THE FIRST AND BEST FOR PC GAMES
ISSUE 137 JANUARY 2004 £5.99

PCZONE

WORLD EXCLUSIVE!

DOOM 3

The scariest game in the world is here!

DEFINITIVE REVIEW!

KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC

EXCLUSIVE!

DEUS EX INVISIBLE WAR

It's finished and we've played it – read our verdict inside!

2004 BLOWOUT! The biggest games you'll be playing next year

REVIEWED

CONTRACT J.A.C.K.
NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND
LORDS OF EVERQUEST
SECRET WEAPONS OVER NORMANDY
CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER: SEASON 03/04

PREVIEWED

FAR CRY
SAM & MAX: FREELANCE POLICE

TINY COMPO: Whose head appears on a spike in the secret ending of *Doom 2*?

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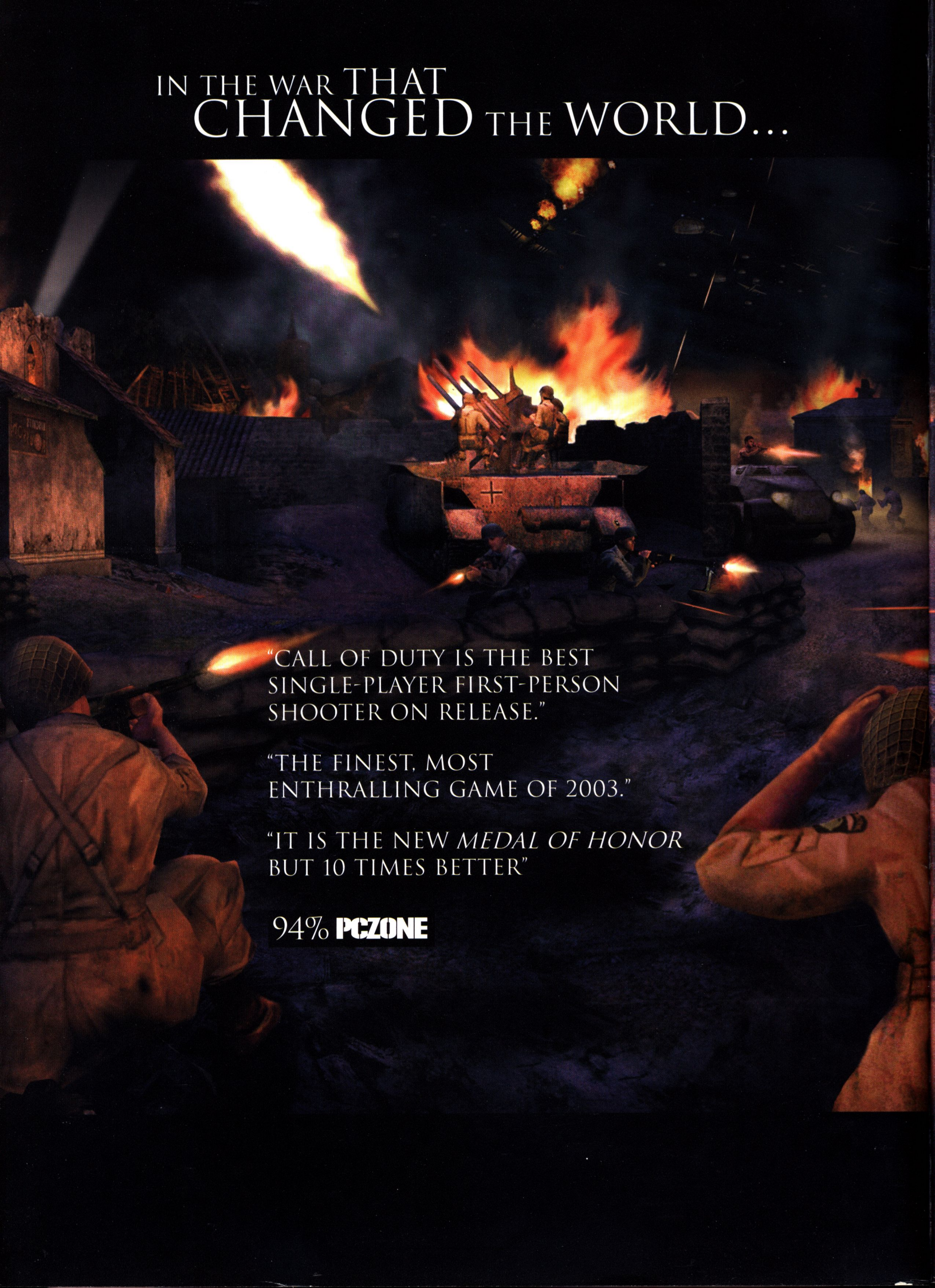
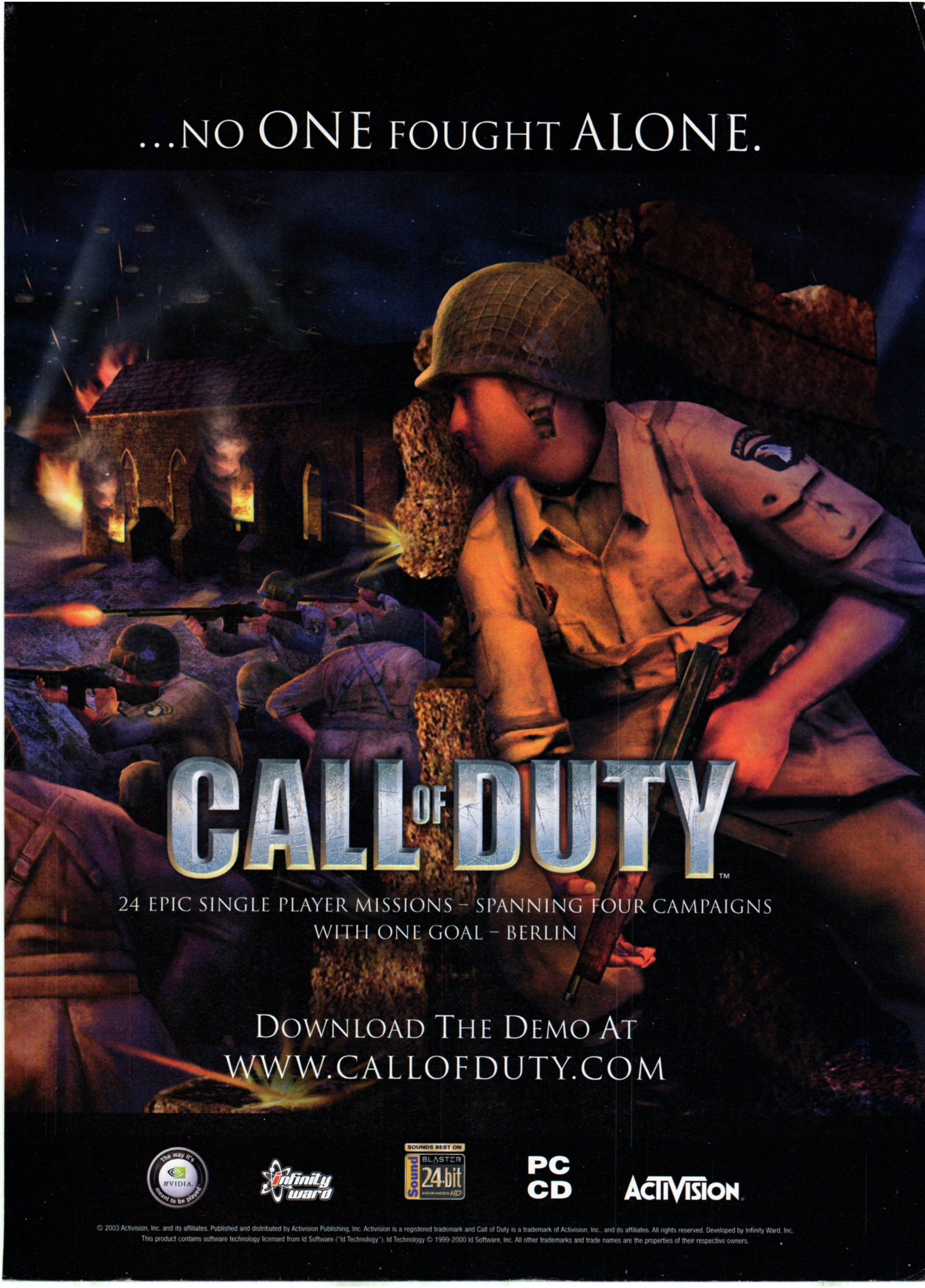

IN THE WAR THAT
CHANGED THE WORLD...
"CALL OF DUTY IS THE BEST SINGLE-PLAYER FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER ON RELEASE."
"THE FINEST, MOST ENTHRALLING GAME OF 2003."
"IT IS THE NEW MEDAL OF HONOR BUT 10 TIMES BETTER"
94% PCZONE



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DOOM 3 P36

Massive World Exclusive preview of the most stunning and terrifying shooter ever

Independents Day

Money makes the world go round, but does it actually improve things? Big business might benefit a select few, but with mega-budget games slipping into the ether and talented developers going bust, it makes you wonder whether it's working for games.

It wasn't always like this. The games I grew up on were coded by blokes in their bedrooms, sold in the shops and celebrated the world over. (Any tub-thumpers out there will be pleased to hear the best came from Britain, with the likes of *Manic Miner*, *Chuckie Egg* and *Gridrunner*.) Back then, the process of making a game was more about having an innovative idea than having the biggest wallet – and I'd fight anyone who says that those games weren't fun.

Today, technology is king and vast teams work on individual elements, with endless budgets and an end-product that very rarely makes any money anyway. It's not all bad – take a peek at the latest exclusive shots of *Doom 3* on page 36 for proof – but there are way too many games out there hiding behind the gloss of multi-million pound budgets.

But the bedroom coder isn't dead. Individuals and small independent teams are fighting back, creating an underground scene that's threatening to burst into the mainstream. We visited the recent Indie Games Con to bring you the evidence (page 26), and we've stuck the best of the games on our cover discs. If they inspire you, why not think of an idea yourself and send it to us. If it's any cop (or outrageously bad), we'll stick it in the mag as part of a regular feature we'll be kicking off over the next couple of months – see page 15 for details on how to enter.

Next month, we're following this up by bringing you a monthly look at the best free games in the world and we'll be putting these on our cover discs as well to make sure *PC ZONE* is the only magazine you need for games, big, small or in-between. Until then, have a brilliant Christmas, and an even better New Year. See you in 2004...

Dave Woods
Editor

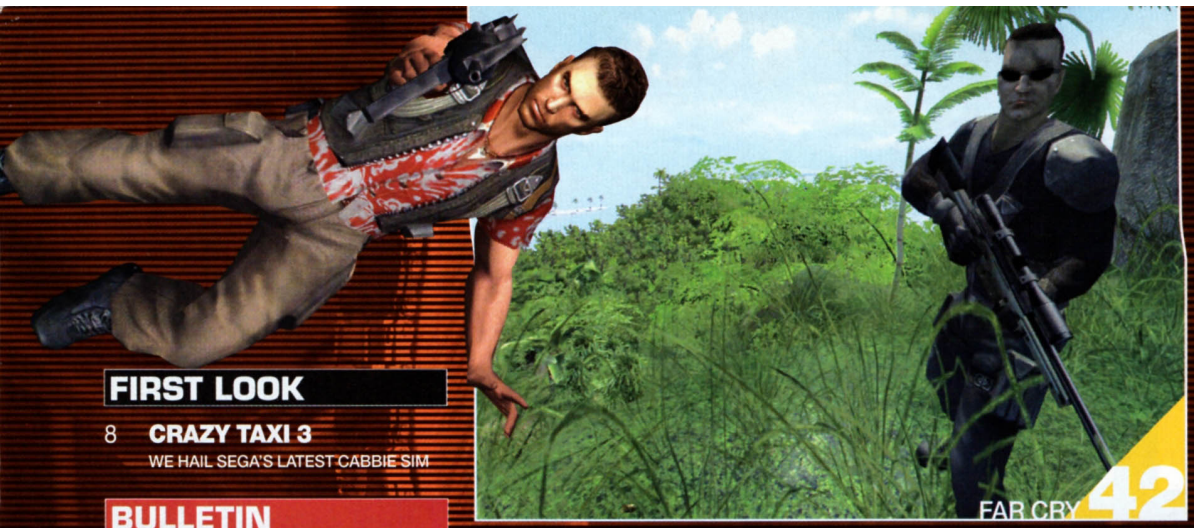
DEUS EX: INVISIBLE WAR P64

Better than sex? First review of the sequel to the greatest RPG ever

COVER DISCS P142

■ **EIGHT EXCLUSIVE DEMOS...**
Max Payne 2, *Contract J.A.C.K.* (Single-player), *Championship Manager: Season 03/04*, *Chrome* (Multiplayer), *The Temple Of Elemental Evil*, *V-Rally 3*, *Virtual Skipper 3* and *Uru: Ages Beyond Myst*. Plus, the morning after in *Call Of Duty*.

■ **DVD EXCLUSIVE**
FIVE demos exclusive to the DVD, including *Need For Speed Underground*, *UFO: Aftermath*, *Ford Racing 2*, *Kelly Slater Pro Surfer*, *Echelon: Wind Warriors*, plus incredible footage of *Doom 3* and *Deus Ex: Invisible War*.



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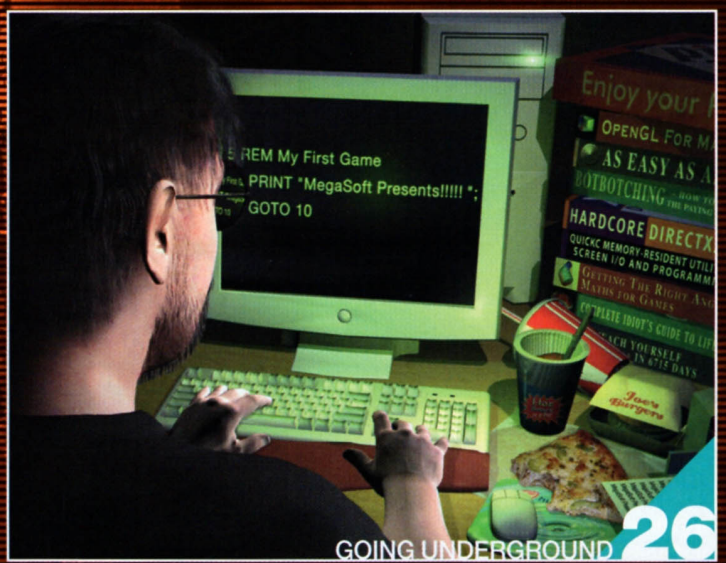

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WIN!

TINY COMPO Correctly answer this month's cover question and you could win some goodies. Send your entry on a postcard addressed to: Tiny Compo (137), *PC ZONE*, 9 Dallington Street, London EC1V 0BQ. The first entry with the correct answer plucked out of the hat wins a mystery prize. The editor's decision is final. Closing date: January 7th, 2003. The winner of our December cover (135) is M. Richmond, who knew that Ian McKellan plays Gandalf in the Lord of the Rings films. So right now he's an extremely happy bunny.

FIRST Look!

Like Robert De Niro, only happier

CRAZY TAXI 3: HIGH ROLLER

The return of the big yellow behemoth is upon us...

■ **LAVENDER CAR-FRESHENER** Will Porter

ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW

PUBLISHER Empire
DEVELOPER Sega/Strangelite
EXPECTED RELEASE DATE Q1 2004
WEBSITE www.empireinteractive.com

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- The third incarnation of the greatest arcade game of recent years
- Physically improbable taxi-jumping skills have been added
- Updated maps and graphics
- All new Vegas-style map to explore

THE ARCADE version of *Crazy Taxi* was so incredibly addictive that it sucked up a frightening amount of my hard-loaned cash, and indeed my social life, during my hazy student days. Six months later the equally good console-port was one of the Sega Dreamcast's saving graces. A perfunctory sequel followed it with an extra map and some kooky mini-games, and yet another 12 months passed before the PC version of the original lollopped into town to a muted fanfare: fun, but also dazed, confused and very much seen before.

Times must have changed, however, as instead of being third or fourth on the console-port food chain, we've now been boosted to second in the queue, receiving *Crazy Taxi 3: High Roller* from our bastard Xbox contemporaries. Effectively a polished compilation of the first two games – with an added Vegas-style map – if you've never scattered pedestrians in a huge yellow taxi to the sound of Dexter Holland of The Offspring shouting "Yeah! Yeah! Yeah!", then here's your golden chance.

"With flames spurting from your wheels, there's no doubt *High Roller* is a lot prettier than before"

PRETTY FLY

With flames spurting from your wheels, shiny bumpers and a modicum of motion-blur, there's no doubt that *High Roller* is a lot prettier than its predecessors. The changes, however, aren't entirely cosmetic. This time around, your car can jump over obstacles, finding loads of new short cuts in the process. It can also carry multiple passengers and discover whole new locations that have been crowbarred into existing maps, like the sudden construction of a funfair next to the baseball stadium on the West Coast level. Also added is a whole raft of mini-games to challenge your Crazy Drift and Crazy Hop skills when you're bored of hunting down punks who want to go to Pizza Hut. So you'll find yourself trying to jump higher, knock baseballs further, pop balloons faster and dislodge giant mirror-balls from disco ceilings for no reason.

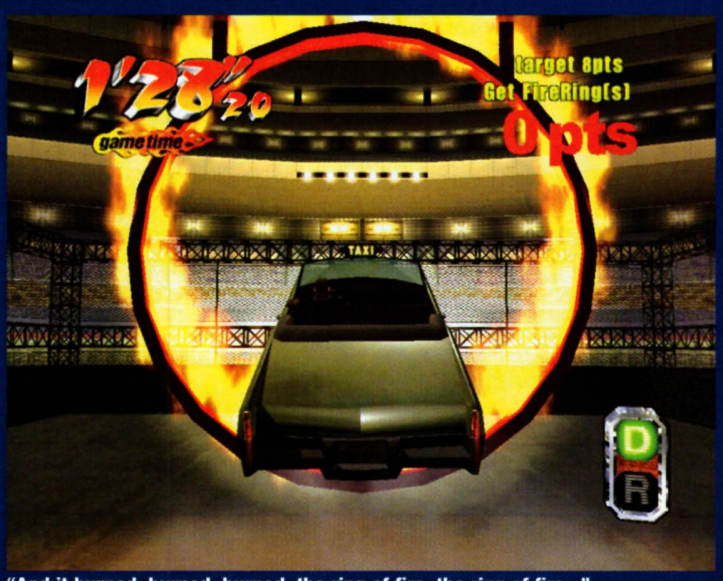
***Crazy Taxi 3* will enable you to jump higher than ever before.**

STRIP-SEARCH

The new neon-tinged Vegas map, Glitter Oasis, is easily the game's most welcome addition. With its casinos, fountains and pedestrian walkways, it's a superb place to earn your crust as a cabbie, while the lakes, canyons and hairpin turns of its surroundings make for some spectacular leaps and crashes. Elsewhere, the Small Apple level shows some *Taxi Driver* styling, although it's doubtful the game's engine will enable you to shoot off Harvey Keitel's fingers.

For us, however, *Crazy Taxi* will always be leaping over trams in the perfectly designed West Coast rush hour, and we can be thankful that this pleasure remains beautifully intact. It's true to say there's little territory in *Crazy Taxi* that hasn't already been covered by the *GTA* franchise, but its brand of energetic leap-in, leap-out arcade action has rarely been bettered on the PC. We're stroking our gamepads in anticipation. PCZ

Surely high-profile sportsmen can afford their own transport?



"And it burned, burned, burned, the ring of fire, the ring of fire..."

There are no pissed people who need taking home, so you won't be able to charge extra if one pukes on the backseat.

VEGAS BABY!
There are loads of recognisable Vegas locations and homages to famous hotels in the Glitter Oasis map. Strippers and Hispanics handing out call girl catalogues are thin on the ground, mind.

GRATUITY
Drive with style and skill while avoiding buses and your passengers will be compelled to throw tips at you.

CABBIES
There are four drivers to choose from in each city, each one with an individual car. That's 12 cars in total, fact fans!

PEDESTRIANS
In the Vegas map, you'll find boxers, showgirls and magicians waiting to shout at you for driving the wrong way.

FOUR'S COMPANY
If you fancy a challenge and a few extra tips, you can now pick up groups of up to four passengers.

ACCURIST
As usual, you can choose between either a set time limit, or rely on the extra seconds you get from picking up customers.

BULLETIN

TWO THOUSAND AND PHWOAR

ASSOCIATE EDITOR Jamie Sefton

2003, eh? I don't know about you, but I reckon it's been – excuse the bad language – a shitting good year for PC games. *Jedi Knight: Jedi Academy*, *Call Of Duty*, *Max Payne 2*, *Splinter Cell* and *Rise of Nations* are just some of the games we've been caning over the past 12 months. And all this to the grunts of approval from Martin Korda and the girlish whelps of delight from editor Woods.

However, now that *Half-Life 2* looks likely to slip into next year and with the small matter of our cover game *Doom 3* appearing on the radar, 2004 could be even better – especially when you consider *Rome: Total War*, *UT2004* and *Deus Ex: Invisible War* are all lined up too. Check out our huge 2004 preview feature on page 35.

In Bulletin this month, we have a real bonus for old-skool gaming fans in Emulation Zone, with the exclusive unearthing of a lost Nintendo game, *Super Mario Bros Special* – check out page 16 for all the juicy details.

We also have an exclusive interview with Warren Spector, where he confirms details for *Deus Ex 3* (page 11), along with the first images from the *Freedom Force* sequel (page 14) and promising sci-fi RTS/RPG *Restricted Area* (page 15). Plus, we have shots of Archer Maclean's *Pool Paradise* (page 15) and the latest on Ascaron's promising RPG/RTS hybrid *Sacred* (page 18).

All this, plus your regular faves including a Special Report on the new UK law that bans game back-ups (page 12), and The Man Who Knows (page 14).

Have a great Christmas, eat and drink until you're physically sick and I'll see you back here, same place, different year for the biggest and best PC games on the planet. Cheers!

DRIVE MY CAR

EXCLUSIVE! FIRST DETAILS ON WHAT PROMISES TO BE THE MOST AUTHENTIC RACING TITLE EVER, *GTR: THE ULTIMATE RACING GAME*

IN THE HIGH-OCTANE world of motor racing, Formula One gets the glamour, and rally driving gets the grit. Somewhere in between lurks the world of GT racing, a fully-fledged circuit with professional drivers, teams and sponsors. Often racing on the same tracks as their Grand Prix counterparts, the sport is nevertheless a world apart, contested by hard-living, hard-smoking drivers; think Steve McQueen rather than Jensen Button. Featuring heavily modified sports cars, there is speed, spills and even some overtaking.

PLAYING CATCH-UP

It's therefore something of surprise that it hasn't been fully exploited by the games industry. While we often have to physically wade through the piles of F1 and rally games littering the office, those representing GT racing are noticeably thin on the ground. So much so, that a bunch of enthusiasts developed a GT mod for EA's *F1 2002*.

Boasting the cars and tracks from the FIA GT series, it became something of a hit among the mod community and fans of GT racing. And it wasn't long before it came to the attention of some of the GT drivers, most significantly Henrik Roos, the three-time Swedish GT Champion and keen gamer. He was immediately impressed. In fact, he liked it so much, he bought the company. Sort of.

"Every aspect of the sport is being recreated in emphatic detail"

We caught up with Roos between qualifying stages for the final race of the FIA GT series at Monza, in Italy. Sat in his trailer, bedecked in leathers and sweat, he enthused over his first impressions of the GT mod: "I was really amazed, it's fantastic," he told us. "It started when a Swedish driver who raced online sent me an email saying that he'd found a picture of my car in the game. I didn't know about it, so I was very surprised and curious."

Each car's engine sound has been authentically sampled.

Contact was made with the developers, and eventually the current incarnation of what's known as SimBin was established, with the goal of making a commercial game. And despite SimBin's administration centre being based in Sweden, on the technical side it's a truly international outfit. Members of the team work from such far-flung places as Hungary, Italy, Holland, America, South Africa and Australia, with the operation headed by a guy in Bournemouth, of all places.

TRAILER TRASH

It's an unusual approach all-round though, due to the unprecedented access that the involvement of Henrik Roos Motorsports brings to the project. Every aspect of the sport is being recreated in emphatic detail, and the developers literally eat, breathe and sleep it.

"We sleep in this trailer with beds for the 3D animators," says Roos. "They're really a part of the racing team: they eat at the same time as the mechanics, they get feedback, they live it. Try to do that with Michael Schumacher – impossible!"

He's got a point. SimBin may be a bunch of chancers, but what they lack in experience, they make up for in contacts and confidence. As Roos says: "I'm confident we're going to release the best racing game ever." We'll be the judges of that – more news on *GTR: The Ultimate Racing Game* soon.

- **Publisher:** TBC
- **Developer:** SimBin
- **ETA:** Summer 2004
- **Website:** www.simbin.com

SPECIAL REPORT
New rule outlaws backups

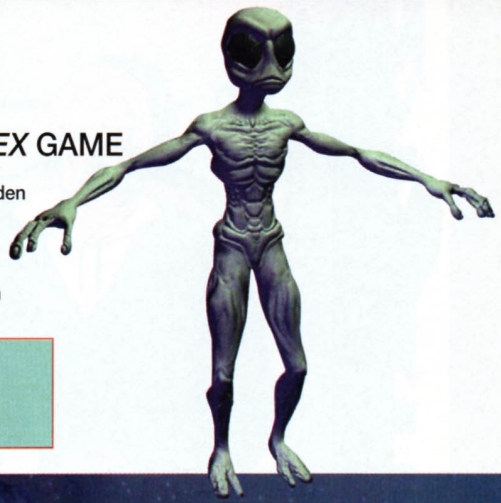
EMULATION ZONE
Super Mario Bros Special is here!

WIN PRO EVO 3!
Put the boot in this Christmas

PC ZONE CHARTS
Latest charts and release dates

DEUS EX 3 GLEE

EXCLUSIVE! WARREN SPECTOR REVEALS DETAILS OF THE NEXT *DEUS EX* GAME



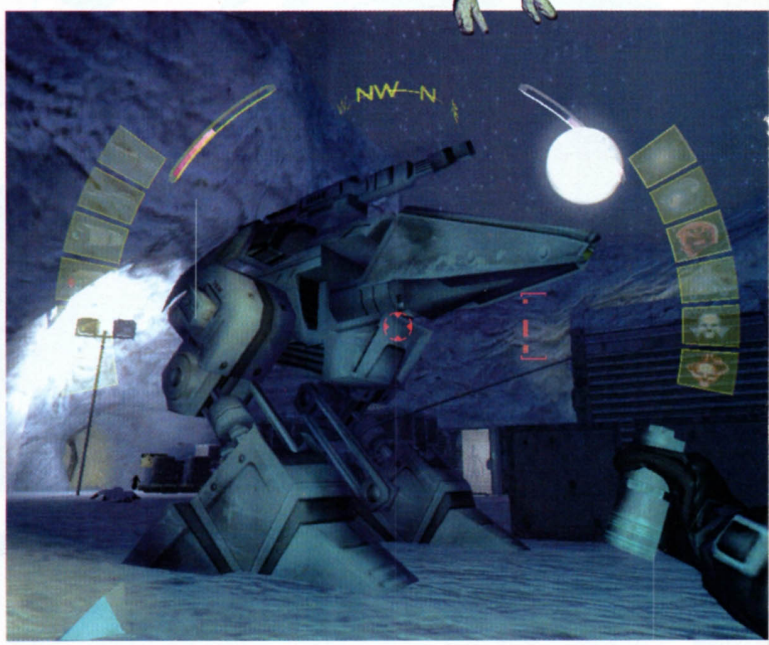
IT WAS FAIRLY inevitable that another *Deus Ex* game would be developed by Ion Storm. However, *PC ZONE* received firm confirmation of that recently, when we met studio director Warren Spector for the launch of the futuristic, first-person shooter adventure *Invisible War*.

"We've already started thinking about the third game in the series," Spector told us. "My problem right now, though, is that are two specific stories we need to tell in this universe. Obviously, the members of the community are going to come up with their own ideas, but there are at least two more stories that must be told with these characters, in this setting. As yet, though, I don't know which way to go."

Warren Spector went on to say that even several years of solid development on the second incarnation of *Deus Ex* hadn't dampened his enthusiasm for the conspiracy-ridden universe he and his Austin-based team conjured up: "We're not even close to burning out yet," he told us. We'll keep you updated on all breaking *Deus Ex* news.

- **Publisher:** Eidos
- **Developer:** Ion Storm
- **ETA:** TBA
- **Website:** www.deusex2.com

Check out our exclusive on *Deus Ex: Invisible War* in this issue.



***Invisible War* is only the second in a series of *Deus Ex* games planned.**

New Blood

SEXY NECK-BITING RETURNS IN THE THIRD-PERSON ACTION GAME *BLOODRAYNE 2*

More vampire bytes.

BLOODRAYNE IS SET for a return to bite the neck that feeds her in a sequel, due late next year. *BloodRayne 2* again features the gothic-looking vampire babe slashing, shooting and biting through various alive and undead enemies, this time in a modern-day city.

Majesco promises the new game will have more advanced and acrobatic melee combat with outrageous combos performed, bizarrely, with the aid of a drop-down menu. You'll also have more violent finishing moves and new powers such as Blood Storm to make mincemeat of anyone stupid enough to get within neck-puncturing distance of *BloodRayne*.

We'll bring you the first bloodthirsty screenshots as soon as we get them.

- **Publisher:** VU Games
- **Developer:** Majesco
- **ETA:** Q4 2004
- **Website:** www.bloodrayne2.com

You would.

BACKED INTO A CORNER

ACCORDING TO THE LAW, YOU'RE ALLOWED TO MAKE A BACKUP OF YOUR GAMES. SO WHY IS THERE A LAW AGAINST IT? *STUART CAMPBELL* INVESTIGATES...

SPECIAL REPORT

IF YOU WERE watching the news very closely last month, you still almost certainly won't have seen a story which could have some of the most dramatic implications ever for the software industry and its never-ending battle against piracy. Very, very quietly, the government passed The Copyright And Related Rights Regulations 2003 Act (hereafter referred to as the CRRRA), a series of amendments to the UK's copyright laws designed to bring us into line with the European Union Copyright Directive.

The EUCD itself was designed to be a European equivalent to the US Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA), the infamously draconian bill which has already led to a series of controversial prosecutions such as that of Dmitry Sklyarov, who is still subject to prosecution in the US – read more at www.freesklyarov.org/

Said bill also recently saw SunnComm threaten to sue student Alex Halderman for $10-million for revealing that its latest anti-CD copying technology could be circumvented by holding down the PC's Shift key while loading the disc up, hence disabling Autorun and preventing the anti-copying program from auto-installing. The company finally backed down on the threat after receiving a storm of ridicule in the media.

CRIME STORY

But we're more interested in how this is going to affect you, the average PC owner on the street. Because the bad news is that the EUCD is almost certainly going to make you a criminal.

Computer games users enjoy a special privilege under the existing Copyright Law. According to Section 50(A) of the 1988 Copyright, Designs and Patents Act. It states that legal purchasers of computer games are explicitly permitted to make a backup copy of their purchase.

Interestingly, the rule specifically applies to computer games. For no adequately explained reason, purchasers of music CDs or DVD movies are not granted the same rights to protect their investment. The only rational explanation we can come up with for this anomaly is first, that the law recognises computer software is more expensive in comparison to other leisure media; and second, the games industry is so fragile and hostile towards backwards-compatibility, that your chances of being able to obtain a legal replacement for a duff disc after anything more than a couple of years are so remote as to require legal remedy.

"The bad news is the European Union Copyright Directive is almost certainly going to make you a criminal"

CATCH 22

This section of the law has not been changed by the CRRRA. You're still entitled by UK law to make a backup copy of any piece of software you buy legally. Where things start to get interesting, though, is in Section 296Z of the new law. Section 296 makes it an offence to do anything at all which is designed to

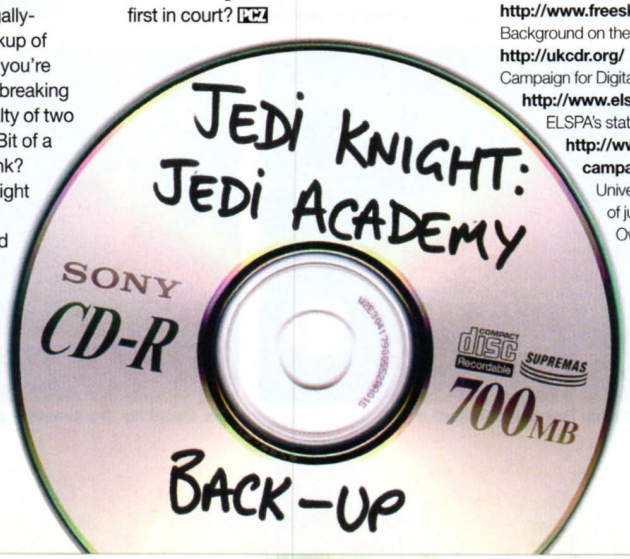
ILLUSTRATION Henry Obasi

circumvent any piece of copyright protection technology put in place by the manufacturers or distributors of any copyrighted work. This is a direct copy (ironically) of the section in the US DMCA, under which the prosecutions of Sklyarov, Halderman and others were possible.

To put it bluntly, what it means is that if a disc has some form of anti-copy protection, it's a criminal offence to either circumvent that protection yourself, or to give anyone else any device or piece of information which will enable them to do so. So, if you exercise your legally-enshrined right to make a backup of your legally-purchased game, you're automatically and necessarily breaking the law, with a maximum penalty of two years imprisonment. Hmmm. Bit of a mixed message, don't you think?

Now, lesser publications might be content to highlight this glaring contradiction in law and leave it at that, were they alert enough to have noticed it in the first place. But not us.

We've examined the evidence and come to the only logical conclusion, which is: under the new UK copyright laws, any software publisher who implements any form of copy protection on its discs will be breaking the law. Because it's an offence, obviously, to deprive the consumer of any right which is explicitly granted to them in law. And if you implement copy protection which there is no legal way to circumvent (which, thanks to the CRRRA, there now isn't), then you are, obviously, depriving the consumer of the opportunity to exercise their legally-enshrined right to a backup. Which is illegal. So, who wants to be the first in court? PCZ



CAN YOU SURVIVE WITHOUT A BACKUP?

ARE WE MAKING A FUSS ABOUT NOTHING? IS IT THAT ESSENTIAL TO HAVE A BACKUP? READ ON...

So, the 64-million dollar question: do you really need a backup? The industry line, in a nutshell, is: "If your disc goes wrong, we'll supply you with a new one, therefore there's no need for you to make your own backup and the law does not apply." There are, however, two extremely obvious flaws in this policy.

First, if you look in the back of any game manual, you'll either find no information on what to do with a corrupted disc, or an instruction to send it back with a fee to cover handling – in most cases this will be between £7-£10. EA backed down on this charge after a series of complaints about the state of *Battlefield 1942* discs – detailed in recent issues – but in almost all cases with virtually all publishers, you'll still be charged.

Second, there's the issue of replacements. If you've ever tried to buy a copy of an older PC game (say, more than three years), you'll be familiar with the near-impossibility of the task. Half the time, the publisher won't even be in business anymore.

The fact is, as the Entertainment and Leisure Software Publishing Association (ELSPA) was keen to point out during last year's FairPlay campaign for lower game prices, when you buy a computer game, you're buying a licence to play the game code – and that licence is for life. You are, therefore, entitled by law to protect that right by ensuring the safety of the code, regardless of whether the publisher can be relied on to help you or not. And since it's no good waiting until the disc gets corrupted and then making a backup, you have to make the backup first.

LINKS

http://www.patent.gov.uk/copy/notices/2003/copy_direct3.htm
Details of the changes to copyright laws.
http://www.theregister.co.uk/content/6/33322.html
The story of SunnComm vs. Halderman.
http://www.freesklyarov.org/
Background on the case of Dmitry Sklyarov.
http://ukcdr.org/
Campaign for Digital Rights.
http://www.elspa.com/consumer/faqs.asp
ELSPA's statement on backup law.
http://www.fairplay-campaign.co.uk/esler.pdf
University of Hertfordshire's analysis of judgement in the Sony vs. Owens (2002) case.

BROKEN SWORD
THE SLEEPING DRAGON

Do you have the right equipment to keep up with him?

The way it's meant to be played
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THE MAN WHO KNOWS

BOFFINS IN HOLLAND have discovered that playing **computer games** at work makes employees blissfully **happy** and highly **efficient**. Those who don't play were found to be **slothful**, sullen and **unreliable**, often forgoing work in favour of a **mournful** day in their **fetid** beds, cursing the day they were born. Scientists from the **University of Utrecht** experimented on **60** office workers from a Dutch **insurance firm**, with some allowed to play simple **Windows** games such as ***Solitaire*** and ***Minesweeper***, and a control group barred from any such activity. Research leader **Professor Jeffrey Goldstein** bragged: "We told them they were allowed to play games for up to one hour a day for the next month, and could choose when they wanted to play." After the gamers and non-gamers were **forced** to log their reaction to the experiment in terms of personal **productivity** and **hatred** of their job, Goldstein claimed: "The groups that played games showed improvement on both of these measures." The **egghead** also made a caffeine-related correlation, whispering: "I compare games with a coffee break. If you're like me, you use them in strategic, functional, useful way." The **madcap** scientist is planning further experiments using more complicated games that involve **strategy** decisions or **role-playing**. Goldstein speculated: "I can imagine different games would have different effects. If you made a competitive league table, for example, and your business was competitive, like sales, you might want to increase competition in this way." ***Counter-Strike*** it is then.

The maker of the ***Resident Evil*** film has chosen an ambitious title for its latest **game-to-movie** conversion. Independent **German** producer and distributor **Constantin Film** has announced that work is to begin on a **silver screen** adaptation of none other than **moribund** driving game ***London Racer***, known in Germany as ***Autobahn Raser***.

Sales and marketing director of Davilex Games, **Hans Lange** cheered: "*Autobahn Raser* has grown into one of the most popular casual games available. It incorporates breaking the rules, local recognisability and plenty of humour. The cult game also enjoys huge following in the German-speaking countries." Hold the Oscars, we say.

"Those who didn't play games were slothful, sullen and unreliable"

Heroes vs. Hitler

IRRATIONAL COOKS UP NAZI-BASHING *FREEDOM FORCE* PREQUEL

"NAZIS, I HATE these guys," mutters Ken Levine, the gaming god behind such gems as *System Shock 2*. And to show what a force for good he is, Ken's come up with the idea for *Freedom Force vs. The Third Reich* – the sequel to 2003's superhero team-based RPG jaunt.

With a WWII setting, the golden age of 1940s square-jawed comic book heroes to draw on and a thoroughly evil force to battle, the game is starting to look very interesting indeed.

"We've built tons of new content," says Ken. "Dozens of new heroes, villains, civilians and vehicles – you name it. We've dedicated a pile of resources to making multiplayer sing. We've also incorporated a skirmish mode, and we're working heavily on the team-mate AI, so they'll behave realistically in combat."

So expect cackling Nazi Generals, mad scientists and a multitude of Aryan doombringers. We're buying some new spandex tights in fevered anticipation.

- **Publisher:** TBA
- **Developer:** Irrational Games
- **ETA:** 2005
- **Website:** www.irrationalgames.com

The Man in the Leisure Suit

REJOICE! *LEISURE SUIT LARRY* IS BACK IN HIS FIRST 3D ADVENTURE, *MAGNA CUM LAUDE*

ON THE DVD **FORGET *SAM*** *& Max: Freelance Police*! Don't even think about *Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon*! Yes, *Leisure Suit Larry* is back in a brand new adventure! And yes. We're being sarcastic.

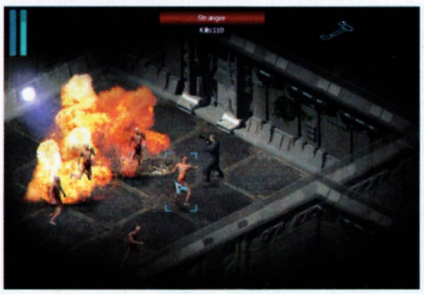
The previous seven *Leisure Suit Larry* games, dating back to the 1980s were risible, seedy affairs, involving Larry trying to chat up various girls in the hope of getting a shag. As you may have gathered, we're not exactly talking about cutting-edge *Deus Ex*-style gameplay here, but the various titles have remarkably sold millions over the past 15 years.

Which brings us to the latest adventure – *Magna Cum Laude* – revamped in full 21st century 3D by developer High Voltage, and starring Larry chasing tail again, this time around a college campus – with hilarious results… We can't wait – more *Larry* news soon.

- **Publisher:** VU Games
- **Developer:** High Voltage
- **ETA:** Q4 2004
- **Website:** www.vugames.com

Larry describes his tadpole hobby to a girl...

This could be the greatest game ever. EVER.



Light alien farts for extra points.

You'll be able to flick between your armaments as you would in an FPS.

NO TRESPASSING

BLADE RUNNER MEETS *FALLOUT* IN MASTER CREATING'S *RESTRICTED AREA*

RESTRICTED AREA is a forthcoming action-heavy German RPG set in cut-and-paste sci-fi future no.34: the environment is buggered, giant corporation-led megacities have forced a downtrodden public into joyless servitude, mutants are roaming contaminated wasteland and everyone has developed a strange taste for neon lighting.

What makes the game stand out slightly from the RPG crowd is the way in which each of your four playable characters (a corporation-hating warrior, a woman with incredible psionic mind powers, a disgraced son of a Yakuza boss and a female hacker) make their way through the game independent of the player. So, if you play as a character who, for example, is caught trying to steal something, then you'll have to sit in a cell until one of the other characters rescues you. If, on the other hand, you're playing the other character, then it'll be up to you to go in all guns blazing and rescue your dimwit jailbird friend.

Your scuffles will be guided by all the normal character points malarkey, but this time around your quick reactions and FPS-style strafing will also play a vital part in blasting your genetically-enhanced foes. Meanwhile, details of a co-operative multiplayer mode, multiple endings and unlimited computer generated sub-quests are another string to what is quite a promising bow. Look out for the playable demo of *Restricted Area* next issue.

- **Publisher:** 4am Entertainment
- **Developer:** Master Creating
- **ETA:** April 2004
- **Website:** www.4amgames.com

Search For a Game

WANTED! Your PC game ideas!

DOOM 3? *MAX PAYNE 2*? THINK YOU CAN DO BETTER?

"IT'S *GTA* MEETS *VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE*!" No, no, I've got it. "Think *Morrowind*... In the animal kingdom!" No, no: how about: "A little bit *EverQuest*, a little bit *Tomb Raider*!"

Think you can do better? Got a great idea for a game? Want to beat Lionhead, Monolith or Valve at their own game? If you've got the PC gaming pitch to end all PC gaming pitches, then *PC ZONE* wants to hear from you!

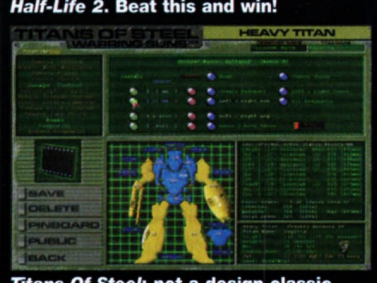
We're looking for your game ideas summed up in a one-line pitch, like those above, and then expanded across no more than 300 words. Your PC game concept can be serious, off-beat, disturbing or just plain stupid, with illustrations, diagrams and mocked-up screenshots welcome, but not absolutely essential.

We can't promise tons of cash, rewarding careers at leading development studios or a Ferrari in every garage. Sorry about that. But what we can promise is that you'll feature in a new section starting soon in *PC ZONE*, becoming the envy of all your friends, along with a great prize for any idea we praise/slag off mercilessly.

So get rummaging around your brain. What better way to start the New Year than with a bit of fame?

Send your ideas to: Search For A Game, *PC ZONE*, 9 Dallington Street, London EC1V 0BQ.

***Half-Life 2*. Beat this and win!**

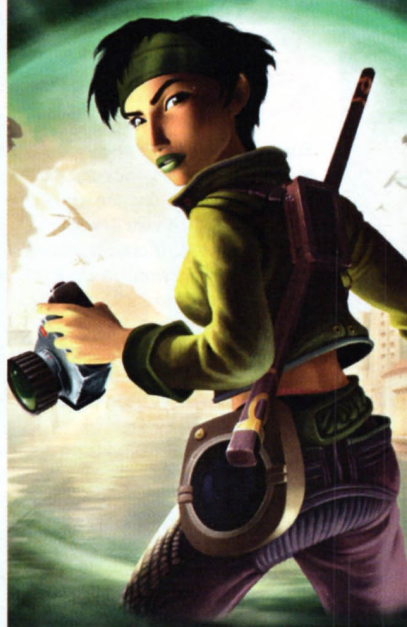


***Titans Of Steel*: not a design classic.**

BEYOND GOOD & EVIL

She has the right equipment to play this game.

Do you?



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EMULATION ZONE

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

HYPER EXCITING SPECIAL INVESTIGATION!

YOU'LL HAVE to forgive Emu Zone if this month's column is a little disjointed, because your intrepid reporter has spent the whole time wading through websites where all the text looks like this: â‰ï,â,Á,Ä,é,Ì,Í,±,±,¸,è,©,È_H 'á'Ì'ê_T_Ô,É¯ê‰ñ (that's a direct cut'n'paste quote, folks). And because of this, his brain appears to be a little broken.

Excitingly, though, it's all been worth it, because this month Emulation Zone is proud to present its beloved readers with something a little bit special – a lost but excellent world. So now is the time to rejoice – no longer need you wander the virtual streets of Japanese computing as a clueless and befuddled tourist. Now is the time to take a leap of faith and clasp our hand tight while we make the merest of scratches on the surface of Nippon computing for you and see what we can reveal.

LINKS

www.jcec.co.uk/index.html – The Japanese Computer Emulation Centre. Lots of info, emulators and necessary system ROMs

"No longer need you wander the virtual streets of Japanese computing as a clueless tourist"

Super Mario Bros game. But we'll get to that in a moment. First, let me tell you the thrilling backstory. Are you sitting comfortably? Then we'll begin.

One of the most obscure corners of the zany, lovable world of emulation is the one devoted to Japanese home computers. For obvious reasons, the Japanese don't tend to be very fond of computers as a leisure device, so the country has always been the world's biggest console stronghold. Nevertheless, there have been Japanese computers, and where there are computers, people will play games. So, throughout the 1980s and 1990s, a whole gaming subculture grew up around machines like the Sharp X-1, the FM Towns and the NEC PC-80 series. And where there's a gaming subculture, you can be sure there'll also be some emulator authors.

INTO THE GREAT UNKNOWN

The emulation of Japanese home computers, though, is a daunting world for us Westerners. This is because the vast majority of the emulators are written in Japanese, with Japanese options and menus, Japanese documentation and Japanese home pages. And since the emus themselves, being of computers, are rather more complex to use than console emulators, your chances of being able to get them working without a pretty comprehensive knowledge of Kanji are slim to none. This might explain the dearth of information about both the machines and some of the weird and wonderful games they can play.

Thank heavens, then, praise be, for the Japanese Computer Emulation Centre – a sparse and basic website which offers just enough of a sliver of information to tip the balance and enable the English-reading gamer to get a foot in the door of this very strange

HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

SMALL, BUT PERFECTLY FORMED

The earliest Japanese micro to boast any noteworthy gaming was the PC-6001 from NEC (the same people who'd later bring us the PC Engine). This also got an unsuccessful US release as the NEC Trek. Arriving in 1981 (while we were all still impressed with the black-and-white, mute 1K Sinclair ZX81), the Trek offered colour graphics, 16K of memory and impressive sound facilities. Namco welcomed the machine with a special version of its arcade hit *Xevious*, charmingly entitled *Tiny Xevious*.

Nearly a proper keyboard!

Aww. Isn't it cute?

EMUS

A couple of PC6001 emulators are available, but the easiest to use is Virtual NEC Trek, which you can download from www.geocities.com/emucompboy/

THE STRANGE STORY OF NEMESIS 90

IF AT FIRST YOU DON'T SUCCEED – RELEASE AN UNOFFICIAL VERSION...

Konami's *Nemesis* series of games (known as *Gradius* outside Europe) contains one of the most twisted and confused videogaming bloodlines this side of *Bubble Bobble* (and there's an entire Emulation Zone to be written about that one day soon). And while there have been around 20 identifiably different games in the series, the imminent latest incarnation for PS2 is numbered just *Gradius 5*.

One of the series' many detours along the way came via the MSX line of computers (which were released worldwide but flopped outside Japan), where a port of the original arcade game was followed by two sequels, both exclusive to the format. 1987's *Nemesis 2* was a particularly fine effort, stretching the machine to its limits. It was clearly a shame to limit its audience to the small number of non-Japanese people who ever bought an MSX.

So, in 1990, Konami decided to extend the game's reach, by bringing a revised and enhanced version to the Sharp X68000, the pinnacle of the Japanese computer industry and a machine more than capable of holding its own with the likes of the Amiga and Atari ST. Sharp was NEC's main competitor in Japan, setting its MZ series up against NEC's machines before the X68K came out.

However, *Nemesis 90*, as the new incarnation was called – odd in itself, since it was a Japan-only release and should have had a *Gradius* billing – saw the difficulty level of the MSX game ramped up to extraordinary heights. And this left even experienced *Nemesis* players struggling to get off the first stage. Because of this, the game never hit the big time and languished in obscurity.

However, some dedicated fans wouldn't let the matter lie, and in 1994 released one of the most impressive unofficial hack games of all time, in the form of an X68000 port of the original MSX *Nemesis 2*. Taking full advantage of the X68K's capabilities to vastly improve the graphics, sound and scrolling of the MSX version, but retaining its somewhat friendlier difficulty level, they rescued the excellent stages hidden beyond the skills of most *Nemesis 90* players. In doing so, they came up with a superbly accessible game that ended up being far more enjoyable than its official parent.

***Nemesis 2* on MSX: not too pretty.**

EMUS

The best X68K emulator, and the only one Emu Zone could get to run the *Nemesis* games is XM6 (available from the JCEC, see link). However, Win68K (from the same place) is a more established emu and runs some other games that XM6 doesn't. Our advice – get both

The unofficial X68K port: prettier.

The official *Nemesis 90*: prettiest, impossible.

SECRET MARIO GAME REVEALED!

I THOUGHT YOU WERE SPECIAL

CHRISTMAS IS COMING, SO HERE'S A SPECIAL GIFT FOR YOU

But here's our star – a game so obscure that even the internet's supposedly most definitive *Mario* sites know nothing about it. But have no fear – your very own never-sleeping Emu Zone has uncovered one of gaming's true rarities for your entertainment and enjoyment: *Super Mario Bros Special*.

The game was licensed by Nintendo to veteran Japanese coders Hudson Soft, and released in 1986 for the NEC PC88 series, successors to the PC-6001. Boasting graphics and (especially) sound on a par with the NES and coin-op versions of the game, *SMB Special* was nevertheless a very different kettle of mushrooms.

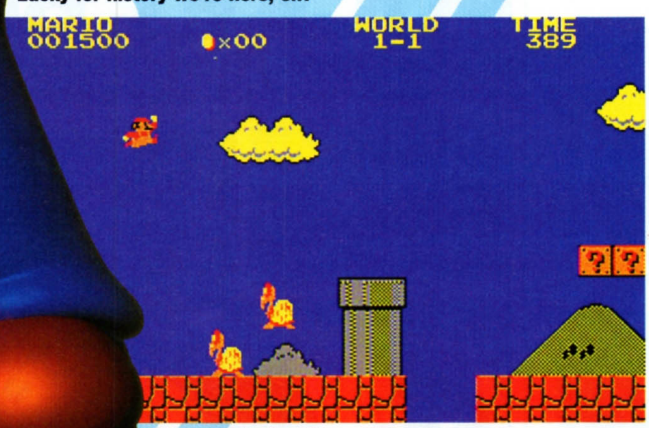
Most obviously, it came with a completely different set of levels to the original game. But more significantly, the PC88 wasn't up to the job of smooth-scrolling, so *SMB Special* is actually a flick-screen game. Kick a Koopa shell in *Special* and it won't skitter away off the screen; rather, it'll bounce off the edge and come zooming back at you whether there was an obstacle there or not. All of which can be very disconcerting if you're near the right-hand edge when it happens.

Combined with the slightly frisky controls, this change makes *SMB Special* a fantastically hard game. Even more so even than the better-known Lost Levels incarnation of *SMB*, which came out in Japan and later made it to these shores as part of the SNES *Super Mario Allstars* compilation.

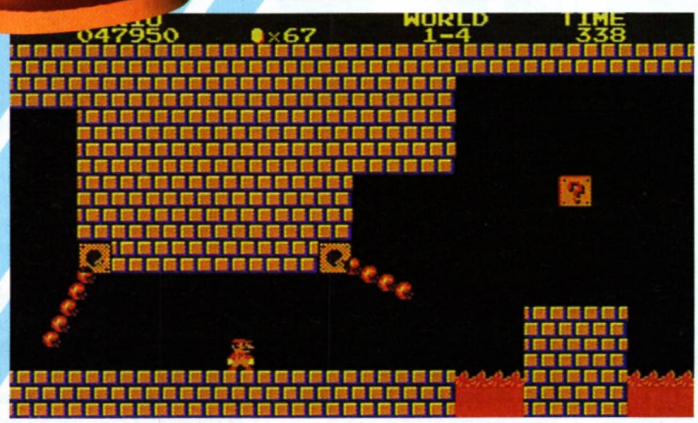
EMUS

The best of a couple of emulators is PC88Win, which can be found at my own website www.worldofstuart.co.uk – along with the necessary system ROMs and a copy of *SMBS*

Lucky for history we're here, eh?

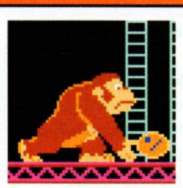


He's going to hurt himself like that.



You'll be doing well to get this far.

WHAT IS EMULATION?



By installing an emulator, you can run games that were programmed for different platforms – such as coin-ops – in their original form. The games come in the form of a ROM (Read Only Memory) that you load into the emulator to run. There are legal issues though, and unless you own the original game it's often against the law to download a ROM. For that reason, we can't give you links to ROMs, though we can give you links to the emulators themselves.

WORMS 3D

He has the right equipment to play this game.

Do you?

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Seraphim takes on a horde of monsters – dressed in only her pants. Tough.

Horses may be realistic, but we haven't spotted any crap yet.

Horse Play

PC ZONE GETS THE LOWDOWN ON ASCARON'S COMBAT-HEAVY ROLE-PLAYER, *SACRED*

SACRED is a new RPG set in the massive fantasy kingdom of Ancaria. As one of six unique characters – including a magical powered-up Battlemage and a blood-sucking vampiress – you have to, ahem, destroy an evil Sakkara demon from the Realm of the Dead that has been unleashed accidentally by dark magician Shaddar. OK, it has the usual smattering of ridiculous names that'll have you showering your friends with spittle, but *Sacred* could still be one of the first top role-players of 2004.

"Players can choose their own style of fighting in *Sacred* using the different characters," says Alan Wild, product manager of Ascaron. "You have ranged magic, close-combat and ranged combat, single and dual-handed weapons as well as combos. Plus you can disarm opponents of their wielded items."

The game's Smithing system is a great way of weapon customisation, allowing you to create a whole host of fantastic home-made weapons and armour. "Rings, amulets, runes and sharpening can all be applied to weapons and armours," continues Wild. "Equally, you can remove previously forged items from the weapon and either use them for an alternative purpose, hoard them, trade them, sell them, or forge them into something completely different."

Horseback riding and combat is also featured, with various horses having characteristics that will allow players to identify their steed instantly and make them an integral part of the quest, rather than simply a 'vehicle' for carrying characters about. We'll bring you an exclusive review and playable demo of *Sacred* in February.

- **Publisher:** Ascaron
- **Developer:** Ascaron
- **ETA:** February 20
- **Website:** www.ascaron.com

"Just Adventure published something where somebody wrote to Ray Ivey, saying I was 'a faggot that should be taken out into the streets and shot.' Then a number of gay magazines in America assumed I was gay, which I've got no problem with, but they approached DreamCatcher asking if they could do interviews with me, because they liked the idea of a gay videogames designer. I welcomed the coverage, but couldn't hand on heart say I fitted that bill!"

Charles Cecil on the perils of announcing a 3D variant of a much-loved 2D game.

"We're not very good at presenting our own ideas, partly because our ideas tend to sound quite mad in the sobering environment of a publisher's conference room. We design games in pubs and restaurants, and we wish we could do all our business meetings there as well."

Nick Bruty of Planet Moon Studios, developer of insane shooter Armed & Dangerous, *is our kind of game designer.*

"This has been confusing me for many months now – does she or doesn't she exist? How am I supposed to know she isn't a robot? Or something?"

Confused forumite Duskreaver and his existential questions on ZONE*'s classy contributor Rhianna Pratchett.*

POCKET BILLIARDS

ARCHER MACLEAN CHALKS HIS CUE FOR *POOL PARADISE*

Archer Maclean's latest project ***Pool Paradise*** – note the player with incredible jungle camouflage.

THE LEGENDARY team of programmer Archer Maclean and 'Whirlwind' snooker player Jimmy White are to reunite for the heavenly sounding *Pool Paradise*, due for release March 2004.

Developed by Maclean in association with Awesome Studios, the game is a comprehensive pool sim set on a South Pacific tropical island where the aim is to make your fortune by competing against 30 league opponents. Jimmy White appears in the game as an adversary, although we imagine he'll be quite difficult to get to the table with all those dusky maidens and Pina Colada on draught.

Pool Paradise features oodles of US and UK pool variations, as well as strangely shaped bonus tables to unlock and mini-games to play, including a cannon ball coconut shy and Maclean's *Defender* clone, *Dropzone*. Expect a preview very soon.

- **Publisher:** Ignition Entertainment
- **Developer:** Awesome Studios
- **ETA:** March
- **Website:** www.ignitionent.com

St Valentine's Day Massacre

EXCLUSIVE! HANDS-ON PLAY OF HOODLUM HOMAGE, *GANGLAND*

Paradise City could make Liberty City look like a retirement village.

A fight over parking turns violent.

STUFF THOSE COTTON wool balls in your cheeks, cut off a horse's head and riddle your enemies with tommy gun bullets – the gangsters are back in Media Mobsters' RTS/RPG, *Gangland*.

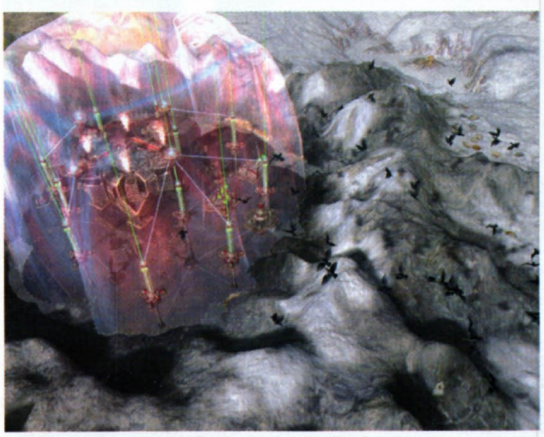
You play the single-player missions as one of four brothers in a Mafia family, although the Mario in this story isn't a happy Italian plumber who collects coins, but a nasty gangster who collects extortion money. You have to complete missions for various mob bosses around the mythical Paradise City, gaining notoriety, money and molls so that you can eventually hunt down your three brothers – your own flesh and blood who murdered the fifth brother in the family.

Gangland plays out in real-time, complete with day/night cycle, as challenges are delivered to you by phone. The game's non-linear Event engine keeps you constantly updated so you can bribe police, kill off rivals and expand your business into gambling dens, casinos and brothels.

However, the major part of *Gangland* focuses on combat, so you can recruit bouncers, henchmen, gunmen, ninjas, bombers and other units, arm them with as much lethal weaponry as you can carry, and organise your own violent mob hit or drive-by shooting using the game's five vehicles.

Gangland is scheduled for release on, you guessed it, February 14 – check out the website below for more info.

- **Publisher:** Whiptail
- **Developer:** Media Mobsters
- **ETA:** February 14
- **Website:** www.mediamobsters.com



Terraforming planets is the game in *Perimeter*.

In the future, Morris dancing will be incredibly popular.

Make The Earth Move

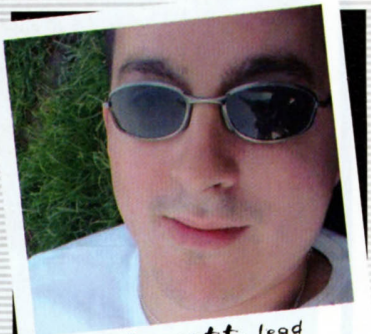
KD LABS' TERRAFORMING RTS *PERIMETER* GETS A UK RELEASE

CODEMASTERS HAS signed the Russian-developed strategy game *Perimeter* for launch early in 2004. Set in the future, human civilisations are forced away from a dying Earth, battling for valuable resources on different planets so they can ultimately find a new homeworld.

Gameplay centres on territory and the terraforming of various landscapes. This creates energy to build structures, including the protective perimeter force field of the game's title. Combat is inevitable between settlers when resources become more scarce, so you'll have to balance the expansion of your empire with the need for soldiers and officers.

As well as a host of options for multiplayer games, *Perimeter* promises lush visuals supporting the latest graphics cards and an original electronic soundtrack. More on *Perimeter* in a future *PC ZONE*.

- **Publisher:** Codemasters
- **Developer:** KD Labs/1C
- **ETA:** Q1 2004
- **Website:** www.codemasters.co.uk/perimeter



Simon Barratt, lead coder at Pineapple Interactive

DEVELOPERS' QUESTION TIME

What PC games are you playing at the moment?
Counter-Strike (still!), *Neverwinter Nights*, *Call Of Duty* and I'm preparing for *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic*.

What was the last videogame you finished?
Call Of Duty single-player, which was really good fun – I'm still playing it online.

What's your favourite game of all time?
Very tough question. I've told myself I won't cop out with multiple answers and just say... *Day Of The Tentacle*!

What are you most proud of in your career?
Helping put together the team working on our shark-based action game *Bloody Waters* – and developing Coyote, the engine behind it.

Who do you most admire in the industry and why?
Probably Tim Sweeney (Epic) or John Carmack (id) for the influence they have over the industry in terms of hardware and software technologies.

What has the PC contributed most to videogaming?
The PC tends to be the place that new techniques are tried out, mainly because of the PC hardware advancing all the time. The techniques push consoles and users' machines to keep up, which, while bad for PC gamers' pockets, has made games look and feel as good as they do now – which can only be a good thing.

What's your company's philosophy?
Pineapple is focused on developing fun and unique games. We didn't want to go ahead with a release till we had the right formula and we feel we've hit on it with *Bloody Waters*.

What's the best thing about your job?
Developing new techniques and modifying older techniques to be faster and better-looking. It's always good fun throwing ideas about.

What's the worst thing about your job?
Developing new techniques and modifying... Only joking! I don't really find anything bad about my job. I'm very lucky, I guess...

What are you working on at the moment?
We're working away on *Bloody Waters*, experimenting with how many ways a shark can kill an innocent fisherman. We'll be releasing a lot more information on the project soon...

What's the Next Big Thing in PC gaming?
Realistic physics is still the 'big thing' really: having objects in your game that can react in an infinite number of ways to the gamer is a technology that you simply have to sing the praises of.

COURTLY LOVE

NEW SCREENSHOTS FROM THE EMPIRE-BUILDING *KNIGHTS OF HONOUR*

Coastal landings are a great tactic to surprise enemies.

"No, it'll work! We all climb inside a hollow wooden cat..."

GERMAN PUBLISHER Sunflowers recently dropped into the *PC ZONE* offices to show off the latest code of its Black Sea Studios-developed *Knights Of Honor*.

This impressive-looking RTS throws you into medieval Europe, where as one of many kings, you have to use your plucky knights to conquer kingdoms and expand your realm through espionage, diplomacy and war.

There are over 1,000 different knights you can command, each with unique abilities that affect how your armies perform in battle. The AI can build formations of troops, essential if you have to take charge of several real-time battles at once that can include ambushes, sieges, coastal landings and assaults on enemy camps.

Multiplayer will be well catered for, with historical battles (such as Hastings), a Story mode with a sequence of battle maps (including William the Conqueror's Norman Conquest) and deathmatches for up to 12 players. We'll have a bigger preview of *Knights Of Honour* soon.

- **Publisher:** Sunflowers
- **Developer:** Black Sea Studios
- **ETA:** Q2 2004
- **Website:** www.knights-of-honor.net

Doggy-style

BATTLE FOR AIRBORNE SUPREMACY IN *PACIFIC WARRIORS 2 – DOGFIGHT!*

THESE DAYS dogfighting is all about attaching metal spikes to a Jack Russell's canines in the murkier drinking dens of provincial Britain. In the Pacific theatre of war during the 1940s, however, it was all about battling the threat from the East.

Pacific Warriors 2 – Dogfight! boasts 50 missions of flyboy entertainment: 25 fighting for the US of A and 25 playing the part of a Japanese pilot. The missions include scouting enemy territory and defending villages and airstrips from invaders, as well as just blowing the hell out of enemy bases. If you're looking for a quick WWII blast then this should see you right.

- **Publisher:** 4am Entertainment
- **Developer:** InterActive Vision
- **ETA:** March 2004
- **Website:** www.4amgames.com

"Neeeeeeowwww! Bada bada bada! Kaboooom!"

You can fly as an American or Japanese pilot.

Flying the Flagship

EX-BLIZZARD LEGEND BILL ROPER TALKS EXCLUSIVELY TO *PC ZONE*

Bill Roper, the games supremo responsible for the superb *Warcraft*, *Diablo* and *StarCraft* RPG franchises has revealed the name of his new company – Flagship Studios. We decided to catch up with the ex-Blizzard vice president to ask about his new games studio and what exciting titles we can expect…

What is your company's philosophy and does it differ from that of Blizzard?
Our main philosophy, both at Blizzard and now with Flagship, is to make the best and most fun game we can. We want to create an immersive and compelling single and multiplayer gameplay experience with appeal to both hardcore and casual gamers.

How did you settle on the name Flagship Studios?
We started talking with potential publisher partners about our game, and they kept saying it sounded like a flagship title. That matched the quality and effort we intend to pour into the game, and the phrase stuck.

What can people expect of your first game?
The concept for our game is quite different to what we've done in the past in many ways. There are specific philosophies of game design that we would incorporate into games we did, and I think that fans of our past games will see that and appreciate it. For this one, gamers can expect an exciting, compelling, addictive experience with a strong multiplayer component and a lot of content to keep them coming back for more and more!

Flagship Studios is the new studio set up by ex-Blizzard employees.

How long has it been in development?
We started working on the game literally two days after leaving Blizzard (in June), and have been moving along at a fantastic pace ever since then. I remain impressed at how quickly the programmers have not just created the core engine technology, but also at how quickly they've established certain aspects of the tools and the graphics pipeline for the project. The ideas for the game are coming quickly now, and we're getting them prototyped almost as quickly as we can come up with them.

When will you be announcing full details of your first game?
Although we have a development timeline in our heads, we're not going to publicly put any dates out there just yet. This is because at this early stage of development, it's impossible to foresee all the changes the game will require, and we don't want to state a date and then not stick to it at all.

- **Publisher:** TBA
- **Developer:** Flagship Studios
- **ETA:** TBA
- **Website:** www.flagshipstudios.com

Good Cop. Bad Cop.

GOOD COP

A huge *Doom 3* preview, *Deus Ex: Invisible War* review and *Max Payne 2* playable demo. *PC ZONE* continues to bring you the best exclusives.

***Knights Of The Old Republic* turning out to be the best *Star Wars* game we've played in a decade.**

New production editor Clare Lydon whipping us all into shape and proving her incredible prowess by coming second in the Dennis Games Division Pool Tournament 2003.

Finding out that Will Porter is a practising minister of the Universal Life Church of Modesto, California. And that for ten dollars he can make his own saints.

BAD COP

The perennial decline of Leeds United turning Jamie Sefton into some sort of nihilistic, world-hating monster.

The Welsh and Scottish contingent of the *ZONE* Team (Steve-O and Wee Jamie respectively) having their teams unceremoniously dumped out of the running for Euro 2004.

Good Cop: **Inspector Clouseau** Bad Cop: **Chief Inspector Dreyfus** (from the *Pink Panther* films) – suggested by Mark Barker in Blackburn. Send in your ideas for next month's Good Cop and Bad Cop to win a *PC ZONE* goodie bag!

COMPETITION

WIN PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 3!

GOOAALL! TEN COPIES OF KONAMI'S SUBLIME FOOTIE GAME MUST BE WON!

After what seems like 30 years of hurt, the PC finally has the definitive football game – Konami's *Pro Evolution Soccer 3*. Receiving a Classic award and 90 per cent in last month's *PC ZONE*, *PES3* is the best virtual kickabout to be had right now. Its fluid player animation and ball physics delivers the most sublime and realistic matches ever witnessed.

Frantic goal-mouth scrambles? You got it. Tough, midfield-dominated 0-0 scraps? Oh yes. Extraordinary 30-foot screamers into the top corner? Absolutely. However, as well as the usual leagues, cups and training modes *PES3* also has a terrific Master League, where you can take an obscure team of donkeys to European glory by playing the transfer market, mastering tactics and winning games.

So, if you would like to grab yourself one of ten copies of *Pro Evolution Soccer 3* from the football geniuses at Konami (before the *ZONE* team, ahem, 'acquires' them), you'd better get the answer to the following question on a postcard to the *PC ZONE* address as soon as possible…

Where is the Euro 2004 football championship taking place?
A: Luxembourg
B: Portugal
C: Wales

If you fancy getting your hands on a copy of this fantastic footy treat, send your entry on the back of a postcard marked '*PES3* Competition' to: *PC ZONE*, 9 Dallington Street, London, EC1V 0BQ. For full terms and conditions, see page 7.

KONAMI

PC ZONE CLASSIC

***Pro Evolution Soccer 3* on PC. Footie perfection.**

CHARTS

In association with VIRGIN MEGASTORES

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

ChartTrack TOP 10

ELSPA – European Leisure Software Publishers Association

We've run out of things to say about *The Sims*, so here's a jumble of words and phrases for you to rearrange yourselves: dead horse, flogged, to death, cash-cow, needless, popular, used to like it, can't anymore, biscuits, money money money.

