

PCZONE

GROUND CONTROL 2

Earth-shattering review AND demo!



HUGE E3 ROUND-UP!

ALL THE BIG GAMES REVEALED!

F.E.A.R. THE NEW SHOOTER FROM THE MAKERS OF NOLF 2 AND AVP 2

BATTLEFIELD 2

SPLINTER

CELL 3

KOTOR 2

PARIAH

DOOM 3

Release date confirmed inside!

HALF-LIFE 2

Counter-Strike on the Source Engine!

LOTR: THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH

...AND LOADS MORE!

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UEFA EURO 2004

HITMAN: CONTRACTS

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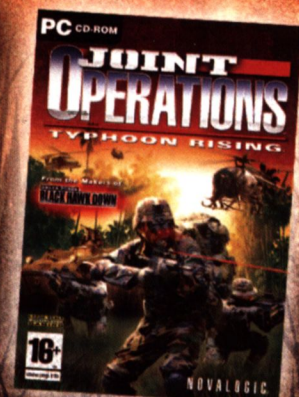
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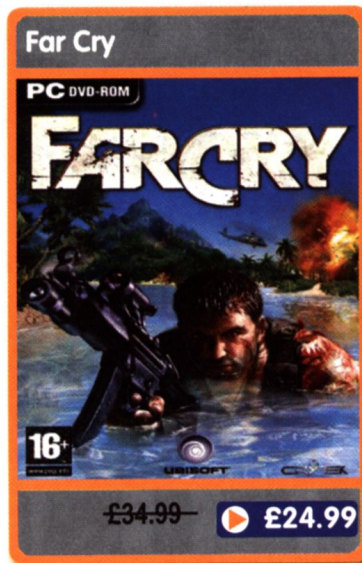
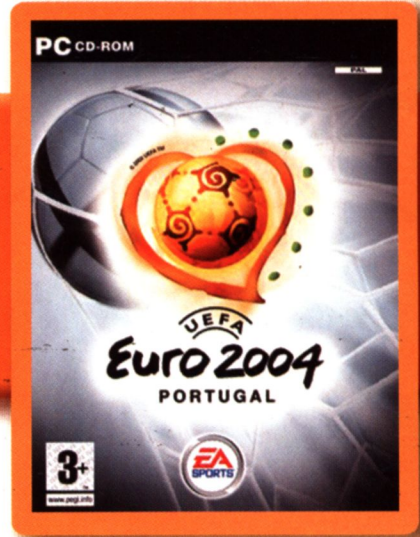
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GROUND CONTROL 2 P68

Earth-shattering review of the action-packed RTS



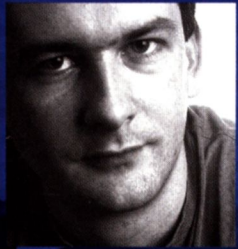
COVER DISCS P134 →

■ THREE EXCLUSIVE DEMOS...

The tactical RTS *Ground Control II*, the action-packed *Soldiers: Heroes Of WWII* and the fantastic *Rise Of Nations: Thrones And Patritots*. Plus, *Halo Custom Edition*, *UEFA Euro 2004* and *TOCA Race Driver 2* (multiplayer).

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LA Confidential

Booze, fags, sunburn, scantily clad women (some with no clothes on at all), hot tub action with porn stars, a spot of eight-ball, loads of videogames, a bit of bungee jumping, the world's biggest rollercoasters and relatively little sleep. Can you guess what it is yet? OK, throw in a load of portly Americans whooping it up like little kids and two transatlantic flights and you've got E3, the biggest games show in the whole wide world, where the very best journalists in the business – and a few *PC ZONE* reprobates – meet in LA to gawp and poke at the games you're going to be playing over the next couple of years.

Most of the biggies were re-runs from last year (although none the worse for an extra 12 months development time). *Doom 3* and *Half-Life 2* were both on show and ironically both are posting a summer release date. *Doom 3*'s a definite, (id hasn't opened its mouth except to say 'done when it's done' for the past three years, so when it announces a release date you can take it as gospel). As for *Half-Life 2*? Summer? 2004? We can but hope, especially after the stunning demonstration of *Counter-Strike* running on the Source engine. Check out page 59 for the full skinny.

But there were also a couple of very big surprises and I personally made sure that none of the *ZONE* team went out drinking until they'd filed world-exclusive reports on *F.E.A.R.* (the new shooter from the makers of *NOLF 2* and *AvP 2*) and *Splinter Cell 3*. They weren't happy, especially as I was spotted ten minutes later by the hotel pool sniffing at a margherita and attempting (unsuccessfully) to get some of LA's finest to rub sun cream all over me, but that's the sort of sacrifice we're prepared to make for you.

Best of show? You'll have to read our 38-page round-up starting on page 34, including the return of the infamous *PC ZONE* (Alternative) E3 Awards to find out. And when you've finished, check out our world-exclusive review and demo of the strategy sequel, *Ground Control II*. I love it when a plan comes together...

Dave Woods
Editor

FIRST LOOK

- 8 **KOTOR 2**
YOU'RE THE LAST JEDI ALIVE IN THE HOT NEW STAR WARS SEQUEL
- 10 **AXIS AND ALLIES**
MEDIEVAL: TOTAL WAR IN WWII? FIRST SHOTS AND INFO HERE!

BULLETIN

- 12 **CLOSE COMBAT: FIRST TO FIGHT**
THE NEW MILITARY SHOOTER - AS USED BY REAL US MARINES!
- 14 **SPECIAL REPORT**
CHRISTIAN GAMES: A WORLD YOU NEVER KNEW EXISTED
- 17 **EMULATION ZONE**
RETURN OF THE MAC
- 19 **DRAGON AGE**
THE MASTERS RETURN! BIOWARE'S NEW RPG BLOCKBUSTER UNVEILED
- 25 **SEARCH FOR A GAME**
YOUR WACKY GAME IDEAS JUDGED
- 26 **THE PC ZONE CHARTS**
NOW WITH ADDED MONKEYS!
- 28 **HOT SHOTS**
TRIBES: VENGEANCE
- 30 **HOT SHOTS**
FIRST PICS OF UNREAL ENGINE 3.0

"F.E.A.R. looks frighteningly good - we'll be sleeping with the lights on"



ONLINE ZONE

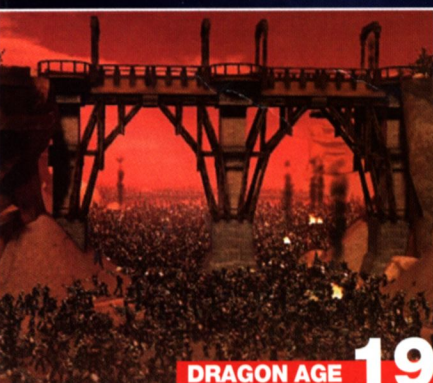
- 96 **ONLINE NEWS**
BATTLEFIELD IS BACK WITH A STUNNING FULL SEQUEL
- 99 **WELCOME TO MY WORLD**
SIZE IS EVERYTHING IN FRENCH MMOG DARK AND LIGHT
- 100 **THE SAGA OF RYZOM**
WE GET OUR HANDS DIRTY IN THE ORGANIC WORLD OF ATYS
- 102 **ONLINE GAMBLING**
STICK OR TWIST? OUR INTREPID CARD SHARK TRIES HIS LUCK ONLINE
- 104 **E3 ROUND-UP**
SCOURING THE SHOW FOR THE LATEST AND GREATEST IN THE WORLD OF ONLINE GAMING
- 112 **FIGHT CLUB**
U2:XMP PROVES ITS WORTH. PLUS GUILDHALL, ZONE CHAT AND MORE
- 114 **COMMUNITY CHEST**
WHAT'S NEW IN THE UNREAL WORLD
- 115 **NEVERQUEST**
FOOTBALL FANTASIES AS STEVE HILL ENTERS BIOSFEAR

HARDWARE

- 118 **HARDWARE NEWS**
THE 3D CARD WAR HEATS UP
- 120 **REVIEWS**
A LAPTOP THAT PLAYS GAMES? WITCHCRAFT!
- 122 **DEAR WANDY**
PC PROBLEMS? DR WANDY IS THE MAN WITH THE ANSWERS
- 124 **WATCHDOG**
COMPANIES TAKING THE PISS? WE'RE HERE TO HELP...
- 126 **BUYER'S GUIDE**

REAR VIEW

- 128 **MAILBOX**
SHARE YOUR VIEWS HERE
- 130 **THE A-LIST**
YOUR ONE-STOP BUYER'S GUIDE
- 134 **DISC PAGES**
- 145 **RETROZONE**
THE LAST-EVER RETROZONE...



DRAGON AGE 19

FEATURES

- 138 **GAMES THAT CHANGED THE WORLD**
THE MAKING OF MUTATED RPG MASTERPIECE FALLOUT

PCZONE

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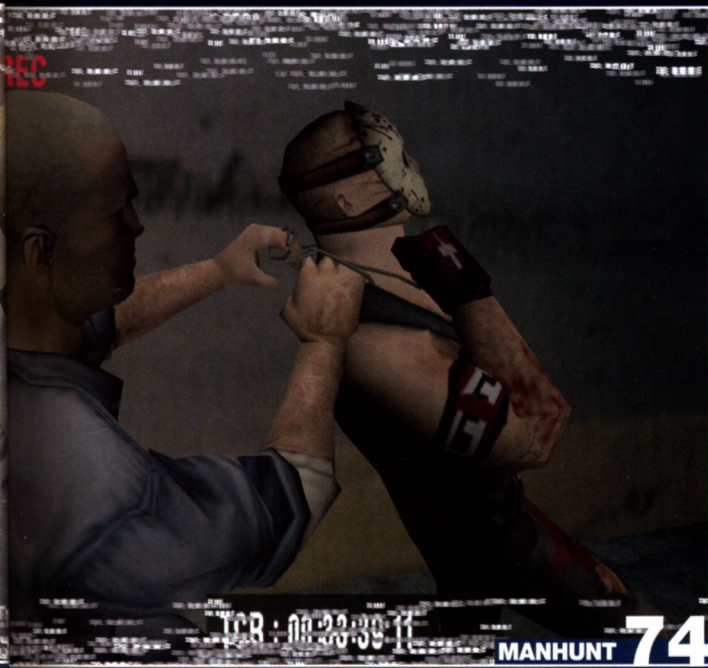
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**HUGE
E3 ROUND-UP!
ALL THE BIG GAMES
REVEALED!**



SPLINTER CELL 3 38



MANHUNT 74



HITMAN: CONTRACTS 84

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PREVIEWS

**MASSIVE E3
ROUND-UP INCLUDING:**

- 34 E3 SHOW REPORT
- 37 PCZONE E3 AWARDS
- 38 SPLINTER CELL 3
- 42 PARIAH
- 44 SID MEIER'S PIRATES!
- 48 F.E.A.R.
- 50 PLAYBOY: THE MANSION
- 52 BROTHERS IN ARMS
- 53 SWAT 4
- 54 NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND 2
- 55 CALL OF DUTY: UNITED OFFENSIVE
- 56 THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH
- 58 KNIGHTS OF HONOR
- 59 SHELLSHOCK: NAM '67
- 60 DUNGEON SIEGE II
- 61 HALF-LIFE 2
- 62 FOOTBALL MANAGER
- 63 PRINCE OF PERSIA 2

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 (143), PC ZONE, 9 Dallington Street, London EC1V 0BO. The first correct entry plucked out of the hat wins a mystery prize. Closing date: June 28, 2004. The winner of our May Tiny Compo (141) is Nicholas Aldred from the charming town of Droitwich Spa. He knew that Romulus and Remus founded Rome, and for this incredible feat we've awarded him a copy of *UT2004*.

GENERAL COMPETITION TERMS & CONDITIONS: 1. Only completed entries received before the closing date will be entered. 2. Winners will be notified by post. 3. No cash alternative. 4. Prizes not necessarily as shown. 5. No correspondence will be entered into. 6. The editor's decision is final. 7. Responsibility cannot be accepted for lost or undelivered entries. 8. Competitions are not open to readers outside the UK or employees of Dennis or its affiliated companies, their families, agents or anyone professionally connected with the competition. Phew!
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contents

REVIEWS

- 68 **GROUND CONTROL II: OPERATION EXODUS**
READ OUR EXCLUSIVE REVIEW OF THE EARTH-SHATTERING NEW RTS
- 74 **MANHUNT**
SO GORY EVEN WE WERE SHOCKED!
- 76 **UEFA EURO 2004**
HANDS UP WHO CAN SPOT THE DIFFERENCE WITH FIFA?
- 78 **RISE OF NATIONS: THRONES AND PATRIOTS**
LAST YEAR'S BEST RTS GETS BETTER
- 80 **DEAD MAN'S HAND**
- 83 **THE PUNIC WARS: A CLASH OF TWO EMPIRES**
- 84 **HITMAN: CONTRACTS**
BALDIE'S BACK! BUT CAN HE STILL MIX IT WITH THE BIG BOYS?
- 86 **PARADISE CRACKED**
- 86 **WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP RUGBY**
- 87 **WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP POOL 2004**
- 87 **ANNO 1503: TREASURES, MONSTERS AND PIRATES**
- 88 **BLITZKRIEG: BURNING HORIZON**
- 88 **THE BLACK MIRROR**
- 88 **PAC-MAN WORLD 2**
- 89 **HARRY POTTER AND THE PRISONER OF AZKABAN**
- 89 **BAD BOYS II**
- 90 **REPLAY**
ALL THE LATEST BUDGET GAMES REVIEWED, INCLUDING *LINKS 2003*, *ICEWIND DALE II*, *ENCLAVE* AND MORE
- 92 **FEEDBACK**
YOUR VIEWS, REVIEWS AND OPINIONS ON THE LATEST GAMES



There is another...

FIRST Look!

KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC II: THE SITH LORDS

The curtain rises on the RPG sequel we've been waiting for

WIDE-EYED PADAWAN: Martin Korda

ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW

PUBLISHER Activision

DEVELOPER Obsidian Games

EXPECTED RELEASE DATE Q1 2005

WEBSITE www.lucasarts.com

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- It's the sequel to the best *Star Wars* game ever
- Set to be even bigger than the last game
- All-new weapons, Force powers and Feats
- Streamlined inventory system
- Acrobatic combat animations
- Facial animations

IT'S FIVE YEARS after *Knights Of The Old Republic* and the perennially endangered Jedi once again stand on the brink of extinction, thanks to the Sith. Nothing new there then, eh? Or is there? You see, while the basic premise of this RPG may sound hackneyed, new developer Obsidian – taking over the reins from Bioware – is determined to build on the original's massive success by injecting a tantalising concoction of new features into the sequel. We took a trip to the developer's offices to find out the facts about the second *KOTOR* straight from the Tauntaun's mouth.

NEW TO YOU

First things first then: character creation. Producer Chris Parker assures us that it's remaining virtually untouched from the previous game's system. Not so the inventory. "It's receiving a substantial overhaul that'll enable you to switch from melee to ranged weapons without interrupting the flow of the turn-based combat." He also mentions a facial animation system, which should ensure your party members have far more charisma than *KOTOR*'s often expressionless cast. This means higher-level characters are now able to pull off stunning new combat animations.

Building the anticipation, Chris then lets us see one of the new mini-games first-hand. It's a typical Lucas-scribbled hanger shootout, in which you man a turret of an escaping ship and cut down advancing Sith soldiers.

Of course, *KOTOR*'s most outstanding feature was the quality of its plot, something the hugely experienced Chris Avellone (the brains



There'll only be one Jedi in the game this time around: you.

behind many of the most recent Black Isle scripts and chief storywriter here) is keen to replicate, with a tale that casts you as the galaxy's last surviving Jedi. What's more, having been kicked out of the Jedi order years prior, you've become estranged from the Force.

"The game starts with you waking up, dazed and confused in the morgue of a mining facility after a Sith attack on your ship," explains Avellone. "Being the last of your kind, you're top of their 'Most Wanted' list, meaning you must once again learn the way of the Jedi in order to survive."

Helping you in your quest will be a wrinkly old crone called Kreia, who's not only uglier than something you'd find at a petrol station counter at 3am, but also extremely knowledgeable about Force powers. Which is pretty damn handy considering you've forgotten them all.

Also joining your merry band is hawk-faced Atton Rand, a charismatic rogue who helps you fill in your memory banks, as well as mucking in with combat – during which he'll no doubt be able to utilise his massive conk as a secondary weapon. Fleshing out the party line-up, meanwhile, is a T3 unit droid – a tin box on wheels that beeps like a broken alarm clock, a bit like R2D2 only even more annoying.

With 16 new Force powers and Feats (including Force Sight – the ability to see through walls), plus a host of new weapons such as Wrist Rocket Launchers, there's more than enough to excite any *Star Wars* fan. But will it be as good as *KOTOR*? Well, it's hard to say for sure at such an early stage, but from the looks of things we're talking a lot more *Empire Strikes Back* than we are *Super Bombad Racing*... [E]



The Sith are out to get you, so you'd better be on your guard.



The graphics engine is receiving a complete overhaul.



“With 16 new Force powers and Feats as well as new weapons, there’s plenty to excite any *Star Wars* fan”

A new weapons config system means you can easily switch between weapons during combat.

KNOW YOUR ENEMY

Enemies will vary from ankle-biting alien critters to Sith Masters. Depending on your party’s abilities, you can either choose to fight each enemy, or try using other skills to beat them – like reprogramming enemy droids.

AI, AI

The Enemy AI is being totally reworked, meaning that teams of enemies will now work together more intelligently, heal each other more effectively and try to out-manoeuvre you more often.

BRANCHING OFF

There’ll be certain missions when your party has to split up and go off in separate directions to complete tasks simultaneously. In these cases, each task will be played out separately by you.

LEVELLING UP

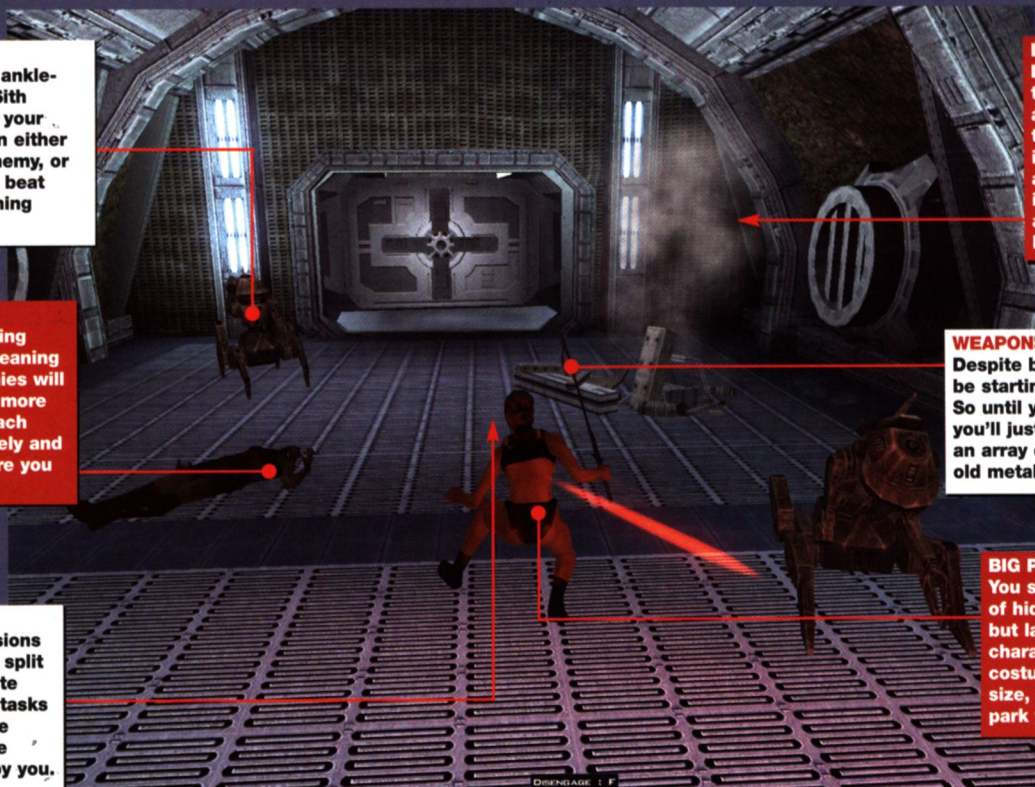
Levels are set to be larger than before, offering you a vast number of areas to explore. Newly implemented weather and particle effects and improved level geometry are set to generate a more believable world too.

WEAPONS

Despite being a Jedi, you won’t be starting off with a lightsaber. So until you track one down, you’ll just have to make do with an array of blasters and a plain old metal chopper.

BIG PANTS

You start off wearing just a pair of hideously-oversized pants, but later you can dress your character in all sorts of costumes. And with an arse that size, you’ll probably be able to park your Speeder in it too.



**FIRST
Look!**

AXIS & ALLIES



From board to screen, we look at Atari's all-new version of the classic war game

■ **AXIS OF EVIL:** Richie Shoemaker

ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW

PUBLISHER Timegate Studios
DEVELOPER Atari
EXPECTED RELEASE DATE Late 2004
WEBSITE www.atari.com

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- The original '80s board game is an established classic
- *Total War*-style RTS with tanks
- Accessible quick-fire 3D battles set across the globe
- Intriguing alt-history campaigns

"For the all-new Axis & Allies, Timegate is taking a more radical approach"

AXIS & ALLIES is the king of war board games. It may lack the tactical subtlety of titles like *Squad Leader*, and *Risk* may be more approachable, but with its marriage of realism and WWII fun, A&A ticks all the boxes – and can be completed in an afternoon. This is a big plus, when games like *A World At War* drag on almost as long as the battles they attempt to emulate.

So we were very excited by Atari's new plans to reintroduce the game to a new generation of PC war-gamers. Problem is, the last *Axis & Allies* PC game, released in 1998, covered all the bases anyway. It was a straight-up board game conversion, no more, no less. So what now?

NEW RADICALS

For the all-new A&A, developer Timegate is taking a more radical approach, one that takes almost as much inspiration from the *Total War* series as it does the original board game. As in *Total War*, you have your turn-based *Risk*-style bit (a digitised version of the A&A board game), with real-time 3D battles that blitz onto the screen whenever you or your opponent advance into a defended territory.

Setting aside, the game differs from *Total War* in one key area – the 3D battles, which are set to follow the common RTS template where bases must be built and resources gathered before you can join a battle. It appears to be a wholly unrealistic way to wage what are supposed to be realistic battles, but the developer sees this as the only way to ensure the war is as enjoyable to play



As the war progresses, new tanks and technologies become available.

through at the game's conclusion as it is during the tense early stages.

In *Total War* for example, you could, after conquering a certain portion of the map, rely on numerical superiority to win the game with scant regard for tactics – and in doing so, effect a dreary anticlimax. In A&A, you may (in time) employ a vast global army too, but unless you can build a field HQ quickly and bring in supplies, you won't be able to bring your numerical superiority to bear and could falter against a smaller but more organised foe.

CHAINS OF COMMAND

Although the global dynamic campaign will be the central focus of the game, requiring you to exercise both real-time reflexes and turn-based brainpower, Atari is planning to include traditional story-driven campaigns too. There will be one

each for the joint Allied and Axis side, which in the case of the latter is set to take an alternate route through history culminating in victory – or perhaps stalemate – for the Germans. Whether this includes the subjugation of Great Britain or Russia, or a Japanese invasion of America we're not sure – Timegate is being coy. However, it seems that unlike other WWII-themed games, this may well pull up a few welcome surprises.

Although *Rome: Total War* remains at the top of our most-wanted strategy game list, *Axis & Allies* looks set to command a respectable position in the chain of command. Right now, we fear only for the 3D battles themselves, which appear to follow the unsubtle C&C formula too closely. Of course, the full-scale war has yet to begin, with plans still being drawn up, so we reserve judgement till then. [P2]



It may have palm trees, but we wouldn't advise holidaying here...



In *Axis & Allies*, you can get all tanked up.



Axis & Allies is set to ship with a decent spread of multiplayer options, though sadly not for the full dynamic campaign.

RESERVE AND PROTECT

Each nation begins with one or two production centres that are the only territories where you can place new units ready for battle. If the enemy have bombers within striking distance, it's best to build some anti-aircraft batteries to protect them, or a new centre elsewhere.

GENERAL ADVANCE

The board game only featured generic tanks, infantry, fighters, bombers and ships. Now mobile and recon units are available too (among others), all specific to each nation. This expands *A&A* far beyond the latest edition of the non-digital version.

WORLD PARTY

Axis & Allies will be the first RTS that enables you to conquer the globe entirely (apart from those neutral countries), although the process may take a little longer than it did in the board game.

RISKY BUSINESS

The main window of the campaign map is where you'll be building and moving your armies, in a similar way to *Total War*. Of course, *Total War* borrowed the system from *Axis & Allies* in the first place...

RULE CHANGE

It's not the most exciting interface we've seen, but all the options are there. Interestingly, it looks like the turn-based part of the game is set to run out of sequence with the established rules.

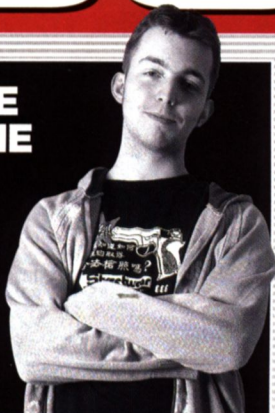
COMBINED FORCE

The unit you select will be highlighted here, showing its attack and defence values and the strength of the force. However, you can only place your units in territories under Allied control or your own.



BULLETIN

HOME ALONE



NEWS WRITER Will Porter

▲ The phone rings. It's Dave. He's saying something about late copy, but interspersed with this are words like 'Playboy Mansion', 'cocktails', 'Half-Life 2', 'Mallo's hot tub' and 'Justin Timberlake's restaurant'. I put the phone down, mildly surprised that the smell of alcohol can permeate through thousands of miles of phone line just as well as it can cover the ten metres of air that stand between my desk and the editorial throne. Outside, it starts to rain.

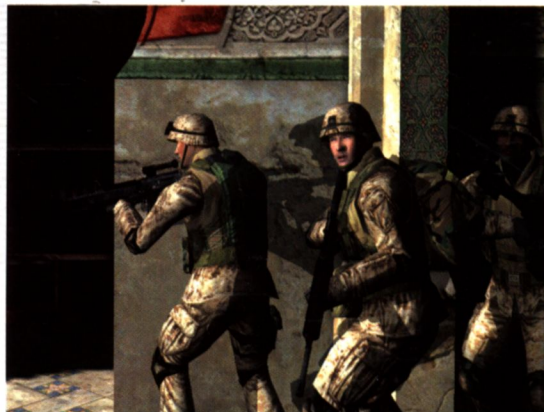
It's E3 time, y'see – the time of year when games journalists are split asunder. Two groups form 'the stayers' and 'the goers': one grumpy, the other happy. All, however, are similarly overwhelmed by the sheer quantity of gaming information that gushes out of E3 like a burst water main. Bad games, good games, games that are so amazing they make your nose bleed – and then we plunge it through the PC ZONE condenser and provide an analysis of the cream of the crop for you, the discerning reader.

This year is no exception, and we've gone through hell, highwater and Hef's mansion to get you the best coverage. At least that lot have. It's not easy idly passing by the BloodRayne 2 booth babe when you're on your way to pick up some vital nuggets of information on a Russian RPG y'know. And the LA night-life can't be sampled on its own can it?

Seriously though, I'm just being jealous. Trying to cover an event with so many thousands of games on show is, apparently, knackered. Anyway, maybe next year I'll get to go. Until then, I'll just console myself with my lovely news section, spread over the next few pages. Now with added monkeys...



The most realistic squad shooter ever?



"Hey Chip, isn't that your mom over there?"

TOO CLOSE FOR COMFORT?

REAL URBAN COMBAT AND REAL MARINE TACTICS TAKE TO THE STREETS IN *CLOSE COMBAT: FIRST TO FIGHT*



"THE MARINE CORPS plans to use *First To Fight* to train marines – so the game was not designed by hobbyists," explains Peter Tamte, the president of Destineer Studios and former exec at Bungie. "Our information comes directly from active duty marines fresh from the front line of combat in Gulf War II."

Close Combat is set to be one of the most authentic military experiences we've ever seen. From tactics to weaponry to setting, everything has been designed with absolute faith to the ways of the American MAGTF – the Marine Air Ground Task Force. As the leader of a four-man Fire Team, it's your role to lead your men through a conflict that takes place one year from now in an as-yet unnamed real-world Middle Eastern city. So far, so par-for-the-course you may think, but *First To Fight* intends to set itself out from the crowd with some remarkable AI. This means your team-mates will play out the actions of a real marine to the letter.

"The Marine Corps has developed a system of formation, movement and tactics they call Ready Team Fire Assist – which gives each of the men a specific responsibility and position," explains Peter, as he points out the way in which the members of the Fire Team continually maintain 360-degree cover – each of them standing on a staircase with their guns trained in different directions. "Ready Team Fire Assist allows players to play differently from other team-based shooters. The idea is that if your marines are behaving

like trained marines, you can concentrate on what you're supposed to be doing – getting your team through the perils of urban combat."

As the onscreen action unravels, it's explained that all of your squad-members run on their own AI – their responses are never scripted. When the

looking back. Each soldier and each enemy, meanwhile, comes packaged with an individual psychology model that registers how confident, scared, shocked or awed they are – and the way they act is set to be dynamically linked.

When playing the game, meanwhile, you have support from Armoured Assault

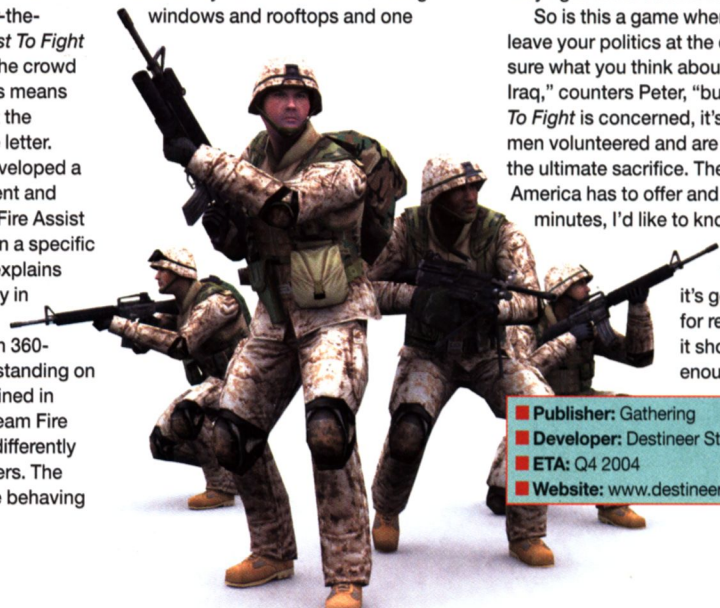
"Our info comes direct from active duty marines fresh from the front line"

PETER TAMTE PRESIDENT, DESTINEER STUDIOS

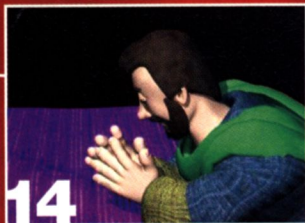
order is given for the squad to move forward, they do so moving from cover to cover, alternating between moving and looking out for their team-mates, and always with one man covering windows and rooftops and one

vehicles, M1 Abrams tanks and other Fire Teams – all of whom, like yourself, are equipped exactly as the Third Battalion, First Marines are when they fight in the streets of Iraq.

So is this a game where you should leave your politics at the door? "I'm not sure what you think about the war in Iraq," counters Peter, "but as far as *First To Fight* is concerned, it's OK. These men volunteered and are willing to make the ultimate sacrifice. They're the best America has to offer and for just a few minutes, I'd like to know what it's like to be one of them." So if it's good enough for real marines, it should be good enough for us.



■ Publisher: Gathering
■ Developer: Destineer Studios
■ ETA: Q4 2004
■ Website: www.destineerstudios.com



14

SPECIAL REPORT

A new meaning to God games



17

EMULATION ZONE

Return of the Mac



20

INDIE ZONE

Indie oldies but goodies



26

PC ZONE CHARTS

Now with added monkeys!



Are we allowed back into the wasteland?



Kingpin - violence, gangsters and Cypress Hill. Happy days.

In To Stay?

INTERPLAY HEAD HONCHO DEFIES THE BAILIFF TO HINT AT KINGPIN 2 AND POSSIBLY FALLOUT 3

IN A STRANGE turn of events, Interplay CEO Herve Caen has revealed that his company is still planning on bringing new life to franchises that most would have thought were pushing up the daisies. This news comes despite the fact that Interplay is facing huge financial difficulties and, in mid-April, was behind in its rent and facing eviction.

In an investor conference call, Caen confirmed that *Kingpin 2*, the sequel to the 1999 all-pimpin', all-swearin' shooter, is in existence. The original game was developed by Xatrix, who later became *Wolfenstein* developer Gray Matter, but no developer or release date has been pinpointed. Another atomic bombshell, meanwhile, was the fact that even though

Interplay's RPG studio Black Isle was unceremoniously killed off last year, *Fallout 3* is still alive - albeit in limbo. "We're planning to publish *Fallout 3*," states Caen, later confirming it would be handled by an unnamed external developer.

With the sublime *Earthworm Jim* and the *Descent* series also planned for rejuvenation, this would be fantastic news

- but Interplay's financial stresses are so huge, we're not holding our breath. It's been put on record that the company has been struggling to cover its 113-man wage bill and was also behind in its royalties on the *D&D* licence, which now means it's lost the rights to publish *Baldur's Gate 3* on the PC. Further details are scarce, but we're keeping our fingers firmly crossed.

GOOD SPORTS

SPORTS INTERACTIVE REVEALS NHL LICENCE AND OUT OF THE PARK BASEBALL

ON THE DVD **WHAT WAS ONCE** simply known as *Eastside Hockey Manager* (and son of *Champ Man/Football Manager*) has now been stamped and branded by an official NHL licence. We may not understand all the rules, but we're certainly no stranger to the format of the game: the top-down view, the pages of stats, the comments of unhappy chairmen - it makes us go all gooey just thinking about it. In production since 2000, *NHL Eastside Hockey Manager* is set to incorporate 20 leagues from across the planet - including the UK - and hits the shelves in July.

Another string for the SI bow, meanwhile, is the acquisition of *Out Of The Park* Developments, the German creators of the independent *Out Of The Park Baseball* management series. The first joint effort from the two teams is set to be released in 2005, but should you be interested in a taster, you could easily nab a copy of *Out Of The Park*

Baseball 6 (which enables you to download famous past players and provides for multiplayer games over the

Internet). Alternatively, if you watched *Field Of Dreams* without puking and quite like bizarre organ playing, you can sample some baseball delights with the demo on our cover DVD.

- Publisher: Sega
- Developer: Sports Interactive/ Out Of The Park Developments
- ETA: Hockey in July, Baseball in 2005
- Website: www.sportsinteractive.co.uk

17. Kalle Konsti (Racers)

Personal Details	Mental Attributes	Technical Attributes
Right Wing	Aggression 9	Checking 8
186 cm / 84 kg	Anticipation 10	Deflections 7
Shoots: Left	Bravery 8	DeKing 10
Born: 3.7.82 (Age 21)	Creativity 9	Faccoffs 10
Savonlinna, FIN	Determination 9	Hitting 12
Finish	Flair 10	Off The Puck 10
	Influence 13	Passing 11
	Teamwork 13	Pokecheck 10
	Work Rate 11	Positioning 11
Physical Attributes	Slapshot 11	
Acceleration 14	Stickhandling 11	
Agility 15	Wristshot 11	
Balance 14	Selection Info	
Speed 14	Form 7-8-7-7-7	
Stamina 14	Morale Superb	
Strength 16	Condition 78%	

2003-04 Racers Regular Season

	GP	G	A	P	±	PIM	SOG	Sh%	Avg R
	15	8	7	15	10	8	56	14.3	7.60

It's a bit like football, but on ice, with a puck. And helmets. And big sticks.



"Give me a couple of years and the virtual people we create will look even more interesting than my face!"

We reckon that Randy Pitchford, the most enthusiastic man on earth and games supremo over at Gearbox, has a charming appearance that'll never fade.

"Like a dirty old man in a tattered raincoat sitting at the back of the bus, *Wideland Games* is thrilled to expose itself to the world!"

Former Bungie head-honcho Alexander Seropian's intriguing new company announces its arrival.

"You know that *Half-Life 2* uses the Source engine? Well, you know those saucy seaside postcards? Why don't we do 'source-y' postcards - with fat women and stuff about husbands with big crowbars?"

Will makes a suggestion for the back page. Don't expect much next month.

Games Of Praise

SPECIAL REPORT

Giving new meaning to the term god games, an increasing amount of Christian developers are making their presence felt. *Pavel Barter* plays it by the Book



Hey! Check the dude in the blue strides.

FROM THE clandestine sects of *Deus Ex: Invisible War* to the all-seeing deities of *EverQuest*, religion has reared its head in some of our favourite PC titles. Playing God even has a genre unto itself, and as you gaze down upon the developing worlds of *Black & White*, *Civilization III* or *Sim City*, you realise that being all-powerful is a tough task. Well, tough but enjoyable in an ego-stroking sort of way.

False idols aside, there are plenty of PC games in which religion is a far more serious affair. Long before god games first emerged there were God's games: software developed and purchased by devout churchgoers. While other branches of popular culture – film, music and art – maintained successful Christian niches for aeons, the number of biblical games (and companies producing them) has only seen a dramatic rise over the last couple of years.

Valued at hundreds of millions of pounds per annum, this market emerged as a backlash to the 'spiritually questionable' values of mainstream gaming. PC gamers are in a world of sin, you see, and now it's soul-saving time.



Giving the Devil hell in *Eternal War*.

"Christian games vary in content, from promoting good morals to evangelising about Christ," says Brian Timson, creator of *Heaven Bound*, an interactive adventure adapted from Bunyan's allegorical work, *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Tim Emmerich, who runs the annual Christian Game Developers Conference (CGDC) in the US, elaborates: "Some of these games are based on a biblical story. Others cast you as a Christian and incorporate Bible scriptures. Some utilise the Bible as content for questions or learning, while a couple require you to actively use your Bible to play the game."

Full Armor Studios' *The Walls Of Jericho* is a *Tetris*-like puzzle game, where you match blocks and use the Ark of the Covenant to bring down the walls. *Victory At Hebron* is a biblical *Yu-Gi-Oh!*, with 100 virtual cards featuring Christian heroes and combat gear, including Sword of the Spirit and Breastplate

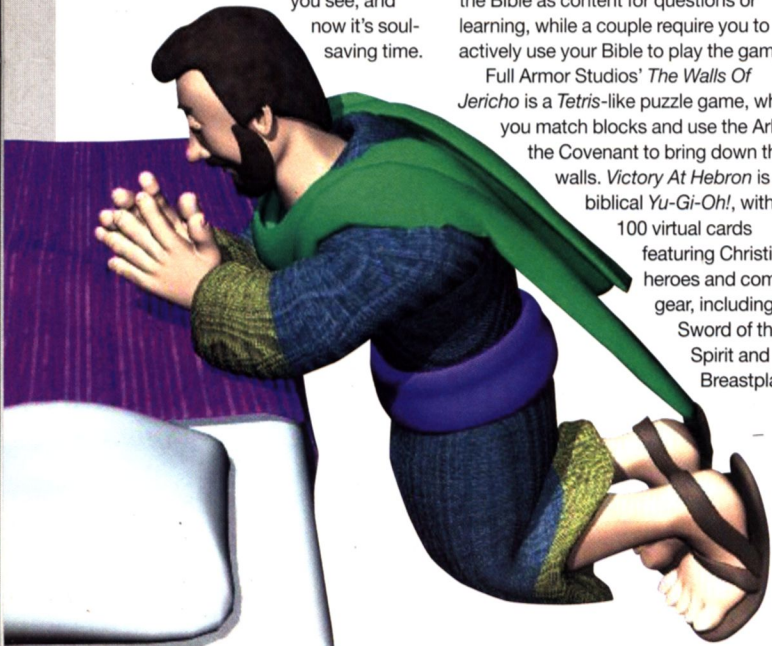
of Righteousness. *Hebron's* creator, Brethren Entertainment, is currently developing a Christian anime-style RPG, *Casting The Shadows*.

FOR GOD'S SAKE

Although saintly rock groups like Evanescence have been massively popular in mainstream markets, large games publishers seem hesitant to sign up Christian developers. As a result, many religious PC offerings are low budget and

more than just a little bit rubbish. *The Last Bible*, by Distant Star Productions, stars a podgy, bearded bald bloke who saves souls by solving Bible-related puzzles, for example. Likewise, blocky FPS *Eternal Warriors* is unlikely to win many awards for graphical finesse.

Thankfully, the emerging community of Christian game developers is producing slightly improved PC fodder, largely thanks to America's annual CGDC. This event provides a forum for visitors to



What are you saying?

This is what *Derek* looks like. The game, not the bloke. Fancy playing it?



CGDC: doing God's work.

"Being independent means we have freedom to be creative. I pray the Lord blesses us with miraculous creativity"

TIM EMMERICH ORGANISER, CHRISTIAN GAME DEVELOPERS CONFERENCE

discuss technical issues and depart with their horizons expanded. For the time being, most Christian developers remain independent, according to the CGDC's Tim Emmerich. "That means we have greater freedom to be as creative as possible. In fact, I earnestly pray that the Lord blesses us with miraculous creativity."

But do these games really have crossover appeal? Purchased by Christians worldwide, they're largely developed in the United States and many deliver their message in heavy-handed strokes. FPS game *Saints Of Virtue* focuses on themes like sanctification, apathy and the sinfulness of the general public. "It's the first in a new generation of computer games, but it's only the start," says a spokesperson for its creator Shine Studios. "Computer games have gripped this generation in a stranglehold. An increasing number of games captivate this computer-savvy generation with evil and violence in mind-numbing reality."

SPREAD THE WORD

Others avoid bombarding their players with guilt in favour of widening their audience and appealing to all gamers. "While our fanbase is mostly made up of Christians, we do have a number of non-Christians playing *Heaven Bound*," insists Emerald Studios' Brian Timson.

"The market does seem to be expanding to include more and more non-Christians who enjoy playing the game."

A few developers are keen to stray even further from the righteous path and deliver sophisticated gameplay, larger budgets and a less overt message. Naturally gravitating toward the FPS genre, these titles haven't exactly produced a success of *Half-Life* or *Doom* proportions but, for many Christians, they're as popular as Sunday prayer.

N'Lightning claims to have sold 30,000 copies of *Ominous Horizons: A Paladin's Calling*. Blasting demons with weapons like the Sword of the Spirit, Holy Crossbow and Moses' Staff, you hunt for pieces of the original Gutenberg Bible. Meanwhile, N'Lightning's *Catechumen* – in which you star as a Christian warrior from Roman times – has sold a reported 70,000 copies. Another godly FPS, *The War In Heaven*, gets all Old Testament on your arse with the story of evil's first hissy fit: Lucifer's decision to leave God's side. Some FPS Christian games, meanwhile, go to extreme lengths to avoid bloodshed. In *Rev7*, ammo consists of doughnuts and cookies. In *Eternal War: Shadows Of Light* – the first Christian FPS with multiplayer gameplay – the beasts simply vanish when you smite them with your Soul Disc or Spirit Sword.

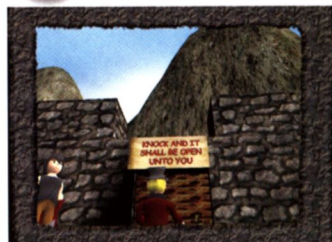
FIGHT THE GOOD FIGHT

In an age-old irony, one of Christianity's mainstays over its two millennia in existence has been conflict, and some developers now foresee a growing fracture in

THE CHOSEN ONES



SOME OF THESE TITLES, FEATURED ON THIS ISSUE'S DVD, HAVE BEEN HOLY CASH COWS IN THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY. THEY'RE NOT VERY GOOD THOUGH...



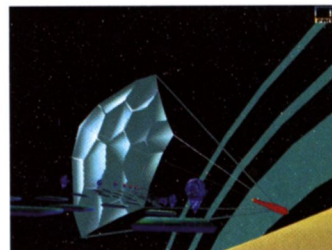
HEAVEN BOUND

Onward Christian soldiers in this PC remake of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Rock and roll.



DEREK

What was once the name of an unassuming bloke you just met, is now a Christian adventure game.



GODSPEED 3D

Race through virtual worlds where moral hazards require sudden decisions – but no violence. "Since I'm doing this full-time, I need to try to make a living," says Stone Engelbrite of Inspired Idea. But it's not about the money. "If I were motivated by profit, I'd be doing accounts or something. My vision is to see people's lives touched by God."



ETERNAL WAR: SHADOWS OF LIGHT

Your friend John is trapped in a vicious circle of self-mutilation and, erm, porn. It's your job to prevent him from committing suicide by journeying into his personal hell and defeating his inner demons. "Christian bookstores (in the US) are scared to carry the game," according to Pat Ponech of Two Guys Software.

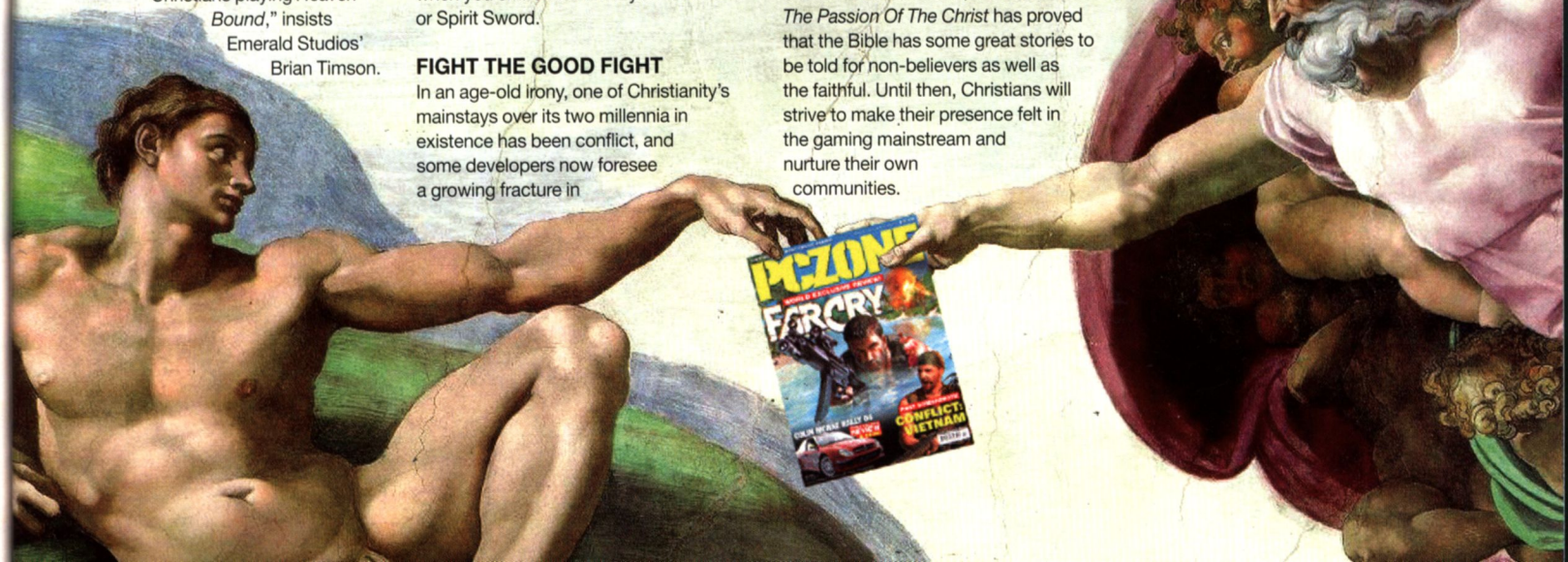
their community between those who want to avoid violence completely, and those who believe that the only way to create truly successful godly games is to pander to the mainstream. According to Cheyenne Wolford, creator of Christian PC adventure titles *Nacah* and *Derek*: "3D Christian action games, the ones that involve shooting evil spirits, are not in line with the non-violent teachings of Christ. You'll see the same rift occur in the Christian games industry as has happened in Christian music, and it won't be long before this rift hits the churches."

Inner turmoil aside, every Christian developer is of the opinion that their market will continue to expand, fine-tune its technologies and move into areas such as the MMOG. After all, the recent movie *The Passion Of The Christ* has proved that the Bible has some great stories to be told for non-believers as well as the faithful. Until then, Christians will strive to make their presence felt in the gaming mainstream and nurture their own communities.

"What PC games would Jesus play?" asks one inquisitive reader on popular culture website, The AI Menconi Ministries. "I think he was the type of person who would rather be skateboarding than playing a game about skateboarding," answers the Minister. "I think he would feel the same about other sports games. He seemed like the outdoors type." [E]

YOUR SHOUT!

Do you think ideology should be a part of videogames? Or should religion stay well away? Write to PC ZONE at the usual address or email: letters@pczone.co.uk



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This game is only suitable for children aged 12 years and over. The game contains adult language.

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You make it a Sony

EMULATION ZONE

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

RETURN OF THE MAC

LAST MONTH in Emu Zone, you may recall that we talked about the deeply ironic difficulties involved in trying to use your PC – which will happily emulate every other gaming system under the sun – to run old PC games. While programs like DOSBox offer a partial solution, frankly by far the smartest plan is usually to find a port of the game you want to play on another system. This is fine for games from the mid-1990s onward (when most successful PC games would be converted to one or other of the 16-bit or 32-bit consoles), but for earlier stuff you're often still scuppered. Why? Well, because the only other format many early PC titles were converted to was the Apple Macintosh. Damn. Oh well... See you in next month's Emu Zone.

Ha ha! Emu Zone is joking, of course. Emulation of the Mac is but a mere trifle to the excitingly powerful PCs of today, and the best way to achieve a virtual Mac is with the splendid freeware emulator



Marathon's deathmatch was famously stylish.

Basilisk II. Capable of emulating a huge range of Macs from the early black-and-white models right up to the later Performas and Quadras, Basilisk is easy to use (Apple generously makes its System 7.5.3 OS freely available for download) and highly compatible, running most of the games Emu Zone threw at it without complaint. This enabled your intrepid reporter to relive the joys of such classics as *Crystal Quest* (still the only action game ever to properly justify mouse control), *Royal Flush* (the first computer pinball game licensed from a real arcade table) and, most excitingly of all, the *Marathon* series.

Marathon was created by Bungie, who later went on to make the legendary *Halo*, and you can clearly see the beginnings of the later game in the

Marathon titles. One of the first FPS games to be in true 3D, and the pioneer of the 'rocket jump' among many other things, *Marathon* greatly increased the sophistication of the genre from the mindless maze-blasting *Doom* clones popular at the time – something for which Emu Zone has never forgiven it. However, it's still an inspiration to FPS game designers/developers everywhere.

All this, and it's still largely unclaimed outside of the coding community, mainly because it was never properly brought to the PC. Basilisk runs the far nicer-looking sequels *Marathon 2* and *Marathon Infinity* rather better than it does the original, so Emu Zone recommends you check those out first. **LINK**

LINKS

basilisk2.cjb.net/ – Basilisk download page
www.kearney.net/~mhoffman/basiliskil/system753_tutorial/ – System 7.5.3 download and installation guide

EMU ARCHIVE AT WWW.EXCELLENTCONTENT.COM/EMUZONE



Check that trail, man!



A calm moment in *Crystal Quest*.

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.

EMULATION OF THE MONTH

JET SET WILLY – THE FINAL FRONTIER (AMSTRAD CPC, 1985)

Having put right Emu Zone's long-standing neglect of the Commodore 64 last month, it seems only right to also mention the other oft-overlooked 8-bit classic, the Amstrad CPC. A highly capable machine which was totally overshadowed by the twin behemoths



A rare Amstrad exclusive.

of the C64 and the Speccy, the poor old Amstrad was largely bereft of original games, but often boasted by far the best ports of games born on its two competitors. Nowhere is this phenomenon better illustrated than by the strange tale of the Amstrad version of seminal exploration/platformer *Jet Set Willy*.

Released under the same cover as the original 1984 version, the Amstrad port featured far more rooms than the Speccy or C64 versions, and was later used as the basis for the official sequel on the other formats. Meanwhile, the same year as both the first Amstrad version and the Speccy/C64 sequel were released (confusingly entitled *Jet*



Set Willy 2 – The Final Frontier, a new version of the Amstrad game was written. This hastily chopped out all the extras, only featured rooms from the original game (but added, of all things, a high-score screen) and was re-released at a budget price.

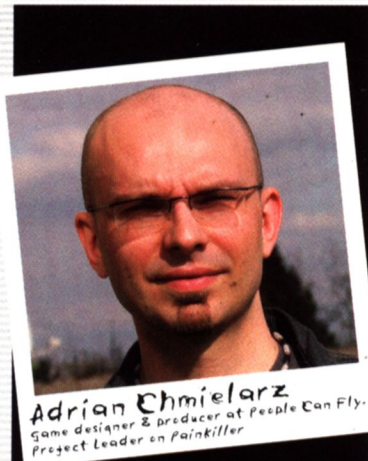
Baffled gamers sobbed into their copy-protection colour charts, but for possibly the only time ever, it was Amstrad owners who got to enjoy the experience of having the best thing first. I wonder if Alan Sugar smiled.

LINKS

www.caprince32.cybercube.com/ – homepage of the CaPriCe emulator

SPACIOUS. ROOMY. DOORWAY TO HELL

DISCOVER THINGS THE ESTATE AGENT MAY HAVE FAILED TO MENTION IN KONAMI'S *SILENT HILL 4: THE ROOM*



Adrian Chmielarz
Game designer & producer at People Can Fly.
Project Leader on Painkiller

DEVELOPERS' QUESTION TIME

What PC games are you playing?
I rarely play PC games – 99 per cent of them are boring. Believe it or not, I'm playing *Painkiller* multiplayer. Not to find new bugs, but to prove who's better with the stakegun.

The last videogame you finished?
Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon – I haven't quite finished it because of the *Painkiller* gold master, but I'm close. Another I finished recently was *Silent Hill 3*.

What's your favourite game of all time?
My top three in alphabetical order: *Quake*, *The Secret Of Monkey Island*, *Silent Hill 2*.

What are you most proud of in your career?
Proving that *Painkiller* is not just another shooter, but a top-class triple-A game. Coming from Poland (a country that one LA taxi driver described as being "winter all year and where bears roam the streets"), we had to work unbelievably hard to break through.

Who do you most admire in the industry?
Akira Yamaoka, the composer behind *Silent Hill's* music and sound. He's a genius, period.

What has the PC contributed most to videogaming?
Not much in the terms of the gameplay, but PCs have pushed the technology. OK, maybe it's not so bad with the gameplay – *Resident Evil* would never have happened without the PC's *Alone In The Dark* would it?

What's your company's philosophy?
Never compromise the quality of any of the game's elements. You never catch us thinking: 'Oh come on, do we really need to have ten different sounds for the bullet's ricochet?' – because we know we do.

What's the best thing about your job?
Someone once said: 'If you work on something you love, it's like you've never worked in your life.' After the last three months of 16-hour days while we were finishing *Painkiller*, I'm not saying it's entirely true – but the man had a point.

What's the worst thing about your job?
Having to deal with business while being creative – invoices and all that crap.

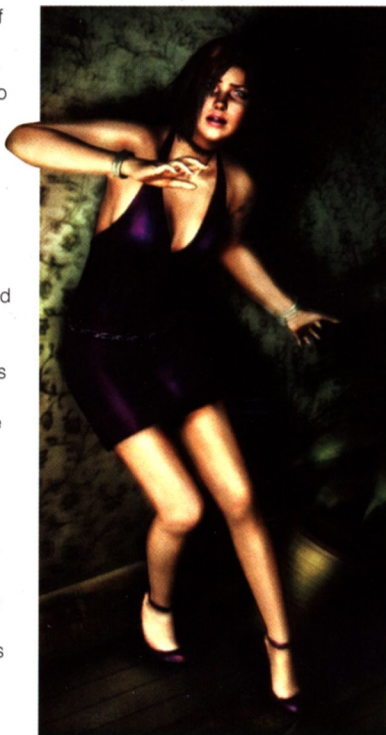
What are you working on right now?
Painkiller Xbox. Among other things.

The Next Big Thing in PC gaming?
Real-time physics – we're only beginning to understand how to use it in games. And the next generation of graphics technology is almost upon us.

ESSENTIALLY A GOTHIC revision of the wardrobe-encased *Chronicles Of Narnia* (without the lions), *Silent Hill 4: The Room* tells the charming tale of a man who discovers a gateway in his apartment that leads to a terrifying alternate dimension – where his neighbours are mutilated and limbless corpses need to be reunited with their errant body parts.

On show at this month's E3, *Silent Hill 4's* lead character, Henry Townsend, has been locked in his flat by a fellow called Walter. He can watch the world walking past his window or eye up his neighbour through a gap in the wall, but otherwise his only way out is through the menacing portal in his bathroom – through which are S&M mutants and demon dogs hell-bent on ripping him to shreds.

Action is played out in the first person when Henry is sauntering around his apartment, but reverts to the familiar third-person view when a different dimension is entered and there are reanimated corpses to batter. We're promised a much more action-orientated affair than in the previous sorties, and from what we've seen, *Silent Hill's* position as one of the most 'shit-a-brick' scary games around is more than likely to be retained.



Posh Spice plumps out for *Silent Hill 4*.



Like a *Crystal Maze* puzzle, isn't it?



Lead piping – the killer's friend.

- Publisher: Konami
- Developer: Konami
- ETA: September 2004
- Website: www.sh2004.com

No Holds Bard

ADVENTURE AND HUMOUR ALL CATERED FOR IN *THE BARD'S TALE*



Come on man, get up and fight!



The casual look. "Last one down buys the beer!"



PISS-TAKE GAMES don't have the greatest of track records on the PC – but 20-year-old RPG stalwart *The Bard's Tale* is getting a remake with its tongue so firmly in its cheek that it can no longer swallow.

An action RPG in the model of recent console efforts such as *Champions Of Norrath* or *Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance*, *The Bard's Tale* is set to meld button-mashing combos with a branching storyline and plentiful mockery of the fabric of roleplayers as a whole. Here, y'see, the

women won't have gigantic breasts to cater for testosterone-laden dungeon-masters – they have them because it's ironic. And post-modernly ironic at that.

With 40 hours of adventuring, a 1,000-page script, Interplay founder and RPG legend Brian Fargo at the helm and conversations that actually have a large bearing on the game's events, there's a lot to hope for in *The Bard's Tale*. Plus, your ability to summon up creatures through the medium of song (a rubbish rat at first, a

grumpy old man who can find traps and a massive bruiser later on) is a nice touch. Whether the humour (or, perhaps, 'humor') translates to these shores is, however, yet to be seen – although the anglophile cast and hard-drinking lead may well shine through in the end. More soon.

- Publisher: Acclaim
- Developer: inXile
- ETA: 2005
- Website: www.thebardstale.com

BAIZE OF GLORY

CODEMASTERS CHALKS UP WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP SNOOKER 2004

THE ANNUAL STICK and ball update may have missed the actual World Championship, but that didn't stop Steve Davis decamping from Sheffield to King's Cross for a swift frame with *PC ZONE*. Between mouthfuls of dry cheese and ham sandwiches (later donated to your starving reporter), The Nugget explained: "I'm not here to give you any bullshit - everybody knows the advances in computers. My initial view of the difference between the 2003 version that my kids play at home and still enjoy is that they seem to have got this to look more three-dimensional. It feels like you're more immersed over the table."

As well as online play, trick shots and a host of real-life tournaments, *WCS2004* also features classic matches from the past, including Davis's epic 1985 world final defeat to Dennis Taylor. Nineteen years on, the pain is still real.

"I'm looking forward to using the on/off switch at the right moment just before Dennis pots the black," says Steve. "Perhaps we could have David Vine coming on the set afterwards and asking different questions: 'Steve, my gran could have potted that, how do you feel?' Or for the X-rated version: 'Steve, I could have potted that with my dick, how do you feel?'" Interesting. And quite rude.



Playing with an invisible ball is fun.

- Publisher: Codemasters
- Developer: Blade Interactive
- ETA: End of June
- Website: www.codemasters.co.uk/snooker2004



Thank goodness he's potting it with his cue...



Yellow ball in the top left-hand pocket, OK?

Good Cop. Bad Cop.

GOOD COP



E3! Fun in the sun with hordes of nice ladies and a fresh crop of gaming goodness to salivate over.

Woods, Hill and Sefton going to a raucous party at Hef's Playboy Mansion with 100 Playboy models. We believe an applicable term to use is 'like pigs in shit'.

The same contingent visiting *ZONE* legend (and now porn baron) Mallo in his luxuriant LA pad. Where they discussed current gaming issues with some porn starlets in a hot tub.

