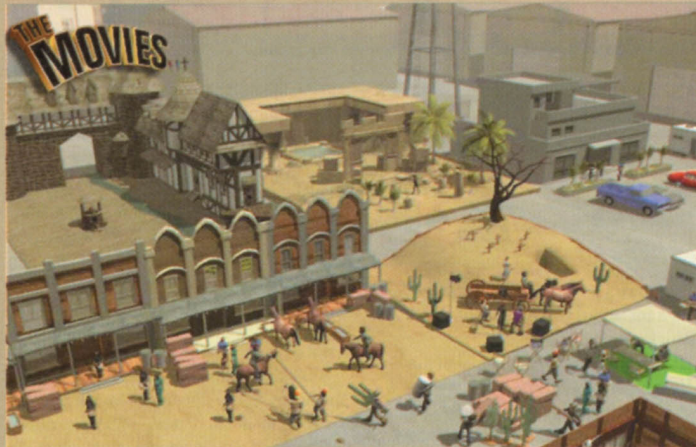
PETER Lionhead started out over a pub conversation, with me complaining to my brother-in-law about how differently life had turned out to what I'd expected after we'd sold Bullfrog. So he suggested we start a new company. We then got a couple of other people in, including my friend Steve Jackson, who co-wrote the *Fighting Fantasy* books, and a young Demis Hassabis who now owns Elixir Studios. We now have about 150 people working for us.

PCZ Lionhead has always been renowned for its originality. But why

do you think that in so many cases the gaming public has shunned so many original games?

PETER Too often, originality is the only selling point of these games. The objective

that we're trying to look at here at Lionhead is to keep things really simple – to the point that we can explain our games to anyone in just a couple of minutes. While originality plays a major role, the



The Movies is looking like being another Lionhead hit.

concept is always aimed primarily at the mass market.

PCZ Where do you see PC gaming going from here?

PETER PC gaming is very healthy. It's continuing to carve out a niche for itself. It now has many more mass-market games than it used to. However, we still haven't cracked the online side of things. We're going to start to see the evolution of stagnant genres like the RTS. Also the continuing of lifestyle games like *The Sims*. One thing's for sure, we'll still be talking about PC games in ten years time.



Some of the brains at Lionhead.

games on a PC. So you could effectively say that every game we make, leads on the PC." After several hours of deep discussion, a 12oz steak, fries, enough salad to cater for a vegetarian's convention and three litres of coke, I dragged my bloated body back to base camp, full of admiration for a team brimming with ambition, ideas and talent. Day one over. Good start.

THURSDAY

It's always a pain when a taxi shows up too early. Especially when you've gorged yourself on meat the day before and find yourself the following morning rushing out of the shitter with your kecks still flapping round your ankles in a rush to stop the driver pounding down your door.

LIONHEAD

Fortunately, I still made it to Lionhead studios on time to speak with gaming legend Peter Molyneux about some of Lionhead's and Black & White Studios' latest games, *Black & White 2* (previewed last issue) and *The Movies* (previewed on page 50). But before I experienced these gaming delights, I spent an hour discussing Guildford, games and the industry with a man who's done it all and seen just about everything games-related there is to see. In a time when so many developers and even mighty publishers have found themselves in the midst of financial catastrophes, Peter's companies have fared formidably, thanks to strong leadership, a wealth of talent, freedom of artistic expression for its workers, and financial nous.

I asked Peter why he thought so many developers were struggling, and what changes he felt were needed for a wobbling industry to find its feet in today's ice fields of financial uncertainty. "It costs so much money to create a game that publishers are now betting their chips on three and not 30 developers. Some of the smaller developers are banding together,

but sadly many are falling by the wayside. I think this consolidation will continue for the next couple of years. The overwhelming urge for developers is to create every piece of technology themselves. There needs to be more Middle Ware – using someone else's products to create your game, so that you can concentrate on making a great game

with fewer people. It's the glimmer of hope that'll make games far less expensive to produce."

Filled with hopes of a brighter future, I bade my farewell and drove across town with PR woman extraordinaire Cathy Campos, to visit a very different kind of games developer to the one I'd just seen, Small Rockets.

SMALL ROCKETS

PC GAMES CURRENTLY IN PRODUCTION

Upgrades to
Ultra Assault
New project yet to
be announced

We chat to...
Director Jonathan
Small



PCZ Do you think the future of gaming lies in downloadable games?

JONATHAN In the short term the future will be Independent Small Downloadable Games. They will be focused on the PC as it's a platform where you can get the tools cheaply, you have loads of performance, and most systems will be connected online. This will be great for the PC as it will become a hotbed of original content once again.

PCZ Why do you think *Freelander* failed?



Ultra Assault is reviewed on page 97.

JONATHAN In some respects I think they had the right idea – but were a bit before their time. They were following a model where games can be like TV, and so available free, paid for by advertisements. Unfortunately, the money from advertisements disappeared with the dot.com crash.

PCZ What are your future plans for Small Rockets?

JONATHAN To get better at creating this kind of content. To make more games with higher quality, more diversity and available at lower cost. I want Small Rockets to be part of the independent game development revolution.

SMALL ROCKETS

Masters of the downloadable game, Small Rockets started up a little over two years ago. Based in a shop/office overlooking Guildford high street, they've already released 18 games via their website www.smallrockets.com, which has seen an ever increasing amount of traffic. You can read the review of the company's latest game, *Ultra Assault*, on page 97. In their quiet, intimate and wholly agreeable offices (I later tried sneaking their incredibly comfortable sofa out without being noticed, but was promptly collared by Cathy), I spoke with the company's director Jonathan Small about why they decided to specialise in downloadable games. "In essence, we want to help the games industry build its own Indie scene. We wanted to show that games don't need to be blockbusters to be fun," explained Jonathan. Our conversation meandered around the subject of downloadable games past, present and future, and Jonathan had this to say about what we can expect from this form of purchasing games. "It's the future. It's



more convenient, simpler to use, cheaper to the consumer and you won't get your DVDs scratched. Also you can try before you buy." Sounds like a pretty convincing argument to me.

FRIDAY (NIGHT)

Emerging from the train station, I shivered. Not from the biting cold or incessant rain which still fell like a waterfall from the sky, but from the thought of the evening ahead. For the past two days I'd been telling everyone – to exclamations of horror – about my invite to the Mucky Foot Christmas party. This is, after all, the games development company not only renowned for its original and quality games (such as *Startopia*), but also for its love of life and hearty piss-ups. In fact, it was Peter Molyneux who had given me the greatest cause for concern as he recounted an incident from a drunken night with Mucky Foot where directors Gary Carr and Guy Simmons chased him through Guildford high street with intentions on his life.

I made my way briskly to the venue and gingerly pawed at the door, which opened with an ominous creak, revealing a near-empty establishment filled with bug-eyed men with clearly questionable psychological stability.

I stepped in. Conversations stopped, the record screeched inharmoniously into silence and a chill wind swept through the room, propelling tumbleweeds across it as the Grim Reaper emerged from the men's toilet. "The Mucky Foot do's upstairs mate," came the shrill cry from the barman. I sprinted up the stairs and into the room housing Mucky Foot, heart racing faster than a greyhound with an electrode up its arse. At least, it was something like that anyway, I was too scared to really take it all in.

MUCKY FOOT

Beards. Everywhere. Suddenly, my three days of pre-planned facial hair growth seemed alarmingly inadequate as I searched for familiar faces. It wasn't long before I found them. Gary, Guy and Cathy were all on one table and beckoned warmly for me to join them. With them sat a guy called Simon, who my notes for the evening simply describe as 'The Offensive One', as he spent the first hour

MUCKY FOOT



The Mucky Foot boys in a typically low-key pose.

PC GAMES CURRENTLY IN PRODUCTION

See below

We chat to...
Director Guy Simmons



PCZ Can you tell us a bit about the history of Mucky Foot?

GUY Mucky Foot was the first of the Bullfrog offshoots. When EA bought Bullfrog, the company gradually changed. Me and a couple of chums realised we weren't happy anymore and started Mucky Foot. Gary Carr (also from Bullfrog) chose to jack in his perfectly respectable job and join the happy, sweaty, stinky, family that is 'The Foot', as joint lead on *Startopia*.

PCZ What are your thoughts on game development for the PC?

GUY From a nitty-gritty level, I love it! DirectX is a dream nowadays. PC tech is so powerful that the limits of what we can do are being skittled at a wonderful rate. But from a games point of view, it's all getting very samey isn't it? Where's the innovation gone?

PCZ What are your future plans for Mucky Foot?

aggressively interrogating me about why I liked working for PC World. Attempts to sell him a PC proved futile. It wasn't long, though before the two of us were buddies downing king-sized glasses of red wine while Gary led a chorus of raucous song. This was exactly what I'd been looking for. Mucky Foot, seemingly one of the last bastions of the rock 'n' roll lifestyle so widespread in the games industry just a few short years ago, were clearly keeping the flame burning.

Minutes later, Simon coaxed me into taking part in a downing competition. Not a pint of beer, but a bottle of red wine. My life flashed before my eyes as I pictured myself with my head stuck down a toilet bowl for the rest of the evening. But before I'd drank a third of mine, a tall, strangely beard-free programmer had finished his bottle to roars of appreciation from his peers. I didn't see him again for the rest of the evening.

The night finished in a pissed-up frenzy in a club/pub called the Five and Lime, where I managed to spill a pint of beer over a woman who looked like she'd been cross-bred with a Shitsu (and that was after the equivalent of about ten pints),

GUY To continue in our quest for mediocrity and boldly go nowhere new, while desperately trying to keep our fat necks above the waterline (*grins*). Oh, and to get a new, original PC game, signed, completed and in the shops with a PC ZONE award logo on the box.

PCZ Has the industry lost its rock 'n' roll reputation?

GUY It's more pop nowadays. Publishers, not developers, are everything. The publisher selects the game and team, which is then put together from a design doc as thick as a house, with tasks neatly scheduled and payments made when milestones have been met. Horrible isn't it? But within our little developer microcosm we still do our best to have a laugh, as Mr Korda found out at the Mucky Foot Christmas bash (be nice Martin, we kept the polaroids).



Startopia – massively underrated.

my six-foot six and utterly paralytic dance partner. The evening ended in a haze of drunken songs, back slapping and promises of a repeat performance in the near future. The team has not only got a near unrivalled pedigree as game developers, but a team spirit which transcends the work place. And they know how to do a piss up.

Next month, PC ZONE's intrepid explorers Martin and Rhianna venture forth to deepest Kent and Sussex. Tally ho! **PCZ**



RISE OF THE INDUSTRY

HERE, WE INTRODUCE YOU TO SOME OF THE INDUSTRY'S MOST TALENTED INDIVIDUALS WHO WE FEEL CONFIDENT YOU'LL BE HEARING A LOT MORE ABOUT IN THE FUTURE



JONTY BARNES
HEAD OF STUDIO AT BLACK & WHITE STUDIOS

PCZ Tell us a bit about your position at Black & White Studios...

JONTY I'm Head of Black & White Studios, where we're making *B&W2*, and a *B&W* inspired project for the consoles. I'm responsible for driving the creation of the games within the studio.

PCZ How long have you been in the profession, and what jobs have you had in the industry?

JONTY I've been working in this industry for 14 years. During my third year of a degree, I took a year off to work at Bullfrog as a junior programmer. When Peter founded Lionhead Studios, I joined him as a lead programmer on *B&W*. Four years later I became project leader on *B&W: Creature Isles*.

PCZ What advice would you give to those who want to follow in your footsteps?

JONTY Enthusiasm and persistence go a long way. Go and do some work experience with a developer; maybe try to do some testing as it'll give you broad overview. Also, some qualifications, a portfolio of work and utter determination are a real plus.



GRATHIUS WANTS YOU



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PCZONE Nov 2002

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PCGAMER Aug 2002

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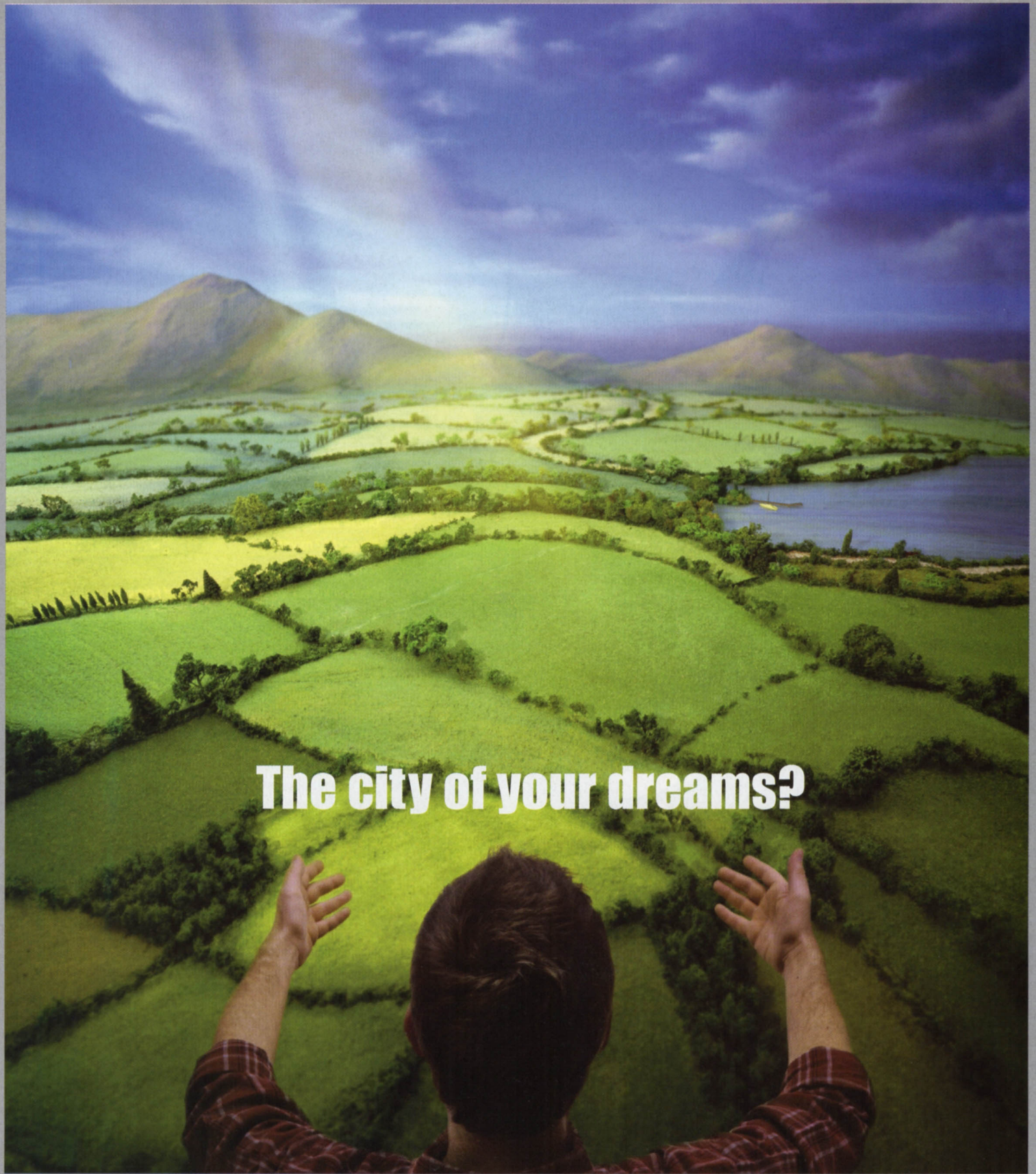
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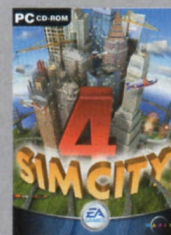


An aerial view of a vibrant, detailed city built with plastic blocks, featuring skyscrapers, cranes, roads, and green spaces. In the foreground, a person's hands are reaching out towards the city, suggesting direct control. The sky is a mix of blue and purple, and a helicopter is visible in the distance.

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Earn an honest bob as a... FREELANCER

We've always said that one good freelancer deserves another. Unfortunately this time we could only find **Paul Presley**

LAST
PREVIEWED
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THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Digital Anvil
PUBLISHER Microsoft
WEBSITE
www.microsoft.com/games/freelancer
ETA March 2003

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- *Wing Commander* meets *Elite*
- Trading, piracy, exploration, bounty hunting – the lot
- Strong storyline that merges effortlessly with freedom of play
- Five years of development time looks like paying off

FREELANCER, EH? Ooh, it's like someone took a snapshot of my working life and made it into a computer game. Assuming, obviously, that you replaced the filthy, commuter-stuffed tube trips into London with hurtling through hypnotically beautiful wormholes in space. Replaced

sprinkling instant coffee into my eyeballs in a forlorn attempt to stay awake all night to write a two-page preview of some godforsaken Tycoon game from Belgium with dogfighting a dozen angry pirate ships in the middle of an asteroid field, swooping in and out of the rocks with the cool demeanour of Han Solo,



Pink space? Patrick Moore never told us about that.

CV



DIGITAL ANVIL

Formed from the broken shards of Origin Systems by Mr *Wing Commander* himself, Chris Roberts, Digital Anvil was meant to allow Roberts to escape the noose WC had put around his neck. The company has completed only one game to date. A, er, *Wing Commander* clone...

1998 Company forms and announces a big old vision – massively multiplayer *Elite* in an amazingly free-form universe.

2000 Microsoft buys up the company and provides much needed funding. Multiplayer ambitions of *Freelancer* reined in from "thousands simultaneously" to "about 16".

2000 *Starlancer* provides a necessary distraction from the now-increasingly delayed *Freelancer*. Not too bad, as space shooters go.

2000 Chris Roberts realises his future lies in making unwatchable films rather than games, so leaves for Hollywood. *Freelancer's* future looks uncertain.

2003 *Freelancer* re-emerges as a single-player-focused epic that might just be the best space game since *Elite*.

"Chris Roberts went to Hollywood to turn *Wing Commander* into the really awful film it was always trying to be"

A GALAXY OF STARS

A VERITABLE WHO'S WHO OF TINSELTOWN'S HOTTEST AND SHARPEST TALENT LEND THEIR VOCAL TALENTS TO *FREELANCER*



John Rhys-Davies, from dwarf to white dwarf.

OK, so it's more of a Who're They than a Who's Who, but Digital Anvil has provided the discerning celebrity-spotter with such famous names such as John 'Gimli' Rhys-Davies, Ian 'Beverly Hills 90210' Ziering, Xander '24' Berkley and Sulu from *Star Trek* aka George Takei. Which, ironically, is a better cast list than Chris Roberts managed to assemble for the *Wing Commander* movie.



Didn't I see you in *Stargate*?



Combat hasn't moved on from the *Wing Commander* days.



Taking on the entire galactic military isn't the wisest of ideas.

dispatching foes with the panache of a master pilot. Replaced being stuck in a dingy pub with a sweaty marketing bore twatting on about how the shading routines in his firm's latest tediumfest are the most exciting development in vertex technology for the past three months, with standing in a hi-tech bar on board an interstellar battlecruiser stationed on the edge of the solar system, negotiating thousand-dollar deals with grateful mega-corporations to explore uncharted regions of space. And instead of a tepid pint of lager to divert me, there's a sexy intergalactic police women with tits the size of Sputnik to flirt with, and instead of nothing but bar nuts and a clapped-out fruiti to spend my money on, there are missiles, lasers and mines to buy and fit to my sleek, ultra-cool fighter ship. Apart from all that, identical.

PREVIOUSLY...

I'll forgive you for being a touch surprised by all this. *Freelancer* is one of those titles often referred to by folk in the know as 'vapourware'. *Duke Nukem Forever* is a good example of the term. Been in development for years, unlikely ever to see the light of day, likely to be a steaming pile of Moyles if it ever does. *Freelancer* was first whorishly paraded around sniffing journalists some five years ago by the man behind the legendary *Wing Commander* series, Chris Roberts. He'd taken his story-driven, space-based shooter and thrown it screaming into an *Elite*-style free-form world. It was going to be the best thing we'd ever seen. It was going to put his newly formed development company Digital Anvil on the map. Unfortunately, someone must have been holding the

map upside down, as it then all went quiet and nothing more was heard about the project for several years.

Along the way we got a sort of interim thing called *Starlancer* – effectively *Wing Commander* all over again. Not bad, but not what we were waiting for. Then Digital Anvil seemed to implode, Chris Roberts went to Hollywood to turn *Wing Commander* into the really awful film it was always trying to be,

Microsoft stepped in, threw a load of cash about and told the remaining team to carry on regardless. Then there was silence again.

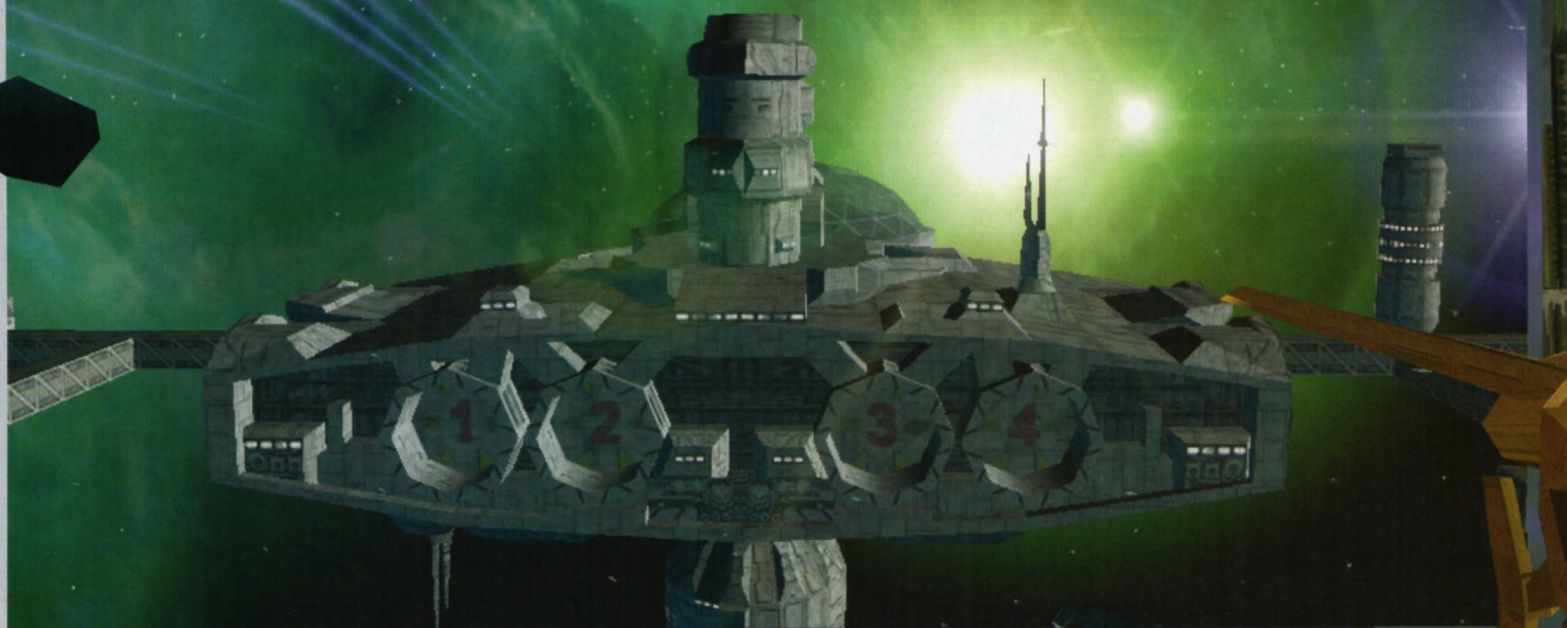
AND NOW...

Now, suddenly, seemingly from nowhere, *Freelancer* beta code drops on the desk along with a note saying 'ready in March'. And in the tradition of all good vapourware it's going to be utter shi...

Oh, hang on, maybe not. This intro sequence is a bit tasty for a start. Sequel to *Starlancer*, this time telling the story of the defeated enemy of that game, the Coalition, 800 years after they blasted off into distant, unknown space to start a new life. Quite a stunning piece of FMV

"You're a budding intergalactic odd-job man, fresh from surviving a terrorist attack on a space station"

"A veritable Pandora's Box of weapons and ships are on offer"



Space stations come in many wonderful shapes and sizes...

actually. Must be hiding something. But that's just it you see. Although everyone's expecting *Freelancer* to be crap, from what I've played, the truth is it's going to be nearer the 'Classic' mark.

RULE BRETONIA

So, 800 years then? Yup, and as no one once amusingly said, 800 years is a long time in space politics. The known universe is split into about five sectors, each controlled by one set of the fleeing Coalition colonists. Essentially, they break down as American, British, Japanese, German and... well I think it was Spanish in the intro, but in the game this sector seems to be a mish-mash of pirates, criminals and unexplored space. Maybe Welsh then?

Of course these factions are not called America or Japan. Each name has a 'futuristic' twist. Britain is called Bretonia, for instance, and has systems called New London, Dublin and, for some reason, Leeds.

What *Freelancer* does really well is create a believable background universe for you to explore. Along with the internal governments of each sector, the playing field is littered with about 50 other factions – mega-corporations, freedom fighter/terrorist groups, pirate clans and so on.



...and also blow up real nice, like.

The beauty is that they all have dynamic relationships with each other that mean you have to take a bit of care when choosing what jobs to do and for whom.

Your reputation is almost as important as your ability behind the joystick.

But what do you do?

Well as the name (and my rambling opening paragraph) suggests, you're a budding intergalactic odd-job man, fresh from surviving a terrorist attack on a space

station that exploded along with all your belongings and the remnants of a million-dollar deal you were lining up.

Luckily, you make it to the Liberty (American) home planet and are offered a one-off job by the local police force (who also give you a clapped-out old banger of a ship). The idea is that you plunge into this dynamic universe as you see fit, following the background story along the way, trading, looting and shooting your way to a fortune in between chunks of exposition and story-based missions.

There's a lot of freedom on offer. Plenty of goods are available to trade as part of a complete (though slightly confusing) economic system. The bars on the planets and space stations are full of characters offering commissions. And, of course, there's a wide-open universe to explore and exploit.

BOOTY CALL

Freelancer really comes alive in the detail. The universe around you is constantly on the move, there's always stuff happening – you can believe in it. Radio chatter between traffic controllers and passing cargo ships fills your cockpit while you wait for docking clearance. You can contact other ships and ask about their business. Or scan their craft and decide if it's worth a risk going for a bit of looting and pillaging. Get into a fight with pirates along a trade route and you might find yourself supported by passing bounty hunters looking for a score. Destroy an enemy, salvage one of his weapons and you can take it back to base, patch it up and have it fitted to your own ship.

There's plenty of incentive to keep going. A veritable Pandora's Box of weapons and ships are on offer –

"The action thrills of *Wing Commander*, the freedom of *Elite*, the mercenary nature of *Privateer*"



Germans in space. A thing of, er, beauty.

people an important aspect in the way you approach whole game.

Talking of visuals, *Freelancer* is quite the technological piece of work. Not so much photo-realism as CGI-cartoon style – at least in the cut-scenes. It's not so clear-cut in the actual space sections, but compared to the visually distinctive style seen in games such as *X: Beyond the Frontier*, it's very much driven by what the current 3D card technology can do rather than trying for a visual style all of its own. None the worse for it, mind you. It still looks like a million spacebucks. Just technologically generic spacebucks.

Space combat is handled in a pseudo-*Wing Commander* manner. Joystick controls have been chucked out the window, paving the way for a simpler mouse/keyboard combo that, while not offering as much realism as the rest of the game (or what I imagine as realism in a make-believe far future fantasy world – though who knows, one day space craft may well be controlled

although not a great deal in the way of non-combat hardware, which is a shame. Some of the larger, more expensive ships are quite a sight to behold, and each sector has its own visual style and lists of hardware to choose from, again making the need to watch your reputation with different



Hurting through the void.

WANNA BE IN MY GANG?

MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER *ELITE* IS THE HOLY GRAIL FOR SPACE SIM DEVELOPERS. *FREELANCER* PROMISED SO MUCH



It was going to support thousands of players, now it's 32. Never mind.

Back when it was first announced, one of *Freelancer*'s big goals was to provide a massively multiplayer online universe for gamers to live out their deeply longed-for Ultimate *Elite* Fantasy. Sadly, technology is still just lagging behind the requirements for that dream to become a reality, but today's *Freelancer* does offer some solace.

Online *Freelancer* supports small-scale 16-32 player servers which provide a level of persistency in that when you log on to one, you create characters that are unique to that server alone. Whenever you log on to a previously visited server, you carry on from where you last left off, joining up with friends and clans to take on missions too tricky for a single player. A server can also store any number of created characters, even if it can only host 16 active players at a time.

It's a sort of small-scale massively multiplayer – or at least persistent world – experience, and it'll be interesting to see how it pans out.



"Hah, taste my wiggly sperm lasers of doom!"

by a keyboard and mouse), at least makes things simple enough to be able to throw yourself right into from the off.

EUROPEAN UNION

All in all then, it's looking like *Freelancer* will pretty much be everything it was promising to be all along (minus the massively multiplayer thing, which in retrospect was probably a bad idea anyway). The action thrills of *Wing Commander*, the freedom of *Elite*, the mercenary nature of *Privateer* and the story quality of, well, a half-decent piece of pulp sci-fi writing at any rate.

Ah, but hang on. A tall German chap has just strolled in the office carrying a preview copy of *X2: The Threat* – a more hardcore space epic, but one that may come even closer to fulfilling hopes for a spiritual successor to *Elite*. So there's more than one pretender to this galactic throne, after all. But more about that another time. For now, all we need to know is that *Freelancer* is going to grab the attention of many. Not through hype, not through extensive marketing or over-excitable press coverage – it'll do it simply by being a damned fine game. Sometimes the wait really is worth it. [E]



Freeze, punk!

JUDGE DREDD: DREDD VS DEATH

In the 22nd century, playing computer games will be illegal. *Mark Hill* pays a visit to Rebellion to make sure its latest effort is out some time before then...

LAST
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PCZONE
ISSUE
120

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Rebellion
PUBLISHER VU Games
WEBSITE www.rebellion.co.uk
OUT Autumn

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Judge Dredd is the perfect character for an FPS, and Death the perfect villain
- Fantastic new engine, ideal for the comic-book style
- Sections of the vast Mega-City One realised and teeming with crime and life
- Fuzzy-logic AI makes both enemies and citizens feel real
- You can arrest anyone who breaks the law. And kill them if they resist

**NEW
SHOTS
AND
EXCLUSIVE
HANDS-ON!**

THEY LOOK good, don't they? The buildings filling the screenshots over the next couple of pages, towering against the dark skyline, with ship-in-a-bottle detail and nightmarish vastness? Well, you should try walking around beneath them.

Yes, that's right. They're not part of some convoluted artwork to make the game look good to gullible magazine readers, they're physical presences that will take your breath away when you start exploring Rebellion's computerised version of Mega-City One, home of Judge Dredd and 400 million people.

"It's all built to scale," says lead artist and designer Tim Jones, pointing at one of the gargantuan constructions. "So each of those white dots is a proper, permanent-presence, size-scaled window." Not that Rebellion is trying to cram the whole city into the game. Given that it takes up the whole of the Eastern US seaboard, that would just be stupid. "We've broken it into sections because we wanted everything to look very polished rather than generic."

They've taken some of the most recognisable areas from the comic and translated them to the monitor in all their gigantic glory. At this early stage, though most of the architecture is complete, the swarm of movement and people that will make the city truly come to life in the player's imagination is still missing. But it's already coming together enough to see how incredible it's going to look.

"Giant screens showing full-motion video add to the sense that this is a vibrant, living – if also dark, dank and scary – city"

There are even giant screens à la *Blade Runner* showing full-motion video, adding to the sense that this is a vibrant, living – if also dark, dank and scary – city. There will be news reports playing all over the city, helping to progress the story – about which little is known, by the way, apart from the basic premise of Dredd confronting his arch nemesis Death and the Dark Judges. Although you can get an idea of its scope by the producer Ed Woolf's words.

"There are 9,000 lines of dialogue and it's growing. The script is quite involved. We've got 25 years of the 2000AD comic to go on."

Grenade rounds – for when you want to be really sure.





The AI should see opponents make decisions according to the situation.

THE CRIME IS LIFE

Ed tells us some of the things we can expect to see once the full noise and bustle of the crowded futuristic city is recreated: "There'll be flying robots coming down from the sky, cars sweeping past, a monorail speeding above." And, more importantly, a hell of a lot of people. As head of programming Kevin Lea adds, "We focused on visualising Mega-City One, and to do that realistically means having lots and lots of people on screen simultaneously. They've all got complex bone structures, animations and lots of polygons, but because of how scalable everything is, it will run quite happily on whatever PC you've got. It doesn't have to be state-of-the-art."

The issue of scalability is an important one. It means that although *Dredd vs Death* is also being developed for the PS2, it automatically looks better on a decent spec PC. In fact, Rebellion's Asura engine is so impressive it shouldn't be long before other developers start using it and, thanks to its user-friendliness and fast rendering, we can expect it to have a big impact with the mod community.

It might not have the ultra-realistic look of *Doom 3*, but it's perfect for the dark, comic-book style of *Dredd*. Not to mention all those other 2000AD characters Rebellion has lined up for videogame transfers.

THE SENTENCE IS DEATH

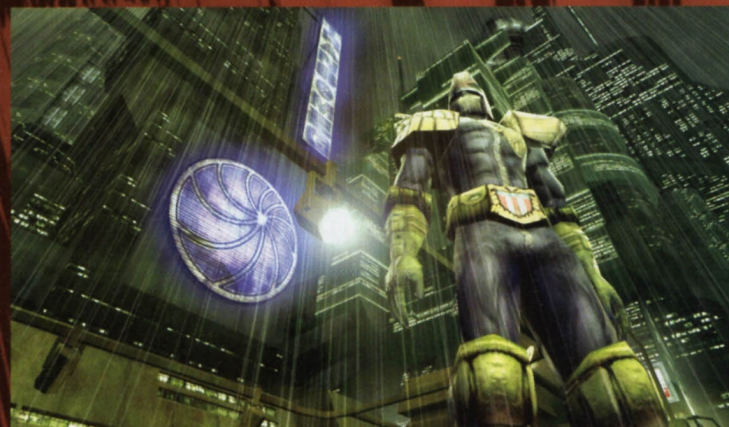
Of course, it's not just the graphics that remain truthful to the comic original, and the gameplay itself is fashioned in true *Judge Dredd* style, rather than the generic move-through-corridors-and-kill-everything FPS we're so sick of seeing.

"You can't just go round shooting people," explains Ed. "You have to challenge them and try to arrest them. If they resist and pull a gun out on you, then all hell breaks loose. But you have to stand by the laws you've sworn to uphold, which is why you have a law-meter on the screen display. It goes down if you shoot innocent people (or ones that have willingly surrendered) and if it reaches the bottom you'll get a visit from the SJS, the Special Judiciary Squad, who will try to arrest you." Their appearance doesn't signal game over though, it simply makes your life much more difficult as you try and get on with your mission objectives while simultaneously avoiding those damn Special Judges.

"If the meter reaches the top as you arrest lots of criminals," continues Ed, "You'll get special rewards, like unlocking skins for multiplayer and so on."

JUDGEMENT DAY

There's no better way to give a taste of what the game will be like than showing a mission, which is exactly what the



The Asura engine really brings the feel of the comic to the PC.

Rebellion guys did. The whole thing kicks off in the docks area of Mega-City One, a level which they originally thought would demonstrate just the kind of huge scale they were aiming for, but has since been dwarfed by all the other environments they've been building.

It's pouring down, as it so often is in this damp, dark city, and if you look up at the sky you can see the raindrops

exploding on your visor. It's a good job there's no time limit, because chances are you'll be spending quite a while 'coo-ing' and 'ahh-ing' as you take in the full beauty of the Asura engine.

Your first mission is to arrest a gang of hoods. The bad news is they out-number you by quite a margin. The good news is when you find them, half of them decide to leg it. Still, enough of them hang around to make it a pretty hairy fire-fight. Elsewhere, you're informed of a group of punks spraying graffiti in a subway tunnel. As you arrive to bust asses and take names, graffiti-cleaning robots turn up to wash down the defaced walls. City life must go on, y'know.

The city is populated with all types of gangs, not all necessarily part of the main storyline, but adding to the atmosphere and immersion. You can even, if you're feeling particularly devious, lead one gang into another's territory and watch them slug it out, saving yourself precious Lawgiver bullets.

IT'S ALL A BIT FUZZY

The thing is, all this atmosphere and immersive detail would go out the window

I AM THE LAW, OLD CHAP

CARNAGE, BRUTALITY AND A FIRM GRASP OF IRONY DISTINGUISHES DREDD FROM HIS U.S. COMIC BOOK COUSINS

The helmet may make him look like some kind of an ancient Greek spear-carrier, but Judge Joseph Dredd has little time for democracy. He is, on the other hand, a perfect antidote to all those touchy-feely superheroes that populate American comics, with their moral dilemmas and obsession with saving civilians. The difference between the good guys and the bad guys in *Judge Dredd* lies simply on which side of the law they operate. In fact, the Judge himself is barely human, hardly ever portraying feelings other than anger and never taking off his helmet, thus remaining heartless and faceless.

The whole thing shouldn't be taken too seriously though, because more than anything else he is a dark parody of American heroism. Dredd was inspired by the likes of 'Dirty' Harry Callaghan and Charles Bronson in *Death Wish*, and he has, in turn, helped inspire such caricatures as *Duke Nukem*. But where the humour of the Duke was restricted to spouting toilet humour and Arnie-esque one-liners, *Judge Dredd* has every chance of introducing a bit of blacker-than-black British humour to the world of ultra-violent shooters. Which probably means the Yanks will be left scratching their heads.





Every light on every building is a scalable window.

if it were not backed up by equally realistic NPC behaviours. I've always said that an FPS should be judged above all on the quality of its AI, and in this case things appear to be well on track – which is especially refreshing given that it's usually the last thing the developers get round to.

In most games, the programmers try to make it look like your enemies are acting intelligently by having them run off or shoot at you intermittently from a position of cover. These are usually just scripted patterns and path-finding routines rather than proper responses to an active situation. In *Judge Dredd*, enemies will take cover behind any object they find in the environment. And if you drop a new object in, they'll recognise it and use it to their advantage.

As Ed explains: "The fuzzy logic AI system we're using means that each character makes a decision based on the environment around him and the actions taking place. For example, if the enemies out-number you, they start firing at you. If you kill a few of them, the others are much more likely to surrender or call for backup." When the criminals do surrender (by kneeling down and putting their arms behind their back) you can go up to them and cuff them, while an on-screen message will relay the penalty for their heinous crimes.

And with the fuzzy logic comes other benefits: "Every time you play the game it will be slightly different. Different gangs will have attributes they always adhere to, but they will still make decisions based on what's going on around them," says Ed.

"It's not random," adds Kevin, "Because they won't do things that are completely out of character. But they're still unpredictable. And the larger the group of people the more chaotic it can all become."

But it's not just perps who behave realistically. All the citizens thronging around you have their own lives to get on with. "A bit like in *The Sims*," says Kevin. "They can interact with things in their environment, like if they see an advert coming on a TV screen they'll walk over to watch it."

SUMMARY EXECUTION

Another element designed to make each game different from the last is the lack of pre-set death animations. Instead, Rebellion has gone for the ragdoll effect

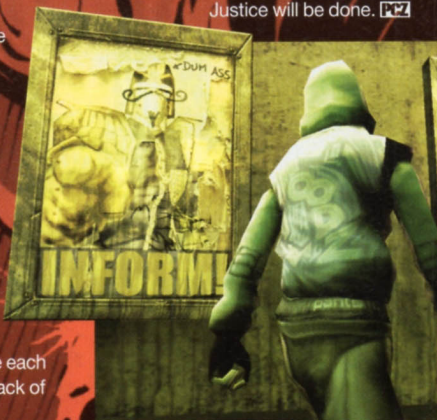
where the body of the victim falls according to skeletal physics, the environment and where they were hit. It also means they'll slump against walls and assume unnatural positions on stairs rather than lie rigidly as most computerised corpses do. This is especially effective when using the high-explosive ammo, a sort of grenade that sends bodies flying in all directions in a magnificent explosion, with limbs twisting in midair and landing in the most painful of positions.

Of course, setting off explosions in the middle of a crowded street and causing massive civilian casualties isn't usually a good idea. But this is *Judge Dredd* remember, and protecting civilians at all costs has never been high on his agenda. "Because you have this law meter," explains Kevin, "there's some room for manoeuvre. You can say, 'well, my law meter is pretty high and there's one innocent guy and three bad guys. I'll take out all of them.' And that's the sort of thing Judge Dredd does on a daily basis. His basic thinking is that a hostage deserves to die for being stupid enough to get caught in the first place."

And as for multiplayer? Well, they're not supposed to talk about it. But you can tell by the twinkle in their eyes that it's going to be special.

With 2000AD, Britain has been producing some of the world's best comics for some 25 years. Now, it looks like we're finally going to start producing world-class first-person shooters too.

Justice will be done. [X]



The comic's dark humour remains.

"Minimising civilian casualties at all costs has never been high on Judge Dredd's agenda"

STRAIGHT AND NARROW

BUT WITH SOME BENDS...

It's not a free-roaming game by any means, but each section of the city is big enough and full of so much stuff going on that you can just spend some time wandering and getting involved with events that have no consequence to the story (like arresting the myriad lawbreakers). And Rebellion is making sure that even straight mission objectives can always be completed in a variety of ways.

"There are different ways you can try to get into a death cult's headquarters in one level," begins Ed as one example. "Go up to the gates and blow them open, in which case all the guards will come pouring out and attack you, or you could arrest a cult disciple in a different part of the city who might give you the codes to get in. You could even create a diversion by using your high-explosive ammo and wait for the guards to go and investigate."

It's not quite *GTA III* in reverse – arresting criminals instead of committing the crimes – but *Judge Dredd* certainly has plenty of room to roam.



If the main storyline starts to drag, just go AWOL and arrest some perps.

Sheer brutality...

DEVASTATION

Anthony Holden gets his hands bloody with a near-complete build of this first-person gunfest

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Digitalo
PUBLISHER Novologic
WEBSITE www.devastationgame.com
ETA March 2003

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- It's nearly finished and we've played it
- Visually impressive, with the power of the *Unreal* engine behind it
- Brutal array of weapons and *Soldier Of Fortune*-like gore levels
- Could rock in multiplayer

YES, YES, the future's going to stink – thanks for reminding us. The cities are going to be poisoned, shattered war zones, corporate bigwigs are going to rule the world from secluded strongholds and waves of cloned corporate bully-boys are going to sweep the ground-level slums to harry us into submission.

Luckily, in *Devastation*'s account of things, at least, we'll have loads of guns on hand. More than 40 unique weapons in fact, ranging from simple pistols to

and torsos with your improbable array of artillery. Not to mention the real physics engine, which allows you to pick up the decapitated heads and play a spot of post-bloodbath basketball. It's dumb stuff, but you can't deny the appeal.

THE WORLD AROUND US

After the sheer brutality has worn off, the next most immediately impressive thing about *Devastation* is the quality of the environments, which are sprawling, well-realised affairs, brought lovingly to life by meticulous detail and generous smearings of virtual grime. The single-player game takes you through burnt-out slums, abandoned Chinatown streets, maze-like corporate installations and neon-soaked Tokyo shopping districts, all looking as solid and imposing as you'd expect considering the *Unreal* engine is chugging away under the bonnet.

Beyond this the game is, as we expected, a fairly straightforward urban shooter, but given an extra measure of charm by its wilfully over the top

weaponry, gleeful blood-letting and highly interactive *Unreal*-powered environment.

Another handy feature is the option of playing in either arcade or full sim mode, with the latter turning on such features as manual reload, restricted inventory capacity, realistic weapon recoil and uncompromising friendly fire.

FEAR FACTORS

However, we'd be lying if we said there weren't a few worrying signs, especially at this late stage of development. The object physics, for example, is yet to be entirely sorted out, leading to all sorts of comical moments. Crates flying 20 feet into the air with the merest brush of an arm or leg. Packets of freeze-dried chicken (functioning as health packs) dancing farcically around the floor as they ping

from surface to surface – you might as well be fighting on the moon.

Collision detection is also a bit dicey and characters have a tendency to float a couple of feet above the ground. The enemy AI is still extremely basic, and the whole thing has a slightly amateurish ring to it courtesy of some clunky character models and B-grade dialogue.

Not good signs you'll agree, but by no means disastrous. The team-based multiplayer, not yet up and running in our version, still promises to be hugely enjoyable, especially the intriguing Territories mode, and there are still a couple of months left to refine other areas.

We've reined in our expectations of this title, but the signs are still good for a fun, blood-soaked genre blaster. We'll have a review in a couple of issues. **PCZ**

"It soon becomes apparent this game is about brutal carnage and little else"

high-tech laser cannons can that reduce even the most elite genome soldier to a cloud of red mist.

And as far as we can make out, this is exactly what post-apocalyptic shooter *Devastation* is all about. We recently got our hands on the latest playable build, some 90 per cent complete, and it soon became apparent that this game is all about brutal carnage and not much else. The weapons are satisfyingly diverse and powerful, with a regional system positively encouraging you to remove limbs, heads



All the ingredients are there, it just needs a good spit and polish.



LAST
PREVIEWED
PCZONE
ISSUE
123



Devastation has its work cut out, releasing a month after *Unreal II*.

BANDITS

PHOENIX RISING



83%

PC ZONE
Benelux

4/5

THE ADRENALINE VAULT

80%

PC GAMER

...a full-scale adventure approaching epic magnitude.



Gear up, gun down!

A wasteland ruled by grim clans fighting for gas, ammo & auto parts; The proud city of Jericho where civilisation thrives, Bandits on the outside wanting in. Our hero's drive head first into the carnage, adrenaline junkies wreaking havoc! Behold the world of BANDITS.

Over 20 single player campaign-based missions.

Cannons, missile launchers, sniper guns, shotguns, mine droppers. You name it!

Up to 8 player LAN and Internet multiplayer mode, with GameSpy support.

Dynamic landscapes: desert canyons to deep snow & weapons leave craters.

Unique physics: hyper-realistic explosions, recoils and more.

Download the demo from
www.bandits-game.com

Hits the road on February 14th.

PC CD-ROM

BANDITS

PHOENIX RISING



Singularity
SOFTWARE



PAN VISION

GAME

www.game.uk.com



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A real scream...

FAR CRY



CV



CRYTEK

Crytek is based in Coburg, Germany, and is owned by the Yerli brothers. The company has only been in operation for three years. *Far Cry* will be its first game

1999 Crytek established.

2001 Crytek wows E3 audiences with tech demo *X-Isle: Dinosaur Island*.

2002 A publishing deal is signed with Ubi Soft for the development of *X-Isle*, now *Far Cry*.

2003 *Far Cry* released.

Big White Men With Guns cover shoot.

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Crytek

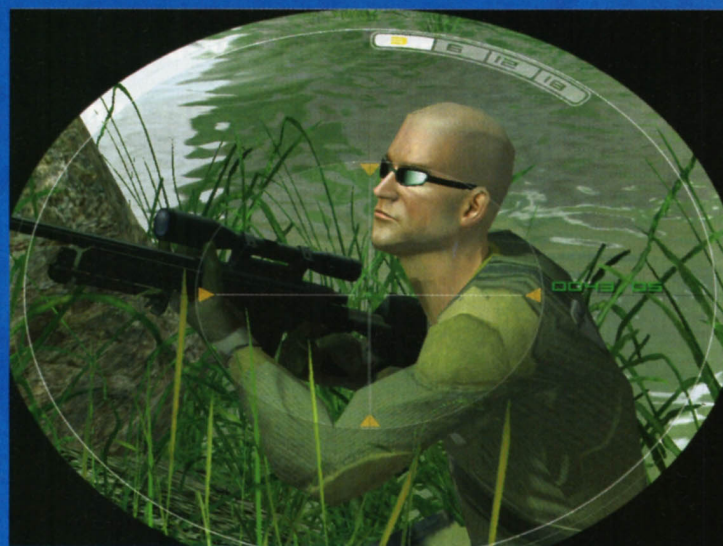
PUBLISHER Ubi Soft

WEBSITE www.crytek.com

OUT September 2003

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Fantastic enemy AI
- Great models and animation
- Can drive jeeps and boats
- Very atmospheric paradise setting



Bald Men With Bigger Guns cover shoot.

Psycho
Vacationer's
Monthly
cover
shoot.



Head gasket's gone again.

DESPITE its location in the heart of Bavaria, Crytek is home to talented gaming types from all over the world. The company exudes an eclectic quality, which this year at least, led to an astonishing Christmas party at a local bar.

Certainly, the menu of free beer, belly dancers, exotic fruits and a designer wearing 6-inch stiletto heels while showing off his most intimate piercing is one of the more unlikely experiences you

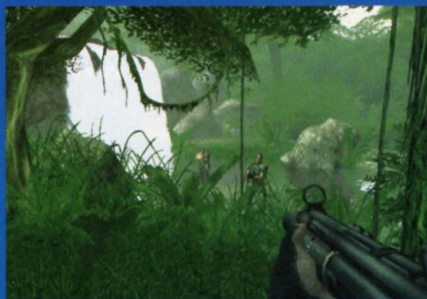
could have in the home of the Bratwurst sausage. But as company CEO, Cervat Yerli (one of the three Yerli brothers who run the company) pointed out: "People who work for Crytek come from all over the world. We are very proud of this and it ties in with our philosophy of making games for a world market and not just the German market." So, watch out world, here comes Crytek...



Ursula Andress is just about to appear...

Far Cry is still some way off – nine months off to be precise – and although we put the new CryENGINE™ through its paces for a good few hours, it's still difficult to say just how good the game will eventually be. Currently there are only a few levels up and running, and although





A rather unorthodox approach to fishing.



Despite all the flash technology it's gameplay first for these boys. Note the unrealistic tracer effects.

"You can build intelligent AI, but what you really have to do is build an intelligent world around the AI"

it's great fun blasting your way through them, it's clear that the soul of the game is not yet in place.

One thing that does instantly jump out at you though is the devious nature of the enemy soldiers. On one jungle level in particular, you are stealthily working your way towards two distant guards when suddenly one of them spots you. He

dives for cover behind a tree while the other calls out into dense undergrowth. Before you know it there are half a dozen soldiers attempting to outflank you by crawling up through the trees to your left and right.

From very early on in production, the team realised that in order to achieve superior AI, the characters in the game

needed to be aware of how to use their environment. "You can build an intelligent AI, but in truth what you really have to do is build an intelligent world around the AI," says *Far Cry*'s producer, Christopher Natsume: "The AI has to know what is in the universe around him. What can I do? Where can I go? Is that a car there? Can I fix it? Is that a tree? I'll hide behind it. Because each character in the game has a certain behaviour, they know how to react with these things."

We watched a scout and a cover guard move around a specially created level and it was eerie the way they both handled the environment in different ways. The guard glided from one tree to another staying covered the whole time. The scout on the other hand was not so concerned with cover. His mission quite clearly was to get from A to B as quickly as possible.

BIN THE SCRIPT

Another intriguing aspect of *Far Cry* is its lack of scripted set pieces. Even when the action is bigger, louder and more cinematic than usual, the CryENGINE™ is generating it all on the fly. In most shooters, a situation where an enemy scout spots you and then runs to a radio to call for an airstrike would almost certainly be scripted.

In *Far Cry* it's a different story. As the scout has the intelligence to know that if he attempts to shoot you he will almost certainly die, he takes the next best option and goes for help. Next thing you know, paratroopers are sliding down a rope from a helicopter hovering just above the trees.

Some of the things the enemy does are truly unbelievable. When stalking a group of six soldiers we witnessed one of them run to a jeep, jump in and then drive off. Another two threw themselves on the ground in sheer panic, and the other three rolled instantly into the forest and began flitting from one tree to another taking pot shots.

Working out what the enemy is going to do next proved virtually impossible, you can't even predict how they act when they die. Some of them go for the full on gurgling, arms flung back Oscar performance. Others just slump head forward onto their chest. The events in *Far Cry* seem more random than the National Lottery. And as Mr Natsume explains: "Every time we play *Far Cry* something different happens because the AI is actually responding to what we're doing in his environment."

MONKEY WORLD

The full extent of the plot for *Far Cry* has yet to be revealed (though we suspect it's



Nothing like a spot of skeet shooting.

SWAMP FEVER

PLAY MISTY FOR ME

Graphically *Far Cry* is looking fantastic. One effect that especially stands out is the mist hovering above the swamp. This swirling vapour also acts as cover, so even if the enemy can hear you paddling through the water, they still have no idea where you are. Great ideas make great games – and so far, *Far Cry* is full of great ideas.



It's all about using the environment to your advantage.

some kind of Dr Moreau dealie). However, what we do know is that as Jack Carver, your mission is to rescue sexy journalist Valerie Locklin from a small tropical island somewhere in Micronesia.

Apparently, and this has yet to be confirmed, when you finally rescue Valerie you will get to control her as well as Jack, or she will become a kind of computer controlled sidekick. Still, whatever happens, *Far Cry*, like most shooters, will endeavour to keep you entertained with a whole host of interesting bits and bobs.

For a start the whole game takes place in a paradise setting and the steamy, tropical atmosphere of the game is shaping up nicely. Swamps boast steam rising from the surface of the water, and more importantly from a tactical point of view, the final version will allow you to hide underwater and then jump out of the water to ambush your prey.

Some nice looking flora and fauna enhance the dripping jungle vibe of the game and the sound of wildlife is present in all outdoor missions (there are indoor missions as well, but Crytek isn't showing much of those yet). Monkeys in particular are an important part of the game. If you're approaching an enemy position and you disturb a bunch of primates, they will almost certainly give away your position. Likewise, if you hear a cacophony of screams and squeals from nearby trees, it's time to take cover.

CARVING 'EM UP

As well as natural wonders, *Far Cry* offers mechanical diversions. Vehicles play a major part in the game and the final version will feature a range of vehicular missions. In fact, at this stage of development one of the highlights for us, was climbing into a military RIB and zooming up a river while strafing soldiers on both banks. You even had to anticipate the roll of the boat on the waves in order to pull off a clean hit with the sniper rifle.

And of course, there are weapons – lots of them. Jack Carver's selection of guns will include everything from machine guns to rocket launchers as well as mounted rail guns and other more heavy-duty toys. The full list of weapons hasn't been finalised yet, but we're fairly sure we're not going to be short changed in this department.

In fact, one thing we can guarantee is that there will be weapons to suit all types of combat. As well as being designed as a straightforward action game, *Far Cry* is placing a huge emphasis on thoughtful, long-range combat. As Natsuume says: "We're on tropical islands, we're in jungles, we're outdoors. We need to have long-range combat. We need binoculars. Because of our graphics engine you can see a really long way in *Far Cry* and we will ensure we get the most gameplay out of that."

