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6-PAGE
REVIEW!

DOOM 3

It's here! But was it worth the wait?

HANDS-ON!

TRIBES:
VENGEANCE

Played to death –
our verdict inside

HE'S BACK!

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NUKEM
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NY COMPO: Who is the voice of Duke Nukem?

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GAME CRITICS AWARD
BEST OF E3 2004
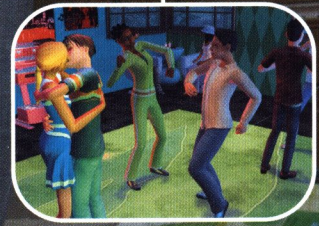BEST SIMULATION GAME

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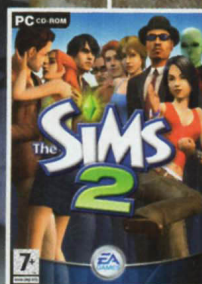**AGE 17** Get lucky on the dancefloor and maybe in the bedroom.

AGE 23 Date your way through the phonebook. Twice.

contents →
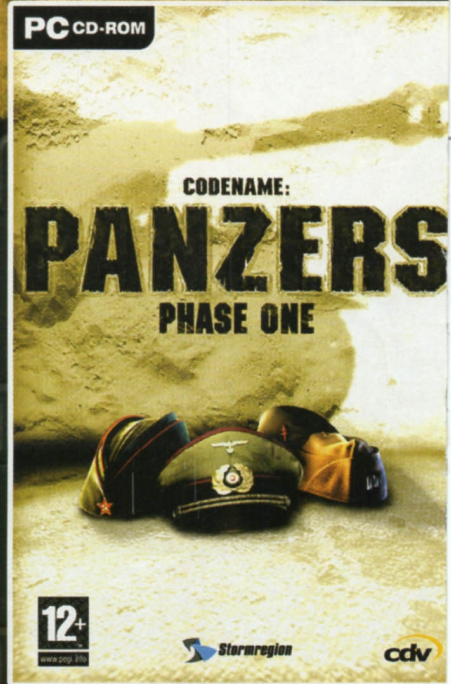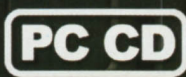
THE FIRST AND BEST FOR PC GAMES

CALL OF DUTY
UNITED OFFENSIVE P56

The stunning follow-up to the best WWII shooter ever!
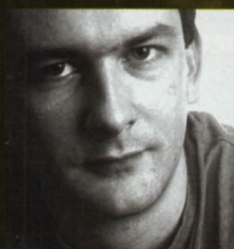
Knee-Jerks

Games kill. You've seen the headlines before and you'll see them again within a couple of years. To be honest, you shouldn't expect anything more from the tabloid press, although it's always sickening to see papers trying to raise flagging sales by cashing in on real-life tragedies.

No, what's made me really angry this time around is the knee-jerk reaction taken by certain retail outlets that have pulled *Manhunt* from their shelves. This, despite it being passed as an 18-certificate by the BBFC and while still stocking a wide range of similarly violent games, books and mags. Perfect hypocrisy.

There's a way of exacting revenge though, and it doesn't just involve you and who you give your money to. Seeing as Rockstar owns the rights to some of the biggest franchises in existence, I'd like to see it stick a single finger up and refuse to let the offending retail outlets stock the upcoming *GTA: San Andreas* when it's released later in the year. I'm sure you'd hear them bleating for forgiveness.

Don't get me wrong. I'm not against debating the issue. I'm not saying that there isn't a line that developers have a responsibility to stick on the right side of. What I'm dead against is tabloid journalists and/or retail outlets becoming our moral guardians. Because if you think the world's a bad place now…

It gets worse, though. *Manhunt* was rated for adults-only, but obviously found its way into the hands of a minor. Whose fault? Not the developers, who passed the game to the BBFC for rating before it went on sale. Certainly not the BBFC, which did everything it could to advise said retail outlets. Erm… Who then? Well, credit where credit's due to *The Sun* for exposing the very same retail outlets who refused to stock *Manhunt*, for selling other 18-rated games to underage kids days after the controversy kicked off. Oh, and meanwhile the so-called 'negative' publicity given to *Manhunt* has only served to sell more copies of the game.

The moral of the story? Stick to what you know or you'll just make the situation worse. Trouble is, this maxim falls down when you're dealing with people who obviously don't know anything about anything.

Dave Woods
Editor

DOOM 3 P62

**It's here, but was it worth the wait?
Find out in our massive six-page review!**

COVER DISCS P136 →

■ **SEVEN EXCLUSIVE DEMOS…**
Juiced, Mashed, Painkiller (multiplayer), *D-Day, Disney's Toontown, Gorky Zero: Beyond Honor* and *Beanotown Racing* (multiplayer).
Plus Unreal Engine 3.0 movie, *Duke Nukem* demos and more!

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Demos of *Codename: Panzers* (second demo), *NHL Eastside Hockey Manager* and *Besieger,* plus *EverQuest 2* DVD-Video footage, *Far Cry* maps and much more!

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"*Doom 3* holds the record for making me jump out of my seat the most"

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contents

BULLETIN

RENT BOY

■ **NEWS WRITER** Will Porter

▲ Two things are apparent to me this month. The first is that I'm a gaming wreck, incapacitated by a lethal *City Of Heroes* habit and still suffering from *Doom 3* flashbacks whenever someone turns a light off. The other is that I'm skint – having spent all my cash on frozen pizzas, phone bills and the Indian takeaway down the road.

So it was then, when considering my position as the UK's most prestigious PC gaming news reporter (maybe), that I made a crucial decision. From next issue, I'm selling out. If games companies want coverage, the only language I'll be speaking in is cold, hard cash. As of Thursday Sept 16, I'm bent as a two-bob note, as pliable as an FA secretary.

Cash donations should be placed in brown envelopes in the third cubicle on the right in Balham station's gents toilets – tucked neatly atop the U-bend and behind the startled businessmen. As for ladies of ill-repute, please send these to the *ZONE* office – although it's likely that they'll have to masquerade as work experience applicants if my boss gets suspicious.

With all this in mind, I'm sure we'll come to a fairer, better and more productive Bulletin section. Even though, of course, I'm being ironic and satirical. I'd never sell out: how could anyone who reports on goblin-bothering and Nazi-shootage ever squander his unique position for ill-gotten gains? So enjoy this untainted feast of news – and while you're doing it, why not try a delicious Chicken Tikka Roll from Zaytoon Restaurant and Takeaway, 14 Upper Tooting Road, London? Only 25 metres away from this magazine!*

▼ *If you're standing at the magazine rack in Tooting Bec Costcutters.

FALLOUT FALLS IN

PLEASE STAND BY

MORROWIND CREATOR BETHESDA SNATCHES THE REINS OF INTERPLAY'S TROUBLED *FALLOUT* FRANCHISE

IT'S TOUGH being a *Fallout* fan: seeing your dream game being thrown around and generally mistreated during the lengthy collapse of former publishing giant Interplay. But now there's a light at the end of the rat-infested tunnel and signs that this Temple of Trials is almost at an end.

Why? Because Bethesda, the roleplaying god who created the free-roaming marvel that is *Morrowind* has snapped up the rights to develop *Fallout 3*. Apparently facing off bids from *Vampire: The Masquerade – Bloodlines* developer Troika (whose staff consists of many original *Fallout* designers), Bethesda is intent on starting from scratch, ditching all previous work on Interplay's hiatus-bound project in its entirety. We got in contact with Bethesda spokesperson Pete Hines and asked him why the company had pounced.

"We had internal discussions about what kind of game we thought we could do, and do really well," explains Pete. "There are other RPG licences out there, as well as the opportunity to implement any number of our own original ideas. However, at the end of the day we really wanted the chance to make *Fallout 3*." The developer hasn't made any concrete announcements as to gameplay styles as yet, but claims it plans to use some snazzy technology currently in development rather than the *Morrowind* engine.

PROVE YOURSELF

The announcement may have brought good news, but opinion is still split down the middle within the *Fallout* community. Concerned that a development house with no prior link to *Fallout* may simply create 'Morrowind with guns', various petitions and vitriolic threads have been appearing online demanding that proposed dual-development for consoles is scrapped. These threads are also concerned that *Fallout* features like the SPECIAL ruleset, isometric viewpoint
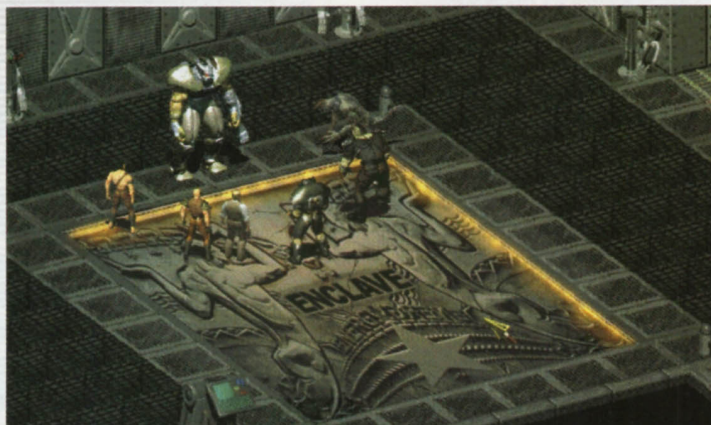
This is where we left it in *Fallout 2* – but it's not over yet...

"Fans have been waiting since 1997 for another great *Fallout* experience"

PETE HINES
BETHESDA SOFTWORKS

and trademark adult grit might be left by the wayside.

So was Bethesda surprised by the mixed reaction to its new acquisition? "Not really," explains Pete. "We got a similar reaction when we said *Morrowind* would be on Xbox. These are folks that are very knowledgeable about *Fallout* and very dedicated to the franchise. They've been waiting since 1997 or 1998 (depending on who you ask) for another great *Fallout* experience, and

it's not unreasonable to assume that any number of things are going to be interpreted as a threat to that happening. I think it's a fear of the game being diluted, but as we proved with *Morrowind*, you can take a game that was designed for only one platform (PC) and released on multiple platforms without sacrificing anything. There wasn't a single feature or idea we took out of what we were doing for *Morrowind* because it wouldn't have worked on Xbox."

So the radioactive wastes will consume us once more, but right now it's impossible to say what angle we'll be viewing them from. Nevertheless, we're highly intrigued. More as it happens...

■ **Publisher:** TBA
■ **Developer:** Bethesda Softworks
■ **ETA:** TBA
■ **Website:** www.bethsoft.com

Fallout 3 is dead. Long live *Fallout 3*.

ROUND-UP

HERDING FASCINATING NUGGETS OF GAMING INFORMATION INTO AN EASILY DIGESTIBLE PEN

Bow-wow!

CRYING GAME

Crytek, the German developer of the sun-drenched, blood-drenched and truly sublime *Far Cry* has announced that its next project is going to be the start of an entirely new franchise with monolithic publishing house EA. Jack Carver hasn't been left stranded in Micronesia though: Ubisoft has assured everyone that its brand will continue despite its original deal with Crytek coming to a close. Hopefully this won't mean a drop in standards for the inevitable sequel.

NEVER SAY NEVER

Roleplayers rejoice! Word is you've got a few treats in store, what with rumours suggesting that *Neverwinter Nights 2* and *Baldur's Gate 3* are in the works. Atari is set to publish both, but the identity of the developer who's taken control of Interplay's *Baldur's Gate* franchise is still to be revealed, as is Bioware's role on the *Neverwinter* sequel. What we *do* know though, is that Obsidian (*KOTOR 2*) has another project in the works. So could it have been entrusted with the future of *Neverwinter*?

RE-RETURN TO WOLFENSTEIN

Id head honcho Todd Hollenshead has revealed that a sequel to 2001's Nazi/Undead-bashing romp *Return To Castle Wolfenstein* is in the works with another developer. In a lengthy hype video for *Doom 3*, Hollenshead also revealed that work has already begun on id's next project, an 'entirely new intellectual property' (not a sequel or a remake to you and I). Intrigued? Well, just enjoy *Doom 3* for now…

STOP PRESS

Bad news for people who like games where you get to shoot things (which is most of us). On the day of our deadline, it's been revealed that both *Brothers In Arms* and *Stalker: Shadow Of Chernobyl* won't be seen before the year is out. *Stalker's* delay comes as no surprise to us: such a far-reaching game is going to need as much time as it can get. However, the *Brothers In Arms* no-show is quite unexpected. Never mind though: better a polished end product rather than an *Angel Of Darkness* rush-job, eh?

ONCE WERE WARRIORS

HIGHLY LAUDED XBOX MILITARY SIM *FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR* TO GET A PC AIRING

"THIS GAME'S all about making the correct tactical decisions." So says THQ's creative manager Greg Donovan, as he reveals the PC incarnation of the innovative cover-and-gun military sim *Full Spectrum Warrior*. "It's not like a real-time strategy game, you're not managing your resources – your resources are your men. You get to know the personalities of each of the men. The army's policy and the game's is all about minimising casualties, keeping your men safe and utilising the correct command tactical decisions."

Starting life as a training tool for the US military, the game sees you following two teams of four men as they progress through 12 hellish hours of combat in a fictional Middle Eastern city. Despite its high bodycount, this is a game that fully intends to make you think and use true military tactics – breaking deadlocks with suppressive fire, flanking, smoke grenades and the like. With two more levels than the console version and some nicely upgraded textures, it's looking like a brilliantly tense and original game.

- **Publisher:** THQ
- **Developer:** Pandemic
- **ETA:** September
- **Website:** www.fullspectrumwarrior.com

The trend for ultra-realistic American war games continues.

HIS MASTER'S VOICEOVER

A PC game's success often hangs on the voice actor's every word. *Pavel Barter* goes behind the scenes to find out who's talking

SPECIAL REPORT

A MAN with a gravelly voice at the other end of the telephone has just threatened to rip off my head and, erm, defecate down my neck. Now under normal circumstances, *ZONE* assignments don't end in scatological threats, but these aren't exactly normal circumstances. The fellow at the other end of the phone, you see, just happens to be Duke Nukem and now he's muttering something about alien bastards smashing up his ride.

Mr Nukem – aka voice actor extraordinaire Jon St. John, a name which surely deserves a cameo in future *Spinal Tap* sequels – is one of many thesps bringing PC games to life with their manic shrieks, dulcet tones and feral barks. As Hollywood stars continue to rub their celebrity scent all over games, so these unsung heroes of the industry are pushed ever further from the spotlight.

Their fame is faceless, but top talent like Jon, who also starred in *Undying* and as the fearless drill instructor in Gearbox's ace *Half-Life* expansion *Opposing Force*, has his share of admirers. "I do a lot of voiceover work and every time I meet a new client, they look at my CV and ask, 'Are you Duke Nukem?' I reply in a Duke voice and they start screaming: 'Oh my God, you are!' Every time my partner introduces me to any family members – from teenage boys to guys in their 30s – she tells them I'm Duke Nukem. Immediately they're all over me. I do the voice and their jaws drop."

NEARLY CABARET

Lani Minella is probably the most audible actor in gaming history, having appeared in over 450 titles. Her CV is longer than a horse's face, and includes roles in iconic PC titles such as *Unreal Tournament*, *EverQuest*, *Neverwinter Nights* and *The Sims*. She's cast and directed actors for many a Blizzard Entertainment title, starred in Blizzard's *Diablo*, *StarCraft* and *Warcraft III*, and has experienced equal doses of affection and indignation among gamers for her digital characterisations.

"One year I went to GDC and someone grabbed me by the arm and asked whether or not it was true that I was the witch in *Diablo*," she told me. "When I told him that I was, he gasped. I also told him I was the peg-legged boy and suddenly he and his friends started cursing me because I sold them bad stuff or whatever in the game. People really personalise what we do."

Classy videogame voice-acting began in the early 1990s. Prior to this, when Bob the programmer would read his lines in front of the mic, you'd find better spoken performances in Bulgarian porn. True, the intervening years have seen continued vocal atrocities: *Resident Evil*'s deadpan lines like "Where's Barry?" still hurt us now, while *Far Cry*'s Jack Carver deserved to be strangled with his own insipid vocal chords.

As audio technology improved, so actors began receiving phone calls from developers. Rob Paulsen, who manned the mic for *Armed & Dangerous*, *Escape From Monkey Island*, *Baldur's Gate II* and *Giants: Citizen Kabuto*, says that "videogame work came as a natural extension of some of the animated shows I was working on in the 1990s: stuff like *The Mask*, *Animaniacs* and *Pinky And The Brain*."

Meanwhile, Jon St. John spent 30 years in radio. "I started with *Duke Nukem* and from there it snowballed. I discovered that I could do a number of characters and dialects. When I first began this job the only hot game out was *Doom*, so I really didn't know what to expect. I played *Duke Nukem*, thought it was hilarious and instantly became a gamer."

THE REAL DEAL

Merle Dandridge is a more recent recruit to voiceovers. Hailing from a theatrical background (she still acts in *Rent* on New York's Broadway), Merle auditioned for the role of *Half-Life 2*'s Alyx Vance, alongside 50 other actors. She subsequently landed the part of Gordon Freeman's sidekick in the game the globe is gagging for. How did she go about nailing the character's accent and personality?

"I don't think I ever sat down and said 'Alyx must be from this region', or anything like that," says Merle. "It was

Lani Minella: in her own words "so gothic she could crap a bat".

Merle Dandridge: Star of *Rent* on Broadway and forthcoming star of *Half-Life 2* on your very own PC.

more like I explored the woman, how she thinks, how she would respond to her surroundings and who she is. She's got to have some depth to her so I opted for a richer sound. I have to say that I absolutely loved working on this script. The writers, producers and everyone else involved were just so hands on and infectiously creative. It was great to delve into a world I knew nothing about."

Recording sessions last up to four hours per day, sometimes stretching to a few days if the character is prominent. Actors consult with developers and often view character artwork before agreeing on the required sounds and voices. Scripts are typically performed with two or three takes per line. Anyone who reckons all this sounds like a piece of cake doesn't know their arse from a hole in the ground,

says Dee Baker. Spoken word is only a small part of the work.

"Ever tried talking for four hours straight? How about yelling and screaming like you're on fire or being eviscerated by a cave troll? I recorded some of the most hideous stuff I've ever done recently for the upcoming *Doom 3*, which I'm pretty proud of. In

Halo 2, I play a horrific creature toward the game's end."

For the most part, voiceover actors are unimpressed with celebrities who worm their way into game vocal booths.

<div style="background: orange;">

"Every time my partner introduces me to any family members she tells them I'm Duke Nukem. I do the voice and their jaws drop"

JON ST. JOHN THE VOICE OF DUKE NUKEM

</div>

"Hollywood actors can be very difficult and they don't always deliver the goods," says Lani Minella, perhaps remembering David Duchovny's woeful efforts in *XIII*. "I don't believe gamers really give a hoot anyway. If anyone can tell me one game that spent millions on a Hollywood star and it actually increased sales, I will eat that game."

STAR F***KERS

"On-camera 'stars' can cost game makers spectacular amounts of money, with mixed results, in my opinion," continues Dee Baker. "Anyway, the voice actor usually gets a single fee for the work and that's it. In contrast, for TV series and film voice work, the voice actor is paid a session fee, then residuals for each airing and for each DVD or video sold. With the game industry bringing in billions more dollars worldwide than feature films, and the importance of good voice acting in gaming, it is weird that it's so difficult to get game companies to pony up a bit more for first-rate acting."

There's scant excuse for crappy voice work in today's PC games (*Far Cry* sequels, take note) but from all accounts professional blabbermouths aren't receiving the kudos and credit they deserve – certainly not the financial credit. As for Duke Nukem, he's still on the other end of my phone and snarling for blood. Talk might be cheap in the gaming industry, but abuse like Duke's will always be sweet music to our ears. PCZ

Jon St. John asks you politely whether or not you'd like to get some.

Dee Baker moans 'n' howls in *Doom 3*. **Duchovny: rubbish in *XIII*.**

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WORD UP · ON THE CD · ON THE DVD

EVER WANTED TO HEAR DUKE NUKEM TELL *ZONE* HE WANTS TO RIP US A NEW ONE? WELL NOW YOU CAN

Because we're narcissistic, self-absorbed egotists, we asked our new voice-acting chums to record some samples extolling our virtues. We've stuck 'em on our discs for you to enjoy along with some other (slightly disturbing) samples of their work.

LANI MINELLA

"I have a four octave range and can pretty much sound like anything. I love being evil bosses in Blizzard games because I drop the pitch down to become Zerg queens, harpies or banshees. Orcs are great fun too. In *Unreal Tournament 2003* I played the juggernauts, mercenaries and Egyptians." [Lani shifts into *UT* mode and starts screaming insanely.]

JON ST. JOHN

"Duke Nukem is Clint Eastwood on steroids. As we started developing the phrases with George Broussard [of 3D Realms] we made him meaner and I gritted my teeth harder. As for *Half-Life: Opposing Force*'s drill instructor, Randy Pitchford asked me to imitate R Lee Ermey from the movie *Full Metal Jacket*. I did all the drill instructor lines for the game, as well as a bunch of soldiers in different dialects."

DEE BAKER

"I'm becoming known for doing more bizarre stuff vocally, from the non-human to the inhuman. My most enjoyable projects tend to be the most bizarre ones where I can create something out of nothing – no words, maybe not even a visual. I particularly love non-verbal vocal creations like monsters, aliens and animals."

</div>

EMULATION ZONE

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

FRUITYS COME CLEAN

IF YOU'RE AN alert reader, you may recall Emu Zone's column from late last year (issue 132). To jog your memory, it was devoted to the pioneering use of emulators to allege systematic and deliberate fraud being committed against British consumers by the fruit machines blinking and beeping ubiquitously in the nation's pubs, chip shops and arcades. The FairPlay Campaign revealed, to the shock of most players, that fruit machines were not only heavily stacked against the player in pure chance terms, but that they actively and by design cheated gamers by offering 'gamble' opportunities (typically by means of 'high-low' reels) in which the player would lose their money regardless of which option they chose. The campaign took the revelations to MPs, the press and the relevant authorities, and here at Emu Zone we promised to keep you up to date with developments.

Impressively, after less than a year in existence, the tiny, emulation-led campaign has yielded concrete results against the massive, multi-billion-pound UK fruity business, and the evidence should be starting to show up in pubs and arcades near you about now.

The new machines might still fleece you, but at least they have to tell you now.

Where machines used to carry only vague, meaningless disclaimers regarding the odds on gambles, all new machines from this summer onwards will now carry an explicit warning that players may be offered gambles which they have no chance

"While only a small step, this is a triumph for emulation"

whatsoever of winning. While it's short of FairPlay's ultimate aim that these crooked 'gambles' themselves be outlawed, it's a major step forward in the fight against one of the UK's most crippling addictions. No longer will losing gamblers be driven to lose more in the belief that riches would have been theirs if only they'd chosen the other option, because the machines now admit for the first time that they cheat outright. FairPlay doesn't plan to rest on

these initial achievements (the campaign, including *PC ZONE's* own coverage, has also helped convince the relevant Parliamentary committee to tighten restrictions on under-18s playing fruit machines in the forthcoming new Gaming Act, helping teenagers to avoid taking the first steps into addiction). However, even though a small step, they nonetheless represent a triumph for emulation, actually doing some good in the real world – as well as enabling players to enjoy the best of gaming irrespective of time, format or geography, of course. Normal service will be resumed next month, but for now emu fans should allow themselves a small glow of congratulation. **PCZ**

LINKS

www.fairplay-campaign.co.uk/fruit

EMULATION OF THE MONTH

DANGUN FEVERON (ARCADE, 1998)

There's almost nothing Emu Zone likes more than a good shmup; but if there is, it's bringing news of a game never released on these shores to British gamers. Or possibly revealing the existence of hitherto secret things.

It's with astonishing good fortune, then, that this month we can do all three. *Dangun Feveron* is a brilliant, over-the-top shooter only released in Japanese arcades, which combines

frantic action with a disco-dancing theme. Most interesting, though, is that it also contains a hidden game, in the form of the 'Score Attack' mode often included in home-console ports of coin-op shmups to extend their lifespan, in the light of home gamers being able to continue infinitely for free.

In a Score Attack, you're given unlimited lives, but only a certain amount of time in which to amass the

greatest possible number of points, usually by means of clever semi-hidden combos and so on.

Dangun Feveron's is no different, taking place over a special three-minute level in which the game's enemies hurl themselves at you in hordes, offering some of the most adrenalin-pumping action ever.

You can access the mode by holding down both fire buttons while you press the Start button after inserting a credit. While a Score Attack game was a bit of a waste of your cash in the arcades, at home on MAME it's ridiculously addictive. Especially with a decent score like Emu Zone's 664,059 to aim for – come and have a go…

LINKS

www.mame.net – MAME homepage
mamefans.metropoliglobal.com – useful 'information' about MAME ROMs

Shoot! Faster! More!

Dance yourself dizzy. Yeah, baby!

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.

THE MAN WHO KNOWS

KIRSTEN DUNST ordered the developer of *Spider-Man 2* to reduce the size of her **"gigantic" breasts**, it has been revealed. The sexually attractive 22-year-old film star, who boasts medium-sized breasts, was **horrified** at the over-inflated breasts sported by her character **Mary-Jane** in the *Spider-Man 2* game, which is based on the current movie about the fictional arachnid humanoid. Dunst, 22, breasts medium, **screamed**: "I got to approve the videogame, the way she looks. They made her boobs gigantic. I was like, **'Tone down the boobs, please!'** It was ridiculous."

Trent Reznor of angry rockers **Nine Inch Nails** has broken his silence over the non-inclusion of his music in *Doom 3*. Reznor, who grew close to **id Software** guru **John Carmack** when he contributed to *Quake*, opened his heart over the rejection of his work and the **devastating effect** on their relationship. Reznor, angry, revealed: "I was working with the best guys in the field – true geniuses. Our idea was to have no music apart from a main theme I'd write for the intro. No rock, nothing current-sounding, nothing to date the game. Well eventually **time and money and bad management** came into play and it didn't work out. Disappointing on a number of levels for me, but that's the way it went."

Recently relegated **Leeds United** have been dealt a cruel reminder of their second-class status by **Codemasters**, who has dropped the once proud side from its *Club Football* series. However, the publisher is claiming that the snub is not due to lack of interest in the financially crippled club. A spokesman said: "Selling isn't a factor as *Leeds United* was one of the **best-selling** last year. We're not cancelling the relationship we enjoy with Leeds United and will review the opportunity to release versions of *Leeds United Club Football* in the future. It's the **complications** of the domestic season versus European Super League thing I guess. We'd have to **change the coding** of the game dramatically for it." Leeds fan Jamie Sefton is believed to be angry.

Dunst, 22, breasts medium, screamed: "I got to approve the videogame, the way she looks. They made her boobs gigantic"

SHADOW PLAY

CHASE NUCLEAR SUITCASE BOMBS AROUND THE GLOBE WITH SEMI-TACTICAL SHOOTER *SHADOW OPS: RED MERCURY*
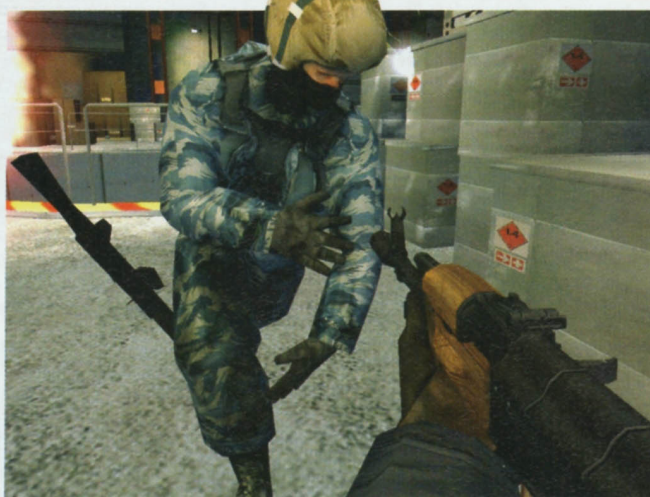
Shadow Ops: preparing for emergenices without the pamphlets, but with big guns.

CREATED IN homage to the urban firefights seen in Ridley Scott's *Black Hawk Down* opus, *Shadow Ops: Red Mercury* is a forthcoming semi-tactical shooter that'll see you and some AI buddies leaping, diving, running for cover and shooting oodles of bomb-harbouring terror-people.

The titular Red Mercury, you see, is a suitcase with 45 Hiroshimas' worth of destruction in – and it's up to you, one Captain Frank Hayden, to run and gun through jungles, cities, trains and subways in exotic locations like Paris, Syria, Kazakhstan and the Congo to save the world from its misuse. It's not going to be the most serious of affairs – gung-ho Hollywood action has been chosen over painstaking realism (as demonstrated by the lack of team

orders and plentitude of exploding barrels), but it still looks like being an exhilarating experience.

What's instantly noticeable when you watch *Red Mercury* in action is the high quality audio: your AI cohorts are pretty chatty (shouting, screaming, passing the time of day) while the game's explosions, of which there are many, are liable to implode your eardrums. The dialogue isn't too bad either, what with it being written by real Hollywood scriptwriters. That said, in situations like this we're never told exactly which films they've worked on before, so we don't think we're talking Orson Welles here.

It's being touted as an interactive summer blockbuster, and much of it has been storyboarded, scored and

scripted in the same way as your favourite popcorn-munchers.

Essentially though, you're looking at a high-production value shooter that balances a ludicrous body-count with a smidge of realism – you'll be hiding behind cover and pressing yourself against Middle-Eastern walls as much as you are lining up an RPG, sniping a bored sentry or fiddling with high explosives. Added to this mix are a full complement of multiplayer maps, 14 of which are exclusive to the PC version, so we're expecting pretty good things from *Red Mercury*'s October release.

- **Publisher:** Atari
- **Developer:** Zombie Studios
- **ETA:** October
- **Website:** www.atari.com/shadowops

LET ME HEAR YOU SHOUT

I am gamer, hear me roar.

NOW HERE'S an oddball. For years you've been swearing at your top-down troops for not listening to you and ambling straight into certain death, but now there's an RTS on the horizon that could react to your effing and blinding – or at least pay attention to your strategic mutterings.

Will Of Steel you see, is set to include a voice control feature – and if you want you'll be able to control its brand of Middle-Eastern warfare entirely through the medium of sound. Gameyus are promising that everything (from camera control through to unit selection and movement orders) will be responsive to swift barks into a mic – whether you're shouting out unit names or using authentic military phonetics.

The idea is to provide some realistic general-to-underling communication, but as to whether it works or not… Well, you'll have to wait and see. Whatever the case, the game looks like it'll provide some decent helicopter and tank stimulation even if you resort to old-fashioned mouse point-and-clickery.

■ **Publisher:** GMX Media
■ **Developer:** Gameyus
■ **ETA:** TBA
■ **Website:** www.gmxmedia.net

Cossacks March On

ON THE DVD

WE TOUCH BASE WITH THE *STALKER* CREATOR GSC GAMEWORLD ON ITS FORTHCOMING RTS OPUS *COSSACKS II: NAPOLEONIC WARS*

EVER SINCE it paraded our news writer around the Chernobyl forbidden zone, we've had a green, glowing soft spot for the Ukraine's GSC Gameworld. The developer has two very different games on its hands: one an irradiated survival shooter (*Stalker*), the other a recreation of 19th century European warfare.

We probed the superbly named Eugene Grygorovych, the project lead on the short Frenchman's military sim, and asked him just why we should be interested in *Cossacks* with *Rome: Total War* peeking over the horizon. "Well, they both have stuff to boast about," he explains. "*Rome: Total War* succeeds by dint of its 3D engine and the opportunity to observe the battle in perspective, whereas *Cossacks II* is great because of its non-linear tactical gameplay, and the way that victory can be obtained in so many ways. Our factors of morale and fatigue, true-to-life ballistics and terrain that all influence the course of battle should also allow the player to show his strategic talents. People won't regret playing *Cossacks II* for a second."

As you can see from the exclusive movie that we've got our hands on, there'll be a ton of on-screen action with up to 64,000 units on the battlefield at any one time. With a main campaign that plays out an authentically recreated Napoleonic campaign, six totally reconstructed historical battles and enough period information for a couple of encyclopedias,
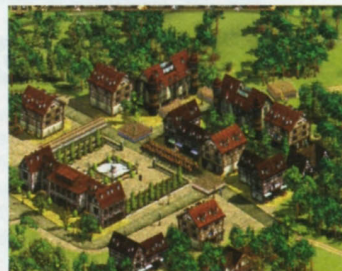
Like Stalker. Only different.

there's clearly a lot of love being put into these little musketeers. But doesn't it get a bit confusing having two games so entirely different being created in the same building?

"Well, two different teams are working on these projects" continues Grygorovych, "So there won't be a situation that during the battle of Austerlitz a shining portal will open and a group of zombies commanded by an evil Controller joins forces with Napoleon. We'll save that one for some other, less historically bound game." Shame really – that could have been good.

■ **Publisher:** CDV
■ **Developer:** GSC Gameworld
■ **ETA:** September
■ **Website:** www.cossacks.com

EXPERIENCE NEEDLESS SUFFERING

indieZone

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

INDIE ZONE MAY have mentioned this before, but one of the joys of the indie scene is the keeping alive of game genres which the mainstream has long since abandoned. During the war, when Indie Zone was a lad, it was all cute platform games around here, but when did you last see one on the PC? And yet, the form didn't suddenly stop being entertaining, did it? Of course, sometimes revival can go too far. Ask Dr Frankenstein.

FREE PLAY

Mario Forever

(Buziol Games)
www.the-underdogs.org

MUCH IMITATED, never bettered – but still the holy grail for the majority of young Indie platform pups. The Nintendo frontman has a fair few unofficial outings on your humble PC, and while most are rubbish knock-offs, this Mario 'shroom em up from Polish outfit Buziol Games is easily the most accomplished to date. Borrowing graphics and music from the SNES *Super Mario All-Stars* and *Super Mario World*, but creating new and original level designs in the style of the original *Super Mario Bros*, this hybrid is almost as captivating as the real thing, though the scrolling and controls could both stand a little extra smoothness. Every bit as much a clone as this month's commercial indie effort, of course, but this one doesn't try to either disguise its origins or profit from them.

"How do I keep getting into this?"

An odd situation for a chef to be in.

SUPERSTAR CHEFS

■ $19.99 (about £12) | Pub: Arcade Lab | Dev: Arcade Lab |
www.arcadelab.com/chefs.html

REQUIRES Direct X 3 and a 133MHz processor **DESIRES** That'll do nicely

He knows it's wrong, but *Stuart Campbell* still loves it...

A FEW MONTHS AGO, Indie Zone expounded at some length on the issue of plagiarism in independent games, and specifically the blatant remaking for profit of old games with no acknowledgement to the original creators. Which puts your reviewer in a bit of a spot when someone remakes one of his all-time favourite games of the '90s, does a lovely job of it, but shamefully fails to admit that's what it's done.

The game in question here is Team 17's budget-price 1993 Amiga platformer *Qwak*, and *Superstar Chefs* is an absolutely unabashed clone of it. Made up of 64 single-screen platform levels where your object is simply to clear the screen of fruit, *Chefs* adds a few minor new elements and changes to the original design, but to all intents and purposes this is *Qwak 2004*. Except that the player's avatar is now a cook instead of a duck.

The graphics, like the original's, are small but beautifully packed with colour and character, and the wraparound levels are simple but fiendishly designed. At first it seems overly-easy, especially on the default middle difficulty setting, with enemies that just do their own thing rather than chase you. You also have a plentiful supply of extra lives to add to your generous initial allocation, but it's easy to lose four in about 20 seconds if you're not paying attention, and with no continues it takes skill to get through each stage.

There are also two different two-player modes – a co-operative game and a best-of-seven-stages high score battle mode. Generally, there are many hours of fun to be had for the money, though 12 quid seems a little steep for a game whose setup file is only 1.7MB big.

So how to solve our dilemma? Well, since this is essentially the same game this reviewer played in 1993, he's going to give it the same score he did then, except with 20 per cent deducted for the flagrant theft of someone else's work without so much as a nod of credit. (Adding insult to injury, the website describes *Superstar Chefs* as "similar to *Bubble Bobble* and *Mario Bros*", when in fact it's not nearly as similar to them as it is to *Qwak*.) It's a super little game, though, but this kind of thing really has to stop.

PCZONE VERDICT	69
A good ripoff of someone else's genius	

RICHARD BURNS RALLY™

"Porno for Petrolheads"
- PC Gamer

"This is a must for any motorsport-mad gamer"
- Motorsport News

RICHARD BURNS
2001 WORLD RALLY CHAMPION

www.richardburnsrally.com
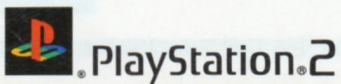
WARTHOG   PlayStation.2   XBOX   PC CD-ROM   SCi GAMES

Chris Hewett (right)
Director of development and
executive producer at Monolith

DEVELOPERS' QUESTION TIME

What PC games are you playing at the moment?
Rescue Heroes, mainly due to my two-year-old son, Jack. He also loves *Battlefield Vietnam* and can already launch the game from the Windows start menu, click on single-player, click on the map, select the spawn point, press play, get into helicopters and select the song *Surfin' Bird*, which is his favourite. Now he just needs to learn how to fly it.

What was the last videogame you finished playing?
Battlefield Vietnam (although it's still ongoing of course). It's exactly the type of game I wanted to make before I started at Monolith nine years ago!

What's your favourite game of all time?
Rainbow Six or *Half-Life*. I'm really into Special Operations and I love the immersion of *Half-Life*.

Who do you most admire in the industry and why?
Making great games requires the perfect blend of science and art. Very few people can do that well. So my answer would be any developer who's made a great game.

What has the PC contributed most to videogaming?
Multiplayer.

What's your company's philosophy?
Make great games on time and on budget, have fun doing it and have a life outside of work. The number one essential ingredient to making this happen is communication!

What's the best thing about your job?
Being surrounded by people that love their job. I honestly can say that the *F.E.A.R.* team are the most motivated group of people I've ever worked with. Every one of them absolutely loves what they're making and it's beginning to show.

What's the worst thing about your job?
I wish we could make these games in six months. Sometimes, spending two years on a game – even when you love it – can wear you down a bit.

What are you working on at the moment?
I'm managing the development of *F.E.A.R.*, which means I spend my time answering these types of questions.