		TITLE	PUBLISHER	SCORE
1	NEW	**THE SIMS: MAKIN' MAGIC**	EA	55%
2	NEW	CALL OF DUTY	ACTIVISION	94%
3	NEW	FIFA FOOTBALL 2004	EA	81%
4	NEW	MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE	ROCKSTAR	93%
5	NEW	STAR WARS GALAXIES	ACTIVISION	N/A
6	NEW	THE SIMS: DOUBLE DELUXE	EA	67%
7	▼	CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 4	EIDOS	90%
8	▼	THE SIMS: SUPERSTAR	EA	59%
9	▼	C & C: GENERALS – ZERO HOUR	EA	83%
10	▼	HALO: COMBAT EVOLVED	MICROSOFT	84%

The second-best football game of the year sits pretty at number three, smug and secure. By the time you read this, the far superior *Pro Evolution Soccer 3* may well have rocked its boat a little; by how much depends on you, dear reader, so buy, buy, buy!

The greatest and most authentic WWII experience that money can buy has hit the high street, so now there's no excuse not to go and make a mess of the French countryside. The greatest shooter in years, *Call Of Duty* is an absolutely essential purchase.

A thing of beauty, a thing of grace, a short-lived orgy of violence that cannot help but awe and amaze. *Max Payne 2* is stunningly good, and worth every single solitary penny you spend on it. New York has never been bleaker, no game has ever been sexier.

YOUR SHOUT

Have your say at www.pczone.co.uk

Halo deserves to shrivel into an acrid little ball for what it has done to us. You were ours, you whore. OURS! Before you left us for that slick, shallow bastard offspring of Bill Gates and a computer.
captain_moquette

Do EA make ANY games which aren't sequels/yearly updates? Do they know what original means anymore?
Carpet_2001

Sims. Nuff said.
son_jason00

Virgin megastores TOP 10

1. MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE	ROCKSTAR
2. COMMANDOS 3: DESTINATION BERLIN	EIDOS
3. HIDDEN & DANGEROUS 2	GATHERING
4. HALO: COMBAT EVOLVED	MICROSOFT
5. JEDI KNIGHT: JEDI ACADEMY	ACTIVISION
6. TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2004	EA
7. TOMB RAIDER: THE ANGEL OF DARKNESS	EIDOS
8. RUGBY 2004	EA
9. THE SIMS: DOUBLE DELUXE	EA
10. ENTER THE MATRIX	ATARI

COMPETITION

Virgin megastores

Win the entire Virgin Top 10!

Once again, *PC ZONE* and Virgin have teamed up to give you the chance to win every game in the current Virgin Top 10 (see left, and try not to drool). All you have to do to enter is answer the following:

QUESTION: Which drug is central to the plot of the original Max Payne?

Send your answers on the back of a postcard to:
PC ZONE Chart Compo Issue 137, Dennis Publishing, 9 Dallington Street, London, EC1V 0BQ. Closing date: January 7, 2004

- 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*.

For general competition terms and conditions, turn to page 7.

INCOMING!

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

DECEMBER	
ALPHA BLACK ZERO: INTREPID PROTOCOL	PLAYLOGIC
BEYOND GOOD & EVIL	UBISOFT
LOCK ON: MODERN AIR COMBAT	UBISOFT
LORDS OF EVERQUEST	UBISOFT
PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME	UBISOFT
SECRET WEAPONS OVER NORMANDY	ACTIVISION
STAR WARS: KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC	ACTIVISION
VIETCONG: FIST ALPHA	GATHERING

JANUARY	
LORDS OF THE REALM III	VU GAMES
RAINBOW SIX: RAVEN SHIELD – ATHENA SWORD	UBISOFT
UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004	ATARI

FEBRUARY	
BREED	CDV
GANGLAND	WHIPTAIL
HORIZONS: EMPIRE OF ISTARIA	ATARI
KNIGHTS OF THE TEMPLE	TDK
X2: THE THREAT	DEEP SILVER

MARCH	
ARMED & DANGEROUS	ACTIVISION
CHICAGO 1930	DEEP SILVER
DEUS EX: INVISIBLE WAR	EIDOS
DRAKE	VU GAMES
FAR CRY	UBISOFT
GROUND CONTROL 2: OPERATION EXODUS	VU GAMES
RICHARD BURNS RALLY	SCI
SAM & MAX: FREELANCE POLICE	ACTIVISION
SÖLDNER – SECRET WARS	BIG BEN
SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TOMORROW	UBISOFT

Q1	
CODENAME: PANZERS	CDV
DRIVER 3	ATARI
HITMAN: CONTRACTS	EIDOS
HALF-LIFE 2	VU GAMES
KNIGHTSHIFT	DEEP SILVER
LEGACY OF KAIN: DEFIANCE	EIDOS
PAINKILLER	DREAMCATCHER
RACE DRIVER 2: THE ULTIMATE RACING SIMULATOR	CODEMASTERS
THE SIMS 2	EA
VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE – BLOODLINES	ACTIVISION
WARTIME COMMAND: BATTLE FOR EUROPE 1939-45	CODEMASTERS

REST OF 2004	
ADVENT RISING	VU GAMES
AGAINST ROME	BIGBEN
AXIS & ALLIES	ATARI
BATTLEFIELD VIETNAM	EA
BLACK9	VU GAMES
BLACK & WHITE 2	EA
BLOWOUT	VU GAMES
COSSACKS II: NAPOLEONIC WAR	CDV
DEAD MAN'S HAND	ATARI
DELTA FORCE: BLACK HAWK DOWN – TEAM SABRE	NOVALOGIC
DOOM 3	ACTIVISION
DRAGON EMPIRES	CODEMASTERS
DUNGEON SIEGE 2	MICROSOFT
EVERQUEST II	UBISOFT
EVIL GENIUS	VU GAMES
IRON STORM	DEEP SILVER
JOINT OPERATIONS	NOVALOGIC
KNIGHTS OF HONOR	SUNFLOWERS
MEDAL OF HONOR: PACIFIC ASSAULT	EA
MEN OF VALOR: VIETNAM	VU GAMES
MIDDLE-EARTH ONLINE	VU GAMES
PARAWORLD	SUNFLOWERS
ROME: TOTAL WAR	ACTIVISION
SACRED	ASCARON
SID MEIER'S PIRATES	ATARI
THE LORD OF THE RINGS: BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH	VU GAMES
THE MATRIX ONLINE	UBISOFT
THE MOVIES	ACTIVISION
TRIBES: VENGEANCE	VU GAMES
WARHAMMER ONLINE	SEGA
WORLD OF WARCRAFT	VU GAMES

MISSING IN ACTION

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

CAPTAIN SCARLET

UNFORTUNATELY *Captain Scarlet* won't have time to even blink, let alone retaliate, seeing as Batfish Studios has closed down. Licensing problems and game completion issues meant that *Captain Scarlet: Retaliation* wasn't anywhere near as indestructible as he was back in his heyday.

- **Publisher:** Digital Workshop
- **Developer:** Batfish Studios
- **ETA:** KIA

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004

STEREOTYPICAL slippage excuse number 27 has been trotted out again for the release of *Unreal Tournament 2004*. Apparently, "extra development time makes for a more polished game": but does it really? Despite this, you can expect the exclusive review and playable demo in the next issue of *PC ZONE*. Hurrah!

- **Publisher:** Atari
- **Developer:** Epic Games
- **ETA:** January
- **Website:** www.unrealtournament2004.com

TRINITY

WE QUITE liked *Trinity* when we saw it at E3, but the powers that be have decided the futuristic shooter from the makers of *Wolfenstein* was wasting valuable time and money. So it's officially dead in the water: there won't be any bullet-timed, superhuman shenanigans on the roof-tops of New Orleans ever again. Shame, really.

- **Publisher:** Activision
- **Developer:** Gray Matter
- **ETA:** KIA

US TOP 10

1. DARK AGE OF CAMELOT: TRIALS OF ATLANTIS	WANADOO
2. THE SIMS: MAKIN' MAGIC	EA
3. HALO: COMBAT EVOLVED	MICROSOFT
4. MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE	ROCKSTAR
5. AGE OF MYTHOLOGY	MICROSOFT
6. RAILROAD TYCOON 3	GATHERING
7. THE SIMS: DOUBLE DELUXE	EA
8. AGE OF MYTHOLOGY: THE TITANS	MICROSOFT
9. MS FLIGHT SIM 2004	MICROSOFT
10. CALL OF DUTY	ACTIVISION

SOURCE NPD Techworld

HOT SHOTS

X2: THE THREAT

A star is born – Egosoft's beautiful space opera sequel warps into view

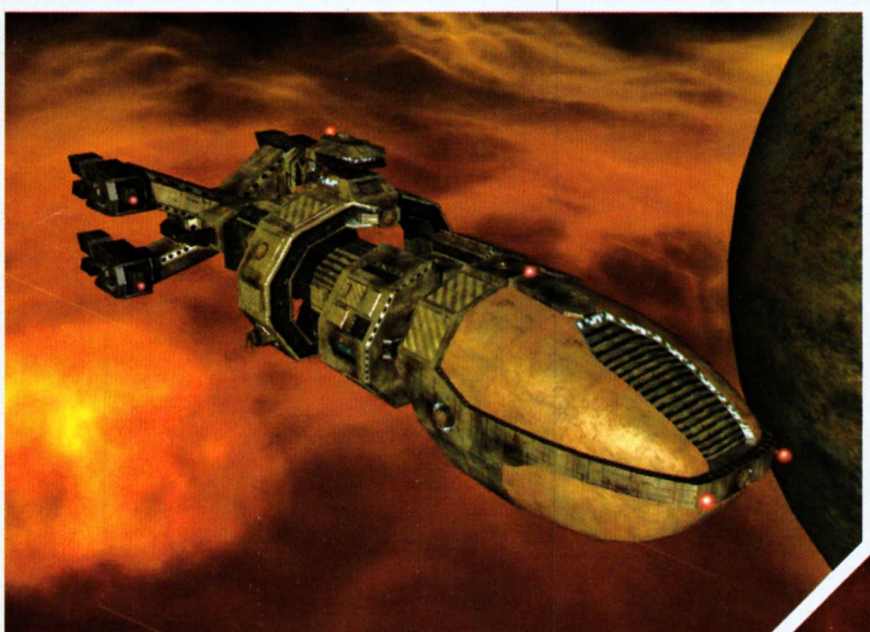
GLEAMING intricately-patterned ships, sparkling with a myriad of tiny lights move gracefully through infinite space, decorated with supernovas, asteroids, stars, exotic planets and massive space stations. Sounds idyllic, doesn't it? Well, it would be, if there wasn't a terrifyingly evil race of aliens known as "the Khaak" heading straight for you, bent on the destruction of the universe...

Space trading/fighting sim *X2: The Threat* looks set to eclipse the original in sheer size and scope. Egosoft's managing director Bernd Lehahn states that his aim is: "To make a simulation that allows every possible freedom, that you're never finished." In the *X2* universe, a completely simulated economy for immersive trading and resource management exists, but you can also keep your trigger-finger exercised with spectacular space battles involving dozens of alien adversaries, each with unique ships and special abilities.

X2: The Threat has just come out in the US, but the European release in February will be the full, polished version, with cut-scenes, an improved plot and the ability to download new AI plug-ins for your burgeoning capitalist fleet. Look out for the full review of *X2: The Threat* next issue, with an exclusive playable demo to follow.

- **Publisher:** Deep Silver
- **Developer:** Egosoft
- **ETA:** February 6
- **Website:** www.egosoft.com

YTSMA-75
None



Welcome to the level 2 flight simulation. This time you will have the exclusive chance to command a capital ship and take a seat in one of its 8 turrets or in
YN21A-00
None

YNSHA-00

GOING UNDERGROUND

They may dine on last week's pizza and live like trolls in garages, but unsigned indie developers remain fiercely committed to their art. *Pavel Barter* ventures into the heart of PC gaming's thriving underground scene

PLAY THE GAMES ON YOUR COVERDISC! ON THE CD ON THE DVD

SOMETHING IS afoot way beneath the radar of the mainstream games business. Whizz-kid computer buffs are working late into the night in their bedrooms and garages, creating weird and occasionally wonderful creations. Penniless and hungry, these Doctor Frankensteins of development eschew ragdolls in favour of rag 'n' bone, use 2D like it was the new 3D, and ask their mums to provide the voice-acting. Forget about your multi-million dollar games like *Enter The Matrix* and *Tomb Raider*, these no-budget desperadoes are providing an alternative to the excesses of the industry. They are, in a sense, the snot-nosed, do-it-yerself punk-rockers of gaming.

A vast community of underground developers has emerged around the globe over the last decade, and although it remains a mouse nipping at the elephant heels of corporate publishing, its creations fit tiny niches that dedicated fanbases happily plunder. Also, because of the vast amount of documentation and relatively cheap development kits for the PC, indies are mostly designing for your friendly neighbourhood desktop. OK, much of their wares are bollocks, with bug-ridden graphics that look like they were dragged through a field before crashing into a tree. You'd rather be roasted by Scunthorpe F.C. than play some of these gaming mutants. It's just as well then there are organised underground pow-wows to sort the wheat from the chaff.

LOW-FI FANFARES

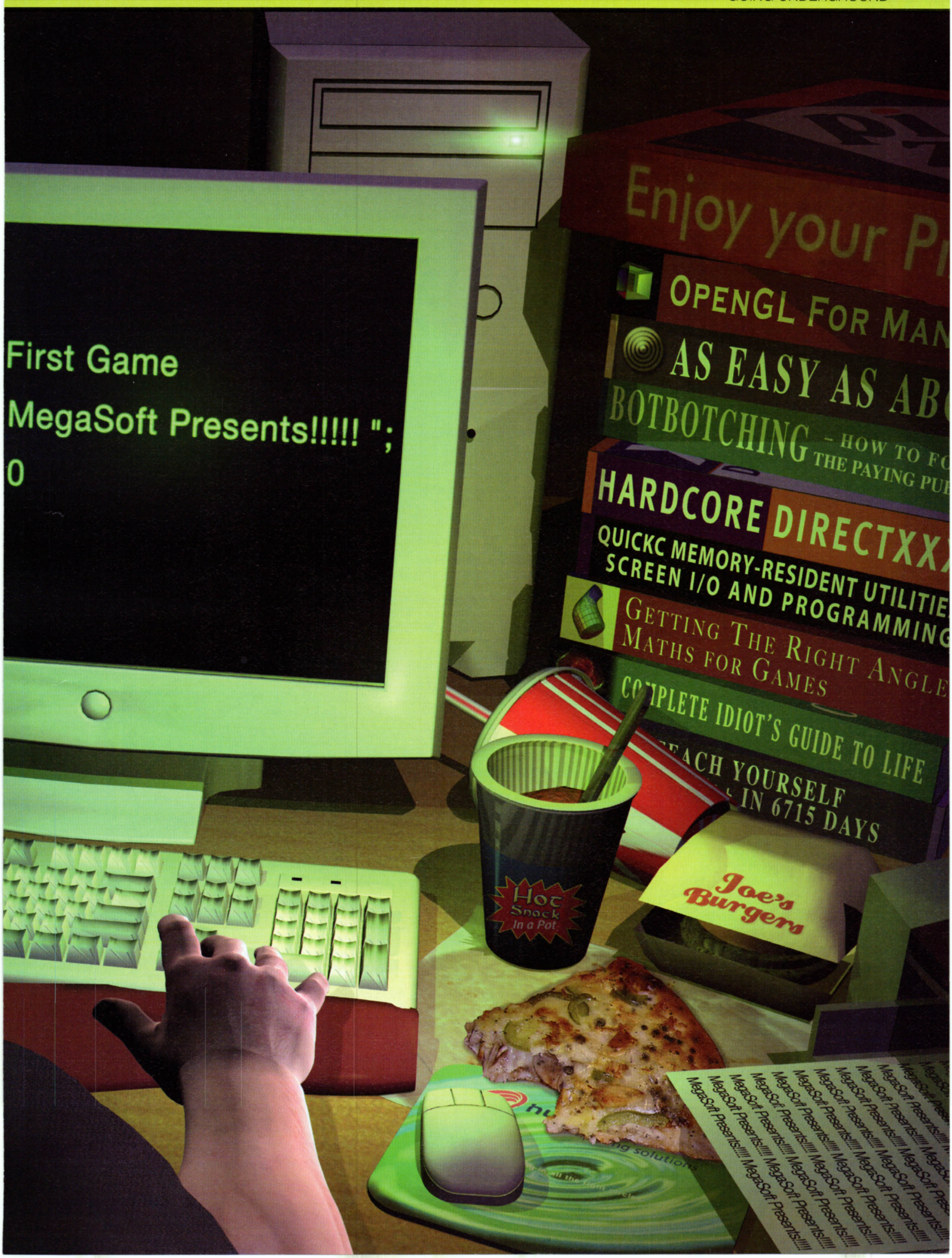
Tucked away in a darkened corner of Oregon, United States, in a hall the size of the men's toilets at E3, the underground community amasses for the Indie Games Con (IGC) 2003. A range of games, almost all PC, are on hand for attendees to sample: FPS, soccer, racing, puzzle and the frankly uncategorisable. Endowed with the budget of a village needlework society, some of these titles revel in their old-skool hip sway.

"With little or no budget, these titles revel in their old-skool hip sway"

Katsu's Journey, an adventure set in feudal Japan, looks like the bastard son of *Zelda* with a permanent big-head cheat enabled. *Dark Horizons: Lore* is one for the die-hard mech fans, with over-the-top battles in a surprisingly textured universe. *Fuzzee Teevee*'s bubbly graphics and twist on the classic puzzle theme (when you can't move a block,

Developers leave their garages for IGC 2003.

ILLUSTRATION Joe Roberts


First Game
MegaSoft Presents!!!!! ";
0
Enjoy your Pr
OPENGL FOR MAN
AS EASY AS ABC
BOTBOTCHING - HOW TO FO
THE PAYING PUB
HARDCORE DIRECTXX
QUICKC MEMORY-RESIDENT UTILITIE
SCREEN I/O AND PROGRAMMING
GETTING THE RIGHT ANGLE
MATHS FOR GAMES
COMPLETE IDIOT'S GUIDE TO LIFE
TEACH YOURSELF
IN 6715 DAYS
Hot Snack in a Pot
Joe's Burgers
MegaSoft Presents!!!!!

***GravRally*: hover racing in 2265, naturally.**

batter your opponent over the head with it) ensures another standout.

The booty on show is as independent as Destiny's Child and some of it almost as hot, but IGC isn't all fun and games. Seminars over the course of the three-day conference corner techy subjects like AI, character animations and game art, as well as offering practical advice on marketing, legalities and how to create a finished product that isn't rubbish.

Conference organiser Jay Moore explains the ethos behind this event, now in its second year: "We called this Indie Games Con because it could potentially grow up to be its own QuakeCon, where we can include gaming audiences under an umbrella conference. We're striving to do anything we can to break down barriers between independent developers as well as the gamer and the developer."

Indie veteran Jeff Tunnell was there (the designer behind 1990s low-fi hits like *Front Page Sports: Football Pro* and *Incredible Machines*), presenting his speech 'Independent Game Development: The Future is Now'. Tunnell's message was commendable for its DIY buoyancy: being indie shouldn't be your last option he said, it should be your best option. And after hands were shaken, games played and speeches made, everyone retired to the bar and danced to Tunnell's drunken rendition of Eric Clapton's *Cocaine*.

The IGC Best in Show award was presented to 21-6 Productions for futuristic racer *GravRally*. "It was a fantastic experience from every angle," gushed 21-6's Justin Mette after the event. "The conference is small and focused on supporting indie developers. Meeting many of the other teams in the community that are making games, sharing war stories, sharing advice and getting to see the games they're working on is extremely inspiring and energising. We also used the conference as an excuse to get our remote team together in one place. There were some of us that met for the first time after almost two years of working together."

WEIRD SCIENCE

While most of us are struggling to figure out the differences between *FIFA Football 2003* and *FIFA Football 2004*, many DIY developers are charting entirely new gameplay waters. *Teenage Lawnmower*, from Hiroshima-based Robinson Technologies, stars a kid who spends his weekends mowing lawns in order to help his alcoholic mother (see box, right). Yikes, and there was me thinking that *Max Payne* was a little screwed up.

Seth Robinson – whose résumé includes a game about undertakers (*Funeral Quest*) – contends that *Tetris* clones and other retro retreads tend to be

"Some of us met for the first time after almost two years of working together"

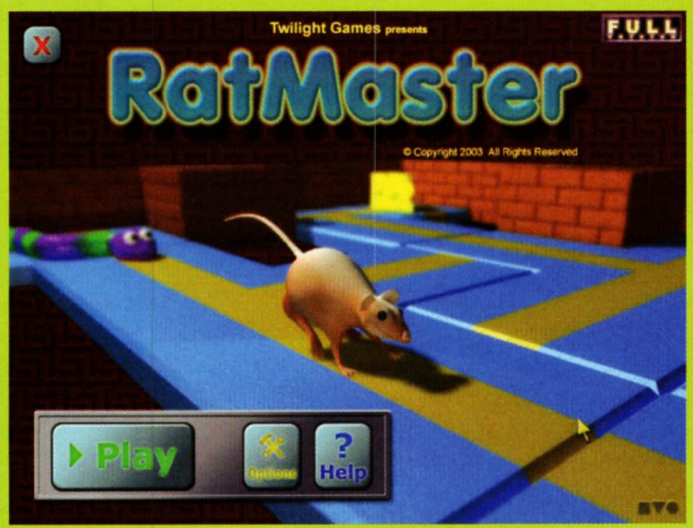
TALES OF THE UNEXPECTED

MUMMY, MUMMY, THE NASTY GAMES ARE SCARING ME

Indie developers enjoy scouring the demented recesses of their minds for the more unusual and demented game concepts. ***Dr Blob's Organism***, from the aptly-titled Cheapass Games, requires you to control a blobby organism sitting in a Petri dish and bombard invading ooze with your micro-gun. ***RatMaster*** by Twilight Games mixes cheese-hungry rodents with snakes, electric fences, gates and rotating paths. Although it's a child of the 21st Century, it looks like it was created in 1864.

It gets worse. ***Teenage Lawnmower*** is a particularly warped piece of software in which you play a 17-year-old with an alcoholic, drugged-up mum. Only by accepting work mowing lawns can you earn the money to help your mum and stop her from moving in with her abusive boyfriend. (It's a black comedy, honest.)

Betty's Beer Bar on the other hand is a 'violent bartending game', in which you have to serve customers as quickly as possible without getting them drunk. If they start to get tipsy they stop tipping, so you have to prop them up with strong coffee. As for the Korean arcade shooter ***Cutey Fatty***, about a 100kg overweight girl who wants to be a supermodel... Let's not even go there.



Forget cute marsupials – indie developers like to be different.

***Teenage Lawnmower* is brilliantly twisted stuff.**

***Fuzzee Teevee*: addictive and manic puzzling.**

Ninja and samurai roam the land in *Katsu's Journey*.

Cheap game engines like Torque give indies a boost.

Big-game hunting without the guns in *Wild Earth*.

Colourful puzzler *Orbz* is a shining star among indie games.

the most financially rewarding. However, if your malformed gamechild is perky enough, it's possible to create an underground fanbase and shift copies.

Certainly, independent studios like PopCap (*Bejeweled* and *Bookworm*) and GameHouse (*Collapse* and *Ricochet*) are proving successful with their variations of tried-and-tested puzzle games, and entertaining think 'em ups like *Pandamonium* have their own admirers. California's Chronic Logic, however, decided to take a completely different tack and create bridge-building sims. OK, so it might sound duller than a bag of hammers, but Chronic titles like *Pontifex II* – in which you're required to engineer a perfect bridge and avoid sending its passengers to their doom – incorporate ingenious physics together with brain-melting gameplay.

"As an independent, you can take a lot more risks than bigger companies and you're free to explore different ideas," says Chronic's Phil Carlisle. "Most mainstream publishing companies would assume there isn't a big enough market to support a game about bridge building. But for us and the scale that we're at right now, we think there is." While Chronic's future games will incorporate the same physics engine as *Pontifex*, the company is keen to burn its bridges, so to speak, and is currently creating *Gish* (a side-scrolling platformer starring, um, a ball of tar) and *2048 Insurgency* (a futuristic vehicle-combat game).

SHOW ME THE MONEY

Some developers would rather wrestle hippos rather than be a corporate whore and denounce their independence. James Thrush, producer for Super X Studios in San Diego is one such person; he maintains that the quality of the product is the be-all and end-all. "I have mixed feelings about budgets getting bigger in the mainstream, because much of that cash flow is getting wasted. Independent developers will always have the edge in that we'll be able to make products cheaper than mainstream companies. Why? Because there are less overheads."

Super X's *Wild Earth* has won numerous awards, due to its original theme and silky-smooth animations. As a photojournalist for one of the world's biggest nature magazines, your job is to take photos of animals in their natural habitats on the plains of Africa. The resulting photos are woven into an online article mock-up in this big-game paparazzi sim. "When you're making a game product there are two choices: stick with something tried and tested, or create something innovative," explains Thrush. "They're both valid. Once a game concept is proven, people want more of that type of game. That's tough for an independent to do, but we'll always have the advantage of developing riskier stuff."

Joe Maruschak, of Oregon-based indie BraveTree, says that IGC 2003 signified a noticeable transformation from the year before. It was as if the underground scene was out of short trousers and finally growing man hair.

"Many of the people and games were a lot more business and marketing-savvy, and the concerns of the developers have matured," he states. "Last year, the whole attitude was 'how can I go about this?' This year, the questions were more like 'where is the best place to get cheap, high bandwidth server hosting?' The conversations shifted from how to even make an indie title to how to make money with an indie title."

Big bucks to independent developers are like brain cells to a glue-sniffer – in short supply. BraveTree looted its piggy banks to produce *ThinkTanks*, and worked without a paycheck rolling in, praying that the completed product would transform their blood, sweat and tears into hard cash. In addition to the difficulty of crafting a lovable game, regular family and life issues add to the indie developer's woes.

Distractions are a prerequisite, says Maruschak, though at least the overheads

The deadly Scrabble of *Dungeon Scroll*.

***ThinkTanks*: the M1 in the not too distant future.**

STEPS TO SUCCESS

TIPS ON BECOMING AN INDIE DEVELOPER

DISCARD YOUR MATERIAL POSSESSIONS

Before leaving Sierra to venture into independent development, Jeff Tunnell was driving a flashy BMW. Now he's in what looks like a base model Chevy Cavalier, probably the only vehicle which rusts from the inside out. But hey, art is all about pain, right?

KNOW YOUR ROLE

Sort out the team's various responsibilities prior to developing a project. Who's the art director, who's lead programmer, and who's going to lean out the window and scream "ding!" when a visitor presses the broken doorbell?

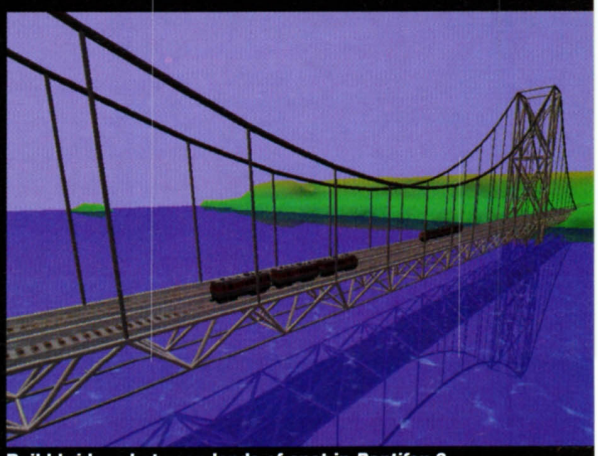
WEAR YOUR HEART ON YOUR SLEEVE

Inhuman Games called its futuristic RTS *Trash*. It could be argued that honesty is a valuable commodity in the world of indie games.

RETRO IS THE NEW MODERN

Oasis have been getting away with it for years and The Strokes sound like a thousand bands before them. Tell everyone it's seriously hip to write remakes of *Defender* and get to work.

Cuteness gone mad in *Pandamonium*.



Build bridges between lands of snot in *Pontifex 2*.

remain fairly minimal. Robinson Technologies took about a year on its pseudo-RPG *Dink Smallwood*, eight months for *Teenage Lawnmower* and a month on word-game *Dungeon Scroll*, with the cost of each title breaking down to a few thousand US dollars.

A HELPING HAND

Online publishers throw struggling auteurs a lifeline by distributing their product and handing them around 65% of revenues from games sold. GarageGames, which is also responsible for Oregon's Indie Games Con, hands its developers the Torque Game Engine, the technology behind Sierra's *Tribes 2*, for a mere £60. 21-6 Productions is on the GarageGames roster and the deal has worked in its favour, with its game *Orbz 1.0* generating hundreds of multiplayer sessions at any given time. Described as a cross between scorched golf, billiards and *Counter-Strike*, *Orbz* is simple but compellingly addictive, with an inspired set of play mechanics.

"It's easier for indie game developers to succeed now than it has ever been before," says Justin Mette of 21-6. "The ability to assemble a team over the Internet, license a top-quality gaming engine for £60 a seat and work with a community of over 20,000 other game developers has finally made it possible to develop a quality game on a very low budget. Also, the online game sales market has become strong over the past couple of years and it's now possible to make your money back and earn a living from your games."

3D beat 'em up *The Rage* may not stack up against the likes of *DOA3*, but it's solid, brutal fun nonetheless.

***2048*: indie game development can be a lonely task.**

Mette continues: "In terms of graphics, it's going to be a while before indie titles (typically selling for around $20) are going to compete with retail titles. We'd never say this is a way to create huge amounts of wealth, but you can make a decent living doing this."

WHEN WE WERE KINGS

Of course, the history of independent games features a twist of Shakespearian proportions: there once was a time when the underground *was* the mainstream. Behemoths of publishing like Atari and EA started out in garages, their toes peeking out through holes in their socks while they struggled to create the next *Pong*, much like today's underdogs. Jon Hare, creator of Amiga classics *Sensible Soccer* and *Cannon Fodder*, looks back fondly on the days when most developers were so poor they went to Kentucky Fried Chicken to lick the other kids' fingers.

"For most, our main workspace was our bedrooms. I remember some fantastic times in 1986-88 – going up to Newsfield's offices in Ludlow, where *Crash* and *Zzap!* magazines were made and going to parties with other bedroom-developers. We didn't know it at the time, but looking back it's always reminded me of the documentaries you see of Jimi Hendrix when he first came to the UK, hanging out with Bob Dylan, Joan Baez and Eric Burdon from the Animals. We were young

NOW PLAY THE GAMES!

RIDE THE UNDERGROUND EXPRESS TO FUN-CITY WITH THESE NOT-SO-CRAP GAME DEMOS

Through the boundless generosity of the indie development community (not to mention their wretched thirst for exposure), we've managed to assemble a partial truckload of game demos from free developers around the world – so now you can actually play the games and taste the untamed pleasures of underground ingenuity. Check your cover discs for the following indie gems...

TEENAGE LAWNMOWER (ROBINSON TECHNOLOGIES)
Your mum's an alcoholic, and if you don't mow enough lawns to pay for the groceries, she's going to make you move in with her abusive boyfriend. A twisted mix of simulation, interactive story and arcade action.

DUNGEON SCROLL (ROBINSON TECHNOLOGIES)
A surprisingly addictive mix of hangman and dungeon crawling – only magical letters stand between you and hordes of nasty cave-dwellers.

BRIDGE CONSTRUCTION SET (CHRONIC LOGIC)
Build a bridge over troubled waters, then test its strength by daring hapless commuters to travel across it.

TRIPTYCH (CHRONIC LOGIC)
A fast paced physics-based puzzler guaranteed to frazzle noggins across the globe.

THINKTANKS (BRAVETREE GAMES)
Scuttle about in a tiny tank while launching a Panzer blitz on your many enemies.

WORD PEACE (CHRONIC LOGIC)
Spelling words on a hexagonal board hasn't been so much fun since you used to play Scrabble with your nan.

NVCHESS (SUPER X STUDIOS)
The ancient board game set in worlds of Sky, Fire and Ice and Holographic. If *The Matrix* characters were to play chess, this would be it.

THE RAGE (FLUID GAMES)
Final Fight meets _Double Dragon_ under the banner of dodgy graphics and a surprisingly proficient game engine.

DESKTOP DREAMSCAPES (SUPER X STUDIOS)
More of a real-time screensaver than a playable demo, this 3D extravaganza gives some indication as to what bedroom svengalis are capable of.

ORBZ (21-6 PRODUCTIONS)
Big magical balls star in a simple but sassy 3D action puzzle game.

WORMS 3D (TEAM 17 – DVD only)
Not exactly underground but defiantly independent, Team 17 rounds off the bunch with a brand new demo of its latest turn-based *Worms* outing.

Mech madness in *Dark Horizons: Lore*. Now seeking beta testers.

IGC 2003: "Right, who's got a tenner and we'll make a game."

SCENE AND HEARD

UNDERGROUND, OVERGROUND, DEVELOPING FREE...

Aside from Oregon's Indie Games Con, there are other chances for international underdogs to strut their stuff. March 2004 will see the 6th Independent Games Festival (IGF) taking place in San Jose, California. Less of a shoulder-rubbing, brainstorming exercise, and more a straightforward competition as part of the Game Developers Conference, this event was inspired by the Sundance Film Festival. There are about 100 entrants for the competition every year and winners amble home with a wad of cash.

Since its launch in 2000, Scotland's Dare To Be Digital competition has received hundreds of entries from students around the UK. Universities and colleges across the country ran branches of the competition this year, with the winners visiting Dundee for the final week of the competition. *Demon Lore* – a PC RPG – won £2,000 for best innovation and creativity. Richard Leinfellner, EA's Vice President was a member of the judging panel and judged the standard of entries as "incredible".

The award-winning *Demon Lore*.

and it was our life so it didn't seem that special, except it was fun and we were making enough money out of it to live."

When Amiga hired Hare's team in 1990, upfront costs for games like *Sensible Soccer*, which went on to sell two million copies in its various guises, remained well beneath £50,000. But as the 1990s progressed, the industry became a multi-billion dollar prospect, with publishers consolidating and trends shifting toward games based on established licences.

"It was getting to a point where unless you had access to IP, you were fighting an uphill battle," Hare tells us. "You also needed a lot of clout with retailers to get your game on the shelves, so many people who wanted to make games felt that unless they were owned by or had a relationship with some of these large publishers, they were out in the cold."

While most Old Testament indies either sold out to The Man or packed up their development tools and went to work on building sites, some managed to weather corporate storms and rising budgets and maintained their autonomy. Team 17, the UK studio behind the *Worms* franchise, is one of the few larger-scale independents remaining in Europe and it's perfectly happy to remain that way.

"Once you go down the route of being acquired, you have to change the way you work – and we've always been used to making our own decisions. Lose your IP and you lose your independence," says Team 17's development director Martyn Brown. "It's happened to quite a few people we know, but we like to keep things the way they are."

"The budget for most modern games could pay off a Third World deficit"

MAKING MOVIES

A few years ago developers might have scoffed at comparisons between indie games and indie films, but now many believe the two media are growing closer in nature. While the budget for most contemporary games could pay off a Third World deficit, underground intellects continue to tinker away cheaply beneath the surface.

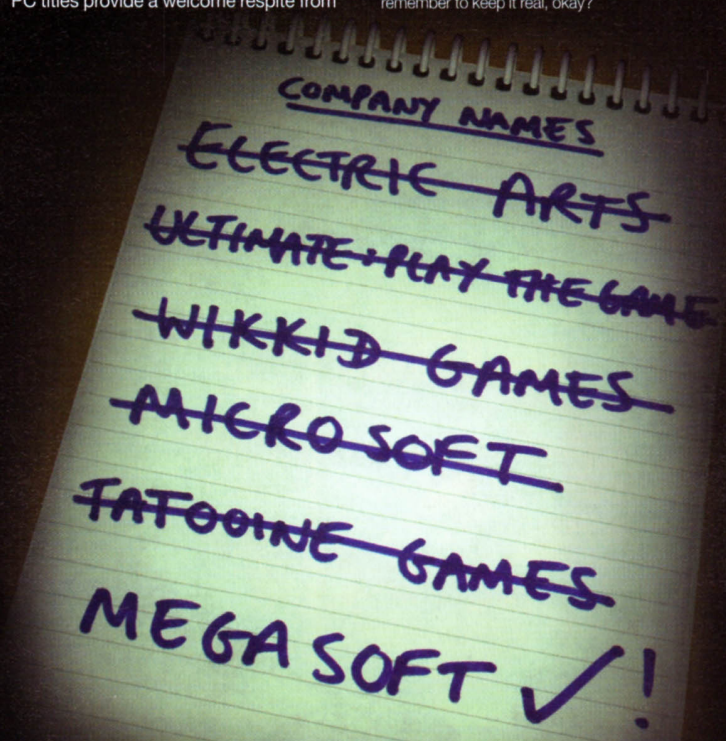
Most publishers would argue that if a game only sells 100,000 copies then it isn't worth creating; but if the project cost £3,500 to create (the average cost of an indie), then that amount of sales would signify a huge success. At a cost of £23,500, the *Blair Witch Project* saw a much larger profit ratio than multi-million global blockbuster movies like *Titanic* and *The Phantom Menace*.

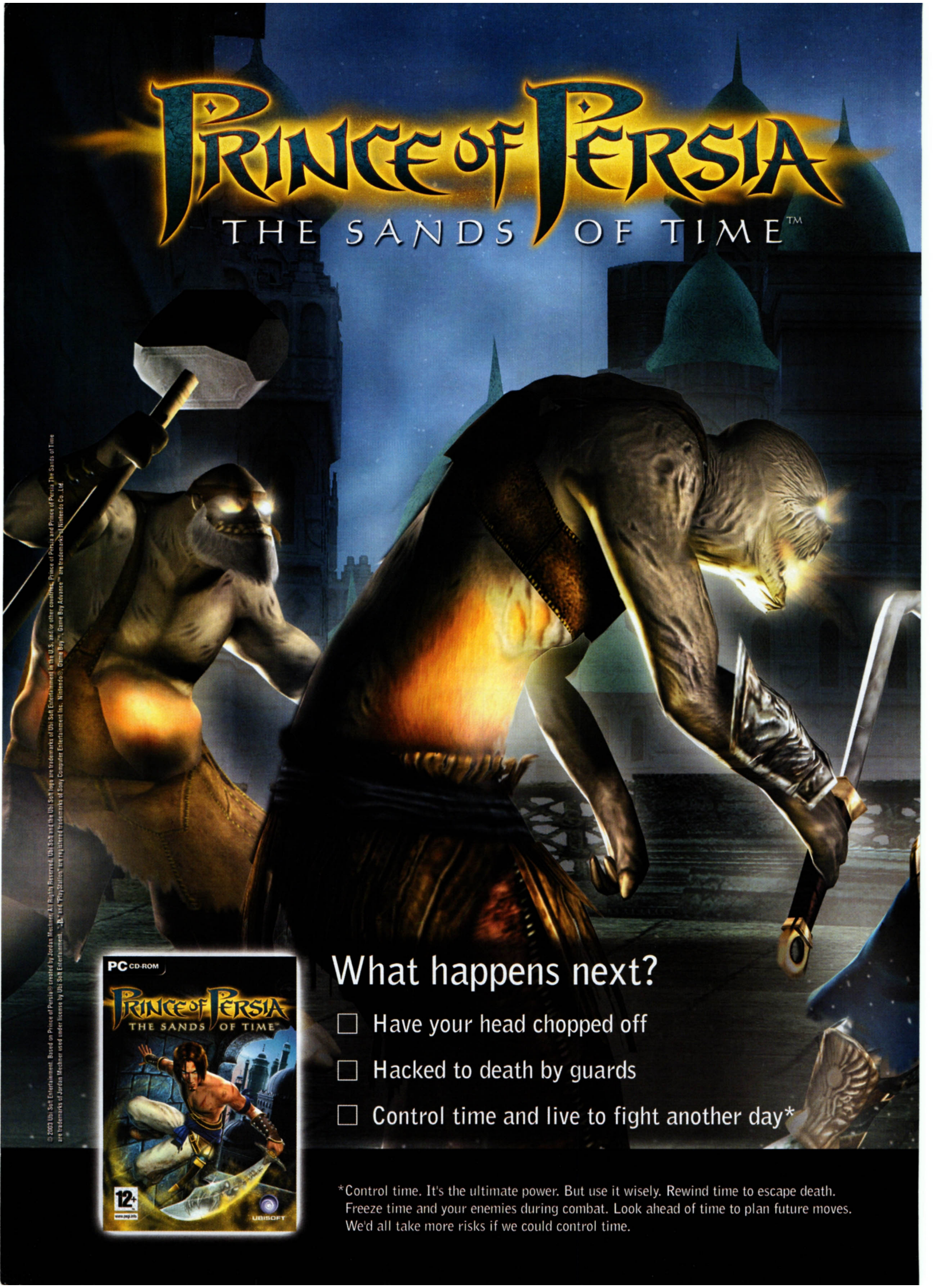
From HipSoft's *Digby's Donuts* to Fluid Games' high-kicking *The Rage*, Pin's *Terraformers* (a 3D game for the blind) to Plastic Games's *Bit Shifter*, independent PC titles provide a welcome respite from the mainstream's hackneyed sequels, lazy licensing and tired franchises. The same "keep it real" ethos is ensconced behind some of our favourite games: even though Valve *(Half-Life 2)* work within the Vivendi space and Rockstar Games (*GTA: Vice City*) sells its games by the truckload, both companies maintain a lot of autonomy. Maybe it's just a matter of time before a breakthrough-hit hails from the underground.

Either way, DIY developers are welcome agitators. Their raw, unfettered creativity is a refreshing counter to the corporate monopolies of the games industry and it would undoubtedly be a poorer world without them. Even if some of their games do stink. PCZ

HAVE YOUR SAY

Are underground games a breeding ground for creativity and new talent? Play the games on our discs and then vent your passion and fury on the *PC ZONE* forums (www.pczone.co.uk). Just remember to keep it real, okay?

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NADEO

nVIDIA The way it's meant to be played

PCZONE PRESENTS THE BIGGEST PC GAMES OF 2004

PC ZONE PRESENTS:
THE BIGGEST PC GAMES OF 2004

IT'S THE SORT of festive, end of year, desperately-groping-to-find-meaning-in-life kind of thing we have to say in the run-up to Christmas, but boy oh boy, what a year for PC gaming 2003 was, eh? Even though some of the big hitters didn't quite make the cut, there are so many outstanding games to play at the moment it's frankly bewildering. What with *Call Of Duty*, *Max Payne 2*, *H&D2*, *Pro Evo 3* and *KotOR* (to name but a few), we've all found ourselves doing brutal triage to narrow down the games worthy of attention. And that's gotta be a good sign.

Luckily, next year is looking equally incredible for PC gaming, with some truly genre-changing games coming our way – not least the stunning *Doom 3*, which kicks off our Best Of 2004 line-up in magnificent style on page 36.

Elsewhere, we've managed to whittle our most-wanted games down to an unwieldy and largely arbitrary 29 scorching games. Why, you may ask? Well, last year, we managed to round off the list to a startlingly convenient total of 101, but as it turned out a lot of the titles we featured were utter shite. Not only that, but a good quarter of them didn't come out at all, owing to slippage, cancellation or the fact that they existed only in someone's deranged mind.

Hence the decision to refine this year's round-up a little, concentrating on the best of the best, the cream of the crop, the top dogs, the [*get on with it –Ed*].

Compiling such an elite list was not easy, and many worthy games have been cruelly excluded, but we've nonetheless managed to assemble a nigh-on definitive list of the biggest games of next year. Even better, we've divided them into genres across 24 fun-packed pages. Go on, knock yourself out.

HEY, WHAT'S THIS?

WHAT ARE THE ODDS?

THE LONG SHOTS OF 2004

You may have noticed a few key absences – big games you might have expected to appear and haven't. The reason is, we're not entirely convinced they'll make a 2004 release date; so instead, we're giving odds, in these handy yellow boxes, for how likely we think it is they'll prove us wrong. Place bets now!

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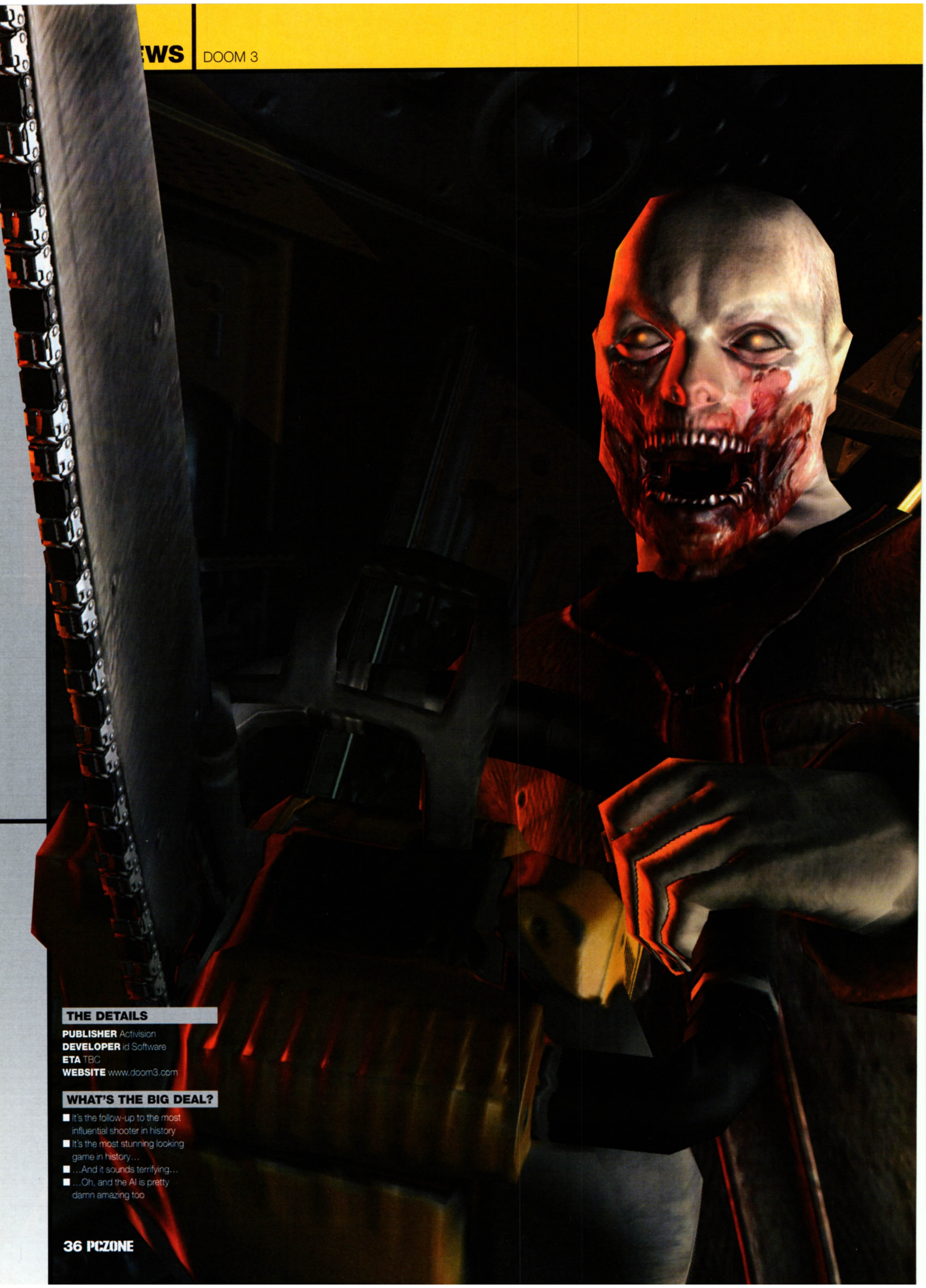


THE DETAILS

PUBLISHER Activision
DEVELOPER id Software
ETA TBC
WEBSITE www.doom3.com

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- It's the follow-up to the most influential shooter in history
- It's the most stunning looking game in history...
- ...And it sounds terrifying...
- ...Oh, and the AI is pretty damn amazing too

LAST PREVIEWED PCZONE ISSUE 135

Doom, Doom, shake, shake the room...

DOOM 3

ETA When it's done 2004

***Martin Korda* catches up with id Software and delves deep into what's shaping up to be the most atmospheric shooter of all time**

THROUGHOUT the annals of gaming history, there are few titles which have left as much of an impression – for so long, on so many – as *Doom*. It's testament to the game's quality that over a decade after its initial release and some nine years since its sequel, the series has returned to such rabid excitement.

Of course, the fact that it's the most visually stunning and atmospheric piece of software on the planet does help its cause somewhat. We were lucky enough to get another eyeful of the game that's got graphics cards quaking in their ports, when we caught up with id Software's Tim Willits (lead designer on *Doom 3*), programmer Robert Duffy and long-locked international face of the company and CEO Todd Hollenshead. Get ready to be impressed.

CALM BEFORE THE STORM

Just in case you've been living on a completely different planet and are not familiar with *Doom 3's* setting, let's start with a little background information to get you up to speed. The UAC, a mega-research corporation, has got itself in a bit of a pickle. Having set up base (the Delta Complex) on Mars to conduct top secret teleportation experiments, they somehow manage to rip asunder a gateway into hell. The silly sausages.

Understandably, the hell spawn aren't too happy about being interrupted in the middle of a roasting, and flood out into the base, seemingly massacring everyone. Everyone except you, that is, and a few other helpless unfortunates. Which kind of leaves it in your trembling mitts to take on the entire might of all that is evil, and save the universe from being consumed by a kerzillion years of darkness and suffering. No pressure.

Thankfully, it won't be all guns, guns, guns from the off. As Tim explains, you'll get a chance to get your bearings first, as well as being thrown a few teasers to get you in the mood for the story ahead. "When you arrive at the UAC, you'll have an option to explore a limited amount of the facility before the demonic invasion takes place. You can explore some of the more administrative areas, talk with other characters and learn about what's going on with the experiments, while discovering some secrets about the other main characters."

The game's sedate start won't last for long though, and you'll soon find yourself scrabbling for your life, embroiled in some of the most thrilling and

Whatever you do, don't wait to see the whites of their eyes.

"We're leaning towards crazy puzzles to make hell an unsettling place"

atmospheric set pieces ever to grace a PC screen. Having just sat through one particularly gripping and life-threatening sequence which had us crying for our mummies, we asked Tim if he could give us a few more specific examples.

"We have a scenario where you find these tanks of dead demons that the UAC have discovered. All the tanks glow with an eerie light and you have to make your way through the facility using just that illumination as your guide." And will one of them burst out of their tanks at you? "If I were to tell you that, it wouldn't be a surprise when they do, would it?" he told us. "Sometimes, the anticipation of what's going to happen can be more frightening than the actual event itself." We'd say that's a yes then.

INTO THE FIRE

But don't expect to be spending your whole time cowering in the crevices of the man-made locales of the Delta Complex. This is because id Software has seen fit to book you a trip to hell as part of *Doom 3*'s wild ride of bloodshed, the thoughtful souls. Propelled into the fire in order to retrieve a special item essential for the completion of your mission, you can expect a none-too-friendly reception, as well as a drastic change of setting and gameplay mechanisms to boot.

You can't go out like that, you're only half-dressed.

"When you get to hell, you'll find your stamina is hugely affected," explains Tim. "The environment will be totally different and affects your movement around this world. We're leaning more towards crazy interactive puzzles, which will turn you in all sorts of different directions in order to make hell a really unsettling place – you never know what's going to happen next. The world is very dynamic and fluid, unlike the man-made areas on the base." Sounds chilling. But not literally, obviously.

HIDDEN DEPTHS?

Contrary to what many believe, *Doom 3* is shaping up to be anything but a boot-it-and-shoot-it, linear and unoriginal FPS encased in a jaw-dislocating engine. Graphically, it's clearly untouchable, but as we spoke to Tim, it became evident there's more to *Doom 3*'s gameplay than the ill-informed would have you believe.

"We have situations where we orchestrate the events that will happen to you. But we also have situations based on what you do. The characters and even parts of the environment will be reacting dynamically to you. We do control the environments, but you also have choices you can make," states Tim.

This dynamic environment is probably best highlighted by the way the AI reacts to you. Whereas in the past, many shooters would throw you into a battle where the AI's sole goal was to shoot/bite/kick/stab you to death, *Doom 3*'s nasties are rather more intelligent.

Take the terrifying Archvile creature for example, one of several enemies resurrected and given a makeover from the original game. In *Doom*, the Archvile could resurrect monsters that you'd killed. But, as Tim is keen to highlight: "The Archvile can now call in monsters. If you walk into a room and there's a lot of overhead room, the Archvile may call in some flying creatures. But if you try and hide in the ducts, he'll try to call in some smaller maggot-like creatures to get you. Basically, he'll summon the type

THE SOUND OF MUSIC

THERE'S NO GREATER TERROR THAN A TERROR YOU CAN'T SEE

Imagine *Jaws* with no music. Go on, have a go. What would you have? A fin. A few waves. The occasional sound of a squawking seagull flying by. *Doom 3* is no different. Well, apart from the fin, sea and seagull sounds, of course.

Without the right sound and music, *Doom 3* wouldn't be scary at all. Utilising six-way surround sound and subtle uses of environmental effects and music, it is without a doubt the scariest game we've ever heard, playing with your mind and making you believe there's a demon in your room ready to slurp your intestines like spaghetti.

As id Software's CEO Todd Hollenshead explains: "We don't have level music per se, like in *Return To Castle Wolfenstein* where you had independent audio tracks. We're going for more ambient sounds. There will be elements of music, but there's no soundtrack." Which kind of negates the possibility of having Trent Reznor putting one together, then. "At one point, we thought we'd have a collaboration with him, but it ended up not working out for us." But from what we've seen of the game, the sound and music complement the graphics to perfection. Who needs Mr Reznor, eh?

CV

ID SOFTWARE

Games development companies don't come much bigger, better or more influential than this. Don't believe us? Then here's a taster to convince you...

1993 *Doom* changed the face of PC gaming forever. *Wolfenstein* may have been the first FPS, but *Doom* was more influential.

1994 *Doom 2: Hell On Earth*, the inevitable sequel, was bigger, badder and longer. However, many felt the original was the better game.

1996 *Quake*. The first *Quake* game took graphics and sound to an all-new level, as well as introducing a true 3D engine for the first time.

1997 *Quake II*. Building on the success of the original, this wasn't a massive leap forward, but did introduce an absolutely superb multiplayer game.

1999 *Quake III: Arena* followed on from the stunning success of *Quake II*. The third game was the first game in the series to do away with a traditional single-player game, turning the spotlight solely on deathmatching.

That hat is sooo you!

Excuse me, but would you mind terribly turning me and my friend here the right way up?

of creatures he needs to find or kill you." Now does that sound like a game entirely reliant on scripted sequences? Thought not. Neither does Tim.

"Our AI is pretty smart," he continues. "Creatures will know where you are, they'll set up ambushes for you, they'll hunt for you, they'll follow you. We've got some areas where, if you get carried away and start shooting out the lights, they'll start to close in around you. All the creatures can see in the dark because they're born from the depths of hell. They can smell your fear." And if you're not careful, you'll be doing the same while playing the game.

TO ME, TO YOU

During the course of the game, you'll also have the opportunity to interact with the base's computer system, through the Graphical User Interface (GUI). "We've added a GUI to the computer systems throughout the UAC," begins Tim. "It's a very powerful interactive paradigm and doesn't require additional controls. You interact with the

Doom 3 is shaping up to be the most terrifying game ever.

GUIs the same way you interact with a webpage, and the graphics are presented with a *Flash*-like level of interactivity and quality. The computers can control anything from complex machinery to simply turning on or off the lights in a room." Using a GUI will be simple. Walk up to it, and your weapon will automatically lower and a mouse cursor will appear on the screen.

INCY WINCY SPIDER

Tim and CEO Todd Hollenshead were reluctant to divulge much information about as yet unannounced enemies. We did, however, manage to find out about one new alien adversary, the Vagary, a spider queen who Tim promises will be as vicious and fast as she is terrifying. The Vagary has the body of a spider and the torso of a female, and is equipped with a web and claw attack.

But AI won't be restricted only to things that want to tear out your ribcage and use it as a dish rack. During the course of your quest, you'll invariably stumble across other survivors, who'll furnish you with priceless nuggets of information or help guide you through particularly tricky areas of the game. "These characters will help feed the story and give background information," says Tim. "We've tried to create a much richer back-story for the UAC, what they're doing and why you're there, so you can experience much more than just running around and shooting."

BACK TO THE FUTURE

In what is clearly a homage to *Doom*, *Doom 3* is also set to feature hidden rooms packed with useful equipment, a feature which has been tied in perfectly to the UAC's back-story. "The UAC has always been very paranoid about their security. They were very concerned about their employees stealing technology, so they've hidden things within the base's infrastructure."

Of course, keeping yourself and your allies alive would be virtually impossible were it not for the game's monstrous collection of heavy-duty weaponry, much of which we've spoken about in detail in previous previews. But we did manage to garner some new info about a few of the death-givers that id has been reluctant to divulge in great detail in the past.

Tim assures us that the BFG, although still under development, will resemble the original BFG far more closely than it will *Quake III*'s, hopefully meaning a return to its 'Area Damage' roots. He also revealed that the chaingun has proved a favourite for deathmatch games, thanks to its combination of rapid fire-rate and long-distance accuracy.

In addition, he also proudly promised you'll be able to knock rockets out of the sky with the Plasma gun before they get a chance to part your body from its limbs, a trick which will no doubt prove priceless in multiplayer games.

What's more, like many of its monsters, a lot of *Doom 3*'s items are upgrades from the original. "The Berserk Pack is now like the Haste power-up and Berserk pack combined. We also have invisibility and IR, but beyond that it's too early to say anything more," explains Tim.

SOUL TO SOUL

But it was his next snippet of information regarding the mysterious Soul Cube which got our heartbeats really racing.

"We don't want to give away too many surprises, but what we can say is that the Soul Cube is an ancient weapon, one created millions of years ago to stop the forces of hell. It was used in an epic battle of good versus evil long before earth was anything like we know it today." The plot thickens.

TURN OFF THE LIGHTS. CAMERA... ACTION!

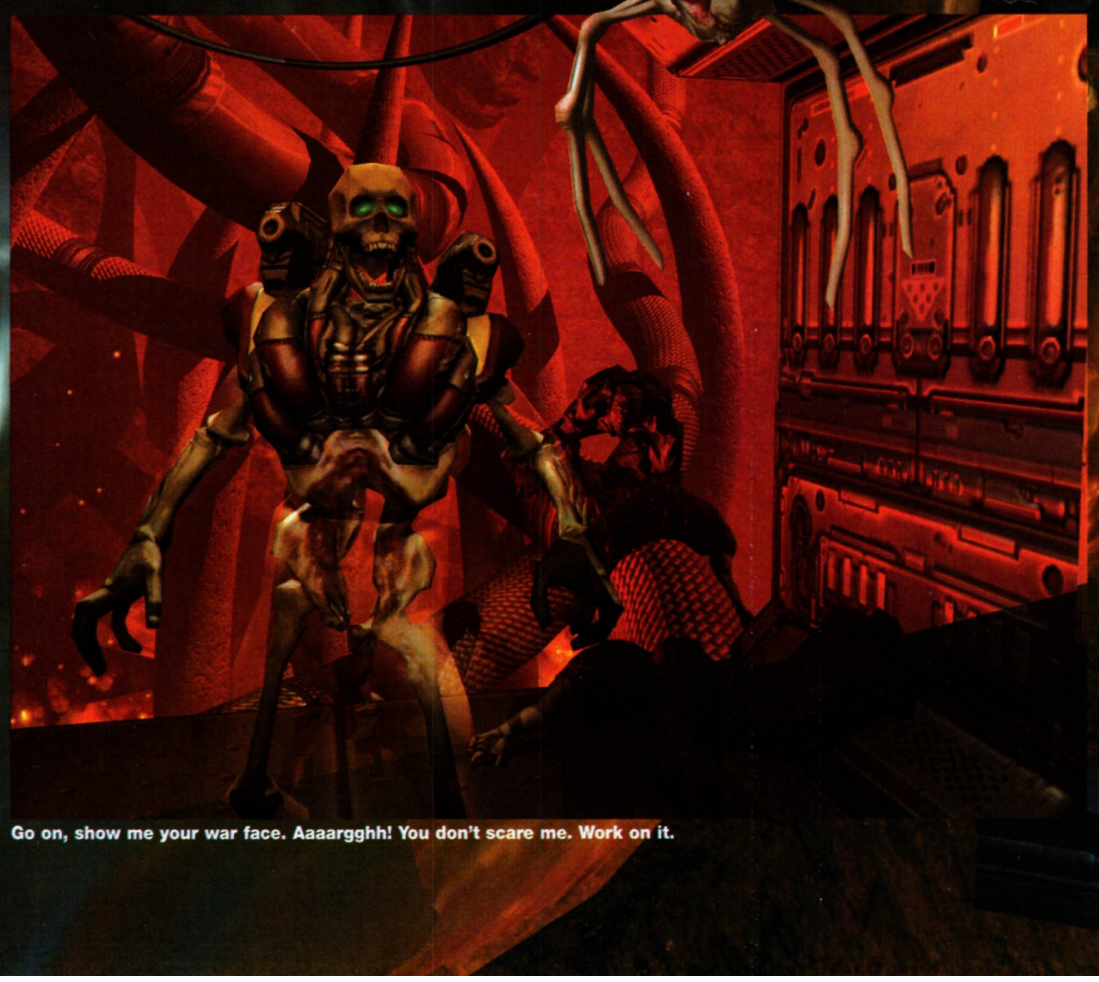
LEAD DESIGNER *TIM WILLITS* REVEALS HOW WE MAY SOON BE SEEING *DOOM* ON THE BIG SCREEN TOO

Yes, it's happening. Or at least, so Tim believes. With the film rights now officially licensed to Warner Brothers (the third time the game has been licensed), it's looking more likely than ever that the film will get made. "There's a high level of excitement at Warner Brothers," says Tim. "It's difficult to say until they start filming the movie whether there's actually going to be one, though. However, I think we're well on our way to a solid script. Then we hope to get top actors associated with the project." Could this be the first ever, decent game-based film? We live in hope.

MODS YOUR GAME?

PROGRAMMER *ROBERT DUFFY* TELLS US HOW YOU CAN CREATE YOUR VERY OWN HELL ON EARTH

From the start of the project, id was adamant it wanted to make the modding community's life as easy as possible. "You can run the world editor, as well as the other tools direct from the console," Robert explains. "Another key factor is that all of the source areas, scripts and GUI scripts are available right out of the box. This provides a huge learning tool for people, as they can see exactly how we put the game together. In the past, we'd typically only release one or two examples, but with *Doom 3*, you have everything available. We're looking forward to seeing all of the cool content the community produces."



Go on, show me your war face. Aaaargghh! You don't scare me. Work on it.

Doom 3's physics system is stunning.

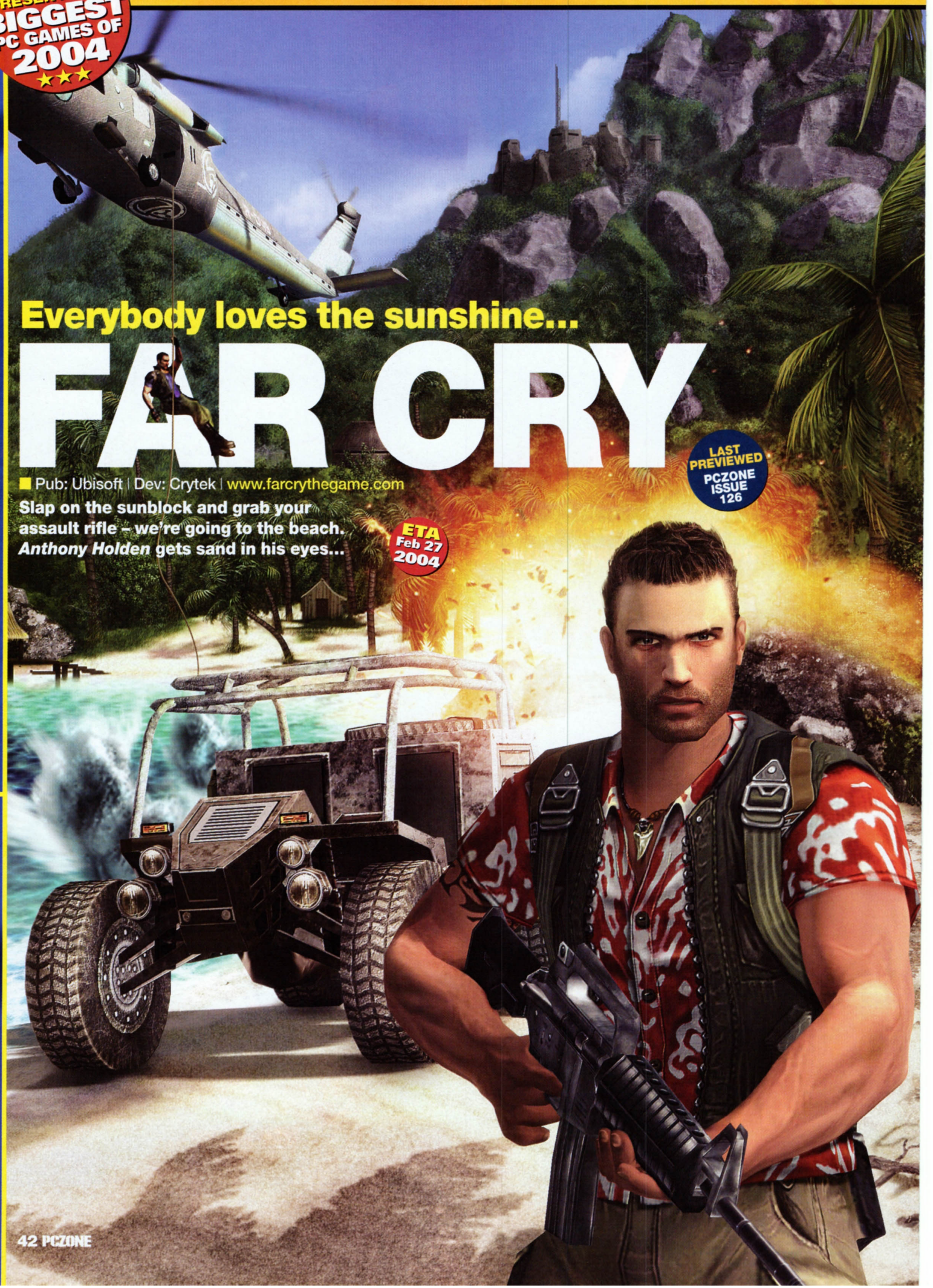
Oh dear, dry rot. Nasty. That's not going to be cheap I'm afraid, guv.

EVOLUTION

Id's 22 dedicated employees have been working furiously on the game since the company's annual QuakeCon event, during which they received feedback from their fans. "Players felt they floated around too much, a problem we found to be rooted in the physics engine. But because the guy who made our physics engine is part of our team (Jan Paul van Waveren), it was easy to fix. We've now made the player feel weightier, which gives deathmatch a more solid feel."

The way *Doom 3* is shaping up, it's looking more and more likely that it'll live up to its hype. A re-imagining of its predecessors rather than a recreation, both fans of the original and *Doom* newcomers will no doubt find plenty to get excited about. Graphically stunning and ever more convincing, and with some gameplay surprises to boot, it looks like it's going to be a slugfest between this titan and *Half-Life 2* for 2004 FPS supremacy. Quite frankly, we can't wait till it all kicks off for real. PCZ

"We've tried to create a richer back-story, so you can experience much more than running around and shooting"



Everybody loves the sunshine...

FAR CRY

LAST PREVIEWED PCZONE ISSUE 126

■ Pub: Ubisoft | Dev: Crytek | www.farcrythegame.com

Slap on the sunblock and grab your assault rifle – we're going to the beach. *Anthony Holden* gets sand in his eyes...

ETA Feb 27 2004

"Hang on, hang on, I'm reloading. Ohhh, no fair!"

The 'polybump' technique used to create models is similar to that in *Doom 3*.

MAPPING MADE EASY

NOW EVEN YOUR MUM CAN MAKE A KICK-ASS MAP

It's fair to say most of us will have dabbled with a set of modding tools at one point or another. My first foray came with an early version of Worldcraft, trying to make the world's most ambitious *Quake* map. After wrestling with countless leaks, interminable compile times and a generally unwieldy interface, I gave up with only a lava-filled trench to show for my trouble. Well, things have come a long, long, *long* way since then.

The CryEngine Sandbox is *Far Cry*'s built-in editing tool. It is, not to put too fine a point on it, bloody remarkable. Built around a 'what you see is what you play' concept, this straightforward tool allows you to whip up a working map in a matter of minutes, complete with terrain, foliage, vehicles and weapons. It even lets you jump straight in and play your level at the click of a button. It's level design at its most intuitive.

"When we designed *Far Cry* we knew that the long-term success of the game depended on having the best modding tools we could make," says Crytek's Cevat Yerli. "What we can do in a few minutes with CryEngine Sandbox takes hours in other editors. You can preview your artwork, you can set up your materials, create sound layers, create your dynamic music system, you can set up the AI, create the physics – whatever you want pretty much. It's a small wonder."

The CryEngine Sandbox is sure to attract a legion of new modders.

CV

CRYTEK

Formed by an ambitious trio of brothers with a love of first-person shooters, Crytek is a young development team based in Coburg, Germany.

1997 Three brothers – Faruk, Cevat and Avni Yerli – begin to tinker with game ideas. They gather a couple of like-minded friends and a small development community begins to emerge.

1999 Their tinkering begins to gel into something more substantial and the Yerlis officially form Crytek in Coburg. By the end of 1999, offices have been leased and work is underway on an ambitious 3D engine.

2000 At E3 2000, Crytek touts a tech demo to every publisher in the place. Duly impressed, NVIDIA signs a deal for Crytek to develop the *X-Isle: Dinosaur Island* demo for distribution with the GeForce 3.

2001 In March 2001, a publishing deal is penned with Ubisoft. The *X-Isle* project is renamed *Far Cry*. Newly flush with Ubi's cash, Crytek hires talent from 17 nations around the globe to work on the new title. Staff numbers quickly increase from six to 58.

2004 The eagerly awaited *Far Cry* is finally due for release.

THEY HIDE the bruises well, but the team at Crytek must be pinching themselves every five minutes. Three years ago they were a tiny start-up in a backwater town with only a tech demo of some lizards wandering around a swamp to their credit. Now, they're putting the final touches to a game that's being mentioned in the same breath as *Half-Life 2* and *Doom 3*. It's an incredible feat, but, as we found when we visited the German developer, one they're all too keen to play down.

"I honestly think it's our inexperience that has put us here," says Cevat Yerli, CEO of Crytek and one of three brothers at the heart of the *Far Cry* dream. "It's what really pushed the game more than anything else. None of us were afraid to push things because we didn't know what was possible and what wasn't. We just said 'look, it must be possible' – and we made it work."