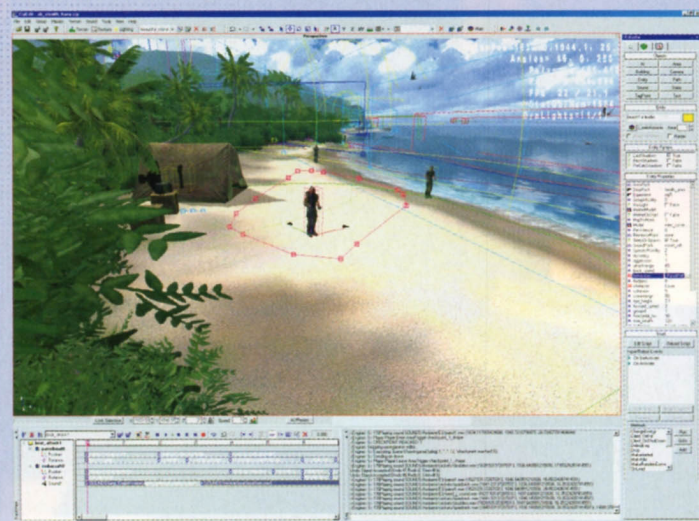
Looks like we're going to get plenty of use from the sniper rifle then.

THE WORLD IN YOUR HANDS

A WIZBANG LEVEL EDITOR MAKES LIFE A LITTLE EASIER

The design tool used in *Far Cry* is one of the best editors we've seen. Absolutely everything from objects to AI scripts can be added in real-time as you play through the mission. So, if someone wants to see what happens if they put an enemy in a certain position, they literally just drop the character in to the map as they play through.

Terrain too can be altered in an instant. All the level designer has to do is drag a selected part of the landscape in the required direction. While we were at Crytek we saw a basic, yet wholly playable level created from scratch in about two minutes. Whether or not the editor will be released with the game is currently undecided. If it is, then prepare yourself for an onslaught of mods.



A level editor so powerful your mum could make a mod.

One of the most important factors these days in the development of any FPS is that it has to have something that at least attempts to push the genre forward. Natsuume is more than aware of this and even concedes that their baby is up against some stiff competition. Nevertheless, he is astute enough to agree that plenty of shooters do nothing to advance the genre.

FORWARD MARCH

According to Natsuume, *Far Cry* will not fall into this trap: "When we decided to do a first-person shooter we had to look at how we were going to change the gameplay to create a different experience that takes the genre to a new place."

Crytek's ever-thoughtful CEO concurs with his producer on this point: "We are pushing AI to the next level, graphics to the next level and many other aspects too. We really are trying our best. We want to make a great game – and we really hope it turns out that way."

There's no denying it, Crytek is extremely talented and refreshingly frank. There's a confident feel around their office and their sensitivity to the fact that the FPS genre needs to evolve bodes well. The game is not due to ship until autumn, but we're already itching to get another look at it. We have a funny feeling this is going to be one hell of a rumble in the jungle. **PCZ**

Q&A

CHRISTOPHER NATSUUME



Before working in the games industry *Far Cry*'s producer had a career in ballet and opera. We couldn't care less about that, so we asked him about the game instead...

PCZ The level editor seems to be a very powerful tool. Why is this program such an important part of the development process?

CN What we do is start from the beginning and we define the simplest parts of what we're going to build. What is a rock? What is a tree? This is all done with a materials system that holds information about an object: what kind of particles come off it? What kind of sound is played when you shoot it? How hard is it? Can you pierce it with a bullet? Can you see through it? We don't worry about drawing bullet holes for trees because we systematically design it from the ground up with the editor.

PCZ All the palm trees seem to be leaning in the same direction. Can you do stuff like change the direction of the wind?

CN Er, the direction of the wind is not determined – trees sway sort of randomly. We look at every feature we put in and ask how much gameplay do we get out of it? We don't put in features that don't have gameplay.

PCZ Why will *Far Cry* be better than any other shooter on the market?

CN What we're trying to do is get from a good idea to a great idea. There's a lack of truly great games around and the thing is you can look at a good game and say: "yeah, that would have been great if they'd done this or that..." Because of our editor we can do these things very quickly and that's the difference between a good game and a great game.

PCZ What game are you playing now?

CN I'll be predictable and say *GTAIII*. But hey, it is a great game.



"Take me, darling."



The indoor bits look pretty too.



Yul Brynner, Telly Savalas – there's always been a place for the bald man in the movies.

Everyone loves going to... THE MOVIES

Lights. Camera. Action. *Martin Korda* sits in the director's chair

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Lionhead Studios
PUBLISHER TBA
WEBSITE www.lionhead.com
OUT TBA

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- You get to make your own movies...
- ...and unique movie stars who throw tantrums and grow older
- Record your own dialogue and soundtracks
- Email movies to your friends
- Incredibly intuitive, yet deeper than a bloody big well

CV



LIONHEAD STUDIOS

I could use these few intro lines to tell you a little about how Lionhead is one of the most respected developers in the UK or you could read all about them on page 28. Ooops, I've run out of room.

1997 Disillusioned with the direction that Bullfrog was taking after selling the company to EA, Peter Molyneux forms Lionhead.

2001 *Black and White* is released to massive critical acclaim.

2002 *Black and White* expansion pack, *Creature Isles*, is created by Black and White Studios, one of the first satellite developers set up to work in conjunction with Lionhead.



Forget the local Odeon, the real movie action'll be on your PC.

AND THE winner of best Motion Picture is... *Cute Mentally Challenged Man in Heroic Battle of Adversity XXVII*. That's yours. Jumping exultantly from your seat, you try not to look smug, consciously avoiding the withering stares from the other four nominees as they fail to hide their disappointment. You walk on stage, propelled by an injection of euphoria and adrenaline, ears ringing with a crescendo of applause. This is the moment you've been waiting for your whole life. Beaming triumphantly and gripping your newly acquired golden paperweight, you speak into the foam covered mic: "I'd like to thank my mum, dad, sister <sniff>, brother, ummmmm... cousins, cousin's pet badger <sob>, the taxi driver who brought me here... errr, I think his name was <sniff> Ahmed. Err, umm, or was it Armind? Reginald, my secondary <blub> school drama teacher...." boohoooo. Boohooooooooo, blub...

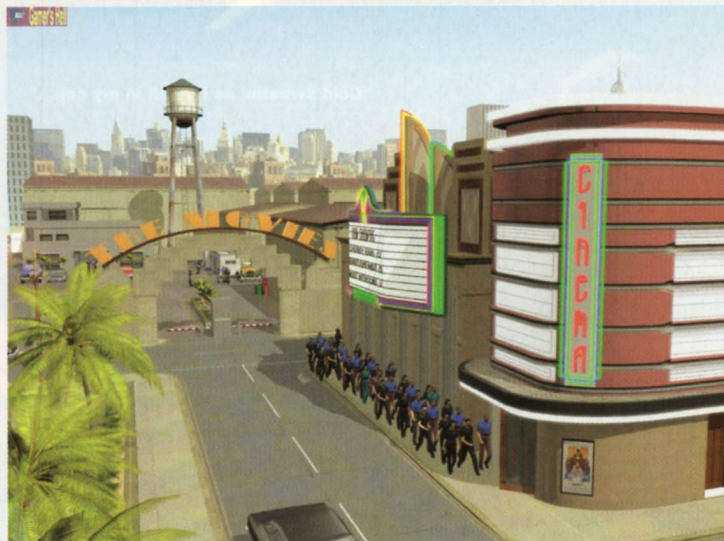
Just a dream right? After all, how likely is it you'll ever make anything more cinematically ambitious than your annual three minute kinky camcordered fumble with the missus? You know, the one with the heart-stopping rollercoaster-ride of an ending where one of you puts the kettle on and asks, "Nice cup of tea?" Oooh, that'd be lovely darling.

PERCHANCE TO DREAM

Well, maybe, just maybe, it's not such an impossible dream. Suppose if you will, for one dream-like moment, that you could make your own films, without having to raise £100 million first, and without acting as a semen receptacle for some grotesquely deformed sun-dried prune of a producer in order to get your big break? Well, suppose no longer my celluloid loving friends, as development giant Lionhead is on the case to make all your dreams come true (apart from the one featuring Claudia Schiffer, a Black and



The sets available to build will change throughout the ages.



Watch the crowds flock to see your latest masterpiece.



What goes on behind the camera is just as important as what goes on in front.



THE MOLYNEUXS

AND THE WINNER OF BEST FILM IS...

What's the point of spending days, if not weeks, making a blockbuster when you've got no audience to appreciate your labours? Fear not, Lionhead is well ahead of you. Plans are currently underway to provide an online service to upload your creations to a *Movies* website, and better still, once every so often, its their very own version of the Oscars. The winner will be sent a patch which will raise the reputation of their film company in the single-player game, making it far easier to recruit the best actors, cameramen and scriptwriters. What a thoughtful bunch they are.



Decker Workmate and an industrial sized barrel of Vaseline, sadly).

But before I regale you with details of how you can become the next Spielberg, a little background information, if you please. Peter Molyneux, director and founder of Lionhead Studios and the brains behind some of the most innovative titles in gaming history, woke one January morning, sat up, sipped his tea and suddenly realised he'd had a fantastic thought. Why not create a game where you can make your own movies? What a bloody good idea, he thought. So off he toddled to work, told his co-founders at Lionhead over buns and tea about a game where you run a movie studio from the 1920s to the present day, and everyone clucked with delight. And when Peter recently took me through the game, so did I.

WHERE'S MY MOTIVATION DARLING?

First off, you need to build a studio, with each decade offering new sets of buildings and locations to film your epics in. Next, get your pissed-up bunch of work-shy writers to come up with a script. Recruit some movie stars, or simply create your own with the intuitive editor, and start imagining your film. Surely it can't be that simple though, can it? Can

The way that you influence the tone and direction of your movie is again, almost too easy to believe. A set of sliders at the bottom of the screen allow you to adjust certain parameters such as violence and realism. Sounds simplistic right? Well, that's what I thought too, but when Peter showed me how these variables interact with the individual acting styles of each cast member (who actually age throughout the years), which in turn combine with the near infinite amount of sets that you can build to create a limitless amount of unique scenes, it soon became obvious just how free-form the game is going to be.

I'M AN ACTOR, DON'T YOU KNOW?

Not satisfied yet, you rapacious throng of demanding games connoisseurs? Then how about the option of adding your very own soundtrack (if you don't fancy using the massive archive which will come bundled with the game)? Bet you're glad you took those recorder lessons when you were six now, eh? And as if that wasn't enough, you can even add your own dialogue. So from the comfort of your own arse, you'll be able to fulfill an ambition you've harboured since you

"You can make pretty much whatever movie you want in each era, though *Rear Entry VII* might be pushing it"

it? Hmmmm? Hmmmm? Well actually, yes it can. But despite this ease of use, *The Movies* is looking like being one of the most free-form, exciting and compelling titles in years.

However, while you'll be free to make pretty much whatever movie you want in any of the eras – although *Rear Entry VII* might be pushing it – there will be certain constraints and problems. First off, audience. Making a Tarantino-like blood-bath of a film in the conservative 1920s won't make you much money, or win you many friends. Secondly, technological restraints. Making *Star Wars* in the 1930s will be next to pointless as it'll look utterly shit, and no one will understand what a space ship is anyway.

were a pretentious, rake-like film studies student who made nonsensical films based on the ethical teachings of Kant, filled with wailing toga-wearing academics flinging their arms about in attempted profundity. Yes, finally, after all those years of hankering for another chance, you'll be able to make a film that's not utter shite.

It's still early days for *The Movies*, but with some stunning work being done on actor behaviour – they'll get drunk, throw tantrums, touch little boys on the bottom (I made that one up, but you get the idea), and some incredible animations and aging effects, it looks like *The Movies* will be yet another hit to roll off the seemingly never-ending Molyneux conveyor belt of videogame excellence. **EF**



Not pictured: one fighter cleric who's just crapped his pants.

Chuck out your razors, it's... EVERQUEST II

Sword in hand, **Scott Steinberg** bravely explores a world filled with wizards, warriors and hairy blokes posing as buxom barmaids

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Sony Online
PUBLISHER Sony Online
WEBSITE www.everquest2.com
ETA Autumn 2003

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Sequel to the great-granddaddy of online role-players
- Hours and hours of gameplay – even for those who hate hacking 'n' slashing
- Stunning new graphical engine with no resolution limits
- Dance, attend a play, meet your potential mate... it's *The Sims* gone medieval



OMINOUS rumbles echo throughout the Commonlands. Keyboard clasped firmly, you resolutely reach for the hotkey that conveys puzzlement. But before you or the rest of the party can react, a frothing clump of spherical objects bedecked in moss comes tumbling over the horizon. Could it be the errant result of a frost giant's bowel movement? Nay, there's an angry Earth elemental charging your way, and the only help at hand are two slovenly schoolmates currently posing as barbarian swordsmen. Crap in a hat... the blokes back at the guild never said adventuring would be this stressful.

Then again, they weren't fully acquainted with *EverQuest II*. Sequel to the online role-playing obsession that swallowed so many souls it might as well be a minor deity, this is a title poised on the brink of superstardom. With more than 400,000 subscribers to its predecessor's name, legions of Fan Faire conventions, and many a ruined marriage to the franchise's credit, it's a series that by all accounts has redefined

gaming as we know it. And, in the US at least, the new game is set to launch. Which, as they say in the business, lads, is big freakin' news.

Mercifully, the 45-strong development team knows a good thing when they see it. Therefore they aren't so much reworking the title as polishing the existing gameplay to a keen shine. So sweeping changes aren't high on Sony Online's list. With the impending PR nightmare sure to come from thousands of shut-ins who'll soon renounce religion (and bathing) for love of a computer game, who can blame the beggars?

TRADING SPACES

What they have done an excellent job of, however, is reworking existing material to accompany the newly reset calendar. Although set once again in the world of



"Cold sweatin' as I dwell in my cell..."



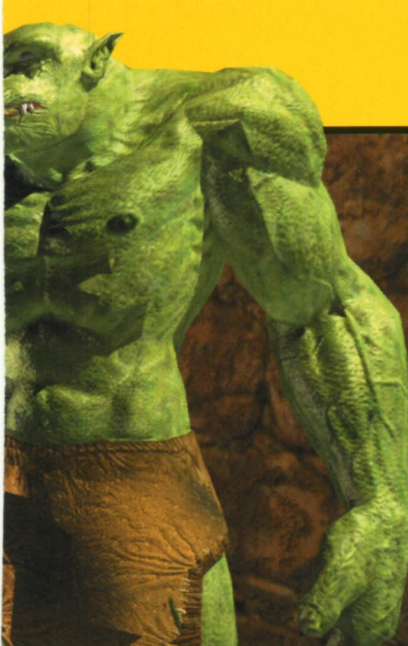
"Thank you. I love you all."

Norrath, this latest escapade takes place several generations removed from the initial offering – specifically, during the Age of Destiny. As senior game designer Bill Trost explains: "The scale of the world is much larger than before... So much so that now, even familiar geographical features take on new life."

Both previously seen locales and play mechanics have received a comprehensive makeover. From blows that can now be targeted at specific portions of the anatomy to entire cities such as Freeport or Erudin reconstructed using a more logical layout, all that is old is once again new. And, as opposed to previous questing, everything is designed to be devoured in reasonable two-hour chunks. "We want people in and playing as soon as possible," suggests Trost.

"We're taking the time to flesh out an entire world this go round"

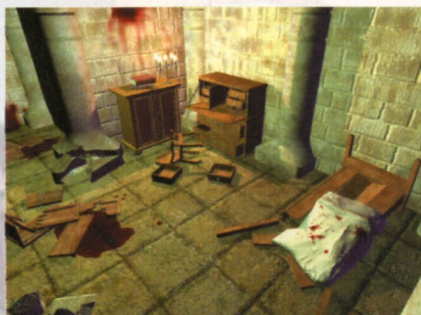
BILL TROST SENIOR GAME DESIGNER



UNDER CONSTRUCTION

BREAKING GROUND WITH NEW POCKET ZONE TECHNOLOGY

It's been a hard day. First, there was the angry dwarf who didn't appreciate the longsword you forged him. Then that shapely elven maiden tossed you for a necromancer. Times like these call for crawling back to your home in shame and bawling your eyes out where no one else can see. Luckily, now you can, courtesy of *EverQuest II*'s new 'pocket zones'.



Create your very own private student flat.

A way to create self-contained spaces dynamically, the technology allows for construction of houses, arenas, apartments, inns, guild houses and other structures that are at the same time separated from, yet part of the active world. Purchase a mansion with fully customisable exterior, for instance, and unless you give someone a key, your privacy within said structure is guaranteed. The system isn't just useful, but imperative to the proper functioning of player controlled settlements and similar constructs.

Likewise, it's also an essential tool for party planners. Want to keep those thieving halflings from nicking the silverware while everyone's sloshed on grog? Simply refuse to sell them invitations and hoist a mug high... Three cheers for pocket zones!

"As soon as the player enters the game, we hit them with tons of things to see and do"

BILL TROST SENIOR GAME DESIGNER

But that doesn't mean once you've chosen one of 14 races (including newcomers such as the Thundercat-like Kerrans) it's off adventuring you go. Thanks to new trade skills, you can easily make a name for yourself taking part in a player-driven economy. Whether you're busy promoting parties, planning real-time weddings, or just strutting on the gladiatorial circuit, even those who never venture beyond

the confines of 'save haven' will inevitably find a lifetime's worth of entertainment in store.

THE GREAT BEYOND

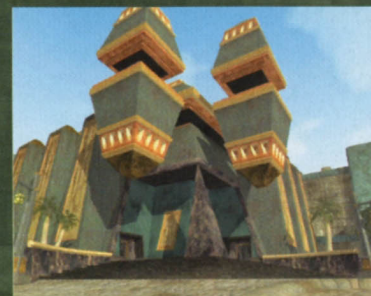
Intrepid souls won't be disappointed, either. Should wanderlust beckon, you'll find a world of wonder lying out there. Having picked up a quest via a new system that allows for assignments to be gained anywhere, anytime, even through chance meetings with random strangers, stirring up excitement and/or trouble won't be a problem. Dozens of freshly introduced areas including the decrepit Fallen Gate, hideously malformed Castle Nektropos and staggeringly panoramic Grand Plateau await.

"As soon as the player enters the game, we hit them with tons of things to see and do," says Trost. "The first *EverQuest* was built piecemeal... we're taking the time to flesh out an entire world this go round." Needless to say, you will be surprised – and not just because low-level dungeons have become high-level challenges and vice-versa. Wandering through Bixie beehives, dark temple Cazic-Thule and Qeynos' familiar facade, a host of new challenges present themselves. And that's before you even take into account the baddies like zombies, void beasts and dragonfly faeries who still can't play nice with humanoid species.

Predictably, boss encounters serve as the *coup de grâce*. Trigger a scripted battle and you may find yourself face to face with Darathar the Deceiver, a titanic dragon who belches

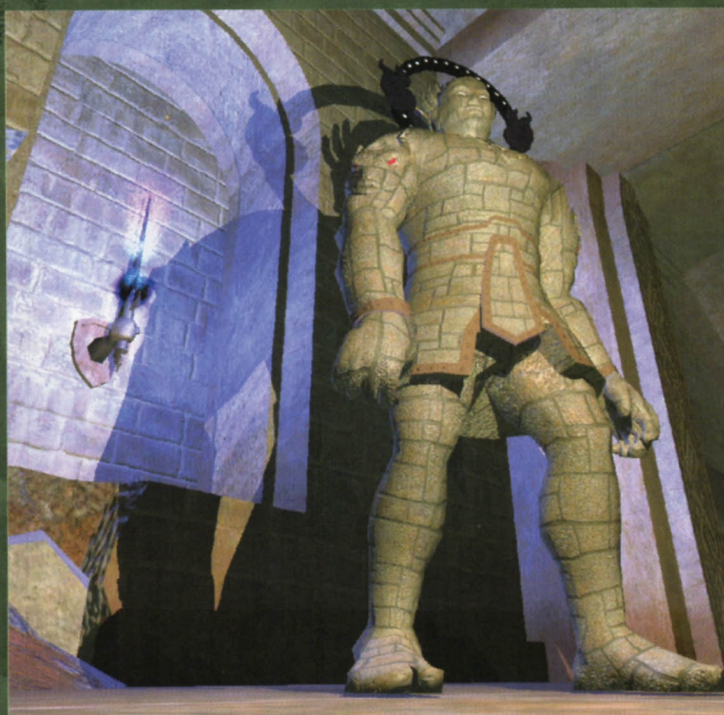


The latest plans for Wembley unveiled.



That doesn't look very safe.

flames like a Parisian tourist does crepes. Like general encounters, each is carefully placed by the design team to ensure players experience the game through a steady system of progression. Not that anyone's railroading you into any decisions at any time, since this



"Don't give me that stony-faced look."





A couple of friendlies want to welcome you to the Age of Destiny.

is live role-playing at its most sophisticated and potentially liberating.

'ELLO, SEXY

Graphics-wise, it's a corker too. We can scarcely believe the game is actually powered by a new graphical engine that's unfettered by resolution capping, whereby picture quality can steadily be upped as basic end-user PC specs improve over time. Such tidbits become all the more impressive when you spot shadows shifting as the sun passes overhead or characters wearing clothes and armor that move independently of the body beneath.

Visual marvels are obviously a speciality. As night falls, torches are lit throughout cities and lights flicker. The

sky itself turns a dark shade, filling with a host of unfamiliar stars. If it happens to be raining, even simple visibility becomes obscured by a cloudy haze that fast recedes when the morning sun creeps out. Impressive it is, oh yes, and incredibly atmospheric too.

Best to keep an eye on the locals, though. Not all are friendly, but you can always make someone smile thanks to more than 110 emote animations, which are built into the interface. If the devil is in the details, let's just say the title is well on course to be sinfully delightful.

FINAL FANTASY

Not only cleaner and sharper looking, this is a product whose gameplay appears well on course to being every bit

as dapper. For one, new systems make it easier to find and assemble a party. Political influence is more pronounced, so you can easily form allegiances with in-game factions like the Freeport militia. Players can become sages, telling fortunes or even assigning individuals special quests. Overall, the structure emphasises teamwork above all else, as "the gist is now on co-operation... players working against the environment, not each other," says Trost.

Joining forces, heroes from across the globe can perform miracles, slay monsters, and even stage the occasional poetry reading. Or just stay at 'home' (their individually tailored virtual domicile) and furnish the place with a brewer's still, blacksmith's forge or the odd piece of art. Just a sample of the many facets of the most comprehensive project Sony Online has undertaken to date. Happily for the fan community, each should be keenly balanced as well. It's an issue the development team is especially sensitive about, given the

"You can always make someone smile thanks to more than 110 emote animations"



Notice the subtle displays of light and shadow that play across armour...



The look of Freeport has changed noticeably, sporting a Middle Eastern feel.

Q&A

BILL TROST



We put the screws to senior game designer Bill Trost

PCZ Ever met an *EverQuest* fan that scared you?

BT Honestly, not really. Most are just normal people with normal lives who enjoy a break from their everyday routine now and again. True, some need to come back to reality faster than others, but hey...

PCZ When the new game launches, can I buy your character on eBay?

BT No way. But talk to me when the rest of the team's not around, and I'll tell you where someone might go to find a powerful wizard on the cheap. If they were so inclined.

PCZ Funniest in-game moment?

BT I haven't had too many. But a colleague was adventuring with a party who'd been online for a long session. Their cleric just stopped moving in the middle of a fight. He'd been playing so long, he fell asleep. So they carry him back to town, and three hours later he twitches a little. But the guy still didn't respond to questions... he must've just dozed on the keyboard.

PCZ Are Fan Faires good places to pick up chicks?

BT Let's put it this way. I don't think a professional bodybuilder could lift some of the girls there.

PCZ So no chance we'll meet our next girlfriend online?

BT Doubtful. Although, you might find a few willing brides. What's the term they use? Ah yes... "from Russia with love".

unusually vocal nature of their clientele. "You can never underestimate how many players you'll have on day one," laughs Trost. "It's the reason we're putting so much effort into making sure everything runs smoothly across the board. I hate to say it, but you don't know what trouble is until you've got a group of pissed off social outcasts... er, lifelong role-players banging at your door." **PCZ**

HEARTS OF IRON

Hearts of Iron is the first ever World War II PC strategy game of true Grand Strategic scope! The game map spans the entire world & allows players to take part in any front they choose. Developed by the team behind the award winning Europa Universalis PC Games, Hearts of Iron focuses on the epic struggle between the great alliances of the world orders - Fascism, Communism & Democracy.

- Global map with all the nations between 1936 & 1946 accurately portrayed & available to play.
- Real Time game-play, with the capability to pause at any time to issue commands.
- Change the course of war by researching super weapons & superior production capabilities.
- Thousands of real generals & political leaders have been incorporated for a high level of accuracy.
- Over 100 different ground, air & naval forces fighting the total war on divisional level.
- Modify & construct your own settings & campaigns with the in-built scenario editor.
- Internet multiplayer over the Valkyrienet matchmaking service.



Where Diplomacy Ends, War Begins



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Ryan McKane is...

TOCA RACE DRIVER

Even driving games have stories now, but Steve Hill still can't drive

WE'VE traditionally looked kindly on the TOCA games here at PC ZONE, adorning them with the default goodness award of the time, be it a 'Recommended' or an 'Excellence' tag. While never capturing the heady heights of the Colin McRae games, Codemasters' tar-based counterpart has nevertheless provided a consistently solid drive. There have only actually been two TOCA games released, and it would have been all too easy to simply spruce the series up and churn out a number three. But Codemasters doesn't want to give you that. It wants to give you a whole new driving experience. As studio head Gavin Raeburn says: "If we were to expand the appeal of TOCA, and also move the racing genre forward, we really needed to start all over again with a fresh concept and design."

CHARACTER BUILDING

To this end, *TOCA Race Driver* will involve a lot more than simply driving round and round a track in an expensive car. To be

fair, that will make up the bulk of the gameplay, but the on-track action is bolstered by a complex storyline intended to provide a compelling incentive to race.

"There are many, many reasons for adding characters and a story into *TOCA Race Driver*," says Raeburn. "To begin with, most current racing games are not a true reflection of the sport they portray. They treat motor racing as if it were a very dull documentary, where no people are involved at all, and the focus is purely on the cars. The racing itself, of course, is vitally important to a good race game, but motor sport is not just about cars –

it's about the people involved as well. Imagine F1 without the likes of Schumacher and Eddie Irvine. We think this is one of the main reasons that F1 games are generally so mind-numbingly dull to play."

WHAT'S THE STORY?

The story, where you play top driver Ryan McKane, involves betrayal, murder and revenge (which you certainly didn't get in *Grand Prix 4*). Raeburn is

sure the narrative approach is more than tokenism though, and it even adheres to Hollywood's classic nine-act structure.

"We're not talking about throwing in a few dull cut-scenes that people have no interest in. We're talking about trying to create the complete world of a pro race driver, where everything in the game has a real-world reason for being there, and where all events are directly driven by you. We want the whole game to flow so that you don't notice the story unfolding, just like in *Half-Life*."

Throw in some extremely complicated damage simulation and a host of tracks and cars, and it all sounds very promising. The game has already been something of a hit on the PS2, where it appeared before Christmas, but needless to say we're betting that the PC incarnation is the definitive version. If so, we might even dig out another award. **PCZ**



For the purist, we give you the in-car view.

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Codemasters
PUBLISHER Codemasters
WEBSITE www.codemasters.com
[/tocaracedriver](http://tocaracedriver.com)
OUT March 2003

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- TOCA games are good
- 38 real-life race circuits
- Brilliant damage modelling system
- A story about a bloke called Ryan

"Most racing games are not a true reflection of the sport"

GAVIN RAEURN, HEAD OF STUDIO, CODEMASTERS



When some twat is ramming you off the track, will you care about a story?



Simulating another day in the life of a Kwikfit fitter.

"THE TRUE BATTLE IS ONLY JUST BEGINNING" PC Zone



The winner of over a dozen media awards is to begin an all-new campaign. A hundred years after the events in the continent of Orbis, The King Artos is dead. Discontent is driving the provinces apart, and closer to war... Can you reign supreme in this world of chaos?

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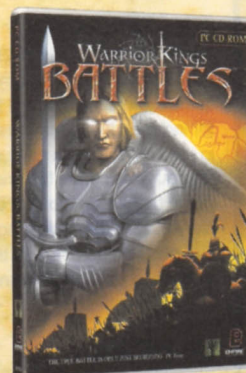
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Steve O'Hagan paints himself blue, grows a wild beard and lifts the kilt on a bonny wee highland RTS

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Soft Enterprises
PUBLISHER Novalogic
WEBSITE www.highlandwarriors.com
OUT March 21

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- It's a bit like *Braveheart*, but a strategy computer game
- Kilted maniacs vs conniving Englishmen
- Versatile 3D engine
- Five playable sides

THE MEMORY of jubilant Scottish fans hanging off the crossbar like Caledonian chimps at Wembley following the home side's 1-0 reversal in 1988 is still cause for much anti-tartan feeling south of the border. But frankly that's nothing compared to the animosity felt by many of those north of Hadrian's Wall for centuries of brutal subjugation by their imperialist neighbour. Well, whichever side of the halfway line you stand on this field of simmering tension, it's payback time, as *Highland Warriors* lets you play the role of Scottish patriot or Sassenach invader in a recreation of medieval combat set among the hoarse and heather of the highlands.

CULL OF KINTYRE

Loosely based on history, this fully 3D RTS runs from the founding of Scotland in the 9th century up until the struggle for independence from the English yoke in the 14th and 15th centuries. Another rigorously accurate historical strategy game then? Erm, no. Not unless the clansmen of the Middle Ages really were superhuman heroes with the power to throw dazzling spells and magical

pyrotechnics around like a haggis from a whiskey barrel.

And fair play too. Rather than aiming to be an authentic *Medieval: Total War*-style battle simulator, *Highland Warriors* pitches itself somewhere between the plot-driven heroics of *Warcraft III* and the comic book history of *Age Of Empires*.

There are five sides (four clans and the English) to play as through the game's four campaigns. Each has its own special units and powers. Wicked William I, for example, can cause opponents to flee from his radius of fear, or can torture enemy units to glean vital information. The Cameron clan, on the other hand, is blessed with berserker units that can create whirlwinds of death on the battlefield, and standard-bearers that whip up nearby units into a frenzy of bloodletting.

MONARCH OF THE GLEN

From the missions we played, gameplay veers between basic build and battle, to more cut scene-heavy manoeuvres in which smaller bands of heroes wander from one scripted incident to another. Seasoned RTS gamers should feel at home pretty quickly, as *Highland Warriors* adopts several genre-standard features such as the 'select idle villager' button, the handful of unit formation orders, and the fog of war black veil that shrouds the map. A nice touch is the ability to move all the buttons, mini-maps and status displays on screen to create a dashboard you're comfortable with.

Thanks to its nifty 3D engine, the action can be viewed from practically any angle. You can pan, rotate, zoom and elevate the camera so that you can



Better than *Braveheart*. Well, at least it hasn't got Mel Gibson in it.



One of the lesser known clan tartans.



"We gonna have a house party, yeah."

"Wicked William I can cause opponents to flee from his radius of fear or torture enemy units"

go from a top down Eagle's-eye view, to practically looking up a clansman's kilt (and believe us, Martin was quick to try just that).

Worthy of mention in this department is the eyebrow-raising level of detail in the units, structures and environments. Rabbits scamper, trees and flags sway in the wind, shadows match their casters exactly, and buildings get burnt to the ground with an impressive, fiery flourish.

When the fighting starts you can zoom right in as druids unleash walls of flame,

unkempt, hirsute berserkers clash with chainmailed knights and spearmen brace themselves for cavalry attacks – all in glorious 3D. The only problem being the fairly ravenous demands it all makes on your graphics card.

However, with more than 50 missions, a skirmish generator and eight-way multiplayer battles, there'll be plenty for everyone in *Highland Warriors*. Our only worry is that sustained play may reveal yet another generic RTS dressed up in a 3D engine. And kilts. [C]



More brutal than Celtic fans in Spain.



Real-time high beam technology.

ENIGMA: RISING TIDE



"Debut Game of the Year - Enigma: Rising Tide"

-- IGN Action Vault Awards ign.com

"There is nothing like watching a torpedo rip open a slow-moving merchantman or tanker, or the feel of eluding a destroyer's depth charge run by doing a quick surface-to-torpedo depth and firing all tubes in a spread that sends her to the bottom. The game's directional sound effects are topnotch: the pinging of sonar, the whirring of torpedoes as they speed by, and the clanking and creaking as your sub prepares to dive. And, the game also recognizes voice commands, making it possible to play Rising Tide totally hands free!"

-- Gamespy.com



-- GAMESPOT 9/10

-- GAMES REVIEW 9.2/10

Runaway

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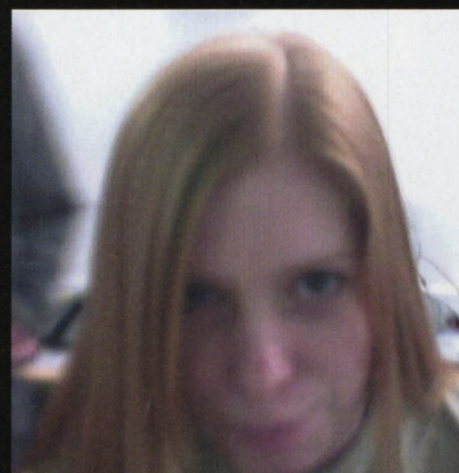
UNLEASH A DIFFERENT KIND OF ANIMAL

ADAPT



C DRIVE WARLORD Glasgow, Scotland

You think you've got balance - don't be FOOLED! I'm sending in PIRANACHEETAH's: Taking advantage of the fastest of land animals with a ferocious set of teeth to match. They enjoy a frenzied bout of pack hunting and are agile enough for a surprise attack in a 30 min. death match - it's sink, swim, run or be devoured!!



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game studios

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OR DIE



Wizard
London, England

Send in my TURTLE-PHANTS, they might sound like a subjugated military troop but with the massive stomping power of an elephant and the protective armour of a turtle – on land or sea these guys'll flatten anything in their path and still take no flak – you won't be coming up for air!

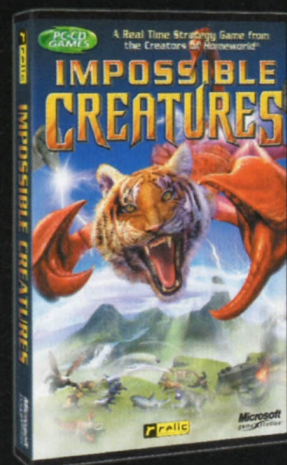
...C-ya; most definitely don't wanna be ya!



SLAYER
Cardiff, Wales

If you guys think you've got all the combinations covered – think again.

Meet: TIGRA! Start running boys, because this cat's renowned for fast paced vicious and violent attacks. She's deadly in herds and her unique camouflage means she's one of the most aesthetically pleasing animals in this arena – but DON'T BE DECEIVED you're going to be seeing more than stripes when she catches up with you. Au revoir. 😊



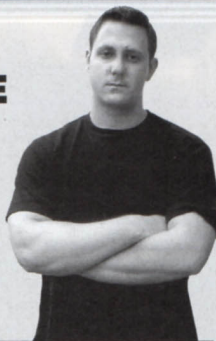
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www.impossiblecreatures.co.uk

REVIEWS

SINS ONLINE



■ **REVIEWS EDITOR** Martin Korda

▲ I am writing to you from the brink of insanity. Hovering nervously beside me are two very large men, brandishing a straightjacket and an electric cattle prod. It's for my own good. I could lose it at any second. But fear not, before I'm dragged away kicking and frothing, I'll make sure I finish this column, safe in the knowledge that the longest-running review code saga of my near two-year reign as reviews editor is over.

It all started two weeks ago when the lime green wallet containing the review code for *The Sims Online* dropped onto my desk with a customary plop. Off it went to Keith Pullin to review. The disks were corrupted. Several days and 270,000 phone calls to various parties later, Keith received another batch. The disks were corrupted. More time passed, more phone calls made and more code tracked down and sent to Keith. This time things were different. Not only were the disks corrupted, they virtually destroyed his machine. It was time for another plan.

The code then made its way to a certain Richie Shoemaker. Once again, the code failed to work. Oh, and it destroyed his machine too.

Boxed code was ordered from America. Code was delayed from America. It was almost time to start crying. Then, at the 11th hour, I called **ZONE** freelancer Scott Steinberg, who I'd heard had been playing the game extensively (as it was already on sale in the US). Thankfully, he was ready to step in and do the definitive review. The day was saved, but my sanity, sadly, wasn't.

Before I go, let me point out a game which will send you crazy in other, far more pleasant ways – *Unreal II*. Our massive world exclusive review of the biggest and most exciting shooter since *Half-Life* starts on page 64. You simply have to play this game.

OK guys, take me away, I promise I'll come quietly.



The day of reckoning is here. Can Legend's massive shooter re-write the FPS rulebook and revolutionise the genre?



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THE ZONE SCORING SYSTEM

Some people (mainly game 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. 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*. We know that occasionally

you might disagree with us but we're big enough to take criticism. You can email your thoughts to letters@pczone.co.uk, or get them off your chest instantly on the forums at www.pczone.co.uk. If you think you can do better then why not send us a review – if it's good enough we'll print it in the magazine.

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.

MEET THE TEAM



DAVE WOODS

Unreal II



JAMIE SEFTON

Unreal II

What are you currently playing?

What job would you give your Sim in *The Sims Online*?

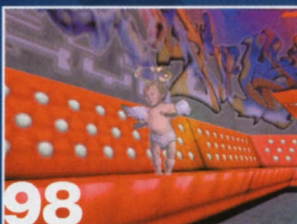
Anti-McDonalds Protestor

Football Hooligan



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Is the FPS revolution here?



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INCLUDING GROUND CONTROL, MESSIAH, ICEWIND DALE AND HEART OF WINTER, BALDUR'S GATE AND TALES OF THE SWORD COAST, BALDUR'S GATE II: SHADOWS OF AMN AND THRONE OF BHAAL, FALLOUT 2 AND MANY MORE...

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80



88



MARTIN KORDA

Unreal II
Malaysian Ping-Pong
Ball Salesman



ANTHONY HOLDEN

Battlefield 1942 and Silent Hill 2
Itinerant Pool Hustler
or Televangelist



RHIANNA PRATCHETT

Age Of Mythology
Agent Provocateur



KEITH PULLIN

Grand Theft Auto III
Punch Bag



MARK HILL

Unreal II
Pimp



RICHIE SHOEMAKER

Laser Squad Nemesis and
BF1942: Road to Rome
Hopeless Drunk

Unreal

THE AWAKENING

IMPERSPECTIVE

ALIENS VS PREDATOR 2

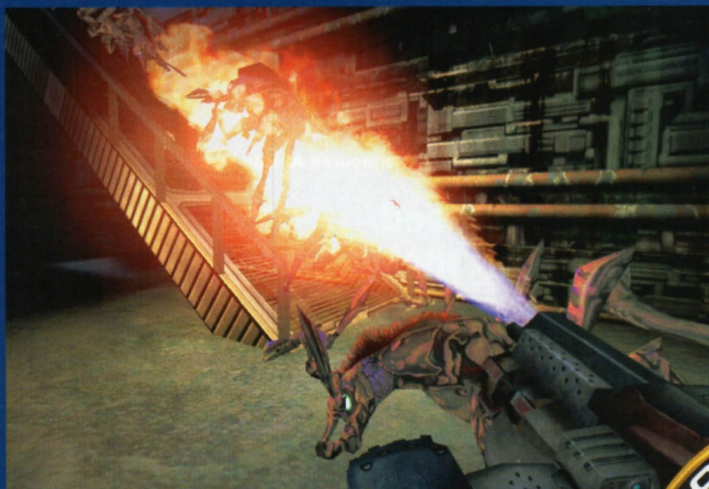
Reviewed Issue 110, Score 93%

Though palling somewhat in the graphical stakes, *AvP2* has certain similarities with *Unreal II*, not least the sci-fi setting and terrifying enemies. It boasts an excellent plot too, although the tripartite gameplay means the quality isn't as consistent as it should be.

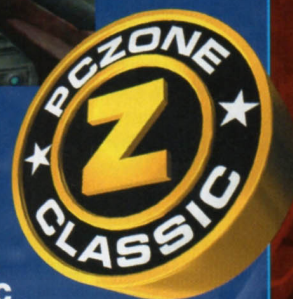
UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2003

Reviewed Issue 122, Score 90%

If you want the looks of *Unreal II* but want to take the whole thing online, this is the place to do it. You might however find the bright, shiny graphics can actually get in the way of a good deathmatch. And we're not just talking lag-wise.



The enemies look stunning, but don't spend too long admiring them or they'll rip your guts out.



■ £34.99 | Pub: Atari | Dev: Legend Entertainment |
ETA: February 7 | www.unreal2.com |

REQUIRES PIII 733, 256Mb RAM and a 32Mb video card
DESIRES P4 1.2GHz, 384Mb RAM and a 64Mb video card

The wait is over. Mark Hill presents the best reason you will ever have to upgrade your PC

WE'VE BEEN waiting a long time for the next evolutionary step in first-person shooters. I don't care what anyone says, nothing released in the last two years has done more than take small steps towards real progress.

Deus Ex was truly revolutionary, and in many respects the way I would hope first-person games will go, but not strictly a thunderous action romp. I'm talking about the intense anxiety of those first few *Doom* games or the sheer joy of bulldozing through a *Duke Nukem* level. I'm talking pure action. And I'm talking single-player.

There's little that can equal the full, in-your-face thrill of an evenly matched bout of *Quake III* or *Counter-Strike* but, even without problems of lag, cheating and the difficulty of finding opponents that don't practice 24 hours a day, these are just short-term kicks. It's very different to immerse yourself in a single-player story, where everything has been designed just for you. Multiplayer is a sport, single-player an artform.

In contrast with most developers, Legend Entertainment has done the smart thing and has ignored online modes completely, avoiding the danger of spreading themselves too thinly. Instead they have concentrated on creating the

ultimate solo shooter. The question is not only "have they succeeded?" but also "is it enough?"

EVOLUTION

There's certainly something evolutionary about *Unreal II*. It takes elements from games like *Doom*, *Half-Life*, and *AvP2* and wraps them up in the most splendid-looking package imaginable, with a dose of intergalactic plotting for good measure. Those looking for something truly groundbreaking though will be disappointed.

Because while *Unreal II* does many new things and is certainly no clone, neither is it trying to revolutionise gaming and shatter all your preconceptions. After all, this is an *Unreal* game. It has an image and a reputation to maintain and a fanbase to please. You don't get Radioheads in the game industry: if the fans want angsty rock, you don't serve them experimental electronica.

But *Unreal II* does have some aces up its sleeve: its breathtaking beauty, a startling variety of gameplay, some well-developed characters and a plot that does more than serve as a trivial excuse for the shooting.

As ex-marine turned security marshal John Dalton, you start off on a mission to investigate a



In some missions you'll be helped out by some well-armoured AI side-kicks.



facility on a small planet whose communications have been cut off. As you descend in your shuttlecraft it's obvious something isn't quite right. You can tell by the piles of bodies, the sprayed blood and the impaled heads that greet you. To say nothing of some rather unsettling alien noises. But it's daylight, the sky is blue and the world is awash with colour. So there's nothing to be scared of, right? Wrong. The first movement in this symphony of violence is straight out of the *Aliens Vs Predator* songbook, and it's not long before you're pushing your chair away from the screen as some nasty creatures fill the screen with bolts of lightning. And that's before you meet the Skaarj.

WAKE UP, BOO!

The powerful, ugly aliens from the first *Unreal* are back. And they look so good it takes a while before you can fight them properly. On the one hand you'd really like to turn tail and run when they first come charging at you, but on the other you'd desperately like to get a closer look. Their towering frames, covered in sinewy muscle and leathery skin, is just one of the many sights that will have you staring in astonishment at your screen. As a result, your first few attempts will end up with you spraying a distant mountain with bullets as your body is torn to shreds

"You need to hit the pause button on a regular basis just to catch your breath"

like a ragdoll. The thing is, the close-up glimpse you get just before your innards are pulled out of your eye-sockets is actually worth it.

The next level is a taster of better things to come (because this is a game which keeps improving as you progress), as you find a crashed space craft and have to help the soldiers to fend off hordes of aliens while you wait for a dropship to pick you all up. Despite the dusk, which keeps a lot of the battle tantalisingly unclear, you once again have the urge to just sit back and watch, as your comrades run, scream and waste as many enemies as they can. Not that you can stay neutral for long, as ever more powerful Skaarj hurl their hulking masses at you while you fumble through your weaponry for something

What... the hell... is that?

effective. This is the kind of game where you need to hit the pause button on a regular basis just to catch your breath.

HISTORY LESSON

Soon after, some may think the game dips a bit in quality. The rest of us know better and just strap in for a relentless bout of nostalgia, as the primitive thrills of *Doom* are served up with a coating of visual and technical wonder. It's leave-your-brains-at-the-door stuff, with dozens of arachnid creatures scuttling towards you like a hideous living carpet while some larger

insectoids hurl their formidable bulks through the air in an attempt to squash your head. It's like *Eight Legged Freaks* meets *Starship Troopers* by way of old-school shooting. But even if this isn't your type of thing, you'll be having too much fun with the flamethrower (perfect for setting the swarming critters ablaze) and marvelling at the effects to care.

But it's not until later that you realise that it isn't just the graphics that are a bit special and on another level entirely from what we've seen before. Variety comes in the shape of

WOT?! NO MULTIPLAYER?

THAT'S BECAUSE IT'S BEEN OUT FOR MONTHS, YOU DONKEY

There's really no reason to moan about the lack of online modes in *Unreal II*. It's meant that Legend has been able to concentrate on creating the best single player experience possible, while another team thrashed out *Unreal*

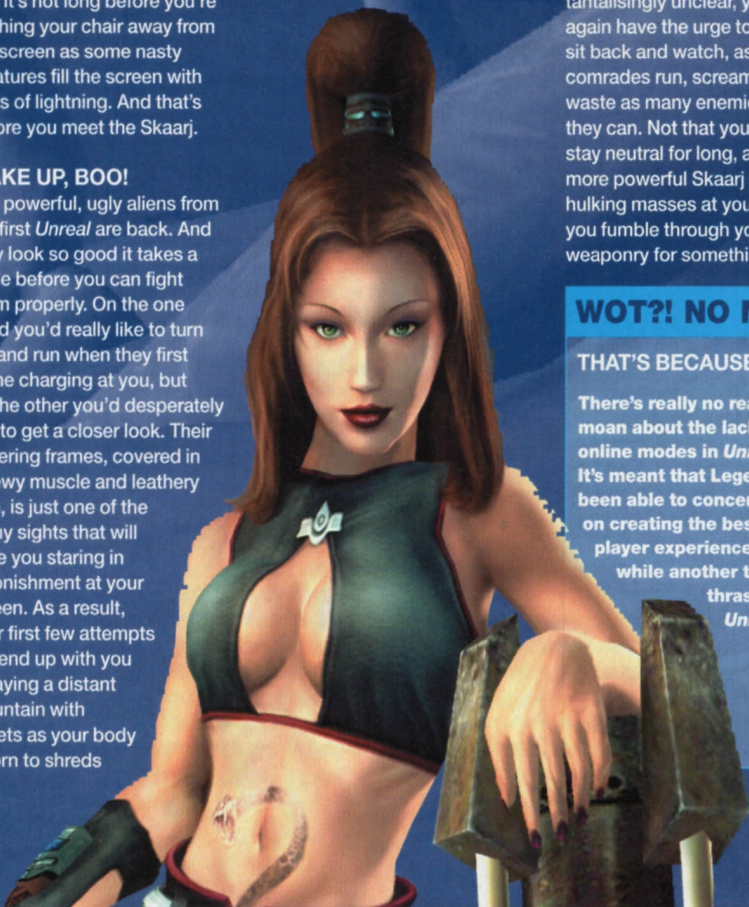
Tournament 2003. It's true that *U2:TA* looks better, but that's precisely because it doesn't have to make the compromises necessary to accommodate dozens of people.

Having said that, it would be good if Legend decide to put out a multiplayer patch or expansion pack, if only to get to use the excellent weapons. And you can imagine some fantastic defend/attack modes where

the defending team can use turrets and field generators – and considering *UT2003* doesn't have an assault mode it could be a real boost. Even deathmatch



Frag online with *UT2003*.





I know how to make a girl hot down there.

DEFENDER

The first such mission takes place after a cute alien animal has messed up your ship's engines and you're forced to land for repairs. You're given some field generators – which create force fields where you want them – and some rocket turrets, and have to set up a line of defence before an enemy ship drops a load of its soldiers near your grounded vessel. Your job is to stop any of them getting to the door and hacking the entry code. After the first wave has decimated your turrets and left you with hardly a force field to speak of, you get another wave. And another one. Even with a health and shield regenerator nearby it takes plenty of tactical guile as well as swift mouse targeting to dispose of them. The fantastic terrain, full of dips, rises and



The outdoor locations are sprawling and breathtakingly beautiful.

I am spiderman, I am, I am, I am, I am!

infiltration missions, where sniping and using the terrain for cover as you break into a fortress-like building give the feel of a sci-fi version of *Project IGI*. But it's the levels where you have to defend an area or structure that really impress. If you're anything like me, you'll be keeping the save games taken at these points to replay over and over. And I can guarantee that each time you play them it will be different.



Enemy AI is some of the best ever seen in an FPS. Your foes strafe, take cover and have a deadly shot, making *Unreal II* a hugely challenging FPS.

rocky outcrops makes for a perfect battlefield.

The fight is made all the more difficult by the fact that these enemies are even more visually impressive than the Skaarj. They are genetically engineered female warriors who hide their bald heads behind some incredible

armoured suits that look so colourful and alive with energy it seems a shame to pummel them with rockets.

Your next defending assignment presents another surprise: the resources you have to arrange tactically are marines you can give orders to. It's not a *Ghost Recon* type of

command (you simply tell them which entrance you want them to cover) but neither does it need to be. Once the enemy waves arrive (as tiny specks in the distance of a sublime desert planet) it's another case of colourful, stunning bedlam.

But it's another defensive mission later on that really

takes the cookie. Here you have marines (who you can now order to cover you and follow you around) and turrets and field generators. The resulting clash is about as intense, manic and enjoyable as any I've ever encountered in a shooter.

However, these *Halo*-like touches and all the talk of

hectic battles shouldn't mislead you. *Unreal II* paces itself throughout, so that there are enough lulls to compose yourself and truly appreciate the action when it comes. You might even find that the speed at which you run feels a little slow in places, but you have to remember that you're wearing some serious armour and carrying some heavy weaponry.

CREW CUT

TAKE A CLOSER LOOK AT THE CHARACTERS. THEY'RE WORTH IT



AIDA

Accused by the army of being responsible for the death of a colony when younger. As a result she's a hardened cynic. Legend reckons the game will only be in the shops for an hour before someone creates a mod to remove her clothes. They certainly know their target audience.



NE'BAN

The only alien you won't be turning to green mush as soon as you set eyes on it, Ne'Ban is the ship's pilot. He speaks awful English and struggles to understand humanity, but he has other problems too. It turns out he's a prince, and his people want him back.



ISAAK

Your gruff, rough engineer is a disgraced ex-marine whose cowardice cost the lives of many of his comrades. You can understand why Aida resents him. He's there to explain how each weapon works, as well as creating new ones or modifying existing ones.



JOHN

That's you that is. Kicked out of the army and just dying to become a marine again. Which is why the big potato-head is so willing to do everyone's dirty work throughout the game. John is crucial in bringing the crew together and changing their lives for the better.

DOWN THE HATCH

The tempo is kept just as varied as the gameplay by having you return to your ship, the Atlantis, in between missions. It's similar in this way to *Elite Force*, where you got to hang around Voyager now and again. But because the Atlantis is a small vessel, it has much more detail than the *Star Trek* cruiser, and you don't have the annoying feeling that you are being denied access to large parts of your own ship. Here you can visit every room (including your own sleeping quarters), open hatches and crawl *Alien*-style through the floor ducts that lead to vital engine panels, and talk to the members of your crew.



"The resulting clash is about as intense, manic and enjoyable as any other I've ever encountered in a shooter"

The Skaarj are truly awesome adversaries.

conversations does create the illusion of a greater involvement with the story and does help to immerse you in the crew, making you feel like you're interacting in an evolving story rather than sitting back and eating it up. But it's very simplistic, with only a few choices available. Which I suppose is just as it needs to be to satisfy the trigger-happy fans the title is so clearly aimed at. But just in case such shooting aficionados get bored

with even this amount of storytelling, Legend has made sure it only really takes place during the mid-mission breaks aboard your ship. And if you don't want to get the full back-stories of each character, you can just avoid your crew and run directly to the shuttle bay. It's almost as if they expect the game to be played mostly by inbred hicks who have difficulty reading and need to shave their knuckles every morning. And who's to say they're wrong?

THE BEST GRAPHICS IN THE WORLD. EVER

Graphics aren't everything. Especially in a chess simulation or a cutesy puzzle game. But in a first-person shooter where you wander through grand alien landscapes, meet all manner of strange creatures and are generally sucked into a whole different world, they're pretty darned important. It's all very well clamouring for deeper stories and more original ideas, but the better the graphics the

Yup, I'm afraid it's fillings for you Mr.Bigmaw.

You'll find more information on each of them in the Crew Cut panel, but it's sufficient to say that their presence adds a touch of depth you might not expect from this type of game. Each one of them has a complex back-story that explains their personality and they all evolve throughout the course of the game.

The least complex character is reserved for yourself. Good, substantial characters are hard to come by in any game, but first-person shooters always seem to star muscly, obtuse meatheads. At least John is a rounded person, with a sense of humour and decent personality rather than a typical Duke Nukem-inspired hooligan.

PLOTTING COURSE

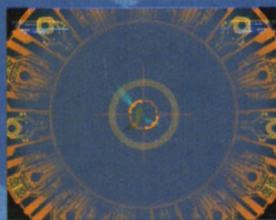
Legend is convinced that what will set *Unreal II* apart from all other shooters is the story. But, while it's great to have a proper overarching plot (in this case, the discovery of a series of ancient artefacts which several races are chasing in the hope of creating an ultimate weapon), it still feels at times like little more than an excuse for the action set pieces. The character development I've already mentioned does do more to set it apart from other titles, but you get the feeling there too that Legend was scared of adding too much depth for the hardcore FPS fans.

The addition of dialogue choices in the midst of your

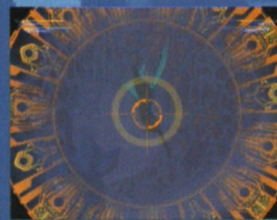
WALKTHROUGH →

GO FETCH BOY

We love discovering those cool hidden touches...



1 There's a creature flying way up in the sky. I have a sniper rifle. Wouldn't it be cool if I could shoot that sucker down?



2 I can, I can! Watch it plummet towards the ground. Haha, I'm the master of the universe. Now let's get on with the game.



3 Wait a minute. A member of the local wildlife has spotted my quarry and is dragging it off to its cave. Brilliant.

better the immersion. And you won't get any more immersed in the physical reality of a game than this.