What's the Next Big Thing in PC gaming?
Monolith focuses on cinematic, story-based action games. So the day I can get the same emotional response from an in-game character that I get from an actor in a movie, games will be no longer be looked at as just games anymore. If games can bring a tear to your eye, then we're truly onto something.

OH NO, MORE GOBLINS!*

SMITE THE ENEMY WITH A CLICK OF THE MOUSE IN *KOHAN II: KINGS OF WAR*

IMMORTALS, EH? Always leading subservient races into desperate battles that see empires rise and fall, cultures dissolve and RTS games created to provide coverage. *Kohan II* is such a game, a 25-mission tale of ethereal in-fighting that sees six races (all led by the trouble-making immortal Kohan) going at it in a fight to see who's the most fantastical – from your accustomed human and undead chaps to the more leftfield Drauga and Gauri.

Kohan II is set to be a streamlined version of its predecessors, with an emphasis on battle tactics and strategy rather than fiddly micro-management. There are all manner of siege engines, wraiths, revenants, giant elephants and wandering beasts to be befriended and then shackled in chains – now all shown in full colour, spin-around 3D.

You can't get much more niche than *Kohan*'s normal hardcore market, but this epistle is clearly designed to hustle a few more gamers into the ranks. *Kohan*'s calling-card customisable tactical formations are back with a vengeance and should appeal to swivel-chair generals everywhere. Marvellous.

*No goblins actually involved

Can't we all just be friends?

Kohan II: good, but it won't help you much with the ladies.

The dead take on the living...

- **Publisher:** Gathering
- **Developer:** Timegate Studios
- **ETA:** September
- **Website:** www.timegate.com/kow

All Made Of Stars

GAME STARS LIVE SET TO UNLEASH GAMING GOODNESS ON THE MASSES

WE ALWAYS feel quite superior because we play games ages before anybody else; when you look and smell like we do you have to grab any consolation you can. But now some clever sod has come up with an event that's going to let the masses play all the Christmas hits months in advance of their official release. Bastard.

Game Stars Live is set to run September 1-5, and for a mere tenner (£12 if you buy on at the door) you'll be playing games as exciting as *Star Wars Battlefront*, *Pro Evolution Soccer 4*, *Brothers In Arms*, *Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory* and *Prince Of Persia 2* way before they hit the shelves. What's more, if you're that way inclined, there'll be console games as far as the eye can see with Activision, Atari, Eidos, EA, Nokia and Nintendo all signed up and raring to go. Or at least you'll be able to see as far as the back wall of the ExCeL exhibition centre in the heart of London's trendy Docklands area.

For more information, check the website at www.gamestarslive.com, snap up some tickets and we'll see you there!
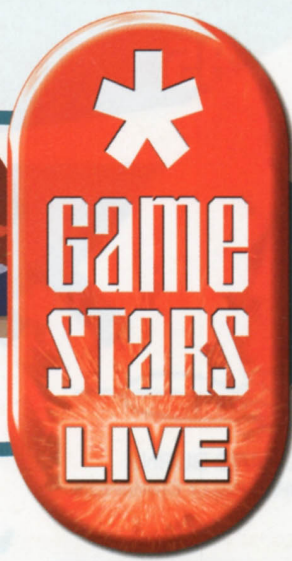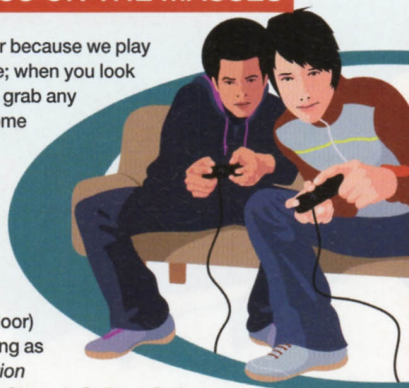
Let There Be Colin

COLIN MCRAE 2005. IS IT THAT TIME OF YEAR ALREADY?

IT'S AT THIS time of year that Native Americans would traditionally gather in areas of spiritual significance and perform sacred rituals to pray for rain. There's a similar annual tradition within *Colin McRae* circles, where rally enthusiasts stand on country roads and wave mudflaps at the heavens to ensure the safe delivery of their favoured rally sim.

Well, he's back for his fifth sortie (read 'em: fifth); notable mainly because this time around we'll be getting the game at exactly the same time as our console contemporaries. The general emphasis is on 'bigger' and 'faster': more cars, more stages and nine countries to race through. Plus, the stages are designed specifically for you to push your car to the limits of its capabilities, with ultra-realistic damage and paint scratches for when you spin off the road and into a tree.

Coupled with a new non-linear Career mode that sets you on your way to becoming a gruff superstar much like Mr McRae himself, *Colin McRae Rally 2005* looks set to appease these growing crowds of water-proofed motorheads that are cropping up in the fields of Warwickshire to supplicate themselves before the mighty *Colin* god.

- **Publisher:** Codemasters
- **Developer:** Codemasters
- **ETA:** September
- **Website:** www.codemasters.com/colinmcrae2005

A lovely white car.

A lovely blue car.

A lovely white Peugeot car. And a lovely tree.

SPECIAL DELIVERY

INFILTRATE, PARACHUTE AND KILL BAD MEN IN *CT: SPECIAL FORCES: FIRE FOR EFFECT*

WE'RE AMAZED that games haven't run out of special forces. You would have thought that we'd have moved onto 'ordinary' forces or 'they're OK' forces by now. That said, *CT: Special Forces: Fire For Effect* is about to be as excessive with action as it is with colon usage.

Taking control of two highly trained and badly named men, it's your mission to infiltrate and sabotage terrorists. Stealth Owl (a parachuting, sniping man of mystery) and Raptor (a balls-out, close-combat badass) will be able to control jeeps, hovercrafts and the like – while even indulging in the first skydive shootery ever seen on the PC. Apart from that bit in *NOLF*.

With battling through cities, deserts and rugged mountain-tops, there looks to be a fair bit of variety – although we're reckoning this is going to be a lot more non-stop action than it is painstaking recreation of US foreign policy. Still, the two-man squad angle is interesting, and (as you may be well aware), we do like shooting big guns at terrorists.

- **Publisher:** Hip Interactive
- **Developer:** Asobo Studio
- **ETA:** Q1 2005
- **Website:** www.hip-games.com

Even more unnecessary carnage. Ban it! Now!

Another chopper bites the dust.

But will it be as thrilling as the *Moonraker* opening? Probably.

Helicopters and beaches: a popular combination.

MEDIEVAL LORDS
+ Build, Defend, Expand +

Medieval Lords: Build, Defend, Expand challenges aspiring city governors to build and manage thriving cities, protect against invasions from neighbouring kingdoms, and expand into new territories - all in the city building genre's first 3D environment that lets the player zoom right into the action and build anywhere on the map.

Medieval Lords brings city builders inside the walls of richly-detailed cities during the middle ages. Through the course of ten scenarios, players must manage finances, population, and food resources to evolve towns into thriving kingdoms. Build docks for fishing local waters, harvest fields to grow food and raise livestock, keep citizens healthy and entertained, and recruit soldiers and cavalry for a well-defended city.

October 2004
www.medievallords.com

MONTE CRISTO
www.montecristogames.com

Digital Jesters

12+
www.pegi.info

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

It's that time again! Time to unleash the mighty forces of professional criticism onto the quivering masses of our readership. Time to sort the games designing wheat from the amateur scribbling chaff. Time for another Search For A Game. This month, Neil Moodley of Somewhere in the Internet takes a topical view, giving you the chance to prove not all footballing referees are as blind as a Swiss bat in a game he describes as...

"*Pro Evo* meets *Far Cry* meets the ref..."

Expansion packs mean you can play as ref faves such as Collina and Urs Meier.

REFEREE! 2004

YOU ARE a wannabe football referee. You must graduate from Training School to qualify for the Football League, where you work your way up the ratings from Division Three all the way to the Premier League and even internationals at major tournaments.

The Training Academy enables you to participate in training to achieve certain objectives. Once you've earned your licence, you get to take charge of Division Three games, played out from a first-person perspective.

The game is played using fairly standard FPS controls, with a few differences. This means 'crouch' will be 'check with linesman', 'fire1' will be 'blow for infringement', 'Alt-fire' will be 'yellow card' and so forth. The game's difficulty level could be set so you must comply with only subsets of the full rulebook.

In this game, AI managers and the fourth official give you a rating after each game. Continuous high ratings ensure you're promoted to the higher leagues.

Conversely, get poor ratings and you'll be demoted, and ultimately struck off the list.

To ensure this doesn't happen, set yourself a training regime and play in some mini-games. Poor quality training affects your ability to keep up with play during the game, thus endangering your match ratings.

The dream would be to merge the online *FIFA* games with *Referee!*, so that online players play the *FIFA* game while you take the part of the ref.

The action would have *Far Cry*'s look.

Pro Evo 3 would provide the football.
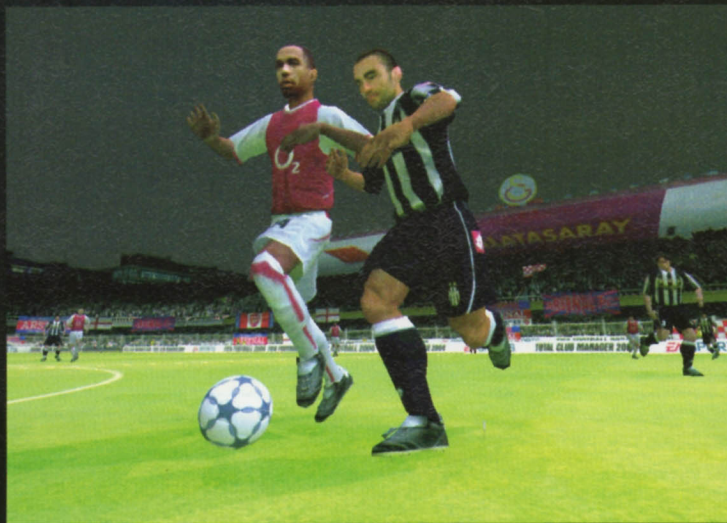
Regular updates will keep the teams, tournaments and players current.

WHAT THE JUDGES SAY

"What a dog's arse of an idea. Who in their right mind would ever, *ever* want to play a football game as the referee? The type of people who actually want to become referees are the same individuals who end up as estate agents, traffic wardens and PE teachers – odious, petty, power-crazed and unwanted members of our society. *Referee! 2004* is an appalling concept – it *has* to be a joke, or I seriously question whether Neil has ever played a videogame before. Either that, or he's an estate agent with a dream of one day becoming a ref." **Verdict: MISS!**

"Get out of my sight! You make me sick! Do you have any idea of what makes games fun and interesting to play? Shooting Nazis in the head – this is fun, because it requires skill and accuracy and means you can kill the bad guys. Scoring goals from a series of audacious passes – this is fun, because it offers the satisfaction of outwitting an enemy force. But trotting around a pitch blowing a whistle and watching other people score goals? This is *not fun*. No risk, no reward, no chance in hell. Now get out." **Verdict: MISS!**

"It's not a great idea, but ignore some of the more derogatory comments given by certain other members of the panel – you've clearly tried very hard and get a gold star for effort. Your game still sounds pretty shit though: I honestly can't imagine a game selling if it had David Elleray plastered on the front of the box. Who wants to be a referee apart from geography teachers? If it was less realistic, with *Theme Park*-style humour and comedy injuries, it'd be a lot better. If you had a gun then that would be cool too." **Verdict: MISS!**

"Ouch. That had to hurt. Ah well, at least he tried, eh? (Whaddya mean he shouldn't have bothered?) Never mind, next month we'll have another hopeful entrant. See ya!"

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

CHARTS

In association with **VIRGIN MEGASTORES**

People they come together. People they fall apart. No one can stop us now. 'Cos we are all made of charts

ChartTrack TOP 10 elspa

It doesn't swear quite as much as the real thing (or chew gum, shout at the referee or display casual racism when the mic is still turned on) but *Champ Man* still delivers the greatest management experience available outside of the dug-out. We love it dearly.

Never has so much care and attention been given to men of so few pixels – so it's hardly surprising that *Soldiers* is so addictive. Smartly marketed at both strategy hacks and action fans, Codemasters has clearly come up trumps with their Ruskie war opus.

		TITLE	PUBLISHER	SCORE
1	NEW	**CHAMP MAN: SEASON 03/04**	EIDOS	90%
2	NEW	SOLDIERS: HEROES OF WWII	CODEMASTERS	90%
3	▼	JOINT OPS: TYPHOON RISING	NOVALOGIC	83%
4	▲	THE SIMS	EA	86%
5	▲	THE SIMS: TRIPLE DELUXE	EA	N/A
6	▲	CSI: DARK MOTIVES	UBISOFT	60%
7	▼	GROUND CONTROL II	VU GAMES	84%
8	▼	FAR CRY	UBISOFT	93%
9	NEW	SPIDER-MAN 2	ACTIVISION	N/A
10	NEW	SHREK 2	ACTIVISION	N/A

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

Spider-Man 2? Shrek 2? The Sims – not once but twice? Are the school holidays here already?
DavidMc555

Everybody was *Typhoon Rising*… come on sing along, this is only going to happen once.
Deadmartyr

I'm shocked to see *Soldiers* so high up. Not many original games sell. They seem strange and scary, so people tend to run away from them and buy something tried and tested. Like *The Sims*.
Spudy2000

We've played this game to death but still haven't seen any sign of typhoons. But despite the surprising lack of southern hemisphere catastrophic climatic conditions, we're still glad to discover a worthy challenger to the *Battlefield* goliath.

Fascinating. Little people, but inside your computer. Incredible. What will they think of next? I must buy this for my wife – she has far too much spare time on her hands. Maybe these computery games aren't just for children after all! Shopkeeper! Five copies!

Virgin megastores TOP 10

1.	JOINT OPERATIONS: TYPHOON RISING	NOVALOGIC
2.	GROUND CONTROL II: OPERATION EXODUS	VU GAMES
3.	FAR CRY	UBISOFT
4.	THE SIMS: TRIPLE DELUXE	EA
5.	THIEF: DEADLY SHADOWS	EIDOS
6.	UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004	ATARI
7.	NORTON ANTIVIRUS 2004	SYMANTEC
8.	PERIMETER	CODEMASTERS
9.	CSI: DARK MOTIVES	UBISOFT
10.	TOCA RACE DRIVER 2	CODEMASTERS

COMPETITION Virgin megastores

INCOMING!

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

SEPTEMBER
CALL OF DUTY: UNITED OFFENSIVE	ACTIVISION
CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 5	EIDOS
CODENAME: PANZERS	CDV
COLIN MCRAE RALLY 2005	CODEMASTERS
CONFLICT: VIETNAM	SCI
EVERQUEST II	UBISOFT
JUICED	ACCLAIM
PORT ROYALE 2	ASCARON
RICHARD BURNS RALLY	SCI
ROME: TOTAL WAR	ACTIVISION
SHELLSHOCK: NAM '67	EIDOS
STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT	ACTIVISION
THE SIMS 2	EA
TOP SPIN	ATARI
WARHAMMER 40K: DAWN OF WAR	THQ

Q3
DRAGON EMPIRES	CODEMASTERS
GHOST RECON 2	UBISOFT
HIDDEN & DANGEROUS: SABRE SQUADRON	GATHERING
PAINKILLER: BATTLE OUT OF HELL	DREAMCATCHER
TRACKMANIA: SUNRISE	DIGITAL JESTERS
SNOWBLIND	EIDOS

OCTOBER
BLOODRAYNE 2	VU GAMES
COSSACKS II: NAPOLEONIC WAR	CDV
DRIV3R	ATARI
EVIL GENIUS	VU GAMES
LEISURE SUIT LARRY: MAGNA CUM LAUDE	VU GAMES
MEN OF VALOR: VIETNAM	VU GAMES
NEXUS: THE JUPITER INCIDENT	HD INTERACTIVE
PACIFIC FIGHTERS	UBISOFT
SHADOW OPS: RED MERCURY	ATARI
SILENT HILL 4: THE ROOM	KONAMI
SNIPER ELITE	MC2
STAR WARS GALAXIES: JUMP TO LIGHTSPEED	ACTIVISION
TRIBES: VENGEANCE	VU GAMES
VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE – BLOODLINES	ACTIVISION
VIVISECTOR	BRIGADES

NOVEMBER
AXIS AND ALLIES	ATARI
FLATOUT	EMPIRE
FOOTBALL MANAGER 2005	SEGA
LORD OF THE RINGS: BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH	EA
NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND 2	EA
PLAYBOY: THE MANSION	UBISOFT
PRINCE OF PERSIA 2	UBISOFT
PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 4	KONAMI
ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON 3	ATARI
SID MEIER'S PIRATES!	ATARI
SPLINTER CELL: CHAOS THEORY	UBISOFT

Q4
BLACK & WHITE 2	EA
CLOSE COMBAT: FIRST TO FIGHT	GATHERING
FAHRENHEIT	VU GAMES
KOTOR II: THE SITH LORDS	ACTIVISION
PARIAH	HIP GAMES
THE MATRIX ONLINE	SEGA/WB
THE SIMS 2	EA
SETTLERS: HERITAGE OF KINGS	UBISOFT
STARSHIP TROOPERS	EMPIRE
WARTIME COMMAND: BATTLE FOR EUROPE 1939-45	CODEMASTERS
WORLD OF WARCRAFT	VU GAMES

TBA 2004
HALF-LIFE 2	VU GAMES

2005
ADVENT RISING	VU GAMES
BATTLEFIELD 2	EA
BROTHERS IN ARMS	UBISOFT
DREAMFALL: THE LONGEST JOURNEY	FUNCOM
DUNGEON SIEGE II	MICROSOFT
F.E.A.R.	VU GAMES
GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS	ROCKSTAR
MIDDLE-EARTH ONLINE	VU GAMES
MIDWAY	SCI
STALKER: SHADOW OF CHERNOBYL	THQ
STAR WARS: REPUBLIC COMMANDO	ACTIVISION
SWAT 4	VU GAMES
THE MOVIES	ACTIVISION

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

DUNGEON SIEGE 2

Well, it's lucky that the *Shrek 2* game has temporarily sated the demand for greater donkey presence in games because *Dungeon Siege 2* has officially slipped to early next year. So woodland jaunts that you were planning that involve the murdering of wildlife will have to remain illegal until then.

- **Publisher:** Microsoft
- **Developer:** Gas Powered Games
- **ETA:** Q1 2005
- **Website:** www.gaspowered.com
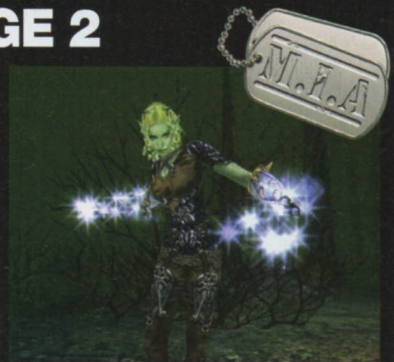
ADVENT RISING

We haven't sung the 'It looks a bit like *Halo*. *Halo*. *Halo*' song for months, and we won't get to sing it again until early next year. VU reckons they'll get more cash from their sci-fi shooter if it isn't released with the Christmas bigshots. Ironically missing out the advent season.

- **Publisher:** UV Games
- **Developer:** GlyphX
- **ETA:** Q1 2005
- **Website:** www.adventtrilogy.com

LULA 3D

What with interactive self-pleasuring material as a scarce commodity these days, many will be shocked to hear that Lula 3D has fallen off the release walkway and, presumably, into next year. Proof, if ever it were needed, that German porn stars get slippery when wet.

- **Publisher:** CDV
- **Developer:** Redfire Software
- **ETA:** TBA
- **Website:** www.lula3d.com
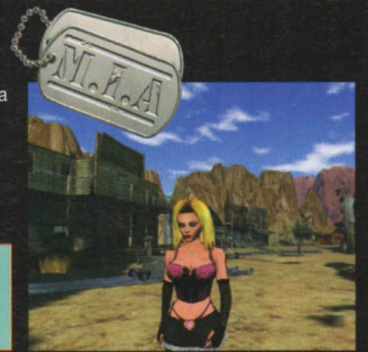
TOP 10 MOST IRRITATING ONLINE HAXX0R-ISMS

1. **1337** (EXCUSE ME? OH, YOU MEAN L33T)
2. **PR0N** (CALL IT WHAT IT IS BOY. AND NO THANKS, I'VE GOT PLENTY)
3. **FKIN L0S3RR** (LOOK. I'LL TELL YOUR MOTHER)
4. **N00B** (N00B? N00B? NO, I'M JUST RUBBISH)
5. **LLAMA** (I'M A PERUVIAN HERBIVORE THAT SPITS? OK, THANKS?)
6. **SMB** (NO THANK YOU. I DOUBT YOU'VE WASHED)
7. **SMD** (AGAIN, I'LL HAVE TO POLITELY DECLINE. SORRY)
8. **NUBJE** (ALL I ASKED WAS HOW TO DEFUSE THE BOMB)
9. **W00T** (IS THAT LIKE A WOOHOO OR A HOOT? OR BOTH?)
10. **MØØSE** (A MØØSE ONCE BIT MY SISTER...)

SOURCE National Advisory Board of Getting Out More

HOT SHOTS

SID MEIER'S PIRATES!

Avast, me proud beauty! Read on and find out why our Roger is so jolly this month...

WE JUST boarded an unmarked ship sailing off the coast of Norwich and plundered these new screenshots from Sid Meier's forthcoming nautical spectacular, *Pirates!*.

And that's not all. We threatened the bilge rats with the plank unless they spilled the beans on the game. Hence, we now know that you have to compete with a group of ten real-life AI-controlled pirates such as Blackbeard and Long John Silver. They play the game same as you, with advanced AI replicating your playing patterns. This means you can bump into one of your adversaries at any point in the game, prompting huge battles. The aim is to appear first in the league table of pirates. Sid Meier's latest opus *Pirates!* should be appearing in your telescope in a couple of months – watch this space for an exclusive review and demo.

■ **Publisher:** Atari
■ **Developer:** Firaxis
■ **ETA:** November
■ **Website:** www.firaxis.com

Bad Guy   Pirate

FOREVER
IS A LONG TIME

Duke Nukem Forever **has spent seven years in development limbo, so is this PC idol dead or is he just taking a break?** *Pavel Barter* **pokes the big man with a stick...**

MAY 2001. E3, Los Angeles. A meathead with dyed blonde hair wields a big plastic shooter at anyone who dares cross his path. Alongside this walking steroid are two scantily clad ladies who 'shake it' whenever their master commands. After ogling this actor and his impressive assets, a crowd of assorted fanboys gather around a TV screen to chow down on a visual feast.

After four years of absence, Duke Nukem (sexist mofo, alien killer and all-round destructive lunatic) has finally returned – and here, at E3 2001, is a video for his long-awaited sequel, *Duke Nukem Forever*. And what a trailer it is! Pure *Duke*-ness seeps from every pore. There's a breathtaking Las Vegas cityscape, the camera swooping in and out of casinos, dazzling explosions and grotesque creatures.

There's our hero, hornier than a Viking hat shop, flinging money at strippers, sporting bazookas and mounting motorbikes. Duke plays pinball, buys food from vending machines and kicks the ass of anyone who looks at him funnily.

Finally, a voiceover poses a question to the attentive audience. "Whaddya gonna do? Save the world by yourself?" "Ooh, yes," yell the fanboys. "Can't wait!"

E3 ends and the clock ticks once more. Weeks turn to months turn to years. Now it's late 2004 and there's still no sign of *DNF*. This, people, is a delay of Wembley Stadium proportions, a vanished masterpiece reduced to conspiracy theories and whispered rumours on website forums. Seven years since its announcement and the world still hasn't had a playable sniff of this digital Sasquatch.

What's the story behind *Duke Nukem Forever's* eternal development? Will the game ever see the light of the day? Should we even care about a cigar-smoking redneck in today's world of *Far Cry* and *Half-Life 2*? To find the answers to these questions, we must venture back to the misty recesses of the last millennium, to a development studio in the heart of the Lone Star State.

↘

A KING IS BORN

Why must the titles be so cryptic?

THE PEOPLE'S PRINCE: DUKE NUKEM

In 1991, the Nukem legend was spawned by Texas-based developer Apogee Software, the geniuses who helped create *Wolfenstein 3D*. Although the game was essentially a blocky platform shoot 'em up, gamers relished its cocky lead character and arch nemesis Dr Proton. The studio was compelled to create a sequel: 1993's *Duke Nukem II*.

3D Realms crafted the franchise's next instalment and *Duke*-mania promptly kicked off like a ruck in a Texan pool hall. *Duke 3D* featured interactive environments, hilarious dialogue and stoopid violence: just the right ingredients to serve up an iconic PC game character and a successor to the 3D shooter crown, then held by *Doom*.

"We spent months and months making everything active and responsive to the player's actions," says level programmer Richard 'Levelord' Gray. "We also catered to the child in everyone. For instance, everyone loves the sound of breaking glass. I never get tired of going into a game and blasting every window and bottle I find to smithereens."

"We accommodated the lust for boobs that all of us share. *Duke* also hit a bone by successfully combining comedy and violence. This isn't easy to do. Most of the time, humour either softens the violence or the combination makes the game hard to take seriously. Either that, or the humour just plain sucks."

Although it wasn't officially announced until 1997, *Duke Nukem Forever* first reared its peroxide head in 1996. According to an interview from that time with Scott Miller (honcho of Texas-based Apogee) on GameSlice.com, the game was not intended to be a sequel: "Rather, it was meant to be another episode in the life of Duke. A side-scrolling platform game similar to the original two *Duke* games, but with better technology and graphics.

"We're using the same *Duke* model from *Duke Nukem 3D* and adding dozens of new frames. Duke will climb chains, poles, ladders, walk hand-over-hand along wires and pipes, do mid-air flips and ride several vehicles, including a jet-ski and a Harley."

Programmer Keith Schuler (who years later would be instrumental in the creation of *Max Payne 2: The Fall Of Max Payne*) began work on this side-scroller, only for it to be cancelled when his talents were required on *Duke Nukem 3D's Plutonium*

Pak. Development of another 3D *Duke* game soon commenced. Although this had nothing to do with Schuler's aborted project, the team decided to recycle its name. So began the long saga of *Duke Nukem Forever*…

ENGINE TROUBLE

When Chris Hargrove, now lead architect at Gas Powered Games (*Dungeon Siege*), arrived at 3D Realms (a division of Apogee headed by George Broussard) in the autumn of 1997 at the tender age of 22, *DNF* was still in prototype phase. The team didn't officially start the project until January 1998, when they were handed code for the Quake II Engine.

"We showed the game at E3 1998 (in Atlanta)," says Chris Hargrove. "We'd only been working on the project for a few months by that point, but we'd managed to make quite a few engine improvements and create a decent amount of content as well. Our focus at that time was on

One of the 11 screenshots from the last batch released at E3 2001.

Duke gets to the bottom of things at E3 2001.

making the most exciting gameplay and content possible, and the engine improvements were specifically designed to help our designers and artists do the best work they could. Fortunately, the feedback we got from the E3 demo showed that our approach was paying off."

BELIEVE THE HYPE?

With more locations than an interplanetary travel brochure, vehicles such as trucks and boats and footage of Duke perving at a Vegas strip joint, fans weren't disappointed. This E3 presentation also revealed a sidekick: a babe sporting a chest even bigger than Duke's.

Within a few weeks of this E3 showcase, 3D Realms announced that it was switching to the Unreal Engine. Chris Hargrove recalls the decision: "Shortly after E3 1998, we looked at some of our goals for the game content and unfortunately, we realised that several of them, such as the use of huge outdoor areas, were pushing the Quake II Engine beyond its limits. We knew we could modify the engine, but that it would be a complicated task that could take some time.

"Around that time, Unreal

DUKE NUKEM FOREVER TIMELINE

☢ EARLY 1996	☢ MID 1996	☢ LATE 1996	☢ MAY 1997	☢ SUMMER 1997
3D Realms begins work on side-scroller, *Duke Nukem Forever*.	Side-scroller project is abandoned.	Five programmers leave 3D Realms to found Ritual Entertainment.	Randy Pitchford leaves 3D Realms for Valve, later Gearbox.	3D Realms signs a contract with Finnish developer Remedy to provide funding, design direction and a marketing plan for *Max Payne*.

"That'll teach you to call with an 8 and a 4!"

MODEL CITIZENS

PLASTIC NUKEM SITTING ON THE DASHBOARD OF MY CAR.

Burn them with lighters, stick 'em where the sun don't shine, or just arrange them in disgusting positions around your PC. This line of action figures based on characters from *Duke Nukem 3D*, ranging from the Pig Cop to the Octabrain, was pulled from the shelves back in the 1990s.

"OK: where's Action Man?"

DNF FOR ATARI 2600

A FOOL IS BORN EVERY MINUTE

"*Duke Nukem* is a classic game, and what better system to release it on first than the most classic of consoles? Sure, you have your Xbox, your PS2 and other modern era consoles, but for true gaming fun, you want to play *Duke Nukem Forever* on the Atari 2600 – a console exclusive to boot!"

This Web announcement by 3D Realms in 2003 added that there'd be multiplayer facilities between 2600's via a 'DukeLink cable' and blocky pixel ragdoll physics. "Many folks have wondered why it's taken us so long to get any information out on the game. Well, the reason for that is that we've had to spend an enormous amount of time and effort figuring out how to make the Unreal Engine work on the Atari 2600 system."

Duke devotees picked their jaws off the carpet when they realised it was April 1 and they'd been taken for a ride. Suckers!

Here's one I let off earlier...

was released and it had support for most of our goals already built in. Given that our investment in the Quake II Engine had only amounted to a few months by that point, we determined it'd probably be better in the long run if we just switched engines."

BRING IT ON

Over the next few years, *Duke's* fans started to become antsy. Where was this masterpiece they'd been promised? What does 3D Realms mean by "the game's release date is

when it's done"? The E3 2001 showcase only seemed to make the wait all the more torturous; the sneer on Duke's digital chops even more mocking.

According to Chris, who left 3D Realms in 2000, *Duke Nukem Forever* hasn't undergone any more engine switches, but its version of Unreal has been drastically overhauled. Considering the arrival of a new generation of game engines (in the splendiferous form of *Half-Life 2* and *Doom 3*), this is critical to the success of the game. A sentiment that Chris shares.

"As long as the engine behind a game has room to grow over the course of a project's life, and the developer has the skillset to take advantage of that, then there's no time limitation. Since 3D Realms first licensed Unreal, the engine has grown and improved considerably. Based on the early impressions of Unreal Engine 3.0, it's poised to continue doing so." And if you saw our stunning world exclusive look at the Unreal Engine 3.0 last issue, you've got every reason to be excited.

BREAKING THE BANK

3D Realms was rumoured to have parted with around half a million bucks for *Quake's* technology back in 1998, only to abandon the engine a few months later. *DNF's* budget could have paid off third-world debts at this stage – it wouldn't be a stretch to assume that cashflow has been a thorn in *Duke's* toe.

Having created the *Max Payne* franchise and reaped rewards from spin-off *Nukem* PC hits like (the frankly rubbish) *Manhattan Project*, Broussard's team probably aren't short on lolly. However, it has been at loggerheads with *Duke's* publishers for some time. Take 2 Interactive (parent company of Rockstar

LATE 1997
Work begins on another *Duke 3D* game, also titled *Duke Nukem Forever*.

JANUARY 1998
The developer begins work on *DNF* with the Quake II Engine.

MAY 1998
Duke Nukem Forever showcases at E3 Expo in Atlanta.

JUNE 1998
3D Realms switches to the Unreal Engine.

DECEMBER 2000
Publisher Gathering (a division of Take 2) acquires the PC rights to *Duke Nukem Forever* from Infogrames (now re-named Atari) for a reported $12 million. A release date is scheduled for "the second-half of 2001".
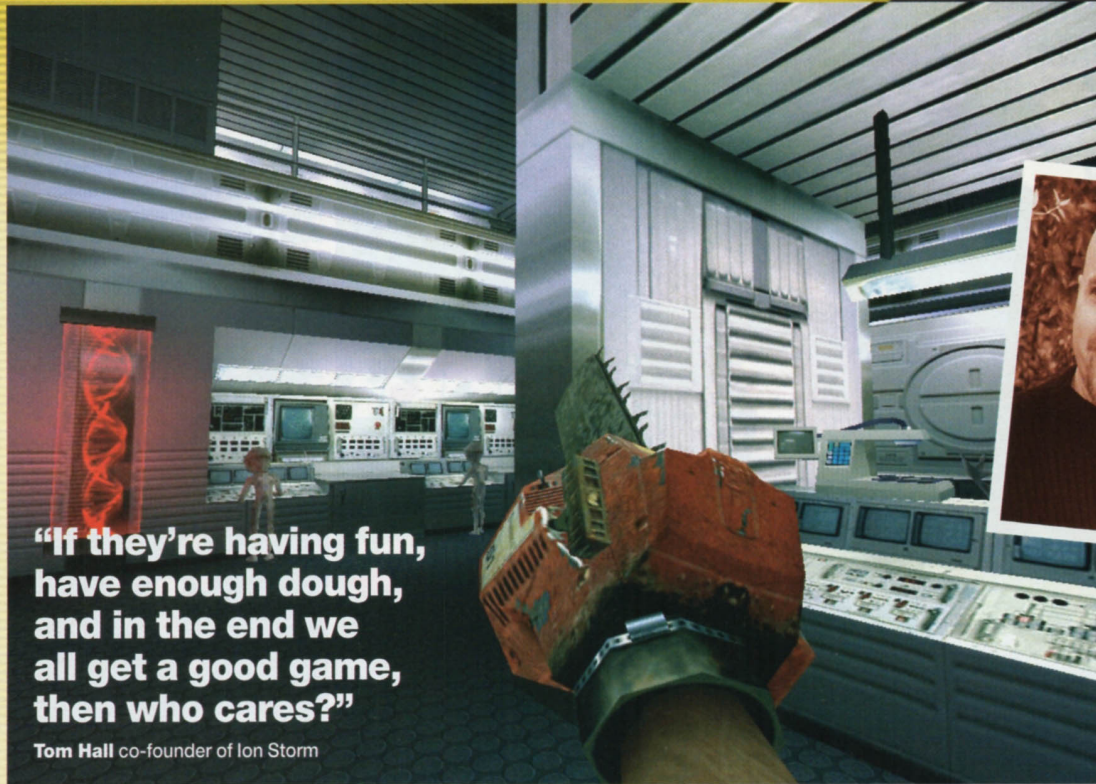
> ## "If they're having fun, have enough dough, and in the end we all get a good game, then who cares?"
> **Tom Hall** co-founder of Ion Storm

Duke prepares to rip the alien greys a new one.

Richard Gray (above) and Tom Hall (left), former 3D Realmers.

my decision was based on 3D Realms' track record of slow development – even back then. If I'd known my first real Build game was going to be released more than two years after *Doom*, I would've thought twice about working for Apogee. In retrospect, the game was successful anyway, so I don't regret any decisions I made."

Some of these former 3D Realms programmers are baffled as to the length of *Duke's* delay. "I really have no idea why it's taking so long," says Michael Hadwin, who left in 1996 to join Ritual and

DUKE SPEAKS

THE VOICE OF DUKE NUKEM, JON ST JOHN

"I've been waiting forever for *Duke Nukem Forever* – I'm beginning to wonder if it's ever going to happen. I never did do any voiceover work on that game. I'm afraid the whole *Duke Nukem* craze has passed. I wish I could tell you what exactly what's going on.

"The last thing I heard, and it wasn't even directly from 3D Realms – it was by word of mouth – was that by the time the team got the graphics and everything looking right and were ready to start working on the voice, the game engine became outdated. They kept trying to update the engine and it simply became too much trouble. I dunno – I'm not in the technical end of it. They never got it together and I guess they just moved on to other projects." Don't forget to check out Jon's voiceovers on the discs and our Special Report on page ten.

suffering from prima donna syndrome," says ex-employee now designer at Ritual, Richard Gray. "I thought I was great and I was frustrated that I wasn't treated like a god. I know better now. Four of my fellow former 3D Realmers came to me with the offer to join them, so I did."

Ken Silverman, who crafted *Duke Nukem 3D's* Build Engine and now just programs as a hobby, decided to walk in the same year. "Believe it or not, part of

Can't wait to see this?

Games and Gathering) who bought the PC publishing rights for a reported $12 million in 2000, has occasionally commented on the protracted delay. The Texan developer isn't having any of it.

"Bear in mind that 3D Realms funds *Duke Nukem Forever* 100 per cent out of our own pockets. Take 2 does nothing," George Broussard announced via the Internet in 2003. "If we didn't have utmost confidence in our abilities and the future of the game, then why would we continue to fund it ourselves? We could easily quit, scrap it and do some other game.

"All we want to do is keep quiet, work on the game and emerge later

and show you what we're working on. We don't want hype. We don't want drama. We don't want Take 2 saying stupidass things in public for the sole purposes of helping its stock."

I'LL GET MY COAT

While 3D Realms has been sidelined over the years by projects like the ill-fated game *Prey*, employee turnover hasn't helped matters either. In 1996, a bunch of staff also left to establish Ritual Entertainment (creator of *Counter-Strike: Condition Zero*).

"I was unhappy at 3D Realms, but I now know this was mostly because of me

Sightseeing as well as killing is all part of the game.

DUKE NUKEM FOREVER TIMELINE

MAY 2001	JAN 2003	JUNE 2003	APRIL 2004
DNF video shown at E3 Expo in Los Angeles.	George Broussard: "The release date is when it's done. Simple as that." OK, George…	A Take 2 conference call announces that the company is " just hopeful that 3D Realms will finish it (*DNF*)". George Broussard replies on the Shacknews messageboards that "Take 2 needs to STFU imo".	George Broussard: "Don't assume our lack of showing anything is because we have nothing to show. We're just waiting until the right time. That's our call."

WORTH WAITING FOR

DNF THREATENS TO BE BIGGER, BADDER AND BEEFIER

The story so far: Duke's old nemesis Dr Proton has nuked parts of Nevada, gained control of Area 51 and stolen a spacecraft, and now he's recruiting mean-spirited ETs to take over the world. It's up to Duke Nukem to take back Las Vegas, dispose of the alien scum, blow stuff up, treat women like objects and ultimately restore order to Nevada.