BAD COP



Will and Ant being really jealous of the LA jet-setters, sitting in the office and refusing to make each other tea.

The recurring mystery of the *Knave* porn mag that was found stuffed behind the radiator in the gents toilet. We have our suspicions...

Wee Jamie, designer and maniac, endangering his life and everybody else's on a go-kart track.

This month's Good Cop/Bad Cop making us sound like we're dirty old men. When some of the team are actually in their early 20s. And one's a girl.

Good Cop: **Dutch** Bad Cop: **Vic Mackey** - from *The Shield*. Suggested by Big Bad BJ from Gloucester. Send in your ideas for next month's Good Cop, Bad Cop to win a *PC ZONE* goodie bag!

HERE BE DRAGONS

BIOWARE SHOWS THAT PC-ORIENTATED RPGS AREN'T A THING OF THE PAST WITH DRAGON AGE

FRESH FROM a bout of Microsoft takeover rumours, BioWare brushed itself off at E3 and made roleplayers rejoice. The *Neverwinter Nights* and *KOTOR* boys have been beavering away for the past 18 months on their first game set in an original world and landscape: no more D&D, just a beautiful quasi-Middle Eastern approach all of its own. Although, even if the supporting cast aren't technically elves and dwarves, the races will certainly be elf-ish and dwarf-ish.

With 40-50 hours of single-player adventuring and a multiplayer contingent poised to mimic the online

successes of *NWN*, the most applicable word for *Dragon Age* would be 'epic'. The draw distances look to be vast, with hundreds of characters shown battling on screen, while your chosen heroes and their henchmen strut their motion-captured stuff in some gorgeous 3D environs.

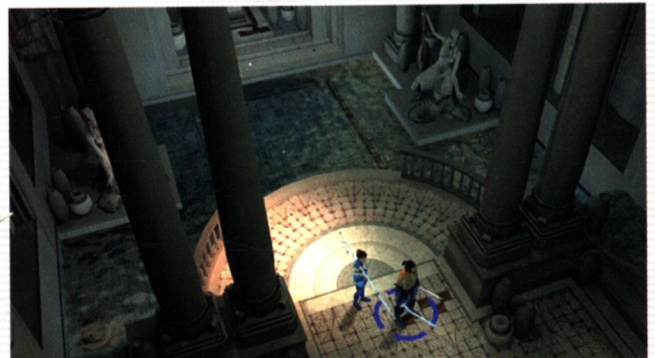
The action itself generally takes place in your common-or-garden RPG third person, although during the real-time combat (complete with a pause button to help you strategise), the view flips to a more encompassing over-the-top viewpoint. Seeing as the game is still in its early stages,

BioWare is only issuing a hazy 'when it's done' ETA for what will almost certainly become one of the most anticipated RPGs of the next few years. Not a word has been said on the storyline, but something tells us that dragons might feature strongly. We'll keep you updated.

- Publisher: TBA
- Developer: BioWare
- ETA: When it's done
- Website: www.bioware.com/games/dragon_age/



It's a bit more crowded than the streets of *Neverwinter*.



BioWare is the king of the RPG, so this should be awesome.

IndieZone

DRAGGING THE WORLD OF UNDERGROUND DEVELOPERS KICKING AND SCREAMING INTO THE LIMELIGHT

PERHAPS THE most dismaying thing about the world of games is the incredibly short shelf-life of the typical release. While it's easy to walk into a High Street store and buy a 20-year-old Rolling Stones album, try getting hold of any game released more than three months ago and see how far you get.

This is one of the greatest advantages of

the Web-distributed indie scene – as long as you don't do something fat-headedly stupid like putting a year or an inappropriately time-specific setting in your game's title, nobody need ever know it's ancient. That means you can continue to sell it indefinitely as if it's the hottest new thing on the block. Hurray for those clever folks in the indie scene, eh?

FREE PLAY

PACMAN WORLDS

(Danjo Software) www.megagames.com

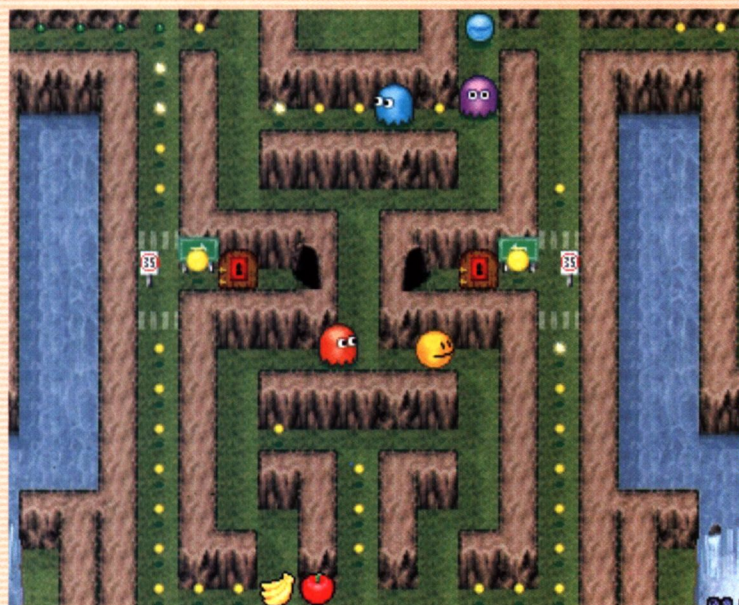
ONE OF THE very few games which can lay claim to being more ripped-off than *Boulder Dash* is *Pac-Man*. There have been literally hundreds, probably thousands, of *Pac* clones – the vast majority of which are total rubbish. This one, however, takes the concept and extends it in a thoughtful and entertaining way, while maintaining the all-important game balance that so many clones entirely miss.

And that's despite having presentation

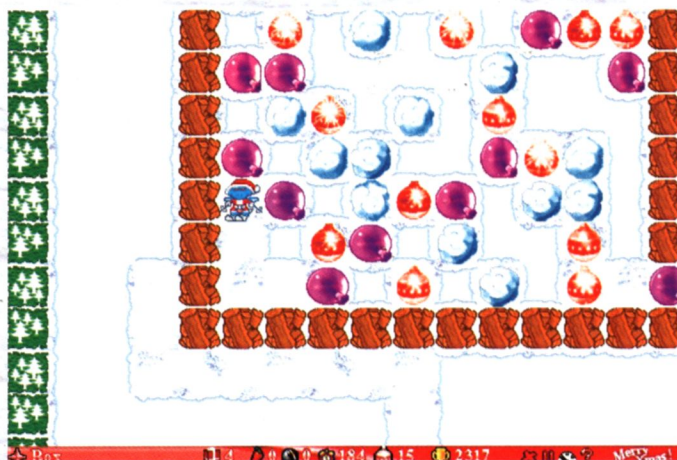
that's just asking for a slap (like a teeny-windowed mode and an always-default full-screen mode that screws up your desktop).

It's easy to imagine one of the official *Pac* sequels taking this clever, more exploratory route away from the original game, with a handful of well-chosen additions like the 'policeman' ghost who comes out and chases you if you use the turbo power-up in sections

of the mazes marked by speed-limit signs. Full background and instructions can be found within the game, which we can't put on our cover discs for legal reasons. You can find the full game online though, so go check it out.



Pac-Town, the game's central hub area.



Balloons are among the new features.

BOULDER DASH XMAS 2002 EDITION

■ \$19.99 (£11) | Pub: FlyOrDie Software | Dev: FlyOrDie Software | ETA: Out Now | www.flyordie.com

REQUIRES PII 300MHz, 64MB RAM DESIRES PII 500MHz, 128MB RAM



As lazy summer days approach, Stuart Campbell decides to get all festive

THE HISTORY of Peter Liepa's rocks-and-diamonds puzzler *Boulder Dash* is a long and confused one: since the seminal game's 1984 release, it's been one of the most unofficially-cloned designs of all time. FlyOrDie contributed its own bit of water-muddying to the story with its 'inspired by' title *GemJam* a few years ago, but since then it's ponied up for the official licence and made several officially-endorsed *Boulder Dash* titles. Added to the mystery is the fact that *GemJam* isn't much cop and its later *Treasure Pleasure* official sequel is rubbish (missing the point of what made *Boulder Dash* great). This game – released between the two – is by far the best game in the series since the original.

A genius piece of sensitive designing, it takes a perfect grasp of the heart of the original game and adds sparingly to it, creating the most addictive thing we've played in a year. It deserves a wide audience, so if you have any complaints about Indie Zone reviewing an 18-month-old game, go stick your head in a pig.

Offering 50 levels (plus 15 optional tutorial ones if, as is alarmingly possible, you've never played a *Boulder Dash* game before), *BDX2002E* lures you in with a few quick and simple stages you can complete in under a minute. It then steadily ramps up the difficulty until you're faced with levels that you're head-scratchingly certain just can't be done. Until, that is, a lightbulb flash of inspiration occurs and you realise the solution. Helpfully, the map structure means you can try different stages if you get stuck on a particular one, and only the slightly rubbish save-game implementation (just one too-easily-overwriteable slot that idiotically saves to the registry rather than a handy file) lets it down at all.

The levels are wildly varied in puzzle style, (so it never feels repetitive), and so fiendish that the sense of reward for completing one is heartwarming. For eleven quid, no-one who fancies themselves as a lover of videogames should be without this.

PCZONE VERDICT 90
Unmissable!

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IN WEB WE TRUST

THE MAN WHO KNOWS

COMPUTER games teach you to **cut up live humans**, experts claim. According to **research**, doctors who spent at least three hours a week playing games made 37 per cent fewer mistakes in **laparoscopic surgery** and performed the task 27 per cent faster than their counterparts who didn't play games. Laparoscopic surgery – often known as **keyhole surgery** due to its similarity to putting a key in a hole – involves using a tiny camera and instruments controlled by **special joysticks**, and can be performed on a wide variety of body parts: including appendix, **colon**, gall bladder and **knee**. The study, carried out at **Iowa State University**, involved doctors completing three videogame tasks that tested such factors as motor skills, reaction time and hand-eye coordination. Dr James 'Butch' Rosser, 49, bragged: "I use the same hand-eye coordination to play videogames as I use for surgery" – a procedure which he described as "like tying your shoelaces with 3ft-long chopsticks". Rosser has also developed a course called **Top Gun**, in which surgical trainees warm up their coordination, agility and accuracy with a game, before entering the operating room. Rosser sneered: "It's like a good football player. You have to warm up first."

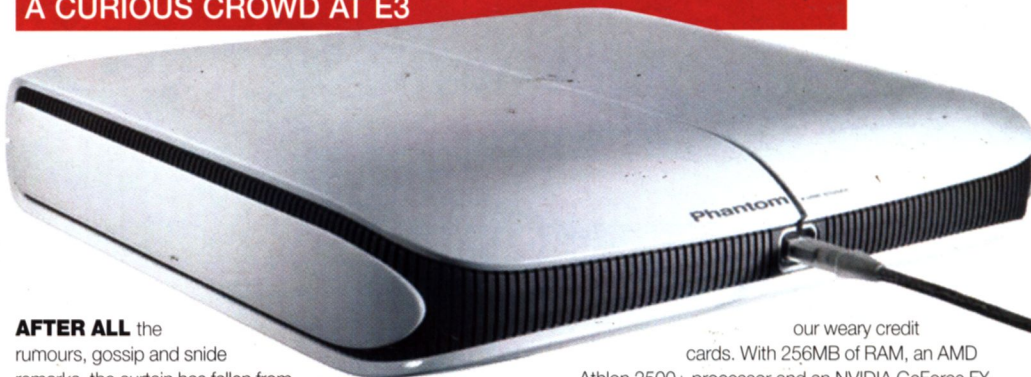
The world's most famous **Belgian** is coming to the PC. **Hercule Poirot**, the fictional detective created by the late **Agatha Christie**, is to star in a series of computer games, rumoured to include 1930s thrillers **Death On The Nile** and **Murder On The Orient Express**. Christie's grandson, **Mathew Prichard**, has generously given permission for boffins to develop a series of five games over the next six years. Prichard lied: "My grandmother was always very keen on using new ways to reach people who wanted to enjoy her work."

The previously impeccable name of **GTA III** has been **sullied** by a shameful **pornographic** cash-in. Advertised on former **ZONE** employee **Mallo's** arthouse website www.girlskissing.co.uk, **Grand Theft Anal 3** lets you: "Join the joyride and get your motor revving! Journey deep inside the colon-canal of **six honeys** as they steal the spotlight with their **adorable asses!**" Now that's what we call real class.

"Doctors who spent three hours a week playing games made 37 per cent fewer mistakes in surgery"

PHANTOM MENACE?

THE SECRET PC CONSOLE IS FINALLY UNVEILED TO A CURIOUS CROWD AT E3



AFTER ALL the rumours, gossip and snide remarks, the curtain has fallen from the Phantom: the piece of kit that enables you to run PC games on your very own television. That's not the real gimmick though – the selling point is that instead of buying games from a spotty youth in Woolworths, they'll be pumped into the 40 gig hard drive through the miracle of broadband.

What's more, you don't necessarily have to pay for the beast either: subscribers get it automatically in much the same way that contract mobile phones operate, with \$29.95 as the monthly asking price. Basic content is then provided free, premium games at retail price and three-day rentals for \$5 a pop. For now, the service is aimed squarely at an American audience – which may well be a good thing for UK gamers as we'll be able to see whether the Phantom sinks or swims before offering up

our weary credit cards. With 256MB of RAM, an AMD Athlon 2500+ processor and an NVIDIA GeForce FX 5700 graphics card, the console won't be chasing the high-end games of the future – but Infinium Labs is hoping the delivery system sells it. So the Phantom exists and we've touched it – but we'll have to wait a while to discover whether or not it's any cop.



Will this shiny silver box and keyboard spell a revolution in PC gaming?

Imperial March

COLONIALS REJOICE AT NEWS OF EMPIRE EARTH 2

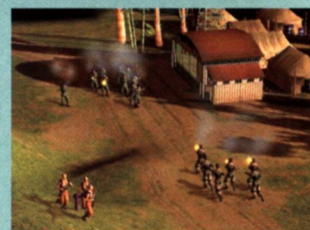
EMPIRE-BUILDING in the real-world has fallen out of vogue since the mid-20th century, but budding conquistadors can still get their territorial kicks from Mad Doc Software's forthcoming RTS sequel to 2001's nation-building smash **Empire Earth**.

In answer to gamers who found the original rather too fiddly, the new developer is focusing on streamlining the micro-management of your real-time war-machine. Easier underling-arrangement, less quibble-some research processes and more intuitive navigation are assured for those who're more concerned with power-mongering rather than the harvesting habits of peasants.

EE2 also promises 14 different civilisations ripe for the rearing, seasonal changes and tasty-looking weather effects. Coupled with the obligatory new units and a new-found ability to trade cities and adjust borders when kowtowing to

aggressive neighbours, there should be enough fuel for the fires of armchair Imperial glory. Next year's release should let the rabid dictator in all of us shine through.

- **Publisher:** VU Games
- **Developer:** Mad Doc Software
- **ETA:** First half of 2005
- **Website:** www.empireearth.com



Small men fighting.



Surely helicopters flying this close are a potential death trap?

WIN!

TOCA 2 GIVEAWAY!

TEN LUCKY PETROLHEADS SET FOR TOCA RACE DRIVER 2 GLORY



Don't say that we don't treat you well. For one month and one month only, lucky ZONE readers have the chance of snaffling the best driving game we've played in absolutely ages! *TOCA Race Driver 2* scored a hefty 89 per cent when we took it for a spin last issue, and it's got even the most reserved among us making strange motor noises while we sit at our desks, leaning into the sides of our swivel-chairs as we take those sharp turns.

So get your pens or mobiles ready. To enter, simply send us a postcard or a text message (see 'Win By Txt!', below) with the answer to the following question. Easy eh?

Which of these is not in *TOCA Race Driver 2*?

- a) Ice Racing
- b) GT Sports Car Racing
- c) Midnight Circuits around Basildon's Tesco Car Park Racing

Answers to:

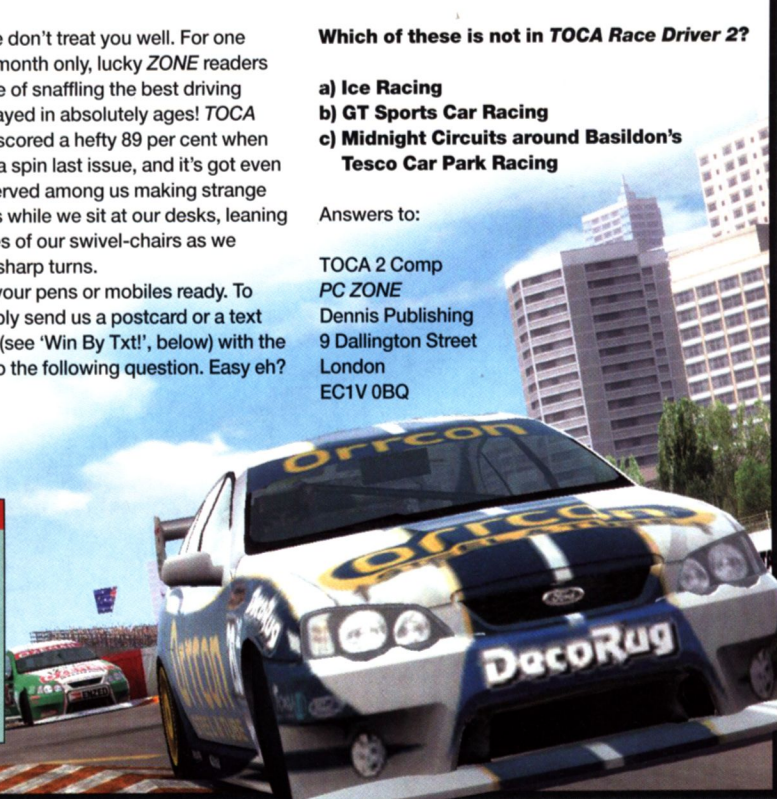
TOCA 2 Comp
PC ZONE
Dennis Publishing
9 Dallington Street
London
EC1V 0BQ

WIN BY TXT!

Seeing as we're down with the kids and are especially 'rad' and 'wicked', we've now got mobile capabilities. So if you want to enter by text then send PCZTOCA to 83125, with your answer (a, b or c), plus your full name and address.

All text entries must be received by June 28. Messages will cost 50p plus your standard operator text messaging charge. For full terms and conditions, see page 7.

■ For full terms and conditions, see page 7.



SHORTS

COOL FOR SKOOL



After the demise of the *Urban Chaos* developer Mucky Foot, designer Simon Keating was pissed off. So pissed off in fact, he went solo, formed MuckyBaby productions and created a homage to Specky classic *Skool Daze*. *Skool's Out*, the trials of a young ruffian called Derek, is on offer at a ridiculously low price – and you can play the demo today, on our shiny DVD.

PACIFIC FIGHTS



If *IL-2* isn't enough for the propellerhead in you, then watch out for *Heroes Of The Pacific*, a dogfight game that's promising 300 combatants onscreen and 25 authentic WWII planes to shoot holes in. It's all looking graphically airtight too, though simultaneous console releases this winter suggest an aim of more gung-ho action than painstaking realism.

SHOOTING STALIN

COMMUNIST GRIME GIVES AN EDGE TO RUSSIAN DEVELOPERS

THE FALL OF the iron curtain may not have reinvented the lives of the people who lived behind it, but (small comfort as it is), the games industry is thriving. Games like *Perimeter*, *Stalker* and *Soldiers: Heroes Of WWII* all hail from the former USSR, and now their shooters are beginning to latch onto the dingy past of the Soviet Union and all the totalitarian nastiness that comes with it. Enter *You Are Empty* and *The Stalin Subway* – two separate Ruskie titles that plunder the Soviet '50s for their distinctly non-egalitarian setting.

First up is *The Stalin Subway*.

Taking place in a variety of real Muscovite locations, the game sticks you in the furry hat of an MGB agent (the proto-KGB). The

action is set against the Stalinist regime and you're fighting for the interests of the people – the main interest being to stop them being killed horribly. Action in the style of *Return To Castle Wolfenstein* is promised – as well as a cavalcade of destructible objects and some striking Soviet architecture to fire bullets into.

Looking far more dazzling than its counterpart, meanwhile, is the bizarrely monickered *You Are Empty*. It's a shooter that takes place in a beautifully imagined Soviet town where some scientific tinkering has gone awry – turning the townsfolk from bread-queuing proles into rampaging mutants, when they should have become Communist superhumans instead. Tsk.

While the jury's out on *The Stalin Subway*, *You Are Empty* has an impressive home-grown graphics engine and multiple endings, along with a cavalcade of freaks to blast to bits. We're betting all our roubles on it being a winner when it hits these shores.

- Publisher: Buka (*The Stalin Subway*), 1C (*You Are Empty*)
- Developer: G5 Software / Digital Spray ■ ETA: TBA
- Website: www.g5software.com www.youareempty.com



The Stalin Subway: Glasnost?



You Are Empty: Perestroika?

Command and commandeer
over 100 authentic vehicles
and weapons

Fully destructible
environments means nothing
will be left standing

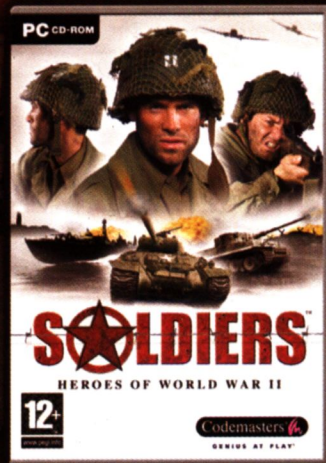
Take direct control of
individual units to take out
specific enemy targets

Totally interactive battlefield
- shoot from cover, evade
the enemy, set ambushes

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2 METHODS OF CONTROL ◊ LIMITLESS PATHS TO VICTORY ◊ CUNNING AI ENEMIES ◊ VARIETY OF ULTRA-DETAILED TERRAIN ◊ TEAM AND VS ONLINE MULTIPLAY.



AGAINST ALL ODDS A FEW GOOD MEN WILL PREVAIL
ACTION AND STRATEGY ARE YOUR ALLIES IN THIS HEROIC WWII ADVENTURE.

Out 2nd July

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GENIUS AT PLAY™

Search For a Game



Got the greatest game idea since *Doom*? Come and put it to the ultimate test – PC ZONE's Search For A Game...



"Back again? Yup, it's that time of the month where you plucky ideasmiths get to test your mettle against our expert panel of judges with another brilliant gaming idea – in your opinion. This month's contender is **Craig Fleming** from **Waterlooville** in **Hampshire**, pitching an idea for a new kind of online RTS that puts the 'work' back into 'teamwork'. Will our judges bite? Take it away Craig, with...

"C&C: Generals meets Savage"

CHAIN OF COMMAND

THIS is an online RTS with thousands of units. Set in the 20th century, it takes place across a wide range of gigantic maps, with battles occurring over land, sea and air. Games begin with you collecting resources, building bases, commanding troops and so on.

So far, so familiar, except here *other players* can be assigned certain jobs in the team. You could have someone commanding all your resources and citizens, leaving you to do the fun stuff. Or you could assign a

player complete control over your navy, army or air force. Orders are given by the commander, who is the starting player. He can assign generals to different game aspects and they in turn can assign captains to their own tasks. This opens up new problems. The commander can only assign duties for his generals to meet: he can't control them directly. The generals can only give orders to captains. Orders are given via texts or microphones. The players can fire or demote other players at

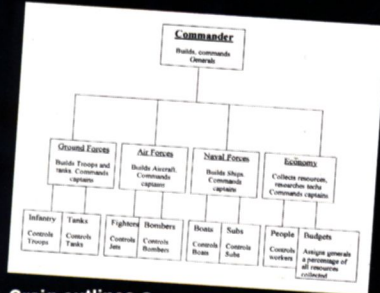
anytime if they're failing tasks or disobeying orders. They can then comply within five minutes or be kicked off the team. In this time they can negotiate, defect (taking their forces and/or cash with them) or even attack their own team. Enemy spies can disrupt communications too, causing confusion and kicking off all sorts of infighting. To win, the team must work together, meet demands and follow orders. If not, they will see their force crumble and fall apart.



Craig provided a sample screenshot, but sees the final version being more 3D.



C&C sets the standard for RTS titles.



Craig outlines a typical command structure.



Savage has a similar 'online ordering' structure, but treads the FPS route.



"I suppose it could be fun being the commander, or being a spy disrupting things and planting false information. The trouble is that it would need an awful lot of organisation between players. Plus, you couldn't just jump in and play this online: that would be chaos. People wouldn't accept commands and they'd be difficult to enforce – it would need a bloody good clan for a game to be fun. It's not going to be much fun at the bottom of the command chain either. Nice idea, but it needs a lot more work." **Verdict: MISS!**

"It's an interesting idea. A bit like *Savage* but much more complicated, which would be my main criticism – it's probably too complicated. For a start, you need two dozen people before you've got a real game and with the gameplay involving infighting, firing people and disobeying orders, it sounds like a recipe for gaming disaster to me. But, and it's a big but, if the design is tightened up and each job made really interesting and rewarding in its own right, then it could just about work." **Verdict: HIT!**



"I like it. The problem is that everyone would want to be in charge. The most telling line is '...leaving you to do the fun stuff'. Everyone will want to do the fun stuff! If played over a LAN with people you know it'd be good, but there's too much capacity for someone to mess everything up. You have to remember that most of the people playing online are arseholes who simply won't do what they're told. But it is a good idea and it should be made – or at least ideas within this blueprint should be used in the future." **Verdict: HIT!**

"Two hits and a miss – that's not bad in our book. Well done Craig! Tighten the idea up a bit and it could be a winner. See you next month with another contender!"

Send your ideas in no more than 300 words (along with a one-line pitch and any artwork) to 'Search For A Game' at the usual address. If any publishers like the sound of anything here, email us at letters@pczone.co.uk. (Well, you never know...)



CHARTS

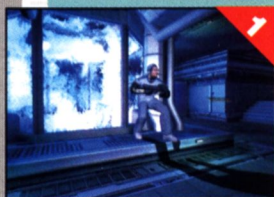
In association with **VIRGIN MEGASTORES**

Heads up pop pickers – here's the lowdown on the top ten that all the kids are talking about. What crazy games are causing a jive round your way?

ChartTrack

TOP 10





Retaining its crown is *Far Cry*: king of the jungle, belle of the beach and terror of all Trigenes everywhere. Jack Carver provides the best solo expedition we've played in ages and destroys more helicopters than we ever thought possible.



Some PC gamers are intent on giving the rest of us a bad name – perpetuating the myth that sexual frustration is rife throughout computer-dom. Thanks guys – great team spirit. We hope you've had success getting your simulated Germans to bump uglies...

	▲▼	TITLE	PUBLISHER	SCORE
1	-	FAR CRY	UBISOFT	93%
2	▲	CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER: SEASON 03/04	EIDOS	90%
3	NEW	TOCA RACE DRIVER 2	CODEMASTERS	89%
4	▲	THE SIMS	EA	86%
5	▼	BATTLEFIELD VIETNAM	EA	87%
6	▼	UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004	ATARI	91%
7	▼	COUNTER-STRIKE: CONDITION ZERO	VU GAMES	83%
8	NEW	SINGLES: FLIRT UP YOUR LIFE	DEEP SILVER	48%
9	NEW	PAINKILLER	DREAMCATCHER	83%
10	▼	SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TOMORROW	UBISOFT	89%



Ah, TOCA. The game that makes driving such a pleasure – as opposed to the White Van-ridden slog on the real highways of Great Britain. Mirror, signal, manoeuvre? Piss off! Get in a high performance vehicle and drive very fast until you hit a tree: the TOCA way.



It's not big or clever, but it is funny charging around *Painkiller's* superbly designed levels, freezing, staking and skewering its undead inhabitants. It's good to see another game from a relatively unknown developer in the top ten too.

YOUR SHOUT Have your say at www.pczone.co.uk

There's a lot of lonely people out there if they're actually buying *Singles*. I thought it would be headed straight for the bargain bin and then to oblivion straight afterwards.
AlanShep2001

Message to people buying *Singles: Flirt Up Your Life*. LEAVE THE HOUSE! Go to bars! Drink beer, meet people, meet girls, buy girls drinks – you can do it! You too can pull. Believe, people...
bagsabbis

Why is *Painkiller* below *Singles: Go Get A Life*? I mean... You can shoot stakes into zombies! *Stakes into zombies!!* For it to be only at number nine is devil worship!
Jerem

Virgin megastores TOP 10

1. FAR CRY	UBISOFT
2. UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004	ATARI
3. TOCA RACE DRIVER 2	CODEMASTERS
4. SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TOMORROW	UBISOFT
5. SINGLES: FLIRT UP YOUR LIFE	DEEP SILVER
6. COUNTER-STRIKE: CONDITION ZERO	VU GAMES
7. BATTLEFIELD VIETNAM	EA
8. X2: THE THREAT	DEEP SILVER
9. THE SIMS	EA
10. CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER: SEASON 03/04	EIDOS

Virgin megastores COMPETITION

Win £100 of Virgin vouchers!

PC ZONE and Virgin have teamed up to give you the chance to win 100 shiny pounds-worth of goodies from your local Virgin Megastore. All you have to do to enter is answer the following:

QUESTION: The scripts for *Singles: Flirt Up Your Life* are written by a guy who has previously worked on which Newcastle-based kids TV show?
A Jossy's Giants B Jonny Briggs C Byker Grove

Send your answers on a postcard to: PC ZONE Chart Compo Issue 143, Dennis Publishing, 9 Dallington Street, London, EC1V 0BQ. Closing date: June 28, 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.

To enter the competition by text: send PCZVIRGIN, to 83125, with your answer (a,b, or c), plus your full name and address.

- All text entries must be received by June 28. Messages will cost 50p plus your standard operator text messaging charge.

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

INCOMING!

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

JUNE

BESIEGER	DREAMCATCHER
CHAOS LEAGUE	DIGITAL JESTERS
EASTSIDE HOCKEY MANAGER: FRANCHISE EDITION	SEGA
GROUND CONTROL II: OPERATION EXODUS	VU GAMES
HARRY POTTER AND THE PRISONER OF AZKABAN	EA
MASHED	EMPIRE
THE PUNIC WARS: A CLASH OF TWO EMPIRES	EXCALIBUR
THIEF: DEADLY SHADOWS	EIDOS
SOLDIERS: HEROES OF WORLD WAR II	CODEMASTERS
WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP SNOOKER 2004	CODEMASTERS

JULY

JOINT OPERATIONS: TYPHOON RISING	NOVALOGIC
SHELLSHOCK: NAM '67	EIDOS
SÖLDNER - SECRET WARS	BIG BEN
SPIDER-MAN: THE MOVIE 2	ACTIVISION
WARLORDS: BATTLECRY III	ENLIGHT

Q3

CODENAME: PANZERS	CDV
CONFLICT: VIETNAM	SCI
DOOM 3	ACTIVISION
DRAGON EMPIRES	CODEMASTERS
DRIV3R	ATARI
EVERQUEST II	UBISOFT
FLATOUT	EMPIRE
GHOST RECON 2	UBISOFT
JUICED	ACCLAIM
LEISURE SUIT LARRY: MAGNA CUM LAUDE	VU GAMES
MEDAL OF HONOR: PACIFIC ASSAULT	EA
NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND 2	EA
RICHARD BURNS RALLY	SCI
ROME: TOTAL WAR	ACTIVISION
THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH	EA
THE SIMS 2	EA
STALKER: SHADOW OF CHERNOBYL	THQ
STAR WARS: BATTLEFRONT	ACTIVISION
WARHAMMER 40,000: DAWN OF WAR	THQ
WARTIME COMMAND: BATTLE FOR EUROPE 1939-45	CODEMASTERS

Q4

ADVENT RISING	VU GAMES
AXIS AND ALLIES	ATARI
BLACK & WHITE 2	EA
BROTHERS IN ARMS	UBISOFT
BLOODRAYNE 2	VU GAMES
CALL OF DUTY: UNITED OFFENSIVE	ACTIVISION
COSSACKS II: NAPOLEONIC WAR	CDV
EVIL GENIUS	VU GAMES
FAHRENHEIT	VU GAMES
FOOTBALL MANAGER 2005	SEGA
PARIAH	HIP GAMES
PRINCE OF PERSIA 2	UBISOFT
ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON 3	ATARI
THE MATRIX ONLINE	TBC
THE MOVIES	ACTIVISION
SETTLERS: HERITAGE OF KINGS	UBISOFT
SID MEIER'S PIRATES!	ATARI
STAR WARS: REPUBLIC COMMANDO	ACTIVISION
TRIBES: VENGEANCE	VU GAMES

REST OF 2004

HALF-LIFE 2	VU GAMES
MEN OF VALOR: VIETNAM	VU GAMES
SPLINTER CELL 3	UBISOFT
VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE - BLOODLINES	ACTIVISION
WARHAMMER ONLINE	SEGA
WORLD OF WARCRAFT	VU GAMES

2005

DUNGEON SIEGE 2	MICROSOFT
KOTOR II: THE SITH LORDS	ACTIVISION
MIDDLE-EARTH ONLINE	VU GAMES
F.E.A.R.	VU GAMES

MISSING IN ACTION!

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

TRAIN SIMULATOR 2.0

THE CHEST-BEATING, the cries of "Why God? Why?" - none of these were heard in the office the day *Train Sim 2* was officially derailed. Apart from Prezzer, who let a single tear trickle down his face. 'Business objectives' indeed! *Train Simulator 2.0*: you shall be avenged.

- Publisher: Microsoft
- Developer: Microsoft
- ETA: KIA



MIDDLE-EARTH ONLINE

HAVING seen all five endings to *The Return Of The King*, you'd have thought the LOTR story was over. Not so. You will, however, have to wait a while longer before wandering around Hobbiton and smoking strange herbs - 2005 is the tentative release date.

- Publisher: VU Games
- Developer: Turbine Entertainment
- ETA: 2005
- Website: www.vugames.com



SOLDIERS: HEROES OF WWII

YOU'LL have to search for the hero inside yourself (as opposed to on your monitor) for an extra month, as *Soldiers: Heroes Of WWII* is having some extra attention from the top-down God of RTS fiddling. We've been promised the review next issue: until then, satiate your thirst for 1940s destruction by playing our exclusive demo.

- Publisher: Codemasters
- Developer: Best Way
- ETA: July
- Website: www.codemasters.co.uk/soldiers/



TOP 10 GAMES THAT FEATURE MONKEYS

1. **MONKEY ISLAND SERIES** (THREE-HEADED MONKEY)

2. **BLACK & WHITE** (GIANT RELIGIOUS MONKEY)

3. **DONKEY KONG** (GIANT ARCADE MONKEY)

4. **FAR CRY** (MUTATED SCARY MONKEYS)

5. **SYSTEM SHOCK 2** (PART-ROBOT, PSYCHIC MONKEYS)

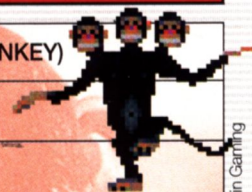
6. **DISCWORLD SERIES** (STUDIOUS, VIOLENT ORANG-UTAN)

7. **MONKEY STRIKE** (BANANA-LOVING, HALF-LIFE MONKEYS)

8. **SAVAGE** (INNOCENT, BEFUDDLED MONKEYS)

9. **THE HOUSE OF THE DEAD 2** (EVIL ZOMBIE MONKEYS)

10. **ALADDIN** (HELPFUL, CHEEKY MONKEY)



IS THERE A GAMING CHART YOU'D LIKE TO SEE HERE? SEND IT IN AND IF WE PRINT IT YOU'LL GET A PCZ GOODIE BAG!

SOURCE: The National Society for the Promotion of Simians in Gaming



TRIBES: VENGEANCE

Vengeance is a dish best served cold. With jet-packs. And skiing...



OUR INTEREST in Tribes:

Vengeance has been simmering for quite a while now, but E3 has kicked it beyond boiling point and into steamy fervour. On the one hand, it's a newer, sleeker version of a much-loved (albeit somewhat niche) multiplayer gem. On the other, it's set to be a multi-layered, character-driven solo experience detailing a family ripped apart by the conflict between an evil empire and the titular tribes. What's more, it's being overseen by Ken Levine – the man behind the scintillating *System Shock 2*.

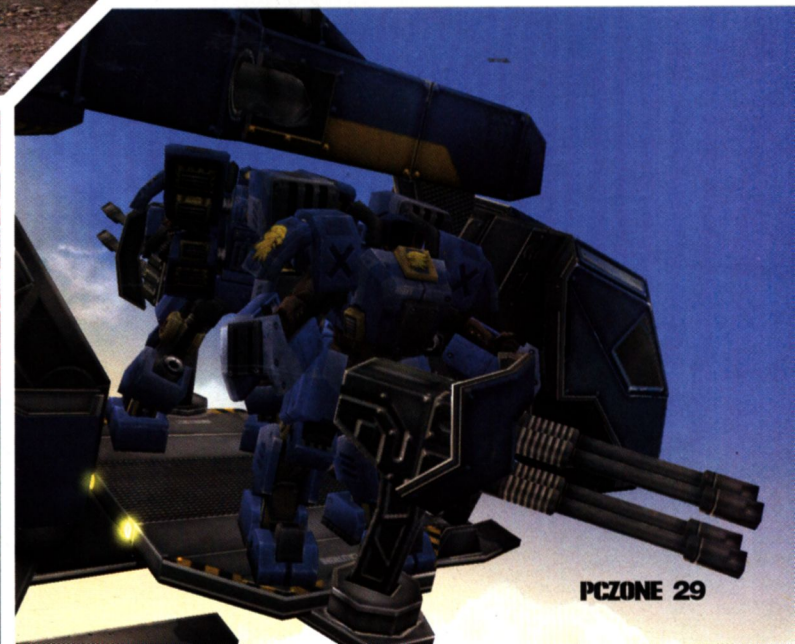
With locations varying from the trademarked green hills that are so adored by *Tribes* devotees to sports stadiums, underground cave networks, acid wastelands and the urban rubble of destroyed cities, this should be a product that delights old hands and newbies alike. With the mass market introduced to 'skiing' (the physics-assisted launching tactic that sets *Tribes* so far apart from your average corridor-carnage shooter), who knows what online wonders await us?

Quite frankly, we're chomping at the bit because if *Tribes: Vengeance* fulfils its potential, it'll be a stormer – and you and I will be able to ski-jump backwards...

- Publisher: VU Games
- Developer: Irrational Games
- ETA: Q4
- Website: www.tribesvengeance.com



ITEM NAME (BUILD 28921)





UNREAL ENGINE 3.0

Epic drops jaws with stunning exposé of the Unreal 3.0 engine

AFTER its closed-doors showing at the recent Games Developers Conference, the Unreal 3.0 engine took to the floor at E3 and dazzled one and all with its splendour. We'd be lying if we said we understood all the jargon – terms like 'lenticular halos', 'parameterized phong lighting' and a 'dynamically-deformable base height' make us feel dizzy – but essentially, as these screens amply show, it all means the games of the next five years are going to be absolutely frigging beautiful.

The key advances over the previous Unreal tech include more natural and subtle lighting and shadow effects, massive environments with no discernible draw-distance limits, and superior ragdolls and physics objects – with joints that can actually break when a force is applied! We're talking seriously cutting-edge stuff here – a definite step up from the likes of *Half-Life 2* and *Doom 3*.

Of course, it's still only a tech demo at this stage – and the first games with this tech are unlikely to appear for some years yet – but it's still a tantalising glimpse of tomorrow's PC games.

Roll on the future.

■ Developer: Epic

■ Website: www.unrealtechnology.com





The soldier
nor does he transport
need to do so.

enemy.
The goal of battle is final victory, not protracted warfare.
It is through an understanding of warfare that the general
protects the security of his people and of his nation.

Al...
Terra. On Morning
Alliance, veteran
final desperate def...
in a brutal ground

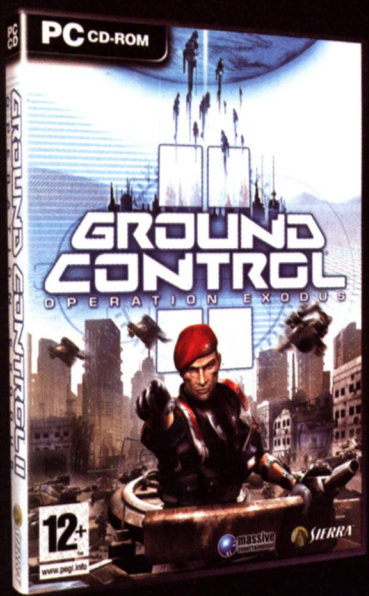
Doc. 3 American Army in action



Photo © National Archives / Corbis/Bettmann

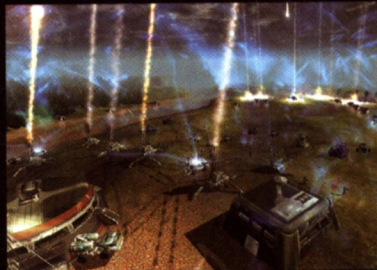


The weapons may have changed, but it's your



Ground Control II: Operation Exodus is an epic real-time action-strategy game that takes your strategic and tactical thinking to the limit. Test your skills as you take the role

of Captain Jacob Angelus commanding the hardware-intense Northern Star Alliance of the nano-organic technology of the alien Virons in 24 action-packed missions.



Empire of
planet of the
Angelus leads a
ple from annihilation



**"Ground Control II
may well end up being
the strategy game of the year"**
PC Zone



Doc. 6 Vlaana Azleaa
Terran Empire

**"We're really looking
forward to the fully-finished
shell-shocker"**
PC Gamer



Doc. 7 Northern Star Alliance Army
fighting on Morningstar Prime

tactics and strategy that will win the war.

Then test your strategies and tactics against thousands of players online by logging on to Massgate™, an online community system that gives you immediate access to online

matchmaking, drop-in multiplayer, hi-score ladders, tournaments, chat rooms and much more.

Change your strategy



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EVERYTHING STARTS WITH AN E3

Steve Hill brings you the E3 lowdown: games, girls and grins as wide as LA...

TEN YEARS on, the annual E3 bonanza is still treated with equal amounts of anticipation and trepidation.

While it's always a welcome opportunity to catch up with some old faces, the punishing routine of ritual alcohol abuse can test the hardest of hedonists.

This year's line-up sees a grizzled
PC ZONE

quartet of my good self, the boss Woods, professional Northerner Sefton, and online goblin-chaser Prezzer, amazingly going to his first E3 following 61 years in the industry.

In the same way that the royal family travel separately to minimise risk, we split up, with the talent on one flight, and the admin (Woods, Sefton and Prezzer) on another. So while they whoop it up with half the industry on the Virgin flight, I'm 45 minutes ahead on the American

Airlines starvation route. This is the least of my problems. While running for the tube in the pissing rain, I slipped and cracked my foot on the underside of the carriage, and it has now blown up like a balloon, so much so that I almost retch when inspecting it in the aircraft toilet. Given that E3 is essentially a three-day walking holiday, this isn't a good start.

Some consolation is afforded by the fact that I'm heading straight for the San Fernando Valley, where former **ZONE**







staffer-turned-porn-baron Mallo has been holed up for the last six months in a hillside retreat, next door to CC DeVille out of Poison, no less. With a swimming pool, hot tub, pool table and barbecue, it's a reasonable gaff, although I wish they didn't have a basketball hoop. Within hours of arriving, a failed catch has busted a finger on my right hand, not ideal given that E3 largely involves three days of over-enthusiastic hand-shaking.

NAKED AMBITION

E3 is all about parties, but the first of the show isn't on the official agenda. The day after we arrive, the cream of the games industry (us lot) heads for Mallo's to meet up with the cream of the porn industry (him and his mates). An interesting meeting of minds, the parallels between the two businesses are clear. Both products are enjoyed predominantly by men, both feature specific genres, and both have their own array of bewildering abbreviations. For every MMORPG or FPS in the games

industry, there's an ATOGM or DP (although any talk of these were banned before midday by a female colleague). Another parallel is that over-exposure to either games or porn can leave you jaded. In the same way that we barely register a shrug when a Gallic adventure drops onto the mat, these guys are oblivious to the delights of free copies of *Whap It On My Face*, a fact that prompts the opening negotiations of a transatlantic porn-for-games deal.

Furthermore, in England, when you tell people that you work in the games industry, you generally do it under your breath and are greeted with somewhere between blank incomprehension and outright contempt. Here, we're greeted with respect, awe and envy – and this from people who look at naked girls for a living. In fact, some of the porn guys are actually coming to E3 in an attempt to get into the games industry.

HE WHO DARES

The following day, we head for Six Flags theme park, scene of Korda's ball-busting incident of two years prior. The Goliath roller coaster sorts out the men from the boys, with Sefton's pained expression captured on camera for posterity. Woods ups the ante with the DareDevil Dive bungee jump, which sees him wrapped in a blanket with two other people and dropped out of the sky. Not my idea of fun, I settle for the White Water Rapids, and spend the rest of the day drenched in filthy water and rat-piss.

The next party on our punishing schedule sees Woods, Sefton and myself on the list for Ubisoft's shindig at The Playboy Mansion, appropriately to mark the forthcoming game *Playboy: The Mansion*. Not an invite

to be scoffed at, Woods and myself spend the preceding hour preening ourselves like ponces, even to the extent of ironing shirts, something that Woods approaches with all the dexterity of an amputee elk.

Hammering the hotel's happy hour for two large vodka & tonics each in the space of five minutes, we pick up Sefton and jump in a cab. For security reasons, access to The Mansion is only by shuttle

Following a life-threatening journey, we erupt into the club where superstar DJ Paul Oakenfold has just dropped Donna Summer's *I Feel Love*. Something of a moment, three reeling Englishman hit the floor, cutting a rug like the glory days of old.

Bed follows shortly after, and then in what seems like the blink of an eye we find ourselves at E3, walking around in a trance with pain coming at us from every

"Here, we're greeted with respect, awe and envy – and this from people who look at naked girls for a living"

from a UCLA parking lot. Unfortunately, our Russian cabbie has never heard of UCLA. With time ticking away, we spend a torturous hour – during which he tries to drop us at a supermarket car park – with Sefton at boiling point, me grinding my teeth in despair and Woods lolling about singing along to Abba.

We finally make it to The Mansion fashionably late, and manage to miss Hugh Hefner's brief appearance. What we don't miss is the slew of naked women, their dignity protected only by painted-on bikinis. We also go for an unofficial tour of the grounds and, caught short, take advantage of the privacy afforded by a bunch of sinister cages packed full of spider monkeys.

LOVED UP

Hef wants everyone out by midnight, so we jump in a cab and head to Avalon in Hollywood for the Vivendi party.

angle. Me and Woods sit through a demo of the ultra-violent (and massively impressive) *F.E.A.R.*, with arterial spouting not necessarily what you need first thing in the morning. Some respite is offered by the first booth babe of the day, with Woods spending five minutes of quiet reverie stalking her on the Tecmo stand, declaring her the winner before noon on the first day.

With the worst of the excesses gone, the rest of the show passes in a blur of flashing lights and thumping bass bins. One of the strongest for years, the PC games are particularly impressive and although there aren't a stack of new announcements, some of the big boys, particularly *Half-Life 2* and *Doom 3*, declare themselves 'ready for the summer'. With the LA sun beating down on us like a sock full of pool balls, that doesn't seem like a million miles away.

When it's all over, we decamp to Mallo's for one final bender, hanging out with porn stars in the sun-kissed delights of California. They're not happy though. As Mallo says, he'd rather be grabbing games. [E3]



PC ZONE E3 AWARDS

It's that time of the year again - join us to check out the industry's most respected annual awards!

BEST IN SHOW
Half-Life 2.



BEST ONLINE GAME
Warhammer Online.

BEST START TO AN E3 EVER
Hill ending his first night in a hot tub with a selection of gorgeous babes.



BEST PARTY
Ubisoft's bash at The Playboy Mansion.

BEST AMERICAN NAME
Chip Bumgardner (MMOG producer, Unrivalled Entertainment).

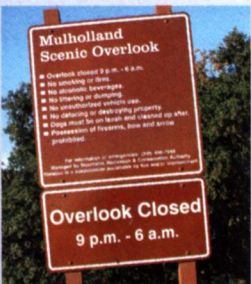


BEST BOOTH BABE
The stunning Tecmo booth babe spotted on the first day. Woods spotted salivating.

BEST IMPRESSION OF A BUZZ-SAW
Sefton snoring on Mallo's floor.

MOST EMBARRASSING ZONE MOMENT

Sefton's night terrors: found on his back trapped under a tripod like a turtle trying to right itself, before attempting to sleepwalk his way to Mulholland Drive.



LONGEST LIE-IN
Sefton's 5pm following the above.

MOST ILL-TIMED CONVERSATION
The Dennis employee who dismissed an entire range of games

while taking a piss, unaware that a director of the company was on the shitter.

BIGGEST BOY
The man-mountain who managed to dwarf a military helicopter. Nice work fella!



WORST PRESENTATION
Juiced. Having been kept waiting for half an hour, Hill and Sefton were shown around the game menu for 20 minutes, finally seeing three seconds of action on a defective screen and being told to go and look at the Xbox version. Great game, rubbish presentation.

MOST POINTLESS JOURNEY
Hill's two-hour odyssey to play a game of *FIFA 2005*. Lost 1-0.



WORST SIMULATED ACID FLASHBACK
Hill, with a particularly twitchy hangover, being accosted by an 8ft Yeti.

WORD OF THE SHOW
"Woof!"



BIGGEST WASTE OF DOLLAR BILLS
The *ZONE* employee who can't remember having a private dance at The Body Shop (not Anita Roddick's).

MOST UNORTHODOX BEGGING TECHNIQUE
Interrupting a *ZONE* breakfast to insult everyone before asking for a dollar.

WORST MEAL
The Six Flags Triple Burger - Queuing half an hour for three limp pats of gristle is not good.

MOST INTERESTING PROPOSAL
Mallo's roommate offering to rub a Konami employee's head while he performed a sexual act with another man, looked over by three prostitutes and a priest.

WORST YORKSHIRE TO CALIFORNIA TRANSLATION
Sefton repeating "three bottles of beer" four times at The Hollywood Canteen before giving up.

PASTIEST BRIT
Mallo, still sporting a Doncaster tan after six months in L.A.



BEST FREEBIE
The Radica 20Q machine that can identify anything you're thinking of within 20 questions. Chicks love it.



BEST HANGOVER CURE
Pure carrot juice.

BEYOND THE CALL OF DUTY
Woods raising himself from his deathbed to attend a meeting with an obscure German publishing company.

TRICKIEST EXPENSES CLAIM
Two bottles of champagne and a slew of prime shrimp for Mallo's barbecue.





Hard cell...

SPLINTER CELL 3

Sam Fisher is back with an even more lethal streak. *Jamie Sefton* hides in the shadows for an exclusive night-vision view of the third outing for the stealth action series

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Ubisoft Montreal
PUBLISHER Ubisoft
WEBSITE Q4 2004
ETA www.ubi.com

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Cool new stealth kills
- State-of-the-art next-gen graphics with ragdoll physics
- Open level design with secondary objectives
- Co-op multiplayer versus AI

“In the new *Splinter Cell*, your favourite Third Echelon operative can now perform ninja-style stealth skills”

SAM FISHER creeps into a Japanese house and begins shimmying along a pipe suspended from the ceiling, just above an unsuspecting guard. Slowly, but oh-so-surely, holding on to the pipe with his feet, he silently manoeuvres his hands into position, grasping the shocked enemy by the neck and wringing the last vestiges of life from his struggling body.

I'm only a few minutes into the E3 presentation of the brand new *Splinter Cell* game and already there's been a massive revelation – everyone's favourite Third Echelon operative can now perform ninja-style stealth kills. And that's just the beginning. *Splinter Cell 3* (working title) is a major rewrite of the stealth series in terms of graphics, level design, animation, AI and gameplay. It

also boasts some stunning new single-player and multiplayer features that are sure to leave fans of Tom Clancy's most famous undercover gimp breathless with anticipation.

CUTTING EDGE

Even though *Pandora Tomorrow* has only just been released, the third *Splinter Cell* game is already well into development and most surprisingly, has only been officially confirmed as a PC title, to be launched later this year. Set in 2008, the story revolves around an 'information

attack' on the world's electrical and telecommunication networks (apparently from North Korea), that's allowed terrorists to remotely hijack military defence systems.

CV



UBISOFT MONTREAL

Ubisoft Montreal is Ubisoft's flagship development studio, a talented bunch that sent the company's fortunes sky-rocketing with the first *Splinter Cell*.

- 2003** *Splinter Cell*. The first-ever outing for Sam Fisher on PC. Although coming after the Xbox version, the PC version was a triumph with superior graphics and mouse-control.
- 2003** *Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time*. Finally, a 3D update of the classic 2D original, with superb-intuitive controls, great combat and nifty wall-running acrobatics. We like.
- 2004** *Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow*. The recent sequel to *Splinter Cell* introduced a few new moves and weapons, as well as innovative stealth multiplayer modes.



Big gun? Check. Bullets? Check. Headgear? Check. New knife? Double-check.

Sam can throttle enemies from above.





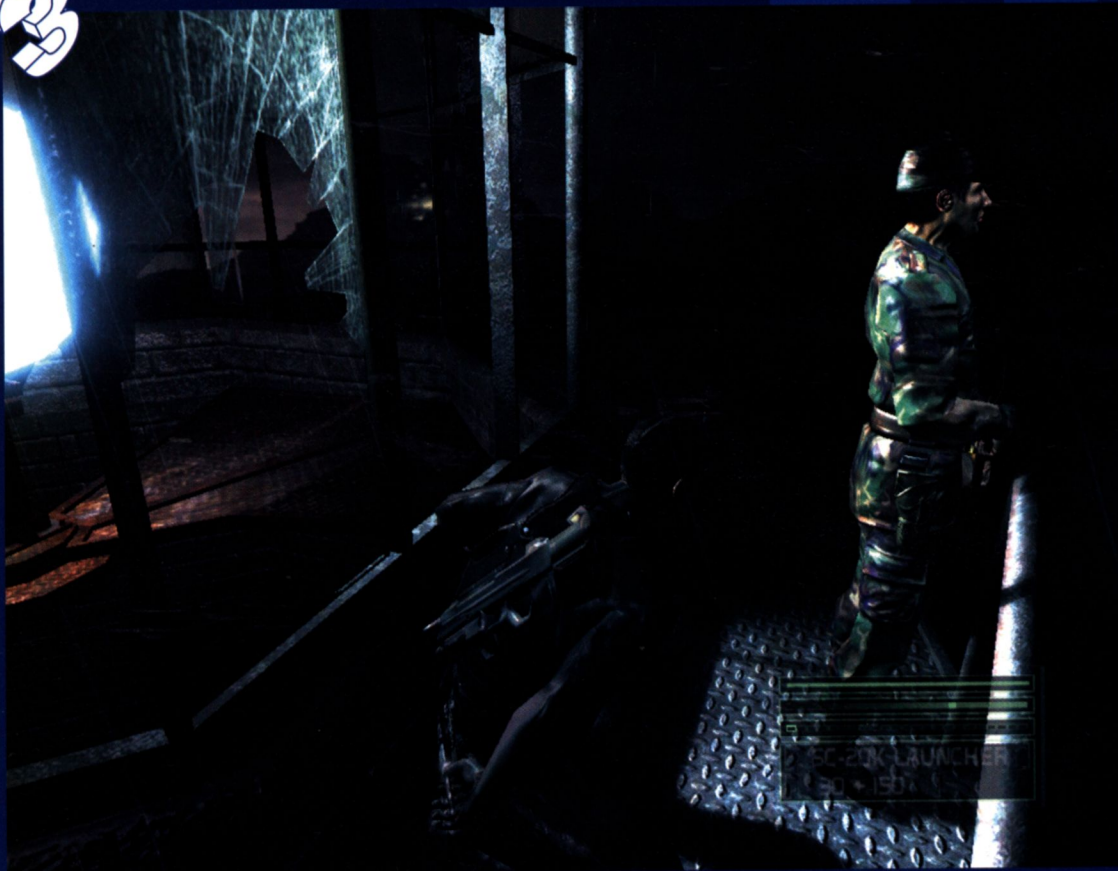
Sam's brand-new muscular frame.

electronic equipment. In the demo, Sam uses this technology to distract a guard watching television by interfering with the signal. Once the poor fool gets out of his chair to investigate the sudden deterioration in picture quality, Sam creeps into the room behind him and deftly snaps his neck like a dry twig.

"Also, we might include another gadget based on experimental real-life technology that uses low-frequency sounds to increase the level of fear in NPCs. They may decide not to enter a dark area covered by this non-lethal weapon because they feel unusual – it actually affects their behaviour."

MISSION (NOT) IMPOSSIBLE

All the weapons and gadgets are accessed through 'goggle-vision', a new slick HUD that mimics being inside Sam Fisher's distinctive headwear – further immersing you in the *Splinter Cell* universe. As for the new open mission structure, this apparently came about mainly because us fussy PC gamers



Co-op multiplayer means you can keep watch while your team-mate sneaks up and pulls off a stealth kill.

"We want to keep the game believable, so we reckoned that in a few years it could be possible that something would happen between Japan, North Korea and South Korea," says lead programmer Dany Lepage. "We're still moving from one area to another, which is what sets us apart from say, *Metal Gear Solid*, where everything happens in the same place. We want very different and diverse environments, so *Splinter Cell 3* is set to have missions in New York and Peru."

The new title emphasises Sam's unique ability to get in really close to enemies, and with the addition of the new stealth kills, offers you a very different *Splinter Cell* experience – especially with the addition of a combat knife and some spectacular new moves.

"In playtesting, we found out that 80 per cent of the NPCs were killed by the players, but until now we haven't had that many ways to finish them off," continues Dany. "Sam is now much

more powerful from close proximity because of the knife."

Although you can't use the blade for the actual killing (to keep the game's non-18 rating), you can hold it against an enemy's throat before removing it and

the ground before taking the remaining guy down with a blast from an extremely powerful shotgun. Yep, you read right – Mr Stealth has re-armed himself with more powerful weaponry.

"The shotgun could look weird for

"We want very different and diverse environments, so *Splinter Cell 3* will have missions in New York and Peru"

DANY LEPAGE LEAD PROGRAMMER, *SPLINTER CELL 3*

silently choking them. Also, you can use the knife as a tool to cut ropes and even slice through soft-body materials to give you access to previously inaccessible areas of a level.

GUNS 'N' GADGETS

In another impossibly cool sequence, Sam uses his optical camera to spy into a room occupied by two goons, one standing just the other side of the door. In a split-second, Sam bashes open the door, knocking one enemy instantly to

a stealth game, but it's nice to have. Sometimes, in the first *Splinter Cell*, you were seeing two or three guys in a room and you couldn't do anything. Now you have the choice of being able to kick the door in and shoot everybody."

Of course, this piece of gameplay also nicely demonstrates the game's new ragdoll physics, that according to Dany, proved to be a huge challenge for the development team.

"The position of an NPC can be anything now, so the question is, how do you carry a ragdoll? You can't just use a straight animation, so we needed to create some special technology. It's not just about killing someone with a rocket launcher and obliterating them – you have to dispose of the bodies by carrying and hiding them." Or indeed, as in another beautiful sequence set on top of a rain-swept lighthouse, hang from a ledge below, reach up and pull enemies off the edge and into the sea.

Other new gizmos include a sniper rifle attachment that can zoom in huge distances and shoot through objects such as wooden planks; and an E-beam, a device that disrupts any

complained about the fact that missions were quite straightforward, and could be completed by simply causing distractions, using stealth or shooting enough enemies until you made your way past an obstacle.

"You had a great amount of freedom inside an area, but not freedom between areas," says Dany. "Now you can complete objectives in any order and we've included secondary objectives that are carried from one mission to another if you fail them. So, for example, if you don't get access to a computer and some badly-needed files, you need to get them on the second map. If you don't, you're not going to be able to access them on the third map. It'll also be a lot more forgiving with the reasons for mission failures."

WORKING TOGETHER

If you enjoyed the stealthy multiplayer of *Pandora Tomorrow*, you'll also be chuffed to know that there's now a potentially cracking co-operative mode for two players. This involves you and a friend co-ordinating an infiltration mission against computer-controlled

WEATHER WITH YOU

FETCH THE BROLLY – *SPLINTER CELL 3* NOW HAS WEATHER EFFECTS THAT DIRECTLY AFFECT GAMEPLAY



Not only do *Splinter Cell 3*'s new weather effects for rain and wind look gorgeous, they actually affect gameplay. Guards change patrols if it's raining, for example, and you can push or pull baddies into the ocean to cover your tracks. The sound masking process is also new in *Splinter Cell 3*, which means you can cover the noise of you running or dropping down from a height by drowning it out.