The screenshots speak for themselves. But wait until you've seen it moving. You could sit and watch flames all day, and almost feel the warmth radiating from them. But there are plenty of other incredible effects too. Take the smoke for example. Not only does it have

And it's not just the visuals that are top notch, so is the sound. From the noises of different creatures, to the ambient sounds and weapon effects, right up to the excellent voice acting, the quality doesn't diminish for a single moment. Even the in-game soundtrack complements the action so well you hardly notice it. Except when you find yourself tapping along to it of course.



The array of weaponry is diverse and inventive.

a real corporeal look to it, it behaves like real smoke too. I spent ages using a smoke grenade just before a concussion one and staring in awe as the shock wave made the smoke disperse in different directions.

JAWS
Scientists say that Great White sharks are misunderstood. They're not mindless killers who will try to eat anything within sight, it's just that, lacking hands and the ability to speak, their way of



Two legs good, eight legs very, very bad.

MISSSED OPPORTUNITY (O)



"It's not just physical between us, is it?"

IT COULD HAVE BEEN SO MUCH MORE THAN A STRAIGHT SHOOTER

Apart from small grievances like not being able to skip cut-scenes, the biggest disappointment is seeing how much potential there is here to make something truly groundbreaking. It would have been nice to have more involved dialogue and see some story elements taking place during missions rather than just the Atlantis interludes. There's precious little interaction with the environment, except for doors and switches. And we would have preferred it if we'd been challenged with a few brainteasers now and again instead of waves of creatures and end-of-level bosses.

communicating with the world is by putting it in its mouth and sinking their teeth into it. Similarly, in a shooter you communicate with the world primarily through your

weapons. That is why their feel is so important. And in *Unreal II* you have a truly amazing multilingual arsenal at your disposal. I am not exaggerating when I say that it has the best

and most imaginative selection of weapons of any game ever made. For a run down of the most important ones you can take a look at the Top Of The League Arsenal side panel, but

WALKTHROUGH →

WELCOME TO THE GAME There's nothing developers like more than creating the aftermath of a slaughter. And leaving you with the mess...



1 Start with a trip to the briefing room, where the lovely Aida uses her visual aids to explain the situation.



2 One of your first sights is an impaled head next to the installation's entrance like a party invitation. It would be rude to refuse.



3 The bloodbath continues inside. Witness this body crushed by a door. And listen out for some weird howling.

TOP OF THE LEAGUE ARSENAL

HERE'S YOUR BASIC ARSENAL. WE'LL KEEP SOME OF THE LATER DISCOVERIES AS A SURPRISE



DUSTER

You'll be using this assault rifle a lot. Its alt fire mode is a burst of concentrated ammo that's great for knocking down armoured soldiers and can be used to ricochet around corners.



SHARK

This great rocket launcher packs a powerful punch, especially when Isaak modifies the alt fire so you can assign one of four rockets to different targets and then watch them fly off.



VULCAN

This gorgeous flamethrower is even better than *Return To Castle Wolfenstein's* and the alt fire is pure genius: lay down a line of napalm, which you can light as a fuse to lay fiery traps.



HYDRA

A multipurpose grenade launcher to which you can add different ammo as the game progresses: incendiary, fragmentary, concussion, EMP, smoke and toxic gas.



SHOTGUN

A very powerful hitter but most effective with the alternate fire mode, which accesses the brilliant incendiary ammo that can damage a group of enemies with its flames.



WIDOWMAKER

This sniper rifle is a thing of grace and beauty. Its zoom is tremendous, and makes you realise just how good the engine is. Pinpointing enemies from halfway across a map is truly satisfying.

all you need to know is that these beauties alone are worth the admission price. The moment you receive the spider gun is a true revelation. It works by shooting a spore at your victim which then bursts into dozens of tiny spiders that crawl all over their body,

there's a general feeling that Legend have kept it as simple as they could in order to satisfy the target audience.

The problem is this: as games get ever more sophisticated, how can we keep putting up with titles that have you shooting at things

that's not *Unreal II's* fault. Legend has taken the first-person shooter genre as far as it can go before it mutates into something deeper, more interesting and more complex.

The real advances aren't coming in the form of traditional first-person shooters; they're

"Unreal II is in the same class as Doom, Duke Nukem 3D and that Valve game"

making them run around screaming. It's almost on a par with those moments in *Undying* where you could induce your enemies to commit suicide.

JUST A NUMBER

There is no doubting the greatness of *Unreal II*, but that's not to say it's perfect. I've already pointed out the shortcomings in the story, and

99 per cent of the time? Hasn't this souped-up fairground Duck Hunt gone as far as it can?

Of course there will always be people who want nothing more than their meat and two veg rations of endless shooting, but it's about time we opened our taste buds to more exotic flavours. This industry has too many *Die Hards* and not enough *Mulholland Drives*. But

crossover games that merge and disregard genres in an effort to create deeper and more satisfying experiences. They're games like *Splinter Cell*, *GTA3*, *Deus Ex 2* or *Black & White 2*.

But judged against the Top Ten Shooters in our A-List, *Unreal II* has little competition. It's all a matter of taste, of course. For example, I



Come on then, I'll take you all on.

found that *No One Lives Forever 2* became unfunny, derivative and boring after the first level. And though there is much to be said for the realistic setting of *Medal of Honor*, there's no denying that it uses up all its aces in a few fantastic levels, leaving the rest to sag.

I wish I could just walk away now without giving *Unreal II* a score, thus forcing it into direct competition with the likes of the games I've mentioned. A mathematical verdict seems like such an ungraceful and inadequate way to convey the feel of this game. I would much rather you just took my word for it and went out and bought it. Sadly, boards of directors, marketing and advertising gimps would be completely lost without a number to hang on to. But it's just a number. The real knowledge can only be conveyed in words: *Unreal II* is in the same class as *Doom*, *Duke Nukem 3D* and that Valve game. Except that games keep getting better. And this is the best. [A+]



SECOND OPINION

MARTIN KORDA

Mark has got it spot on. *Unreal II* is an FPS of true beauty, atmosphere and clever touches, which melds the best ideas from many of the shooters that have preceded it. To this it adds the most breathtaking graphics I've seen to date, a largely well-scripted plot, convincing and at times humorous acting, and a vague sense of interaction with other characters. The AI is monumentally tough, meaning this is no three hour no-brainer, while the action is perfectly paced, but a lack of puzzles and over-reliance on tried and tested FPS grass-roots mechanics means that *Unreal II* doesn't so much embrace an original and groundbreaking approach as touch it flirtatiously on the arm. But that doesn't stop it being the new benchmark for the genre, and Legend's largely successful attempts to immerse you into a world of mystery and intrigue must be applauded.

Buy this game. If you don't, you'll be missing out on one of the most exhilarating experiences in gaming history. And you wouldn't want to do that now, would you?



4 These Izarians are easy pickings, but they'll still going to scare the living daylights out of you.



5 The first Skaarj lands on a lift you're travelling on. These guys are ugly, tough and amazing to watch.



6 Hurrah! You found an artefact. Unfortunately, you've also found your first boss character.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Amazing graphics
- ✓ Great sound
- ✓ Loads of variety
- ✓ Fantastic weapons
- ✗ Environment not very interactive
- ✗ Simplistic gameplay

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Sublime action, astonishing beauty

THE SIMS ONLINE

■ £29.99 | Pub: EA | Dev: Maxis | ETA: March 28 | www.thesimsonline.com

REQUIRES PIII 500, 128Mb RAM, 2Mb 3D card and a 56K modem **DESIRES** PIII 700, 8Mb 3D card and an ADSL connection

A wave of Sims has hit the Internet. Scott Steinberg stands in the surf



In the Garden Gnome sweatshops.

I'VE GOT a deep love for god games. Blame *Populous*. I used to be at the monitor for days at a time overseeing all that shepherding and destruction. I'd mastered just about every new title right up until 2000, when Will Wright unleashed his simulation of life upon the world. *The Sims* reigns as the non-hardcore gamer's title of choice, a cash cow (like all narcotics) that leaves non-players wondering why waiting for a digital avatar to go to the toilet is so captivating.

"TSO is, if it's possible, even more open-ended than the *The Sims*"

It was only a matter of time until we saw an online version. And here it is, in massively multiplayer form. But rather than being a game, it turns out to be more of an online environment. From afar it resembles *The Sims*, but even a short session reveals *TSO* as a

different beast. Gone is the god-like control, and with it the voyeuristic pleasure of watching a community develop and interact. Since all Sims here are players, *TSO* emphasises interaction between them; walling another person's Sim into a room to die isn't so easy when they can just log off. Lurid peeper instincts can, fortunately, still be indulged, but unless you wade into the fray you won't get much out of the whole experience.

Trouble is, you might not get much out of it even if you do. *TSO* is, if it's possible, even more open-ended than *The Sims*, and while that's good on paper, and the first few days can be fun,

when the shine wears off it starts to feel too much like... life.

START ME UP

Things get going very quickly. Choosing the look and the lifestyle of your Sim is painless, after which you can roam free. The popular places bookmarked in the game's simple, well-



INPERSPECTIVE

THE SIMS

Reviewed Issue 87, Score 86%
A more addictive approach with a total-control model, and the game single-handedly responsible for bringing thousands of new gamers into the fold.

EVERQUEST

Reviewed issue 80, Score 85%
The most popular and best MMORPG around, and a model for the genre, with the added benefit of many structuring elements that are missing here.

designed interface make it easy to find people to talk to. Using the city map, you can either wander into an existing structure or find yourself that perfect plot of green and pleasant land on which to build.

But while making your Sim is a breeze, building the little bugger a house is not. The build interface is clunky, slow and somewhat frustrating, and your sim stands around to watch you build, so you'll have to take a break from building your palace in order to take them to the bathroom – no small task when



Read books to build your cooking skills, as all these Sims are. How fascinating.

SEX IN THE (SIM) CITY

I KNOW WHERE TO GET IT, IF YOU WANT IT.

Since everyone in *The Sims Online* is hot, it's no surprise that lovin' is the most basic social currency. Don't be surprised when someone walks up and shoves a tongue down your throat five minutes after you've first logged on. Log on late at night (US time, at least) and you'll be witness to a mating display typically reserved for televised nature shows, as teenagers discover the world of digital puberty. And there are plenty of houses of ill repute scattered across each city, complete with players offering services for Simoleans. While I'm thinking of it, someone should write to Maxis and ask for a VD Clinic object.



Are there laws to stop this kind of thing?

I'm betting on the one with the stick.

you're in the middle of a plumbing install. Domicile layout takes patience and plenty of trial and error. Think of your house as a project in evolution.

Starter homes are small. Larger pieces of land carry a price penalty when purchased without the aid of a roommate, putting them out of reach of beginners – rewards in *TSO* do not come to loners. Roommates are simply other players recruited to pool resources and share expenses. Of course, there's always a fair chance you'll end up sharing with psychos who steal your food and CDs, but without the financial benefit of roommates, don't even bother dreaming about building that playboy mansion you've always wanted in real life. It's your choice, so take your risks.

MONEY IS ALWAYS THE THING

Cash is the underpinning factor, but also the downfall of the game. It flows from two sources:

jobs and visitors. Instead of using *The Sims*' career scheme, Sims in *TSO* have skills which combine with job objects to earn cash. Job objects are simply furniture or workstations which can be interacted with and generate money, ranging in size from individual units like a workbench or blackboard, to a hulking pizza-making machine which requires four Sims to operate. If it sounds dry, that's because it is.

Appropriately, skill levels are built by practicing on skill objects – a creative skill can be built by standing around playing the guitar, for example. Skills max out at ten points, but that level decays, so if you quit going to the gym your body skill will sag like an old codger's bicep.

Theoretically, the skill system is a charm. But you'll stand around a lot waiting for your Sim to learn skills, as the skill and job objects have little to no interaction with the player. The idea is that people will talk while their Sims learn, but in practice it isn't always so. Wandering into a room full of people silently reading or scribbling on blackboards is not uncommon.

Of course, you don't have to work in an office or a shop if you don't fancy it. Larger, established houses will offer work to those who need it, typically doing things like cleaning and maintenance. During one session, I wandered into a club frequented by women and was offered a position as a male cage dancer. Yeah, I took it, but the tips were lousy, so I quit. Sadly though, most players seem to



When in doubt, the game will explain your stats to you.

stick to the job objects, which doesn't evolve the game.

When you've got a home, either as owner or roommate, visitors will generate you a cash bonus simply by sticking around for a while. You can charge them to get in the door or for food, and you can provide job objects where they'll earn money for themselves and you. Luring them there in the first place is another story.

I WISH I WAS SPECIAL

Just like in real life, the other lynchpin of Sim society is popularity, which is linked back to cash. It's the chicken and egg, really, and at a certain point you can't have one without the other. You need to be nice to the people milling about your house so they'll stick around, and so they'll want to come back.

Every idea behind the game is focused upon bringing people together and keeping them



An nice line of window-urinals.

there. You can make friends, an interaction which has your Sim presenting a red balloon as the universal symbol of friendship. Like owning an American Express card, belonging to a friendship ring has privileges, not least of which is a greater array of interaction options. Many entertaining ways to express yourself become available as you know more people. The



Decorative shrubberies boost your comfort level.

emphasises the benefits of finding your name on these rosters of luminaries. But landing on the list requires a decent amount of hustling, and once

than the shimmering popette herself, but no one seems to do so. In-game text reinforces the idea that being beautiful is the road to success. Despite the

“Like owning an American Express card, belonging to a friendship ring has privileges”

problem is that you can't just go around handing out balloons like a drunken clown – your ability to make new friends is tied to the number of friends you already have, so choose wisely.

There are also a host of Top 100 lists (popularity, affluence etc), ranging in a wide variety of categories, and the game

you spend all that cash on a big house, you'll need to keep people coming back to stay on the list and pay the bills.

SIM STALKING

Everyone in *TSO* is beautiful. You can choose heads and clothing styles that look more like Britney Spears' doddering Auntie Rose

stats which place a large percentage of players in the 30-60 range, the one person I met who was over 35 was a 55 year-old woman whose Sim looked like Geri Halliwell. By contrast, I built a Sim that was visibly aged and out of style, which promptly led to a punch-up when I tried to talk to the wrong girl.

MISSED OPPORTUNITY (O)



Can you follow this conversation?

WHAT WAS THAT YOU SAID?

If you don't pay attention, it's far too easy for conversations around you to fly by, especially if you're in a crowded room. *The Sims Online* doesn't offer any means by which you can recall even the last ten statements, and far too often conversations die as a result. Sure, the point is to provide a reasonable simulation of real life, but any conventional chat program keeps a log of the conversation, and *TSO* needs this badly.

WALKTHROUGH →

GETTING STARTED IS EASY

Choose a name, create a Sim, select a town. And then get all of your stuff nicked.



1 You'll begin with an empty Sim screen. At the moment they have no personality, or purpose. Simply choose 'Create A New Sim' and get creating.

2 There are plenty of heads and bodies to choose from. Name your Sim and add any profile info you want, and then you're off.

3 There are ten cities from which to choose. The descriptions make them seem unique, but they're not. You can only have one Sim per city.



The friend chart is a handy relationship map.



These readers are not to be disturbed.

Differentiating between game design and the play-styles it engenders in the public can be futile, and while it's no fault of Will Wright's that everyone wants to be beautiful, there's nothing in the game that encourages people to create a Sim that wouldn't be at home on a Las Vegas strip stage. The emphasis on cash and beauty leaves the game unbalanced, offering little reward to the player who wants to pursue a different path. This is compounded by the fact that you learn faster and make more money when you're doing the same thing a lot of other people are doing.

REALITY TELEVISION

It's said that you can create whatever job you want. I went about looking for players who had started a band, and while I found evidence of failed attempts, what I came across most often were dance floors and empty stages with Sims snogging by the speakers.

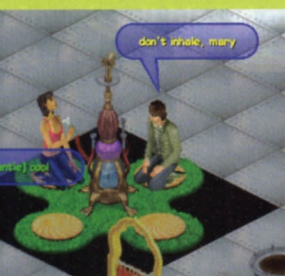
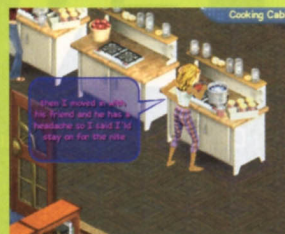
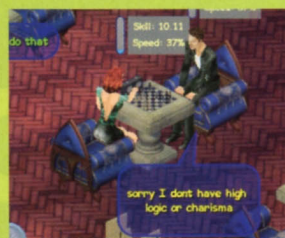
This may change as more objects and designs come into play. The necessity for a consistent set of data for servers and players means that a lot of user mods that made the original game so unique are unavailable. *The Sims* was strong out of the box, but customisations from the

user base have kept it in the charts. I've already sent emails to Maxis asking for a kebab shop job object, but so far it's gone unanswered.

Similarly, many of the little details from *The Sims* are gone; there are no home invasions or fires. *TSO* offers modes of interaction which simulate conflict, but the greatest danger anyone faces is being poor. When all the pressure's off, it's very easy to be aimless.

GET TO IT, ALREADY!

While there's no question that *The Sims Online* possess a potential addiction, and the



Not a bong, it's a bubble pipe.

severity will vary widely among players. Given the amount of time required to build a Sim into a fully-functioning wage slave, I found myself with little desire to wade through hours of meandering and chatting, especially when I have to drag the guy to the toilet and shower every five minutes as well. When communication between players works, it's a fun environment, as the proven Sim character designs give everyone something to chuckle over. But uncomfortable pauses inevitably occur, and that's when people just wander off.

Visually, it's the same *Sims* presentation, with little or no change to the 3D engine. There is some lag, even on a fast machine with an ADSL connection, but nothing that really harms gameplay. While a 3D upgrade would be nice, the

SECOND OPINION

RICHIE SHOEMAKER

Not being what you would call a hardcore *The Sims* fan – quite the opposite in fact – I have to say I found *The Sims Online* to be quite entertaining. As an online game it's by far the most accessible around and, in time, sure to be the most popular. But if Maxis want to keep interest levels up, they have to release a hell of a lot more content since there isn't really much of a game underneath what is a glorified chatroom full of people that, in reality, you'd be perfectly happy never to meet. If life's about climbing the social ladder, meeting beautiful people and making money, then *TSO* is as good a place to indulge your fantasies as any. But until they allow in crack-smoking stars and organised crime, I fear many of those who hate *The Sims* will hate its online cousin just as much.

two-year-old *Sims* engine just about does the job satisfactorily.

My biggest gripe with *TSO* is that it provides no mechanism for people to overcome their own in-game aimlessness. Without a structure to encourage talk, many players wander through the game engaging in superficial interaction at best. I would have been happier with a job system that required interaction in the early stages, leading to relationships later.

Granted, the game will evolve, but that doesn't change the fact that much of what people loved about *The Sims* isn't present here, and that the new systems are flawed. For ten quid a month plus the entry cost, *The Sims Online* is too much of a meandering ride. [D]

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Accessible, open interface
- ✓ Character design continues to entertain
- ✓ Unique approach to massive on-line play with few boundaries
- ✗ Too much emphasis on cash
- ✗ Un-interactive skill development
- ✗ Lack of structure relies too heavily on player co operation

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An addictive premise too reliant on largely flawed human nature



ASHERON'S CALL 2: FALLEN KINGS

■ £29.99 | Pub: Microsoft | Dev: Turbine Entertainment Software | ETA: Out Now |
www.turbinegames.com

REQUIRES PIII 733, 256Mb RAM, 32Mb 3D card and a 56K modem **DESIRES** AC2 will run just fine on this at lower detail, but we recommend a P4 and GeForce4 (or better) for high-detail settings as well as an ADSL line for optimum lag-free performance

Verily for it cometh to herald the downfall of the mighty *EverQuest*? In other words, Chris Anderson checks out the latest pretender to Sony's online RPG crown



IT WAS with some trepidation I entered the world of *Asheron's Call 2* for the first time. Online RPG's have something of a notorious reputation for botched launches, bug-ridden code, server crashes and of course our ever-present companion: Mr Lag. Fortunately, the early good news is there are no such problems with AC2, at least not to begin with. The install and patch download were clean, and in no time at all I was creating a character. You can choose from only three races: humans, lugians and tumeroks. It doesn't matter one whit what you do here apart from messing about with hair and features to make yourself look as stupid as possible, because your character will change dramatically at later stages in terms of stats and skills, so simply picking a basic persona (complete with silly name made up of at least ten apostrophes) and entering the gameworld is as taxing as it gets at this point.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

When you first enter the game you will be placed in a training ground which is driven by a series of easy quests. Learning

nearest town (the town you start near is dependant on the race you choose), you'll pretty much know what you're doing. First impressions were positive then. The graphics look beautiful and detailed, there's no lag, and you are eased into the game mechanics in a timely fashion.

THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE INEXPLICABLE

But don't get too excited yet. It's not all this good. Given that space is limited here I am going to take you on a whirlwind tour through AC2 and highlight the ups and downs you can expect to find. Fasten your seatbelts, here we go...

THE GOOD

The quests are excellent, and there are many of them, each yielding a great deal of experience points. AC2 is similar to most RPGs in this respect - gain experience and level up - we've all been there. The maximum level is 50, but trust me when I tell you that it's going to take you a hell of a long time to get that high.

Graphically, AC2 is stunning, and you can vary the level of detail on the startup screen to

INPERSPECTIVE

EVERQUEST: NEW DAWN

Reviewed Issue 125, Score 87%
EverQuest has been around a long time and as a result is much more polished than AC2 and has a lot more content. It has no storyline, if anyone cares...

NEOCRON

Reviewed Issue 124, Score 85%
A fantastic futuristic alternative to traditional fantasy online RPGs. The community is growing and you'd do well to join it if you haven't already.

been ruined by an unknown evil. A series of major quests in which you enter vaults (ie dungeons) reveals the story slowly, keeping you gripped and guessing throughout. And at the end of each vault you get a slide show with a voice-over unfolding the tale even more. And while it may occasionally verge on the corny, it works surprisingly well.

THE BAD

Monster AI is absolutely abysmal. Often you can stand right in front of them and they won't move. That is, when they're not stuck behind a tree and can't find their way around it.

Gold plays a much smaller role than it should, when you loot



The game can be played from a first or third-person perspective.



The tutorial provides an excellent introduction to the game.



You're not going to get up from that.



Should have packed my sunglasses.

"The maximum level is 50, but it's going to take you a hell of a long time to get that high"

stones provide information about the environment and the interface. This is an excellent introduction, particularly for people who have never played an online RPG before. The simple series of quests does not take too long and by the time you leave your training ground and make your way to the

suit your PC. Even at lower resolutions the graphics are hugely impressive.

The storyline also offers plenty to get excited about. The world of Dereth is barren. Humans, lugians and tumeroks have come out of their underground hideouts to discover the towns have

things from monsters you can turn the items into gold (which is handy since there are no NPC merchants around to sell to), but the only thing you can do with your gold is buy things from other players, or use it to finance trade skills.

The lack of any real towns may well suit the storyline, but it

It has to be said, there are some very nice looking dungeons in this game.





Can anyone else see stars?



Fuel the workshop for trade skill bonuses.

makes the game world feel desolate and barren, which stinks of a total cop-out and an excuse to minimise lag by making the gameworld largely featureless. It's hugely disappointing.

The guild system in which players hand over experience to players higher than them in their monarchy in return for items works well for some people, but it encourages lower levels to beg

servers down with no warning whatsoever and then ignoring your user base when they try to find out what's going on will lose you customers in a big way. Hopefully this is only a temporary hiccup; visit an 'unofficial' website to get the actual situation on UK server stability, with any luck they will be back to normal by the time you read this.

are working on trade skills, forget it. Turbine says it has no plans to increase the capacity of the inventory, but banks or something similar may appear sometime in the future. For now they are working on more important things, such as 'flying mounts'. Please!

Trade skills: armour-crafting, weapon-smithing, you can do them all, and mostly with components you find on the

"AC2 has had a smooth launch and features some of the best graphics in an online RPG"

from higher levelled characters who, for their part, earn experience for doing nothing but handing down things they no longer need. It also encourages guild members to admit just about anyone in the interest of getting experience for free, so guilds full of idiots are commonplace.

Bugs: oh yes, they are there, but in fairness AC2 is largely bug-free in comparison to its counterparts.

Downtime: While I was reviewing this game, Dawnsong, the UK server, was down more often than it was up. The only concession made on the official website towards this was that Dawnsong had been down for 30 minutes when it had in fact been down for the best part of two days, and secondly an admission there were problems but no explanation as to why, and no ETA on a fix. A tip to Turbine and Microsoft: taking

THE INEXPLICABLE

There are no banks in the game, and no bags or containers to store your things in. The inventory system is the worst in known history. You never have enough room to store all the things you need in the normal run of play, and if you

monsters you kill. However, it costs gold to make things, and even when you have allegedly 'mastered' an item to its highest value you can still make completely crap things which are useless to you and anybody else, and all your gold goes down the pan. It doesn't



The graphical quality is dazzling.

THE PRICE OF DEATH

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU DIE? NO, NOT IN REAL LIFE STUPID, IN THE GAME. FIND OUT HERE

One of the most controversial aspects of online RPGs is the time-wasting attached to getting your things back from wherever you died. In AC2 you return to your lifestone when you die (a bind point which you select yourself, usually one close to where you are hunting) and your entire inventory is intact. Additionally, you lose no experience when you die. However, your Vitae (a combination of personal mana and physical energy supply) is reduced. There is a hidden cost for dying in AC2. Players may think losing Vitae simply means having less mana to cast spells or energy to hit for longer, but in fact, the more Vitae you lose each time you die, the less likely you are to land spells or melee hits successfully. This is quite a price to pay, and if you suffer a few deaths in succession, prepare to die, and die, and die again as you become next to useless even against monsters you were killing with your eyes closed before.



There are hidden costs for dying in AC2.

WE ARE SO SKILL

MELEE, MAGIC AND ARCHERY FORM THE BACKBONE OF THE AC2 SKILL TREE

There is no strict class system in the game. Instead, you get to choose from different skill trees which branch out into more defined roles. For example, melee types can later become defenders, magic users can become enchanters or sorcerers, or you can mix and match skills from different trees to make your own class to a certain extent. This works pretty well, but the poor skill selection holds it back somewhat, even at level 30 there are not many magic skills (or spells) to choose from, so branching into other skill trees is actually more of a necessity than an option.



Have it!

matter how high your overall skill is, you can, and will make worthless items far more often than useful ones. It's entirely possible for someone with trade skills far inferior to yours to make something much, much better due to the random stats generated when components are combined to make an item, regardless of skill. The January patch was released just as we went to press, and it has made things significantly worse, to the point that most people in the game no longer craft at all. If you are more of a craftsman than a fighter, AC2 is currently the worst choice on the market.

IN CONCLUSION

AC2 has had a smooth launch and features some of the best graphics ever seen in an online RPG, but in terms of actual game content it falls way short of the competition, and the fact that things like the inventory

management problem even exist suggests the developers have never played their own game. Our advice is to check the unofficial websites to keep an eye on how the patches affect the gameplay and gauge player reactions before buying this game (the official forum is heavily moderated and posts are read before they get put up, so you never have any idea what the general community really thinks since many comments aren't posted). A good place to start is: www.ac2hq.com which has a good forum community and also contains a wealth of information on all aspects of the game. We'll be revisiting AC2 in a couple of months time to see how it's developing. Till then, think hard before investing your time and money on an RPG that falls well short of the likes of *EverQuest* and *Neocron*. [C]

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Excellent graphics
- ✓ Great starter quests and introduction to the game
- ✓ Virtually lag free
- ✗ Inventory management system from hell
- ✗ High abilities in trade skills are meaningless
- ✗ Terrible monster AI

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A triumph for graphics over game mechanics

DEVELOPED
WITH TECHNICAL
SAS CONSULTANT
& AUTHOR
CHRIS RYAN

» YOU HAVE
A PLAN,
» YOU HAVE
AN ENEMY,
» EXECUTE
THEM BOTH.



You are David Jones, ex-SAS one man army use firepower stealth and tactical genius to succeed.



Eliminate terrorism through massive battlezones in Russia, China and the Middle East.

Hit your mark with over 30 weapons inc. M16, Dragunov and more, each with realistic targeting system.



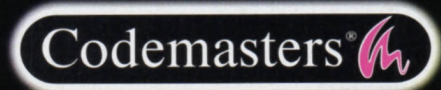
A new experience in multiplayer objective based team missions, with voice over net compatibility.



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PC ZONE
"ONE OF THE GREATEST SHOOTING GAMES EVER..."
PC GAMER

IGI-2 COVERT STRIKE™

Download the demo and Chris Ryan's tactical video at www.codemasters.com/igi2



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GENIUS AT PLAY™



The siege of Monte Cassino was one of the bloodiest battles of the war and it remains the bloodiest battle in the game.

BATTLEFIELD 1942: THE ROAD TO ROME



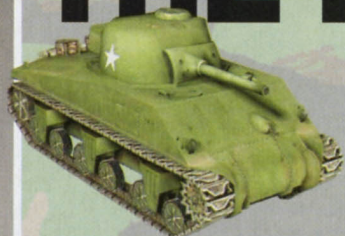
REQUIRES ORIGINAL
BATTLEFIELD 1942

■ £19.99 | Dev: Digital Illusions | Pub: EA | ETA: February 7
www.battlefield1942.com

REQUIRES PIII 500, 128Mb RAM and a 32Mb 3D card

DESIRES P4 2GHz, 512Mb RAM, 128Mb 3D card and an ADSL Internet connection

After dishing out sushi to the Japanese and sauerkraut to the Bosch, Richie Shoemaker prepares linguine for Mussolini

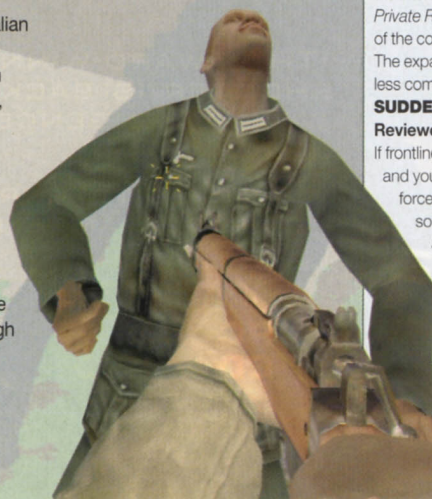


FOR THE solo gamer, *Battlefield 1942* was an experience that veered between mild annoyance and utter frustration, but for those with a capable machine and broadband connection it offered a multiplayer experience unlike any other, with dozens of players flying, sailing, driving and shooting their way across some of the most expansive locales in FPS history.

Rightly or wrongly, instead of addressing the weaknesses in

the game (the poor single-player game being about the most obvious), Digital Extremes has instead decided to build on the game's strengths, expanding what was already one of the most varied WWII gaming experiences still further, adding Italian and French troops, setting them and their allies across six new maps throughout Italy and Sicily, throwing in a couple of new weapons and nine new or remodelled vehicles.

Though the French and Italian soldiers look and sound the part, the five troop kits remain identical (scout, engineer etc), so there isn't anything fundamentally new added to the gameplay by having them join the party. A new Italian weapon for the Assault class and a British weapon for the French Medic is about the sum of the changes on the Infantry side of things, although engineers of all nationalities



INPERSPECTIVE

MEDAL OF HONOR: ALLIED ASSAULT

Reviewed Issue 112, Score 94%

For a real WWII single-player challenge it doesn't get any better than this *Quake III*-powered shooter: the interactive equivalent of *Saving Private Ryan*, only without so much of the corn-fed sentimental claptrap. The expansion is considerably less compelling though.

SUDDEN STRIKE II

Reviewed Issue 120, Score 72%

If frontline action isn't your thing and you prefer to direct your forces from the rear, how about something a little more epic? *SSII* is far and away the best WWII RTS available and like *Battlefield 1942*, it takes in every theatre of the war.



Only one of the new maps features any shipping.

"Olive trees overlook deep ravines while treacherous roads link deserted mountain villages"

can fix bayonets and go on stabbing sprees, which is far easier said than done.

PRIVATE POPE-SICLE

Of the new vehicles, both sides have been reinforced with a twin-engine fighter bomber, there are a couple of new light tanks, a US half-track with a heavy anti-tank gun and a German tank-destroyer. The new vehicles are great fun, especially since secondary positions like machine-gunners are more protected than they were on the old tanks and main weapons are harder to bring to bear. Just to make things even more difficult for those keen to jump into a new tank, many of the new maps include fixed anti-tank guns, which apart from being a great tool for defence, mean that those who miss the chance to climb aboard a tank will at least have a big gun to run to for backup – which should hopefully reduce the number of team-killers that blight the odd online game.

Best of all the new additions are the maps themselves. While generally smaller than those of the full game and as a collection nowhere near as varied, they are nevertheless packed with detail.



Olive trees overlook deep ravines while treacherous roads link deserted mountain villages. Because of the rugged landscape, heavy armour is practically forced along roads frequently bordered by high ground and lethal cannon fire. Leave the roads and progress can be slow, jeeps and APCs can be wrecked in seconds, while tanks can often become trapped. Consequently, most of the new maps favour the infantry, with slow measured advances and desperate counter-attacks. Engineers, the whipping boy player class of the original game, are now an important part of the action, laying mines across important roads and backing up armour as they advance, repairing as they go. It's clear a lot more thought has gone into the maps and units this time around.

EASY TIBER

Although it's still the case that *BF1942* remains more dedicated to the multi rather than the single-player, the developers

THE PENNE IS MIGHTIER THAN THE SWORD

ITALIANS DO IT BETTER... EXCEPT FOR WAR THAT IS

Despite their collective skills with a leather ball, a keen eye for tailoring and the near miracles they can perform with a few eggs and some flour, the Italians aren't what you'd call the most proficient at waging war. They used to be, once upon a time, when swords and skirts for men were all the rage, but since their heady empire days they've let the old bloodletting skills go a bit. By way of example, during the carnage of WWII, the Italian armies would outnumber a foe eight to one and still lose

the battle. They would constantly have to ask their Nazi chums for aid, their machinery wasn't much cop and the soldiers – despite being impeccably dressed and armed with mandolins – just couldn't be arsed with the whole sorry business of traipsing across the baking hot deserts of North Africa, especially when they had a perfectly decent country of their own to laze about in. A stomach for wine but not for war, you could say.



have improved the AI quite considerably. The computer-controlled players neither drive like they are blindfolded nor shoot with the accuracy of a Washington sniper. Compared to the bots of *Unreal Tournament 2003*, we're still way below standard; there's still very little camaraderie between you and your AI goons and the single-player game still feels more like a team deathmatch than a proper team experience, with no control over your allies. Tactically the troops only understand one strategy; rush to the front line and shoot the enemy. Nonetheless, the single-player game is by no means the pointless exercise it once was.

One major enhancement to both the single and multiplayer game is the increased 64-player limit on games. Though it's frequently the case that more is better, it comes at a price. On our 'desirable' system the game occasionally slowed down with 63 bots running around and in multiplayer games you can forget it unless you have a broadband connection.

THE FULL MONTE

Although *Road To Rome* falls somewhat short of being the perfect add-on, considering it has only been a few months since the release of the original game, the developers have managed to pack quite a

lot into it in a very short space of time. For multiplayer fans there are endless hours of battling ahead, for single-players considerably less (though certainly more than the seven or so hours required to complete the *Medal Of Honor* add-on). With plans to continue to expand this most rich and varied of first-person action games, we only hope it isn't too long before some sort of tactical command structure is added into the game. **PZ**

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Well thought out maps and vehicles
- ✓ Huge 64-player battles
- ✓ Improved AI....
- ✗ ... but still way below acceptable
- ✗ Needs lots of memory and a fast internet connection

85

As in the real Italian campaign, a slow and steady advance



That's torn it.



Us Brits are such a miserable bunch.



Fixed anti-tank cannons are a welcome addition.



Glad you can find something to smile about with legs like that.



Collecting coal is less of a hassle with a gyrocopter at hand.

IMPOSSIBLE CREATURES

■ £29.99 | Pub: Microsoft | Dev: Relic | ETA: February 14 | www.relic.com

REQUIRES PIII 900, 128Mb RAM and a 16Mb 3D card

DESIRES P4 1.5GHz, 256Mb RAM and a very flashy 3D card

During a recent stroll in a field, Keith Pullin survived a frenzied attack by a donkey. Still suffering from shock, we thought this RTS might cheer him up...



With a tongue like that you'd never go out.

SOMETIMES a great idea comes along, and you hope with all your heart that it's going to work. *Impossible Creatures* is one such idea. On the surface the concept is fantastic: genetically splice the most unlikely of creatures, come up with some outlandish creations, and then throw them into combat against other similarly modified mutants. What's more, it's an

idea from Relic, the people who single-handedly revolutionised the space RTS genre with *Homeworld*.

Sounds perfect doesn't it? Sounds like the sort of sandpit you could spend hours messing around in. Unfortunately it's just not.

CLEAN UP THAT MESS

The trouble with *Impossible Creatures* is that it is messy. Nearly every part of the game possesses some kind of niggly problem that eats away at your enjoyment.

We start with the obvious – the graphics. Despite the fact you can create a total of around 40,000 creature combinations, the majority of them look and act pretty much the same. Essentially, every creature whether it's a hybrid of a monkey, tiger, fish, wolf or whatever, is an animal-shaped blob with vaguely discernible legs. True, the flying units possess a little bit more in the way of

individuality, but wings aside, as far as the player is concerned their entire army is nothing more than one heaving entity of flesh and fur.

Essentially the whole idea becomes pointless. All you need to do is churn out generalised unit types such as good close combat fighters, some kind of airborne unit, and effective long-range attackers, all combined, they are more than capable of taking you through the game.

Those hoping that *Impossible Creatures* would provide them with the chance to spend hours tinkering with DNA to find the perfect predator will be sorely disappointed. Quite simply, you will never find that dream.

ANIMAL INSTINCT

So, when the novelty factor wears off what do we have?

Well, we have nothing more than a basic RTS game. In fact, it's more basic than most. And this is not a bad thing.

Compared to the likes of *American Conquest*, *IC* is a breeze to get into.

The rudimentary resource management means you only have to worry about coal

jerk around and get stuck at the bottom of cliffs. Oddly we found that if you ignore the camera completely and just stick to the default view, it's a lot easier to see what's going on.

To its credit, *Impossible Creatures* is not short of options. Both the single-player skirmish mode and the multiplayer mode offer various difficulty settings, a reasonable selection of maps, eight different AI opponents, and the ability to import armies that you've previously built using the in-game creature editor.

All in all, you can't help

"You can't help thinking that this is the perfect game for RTS beginners"

and electricity. The interface is easy enough to navigate your way around – even without going through the tutorial. The only real handling problem lies with the camera, which tends to

thinking that this is the perfect game for RTS beginners. The whole animal thing will certainly appeal to the under-tens anyway. Maybe that's what Relic had in mind all



INPERSPECTIVE

THE GLADIATORS

Reviewed Issue 123, Score 80%

A fast paced RTS that's simple to play and easy to enjoy, *Impossible Creatures* offers the same kind of simplicity in terms of gameplay but without the atmosphere.

BATTLE REALMS

Reviewed Issue 111, Score 86%

Battle Realms pioneered the unit alchemy concept, and it would be fair to say that the idea behind *Impossible Creatures* is not dissimilar. However, in its enormous favour *BR* manages to convey personality into these units too...



The attacks from buildings are more spectacular than most of the animal's other efforts.

"The self-deprecating B-movie script tries hard to provide a bit of light relief"



Your first job on any mission is to build up defences.



A grizzly lets rip with a needle attack.



For once it's not the lobsters getting eaten.

along. A word of warning though; don't venture anywhere near the full campaign unless you've reached a competent level – your opponents here are totally ruthless to say the least.

WILLING BUT NOT ABLE

You sense that even the humour is geared towards a less-discerning audience. The self-deprecating Hollywood B-movie script tries hard to provide a bit of light relief, and in fairness, the

irreverent banter between the two main protagonists, Rex Chance and Lucy Willing, is at times worthy of a chuckle or two.

But even that side of the game wears thin. It's a bit like watching a Leslie Nielson film –

eventually you see every joke coming a mile off. There comes a point where you can't be bothered to laugh anymore, and that point is reached fairly quickly.

Overall, *IC* is a huge disappointment considering

how long we've been waiting for it. This is by no means a despicable effort, but you get the impression the developer had simply had enough and just wanted the game out the door. Relic is capable of producing much better games, and we can only hope that when *Homeworld 2* finally appears, we'll discover where all their time and effort has truly gone. **[MP]**

CROSS BREEDING

THE MONSTROSITIES YOU ARE CAPABLE OF CREATING IN IMPOSSIBLE CREATURES ARE ENOUGH TO MAKE DR FRANKENSTEIN SCRATCH HIS HEAD IN WONDER. HOWEVER, CREATING THE PERFECT HYBRID IS FAR FROM SIMPLE...

The first thing you need to do is choose two animals that are very different from each other. Ideally you want a strong melee fighter such as a lion and something that

has a ranged attack such as a porcupine. Other possibilities include fusing together flying creatures like the snowy owl with something like a hammerhead shark.

The trick is to think about what sort of creature you need for a specific task and then make it. Here are some of our impossible creatures...



BABING COBRA

This cross between a baboon and a spitting cobra was created primarily as cheap cannon fodder that can be used to soften up opposing creatures.



CHAMPERFISH

A chimpanzee and an archerfish combine to create extremely strong ground units that gain a real bonus when hunting in packs.



KILLING MANTIS

With a little bit of killer whale along with a dash of praying mantis this enormously powerful creature is equally at home on land or in water.



LOBSTY OWL

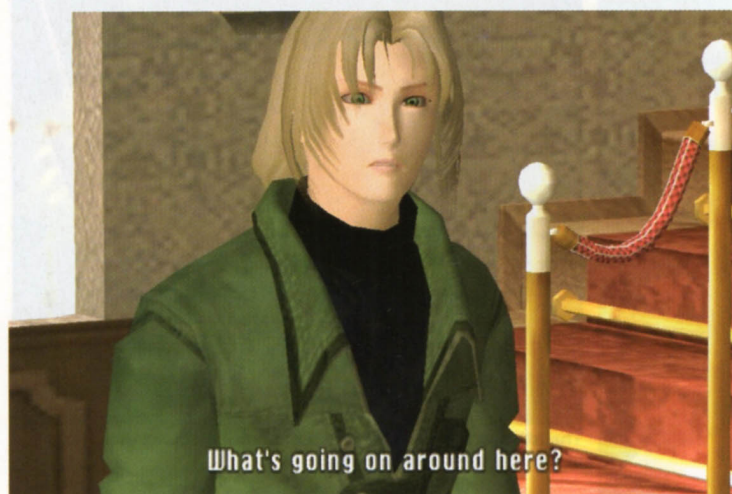
Crossing a lobster and a snowy owl can mean only one thing – death from above. This creature is great for puncturing holes in enemy defences.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Features 40,000 different unit types
- ✓ Good set of options aimed at RTS novices
- ✓ Easy to pick up and quite playable
- ✗ Hard to impart individual characteristics on 40,000 different creatures
- ✗ Looks messy
- ✗ Generally over-simplistic and uninspiring

65

Impossibly tame



If he were any more effeminate, he'd have breasts.



Some of the story takes place in a 16th century version of the same village.

SHADOW OF MEMORIES

■ £19.99 | Pub: Konami | Dev: Konami | ETA: Feb 7 | www.konami.com

REQUIRES PIII 450, 64Mb RAM and a 16Mb 3D card DESIRES PIII 750, 128 Mb RAM and a 64Mb 3D card

It's been hailed as a storytelling masterpiece. Mark Hill rolls his eyes in dismay

IF ANY further proof were needed that storytelling in games is primitive, childish and in need of a revolution, this is it. *Shadow Of Memories* received scores of eight or nine out of ten in almost every PS2 magazine when it was released a few years back. The PC version, which came out in the States a few months ago, has been getting the same sort of rave reviews.

The reason? That it tells a complex, dramatic and slightly original story. Never mind that there's barely the bones of a game to support it, that the characters are one-dimensional marionettes and the dialogue is functional at best. The way people have been talking about it you'd think none of them had ever read a novel.

DEAD AGAIN

The premise is not without its merits, beginning as it does with your character's death and his subsequent time travels as he attempts to thwart his own

murders, one after the other. You save yourself from one death, then do it all again only in a different place and time, as you move ever further along the game's timeline. The problem is you might as well not be there for all the input you have. Ninety per cent of the 'game' is made up of interminable cut-scenes and loading screens. The other 10 per cent has you walking round the streets of a quaint German village, sparking off cut-scenes by, say, clicking on a character or turning down an alleyway.

The adventure element has you dying in a fire, travelling back

in time from the limbo you end up in, seeing a boy starting the blaze so you can stop it (all this in cut-scenes, of course) and then going back to the present. There are as many as five objects to pick up during the course of the 'game', their use always obvious to the point of utter imbecility.

ONE ENDING'S ENOUGH

Since it's more like a film than a game, I'm going to judge it as a film. And quite frankly, it's a turkey. The main character is straight out of a Japanese Mills and Boon novel, and the quality of the narrative isn't far off one



There's so little to do that you might as well take redundancy.

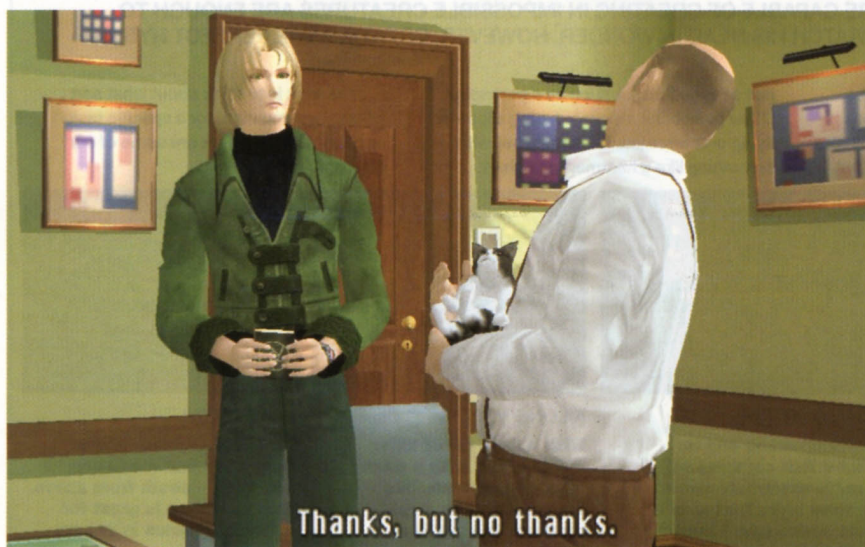
either. There aren't more than a handful of dialogue options in the whole thing. You're supposed to just sit back and watch.

The main criticism *SoM* got from PS2 reviewers is that it's too

short (despite the several endings, which depend on a couple of those dialogue options). I beg to differ – it's too long. Would you sit through a pompous, five-hour anime movie? No, you wouldn't. It's not as though much happens in the cut-scenes either. I ended up reading a book in order to stem the boredom.

At least Konami have done a good job of converting it, with high resolutions and mouse support. But this is not the way stories should be told. **FM**

"The characters and narrative are straight out of a Japanese Mills and Boon novel"



Watching cut-scenes like this is about the sum total of your involvement in *SoM*.

INPERSPECTIVE

GRIM FANDANGO

Reviewed Issue 71, Score 90%

If you want a proper adventure game, this is as funny and well acted as any comedy. It has great characters too.

PLANESCAPE: TORMENT

Reviewed Issue 86, Score 87%

If you want a proper interactive novel, look no further. Loads of well-written text, great plots and dialogue options. And it's a deep and complex game too.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Nice graphics
- ✓ Intriguing concept
- ✓ Complex story...
- ✗ ...badly performed
- ✗ Not a game at all
- ✗ Soporific

45

Interactive novel
my arse



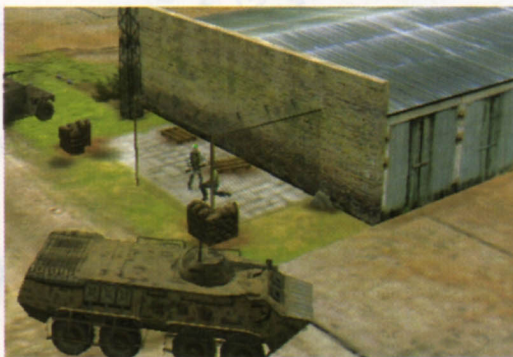
As if civilisation hadn't suffered enough.



Vehicles are there to be commandeered.



The search for answers drives you on.



The engine is crisp, though has clipping problems.



Slaughtering slave traders takes up much of your time.



The landscapes are often bleak, though thoroughly atmospheric and quite beautiful.

SOLDIERS OF ANARCHY

■ £29.99 | Pub: Big Ben Interactive | Dev: Silver Style Entertainment | ETA: Early Feb | www.soldiers-of-anarchy.com

REQUIRES PIII 800, 128Mb RAM and a 16Mb 3D card **DESIRES** P4 1.3GHz, 256Mb RAM and a 32Mb 3D card

Keith Pullin hunkers down in a bunker to play this post-apocalyptic RTS

A LOT OF people think biological warfare is just an excuse for a kind of futuristic fancy dress party with funny looking outfits and breathing apparatus, but there's a lot more to it than that. Contrary to popular belief, an act of biological terrorism (and that includes any children fathered by Michael Jackson) is very bad for the planet's health.

Soldiers Of Anarchy is a perfect example of the kind of mood you are likely to be in after surviving a global biological attack. And let's face it, if you've been living in a bunker for ten years, you're bound to be a bit irritable. Especially if you also happen to be part of the last surviving group of soldiers in the world, and have no idea how the rest of the population died.

bloodshed, there's also a sense of mystery arising from the struggle to find out the terrible *Twelve Monkeys*-like truth of ten years previous. So, as you explore the sometimes serenely beautiful, though often very bleak landscapes, you find a spirit of exploration

members' skills in areas such as heavy weapons, medicine, marksmanship and explosives.

As you progress, you find vehicles such as jeeps, APCs, tanks, jets and choppers. All this equipment, along with any other weapons and ammo you find, can be taken back to your base

And then there's the poor clipping that mars an otherwise crisp looking game.

SoA isn't a doomsday classic, but if you want a thoughtful and relatively tactical blend of role-playing and strategy, and can put up with some niggly foibles, this should do the trick. **[C]**

"It's a cross between a fully 3D version of *Commandos 2* and something like *Fallout*"

as well as retribution that drives you forward.

Probably the easiest way to describe *Soldiers Of Anarchy* is as a cross between a full 3D version of *Commandos 2* and something like *Fallout* or *Jagged Alliance*. The role-playing element is crucial to the gameplay as you have to recruit NPCs to join your cause, and also improve your team

and used in later missions. One of the keys to SoA is deciding which troops and equipment to take into each level.

CHEMICAL BROTHERS

SoA's RTS and RPG mix works well, but overall the pace is a little too slow. Cumbersome interface problems such as not being able to cleanly select units also dampen the overall enjoyment.

INPERSPECTIVE

COMMANDOS 2

Reviewed Issue 108, Score 91%
A slick interface, immense detail and fantastic gameplay make *Commandos 2* the best small-scale tactical war game around.

SUDDEN STRIKE

Reviewed Issue 96, Score 86%
Planes, trains and automobiles – oh and tanks, and guns and bombs, and the fighting, and the gnashing of teeth and the... Well, suffice to say it's got everything SoA's got – and more.

NEW WORLD DISORDER

SoA is a gloomy RTS in which you must guide your sole-surviving squad of soldiers through 13 missions in order to discover exactly what happened to the human race.

There's a distinct *Mad Max* vibe going on, what with the earth now being populated by ruthless gangs who survive by trading humans. Needless to say, killing off these amply armed slavers is a major part of the gameplay. But apart from the

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Interesting and topical biological terrorism-based plot
- ✓ Moody landscapes
- ✓ Well worked mix of RTS and role-playing
- ✗ Very slow pace
- ✗ Interface can be stubborn
- ✗ Poor clipping in places

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Nearly complete anarchy, but not quite



The Blitz kicks in over England.

HEARTS OF IRON

■ Price: £29.99 | Publisher: Koch Media
Developer: Paradox | ETA: February 7 |
www.paradoxplaza.com

REQUIRES PIII 300, 64Mb RAM and a 4Mb 3D card
DESIRES PIII 450, 128Mb RAM and a 16Mb 3D card

Daniel Emery relives the 'good old days' of rationing, genocide and mass murder – must be WWII then

TODAY AMERICA is hell-bent on starting a war with Iraq and North Korea. It wasn't always this way.

Sixty years ago things were very different. Britain stood alone against the Nazi menace (the French surrender-monkeys giving up in six weeks) and

America was looking the other way, fingers in their ears going "La la la, nothing to do with us." Funny how things change...

Hearts Of Iron, a massively in-depth strategy game based around WWII gives you the chance to do things differently to how they really happened all those years ago.

The game is a struggle between three 'ways of life' – Fascism, Communism and Democracy – with at least one destined for the graveyard. Countries are aligned to one of these three philosophies, with Great Britain, Germany and the USSR heading up the Democratic, Fascist and Communist factions respectively.

Although the gang of three are irrevocably tied, other countries can be brought round to your way of thinking. Having the Spanish on Hitler's side makes WWII much easier, while having America as part of the



Some good news for the Brits.

Allies in 1939 isn't going to be good news for Central Europe. Of course, you may not want to join any of the groups and go it alone. *HoI* is very open ended.

RESEARCH, RESEARCH, RESEARCH

While the diplomats are making friends, your scientists are researching technology like it's going out of fashion. Some games have a technology tree, but *Hearts Of Iron* comes with a veritable forest. It features 14 different sections – land warfare, light aircraft, tanks etc – each with more than 30 different steps to research (all integrated).

In other words, there isn't a hope in hell of getting everything

researched before the game finishes at the end of 1948.

Now this is no bad thing as you'll be made to think tactically. Spend too much time researching the ultimate fighter and your ground troops will become mincemeat. Of course, trying to cover all your bases means you'll lose the edge in one critical area, and decisions you made years ago have a nasty habit of biting you on the arse.

Get it wrong and they'll be speaking German in Manchester.

While you're researching better tanks, planes and ships you've also got to keep your current forces up to scratch. Now this is going to require some hard decisions on how you 'spend' your resources.

POINTS MEAN PRIZES

Research and manufacturing requires precious IC (industrial

"The game is a struggle between three 'ways of life' – Fascism, Communism and Democracy"

INPERSPECTIVE

MEDIEVAL: TOTAL WAR
Reviewed Issue 120, Score 90%

If you prefer controlling stunning fully 3D real-time battles, then you won't find anything better than this classic RTS. It's pure genius, but you'll need a pretty meaty machine to get the most out of it.

EUROPA UNIVERSALIS 2
Reviewed Issue 114, Score 72%

Set in the Middle Ages, you play as one of the major nations. It's historically accurate and includes period monarchs, military leaders, and technological gains. Not surprisingly, *EU2* developer Paradox has used the same engine to develop *Hearts Of Iron*.



America finally wakes up.



When it's dull, it's very dull.