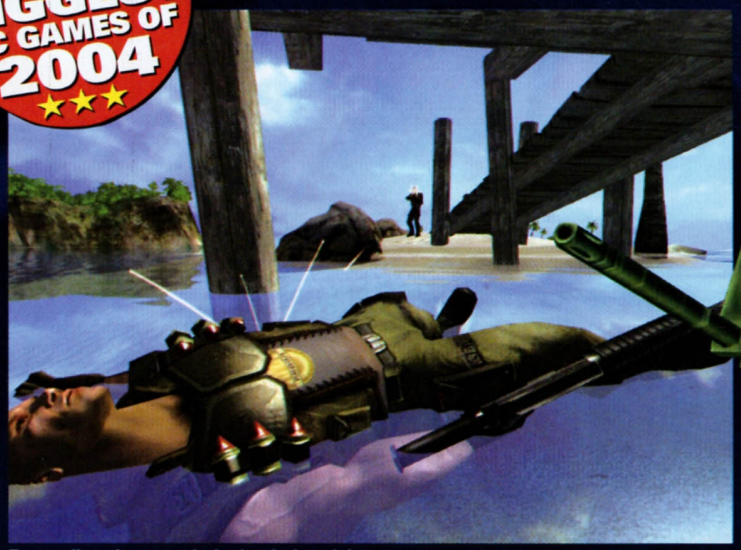
If you haven't seen the game in motion yet, let us assure you they've achieved something special. *Far Cry* is one of the most striking and distinctive first-person shooters to come along in years, with a sun-drenched tropical environment that drips atmosphere from every blood-splattered leaf. It may not match *Doom 3* for sheer level of detail (though it's not far off), but its vast outdoor environments are without doubt some of the most fetching we've encountered to date.

"One of the most striking first-person shooters to come along in years"

"In 2000 I had a vacation in the Maldives," says Cevat. "It was the most beautiful place on Earth I had ever seen. When I woke up in the morning and opened the door I saw the sun glowing everywhere and I thought: *this* is the location for our game."

FUN IN THE SUN

Thankfully perhaps for the Maldivian tourist board, the action does not take place in the Maldives, but on a series of similarly picturesque islands somewhere



For god's sake man, he's dead already!

"Bugger me, this sand gets everywhere..."

ONLINE ASSAULT

FAR CRY'S MULTIPLAYER MODES FINALLY REVEALED

Until recently, *Far Cry*'s multiplayer game has been very much under wraps. As it turns out, that's because it didn't actually exist. The team has been largely concentrating on the single-player game until recently, when a four-month release slippage allowed them to expand the online portion into something worthwhile.

The game will now take in three multiplayer modes – deathmatch, team deathmatch and 'assault', the latter being a basic revision of *Unreal Tournament*'s assault mode with vehicles and player classes. "*Far Cry* multiplayer is trying to take some of the basic essence of other successful multiplayer shooters, and the elements from *Far Cry* that have been successful in the single-player game and make that work really well in multiplayer," says Crytek's Chris Auty. "What that means is lush tropical islands, providing a lot of natural cover, and vehicles, because the distances are so great. Our maps are typically 2km square, and our sniper rifle shots and rockets can go up to 1km with pretty good accuracy."

While these aspects promise to add an unorthodox twist to some familiar game modes, it's still a pretty bare-bones selection for such a big game. Only around eight unique multiplayer maps will be shipped, though these are padded out with day, night and heavy weather variants.

Chris explains: "Because our editor and mod system is so easy to use, we decided to focus on a few key areas and let the modding community fill in the rest."

So, using the robustness of your editing tools as an excuse to skimp on content, eh? It's a bolshy move on the part of Crytek, though having seen the Sandbox in action, one we can understand completely.

Assault mode takes full advantage of *Far Cry*'s vehicles and open spaces.

Hands up who wants ice-cream?

in Micronesia. You enter the scene as Jack Carver, a charter skipper with a mysterious past (of course) and a penchant for killing people with any weapon you can lay your hands on. At the start of the game, you're hired to take a certain Valerie, a sexy young photojournalist (or so she claims), to shoot exotic birds in an untouched island paradise (with a camera that is). Job done, you're just about to head home, when you're attacked by a boatload of mercenaries, your ship is scuppered and you find yourself scrambling into an abandoned WW2 bunker and fighting for your life.

"The credo of our game is: hell breaks loose in paradise," explains Cevat. "So with that in mind, we start with paradise and we end with hell. It's not really hell of course, but the environment gradually transforms into something harsher and darker. As the story unfolds the game gets darker and more serious, and there will be plenty of twists and revelations along the way."

While we'll have to take Cevat's word for that, there's certainly nothing too surprising in the game's basic premise. One man, alone against an island of vicious mercenaries, with only a selection of real-world weapons to aid him and a lusty maiden to rescue. Oh, and a mysterious guardian character giving hints and directions over a walkie-talkie. Luckily however, that's where the established patterns are abandoned.

TASTE OF PARADISE

Aside from its visual appeal, *Far Cry* has two vital features that elevate it into potentially goal-shifting territory. The first is the AI, which has a decent claim to be the best team-based AI of any shooter ever. The other is an old favourite, promised a million times and delivered perhaps twice: non-linear gameplay.

We'll understand if you're furiously rolling your eyes and tutting right now – it's one of those immortal claims that marketing gibbons love to stick on the back of game boxes, in amongst bullet points like 'unique multiplayer modes'.

This time, however – and you might want to take a seat – it *actually works*. Before you choke though, let's qualify that. It's not the Holy Grail of freeform action. Don't expect to be able to talk your way out of a firefight with a series of mind-boggling riddles or fashion a crude yet effective abseiling rig from vines and fronds. You still have to progress through the game by shooting bad guys and getting from point A to point B – but how you specifically go about these things is completely up to you.

Cevat explains: "We've kind of built a non-linear structure in a linear construct, if you like. What we have is an 'action bubble' concept, which means that every action scene in the game is pretty much converged into a bubble, a story point. So you have spaces, connected by dots, which build up a storyline. The story is completely linear, but the way you approach it is entirely up to you."

They're not as dumb as they look...

Tropical Jungle Toe. Toe Factor: 5 (with apologies to www.cameltoe.org).

"Gonna shoot me some fish, uh-huh."

While this all sounds reasonable enough, the point was really pushed home to me during a level entitled Pier. Like most of *Far Cry*'s missions, it's a vast, sprawling affair, broken up by multiple checkpoints. Having completed the opening sections of the level with relative ease, I got stuck in a big way at the final checkpoint. It seemed simple enough – barrel down a mountain and clear out a pier-side enemy camp before buggering off in a boat. A cinch, surely, seeing as I'd already overcome a guard station, commandeered a paraglider, sailed it to the safety of a beach cove, infiltrated a mercenary camp, blown up a weapons cache, stolen a humvee, had a manic chase through the jungle and rammed a pursuing jeep off the side of a cliff.

Ten attempts later, I was getting increasingly frustrated. The enemies were too organised, too quick to surround me and too well armed. I'd tried the direct approach, the stealth approach, a bit of hit-and-run combat and a shitload of grenades. There were just too many of them. Looking to the skies for inspiration, I happened to spot a guard tower on top of a mountain half a click away. It was a bit of a hike over there (there is a sprint key, but its use is limited by stamina), but sneaking up on the guard and taking his sniper ammo gave me exactly the edge I needed. I thinned out the ranks a bit from the top of the hill, making sure to take out the squad leader, and moved in to clear out the rest as they struggled to regroup.

It wasn't the only way to complete the level by any means, but it's exactly this sort of improvisation that *Far Cry* is all about. There's always at least half a dozen different ways to approach each action sequence, it might just take a few frustrating moments before you click out of the forward-forward-shoot mindset and take the lateral approach. After that, you'll feel more liberated than a naked madman in a tub full of jelly.

"The AI could well be the smartest and most organised ever seen in an FPS"

SWIMMING WITH SHARKS

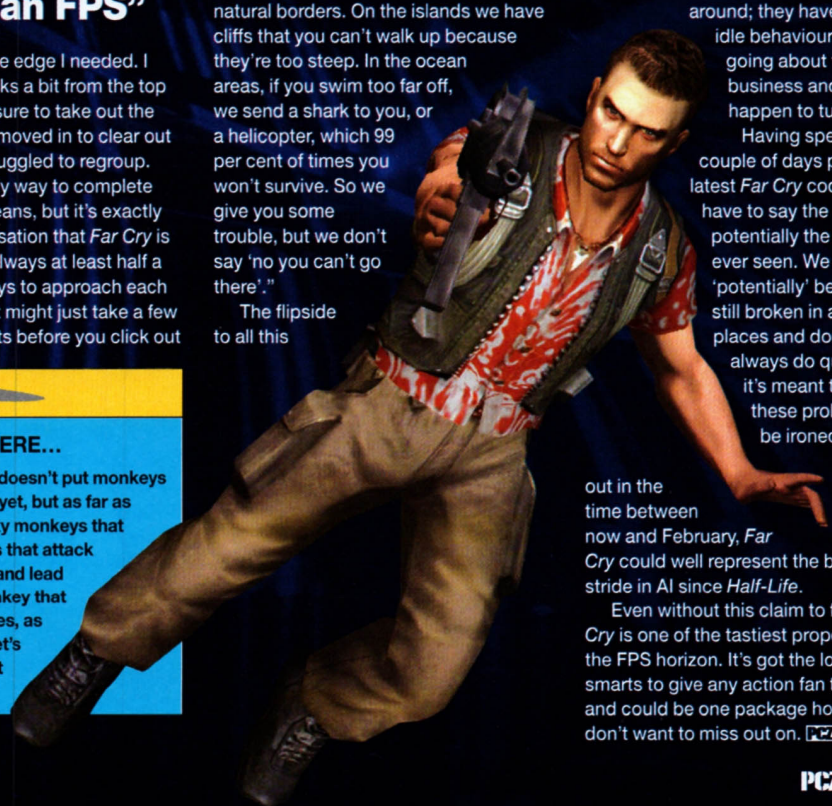
The first thing most of us will try to do is break the game's apparently open nature, but Crytek is one step ahead. "Sure, you can go and swim out into the ocean and leave the island if you want," smiles Cevat. "Yes it's possible, but of course it's limited. Not by unnatural borders such as invisible walls, but by natural borders. On the islands we have cliffs that you can't walk up because they're too steep. In the ocean areas, if you swim too far off, we send a shark to you, or a helicopter, which 99 per cent of times you won't survive. So we give you some trouble, but we don't say 'no you can't go there'."

The flipside to all this freedom is a hugely sophisticated AI system. It's pretty obvious that you can only offer open-ended action if the AI is smart enough to react appropriately, and *Far Cry* is more than up to the task. The enemies – which range from mercenaries and helicopters through to mysterious mutant creatures – could well be the smartest and most organised ever seen in an FPS. "The AI adapts tactics according to the player's actions," boasts Cevat. "They use teamwork, they call reinforcements – either on radio, by launching flares, or just by signalling or calling to nearby guys. They're smart as to their environments and how to use them. They find cover, they use military tactics – they'll flank you out or retreat under fire."

The enemies are also as attuned to the world of stealth as any *Metal Gear* grunt. You can distract them by throwing rocks, or sneak past them when their back is turned. "Enemies are never automatically aware of your presence," agrees Cevat. "They have to see you or hear you to know where you are. Until then, they're not just standing around; they have a lot of idle behaviours – they're going about their daily business and you just happen to turn up."

Having spent a couple of days playing the latest *Far Cry* code, we'd have to say the AI is potentially the best we've ever seen. We say 'potentially' because it's still broken in a lot of places and doesn't always do quite what it's meant to. But if these problems can be ironed out in the time between now and February, *Far Cry* could well represent the biggest stride in AI since *Half-Life*.

Even without this claim to fame, *Far Cry* is one of the tastiest propositions on the FPS horizon. It's got the looks and smarts to give any action fan the sweats, and could be one package holiday you don't want to miss out on.



Why Don't You?...

SURELY THERE'S BEEN SOME KIND OF MISTAKE HERE...

What sort of a sick person designs a game set in the jungle and doesn't put monkeys in it? Maybe there are a couple hidden in levels we haven't seen yet, but as far as we're concerned this game should be all about monkeys. Cheeky monkeys that steal your ammo when you're not paying attention, evil monkeys that attack you from the treetops, cute monkeys that leap out of the jungle and lead you to hidden cave entrances... Better yet, how about a pet monkey that can be sent off to cause a diversion while you plant the explosives, as well as doing hilarious gags with bras and soda siphons? (And let's face it, what kind of South Pacific sea captain *doesn't* have a pet monkey?) Crytek, your job is only half done...

WHAT ARE THE ODDS?

QUAKE 4

There's very little chance you'll see this immense sequel in 2004. If anything, it'll be shown for the first time at E3 or QuakeCon, but we strongly tip a release date in 2005.
ODDS FOR RELEASE IN 2004: 100/1

Even though we don't yet know when the game will ship, we have got hold of these rather nice, exclusive screenshots. You lucky people, you.

HALF-LIFE 2

ETA TBC

Pub: VU Games | Dev: Valve Software | www.valvesoftware.com

Over two months late and still no sign of *Half-Life 2*. *Martin Korda* tries to make sense of it all

SEPTEMBER 30, 2003, a date tattooed on to the eyeballs of every self-respecting PC gamer the world over. Holiday time was booked. Wives lent to sad loner neighbours for a week to get them out of the way. Children sold into slavery.

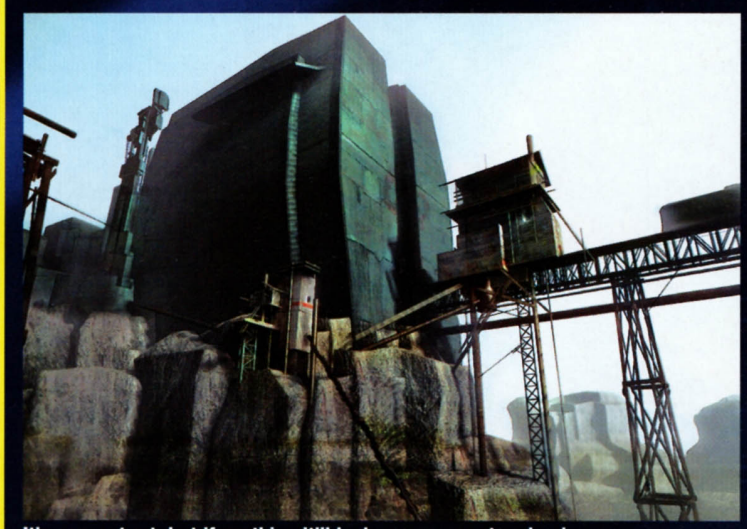
With 30 notes clutched in clammy hands, the masses waited for the release of *Half-Life 2*. Then some twat hacked into Valve's server and stole the source code, and we've been waiting impatiently ever since, wondering when we'll see this titan of a shooter finally hit the shelves. Some miscreants even lowered themselves to downloading the stolen code for a peek at what's in store (but not *PC ZONE* readers, surely…).

At the time of writing, we're still no more clued up about exactly when the game will appear. Valve is being very cagey on this subject, though they were kind enough to send us these three stunning exclusive shots for you to feast your eyes on. Nice, aren't they?

Surely though it can't be long. When we first saw the game back in March 2003 it was looking all but finished, which makes us think that the delay has more to do with the code theft than any major problems with the game itself. Concern over the security of multiplayer servers seems to be the reigning theory at present.

Thankfully, the code that was leaked onto the Net seems to be partial at best, reports suggesting it bears very little resemblance to the scintillating action we've seen at official showings. Someone may have stolen the game's engine, but they certainly haven't stolen its gameplay, nor, hopefully, its thunder.

The release date may be shrouded in mystery, but despite the delay and confusion, *Half-Life 2* is still looking like being the most groundbreaking first-person shooter in years. It's coming, that you can be sure of, so keep that holiday time on standby and those pesky kids under lock and key for just a little while longer. This is one gaming experience you won't want interrupted.



It's concept art, but if anything it'll look even more stunning in-game.

If you see a Strider, whatever you do, don't take cover behind a car.

MEDAL OF HONOR: PACIFIC ASSAULT

■ Pub: EA | Dev: EALA | www.mohaa.ea.com

ETA Winter 2004

The deposed king of WW2 mounts its comeback: *Will Porter* goes commando

EVEN THOUGH *Call Of Duty* has upped the stakes for muddy trench warfare, we're still holding a candle for *Medal Of Honor: Pacific Assault* (albeit a sputtering and feeble one). For those who missed our big preview last issue, this ruck kicks off at Pearl Harbor and ends up at Tarawa Atoll in 1943, and with the engine providing five times the geometry of previous games you can be sure that the visuals will be pretty special.

Environments are larger and more detailed and the characters notably more fleshy. You'll even be able to tell a green recruit from the others because they'll have pale faces, brand new clothing and a tendency to cower at the back and fight like a girl. With a now obligatory physics engine and oodles of research piled into its production, there's a lot of potential in *Pacific Assault*; we're just crossing our fingers that it can prove a worthy rival for the mighty *CoD*.

I say, these tommy guns pack quite a punch, what ho!

The red team valiantly defend their giant robotic horse-head thingy.

"Mine!" "No, mine!" "No, mine!"

***UT*: beyond thunderdome.**

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004

ETA Feb 2004

■ Pub: Atari | Dev: Epic games | www.unrealtournament2004.com

The staggeringly comprehensive sequel is mere weeks away. *Anthony Holden*'s on a hair-trigger

AS A straightforward follow-up to last year's model, you pretty much know what you're going to get with *Unreal Tournament 2004*. You can expect more of the same, except bigger, shinier, and with the addition of vehicles. The delay in release date should ensure that the new Onslaught game and rejuvenated Assault mode run as smoothly as a Swiss chronometer, while the 37 new maps are tested and balanced to breaking point. All that's left to do is decide if it's worth 30 of the Queen's notes or not – something we'll be doing next month in our huge exclusive review.

STALKER: OBLIVION LOST

ETA July 2004

■ Pub: THQ | Dev: GSC Game World | www.stalker-game.com

It's time for some adventures in the forbidden zone. *Anthony Holden* dodges the fallout

WE'VE WELL and truly got the message from the developers of *Stalker*. You've got a nice game engine, yes we've seen it, thanks very much, but now can we see the game please? Over the last 12 months we've been treated to demos of *Stalker*'s real physics system, its high-poly environments, its vehicle handling and most recently its convincing day/night cycles. We admit it all looks very lovely and interesting, but we just want to *play the game*! We want to test the 'fully dynamic' AI, see how the 'realistic trading system' works and taste a bit of this 'open-ended storyline' with its eight possible endings. Next month, we'll be taking a much more thorough look at this intriguing title, when all our questions will hopefully be answered. In the meantime, here's a couple more pretty screenshots.

Best weather. Ever. But what about the game?

The giant metallic dome had to be defended at all costs.

"Shit. This looked so easy in *Thunderball*."

TRIBES: VENGEANCE

ETA Q4 2004

■ Pub: VU Games | Dev: Irrational Games | www.vugames.com

Vengeance is a dish best served by a rocket-toting man with a jet-pack, reckons *Will Porter*

WITH THEIR disc-launching, jet-pack thrusting, physics-assisted skiing and epic CTF battles, the *Tribes* games have always been a niche series waiting for greatness. Despite having one of the most vibrant online communities around, the series has somehow managed to stay hovering just outside the mainstream, but Irrational's *Tribes: Vengeance* looks set to change all that. With an epic, multiple-perspective, timeline-skipping solo blast (think *Pulp Fiction* in heavy armour), it's set to take the tribal war into the big time.

Irrational is being pretty cagey about details, especially on the multiplayer side, but we're starting to get a better picture of the twisty-turny solo campaign.

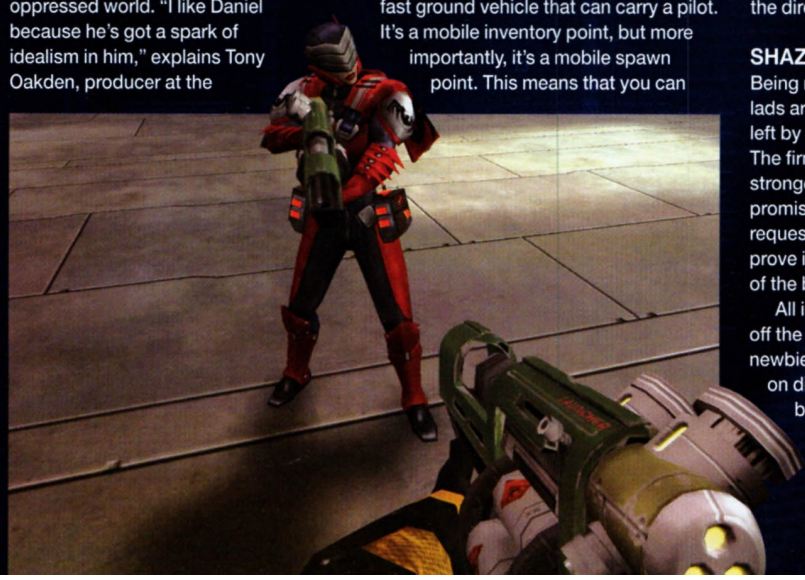
The basic idea is to bounce you around the *Tribes* back-story like a demented Scott Bakula, giving you control of many characters across several times and places. Not only does this enable the developers to sketch out the plot in a more interesting fashion, it also gives you a chance to learn every conceivable style and speed of *Tribes* combat – bound to come in handy.

TRAPPED IN THE PAST

So, in one level you'll be a six-year-old Imperial Princess, fighting for your life as your palace is invaded and family massacred; while in another, you'll play Daniel, a rebel leader on a barren, oppressed world. "I like Daniel because he's got a spark of idealism in him," explains Tony Oakden, producer at the Canberra branch of Irrational Games. "While he recognises the plight of his people, and spends most of his time leading raids to secure supplies for them, he remains optimistic there's hope for the future."

So how about new weapons and vehicles then, Tony? "Well, there's the Rover, which is a lightly armoured but fast ground vehicle that can carry a pilot. It's a mobile inventory point, but more importantly, it's a mobile spawn point. This means that you can elect to respawn from wherever the Rover is at any time."

This may sound familiar if you've ever played *PlanetSide*, but will clearly add some fresh tactics to the bubbling mixture of tribal warfare. Another new feature will be the Rocket Pod, a devastating weapon that "fires a cluster of spiralling rockets, guided by the direction you're looking".



SHAZBOT RISING

Being new to the series, the Irrational lads are also very mindful of the legacy left by defunct series creator Dynamix. The firm is promising to maintain a much stronger link with its fans, and has promised an open beta next year at the request of the *Tribes* community to prove it (nobody wants to see a repeat of the bugs that plagued *Tribes 2*).

All in all, Irrational looks set to pull off the rare trick of delighting fans and newbies alike, and with the fresh ideas on display here, disc-launchers should be the must-have accessory come next winter.

Another pinko rope bridge liberated for Uncle Sam.

Duck hunting, Vietnam-style.

BATTLEFIELD VIETNAM

Pub: Electronic Arts | Dev: Digital Illusions Canada | www.eagames.com

Paul Presley succumbs to jungle fever

YOU CAN'T throw a stone in the online shooting arena that is the Internet without hitting a *Battlefield 1942* server. DICE's grand-scale answer to the tiring *Counter-Strike* was easily one of the most popular things to happen to multiplayer gaming since *Doom*, and there's no reason why this sequel shouldn't be just as elbow-rattlingly cool as the original.

ETA Spring 2004

Designed to sit alongside rather than supplant the original, *BFV* is all about the fun of brutal jungle warfare. Booby traps spring, nerves crack and napalm drops from passing air support. The jungle setting makes ambushes a constant threat, while thumping '60s rock music blares from the speakers of passing helimachoppers. It couldn't be more *Apocalypse Now* if it dropped acid.

Unlike *BF 1942*, *Vietnam* will have a fight on its hands, with the likes of *PlanetSide* and *Joint Ops* digging in for a long campaign. Regardless, we're already smearing our faces with mud in anticipation.

"Stop using bullet-time, godammit!"

WHAT ARE THE ODDS?

STAR WARS: REPUBLIC COMMAND

Slated for summer, this stormtrooper-based FPS is yet to produce even a single screenshot, so we reckon it's a safe bet for 2005.

ODDS FOR RELEASE IN 2004: 20/1

Like my new anus-mounted grenade launcher?

"Look sir, some tortoiseshell butterfly larvae!"

As daylight fades, the tension mounts.

JOINT OPERATIONS

ETA February 2004

Pub: Novalogic | Dev: Novalogic | www.novalogic.com

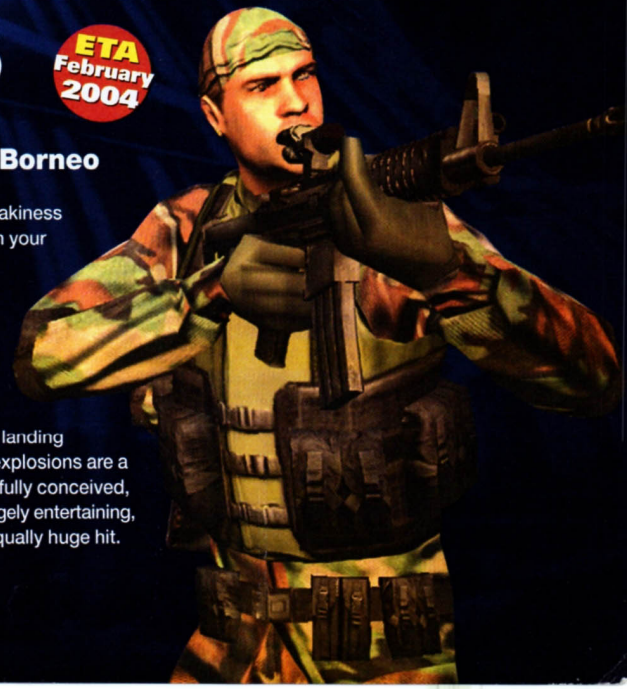
Phil Wand finds himself next to some leafy shrubs in Indonesian Borneo

FROM THE minds that brought us *Delta Force*, *Joint Ops* is Novalogic's flagrant attempt to steal a bit of *Battlefield 1942*'s thunder with a modern-day take on large-scale combat. It's a rather photogenic affair too, full of small details and smart ideas missing from the WWII best-seller.

Strangely mirroring *Battlefield Vietnam* (see above), *Joint Ops* plunges you into a claustrophobic world of gunfighting, ambushes, swamps and crocodiles, with only your team and a handful of vehicles to back you up. No tanks, no aircraft carriers, no distant artillery softening enemy lines.

The location is Indonesia, the year is 2006. Birds circle overhead and the dusk glows orange as you and up to 64 other Stallone-alikes are dropped into the jungle to tramp through undergrowth and shoot shit out of the mosquitoes. You can use time of day to your advantage – the long, early-evening shadows give away enemy positions, and a morning sun can dazzle your opponents. Gameplay is less frantic and more organised than in *Battlefield*, with sneakiness more important than your muzzle diameter.

Graphically, the *Joint Operations* world is impressive. The wash from landing craft leaves waves on beaches, dust swirls beneath landing Chinooks, and the explosions are a real treat. It's beautifully conceived, atmospheric and hugely entertaining, and should be an equally huge hit.



Rome will give you a maximum of 20 units per army, as opposed to 16 in previous *Total War* games.

So good, they based a TV show on it.

ROME: TOTAL WAR

■ Pub: Activision | Dev: The Creative Assembly | www.totalwar.com/community/rome.htm

ETA Autumn 2004

Steve O'Hagan takes an early visit to the Roman bloodbaths

FEW STRATEGY games are so good they get mainstream TV shows based on them. In fact, before it's even been released, *Rome: Total War*, is probably the sole claimant to such a title. But if you thought the engine on BBC2's recent *Time Commanders* series looked awesome, the news from the *Total War* camp is that you ain't seen nothing yet. What you'll be watching on your PC later this year will leave the show in the shade.

"*Time Commanders* uses a version of the game that will be a year old by the time it's released," says Mike Simpson, development director at The Creative Assembly. "That year is being spent on polishing the game. The general gameplay, user interface, AI and visual appearance are improving almost daily. Every time a new feature goes in, we all crowd round whoever's desk and grin."

FEAR FACTIONS

You'll be able to play as a number of factions, including the Carthaginians (think Hannibal and his elephants), the Egyptians (think Cleopatra and the Pharaohs), and barbarians such as the Gauls (think those guys getting their arses kicked at the beginning of *Gladiator*). But it seems that commanding the Romans themselves will offer the most variety.

"The eventual aim of the Imperial Campaign is to become emperor," says Mike. "But apart from conquering, you'll be guided by the senate, who'll give you short-term goals and reward you for achieving them."

To help you get to grips with the kind of sprawling campaigns that unfold in *Total War* games, Creative is implementing an 'advisor' feature that promises to be a whole lot more than a bunch of context-sensitive text balloons.

Mike explains: "The idea is that the advisor uses the game AI to look at what you're doing and provide intelligent suggestions on how to play the game. In some cases, if you want, he'll even do it for you. So between that and the options to hand over responsibility for various things to your minions, people who might not normally be interested in a deep and complex game like *Rome* can play it easily, and play it well. It'll open up the game to a much wider audience."

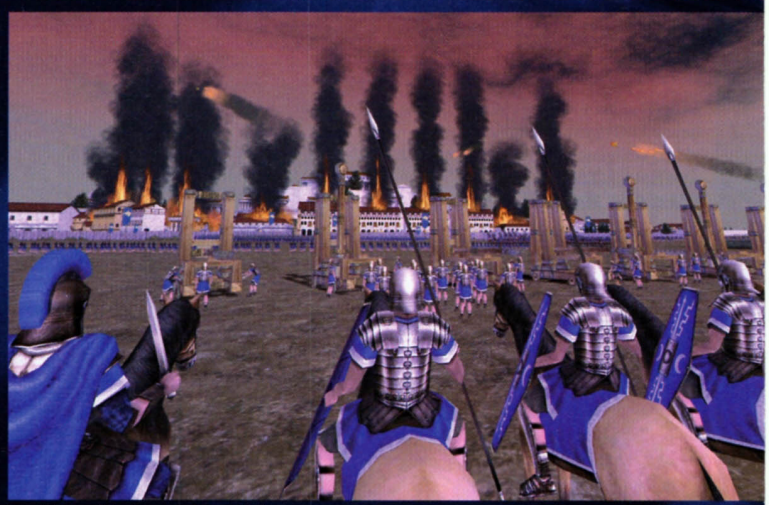
DIVISIONS OF THE SPOILS

This delegation principle has also been taken on to the field of battle. "You can control the exact movements of units, or divide your army into divisions, put captains in charge and give the divisions orders like 'take that hill' or 'attack the centre'," explains Mike.

"Your troops have more unit-level intelligence, and you can let them organise themselves locally. They'll automatically turn to face the enemy and change shape and position to link to units on either side to present a solid line. To organise battle lines, simply dump units in vaguely the same area – they'll sort themselves out. But if you want precise control, you still have it."

We also pressed Mike about multiplayer options, hoping for more scope than in previous *Total War* titles. "There won't be a multiplayer campaign using the full single-player campaign game – the games would take so long it's just not practical. We're looking at the option of a massively multiplayer campaign with a simpler feature-set where players join a faction and play when they like. No promises yet..."

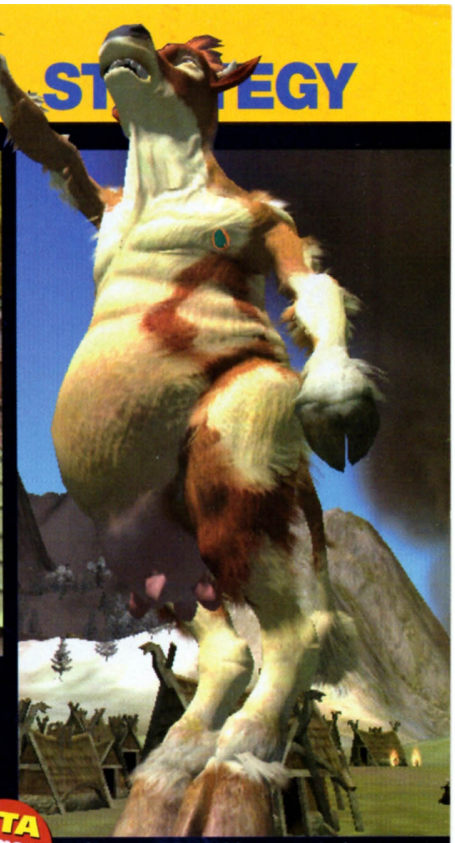
And if all that isn't enough to whip you into paroxysms of excitement, then it's time to hang up your mouse and hot-keys list and go home. *Rome: Total War* is almost guaranteed to be awesome, so start drooling now.



You'll be able to send multiple armies into the field, one under your command, the others under the AI.

It's the first truly next-gen RTS.

B&W2 gives you control over every aspect of your cities, from pubs to wall defences.



Siege combat with creatures is set to be a stunning sight.

BLACK & WHITE 2

■ Pub: Activision | Dev: Black & White Studios/Lionhead | www2.bwgame.com

ETA Xmas 2004

It's the ultimate battle of good vs evil, and *Steve O'Hagan's* on the sidelines

DESPITE bugs, controversy and heated debate, *Black & White* was a landmark in PC gaming. Like no other game, it put your own morality at the heart of the experience, not to mention boasting some of the most innovative game design ever seen.

Responding to criticisms of the first title, the sequel is set to be a far more complete affair, though once again the focus is on your King Kong-sized creatures. Series mastermind Peter Molyneux elaborates: "There are fewer creatures in *B&W2*, but what they can do and their look is vastly improved. They're far more intelligent, meaning they can be key in the overall game strategy, but they're easier to train."

These brainier beasts are also key to the increased tactics available to you during battles. "If you're in defensive mode, your aim is to repel your attackers from your city, so you need to use your creature to repair any damage to your ramparts. If you're attacking, your beast will lead your armies, which are organised by joining small units into bigger formations. These can then be split into two parts, with you leading one half, and your creature the other, so you can overcome the opposition with a pincer movement."

Clearly there's a stupendous game in the making here – keep an eye on our monthly 'Lionhead Diaries' (page 150) for more updates.

WHAT ARE THE ODDS?

WARTIME COMMAND

It may be slated for a summer release, but we can't help thinking that Codemasters' hugely ambitious WWII RTS saga is going to slip. A lot.

ODDS FOR RELEASE IN 2004: 5/1

LOTR: THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH

ETA Winter 2004

■ Pub: EA | Dev: EA (Westwood) | lordoftherings.eagames.com

***Anthony Holden* aims his farsight at the Ring game to rule them all**

ITS stranglehold on the genre may have loosened somewhat in recent years, but the development team formerly known as Westwood is still a mammoth force in the RTS world. Unlike so many developers gobbled by the EA machine, it's continued to produce excellent games as borg drones – *C&C: Generals* being a case in point.

In something of a dream ticket for fans, the masters of build-and-rush strategy have now teamed up with one of the biggest licences of the minute – Peter Jackson's *Lord Of The Rings* trilogy. Using its official access to the full, team Westwood is crafting a truly epic RTS, designed to mirror the grandeur of the films. Wanna recreate the Battle of Helms Deep? Well, now you can, and in much more convincing style than VU's recent *LOTR: The War Of The Ring* (reviewed last month).

Highlights are set to include the siege warfare system, the use of traps and pitfalls, plus some spectacular magic effects. This is going to be colossal.

With high-level tactics and sieges, it's a serious change of pace for Westwood.

The original *Ground Control* was a pioneering minor classic.

Hardcore Swedish action of a very different kind.

GROUND CONTROL II: OPERATION EXODUS

■ Pub: VU Games | Dev: Massive Entertainment | www.groundcontrol2.com

Temper, bowels, carnal urges: *Steve O'Hagan* adds ground to the list of things he can't control

ETA Q2 2004

THE original *Ground Control* was in the vanguard of RTSs such as *Battlezone*, *Uprising* and *Warzone 2100*, all of which came along around the turn of the millennium to revolutionise the genre by transporting the action to rolling 3D vistas.

What *Ground Control*, possibly the best of the bunch, also offered was the chance to forget about any resource gathering. Instead, it placed small platoons of futuristic troops at your disposal, along with vehicles and aircraft which gained experience as each highly-tactical mission was completed. Dropships ferried your assault teams to the battlefield, as well as delivering reinforcements or evacuating troops at the conclusion.

This sequel is set to follow tightly the formula of sci-fi skirmishing, only it's set in 2741 – 300 years further into the future. But the date's not the only thing that's changed, as the visuals have also progressed eons, along with certain aspects of the gameplay.

Take the role of the dropships. Before, your reinforcements were scripted into the missions; now, the amount of dropship-borne reserves you can call upon is dependent on your control of strategic locations on the ground.

"This makes battles in *GCII* far more dynamic than in its predecessor," says lead designer Henrik Sebring. "But as well as bringing reinforcements, these huge, hulking dropships can also be controlled on the battlefield like a regular unit. They can be used to give additional fire support or provide specific tasks, depending on their configuration."

You go against the family, you get the dirtnap, capisce?

HEAVY WEATHER

Another feature of *Ground Control* that's been moved to centre stage is the weather. Henrik explains: "In addition of being truly beautiful, the weather system really changes gameplay.

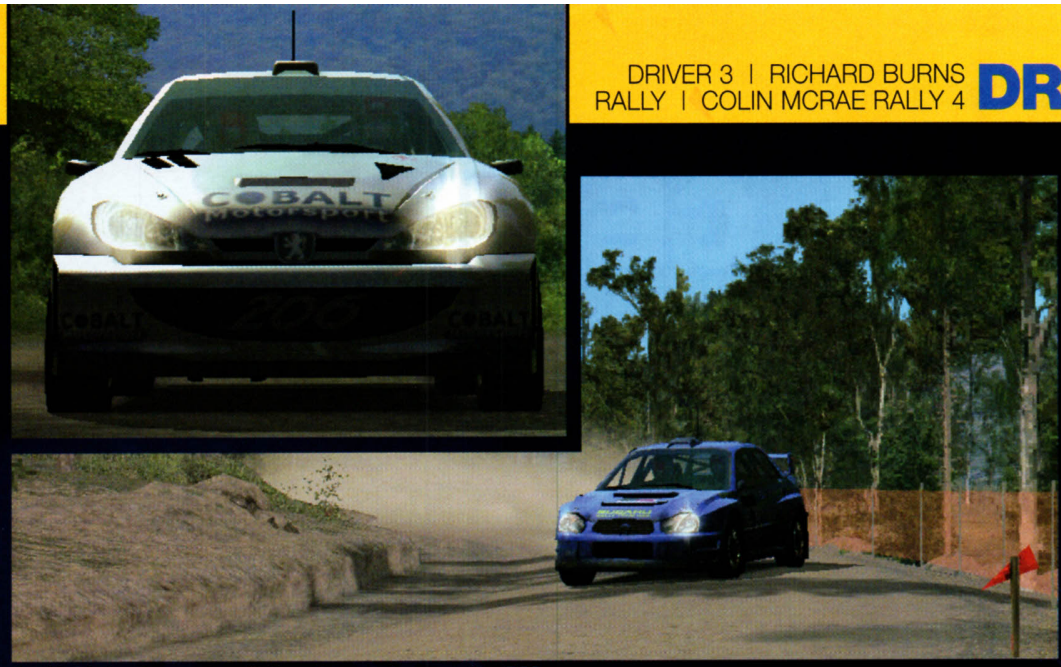
"For example, on a clear day scouts enjoy great view ranges and rapid deployment. Battles are fought over great distances, and smoke support might need to be called down to relieve heavily engaged units, while dropships bring in much needed reinforcements.

"Suddenly, heavy storm clouds form up in the sky," enthuses the frenzied Swede. "Rain starts pouring, getting denser by the second. The first lightning bolt strikes, illuminating the sky and the ground around its impact. The heavy thunderstorm quickly changes the battlefield as view range and accuracy are decreased; the dropship reports its inability to get to the battlefield. Battles become tight, the action taking place at close quarters, until the storm disappears."

In the new incarnation, tactical commanders are able to use weather shifts to launch sneaky offensive manoeuvres or a simple redeployment to throw the opponent off guard. Henrik continues, ominously: "The different factions in the game respond differently to weather – one man's bread is another's death." We'll never feel relaxed in a baker's again.

We were also keen to hear about *GCII*'s multiplayer modes, as the developers have been making noises about some intriguing new features. Henrik was happy to oblige: "In the special drop-in mode, up to eight players can just drop in to an existing game and play, without first having to find opponents and set up a game."

But for us, he's saving the best until last: "You'll also be able to play through the single-player campaign in co-operative multiplayer. Each player will have their own units to control, including dropships, but with shared objectives." Which sounds like mint fun to us.



Could this be the most realistic rally experience on the PC?

RICHARD BURNS RALLY

ETA March 2004

■ Pub: SCi | Dev: Warthog | www.sci.co.uk

***Dave Woods* gets behind the wheel of McRae's new nemesis**

JUST before the final round of the World Rally Championship, Richard Burns blacked out at the wheel of his car on the motorway. Thankfully, one of his rivals was sitting next to him and pulled the car to safety. Burns has since been diagnosed with a brain tumour. We wish him a quick and full recovery.

However, despite the possibility of the game's namesake never competing in professional motorsports again, the *Richard Burns* game is well and truly on track. We've just played the latest PC code and can report the claims for total realism are looking far from hollow.

Every single element of the car is an independent entity, meaning each wheel is its own mass and has separate contact with the track. This leads to a hair-raising ride, especially as the real-life damage model means one wrong turn could lead to a crocked car. For fans of sideways dirt-spurting action, a new champion could have arrived.

COLIN MCRAE RALLY 4

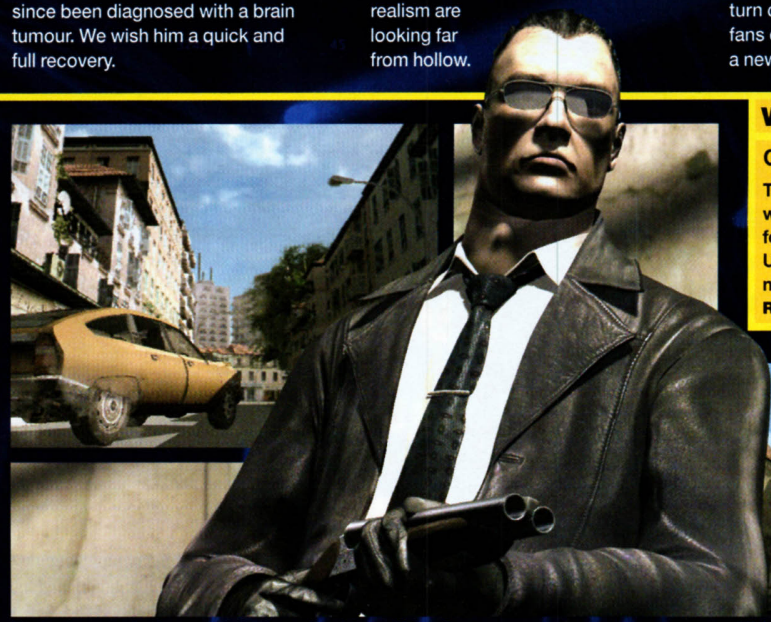
ETA Spring 2004

■ Pub: Codemasters | Dev: Codemasters | www.codemasters.co.uk

The dour Scot rides again.

NOW in its fourth incarnation, where can Codemasters take the *Colin McRae* franchise? That's the question we asked Graham Rigby, senior game designer, and this was his succinct reply: "We've improved the car physics and have gone for a more realistic race model to give more depth to the experience. The cars move more realistically now and feel heavier, more substantial."

But what about *Richard Burns*, also opting for a more realistic model? "We'll be doing an online rally and stages mode, which is my favourite new thing." And unique as well – at the present time *Richard Burns* is only planning to ship with offline play and the possibility of downloading ghost riders from the Web. If they're neck-and-neck for gameplay, this could well be the deciding factor.



He looks tough, but at night he cries himself to sleep.

All houses should have ramps attached.

You'll get to drive this mighty 18-wheeler.

WHAT ARE THE ODDS?

GRAND THEFT AUTO

The new *Grand Theft Auto* game was recently announced as an all-formats release for Christmas '04. Uh-huh. Ain't gonna happen baby, not on PC at any rate.

RELEASE IN 2004: 500/1

DRIVER 3

ETA Summer 2004

■ Pub: Atari | Dev: Reflections Interactive | uk.atari.com

Will Porter*, veteran of many a highway near-miss, cowers before the game that would be *GTA

YEARS before the *Grand Theft Auto* bandwagon became a hip and cool place to hang out, one game so successfully borrowed from the series that it actually presaged many of the ideas of the later games: the unequivocally cool 3D crim-sim *Driver*.

Now attempting to restake its claim on the genre, *Driver 3* sees you once again donning the lead shoes of Tanner, undercover cop and getaway driver extraordinaire. In this latest, heavily plot-driven and cinematic affair, you'll infiltrate a gang of car thieves and bring them down from the inside – mainly by driving stolen cars really, really fast.

With a story that spans Tanner's native Miami, Nice and, interestingly, the streets of Istanbul, *Driver 3* is looking very promising indeed.

"There are over 150 miles of drivable road," boasts Reflections' Martin Edmondson. "And that doesn't include the miles of back alleys and parks not marked on the overhead map. There are over 35,000 individually placed buildings too – it's far bigger than *Driver 1* and *2*."

What's really got *PC ZONE* pawing at the ceiling, though, is the car damage and physics system – an engine that's been in development for around five years and makes for some ultra-realistic destruction. "Panels bend and fall off," explains Martin. "When lying on the ground, they become part of the universe with physical properties so they can be pushed along, or affected by gunfire. Wheels and windows can be shot out and many effects besides."

With 70 vehicles in the game, covering cars, vans, bikes, boats and a fully articulated 18-wheeler rig (airhorn included), *Driver 3* looks set to put the series firmly back on the map. Could this be a serious challenge to the mighty *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City*?

EVIL GENIUS

ETA Q3 2004

■ Pub: VU Games | Dev: Elixir Studios | www.howevilareyou.com

Jamie Sefton rehearses his maniacal laugh for the ultimate Bond spoof

FROM THE makers of *Republic: The Revolution* comes *Evil Genius*, a distinctly 'why didn't I think of that?' tycoon game that casts you as a Spectre-style super-villain.

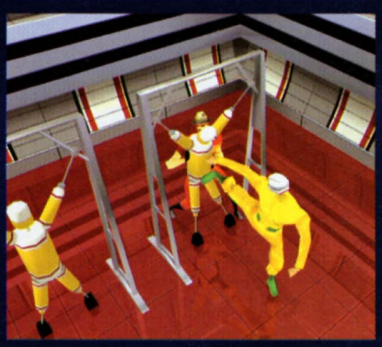
As one of five cackling megalomaniacs, you begin with $100m to spend on your evil island empire, with the ultimate aim of constructing a terrifying doomsday machine. By completing missions around the globe, such as stealing the Mona Lisa, you can make money and increase your notoriety, attracting beefier and more lethal henchmen to do your dirty work.

Like other tycoon-style titles, you build up your base of operations by adding various rooms such as research facilities and canteens, as well as training up your evil staff. "However, rather than directly controlling minions' actions, you can 'tag' target objects and characters with orders," says Elixir's Demis Hassabis.

"So, in the event of an intruder alert, you tag the inquisitive enemy agent with a kill or capture tag, and any minions who meet the agent take action. This intelligence makes issuing orders much easier, eliminating micro-management without compromising strategic depth."

If you manage to capture a goodie-two-shoes spy from your enemies the Forces of Justice, you can use the rooms in your island to torture them and gloat. "Some of the funniest parts of the game come from events like a captured agent being tortured in an industrial food mixer," grins Hassabis.

With a colourful, cartoon style and excellent comedy animations, *Evil Genius* looks set to be one of the quirkiest and funniest titles in years.



***Evil Genius* is stuffed with British humour.**

"Someone must want to play *Risk* with me? I promise, no disintegrations..."

The Forces of Justice raid your island.

THE MOVIES

ETA June 2004

■ Pub: Activision | Dev: Lionhead | www.themoviesgame.com

There's no business like pretend show business, sings _Steve O'Hagan_

WE'VE GOT A feeling that, if everything goes right, *The Movies* could turn out to be the biggest thing since *The Sims*. The concept is supreme: take control of your own movie studio, hiring actors, crew and writers, and then go through the process of producing and directing your own flicks, before showing all your mates (and the rest of the world, via the Net) the results.

According to mastermind Peter Molyneux, much of the game's allure will lie in the peccadilloes and peculiarities of its virtual actors.

"While they're young, stars can be cast in romantic leads," the Lionhead supremo told us recently. "As years go by though, they'll start to age. But rather than moving gracefully into character roles, their egos mean they'll cling to the roles they played in their heyday. If you allow them to continue in these romantic roles, you'll be lambasted by critics who'll question the realism of a 40-year-old actress having a love affair with a 20-year-old heart-throb. To prevent this happening, your only option may be plastic surgery."

The ageing process is only one of many pitfalls to watch out for when dealing with Tinseltown prima donnas: "We hope to include anything you've read in gossip magazines or tabloids in the game. Stars having affairs, personal problems, dark secrets, strikes – we'll even try to include eating hamsters!"

From what we hear about Hollywood, most rodents are inserted at the other end, preferably shaved, de-clawed and injected with class A narcotics. But we're not going to split hairs.

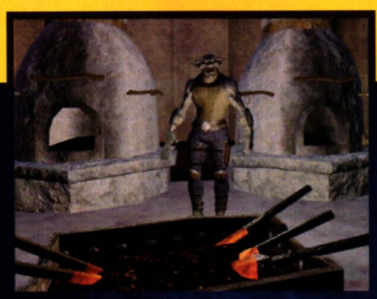
Make movies to any length, from a 30-second trailer to an epic lasting hours.

WHAT ARE THE ODDS?

SIM CITY 5

OK, so it hasn't even been announced yet, but come on – this is EA we're talking about! However, we feel the symmetry of *Sim City 2005* will be too hard to resist.

ODDS FOR RELEASE IN 2004: 200/1



"Extended warranty with that, sir?"

EVERQUEST II

ETA Summer 2004

■ Pub: Ubisoft | Dev: Sony Online Entertainment | www.everquest2.com

The biggest MMOG on the block shows *Paul Presley* how it's set to get bigger

Winnie The Pooh goes feral.

"It's all right for you with your wings and that, but nobody's going to believe I'm Peter Pan."

IF IT WAS *Ultima Online* that started the MMOG ball rolling, *EverQuest* was the game that picked it up, scored several touchdowns, slammed a handful of dunks and bagged a hatful of goals. For the past five years, nothing has been able to touch it – and the original doesn't look like stopping any time soon. Even with this sequel nearly done, threatening to steal its audience.

That's not the plan, though. *EQ 2* has been designed primarily to capture the attention of those who've already eschewed the original. It's focussed on short, sharp, immediate thrills – the epic adventure rather than the career as a melon farmer.

The two main cities in the new world of Norrath – Qeynos and Freeport – are at polar opposites when it comes to morals and ethics, and every race in the game is allied to one side or another. They're huge cities too, two of the largest fantasy cities ever made in a game, no less. Each has been designed along the game's D.I.M.E. system – standing for Deep, Intimate, Meaningful and Entertaining – a set of guiding principles for everything in the game.

Accordingly, the developers are at pains to stress that everything in the game has meaning, from the architecture to the kinds of creatures you'll encounter. Even when I attempt to catch them out by asking about some elephants seen in one area, their commitment to the cause doesn't waver and we learn they hunt in packs, are territorial and interact with other creatures regardless of player interaction.

That's when you begin to realise why *EverQuest* has had the astonishing hold over its audience all this time. The developers genuinely believe in what they're doing and are straining every fibre in their being to make *EverQuest II* the ultimate massively multiplayer experience it can be.

WHAT ARE THE ODDS?

DUNGEON SIEGE 2

The follow-up to Gas Powered Games' stylish hack 'n' slasher is in development, pencilled in for Xmas '04. If the first game is anything to go by, it'll be more like Summer '05.

ODDS FOR RELEASE IN 2004: 15/1

VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE BLOODLINES

ETA Spring 2004

■ Pub: Activision | Dev: Troika | www.vampirebloodlines.com

BRINGING a little added gore and FPS mayhem to the traditional RPG, *Bloodlines* looks like the sort of game that'll make geeks, gamers and the general public beg for more.

We brought you up to date on it last issue, but if you missed that, *Bloodlines* is a gory twist on the *Deus Ex* blueprint. Set in goth-laden LA, it's powered by the Source engine that's propping up Gordon Freeman's new exploits – and with the rich tapestry of the White Wolf pen-and-paper gaming universe at its core, it promises to be extra-special.

"Welcome to Hull. City of fun."

"I knew the architect's plans should have been metric."

WoW features an 'all-new' combat system. Well it would, wouldn't it?

Bloke stands mesmerised by floaty thing over other bloke's head.

WORLD OF WARCRAFT

■ Pub: VU Games | Dev: Blizzard | www.blizzard.com/wow

Blizzard's stunning MMORPG is creeping towards completion. *Chris Anderson* is just plain creepy

ETA 2004

THE WORDS 'grind' and 'level' are all too familiar to veteran online role-players. It's the curse of the genre, but curiously, the one ingredient that appears to keep people playing. *World Of Warcraft*, as anyone who has not been living on Mars for the last few years will know, is Blizzard's debut entry to the genre, and is quite justifiably sitting at the top of RPG wish lists the world over. We asked Mark Kern, team leader on *WoW*, how the renowned development team intends to avoid the pain of level grind.

"First and foremost, at the core of *World Of Warcraft* is an expansive quest system with a wide variety of quests for characters of all races to undertake," claims Mark. "We're incorporating an unprecedented level of variety to how players obtain and organise quests, what they must do to complete them, and what their rewards will be. This helps to make combat in the game feel more goal-oriented, and as a result, players will often find their characters levelling up almost as a pleasant side effect of exploring the world and completing quests, as opposed to levelling up being their primary motivation for adventuring in the game."

THE WOW FACTOR

It sounds great in theory, but will it stop power gamers falling over themselves to find the fastest way to level? Of course it won't, but Mark is adamant *WoW* will be the mythical Holy Grail of online role-playing – a MMORPG that appeals to both hardcore and casual players.

"*World Of Warcraft* will be accessible to gamers of all skill levels, and it will have the right mix of content to offer a satisfying and rewarding experience – whether players only have 30 minutes to play at a time or are able to pull multiple all-nighters," boasts Mark. "We love this genre, and we've logged thousands of hours playing all sorts of RPGs and MMORPGs, and this extensive experience is helping us make the right decisions for *WoW* and avoid the pitfalls that other games have encountered."

It's fighting talk and no mistake, though with the disappointment of *Star Wars Galaxies* still souring every breath we take, we'll remain cautiously optimistic at this stage. Certainly however, Blizzard's impeccable track record promises a smoother release than most rushed-to-market MMOGs, and that's half the battle already won. For once, a developer can sit cosily on its perch and make lofty claims knowing it has both the tools and the know-how to make it happen.

Is that a beard? Thought so.

Casual or hardcore, this is your game.

Can Blizzard weather the MMORPG storm? We reckon.

"Damn these new contact lenses."

ULTIMA X: ODYSSEY

■ Pub: EA | Dev: EA/Origin Systems | www.uxo.ea.com

One legend meets another, as *Paul Presley* visits the remaking of a classic

SURE, there were MMOGs around before *Ultima Online*, but you'd have been hard pushed to know it. *UO* was the game that kick-started the whole genre and now it's back to stake its claim to the throne. Of course, *UXO* isn't *UO2* as such – it's set in a different world, with different themes and different content, but it promises to be no less impressive.

Origin has ensured that plenty of innovation is on show – not least of which is the patented 'Virtues' system, designed to elevate mundane adventuring into something truly worthwhile. The more you live up to this set of ethical codes, the more powerful you will become.

UXO is using the latest *Unreal* engine to power its multiplayer questing, something that already puts it at a large visual advantage. If all goes to plan, Origin might well redefine the genre once again.

ETA Early 2004

"I told you grandma, no more hugs till you have a shave."

"Go my Laurence Llewellyn-Bowen clone of death."

WHAT ARE THE ODDS?

THE MATRIX ONLINE

Monolith's mega-budget MMORPG is its debut entry into the genre – not to mention a huge undertaking – so we're tipping it for early '05.

ODDS FOR RELEASE IN 2004: 8/1

"Well I didn't put them up there. Go get a stool will you?"

The Atkins Diet, while effective, has severe side effects.

Orcs – The Musical.

MIDDLE EARTH ONLINE

■ Pub: VU Games | Dev: Turbine Games | www.middle-earthonline.com

ETA Late 2004

"Oh just make a joke about my ring or something," says *Paul Presley* when asked to provide an intro

SURELY 'massively multiplayer Hobbits' is some kind oxymoron? Nonetheless, with the final of the breathtaking films causing otherwise sane minds to fall in love with Middle Earth all over again, a MMOG based on Tolkien's world is the natural next step.

MEO takes its cue from the many other MMOGs out there, but the developer (of *Asheron's Call* fame) isn't forgetting the rich source material it has to work with. Elves are far more than tall thin magic casters as with other games, and Dwarves do more than just bite kneecaps and sing about gold.

Capturing the elegance, grandeur and majesty of Tolkien's vision has been key throughout the whole development cycle. Skills, for instance, are designed to give players the sense that they *are* hobbits, rather than just shorter graphical versions of everyone else. Monsters will all carry 'realistic' treasure, meaning you don't get snakes with swords or rats with gold rings. Even basic things such as calling guilds 'fellowships' show how much the source material is being adhered to. Which is all we're asking for at the end of the day.

"Hi, I'm Bob, your motivational counsellor."

SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TOMORROW

ETA March 2004

■ Pub: Ubisoft | Dev: Ubisoft Montreal | www.pandoratomorrow.com

***Anthony Holden* limbers up for another tactical espionage outing**

DIRTY SNEAKS everywhere, it's time to prepare yourself – the follow-up to the greatest stealth shooter ever is almost upon us. What was initially tipped as an expansion pack has now blossomed into something more substantial, and *Pandora Tomorrow* now promises both a robust single-player campaign and the exciting prospect of online multiplayer.

New moves for Sam Fisher include the ability to pause in the middle of shimmying along a beam, hang by your legs and take pot-shots at enemies, as well as a *Streetfighter 2*-style somersault kick.

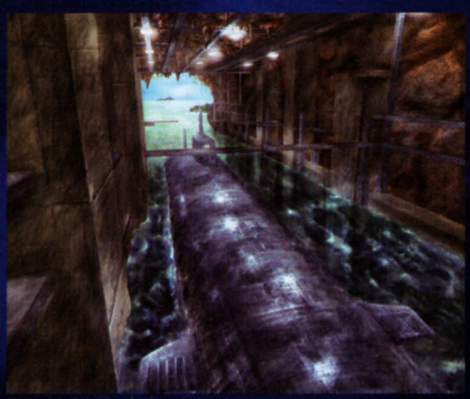
However, still the biggest mystery surrounding the sequel is how the new multiplayer modes are going to work. We've seen some snippets of them in action, but only enough to glean that you work in squads, and have the full range of stealth options available to you. It's not yet clear if there's to be a full-blown stealth deathmatch mode, or if you're simply able to play through the solo campaign in co-op – though the screenshots are certainly suggesting the former.

All will come clear in the coming weeks, as Ubisoft is planning to strip away the cloak of mystery very soon. Expect a full preview next issue.

Look. Look! Squad-based multiplayer!

"Tell me: why haven't you subscribed to *PC ZONE*?"

The 'spy trap' is one of several new mystery gadgets.



The plot is rumoured to feature a submarine...

ADVENT RISING

ETA Summer 2004

■ Pub: VU Games | Dev: GlyphX Games | www.adventtrilogy.com

***Anthony Holden* uses the Force, bends spoons and fights the Covenant, all at the same time**

IF IT CAN deliver even half of the gameplay and features promised in its design brief, then *Advent Rising* is going to be one of the biggest titles of next year. It may be pitching primarily for Xbox, but its mix of *Matrix*-style acrobatics, massive scale vehicular action and Jedi-like superpowers should prick the interest of any alert gamer.

We spoke to designer Donald Mustard, asking him about the use of physics in the game. "Physics play a large role in *Advent*, especially in our environments. What fun would it be for us to give you all sorts of neat powers and then not let you use the world as a weapon? You'll do everything from ripping boulders out of the ground to hurl at your enemies to punching enemies through fully destructible columns. See a group of enemies standing next to a vehicle? Pick it up and drop it on their heads."

If that doesn't sound cool enough, he also confirmed that the game would be playable both in first- and third-person perspectives, which should put to rest some of the concerns regarding *Advent's* console roots.

This game still has plenty to prove, but we're confident this is going to be a big deal in 2004.

One *big* gun would be better...

WHAT ARE THE ODDS?

TOMB RAIDER 7

With this once proud series now in the capable hands of Crystal Dynamics, we can except to see (another) reinvented Lara very soon. But 2004? Maybe not.

ODDS FOR RELEASE IN 2004: 30/1

In a perfect world all games would feature dogs who wear suits.

ETA Spring 2004

SAM & MAX: FREELANCE POLICE

■ Pub: Activision | Dev: LucasArts | www.lucasarts.com/products/freelancepolice

The funniest duo in PC history is set to grace our screens once more. A teary *Will Porter* falls at the feet of Michael Stemmle

THEY'RE BACK. Tumbling out of the mystery vortex and on to our hard drives, Sam and Max, perennial slapstick/wisecrack heroes and investigators of obscure Americana, are about to jam their wet noses straight back into our lives. We cornered Michael Stemmle, director of all *Sam & Max*-related activities at LucasArts, offered him a box of Snuckies Pecan Candy and a sample of Sasquatch hair and he had all this to say...

PCZ How would you describe *Sam & Max: Freelance Police* to someone who hasn't heard of the dog & rabbit crime-fighting duo before?
MS Sam is a dog. He wears a suit, and has been known to play the banjo... badly. Max is a naked, hyperkinetic rabbity thing. Together, they upset the apple cart of crime as the Freelance Police, a vaguely sanctioned, rarely discussed branch of the criminal justice system.

PCZ Are you confident that this move into 3D will be more successful than the recently cancelled *Full Throttle* sequel?
MS I don't know if 3D has much to do with the success or failure of any game. But I *do* know that Sam and Max look *great* in 3D.

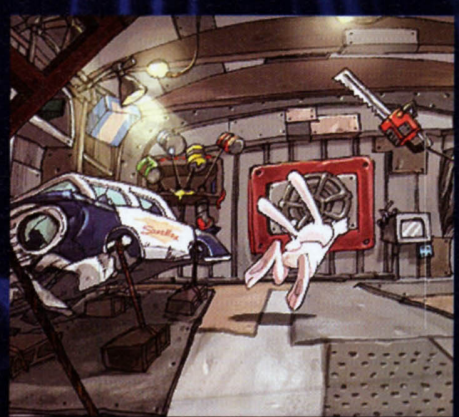
PCZ How will the control system work now that the game is in 3D? Compared to how it played in the original point 'n' click adventure?
MS Pretty darned well. All we've done is taken the old 2D point 'n' click system, and replaced the '2' with a '3'. OK, I hear there was also some programming involved, but that's the essence of it.

PCZ Will there be mini-games as in the first game?
MS Will there be mini-games? Will there be mini-games? There'll be more mini-games than you can shake a genetically altered lab rat at, you young whippersnapper! And that's a good thing, because one of our dozen or so mini-games actually revolves around the shaking of genetically altered lab rats. In space. In 3D.

PCZ Can you tell us anything about the story for *Sam & Max: Freelance Police*?
MS The story of *Sam & Max: Freelance Police* is really six stories, loosely held together by a thrilling über-plot. The individual stories are wide-ranging cases of the Freelance Police, featuring exotic locales (such as a low-rent space station, and a lame-ass neopagan desert bacchanal) and freakish bad guys (like an exceptionally honked-off Miss Congeniality, and a rogue artificial intelligence made out of tortilla chips). We're trying to keep the über-plot under wraps for now, but suffice to say it features all the barely plausible grandeur that fans have come to expect from Sam and Max.

PCZ Will any characters from the first game make a reappearance?
MS Besides Sam and Max, the only other character who's officially returning is Flint Paper, the Freelance Police's rough 'n' tumble private detective neighbour. He actually plays a critical role in the über-plot.

PCZ What's your favourite bit in the game so far?
MS Our Jump, Jive, and Flail mini-game. I never suspected that Max would be so light on his feet.



Chainsaws, police cars... It's like we never left.

Switchman Harry took his yoga seriously.

ETA Q2 2004

THIEF 3

■ Pub: Eidos | Dev: Ion Storm | www.thief3.com

IT'S BEEN a little hectic over at Ion Storm lately. For the last few months, the entire *Thief 3* team has been pulled off the medieval sneakfest to help get *Deus Ex: IW* out the door. Now that *Invisible War* is finito, the entire studio will be putting their talents to work on this little baby...

When we last played it in May, *Thief 3* was looking hugely atmospheric, though the AI was still all over the place. But we have high hopes for this arrow-slinging sequel, and will bring you a huge preview in the New Year.

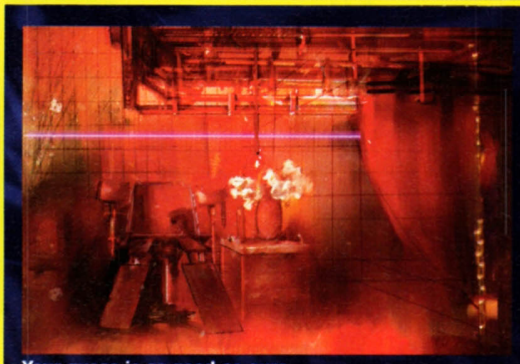
You think that hurts? Wait till I get the oboe out.

ETA March 2004

ARMED & DANGEROUS

■ Pub: Activision | Dev: Planet Moon Studios | www.lucasarts.com/products

THE LATEST action-packed venture from Planet Moon Studios (of *Giants: Citizen Kabuto* fame) is pure, unadulterated silliness. You are the head of an unlikely quartet of thieving heroes, out to depose an evil tyrant and generally lay waste to the highly destructible environment. The humour is puerile, the weapons bordering on ridiculous, and we can't get enough of it. Some things are just ingeniously stupid.



Your guess is as good as ours...

HITMAN: CONTRACTS

ETA Q1 2004

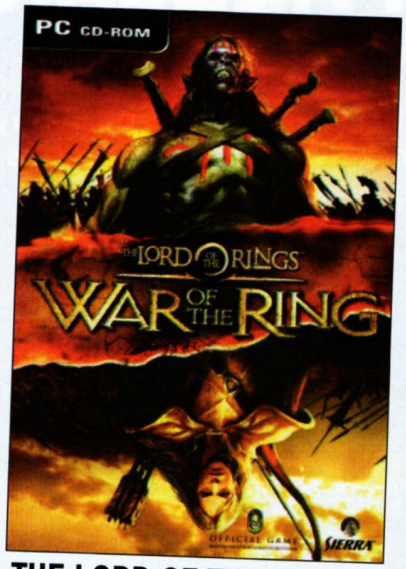
■ Pub: Eidos | Dev: Io Interactive | www.hitman3.com

THE *HITMAN* games have always threatened greatness without quite nailing their target. The third in the series, *Contracts*, promises a darker, lonelier vibe with less of the feeble 'war on terror' morality. This time, you find yourself wounded and alone in Paris, your identity exposed and your enemies all around. Better controls and more cool assassination techniques are promised, though hopefully less of the frankly transparent disguises. Full preview soon.

Play on

CALL OF DUTY™

STAR WARS:
KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC™



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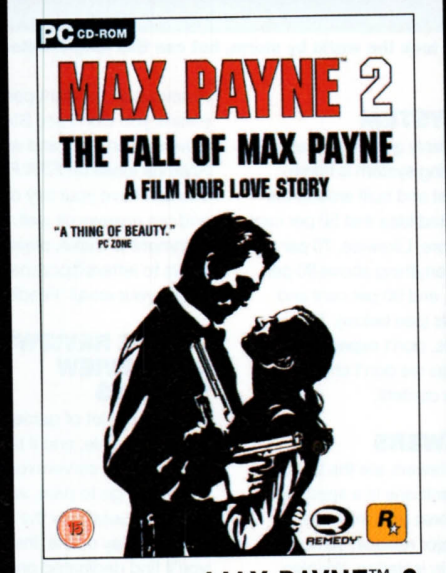

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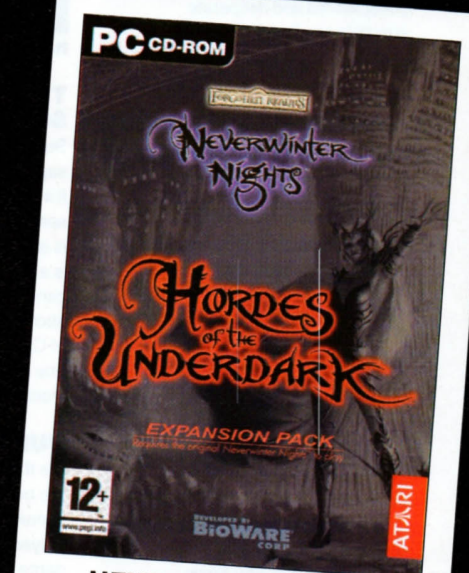

NEVERWINTER NIGHTS:
Hordes Of The Underdark

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REVIEWS

THE DEFINITIVE LOWDOWN ON ALL THE LATEST PC GAMES

DAY OF EXES

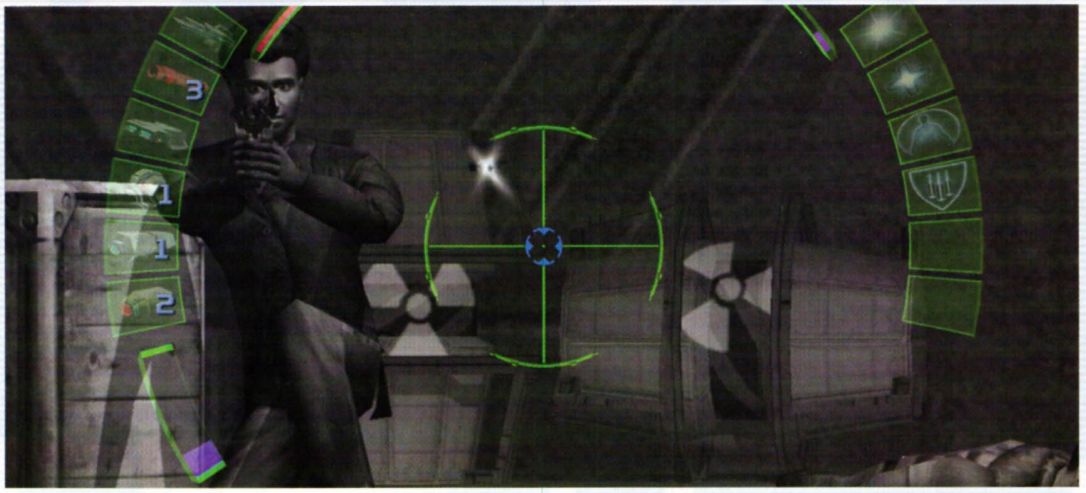
■ **SENIOR REVIEWS ED** Martin Korda

Never before has a Meet The Team question caused as much controversy, wrestling of consciences and desperate attempts at witty sidesteps as it did this month. No, not the 'What are you currently playing' question – the other one. Yeeeeeeeees, that one. After banning the 'my girlfriend/wife/partner' answer, there was a mass scrabble by many of the attached members of the team to get their non-committal replies in first. Porter only narrowly escaped with his response by tagging on Mr.T at the end, although something tells me that the former A-Team hardman may have something to say about the matter were the situation ever to arise. Frankly Will, I don't fancy your chances mate. Still, enough of such divorce-inducing frivolity and onto this month's collection of reviews.