"When there's thunder outdoors, for example, you can move fast and the NPCs aren't going to hear you," says Dany Lepage. "Using the weather system, you could see a lightning strike, wait a few seconds for the noise of thunder and use it to cover your steps. In previous *Splinter Cell* games, if you ran too fast, nearby NPCs would react – but now you can also run at them, catch them by surprise and kill them."



A new move has Sam pulling enemies off buildings from below.

opponents, with brand-new moves exclusive to these levels.

In the demo, I watched mesmerised as Dany and a Ubisoft colleague used USB headsets to plan the infiltration of an office building, beginning with one operative giving the other a simple leg-up over a wall and ending with a *Mission Impossible*-inspired raid on a computer terminal, with one agent lowering the other down on a rope. You can also use this 'drop move' to lower your partner on a line, grab an enemy from above and strangle them.

HELPING HAND

"If you have the voice system on a headset, it works really well because you can co-ordinate your tactics, creating diversions so, for example, it'll help the other player. But not everyone has this feature, so we've had to work on a way to make the standard communication fun and easy to use, as we definitely have two maps where both players are split apart for a while."

The AI in *Splinter Cell 3*'s co-op mode appears to be very advanced too. So, for example, if they think there's just one operative and they see you, they come directly towards you, giving your partner an opportunity to sneak up on them from

behind in a *Jurassic Park* Raptor-stylee.

Finally, *Splinter Cell 3* looks absolutely stunning, fully utilising the latest graphics cards and DX9 routines. New weather effects have rain splashing off Sam's clothes and collecting in puddles (see 'Weather with You', opposite), while soft shadows and silhouettes can be projected onto walls depending on a character's position in relation to a light source. Reflective surfaces can reveal Sam's whereabouts to enemies, whereas gobsmacking glass diffusion effects give a real impression of being in a real physical space. Sam Fisher himself is much more detailed, so you can now see his muscles, as well as 90 bones for realistic limb movement.

Splinter Cell 3 could be the best Tom Clancy adventure yet, ironing out many of the last two titles' gameplay quirks. What's more, with the addition of ragdoll physics, a new HUD, co-op multiplayer modes, shotgun diplomacy, a brutal door bash, knife-play and sneaky choke kills, there's also a genuine adrenaline kick to the stealth action genre. The world may be a more dangerous place, but we'll sleep safer in the knowledge that Sam Fisher is out there, watching over us in the darkness with green night-vision goggles... [E3]



Sam's new albino brother is unconfirmed as a player character.



Keep your new character CJ fit or he'll end up as a fat boy at E3.

GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS

■ Dev: Rockstar North | Pub: Rockstar | ETA: Q2 2005 | www.rockstargames.com/sanandreas

First details revealed of Rockstar's latest drive-by shooter epic right here

ALTHOUGH still only officially announced for PlayStation 2 this October, we'll challenge Tommy Vercetti to a chainsaw duel if we don't see *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* on PC by this time next year. Here's the major revelation – *San Andreas* is actually a huge US state similar to California, with three fully-rendered cities the same size as *Vice City* – Los Santos (Los Angeles), Las Venturra (Las Vegas) and San Fierro (San Francisco). Not only that, but you have all the countryside in-between, with mountains, strange locals and a definite road movie feel.

CRIPS AND BLOODS

San Andreas is set in the early 1990s, complete with those infamous period radio stations. You play through the game as Carl Johnson (CJ), a street kid who's recently returned to his home of Los Santos to find in-fighting in his

family and his gang, the Orange Grove Families. CJ is soon dragged back into the gangsta lifestyle when a couple of bad cops get on his tail and everything goes tits-up.

Rockstar has included more real estate to buy, including casinos, and many more interiors of buildings have now been fully modelled – important, as you can now go robbing houses for money. CJ has to eat to maintain his stamina meter, but don't go scoffing too many burgers and fries or you'll put on weight, affecting speed and strength. If you're getting too porky, it's time to get down to the gym and slim down.

San Andreas also promises new vehicles including bicycles, more satisfying weapons with ragdoll physics, improved NPC AI and the ability to recruit gang members for four-way drive-by shootings. By our reckonings, this is going to be B.I.G.



You can participate in four-man drive-by shootings.



Push bikes are a new vehicle in *San Andreas*.



Keeping it Unreal PARIAH

An outcast? Shunned by society?
But enough about *Rhianna Pratchett*, here's *Pariah*

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Digital Extremes
PUBLISHER Hip Interactive
WEBSITE www.pariahgame.com
ETA Q1/Q2 2005

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- From the makers of *Unreal* and *Unreal Tournament*
- Modified Unreal engine combined with Havok physics technology
- Vehicles and customisable weaponry
- Storyline penned by Hollywood scriptwriters

CV



DIGITAL EXTREMES

Located in Toronto, Canada, Digital Extremes was founded ten years ago on the vision of pushing the boundaries of technology, imagination and innovation.

1998 *Unreal* – DE launches one of the most successful FPS franchises with this visually stunning title.

1999 *Unreal Tournament* – One of the best multiplayer games gets its first outing.

2004 *Unreal Tournament 2004* – Five years later and the *UT* brand is still going strong and heralds the return of Assault mode.

“THE UNREAL *Tournament* games we've done have all been very multiplayer focused. *Pariah* is our attempt to try and take everything we've learned from developing strong multiplayer games and really try to replicate that in the single-player experience.” In essence, this is the goal behind *Pariah*, the new FPS from Digital Extremes – so says the studio's founder and creative director James Schmalz.

WORDS AND PICTURES

As you'd expect from a game built on Unreal technology, the graphics in *Pariah* are gorgeous, with especially nice touches like weapon physics, water effects and a general feeling of life in the game's *Halo*-like environments. However, the developer is keen to press



The environments scream *Unreal*.

the importance of *Pariah*'s Hollywood-penned storyline, which is thankfully refreshing in a genre that has a tendency to delight in developing bigger and better ways to blow shit up (but don't worry, there's plenty of that too).

To play the game, you assume the role of Jack Mason, a military doctor in the year 2520. When Jack is drafted onto a ship to oversee the moving of a female prisoner with a mysterious virus and that vessel subsequently crash lands, like Gordon Freeman before him Jack has to adjust to being the wrong man in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Alongside Jack there are also NPCs in the game, the most important of

“Now that technology allows us to have facial animations, we can make more movie-like and believable characters”

JAMES SCHMALZ CREATIVE DIRECTOR, DIGITAL EXTREMES

which is the prisoner Karina who remains a constant presence in the storyline and is rather charmingly depicted with normal-sized breasts and a scruffy ponytail.

“We wanted our main female character to be as convincing as



The explosions come thick and fast.

possible,” explains James. “We wanted her to feel real, not like the traditional game character. Now that technology

allows us to have facial animations and expressions, we have the ability to make our characters more believable and movie-like.”

Of course, it wouldn't be Unreal technology without some impressive weaponry at your command. *Pariah* has



Pariah has many drivable vehicles for both single-player and multiplayer.

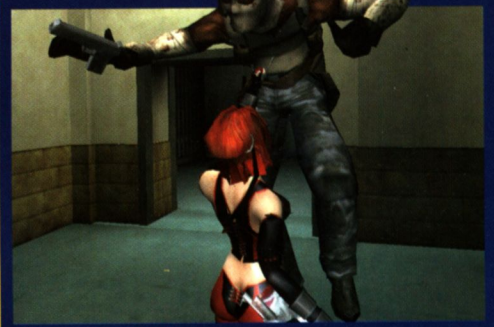


Your friendly local tour guide.

favourites such as the sniper rifle and grenade launcher, and also includes a few beasts like the Bulldog and a massive Redeemer-like weapon known as Titan's Fist which actually plays a part in the storyline. Using items known as Weapon Energy Cores even enables you to customise and upgrade your weaponry.

It may not have *Unreal* in the title, but *Pariah* certainly has *Unreal* in its heart. With a decent storyline and single-player mission, coupled with the ever-excellent multiplayer offerings from Digital Extremes, it may just be the FPS hit of next year. We'll bring you more updates throughout the year.

E3 SHOWS



Don't mess with Rayne.

BLOODRAYNE 2

■ Dev: Terminal Reality | Pub: Majesco |
ETA: October | www.bloodrayne2.com

With a complete graphical overhaul, the continuing adventures of über-bosomed goth Rayne are set to be just as blood-splattered as those previous. The game, now set in the present day, adds some neat acrobatics and more reactive combat controls to the mix of fists, bullets and bloodsucking in our heroine's quest to stop her embarrassing dad from creating a vamp army. So essentially, it's more of the same, but maybe better.



Barmy army.

ARMIES OF EXIGO

■ Dev: Black Hole Games | Pub: EA |
ETA: Q3 2004 | www.blackholegames.com

From the development house brought to you from the producer of films like *Total Recall* and *Rambo*, this RTS is served with all manner of fantasy trimmings. Humans versus green-skinned monsters versus cave-dwelling bio-organic chaps is the conflict in question, and with it comes heroes, underground tunnels, spell-casters and siege-engines. *Warcraft* beater? Wait and see.

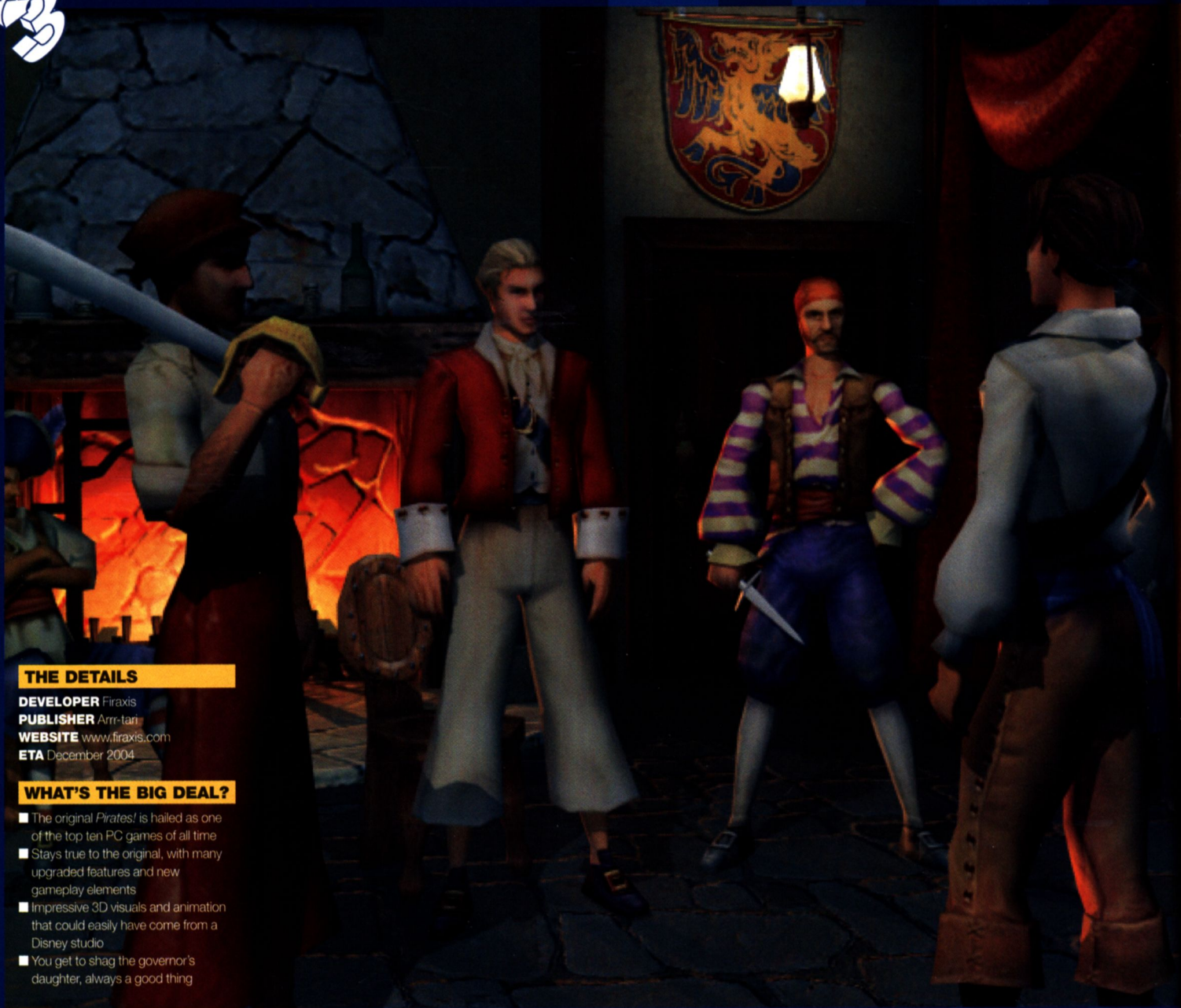


Souped up and ready to roll.

JUICED

■ Dev: Juice Games | Pub: Acclaim |
ETA: Q4 2004 | www.acclaim.com

Car-modding racer *Juiced* was mightily impressive at the show, with fantastic graphics and infinite tweakability of the 47 cars from 17 manufacturers, including Nissan and VW. Also, with its 51 parts manufacturers, ability to hire driving 'wingmen' and smart collision damage, we reckon *Juiced* could challenge *Need For Speed Underground 2* for the title of best street racer. Full exclusive preview next month.



THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Firaxis
PUBLISHER Arrr-tani
WEBSITE www.firaxis.com
ETA December 2004

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- The original *Pirates!* is hailed as one of the top ten PC games of all time
- Stays true to the original, with many upgraded features and new gameplay elements
- Impressive 3D visuals and animation that could easily have come from a Disney studio
- You get to shag the governor's daughter, always a good thing

A bit like an old Adam And The Ants video, isn't it?

Up the riggings, you monkeys...

SID MEIER'S PIRATES!

Get ready to buckle your swash, shiver your timber and exhaust every other pirating pun as *Richie Shoemaker* goes in like Flynn...

DESPITE more modern attempts to outdo him, Errol Flynn remains the archetypal matinee action idol, immortalised in such classics as *Captain Blood* and *The Sea Hawk*. He was, is, and forever will be, the ultimate swashbuckling hero, despite his dubious

off-screen behaviour. (He famously once said: "I can't reconcile my gross habits with my net income.")

Likewise, Sid Meier's original 'action sim' *Pirates!* is a classic from a bygone and simpler age, one that remains as playable today as Flynn's early high seas

adventures are watchable. The difference between them (apart from a few lifestyle choices) is that Meier is very much alive, meaning that after much cajoling from fans, an all-new-and-improved *Pirates!* is setting course for a return to our monitors. And about time

CV



FIRAXIS

Sid Meier co-founded MicroProse in 1982 and left just before it went tits-up. He set up Firaxis with long-time collaborator Jeff Briggs in 1996.

1997 *Gettysburg!* is the first Firaxis game, and a decent Civil War game it was too. A sequel, *Antietam!*, followed a year later.

1999 *Alpha Centauri* is hailed as the true sequel to *Civ*. Add-on *Alien Crossfire* followed soon after.

2001 Back to Earth for *Civ III*. It didn't push the boundaries, but then it didn't have to.

2002 *Civ III* goes online in *Play The World*. Oh yeah, and there was *SimGolf*.

2003 A second *Civ* add-on arrives as *Civ III: Conquests*.

2004 *Ahoy! Pirates!* is sighted and Firaxis is still to release a game without Sid's name in the title. If it ain't broke...



"You can betray your allies, switch sides or just go jolly-rogering and attack anything on the high seas"

Leave port and *Pirates!* switches to a 3D view of the Spanish Main.

Why Don't You?...

LET US PLAY THE WORLD? MULTIPLAYER IS THE WAY TO GO

I'm sorry, but Sid's excuse (see Q&A) for not including even a half-hearted multiplayer game just doesn't wash. We're not saying there wouldn't be any issues to resolve, but we're not asking for a full multiplayer campaign either – just some old-fashioned, shoulder-to-shoulder mini-games would do. A sword-fight between two human captains wouldn't be too taxing to include, neither would a 16-player ship deathmatch or even a CTF-style 'capture-the-port' game with various classes of ship sailing out to take the opponent's base.

Instead, we get the option to download flags and extra skins. Woo-hoo. Perhaps this dire omission is down to the Xbox version in production, or does the answer lie hidden in the developer's back catalogue – the first expansion for *Civ III*, anyone? Best keep an extra £20 in the hold if you want to loot the real pirates.

Do a little dance, make a little love, get down tonight.

too – the last 17 years have seen some depressingly average imitators make sail for glory and sink without trace soon after leaving port.

LOCK UP YOUR DAUGHTER

In this increasingly genre-obsessed world, it's worth noting that *Pirates!* is something of an anomaly: it's neither straight-up action, nor strategy or RPG, nor, in the traditional sense, an adventure. Rather, it takes elements of them all and is essentially a series of mini-games bound within a plot-your-own storyline. All the action is based in the 17th century Caribbean, where the major colonial powers of England, Holland, Spain and France are vying for a share of the region's wealth.

Rather than going all-out to realistically simulate the sailing ships and strategy of the era (as you might otherwise expect from a Sid Meier game), *Pirates!* remains in essence much like its ancient arcade-orientated

forebear. Apart from the gloriously-staged sword-fights, spirited sea battles, the governor's daughter swooning at your dashing good looks and the odd hornpipe or two. All the basics of a classic Flynn movie in fact, only in videogame form.

GRAPESHOT OF WRATH

You start the game in a friendly port, with a basic ship and a skeleton crew. What you do next is up to you: stick around and visit the local hostelry and you may hear rumours of passing ships ripe for plunder, or swing by the governor's residence and you may be presented with a mission to ferry goods to a nearby outpost or vanquish an enemy ship sighted offshore. Fulfil the mission and your footing with that faction increases, which if siding with the English, is likely to be to the detriment of your status with the Spanish. Of course, you can betray your allies at any time, switch sides or simply go



"Look behind you, a three-headed monkey!"

Q&A

SID MEIER

Captain Sid Meier talks to cabin boy Richie – and then throws him overboard

PCZ Why did you leave it 17 years to do a new *Pirates!* – was it anything to do with a certain movie?

SM We decided to do *Pirates!* before we were aware of *Pirates Of The Caribbean*, but the timing of the movie was quite unusual. That said, it was encouraging that the movie did well and from that I hope that people think *Pirates!* will be fun to play too.

PCZ Why didn't you opt to remake *Pirates!* as a straight RTS?

SM Part of the charm of the original was that we just did it without worrying about it fitting into a particular genre. Other developers have done strategy games or simulations on the pirate theme, but by focusing on one thing, I think they lost a lot of the other fun aspects.

PCZ Indeed – *Pirates!* looks like it's going to be a fun game. No offence, but you're not known for producing out-and-out fun games are you?

SM *Civ* was naturally a more weighty topic, but we still took a fun approach – whereas *Pirates!* has to be fun, adventurous and exciting. As a rule, we let the topic influence how deep we get; how much pure fun versus how much deep thinking and strategy. If we hadn't made the original game and we were doing a *Pirates!* game today, we might feel it needed to be deeper or more of a *Civ*-type of game – and I think that would be the wrong way to go. Perhaps we've all become a little more stereotyped today than we were when I originally made *Pirates!*

PCZ There are online features to the game, but no multiplayer options. Why not?

SM We tried to think of how we could make it work, but there are a couple of issues that we couldn't solve. One is a time synchronisation issue. The other is that we'd have to create a game with six to ten equally important characters. I think the *Pirates!* experience is about you and your story and what you do as a player, and it works best as a single-player game. To try and do both would involve some serious compromise.



The animation during fights is impressive – you can almost feel the sword swishing past your ears.

jolly-rogering and attack everything afloat on the high seas.

Ship-to-ship combat in *Pirates!* appears rather simplistic at first hand. The wind direction and strength dictates ship speed, leaving you to control the rudder and press the fire button whenever your prey swims into range. Despite such an apparent lack of complexity, watching a ship duel reveals a delicate balancing act of trying to ensure the wind fills your sails to effect the necessary speed, all the while leading your cannons to pound the enemy ship. Problem is, by striking a parallel course, you leave your vessel open to similar volleys. With 27 types of

vessel all distinct in speed, crew and firepower, *Pirates!* may well be an easy game to learn, but it's tricky to master.

However, the biggest change and by some margin the most obvious is the graphical update to the sword-fighting

sections which kick in whenever you attempt to board an enemy ship. Here, you take on the enemy captain, and although he may be an excellent swordsman, if you've decimated his crew beforehand, the fight is much

SATURDAY NIGHT (CABIN) FEVER

STOP LEANING AGAINST THE BAR AND GET INTO THE GROOVE, SAILOR BOY!

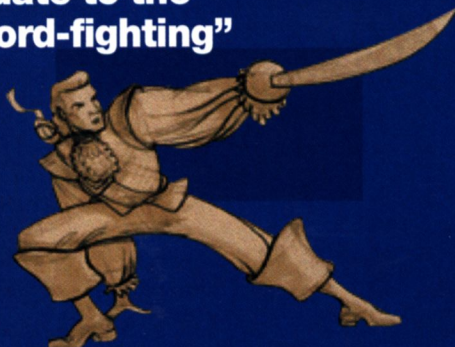
Dancing may seem an odd accompaniment to a game about salty sea dogs. However, as Errol Flynn effortlessly epitomised, pirates weren't just rogues and fencers, but flesh-and-blood men with an eye for the pretty ladies (especially after months at sea). Get in with the local governor and he may introduce you to his daughter – and as much as she may be impressed with your stories of derring-do, it'll be your fancy footwork that most impresses her.

By accepting an invitation to escort her to the ball, the game transforms into a Baroque twist on *Dance Dance Revolution*, where you must follow your partner's cues and move in time to the music. Get the steps wrong and you risk embarrassing the lass and going home alone. Get it right and she'll be all over you like scurvy.



"You dancin?" "You askin?"

"The biggest change and by some margin the most obvious is the graphical update to the sword-fighting"



easier. Beat him back to the abaft of his poop deck and he keels over into the water, leaving his ship, its crew and cargo yours for the taking.

Apart from the obvious beat 'em up fun to be had (with various combo moves to perfect), the animation during such fights appears wonderfully directed. Foils whisk the air and sabres clash as limbs counterbalance the artistic flurry on-screen, with all the combatants parrying and thrusting across detailed backdrops. There's very little freedom of movement since the duels take place on an axis rather than a 3D plane, which may upset *Tekken* die-hards, but the cinematic effect more than makes up for it.

SOLID SEA SNAKE

Despite sticking to the same 17-year-old formula, Meier and his team have made sure there's plenty for fans who're still alive since the first game set sail. Land your crew and the focus switches to a RTS-style view, where you can direct various units C&C-style as you launch a sneaky assault on a port.

Or, if you prefer to slip into town stealthily, the game switches to a distant third-person view reminiscent of *Metal Gear Solid* with gameplay to match. Creep ashore during the day and you must find a disguise and avoid the crowds as they go about their business; sneak in after sundown and instead you must stick to the shadows and avoid the torch glare of the night watchmen. If you're caught, it's the clink.



It may seem idyllic, but it won't be long till the grapeshot start flying.

There are other new features too, like being able to upgrade your fleet of ships (up to a total of eight) and man them with specialist crew. These can be surgeons who heal the sick and wounded, sailmakers and carpenters who effect repairs while at sea or cooks with the ability to stave off a potential mutiny by adding shelf life to the rancid limes rolling about your empty cargo hold.

Having had a sneak preview, we reckon that Sid Meier's got the balance just right between staying true to his original vision and offering enough new features for

today's gamers. Come the release date, it should be interesting to see how successful the game eventually is because it's so very different to what us genre-led PC players are used to playing.

However, that's a problem for the marketing minds – we're more interested in the finished product, which is set to be another Sid Meier-sterpiece. It may be too late to revive Errol Flynn's Hollywood standing, but after the disappointing *SimGolf*, *Pirates!* looks to be a welcome return to form for Cap'n Sid, one of the most respected PC developers still afloat. [E]



Pirates! now has simple stealth mini-games.



"We are sailing, we are saailing..."



"Say cheese!"

CT SPECIAL FORCES: FIRE FOR EFFECT

Pub: Hip Interactive | Dev: Hip Games | ETA: Q1 2005 | www.hipinteractive.com

RELEASED last year, *CT Special Forces* was a well-received 2D console blast 'em up in the mould of SNK's classic *Metal Slug* games. Developer Hip Games has now announced that its sequel, *Fire For Effect*, is set to be in full 3D, with the original's mix of non-stop action and ridiculous OTT weaponry and vehicles, plus techno-gadgets and a brand new physics engine.



It may be virtual, but keeping fit is still a priority.

THE SIMS 2

Pub: EA | Dev: EA | ETA: Q1 2004 | thesims.ea.com

WHILE *The Sims 1* was about your characters' basic needs, *The Sims 2* focuses on their aspirations, breaking down into romance, fame, fortune, family and knowledge. All the Sims now also react towards the screen. So for example, if you set up a snogging sesh for your Sim, they'll give you a sly wink. Oh, and EA confirmed (on record) that you can have orgies too.



You can just about see his Spider-sense tingling.

SPIDER-MAN 2

Pub: Activision | Dev: Treyarch | ETA: Summer 2004 | www.treyarch.com

IF YOU'VE seen the movie trailer, you'll know that *Spider-Man 2* is looking pretty hot. However, if you're more concerned about the game, we can tell you it's looking just as good too. Using a realistic pendular physics system that authentically replicates Spider-Man's abilities, you're tasked with stopping evil deeds and battling bad guys like Mysterio and Dr Octopus.



They're going to be hot in those suits come summer.

Time to face your...

F.E.A.R.

A night at the Playboy Mansion, too many vodka-cocktails, not enough sleep and Dave Woods has got the F.E.A.R....

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Monolith
PUBLISHER VU Games
WEBSITE www.vugames.com
ETA 2005

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- It's a Monolith shooter
- Stunning new DX9-native engine
- Adult story
- It's bloody scary (and we mean bloody!)

WE'VE ALWAYS loved Monolith's games – notably *AvP2* and *NOLF 2* – so feel a little perplexed that its games have never scaled the heights of those from the stables of the two Mac Daddies, id and Epic. Still, if we went on sales figures alone, we'd be worshipping Will Young and the like, so it was with no little excitement that we were told this year's E3 show was set to be the launchpad of a brand-new title, *F.E.A.R.* (it stands for 'First Encounter Assault Recon' if you're interested, but we wouldn't let it put you off your breakfast).

READY TO ROLL

Getting the very first appointment of the very first day of the show, we squeezed ourselves into the dank booth,

donned a pair of oversized headphones and settled back for the ride. Billed as a cross between *The Matrix* and *The Ring*, we were promised an 'intense combat experience with rich atmosphere and an engaging storyline', and the first few minutes of the demo definitely delivered in spades.

F.E.A.R. sports a brand-new DX9-native engine, incorporating Havok 2.0 physics, developed from scratch by Monolith and looking especially tasty. You won't get a brilliant handle from the static screenshots, but one of the most talked about new features is the Cinematic Special FX, which shower you with sparks, cover you with smoke and generally make you want to drop your mouse, duck your head and shout 'Easy!' while backing off from the PC. Intense, it certainly is.

UNDER SIEGE

Before the demo, Chris Hewett, director of development at Monolith, broke his silence to put a sliver of flesh on the bones of *F.E.A.R.* "In *F.E.A.R.*, an





Monolith's 'Cinematic Special FX' in action.

LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION!

STALLONE, SEGAL, SCHWARZENEGGER? FINISHED. YOU'RE THE NEW ACTION HERO



From the little we've seen of it so far, *F.E.A.R.* is shaping up to be one of the most cinematic FPS experiences ever. The new engine delivers the on-screen intensity and Monolith promises the game structure is set to match. This means that as well as the standard run, shoot, run sequences, you can look forward to a number of spectacular set pieces, including a "catastrophic helicopter crash, riding shotgun in a high-speed car chase, being pursued by assassins on motorcycles and enemy attack helicopters".

We like the sound, we like the look, and although Monolith wasn't keen to go into specific details about your arsenal, as a member of F.E.A.R. you're given access to the best and most devastating weapons around. Sketchy details so far include the corkscrew missile launcher, the rapid-fire battle cannon and the sub-nuclear blaster, capable of leaving a pile of ash in place of your adversary. Sounds good to us.

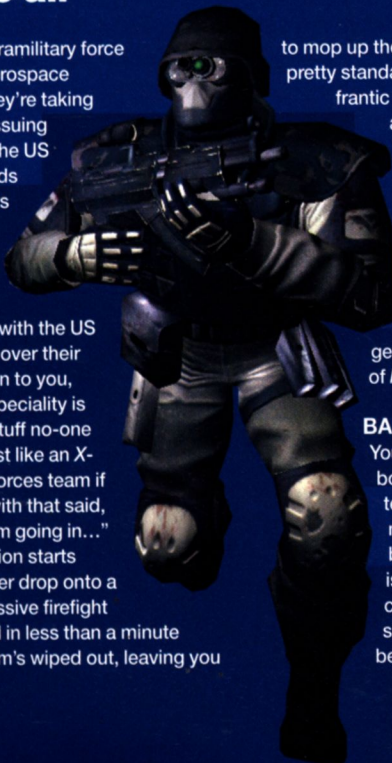


The new series of *Driving School* had some interesting characters.

"The bodies are mutilated by an invisible force, crushed, contorted, stripped of flesh and tossed into the air"

unidentified paramilitary force infiltrates an aerospace compound. They're taking hostages but issuing no demands. The US military responds by sending in its best Delta Force team, only to have them literally torn apart. So, with the US military best in over their heads, they turn to you, F.E.A.R. Your speciality is to handle the stuff no-one else can, almost like an *X-Files* Special Forces team if you like. And with that said, this is your team going in..."

And the action starts with a helicopter drop onto a building. A massive firefight breaks out and in less than a minute your entire team's wiped out, leaving you



to mop up the mess. Cue some pretty standard – albeit lush and frantic – FPS action, with the added distraction of some sublime bullet-time slow-mo effects, with you up against a crew of well-oiled paramilitaries. So far, so good, but as you get deeper into the complex, you start getting your first whiff of *F.E.A.R.*

BACK ON NOW!

You come across the bodies of the Delta Force team. They've been mutilated, but the lack of bullet holes in the room is evidence that the crack team didn't get a single shot off before being pulled apart. And



"Don't shoot, I just came in to check my email..."



The action starts with a helicopter drop – your first whiff of *F.E.A.R.* is on its way.

this is the government's finest. Suddenly, you're up against distinctly non-humanoid beings, but just when you think you're a dead man walking, reinforcements arrive. Then, what looks like a small girl appears behind a security fence. This is when events take a distinctly unsavoury turn. In *Ring*-style, the visuals start distorting and the girl starts walking towards your men. As she gets within a few metres, the bodies are mutilated by an invisible force, crushed, contorted and stripped of flesh, before being tossed into the air. Crikes. And then she starts walking towards you...

Thankfully the demo stopped there and we were tipped out into the bright lights of E3, something we've never been so relieved to see. *F.E.A.R.* looks frighteningly good, and although the team wasn't prepared to divulge any of the secrets of the story ("That's what's going to make the experience, so we want to keep that under wraps for now"), we saw enough to warrant a trip back to the hotel for a change of apparel before our next appointment.

We'll bring you a huge update as soon as we dare. In the meantime we'll be sleeping with the lights on. [E3]



Nice sofa, but what about some big, bouncy, cuddlesome cushions...?



Girls kissing - always a winner in our book.



"Mind you don't pop out, love."

Getting jiggy with it...

PLAYBOY: THE MANSION

Get grotty in the grotto with this fanny magnate simulator



THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Cyberlore Studios
PUBLISHER Ubisoft
WEBSITE www.ubisoft.com
ETA Winter 2004

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Officially-licensed Playboy game
- Be Hefner - build and run your own Playboy empire
- Dress the Bunny Girls in a variety of costumes
- Wobbly norks

AS WE'VE mentioned in these pages before, lounging around in a dressing gown surrounded by pornography is a luxury afforded only to Hugh Hefner and freelance games journalists. Naturally, it's the former that concerns us here, as *Playboy: The Mansion* enables you to virtually don the silk robe of the revered porn baron and attempt to run his glamorous empire. And with *PC ZONE's* hardy triumvirate of Woods, Sefton and Hill having recently paid a visit to The Mansion, we have some idea of what it's all about.

SEX YOU UP

Part business-sim, part life-sim, the game can essentially be broken down into three areas: constructing the mansion, living the Playboy lifestyle and building your empire. As such, you can tamper with Hugh's famous Beverly Hills

hide-out (five minutes from UCLA in a shuttle bus), building tennis courts, aviaries or maybe adding to the monkey cages that are already there (although we're not sure you'll be able to do anything about the rats that we saw stealing their food).

The famous Grotto also features heavily, and you might be able to do something about the slightly dank smell, and the fact that it's infested with the DNA of decades' worth of party guests.

Of course, you'll also have to provide enough bedrooms to house your stable of buxom beauties. Alleged to service a rotating squad of seven Playmates, keeping them all happy must be a difficult chore, surely impossible without scoffing down Viagra like Smarties.

This is replicated to some extent in the game, with Hef able to indulge Playmates in a *Sims* fashion, with such options as 'sexy gossip' and a 'warm hug'. And while you won't actually get to see the old boy throwing them around the room, the issue of sex hasn't been skirted over. Guests are to be found rutting in a bush, for instance, the crucial areas disguised, much like recent shag 'em up *Singles: Flirt Up Your Life*. Unlike that game though, there will be no pubic hair (or genitals).

BREAST IS BEST

Unfussy onanists may be pleased to learn that breasts are on the agenda, with the

“Breasts are on the agenda, with the game set to boast nipples you could hang a wet duffel coat on”

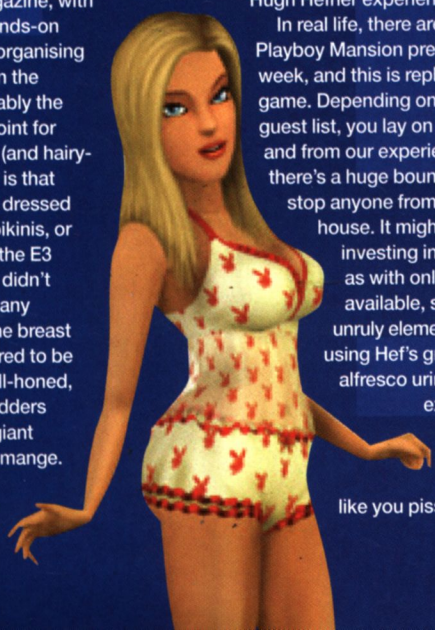


Not the first activity that springs to mind.



These guests got a lot further than we ever did.

game set to boast nipples that you could hang a wet duffel coat on. These will predominantly appear in the pages of Playboy magazine, with Hef taking a hands-on approach and organising photo-shoots in the mansion. Probably the major selling point for casual gamers (and hairy-palmed loners) is that models can be dressed in a variety of bikinis, or not. And while the E3 demonstration didn't actually reveal any toplessness, the breast physics appeared to be particularly well-honed, with fulsome udders wobbling like giant plates of blancmange. There's no point having a



shagging pad if you're not going to use it, and inviting your celebrity friends round for a knees-up is a key part of the Hugh Hefner experience.

In real life, there are parties at the Playboy Mansion pretty much every week, and this is replicated in the game. Depending on who's on the guest list, you lay on entertainment – and from our experience, ensure that there's a huge bouncer on the door to stop anyone from getting into the house. It might also be worth investing in a few more toilets, as with only four cubicles available, some of the more unruly element were discovered using Hef's grounds as an alfresco urinal. After all, as executive producer Chris Boxmeyer explains: "I don't think Hugh would like you pissing in his garden."



“Oh rotten luck, Jimmy's taken a tumble. Bagsy his ginger beer back at base.”

MIDWAY

■ Dev: Mithis | Pub: SCI | ETA: Summer 2005 | www.sci.co.uk

Pacifying the Pacific with all the carnage that WWII can provide...

“I THINK World War II just started!” screamed Josh Hartnett in Bruckheimer movie clunker *Pearl Harbour* – perhaps under the impression that the entirety of Europe had been chucking fairy cakes and small twigs at each other for the several years previous.

Nevertheless, their war had begun, and *Midway* is a game that seeks to represent the naval and aerial battles over the Pacific in and around 1942, leading up to the titular Battle of Midway.

Like *Battlefield 1942* without the soldiers running around, *Midway* is primarily a multiplayer game for up to 16 players – although a strong solo on both the American and Japanese campaign is promised for the friendless.

You switch between the controls of battleships, subs, aircraft carriers and

dog-fighting planes, and carry out all the torpedoings, bombings and explosions of various sizes that go with them.

The developer is clearly aiming *Midway* at the 'fun' market rather than that which demands flaps, chocks, ailerons and other such nonsense. Therefore, don't go expecting the fluffy inanity of *Secret Weapons Over Normandy*, but then don't expect a manual an inch thick and a pair of flying goggles either.

Visually, everything seems to be ticking along nicely (although when your landscape consists mainly of a big patch of water, you can't really go far wrong). We confidently expect *Midway* to be a jolly blast when it touches down next summer.



Planes, subs, aircraft carriers: they're all at your disposal.



No corridor blaster, this – you can take any route you want. After all, it's your arse on the line.

Not Knopfler...

BROTHERS IN ARMS

More death and destruction in the brand-new WWII shooter from the respected maker of *Halo: Combat Evolved* on PC

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Gearbox
PUBLISHER Ubisoft
WEBSITE
www.brothersinarmsgame.com
ETA Q4 2004

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Not just your average WWII shooter
- Great squad dynamics
- Battlefields painstakingly researched and recreated
- Incredible facial animation and detail



The detail in your fellow paratroopers faces, from sneers to fear, is plain eerie.

PLAYED out in real-time between June 8 and 13, 1944 (well, real-time without the boring bits), *Brothers In Arms* puts you in the army-issue boots of squad leader Sgt Matt Baker. You've been dropped behind enemy lines, separated from your scattered men, and are instrumental to the success of the Allied incursion into Normandy.

What first strikes you when you see *Brothers In Arms* is the astonishing detail in your fellow paratroopers – the way their eyeballs follow your movement,

their sneers and snarls, the looks of fear and pain... Their faces are so life-like, it's honestly disconcerting the first time you see it. Your squad, who you gather together as the game progresses, are separated into two groups – one with heavy guns that can suppress German outfits, and the other with lighter armaments and grenades, who you can use to flank, sneak and outmanoeuvre the enemy.

Très clever stuff this. If you were to come across a German machine-gun emplacement, for instance, it's your role to order your men, with one deft click of the mouse, to deliver some suppressive fire and pin them down while you and your light-footed squad members find a way to get a better shot. And you can take any route you want – this isn't a run-of-the-mill corridor blaster. You can choose any path for your tactical cleverness, whether it's through a field, around a farmhouse or leaping over the authentic Normandy ditches.

THE REAL THING

And 'authentic' is the key word here. Every townhouse, out-house and hen-house has been lovingly recreated from veterans' memories, contemporary photos, aerial photography and developer visits to the battlefield. When you stand at Dead Man's Corner (so-called after the German officer who, in

reality and in the game, was draped over a wrecked tank on a major Allied transport route) and gaze out over the burning town of Cotes D'Armor, then that's the exact same view soldiers would have seen back in 1944.

DEATH BY TANK

Even historical events – such as a paratrooper getting tangled in a tree directly above a German mobile kitchen and being used as target practice – are directly recreated. Even the hand signals you frantically wave at your petrified troops are direct from the fields of WWII combat. There's no *Call Of Duty*-style Panzerfaust-lugging solo heroics either – you won't be destroying four tanks per level. Here, the metal beasts are as they truly were: killing machines that'll be a terrifying proposition to take down.

A storm is currently brewing in the realms of the squad-based shooter, with *Close Combat: First To Fight*, *SWAT 4*, *Ghost Recon 2* and *Conflict: Vietnam* all vying for the top spot. But our money is currently on the untamed action of *Brothers In Arms* and the pedigree of Gearbox, who developed the supreme *Half-Life* expansion pack *Opposing Force* and, most recently, *Halo* on PC. Gearbox isn't talking about what it's got powering it yet either, but we do know of another engine that has similarly jaw-dropping facial animation...



Authenticity is what it's all about here – from the battlefield...



...to the townhouses, every detail has been lovingly recreated.



What's Gordon Freeman doing in the game?

SWAT 4

■ Dev: Irrational Games | Pub: VU Games |
ETA: January 2005 | www.swat4.com

E3 2002. Two years ago, *SWAT 4* was announced to an expectant crowd. We surfed heads to get a front-row view of the latest tactical shooter and... Pissed ourselves laughing. Looking more like a conga 'em up than a shooter, it was a total embarrassment, a non-game or, in the words of the PR person responsible, "shit on a stick".

Not surprisingly all went quiet on the *SWAT 4* front. Then it was officially canned, only to suddenly

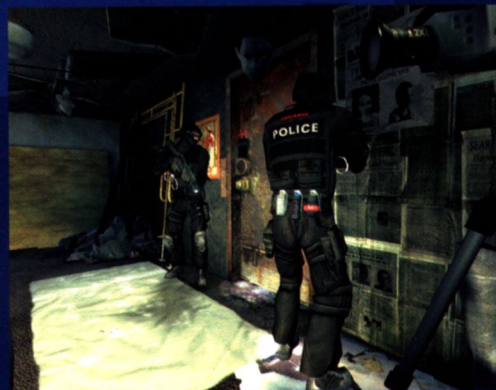
reappear on the horizon last month, with Irrational Games at the helm.

Reasons to get excited: Irrational made *System Shock 2* (SS2 is still one of our favourite games ever), and it's powered by an enhanced Unreal engine (as used by Irrational in its upcoming *Tribes: Vengeance* game). It's also shipping with three multiplayer modes and a co-operative campaign mode, and it sports authentic assault gear, realistic ballistics and Havok-defined

physics. Woo-woo! And yay!

You take charge of a squad of up to five officers and have to work your way through a series of 16 high-risk missions – saving hostages, counter-terrorism and rescuing cats from the tops of tall trees (possibly) – following police protocol and avoiding putting your sirens on to get to the burger shop.

We're excited again, and we think you should be too – look out for a more in-depth preview shortly.



Aww look, he's got kneepads on. Saves grazing.



Fully integrated real-life physics should make this the most immersive *SWAT* game yet.



Check out all those cheerful colours. Nice, innit?

SETTLERS: HERITAGE OF KINGS

■ Dev: Blue Byte | Pub: Ubisoft |
ETA: Q4 2004 | www.bluebyte.net

SETTLERS IV was nigh-on impenetrable for newcomers – one play felt like you were gate-crashing some medieval, farming-crazed secret society. *Settlers: Heritage Of Kings* is somewhat of a counterbalance, and everything – from the cheery 3D animations to the smooth learning curve – wants to welcome you back.



Get 'em a nag and they all want to be glory boys...

IMPERIAL GLORY

■ Dev: Pyro Studios | Pub: Eidos |
ETA: Q3 2004 | www.pyrostudios.com

THE CREATOR of *Commandos* has announced a new *Civ*-style RTS that it promises to be "the most extensive ever". *Imperial Glory* is set in the 19th century, when various European powers – including Great Britain, Russia and Austro-Hungary – are vying for supremacy. As well as offering diplomacy, trade agreements and resource management, there's huge land and naval battles in real-time 3D too.



What lovely scenery. Makes you feel all summery.

COLIN MCRAE RALLY 2005

■ Dev: Codemasters | Pub: Codemasters |
ETA: Q1 2005 | www.codemasters.co.uk

WITH SCI'S *Richard Burns Rally* looking as if it could up the stakes in the rally genre, Codemasters has announced that the dour *Scot* is set to return next year on PC with a much-improved damage model and better scenery graphics. *Colin McRae 2005* also promises 20 different classes of rally races and a far more diverse collection of cars, including 4x4 classics.



"But Mulder, I can't accept there's anything supernatural in a floating car." "Shut it, Scully."



Glare those lights, honk that horn. Wild boy.



Remember little racers, a festive-red car isn't just for Christmas...

The thinking boy-racer's game

NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND 2

We ditch our 2CV and take EA's new freeform racing adventure for a spin

THE CAR-RACING genre is dead. A bold statement you might think, and perhaps a trifle premature, but the omens are definitely there. Pure racing games are being pushed aside by a new breed of driving/action games, ones that offer gamers a lot more than just looping strips of tarmac. *TOCA Race Driver*, *GTA*, *Midnight Club*... The list goes on, and now the world's biggest publisher has weighed in with its newest offering.

Need For Speed Underground 2 takes the formula of the first game (illegal street racing and boy racer-ish car tuning), and adds a drive-anywhere city, resulting in a mixture of freeform exploration and non-linear racing that's sure to get *GTA* fans thinking.

"The game is all about discovering the tuner culture," says executive

producer Chuck Osieja. "You have to explore the city to find out where the races are, how to get the best cars, how to find the best races and how to get all the best parts for your car."

This is a significant shift from the original *Underground*, which presented the illusion of a coherent city but was really just a series of interconnecting tracks. *NFSU2*'s go-anywhere urban sprawl is three times the size of the original, with five distinct neighbourhoods to unlock and a much wider variety of race types. "We're making sure this is a proper sequel and not just a kind of '*Underground 1.5*,'" says Chuck.

BABE MAGNET

The core aim of the game is to grow and develop your reputation as a street racer, earning new parts and upgrades along the way to hot up your ride and hopefully impress some chicks. This time, the number of potential car modifications has been

massively expanded, and now embraces performance tuning as well as visual changes. More licensed cars will be on offer, but the selection



"Damn! No petrol and stranded all alone. If only there was some sign of life..."

of car types has also been broadened far beyond the traditional Hondas and Toyotas. "We're trying to anticipate where the tuner scene might be in a couple of years, not just follow what's already out there," claims Chuck.

New game modes are also promised, though these are being kept under wraps in case they're nicked by the competition. What Chuck can tell us is that the variety of driving styles is set to expand and change as the city opens up, with short, technical races in the inner areas making

way for longer, open races in the surrounding hills. A freeway system runs around the entire length of the world, and Chuck is particularly excited by the prospect of LA-style spaghetti junctions. "I didn't think this was going to be very cool, but it's insane when you see it. I about messed myself." Ahem.

With no pedestrians, cops or guns, *NFSU2* is not out to beat *GTA* - but it is taking cues from it, as well as building on its own heritage. It's an intriguing prospect we're looking forward to.

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER EA Black Box Studio
PUBLISHER EA
WEBSITE www.eagames.com
ETA Autumn 2004

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

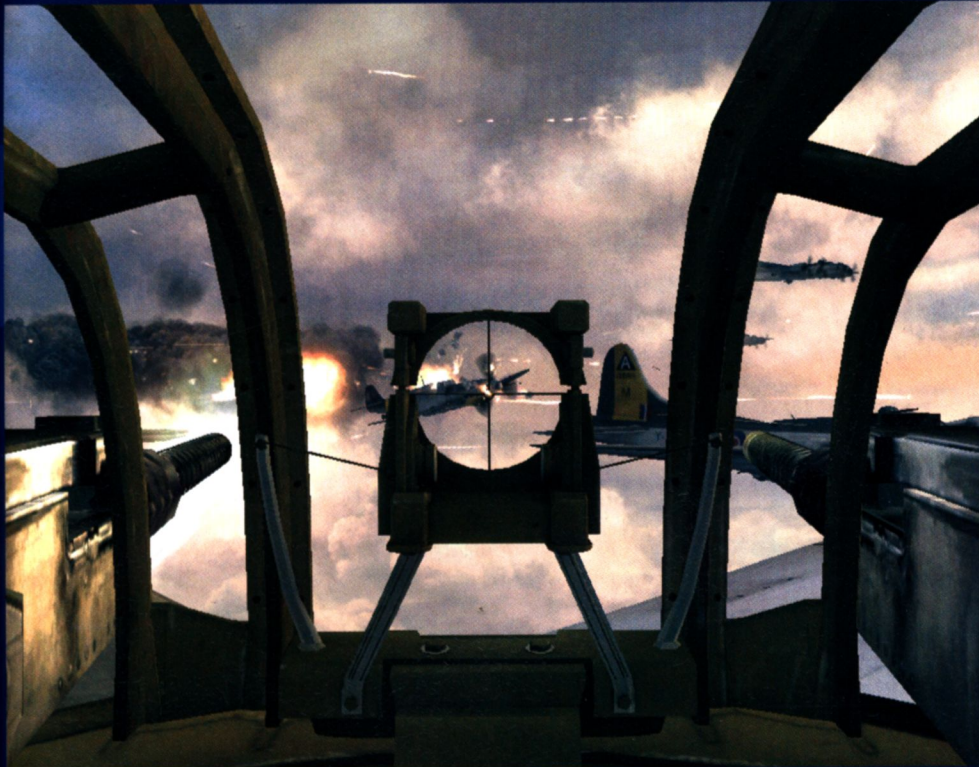
- Sequel to last year's ace neon-drenched street racer
- Now takes place in a huge, go-anywhere city
- Freeform *GTA*-style gameplay
- Endless car-tuning options to keep the most anal boy-racer happy



CALL OF DUTY: UNITED OFFENSIVE

■ Dev: Activision | Pub: Gray Matter/Infinity Ward | ETA: Q4 2004 | www.gmistudios.com

An expansion pack for *Call Of Duty? We report from the front line*



You get to man a turret during the bombing mission. Woo-hoo!

WE DIDN'T think it was possible, but the greatest WWII shooter ever could soon be eclipsed – by its own expansion pack! We spent an hour looking at *United Offensive* and talking to Gray Matter's creative lead Richard Farrelly, who took us through an entire Russian level, Kursk, in which all of the visceral, gut-twisting realities of war were every bit as evident as in the original game.

"You get to play through an American, British and Russian campaign. Each has a separate story based around a central character," explains Richard.

The Kursk level saw Russian troops under aerial bombardment as massed German ranks stormed their trenches. Machine-gun fire

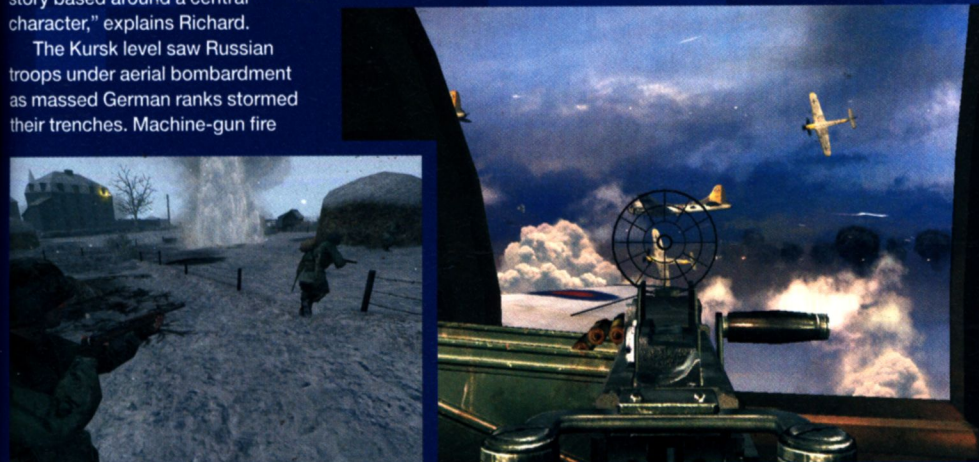
chattered unceasingly as mortars and bombs sent men spiralling skywards while rain hammered down in the opposite direction, showing off *UO's* impressive new particle effects system. Later on, German troops set fire to groups of our comrades with sickeningly realistic flamethrowers – one of 14 new weapons on show, including deployable light machine guns.

Richard was reluctant to talk in detail about the promised vehicular multiplayer games, saying only: "We're currently trying to get the

balance right so that it's possible for infantry and tanks to support each other. Also, the levels in multiplayer will probably be bigger than in the single-player campaign."

We also saw a B52 bombing mission where you man the turrets and manually drop the payload at the end.

It's already clear that *United Offensive* is going to be one hell of a ride. And if it fulfils its early promise, it could well be the first great FPS add-on since *Half-Life: Opposing Force*.

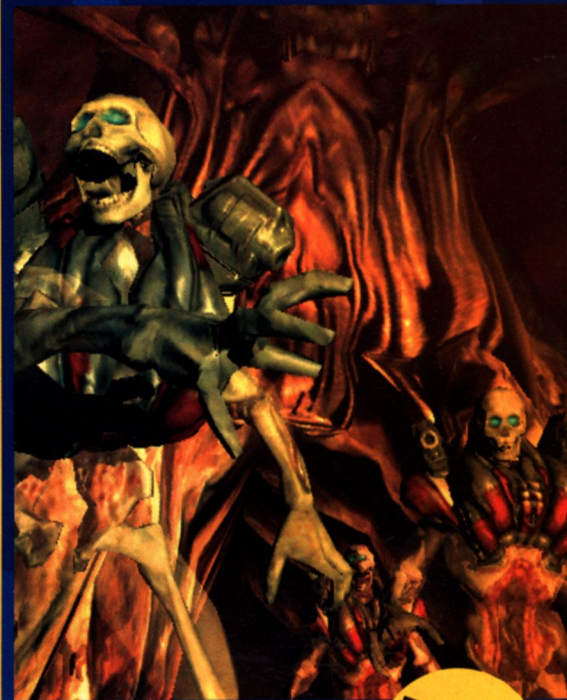


Check out the new particle effects. Nice, eh?

I see a few clouds on the horizon...



I think they're pleased to see you.



Are you ready for *Doom 3*?

DOOM 3

**RELEASE
DATE
CONFIRMED!**

■ Dev: id Software | Pub: Activision |
ETA: Summer | www.doom3.com

BIZARRELY only playable on Xbox at the show, *Doom 3* is still promising to be a damn scary PC shooter – with id finally confirming a release date of "this summer". *Doom 3* plays great (even using console controls), using your torch for searching out the monsters in the darkness, then quickly switching to one of your meaty weapons that include a shotgun, machine gun and grenades.

Fans of game gore will appreciate the detail of the rotting flesh and exposed internal organs on *Doom 3's* zombie foes, and also the visceral blood and brains that splatter about the walls of the Mars facility when you're blasting. The tense, survival horror atmosphere was heightened when we wore the headphones provided – sound obviously playing as big a part in id's latest as the cool physics and lighting effects.



The hunting lobby turns militant.



Presumably that's not a hunk-a-chunk of burning love.

Release the Hobbits...

THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH

Begun, the battle for Middle-earth has. (*Wrong trilogy - Ed*) Soaking up EA's new offering, *Anthony Holden* feels the lure of the Dark Side. (*Fired - Ed*)

THE DETAILS

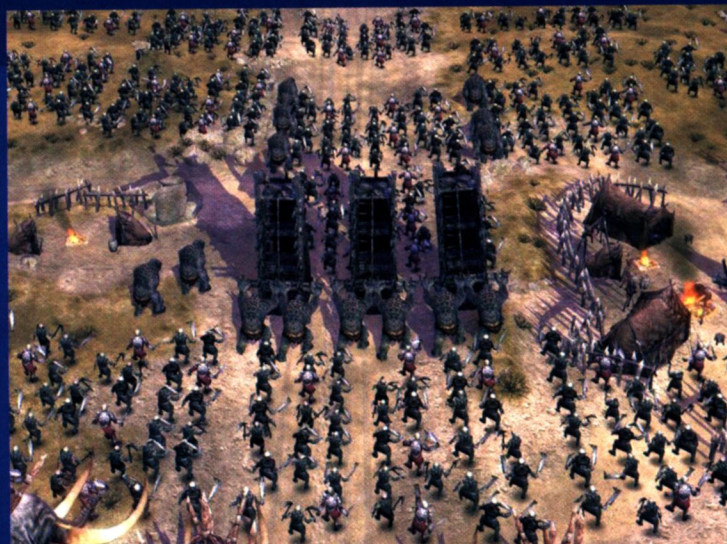
DEVELOPER EA Pacific
PUBLISHER EA
WEBSITE lordoftherings.eagames.com
ETA Christmas

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- New RTS from old Westwood team
- Solo campaign covers all three *LOTR* films
- Emotion system = huge leap in the way units move and act
- Redesigned troop handling system

WE'VE said it before, but *The Battle For Middle-earth* is something of a dream ticket for real-time strategy fans. The design talent of team Westwood, the mega-budgets of EA, the production values of a Hollywood studio and the licence to the most spectacular cinematic trilogy since *Police Academy 4* through to 6.

Up till now, the only possible objection has arisen from the looming shadow of an even greater strategy presence, the toga-clad bulk of *Rome: Total War* (that, and the non-involvement of Steve Guttenberg). But forget all that. The comparisons are now utterly redundant, as what we saw at E3 has proven that EA is taking a very different direction with its trilogy-spanning title.



While the battles will be epic, they can't quite match the films unit for unit.

Where Activision's *Rome* is aiming for maximum *scale*, *TBFME* is aiming for maximum *emotion*, with an emphasis on fleshing out the little details that change a battlefield simulation into a true cinematic spectacle.

"We're trying to take the RTS genre away from guys walking up to each other and going hack, hack, hack until

one of them is dead," says executive producer Mark Skaggs. "That's the old way of doing things. We're adding a lot of emotion to the game to bring the characters and the world to life."

By way of illustration, Mark fires up the latest in-game demos, showing off the actions and behaviour of a few different units on the battlefield. First up

is an elephantine Muma, carrying a saddle-load of black-clad archers into a Gondorian village. The big bugger starts off simply lumbering towards its foes, swinging its trunk chains like a scythe.

It's impressive enough as is, but when a skilful trebuchet lands a fireball on its back, the fun really begins. Rearing up on its hind legs, the dumb beast roars in panic, then tries to run away as the flames attack its hindquarters. Thrashing about like a cornered badger, the creature lays waste to several nearby buildings before dropping dead with a reluctant thump. It's an Oscar-winning performance, and one that wouldn't look out of place in a Peter Jackson action reel.

I SECOND THAT EMOTION

If anything, the sentient creatures are even more impressive. When Treebeard gets set on fire by a gaggle of orc archers, he runs, unbidden, into a nearby stream to douse himself before returning to swing some angry wood. Humans, meanwhile, can be seen jeering and tensing for combat whenever an enemy comes near, celebrating with cheers and sword thrusts after a victory, and cowering in trepidation before a monstrous troll. Forget your tokenistic



"We're adding a lot of emotion to the game to bring the characters and the world to life"

MARK SKAGGS
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER, *TBFME*

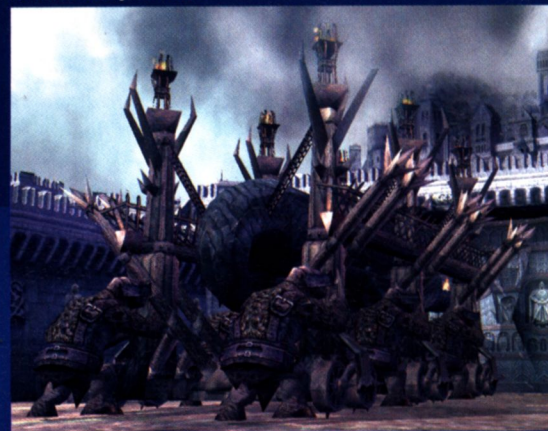
Thanks to the new emotion system, every orc, Uruk-Hai and Easterling is wearing a particularly nasty scowl in today's battle.

idle animations like press-ups or puffing a fag – this is the new way of doing things, and it's damn impressive.

"Recreating the *Lord Of The Rings* as an RTS experience is about more than just big battles," confides Mark. "The battles are still big, but what we really want to do is recreate the emotions from the film. We want to give you the feeling of being behind the walls at Helm's Deep, looking out and seeing all the orcs and thinking 'we're doomed'. Getting the emotion system in there is going to be one of those things that makes you look back at every other RTS and think 'something's missing here'."



Get a few nice pianos out of this lot.



More trolls than a *Half-Life 2* forum.

MAN HANDLERS

Another big difference between *TBFME* and *Generals* is the way troops are handled. Owing to the size of the battles, the designers have had to rethink everything from troop creation up, resulting in grouped units, formations and a new feature called battle lines.

So, rather than clicking to create a single unit, you now click to create an entire squad of troops, the size determined by the unit's natural disposition. Archers are currently set at around ten per group, while orcs are in the realm of 20. You also have the choice of two or three formation shapes – wedge, square, bunny rabbit – for some of these groups, though on the evil side things are more or less chaotic.

However, grouping units is just one measure the team has come up with to tidy up the battlefield; the other is somewhat farther-reaching and potentially far more interesting.

"We're doing some big changes in the way armies close in and battle each other," explains Mark. "It's what we call 'battle lines'. When you have two giant armies coming together, you can set lines for your troops to stick to, enabling them to move forward in a nice wave. The ones in the front meet the fight, the ones at the back wait and then it breaks up into pods as the battle progresses."