Raw action meets massively rendered environments such as the Grand Canyon, the Hoover Dam and the Vegas strip. Vehicles range from donkeys to jet-skis and a truckload of new weapons are being carted in – pistols, automatics, sniper-rifles, rocket launchers, shotguns, laser-guns, tripwires and more. Of course, Duke's trusty boot will be employed to squish smaller enemies.

Calamari and chips: seafood, bad move...

I wonder if that kid will ever make that phone call...

although sometimes the impact of the process can cause their games to come out less-than-perfect, simply because of scheduling constraints that build up along the way. Fortunately, this isn't a problem for 3D Realms. If you ask me 'do I think it will it ever see the light of day'? Yes, I believe it will."

As you read this, in a darkened room in Texas, tech boffins are busy tinkering on *Duke's* new pipe bombs. Meanwhile, somewhere in Los Angeles

sits an out-of-work actor, biceps bigger than his head. This man-mountain is twiddling his thumbs, waiting to reprise his role as Duke Nukem at a future E3. As for *PC ZONE*, we'll be there, ready with open arms to welcome the prodigal son back into the fold with a hearty slap on the back, a freeze gun and a fresh pack of bubblegum. Shit happens... PCZ

recently founded Skylab Games. "I've shipped three AAA titles since leaving 3DR and I'm almost done with number four. I can't imagine what could possibly be taking so long. Sadly, *Duke Nukem Forever* has become a slang term within the industry for 'a game that'll never ship', or a development cycle that takes 'forever'. I'm confident the boys at 3D Realms have created something special for the *Duke* fans. Now they just need to set it free."

Most former staff like Richard Gray reckon we should be patient and abide by George Broussard's mantra: *Duke Nukem Forever* will be out when it's ready. After all, too many bog-standard games emerge from 18-24 months of development, while true champs like *Doom 3* take aeons.

SEVEN YEAR ITCH

Tom Hall, creative director on *Duke Nukem II*, the force behind *Duke Nukem 3D's* barmy plot, and an Ion Storm (*Deus Ex*) founder, is brimming with optimism. "I think they want to make it as interactive and varied as they can, which is cool. That was the idea

behind *Half-Life 2* as well, so we'll see what happens. But you know... If they're having fun, have enough dough and in the end we all get a good game, then who cares? I know George and the guys will make a fun game. I'll buy it!"

Chris Hargrove continues: "I wish there were some kind of exciting conspiracy behind it all, but in reality there isn't. The project's had its share of hurdles, but it's got a very talented crew behind it, and over time the crew and company have learned how to make things go more smoothly.

"Many other game companies and projects undergo these same lessons,

DUKE ON THE DISCS!

Don't forget to check out the discs this month, which feature a ton of *Duke Nukem* goodies including playable demos, movies and exclusive audio treats from the big man himself.

■ Check out the official *Duke Nukem Forever* website at www.3drealms.com/duke4/index.html
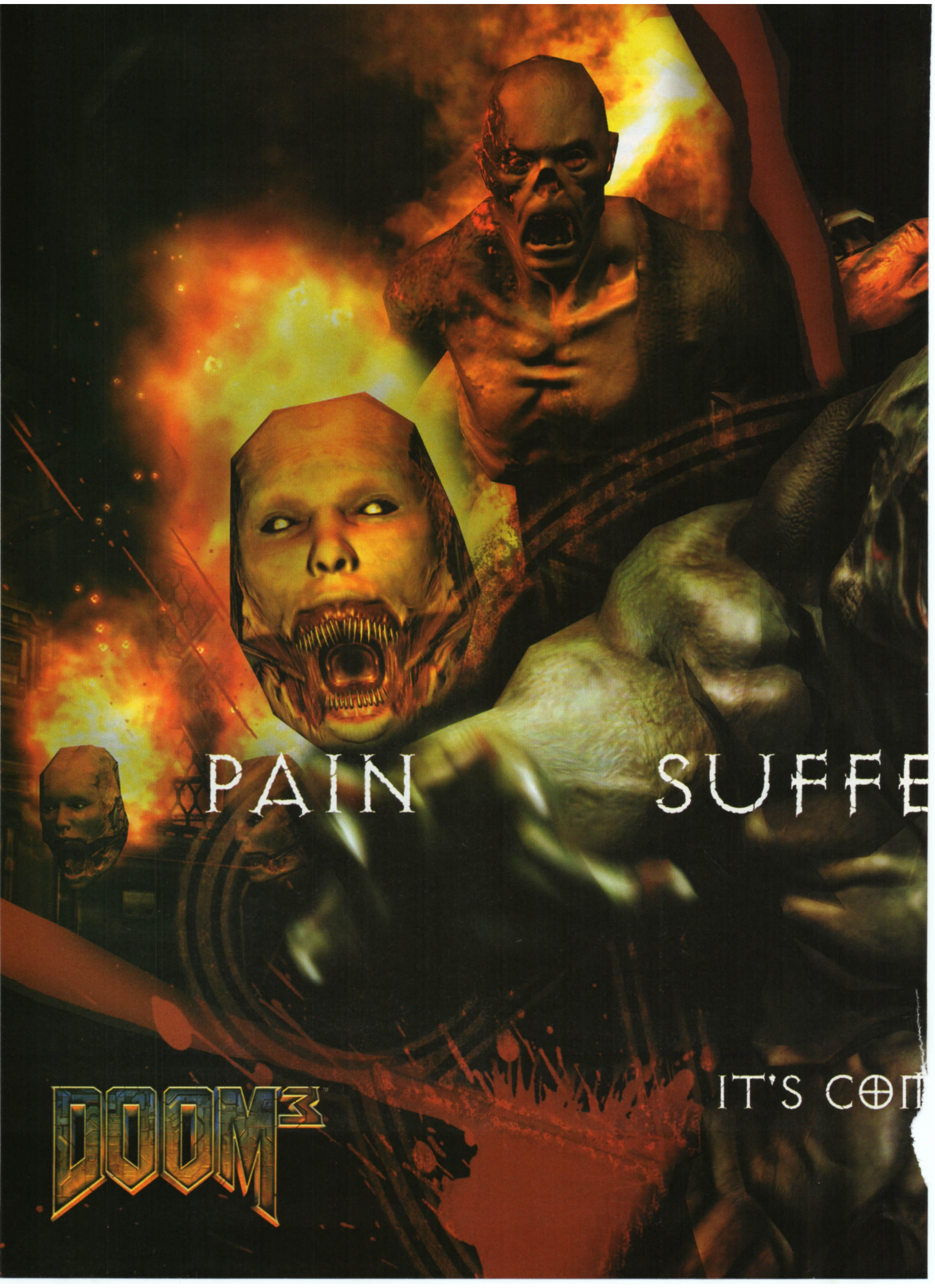
PAIN   SUFFE

DOOM 3

IT'S COM

RING   DEATH

NG FOR YOU

I'm a rocket man...
TRIBES: VENGEANCE

Will Porter hears whisperings of a princess mixed up in an Imperial Conflict in the depths of space, and is mildly surprised to be handed a jetpack

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Irrational Games
PUBLISHER VU Games
WEBSITE www.tribesvengeance.com
ETA October

LAST PREVIEWED PCZONE ISSUE 144

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Highly original and pacy character-jumping narrative
- Fluid and fast-paced jetpack action
- Tons of vehicles and new weapons
- Online favourite aimed squarely at the mainstream
- Everyone will learn how to ski

CV

IRRATIONAL GAMES

With studios in Canberra down under and Boston MA, some of the big boys at Irrational have worked on classics like *Thief*, *Ultima Underworld* and *System Shock*.

1999 Irrational releases *System Shock 2*, and the world is made a slightly brighter (yet scarier) place.

2002 *Freedom Force*, the game we went to for our super-kicks before *City Of Heroes* arrived on the scene, gets its debut.

2004 Irrational announces that it's been entrusted by VU games with the *SWAT* licence, while work continues on the comic-book inspired sequel *Freedom Force Vs. The Third Reich*.

YOUR AVERAGE shooter plot isn't rocket science. A group of bad monsters/men/aliens/Nazis (or possibly some monstrous, humanoid alien Nazis) look like they're about to do something bad: unleashing the power of hell, destroying the Earth, invading Poland – a brand of unethical-ness that prompts instant and violent intervention. As a muscly man with a large gun and remarkable powers of healing it's up to you to stop this nastiness by shooting things. Sometimes in the face, sometimes in the chest, sometimes even shooting stationary barrels full of explosive materials.

So it was then, that at some stage someone from Irrational must have knocked on the polished oak door of the ivory towers of VU Games with a briefcase full of surprises. A shooter with a tear-jerking plot that centres on the relationship between a mother and her beautiful princess daughter? Five characters? Playing as good guys and bad guys? Villains who aren't necessarily bad, just misguided? Playing in the present for one level, before playing the next 30 years in the past? A strong female lead who becomes an extreme sports champion? Playing that same character as a six-year-old child? Excuse me, but exactly what drugs are you on?

CLEVER DRUGS

Tribes: Vengeance is complicated. Not the running, sliding, jetting into trees and firing explosive discs aspect of it – that's relatively simple to grasp. But the way the plot plays out completely ignores the accustomed FPS blueprint. It opens like 'Royal EastEnders In Space' (with jetpacks), with you playing a prissy princess who's slightly miffed to have been crowbarred into a marriage of convenience by your Imperial father, before taking you into a narrative with so many splices, flash-forwards and recaps that Tarantino would be proud.

There you are as Victoria the Princess (mother-to-be of our other lead female character, Julia), mooching on the Imperial barge when it comes under attack from Phoenix rebels. From here you are guided through a tutorial that's been cleverly integrated with gameplay – leading Victoria through the bowels of the ship with your sister Olivia talking in your ear and explaining how armour suits, weaponry dispensers and jetpacks (which as a Princess you've never reduced yourself to using) work. Before

Nice to see that the British car industry has an intergalactic showroom somewhere.

MAN, I FEEL LIKE A WOMAN

FIGHTING IN A BRA? WHAT WILL THEY THINK OF NEXT?

Cate's great, but she doesn't sell.

VU Games seems to be on a bit of a roll with breaking the mould in FPS characters – the lead character of *Men Of Valor* is an African American while *Tribes* totes two women as its lead characters. This almost didn't happen though, since when the sublime *NOLF 2* failed to shift enough units due to male confusion at being given cat-like sexpot Cate Archer to control, shockwaves went out from VU command. The *Tribes* female bias almost came a cropper, but thankfully a year's worth of valuable production meant that the innovative storyline was saved from the marketing men. Hoorah!

A jetpack culture means spherical buildings and high ceilings.

Like the *Rocketeer* movie. Only without Timothy Dalton. Shame.

long you're jetting yourself around huge rooms packed with enemies and gun emplacements and essentially getting to grips with the slippery-slidey ways in which *Tribes* handles – dying quite a lot in the process I might add.

Tribes: Vengeance may not quite match the graphical splendour of other forthcoming shooters (and to be honest in a game with such a sense of physical realism ingrained into its characters, a lot of the household objects I bumped into on my travels were unusually bouncy), but it should make up for this with its extraordinary fluidity. My privileged fiddle later took Victoria into an area of the Imperial flagship where artificial gravity had failed – and floating around that area was a delight: constantly scanning all 360 possible angles of attack, tentatively tapping my boosters, knocking an

enemy back with my Blaster and watching him spiral out of control with smoke billowing out of his jetpack.

The 16 levels of *Tribes: Vengeance*, y'see, have been made with half a mind (almost two thirds of a mind) on introducing the player to the subtle ways of the online tribal experience. This is perhaps why, conveniently enough, the

"A narrative with so many splices and recaps that Tarantino would be proud"

story watches young Julia become a sporting hero in a game that's more than a little bit like *Tribes*' online l33t-fests – only with markedly less sarcastic comments when you die in stupid ways. It seems to work though, casually skiing backwards into one of a stadium's four

capture points and firing discs at three Phoenix heavies before jetting up into the stratosphere is a truly cathartic experience. It'll be a rude awakening when online virgins hook into a game that features real *Tribes* nerds – but for now skiing up and down the slopes of the arena like it were some futuristic skate park, taking potshots at passing enemies and grabbing fuel canisters to take back to your home base is a silky-smooth experience.

WHY CHROMOSOME

It's not all womanly death-giving though, testosterone will be provided by playable

characters Daniel, Jericho and Mercury – one hero Phoenix Tribesman, one ruthless Phoenix leader and another super-cool, rogue agent who works for the highest bidder. It's here that the *Vengeance* twisty-turn dynamics come into play: at one point you'll be playing as Victoria and Daniel trying to work out how a stealthy assassin has managed to infiltrate a secure base and wreak havoc, and at another you'll be playing Mercury, that very mischief-maker, carrying out this nefarious task. It really is storytelling magic, and the level that gives you the Silver Surfer stylings of Mercury is probably the best I played. It showed up a fair number of AI glitches that will hopefully have been ironed out in the final product, but sniping and sliding around a moonlit mountain range and managing to pull off some incredibly

"I remember when all you could see was green fields..."

"Snipe and slide around a moonlit mountain range pulling off stylish kills"

But will the game be able to stand up to the *UT 2004* behemoth?

Three weapons and a jetpack: heavenly.

stylish kills with momentum had me feeling the same smug way I do when I pull off a particularly smooth *Max Payne* headshot. Which, coming from me, is high praise indeed.

A word on firepower. Newcomers include the Burner (like a Bio-rifle with flames), the Rocket Pod (which follows your crosshair and replaces the earlier lock-on missile model) and the Grappler, that enables you to harpoon the scenery and swing around like a lunatic. The blaster, meanwhile, has received an overhaul from its previous laser-hurling capacity and now acts as a highly satisfying shotgun. And to finish the job, all the *Tribes* oldies but goldies: Chaingun, Grenade Launcher, the Spinfuser with exploding discs of death (very practical), the famous Sniper Rifle

and the always efficient Mortar (my favourite). And for the grand finale: the famed Buckler system – half shield and half *Tron*-style throwing disc.

CHILD'S PLAY

As for the level with you playing the six-year-old Julia, well I can't think of many games that have done that before. In an echo of the game's first level you find yourself running around an Imperial Palace under attack from the Phoenix – but this time your viewpoint is at navel height to all the soldiers running around you. With cries of "Death to the Empire! Death to the traitor Victoria!" ringing in your ears, you take to the (convenient) ducts and vents, run defenceless under hails of bullets being exchanged by rival soldiers and watch your snivelling father

get callously murdered part way through the level. As for the level's close, well that sets up Julia's dark desire for the eponymous vengeance in the game, so I won't go into detail, but it comes after a truly great moment in which you clamber into a one-man fighter craft and exchange an interest in My Little Rocket-Pony for bloody murder.

Seeing this tiny form encased by metal and at the helm of a weapon-clad flying machine perhaps recalls #59 in the catalogue of reasons why *The Phantom Menace* was a terrible film, yet Julia pulls it off in a significantly less irritating fashion. With boosters on each side and rockets and falling masonry tumbling from damaged rooftops, it's clear that *Tribes'* flying vehicles are great fun to play. In the early code that I played, however, I can't say the same for the game's more land-orientated craft. It's clear that the developers have taken a leaf out of *Halo's* book when designing the tanks, but (even if they are supposed to hover) they neither feel as weighty nor as powerful as they should. Then again, it's still early days so all may change in the tinkering that still lies ahead.

We'll have a full exclusive review of

single-player *Vengeance* next issue, along with a full round-up of its multiplayer capabilities, so you'll have to sit tight in your hover-packs for a few weeks yet. Will the final product be as icy cool as Sean Connery jetting over the sides of a French chateau in the opening scenes of *Thunderball*? Well, chances are it'll have less underarm hair anyway. **PCZ**

"Nope. It's far too... different."

WILL THE HARDCORE JUMP ABOARD THE VENGEANCE EXPRESS?

Now *Tribes* bods are renowned for their devotion to the cause, and countless flame-fests are posted online even now debating the age-old *Tribes* versus *Tribes 2* argument. So what's going to happen here? The main tweaks in the multiplayer game are to smooth out the rough edges of controls and gameplay – for example, all the packs you pick up are now operated with the same key-presses and have both sudden-hit 'active' uses and more subtle passive roles. Locations, meanwhile, range from mountain ranges to green fields, ruined cities and some kind of entirely indoor greenhouse structure that yours truly got thoroughly massacred in during a brief multiplayer scuffle. But will the fans, who the developers lovingly refer to as 'insane', lap it up? Wait and see.

Deep rivers have currents that slow you down.

Havok physics are so realistic, you can almost see the rigor mortis setting in.

LAST PREVIEWED PCZONE ISSUE 136
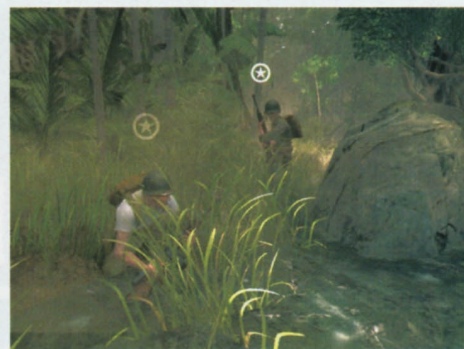
The *Ground Force: Vietnam* team hard at work.

Land of the raging gun...

MEDAL OF HONOR: PACIFIC ASSAULT

Jamie Sefton screams "Banzai!" and rushes headfirst into a bloody playtest of the latest, and possibly greatest, *Medal Of Honor* game yet

YOU'RE witnessing a scene from hell: tracer fire is whizzing about your head; Japanese soldiers run at you, teeth and bayonets bared, screaming angry death; planes fly overhead raining bombs and missiles; a fellow soldier is cowering behind a wooden pillar too frightened to move; dozens of bodies float lifelessly in the sea. As the final level in EA's new WWII FPS *Medal Of Honor: Pacific Assault*, the island raid on the fortified Tarawa Atoll could be the series' finest hour, eclipsing even the epic Omaha Beach landings from the first game.

"*Pacific Assault* is very chaotic," says EALA's product manager Ben Kusin. "One of the most important things we've realised conceptually and put in the game, is that war is a manic, hellish experience. A lot of shooters are simple – they put you in a situation, and you move forward very quickly. However, in real war, bullets are coming behind you from the left and right, bombs are flying in; so you

always need to have your head on a swivel, checking everywhere around you at all times."

WELCOME TO THE JUNGLE

The sequel to the 2002 smash hit *Allied Assault* bravely moves away from the European theatre of operations towards the bitter fight against the Japanese in the

Far East. As new recruit Tom Conlin, you begin your battle for survival at Pearl Harbor and end your tour of duty with the brutal assault on Tarawa, described above.

"There's a reason most other shooters stick in Europe – the Pacific is very difficult to recreate," continues Kusin. "You have

dense jungle environments, with vivid colour schemes. The graphical intensity needs a big team, which is why we have more than 100 people working on it. It's paid off though, as we feel we're on a par with the *Doom 3s* and *Half-Life 2s*, although the game will be scaleable so we don't alienate any fans with lower-spec machines."

"We're taking the game off-rails with our new non-scripted dynamic AI system that's based around morale"

BEN KUSIN PRODUCT MANAGER, EALA

The visual splendour on show is demonstrated aptly by one of the first missions we get to play. The River Walk level had me and my squad yomping through beautifully realised misty jungle, teeming with different trees, flora and fauna, grass that flattens as you crawl

CV

ELECTRONIC ARTS

EALA is Electronic Arts' big development studio complex in Los Angeles, housing the huge 100-strong *Medal Of Honor: Pacific Assault* team. Being located in the entertainment capital of the world has enabled EA to pick up talented artists who've worked on movies such as *Shrek* and *Spider-Man*.

2002 *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault* is released to universal acclaim, with the Omaha Beach invasion setting a new standard in epic WWII gaming. *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault – Spearhead* is the first expansion pack, featuring new characters, weapons and European locations.

2003 *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault – Breakthrough*. The second expansion pack threw you into conflicts in Italy and North Africa.

through it, changes in light from the forest canopy, flowing rivers with varying currents, waterfalls, and tropical birds that fly off when you disturb them.

Yet the one thing that becomes immediately apparent when you play *Pacific Assault*, is that this isn't a straight run-and-gun shooter. You have an AI-controlled squad that you have to work with to complete missions, with an icon popping up in the right-hand corner when your captain wants you to carry out orders. Kusin: "We're taking the game off-rails with our new non-scripted dynamic AI system that's based around morale. You'll notice this, for example, if your squad goes into a situation and kills the Japanese captain. Although there's no actual number displayed or anything, the enemy's morale would drop and your squad would want to move double-time and charge them."

In practice, this means a much more open and fluid 'push-pull' aspect of combat, with levels never playing the same way twice and events during skirmishes determining you and your enemy's battle strategy and mental state. This was proven in a later part of the River Walk level, when I threw a grenade into a formation of Japanese soldiers killing and scattering many of their squad. As almost a last resort, they suddenly performed a 'banzai' attack, running suicidally straight at my squad with bayonets bared, requiring a quick barrage of machine-gun fire to see them off. Even after the shoot-out, I had to carefully check the bodies, as any surviving Japanese

Weapons include a lethal machine-gun placement that you can pick up and move.

soldiers will attempt to set off a grenade as a final act of defiance.

NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCE

If you or any of your squad do get injured, then you're going to have to rely on your medics – part of developer EALA's wish to jettison some of the more obvious videogame devices. "In the real world you don't just come across medipacs and rations when you need them at the end of a level or at strategic points," says Kusin.

It's now vital to properly look after your squad – go storming off Rambo-style into the jungle, and your Corpsman may well be way back tending to injured soldiers, leaving you stranded. Also, if you do get shot or hurt, it's best to take cover first before you call for a medic, or you may be asking the poor doc to risk his own life getting to your position.

However, if your health does reach zero, you'll experience another innovation in *Pacific Assault* – 'Verge of Death' –

when you start breathing heavily, hear disembodied voices, and the world slowly fades to black. In this short window of opportunity, you could be saved by a medic, rescued, killed by an enemy; in fact a range of outcomes, depending on the circumstances. It's perhaps overly cinematic, but the Verge of Death is hugely effective in giving those desperate moments a real tension and a terrifying feeling of life slipping away from you.

I was mightily impressed (and slightly shell-shocked) after getting my hands on *MOH: Pacific Assault*. The EALA team is developing a WWII shooter that promises a huge range of different gameplay experiences, from epic island beach landings involving hundreds of soldiers and vehicles, through missions to rescue a downed comrade in dense jungle, to the tense seeking and destroying of silent snipers hiding in treetops. With a raft of new weapons and gameplay features, plus new squad-based multiplayer (see 'A Different Class', below), *Pacific Assault* could be a tropical paradise for WWII FPS addicts. We'll find out if it's mission accomplished with an exclusive review and playable demo next month. **PCZ**

"Sir, I can see the Ewoks just over the ridge."

Scouting missions require   you to keep your head.

A DIFFERENT CLASS

PACIFIC ASSAULT* INTRODUCES DIFFERENT SOLDIER CLASSES TO *MEDAL OF HONOR

EALA is planning major additions to the multiplayer side of *Medal Of Honor* with the addition of four classes of soldier: Infantryman (basic soldier), Corpsman (medic), Engineer (demolition expert) and Ammo Tech (handles heavier weapons and ammo). As with other such online games such as *Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory*, the most successful squads will have a mix of classes for a well-balanced team.

Also, in addition to basic Deathmatch and Capture The Flag modes, *Pacific Assault* introduces the Invader game type, where spawn points will move back and forth throughout a map. There'll also be instant server select and Punkbuster technology incorporated, to hopefully put a stop to the mass cheating that happened with *Allied Assault*.

Flying the flag for *Warhammer 40K*.

Doom 3 makes a cameo appearance.

Assault Marine Squad
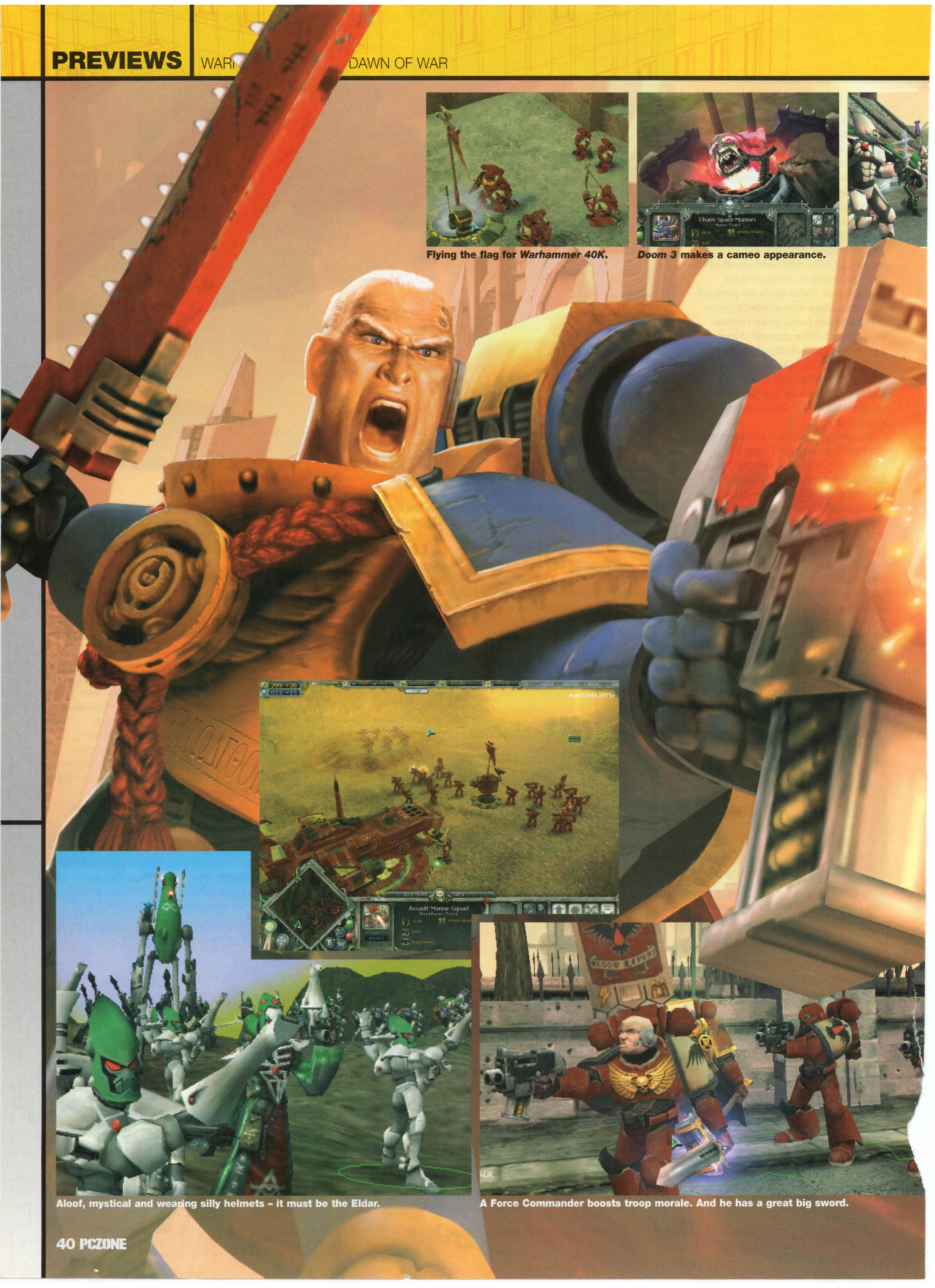
Aloof, mystical and wearing silly helmets – it must be the Eldar.

A Force Commander boosts troop morale. And he has a great big sword.

Getting close to the action.

It was my first play online, OK!?

"OK boys, that looks good. Say cheese!"

Breaking the rules...

WARHAMMER 40,000: DAWN OF WAR
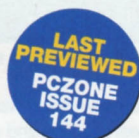
A new day for *Warhammer* fans is fast approaching and *Richie Shoemaker* has been staying up late hoping to see it through

THE LATEST edition of the *Warhammer 40,000* rulebook is a weighty tome; 288 pages of background info, racial statistics, to-hit modifiers and all manner of vehicle, weapon and spell stats – enough to send those unfamiliar with Games Workshop's tabletop battle system running for the hills.

Of course, this excludes the small library of supplementary Codex manuals – one each for the main combatants, the many dozens of novels and, of course, the monthly hot-fixes applied via the ever-present *White Dwarf* magazine. It wouldn't be stretching the truth to say that, apart from Tolkien's, George Lucas's and our own, few worlds have been so mapped, written about and fought over as those which play host to humanity's struggle in the 41st millennium.

Yet as you may already be aware, distilling this wealth of information into

direct translations of the tabletop hobby. But these titles have never fully realised the universe in which they're set. This is because, in faithfully minimising the exhaustive rules for a smaller playing field, they've generally ended up as convenient revisions of the real thing, their exclusive benefit being that you don't have to invest time and money in a lead army to play them.

THEATRE OF BLOOD

In transposing the strategy of *Warhammer 40,000* from tabletop to desktop, *Dawn Of War* developer Relic has approached things differently and focused more on the iconic imagery that punctuates the rulebook, rather than the rules themselves.

Moving from a turn-based model to the antithesis of real-time – meaning whole chapters have been ruthlessly culled – is a brave step sure to irk the

most battle-hardened tabletop trialists would be lying if they weren't impressed by the visuals. Here, for the first time we get to witness the true brutality of the *40K* universe.

You gawp in wonder at squads of Space Marines unloading their bolters into ranks of advancing Orks, dreadnoughts with power saws slicing through crowds of melee troops and whirlwind missile launchers peppering the landscape. Before, you needed dice and a tape measure to appreciate the carnage.

However, not only is *Dawn Of War* the most visually impressive game ever with the *Warhammer* moniker, it's certainly the most violent. Indeed, few first-person shooters offer as much in-yer-face gore – when you slow down the action, it's almost balletic as arteries are opened, drenching the screen in arcs of claret.

MARINE BIOLOGY

In terms of the gameplay on offer, *Dawn Of War* isn't quite as distinctive. Resource management is kept to a minimum, with points earned through capturing and holding victory locations. The more locations you hold, the quicker your points rack up and the more units and structures you can bring into play.

That aside, the mechanics of the game will be familiar if you've played a RTS in

"Slow down the action and it's almost balletic as arteries are opened, drenching the screen in arcs of claret"

something more interactive has been a thankless task for a number of games developers over the years; most, if not all of the more memorable efforts being

purists. However, after we finally managed to distract ourselves from painting the miniature figures to actually play *Dawn Of War*, we reckon even the

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Relic
PUBLISHER THQ
WEBSITE www.thq.co.uk
ETA September

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- The brutal *40K* universe brought to life
- Highly accessible yet full of detail
- Four distinct races – all firm fan favourites
- Cheaper than the 'real' thing

CV

relic

RELIC

Dawn Of War is the Canadian developer's first licensed title and we're told it has two new PC games in development too...

1999 Relic debut with *Homeworld* – and what a stunning debut it was.

2003 Suffering the typical 'second album syndrome' with *Impossible Creatures*, Relic makes amends immediately with *Homeworld 2*.

2004 No more *Homeworld* games are likely, sadly, but *Dawn Of War* promises to be every bit as enjoyable.

2005 No doubt we'll soon hear about Relic's future games, plus more on the planned *Dawn Of War* expansion pack.

PAINT YOUR WAGONS

THE PINK MARINES ARE READY AND WAITING

As lifelong Games Workshop devotees will know, the battles waged across bedroom carpets are only part of the enjoyment of the *Warhammer* battle experience. Indeed, you only have to brush past your local GW shop or flick through the pages of the latest *White Dwarf* magazine to see how much effort is put into making each unit presentable – indeed, for some people, more time is spent painting and building than fighting.

Thankfully, the colouring-in process is much simpler in *Dawn Of War*; you simply pick a few shades and in seconds you have a ready-painted army. What's more, you can also import your own banners – so if you can think of something suitable with which to adorn my pink Space Marines, feel free to drop me a line.

Crayons at the ready kids!

Let a dreadnaught get near your infantry and it gets messy.

Terminators backed up by a full compliment of vehicles. Victory is assured.

They look silly, but don't underestimate an Ork's wheels.

the last few years. *Warcraft III* is the closest in scope and setting, as upgrades to current units and ever more devastating units become available as your field base expands with new and upgraded buildings.

I WANNA BE A MARINE

But of course, this being *Warhammer*, it's the units themselves rather the manner in which they come into play that's most important – and we have to say that we've rarely enjoyed such a diverse spread.

Of course, the Space Marines are the main attraction (being the stars of the single-player campaign). Then there are the regular troops that can be upgraded to include devastator missile launchers, plasma rifles, heavy bolters and flamers; as well as the close-combat assault marines with their jetpacks that enable troops to leapfrog from the rear to get

> "Close-combat assault marines have jetpacks that enable troops to leapfrog straight into the action"

straight into the action.

Later on come the awe-inspiring Terminators – lumbering marines in power armour that can decimate anything that gets in their way. Then there are the vehicles: dreadnoughts, rhino APCs, land speeders, whirlwinds and predator tanks – all as detailed as if they'd come straight from a glass display cabinet.

Relic certainly hasn't skimped on the three extra races that become playable in the multiplayer game either, with the Ork, Eldar and Chaos forces each as detailed and offering the same depth in unit variety as the headlining act. The crude machinery of the Ork hordes is perfectly at odds with the sleek gravity-defying tanks and striding dreadnaughts of the Eldar forces. Then there are the sinister and murderous Chaos legions, spearheaded by cannon fodder Cultists and supported by Demons and Space Marines now twisted and turned against the Imperium.

WHO'S THE GREATEST?

It's difficult to single out any of the four races as having an obvious advantage on the field of battle. While the Eldar have the speed and the Imperials excel at close combat, each side has the ability to counter whatever the enemy is able to side against them. On paper, the Orks are weakest, a disadvantage made up for by their versatility and the numerical advantages they bring to bear. Meanwhile, the Chaos forces, though lacking the close-combat punch of the Space Marines, can at least callously employ Cultists to act as a buffer while they ready their awesome array of long-range firepower.

Although the preview build played here only features a handful of near-complete single-player missions, there are hints that Relic has a number of surprises in store. The full storyline is still under wraps, but there are a number of units

available in the solo campaign that won't be allowed into the multiplayer arena – squads of Imperial Guards being just one example we spotted.

Currently, the AI in places appears simplistic, inconsistently so – a clear indication that this aspect is still being worked on. However, it's disappointing that you can't occupy any buildings, cover

instead coming from craters and trees. The recent *Ground Control II* handled this aspect brilliantly, allowing you to select which direction you wanted your troops to cover. It's a system Relic could have borrowed from to add an extra dimension to the combat.

That said, the impact and pace of *Dawn Of War* is far more immediate and frenetic. The finished version promises to be a fast-paced, ultra-violent RTS, sure to widen the appeal of what is perhaps one of the most underrated science fiction realms ever conceived. Having played it extensively online and off, we're confident that *Dawn Of War* is going to be the first *Warhammer* game to truly capture the essence of what has made the tabletop hobby such a global success. To do so without referring to the extensive ruleset that's taken over 15 years to develop will be quite some achievement. **PCZ**

Why Don't You?...

Never were truer words spoken.

HANG ABOUT – CAN'T WE SLOW DOWN A BIT?

More armies, more units, Titans... The wishlist of extras for *Dawn Of War* is near infinite and Relic has done a fine job of sticking to the core units rather than going overboard – which would've resulted in an unbalanced mess of a game. Saying that, there are a few things I'd have liked to do (apart from occupy buildings), one of which would be to have more functionality when the game's paused. You can issue orders when the action is suspended, but to satiate the turn-based faithful, it would be helpful in combating the breakneck pace of the game if you could set cues for your troops to follow that linger on-screen. (*You're getting old, Richie – Ed.*)

Looks like spring's in the air.

THE FUEL STORAGE IS DESTROYED!
"You were only supposed to blow the bloody doors off!"

Expect plenty of plot twists as you search for your kidnapped father.

The look of each campaign is very different.

Achtung...

MORTYR 2

Martin Korda takes to the trenches in this WWII FPS sequel

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Mirage Interactive
PUBLISHER Redback
WEBSITE www.mirageinteractive.com
ETA October

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- It's a rarity: a new solo WWII shooter
- Varied selection of experimental WWII weaponry
- 30 hours of challenging gameplay promised
- Solid physics engine

OK, IT'S TRUE: we weren't the greatest fans of the first game. *Mortyr* was an average shooter, barely able to improve on the similarly-themed *Wolfenstein* from a decade earlier. However, having played the latest code of this WWII FPS sequel, we're reasonably confident it's going to be a considerable improvement over *Mortyr*.

Doing away with the whiffy sci-fi overtones of the original, *Mortyr 2* casts you as Sven Mortyr, a British soldier (although he's Norwegian) who's intent on rescuing his father from the Nazis. During the game's five campaigns – which Mirage says span a whopping 30 hours of gameplay – you visit a variety of locales including northern Europe, Poland, Yugoslavia, Greece and a titanic Nazi underground bunker.

BEHIND ENEMY LINES

Graphically, *Mortyr 2* looks set to be quite spiffing actually, thanks to Mirage's home-made Argon engine that does a fine job of replicating the look and feel of WWII battlefields. During one level, we found ourselves trapped behind enemy lines in German-held trenches, forced to launch a daring one-man raid to sabotage the Nazi's artillery and clear a path for advancing Allied troops.

Explosions sent debris flying, while barrels rolled convincingly back and forth as they clattered into trench walls. Artillery fire soared towards its distant targets, the booms masking our approach as we launched stealthy attacks on gunners. With so many WWII shooters concentrating on teamwork, *Mortyr 2's* solo gameplay is a welcome return to tense one-man-army action.

In another mission set in a snow-covered village, we found ourselves outnumbered and outgunned, forced to use stealth, tactics and cover to survive, firing short controlled bursts in order to conserve our limited ammunition. What's more, sniping proved an essential skill, while experimental weapons – designed but never manufactured in WWII – added substance to an otherwise predictable, yet realistic arsenal.

Mortyr 2 is also set to feature several sub-games including stealth levels and helicopter piloting missions, though when we tried the former, it proved to be more irksome than entertaining and felt somewhat tacked on. The AI too, though admittedly still incomplete, also needs plenty of tweaking. Challenging it may currently be, but convincing it ain't.