We kick things off with a battle of the RPG heavyweights, *Deus Ex: Invisible War* and *Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic*. Three years after its release, the original *Deus Ex* is still sitting pretty at the top of the RPG section of our A-List – but not for long.

After months on the wagon, brittle-boned former *Championship Manager* addict Steve Hill has once again been seduced by the game's charm with the latest instalment, *Season 03/04*. Unseen for nearly a month, I called him up to see if he was still alive. Barely able to string a sentence together he babbled something about Chester, lack of sleep, piss holes in the snow and wearing the same pair of pants for three weeks, which instantly put my mind at rest that he was OK and still his usual self.

We've also got, among others, reviews of *No One Lives Forever* spin-off *Contract J.A.C.K.*, WWII flight sim *Secret Weapons Over Normandy* and *Lords of EverQuest*. So delay no longer, go check 'em out. Enjoy.



Its predecessor took the world by storm, but can this long-awaited sequel live up to the hype? Turn to page 64 to find out.

THE ZONE SCORING SYSTEM

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

OUR REVIEWERS

We think our reviewers are the best in the business. Each one is a specialist in numerous genres and will have played every major release, so no game is judged in isolation. We also make sure the right game gets reviewed by the right person, which means you won't see Steve Hill reviewing an RPG and we won't let Rhianna loose on *FIFA Football 2003*. You can have your say on the games and our reviews as well. If you have a comment to make, please email your views to letters@pczone.co.uk and entitle your email 'Feedback'.

ONLINE REVIEWS AND REVIEW UPDATES

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

OUR PCS

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

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

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

MEET THE TEAM

DAVE WOODS

What are you currently playing?

Pro Evolution Soccer 3 and *Hidden & Dangerous 2*

Who would you most like to have a *Deus Ex* with?

Anyone who can stump up £40

JAMIE SEFTON

Knight Of The Old Republic and *Pro Evolution Soccer 3*

Keira Knightley

DEUS EX: INVISIBLE WAR
Better than a day of sex?

LORDS OF EVERQUEST
MMORPG moves into RTS

RE-RELEASES
Older games at new prices

FEEDBACK
Where you air your opinions

DEFINITIVE REVIEWS

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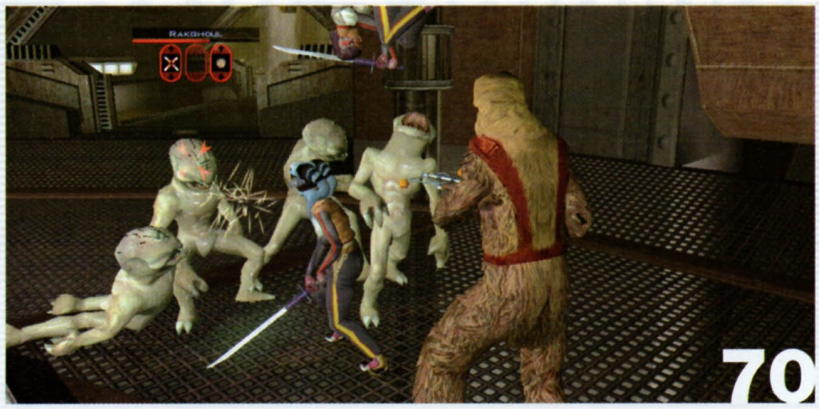
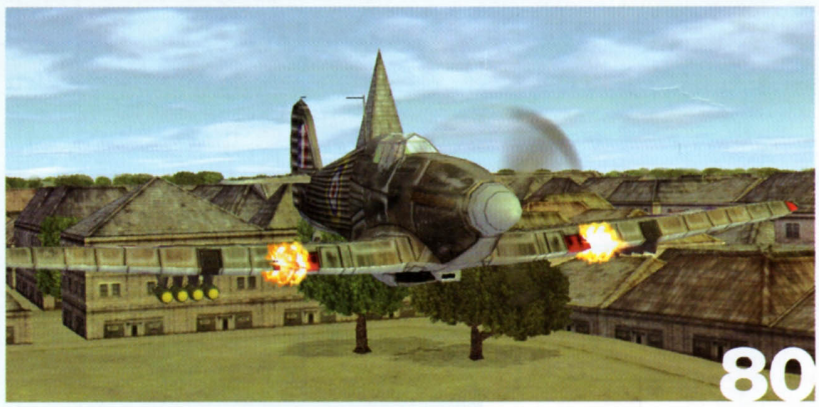




MARTIN KORDA
Championship Manager: Season 03/04, *Quake III: Arena*
Just 24 hours? Pah, it'd be barely worth it

ANTHONY HOLDEN
Max Payne 2
A whole day? Are you mad? I'm not as young as I used to be you know

PAUL PRESLEY
URU: Ages Beyond Myst and *Virtual Skipper 3*
(Answer censored by Mrs Presley)

WILL PORTER
Call Of Duty, *Max Payne 2* and *Contract J.A.C.K.*
Well, obviously, with my darling girlfriend who I love very much. And Mr T

RICHIE SHOEMAKER
Knights Of The Old Republic and *Deus Ex: Invisible War*
Keira Knightley

STEVE HILL
Champion Manager: Season 03/04
If it's got a backbone, I'll do it

DEUS EX: INVISIBLE WAR

■ £34.99 | Pub: Eidos | Dev: Ion Storm | ETA: February 6 | www.deusex.com

REQUIRES: PIII 1.2GHz, 256MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card
DESIRES: P4 2.8GHz, 1GB RAM and a 128MB 3D card

It was a *PC ZONE* Classic, and you voted it Game Of The Year 2000 along with half the games-playing world. *Richie Shoemaker* casts a critical eye over the sequel

INPERSPECTIVE

DEUS EX
Reviewed Issue 93, Score 94%
The graphics may have baggy eyes, flecks of grey hair and a leathery neck, but the mind is still as sharp as a tack. And since it's available at a mere fiver, you would do well to try this out first before attempting the sequel. Not only for the sake of continuity, but because it's still a very, very deusexy game.

STAR WARS: KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC
Reviewed Issue 137, Score 94%
Yet another over-egged *Star Wars* cash-in, this time aimed to hijack the role-playing genre? Actually no, it's brilliant – turn to page 70 to see why.

Sure, we all loved *Thunderbirds 1-5*, but by the time he got to *24*, Brains was pushing his luck.

IF YOU'D care to turn to the Rear View section of the magazine, page 139 to be exact, you'll see that sitting proudly atop the role-playing game column in *PC ZONE's* A-List is *Deus Ex*. In case you have difficulty locating it, it's the one with the picture of a guy who evidently forgot to remove his spectacles from their case before putting them on.

Now *Deus Ex* (pronounced 'juice sex' if you happen to be of North American origin or 'dayasex' if you're English) is perched where it is for one very good reason: because Ion Storm's debut sci-fi thriller is one of the most intelligent and absorbing titles ever committed to CD-ROM. It's also a game that, along with *Half-Life* and *Solitaire*, is one of the few that it should be your duty to play. From the intricate layering of gameplay styles through the tangled web of its branching techno-thriller plot, *Deus Ex* remains as invigorating today as it was three and half years ago, despite the obvious graphical senility.

IN WITH THE NEW

Sadly, nothing lasts forever, and having almost single-handedly propped up the genre for most of the 21st century, it looks like we'll be seeing a new game ruling *PC ZONE's* role-playing roost next month. When you consider that most games have about as much longevity as a free-range egg, *Deus Ex* has had a bloody good innings. What's more, seeing as it won't be falling far down the *PCZ* pecking order, we shouldn't be too mournful – especially now the sequel *Invisible War* is done, dusted and ready to take the rightful place of its illustrious predecessor.

Sadly, it's with regret that I must inform you I just lied. Turn a few pages and you'll find the game which will replace the first *Deus Ex* at the top – *Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic*.

"*Invisible War* is not what we were hoping for – and in the case of many fans, demanding"

Put bluntly, *Invisible War* isn't nearly as good as its illustrious predecessor. There are RP elements of course, but essentially, *Invisible War* is a first-person shooter – admittedly a very, very good one – but not what we were hoping for, expecting or in the case of a great many fans, demanding.

The changes have come about, whether Ion Storm or Eidos choose to admit it or not, thanks to the concurrent development of both Xbox and PC versions of the game. As Ion Storm learned during development of the PS2 version of *DX1*, it's infinitely more difficult to take a game from the PC to console than it is from console to PC.

By necessity then, it seems that greater emphasis was put on making the console version more accessible, and as such seemingly insignificant PC-specific features that helped foster a sense of realism have been taken away. And all this because the over-sized Xbox controller can't deal with them.

SAY IT AIN'T SO

The developer has had to simplify much of the mechanics of the game – and as is so often the case, there's a fine line between streamlining a game and dumbing it down. It would be a touch unfair to accuse Ion Storm of wholesale retardation, but it's certainly true it's taken simplification a touch too far for the likes of us PC players, who

"Excuse me sir, but do you have a licence for that weapon?"

like nothing better than to wear away every key and button we have available to us.

It's the interface that has obviously received the most attention. Whereas before the inventory's capacity was based on the size and weight of each item, this time round it's simply comprised of a number of slots (one per item), á la *Resident Evil*. So, a packet of cigarettes will take up the same space in your backpack as shoulder-mounted rocket launcher – clearly sick and wrong.

The concept of weapon ammo has also been altered in that only one type is required to fire all the weapons in the game, although a flame-thrower will use up more ammo than a pistol. It's a system that should work, but it feels wrong because it's difficult to judge how much ammo each weapon will swallow up with one shot, and a visual prompt would have been handy.

Then there's the non-existent damage modelling, where four shots to the head are about as effective at bringing down an assailant as a gentle squeeze on the thigh. Another minor irritant and further evidence of having to pander to the needs of the console market is the disappearance of the Reload key. Hardly crippling, but it's annoying nonetheless.

SHOOT TO KILL

But perhaps the biggest change, one that alters the nature of the gameplay quite significantly, comes by way of a reduction in the number of augmentations and skill modifications you can install about your person. In my opinion, it was these 'biomods' that contributed greatly to *Deux Ex's* sense of freedom; being able to change your character's skills and emphasis towards combat, stealth or otherwise. Certainly, there were plug-ins that, as it turned out, were next to useless, but the fun was in exploring the possibilities.

There were ten augmentation slots in *Deus Ex*, with over 20 biochips to choose from, and you could upgrade each three times. Now there are only five slots, 15 skills and two levels of upgrade. There were also 11 separate skills in the original game that could be advanced through four stages of training, from 'untrained' to 'advanced'. These skills have been done away with. You do the math.

With the simplification of the interface and the streamlining of augmentations and elimination of skills – which has meant throwing out the old 'wobbly arm' weapon skills – what was originally a unique first-person RPG now comes across as an over-complicated shooter. Whereas before you were forced to think of varied solutions because your combat skills were often underdeveloped, here, since your combat abilities aren't held back, it's all too easy to get carried away and just shoot your way through certain situations. And the more you resort to violence, the more of a shooter the game becomes – and the subtly crafted role-playing and adventure elements become wasted and ignored.

Of course, whether you go around all barrels a-poppin' or take a more leisurely route through the game is a matter of choice. Perhaps it's a good thing Ion Storm has made the game more accessible to pure

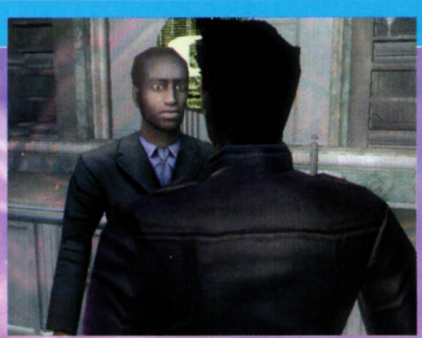
"What was originally a unique first-person RPG is now an over-complicated shooter"

HEY BOY, HEY GIRL

SEX MATTERS

Alex D is a fittingly androgynous sobriquet, when you consider that you can choose to take the role of either a man or a woman in the game. Depending on your choice, the other characters in the game may treat you in different ways.

An amusing instance comes early on when you meet a local businessman in a bar – who, it transpires, is gay. As an attractive male, you'll find yourself becoming the target of his less than subtle advances (and yes, I did visit his apartment later on).



***Dancing Queen*, anyone?**

If you play a as a woman, you try and get him paired off with a guy dancing in the corner. In the end, the results aren't going to change the course of the game, but it's a fun and unique approach all the same.

Mayor Livingstone took the direct approach for this year's fireworks display...

combat FPS fans. In doing so, however, a great many RPG purists may well be put off. And this would be a shame because even though the central character may not stand up to as much internal probing, the storyline, environments and missions certainly do.

FEAR OF A BLEAK PLANET

Set 15 years on from where the original left off, you play Alex D (no relation to Chuck), a nanotechnologically-enhanced inductee of a scientifically enlightened organisation called Tarsus. With me so far?

JC, the central character from the first game, is but a distant memory. His legacy – The Collapse – resulted in the eradication of corrupt governments and shadowy organisations, and city states instead administered by huge international corporations. These corporations subcontract matters of defence, health, law and education, often to subsidiary shadowy organisations. In other words, it's much the same as before but with other people in charge.

Things start simply enough: you're an augmented being, a product of science and so-called progress. Ranged against you and your kind are the luddites, The Order, hooded rainbow warriors who're far from being the lovable tree-hugging type you might expect.

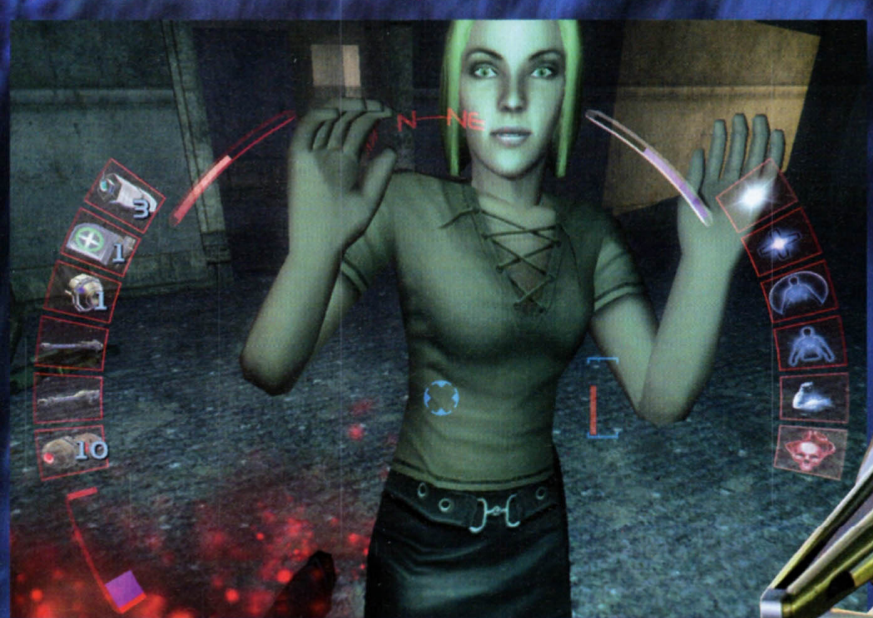
What initially seems to be a simple choice – to side with the techno-evangelists or go with the quasi-religious fanatics – soon develops into a political and moral quagmire of half-truths, outright lies, alliances and hidden agendas. What you do and who you believe depends on what you do or don't uncover, either by speaking to the various NPCs or reading journals and other material left lying around. Your course through the game will depend not on what is overtly right or wrong, but what you *think* is right or wrong. Needless to say, you're kept on your toes from beginning to end, to the point where you start to question not only what's said but sometimes how it's said.

On my first play through the game, I'd pretty much decided who I was going to side with halfway through. A couple of instances caused me to waver momentarily and the storyline descended into *Max Payne* silliness on one occasion, but I stayed true to the cause. Then, almost at the last scene, a character said something in a way which made me stop and think: "Oh Lord God nooo. What have I done?" I almost sunk to the floor in an over-dramatic Charlton Heston fashion, believing I had condemned the entire human race to extinction. Rarely does a game make you question your own judgement in such a way, and it's this one aspect above all else – as was the case with the original game – that makes *Invisible War* such a uniquely compelling and unforgettable experience.

MISSION POSSIBLE

Although a typical mission will involve getting into a certain area to find some important piece of evidence, it's the means by which you can complete your objectives in virtually any order that makes *Invisible War* such a unique experience when compared to the typical first-person shooter. Rarely are you forced down a pre-set path, unless concerned with deteriorating health or a lack of necessary hardware. Rather, the game offers a number of ways to approach any situation.

One room that required my immediate investigation was being patrolled by guards (who can be easily distracted or, if necessary, eliminated and their bodies hidden). Had I chosen to slip past the security though, I would have found a grate offering another way in, albeit with cameras to negotiate



I see someone has a couple of implants of their own...

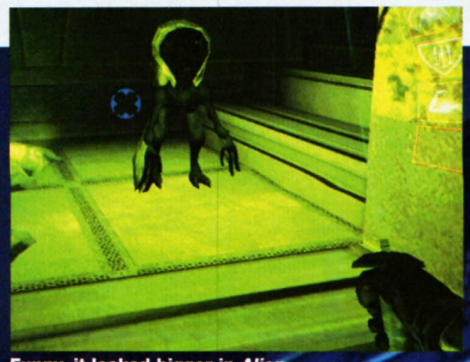
MISSED OPPORTUNITY

MULTIPLAYER MAY BE MISSING, BUT WE MISS THE OPTION TO EVOLVE

Despite the potential for mucho multiplayer fun and the use of the party-friendly Unreal engine, it isn't surprising Ion Storm elected to leave out a multiplayer mode. It was no big draw in the first game and so it isn't something we're going to start getting worked up over now. However, what's very much missed is the emphasis on character development, a cornerstone of any RPG, which has been relegated to a minor role here.

What's more, weapon add-ons are little more than power-ups. Plus, despite having over a dozen biomod augmentations to call upon, you can only install five, and these are only special abilities that are little more than Force powers in the game. In all honesty, there was as much character development in *Jedi Academy* as there is here.

He must be evil. The eyes are a dead giveaway.



Funny, it looked bigger in *Alien*.

A game riddled with deceit, conspiracy and static discharge.

along the way. However, it was only once I'd entered the apartment and completed my objective that I found another means of entry which would have involved playing the cast members off against each other. Unfortunately, I'd hacked down one of them on my way in, and in doing so had cut off a lucrative source of future revenue.

BEAUTIFUL GAME

Graphically, *Invisible War* is a visual feast. It's certainly true that the first game lacked a certain finesse in the graphics department and Ion Storm has certainly made amends here. The Unreal technology is superb, and although the levels are all doused in perpetual twilight and gloom, there's a very real and tangible sense of foreboding, a feeling that's made all the more intense by the tightly-packed levels.

Adding to the mood are some wonderful shadow and lighting effects. Swinging bulbs cast lengthening shadows as they arc gently from the ceiling, and by crouching behind a dimly-lit doorway you can watch as the silhouette of a guard creeps past outside.

Pick up a wine glass and hurl it against the wall and its shadow will race to meet it. Even flailing bodies contort through the air as you hurl them around the place, shadows warping across the floor and walls in a rather macabre yet perversely satisfying dance. (I even maxed out my Strength enhancement just to see how far I could hurl corpses, which is quite far as it happens.)

INTELLIGENCE SERVICE

Of course, such graphical finery comes at a price. Even at a standard 1024x768 resolution with shadows dancing and detail on high, you're going to need a PC at least as good as the recommended spec. Even then, frame rates will suffer when the lead starts flying.

As to the enemy AI, I must admit that while there were no instances of utter stupidity to report, it never once surprised me with a display of super-human tactical awareness either. Partly due to the small focused levels and partly because you rarely fight more than three or four enemies at any one time, it's rare to see any cognitive team-dynamics on show. Saying that, troops advanced and retreated as you would expect, and when given the chance, enemy soldiers did seem to react to audio cues. For instance, a grenade launched in a cave had the desired effect of bringing every nasty around bearing down on me, which led to a tense, very enjoyable and ultimately futile and short-lived engagement.

THE THIRD COMING

Despite being paced and plotted with precision and offering a level of graphical loveliness and interaction easily on a par with any action game currently available, *Deus Ex* doesn't cut the mustard. The fact remains that *Invisible War* neither runs at the full-pelt pace to satiate the FPS drone, nor offers the depth of character development to satisfy the seasoned role-player – or indeed the veteran *Deus Ex* fan.

"The Unreal technology is superb, and there's a real and tangible sense of foreboding"

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BIOTOX ATTACK DRONE
Stick this chip in your arm and on activation it launches a drone that attacks and immobilises any nearby organic foe.

NEURAL INTERFACE
Out of stock sadly, this cranial implant available on the black market enables you to hack into security terminals and turn off security cameras.

VISION ENHANCEMENT
Stick this little chap behind the iris and you'll be able to spot enemies through walls.

HEALTH LEECH DRONE
Another plug-in available from shady retailers, this leg implant will break down nearby corpses and add organic biomass to your own to improve your health.

THERMAL MASKING
Set into your skeleton, this biomod acts like the Cloak augmentation – but this baby only renders you invisible to drones and robots.

SECOND OPINION

PAUL PRESLEY

It took me a while to identify exactly what it was about *Invisible War* that was leaving me cold, disappointed and underwhelmed. Initially, I'd put it down to the clumsy interface, the cramped, claustrophobic levels, the dated feel to the engine and the simplified style of gameplay in comparison to the first *Deus Ex*.

However, after several days of navigating confusing dialogue, illogical narrative structures and some horrendous story editing, it hit me. *Invisible War's* biggest cause for complaint is that it displays absolutely none of the polish, care and attention to detail that made the first game such a stand-out classic.

It's worth bearing in mind that there's still a full two months before the UK release (the game is already on sale in the US), and any patches will likely be incorporated. Don't expect any major changes to the game, though.

By stripping out a hefty chunk of what made the original such an engorged and richly diverse exploration of character and narrative, *Invisible War* is literally only half the game its predecessor was. Saying that, although there are more visceral action games around, few are as intelligent, demanding or rewarding as this.

Deux Ex: Invisible War will sadly go down in history as a disappointment. Despite being a great game, we were all expecting more. Let's just hope *Deus Ex 3* will be the game this should have been.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✔ An intelligent story full of intrigue
- ✔ Multiple paths to complete dozens of non-linear objectives
- ✔ A beautiful and highly interactive experience
- ✔ Stunning visuals and physics
- ✘ More shooter than RPG
- ✘ Over-simplified interface and gameplay elements

86

More style, less substance – but still as intensely involving and rewarding as ever

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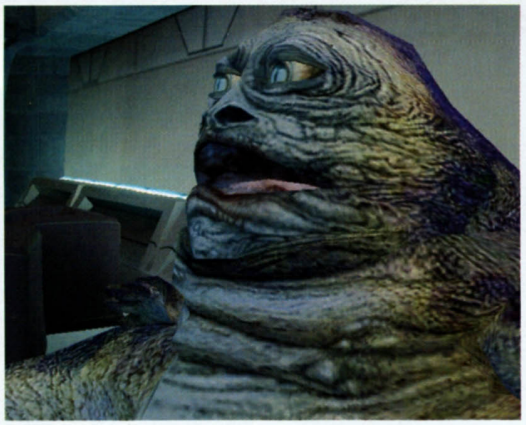
All together now... "Don't get cocky kid."



Jabba accidentally sits on a Thermal Detonator.

"Ooh, me droids are playing up again."

STAR WARS: KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC

PC ZONE CLASSIC

■ £34.99 | Pub: LucasArts/Activision | Dev: BioWare | ETA: December 5 | www.swkotor.com

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 128MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card **DESIRES** P4 1.6GHz, 512MB RAM and a 128MB 3D card

***Richie Shoemaker* feels the Force in this stunning RPG**

KECKS, undercrackers, scants... however you refer to them, it's rare to see any would-be hero making his grand entrance sporting little else but a pair of organ grinders – let alone one hailing from a galaxy far, far away. Nevertheless, having gone through the usual character-creation process of virtual dice-rolling, skill-tweaking and the often tortuous procedure of procuring a fitting name for your alter ego, your journey through *Star Wars*' first RPG begins with you in a fitful slumber in your pants. You're roused by a panting CO, who learns upon entering your berth that standing to attention first thing in the morning is something that comes quite naturally to most humanoid males, and as it happens, females too, though not in quite the same way.

Despite the potential for non-commissioned hanky-panky in the depths of space, it appears your superior's abrupt and urgent entrance has much to do with an attack of the Sith, who have taken it upon themselves to board your ship, the Endar Spire, and tear it apart in search of some lady Jedi called Bastila. Without much in the way of breakfast, a shower or even a fresh set of undergarments, your mission (after acquiring clothing more suited to battle) is to explore the gleaming corridors of your Republic ship to find and rescue the fugitive saber-swinger before the evil silver-suited ones get a hold of her.

A PRESENCE NOT FELT SINCE

Despite the ominous 'get the girl, kill the baddies' scene-setting, *KOTOR* quickly establishes itself as an adventure distinct from any other in the *Star Wars* canon. Apart from the fact it's the first ever *Star Wars* dice 'em up, it's also the first time since *Phantom Menace* that fans have been given a new timeline to explore, this one set across largely virgin territory a full 4,000 years before any of the films.

INPERSPECTIVE

NEVERWINTER NIGHTS
Reviewed Issue 118, Score 91%
The most recent of BioWare's AD&D *Forgotten Realms* role-players was this 3D effort and with a second expansion due soon, the game still has plenty of life left in it. Less spectacular but more challenging than *KOTOR*, *Neverwinter*'s single-player game is pretty damn good, but in multiplayer mode it really shines.

STAR WARS GALAXIES: AN EMPIRE DIVIDED
Reviewed Issue 132, Score 67%
Not so much an empire divided as a community fractured, between those who think this online role-player is the best thing since the summer of 1977 and those who reckon it's a load of bantha poo-doo. We'll be revisiting the game next issue to see how it's improved over the past couple of months – watch this space.

It wouldn't be much of a *Star Wars* game if you didn't pass by a Rancor in some dank dungeon.

Ironically the gist of the storyline will be hauntingly familiar, seeing as it features an evil Jedi going by the name of Darth with you playing a young backwater hick with powerfully raw and untapped Force abilities that may (or may not) facilitate his downfall. As the story progresses, you'll see a peaceful planet obliterated, assemble a ragtag crew of freedom fighters (among them a mournful Wookiee, a wheely useful droid and a lovable rogue) and you even acquire a ship which is no doubt the fastest hunkajunk in the galaxy. Even the intro movie apes the opening scenes of *A New Hope*.

Not that we'd have it any other way. The blatant scene-checking is obvious and intentional, to show that despite the lack of our favourite characters, *KOTOR* is as *Stars Wars*-packed as they come. In fact I would say this game offers the most gripping and enjoyable slice of *Star Wars*-tagged fiction since *Return Of The Jedi*, with enough in the way of plot, action and diverse and interesting characters to fill a movie trilogy of its very own.

AH, LITTLE SISTER

However, it is as a role-playing adventure *Knights Of The Old Republic* must be judged, and comparisons with other PC RPGs would, initially at least, show it up to have something of the dumb blonde about it. For instance, there are few starting options compared to the exhaustive character choices in BioWare's previous D&D-flavoured role-player outings.

"The most gripping slice of *Star Wars*-tagged fiction since *Return Of The Jedi*"

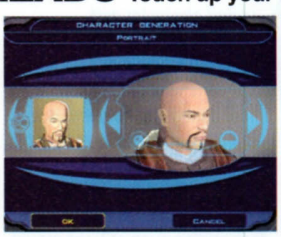
Progress a few hours though, and even before you begin your Jedi training and start down the Dark or Light path, you'll find the game is full of hidden depths. These range from dozens of optional side quests that shadow the central mission, to the thousand or so inventory items that can be found, traded, adapted and equipped across your party of nine.

What makes *KOTOR* such a wonderfully engaging experience is the characters and the way they have been brought to life. I'm not just talking about the graphics either (which – unlike most console-to-PC transferrals – are befittingly vibrant, highly detailed and endlessly watchable), but the depth of personality lavished on the various non-player characters. Thanks to a combination of an excellent script and a quality in the voice-acting that is almost without equal, there is a real diversity and dynamism among your party, even if your potential enemies are a little one-dimensional. An early recruit to your cause is Mission Vao, an irksome and plucky adolescent who initially you'll wish would fall off a ledge. But take the time to talk to her and her sidekick

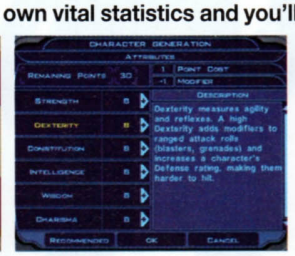
WALKTHROUGH →

HEY, NICE THREADS Touch up your own vital statistics and you'll be number-crunching in style

1 Male or female pretty much covers all the gender options, but Soldier, Scout or Scoundrel are hardly the most exhaustive character choices we've ever seen.



2 Not the greatest choice of heads available, none of them are particularly attractive either. Remember this is 4,000 years before the Skywalker bowl cut was cool.



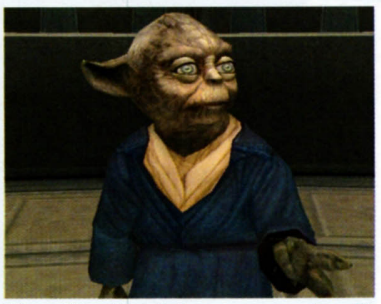
3 Here's some stats: Strength aids melee attack, Constitution defines hit points, Dexterity will help your aim, Wisdom affects your Force powers... And so on.

4 Next, you must select Skills and Feats, the latter being special moves and combat-related abilities. These enable your character to look impressive during combat.

5 Rarely do you see Luke Skywalker bounding about the galaxy in a thong. To make up for it, here you are half-naked on your bunk, reporting for duty.

"Hokey religions and ancient weapons ain't no match for a big pair of Jabbas, honey."

The Wookiee Support Bra. Now in red.



"Cup of tea I need, ten pence you have?"

Wookiee, and by the end you'll love her like you would a sister. Unless during the course of events you become seduced by the Dark Side, in which case you'll end up wanting to cave her skull in like a Jaffa Cake and blame it on HK-47, your mildly psychotic assassin droid.

Enjoyable as all the talky bits are, *Knights* is just as good when it comes to slicing droids and shooting Sith troopers in the face. As most modern RPG combat tends to be, battles are conducted in real time, and can be paused at will to allow you to select targets and queue up which special moves to use.

USE YOUR FEAT

With the right skill progression a soldier can use Feats such as Rapid Fire and Sniper to take down an enemy from range. Melee specialists with dual Vibroswords have a similar array of lethal moves, including Flurry, Power Attack and Critical Strike. In between all this hoo-ha characters can activate personal shields, lob grenades or patch themselves up during a lull in the action. The combat may not be as in yer face as the first-person *Jedi Knight* games, but it's just as intense and certainly much more enjoyable to watch, especially later on when you have a roomful of Dark Jedis cavorting around letting off lightning bolts and trying to choke the life out of their opponents. With over 30 Force Powers to work with (not to mention hundreds of weapons) combat is quite a tactical challenge.

SMOKE IN YOUR EYES

In terms of general presentation *KOTOR* is about the best RPG there is – no question. Almost faultless throughout, the familiar music is complemented by a few original pieces, and the sound effects are spot on with a mix of the familiar and the new.

The interface is a massive improvement on the console version, everything being mouse-driven of course. It would have been nice to have been able to zoom the camera around a bit more and be able to look up and down, but these are minor nuisances as graphically the game is absolutely beautiful throughout. That said, the larger battles will test all but the most modern graphics cards (with some degree of slowdown when the screen fills with smoke), but the dramatic and varied environments, not to mention the varied character and background animations are pay-off enough.

The only real issue we have with the game is a lack of multiplayer support, which isn't so much an issue anyway since BioWare has been quite open about the fact that adding such options would ultimately have weakened the single-player experience. On the evidence of the finished game, that decision appears totally vindicated. Although *Baldur's Gate II* remains the hardcore choice and *Morrowind* may offer more scope for non-linear free-roaming, when it comes to story, characters, accessibility and replayability *Knights Of The Old Republic* is one of the finest RPGs of the last five years and easily the most accomplished, unique and entertaining *Star Wars* product released in the last ten. PCZ

THE POWER OF THE LITE SIDE

IT MAY LOOK LIGHT AND FLUFFY, BUT TAKE A PEEK UNDERNEATH AND *KOTOR* HAS DICE OF STONE

A fact not lost on its Xbox-owning fans (who've been playing the game for some months) is that *Knights Of The Old Republic* has a pace, charm and grand sweeping story reminiscent of classic era *Final Fantasy*. Knowing the characters and the story – as opposed to amassing raw stats and arbitrary skills – is what marks the focus of the gameplay.

Not that we're implying *KOTOR* is RPG-lite – far from it. For those turned on by initiative rolls and to-hit modifiers, you'll be pleased to know that by tweaking a couple of gameplay buttons in the options menu, *KOTOR* transforms into a bewitching display of numerical randomness sure to please the beardiest of modern-day warlocks. The point is that for those of us with an aversion to arbitrary and ultimately meaningless statistics, such things can be hidden out of sight. You can auto-assign experience points and new skills and be left alone to enjoy the game for what it ultimately is – one of the best *Star Wars* games ever made.

"That damn Jedi and her +3 Purple Lighting Spell Of Doom."

SECOND OPINION

MARK HILL

KOTOR is not only the best _Star Wars_ game ever made, it's quite probably the best RPG ever made. It blows my previous favourite, _Planescape: Torment_, right out of the picture, and is unlikely to be surpassed any time soon (_Deus Ex: IW_ doesn't count; it's too multi-genred to be considered just an RPG). The _Star Wars_ veneer gives it an extra dimension for us fanboys, not least because it feels truer and more authentic than George's latest CGI puppetry films. But even more extraordinary is that it successfully develops an engaging love story – something that _Clones_ didn't come close to achieving. The plot as a whole is absorbing and very cleverly structured, so that the freedom you have to grow as a character always feels organic.

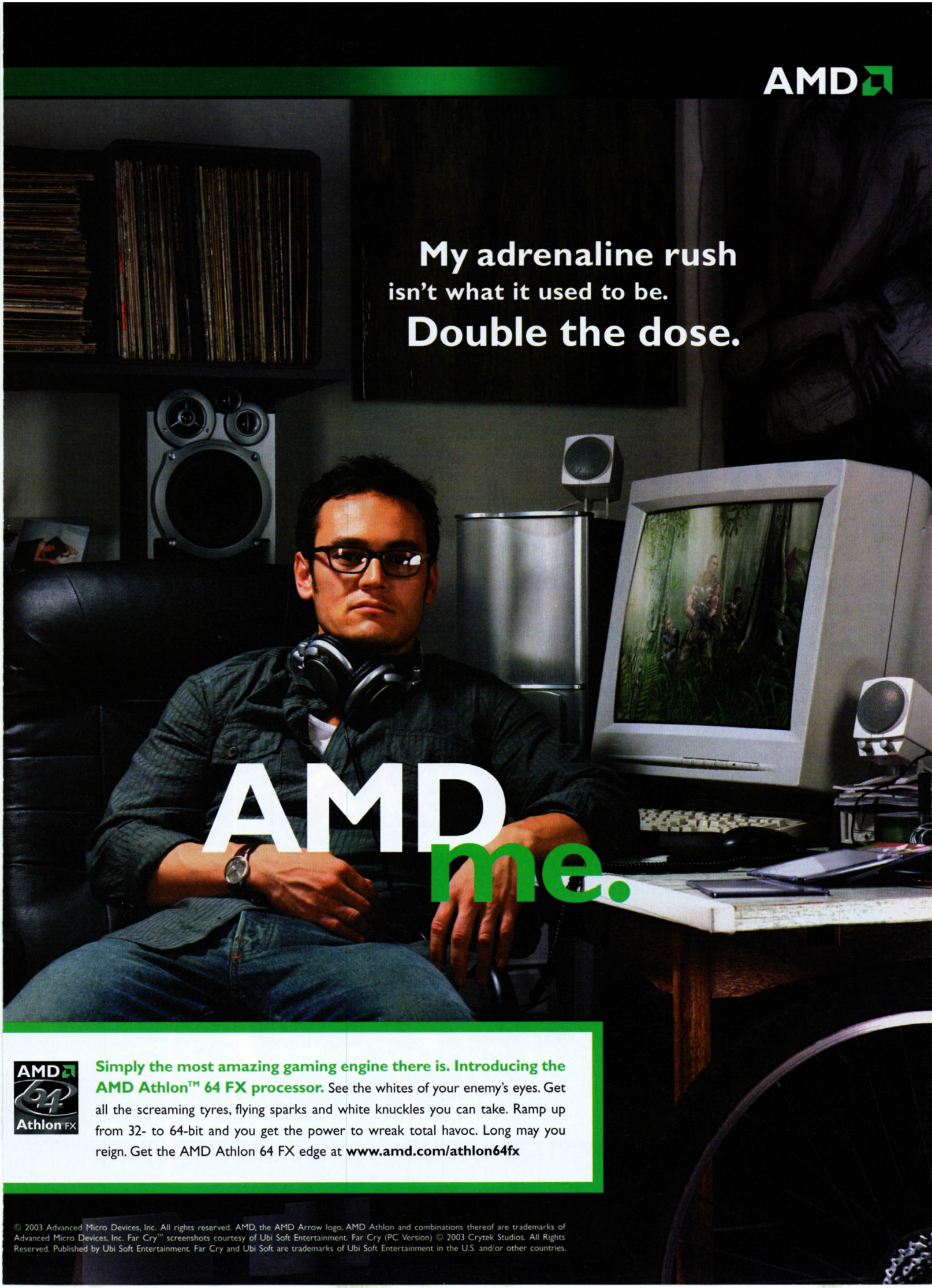
Some of the mechanics are a natural evolution from the _Baldur's Gate_ games and _Planescape_, and it will be remnants of these hardcore RPGs, like the semi-turn-based combat, that will keep a lot of punters from getting into it. It's their loss. This is the closest to being a Jedi you can get without becoming an actor and moving to LA.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✔ Accessible RPG gameplay with plenty of depth
- ✔ Wonderfully fleshed-out characters
- ✔ Spectacular real-time combat
- ✔ More than enough stats, skill, quests and items for the RPG nut to exhaust
- ✔ Music, sound and speech are all near perfect
- ✘ No multiplayer options

94

Simply the best *Star Wars* for a decade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CONTRACT J.A.C.K.

£19.99 | Pub: VU Games | Dev: Monolith | ETA: Out Now | nolf2.sierra.com/

REQUIRES PIII 733, 128MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card **DESIRES** PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

As good as *NOLF 2* or Just Another Crappy Killathon? *Will Porter* reads the small print and finds out if he knows *J.A.C.K.*

IN PERSPECTIVE

NO ONE LIVES FOREVER 2
Reviewed Issue 122, Score 93%
Far superior to its dimwit watered-down cousin, *NOLF 2* is a much wiser buy than the shorter shootathon that is *Contract J.A.C.K.*

XIII
Reviewed Issue 135, Score 83%
Sexier and with better fashion sense than Mr Jack – despite its dumbass grunts, this is slicker than slick.

A vehicular machine gun certainly helps during rush hour.

MOON UNIT ZAPPER

1960s SCI-FI MAKES A WELCOME RETURN AS JACK LASERS HIS WAY ACROSS THE MOON

It's company policy to rate *Moonraker* the worst Bond film ever, but to see its laser battle recreated still made our mouse mats go clammy. With two badass laser weapons, endless white corridors, a bio-dome and a wander across the moon's surface, the best moments of *Contract J.A.C.K.* are undoubtedly the lunar ones. The base is part of the space station that was destroyed in *NOLF 1*, renovated and improved by its resident mad scientist; its airlocks, hull breaches and laser-toting invaders make it a great place for a killing spree too. Following this up with our hero being sucked into space and battling evil astronauts is another masterstroke. It's just a shame the game isn't this good the whole way through.

In space, nobody can hear you swing.

Hmmm. This might come in handy.

Volkov puts you through your paces in the assault course.

HERE IN the underground secret headquarters of *PC ZONE*, we often ramble on about the greatness of *No One Lives Forever 2*, extolling the virtues of Cate Archer's silky scrambles through the underground late into the night. Not that it made a jot of difference, mind, as hardly anyone went out and bought a copy. Tsk.

This didn't go unnoticed in the ivory towers of Monolith and, we can only presume, a marketing man with a big stick hovered over the employees when they were looking for a way to make the *NOLF* universe more saleable to the masses. "How do we make the kids buy a game that stars a sexy woman who sneaks around, solves problems and eliminates targets coolly and calmly?" they asked each other. "Erm. Have a gruff man who blows shit up instead?" said the quivering voice of the tea lady. Genius. Have a banana. And so *Contract J.A.C.K.* was born.

SEXUAL EQUALITY

Contract J.A.C.K. is essentially a standalone expansion pack to *NOLF 2*, albeit one with a significantly different style of gameplay. Playing as a mean and moody bad guy, the game sees you being tested and hired by the moustache-twirling head honcho of evil-doing conglomerate H.A.R.M., one Dmitri Volkov. A rival gang of leather-clad, skull-emblazoned hoodlums known as Danger Danger are weaselling their way up the cat-stroking ladder, and Volkov needs someone to find out what they're up to.

Neatly dovetailing the goody-two-shoes exploits of Cate Archer, *Contract J.A.C.K.* takes place between the two *NOLF* games; providing some great in-jokes for fans, as well as an interesting counter-story to the machinations at UNITY HQ.

We're still firmly in *NOLF* territory here; a lot of the camper *Avengers*-styled humour has been scaled down, but it still looks and sounds much the same – and it's still fairly funny. Disembodied voices boom along the laser-blasted corridors complaining: "It's times like these I wish that I'd built that army of killer robots instead of finishing the East Wing!" This causes you to raise one or two wry smiles while you crack open the heads of the opposing forces.

"Most gadgets have been cut out, perhaps because contract killers don't carry make-up"

Weapons, meanwhile, are essentially those from the meatier end of Cate Archer's arsenal: most of the gadgets have been cut out, perhaps because burly contract killers generally don't carry hairpins and make-up. The awesome Bacalov Corrector, the little gun with the big bang, makes a welcome return, while a collection of C4, flashbangs, grenades and incendiaries help in clearing out the enclosed spaces and corridors of Italy, Czechoslovakia and various military encampments.

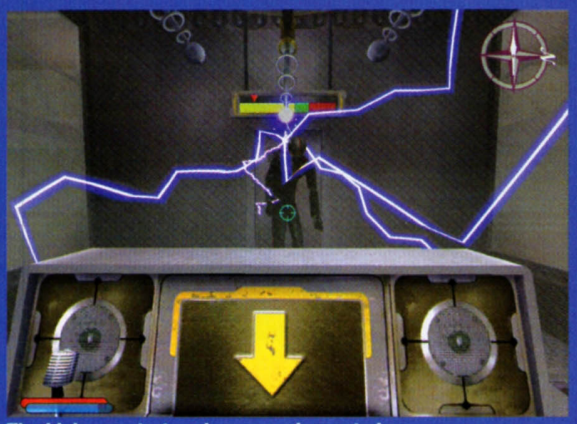
FIGHT FOR YOUR RIGHTS

The major difference you'll notice if you played *NOLF* is the style of combat. Quite simply, it's mental. Bad guys don't sidle and snipe, they sprint over the level at breakneck speeds in some sort of evil gun-toting swarm. Appearing from a multitude of alleys, rooms and henchmen-backwaters, the omnipresence of snarling black leather makes for some extremely frenetic shooting sessions.

What's more, the AI is pretty good. At any point the multiple enemies on-screen will be

Say hello to my little friend!

This shot was taken in the last three seconds of his life. Sad.



The bloke you torture is a very pleasant chap.

"Jack's exploits never slip out of top gear, despite the fact that your brain probably will"

diving, crouching, ducking behind walls and firing over them, charging at you or demonstrating a disturbing penchant for tumbling over balconies. The old FPS chestnut of a group of grunts just watching comrades getting bullet-riddled and not reacting rarely happens here, and in an age where so many good games are released with brain-dead automatons for villains, it's really quite refreshing.

Gameplay revolves around getting to a new area of a map, diving behind the street furniture and trying to blow the merry hell out of a legion of baddies until they stop appearing. When that happens, you can move on to the next meanie-packed bottleneck – all of which is great fun, at least to begin with.

However, in one of *Contract J.A.C.K.*'s greatest strengths, we also find its greatest weakness. And as the proud holder of an English degree, I can reliably inform you this is an example of irony.

Contract J.A.C.K. never lets up, never allows you to draw a breath. Levels, like in the Italian towns you find yourself fighting in, go on for too long, and you find yourself getting bored of the action and wanting something a little less intense. Games like *Call Of Duty*, and indeed *NOLF 2*, have demonstrated the benefits of periods of slower-paced combat, but Jack's exploits never slip out of top gear, despite the fact your brain probably will. You can't help but think back to the skill points, stealth and tension of Cate Archer's forays in espionage and wipe away a tear for its demise.

These ruins provide some of the best shoot-outs of the game.

GIMME A BREAK

What's more is that Monolith has clearly done its best to make the game as non-episodic as possible. One environment merges seamlessly into another: in the time it takes to drive from Milton Keynes to Doncaster, Jack has left a bullet-strewn Czechoslovakia on a rocket, had a big scrap on the moon and landed in the middle of an Italian baddie outpost on the return journey. What's more, in all this time your only stated objective is to rescue a scientist.

The lack of natural breaks is not only exhausting, but also limits any emotional attachment to proceedings. Gone are the hidden notes, the side-objectives and the lock-picking of previous *NOLF* outings. Jack is a walking killing machine and

MISSED OPPORTUNITY

They're all dead. I've killed them all.

WHO'S A NAUGHTY BOY?

Jack is a killer who works for an evil organisation, but he never really does anything hugely bad (*Apart from massacre people wherever he goes – Ed*). He only ever kills soldiers and other bad guys, but it would have been really good if he actually got to murder some of the goodies. Games like *Jedi Academy* give you the chance to taste the dark side, so why can't we run through UNITY HQ with all guns blazing and put some bullets in some do-gooders, godammit?

Eat snowbound firey death, you bastards!

"Yes Gromit, it's made of cheese!"

very little else. A lack of cut-scenes and precise objectives mean that Jack's antics only ever feel skin deep.

THERE'S MORE

However, just when the sameyness of your gunplay is really beginning to bite, Monolith, eternal innovators of the FPS genre, pulls something shiny out of the bag. Every now and then a stroke of gameplay genius enters the fray and re-ignites your flagging imaginative juices – like Jack's bazooka-toting skidoo. Charging over the Czech mountain-tops blasting baddies over ledges and out of poorly built huts has never been so much fun.

In addition, the turning circle and controls make it a sheer joy to drive; helicopters swoop overhead while you career through border-posts and leap over trains while giggling like a maniac. It's true to say that the later Scooter-with-a-Machine-Gun section doesn't supply the same amount of giddy thrills as this, but it still makes a welcome change from the crazed on-foot action around you.

Jack takes you to the moon and back. If you'll be his baby.

Elsewhere, you find yourself torturing a Danger Danger goon on a giant machine with cooking options such as 'Rare' and 'Well Done', which isn't quite as nasty as it sounds. The poor guy is really quite polite about the situation, but it's a nice little sub-game nevertheless.

Other nice touches include Jack's interloping on a battle between Danger Danger and the Czech military, both of whom are hell-bent on filling you with bullets, as well as each other. This creates some rather nice *Half-Life*-esque moments, where you hide behind a barrel and wait for enemies to fire off their bullets so you don't have to.

Cheesy references, meanwhile, are deliberately kept to a minimum this time round. However, Bond fans are still well catered for in the moon-base (see panel on page 69), and the Czech rocket silo tucked inside a mountain. In this reviewer's 007-hazed eyes, the latter is more than a little bit like Blofeld's volcanic lair in *You Only Live Twice*. In essence, the game is a series of peaks and troughs; neat little touches like these don't happen often, but they do perk you up when you've shot your fill of identikit villains.

TOO LITTLE, TOO LATE

It's the turn of the tide for the FPS and people are starting to expect more and more from their shooters; in six months time people will be treating Havok-free shooters without a decent physics engine like lepers at a finger buffet. I started playing *Contract J.A.C.K.* fresh from the mean and moody streets of *Max Payne 2's* New York, and the yawning chasm between them made it feel like I'd gone back in time two or three years. This may have meant that my clothes were back in style, but it still wasn't a great experience.

Thankfully, the fun and frenetic gameplay took my mind off this, but the fact that *Contract J.A.C.K.* is far from cutting-edge is certainly something to keep in mind. Little things, like the engine not enabling you to jump on the bonnet of your car really niggle at you more than they should.

It's also short – I estimate it at five or six hours – and you should undoubtedly keep this in mind before spending 20 crisp notes on it. It's fun to play, but would you rather have six hours in the *NOLF* universe that occasionally drag, or six hours of pure *Max Payne 2* class for a few pounds extra? To Monolith's credit, it has included some well-designed multiplayer maps and released some pretty nifty modding tools, but *Contract J.A.C.K.* only just scrapes home in the value-for-money stakes.

It remains, however, a fun experience; a dumbed-down *NOLF* adventure that hasn't aged that well, but still walks with a spring in its step and a tongue in its cheek. It won't live forever, but nothing ever does. PCZ

Had a workplace accident? Then call Henchman Solicitors – facial reconstruction a speciality!

SECOND OPINION

DAVE WOODS

I hated the original *NOLF* and amusingly still get flamed for my review by some oik on a rival mag's forum – if you're listening, GET OVER IT! Happily, *NOLF 2* corrected almost every mistake (AI and level design predominantly), and reaffirmed my love for the FPS. And now comes *Contract J.A.C.K.*, a standalone expansion with bells on that ploughs a different furrow to its predecessors. This is all about action, with wave after wave of opponents who aren't really bothered about survival, but intent on taking a hit from your health and hampering your progress for a few seconds. Thankfully, this isn't a *Serious Sam*-type affair, though. The AI routines are clever enough to fool you into thinking that there's a semblance of intelligence on offer: instead of charging at you down a pre-defined line (á la *NOLF*), the enemies in *J.A.C.K.* take cover, and don't get tired of waiting for you to make the first move. Don't expect stealth; expect fast, frantic, cartoon-like action, and not too much of it. You'll finish the game in about five hours and wonder whether it was worth it – unlike *Max Payne 2*, there's nothing memorable about this.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✔ Good melee AI
- ✔ Snatches of inspired gameplay
- ✔ Engaging *NOLF* universe
- ✘ Quite repetitive
- ✘ Pretty short

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***NOLF*-lite mayhem with only fleeting moments of greatness**

NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND

■ £34.99 | Pub: Electronic Arts | Dev: Black Box | ETA: November 28 | www.eagames.com/official/nfs/underground/us/home.jsp

REQUIRES PIII 800, 128MB RAM and 32MB 3D card **DESIRES** P4 1.8GHz, 256MB RAM and 64MB 3D card

***Will Sargent* slips his clutch and disappears into the night**

IT'S TIME to trade in the Ray-Bans and *Soft Rock* driving anthems CD for a puffa jacket and earrings, because, as those rear-window stickers of many a teenage Nova SRi driver proclaim, *Need For Speed* is "on a mission".

Yes, whereas the previous *NFS* outing, *Hot Pursuit 2*, indulged us with Ferrari fantasies amid the rolling hills of a tropical fantasy world, *Need For Speed Underground* follows Rockstar's *Midnight Club II* down to the dirty, neon-soaked streets of the urban sprawl – without the needless violence, of course.

More than 20 motors from *Max Power* favourites Subaru, Mitsubishi, Toyota and more can be souped-up with everything from 'InGen' engine chips and 'Nitrous Express Inc' boosters, to plain old panel stickers. All these strap-ons are available in 100-odd challenge stages, increasing in difficulty as you progress through the game.

Street racing parades the new graphics engine at its best, offering multi-lap blasts against a handful of cunning opponents. Every race is set in the city at night, so the courses demand absolute concentration. *Hot Pursuit's* shortcuts make a welcome return, while sprawling city centre junctions transform into single-lane back alleys at the turn of a corner.

When you peel out for the first time, you'll be genuinely impressed at the leap forward in terms of speed and graphics over its somewhat sluggish predecessors. In 1024x768, the game (running on a pukka PC) totally shats on anything you'll see in console land. *Project Gotham 2*? Pah!

"The game totally shats on anything you'll see in console land. *Project Gotham 2*? Pah!"

FEEL THE NEED?

The last three *NFS* games – *Porsche Unleashed*, *Hot Pursuits* and *HP2* – were too slow, so it's good to see Black Box drawing inspiration from the best street racing games out there, namely *Burnout* and *Project Gotham* (both console-only). We particularly like the new speed effects, such as blurring scenery and 'shaky cam' once you thunder past 100mph in the Drag races. Plus, there's also the chance to earn style points for dangerous power-slides.

The AI's much more forgiving too, with competing machines swerving and shunting just enough to frustrate – unlike those bloody cops in *Hot Pursuit 2*, who nudged you into a spin with irritating regularity.

Heck, it's all sounding pretty favourable for *Underground*. Is it better than *Midnight Club II*, then? Streets ahead. In fact, it's up there with *McRae* as a highly recommended drive. PCZ

MODEST BEGINNINGS

You start out with a small amount of cash, enough to buy a somewhat sluggish Golf GTi or Mazda MX-5. Win races and you'll earn more lolly for engine upgrades etc, and, eventually, a better car. All simple enough.

There are three prime racing styles: Street, Drag and Drift, and these are scattered across the real world too, so it's sure to appeal if you spend your weekends fitting neon under-lighting to Ford Capris for burnouts in Asda's car park.

IN PERSPECTIVE

MIDNIGHT CLUB II
Reviewed Issue 133, Score 81%
Employs Rockstar's special brand of carefree violence in familiar real-world cities, but pales when compared to *Underground's* advanced visuals and overall polish.

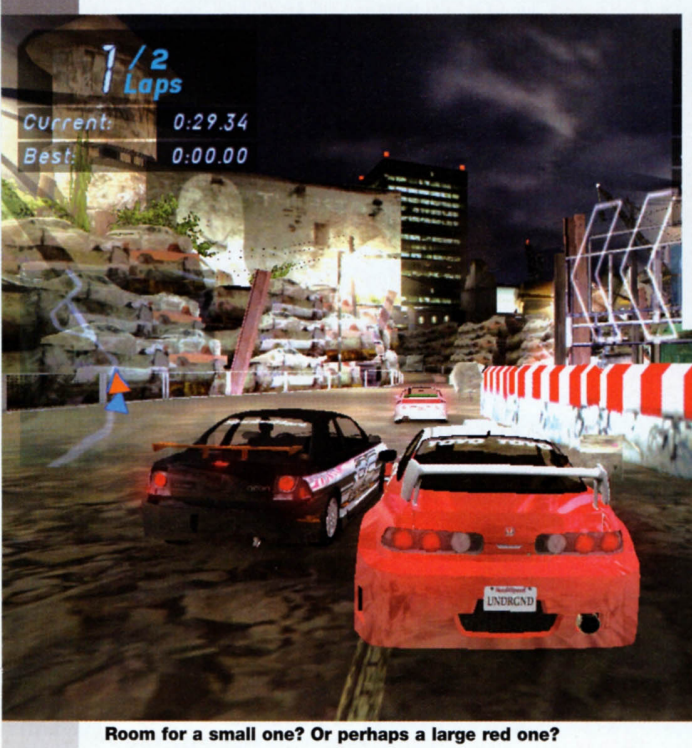
TOCA RACE DRIVER
Reviewed Issue 128, Score 76%
Introduced a storyline to the once pedestrian touring car scene, while a wonderful physics engine guarantees you'll crash just to see bits drop off.

PCZONE VERDICT

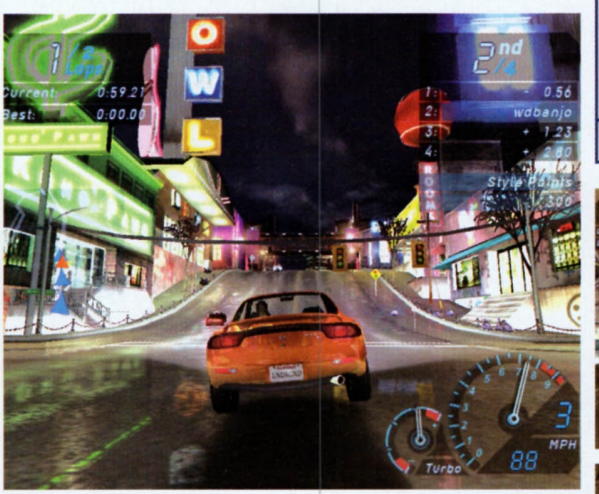
- ✔ Incredible speed – at last!
- ✔ Ups the ante for graphics detail. Yet again
- ✔ Opponents are tough, but not unfair
- ✔ 4-player LAN/MODEM action
- ✘ Only night-time racing

85

Mission accomplished



Room for a small one? Or perhaps a large red one?



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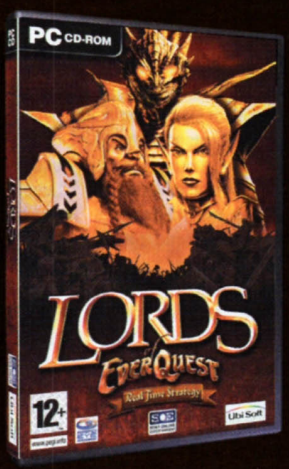

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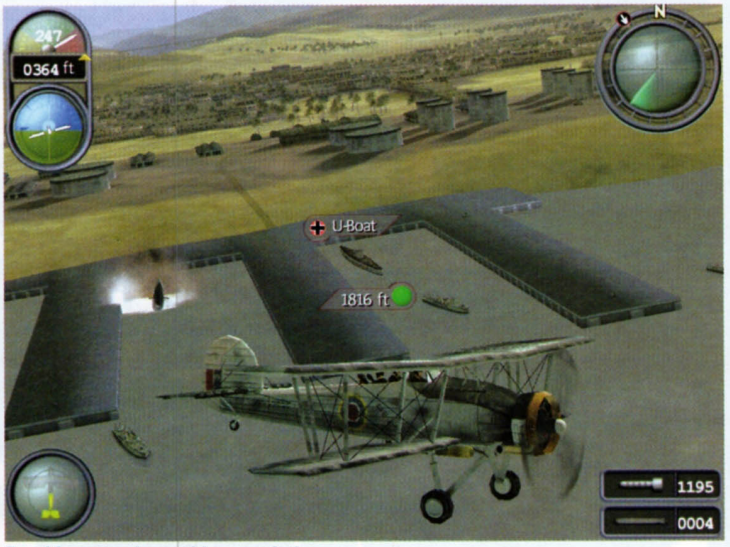
Landing is as simple as flying over the base with your wheels down.



Bombing runs keep things varied.

SECRET WEAPONS OVER NORMANDY

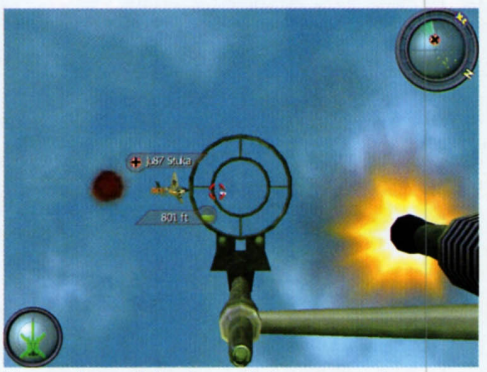
PC ZONE ESSENTIAL

■ £34.99 | Pub: Activision/LucasArts | Dev: Totally Games | ETA: November 28 | www.lucasarts.com

REQUIRES PIII 850, 256MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card **DESIRES** P4 2GHz, 512MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

***Paul Presley* wins World War II for the 876th time. And that's just this month...**

'Combat reflexes' is *SWON*'s version of bullet-time.



You can leave flying for a stint on mounted guns.

Who do you think you are kidding Mr Hitler?

IT'S THE global military conflict that just keeps on giving. If there's an area of World War II that has yet to be covered by the all-encompassing medium that is gaming, then I'll be extremely surprised. Okay, the old Home Guard has never featured that much, nor those plucky gals working in the Spitfire and parachute factories while their menfolk were holding back the Jerry army. Keep those spirits high, ladies. The war will be over by Christmas, thanks to you.

So it's quite a mystery exactly what "secret weapons" LucasArts is referring to in the title of this long-awaited return to the war-torn skies. It's not like Adolf had a futuristic death ray pointed at Dover or anything. Even if he did, it would probably have been taken care of by Clint Eastwood, Richard Burton or Telly Savalas, wouldn't it?

OPEN SECRETS

There's nothing that surreptitious about the weapons seen in *SWON* – the rickety Me163 and 262 rocket planes being about as exotic as it really gets. However, what LucasArts lacks in ground-breaking historical research, it more than makes up for in refined game design and engageability (if I may be so bold as to reinvent the English language for a moment).

Secret Weapons Over Normandy hasn't been designed to get the piston and propeller crowd whooping and dancing and giving each other mistimed high fives. If you saw *Matrix Revolutions* and came out thinking, "cool battle scenes, I want a big robot thing", rather than banging your fists against your temples and shrieking "but that made no sense!", then you're *SWON*'s target audience.

Now, don't get me wrong: I'm not for a moment suggesting that this is a game for morons. This is a game for those that put adrenalin thrills above cerebral pondering. Those that thrive on action, adventure and really wild things. As opposed to those that prefer every bolt to be the right way up, every switch to be correctly flickable and every gaping plot hole about emotionless machine AI blithely making a pointless deal with human survivors to be logical. Sorry, *SWON*. Back to *Secret Weapons Over Normandy*. Planes and that.

"This is a game for those who thrive on action, thrills, adventure and really wild things"

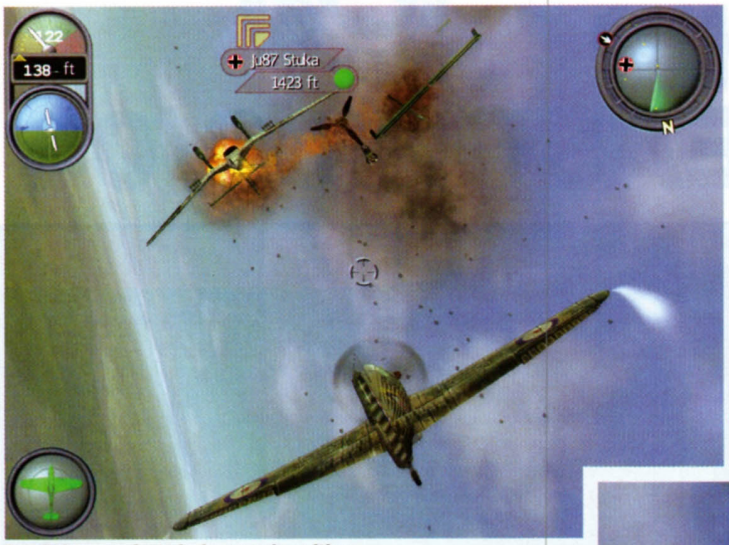
In this game, you are James Chase, the dashing all-American heeroo. Initially, you take on the dastardly "looftwaffer", but rapidly progress to almost every major battle of the entire war – Dunkirk, the Battle of Britain, Midway, D-Day. By the end of it all, you've amassed enough air miles to qualify for every free gift on offer.

Talking of which, the thing that stands out above all else is how much of a console feel this all has – but in a good way, for once. Progression through the campaign unlocks all manner of bonuses, from aircraft upgrades to special challenges, right through to bonus planes (including a real surprise should you make it towards the end of

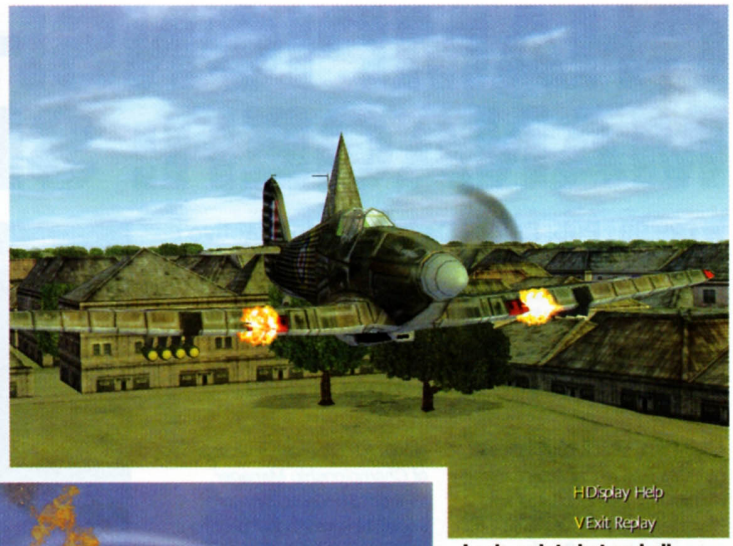
IN PERSPECTIVE

IL-2: FORGOTTEN BATTLES
Reviewed Issue 128, Score 92%
The premier WWII flight simulation of choice. More realistic than *SWON*, no less action-packed.

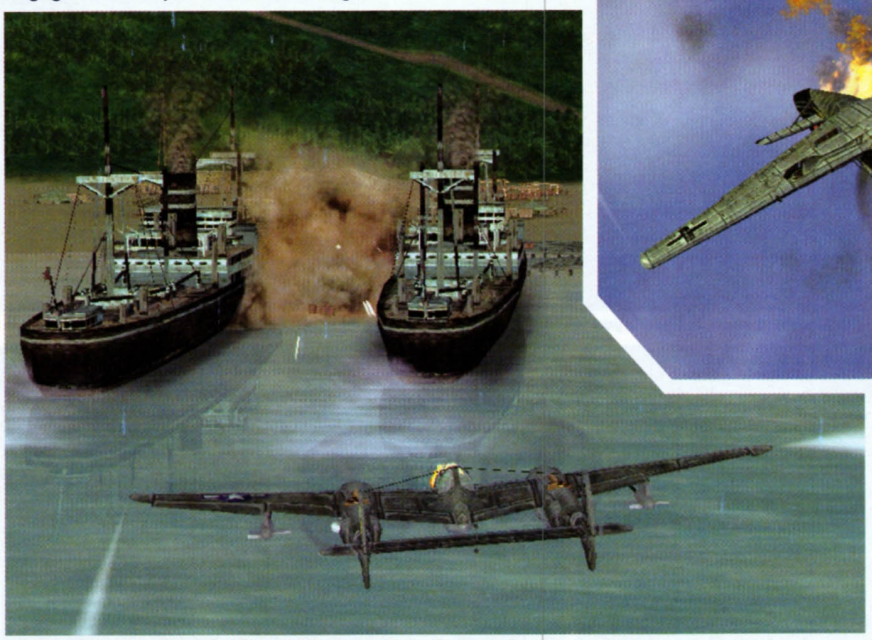
CRIMSON SKIES
Reviewed Issue 96, Score 82%
More arcade-style flight action. Older than *SWON* but still quite engaging.



Dogfights are fast, furious and exciting.



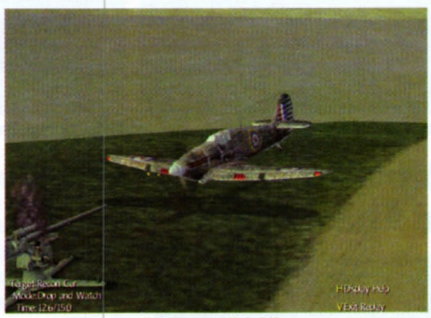
Look, pointy hat and all...



Accuracy is everything in *Secret Weapons Over Normandy*.

Dun, dun, dun... Another one bites the dust.

Ready to kill the boss? We know we were.



A touch close, don't you think?

On the negative side, the game is all a bit simplistic. If you try to do anything that strays outside of each mission's carefully laid narrative structure, you start to see some cracks in the seams. In filmic terms, there are times when *SWON* is badly edited too: out of sequence radio messages, obvious enemy spawn points, things like that. Mostly it does a solid job, just so long as long as you don't try to break it too much.

There's also a very deliberate cartoon-ish visual style at work that I'm not entirely convinced works. The mid-level cut scenes are a nice mix of archive photography and game engine animation, but it's the in-game stuff that feels a bit plain at times.

FLYING HIGH

But that's more a personal taste thing than serious criticism. What this release has going for it is Fun, with a capital F – unlike recent flight sims that have taken a rather po-faced approach. Gaming is meant to be about entertainment as well as realism, and with this release, LucasArts seems to agree with this notion in every sense. PCZ

BACK FOR MORE

It's so refreshing to see that someone has finally realised that a structured reward system is what keeps people coming back to games, and is the reason that every house in the world has a PS2 or an Xbox nestled next to the widescreen digital hi-def NICAM stereo idiot lantern. Why it's taken PC developers quite this long to cotton on is anyone's guess, but here, finally, someone is doing it right. *SWON*'s rewards keep you coming back time and again, no matter how frustratingly hard the missions become.

the game). There's also 'behind the scenes' video clips available in this flight sim.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✔ Action-emphasis lessens the 'hardcore-only' potential
- ✔ Dramatic mission structure
- ✔ Console-style rewards keeps interest up throughout
- ✔ FUN!
- ✘ Cracks can show
- ✘ Where's the multiplayer?

80

Oh what a wonderful war

ONE-MAN ARMY

FOR THIS MISSION, YOU'RE ON YOUR OWN SON...

Secret Weapons Over Normandy isn't exclusive to the world of PCs: both Xbox and PS2 versions are due to be released at more or less the same time, both of which have one thing that us computer jockeys do not – multiplayer.

While console pilots get to enjoy all manner of Deathmatch and co-op thrills, we PC owners are expected to make do with a custom mission builder instead. Not fair. Not bally fair at all. Voice your disapproval. Write to the developers. Inform your MPs. Take to the streets. Tut loudly in the direction of disaffected youths. This will not do, LucasArts. Get a patch underway now or feel our wrath. Your choice.