Unsurprisingly for a Westwood title, resources also play a part in *TBFME*, but again, this is one RTS device that's been

thoroughly rethought. For a start, harvesting and gathering are gone, history, caput, deemed inappropriate for the Tolkien universe. As such, much of the resource collection now takes place in the walls of your base, be it through farms for the tree-loving humans or slaughterhouses for the savage orcs. In addition, gold is set to be dropped by the dead in RPG fashion.

NOT SO EASY

To compensate for this simplification, it's been made much more difficult to upgrade as you climb the tech tree. For example, if you gain access to fire arrows in the middle of a battle, you can't simply upgrade all your existing archers to fire

archers; but nor do you need to build a whole new set of fire-wielding troops. Instead, you have to send a cart laden with fire arrows out to meet your army on the battlefield, and only when it reaches them can they upgrade. Clearly, enemy supply carts are set to become a natural target in the same way enemy harvesters once were, though with far more satisfying tactical implications.

There are other new features we could talk about – the radical new interface, the streamlined base building – but in every case the aims remain the same. First, to make the game true to the *Lord Of The Rings* cinema; and second, to make it more fun. And this, after all, is what Westwood is best at. [E]



Ignore the ol' gipper graphics and get into the compelling gameplay.



Because battles can happen simultaneously on many fronts, you can now pause games.

Champions of Europe

KNIGHTS OF HONOR

It's time to wage war on Europe and we don't need a referendum to justify our actions

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Black Sea Studios
PUBLISHER Sunflowers/EA
WEBSITE www.knights-of-honor.net
ETA September

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Real-time empire-conquering simulation
- Extensive tech trees, economic and diplomacy systems
- Over 1,000 knights with six different professions
- Complex but easy-to-command 3D battles

INSTEAD of wilting in the dark and heat of the vast E3 conference centre, German strategy specialist Sunflowers – previously responsible for *Anno 1503* – was positively blooming, showcasing several new titles. Among these was the prehistoric 3D RTS *ParaWorld*, plus the announcement of the new *Anno War*. But it was the medieval Machiavellian machinations of *Knights Of Honor* that continued to whet our strategy appetite.

Since we last saw the game in September last year, Sunflowers, along with co-developer Black Sea Studios,

has been gathering feedback from internal QA, press tours and fan forums to add features and tweak existing code. It hopes this will ensure that *Knights Of Honor* becomes one of the must-have single-player and multiplayer empire-conquering sims for 2004.

I SPY

Knights Of Honor begins in one of three medieval periods ranging from 1000AD to 1350AD, each with different political situations and national borders. You start in one country as king and use diplomacy, espionage, war, economic and trade management through the power of your knights to be crowned emperor of Europe.

As monarch, you concentrate on the overall running of your countries and provinces within, while employing up to nine loyal knights to carry out your good/evil commands on a local level.

Knights can have six different professions, including marshal (for raising and commanding armies), landlord (managing food production and tax collection) and cleric (converting local populations to your chosen religion).

However, the most intriguing role for a knight is becoming a spy, as you can then plot to overthrow a rival king by taking over his armies and forcing him to give you a town's keys without a battle. Or,

you could murder him in his sleep just after he's 'coincidentally' married one of your lucky daughters, thus presenting you his entire kingdom on a silver platter complete with plague-free trimmings. Every successful task completed by your knight gives him experience or 'fame' points, which you can use to spend on useful skills, such as healing, tactics and leadership to boost your troops' morale.

SPANISH FRY

Once you've developed your towns, using the extensive tech trees and economic system to increase population, learning, prosperity, happiness and wealth (somewhat reminiscent of *Civilization*), you can really start causing medieval mayhem by waging war against your neighbours.

Using our English marshal knights, we decided to create a grand army made up of burly peasants, skilled archers, masterful cavalry and siege equipment to take a leisurely pop at the King Sancho of Navarr.

Zooming into the close-in Battle view we arranged the formations using a simple regiment-based tactical system that enabled us to position the troops on the battlefield with a few taps of the left mouse-button. Within minutes, the Spanish king's castle was breached, his troops fleeing in terror, many screaming and burning alive in a hail of fire arrows. Hilarious.

Knights Of Honor's graphics may be lacking a little when compared with an RTS like *Rome: Total War*, but there's no doubting the game's potentially intoxicating mix of empire building, political intrigue and warmongering. Watch out for a bigger preview later in the year.



You can mount an attack in the dead of night. Sneaky.



Check out alliances between nations.





ShellShock's missions comprise stunning images...

...but it ain't no sentimental film. It's brutal.

SHELLSHOCK: NAM '67

ON THE CD ON THE DVD ■ Dev: Guerilla | Pub: Eidos | ETA: June | www.eidos.co.uk/gss/shellshock/

MANY recent wargames are a bit too clean and shiny for our liking, bearing little resemblance to the actual reality of battle. *ShellShock: Nam '67* is the game that's intent on bucking this trend and putting the horror back into the bullets – even if the jury's out on whether this is because of its historical significance or because they know the kids love to see the gristle flying off the bone. Expect to see atrocities committed by your squad, heads on spikes, gruesome NVA traps and some of the most disturbing images we've seen in a shooter for many a year.

Viewed from a third-person perspective, *ShellShock* sticks you in the fatigues of a basic grunt trying to survive his tour of duty – whose successes see him rising through the ranks and into the Special Forces and the top secret Black Ops. You fight in squads, though you won't be able to give orders, and you visit all of the expected Vietnamese locales, from

paddy-field and tunnel network to wreckage-strewn city.

Despite being a little cynical when first presented with *ShellShock*, we're warming to its gung-ho brutality. A very cinematic game, it has 12 hour-long missions containing striking images and a storyline that encompasses mythical all-powerful NVA generals, a spy in

the camp and a revered Special Forces hero who dies in suspicious circumstances. With its unflinching approach to warfare, developer Guerilla is clearly hell-bent on making *ShellShock* the *Platoon* of the current crop of Vietnam shooters. We'll need a more thorough playtest to see whether the gameplay lives up to the vibe.



With gory traps for soldiers, the kids are gonna love this game.



America's army showing their usual restraint.



The Witcher ain't afraid of getting a bit messy.

THE WITCHER

■ Dev: CDProjekt | Pub: TBA | ETA: Summer | www.thewitcher.com

THE WITCHER has one sole purpose in life: to hunt down and kill monsters wherever he finds them. In this beautiful and dynamic adaptation of BioWare's Aurora engine, you take on the role of this lone warrior and embark on a journey through an in-depth fantasy world based on the stories created by best-selling Polish author Andrzej Sapkowski.

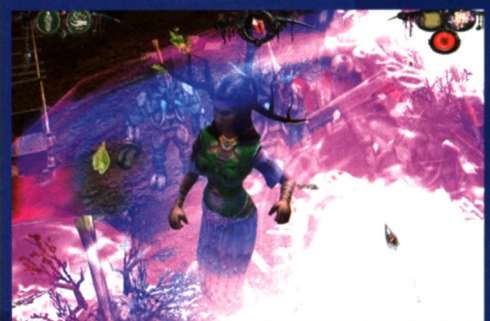


The space-aged visuals are out of this world.

NEXUS: THE JUPITER INCIDENT

■ Dev: Mithis Games | Pub: HD Interactive | ETA: October 1 | www.NexusTheGame.com

LISTEN up you hardcore space strategy fans, there's a new kid in town, *Nexus: The Jupiter Incident*. With its breathtaking visuals, this space-based RTS covers an epic six-episode campaign, which includes 100 planets, 20 solar systems and a 3D starmap that lets you survey your galactic vistas from afar before zooming into the action.



Take a fairy story, add acid, and that's *Blood Magic*.

BLOOD MAGIC

■ Pub: HD Interactive | Dev: Sky Fallen | ETA: Early 2005 | www.bloodmagicthegame.com

THIS particular game delights in steering away from the usual fantasy game conventions and plays out more like a slightly twisted fairy story with unconventional role-playing characters and, thankfully, not a sweaty leather codpiece in sight. Visually stimulating and geared towards both the solo and the multiplayer, it looks like being a feast for hungry RPG fans.



The monsters are smarter and nastier.

Siege the day...

DUNGEON SIEGE II

Rhianna Pratchett loads up her pack mule and prepares for round two

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Gas Powered Games
PUBLISHER Microsoft
WEBSITE www.gaspowered.com/ds2
ETA Q4 2004

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Greater storyline and characterisation
- New skill and magic trees
- Four character races: human, elf, dryad and half-giant
- Heaps of new loot, set items and customisable weapons

PLAYING the original *Dungeon Siege* was a bit like getting a beautifully-wrapped present, tearing through the layers of shiny paper and ribbons with childish anticipation, only to find you were holding an egg whisk and a book on birds of the Northern lakelands. In short, it had a beautiful style but the substance was terribly dull.

Thankfully, Kevin Lambert, lead designer on *Dungeon Siege II*, assures us that the sequel is set to offer something a bit more substantial. "We already had a beautiful engine in place so we could really focus on the content this time and

listen to what the fans really wanted," explains Kevin. "Everyone said that they wanted to see more of a story and better characterisation, so that's what we've given them."

UNDER CURRENT

At first glance, *DS2* doesn't look that different to the original: the environments are a bit more lush and colourful, along with some nice spell effects – but it doesn't appear to be radically different. This is because most of the main changes lurk just below the surface.

The main players from *DS* are still there: ranger, fighter, combat and nature mage, although now you can diversify them much more so your character can

specialise in different spell powers and specific weapon disciplines. OK, so it's not what you might call original, but given that the *Dungeon Siege* combat system was very slick to begin with, features like these can only enhance it.

The AI is another area which the developer has tweaked, and now the monsters are much sneakier in the way they attack your party. Not only do the little devils use foliage for camouflage, they also lead you into ambushes and target certain members of your party if they have a particular grudge against their discipline.

"Everyone said that they wanted to see more of a story and better characterisation"

KEVIN LAMBERT LEAD DESIGNER, *DUNGEON SIEGE II*





GAS POWERED GAMES

Gas Powered Games was founded in May 1998 by Chris Taylor of *Total Annihilation* fame. *Dungeon Siege* was the studio's first game.

2002 *Dungeon Siege* – The original DS took party-based combat into a fluid and beautiful 3D world. The views were impressive, but the lack of a decent storyline and narrative were not.

2003 *Dungeon Siege: Legends Of Aranna*. A no-frills expansion on the original game, a few tweaks here and there but nothing spectacular – but at least the original was bundled with it.



New skill trees make the base characters far more interesting.

SHOW ME THE LOOT

"Players love lots of items – they're always looking for that next big weapon. It's the Las Vegas jackpot mentality," says Kevin as he shows off some of the new unique and set items in the game. "You'll be able to find some awesome items in *Dungeon Siege II* which you'll want to keep for ages because you can't bear to give them up."

DS2 also gives you the opportunity to collect magical reagents which, when combined with the right weapon and the help of an enchanter, enable you to have customised weaponry – a feature that was sadly lacking from the original.

Unlike the DS expansion *Legends Of Aranna*, *Dungeon Siege II* looks like it's addressed all the niggling problems of the first game, while still retaining the seamless environments and sublime combat. Add into that an engaging storyline and good dialogue, and we could well have the quintessential 3D action role-player on our hands.



CREATURE COMFORTS



IN DUNGEON SIEGE II, MULES ARE BACK – AND THIS TIME, THEY'VE BROUGHT THEIR FRIENDS

They may have occasional got stuck or forced into corners by giant spiders, but the pack mules were always a lovable and helpful addition to any adventuring party. This time around you can still have mules, but there's also the option to add different 'pets' to your party, such as fire elements.

However, keeping pets does come with its share of responsibilities and you have to learn how to shape your pet into becoming a useful member of your party, complementing your party dynamics. This is done by feeding them different items, for example melee weapons if you want them to grow up big and strong, or magical items if you want them to be, yes you guessed it, more magical! Think of the MAGs (symbiotic creatures) in *Phantasy Star Online* on Dreamcast.

HALF-LIFE 2

■ Dev: Valve Software | Pub: VU Games | ETA: Summer (and we take that to mean summer 2004) | www.valvesoftware.com

It's nearly here – and to keep you going we've got an amazing revelation hot from the show...

WE WERE treated to 30 minutes of in-game footage from the shooter everyone wants to play at E3 – and the good news is that it looks as groundbreaking as ever. Some people have been moaning on about the fact that it's been delayed and delayed, and OK, we want to get our hands on it as much as anyone else. However, this can't detract from the fact that *Half-Life 2* is shaping up to be the game of 2004.

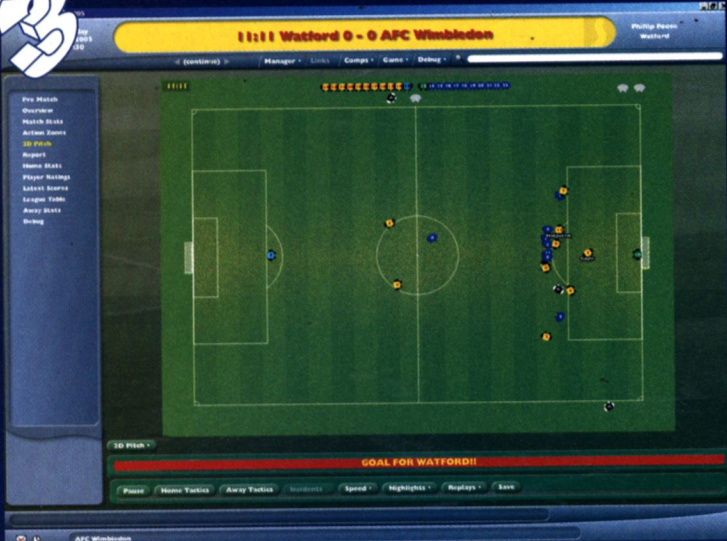
2004? That's right. After the *Half-Life 2* demos, we were politely informed that the game is shaping up for a summer release, which means that it could potentially ship in the next couple of months. Cynics might point out that Valve has announced and missed a prior release date, but we're pretty sure that it's not going to make the same mistake again. Or at least, we hope it won't.

And then Valve dropped the bombshell. It turned out it hadn't expected us to fly across the Atlantic just to see *Half-Life 2*. The lights dimmed again, and the legend 'Counter-Strike running on Source' filled the screen.

Now, we make a habit of not whooping at games. In fact, we consider it an illegal activity done exclusively by stout Americans. However, when we saw a round of *Counter-Strike* on *de_aztech* running on the *Half-Life 2* engine, we couldn't help ourselves. We whooped loud. And then we whooped some more. And then, shame-faced, we left the Valve booth. Damn. Got us again...



Counter-Strike on the Source engine! Check out the new physics on the barrels.



Watford vs AFC Wimbledon. Ah, the glitz, the glamour.

Only 70 grand a week? Wouldn't get out of bed...

Football crazy, football mad

FOOTBALL MANAGER 2005

Sports Interactive invited **PC ZONE** to see how the ex-developer of *Championship Manager* is progressing with its latest stats-obsessed footie creation

AFTER Sports Interactive's recent transfer from publisher Eidos to Sega, the hugely successful company set up by the footie-mad Collyer brothers is now keen to draw a line under its previous development of the *Championship Manager* franchise to concentrate fully on its latest venture.

Football Manager 2005 is promising to be Sports Interactive's best footie management sim to date, and from our exclusive E3 preview of the game, we can assure fans that the latest code – still six months from completion – is already looking healthier than Chelsea's bank balance.

There are new player screens with more than 30 new stats too, mostly made up of special moves – such as Cristiano Ronaldo's slinky step-overs – that are only revealed to you through scouting and training. SI is also adding player photos for more personality (a technique used in its other upcoming release *NHL Eastside Hockey Manager*, see p13) – although how many hinges on the success of a number of licence negotiations over the next few months.

Interactive is revamping the media aspect of its game as well. You can now receive more newspaper-style text reports on football goings-on, as well as giving you the opportunity for 'mind games'. This is ideal for publicly winding up other managers and unsettling their teams – as Alex Ferguson did so successfully in causing Kevin Keegan's famous "I'd love it!" outburst on live TV a few years ago.



Up the Arse, as some might say.

A SCREEN OF TWO HALVES
While retaining the core gameplay, Sports Interactive is adding more data and new features to *FM2005*, while also delivering an overall speed increase of at least 30 per cent. The first of the gameplay improvements is the interface, now much easier to navigate with neater panel organisation, more pop-up menus and a homepage that players have as a first point of contact with their team.

Most importantly, however, you can now split the interface screen into two panels, meaning, for example, you can watch a 2D match while keeping an eye on live league table updates – good for end-of-the-season crunch games. Handling reporters is now a vital part of being a modern manager, and Sports

OILY CREATURES
Agents are also becoming more important, so you have to quickly learn what type of character your players' agents are when doing deals with them (from easy-going to hard bastard). Leeds United fans will also be glad to know that it's going to be harder for teams to go into administration – but you might have to put up with the interference of a chairman, who could start selling players behind your back if you're in dire financial difficulties.



The great and the gum-chewing are all included.

SI is releasing a media editor so you can get scribbling.

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Sports Interactive
PUBLISHER Sega
WEBSITE www.sigames.com
ETA Q4 2004

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Made by the ex-Champ Man creator/developer
- Uses SI's 45 league and 250,000-strong player/coach database
- Completely new and user-friendly interface
- Split-screen capability – watch matches and live stats

PRINCE OF PERSIA 2

Pub: Ubisoft | Dev: Ubisoft Montreal | ETA: Q4 2004 | www.ubisoft.com



More swash, extra buckle and some giant monsters make for a spectacular sequel.

PRINCE *Of Persia: The Sands Of Time* was a peculiarity because its lead was a nice, polite simpleton who was singularly useless at talking to women and rarely made things explode. To some, this was charming. To far too many people, however, it was a reason to completely ignore the game and buy something with guns instead. Witness then, the rebirth of the Prince: innocence gone, naivety lost. A mean mother-bitch from hell who can cut people's heads off and only shaves every other week.

The action takes place some six to eight years after the original, with

the Prince's ship being invaded by some undead beasties. It then progresses through to a cursed island fortress where he can face off against yet more nastiness and Dahaka – the living incarnation of fate (or some such nonsense), who bears a hefty grudge against our boy the Prince.

The game's intended to address the flaws many perceived in its predecessor, namely the way in which puzzles and combat were kept so separate from

each other, and the fact that the fighting itself was a bit iffy. So you can now wield two swords and use enemies as human (well near-human) shields, as well as throw objects and mix the trademark wall-running and jumping with the laceration of your enemies.

Monsters too, seem to have grown with the Prince's moodiness – as you can see from the Legolas-style toppling of the colossus in the screenshots. So it's all change, but whether it's for better or worse is hard to discern; the fighting may be better, but will the charm remain? You'll have to wait and see.



Surely we can sort this out amicably?



Decapitate! Dismember!



Time control also returns.



The *Worms* saga takes a new twist.

WORMS: FORTS UNDER SIEGE

Pub: Sega | Dev: Team 17 | ETA: Q4 2004 | www.team17.com

FRESH on the trail of *Worms 3D* comes *Worms: Forts Under Siege* – a game that wants to add a fresh, structural element to our enjoyment of bazookas and sheep. With Trojan donkeys, catapults and 28 other weapons, it looks like a welcome spin to the title – as well as providing a *Worms*-eye view of history, taking the wriggly ones to Camelot, Ancient Egypt and Troy.



Large sausage/teeth monsters. Fear them.

UFO: AFTERSHOCK

Pub: Cenega | Dev: Altar Interactive | ETA: Q1 2005 | www.altarinteractive.com

ALTAR Interactive used E3 to announce its forthcoming sequel to *X-COM* clone *UFO: Aftermath*. *UFO: Aftershock* is set 20 years after one of the 'bad' endings of the original, and begins on one of the large orbital spaceships called a Laputa, before moving to Earth's ravaged landscape. Expect much-improved 3D graphics, new units and cool weapons.



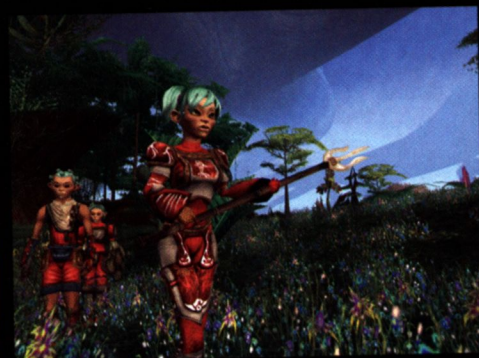
Left a bit, right a bit...

GHOST RECON 2

Pub: Ubisoft | Dev: Red Storm | ETA: Q3 2004 | www.ubisoft.com

THE LAST *Ghost Recon* was designed for PC then ported to console, but this time the tables have been turned – unfortunately. Still, the game's looking solid enough, with your marines (played in third person) taking part in an international jaunt into North Korea, where everyone's favourite communists have gotten into a bit of a scrape with their Chinese neighbours.

CHALLENGE TODAY'S



NEVER

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your massively multi-player prayers...”

PCGAMER

“Visually Ryzom is nothing short of breathtaking”

PCZONE

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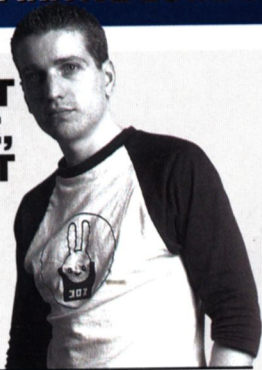
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REVIEWS

THE DEFINITIVE LOWDOWN ON ALL THE LATEST PC GAMES

RIGHT
HERE,
RIGHT
NOW



■ ASSOCIATE EDITOR Anthony Holden

▲ So, you must be about fed up with hearing about E3 by now, huh? Well, you can forget all that for the next 20-something pages (apart from these two), because here at the reviews section we're all about the here and now. There's none of this salivating for the next generation of games and dreaming of a better tomorrow. It's just cold, hard facts. (Although, have you seen those *Splinter Cell 3* videos? Ooh boy, that's some good shi-... Sorry.)

Yeah, OK, it's easy to get carried away. We're all excited about the shiny new games that are coming out and how great they're going to be, but we sometimes spend so long looking forward, we forget about the games that are here now; what's good now. I've even heard people criticising existing shooters because they're not as good as *Half-Life 2*. I mean... What?

A similar thing is happening with *Painkiller*. Here's a game that makes us laugh out loud over and over again, and that we can't stop playing because it's so much fun. That makes it a good game, right? You'd think so, but apparently not. "It's too repetitive, it's not innovative, it's no *Doom 3*." Oh, give up. *Painkiller* is great fun and we stand by our score, whatever the miserable naysayers reckon.

Another game that's good right now is *Ground Control II*, the new sci-fi RTS from Massive Development. Our exclusive six-page review starts just over the page, and while the game doesn't do anything remarkably new or different, it's still an excellent RTS. Not everyone is going to like it, as our second opinion attests, but if you like your tactics fast and furious, you're in for a treat.

In fact, strategy games steal the show this month, with expansion packs for *Rise Of Nations* (page 78) and *Blitzkrieg* (page 88) also registering well.

So, games fans: get in there, stop wishing for *Counter-Strike 2* and enjoy this month's offerings.



Hardcore Swedish action with *Ground Control II*. Find out if it's hit paydirt with our definitive review on page 68.

68

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 Will loose on *FIFA Football 2004*. 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 MULTIPLAYER 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 Online Zone section.

Online Zone is also the place where we review online-only games, mods and major updates of online games. Between the two sections, we've got every gaming angle covered!

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).

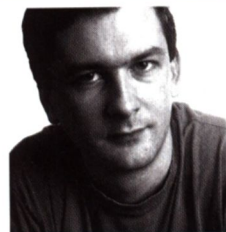


Only games that score 90 per cent or more receive the coveted Classic award. The best of the best.



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

MEET THE TEAM



DAVE WOODS

Blackjack in Las Vegas



JAMIE SEFTON

Painkiller and *UT2004*

QUESTIONS

1. Currently playing?
2. Best things at E3?

Counter-Strike on the Source engine. And the Tecmo ladies

Counter-Strike on Source and *Battlefield 2*



80

DEAD MAN'S HAND
Guns, cards and the ol' joanna



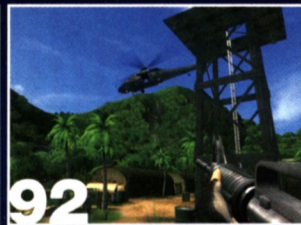
84

HITMAN: CONTRACTS
The bald truth on the new stealthier



90

REPLAY
We tee up the latest budget titles



92

FEEDBACK
Tell it to us straight!

DEFINITIVE REVIEWS

- 68 **GROUND CONTROL II: OPERATION EXODUS**
- 74 **MANHUNT**
- 76 **UEFA EURO 2004**
- 78 **RISE OF NATIONS: THRONES AND PATRIOTS**
- 80 **DEAD MAN'S HAND**
- 83 **THE PUNIC WARS: A CLASH OF TWO EMPIRES**
- 84 **HITMAN: CONTRACTS**
- 86 **PARADISE CRACKED**
- 86 **WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP RUGBY**
- 87 **WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP POOL 2004**
- 87 **ANNO 1503: TREASURES, MONSTERS AND PIRATES**
- 88 **BLITZKRIEG: BURNING HORIZON**
- 88 **THE BLACK MIRROR**
- 88 **PAC-MAN WORLD 2**
- 89 **HARRY POTTER AND THE PRISONER OF AZKABAN**
- 89 **BAD BOYS II**
- 90 **REPLAY**
INCLUDING *EMPIRE DRIVING COLLECTION*, *ICEWIND DALE II*, *LINKS 2003*, *ENCLAVE*, *V-RALLY 3*, *MIDTOWN MADNESS 2* AND MANY MORE
- 92 **FEEDBACK**
DID WE GET IT RIGHT, OR HORRIBLY, HORRIBLY WRONG? HAVE YOUR SAY HERE



ANTHONY HOLDEN
Far Cry and *Hitman: Contracts*
Splinter Cell 3. Oh, and *Brothers In Arms*



PAUL PRESLEY
City Of Heroes and *EVE Online*
Warhammer Online and the Sony PSP



WILL PORTER
Painkiller and *City Of Heroes*
Brothers In Arms and *Half-Life 2*



MARTIN KORDA
Ground Control II
Half-Life 2 and *Rome: Total War*



STEVE HILL
Pro Evo and *TOCA Race Driver 2*
The painted Playmates at Hef's place. And the games



STEVE O'HAGAN
Perimeter and *Lords Of The Realm III* (just kidding)
Rome: Total War and *Half-Life 2*

GROUND CONTROL II: OPERATION EXODUS



■ £34.99 | Pub: VU Games | Dev: Massive Entertainment | ETA: June 2 | www.groundcontrol2.com
 REQUIRES PIII 800, 128MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card with T&L support DESIRES P4 1.5GHz, 256MB RAM and a 128MB 3D card

The sequel to one of the most intense RTS games ever is here.
 Martin Korda preps himself for some hardcore Swedish action...



**"It's about
 outwitting your
 enemy through
 intelligent
 strategic
 decisions, not
 mining ore"**

Not sure how he got that past the MOT people.



IF YOU'RE a strategy game fan, then surely you've felt it by now. That niggling itch in the back of your brain telling you that something's fundamentally lacking from many of the RTS games you play. Just something small, mind you. Damn, now if only I could think what it was. Just give me a minute here... Graphics? Yes, that's it: it's definitely graphics. No, wait, there they are. Silly Martin. Just look at them, all pretty and 3Dish, bump-mapped, mip-mapped, zip-zapped, tri-textural super-google shaded with a cherry on top.

INPERSPECTIVE

GROUND CONTROL

Reviewed Issue 126, Score 87%
Available for a fiver, *Ground Control* relies heavily on mastering battlefield tactics, as you can't call down reinforcements like you can in *GC2*. If you want to check out what an RTS game is like without resource management, start here.

MEDIEVAL: TOTAL WAR

Reviewed Issue 120, Score 90%
Still the best, most epic, strategic, compelling and lifelike RTS ever created, it now comes bundled with the excellent *Viking Invasion* expansion pack. No self-respecting strategy fan should be without it.

WARCRAFT III:

REIGN OF CHAOS

Reviewed Issue 119, Score 85%
Love resource management? Then *Warcraft III* is the way to go. Featuring the best plot ever to grace an RTS, it's one of the most thrilling resource management-based RTS games around, though not particularly strategic.

They've certainly come far of late, haven't they?

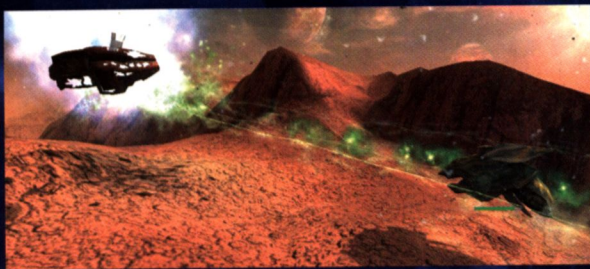
So what is it then? Ah, I've got it. Actually, now that I think of it I can hardly believe I brought it up. Strategy. Yes. Realistic. Lifelike. Strategy. I know – it's hardly as though it's in the title of the genre or anything. R (real), T (time), S... Oh, hold on a second.

But there are, of course, always exceptions, and *Ground Control II* is one of them, a sequel to one of the most satisfyingly strategic PC games ever made. It's a 3D RTS that's bereft of resource management and all about battlefield tactics. It's about outwitting your enemy through intelligent strategic decisions, not mining ore and massing troops for one flash offensive. So, fancy checking it? Of course you do.

CHECK IT

Now, if you haven't played the first game, don't panic. Breathe in, breathe out, aaaaand relax. There, all better now. Y'see *Ground Control II* is set so long after the first game that the only background you really need is this: your planet, Morningstar Prime, is the setting for the Northern Star Alliance's last stand against the evil Imperial Empire, led by tight-arsed former dominatrix Imperator Vlaana (just check out www.spankmevlaana.imp if you don't believe me). Ha-ha, made you look...

Things are looking pretty bleak for the NSA.



Bless you.

Outnumbered, outgunned and with Rich Tea supplies running low, it's only a matter of time till they wilt under the onslaught of the Terran Empire – or Imps as they're jovially referred to by everyone in the game. Enter you – captain Jacob Angelus (who looks uncannily like Massive's CEO Martin Malfisz), a square-jawed beret-wearing hero who sports the worst cockney accent this side of a Mary Poppins movie.

You simply can't take the man seriously. He's all like: "Awwright generawl, nar problem at orl me ol matey skip piana tuning fella me lad, da ya want may ta clean yer chimmerney while oym

ere?" Still, that's your alter ego and you're stuck with him from beginning to end, as the entire plot – which we'll come to later – is seen through his eyes. Or should that be 'oys'?

TWO FOR THE PRICE OF ONE

There are two campaigns for you to play through, the first of which sees you controlling NSA forces. Things start sedately enough, with an excellent tutorial taking you through the basics. Massive has thankfully managed to avoid producing the type of life-sapping tutorial that's responsible for more suicides than glue.

Through it, you learn the essentials of the game, namely how to use your Dropship to call reinforcements to the



These are the Virons. Lookers, aren't they?

battlefield, and how to utilise the fully tactical terrain to your advantage. With resource management unceremoniously dumped like a boring partner who could lose an entire meal between their front teeth, your main goal in GC2 is to capture strategic areas called Victory Locations and Landing Zones (LZs), then hold them in order to gain Acquisition Points (APs). These can then be spent on an array of reinforcements. The more Victory Locations and LZs you capture and hold, the more APs you clock up. Clear? Good, let's move on then.

DROPPING YOUR LOAD

One of the game's best features is the Dropship, which delivers your troops to an LZ while laying down suppressing fire to ward off any marauding nearby enemies as your new recruits disembark. Upgradeable in a variety of ways (firepower, armour, cargo etc), these hulking machines are your most important unit, and can even turn the tide

of battle in your favour when things start to look hairy.

Battlefield tactics are also essential if you're to stand any chance of succeeding, as *Ground Control II* is tougher

huge attack and defence bonus, as does ensconcing them in buildings.

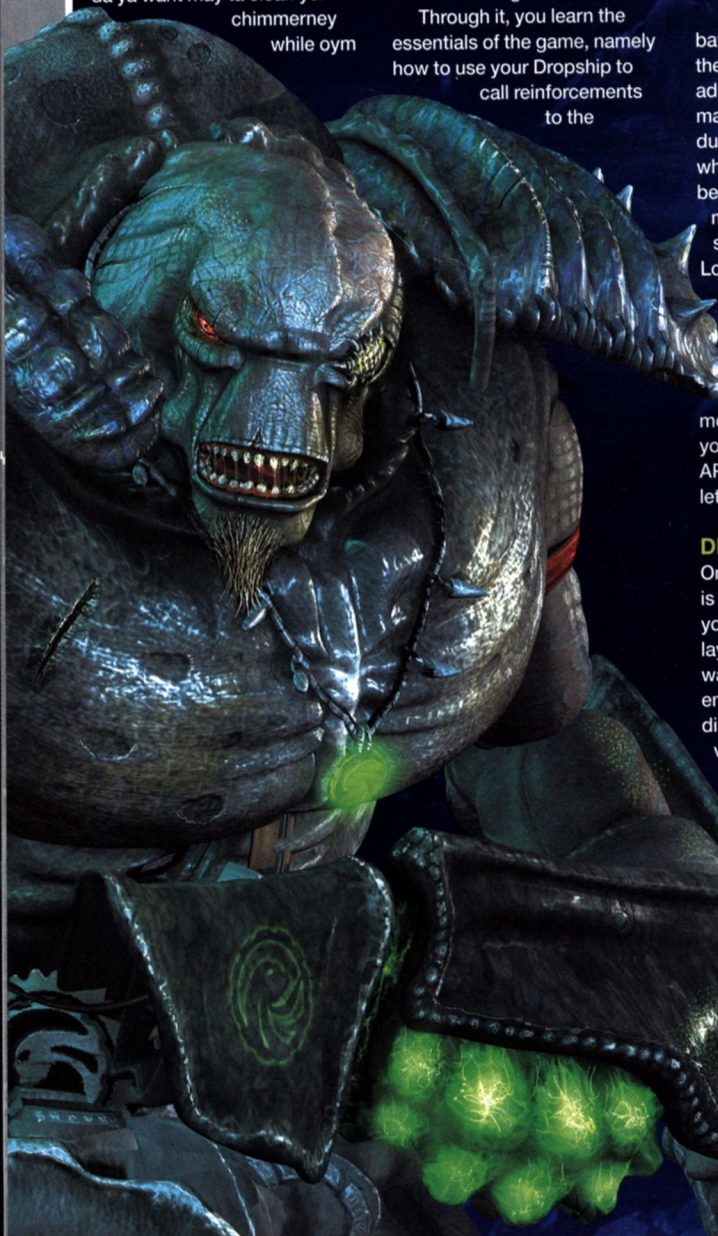
This latter feature is particularly handy when infantry come up

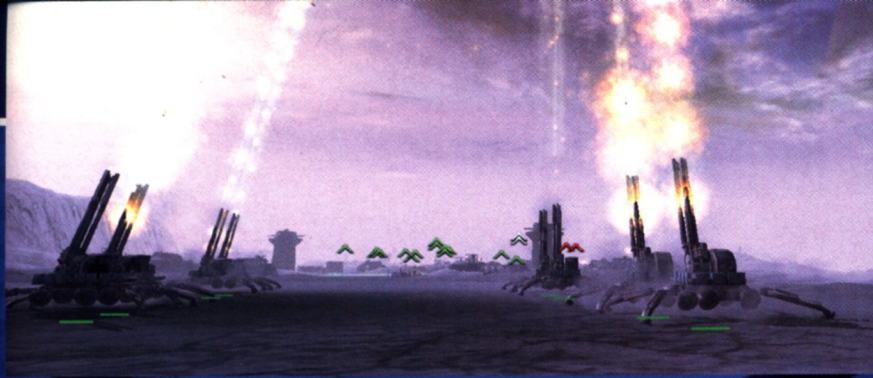
“Battlefield tactics are essential if you're to succeed, as GC2 is a tough nut to crack”

than old meat that's been deep-fried in concrete. Well, it is on the harder levels, anyway. Seizing the high ground not only allows your troops to see further, but lavishes them with a



Strange place to build a statue.





That can't be good for the ozone hole.



Watchtowers increase your troop's line of sight and attack and defence bonuses.



Trees? Grass? Who needs 'em?



Escort missions require a far more cautious approach.

LET'S GET IT ON

GROUND CONTROL II: BEYOND EXODUS

Once you've completed the single-player campaign, you can turn your attention to either the skirmish or multiplayer games. Both offer one-off maps in which you can play either as or against the NSA or Viron, though strangely we couldn't find any option to play as the Terran Empire.

Multiplayer games are just like the excellent freeform games from the single-player campaigns, and require you to capture and hold all of the map's Victory Locations and Landing Zones in order to win. Skirmish games are exactly the same, except you take on the AI instead of human opponents. There's also an option to play through the single-player games with a friend.

We'll be revisiting the multiplayer games in a couple of month's time, but if they're half as much fun as the single-player equivalent, then multiplayer GC2 could be a real winner on the Net.



We hope there's a patch to make the Terrans playable soon.

ANYONE FOR SECONDS?



NSA tanks can deploy side shields to protect foot soldiers.

THE TROOPS MAY HAVE SIMILARITIES, BUT THEY'RE ALL INDIVIDUALS

Although the look of their units is very different, both the NSA and the Viron possess a very similar selection of hardware – light and heavy soldiers, tanks, aerial units and APCs, as well as rocket launchers, repair vehicles and artillery. However, every unit has a secondary function that gives it its own personality, as well as hugely increasing the game's tactical scope.

NSA tanks, for example, can deploy side shields that offer cover for foot soldiers. However, this slows them down to a crawling pace, making them easy to flank. Some Viron units can quickly regenerate their health when in secondary mode, but this makes them prone to attack. It's worth looking after your units too, as they gain experience and prowess the more action they see.

Oh, and one more thing. If things are looking really ropey, you can sometimes call in air strikes, which decimate anything in their paths. Just make sure you get your troops out the way first, OK?

against heavy armour, and if you stumble across any enemies holed up in buildings, you can even order your men to charge in and engage them indoors. With the free and versatile camera, it's a real joy to zoom into a tower block and watch as your troops slug it out at close quarters with the enemy, although it would've been nice had they been able to fight hand-to-hand. Still, you can't have everything I suppose.

But wait, there's still more to learn. Armoured vehicles tend to be weak at the rear, so flanking is an essential skill to master. Forests provide cover for infantry and make them hard

to detect, bad weather reduces visibility and realistic line of sight means you can only attack an enemy that your men can actually see.

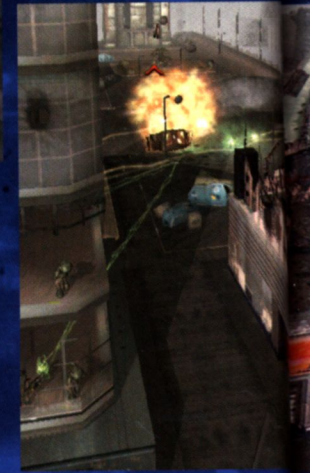
I'M THE PARTY POOPER

Right, all sounding pretty good so far isn't it? But let's not be too hasty though eh, because GC2 has one *huge* problem when it comes to its line of sight system. Or maybe it's the AI. Or maybe it's both. Either way, it's a *huge* problem.

Picture this. You've just sent your men up a hill. They arrive at the top panting and sweating like beasts to see a group of enemy units below. Now they're gonna get it.

Using these boys as spotters, you roll out the artillery that's been sitting dormant back at your base, select their secondary function – rapid and multiple shell firing (for more on this sort of thing, see 'Anyone For Seconds?', above) – and begin your attack.

Shells arc majestically through the sky and come crashing down on the enemy. The impact twists your gut into intestinal fusilli. Men cry in pain as shrapnel severs their limbs. A passing kebab van stops by to replenish its stocks and reheat some six-month-old



Alsatian meat on burning soldiers. Vehicles crumble into dust. And do any of these poor saps think to move away from your relentless shellfire? Do they hell. They can't see you, so they assume you're not there, and simply carry on dying. This doesn't happen too often, admittedly, but it does occur regularly enough to sully the game's otherwise excellent tactical subtleties.

IT'S NOT EASY BEING GREEN

Once you've completed the NSA campaign, danced around the room like a gibbon and dislocated both your arms in order to smugly pat yourself on the back, you suddenly realise you're only halfway there. Picking up the story seamlessly is campaign number two (which is considerably harder than the NSA one), which sees you taking control of a bunch of lizard-like green-skinned aliens called the Vironns, or 'Vyrrrrrrms' as the stereotypical cigar-chomping, tough-talking, scar-faced general who dishes out your orders calls them.

A nomadic race, the Vironns live on colony ships, abide by a strict code of honour and, just like any self-respecting alien race, speak in idiotic sentence structures with accents that fall somewhere between Russian, Scottish and Indian. "Welcome

Unlike *Ground Control*, foot soldiers are now individual units, rather than squads.

you we do Angelus captain. Honour you we do Angelus captain." Bless. In terms of plot, things are pretty solid, if a little predictable at times, with plenty of twists and character development

though is that things are left wide open for a sequel or expansion pack. Playing as the Vironns isn't too dissimilar to playing as the NSA, as each side has virtually the same set of units, only the

seem to be quite as powerful and satisfying as you might hope, and while the process does have its advantages – different weapons and abilities as well as smaller but tougher groups of troops to manage –

"GC2's freeform missions are some of the most intense to ever grace an RTS – pure mayhem"

keeping you hooked from beginning to end. The story centres on the NSA's hunt for an ancient artefact, which proves to be their last and only hope for survival, while the Vironns... Well, you'll just have to find out for yourself, as telling you any more would only give the game away. And I'd hate to do that. What I will tell you

Viron's firepower looks all gunky and organic, like giant beetles with laser beams attached. However, there is one, very significant difference between them: melding, a process that enables any two Viron units of the same type to merge together on the battlefield to create a Super Unit. However, these never

you can't help but think it's more of a gimmick than an essential tactical tool.

FREEDOM FUNNEL

So, now we've established the basics, let's move on to the meat. *Ground Control II's* missions can be separated into two very distinct categories: freeform and objective-driven.

MISSED OPPORTUNITY

YOU CAN TAKE OUR RESOURCE MANAGEMENT, BUT YOU CAN'T TAKE OUR FREEDOM

I can see why they did it, but it doesn't stop me wishing they hadn't. The objective-based missions, while fun enough in their own predictable way, are clearly there to draw in the non-hardcore punters, as well as to further the storyline. However, with the freeform missions being so thrilling and the game incredibly tactical, it would have been great if the campaign structures had been more flexible too, possibly featuring a strategic map of Morningstar Prime with a choice of missions based on how well you perform. It'd also be nice if you could take your remaining experienced troops with you from one mission to the next. All of this would have given the whole NSA vs Terran Empire war a far more epic feel, while still allowing for a solid plot. It would have helped no end in convincing you that you're involved in a full-scale battle for survival too, one that you actually have some influence over. Oh well...



OK Mel. Calm down.



Your planet resembles Milton Keynes. Only slightly nicer.





Run away!

The first of these is where the game's true brilliance lies, and where the lack of resource management can be felt most poignantly – as well as working the best.

As early as the second level, expectations rise to virginity-losing proportions as you and a squad of men – backed up by two AI generals with their own set of troops – race across the sea to storm an Imp-held beach. Set to a perfectly judged heavy-rock score which gets

the pulse a-racing, you and your men charge the enemy lines in a desperate attempt to gain a foothold on the map and win your side's first Landing Zone, as mortars and laser fire cut into your modest ranks with merciless ferocity. After some bloody fighting, you finally capture your first Victory Location, and that's when the fun really begins.

Scattered across the map are countless more of these enemy-held Victory Locations and LZs, and together with your two AI-controlled allies – who work autonomously, yet always feel as though they're working with you – your sole goal is to capture and hold all the strategic points on the map. Easier said than done of course, as the enemy launch counter offensives to recapture their lost territory, creating a seesaw effect as the battle swings back and forth.

GOOD, BAD AND UGLY
It's missions like this that prove to be among the most intense ever to grace an RTS – shots of pure mayhem spewing out cerebral conundrums by the

second; unceasing barrages of action that require lightning-fast decisions and a keen knowledge of tactics and troops.

Dropships wail over the battlefield delivering reinforcements, blinding explosions light up the alien sky, while desperate pleas for backup from overrun LZs and Victory Locations assault your ears. This is where *Ground Control II* excels, with levels so action-packed they literally sweat intensity. And yet, despite their thrills and heart-palpitating mayhem, they also always require you to think strategically about your every move.

It's tragic then that some fingernail-tearingly fiddly unit selection and occasionally abysmal path-finding blight these otherwise brilliant levels. It's enough to send you into a keyboard-massacring fury as your men are cut down through no fault of your own, as you futilely attempt to select them, or find that half of them have been left behind in a nearby field and are idly admiring the dandelions instead of killing things.

BEING OBJECTIVE
So what about the objective-driven missions? Predictable in nature, these charge you with capturing one pre-set LZ and Victory Location after another, funneling you down set routes in order to adhere to the slowly unfolding storyline. Don't get me wrong, these maps can be fairly entertaining in their own right, but they never come close to the dizzying heights or guttural thrills of the more freeform maps.

Stealth missions have also been thrown in, slowing down the action and making you approach each level far more cautiously. The only caveat is they reek of being tacked-on, and soon have you wrinkling your nose in dissatisfaction.

However, despite its irks and shortcomings, *Ground Control II* is still a thrilling and beautiful RTS that sucks you into its world of war and carnage, shakes you up with its



Crop circle theories abound in GC2.

SECOND OPINION
RICHIE SHOEMAKER

There's a real sense of urgency to *Ground Control II*. Missions are hectic, enemy units come at you constantly and there's very little time to sit back, ponder your options and organise for a good old-fashioned siege. For defensive and cautious generals like myself, this can become tiresome – indeed, I often found myself becoming dulled by the relentless and repetition of it all. In the end I resorted to the age-old tactic of saving the game, surging ahead blindly to scout out enemy positions and then reloading.

Call it cheating, call me a poor leader, but the fact is that *GC2* just doesn't allow for players to form a varied or cohesive strategy. Too often, the endless advancing comes by way of exploiting game mechanics rather than making use of them.

Admittedly the graphics are detailed, the storyline is well structured and some of the units are wonderfully unique; but at the same time the AI appears less evolved than we might have hoped. Skirmish battles are more fluid and interesting than the central campaign, but the fact is that the action lacks the depth and variety you get with real-life, combined arms strategy games.

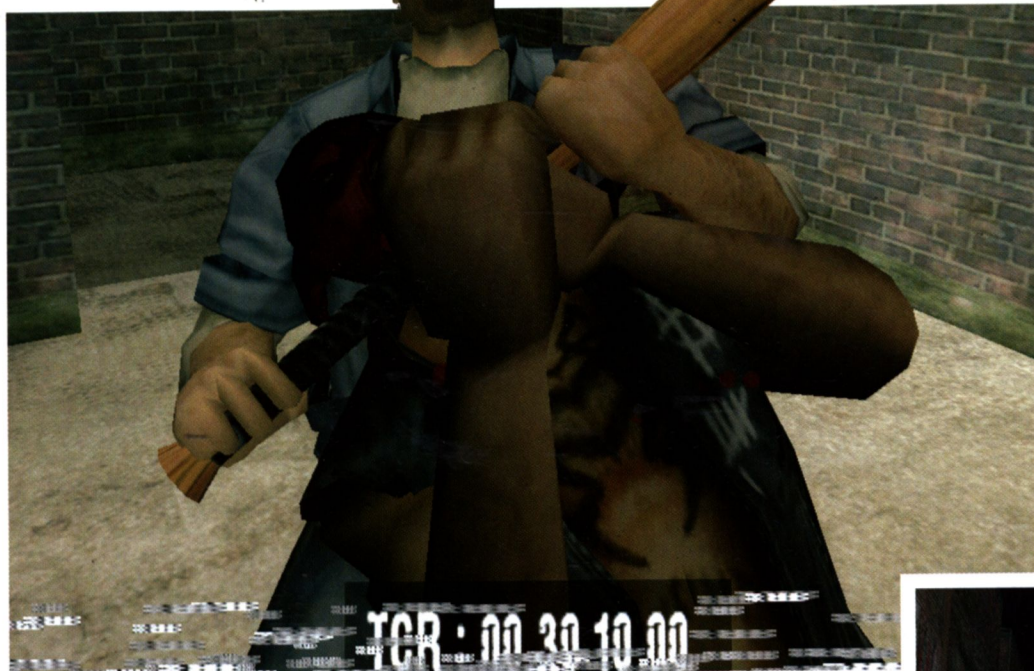
intensity, plot-twists and booming aural assaults, then spits you back out into reality as the end credits roll. It's by no means a masterpiece, but it is one of the most tactical, rewarding and entertaining RTS games money can currently buy. If you want real strategy, then you want a copy of *Ground Control II*. It's as simple as that. **PCZ**

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Looks and sounds fantastic
- ✓ Hugely tactical
- ✓ Intense freeform missions
- ✓ Well-written and acted plot
- ✗ Annoying AI and control glitches
- ✗ Objective-based missions are too predictable

84

A visually stunning, tactically challenging real-time strategy romp



If clubbing someone to death with a bat appeals, you'll love *Manhunt*.

MANHUNT

■ £29.99 | Pub: Rockstar | Dev: Rockstar North | ETA: Out Now | www.rockstargames.com/manhunt

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 192MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card DESIRES P4 2GHz, 512MB RAM and a 128MB 3D card

Jamie Sefton ramps up the body count for Rockstar's videogame nasty

MANHUNT is the most violent videogame ever made, and even I pondered whether the unflinching unpleasantness was justified, seconds before I repeatedly caved a gang member's skull in with a baseball bat until his brains spilled out.

Developed by *Grand Theft Auto* creator Rockstar North (originally for PS2), *Manhunt* puts you in the Death Row fatigues of James Earl Cash. He's a nasty sort: a convicted murderer who, instead of being killed by lethal injection, awakes in Carcer City, USA, with a direct earpiece-link to snuff movie auteur Lionel Starkweather (played by Brit actor Brian Cox).

To survive this urban nightmare, you must find any

weapons you can lay your hands on to kill gang members and government agents in the nastiest way possible. This keeps your sick TV audience frothing at the mouth, and also helps you progress through *Manhunt's* levels or scenes with the aid of Starkweather's whispered instructions.

SOFTLY, SOFTLY

As a stealth game, *Manhunt* is simplistic, without any of *Splinter Cell's* ledge clambering or hanging upside-down from a roof by your toenails – you don't even have crouch or prone options. Avoiding enemies is just a matter of keeping the noise you make to a minimum and sticking to the shadows, and as long as you're hidden (represented by a shadow figure icon turning blue), the gameplay convention means any baddies can't see you, which can appear rather stupid when you're almost nose-to-nose. Also, it's sometimes difficult, even with PC mouse-look, to manoeuvre the camera when your back is against the wall to see exactly where any threat is coming from.

Another criticism is that the hand-to-hand and weapon combat system is crude, with

aiming difficult and multiple adversaries almost impossible to deal with. You always have to leg it and hide behind the nearest corner, luring enemies by throwing objects, dumping corpses in full view, or making a noise by tapping on a wall as in *Metal Gear Solid 2*. The later action-heavy levels involving almost constant firefights are often frustrating because of this unsatisfying real-time fighting. Add the annoying checkpoint saving system too, and *Manhunt* can often appear as if it's designed to drive you to murder.

Fair enough, there are some genuinely tense gaming moments when you're being

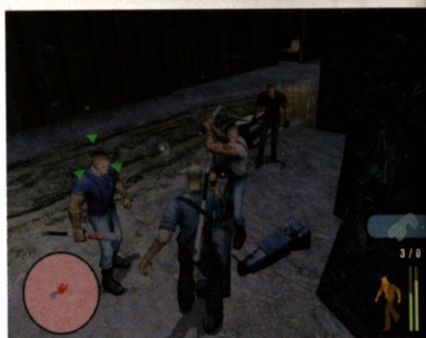
hunted down by enemies, with the heart-beat sound effects and John Carpenter-style electronic soundtrack adding to the superbly dark atmosphere – and it's the stealth kills that give *Manhunt* its raison d'être.

READY TO DIE?

Sneaking up behind enemies means you can pull off quick, nasty or gruesome executions from the POV of a hidden camera, complete with fuzzy videotape effects and blood splatters on the lens – all with improved hi-res PC graphics. All the different death moves, depending on your chosen

ferocity of attack and type of weapon – ranging from plastic bag suffocations to gory axe assaults – are immensely satisfying and addictive too, willing you to discover the next piece of killing equipment.

Manhunt isn't an essential game – it has a pernickety camera, repetitive gameplay and often-frustrating real-time combat. Yet, it also has a unique atmosphere, tense moments and stylish, visceral videotaped kill cut-scenes – if you can stomach the violence. Now, where's that cheese wire? **PCZ**



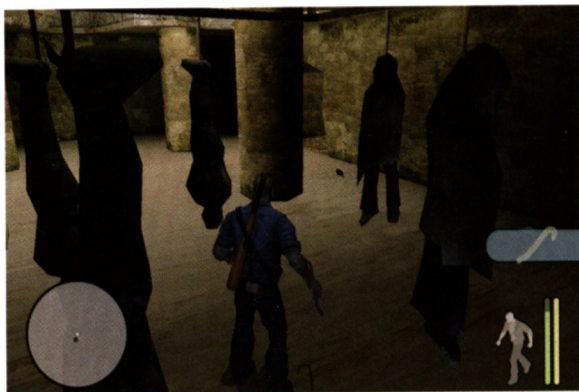
If you don't like violence, look away now.



Not the best way to go.



"Blue moon, you saw me standing with a baseball bat..."



Looks like someone beat you to it...

INPERSPECTIVE

SPLINTER CELL:

PANDORA TOMORROW

Reviewed issue 141, Score 89%
The best stealth game ever, with great missions, cool gadgets and stonking multiplayer.

HITMAN: CONTRACTS

Reviewed issue 143, Score 70%

Agent 47 is very much a bald psychotic relation of James Earl Cash, but IO Interactive's latest doesn't add a great deal to the assassination genre.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Very violent videotape-style kill scenes
- ✓ Dark, twisted atmosphere
- ✓ Fantastic music, voice-acting and sound effects
- ✗ Repetitive stealth gameplay
- ✗ Flawed real-time combat system
- ✗ Annoying camera and save-game issues

74

Silent, but very violent

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Prepare to do battle with the rest of Britain in SOCOM II. Get your team together and join forces online. Work as a unit to survive. And remember: either we all go home, or no-one goes home.

fun,
anyone?
PlayStation 2
www.socom2-game.com

UEFA EURO 2004

■ £39.99 | Pub: EA Sports |
Dev: EA Canada | ETA: Out Now |
www.easports.com

REQUIRES PIII 700, 256MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card
DESIRES P4 1.1GHz, 512MB RAM and a 128MB 3D card

Steve Hill warms up for Portugal with this perennial football contender

THERE'S an argument that says releasing the same game every year is taking the piss, let alone knocking out an extra one in cup years. The 'event product' is a tried and tested formula though, and one that's increasingly lapped up by punters drunk on football amid alternate summers of false hope.

A licence to print money, EA's FIFA (or in this case UEFA) is a simple case of sketching in the relevant stadia, updating the kits, having an educated guess at the squads (no Rio Ferdinand, naturally) and cobbling together a game based on the tournament.

With *UEFA Euro 2004*, you can cut straight to the chase in Portugal, or for the longer haul, take charge of your chosen nation (from a total of 51) at the start of the qualifying stages. This means you're able to relive the last two years in a matter of hours, with the added advantage of not being surrounded by drunken men wearing polyester.

TWELVE ANGRY MEN

Thankfully you can skip through the meaningless friendlies, although they do provide an opportunity to try out some potential first-team candidates. Or at least they *would* if you could make more than three substitutions per game, as in the real-life version of the competition. Now, if I can spot

INPERSPECTIVE

PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 3

Reviewed Issue 136, Score 90%

This is football as we know and love it. Simply the best: forget the rest.

FIFA 2004

Reviewed Issue 136, Score 81%

The same basic game, but with more options. Probably residing in a bargain bucket near you.



As with *Pro Evo*, Dutch player names are outlawed.

this howler within 20 minutes, what *have* the game testers been up to? Are they shy? Are they morons? Christ, I'd have done it myself for the price of an air ticket and a fish supper.

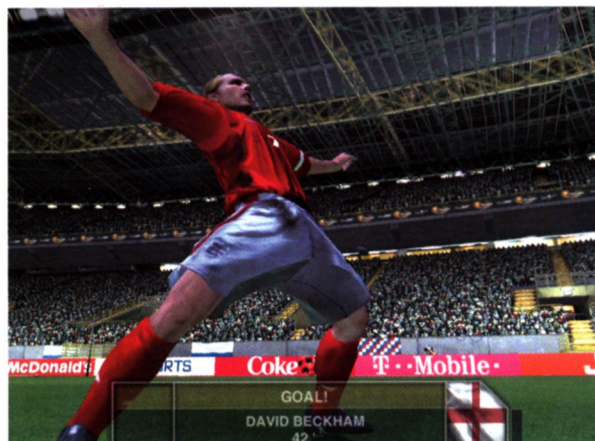
Here's another bug: if you make a substitution at half-time, the new player doesn't actually come on until there's a break in play in the second half – perversely, not including free kicks. It might only be a minor issue, but bafflingly, it's a mistake that's been *added* to the game since *FIFA 2004*. Still, when the producer is a man who once claimed to the assembled press that football is a game played by 12 men, there are bound to be some problems.

KICKER CONSPIRACY

Otherwise, this is simply *FIFA 2004* in different shirts. No more, no less – dodgy off-the-ball system included. You probably won't play through the qualification route more than once, and the management ideas are at best tenuous, with morale supposedly affecting a player's performance, despite the fact that you're directly

controlling him. Talking of which, if you're not using a dual analogue pad, you're only getting half the game, with an array of showboating tricks available on the right stick.

Elsewhere, the corners are still an absolute disgrace – basically a pointless mini-game – and free kicks are almost as shoddy, forcing you to shoot from virtually anywhere in the opposition half. For all that, it's still possible to play a tolerable game of football. **PCZ**



Beckham re-enacts his tabloid escapades.



It could happen. No, really.



Or we could just lose to Germany on penalties again.



That's the closest Wales will get to Euro 2004.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Reasonably playable
- ✓ Official authenticity
- ✓ Extensive campaign
- ✓ Playable online
- ✗ Abysmal set pieces
- ✗ Fresh errors
- ✗ Nelly Furtado

67

Spend the money on beer and crisps and watch it on the telly



**WHERE WERE YOU WHEN THE
PERSIANS STORMED
THE BEACHES OF NORMANDY?**

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RISE OF NATIONS: THRONES AND PATRIOTS



£19.99 | Pub: Microsoft | Dev: Big Huge Games | ETA: May 22 | www.microsoft.com/games/thronesandpatriots

REQUIRES PII 500, 128MB RAM and a 16MB 3D card DESIRES PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card

FULL VERSION OF RISE OF NATIONS REQUIRED

The best RTS of 2003 expands as Steve O'Hagan takes to the throne



For today's political system, let's try... Libertarian Confucianism.



These scenes just in from Fallujah...



The Cold War campaign is exceptional.



Historical RTS games don't come much better.

WHAT WITH the recent skirmish to Afghanistan and the unfinished messing around in Iraq, empire building is all the rage at the moment. What better time then, to release the first expansion pack to last year's excellent empire builder *Rise Of Nations*, appropriately titled *Thrones And Patriots*.

The 'More! More! More!' aspect of the add-on is taken care of by the inclusion of six new nations, 20 new units, two

new strategic wonders, four new single-player campaigns and a new game concept: government. Most of the new units belong to the new nations, like the American Marines and the Persian's impressive line of war elephants. But let's be honest – chucking these into an already huge game doesn't really change the experience.

WE RUN T'INGS

Governments are managed through the new senate building. Here, you research political systems, with each regime style subtly affecting the mechanics of your economy and fighting units. The flipside to the Senate's new options is that *RoN* was already in danger of becoming a frenzied upgrade-fest in the larger missions. Juggling a campaign in enemy territory and keeping up with the Joneses on the technology and infrastructure front is now even more of a head shag. Unless, of course, you use the pause function – but pausing in a real-time strategy game is for pussies, right?

What you're really paying for in *Thrones And Patriots* are the four new single-player campaigns. The original game's solitary campaign started at the dawn of civilisation and ended about now. The main problem was that just as you'd get stuck into the units and technologies of one era, things would arbitrarily advance to the next. This time around, the campaigns are each rooted firmly in a particular epoch.

The Alexander campaign never leaves Ancient times, for example, as you lead the Macedonians in their quest to control the Eastern Mediterranean. The Cold War campaign – the largest – starts in the modern age, ends in the information age and spans an expanded world map. This beauty even has a new set of rules and dynamics involving nuclear weapons and espionage missions.