IT'S UP TO YOU

Mortyr 2 is unlikely to set the world alight, but neither should it be discounted. If Mirage can use the next few months to sharpen up the sub-games and improve the believability of the AI, then this could well be a very solid and hugely challenging solo WWII shooter, something that's becoming decidedly rare in a genre evermore dominated by team-based gameplay. We live in hope. **PCZ**

Apparently, there *is* a light that never goes out...

Better the devil you know...

SHADE: WRATH OF ANGELS

Jamie Sefton faces his inner demon to play the latest code of Black Element's atmospheric action-adventure...

Shade has four movement speeds, from creeping to running very fast.

Nice crazy paving.

Guns are fired using an over-the-shoulder camera.

BACK IN THE veiled mists of time (well, issue 121), we hitched a ride to Prague for a first look at *Shade: Wrath Of Angels*. A third-person hack 'n' slasher, it involves a main character who could usefully transform at will into an angry, vengeful spell-casting demon – a bit like our editor Dave Woods. Eighteen months on and Czech developer Black Element has been busy using its dark powers to summon a game that, if certain gameplay elements can be banished to hell, could turn out to be devilish fun.

Shade follows the blueprint of such action-adventure franchises as *Soul Reaver* and *Tomb Raider*, featuring a mixture of platform jumping, combat and stealth-type sneakery. Set across 31 levels and four different themed time zones – the present, medieval, Egyptian and the disturbing Shadowlands – *Shade* has the self-titled human/demon hybrid vanquishing mummies, skeletal warriors, undead knights and all kinds of saliva-dripping nasties.

At your disposal is a range of over 26 weapons including guns, crossbows and various swords that can be upgraded, as well as enemy weapons such as huge axes that Shade can pick up and stab towards the nearest servant of Satan.

Combat is simply a matter of tapping the left mouse-button to produce different attack moves, although by pressing the right mouse-button, the shotgun and crossbow both have rather nifty over-the-shoulder views available for uncomfortably close-up kills.

With a few months left of development, the swordplay in *Wrath Of Angels* is still a little unsatisfying. You don't get the impression that your supposedly hefty chunk of sharp metal is actually hitting a solid body, even though the sprays of blood and flailing animation of enemies look decent enough – but hopefully this will be sorted before release. The platform elements are coming along nicely however, with Shade automatically grabbing hold of a ledge with both hands if you fall off one, saving your blushes and your (after) life.

SATAN'S SPAWN

Yet it's Shade's clever trick of transmogrifying into a scaly monster of Hades that could prove to be the game's major selling point. Rather than collecting a certain number of souls to transform into a demon – as with recent FPS *Painkiller* – all you need to do is ensure you have enough magical power (the blue bar in the top-left corner) and hit a key. Instantly, beams of blinding light break your human frame apart and you're reborn as a horny killer, able to cast lethal spells and shoot fireballs at anything in your way.

Graphically, *Shade: Wrath Of Angels* is no *Far Cry*, but there's cool lighting, good spell effects and destructible objects that should all display perfectly fine on the meanest of graphics cards, right up to the beefiest of pixel-pushers. AI is straightforward, shall we say, with enemies that lurch blindly forwards and fail to see you if you jump on top of a handy nearby box or staircase.

However, we're keeping our fingers and eyeballs crossed that Black Element is also about to inject an IQ-boosting serum into every monster's digital brain before the game's scheduled October release. We'll have more on *Shade: Wrath Of Angels* before hell freezes over. **PCZ**

"Instantly, beams of blinding light break your human frame apart and you're reborn as a horny killer"

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Black Element
PUBLISHER Cenega
WEBSITE www.shade-game.com
ETA October 1

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

■ Atmospheric third-person slash 'em up
■ Main character can transform into a demon
■ Melee, gun and sword combat
■ Platforming elements

Michael Jackson's back garden.
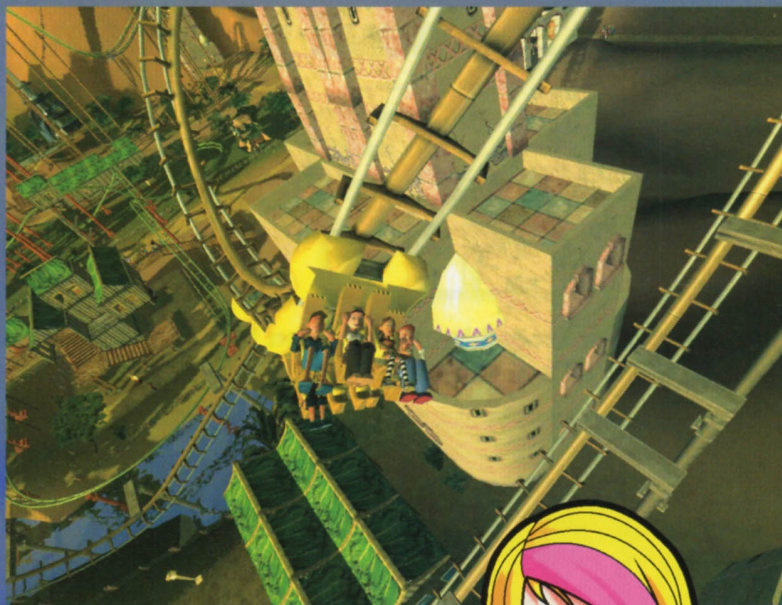
Ride the rollercoasters in 3D.

Mummy, I feel sick...

ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON 3

Jamie Sefton dodges the three-hour queues, bawling kids, £10 ice cream and vague feeling of nausea to check out the future of the loop-the-loop

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Frontier Developments
PUBLISHER Atari
WEBSITE www.rollercoastertycoon.com
ETA November

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

■ Sequel to Chris Sawyer's popular *Rollercoaster Tycoon 1* and *2*
■ Full 3D graphics with Coaster Cam™ and Fireworks MixMaster
■ Brand new rides and attractions
■ People Editor for creating your own unique park guests

WE'VE always loved rollercoasters here at *PC ZONE* – from Martin Korda's legendary scrotum-bursting plummet at Six Flags in California, to my own vomit-inducing experience on the Dragon Kahn ride in Barcelona. However, recreating the thrill of a 100m dive on a 17-inch monitor is always going to be difficult, even with the graphics advances we've seen over the past year or two.

Despite this, *Rollercoaster Tycoon 3* is making a gravity-defying attempt to become the most realistic fairground ride simulation ever created. Chris Sawyer's well-known franchise always owed a huge amount to Bullfrog's *Theme Park* and Wil Wright's *Sim City*, but the third incarnation has been passed on to David '*Elite*' Braben's company Frontier Developments, who produced the

Wacky Worlds expansion pack for *Rollercoaster Tycoon 2*.

Obviously a *Rollercoaster Tycoon* game wouldn't be much cop without a collection of decent rides, so the team has spent a lot of time researching new attractions, which you can now climb aboard in 3D using the new Coaster Cam™. Based around five themes – classic, spooky, western, sci-fi and adventure – rollercoasters include the Thrill-lift and Tilt-coaster, and classic 'flat-rides' such as the Zipper and Skywheel. Each coaster has a wider range of components and you can now add animatronics, triggered by the ride, including a T-Rex attack and an oil tanker bursting into flames.

ALL THE FUN OF THE FAIR

"There are whole new components to the game such as a day/night cycle, so you can lay out fancy night-time lighting, or make rides extra scary," continues Braben excitedly, "and you can now design your own spectacular fireworks displays." These show-stopping visuals can also be synchronised to the in-game music or your own MP3s imported into the game (see 'Fire In The Sky', right).

Of course, the people who'll hopefully benefit from all your hard work are the thousands of fully-animated park visitors that you'll have to keep happy with spectacular attractions and state-

CV

FRONTIER DEVELOPMENTS

After enjoying massive success with the space trading classic *Elite*, written with university friend Ian Bell, David Braben set up Frontier Developments in 1994.

1995 *Frontier: First Encounters* was the first release from the fledgling company, although it disappointed many after the excellent *Elite II: Frontier*, and was crippled by numerous bugs.

1998 *V2000* was a fantastic follow-up to Braben's action strategy/shooter *Virus*. Packed with gorgeous 3D visuals, we gave it 90 per cent and a Classic award.

2000 Nothing to see here. *Infestation* was, unfortunately, a poorly received buggy-based combat game with terrible handling and dull gameplay.

2002 *Rollercoaster Tycoon 2: Wacky Worlds* was a Frontier-developed expansion pack that allowed you to build parks around real-world locations such as the Great Wall of China.

Recreate the Harry Palmer scene from *The Third Man*.

Kick the man in the bear suit for extra points.

Give them bread and circuses and the plebs flock in.

of-the-art facilities. "The technology for the people is new, based on a principle we first used in the game *Frontier*," says Braben, "where different body components such as clothing, hairstyles, and faces are put together to make a huge number of different possible combinations. We have thousands of visitors in *RT3*, all different, with facial expressions, each doing their own thing, telling jokes to each other, arguing – even bursting into tears."

You'll be able to create your own characters with the People Editor, so you can put family, friends, work colleagues and celebrities into the game as park visitors – we'd personally relish the opportunity of seeing TV saleswoman Linda Barker throwing her guts up in terror. Also, if you group people together as a family, the AI will change their behaviour accordingly.

"YOU FIRST." "NO, YOU…"

"When we first included groups, we found that very few people were going onto the rides," continues Braben. "This was because when a particular group member wants to go on an extreme ride, the others may not, so it ended up with big crowds of people just standing around waiting next to the extreme rides. To fix this we added another factor – 'peer pressure' – where the guy who really wants to go on the coaster would try to persuade the rest, which now means that groups go on the ride together more often."

Another important aspect of the *Rollercoaster Tycoon* games are the extra ways of persuading visitors to open their wallets in your park, so you'll be able to augment the rides with numerous shops and stalls. Sneaky ways of improving profits include offering free chillis on the burgers, which will have visitors gulping down drinks and syphoning money straight into your pockets. However if you'd prefer to just concentrate on building the biggest and most hair-raising rides, the Sandbox mode allows you to unleash your most ambitious ideas with unlimited funds.

Graphically, *RT3* is a world away from the plain, isometric visuals of the first two games, with a full 3D camera, DX9-compatible lighting effects and full animation for visitors. "It's amazing to watch," says Braben. "When you see a whole load of people's faces watching a coaster go past or a fireworks display, it's reminiscent of the famous footage of the crowd at Wimbledon, where most of the heads move together as the ball goes from side to side." We'll have a full hands-on of *RT3* next month – if we can keep our hotdogs down. PCZ

FIRE IN THE SKY

ENTERTAIN THE CROWDS WITH *RT3*'S NEW FIREWORKS MIXMASTER

Developer Frontier is particularly pleased with its Fireworks MixMaster. Here, you can create spectacular displays using rockets, flares, fountains and other types of firework, then synch them to in-game music or your own imported MP3s. "It's a

Bright spark, that one.

simple process," says Braben. "You place down a new type of scenery item which acts as the 'mortar' for the fireworks, and then use our new MixMaster to specify the timings and type of fireworks for the whole display, synchronising it to music using a timeline." The more successful your fireworks display, the more "oohs" and "aaahs" you'll hear from happy guests, who'll spend more of their hard-earned cash in the park.

In the People Editor you can set visitors' nausea tolerance.

You can move the camera to zoom right into a person's face.

This is the end. My only friend, the end. Etc etc.

Meet people of an exotic and interesting culture and kill them!

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- It's a Vietnam game to get genuinely excited about
- It's from the developers of *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault*
- Riddled with historical detail and documentary footage
- PC-only missions and technology, with some particularly natty water effects

Napalm nights...
MEN OF VALOR: VIETNAM

Jamie Sefton **tries to avoid every Vietnam movie cliché as the Rolling Stones'** *Paint it Black* **plays on an endless loop inside his brain**

VIETNAM is getting extremely crowded these days. There are now so many shooters based on that famous US conflict of the 1960s and 1970s that we wouldn't be surprised to find out that the figures lurking in the dense jungle aren't enemy VC, but simply other developers researching the fauna and plant life for their own Vietnam game.

However, a recent thrash of *Men Of Valor: Vietnam*, from the creators of *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault*, has given us hope that the flood of 'Nam-based titles (check out the *Conflict: Vietnam* review on page 74) won't all leave us

shell-shocked and gibbering like Colonel Kurtz on one of his bad days.

You play through the game as Dean Shepard, an African-American marine thrown into the conflict in 1965, with each mission preceded by Dean's emotional letters home to his mum and gritty documentary footage (see 'TV War' right).

IT'S REAL, MAN

Developer 2015 has done its research and according to level designer Cayle George, *Men Of Valor* will be one of the most accurate portrayals of the Vietnam war. "Almost every mission in the game has elements that are drawn from history," he told us. "There are real missions that US marines took part in, such as defending the Mach 3 compound during a heavy NVA assault. The same applies to weaponry, so you won't find a gun that wasn't actually in the timeline you're playing. You progress from the start of the war towards the end when the M16 was introduced – things like that."

In one of the first missions we witnessed, Dean and his squad have to clear out VC villages when his unit's APCs

(Armoured Personnel Carriers) get bogged down in a rice paddy field. In a scripted, but beautifully cinematic sequence, soldiers who had been chatting casually suddenly pour out of the vehicles as an enemy mortar makes a direct hit, exploding and scattering a horrific mix of limbs and metal into the air.

Later on we see a barrage of machine-gun fire mow down a fellow squad-mate, who just lies there bleeding on the muddy ground screaming "No! I'm not ready!"

"Almost every mission in the game has elements drawn from history"
CAYLE GEORGE LEVEL DESIGNER, *MOV*

CV 2015

2015

Based in Tulsa, Oklahoma, 2015 has been crafting sophisticated shooters since 1997.

1997 Tom Kudirka, CEO and president, sets up the company and begins work on the expansion pack for Ritual's *SiN*. *Wages Of SiN* went on to garner much critical acclaim, if not massive sales.

2002 After two years of development, *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault* storms the beaches of the videogame world and becomes a worldwide smash.

2002 Twenty-two staff leave 2015 to set up Infinity Ward and begin development on *Call Of Duty*, as the *Medal Of Honor* franchise is assimilated by EA. The remaining team at 2015 rebuild the company and commence work on *Men Of Valor*.

My bridge! Mine!

Grass and foliage sway as you move through it.

John Woo helmed the epic Billy Goat Gruff movie.

Dean has to use covering fire to distract the VC as another soldier desperately picks up the wounded soldier and drags him behind the tanks. The injured man dies moments later, just as napalm strikes from US aircraft ignites the enemy hills and trees in a blaze of fiery destruction.

IS THAT A REAL DEAD PERSON?

Men Of Valor is peppered with disturbing images of war, but George insists that it was done with the best intentions. "I don't think our intent was to shock the player. I mean we're not out to make a political statement about the Vietnam War; you can draw your own conclusions about that. I think our goal is to portray the war

accurately and we've tried to leave things out which are tasteless."

Unlike many other cross-platform Vietnam games, 2015 is completely overhauling the PC version, so players will experience extra missions and more soldiers involved in the battles. Rather like *Medal Of Honor* or *Call Of Duty*, you don't control your squad in the game, relying instead on the AI to send around half a dozen soldiers scurrying into firefights with you. "However, your squad-mates are not so beefed up that they're just going to wipe everybody out so you don't have to play the game," adds George, "but if you work with them and you fight alongside them, you will have a

much easier time playing rather than being a loner."

As you can see from these exclusive screenshots, *Men Of Valor* also has graphics that are far superior to its console equivalent. The water effects are stunning, rippling and splashing if disturbed by soldiers or gunfire. The explosions are also terrific, tossing earth, brick and wood into the air, and creating realistic plumes of smoke. "We have an awesome amount of foliage, canopy and jungle," continues George. "There's full ground coverage with grass everywhere that you can hide in or explore with your squad. It's pretty cool the way the grass actually moves as you walk through it."

Multiplayer has also been beefed up for PC to include 24 online players and more maps, although the mooted co-op mode has unfortunately been dropped quicker than a cooked grenade. The level

we played in a ruined VC town included around 20 different classes (VC and US combined) and was very well balanced, with loads of wrecked cars to shelter behind and houses to creep through and/or snipe from.

We're mainly looking forward to the single-player side of things though, seeing as the structure of missions looks to be expertly designed. But it's not just the big stuff – there are plenty of nice polished touches (like the way that your squad might be accompanied by a reporter with a TV news camera, or the way that flocks of birds fly over the battlefield) that suggest that the game we're dealing with is of a superior quality. So, after all our bitching, it turns out that we're not fed up with Vietnam after all. Charlie can stay in the trees as long as he wants. **PCZ**

TV WAR

MEN OF VALOR DOESN'T SHY AWAY FROM THE VIETNAM WAR'S BRUTALITY

Developer 2015 has used actual footage of soldiers in action throughout *Men Of Valor* – including dead bodies – but isn't the team concerned this could be seen as being in bad taste? "There were certain things that went on which have to be shown if you're attempting to make a game that is trying to be historically accurate," says George. "One of the most interesting things about the Vietnam War was

War: horrid.

the amount of media coverage it got, as compared to any other war before it, so I think that the documentary was a great way to set some of the moods for some of the missions. It's obviously a mature game with the language and the blood levels, but we're definitely not setting out to offend anyone."

The multiplayer game we played had barricades like this littering the streets.

Poison Gas Cage Trap
$6000

Wind Machine Trap
$10000

Confusing PopUp Trap
$5000

Test Dummy Machine
$1000

Poison Gas Cage Trap.

$ 27600

Setting ludicrous traps for unsuspecting agents is one of the best bits in *Evil Genius*.

"Ah, the machine that goes ping!"

"Mine, all mine! Hahahahahahaha!"

Shen Yu watches on.

Everybody wants to rule the world...

EVIL GENIUS

LAST PREVIEWED PCZONE ISSUE 141

Maniacal laugh? Check. Huge underground lair? Check. Looks like *Jamie 'Dr Nowt' Sefton* is ready to begin his plans for global domination

AH, THOSE were the days – the 1950s/1960s Cold War period, when masterminds of terror attempted to destroy the world by building a giant laser out of diamonds or irradiating the gold supply, rather than using cowardly suicide attacks or crude 'dirty' bombs. *Evil Genius* is Elixir Studios' latest strategy game, a light-hearted homage to the kind of tongue-in-cheek baddies and henchmen who populated the James Bond and Austin Powers movies.

Your first task in *Evil Genius* is

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Elixir Studios
PUBLISHER VU Games
WEBSITE www.howevilareyou.com
ETA September

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- New RTS from the makers of *Republic: The Revolution*
- Live out all your James Bond villain fantasies
- Easy-to-use interface with no micro-management
- Cool, stylish graphics and funny character animations

choosing which supervillain you want to be – short, balding Blofeld-lookalike Maximilian, sultry temptress Alexis or Ming the Merciless/Fu Manchu hybrid Shen Yu – with the ultimate aim of constructing a terrifying doomsday device.

WATCH OUT...

However, you begin the game about as notorious as Jeremy Beadle, and you really won't convince the world you're a serious threat if you continue to conduct your nefarious business from your mum and dad's house. So, after getting a quick overview from the excellent tutorial, you set about creating an underground base for your supervillain (we chose Shen Yu). Do this by clicking on the malleable rock, then dragging-and-dropping blueprints for corridors and rooms, which are soon built by scurrying construction workers.

Although you never control your minions directly (apart from henchmen, but more on that later), managing your staff is a major part of *Evil Genius*. There are three distinct groups of minions: military (for security), scientists (for research) and social (for general duties

such as construction). Each group has their own tech tree that you have to develop through training and other techniques, including kidnapping people from abroad. Plus, each individual has five statistics, such as health and loyalty, that you have to keep a beady electric eye on.

All these helpful and dispensable slaves react automatically to the decisions you make in the simulation – putting out fires, delivering equipment, interrogating suspects, researching weaponry and killing enemies. This then leaves you free to concentrate on completing the mission objectives (such as luring the criminal underworld bosses to your island), cackling insanely and other important elements of megalomania.

HIRED GOONS

Next, we turn our attention to the world map. Here, you can start infiltrating countries with your minions to siphon money into your pocket. You can also attempt sneaky plots to capture valuable characters such as

scientists or equipment such as NASA rocket parts – and then use these to research your ultimate doomsday weapon.

Unfortunately, this creates heat in the countries and their respective law enforcement agencies soon begin sending their spies to check out your now not-so-secret base. The first wave are pretty stupid and blunder into traps you set for them. However, as your notoriety increases, countries send smarter and smarter agents until you must face the almost-indestructible James Bond-style super-agents.

To deal with all these agents you need henchmen – the Jaws and Oddjob of *Evil Genius* – with a total of 12 available, including Colonel Blackheart, a colonial hunter with a wooden leg. You can control him directly to summon minions, or use his special powers of laying mantraps or summoning a monkey bomber to kill or capture foes.

After several hours of play, we'd only scratched the surface of this involving and entertaining RTS. We're already looking forward to getting our 'goldfingers' on the finished game – expect a full review soon. **PCZ**

Siege engines and ladders are required to break into castles like this.

Formation options and other tactical considerations are part of the battles.

"Contestants, ready? Gladiators, ready?"

In times of war (often), factions can call on special units.

A *Watercolour Challenge* map of Europe.

Arranging marriages and alliances is massive.

What no 'u'?

KNIGHTS OF HONOR

As he's always serfing the Net, *Steve O'Hagan's* our man to run the rule over this king-making RTS

YOU KNOW globalisation has got out of hand when a developer from Bulgaria drops the 'u' in honour, US-style. And while America has nothing to do with this European-set medieval empire-builder, at least the goal of having to achieve domination over the known world will ring true the other side of the pond. For as regent of one of Europe's feudal kingdoms, your task in *Knights Of Honor* is to bring the entire continent under your sway.

The game plays in real-time and revolves around territories, each of which are controlled by a town run by one of your princes or a knight. To emerge triumphant, most of your time is spent tinkering with your vassals (ooh, missus!) to get the right man in the right job at the right place. Of course, sooner or later, some maggot is going to challenge your power, at which point you can slip into the tactical battle engine and direct your metal-clad forces to a well-earned victory.

While it's true that it's old-school fixed-view isometrics all the way, the look of *Knights* is fairly charming. The pottering peasants, streaming banners and massive game map are perfect for the genre, even if the battles themselves are a tad lacklustre. Generally either ambushes of armies at camp, attacks on castles or straight meeting engagements, these slightly rudimentary clashes certainly won't be threatening *Medieval: Total War*.

BUSH IS A KNAVE

Which is fine, as the real meat of this game is what happens between the fighting. Your progress as a leader is measured by a power bar. Representing both the strength of your realm and the support of your populace, it lowers when you do unpopular stuff like launching unprovoked wars or raising taxes, and any leader would find it hard to do both of these at the same time. When low, corruption is rife and your income suffers, while at the same time peasant revolts are

more likely. To raise the bar, you must take decisions that please your serfs, such as winning wars and expanding your empire, by fair means or foul.

After all, as any proto-Machiavelli will tell you, there's more than one way to skin a cat. You could grasp it in your mailed fist before hacking away at its mangy hide with a crude dagger (that's a metaphor for using force, by the way). Alternatively, you could get the cat to marry your daughter, (which is where the feline allegory starts going awry), or even place one of your spies in its court, hoping that one day your agent rises to become heir to the moggy's litter (throne).

We like the way this is shaping up – a sedate, cerebral foray into the Dark Ages – and if you like a little more kingdom-making and a little less tank-rushing, keep your eyes firmly on it. **PCZ**

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Conquer the whole of Europe
- Use force, diplomacy or subterfuge to win victory
- Real-time empire management and tactical combat
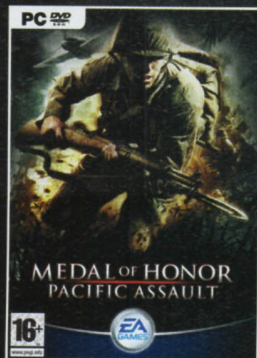- Massive real-time game map that covers all Europe

MEDAL OF HONOR
PACIFIC ASSAULT™

YOU DON'T PLAY. YOU VOLUNTEER.™

MEDAL OF HONOR
PACIFIC ASSAULT

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REVIEWS

THE DEFINITIVE LOWDOWN ON ALL THE LATEST PC GAMES

HELL ON EARTH
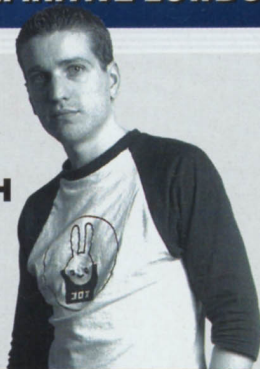
■ **ASSOCIATE EDITOR** Anthony Holden

▲ How could we have been so wrong? After all the years of fevered anticipation and vulgar, overzealous reportage, how could *Doom 3* have turned out to be nothing more than a bog-standard corridor shooter with nice shadows? It makes you question the whole value of the industry and the… Hang on – what's that? Sorry, Will's trying to tell me something… It's great, you say? Exactly what we said it was going to be? Oh, well thank the good lord for that. We would've looked a right bunch of ninnies otherwise.

Anyway, given the fact that the game was leaked on the Net a good two weeks before its UK release, I'm sure this is news to no-one. The response has been astonishingly unanimous: '*Doom 3* is here and it's great'. (Our own thoughts on the matter start on page 62).

Supposedly, the moral of the story is that patience is a virtue and 'done when it's done' is a policy that makes for great games (if you can afford it). We can only hope that the assumption holds true for Valve, which has been making noises about submitting gold candidates in time for a September release. (As for *Duke Nukem*, decide for yourself on page 26).

So, with *Doom 3* here and *Half-Life 2* potentially only a few days away, do we really care about the likes of *Catwoman* and *Transport Giant*? Well, maybe not, but there is at least one other game you should find time in your busy schedule for, namely *Call Of Duty: United Offensive* (page 56). It may 'only' be an expansion pack, but it's also a superb follow-up to the best FPS of 2003, and a title we deemed important enough to stick on our cover this month.

After that, you're more than welcome to lock yourself in your room, shut the curtains and enjoy *Doom 3* – go on, you've waited long enough…

▼

UNITED OFFENSIVE 56

The follow-up to the most intense shooter ever is here – world's first review, page 56.

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

QUESTIONS

1. Currently playing?

2. Reasons *Doom 3* is good for society?

DAVE WOODS

Doom 3 and *Juiced*

Because it will cause the *Daily Mail* to implode in its own self-righteousness

JAMIE SEFTON

Doom 3 and *Manhunt*

People need to know the scientific dangers of experimenting with portals into hell

DEFINITIVE REVIEWS

DOOM 3 62

RICHARD BURNS RALLY 68

CONFLICT: VIETNAM 74

ANTHONY HOLDEN

Doom 3, Joint Ops and *United Offensive*

It allows stupid folk to unite around a common scapegoat

PAUL PRESLEY

Final Fantasy XI, *The Saga Of Ryzom* and *Joint Ops*

It should keep the kids off the streets (18 and over only, obviously…)

WILL PORTER

Doom 3, City Of Heroes and *Tribes: Vengeance*

It reminds us that zombies are ne'er-do-wells who should never be trusted

MARTIN KORDA

Doom 3

It should keep the tabloid writers off the streets

STEVE HILL

Doom 3 and *Pro Evolution Soccer 3*

Gives me something to blame it on next time I slay a zombie

RICHIE SHOEMAKER

Half-Life again, in readiness

Because it's recycled, of course

CALL OF DUTY: UNITED OFFENSIVE

■ £24.99 (TBC) | Pub: Activision | Dev: Gray Matter Interactive | ETA: September 24 | www.callofduty.com

REQUIRES PIII 700, 128MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card **DESIRES** P4 1.2GHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

The original game left us with ringing ears and permanent shell-shock. *Anthony Holden* braces himself for another brutal skirmish

FULL VERSION OF CALL OF DUTY REQUIRED

WAR, war, war. Everywhere you look in this magazine it's bloody war. War in Vietnam, war in the Pacific, war on terror – you'd think the whole industry was run by Donald Rumsfeld and George Bush. (*It's not? – Ed.*) But while most of the war-themed claptrap shoved down our gullets is that way simply because the developer lacked the imagination (or the cojones) to do anything different, there is the odd game that comes along and justifies the whole sick obsession. *Shellshock: Nam '67* was one such game. No hang on, that was an awful, gratuitous piece of bum-floss. Let's try that again… *Call Of Duty* was one such game.

You see, the thing about *Call Of Duty* – and to a lesser extent *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault*, its unofficial precursor – wasn't just the hurricane-force sensory assault of its more celebrated moments. More than that, it captured like never before the reluctant heroism and horror of infantry warfare, and single-handedly reminded us why setting games in real-life war situations was such a ruddy good idea in the first place. Indeed, it made every other war-themed game look like something from the *Army Men* stable.

You'll forgive us then, for being a little agitated about the first expansion pack to the game, *Call Of Duty: United Offensive*. Sure, it was always inevitable and sure, we can see the slight cheekiness of releasing it just in time to take the wind out of *Medal Of Honor 2*'s sails, but what the hell – this is *Call Of Duty* we're talking about, the best war shooter in the world! (Ahem.) For many, the biggest problem with the original was that there simply wasn't enough of it, and this has been thoroughly rectified in the expansion, with 13 new single-player missions and a clutch of new multiplayer options.

MONKEY GO HOME

Better yet, *United Offensive* was put together by Gray Matter Interactive, the esteemed developer behind *Return To Castle Wolfenstein*, *Kingpin* and er… *Redneck Rampage*. These boys know what they're doing, which goes against the unwritten rule of getting a team of brainless chimps to knock out your expansion pack while your A-team works on the sequel. They're here only because they were at a loose end after *Trinity* was cancelled, but again, what the hell – it's our gain.

So, after all that, is it any good? The short answer is yes – *United Offensive* is every bit as good as the original, matching its intensity, variety and magnificent level design blow for blow. Is it different enough? Does it bring enough new stuff to the party? Well, we'll see about that, but for now let's take a look at the facts.

Following the structure of the original game, *UO* is split into three campaigns: American, British and Russian. In the US campaign you find yourself

Another DIY disaster gets tempers flaring.

Cpt. Foley
Submachine Gunner

Shooting your captain in the gonads is not recommended.

attached to the 101st Airborne during the Battle of the Bulge; in the British missions you begin as part of an RAF bomber crew and later become an SOE operative in Sicily; while the typically brutal Russian missions cover the horrific Battle of Kursk.

THIS MEANS WAR

Right away, you're reminded where you are. The first mission begins with you and some other troops on a routine jeep reconnaissance at the end of a long day, wearily patrolling the Belgian woodland for Jerries and entreating the corporal for a hot meal. Lulled into this laid-back scene, you follow your squad blithely as they scout the area, fully expecting a gentle tutorial-style mission to ease you into things. And then you're dead.

Yes, 20 seconds into the game, there's every chance you'll be a fresh corpse, the contents of your skull sprayed all over the virgin snow. Because, you see, you weren't paying attention to the sergeant's orders, or you weren't using cover wisely, or you didn't aim down the sights of your gun when that German force turned up – or perhaps because you forgot to crouch when reloading. Yep, this is *Call Of Duty* all right, and it ain't no picnic.

Things hot up even more when the troops you stumbled across turn out to be part of a major German offensive, and mission two sees you desperately trying to hold a defensive line until reinforcements arrive – scurrying from foxhole to foxhole, sniping, shooting, warding off flanking attacks and taking out tanks with a bazooka.

It's this sort of rapid-fire diversity that really defines the action in *UO* – you have very little time to think as you're thrown from one desperate situation to another, death never more than a single bullet away. If anything, the tempo is faster in *UO*, the variety greater, and as a result the missions frequently more exciting.

Having said that, the US campaign is probably the weakest of the three. It's good solid stuff, but feels very much like more of the same, and it's only once you reach the British missions that the true beauty and flair of *United Offensive* starts to shine through.

DARKENED SKIES

In a nice change of pace, you begin the UK campaign in the belly of an RAF Flying Fortress over north-western Europe, alternately manning the tailgun and dorsal turret of the big bomber and trying to shoot down swarms of pesky Stukas. It's a magnificent scene, and a great chance to gape at Gray Matter's awesome new particle effects in the flak and smoke billowing around you.

However, where the US campaign was all relentless

DIVIDED OFFENSIVE

THREE NEW MULTIPLAYER MODES SET TO MAKE AN IMPRESSION ONLINE

United Offensive brings a host of additions to the online arena, most notably with the addition of drivable tanks and jeeps. Three new modes are included to take advantage of this new mobility, namely Capture The Flag, Domination and Base Assault, handily accompanied by ten new maps.

The modes themselves are an interesting mix. CTF is self-explanatory, and really just corrects an oversight from the original game (which, let's face it, offered a pretty rubbish set of multiplayer options). Domination is a king-of-the-hill style mode in which you have to capture and retain a number of strategically placed flags – *Battlefield*-lite, if you will.

And finally, there's Base Assault, which we're

Our money's on the guy with the cannon.

betting will become the most popular *Call Of Duty* mode of all. In addition to the six existing modes, it makes a pretty forbidding arsenal, and could just be enough to kick-start *CoD*'s true online assault. As ever, we'll bring you a full online review once some servers go live.

British Rail clamps down on fare evaders.

Don't get cocky.

SMELLS FRESH

A SPOTTER'S GUIDE TO WHAT'S COMPLETELY NEW IN *UNITED OFFENSIVE*

SPRINTING
Holding the Alt key now gives you access to a very short sprint burst – essential for running from cover to cover in the Russian missions and damn handy in multiplayer too.

'COOKING' GRENADES
Holding the left and right mouse buttons simultaneously enables you to 'cook off' grenades, allowing the fuse to burn down before lobbing them. Also applies to satchel charges in multiplayer.

FLAME-THROWER
Gray Matter does the best flame-throwers in the business, so it's only logical that it would bring its famous *Wolfenstein* burner into *UO*. And with the new particle system, it looks better than ever.

SATCHEL CHARGES
Available only in multiplayer, these handy bundles of dynamite give infantry the ability to disable tanks and (in Base Assault mode) blow up the occasional building too.

DEPLOYABLE LIGHT MACHINE GUNS
There are ten new weapons in *UO*, including a silenced Sten and bazooka, but the most significant additions are the all-new deployable machine guns. Comprising an American .30 caliber and German MG 34, they're a bit slow to deploy, but should prove essential in multiplayer.

Deployable and deadly.

intensity and realism, this is pure cinema. It's a theme that continues as you bail out of your ruined plane and pull your chute, beginning the next mission hanging halfway up a tree with your harness strangling your nuts and a German patrol pissing on the tree below you. Soon enough you're rescued by some chaps from SOE (that's Special Operations Executive, not the people who made *EverQuest*), and all of a sudden you're a commando saboteur, reliving the excitement of *Force Ten From Navarone* or *Where Eagles Dare*.

This is quickly followed by a few hints of *The Guns Of Navarone* and even a bit of *Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade* as you elude the Germans in a motorcycle sidecar.

It's all jolly good fun, if not particularly realistic, and provides an excellent buffer from the brutality that's to follow in the Russian campaign. I won't give away too much of that, except to mention that it's every bit as furious and bullet-riddled as Stalingrad was in the original game, perhaps even more so as you approach the climactic conclusion. Towards the end, the Battle of Kursk scenes are perhaps the most impressive of any *Call Of Duty* levels ever, and will leave you absolutely drained and exhausted when you eventually emerge carrying the red flag. Let's just say it's worth the wait.

WRITTEN IN STONE
However, while I have no problem heaping praise on the quality of the levels and the general execution of *United Offensive*, I will add that all the problems of *Call Of Duty* remain in force. Worst among these is perhaps the heavy reliance on scripting, which, though extremely dramatic and effective, has some pretty obvious downfalls.

One is that every scenario plays virtually identically every time; but I feel this is forgivable except where the game tries to trick you into thinking otherwise. So, when your SOE major says, "Keep down lads, if they spot us we're cooked", you'd expect to have to remain crouched to retain the element of surprise.

"The Battle of Kursk scenes are perhaps the most impressive of any *Call Of Duty* levels ever"
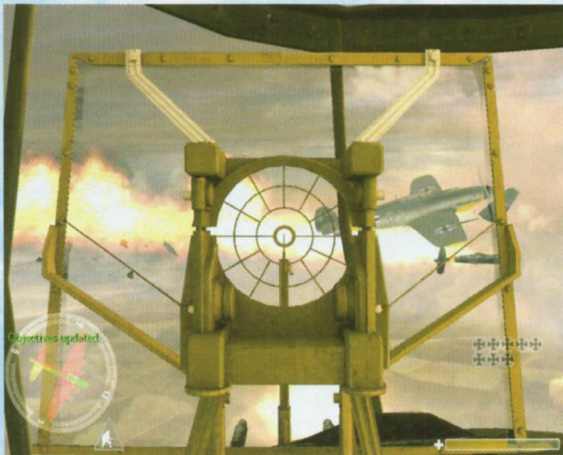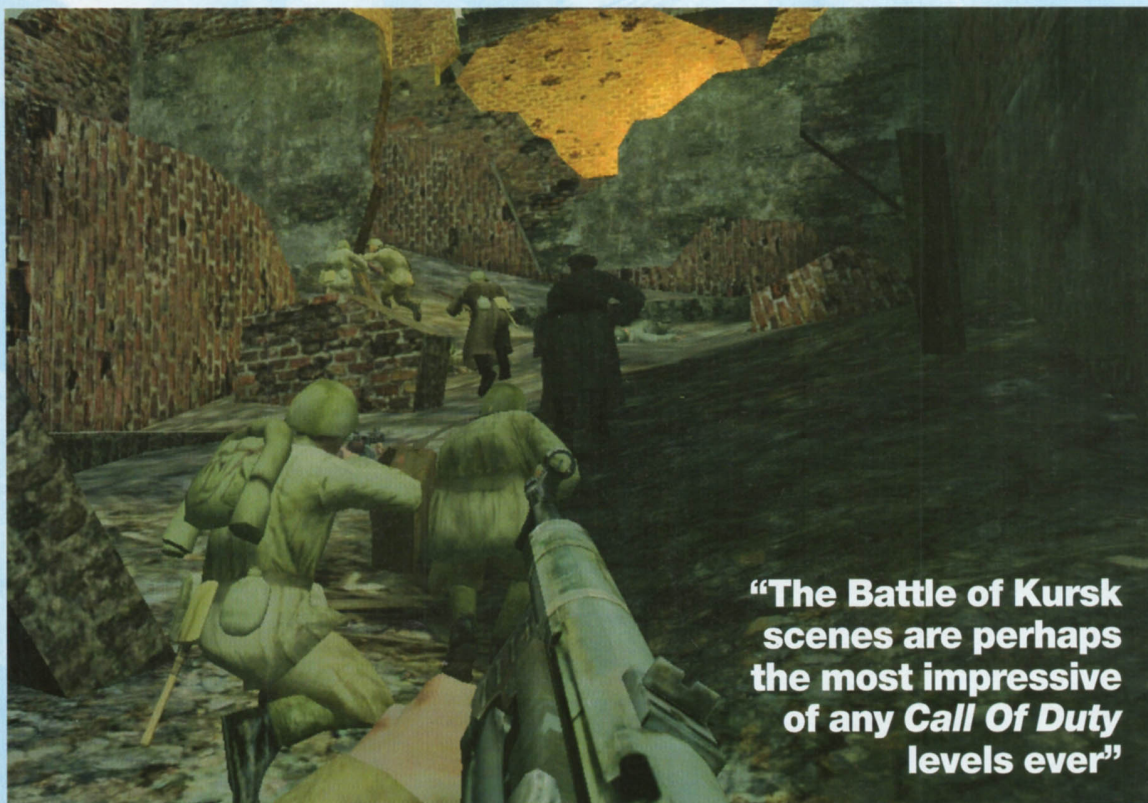
"First one to the top of the hill gets free ice cream!"