It's good to play together.

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER: SEASON 03/04

■ £29.99 | Pub: Eidos | Dev: Sports Interactive | ETA: Out Now | www.sigames.com

REQUIRES PIII 600, 128MB RAM and a 4MB 3D card
DESIRES PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM

Steve Hill thought he was cured. He couldn't have been more wrong

CAN I shock you? I didn't get addicted to *Championship Manager 4*. Perhaps because, having reviewed it for *PC ZONE*, I got on a plane to South America and stayed there for six weeks. While roughly a quarter of a million people were trawling the virtual transfer market and staring at tiny dots on a screen, I was tanning my oily hide.

By the time I got back, Spring had sprung, and faced with the option of squinting at a monitor or lying in the park observing Swedish au pairs, I chose the latter. Throw in the farrago of the numerous patches and it became increasingly unappetising. Which is strange when you think that despite its bug issues, *CM4* was the best instalment of the series yet. Maybe it was sunstroke.

So surely this latest standalone update to unarguably the finest football management game ever (even despite the multitude of bugs the game shipped with) would prove to be no more successful at stealing my life? Surely, I'd been cured of my *Championship Manager* addiction once and for all?

SYSTEM ADDICT

So what am I doing sat up in the middle of the night with a throbbing head and eyes like piss-holes in the snow? Tragically, I'm back. It's said that when drug addicts relapse, they immediately go back to the same levels of intoxication they enjoyed in their heyday. That would also appear to be true of *Championship Manager*, as there's been no fannying about. No question of playing a couple of matches and switching it off: we're talking eight hours straight, hunger pangs, grinding jaw, tapping foot, the lot. I am a weak man. I've been sucked back into a pretend world of association football.

INSTANT REPLAY

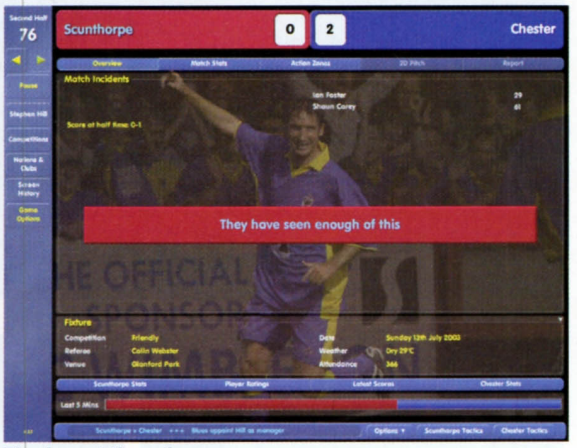
Ostensibly, it's the same game as *CM4*, with the obligatory data update and new leagues. The key difference, though, is that it works near-perfectly out of the box. There are some ergonomic improvements, with the training in particular receiving a much-needed overhaul, enabling you to gauge its affect more clearly.

The match engine now boasts instant replays too, along with visual indicators such as red and yellow cards and the offside flag, saving you the humiliation of running round your bedroom celebrating a disallowed goal. There've also been subtle changes made to the interface, and while they may not be immediately apparent to the untrained eye, going back to *CM4* does feel a little clunky.

The *CM4* bug debacle will have left a lot of people disillusioned, and that's fair enough. Annoyingly, though, this is the game that *CM4* should have been out of the box. I genuinely wanted to slate it, but it has inexorably got the better of me, even if it does need slight patching. Begrudgingly, but undeniably, a classic. PCZ

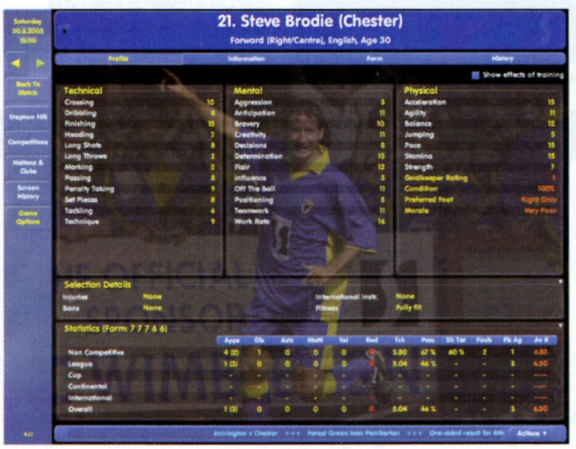
"If you were born in Wales, you must have heard the tales of Chester boys and what we do to you."

Training is now presented in a far clearer fashion.



They're not the only ones.

"This is what *Championship Manager 4* should have been"



Good enough for the first team? You decide.

INPERSPECTIVE

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 4
Reviewed Issue 128, Score 90%
Bugged to f*** on release, but still an unbelievably great game nonetheless. The patches just make it even better.

TOTAL CLUB MANAGER 2004
Reviewed Issue 137, Score 48%
A complete shambles and a disgrace to the EA Sports brand. Leave well alone. Check out our review on page 91 if you still want to know more.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✔ Improved match engine
- ✔ New training options
- ✔ Tweaked interface
- ✘ Ruins your life
- ✘ Still a bit slow

90

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EVERQUEST: LORDS OF EVERQUEST

■ Price: £34.99 | Pub: Ubisoft | Dev: Rapid Eye Entertainment | ETA: December 5 | www.lordsofeverquest.com

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card **DESIRES** P4 1.4 GHz, 512MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

As the *EverQuest* brand starts to branch into other genres, *Steve O'Hagan* makes the break from role-playing and indulges his deepest RTS fantasies. At least, that's his strategy...

EVERQUEST has acquired the moniker 'EverCrack' in certain quarters, due to its notorious and sometimes life-destroying addictiveness. Its fantasy-filled perpetual world proves too good to leave behind for some weak-willed gamers, leading to loss of friends, loss of jobs, and in one case, loss of life.

So you might approach this real-time strategy spin-off with some trepidation, wary of getting sucked into a world you won't be able to pull yourself out of. But fear not. This strategy-lite franchised brand extension may have its charms, but it won't have you spellbound for long.

INNER FANTASIES

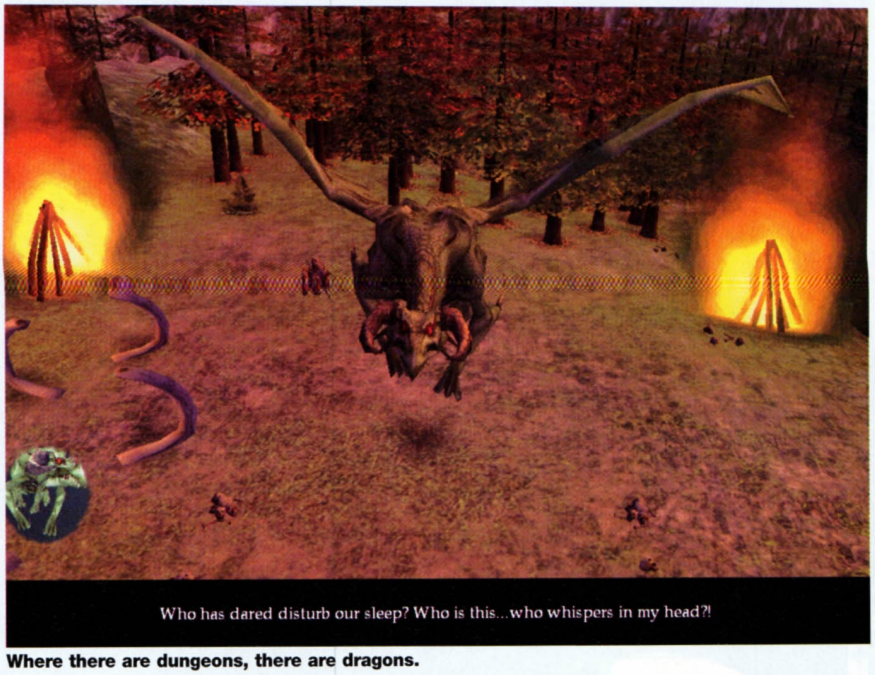
The action is set 10,000 years ago in the same over-the-top magical land of the online game. We're talking golden-haired amazons with knockers like space hoppers, and bearded barbarians with impossible musculature. A sort of lurid *Lord Of The Rings*.

The three single-player campaigns tell the story of three factions; the evil Shadowrealm, the Elddar alliance of Elves, men and halflings, and the barbarians and dwarves that make up the Dawn Brotherhood .

Each campaign kicks off with you choosing a hero to play through with. From Elven rangers, to halfling rogues, all the character classes that veterans of the RPG would expect are present. The choice you make here is a big one, because the hero you select stays with you, gaining experience until the campaign is concluded – as do all the troops you command.

The gameplay is that of any number of RTS titles: platinum mines habitually decorate the maps, and it's from these that your workers extract the game's only resource to fund the construction of buildings and new units. Because these mines are soon depleted, you're constantly searching for new ones to make good your losses in battle. The range of buildings and units available is extremely limited, as are units – in line with *Lords Of EverQuest*'s simplified take on the genre.

The camera can be persuaded to swoop fairly low.



Where there are dungeons, there are dragons.

INPERSPECTIVE

WARCRAFT III
Reviewed Issue 119, Score 85%

The game *Lords Of EverQuest* most closely resembles, but a far better bet if you like to be a bit selective with your fantasy strategy games. Slick, polished, and imbued with the same epic, quest-like feel of *LOE*, this has also got massive online support.

WARRIOR KINGS: BATTLES
Reviewed Issue 128, Score 85%

A superb, in-depth fantasy RTS that is pretty much the pinnacle of the genre. Flexible and extensive technology and building trees, and a wide range of strategic and tactical options win out.

Retreating before anyone important dies is often all that's on your mind.

"Simply producing troops and keeping them alive is enough for most of *LOE*'s challenges"

LORDS OF MINUTIAE

THE LEVEL OF DETAIL IN THE INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERS IS LOST IN A GAME OF THIS SCALE

Every unit is rated for a range of statistics beloved by fantasy gamers, from elemental resistance to mana. Units also have special abilities, some of which they use automatically, others which you have to trigger. Stats increase as units advance through the levels, and when they hit level six, they can be 'knighted' giving them increased powers and an aura that benefits nearby friendlies.

But while this level of individual detail is everything when you're leading a party of three in a heroic role-playing adventure, when you're dealing with a small army of grunts, you really couldn't care less who among them has a slightly better resistance to poison.

The visuals in *EverQuest* are fairly impressive.

Melees quickly get confused and crowded, making it hard to see what's up.

Building options are limited. Blunt but true.

Instead, the focus of your strategic husbandry is firmly on the preservation of your troops. This is because not only are numbers usually limited, but keeping them alive long enough to progress up levels, acquiring new abilities and increased statistics as they go, is key.

STAYING ALIVE

But it's in this system of experience-gathering troops that the game's strong point and fatal flaw uncomfortably co-exist.

Nurturing troops is satisfying, and there is a touch of that simple RPG-like desire to play on for 'just one more level-up'. But what this system also means is that the one overriding combat tactic is simply to keep your important troops from dying. All units regain health over time, so the simple trick is to constantly withdraw units whose health dips in battle so they live to fight another day, thus advancing through the levels. Remember this and you'll never struggle.

Missions in *LOE* are designed to give you the feeling that you're part of an epic adventure. Characters you meet may join you, attack you or set you a sub-quest which, if completed will make your main task easier. Unexpected events unfold and new objectives are thrown at you, though with scripted regularity.

Your AI opponents don't collect resources or construct buildings and resources. You're never up against a strategy or anything approaching a thinking opponent. Groups of enemy troops litter the map waiting to be activated by your approach. So there really is seldom any need for a strategy of your own. Simply producing troops and keeping them alive as long as possible is enough for most of *LOE*'s challenges.

ENGINE ROOM

The engine enables you to tilt the camera and zoom to ground level, or to pull out for an overhead view. The viewpoint cannot be panned or rotated, though, meaning troops are inevitably obscured behind buildings and trees.

Scottish-accented clansmen swing their maces with aplomb, archers draw their bows elegantly and magic users conjure flames, lightning, gasses and other enchanted fireworks. But the overall effect is fairly poor. The difficulty in telling who's who in a full-on ruck means most of the time your eyes are on the tab displaying all the troops currently selected, making sure you can pull out each one as his health dips to keep him alive.

Most would agree that franchising in games is the enemy of innovation. And *LOE* conforms to the maxim fully. While it can be an amusing, undemanding RTS experience with plenty of fighting for a short while, it brings nothing new to the table. More EverCack than EverCrack.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✔ Pick up and play
- ✔ Addictive character development
- ✘ It's real-time, but there's not a lot of strategy
- ✘ Highly derivative
- ✘ Entirely scripted – there's little real enemy AI
- ✘ One tactic constantly wins out

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Lightweight RTS tie-in with a logo on it

TEAM17

SEGA

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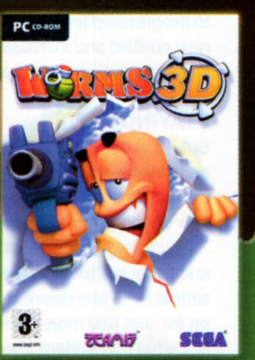

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3+ www.pegi.info

Stop loitering and go and save the world.

Notice the lack of mounted units and artillery pieces?

You can zoom in and control your wizard direct.

SPELLFORCE: THE ORDER OF DAWN

■ £34.99 | Pub: JoWood | Dev: Phenomic | ETA: November 28 | spellforce.jowood.com

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card **DESIRES** P4 1.8GHz, 512MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

From the code-conjurors behind *The Settlers* comes this union of *Warcraft III* and *Baldur's Gate*. *Richie Shoemaker* sizes it up

ALTHOUGH the fantasy setting is much like any other two-bit fantasy read, as real-time strategy games go, *SpellForce* is unique. It looks pretty, it's big and the interface is a dream, but it's the gameplay we're most impressed by. That's because it successfully blends standard-issue RTS precepts with great chunks of role-playing adventuring to produce a game that offers some of the best of both worlds.

RPG OR RTS?

Your central character is a Rune Warrior, who's been summoned by a great wizard to unite the fractured lands and empires. You begin, as is consistent with its RPG leanings, by choosing from a range of starting professions and balancing attribute points, as well as gaining and spending valuable experience. To succeed, you must collect the magical runes that will enable you to summon armies of humans, elves, dwarves, orcs and trolls – plus the odd kick-ass hero character – and send them into battle against the enemy in a big ol' twatting-frenzy.

Whereas most modern strategy games enable units to carry over experience from battle to battle, *SpellForce* takes this most standard of RPG features to an extreme, by enabling you to allocate your points to a bewildering array of combat skills and magical abilities. Sadly, only your main character can be bestowed with these riches, but to make up for it the linear mission structure includes a number of optional side-quests and trade items. These sub-missions are generally fairly mundane searches for objects or simple assassination missions, but they lend the game the illusion of non-linearity and freedom, which for an RTS is mildly revolutionary.

KINGDOM FOR A HORSE

For all it's role-playing distractions, however, *SpellForce* is a strategy game at heart – and a fairly decent one at that. The range of units is impressive: soldiers, archers and magic users are available to deploy for a range of races. You can also mix and match these into quite a fearsome force – just remember to keep your evil orcs and trolls away from your fluffy dwarves and elves. Despite the wide array of units and playable races, though, it's strange there are no mounted or artillery units.

Overall, *SpellForce's* elements fit together well.

"You can mix and match units into quite a force – just keep fluffy dwarves and evil orcs apart"

Mix up good and evil units and they might turn on each other.

Being a strategy game at heart, it's something of a minor tragedy that very little tactical wit is required to overcome the enemy. Even if you exhaust your resources on a balanced army, it's rare you'll lose a fight. What's more, without aspects like morale, weather and high ground to worry about, the outcome relies solely on the numbers involved – and perhaps the odd magic spell.

The storytelling in *SpellForce* is slightly suspect too. While some of the voice talent is decent enough, the script is banal and tedious. What's more, while there are plenty of cut-scenes to look forward to, they're generally poorly composed and amateurish.

Although *SpellForce* is unlikely to offer much of a challenge for the most tactically astute RTS minds, it is unique, attractive and engaging enough to appeal to all but the most unforgiving fantasy fan. PCZ

IN PERSPECTIVE

WARCRAFT III: REIGN OF CHAOS
Reviewed Issue 119, Score 85%
Originally designed as a 'role-playing strategy game', Blizzard decided to backtrack halfway through development. But this is still a great fantasy RTS and it's not completely devoid of role-playing bits either.

DUNGEON SIEGE
Reviewed Issue 114, Score 89%
An action-orientated role-playing gem that promised expansive freeform gameplay, but ended up being too linear for its own good. However, it did include a donkey and some spectacular spells, so we gave it a thumbs-up for that.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✔ Blended RTS and RPG elements
- ✔ Enjoyably diverse single-player campaign
- ✔ Simple and intuitive interface
- ✘ Strategically undemanding
- ✘ Uninspired storytelling
- ✘ No skirmish mode

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An absorbing if limited fantasy romp

RAILROAD TYCOON 3

■ £34.99 | Pub: Gathering | Dev: PopTop | ETA: October 31 | rt2.godgames.com/

REQUIRES PII 400, 128MB RAM and a 16MB 3D card **DESIRES** PIII 800, 256MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card

Resident *Zone* mentalist *Steve O'Hagan* goes loco in this choo-choo-empire-building sim

Wow, a 2917! Quick, write it down.

The zoom feature makes route-planning easy.

Sadly, we'll still have to tolerate travelling by train in 2015.

More business for you then.

ALONG with air traffic control, the thought of rolling stock, steam engines and multi-junction signal boxes doesn't really get us going here at *PC Zone*. So the fact that even we agreed the original *Railroad Tycoon* was good was testament to the great Sid Meier's uncanny knack of producing classic strategy and management titles.

Since then, though, our Sid has moved on, and this latest edition of the railroad building sim is in the capable hands of PopTop Software, who also knocked out the second installment in the series. And as there are two types of people in this world – those who have played a *Railroad Tycoon* game and those who haven't – we'll begin by summing up what all the fuss is about.

IN PERSPECTIVE

ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON 2
REVIEWED ISSUE 123,
SCORE 80%
On the surface very similar to *RT3* – vehicles carrying people and propelling them along stretches of track. Only here, it's a good thing if your passengers vomit when they get off. A classic of the genre and fiendishly addictive, despite a fairly steep learning curve.

VEGAS: MAKE IT BIG
REVIEWED ISSUE 135,
SCORE 84%
Much more appealing to your average punter. Dazzling 3D visuals bring Sin City to life, but there's no lack of meat for the tycoon game aficionado to get their stat-crunching teeth into here too.

"After building a couple of stations and buying a train, sit back and watch the dollars flow in"

You're the boss of a fledgling railroad company. After building a couple of stations, a bunch of track and buying a choo-choo to travel on it, you sit back and watch the dollars flow in. Passengers and freight are carted this way and that, and soon enough you're branching out into hotels, factories, warehouses and other lucrative enterprises. Of course, there is competition from other operators, along with a host of economic problems to grapple with. But that's to be expected.

What this latest offering primarily offers over its predecessors is a 3D engine. And what an engine it is. One push of the mouse wheel and you've gone from your view of all of Italy, direct to looking at your train chugging into Milan station. Day turns to night, accurately mapped stars twinkle in the firmament and then a nasty fog descends to obscure it all.

And it's not just for show – this new engine means bridges and tunnels are back, providing options in dealing with difficult terrain. What's also interesting about this update is how the wider economy works, with goods being transported independently by canal barge, river boat and sea freighters. While the sole effect of this tends to be forcing you to build away from waterways for maximum profits, it's a nice touch.

The interface too, has had a tweaking, but despite it being more navigable than ever, it'll still confuse the hell out of a *Tycoon* game newbie. Once again, despite pretty graphics, there's a heavy-duty beast lurking here, full of spreadsheets, stats and information screens.

LIGHTEN UP, BABY

In the end, this is still a fairly engaging sim, made all the better by the 3D engine. But it's dry as a bone, with no humour and nothing very exciting for most of us to latch on to. There are better management topics out there (see box), and while *Railroad Tycoon* was a classic in its day, we'd rather spend five hours in the attic helping granddad fix the signal box on his '00' gauge Hornby set. PCZ

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✔ Do the locomotion again
- ✔ Tidy 3D engine
- ✔ Expanded economy
- ✘ Anorak subject matter
- ✘ Difficult to fathom for newbies
- ✘ Same game as before, only in 3D

68

A capable update to a series that's had its day

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If only the gameplay matched the plasma effects.

Single-player missions have a distinct multiplayer feel to them.

APOCALYPTICA

■ £29.99 | Pub: Konami Europe | Dev: Extreme FX | ETA: October 23 | www.apocalyptica.net

REQUIRES PIII 700, 128MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card **DESIRES** P4 1.7GHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

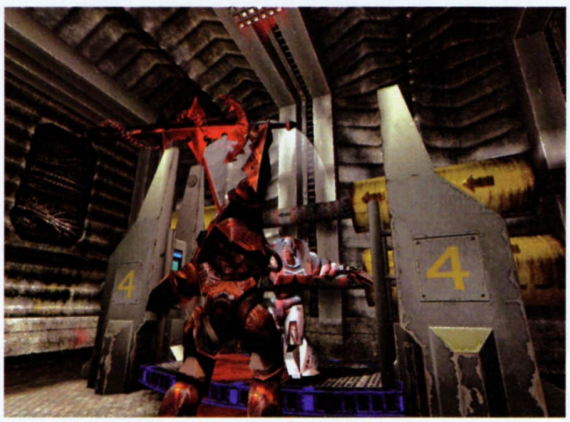
It's the end of the world as we know it and *Keith Pullin* feels anything but fine

WHEN humanity is on the brink of destruction, who ya gonna call? Ghostbusters? No. Superman? No. What you need is the best of the best, the ultimate crusaders. That's right – robotic saints. And we're not talking Roger Moore cyborgs.

Apocalyptica's gameplay is a battle between mechanised warrior saints and demons – and, all things considered, the idea is a novel one. After all, it's not every day you get to play as a robot nun with a rocket launcher.

Don't get too excited, though. Despite boasting a wholesome choice of 16 lead characters as well as spells, melee weapons and guns, in reality the combat element of the game is weak. Swordplay is sluggish and limited by too few moves, and ranged warfare frustrates with a showing of fairly ordinary pistols.

However, where *Apocalyptica* does impress is with its thoughtful single-player missions that manage to incorporate bots as team-mates. For instance, one level sees your team searching for a cog from a piece of machinery to take to another piece of machinery to complete the mission. Nothing unusual there, but while you're doing your thing, evil bots are doing theirs – and that means taking the same cog to another machine, which happens to flood the sewers and drown you. CTF? Indeed.



The interior textures need a makeover.

Combat is great but special moves and weapons are limited.

What's more, there are *Jailbreak*-style missions to contend with too. Such variety almost leads you to forgive the aforementioned lack of combat grit – and that may well have happened if it wasn't for the bots' insane behaviour.

These 'super' saints have their own agenda, which plainly has nothing to do with tactics or strategy. You have absolutely no control over them as they crash headlong into enemy lines and hack away viciously until their inevitable death. Failing that, they attempt to launch themselves from the nearest balcony or cliff. And if that doesn't satisfy their lust for lunacy, they stand in a corner somewhere twitching with directional angst. But it's not just your saintly troops who are preoccupied. Satan's sinister subjects appear equally mystified by the whole thing.

"You have no control over them as they crash into enemy lines"

SEEN IT BEFORE?

Graphically, *Apocalyptica* does nothing groundbreaking and the textures throughout lack detail or depth. You never get the feeling you're in a world that existed before you came along. In fact, the level design feels like more of an afterthought. Add to that the animation, which is no better, and the fact that every character model (allied or otherwise) lacks fluidity or realism and overall, it's indicative of the average nature of the game. Online play with similarly skilled competitors raises the enjoyment levels slightly, but when it comes down to it, *Apocalyptica* is half saint, half sinner. PCZ

IN PERSPECTIVE

UT2003
Reviewed Issue 122, Score 90%
If you want bots who know how to think for themselves, *UT2003* is the game for you.

MISTMARE
Reviewed issue 130, Score 67%
Religious overtones abound in this monkish action adventure. The graphics are great, but watch out for the control method.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✔ Loads of characters to choose from
- ✔ Plenty of mission types
- ✘ Poor animation
- ✘ Chaotic level design
- ✘ Abysmal bot AI

50

Good and bad in fairly equal doses

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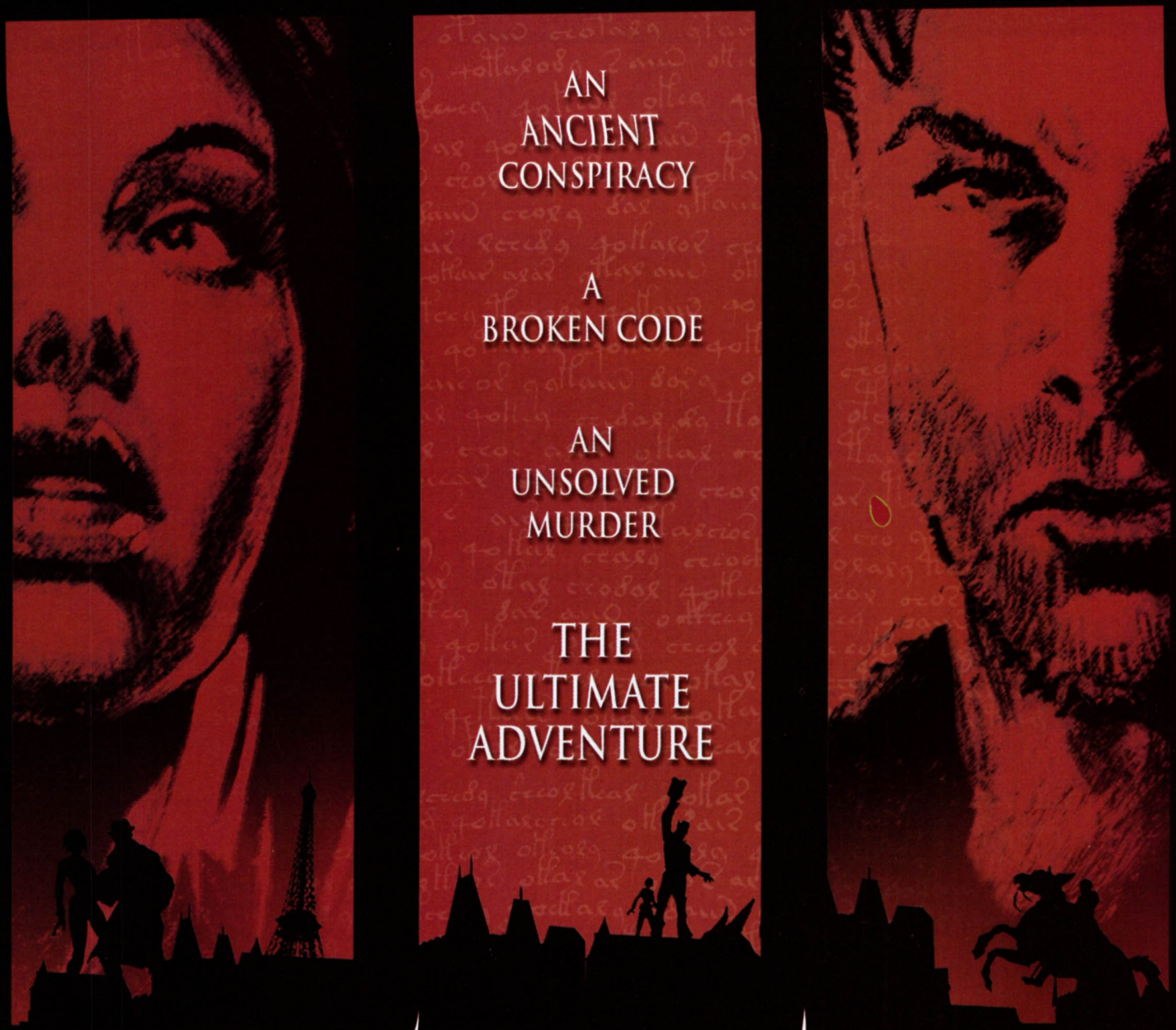

BROKEN SWORD

THE SLEEPING DRAGON

'THE REBIRTH OF A GENRE' - 87% PC GAMER

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Pick the team and go to the match.

Welcome to the cheap seats.

Change the tactics and see if it makes a difference.

The 'Team Of The Day' selection often seems completely random.

TOTAL CLUB MANAGER 2004

■ £29.99 | Pub: EA Sports | Dev: EA Canada/Germany | ETA: Out Now | www.totalclubmanager.com

REQUIRES PIII 600, 192MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card **DESIRES** PIII 800, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

Steve Hill continues his football management odyssey with EA Sports' annual entry

HAVING already monopolised virtually every area of sport, last year EA finally made a half-decent football management game with the surprisingly passable *Total Club Manager 2003*. And in a move that will surprise nobody, this year sees the conveyor belt spit out the inevitable sequel. Having said that, sequel is perhaps too strong a word for this, as when it comes to sports games, EA generally opts for a spot-the-difference update.

At first glance this would appear to be the case here, but a closer look reveals something more mystifying. Rather than update it, EA appears to have backdated it, as there are players present in some of the squads who left some four years ago. Throw in some of the more recent acquisitions, and you're presented with something of a super-squad, an absurd proposition that undermines one of the key areas of the genre.

DEARY DEARY ME

Even overlooking that heinous crime, it's a cumbersome affair. The interface is ugly and unwieldy, particularly compared to the clean lines of *Championship Manager: Season 03/04*, the management game against which all others should be judged (reviewed on p82). After a couple of weeks of Sports Interactive's masterpiece, playing this is like wearing someone else's clothes.

Even when you've waded through the mire, switching off the superfluous merchandising options (and the wholly inappropriate pounding dance music), it's still hard work, betraying its German origins with some idiotic ideas. Example? Your squad's morale is boosted when they receive a free magazine subscription. Yeah, thanks for that.

The *FIFA* engine-based action looks OK, but there's never a sense that it bears any relation to the alternative text engine. Ultimately, there's more integrity in the animated dots of *CM: Season 03/04* than there is in the 3D-accelerated players of *TCM 2004*, even those that have the right skin colour. The crux of a football management game is creating the belief that the decisions you make affect the outcome of matches, and this is rarely the case here.

NUMBERS GAME

There also appear to be more fundamental issues. For instance, following a match that my team lost 4-1, my goalkeeper received a rating of nine out of ten and was subsequently named in the Team Of The Day along with three of my defenders.

TCM 2004 is a mess of a game, and a blight on EA Sports' generally exemplary range. The sooner it drops it like the hot shit it is, the better for everyone involved. Sports Interactive's deal with Eidos is over, and it can only be a matter of time before someone from EA turns up on the doorstep offering a giant cheque. Until that event happens, avoid this like *Emmerdale*. PCZ

"Rather than update it, EA appears to have backdated it"

IN PERSPECTIVE

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER: SEASON 03/04
Reviewed Issue 137, Score 90%
Sports Interactive's final hurrah before Eidos reclaims the name. Accept no substitute.

CLUB MANAGER
Reviewed Issue 137, Score 42%
The official series may be absurdly simplistic, but at least it's playable – providing you support one of the teams, that is.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✔ Lots of leagues
- ✔ 3D engine is watchable
- ✘ Abysmal data
- ✘ Cluttered interface
- ✘ Ridiculous ideas
- ✘ Fundamentally flawed

48

Ugly and stupid

THE HOBBIT

■ £24.99 | Pub: VU Games | Dev: Inevitable Entertainment/ The Fizz Factor | ETA: November 28 | thehobbit.sierra.com

REQUIRES PIII 450, 128MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card
DESIRES P4 1.4GHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

***Keith Pullin* takes his big hairy feet on a little adventure**

"Why is there a giant fork hanging around your neck Gandalf?"

You need to be sneaky on the Troll levels to stay undetected.

Hmm. Show me the part of the book where Bilbo gets attacked by a giant armadillo then...

UNLIKE the foreboding menace of Tolkien's earlier tale *The Lord Of The Rings*, *The Hobbit* is a brief, more light-hearted foray into the beardy literary marvel Middle Earth.

Set several years before Frodo's gruelling sojourn to Mordor, *The Hobbit* follows Bilbo Baggins, Gandalf and a band of gold-obsessed dwarves as they venture into the heart of Lonely Mountain to swipe the dragon Smaug's gleaming hoard.

CRYSTAL CLEAR

The PC version of events sticks to the script pretty faithfully and the upshot is a charmingly playable 3D action-adventure. All the best moments from the book are there, such as the bickering trolls, 'stealing' the ring from Gollum and of course, the final attack on Smaug. Not too much to gripe about when it comes to content, then. Yet, *The Hobbit* will not appeal to every lover of the little people...

This is because it's so sanitised, you can almost smell the disinfectant. With inoffensive gameplay along the lines of *Harry Potter And The Philosopher's Stone* and a non-threatening cartoon style reminiscent of *Zelda* on the GameCube, *The Hobbit* is aimed squarely at pre-teens.

When Bilbo kills an enemy, instead of severed limbs, gushing blood and wails of agony, you're rewarded with a sparkling shower of crystals. The more "courage crystals" Bilbo collects, the stronger he becomes.

Enemy innards are not the only places harbouring crystals. Virtually every corner, crevice and cubbyhole on each of *The Hobbit's* essentially linear levels hides a gem; it's like a plague you can't escape. What's more, the tinkling sound of crystals echoes around your head hours after you've stopped playing.

Despite the linearity, there's still room for a few mini-quests, secrets and puzzles. Completing every quest ("please find my son!" etc) and finding every secret is not always essential, but the chances are it'll help in the long run. The puzzles could be anything from knocking apples out of trees with stones, to unlocking a chest by playing a strange sort of reflex test, where you have to stop tumblers at the right time. Oh, and cowards will be pleased to know this is one Tolkien game where you can wear the Ring and run away...

And platforms? Don't talk to us about platforms; *The Hobbit* contains more precarious vaults across crumbling rock precipices than all the *Harry Potter* and *Zelda* games put together as one.

So, cute and annoying it may be, but *The Hobbit* is still worth a shot if you have little ones itching to smear their greasy fingerprints all over your computer. Okay, it might not possess the glamour and gore of EA's more topical *Lord Of The Rings* game, but at least it won't give anyone nightmares. In fact, you'll be lucky if you get any sleep at all with all those bloody crystals jingle-jangling around in your head. PM

"The tinkling sound of crystals echoes around your head hours after you've stopped playing"

IN PERSPECTIVE

THE LORD OF THE RINGS: RETURN OF THE KING
Reviewed Issue 136, Score 68%
Based on the current film, this lightning-hurling, hack 'n' slash action epic depicts a more adult Middle Earth.

HARRY POTTER AND THE PHILOSOPHER'S STONE/ CHAMBER OF SECRETS
Reviewed Issue 112/124, Score 80%/74%
Good, clean bean-collecting fun with the witches, wizards and assorted weirdos of Hogwarts.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✔ Slick, flowing gameplay
- ✔ Good, clean fun
- ✔ Fairly faithful to the book
- ✘ Unoriginal and simplistic
- ✘ Odd visual style
- ✘ Too much jumping

65

One of the better Tolkien games – but only for the kiddies

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Units can level up if you keep them alive long enough.

Looks a bit dated, doesn't it?

NO MAN'S LAND

■ £34.99 | Pub: CDV | Dev: Related Designs | ETA: Out now | www.nomans-land.de

REQUIRES PIII 700, 128MB RAM and a 16MB 3D card **DESIRES** PIII 1.2GHz, 256MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card

The Europeans are stealing land from the American Indians. *Steve O'Hagan* shimmies in and settles the squaw

Selecting the units can be immensely frustrating.

Night battles are hard to see.

GIVING your game a name that conjures up images of WWI trench warfare is a slightly odd choice – especially when it's about the colonisation of the Americas. But once you've played *No Man's Land* it all makes sense, as it gives you the feeling that the RTS genre, like the British Army on the Somme, hasn't progressed in two years.

Despite its smattering of interesting features, *No Man's Land* is a game stuck in a time warp. In terms of visuals and playability, it's about as innovative as the last series of *Big Brother*.

The action begins with England and Spain arriving to colonise the New World, and stretches a few hundred years until the Wild West. The three campaigns enable you to play as a range of sides, including the American Indians, the Spanish or the English in loosely historically-based missions.

JUDAS PRIEST

And when we say 'loosely', we mean very loosely. Though it has a historical setting, it might as well be set in Middle Earth for all its adherence to realism. This is a world where shaman can summon ghostly warriors, Catholic priests are little more than magicians, and heroes can take hundreds of enemy arrows before perishing.

None of which would be a problem if the game was any good. But originality? Forget about it. In fact, almost every aspect of the game, from the resource collection to the upgrades system and the use of character special abilities, is the mirror image of those from other superior titles. You can only chop trees, build defence towers and upgrade armour in the barracks a number of times before déjà vu kicks in.

Features such as unit formations, flexible technology trees, battle tactics and unit AI that displays initiative are totally absent. This gives *No Man's Land* the aura of a game that's just woken up out of suspended animation, looking around bleary-eyed and wondering at how much things have changed.

"It's about as innovative as the last series of *Big Brother*"

TURN AWAY NOW

Visually it's pretty diabolical too, with clunky, indistinct animations, bland, isometric environments and only a modest zoom function available – no panning or rotation of the camera here.

Even when battles erupt, things don't look much more exciting. The lack of unit formations and the tendency to reward you for wrapping up all your troops in a selection box and hurling them en-masse at the enemy means you're left looking at condensed clumps of men, horses and cannons battering each other in a way that's cringesome to watch.

What's more, the missions themselves don't engage you a great deal. From having to lead a small party of men across the map fighting off wild animals and patrols, to the 'build-then-conquer' traditional RTS style levels, it's a non-stop trawl through the book of elementary RTS level design. Our advice? Give this a miss. PCZ

INPERSPECTIVE

AMERICAN CONQUEST
REVIEWED 126, SCORE 71%
If it's the period you're interested in, this massive-scale RTS has far more to offer than *No Man's Land*. Huge building options and the capability to mass armies of up to 64,000 men stand out.

WARRIOR KINGS: THE SAGA
REVIEWED 137, SCORE 87%
To our mind, two of the best resource-gathering RTSs bundled in one package. Their combat mechanics and unit formation options carry a pleasant whiff of the *Total War* series, and the technology and building trees are flexible and impressive. Check out our review of *WK: The Saga* on page 92.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✔ Interesting setting
- ✔ Easy to pick up
- ✘ Massively derivative
- ✘ Basic, indistinct visuals
- ✘ Unimaginative interface
- ✘ Tedious missions

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The American bad dream

WINGS OF HONOUR

■ £29.99 | Pub: City Interactive | Dev: City Interactive | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PIII 700, 128MB RAM and a 32MB 3D Card **DESIRES** 256MB RAM is better

***Daniel Emery* prays that someone, someday, will release a decent WWI flight sim...**

STICK GOES forward; houses get bigger – stick goes back; houses get smaller. That, dear reader, is *Wings of Honour* summed up in 12 words. And it's about as exciting as it gets: as a WWI flight sim, *Wings Of Honour* falls down on almost every level.

With its stunningly average graphics, mid-range sound effects and a physics flight model that would have Isaac Newton spinning in his grave, there isn't a whole lot going for this game. Now, this wouldn't be the end of the world if it actually had some of the basic essentials needed for a flight sim – not least of which would be the ability to look left and right as well as behind you (the so-called six-view).

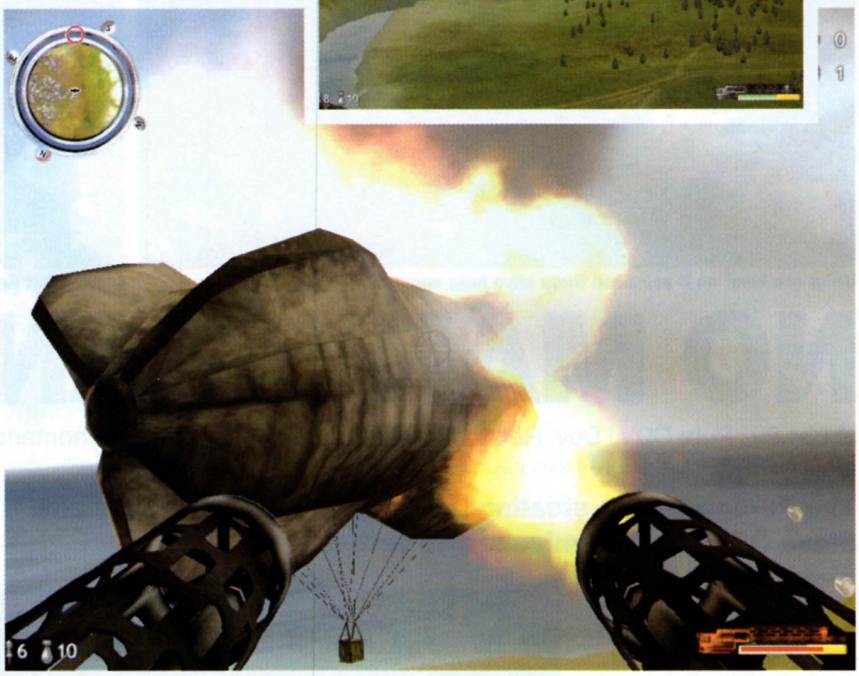
If the cramped viewing isn't enough to drive you to frustration, then the game's set-up will push you over the edge. Rather than having a simple keyboard/joystick/mouse option, you have to manually input every joystick function (up, down, left right etc). Surely it wouldn't have taken too much effort to have put this option in, would it?

As for the game itself, it's a throwback to an earlier age: an age when people would pay for a basic arcade shooter and be happy with their lot. But this is 2003 not 1996, and a sub-standard game like this isn't going to have a hope in hell of shifting more than a few hundred copies off the shelves.

There's still a big gap in the market for a shit-hot WWI flight sim, with nice-looking aircraft, a choice of flight modes and some real gameplay. *Wings Of Honour* just isn't it.

PCZONE VERDICT 48

Shot down in flames



There are only four training missions in *Wings Of Honour* – but they're not much cop.

STATE OF EMERGENCY

■ £19.99 | Pub: Rockstar Games | Dev: VIS Entertainment | ETA: Out Now

IF THIS game looks familiar, it's because it's the PC port of a mediocre, two-year-old PlayStation 2 game. Quite why Rockstar thinks there's a market for such a thing, we don't know, because there isn't much here to tempt the average PC gamer.

State Of Emergency sees you engaging in frenzied bouts of cartoon ultra-violence as part of an uprising against a fascistic global corporation, with each of the four stages being set during massive civilian riots. You can play either a mission-based story mode, or rack up points against the clock in chaos mode. Whichever you choose, the gameplay for this consists of little more than smashing things and beating/shooting/stabbing people to death.

All this violence is undeniably fun for a while and the visuals are decent, but after a couple of hours you'll have seen all there is to offer.

Sam Kieldsen

PCZONE VERDICT 62

We haven't seen graphics like that since 1993.

Unsurprisingly, the game carries an 18-certificate.

STRATEGIC COMMAND

■ £19.99 | Pub: GMX Media | Dev: Fury Software | ETA: Out Now

THIS is one of those hex-games that will only appeal to a hardcore minority. And even real fans of the genre will find it's hardly the pick of the bunch. *Strategic Command* is your standard *Risk* meets *Panzer General* affair, with players choosing either Germany or Britain during WWII.

Graphically, it's nothing to write home about, although in fairness to the developers, they have made that quantum leap and given the game icons that represent the weaponry (as opposed to using NATO symbols that few people understand). But despite some reasonable sound effects, *Strategic Command* still resembles a game from the early 1990s.

The map, such as it is, only covers Europe – with Canada and America stuck on at the edge like some kind of lost island of Atlantis. That's not to say *Strategic Command* isn't enjoyable – it is. But with graphics from the Stone Age, lacklustre maps, no variety in icons and a very simple diplomacy system, it's a game that only entertains for a couple of days.

Daniel Emery

PCZONE VERDICT 49

Looks suspiciously like *Homeworld* to us.

ECHELON: WIND WARRIORS

■ £19.99 | Pub: Oxygen Interactive | Dev: Madia | ETA: Out Now

IF YOU'RE a flight sim purist, it's time to cover your eyes because *Echelon: Wind Warriors* (the follow-up to 2001's *Echelon*) is pure arcade. Flying a variety of futuristic craft, you have to blow away the opposition using missiles, cannon and machine guns, while avoiding the seemingly never-ending barrage of flack heading in your direction.

The flight model is a mix of the logic-defying and the convincing. Turning your engines off enables you to levitate, but the yaw and pitch take some getting used to. However, these novel touches do add a modicum of originality to the game.

Graphically, *Echelon* is looking fairly dated, but it's nice to see you have plenty of control over the customisation of your craft. And while the AI is challenging, it does tend to be a little on the suicidal side, displaying absolutely no regard for its own life with its incessant attacks. Still, what do you expect from an arcade shooter? To its credit, though, *Echelon* does boast some truly vast maps, along with some very convincing weather conditions to boot.

Dated, but addictive, *Echelon* is a fun blast for owners of older PCs. If you're a hardcore flight fan, give it a miss, but for 20 quid, you could do a lot worse.

Daniel Emery

PCZONE VERDICT **60**

Just another *Sims* expansion pack that's far from magical.

THE SIMS: MAKIN' MAGIC

■ £14.99 | Pub: Electronic Arts | Dev: Maxis | ETA: Out Now

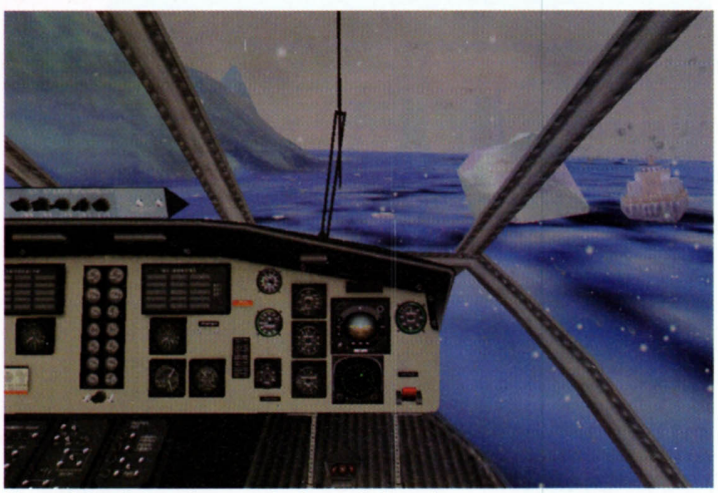
THE SIGHT of a sim hurling lightning bolts across the sky is more a sign of the times than a signal to rejoice at the new found spellcasting-abilities of the world's most marketable AIs. Still, for some, the ability to tap into Harry Potter-type mischief will be yet another reason to pass 15 notes EA's way.

Makin' Magic is exactly what you'd expect from a sixth expansion pack; new costumes, new wallpaper and some surreal NPCs. There's also a shed-load of spell ingredients you can mix in odd-looking machines to increase basic attributes like 'fun' and 'comfort', as well as advanced skills like 'creativity'.

We've moaned and we never stop shaking our heads at the frighteningly enduring sales power of *The Sims* expansion packs. Looks like Maxis has pulled another rabbit out the hat.

Keith Pullin

PCZONE VERDICT **55**



Many of the dials and gauges in the cockpit work.

SEARCH AND RESCUE 4

■ £24.99 | Pub: Just Flight | Dev: Interactive Vision | ETA: Out Now

THIS is a game that does exactly what it says on the tin, so to speak. *Search And Rescue 4* is a coastal helicopter rescue simulation boasting over 100 missions. Most of these entail you taking off from your base, picking up someone or something and taking them or it somewhere else, before going back to the aforementioned base.

If the missions are a tad samey, the flight model is realistic and the environments are pleasantly varied – arctic areas, dusty canyons, oil rigs out at sea. These things make the game surprisingly enjoyable. And although the graphics are nothing special by today's standards, they do their job nicely.

The lack of variety means that this isn't going to appeal to everybody, but flight sim fans with a penchant for the different should find plenty to keep them occupied.

Sam Kieldsen

PCZONE VERDICT **79**

PATRICIAN III

■ £29.99 | Pub: Ascaron | Dev: Ascaron | ETA: Out Now

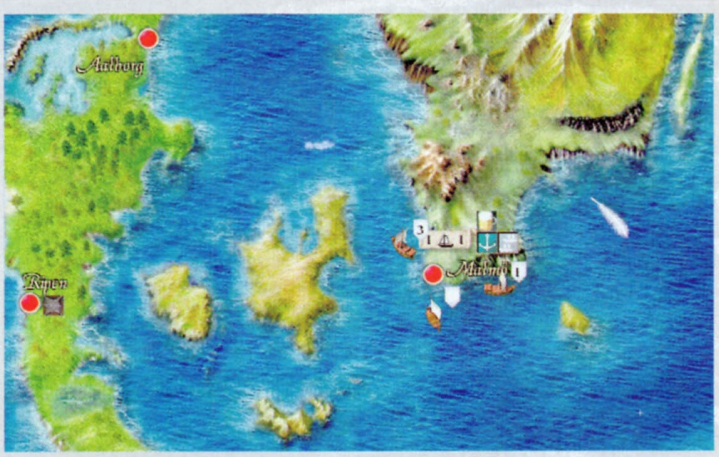
THE *PATRICIAN* series of games is notable for its highly detailed, open-ended and over-earnest depictions of maritime trading in 14th Century Northern Europe. As usual, your goal in this third instalment is to trade and swashbuckle your way to becoming a local power broker.

It's thorough and solid, and as ever you have the option to swap from pirate, trader, builder or adventurer as you wish, with ship battles played out using a simple real-time engine. Trouble is, we're a little sick of Ascaron's near-identical trading sims right now, having had *Port Royale* and *Tortuga* thrust at us in quick succession – so this needed to be special to hold our attention. It wasn't.

Overall, there's a lot to admire, but *Patrician III's* interface, economy and strategies are simply too dense. What's more, the historical setting is too obscure for most gamers' tastes.

Steve O'Hagan

PCZONE VERDICT **59**



Things really haven't changed much since *Patrician II*.

My other car's a Ford.

Stay on the racing line to complete the challenge.

Remember that brown Capri your older brother had? It ain't here.

FORD RACING 2

■ £9.99 | Pub: Empire Interactive | Dev: Razorworks | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PIII 500, 128MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card **DESIRES** PIII 800, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

***Steve Hill* turns bargain hunter for this superior racing sequel. But does it pack the required va-va-voom?**

THAT HENRY Ford was onto something when he knocked out the original Model T you know. Unfortunately, it isn't featured here, although the last half-century or so is ably represented. *Ford Racing 2* boasts no less then 35 Ford automobiles, including pick-ups, cars made famous on the big screen, custom cars, futuristic prototypes and stock cars. There's a distinctly American bent to the proceedings, though – despite the UK developer – so if you're hoping to tear around in an absurdly proportioned Capri, you'll be disappointed.

Ford fans and skinflints are catered for, however, with the game retailing for less than a tenner. As embittered cynics, this immediately raised our suspicions, but there doesn't seem to be a great deal wrong with it. The handling is a little slack and there's no damage model, but otherwise it's a run-of-the-mill racer that ticks every cliché in the book, low-flying helicopters and distended female voice included.

Where it succeeds is in the variety of challenges contained within, with the game gradually unlocking after completing various tasks, some of which can be mildly addictive in the short term. What's more, graphically it's as crisp as a winter morning, with all manner of animated trackside detail.

A surprisingly slick package, this really is a case of top brands at a rock-bottom price.

PCZONE VERDICT 64

Affordable Ford fun

TRAINZ RAILWAY SIMULATOR 2004

■ £29.99 | Pub: Just Trains | Dev: Auran | ETA: Out Now

WHAT'S left then? *Virtual Kite Flying? Interactive Frisbee Simulator?* No, got it – *Hill Walking 2004: The Dales.* Seriously, is there any non-computerised hobby left to us that hasn't been digitised, virtualityarised and interactivated? (*Stop makinguperising words Presley – Ed*).

Trainz 2004 takes that much-loved boyhood/middle-aged pastime of building a model railway in your attic and crams it kicking and screaming into your CPUs.

You drive trains, all manner of the buggers, around pre-built tracks – or build your own layouts and create your own worlds of make-believe. Controls are either simplistic (twiddle the knob to go forward or back), or nod towards proper simulation by letting you sit in the cabs and pull the various levers.

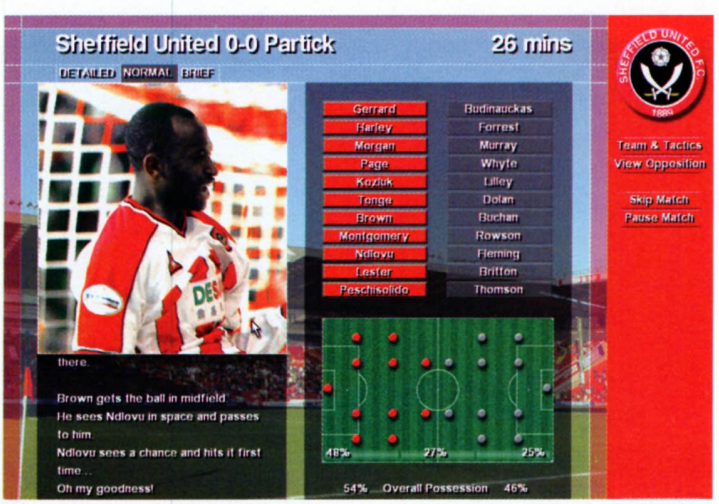
Alternatively, if you're power-crazy you can go all managerial and assign remote drivers to different tasks – yes, the time has finally come to fulfil those long-held dreams of being a railway supervisor.

It's all fine and dandy and looks nice enough, but really, are you going to buy it? Thought not.

Paul Presley

PCZONE VERDICT 66

It's a busy pretend life.



Proper photos and everything.

CLUB MANAGER

■ £19.99 | Pub: Just Football | Dev: Smoking Gun Productions | ETA: Out Now

FOOTBALL management games are coming thick and fast, with this aimed at the more casual end of the market. The official endorsement of 17 clubs means fans can play an extremely rudimentary simulation game, while simultaneously looking at photographs of their favourite players. The clubs involved are: Arsenal, Blackburn, Bolton, Charlton, Chelsea, Everton, Hibs, Ipswich, Leeds, Man City, Norwich, Portsmouth, Sheffield United, Southampton, Sunderland, West Brom and Wolves.

With a dearth of information available, there isn't a great deal of skill involved beyond strengthening your squad, and aficionados of more complex games will scoff heartily.

It's reasonably slick though, with voice commentary for the matches – plus you can whizz through a season in a matter of hours. Anything but hardcore, this is a 'My First Management Game'.

Steve Hill

PCZONE VERDICT 42

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REPLAY

The place to go when you've got no dough

WARRIOR KINGS: THE SAGA

■ £24.99 | Pub: Empire Interactive | ETA: November 28

STILL RIDING high in our A-List, *Warrior Kings: Battles* is something of a rarity in the world of strategy games, in that it requires you to use – wait for it – proper strategy. A somewhat alien concept in the likes of its more commercially viable counterparts (*Command and Conquer: Generals and Warcraft III*), *Warrior Kings: Battles* makes you think about every encounter that takes place across its beautiful and expansive 3D levels. Terrain and a knowledge of each unit's strengths and weaknesses, coupled with a towering five-branched tech tree make this one of the most involving and challenging RTS games on the market.

Its predecessor, *Warrior Kings*, which is also included in this package along with a complete PRIMA Strategy Guide, is very much the same game in concept, if not in overall execution. While *WK:B* fills the gaping void left by its forbearer's lack of skirmish options, *Warrior Kings* more than makes up for this deficiency by boasting a stunning, branching storyline and a superb variety of missions. These range from titanic battles between hundreds of troops, to covert infiltration tasks where you command just a handful of men.

You could say that *WK:The Saga* is the ultimate *Warrior Kings* package, offering everything you could possibly want from any RTS: stunning graphics, epic battles, strategic diversity, challenging AI, two campaigns (one story-led, one skirmish-driven) and near unlimited multiplayer options. Sans many of the bugs which blighted the two games on release (especially *Warrior Kings*), if you're one of the countless who overlooked these titles in the past, now is the time to right that wrong.

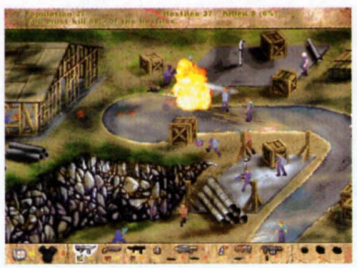
Martin Korda

PCZONE VERDICT **87**

***Warrior Kings* and *WK:Battles*. Two of the best RTS games in recent history.**

POSTAL CLASSIC AND UNCUT

■ £9.99 | Pub: Whiptail Interactive | ETA: Out Now



Nice coat, shame about the game.

Going loco, down in Acapulco.

BACK IN 1997, this tawdry little title caused a minor ripple of controversy. Exploiting the trend for disgruntled American postal workers to reach the end of their mental tether and embark on psychotic killing sprees, it was deemed somewhat in bad taste.

The gameplay essentially consists of the trench coat-sporting main character 'going postal' and wilfully slaughtering the inhabitants of whatever neighbourhood he happens to be in.

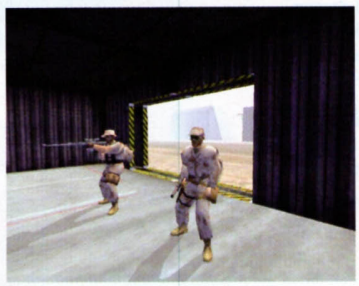
However, with a graphical style that can at best be described as dated, it hasn't aged well. In fact, it looked shit at the time, and why it's up for re-release is a mystery. Presumably, there's a hope that the people who bought the even more contentious *Postal 2* will be tempted to see what the fuss was about.

Our advice is don't bother. It looks plop and arguably plays even worse. Scuttling around a 2D backdrop, the control method is murky to say the least, and with rewards for killing anyone, the major skill consists of holding down the fire button.

It may have shocked at the time, but subject mater aside, this is decidedly unremarkable and serves as little more than a nostalgia piece. If they had any decency, they'd have given it away free with *Postal 2*.

Steve Hill

PCZONE VERDICT **30**



Weapons of mass destruction?

What weapons of mass destruction?

CONFLICT: DESERT STORM

■ £9.99 | Pub: SCi | ETA: Out Now

YOU'VE SEEN it on TV, you've read about it in the newspapers, now you can finally play this second-rate squad-based shooter budget release. The only problem is that it ain't as good as its similarly flawed sequel, both based in and around the sandy bits of Iraq.

Set in those bad ol' pre-liberation days, it's your job to prepare the way for George Bush Snr's forces; blowing up Scuds, infiltrating airbases and sneaking around right under Saddam's evil nose. Hell, while you're in 1991, you might as well have a poke around for some weapons of mass destruction as well. It might just save some time in the long run.

With a clunky control system and stealth that doesn't quite work, *Conflict: Desert Storm* isn't a patch on realism-bound peers like *Operation Flashpoint* or *Rogue Spear*. It's a passable shooter with a few decent levels, but most of your carefully planned assaults degenerate into formless scrambles against the brain-dead AI of the Iraqi crack troops.

Being able to choose between playing as US or British troops is a nice option, but the game really hasn't aged well. For a bit of extra cash, you'd be mad not to splash out on *Hidden & Dangerous 2* instead of this.

Will Porter

PCZONE VERDICT **55**

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Shigeru Miyamoto

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FEEDBACK

"It looks likes a port, plays like a port and stinks like a port"

M TROMANS GIVES HIS OPINION OF *HALO*

***Martin Korda* soaks up your views on the latest releases, and then invites our reviewers to share their words of wisdom**

IT'S YOUR SHOUT

Feedback is here to offer you a platform to have your say about games we've reviewed over the past three issues. Whether you totally agree or utterly disagree with us, we want to hear from you. And all you have to do to get your views in print is send an email to letters@pczone.co.uk with 'Feedback' in the subject line. Please try and keep your views to less than 100 words. Anything longer will not be considered or may have to be edited for size.

HALO: COMBAT EVOLVED

REVIEWED ISSUE: 135 (BY: MARK HILL), SCORE: 84%

What we thought

This could soon become little more than an also-ran. Even if it is a very good one.

What you said

Gearbox has made a real dog's dinner of an all-time classic. After three years of excitedly waiting, it gives us this – a tragic excuse for a top title priced at £34.99. It looks like a port, plays like a port, stinks like a port. What's more, there's no antialiasing and a frame limiter, and overall gameplay is dire – I put it down after just 30 minutes and haven't played it since. You should have given it 0%. I just want to forget this ever happened.

M Tromans (very unhappy)

***Halo*. Not quite what some were hoping for.**

I bought this partly due to the hype and partly thanks to your review and in general, I'd agree with your comments but not necessarily the score. The outside areas, vehicles and squad-based action are excellent. Unfortunately, the vast majority is corridor-based action set in bland locations and the biggest problem is the bugs: I've had more crashes and lock-ups than with any other game I've ever played. The game is worth 79%, but with the bugs, 49%.

Steve T

I freely admit I don't like this game, but 84% is a fair score. All this review has shown is that while it may be considered a great FPS on the X-Box, it's merely an also-ran on the PC.

One thing you have to remember is when games are reviewed, the score is based upon the game and also against the competition. On the X-Box, *Halo* had no competition and still doesn't, but a FPS has to offer a lot more on a PC than it does on a console to get a high score.

DarthMorbus

Mark's comment

I'm surprised to find so many negative comments, since the gaming community has praised the conversion far more than I did generally (performance issues aside). The AI's true worth can only be seen on the higher difficulty levels, but it's the standard difficulty setting most will play and where the game should be at its best. Oh, and the story isn't too hot either.

MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE

REVIEWED ISSUE: 136 (BY: DAVE WOODS), SCORE: 93%

What we thought

***The Fall Of Max Payne* is one of the tightest, most thrillingly captivating games of all time, and like all good things in life I didn't want it to end.**

What you said

This game is special – a shooter with a plot, a story that draws you in so much that its linearity is irrelevant. There's some truly disturbing imagery, tragic comedy and romance thrown in too. All this and the most gorgeous visuals of any game – the interaction with the environment has to be experienced to be believed. I completed *Max Payne 2* with the feeling I'd participated in something more than a game.

Igzilla

This game rocks. I love the slow-down close up kills, which really show off the ragdoll and Havok 2 physics. It's well worth buying, but I don't think it's going to be able to contend with *Half-Life 2*.

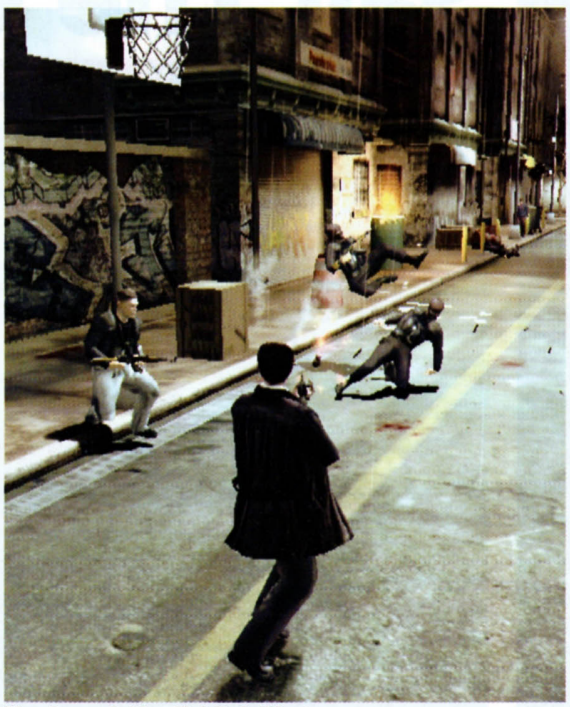
Cheezymon

Absolutely brilliant from start to finish, and I think the length is about right. It leaves you wanting more but not feeling like there've been filler levels.

T Mulford

Dave's comment

It's unanimous then: *Max Payne 2* is officially brilliant. I was a bit concerned that the length would put some of you off, but thankfully every minute of the six or seven hours it takes to complete is immaculately crafted, culminating in a game that's short but oh-so-sweet.



***Max Payne 2*: it's officially brilliant.**

UFO: AFTERMATH

REVIEWED ISSUE: 134 (BY: MARK HILL), SCORE: 82%

What we thought

It may not have *Enemy Unknown's* charm, but there's more than enough here to keep the *X-COM* spirit alive.

What you said

I'll not be buying another game by Altar. *UFO: Aftermath* looks good and there are some nice touches, but I was deeply disappointed with the tactical combat in the game.

For starters, your troops have no AI whatsoever. Altar's excuse: you're in command. You can't set up decent ambushes either, and in the end, everything becomes a chore. If you're moving troops as a group, those that get there first will happily take enemy fire and do nothing. There are many more problems too.

I'll play this through to completion, but I probably won't go back to it very often, unlike with the other UFO games.

Niall

It's a great game and I think the score should have been 87% – it could even have been a Classic if they'd included the cattle prod from *Enemy Unknown*. That classic fun of running up to an alien with a cattle prod, only to run out of action points and be fried by the little bastard cannot be reproduced without hand-to-hand combat.

Nevercanever

Mark's comment

The game shipped initially with a ton of bugs and so has received the usual lambasting from gamers for this very reason. How much you enjoy it depends on your expectations of the whole shebang. It's more of an *X-COM* tribute band than a comeback tour for the original, so if it's deep tactics you're after, you'll have to get your kicks elsewhere. PCZ

Bugged but fun. That's *UFO:Aftermath*.

ODDS AND SODS

■ **ONLINE EDITOR:** Paul Presley

Last month I gave you a mission. An entreaty. A reason for living, if you will. I asked you to seek out the strange and unusual and to embrace them with the kind of love reserved for long lost aunties looking to offload a previously undiscovered inheritance.

However, I would never ask others to do that which I am unwilling, so this month Online Zone is looking at some of the more obtuse aspects of our multiplayer gaming world. *Pirates Of The Burning Sea* (see opposite) could either be the best or the worst thing ever, depending on both the eventual implementation and your own preferences towards historical naval battles.

The world of *There* is an interesting little number, previewed by our American shopping correspondent on page 110, encouraging social contact, partying like there's no tomorrow and a total absorption into consumer culture.

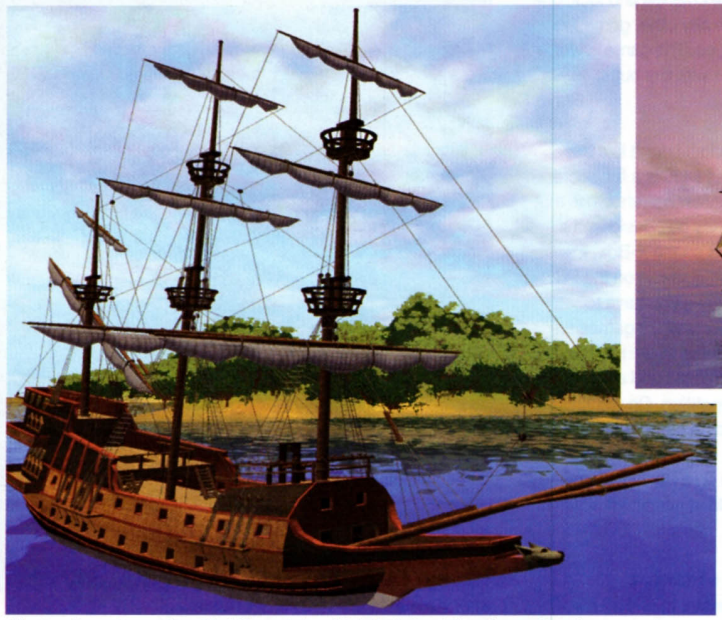
We also wanted to bring you a review of *URU*, the latest *Myst* adventure this month, but last-minute delays in bringing the online portions of the game, er, online, meant that it just wasn't possible. We'll have to wait until some time in January before we see if this really will herald a new dawn for adventure gaming.

And then there's *Yohoho! Puzzle Pirates* (see page 108). Come on! Pirates! Puzzles! The only way it could be better is if they were monkeys.

Yes, diversity is truly the spice of life my friends. However, mass franchise-based conformity also has its benefits, so next month *Online Zone* brings you the Super *Star Wars* Holiday Special (complete with dancing Wookiees). Impressed, you will be.

Sail The Ocean Blue

PIRATES OF THE BURNING SEA SETS SAIL EARLY NEXT YEAR



Nip back and see the flightless island birds later. They're not going anywhere.

The Caribbean in all its glory.

DEFINITELY NOT ONE for motion-sickness sufferers, *Pirates Of The Burning Sea* is possibly the world's first nautical MMOG, set in the year 1720 and letting you live out all your boyhood historical naval fantasies (or at least those inspired by *Master And Commander*) as you sail across thousands of miles of realistically modelled ocean landscape, battling for honour, glory or loot. Fly the flags of England, Spain or France, or go it alone under the Jolly Roger banner.

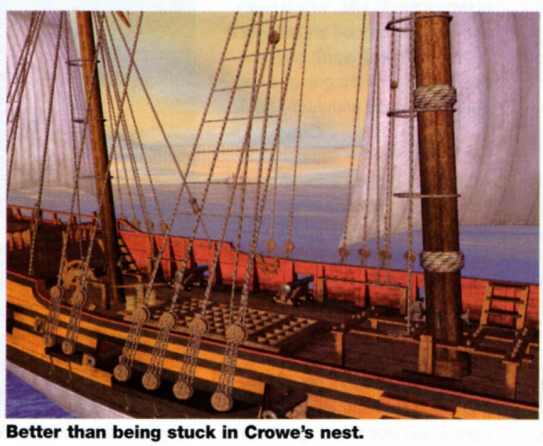
You start the game with a ship of your own, a pocket full of doubloons and an ocean of possibilities. Teaming up doesn't involve all piling in the one boat – creating entire fleets with your friends online is the name of the game here. At launch there will be 20 different ships to pick from, all historically modelled on real-life equivalents, and all fully customisable to your own needs.

Keeping the action fast and furious, *POTBS* does away with the whole levelling and character class issues, instead simply letting you arbitrarily improve any skills you see fit, both through study and implementation.