What makes the campaigns such a joy are the masses of scenarios they contain – some 130

in all. Practically every individual territory now has its own associated mission, giving each game a unique flavour. Unifying Greece as Alexander, for example, has you more concerned with intimidating your foes into submission than slaughtering them. Wrestling Burgundy back from the Royalists as Napoleon is more about protecting your cities from revolting peasants and raiding monarchists. And invading Afghanistan as the Soviets is all about using your helicopters to track down the

guerrilla training camps before the time limit expires. These missions are what prevents *RoN* from becoming just another build-and-conquer RTS, and the fact that there are truckloads of them in *Patriots* means *RoN* is now better than ever. Go buy, nation builders, and show Dubbya how it's done. **PCZ**

INPERSPECTIVE

EMPIRES: DAWN OF THE MODERN WORLD

Reviewed Issue 135, Score 83%

Though it only offers a measly 1,000 years of human history, *Empires* is a similarly extensive historical RTS. A nice 3D engine makes it the prettier option.

CIVILIZATION III

Reviewed Issue 138, Score 84%

Essentially speaking, *Rise Of Nations* is a real-time version of this turn-based classic. *Civ* is one of the all-time great games, so it's hard to compare the two, but *RoN* is fresher and faster.



PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Four superb single-player campaigns...
- ✓ ...Full of unique scenarios
- ✓ Improved strategic map
- ✓ New nations, units and governments
- ✗ New research options make things even more frenetic

89

A truly imperial expansion pack



RISE OF NATIONS

THRONES & PATRIOTS

HISTORY CONTINUES TO CHANGE IN AN INSTANT!

THE PC GAME OF THE YEAR JUST GOT BETTER!

Rise of Nations®: Thrones & Patriots Expansion is here. Now you can lead one of six diverse new nations into battle, including the Americans, Dutch, Indians, Iroquois, Lakota and Persians. Or you can lead the charge in four historical single player campaigns: "Alexander the Great," "Napoleon," "The New World" and "The Cold War." The expansion also offers more than 20 new units, including massive Persian war elephants and American marines, and adds governments to the original game. Every decision and detail counts, as you change history, control man's destiny and craft the perfect plan for world domination.

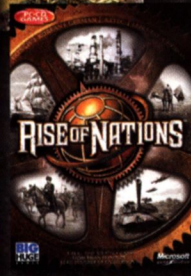
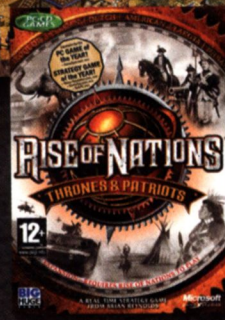


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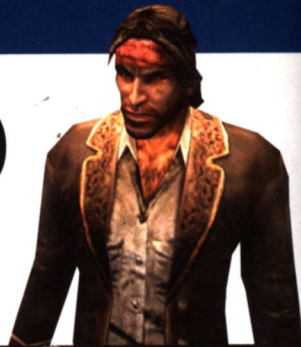


DEAD MAN'S HAND

■ £19.99 | Pub: Atari | Dev: Human Head Studios | ETA: Out Now | www.dmhgame.com

REQUIRES PIII 800, 256MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card with T&L support DESIRES P4 1.1GHz, 512MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

Michael Filby settles down for a game of cards, only to be dealt a duff hand



Clint Eastwood is reported to be "unperturbed".

SAY WHAT what you want, the Wild West is great – cowboys and Indians, guns doing the talking, swinging saloon doors and tarts called Betty. So why on earth are there so few Wild West games? The last cowboy-themed FPS was released a whopping seven years ago – something we picked up on with our 'Search For A Game' entry *Frontier* last issue. Such a ripe setting deserves better than to be ignored by the PC's premiere genre, but *Dead Man's Hand* won't exactly help its cause.

You jump into the spur-laden boots of El Tejon, a mercenary

with dirty sanchez-style facial hair who used to ride with a gang of bandits known as The Nine – until they decided to shoot him for trying to leave. The game begins with El Tejon setting out on a murderous and vengeful hunt for his former gang buddies.

OLD EL PASO

Each of the 27 fairly short levels follow the same drill – you pick some guns to take with you, have a quick round of simplified poker to win some ammo, then blast your way through the map.

Slight variations are occasionally added to the mix, such as the need to shoot windows and pans in a mansion, or taking to your horse for some on-rails shooting. It's kind of fun, in a strangely mindless way.

You can score extra points with 'hat shots', or by stylishly killing the bad guys through shooting nearby barrels or crushing them with bits of precariously balanced scenery. Making kills also fills a special 'shot' bar, which gives you access to the weapons' secondary fire modes.

DEAD AND BURIED

The levels in *Dead Man's Hand* have been designed so you can play through them several times for higher scores, but the enemies always pop up in the same spots, draining any fun or challenge this could provide. The AI is dreadful too, with enemies running across or away from you instead of at you or towards cover. They also stand



Paul Daniels would never have stood for this.



Death, bullets and piano playing.

around behind walls firing into the wood, leaving you to pick them off by shooting at a protruding elbow or toe.

But that isn't all. The graphics are strangely washed out and blocky, and fail to capture the dusty, sun-drenched feel usually associated with Sergio Leone's famous 'Spaghetti' Westerns. The cinematics are presented like an old black-and-white cine-film, but the effect is totally ruined by the pixelisation – one of several clues it was designed for a console. The sound manages to be quirky, but isn't nearly varied enough – El Tejon groans every few minutes like he's grasped the wrong weapon from his trousers.

Dead Man's Hand isn't a complete write-off – the game does exude some degree of

charm and the music's quite catchy. Its main problem lies in offering nothing that you haven't seen a thousand times before and falls short in just about every department. The fact that it's only 20 quid doesn't really do enough to help matters either. A game about the Wild West that looks like it's been put together by cowboys – how's that for irony? [FV]

INPERSPECTIVE

OUTLAWS

Reviewed Issue 51, Score 83%
The last cowboy FPS was released back in 1997, making it *DMH's* spiritual predecessor but with LucasArts' quality.

DESPERADOS: WANTED DEAD OR ALIVE

Reviewed Issue 103, Score 82%
This *Commandos*-style RTS has been overlooked by many, but is still worth tracking down for some strategic six-shooter action.



"Enemies pop up in the same spots, draining any fun"

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Old-fashioned charm
- ✓ Catchy music
- ✓ Ropy, linear levels
- ✗ Far too short
- ✗ Limited selection of weapons

56

Dead Man's Gland, more like

CUTTING EDGE ACTION.



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You are the last of your clan. You are driven by vengeance. And you are the most lethal ninja that ever lived. You are Ryu Hayabusa, sworn to destroy the evil Vigor Empire for massacring your kinsmen. No monster, no magic and no masonry will stand in your way. Walk up walls, wield new weapons and wage all-out war in history's most celebrated action game recreated and redefined just for Xbox. With awesome detail, and breakthrough 3-D gameplay, anyone who's ever seen a ninja and lived to tell the tale will agree that no game ever looked this good.



it's good to play together

www.ninjagaidengame.com

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Capturing a fort requires your men to stand around and shout at it. Really.



The visuals are passable, but the animations suck.



It's known as *Nemesis Of The Roman Empire* in the US, trivia fans.

A swift double-click at the right moment can be enough to swing a battle with a hero's special power.



Clumps of troops are assigned to heroes so everyone moves in formation.

THE PUNIC WARS: A CLASH OF TWO EMPIRES

£29.99 | Pub: Excalibur | Dev: Haemimont Games | ETA: Out Now | www.haemimontgames.com/punicwars

REQUIRES PII 400, 128MB RAM and a 16MB 3D card DESIRES PIII 1GHz, 196MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card

Rome and Carthage go to war – in colour! Steve O'Hagan dusts off his sandals

THE SLIGHTLY

rude-sounding *Punic Wars* is the sequel to *Celtic Kings*, a lesser-known RTS that picked up a respectable 70 per cent in these pages last year. Like its predecessor, *Punic* is an interesting effort set in the times of the Roman Empire, only now focusing on the wars between

Carthage and Rome (think Hannibal – the elephant one, not the people-muncher).

Also like its predecessor, *Punic Wars*' loins are girded with some great resource management ideas. No bases are built and resources aren't collected – rather, they're transported from villages to military camps and facilities as required. This is all managed fairly simply using the excellent overview map.

HERO WORSHIP

Troops can be assigned to follow one or other of your hero units, which means that while you may have a huge force to deal with, large formations can be manoeuvred with a single click. It's an economic system that minimises unnecessary micro-management.

As well as being your hardest hard-nuts and the marshals of your lesser soldiers, heroes can

also carry special items that can be unleashed mid-battle to swing the course of a fight.

Barracks, town halls, forts and villages all feature in *Punic Wars*, but they can't be built or destroyed – only captured and lost. In addition, most troops have the ability to build a catapult at the gates of the enemy settlement to destroy its defences, before reducing its loyalty by yelling at it. Yes, yelling. What this means is that scenarios have a tactical edge that many so-called strategy games lack – both sides know where the resources lie (in the form of the villages and such), and you both know that control of these will win you the war.

MANUAL RELIEF

But as with the previous game, *Punic Wars* is made less accessible by its flagrant lack of polish. A cursory manual, a poor tutorial, terrible

animations, weak voiceovers and an unsightly interface immediately count against it. And even once you get to grips with some of the more unusual mechanics, certain things remain a thorn in the game's side.

For starters, the actual battles are dull. While the broader strategic style is good, your tactical options are minimal once the battle is joined, and your main concern is when and where to use your precious Hero power. Formation options are lacking, and there are some glaring omissions in the order

palette, resulting in combat that's nowhere near as exciting as it should be.

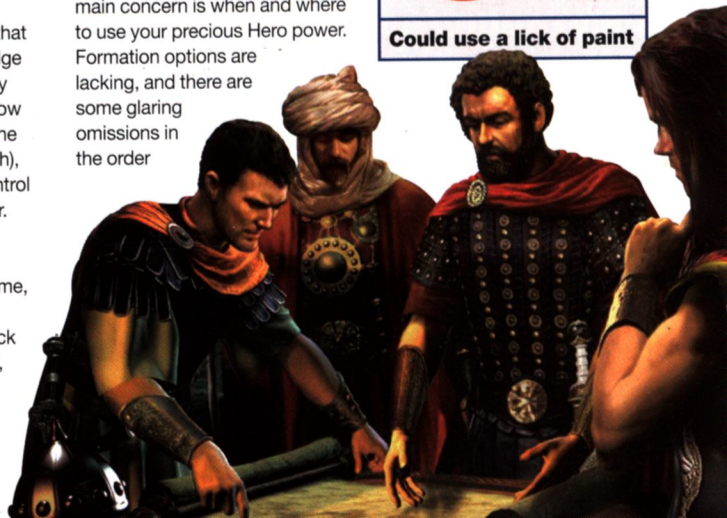
Still, this is a laudable effort, and some of the campaign missions can be enthralling contests between huge armies. But the series hasn't moved on from the last instalment and still has plenty of distance to go to enter the RTS premier league. Until then, you're best off waiting for it to hit budget. [C]

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Effective resource management system
- ✓ Large scale and strategic battles
- ✗ Poor presentation
- ✗ Gaps in the interface
- ✗ Hard to get to grips with

64

Could use a lick of paint



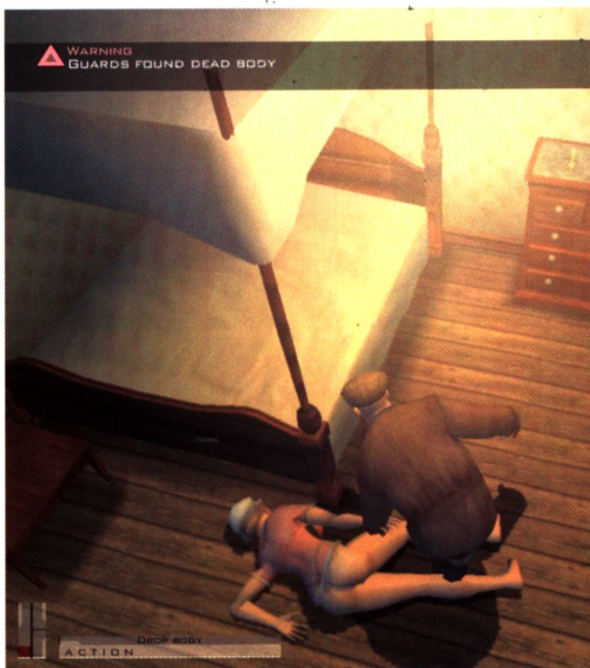
INPERSPECTIVE

WARRIOR KINGS: BATTLES

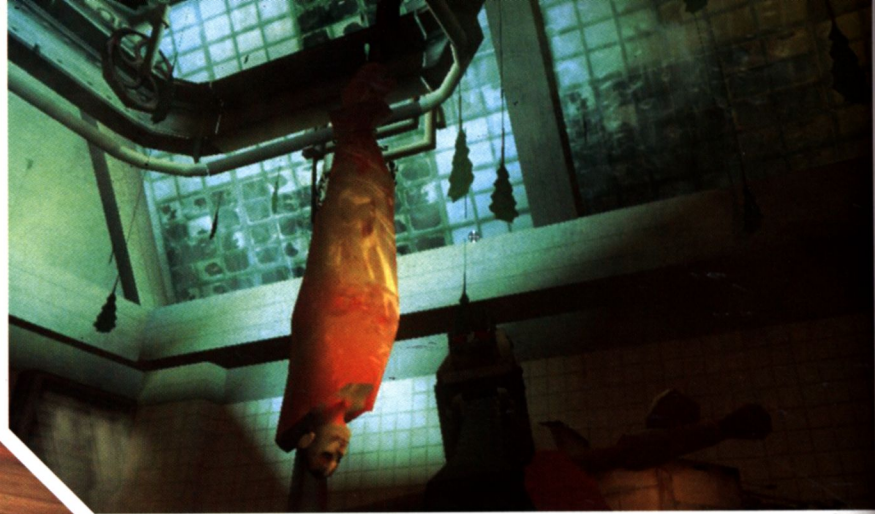
Reviewed Issue 128, Score 85%
We at ZONE have a long-term fondness for this beauty: a clever resource-based RTS with a difference. Much more tactical than most, it boasts a fine 3D engine and some challenging enemy AI.

WARCRAFT III

Reviewed Issue 119, Score 85%
For another RTS with an emphasis on individual heroes, *Warcraft* is well worth a look. Polished like a diamond, this fantasy romp may be ever so slightly shallow in gameplay, but has a great story and fantastic production values.



The 'new dark tone' means semi-nudity, hookers and bondage throughout.



"Hold still a moment and I'll get your measurements for you."



Submarine, research lab or abattoir - every door in the game has a keyhole.

HITMAN: CONTRACTS

■ £29.99 | Pub: Eidos | Dev: Io Interactive | ETA: Out Now | www.eidos.co.uk

REQUIRES PIII 800, 128MB RAM, 32MB 3D card and 2GB HD space
DESIRES P4 1.6GHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB DirectX 9-compatible 3D card

The assassination game gets weird as Anthony Holden puts on another man's clothes and peeps through keyholes

PRECISION, audacious courage, elegance of execution. If cinema's taught us anything, these are the hallmarks of the successful hired assassin. Sadly, they're also the exact things that are lacking in *Hitman: Contracts*, which is defined more by mediocrity, repetition and a saddening lack of ambition.

Indeed, rather than the bold new direction we were promised, what we have is a mixture of rehashed missions from previous games, obvious filler and only a scant few levels that recall the series at its best. The stealth dynamics still rely mainly on stripping unconscious men and stealing their clothes, the AI is still laughably forgetful and the characters and plot uninspiring.

INPERSPECTIVE

- SPLINTER CELL**
Reviewed Issue 125, Score 94%
If you like stealth-action, this is the best game on the market. The recent semi-sequel offers a handful of new missions and an excellent multiplayer game.
- NO ONE LIVES FOREVER 2**
Reviewed Issue 122, Score 93%
It's already starting to look slightly dated in the wake of *Far Cry*, but this spy-spoof still plays a mean game of stealth-tinged shooting.

On this last point, *Contracts* is particularly guilty. Much of the game is told through a series of flashbacks as our hero, the cold-blooded 47, passes in and out of consciousness. It may have seemed clever at the time, but the result is a fractured, incoherent structure that feels more like *Hitman: The Lost Levels* than a proper sequel.

TO KILL WITH INTRIGUE

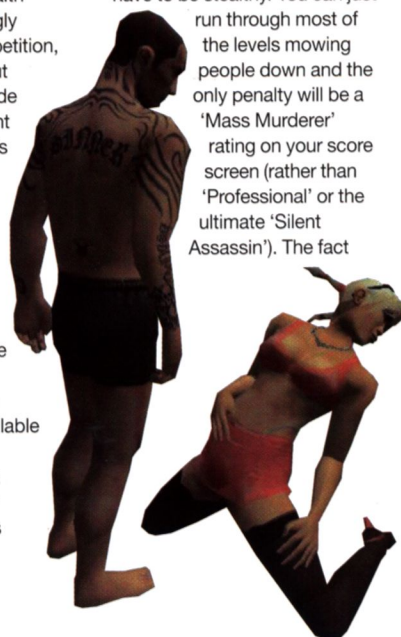
Saying all that, the game retains much of the charm of the previous titles. The stealth dynamic is still pleasingly different from the competition, being all about balls-out brashness as you parade around in broad daylight wearing someone else's identity. The tension this creates is very different from lurking around in the shadows, and allows you to feel like even more of a smart-arse when you finally pull the trigger on someone.

There's also a huge degree of freedom available to you, and you can generally accomplish a mission in any number of ways (though there's

always a kind of 'ideal path' if you look hard enough). And the various killing techniques you can employ are both numerous and occasionally hilarious.

But in many ways, *Hitman's* brand of stealth is one that's barely evolved since *Goldeneye*. Steal the pass-key, hide a few corpses, lay a bomb on a submarine - it's all stuff we've done a hundred times before. Even the outfit-switching idea is starting to wear thin.

Worse still, you don't actually have to be stealthy. You can just run through most of the levels mowing people down and the only penalty will be a 'Mass Murderer' rating on your score screen (rather than 'Professional' or the ultimate 'Silent Assassin'). The fact



"Will that be all, sir?"

that you can get away with this is symptomatic of the sloppy PC conversion, where the difficulty level hasn't been ramped up to accommodate mouse and keyboard control (see also the crap physics, dodgy animations and awkward inventory system). Sure, it's more fun to do it the stealthy way and get a nice rating, but there should be more incentive to make you want to do this than a few new weapons.

NO, REALLY...

As for the AI, it's embarrassing. While all stealth games are guilty of fudging reality a bit, *Hitman* borders on ludicrous. You can go on a murderous rampage, then change clothes and lie low for a while, and all the inhabitants of the world simply go back to their business, stepping through mountains of bloody corpses as they go.

Clearly, *Hitman: Contracts* is no *Splinter Cell*. There's still fun to be had here, but it's tempered by frustration and repetition, and it may only be the frequent and unalloyed pleasure of garrotting people and leaving them naked in a closet that saves this game from being a total disaster. **[C-]**

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Reasonably tense and exciting
- ✓ Good replay value
- ✗ Too many boring missions
- ✗ Little sense of plot or progression
- ✗ Poor conversion from console

72

No sense of adventure

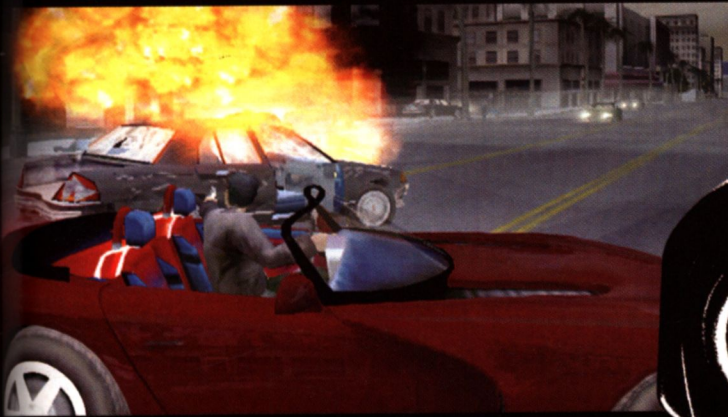
"Make sure you get it"

"★★★★★"

Maxim

"This is one viciously involving
mother of a ride."

Loaded



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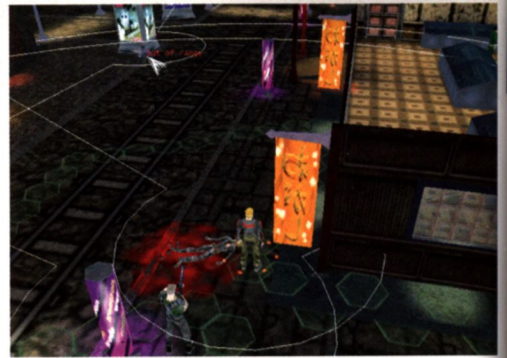
PlayStation 2



ACTIVISION

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White lines show what you and your allies can see.

PARADISE CRACKED

■ £19.99 | Pub: Oxygen Interactive | Dev: MiST land | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PIII 300, 64MB RAM and an 8MB 3D card DESIRES PIII 450, 64MB RAM and a 16MB 3D card

X-COM meets Deus Ex – in Russia?

Richie Shoemaker reaches for the vodka

BIZARRE Russian strategy games – we love 'em. Take *Perimeter*, given an Essential award last issue, and still filling our office with strange sci-fi noises. So, a bizarre Russian strategy game with turn-based action and a poorly translated plot? Bring it on!

Unfortunately though, *Paradise Cracked* is no *Perimeter*. Graphically weak, poorly executed and largely impenetrable, it's a game that will grind you into submission like a Siberian winter. Clearly inspired by *X-COM*, *Paradise Cracked* features much

the same mechanic, where Action Points (APs) limit the movements a character can make in any one turn. Aimed shots eat more APs than 'snap' shots, likewise a stealthy crawl – as opposed to a mighty sprint – gets you a third of the way across open ground before the enemy targets you. All standard stuff, and for that reason alone the combat is mildly satisfying. There's certainly plenty of it, as new enemy squads amble

into view as soon as the previous one is cut down. With new weapons to pick up and party members to recruit, in some instances you might carelessly admit to having fun. That is, until you realise you've been trudging through the bleak underworld of Paradise City for hours in a relentless rehash of fetch-and-carry missions, in between which the combat becomes more and more monotonous as the hours tick by.

Clearly, the developer has made an effort to weave an intricate cyberpunk story. However, the dialogue is so bad, the voice-acting so hammy and the text interludes so laced with obtuse meaning that you'll be reaching for the quit button before you can say perestroika.



Dead bodies are a useful source of ammunition.



Marvel at the glorious interiors.



Graphics-wise, it's not exactly cutting edge.

PCZONE VERDICT **30**
Stay off the crack

WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP RUGBY

■ £29.99 | Pub: Acclaim | Dev: Swordfish | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PIII 733, 128MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card DESIRES P4 1.1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

Steve Hill gets involved in some belated ruck and maul



SIX MONTHS after the big event and another rugby game drops on to the mat. This one is 'The Official Game of the England Rugby Team', and as such comes with a picture of thickset men puffing their cheeks out. The in-game action takes it a step further, opting for cartoonish appearances rather than gritty realism.

A notoriously tricky sport to simulate, *WCR* takes an arcade approach that even resorts to old-school button-bashing à la *Daley Thompson's Decathlon*. Find yourself in a scrum? Simply hammer the joypad until you overcome the opposition. It's not the most subtle of approaches and one that requires a degree of joypad gymnastics given the surfeit of



The rugby equivalent of an open goal.

other buttons to command.

With very little time afforded on the ball, attacking is generally a case of passing the ball along the line and looking for somewhere to make a surge. Some intricacy is added by the ability to throw a dummy or palm off an opponent, but essentially it's a series of quickfire passes and scrums. If you do manage to score a try, the conversion is a straightforward case of judging the wind and giving it a hoof. Defending is less fun, with the

'player select' function singularly failing to choose the right man to make a tackle.

For all its shortcomings, which can be attributed as much to the sport as to errant design, *WCR* is playable for a couple of hours. Ultimately though, the appeal fades quicker than the post-World Cup euphoria.

PCZONE VERDICT **55**
Frivolous man-mauling



WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP POOL 2004

■ £29.99 | Pub: Jaleco | Dev: Blade Interactive | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 32MB DirectX 9-compatible 3D card
DESIRES That pretty much covers it

Blackballed from every pub in town, Dave Woods' only hope now is on the PC...

"WE'VE GOT the roundest, shiniest balls in the business," the developer of *World Championship Pool 2004* told us on a recent trip to the PC ZONE offices. It's a claim I'd like to test, but one thing is certain: Blade's balls are definitely rounder and shinier than those in *Pool Paradise* (reviewed in issue 141, 65 per cent). I doubt this is going to sway you one way or the other, but there's little else to divide them except for one important feature: the method of control.

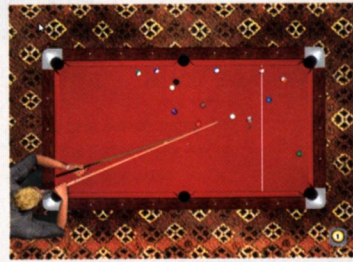
World Championship Pool is a spin-off from the same team that delivered *World*

Championship Snooker (spot the link) for Codemasters, and while it plays a perfectly accurate game there's one crucial difference between this and *Pool Paradise*. PP attempts to recreate authentic cueing action with your mouse, a modern innovation accepted as the norm in golf games. Here, you simply aim, set the power and click to unleash your shot, which means that while the game you're playing looks like pool – with 11 of the best poolsters in the world strutting their sticks – it certainly doesn't feel like it.

Funally enough, while *World Championship Snooker 2003*

sported a perfectly playable game of pool, *World Championship Pool* also ships with a perfectly playable game of snooker – go figure. Some might say it's an ingenious way of getting people to pay for the same game twice, but if you haven't got the first it's a moot point. Less moot is the fact that – in my opinion – this is the second best pool game for your PC. If you must have one, get *Pool Paradise* instead.

PCZONE VERDICT **59**
Stick yer tri-click



Authentic '70s pub carpets included.



A long pink, or a screw back for the brown? Decisions...

ANNO 1503: TREASURES, MONSTERS AND PIRATES

FULL VERSION OF ANNO 1503 REQUIRED

■ £19.99 | Pub: EA | Dev: Sunflowers | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PII 500, 128MB RAM and an 8MB 3D card **DESIRES** PIII 800, 256MB RAM and a 16MB 3D card

Richie Shoemaker sails through the add-on to one of the most overlooked strategy games of recent years



It's getting hot in here...

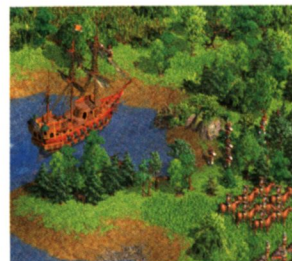


Trading ships are key to success.



Want resource management and combat? Get Anno 1503.

FEW developers have managed to combine the real-time combat of *Age Of Empires* and the city-building strategy of *SimCity* with as much success as Sunflowers, the creator of the *Anno* series. *Cossacks* was good, but the combat too often became overwhelming, while other efforts like the *Stronghold*



Nice day for it.



They don't like it up 'em.

series squeezed their city-building into cramped corners that were too constrictive to be truly enjoyable.

Even *Anno 1503* wasn't quite the perfect medieval *SimCity*. There were no multiplayer options for one thing, and the game appeared far more complicated than it deserved to, thanks to an overburdened interface and useless manual.

Annoyingly, this belated add-on pack does little to fix the original game's flaws. The multiplayer component (for some time promised as a free release) has failed to materialise, while the interface hasn't changed beyond the cosmetic.

What you get instead are 12 new standalone missions and three extended continuous play games. It doesn't sound like

much, but to be fair, these missions are as vast and varied as those in the full game. The gameplay also remains much the same – build a city, trade, build an army, fight – but there are a handful of new units and options available. Then again, with such a dramatic subtitle to the game, we were hoping to be battling giant sea creatures and discovering subterranean palaces made of gold. The odd giraffe or bear doesn't quite have the same impact.

Needless to say, *Anno* is still great; but for such a weighty game, this expansion feels thoroughly flimsy.

PCZONE VERDICT **57**
Fool's gold

BLITZKRIEG: BURNING HORIZON

■ £19.99 | Pub: CDV/Koch Media | Dev: Nival Interactive | ETA: June 4

REQUIRES PIII 400, 64MB RAM and an 8MB 3D card DESIRES PIII 800, 128MB RAM and a 32MB card

Steve O'Hagan sneaks off for a quick Sherman Tank

BLITZKRIEG is that WWII RTS that looks like *Sudden Strike*, plays like *Sudden Strike* and is from the same publisher as *Sudden Strike*. The saving grace being that it's better than *Sudden Strike* – which is no mean feat. This expansion pack

(standalone, mind – meaning you don't need the original game) doesn't really change the winning formula of realistic-looking tanks, pretty explosions and carnage-filled missions at all, merely adding a new 18-mission campaign, around ten

individual scenarios and 60 new units. The experience is the same: you have a mass of units to control, and making do with what you start with, you have to defeat the far stronger enemy.

Again, each mission is like a puzzle rather than a test of



strategy: usually, you have to play each one a few times to work out how to complete it, learning enemy positions through trial and error (they never change). Artillery and air support are still incredibly important, and as a general rule, the levels are extremely tough.

But also fun. The allure of commanding formations of period-perfect Tiger tanks never fades, it seems. Watching buildings being slowly reduced to rubble by your pounding artillery is always a joy, and

sending screaming Stuka dive bombers to wreak havoc on your enemy's supply dumps is surely never anything less than one of life's finer moments.

Don't have any illusions: this is simply more of the same. But then as they say, if it ain't broke, carpet bomb it with a Lancaster.



Locating snipers under trees is still tricky.



It's all quiet now, but...

PCZONE VERDICT **75**
Good news from the front

PAC-MAN WORLD 2



■ £9.99 | Pub: Hip Games | Dev: Namco | ETA: Out Now

WHAT'S THIS? A 3D Pac-Man with cute little red boots? Ice-skating, swimming, doing shimmys and flip kicks? Not dying when a ghost touches you, merely losing a health wedge, which you can replenish by collecting 50 Pac-Dots? Sacrilege and blasphemy. It's not even like it's an exemplary platform game – possibly passable on console, but let down by dodgy camera angles and poor level design.

But wait. What's this? Collect special gold tokens and you can unlock the

original *Pac-Man*, *Ms. Pac-Man*, *Pac-Mania* and *Pac-Attack* arcade games. Saved! It's a work of genius, clearly. Except... How can it be? The developer has actually managed to make the original *Pac-Man* games worse than they were 20-odd years ago. Jerky animations, a Pac-Man that's not even round and... Oh, I give up. Lucky it's only a tenner or we would have been really piqued.

Dave Woods

PCZONE VERDICT **46**



Decent fun for less than a tenner, but a sorry corruption of a legend.



Does this screenshot not just scream excitement?

THE BLACK MIRROR

■ £29.99 | Pub: GMX Media | Dev: Unknown Identity | ETA: Out Now

THE BLACK Mirror isn't an inherently bad game – there, I've said it. When placed next to last month's point-and-click clunker *Midnight Nowhere*, it's almost passable. It's slow, steady and pretty dreary – but it's got enough intrigue to keep you clicking away for a few hours.

In the same sort of way that you find yourself mildly interested in an ITV *Poirot* special, there's definitely some mileage in the slow drippage of information to the player – and it even brings a decent point-and-click feature to the fore (about five years too late), with hotspots

disappearing should an item have no further impact on proceedings.

It's not a good game, though, the chief culprit being the dialogue: rambling, stereotypical, mistranslated and acted out in the style of a Jackanory presenter reading the extended essays of Karl Marx.

It's got enough about it to keep the hardcore happy, but (even though I have a soft spot for its recurring ineptness), the vast majority should steer well clear.

Will Porter

PCZONE VERDICT **51**

HARRY POTTER AND THE PRISONER OF AZKABAN

■ £29.99 | Pub: EA | Dev: Know Wonder | ETA: June 4

REQUIRES PIII 600, 128MB RAM and a 16MB 3D card
DESIRES PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card

A great game for kids, Will Porter reckons he's too old to enjoy this one – so why's he still smiling?



This isn't the rabbit she had in mind.



The 17th step was always their fave.



Harry liked a good ride.

THE GREAT thing about the Harry Potter books is that they can be enjoyed by kids and adults alike. If you're one of the naysayers, the chances are you haven't read the later books, you've only seen the films or you're a prick. Either way, I hate you. Potter games on the other hand, well they're firmly in the kiddie zone.

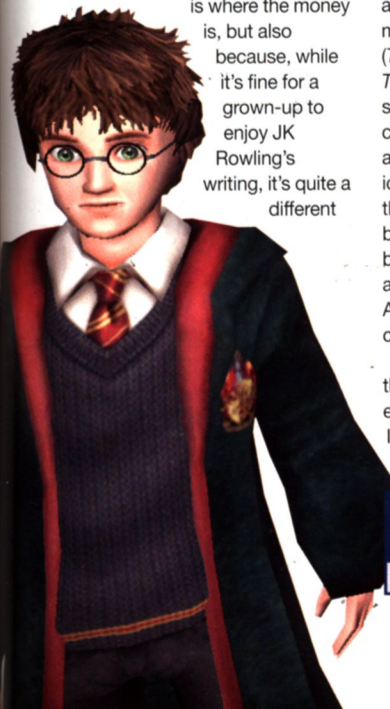
This is down to the fact that this is where the money is, but also because, while it's fine for a grown-up to enjoy JK Rowling's writing, it's quite a different

matter to pretend to be a child wizard and throw bright-yellow fireworks at pixies.

So, this is a kid's game, but it's also a pretty good one. Given the sheer monotony of other kiddie-fare efforts (*The Cat In The Hat*, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*), the diversity, imagination and scope for exploration in *Azkaban* shows a credible amount of respect for its young audience. Whether you're sliding down ice chutes, flying hippogriffs, unlocking the multitude of secrets, possessing bunny rabbits or hurling spells at flying books, there really is a lot to keep your average Potter-obsessed child amused. And almost your average games reviewer, come to that.

If you've been of age for a fair while, then you shouldn't pay money for this – even if you like Potter, it's far too simplistic. If you're a young 'un, however (or if you own one), it's a decent buy.

PCZONE VERDICT **68**
 Kids' stuff, but good kids' stuff



Wish I'd gone before I left home. These nettles are getting right up my arse.

BAD BOYS II

■ £29.99 | Pub: Empire Interactive | Dev: Blitz Games | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PIII 600, 64MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card
DESIRES PIII 800, 128MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

Bad games, bad games, whatcha gonna do? Richie Shoemaker's comin' for you



The graphics are so bad, that car's actually meant to be a tree.

THE NERVE of some people. I mean, the movie upon which this game is based may make for a passable evening in front of the telly, but do they really expect us to want to play the game afterwards? It's the sort of dumb action flick where you switch your mind off at the door and forget the whole thing immediately afterwards – if we wanted to prolong the experience we'd beat our brains out on a brick wall while listening to some particularly puerile gangster rap.

However, even if it was the best film in the world, *Bad Boys II* is a miserable game. Being a rather cheap console port, the graphics are muddy and unrefined, especially the cut-scenes, which are frankly abysmal. Likewise, the sound clearly comes from a stock

sample library, save for the voices, which are delivered by sound-a-likes rather than the Hollywood stars themselves.

But by far the worst aspect of the game is the horrendous control system, which flicks confusingly between third- and first-person views, while the camera sweeps all over the shop and does its best to disorient you. Perhaps if the developer had borrowed a few directorial tips from Hollywood, it might have had a better game to show for it. As it is, *Bad Boys II* is bad, and not in a good way.

PCZONE VERDICT **37**
 Badder than bad

REPLAY

How low can you go? Anthony Holden finds out

EMPIRE DRIVING COLLECTION

■ £14.99 | Pub: Empire Interactive | ETA: May 28

BY JINGO, things move fast in this industry don't they? Just weeks after we brought you reviews of two new releases on Empire Interactive's Xplosiv label – *Big Mutha Truckers* and *Total Immersion Racing* – it appears Empire has

come up with an even better idea. It's a bumper budget bundle of sorts, offering those two games along with four others and going by the astonishingly clever name of *Driving Collection*. The other four titles in the mix are *Ford Racing 2*, *London*



Europe Racer: euro-trash.



Classic isometric dungeon-crawling, if a little pricey.

ICEWIND DALE II

■ £14.99 | Pub: Avalon | ETA: Out Now

THE ONCE-PROUD RPG genre is facing extinction on the PC. BioWare and Ion Storm are being lured over to consoles. Origin's been swallowed by EA and everyone else is fighting for a stake in the online goldmine. Black Isle, meanwhile, developer of *Icewind Dale II*, was shut down last year, making this re-release a somewhat poignant reminder of happier times for goblin-lovers.

And what's more, it's still great. Relentless perhaps, with hours and hours of ice-bound villages and samey dungeons to hack through, but addictive and compelling nonetheless. Indeed, in

the context of the current RPG drought, this old-skool D&D-er could be seen as something of a classic.

Saying all that, we're not hugely impressed with the price. Considering you can pick up *Neverwinter Nights* for less than 20 notes these days, this visually and technically dated effort should be no more than a tanner. In fact, a quick scan of the Net reveals at least one outlet that's already selling *Icewind Dale II* for £14.99, which makes the re-issue a bit of a con, if you ask me.

PCZONE VERDICT 70



Total Immersion Racing: almost worth the entry price alone.

Racer, *Europe Racer* and *Crazy Taxi*.

While at least two of these titles are utter excrement (hint: set in London and Europe), it's still a nice eclectic mix with some quality behind-the-wheel action.

Total Immersion Racing is arguably the pick of the bunch, with its meat-and-potatoes driving model, better-than-average AI and generous career options. *Crazy Taxi* is the other choice gem, an arcade and Dreamcast classic that remains likeable despite the years. If you've enjoyed it before, you probably won't want to go back, but it'll certainly shut the kids up for a few hours – maybe even until the ransom comes in.

Elsewhere, you've got big rigs to drive and goods to trade in *Big Mutha Truckers* and more Ford cars than you could ever need or want in the above-average



Go on, drive into it.

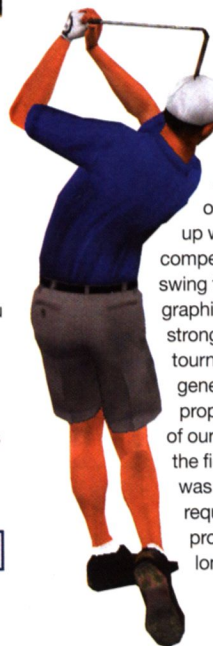
Ford Racing 2. For 15 quid, there's a forgivable amount of filler in here, and for sheer volume alone it scrapes in as budget buy of the month. Though it's still not a patch on *TOCA Race Driver 2*, of course.

PCZONE VERDICT 78

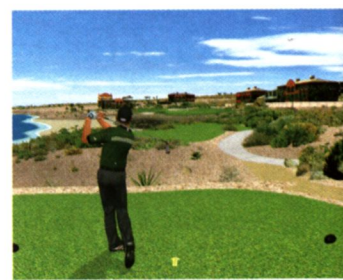
LINKS 2003

■ £9.99 | Pub: Xplosiv | ETA: June

EA'S *Tiger Woods* franchise now dominates the golf genre on PC, and there's no denying they're enormously polished and enjoyable games. But for the truest simulation of the sport of the fat and retired, the *Links* games have often been the premier choice. What's more, given that *Links 2004* was an Xbox exclusive, this 2003 incarnation may be the last *Links* game ever on PC – ending a venerable line of simulations dating back ten years.



In effect then, this is still the 'current' *Links* model, and being a mere 18-months old, it still stands up well against the competition. The real-time swing feels good, the graphics are generally strong and the tournament options generous in their proportions. In fact, one of our biggest complaints the first time round was the high spec requirements, a problem that should no longer apply for most.



That'll be in the sea, then.



Can't see the wood for the trees...

In terms of online play and create-a-player options, it's true that *Links 2003* has nothing on the *Tiger Woods* series – especially the forthcoming *Tiger 2005*. Until that turns up though, this is a sound purchase.

PCZONE VERDICT 73



Driving like that midtown? Why, that's just sheer madness!

MIDTOWN MADNESS 2

■ £9.99 | Pub: Xplosiv | ETA: June

GAMES date fast, that much we know. Some, however, simply become redundant, and for my money, this is one of those games. Three and a half years ago, we loved *Midtown Madness 2* for its drive-anywhere cities and variety of over-the-top driving challenges. That, however, was before *Grand Theft Auto III* and *Vice City* roared into town, games that offer pretty much everything *Midtown Madness 2* does and a whole lot more, with better graphics, music and humour to boot.

For a fiver, *Midtown Madness 2* might be worth considering, even if just for the historical interest – but at this price we can only recommend it if you've got a very slow PC or a temperament too frail for GTA's gleeful brand of crime-making. Others might be interested to note that there's a new *Carmageddon* game on the horizon, which should satisfy any desires for vehicular madness, be they midtown or otherwise.

PCZONE VERDICT 55

V-RALLY 3

■ £9.99 | Pub: Atari | ETA: June 11

HANG ON, what's this? We only reviewed this game brand-new five issues ago. Bloody well liked it too, though admittedly that was partly down to its already low asking price. But still, this definitely deserves the award for Underrated Offroad Racing Game Of 2003, not to mention Fastest Game To Budget, 2004.

The most immediate strengths of *V-Rally 3* are the rich, detailed graphics and the fully deformable car models, although there's more to the game than looks. Indeed, there's some real depth here, with an enjoyable career mode and rewarding driving model.

The only real tarnish comes from the fact that *Colin McRae Rally 04* has appeared in recent months, predictably raising the bar for handling, damage modelling and general driving excellence.



A side effect of this has been to push the price of *Colin McRae Rally 3* down to bargain prices at some outlets, making it difficult to justify the price of *V-Rally 3*. Which is unfortunate, because this is a very solid game.

PCZONE VERDICT 75



A car driving towards you.



And one driving away.

ENCLAVE

■ £9.99 | Pub: Atari | ETA: June 11



Enclave: a dead genre...



...but with pretty blue whirlpools!

NOW HERE'S a game that was just made for budget. Not in a bad way, mind – it's a perfectly competent and actually rather good-looking title. It's just that it's the type of game you only want to pay ten quid for.

In fact, I made my position known on this genre in a previous review – the fantasy hack 'n' slash game, of which this is a classic (if superior) example, is defunct, obsolete, a dead-end for interactive entertainment. Unless someone can reinvent or rehabilitate the genre in some

way, it has no business on the hard drive of any discerning PC games player.

Still, for less than a tenner, I'm willing to lift my embargo just this once, as *Enclave* is probably the most energetic and graphically polished example of the genre since 2001's *Severance*, and it still looks good a year on. It's mindless and hopelessly unsophisticated, but there's enough dumb violence here to justify ten notes. Otherwise, try *Painkiller*.

PCZONE VERDICT 60

LEFTOVERS

▲ Oh dear. The leftovers bin is positively overflowing with excrement this month, god only knows why. It's a real foul-smelling swill, but let's see if we can't find a few kernels of golden corn in there nonetheless.

The first bobbing floater is *Knights Of The Cross* (Games4U, £9.99, Out May 28). Not only is this historical RTS an ugly, unrewarding mess, it also wins the prize for being the first budget title to be released at the same price as the original version (7 per cent). This stunning piece of audacity comes courtesy of new budget label Games4U, which also brings us the 'Allo 'Allo-inspired *Another War* (£9.99, Out May 28), a tedious point-and-click RPG set in Nazi Germany. It's stultifying at best, and earns a generous 18 per cent.

Speaking of Nazis, who remembers *Mortyr* (Games4U, £9.99, Out May 28)? No-one? Oh well, that's probably because it's an awful, four-year-old FPS that nobody in their right mind would play today. Charging a tenner for this rancid dog egg is tantamount to assault: 1 per cent.

Surprisingly, *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire? 2nd Edition* (Sold Out, £4.99, Out Now), proves to be a highlight, the TV-based quiz being much the same as we remember it. That is to say, it's passably entertaining: 50 per cent.

Elsewhere, Atari is re-releasing the client for struggling online RPG *Horizons: Empire Of Istar* (Atari, £9.99, Out June 11). The recently launched MMORPG is dying on its arse, and the client should really be free if Atari wants to save it, so this gets just 45 per cent. Slightly more promising is *Line Of Sight: Vietnam* (Atari, £9.99, Out June 11), a B-grade shooter that's rock-hard but reasonably playable: 58 per cent.

To wrap up, we've got a stealthy turd that slipped under our radar last month – *Will Rock* (Focus Multimedia, £4.99, Out Now). This sub-*Serious Sam* shooter should've been killed at birth, and you'd be better off putting your five quid towards a copy of *Painkiller* – 20 per cent.



Knights Of The Cross: pants.



Mortyr: really, really pants.



Will Rock: still pants.

FEEDBACK

Will Porter grabs the **ZONE** readership, shakes them up and down and inspects the nuggets of wisdom that fall from their clever gaming minds...



Breed: how did it go so wrong?

IT'S YOUR SHOUT

Feedback is here to offer you a platform to have your say about games we've reviewed in recent 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.

FAR CRY

REVIEWED ISSUE 140 (BY WILL PORTER), SCORE: 93%

What we thought

Far Cry is a bona-fide classic: a technological marvel that's as rewarding as it is beautiful.

What you said

Finally we have a game that's made me forget all about *Half-Life 2*'s protracted no-show. Having played every shooter of note in recent years, *Far Cry* easily surpasses the other pretenders to the FPS throne. Think of the beauty of *Unreal II*, the scale of *IGI 2* and playability that eclipses anything else in its genre and you won't be far away. *Half-Life 2*? I want *Far Cry 2*. Yesterday.

Paul Kitson

Far Cry is a superb game but it's very hard at times – sometimes frustratingly so. For some reason, however (even though I keep on dying and have to replay the same section countless times), something keeps on drawing me back. I know it isn't really unlimited and you're always drawn a certain way, but the illusion of freedom is there and I love it. So the fancy graphics and watery water, the gameplay is ace.

Darrenmdr

Will's comment:

Far Cry is astounding, and yes it can get frustrating at the



Far Cry brings a happy tear to every shooter-loving eye.

same time – but as you say, the replays are so great that it doesn't really matter. Personally, I really like being challenged by a game and really quite respect *Far Cry*'s take-no-prisoners approach and dedication to autosaves. It's still the best single-player shooter I've played in years.

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004

REVIEWED ISSUE 138 (BY RICHIE SHOEMAKER), SCORE: 91%

What we thought
UT2004 offers just about all you could ever want in

with four other players and you'll see what I mean). The multiplayer is the shining point, but the single-player is by no means a tagged-on gimmick – it's a worthwhile and challenging campaign too. Many old maps are rejuvenated and great to play once again. I would've given it an extra per cent, but your review was pretty much spot-on.

Wounded Hamster

I got *UT2004* a few days ago and I haven't played anything else since. *UT2003* was a great game, yet it felt hollow somehow: it'd lost

the classic *Unreal Tournament* feel. Clearly, the developer realised its mistakes with *UT2004* – it even has a posh new version of the Classic *UT* menu music this time around! One thing I'll never understand though: why did they get rid of the Ripper from *UT*, yet keep the Bio-rifle?!

Jeren

Richie's comment:

I can't really argue with either of you – once again, you're spot-on. Even you Mr Hamster, suggesting 92 per cent as a more accurate score – which in hindsight, it probably is. What makes *UT2004* such an incredible game to play compared to other wheely-shooters is that the vehicles haven't been allowed to take over the game; running around on foot is just as enjoyable as bounding over the dunes in a buggy. And oh yes, the Bio-rifle. I'll take a per cent off the score for bringing it back, so maybe 91 per cent was on the money after all.

BREED

REVIEWED ISSUE 141 (BY ANTHONY HOLDEN), SCORE: 55%

What we thought

It's not the worst game in the world, but it is a frustrating and flawed

game that will only reward the most forgiving of players.

What you said

I don't know how anyone could have considered this the British equivalent of *Halo*. The enemies stand there motionless, firing shot after shot until you shoot them in the head with your eyes closed. It's more fun getting killed than actually progressing in this crotch of shit.

Rjcanty

Breed: what a fat festering pile of excrement. I was looking forward to this game, but I wasn't very impressed. The gun models look like cheap, tacky plastic toys that you get from a pound shop and the breed themselves are as intelligent as a herd of stoned elephants. Even the transition between Space and planets is crap. And then there's the voice-acting. Ouch. Utterly crap and disappointing.

Graham_123

Anthony's comment:

It's disappointing that a UK production with so much potential came in for such a kicking – but it's certainly deserved. *Breed* is an empty shell of a game with enemies that are essentially dead to the world and abysmal production values. The environments are massive (and OK to look at), but these are the only redeeming qualities of a truly shoddy shooter. [X]



UT2004: a great game, Bio-rifle and all.

550

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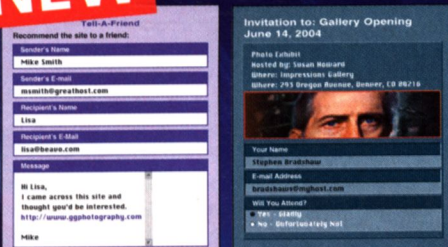
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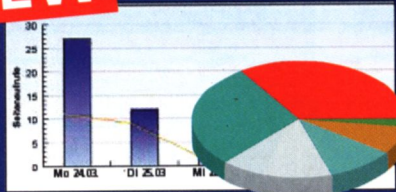
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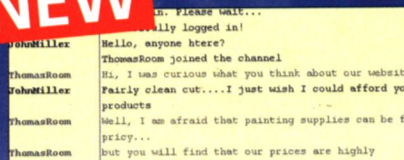
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ONLINE ZONE

BRING YOUR OWN



■ **ONLINE EDITOR:** Paul Presley

▲ So there I am, crafting my way through *Star Wars Galaxies*, gathering wood samples on Tatooine (wool! it's just like the films!), when I'm attacked by a passing beastie, far more powerful than I. My fault, I shouldn't have stepped out into the wilderness without protection, but then I've always had a hankering to see past the next hill, real or virtual.

Anyway, beastie attacks, nearly wipe me out, then just as the killing blow is descending, a robed figure steps out of nowhere and slays it with one swipe of a sword. Cripes. Next thing, I'm being offered a spot of rest and recuperation nearby, and before you can say "crazy old wizard", I'm being invited to join a secretive sect of Jedi-in-training, with the promise of unleashing the hidden depths within.

That's when it hits me - I'm Luke Skywalker! The *Star Wars* story is happening all around me and it's nothing to do with LucasArts or the developers keeping SWG running. It's all down to the players. We're creating our own epic and thrilling content, in spite of the limitations of the gaming system.

Which is where the real 'next-generation' of MMOGs are going to spring from. I mentioned this two issues ago, but it warrants further expansion. The more a MMOG developer tries to develop the rules of its game, the more it's going to find itself struggling to retain a sizeable enough audience to stay afloat. MMOGs aren't games at the end of the day, they're virtual life simulations. OK, simulations set in fantasy worlds or in galaxies far, far away perhaps, but simulations nonetheless. The more freedom a developer allows a game's players in terms of content creation, the more those players want to stay on board for a profitable duration.

▼ Learn the lesson.



DICE ROLLS

TRUE BATTLEFIELD SEQUEL HEADS TO THE MODERN AGE

HISTORY LESSON'S OVER, kids. Fed up (for the moment) of turning our past military conflicts into action-packed virtual reality entertainment for the online masses, EA has let the original Swedish creators of *Battlefield 1942* loose on a modern-day setting. The result is *Battlefield 2*, a new version of the team-based online shooter that redefined the way this genre has developed over the past few years.

Battlefield 2 puts you in the middle of a three-way conflict between the US, China and a coalition of Middle Eastern forces, waging war across air, land and sea in over 30 new vehicles and with just about every modern piece of hardware you can think of. Maps are designed to support over 100 players at a time, and come fully scalable, automatically adjusting the amount of vehicles and hardware available to suit the current number of players.

Unlike the recent *BF Vietnam*, which disappointed some by re-using the existing game engine (with slight tweaks to provide



Strategy plays more of a part this time with the Commander mode.

a more jungle-based atmosphere), *BF2* is set to utilise a brand new graphics engine, built from scratch by the Swedish team.

If you're a techie, the engine is completely shader-driven, with every on-screen pixel being dynamically lit and

shadowed from multiple light sources. And if you wouldn't know a bump map from a bitmap, it looks really pretty, as the screens on these pages demonstrate.

The game is also deformable, with destructible environments finally making those rocket launchers and explosive charges feel as though they're making a proper impact on the world around you. It's doubtful as to whether every part of every level is deformable (the lag times would be horrendous), but it's likely that key structures on each level will certainly be fodder for a rocket or two.

Also new to the *BF* series is the sequel's Commander mode. Taking a cue from recent advances in the field of marrying strategy games to shooters (such as *Savage*), *BF2* enables one player on each

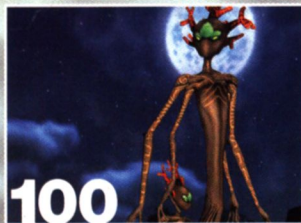


Vehicles will once again be multi-manned for added team value.

"Destructible environments finally make those rocket launchers feel as though they're making a proper impact"



Look at those individually light-sourced pixels.



100

THE SAGA OF RYZOM
Hands-on in Atys



102

ONLINE GAMBLING
Breaking the virtual bank



104

E3 PREVIEWS
The best games at the big show



115

NEVERQUEST
Looting limes in *BiosFear*

BACK TO WAR



Yes, helicopters are supposedly easier to fly this time.

side to take on a tactical role, guiding the flow of the conflict with special tools. Commander rewards are based on how well the team does as a whole, not individual performance, so with the majority of online players being the feckless, uncooperative bunch they are, it's likely to be a thankless job, suitable only for dedicated clans.

That reward structure is just one more way that DICE is hoping to steal a march

(and a dedicated audience) on its rivals. As you continue to fight, you earn promotions, medals and better weapons, rising from green recruit to four-star general. Of course, you have to start from scratch each time you join a new server, as *BF* isn't yet ready for a *PlanetSide*-style persistent world set-up – although a recent interview with the developer indicated this was an area it would like to explore in the future.

That won't be for a while yet, though.

Battlefield 2 is penned for a spring 2005 release and the indicators are that there's plenty of work to keep the team busy between now and then – especially if it wants to get graphics this good looking running online without too much lag.

- Publisher: Electronic Arts
- Developer: DICE Studios
- ETA: Spring 2005
- Website: www.eagames.com

WEBGAME OF THE MONTH

WHY PAY TO PLAY WHEN THE INTERWEB PROVIDES FUN FOR FREE?



STREET FIGHTER FLASH

(FLASHKOF.FREE.FR)

I'm tempted to turn 'Webgame' over to Suzy this month, seeing as she's the resident PC ZONE *Street Fighter* champion (Ahem! – Ant), but I doubt whether this Flash version of the eponymous arcade beat 'em up would prove comprehensive enough for her abilities. Last time Ken, Ryu and the gang came up in post-office pub conversation, it took about five minutes before my bearings were completely adrift in a sea of phrases and nomenclatures such as 'Plus EX2', 'Turbo Revival' and 'Super Street Fighter II Turbo: Grand Master Challenge'. Might as well be Greek to me. I tried to get my own back by talking about World War II fighter plane classifications, but by that stage I'd drunk so much Crème De Menthe I could barely remember whether the FW-190 -B or -C type had its feather point adjusted to a more suitable 200m range. The shame.

But now I have the upper hand, because I've discovered a *Street Fighter* edition previously unknown to Wallace. It's online only, it's Flash-created and, just to cap it all, it's French. Put that in your Dragon Punch and hundred-hand slap it.

Admittedly, it's not going to win any Definitive Version awards at whatever passes for the *Street Fighter* OSCARS, but it's impressive enough, with all the classic characters. There's a (fairly) comprehensive moves list – I lack the knowledge to know whether it's complete or not. What I do know is that it brought back all those horrid memories of not remembering one attack's button combo from another and seeing most of my efforts to hit something as being down to random smacks of the keypad. A randomness that I pretty much associate with playing the arcade version anyway.



Surely this is the dictionary definition of 'frustrating'?

THE ONLINE SHORTS

GLEANNING THE FACTS FROM THE GLOBAL RUMOUR MILL



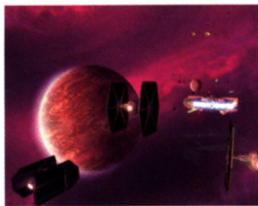
CITIZEN ZERO

While *FFXI* takes care of the PC-PS2 cross-platform market, Micro Forté is hoping to do the same for the PC-Xbox factions with *Citizen Zero*. Following an extended 'downtime' of almost two years, the sci-fi themed MMOG set in an off-world prison colony of the future is being developed on both platforms. Check out www.citizen-zero.com for more.



MORE FINAL FANTASY

Speaking of *FFXI*, Square Enix has unveiled the latest add-on pack to keep Vana'diel ticking over until the eventual European release arrives. *Chains Of Promathia* is set to hit US stores this autumn, bringing with it whole new areas to explore with your chocobos – including the Tavnazian Archipelago and the subterranean Movalpolos.



A NEW HOPE

Star Wars Galaxies has undergone a slight revamp in preparation for the *Jump To Lightspeed* add-on pack. If you're a new player (or starting a new character), you're now given additional guidance on getting started thanks to helper droids steering you through several beginner quests. This gets you more familiar with your chosen career and closer to Jedi-hood.



MOD NEWS

Bungie has cheered the *Halo* community with the *Halo Custom Edition*, bringing with it a series of tech upgrades and the *Halo Editing Kit*. Also, the official *Far Cry* site (www.farcry.ubi.com) now fully supports the FPS's modding community, with links, guides and support. Finally, Free Monkey Interactive is to bring a *U2 XMP* total conversion to *UT2004*.



CLAN DIARY



INFINITY-ESPORTS

PHILIP WRIDE, Manager



Karma was fourth in the Russian heats.

DeliCato charted high in Sweden.

So much has happened since I last put pen to paper – some good and some bad, as is generally the case with gaming at the highest level. First, our impressive *Call Of Duty* team decided to stop playing for Infinity-eSports due to player issues, namely work and college. This is a great loss to the whole of Infinity-eSports, as the *COD* crew were certainly the best in the UK as well as a recognised top team in Europe. Fear not though, we have plans to bring back *Call Of Duty* to I-eS, but that's something for the future. Until then, I'd like to thank all the players that aided in making the first I-eS *COD* team successful and wish them

“Professional gaming is not as easy as some people portray and it's often hard to combine it with other commitments”

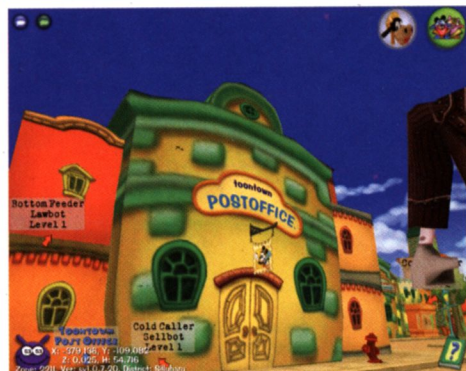
the best in their continuing gaming careers. As this proves, professional gaming isn't as easy as some people portray and it's often hard to combine it with other commitments.

But it's not all doom and gloom this month. On a more positive note, we're pleased to announce that one of the world's best *Warcraft 3* teams has come to Infinity-eSports, bringing in a combination of Swedish and Russian superstars who've shown the masses on numerous occasions what they're made of. The team are currently competing in what can be considered the 'Champions League' of *Warcraft 3*, with impressive results. Not only this, but several of the players took part in national Acon4 qualifying events during the weekend of April 18-19 and did the team proud. DeliCato placed third overall in the Swedish qualifiers, while Karma did a good job too, finishing fourth in the Russian qualifiers. The other players that took part put in a good showing on behalf of I-eS and it means we now have a solid platform to build from.

In essence, things are looking good for the team, with a new squad, a partnership with www.everglide.co.uk being announced and all the players looking forward to the summer season. We're all fired up and ready for action – stay tuned to see how we get on.

TOONTOWN GOES EURODISNEY

THE CHILD-FRIENDLY CARTOON MMOG GETS A EUROPEAN LAUNCH



ToonTown, a world of magical fantasy.



Trolley rides provide access to mini-games.

NOT OUR usual beat perhaps, but fans of Uncle Walt's sugar-coated happiness wanting to spread his infectious good, clean, family fun into our virtual playscapes will be pleased to hear about the imminent European release of Disney's *ToonTown Online*.