MISSED OPPORTUNITY (O)

STRATEGIC DELICACY GOES OUT THE WINDOW

One of the coolest aspects of *Call Of Duty* was its introduction of basic squad tactics such as laying down suppressing fire, flushing enemies out of cover and performing flanking manoeuvres. Sadly, these subtleties are underplayed in *United Offensive*, with fewer opportunities to put such manoeuvres into practice. It's partly a problem of your team-mates running ahead of you too much and partly the fact that the levels haven't been designed for it – but whatever the case, it's something we want to see return with force in *Call Of Duty 2*.

Squad tactics: underused.

Not so, as I discovered when I proceeded to break orders and jump around like a ten-year-old with a tapeworm – all with absolutely no repercussions or reaction from the game.

HANG ON A MINUTE...
If this is slightly disappointing, it's nothing compared to the moments when scripting overrides all common sense. I'm thinking mainly of the moments when AI paths overlap badly and one of your squad-mates runs straight past an (equally oblivious) enemy going in the other direction, ignoring each other in their rush to meet their scripted appointments.

To be fair, this is an occasional problem at worst, and the AI is generally quite convincing… Except, now that I think about it, that your team-mates are largely useless at killing Germans (not wanting to steal your fun, they simply miss time and time again), and your commanding officers are still indestructible. I guess this is the

price you pay for tight scripting and dramatic intensity, but it doesn't mean we have to like it.

PANZERS AT DAWN
So what about the multiplayer game? If anything, this is the area in which *Call Of Duty* needs most of a boost, the original game offering no truly essential online gameplay. Given the number of people who own the game, the online modes were always going to have some support, but you could hardly say it's taken the Net by storm.

To attempt to remedy this, Gray Matter has added three new game types, all team-based and now with the addition of vehicles such as tanks and jeeps. Sadly, there were no servers up at the time of writing, but we've had a good old play on the office LAN and there's definitely some promise there – most notably in the excellent Base Assault mode.

Borrowing extensively from *Counter-Strike* and *Enemy Territory*, Base Assault gives

The explosions and smoke are the best in the business.

"Need a push, mate?"

each team three bases to defend, and litters the map with tanks, jeeps, fixed cannons and bazookas. In order to win the day you have to destroy the above-ground portion of all three enemy bases with tanks, satchel charges and anti-tank weaponry and then set bombs in each of the now-exposed basements – as well as defending the bombs against defusing for several long minutes. It's not easy, but it is a hell of a laugh, with excellent attack-and-defend dynamics

and some frantic races across maps to try and defuse ticking time bombs. Even from our LAN-dabbling, Base Assault looks set to become *the* standout multiplayer mode of *Call Of Duty*, and will certainly satisfy those looking for some real novelty in this add-on pack.

POINTS MAKE PRIZES
Cleverly, *UO* also introduces a new battlefield promotion system, cribbed directly from *Enemy Territory* and awarding high-achieving players with extra ranks and abilities. When you reach the highest rank, platoon sergeant, you even acquire the ability to call in artillery strikes – also borrowed from *ET* but great fun nonetheless. In combination with the new modes, vehicles and the ever-amusing kill-cam feature, *Call Of Duty* multiplayer just became a serious contender and should start making waves online once the excitement of *Doom 3* calms down.

Which brings us to a rather pertinent point. I feel pretty safe in saying that *United Offensive* is one of the most impressive and rewarding expansion packs of recent years, matching and occasionally even outstripping the quality of its outstanding parent. But it could be a fully immersive VR porn sim for all you care – you'll still buy *Doom 3*

OK, who left the gas on?

Nice shot -- that's the last of them. Have a look, Doyle. You bought your ticket, might as well enjoy the show.
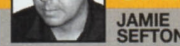
OK, they're a cynical, piss-easy way of squeezing extra money out of lucrative franchises, but personally, I love expansion packs. Why? Because when they're done right, they can present you with more delicious nuggets of your favourite games, with improved graphics, better weapons and brand new levels (at a cheaper price).

So is *United Offensive* worth shelling out for if you've already completed *Call Of Duty*? Oh yes. In fact, I'd go so far as to say that if you've never played this FPS franchise before, it's *your* call of duty as a PC gamer to buy a copy of the original along with *United Offensive*. It's just fantastic.

Inspired new additions include a magnificent gunner mission aboard a bomber over Holland, and an atmospheric sojourn with British special forces to blow up a train bridge.

All the missions have been tweaked to perfection and Gray Matter should be given a medal of honour (ho ho) for what it's achieved with its new particle effects. *United Offensive* is one of the best expansion packs I've ever played and an absolutely essential purchase. Victorious.

instead (which is only right and good I suppose).

I can only suggest that once you've completed id's masterpiece, *United Offensive* might be a good way to offset the post-hell withdrawal trauma. It's not just more of the same, it's got some fantastic single-player missions and a far more convincing multiplayer complement. And, above all, it's a worthy continuation of the *Call Of Duty* saga. **PCZ**

PCZONE VERDICT

✔ Thirteen new missions across three superb campaigns
✔ Just as intense and explosive as the original
✔ Great new multiplayer modes
✔ New weapons and abilities
✘ Same AI problems
✘ Same over-reliance on scripting

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The war rumbles on

DOOM 3

■ £TBC | Pub: Activision | Dev: id Software | ETA: August 13 | www.idsoftware.com

REQUIRES P4 1.5GHz or Athlon 1500, 384MB RAM, 64MB 100% DirectX 9.0b-compatible 3D card, DirectX 9.0b-compatible soundcard, 8x CD-ROM drive, 2.2GB hard disk space and Windows 2000 or XP (NB: *Doom 3* does not support Win95, 98, ME or NT!)
DESIRES P4 2.8GHz, 512MB RAM and a 256MB 3D card

Will Porter welcomes the granddaddy of PC gaming back to the fray. It's been a long time, but it was well worth the wait...
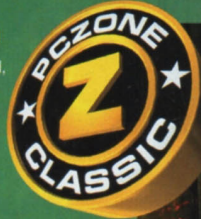
INPERSPECTIVE

FAR CRY
Reviewed Issue 140, Score 93%
Simulated freedom, more variety and a touch of realism make *Far Cry* a slightly better game than *Doom 3*. That said, the creatures of hell knock the trigens into a cocked hat.

PAINKILLER
Reviewed Issue 142, Score 83%
It may be all-out action, but *Painkiller* never tries to jangle nerves in the seemingly effortless way that *Doom 3* does. *Doom 3* can get just as frenetic, but it also knows how to balance itself with periods of quiet and tension.

KREED
Reviewed Issue 145, Score 39%
Kreed is essentially *Doom 3* (and if you read some forums, infringingly so) in plot, setting, gameplay style and intention. It's just hideously rubbish – and makes you recognise the talents of id even more than you did before.

GENTLY NOW, don't rupture anything, but let out that breath you've been holding for the last three years: *Doom 3* is here and it's magnificently, hellishly great.

Before I start up on how and why it's going to blow you away though, we need to spin back three weeks to when I was playing through the original 1993 incarnation of *Doom* in preparation for this review. At that time, a quizzical young work-experience lad was sitting to my left with a look of undisguised derision on his face. "What do you mean it doesn't look scary?" I screamed. "You weren't there! You weren't with us at the start! Didn't you just see those lights going out and those… Those Imps! Jesus! Get out of my sight!"

But how could he ever know? That ball of adrenalin that used to plunge into your diaphragm every time you opened a door, the 'spawn-twitch' that would kick in every time a light flickered, the suspicion that arose with every casually strewn key or weapon – it may look ropey by today's standards, but while *Wolfenstein* laid the foundations for first-person gaming, *Doom* created the blueprint for everything that would follow in its giant cyber-demonic footprints. I was so riled by this kid's innocent id-bashing that I didn't stop shaking and muttering until about three days ago – because three days ago I started to play *Doom 3*. And I discovered that parts of it are going to eat his ignorant little soul.

SUPER SHINY

Fact: *Doom 3* is the most polished game ever to be released on the PC. It's so well fabricated that you simply cannot see the seams. But despite the incredible graphical technology, sound effects that will thrill and amaze you, scripting that will chill your spine and the most beautifully animated monsters ever seen, this is a marvel that resolutely looks back to the past of PC gaming. *Doom 3* is id looking back to its roots and saying: "What would we have made back

then if we had access to the technology, skills and unlimited piles of cash we have now?" It's a stripped down, no-nonsense shooter that doesn't so much ignore modern gaming conventions as scorns the fact that they even exist. So there's no stealth, no leaning round corners, no sniping and no inventory; no RPG elements, no pretend-clever enemy AI, no complicated, open-ended objectives, no alternate firing modes, no drivable vehicles and no mock realism. Of course, there's story, characters, events and environments that have all the hallmarks of a great contemporary shooter. However, in terms of basic gameplay, the only extra keys added since *Quake II* are for getting out your torch and frantically jabbing at the sprint button. This is back to basics stuff, but they're basics that still work well.

CALM DOWN

So then, plot. The UAC is a nasty global corporation that wields so much power that the boundaries of morality no longer act as a barrier to its machinations, with a wipe-clean sheen of rules, regulations, no-smoking areas and safety procedures to protect its image. Its Mars base is an isolated outpost where the UAC's most brilliant – and most notorious – scientist Doctor Betruga can research whatever he pleases: be it teleportation, strange emanations coming from the depths of the facility or an intriguing mixture of both. You are a raw marine employed by the UAC, and your first 15 minutes on the base sees you wandering around Freeman-style, gawking at the stunningly presented (and realistically grimy) military outpost, before being sent off on the trail of a missing scientist.

Unfortunately, Betruga has been dabbling in things he shouldn't, and once the game's roaming preamble comes to a close, guess what: all hell breaks loose. (And yes – in the grand tradition of *Doom* reviews through the ages – we do mean *literally*.) Lost Souls dive in and out of computer screens, your radio becomes jammed with cries of pain and shouts for help, the outpost becomes shrouded in darkness and the civilians and

A product of a warped mind if ever we saw one…

You can shoot cacodemon fireballs out of the sky.
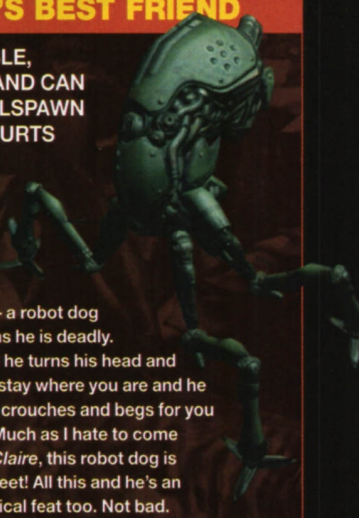
They may be lost, but they're also very angry.

soldiers of the Mars base become mindless automatons who live only to serve the will of hell. Oh, and to eat your brain.

THRILLS AND SPILLS

Doom 3's action starts as it means to go on – it's brutal, intensely scary and plays with all manner of lighting effects and sound trickery to shock

you into a sense of total insecurity. These opening chapters are as tense as they are technologically dazzling. They set you up as some sort of sci-fi John McLean, with your gruff sergeant barking in your ear while zombies lurch out of the shadows as you get to grips with the amazing interface.

When I say that *Doom 3* is

polished, I don't just mean the lush visuals. id's massive clout means that its come under none of the publisher pressure that usually forces developers to throw barely-working code into the wilderness with a promise that it'll patch the invisible shotgun bug in a month or two.

Five years of tweaking have paid off: *Doom 3* not only plays

flawlessly, but the way the interface system binds it all together is an absolute triumph. Bear witness to the way in which walking up to a computer console sees your gun lowered and leaves you free to click around the screen in the way that you'd use a real computer. It's a simple, yet devastatingly effective advance on the normal 'tap E to turn off nuclear reactor' approach.

Meanwhile, your PDA (Personal Digital Assistant) does the job of your normal Tab-located objective screen, but also downloads all the data available on the PDAs of the base's dead and undead. So, where you once picked up keys, you now download security access passes, as well as viewing UAC infommercials and browsing through personal

emails. This may sound strange in a no-holds-barred shooter like *Doom*, but these emails add a lot of back-story to the locations you're battling in and contain a convenient amount of highly useful codes that help you open lockers of ammunition.

CHUCKLE BUNNY

There's also some hit-and-miss laughs to be had lurking in the personal notes of the deceased, and you might even spot a thinly veiled reference to *The Office* when one Brent Davis gets an email from Finchy concerning an upcoming quiz night. More seriously though, the cleverness of Carmack's code enables you to listen to victims' private *Star Trek*-style audio logs, and (instead of forcing you to stare at a menu screen while you do this), keeps

> "*Doom 3* not only plays flawlessly, but the way the interface system binds it all together is an absolute triumph"

them running in the background while you explore the local vicinity and riddle Satan's minions with bullets.

JEEPERS CREEPERS

Doom 3 also holds the record for making me jump out of my seat the most: five jumps, as opposed to *Far Cry's* three and *Thief: Deadly Shadow's* two. This included one absolutely text-book 'is it dead?' moment where I near had a coronary. It's fair to say, however, that this scary ambience ebbs and flows, perhaps because

continued exposure to hell numbs you somewhat.

Personally, I reckon this is a game where you have to give to receive; and whenever I found that I was just going through the motions of running and shooting, I made a policy of saving my game and giving myself a cool-off period. If you're not in the right frame of mind to play *Doom 3*, you won't get the best of it – it's a game that *must* be played alone, in the dark, with the sound turned up and with your full attention.

Then again, even the more cynically minded will at some point come across a corridor that, well, just bodes badly. The background noise subtly changes, the lighting looks slightly different and the walls seem more penned in. These are all efforts to put you on edge, made all the more worrying by the growls of a

nearby pinky demon. It's at these points that *Doom 3* hits its peaks, aided and abetted by the worrying fact that you can't hold your torch and gun at the same time – and delivering a demon a quick blow to the head from a plastic light source won't have the same effect as a shotgun blast to the face.

SITTING PRETTY

In terms of baddies, let's just say the gang's all here: Imps, ArchViles, Revenants, Lost Souls – it's like we never left! Or rather: it's like we left, watched technology progress for 11 years, came back and then scooped our jaw from the ground before it got eaten by a huge, slavering pinky demon whose animation is the most amazing thing I've ever seen in a PC game. Call me a fanboy, but seeing *Doom's* flat poo-brown

Imp turned into a wall-crawling, chasm-leaping, fireball hurling 3D works of art is a dream come true.

FUNDEAD!

Lost Souls meanwhile, previously the most rubbish monsters in *Doom*, have become open-mouthed heads of fire that hurtle towards you screaming at frightening speeds. And as for the new boys – well, the weird spider-head things are cool – but when you see the Cherubs in action… Jesus Christ! Half-moth, half-baby: all good. Then you've got your bosses, which I won't ruin for you, but suffice to say that by the time you've gone to hell and back, your competition has grown to some quite colossal sizes.

My only complaint here is perhaps that some of the children of hell are a tad too easy to kill on the default difficulty setting, specifically a few of the bosses and the pinky demon. However, when you're also trying to fend off five head-spiders who're trying to bite off your kneecaps, it's not something you worry about.

My main issue about the game however, is the old chestnut of variety. *Doom 3*

took me around 17 hours to complete – although you could stretch it to 20. Within this, id operates a well-paced dripfeed of monsters and weapons – just as your attention is about to flag, it throws in something new and amazing for you to kill. This could be a rocket-toting Revenant perhaps or a terrifying Spider Queen; or it could also draft in a collection of badness from earlier in the game that's even more fun to kill with your recently-acquired heavy-duty armaments.

This all works well, but the locations you fight in can get pretty samey – it's fascinating to watch the outpost slowly becoming more infected by the tendrils of hell, but the environments you fight in often blur into one another. Reactors, laboratories, teleportation centres, engineering levels, communication turrets: they all sound different, but I did get lost a few times. Whereas in a game like *Far Cry* you can boot up a level and instantly know where you are, *Doom 3* has so many areas comprised simply of 'Generic Sci-Fi Corridor and Ducts: model A' that you can grow tired of them.

PLAY IT AGAIN

I'd also question how much replay value there is, because *Doom 3* couldn't be much more linear or reliant on clever scripting if it tried. Every now and then you're given a decision to make that shifts the goalposts of the story for a half-hour or so, but any indication of player power on the game is

Better go to SpecSavers…

QUAD DAMAGE

DOOM 3 READY TO TAKE OVER INTERNET

Just bring it.

The chaps from id once told us they fully expect an eight-way multiplayer mod to appear within hours of the *Doom 3* release. For now though, multiplayer is limited to a mere four players – id wants to provide a much more creepy and less frantic experience than its recent arena-thons.

Our initial reaction to this is highly positive. The six out-of-the-box maps are a bit of an id all-star line-up, including a remake of *Quake II*'s classic Q2dm1: The Edge, which completes *PC ZONE's Doom 3* wishlist just nicely, thankyou very much. There's also a map called 'Lights Out', where shadowplay and torch-waving becomes an absolute necessity. We'll have a full review of *Doom 3's* multiplayer capabilities next month in Online Zone when we've found out all its beautiful and ugly secrets. But for now, our lunchtimes are about to get a whole lot darker…

MISSED OPPORTUNITY

IT'S SICK (WELL FAIRLY SICK), BUT IT COULD'VE BEEN SICKER

I can be a nasty pup when I want to be, so I was quite disappointed that you can't blow limbs off or repeatedly shoot dead bodies as in *Soldier Of Fortune II*. You can shoot a dead zombie about five times, and they respond with due respect of Newton's Laws, but any more than that and they dissolve into a skeleton and a puddle of red gore. It's not pleasant, but we'd have liked it if it was a bit more grisly.

The chainsaw is a great weapon (and the first time you pick it up it's damn exciting), but it would've been nice to lop a few heads off with it and generally 'do a *Scarface*' with the undead. Never mind though, there's still a lot of blood…

Doom 3: try not to lose your head…

---

meshes them together into an amazingly cohesive whole that reels you in further than you ever thought possible.

Occasionally, you just stop the mayhem and stare at the distorted body of a bloody zombie refracted through a bent pane of glass, or listen

"As the News Of The World might say, Doom 3 is a roller coaster ride to hell and back"

aren't half as much fun to fight as you might have hoped.

These moans are what make *Doom 3*, for me, lag just slightly behind *Far Cry*, a game that offers consistently exhilarating experiences and provides for more variety of gameplay styles. That said, *Doom 3* remains a ground-breaking and amazing piece of work. It's a game that recognises just how many amazing technologies it's running beneath its bonnet, yet refuses to jam any of them in the spotlight. Instead, it

shallow and illusory. As for AI, well, as I've explained, clever-clever hunting and demonic teamwork isn't really what *Doom 3* is aiming for. So, despite delivering thrilling firefights, one bout of violence pans out much like another, and a few villains (namely gun-toting zombies)

to the baleful screams of a tortured soul reverberating around the complex. Sometimes, you just stand open-mouthed over a glistening

tentacle while you listen to it oozing through a metal grate: I guarantee you'll have trouble believing that a machine that you own is capable of something so astounding. And when you get to hell itself, here's a tip – look up and watch the swirling skies, then tell me that *Doom 3* isn't something special.

BACK TO THE FUTURE

To be honest, some people may not 'get' *Doom 3* as I did – an awareness of the heritage of PC gaming and an element of fanboyism helps in its appreciation. The Xbox crowd, for example, may be confused by Imps hiding in unrealistic hidden compartments right

next to conveniently placed racks of ammunition, while the cultural significance of the inclusion of the chainsaw may bypass more recent converts to the halls of PC gaming.

If you've bought this magazine though, it's a fair bet that you, like me, are going to love it. And even if you wouldn't know a shotgun from a BFG (which makes a more than welcome reappearance), any idiot can see the appeal of Imps leaping out of staircases, standing silhouetted by a blinding light before bounding into the shadows to wait for you around the corner, or diving through just-opened doors intent on opening your stomach.

As the *News Of The World* might say, *Doom 3* is a stunning roller coaster ride to hell and back. Its pleasures are tempered only by a few lapses in variety as the game progresses, thereby being pipped to the post by the exhilaration and exploration of *Far Cry* – but this is still gaming at its most vital.

Of course, two of the holy shooter trinity have now materialised and turned up trumps, so what's next? The curtain's up, the knives are drawn and, as of right now, the cards are on the table. Gordon Freeman, it's time to see if you can dance. **PCZ**

We've come a long way since 1993.

The most iconic figure of PC gaming.

PCZONE VERDICT

✔ The most polished game ever
✔ The forefront of graphics and sound technology
✔ Amazing reimagination of the *Doom* creatures
✔ Genuinely creepy atmosphere
✗ Sci-fi environments get a bit samey
✗ The barrels aren't green

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The id boys are back in town

RICHARD BURNS RALLY

■ £29.99 | Pub: SCi | Dev: Warthog Sweden | ETA: September 2004 | www.richardburnsrally.com

REQUIRES PIII 1.6GHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card **DESIRES** P4 2.6GHz, 512MB RAM and a 128MB 3D card

"Medium left, into difficult right, into virtually impossible left..." *Steve Hill* looks for stimulation in simulation

FORGET everything you know. If you've played a rally game at any stage in the last decade, you'll be familiar with the form. It's all about driving heavily sponsored cars through rural areas at high speed, sliding round bends with aplomb and launching yourself into the air at every opportunity. That's why we play them, to replicate the unfettered joy of tearing down a country road with your tongue lolling like a dog with its head out the window. As far as gamers are concerned, that's rallying, and it's a template that dates back to *Sega Rally* in the arcades.

INPERSPECTIVE

MOBIL 1 RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP
Reviewed Issue 84, Score 82%
Probably the closest to *Richard Burns* in terms of hardcore approach, and available for virtually nothing. Which is something.

COLIN MCRAE RALLY 04
Reviewed Issue 140, Score 84%
Little more than an amalgamation of the previous titles, but still the best a man can get. Number five is almost here though.
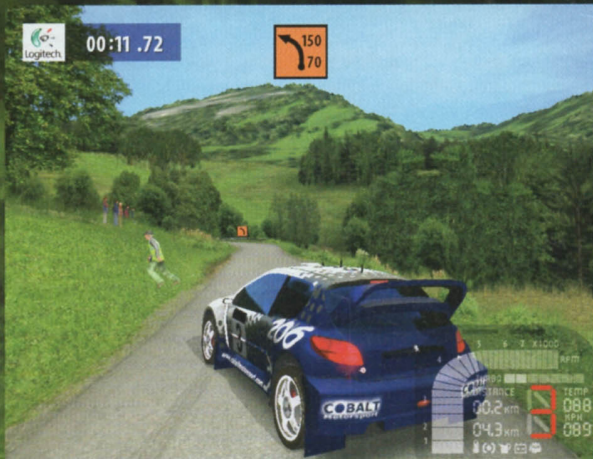
A pristine car, an open road... What could possibly go wrong?

It turns out that games lied to us. All the rally games we've played over the years have been nothing but a cruel deception, designed to kid us that we're enjoying ourselves. The truth is that rallying is nowhere near as much fun as we thought. It is in fact a highly technical sport contested by dour men, that requires years of practice to be remotely competent at. Stop the car – *Richard Burns Rally* is here to drive that message home.

BARELY LEGAL

Richard Burns has been driving rally cars since the age of 15, and claims that it's the only thing he's ever wanted to do. Comparable levels of commitment are required in order to play his first official game. Eschewing the arcade stylings of its genre mates, *Richard Burns Rally* wears its simulation colours proudly on the sleeve of its overalls, claiming to be the most accurate representation of the sport ever created.

They'll certainly get no argument from us. Having slipped, slid and sworn our way round 36 tracks of evil, we have to conclude that 'professional rally driver' may have to be scrubbed off the list of possible career changes (along with footballer, rock star and respected journalist).

Essentially, *Richard Burns Rally* makes a fool of you. It's so difficult that the first time you play it is akin to the first time you rode a bike, or indeed played a game. The first time I played it was at publisher SCi's headquarters, and it was frankly embarrassing. Naturally setting off at full speed, I remained on the track for all of five seconds before careering into the shrubbery – a cycle that was to repeat itself for the best part of

an hour as the air turned bluer and my face turned redder, not helped by the hollow platitudes of encouragement from the brace of attendant PR men. Amazingly, despite my abysmal performance, I actually posted the second best time of any journalist so far.

DON'T DO IT

If I could have my time again, I'd revisit the scenario with the current benefit of a month's practice under my seatbelt. Such is the steepness of the learning curve that you simply have to put the hours in to become anywhere near competitive. It really is a case of rewiring your brain to oppose your instincts. That inviting jump up ahead? Resist the urge to floor it and sit back as you glide

gracefully through the air – instead dab the brakes and wince as you briefly become airborne, praying that the car doesn't buckle on landing. That tempting bend? Forget about powersliding all the way round it – you'll have to gently brake in a straight line and then smoothly accelerate out of it.

Such is the vicious nature of the game that it's even possible to crash while driving in a straight line, given the authentically rutted tracks that make up the stages.

It's this wilfully hardcore approach that sets *Richard Burns Rally* apart from the rest, and it's going to leave a lot of people cold. If you pick this up hoping for a quick whizz round a few exotic locales,

you're going to find it bewildering, and may well be looking for your money back. In fairness, the hardcore nature of the game is made apparent throughout, with messages urging you to take it easy before each stage.

BACK TO SCHOOL

Furthermore, a comprehensive Driving School is included, located in the forestry of North Wales and hosted by Burns himself. Consisting of a number of increasingly difficult tasks, it's pretty much essential, and in fact the basics have to be completed before you are allowed to begin a rally season.

Ultimately, success at *Richard Burns Rally* is acquired by driving sensibly. It's simply not worth taking risks to gain a couple of split seconds, as this is more than offset
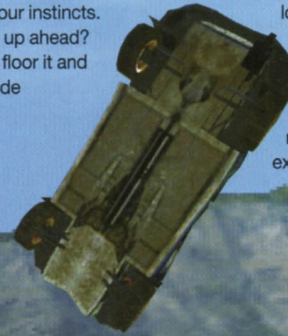
"Start praying that the car doesn't buckle on landing"

GIVE US A SHOVE MATE

A RUSH AND A PUSH AND THE LAND IS OURS

In *Richard Burns Rally*, careering off the track isn't so much an occupational hazard as a regular fact of life. Fortunately, the stages are littered with gormless spectators who are prepared to put down their Thermos flasks and digestive biscuits long enough to right your car, heave it back onto the road and send you on your way. This can take between ten seconds and half a minute depending on the difficulty level. On the hardest setting, if there's no one around, then you simply don't get a push, and are forced to sit in your car making small talk with your co-driver until one or both of you loses your mind.

As a further hazard, the spectators occasionally get in the way, resulting in a dull thud, a red screen of death and the loss of several valuable seconds of race time. Dickheads.

"No, you can't have a lift."

00:15 .58

An unorthodox approach from the Peugeot team.

Rally Of Gateshead Results			
1	S. Hill	26:55:41	10
2	G. Bertrand	28:39:69	8
3	P. Sandbach	28:43:05	6
4	D. Ergma	29:00:98	5
5	J. Fournier	29:19:01	4

Continue

Difficult? Pah! Pissed it.

by the time it will take to haul your crumpled car out of a ditch. A conservative strategy is required, and not crashing is highly recommended – particularly as on the harder levels this will often mean that your race is over.

So where's the fun in all of this? Well, the 'fun' – such as it is – is in the tightrope effect of careering down country roads in the knowledge that a slight clip of a tree stump will send your expensive car hurtling through the air and quite possibly snap your neck. Countering this by driving slowly (often in the pissing rain) doesn't sound that exciting, but it's a ploy that can

win championships, at least on the Rookie level. The hardcore approach continues under the bonnet, with a bewildering array of tuning options that almost nobody will ever use. In fact the only vaguely viable skill is in attempting to second-guess the weather with your choice of tyre.

COLIN WHO?

Releasing a hardcore simulation is an admirably bold approach from SCi, as it would have been all too easy to fax in a substandard *McRae* clone. When Burns goes head to head with his arch-rival this September, there will at least be some difference between the

games (and I think we can all hazard a guess as to what *Colin 5* will be like).

That said, graphically Burns is largely indistinguishable from any rally game of the last five years, featuring the perennial locations of England, Japan, Finland, France, USA and Australia as well as a somewhat miserly eight official cars.

Whereas Burns himself appears visually and in voice-overs, the pace notes are the responsibility of his co-driver Robert Reid, who does a passable job, give or take the odd freak pronunciation. As for other modes, up to four players can take it in turns to play, and

the Richard Burns Challenge allows you to race against his ghost car. It's not so much a challenge as a walkover however, as keeping up with him for more than ten seconds is nigh on impossible.

The hardcore approach may deter a lot of people, but by the same token those who've found rally games too simplistic may be tempted by the obscene challenge that *Richard Burns* presents. For those prepared to put in the ferocious amount of practice required to get to grips with the handling, there's a wealth of gameplay here. For the rest, there's always good old reliable *Colin*. PCZ

PCZONE VERDICT

✔ Extremely realistic
✔ Absolutely comprehensive
✔ Plenty of longevity
✔ You can kill birds
✘ Harder than plaiting snot
✘ Drab graphics
✘ Only eight cars
✘ Joyless

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This is hardcore

MISSED OPPORTUNITY

Sorry, I've done it again.

PENNY ARCADE

The damage model offers four different levels of realism, namely none, safe, reduced and realistic. However, the handling in each case is identical and a crash is a crash, whether it involves a cracked windscreen or your race grinding to a halt through a perished gearbox. As a break from the relentlessly hardcore action, it might have been an idea to include an 'unofficial' arcade handling mode, just to let you get used to the stages and perhaps enjoy yourself before getting back to the slog of the real thing.

And while we're about it, they could have thrown in some actual races against other cars or even some kind of online mode. But no, this is real-ale hardcore rallying, and clearly above such things.

Step into Christmas.

"Get out of the way you tit!"

"A conservative strategy is required, and not crashing is highly recommended – particularly as on the harder levels this often means that your race is over"

Differential Map / Center

Throttle	Lock	Brake	Lock	Speed	Lock
0 %	0 %	0 %	0 %	0 km/h	0 %
10 %	6 %	10 %	10 %	20 km/h	0 %
20 %	10 %	20 %	20 %	40 km/h	10 %
30 %	25 %	30 %	40 %	60 km/h	20 %
40 %	38 %	40 %	70 %	80 km/h	30 %
50 %	50 %	50 %	100 %	100 km/h	40 %
60 %	63 %	60 %	100 %	120 km/h	70 %
70 %	75 %	70 %	100 %	140 km/h	100 %
80 %	100 %	80 %	100 %	160 km/h	100 %
90 %	100 %	90 %	100 %	180 km/h	100 %
100 %	100 %	100 %	100 %	200 km/h	100 %

All interesting stuff.

That's the no claims bonus buggered.

CODENAME: PANZERS PHASE ONE

ON THE DVD

■ £34.99 | Pub: CDV/Koch Media | Dev: Stormregion | ETA: Sept 3 | www.panzers.de

REQUIRES PIII 750MHz, 256MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card
DESIRES P4 1.8GHz, 512MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

Another front is opened in the WWII RTS war. Rather than write anti-war poetry about it, *Steve O'Hagan* brings you this review

PC ZONE Z ESSENTIAL

Hot in the city, hot in the city tonight.

'Ave it! The explosive effects are pretty sweet.

WHAT DO you do with your flamethrower squad when an enemy Panzer rumbles into view? Crawl into cover and hope it doesn't see you? Try to explode its fuel tank with a well-aimed burst of napalm? Or heat it up with your burners until the roasting crew have to bail out, and then nick it for yourself?

While it may be about as realistic as West Brom's chances of winning the Premier League this season, the third answer is the one you're looking for. At least, it is when you're playing *Codename: Panzers*. Hot on the heels of *Soldiers: Heroes Of WWII* comes the latest war-with-the-Nazis RTS off the production line.

But where *Soldiers* at least paid some attention to the fact a man can't take a tank shell in the face and survive, *Panzers* is happy to heave all such concerns overboard. This leaves the developer free to create its own laws of physics, enabling trucks to take a pummelling from anti-tank shells and survive, dive bombers to appear in a nano-second of having been summoned, and repair vehicles to patch up friendly armour mid-battle.

Unsurprisingly then, if you're looking for an authentic WWII experience, look away now. But if you want a playable, action-packed RTS adorned with all the paraphernalia of war, read on.

MEAT MARKET

Panzers' 30 missions spread over three campaigns follow the Germans from Poland to Moscow, the Russians from Moscow to Berlin and the western Allies from D-Day to Market Garden. Typically, you're in command of a handful of tanks and armoured vehicles, together with a similar rationing of infantry squads, support vehicles and artillery guns. While

INPERSPECTIVE

SOLDIERS: HEROES OF WWII
Reviewed Issue 144, Score 90%
Slightly smaller in scale, but *Soldiers* still feels more epic than any number of WWII RTS titles. It's substantially harder than *Panzers*, but it looks better, plays better and even lets you drive the tanks yourself!

BLITZKRIEG: BURNING HORIZONS
Reviewed Issue 143, Score 75%
If you're looking for massive-scale WWII battles, *Blitzkrieg* is in the vanguard. Though derivative of *Sudden Strike*, this standalone expansion is a great little war-themed RTS with plenty to recommend it.

"Where's the runway again?"

WE HAVE EXPLOSIVES!

SOLDIERS: HEROES OF WORLD WAR II BLOWS APART THE VISUALS IN CODENAME: PANZERS

Let's face it: you can argue about which game has the most impressive AI or which control interface is best for organising troop movements, but at the end of the day, what you really want to know is which game causes the most explosive destruction? *Codename: Panzers* is certainly impressive in the graphics department – telegraph poles and high-tension wires buckle and snap as armoured vehicles plough through them, and hedges, trees and walls are crushed under the tracks of the heavy Panzers. However, it's Codemasters' *Soldiers: Heroes Of WWII* that has the edge on spectacular visuals because of Best Ways' superlative engine that renders full 3D collapsible buildings and ragdoll physics. When it comes to over-the-top explosions, *Soldiers* is 'da bomb'.

Call that an explosion?

Now *that's* an explosion.

offering bigger forces than *Soldiers*, *Panzers* is nowhere near the scale of *Sudden Strike* or *Blitzkrieg*.

A crude cut-scene frames each mission, laying out the lie of the land. The missions have more substance than the average RTS, with a good spread of objectives and plenty of unforeseen events triggered once you've got about your business. Once in control, there's no resource management to worry about, other than keeping your troops alive so they carry their experience over. Success results in the award of tasty prestige points used to upgrade your forces with the latest killing technology.

COMING ALIVE

The engine is fairly robust, letting you view the action from any direction, but falls short in not allowing a wide focus on the action. The vehicles and men are well animated though, with tanks rocking on their chassis as they fire, and troops flying in the air as howitzer shells hit.

Best of all, massive plumes of smoke and fire erupt from the

ground as each heavy artillery shell arcs across from its hidden gun pit. But this would all be more impressive had *Panzers* not been ambushed by *Soldiers*. The latter's more gritty, earthy and satisfying reproduction of combat outshines the more angular, polygonic feel to the visuals here (see 'We Have Explosives!', above).

Unlike *Soldiers*, though, *Panzers* doesn't punish gung-ho

"Massive plumes of smoke and fire erupt as each heavy artillery shell arcs across"

aggression so heavily. Many missions can be completed by strolling into town with your shiny great tanks and blowing the bejeezus out of everything. Which, obviously, is fun. Having

the licence to pursue such wanton destruction is *Panzers*' strong suit, making it less frustrating than some of its RTS comrades.

The AI chips in to increase the enjoyment by not just waiting for you to turn up. You almost believe it's thinking for itself when it retreats under pressure, or sets upon you with reinforcements where you least expected.

On the other hand, tactics are fairly thin on the ground – other than exploiting the strong points of your units and the weaknesses of an enemy. Kill his repair trucks, keep your armour

At the beginning of a mission, everyone's confident. Won't last.

moving to avoid the incoming artillery, keep your vehicles repaired while they slug it out with the enemy – that kind of thing. There's not much in the way of clever flanking manoeuvres or subtle feints. There are also issues with the unit control interface, and managing your units in formation is a pain. In fact, finding your units at all can be a mare, as when things get hot, the mini-map becomes engulfed in pulsating markers, completely obscuring your dispersed forces.

So there it is: yet another WWII RTS. It may look like the others, but this is way more on the 'pick-up-and-play' end. In essence, *Panzers* is an RTS in the *Command & Conquer* mould – it's all about ease of play and accessibility. With its scant regard for what it's supposed to be simulating, it could easily have been a high-thrills fantasy or sci-fi RTS that had its graphics changed to give it a WWII feel. Yes, that's what it is: it's *Second World Warcraft*. **PCZ**

Tanks can't be immobilised – they keep going to the bitter end.

Danger, danger! Red hot means the crew has to jump out.