"Hearts Of Iron isn't aimed at the adrenaline junkie who'd play Sudden Strike"



The Eastern Front comes to life.

capacity) units. It's here that things start to get a little complex. To produce IC points you need the following: factories, coal, steel and rubber. Run out of rubber and you can convert oil. Run out of oil and you can convert coal (although your tanks, ships and planes won't be able to move). Run out of coal or steel and everything grinds to a halt. Build more factories to increase output. With us so far?

But it doesn't stop there. As well as factories, each sector of land contains land, sea and air defences (along with a road and rail infrastructure). You need to micromanage every province in your domain, while assigning research goals, building an army and organising the collection of raw materials. And sadly, it's here that things fall over.

A LITTLE CROSS

WITH ALL THESE OPTIONS, EVERYBODY'S HAPPY



One thing you can say about *Hearts Of Iron* is that it caters for everyone. You can play as any nation in the late 1930s – even countries that are now no more, such as Tibet and Manchuko. Accurate flags, a reasonable assessment of each country's capabilities and a list of historical leaders.

Although the developer has gone to extreme lengths to make the game accurate, there is one large piece of history missing: The Swastika. For some reason, Germany is still using an old flag from the Kaisers day.

What makes this decision more ironic is that the developers are now working on adding Waffen SS units into the game. The same units that manned concentration camps, liquidated the Warsaw ghetto and guarded Adolph Hitler.

Not only have the developers excluded the old crooked cross, but any attempt to talk about it on the website is instantly vaped. The official line is: "Any links posted to a mod which includes a Swastika or other illegal Nazi symbols will be deleted. Any threads that complain about this issue will be closed."

How very Orwellian.



The Australians holding Tobruk.

ZERO AUTOMATION

The one thing the game lacks is automation. While building factories may be fun the first time you play *Hearts Of Iron*, after the 10th or 15th game it becomes very dull. You may want to focus on research or the combat angle. Either way, the last thing you want is a non-stop click-fest.

The combat sequence could also do with a work-over. While games such as *Medieval: Total War* showed what could be done when top-down genres merged with 3D RTS, *Hearts Of Iron* is lagging way behind.

But *Hearts Of Iron* isn't aimed at the adrenaline junkie who'd play *Sudden Strike*. This is definitely a thinking game, with the combat element being just a small (if vital) part of the gameplay.

There is one other factor we've not yet mentioned – time. This game needs lots of it. You can play a game solid for 28hrs and still only be in the

first year of the war.

Relationships, jobs and Christmas can pass you by and all you can remember is: "Well, I had this pincer-movement on the Ardennes but..." It's rather worrying.

The game is old-skool but it's great. If they'd only spent a little more effort on the combat it would have been the all-time Classic WWII RTS sim. We'll start praying for a patch now... [X]

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Very hardcore
- ✓ Goes into minute detail
- ✓ Totally open-ended gameplay
- ✗ Very hardcore
- ✗ Ugly graphics
- ✗ Too much micromanagement

85

An armchair general's wet dream come true

AMERICAN CONQUEST

£29.99 | Pub: CDV | Dev: GSC Game World | ETA: Out Now | www.americanconquest.com

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

Keith Pullin does the world a favour and returns America to the natives



The British open fire on American peasants. Shame.

DURING THE late '80s and early '90s the Commodore Amiga was at the height of its power. If gaming history had distinct eras, this period would have been known as the Sprite Age. Nothing else mattered. Developers actively competed against each other to see who could get the most animated

characters on screen at once. The world went mad for sprites.

Graphics, for once, took a back seat. Gameplay was lost in a throng of spindly arms and legs, but nobody cared. And as for the plot? Well, if people wanted stories they'd read books wouldn't they?

Thankfully, this sprightly foray was soon found wanting. Gamers demanded gameplay and fun was back. Innovation began to seep into lethargic minds; the Amiga stood down and the PC began flexing its muscles.

All fads and phases are cyclical. In other words,

what was fashionable once will be so once again. So, welcome back to the sprite – or to be precise 16,000 of the little buggers.

GSC Game World's *American Conquest*, like its forebearer *Cossacks* has pretty much one thing on its mind,



Close up battle scenes look great.

INPERSPECTIVE

COSSACKS: EUROPEAN WARS

Reviewed Issue 101, Score 89%

There's not too much difference between the two of these, but because the armies are half the size *Cossacks* is a hundred times more manageable.

AGE OF MYTHOLOGY

Reviewed Issue 123, Score 90%

A great all round RTS game with a variety of missions and a simple but effective interface. *AoM* also has a great History of Mythology section so you can learn something there too.



Gunmen surround the house and then flee in terror...



A sneaky native gets a direct hit on a settler's home.



Cutting barley by the sea. If only life was really this peaceful.



Looks like the fort could do with some repairs.



and that is to dazzle you with the sheer number of units it can place on one map. And yes, 16,000 soldiers is an impressive amount of units to control; undoubtedly the developers must have enormous brains to create such mind-boggling figures. But it's all irrelevant. Attention to detail, innovation, design and great gameplay must be there too.

American Conquest is lacking many of these qualities. The eight separate campaigns and 12 civilisations are interesting from an educational perspective. If nothing else they do their best to liven up what is essentially a time consuming and unrewarding RTS experience.

Put it this way: if you can build a small settlement, successfully start gathering and producing all the right resources and then sit around for eight hours while building and organising an army of 16,000, and thoroughly enjoy doing so, then you deserve an award.

Everyone has their limits and for the majority of us, the process of allocating officers, standard bearers, and drummers to individual platoons is a dozen or so mouse clicks too far. It appears that in its haste to create a realistic experience, GSC Game World forgot to make the experience

WALKTHROUGH →

GONE NATIVE

Most of the individual missions in *American Conquest* come with some kind of army already assembled. Even the campaign levels provide buildings so that you can quickly get down to business. Multiplayer games and single-player skirmishes are different though. You have to start from scratch here and that means building...



1 With these humble settlers we will create a powerful army that will rule the world. Either that or we'll lead them to a premature and horrific death – only time will tell.



2 The first structure we build is a fort. This allows us to raise a ferocious army in order to strike down the weird looking natives watching us suspiciously from the edge of the forest...



3 Now we build a mill to create food, and a house so that we can give birth to many fine young men. We won't create any women though, for they will distract us from our pillaging.



4 We send men to the fort to be trained into Halberdiers. Eight is a good start, but we will eventually need thousands to annihilate the natives who still study us from the edge of the forest, growing ever more suspicious of our unfamiliar activities.



5 We build a storehouse and then proceed to chop down wood from the forest... Oh no! There's another two of them. That makes seven natives spying on us from the edge of the forest. We will need an army of at least 16,000 to defeat them.



6 We have been fooled! There are 20 or more and they came this morning. There is no way 80 of us can withstand such fury. All is lost and we flee. Next time we will bring an Armada to purge the land of this teeming menace forever more.

entertaining. Fans of *Cossacks* may think this is a bit on the harsh side, but quantity over quality is not the way forward. Gameplay is what we want – and it's difficult to find here.

EURO REFERENDUM

There are times when *American Conquest* is not such a chore. If you can attain that higher plane of existence required to become totally at one with your strategy, a magical thing happens. You are transported through the pain barrier into a blurred state of consciousness where you can almost feel yourself having fun.

“Just as you're about to give your marching orders your entire army drops dead...”

It doesn't last long though – there's usually something waiting to bring you back down to earth with a crash.

One fairly common cause of anguish is to assemble a reasonable force of about 1,000 units (which takes a good few hours) and then just as you're about to give your marching orders your entire army drops dead from famine. It's hard to

describe exactly what kind of emotion such drama evokes, needless to say it doesn't leave you with a great deal of motivation to carry on.

Another oddity is the enormous gulf in intelligence between the European civilisations and the native American tribes – and it's not in the way you might think. Europeans can barely button

IT'S A HISTORY LESSON

EDUCATION, EDUCATION, EDUCATION

Want to know the entire history of the Americas from around 1500 to 1800AD? *American Conquest* can tell you. The 42 missions span eight historically accurate campaigns boasting the likes of England, Spain, Aztecs, Incas, Mayas, Sioux, Iroquois and the USA.

To the developer's eternal credit you are always given a choice as to whether you want to read all of the details surrounding each mission, but for those who really are keen, there's some fascinating stuff to be found. By reading it all you can get a good idea what it must have been like for both natives and settlers – and it weren't pretty.



Are you sitting comfortably, children?



Must be down near Mexico. Watch out for Incas.



These savages have no respect for other people's property.

up their own uniforms without repeatedly poking themselves in the eye, whereas the wily old native Americans never miss a trick.

IT'S A JUNGLE OUT THERE

The way Mayans appear out of the trees, take a few pot shots at the Spanish troops with either a bow or a blowpipe and then move back into the safety of the treeline is eerily smart. In contrast, the idiotic Spaniards (and French and British and Americans) cannot resist following a lone native marksman back into the jungle and straight into an ambush. Why a supposedly modern, well-trained and disciplined army falls for the same old trick every time is a mystery – and the worse thing is there's no way to stop this from happening.

The only choice you have is to set your soldiers so they don't move from a certain spot. Typically, the problem with this is that they stop moving completely – even if they are being attacked. So, with any soldier whether they are cavalry, riflemen or infantry, you have a simple decision to make while you're waiting for the other 15,000 troops to be born. Do

you let them wander into the jungle to certain doom, or do you fix them to one spot on the map so they can be shot more easily?

For its many sins *American Conquest* does have its graphical charms. The detail on the soldiers and their weaponry is superb for this type of isometric viewpoint – you even get to see them reload. The

landscapes too are intricately detailed. What is poor though is the variety of landscapes. Every map looks identical; a bit of forest here, a bit of desert there, some mountains, an idyllic waterfall, there's nothing really to distinguish one level from another.

SOLDIER ON

Unfortunately, the real problem with the graphics is that it's impossible to see, let alone select, your whole army at once. There simply isn't a monitor in existence big enough to accommodate everyone. If you want to see your troops as a whole entity, you have to switch to a kind of blimp-cam. Of course, when you do this in battle you lose all atmosphere

“Quantity over quality is not the way forward. Gameplay is what we want”



Please don't follow them into the woods again... Doh.

MISSED OPPORTUNITY



Oh look, what a pretty pattern.

SIZE DOESN'T MATTER

The Grand old Duke of York, he had 10,000 men, but even he would have struggled to march this rabble to the top of a hill and back down again.

The development of games like *American Conquest* presents a tricky dilemma and precise balancing act on the developer's part; highly realistic games don't tend to be that much fun, whereas extremely enjoyable games are rarely true to life.

The key is to find exactly the right blend of realism and fun. Marching 10,000 men across the Andes is a perplexing ballet of mouse clicks that leaves the interface in meltdown and is by no means fun. In *American Conquest* you can't help thinking that if the armies were a little smaller and the fights didn't take so long, the whole flow of the game would be better. After all, does it really matter how big the army is? It's what you do with it that counts.

because you may as well be standing on the moon.

American Conquest is the modern day equivalent of playing with toy soldiers – and this is clearly something with niche appeal. Our advice is this: if

micro-management and painstaking troop manoeuvres do nothing for your own personal RTS radar, avoid *American Conquest*. Go instead for a more accessible, varied, entertaining and playable strategy classic like *Age Of Mythology* or *Medieval: Total War*.

For *Cossacks* fans, it's a different story. Since the interface is virtually identical and the general game mechanics are more or less unchanged, there could be something here for you. Should you be doubly blessed with a healthy fascination with early American history, you may well love *American Conquest*. Mind you, having the ability to think about 16,000 different things at once will be a great help in the end. **[C]**

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Realistically large armies
- ✓ Fairly pleasant landscapes
- ✓ Eight campaigns
- ✗ Awkward unmanageable armies
- ✗ Poor AI on individual soldiers
- ✗ Over-complicated economy

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Just like America: big and clumsy

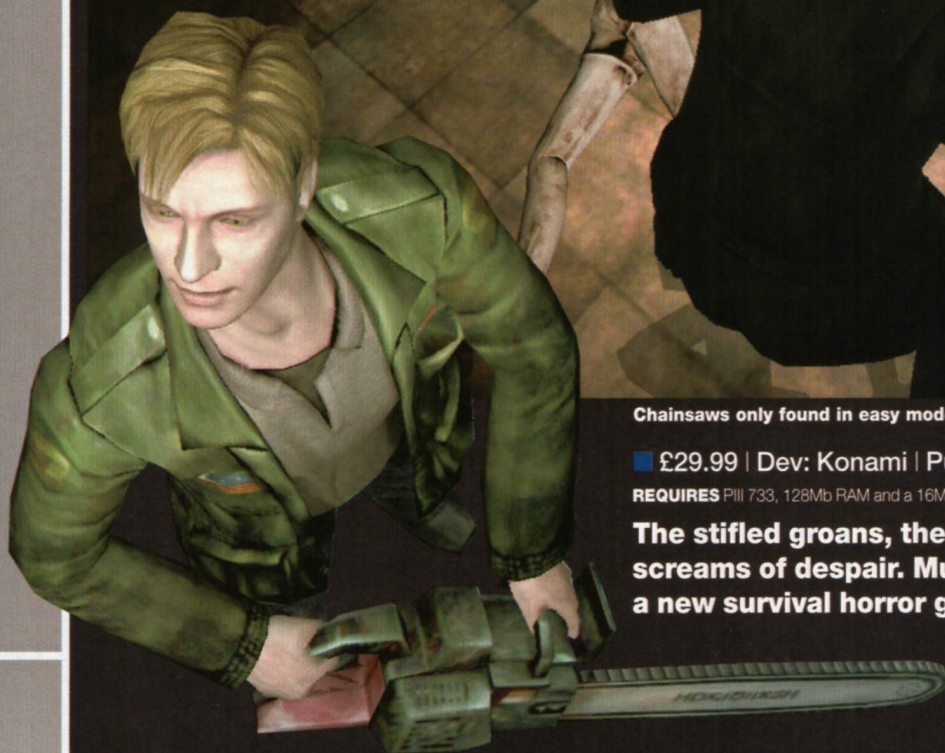


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SILENT HILL 2: DIRECTOR'S CUT



Chainsaws only found in easy mode. Sorry.

That's really going to mess up your sisal, that is.

£29.99 | Dev: Konami | Pub: Konami | ETA: Feb 28 | www.silenthill2.de

REQUIRES PIII 733, 128Mb RAM and a 16Mb 3D card **DESIRES** P4 1GHz, 256Mb RAM and a 32Mb 3D card

The stifled groans, the strange wet hacking sounds, the screams of despair. Must be Anthony Holden reviewing a new survival horror game

INPERSPECTIVE

ALIENS VS PREDATOR 2

Reviewed issue 110, Score 93%

Much faster and more action-packed than any plodding old survival horror game, AVP2 is probably the scariest FPS ever made, and a sure-fire winner if you prefer your action in the first-person.

THE THING

Reviewed issue 121, Score 80%

If you don't mind a few scares but are a bit of a wuss at heart, you might try this icy squad-based effort. It's far less terrifying but has loads of direct action and a good dose of cinematically-inspired atmosphere.

THINGS ARE grim.

Here you are, stuck in this godforsaken, nightmarish town, inhabited only by hideous, misshapen fiends and a few fellow unfortunates whose souls are just as lost and tortured as your own. You're only here because your wife sent you a note, inviting you back to meet her at your favourite holiday spot, Silent Hill. This despite the fact that Mary passed away three long years ago.

Are you dreaming? Insane? Or are you also dead, a walking apparition, wandering the byways of hell?

Anything is possible, as you inch down a typically dim and grimy corridor, part of a

tortuous network of cramped, waterlogged passageways deep under Silent Hill's man-made lake. On the walls, a papier-mâché plasterwork of old newspapers, filthy and yellowed with age. Nothing unusual there – this whole place is caked with refuse, muck and human viscera. You're more concerned about that *thing* out there in the darkness – you can hear its heavy, relentless scraping, and you only have a handful of shotgun shells left. But as you get closer, you notice something strange. In the faint light of your pocket torch, you think you can just make out the date... Wait, no, it can't be. How the...? You stumble backwards as your

mind reels in horror and confusion. These are *today's* newspapers!

BRING THE FEAR

OK, so out of context it might sound a little cheesy, but go with me on this one: this is a truly chilling moment in one of the most unsettling and horrific games ever created. You may have given up on so-called

scary games because of their consistent lameness, but it's time to reconsider, because either I'm getting old and my nerves are shot, or *Silent Hill 2* is some creepy-ass, blood-curdling shit.

For those who haven't been following its ups and downs, third-person horror blockbuster *Silent Hill 2* first appeared on the PS2 more than a year ago,



Late night TV can really do your head in...





Ooh matron, do behave.

"Either I'm getting old and my nerves are shot, or *Silent Hill 2* is some creepy-ass, blood-curdling shit"

where it was heaped with praise by all who braved its dark recesses. More recently, an enhanced version appeared on the Xbox, shortly to be followed by this, near identical PC version. The main difference of the so-called *Director's Cut* is the addition of a new chapter of macabre action, this time played as the mysterious Mary-look-alike Maria, rather than the guilt-racked James Sunderland.

And despite its travels, the game has arrived on PC in amazingly good shape – you're looking at a certified rock solid conversion job. Beyond that though, *Silent Hill 2* is just a damn fine game. Boasting superbly detailed visuals, an incredibly oppressive, tension-packed atmosphere and some of the most impressive use of sound ever in a computer game, this is horror adventuring at its most accomplished.

TALES OF THE UNKNOWN

It's also completely impenetrable. The plot is a vague and twisting thing, the reasons behind the horrors of *Silent Hill* only vaguely hinted at through your journey into the depths of silent Hell. And it's all the more creepy for it. Played alone, with the lights out and late at night, the game creates an enveloping fog of terror and

apprehension that exploits all of our most primal fears. Fear of the dark, fear of the unknown, fear of wobbly, slimy, acid-spitting demons from hell.

Outside, the fog is literal, as you can't see from one side of the street to the other through the swirling, shifting mist. Inside, whether in an insane asylum, filthy apartment building or abandoned prison, the shadows jump and cavort wildly as your torch swings to and fro, the deliberately restrictive camera angles deciding when you'll see what awaits in the gloom. And in this unbearably tense, skin-crawling context, the smallest thing can indeed send your mind reeling. You might walk into a room that is inexplicably upturned, with doors on the ceiling and fluorescent strips flickering



"Let's see. Bread, milk, Glock .45..."

THE MANY LIVES OF JAMES SUNDERLAND

NON-LINEARITY IS NICE IN THEORY, BUT DOESN'T IT REALLY JUST PISS YOU OFF?

Another firmly established tradition in the survival horror genre is to have multiple endings to the plotline, each casting the events of the game into a different light (though the action usually remains much the same). *Silent Hill 2* does not disappoint, with a total of 4 'official' endings and at least two unlockable joke endings. Some of these are pretty bizarre and certainly worth a gander, though as in all such cases we have to wonder how many people are going to bother.

Indeed, how many people get to the end of a game and are overjoyed to find out that they have to play it all over again to properly complete the experience? Certainly not I, especially when it's a hellish, nerve-racking experience like *Silent Hill 2*. In fact, it can be a bit of a slap in the face when you find out that you've given your all to a game for 12 hours or more only to find out that you've been rewarded with the crap ending, where

instead of riding off with the girl and restoring the world to happiness, the girl is hideously maimed, your dog is run over and you join a monastery to live out the rest of your days in hair-shirted abstinence. Great. Stick your multiple endings, give me one brilliant one and we'll all be happy.



To whit: multiple endings, not a good thing.



Needless to say, she took no notice.

inappropriately on the wall. You might be trapped in a frozen elevator when the sound of a sinister game show will suddenly burst forth from your broken radio, starring you as lead contestant. If a horror game is to be judged primarily

on how scary it is, then *Silent Hill 2* comes off brilliantly.

TROUBLED CHILDHOOD

And to be honest, why shouldn't it? To me, fear has always seemed like a fairly easy emotion to conjure. It's not one of those tricky ones that require proper characters and empathy and narrative build-up. It's a perfectly simple, primitive thing. Cinema mastered the art years ago, but it's taken an amazingly long time for games to put it all together. The *Resident Evil* series has always relied largely on cheap shock tactics. *Dino Crisis* was about as terrifying as a bloodied finger in a joke-store matchbox. The first *Silent Hill* was a step in the right direction, certainly, but as far as I'm concerned this is the first

survival horror game where it all truly comes together. It may not quite be *The Shining*, but it's a damn sight more unnerving than the likes of *Scream 6*.

On the downside, anyone hoping for something fundamentally new in the gameplay can forget it. The basic style hasn't changed one iota from the now-standard formula. Rotational control system? Check. Simple collect-and-combine puzzle system? Check. Recurring, invincible nemesis? Check. Minimal ammo, countless keys to find, a lot of back and forth taking items from place to place? Check, check and check.

And to be honest, if you've already enjoyed the game on PS2, the extra chapter is no reason to rush out and buy the *Director's Cut*. While it's just as good as the rest of the game, it's a mere slip of a thing with less than two hours of gameplay.

All that aside, this is still the finest survival horror game money can buy. If you can forgive the quirks of the genre, and you like your games with a side order of sheer terror, it's absolutely essential. **CW**



"This is really going to wow them at ratemypoo.com."



Don't fancy yours much.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ It's brown pants time
- ✓ Deeply atmospheric
- ✓ Superb visuals and an all-round top notch conversion
- ✗ Same old clunky combat system
- ✗ Some weak puzzles

84

Truly disturbing; the best survival horror game on the PC

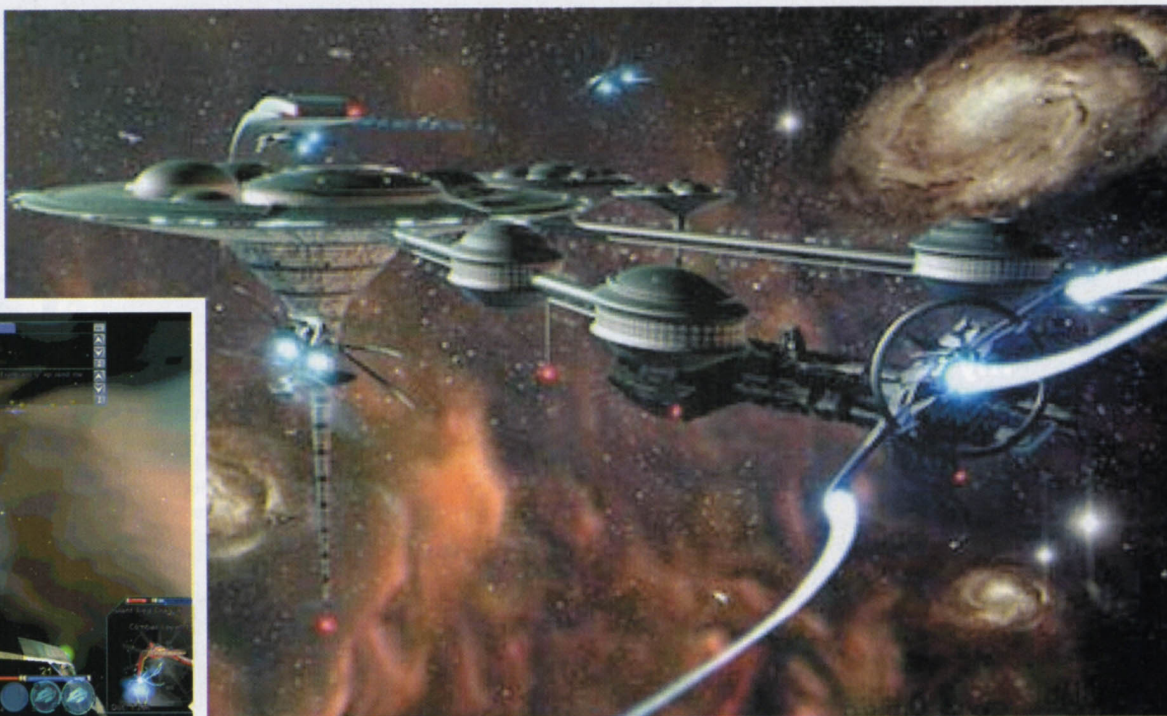




Trading is an easy and lucrative way to level up without fighting.



Combat is intuitive, if nothing else.



Although the character models suck, the environments are pretty awesome.

EARTH AND BEYOND

■ £29.99 | Pub: Electronic Arts | Dev: Westwood | ETA: Out Now
(through online stores) | www.earthandbeyond.ea.com

REQUIRES: PIII 500, 128Mb RAM, a 32Mb 3D card and a 56K modem
DESIRES: PIII 800, 256Mb RAM, a 64Mb 3D card and an ADSL connection

Space jockeys might have finally got the online RPG they were looking for. Chris Anderson flies into the void to find out

IN THE search for a unique twist on the online RPG phenomenon, Westwood has put its best foot forward with a third-person trading and exploration space combat game. After choosing from three races: Terran, Progen and Jenquai, and a total of six classes, which mix and match the trader, explorer and warrior professions, you're sent to your home planet for some in-depth training before entering the big bad world where all the 'real' players live.

If you've read the game blurb and you're thinking 'Elite Online' then you're barking up the wrong interstellar tree. Instead, start thinking about beautiful graphics and an excellent character development system which allows you to gain experience and level up your character either through combat, exploration (yes, you gain experience for just flying around to places you haven't been to) and trading



(each time you make a profit on sales you gain experience).

SPACE CRUSIN'

This means you can reach a reasonable level (maximum level is 150) without fighting at all,

although to reach higher levels you will need to get your hands dirty in all three types of play.

There is no forced player vs player combat, probably because the combat itself is pretty average (point and shoot - that's it) but with the ability to train yourself up in skills from all professions and make your own weapons and items, there's plenty to do. There's a rumour that the in-game storyline

"If you've read the game blurb and are thinking 'Elite Online', then you're barking up the wrong tree"

warning of an alien race which will threaten the three existing races is going about to kick off.

AT EASE

With any luck this might wake up the game's community, which keeps to itself at the moment. As it stands it's a solid game with gorgeous areas to explore, but it's lacking that elusive spark. We'll let you know in an update how it stands the test of time. **PCZ**

INPERSPECTIVE

JUMP GATE

Reviewed Issue: 107, Score 80%

Jumpgate is more for space combat sim purists, as its cockpit view brings you closer to the action. But other than that, it's pretty dull.

NEOCRON

Reviewed Issue 124, Score 85%

Yes, we know it's not a space sim, but it is set in 'the future' and it also has much more to offer as a futuristic RPG than *Earth And Beyond*, especially in terms of character development and heated combat.



Check out those funky graphics. The game is full of great special effects.

PCZONE VERDICT

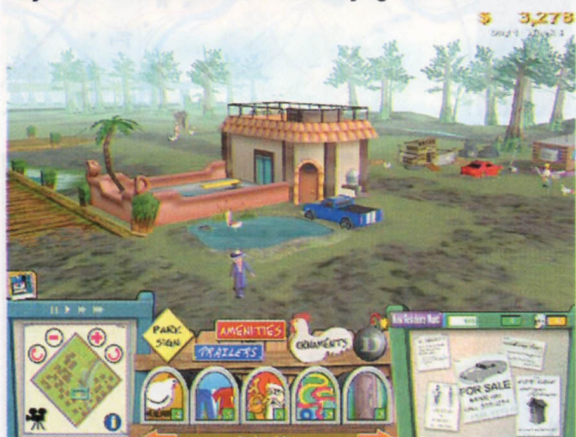
- ✓ Excellent ship and environment graphics
- ✓ More than one way to level up
- ✓ Exploration encouraged and rewarded
- ✗ Awful character graphics
- ✗ Long-term appeal questionable
- ✗ Uninspiring combat

75

A little bit unexciting but far from a lost cause



Maybe 3.7 million Americans weren't lying after all.



"Come on piggy, give me ride."



A couple of likely recruits for *The Jerry Springer Show*.

WE DON'T really do trailer parks here in Britain, the nearest equivalent probably being the caravan sites that litter the North Wales coast like over the coffee. It's the genuine American phenomenon that concerns us in *Triller Park Tycoon*, represented in all its mullet-sporting, roadkill-eating, cousin-shagging glory. Thanks in part to the United States' welfare system (or lack of), sizeable numbers of the

INPERSPECTIVE

BEACH LIFE

Reviewed Issue 120, Score 76%
A much more complete and compelling tycoon game, where you must run a series of beach resorts. Well worth a look.

THE SIMS: ON HOLIDAY

Reviewed Issue 104, Score 66%
Mindless but fun expansion pack for the now world-conquering *Sims*.

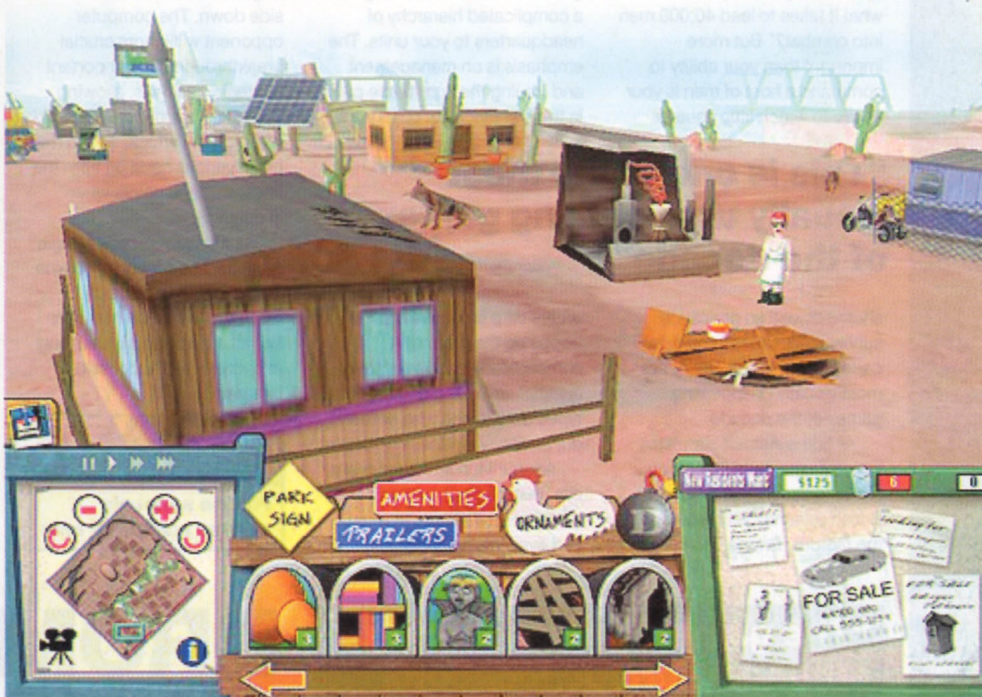
populace are forced to reside in static homes, living in perennial fear of tornadoes and alien abduction, both of which are featured here. Something of a byword for the kind of poor white trash that regularly turn up on

TRAILER PARK TYCOON

£24.99 | Pub: Jaleco Entertainment | Dev: Jaleco Entertainment
ETA: Out Now | www.jaleco.com/trailerparktycoon

REQUIRES PII 450, 64Mb RAM and a 16Mb 3D card DESIRES PIII 600, 128Mb RAM and a 32Mb 3D card

Another tycoon game? Sounds like a job for resident white trash expert Steve Hill



"He got a real pretty mouth, ain't he?"

The Jerry Springer Show, trailer park residents are not renowned for their decorum, and *TPT* exploits all the stereotypes for comic effect. Suffice to say, it's more pondlife than *Beach Life*.

PINK FLAMINGOS

The 'tycoon' genre has been stretched to breaking point of late, and though the transition from *Theme Park* to *Triller Park*

may seem a natural one, it's perhaps an idea that shouldn't have really gone past the initial drunken conversation. While the cultural reference points – pink flamingos *et al* – are spot on, the game itself is limited. Trailers and amenities can only be placed on predetermined plots, and the only real task is in keeping residents happy by maintaining the desired levels of trashiness, flashiness, old-skool and cool.

This is mainly facilitated by the placing of garish ornaments that raise the levels of individual trailers, thus making them more attractive to prospective tenants. Throw in a bit of price-setting and that's about it. You can take control of individual residents and fight with the neighbours, but for all the difference it makes you might as well not bother.

CLETUS!

It's not all bad, and the game engine is quite flexible, offering four levels of zoom, as well as a (largely pointless) first-person mode. There's a reasonable bit

of banjo playing to be had, but we are spared the sound of rednecks hollering at each other, as residents communicate via a *Sims*-style burble.

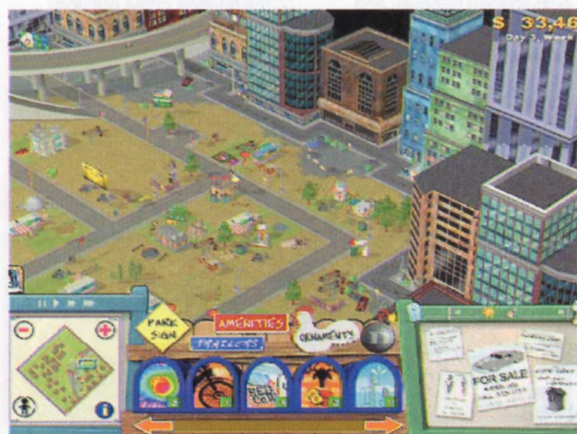
In fact, it would be great to see the next *Sims* add-on set in a trailer park, but until that happens (ie never), this is the only option for the white trash enthusiast. Not exactly essential, it's a game that you are more likely to play for half an hour than half a day, and while it is mildly amusing, the joke soon wears thinner than a caravan wall. **PCZ**

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Reasonably funny
- ✓ Idiot-proof interface
- ✗ Limited gameplay
- ✗ Soon becomes dull

53

In-bred



Once the jokes wear thin, there's little else to enjoy.

AIRBORNE ASSAULT

£24.99 | Pub: CDV | Dev: Panther Games | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PIII 366, 64Mb RAM and a 2Mb graphics card **DESIRES** PIII 500, 128Mb RAM and a 16Mb 3D card

Steve O'Hagan joins some British paras in action

AIRBORNE Assault is a solid, hardcore World War II strategy game advertised with the challenge: "Do you have what it takes to lead 40,000 men into combat?" But more important than your ability to command a host of men is your desire to watch little squares

the river Rhine at Arnhem in Holland. The drama unfolds in real-time and each order you give is filtered down through a complicated hierarchy of headquarters to your units. The emphasis is on management and issuing the right battle plans in the first place, as changes to

formation in the battle has a biography. But despite this detail and research, it's the old bugbear of AI that lets the side down. The computer opponent will ignore crucial breakthroughs and important strategic positions, allowing you to waltz around his positions when on the attack, and to meet his advances head on from the finest vantage points when in defence.

As a simulation of strategic battlefield command, *Airborne Assault* is a fine piece of research and implementation. But as a game, it is a daunting and massively inaccessible experience.

PCZONE VERDICT 55

For the seriously serious wargamer only

"This is one of the most visually unappealing games of the decade"

shuffle across an ordinance survey map. Unless you're into cartography, this is one of the most visually unappealing games of the decade.

Airborne Assault simulates various aspects of Operation Market Garden, the ill-fated British paratrooper assault on the famous 'Bridge Too Far' over

orders take time to reach the troops on the ground. A complicated equation of troop quality, terrain and equipment types determines who comes out on top when the firing starts.

Ammunition levels for every rifle, machine gun and artillery piece on the field are tracked, and every commander and



Well, the graphics certainly won't be winning any awards.

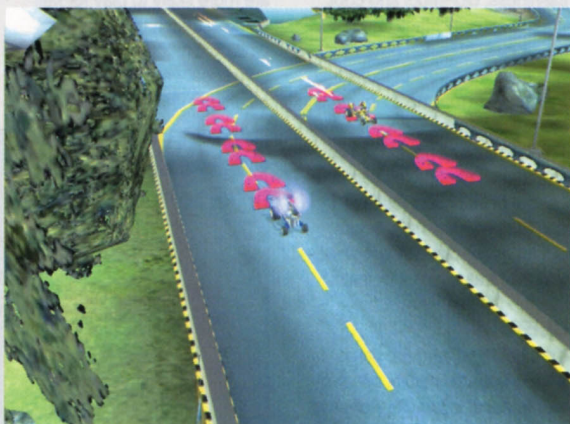


This is about as hardcore as strategy games come.

"The game involves tearing around futuristic locations in odd-shaped buggies"



Drome Racers won't spark much excitement.



The drag races are momentarily entertaining.

DROME RACERS

£29.99 | Pub: EA/Lego | Dev: ATD | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PIII 500, 64Mb RAM and a 16Mb 3D card

DESIRES PIII 733, 256Mb RAM and a 32Mb 3D card

Steve Hill dromes on about this average racer



DROME Racers. It's not exactly an inspiring name, and aptly enough, it is a wholly uninspiring game. Featuring a driving model that can best be described as flaccid, the crux of the game involves tearing around futuristic locations in odd-shaped buggies, and foiling your opponents with a series of unlikely power-ups.

Think *WipeOut*, think *Rollcage* (it's from the same developer), or alternately don't think at all. Simply throw in every cliché in the book, cobble together some half-arsed storyline with vague allusions to *Mad Max*, get it on the shelves before the reviews come out and hope that somebody buys it by mistake.

Admittedly, it wouldn't be the worst mistake ever made, but in a field of entertainment that alleges to break boundaries, *Drome Racers* is barely treading water. Between races, you are given the opportunity to augment your vehicle with a selection of seemingly negligible upgrades, and also to listen to tedious characters droning on about nothing in particular, a solid test of anyone's anger management.

While *Drome Racers* isn't broken, there is never any threat of originality, and it's a safety-first approach that has yielded an unmemorable game that almost provides the dictionary definition of average.



Just another victim of the car compactor.

PCZONE VERDICT 50

Mindless and ultimately joyless



MECHWARRIOR 4: MERCENARIES

■ £29.99 | Pub: Microsoft | Dev: FASA Studio | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PIII 700, 128MB RAM and a 16MB 3D card **DESIRES** The required specs and a subwoofer

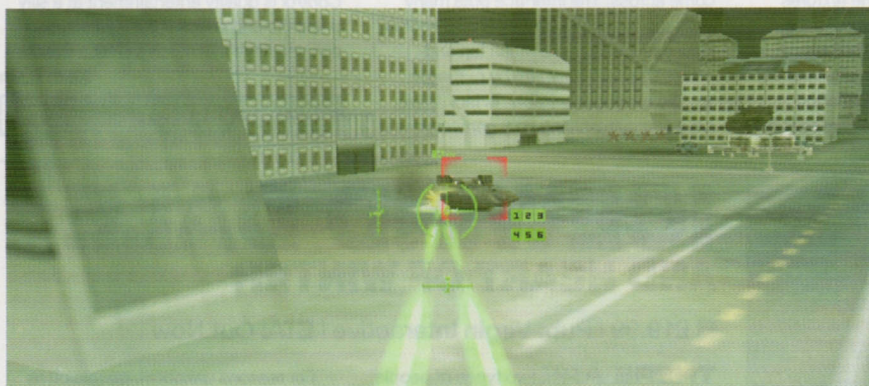
Stompety stomp. Phil Wand takes another 31st century constitutional



Try your luck in a number of Mech contests.



Multiplayer can get seriously addictive.



Light amplifiers make night duelling altogether much easier on the eye.

FIFTY MISSIONS.

ten planets, 35 Mechs, four gameplay styles, 19 new multiplayer maps, and something like 11 squillion weapons. If you've played *MechWarrior 4: Vengeance*, this new stand-alone expansion pack offers a banquet of fresh, ground-shaking, robot warring action, complete with deliciously colourful explosions and a whole gigabyte of new content.

Gameplay is just as before, meaning a short, steep learning curve followed by hours of second-nature hulk-to-hulk fighting – although the need for an aide-memoire for the mad array of keyboard commands will never fully leave you. Revised multiplayer styles and a better Mechlab for all your customisation needs mean *Mercenaries* feels a smidge more accessible than its predecessor, and in the mighty multiplayer mode, you can now have up to eight Mechs stomping into battle alongside you.

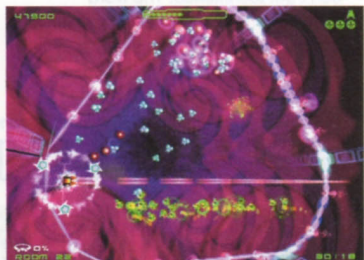
There's something deeply satisfying about engaging an enemy unit, hollering out an order to attack, and then having 200 gross tons of friendly machinery darken your cockpit as team-mates step in to defend you. Multiplayer is where the game excels and is where most players stay.

And, well, there we have it. Crunching into battle across fields, through lakes and down streets in something the size of a five bedroom house is an unusual experience – the psychedelic blast of lasers and the lurid fog of rocket swarms only adding to the game's unique feel. The saw-tooth graphics do detract a little, and you'll need a joystick for the best experience, but if you've not sat in the driving seat of a Mech before, it's about time you tried.

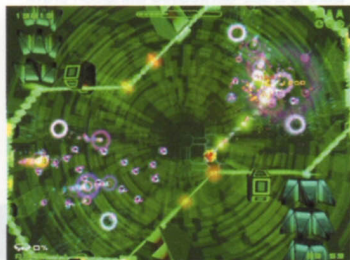
PCZONE VERDICT **82**
Familiar, yes, but still heaps of fun

MUTANT STORM

■ £13.00 (from www.pompom.org.uk) | Pub: Pompom | ETA: Out Now



Robotron fires into the 21st century.



It ain't the same without joysticks.

BROUGHT TO you by the chaps behind the excellent *Space Tripper*, *Mutant Storm* is another slice of retro 2D shooting wrapped up in fancy new space-age 3D graphics. This time the blueprint is arcade classic *Robotron*, and as such sees you zipping around inside an assortment of narrowly confined environs (89 in all), trying to destroy literally hordes of scuttling, mutating beasts on a single-minded mission to kill. The control system also follows *Robotron*'s example, with the ideal set-up consisting of dual joysticks – one to move and one to shoot. But this isn't exactly the commonest of

peripherals and while you can cheat with a keyboard or keyboard/mouse configuration, both of these are poor shadows of the intended interface.

The sheer variety of threat types and attack patterns stuffed into the game's cramped quarters display plenty of ingenuity, and the whole package has been put together with considerable skill and style. However, this is still largely an exercise in nostalgia, which for most of us will offer a couple of hours' obsessive key-bashing and no more. (AH)

PCZONE VERDICT **69**



Feeling nostalgic yet?



It's just missing that magic spark.

ULTRA ASSAULT

■ US\$19.99 (from www.smallrockets.com) | Pub: Small Rockets | ETA: Out Now

MORE RETRO action, this time in the upward-scrolling shooter category (à la 1942, *Raiden*), from the prolific folk at Small Rockets (*Star Monkey*). And again, while it elegantly re-landscapes some well-trodden arcade terrain, it's a largely unmemorable affair.

Ultra Assault also seems to have an appreciation that its ageing retro gamer audience's reflexes have dulled, as it's far from the most adrenalin-pumping, lightning-fast example of the genre. This is not one of those games where the screen becomes so ablaze with enemy flack that you can't see the ground – indeed it's

positively sedate by Japanese standards. However, it's also a well-balanced and enjoyable affair, with a nice *R-Type* 'select-your-own' style power-up tree. And the fact that you retain all your power-ups when you die neatly circumvents the problem of being left stranded and powerless every time you lose a life.

It looks rather lovely, with some posh lighting and shadow effects, and plenty of well-designed enemy units. If you have a hankering for a spanking, retro stylee, you could do a lot worse. (AH)

PCZONE VERDICT **72**

REPLAY

The place to go when you've got no dough

GROUND CONTROL

■ £4.99 | Pub: Sold Out | ETA: Feb 21

GROUND CONTROL

always was a decent strategy game, and now, after refreshing ourselves with the finer points of its immaculate gameplay, we've been charmed all over again.

The beauty of *Ground Control* is its simplicity. Forget tiresome resource management, forget clumsy icons and forget waiting ages to build up your army, GC has all guns blazing from the start. Dropships transport your units to the battlefield and within seconds you're mashing up futuristic terrorists, tanks, spacecraft, communication outposts

and giant fortresses. There's no time for ponderous strategic deliberations here – GC is about getting down and dirty as quickly as possible.

What's also impressive is how good the game still looks. Two and a half years is a long time in terms of graphics technology, but we are pleased to say that GC has barely aged. The textures on everything from the vehicles to the landscape are still superb. The particle effects for the gunfire and explosions are especially eye-catching, and the accompanying sound effects are spot on.



Two and a half years later and *Ground Control* still rocks.

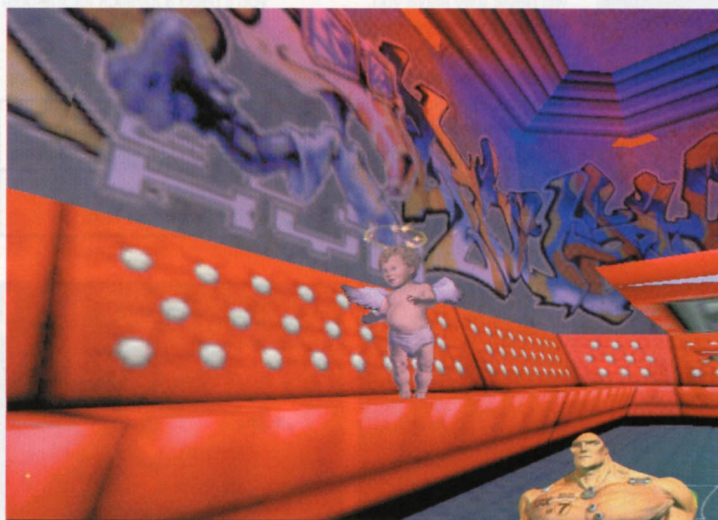
GC is one of the most intuitive and easy to play strategy games we have ever come across. The interface puts many of its modern day counterparts to shame. How you can have so much fun and create so much mayhem by putting in so little effort is incredible. In fact, there are a few overbearing RTS games around

now that could learn a thing or two about ergonomics from GC. You got it, *Ground Control* is quality entertainment at a silly price. Go and check it out – where else can you have this much fun for a fiver?

Keith Pullin

PCZONE VERDICT

87



The weirdest looking kid since *The Omen*.

MESSIAH

■ £4.99 | Pub: Sold Out | ETA: Feb 21

THERE WAS a lot of fuss made over Shiny Entertainment's *Messiah* back in the day. Massively hyped and hugely delayed, it was eventually released to a largely disinterested public.

Looking at the game now, it's hard to see what all the fuss was about. Something of a mish-mash of styles, the main gist involves controlling a nappy-wearing cherub called Bob (how we laughed). Not just any nappy-wearing cherub, Bob has the ability to possess people, the convenient side-effect being that you get to control a wide variety of characters in a third-person style.

Despite some explosive action, pseudo-platform sections, a bit of stealth

and a futuristic setting, it's somehow less than the sum of its parts, and is hampered by over-elaborate controls and cumbersome movement. We were also promised that the game engine would be somehow future-proof, looking better and better as technology advanced. This claim can now be dismissed as horse shit, as it looks no different from any other three year-old game.

By no means a disaster, *Messiah* is a quirky addition to the budget range, and for five quid there may be some curiosity value. But not all that much.

Steve Hill

PCZONE VERDICT

65

ICEWIND DALE AND HEART OF WINTER

■ £19.99 | Pub: Virgin Interactive | ETA: Out Now

THERE ARE two types of people who play the Infinity Engine games. There are those who like strong storylines, characters and quests, with a modicum of goblin bashing thrown in for good measure. And then there are those who like combat, combat and more combat.

If you fall into the latter category, this package was made just for you. *Icwind Dale* is a self-confessed dungeon crawl with no pretensions at all towards epic storytelling. As such, fans of the earlier *Dungeons & Dragons* games who are interested only in character building and pure turn-based combat will love this game, and its expansion *Heart Of Winter* too (which is basically more of the same).

For reasons unknown, people often confuse *Icwind Dale* and *Baldur's Gate*, considering them to be two of a kind. Nothing could be further from the truth. If you've played *BG1* or *BG2* and are looking to this as a temporary fix, you won't find it. This is for combat purists only. Treat it as such and you won't be disappointed. A word on the graphics: don't get too excited. The word 'functional' has never been more apt than when describing the visuals of *Icwind Dale*, but it's a solid title nonetheless, if somewhat linear.

Chris Anderson

PCZONE VERDICT

70



It's one big combat-heavy dungeon crawl, is *Icwind Dale*. Love it or leave it.



With space hamsters and talking swords, *BGII* pretty much has it all.

BALDUR'S GATE II: SHADOWS OF AMN AND THRONE OF BHAAL

■ £19.99 | Pub: Virgin Interactive | ETA: Out Now

DESPITE THE blossoming popularity of 3D RPGs, such as *Neverwinter Nights* and *Morrowind*, the original *Baldur's Gate* games are still far from being relegated to the scrap heap. The second *BG* outing, *Shadows Of Amn*, went down in history not only for being one of the best *AD&D* games ever created, but also one of the longest, with more than 200 hours of gameplay.

Add to that the *Throne Of Bhaal* expansion pack, which added extra spells, objects and a class kit to the original gameplay, as well as having its own story running on from the end of *BG2*, and we're talking prison-time needed in order to complete it. But what an easy stretch it would be as, size aside,

BG2 and *ToB* are beautifully crafted and amazingly detailed adventures.

However, they're not for the weak bladdered or faint-hearted, as the *AD&D* elements are much more complex here than in, say, *Neverwinter Nights*, which may put off those that just want to get on with adventuring rather than worrying about THAC0 (To Hit Armour Class 0, if you really want to know). You're getting a hell of a lot of good game for your money here. And if you're not convinced by that, then it's got a space hamster and a talking sword, and personally, I always warm to that kind of thing.

Rhianna Pratchett

PCZONE VERDICT **85**

BALDUR'S GATE AND TALES OF THE SWORD COAST

■ £14.99 | Pub: Virgin Interactive | ETA: Out Now

THIS IS one of the best role-playing games on any platform, and while graphically it may look a little dated now, there is still a certain charm to its colourful and detailed environments.



So what if it looks a little dated...



...when the quests are so enthralling.

Very strong character development and masterful storytelling are the hallmarks of the *BG* series, and if you have never played it, at less than 20 quid for the first two releases, there has never been a better time to start. The expansion brings new items and weapons and armour to the existing game, and it can be played separately or as part of the main story to make an already epic tale even richer.

Combat is turn-based, although you can play it in real-time and pause the action when you get confused (note we said 'when' not 'if'), but the best way to play is as the designers intended, in traditional turn-based fashion, planning and executing your attacks before venturing forth again in an attempt to reveal more of the storyline.

If you're an RPG fan who can get past the dated graphics, do yourself a favour and take a look at this game. It's a perfect example of excellent game design, very strong story content and enough combat to keep you twiddling your wand for a long time to come.

Chris Anderson

PCZONE VERDICT **82**

FALLOUT 2

■ £4.99 | Pub: Sold Out | ETA: Feb 21

FANTASY FANS and those with a leaning towards *Civ* copycats are fairly well catered for by PC games right now, but there are few modern day examples of truly great turn-based games with futuristic leanings.

The *Fallout* RPG series is one of them, and with a complex character development system and many skills to choose from, you can spend literally hours tinkering about with your characters, fine-tuning them until you have a squad that can deal with any situation the game might throw at them. The storyline is way above par given the throwaway plots usually associated with many of *Fallout 2*'s fantasy counterparts, and there are plenty of twists

in the tale along the way. In fact, you can influence the story yourself, to an extent, depending which characters you choose to align with.

On the downside, the interface is a little cumbersome, particularly while moving units around in combat. And the graphics were never going to win any awards when the game was released, so they won't be knocking your socks off now. But if solid gameplay is high on your agenda, for the princely sum of five pounds, *Fallout 2* will keep you entertained for a very long time to come.

Chris Anderson

PCZONE VERDICT

82



"Got a light? Bleuugh!"

LEFTOVERS

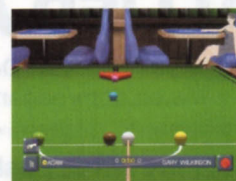
▲ The old, the ugly and the dull. They're all here in this month's leftovers heap. We're faced with one monumentally unspectacular title (heralding from the days when owning a Pentium was still something of a novelty), one which used to be OK but isn't up to much now, and one more suited to sheep farmers than adrenaline-junkie racing game lovers.

So, on to the suffering then. Once upon a time, a long time ago, when reviewers were reviewers and non reviewers err, weren't, or something, we rated *World Championship Snooker* (Sold Out, £4.99) somewhere in between dully average and almost half-decent. Now we just think it's dully average. Isn't time a pisser? Not bad physics though. We'll give it 50 per cent.

No, but wait – it gets worse as we delve ever deeper into the putrid waste festering at the bottom of our plastic bargain bin. *Extreme 500* (Sold Out, £4.99), is an ugly, old, unsophisticated bike game which will leave your machine feeling more patronised than a teenager asked to recite the one-times table by a condescending math tutor while his peers throw paper planes at his head. Not that I have anything against it, it's just so old and dated now that it's not even worth your time for the 499 new pence they're asking for it (22 per cent).

Finally *Screamer 4x4* (Sold Out, £4.99), a relatively recent car game based around Land Rovers. I say car and not racing game, as you spend most of your time crawling around the excruciatingly unattractive levels at a pace befitting a pensioners' outing to Eastbourne, before overturning your vehicle and quitting in a flurry of expletives. Avoid, unless you get off on Land Rovers. And if you get off on Land Rovers, never, ever come anywhere even remotely near me. 42 per cent.

Martin Korda



World Champ Snooker.



Extreme 500.



Screamer 4x4.



UPDATES

A place for single-player redemption and multiplayer action

MULTIPLE CHANCES

What's all this about then?

Some PC games are exceptionally flaky on release, with bugs and omissions that are subsequently fixed over time with patches. When this happens we'll take another look and see if the score is worth upping. By the same token, massively multiplayer games are ever-evolving and because of this we'll be revisiting major releases to see what's changed over time.

This is also the place where we take a proper look at the multiplayer side of games. As we regularly review games before they go on sale, often there are no public servers up and running, so instead of telling you how we think the game is going to play we'll wait and do a proper multiplayer review here, outlining how many servers are up and how the game plays online.

"Stop Getting Bond Wrong!"

JAMES BOND: 007 NIGHTFIRE

MULTIPLAYER

■ £34.99 | Pub: EA | Dev: Gearbox | ETA: Out Now
www.gearboxsoftware.com | Players: 2-32

REQUIRES PII 450, 128Mb RAM and a 16Mb 3D card
 DESIRES PIII 700, 128Mb RAM and a 64Mb 3D card

The Internet may be full of Pussy Galore, but Paul Presley leaves *Nightfire* online distinctly shaken



You should get those fillings checked out, mate.

THE MOST unforgivable thing about playing *Nightfire* online, is that because Gearbox apparently wrote the engine for the game, the multiplayer experience could, in theory, have taken any form it liked.

We could have seen a barrel of Bondian originality – intricate co-op modes with teams of 00 agents infiltrating enemy strongholds à la the opening sequences of *GoldenEye* and *The Living Daylights*, or intense objective matches with good guys vs bad, both struggling to save/take over the world. Things that live up to Bond's reputation.