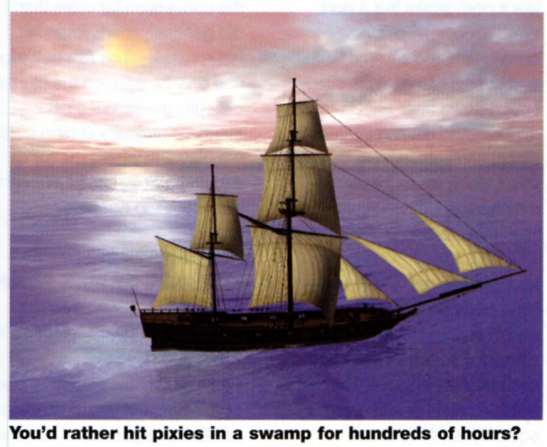
Ostensibly it all sounds like *PlanetSide* in the Caribbean, which is no bad thing – have you seen the weather on Auraxis lately? Still, with no pesky levelling, the freedom to be an honest merchant or a dastardly pirate and amazing-looking weather that goes from calm and sunny to full-on hurricanes, it should be one hell of an experience. Be honest after all, how many other games boast realistic recreations of the entire Windward and Leeward island chains, from Puerto Rico to Grenada to Barbados? Other than *Virtual Skipper 3*? Flying Lab Software is looking to get *POTBS* up and running early in 2004. We'll be charting a course to find out more about this intriguing take on the genre soon.

"How many other games boast realistic recreations of entire island chains from Grenada to Barbados?"

- **Publisher:** Flying Lab Software
- **Developer:** Flying Lab Software
- **ETA:** Spring 2004
- **Website:** www.flyinglab.com/pirates



Better than being stuck in Crowe's nest.



You'd rather hit pixies in a swamp for hundreds of hours?

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ULTIMA X: ODYSSEY
Origin welcomes you to its world

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Social gaming for fun and profit

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GETTING STARTED IN...
Anarchy Online: Shadowlands

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NEVERQUEST
Never say *Neverwinter* again

THE MATRIX RECODED

NEW SCREENS WELCOME YOU TO THE MMORPG OF THE REAL

MONOLITH, UBISOFT and Warner Bros have brought a little light into the darkness that surrounded *Matrix* fans following the abysmal *Matrix Revolutions* (nice battles, shame about the fundamental lack of cohesion and betrayal of the first film's tightly woven narrative). The official website for *The Matrix Online* – 2004's planned MMOG based on the overworked franchise – has been launched and the first screenshots from within the 'real' world have emerged.

Set after the events of the third film (something of a spoiler coming up), *The Matrix Online* sees you as a newly escaped citizen, re-entering the virtual landscape to battle the AI forces still bent on domination.

Bullet time, wire fu, plots written by the Wachowski brothers, natty threads – everything that made the *Matrix* films the icons of cool imagery they once were is present and correct as you pose like an overactive bunch of Goths while spouting pseudo-intellectualism in the name of humanity. Expect to take the blue pill some time late in 2004.

- **Publisher:** Ubisoft
- **Developer:** Monolith
- **ETA:** Late 2004
- **Website:** thematrixonline.ubi.com

"Oh, not a natural blonde then."

***The Matrix*? Or Coventry city centre?**

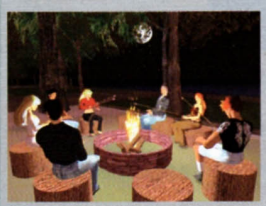
"Dry white wine and a vague sense of paranoia that nothing really exists please."

ONLINE SHORTS

JACKING IN TO THE VIRTUAL NEWS NETWORK

PROJECT A3
4AM Entertainment has announced its first MMOG to be signed up for European release – the visually distinctive *Project A3* from Korea. A hit in the Asian territory, 4AM is looking to get western servers up and running by summer 2004. Visit www.projecta3.com for more details – providing you can read Korean.

ROBOFORGE ON SALE
Liquid Edge Games, the team behind the underground robot fighting hit *Roboforge* (Issue 116, 83%), is offering the entire game and all associated intellectual property to the highest bidder. Got a few million to spare? Check out www.roboforge.net/tender.htm and view the full business model.



A SECOND LIFE
Continuing our 'alternative gaming' theme, anyone seeking an alternative to *There* (see page 110) might want to have a look at *Second Life*. Similar in style to *There*'s social 'metaverse', it's been officially on the go since last June and shows no sign of stopping. Check out secondlife.com for details.

WHEN JEDI ATTACK
Typical. You wait ages for a Jedi to turn up, then a dozen arrive at once. *Star Wars Galaxies* has finally welcomed the much-fabled characters. Seen as a reward for worthy players, the first of the 'Force Sensitive' slots was unlocked recently, allowing the lucky few to start a new Jedi character. Just in time for the European release, too.

WEBGAME OF THE MONTH

WHY PAY TO PLAY WHEN THE INTERWEB PROVIDES FUN FOR FREE?

OPERATION SLAPS
(www.operationslaps.com)

By and large, schooldays are hellish. Double maths. Doing PE in your pants. 'Donating' your lunch money to Forbes major every day. About the only good thing to come out of this nation's fetid schooling system is Friends Reunited. And that's just so you can laugh at how all your enemies are now wasting away in Burger King while you lord it up as a respected gaming industry commentator.

But enough of my personal hell. The only other good thing to come from school was the game of 'slaps' – the inner-city answer to conkers. Aside from getting a snog with tongues from Julie Phillips behind the heating vents, playing slaps was the only way to prove yourself as a man back then.

Two opposing forces would square up, the palms would be proffered face down and you'd take it in turn to hit the quivering hand in front of you as hard as you could before it moved. Make contact and you're rewarded with cheers, the look of disguised pain on your enemy's face and another go. Miss and... Well, you can imagine the pant-staining terror for yourself.

All wars should be fought this way.

As you played slaps, you felt like a one-man army, a military powerhouse fighting for power, prestige and land (that patch of grass by the playground tree). It's that feeling of militaristic bravado that *Operation Slaps* has reproduced. A simple yet effective interface that even recreates the age-old tactic of bluffing, and a deadpan style that manages to summon that same gravitas that a playground game would entail. Plus, the sound effects are meaty enough to make you wince for real.

Okay, it's not much as a single-player experience, but get two of you on the keyboard and suddenly you're 14 again, with Julie waiting in the distance for the victor.

Amassing valuable player feedback...

DEVELOPER DIARY

DRAGON EMPIRES

PETER TYSON, Codemasters

If I'm ever asked what's the most important thing in terms of MMOG development, I'd have to answer that it's community – the gamers who follow and talk about your game. Community is very important to us, and we work to ensure ours is well informed and involved with *Dragon Empire*'s development.

There's always a temptation when developing a game to ignore the people who eventually play it. You guys often have a lot of wild ideas and opinions, and for developers it can be very demanding to try and support them. However, we believe they're a great source of useful information. Essentially, we believe you gamers have something interesting to say.

For this reason, throughout the development of *Dragon Empires* we've often asked gamers for their thoughts on a variety of issues. We've consulted on topics ranging from player-versus-player combat to expansion packs. We have our own opinions obviously, but we like to gather feedback to see if we're on the right track – as we believe – or to see if we've missed anything.

"We believe you gamers often have something interesting to say"

Communication goes hand-in-hand with honesty, and wherever possible we try to be as honest as we can about release dates and development. Where we can't disclose information, it's almost always because of commercial sensitivity, or that the answer to any question is likely to change through the course of development. While it's good to be honest, it's better to be accurate and keep confusion to a minimum.

Developing a game in an open and honest way gets our community excited about it, which can only be a good thing. When you tell someone that they had a great idea and we're currently looking at including it in the finished game, you know you've got a fan for life. Players also learn what is and isn't possible and get a great insight into the development of a game. For us, it's a win-win situation all round.

Next month I'll have the lowdown on how our beta is progressing. Until then...

YOHOHO! LEAVES BETA

PUZZLING PIRATES PREPARE PROPER PLUNDERING

AS ALTERNATIVE gaming experiences go, you can't ask for more than *Yohoho! Puzzle Pirates* – a self-styled MMOARRRRRPG. Since October 2002, Three Rings, a small independently owned development team in San Francisco, has been letting thousands of Beta testers plunder the high seas of abstract adventuring with this quirky Java-based offering.

Y!PP is at heart a social experience, engendering a pleasant community through the non-violent use of puzzles to solve all in-game conflicts. No skills, no levels, just logical prowess and pirate-speak. Everything is puzzle-related, from duelling to manning the crew positions on a pirate ship. Forming a crew is vital to upping your reputation, and a comprehensive political and trading system ensures long-term playability, as do the preponderance of treasure islands to plunder.

From a technical standpoint, the Java nature means that *Y!PP* is designed to work on a wide a range of PC configurations. You don't even need broadband to have a decent gaming experience.

Like IRC, but with parrots.

As of November, *Y!PP* left the safe haven of testing and sailed into the uncharted waters of full commercial service. The developers have made a commitment to adding new content on a continuous basis, with the first crafting puzzle, Distillery, already proving a hit.

If that's whetted your appetite and given you your sea legs, then get yerself over to the website and check out the ten-session free trial to see if ye has the guts to puzzle your way to infamy. Any game with a ten-page FAQ written entirely in pirate-speak deserves your attention.

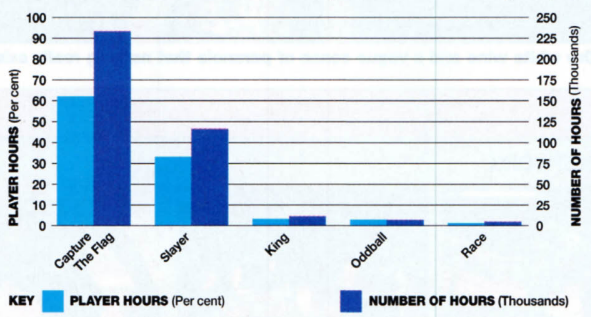
- **Publisher:** Three Rings Design
- **Developer:** Three Rings Design
- **ETA:** Out Now
- **Website:** www.puzzlepirates.com

STATZONE

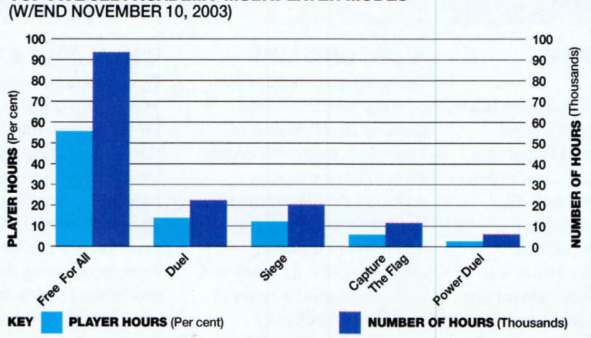
A LOOK AT THE DATA SHAPING YOUR ONLINE WORLD

ALL DATA SUPPLIED BY: CSPORTS.net

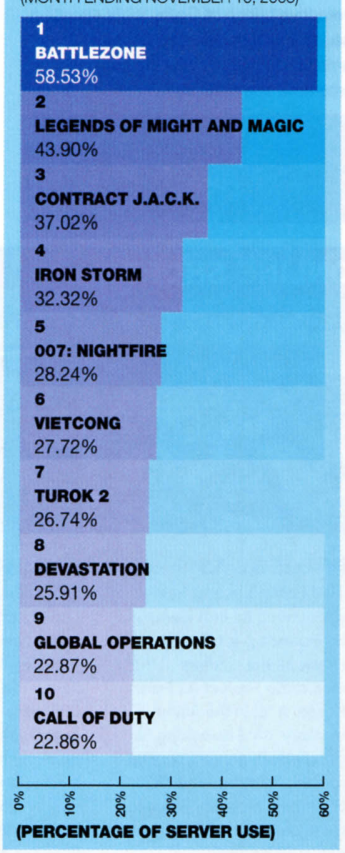
TOP FIVE *HALO* MULTIPLAYER MODES (W/END NOVEMBER 10, 2003)



TOP FIVE *JEDI ACADEMY* MULTIPLAYER MODES (W/END NOVEMBER 10, 2003)



BEST UTILISATION OF AVAILABLE SERVERS
(MONTH ENDING NOVEMBER 10, 2003)



WELCOME TO MY WORLD...

ANDY DOMBROSKI, *Ultima X: Odyssey*

FOR LONG-TIME *Ultima* fans, there are some names that forever hold sway over the imagination. Britannia, Skara Brae, Moonglow, the Bog of Desolation... The Bog of Whatnow? "The Bog of Desolation," repeats Andy Dombroski, lead world builder on *Ultima X: Odyssey*. "There's lots of foul acrid smoke in the air, strange bioluminescent fungi and twisted rotting trees all around. Oh, and a rather nasty indigenous population." Not exactly the shining towers of Castle Britannia and the gleaming world of the avatar we've come to expect then?

For Origin's follow-up to the ground-breaking *Ultima Online*, the Austin-based team has had to move away from the initial epic's familiar locales and into the new world of Alucinor. Not that the previous games aren't connected.

"The most interesting areas are based on locations from the previous *Ultima* single-player games," says Dombroski. "We're very focused on bringing the legendary adventure of *Ultima* into *UX:O*. There are tons of creatures and locations throughout the world that have their origins in the *Ultima* series. For long-time fans, *UX:O* will make them feel like they're 'returning home' to a familiar world they've loved. And for new players, it works out well too, because *Ultima* is a fascinating universe to explore."

Such exploration is helped by the game's system of moon gates. A staple of the *Ultima* series to date, the moon gates act as a fantasy mass transit system that Dombroski reckons will, "reach the far corners of the world. No more begging wizards and druids for rides to and fro. Our moon gate system is accessible to all players, and puts more focus on getting you where you want to be, when you want to be there."

Of these far corners, the most impressive in Dombroski's view are the vast outdoor wildernesses. "It's a cool challenge to take an otherwise 'normal' fantasy area and tune it visually to make it reflect a lot of emotion," he says with great satisfaction. "In the end, we hope people will get to these and feel scared, as well as awed and amazed."

To get these emotions, the art team is pulling influences from some of the masters of emotional manipulation. "We used a few movies such as *Shrek*, *Lord Of The Rings* and a variety of Disney films to inspire the look and feel of *UX:O*," Dombroski explains. "Our goal is to offer players the most visually compelling and differentiated world possible, one that can provoke all manner of different reactions from players as they live out their adventures." The manipulations begin in 2004. PCZ

"We reflect a lot of emotion in our outdoor areas. We hope people will feel scared, as well as awed and amazed"

ANDY DOMBROSKI
ULTIMA X: ODYSSEY

- **Publisher:** Electronic Arts
- **Developer:** Origin Systems
- **ETA:** 2004
- **Website:** www.uxo.ea.com

Ménage a quatre? Things are looking up.

Never mind my nose, just roll over will you...

Watch out for archers... Oh wait, this isn't an RTS.

Translation: "Take me right here, right now."

Aerobics has never been this interesting.

Overpaid, over-sexed, over...

THERE

Chloe Marx goes shopping in this virtual getaway

"FLAMING bananas help you stay awake. Buy one today!" This is Disky's cure for sleeping sickness. Yes, lunacy is rampant in this game, as is one-upmanship on lunacy. In fact, the mine-is-better-than-yours mentality seems to be the way things are around here… Er, sorry, *There*.

But did I say game? Forgive me. *There* officials call this product a "getaway", a "destination", a "virtual metaverse", among other epithets – presumably to market it to non-hardcore gamers. It incorporates a universal chatroom, clubhouses, in-world contests, games, romantic encounters (no, really), and not forgetting the consumers, shopping.

Disky is just one of thousands of people paying *There's* monthly fee of $4.95, all trying to forge a place in the world. She is 35, married and lists her hobbies as: "Designing, shopping and having fun." In other words, she's the ideal target audience – instead of her husband, who's most probably drunk, playing *Counter-Strike,* or perhaps both.

NO LOGO

In addition to shopping, *There* contains an awful lot of selling. Shameless real-world commercial product placement is everywhere, and there's an in-metaverse economy second to none. You can make quite a living creating clothes, vehicles and other items to sell for real; this is because the internal currency, Therebucks, is exchangeable for US dollars.

There's also quite a bit of "game" in *There* – some officially devised, but mostly sponsored by like-minded individuals in pertinent clubs. *There*-created activities include paintball, sumo, hoverboard racing and more. Events are regularly held for fabulous prizes, although if you check in with the regulars, these prizes often seem to be simple bowling shirts you wouldn't be caught dead in. Fortunately, an in-game petition is in the works.

SPIT IT OUT

Being a socially-driven world, experiences in *There* are wholly dependent on who you interact with. One time, I found myself splashing and playing with the other kids in a series of waterfall-surrounded pools. As the object of much gentle teasing and flirting, before I knew it, some gent had given me a hoverbike of my very own "just because". How very charming.

In sharp contrast, though, there were less welcome encounters in a perfectly innocent-looking pub. HeadliceMan made lewd remarks, Nero Lad yelled for me to "take it off!", and the very classy CheeseCutter shouted: "Hey! Do you swallow?" I was diplomatic with my answer, and he quieted down – absorbed, no doubt, in the pile of tissues next to his computer.

There's seemingly something for everyone here, sorry *There,* with about 2,773 clubs at last count. These include: the Harping Monkey Mythopoeia Club, Polygons for Peace, the Free Tibet Campaign, Burger King Bathroom Union 107, the Horny Bisexuals Club and a huge group of *Sims Online* refugees (they had to go somewhere). If you do decide to check it out, though, don't harass Disky. She has enough on her mind. PCZ

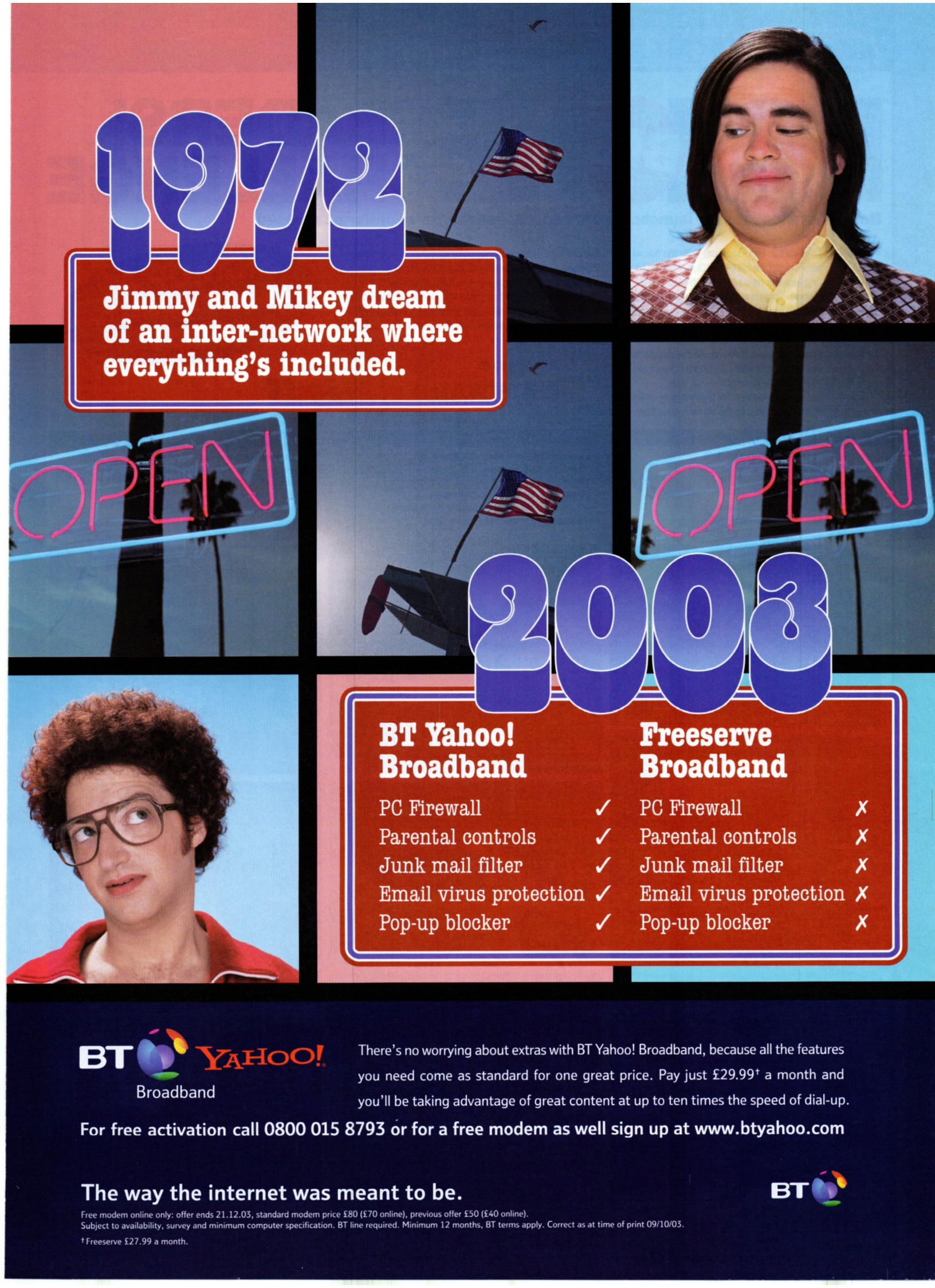
"Shameless product placement is everywhere and the in-metaverse economy is second to none"

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER There, Inc.
PUBLISHER There, Inc.
WEBSITE www.there.com
ETA Out Now

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Attempting to fundamentally change online interaction
- Reactive emotes
- Cartoon avatars can go from blonde pigtails to a purple Mohawk in the blink of an eye
- Includes e-commerce from major companies, including eBay, Disney, EA, Colgate, LucasArts and Sony



BT YAHOO! Broadband

There's no worrying about extras with BT Yahoo! Broadband, because all the features you need come as standard for one great price. Pay just £29.99† a month and you'll be taking advantage of great content at up to ten times the speed of dial-up.

For free activation call 0800 015 8793 or for a free modem as well sign up at www.btyahoo.com

The way the internet was meant to be.

BT

Free modem online only: offer ends 21.12.03, standard modem price £80 (£70 online), previous offer £50 (£40 online).
Subject to availability, survey and minimum computer specification. BT line required. Minimum 12 months, BT terms apply. Correct as at time of print 09/10/03.

† Freeserve £27.99 a month.

PCZONE READERS' CHALLENGE

WIN BIG PRIZES!!

Better get those rocket launchers polished and your terrorist uniforms pressed

ROUND TWO IS upon us. With the furore and fallout from Round One barely settled, it's time to launch headlong into the next phase of the *PC ZONE* Readers' Challenge. This time round we're pitting team against team in both the staggeringly popular *Halo* and the perennial old boy that is *Counter-Strike*. Meanwhile solo fraggers can get their beaks wet in the seminal deathmatch engine – *Quake III Arena*. All the details for the three games are listed below, so brush up your skills and get your name on the door at the Jolt site.

Don't forget, if you're looking for team-mates to enter one of the clan matches, you could do far worse than send your details to our popular Guildhall section (see opposite). With the handy ladder system rather than running a league, it's never too late to sign up

Next month we'll bring you the results of Round One – who won, what they won and what happens to them next. In the meantime, get over to www.pczone.jolt.co.uk and get fragging.

SIGN UP AT www.pczone.jolt.co.uk TODAY!

SPONSORED BY GAINWARD WWW.GAINWARD.COM

HOSTED BY jolt online gaming

HALO

Games run from December 15 – March 12

- Teams of five players each
- The map is Battle Creek
- Game type is Standard CTF
- First team to three points wins the match
- All standard map rules and weapons apply

COUNTER-STRIKE

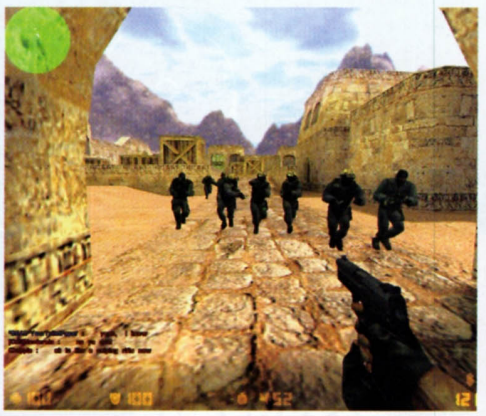
Games run from December 15 – March 12

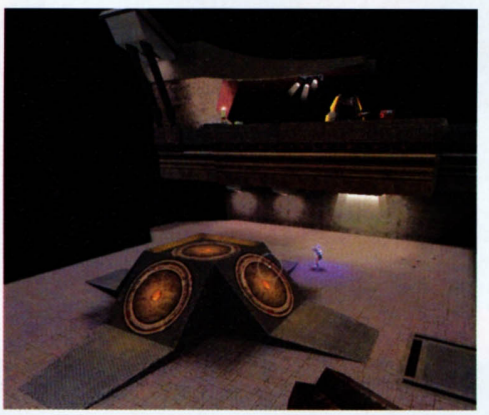
- Teams of five players each
- The map is De_Dust
- First team to five points wins the match
- Matches last one round only (team sides decided in advance)
- All standard map rules and weapons apply

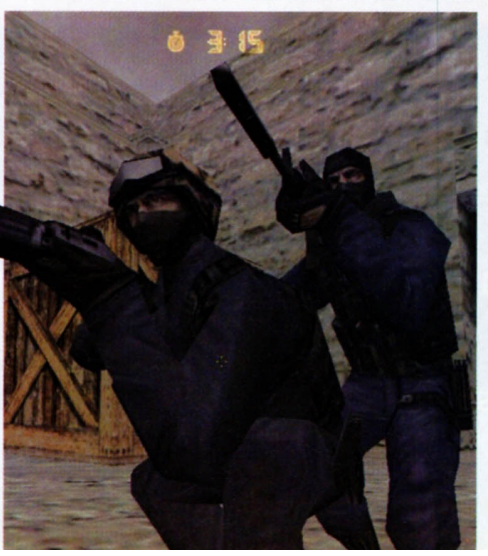
QUAKE III ARENA

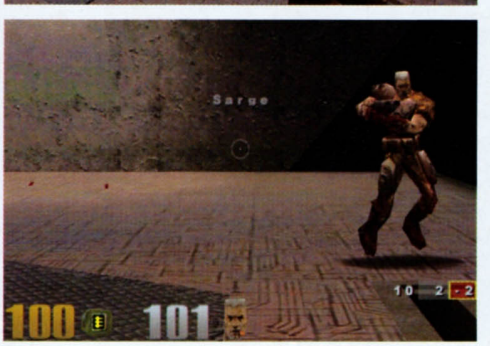
Games run from December 15 – March 12

- Game type is one-on-one deathmatch
- The map is Q3DM17
- First to ten kills wins the match
- All standard map rules and weapons apply









FIGHTCLUB

FIRST RULE OF FIGHT CLUB: *PC ZONE* OWNZ JØØ

AS REGULAR readers will know, our recent office move knocked out our ability to wage war this month, so apologies for not presenting our usual static targets for you to annihilate. Normal service should soon be resumed, and we'll have a full report from our December *Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory* kill-a-thon next month.

■ We're still looking to set up a mass *PC ZONE PlanetSide* event at some point in the near future. If you're signed up to the eternal online conflict (or maybe you've just been looking for an excuse to join the mayhem), the *ZONE* boys regularly play on the Werner server for the mighty New Conglomerate. Give MajorSpiffing a 'Hail' if you see him and find out more.

COME & 'AVE A GO!
www.zonegames.co.uk
for all the info

UPCOMING FIGHT CLUBS

THURSDAY JANUARY 8
6.30pm – 9.00pm
Battlefield 1942

THURSDAY FEBRUARY 5
6.30pm – 9.00pm
Halo

THURSDAY MARCH 4
6.30pm – 9.00pm
Call Of Duty

LAN ROVER

LIFE IN THE FAST LANS WITH STEVE 'SCALPER' RANDALL

If your New Year's resolution is to master the rocket jump, you really should be planning to get to a LAN. If you do get an arse-whipping, at least you'll be shown how they did it – something you won't get online. Happy Christmas and New Year to one and all. For my Christmas present I've asked my wife to let me go out for a three-day LAN event, but where to go? How about these...

■ A double plug for the lovely people at www.inknet.co.uk for their 49th and 50th LAN events (well done guys). Their last event this year starts December 19 at 7pm and ends December 21 at 9pm. The 50th event is next year on January 3-4. Both events are in Worcestershire – costs unconfirmed at the time of writing.

■ Next up for those who want to work off a celebratory hangover, January 2-4 sees Big Game 12 taking place. Held in Southampton for up to 72 gamers and costing just £20, it promises to be quite the shindig. More information from www.thebiggame.org.

■ I am delighted to see that Comrade Chez has decided to host a LAN from Boxing Day until December 28 in Brinscall. You can even share their external broadband connection. Prices are still being voted on in the forum at www.projecthavoc.org.uk/chezlan/, so get in there quick and make your wallet's voice heard.

■ Finally we shouldn't forget the latest Multiplay event, the StratLAN Christmas Party. This will be a smaller event by their usual standards with only 100 people attending. It'll cost £50 to participate and the event runs from December 12-15. Expect loads of fun and frolics from this premiere event. Details available at www.multiplay.co.uk.

■ If you're organising an event, let me know with two months' notice at scalper@gglan.co.uk. Scalper out.

Could do with a bit of tinsel about the place...

GUILDHALL

FEELING LOST AND ALONE?

Looking for that special group of someones to share your love of group gaming? Wanna, to be blunt, be in my gang? Check out some of the guilds and clans currently recruiting members and soon you too could find happiness, togetherness and a sense of belonging.

CLAN Tonto Clan
CONTACT Tonto_SNR
WEBSITE www.tontoclan1.com
MAIN GAMES *Age Of Kings*, *Cossacks*, *Warcraft 3*, *Battlefield 1942*
DETAILS Our clan has been going since 2000. There have been highs and lows, but we're still regarded as a great RTS clan to be in. We always welcome new members, and all that we ask is that you're willing to fit into the community and have a great attitude! Anyone wishing to join the clan should contact me, Tonto_SNR at our website.

CLAN International Frag Force
CONTACT rushty@fragforce.co.uk
WEBSITE www.fragforce.co.uk
MAIN GAME *Call Of Duty*, *Battlefield 1942*, *Desert Combat*, *Raven Shield*, *Soldier Of Fortune*
DETAILS IFF are a well-established and respected clan and we are looking for members for all of the above games – any skill level. You must be able to play as a team member, have a friendly attitude and enjoy the game, not just winning.

CLAN Kings Of Territory (KoT)
CONTACT Riot, via the website
WEBSITE www.k-o-t.tk
MAIN GAMES *Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory*
DETAILS KoT is an expanding clan, and based on two fundamental teachings: teamwork and trust. We are in the *Enemy Territory* Stopwatch UK ladder. We are always looking for new friendly people that get along with other members. KoT looks forward to seeing you soon!

CLAN {KEA} Kill 'Em All
CONTACT Throdgrain{KEA}
WEBSITE www.clankea.com
MAIN GAMES *Counter-Strike*, *Q2* (+Mods), *Q3* (+Mods), *Battlefield 1942*
DETAILS Clan KEA are looking for people who are interested in joining our newly formed *BF1942* team. We are looking for a maximum of 15 people. You must have IRC and a working microphone. For further details please visit #XATRIX on Quakenet.org (IRC).

CLAN =WM= Widowmakers
CONTACT =WM= Dread
WEBSITE www.wm-clan.co.uk
MAIN GAME *Call Of Duty*
DETAILS We are a newly formed *Call Of Duty* clan composed of two former *MOH:AA* clans - [-26-] and [lol]. We are in the Clanbase and TWL Search & Destroy leagues. Currently we're looking for new members who are over 18 with some clan experience. We have a 64-player server, train regularly and play plenty of clan wars.

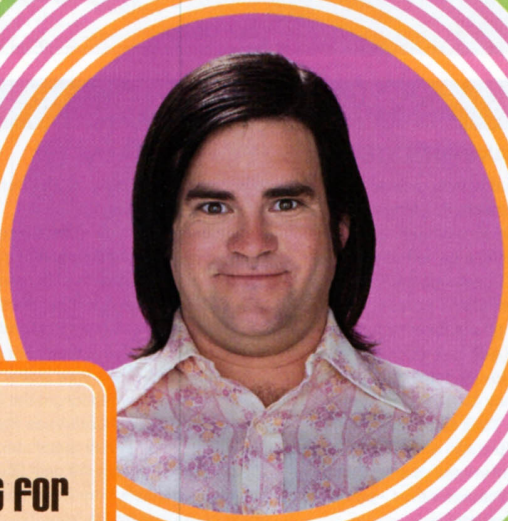
CLAN #oguk
CONTACT Coatsey & Darkslide
WEBSITE www.oguk.com
MAIN GAMES *PlanetSide*, *Counter-Strike*, *BF1942*, *Ragnarok*
DETAILS We're a general online gaming community for all ages. We run a *PlanetSide* squad and soon a *C-S* and *BF1942* one. We hope to have your support – we can cater for all of your gaming needs. So please join us!

To feature in Guildhall simply send your details and no more than 50 words describing your group to online.zone@pczone.co.uk (subject line: GUILDHALL) or to Guildhall, *PC ZONE*, 9 Dallington Street, London EC1V 0BQ.

1970

Jimmy and Mikey think it's wicked-cool when they get lots of stuff for not much money.

2003



BT Yahoo! Anytime launches, packed with great new features for just £5.99 for the first month.

BT YAHOO! Anytime

BT Yahoo! Anytime is here and it includes a lot of great new features like a home page you can personalise, a junk mail filter, controls to help protect your kids when they go online and 150 hours of surfing a month – all for just £5.99 for your first month (£15.99 after that).

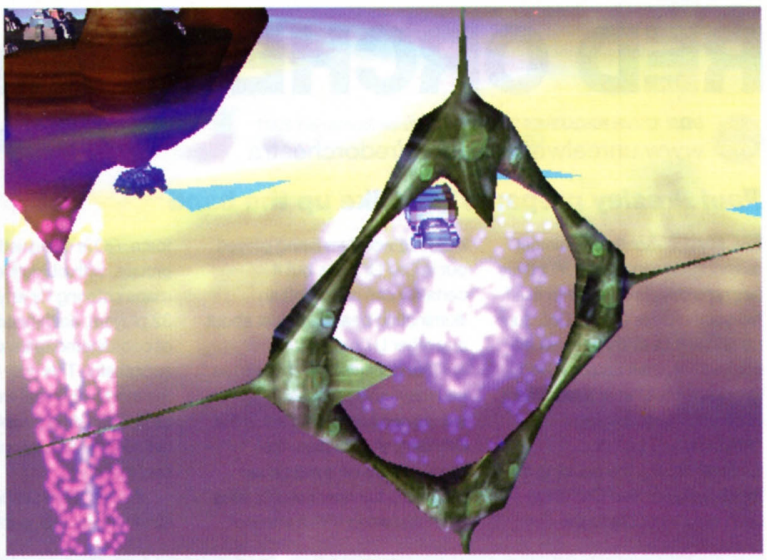
Call 0800 328 4991 or sign up online at www.btyahoo.com

The way the internet was meant to be.

BT

Session limits and other conditions apply. BT Line required. Payable by Direct Debit, Visa, Visa/Delta & MasterCard. Not available on 128k ISDN connections.

Offline orders. Complex yet dull looking.



Warpgates – the sci-fi equivalent of the M40.

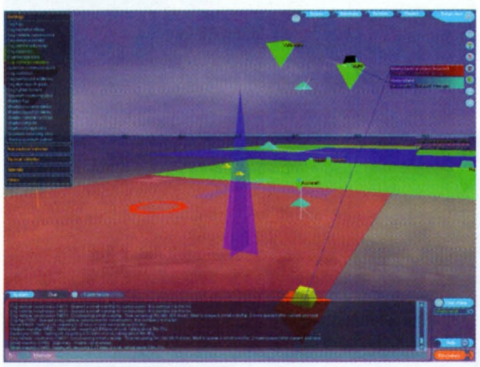
Space rocks (maaan).

TIME OF DEFIANCE

■ Price: £19.99 (includes 3 months gameplay, £7.50 per month thereafter) | Dev: NiCE | Pub: Oxygen Interactive | ETA: Out Now | www.nicelycrafted.com/todc

REQUIRES 500MHz processor, 64MB RAM, 16MB 3D graphics (DX9 compatible), Internet connection **DESIRES** Game is stable on most low-end systems

He may be lying in the gutter, but *Richie Shoemaker* is looking up at the, er, rocks...



All the colours of the rainbow.

Just like the opening of *Star Wars*.

Always with the resources.

IT'S BEEN available as a download for quite a while and has managed to garner a sizeable cult following – so it was only a matter of time and market forces before Nicely Crafted's MMO strategy game was boxed and branded for mass consumption.

If you're late to the party, what you have here a bog-standard RTS, allowing for global domination through either military, economic or diplomatic means.

The backdrop is absolutely vast, essentially made up of a shattered world liberally pocked with islands floating in the sky, all waiting to be conquered and developed. All have resources ripe for extraction, meaning you can expand your army of starships and structures. Either that or you can import them from the Eighth House – a kind of off-map shopping mall where you can badmouth all the other galactic despots in the fray.

TRUST NOBODY

Time Of Defiance is a (semi) persistent-world game – three weeks is the game maximum – and runs in real-time. This means it can take a fair while to explore even a small area of the map, or to mine enough material to build even a fledgling fleet.

"Players only take offensive action when their enemies are offline – for obvious reasons"

Thankfully, you have the option to turn off your PC and go to bed, safe in the knowledge that if threatened, your forces will do your bidding for you. That's assuming you've set up enough orders for your empire to obey before logging out, of course. It's a great system, but for one problem: players only seem to take major offensive action when their enemies are offline – for glaringly obvious reasons.

Fortunately, the battles aren't much cop anyway. Attack options are few and ships aren't shy about disappearing from view. Naturally, if it's space-set combat that gets your pulse racing, you're better off with *Homeworld 2*.

What *ToD* is far more accomplished at is building up player rivalry, especially regarding diplomacy. Engendering trust and treachery is where it shines most.

IS THAT ALL YOU'VE GOT?

Sadly, the general presentation is pretty awful. Graphically, it's ultra-dated, and the interface, though far from crippling, is hardly user-friendly. Setting orders, resource gathering and construction are all soon mastered, but the camera controls remain far from intuitive.

If you can look past such things and put the time in to explore all the hidden depths, *ToD* reveals itself to be a fitfully engaging empire-building epic, closer in spirit to *Star Control* or *Master Of Orion* than more modern strategy efforts.

Approach it for what it is and you'll be rewarded. If you wanted a massively-multiplayer spin on *Homeworld* though, you'll probably end up hating it forever. We nearly did.

INPERSPECTIVE

SHATTERED GALAXY
Reviewed Issue 108, Score 80%
Sadly overlooked, this isometric online RTS failed to secure a European release when it was unleashed three years ago. You can download it and play for free, though.

PROJECT NOMADS
Reviewed Issue 123, Score 85%
More floating rock strategy – who'd have thought that would be a growing genre? However, you won't find much in the way of online/multiplayer content.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✔ Unique among online games
- ✔ Stable and 56K modem-friendly
- ✔ Powerful in-game tools
- ✘ Dull combat
- ✘ Pernickety interface
- ✘ Primitive 3D graphics and sound

66

Some will love it, most will hate it

RED ORCHESTRA V1.1

SIZE 329MB **REQUIRES** Full version of *Unreal Tournament 2003*
www.unrealwarfarex.com/redorchestra

TOTAL CONVERSION

PCZONE ESSENTIAL

Paul Presley prepares to strike up the band

SOME months it's almost as though the mod community is having a private chuckle to itself. No sooner does *Call Of Duty* turn up and knock everyone into a cocked hat, than up pops *Red Orchestra* for *Unreal Tournament 2003* and starts singing "Anything you can do..."

Over-egging the pudding a touch, maybe. *Red Orchestra* can't hold a candle to the majestic wonders being played out in *Call Of Duty*, but it certainly can raise aloft an illuminating beacon to just about any other *UT* mod going.

This is World War II again, as you may have surmised – when will we see something set in the Crimean, eh? To start, the Russians are on a march as they repel the now deteriorating German forces with a show of force. *RO* is designed for large groups, with objective-based maps catering for anything up to 32 players, each needing plenty of coordinated teamwork to be successful. This may be one of the mod's only real weaknesses, as coordinating people tactically online is never easy unless you play in a clan.

Visually, *Red Orchestra* is strikingly superb, capturing the sense of mid-war desolation with pinpoint accuracy. Action is suitably intense too, with the absence of a crosshair and a realistic feel to weapon handling providing some of the best and most intense fire-fights encountered in any online shooter of late.

The offline modes don't hold up quite as well, however, bot AI being pretty basic. But then, this hasn't been designed for that and so shouldn't be held to account as a result. Let's hope more maps will start appearing in the near future, as this is one WWII mod that really deserves the support.

PCZONE VERDICT 83
A grand symphony

Levels have plenty of background detail.

Coordinating attacks is vital.

Fire-fights have a realistic feel to them.

THE GATE

SIZE 155MB **REQUIRES** Full version of *Half-Life*
www.planethalflife.com/thegate

Know a good gate when you see one? *Paul Presley* does...

TOTAL CONVERSION

BOLD claim this, but apparently *The Gate* is the very last of the original *Half-Life* single-player mods to be made. Understandable, what with the biggest sequel of all time just around the ever-slipping next corner: if you're going out, you might as well go out with a bang.

The Gate, for all the lack of professional polish in the cut-scenes, is one heck of a decent shooter, with many sequences easily rivalling those seen in supposedly 'professional' products. It's a tough cookie, don't doubt that, and though it often strays dangerously close, it never quite tips over into fist-through-screen territory.

The story pitches up somewhere between *Stargate* and *The Philadelphia Story*, with a mysterious 'gate' being unearthed in World War II Egypt, then ferreted away by sneaky Americans until the present day. At this point, you're sent through the thing to find out what it does, only to wind up back in the middle of the whole war. Just your luck, eh?

Technically, aside from the dated *Half-Life* engine and some rough and ready audio recording (lending the thing its own strange charm), *The Gate* impresses. It offers crisp, detailed visuals, textures and level designs, together with well-paced action and not everything relying on quick-trigger fingers and sack-loads of ammo.

We're not looking at another *Blue Shift* or *Opposing Force* here, but it's always nice to see a bit of thought and imagination in these things – and *The Gate* has that in droves. Definitely worth a look before the onslaught of *Half-Life 2* mods hit us.

PCZONE VERDICT 72
Tough, fun and inventive

Altogether Indy fans... "Stay out of the light!"

Nobody mention *SG-1*, okay?

Ah, those wacky Nazis.

HOMEWORLD 2

MULTIPLAYER

■ £24.99 | Pub: VU Games | Dev: Relic | ETA: Out Now | homeworld2.sierra.com/ | Players: 2-6

REQUIRES PIII 833MHz, 256MB RAM, 1.2 GB HD Space, 32MB Open GL 3D card, internet connection **DESIRES** P4 2GHz, 512MB RAM, 1.2 GB HD Space, 32MB Open GL 3D card, broadband connection

***Keith Pullin* tests the space between his eyes**

Dogfights never fail to impress.

WHEN playing an RTS, there's nothing worse than an opponent who refuses to fight. *Homeworld 2* has multiplayer servers crammed full of them. Build, build, build – it's all they bloody do until their fleet becomes so massive they have no option but to attack. Alas, in space no-one can hear your screams of frustration – and they certainly ignore your chat.

One possible reason for such primitive tactics could lie in *HW2's* 12 multiplayer maps. There's only so much you can fill 3D space with and most of it tends to be rock or junk. Funky plasma trails may go some way towards making this vast nothingness more appealing, but the truth is *HW2* doesn't have the strategic latitude of a ground-based RTS offering such rich tactical possibilities as thick forest and undulating terrain.

Despite these flaws, *Homeworld 2* still offers plenty to entertain – if you're patient. For a start, it's unquestionably the best 3D space RTS currently online. The interface is easy to navigate, even when you have hundreds of ships to move around. But most important of all, when the battle does eventually come, it's all-encompassing both visually and emotionally.

HW2 is by no means the star of the multiplayer RTS circuit – but it does offer you the chance to get your head among them for while, and that has its appeal. It's not for everyone, but it's certainly worth a go if you're patient, or preferably for the sake of varied competition, extremely creative.

PCZONE VERDICT	
FULL REVIEW ISSUE 134	81
MULTIPLAYER SCORE	72
Takes a while to really get going	

HIDDEN & DANGEROUS 2

MULTIPLAYER

■ £34.99 | Pub: Gathering | Dev: Illusion Softworks | ETA: Out Now | www.hidden-and-dangerous.com | Players: 2-32

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 128MB RAM and a 32MB D3D card, internet connection **DESIRES** P4 2GHz, 512MB RAM, a 128MB D3D card, broadband connection

***Mark Hill* doesn't know if this game's players are dangerous, but they're definitely hidden**

As usual, Deathmatch is extremely popular. Shame.

The realism can leave you feeling ultra-exposed.

There's a vast range of weapons to kit you out.

IT'S ALMOST a criminal oversight that *Hidden & Dangerous 2*, which boasts such attention to detail and variety in all aspects of gameplay, should lack a co-operative multiplayer mode. (Illusion has indicated it's likely to be part of the forthcoming expansion pack.) The excellent single-player campaign is tailor-made for team work, after all. For now, though, we have to content ourselves with three online modes: Deathmatch, Occupation and Objectives.

The first, Deathmatch, is self-evident. The second, Occupation, is a territory control mode you'll be familiar with from *Battlefield 1942*, among others. And the third, Objectives, adds a touch of the *Counter-Strikes*, by giving each team specific goals, such as retrieving documents, eliminating VIPs and the like.

The maps are fantastic (most of them taken from the campaign), and the engine lends itself to some very satisfying action, making us wish more than ever that *Mafia* had included a multiplayer option.

But the bugs that marred the single-player game rear their heads here too. The main problem, and quite a huge one at that, is connecting to a game in the first place. And when you do finally find a server that lets you in, you may find it crashes to the desktop. It's not as if there are many servers around, either.

The bugs are still keeping a lot of people away, and the servers aren't exactly buzzing, but you can still find the odd 32-player bash going on. With more patches and that much missed co-op mode, this might just take off. We reckon it deserves to.

PCZONE VERDICT	
FULL REVIEW ISSUE 136	88
MULTIPLAYER SCORE	78
Bring on the co-op, and make it snappy	

Getting started in...

ANARCHY ONLINE: SHADOWLANDS

It's *Anarchy Online*, but not as we know it. *Shadowlands* brings many new features with it, together with a wealth of new challenges. *Chris Anderson* offers advice to rookies

TRAINING GROUNDS

1 If you're new to *Shadowlands* and *Anarchy Online* in general, the training grounds teach you everything you need to know. Your first few levels will be spent here, getting a feel for the game. *Shadowlands* improves these rookie areas greatly from the *AO* originals, with the inclusion of a trader selling useful items for low-level characters. The levelling here is fast and furious – up to about level six or seven – so don't be in a rush to get out into the big bad world 'til you've milked your starting area for all it's worth.

DIY DESTRUCTION

2 You don't have to wait to learn how to use trade skills to your advantage: the basics of weapon creation can be gleaned right there in the backyard. You can combine items dropped from some of the low-level mobs (monsters) to make better weapons than the ones you start with. Experiment with mixing monster parts and see what you get. If you want a decent gun, try matching a chimera metal bone pipe with an energy accumulator to make a basic firearm, then watch what happens when you add a soul stone.

ENTERING SHADOWLANDS

3 If you have an existing *AO* character and don't want to start from scratch in the expansion, you can gain access to the *Shadowlands* by heading to the whompas in Borealis, Rome Green and Old Athens. From there, you can get to Inner Jobe, which in turn leads you to Jobe Research, the main hub for *Shadowlands*. From there, you can gain access to the playfields. Nascense is the first and is suited to levels 1-50. From here, you can access the other playfields, all of which increase in difficulty as you head north.

THE SHADE

4 The Shade is one of two new classes, but be warned – it's very hard to play solo, relying heavily on teaming with other people to progress. Opifex is a good choice of breed if you're thinking of trying it, because it has high sense and agility rating, both of which are attributes important for this particular class. The Shade is a challenging character to play: difficult in the early levels, rewarding if you stick with it long enough.

THE KEEPER

5 If you're new to this, the Keeper is the best choice of the two new classes; a support class that's also capable of dealing a fair amount of damage in its own right. The majority of the Keeper nanos are designed to protect team-mates from debilitating attacks by your enemies – attacks such as Snare or Root. This makes the Keeper an excellent choice if you want to play a strong melee class – and a great addition to any team.

FACTION FACTS

6 Factions play a big part in the expansion, much more so than in the original game. If you're already playing an Omni-tek character, you'll be automatically aligned with the Unredeemed. Similarly, if you're playing a Clan character, you'll have automatic affiliation with the Redeemed. Your choice of faction determines which quests you have access to, and in some cases, which items and armour you can equip. It also predicts the Shadowbreed skills you can access. If you're starting a new *Shadowlands* class, the quests you initially opt for and the creatures you kill determine your faction.

SPECIALISATION

8 *Shadowlands* enables you to specialise and learn unique nano programs specific to your chosen profession. Head to the IPS shop in Jobe Harbour and you can meet Dedlock, a man with a passion for books. He sends you out to hunt creatures and find the books he wants for his collection. In return, he'll upgrade your NCU so you can have access to new nano programs. There are four specialisations and this is the only way you can gain access to them. Be prepared for some very tough encounters during the more advanced quests.

PLAYFIELD PROGRESSION

7 All of the new playfields are level-based and increase in difficulty as you progress through the expansion. However, you'll find new monsters spawning randomly in your current playfield, which isn't great as their level is very high. If you come across one of these you have two clear choices: attack it and die or run away and live. Otherwise, you'll have to start exploring the benefits of teaming up right away. Luckily, the *Shadowlands* are crawling with like-minded newbies, so finding partners isn't a problem.

PERKS AND PLANNING AHEAD

9 Perks are skills you can learn to further customise your character to your individual style. Of all the perks available, Profession perks are by far the most potent. You get one perk point to spend every ten levels, and one per level from level 200 onwards. Think long and hard before you spend your perk points, though. It's possible to 'untrain' them, but it takes some 72 hours. Check out the forums at www.anarchy-online.com for feedback on which perks players are finding the most useful.

SHADOWRIFTS ARE YOUR FRIEND

10 Shadowrifts can be found randomly throughout the indoor mission playfields. Activating one gives you a temporary boost, dependant on the kind of Shadowrift you find. The boosts only lasts a few minute, mind, so save them until you come across a mob that's proving to be a pain in the arse, or a room you can't clear. The key thing is not to get carried away – you don't need us to tell you what happens if the timer runs out and you're smack in the middle of a room full of monsters now do you?

- **Publisher:** Funcom
- **Developer:** Funcom
- **Website:** www.anarchy-online.com

COMMUNITY CHEST

MAX PAYNE

James Lyon takes a trip back to the mean streets of New York

Stop! Bullet time. If there's one thing that's driven the *Max Payne* community it's the opportunity to easily adapt the mechanics of such a stylish experience into their own creations. That sweet melding of Payne's slow-mo acrobatics and gratuitous gunplay gives even the simplest map a touch of class.

To be honest, there's not too much in the way of resources available, and we're probably seeing the last efforts now as everyone embraces the more mature-looking sequel. Here, though, are some things we thought worth checking out. All of which can be downloaded in a New York minute – 22 if you're on dial-up.

KUNG FU VER 3.0
(WEAPON MOD)
www.fileplanet.com/files/120000/120816.shtml

Probably the most renowned of the *Max Payne* mods, *Kung Fu* says it like it means it, turning *Max* into a master of martial arts with impressive combat moves instantly to hand without the need to configure any new keys. Makes the game at least 137% more stylish than it already is.

MATRIXED REALITY (PUPU EDITION) VER 2.2
(MOD AND MAPS)
www.fileplanet.com/files/120000/124282.shtml

Max Payne and *The Matrix* go together like beer and kebabs, and this *Matrix* mod is the best of the bunch so far. Cribbing from *Kung Fu*, you can experience the lobby and chateau movie scenes, all the while performing those Neo moves.

POLAR PAYNE
(MOD)
hellskitchen.paynereactor.com/Hell's%20Kitchen_files/polar.htm

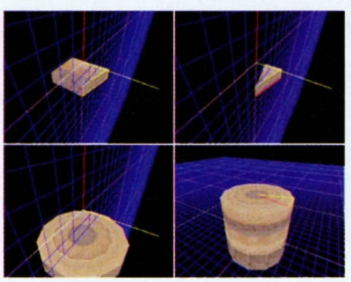
Truth be told this is shoddy in places, unfinished and unbalanced – but that doesn't stop it raising a smile. You're a polar bear eager to rend the flesh of arctic explorers treading on your patch. Never mind the inexplicable use of weapons, chucking trout grenades wins us over.

JUKEBOX
(MUSIC EDITOR)
www.fileplanet.com/files/80000/83657.shtml

A simple little thing which enables you to change *Payne's* in-game music and add in new .wav files. It's a little fiddly, but follow the instructions and you too can mow down perps with inappropriate chart hits. Us? Nothing like a bit of *Hole In The Head* while we guzzle painkillers.

DEEP SIX
(FANSITE)
www.3dactionplanet.com/maxpayne

In looking for *Max Payne* websites to spend time on, the safest bet we found had to be Deep Six – probably because it's hosted by GameSpy. Still, this is the way to go for interviews, info and editing tools without the unnecessary confused love that general fansites bring.



3D REALMS EDITING
(WEBSITE)
www.3drealms.com/max/tutorials

Like we said, expect mod teams to move quickly onto the sequel. In the meantime, 3D Realms provides its very own official editing guide on its website. It's not the only comprehensive guide, but, broken into easy-to-understand sections, you can at least be assured it knows what it's talking about.

LAME-KATANA
(WEAPON MOD)
hellskitchen.paynereactor.com

If seeing fountains of blood spurting in *Kill Bill* impressed you, you probably haven't seen enough Japanese anime – so you'll definitely want to get your hands on this. In the hands of *Max*, the katana is a weapon that'll see more red stuff shooting around than an explosion in a ketchup factory.

THE LOST LEVELS DEMO
(MAP)
www.thelostlevels.tk

A demo showing off a level of an unofficial continuation of *Payne's* story which promises to be out very soon. Whether we'll get to see it finished is a different matter. For now, this represents one of the better amateur efforts – even though it can be tricky to know what to do.

STEVE HILL'S NEVERQUEST

Small-minded goblin-hater *Steve Hill* enters the terrifying online world of *Neverwinter Nights*

KICK OUT the MMOGs! Enough with the Massively Multiplayer Online Games, this month we're downscaling *NeverQuest* to the cosier surroundings of a small-scale *Dungeons & Dragons* adventure. With enthusiasm already at a record low, simply writing those two words almost makes me weep. What am I doing with my life? All I ever wanted to do was interview Mark E Smith. Instead I'm reduced to playing online *Dungeons & f***ing Dragons* for money. I don't even know what *Dungeons & Dragons* means, only that it conjures up grainy images of bearded men rolling many-sided dice and quaffing flagons of real ale.

Those days are (hopefully) gone, and the 21st century equivalent involves sitting around in your underpants indulging in an online fantasy with like-minded non-shavers around the world. *Neverwinter Nights* appears to be the game du jour for such activity, and enthusiasts will be pleased to learn that it involves 'Classic *Dungeons & Dragons* role-playing utilising the *D&D* 3rd Edition rule set.' Fair enough, although a less likely claim is the promise of 'the multiplayer experience of a lifetime'.

BONE MACHINE

On the plus side, the smaller groups should make for a greater sense of camaraderie, and while I'm not looking to make any lifelong friends, I'm hoping for at least some degree of social interaction. This hunch initially appears to be on the money, judging by the conversation I inadvertently stumble upon in the pre-game chat room. I miss the start, but someone is describing how his Spanish teacher had to leave because she kept sleeping with the students. He then explains that she was "22, 23, pretty hot body" and that he had actually "boned her" himself on the basis that he simply thought, "Why not?"

Why not indeed, although it's not the sort of conversation you expect to be conducted between a wizard and an elfling. Talking of which, I need to select and dress a character at the obligatory Barbie doll screen. Having finally clarified what an Orc is – I always thought it was a bird – through an enforced viewing of *Lord Of The Rings*, I opt to be a Half-Orc. I'm not sure what the other half is, but I am a very ugly man. Face like a bag of spanners, blue hair and lamb chop sideys – think Monkey in his hypothetical Vegas years, replete with shiny pyjama suit. Nice tattoos, mind.

"I am a very ugly man. Face like a bag of spanners, blue hair and lamb chop sideys – Monkey in his Vegas years"

WORLD OF LEATHER

Rudish Kragest is the automatically generated name, and chaotic fighter is the game. Armed with a sword and a torch I look as hard as nails, especially when I slip into my studded leather armour. A chance to test my mettle presents itself almost immediately as I am bluntly told to "Piss off" by a Servant of Kravos. I won't stand for that, and take a poorly aimed swing at the hooded potty-mouth. Seconds later, I'm lying dead in a cornfield, stabbed in the gut by the foul-mouthed aggressor. Faced with a choice of respawning for a price, or waiting for someone to come along and help, I eventually opt for the former as playing dead in a field doesn't quite live up to the promised multiplayer experience of a lifetime.

In fact, none of it does. As far as human interaction goes, nobody gives me the time of day, and I feel like the embarrassing guest at a party to which I am not invited. Attempting to get with the spirit and embark on some quests is a baffling proposition. Admittedly, I have concentration issues, but these are only exacerbated when the task in hand is delivered in arcane English. It's even more problematic when I inadvertently log onto a French server.

Even cows ignore the dead schmuck! Well, wouldn't you?

FAVOURS FOR SAILORS

It's the same story wherever I go, and over the course of a few days I hang around the docks with some sailors, trawl some underground caverns and get lost in the woods. At the slightest sign of trouble, I am almost always on the losing side, going down variously to a couple of birds, some imps, and an invisible stalker. I am even killed by a Beetle, like a dyslexic Mark Chapman in reverse. Nobody ever comes to my aid, and the only acknowledgement of my existence is when someone in my party asks, "Why is this man dead?"

There's some encouragement when I respawn in a bedroom to be confronted by Larana (22, 23, pretty hot body) with the message 'This cheerful lass stands in your room eyeing you with an eager anticipation'. Despite being no stranger to this situation, there is a frisson of excitement and I climb into bed in preparation. She doesn't live up to her promise though, leaving me trouserless and alone. Now where's that Spanish teacher?

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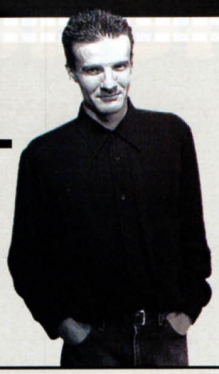


■ **ASL?** Phil Wand

▲ It's Friday afternoon and I can hear an eerie wail. One of my regular pings to a distant BT router hasn't responded, and my monitoring software now sounds like the Clacton Pier ghost train – my ADSL line has spluttered to a halt. At first it's like the initial stages of a power cut. I'm flicking light switches, trying to boil the kettle and wondering why the bread won't stay down in the toaster. I visit the BT website for details on network outages, and I send MSN messages to my colleagues. It doesn't take me long to realise just how net-dependent I've become.

Within minutes, I'm on the phone to BT, eventually speaking to someone helpful. The guy asks me to unplug my microfilters so he can test the line, and as the last filter leaves the socket, it dawns that the phone I'm using is hanging from it. Whoops. A discouraging tone fills my ears as my cheeks redden. I'm back on the phone and back in the queue. An hour of mucking about and – hurray! The line is back.

BT gets a lot of stick. It has more customers than anyone else, and subsequently receive the lion's share of complaints. But in all the times I've dealt with the company, it's answered the phone at odd hours and moved swiftly to deal with faults. It's true it charges more than its competitors and that its domestic product range is small, but BT has always been on the case.

Which is more than can be said of Bulldog, the broadband ISP I chose for my second ADSL line. Three weeks of waiting, three emails explaining the service will "soon be ready", and finally it tells me I've failed the dreaded test. Spies at BT tell me that nobody's even sniffed my line. I ditch the Dog, sign up with BT and have another DSL account in less than a week. Caveat emptor. ▼

The unassuming Hercules 3D Prophet 9800 SE All-In-Wonder. With W1zzard's software mod installed, it transforms into a 9800 Pro and the best value video card available.

All-in-wonderful

Simple driver tweak hauls £370 performance from a £160 card. Christmas has come early

WANT A 9800 PRO for the same money as a 9600 Pro? Of course you do! The Hercules 3D Prophet 9800 SE All-In-Wonder 128MB has a street price of around £160, but a freely available download can turn it into one of the fastest Radeons going. Not only that, but because it's the All-In-Wonder variant, you also get a TV tuner, video input and a wireless remote thrown in. It's the biggest hardware bargain of the year – and ATI's biggest secret.

WHAT? WHY? HOW?

Processors are not built individually, but separated into core lines – thousands are put together at the same time and to the exact same specifications. Deep in the factory, the chip manufacturer runs tests to determine whether the slices of silicon are good enough to put in high-end boards, or whether they're better suited to a more relaxed life in a less stressed environment. Consumer demand also has to be taken into account, in that slower cards sell a lot more than the speedier versions.

If you cast your mind back to last year, you may recall that the Radeon 9500 gained notoriety for the exact same reasons – popped from the same mould as the 9700, the GPU was shackled at the factory and sold as the 9500. Overclockers soon discovered that the two products were essentially the same card, and quickly released patches to unlock its true potential. The key to understand why the trick works with the Hercules 9800 SE is its specification. The 256-bit memory bus and modified R350 core (with four rendering pipelines rather than eight) reveal that it's actually a muzzled 9800 Pro.

DOES IT WORK?

The upgrade is in no way guaranteed. Although more than half the people surveyed reported success, there's still a chance that your 9800 SE will remain as Hercules intended, as a plain 9800 SE. So the softmod trick is best suited to people looking to upgrade to middleweight video hardware and not to people looking for a genuine 9800 Pro – you may be disappointed.

The card I tested 'de-cloaked' straight out of the shrink wrap, and from the benchmark results we conducted, it's identical in performance to Sapphire's 9800 Pro Atlantis 256MB from last month's round-up. I've tested a lot of cards over the years, but the joy from this particular test was like no other – the increase in performance was amazing!

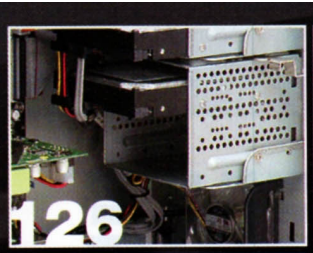
SUCK IT AND SEE

If you're a Hercules 9800 SE owner, visit www.ocfaq.com/softmod/ and download the Softmodded Display Driver. If it works, please consider sending a small donation to the guy who made it all possible – there's a PayPal link at the bottom of the page. Sending the guy £10 for saving you more than £200 really isn't too much to ask, especially at this time of year.

ALL IN WISDOM

HERE'S WHAT YOU DO

1. **Not all 9800 SE cards will work with the software mod. As I'm sure you've found out by now, few things in life are guaranteed.**
2. **Once the modded drivers have been installed, reboot. Some cards will lock your machine before Windows reappears, others corrupt the display.**
3. **To check the mod is working, open *3DMark01* and run the Fill Rate tests. The multi-texture result should be between 2,000 and 3,000 – double that of the standard 9800 SE.**
4. **The whole process can be undone simply, by installing official CATALYST drivers from the ATI website.**
5. **There's no way to tell whether a card has ever been softmodded. Your secret is safe with me.**
6. **The Hercules card doesn't feature memory chip heat sinks, so make sure that your case has more than adequate cooling. At minimum, you need an inlet fan at the front and an exhaust at the rear.**
7. **Install a monitoring tool to keep an eye on temperatures.**
8. **Feeling brave? There's nothing stopping you from overclocking the modded board from 375MHz to 400MHz and wrenching even better results from it.**
9. **If you're at all unsure about softmodding or overclocking, don't do it.**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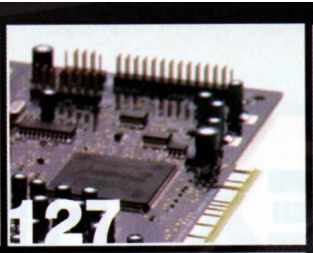
PC REVIEWS
Gaming machines extraordinaire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BOOM YEAR

Forecasts point to yet another rise in PC sales

IT LOOKS TO BE another bumper year for PCs, with 2003 shipments predicted to top 160 million units – that's around five machines every second, and a 10 per cent increase on last year. While it's true that many PCs are sold to businesses, over half of all households have a PC and the forecasts singled out recent demand in the home market as one of the reasons behind the big numbers. So the next time one of your Xbox fanboy friends tells you how his 733MHz lunch box is poised to conquer the gaming world, you should explain that the number of PCs built each month shades the total user-base of every console in the UK by a factor of two.

But who's buying all these machines? Any PC veteran will tell you that their 200MHz Pentium Pro from 1995 was more than adequate for what we spend most of our time doing nowadays – reading and writing emails, sending instant messages to the people sat next to us, composing letters, listening to music and perusing the 'free tour' area of gentleman's websites.

So why the sudden urge to upgrade? Easy. The one thing likely to make our PCs feel like clockwork toys is the game we bought last Saturday. Take the second *Max Payne* instalment, whose system requirements make the hardware you bought this time last year feel obsolete. Or take *Halo*, which could bring a Cray X1 to its knees.

And there's your answer. Lurching graphics, slow reactions, detail levels cranked so low it's as though you're looking at everything through frosted glass. Most PCs never actually need replacing, the poor things just get worse at meeting the demands you make of them. And so they get junked.

Images from next-generation games are fuelling consumer demand. Like this one.

However, if developers stop testing the limits of technology, we won't have faster processors, better video cards and more realistic games. And that's bad news for everyone – including Xbox owners. No prizes for guessing the world's favourite platform for developing console games...

"Most PCs don't actually need replacing, they just get worse at meeting the demands you make of them"

RECALL OF DUTY

ATI recommends reverting to CATALYST 3.7 drivers

Eager gamers who upgraded their Radeon-based system to CATALYST 3.9 could well experience fatal VPU recover errors while playing *Call Of Duty*. In the first widely publicised driver bug for, oh, longer than I can remember, ATI admitted to the problem and suggested that people experiencing the lock-up downgrade their drivers to CATALYST 3.7. Unlike the silly rumours that were circulating a month ago about the 3.8 drivers destroying monitors (if it were possible, you'd imagine a virus trying to pull the same stunt, but there are none), this is kosher. See www.ati.com/support for more information.

DRIVER WATCH

ON THE DVD

Time for an update? One look at our chart will tell you

MOTHERBOARD

MANUFACTURER	NAME	DESC	RELEASED	SIZE	WEB
Intel	Chipset Software Installation Utility	5.0.2.1003	27-Aug-03	1.4MB	support.intel.com
NVIDIA	Forceware	3.13	03-Nov-03	12.9MB	www.nvidia.com NEW
SIS	AGP	1.1.7	07-Oct-03	5.4MB	download.sis.com NEW
VIA	Hyperion	4.49	20-Aug-03	1.4MB	www.viaarena.com

GRAPHICS

MANUFACTURER	NAME	DESC	RELEASED	SIZE	WEB
ATI	Display, Control Panel, WDM	CATALYST 3.9	05-Nov-03	25MB	www.ati.com NEW
NVIDIA	Detonator FX	52.16	23-Oct-03	8MB	www.nvidia.com

SOUND

MANUFACTURER	NAME	DESC	RELEASED	SIZE	WEB
Creative	Audigy 2 WDM Drivers	DriverPack 3	09-May-03	6.88MB	uk.europe.creative.com
M-Audio	Revolution	5.10.00.0051	04-Sep-03	10MB	m-audio.com

SNIPPETS

SPEAK UP AT THE BACK

Creative does seem to be sticking to its promise of releasing almost two products a week this year – it's just unveiled its most expensive speaker set yet, the £330 GigaWorks 7.1 S750. As with the T7700s (see review, page 128), the S750 features two-way front speakers but is blessed with titanium supertweeters, plus 700W of power and a wireless remote. 210W finds is way to the 8-inch down-firing long-throw woofer, something that's sure to drive the girls wild. europe.creative.com

WEBWARD GAINWARD

Owners of the creepiest logo in computers, Gainward has recently launched its UK website. Uncharacteristically for a hardware vendor, it's actually vaguely useful, and includes a form for sending flame mails to technical support. The full Gainward range from GeForce2 to FX is covered, including its water-cooled cards, and the site gives full specifications, plus package contents and system requirements. The only criticism is that it's not obvious where to buy Gainward gear. www.gainward.co.uk

SCRATCH 'N' MIX

Powered entirely by USB, the £150 Hercules DJ Console features a multi-channel sound card for real-time MP3, WMA and audio CD mixing and compilation building. The hardware includes a pair of vinyl-style jog wheels, crossfader, numerous fidelity sliders and controls, plus 28 buttons for playing, pausing, cueing and so on. The DJ Console ships with its own fairly comprehensive music software suite, plus a bundle of tools including Atomix *Virtual DJ* and Ots *CD Scratch*. europe.hercules.com

AREA-51 EXTREME

■ £2,350 | Manufacturer: Alienware | Phone: 0800 2799 751 | www.alienware.co.uk

Alienware has built another PC you always wanted

PC

PCZONE RECOMMENDED

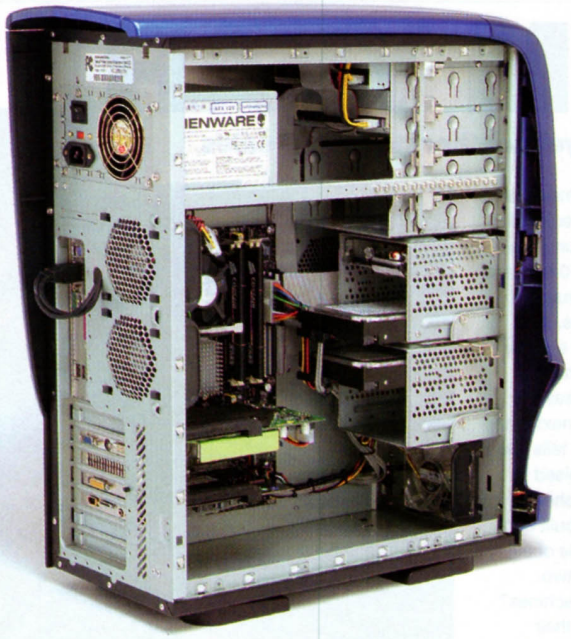
ANOTHER crowd gathered at Wandy Towers to witness the unveiling of the maddest Area-51, featuring Intel's 3.2GHz Expensive Edition CPU and GeForce FX 5950. At the time, neither the processor nor the video card were available on UK shores, and when my hand reached for the On button, you could have hacked at the air with a meat cleaver. Life lesson number one: cool shit makes you popular.

Like the arse end of a Porsche 911, the Area-51's looks are in questionable taste but are unique and instantly recognisable, endowing the owner with a flock of green-eyed geeks and admiring glances at LAN parties. Unlike the 911, you can't slash its tyres or run your front door key along the doors.