PCZONE VERDICT

✔ Easy to get into
✔ Massive range of mission goals
✔ Enemy AI is life-like
✘ Might as well be a sci-fi game
✘ Simplistic tactics
✘ *Soldiers* just did it a whole lot better

80

Great fun, but essentially *Soldiers*-lite

CONFLICT: VIETNAM

■ £29.99 | Pub: SCi | Dev: Pivotal Games | ETA: September 17 | www.conflict.com

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 128MB RAM and a 32MB DirectX 9b-compatible 3D card **DESIRES** P4 2GHz, 128MB RAM and a 128MB DirectX 9b-compatible 3D card

The average age of a Vietnam soldier was n-n-n-n-nineteen. *Richie Shoemaker* was just a boy, but that didn't stop him volunteering for another tour of duty

If you've got a problem, maybe you could hire the Green-Team.

Use smoke grenades to guide your chopper to the enemy targets.

INPERSPECTIVE

CONFLICT: DESERT STORM II
Reviewed Issue 134, Score 77%
Conflict: Vietnam's predecessor offers much the same sort of gameplay, only of course set in the desert against men with moustaches. It remains as simple and as easy to get into as ever, the added incentive being that you should be able to find it at a knockdown price.

BATTLEFIELD VIETNAM
Reviewed Issue 141, Score 87%
The *Battlefield 1942* formula, overloaded with vehicles, was barely changed to fit the scope of the Vietnam War. Although it's still good fun, it doesn't work quite so well – the more-recent *Joint Operations*, which is centred more on infantry skirmishes is a far better option.

I LOVE the smell of napalm in the morning. Except I don't. I don't even know what napalm smells like. However, being rather fond of the odd rasher of bacon in the morning (which perhaps isn't too different from the stench of burning man-flesh that results from a napalm strike), I was shoved straight to the head of the draft queue when it came to reviewing *Conflict: Vietnam*.

I also happen to be one of the few members of the *PC ZONE* team alive when the real thing was drawing to a close in 1975 – although being just five years old, the only morning pong I remember at the time was the Atari coin-op. Still, tenuous associations aside, I do have one further qualification to reveal: *Conflict: Vietnam* is a game I've been looking forward to since it was first announced. You see, I thought the two *Conflict: Desert Storm* games

were pretty good. I enjoyed them because when I sat down to muddy my mouse finger, I wasn't expecting much at all. Sure, I wasn't blown away by any technical artistry, but I found myself absorbed in the action – in the case of the sequel, almost to the very end.

The reason for this mild state of temporary obsession was

down to the simple demands the games required: you didn't have to be a military genius to complete them. Ordering your squad to cover your back was easy, and while the enemy never displayed any great degree of intelligence, the action knew when to shift through the gears, with tense and stealthy exercises intermingled with all-out action.

Ultimately though, as is natural when a sequel eventually appears, you expect that little bit more, and it was clear a *Desert Storm III* wouldn't be the game to provide it. Commanding elite soldiers is all very nice and all, but today's fashion dictates our shooters be grittier and their levels leafier – and there can be no conflict that fits the bill more

Don't be surprised if your own side start dropping napalm on you – you're in a VC stronghold.

I guess we'll be walking then.

WELCOME TO 'NAM

The hat looks familiar, but the face...

IT DON'T MEAN A GODDAMN THING

As was the case with the *Desert Storm* games, *Conflict: Vietnam* refuses to tackle any of the issues surrounding the war during which it's set. Instead, it takes its cues from Hollywood, with liberal referencing to the classic as well as the cack. For instance, we meet a similar character to *Apocalypse Now's* infamous Air Cavalry commander Kilgore (sans hat), and you catch a ride on a PT boat with the 'Chief'. Also, the general storyline, where you play a rookie on his first tour of 'Nam, takes its cues from Oliver Stone's *Platoon* (as well as every straight-to-video 'Nam movie).

However, because this is an action game where killing hundreds of NVA and VC troops is the main course rather than the seasoning, the whole experience is closer to an interactive re-run of *Tour Of Duty* (the fondly-remembered but trite TV series from the early 1990s) – except in the case of *Conflict: Vietnam*, the dialogue is rather more colourful.

Two's company, but an army is far more reassuring.

perfectly than that which consumed the backwaters of South East Asia during the 1960s and 1970s.

THE LOST PATROL

The game begins with the groovy sounds of psychedelic rock combo Canned Heat, on board a Huey en route to Ghost Town, a firebase on the frontline.

Once there, the introductions to your fellow squad-mates and a brief squeeze of the available weapons on the firing range are quickly dispensed with, and your first taste of war comes by way of an impromptu VC attack that fails miserably. This is just a tutorial of course – day two is the real baptism of fire, when you're sent on a patrol deep behind enemy lines, which is just about when the proverbial plop hits the

props. Along with your squad, you find yourself cut off and far from your base of operations, outnumbered and surrounded.

The aim then is to simply make it out alive, and as is standard, whenever a light appears at the end of a tunnel it's quickly snuffed out. Nobody said it would be a picnic, right?

The route through the game is an entirely linear one and takes in abandoned towns, ancient temples, VC bases, villages and mile after mile of dense, humid jungle. As a result, the mood

throughout is singularly oppressive, for when you aren't manoeuvring through a twilit jungle, the rain is invariably falling. Leeches and snakes aren't a problem, but you can almost sense them lurking in the undergrowth, eager to sap your health away.

JUNGLE BOOGIE

Of course, it's the enemy who have an exclusive effect on the health of your team. Plus, as you'd expect, the VC are out in force – and despite their preference for coolie hats over something less obtrusive, they can often be hard to make out against the varied hue of greens and browns that colour the leafy canopy under which you tread.

"The game begins with the groovy sounds of psychedelic rock combo Canned Heat, on board a Huey en route to Ghost Town"

Two medical packs are enough to revive a fallen comrade to full health.

Single-player only. Sorry.

WE HATE TO STATE THE BLEEDIN' OBVIOUS, BUT...

Conflict: Vietnam features no multiplayer options whatsoever. Nothing. Not even a link to the official website. Of course, if you buy the console game you can try out split-screen action; but if you're investing in the PC version, you'll only find a greater challenge by playing the whole game again on a higher difficulty setting. Personally, after trudging through the jungle once, it's not something I feel the need to repeat in any great hurry.

It's a shame, because some of the levels would be perfectly suited to co-operative play: one player could be given the leading role and if you follow orders well, you could be given more skill points to spend before the next mission begins. Of course, some of the more claustrophobic maps would need some attention so players wouldn't be falling over each other's feet, but minimal effort would be needed to fix that one. Yep, it's clear that if you want to play US versus VC, you've still got to grab a copy of *Battlefield Vietnam*.

This is no bad thing of course, as it forces you to cautiously probe ahead, avoiding punji traps and using your team-mates to cover your advance, just in case any foes jump out from the bushes. Which they do. A lot.

I WANT TO BREAK FREE

Sadly, *Conflict: Vietnam* all too often feels restricted in the corridor-based linearity of many of the missions. While tropical jungle may seem a freer place to explore than most gaming environments offer, each area of has been carefully manipulated to ensure you don't stray from the path the designers have set. Unbelievably, there's no jump key either. This means that if a log, rock or anything else happens to be lying in your way, you can be sure that if you can't go around it, you'd best head back, preferably in the direction highlighted

on the radar in the top-right of the screen. Not ideal.

What's more, while it's true that the early marches through jungle sections of the game are rather inhibiting after the tropical excesses of *Far Cry*, *Conflict: Vietnam* does occasionally give you some room to manoeuvre when the levels open up to include buildings in various states of repair. Similarly, the enemy seem to make greater use of space as well – and while they like nothing better than to

run full pelt into a hail of bullets, at least they have the tactical nous to come at you from different directions.

Being heavily outnumbered in such instances, the challenge is often about positioning your troops to cover all angles of attack – and when one of your men takes a disabling hit, making sure someone is nearby with a bandage to revive them. It's times like this – when the VC are circling, there's lead flying and two men are down with only seconds until they draw their final breath – that the game truly shines and the cloying linearity temporarily evaporates.

LOVE YOU LONG TIME

Given the fact you can switch between any of the four grunts at will, it isn't long before you end up becoming quite attached to them. This is partly because you can spend points on

Looks like rain again.

upgrading their skills in various areas after each mission, such as using assault rifles, finding boody traps, administering medical aid or throwing grenades. The more VC you dispose of and the more bonus missions you accomplish, the more points you get.

While the benefit of choosing one skill over another isn't immediately apparent as the next level kicks off (most of the time you use whatever weapons you can get your hands on), the process at least fosters some small affinity with those you control. No, we're not at the

Bambi stage yet in videogames, but you care for your characters a great deal more than you do in most shooters. Just as well, because if one dies, it's game over (well, time to reload at any rate).

IT'S NOT ALL GRAVY

But the best news of all is that developer Pivotal has ensured that *Conflict: Vietnam* always remains fun and accessible. This is primarily down to the gameplay, which requires you to advance and shoot things; it's also because the control system is such a doddle to use.

Do you think Cherry is just about to be popped?

"Conflict: Vietnam is always accessible and fun, as well as being far more evolved and a much grittier game than its predecessors"

The first-person view isn't worth bothering with.

Your comrades are relatively adept at taking down the enemy.

Good space, lots of light – why, it'd make an ideal loft conversion.

I've got a bad feeling about this...

The usual FPS keyset is used to move and shoot, while a tap of the right mouse-button brings up the command cursor where, depending on the context, you can order troops to pick stuff up, attack, heal, set traps or simply move into position. It's a fluid system that's gradually evolved through the previous games and it neatly highlights the fact that in Conflict: Vietnam, it's as easy to control four soldiers as it is to control one.

However, the control system isn't perfect, for as is generally the case with all PC versions of console shooters – Halo included – cursor movement is at times sluggish and inconsistent, even when horizontal and vertical sliders are maxed out. In the default third-person view, it can often be difficult to pull off a good aimed shot, yet if you switch to the first-person view, aiming seems painfully slow and the screen is obscured by bloody great sights. Of course, it isn't long before you acclimatise to such idiosyncrasies, but FPS veterans are sure to find the changes more than a little annoying to begin with.

THE WAR IS FAR FROM OVER

Despite the disappointment of games such as Vietcong and Shellshock: Nam '67 (see page 80 for the review), Pivotal's take on the first 'TV war' does a lot more right that it does wrong – and it certainly captures the essence of jungle combat far more effectively than most games that have attempted it. While it's unlikely to be remembered as the definitive Vietnam shooter, in the context of the Conflict series so far, Conflict: Vietnam is much more evolved and certainly a grittier game than its predecessors.

However, as a PC game, it still feels tied down to a console aesthetic, where the controls feel too light and the scenery lacks any real interaction. You can't jump, you can't really hug the trees and the game is effectively corridor-based. I'd dearly like to see Pivotal do something for us PC players, as EA did with Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault, tailored as it was to desktop machines. The Conflict series continues to go from strength to strength, but this latest remains a good game rather than a truly great one. PCZ

PCZONE VERDICT

✔ Controlling your squad is simple and very effective
✔ Tense and action-packed
✔ Character development and interaction is good
✔ Varied, despite the jungle setting
✗ No multiplayer
✗ Floaty controls
✗ Lacks freedom
✗ The AI surprises rather than impresses

75

More *Tour Of Duty* than *Apocalypse Now*

Does anyone have a cup of water?

And people wonder why the trains never run on time.

D-DAY

■ £29.99 | Pub: Digital Jesters |
Dev: Digital Reality |
ETA: August 20 | www.d-daygame.com

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 512MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card
DESIRES P4 2.4GHz, 512MB RAM and a GeForce FX 3D card

Martin Korda **has a bad day at the beach without even leaving his desk**

"That's it chaps – there's lollipops for everyone, just form an orderly queue."

WAIT a minute, didn't I just review this game five issues ago? A WWII 3D RTS? Check. With ridiculously high system requirements? Check. Published by Digital Jesters and developed by Digital Reality? Check and check. That means it must be *Desert Rats Vs Afrika Korps*, an entertaining yet somewhat flawed strategy game with a heavy emphasis on desert-based tank warfare, reviewed in issue 141 and awarded a very solid 70 per cent. Right?

Wrong. Because this is *D-Day*, a frustrating and incredibly flawed 3D RTS set during the Allied invasion of Normandy, which uses the same engine as *Desert Rats* but is packed with amateurish level design and some of the most fiddly gameplay ever to blight a strategy game.

You see, whereas its predecessor was set in the deserts of North Africa, a locale perfectly suited to the kind of full-scale tank warfare that this engine was so clearly designed for, *D-Day* is set in the claustrophobic, hedgerow-covered confines of Normandy, for which this engine is completely inadequate. Add in the fact that infantry and not tanks were the key force in the campaign and you have some major problems.

MEANING?

Most missions require you to navigate enormous numbers of foot soldiers around fields and towns, completing uninspiring tasks such as blowing up bunkers and bridges or storming well-defended enemy strongholds. The first problem here is that all of your foot soldiers look almost identical, so selecting a sapper (to place explosives on a target) from a tightly packed cluster of 30 miniscule soldiers isn't only fiddly, but hideously time-consuming too. Usually, by the time you've identified one, half your men are swimming in pools of their own blood and you're left angrily hitting the reload key.

D-Day's main claim to fame is that it's historically accurate (incredibly, it's the only game ever to have been approved by the Normandie Memoire Association). However, that doesn't change the fact that it's lacking both the gameplay and quality to do the setting justice.

For example, take the Omaha beach mission. As you'd expect, this tasks you with storming and securing the beach.

> **"*D-Day* is packed with some of the most fiddly gameplay ever and amateurish level design"**

INPERSPECTIVE

DESERT RATS VS AFRIKA KORPS
Reviewed Issue 141, Score 70%
Featuring the same engine as *D-Day*, this desert-based RTS is infinitely more entertaining thanks to a greater emphasis on tank warfare and superior level design.

SOLDIERS: HEROES OF WORLD WAR II
Reviewed Issue 144, Score 90%
The daddy of WWII RTS games. Highly strategic yet fiendishly entertaining – even for non-RTS fans – it's currently in a league of its own.

D-DAY EDUTAINMENT
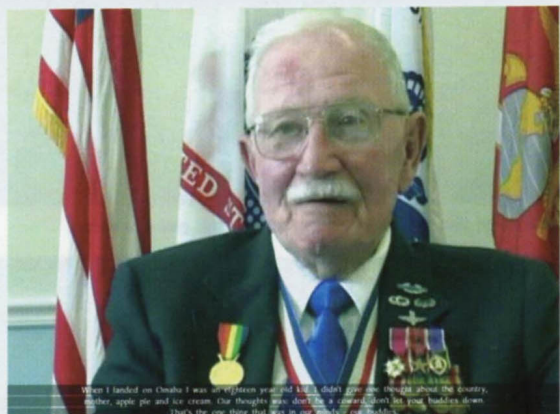
The gameplay ain't up to much, but veterans give first-hand accounts of what it was like during D-Day.

HEY KIDS, LEARNING CAN BE FUN! CERTAINLY MORE FUN THAN PLAYING *D-DAY* ANYWAY…

What *D-Day* lacks in the gameplay department, it really tries to make up for in the educational stakes, with a set of well-researched and hugely informative videos about the Allied invasion. These range from testimonies from veterans who landed on Omaha beach to the accounts of French civilians who lived under the German occupation.

Once you're done with these, you can swot up on every unit that took part in the D-Day landings and find out what part it played in the conflict. And if that still doesn't sate your thirst for knowledge, there's plenty of WWII footage to wade through too.

The only downside to all this is that it's so comprehensive, it makes the game look even more rushed and amateurish than it already is (if that's possible). Still, if nothing else, *D-Day* at least proves to be a mildly distracting piece of edutainment.

Look at us! We're British tanks! Bomb us, bomb us!

However, on anything under a P4 2.4GHz machine, the level jerks like an epileptic in a strobe factory, and proves to be virtually unplayable. Even on a higher-end machine it can hardly be construed as fun, as all you have to do is mass your troops and charge each enemy stronghold in turn with hundreds of tiny, nondescript soldiers that are totally bereft of character and feel utterly expendable. It's not fun, it's not strategic and it certainly isn't realistic.

TANKED UP

However, let's not be too hasty to write this one off, as it does possess some merits. When the tanks do finally show up, levels become far more entertaining, and the game's strategic subtleties finally come into play.

Like *Desert Rats*, you can target parts of enemy tanks, such as the turret or the caterpillar, rendering them impotent or immobile. Meanwhile, loading an officer into one of the scores of vehicles on offer increases both its attacking and defensive capabilities. Likewise, tanks can be dug in to gain an extra defensive bonus, although this does render them immobile and prone to flanking attacks.

Best of all though, is the inclusion of optional secondary objectives that have a bearing on later missions. So, if you take a detour to capture that enemy anti-ship gun in one level, you can call on some devastating ship-based artillery support two levels later. It's a basic idea, but adds some spice to an otherwise highly predictable game.

RUSHING THE SHELVES

Despite its smattering of positive elements though, *D-Day* reeks of being rushed to the table like a pot of undercooked sauerkraut. It's as though someone came up with the idea a couple of months ago to cash in on the 60th anniversary commemorations, then banged it out in record time. With levels this basic, pathfinding this broken and dialogue so bad it makes you grind your teeth into a pulp, it's impossible to feel otherwise.

In fact, if the Allies had spent as little time planning the D-Day landings as Digital Reality has evidently spent creating this game, I'd probably be called Schultz and have an unhealthy interest in pull-up socks, spicy sausages and the music of David Hasslehoff. I think that says it all really. PCZ

Is this what they mean by 'the heat of battle'?

Something tells me they're not interested in sandcastles.

Things get interesting when the tanks come out to play.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✔ Comprehensive collection of units
- ✔ Entertaining tank battles
- ✘ Prone to chronic slowdown
- ✘ Teeming with bugs and glitches
- ✘ Fiddly interface and unit selection
- ✘ Crap level design

46

Tanks but no tanks

Ooh look, gratuitous gore! The kids are gonna love that...

Practise at the range – or play something good instead.

Excuse me ladies – I'm feeling a shooting pain in my groin...

SHELLSHOCK: NAM '67

■ £29.99 | Pub: Eidos | Dev: Guerrilla
ETA: September 3 |
www.shellshockgame.com

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card with T&L support
DESIRES P4 2.4GHz, 512MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

Michael Filby finds himself shell-shocked, but for all the wrong reasons

"DRUG references: check. Swearing: check. Prostitutes: check. Dead bodies: check. Gameplay – oh." This could quite easily describe the checklist reeled off by Eidos before giving the go-ahead for *Shellshock: Nam '67*, an attempt at a realistic and gritty war game that's as controversial as the war it's based on. Well, that's how it's been marketed, anyway.

You start off as a rookie grunt, and gradually work your way through to promotion into Special Forces and beyond. Controlling your soldier from a third-person perspective, the idea is to accompany your squad through several missions, all the while avoiding VC booby traps and witnessing wartime atrocities. Sadly, the reality is far less interesting.

WHITE MEN CAN'T JUMP

For a start, the missions themselves range from run of the mill to deathly boring, and frequently mess you around with objectives that are inadequately explained. The control system never feels quite right, probably due to its shared development on the consoles. Bizarrely, you can't even jump, which leads to several 'hilarious' occasions where your highly trained soldier has to run halfway across the level to get around a shin-high trench.

The AI is also wholly inconsistent. While the enemy is usually fairly competent at seeking cover, they'll often inexplicably spoil it all by running around blindly, or totally fail to notice your presence when you're standing right in front of them. Your squad-mates are frequently nothing less than a pain in the arse too, either because they're always getting lost, or keep running into your line of fire.

In between missions, you often get to stroll around your base camp where you can try out new weapons, chat to soldiers to progress the story, and purchase contraband.

Look, homoerotic stares only compound the controversy.

The contraband stuff includes pictures of women with – yes – partially exposed breasts, not to mention a selection of drugs and a pass to visit the local prostitutes. It's all far tamer than it sounds though – the pictures are juvenile, the drugs are no more controversial than Snake's sniper-rifle steadying pills in *Metal Gear Solid*, and the encounters with prostitutes are sexually inexplicit.

The presentation is a mixed bag – the pre-rendered cinematics are generally of a high standard, yet the in-engine cut-scenes are dull and unskippable. The graphics engine itself isn't exactly triple-A, and is blighted by an annoying fog that fails to hide the pop-up. There was even one part of the game where the approach of an enemy could be spotted by watching his elbow protruding through a brick wall. Thankfully, the quality of the sound fares better, featuring several licensed tracks from the era accompanied by some atmospheric sound effects throughout the game.

Nevertheless, *Shellshock* is a mess. It's no more controversial than a hundred other games you'll have seen before, all of which play better than this. Look beyond the undeserved 18-certificate, and you'll find little more than a below-par action-shooter that's about as much fun to play as pulling a VC bayonet out of your gonads. It smells of something hot and strong, and it ain't napalm… **PCZ**

Lawn grooming: the first casualty of war.

INPERSPECTIVE

BATTLEFIELD VIETNAM
Reviewed Issue 141, Score 87%
Lacks a worthwhile single-player mode, but packs a mean multiplayer napalm-flavoured punch – provided your system and net connection are up to it.

CALL OF DUTY
Reviewed Issue 136, Score 94%
It may not feature foul mouths or dismemberment, but it plays a damn sight better than *Shellshock*.

PCZONE VERDICT

✔ Decent music
✔ Nice cinematics
✘ Hateful checkpoint save system
✘ No multiplayer
✘ Feels unfinished
✘ Not as hardcore as it thinks it is

53

Daily Mail-baiting rubbish
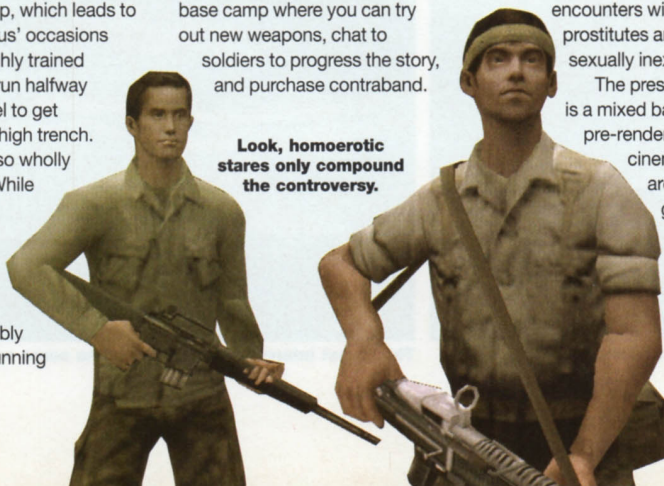
CORONER'S DEPT.

RANK: Major

NAME: Mayhem

CAUSE OF DEATH:
Moron behind the
keyboard activated
his flashlight
instead of his
rocket launcher
in the middle of
a firefight.

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TRANSPORT GIANT

■ £29.99 | Pub: JoWooD/Koch Media | Dev: JoWooD Productions | ETA: August 13

REQUIRES PIII 500, 64MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card **DESIRES** PIII 800, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

***Daniel Emery* steps into the exciting world of traffic management, accountancy and stock control…**

DESPITE going down like a lead balloon in Britain, the Germans loved 2000's *Traffic Giant*. The premise of the game was simple: turn a suburban sprawl into an efficient model of public transport and make the trains run on time. So, with the inevitability that night follows day, the developer has now come up with a sequel: *Transport Giant*.

The game is similar to Chris Sawyer's 1994 masterpiece *Transport Tycoon*. In *TG* though, rather than micro-managing cities, you develop a full transport infrastructure for a country, while making a fat profit from shipping freight and passengers. However, unlike its classic inspiration, this rendition falls flat on its arse.

For starters, there are big issues with pathing, AI and basic sanity. Road transport seems incapable of overtaking slower traffic, so new HGVs find themselves driving from London to Glasgow at 10mph, stuck behind a horse and cart.

Then there's the trains. You can toil for hours creating a fantastic train network, only for the computer to turn them 180-degrees (for no apparent reason), straight into the path of oncoming trains. And we won't even go into the logic-defying shipping system…

However, what really gets our goat is that all this could've been avoided with a few design tweaks. *Transport Giant* should have been an engrossing game; in its current state though, it's just a giant pain in the arse.

It's no *Doom 3*.

Central London. Look, no traffic!

Not my first choice for a liner.

PCZONE VERDICT 55
Stuck in a traffic jam

BESIEGER

ON THE DVD

■ Price: £29.99 | Pub: Dreamcatcher
Dev: Primal Software | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 32MB 3D Card **DESIRES** P4 1.5GHz, 512MB RAM and a 64MB 3D Card

***Steve O'Hagan* finds it difficult to be constructive in this castle-building RTS**

FROM RUSSIA with love comes Moscow-made *Besieger*, a wall-building RTS that has a plot to do with Vikings, flying ships and ogres. Your task is to conquer map after map by building impregnable villages, forts and later, castles, while simultaneously trying to equip an army powerful enough to wreck your opponent's citadel.

And in concept at least, *Besieger* is a decent stab at an RTS: somewhere between the epic panoramas of *Warrior Kings* and the build-and-defend gameplay of *Stronghold*. Initially, good points abound, such as the flight sim-like draw distance, the smart mini-map and the balance you need to strike between workers and fighters.

Even with the by-the-numbers resource gathering and technology trees, *Besieger* could have been a decent, offbeat little game. The balance between constructing defences and retaining a mobile force to sally out and hurt your opponent is a strong one, and the flexible graphics engine is more than capable of bringing the game to life.

Unfortunately, all the developer's good efforts are ruined by the stinking, incompetent AI, especially in the realms of pathfinding. For a game that revolves around breaching walls and scaling ramparts, the fact your troops can't walk through a gap even if it's the size of the English Channel with a sign saying 'free rape and pillage through here' is loony. It also means that frustration soon replaces fun, and optimism turns to despair.

If there's something strange, in your neighbourhood…

Fancy holidaying here?

Mountain magic.

PCZONE VERDICT 58
All the longevity of a sand castle

CATWOMAN

■ £29.99 | Pub: EA | Dev: EA/Argonaut | ETA: Out Now
REQUIRES PIII 733, 256MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card **DESIRES** P4 1.5GHz, 512MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

Rob Taylor nearly chokes to death on an EA furball

You should see her cleaning herself...

I wonder if she has three sets of nipples...

Is the tail hot? We can't decide.

IF EVER a scabby moggy was let out of the bag way before its time, EA's latest movie-to-game franchise is it. The risible plot involves heroine Patience Phillips's murder after stumbling upon yet another dastardly corporate conspiracy. Resurrected as Catwoman, she now possesses the agility and intuition of a cat. Not a lion. Or a tiger. Not even a panther. Just a cat. The kind of pet your nan would have.

In her quest for revenge Catwoman prowls across rooftops using her Cat Sense and slinks across mesh panels *Prince Of Persia*-stylee. You'll also indulge in Capoeira-esque close-quarter combat and earn bonuses pulling off trick moves like Scaredy Cats and Alley Cats. Unfortunately, less dodgy cameras reside in Peckham market, while fiddly controls coin a frustrating experience that's less fun than a double heart bypass.

Aside from atmospheric lighting effects, Catwoman is uninspiring to behold, filled with gloomy, coarsely textured levels. Star of the show is undoubtedly S&M fetishist Catwoman herself – leave this minx alone for a mo and she does a virtual lap dance. Audio is similarly bland, combining a token sub-Danny Elfman score with repetitive effects. Although Ms Berry provides her sultry vocal talents, Catwoman's dialogue tends to drip cheese rather than sexual innuendo. Sadly, some superheroes are fundamentally lame. Perhaps if Catwoman was a little more tongue-in-cheek – à la *NOLF*'s Cate Archer – the melodrama on offer might be more palatable. As it is, this mangy specimen should be put to sleep immediately.

PCZONE VERDICT	**40**
Cat litter	

SPIDER-MAN 2

■ £29.99 | Pub: Activision | Dev: Fizz Factor | ETA: Out Now
REQUIRES PIII 600, 128MB RAM and a 16MB 3D card **DESIRES** PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card

Sam Kieldsen feels his crapness sense tingling

BASED VERY loosely on the blockbuster sequel currently showing at a fleapit near you, *Spider-Man 2* the PC game has nothing to do with the number one-selling console game which is an entirely different – and sadly, infinitely superior – game.

What we have here is a Spidey-themed action title aimed squarely at the younger PC gamer – think bright colours, no real-life guns (the bad guys tote silly sci-fi bubble-pistol thingummies instead) and gameplay so easy you can sail through it in a single afternoon. Gritty it ain't.

That said, it's occasionally diverting while it lasts, especially when you're able to let Spidey loose in Manhattan. You can crawl up walls, swing from buildings and glide through the air like some blue and red albatross, stopping off every so often to web up a mugger's face before pounding him into submission.

Most other levels involve inane puzzles and unchallenging boss fights (again, younger players might find this more appealing). Comic fans may enjoy the inclusion of classic villains such as Mysterio and Rhino, but the main baddie of the piece is the metal-tentacled Doc Ock, played, as in the movie, by Alfred Molina. Tobey Maguire and Kirsten Dunst also pop up to voice their characters, although Maguire's performance is pretty stilted and dreary – there's no doubt he'd rather have been poolside with a bevy of Hollywood honeys than cooped up in a studio spouting wisecracks for some daft kid's game.
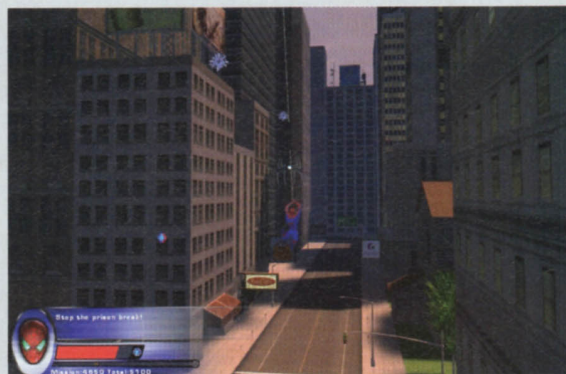
There's nothing too 'Amazing' about the graphics.

See the film three times instead.
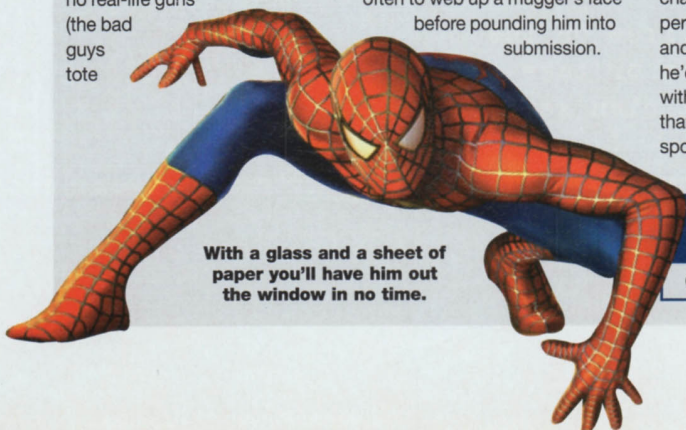
With a glass and a sheet of paper you'll have him out the window in no time.

PCZONE VERDICT	**46**
One for da kids	

Magazine's aren't for reading...

they're for reloading.

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REPLAY

Anthony Holden **does his bit for poverty with the latest budget releases**

Don't kill any civilians

SPLINTER CELL

■ £9.99 | Pub: Focus Multimedia | ETA: September 1

BEST BUY

Everything's a stealth challenge for Sam Fisher.
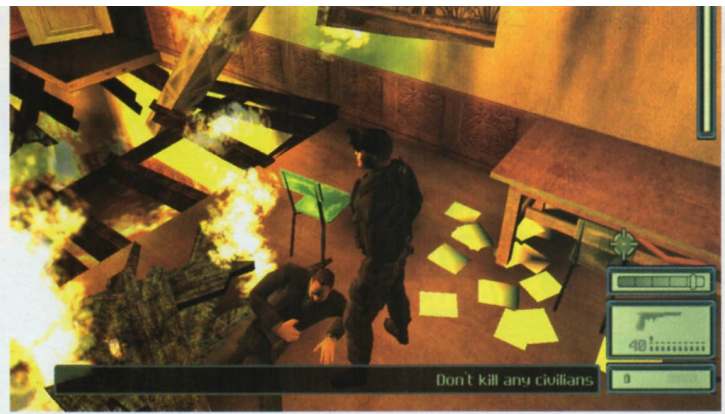
TEN POUNDS? For the greatest stealth game ever made? I don't know if I altogether approve. It seems wrong somehow, like selling off the contents of the Louvre in a jumble sale or something.

Still, I suppose it does finally give any sceptics out there a chance to correct the error of their ways at minimal expense. If you count among this number, I can only repeat the message that this is the most polished, most sophisticated and most cinematic stealth-action game ever created. Indeed, even for non-sneaking fans it offers plenty of magnificent gameplay, breaking the stealth tension with frequent explosive set pieces.

The stealth system itself blends the best parts of *Thief*, *Metal Gear* and *Tenchu*, using devices such as a light/shadow meter, a variety of high-tech spyware and a set of acrobatics Jackie Chan would be proud of. The production values too are faultless, and in visual terms *Splinter Cell* still stands up alongside anything the PC has to offer.

On the downside, there's no multiplayer available – this aspect of the series not appearing until the more recent *Pandora Tomorrow*. There are however a couple of bonus maps available for download if you're really keen.

If you were to push me, I suppose I could also mention that it's a tad linear and the AI isn't quite up to *Thief 3* standards, but this really would be churlish in the face of such a grand gaming achievement.

PCZONE VERDICT **92**

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2003

■ £9.99 | Pub: Atari
ETA: September 3

This game will live for some time yet.

DON'T BE fooled: this incarnation of the great online shooter may have been thoroughly outgunned by the more recent *UT 2004*, but this by no means makes the earlier game redundant. Not only is *Unreal Tournament 2003* still a fantastic shooter in its own right, with a perfectly viable offline mode for the Internetually challenged, but – importantly – it gives you access to a vast catalogue of mods, mutators and total conversions that are not compatible with *UT 2004*.

Some of these, such as *Red Orchestra*, *FragOps* and *Infection*, are worth the price of entry alone. And with a full year's head start on *UT 2004* (not to mention the incentive of Epic's Make Something Unreal competition), the mods and conversions will just keep coming.

Admittedly, if you've already got the beautifully comprehensive *UT 2004* this is a difficult purchase to justify; but if you're a fan of online shooters with even a passing interest in the mod scene, you simply must own this game.

PCZONE VERDICT **89**

LEFTOVERS

▲ Mother of God, what's happened? The normally scatological nature of this section has been upturned with an almost unthinkably good line-up of budget releases.

Take the magisterial *Civilization III* (Atari, £9.99, Out September 3). After all these years, and despite countless attempts at imitation, *Civ* is still the undisputed champ of historical turn-based strategy, and *Civ III* is the most polished and handsome version yet. 88 per cent.

For the more goblin-inclined, there's yet another genre-leader in the form of *Neverwinter Nights* (Atari, £9.99, Out September 3). With the possible exception of *Morrowind*, this beautifully crafted D&Der is the finest fantasy RPG money can buy, and scores a critical hit with 84 per cent.

In a slightly deeper niche we find lurking the classic space epic *X Gold* (£9.99, THQ Budget, Out Now). Comprising both the original *X: Beyond The Frontier* and the *X-Tension* expansion pack, this is space trading and exploration at its most hardcore, and though superseded by *X2*, still trades its way to a starry 75 per cent.

More ups and downs follow, with the re-issue of the crowd-pleasing *Rollercoaster Tycoon 2* (Atari, £9.99, Out September 3). The third iteration may be just around the corner, but for our money this version still does the job, rising to a white-knuckled 79 per cent. Saying that, you might want to avoid the disappointing *Rollercoaster Tycoon 2: Wacky Worlds* (Atari, £9.99, Out September 3), which for a tenner is still vastly overpriced: 50 per cent.

Finally, we have the thoroughly B-grade *Enter The Matrix* (Atari, £9.99, Out September 3). This action brawler is slowly creeping towards a reasonable price-point, but seeing as the pompous trilogy turned out to be shite, we're giving it a self-important 58 per cent. Still, not a bad bunch all things considered. ▼

Civilization III.

Neverwinter Nights.

FEEDBACK

It's a deal, it's a steal, it's the sale of the taffing century.
Will Porter opens the floodgates on *Thief: Deadly Shadows*

"Damn, only six giant acorns left..."

THIEF: DEADLY SHADOWS

REVIEWED ISSUE 144 (BY WILL PORTER), SCORE: 85%

What we said

Deadly Shadows has too many niggles to be a true great, but it remains compelling. The story is great, the tension is real and if you like copious adrenal activity, you won't go far wrong.

What you said

Most people wade into the game with a large *Deus Ex*-shaped chip on their shoulder which prevents them from liking *Deadly Shadows*. But those with chipless shoulders will realise that this is a great game, and that Ion Storm has redeemed itself somewhat.

Escaped_monkey

OK, it's not the greatest game ever, but it is the greatest stealth game ever. The graphics (while not the greatest) are very good – just take a look at those walls for god's sake! The stealth works really well and the AI is sublime.

On the downside, the voice-acting is a bit dodgy and I still don't like the supernatural elements, but at least they're in the minority. The ragdolls are horrid too and the game's not as immersive because of them. Overall though, this is a truly great follow-up to *Thief 2*.

Spudy2000

Got to agree on the point of the city guard recognising you on sight and dragging you off for a good kicking – it's annoying to have such a chore just to get between levels. The open city thing is convincing though, the buildings all look good and the way you can just pickpocket people or rob any old building is

cool. I agree that it's the console connection that's held it back: you just can't help thinking it could easily have achieved so much more on the PC.

Bob_the_Insane

Apart from the improved lighting and graphics, I'm struggling to think how *Deadly Shadows* has moved on since its predecessor. The ability to wander around the city between missions and the need to please the Hammerites and Pagans was good in theory, but in practice the city feels too small and the requirements for pleasing the factions are lame.

If the developer had put more thought into it (and not made it for Xbox), it could've provided a serious challenge to *Splinter Cell's* stealth crown. Instead, it's left challenging *Thief 2* for best game in the *Thief* series.