Instead, much like the single-player game, Gearbox and EA have failed to realise the essence of all things Bond and have presented us with basic deathmatch and capture the flag sessions with Bond-style skins. It simply won't do.

Aside from the fact that technologically your latest *Unreals* and *Quakes* are better at that particular job, there's just nothing about *Nightfire* online that appeals to the Bond fan. The lack of thought is evident the first time you see an ancient 'Q' bombing about with the same speed as a US Marine. Even the inclusion of gadgets is pointless, as the fast-paced nature of deathmatch means you never have any time to use them.

Forgive me for going all Alan Partridge on you here, but Stop Getting Bond Wrong! These are Things That Matter. [M]

PCZONE VERDICT

FULL REVIEW (ISSUE 123)	87
MULTIPLAYER SCORE	55
Uninspired deathmatch fare. Expect it to die	

PATCHED

MULTIPLAYER

REQUIRES ORIGINAL
 MEDAL OF HONOR:
 ALLIED ASSAULT

MEDAL OF HONOR: ALLIED ASSAULT – SPEARHEAD V2.11

■ £19.99 | Pub: EA | Dev: EA Los Angeles | ETA: Out Now |
www.ea.com/eagames/official/moh_alliedassault | Players: 2-32

REQUIRES PII 450, 128Mb RAM and a 16Mb 3D card DESIRES PIII 800, 256Mb RAM and a 32Mb 3D card

With the allies pushing on to the heart of the Third Reich, Paul Presley hooks up with a band of brothers



Even in war, ballet lessons must come first.

THE ONLY real difference between Spearhead's online game and that of vanilla *Medal Of Honor* is the inclusion of a new game type – Tug Of War. Essentially two teams grasp either end of a rope and through rapid pressing of the A and D keys you try to pull your opponents into... only kidding.

Tug Of War is *MOH*'s answer to *Battlefield 1942*. Each team has five objectives to fulfill, the winners being either the first to achieve them all or have achieved the most when the time runs out. Fundamentally it's exactly the same as *BF1942* –

each objective really just being to capture a map location – but the option to destroy certain spawn points adds a tactical element that lifts it above the normal deathmatch variants out there.

The public seems to have taken to it quite well, with dedicated servers filling up faster than a kebab shop at closing time. Also team play tends to work better here than in games such as *BF1942* or *Counter-Strike*, with none of the usual lone wolf action so often seen by the off-putting hardcore crowd.

The other changes are mainly cosmetic. Some good new

maps, one or two weapons and a few new uniforms – including British Paratroopers at last. Putting on the famous red beret almost brings a tear to the eye, I can tell you. All in all, a good expansion to an already very playable, if somewhat under-appreciated, online game. [M]

PCZONE VERDICT

FULL REVIEW (ISSUE 123)	82
MULTIPLAYER SCORE	80
Oh, what a lovely war(game)	

Chart Hits

13992	3rd Edge, In and Out
17254	Atomic Kitten, Last Goodbye
14650	Avril Lavigne, Complicated
15341	Big Bruvaz, Nu Flow
15602	C. David, What's Your Flava
17288	Cheeky Girls, The Cheeky Song
15607	D J Sammy, Heaven
17295	D. Beddingfield, Not The One
16820	Dannii Minogue, Needle On It
17298	Darius, Rushes
14040	Eminem, Cleaning My Closet
15494	J. Timberlake, Like I Love U
17052	J-Lo, Jenny From The Block
14556	Las Ketchup, Ketchup Song
17191	Lasgo, Pray
17335	Liam Lynch, Whatever
17337	Liberty X, Holding On For You
15640	Madonna, Die Another Day
15522	RHCP, The Zephyr Song
17367	Rikki & Daz, Rhinestone Cowboy
17368	Robbie Williams, Feel
15529	Rosie Ribbons, Blink
14729	S Club Juniors, New Direction
17376	S Club, Alive
17382	Scooter, Posse
16744	Shaggy, Hey Sexy Lady
17237	Shakira, Objection
17241	S. Bextor, Music Gets The Best
17106	Sugababes, Stronger
17393	Sum 41, Still Waiting

TV and Film

12765	20th Century Fox, Intro
13083	Addams Family, Theme
12770	Airwolf, Theme
12767	A-Team, Theme
12773	Austin Powers, Theme
12777	Back to the Future, Theme
12778	Batman, Original Theme
12779	Battlestar Galactica, Theme
12783	Benny Hill, Theme
12786	Bewitched, Theme
12966	Big Brother, Theme
12787	Big, Theme
12967	Blackadder, Theme
12791	Bod, Theme
12795	Buck Rogers, Theme
12796	Buffy, Theme
12801	Charlies Angels, Theme
12802	Cheers, Theme
12968	Choultou & The Wheelies, Theme
12809	Coca Cola, Theme
12816	Dangermouse, Theme
12830	Dukes Of Hazzard, Theme
12840	Exorcist, Theme
12841	Fall Guy, Theme
12843	Fantasy Island, Theme
12855	Flintstones, Theme
12969	Friends, I'll Be There For You
12858	Ghostbusters, Theme
12862	Godfather 2, Theme
12867	Grease, Theme

12869	Gremlins, Theme
12877	Hawaii Five-0, Theme
12895	I Love Lucy, Theme
12898	Indiana Jones, Theme
12899	Inspector Gadget, Theme
12792	James Bond, Theme
12970	Joe 90, Theme
12913	King Of The Hill, Theme
12915	Knight Rider, Theme
12936	Looney Toons, Theme
12942	Married With Children, Theme
12972	Men Behaving Badly, Theme
12945	Mission Impossible, Theme
12930	Monty Python, Bright Side of Life
12973	Mr Men, Theme
12947	Muppet Show, Theme
12974	Only Fools, Closing Credits
12951	Pink Panther, Theme
12955	Scooby Doo, Theme
12900	Simpsons, Itchy & Scratchy Show
12956	Simpsons, Theme
12835	Star Trek, Enterprise
12957	Star Trek, Original Theme
12817	Star Wars, Imperial March
12822	Star Wars, Luke's Theme
12982	Star Wars, Yoda's Theme
12963	Thunderbirds, Theme
12964	Toy Story, Friend In Me
12979	Wallace and Gromit, Theme
13287	X-Men, Theme

Game Headz (Retro)

13198	Afterburner, Theme
13200	Arkanoid, Game Start
13201	Bomberman, Theme
13205	Bubble Bobble, Theme
13208	Castlevania IV, Level 1
13209	Castlevania, Boss
13277	Castlevania, Simon
13212	Commando, Level 1
13215	Donkey Kong, Start
13218	Gauntlet, Title
13220	Ghouls And Ghosts, Level 1
13222	Gradius, Level 1
13224	Mario Bros. 2, Theme
13225	Mario Bros. 3, Level 1
13284	Mario Bros., Level 1
13227	Mario Bros., Underground
13276	Mario World, Game Over
13275	Mario World, Intro
13272	Mario World, Level 4
13121	Rick Dangerous, Theme
13278	Sonic, Hill Zone
13279	Sonic, Marble Zone
13260	Street Fighter II, Cammy's Stage
13267	Street Fighter II, Ken's Stage
13253	Street Fighter II, Ryu's Stage
13254	Street Fighter II, Title
13228	Tetris, Theme
13230	Wizball, Theme
13231	Wonderboy, Level 1
13288	Zelda 2, Intro

Dance Anthems

12458	Binary Finery, Binary Finery
12459	BT, Flaming June
12454	BT, Godspeed
12452	DJ Jean, The Launch
12457	Energy 52, Café Del Mar
12680	Faithless, Insomnia
14238	Oakenfold, Starry Eyed
12466	PPK, Resurrection
14246	Robert Miles, Children
14257	Supermen Lovers, Starlight

This Month's Specials

12714	Beck, Where It's At
14159	Busta Rhymes, Woo Ha
12575	Jacksons, Bim It On Boogie
18758	Mario Sunshine, Delfino Plaza
12945	Mission Impossible, Theme
13985	Out Run, Magical Shower
12900	Simpsons, Itchy & Scratchy Show
12817	Star Wars, Imperial March
13254	Street Fighter II, Title
12757	The Beatles, Day Tripper

Old Skool

14218	Afrika Bambata, Planet Rock
14222	C.Jackson, Get Wicked
14160	D-Lite, Groove Is In Heart
14161	Fresh Prince, Summertime
14235	Mantronix, Have Your Love
14236	MARRS, Pump The Volume
14162	Prodigy, Charly
14243	Prodigy, Everybody In Place
14244	Prodigy, No Good
14250	S-Express, Theme

Exclusive

13201	Bomberman, Theme	13985	Out Run, Magical Shower
13255	Mario 64, Level 1	13986	Pac Land, Theme
13981	Mario Bros., 1 Up	13987	Pac Man, Theme
13982	Mario Bros., Death	13988	Rocket Power, Theme
12995	Monty on the Run, Theme	13990	Saxxon, Loader

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Vertical Picture Messages

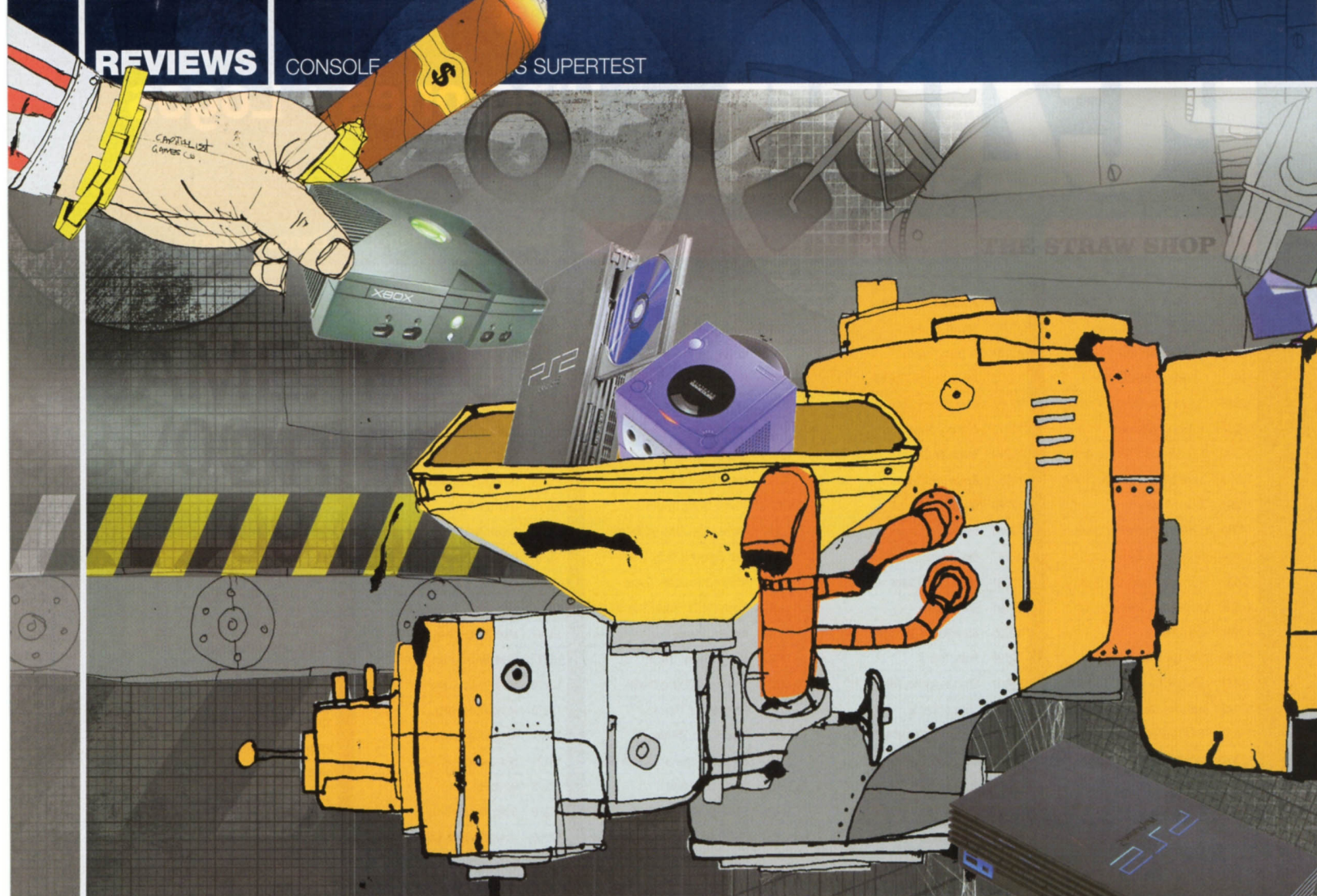
Alan	Angel	Basil	Britney	Bruce	Buffy	Clint	David	Diaz	Dido
10010	10012	10022	10040	10171	10043	10059	10025	10074	10080
Dogg	Dre	Elvis	Jack	Jay	J-Lo	Jolie	Keith	Kermit	Kirsten
10242	10087	10089	10118	10125	10132	10140	10147	10212	10088
Kylie	Mr T	Rachel	Rock	Samuel	Skeleton	Tom	Tupac	Wozzel	Xena
10164	10208	10217	10273	10233	10237	10258	10002	10271	10279

Logos

007	007	100% BITCH	ATARI	ATARI	ATARI	ATARI	ATARI	ATARI	ATARI
10861	11210	11114	11213	10682	11217	10376	10364	10409	10873
10458	10459	10683	10690	10684	11097	10762	10406	10750	10495
I LOVE BEER	IVY	IVY	IVY	IVY	IVY	IVY	IVY	IVY	IVY
11109	10691	10694	10695	10588	10767	10745	10580	10701	10441
11216	10454	10489	11132	10451	10449	10692	11220	10879	10569

Picture Messages

11362	11684	11600	11598	11561	11376	11377	11378	11382	11575
11572	11383	11389	11458	11619	11390	11440	11592	11421	11418
11391	11639	11392	11562	11459	11393	11462	11366	11461	11460
11555	11434	11495	11513	11386	11472	11594	11603	11577	11611
11631	11375	11404	11573	11337	11308	11578	11447	11606	11387



THE CONTENDERS

METAL GEAR
SOLID
ISSUE 96 - 82%



CRAZY TAXI
ISSUE 119 - 81%



VIRTUA TENNIS
ISSUE 114 - 80%



GTA III
ISSUE 117 - 95%



TONY HAWK'S 3
ISSUE 115 - 86%



CONSOLE CONVERSIONS SUPERTEST

Forget what platform they came from. Great games are great no matter what their origin. Mark Hill gets the **ZONE** team to dish the dirt

THE JURY

JAMIE 'FOUR-THUMBS' SEFTON



MARK 'DUAL SHOCK' HILL



DAVE 'HALF A THUMB' WOODS



MARTIN 'BUTTON HAMMERER' KORDA



ANTHONY 'CONSOLE-BOY' HOLDEN



PC GAMERS can be as snobbish as anyone else, especially when it comes to consoles. Whether it's because we fear their dominance will one day wipe out the PC market or we're just plain mad that their owners can play great games without spending a grand on the machine, we've always looked down on console games as over-simplistic and childish. But with the advent of the next-gen machines, we're seeing plenty of quality titles, and there's no reason we shouldn't play them on our PCs.

Mark: Mentioning in a review that a game was a console conversion used to be an insult, meaning ropey graphics and superficial gameplay. Not any more.

Dave: There's still the problem of code that has just been ported straight over, leaving you with poor looks and weird controls, like in *Crazy Taxi*.

Anthony: That's one of the best conversions there is.

Dave: They've done nothing to it though, and it's a two-year-old game.

Martin: It isn't just about doing a good job, it's about doing it in a

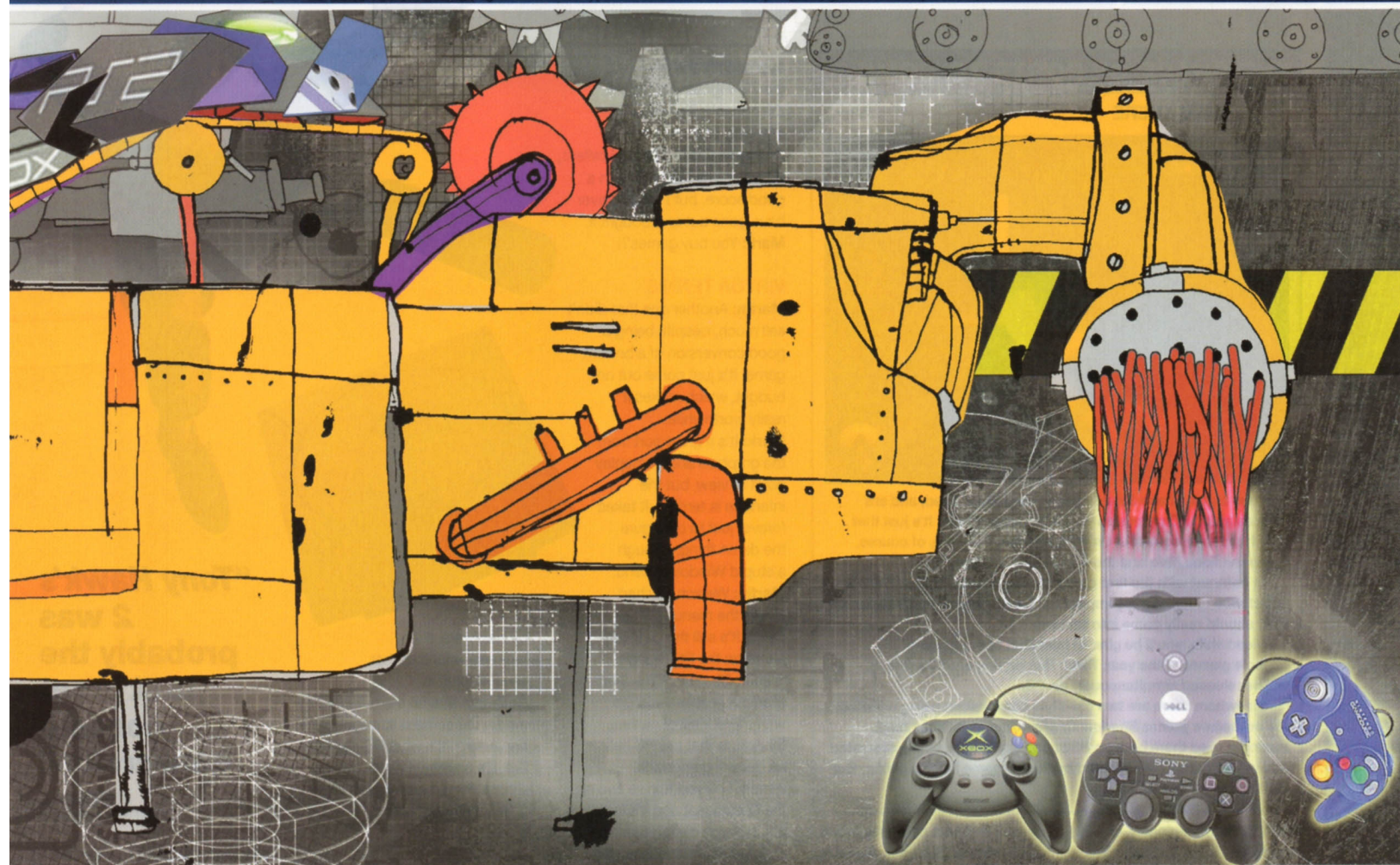
realistic timespan. Otherwise everyone's played it three years ago and no one's interested.

Dave: There's no problem with a title leading on a certain platform, it's when they're just cashing in on a successful property.

Mark: But if you don't want to buy a console, it's good to eventually get the chance to play those games.

Jamie: If you just pay a fiver, then fair enough. But with something like *Crazy Taxi* they could have added a lot more, like online multiplayer, but instead they charge full price for an old game.





Dave: Plus, all these games are very much console style titles, not what you'd usually play on a PC.

Martin: What about *GTA III*?

Dave: They developed it for PC, they just released it on PS2 first. It's always been a PC game rather than a conversion.

Anthony: But what defines a conversion is surely that it comes out much later than the console version, like *GTA III* did. But a lot of companies are making multiformat development their policy.

Jamie: Someone from Midway told me they can't see why they shouldn't develop for PC and Konami is bringing out PC-exclusive titles.

Anthony: And Capcom.

Jamie: These are big Japanese companies and it's brilliant for us. It shows the PC is a vibrant format.

"It's good, but it didn't blow me away"

MARK HILL
ON METAL GEAR SOLID

METAL GEAR SOLID

Anthony: This is definitely the older paradigm where they do the port ages after the event. It only happened because it became a big hit on PlayStation.

Martin: The big question is how well do they stand up against other PC games.

Dave: Well this stands up brilliantly. It's an excellent game, but again, a lazy conversion.

Mark: I hadn't played it before this version and I was disappointed. It's good, but it didn't blow me away.

Martin: They added the first-person view from the start, but it was crap and no one really used it anyway.



Anthony: You have to remember it was engineered to make the most of the PSOne. The coolest moments were the ones that used the Dualshock controller's vibration, and that doesn't come across with a PC controller.

Martin: Ultimately it's a lesser game than the console version.

Dave: That's changing with *Metal Gear Solid: Substance*, which is coming out soon after the console version.

Anthony: Thanks to the Xbox, otherwise we'd have to wait forever.

Dave: We are getting a lot more games on PC thanks to the Xbox, but conversely it's taking away some big PC titles, such as *Halo*, which was originally a PC game.

Jamie: I hate the whole 'Xbox lead' thing.

Mark: It's better than 'Xbox exclusive' which is what



Crazy Taxi offers a very faithful port but not much else.

happened to the *Buffy* game. I'm going to have to buy one just to play that.

CRAZY TAXI

Anthony: It's one of the best conversions in terms of being

faithful to the original. It's an exact reproduction, but it came out two years after the Dreamcast version and three years after the arcade one.

Martin: The thing in its favour is that most PC driving games take



Metal Gear Solid failed to impress the PC market.

THE SHAPE OF PORTS TO COME

WELL, HALO THERE



The two biggies have already been briefly discussed, and are both as much PC games as they are console ones. It's just that they happen to come out on PC a bit later. They are, of course, the marvellous *Halo* and the *GTA III* add-on *Vice City*.

In contrast with the first game, we expect *Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance* to make a big impact on the PC, where the first-person view should really come into its own.

Meanwhile, you'll be glad to hear that of the biggest console games of the year, *Tomb Raider: Angel Of Darkness*, will be released simultaneously on PC.

Elsewhere there are two old-style conversions being adapted: the adventure games *Shadow Of Memories* and *Silent Hill 2*.

Having played them both on PS2 I can say they're vastly overrated and will be completely ignored by the PC game buying public. But then what do I know?

themselves too seriously, all those Grand Prix and rally sims, and this is just a fun breath of fresh air. We only have *Insane*, which never really took off, and *Midtown Madness*.

Jamie: And *Carmageddon*.

Dave: I can't imagine who would buy *Crazy Taxi* on PC. I don't think it sold very well.

Mark: You could probably get a second-hand Dreamcast and the original *Crazy Taxi* for the same price.

Jamie: It seems pointless, but it does broaden the titles available.

Mark: It's better to have it than not.

Dave: I don't really think it makes any difference.

Martin: It goes to show that, like all the games here, it's still very playable even though it's a very consolish game. You couldn't have *Medieval: Total War* on the PS2.

Jamie: And there's never been anything on console that

approaches the genius of the *Tie-Fighter* games. All the console *Star Wars* titles are really shallow.

Anthony: *Crazy Taxi* is excellent, which is why I gave it such a good score, but I would never have gone out and bought it.

Mark: You buy games?!

VIRTUA TENNIS

Martin: Another one that didn't sell much, despite being a good conversion of a brilliant game. It's just come out on budget, which makes it really worthwhile.

Mark: It's a great port from the graphics and gameplay point of view, but the interface is terrible. It takes forever just to configure the damn thing, through a stupid Windows menu.

Martin: We actually had to use the manual!

Dave: It's still the best tennis game on the PC though.

Jamie: Oh yeah, it's superb.

Mark: A problem you get with these kind of games, though, is that the PC has no decent gamepads.

Jamie: I played two vs two on the Dreamcast and it's fantastic fun, but you can't have four people sat around a monitor.

Mark: It takes you a day just to get two pads configured.

Jamie: That's the problem with these games. You can play against the AI for practice, but the real fun is playing against your mates. You should be able to play this version online at least.

Martin: If we're going to have all these arcade, instant action titles, they need to be supported



"Tony Hawk's 2 was probably the first great console conversion"

MARK HILL
ON TONY HAWK'S

by hardware, like four way adaptors that you just plug in.

Anthony: Maybe the reason they made it all so hard to negotiate is because that's what PC gamers like. It's so refreshing to turn on a console and just select 'Start Game' without fiddling.

TONY HAWK'S 3

Mark: Again I don't think it sold well, because they're not converting the fourth one to PC. Which is a shame, because it's brilliant.

Jamie: Which goes to show, we do get upset if games don't get ported over to PC.

Mark: Well, I'm not too upset because I'm playing it on PS2 and would never play it on PC anyway.

Martin: *Tony Hawk's 3* is a brilliant conversion though, and you do play it on your own rather than with your mates. It actually feels like a PC game.

Mark: Again, the problem is having a pad that feels right.

Anthony: Exactly.

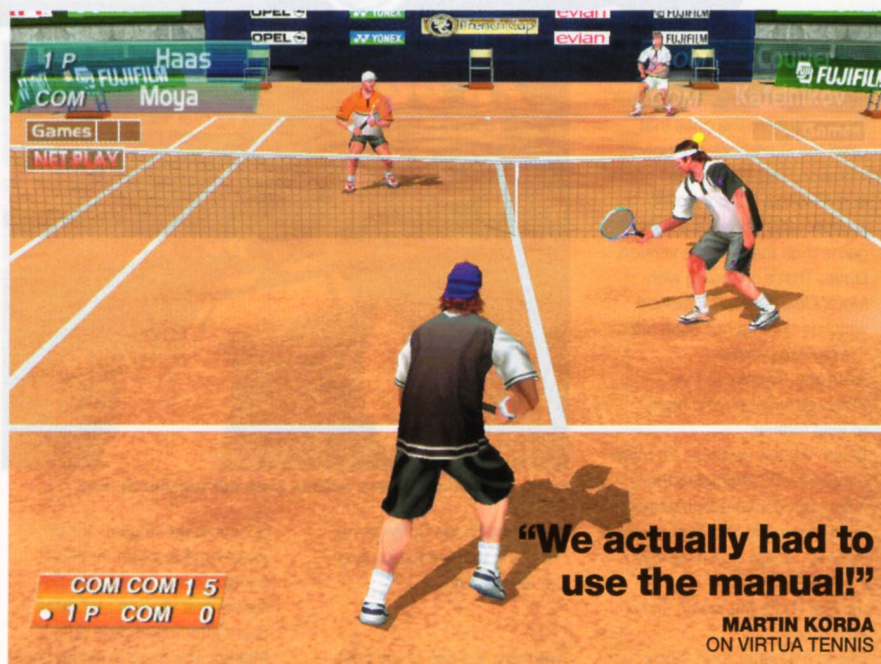
Jamie: And it's the sort of game

where you do need to press a large combination of buttons.

Anthony: People like Alienware are trying to make a dedicated gaming PC, but they're doing it for the hardcore FPS fans. They should also do one that supports console games better.

Mark: *Tony Hawk's 2* was probably the first great console conversion, turning the poor PSone graphics into crisp high-res ones. The interface is fantastic.

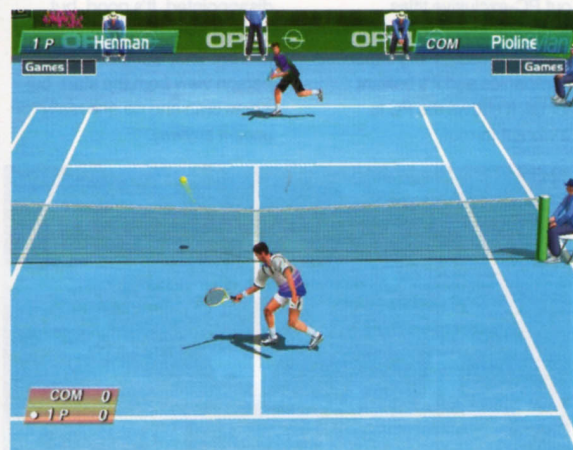
Martin: Which makes all the difference. This doesn't use the bloody annoying keyboard layout of X, A, Z for Start, Select and whatever. It's idiotic. Remember *Final Fantasy VIII*? Dave was reviewing it and it took him half



"We actually had to use the manual!"

MARTIN KORDA
ON VIRTUA TENNIS

It looks great but *Virtua Tennis* could have been a bit more user-friendly.



Is that really Tim Henman winning?



GTA III: A fantastic game whatever the platform.

a day just to figure out how to get out of the menu.

Mark: One advantage of *Tony Hawk's* on PC is that if you're into creating your own parks, which can be great fun, it's so much easier doing it with a mouse than a console controller.

GTA III

Mark: It's amazing how much difference playing with a mouse and keyboard makes.

Dave: It's much better.

Jamie: *Splinter Cell* is the same, it works much better on PC than the Xbox. And *GTA III* is an example of how console games are starting to have real depth. And that's happening more, especially with the Xbox having a hard drive. The very idea of what is a console game is changing anyway.

Dave: Like I said before though, it's not really a conversion. They were always going to do a PC version, it's just that there was a period of exclusivity for PS2.

Mark: Rockstar are very much PC gamers, and you can tell. They know what we want. The original *GTA* started

out as a PC game after all.

Martin: And it's the little things too, like being able to play your MP3s and download skins.

Mark: And the graphics are so much better.

Dave: And like we said, unlike *Virtua Tennis* and all those, where you need a pad, this works better with a mouse.

Mark: You do have to keep changing between mouse and pad when you get into cars though. Driving with the keyboard sucks.

Martin: Just goes to show what difference it makes when the developers put in the effort.

Anthony: Is that what it takes? You need a leading developer to get a decent conversion?

You need Gearbox to do *Tony Hawk's* in order to get the keys working?

Mark: Maybe it's really, really hard adding mouse support and redefineable keys.

Martin: Surely it's only a couple of weeks of work.

Jamie: Get into work, do a conversion, go down the pub.

Martin: The ultimate question then is, when you get back from

the proverbial pub, do you sit down to play *GTA III* on your PS2 or your PC?

Mark: Where's the proverbial pub?

Martin: Would you boot up your PC just to play this?

Anthony: Are you on your own or with mates?

Martin: On your own.

Anthony: PC. If the only games you had in the house were *GTA III* on PS2 and *GTA III* on PC, then yeah.

Mark: You'd be really stupid to have both versions though. And no other games.

Jamie: Depends how drunk I was. It's been improved a lot for *Vice City*, but in the original game it's really hard to shoot people on the PS2 and a lot easier on the PC.



Mark: Definitely PC. I only wish I could use a DualShock 2 for the driving bits.

Martin: Whereas with all the other games here you'd go straight to the console. Would anyone play one of the other ones on the PC when they got back from the pub?

Everyone: No.

Martin: That settles it.

Mark: Like we said, it's really a PC game, and only a conversion because of the minor technicality of coming out much later.

Martin: And we're going to see more of that. Like *Halo*.

Mark: That was originally a PC game anyway. The code was all there.

Anthony: It was taken to the

Xbox a long time before it was finished though.

Martin: And now Gearbox is revamping it completely.

Dave: Only because Bungie is busy with *Halo 2*. I think Gearbox is just adding multiplayer. The single-player is pretty much there already.

Jamie: *Halo* was amazing on the Xbox, even with just four players, so I can't wait to play it online.

Mark: As far as I'm concerned, first-person action games are a waste of time on console, purely from a controller point of view.

Mouse and keyboard is so natural once you've mastered it.

Jamie: I'd say *Halo* is the exception to the rule. And there's *Timesplitters 2*, *GoldenEye*...

Dave: But how much better would they have been on PC?

Anthony: That's another good thing about the Xbox though. They picked an adult title as it's a killer app, not some kiddie *Mario*-type game. **PC**

THE WINNER IS... GTA III

IT'S A PC GAME!!!



No surprises here since, as Dave says: "It's probably one of the best games of all time, on any format." Still it's quite an achievement to get a unanimous decision with the likes of *Tony Hawk's 3* on the list. In fact, Martin says: "*Tony Hawk's 3* deserves a mention because they actually made an effort."

But there could only be one winner, despite the petty squabbles on whether it should be included at all since it's a fully-fledged PC game in its own right. When you think about it it's a hybrid game: the running 'n' shooting element of the game works much better on PC, but the driving bits really need a good gamepad. Look, just play the damn game, OK?

"It's amazing how much difference playing with a mouse and keyboard makes"

MARK HILL ON GTA III

THE VERDICT

AS UNANIMOUS AS THEY COME...



DAVE
GTAIII
Pro Evolution Soccer 2



MARTIN
GTAIII
Pro Evolution Soccer 2



MARK
GTAIII
Buffy



ANT
GTAIII
Super Monkey Ball



JAMIE
GTAIII
Halo

Best Game
Most Wanted Conversion

THE WINNER IS... GTA III

IT'S A PC GAME!!!



Grand Theft Auto III is the most recent addition to the Grand Theft Auto series, and it's probably one of the best. It's a PC game, but it's also a console game. It's a PC game, but it's also a console game. It's a PC game, but it's also a console game.

the powerful GPU, do you
all down to play GTA III on
your PC? or your PS2?
Mark: Where's the power?
Anthony: You beat up your
PC just to play this?
Anthony: Are you on your own
or with me?
Mark: On your own.
Anthony: PC. It's the only game
you had in the house when GTA
III on PS2 and GTA II on PC
then year.
Mark: You'd be really stupid
to have both versions then.
And no other games.
Mark: Depends how often
you play. If it's been a while
you can't play it on the original
PC. But in the original
game it's really hard to shoot
people on the PS2 and a lot
easier on the PC.

are playing



Anthony
GTA III
PC



Mark
GTA III
PS2

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Real-time strategy never looked so sharp.

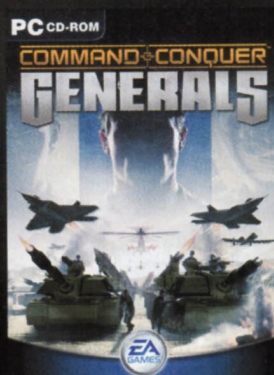
WHOEVER SAID

'THE PEN IS MIGHTIER THAN THE SWORD'
DIDN'T HAVE ONE OF THESE TO PLAY WITH.

The year is 2020. Global conflict beckons. Who will emerge and take control? Someone with a keen strategic mind and exceptional leadership skills. Someone as at home in the war room as he is on the front line. Someone with ice water in his veins. Fit the bill? Sign up for Command & Conquer Generals.

COMMAND + CONQUER
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generals.ea.com



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uk.ea.com

HARDWARE

THE DRIVER GAME



■ **HARD WIRED** Steve Spence

▲ It's one thing to have a nippy PC, but if you don't maintain it properly, chances are it will grind to a rather predictable halt and crash every time you throw anything at it more intensive than *FreeCell*.

There's only so much weekly defragging can do, and *Windows Update* seems to introduce as many new problems as it fixes, so whenever you encounter problems, whether they're stability issues in a game or just a matter of getting your system to perform on a par with others of similar spec, a good first place to start is the humble hardware driver.

It's mad to think that while some people crave the latest and greatest technology inside their PCs that they neglect to keep their drivers up to date – but many do. Unfortunately for them they're also one of the groups who would benefit the most, with driver updates generally fixing all manner of compatibility and performance problems.

Don't think that if your PC is over 18 months old that there's no point looking for updates either. When trawling the web recently, I found a forum full of users discussing the performance gains seen from the latest Detonator driver. You'd think that the most impressive margins would come from the quickest PCs, but instead it was a user who was still lumbered with a TNT2 Ultra who was singing its praises the loudest – the new driver had increased performance in some benchmarks by almost 35% from the stock TNT2 driver, allowing him to crank up the resolution a notch higher – for free.

In a sense, drivers are half of what you pay for when you shell out for new kit, and while such successes aren't something you'll encounter on a daily basis, an extra 4-5% here or there can only be good.

So, to help you stay up to date, we're going to keep track of all the major chipsets on the opposite page and point you in the right direction as and when new updates arrive.

See you next month.

THE BIG CHILL

It's time to take your PC sub-zero...

OVER THE LAST six months, the Internet has been littered with stories of loonies cranking their PCs up and over the 4Ghz mark, but unless you're comfortable with the idea of strapping a reservoir of Liquid Nitrogen to your CPU's heatsink, it's not something you'd find yourself repeating at home – at least not for very long.

Until recently, the only alternative to this hardcore and, to be brutally honest, extremely dangerous method of performance cooling has been pre-built systems such as Prometia, Vapochill and possibly Koolance. All three of these basically consist of pre-built cases decked out with their respective cooling, radiators, fans and monitoring equipment.

This month, Asetek, the manufacturer of Vapochill, has launched a standalone Vapochill kit that can be fitted into any relatively spacious case. With two models, one for AMD, the other for Intel, and two tiers of each, anyone enthusiastic, and

The coolest you'll get your PC without moving to Russia.



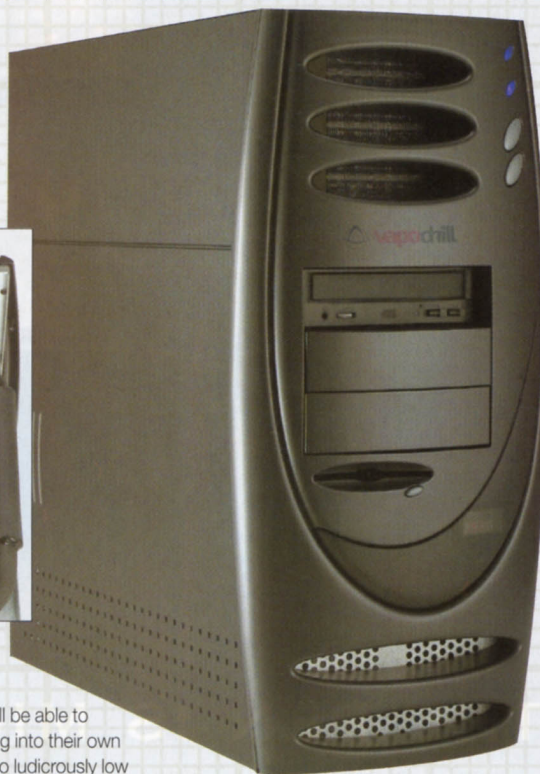
Chill it yourself.

suitably geeky enough will be able to install vapor-phase cooling into their own PCs and chill their chips to ludicrously low temperatures (anything up to -15C is possible with the kit, depending on the specific processor and CPU load).

Of course once you've gone sub-zero, the next step is to overclock. Although Asetek isn't able to guarantee specific yields on other company's equipment, it says margins of 25-30% are seen as an

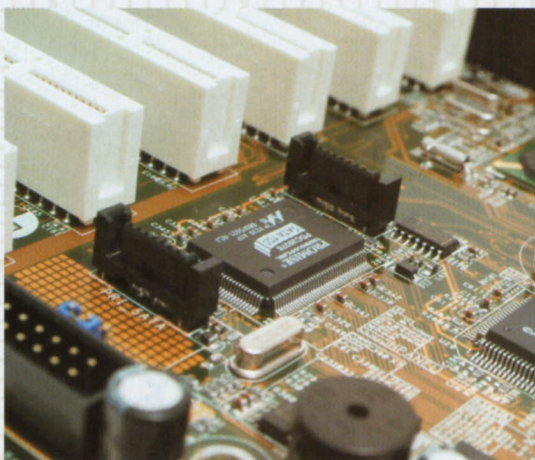
average, which is pretty impressive considering how little air-cooling seems to manage these days.

The kit is available in two ratings, standard (130W) and premium (160W) and it costs £250 and £300 respectively. For more information check out www.asetek.com.



CHE SATA SATA...

The new Serial ATA drives are here, but don't expect a revolution



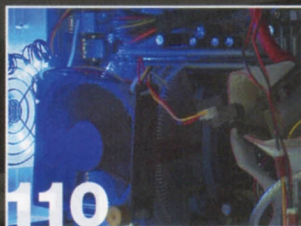
We'll be looking at a new SATA drive next month.

SERIAL ATA HARD DRIVES have been a long time coming. Loads of retail motherboards have included the option since but you've had to wait until now to get your hands on the first retail drives from Seagate.

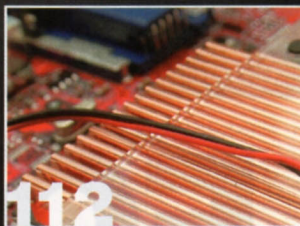
As part of their Barracuda ATA V range, the new SATA150 drives feature 8Mb cache, spin at 7200 RPM, and initially will only be available in two flavours – 80Gb and 120Gb, costing £105 and £145 respectively.

With shorter, narrower and significantly tidier cables than the now ageing Parallel ATA standards, SATA has been dubbed as quicker too, but that isn't quite the case. While the new interface itself has a peak throughput of 150Mbps, it will rely on the same PCI bus as P-ATA currently does, which means it will always be limited to a peak figure below 100Mbps.

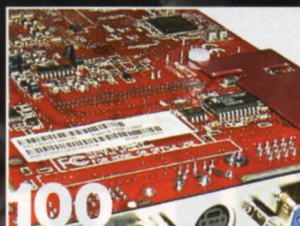
Because of their serial nature, SATA drives won't share controllers with other devices, which means less choking or throttling and higher sustained speeds, but at first that will prove the only real performance benefit until the arrival of PCI Express and the touted SATA300 and SATA600 standards.

**REVIEWS**

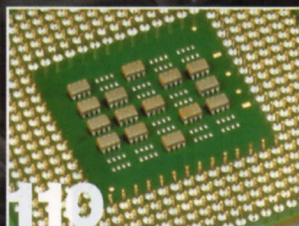
Coolers, cases and cards

**REVIEWS**

The cream of gaming hardware

**DEAR WANDY**

Got a problem you can't fix?

**BUYER'S GUIDE**

The best kit, the lowest prices

NVIDIA SPEAK A NEWER LANGUAGE

DirectX 9 is here, the new graphics cards are here... now we just need some games

SINCE THE announcement of GeForceFX there's been quite a frenzy online with loads of you itching to get your hands on the new GPU, available later this month. And from what we've seen so far we can't blame you.

That said, NVIDIA is currently focusing its efforts elsewhere to make sure that you've got something other than a bunch of fancy tech-demos to look at when you finally get hold of your new card. And this month they're holding a huge developers' event at the Ministry of Sound.

For two days, NVIDIA is taking over the Ministry to talk about CgFX, a GeForceFX specifically enhanced version of its shader language, Cg, and to give developers a chance to

try their code for the first time on the new board.

Developers from across Europe are expected to attend to get a first look at the capabilities of the new board, which goes much beyond the basic DirectX9 requirements. The general feeling seems to be one of excitement about the new GPU and what it will facilitate games developers to achieve.

What this means is that the first DirectX 9 games will probably hit around the summer time with the likes of *Breed* and *Doom 3* among the initial wave to show off just why we've been getting so excited about the new graphics API.

"The feeling among developers is one of excitement about the GeForce FX cards"

DRIVER WATCH

Check the latest price chart and make sure you don't pay over the odds

PRICEWATCH has had the honour of filling this spot for the past 12 months, but we've decided to retire it for a bit in favour of news on the latest drivers. With massive performance gains available with the latest updates it's always worth checking here to make sure you're running the latest revisions.

Graphics wise, the big three have all released new updates for their GPUs, with NVIDIA rolling out the WHQL incarnation of their Detonator 4.0, and ATI launching the first of its certified DirectX9 drivers, Catalyst 3.0. Things have been pretty busy with Matrox too, with a relatively major update for the Parhelia which fixes a stack of games that includes *RTCW*, *Half-Life*, *Medal of Honor*, *Quake III* and *Rallisport Challenge*.

With Microsoft releasing the final DirectX 9 client last month

many of you might have made the jump only to find that some of your kit isn't supported. As a DirectX upgrade can't be easily

uninstalled, it's probably wise to wait until DX 9 starts appearing in game requirements, unless you're desperate to run what amounts to

a limited number of DX9 tech-demos and are comfortable with the possibility of a total OS re-install. You have been warned.

MOTHERBOARDS

MANUFACTURER	NAME	VERSION	SIZE	WEB
Intel	ICH2 INF	3.20.1008	1.49Mb	support.intel.com
Intel	ICH4 INF	4.04.1007	1.31Mb	support.intel.com
SIS	IDE	2.0.2	5.45Mb	download.sis.com
SIS	AGP	1.1.3	5.29Mb	download.sis.com
VIA	Hyperion	v4.45	1.29Mb	www.viaarena.com

GRAPHICS

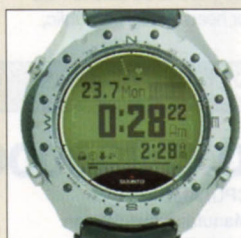
MANUFACTURER	NAME	VERSION	SIZE	WEB
ATI	Catalyst 3.0	6.14.01.6255	5.62Mb	www.ati.com
ATI	Catalyst 3.0 Control Panel	6.14.10.4012	4.62Mb	www.ati.com
Matrox	Parhelia	1.03.00.043	8.22Mb	www.matrox.com
NVIDIA	Detonator 40	41.09	16.3Mb	www.nvidia.com

SOUND

MANUFACTURER	NAME	VERSION	SIZE	WEB
Creative	Audigy	11.2	12.67Mb	uk.europe.creative.com
Creative	Audigy2	11.02.12.17	7.89Mb	uk.europe.creative.com
Hercules	Fortissimo/Digifire/Game Theater	6.07	14.7Mb	europe.hercules.com

SNIPPETS**AUDIGY2 GOES PLATINUM EX**

No sooner has the Audigy2 launched and won a stack of awards (including our very own Best Buy) than Creative Arts are ready with the top-tier equivalent, the Audigy2 Platinum eX. Using a different card from the standard Audigy2, the Platinum eX model has three speaker ports onboard plus Firewire support, and hooks up to an external breakout box for a selection of inputs, infrared, optical connectivity and an additional Firewire socket. Pricing for the pack as yet isn't available, but we'd expect to be paying anything over £200 for the little honey.

**WATCH IT!**

If you're not irritated by the SMS spam and random 'news' messages which seems to be becoming a regular thing on our mobiles, Microsoft's latest attempt to break into your life could be just the thing for next year's Christmas list. Dubbed 'SPOT' (Smart Personal Objects Technology), it uses FM Radio subcarrier frequencies to send information such as sport scores and news direct to a specially designed range of watches. Soon nowhere will be safe. Just don't forget to turn it off before you go to the cinema.

**MUVO 128MB**

Creative Arts are following up the success of the Muvo this month (PC Zone Best Budget MP3 player) with the announcement of a new model which offers 128Mb – double the capacity of the first unit.

Costing around £130, the high-capacity solid-state MP3 player/USB key combo device otherwise remains the same, and is natively supported in the likes of Windows XP without the need for driver or bloatware applications.

BUILT FOR FUN

PART ONE

Fact: PCs are hot, noisy and ugly. Wrong. Steve Spence shows you how to make yours cool, quiet and beautiful

PICTURE THE scene: you book your place at the biggest LAN party in the country and turn up with your off-white case to be greeted by hordes of customised PCs resplendent with strips of aluminum and flashing lights. Oh, the shame. But it doesn't have to be this way. Believe us, it doesn't cost much to transform your drab box into an object of envy. And we're here to show you how.

Modifications aren't just restricted to aesthetic changes – there are plenty of things you can do under the bonnet as well. We're not saying you have to, we're not saying you should, but if you want to be able to hold your head up high in public,

we suggest you have a long hard think about things.

CASE THE JOINT

Still with us? Good. The first thing is to get your priorities right. What do you want out of your system? If you're just after a makeover, then the most significant and most instantly gratifying upgrade is your case. Your average PC spends its life inside a discoloured steel monstrosity that treats your components to too much heat and too much dust. Aluminium cases, such as the Cooler Master ATCS-201 SXT and ATC-210 are as good a starting point as any for a transition, offering significantly improved airflow

and lower ambient temperatures thanks to fitted fans and the higher thermal conductivity of the construction material.

Of course the other big benefit of aluminium is the weight. Stick a couple of hard drives, a DVD drive, CD writer and a 450W PSU into a steel case and you've got something which isn't designed for lugging around. Aluminium cases, on the other hand, are almost featherweight, weighing an average of 5Kg, almost three times less than your average steel cage.

So why don't PCs come in aluminium cases as standard if they're such a huge improvement over their steel

counterparts? Basically, it's the cost. A cheap and nasty steel case will set you back around £50 tops, whereas a decent aluminium unit will cost double that, with some of the nicer offerings costing closer to £150. Five years ago, when a new PC meant a whole new box for the shelves of your local PC World, that kind of money was a problem, but today with a shift in

culture towards upgrades and self-installation, an aluminium case can last several generations and even prove to be more cost-effective.

COOL DUDE

Throwing your PC into a new case is one thing, but if you smoke your CPU you'll soon be crying like a baby. On top of good airflow within your case

“Your average PC spends its life inside a discoloured steel monstrosity that treats your components to too much heat and too much dust”

COOLERS

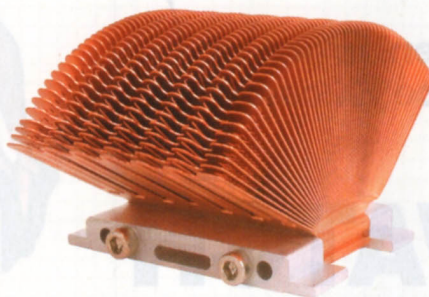
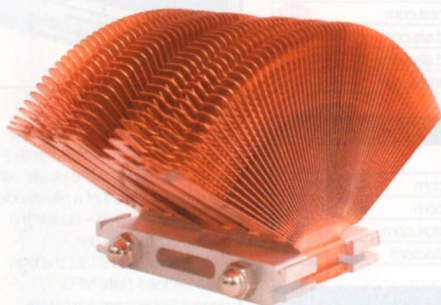
CNPS6000CU

CPU: AMD
Manufacturer: Zalman
Price: £38
Phone: 0870 321 4620
Web: www.quietpc.com

Weighing in at just under half a kilogram, the all-copper Zalman flower for AthlonXP, Athlon and Duron Processors is the second heaviest we've seen. Ever. Fifty six copper fins are squeezed together to form a finely polished base which on the reverse side sits in direct contact with the CPU core.

The emphasis with flower coolers is on silent or unobtrusive cooling, which is why the low-noise fan comes equipped with a small speed/voltage adjuster.

Because of the nature of the clip, which goes across the middle of the heatsink and requires a metal lever to lock in place, it's a good idea to fit a shim to the CPU first – Athlon cores are notoriously fragile and it would only take a little uneven pressure for the base of the cooler to rock slightly and render your CPU useless.



CNP6500BCU

CPU: Intel Pentium 4 (478 pin)
Manufacturer: Zalman
Price: £49
Phone: 0870 321 4620
Web: www.quietpc.com

Thanks to Intel's unique heatsink mount on its motherboard (a black plastic frame which secures in four separate places) it's possible to fit something even bigger (and heavier) than the CNPS6000CU to your Pentium 4. Weighing in at under a kilogram, the full copper Zalman might prove too heavy for the average geek to even lift, and is best suited to systems that are seldom moved, if at all, because of this extra weight.

With the supplied fan at its minimum speed, this cooler is as effective as Zalman's lower spec copper-aluminium hybrid when running flat out, emphasising the huge difference copper makes to heat control. Either way, this little number cooled our 3Ghz testbed nicely, and has done for some time now.

ZEN RADIATOR

CPU: AMD/Intel Pentium 4 (478 pin)
Manufacturer: TS Heatronics
Price: £75 (+£10 for Intel mounting kit)
Phone: N/A
Web: www.tsheatronics.co.jp

Looking more like a Gerry Anderson spacecraft throwback than a CPU cooler, the Zen Radiator, made by TS Heatronics has some suitably space-age technologies at its heart to keep your processor cool. It's so advanced, in fact, that it almost isn't a heatsink technically, instead using a complex radiator with a pair of fans to cool your PC's brain.

The radiator itself consists of a flat tube of metal, about 30mm wide, which is filled with a phase-change fluid. A metal plate which sits directly on the processor draws heat off its core. As the plate gets hotter, so the fluid in the radiator evaporates and passes through the radiator, cooling as it goes. By the time it gets back to the plate, this vapour has condensed back, and begins again the cycle from liquid to gas, and back to liquid.



PCZONE VERDICT

79

PCZONE VERDICT

82

PCZONE VERDICT

74

(something which needs inlet and outlet fans to achieve) it's worth paying special attention to your PC's number one hotspot: the processor – especially if you're thinking about overclocking your system. That means tearing out that whiny stock cooler and giving your CPU a shiny copper cooler to take the heat out of the situation.

Copper radiates heat almost twice as effectively as aluminium, which makes it a perfect material for CPU coolers. With one tiny drawback – weight. A conventional CPU socket can happily handle up to 500g of metal, but much more and you'll need to whip it out whenever you're lugging your PC to a LAN party.

The choice of aftermarket coolers is huge, with heatsinks costing anything from £10 to £100, with a similar disparity in performance. So work out how much cash you want to throw at it, look at our recommendations below for a guide to how the major players compare, and then you can be sure you won't get your fingers burnt. Literally. [PC]

CASE STUDY 1



ATC-201 SXT

Manufacturer: Cooler Master

Price: £150.00

Phone: N/A

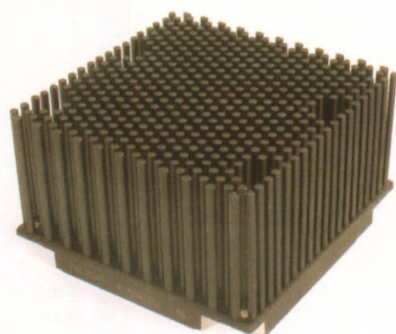
Web: www.coolermaster.co.uk

If you needed any convincing of the aesthetic benefits of an aluminium case, look no further. With its snowed grain finish, Cooler Master's ATC-201 SXT is one of its nicest cases to date. Coming with a pre-fitted window on the left hand side of the case, fellow LAN-goers can peek inside at your rig and coo at the techie goodness.

Pre-fitted with two 80mm fans at the front behind the grille, and a third below the PSU almost adjacent to the CPU socket, the system runs much cooler than the steel equivalent we transplanted it from. Although there are more fans, if anything this is almost quieter than the steel equivalent as it's got none of those rattling steel panels and the plastic fascia – things which can serve to amplify rather than insulate your PC's acoustics.

PCZONE VERDICT

88



HHC-L61

CPU: AMD

Manufacturer: Cooler Master

Price: £35

Phone: N/A

Web: www.coolermaster.co.uk

Better known for its high quality aluminium cases, Cooler Master has been making heatsinks for some time, though this is the first of its products to really hit the spot for performance CPU cooling.

An entirely copper unit, the HHC-L61 isn't as heavy as you'd expect, and performs better than many other copper designs thanks to two copper heatpipes which draw heat from the core and dissipate it directly into the fins, improving the heatsink's efficiency. Overall performance is great at stock speeds, and noise-wise it's less obtrusive than all but the stealthed-up Zalman's.