Available Stateside for the past half a year or so, *TTO* has managed to pick up a sizeable following – among both its target audience of pre-to-early teens and also attracting several

'inner' children still lurking in adults, longing for simpler, happier times.

So far, around 50,000 subscribers have signed up, but Disney is hoping that with May's European marketing push, a whole new audience will enter the land of Mickey, Pluto, Goofy et al.

TTO sees you creating your own toon creature from a series of animal templates, then using a collection of 'gags' to fight off the evil 'Cogs',

unleashed upon the land by an unwitting Scrooge McDuck. Think *Final Fantasy* with custard pies and you're on the right track.

We'll take an in-depth look next month, assuming an anvil doesn't fall on our heads in the meantime.

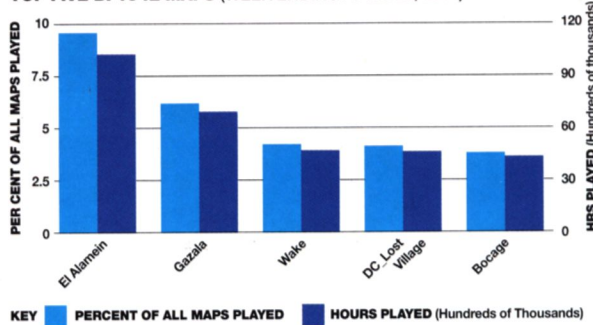
- Publisher: Disney
- Developer: Disney
- ETA: May 2004
- Website: TBA

STATZONE

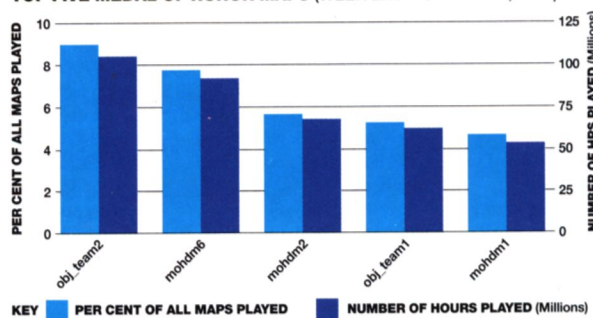
A LOOK AT THE DATA SHAPING YOUR ONLINE WORLD

ALL DATA SUPPLIED BY: ESPORTS.NET

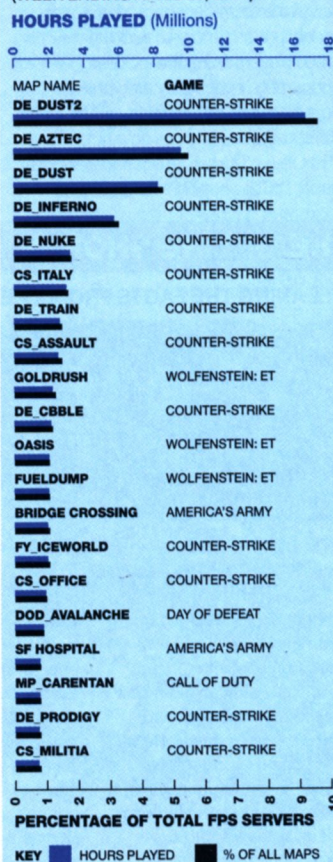
TOP FIVE BF1942 MAPS (WEEK ENDING APRIL 25, 2004)



TOP FIVE MEDAL OF HONOR MAPS (WEEK ENDING APRIL 25, 2004)



TOP TWENTY FPS MAPS ONLINE (WEEK ENDING APRIL 25, 2004)



WELCOME TO MY WORLD...

Vincent Pourieux and Jean-François Levigne – Dark And Light

MUCH HAS BEEN made of the epic size of the virtual world in *Dark And Light* – a single seamless world stretched over 15,000 square miles, all on one global server. “The size of our world is the result of our decision to have all the players on one logical server,” says Vincent Pourieux, lead programmer at developer NP Cube. “The players will form one big community, and the stories they live are set to be part of the unique history of the world of Ganareth.”


“When players meet in real life, they won’t have to ask ‘which server do you play on?’” adds his development colleague, Jean-François Levigne.

Aside from the sheer scale of the thing, Ganareth is being filled with all sorts of interesting features. Should

the idea of schlepping across the vast terrain on foot not appeal, tamed dragons provide a handy transport service for up to 80 people at a time. Alternatively, should you find yourself atop a snowy mountain peak with nowt but a sword, a shield and a suit of armour to your name, and the thought of wading knee-deep in packed snow doesn’t fill you with joy, the shield can double as a handy snowboard too, meaning you can ski your way across the piste.

According to Pourieux, these smaller elements go hand in hand with the mammoth gameworld in creating the overall *Dark And Light* experience. “The world of Ganareth is being acknowledged because its unique graphics create not only an environment for fighting

and growing a power base, but also an environment that players enjoy being in,” he says. “In a recent survey, most of our testers said that the first thing they wanted to do when they discovered *D&L* was to go and explore the world. Not many games can claim that!”

Exploration is further enhanced by the use of the proprietary VWorld Technology software, a satellite imaging program that translates real-world terrain data into virtual world form. This means that NP Cube can take certain liberties with geography. “Thanks to our technology, you can admire some of the most beautiful landscapes on Earth,” says Levigne. “I particularly like the fact that we now have Hawaii facing Reunion Island – which is where we’re located!” 

“I particularly like the fact that we now have Hawaii facing Reunion Island”

JEAN-FRANÇOIS LEVIGNE DARK AND LIGHT

■ Publisher: n/a
 ■ Developer: NP Cube
 ■ ETA: TBC
 ■ Website: www.darkandlight.com



THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Nevrax
PUBLISHER Wanadoo
WEBSITE www.ryzom.com
ETA June

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- A fantasy MMOG with nary an orc in sight
- Pacifists gain power and respect through complex crafting
- No tiresome loading delays during play
- Tutorials offer newbie-friendly learning curve
- Living, breathing world boasts day/night cycles and seasons



"I told you. No shoes, no tie, no face mask - you ain't coming in."

The hills are alive...

THE SAGA OF RYZOM

Will Sargent gets hands-on and back to nature in darkest Basingstoke



Bet that's not eco-friendly.



The annual dance-off gets nasty.

OUR BEARDS have grown long since we last travelled the lands of Atys. But we've spent this time well, crafting a five-blade razor with three – yes three! – LubraStrips to tidy our appearance for this, *ZONE's* second presentation of garlic-scented MMOG, *The Saga Of Ryzom*.

Whether your gaze is currently distracted skywards, towards the twin moons of Tatooine, or westwards, towards the congested pathways of Norrath, we recommend a short romantic trip to the enchanted forests of the Green Planet. The fresh air will do you good. You see, we've been helping with beta test duties this month (praise be for all that French dialogue!), so be quiet while we tell you all about it.

Ryzom makes no excuses for being a complex, skill-based RPG, as opposed to character-based. Its modular systems apply to every area of

the game, from foraging to spell-making, so if you found *Diablo 2's* manual confusing, you might well be advised to look elsewhere. Yes folks, this is hardcore, but if you like the idea of cooking up your own spells and attack sequences, then this is definitely the place to be.

There's no wizard, warrior or thief template to climb inside at the character creation screen. Instead, you pledge allegiance to one of four civilisations (Faros, Matis, Trykers and Zorai), and then modify the proportions and features of your avatar. With everything from 'chin depth' to 'nose level' to tinker with, it's unlikely you'll come across your long-lost identical twin in a hurry.

LAND AND FREEDOM

Each civilisation has its own distinctive look and habitat (desert, forest, lakeland and jungle respectively), each fraught with unique dangers and opportunities. But you won't experience the best of this geographical variety until after level 20, when you leave the safe confines of 'newbie island' for the... (crack of lightning) mainland! Mwah-ha-haa!

The next stage is to balance skills, again using a simple slider system to prioritise Fight, Magic and Forage. This is



NEVRAX

This is the first game from Nevrax, but don't jump back in your X-Wing just yet – these boys are hardcore D&D buffs with years of real-world, dice-wielding experience which will help sculpt the most shapely of MMOG. CEO David Cohen has lured a number of Brits to Paris to help realise his Gallic vision, including online tech specialist Daniel Miller who was previously working with Sony UK. A handful of Cohen's childhood pals, including laconic dungeon master 'Vince D' make up the numbers in a team of around 50 staff.



Run for the hills - it's the Kitin invasion!

important, and although you can tweak your character's skills once underway, you'll save loads of time deciding here whether you want to twat, zap or build stuff. And yes, before you ask, our bronzed warrior did waste half an hour scrabbling for goodies with his bare hands before we realised Conan's sausage fingers might not be best suited to crafting silk slippers.

Crank up the Forage bar to full, ignoring all other skills, and you'll begin with half-a-dozen essential prospecting and foraging skills, giving you an immediate head start as a craftsman. Go in with all guns blazing (full Fight bar) and you'll enter the game loaded with dagger attack, taunt, shield and more, ready to slice and dice all who cross your path.

These abilities, or 'actions', are the lifeblood of *Ryzom*, and as you gain experience in foraging, fighting or magic you add new and more powerful actions to your repertoire of moves.

A WINDOW ON YOUR WORLD

Having patched and pumped the main game into your PC's RAM chips, the first challenge is the interface. The usual array of radar, map, compass, chat, player stats and inventory are there to greet you, but there are new ideas too. Click on a body part and your inventory highlights compatible items; set a waypoint marker on the map (this can be fellow guild-member's later in the game) and your radar will point the way, counting down the metres as you run. Handy if your clan has left you, or if you did a runner from a beast after finding a rich seam of new resource.

Four tiny VDU icons at the bottom of the screen hot-switch through preset info bar configurations, enabling a quick switch between, say, inventory management and combat duties.

Starting at your village centre, traders and quest masters are on hand to help you get levelled up to 20 fast. Complete basic quests, such as 'find a mushroom' or 'kill a creature' and you'll gain skill points to trade in for new actions.

Having set out to be a craftsman, we

were soon adding to our forage and prospecting skill-set, improving both the volume and quality of resources available to us. Before long, we had the equivalent of *Time Team*'s 'GeoPhys' to hand, and nothing underground was safe from our pickaxe. Not much use when a pack of ravenous dogs decides a weedy archaeologist will do for dinner, but a quick respawn to the nearest village centre (choose from five or so respawn points) and a ten-minute wait to get Hit Points, Stamina, Sap (mana) and Focus (foraging energy) back up to peak levels, and you're ready for the next big dig.

Initial impressions of *Ryzom* are good. The game looks superb and plays smoothly enough – a touch of lag is to be expected at beta stage, especially with all those bump-mapped backdrops and highly populated scenes.



Bet they wish they'd packed brollies.

Admittedly, success (and enjoyment) will be dependent on joining guilds, undertaking larger quests and tinkering with home-brew actions and spells. With NevraX due to end the beta and move to full release imminently, we'll let you know how it all shapes up as soon as we know more. [37]



A land of beauty, splendour and very short skirts.

"Before long we had the equivalent of *Time Team*'s 'GeoPhys' to hand, and nothing underground was safe from our pickaxe"



THERE'S NO 'I' IN TEAM

THE DOOR TO RYZOM'S WORLD SWINGS WIDE OPEN ONCE YOU'VE TEAMED UP WITH A GUILD

Teamwork in *Ryzom* is your number one priority – not just between individual players, but also between guilds and civilisations. The higher your guild gets, the nearer it gets to leading an entire civilisation. Eventually, a guild can climb so high it will become a 'dungeon master' in its own right, providing new missions to the lower level players. There will be political decisions or suggestions to make to other guilds about relationships with various tribes and civilisations. Although the existing tribes of Atys inhabit acres of land, there's plenty of virgin territory to be claimed for your own needs. Of course, you can only realistically achieve this by working hard as a guild, so balanced teamwork is essential if world domination is your goal.



The guild is set – let's rock!

You won 1.00 GBP on Field Bet



User: Dave_pcz
 Balance: £10.00
 Total Bet: £5.00
 Bet: £1.00

SPECIAL BETS

Stay out of the black and in the red, nothing in this game for two in a bed. Oh no, sorry, wrong game.

PLACE YOUR BETS

There are plenty of online games you can play that pay out real cash money. We sent *Dave Woods* in to make our millions...



IN THE annals of gambling, I boast a fair few entries – for all the wrong reasons. Spurred on by a first-time win on the horses about ten years ago, I've been on a downward spiral ever since, starting with the time I forgot to put a bet on after being tipped off about some complicated sting operation by my brother. "Dave! How much did you win? I got £1,500!"

Then there was the time I received a chain email urging me to bet on Nasty Nick winning *Big Brother*. I put the bet on and forwarded the email to my mates, reasoning that if loads of people had a stake in him winning, he was bound to romp home. Trouble is, just after I placed my bet, the news came that he'd been kicked out for cheating.

I did come out even the one time I went to Las Vegas, but my luggage was lost en route and I had to gamble in an oversized

Elvis T-shirt and a pair of fluorescent orange shorts...

Of course, this streak of bad luck makes me perfectly qualified to skim the murky world of online gambling – if I can win money, then you definitely can. My brief's simple: take a wedge of the mag's cash, then play blackjack, poker, craps and roulette until I've either doubled my pot or lost the lot. Apparently, if I win big I've got to take the rest of the ZONE team out for a slap-up dinner. Yeah, right...

**DAY ONE
 BLACKJACK
 BANK: \$75**

Blackjack. Not even I can mess up blackjack. I decide to start at www.888.com because the ads boast it's the 'biggest online casino since 1996'. And before you scoff, that sort of claim is going to look pretty impressive in 200 years time.

As with all online casinos, you can play for free on the practice tables, but it's a very different game with virtual money. If you're not going to lose real money, why not twist on an 18?

**5 MINUTES LATER
 BANK: \$90**

OK, I've yet to play a hand, but as a first-time user I've been given a 20 per cent bonus. I try to leave, but am reminded of 888's cash-out policy. Worth a go. First hand up, I bet a dollar. One dollar. And I win, which gives me two dollars. Next hand, I'm in for \$5: I get an ace/seven, the dealer gets a four. I double up, hit a 21 and he busts, netting me \$20. I've never been happier.

Six losing hands later though and I'm beginning to wonder about the 'random' factor of these places – it seems to be playing more like a dodgy end-of-pier machine. With my mind on this, I nearly make a fatal mistake when I try to double on a 20, thinking it'll double my bet. It hits me with another card, but unbelievably I hit an ace and win. Happy days.

**40 MINUTES LATER
 BANK: \$147**

I'm on a run, with cards printed by the good Lord himself and close to doubling my money – at which point, I'm going to call it a night. And then the unthinkable happens. The cards of Satan

"The cards of Satan come to stay and I'm wiped out in a short stretch"



WARNING!
 Gambling is bad. Gambling can cost you a lot of money. It can also be fun, as long as you're prepared to lose everything you stake. PC ZONE can accept no responsibility if you decide to log on when drunk and wake up to find you've maxed out your credit cards and pawned your TV set. PC ZONE would, however, like to accept responsibility if you win lots of money.



As Abba once trilled, the winner does indeed take it all.



Careful of the bloke in the dodgy hat.



Win or lose, poker's always fun.

come to stay and I'm wiped out in a short stretch that puts me on a downer for the next 24 hours.

1HR 40 MINUTES LATER BANK: \$0

If I was playing in an unregulated arena, I'd swear the cards were rigged. If I was back in the Wild West, someone would be dead. One question I'd like the answer to: how can you keep getting dealt 14s and 15s, time after time after time? Huh? You want me to leave? OK, and don't expect to see me here again.

DAY TWO POKER BANK: \$75

It's time to embrace a game of skill, bluff and counter-bluff. Poker, namely Texas Hold 'Em. The best bit? Online, no-one can see you shake like a leaf.

I hit www.pokerroom.com, which provides basic tutorials if you're not sure about the rules of the game. It also has some tournaments, where you pay a stake plus a commission for the house and take the pot if you win. I sign up for the next one available and try to memorise the order of the winning hands. Four aces is good? Right?

10 MINUTES LATER BANK: \$1,500

Steady. Once you've paid your tournament money (in this case \$10), you get virtual chips to play with. I want to play for more but this is the only table that seems to be attracting attention. I play cautiously until I hit 'pocket aces' and go in with a huge bet (\$500). Everyone else folds. On the next flop an ace appears, everyone else checks and I put another big bet in, despite the fact that I've got nothing in my

pocket (a three and a six). Everyone buckles like a belt. Again. I'm the king of the world.

20 MINUTES LATER BANK: \$5,395

You're looking at the chip leader. Four people are out and I've taken over \$3,000 on one hand. I get a full house, queens

and twos and bet huge. Disaster. I go big and lose to a full house, queens and sixes. Shithouse.

1 HR 30 MINUTES LATER BANK: \$0

I'm out, placed fourth – but while I've lost \$11, I don't care. That was fun. If you can trust yourself to play sensibly, online poker is the future. I move to the ring tables and lose everything. Double shithouse. Stick to the tournaments until you know what you're doing.

DAY THREE CRAPS AND ROULETTE BANK: £50

I try to download the Casino software from Ladbrokes but keep getting error messages, so switch to William Hill. I head for the craps table and realise I don't know how to play. I click a few chips down, win a couple of throws, lose a couple and head for the roulette round about even, but none the wiser.

10 MINUTES LATER BANK: £50

I start betting on straight reds and blacks, but more than any other game yet, roulette just doesn't seem real when you're playing on your PC. The ball doesn't spin convincingly, and not physically getting the chips on the table makes it look like I'm not winning. Which I'm not.

15 MINUTES LATER BANK: £116

I start hitting a single number, covering splits on surrounding numbers and bed in. Then I start winning: only small at first, until I hit the jackpot. Red 19 comes up, a number I've got covered and surrounded. Ker-ching! I've more than doubled my money and I cash out.



Hands up if you know how to play this...

HELP!

HOW TO BREAK THE ONLINE BANK (OR DIE TRYING)...



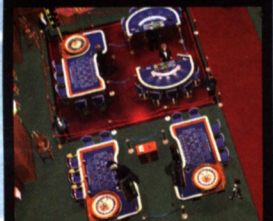
BLACKJACK

Blackjack's probably the easiest game to play online and the odds are pretty good. The dealer has to draw to 16 and stick on 17s and above, so it's often worth standing from as low as a 12. Double up if you hit an 11, split if you get a pair of aces and play it patiently. It's predominantly a game of chance though, so don't risk \$100 on a hand unless you feel really lucky.



POKER

Play cautiously at the start. Texas Hold 'Em is the main poison – everyone gets two cards face down and you make up the hand from the flop (another five face up). Bet if you get an ace in your pocket, or connected suits, but don't get carried away (like me) and start betting on low pairs when the flops produce picture cards.



ROULETTE

Complete luck. Tips are pretty much useless, but try and come up with a pattern that suits you. I play a single number and connect all the other adjoining numbers as well, essentially covering a group. If your main number comes up, you're in for a big win. Do that or stick to red/black odd/even bets, but remember the house has the odds, with the 0 and 00 slots.

FEED THE ADDICTION

BLACKJACK: www.888.com

POKER: www.pokerroom.com

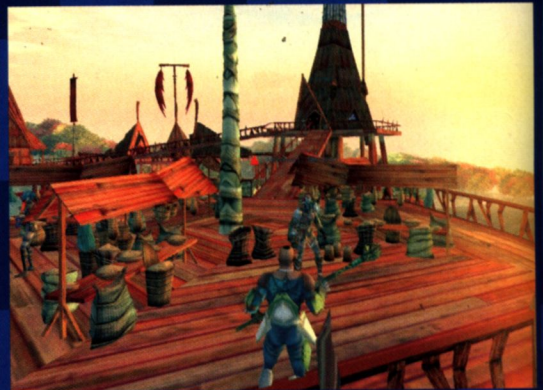
CRAPS AND ROULETTE:

www.ladbrokes.com

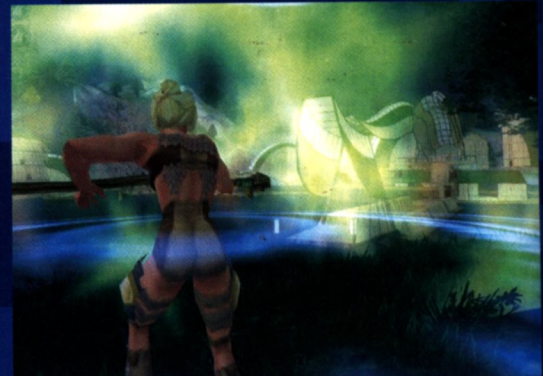
www.williamhill.co.uk



Visually distinctive and full of depth... And that's just the trousers.



Crafting, buying and selling make for a dynamic economy.



The magic's good, but it isn't helping budge that thing is it?

Ready for take-off...

DRAGON EMPIRES

The British are coming! Paul Presley looks at a MMOG from over here that's hoping to make a big splash over there...

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Codemasters
PUBLISHER Codemasters
WEBSITE www.dragonempires.com
ETA November 2004

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Player-controlled cities, economy and world growth
- 10,000 square miles of seamless fantasy world
- Five realms controlled by in-game dragons
- It's British, so let's get behind it!

IF YOU'RE a regular reader of Online Zone, you may have been following the progression of *Dragon Empires*, thanks to our recently concluded series of Developer Diaries. Of course, that wasn't going to stop us from paying the team a visit at this year's show to see how things are shaping up as they prepare for the first of three public beta tests ahead of the scheduled November release.

As the game's title suggests, the world is split into five empires, each

ruled over by a distinctive type of dragon. As we're taken on a whistle-stop, god mode-assisted tour of the landscape, two things become apparent. One is how very different in nature, atmosphere and style the five empires are from each other. The second is how having a single, seamless world adds a sense of scale to these games. Zones may provide concentrated experiences for the designers, but from a player's perspective, nothing quite beats cresting a mountain ridge, gazing

out over the rolling hills stretching for miles into the distance and knowing you can clamber all over them.

ALL BACK TO MINE

The five dragon types infuse their personalities all over their domains. This means the insect dragon's cities are all dark, menacing and vaguely threatening, while the fish dragon presides over an aquatic Waterworld-type affair. The bird dragon, meanwhile, has its home among the treetops, Ewok-style, and the human-dragon hybrid sets her stall out atop giant towers, lording it over the slums below. Finally, the monkey dragon - *ZONE's* favourite - and his primitive world wouldn't look out of place in *Planet Of The Apes*, circa the Charlton Heston era.

To date, no fantasy MMOG has been able to escape from the

CV



CODEMASTERS

Probably most famous for the Colin McRae and TOCA line of driving titles, *Dragon Empires* marks the evergreen Britsoft publisher/developer's entry into the MMOG world.

1980-1989

The brothers Darling form Codemasters and make several million with a raft of 8- and 16-bit titles. Ferraris all round.

1990-2003

Hundreds of games on every platform, covering every subject have great success - the biggest involving Colin McRae.

2004

Dragon Empires charts a new path for the company, leading the way for other Brit MMOGs to follow.



That's one magic hat!





"Get your stinking paws off me, you damn dirty ape!"

click 'n' wait school of combat controls. Many try to sugar the pill by adding time-based abilities, stance options, or by placing strict limits on different class functions mid-fight. At first, it doesn't appear that *Dragon Empires* has solved the problem either, but then we're shown the hidden depths at work.

As you progress through levels, you get to choose the spells or combat abilities that your weapons become infused with, dependent on the particular magic or skills you opt to learn. Combined with the base attributes of each weapon, it means that you can carry a very personalised arsenal, switching between weapons as you need their particular benefits. No two swords will be the same, for example, as their abilities vary according to their particular owner.

POWER GAMES

What justifies *DE*'s presence in the MMOG genre perhaps more than any other aspect of the game is the amount of player control displayed within the gameworld.

While most MMOGs give you a progression tree and a static environment to grow older in, *DE* at least gives you a sense of direction, a reason to keep coming back – namely in the shape of player-controlled cities.

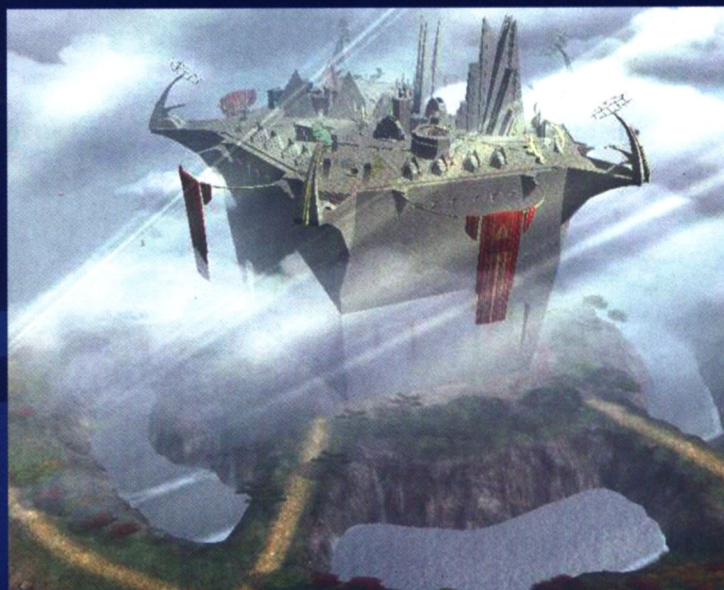
Forming a clan is a crucial step towards making a long-term impact, as once you've proven your worth to the dragon rulers, you're allowed to challenge for control over every one of the game's cities and towns.

Controlling clans get to decide on a city's manufacturing direction, as well as being allowed to expand their holdings *and* earn tax revenue from traders and crafters who set up shop within their walls.

CAPTURE THE FRAG

You might think this would leave the world in a chaotic state, but there's actually a real sense of structure to everything. To challenge for a city, your clan has to first prove its worth to an empire's inhabitants, earning a reputation through deeds and actions as well as through growth.

Once accepted, you can then issue a challenge to a city-based clan that's proven to be unstable or ineffective. Battles take place at set times (controlled by the dragon overlords) and



The majestic empire of 'The Lady'. A classy place, ripe for invasion.

are fought by a fixed number of players (you pick your best team as though you were a football manager with a large squad), attackers having to control each city's 'capture points' to win.

City combat isn't the only form of PvP available to you anti-social types. Blood Circuses provide the arenas for duelling between players – teams of up to six players can take on others in deathmatch-style combat, wagering forming the reward. Of more interest are the role-based encounters, where you can opt to become an outlaw, bounty hunter or trader, amassing a reputation

whenever you cross your empire's border to cause trouble or look for profit.

ALWAYS ON

Codemasters is backing *Dragon Empires* for the long run, knowing the lengthy financial commitments needed to produce a success in this genre. Regular quest and content updates will keep things fresh, while half-yearly (or thereabouts) expansions should keep the hardcore crowd coming back for more. We'll be taking a deeper look once the beta tests get going: until then, we're practising our monkey impressions. ☑



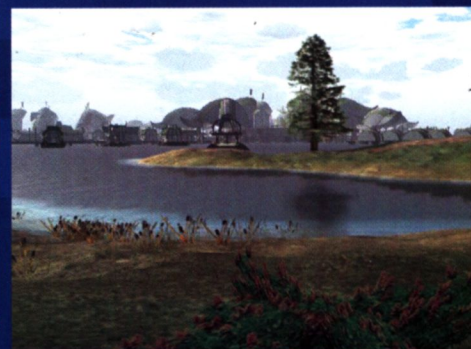
Scary, but his house still looks like Gandalf's hat.



"The five dragon types infuse their personalities all over their domains"



The unforeseen dangers of free-range chicken farming.



Swansea – the early years.



She's begging for it. Resurrection that is.



Group combat is all about effective combos.

That ol' Blizzard magic WORLD OF WARCRAFT

The fanboy favourite gets a public airing

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Blizzard
PUBLISHER VU Games
WEBSITE www.blizzard.com/wow
ETA Late 2004

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- If there's one thing Blizzard does well, it's game balancing
- The *Warcraft* universe is one of the most popular in gaming...
- ... And now it's a persistent massively multiplayer one
- Story-driven content over random, meaningless level grinding

THE ONE thing that the MMOGs of E3 almost all seemed to share was a desire to include content for players that has some meaning. No-one has taken that to heart quite as much as Blizzard though, as the large crowds surrounding the plethora of *World Of Warcraft* machines proved.

Every quest in the game has an associated storyline, often containing multiple parts, meaning your character progression is as much about exploring the unfolding narrative as it is levelling and numbers.

Of course, *Warcraft* is best known for the intricately balanced strategic gameplay – a factor that most comes over in the PvP areas of *World Of Warcraft*.

Battlefields provide teams with the chance to really go at it, fighting for control over gold mines, binding stones (for regeneration and empire growth) and habitable towns. Knowing how best to use your personal skills in the combat zone – as well as



Something of a rainbow coalition.



KISS embark on another world tour.

how to combine them with the skills of your team-mates – is the key to victory.

So far, the game has been in a closed, invitation-only beta test state across North America, and the response from the fans has been overwhelmingly positive. The *Warcraft* universe is one of such depth that being able to enter it first-hand is proving an almost irresistible attraction for most. However, it's also causing the development team the most problems with regards to keeping people happy.

Just days before E3, for instance, the team added a new feature to the beta that received mixed responses at best. Characters now get experience point bonuses for being fully rested, as well as penalties for adventuring while tired. While this doesn't sound too radical on the face of things, what rankled most players was that you could only

be fully rested at specific inns – meaning that it actually punished the hardcore crowd who put in hours of questing and adventuring time. Luckily, the demonstrations at the show seem to indicate that player-built camps will now also allow 'full' resting bonuses, which should hopefully calm a few hackles.

It has to be said that most of *WOW* follows fairly standard MMOG lines. But where the hook lies is in that Blizzard magic – the ability to push an existing genre practically to breaking point in terms of craftsmanship and gameplay mechanics. Just adding a sense of purpose to everything is so far putting the game at the top of the list for many gamers, so what the team has in store for inclusion between now and the eventual release will most likely be enough to keep that banner raised high for even non-devotees.



MEDAL OF HONOR: PACIFIC ASSAULT

■ Dev: EA PACIFIC/TKO | Pub: EA | ETA Q3 2004 | www.ea.com

EA heads for enemy territory with *Pacific Assault* multiplayer



"Anyone here called Ryan?"



And then his heart went BOOM... along with his body.

PACIFIC ASSAULT, the latest entry in EA's WW2 shooter franchise, is fast approaching completion, and is showing every intention of taking back the crown so effortlessly lifted by *Call Of Duty* last year. E3 gave us a chance to sample some single-player missions, but we also had a chat with multiplayer producer Matt Powers about the online side of the game.

"*Medal Of Honor* is known as the best single-player first-person shooter of all time. We want people to say the same thing about the multiplayer game."

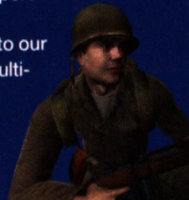
Matt's key weapon in this battle is a new game mode called *Invader*. Smelling strongly of *Enemy Territory*, *Invader* is an objective-based attack-and-defend game for two teams. "We've based all the scenarios on real-life battles," says Matt. "Generally, the Japanese are on an island defending and the allies are attacking."

In a first for *Medal Of Honor*, *Invader* is also set to feature a full set of player classes, including corpsman (medic), combat engineer and basic infantry – again, strongly paralleling *Enemy Territory*. "We're

integrating drivable vehicles as well," adds Matt. "It's not a vehicle combat game by any means, but vehicles are integrated in a few appropriate places in the maps."

EA is also promising first-class community support, including stat-tracking, anti-cheat devices and maximum support for modders.

According to our sources the multiplayer game is almost done, so expect a playtest soon.



Messin' about on the river...



The most action-packed screenshot in the world.

ROME: TOTAL WAR

■ Dev: The Creative Assembly | Pub: Activision | ETA: Q4 2004 | www.totalwar.com

Friends, Romans, countrymen. Lend me your ADSL connections

ACTIVISION WAS

proudly showing off *Rome's* multiplayer aspects at the show, even though, currently, there's only one type of mode – kill everything and everyone that's not on your side, just like in single-player. However, you can have up to eight generals and four teams battling each other on a single map.

We tried out a two-on-two play test, first selecting our factions from a choice of 12, picking our troops – which we decided upon with our team mates to make sure we had a balanced force – and then arranging our armies on the battlefield.

Once hostilities commenced, we liaised over a voice communication system with our comrades, meaning we could converse without the eavesdropping scumbag enemy – who sat opposite – overhearing our plans. We agreed that he'd hold a solid wall of spearmen backed up by archers on a ridge in order to suck the enemy in, while we would



Multiplayer games are phenomenal.

wheel round the back of our opponents with the cavalry and decimate their unsuspecting forces.

It worked like a dream. The cavalry charges were staggering, with horses flattening scores of enemies with their awesome impact and the game flowing more

smoothly than malt whiskey at a Scotsman's birthday party.

What's more, because the only information being sent from one machine to the next is the occasional order, online games are set to run every bit as smoothly as the seamless LAN games.

JOINT OPERATIONS: TYPHOON RISING

■ Dev: NovaLogic | Pub: NovaLogic

| ETA: Summer 2004

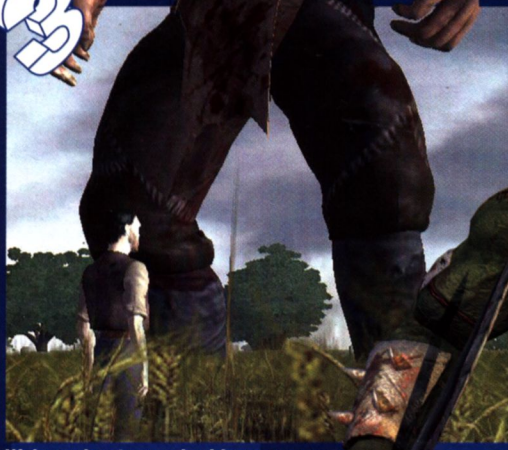
Web: www.jointopsthegame.com

FIRST THE BAD news. *Joint Operations* has been pushed back from May to later this summer. The official reason given is the usual 'final polishing... committed to delivering excellence... blah de blah' corporate spiel. From our extensive testing of the beta version, we'd say it's mainly down to eliminating the horrendous lag displayed on some of the larger servers.

The good news is that conceptually it still looks like a winner – 100-player games; all the vehicles, guns and military equipment you could ask for; and scenery to die for. It's clear that NovaLogic is determined to make this the premier online tactical shooting experience.

Teamwork is going to be key to success, and with *NovaWorld* supporting plenty of clan options, we're likely to see a lot of action in the various ladders and tournaments expected to go live with the game.

All in all, we've pretty high hopes for *Joint Operations'* prospects, assuming those technical details can be sorted.



We're going to need a bigger page.



Arsenal's new defence aim for another unbeaten season.

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Games Workshop/Climax
PUBLISHER Sega
WEBSITE www.warhammeronline.com
ETA 2005

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Forget crafting and poncing about – this is brutal violence at its best
- The *Warhammer* franchise is much loved by UK gamers
- Axes, spikes, blood, guts... Lovely
- It's another MMOG from the UK!

WARHAMMER ONLINE

"Pretty, stable and not crap," says the developer. Get ready for a very British MMOG

"**WE'VE GOT** to look fantastic, certainly as good as any other MMOG. Stability, because it's the life and death of the business. And 'not crap' is a good thing to aim for. Most games are crap, let's be honest. Let people get pissed, let them beat the shit out of things – that's where we want to go. Narrow, but deep." So says the very British team behind the online incarnation of one of the UK gaming world's oldest franchises – *Warhammer Online*.

"It's a very European take on a fantasy world," says producer Robin Dews. "It doesn't have that high-sorcery, chainmail-bikini, bimbo look. It's very gritty and grubby and medieval. We wanted a very innovative take on gameplay mechanics, so we've dropped gameplay levels and class/race matrixes. We looked at loads of other MMOGs and said: 'That's good – we'll nick that,' and 'we don't like that – it's rubbish.'"

Players of the decades-old (and still thriving) tabletop *Warhammer* will be familiar with the setting of orcs, goblins, mud, spikes and mass violence. What won't be so familiar – to anyone – is the way the team is handling the gameplay.

"There's a what-you-see-is-what-you-get approach. For instance, almost every online game has a 'monster con' system. I'll click on a monster and get a little green bar or something that tells me whether it's hard or not. We thought that was rubbish and so threw that concept away. If I'm walking down the street and see a bloke built like a brick shithouse with tattoos and a shaven head, you know if you go up to him a say, 'Hey fatty!' you'll get the crap beaten out of you."

The emphasis is very much on combat. Weapons are sharp, dangerous and almost never sheathed. Magic is

less concerned with producing pretty light shows than it is with taking a target's head off in messy ways. And as for crafting...

"Bollocks to that," is the team's no-nonsense reply. "Who wants to sit around making pants? OK, that's a bit of a lie. The rules we were given were that players can make anything, as long as it's to do with killing people. You can make swords and shields 'cos that's to do with getting drunk. You can brew beer 'cos if you drink good beer, you ultimately want to kill people."

As of yet the beta is still awaiting a public opening and there's no release date in mind, but the smart money is on early 2005. We'll be visiting the Nottingham-based team to get the drinks in and crack a few heads in a couple of months. Stay tuned.



That's the last time he tries the pocket elephant gag in public. The two towns are Worzel and Gummidge. Honest. Is that a bone in your pocket, etc, etc...

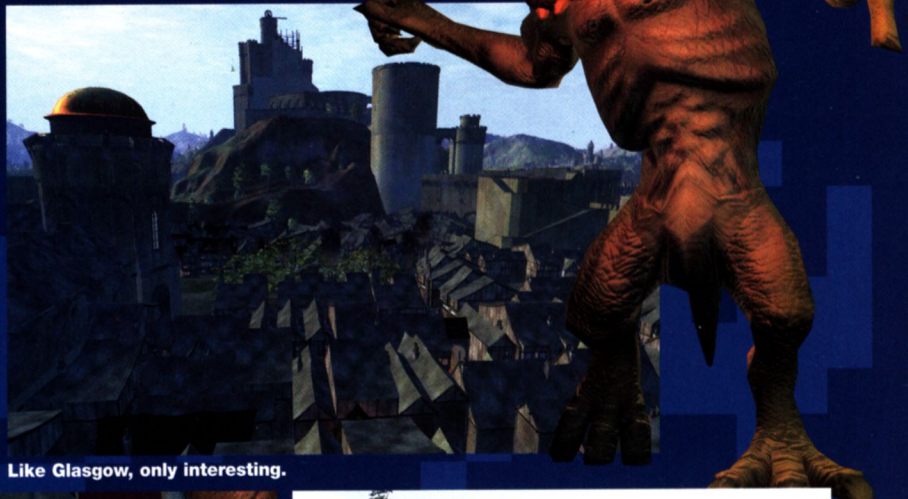
VANGUARD: SAGA OF HEROES

■ Dev: Sigil Games Online | Pub: Microsoft | ETA: 2005 | www.vanguardsoh.com

Mythica may be dead and buried, but Microsoft isn't calling it a day yet...



The *Vanguard* welcoming committee – fruit basket optional.



Like Glasgow, only interesting.

WHILE OFFLINE games flounder somewhat in the peaks and troughs of dying genres, accusations of unoriginality and cookie-cutter design, the online world is rapidly becoming the arena in which developers seek to push the envelope that bit more rigorously. Brad McQuaid did it back in 1999 when he co-created the Western world's most notorious MMORPG *EverQuest* – and now he's seeking to do the same two gaming generations later with *Vanguard*.

Although the game is some way off completion, we were lucky enough to get a sneak preview into just what kind of diabolical scheme Sigil has up its sleeve for finding new ways to suck the time from our fragile lives.

"We've spent the first part of the development cycle putting together the elements of a first-generation MMORPG," explains *Vanguard*'s art director Keith Parkinson. "This means all the features that are associated with those types of games, like different combat classes, trading etc. We did all this in quite a short space of time so that we could



In *Vanguard*, you can own your own buildings.

dedicate the rest of our cycle to the things that hadn't been done before and all the features that will be required in a third-generation title."

What's already there in the game looks visually spectacular even at this early stage. Towns and cities encompass a whole range of fantasy settings – from white-stoned, sublimely Tolkienesque villages that have been all built to scale, to Arthurian castles and closely built

medieval towns that ooze grimy life.

Kevin explains that this mishmash of typical fantasy backdrops is a deliberate move to ease players into the game:

"We've tried to keep the style towards what people might expect, but also tried to give it just that little bit more... It's important that players feel comfortable with the world but at the same time, that they are shown something exciting."

Much of *Vanguard* is still under wraps



Marvel at the biggest ball of mystic twine!

although the developer has started revealing some of the back story on its website. With a strong commitment to community, player grouping and giving the gamer the experience they've always wanted, it's clear that the next phase of *Vanguard*'s development cycle is set to be a very exciting one. With such a development pedigree behind it, not to mention Microsoft's backing, anything and everything is possible.

THE MATRIX ONLINE

■ Dev: Monolith Productions | Pub: Sega | ETA: Late 2004 | www.thematrixonline.com



Kung fu by Bruce Lee. Shoes by Clarks.

SEGA HAD tantalised the gaming world for a couple of weeks prior to the show, with a so-called "explosive announcement", fuelling rumours of new hardware, corporate buy-outs and colonisation of the moon. In actual fact, it simply turned out to be the news that the beloved developer had signed up to publish *The Matrix Online* in the west.

The City forms one of the largest continuous urban MMOG worlds out there, where every building can be entered and fought in. Combat is at the heart of the experience, with faster-paced action than in most MMOGs – a mixture of martial arts, street fighting



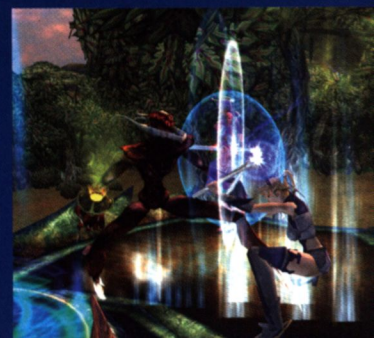
Piggy In The Middle... Extreme!

and gunplay backed up by 'power moves' that attempt to capture the spirit of the film. The setting is directly after the end of the third movie, with citizens awakening to the truth of their virtual shackles and the chaos that ensues.

The Wachowski brothers have consulted heavily in the creation and content of the game world to make sure their vision stays true.



City Of Villains fights for the Dark Side.



Tabula Rasa - Richard Garriot's new game

Not too many carbs in the *Guild Wars* monsters.

NCSoft

Beware European evil-doers! Captain Britain will be saving the day very soon...

NCSoft HAS been carving out quite a reputation recently in the US and Korea thanks to the release of both *City Of Heroes* and *Lineage II*. The good news is that wheels have finally started turning regarding bringing the love to European networks. Nothing has been officially announced yet, but we managed to learn that several big-name publishers have been in talks with the

firm to set up a presence in our neck of the woods.

Of the games at the show, *Guild Wars* was easily the most prominent on the NCsoft stand. Thanks to the 'E3 For Everyone' event that allowed players across the world to download a time-limited trial of the game that ran live during the show dates, it was also one of the biggest gameplay experiences at the whole show, with tens of thousands of gamers taking part.

The game itself stems from ex-Blizzard employees, and if you've ever played *Diablo* via the Battle.net servers, you'll know what to expect from this fantasy offering, with gameplay along similar, albeit prettier lines. It's action-oriented, based around quick, thrilling combat, and the biggest hook is that there's no monthly fee to play. Buy the game once, and pay only for the expansion packs that you like the look of. Not a bad deal, all told.

Meanwhile, *Tabula Rasa* is along more traditional MMORPG lines - as you'd expect from the minds that brought us the original *Ultima Online*. It's not entirely like the others, having more of a *Phantasy Star Online* feel, with central



hubs, private scripted mission areas and plenty of sci-fi action. Integrated voice comms enable you to swap battle tactics with ease and the 'body, mind and spirit' concept runs through every aspect of the game, from character development to combat skills and attack moves.

One genre that's cruelly neglected is the massively multiplayer post-apocalyptic road vehicle combat game.

Luckily, *Auto Assault* is driving into action, letting you team up with heavily-armed convoys in this PvP-based curiosity. Fully destructible maps, cars that transform into big, stompy robots, regular tournaments and even support for steering wheels and gamepads sets AA apart from most MMOGs. There's even crafting involved, although it's mostly in the form of looting your enemies' burning chassis for spare parts and ammo to bolt on.

Finally *City Of Heroes* gets the one expansion pack that everybody wanted - *City Of Villains*. Finally, you can throw away those robes of justice and break out the giant mechanical octopus arms of chaos as you build lairs, attack the citizens and generally live out those Brotherhood Of Evil mutant fantasies. Which is all good, but here in Europe we're still waiting to see the original 'heroic' version of the game. The smart money is on a special bundle pack, but we'll get the full spec soon.

"Finally, *City Of Heroes* gets the one expansion pack that everybody wanted - *City Of Villains*"



FUNCOM

It may not have tigers, but Norway is buzzing with aliens



They're just big pussy cats really. With guns.



You can even get on board the alien ships.

E3 WAS A time for the Norwegian team behind *Anarchy Online* to really start capitalising on the success of the very popular sci-fi themed MMOG. Aside from the upcoming *Alien Invasion* expansion pack (and anyone who's experienced *AO: Shadowlands* knows that the one thing Funcom doesn't do is regular-sized expansions), the big announcement was that there are no less than *three* brand new MMOGs

currently in the pipeline back in Oslo.

This growth is down to the sheer respect the development team has garnered among the games creation community through *AO*, and is also a chance to show off the swanky new game engine about to be displayed in the single-player sequel to *The Longest Journey*. The first of these new MMOGs is set to arrive in mid-2005 and is said to be based on a big upcoming film licence

due for release the same year. Funcom is staying quiet beyond that – for now.

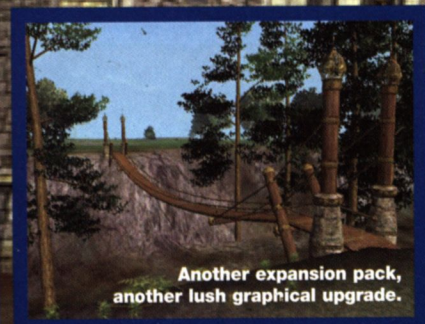
Meanwhile, work on *Alien Invasion* is still keeping the gang busy, with the components for the player-built cities looking extremely impressive, adding a whole new visual style to the already spectacular landscapes of the *AO* world. The aliens are also coming along nicely, with the AI routines and adaptive attack 'waves' providing continually

challenging combat encounters. These adjust each new attack to suit the number of PCs in the area, the particular strengths and weaknesses of the characters and even the skills and equipment used in a previous attack.

We're all over the coming alien arrivals here at *ZONE*, and you can expect us to head to the mothership for an exclusive behind-the-scenes peek in an upcoming issue.

MYTHIC ENTERTAINMENT

Those dark ages keep getting brighter in *Camelot*



Another expansion pack, another lush graphical upgrade.

The new keeps give PvP combat added depth.

THE ONGOING success of *Dark Age Of Camelot*, recently given a healthy boost with the *Trials Of Atlantis* expansion pack, hasn't caused the guys at Mythic Entertainment to rest on their visually enhanced laurels. With E3 came the unveiling of two new upgrade packs – *New Frontiers* and *Catacombs*.

New Frontiers is primarily designed to boost the realm vs realm PvP combat, with siege battles being greatly enhanced thanks to over 20 all-new keeps. These not only look great, but also provide plenty of destructible walls for your giant catapults and trebuchets (and magic) to pummel before you capture them for your realm.

Meanwhile, the new EMotion FX2 engine in *Catacombs* has allowed Mythic to give all the character and monster models in the game a complete overhaul, with the new figures now sporting visuals almost as realistic as the new tree and foliage tech that was introduced with *TOA*. It's also enabled players to completely customise the look of their characters upon creation, from nose length to hair colour. Plans are afoot to let existing characters get some much-needed plastic surgery too.

Also, bearing in mind the name, *Catacombs* introduces a whole range of new subterranean environments to explore. Private caves let groups of players adventure without external interruption and a new 'obelisk teleportation' system provides a new mode of long distance transportation for players growing bored of riding horses.

New Frontiers is set to go live in a couple of months (testing is taking place right now), with *Catacombs* appearing towards the end of the year.

FIGHT CLUB



FIRST RULE OF FIGHT CLUB: PC ZONE OWNZ JØØ
FIGHT CLUB MODERATORS: METALFACE, REX MUNDI & GOWERLY

IT WAS a packed turn out for April's *Unreal II XMP* Fight Club, with no less than seven of the ZONE regulars popping up long enough to be shot to shit by you.

While XMP newcomer Will struggled to understand just what the hell was going on, grizzled vets like Ant made a concerted effort to marshal the troops into some semblance of order. Not that it helped much in the end, of course.

The stand-out moment was surely Prezzer's engineer turning one base camp into a Hampton Court-style maze of shield walls, trip mines and gun turrets, only for Jamie M to accidentally set them all off in one massive chain reaction and the enemy to nip in and win the round. Stand-out players, meanwhile, included Bl1tz, Juups, -PF-Target,

Eddie and TAU:SuicideKing – who certainly lived up to his name. Next month, it's the turn of *UT2004*. We'll bring you a full match report then.

You may have noticed something odd in the upcoming events listing below.

What, exactly, is the 'Summer Special Free-For-All' then? Well, since we now have spanking new public gaming servers to enjoy, we thought we'd celebrate by running amok across all the games we currently support. On August 5, the ZONE team will be jumping on and off each of the different games running, so you're almost guaranteed to find at least one of us playing the game of your choice. Stay tuned to our IRC channel (see ZONE Chat, opposite, for details) for regular updates on the day to see which Zoner is playing what.

COME & 'AVE A GO!
www.zonegames.co.uk
for all the info

WHO'S WHO

Paul Presley	Prezzer
Anthony Holden	Shokupan
Jamie Sefton	NorthernScum
Phil Clark	ShitKicker
Jamie Malcolm	Jimlad
Martin Korda	Nameless One
Will Porter	Batsphinx
Phil Wand	Wandy
Suzy Wallace	Uzibat



Metalface shows his true colours. Not very pretty are they?



Defensive tactics feature heavily.



The ZONE team scores a point. Finally.



Will fails to capture an energy point.

UPCOMING FIGHT CLUB EVENTS

THURSDAY JUNE 3

6.30pm – 9.00pm
Battlefield Vietnam

THURSDAY JULY 1

6.30pm – 9.00pm
Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory

THURSDAY AUGUST 5

6.30pm – 9.00pm
Summer Special Free-For-All



Prezzer roasting on an open fire...

ZONECHAT

RECORDED IN FRONT OF A LIVE STUDIO AUDIENCE...

WITH E3

currently dominating the schedules like a special episode of *EastEnders* in which Dot Cotton, drugged out of her skull on tea and mescaline lays waste to the entire Slater clan in a mad frenzy, ZONE Chat is being held later than usual this month. This means that we can't include it in this month's pages, as we've already gone to press by May 5, the date for our virtual chinwag.

Not wanting you to feel left out however, young Will took it upon himself to jump into the 24-hour fun palace that is our chat channel late one Friday night for an impromptu natter. Just goes to show that you never can tell when we might pop up, so it pays to stay tuned at all times. Who needs real life anyway?

If you want to take part, you'll require an IRC program - we recommend mIRC (www.mirc.com) as the most straightforward and easy to use. Once installed and set up, log on to irc.uk.quakenet.org then type '/join #pcz' to enter the PC ZONE channel. There, you'll find a



whole gaggle of your fellow Zoners, eager to hold court on matters of great import. Or just what they're having for tea.

The next official ZONE Chat is on Wednesday June 16, 5-7pm in the #pcz channel. It'll have the usual nonsensical shouting, embarrassing emotes and pointless competitions. Make sure you have this issue of PC ZONE to hand, as you'll need it to win. Prezzer will be there talking about E3, while Will will be trying to pretend he doesn't care about not going at all. See you there!

**WEDNESDAY
JUNE 16
5.00PM - 7.00PM**

LAN ROVER

STEVE 'SCALPER' RANDALL FILLS UP ON ADRENA-LAN...

- www.blasthards.co.uk is hosting an event from June 11-14 at the Conservative Club, Thirsk, North Yorkshire. Remarkable value at £14 for the three days, I'm sure you'll agree.
- The next three-day event is in Aberdeen on June 18-20. It'll cost £20 and if you want to see what happens, there's a small movie of previous events at www.scotlandlanparty.com.
- From June 25-27, www.game-domain.net is hosting its third four-day event of the year for 32 players. It'll set you back £27.
- On the same dates, www.fragurself.co.uk is having Party 10 in Manchester. It'll burn a £45-shaped hole in your pocket and has its own on-site bar, which means the event is over-16s only.
- www.multiplay.co.uk is hosting *Insomnia 20* for 600 gamers, also from June 25-27. 60 dirty notes will cover you for all three days. Expect the usual competitions as well as the use of a 100MB Internet connection, courtesy of BT.
- My own www.ggfan.co.uk is set to host its third event of the year towards the end of June too in East London. The date has yet to be confirmed, but costs will be £20 for 24 players. Keep checking the site for details.

- The next event for www.clanlan.net is on July 2-4 in Mill Street, Merseyside, for 32 guys who like to blow the shit out of one another. £16 for the whole event. Bargain.
- Just time to mention Northern Ireland's latest gaming centre. It's called GAMETHEWORLD and has set up base in Bangor. If you want to find out who's playing what, or when the next all-nighter event is, then visit www.gametheworld.com.
- If you want your party to feature here, drop me a line with at least two months advance notice, plus details of numbers, costs and location at scalper@ggfan.co.uk - Scalper out.



No one packs 'em in like Multiplay.

GUILDHALL



▲ FIGHT THE GOOD FIGHT

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. This could be the start of something...

CLAN Assault Specialist Squad (ASS)

CONTACT admin@assquad.net

WEBSITE www.assquad.net

MAIN GAMES *Delta Force: Black Hawk Down*

DETAILS Established BHD squad, playing mainly TKOTH - we play for fun and in matches. Membership is currently by invite only, with prospective applicants monitored by recruitment officers. We have custom maps designed in-squad and a very healthy community. We run a 100Mbit server - search the servers for 'ASS' to find us.

CLAN UKFC| UK Fight Club

CONTACT B11tz or Nemesis

WEBSITE www.clan-ukfc.co.uk

MAIN GAMES *Counter-Strike, Call Of Duty*

DETAILS UKFC already has a C-S team doing very well in the Enemy Down ladders, but we're looking to expand to COD. Skill doesn't matter as long as you get on with members and have fun. You can find us on IRC in #ukfc and #ukfc.cod on Quakenet.

CLAN Soldiers On Speed, -Sl0S-

CONTACT phr33zernburn@aol.com or

Blueicefuser@aol.com

WEBSITE s-o-s.fragism.com

MAIN GAMES *Battlefield Vietnam*

DETAILS -Sl0S- is a brand new clan and we're not afraid to show our true potential, to dominate all - our clan is very skilled. We're going to enter some leagues soon, ClanBase and IGN. Our leader is -Sl0S-V3.N.o.M.

CLAN =|DoD|=Disciples Of Death

CONTACT Maxoffhonor@hotmail.com

WEBSITE www.disciples-of-death.org

MAIN GAMES *Call Of Duty*

DETAILS A friendly and mature clan, we have our own COD and TeamSpeak servers - the IPs are available on our website. We're a very successful clan, but we need people from Europe or the UK to come and join. Hang by our servers and you might get picked up.

CLAN 9th Army C.M.C.

CONTACT goliath@9th-cmc.de

WEBSITE www.9th-cmc.com

MAIN GAMES *Call Of Duty, Vietcong, AVP2,*

BF1942/Vietnam, Counter-Strike, EVE Online

DETAILS We're a European/US clan specialising in several main games. We play both for fun and in leagues, teamwork and communication being our main tools for success. If you're over 15 and would like to be part of our community, visit our website and click on 'join us'.

CLAN SFX (Starfleet Xtreme)

CONTACT Johnbigtrekfan@aol.com

WEBSITE www.sfxclan.com

MAIN GAMES *Bridge Commander, Wolfenstein:*

Enemy Territory, America's Army, Freelancer, Diablo 2, C&C Generals

DETAILS We're a 60-strong clan that's over two years old. *Bridge Commander* is our main game, but we also play the others listed. To join, you must be 16+ and have a microphone and MSN Messenger. We're like one big family - if you have any questions, contact me and I'll be happy to answer them.

To feature in Guildhall, send your details and 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.



COMMUNITY CHEST

UNREAL TOURNAMENT

It's one of the longest-running shooters and it keeps getting better. Daniel Emery takes aim

With the release of *Unreal Tournament 2004*, we thought it'd be an appropriate time to give you the skinny on some of the mods, skins, maps and total conversions available for the whole series – *Unreal Tournament*, *UT2003* and *UT2004*.

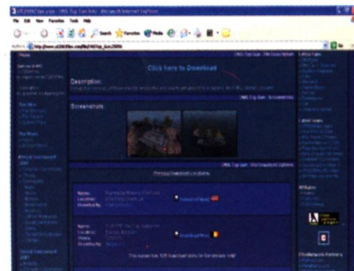
There's no denying that the *UT* series has to be the most user-friendly we've ever seen. You can tweak settings to your heart's content, with the game being designed with customising in mind, and the community has hundreds of thousands involved. Finding the eight best was tricky – not because there's a shortage, but because there are so many excellent ones. Here's our pick...



PLANET UNREAL (WEBSITE)

www.planetunreal.com

Planet Unreal is still the mother lode when it comes to finding bots, levels, maps and skins – in fact, anything and everything *UT*-related. There's also a collection of top-notch screenshots (if you fancy tarting up your desktop), along with an utterly brilliant explanation of the *UT2004* Onslaught mode.



UT 200X FILES (WEBSITE)

www.ut2003files.com

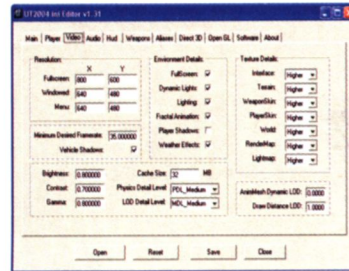
This is another great site packed to the gills with mods, patches, skins, utilities, films, new audio files and wallpapers. It focuses on the *UT2003* and *UT2004* versions, but the file section layout is the best we've seen, giving a screenshot of every map, a good description and plenty of tech details.



UNREAL PLAYGROUND (MAPS)

www.unrealplayground.com

Maps, maps and more maps: in fact, almost every map ever released finds its way to this site. The only drawback is that it's proving too popular – it's reaching the limit of its bandwidth allocation, so you may well need to register before downloading. Still, as long as it's free...



UT 2004 INI EDITOR (UT2004 UTILITY)

www.soulx.com/fila/

When someone makes a great bit of software, you expect a fanfare – but this piece of home-grown software is buried on an unassuming site. Don't be deceived though: this is excellent for changing your ini. settings – many of which can't be changed through the normal *UT* GUI.



SKIN CITY (SKINS)

skincity.beyondunreal.com

Skin City might sound menacing, but is actually very useful. Come here and you find skins for every version of *Unreal*, ranging from the excellent to the ludicrous. At the time of going to press, there were only about 30 new skins for *UT2004*, but we're guessing that number will grow exponentially.



RED ORCHESTRA (TOTAL CONVERSION)

www.unrealwarfarex.com/redorchestra

We couldn't do this Community Chest without referring to WWII, it being the 60th anniversary of D-Day. *Red Orchestra* transforms *UT2004* into an Eastern Front fight between the USSR and Nazi Germany. It's like *Call Of Duty*, so stop reading and start downloading.



AIR BUCCANEERS (TOTAL CONVERSION)

ludocraft.oulu.fi/airbuccaneers

They may only see daylight for six months, but when it comes to coding there aren't many who can outdo the Fins. This game stands *UT* on its head: instead of futuristic weaponry, the game is now filled with hot air balloons, cannons, air-mines and other ancient technologies. Think sky pirates and you're on the right track.



TROOPERS: DAWN OF DESTINY (TOTAL CONVERSION)

www.ut2003troopers.com

When amateurs start messing with *Star Wars*, it's either ultra-geeky or it involves LucasArts' lawyers. However, this TC isn't just tolerated, it's unofficially approved! *Troopers* takes all *UT*'s characters, weapons and locations, then ports them into the *Star Wars* universe, far, far away...

STEVE HILL'S NEVERQUEST

Steve Hill gets the fear in the freak show that is the world of *BiosFear*



'GAME Experience May Change During Online Play.' Ain't that the truth? Unlike static games, your online affair is a completely random coming together of misfits, with events decided on the whim of the fates. A butterfly effect, one tiny action is able to set into motion a momentous chain of events. This is arguably the strength of online gaming, but it also presents something of a problem. Depending on when I decide to enter into the terrifying world of *BiosFear*, an entirely different story awaits. For the sake of half an hour, this page will be unrecognisable from its millions of alternate realities that are possible.