Davetsutton

"I'd rather play a flawed game with true flair than a flawless game that's utterly bland"

SPEAKAFREAKA ON THE NOT-AT-ALL-BLAND *THIEF 3*

Despite a few problems and the dodgy physics (which I didn't even notice for a while because I was so engrossed with the story itself), the game feels like a great ending to a classic gaming trilogy.

However, I was expecting a more freeform approach to the

whole thievery business. I was hoping to be able to enter any building, walk up a wall with the climbing gloves, enter an upstairs window and steal all the belongings, unbeknown to those downstairs. There just don't seem to be enough opportunities to engage in actual thieving.

It'd be great to see an expansion pack for the PC or a *Thief 4* which has more opportunities for freeform thievery – more windows, skylights and chances to use new tools. More open areas would be good too; something a little less claustrophobic.

Darrenmdr

Thief 3 is one of the few games I've really enjoyed playing this year. I found myself constantly drawn into the gameplay by the compelling and beautifully drawn storyline and fantastic music and sfx. Most importantly, the game is played at a very slow pace by and large, but it still feels like every moment is vitally important.

I also thought the voice-acting was great. It showed a real sense of humour and tongue-in-cheek fun while successfully making the game

even more immersive (unlike a game like *Breed*).

Undoubtedly, it's been badly scarred by its difficult gestation, and most of the flaws your review stated are entirely true. However, I don't feel this takes away from the overriding truth that this is a great game. I'd much rather play a flawed game that has true flair, than a game that is essentially flawless, but utterly, utterly bland.

Speakafreaka

I think Will was spot-on in his assessment of *Deadly Shadows*, but I have to take issue with his 'Missed Opportunity' box, where he criticises the voice dialogue in the game for its American accents and supposed lack of medieval authenticity.

He would be correct in this opinion were it not for the fact that none of the *Thief* games are actually set in medieval England. They exist in an alternate history which has elements of Europe from pre-Christian times (the Pagans), up to a medieval Industrial Revolution (the Hammers).

As a result, I think the variety of accents is fair enough since we're not talking accurate history here. I found the Pagan dialogue a bit 'overcookedsie' compared to the earlier games, but if Will didn't take issue with that he shouldn't take issue with 'Tafferspeak' either.

Alan Bourke

Will's comment

I know that *Thief* isn't *really* a medieval game, but to me the voice-acting still doesn't sound right – the content is outstanding, but I stand by my opinion that the delivery is off-key. Never mind though, horses for courses really, I think we're all agreed that *Thief: Deadly Shadows* is a great game despite its fair share of shortcomings.

Whereas a lot of people couldn't really overlook the flaws in *Deus Ex: Invisible War* (myself included), the mastery of tension, AI, sound effects and level design on show does balance out moans about physics, ragdolls and dual-development.

Whatever your opinion, it's clear that *Thief: Deadly Shadows* contains some of the best stealth that the PC has to offer: it's a worthy third chapter to a venerable series, but simply has too many niggles and downfalls to be considered a true classic. **PCZ**

"What do you mean, 'do I fancy a taff'?"

THE JURY

DAVID 'WHEEL SPIN' WOODS

STEVE 'DAMON' HILL

MARTIN 'THE CLUTCH' KORDA

JAMIE 'POWERSLIDE' SEFTON

SUZY 'CRUISY' WALLACE

AND A SPECIAL GUEST APPEARANCE FROM...

WILL 'TRACK MANIAC' PORTER

SUZY CRUISY

HOW'S MY REVIEWING? CALL 0800-PORTER

SUPERTEST: DRIVING GAMES

THE CONTENDERS

COLIN MCRAE RALLY 04
ISSUE 140, SCORE 84%

GRAND PRIX 4
ISSUE 119,
SCORE 86%

NEED FOR SPEED: UNDERGROUND
ISSUE 137, SCORE 85%

TOCA RACE DRIVER 2
ISSUE 142,
SCORE 89%

TRACKMANIA
ISSUE 139,
SCORE 79%

Martin Korda **and the team strap themselves in to find the best driving game on the PC grid...**

LIKE SHOOTING people in the head and smiting giant house pests in dungeons, driving fast cars around corners is one of those things we PC gamers just never seem to tire of. Right now, the genre is in particularly good health, having been forced to rethink itself in a variety of ways in order to remain fresh. The results can clearly be seen in this supertest.

Indeed, we believe this month's collection of games is about as diverse as you can get, ranging from the ultra-hardcore realism of *Grand Prix 4* to the strange arcade/puzzling mayhem of *TrackMania*. So buckle yourself in and prepare for a wild ride as we set out to find the top PC driving game. Gentlemen (and Suzy), start your engines...

ILLUSTRATION Sleazy Rider

COLIN MCRAE RALLY 04

Steve: I have to say that I really can't remember what the difference is between *04*, *3* or *2.0* to be honest. It's just this year's game. It's addictive in the short-term, but I've barely played it since I reviewed it.

Dave: It's probably the purest racing game here, as you're just racing against yourself. You can't get taken out by the AI.

Martin: Isn't that the whole point of driving games though?

Dave: No, because in rally games it's all about racing against the clock. It's all down to you.

Martin: Still, it would've been nice if you'd been able to have the option to drive against other cars on the same piece of track.

Steve: Well you could in *CM2.0*. In *CM04*, you just have this stupid Online mode where you post your best times on a website. I looked on there and it looks like nobody is bothering with it.

Jamie: I really liked this game – it's got a great driving model. It just feels right.

Dave: Surely there's nowhere left for the series to go though: it's got as good as it can be. Even the visuals between *CM3* and *04* weren't that different.

Martin: The only major change seems to be that you can drive a couple of different cars, because you could only drive the Ford Focus in *CM3*.

Steve: But rally cars are pretty generic, so it doesn't really make much difference which car you drive. Something like *Richard Burns Rally* is completely different from this though. Unlike *CM04*, you can't just pick it up and play it: you're lucky if you get round the first bend.

Martin: That's the great thing about *CM04*. You can just pick it up, play it straight away and have fun, but it still feels really realistic. After *Grand Prix 4*, this is the most realistic game here.

Dave: The damage model is great – I hate games without it. But for me it's not about the realism, it's about what's the most fun game to drive. And if that means crazy powerslides, then so be it.

Martin: What do you think Suzy?

Suzy: As far as rally games go, it's about as good as it gets. It plays well and looks and sounds great.

Martin: I do prefer games where you race against other people, but *CM04* has this ability to put you into a trance-like state. Before you know it, it's three in the morning and you've been racing around on your own for hours. There aren't many games here that can do that.

Dave: But there are quite a few activities that you can do on your own at three in the morning. *(Everyone laughs.)*

Steve: It's true though. There are hundreds of tracks and the career mode just seems to go on forever.

Martin: But is there any point buying this one if you've already got *CM3*?

Dave: I think if you forked out 30

one guy off the track and he came into my trailer looking for me after the race.

Steve: There's a story that runs all the way through the campaign too.

Martin: That Scottish mechanic with the tits is quite funny.

Steve: Do you mean Scotty? Yeah, he's great. After you've been racing for a few hours and finally get on the podium, there's this clip of him getting pissed in the trailer.

Dave: The handling on each of the 15 car types is really different. Racing trucks and Formula Ford cars are completely different experiences.

Martin: The rally driving isn't too hot though.

Steve: It's no *McRae*.

Dave: I've had some of the best races of my life with this game.

Steve: I found it too easy to resort to just twatting your opponents out of the way.

Dave: Yeah, but then they get vendettas against you.

Jamie: And you end up busting up your car too and getting an earful from Scotty. As for that guy's name, could they not have thought of something a bit more original? Hey, the guy's Scottish, what should we call him… Er, I know, how about Scotty?

Dave: It's great how the damage really affects the handling. So if you crash into someone on the first lap and try and race on, your car will be all over the place. The AI is fantastic too, and tries to block you and hold the racing line into corners. There was this one time I was blocking this guy off, so he overtook me on the outside, but because I was holding the racing line, I overtook him straight back.

Steve: OK, we don't want your

life story. But you're right about the AI, and I love the fact that they can make mistakes too. Quite often, you drive past two cars that have taken each other off the road.

Martin: The weather effects are pretty good too. The handling of the cars is completely different when it's wet.

Steve: I agree, the weather effects are very realistic. The Online options are impressive too. I've been playing a lot against Americans and they take it really seriously.

Jamie: Do they just race the ovals all the time?

Steve: Funnily enough, the oval circuits here are much better than in most *NASCAR* games.

Suzy: They're boring. They're for Americans who think driving in circles constitutes race driving.

Steve: Rubbish, it's racing on a knife-edge. I find it quite thrilling.

Suzy: The Pro Simulation mode is brilliant. The handling is just amazing. I think it makes *TOCA Race Driver 2* the most

Colin McRae 04 is all about beating the clock, rather than on-track opponents.

quid for it and already had the last one, you would feel slightly disappointed with this.

Suzy: But if you love rally games, it's worth getting.

Martin: How did you all find the car set-up options?

Dave: Car set-up?

Suzy: I thought they were OK actually. There aren't a huge amount of options, but what's there is pretty good. For instance, brake bias...

Dave: What the hell is brake bias when it's at home?

Suzy: It's when you have more braking power either on the front or rear brakes.
(Blank looks all round.)

Martin: That's pretty embarrassing actually. Suzy knows more about cars than the rest of us put together.

Steve: But do these set-up options work in the game?

Suzy: Yes.

Steve: How can you tell?

Suzy: If you put more brake bias on the front end...
(Blank looks all round.)

Steve: You what?

Martin: Look, as far as I'm concerned, I don't think fiddling with the car set-up in *CM04* is essential at all, as you can play it without ever touching that stuff.

Suzy: It does make a difference though: you just have to know what you're doing, that's all.

Martin: That's us stuffed then.

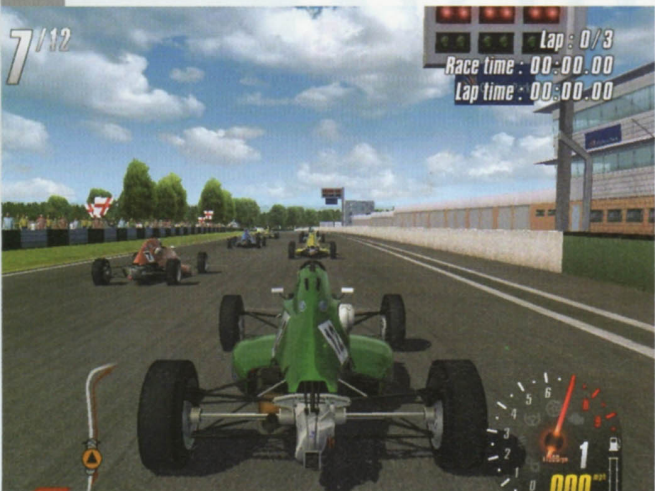## TOCA RACE DRIVER 2

Steve: It's the most complete racing game ever. Great physics, damage model, everything.

Dave: I love the way the AI holds grudges against you. I knocked

"The handling is just amazing – *TOCA Race Driver 2* is really hard but so, *so* realistic"

SUZY WALLACE GETS REVVED UP BY *TOCA RACE DRIVER 2*

With 15 distinct vehicle types, *TOCA* has endless replayability.

realistic racing simulator on the PC. It's hard, but so, *so* realistic.

Martin: Most of these games suffer from not having decent career modes, but this one comes closest to having a decent one.

Steve: Yeah, but you don't have qualifying weekends or any of that stuff.

Martin: But that's no bad thing, as it keeps the game moving along at a decent pace, and you really feel like you're getting somewhere fast with your career.

Steve: The problem is that, with most races being just three laps long, you have to ram your way to the front.

Martin: Or master the game so well that you don't need to – and surely that's the point. You don't become a great racing driver overnight, but if you do mess it up, you only have to replay a three-lap race rather than a great long one. What's more, whereas *Colin McRae 04* has nowhere to go from here, this series has got loads more life in it.

Steve: Like what?

Martin: More cars, more variety, a more freeform campaign, more story elements. You name it.

Steve: But why is there no *TOCA* racing? It's kind of

strange given the game's name.

Martin: Someone call trading standards.

Steve: Even so, it's the game I've played more than any other this year and I'll probably still be playing it for a very long time.

TRACKMANIA

Jamie: It's good fun, but you can't compare it to *TOCA*. It's an arcade game.

Martin: It's momentarily fun. It peaks very quickly and then tails off even faster.

Jamie: I had more fun with this than I did with *Grand Prix 4* though.

Dave: That's because *GP4* isn't any fun at all.

Jamie: The driving model is terrible.

Martin: I know what you mean. One time I was driving over some ice and turned my car 90-degrees, but no matter how much I pressed accelerate, I just kept on moving sideways. *(Grunts of agreement all round.)*

Steve: There's no collision with other cars either, you just drive straight through them. What's that all about?

Dave: Surely if you can code something like *TrackMania*, you can code collisions.

Martin: It's one of those games that you have to play with other people, as it can be a lot of fun challenging your mates. Playing it on

your own is just dull though.

Suzy: It's cool to be able to create your own tracks.

Dave: When I first saw it I laughed in its face, but it actually turned out to be a lot of fun in the end.

Martin: The challenges are ridiculous though: you're never told what you need to do and you end up just guessing.

Jamie: It looks like it's been thrown together in three months. I know, let's get Porter in here,
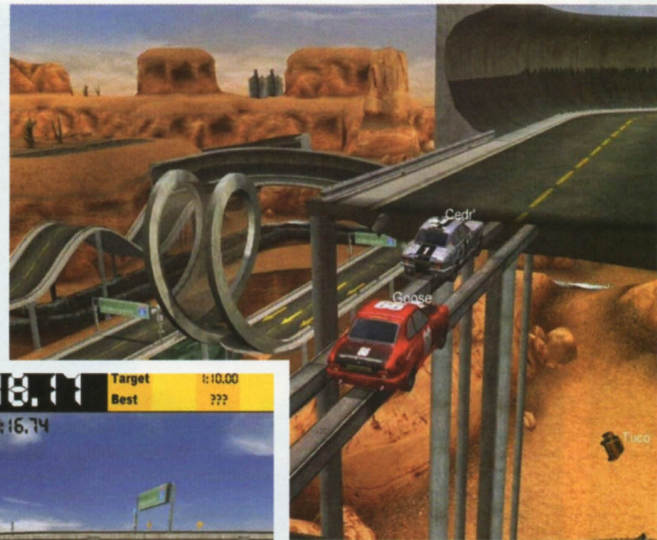
"I'm gonna make it, I'm gonna make it!"

he loves this game.

(Dave calls in Will, who enters beaming and shaking from uncontained excitement.)

Martin: So don't you think the excitement starts off high then disappears quite quickly?

Will: No, no, no, no! The excitement keeps building and building and building…
(Everyone laughs.)

Steve: Get this boy into PR…

Will: …and there are some brilliant constructive puzzles but not necessarily the racing sections I agree with that I agree with that…
(Concerned looks are exchanged by all as Will starts turning purple.)

Will: …but as soon as I heard that it was going to be in this Supertest I knew you'd all say it was shit but it's not shit it's like a small game it's independent and it's a really good game…
(Will is shaking uncontrollably now and banging his palms on the table.)

Will: …and just because it looks like shareware doesn't mean that it's a crap game and it has some really good ideas in it and the replayability is awesome you just can't put it down and you always

want to go and get the gold and they didn't have much money behind them so you should take that into account…

Steve: What? So if I made a game that'd automatically make it good?
(Will finally takes a breath. Everyone sighs in relief.)

Will: No, no. This one's brilliant though.

Jamie: But it's impossible to tell what you need to do.

Will: No, no, no, it's not, it's not, it's obvious – you just go from one side of the track to the other.

Jamie: With another year of development, it probably could have been turned into a really good game.

Martin: There are some nice ideas, like being able to create your own tracks, but it lacks any real substance.

Jamie: And proper racing dynamics too.

Will: I agree the driving model is a bit shit, but the main thing about it is the puzzles.

Steve: It's shit.
(Will's shoulders begin to hunch and his tone drops 13 octaves.)

Will: Well… I liked it.
(He shuffles out of the room a broken man.)

GRAND PRIX 4

Jamie: If you love F1 and you love tinkering with cars, then you'll probably love it. However, I found it deadly dull.

Steve: Even if you play it on the more arcadey modes, it's still not enjoyable.

Dave: Yeah, you end up smashing everyone out of your way.

"Just because it looks like shareware doesn't mean it's crap – it has some good ideas"

WILL PORTER HAS MORE THAN A CRUSH ON *TRACKMANIA*
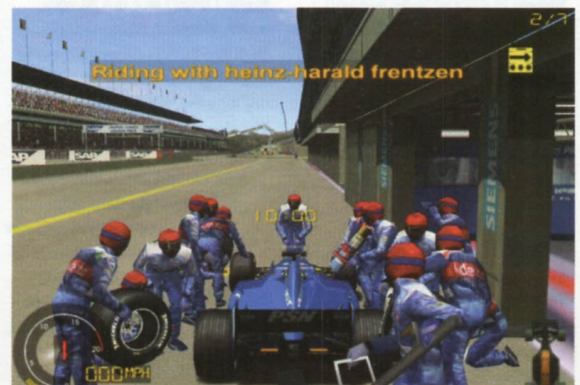
These days, real F1 is more about the pit stops than racing.

It's glaringly obvious just how good *Need For Speed: Underground* is.

"Brilliant! It looks fantastic and had millions poured into it. It makes me feel young again"

DAVE WOODS FEELS THE NEED, *UNDERGROUND*

Martin: There are about eight different driving aids that you can use to customise the game to your liking though.

Suzy: But the driving aids in *Grand Prix 4* are ridiculous. With some of them all you have to do is hold the accelerator and follow the dotted line on the road.

Martin: If you really want to get into F1 and you want as realistic a racing experience as you can get, then this is the game for you. If you're talking about instant gratification, then it's bottom of the pile. However, if you take the time to really mater it, I think it's the most satisfying game here.

Suzy: The cars all seem to handle very strangely. It's almost like they want to naturally adhere to the racing line. The controls are awful too. 'A' to accelerate, 'Z' to brake and '<' '>' to turn left and right.

Martin: Yeah, but you can't play with the keys. Out of all of these games, this is the one that most needs a steering wheel. You have to play from the in-car view to really get a feel for the way the car moves. It's almost impossible playing from a behind-car viewpoint because it's so realistic.

Steve: But it just feels like you always crash on the first lap and then it's all over. It's too hard to get into, and with the driving aids it's even less fun than without.

Jamie: If these *GP* games are so good, why does no-one make them anymore?

Martin: Because F1 is no fun anymore. There are so many safety measures in place that cars can't overtake each other properly. Ten

years ago it was really exciting with loads of overtaking. Now it's just a procession, and the only exciting parts are the start and the pit stops.

Suzy: I'm not too sure about the damage model, as this one time I ripped off both of my front wheels and still managed to drive around the track at 130mph.

Martin: This is the one game here where tuning your car really does make a difference, even if it's just playing with the downforce.

Suzy: But not even I know what half the stuff in *GP4* does. It's just way too complicated.

Steve: Why can't someone just make a decent arcade F1 game for the PC?

Dave: I agree. A game that's really easy to play but has a great damage model so that you can't bang into other cars...

Steve: ...one where you can actually get round the first corner without trashing your car or spinning off. *GP4* meets *TOCA Race Driver 2*.

Jamie: Yeah – now that would be a great game.

Martin: Basically, *Grand Prix 4* is the ultimate driving test on the PC, but of course that puts most people off.

Suzy: I didn't like the AI very much. It keeps doing weird stuff like lining up behind you or ramming you if you stop. It's too dry a game, even for a sim.

Martin: The one major criticism I have is that it's not as realistic as it claims to be. Where are the safety cars and procession laps? It's much the same as the last couple of *GP* games, just with better graphics.

Basically it's very realistic, but not much fun unless you love F1 racing.

Dave: I'd rather play *Morrowind*.

NEED FOR SPEED: UNDERGROUND

Dave: Brilliant! It looks fantastic and had millions of pounds poured into it. It makes me feel young again. The music is fantastic too.

Jamie: I love the hippety-hoppety music.

(Everyone laughs.)

Dave: I didn't think I'd get into the customising part, but found it to be really good fun. The only really annoying thing about it is that there's no damage.

Martin: It really pisses me off how you stop dead as soon as you hit anything solid.

Dave: And if you stop dead in a race, you've basically lost.

Martin: Unless you've got

'Catch Up' on. It's one of those games that you can play with your finger on the accelerator throughout and hardly ever use the brake.

Suzy: You can't really get round corners like that though.

Martin: You can still pretty much do a complete circuit and that makes it really limited for me.

Suzy: The feeling of speed is amazing, especially when you play from the in-car viewpoint. No other game here comes even close to replicating its sense of speed.

Steve: It took me by surprise. The *Need For Speed* series was pretty much dead on its arse, and then this game came out of nowhere. It's been designed to be highly playable, rather than just a way of getting money off people, which really isn't the EA way. I think people who modify cars in real life are beneath contempt, but in this game, I'm loving it. I'm actually sitting there looking at my car thinking about what would look good on it. It's amazingly good fun just doing that.

Martin: I had no interest in playing this game whatsoever, but like Steve it took me completely by surprise. The music, sense of speed, attitude

and presentation are all spot-on. I really enjoyed it.

Steve: This is the first game that's made drag racing playable.

Suzy: The different modes like Drifting and Drag are genius. There are over 100 races and they're all really varied. Getting your car on the cover of magazines when your reputation increases is really cool too.

Dave: The cars are good enough to get on the front of a magazine, but the game wasn't good enough to warrant a magazine cover. *(Everyone laughs.)*

Suzy: It's the best game I've played in ages, but I was disappointed with the ending.

Martin: It hasn't got enough appeal for me to want to spend that long playing it. It's good fun in bursts, but it's too basic a driving game to really keep me hooked.

Steve: It's pure arcade. I play it for an hour at a time, but that's it.

Jamie: I loved the presentation, like the TV-style jumps and the shaky cam effect when you start going really fast.

Suzy: That's a great effect, and the AI isn't bad either. It tries to push you down dead ends and you can do the same back to it too. It's just the ultimate racing game. **PCZ**

It's not underground and they're not speeding. What sort of representation is that?

AND THE WINNER IS... TOCA RACE DRIVER 2

CODEMASTERS' VERSATILE RACER TAKES THE CHEQUERED FLAG...

TOCA Race Driver 2 is our racing game of choice – by a mile.

For the third Supertest running, we have a clear winner. *TOCA Race Driver 2* provides an unparalleled driving experience that falls perfectly between realism and accessibility, and offers more vehicle classes to drive than all of the other four games combined.

Having recently lavished praise on it in his review, Steve picked it as his winner because: "It has everything a driving game could have." For Dave, it was all about the competition: "I've had some of the best races I've ever played with *TOCA*," he chimed. For Jamie, his reasons were simple: "It's just so much fun."

"It's the most comprehensive, accessible yet challenging racing game I've played on the PC," said a frothing Martin. Only Suzy bucked the trend, voting for *Need For Speed: Underground* because she "loved the feeling of speed and more arcadey races". But it was *TOCA* that raced away with the title of Best PC Driving Game.

OUR VERDICT

THE SCORES ON THE DOORS

JURY	WINNER (2PTS)	RUNNER UP (1PT)
DAVE	TOCA RACE DRIVER 2	NFS: UNDERGROUND
STEVE	TOCA RACE DRIVER 2	NFS: UNDERGROUND
MARTIN	TOCA RACE DRIVER 2	COLIN MCRAE 04
JAMIE	TOCA RACE DRIVER 2	NFS: UNDERGROUND
SUZY	NFS: UNDERGROUND	TOCA RACE DRIVER 2

POSITION	GAME	POINTS
1ST	TOCA RACE DRIVER 2	9 PTS
2ND	NEED FOR SPEED: UNDERGROUND	5 PTS
3RD	COLIN MCRAE RALLY 04	1 PT
4TH	GRAND PRIX 4	0 PTS
4TH	TRACKMANIA	0 PTS
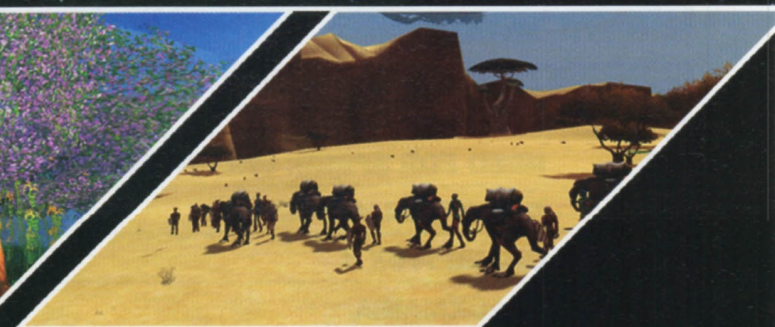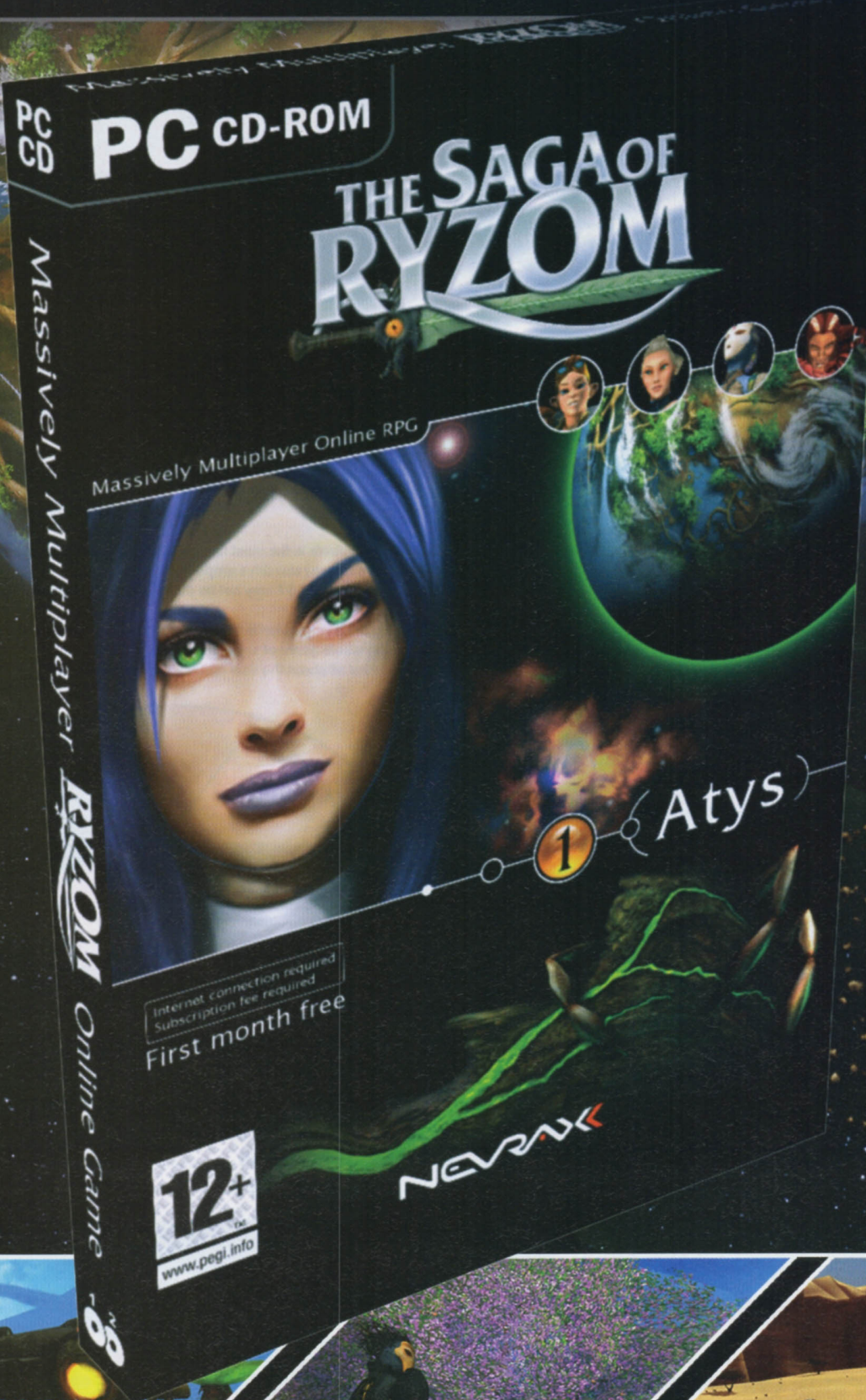
OVER TO YOU

THE PEOPLE HAVE SPOKEN AND THE VOTES ARE IN

Colin McRae Rally 04 takes pole in your poll.

This is the part of the Supertest where we turn it over to you. Whatever your opinion, join the discussion and have your say on what game you think should win. If you'd like to take part in the next Supertest, just log on to www.pczone.co.uk and register your vote. A big thanks if you posted comments this time around. Here's just a small selection…

The graphics, handling, car and damage physics are some of the best in any driving game.
    soulfinger loves doing it solo in *CM04*

TrackMania is the most fun, especially seeing as it's the only game here where I can drive properly.
    TinnionA97 may not be able to drive, but he loves *TrackMania*

NFS: Underground is the winner for me. That game really defined the whole genre of street racing.
    It's all about the cool factor for **taimoor_h** in *NFS: Underground*

READER VOTES

🟦	COLIN MCRAE RALLY 04	32%
🟥	NEED FOR SPEED: UNDERGROUND	23%
🟪	TOCA RACE DRIVER 2	19%
🟨	TRACKMANIA	19%
🟧	GRAND PRIX 4	7%

HOW IT IS

■ ONLINE EDITOR: Paul Presley

▲ Brace yourselves. Abhorrent though the concept may be, I fear I must step briefly away from the shining light of poetic verbosity and slip into the horrid shoes of marketing phrasemanship and corporate buzzwordology. Yes, I must lay out my (shudder) Mission Statement for you all. Worry not. It'll soon be over and we can go back to tongue caressing our lexiconistic verbiage.

'Why, Uncle Prezzleton,' read the many letters that flood daily to my lickspittles, 'hast thou not reviewed *City Of Heroes/Final Fantasy XI*/Other US-Only MMOG Title? Why, why, why?' The answer isn't simple. How do you review a MMOG? You can't take the standard route and use pre-release review code, as contact with fellow gamers is integral to the MMOG experience.

What about games that have already been released in t'other parts of t'world? Why not review them since you can probably buy them on import? Tis a truth, certainly, but hold fast. Does not every major MMOG end up on these shores in an official capacity eventually? And do not the eventual Euro releases often come with extra add-ons and expansion packs? And does not playing on local servers provide a markedly different experience to having to wait for our American/Asian brothers to arise from their slumbers at unfeasible hours of our glorious god-blessed GMT-based days? Of course.

So then, I pledge to one and all, right now, that never shall we prematurely ejaculate our opinions onto these pages. MMOGs shall be reviewed only when they are granted a full European release. Better for you, better for them, better for me (or at least my mail-answering lickspittles anyway).

▼

BIG STOMPY ROBOT FELLAS

'BFR' EXPANSION FOR *PLANETSIDE*'S UNIVERSAL SOLDIERS

"IT EITHER stands for BattleField Robotics, or Big F*****g Robots," says Chris Kramer, director of public relations for Sony Online, announcing the imminent arrival of the latest piece of the *PlanetSide* jigsaw.

Scheduled for a late August roll-out, each of the three warring continents fighting the never-ending war on Auraxis will get to climb inside the giant robotic suits and stomp their authority over the landscape.

Each nation has its own design of 20-foot-tall mech. An anime-inspired giant humanoid for the Vanu (the Aphelion), an ED-209-alike for the Terran Republic (the Colossus) and what looks like a giant truck with legs for the New Conglomerate (the Peregrine). Each has their own type of weapon, tied into the themes of their nation – a cutting laser affair for the Vanu, rocket and missile pods for the TR and a range of firepower for the NewCon.

Each two-man BFR has a customisable loadout, bringing an element of individuality to your choice. Jetpacks can be fitted to provide aerial capabilities, or enhanced power packs aid longer range attacks. Further attachable modules will provide other benefits such as power draining or even cloaking devices.

The Vanu 'Aphelion'. Sleek. Powerful. Purple.

For those having to face their new robotic overlords, attacks will have to be well co-ordinated with each mech having two levels of power shielding to overcome, although small arms fire can penetrate the shielding at certain weak spots, meaning all is not lost for a skilled infantry soldier.

The mechs themselves are integral to the Core Combat experience, with cavern-based modules providing the building blocks for the new units. Luckily, *PlanetSide* is about to undergo something of a mini-relaunch, with the expansion pack being bundled with the main game at retail and long-term subscribers receiving a reduction in fees (at least in America – whether this scheme will see its way over here is yet to be decided).

So, will it change the face of the eternal war? Probably not, although they are expected to arrive prior to the *Battle Islands* upgrade, bringing a series of smaller, concentrated warzones to the fray. The combined effect of the islands and BFRs should at least keep thing ticking over until the next overhaul of the game's dynamics.

- **Publisher:** Ubisoft
- **Developer:** Sony Online Entertainment
- **ETA:** Out Now
- **Website:** www.planetside.com

Each faction gets its own BFR design, all with differing loadouts and functions.

"It either stands for BattleField Robotics, or Big F*****g Robots"

CHRIS KRAMER PR DIRECTOR, SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT

Heroes Of Europe Take Flight

LEADING MMO PUBLISHER LAUNCHES EUROPEAN OFFICE

ON THE DVD

Finally Europeans gets to wear tights.

Millions are playing *Lineage II* already.

Tabula Rasa is on the way soon.

TYING IN nicely with the theme of this month's opening rant (see 'How It Is', left), Korean über-publisher NCsoft, the firm behind the multimillion-selling *Lineage II* and the insanely popular *City Of Heroes*, is all set to open its London-based European headquarters in September. Which is good news for all you Captain Britain wannabes as the aforementioned titles will finally be getting their official European launches.

The two MMOs have already been garnering a lot of interest on this side of the pond, with over 40,000 imported copies making their way over, but the official launch should now see full support for UK gamers. However, the question of local servers hasn't yet been addressed.

The opening of NCsoft Europe will also pave the way for the eventual smooth releases of the publisher's upcoming titles *Guild Wars*, *Auto Assault* and *Tabula Rasa*.

WEBGAME OF THE MONTH

WHY PAY TO PLAY WHEN THE INTERWEB PROVIDES FUN FOR FREE?

THE KINGDOM OF LOATHING
(WWW.KINGDOMOF LOATHING.COM)
Ultima Online. Estimated cost of development: $500,000. *City Of Heroes*. Estimated cost of development: several million dollars. *EverQuest II*. Estimated cost of development: $1 gazillion (or something). *The Kingdom Of Loathing*. Estimated cost of development: a couple of tenners for a copy of Paint Shop Pro and a few pints at the local for inspiration. Who says MMOGs have to cost a fortune to launch?
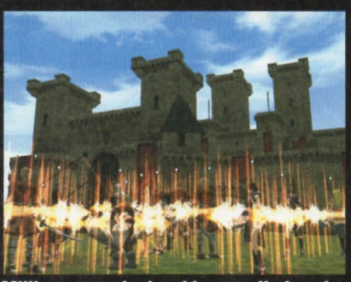
The *Warhammer* boys could probably have learnt a lot from Jick and the guys at Asymmetric Publications who seem to have knocked up this web-based MMOG in a couple of afternoons. Not that it suffers as a result. Choose from many character types – from Disco Bandits to Seal Clubbers, work on skills as diverse as mysticality, moxie and sneakiness, and even play dress up with a wide variety of… interesting clothing types.

Of course it looks like it's been drawn by a four year old, but that's part of the genius. All the action takes place in your mind (and considering how puerile and diseased our minds are that's no bad thing) and you haven't known fear until the first time you come face to face with a piece of undead elbow macaroni in the Haunted Pantry.

KOL is actually deceptive. It looks like a pile of shit and some sort of rudimentary attempt at My First Webgame, but ten minutes' play and you're hooked. The surrealism, the genuinely witty wordplay or just the lively (and growing) community. There are even guilds and (an attempt at) PvP. *The Kingdom Of Loathing*. Where an adventurer is YOU!

Who needs Norrath?

CLAN DIARY

SCEE

ANNE ROGERS, aka Jaffy
www.scee-clan.co.uk

The Electronic Sports World Cup is widely regarded in gaming communities as the finest LAN event of the year. Thus, arriving at the player village in the spectacular Futuroscope in France, our home for the next week, the atmosphere was a fusion of tension and excitement. The event presented some outstanding matches, with the *Counter-Strike* results being a particular highlight.

From the very first match in the male *C-S* tournament, we saw that the ESWC 2004 would be an event to remember, with American clan TSG beating the Swedish clan Adrenaline in an overtime game that left the audience breathless.

It was a disappointing week for the UK though. My team, the Creative-sponsored SCEE Ladies failed to make it out of the group stages, mirroring the performance of UK men's *C-S* team WOLF. The British *Quake 3*, *Pro Evo 3* and *Warcraft III* teams also failed to make an impression.

Nevertheless, the event was a true spectacle, attracting many members of the public. Spending

> ## "From the first match in the *Counter-Strike* tournament, we saw that the ESWC 2004 would be an event to remember"

The SCEE Ladies in action.

most of my time in the *Counter-Strike* building, I saw just how far girl-gaming has come in the last year or so. A lot of these teams could easily take on some of the male national teams.

However, the ESWC isn't just about the competition. The organising committee cite it as a celebration, and it was. The parties in the player village every evening were a rare opportunity to fraternise with gamers from other disciplines, and a lovely way to relax after a day's competition.

However, the highlight of the whole event was the *Counter-Strike* final. We queued for an hour to get into the 1,000-capacity venue, and still some people were turned away, so it seemed as if joining the 15,000+ spectators on Half-Life TV would've been a better option. However, the atmosphere inside to see the Titans(DK) 13-11 victory over Spixel(SWE) was worth the crush.

Now it's time for my team to learn from our mistakes and keep training. Bring on ESWC 2005!

Ninjas will help fight the undead.

He's a real beast.

UO TURNING JAPANESE

SAMURAI EMPIRE EXPANSION PACK REVEALED

AT EA'S RECENT press day in San Francisco, the announcement of the sixth expansion pack for *Ultima Online* was primarily of interest due to the accompanying sushi and saké. Along with the oriental decorations, the clues were all there that something Eastern-flavoured was in the offing. And so it came to pass, when it was announced that number six will be called *Ultima Online: Samurai Empire*,

based in a Japanese-inspired land.