PAL8045

CPU: AMD

Manufacturer: Alpha

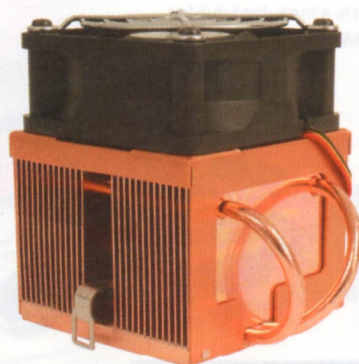
Price: £35

Phone: N/A

Web: www.alphanovatech.com/

Made from a combination of copper base and aluminium pins, the PAL8045 from Alpha is one of the more stereotypically hardcore-looking coolers, but by today's standards it's some way behind the pack. Instead of any sophisticated manufacture methods or heatpipe technology, this huge cooler requires the brute force of a powerful 80mm fan such as the notorious 'Delta Screamer' which makes it big and extremely noisy – anything up to 50Db if you're brave enough to run it at top speed.

Performance is acceptable for the money, but when you take into account its large size and noise output, compared to coolers such as the Zen and Cooler Master, for us it doesn't really hit the mark.



PCZONE VERDICT

60

PCZONE VERDICT

79

CASE STUDY 2



ATC-210

Manufacturer: Cooler Master

Price: £170.00

Phone: N/A

Web: www.coolermaster.co.uk

Once you've invested in your PC's aesthetics, it's tempting to put it in a more prominent position on your desk, or maybe among your AV. But unless you're dedicated enough to hand paint your drives silver to match the aluminium surround, black or cream fascias can ruin all of your good work.

A simpler solution is the ATC-210. Sacrificing the two front fans, Cooler Master has instead fitted a door with a frosting on the upper section to hide your drives. While obviously not as thermally focused as the 201, the 210 is still superior to any steel case. Take note: we fitted the window in the picture ourselves.

PCZONE VERDICT

83

3D PROPHET 9700

■ Manufacturer: Hercules | Price: £249.99 | www.hercules.co.uk

Cheaper than ATI's flagship card and almost as fast. We like

GRAPHICS CARD

THE RADEON 9700

Pro has been the card to buy in terms of raw performance, but with GeForce FX cards just round the corner, its time at the top could be about to end. For that reason, ATI is now starting to pump out cut-down versions of the flagship card at less than £250, and this is one of the first on the shelves.

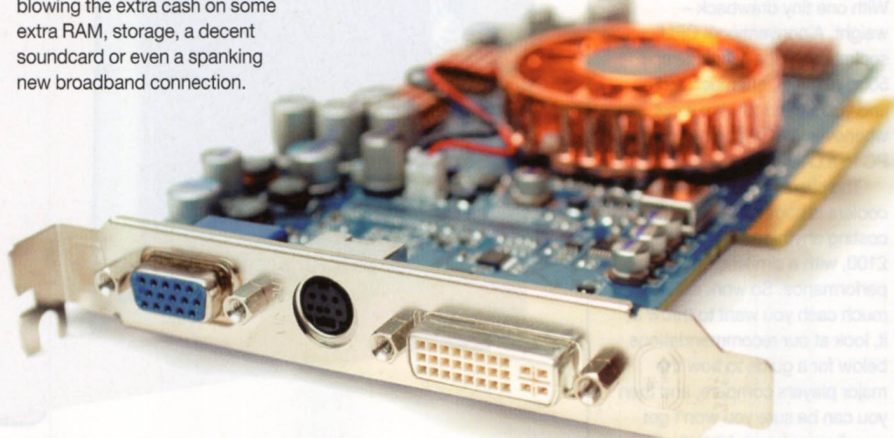
Architecturally it's identical to the 9700 Pro. In fact, the only difference is that it runs at slightly slower operating frequencies – down 50MHz on the core to 275MHz, and 80MHz lower on the memory, running at a respectable 540MHz DDR. The full feature-set of its big brother is intact, with eight pipelines and support for the base DirectX9 and Pixel/Vertex shader 2.0 specs, which will become the norm when DX9 titles start shipping later this year.

One of the things we really liked about Hercules's 9700 Pro was the PCB and memory cooling, and they've made the

exact same effort here. A custom coloured board is used for the card – breaking from the uniform red of the majority of ATI's other partners – and each memory unit has a passive ramsink fitted. It might not look as hardcore as the huge gold construction that adorns cards like the Maya II from Gigabyte (reviewed last month), but Hercules are actually cooling all the memory and if you're into over-clocking it's much more likely to help you squeeze out a few extra megahertz. Also in the box is a copy of the supreme spy shooter, *No One Lives Forever 2*, which is one of the few current titles to really push the new cards in the right direction.

With what is almost a 15 per cent reduction in core and memory speeds, we were impressed at just how close the 9700 comes to the current retail number one. At lower resolutions (1024x768) the boards are almost neck and neck, and it's only at the heady heights of

1600x1200 that the Pro gives you a noticeable lead. What we're saying is that if you're after performance at any cost, the Pro is still the daddy – but this card is so damned close that it's worth getting and blowing the extra cash on some extra RAM, storage, a decent soundcard or even a spanking new broadband connection.



PCZONE VERDICT **87**
Top of the crop

TI4800SE 8X

■ Manufacturer: Micro-Star International | Price: £194 | www.msicomputer.co.uk

That'll be better than the Ti4600 then? Erm, no

GRAPHICS CARD

NVIDIA HAS been bamboozling us with the names of its cards for years and this is the latest effort. Don't be fooled into thinking this is going to be faster than the Ti4600 card – the Ti4800SE moniker is in reference to the card's AGP8x capability only. Actual clock speeds are identical to the Ti4400, with a 300MHz core and 550MHz DDR memory clock.

The card itself is red with cooling that seems to have been strongly influenced by the new GeForce FX, visually at least. But that's where the comparison ends. Two pieces of aluminium sandwich the board, touching both memory and GPU, and at the front a copper radiator sits on the backplate side of the cooler, and is cooled by a transparent GPU fan.

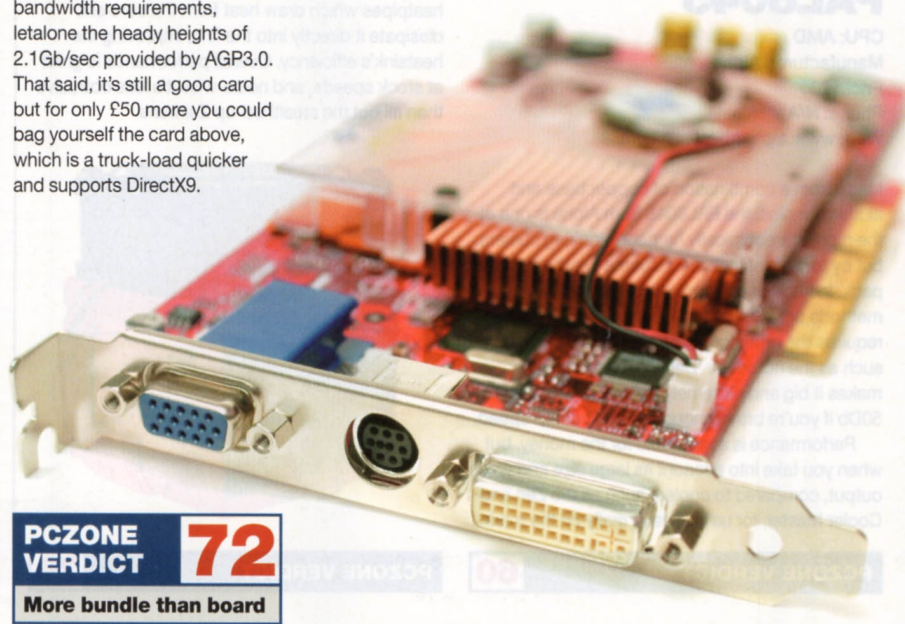
MSI always try to make a real effort with the bundle, and accompanying the usual fare of driver and support CDs is a selection of games: *Morrowind*,

Ghost Recon, *Duke Nukem: Manhattan Project* and a seven game compilation CD (*Sum Of All Fears*, *IL-2 Sturmovik*, *Serious Sam 2*, *Rally Trophy*, *Beam Breakers*, *Zax* and *Oni*).

One of the things that made MSI's Ti4600 shine was its VIVO capabilities and there's been a slight improvement here. Instead of a set of cumbersome leads, MSI now supply a small breakout box which turns the single VIVO socket on the card into four, and provides both S/Video and composite input/outputs to allow both playback and capture through appropriate sources.

The big question, of course, is does AGP8x make any significant difference in the game benchmarks, and in the case of the Ti4800SE that answer is a resounding no. While some manufacturers are supplying the new Ti4200 and MX440 AGP8x variants running at higher speeds the, Ti4800SE from

MSI scored identically to its predecessor, the Ti4400 card. The simple fact is that the GPU doesn't really exceed the AGP4x bandwidth requirements, let alone the heady heights of 2.1Gb/sec provided by AGP3.0. That said, it's still a good card but for only £50 more you could bag yourself the card above, which is a truck-load quicker and supports DirectX9.



PCZONE VERDICT **72**
More bundle than board

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DEAR WANDY

PCs get the winter blues too. This month sees an unusually high number of potentially fatal ailments – is it all too late, or can Wendy save the day?

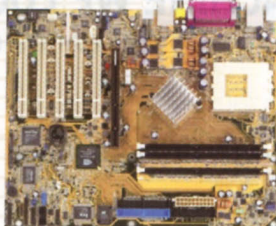
■ **DOCTOR** Phil Wand

LET IT ALL OUT

Share your techie or gaming-related problems with us, and we, in turn, may well share it with thousands of readers via these very pages in a big communal love-in-type thing.

Write to Dear Wendy, PC ZONE, Dennis Publishing, 30 Cleveland Street, London W1T 4JD

Email Address your letters to us at letters@pczone.co.uk with the subject heading 'Dear Wendy'. 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.



The ASUS A7N8X Deluxe. Yes please.

MOBO CHOICE

Q I've recently decided to build my first PC, but don't know a lot about it. I've decided to buy an AMD Athlon 2600+, ATI Radeon 9700, Creative Audigy II, 512Mb DDR and so on and so forth, but I'm just not sure what motherboard to get. A friend has recommended the Abit KX7-333. Do you think this is a good choice or can you recommend a better one for my setup? Another thing I have planned to get is a 17in TFT monitor. Your best budget TFT is nearly £600, but I've spotted a Samsung IM17RU for around the £390 mark. I noticed this is quite a bit cheaper, so is it a bargain or is it no good?

Mezzah

A If you've kept an eye on these pages you'll know I'm a fan of ASUSTeK kit. So the board I'd recommend in an instant would be the A7N8X Deluxe nForce2. It features an 8x AGP Pro slot, Dolby Digital, onboard LAN and will play host to the 333FSB AMD processors. It's around the £100 mark, so shouldn't break the bank. One other board I'd consider for your list is the MSI KT4 Ultra. As for the TFT monitor, it's all down to your eyes. I could recommend a colour for your lounge or speakers for your Hi Fi, but such choices may not suit you. Go and find the Samsung display you're after and look at it. Run a high-resolution desktop and play a few games. Do some word processing. Then decide whether it's worth forking out for. If it helps at all, I'd say it

probably is. My only concern about the particular hardware you've chosen is the ATI video card. Colleagues of mine have identical kit, and while they wax lyrical about monster specifications and monster performance, they are forever complaining about drivers. And so often it's drivers that make or break a card.

TRANSPORT TYRADE

Q I am a subscriber to your mag, but this is the first time I have ever written. I noticed in the January 2003 issue you mention a renewed interest in *Transport Tycoon Deluxe*. Well, I agree it's a great game, and some weeks ago I bought myself a copy – you know, for old time's sake. Despite saying on the box that the game was compatible with Windows Me, of course I couldn't get the damn thing to run. I mailed the tech support but they weren't much help. I know the game was only a fiver, but I'd love to play it again, so how did you get it to run? Actually I don't really expect an answer to this, I'm just venting a bit of spleen at manufacturers who put things on the shelves either unfinished, or unsupported, and even though it was £5, it was still a waste of money that I have to earn back.

Tony

A From what I've read and what I've heard, like me *Transport Tycoon* doesn't

Phil Wand versus Windows Me – place your bets now.

much care for Windows Me and I'm not sure you'll ever get it to work. The trouble here is that, along with a thousand other games, the original version of *Tycoon* appeared long before Microsoft even thought about Windows Me, Windows 2000 or Windows XP. My advice in this instance is pretty clear: forget old games unless you have an old operating system on which to run them. If you still feel a yearning, check the side of the box carefully: if your operating system isn't listed, put it back on the shelf and get yourself online for a little old fashioned research. Even if it is, join a few newsgroups, read a few posts and ask a few questions.

Search the web for people asking the same question you are – I can guarantee you'll find them. In the case of *Transport Tycoon*, it would have become pretty obvious pretty quickly that you should keep your fiver in your pocket.

GOING DEUTSCH

Q I read your comment piece about how tiresome playing online has become. I've only recently joined the online fraternity and have similar concerns. And I have a disturbing answer – Germany! Recently I went to play CS and stumbled into a room with several Germans in it. Not only were they willing to speak

English out of respect for the rest of us but they were also damned good fun. The highlight was rushing downstairs in the warehouse on Assault to find they were all dancing around to an MC Hammer track (how the hell do you do that by the way?). I often play in German rooms now and they almost always forgive my poor German and speak English. Can't imagine the same if roles were reversed, can you?

Carl Singler

**The Germans are coming!
The Germans are coming!**

A Personal experience has shown that the Dutch are absolutely the nicest people to play games with, and so I tend to frequent servers hosted in The Netherlands. On an ADSL connection I still duck under 100ms latency, and over an E-1 you wouldn't know it was several hundred miles away across the sea. A copy of *The All-Seeing Eye* from www.udpssoft.com/eye will allow you to filter servers for all the top games by geographical location, and thus get a good idea of the nationalities you'll be up against.

CROSSGRADER

Q More than a year ago I saw a review in a PC magazine that said the new ATI Radeon 64Mb card was a must-have, although at the time it was about £300. I duly went and bought one and since then I have had nothing but problems. ATI has sent me at least four exchange units, and they've all been crap. In the latest magazine the reviewers are raving about the new Sapphire Atlantis. Is it as good as they say, and is it compatible with the majority of games? What do you think?

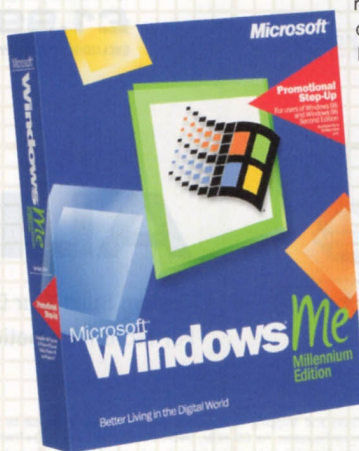
Stephen Martin

A As with Hercules, Sapphire is but one of a number of manufacturers producing ATI based cards. So it's not a question of whether you should be buying Sapphire but whether you should be buying ATI. For raw power there's not much that can touch the Radeon 9700 cards, but ATI has a history of driver problems so you might want to wait and see what GeForce FX can do.

BACK TO FRONT II

Q I had exactly the same trouble as Ross from PCZ

"My advice in this instance is pretty clear: forget old games unless you have an old operating system to run them on"



"Experience has shown the Dutch are the nicest people to play game with"

issue 124: having to fight behind my PC to change wires for the headphones and speakers. So I went to a local electrical retailer and purchased a splitter for 99p. Not £20! Now I can easily turn off my speakers and don my headphones with ease and no more struggling.

Matt H

A There were a few readers offering similar solutions for less than £20, so it would seem there are a fair number of you out there with a soldering iron, a drill and the competence to do some PC DIY. Good for you!

BEEPITY BEEP

Q My PC is really messed up. I have an AMD Duron running at 750MHz, 32Mb Nvidia TNT2, and 128Mb RAM. I was hoping you could help me! Sometimes when I turn on my machine, it sounds one long beep followed by two shorter ones. Then the monitor stops working. I'm due to get a new PC soon but I need to fix it now so I can still have some fun. I'm not sure it's important, but my motherboard is a KT7A. One more thing, it has nothing to do with my problem but I was just wondering if *Half-Life: Day of Defeat* would work on Windows XP because when I get a new PC that's what my operating system will be.

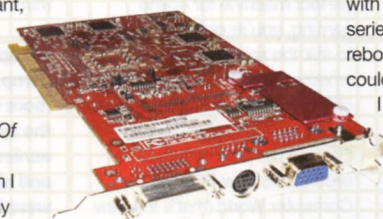
Sam Clarke

A When you turn on your machine, the BIOS on your motherboard does something known as POST, short for Power On Self Test. In some cases the error occurs early on, and here an audible warning is used rather than any error being displayed on screen (simply because you wouldn't be able to see the error). The Abit board you have inside your machine uses the Award BIOS, which makes

one long beep followed by two short beeps to indicate that the video cannot be initialised – the black screen is not your monitor playing up but that old TNT2 card. I'd suggest opening up your case, removing and then reinserting the offending item to see if this cures the problem. If your troubles persist, it sounds like the card is in its death throes and you should replace. On the subject of *Day Of Defeat*, you shouldn't have a problem getting *Half-Life* to work under Windows XP.

BIOS REVISITED

Q With regard to your reply to Ryan Seabury in issue 123 about upgrading his motherboard BIOS, I would like to relate this cautionary tale. My current board, an ECS K7S5A, had been happily running an AMD 1.4GHz Thunderbird for the last 18 months but I fancied upgrading it to a XP2400+. A quick look at the ECS website suggested that all I needed to



The Sapphire Atlantis, with engine by ATI.

do was flash the BIOS on my board to the latest revision and, hey presto, instant CPU upgrade compatibility and no need to buy another board. After printing the instructions, making the ROM image diskette and ignoring the warning (in big red letters) on the website, I proceeded to apply the flash. All was going well until the PC rebooted and instead of getting a nice BIOS

READERS' TOP TIP

QUICK LAUNCH CLEAN UP

I don't know how "top" this tip is, but I've found it useful. If like me you use Microsoft's Quick Launch bar more than the Start Menu, you could end up with a massive column of shortcuts on the former taking longer to navigate than those on the latter, somewhat defeating the object. However, just like the start menu you can add folders to tidy up your shortcuts. Right-click on the Quick Launch bar and select Open Folder. Here you'll find all the shortcuts on the Quick Launch bar, where you can add folders and tidy it all up, if you're a bit sad like me.

Pete

Wandy says: As time goes on, my Quick Launch bar marches closer to the right-hand edge of the screen, and as I'm loathe to delete anything I use, I group them into folders. To add to your tip, if you right-click on the Quick Launch bar and choose Show Text from the pop-up menu, the folders you create will sport their names.

Send in your Top Tip to Dear Wandy and win yourself £50



A quality tip for streamlining Quick Launch.

boot-up screen I was greeted with a blank monitor and a series of beeps. No amount of rebooting, cursing or kicks could coax my PC back to life.

I emailed ECS support to see if there was anything I could do, but didn't get a reply and had to face up to the fact I'd killed my motherboard. I've replaced it but now I can't afford to upgrade my CPU. So, if you think a simple BIOS flash can point the way to a cheap CPU upgrade, be prepared.

Paul Thickitt

A That's three letters from readers having nuked their PCs with a BIOS upgrade. I've never had one go, but with hardware there's always a possibility of something happening. In your case, all may not be lost – the machine will emit beeps to let the user know of POST

errors. Since your ECS board uses an AMI BIOS, rather than Award, the beep order is different. You may want to resurrect your old board and revisit the problem. One short beep is DRAM refresh failure. Two short is parity circuit failure. Three short is base 64K RAM failure. Four short is system timer failure. Five short is process failure. Six short is keyboard controller Gate A20 error. Seven short is virtual mode exception error. Eight short is display memory read/write error. Nine short is ROM BIOS checksum failure. Ten short is CMOS shutdown read/write error. Eleven short is cache memory error. One long then three short is conventional/extended memory failure. One long then eight short is display/retrace failure. [X2]





WATCHDOG

Time for us to stand back and let you, the humble PC user, spew your pent-up consumer rage all over these pages...

■ **WRITING THE WRONGS** Adam Phillips

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!

Don't worry – we're here to help when you've reached the end of your tether. If you have a consumer issue that needs addressing then drop us a line.

WRITE TO Watchdog, PC ZONE, Dennis Publishing, 30 Cleveland Street, London, W1T 4JD

EMAIL Alternatively, email us at letters@pczone.co.uk with the subject heading 'Watchdog'

READ ME!

If you are writing in to complain about a product, please supply us with your full name, address and **contact number**. With PCs, make sure that you also include all **purchasing details** such as reference and invoice numbers.

"Of course the parallel port was in use – the MP3 player was plugged into it!"

PHIL MIDWINTER'S REACTION TO HIS LGE MP3 PLAYER'S INSTALLATION ERROR MESSAGES

ADSL HELL!

You probably read the Robin Williams quote a couple of months back in PC ZONE about high-speed Net access – apparently he can't live without the power of ADSL no matter where his next saccharine-ridden or rent-a-psycho movie is being shot. But some readers haven't even had the luxury of finding out if ADSL really is worth this glowing testimony from Mork – even if they have paid for the service.

Step forward Dave Lehan who ordered a broadband deal from FairADSL for £182.92. "Some BT engineers then came to my house," explains Dave. "They said I couldn't be connected because of the line. I was disappointed but accepted it. I then received a call from FairADSL soon after that, saying they would try and contact BT on my behalf to get the line sorted. I was delighted."

Many weeks later, though, and there was bummer-all contact from FairADSL – Dave couldn't locate a phone number for the company and they didn't bother responding to his many emails. Worse still, that cash he paid up front has yet to be refunded...

Thankfully, FairADSL did actually manage to respond to Watchdog's enquiries: "I can thoroughly understand why he's so irate," says a spokesperson. "One of our

staff did offer to try and help Mr Lehan sort out the problem with his connection and speak to BT on his behalf. Unfortunately, our employee failed to keep him updated."

They apologise for the delay and say you should now have received a refund in the post. They say that they're also introducing a telephone support service to accompany their email helpline to aid customers. Which is nice – why on earth haven't they had such a line in place from the beginning though?

MP3 MUCK-UP

MP3s and their players are becoming increasingly popular, whether it be down to their sheer ease of use and convenience, or the fact that many punters are growing increasingly hacked off with paying way over the odds for the latest CD releases. But sometimes just getting yourself into the MP3 'loop' isn't always simple. Take Phil Midwinter who bought himself a LGE MP3 player from Dixons.

After installing the software, it told him that his parallel port was in use: "Well, of course it was in use – it had the MP3 player plugged into it!" fumes Phil. "So I contacted LGE for help and was first sent a quote directly from the manual that I'd already spent an hour reading."

He was also given advice about USB ports when he clearly

stated in his query to the company that he uses a parallel cable. "I then emailed back complaining that they hadn't even read my question and was then told to contact my PC manufacturer who obviously must know about LGE's MP3 players better than LGE do," sighs Phil. "For Pete's sake..."

LGE holds up its hands to the cock-up: "We are very sorry as it would appear that his original email has been misread which is why LGE's subsequent email refers to a USB connection as opposed to Mr Midwinter's parallel port connection," says a spokesperson for the company. "We apologise profusely for the confusion and the trouble Mr Midwinter has been through with this matter," he kindly added.

Thankfully, they should have been in touch with you by now, armed to the teeth with new information on how to get your MP3 player working correctly. If you should still be having problems though, give them a call on 0870 607 5544.

TIME BOMB

When you set out to buy the perfect machine for online gaming, you're obviously going to ask the sales spud about whether older titles will still work online with newer motherboards and graphics cards. Canny Phil Lawson did just that when he ordered his new PC from The Computer World (that's the new Time and Tiny combo store).

"I was told no such problems would occur," explains Phil who was informed that the likes of *Unreal Tournament* and *EverQuest* should be fine. Once he got his new machine though, Phil found the PC kept crashing while he was in the middle of online frugging sessions.

After a little Net research, he came across more than 50 people who were experiencing similar problems with their Time machines. The only solution appeared to be swapping the existing motherboard with

something a little more stable: "After two weeks of arguing and running up a phone bill, Time finally agreed the PC needed returning and the motherboard needed looking at," says Phil.

Two weeks later and the machine was returned but still the problem remained – crashing during online sessions of *UT* and *EQ*. So off he went back to Time:

"Their stance was that as the PC had been returned and examined, there could be nothing wrong with it anymore, and that they did not support third-party software such as *UT* and *EQ* anyway," recalls Phil. "I replied that *UT* was supplied by them as part of their software bundle and should therefore be expected to work. I was asked if *UT* worked OK when I wasn't connected to the Net, ie single player against bots only. When I said yes, I was told this proved that all software and hardware were working correctly and that I should play the game in single player! The fact that *UT* is an online game, best played against real people, didn't seem to register with the technician."

Phil has decided that he wants to return the whole system and have a full refund but Time is having none of it – in its mind at least, the PC is just fine.

We approached Time and the company suddenly seemed far more understanding: "When the system was returned to us earlier in the year, we ran tests and absolutely no problems were found," explains the company. "It is difficult to determine why a PC may not work with online games as so many factors such as the server, website, connection and the speed of connection may have caused the system to crash," we were told.

They say that your machine has subsequently been tested using online games and indeed, a fault has been found. Therefore, you should by now have received a full refund. Good news indeed, but the simple question remains – why didn't



Robin Williams before and then after he discovered ADSL.

THE ACCUSED

dabs
com

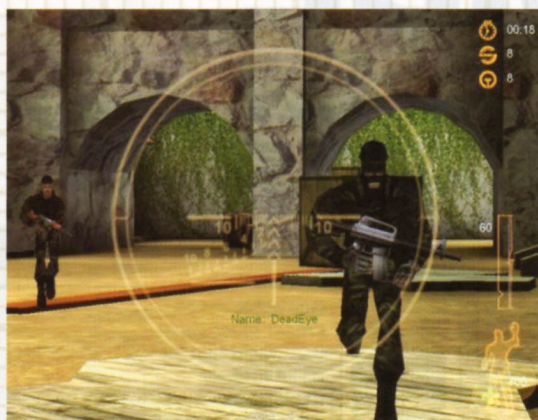
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TIME

GUILTY UNTIL PROVEN INNOCENT



Are Time responsible for making sure their PCs run Unreal Tournament online properly? Phil Lawson reckons they are so we made sure the shop ended up agreeing as well...

Time check the specific online gaming problems the first time they had the PC in for repair? It would save our Phil a lot of time, effort – and money – if they had...

FALLING FOUL OF FREESERVE

While most complaints about ADSL are about the actual service (or lack of it), sometimes the modem itself can cause you punters some real headaches. Enter Andy Bellenie who signed up with Freeserve and was supplied with an Alcatel Speedtouch USB modem.

He began playing *Counter-Strike* and found that after 20 minutes or so, the modem simply turned itself off. "After some research, I established that the problem was caused by the modem not getting enough power from the USB ports on my machine, a common problem with VIA chipsets apparently," says Andy. "The reason it's more of a problem with online games though, is the intensive way in which they use the connection."

A pretty straightforward issue then and one which should be easy to rectify. Or so Andy thought. He contacted Freeserve saying that he would send the USB modem back and that they could then provide him with a PCI one. Nope, came back the answer: "I then asked them if I could get a refund. 'No,' they said. 'Go away,'" recalls Andy. "Several calls and a letter later, and they still won't budge. Their position is that since the modem isn't actually faulty, they won't replace it as I didn't request to return it within seven days of receipt. In fact, they told

me I'd have to purchase a powered USB hub to make the bloody thing work!"

While Andy suggested that we pop round to the company's offices and staple their fingers together, Watchdog instead asked Freeserve for a full explanation to the many issues he raised. This is what we got from them: "I can confirm that our customer services team was in contact with Mr Bellenie on Monday December 16 (after Watchdog contacted them – Ed) to further diagnose his problem," says the company curtly. "It appears that there was an issue with his

OH DABS, WHERE ART THOU?

Ah, the joys of online shopping! Convenience, simplicity and fuss-free consumerism. Well, not quite. Irish reader Sean Peyton ordered a selection of PC-based goodies from Dabs but after two weeks, his order still hadn't turned up. He was told by Dabs to call the carriage service: "Parcel Force told me that my shipments had been signed for," says Sean. "But they definitely weren't signed for by me or anyone I knew. They told us they would sort it out."

Subsequently, part of his order did surface but there was still no sign of his new 19in monitor: "I have since called and emailed many times but to no avail," explains Sean. "I have the feeling that Dabs are ignoring my emails and I don't have time to wait on hold for hours on end." Understandable.

According to Dabs, the reason why there were problems with your deliveries is actually down to you: "Mr Peyton had set up his account address as Co. Cork, Ireland, but then chose 'United Kingdom' instead

that our carrier either took longer than normal to deliver while goods were re-routed, or had to be returned to Dabs as undeliverable," reckons Dabs.

It's a shame that no one at the company spotted this mistake sooner, especially after you sent in those many query emails, Sean. We're assuming you have your monitor now – if not, you know what to do...

SOUND ADVICE

Cast your mind back to issue 123 and you may recall the plight of Tony, a reader struggling to get his hands on a set of drivers for his aging soundcard – to his dismay, he discovered that the manufacturer had stopped updating their drivers for new versions of Windows. While the company offered a reasonable explanation as to why this was the case, it still left Tony stranded without a paddle.

Step forward Graham who sent in this rather useful tip: "I found myself in a similar situation some time ago when upgrading my other machine to Windows 2000 which had an Aztech PCI 368 soundcard. I tried the

"I asked them if I could get a refund. 'No', they said. 'Go away'"

ANDY BELLENIE RECALLS FREESERVE'S INITIAL RESPONSE TO HIS FAULTY MODEM

hardware and the issue is now resolved."

We're assuming then Andy that you are now the owner of a brand-spanking new PCI modem from Freeserve and you are currently in gaming nirvana. Let us know if this is not the case...

of the 'Eire' option," says a spokesperson for Dabs.

They say that orders made for UK destinations follow one logistics route, whereas those for Eire follow another: "The incorrect address on Mr Peyton's account meant

supplied driver disk but that only had Windows 9x drivers on it."

Undeterred though, Graham went on an intensive search of the Internet and discovered a site called 3D Sound Surge which actually specialises in drivers for soundcard chipsets: "I found that the drivers for an equivalent Philips soundcard worked for my card as well – and in Windows 2000! So if you could pass this information on to Tony and your other readers, I'm sure they will find it very useful."

It would be our pleasure – point your browsers to www.3dsoundsurge.com. It's a great site and we hope it helps any of you out there experiencing those dreaded soundcard woes. [E]



A Freeserve spokesperson earlier today...

...OR SCARED OFF



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PlayStation 2



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BUYER'S GUIDE

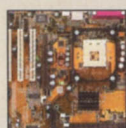
We've performed massive surgery on our Buyer's Guide to give you an even clearer picture of what makes up the dream games machine. We've got three categories for each component, giving you the Best Performer, the Best Buy and the Best Budget. If you think we've got something wrong, email us at letters@pczone.co.uk, and if we print your suggestion we'll give you a GeForce 4 card from Gainward

BEST PERFORMANCE

BEST BUY

BEST BUDGET

INTEL MOTHERBOARD

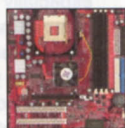


P4T-533C

STREET PRICE £123
MANUFACTURER ASUS
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.asus.com

Following the success of its Intel-850-based P4T, ASUS release a revision based on the i850e chipset for the new 533MHz FSB Pentium 4s. With support for PC1066 RAMBUS and AGP4x, the P4T-533 manages to stand head and shoulders above the competition thanks to clever board design and high-quality components. If you have to have the best then you have to have this.

WAS £130
NOW £123



845E MAX2-BLR

STREET PRICE £113
MANUFACTURER Microstar International
TELEPHONE 020 8813 6688
WEBSITE www.msi.com.tw

The Max2-BLR from MSI is one of the most rounded Intel 845E packages we've seen. Based on the newest revision of the DDR-supporting chipset for the latest 533MHz FSB chips, MSI has brought in some clever extras including onboard 5.1 sound. The addition of Bluetooth allows wireless connectivity to enabled gadgets, plus readiness for a range of peripherals.

WAS £118
NOW £113

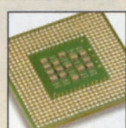


GA-8IEX

STREET PRICE £91.64
MANUFACTURER Gigabyte
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.gbt-tech.co.uk

Just because you're working to a tight budget, don't think you have to settle for second best. If you're after an entry-level Pentium 4 then you could do worse than check out the excellent GA-8IEX from Gigabyte. Along with support for the new 500MHz FSB chips and DDR memories comes integrated Creative 5.1 sound and 10/100 network plus six USB2.0. For less than £100 you can't do better.

INTEL PROCESSOR



PENTIUM 4 3.06GHZ (WITH HYPERTHREADING)

STREET PRICE £566
MANUFACTURER Intel
TELEPHONE 01793 403 000
WEBSITE www.intel.co.uk

As the first CPU to break the 3GHz barrier we knew this 3066MHz chip from Intel was going to be fast. Incorporating a new technology known as 'Hyperthreading' these new CPUs are capable of running like a dual-processor set-up, taking multitasking performance and responsiveness to whole new levels.

WAS £575
NOW £566



PENTIUM 4 'A' 2GHZ

STREET PRICE £149
MANUFACTURER Intel
TELEPHONE 01793 403 000
WEBSITE www.intel.co.uk

Pentium 4 'A' (or the 'Northwood' core as it's known) has doubled the cache of the previous-generation chips. Based on a 400MHz bus, the 2GHz chip is compatible with any of the i845/e i850/e motherboards and would be more than respectable in any gaming system. Look at the price difference between this and the top-end Intel chip on the left. Frightening isn't it?

WAS £154
NOW £149



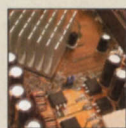
CELERON 1.8GHZ

STREET PRICE £64
MANUFACTURER Intel
TELEPHONE 01793 403 000
WEBSITE www.intel.co.uk

With a quarter the cache of the newest Pentium 4s, the Celeron 1800MHz may not seem like it has the necessary guts for a decent gaming system but nothing could be further from the truth. At entry level these chips are a cost-effective way of getting an i845e/i850e system together, which can be upgraded to P4 later simply by swapping chips. It's a brilliant compromise solution.

WAS £65
NOW £64

AMD MOTHERBOARD



ASUS A7N8X

STREET PRICE £119
MANUFACTURER ASUS
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.asus.com

It's been a long time coming but everything good is worth the wait and finally we've got our hands on the nForce 2 in the form of the A7N8X from ASUS. Bringing everything NVIDIA have promised including DualDDR DDR400, AGP8X, dual LAN, Firewire, USB2.0 and other added goodies such as Serial-ATA, this new board sits numero uno thanks to an excellent feature set and blistering performance.

WAS £126
NOW £119

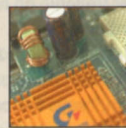


K7N420PRO

STREET PRICE £83.42
MANUFACTURER Microstar International
TELEPHONE 020 8813 6688
WEBSITE www.msi.com.tw

As the top nForce board, the K7N420Pro from MSI beat every KT266/266A offering we put it against. Add to the great performance an integrated GeForce2MX graphics chip plus separate AGP 4x slot, 100Mbit LAN, integrated 5.1 sound, and you'll agree it's perfect for seasoned enthusiasts and first-time gamers alike. Watch out for the nForce 2 boards, arriving next month though.

WAS £84
NOW £83.42



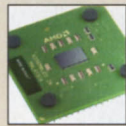
GA-7TXH

STREET PRICE £83
MANUFACTURER Gigabyte
TELEPHONE 01908 362 700
WEBSITE www.gbt-tech.co.uk

Usurps another great Gigabyte board – this one is a fantastic Via KT266A-based DDR solution. Integrated are both 10/100 LAN and four-channel audio from Creative, which is plenty good enough for gamers. In testing it proved stable and among the faster DDR266 boards for Athlon. A complete bargain if you're looking to build a cheap system around an AMD processor.

WAS £84
NOW £83

AMD PROCESSOR

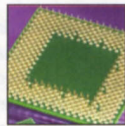


ATHLONXP 2700+

STREET PRICE £289
MANUFACTURER AMD
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.amd.com/gb-uk

While they may not come top of the pile for sheer number crunching with the AthlonXP just yet, AMD is making some substantial steps in that direction – as the new 2700+ CPU proves. Based on a ramped-up 166MHz front-side bus, these new CPUs are more than 10 per cent quicker at the same frequencies. It may lack the fancy Hyperthreading of the new Pentium 4 but then it costs about half as much.

WAS £298
NOW £289



ATHLONXP 2100+

STREET PRICE £77.50
MANUFACTURER AMD
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.amd.com/gb-uk

Running at 1.8GHz, the 2100+ AthlonXP is the quickest of AMD's original AthlonXP chips. Boasting both Quantispeed and 3DNow! Architectures plus fast cache and a 266MHz bus speed, most existing Athlon motherboards will support it out of the box. In terms of bang for your buck this provides the best middle-ground solution for gaming that money can buy.

WAS £81
NOW £78



ATHLONXP 1800+

STREET PRICE £55
MANUFACTURER AMD
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.amd.com/gb-uk

Low-end Pentium 4s and AthlonXPs are now getting so cheap they rival the Durons and Celerons of this world – and that's exactly what we have here. AMD has traditionally been the cheaper of the two processor giants, and the AthlonXP 1800+ (top-end equipment not so long ago), has taken such a plunge in price it's within £5 of the old Best Budget chip, the Duron 1.3GHz. Bargain.

WAS £59
NOW £55

HARD DRIVE



WD1200JB 120GB

STREET PRICE £131
MANUFACTURER Western Digital
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.wdc.com

With your game and media collections growing every day – some game installs use more than 2Gb of your precious storage – what you need is a really big, fast hard drive and that's exactly what Western Digital deliver with the WD1200JB. 8Mb of cache and spin speeds of 7200RPM mean that this 120Gb beast thrashes all competition beating a large proportion of SCSI drives too.

WAS £147
NOW £131



BARRACUDA ATA IV 60GB

STREET PRICE £72
MANUFACTURER Seagate
TELEPHONE 01628 890 366
WEBSITE www.seagate.com

An old favourite at PC ZONE, the Barracuda ATA IV is packed full of clever technology, which allows this 60Gb beastie to spin at the heady heights of 7,200RPM while sounding much less obtrusive than many 5,400RPM units. Don't underestimate the difference this can make. If you're still struggling with space this could well be worth a dip.

WAS £76
NOW £72



U SERIES 6 40GB

STREET PRICE £63
MANUFACTURER Seagate
TELEPHONE 01628 890 366
WEBSITE www.seagate.com

The U Series 5 drives are now pretty much unavailable, and find themselves replaced in the hallowed PC ZONE Buyer's Guide pages by its younger brother the Series 6. With the same specs as the Series 5 these new drives run even quieter and cooler than before, and provide what must be considered the minimum amount of storage space for any self-respecting gaming system.

WAS £65
NOW £63

Available NOW from

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.com
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◀ BEST PERFORMANCE ▶	◀ BEST BUY ▶	◀ BEST BUDGET ▶	
 <p>PX-W4012TA STREET PRICE £78 MANUFACTURER Plexor TELEPHONE +32 2 725 5522 WEBSITE www.plexor.be</p> <p>A decent CD-rewriter provides a flexible storage solution, and most of the problems associated with the technology have been eradicated with this drive. If CD burning times of more than five minutes won't do look no further than the PX-W4012TA from Plexor. Cutting CDs in around two minutes this 40x leviathan has a full range of countermeasures including Burn-Proof to make coasters a thing of the past.</p>	 <p>CRW3200E-VK STREET PRICE £86.94 MANUFACTURER Yamaha TELEPHONE N/A WEBSITE www.yamaha-europe.com</p> <p>It might not be as fast as the Plexor drive but this is still a superb buy. Yamaha has consistently been praised for making great long-lasting CD-RW drives, and the 3200 is the companies' current range-topper. The overall bundle is excellent but we particularly love its Audiomaster burning mode for cutting high-quality audio CDs – and we're sure you will too. A veritable bargain if ever we saw one.</p>	 <p>40X12X48 CDRW STREET PRICE £45.82 MANUFACTURER LiteOn TELEPHONE N/A WEBSITE www.liteonit.com</p> <p>The LiteOn 40x12x48 offers stunning value for money, costing slightly more than many standard CD-ROM drives. While maybe not as feature-packed as the Plexor and Yamaha it does have a few tricks up its sleeve, including Smart-Burn – a technology which assesses media quality and adjusts burn speeds to reduce coaster ratio. The best low-cost drive that money can buy.</p>	CD REWRITER
 <p>SAPPHIRE ATLANTIS RADEON 9700 STREET PRICE £265 MANUFACTURER Sapphire TELEPHONE 020 8879 6407 WEBSITE www.sapphiretech.com</p> <p>We thought it would be months before we'd see boards based on the Radeon 9700 Pro dipping below £300, but Sapphire obviously had other ideas. Delivering the same high framerates as the Hercules card previously listed the Sapphire is around £60 cheaper missing only the cosmetic memory cooling.</p>	 <p>VERTO TI4200 64MB STREET PRICE £112 MANUFACTURER PNY TELEPHONE 01256 338 609 WEBSITE www.pny-europe.com/uk</p> <p>The Verto Ti4200 64Mb GeForce4 from PNY is a relatively late arrival. Coming within 20 per cent of Ti4600 in many benchmarks, but costing up to half the price, it has all of the features of the quicker GPU without the dent in your wallet. Overall, we think this is the best solution if you're looking to future-proof your system without spending a ridiculous amount of cash along the way.</p>	 <p>EXCALIBUR RADEON 9000 PRO STREET PRICE £83 MANUFACTURER HiTech TELEPHONE N/A WEBSITE www.hitech.com.hk</p> <p>The Excilbur Radeon 9000 Pro may not be the fastest DirectX8.1 board but it's certainly the cheapest. Coming in at well under the price of the equivalent Hercules board, it sports ATI's new mainstream GPU and 64Mb of 275Mhz DDR (500Mhz). This HiTech board is a great step-up to playing shader-dominated games for the budget-conscious.</p>	GRAPHICS CARD
 <p>SOUND BLASTER AUDIGY PLATINUM/EX STREET PRICE £162 MANUFACTURER Creative Labs TELEPHONE N/A WEBSITE www.europe.creative.com</p> <p>Successor to the Sound Blaster Live! series, the newer Sound Blaster Audigy brings with it a pile of new toys including EAX advanced HD and on-board Firewire. The Platinum/EX card comes with an external breakout box which moves all the important ports and connectors of the Platinum onto your desk.</p>	 <p>AUDIGY2 STREET PRICE £86 MANUFACTURER Creative Labs TELEPHONE N/A WEBSITE www.europe.creative.com</p> <p>The original Sound Blaster Audigy sat in this slot from the day it arrived, only to be replaced by its next of kin, Audigy2. Delivering further improved audio quality, though this time over 6.1 channels of Dolby Digital EX, Audigy2 is the first soundcard to receive THX certification and deliver the fidelity required to reproduce new formats such as DVD-Audio. Pound-for-pound it's the best gaming soundcard in the world.</p>	 <p>GAMESURROUND FORTISSIMO II DIGITAL EDITION STREET PRICE £32 MANUFACTURER Hercules TELEPHONE 020 8665 1881 WEBSITE www.hercules-uk.com</p> <p>As a frequent offender on the PC ZONE Buyer's Guide, the Fortissimo II lived in the Best Bargain slot for many months – only to be replaced by its Doppelgänger the Fortissimo II Digital Edition – which adds 5.1 for your DVDs and an even better software bundle.</p>	SOUNDCARDS
 <p>INTELLIMOUSE EXPLORER V3.0 STREET PRICE £37 MANUFACTURER Microsoft TELEPHONE 0870 601 0100 WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/uk</p> <p>Probably the cheapest upgrade you can perform, but if you're playing with a rubbish mouse it could give you the biggest performance increases. Hardcore gamers love the IntelliMouse Explorer v3.0, and we have to agree that it's the best ball-less rodent out there. With improved optical sensors, a better shape and even more responsive buttons it's in a word – fragstastic.</p>	 <p>MX500 STREET PRICE £32 MANUFACTURER Logitech TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127 WEBSITE www.logitech.com</p> <p>Microsoft might dominate the mouse market but it hasn't got everything its own way. The MX500 is one of the most interesting mice we've seen for a while now. The left and right buttons are hidden – being integrated into the upper shell of the body and on top of the fourth and fifth buttons. There are two either side of the wheel to assist scrolling, plus one that emulates Alt-Tab. Very handy.</p>	 <p>OPTICAL MOUSE BLUE STREET PRICE £27 MANUFACTURER Microsoft TELEPHONE 0870 601 0100 WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/uk</p> <p>For gamers who don't need five buttons and a portable back-scratcher on their mice, we present the Optical Mouse Blue. With all of the high-tech optical wizardry of the other Microsoft mice, this funky blue three-buttoned offering is extremely comfortable to use and is perfect for RPG/RTS titles – or FPS-ers who prefer to keep most of their controls on the keyboard.</p>	MICE
 <p>PRO KEYBOARD STREET PRICE £50 MANUFACTURER Apple TELEPHONE 0800 039 1010 WEBSITE www.apple.com/uk</p> <p>While it may seem odd to have a Mac product amongst all this PC goodness we have good reason. Rather than faff around with 15 multifunction buttons which don't help at all in fast-paced gaming, the Pro Keyboard from Apple is simply the best USB offering out there. Quality components make it one of the most quiet and compact offerings money can buy. You get what you pay for, remember.</p>	 <p>OFFICE KEYBOARD STREET PRICE £27.20 MANUFACTURER Microsoft TELEPHONE 0870 601 0100 WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/uk</p> <p>Microsoft's office keyboard may seem more focused at the professional market with the MS Office buttons across the top, but we found the scroll wheel and remappable keys brilliant in many games – in some situations acting like an additional mouse wheel, one for weapons, the other for items. Handy shortcuts abound and brilliant all-round performance make this our new Best Buy.</p>	 <p>MULTIMEDIA KEYBOARD STREET PRICE £21.14 MANUFACTURER Microsoft TELEPHONE 0870 601 0100 WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/uk</p> <p>The Multimedia Keyboard can only be described as the geek's friend. With support for many of the Windows XP customisations plus dedicated buttons for the instant messenger app of your choice and a central console of buttons to drive media player, life doesn't get much simpler, and, at under £25, not much cheaper either. If you're struggling with a poor keyboard give the pub a miss for one night and get this.</p>	KEYBOARDS
 <p>WINGMAN CORDLESS STREET PRICE £34.07 MANUFACTURER Logitech TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127 WEBSITE www.logitech.com</p> <p>The PC might not have a definitive gamepad just yet, but this is as close as it gets for the moment. The infra-red interface doesn't hinder your input. On the contrary, the fact it's wireless means your desktop is less cluttered and the discreet receiver is almost invisible. Comfortable to use and a doddle to set up, it makes the grade as best performance but only by a short distance.</p>	 <p>FIRESTORM DUAL-POWER GAMEPAD STREET PRICE £24.99 MANUFACTURER Thrustmaster TELEPHONE 020 8665 1881 WEBSITE www.thrustmaster.co.uk</p> <p>This wired, force-feedback version of the Firestorm wireless might not win any awards for looks, but its ergonomics are great. Decent soft grips with superbly placed buttons and a decent d-pad make precision control a breeze. Set-up couldn't be simpler and the rumble ain't bad either. A no-nonsense pad for no-nonsense gamers.</p>	 <p>SIDEWINDER PLUG 'N' PLAY STREET PRICE £12.92 MANUFACTURER Microsoft TELEPHONE 0870 601 0100 WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/sidewinder</p> <p>Four buttons, two triggers, directional pad, USB. Dead simple, dead effective and at under £13 really rather cheap. The Plug 'n' Play gamepad is the new basic controller from the Seattle sidewinders and comes in funky transparent plastic, in contrast to the gloomy black pads of yesteryear. We've used them in the office for years and we've never heard a word against them.</p>	JOYPAD

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JOYSTICK

**HOTAS COUGAR**

STREET PRICE £249

MANUFACTURER Thrustmaster

TELEPHONE 020 8665 1881

WEBSITE www.thrustmaster.co.uk

Have we finally snapped? £249 for a joystick?

You could get a brand new GeForce 4 for that and still have enough change to go out on the razz for a couple of weeks. Ah, but the HOTAS is probably the finest flight stick in the world, complete with tome-like manual. For those that have everything this is the closest you'll get to sitting in a plane... If you're strong enough to lift it out of the box.

**SIDEWINDER FORCE FEEDBACK 2**

STREET PRICE £52.87

MANUFACTURER Microsoft

TELEPHONE 0870 601 0100

WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/sidewinder

The Sidewinder Force Feedback 2 is a fine stick with perhaps the best, most refined force-feedback settings around. Performance is great overall, with the infra-red activation sensors in the handle. Its huge base will keep it planted on your desk and as long as you don't mind the extra wiring for the external power supply, it makes a great enhancement for any airborne frolics.

**CYBORG 3D GOLD**

STREET PRICE £30

MANUFACTURER Saitek

TELEPHONE 01454 451 900

WEBSITE www.saitek.co.uk

Saitek's current generation of sticks are fabulous. The Cyborg Gold is a top-line, former Best Buy, USB stick that excels across the board. The design is superb, both durable and adjustable – even the left-handed are catered for with response and accuracy both unequalled. If you're not interested in force-feedback effects (and to be honest who is these days?) this is the stick to go for.

SPEAKERS

**MEGAWORKS 510D**

STREET PRICE £299.62

MANUFACTURER Creative Labs

TELEPHONE N/A

WEBSITE www.uk.europe.creative.com

The Megaworks 510D is the Daddy of gaming speakers – five 70W satellites and one 150W digitally amplified subwoofer together deliver 500W of power to recreate subtle sounds and devastating explosions alike. Want to know how those soldiers on Omaha Beach in *Medal Of Honour* really felt? Now's your chance. Just make sure your neighbours are away first.

**PROMEDIA 4.1**

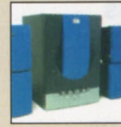
STREET PRICE £299

MANUFACTURER Klipsch

TELEPHONE N/A

WEBSITE www.klipsch.com

Klipsch's Promedia 4.1 took Best Buy many months ago with their TXI-Approval and great sound reproduction. They're beautifully made, sound amazing and are the first speakers to split your ears as well as the Crossfires from VideoLogic did. Whether you're a gamer or an audiophile looking for your PC to make sweet music, these are the business, as long as you can find an outlet willing to serve them up.

**XPS210**

STREET PRICE £40

MANUFACTURER Hercules

TELEPHONE 020 8665 1881

WEBSITE www.hercules-uk.com

Who needs surround sound? Answer: everyone who can afford it. For everyone else, this small but perfectly formed 2.1 speaker set-up is cheap – but doesn't sound it. With tone controls and stereo enhancement, it's an ideal solution for desktop gaming. The satellites and subwoofer are well matched, giving decent overall sound. And adorned in royal blue it looks the part too...

HEADPHONES

**HD600**

STREET PRICE £200

MANUFACTURER Sennheiser

TELEPHONE 01494 551 551

WEBSITE www.sennheiser.co.uk

The HD600 are Audiophile-level headphones, and unless used with a soundcard like the Audigy Platinum/EX are total overkill for most gamers. That doesn't stop their fantastic response range from reproducing every gunshot and explosion perfectly with bass so deep and strong you'll be convinced your speakers are running too. They won't obviously – you'll have sold them to finance these.

**HD497**

STREET PRICE £47

MANUFACTURER Sennheiser

TELEPHONE 01494 551 551

WEBSITE www.sennheiser.co.uk

Replacing the HD200 Masters – which used to occupy our Best Buy slot comes the HD497 – also from Sennheiser. These new headphones have an enhanced frequency response range which might not come close to the HD600, but is still pretty damn good. Their extremely comfortable design coupled with easily replaceable parts, mean these headphones could well outlast your PC.

**GAMEVOICE USB**

STREET PRICE £34.07

MANUFACTURER Microsoft

TELEPHONE 0870 601 0100

WEBSITE www.microsoft.com

When are headphones more than just headphones? Simple – when they're the Microsoft Gamevoice USB. The Gamevoice allows you to talk to your mates online as you play clan games with a handy control panel which lets you switch between comms channels. Adding a new dimension to your gaming online, and doubling as a decent set of headphones they're a bit of a bargain.

TFT

**180MT**

STREET PRICE £939

MANUFACTURER Philips

TELEPHONE N/A

WEBSITE www.philips.co.uk

The 180MT from Philips is more than just a flat panel. An 18in fourth-generation screen with VGA connectivity plus inputs for Scart, S-Video and an RF tuner mean that you can ditch your telly and pipe all manner of consoles, TV and video kit through the one screen. You can even use picture-in-picture to watch the latest *Futurama* while you die repeatedly in *BF1942*. Classic.

**SYNCMaster 181T**

STREET PRICE £599

MANUFACTURER Samsung

TELEPHONE N/A

WEBSITE www.samsung.com

What do you need to be heralded as our Best Buy in the TFT category? You need to boast top specs, which the 181T provides with a response time of 25ms, a contrast ratio of 500:1 and rated brightness of 250 cd/m2. This results in a cleaner, crisper picture than our previous award-winner. A good start but the 181T is also cheaper and bigger (a whole inch diagonally) which completes the perfect package.

**T1620B**

STREET PRICE £522.87

MANUFACTURER Sharp

TELEPHONE 0800 262 958

WEBSITE www.sharp.co.uk

Sharp's 16in T1620B is more than £100 cheaper than the Iiyama and delivers all the visual goodies albeit on a smaller display area. Delivering 1280 x 1024 on a digital 75Hz, this screen will make your games look great while allowing you to reclaim some desktop real estate from large lumbering CRTs. If TFTs aren't quite affordable yet, this proves that the day isn't far away.

MONITOR

**GDM-FW900**

STREET PRICE £1,139

MANUFACTURER Sony

TELEPHONE N/A

WEBSITE www.sony.co.uk

Do you remember the day when PCs used to ship with 14in screens? Pah. The gigantic 24in GDM-FW900 from Sony has to be seen to be believed. Costing almost double that of the Iiyama Vision Master Pro 512, you'd expect something special and that's exactly what you get. Supporting nutty resolutions such as 2304x1440 at 80Hz, you can be sure this ultra-flat screen will deliver a rock-solid picture at all times.

**VISION MASTER PRO 512**

STREET PRICE £527.27

MANUFACTURER Iiyama

TELEPHONE 01438 745 482

WEBSITE www.iiyama.co.uk

Equipped with the latest Mitsubishi aperture grille Diamondtron screen, it has a smaller viewable area than suggested – 20in instead of 22in, but gives outstanding results at resolutions up to 2048x1536 at 85Hz – something many graphics cards can't even support. There's also a four-port USB hub and integrated speakers which are OK for Windows, but may be tinny for games or music.