The only thing lacking from the package is a monitor and some speakers.

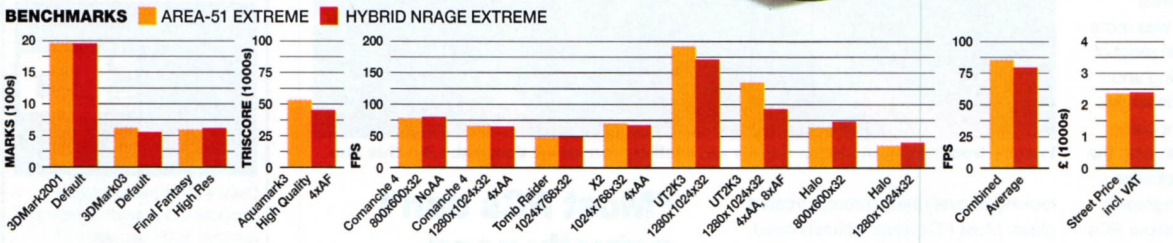
Open the metallic blue bonnet and the inside is filled with the world's finest bits and pieces, including a 420W PSU, 1GB Corsair RAM, Audigy 2, Plextor DVD+-R/W, a Barracuda RAID array, and more. Every cable is tied back and tucked out of site, giving the impression that whoever put it together is naturally fastidious – I wouldn't be surprised if they lacquer their shoes and Mr Sheen their teeth each morning. In short, a great deal of care goes into assembling every machine, and it shows.

Crucially, this Area-51 ain't that expensive – although touted as a 'dream machine', configure a Dell or a HP of identical specification and I'd put money on the Alienware being cheaper.



The benchmarks speak for themselves. The 24/7 technical support is staffed by gamers who know their stuff, and the website is beyond compare. There's even a 14-day, no-quibble returns policy. Small touches like a personalised folder with the specifications of your machine, complete with individualised benchmark results, mean it's almost impossible to find fault.

Quality is remembered long after price is forgotten, and that seems to be the secret of Alienware's success.



PCZONE VERDICT

- ✔ Looks, power, kudos, warranty, value
- ✔ Unbelievable quality and support package
- ✘ Athlon 64 FX-based system is faster

92

You want it

HYBRID NRAGE EXTREME

■ £2,399 | Manufacturer: Quantum | Phone: 0870 4000 111 | www.directfrom.com

A big hitting PC from a big hitting manufacturer

PC

QUANTUM is the big-name manufacturer you've never heard of – a UK company that builds thousands of PCs each and every week for the likes of Walmart and Office World. Additionally, its directfrom.com Web front sells branded systems, components and peripherals direct to the public. The company's Hybrid range caters for casual to hardcore gamers, and you can configure your kit with either a P4 or Athlon 64 CPU, with prices starting from £1,450 inclusive.

The nRage system here features a similar specification to the Area-51 Extreme, and includes 1GB RAM, an Extreme Edition processor, plus Gainward 5950 graphics card. Unlike the Alienware, the Quantum machine also boasts a 17-inch Hansol flat screen, plus Creative Inspire 6.1 6700 speakers – the two extras would cost £400 if purchased separately. So although the Quantum is priced higher than the Area-51, it's arguably in front on value.

If you were to hide the Alienware and Quantum cases, you'd be hard pushed to spot the difference between the two machines. They have identical processors (Quantum uses an Epox motherboard, Alienware uses Intel), share NVIDIA GPUs, and are both convincingly rapid in every benchmark.

Indeed, if the bling-bling factor is a low priority, Quantum is the obvious choice – it's not quite as tidy inside the case, you have to contend with XP Home rather than XP Pro, and the overall presentation isn't quite up to the standard set by the Area-51. However, for many people this won't matter.

The only obvious complaint about the nRage is the nightclub lighting. The atomic green exhaust fan at the rear strobes on and off, and the clash of colours visible through the case window may deter some buyers who sleep in the same room as their PC.

Then again, this is an out-and-out gaming machine. If you want bland style and unchallenging ergonomics, you'd be better off flicking through an IBM catalogue.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✔ Presence, power, everything included
- ✔ Some record-breaking benchmarks
- ✘ Can't match Alienware kudos
- ✘ Case illumination is an acquired taste

85

Snappy and snazzy

FX5950U-VTD256 256MB

■ £375 | Manufacturer: MSI | Phone: 0208 8136 688 | www.msicomputer.co.uk

GRAPHICS CARD

The 5900 Ultra was king of our speed trials. Is this thing faster?

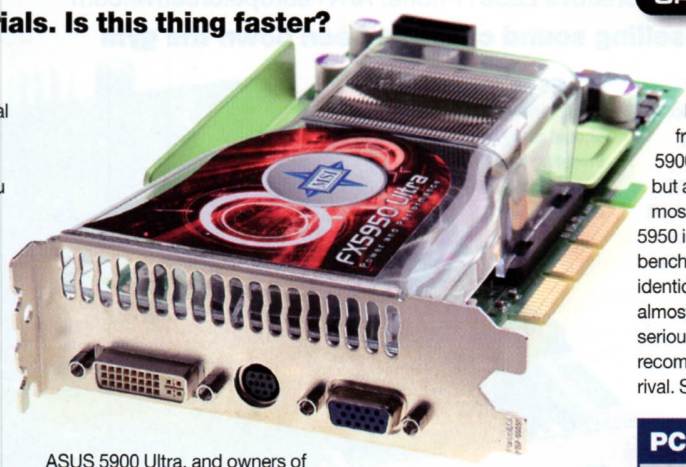
YOU KNOW, I'm pretty sure NVIDIA has released enough video cards this year to warrant a Pirelli-style calendar of them all. The 5800 Ultra would be January's buxom lass who, despite the lipstick and heels, has been left on the shelf to slowly gather dust. And the latest 5950 Ultra would suit December, rounding off the year with a crown of snow, some golden baubles and a dash of glitter round her DVI port.

Yes, this thing's an eye-popper all right, but for all the wrong reasons. It's wider and uglier than a Lincoln Continental and almost twice as heavy. It's also hungry on power, the box stating in bold red print that you need a minimum 350W PSU.

The accompanying bundle is pretty much identical to that of other top-spec MSI cards, such as the X5900SP-VTD256 from last month's round-up, and contains a spray of games plus tools to help you take advantage of the card's video abilities.

Overall though, you should be aware that the 5950 truly is old wine in a new bottle. It features a 475MHz DDR memory and 475MHz core, both figures up 25MHz on the 5900. It also boasts MSI Dynamic Overclocking Technology, where the GPU's motor is throttled up and down depending on the demands made of it, but its effects are never obvious.

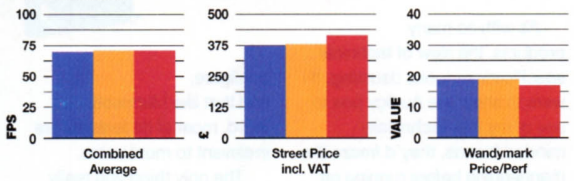
In actual fact, there was a noticeable decrease in grunt when compared to our winning ASUS 5900 Ultra, and owners of similar top-ranking cards would be ill-advised to upgrade. If you're looking into video editing, the Leadtek equivalent is £50 cheaper (an All-In-Wonder Radeon is also well worth considering). If you're longing for a decent frame rate, Gainward's 5900 Ultra is cheaper still, but a used 9700 Pro makes most sense financially. The 5950 is fresh and fast, but its benchmark results – trailing the identically-priced 9800XT in almost every test – mean I have serious misgivings about recommending it over its ATI rival. So I won't.



SPECIFICATIONS

HARDWARE 256MB NVIDIA GeForce FX 5950 Ultra
ANCILLARIES VGA to DVI converter, S-video to S-video, VIVO junction, power splitter
BUNDLE *Morrowind*, *Ghost Recon*, *Duke Nukem: Manhattan Project*, Games Collection (7 Games), RestoreIT! Pro, VirtualDrive Pro, WinDVD 5.1, WinDVD Creator, SuperPack CD, MSI Media Center, Installation CD

BENCHMARKS



■ MSI FX5950U-VTD256 256MB ■ ASUS V9950 ULTRA 256MB ■ ASUS RADEON 9800XT 256MB

The **COMBINED SCORE** is an average of a number of real-world gaming tests and bespoke benchmarking tools. The **WANDYMARK** is the combined average score divided by the price

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✔ Speed, VIVO capabilities, MSI quality
- ✔ Big bundle of top software
- ✘ Slower than reigning speed champs
- ✘ Hogs two slots, ugly

79

Fast, but ultimately disappointing

RADEON 9600XT 128MB

■ £163 | Manufacturer: ASUS | Phone: N/A | www.asus.com

GRAPHICS CARD

00MHz and a free copy of *Half-Life 2* is tempting indeed

GORDON Freeman gives me a resigned look from the literature inside the box, and the orange paint on the card itself reminds me of what we'd all be playing now had things not gone awry for Valve back in September.

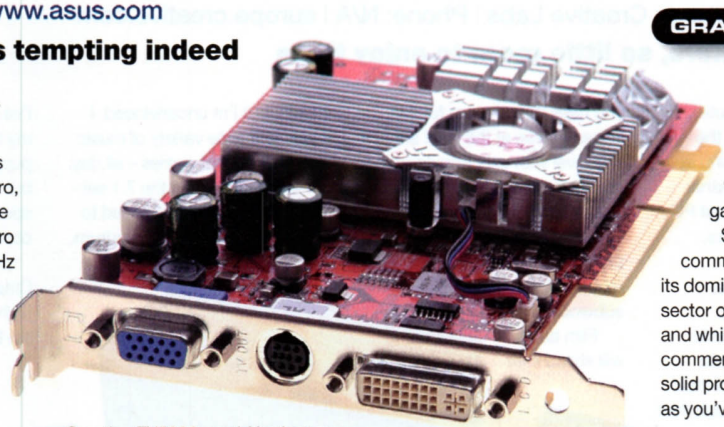
The 9600XT and 9800XT were trumpeted as 'official *Half-Life* hardware', but with the game now rescheduled for launch in the first quarter of 2004, it's unlikely that XT owners will be able to redeem their *Half-Life 2* coupons before their cards are superseded by new and better technology. Shame.

All that aside, the 9600XT remains a fine card for the money. In terms of power, it's ahead of the existing 9600 Pro, but a still a way back from the old 9700 Pro and the 9800 Pro (even if it does have a 500MHz core clock – the fastest of any card I've tested).

Typically for ASUS, the card's presentation is near faultless, with a good range of bundled goodies, plus software tricks including GameFace, which superimposes a video feed on top of any game, and Smart Doctor II, which features dynamic overclocking and automated fan adjustments.

The card's average score of 46fps demonstrates that, despite all the pomp, there's no getting away from its mid-range-ness. It's a quick card all right, but not one that elicits gasps from passers-by. And while it's more rapid than the 9600 Pro, it's more expensive – a used Connect3D 9700 Pro or a new Creative FX5900 would be better value and considerably faster. True, the Connect3D and Creative packages are a little anaemic, but the 9700 and 5900 are from the higher echelons – many of their benchmarks are one-and-a-half times more impressive than those from this XT, which is a considerable gain in anyone's books.

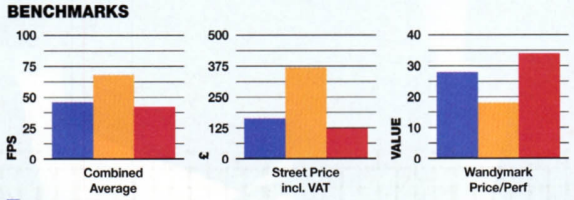
So while ATI is to be commended for continuing its domination of the mid-range sector of graphics cards, and while ASUS must be commended for yet another solid product, it's not as special as you've been lead to believe.



SPECIFICATIONS

HARDWARE 128MB ATI Radeon 9600XT
ANCILLARIES VGA to DVI converter, VIVO junction
BUNDLE *Battle Engine Aquila*, *Gunmetal*, Games Power CD (6 Games), PowerDirector Pro ME, ASUS DVD, Ulead Cool 3D SE, Ulead PhotoExpress SE, Medi@Show SE, Installation CD

BENCHMARKS



■ ASUS RADEON 9600XT 128MB
■ SAPPHIRE RADEON 9800 PRO ATLANTIS 256MB
■ GIGABYTE RADEON 9600 PRO 128MB

The **COMBINED SCORE** is an average of a number of real-world gaming tests and bespoke benchmarking tools. The **WANDYMARK** is the combined average score divided by the price

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✔ Quality product, fast mid-ranger
- ✔ Big bundle, overall presentation
- ✘ Latest Catalyst drivers not the best
- ✘ 9600 Pro remains value champ

80

Not the leap in power you're expecting

AUDIGY 2 ZS

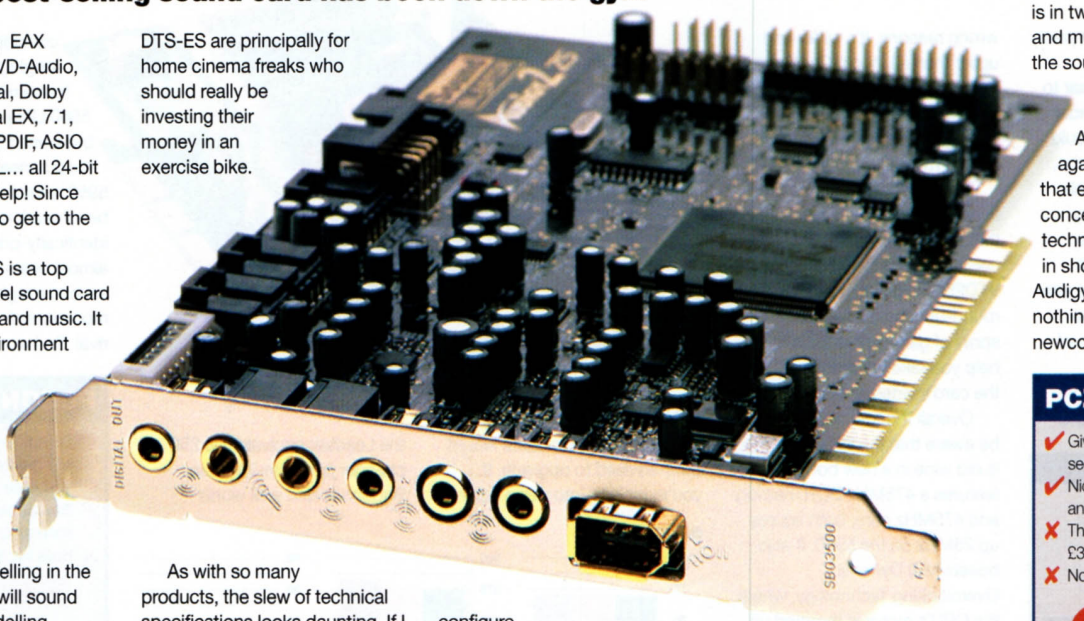
SOUND CARD

■ £90 | Manufacturer: Creative Labs | Phone: N/A | europe.creative.com

Creative's best-selling sound card has been down the gym

THX, EAX, EAX ADVANCED HD, DVD-Audio, DTS-ES, DTS Digital, Dolby Digital, Dolby Digital EX, 7.1, CMSS, FireWire, SPDIF, ASIO 2.0., AC97, OpenAL... all 24-bit with 108db SNR! Help! Since Creative is unable to get to the point, I will.

The Audigy 2 ZS is a top quality eight-channel sound card for games, movies and music. It supports multi-environment sound, or EAX 4.0 ADVANCED HD, meaning that audio effects will 'morph' depending on the acoustics of their surroundings – yodelling in the cockpit of an F-16 will sound very different to yodelling halfway up Mont Blanc, for example. You also get a better signal-to-noise ratio, meaning that relative to background noise the sound is clearer than ever before. Dolby Digital EX and DTS-ES are principally for home cinema freaks who should really be investing their money in an exercise bike.



As with so many products, the slew of technical specifications looks daunting. If I were to show the Audigy box to any of my less technically minded friends, they'd freeze like mannequins before running off. Yet you and I both know that the big SB is easy to install and configure, and that like Microsoft Word, most of its features are irrelevant to most users.

The only thing you really need to know is that it sounds superb in most situations. Although the 7.1 configuration is an extravagance, that's not a fair criticism – it works admirably with 5.1 speakers, and if you're into your DVDs you might feel that all those channels give you the edge you've been looking for. Additionally, the ZS will 'upmix' a stereo signal to all your speakers and will make you feel like you're sitting in an auditorium.

The one area it does fall flat is in two-speaker headphones and music reproduction, where the sound is strangely less involving than the quality to be found in the M-Audio Revolution. Then again, if you're after a card that embraces every conceivable gaming technology and works wonders in shooters, you've got it. Audigy 2 owners will gain nothing of real value, but newcomers are going to love it.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✔ Gives a gaming experience second to none
- ✔ Nice bundle of decent games and utilities
- ✘ The plain vanilla Audigy 2 is £35 cheaper
- ✘ No DVD player software

87

Another fine Blaster

INSPIRE T7700

SPEAKERS

■ £119 | Manufacturer: Creative Labs | Phone: N/A | europe.creative.com

So many speakers, so little room to enjoy them

MODERN computing means many things, but the dominant theme is of being at peace with technology rather than hemmed in by it. Most PCs live in argy-bargy of books, magazines, cups of tea, ashtrays, biscuits, cables, crumbs, bowls of cereal, telephones... elbow room is vital. No one likes having to crank up the sensitivity of their mouse so that, even though their hand is trapped between a 1998 copy of *Maxim* and yesterday's beans on toast, they remain able to move the cursor with barely perceptible twitches of the wrist.

And, just as I was relaxing into the space afforded by the replacement of my old 22-inch CRT with a new 17-inch LCD, along comes Creative with its 7.1 Audigy 2 ZS and 7.1 speakers, the Inspire T7700s. Not only will you have to find room for five cubes – three at the front and two level with your shoulders – you'll also have to tidy up the desk behind for the rear speakers. And then there's the rabbit hutch subwoofer.

Film buffs will shake their heads, but I'm unconvinced. I listen to a wide variety of music and play a lot of games – all day, every day – and the 7.1 set-up hasn't managed to bang my eardrum. I've stubbed toes on the sub and my nephew loves tugging on the puppeteer's nightmare of cables, but I'm buggered if the two extra speakers have made any obvious difference.

Now don't get me wrong. The Creative units are of a typically high quality construction. There are 8W available to the edge speakers, with 20W for the centre and 24W for the bass. The front trio are all two-way and deliver a beautifully crisp sound whether listening to oldies or Oakenfold; games like *UT2K3* and *Desert Combat* sound tremendous.

But my preferred home speakers, Creative's 5.1 Inspire P580s, do the job just as well, and in less space. Unless you're seriously into DVDs and are determined to fill every hole on the back of an Audigy 2 ZS, or have a desk the size of Eisenhower's flight deck, I'd suggest you do the same and stick with what you've got.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✔ Great sound, clean bass, not bad pricing
- ✔ Remote control with power on/off
- ✘ Sprawling set-up with cable linguini
- ✘ No digital input

79

Top quality, space hungry

KOMPLETT.co.uk
-SAVE TIME AND MONEY

Samsung Syncmaster 193T 19" LCD

From the corporate office to the home office, Samsung LCD Monitor delivers high contrast, crisp text, and lightning fast response time - all in an ultra-slim, lightweight design.

- *Dot Pitch: 0.29 mm*
- *Max Resolution: 1280 x 1024 @ 75 Hz*
- *Dual, TCO-99*

SAMSUNG

£469

SKU/Itemnumber: 121285

Second to none!

£799

EPSON SKU/Itemnumber: 118764

Epson Projector EMP-S1

- *1200 Ansi Lumen/SVGA*
- *400:1 image contrast*
- *Max resolution: 800 x 600*

£259

SAMSUNG SKU/Itemnumber: 120508

Samsung Syncmaster 172V 17" LCD

- *1280x1024 @ 75 Hz*
- *450:1 Contrast*
- *TCO-99*

£79

CHIEFTEC SKU/Itemnumber: 119921

Chieftec Matrix Big Tower

- *Case w/360W MA-01SL-D*
- *To P4 / AMD (UK)*
- *Color: "golden silver"*

£119

LG SKU/Itemnumber: 118986

LG GSA-4040BDVD-recorder

- *Read Speed: 32x(CD)/12x(DVD)*
- *Write Speed: 24x(CD)/3x(DVD-RAM)/ 4x(DVD-R)/4x(DVD+R)*
- *CD / DVD Rewrite Speed: 16x(CD)/2x(DVD)*

£349

POWERCOLOR SKU/Itemnumber: 121500

PowerColor Radeon 9800XT

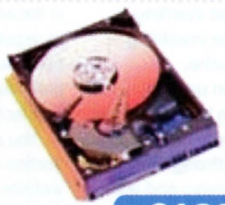
- *256 MB DDR memory*
- *AGP, ATI 9800XT*
- *DVI-I, TV-Out, Retail -version*

£135

POWERCOLOR SKU/Itemnumber: 121501

PowerColor Radeon 9600XT Bravo

- *128 MB memory*
- *AGP, ATI 9600PRO*
- *DVI-I, TV-Out, Retail version*



£189

Western Digital SKU/Itemnumber: 116875

Western Digital Caviar 250 GB

- *Special Edition*
- *Serielt-ATA 7200k*
- *8MB cache WD2500JD*

£145

Jens of Sweden SKU/Itemnumber: 119520

JOS MP3-player MP110

- *MP3, dictaphone, FM-radio*
- *256 MB memory*
- *SRS-WOW effect*

We update the prices continuously on our sites, so for fully updated price specifications, wide and varied assortment and real-time stock levels please check our webshops:

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Prices and specifications are set as estimates at 12:00 GMT 22nd October 2003 and will vary.

DEAR WANDY

Crackling noises from your speakers? Constant reboots? Always freezing in the middle of games? It's time to call out the fifth emergency service!

■ **NOT THE AA:** Phil Wand

LET IT ALL OUT

Share your techie or gaming-related problems with us and in turn, we may well share them with thousands of readers via these very pages in a big communal love-in-type thing.
Write to Dear Wandy, *PC ZONE*, Dennis Publishing, 9 Dallington Street, London EC1V 0BQ.
Email Address your letters to us at **wandy@dearwandy.com** with the subject heading 'Dear Wandy'. Please note: while we can assure you that we read absolutely every techie query sent to us, we are unable to offer personal replies. Sorry.

SNAP, CRACKLE, POP

Q When I play a game on my PC, the sound crackles and distorts – it's most obvious during speech. It's ruining my gaming experience and has only happened since I upgraded my motherboard. The games I'm playing that it affects so far have been *Command & Conquer: Generals* and *Vietcong*.

I have an MSI K7N2 Delta L motherboard, and have disabled the onboard sound and am using my old Sound Blaster Live! Value card instead. I have 512MB memory and a GeForce FX 5600. I've tried emailing MSI, but so far have only received an automated reply. I've also tried emailing EA Games, but again only ever saw an automated reply and a link to its complicated website. I have DirectX 9.0a and all the latest drivers. Please help!

Dean Heit

A **A little research online reveals that Sound Blaster Live! Value cards have a somewhat startling reputation for the crackling noises you describe, particularly when used in conjunction with VIA chipsets and GeForce hardware. As you might expect, although the problem is pervasive and well documented, solutions are thin on the ground.**

That said, I'd first suggest changing PCI slots. First, you need to unplug the card and push it back somewhere else on the board. If this fails, try increasing the IRQ priority in the BIOS – right-click on My Computer, choose the Hardware tab, click Device Manager and select the View Resources menu and By Connection to see which has been assigned to your card.

However, ditching the buzzing Blaster and reverting to onboard sound is by far and away your best bet. The K7N2 features fairly impressive six-channel audio and should immediately cure the problem you describe – to be honest, I'm not quite sure why you insist on using the old Creative card. If the problem persists with onboard audio, it's almost certainly going to be a stuffed driver install or dodgy shielding on one or more of the audio cables. Try wiggling them or unplugging and reseating them when the crackle kicks up.

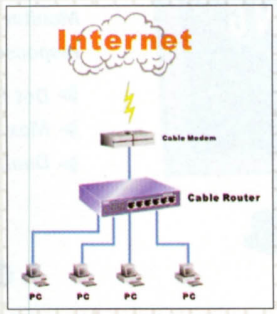
RETURN OF THE MAC

Q I read the query posed by Sam Foley in issue 134 and your subsequent reply with interest, as I had similar problems when I first had Telewest's blueyonder installed. The one thing you didn't mention in the article was that you need to register the MAC address of every network card or other peripheral sharing the internet connection, such as a router.

You do this via the Selfcare section on the blueyonder website, and you can enter up to five MAC addresses. Failure to do this means you won't be able to connect to the internet from any computer on the network – even the one it was installed on. As soon as you disconnect the rest of the network from the host computer, you can access the internet again.

I've had ICS working perfectly on a mix of computers running a variety of systems, including Windows 98, Me and of late, XP. Recently, I've added an SMC router/switch for simplicity and a hardware firewall, ensuring I registered their new MAC addresses before making any changes, and then waiting a couple of hours before connecting everything up. I have four items permanently connected and have had six for a period.

Steve Tyler



Connecting multiple PCs to your cable modem via a router is the easiest and most robust solution.

A **I've received a couple of letters regarding cable connections and multiple PCs, all of which exhibit varying degrees of inaccuracy. Added to which, Internet Connection Sharing (ICS) remains a contentious issue, as it simply won't behave for many people, myself included. True, the version included with Windows XP does the job much better than any predecessor, but you still need to leave the ICS machine on 24/7, and with all the power-saving features turned off. If this works for you (and you're not sleeping in the same room as your PC), then fine, but it remains the clumsy way out.**

As Steve has discovered, the best and easiest way to get your LAN talking down a cable connection involves buying a router. A four-port switching unit can be yours for around the £60 mark from any network-savvy store.

The trick is to connect the router to the existing cable modem, connect your PCs to the router, register the router's MAC address with blueyonder at selfcare.blueyonder.co.uk (a MAC address is a 12-digit code that uniquely identifies any network capable device), power-cycle everything and sim sala bim, job done. If you're using a router, you only need register its MAC address at the selfcare site rather than everything 'behind' it; if you're using ICS, you only need register the PC which acquires the DCHP lease from the blueyonder network.

EPOXY RESET

Q I have an Athlon XP 1700 on an Epox 8KHA+ motherboard, 512MB RAM and a Radeon 9700 Pro with Enermax EP365-VE PSU and Windows 2000. A while back, my PC started rebooting about five minutes into any game – *Morrowind*, *Medal of Honor*, the *Chrome* demo, you name it. This went on for a couple of days, until the whole thing gave up the ghost completely.

I managed a virus check and a defrag before this point, and no problems were highlighted. The machine would not boot up at all and kept emitting an irritating, regular beeping noise. I stripped the whole thing down to basics, switching drives and cables, then built it up again. I found that nothing made any difference, until I unplugged, then re-attached, the monitor from the graphics card. I finally got the computer to boot up.

I was told this could have been an earthing issue, but I began to experience the rebooting-during-games problem again after I attached a couple of case fans that I had forgotten to reconnect after the initial rebuild. I disconnected them again and the system booted up fine, although the initial problem has returned. The system reboots, often half-an-hour into a gaming session and sometimes the PC fails to start up fully, rebooting shortly after the desktop appears.

I'm obviously worried, but can't seem to identify the cause of all this. Is it the graphics card, or is there an issue with the PSU? I've had no problems with

"No problems were obvious but the machine wouldn't boot up and kept emitting an irritating beeping noise"

"Sadly, the only foolproof way of cleaning up the mess is to backup all your data, format and then start all over again"

Games like *Battlefield 1942* don't benefit from screen-freeze.

this system before and would love to be able to solve this one.

Steve Bond

A simple flash of your BIOS may be just the remedy. Early versions of the Epox 8KHA+ motherboard have a known stability issue, the symptoms of which are exactly as you describe: random rebooting and a failure to start up afterwards. The original way of curing this problem was to replace the BIOS chips – there's a strong possibility that your chip is either faulty or mismatched – but flashing it to the latest version from the EPoX website may do the trick. Visit www.epox.org for more info; the consensus is that the company is quite hot on support issues and it should be willing to help you out.

If the machine continues to exhibit problems after your upgrade and you're absolutely, positively sure that the system is virus-free, I'd be inclined to point the finger at your memory or even at the Radeon. Before replacing anything, I'd bung in a low-fi videocard and then run a video benchmark – *3DMark03* for example – to ascertain whether the system still reboots under load. Because it's not beyond the realms of possibility that the ATI card is the root of all this, and you may even discover that the 3.8 Catalyst drivers do something to ease your pain.

AS YOU WERE

I'm looking to upgrade. I currently have an ASUS A7N266C motherboard with an Athlon XP2400+ (clocked to run at 2.2GHz), 512DDR PC2100 RAM and a GeForce4 Ti4600. If I go for a Radeon 9600 Pro graphics (128MB or 256MB?), will I need to upgrade the motherboard to see any improvement over my old card? If I do upgrade the motherboard to 8xAGP, which processor do you recommend? I'm looking at either a Pentium 4 2.4GHz or an Athlon XP2700+ Barton. Also, will I get any improvement in performance if I up the RAM to 1GB? I'm looking at the best value-for-money system. Any advice you can give would be gratefully received.

Andrew P

A In all honesty, you're not going to get any conspicuous speed boost from switching to the 9600 Pro. It's a better card, and of course is DirectX 9-compliant (whoopee do), but because you said that you're after 'best value', I'd dissuade you from making the change (to the 128MB version, if push came to shove). Stick with the Ti4600: it's a great card and costs you nothing to keep running. I also see no reason to upgrade your motherboard. 8xAGP is not going to make any impact on your gaming, even if you were to pair it with the more recent Radeon.

To be frank, it sounds like you have the itch to upgrade, but as yet lack the funds to make a decent job of it. Making small changes to PCs is a wholly unsatisfactory business, and you end up convincing yourself that your costly, modern-standards hardware is significantly faster than the stuff you just binned, even if it plainly isn't. If I were you, and I'm sure this will be my epitaph, hold onto your cash until after Christmas and then make the biggest leap you can to the very best kit you can afford.

THE BIG FREEZE

I've suddenly started experiencing a problem where all of my games regularly freeze for anywhere up to 30 seconds, before continuing from where they left off. Almost all the games I play are high-tempo, and this makes them virtually unplayable due to the pauses getting longer and more frequent the more I play.

I'm currently running an ASUS A7V333 with an Athlon XP 2100+ processor, with 256MB DDR RAM and a GeForce4 Ti4200. I've got the latest video drivers and DirectX installed, and I've also tried re-installing the games; all to no avail. Any light you could shed on this problem would be greatly appreciated.

Mike McClue

A As with many problems of this nature, the culprit could be any one of about a dozen things. However, freezing or locking problems can normally be traced to duff memory sticks, a failing power supply, a driver issue or BIOS problem. So, the first thing to do is test your memory. The quickest way to do this is to download the version 3.0 release of *Memtest86* from www.memtest86.com. In addition to any software tests, swap out the current RAM with equivalent sticks from a friend's machine to see if this helps oil the gears.

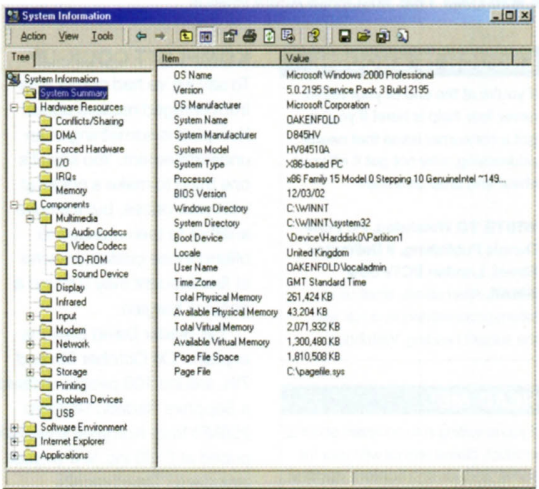
A power supply is less easy to diagnose, but if the problem is persistent and you've tested your RAM, a new PSU is worth a shot. A driver issue is similarly tricky to spot, but it could be you've updated a driver without first removing the old one – the series 50 Detonators, for example, will land you in a mire if you don't un-install the series 40s first. Sadly, the only foolproof way of cleaning up the mess is to backup all your data, format and start again.

Lastly, there have been some reports of A7V333 users having trouble with early BIOS revisions, and you should therefore visit the ASUS site to make sure you're completely up-to-date: www.asus.com

WANDY'S TOP TIPS

I'd been chatting to the usual crowd in *PC ZONE'S* IRC channel (#pcz on QuakeNet) and happened to mention Microsoft System Information. The resulting 'coo' and 'cor' noises prompted me to reproduce it here for the benefit of anyone who wasn't in the room at the time.

To run the tool, click the Start button, choose Run, then type 'msinfo32' and press Enter. It's a small and inoffensive utility that dispenses key information about your system, ranging from hardware details to exhaustive information on shared IRQs, conflicts and even which audio and video codecs you've installed.



Microsoft System Information, included with your copy of Windows. Right click on the top node, save your specs as a text file, ZIP it up (it's about 350KB) and attach it to any technical support mail. Hey presto!

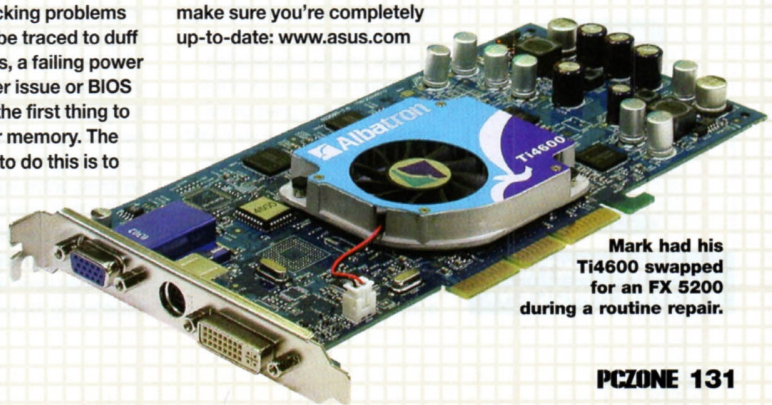
DOWNGRADE

I recently sent my PC off for repair as it was overheating. Before they traced the problem to the processor, they replaced the graphics card thinking it was the cause. When my PC went to the repair shop, it had a GeForce4 Ti4600 in it, but when it came back it had a GeForce FX 5200 instead. Have I been fortunate in receiving a free upgrade or have I been short-changed with whatever graphics card they had in stock at the time?

Mark Austen

A Yikes. You've been had. The FX 5200 is a £60 budget model, a Ti4600 is significantly faster and can fetch up to twice that amount on eBay. Did I mention that my brother's a lawyer? PZ

Visit Wandy on the web at www.dearwandy.com



Mark had his Ti4600 swapped for an FX 5200 during a routine repair.

WATCHDOG

It never ends, does it? The horror stories, the let-downs, the trials and tribulations – welcome to the dark side of PC gaming...

■ **WRITING THE WRONGS** Adam Phillips

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!

If you're at the end of your tether, never fear, help is here! If you've got a consumer issue that needs addressing, why not get it off your chest and drop us a line?

WRITE TO Watchdog, *PC Zone*, Dennis Publishing, 9 Dallington Street, London EC1V 0BQ
EMAIL Alternatively, email us at letters.pczone@dennis.co.uk with the subject heading 'Watchdog'

READ ME!

If you're writing in to complain about a product, please arm us with your full name, address and **contact number**. With PCs, make sure you also include all **purchasing details** such as reference and invoice numbers.

THE ACCUSED

KOMPLETT.co.uk – SAVE TIME AND MONEY
blueyonder
dabs.com
ebuyer
SAMSUNG

GUILTY UNTIL PROVEN INNOCENT

KOMPLETT COCK-UP

To say we've had complaints from enraged readers about Komplett is something of an understatement. You see, it's one thing to make a cock-up with your prices, but it's quite another to then manage to offend those customers who at first thought they'd found a genuine bargain.

Let reader David Stevens explain: "On October 6th and 7th, around 100 people ordered a Sapphire Radeon 9800pro 256MB from Komplett's website, priced at £130 inc. VAT (myself included)," David recalls. "Obviously, this price is extremely low, but with Komplett being famous for occasionally offering massively reduced hardware (like their £9 GF4 MX440), many people ordered the card. Everyone who did received electronic confirmation emails, complete with a .pdf document listing and, among other things, a ship date, VAT number and a payment term. The card was also advertised at this price on page 144 of *PC ZONE*, issue 135."

The trouble is that David and the other customers then received an email on October 9th from Komplett which informed them that the graphics card's advertised price was wrong and should have been around £400, not £130. Thus the company would not be honouring any orders placed for the card at the original advertised price.

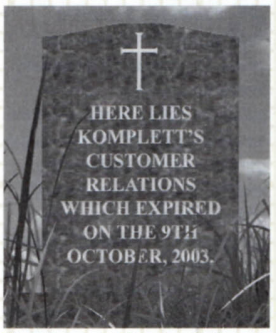
If that wasn't bad enough, Komplett then managed to offend its customers in a staggering display of customer relations ineptitude – here's an excerpt from its email: "We are EXTREMELY proud of the genuine people who emailed and called informing us of the mistake and who gave us the invaluable advice that we might want to rethink the price. Our hats go off to you people, you know who you are! Unfortunately, we also have those in society who like to take advantage of others' mistakes or misfortunes."

The likes of David Stevens were mortified at being branded with such a brush: "Apart from being very unprofessional, this was downright rude and irritated those of us who'd bought the card thinking it was a genuine offer," he explains. And we can't blame him.

Watchdog has sifted through the evidence compiled by various readers and it does look like they've got a fair complaint to take to Trading Standards. But first, we wanted to get Komplett's angle on the fiasco.

We emailed its Services department but have heard nothing back from the company – we're hoping after reading the above, Komplett might get back to us (and its upset customers) with an explanation in time for the next issue of *PC ZONE*...

"This is some of the worst service I've ever encountered and something should be done"



May they rest in peace. Amen.

DON'T MOVE!

They say that it's better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all. Or something like that. Whatever the case, we're sure that reader Warren Harper would say that's a load of old arse. See, he's signed up with Telewest's blueyonder broadband service and had been enjoying the distinct thrill of shooting the crap out of terrorists online in *Counter-Strike*.

But then Warren made the classic mistake of moving 100-metres up the road: schoolboy error. After transferring the broadband service to his new home, it all went rather Pete Tong.

"The ping rate now jumps from 40 to 500 every ten seconds or so, which is painfully annoying, as you can imagine," explains Warren.

He had hoped the problem was a mere glitch, but a week later and it was still running very slooooow. So he got on the blower to Telewest and the following week, an engineer popped up, poked around and stated Telewest didn't support gaming – despite Warren's protestations that the problem was to do with the connection and not due to ropey software.

Never mind – Warren phones up Telewest again and the company agree to send out another engineer: "The engineer comes four days later and finally agrees it's not a problem with my set-up but the area network itself, so he leaves assuring me that things will get sorted," says Warren.

Er, well not quite. Two weeks later and Warren's still got no proper service, so another engineer is sent out. This time, the engineer figures out that it's a problem with the universal broadband router in Warren's area and it will be sorted.

Three weeks (and sod all change) later and Warren's given up – and has contacted us: "Three months later and I'm still unable to play games online but Telewest is still charging me £25 a month when I might as well have had dial-up."

So Telewest, what's going on? "Although several technicians investigated the slow ping rates Warren was experiencing, it clearly took time to resolve the issue and we haven't lived up to our usual high standards of service," explains a company spokesperson.

"A technical support colleague has been in touch with Warren today and it appears that ongoing network improvements in the customer's area have recently restored his ping rates to the kind of speeds that gamers with a blueyonder broadband connection can normally expect," he concluded.

Warren, Telewest should have credited your account with a month's free service by way of apology. Watchdog reckons it should be three months, but you can't always get what you want, can you?

E-DIRER?

It's a horrible situation to find yourself in when it's your word against a company's. Take Hussain Shah who bought a processor from EBuyer – and made a mistake that would cost him dear.

"I didn't inspect the goods as I wasn't available at the time of delivery and, in my excitement, I just installed the processor," Hussain explains. "I then got a bios warning indicating the chip was either damaged, overheating or seated incorrectly. This prompted an inspection and I found that one corner of the core was chipped very slightly."

But Hussain was adamant that he'd not caused the damage. So he sent the goods back, but EBuyer was having none of it: "Surprise, surprise, it says it's my fault – damaged on installation," fumes Hussain. "To add insult to injury, the company also sent back the processor and overcharged me for the courier service, despite specific instruction not to do so, given three days prior to dispatch."

He's tried reasoning, but EBuyer is having none of it: "I'm really disappointed in the way the company has dealt with me – I feel I'm being penalised for my honesty."

Well, EBuyer is sticking to its guns, we're afraid: "When our qualified technician inspected

SAINTS NOT SINNERS

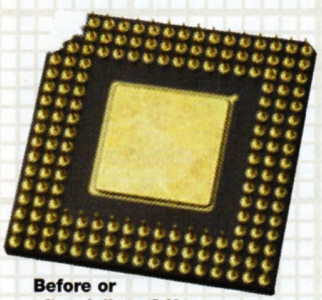
WHILE IT MAY SEEM LIKE WE LOVE PUNTER PROBLEMS, WATCHDOG DOES LIKE TO HEAR GOOD NEWS AS WELL. NO, WE REALLY DO...

Samsung could learn a thing or two from Relisys when it comes to customer service. Take Richard Davies who was bought a new PC with a 17-inch Relisys monitor for Christmas. "The monitor worked fine until yesterday, when it made a popping noise and went off," explains Richard. "I checked the back and noticed that there were big black burn marks all over the vents. My dad then phoned Relisys immediately, who took the model number and said it would deliver a new one to my house the next day."

Well, much to Richard's delight, the replacement did indeed arrive first thing the following day: "I was so impressed with its customer service and would recommend Relisys to anyone," reckons Richard. And we'd heartily agree. You reading this, Samsung?

Hussain's processor, it was noted that physical damage had occurred to the CPU core," says a spokesperson. "This physical damage is consistent with the incorrect fitting of the heat sink and fan assembly, and as such is not covered by EBuyer's warranty or the manufacturer warranty."

Ouch. While Watchdog always holds out for gestures of goodwill, EBuyer clearly doesn't. In the meantime, it might well be a bad case of stating the bleedin' obvious, but always check any product you order before installing it.

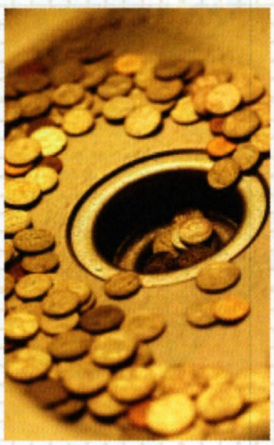


Before or after delivery? Hmm...

MISSING IN ACTION

When is a 24-hour delivery not a 24-hour delivery? When you shop at Dabs.com, according to reader Lance Baird: "Having recently ordered a new graphics card and USB 2 card from Dabs, I'm still waiting for my parcel – which the Royal Mail says has gone missing," explains Lance. "It's now been 19 days or 456 hours-plus for a 24-hour delivery and I still haven't received my order or any reasonable reply by email explaining why I haven't received either a replacement delivery or a refund."

Well, according to Dabs, once you reported the goods hadn't been delivered, the company launched an investigation. "Following this investigation by the carrier (necessary as part of our fraud-control procedures), the goods were declared untraceable and a credit was raised."



Reader Lance Baird wondered where his money had gone.

Dabs says an email was sent to confirm the credit eight days later, but it does apologise for any inconvenience caused.

SAMSUNG SLIP UP

Yep, it's bad enough when a piece of equipment you've splashed out on doesn't work, but it's just rubbing salt into the wounds when the manufacturer drags its heels doing anything about it. Reader Chris Harding bought a Samsung monitor this summer, but it went bang and died on him a month later.

Our Chris then phoned the company to sort out a replacement: "Samsung told me that I'd be getting a refurbished monitor to replace the broken one, and I was told to expect a phone call in a few hours," says Chris. "Now first, I don't think it's right I should have to settle for a second-hand monitor when mine was only a month old. And second, I never received the promised phone call anyway."

He's tried in vain to get hold of a replacement monitor from Samsung, but it's now been over three weeks and he's still had no joy (or new monitor) from the company: "This is some of the worst service I've ever encountered and something should be done about it," reckons Chris.

Well, we did send your complaint to the company, but ended up fielding several calls from PR people there who kept asking for your contact and address info – which had already been supplied in our initial email to the company...

At the time of going to press, we still haven't heard anything concrete back from Samsung, despite assurances from it that we would.

Anyway, we're sure by the time you read this, you'll have a new monitor, Chris – if not, do let us know. In the meantime, we'd recommend Samsung read this month's Saints Not Sinners entry, above.

NO SURPRISE THEN...

Watchdog should be shocked. But depressingly (and rather tellingly), we're not – Web application testing firm SciVisum has carried out a survey that shows many Brit companies are letting punters down with their web services.

According to SciVisum, many UK companies are running their websites blind, with 81% of them relying on customer complaints to highlight any problems with their online services. Also, some 34% of companies never bother monitoring their web performance at all. PM

The future of British business online is in safe hands...

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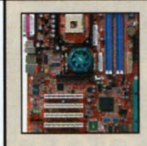
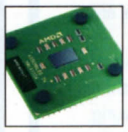
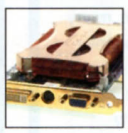
BUYER'S GUIDE

Fancy a new graphics card or joystick? If you've got the cash, we've got the knowledge...

Want to know more about our in-depth, authoritative Buyer's Guide? You've come to the right place. Editor's Choice is the class champ, the product that will satisfy everyone, no matter what you play. Recommended products wear a silver medal: not quite as triumphant as the outright winner, but worthy and cost-effective nonetheless. Finally, the Also Consider product is one we believe you should look at before settling for one of the other two – it may just tickle your dipple.

If you feel we've got something wrong, or just want to add your tuppence ha'penny, send an email to: letters@pczone.co.uk. If we act on any of your mind-blowing suggestions, we'll be certain to shower you with fabulous gifts. Promise.

	EDITOR'S CHOICE	RECOMMENDED	ALSO CONSIDER
MOTHERBOARD	 **IS7-E (INTEL)** **STREET PRICE** £78 **MANUFACTURER** ABIT Computer **TELEPHONE** N/A **WEBSITE** www.abit.com.tw Huge performance coupled with a huge sigh of relief from your wallet. Although the IS7 uses Intel's Springdale chipset, essentially a restricted version of its Canterwood sibling, Abit's motherboard supports P4 800/533/400MHz CPUs with Hyper-Threading, and up to 4GB of Dual DDR. It also features onboard LAN, six-channel audio, and IEEE 1394 FireWire. Proof you don't need to spend over a ton for a top-rank motherboard.	 **K7N2 DELTA ILSR (ATHLON)** WAS £90 NOW £86 **STREET PRICE** £86.50 **MANUFACTURER** MSI **TELEPHONE** 020 8813 6688 **WEBSITE** www.msi.com.tw With the nForce2 chipset and the FSB wound up to 400MHz, the K7N2 Delta provides AMD die-hards with extra shove from a faster system bus and up to 3GB of Dual DDR memory. Although Barton-cored Athlons aren't a patch on their Hyper-Threaded opposite numbers, boards like the K7N2 Delta close the gap. Other features include dual IEEE 1394 FireWire and automated BIOS updates.	 **875PNEO-FIS2R (INTEL)** **STREET PRICE** £150 **MANUFACTURER** MSI **TELEPHONE** 020 8813 6688 **WEBSITE** www.msi.com.tw A high-end P4 Canterwood board, the Neo features some truly remarkable features, including dynamic overclocking – the hardware jumps on the throttle the moment you open applications – and automated BIOS updates using MSI's own Live Update software. Other features include IEEE 1394 FireWire, six-channel audio, onboard LAN and support for Dual DDR. Build quality and overall packaging are excellent.
PROCESSOR	 **P4 3.0GHZ** WAS £340 NOW £296 **STREET PRICE** £296 **MANUFACTURER** Intel **TELEPHONE** 01793 403000 **WEBSITE** www.intel.com For an additional £160, you could order the three-litre chip's big brother, the 3.2GHz, but we don't think the extra thrust justifies the price hike. With Hyper-Threading enabled, the 3.0GHz Pentium delivers a jaw-pounding power hit from twin processors and an 800MHz front-side bus. With a decent motherboard and some fast memory, products such as this make *Doom 3* and *Half-Life 2* seem all the more plausible.	 **ATHLON XP 3000+ BARTON** WAS £218 NOW £196 **STREET PRICE** £196 **MANUFACTURER** AMD **TELEPHONE** N/A **WEBSITE** www.amd.com Let's not forget who drove Intel into rolling out key features such as Hyper-Threading. AMD's Athlon successfully shocked its rival into releasing technologies that were originally pencilled for the next Pentium. And although any 3.0GHz HT on paper makes the Barton look like a distant runner-up, it remains a great chip at a great price. Paired with a decent video card, it's a high-quality solution.	 **P4 2.4GHZ** **STREET PRICE** £145 **MANUFACTURER** Intel **TELEPHONE** 01793 403 000 **WEBSITE** www.intel.com For little more than £200 you can have our Editor's Choice motherboard and a Hyper-Threading Pentium 4 chip running at 2.4GHz with 800MHz FSB. Drop in our favourite Radeon 9800 Pro video card, and instantly you have a balls-on machine that's ready and willing to tackle the next generation of gaming. If you're building a local games network and want big machines for small money, look no further.
HDD	 **WD1200JB 120GB** WAS £90 NOW £88 **STREET PRICE** £88.50 **MANUFACTURER** Western Digital **TELEPHONE** N/A **WEBSITE** www.westerndigital.com Many of you will view a 120GB HDD as an extravagance, but with games getting longer and broadband getting wider, a hangar-like hard drive gives you plenty of room for mucking about. You'll also bring that never-ending quest for more room to an abrupt end. The price is just right, and the performance second to none. Like the DiamondMax Plus9, the WD1200JB features an 8MB cache and a speed of 7200RPM.	 **DIAMONDMAX PLUS9 80GB** **STREET PRICE** £60 **MANUFACTURER** Maxtor **TELEPHONE** N/A **WEBSITE** www.maxtor.com The mid-sized Maxtor is for everyone: large, fast and not that expensive. Most users will find 80GB more than adequate for work, play and downloading requirements, and those greedy for more gig can jump a size up. The Fast ATA, 7200RPM drive includes Maxtor's Shock Protection System and Quiet Drive Technology, but for the Serial ATA version, expect a £20 premium.	 **RAPTOR 36GB** **STREET PRICE** £106 **MANUFACTURER** Western Digital **TELEPHONE** N/A **WEBSITE** www.westerndigital.com If you don't need a deep hole for your data, or if you intend keeping your dirt on a separate drive, the 10,000RPM Serial ATA Raptor makes the ideal foundation for your primary partition. It's wickedly fast, perhaps the fastest HDD available yet, and although designed for server environments, provides gaming desktops with the kind of warp-nine, low access times that make any application more nimble.
GRAPHICS CARD	 **128MB RADEON 9600 PRO** **STREET PRICE:** £122 **MANUFACTURER:** Gigabyte **TELEPHONE:** 01908 362700 **WEBSITE:** uk.giga-byte.com Although the 9800 Pro wins on power, the 9600 Pro is the value king. For less than half the cost of a big-ass Raddy, the 128MB middleweight delivers an amazing punch that knocks its NVIDIA counterpart for six. Gigabyte's big bundle includes three top games, plus PowerDVD 5 and all the necessary cable whips. Sure, it's not the fastest, but for this money it goes beyond our expectations.	 **256MB V9950 ULTRA** **STREET PRICE:** £380 **MANUFACTURER:** ASUS **TELEPHONE:** 01908 518000 **WEBSITE:** www.asus.com The FX 5900 Ultra finds it feet again with the release of the series 50 Detonator drivers – top-class Radeons will find themselves level pegging with the old GeForce. The one thing preventing this and other über-cards from hogging the Editor's Choice slot is their bad value – you don't get many frames per pound spent. That said, if you're after top resolution and quality gaming, look no further.	 **128MB RADEON 9200** **STREET PRICE:** £78 **MANUFACTURER:** Gigabyte **TELEPHONE:** 01908 362700 **WEBSITE:** uk.giga-byte.com It's one of the cheapest, but it ain't no slowpoke. Quicker and better value than entry-level GeForce cards, the 9200 is an admirable performer at low resolutions, and not too bad higher up. Sure, you're not going to be leaving flames in your tracks, but for budget money you shouldn't expect to. Gigabyte's tempting bundle includes a game, a copy of PowerDVD 5 and cable whips.
SOUND CARD	 **REVOLUTION 7.1** **STREET PRICE** £88 **MANUFACTURER** M-Audio **TELEPHONE** 0871 717 7100 **WEBSITE** www.m-audio.co.uk Although it lacks a few of its rivals' gamer-friendly features, including hardware DirectSound and a joystick/MIDI port, the Revolution more than makes up for any deficit with a truly astonishing quality of sound. Unique technologies enhance your enjoyment of games, music and movies. The software is straight-talking and boasts a familiar look and feel, making the card a delight to work with.	 **AUDIGY 2** **STREET PRICE** £75 **MANUFACTURER** Creative Labs **TELEPHONE** N/A **WEBSITE** uk.europe.creative.com A quantum leap from its predecessor, the Audigy 2 offers a boggling range of pro-gamer and DVD features, including 6.1 surround sound, EAX Advanced HD, Advanced Resolution DVD-Audio and 24-bit/96KHz recording – it was the first card to gain THX certification from LucasFilm. If you appreciate the immersive experience offered by high-fidelity surround sound, the Audigy will give you an experience like no other.	 **AUDIGY 2 PLATINUM EX** **STREET PRICE** £150 **MANUFACTURER** Creative Labs **TELEPHONE** N/A **WEBSITE** uk.europe.creative.com Offering the same core features as its little brother, the Platinum Ex is guaranteed to perform and sound like no other card. The external breakout box is a boon for serious listeners, and includes standard audio connections and volume controls. The big Platinum also offers dual SB1394 FireWire ports and optical links, a stereo RCA input, plus MIDI In and MIDI Out mini-DIN sockets.

MICE

EDITOR'S CHOICE

MX500
STREET PRICE £34
MANUFACTURER Logitech
TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127
WEBSITE www.logitech.com

Although it comes with a tail and doesn't have the same substantive feeling as the battery-reliant MX700, the MX500 remains a solid product and a solid performer in all games. It features Logitech's MX optical engine, mouse wheel (plus two additional buttons either side to aide document navigation), a task-switcher button, and two thumb buttons that speed up web navigation.

RECOMMENDED

OPTICAL MOUSE BLUE
STREET PRICE £20
MANUFACTURER Microsoft
TELEPHONE 0870 601 0100
WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/uk

If you've ever been boggled by the number of buttons on a mouse, and have fond memories of a time when three clickers and a wheel were all you needed, Microsoft's blue rodent is the perfect peripheral. It's nice to look at, nice to hold and, as any veteran FPS gamer will tell you, three buttons is all you need. Plus the latest optical technology means it works anywhere.

ALSO CONSIDER

MX700
STREET PRICE £47
MANUFACTURER ACTURER Logitech
TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127
WEBSITE www.logitech.com

Sporting the MX optical engine that made Logitech famous with gamers, the MX700 is essentially an MX500 with its tail lopped off. A cradle keeps your desk tidy and acts as a recharger for the unfettered rodent – making the mouse more attractive to people who don't do batteries. It's a touch pricey and we remain unconvinced that going cordless is worth the extra stash.

KEYBOARD

EDITOR'S CHOICE

INTERNET NAVIGATOR
STREET PRICE £21
MANUFACTURER Logitech
TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127
WEBSITE www.logitech.com

The Internet Navigator lies absolutely flat on your desk, a trademark Logitech design that makes it look sleeker and 'feel' nicer. There's a scroll wheel along the left edge and a raft of customisable function keys to make trawling the web a cinch – you no longer have to swap back and forth to the mouse, and instead can leave your hands over on the keyboard. Once you browse this way, there's no going back.

RECOMMENDED

OFFICE KEYBOARD
STREET PRICE £28
MANUFACTURER Microsoft
TELEPHONE 0870 601 0100
WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/uk

Forget what you've learned about Microsoft software – their hardware is always of an exceedingly high build quality and, despite problems with early Intellimouse rodents, extremely durable. Shortcut buttons you think you'll never use soon become second nature, especially when reconfigured to suit your way of working, and once you learn the enhanced layout you'll never go back to tapping on anything else.

ALSO CONSIDER

PRO KEYBOARD
STREET PRICE £50
MANUFACTURER Apple
TELEPHONE 0800 039 1010
WEBSITE www.apple.com/uk

If you think we're mad for including an Apple keyboard, think again. Anyone looking for a Rolls-Royce keyboard, and who can live without all the additional buttons, scroll wheels and assorted paraphernalia, need look no further. The Apple Pro plugs straight into your USB port and, with the help of third-party utilities, disguises the fact that it was designed for computer illiterates with fewer than two mouse buttons.

JOYSTICK

EDITOR'S CHOICE

CYBORG EVO
WAS £34 NOW £28
STREET PRICE £28.50
MANUFACTURER Saitek
TELEPHONE 01454 451900
WEBSITE www.saitek.com

A welcome new look for Saitek, and the welcome addition of a four-way adjustable head, larger buttons, plus a meaty damped throttle at the back of the base. As with all Cyborgs, the sculpted hand-rests can be repositioned ambidextrously and will suit all hand sizes. An eight-way hat switch, five thumb buttons with trigger, four base buttons and a shift key to double the possible combinations make this a winner.

RECOMMENDED

CYBORG 3D GOLD
STREET PRICE £24.99
MANUFACTURER Saitek
TELEPHONE 01454 451 900
WEBSITE www.saitek.com

A former Best Buy, the Saitek stick is renowned for the way it can be taken apart and put back together to fit your hand perfectly, and also for its ambidextrous nature – lefties as well as righties can get to grips with it. It features seven fire buttons and, like the Sidewinder, has eight hat buttons, a lever throttle and a twist grip for controlling the rudder. At this price you'd be daft not to.

ALSO CONSIDER

HOTAS COUGAR
STREET PRICE £249
MANUFACTURER Thrustmaster
TELEPHONE 020 8665 1881
WEBSITE www.thrustmaster.co.uk

The John Holmes of joysticks. Based on the flight controls of an F-16, sturdy metal construction makes it feel like no other peripheral. With 28 customisable buttons, 18lbs of resistance built into its springs, programmable hat switches and an adaptive action for the separate throttle arm, it transforms any flight simulation and is the ultimate toy for wannabe pilots. It's ten times the cost of a regular joystick, but is in a class of its own.

SPEAKERS

EDITOR'S CHOICE

INSPIRE 5.1 5300
STREET PRICE £50
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

The Inspire furnishes you with five satellite speakers, a sub and a wired remote control. All are sleek looking, solid feeling and great sounding. The bass is clean, the middle and treble crisp, and although power output doesn't climb into three digits, the amp provides more than enough oomph. Added to which, there's support for enhanced 5.1 surround sound on EAX titles. The only downside is that there's no headphone jack.

RECOMMENDED

Z-640
STREET PRICE £70
MANUFACTURER Logitech
TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127
WEBSITE www.logitech.com

Logitech has patented the pressure-driver design of its subwoofer and we can hear the difference. For the money, the clout is simply amazing – bassheads among you will love it. Higher frequencies don't disappoint either, the 5.1 sounding almost as clean and inviting as the Inspire 5300s. Unlike the Creative set, the Z-640 has a headphone socket, but it's not conveniently sited. Shame.

ALSO CONSIDER

MEGAWORKS THX 5.1 550
STREET PRICE £235
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

Successor to our Best Performance winner, the Megaworks 550 is a pretty stunning 5.1 setup featuring five 70W capsule-shielded satellite speakers, a 150W wood subwoofer, and a wired remote with a separate headphone socket. Built to THX standards the sound quality is superb in both DVDs and games – Creative's BASH system providing 500W of burst power that'll make you leap out of your seat.

SCREENS

EDITOR'S CHOICE

CML174SXW
STREET PRICE £330
MANUFACTURER Hitachi
TELEPHONE 01628 585000
WEBSITE www.hitachidigitalmedia.com

When it comes to flat panel, fast-paced gaming, response times really count. And the CML174SXW has one of the lowest response times in its sector – a mere 16ms. It also delivers top-notch image quality, weighs in at just 5kg, and comes in colours that'll match your kit. If you're looking to make the move from CRT, and action games are a priority for you, the handsome little Hitachi is the obvious choice.

RECOMMENDED

FLATRON L1710B
STREET PRICE £345
MANUFACTURER LG Electronics
TELEPHONE 01753 491500
WEBSITE www.lge.co.uk

This 17-inch panel came within a gnat's guff of knocking our Hitachi favourite from the top spot, but its slightly fatter price tag (from the addition of a USB hub), plus inconspicuous silver and grey trim saw the L1710B lose out. But don't think it's a distant second place – things are as close as a kiss, the LG offering marginally better picture quality and matching the Hitachi for speed. Yet another nail in the CRT coffin.

ALSO CONSIDER

VISIONMASTER PRO 514
STREET PRICE £490
MANUFACTURER Iiyama
TELEPHONE 01438 745 482
WEBSITE www.iiyama.co.uk

Boasting a 22in Mitsubishi Electric DIAMONDTRON tube, 0.24 mm AG pitch and flicker-free refresh rates at immense resolutions, the Iiyama is a truly breathtaking sight on your desktop – not least because it gobbles so much of it. The big VM also features a typically comprehensive on-screen menu, USB hub and audio connectors. At 1600x1200, the display is rock steady at 110Hz and is ideal partner for gaming.

MP3 PLAYER

EDITOR'S CHOICE

APPLE iPod 40GB
WAS £419 NOW £409
STREET PRICE £409
MANUFACTURER Apple
TELEPHONE 020 8210 1000
WEBSITE www.apple.com/uk

There are loads of MP3 players on the market but everybody wants an iPod and the new version is even smaller (in size) yet bigger (in capacity). It weighs less than two CDs and can store up to 7,500 tracks, and as a bonus the supplied headphones are top notch as well. The speedy Firewire interface (you'll need a suitable connection) and remote control rounds off a totally class act.

RECOMMENDED

ARCHOS JUKEBOX MULTIMEDIA
WAS £316 NOW £299
STREET PRICE £299
MANUFACTURER Archos
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.archos.com

While it may never win any awards for aesthetics, the Jukebox Multimedia from Archos is the Swiss Army Knife of media players. Handling one of the widest selections of file types, the player can even play back a selection of video formats including DIVX. The sound is fantastic, but the bundled headphones are shite. And it's cheaper than the mighty iPod.

ALSO CONSIDER

MUVO
STREET PRICE £60
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.europe.creative.com

The MuVo is one of the smartest gadgets we've seen. It comes in two parts, a USB key that plugs into any system running XP (without drivers), and a battery housing. Plug it into your PC and you can back up your documents. Drag a few MP3s onto the drive and when you snap the two halves together and plug in some headphones you've got one of the smallest MP3 players on the market.

MAILBOX

A problem aired is a problem halved. Hopefully. Go on, talk to Uncle Dave...

■ **GO AHEAD CALLER, HE'S LISTENING** Dave Woods

HENPECKED

There was a time when I used to have my PC all to myself: just me and my games. My wife used to drop casual comments like, "Mmm, that was a good shot darling", and "Yes, they're very good graphics dear". But that was all. So when I got *Medal Of Honor* for my 30th birthday, I was looking forward to getting stuck in. However, conscious of my wife becoming a *MoH* widow, I decided to let her have a go too. Big mistake.

She finished the main game three days later and moved on to the expansion pack. Today, she kindly said I could have a go on my game. MY GAME. With great anticipation, I took the chair, grasped the mouse and clicked to start the next level. Can you guess what came up on the screen? Yep, the end credits. THE END CREDITS!

Please can I win the Letter of the Month so I can have the sound card prize, which will go towards building her a PC!

Anthony Smith

Sorry. Much as we sympathise with you, we feel that you need to stand up to this obvious tyranny yourself. Sending you a sound card would be akin to emasculation.

A SERIOUS SPLIT

The PC is the best gaming machine out there, full stop. It has the best graphics, control and all-round gaming goodness of any system. I own a PC, my mate owns an Xbox, so it's odd that when we meet up to play games, we do it at his house. Why? Two words: split-screen.

The PC is great to play over the Internet with mates, or over a LAN if you're lucky enough to have one. However, it's nothing like sitting around one screen, each holding a controller and fighting the people sitting next to you. The only split-screen PC game I've got is *Serious Sam*, and when I got that it was the one time my mates came to my house. So put the message out to developers: we need split-screen, we need dual mouse support (we have USB now don't we?), and we need it now.

Inferno_str1ke

Split-screen games don't work on PC: it's LAN or Internet only.

***Serious Sam* was one of the only PC games we know to offer split-screen play – and there's a good reason for that. Nobody really wants to huddle around a monitor and play games on a PC. The fact of the matter is, they're different beasts – the PC gives you cutting-edge graphics and a deeper gaming experience, with online play for multiplayer action. Consoles enable you to sit around and insult your mates. Both are brilliant fun.**

HALO? GOODBYE.

First of all, I think you've got a brilliant magazine. I got issue 134 and when I finished reading it, I couldn't wait for 135 – especially as you were advertising reviews and playable demos of *Half-Life 2* and *Halo*.

After years of waiting, what's a couple more weeks between friends?

When I got it, though, I was disappointed. Not because *Half-Life 2* was missing (you apologised for that), but because there was no demo of *Halo* on the DVD. I went through the magazine looking for an explanation, but couldn't find anything. What went wrong?

Kebswong

Just a case of bad timing, unfortunately. We try to be as accurate as possible on our Next Month page, but we're dependant on dates given out by publishers who are notoriously tardy. The review code for *Halo* and the demo turned up late and we'd already gone to press. They were both on issue 136 instead. Sorry.

BLACK WIDOW

I desperately need your help. A few years ago, I used to have a game on my Amiga called *Archer Maclean's Pool*, which I used to play all the time. Was it ever brought out on the PC, and if so, what are the chances of finding a copy that will run on today's operating systems? I have to have this game or I will become depressed – no pressure you understand... Please help.

Ryan Seabury

As far as we're aware Ryan, the game was never released on the PC – although you can still buy it for the PlayStation. However, the good news is that Archer is working on a brand new pool game, called *Pool Paradise*. Turn to page 18 for more details.

BREED PLEAD

What's wrong with *Breed*? It hasn't died in action, has it? I've been waiting for a long time and remember it being previewed along with *Splinter Cell* in an old issue of *PC ZONE*. *Splinter Cell* has been released, reviewed and I've bought and finished it, but *Breed* still isn't out. Can you tell me what's been happening and when (if ever) it's going to get released?

Look out for a new single-player *Breed* demo next month and the review a month later.

Joe Chahine

We actually got review code for *Breed* this issue, but we weren't happy with the state of it and sent it back. The latest word is that we're going to get review code sometime in January, although we're hoping to have a brand new single-player demo on next month's cover discs. So not too much longer now, Joe.

SHORTARSE

As a man on the go, I've not got the time, the patience or the inclination to sit through 30-hour epics, so it's been a real breath of fresh air to play *Freedom Fighters* and *Max Payne 2* from start to finish. Both games only took about 6-8 hours of solid play, but I loved every minute. What's more, neither was stretched out for the sake of adding meaningless hours.

This is surely the future of gaming for the MTV generation: games you can pick up and play and find instantly addictive so

SOMETHING BOTHERING YOU? WE'VE GOT TWO STRONG ARMS, WE CAN HELP

MAILBOX, *PC ZONE*, 9 DALLINGTON ST, LONDON EC1V 0BQ, 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 one of the best cards you can currently buy.**

"Why can't publishers follow EA and place the CD-key on the manual of all the games they produce, away from prying eyes?"

MATTHEW LAWSON DESPAIRS

you can jump in and out whenever the time suits.

Mark Brooks

I thought *Max Payne 2* was superb as well. As long as the game is brilliant, the length shouldn't be an issue.

ROME: WAIT SOME MORE

I was on the *Rome: Total War* site the other day and read the following. "We can now confirm that *Rome: Total War*, the next game in the multi-award-winning *Total War* series, is on schedule for an autumn release in 2004."

Please tell me this isn't true! I know release dates are more elastic than Jordan's knickers, but what happened to January? Surely The Creative Assembly isn't going to waste all the publicity from *Time Commanders*? No-one will remember the game by then.

Gavin Hay

I'm afraid it's true – the release of the game is set for the end of next year. You'll have to tape *Time Commanders* and start watching it again next summer to remind yourself how good it's going to be.

NO-OP

I've just found out that *Hidden & Dangerous 2* is going to ship without a co-operative mode. What? First *Halo* and now *Hidden & Dangerous 2*? Are the developers so out of touch or do they just not care? In the case of *Halo*, it's doubly annoying, due to the fact it had a co-op mode before the port and it was one of the best things about the game.

Why can't developers seem to grasp that co-op modes can make their games last much longer than they do at the moment? If *Medal Of Honor* had a co-op mode, I'd still be playing it now. What about the upcoming *Call Of Duty*? It almost certainly won't have co-op, but it's damned suited for it.

Chris Morgan

We were as disappointed as you to find out co-op play had been dropped from *Halo*. I think a lot of it comes down to time pressures and making sure the game gets released on time. Apparently, Gearbox is looking at implementing a co-op mode in the future, so it looks like it's a waiting game.

No co-op mode for *H&D2* and *Halo*? Bloody rubbish, that.

KEYLESS

Am I the only one who can't connect to *Counter-Strike* because of Valve's policy of making us have CD-keys? I bought *Half-Life*, but the CD-key it came with was already being used. My mates have the same problem, and not just with *C-S*.

Basically the CD-key system stops paying users from accessing *Half-Life* online and I don't see why we should pay for gamers who decide to hack the game, using fake CD-keys.

Tim Glebocki

If your legitimate CD-key is being used by some nefarious soul (and it happens way too often to be even vaguely amusing), contact VU Games and demand a new one. PCZ

LETTER OF THE MONTH

I'VE GOT THE KEY, I'VE GOT THE SECRET

Is it just me or are games publishers not taking the whole pirating issue all that seriously? Working for a retailer myself, it's natural to see that one of the main ways publishers try to limit the illegal downloading/copying of the games they sell is with the use of CD-keys, which is perfectly understandable. What I don't understand is why some publishers seem to insist on sticking these CD-keys inside the DVD cases, which can't be peeled off.