It's an issue that's been weighing heavily on my mind, to the extent that I've been unable to start the game for fear of the consequences. What if I play it and nothing interesting happens? If I leave it a day, it might make for a

brilliant tale. It's the gaming equivalent of the Yipps in golf. You can't legislate for it, and it's only under extreme duress that I force myself to take the plunge. Richie Shoemaker has kindly lent me his characters, on the understanding that one of them is 'buff' and that I will rule the land like some all-powerful behemoth.

THREE DEAD MICE

Perusing the Shoemaker stable, I find he's assembled three fine specimens, namely Miffy, Unwashedmass and Withchild (strange lad). I opt for the latter, a buxom blue woman who also happens to be a level 23 Bulkan, whatever that is. Emerging into a typical RPG setting, I'm suddenly stricken by the fear, convinced that this is the wrong time to play. Glued to the spot, I fend off the advance of three armoured mice, in the process earning myself a pair of leather trousers.

It's as much as I can take

though, and I come out. With my deadline for this article spiralling into the distance, I update Prezzer on the rodent/new kecks scenario, possibly simultaneously confusing whoever monitors email messages at ZONE Towers. If they're looking for scandal, they won't find it here: "Not made much progress with this, bar killing a few armoured mice and gaining some leather trousers. It's looking like tomorrow I'm afraid."

Sullied by the brief experience, I head into the real world for a hastily-arranged round of golf, followed by a pint of weak beer, returning home for a gutful of food and an entire live European football match.

BUZZ BUZZ BUZZ

It can't be put off forever though, and it also can't be made up – partly due to integrity, but largely because you simply can't make this shit up, as I'm soon to discover. Resuming the mouse-killing spree, I wander around and discover that I'm on the verge of a quest, namely defeating a cursed hell cobra.

Bolstered by this new sense of direction, I attempt a chat with a small winged creature called BuzzBuzz, only for her mate ReignCloud to chip in: "She's afk (away from keyboard) and I'm eating." Further questioning reveals that ReignCloud is chowing down on a bit of chicken. "Nice," I muse. "Yeah," agrees the returning BuzzBuzz. Continuing the culinary theme, I share the fact that "I've had a pie", and BuzzBuzz concludes that "those are good too".

Not really the thrilling adventure I'd hoped for, I begin to feel a sense of nameless dread when a lumbering oaf called Tact joins the chat with the opening gambit: "Can I ask you summit?" Without waiting for an answer he asks: "Wanna see my sword?" He then embarks on a contest with ReignCloud in which they discuss at length the merits of various weapons and how many months it took to earn them. Stultifyingly dull, the tedium is only briefly suspended when

BuzzBuzz impressively kills a stray dog. My kind of girl.

PITCH BATTLE

I'm rapidly losing the will to live when Tact says to ReignCloud: "Hey, come and hit me on the soccer." This piques my interest and I follow them round the corner where I'm astonished to discover a full-size football pitch, replete with goals, nets, the lot. It's almost more than my mind can take, and if it wasn't for the screenshots I may have been tempted to dismiss it as an 'episode'. What happens next almost provokes one.

With Tact and ReignCloud content to whack each other with axes, I take a stroll to the away end where I'm set upon by an unlikely ambush of white tigers and poison scorpions. It's a hard-fought battle and the pitch runs red with tiger blood. Finally I submit, going down in the area like a Chelsea midfielder in Europe.

Genuinely disturbed, I log out, reach for the remote control and immerse myself in snooker. At least there aren't any tigers there. [E2]



Don't fancy its chances...



And they say London is a concrete jungle...

"The tedium is only briefly suspended when BuzzBuzz impressively kills a stray dog. My kind of girl"

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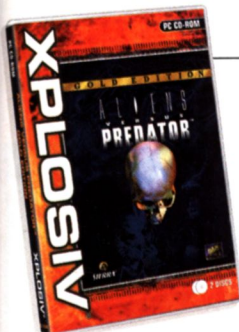
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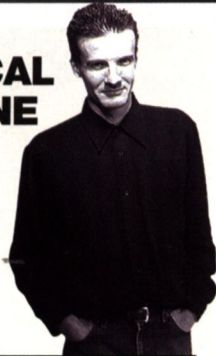


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HARDWARE

ALL THE LATEST NEWS AND REVIEWS FROM THE WORLD OF PC HARDWARE

GRAPHICAL GOLDMINE



■ **HARDWARE EDITOR** Phil Wand

▲ So the gloves are finally off. ATI and NVIDIA have trumped out their new hardware, and by the time your eyeballs pass over these words, you'll be able to nip down to your local computer store, slam your fist on the counter and shout: "I want to be poor!" at the top of your voice. They'll look at you a bit strangely, but should be eager to help out.

Of course, the obvious question is which card should you buy?

And you know, it doesn't feel right recommending one product over the other. Not yet. I can tell you that both cards offer massive performance improvements over their predecessors, and that your gaming is sure to get instantly better (whether you'll get any better still depends on how much you practice, of course). However, with UK pricing still on the wobbly side and no word on driver stability, it's not possible to give you directions left or right. So if you were hoping for a nod to NVIDIA, or a wink at ATI, you're out of luck this issue. With costs likely to be on the high side, unless you can afford both or want to affirm your loyalty to a particular brand, it'd be silly to leap in just yet. Take your time, read up and then make your move.

Hardware aside for one moment, remember I talked about junk email last month and of how billions of messages were causing untold strife to Internet users across the planet? Well, over the last month I've received around 100 spams, down from the usual 10,000, thanks to a tailor-made challenge/response system on my mail server. If you wrote to me, you may have found the system emailing you back – challenging you – to see who you are. With millions of messages flying out the door in any given minute, Joe Spammer hasn't the time to read such replies – and so only genuine people take the time to respond. And the server treats any reply to the challenge as evidence that the sender is real and thus friend rather than foe. It works!

RADEON GOES PLATINUM

ATI says its new hardware is twice as quick as the 9800XT. The best news is, it fits in your AGP slot

HAVING BEEN OUTGUNNED by the RADEON 9700 18 months ago, everyone was pretty sure that NV40 would win back the video card crown for NVIDIA. Uncle Sam would pummel the Canadians into submission, no sweat involved, and we'd all go back to buying GeForce and sniggering at ATI's flaky drivers. And it must be said, every review of the new GeForce 6800 Ultra (see opposite) is pretty remarkable, with the new card a country mile ahead of the 9800XT – but ATI has not been resting on its laurels. Our Commonwealth buddy has been working flat out on its next generation card too, and from what we've learned, it looks as though its next generation stuff is up to beating the Yanks.

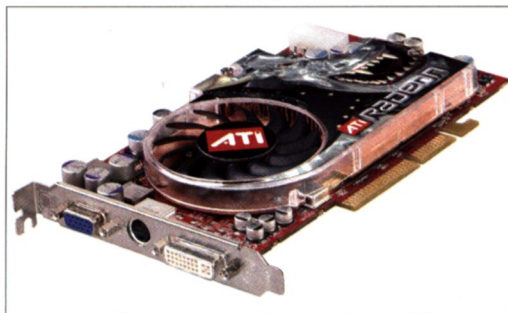
IT'S ALL IN THE NUMBERS

The new X800 has a stats sheet that would put Jordan to shame. The standard card, the X800 Pro, has an SRP of \$399 and features 12 pipelines, 900MHz memory and runs at 475MHz. The one you really want though is the X800 XT Platinum Edition, which ups the cost by \$100 but gives you 16 pipelines, 1.12GHz memory and a 520MHz engine. Both cards

"ATI now has its very own computer-generated babe called Ruby. She's 80,000 polygons of tight-clothed action hero – we're in love"

have 256MB of the latest GDDR3 memory, six vertex shaders, a 256-bit bus and are all AGP-based. If you're thinking about buying a lesser card and soft-modding it into something more crazy, ATI knows your game and is taking steps to ensure that cards remain as the factory intended. Nonetheless, hardware experts at the company admitted they're pretty amazed at the ingenuity of the guys creating these tools, so who knows?

The X800 comes with enhanced SMOOTHVISION and a feature called 'temporal anti-aliasing'. Although this sounds inspired by *Star Trek* (probably one of the lamer episodes, where



Yup, it's a video card. What were you expecting?



Ruby's the face of the new RADEON. We like.

Data forms a relationship with a table lamp), it helps the new RADEON provide twice the number of samples on screen and deliver a more fluid gaming experience. It also has 3Dc, a feature that compresses texture maps by up to four times, meaning development teams can make high-definition characters and surroundings using current coding techniques. You'll be hearing more about this particular feature over the coming months.

SILICON SHOWDOWN

Sadly, ATI hadn't provided a card to test at the time of writing, so we can only use the company's own benchmarks. The card chalks up 12,000 marks in 3DMark03, is one-and-a-half times faster than a 9800XT when running *Battlefield Vietnam*, and preliminary tests show it to be more than a match for the 6800 Ultra. With all this power on tap, you might expect the card to run so hot that it might set fire to your house should the hubcap-size fan fail, but not so – from what we've learned, it actually requires less juice than the old card. All of which means it slots inside a Shuttle and only requires a regular heat sink and fan.

To top it all, ATI now has its very own computer-generated babe called Ruby and, well, we're in love. She's 80,000 polygons of tight-clothed action hero with great, er, feet. We badgered the ATI guys to hand over the unlock code for her to take her shoes off, but not even a *PC ZONE* T-shirt could sway them. Bastards.



120

REVIEWS

Join in our laptop love-in



122

DEAR WANDY

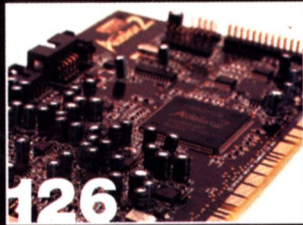
Don't fret, Wandy can help



124

WATCHDOG

We're on your side you know



126

BUYER'S GUIDE

Out with the old, in with the new

Six of the best

Initial benchmarks may show RADEON to be a neck ahead, but the show's not over yet

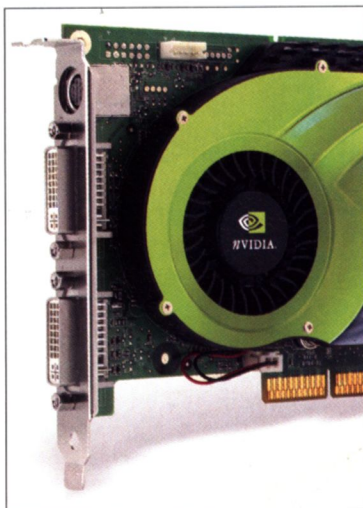
SO THE RADEON X800 is a bit of a blinder. Still, it would be silly for NVIDIA loyalists to pack their tents and set up in the ATI camp on the basis of a few preliminary reports and results. There's so much emphasis these days on minor frame rate variations, despite them being barely noticeable to the naked eye, with the elongated bar graphs you see on benchmark-crazy websites often exaggerating the truth. And what about pricing? If the 6-series NV40 cards can undercut their ATI equivalents by a decent margin, they're sure to reel in the majority of customers in the all-important mid-range sector.

And let's not forget, this is just one of many steps we'll be taking towards lifelike

video. Already there are rumours that NVIDIA is to release a special 'upped-clocks' version of the 6800 called the Ultra Extreme, and power freak manufacturers such as Gainward are sure to produce even faster, liquid-cooled variants. By the time these next-generation cards are in plentiful supply, the price has come down and the driver sets have been tweaked and updated, you're sure to see the X800 and 6800 almost inseparable in most real-world tests and in value rankings.

OUT IN FRONT

One area where NVIDIA has a technological lead is in Shader 3.0 support and 32-bit precision, the company proudly boasting that it can help



The 6800 Ultra is as proficient as the X800 in most areas - and with pricing yet to be confirmed, the decision is not an easy one.

developers 'reach new levels of cinematic quality never before seen in 3D games'. With the rival ATI hardware supporting Shader 2.0 and 24-bit only, it could mean that NVIDIA stretches a lead at some point in the future once games are rewritten to support these new features.

Right now, though, we can't tell what effect it has - it's just another bullet point on the back of the box. What we do know is that the 6800 Ultra is much larger and much hungrier than the X800 XT Platinum, the card requiring two power connectors and a beefy PSU. And the 6800 runs hotter and requires more room, meaning in some cases it won't be the easiest fit. Whether practical matters might dissuade buyers in this benchmark-biased world is yet to be seen - right now, it's anyone's game.

SPECS

	X800 XT PLATINUM	6800 ULTRA
Designation	ATI R420	NVIDIA NV40
Process	130nm	130nm
Shader support	VS 2.0, PS 2.0	VS 3.0, PS 3.0
Precision	24-bit	32-bit, 16-bit
Pixel pipelines	16	16
Vertex shaders	6	6
Texture filtering	Bilinear, Trilinear, 16X Anisotropic	Bilinear, Trilinear, 16X Anisotropic
Anti-aliasing	Multi-sampling	Super-sampling, multi-sampling
AA sample type	Scattered/sparse grid up to 6X	Rotated grid up to 8X with super-sampling combined at 8X
Bus	AGP8X	AGP8X
Memory	GDDR3	GDDR3
Core frequency	520MHz	400MHz
Memory frequency	1.12GHz	1.1GHz
Memory bus	256-bit	256-bit
Basic pixel fill rate	8,320Mpixel/sec	6,400Mpixel/sec
Multi-texture fill rate	8,320Mpixel/sec	6,400Mtexel/sec

SNIPPETS

HUGE AND HARD

Hitachi's latest Deskstar hard drive provides 400GB of SATA data storage with an 8MB buffer. And if you think that all that space would slow the unit down, it's actually one of the quickest 7,200rpm drives on the market. Hitachi's SCS (Streaming Command Set) means the drive can be configured to work even quicker with media encoders and video rendering devices. The 250GB version is available now for £150, so expect the new drive to cost around £200. www.hitachigst.com



HELP THE AGED

Intel's forthcoming Grantsdale and Alderwood chipsets, which, as reported last month, are set to introduce PCI Express, DDR-533 memory and Socket 775 processors to desktop motherboards from June onwards, will exclude drivers for Microsoft Windows 98 or Windows Me. If you're still running aged operating systems, budget for a shrink-wrapped copy of XP to go with your new hardware. And please, no more emails telling me how Windows 98 is "great for gamers". It's not. www.intel.com

WINDOWS UPDATED

Microsoft has delayed Service Pack 2 (SP2) for Windows XP, a free belt and braces security update that plugs a whole bunch of holes and includes new features such as pop-up and Web application blocking for Internet Explorer. With Windows XP now selling at the astonishing rate of 10,000,000 a month - about 200 copies every minute - Microsoft has become somewhat preoccupied with the product's poor security. Beta testing of the 220MB patch has shown it to be very stable. www.microsoft.com

CHEAPERBAND



An increasing number of ISPs are providing cut-price broadband products, with Plus.net being the cheapest so far at just £14.99 monthly. However, when choosing a new ISP, or when migrating from your existing provider, there are many things you need to take into consideration, such as whether the company forces you to buy an expensive modem as part of the signing up process, if they limit your usage and the size of their activation fee. My advice would be to visit the UK's best broadband aggregation site, www.adslguide.org.uk

GETTING INTO CODING

Fancy writing your own?

I receive a few emails each month from people wanting to write their own games. Most have never programmed before, and from what I can make out are hoping to sit down in front of their PC one evening and crack out something to rival Counter-Strike. I wouldn't advise it - writing batch files and PHP doesn't qualify you to code complex games. Your best bet is to use third-party game development tools such as Blitz Basic (www.blitzbasic.com) or Dark Basic (darkbasic.thegamecreators.com) to help make your ideas real. If you think you've got a knack, move up to C++ and an armful of programmer's books from Amazon. But not before.

DRIVER WATCH



Need a patch? Take a look to see if you're behind the times

MOTHERBOARD

MANUFACTURER	NAME	DESC	RELEASED	SIZE	WEB
Intel	Chipset Software Installation Utility	5.1.1.1002	12-Dec-03	1.4MB	support.intel.com
NVIDIA	Forceware	3.13	03-Nov-03	12.9MB	www.nvidia.com
VIA	Hyperion 4in1	4.51	02-Dec-03	1.4MB	www.viaarena.com
VIA	Hyperion Pro 64-bit	0.96 Beta	04-Feb-04	2.25MB	www.viaarena.com

GRAPHICS

MANUFACTURER	NAME	DESC	RELEASED	SIZE	WEB
ATI	Display,Control Panel,WDM	CATALYST 4.4	07-Apr-04	27.7MB	www.ati.com NEW
NVIDIA	Forceware	56.72	01-Apr-03	10.9MB	www.nvidia.com NEW

SOUND

MANUFACTURER	NAME	DESC	RELEASED	SIZE	WEB
Creative	EAX 4.0 ADV HD Driver Update	1-84-40	29-Mar-03	6.5MB	uk.europe.creative.com
M-Audio	Revolution	5.10.00.0052	06-Oct-03	10.1MB	m-audio.com

INSPIRON 9100 3.2GHZ

Price: £1,526 | Manufacturer: Dell | Phone: 0870 1524 649 | www.dell.co.uk

Laptop in 'very good' shocker

LAPTOP PC

KNOWING full well that I'm not the world's biggest laptop fan, Dell was kind enough to send me its latest laptop. It turned up one day in a small but incredibly heavy box, suggesting the company had sent me a dozen gnomes by mistake. The accompanying press article made all the usual claims about 'outstanding whatnots' and 'handling intense thingamabobs plus complex multimedia doodahs'. This had me rolling my eyes and wondering if the marketing department had even seen the thing, but the spec sheet looked interesting, and since I needed something to prop my back door open on nice mornings, I thought I'd review it.

MUSCLEBOUND

Although you carry it around in a natty leather handbag, the Inspiron 9100 is more outwardly heterosexual than a lesbian love scene. Squeezed under the lid is a 3.2GHz Prescott with 800FSB and Hyper-Threading, 1GB expandable to 2GB PC3200 RAM, the 128MB version of the Mobility Radeon 9700 and 60GB of 7,200rpm HDD. There's also a four-times DVD-writer, built-in wireless and Bluetooth, and in the unlikely event the 1920x1200

screen doesn't meet your optical standards, there's a DVI port and two USB holes for hooking up an existing monitor and peripherals. Oh, and there's a subwoofer integrated with the battery.

And you know what? All that hardcore hardware means the Inspiron is the first notebook to whip PC ZONE's 3.06GHz test system in the benchmarks and sound good while doing so. While the old three-litre isn't exactly cutting-edge any more, it still plays *Far Cry* and *Battlefield Vietnam* with only an occasional puff on its inhaler, so when the

9100 chalked up a higher score - 3,371 in 3DMark03 - I laughed in disbelief. Could I soon be referring to one of these robot booster cushions as "my PC"?

GOURMET

But let's not get too carried away. While the chunky Inspiron is lovingly screwed together (and easily motorbikes past every gamer's low expectations of a laptop), there are drawbacks. The most obvious is the minuscule battery life, and that's despite a Lithium Ion cell the size of Heathrow airport. Slightly less than 30 minutes hard shooting can suck the tank dry - super grunt plus super cooling means

it drinks electricity like some comic book super-villain.

Mind you, a closer inspection of the press release reveals that Dell isn't targeting the Inspiron at company reps or at travel writers on the Delhi-Jalandhar Express. No, this flip-top is aimed at homebound power users who fancy the convenience of a portable PC without all the hassle of a small form factor machine (a Shuttle may have a similar footprint, but you also need a separate monitor, keyboard, mouse and speakers).

"The Inspiron 9100 provides all the power of a desktop PC for entertainment and home/home office functionality," is the PR spin, "offering mobility within the home and convenience for occasional travel." What that means is, take this thing too far from a 240V plug socket and the only game you'll be playing is *Piss Awful Card Game 2* on your Nokia.

TAKEAWAY

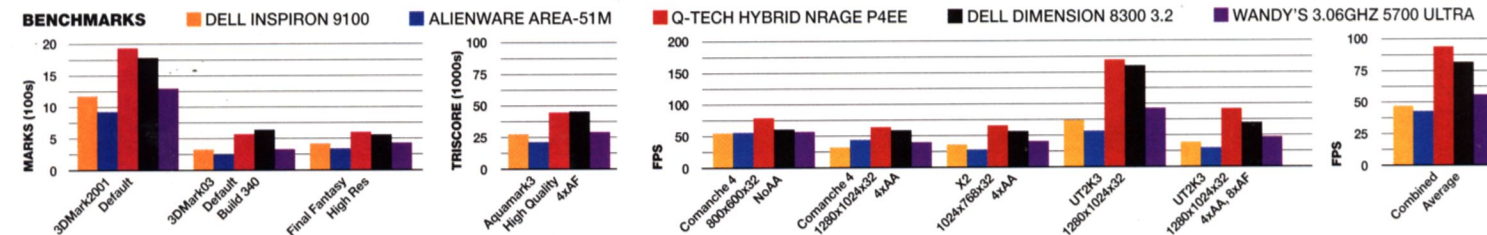
Having played *Desert Combat* and *Battlefield Vietnam*, and having been amazed at *Far Cry*

on this thing, I can say without doubt that it's a miniature milestone. Not because what it's packing is particularly ground-breaking and not because it's ergonomically superior to any other laptop I've disliked. Rather, it's because the 9100 is priced to beat everything else in its sector. At just £1,299 plus VAT and delivery - other configurations are available starting at under a grand - the Inspiron 9100 is a snip. It's not suited to roving business types, nor to anyone with weak shoulders for that matter, but for gamers it's ideal and much cheaper than Alienware's Area-51m. Just remember that if you do end up using it as a doorstop, make sure there's a plug socket nearby. **PCZ**

SPECIFICATIONS

HARDWARE Dell Inspiron 9100
15.4-inch WUXGA screen
Pentium 4 3.2GHz Prescott
60GB HDD 7,200RPM
4x DVD+RW
128MB Mobility Radeon 9700
Bluetooth
TrueMobile 802.11a/b/g wireless
1024MB RAM 400MHz DDR
Network port
56K v.92 integrated modem
Integrated subwoofer
2 x USB ports
DVI out, VGA out
Windows XP Professional

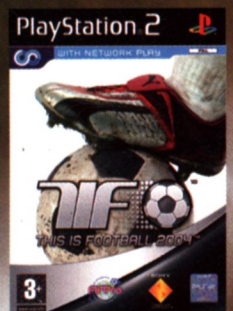
BENCHMARKS



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PlayStation 2



www.tif2004.com



DEAR WANDY

Every month our resident quack reads your letters and solves your problems. Think you know better? Write in, sound intelligent and win yourself £50 for a top tip...

HELLO SUMMERTIME 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. If you have any **top tips** to share with the group, then send them in too: if Wandy's impressed, he'll print them and send you £50 for your trouble.

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're unable to offer personal replies. Sorry.

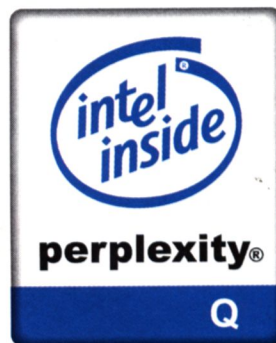
FLAT OUT

Q My next monitor will almost certainly be an LCD panel, but one thing I've never understood properly is how the whole native resolution thing affects matters. Suppose I buy a flat screen that has a resolution of 1280x1024 pixels. Does that mean that I need to run everything at that precise resolution to get maximum clarity? What if I need to run at a lower resolution? If a game isn't performing too well, does the image still fill the entire screen? And if so, does the mapping of the lower resolution on to the screen's native resolution cause any degradation in image quality?

Dave Gray

A The short answer is, yes, yes and yes. Can I go home now? In a cathode ray tube (CRT) screen, the image you see is formed from a single beam of electrons striking a phosphor coating. The electrons are steered

lines 85 times each second. Which is rather impressive, I think you'll agree. In comparison, liquid crystal display (LCD) technology comes across as rather tame. Transistors and capacitors are arranged in a waffle of rows and columns, the dimensions of which are a) fixed and b) equal to the unit's native resolution. When on the receiving end of an electrical charge, individual cells of this crystal matrix are made to 'move' - same as you would if anyone plugged you into the mains - and allow light from the lamp at the back to pass through and reach your eyeballs. If the output resolution of your PC matches the dimensions of the matrix, the pixels will 'map' directly from one to the other and you experience the sharpest picture possible (anyone who tells you that CRT is 'superior' in appearance needs to see an optician).



Intel's latest 733MHz Albino Semi-Communist Perplexity Q chip features turbo-grunting and a 2.6999 recurring shovelhead.

LAPDOG

Q I recently bought a 1.5GHz Intel Centrino laptop from PC World. The guy behind the counter said that because it was a Centrino, the 1.5GHz processor magically becomes 3.4GHz. Is that right? I downloaded WCPUID to have a look at my laptop, and it quickly became clear that the system clock was 99MHz with a 15 multiplier and the system bus was 400MHz. Have I been told a pack of lies? My second question is that I installed *Far Cry* on the machine, but whenever I try and play I get hit by a random restart. My other games don't give me any grief. Do you have any idea what might be causing my problems?

Mangesh

"The Centrino is the result of the marketing dept playing with words and sniffing adhesive"

around with magnets, and in creating a 1280x1024 Windows desktop at a refresh rate of 85Hz, the beam will draw 1,024

However, when you reduce the resolution in your video card, as you may do when getting a greedy bastard like *Far Cry* to run, the image undergoes something known as interpolation. In simple terms, it must be scaled upwards to meet the matrix - if you run *Far Cry* at 800x600 on a 1280x1024 screen, it will be enlarged by roughly 60 per cent. While the game will fit the screen perfectly, corner to corner, this is less than ideal.

Interpolation means a lot of the scaling is guesswork, meaning the image will be blurry; plus, the proportions are different, so your image will look squashed. If your PC is weedy at 1280x1024, think before making the decision to flatten your viewing.

A flat panel monitor is like a giant waffle maker. Sort of.



A The Centrino is the result of the marketing dept playing with clever-sounding words and sniffing adhesive into the bargain. Yes, if you thought AMD's ad people were all fruitcakes, Centrino proves that its Intel rivals are fruitcakes with a walnut whip topping.

Let me try and explain. First, there's the Mobile Pentium 4 processor, not forgetting the Mobile Pentium 4 with Hyper-Threading and Mobile Celeron, all of which

sound nicely familiar - they should do, as they have a Northwood core.

The trouble comes with the Pentium M processor, which is the cornerstone of Centrino technology and very easily confused with the Celeron M, which is neither. Put another way, my dad wants a laptop and this kind of nonsense would kill him - 'death through massive incomprehension' would be the last line on the coroner's report.

So what, you may well ask, is this Centrino thing? It's the Pentium M partnered with Intel's 855 chipset and PRO/Wireless networking hardware. Miracles are not in its technical specifications, but I hope you can see that it's easy to understand why the guy at PC World may have been a bit confused. Your laptop is no slouch, the 1.5GHz rating misrepresenting the 'real' capabilities of the Banias core chip, but it's certainly not the 3.4GHz power station you may have been hoping for.

The Centrino is best suited to business people on the move who demand decent performance with a three-hour battery life, not to gamers wanting a three-digit frame rate and who leave their systems plugged in most of the time anyway. As for the crash, make sure you're running the latest, patched version of *Far Cry*.

UNSOLVABLE MYSTERY

Q I've had this apparently unsolvable problem for months now. Two genius friends of mine have tried to sort this out but to no avail. Very simply, the problem is: every time I start using the Internet, after a random period of time I get an error message saying: 'The program svchost.exe has generated errors and will be shut down.' I've used anti-spyware and anti-virus software with no

“My guess is that it'll start up, run and boot fine, but as soon as you put the system under load your Barton could go for a burton”

result. I've even formatted my C: drive and completely reinstalled – you'd think that would get rid of it, but no. As soon as I connect up again, it comes back. Please help.

Andy Morris

A The svchost.exe error is the prime symptom of the Blaster worm. I appreciate that you've used all manner of tricks in order to cleanse your system, but if a remote machine is reinfecting you, there's no chance of sorting the problem. Make sure you're using the latest service pack – you don't say what version of Windows you're using – and have all the updates from Microsoft. Once you've patched, I'd be surprised if the problem recurs. If you're stuck with a slow connection, visit microsoft.com/security/protect and get the updates mailed to you on CD.

BIT PART

Q I have an ASUS A7N8X Deluxe motherboard revision 1.04 with an Athlon 2100+. I'm looking to upgrade to a Barton 3200+ to take advantage of its 400MHz front-side bus. I've upgraded my BIOS to the latest version as is required to support the CPU, but have found some interesting articles discussing the processor's compatibility with my motherboard. According to various places on the Web, the Barton will only run stable in a motherboard with the second revision of the NVIDIA nForce2 chipset. I duly emailed NVIDIA, who told me to contact ASUS, and as yet have had no reply. I've emailed AMD who also referred me to ASUS.

However, the biggest thing that bugs me is how my motherboard will support 400MHz, when the jumper options support a maximum of 333MHz? Will the Barton run without problems? I'd greatly

appreciate any feedback concerning the issue.

Owen Fowler

A It should work in theory, but in practise it may not. Originally, all 1.04 revisions of the A7N8X Deluxe were unaware of the 400FSB processors because these chips weren't around. A later BIOS update added support for the doubled-up bus speed, but for every ten owners with chips performing faultlessly, two will be tugging themselves bald in frustration.

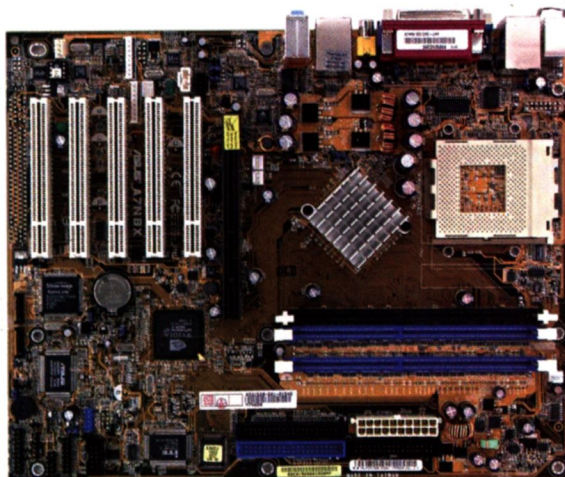
In simple terms, what you've dug up on the Web is quite correct, and although the release notes for the BIOS say the Barton is supported, I wouldn't be surprised if you ended up looking like Telly Savalas trying to get it to work.

Having said all that, you may feel there's little harm in trying. An XP3200+ 400FSB chip is not going to set you back more than £150, and if it turns out that your A7N8X complains, you've got yourself a potent processor to pair with a future motherboard upgrade. So if you're up for a challenge, go find yourself some decent

PC3200 (DDR400) memory – proper RAM could well be key to your success here – and then set your bus speed to 200MHz. The latest 400FSB Athlon processors are 'double-pumped', much like the 800FSB Pentiums are 'quad-pumped', and your A7N8X will be able to play along. Once you've got the BIOS settings right, you can power up and see what happens. My guess is that it'll start up, run and boot fine, but as soon as you put the system under load, such as running a benchmark or playing a game, there's a chance the Barton could go for a burton.

If this happens, play around with CAS timings in the BIOS, then gently tickle the core voltage (vcore) figures upwards, making sure you're not overheating the northbridge in doing so (the bus controller, hidden away under its spikey heat sink). You may even want to invest in a separate cooling fan for it as it's prone to getting super-toasty. Good luck! [LW]

Visit Wandy on the Web at www.dearwandy.com



Revision 2 of the A7N8X has no bother talking with 400FSB Athlons. A pity, then, that Owen Fowler has revision 1 inside his machine.

FANCY A QUICKIE?

NO LOITERING

Q I felt obliged to email you in relation to your reply to Ben Richards' problem with Halo in issue 140. He complained that every time he ran Halo he got the following error: 'Your computer's video driver was not tested with this game. A newer version that is compatible may be available' etc. You blamed the problem on the fact that the 9700 Pro doesn't work with the game, however I myself have a 9700 Pro and have experienced no problems playing the game. The only time an error comes up is when I have RefreshForce on (a program that forces the same refresh rate throughout XP). However, disabling this software fixes the problem completely.

Richard White

A Thanks for the advice. It's true that Halo has caused a lot of problems on a lot of configurations – can you tell it's not my favourite ever console conversion?

Q I'm looking to upgrade my machine so that I'll be able to play next generation games. It's a Packard Bell iMedia 5070, with 2.0GHz Pentium 4, 192MB RAM and a 40GB hard drive. I was thinking of upgrading to a Radeon 9800 Pro 256MB, a Samsung Spinpoint SP1604N (160GB space, 7200rpm) and 4x256MB PC3200 RAM. Would this be powerful enough to play the more demanding titles like Far Cry? I was thinking of just going to PC World or some other shop so they could install everything. When the new HDD is installed, would I need to reinstall XP? Would the settings remain?

Geoffrey Simpson

A While the 9800 Pro would be ideal, you'll find that the 2.0GHz Pentium is a serious bottleneck and that the PC3200 RAM either has no effect or doesn't work at all – PC3200 is designed for bus speeds of 800MHz and Williamette-core Pentiums such as the one in your Packard Bell are 400MHz. And while you can migrate the contents of your 40GB hard drive to the 160GB, you'll need third-party software such as True Image to do this. My advice? As an interim solution, go for the 9800 Pro 128MB (£150) and 512MB PC2100 RAM (£60) and leave the hard drive alone.

Q I recently upgraded my CPU to an AMD 3000+ Barton and I wanted to overclock on an ASUS A7N8X with GeForce3 Ti200, 1GB RAM at 333MHz. After overclocking, the system runs fine for up to five hours, then it displays a BSOD and restarts. Sometimes programs won't run at all. Anything you can recommend except slowing the CPU speed?

Lee Renaut

A I think this one's quite easy: either your video card or your processor is getting hot. Something like a Zalman Flower – this hovers over your motherboard and cools both processor and northbridge – partnered with two Vantec Stealth fans (intake at the front, exhaust at the rear) should prolong your overclocking frolics. Take a look at www.zalmanusa.com and www.vantecusa.com

Q According to 3DMark03, the clock speeds of my Sparkle GeForce FX5600 are 100.3 and 54.0. I'm running an AMD 2600XP+ with 1280MB PC2700 RAM on an ASUS A7N8X-X nForce2 motherboard. I contacted Sparkle, but the company had no answers. When I run 3DMark03 I get a score of under 2000, making it slower than my old Radeon 9000.

Stewart Crofts

A The true speed of your FX5600 should be 550MHz (memory) and 325MHz (core). Make sure you're running the latest DETONATOR drivers, then search for coolbits.reg at www.dearwandy.com. Using this registry tweak, you'll be able to configure the clock speeds from the Display control panel.



WATCHDOG

The Rolling Stones had it right you know: you can't always get what you want. But if you write to watch Watchdog, you just might find you get what you need...

■ HE KNOWS WHERE THEY LIVE Adam Phillips

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!

Don't worry - we're here to help when you're at the end of your tether. If you've got a consumer issue that needs addressing, then drop us a line.

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EMAIL Alternatively, email us at letters.pzone@dennis.co.uk with the subject heading 'Watchdog'

READ ME!

If you're writing in to complain about a product, please let us know your full name, address and contact number. With PCs, make sure that you also include all purchasing details such as reference and invoice numbers.

TICKED OFF AT TISCALI

If you want to MAKE a point, reader Warrd Adlani reckons that CAPITALS are the way to go. After all, he's furious with Tiscali who was supposed to be providing him with a top quality ADSL service: "I joined Tiscali broadband 512/256 ADSL four months ago. I had high hopes that that would be well and I'd finally be able to stop making the two-hour trip to my uni to get simple things off the Net."

But he reckons the service he's ended up with is CRAP: "I've been getting the WORST speeds imaginable - speeds that even my 56K modem surpasses effortlessly," SHOUTS Warrd. "My download speeds range between 1Kbps-5Kbps at MOST during the evening and more than necessary during the day. Plus, my pings shoot up to 1,500+, which makes Counter-Strike unplayable and my rage unbearable."

Quite. Now Warrd has called Tiscali's "CUSTOMER SUPPORT" and sent "NUMEROUS" emails, but has there been anything that one could consider 'a result'? "NO!" yells Warrd.

"Tiscali's technicians have explained to me obvious procedures which I already knew and had tried. I've formatted my HD more times than I've breathed in my life and have patched and updated/de-dated my drivers, but - NOTHING!" fumes Warrd. "Plus, Tiscali's forums are full of people who're complaining too!"

So what does the company have to say for itself, EH? "Tiscali has experienced dramatic broadband growth in the first quarter of this year due to our very competitive offers," says a spokesperson, surreptitiously slipping in a plug for its service. "This has caused some localised issues in terms of speed as well as putting additional pressure on our customer telephone support team."

Righto, but how is all this being resolved then? Well,

Tiscali says that it's now completed a programme of network upgrades in the areas affected and has also invested in more customer support agents.

Tiscali also says that you've been contacted, Warrd, and that it's arranged for technical support to call you to go through some system checks.

"His local VP was included in the recent upgrade, so he shouldn't be experiencing speed issues now," says Tiscali. "We'll also credit Warrd's account for the time he's experienced poor service and, if following the technical support call, this is not resolved to his satisfaction, we'll release him from his contract and give him a full refund." Sounds good to us.

A TINY PROBLEM

If there's one thing Watchdog hates, it's being treated like a criminal - especially when the biggest crime you've ever committed involved a dodgy mullet haircut back in 1987. Anyway, back to the case in point. Software that's provided with a shiny new PC. Or, more importantly, the lack of it.

Back in t'good ol' days, you'd have back-up discs provided with a new PC in case anything went wrong with the install. Not anymore as one reader, Sandra Ward, is keen to point out.

"I purchased a computer from Tiny and I tried to burn my first disc from the pre-installed Pinnacle Suite



A CD, yesterday. You won't find these with Tiny PCs.

and was shocked to read a message stating that I'd have to reinstall as there was a registry problem with the original installation," Sandra explains.

When she tried, Sandra discovered that she didn't have the Pinnacle Suite software, nor the Windows CD either. "Tiny told me that it withheld such discs due to piracy, but I asked what would happen if I needed the Windows CD in the event of a re-format? I also pointed out that because every Windows CD has a unique activation, the CD was of no use to Tiny once activated on my PC." Tiny's reply? "It told me I could buy the discs, but I refuse to spend any more money."

Stating the obvious, Sandra is none too happy with this position - especially considering she's had two of Tiny's machines in the past, both of which came with back-up discs. She's also non-plussed about the lack of a power lead supplied with her new PC.

Off we trotted to Tiny to find out what its policy is when it comes to software CDs:

"Regarding Mrs Ward's concern about the system recovery reload CD," explains a spokesperson for the company. "This is offered to tiny.com customers during the ordering process, both on the order page where our customer selects what package of extended support is wished for, and again on the following page where a list of essential extras is shown. Both of these pages have to be navigated before any order can be placed for a system."

As for the Pinnacle software, this is supplied under a pre-installation licence and pre-installed onto the computer: "This is common industry practise (and) the licence does not include the supply of the installation discs; this is at the request of Pinnacle to assist in preventing software piracy."

And the lack of a power cable? Tiny apologises and says it's now popped one in the post. As a gesture of goodwill, it should have also provided you with a recovery reload CD, Sandra.

As for the wider issue of companies holding back CDs? Well, perhaps it will combat piracy in the short term, but surely as customers get more peeved at not getting perceived 'value for money', they'll get the software somehow...

Remember, you reap what you sow. [W]



Warrd wants Tiscali to GET ITS ACT together or else he's OFF!

SAINTS NOT SINNERS

▲ **EVEN THE MOST SLATED OF COMPANIES CAN BE GOOD SOMETIMES...**

If you're a keen Watchdog reader, and let's face it, why wouldn't you be, you'll know that Dabs comes in for a fair amount of stick in these pages. Sometimes we despair, as the company's name pops up time and time again in our inbox. But you know what? On occasion, Dabs can get it very right too, as Chris Sugg points out.

"I ordered a Saitek Cyborg 3D Gold from Dabs about two weeks ago, and a few hours afterwards discovered they were to be discontinued," recalls Chris. "I sat looking at my Dabs order which stated 'stock unavailable at present time' for days and was thinking of cancelling, but last night I got an email saying my order was ready for shipment."

Chris continues to gush about how great Dabs are for getting him one anyway: "And to top it all, because of the delay, it sent it next-day delivery at no extra cost and it arrived this morning. Well done, Dabs!" And on this occasion, we have to be gracious and agree.



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- PC Zone, April 2004

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- Alienware® Cable Management System
- Microsoft® Windows® XP Home Edition
- AlienAutopsy: Automated Technical Support
- AlienCare: Advanced Gaming Technical Support including:
 - Lifetime Personalised Online Support Portal
 - 1-Year Toll-Free 24/7 Phone Support by Alienware Technicians
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BUYER'S GUIDE

Want some new kit? Read this first – it's like having your own personal shopper in handy magazine form

Whether you want a new graphics card, motherboard or joystick, this is where to look to find the best on the market. Editor's Choice is the class champ, the product

that will satisfy no matter what you play. Our Recommended product wears a silver medal, not quite as triumphant as the outright winner, but a worthy alternative.

Finally, the Also Consider product is one we believe you should look at too before making your final decision. If you feel we've got something wrong, missed out a great

product or just want to add your own words of wisdom, mail letters@pczone.co.uk. If we act on your suggestion, we might even send you a gift. We're nice like that.

◀ **EDITOR'S CHOICE** ▶ ▶ **RECOMMENDED** ▶ ▶ **ALSO CONSIDER** ▶

MOTHERBOARDS	 <p>IC7 STREET PRICE £85 MANUFACTURER ABIT Computer TELEPHONE N/A WEBSITE www.abit.com.tw</p> <p>Another solid and modern ABIT board with dual-channel memory configuration, two channel SATA with RAID, USB 2.0, 800FSB, plus 6-channel audio with S/PDIF. All cables included and it's overclocker-friendly, with a host of tweaking options in the BIOS. If you want high-speed networking, the IC7-G variant includes Intel Gigabit LAN on-board. The downside to these boards is they don't support earlier 400FSB Pentiums.</p>	 <p>K7N2 DELTA ILSR (ATHLON) STREET PRICE £74 MANUFACTURER MSI TELEPHONE 020 8813 6688 WEBSITE www.msi.com.tw</p> <p>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.</p>	 <p>875PNEO-FIS2R (INTEL) STREET PRICE £105 MANUFACTURER MSI TELEPHONE 020 8813 6688 WEBSITE www.msi.com.tw</p> <p>A high-end P4 Canterwood board, the Neo has some remarkable features, including dynamic overclocking – the hardware jumps on the throttle the moment you open apps – 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 packaging are excellent.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">NOW £105 (was £116)</p>
	 <p>P4 3.2GHZ STREET PRICE £193 MANUFACTURER Intel TELEPHONE 01793 403000 WEBSITE www.intel.com</p> <p>With the price of the 3.0GHz now well below £200, it makes sense to spend a bit extra on the 3.2GHz. Hyper-threading delivers a jaw-pounding, double-whammy power hit that pushes benchmark scores well ahead of the equivalent Athlon, and an 800MHz front-side bus paired with the right memory makes its presence felt. If you've got a P4 motherboard, chances are you're already set for an upgrade to remember.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">NOW £193 (was £209)</p>	 <p>ATHLON XP 3200+ 400FSB STREET PRICE £135 MANUFACTURER AMD TELEPHONE N/A WEBSITE www.amd.com</p> <p>No, it's not as punchy as the hyper-threaded Pentium – but it's got a great price tag. Earlier 333FSB chips can be had for around the £100 mark, but with an nForce2 or better chipset and DDR400 memory, you can enjoy the speed boost from more recent XP chips. If you want to build a low-cost, high-power PC, get a cooking video card and the AMD chip will do you proud.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">NOW £135 (was £159)</p>	 <p>P4 2.6GHZ STREET PRICE £130 MANUFACTURER Intel TELEPHONE 01793 403000 WEBSITE www.intel.com</p> <p>We'd previously recommended Intel's 2.4GHz 800FSB chip, but recent price slicing means the 2.6GHz chip now makes most sense. Coupled with a decent motherboard, some top-class memory and an FX 5700 Ultra or Radeon 9600XT, you'll have a machine that's muscular enough to tackle all the latest games. If you're building a home games network and want big machines for hardly any money, look no further.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">NOW £135 (was £159)</p>
	 <p>WD1200JB 120GB STREET PRICE £70 MANUFACTURER Western Digital TELEPHONE N/A WEBSITE www.westerndigital.com</p> <p>You may well view a 120GB HDD as an extravagance, but with games getting longer and broadband getting wider, a hangar-like hard drive gives you plenty of room for mucking about. You'll also bring that never-ending quest for more room to an abrupt end. The price is just right, and the performance second to none. Like the DiamondMax Plus9, the WD1200JB features an 8MB cache and a speed of 7200RPM.</p>	 <p>DIAMONDMAX PLUS9 80GB STREET PRICE £54.50 MANUFACTURER Maxtor TELEPHONE N/A WEBSITE www.maxtor.com</p> <p>The mid-sized Maxtor is for everyone: large, fast and not that pricey. 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 to pay a £20 premium.</p>	 <p>RAPTOR 36GB STREET PRICE £83 MANUFACTURER Western Digital TELEPHONE N/A WEBSITE www.westerndigital.com</p> <p>If you don't need a deep hole for your data, or if you intend keeping your dirt on a separate drive, the 10,000RPM Serial ATA Raptor makes the ideal foundation for your primary partition. It's wickedly fast, perhaps the fastest HDD available yet, and although designed for server environments, provides gaming desktops with the kind of warp-nine, low access times that make any application more nimble.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">NOW £83 (was £92.50)</p>
 <p>RADEON 9800 PRO 128MB STREET PRICE £153 MANUFACTURER Sapphire Technology TELEPHONE N/A WEBSITE www.sapphiretech.com</p> <p>Bit of a no-brainer this one. In what amounts to an AGP swansong, the 128MB version of ATI's Radeon 9800 Pro can now be yours for just £150: high-end punch in a mainstream price bracket. Like the 5900 XT, it's a product from the higher echelons, remarketed to appeal to a wider audience. Unlike the GeForce, it's not been throttled: it's the real deal. Buy one now.</p>	 <p>GEFORCE FX 5900 XT 128MB STREET PRICE £140 MANUFACTURER XFX TELEPHONE N/A WEBSITE www.xfxforce.co.uk</p> <p>The 5900 XT offers world-beating value – a top banana card packaged up with a mid-range price tag. In benchmarks, the 5900 XT is so far out front on power, it's snapping at the heels of big boys like the 9800 Pro. If you want the card that offers more frames per second per pound than any other, look no further. AGP is on its way out with a bang.</p>	 <p>RADEON 9800XT 256MB STREET PRICE £309 MANUFACTURER ASUSTeK Computer TELEPHONE N/A WEBSITE www.asus.com</p> <p>With mainstream cards hogging the two front pews, it's only fair we gave some space to the fastest card on the market: the world's best presented prize-fighter, the ASUS Radeon 9800XT. If you're lucky enough to have the requisite three hundred quid rattling around in your back pocket, why settle for anything less? You even get a coupon for <i>Half-Life 2</i> – read more about the game in our ten-page preview on page 32.</p>	
 <p>REVOLUTION 7.1 STREET PRICE £90 MANUFACTURER M-Audio TELEPHONE 0871 7177 100 WEBSITE www.maudio.co.uk</p> <p>Although it lacks a few of its rivals' gamer-friendly features, including hardware DirectSound and a joystick/MIDI port, the Revolution more than makes up for any deficit with a truly astonishing quality of sound. Unique technologies enhance your enjoyment of games, music and movies. The software is straight-talking and boasts a familiar look and feel, making the card a delight to work with.</p>	 <p>AUDIGY 2 ZS PLATINUM PRO STREET PRICE £167 MANUFACTURER Creative Labs TELEPHONE N/A WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com</p> <p>A quantum leap from its predecessor, the Audigy 2 offers a bogging range of pro-gamer and DVD features, including 6.1 surround sound, EAX Advanced HD, Advanced Resolution DVD-Audio and 24-bit/96kHz recording – it was the first card to gain THX certification from LucasFilm. If you appreciate the immersive experience offered by high-fidelity surround sound, the Audigy will give you an experience like no other.</p>	 <p>AUDIGY 2 ZS PLATINUM PRO STREET PRICE £167 MANUFACTURER Creative Labs TELEPHONE N/A WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com</p> <p>With the same core features as its little brother, the Platinum Pro is guaranteed to perform and sound like no other. The external breakout box is a boon for serious listeners, including standard audio connections and volume controls. The big Platinum also offers dual SB1394 firewire ports and optical links, a stereo RCA input, plus MIDI In and MIDI Out mini-DIN sockets.</p>	



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EDITOR'S CHOICE

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MX500
STREET PRICE £34
MANUFACTURER Logitech
TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127
WEBSITE www.logitech.com

Although it comes with a tail and doesn't have the same substantive feeling as the battery-reliant MX700, the MX500 remains a solid product and a solid performer in all games. It features Logitech's MX optical engine, mouse wheel (plus two additional buttons either side to aide document navigation), a task-switcher button, and two thumb buttons that speed up web navigation.



OPTICAL MOUSE BLUE
STREET PRICE £20
MANUFACTURER Microsoft
TELEPHONE 0870 6010 100
WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/uk

If you've ever been boggled by the number of buttons on a mouse, and have fond memories of a time when three clickers and a wheel were all you needed, Microsoft's blue rodent is the perfect peripheral. It's nice to look at, nice to hold and, as any veteran FPS gamer will tell you, three buttons is all you need. Plus the latest optical technology means it works anywhere.



MX700
STREET PRICE £47
MANUFACTURER Logitech
TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127
WEBSITE www.logitech.com

Sporting the MX optical engine that made Logitech famous with gamers, the MX700 is essentially an MX500 with its tail lopped off. A cradle keeps your desk tidy and acts as a recharger for the unfettered rodent - making the mouse more attractive to people who don't do batteries. It's a touch pricey and we remain unconvinced that going cordless is worth the extra stash.

MICE



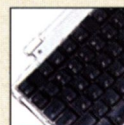
INTERNET NAVIGATOR
STREET PRICE £21
MANUFACTURER Logitech
TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127
WEBSITE www.logitech.com

The Internet Navigator lies absolutely flat on your desk, a trademark Logitech design that makes it look sleeker and 'feel' nicer. There's a scroll wheel along the left edge and a raft of customisable function keys to make trawling the web a cinch - you no longer have to swap back and forth to the mouse, and instead can leave your hands over on the keyboard. Once you browse this way, there's no going back.



INTERNET KEYBOARD
STREET PRICE £15
MANUFACTURER Microsoft
TELEPHONE 0870 6010 100
WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/uk

Forget what you've learned about Microsoft software - its hardware is always of a high build quality and, despite problems with early Intellimouse rodents, very 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 anything else.



PRO KEYBOARD
STREET PRICE £46
MANUFACTURER Apple
TELEPHONE 0800 0391 010
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.

KEYBOARDS



CYBORG EVO
STREET PRICE £25
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.



CYBORG 3D GOLD
STREET PRICE £22
MANUFACTURER Saitek
TELEPHONE 01454 451900
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.



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.

JOYSTICKS



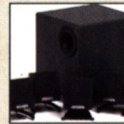
INSPIRE P580 5.1
STREET PRICE £53
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

We don't like the idea of blowing a ton on speakers, chiefly because the mid-range Creative products are so good. You could spend a little more on a 7.1 set, but you'd lose out on space - and there's little benefit for games players. Instead, stick to the six speaker P580s, which deliver crisp bass from the subwoofer and a clean, bright sound from the satellites. This latest design includes a headphone jack at last too.



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.



MEGAWORKS THX 5.1 550
STREET PRICE £189
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

Successor to our Best Performance winner, the Megaworks 550 is a stunning 5.1 setup with 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 DVDs and games - Creative's BASH system providing 500W of power that'll make you leap out of your seat.

SPEAKERS



CML174SXW
STREET PRICE £340
MANUFACTURER Hitachi
TELEPHONE 01628 585000
WEBSITE www.hitachidigitalmedia.com

When it comes to flat panel, fast-paced gaming, response times really count. And the CML174SXW has one of the lowest response times in its sector - a mere 16ms. It also delivers top-notch image quality, weighs in at just 5kg and comes in colours that'll match your kit. If you're looking to make the move from CRT, and action games are a priority for you, the handsome little Hitachi is the obvious choice.



FLATRON L1710B
STREET PRICE £290
MANUFACTURER LG Electronics
TELEPHONE 01753 491500
WEBSITE www.lge.co.uk

This 17-inch panel came within a gnat's guff of knocking our Hitachi favourite from the top spot, but its slightly fatter price tag (from the addition of a USB hub), plus inconspicuous silver and grey trim saw the L1710B lose out. But don't think it's a distant second place - things are as close as a kiss, the LG offering marginally better picture quality and matching the Hitachi for speed. Yet another nail in the CRT coffin.



VISIONMASTER PRO 514
STREET PRICE £492
MANUFACTURER Iiyama
TELEPHONE 01438 745482
WEBSITE www.iiyama.co.uk

Boasting a 22in Mitsubishi Electric DIAMONDRON tube, 0.24mm AG pitch and flicker-free refresh rates at immense resolutions, the Iiyama is a breathtaking sight on your desktop - not least because it gobbles so much of it. The big VM also has a comprehensive on-screen menu, USB hub and audio connectors. At 1600x1200, the display is rock steady at 110Hz and so ideal for gaming.

SCREENS



APPLE IPOD 40GB
STREET PRICE £400
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 too. The speedy Firewire interface (you'll need a suitable connection) and remote control rounds off a totally class act.



ARCHOS JUKEBOX MULTIMEDIA
STREET PRICE £316
MANUFACTURER Archos
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.archos.com

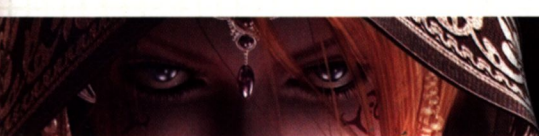
While it may never win any awards for aesthetics, the Jukebox Multimedia from Archos is the Swiss Army Knife of media players. Handling one of the widest selections of file types, the player can even play back a selection of video formats including DIVX. The sound is fantastic, but the bundled headphones are shite. And it's cheaper than the mighty iPod.



MUVO 128MB
STREET PRICE £67
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.europe.creative.com

The MuVo is one of the smartest gadgets we've seen. It comes in two parts, a USB key that plugs into any system running XP (without drivers) and a battery housing. Plug it into your PC and you can back up your documents. Drag a few MP3s onto the drive and when you snap the two halves together and plug in some headphones you've got one of the smallest MP3 players on the market.

MP3 PLAYERS



FX 5700





MAILBOX

This month's mailbox feels oh so pretty and witty and wise

■ PRETTY IN PINK Dave Woods



WALDEN

I'm writing about Antony Walden's (sic) *Breed* review in issue 141, and more specifically the voice-acting. The review says: "It honestly sounds like the developer has blown its sound budget on hookers and got some mates down the pub to have a go instead." Well, I picked up a *Breed* preview disc from GAME recently and heard the following from Jeff Wall, one of the lead artists on the game: "The initial stuff sent to us was a bit lame so I did a bit of trial recording with my own voice. Everyone seemed to like that,

so we went with it." And lo and behold you can see him doing that ridiculous gruff drawl into the mic. You also get to see the development team boozing outside at a picnic table (thus cementing Antony Walden's pub theory). It's amazing what you can find out for 99p.

Luke Kavanaugh

Not that there's anything wrong with boozing outside at a picnic table. As long as you remember to go back to the office at some point and finish your game...



Rome: Total War. Lots of horses, but not much naval warfare.

SHIP SANDWICH

I've just finished reading your *Rome: Total War* preview, a game you describe on your cover as "the greatest strategy game of all time". That's quite a claim considering there isn't any naval warfare in it.

This is ridiculous. The first Punic War was won by Roman sea power, and without the naval victory at Actium, the Roman empire would never have become an empire. If the game is "all but finished" and Creative Assembly is trying to "cram in as

many extra features as possible", then perhaps it should contemplate 'cramming in' some code to enable us to fight a few sea battles now and again.

Rob Black

Handbags out. So Creative Assembly, why haven't you got any real-time naval combat in your game? Hmm? "The simple answer is that when we do naval battles, we want to go all the way and do it really well. They'll involve grappling hooks, ramming, men leaping onto enemy ships, wind effects, sea states, storms and so on – the whole works. All this would take around a year and a half to do – and we didn't want to keep fans waiting all that time until the game was finished."

E=MC2

Now, it might just be me, but am I one of the only people who truly believes that interactive physics

LETTER OF THE MONTH

WAITING TO HAPPEN

Being aware of *PC ZONE*'s immense popularity, I thought I'd let you in on my next-gen gaming idea, *Amadeus Ex*.

Based in the 18th century, you adopt the role of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart in a conspiracy-riddled musical industry – fighting for survival while unraveling the mysteries of the classical world. The plot features a variety of twists and turns, including splinter cells within the business, a mutant breed of musicians, and a shocking ending which is a far cry from expectations. Set over five unique locations, including Prague and Versailles, you slowly pursue the infamously deadly JC von Beethoven, discovering a side to the musical world that could spell doom for all future music.

With never before seen or heard-of adaptive AI to suit any mood, tone or frequency, enemies can deliver knockout chords and blazing concertos and stop at nothing to rule all symphonies. However, temptations lurk at every concert – when the call of duty arrives, will you wear the halo (groan), or join the dark side? You also get the chance to dive into ballet-time and exciting new multiplayer options are available, such as team deafmatch and guess-the-key. Head-to-head composition matches help tune your conducting skills for the ultimate showdown of style and rhythm. *Half-Life 2?* Prepare for a duet.

Martin Kennedy

We've got one as well: Medal Of Honor: Deerhead. It's like the expansion, except you've got antlers on your head, which explains the unerring accuracy of the German snipers.

in games is über-cool? Surely seeing someone being blasted 40ft into the air by a grenade and crashing back down to the ground, or pushing things off ledges is the biggest kick you can get in a game? *PC ZONE*, I like you (beyond words), but I don't think you give enough attention and praise to physics. Does anyone agree with me that physics rules?

Matt Howes

You're joking aren't you? Everyone at ZONE loves physics in games (apart from Prez), and where a game does something special we'll be the first to tell you about it.

WHY OH WHY?

Can you please put something straight for me? In May's issue of the mag, why did you put *Jedi Academy* in the Third-Person Shooter Supertest? OK, it has first and third-person options, but who in their right mind uses

the third-person option when using guns? The lightsaber uses third-person, but if I'm going to be really picky, that's not really shooting is it? The fact that it shouldn't be in there is backed up by the fact that it didn't score a point, yet it's a decent game.

Anon

It didn't score a point because it's not as good as the other games in the Supertest.

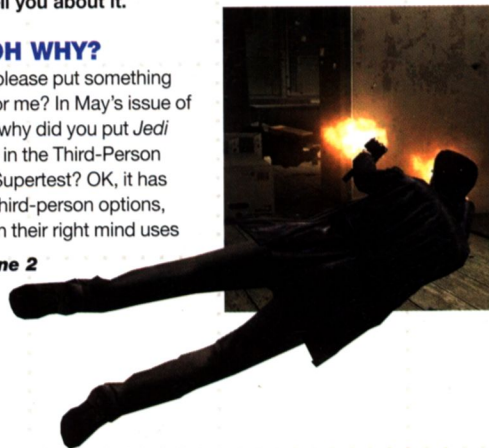
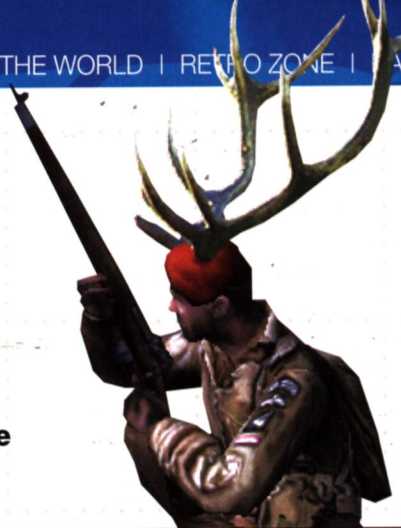
***Jedi Academy*'s one of those games that spans genres, but seeing as the lightsaber sections are the best, we thought it deserved a place in the Supertest.**

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SOUND, SORTED

I've always enjoyed many different sections of the magazine from issue to issue, but I wanted to commend Steve Hill's 'Ministry of Sound' and John McLean-Foreman's Lionhead Diaries article in issue 141. Graphics have always been regarded as the frontier for games development, but now that most games look great, it's the other aspects of creating games that make them stand out from the pack. Sound, music, AI and



John McLean-Foreman: sound guy.

many other parts of creating a game are getting to be just as important, and if a game's going to be considered a modern classic, it must excel in every field. I hope you continue to cover this topic and that the articles help to remind developers that there is more to games than fancy graphics.