**720P 17-INCH CRT**

STREET PRICE £116.32

MANUFACTURER Hansol

TELEPHONE 01252 360 400

WEBSITE www.hansol-uk.com

For the budget-conscious gamer Hansol is a company well worth a look. With a fabulously low price, it does 1280x1024 at an excellent 85Hz (and for those mad enough, 1600x1200 at 75Hz). Focus is tight and the picture sharp, and considering you're paying a little over £100 there's not a lot that will touch this for the money. If you've still got a 15in monitor, consider yourself rebuked.

MP3 PLAYER

**APPLE IPOD**

STREET PRICE £388 inc VAT

MANUFACTURER Apple

TELEPHONE 020 8210 1000

WEBSITE www.apple.com/ipod

With all of the styling of their desktop systems, the iPod caused a few dropped jaws for looks alone. Packing a 20Gb hard disk and speedy Firewire interface, the new models are finally Windows-compatible and come with excellent headphones and a tiny little inline remote control that means you don't have to keep fishing it out of your pocket to change tracks or up the volume.

**ARCHOS JUKEBOX MULTIMEDIA**

STREET PRICE £330 inc VAT

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. Sound is fantastic but as with a lot of other players on the market, the bundled headphones are shite.

**MUVO**

STREET PRICE £99.99

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.

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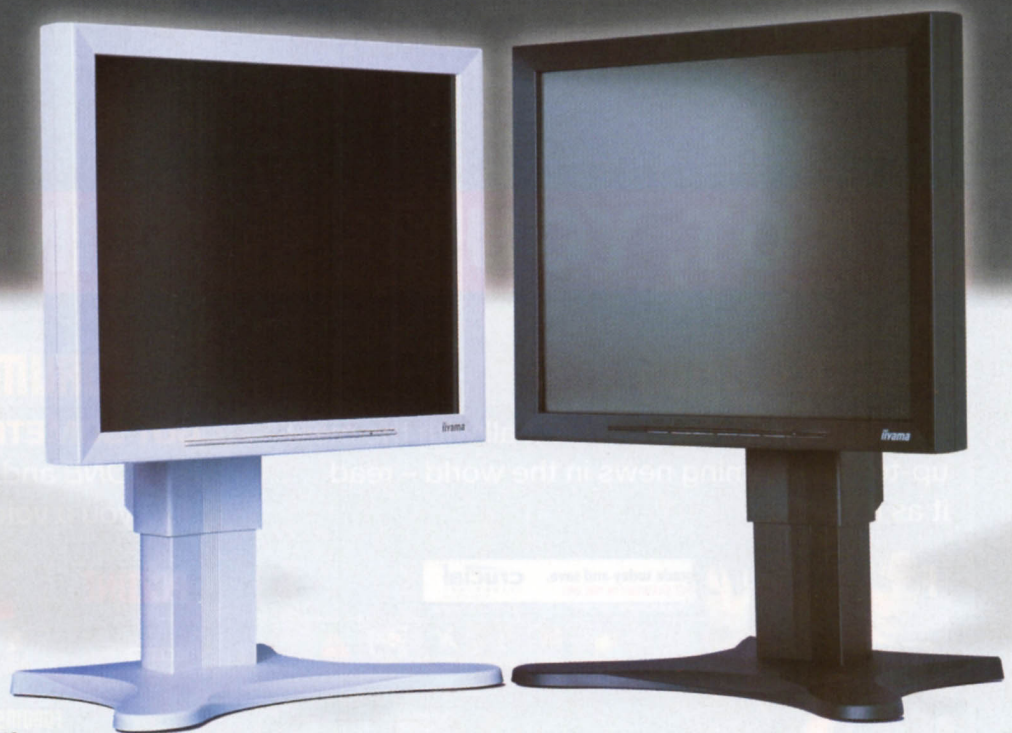
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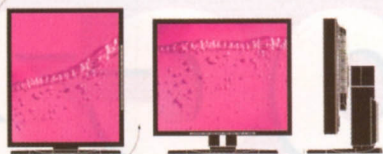
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HIT AND MYTH



MYTHING LINK Rhianna Pratchett

Sometimes I can't help thinking there are too many games out there. Just when the stack of must-play titles on my desk is almost depleted, along come another 20 or 30 to take their place. All of us here at ZONE thought we had the answer by turning our passion into a profession, but believe me, it doesn't help matters. You're pitying us now, I can tell.

Worst of all, of course, is when you find a game as utterly addictive and un-put-downable as *Age Of Mythology*. Most recently I've been enjoying it online, where I get trounced on a regular basis. I've taken the plunge with the in-game editor this month and produced a Guide for you on page 126, which takes you through creating a basic single-player map. For what it's worth, you can find my personal handiwork on this month's discs. If you find yourself inspired to create something better (and that won't be hard) then why not give the map editor a go and send your creations into PC ZONE. You might even earn yourself a place on our hallowed coverdiscs.

It was a bit of a task tracking down Richard Garriott for our Games That Changed The World on *Ultima Online*, but we managed it and you'll find Chris Anderson talking to Lord British himself about the development and popularity of *UO* on page 150.

Battlefield 1993

ON THE DVD **Return to Mogadishu in Battlefield 1942 mod Campaign In Somalia**
www.cismod.com/



Taking off is not quick in one of these, so back-up is key.

IN SPITE of its massive popularity online, EA's *Battlefield 1942* hasn't taken off quite so quickly in the mod community, owing mainly to a lack of development tools. Which is why this *Campaign In Somalia* mod is so welcome, with its adaptation of the WWII game to the more modern setting of the '93 US/UN intervention in Somalia with new weapons, vehicles and maps.

It's in its initial stages at the moment, so don't expect too much as yet. And while C/S comes packed with new weapons and vehicles to try out, the maps are currently work-in-progress so you'll only find early code on the discs. However, the desert maps of *BF 1942* provide a perfectly suitable testing ground for the more modern focus, and while you may find it a bit odd to see a Black Hawk helicopter squaring off with a Stuka, it's still fun to run into an enemy bunker with an M16 firing under-slung grenades.

For the final release of this early mod, we can expect to fight on both the American and Somali sides with weapons and vehicles specific to each. Which doesn't sound all that fair if you've seen *Black Hawk Down*. Other good news is that the net code seems to be getting progressively better for *Battlefield 1942*, which can only be a good thing in the run up to the release of the expansion pack later this month.

What's more, for those of you who had complaints about the physics and realism of *BF 1942* in its vanilla form, we have also included the *Realism* mod on this month's discs.

This allows for much more realistic weapon recoil, firing and reloading, together with new vehicle physics and better ballistics from artillery. Up until now, you may have found *BF 1942*'s scenarios quite easy, but with the realism mod you'll find a whole new challenge. Tally-ho, chaps!

CHEATS AHOY!



The old Cheat Master section of these pages may be dead, but we haven't buried it completely. Check out our cover discs where the art of cheating is still very much alive and kicking. You can find all the latest cheats for your favourite games under CheatStation in the Extended Play section of the discs.

This month we've got everything you need to know to cheat your way through *SimCity 4*, *Civilization III*, *Impossible Creatures*, *Myth III: The Wolf Age*, *Gothic* and *MechWarriors 4: Mercenaries*. And in case you're in any doubt, just remember: those who can, do... those who can't, cheat. It's the only way.



Many of the units are already updated on existing maps.



You'll find more heavy-duty transport in C/S.



"You may find it a bit odd to see a Black Hawk helicopter squaring off with a Stuka"





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THE GUIDE
Make ageless *AoM* maps



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THE MOD SQUAD
Get on your bike



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Packed with fantastic demos



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FIGHT CLUB
Bring it on

I'll Make You FAMAS

Counter-Strike 1.6: the daddy of Half-Life mods is back

FOR THOSE who are sick of waiting for *Condition Zero*, you'll be happy to know that Valve will very soon be answering your prayers with *Counter-Strike 1.6*, featuring new weapons and a new map originally built for Ritual's single-player game. Together with the new in-game gadgets, CS 1.6 also sees the release of Steam 2.0 technology, Valve's ultra-fast online delivery software.

Included in the new stuff is a riot shield and a FAMAS rifle for the CTs, with the terrorists getting a new flashing C4 icon on the bomb maps and the Galil rifle. As if this wasn't enough, there will also be major changes to *de_aztec* and *de_inferno* as well as the inclusion of a new map using CS 1.6's new 'skin masking' technology, making for more effective camouflage, entitled 'de_airstrip'. This skin masking technology will allow for polygon transparency in certain environments, making for some seriously great hiding places and sniper nests.



Riot shields might give the CTs a big advantage over the terrorists.



Visiting the parents is never easy.



Now that's what I call a ramp.



Better lighting than in the real world.

Age Of Mythology

■ aom.heavengames.com

ON THE DVD **WE'RE CONTINUING** our coverage of the outpourings from the blossoming *Age Of Mythology* community with three more single-player maps for your pleasure. In *Defend The Monument* the objective is to protect a Greek monument from the forces of Loki until Zeus' mythical army comes to the rescue. In *The Long Journey* you take control of the war-weary hero Achilles as he searches for his homeland. *Home Coming* focuses on the hero Ajax's mission to find out why bands of Cyclops are attacking his home village. If you fancy trying your hand out at making your own maps, turn to the Guide on p126 for a step-by-step tutorial.

Grand Theft Auto III

■ www.rockstargames.com

ON THE DVD **ONCE GTA III** is complete and you've run around Liberty City a couple of hundred times gunning down innocent civilians and taking pot-shots at police choppers, things can get a bit repetitive. No matter how many times you engage in a hair-raising police chase to your inevitable death at the Shoreside Vale, you need something new, and *Vice City*'s not here yet. Fret no more, however, as we bring you a selection of some of the best mods yet to come from the *GTA* community, ranging from stunt tracks that reach up into the distance, to wall-climbing cars and bodyguards. Try it again after installing the mods on our coverdiscs and you'll find new sites, vehicles and still more incredible police chases to be had.

Red Alert 2: Yuri's Revenge

■ westwood.ea.com

ON THE DVD **WHILE MANY MAY** rejoice that *C&C: Generals* has abandoned the FMVs that Westwood became infamous for (that'll be everyone but me and *Wing Commander* fan-boy Korda, then), they are still alive and well in *Red Alert 2: Yuri's Revenge*. And to sustain the *C&C* fervour, Westwood Pacific has released its latest official map pack for *RA2:YR*.

The pack contains five multiplayer maps: the two-player *River Rampage*; three two to four-player maps in the form of *Deep Freeze*; the island maps *Spirit of Mojo One* and *Sink or Swim*; and lastly the huge eight-player dinosaur-filled *Monster Movie*, which shows that 3D or not, dinosaurs attacking tanks still has a special place in our hearts.

SHORTS

TEA LEAF HEAVEN



Ion Storm might be keeping tight-lipped about *Thief III*, but pining fans can find solace in the upcoming unofficial expansion *Thief II: Shadows Of The Metal Age*, which is due to debut before *T3*. *T2X* as it's known, has just got itself a beautiful new website, www.thief2x.com, which contains new screenshots and updates.

HONOR THE DEAD



ON THE DVD Two more *Medal Of Honor* maps for you this month, courtesy of Tuff Marine at Planet *MOH*. *Omaha II* is a redesign of the classic beach-landing map with new additions such as Nebelwerfer rocket launchers and beautiful dawn lighting. The second map *Vervins* is an atmospheric town map with plenty of sniping positions. Install and enjoy.

TROOPERS READY FOR BETA



We thought they'd gone quiet lately, but the *UT 2003 Troopers* team have been hard at work throughout the festive period and well into the new year on preparing their huge *Star Wars* mod for Beta testing. By the time you read this, it should be up and running so go and grab the latest from www.ut2003troopers.co.uk.

WHAT A PLAYER



ON THE DVD Windows Media Player 9 is here, with some great new features. It's faster, more powerful and better than before, so install it in time for watching the movies on the coverdisc.

THE GUIDE: CREATING MAPS IN AGE OF MYTHOLOGY

Don't pray to the gods, *Rhianna Pratchett* is here to show you the way and the light

WITH *AGE* Of *Mythology*, Ensemble Studios could have so easily screwed up the brilliant gameplay of the series that forms the holy core of many a strategy gamer's back catalogue. By dabbling with legend and pre-history, they could have come up with a grotesque and paltry offering, smashing the dreams of RTS fans everywhere. But they didn't. Detailed environments and units, well balanced civilisations and a strong multiplayer mode ensured the third *Age Of* game is a worthy successor in every way. Oh, and let's not forget that increasingly essential part of the gaming experience – the mighty map editor.

Even if you're familiar with the *Age Of Kings* editor, you'll be surprised at how much this latest version allows you to do. It's the overall atmosphere of your maps that benefits, with stuff like in-game cinematics and lighting effects at your fingertips for inclusion. This guide introduces you to the *Age Of Mythology* editor and walk you through creating a basic single-player map. There's very little information on the editor included with the full game, so guides like this

along with fansites, are essential reading. If you're looking for extra inspiration you will also find a selection of fan-created maps on this month's coverdiscs, as well as some useful links for extra tips.

FACE TO INTERFACE

It may not be the most inspiring looking interface, but the only way you're going to make the green carpet that is your starting point look a bit more lively is to get to grips with the various menus and feature buttons.

MENUS

File – Here you can bring up a new map, save or load an existing one, build cinematics, take a screenshot of your map or access the main game menu.

Edit – Your first port of call if you make a mistake you want to undo, or if you want to cut down on the amount of work needed by using the copy and paste buttons for units and terrain.

Scenario – This menu allows you to adjust the main attributes of your scenario such as player names,

gods, initial resources and AI for the computer-controlled players. Here you can also control things like population, victory conditions, as well as play-testing your map.

World – Allows you to edit the physical make-up of your map by lowering or raising the terrain and adding extra atmosphere with a choice of ten lighting modes.

Terrain – Here you paint on your terrain details such as water, snow and forests. There's also a specific tool for creating canyons, which is grand.

Objects – The main menu for adding and adjusting buildings, objects and units.

Triggers – This is where you add in all the little bits to make your scenario come alive, such as the moments when certain music pipes up or when the lighting changes for dramatic effect. You'll find you need to use triggers more if you're creating a single-player versus the computer map.

Cinematics – Allows you to plot waypoints for your camera in order to create in-game movies. The letterbox bar will allow you to see how the cinematics will look in the actual game.

View – Here you can adjust the terrain grid and various other aspects of the scenario such as line of sight and range rings.

The main features are also shown as shortcut icons below the menus. Run your mouse pointer over the buttons to identify them.

CARPET O' GREEN

It may seem a daunting task turning the green screen in front of you into a lush and verdant *Age Of Mythology* map, but as with life, all you need is a little bit of knowledge and a fair bit of experimentation (or so my grandmother told me, before dying in a chemistry accident). This guide will show you how to create a savannah style map with a few watering holes. It'll be teeming with wildlife and designed to be played against one computer opponent. First tip: make sure you keep saving all the time, as you won't be prompted to when you exit.

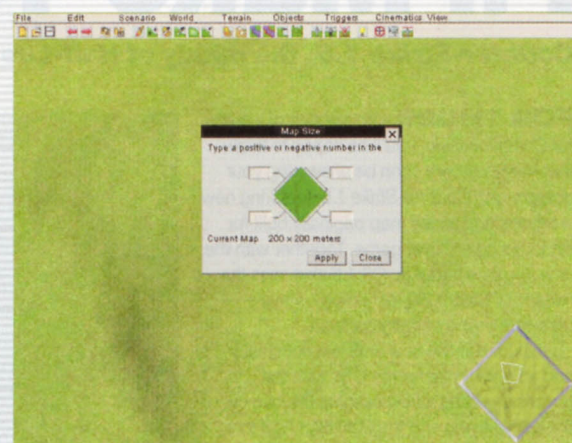


Fig 1. You'll be seeing a lot of this at the beginning.



Fig 2. Seven different types of sand... hold me back!



Fig 3. The town centre is the starting point of a good civilisation.

To change the size of your map go to the World menu and select Map Size (Fig 1), but for this guide I've stuck with the default setting. To start decorating the terrain, go to Terrain and then to Paint Terrain. Select the type of terrain you're looking for. In this case I've mostly used the sand palette.

Use the brush icon under the Scenario menu to adjust your brush size, then get busy (Fig 2).

After you've put the basic undercoat and adjusted the terrain height to your liking using the shortcut buttons, it's a good idea to place your town centres, as they will be the focal points of your map (Fig 3). To



HIS MASTER'S VOICE

TOP-NOTCH MAP MAKER JETBILIX'S TIPS

Those who know best what it's like to work with the *Age Of Mythology* editor are the fans themselves. One of the most active in the AoM community is Jetbilix, and on last month's discs we featured his work on a six-part adventure centring around the return of Gargarensis (the Cyclops baddy from the original single-player game). Just in case you missed them last time, we've put them on again, along with some more maps from the AoM community. Check out page 124 for more details. Without further ado, these are Jetbilix's tips for basic map building.

1) Familiarise yourself with the way the editor works, the top menus, the features – all of it. Try

making a simple map and start with one simple objective, such as kill a certain unit, and perhaps one simple cinematic.

2) If you want to create a good atmosphere, you need to make the map look good, with some nice scenery, water, cliffs, rivers, animals and so on. Use the Beautify Water or Edit Water buttons and the editor automatically adds features to the watered sections you selected. Try to make your towns as real as possible, with well-placed walls and buildings.

3) You can also add snow and use different types of lightings from Dawn, Default (noon) to Night – choose the one which best suits your map.



Get some inspiration from Jetbilix's maps included on this month's coverdisc.



Make water more beautiful at the click of a button.

find the town centre go to the Objects menu and then to Place Objects. Use the menu to select Buildings and then scroll through until you come to Town Centre. Click on it once and then click where you want it on the map.

You'll need to do the same for any other buildings you want to add. Although for this map I've just chosen to add four sentry towers akin to the start of

most scenarios. Make sure that when you add the second town centre and towers you assign them to Player 2.

WATER FEATURE

If you're intending to add water to your map, now is the time to do it. Putting water on the map is much like painting the terrain, although some of the water can only be painted with a large size brush. Go to Terrain, select the

Water tool, choose the type of water you want and then splash it all over the map.

The editor also contains a nice little feature called Beautify, which you can find under the Terrain, Edit Water menu. To use this you need to select the body of water you want to give a make over to, click Beautify, and as if by magic, your water now has trees and rocks around it.

The next thing you'll need to add is a bit of wildlife. The main food sources usually found in the immediate area of the town centre are pigs, goats, chickens, cows and berry bushes – depending on the climate. I added a few goats, some clucking chickens and a scattering of berry bushes. Make sure you give each player approximately the same amount of food resources.

Placing animals and fish works the same way as placing buildings, only you go to the Nature menu instead. As you start spreading over the map and adding wild animals instead



They may look cuddly, but they'll have your leg off.



Make sure you spread out the relics.

of domestic ones, make sure you've got them assigned to Gaia, aka mother nature, otherwise they will attack you on sight if they've been assigned to an opposing player.

GOLD RUSH

Add gold and trees in the same way as the animals. You can vary the type of tree you put on the map and also the sizes of the gold mine. Also add a few evenly spaced relics, which you'll find under the Nature menu. Unfortunately, you can't select which relics you place, as they will automatically change at the start of every game.

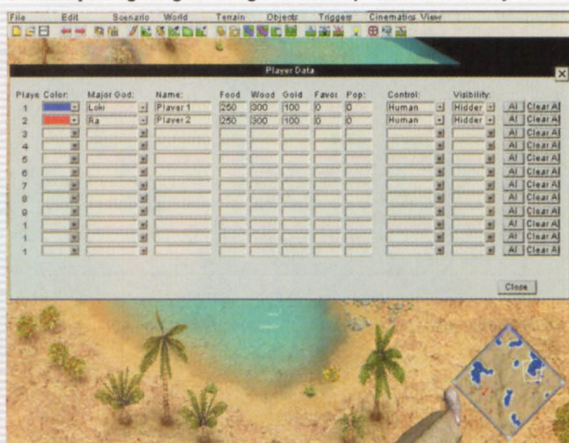
After that just tidy up the loose ends on your map. Check the resources are evenly spread out. Check that everything that needs to be got to can be got to. And make sure you haven't hemmed in half your animals with over enthusiastic tree planting.

To give your map a bit more





The eclipse lighting effect gives a nice, ominous atmosphere.



This is where you decide who starts with what.

atmosphere, you might want to adjust the type of lighting or music you have. In the case of the lighting it's quite easy – just go to the World menu and select Lighting. There are a variety of different lighting modes to blend in with the various style of map, and for this one I've just used the default mode.

If you want to have music playing throughout your map in the same way it does in the full game, then you'll need to set up a trigger for it. Click on the Trigger menu and in the left-hand box click Insert, name the trigger as you like, make sure Action is marked as Active and Condition is marked as Always and click on the Effects tab in the same

menu. When the Effects box comes up, set the type as Music Play and you should get music throughout your playing time.

AN AI FOR AN AI

Next you have to adjust the finer details of your map and specify the setup you want for each player. Click on Scenario and then Player Data, and this will bring up an overview of the map. Adjust map details such as resources and population limit in this screen. Also assign which civilisations will be run by human players and which will be CPU.

If you loaded up your map now, you would find that even though you've marked it as CPU, the computer wouldn't be doing

ICING ON THE CAKE

THERE IS ALWAYS MORE TO LEARN, GRASSHOPPER. WANT TO KNOW MORE? HERE ARE SOME EXTRA TIPS FROM JETBILIX ON HOW TO USE CINEMATICS AND WHAT THINGS TO AVOID

Multiple cinematics, harder enemies, and various complicated and interesting objectives all help give a map atmosphere, which is very important. Inter-link your objectives so that when you reach a certain point in the map, a new objective is automatically triggered. Creating a cinematic requires quite a bit of practice, and you need to put in the time to learn about them. Make sure you use an appropriate cinematic at the appropriate time, so the storyline of the scenario stays flawless.

Add more 'goodies' to the map. For example, an unusual object, or a relic that fires off a cinematic granting the player a god power when they get near it. Test your scenario several times to check for flaws. Everything needs to be in the right place at the right time, and there need to be enough resources for every player. Triggers can be treacherous so pay particular attention to them.

Watch out when you elevate the terrain, as it might look odd if you do it near water or objects,



Wayne suddenly felt very alone.

and make sure your scenario has the right objects for the right location. Nobody wants to see polar bears wandering the sands of Egypt!

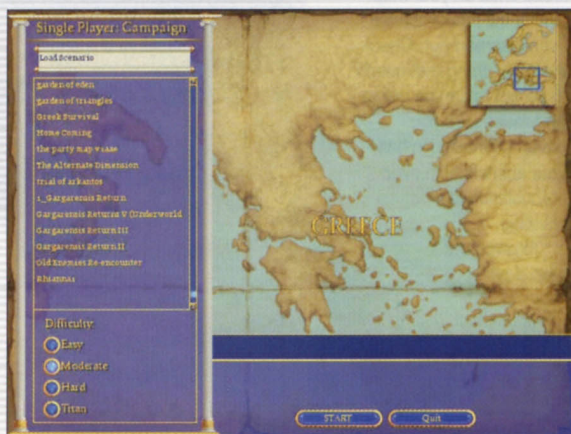
Finally always add AI to the computer players, or else they just stand there and do nothing.

anything. That's because you need to assign AI to the computer. Do this by clicking the small AI button next to the box that says CPC. This brings up a menu of files. Click once on the aomdefaultai.xs file to highlight it and then click Open. Save your game and when you load it up the computer will kick into action, and start taunting you!

To load up your newly created map (and you'll need to do this several times to check it plays OK) go to the single player section of the main game menu. Click Load Scenario and you will get a list of the scenarios you have in your scenario folder, which will include any you've created as well as any you've downloaded. Load up your map and get playing! [P]

HELPING HANDS

From now on, you're on your own. But don't panic, as there's plenty of help to be had from fellow fans. The fan forums for *Age of Mythology* are the best place to go for help and information on all aspects of the game, and many fans have already created help guides for the various features of the editor, including how to set up more complicated trigger points and in-game cinematics. You can find my humble effort, GardenofRhi, on this month's discs, plus a variety of other maps to try out. Meanwhile check out these links for the latest information on the *Mythology* community. aom.heavengames.com, aom.rts-gamer.com and www.ageofmythology.com



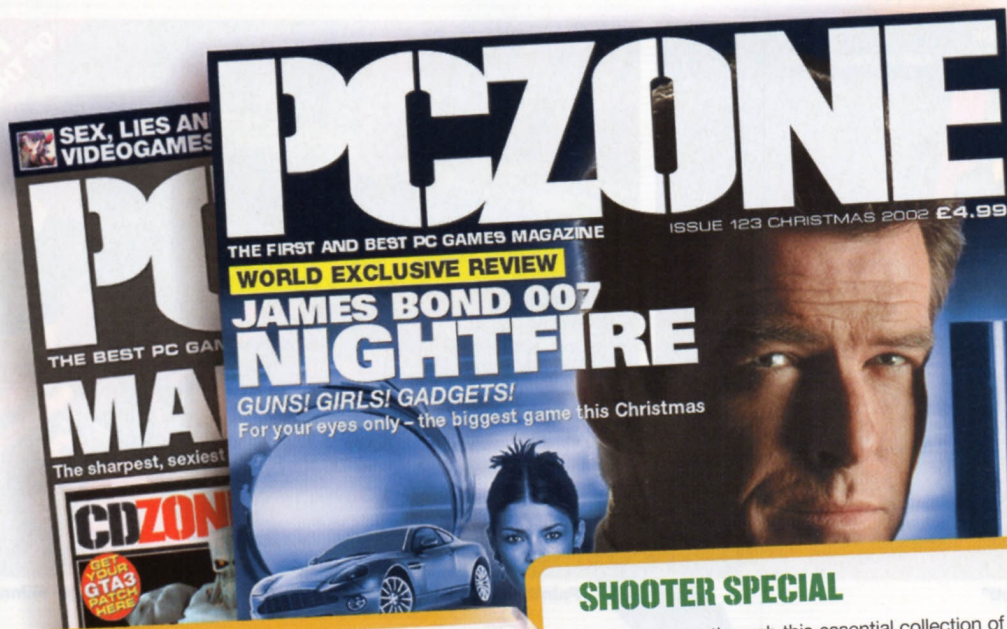
This is where your scenarios live. No, not Greece.



There's nothing like kicking butt on your own map.

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THE MODSQUAD

Chef **Tony Lamb's** monthly mod soup



Get splatted and it's: "Hands up, you're out!"



Paintball 'markers' (why can't we call them guns?) lovingly skinned.

DIGITAL PAINTBALL BETA 1 + 1.1 PATCH

ON THE DVD SIZE 23.9Mb REQUIRES Full version of Half-Life
www.digitalpaintball.net

TOTAL CONVERSION

PAINTBALLERS

are a hardened breed. Out in all weather, fearless, thick-skinned (they have to be – those things bloody hurt if they hit you) and totally devoted to their sport. And why not? It's just about the only way to legally inflict pain on someone you don't like.

Digital Paintball is the next best thing, a mod to give you the real feel of the game but without the likelihood of getting hurt or

rained on – and with little attention to detail spared. It's a team-based mod that offers you a range of real-life markers (OK, guns), each reflecting the characteristics of their often highly-expensive metal counterparts. The markers aren't only accurately skinned to look just like the real thing, but they have the same levels of accuracy, rates of fire and ammo storage capacity too. When you

start you have 100 credits which you use to buy your first marker, and as you progress through the game and get some kills, you score points, get more credits and can either buy a new marker or just upgrade the one you've got. Enhance your barrel to improve accuracy, carry more ammo or just buy a faster marker – it's up to you.

While few in number, the maps are great looking, are well

lit and full of suitable obstacles to hide behind. Several have tower positions for suppressive fire or limited sniping. A couple are CTF – if you can survive long enough (most rounds are only two minutes and even that short time is rarely used). You can even buy paint grenades for when you want to get really mucky. However you get marked though, a splash of paint means you're out for

the rest of the round – just like the real thing.

Digital Paintball is a well crafted, good looking and above all hugely enjoyable mod that would be a blast on a LAN with plenty of players. Online support is also good.

PCZONE VERDICT **82**
 Splat-tastic

BATTLEGROUND DEMO

ON THE DVD SIZE 58Mb REQUIRES Full version of Half-Life
www.bgmod.com

BATTLEGROUND

is an American War of Independence mod reflecting the conflict between the red-coated soldiers of good old blighty and the unwashed colonial yobs. We lost, of course, but here's your chance to fight for either side and affect the outcome of a few online scraps.

When joining a team, you'll be presented with several class choices, each having its own variety of long-range and melee weapons, uniform and strength/speed characteristics. Typically, the less accurate but

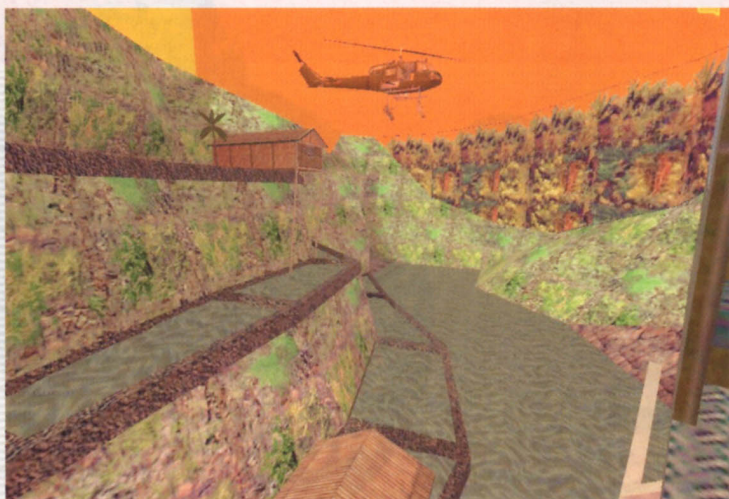
more powerful musket is backed up by a sword, while the more accurate rifle has less outright killing power and only a dagger as melee choice. If you miss your target (which you probably will – players have a gunsight but no bullet decals to show where their shots fall), your best bet is to run away and reload as melee fighting is generally pot luck and reloading takes ages anyway. That said, the joy of watching your enemy crumple at long range from a musket wound will make you smile. The usable cannons are a blast too.

There are a lot of rough edges however. Animations are wooden, maps limited (although they do show a lot of thought and imagination despite their low levels of detail), weapons are basic and online support sparse at best. Still, the grin factor is high enough to make up for these failings and the team says there are a lot more in the pipeline, so watch this space.

PCZONE VERDICT **75**
 Go slap a colonial today



Let me through – I need to reload!



Maps are blocky and basic, but so is Vietnam, apparently.

HEART OF EVIL

ON THE DVD **SIZE** 91.8Mb **REQUIRES** Full version of Half-Life
www.planethalflife.com/heartofevil

PREVIOUSLY

released in bite-size chunks, but now available as a vitamin-enriched all-in-one, *Heart Of Evil* is a Vietnam scenario mod that sees you in the role of one Percy Freeman, sent into the jungle to kill the notorious Colonel Kurtz.

It's a reprise of the classic war flick *Apocalypse Now* with lots of Charlie-killing opportunities, puzzles, twisted humour and zombies. You didn't know there were zombies in Vietnam?

HoE is packed full with ideas. There is a wealth of new

weapons, sounds and textures, each showing a real passion for the mod and an all-pervading sense of fun, which is repeatedly brought to the fore with the wacky situations and characters you'll encounter. Some of the puzzles can be annoyingly

obscure, but if you keep your sense of the bizarre close to hand and resist the urge to scream profanities, you should muddle through.

It could be argued that *HoE* is let down by poor maps and skins, and it's true to say some

of them are below par. But the blockiness is forgivable given the overall standard of this mod.

PCZONE VERDICT **83**
 Charlie don't surf

TEAM FREEZE 2003 BETA 0.25

ON THE DVD **SIZE** 373k **REQUIRES** Full version of UT2003 patched to v2166
www.badgergoose.com/teamfreeze

TEAM Freeze 2003 is tiny by mod standards. It's a gametype alternative in which players are frozen rather than killed, and the objective is to freeze all the members of the opposing team – at which point they shatter and a point is scored. While this is happening the players can stop the process by standing near a frozen teammate for three seconds to release them... which is all very

well so long as they don't get themselves frozen by the enemy for standing still for too long (deathmatch is not a healthy environment for lazing about). What ensues is a mad panic while everyone tries to freeze the opposition while simultaneously watching their own behind and having to unfreeze any of their teammates who gets caught. This actually works quite well in a big map, but would prove quite

maddening otherwise. Frozen players can cycle through the viewpoints of the rest of their team, and if the currently slightly shaky network play is sorted out then a LAN game could be great fun, with frozen players yelling at their teammates non-stop.

PCZONE VERDICT **65**
 Cool



BFG energy stream is low in power but can cover a wide area.

BFG ARENA BETA 1.034

ON THE DVD **SIZE** 2.9Mb **REQUIRES** Full version of Quake III
www.planetquake.com/bfgarena

AHHHH... the Doom BFG. The feeling of power in deathmatch when you got one of these was so good you could taste it. Unfortunately, the weapon slowly became the lammers' delight – camped on, grabbed and hogged to death. *BFG Arena* aims to reawaken the fun element of the BFG by providing everyone with one and relying on individual skill to win the day. It's like *Instagib*, but with a few new whistles and bells.

The extra goodies come from having a variety of BFG 'modes'. There is of course the familiar in-yr-face single blast that crisps opponents on the spot,

but added to this you'll find a plasma-blasting repeater that projects a fast-moving succession of energy pulses, a spread-shot version, and even a 'black-hole' shot that hangs in the air and sucks in nearby victims before exploding in a shower of gibbs.

There's little else new, but as a small weapons mod *BFG Arena* is an enjoyable reason to re-boot *Quake III*. Not outstanding, but good.

PCZONE VERDICT **63**
 An old friend returns



When frozen, you can see but have to rely on your teammates for rescue.

DISC PAGES

WORDS Mark Eveleigh and Rhianna Pratchett

DISCS Mark Eveleigh

HELP!

CD trouble? Don't worry – phone our helpline on **08700 711 482**. 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 P266 with 32Mb RAM to run the software on the discs. Please note that some games also require a 3D accelerator card.
- Use the browser and menu system to see which demos are 3D accelerator only.

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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ENCLAVE

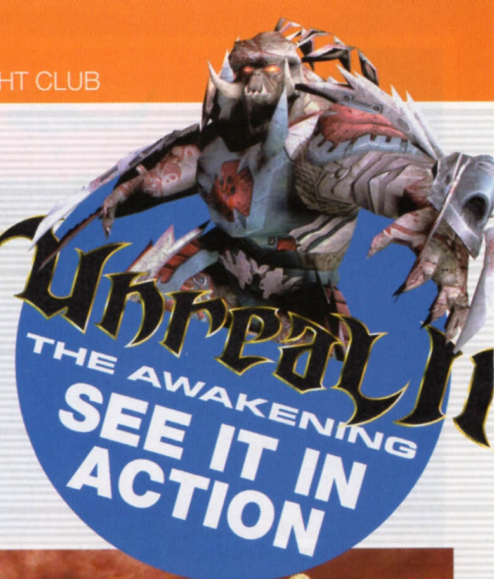
CD1/DVD Pub: Swing! Dev: Starbreeze Studios

A machine gun is fine for those who like to keep their killing at arms' length, but for the true weapons connoisseur, you just can't beat a nice sharp sword, which is what sustains the demand for hack 'n' slash titles. The latest entry into the genre is *Enclave*, a *Severance: Blade Of Darkness*-style exercise in medieval blood-letting, encapsulated in an impressive 3D world.

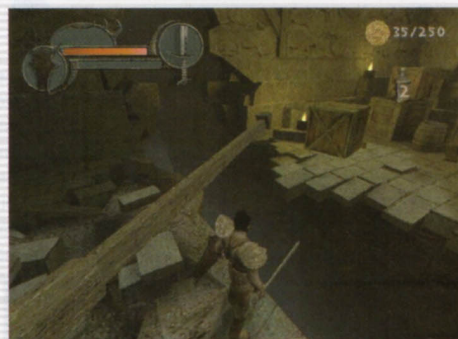
The gaming world of *Enclave* has been split into two by the forces of light and darkness, and in this exclusive demo you get to play through one mission as a knight from the good Enclave side, and one mission as an assassin from the dark hordes of the Outlanders. There are also three different difficulty levels to try out. Before you start the game you'll have to equip your character with your weapons of choice, and there are quite a few, including ranged and melee, for both characters to choose from. Make sure you buy some arrows for your bows, otherwise they'll be useless.

In the first map you need to guide your knight through the ruined city of Mu-Azzam to the city gate on the other side. The route you take is up to you, but there are plenty of enemies lurking around every corner. As you progress through the map you'll need to collect all the gold coins and health potions you can find. Once you've completed this map it will then unlock the dark Outland mission, and you'll find a handy walkthrough for this below.

"The world of *Enclave* has been split into two by the forces of light and darkness"



Red sky at night, assassin's delight.



Use it as a bridge you say? What a marvellous idea.

WALKTHROUGH →

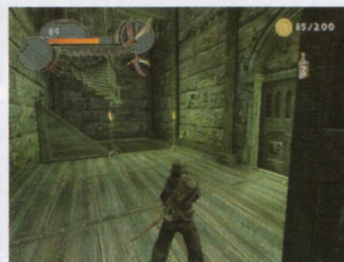
USE YOUR DARK ASSASSIN TO DEFEND THE CITADEL OF ARK MOOR



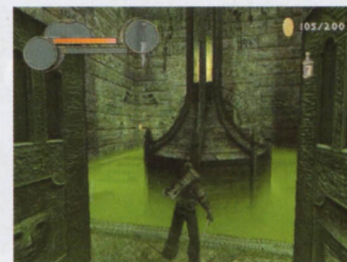
1 First go to the outside of the citadel and kill off all the invaders. You'll find that the bows are simple to aim, but unfortunately the targets will bob and weave all over the place. So you might find it easy to get up close and use your dagger instead. Whatever.



2 Climb down the stairs picking off the ancestor elites as you go. Go through the main door and pick up the gold and potions at either ends of the corridor. Take the next set of stairs down and use your exploding arrows to take out the enemies at the bottom.



3 At the stairs suspended in mid-air, take the right-hand door and fight your way to the main room where the checkpoint and the wheel are. Turn the wheel to lower the stairs and go down. Fight through to the room with the glowing portal and go through it.



4 Fight through the foggy area and use the two shimmering portals to find the Ark Moor key and turn the wheel to disarm the arch. Run towards the airship, picking up the helpful sorceress and the loot on the way. Finish the mission by killing Alecto.

HITMAN 2: SILENT ASSASSIN

CD2/DVD Pub: Eidos **Dev:** IO Interactive **Reviewed:** Issue 121 (74%)

When your head is as bald as a baby's bottom and you've got a barcode stamped to the back of your neck, blending in is never going to be easy. Despite this, Agent 47 is still the best hitman in the business, and in this latest sequel he's as silent and deadly as ever. This demo contains mission five from the full game and revolves around infiltrating a party at the plush German embassy,

taking out a rogue general and stealing his suitcase, which contains a high-tech guidance system. Easy.

It's a tricky mission and involves a lot of sneaking about and costume changing, but your black suit will make you look just like one of the guests. Simply keep your weapon hidden when you're in company, and remember that waiters don't run, and don't try venturing upstairs!



Get a white shirt and you can pass as a waiter.



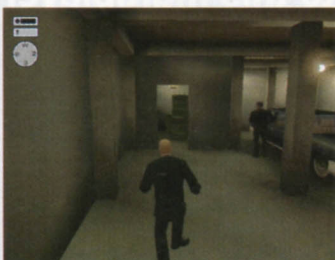
What the hitman saw.

WALKTHROUGH →

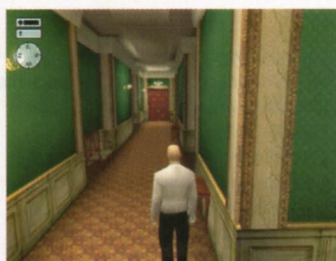
SNEAK WITH THE BEST, DON'T DIE LIKE THE REST



1 Head towards the side complex door and, avoiding the guards, pick it and cross to the door beside the garage. Look through the keyhole and when the guard is walking away from you, open the door and sneak behind him and into the room beside the car.



2 Crouch behind the car and crawl into the room on the left and put on the waiter's uniform. Walk nonchalantly through the kitchen and up the stairs. Check your map – the general and the spy are in red, and the ambassador is marked in white.



3 The general keeps bobbing between the main ballroom and the left-hand corridor. Follow him into the second room on the left and shoot him and the maid that he's with. Head to the office the ambassador keeps visiting and hide in the adjacent room.



4 After the ambassador opens the safe, shoot him and steal the suitcase. Hide it in one of the other rooms. Go back to the room where you changed and put on the suit. Go pick up the suitcase, walk out the front door and sneak back to where you came from.



And that, my friends, is why the SAS uses MP5s.

IGI 2: COVERT STRIKE

CD2/DVD Pub: Codemasters **Dev:** Innerloop

Chris Ryan is back in the sequel to Innerloop's renowned *Project IGI* and this month's demo takes you through an infiltration mission from the forthcoming follow-up. Kitted out with heat sensitive goggles, binoculars, GPS and a concealed armoury, you have to infiltrate an underground base undetected.

While your first instinct in any game with a first-person perspective may be to run in guns blazing, *IGI 2* offers a more covert approach. Not as sophisticated as

the shadow-hopping techniques of Sam Fisher perhaps, but this demo gives a pretty good run through of the stealth tactics involved in the *IGI* series. What's more, with the addition of thermo-optic goggles (that for some reason won't work through solid materials) you can see your enemies from miles away.

There's no sniper rifle, so you'll find it tough to take out security cameras from a distance. Your silenced pistol will likely be your most important tool.

WALKTHROUGH →

DON'T LET THEM SEE YOU



1 You'll start off well outside the compound, somewhere to the east of the warehouse. First things first, so start heading towards the woods off to your right.



2 Take out the security camera next to the warehouse door. A guard will come to check out what happened pretty soon after, so ambush him as well.



3 Approach the warehouse door and shoot the two guards inside. Be careful to ensure you don't set off any alarms while doing this.



4 Now you've made it inside the base, you've got to cross the river somehow. Check your map screen to see what else crosses the river.



Turbos provide a hell of a lot of oomph.

ARMOBILES

CD1/DVD Pub: Infogrames Dev: Ganymede Technologies S.C.

Sports cars not enough for you? How about custom-built sports cars with nitros and mounted gatling guns? Well, *Armobiles* includes both, and this demo sees you participating in one of three events, including racing through checkpoints while the combined military power of the Western world attacks your vehicle. If that's not your cup of tea, there's a Destruction Derby-esque bowl where you fight for your survival. And last, but by no means least, is a stunt

track where you can use turbos to flip your car as many times as possible while flying off ramps.

There are two vehicles on offer in which to participate in the destruction, although frankly you'll almost always choose the one with the most armour if you plan on surviving more than five minutes. As well as having an arsenal on your vehicle with which to defend yourself, you might want to practice your driving skills for the checkpoint tracks.



GROM

CD1/DVD Pub: CDV Dev: Rebelmind



Grenades are very useful for ranged combat against multiple enemies.

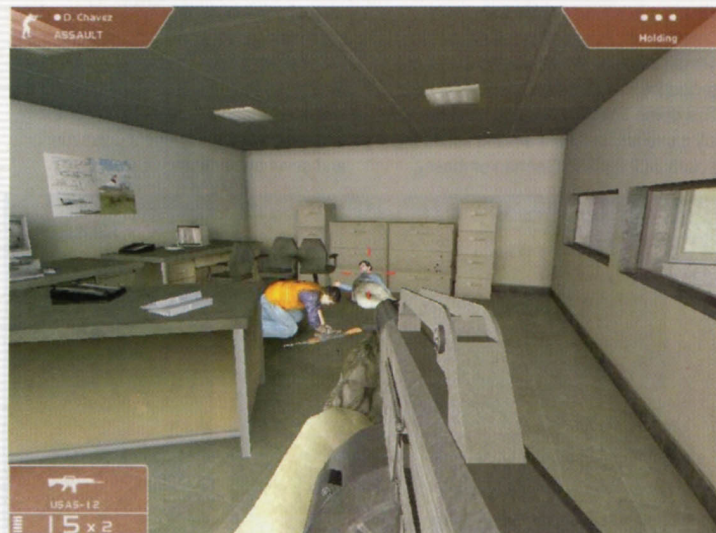
Of all the places you could be in 1942, Tibet would seem to be a pretty quiet one, save for the sound of yaks and the chant of passing monks. At least that's what colonel Grom, a travelling smuggler with a mysterious past, thinks. Unfortunately, Tibet has been singled out by the Nazis as being the resting place of the Lost City of King Arjuna, which supposedly contains twelve magical weapons, any of which

could turn the tide of the war in Germany's favour.

This demo takes you through a tutorial and the first part of the game, as Grom and his partner Petre try to make their way through the bandit-invested countryside to deliver a parcel to an English military base. Once you get there you'll find plenty of little sub-games to help you sharpen your combat skills.

RAVEN SHIELD MULTIPLAYER DEMO

CD2/DVD Pub: Microsoft Dev: RedStorm



Die, filing clerks, die the death of pigs. On your knees, on your knees!

"The online community has taken to this multiplayer demo very well"



You can't run, but you can hide.

Crawling around in the shadows has become somewhat common on the PC of late. Solid Snake helped make it fashionable, although Sam Fisher is the one who currently epitomises stealth action. But the guys behind *Rainbow Six* aren't beaten yet, as this latest update to their spec-ops squad sim shows.

The online community has taken to this multiplayer demo very well so far, and

you can join in after registering for an ubi.com account and installing the demo. More the thinking man's stealth game than *Metal Gear Solid*, you may find yourself spending ages discussing the best strategy for the new map with your teammates. With an additional game mode and a new map with updated net code following our last demo, this is one you shouldn't miss.

OTHER DEMOS ON THE CD/DVD
LASER SQUAD NEMESIS



VIRTUAL SKIPPER 2

CD1/DVD Pub: Duran Duboi Dev: Duran Duboi



Those three staples of the navy – rum, sodomy and the lash – don't apply here.

What do you crave from games? To save the world? To drive faster than the speed of sound on a race track made of pure energy? To fight aliens with your bare hands on a rock orbiting Saturn? Well forget all that, now it's your chance to enter the cut-throat sporting world of competitive yachting.

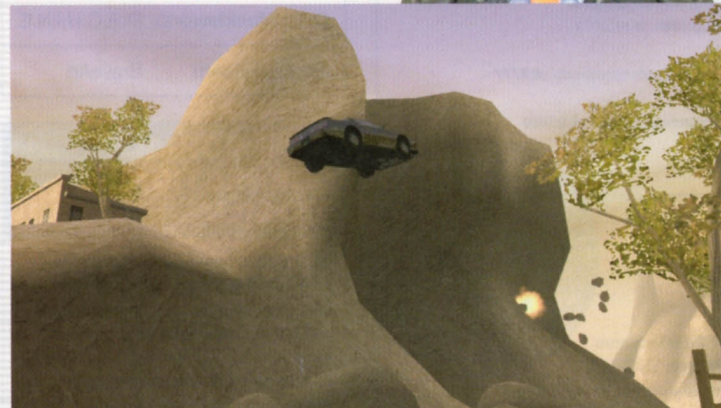
A sport that relies almost entirely on the effort of nature to power the boats,

sailing never really struck us as the most enthralling idea for a videogame, but *Virtual Skipper 2* might just change all of our minds. You can tack. You can jibe. You can roll out that genoa sail at any time. It's like gaming crack.

While the gameplay might only appeal to a very niche market among lovers of our cover demos, the ocean looks superb. If only it was a screensaver.

KNIGHT RIDER

DVD Pub: Koch Media Dev: Davilex
Reviewed: Issue 124 (42%)



Occasionally you get a *Matrix*-esque snapshot.

Only in the '80s could something called the Knight Industry Two Thousand have been cool. Yet cool KITT was, and a damn-sight more entertaining than that Hasselhoff fella. In fact, there was more quality acting in the flash of the LEDs up the accelerator pedal than DH ever managed in his entire career.

Taking on KITT's role, you get to chase a helicopter through a mine-laden canyon with infinite turbos at your disposal. Unfortunately, you only get to drive the car and miss out on the opportunity to regularly take the piss out of Michael's horribly bad lines, but at least that's half the *Knight Rider* experience.

DVD EXCLUSIVES

ONLY AVAILABLE ON PC ZONE'S DVD EDITION.
TO SUBSCRIBE TURN TO PAGE 129

AMERICA'S ARMY v1.50

Pub: US Army Dev: US Army Reviewed: Issue 121 (85%)

In spite of the propaganda that oozes from your screen as you play this game, *America's Army* has had quite a successful take-up worldwide, and this latest release includes all the current add-ons to the game as well as improved net code and better system compatibility.

The point of the whole thing is apparently to show how the US Army behaves in a conflict, without you having to pick up a rifle or become a US citizen. You'll find the game physics are pretty good and you can be guaranteed that there will be no team killers on your side as they get sent instantly to jail.



"Uhhh Sarge, do I pull the trigger now?"



DUNGEON SIEGE UPDATED DEMO

Pub: Microsoft Dev: Gas Powered Games
Reviewed: Issue 114 (89%)

For those of you who missed out on our *Dungeon Siege* demo last time, we've got this new updated version which fixes a few bugs from the initial release.

The demo comes with the first part of the full game, which sees you battling the minions of evil with no one but your faithful mule in tow. What an ass.



Fight the good fight in the updated *Dungeon Siege*.

OTHER DEMOS ON THE DVD

EMERGENCY 2

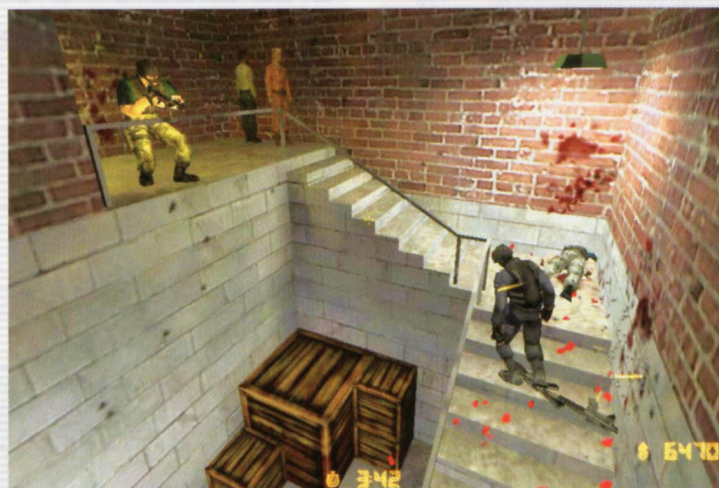
Every DVD issue of PC ZONE comes packed with essential patches for the biggest games together with full versions of *Counter-Strike* mod and retail versions.

FIGHT CLUB

Counter-Strike forever, that's the official word from many of you.
Martin Korda fills you in on the latest frag-fest

REGULAR visitors to this page will know that over the last few months we've been giving you the chance to vote for what game you play during our monthly Free-For-All, carefully choosing a varied cross section to give you maximum choice. However, each and every month, we had the same result and trend, and ended up playing the same game. *Battlefield 1942* and *Unreal Tournament 2003* were both trounced by the popularity of *Counter-Strike*, meaning the world's most popular online game, remains the choice of the PC ZONE majority.

And so, onto the latest evening of carnage, the night of Thursday January 9, where once again the server was packed and the competition intense, marred only by the suspicions that one or two players were cheating. Our very own hawkeye Phil 'Shit Kicker' Clarke claims to have seen a couple of culprits, and from now on we'll be watching extra closely. If we find anyone cheating from now on, we'll come round, rip out your eyes and piss down the gaping holes. Or at the very least, we'll kick you off the server. You know who you are and you have been warned.



Stop running away you cowards and come and fight us online.

Star players of the month this time round were Hellzteenth, :{i.u<::sij}ntlforce (who deserves a prize for possessing the most nonsensical online name I've ever seen), the_durge, willa, ('UFO') Wallace and Mas.ter. So well

done to you all. Which means we still only have one person in our Hall of Fame, K.I.T, who amazingly didn't warrant a mention this time round, which in itself shows just how tough the competitors are getting on our monthly shootouts. See you all next month.

FREE-FOR-ALL

THURSDAY MAR 6

6.30pm – 9.00pm

Counter-Strike

HALL OF FAME

Earn five mentions and you'll have your name immortalised. Our one star player so far is...

K.I.T

KNOW YOUR ENEMY

Dave Woods	Kid Unknown
Richie Shoemaker	Zapatero
Martin Korda	Nameless One
Anthony Holden	Shokupan
Mark Hill	Leatherface
Paul Presley	I R Baboon
Lee Cocker	Viper
Phil Clark	ShitKicker
Danny King-Smith	Ronin
Colin Mackleworth	M.A.C.H.I.N.E.
Jamie Malcom	BraveArt

FREE-FOR-ALL CONNECTION DETAILS

Connecting to our Server is simple. And to make things easier, we've given the server a permanent home. To hook up from within the game, open the *Half-Life* console and type password *pczone* and then press enter. After this type *connect ffa.zonegames.co.uk* and press enter. You'll be taken right there. You can also add the server to popular game browsers such as The All-Seeing Eye or GameSpy 3D by entering *ffa.zonegames.co.uk* where you would normally provide an IP address. Check our forum (www.pczone.co.uk) for any information updates.

PC ZONE GAME SERVERS POWERED BY JOLT.CO.UK

OUR SERVERS ARE OPEN 24/7 AND FREE OF CHARGE. WHY PLAY ANYWHERE ELSE?

We've switched our game servers to the ultra-fast Jolt service, which means lag should now be a thing of the past. We've also changed the way you find them, and from now on we'll refer to them by their name rather than by their address. The easiest way to connect is to load the game you wish to

TFC Public Server #1 – [24hr 2fort]: tfc.zonegames.co.uk:27025
 TFC Public Server #2 – [24hr Badlands]: tfc.zonegames.co.uk:27035

Quake III: [Urban Terror TDM]: q3.zonegames.co.uk:27960

CS Public Server #1 [All maps]: cszonegames.co.uk:27015
 CS Public Server #2 – [Dusty]: cszonegames.co.uk:27025
 CS Public Server #3 – [Custom Maps]: cszonegames.co.uk:27035

play, go to the multiplayer connection screen and instead of typing in an IP address, type in the name of the server from the list below. They can also be accessed from a server browser such as The All-Seeing Eye or GameSpy. Remember to use the password below, which is updated each month.