It's not a big problem in places like HMV and Virgin, who seal the games in plastic boxes. However, places like GAME just empty the CDs from the cases and stick these on the shelves without sealing them up again, exposing the CD-key for people to write-down or memorise and use with their illegal copies.

If publishers are so adamant on cutting out video-game piracy, why can't they at least follow EA's example and place the CD-key on the manual of all of the games they publish, which are always hidden away from prying eyes, instead of leaving the key-code available for all to steal? Maybe someone could point this out to them next time they release a big-name title?

Matthew Lawson

We totally agree Matthew, and Tim Glebocki's letter (right) highlights the resulting problem of key-code theft. It's a situation affecting legitimate buyers, which hopefully means publishers will have to address it sooner rather than later.

BACKCHAT

THE BEST OF THE CHAT FROM THE PCZONE FORUM THIS MONTH. GET INVOLVED AT WWW.PCZONE.CO.UK

It's almost time to plunge a knife into the back of 2003 and welcome 2004 like it's an old friend bearing gifts of gaming goodness. But which of its playthings are you most looking forward to getting your mucky little paws on? That was the question we posed on the forum, swiftly answered by **davetsutton**: "I'm looking forward to *Deus Ex: Invisible War*, *Half-Life 2*, *Far Cry* and all the other big games that were supposed to be out in 2003. Oh, and *FIFA 2007* will be out next year, won't it?" And then he was gone, only to return a minute later. "Damn, how could I forget *Pandora Tomorrow*, the follow-up to my favourite game, *Splinter Cell*? That's top of my list for next year."

***Half-Life 2*: we're dead excited.**

But there's always a cynic in the bunch, even at this time of the year. Take **darrenmdr**: "I'm looking forward to more titles slipping to 2005, along with endless add-ons to *The Sims 2* and asking, 'whatever happened to that *Last Ninja* remake' every so often."

On a lighter note, **Nands** was flying the flag, which is good to see in these troubled times: "Something new and British, maybe by the Bitmap Brothers or something." "You mean something like *Z3* or *Speedball 3*?" asked **Rolls_Roy**. "The Bitmap Brothers haven't made a decent game for ages. I don't know what they're up to now, though. Something good perhaps?" **Nands**? "Aye, some of the golden oldies like *Xenon 2*, *Speedball 2*, *The Chaos Engine* and so on were pure class. A new game in that league, but for today's hardware, would be a fine thing indeed!

The final word this month goes to **5warnea** who penned the following. "Games for 2004? I'm looking forward to a lot of the games that everyone is mentioning, but I'm mainly holding out for *Thief III*. Oh, I remember the days: the depths of night, slowly stalking my prey down a dark corridor, his boots tapping the tiled floor, my heart beating along with the noise. He's completely unaware of my presence, unaware of my watchful eyes.

"Then, whack! I crack him over the head with my trusty blackjack and watch as his unconscious body slumps to the floor and there's only silence. The memories are forever there. Roll on 2004: the shadows await my return." Our thoughts exactly. But before all that, we're looking forward to eggnog by the fire with granny. 'Til next year...

THE PCZONE A-LIST

SHOOTERS

CALL OF DUTY

NEW ENTRY Quite simply the greatest shooter currently on the market, *Call Of Duty* is like the tour-de-force Omaha beach level of *Allied Assault*, stretched out over an entire game. Never before has war felt so real, the player felt so helpless and comrades felt so human. Constantly managing to mix up feelings of dread, fear, excitement and exhilaration within you, there is no greater WWII experience than this.
PUB Activision **DEV** Infinity Ward
PCZ ISSUE: 136

MAX PAYNE 2
NEW ENTRY It's Payne! Slicker than slick, breathtaking and quite beautiful, *Max Payne 2* provides the greatest gaming kicks that money can buy. It's extremely short, but so tense and well-designed that you just won't care.
PUB Rockstar Games **DEV** Remedy **PCZ ISSUE: 136**

MEDAL OF HONOR: ALLIED ASSAULT
It may have been toppled by *Call Of Duty*, but *Allied Assault's* set-pieces, period detail and intense action can still beat most recent FPS releases hands-down. Its graphics may be ageing slightly these days, but it's still a hell of a ride.
PUB EA **DEV** 2015 **PCZ ISSUE 112**

NO ONE LIVES FOREVER 2
Style, stealth and magnificent set-pieces are the order of the day in this excellent spy sequel. It looks brilliant, it's well designed and genuinely funny – and it doesn't treat you like an idiot.
PUB Black Label Games **DEV** Monolith **PCZ ISSUE 122**

HALF-LIFE: GENERATIONS
Unchallenged for three years, *Half-Life* redefined its genre with a cracking atmosphere and a compelling plot. It now comes bundled with the excellent *Opposing Force* add-on pack and the world's favourite mod, *Counter-Strike*.
PUB Vivendi **DEV** Valve Software **PCZ ISSUE 71**

UNREAL II
In terms of visuals, this is the absolute pinnacle in the world of the FPS. What's more, the arsenal of weaponry at your disposal is imaginative and satisfying to wield, while the sound effects, music and voice acting all exude quality too.
PUB Atari **DEV** Legend Entertainment **PCZ ISSUE 126**

MAFIA
From the makers of *Hidden & Dangerous* and just as compelling, this game borrows from every great gangster film ever made. Tense missions, superb atmosphere and great AI – it's a classic in every respect. Badabing!
PUB Take 2 **DEV** Illusion **PCZ ISSUE 119**

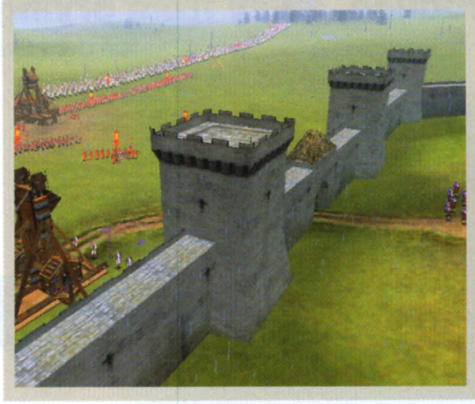
JEDI KNIGHT: JEDI ACADEMY
The latest saber-em-up from the Lucas stable is an absolute winner; think fights with Boba Fett, double-ended light sabers, customisable characters and even the opportunity to turn to the Dark Side. Ace.
PUB Activision **DEV** Raven **PCZ ISSUE 133**

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2003
Not a million miles away from the last *UT* title, *UT2003* does however make leaps and bounds graphically. With finely balanced weapons, smart bots and diverse maps it's the reigning king of speed fragging.
PUB Atari **DEV** Digital Extremes **PCZ ISSUE 122**

HALO
After two years, the Xbox masterpiece has come home to the PC. It may be visually long in the tooth, but its exceptional multiplayer mayhem, superb vehicles and solid solo missions puts it squarely in our hall of fame.
PUB Microsoft **DEV** Bungie/Gearbox **PCZ ISSUE 135**

STRATEGY

MEDIEVAL: TOTAL WAR



A sequel to the stunning *Shogun: Total War* (now available on budget), *Medieval* offers everything its predecessor did and a whole lot more. Adding to the massive 3D battles and turn-based *Risk*-style strategy map are a multitude of new options, both diplomatic and military. Breathtaking in every way, strategy games just don't come any better than this.
PUB Activision
DEV Creative Assembly
PCZ ISSUE 120

RISE OF NATIONS
One of the most addictive and satisfying strategy games to land on our desks in ages. Its unique perspective, great gameplay and all-round freshness make *Rise Of Nations* a title worthy of our prestigious Classic award.
PUB Microsoft **DEV** Big Huge Games **PCZ ISSUE 129**

AGE OF MYTHOLOGY
The *Age Of* series goes 3D in Ensemble Studios' best strategy outing to date. Great gameplay, superb attention to detail and a strong storyline give this an unparalleled sense of atmosphere, plus it includes a decent map editor.
PUB Microsoft **DEV** Ensemble Studios **PCZ ISSUE 123**

REPUBLIC: THE REVOLUTION
This highly original take on the machinations of political upheaval in Eastern Europe has split gaming opinion down the middle, but we think it's a fascinating, educating and unique piece of gaming history.
PUB Eidos Interactive **DEV** Elixir Studios **PCZ ISSUE 132**

WARRIOR KINGS: BATTLES
Warrior Kings was one of the most compelling and diverse RTS games we'd seen. This second chapter, which focuses around skirmish play, offers more units, varied tech trees and challenging AI generals.
PUB Empire Interactive **DEV** Black Cactus **PCZ ISSUE 128**

EMPIRES: DAWN OF THE MODERN WORLD
The latest to fall off the *Age Of Empires* lorry may not innovate, but there's a good variety of nations with accurate historical spins (General Patton, Richard the Lionheart etc), as well as novel unit types and well-written campaigns.
PUB Activision **DEV** Stainless Steel Studios **PCZ ISSUE 135**

COMMAND & CONQUER: GENERALS
The *C&C* series comes of age in this 3D orgy of scud missiles, daisy-cutter bombs and nuclear strikes. *Generals* is a superb-looking game with well-designed sides that offers fun in spades.
PUB EA **DEV** EA Pacific/Westwood **PCZ ISSUE 127**

COMMANDOS 2
There have been a few imitators of the squad-based strategy of *Commandos* but none have come close to this sequel. If, like us, you loved the first game, you'll love this massive, preposterously detailed follow-up even more.
PUB Eidos **DEV** Pyro Studio **PCZ ISSUE 108**

HOMEWORLD 2
The interface to this epic space combat RTS might be a bit intimidating for rookies, but *Homeworld 2* definitely deserves a place in our hall of fame. Staggering visuals and gripping strategic manoeuvring make it addictive.
PUB VU Games **DEV** Relic **PCZ ISSUE 134**

WARCRAFT III
While not a huge departure from the original, *Warcraft III* is an extremely enjoyable and polished package. The storyline is brilliant and the multiplayer action dangerously addictive. Simple, solid entertainment.
PUB VU Games **DEV** Blizzard **PCZ ISSUE 119**

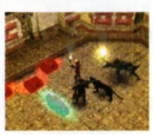
Welcome to the *PC ZONE* A-List, the definitive buyer's guide for all discerning PC gamers. The games that grace these pages aren't just good, they're the best of the best in their respective genres, and our list is continually updated to show how each game stands in relation to its peers

ROLE-PLAYING GAMES

DEUS EX

Warren Spector is one of the true visionaries of the computer game medium, and this is his magnum opus. Combining the finer elements of *Half-Life*, *System Shock 2* and *Thief*, *Deus Ex* is an RPG of complex beauty and a true revolution in computer gaming. The fascinating sci-fi plot and amazing attention to detail, combined with unparalleled player freedom, are just some of the reasons why *Deus Ex* is a landmark in gaming.
PUB Eidos **DEV** Ion Storm
PCZ ISSUE 93

THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND
One of the most impressive RPGs we've seen in years. A massively open-ended world full of beautiful visuals, superb depth of gameplay and innovative character development make this a classic that will keep you totally absorbed.
PUB Ubisoft **DEV** Bethesda Softworks **PCZ ISSUE 117**

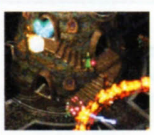


NEVERWINTER NIGHTS
The makers of the epic *Baldur's Gate* series prove they're still a leading force in the world of RPGs with this glorious hardcore 3D adventure. It features great single and multiplayer options, along with a very accessible toolkit.
PUB Atari **DEV** Bioware **PCZ ISSUE 118**

PLANESCAPE: TORMENT
An incredible game from Black Isle, using the *Baldur's Gate* engine. With a compelling story, well-scripted dialogue and the best character development we've seen in any game of its kind, this is a dark, adult scorcher of an RPG.
PUB Interplay **DEV** Black Isle Studio **PCZ ISSUE 87**

DUNGEON SIEGE
Graphically brilliant, massively enjoyable and highly immersive, *Dungeon Siege* is one of the best RPGs to date and only misses out on a Classic because of the shortcomings in the narrative.
PUB Microsoft **DEV** Gas Powered Games **PCZ ISSUE 115**

SYSTEM SHOCK 2
Definitely one of the most original and disturbing games to hit the PC, *System Shock 2* manages to successfully mix the genres of role-playing, action and adventure into one. Play it with the lights off if you're hard enough.
PUB EA **DEV** Irrational Games **PCZ ISSUE 80**



BALDUR'S GATE II
The original *Baldur's Gate* was hailed as one of the best story-driven role-playing games ever. The sequel isn't vastly different, but it's bigger, better and still extremely addictive. An essential for anyone interested in PC role-playing.
PUB Interplay **DEV** Bioware **PCZ ISSUE 96**

DIVINE DIVINITY
This epic RPG contains the action of *Diablo II* combined with the storyline of the *Baldur's Gate* series, not to mention about 200 hours of gameplay in a huge fantasy world. The name may be a bit silly, but the gameplay certainly isn't.
PUB CDV **DEV** Larian Studios **PCZ ISSUE 121**

FREEDOM FORCE
Control your own group of superheroes in this immersive and fully destructible comic book world. It may not be the most sophisticated and beardy of RPGs, but *Freedom Force* is unadulterated bubble gum fun at its best.
PUB EA **DEV** Irrational Games **PCZ ISSUE 115**

GOTHIC II
If you're willing to dedicate some time to it, this vast RPG is worth your pennies. Its sweeping landscapes are a delight to explore and even though it takes a while to get going, the incredible level of immersion more than makes up for it.
PUB Atari **DEV** Piranha Bytes **PCZ ISSUE 132**

ACTION/ADVENTURE

SPLINTER CELL

At long last we've got a new king of the action adventures with the Tom Clancy-influenced *Splinter Cell*, and a new crown prince of stealth in the form of the über-flexible Sam Fisher. *Splinter Cell* features the perfect blend of action, structure and pace, combined with some of the best visuals and set pieces around. No self-respecting gamer should miss out on this.
PUB Ubisoft
DEV Ubisoft Montreal
PCZ ISSUE 125

PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME
NEW ENTRY The fluidity, ingenuity and graphical splendour of *The Sands Of Time* cannot be faulted. Combat may be unsatisfying, but the time-control gimmicks and fast-paced acrobatics put Lara to shame.
PUB Ubisoft **DEV** Ubisoft Montreal **PCZ ISSUE 136**

GRIM FANDANGO
If you've followed LucasArts from the early days of *Monkey Island*, *Sam & Max* and *Day Of The Tentacle*, this is a must. The scripting is impeccable, while sublime graphics and brilliant humour ensure it's top of its genre.
PUB Activision **DEV** LucasArts **PCZ ISSUE 71**

SILENT HILL 2: DIRECTOR'S CUT
Survival horror games have truly come of age with this superbly creepy and atmospheric offering. The (near identical) third game is also out, but for our money this is still the champ. Classy and disturbing.
PUB Konami **DEV** Konami **PCZ ISSUE 126**

METAL GEAR SOLID 2: SUBSTANCE
A convincing PC conversion that adds tanker-loads of side-missions, training stages and unlockable characters to the PS2 original. There's too much waffle, but it's still an excellent third-person sneakfest.
PUB Konami **DEV** Konami **PCZ ISSUE 127**

SOUL REAVER 2
While this latest episode in the saga of Raziel takes few risks with the action/adventure formula, it's a consummately constructed example of the genre. Compelling storyline, satisfying combat and excellent puzzle dynamics.
PUB Eidos **DEV** Crystal Dynamics **PCZ ISSUE 111**

DISCWORLD NOIR
Although the point-and-click adventure game is dying, *Discworld Noir* is still very much alive. It's darker in style than previous *Discworld* games and in our opinion, all the better for it .
PUB Atari **DEV** Perfect Entertainment **PCZ ISSUE 79**

THE THING
Drawing on some brilliant raw material from John Carpenter's classic horror movie, this survival action horror picks up the story where the film left off. It's one of the best film spin-offs around, with tense atmosphere and good gameplay.
PUB Black Label Games **DEV** Computer Artworks **PCZ ISSUE 121**

BROKEN SWORD: THE SLEEPING DRAGON
It has its detractors, but nobody can deny that the third *Broken Sword* game seamlessly reinvents the traditional point-and-click into the realm of 3D. The dialogue may grate, but it's still well worth a look.
PUB THQ **DEV** Revolution **PCZ ISSUE 136**

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**

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 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 enables you to guide your creature through a variety of mini-games. Pure genius in a box.

PUB EA **DEV** Lionhead Studios

PCZ ISSUE 100

CIVILIZATION III

Civilization III sticks to the same compulsive gameplay that made the first two games so popular. Die-hard *Civ* fans will relish the improved visuals and animation, while the new user-friendly interface makes the game accessible to the first-timer. Brings to mind the maxim 'if it ain't broke…'

PUB Atari **DEV** Firaxis Games **PCZ ISSUE 111**

GHOST MASTER

Take your team of ghosts into the town of Gravenville and solve some otherworldly problems, scare a few mortals and bag yourself some new team-mates in this innovative spook 'em up that's one of the freshest and funniest games we've seen for a long time.

PUB Empire Interactive **DEV** Sick Puppies **PCZ ISSUE 130**

THE SIMS

Revolutionary at birth, the concept has since been diluted through numerous add-ons and an unhealthily long stay in the charts. It's now little more than a cash cow for Electronic Arts, although you can't help but admire the strength of community and the fact that it's still selling by the bucket-load.

PUB EA **DEV** Maxis/EA **PCZ ISSUE 87**

VEGA$: MAKE IT BIG

An in-depth tycoon game with all the 3D graphical glitz and glamour of Vegas itself, *Make It Big* provides hotels, casinos and over-priced magic shows that let you suck the money out of punters' pockets. It can get a little too fiddly, but it looks and plays really well. A *PC ZONE* 'Essential'.

PUB Empire Interactive **DEV** Deep Red **PCZ ISSUE 135**

SPACE COLONY

NEW ENTRY Whether you're trying to attract space-tourists or battle neighbouring aliens, taking control of 20 rowdy space colonists and pandering to them makes for a charming and original management jaunt, with plenty of missions to keep you going.

PUB Gathering **DEV** Firefly Studios **PCZ ISSUE 136**

CAESAR III

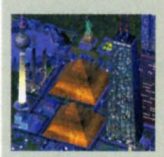
Starting from scratch, you've got to build a majestic Roman city and ensure a harmonious life for your citizens by balancing their work, health and entertainment needs. So what? So it's probably one of the most utterly absorbing and addictive god sims in existence. Hail *Caesar*.

PUB VU Games **DEV** Impressions **PCZ ISSUE 70**

EMPEROR: RISE OF THE MIDDLE KINGDOM

This intricate game comes from the same stable as *Zeus* and *Caesar* – and they know a thing or two about city building. There's a massive amount of gameplay and more than 50 missions spanning seven historic campaigns. As well as the economic considerations, you'll have to follow feng shui and the Chinese zodiac.

PUB VU Games **DEV** Breakaway Games **PCZ ISSUE 121**



SIM CITY 4

The latest outing of the best-selling city-building sim goes 3D. Unfortunately, there are no huge leaps forwards in gameplay, but there are plenty of features, such as regional cities, imported characters from *The Sims* and a terrain editor to keep you occupied.

PUB EA **DEV** Maxis **PCZ ISSUE 125**

DUNGEON KEEPER 2

The ultimate 'it's good to be bad' game, *Dungeon Keeper* was a great idea and *DK2* takes the essence and humour of the original, corrects all the mistakes, vastly improves the graphics, and adds a myriad of new features that build wisely on the original concept.

PUB EA **DEV** Bullfrog **PCZ ISSUE 79**

FLIGHT SIMS

IL-2: FORGOTTEN BATTLES

Much of what has been improved with this sequel to *IL-2 Sturmovik* has been done under the virtual bonnet of the game. *IL-2: Forgotten Battles* features improved AI, more accurate flight models and more of a realistic overall experience, plus more campaigns and even more planes. All of this adds up to an exhilarating flying experience. Put simply, we think *IL-2: Forgotten Battles* is one of the finest flight sims ever to grace our screens.

PUB Ubisoft **DEV** 1C: Maddox Games

PCZ ISSUE 128

MS FLIGHT SIM 2004: A CENTURY OF FLIGHT

NEW ENTRY Another dose of sheer authentic aerial quality from the bods at Microsoft, with revamped weather systems, a beefed-up terrain generator and loads of historical planes for you to career around in.

PUB Microsoft **DEV** Microsoft **PCZ ISSUE 133**

BATTLE OF BRITAIN

Allow yourself to be immersed in one of the most exciting and realistic combat flight sims around. The action is non-stop, the skies are crowded and the flight models actually feel 'right'. Tally ho!

PUB Empire Interactive **DEV** Rowan Software **PCZ ISSUE 103**

FALCON 4

We waited patiently for years for this title to arrive, and the good news is that for once, we weren't disappointed. *Falcon 4* features incredible 3D-accelerated graphics and a dynamic campaign structure.

PUB Atari **DEV** Microprose **PCZ ISSUE 72**

B-17: THE MIGHTY 8TH

B-17 reproduces the experience of piloting a World War II bomber. Just about everything is covered, from planning missions to dropping bombs. A must for WWII and realism freaks everywhere.

PUB Atari **DEV** Wayward Simulations **PCZ ISSUE 96**

MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER

EVERQUEST

EverQuest keeps going from strength to strength and now has a total of five expansion packs. One of the best of these, *Planes Of Power*, provides a multitude of simplifications to help newcomers, while adding lots of new worlds for high-level characters to explore. It's a truly beautiful and captivating game that has claimed the souls and social lives of thousands of people the world over.

PUB Ubisoft **DEV** Sony Online Entertainment

PCZ ISSUE 117

PLANETSIDE

Truly the mother of online battles, *Planetside* is a never-ending war among three armies and waged across several continents. Superb squad battles, stunning vehicles and atmospheric visuals make for a remarkably immersive experience.

PUB Ubisoft **DEV** Sony Online Entertainment **PCZ ISSUE 131**

EVE ONLINE

Eve Online is as beautiful as it is complex, oozing style from every pixel. Choose from four unique races and explore the *Eve* universe with its unparalleled scope for adventure, interaction and trade.

PUB Crucial **DEV** CCP **PCZ ISSUE 130**

ANARCHY ONLINE

A beautiful MMOG with detailed environments and a huge selection of armour and weapons, which all add up to make an immersive title. Many of the bugs have been ironed out and the latest update offers a slick gaming experience.

PUB Funcom **DEV** Funcom **PCZ ISSUE 114**

A TALE IN THE DESERT

No guns, no death, just the peaceful rolling dunes of ancient Egypt. This bizarre, yet beautiful MMOG sees you attempting to build a utopian society, farming camels and progressing through the seven tests of man.

PUB eGenesis **DEV** eGenesis **PCZ ISSUE 133**

MULTIPLAYER MODS

COUNTER-STRIKE (HALF-LIFE)

Despite the troubled single-player release, it seems that *Counter-Strike* will always be the mod that rules the Earth. The popularity of this terrorist versus counter-terrorist mod shows no sign of abating, and there are few PC gamers who don't have a mental map of the troublespots of de_dust. At one point there were more *CS* servers than every other online game put together, and it isn't going to leave us any time soon.
WEB www.counter-strike.net

THE SPECIALISTS
NEW ENTRY Blending *Half-Life* Team Deathmatch with kung-fu, slo-mo gymnastics make this a must-play mod. With a range of maps and *Matrix-esque* bullet trails, it provides a nice break from the über-realism of *Counter-Strike*.
WEB www.specialistsmod.net

DESERT COMBAT (BF 1942)
This *Battlefield 1942* TC focuses on desert-based conflicts from the last decade, playing through scraps like the original Desert Storm and the troubles in Somalia. It's extraordinarily popular, and really rather good.
WEB www.desertcombat.com

NATURAL SELECTION (HALF-LIFE)
This superb *Half-Life* mod sees marines squaring off against the aliens in various sci-fi environments. With the marines working in teams and the aliens acting like mentalists, the variety in gameplay makes this a sure-fire winner.
WEB www.natural-selection.org

DAY OF DEFEAT (HALF-LIFE)
This atmospheric, highly realistic and superbly designed *Half-Life* mod covers various battles from deep within WWII. Its different character classes and superb arsenal of weapons add to authenticity, fun and general carnage.
WEB www.dayofdefeatmod.com

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

HIDDEN AND DANGEROUS 2
With a real Boy's Own-feel, a ninja-bastard difficulty rating and the same superb engine as *Mafia*, *H&D 2* is one of the finest squad-based tactical shooters around. It's got a few bugs, but is still an essential purchase.
PUB Gathering **DEV** Illusion Softworks **PCZ ISSUE 136**

RAINBOW SIX: RAVEN SHIELD
All the style and presentation you would expect from a Tom Clancy game, from the realism of the weapons down to footprints in the snow. A tactical and atmospheric game that can be frustratingly tricky at times.
PUB Ubisoft **DEV** Ubisoft Montreal **PCZ ISSUE 127**

HIDDEN & DANGEROUS: DELUXE
This revamp of *H&D* removes all of the infamous bugs from the original, as well as including three extra campaigns. There's been a lot of work put in to improving the graphics and modding fans will relish the new editor that ships with this edition.
PUB Take 2 **DEV** Illusion Softworks **PCZ ISSUE 115**

HOSTILE WATERS
A brilliant RTS/action game you can play purely strategically or up close and personal. Inspired by the 16-bit classic *Carrier Command*, it's just a shame there aren't any multiplayer options.
PUB Rage **DEV** Rage Software **PCZ ISSUE 101**

DRIVING GAMES

GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY

PS2 owners will finally stop gloating when they see *Vice City*'s glorious PC incarnation. *GTA3* was an incredible crim-sim; so incredible that it was hard to see how it could be improved, but the freedom and variety of its follow-up is blinding. Whether it's carrying out its remarkably inventive law-breaking missions or just shooting pedestrians, *Vice City* is about as close to gaming perfection as you can get.
PUB Rockstar Games **DEV** Rockstar North
PCZ ISSUE 131

GRAND THEFT AUTO III
It may have been overshadowed by its younger brother, but *Grand Theft Auto III* remains as awesome as it ever was. It's a great spin on both driving and shooting genres and you'll still love its noisy orgy of violence and speed.
PUB Rockstar Games **DEV** Rockstar North **PCZ ISSUE 117**

COLIN MCRAE 3
Featuring some of the best handling we've ever seen, as well as an excellent new career mode, *Colin McRae 3* is a must-have racer. Driving conditions are realistic, the tracks are varied and the detail overwhelming.
PUB Codemasters **DEV** Codemasters **PCZ ISSUE 131**

GRAND PRIX 4
You won't find a more accurate racing sim. Graphically lush and full of anal detail, Geoff Crammond's latest effort offers in-depth telemetry and a staggering number of options. *Grand Prix 4* is leading the grid in the world of racing sims.
PUB Atari **DEV** Simergy **PCZ ISSUE 119**

MIDNIGHT CLUB 2
This high octane illegal street-racer is immense fun, with all the cars, ramps and upgrades that you could imagine. With a top soundtrack to boot, this is one of the most addictive driving games on the market.
PUB Rockstar **DEV** Rockstar North **PCZ ISSUE 133**

SPORT

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 4

A major revamp for the legendary football management series that sees the introduction of a new top-down match engine, which lets you watch how your players are performing – and it works like a dream. *Championship Manager 4* is as life-sappingly addictive as it ever was, and the only real downside is the reduced transfer market activity, which is thanks to the financial crisis currently gripping football.
PUB Eidos **DEV** Sports Interactive
PCZ ISSUE 128

PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 3
NEW ENTRY Our guilty console secret has landed on the PC, and it's as good as we hoped. Better than *FIFA* in every conceivable way (bar the official license of course), there is no greater footie experience available.
PUB Konami **DEV** Konami **PCZ ISSUE 136**

VIRTUA TENNIS
Who would have believed that this console favourite would translate so well to the PC? Its control interface is supremely intuitive, while the AI is massively challenging. Best of all, though, are its truly sublime multiplayer options.
PUB Empire Interactive **DEV** Hitmaker/Strangelite **PCZ ISSUE 114**

TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 3
This third edition of Tony Hawk's classic skateboarding game is an absolute joy to play. It features enormous levels, more interaction than ever before and a totally kick-ass soundtrack.
PUB Activision **DEV** Neversoft Entertainment **PCZ ISSUE 98**

TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2004
Each *Tiger* game seems to be getting progressively easier, but this latest effort is eminently playable. With superb graphical touches, an immersive career mode and courses that feel 'alive', it's difficult to put down.
PUB EA Sports **DEV** Headgate Studios **PCZ ISSUE 135**

DISC PAGES

■ **WORDS** Suzy Wallace
■ **DISCS** Suzy Wallace

DOUBLE-TROUBLE!

The *PC ZONE* DVD is now double-sided, which means you get twice as much content as before. If you can't find what you're looking for on the DVD, close the *PC ZONE* disc browser and turn the disc over.

HELP!

CD trouble? Don't worry – phone our helpline on **08700 711482**. The line is open weekdays between 9.30am and 5pm, and Saturday from 10am to 2pm, or email **pc_zone@interchange.co.uk**.

BEFORE YOU DIAL...

If you're 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, sound card, RAM and so on, along with plus the nature of the fault.
■ Have a pen and paper to hand so you can jot down the relevant info.

MINIMUM SPECIFICATION

■ To run the software on these discs, you need at least a PIII 600MHz or equivalent, with a GeForce 2MX 32MB graphics card and 128MB RAM (256MB recommended for Windows XP users).

DISCLAIMER

■ This disc has been thoroughly tested at all stages of its production. However, it's always wise to use a virus checker on any software before running it.
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MAX PAYNE 2

CD1/DVD Pub: Rockstar **Dev:** Remedy **Review:** Issue 136, 93%

We weren't expecting a playable demo for *Max Payne 2* – after all, the game itself is over in a New York second (25,200 of them to be exact, but who's counting)? So it was a massive bonus to get word from Rockstar that a demo was indeed on its way, and what's more that it contained the first three levels from the game. Woo-hoo!

The first level sees you start off in hospital, struggling to recover from the rather large dose of hallucinogenic drugs you seem to have imbibed the previous night, before setting off to take part in some real action.

Once the shooting starts, remember to use your Shot Dodge to gain an advantage over your opponents and Bullet Time when things are getting particularly tough. Take a number of opponents out consecutively in Bullet Time and your speed advantage becomes more pronounced. Oh, and watch out for the physics engine – it's the main reason we gave the game such a massive score.

Once you've completed the three levels, take a crack at the bonus Dead Man Walking map, where you have to take out as many respawning baddies as you can before biting the bullet yourself. Enjoy!

***Max Payne*: a man with some serious issues.**

MAX PAYNE MODNESS

WE'VE GONE *MAX PAYNE* MAD THIS MONTH...

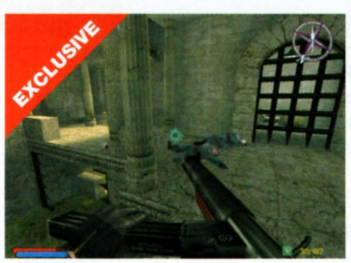
MAX PAYNE MODS
***Max Payne 2* might be wowing us at the moment, but the original is still alive and kicking thanks to the selection of mods we've got for your delectation. See Community Chest on page 120 for more information.**

MAX PAYNE 2 TOOLS
After sampling the delights of home-made *Max Payne* mods, we thought you might be inspired, so why not try creating one of your own for the sequel? We've included all the tools you need on the DVD.

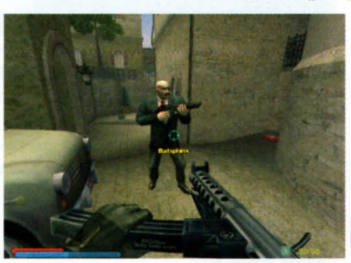
MAX PAYNE 2 EXTRA CHAPTERS
Bought the game but found the action's over all too soon? Load up these official extra chapters to squeeze that final bit of bullet-time from *Max*.

CONTRACT J.A.C.K.

CD1&2/DVD Pub: Vivendi **Dev:** Monolith **Review:** Issue 137, 72% (p74)



Dodge. Shoot. Kill. Repeat.



Shooting with an eyepatch. Interesting.

This demo from *Contract J.A.C.K.*, the prequel to the marvellous *NOLF 2*, gives you your own licence to kill over two single-player levels and two multiplayer levels. Consider the first level of the single-player demo an interview, albeit one for assassins and contract killers. Opponents swarm into the room, and your job is to take them out.

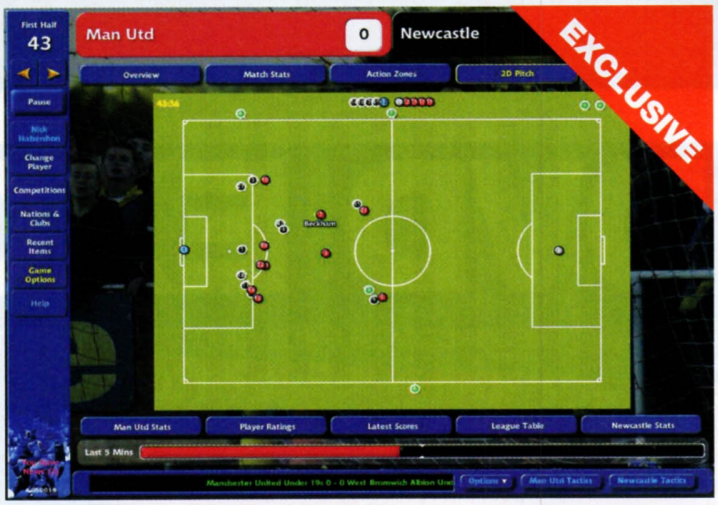
The next mission sees you getting off a train in Czechoslovakia to take the fight to the enemy. There are plenty of opponents on this level and a few puzzles to solve as you go along. The multiplayer demo also has two levels, seeing you pitched against enemies in up to four different modes. Standard deathmatch and team deathmatch are present, as is the doomsday mode from *NOLF 2*. There's also a new demolition mode, and keep your eye out for the Corrector weapon: the first time we fired this baby, we took out everyone, including Will 'Nice Boy' Porter – it's a monster of a weapon!

DOOM 3

CD1/DVD Pub: Activision **Dev:** id

When liposuction goes wrong...

The highly anticipated *Doom* series dusts itself off and puts in a new set of teeth for the third outing in the series. This footage is exclusive to *PC ZONE* – you won't find it on the discs of any other UK magazine. Exciting stuff – just don't watch it in the dark...



The best little spreadsheet in all the world.

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 03/04

CD2/DVD Pub: Eidos **Dev:** Sports Interactive
Review: Issue 137, 90% (page 82)

This is your chance to show the world you've got golden balls. Once you've taken your pick of any English team, you have half a season to manage your way to the top. All the details are current, including West Ham's cashflow problems and Chelsea's gleaming new über-team.

This is your chance to put yourself in Wenger/Ferguson/Houllier's shoes – and then throw them at your star players...

CALL OF DUTY: DAWNVILLE

CD 1/DVD Pub: Activision **Dev:** Infinity Ward **Review:** Issue 136, 94%

The light of day makes it even worse.

Set after the first demo, the location is yet again St Mare Eglise, only this time it's the morning after and you're tasked with holding the town against zee Germans. It all begins with heavy mortar shelling, which leaves you stumbling around. But after taking out plenty of opponents, tanks and mortar emplacements using a wide variety of weapons, you're finally rewarded with... A French car. Fantastic.

LOTR: WAR OF THE RING

CD2/DVD Pub: Vivendi **Dev:** Liquid **Review:** Issue 136, 73%

Dwarf version of an Iraqi super-gun.

A big ruck, Middle-Earth style.

Both Legolas and Gimli (along with the official voices) feature in two missions based on Middle-Earth history. The Elven mission is straightforward, using your elves to track Gollum through the forest; while the Dwarven mission involves scouting out the Middle-Earth equivalent of a nuke in the form of a giant catapult.

V-RALLY 3

CD2/DVD Pub: Atari **Dev:** Eden Games

If you enjoy driving sideways rather than in a straight line, this demo gives you plenty to get to grips with. The third in the slide-and-steer series, *V-Rally 3* takes the art of the powerslide to new levels.

In this demo, you'll be able to get round most corners by steering hard into them. Watch yourself, though, because when your car starts to drift it can be extremely difficult to get yourself back on track, ending in quite a few collisions with trees, fences, walls, spectators and anything else stupid enough to get in your way.

The game enables you to see the damage you're taking too, so you can see how bad your driving really is. By the time we reached the end, we had no working headlights, our windscreen was smashed to bits, the sides of the car were scratched to shit and the rear bumper was dragging along the floor. Where's the AA when you need them?

Surely this many lights is overkill?

TRACKMANIA

CD2/DVD Pub: Digital Jesters **Dev:** Nadeo

Rubbish name. Good game.

If you're fed up racing round tracks, why not try making them first? That's half the challenge of *TrackMania*, which brings a fresh approach to the genre. Three games modes are available – solo (where you can choose to either race or build tracks), multi (where you can race alternately against friends), and LAN play.

What were once boring images are now lush 3D environments.

URU: AGES BEYOND MYST

CD2/DVD Pub: Ubi Soft **Dev:** Cyan Worlds

The sequel to *Myst* returns, this time in glorious 3D. You start by choosing your character, including age and clothing, and begin in the arid desert, complete with handy trailer-trash to provide hints if you get stuck. You can also change between first and third-person view by pressing F1 – useful for navigating more tricky scenery.

Be sure to check out everything you see as you wander about, and keep an eye out for the holographically projected woman, complete with spiritual psychobabble.

Microsoft

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Optical Technology – High performance optical technology in the mouse means there are no moving parts to collect dirt, delivering greater accuracy and control.

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*Many users average more than six months battery life. Energizer batteries recommended.

DVD EXC

ONLY AVAILABLE ON *PC ZONE*'S DVD EDITION. TO SUBSCRIBE TURN

THE ESSENTIAL SELECTION

The *PC ZONE* DVD is now double-sided. On one you've got all the new content, but flip it over and you'll find the Essential Selection, the best demos and mods the world has ever created, along with all the patches, drivers and all the utilities you need to make your PC a shrine of gaming goodness.

CHROME

DVD Pub: Take 2 **Dev:** Techland
Review: Issue 135, 61%

MULTIPLAYER

With that hair, he deserves to die.

This multiplayer demo has two maps – one CTF and one Assault. The CTF map is a square piece of land, with a U-shaped piece littered with crates and boxes. The rest is covered in dense grass – great for hiding in and enabling prime sneakage.

Forget that, though: Battledust2 (Assault) is a much better map than its companion, featuring a base to storm and several vehicles, including a bipedal machine with rail gun, and a buggy with mounted machine gun.

VIRTUAL SKIPPER 3

DVD Pub: Digital Jesters
Dev: Nadeo

Boats: not boring.

Come back! Now! OK, it might not sound like the most thrilling game in the world, but everyone who's played it in the *ZONE* offices has been strangely drawn to the stunning water effects and calming gameplay. Just remember to keep an eye on the wind direction (indicated by the little arrow in the middle of the screen), and keep your sail perpendicular to this – meaning you often can't sail in a straight line. You can raise your main sail, but it's not a good idea if you're heading against the wind – you'll be dead in the water. If the wind is behind you,get it out for maximum speed. Land ahoy shipmates!

PLUS UFO: AFTERMATH, THE MOTHER NEW VERSIONS OF DESERT COMBAT &

DOOM 3 EXCLUSIVE DVD FOOTAGE WATCH IT ON YOUR TV!

LUSIVES

TO PAGE 122. FOR FULL CONTENTS, SEE BACK OF THE BOX

THE TEMPLE OF ELEMENTAL EVIL

DVD Pub: Atari **Dev:** Troika **Review:** Issue 136, 76%

Satisfy your turn-based needs with a tutorial demonstrating the basic controls (a good start but one that leaves you no idea of how to fight) and the complete Moathouse level. After picking up the basics, you'll get to fight frogs, brigands and plenty of zombies. Right-click on your characters to bring up the radial menu – from here you can access your spells, inventory and different fighting tactics and styles. Resting (the little tent symbol in the bottom-right) enables you to recuperate health points and also to memorise freshly brewed spells.

Let's roll those dice and move out.

RPG beastie Large Spider attacks.

NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND

DVD Pub: EA **Dev:** Black Box **Review:** Issue 137, 85% (page 78)

These cars make our resident disc editor emit strange gurgling noises.

A highly-modded Nissan 350Z is your ride of choice in this hi-octane driving game. Choose from the circuit race or a drag race, and pull powerslides and take short cuts to build up your bonus.

Make sure you use the nitrous to give you a boost too, along with the e-brake (handbrake for us limeys) for those tight corners – or for when you want to kick into a powerslide.

OF ALL PATCHES FOR *BF 1942*, *AMERICA'S ARMY*, AND MUCH MORE!

Microsoft

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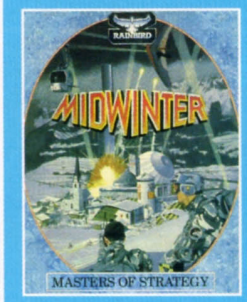
*Many users average more than six months battery life. Energizer batteries recommended.



GAMES THAT CHANGED THE WORLD

MIDWINTER

First-person action, drivable vehicles, deep strategy and 160,000 square miles to explore – in 1989?! *Chris Anderson* breaks the ice on one of the most ambitious titles ever conceived with design lead Mike Singleton

GAME Midwinter
PUBLISHER Microprose
DEVELOPER Rainbird
RELEASED 1989
INFLUENCED *Midwinter's* effect on the games industry over the last ten years has been profound, even though its direct influences are not at all obvious. It was the first 3D game on PC with a completely non-linear gameworld, open to exploration in any way you saw fit. The path to the final victory was equally open-ended and puts the linear approach of many modern titles to shame. And of course, the option to control and master many different forms of transport was a revolution in itself. *Midwinter* remains one of the most ambitious titles ever made on PC, and 14 years after its initial release the industry is still playing catch-up.

PROFILE

Mike Singleton's obvious talents for game design first came to light in 1984 when he released *Lords of Midnight* for the Spectrum. He's since worked on a string of titles for all platforms. *Midwinter* is generally regarded as his finest game on the PC.

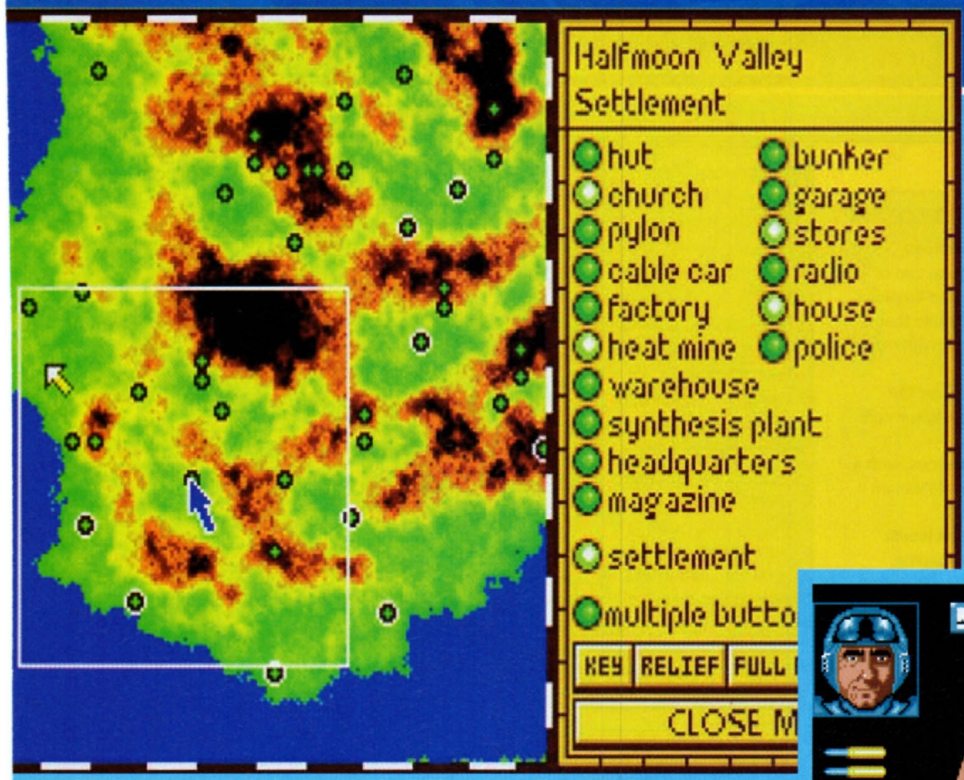
ROLE ON *MIDWINTER*
Director
FIRST GAME WORKED ON
Space Ace for the Commodore Pet
WHERE IS HE NOW? Mike now works at Californian outfit The Collective (*Buffy*, *Indiana Jones And The Emperor's Tomb*), where he's putting the finishing touches on *Wrath Unleashed* for PS2 and Xbox.

Endless hours of open-ended exploration, but one thing's for sure: there'll always be snow.

WAY BACK in 1989, the term '3D' had no real meaning in PC gaming circles. There were no 3D cards, and graphics technology on PC was in its infancy, to say the least. When Mike Singleton laid down the groundwork for a game called *Midwinter*, few people could have predicted the effect it would have on the games industry for years to come. It's no exaggeration to say *Midwinter* single-handedly kick-started the 3D revolution on the PC, although it took years for the 3D action genre to catch up and produce anything on a similar scale.

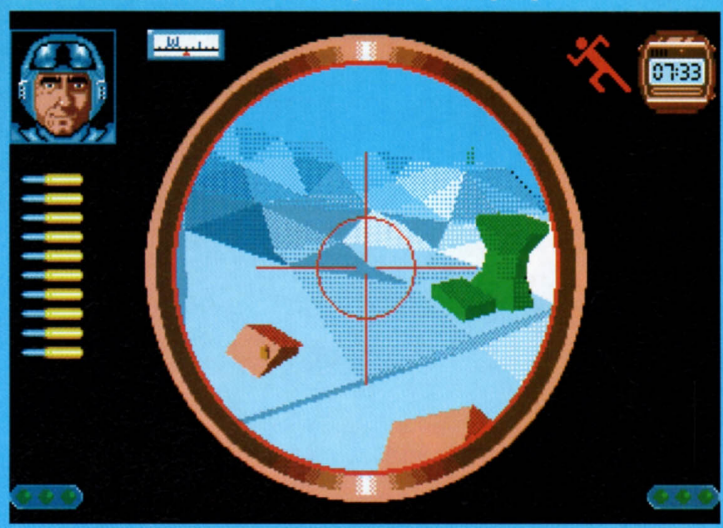
In fact, it wasn't until the eventual arrival of 3D accelerators that development teams even dared to attempt anything remotely as ambitious as *Midwinter*, so far ahead of its time was Mike Singleton's classic.

However, *Midwinter's* brave pioneering developments in 3D software technology are only half the story. If the games industry has proved anything, it's that superior technology and software techniques have never been any guarantee of a good game. *Midwinter* matched its revolutionary 3D environment, with a totally compelling game experience set in a barren frozen wasteland which was home to the last survivors of the human race. From start to finish, Rainbird's creation was a tense race against time, your task being to combat a well-equipped and highly organised army on a large island.



***Midwinter* married first-person action with a compelling stategic component.**

The game could be gloriously unforgiving.



If you wanted to win, sniping was one of the many skills you had to master.

Your primary objective was to take control of friendly characters and use their individual skills to reach other playable characters on the island. Once that was accomplished, you could then recruit them all for the cause. Mastering the skills for a variety of vehicles was also key to success in *Midwinter*. The mix of learning how to drive, ski and hang-glide, while coping simultaneously with a race against the clock as you made your way from one player-character to the next made for very compelling, edge-of-the-seat gameplay.

FROM MIDNIGHT TO MIDWINTER

To find *Midwinter's* true origins, you need to go back even further in time to another classic from the same creator. *Midwinter's* director Mike Singleton explains: "If anything, *Midwinter* was based on the original *Lords Of Midnight*, which I'd written for the Spectrum back in 1984. Like *Midwinter*, it had a large landscape, multiple characters to switch between and even a snow-bound panorama. In a way, *Midwinter* was bringing this concept up-to-date in a true, solid 3D environment. And fundamentally, both games were inspired by a desire to recreate an in-depth, free-roaming world where you have an almost infinite number of ways to approach the game and win it."

A classic in its own right, *Lords of Midnight* was certainly a good starting point for *Midwinter*. But it's hard to believe even the development team could have envisaged how huge and influential the game would become upon release. Nonetheless, Mike believes there was more than an inkling that something great was going to happen.

"I think the whole team was aware we were creating something quite unique," he recalls. "We had a combination of ground-breaking technology, plus a game concept with real depth and endless possibilities. The guys on the development team – Dave Ollman, Dave Gautrey, George Williamson, Andy Elkerton, Stuart Flint, Bruce Butterfield, Val Franco – gave it more than their all. And Peter Jones, Microprose's marketing director, got behind it from the very earliest days. There was a great buzz about the project."

MIKE OF ALL TRADES

While Mike clearly had a great team to help him realise his vision, his team was comparatively small – even for those early days of PC gaming. Mike's official title was director, since they were attempting to produce something as close to a cinematic experience as possible. However, he was also responsible for the entire concept and design, as well as the 3D game engine itself. We asked him how producing a game under these circumstances compared to the huge teams and big budgets seen in the modern gaming industry.

"The development process wasn't a lot different from what you'd expect nowadays," says Mike. "The outline concept was written and discussed with the publisher. This was then followed by full game specification including details of proposed new technology and then, after contract signing, we moved on to full production. The major difference today is that there's a lot more emphasis on prototyping and technology proving. Since *Midwinter* was breaking a lot of new ground in terms of graphics, the initial phases of development were heavily devoted to getting the 3D engine up and running properly, in particular the fractal landscape generation and rendering.

Mike continues: "Development was done primarily on the Atari ST, using machines with 1MB of memory (rather than the target 0.5MB for final release). This (eventually) caused us the worst headache of the entire development process when the time came to cut 1MB of game in half. Lots of creative thinking went into compressing everything and we managed to both compress the 3D object format and increase the rendering speed as a result – which was very gratifying."

"We had a mix of ground-breaking technology, plus a game concept with real depth and endless possibilities"

MIKE SINGLETON
DIRECTOR, *MIDWINTER*

BALANCE VERSUS BEAUTY

With a project of this size, it's often easy for the development team to lose sight of its original goals. Given the huge variety of vehicle types and the many approaches to overcoming the ever-present enemy threat – not to mention the sheer size of the landscape and many different characters and unique abilities to balance – the all-important gameplay element could easily have got lost in the mire.

However, Mike maintains that the *Midwinter* team never

LOOK INTO MY CRYSTAL BALL

WHAT DOES NEXT YEAR HOLD FOR THE ACTION/STRATEGY GENRE?

Midwinter combined so many game elements, it's difficult to find any title in development that offers a similar experience – in fact, you'd have to take two or three different titles and stick them together to come anywhere near this timeless classic. In the 3D action/strategy genre, it's particularly tough to find a title that offers such a measured balance of action and strategy in one package, with most games erring strongly in either direction.

For example, *Midwinter's* recruitment process required you to balance the personalities of your team (much like *Jagged Alliance*), a level of depth you won't see in the likes of *Hidden & Dangerous 2*.

That said, *Operation Flashpoint 2* offers some similar gameplay devices, with a wide range of vehicles and some small-scale strategy, while *Battlefield Vietnam* hopes to provide a more immediate, arcade experience.

But it is perhaps Crytek's forthcoming *Far Cry* that's set to offer the closest experience to *Midwinter* in terms of atmosphere, with its first-person sniping, huge islands to explore and range of vehicles – including a hang-glider. Of course, it's got none of the strategic side of *Midwinter* and is more of a 'mid-summer' when it comes to the weather, but the similarities are certainly there.

Mike's next title is a console-only game called *Wrath Unleashed*.

lost sight of this most vital of elements during the long development process.

"The final product was remarkably close to the original game spec, which I came across a year or so back when sorting out my ancient paperwork. We'd been as comprehensive as possible in the game design and it showed in the final product. In retrospect, I think a little more variety in the hazards encountered during journeys would have helped – the attacks made on you were eventually a bit repetitive. Although you could say the same about many of today's games too."

The end result, as you'll know if you've played *Midwinter*, was an almost perfect balance between strategy, combat and vehicle control and management. But while the game undoubtedly pushed the technological envelope of the time to its limits, there were things the team wanted to do that weren't possible within the realms of the hardware available. While today's development teams can pretty much sit down and write a game plan for their new projects and realise it almost completely, the *Midwinter* team had no such luxury.

"We'd been as comprehensive as possible in the initial game design and it showed in the final product"

MIKE SINGLETON
DIRECTOR, *MIDWINTER*

Mike explains: "We would've loved stereo sound. Instead, we upped the volume if the object was in front of you and dimmed it if it was to the side or behind. This meant you had some audio clues as to the whereabouts of unseen vehicles. Unfortunately, lots of people found this rather difficult, so we added some flashing lights as well. We would have loved more colours per pixel too. It's always limiting to try to do light-source shading with only 16 basic colours."

He continues: "Of course, wonderful VGA with (gasp) 256 colours was great for the PC version, but not everyone had that luxury. We were also supporting EGA (16 colours) and possibly CGA (with four). More processor speed would have been great too and then we could've let the player see much further into the distance. We did some experiments on very fast machines (for the time), with two or three times the view distance and it looked great. Unfortunately, almost nobody had that sort of CPU speed."

VIRTUAL PIONEERS

Midwinter's many and varied gameplay innovations will always be its strong point, and if you played it when it was first released, the list of neat features in this title are almost endless. Who could forget the long trips through the snow, racing against the clock and stopping occasionally to find a building to hide behind? Once inside, you could get in a bit of practice with the game's superb sniper rifle – providing you were in control of a character with enough skill to keep the damned rifle steady. Or how about hang-gliding across treacherous terrain to make up precious time before, usually, crashing unceremoniously into the snow? (Hang-gliding was highly entertaining, but extremely difficult.)

Midwinter was one of the first games to feature localised damage and realistic fatigue levels too, so you may also have been looking at a long limp to bed if things came unstuck. These are just some of the many reasons why *Midwinter* will be remembered as one of the most complete games ever made.

***Midwinter II: Flames of Freedom* – an excellent sequel to an excellent game.**

BRINGING IT TO LIFE

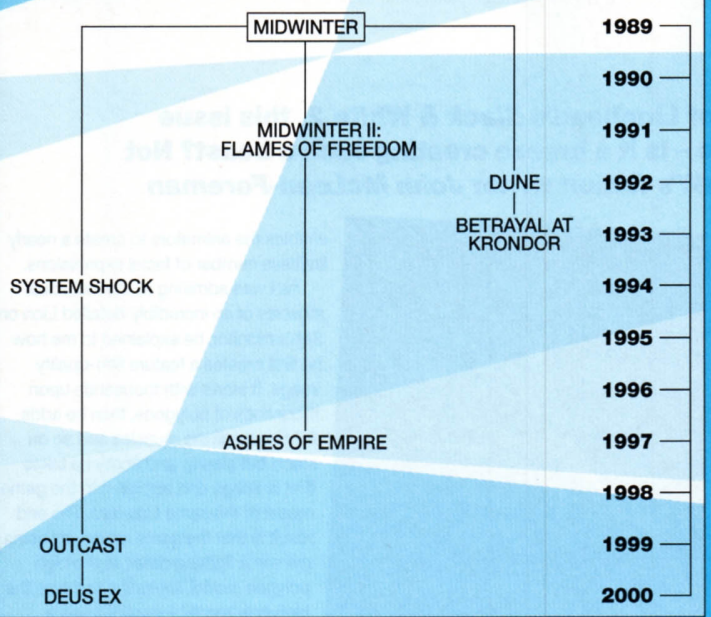
For Mike and the *Midwinter* team, however, the biggest challenge was always going to be creating a 3D world on a machine that was never designed for such purposes. Mike recalls the enormity of the challenge all too well.

"Back then, there was no hardware assistance whatsoever for any 3D graphics – and even the memory layout of the pixels on-screen often seemed designed to make things harder. Not only were 3D games few and far between, so was any reference material. The superb access on the Web now enables people to track down computer graphics research papers, but there was no such easy access in those days."

Mike explains: "For example, we independently 'invented' what we called

FAMILY TREE

The influence of *Midwinter* has been felt across many titles and genres, but here are a few choice titles that have most clearly benefited from its innovations



By the end of the game, you knew all the characters like family.

We can't help thinking there should be more skiing in today's FPSs.

'spatial slicing' to get the polygon order right – a technique more commonly known these days as BSP trees, but not known at all to us back then (although it had already been researched in academia). Then there was all the fun of writing scan-line rendering routines in assembler for generalised polygons – not just triangles. The worst part was the clipping routines. These are always a complete pain to write – even up to this day, where the PS2 still needs vector unit software to do true clipping."

The one thing that wasn't as big a problem was game structure. "I'd been working games around a 3D environment for quite some time – *Lords of Midnight* on the Spectrum had 3D panoramic views, albeit ones that were not very quick to update," smiles Mike. "Because of that, we had a very clear idea of what we wanted designwise from the very start."

ANOTHER LONG WINTER

Following its enormous critical success and modest commercial success, *Midwinter* spawned two sequels: *Midwinter II: Flames Of Freedom* and the lesser known *Ashes Of Empire*, which didn't quite match up to the standards of the first two games.

For Mike, the second title remains the best: "The only true sequel was *Midwinter II: Flames of Freedom*. It expanded hugely on the original, with 42 islands rather than one to explore. What's more, each island had its own missions and characters, but with all the island missions knitting together in a non-linear grand strategy to prevent the enemy taking over the archipelago. It was in this sequel that we managed to inject so much extra variety – over 30 different forms of transport for instance, as well as numerous weapon types. It was definitely a great follow-up to the original *Midwinter*."

While *Midwinter II* was undoubtedly a worthy successor to the original classic, some still preferred the desolate snow-laden wasteland of the first game, along with the less conventional forms of transport that came with it. There's something intensely satisfying about skiing down *Midwinter's* huge slopes, or hopping into a snow buggy or cable car while you dodge the enemy and admire the snowy peaks. Perhaps *Midwinter* was always destined to be a one-off; but regardless, 14 years later it remains unmatched for sheer depth of gameplay and open-ended exploration.

Ironically, if this game were to be overhauled for modern PCs, you'd be looking at a game that would bring even the fastest PC to its knees if you tried to reproduce the environment and modes of transport in any kind of realistic detail. For Mike Singleton at least, that would surely ring a few bells. PZ

THE LIONHEAD DIARIES

Continuing the story of the making of Lionhead's *Black & White 2*, this issue we turn our attention to the Creature – is it a breeze creating such a beast? Not quite, but it beats a real job says *B&W's* fiction writer *John McLean-Foreman*

ON A TYPICAL day, I give very little thought to how the other 50 or so people working in Black & White Studios (part of Lionhead) spend their time. I'm usually far too lost within the minds of my story characters. So it came as a surprise to find out how many people are involved in the development of the Creature.

There's Neil the Creature AI programmer, Stephen who works on the physics engine, the legion of animators, Mark the art lead and the concept artists. There's also Sebastian who designs the Creature in 3D, Per who creates the multitude of skins that surround the bone structure, along with Anton who develops the 3D rendering systems that enable the artists' work to be transferred into a playable version of the *Black & White* program. And that's before mentioning Craig who does sound effects and the testers who make sure everything works perfectly. That's more than a dozen people involved in this part of the game.

The Creature was my favourite part of *Black & White* – I fiddled around with my Tiger far more than anything else. The main problem, though, was that I couldn't ever just leave him to his own devices. If I did, he'd wander off to the middle of nowhere, eat far too much, throw villagers around for no apparent reason and do all the things I didn't want him to be doing. What a little punk.

You create a Creature unique to your style.

CREATURE FEATURES

There are some pretty spectacular changes in the newest incarnation of the Creature, though. First, he's no longer an enormous infant that requires constant mummy-management – he's now your greatest asset. With the new AI, the Creature can control armies and employ dynamic military strategies at the appropriate times. Further, how you train the Creature is much less of a black box in that you see directly into his brain, so you know exactly what it is you're training him to do. Gone are the days of slapping your Creature for eating a villager, only to find that he's moved on to another action. In the new version of *Black & White*, nothing is left to chance.

Another fantastic change has to do with the physics engine. In *Black & White*, the Creature wasn't affected by any external forces. Everything the Creature did, or was touched by, was simply animation that gave the Creature the illusion of being a part of the world. For example, if he tore up a tree and threw it, the game would run an animation while the Creature held the tree; the tree would only become a physical object again when the Creature let it go. The game physics would then apply to the tree, the tree would fall, bounce and so on, in as realistic a fashion as possible.

In *Black & White 2*, all the animations are done within the physics engine. This means that if some outside force (such as a ballista bolt tearing into the Creature's flesh and causing him to stagger painfully) were to interfere with an animation (the Creature charging the enemy), the result would be a combination of the two – a sort of stagger-filled attempt to rush forward. The end result is that there'll be endless combinations of unpredictable animations, depending on whatever is happening to the Creature at the time.

One afternoon, I strolled over to the other side of the office and had a little chat with Sebastian (the 3D guy), who told me the Creature in *Black & White 2* has upwards of 70 bones, 20 of which are in the face. Placing nearly a third of all the bones in the face sounds like a lot, but it enables the animators to create a nearly limitless number of facial expressions.

As I was admiring all the individual muscles of an incredibly detailed Lion on Seb's monitor, he explained to me how he first creates a feature film-quality image. It starts with thousands upon thousands of polygons, then he adds lighting so all the muscles and so on stand out clearly, and finally he takes that lit image and applies it to the game model of the same Creature. The end result is that the game model, by using the same lighting detail as the high polygon model, looks the same as the high poly model – except it has a slightly jagged outline.

CHARACTER ACTOR

Once Seb has finished his work, the Creature journeys to the animation team, who then imbue each Creature with its own personality. The Lion, for example, is aloof and catlike; the Ape is cheeky and foolish, more human in nature.

Kelly, one of the animators, showed me how these two Creatures approached the same task: knocking a human soldier off a city wall. The Ape sent the human screaming towards his demise with a flick of a finger, while the Lion pounced and swatted the soldier half a kilometre through the air. Both were effective, but indicative of vastly different personalities, just as every animation is required to be.

SUITS YOU, SIR

What further separates one creature from another is the myriad of ways in which the Creature alters its form to suit each player's actions. Based on those actions, the Creature appears good or evil, young or old, strong or weak, fat or thin – and every combination in-between. The Creature may grow long hair, which can get wet or matted, or burned by a fire. The more a Creature fights, the more likely he is to become badly scarred. The outcome is that every player has a Creature unique to their own gaming style.

Having discovered exactly what it takes to make the Creature, I'm excited. Even though I can see it all changing on a daily basis, I still can't wait for the moment when I can mould my Creature in my own likeness and unleash him upon the brave new world of *Black & White 2*. PCZ

"The Creature used to wander off, eat far too much and throw villagers around for no reason. What a little punk"

JOHN MCLEAN-FOREMAN
FICTION WRITER, LIONHEAD

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RETRO ZONE DECEMBER 1995

Coolio may have been in *Gangsta's Paradise* and Blur in their very big house in the country, but *Richie Shoemaker* was living in a flat above a kebab shop in Willesden Green. Bless...

THE TERMINATOR: FUTURE SHOCK

The future wasn't that bright after all

"*Future Shock* more than hinted at things to come"

BEING ABLE to look up and down, hopping into tanks and spurting hot lead from above are all features we've come to expect in a modern first-person shooter. However, back in the days when triple-buffering was something you did with a pot of mayonnaise and a pillow when your parents were out at Bingo, such things were seldom dreamt about.

Cruelly overlooked (probably because its release was quickly followed by *Duke Nukem 3D*), *Future Shock* more than hinted at things to come – it was a film licence done right that didn't rely solely on the films. In it, you were simply a soldier fighting the machines of Skynet across the blighted urban wasteland of future Los Angeles. Most buildings could be explored for various weapons and extra ammo and outdoor wrecked cars burned ceaselessly under the bleak sky.

Despite the decent spread of weapons, enemies like spiderbots and the terminators themselves, the game suffered from a lack of variety in the environments and a couple of show-stopping bugs. A lack of multiplayer support didn't help things either, although developer Bethesda (since resurgent with its magnificent *Morrowind* RPG) did make amends with a multiplayer-centric sequel a year later.

Die Skynet! Die!

Sadly, as has been the case with modern FPS masterpieces like *No One Lives Forever 2* that haven't received the adulation they deserve, *Future Shock* barely warrants a mention in FPS history, despite being something of a milestone at the time. Maybe Atari's *Terminator 3: War Of The Machines* will fare a bit better? Let's hope so.

THE BEST OF THE REST

FIFA SOCCER 96
(PC/PSX/Saturn/Mega Drive/SNES)
The original floppy-based *FIFA* was fairly awful, but what made it memorable was the subsequent CD-ROM release, featuring full commentary for the first time. *FIFA 96* went a few steps further with decent 3D graphics (VGA, of course), Motty on the mic, loads of teams and a half-decent game of footy to boot. Not much has changed since and it still ain't number one: we preferred *Actua Soccer* then, today it's *Pro Evo*.

SCREAMER
(PC)
This was the month that PlayStation racer *WipEout* appeared for the PC, but for high-octane race and chase action *Screamer* was far better. Hardly the most original racer, it was fun and suitably furious with an impressive sense of speed. *Screamer* will also be remembered for its marketing, which featured a grim shot of a mangled car with the tagline: 'The roads are full of mad men... Join them'.

CHRONO TRIGGER
(SNES)
Square is renowned for its *Final Fantasy* series, and purists will forever debate which was the best, *FFVI* or *FFVII*. However, for fans of Japan's premier RPG developer, *Chrono Trigger* is up there with both of them. Graphically-lush, predictably twee and endlessly charming, this non-linear time-travelling adventure also had over a dozen endings to explore, keeping you coming back for more.

WING COMMANDER IV
(PC)
Nearly a decade since it was developed, Chris Robert's sci-fi sequel remains one of the most expensive games ever. It cost over $10m, solely because it had an epic full-motion video story, starring Mark 'Luke be a Jedi tonight' Hamill and stock baddie Malcolm McDowell. The bits you watched were incredible; but the bits you played were derivative, repetitive and soulless – like most FMV-laden games of the time.

NEWSFLASH

IT'S DEC 1995 AND...

- PC manufacturer Dell starts up a fully-automated technical support line, AutoTech, which can solve your PC woes without you talking to a real person. So now you know who to blame...
- Following up the summer's PlayStation release, Sony announces a range of high-end desktop PCs. Meanwhile, IBM reckons the next big thing is Net-enabled set-top boxes.
- With most people still trying to get their head around CD-ROMs,' the industry goes and shows off some shiny silver disc thingy called a DVD.
- Having been out for a few months (though not in the UK), Nintendo finally admits sales of the Virtual Boy console have been a touch slow. No matter, though, for VB versions of *Metroid* and *F-Zero* are on the way.

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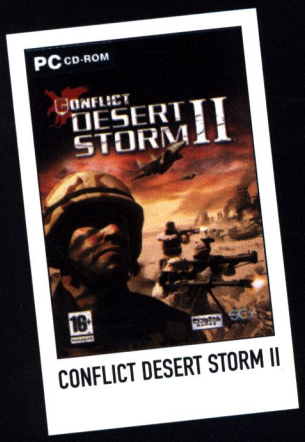

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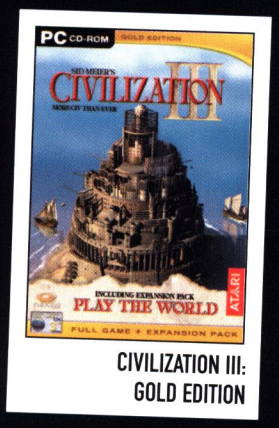

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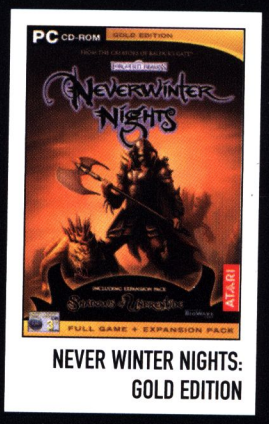

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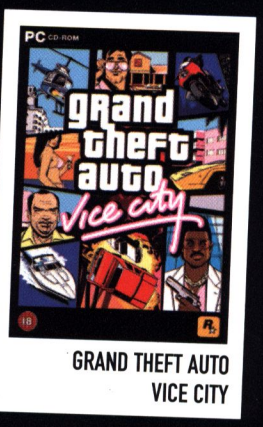

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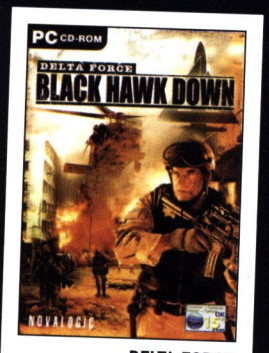
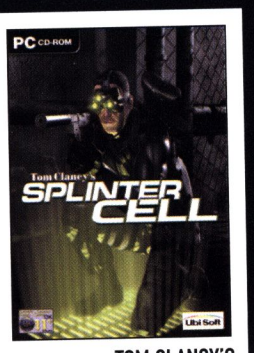
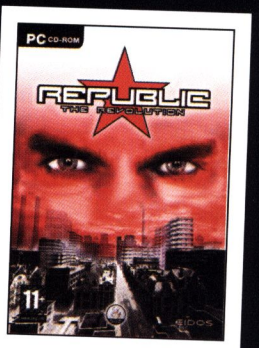


DELTA FORCE: BLACK HAWK DOWN



TOM CLANCY'S SPLINTER CELL



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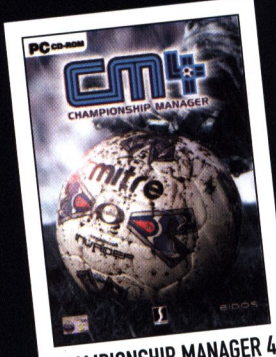

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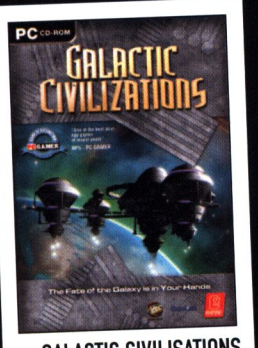

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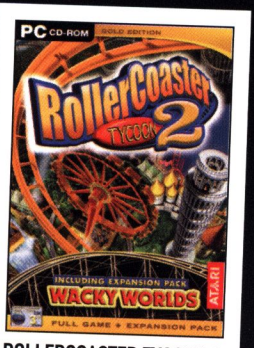

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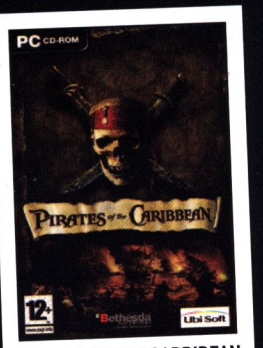

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