Tim Williamson

I couldn't agree more. Surround sound is becoming the norm and it adds an amazing amount to games. Do not underestimate the power of a good soundcard. [X]



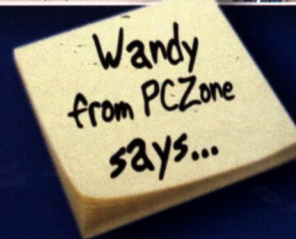
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BACKCHAT



▲ THE BEST OF THE CHAT FROM THE PC ZONE FORUM THIS MONTH. GET INVOLVED AT WWW.PCZONE.CO.UK

The forum. A place to meet, greet and chew the cud. And occasionally get involved in a war of words. Like this month. As you've probably noticed, we got to play *Half-Life 2*. And we thought it was important enough to put it on the cover. As did another magazine. Seems normal enough? You might think so, but it was enough to stir up an ant's nest the size of... Erm, a big ant's nest. Have you ever read *The Magus*? For much comedy reading, check out the extensive threads on the forum, but the events moved **one forumite** enough to call *PC ZONE* "cowardly, pathetic and desperate". Said post also went on to say that: "The truth is that they'd be much better off spending their time working out how to make their own mag better." Ouch. And that was just before we set off for a day go-karting...

Suzy was the firm favourite going into the event. And the odds proved correct, with her beating everyone into a distant second. Being a modest gal, it took her a whole night before she posted on the forum. "I'm feeling particularly pleased with myself after whupping the rest of the *ZONE* team. It doesn't quite make up for the fact that I couldn't sleep due to sore legs/arms/backside, but the pain will fade and my trophy won't!"

AlanShep2001 wasn't content with this. "Maybe you could put up the final positions, so that we can slaughter the loser." A post so against the true meaning of competition it even moved **Dave_PCZ** to reply. "Slaughter the loser? That's a bit unsporting. Anyway, rumours that **Jamie Sefton** posted a best lap time of 55 seconds, with everyone else posting 47 or 48 are yet to be substantiated. As are rumours that **Woods** got ahead of **Suzy** in the second race, only to be blue-flagged to let her through by an idiot steward." "Was **Woods** a lap behind in the first place, though?" asks **Moomocow8**. "Er... Maybe? Actually, no, but he passed me when I spun off trying to catch first place. Mind you, don't let the blue flag nonsense fool you, **Dave** was firmly in my grasp before that anyway!" replies **Suzy_Petrolhead** with her fingers firmly crossed. Final word? It has to go to **RichieHell**:

"I'd love to have a go at proper rally driving. At the moment I have to settle for thrashing my Mazda round town. I'm also the proud owner of a set of skid marks..." The post did continue but sadly, we've run out of space...



Suzy demonstrating girrrl-power.

TXTCHAT



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THE PCZONE A-LIST


SHOOTERS

FAR CRY



A huge leap for PC gaming, *Far Cry* is also an absolute joy to play. With its long-range combat, shimmering shores, impressive enemy AI and seamlessly integrated physics engine, it's the first shooter to show the potential of next-gen PC titles. The narrative may be slightly iffy, but the tension and exhilaration it instils in you makes the battle against the Trigens and their mercenary creators one of the best shooters in years.


PUB Ubisoft **DEV** Crytek
PCZ ISSUE 140



CALL OF DUTY

Call Of Duty is like the tour de force Omaha beach level of *Allied Assault*, stretched out over an entire game. Constantly managing to mix up feelings of dread, fear and excitement within you, there is no greater WWII experience.


PUB Activision **DEV** Infinity Ward
PCZ ISSUE 136



MAX PAYNE 2

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 : 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 is genuinely funny. What's more, it doesn't treat you like an idiot.


PUB Black Label Games **DEV** Monolith
PCZ ISSUE 122



HALF-LIFE: GENERATIONS

Unchallenged for three years, *Half-Life* redefined its genre with a cracking atmosphere and a compelling plot. It now comes bundled with the excellent *Opposing Force* add-on pack and the world's favourite mod, *Counter-Strike*.


PUB Vivendi **DEV** Valve Software
PCZ ISSUE 71



UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004

A fleshed out, revamped *UT* offering that far exceeds both its predecessors and our expectations. Extra game modes, superb vehicles plus inspired weapons and features make this one of the best multiplayer blasts around.


PUB Atari **DEV** Digital Extremes
PCZ ISSUE 138



UNREAL II

It takes a special game to beat the gorgeous visuals of *Unreal II*. 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 lightsabers, customisable characters and even the opportunity to turn to the Dark Side. Ace.

PUB Activision **DEV** Raven
PCZ ISSUE 133

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 The 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 makes *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. In addition, it boasts 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 and 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 and posterously 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 ▶

KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC



The best RPG to appear for five whole years, and the best *Star Wars* game to surface in ten. *Knights Of The Old Republic* manages to develop the franchise more than even Lucas's cinematic efforts ever could. With beautiful graphics, a gripping plot, oodles of Force powers and supreme character development, this is proof, if ever it were needed, that Bioware is one of the best development houses on the planet.

PUB: Activision **DEV:** Bioware
PCZ ISSUE 137



DEUS EX

Great sci-fi plot, amazing attention to detail and unparalleled player freedom: 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.

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 maker of the epic *Baldur's Gate* series proves it's 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 scorch 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 award 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. If PC role-playing's your thang, this is essential.

PUB Interplay **DEV** Bioware **PCZ ISSUE 96**



DEUS EX: INVISIBLE WAR

It's had most of its role-playing elements sucked out and developed a strong console bias, but the gripping plot and action remain intact. It wasn't the revolution we wanted, but it's still a worthwhile purchase.

PUB Eidos **DEV** Ion Storm **PCZ ISSUE 137**



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 is anything but.

PUB CDV **DEV** Larian Studios **PCZ ISSUE 121**

◀ 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.

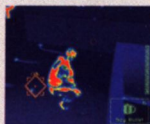
PUB Ubisoft
DEV Ubisoft Montreal
PCZ ISSUE 125



BEYOND GOOD & EVIL

A beautiful game with a myriad of styles that evokes the spirit of *Little Big Adventure*, along with a touch of *Zelda* sparkle. Whether you're fighting government conspiracies or photographing wildlife, it's never dull.

PUB Ubisoft **DEV** Ubisoft **PCZ ISSUE 138**



SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TOMORROW

Two games in one: a set of excellent, if not revolutionary, missions for Sam Fisher coupled with a scintillating spies vs mercs multiplayer mode. Single-player is more of the same, but that's no bad thing is it?

PUB Ubisoft **DEV** Ubisoft **PCZ ISSUE 141**



PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME

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

With narrative and puzzles that *Legacy Of Kain: Defiance* failed to improve on, this instalment of the Raziel saga is well worth a look. Compelling storyline and satisfying combat make it an excellent budget buy, despite the ageing graphics.

PUB Eidos **DEV** Crystal Dynamics **PCZ ISSUE 111**



DISCWORD NOIR

Although the point-and-click adventure game is dying, *Discworld Noir* is still very much alive. It's darker in style than previous *Discworld* games and all the better for it, in our opinion.

PUB Atari **DEV** Perfect Entertainment **PCZ ISSUE 79**



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**

◀ 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. *Ghost Master* is one of the freshest and funniest games we've seen for a long time.

PUB Empire Interactive **DEV** Sick Puppies

PCZ ISSUE 130

THE SIMS

Revolutionary at birth, the concept has since been diluted through numerous add-ons and an unhealthy long stay in the charts. It's now little more than a cash cow for Electronic Arts, although you can't help but admire the strength of community and the fact that it's still selling by the bucket-load.

PUB EA **DEV** Maxis/EA

PCZ ISSUE 87

VEGAS: 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

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 busy for a fair while.

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

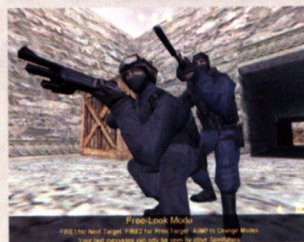
The ultimate 'it's good to be bad' game, *Dungeon Keeper* was a great idea and *DK2* keeps up the good work. It takes the essence and humour of the original, corrects all the mistakes, vastly improves the graphics and adds a myriad of new features that build wisely on the original concept.

PUB EA **DEV** Bullfrog

PCZ ISSUE 79

◀ 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

Blending *Half-Life* Team Deathmatch with kung-fu, slo-mo gymnastics makes 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

◀ MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ▶

EVERQUEST



EverQuest keeps going from strength to strength and now has a total of seven 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, *Anarchy Online* is 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

◀ 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 & 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 it's 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 into 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

◀ SPORT ▶

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 4: SEASON 03/04



A fresh season is added to the *CM4* canon, along with a variety of nips and tucks to smooth out the gameplay. The top-down match engine that enables you to watch how your players are performing still works like an absolute dream. The ongoing financial crises plaguing football means that playing the transfer market is a struggle, but the game is still as life-sappingly addictive as it ever was.

PUB Eidos **DEV** Sports Interactive

PCZ ISSUE 137



PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 3

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 licence 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

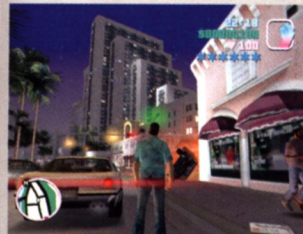
Each *Tiger* game seems to be getting progressively easier, but this latest effort is eminently playable. With superb graphical touches, an immersive career mode and courses that feel 'alive', you'll find it difficult to put down.

PUB EA Sports **DEV** Headgate Studios

PCZ ISSUE 135

◀ 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



TOCA RACE DRIVER 2

NEW ENTRY The most comprehensive driving game on the PC, *TOCA 2* is a must-have if you're into motors. With 15 different motorsports to master, 52 tracks and rival drivers with good AI smarts, it's the best racer on the market.

PUB Codemasters **DEV** Codemasters

PCZ ISSUE 142



COLIN MCRAE RALLY 04

More of a tweak than an overhaul, the fourth *McRae* boasts immaculate handling and oodles of gameplay potential. With an excellent damage model and plentiful motor-fiddling opportunities, it's the best rally game around.

PUB Codemasters **DEV** Codemasters

PCZ ISSUE 140



NEED FOR SPEED: UNDERGROUND

Illegal street racing, jazzed-up supercars and such a strong sense of speed that you yelp when you turn corners. *Underground* is a superbly designed and extraordinarily pretty tonic for testosterone-addled speed freaks.

PUB EA **DEV** Black Box

PCZ ISSUE 137

◀ 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, along with more campaigns and even more planes. All of this adds up to an exhilarating flying experience. Put simply, we think *IL-2: Forgotten Battles* is one of the finest flight sims ever to grace our screens.

PUB Ubisoft **DEV** 1C: Madox Games

PCZ ISSUE 128



MS FLIGHT SIM 2004: A CENTURY OF FLIGHT

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



SECRET WEAPONS OVER NORMANDY

A flight sim with a strong emphasis on fun, rather than flaps, navigation and perfect landings. If you want some intense arcade action with an engaging console-style reward system, look no further.

PUB Activision **DEV** Lucasarts

PCZ ISSUE 137



LOCK ON: MODERN AIR COMBAT

It may not get the heart pounding as much as WWII sims, but *Lock On*, with vast terrain to explore and a huge range of enemies to explode at long range, is the best (and pretty much only) modern flight-fight game to buy.

PUB Ubisoft **DEV** Eagle Dynamics

PCZ ISSUE 138

DISC PAGES

DOUBLE-TROUBLE!

The PC ZONE DVD is now double-sided, which means you get twice as much content as before. If you can't find what you're looking for on the DVD, close the PC ZONE disc browser and turn the disc over.

WINNING STRATEGY



DISCWORLD

WORDS & DISCS Suzy Wallace

At the time of writing, it's that time of year again – the merry whirlwind of big names and big games that is E3. Looking through the latest screenshots and details, I feel like a little kid again as I 'ooh' and 'aah' at the screen. It seems we've reached an important stage – *Far Cry* has already heralded the arrival of the next generation of first-person shooters, and it seems that RTS titles are the next in line.

Real-time strategy is changing. Before last month, the genre seemed stuck in a bit of a rut, but *Perimeter* opened my eyes to just how diverse and entertaining the genre could be if it tried. This month, we have another two distinctive RTS titles, both of which have taken it upon themselves to prove to me that not all RTS games require you to harvest, build and raze. *Soldiers: Heroes Of WWII* puts you right in the thick of the action, while *Ground Control II* manages to wed an otherworldly setting with pure battlefield tactics.

With the office half-empty during E3, I've had the perfect opportunity to nose around these latest RTS offerings and really get stuck in. Now it's your turn.

Of course, that's not all that's on the discs this month, and as well as the other excellent demos, there's more *Half-Life 2* movies, *Halo Custom Edition* and the first proper *Black & White* mod, *Eruption*. Lucky DVD owners can also sample our biggest Extended Play section ever, totalling over 750MB. Enjoy!



The Nazis were real home-wreckers.



Tank battles are fantastic.



Use the walls as hiding positions.

SOLDIERS: HEROES OF WWII

CD1/DVD Pub: Codemasters Dev: Best Way

If you've ever played an RTS and wanted to get in among the action, feeling the heat of combat on your face rather than simply giving orders, then *Soldiers: Heroes Of WWII* is the game for you. Billed as a shooter-cum-RTS, the game enables you to switch between traditional RTS point-and-click and direct control over individual units. It's a great concept, and one you can sample yourself with the exclusive demo on this month's discs.

The demo consists of one level, but fear not – it's a big 'un. With tasks ranging from defending an injured colonel to taking out a missile launcher site, and a difficulty level that's sure to test the best of players, you'll find enough replayability here to keep you coming back all week.

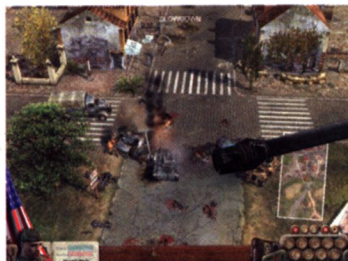
Eschewing tutorials, the demo thrusts you straight into the action, so here's a few hints before you start. First, each of your soldiers has his own inventory, and

you can use the X key to examine and loot boxes, vehicles, dead bodies and gun emplacements – best accomplished when there's a lull in the action. While you're there, you can also repair, refuel and re-arm vehicles – use the red high explosive shells for soldiers and blue armour-piercing rounds for vehicles. You can also use the backspace key to slow down time, and believe us when we say you're going to need it.

To take direct control of your units, select a soldier or vehicle and either toggle with the End key or hold down CTRL. While in this mode, you can aim and fire with the mouse, using the right mouse button to switch between primary and secondary weapons. So instead of shouting at the screen for your soldier to use a grenade, you can do it for him. Like the saying goes, if you want something done properly...



Use the gun emplacement.



Europe's newest accident blackspot.



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, soundcard, RAM and so on, along with 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 1GHz or equivalent, with a GeForce 3 64MB graphics card and 256MB RAM (512MB 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.

■ Dennis Publishing Limited cannot accept responsibility for any loss, disruption or damage to your data or your computer system (including hardware) that may occur while using either the disc or programs and data on it.

GROUND CONTROL II: OPERATION EXODUS

CD1/DVD Pub: VU Games Dev: Massive Entertainment Reviewed: Issue 143, 84%

WALKTHROUGH

BE PREPARED

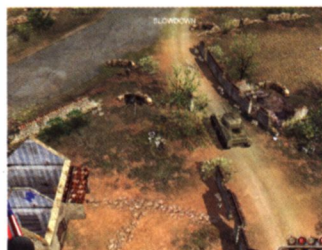
You can find yourself up against it pretty quickly in *Soldiers*. Here's a few tips to keep your head above water...



1 Make sure that each of your soldiers has his weapon equipped. It'll free up your inventory and enable you to have your trigger finger ready for those Nazis.



2 You don't need to be Sherlock Holmes to figure out what could be of use here. Load one of your men in and off we go.



3 Meet up with some Allied troops, listen to their plight and then grab what you can from the three boxes around the colonel's house.



4 Get your men to take up covering positions behind the nearby sandbags and move your tank up so it's in a prime firing position. Fire at will!

Have you got what it takes to be a battlefield commander when the bullets start flying and explosions ring out all around you? Well, with this exclusive demo you can find out, as the action in 3D RTS *Ground Control II* is as unrelenting and explosive as it comes.

The demo begins with two NSA (Northern Star Alliance) tutorial missions that acquaint you with the game's strategic intricacies and gameplay mechanics. You're taught everything you need to know here, from battlefield tactics to how to call in reinforcements.

Once you've mastered the controls, you can pit your wits against the AI in a full level from the game that sees you mounting a daring raid on one of the stranded and unsuspecting leaders of the Terran control.

The basics of *Ground Control II* centre on capturing Victory Locations and Landing Zones (LZs) on each map in order to accumulate Acquisition Points. You can then spend these on calling down reinforcements to help bolster your forces, which are delivered to an LZ of your choice by Dropship. But be careful, as the enemy is keen to win these key strategic locations back, so make sure you keep them well defended.

The Dropship is your most important unit, so make sure that you clear the area of any pesky enemy SAMs before calling it down, or you'll be left stranded and unable to call in backup. Dropships also lay down covering fire as they deploy their load, and can be upgraded in a variety of ways, including better firepower, armour and a larger cargo hold.

Reinforcements can be picked from human soldiers of different disciplines or



Use your combat engineers to heal troops and repair vehicles.

vehicles, which include hi-speed rocket launcher buggies, APCs and combat engineers – the healers of your outfit.

Every single unit comes with a secondary function that makes this already highly tactical game even more engrossing. These vary from additional armour to attack bonuses, and the way in which you use these can often be the key to winning or losing a battle.

You can read more about this action-packed stunner in our review on page 68, or else stop gawping and get yourself into the demo. There's a war to be won dammit, and it's not going to win itself...



IT'S ALL ABOUT THE TACTICS

USING THE TERRAIN AND PROPER TACTICS CAN BE CRITICAL TO YOUR SUCCESS IN *GROUND CONTROL II* – IT'S TIME TO USE YOUR BRAIN



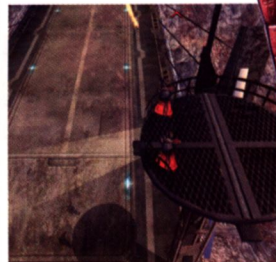
All-terrain vehicles

Capture the high ground to give you superiority in battles, and hide your men in forests, buildings and bunkers to give them an offensive and defensive bonus.



Tactical positioning

Try to use individual units to flank enemy vehicles and hit them where their armour is at its weakest to help hasten your victory. Remember your unit's secondary function.



Storm the building

Sending your men rushing into enemy-held buildings to meet them up close and personal negates the enemy's defensive bonus. Plus, if you capture the building, you've got an instant defensive position.



RISE OF NATIONS: THRONES & PATRIOTS

CD2/DVD Pub: Microsoft **Dev:** Big Huge Games
Reviewed: Issue 143, 89%

Taking the turn-based empire building of *Civilization* and cleverly translating it into real-time, *Rise Of Nations* was (for our money) the best strategy game of 2003. The first expansion pack for the game has just been released, and not only is it great (see our review, page 78), we've also managed to secure an exclusive playable demo so you can try it out first.

The demo offers a generous slice of empire-building action, including a substantial chunk of the excellent Alexander The Great campaign, one of four new campaigns from the add-on. A full tutorial is also included in case you're not familiar with the *Rise Of Nations* gameplay. Once you're done with that though, you can test your skills



Kicking-out time in the town.

on one of three different random map types. Four nations are available, including one brand new nation, the Persians, alongside three from the original game. Get in there and show the world the might of your empire!

HALO CUSTOM EDITION, HALF-LIFE 2 MOVIES & BLACK & WHITE: ERUPTION

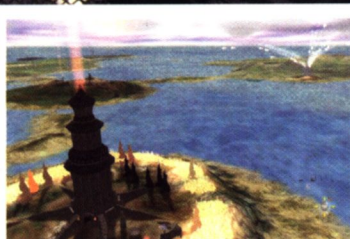
CD1&2/DVD



City 17 in its full glory.

E3 gave us another peek at the magnificent *Half-Life 2*, renewing our frenzied anticipation and silencing any remaining doubters in the process. In order to satisfy your eager appetites, we've got three fantastic *Half-Life 2* movies for you to pore over – so get watching!

We've also got *Halo Custom Edition*, a new version of *Halo* multiplayer that means you can now play custom-created content. The editing tools have also been released (they can be found on this month's DVD edition), so hopefully the playable content should start flooding in any minute now...



Good god! Or bad god? Your choice.

And if it's power you want, why not try out the very first *Black & White* mod – *Eruption*. Featuring a new island, rolling forests, a massive volcano and new models, it was created by one of our own PC ZONE forum users. *Eruption* should be enough to appease your godly desires until *Black & White 2* rolls around.

UEFA EURO 2004

CD2/DVD Pub: EA **Dev:** EA Canada **Reviewed:** Issue 143, 67%



Any hole's a goal, eh Becks?

Well, it looks like the sun has finally remembered to visit the British Isles, which can only mean one thing: another glorious summer of European football. In typically timely fashion, EA has released the official game of the event, and we've got the playable demo to prove it.

With a choice of three playable teams (of the 51 in the full game), the demo gives you a small taste of the action in a single friendly match. The three teams on offer are England, France and Portugal, meaning you can stage England's opening game against France and try for an unlikely upset. Or if you're a



A bit of English grit.

Scotland or Wales supporter, why not play as France and humiliate England decisively? Which is probably closer to the truth anyway...

As for the gameplay, it's 99.9 per cent identical to *FIFA 2004*, so you should have few problems.

TOCA RACE DRIVER 2

CD2/DVD Pub: Codemasters **Dev:** Codemasters
Reviewed: Issue 142, 89%

Following on from last month's single-player demo, *TOCA Race Driver 2* is back with a new demo showcasing the multiplayer game. Both LAN and Internet play are supported, so you can either race your office colleagues when the boss's back is turned, or take on someone less likely to taunt you over the top of your computer.

There are three races on offer, starting with a Formula Ford race at the Oulton Park circuit. These nimble, stripped-down racing machines make for some good high-speed action, although they don't seem to like running on grass or hitting walls. Funny that. After that, you can go



Formula Ford: Fully Off Road Driving.

down under for a V8 Supercar race at Phillip Island, followed by a DTM AMG Mercedes bash at the Hockenheimring – both events giving you far more sturdy, if not quite so fast, machines.

PLUS: DEMOS OF AIRSTRIKE 2, THIS MONTH'S INDIE ZONE GAME BOULDERDASH XMAS, THIS MONTH'S GAME THAT CHANGED THE WORLD FALLOUT, PATCHES FOR HITMAN: CONTRACTS, CALL OF DUTY AND CIVILIZATION III, MOVIES OF DARK SECTOR, THIEF: DEADLY SHADOWS AND SHELLSHOCK: NAM '67, THE UT2004 INI EDITOR AND FOUR NEW MAPS FOR WARCRAFT III: THE FROZEN THRONE

DVD EXCLUSIVES

ONLY AVAILABLE ON PC ZONE'S DVD EDITION. TO SUBSCRIBE, TURN TO PAGE 116. FOR FULL CONTENTS, SEE BACK OF THE BOX

THE ESSENTIAL SELECTION

The PC ZONE DVD is double-sided. Flip it over and you'll find The Essential Selection, which gives you the ten best demos of the last year (including *Far Cry*, *Max Payne 2* and *Perimeter*), the five mods of the month, plus an exhaustive library of patches, drivers, utilities and modding tools. Everything you need to make your mates dead jealous, in fact.

STALKER: SHADOW OF CHERNOBYL & THE MAKING OF UT2004

DVD

Pour yourself a drink, plonk yourself down in front of the DVD player (either on your computer or TV) and put side one of the DVD on to watch some stunning DVD-Video footage.

First up is hotly anticipated shooter *STALKER: Shadow Of Chernobyl*, due later this year from THQ. The setting is eerie, your fellow stalkers look decidedly dodgy and the animals are like something out of Salvador Dali's nightmares. So it all appears to be coming along swimmingly.

Second up we've got *The Making Of UT2004* video, featuring the boys at Epic

discussing the development of the game, *UT* mods and the importance of the *Unreal* community. Enjoy!



Mutants, anomalies and big guns.

TRACKMANIA

DVD Pub: Digital Jesters **Dev:** Nadeo **Reviewed:** Issue 139, 79%

'Design it. Build it. Race it!' That's the motto of *TrackMania*, and you know what? We love it. This unusual driving/puzzle game may not be much of a looker, but for the initiated, it's one big lovable bundle of joy.

This month, we've got two new demos for you – one multiplayer, the other a solo affair – both built to show off the new *Power Up!* edition of the game. There's new puzzle maps, racetracks and an editing suite on offer, all of which have a number of brand new construction blocks for you to tinker with.

If you've already got the game, then you can download the extra features from the official site (www.trackmania.com), but if you haven't gotten a taste of this Gallic low-budget barnstormer, then this is your perfect chance. Give it the time and attention it deserves and you'll be nursing your weary fingers in no time...



Driving on ice is snow joke...



Build your own tracks in the editor.

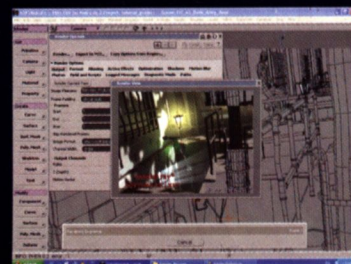
EXTENDED PLAY

DVD

This month we've dug out a whole host of fantastic extras just for you, dear DVD reader. For starters, there's two new Onslaught maps for the fantastic and chaotic *UT2004* – Ascendancy and Aridoom. Coming direct from Epic, you know these are going to be good, and you won't be disappointed.

If you're a budding 3D artist, we've also managed to bring you SoftImage | XSI EXP for *Half-Life 2*. Featuring the full functionality of the SoftImage package, the tool enables you to create, modify and export your own models into *Half-Life 2* – when it eventually arrives, that is.

Plus, there's 120MB of *Neverwinter Nights* content in the *Community Pack*, and if you've waited patiently, we've got the *Halo Editing Kit* to create the custom content playable in *Halo Custom Edition*.



Ready and waiting for *Half-Life 2*.



Aridoom has vast, arid landscapes.

DARK HORIZONS: LORE

DVD Pub: Garage Games

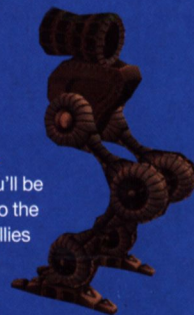
Dev: Infinite Max Gaming Technologies

If you loved Transformers as a kid, owned plenty of Zoids and tinkered with Gundam toys, then *Dark Horizons: Lore* could be right up your street. It's a persistent-world game, based around combat between giant, manga-inspired Mecha Vehicles (known as MAVs), and we've got a full seven-day trial version for you to check out.

Before you jump online, check out the six tutorial missions, which guide you through everything from manoeuvring about the landscape to rescuing power cores from enemy territory. Once you've

got these basics nailed down, you'll be ready to log on to the Net, find some allies and stomp your way across the online world.

There are four game modes – Arena, Team Deathmatch, Capture the Core and Assault. Your performance in all but the Arena game type affects the overall standing of your federation in a worldwide war, so get out there and make a difference!



EXTRA FEATURES

We've also brought you the server browsers All Seeing Eye and Kali, the free anti-virus software AVG, and FRAPS – the program to take video footage of your in-game experiences. So if you happen to take some footage that's especially amusing, stupid or just shows off your incredible skill, send it to: Suzy Wallace, Disc Editor, PC ZONE, 9 Dallington Street, London, EC1V 0BQ. If it's good enough, we might even stick it on the discs.

ALSO ON THE DVD... DEMOS OF *SPARTAN*, *SCHIZM II: CHAMELEON*, *NEIGHBOURS FROM HELL 2*, *SKOOL'S OUT* AND *OUT OF THE PARK BASEBALL*. MOVIES OF *RYZOM*, *EVERQUEST II*, *YOU ARE EMPTY*, *TLOTR: THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH*, *JUICED* AND *DUNGEON SIEGE II*. CONTENT FROM THIS MONTH'S COMMUNITY CHEST (PAGE 114). MODS OF THE MONTH: *ROCKET ARENA 3*, *REMOTE STRIKE (UT2004)*, *HOSTILE INTENT* AND *BATTLEFIELD: PIRATES*. PLUS: *STEAM* – FULL CLIENT AND FULL *STEAM* CACHE, ALL THE LATEST PATCHES AND MORE!



ON THE DVD

GAMES THAT CHANGED THE WORLD

FALLOUT

Will Porter looks back at the game that mutated a genre

AS THE sweet melody of *Maybe* by 1950s group The Ink Spots trickles out of your speakers, the screen flickers and *Fallout's* intro movie begins. It opens with a happy-go-lucky mascot of 1950s corporation Vault-Tec Industries climbing into the safety of a nuclear bunker, moves swiftly on to two heavily-armoured soldiers waving cheerily while shooting a kneeling man in the back of the head, and closes with the decimation of human-kind in a nuclear apocalypse. This is the game that managed to rejuvenate a genre that was dying on its dice-rolling arse and praying for innovation.

A game made by adults for adults (and, as the slogan ran, 'by mutants, for mutants'), *Fallout* embraced themes of sex, violence and drug addiction in a way that no other title could match. Ripping the RPG genre away from its cosy nest of elves and goblins, *Fallout's* mob bosses, raider gangs, prostitutes, sparkling dialogue and grisly brand of violence not only rekindled the embers of a genre, but also provided hooks that would reel in gamers who previously wouldn't have touched a role-playing game with yours.

Casting you as a vault-dweller brought up in the micro-society of nuclear bunker Vault 13, *Fallout* gave

you the task of finding a chip that would fix a water purification system – without which your people would die within 500 days. It was a quest that would branch out and surround you with mysterious cults, bizarre monsters and a canine companion called Dogmeat.

MIDNIGHT MADNESS

"We wanted to do a science-fiction storyline set on Earth – and all of the time travel, alien invasion and virtual reality stories seemed so clichéd," explains Tim Cain, the game's lead programmer and producer. "Someone mentioned *Wasteland* (a 1988 Interplay role-player set after WWII), and we thought of several cool post-apocalyptic plots. I think the exact storyline for *Fallout*, one of being trapped in a vault after the bombs fell, occurred late one night after a lot of pizza and soda."

Tim continues: "Once we decided on the vault idea, elements fell into place pretty quickly. We knew we wanted it to be well after the war, so radiation would be low but there was plenty of time for mutations. We also knew we wanted the player to make any kind of character, so the idea of the random drawing to see who had to go outside happened early too. Deciding on the water chip as the cause came later, though."

"We decided early on to go post-nuclear and stay away from orcs and dwarves," adds Leonard Boyarsky, *Fallout's* art director. "The main thing we wanted in the game were multiple paths – the talker path, the thief path and the combat path – and we were adamant that the actions you took would change the way the world reacted to you."

YOU ARE SPECIAL

Fallout was originally designed with the GURPS role-playing system. However, when the licence-owners started openly murmuring about the high level of violence that was brewing in *Fallout*, the decision was made to switch to a homegrown ruleset known as SPECIAL – after two years of development. This late decision freed up the creative process, but happened so far into production that there was no time to iron out features deeply entrenched within GURPS – one example being the (deeply unfashionable) turn-based combat, a feature that *Fallout* fans would soon come to adore.

GAME *Fallout*
DEVELOPER Black Isle Studios
PUBLISHER Interplay
RELEASED 1997
INFLUENCED Before *Fallout*, role-players were running out of steam – the *Ultima* series and *Diablo* were producing the goods, but overall RPGs were going nowhere fast. *Fallout's* adult themes of nuclear apocalypse, sex, drugs and basic grit showed the world that role-players could, essentially, be cool. It snagged legions of fans and paved the way for a 1998 sequel, as well as the likes of *Deus Ex*, *Vampire: The Masquerade – Bloodlines* and (maybe) *Fallout 3*.



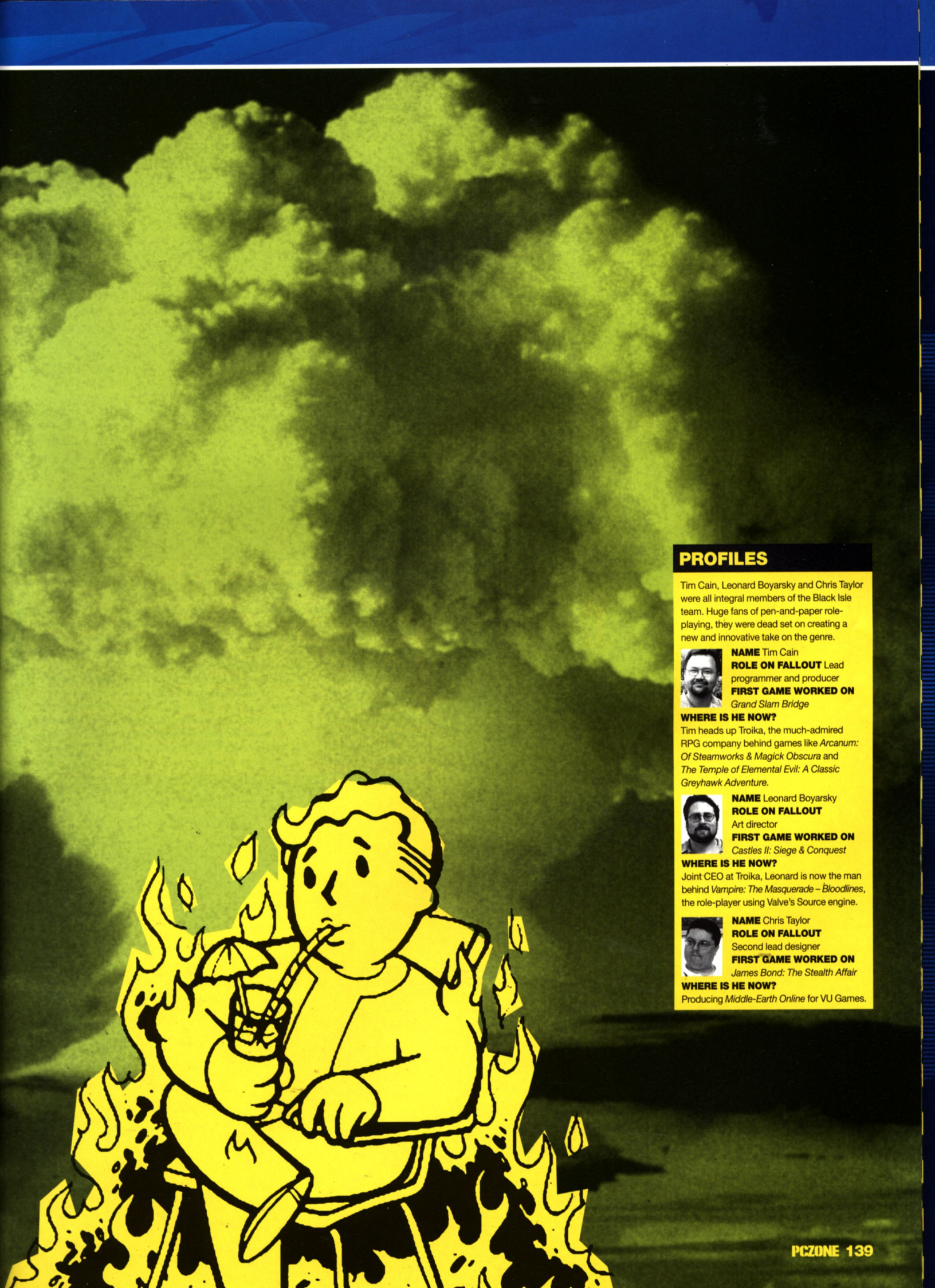
An evil cult stood as one of your main foes.



Bob, purveyor of iguana bits and human flesh.



You could choose to aim for the eyes or groin.



PROFILES

Tim Cain, Leonard Boyarsky and Chris Taylor were all integral members of the Black Isle team. Huge fans of pen-and-paper role-playing, they were dead set on creating a new and innovative take on the genre.



NAME Tim Cain

ROLE ON FALLOUT Lead programmer and producer

FIRST GAME WORKED ON
Grand Slam Bridge

WHERE IS HE NOW?

Tim heads up Troika, the much-admired RPG company behind games like *Arcanum: Of Steamworks & Magick Obscura* and *The Temple of Elemental Evil: A Classic Greyhawk Adventure*.



NAME Leonard Boyarsky

ROLE ON FALLOUT

Art director

FIRST GAME WORKED ON
Castles II: Siege & Conquest

WHERE IS HE NOW?

Joint CEO at Troika, Leonard is now the man behind *Vampire: The Masquerade – Bloodlines*, the role-player using Valve's Source engine.



NAME Chris Taylor

ROLE ON FALLOUT

Second lead designer

FIRST GAME WORKED ON
James Bond: The Stealth Affair

WHERE IS HE NOW?

Producing *Middle-Earth Online* for VU Games.

"I think the strength of *Fallout's* combat system is that it was easy to understand and use, but still complex enough to give you many options on how to fight," muses Tim on the 'three steps forward, two steps back' nature of post-nuclear combat. "Turn-based combat gives you more time to think of battle tactics, so combat feels richer – and a lot of people responded to that."

"We were trying to make a very paper-and-pencil type of RPG. We didn't avoid the previous computer RPGs, but we spent a lot of time trying to get that tabletop RPG experience into a computer game," recalls Chris Taylor, the second lead designer. "I'm most proud of the area designs and the SPECIAL system. SPECIAL needed more time, but overall I'm happy with the way it came out. I would've liked to have spent more time with it and tried to make the stats and skills more meaningful – tweaking some of the combat values, especially the way armour, damage and criticals worked."

Chris continues: "We wanted to make a game that felt different from the 'elves and dragon' games of the time. Part of that was the setting and part of that was the attitude of *Fallout*. The intro movie, with the execution scene that ended with a happy wave was one of the defining moments for us as developers. Giving over-the-top violence, with sexuality and language, combined with a happy-smiley view from the 1950s was a conscious decision."

DID YOU KNOW?

The voice talent for *Fallout* includes Richard 'Stargate bloke and MacGyver' Dean Anderson. And Ron Perlman, the man under the *Hellboy* make-up.

NAUGHTY BOYS

So exactly how far did *Fallout* push the adult envelope? Chris recalls a 'disturbingly funny' example of the Quality Assurance team placing explosives on one of the children running around, and from then playing a game similar to Russian Roulette. Like the *Grand Theft Autos* of today, you didn't have to do really horrible things (you

could even talk your way past the master of the mutants at the game's close should you have high enough speech talents). However, if you wanted to play as a morally dubious character, then you could. This meant you could sleep with the prostitutes, side with the bad guys and assassinate the innocent. You could also steal from the poor and kill any poor sod that crossed your path – even though this wouldn't exactly make people welcome you into their hovel with open arms later in the game.

Drugs and drug-dealers were also on the menu, with all the pros and cons that go with them. "There was no doubt in our minds that the level of violence, profanity and sexuality was going to make us M-rated," explains Chris. "We added drugs because it rounded out the mature themes in the game and gave us the 'magical' potions we needed to do some game systems. We also wanted there to be a very large downside to taking drugs, so addiction was always part of the drug system from the first

day. I'm a firm believer in consequence of action, so if you have drugs, then you need to make them dangerous."

And as anyone who took a gasp of Jet or a handful of BuffOut during the game will tell you, going cold-turkey (or cold rad-scorpion in this case) always played on your mind – it may have given you a boost for a while, but would you be debilitated in ten minutes when you were facing off against a Deathclaw? Better take a few more pills then, eh? Here, addiction was intelligently handled, done in a far better way than the ice cream van, drug-delivery services of Tommy Vercetti.

ONE IN A MILLION

Artistically meanwhile, even though *Fallout* was the brownest of brown games, some things just set it apart from the crowd. "I'm extremely biased towards the intro and ending sequences, as Jason Anderson and I designed them and I felt they gave the game a great, weird feeling," explains Leonard Boyarsky.



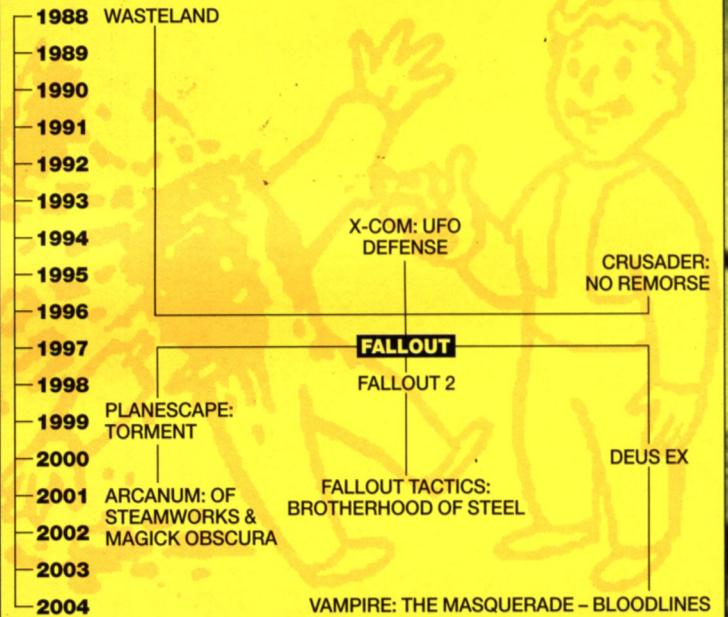
This cheeky chap was, unsurprisingly, an absolute bastard to kill.



The Brotherhood of Steel: badasses.

FAMILY TREE

Fallout's legacy spans any number of games in which you find sex, grit, open gameplay and dice being rolled. No *Fallout*, no *Vampire: Bloodlines*...



"Overall, from an art standpoint our influences included the movies *Brazil* and *City Of Lost Children*, along with the graphic novel *Hard Boiled*."

TOP OF THE PIPS

Above and beyond all this, however, was *Fallout*'s mascot Pipboy (as he became known), who would regularly be shown smiling happily while something horrible was happening to him – his face melting, eyes being vaporised and so on.

"I still think the *Fallout* manual is one of the best manuals ever done," adds Chris – referring to the Pipboy-heavy instruction booklet that came with a 'survival recipes' cookbook as an appendix. It was these little touches that really set the game apart, showing the passion of the team behind it – in both the original game and the sequel.

There's a cavalcade of great *Fallout* moments that teary-eyed fans will readily regale you with – the

choice is wide. For example, the time when your character gets caught in flagrante with a farmgirl by her angry father, after which you're forced into a shotgun marriage and she becomes a rather useless member of your party. In *Fallout 2*, meanwhile, you can sleep with both the wife and daughter of a Las Vegas-style gangster – stealing

"Fallout helped revitalise the computer RPG market, which had been proclaimed dead by many"

TIM CAIN LEAD PROGRAMMER AND PRODUCER, *FALLOUT*

the wife's jewellery and the daughter's drugs stash as you go.

"I liked going back in time in *Fallout 2* and breaking the water chip accidentally," adds Tim Cain – talking of the fact that one false move by your character in *Fallout 2* is what triggers off his ancestor's quest in the original game. "I like it because it's funny, plus I like temporal strange loops."

"I may be warped, but I especially like the fact that they kicked you out of the vault at the end," chips in Leonard. "That put a whole different spin on the game you'd just played and left you with an emotional kick at the end."

In this sprightly young games journalist's eyes, however, it's perhaps the secret stuff that underlines *Fallout*'s

greatness – the random encounters that few gamers would discover such as the paean to *Monty Python And The Holy Grail* found in *Fallout 2* – in which you too must cross the Bridge of Death and answer its keeper's questions on your name, your quest and the airspeed velocity of swallows.

So did *Fallout* change the world? Well,

it certainly paved the way for the non-fantasy role-players we see today – such as *Deus Ex* and *Vampire: The Masquerade – Bloodlines*. "I think *Fallout* helped revitalise the computer RPG market, which had been dead before then – or at least proclaimed dead by many fans and reviewers," explains Tim Cain. "It also showed how popular and fun turn-based combat could be, when everyone else was going with real-time or pause-based combat. Whether it changed the world or not is subjective – but for some people, it did."

Chris Taylor agrees: "We came out with *Fallout* at a time when there hadn't been a good, solid RPG for quite some time. There were many people who'd basically written off the RPG genre, much like the adventure genre today, so we certainly changed computer RPGs and had an influence on future games."

So there you have it: dark, dirty, morbid and thoroughly brilliant. Come back Vault 13, we need you now more than ever. **EW**

THE FUTURE

A GLOW AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL FOR *FALLOUT 3*?

As reported in *Bulletin*, *Fallout 3* is shrouded in intrigue and mystery. What we know is that in December 2003, Interplay's RPG studio Black Isle was shut down – putting the unannounced *Fallout 3* on the shelf. Chris, Tim and Leonard (the former now at VU Games, the other pair at Troika) were understandably concerned.

"It took me a while to think about *Fallout 3* never being released," says Chris. "I think the developer was taking it in a neat direction – it would've been a great game." Tim agrees: "On one hand, I was a little sad, because I wanted to play a *Fallout* RPG that I didn't know the plotline of. On the other hand, I was also surprised, because I thought Black Isle was one of the strongest divisions at Interplay. Plus, I was curious to see if this

meant the *Fallout* licence was available..."

The answer is 'yes' – Interplay CEO Herve Caen revealing recently that "we're planning to publish *Fallout 3*". The game is still on hold, but the rumours are that it'll be picked up by an external studio. So do the boys know anything about all this? Chris claims that he'll "never count those mutants out", while Tim cryptically mutters "I know nothing". Have the radioactive wastes been granted a reprieve? We'll know soon...



Will *Fallout 3* survive?



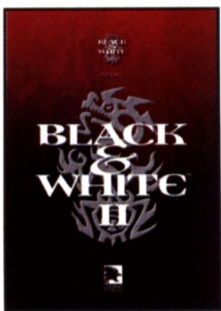
What is it with RPGs and giant insects?



One of *Fallout*'s secret encounters.



Deathclaws – terrors of the wastes.



THE LIONHEAD DIARIES

Getting a game up and running perfectly takes patience and a lot of hard work. These are testing times, writes **John McLean-Foreman**



AT FIRST

glance, testing games looks like a dream job. Who wouldn't want to spend their entire day playing games, hanging out

with friends, analysing competitors' games and getting paid for it? Not to mention that when testers get home they obviously have to do more 'research', regardless of what needs to be done around the house. "Sorry babe... I can't help clean up right now." K-Pow! Pow! Pow! Ratatatatat!

Sadly, testing doesn't work that way. To begin with, testers don't play games all day long; or to be more precise, they don't play games that are fun to play. You know that game that you really, really love, the one you think you could play seven days a week for three years without getting bored? That same ground-breaking wonder of modern gameplay you fantasise about working on was probably only enjoyable in its last two months of production. Prior to that it was, in all likelihood, a bug-filled nightmare. Glitchy, unstable, frustrating as hell... Well, it's that nightmare that testers at Black & White Studios get to 'play' with on a daily basis.

ONE TWO, ONE TWO

Just this week, there were a myriad of problems. Jamie, the lead tester on *B&W2*, was scrolling past his storage pit when he accidentally hit the hotkey for the flamethrower miracle. The hyper-flammable storage pit literally went up in an explosion of smoke, and half the town was gone before any of the villagers even reacted. The entire town burnt to a crisp and everyone began starving because, of



Constant testing means bugs can be ironed out early.

course, the food and resources were suddenly all gone. Jamie painstakingly began to rebuild his town so that he could complete the task he originally intended to. And then the game crashed.

Two days ago, many new features were submitted to the main program at once, causing no end of stability problems – one being that the game slowed down to, oh, maybe two frames a second.

A few days before that, Ben was doing some army versus army testing when the Creature came bounding out of nowhere and began to murder his own soldiers. No matter what Ben did, he couldn't get the Creature to quit with the carnage. Eventually, Ben's soldiers panicked and began firing on the Creature – it was chaos. These are extreme cases that were fixed quickly, but it still illustrates the point.

Back when development teams were made up of maybe four people, testing

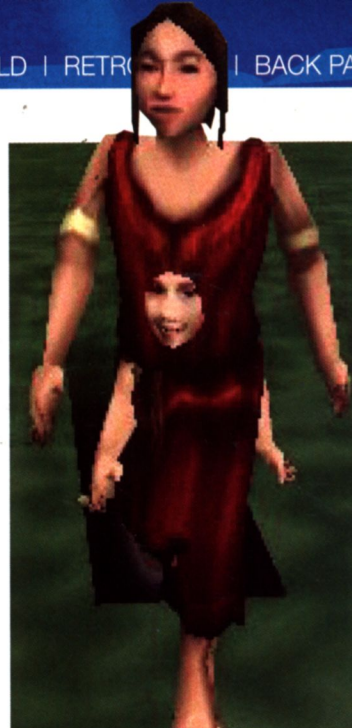
was a great way to break into the industry (that was how the head of Black & White Studios, Jonty, started out). In those days, you didn't require any particular skills – all you needed was enthusiasm and a willingness to learn. These days, it's still a way into the industry, but at Black & White Studios our testers have a different role than they used to. We're now far more interested in using the testers to improve the design than using them for bug hunting (that's done by the legions of testers at Electronic Arts, our publisher).

DON'T BRING ME PROBLEMS...

So what is a *B&W* tester's main job? It's to make the game fun and stable enough for continuing development. With that in mind, they look at the game's design document and compare it to what's happening in the game. If the game can't do what the design states that it should, it's up to the tester to work out why that is, who needs to fix it and offer a list of possible solutions. There are various meetings to discuss the problems where the best solutions are selected and implemented, and just when the testers are starting to think they might get a spare moment to themselves, the process starts all over again.

Part of keeping the development running smoothly involves ensuring that the programmers don't upload any changes to the main program until after they've been double-checked for bugs that could cause a company-wide system crash. This means there must always be a tester on site until the program is stable – woe betide the programmer who uploads buggy code on a Friday night, then sets off for the weekend prior to testing.

Performing such a heinous act means the testers have to wait around all night



Now that just ain't right, is it?

and also that the programmer has to turn around, return to work and stay until 4am fixing the error. This may sound harsh, but until the game is fixed, nobody can work on it over the weekend. This happened here, but in the programmer's defence, the problem stemmed from someone else's code hidden within his own, but the point remains: never check-in before the testers have gone over your work.

THROUGH THE MILL

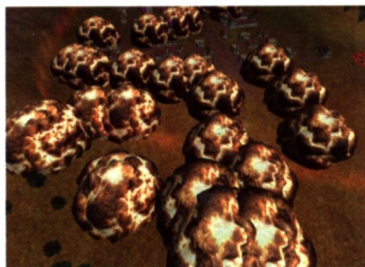
When something important in the game isn't working as it should be, testers put together a focus group to tackle the problem. Such a group can be made of anywhere from two to several hundred people, who keep playing the game until they come up with possible solutions. They tell us why it doesn't look good, why it plays badly, why it behaves in unexpected ways and they also give us design suggestions. By that time, most of the testers have numb thumbs and the glazed looks of people who haven't taken their eyes off their monitors for 12 hours straight.

Both Jamie and Ben have worked incredibly hard on *B&W2* for over a year now, while Nathan and Robbo have been involved since the original *Black & White* was released back in 1997. Nevertheless, it's important to regularly receive fresh perspectives, so testers bring in work experience volunteers, both male and female, who stay and play the game for a week or two at a time. In fact, some of the best suggestions often come from these people.

Clearly, testing isn't all fun and games, but at the end of the day it's a pretty great job. At Lionhead, we're currently booked for work experience volunteers until mid-2005, but we're always happy to have more. If you have the enthusiasm, the patience and a flare for design, who knows? You could end up working on *Black & White 3*. So next time your mother/girlfriend gives you hell for "never getting off that damn computer", just tell her that you're practising for your future career. That's what a few of us did. [X]

"Woe betide the programmer who uploads buggy code on a Friday night then sets off for the weekend without having it tested first"

JOHN MCLEAN-FOREMAN FICTION WRITER, LIONHEAD



Giant popcorn causes *B&W* chaos.



When polygons go wrong...

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WOLFENSTEIN 3D, *Battlezone* and even ZX81 'killer app' *3D Monster Maze* have all been put forward as candidates for the first ever first-person shooter. The truth is, they've all contributed in some way to the development of our favourite indulgence and *Corporation*, an early 16-bit hit from then-publisher Core Design, is no different.

The idea was to break into the high-security offices of the nefarious Universal Cybernetics Corporation and find evidence that would expose their



Robots. Terrifying in any era.

secret robot experiments to the world. And of course monsters, robots and various hybrids were there to put an end to your investigation.

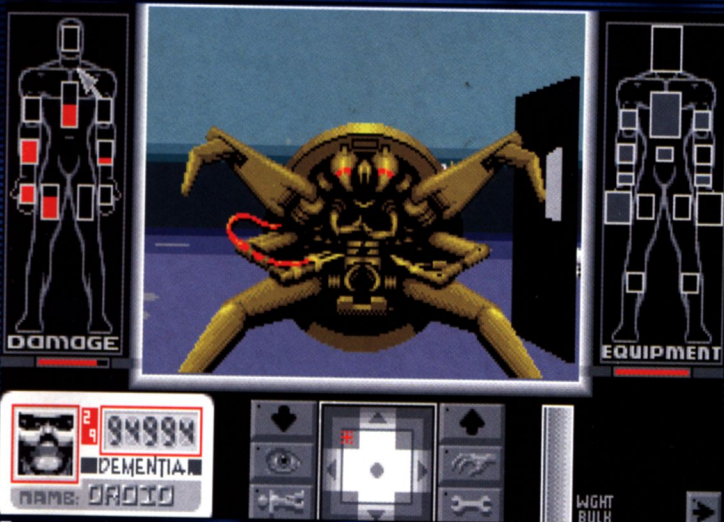
Pre-dating *Thief* by some years, the



A precursor to JC Denton?

gameplay required you to sneak your way past security cameras, hack through doors and in true RPG-fashion upgrade your characters with new skills and implants along the way. But the selling point, unlike previous tile-based games like *Dungeon Master* and *Captive*, was that *Corporation* had smooth, realistic character movement, closer to what we take for granted in first-person games today. Moreover, the interiors, though rather sparse, were totally 3D and the monsters looked suitably menacing (for the time). Sadly, the control system was counter-intuitive and the frame rate suffered for the game's high ambition. So we all went back to playing *Captive* and *Dungeon Master* anyway.

In light of the genius of *Corporation's* spiritual successors, *System Shock* and *Deux Ex*, we think it's high time the original game got some respect. Not a great game at the time, but looking back, it's clear that Core was onto something big. Lara Croft's knockers, as it turned out.



Zzap magazine dismissed the 'realistic' movement as 'a gimmick'.

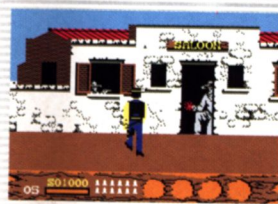


NEWSFLASH

IT'S AUGUST 1990 AND...

- Iraqi troops get lost on their way to the beach and inadvertently invade Kuwait. Sales of military-themed games like *F-19 Stealth Fighter*, *Gunship* and *Team Yankee* go through the roof.
- The 8-bit days draw to a close as the 16-bit consoles are prepped to take over the living room. As the Super Famicom readies itself in Japan, UK gamers are saving up for the Sega Mega Drive, which is announced to hit the shops before Christmas.
- Egghead researchers Tim Berners-Lee and Robert Cailliau invent the World Wide Web and set about developing the first Internet browser.
- Reports are circulating on a potentially serious affliction called VGE, or video game epilepsy. Symptoms range from mild headaches to full seizures which are brought about by exposure to flashing lights, figure patterns and scene-changing. Sounds like a typical Ozric Tentacles jig to us.

THE BEST OF THE REST



SPAGHETTI WESTERN SIMULATOR

(Spectrum/C64)
Bad lip-synching, nervous camera work, bizarre close-ups of man stubble - this game had none of it. In fact, like most games with simulator in the title, it barely passed muster as an arcade game, even a budget £2.99 one. Walk, shoot, avoid flying pots etc etc. But it was the last game I bought for my Speccy, which is why I remember it.



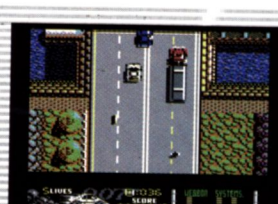
TURRICAN

(Atari ST/Amiga)
Almost the best game to come out of Germany (and hugely successful), *Turrican* was one of the few side-scrolling shooters not to clone the tepid arcade hits of the time. Power-ups, end-level bosses, insane weaponry and endless aliens were par for the course, but it looked gorgeous and the mix of frustration and reward was pitched just right. *Metroid* schmetroid.



SECRET OF THE SILVER BLADES

(PC/C64/Tandy)
Silver Blades was the fourth AD&D game in the 'Gold Box' series, offering much the same as its predecessors with a new area and story to explore. It was beginning to show its age though, and despite its official D&D status and the feature of being able to import your characters from previous episodes in the series, others, like *Ultima IV*, were starting to overtake.



THE SPY WHO LOVED ME

(Amiga/ST/C64/Spectrum)
Half of it a turgid platform shooter pitting Bond against Karl Stromberg, the other a decent *Spy Hunter* rip-off, *The Spy Who Loved Me* was a typical Bond game for the time: multi-generic, utterly unoriginal and a money-spinner for its publisher Domark (aka Eidos). Thank God we don't live in those dark days anymore, eh? Perish the thought.



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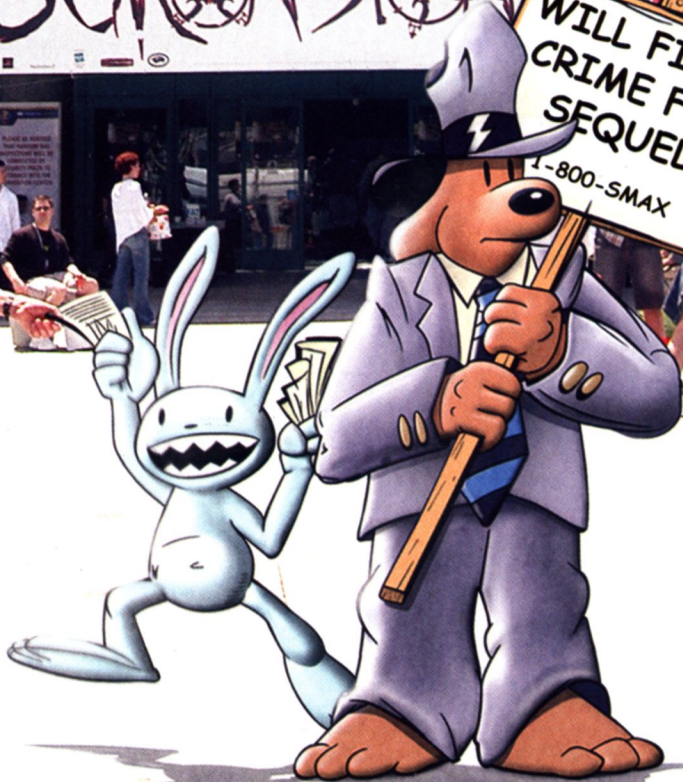
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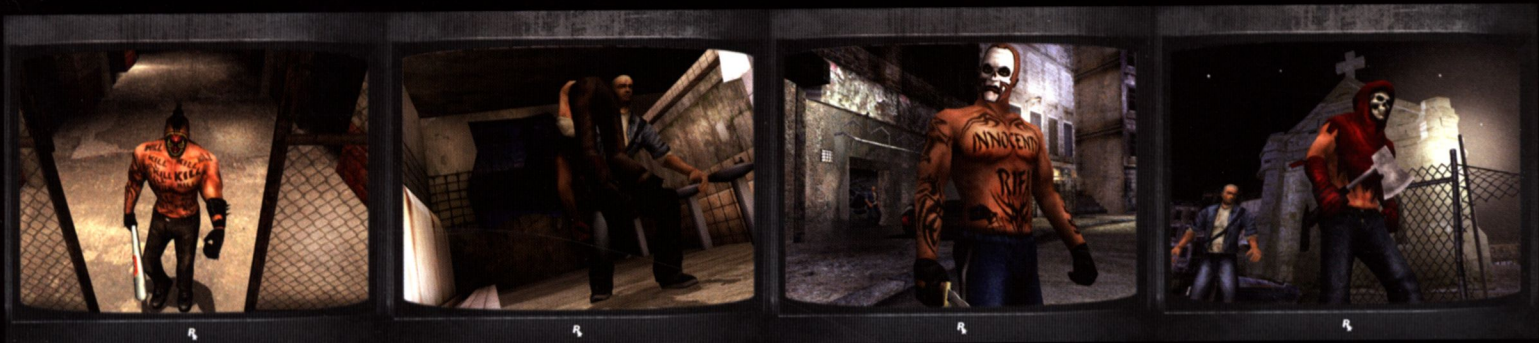


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