Natural Selection #1: ns1.zonegames.co.uk:27020
 Natural Selection #2: ns2.zonegames.co.uk:27070

Unreal Tournament Public Server: ut.zonegames.co.uk:7777

Wolfenstein Public Server: rtwc.zonegames.co.uk:27960

PASSWORD: garden

LAN ROVER

LAN LORD STEVE 'SCALPER' RANDALL KNOWS WHERE THE PARTY'S AT

The Hallowed Ground guys lead this month with their LAN taking place in East London on the Valentine's Day Weekend or the weekend after. To have your say on when you'd prefer to go, or for more information visit www.hgfan.co.uk
 ■ Uncertainty reigns in Andover, Hampshire over the latest event at Battle UK. To offer your support and £25 for three days of fragging on February 21-23, visit the guys at www.battleuk.co.uk.
 ■ Spalding in Lincolnshire is the venue for the 8th event run by [\[arena.co.uk\]\(http://arena.co.uk\). It's another one-day event on February 22, from 9am-11pm, and it costs just £5. Expect the 30 places to fill up pretty quickly.](http://www.fenlan</p>
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■ The Glen Parva Memorial Hall, Leicester is the new location for the Leicester Networking Games Club. It'll run from 3pm-11.30pm. More details available from www.gdbok.co.uk
 ■ Multiplay continue to run the I Series of LAN parties, and will run their 14th (entitled i15) from March 14-16 in their usual Newbury location. Expect between

400-600 gamers.

Price is TBC, but more details are available from www.multiplay.co.uk

■ The Lanarchy series is holding their 8th party on March 15-16. Watford is expecting up to 50 fraggers at £25. Details available from www.lanarchy.co.uk.
 ■ My next GGLan event will be on March 22-23. Visit www.gglan.co.uk.

If you want your LAN party mentioned here, give me two months notice at Scalper@gglan.co.uk.

SCALPER'S
NEXT
GGLAN EVENT:
MARCH 22
AND 23
WWW.GGLAN.CO.UK
FOR DETAILS

IS YOURS A GOLDEN SAMPLE?

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**THE NEXT TIME A NURSE
GETS THIS EXCITED ABOUT
A "GOLDEN SAMPLE", SHE'S
REALLY THINKING ABOUT
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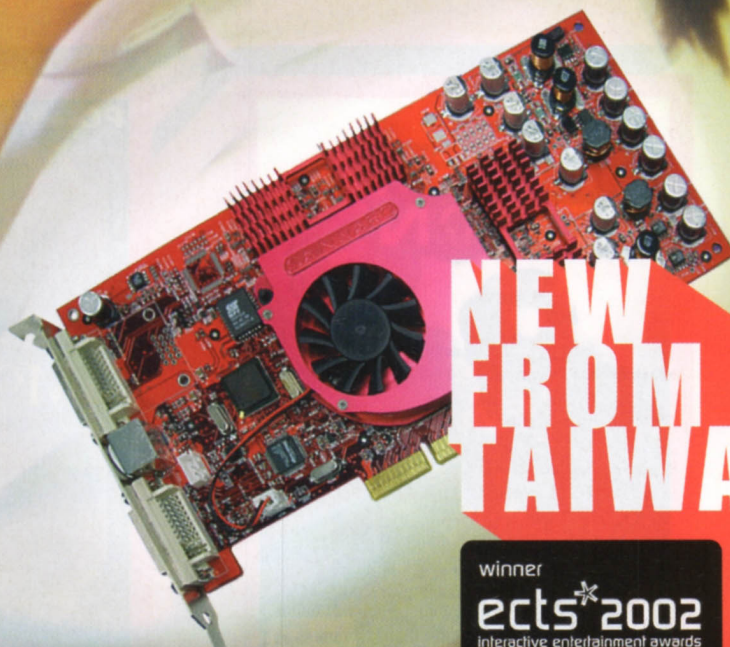
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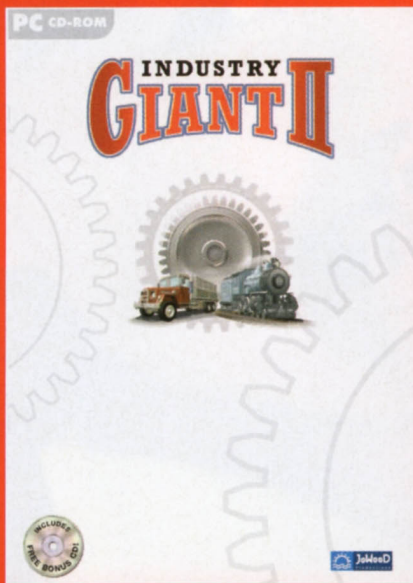
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VIRGIN LOVES



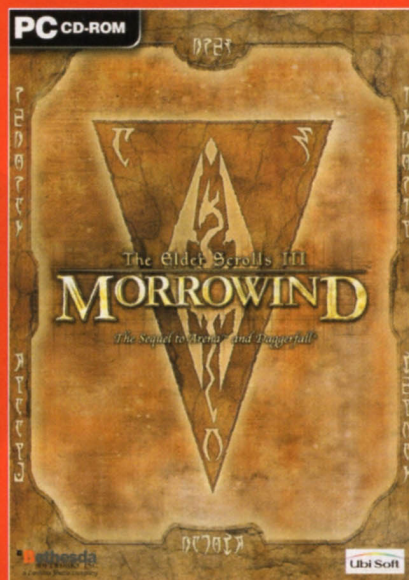
Industry Giant II



Destroyer Command



Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon



The Elder Scrolls III Morrowind

Offer ends 18th February 2003

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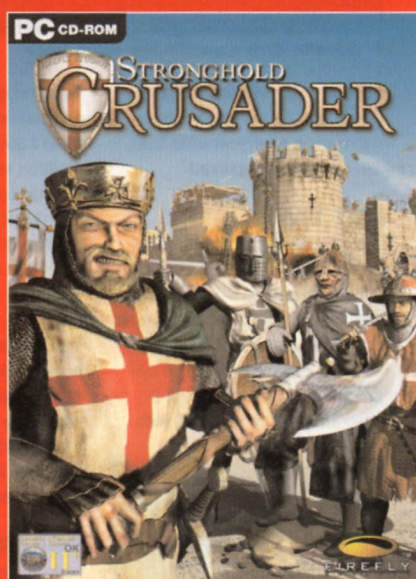
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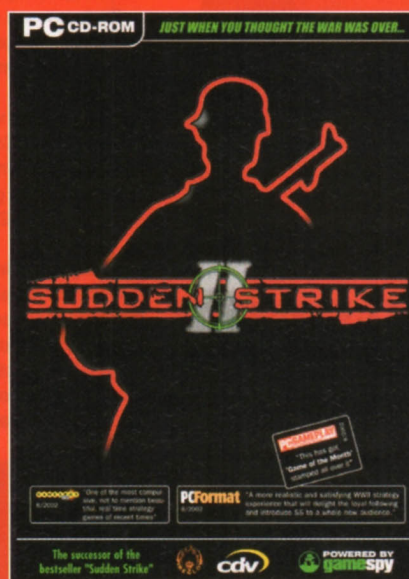
Grand Theft Auto III



Mafia



Stronghold Crusader



Sudden Strike II

WHATEVER TURNS YOU ON

Virgin

megastores



MAILBOX

Everybody needs a good rant every now and again, and we're here to listen...

■ HOLDING COURT Dave Woods



GOOD COP, SAD COP

You say that you wanted suggestions for Good Cop, Bad Cop in the news section. Well, you've got to do Barbie and Ken. I suggest that Barbie is the bad cop but that's up to you!

Scott Holmes

Thanks for the wonderful suggestion, but I think you're missing the point a little bit unless of course you've got a bit of a fetish thing going on with your dolls.

She might be bad, but we don't think she's ever been a cop.



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.



ARTISTIC LICENSE

Following the *Hitman 2* debacle, with some Sikhs complaining about their portrayal in the game, I wonder where it could lead. People surely realise that just because some Sikhs are portrayed as violent in *Hitman 2*, it doesn't mean all Sikhs are. No religion or group likes bad publicity, whether in computer games, films or books, but we have to accept that freedom of speech is a basic human right.

What happens if Muslims, Christians or the Orthodox Church complain about their portrayal in *Medieval: Total War*? (All historically accurate, but not flattering, with endless wars and crusades led by religious fervour). What happens to every WWII game if the Germans object to being constantly portrayed as Nazi cannon fodder?

Sanitise every game, book or film because it may offend someone, and you might as well not bother producing any.

Gavin Hay

P.S. You'd better warn the *Counter Strike: Condition Zero* developers to remove the turbans from the game as shown in issue 125!

You've got a point Gavin, but you should remember that freedom of speech isn't an absolute. Religion is a very sensitive subject and I don't think the Sikh community was complaining about being



Is *Counter-Strike* next in the firing line?

portrayed as violent, but they did object to the developers recreating environments that are considered sacred

NOT FAIR!

Would you please shut the hell up about children playing 18-certificate games – there's no way you can stop it! I'm 13 years old and I play *GTA III*, *Soldier Of Fortune 2*, *Hitman 2* and so on. Who's going to stop me? If a parent wishes to buy their kids

18-rated games then that's their choice and no-one else should have a say. Don't waste the mailbox section of your brilliant mag on some old fart who hasn't got anything better to do than complain about the parenting of others.

Alex Sinclair

You're bang on the money. If parents don't object to their children playing games or watching unsuitable films then there's nothing anyone can do. Whether it's right or wrong is another matter...

DREAMTIME

I empathise with Dave Watkinson in the February issue, some games are too short. DVD drives and 256Mb RAM are almost a standard spec for PCs these days, so why aren't developers taking advantage of it. If several developers teamed up they could create a never-ending game. Just imagine, you start off with a *Homeworld*-style tactical space battle then switch to an FPS game, forcefully boarding a friendly ship to rescue one of



Would you want your kids to play games like this?

"Want to found your very own fight club? Want to set up an illegal gambling circle? You can"

THOMAS BUSH LOVES THE SIMS



Glorified chatroom or everlasting money-spinner for EA? You decide.

your loyal captains from a mutiny. Two weeks later you need a change, so you hyperspace to a peaceful system to engage in a spot of *SimCity*-style micro-management. But lol Before your very eyes gangsters move in, wrecking your simulated Utopia, so cue a switch to a *Vice City* scenario—only now you are a space captain cop chasing villains around in flash cars, happily aware that if you get stuck you can always order a battlecruiser to strafe the area with laser fire. Done badly it would be awful, done well and it might be computer gaming nirvana. It's time we boycotted titchy games. Anyone agree?

Paul Lamarque

Why stop there? Why don't all the major film studios join forces to create an evolving, never-ending film that you only have to pay once to watch and that incorporates every genre and every actor in the world. I'd buy a ticket.

STOP THE WHININ'

I've just read the Crime Supertest and I'd like to say I'm fed up with people complaining about the race-track level in *Mafia*. I completed it first time round. I play a lot of driving games and

did use a steering wheel and maybe that's why I didn't have any trouble. On the other hand, it took me ages to get through the mission where one has to beat up the gangsters without killing them. I didn't complain though.

Gary Fisher

Mark reviewed the game for us and completed the mission first time round as well, which is why he didn't mention it in his review. I smashed my keyboard after the 12th attempt. Them's the breaks...

THE QUIMS

I read your preview of *The Sims Online* in the your 101

Games of 2003 feature in the January issue, and I have to admit that I was a bit disappointed. The game is not just a "glorified chatroom" but a whole new world set to rival the likes of *EverQuest*. It's been in development for years and the amount of effort that has gone into it pays off incredibly well, as anyone who has downloaded the Beta version will know. Want to create an office block? You can. Want to found your very own fight club? Want to set up an illegal gambling circle? You can. I personally believe that this is the best online game so far, and I think



Being a gangster isn't supposed to be easy.

READER REVIEWS

FANCY A CAREER WRITING FOR A GAMES MAG? WELL PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT...

We want reviews of the games you love or the ones you hate. Each one should be between 50 and 350 words and come with a score out of 100. The best one wins a game from the current charts. Send your review to the standard Mailbox address (see boxout) and remember to include your name, address and telephone number.

STARFLEET COMMAND 3

ISSUE 123 - SCORE: 80%



We said... "This is probably the *Star Trek* technophile's ultimate space battle game. It's fast, furious and more fun than it has any right to be."



This is odd, another fairly good *Star Trek* game. I read the review baffled by the fact that once again a *Star Trek* game had received more than 60 per cent. As an unquestioning faithful of my beloved *PC ZONE* I went out to buy the game and I was definitely not disappointed.

As soon as I fired it up I felt immersed in the storyline with the fantastic intro movie. The campaign modes have improved beyond recognition on the previous two instalments, now being unbelievably more structured. The storyline is excellent and filled with twists, turns and conspiracies. What's more the ships are actually from the series instead of the previous look-alikes.

The interface hasn't changed much and it's still easy to use. A much-needed addition to the game is the ability to configure your ship (buy better shields, armour, weapons etc) instead of having to buy a new one. Another feature that's particularly good is the fact that each side is very different: the Federation is an average all-rounder and the Klingons have weak rear shields and good manoeuvrability. The voice acting is superb, the music blends in seamlessly with the action and changes depending on what's happening.

It's not perfect though. The collision detection just doesn't want to work. The first time I played it I was going at full speed towards a ship only to find myself flying through it as if it wasn't there. However, overall this is one of the best *Star Trek* games I have played. Let's hope more *Star Trek* games are like this in the future.

Yacine Aitsiellmi
VERDICT: 85%

it deserves to be treated with respect.

Thomas Bush

Funnily enough, *The Sims Online* isn't actually the best game in the world. To check out what we really think of it turn for the 72 for the definitive *PC ZONE* verdict.

TOP SHELF

Did you see the episode of *Shooting Stars* where they did a sketch satirising the Michael Douglas film *Falling Down*? Anyway, just in case you missed it, I wanted to point out that in the newsagent's scene there were lingering (oo-er) shots of *PC ZONE* on the top shelf. Why top shelf?! It almost looked like a set-up (perhaps someone on the production team is a reader). I think it was the only magazine clearly visible each time. Strange. Or is that just me?

Gavin Hay

Have you spotted *PC ZONE* in a strange place? Send in your sightings with proof

Warning: Reading *PC ZONE* can be bad for your health...

(to our usual address or e-mail) and I'll send you a nice big prize.

SUE YOU SIR

I have just received the February issue of *PC ZONE* and I became so engrossed in Anthony Holden's *Splinter Cell* review that I slipped down my stairs and broke my toe. Or at least I think it's broken - it's

pointing in a different direction to all the others. Well, what are you going to do about it? Or do you want me to get my lawyers involved?

Brian Walsh

I never shirk from my responsibility, so I'm going to give you some very sound medical advice. Pull your toe back into place and keep it there with a strong sticking plaster. Keep that on for a few weeks and if it doesn't fall off then you're sorted.

FAIR PLAY?

What happened to the Fair Play Campaign? I was interested in the concept and was pretty disgusted by the reaction of the games industry, which was to belittle and ignore all the arguments. The boycott period has now come and gone and I've seen nothing in the news or your magazine to say if it was successful or not. I'm presuming the latter, but I would be grateful if you could shed some light on the matter.

Boris Gividen

We contacted a spokesperson for the Fair Play Campaign and this is what he had to say about its impact on the industry.

"It's incredibly hard to gauge the effects of the boycott. All we can say is that **GAME** - by far the nations biggest game retailer - had a much worse time than it expected in the first half of December when the boycott was on, and a much better time than expected in the second half of the month when the boycott had finished. Coincidence or magic? You decide." **END**

FairPlay
ACTION FOR CHEAPER VIDEOGAMES
1st - 8th December 2002
DON'T BUY A VIDEOGAME WEEK

Did the boycott actually work?

MYSTIC MARK

As many experts do at this time of the year, I'm going to make some predictions as to what is going to be happening in the mag over the next 12 months, based purely on my intimate knowledge of the business and general awareness of world politics.

- 1) Jamie suddenly realises that there's more to life than wanting more and more violence in games, becomes a Buddhist nun, and brings peace and love to small children, old ladies and the occasional small furry animal.
- 2) *Duke Nukem Forever* is officially canned, revived, canned again as the publishers say *The Manhattan Project* was actually *Duke Nukem Forever* and wasn't it great?
- 3) Martin grows pigtails (tied up in pink ribbons) after a heavy withdrawal from his '80s greasy pimp ponytail.
- 4) Dave wins the Booker prize for his new addition to the mag. Female readers send in photos of parts of their body that are especially sexually sensitive. He calls it *The Erogenous Zone*, and retires with four Swedish au pairs.
- 5) Steve O finally admits that he is Jarvis Cocker, and in a bid to break free from the image, has a gender realignment operation, takes loads of dodgy hormones, and insists on everyone calling him/her Gladys.

Mark Wilbraham

The Erogenous Zone you say? You know I think you could be onto something there...



Jarvis Cocker



Steve O'Hagan

READER REVIEWS

STAR REVIEW

BATTLEFIELD 1942

ISSUE 123 - MULTIPLAYER SCORE: 91%

We said... "The most fun we've had online since Counter-Strike"



What? That was my initial reaction when I saw the score you'd given *Battlefield 1942*. For me it's the most fun online game I've ever played and if you get on a good, big, fast server then there's nothing out there that can beat it. You redeemed yourself with the multiplayer score a month later, which made me try the single-player game for myself to see if it was as bad as you'd said.

It was. The AI was truly abysmal and the game that I was used to playing online disintegrated into a mess of gargantuan proportions. And, even though the game is essentially multiplayer (I hadn't even checked out the single-player side before), if you're going to add a single-player element into the game (presumably so that EA don't miss out on sales from people who don't play online), then you should make sure it's good.

Back to the good bits though. If you're looking for a multiplayer game to sink your teeth into and you're bored of *Counter-Strike*, buy this. You can fly planes, drive vehicles, sit on ships and control some mean artillery as well as just running around taking potshots at people. The maps are balanced and varied and if you're lucky enough to find a server populated by people willing to take the game seriously, then it's utterly absorbing. Forget *Counter-Strike*, forget the single-player game ever existed and connect your ADSL. It's time to fight.

Neil Crown

VERDICT: 90%





WIN A CREATIVE GEFORCE FX CARD!

It's potentially the fastest bit of silicon your PC will have ever seen. Enter our simple competition and you could be the envy of your neighbourhood (and the PC ZONE office)

WHAT'S 2003 delivered so far? Rain, a bit of snow, broken resolutions and two of the best-looking games of all time. *Splinter Cell* and *Unreal II* have upped the bar in terms of visuals and gameplay, but if you want to play them as God intended, you're probably going to have to rip your old graphics card from the dank bed it's sitting in and replace it with one of the new DirectX 9 based cards that are currently flooding onto the shelves.

For the past year we've been recommending NVIDIA-based cards as delivering the best bang-for-buck ratio, and we're sure that when we finally get hold of the next-gen GeForce FX card it's going to top the pile again.

We don't say that sort of thing lightly either. The GeForce FX chip is three times as powerful as the Pentium 4 processor, and it can handle up to 51 billion floating-point operations per second in the pixel shader alone – the same power you'd need to render 100 *Jurassic Park* dinosaurs at more than 100 frames a second. To put this in some sort of context, you can expect it to perform two or three times better than NVIDIA's current top-end card, which means that you're going to be future-proofed well into 2004.

Sounds good? Well, we've got two cards sitting in the office, and despite the fact they're so new we don't even own them ourselves, we're willing to send them out to the first two correct entries drawn from the editor's hat. All you need to do is answer the following question:

QUESTION: The GeForce FX card comes with a feature that's been dubbed 'Silent Running' by NVIDIA. What does 'Silent Running' refer to?

- A) It's a piss-take. The card makes more noise than a washing machine full of bricks.
 B) The fact the board can dynamically change the speed of the fan depending on what you're using the card for.
 C) I haven't got the foggiest, but could you send me a card anyway?

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

- Please include your title, forename, surname, address, postcode, daytime phone number and your email address
- Please indicate on the postcard if you do not wish to receive details of further special offers from companies other than Dennis Publishing Ltd
- Please indicate

on the postcard if you are under 18 years of age.

- Please indicate on the postcard if you are you a current subscriber

Send your answer, with all the information requested, to: GeForce FX Competition CPCZ303A, PC ZONE, Dennis Publishing, PO Box 154, Bradford, BD1 5RZ. (Closing date: March 6, 2003)

■ Terms and conditions: Only entries with all the questions completed and received before the closing date will be entered into the prize draw. Winners will be notified by post. No cash alternative. Prizes not necessarily as shown. No correspondence will be entered into. The Editor's decision is final. All the other usual competition rules, conditions and restrictions apply. And all that. Phew!



CREATIVE
CREATIVE LABS



THE PCZONE A-LIST

◀ SHOOTERS ▶

MEDAL OF HONOR



It may have taken years but finally there's a shooter worthy of toppling *Half-Life*. Brilliant level design, surprisingly good AI, an unparalleled sense of atmosphere and intensity, not to mention beautifully scripted scenes. It's also the first game that Richie has finished three times in as many months, and the first FPS Rhianna has finished in her life, which gives you some indication of the game's worth.

PUB EA DEV 2015

PCZ ISSUE 112



NO ONE LIVES FOREVER 2

The best single-player shooter only makes number two in the A-List, just losing out to *Medal of Honor*'s multiplayer mode. 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 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 Infogrames 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 II: JEDI OUTCAST

The first *Star Wars* game to be awarded a PC ZONE Classic award since the original *Jedi Knight* back in 1997. This is more than just a simple FPS, it's frustrating, rewarding and extremely good fun. A new hope has come.

PUB Activision DEV Raven

PCZ ISSUE 115



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



MAX PAYNE

It's not big and it's not clever, but for style and content *Max Payne* receives top marks. The character animations and soon-to-be-copied-by-everyone Bullet Time mode are the real stars, it's just a shame it only lasts a few hours.

PUB Take 2 DEV Remedy

PCZ ISSUE 107

◀ STRATEGY ▶

MEDIEVAL: TOTAL WAR

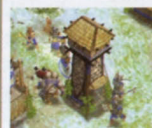


A sequel to the stunning *Shogun: Total War* (now available on budget), *Medieval* offers everything its predecessor did and a whole lot more. Adding to the massive 3D battles and turn-based *Risk*-style strategy map are a multitude of new options, both diplomatic and military. Breathtaking in every way, strategy games just don't come any better than this.

PUB Activision

DEV Creative Assembly

PCZ ISSUE 120



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



WARRIOR KINGS

A visually stunning and hugely ambitious RTS that melds the strategic diversity of *Battle Realms* with the huge 3D rolling landscapes of *Shogun*. With a compelling story to boot, no strategy fan should be without a copy.

PUB Microids DEV Black Cactus

PCZ ISSUE 114



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



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



Z: STEEL SOLDIERS

Z will re-ignite your passion for strategy games with its fast-paced in-er-face action that allows you to get down and dirty from the off. The AI is superb and, as it's entirely mouse-driven, it's simple and easy to get into.

PUB EON DEV Bitmap Brothers

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



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



BATTLE REALMS

Emerging from the quagmire of all too similar RTS games this is a genuinely ground-breaking strategy game. It does have its flaws which include a tedious plot, but the great use of sound, visuals and gameplay shine through.

PUB Ubi Soft DEV Liquid Entertainment

PCZ ISSUE 111



SUDDEN STRIKE

Sudden Strike mixes WWII action with classic RTS gameplay in order to create a compelling strategy title. Its large-scale battles, huge selection of units and superb interface make it a must for RTS fans.

PUB CDV DEV Fireglow

PCZ ISSUE 96

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. Get in.

◀ ROLE-PLAYING GAMES ▶

DEUS EX



Warren Specter 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 Infogrames DEV Bioware

PCZ ISSUE 118



PLANESCAPE: TORMENT

An incredible game from Black Isle, using the *Baldur's Gate* engine. With a compelling story, well-scripted dialogue and the best character development we've seen in any game of its kind, this is a dark, adult scorcher of an RPG.

PUB Interplay DEV Black Isle Studio

PCZ ISSUE 87



DUNGEON SIEGE

Graphically brilliant, massively enjoyable and highly immersive, *Dungeon Siege* is one of the best RPGs to date and only misses out on a Classic because of the shortcomings in the narrative.

PUB Microsoft DEV Gas Powered Games

PCZ ISSUE 115



SYSTEM SHOCK 2

Definitely one of the most original and disturbing games to hit the PC, *System Shock 2* manages to successfully mix the genres of role-playing, action and adventure into one. Play it with the lights off if you're hard enough.

PUB EA DEV Irrational Games

PCZ ISSUE 80



BALDUR'S GATE II

The original *Baldur's Gate* was hailed as one of the best story-driven role-playing games ever. The sequel isn't vastly different, but it's bigger, better and still extremely addictive. An essential for anyone interested in PC role-playing.

PUB Interplay DEV Bioware

PCZ ISSUE 96



DIVINE DIVINITY

This epic RPG contains the action of *Diablo II* combined with the storyline of the *Baldur's Gate* series, not to mention about 200 hours of gameplay in a huge fantasy world. The name may be a bit silly, but the gameplay certainly isn't.

PUB CDV DEV Larian Studios

PCZ ISSUE 121



FREEDOM FORCE

Control your own group of superheroes in this immersive and fully destructible comic book world. It may not be the most sophisticated and bearded of RPGs, but *Freedom Force* is unadulterated bubble-gum fun at its best.

PUB EA DEV Irrational Games

PCZ ISSUE 115



ARX FATALIS

This is a graphically beautiful role-playing game with more than a few hints of *Ultima Underworld*. Its hugely detailed and realistic environment made this a *PC ZONE* Essential.

PUB VU Games DEV Monolith

PCZ ISSUE 122

◀ ACTION/ADVENTURE ▶

SPLINTER CELL



NEW ENTRY At long last we've now got a new king of the action adventures with the Tom Clancy influenced *Splinter Cell*, and a new crowned prince in the form of the über flexible Mr Sam Fisher. *Splinter Cell* features the perfect blend of action, structure and pace, combined with some of the best looking visuals and set pieces around. No one 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



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



DISCWORD 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 Infogrames 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



SEVERANCE: BLADE OF DARKNESS

Anyone who doesn't mind being splattered with the kind of gore rarely seen outside *Soldier Of Fortune* will find much to like in *Severance*. But it stands out from the usual hack 'n' slasher with its amazing engine and combo system.

PUB Codemasters DEV Rebel Act Studios

PCZ ISSUE 98



PROJECT EDEN

Giving you control of four variously skilled operatives in a nightmarish future metropolis, *Eden* is at once predictable and innovative. The combat and AI may be dull, but the varied puzzles and raft of cool gadgetry make up for it.

PUB Eidos DEV Core Design

PCZ ISSUE 107



INDIANA JONES AND THE INFERNAL MACHINE

LucasArts moves away from the point-and-click genre and into *Tomb Raider* territory for its latest Indy game, but with many of the adventure elements still in place. The result is surprisingly good, but not for traditionalists.

PUB Activision DEV LucasArts

PCZ ISSUE 84

◀ 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 Infogrames DEV Firaxis Games

PCZ ISSUE 111



THE SIMS

Revolutionary at birth, the concept has since been diluted through numerous add-ons and an unhealthy long stay in the charts. It's now little more than a cash cow for Electronic Arts, but 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

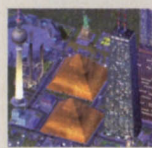


ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON 2

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 Infogrames DEV Chris Sawyer

PCZ ISSUE 123



SIMCITY 4

NEW ENTRY 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 Infogrames DEV Deep Red

PCZ ISSUE 110

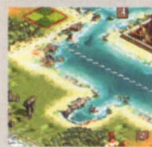


DUNGEON KEEPER 2

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



CALL TO POWER II

It might not have the official endorsement, but *Call To Power II* is a spiritual successor to one of the greatest strategy games of all time, *Civilization II*. The gameplay is familiar but every element has been polished and the result is a hugely challenging and rewarding experience. It's still well worth seeking out.

PUB Activision DEV Activision

PCZ ISSUE 98

◀ ONLINE ▶

EVERQUEST



EverQuest keeps going from strength to strength and now has a total of four expansion packs. The latest, *Planes Of Power* (see page 72 for our full review), 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 of thousands of people the world over.

PUB Ubi Soft DEV Verant

PCZ ISSUE 117



NEOCRON

A much smaller world than the epic *EverQuest*, but there's a lot crammed into this *Matrix* meets *Blade Runner*-style MMORPG. The atmosphere is fresh, exciting and extremely engrossing. We see big things ahead for *Neocron*.

PUB CDV DEV Reaktor

PCZ ISSUE 124



ANARCHY ONLINE

A beautiful MMORPG 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



DARK AGE OF CAMELOT

With some of the best graphics seen in an MMORPG, *Dark Age Of Camelot* creates an atmospheric, engaging and open-ended world. The scale of battles alone should ensure it remains popular for quite a while.

PUB Koch Media DEV Mythic Entertainment

PCZ ISSUE 116



ASHERON'S CALL

You can now find the full game of *Asheron's Call* included in the latest expansion pack *Dark Majesty* at a very generous price. The newest updates also include customisable housing and plenty of new quests.

PUB Microsoft DEV Turbine

PCZ ISSUE 111

◀ DRIVING GAMES ▶

GRAND THEFT AUTO III



It may have taken its time getting onto the PC, but *Grand Theft Auto III* was definitely worth the wait. Offering you both traditional linear missions and a wonderfully freeform world ripe for exploring, the game boasts stunning graphics and superb attention to detail. It's a great spin on both the driving and shooting genres and we can assure you that you'll love this noisy orgy of violence and speed. Crime really does pay.

PUB Take 2 DEV Rockstar

PCZ ISSUE 117



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 Infogrames DEV Simergy

PCZ ISSUE 119



COLIN MCRAE 2.0

This is still the benchmark rally title and looks set to remain so until *Colin McRae 3.0* appears. The graphics are fantastic, the detail is overwhelming and the cars handle beautifully. So if you are on the look-out for the definitive rally game, this is it.

PUB Codemasters DEV Codemasters

PCZ ISSUE 110



CRAZY TAXI

One of the best arcade conversions to the PC that we've seen for a long time. *Crazy Taxi* is a bright, colourful and in-er-face driving experience that's built on solid arcade values and good old-fashioned insanity.

PUB Empire Interactive DEV Hitmaker/Strangelite

PCZ ISSUE 119



MIDTOWN MADNESS 2

Buckle up for some high-speed action as you race around London and San Francisco. The original *MM* was a better, but with improved cars, races and controls, this is even better. We reckon it's the definitive arcade racer.

PUB Microsoft DEV Angel Studios

PCZ ISSUE 96

◀ FLIGHT SIMS ▶

IL-2 STURMOVIK



Combining incredible atmosphere, sound and visuals with possibly the most realistic flight model to date, *IL-2* puts you behind the flight stick of a number of stunningly reproduced WWII combat planes. The attention to detail is breathtaking and the easy-to-use editor allows endless months of replayability. A must-have for any real combat flight sim fanatic.

PUB Ubi Soft **DEV** 1C; Maddox Games

PCZ ISSUE 110

MS FLIGHT SIM 2002

With more polish than previous versions, this professional edition offers players more planes, extra flight loggings and improved graphics. It might not be able to teach you how to fly, but it's the closest you'll get without paying for lessons.

PUB Microsoft **DEV** BAO

PCZ ISSUE 111

BATTLE OF BRITAIN

Allow yourself to be immersed in one of the most exciting and realistic combat flight sims around. The action is non-stop, the skies are crowded and the flight models actually feel 'right'. Tally ho!

PUB Empire Interactive **DEV** Rowan Software

PCZ ISSUE 103

FALCON 4

We waited patiently for years for this title to arrive, and the good news is that, for once, we weren't disappointed. *Falcon 4* features incredible 3D-accelerated graphics and a dynamic campaign structure.

PUB Infogrames **DEV** Microprose

PCZ ISSUE 72

B-17: THE MIGHTY 8TH

B-17 reproduces the experience of piloting a World War II bomber. Just about everything is covered, from planning missions to dropping bombs. A must for WWII and realism freaks everywhere.

PUB Infogrames **DEV** Wayward Simulations

PCZ ISSUE 96

◀ 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

GHOST RECON

A superb squad-based shooter, which masterfully combines tactics and action. The levels range from wide-open landscapes to claustrophobic city streets, in what is a stunning evocation of special forces warfare.

PUB Ubi Soft **DEV** Red Storm Entertainment

PCZ ISSUE 110

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

◀ ALL-TIME CLASSICS ▶

FORMER DOOM CHAMPION DAVID MCCANDLESS RECALLS HIS TOP TEN GAMING GREATS



HALF-LIFE (PC)

Half-Life proved that when everything is in harmony (concept, visuals, design, style, story, mystery, tension and character), a computer game can be as immersive and as compelling as any film. You really feel like Gordon Freeman fighting his way through a B-movie alien invasion plot. Bit of a saggy ending, but still hasn't been bettered.

DOOM (PC)

Doom changed everything. Although graphically something of a Spectrum-game by today's standards, the groans of space zombies, clanking lifts, and the soft whump of the rocket launcher still echo in my mind. Playing the first episode is the gaming equivalent of *Friends Reunited* – all your old pals are there waiting for their shotgun in the face. Pure nostalgia.

COUNTER-STRIKE (PC)

The best multiplayer game ever, thanks to its realism, attention to detail, genius levels and steep learning curve. Like real soldiering, it takes devotion and practice to even become competent. Each weapon is a skill unto itself. Team work is essential. The online scene is now decimated by cheats, cheaters and paranoid non-cheaters. I miss playing it.

JEDI KNIGHT II: OUTCAST (PC)

Underrated shooter with a slow start. Once it kicks in though it's pure *Star Wars* – force powers, duelling with lightsabres, mind-tricking storm troopers. It's as close to being a Jedi Knight as you're going to get from the comfort of your swing chair (after playing I sometimes felt I could force-leap buses and force-pull out-of-reach remote controls with my mind).

ULTIMA UNDERWORLD (PC)

After all these years, I still remember the excitement of playing this dungeon romp. Its huge labyrinthine levels, advanced magical rune system, and difficult puzzles made you feel like you were grappling with the unknown. Encounters with funny, well-written characters (lispng elves, cantankerous dwarves) lightened the load. Why don't they make another one?

SUPER TENNIS (SUPER NINTENDO)

The subtlety of this game was incredible. Backspin, smashes, lobs, and devilishly curving serves – all accessible from a lowly jypad. In true Japanese style your opponents were fiendish bastards. If you beat them all, you got to play this secret ninja guy on an island – he was unbeatable. Pure Day-Glo fun.

DUNGEON MASTER (ATARI ST)

Hours gleefully killing monsters by slamming doors on them, saving your game on floppies, painstaking hand-drawn maps on graph paper, pissing your pants when a skeleton looms out of the dark, hours of inventory management, carrying the bones of your dead comrades to reincarnation points, I could go on... Dungeon exploration at its purest.

MANIC MINER (SPECTRUM)

This game evokes the long-gone dawn of home-computing where one guy, a Spectrum and some drugs could result in a uniquely surreal, fantastically playable gaming experience. *Manic Miner* is a labour of love, a trip through one man's imagination, unsullied by marketing, commercial interests, or the 3D willy-waving that dogs games development these days. Genius.

STAR CONTROL 2 (PC)

This game had everything: a sweeping galactic storyline, space exploration, resource management, combat, diplomacy, weird alien characters, plot twists, and 'melee' – one of the simplest and best two-player games ever. Brilliantly written and very funny – better than most sci-fi you'll find on TV.

RESIDENT EVIL 2 (PLAYSTATION)

Still the definitive zombie franchise. Your dog could solve the puzzles, but the atmosphere, maddening camera angles, and the sickening horror drags you in. Plus there's some great gore: people shot in half, dismemberment, fluids splattered across floor tiles, offal fireworks etc. I played this for 24 hours straight. No sleeping. When was the last time you did that?



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RETRO ZONE

YOUR REGULAR DOSE OF GAMING NOSTALGIA

"With *R-Type*, Irem created what is widely regarded as the finest shoot 'em up ever made"



Without power-ups, you would never stand a chance.

**RETRO
ZONE**

**SEPTEMBER
1987**

**Tay-tay, tay-tay,
ta-ta ta-tay tay
tay tay... *Richie
Shoemaker* ain't
never gonna be
respectable**

R-TYPE

Was this the greatest shooter ever made?

AFTER SEVEN years of *Scramble*, *Defender*, *1942*, *Uridium* and countless insipid clones of each, you would've thought that there wasn't much further game developers could stretch the simple idea of the 2D scrolling

shooter, where all that was required of you was to move left or right, up and down while pressing the button quicker than the human hand was designed to work. However, with 1987's favourite coin-op *R-Type*, Irem did go further,

creating what is widely regarded as the finest shoot 'em up ever, certainly when it comes to alien blasting of the scrolling variety. (*Nemesis* fans may disagree.)

Of course, by the time *R-Type* arrived, the concept of waves of aliens flying the

same path had been done to death. So too had power-ups. What was different was the scale and speed of the graphics (thanks to new 16-bit technology): huge bio-mechanical end-of-level titans that filled the screen; Giger-esque barnacles that swatted you from the sky and swarms of enemy craft, which were predictable, but moved at the speed of light. Then there was your force pod, which you could attach to your ship, or launch to take out the most inaccessible of enemies. Brilliant stuff.

Unfortunately the sequels have been of varying quality. *R-Type II* was even more difficult than the original and was little more than an upgrade. Since then the two games have been remixed and reedited for successive consoles, with a 3D sequel, *R-Type Delta*, finally arriving in 1999. Sadly the world had moved on to bigger and better things.



It looked great then. It looks great now.



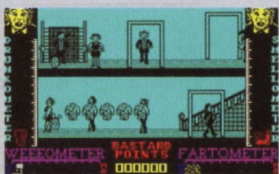
The finest shoot 'em up ever made?

THE BEST OF THE REST



GUNSHIP (PC, C64, Spectrum)

Spectrum owners may remember *Tomahawk* or even *Combat Lynx*, but the best helicopter sim of the '80s was this early collaboration between Sid 'Civ' Meier and Andy Hollis (the *F-15* series and *Longbow 2*). *Gunship* featured high-tech weapons, campaigns set across the globe and a realistic yet playable interface and controls. It set the standard for all the military sims that followed.



HOW TO BE A COMPLETE BASTARD

(Spectrum, C64, Amstrad)
Playgrounds were filled with kids calling each other complete and utter bastards in the '80s and this title from Virgin, based on the Ade Edmondson book, was certainly different. With its split-screen view it had you at a party trying to get all the yuppie guests to leave, either by insulting them or by using objects or bodily odours. Great if you loved fart jokes.



DOUBLE DRAGON (Arcade)

It could've been just another beat 'em up where you must rescue your girl from a violent gang, but it wasn't. Taito's *Double Dragon* was computer violence taken to its fun-filled limits. Interactive backdrops, with barrels you could throw, walls to climb, rocks to pick up and manholes you could throw the enemy into after kneeling them in the clackers; it was satisfying and addictive.



WIZBALL

(C64, Spectrum, Amstrad)
We all remember *Sensible Soccer*, but prior to developing the greatest footy game ever, *Sensible* had a string of 8-bit hits. Perhaps the best was this arcade adventure in which you played a wizard who had to rid the world of colour-sapping aliens, using your teleporting wizball and sidekick cat to collect red, green blue droplets and restore *Wizworld* to its former glory.

NEWS

GAMING NEWS FROM SEPTEMBER 1987

- *Judge Death*, currently due to appear on PCs in 2003, was due to materialise on the Amstrad, C64 and Spectrum around this time. But he never quite made it. Luckily for more forgiving 2000AD readers, *Slaine The Barbarian* did.
- Publisher Mastertronic claimed it held 15 per cent of the UK game market. It said that since 1984 it had sold 12 million units. Publishers would kill for that sort of figure today, mind you, the games only cost £1.99 each.
- Though still popular, the Spectrum's days were numbered. The last in the Spectrum family, the +3, wasn't performing and the twilight years were beginning.



GAMES THAT CHANGED THE WORLD

ULTIMA ONLINE

Creating a game that's a classic in its genre is one thing, creating a game that heralds an entirely new genre is quite another. *Chris Anderson* looks back on the game that kick started the online role-playing revolution

PROFILE

One of the original superstars of the gaming world, Richard 'Lord British' Garriott founded Origin Systems 1982 and lives in his own custom-built mansion in Austin, Texas.



NAME Richard Garriott
ROLE ON ULTIMA ONLINE
Producer

NOW DOING *Tabula Rasa*, the next generation in MMORPGs

GAME *Ultima Online*

DEVELOPER Origin

RELEASED September 1997

INFLUENCED Virtually every MMORPG that followed it, including *EverQuest*, *Asheron's Call* and *Anarchy Online*



The combat is simplistic, but the game mechanics are deep and complex.

BELIEVE IT or not, there was a time when the term multiplayer was strictly related to one-on-one play over two PCs via a serial port, or a few people getting together over a local area network for a quick blast at *Doom*. While people were busy discovering the delights of shooting each other in the face in a *Doom* deathmatch over a LAN (mostly games journalists it has to be said), a company called Origin was busy working on something altogether more ambitious. The plan was to build a living, breathing world for players to live in virtually via the Internet.

The audacity Origin displayed in thinking it could actually create something that would be so good it would hold the interest of players over a period of years when most single-player games struggled to do it for more than a few days, was ever so slightly arrogant, not to mention wildly ambitious, but it still went for it all the same.

The man who conceived the idea and charged with making it all happen was Richard Garriott, creator of the *Ultima* series, one of the most engrossing and powerful role-playing series ever created.

It was never going to be easy, but Garriot's reasoning behind the creation of *Ultima Online* shows he was confident right from the start: "Since I began writing games in the '70s RPGs have always emulated the social, paper games like *Dungeons & Dragons* but solo player games were all that the technologies of the day were capable of supporting in a high-quality way. As the Internet became more popular, we knew our time had come. So in the mid '90s we began creating *Ultima Online* in earnest".

Their time had come indeed, and against all the odds, they succeeded and

created not only a game, but a whole new genre. This is how it happened...

RULE BRITANNIA

Perhaps the most difficult challenge in creating a game of this kind is developing an actual world for people to live in. This was no problem for Garriott, he already had a world. The world was called Britannia, and anyone who had played the *Ultima* games was already familiar with its many towns and dungeons. Branding was firmly on his side, and so was one of the most convincing game environments you could possibly imagine. The question from there was, what the hell do you do with it? The *Ultima* games were rich in terms of story, but a game like this called for complex interaction with items, buildings and

multiplayer heaven players originally envisaged. Garriott is the first to admit to the early problems: "An MMP is much bigger and has inherently more complicated code than a single-player game. Thus the code base needed to be better engineered than previous efforts. It was a lesson we learned the hard way, by not doing it right and shipping an unstable game. Lag issues plagued us until we rewrote a good deal of the server code, and I don't think we kept people very happy during the transition. They even held a drunken, naked brawl in Lord British's castle as a protest."

Despite all its teething problems, *Ultima Online* struggled through its first year and developed into a game that would change the way people thought about interactive entertainment forever.

"The game was in such a bad way when it was released, it's a wonder it ever survived its first year"

virtual people in the game world. It was to be no easy task, and Garriott was well aware of this, and let's be honest, anyone who was around at the end of beta for the 'official' release will readily testify that the game was in such a bad way when it was released, it's a wonder it ever survived its first year of existence. The gameworld was in place, NPC merchants were in their shops, the monsters were roaming Britannia, all the buildings and structures and towns you would expect from a virtual Britannia were present and correct, but the game itself was completely unplayable, with unstable code and nightmare lag combining to make Britannia more akin to hell than the

For those of you who have never experienced *Ultima Online* first-hand and are wondering what all the fuss was about, the following is a guide to just some of the many innovations inspired by what will always be remembered as the true pioneer of the online revolution.

THIS IS YOUR WORLD

The basic premise behind *UO*, as is the case with most RPG's, is to create a character and develop your skills while you explore a fantasy environment. *UO* went much further in the way it allowed you to advance your character, and in fact it even put single-player games to shame in the flexibility it gave you in this



Graphic splendour was never *UO*'s strength, as you can clearly see.

respect. You could use melee weapons and your melee skills developed accordingly, the same applied to schools of magic, but there were so many different areas in each category you could create a character that was entirely unique to you.

or even a fisherman or explorer, without ever once entering into combat.

Housing: as you explored the world and accumulated gold through either killing or selling your wares, eventually you would accrue sufficient capital to buy your own house. This was one of the major

"Ultima Online is still the only game that ever injected real fear into the people who played it"

Combat: you like it? Good. If you don't, no problem. *UO* still has the most impressive trade skill development trees in any online RPG, bar none. In many ways, even *EverQuest* is still embarrassingly shallow compared to *UO* in terms of character development and trade skill management and opportunities. Many people played this game as a blacksmith, or a tailor,

selling points of *UO*. It was even possible to buy your own castle eventually if you played the game long enough and got enough gold together, and of course, you could decorate your house as you saw fit.

Player versus player conflicts: *Ultima Online* is still the only game that ever injected real fear into the people who played it, and it came in the form of the ever present player-killers who prowled

dungeons and the outskirts of town looking for easy prey. It's impossible to describe the adrenaline rush you got when a known player killer entered your vicinity and you had to either run (which usually didn't get you very far) or defend yourself, knowing that if you lost the battle you would also lose your best weapons and armour to the player who killed you. Many of today's online titles have attempted to recreate the thrill of player versus player combat as experienced in *UO*. They have all failed.

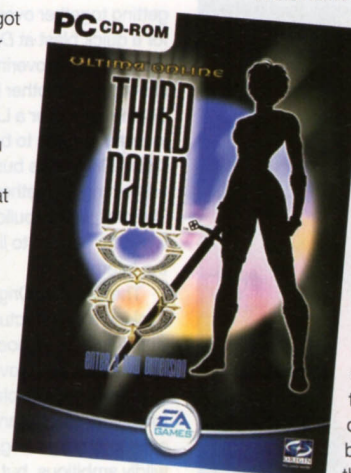
All these things combined to produce a game experience like no other, and while most people have moved on now to 3D online RPGs and left *UO* behind, it remains the most complex and comprehensive online game on the market.

THE NEXT CHAPTER

For all its innovations and revolutionary ideas, *Ultima Online* finally reached a point where it had to change in the name of commercialism. *EverQuest* arrived on the scene and offered a game environment where players could completely avoid player versus player combat if they chose the right server. A decision was made to implement safe continents in the *Ultima Online* gameworld, thus giving people a choice as to whether the many dangers and perils that normally lay waiting for them outside towns would pose a problem. For many people, this was the day *Ultima Online* died.

For all the whining cry babies who complained about being killed and having their things taken from them in a dungeon (after walking straight into the damn thing unprepared, like the idiots they were) there was a whole group of people, a thriving community who were relishing the player versus player conflicts, which for them were an integral part of making the world believable. There were role-players on both sides of the argument – blatant player killers who terrorised the innocent, and knights in shining armour who fought them in the name of justice and protecting

people as they travelled from town to town. It was a totally self-sufficient community where you had to keep your wits about you, or you paid the price. As time went by, more and more of *UO*'s content was geared towards non-PvP. The population count on the non-PvP *EverQuest* servers compared to the PvP servers told its own story, but nobody bothered to tell EA that this was largely due to the fact that PvP in *EverQuest* was very badly implemented and the PvP



The *Third Dawn* failed to convince people *UO* was now 3D, mainly because it wasn't.

THE FUTURE: ONLINE RPG WAR ON THE HORIZON

THE FUTURE LOOKS BRIGHT FOR ONLINE GAMERS

They're all coming: *EverQuest II*, *Planetside*, *Shadowbane*, *Star Wars Galaxies*, *Asheron's Call 2* (see review on page 76), the future has never looked brighter for those with a penchant for online role-playing malarkey. Who's going to win? Let's have a look then... *Star Wars*, ah yes, the name rings a bell. We think this one might do well somehow, though there is every danger it will be highly populated with geeky *Star Wars* losers. *EverQuest II*, let's be honest, can you really see how it can fail? *Planetside* will almost certainly cause a stir for those who like a bit of bite to their online shooting experience, and *Shadowbane* looks set in many ways to build on the foundations of *Ultima Online*'s PvP experience. As ever, we will be tearing them all apart one by one when they come in for review, pointing you in the direction of the best and laughing at the rest.



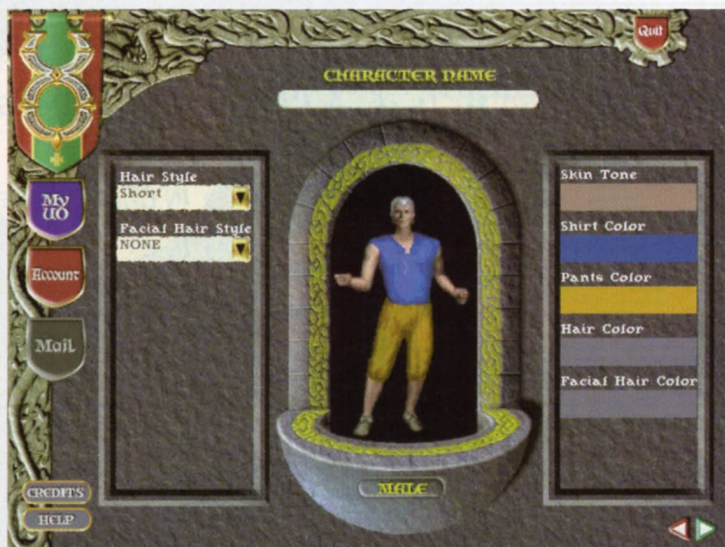
Star Wars Galaxies: this is the big one.

was in no way integrated with the normal game to make it feel a necessary part of creating a believable environment.

But the final nail in the coffin for *UO* was not the switch to player-friendly environments, it was the arrival of 3D, and along with it, the expectations of players went through the roof. *EverQuest* took full advantage of this.

THE GAME THAT NEVER WAS

The game that many *Ultima Online* players waited patiently for was the fabled *Ultima Online 2*. For a long time it looked like it was going to become a reality and, of course, it was going to be 3D. This was the title that was going to replace *UO* as the premier online title, and bring new



The first step, there's no turning back from here.

features and innovations to the genre, while at the same time retaining the original *UO* player base who could still play the original game on the old servers if they wanted to. It never happened. We don't know why, but Richard Garriott does: "After *UO* launched, we advised EA to build another property instead of moving forward with *UO2*. We felt *UO2* would need to have all the features of *UO1* and then some, and as *UO1* was growing it would be hard for *UO2* to beat it. EA insisted we do *UO2*, but late in the project EA cancelled it as they saw *UO2* was taking a long time and would cannibalise the *UO1* player base... Just as we said."

Whether or not *UO2* would have revived the *UO* franchise or killed it off completely we'll never know. However, we do know that irrespective of what comes after it, *Ultima Online* was the first truly original online RPG, and it still puts many

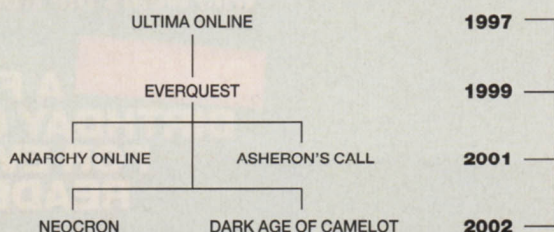
of its followers to shame. The sad thing is, despite the obvious influence *UO* has had in creating and shaping what is now a flourishing genre, the *UO* copycats failed to learn from some of its most important features. Take a look at the *EverQuest* tradeskill system and baffling time-sinks that force players to spend forever completing what should be simple tasks, *Anarchy Online*'s woeful PvP implementation, *Dark Age Of Camelot*'s insultingly simple approach to just about everything, *Neocron*'s mish-mash of class skills which puts it in serious danger of disappearing up its own arse in a desperate attempt to balance the game, all of these titles have evolved from *Ultima Online* in some shape or form, and all of them still manage to get the simple things completely wrong. *UO* got everything right. That's what made it a classic, and that is how a genre was born. [E]



And lo the demon did cast the slanty room spell and the mortals did tremble.

THE EVOLUTION OF A GENRE

WHERE *ULTIMA ONLINE* BEGAN, OTHERS WERE BOUND TO FOLLOW. THE GENRE, WHILE STILL IN ITS INFANCY, IS GROWING RAPIDLY



THE KING IS DEAD

PEOPLE ARE PEOPLE. GIVE THEM AN INCH AND...

One of the most memorable moments in *UO*'s long history actually came about before the game even went live. Lord British, the ever-present figurehead of the Britannia community, made one of his rare appearances in the game at the end of the beta period. Comedy ensued. Richard Garriott recalls: "When we were closing down the Beta, I was giving a speech in the game, when someone cast a firewall spell onto where we were standing. At first I ignored it as Lord British is usually immortal. But, I forgot to set the flag this time and so LB died! Our customer service people could not tell who cast it, so they unleashed dragons and demons on the whole crowd just for fun, as the service was about to be shut down in any case. Much mayhem ensued! Players did not think it was funny. But we did! How we laughed. Probably."



UO still has an extremely loyal following.

ULTIMA ONLINE: THE NEXT STEP

CAN AGE OF SHADOWS REKINDLE INTEREST IN *UO*?

Even as we write, the next expansion for *Ultima Online* is imminent. *Age Of Shadows* (watch for a full review soon) adds two new classes to the *UO* experience: paladin and necromancer, a new landmass, so newer players will finally have a small piece of land on which to place a house, and a custom house design tool so they can mess it about with it endlessly afterwards to make their 'dream abode'.



Age Of Shadows, the latest chapter in the *UO* saga.

REAR VIEW

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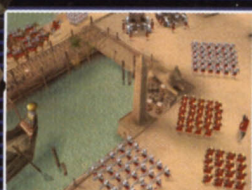
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SUPERTEST

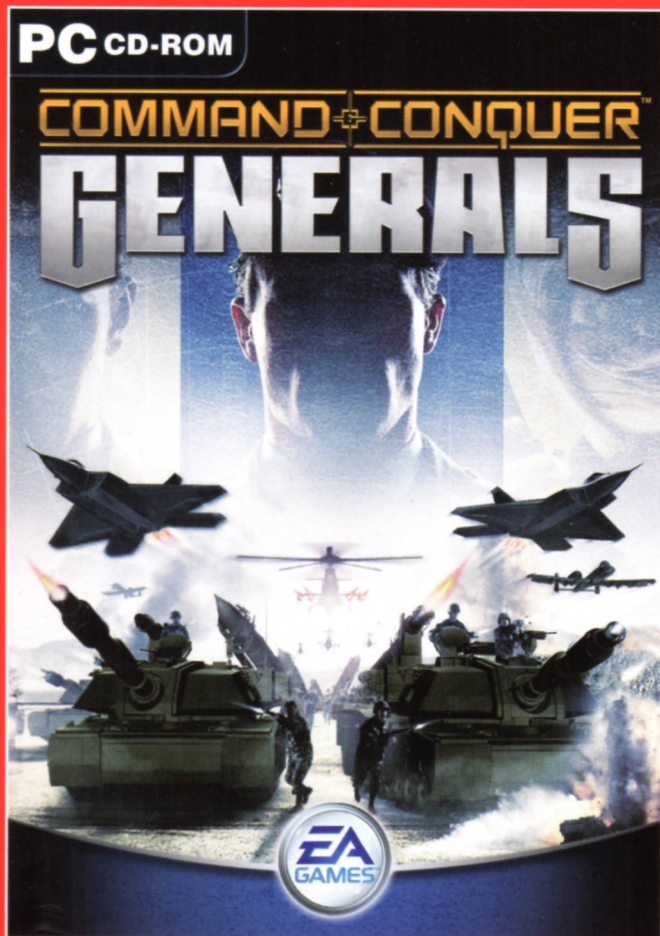
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