The Tokuno Islands to be precise, a mythical area populated by demons, sea creatures and the undead. It sounds a perilous place, but thankfully there are two new professions to master, namely Samurai and Ninja, as well as new skills including the ability to adopt animal form. Throw in new terrain and housing options, and *Samurai Empire* looks like combining

Samurais, early in the morning...

the European high fantasy of *Ultima Online* with the exotic culture of the Japanese. They could have warmed up the saké though.

- **Publisher:** EA
- **Developer:** Origin Systems
- **ETA:** Out Now
- **Website:** www.uo.com

STATZONE

A LOOK AT THE DATA SHAPING YOUR ONLINE WORLD

ALL DATA SUPPLIED BY:
CSPORTS.NET

TOP FIVE *BATTLEFIELD VIETNAM* MAPS (WEEK ENDING JULY 11, 2004)

PER CENT OF ALL MAPS PLAYED / NUMBER OF HRS PLAYED (Millions)

- Operation Hastings
- Operation Irving
- Operation Game Warden
- Operation Flaming Dart
- Khe Sahn

KEY | PERCENT OF ALL MAPS PLAYED | NUMBER OF HOURS PLAYED (Millions)
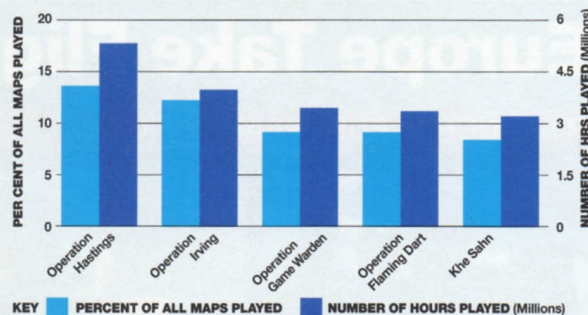
TOP FIVE *FAR CRY* MAPS (WEEK ENDING JULY 11, 2004)

PER CENT OF ALL MAPS PLAYED / NUMBER OF HRS PLAYED (Thousands)

- mp_monkeybay
- mp_airstrip
- mp_dune
- mp_jungle
- mp_freighter

KEY | PER CENT OF ALL MAPS PLAYED | NUMBER OF HOURS PLAYED (Thousands)

MOST DEDICATED *FAR CRY* PLAYERS (WEEK ENDING JULY 11, 2004)

NUMBER OF HOURS PLAYED

- GHOST — 4,239
- VADER ABRAHAM — 3,347
- BOB — 3,170
- O — 3,105
- U2 — 2,911
- TYPE R — 2,523
- LOOSER0815 — 2,484
- BLAKWOLF — 2,467
- ANGELEYES — 2,361
- KILLER — 2,340

KEY | HOURS PLAYED

WELCOME TO MY WORLD...

Daniel Dociu – Guild Wars

DANIEL DOCIU received his grounding in the arts in Romania, a schooling that he feels brings its own distinctive benefits to his role as art director for *Guild Wars*, the upcoming *Diablo* of MMOGs. "I think I bring a fresh perspective on Western art and culture as seen through the eyes of a newcomer," he surmises. "The combination of that perspective with the very diverse styles and talents of the individual artists at ArenaNet is what gives the world of *Guild Wars* its unique flavour."

The key to this flavour, for Dociu, is in the mixture of realistic nature with the trappings of a fantasy environment, but not one that's too heavily skewed towards cliché. "The difference between bad fantasy and good fantasy is a fine line that requires innovation within the established paradigms of the fantasy genre," he says. "Unfortunately, many games are either Tolkein or D&D rip-offs, or the developers are so focused on doing something different that they stray from the core elements that make fantasy cool. That's when you wind up with six-armed, tentacled beasts."

For the team at ArenaNet, the challenge has been to straddle that fine line while still retaining an individual style. "*Guild Wars* has lush fantastical landscapes and both unique and familiar foes," says Dociu, "but it's a brutal, dramatic world of human struggle. In other words, you can leave your elf boots and pixie dust at home. We're very focused on creating a realistic and believable fantasy world, so we spend a lot of time working with the terrain tools to create natural geometry that reflects a specific geography."

While the terrain owes much to real life, the design team get to play with their imaginations while making the content – although as Dociu points out, they still retain a balance. "You don't see a Lich walking around every day, so we have a lot of license to play with what it might look like. However, you do see the natural world, so we have to work harder to make our fantasy world look believable."

The end result of this balancing act is best summed up when Dociu describes a particular area of the world: "The deep swamps, for instance, are currently overrun by a creepy undead army, so they're best avoided at night. Well, actually, there's really very little difference between day and night there." More interesting than mosquitoes anyway. **PCZ**

> ## "It's a brutal, dramatic world of human struggle. In other words, you can leave your elf boots and pixie dust at home"
>
> **DANIEL DOCIU,** *GUILD WARS*

- ■ **Publisher:** NCsoft
- ■ **Developer:** ArenaNet
- ■ **ETA:** Winter 2004
- ■ **Website:** www.guildwars.com

He's just a burning hunk o' love.

"Now then, has everyone been to the toilet before we set off?"
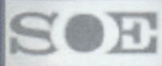
Doing the rounds in...

EVERQUEST II

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- *EverQuest II.* As in the biggest MMO sequel *ever*
- Isn't looking likely to fall by the wayside like many others recently
- Filled with content, no aimless wandering looking for things to do
- Instanced zones for focused questing

CV **SOE**

SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT

It made *EverQuest* don't you know? Here's a brief rundown of the *EQ* story so far...

2000 The saga begins as *EverQuest* launches. Within a year, it's already overtaken industry leader, *Ultima Online*, in terms of subscriber numbers.

2000 *The Ruins Of Kunark*, the first expansion pack introduces a jungle continent and a new race, the Iksar. *The Scars Of Velious* follows later that year, bringing an icy world theme.

2001 *Shadows Of Luclin* not only brings a new moonscape environment, but a much-needed graphical upgrade.

2002 Alternate realities are the theme of *The Planes Of Power* expansion.

2003 Two more expansion packs, *The Legacy Of Ykesha* and *Lost Dungeons Of Norrath* add yet more locations and the Froglok character race.

2004 *Gates Of Discord* adds even more content and revamps the skill system. Meanwhile, *Omens Of War* is pushed back to 2005 and will provide the first major graphical update for four years.

As the European tour begins for Sony's magnum opus, *Paul Presley* has a quest of his own

ON THE DVD

WHAT DON'T we already know about *EverQuest II*? This magazine alone has been charting its development since it was a mere gleam in daddy Sony's eye. Unless this is your first day in the wide world of games (in which case welcome, don't soil the rugs), you've then got about 7,090 other sources of info, not least of which being the official *EQII* website which seems to be taking great pains to keep you updated every time one of the in-house artists so much as breaks wind.

So you can understand my initial reluctance to return to the fray when the PR lass at Ubisoft phoned and urged me to keep one Friday open last July to meet up with the producer of the game in the dark and sweaty basement of an Internet gaming café in London's Shepherd's Bush. I moved out of that godforsaken hellhole several years ago, vowing never to return until the last vestiges of the area's scum had been ridden out of town like diseased wolves. So, being asked not only to re-cross those still smouldering bridges, but to do so while asking questions about a game that's been more ruthlessly chronicled than any in history was an invitation that ranked on a par with interviewing a *Big Brother* evictee a day after the tabloids had finished chewing them up so badly there'd be nothing left but quivering marrow.

Well, the Bugger's Green (as local vernacular has it) might have been the same desolate home of the

Ivan hoped his new 'man of steel' look would go down well with the ladies.

damned it ever was, but luckily, *Norrath Mk II* was looking better than I remembered it from the hands-on session I was granted months ago at an *EQ* fan convention in Vegas.

As with that trip, *EQII* producer Andy Sites was on hand to greet me as I entered the café, himself looking infinitely more refreshed than he did at the *EQ* Fan Faire. Back then, he'd been guarded, nervous almost, understandably since the public were about to get their first proper look at the game in action and no-one could really predict what the response would be. Now, with months of positive feedback having passed under that particular bridge, and at the start of the game's PR tour of Europe (including a trip around Germany that was described as "a blur of pastoral highways at 180kph and empty beer steins"), Sites is much, much happier.

"With the game in general, we found there were a lot of

people who didn't really expect to even want to play the game," he recalls. "We found that if we could just get them to sit down and try it even for an hour, it completely changed their perspective. Back at the Fan Faire, there were so many people saying they had no interest in *EverQuest II* because they didn't feel we could create a game that would be any different. We sat them down, they tried it and were like, 'Oh my god! This isn't what I was expecting at all!'

"The big thing is that change isn't necessarily bad. Just because players

have been used to doing things a certain way for five years in *EverQuest*, it doesn't mean that changing it will be a bad thing. Just getting them to try it out though, that's the key. That's the biggest thing we've had to figure out."

HARRY POTTER
The tour stars in the city of Qeynos, one of the two major gathering points for players. Immediately, we can see that the content designers have been hard at work filling the city with life. There are simple things like a little girl chasing her

cat around the city knocking stuff over, or big things like the militia marching through the city, giving speeches to the citizens. It all helps avoid the *Horizons* effect of having large expanses with nothing in.

"Actually, when we first started making the game we had planned on this grand world, this great expanse of space," Sites admits. "We started planning this giant dungeon, but discovered that it's no fun running for 15 minutes and not finding anything. So we ended up pulling the size and

> ## "When people walk by the larger structures, they'll be able to see who the badass guilds are"
> **ANDY SITES** PRODUCER, *EVERQUEST II*

Waspercise: "And up two-three-four, down two-three-four…"

GADGET CORNER

SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT MAY HAVE THE VIDEO HARDWARE KINGS IN ITS CORNER, BUT HOW ABOUT OTHER PERIPHERALS?

There have been a lot of advancements in the world of online gaming during the five years *EverQuest* has been running. Will things like voice communication software be utilised? "We're going to be allowing voice comms, although we haven't fully integrated it yet," replies Sites. "The only problem we see with it is with the players, obviously. With real voices, you'll interact with a female wood elf and quickly realise it's a 45-year-old guy. It's kind of immersion-breaking."

"Hello. My name's Frank from Grimsby and I'll be your fantasy figure for the night."

scope in and focusing on the content in the different areas. That's where we're at right now: players are walking through the city and having characters calling out to them, based on what they've done and what quests they can do, instead of having to run for 10-15 minutes at a time just to try and find something to do."

There are over 30 members of the *EQII* team whose sole responsibility is to add content to areas such as this. Sites walks over to a group of four magic students on a bridge outside a tower, being taught basic spellcasting by an older tutor. The students swirl their wands around causing light to swoop around them, except for one small lad who gets it wrong and gets knocked to the floor by lightning. The others laugh and the tutor calls for order and resumes teaching. Sites explains that the misfire is a random occurrence and can happen to any of the students. "It helps liven things up," he grins, obviously happy with the work.

JUST THE SUN RISING

We move on to the common lands, the areas outside the main cities. A spot of text-input wizardry and Sites changes the time from gloomy twilight to daybreak, with the sun rising and gleaming off the mountain-tops.

"This is the first major outdoor region outside of Freeport," he says. "You can see the floating citadel where Lucan D'Lere, the overlord of the city lives. The area is roughly 4x5kms."

That's slightly smaller than the original *EverQuest*, but as Sites quickly points out, Sony has had five years worth of expansion to play with. "Like *Kunark*," he points out. "That has huge, empty zones, simply because we didn't have the ability to populate them completely back then. *EQII* has to have slightly smaller areas, but lots, lots more content in them."

ELEPHANT-ASTIC

Our exploration stumbles into a herd of elephants grazing by a water pool. Adults and babies, although I couldn't tell if they were African or Indian. Being a fantasy world, I'd like to imagine they're some sort of cross between the two. With wings.

"These elephants would destroy me if I attacked," Sites says, backing away quickly. "These are all one encounter – if I click on one it highlights all of them, indicating to the player that if you attack one, they all attack you back."

The tour continues through the sewers of Qeynos. Blobs, slimes, bats and icky things are everywhere. The catacombs are a series of dungeons that are underneath both cities, linking one part to another: a sort of London Underground, but with less terrifying rats.

Sites describes how the cities are structured. "They both have 18 zones, each consisting of the town centre and the surrounding villages and neighbourhoods. This is where you start out and where each player has his or her own apartment."

These houses are given out automatically to each new player? "Right. When you create a character, you're given a little one- or two-room apartment within

WHEN IT'S DONE

SO WHEN IS 'FINISHED' REALLY FINISHED?

What criteria do Sites and the team use to determine when the refining process ends and the doors can open? "When the game is fun," he says matter-of-factly. "We have in-game polling forms that ask about your experience, ratings on a scale of one to ten. When we start getting those back with consistently high numbers, that's when we'll consider ourselves close

Not yet, my hair isn't ready.

to being able to ship the game. But it *is* subjective. This is going to be the game that's the sequel to the game that made the company what it is today. So we want it to be a worthy successor to *EverQuest*."

If those planks drift apart, I hate to think of the consequences...

which you can place furniture, hang stuff on the walls and generally customise the interior. When you get into a larger guild or group and start pooling your money, you can then buy larger structures within the actual city, decorated with your guild's emblems. When people walk by, they'll be able to see who the badass guilds are."

NPC ZONE

More text wizardry and we move on to Cazic-Thule, an instanced zone area dominated by a big ol' dragon.

"This was one of the zones we had in *EQ* that's made it over," Sites points out. "To get to this specific part of the area, a group has to perform a specific quest, kill a specific mob (*EQ*-speak for monster) and get a key. Once they do, the zone spawns dynamically on the server and those players are the only

ones inside. What this allows us to do is focus all the content and all the action right on that group, because we know there won't be some other group of players wandering in from the other side or anything."

The AI in the area wasn't fully operational as yet, but Sites explains how the players would battle through smaller foes to get to the main courtyard, how the large dragon would then fly in, address the players then start trying to burn them to a crisp. The idea is that by restricting the zone only to the players who unlock it, all this action can be planned out in advance to provide the best experience.

"That's the best thing about instanced zones," he enthuses. "You get the best of both worlds. A massively multiplayer game, plus the benefits of the scripting and focusing abilities of a single-player game."

The zones are planned in advance and left to the players. How possible is it for the team on the server-side to jump into zones when players enter them and direct the NPC's actions on-the-fly, in a sort of 'dungeon master' role?

Sites sucks on a thoughtful tooth for a moment then starts to theorise: "We can do that, although mostly the zones are scripted in such a way as to be completely self-contained and capable

of handling things. Once everything has been tested and refined, very rarely will we need to have people go in and watch the players and change things on-the-fly. Still, we have that option at our disposal if we need it."

True to form, the monsters kill him while we're talking, which seems as good a point as any to wrap things up for the in-game tour, thank all involved and take my leave.

Back outside, it's started raining and I can't help but wonder what Sites and his team could do with the Bush given five years, a few cheat codes and a fire-breathing dragon. Maybe I could destroy those bridges once and for all? **PCZ**
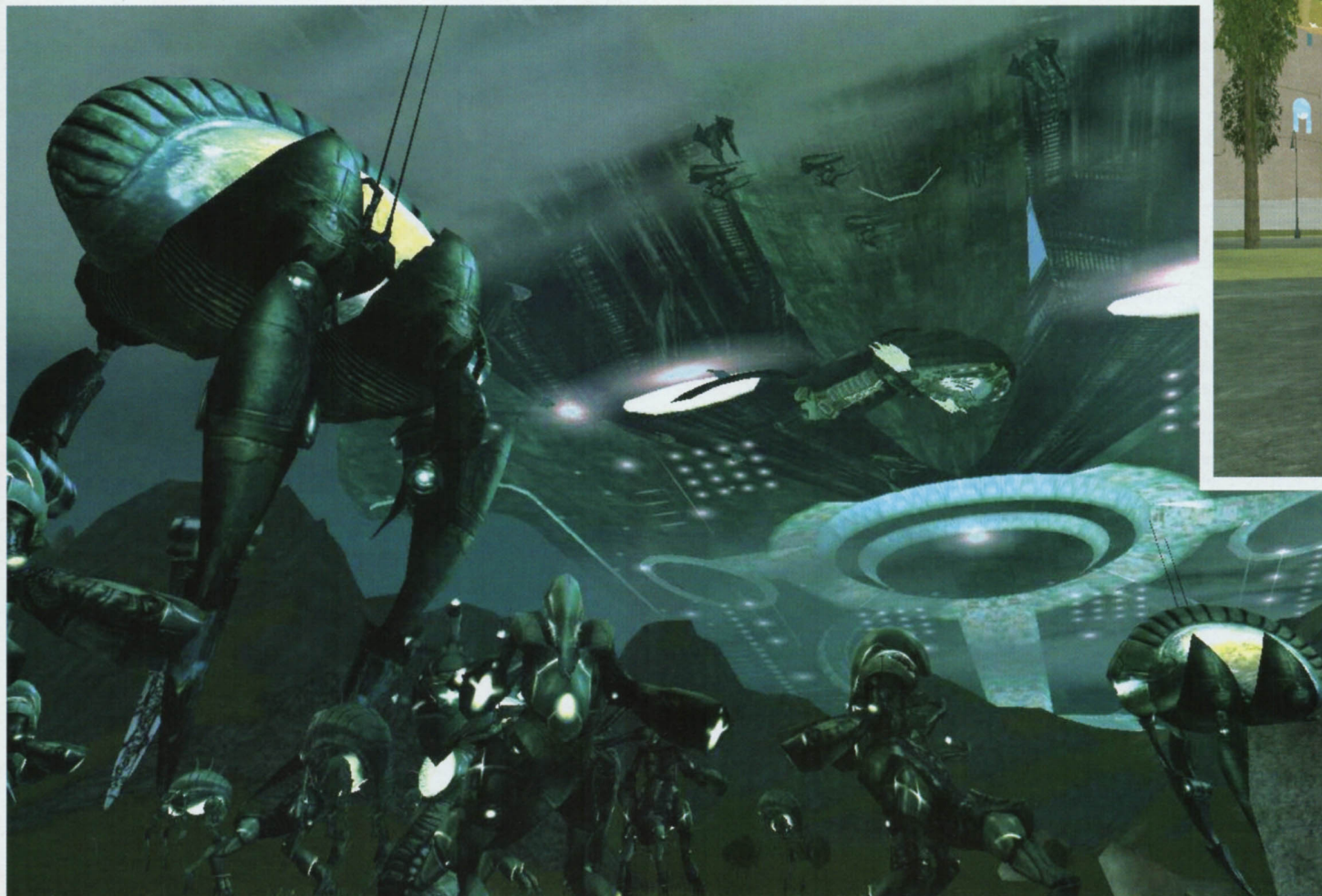
Starry, starry night...

Another chapter in the other love that dare not speak its name...

"No dinner till you've finished training to be a cold-blooded killer."

We reckon this would even scare the shit out of Giger.

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Funcom
PUBLISHER Funcom
WEBSITE www.anarchyonline.com
ETA September

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Fast-paced action with little downtime
- Redefines the conflicts between Omni-Tek and the Clans
- Player towns and housing
- Alien technologies reward the bravest players

CV FUNCOM

FUNCOM

As well as being a beautiful land free of lions and tigers, Norway is also home to this pre-eminent European MMOG developer. Starting in 1993, Funcom has dabbled in everything from complete virtual worlds to multiplayer *Backgammon*...

1994 *A Dinosaur's Tale* gives the team a grounding in the world of 'kid's games'.

1998 Funcom *Poker* adds to the burgeoning online gaming roster of Funcom *Backgammon*, Funcom *Hearts* and Funcom *Spades*.

2000 *Anarchy Online* begins beta testing.

2001 *AO* launches with the world's first free-trial offer for potential subscribers.

2003 *AO: Shadowlands* is released – less an expansion pack, more a whole new game.

Send the buggers back...

ANARCHY ONLINE: ALIEN INVASION

Not a searing indictment into UK immigration policy, but the latest expansion for the longest running sci-fi MMOG of all. *Paul Presley* **checks the passports**

THERE ARE certain unwritten rules within this games industry of ours, one of which states that expansion packs for popular games should never outshine the original title. A few extra maps, a couple of new weapons, maybe a graphics upgrade if the original was old enough. But just so long as the original game retains its allure and doesn't get outfoxed by the younger upstart.

Trouble is, nobody told Funcom. *Anarchy Online: Shadowlands* was such a monster of a game expansion that most observers took it for a full-on new game in its own right. Which naturally means that any subsequent expansion for the popular sci-fi MMOG might end up suffering.

"I think *Shadowlands* raised the bar considerably," admits Marius Enge,

director of the project. "It wasn't just about 'more of the same', it was definitely a 'take it to the next level' endeavour. With all the additions, both in terms of gameplay and character development, *Shadowlands* far exceeded anything I've seen from other MMOG expansions."

GIRL FROM MARS

So how can the latest expansion, *Alien Invasion*, possibly hope to live up to the expectations Funcom has inadvertently made for itself? Enge doesn't seem perturbed. "*Shadowlands* is a metaphysical universe and the aliens don't have access to this universe, at least not yet," he points out. "The scale of *Shadowlands* was one of the reasons we didn't feel we needed to add more land
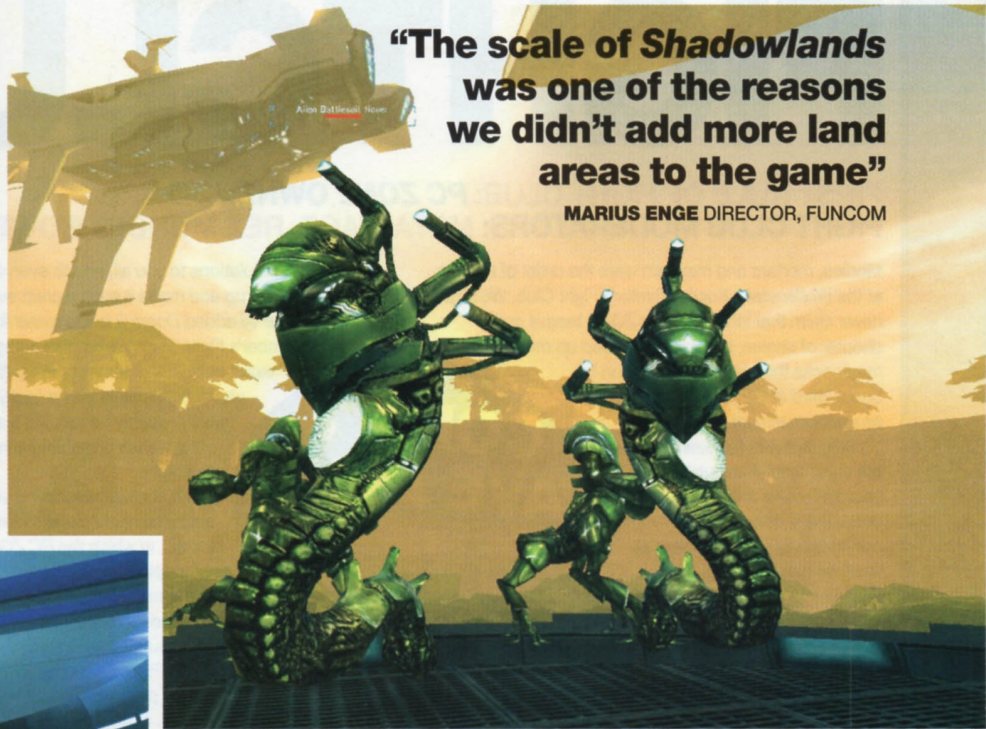
areas with monsters and so on into the game. We felt that the players had enormous areas still to explore and were very conscious of the scale. I'm confident we made the right choices in designing *Alien Invasion* in relation to this."

You already know all about the content of *Alien Invasion* (if not, where have you been)? A quick summary: a mystery alien race invading planet Rubi-ka, all inhabitants under fire regardless of affiliation, player cities that can now be built to fend them off and add to the feelings of 'community', all new combat, skills, perks and rewards up for grabs, plus new clothes. What's not yet been made clear is where the concepts have all originated.

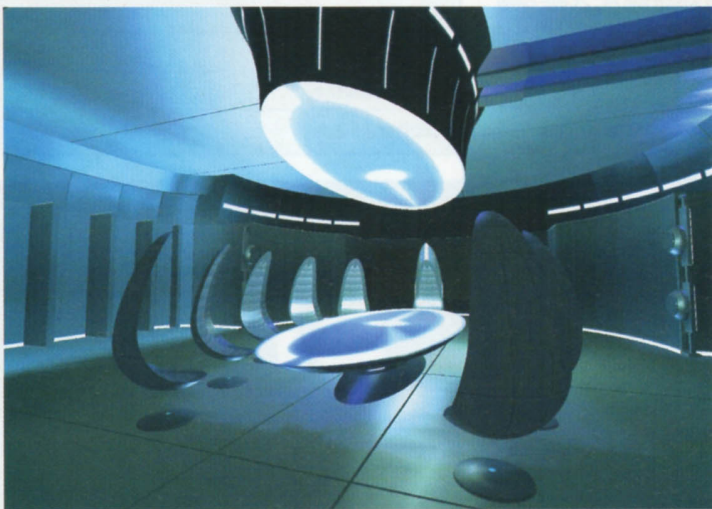Another unwritten rule is that expansion packs are usually a depository

Everybody get down tonight.

Attack of the mecha-seahorses.

The *PC ZONE* meeting room. A happy place.

for all the rough ideas and half-baked plans that wouldn't fit into the game at the time of release.

Enge, on the other hand, is insistent that *Alien Invasion* has been planned from the off. "The story aspects and the reason the aliens are coming is something we've planned for a very long time. There will always, of course, be some additional twists and turns we haven't initially thought of, but the high goal and happenings of the story is planned out many years in advance."

What excites Enge more though, is where *Alien Invasion* will take *AO* in the future. "What turn storywise *AO* will take after *Alien Invasion* is something that's mainly left to the players," he says. "Will the different factions of Clans and Omnis work together against the mutual threat or will they still continue to fight each other? This is something I'm excited about – the player reactions to this. What happens here determines what will happen in the *AO* universe to a large extent."

That future will certainly be revolving around the aliens for the foreseeable future at any rate. *Alien Invasion* isn't being set up as a simple shot of temporary adrenalin until another

Shadowlands arrives. "It will definitely be a permanent addition to *AO*," confirms Enge. "The aliens will keep attacking as long as the players build and use houses. *Alien Invasion* will probably evolve later on though. It just doesn't make sense having aliens attacking day out and day in for several years. As with all MMOGs, *Alien Invasion* and *Anarchy Online* will still continue to evolve."

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY!
It's this evolutionary nature that's made *Anarchy Online* the game that was celebrating a third anniversary a month ago. Quite an achievement when you consider that these days, it's a struggle to even get a decent MMOG launched.

"I think *AO* has changed tremendously since the initial blueprint," explains Enge of the game's appeal. "It's evolved like a good MMOG should and is a more fun game to play as a result. During the three years *AO* has been live, we've always taken pride in listening to the player base for their feedback and suggestions, and there have been some major parts

of *AO* that have been heavily influenced. We expected the majority of the changes and planned for them on the grand-scale, but players continue to add things to their wishlist that were not expected."

Meanwhile, the Norwegian team is busy planning out the content to follow *Alien Invasion* – the 'live' team work about a year ahead in terms of expansions. Enge admits that of this content, about 70 per cent is tightly planned, while the remaining 30 per cent evolves organically as the game world continues to grow. Quite what will happen to that ratio once the aliens arrive is anyone's guess, but the good money is on controlled chaos of the highest and most entertaining order. Watch the skies at the start of September to find out. [PCZ]

Don't be fooled. It's 29,475AD, not 1920.
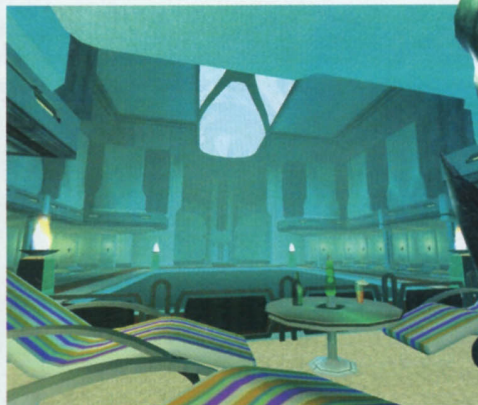
Typical: the German servers are the first to the deckchairs.

FIGHT CLUB

FIRST RULE OF FIGHT CLUB: *PC ZONE* OWNZ JØØ
FIGHT CLUB MODERATORS: METALFACE, REX MUNDI & GOWERLY

Medics, mortars and mayhem were the order of the day at the *Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory* Fight Club. We could never claim that *W:ET* was the *ZONE* team's online shooter of choice, but to say we used up more medipacks than an average day on the burns ward at Guy's Hospital would be an understatement.

Still, as shells fell down around our ears, cries of anguish were heard all round and the scores of our many, many (many) opponents grew ever higher, at least we had a ripping old time of it. Few games are as fast-moving as *W:ET* as the constant ebb and flow of the frontline showed all too clearly.

The *ZONE* boys were well represented, with Prezzer, Will, JimLad, Filby and admins Rex Mundi and Gowerly dying for the cause. Star readers included damo, Yuki, Mr RED Sky & Mr BLUE Sky, Gaz and nC.diss. Our heartiest congratulations to you all, and to everyone else who showed up and made it such a great evening.

■ You'll see we've added *Doom 3* to the roster for November's Fight Club. We're still ironing out the exact specifics of that match-up (the four-player limit makes things tricky), but we'll probably be running a series of two-on-two matches throughout the night.

■ Next issue, we'll bring you the outcome of our Super Summer Special, in which the *PC ZONE* crew were hopping from one game to another like mad kangaroos on burning sand. Heaven knows how it'll turn out, but you can guarantee it'll be an experience like no other.

■ As always, to take part in Fight Club or to find the connection details for all our public game servers, just aim your Web browser sights at www.zonegames.co.uk where all shall be revealed. Let's get ready to rumble!

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
Michael Filby	Parallax

More Nazi gold liberated.

Gaz fires his vindaloo gun.

Prezzer gets sand in between his toes.

Will takes a breather.

Fraggin' in the rain, just fraggin' in the rain...

UPCOMING FIGHT CLUB EVENTS

THURSDAY SEPTEMBER 9
6.30pm – 9.00pm
UT 2004

THURSDAY OCTOBER 7
6.30pm – 9.00pm
Joint Operations – Typhoon Rising

THURSDAY NOVEMBER 4
6.30pm – 9.00pm
Doom 3

ZONECHAT

WORSE THAN A COUPLE OF OLD DEARS, IT'S…

YOU CAN always rely on a discussion about the merits of game saves to spark debate, and this month's *ZONE* Chat was no exception. An innocent question from Prezzer on the #pcz channel in a way not seen since the 'Who's Your Favourite *ZONE* Writer' poll on the Dear Wandy site.

But the theme of the night was heroes, spurred on by the competition to win a copy of *Soldiers: Heroes Of World War II* (congratulations to mysTheAvatar on scooping the prize). Aside from the inevitable brown-nosing towards the *ZONE* crew, the biggest revelation came about when Prezzer admitted to shopping at Sainsbury's (as opposed to having everything hand-delivered from Harrods), lowering his hero worship factor a point or two and causing a swing towards Will.

ZONE Chat returns on September 8, at the usual time of 5-7pm in the #pcz channel on Quakenet IRC. No doubt *Doom 3* will be the hottest topic of conversation, and we'll be looking to find out your own views on the latest magnum opus from id Software. Plus,

The Prezzer & Will Show
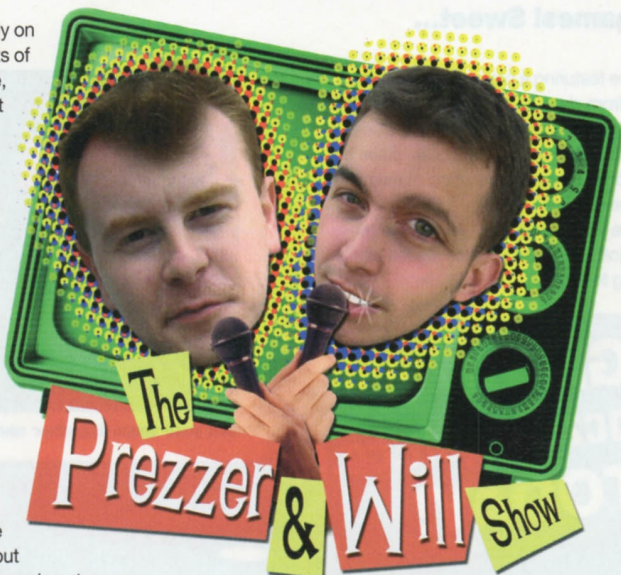
WEDNESDAY SEPTEMBER 8 5.00PM – 7.00PM

we'll be wanting you to tell us who's going to be sitting atop the shooter pile when the year ends. It's simple enough to join in. Just grab a copy of mIRC from www.mirc.com, log on to irc.uk.quakenet.org and type /join #pcz to enter the *PC ZONE* channel. Once there, you'll find us speaking forth unto the masses and answering your questions as only we can. Don't be shy now – we're looking forward to seeing you there.

LAN ROVER

A LAN OF HOPE AND GLORY WITH STEVE 'SCALPER' RANDALL…

■ September 3-5 finds www.clanlan.net hosting its fourth event of the year at TS Scimitar, St Helens, Merseyside. The cost is a measly £16 for 35 players.
■ www.uk-clan.co.uk is at the Millennium Centre, Red Lodge, Suffolk from 12pm on August 28 to 12pm on August 29. It'll set you back £20 per player to attend, although squad organisers of five players or more go FREE. There's a maximum of 100 slots, so you best hurry.
■ www.scotlanparty.com also has 100 places at its August 20-22 event in Falkirk's Dobby Hall. £25 a head is the deal.
■ A slightly cheaper £15 a head for three days sees the Llamalan 4 event on September 3. Details are at llamalan.llamastats.co.uk, but it caters for 35 players in a scout hall in Walderslade, Chatham. I doubt there's a link to Jeff 'Llamasoft' Minter, so don't expect to see him there. Besides, he should be too busy finishing *Unity*. Check out www.lionhead.com/unity for more information about his latest project.
■ September 17-19 sees 80 eager LANners teaming up at the Gosforth Residents Association Hall in Christon Road, South Gosforth, Newcastle at the latest www.planetfrag.co.uk event. Priced at just £22 for the three days, it's good value.
■ A quick shout out to the Insomnia boys and girls, hosting the latest in the ever-popular

i-series from August 27-30. i21 takes place at the usual Newbury Racecourse location and has space for 600 players. Details at www.multiplay.co.uk.
■ Finally, I'll be hosting my first 50-person event in September – I'm currently exploring venues and will give more details next month. Or if you want to be sure of a place, visit my website at www.gglan.co.uk.
■ If you want your party to feature here, drop me a line, with at least two months advance notice, the details of numbers, costs and location at scalper@gglan.co.uk. Scalper out.

LLAMALAN 2004

You'll be spitting mad if you miss Llamalan.

GUILDHALL

▲ FRAG TOGETHER, RIGHT NOW, OVER ME

Fed up playing games all on your lonesome? Wish you could find a tight-knit gang of like-minded souls to share the spoils of your virtual wars? Guildhall is here to help. From five-man clans to 100-strong guilds, this is the place to find your gaming life partners. Be it *Enemy Territory* or *EverQuest*, you'll find them here…

CLAN Wallbanged
CONTACT #wallbanged
WEBSITE coming soon
MAIN GAME *Counter-Strike*
DETAILS We're a skilled clan seeking a last member. You must be a highly skilled/well-known player who's very active to play clan wars: if not, then don't apply. You must be able to attend LANs across the UK. Also, you must have clan experience and be over 16 years old.

CLAN Outcasters
CONTACT Blagg3r (blagg3r@hotmail.com)
WEBSITE outcasters.planetsidestuff.net
MAIN GAME *PlanetSide* (Terran Republic)
DETAILS We're the number one Terran Republic outfit on Werner, with over 300 members, but are always looking for good team players – from rookies to veterans. We run platoons all day and night and use TeamSpeak, but that's not mandatory. Join the TR today. Loyalty till death…

CLAN Hells Gazelles
CONTACT tomnuttal2002@yahoo.co.uk
WEBSITE www.angelfire.com/games5/hellsgazelles/index.htm
MAIN GAME *IL-2 Sturmovik AEP*
DETAILS Like playing flight sims but put off by huge manuals? Put off by propellerheads taunting you on incorrect use of your flaps? Well come on down to the Hells Gazelles. We're an online squadron with members from all over the world who enjoy each other in aptly named 'blastathons'.

CLAN =DD= (Deadly Dozen)
CONTACT aphexbgd@hotmail.com
WEBSITE www.deadly-dozen.co.uk
MAIN GAME *Battlefield Vietnam, Call Of Duty*
DETAILS We're currently looking for dedicated players to join the ranks of =DD=. We're a multi-national clan with a *COD* side which is currently no.1 in CB. We need experienced players of 16 years and over, willing to be active on our *BF* server and on Teamspeak.

CLAN WWSI (we were soldiers)
CONTACT koolkatbinky@hotmail.com
WEBSITE www.wws-clan.com
MAIN GAME *Battlefield 1942, Battlefield Vietnam*
DETAILS WWSI is a new clan to the *Vietnam* scene, but most of our members have years of experience playing in clans. WWSI is currently in the Clanbase UK league for *Battlefield 1942* and the European league for *BF Vietnam*. WWSI is also looking for any friendly matches and is recruiting new members for both *Vietnam* and *BF1942*.

CLAN Battlefield Mercenaries
CONTACT mmenglishmuffin@hotmail.com
WEBSITE www.bfmercs.com
MAIN GAME *Battlefield 1942, Battlefield Vietnam*
DETAILS We're an old *BF1942* clan that's expanded to *BFV*. We've recently joined the Enemy Down ladder and have clan wars lined up. We're a friendly but hardcore fighting unit with players from around the UK and Europe and we need more experienced mercenaries for our *Battlefield Vietnam* team.

To feature in Guildhall, simply send your details and no more than 50 words describing your group to: online.zone@pczone.co.uk (subject line: GUILDHALL), or to Guildhall, *PC ZONE*, 9 Dallington Street, London EC1V 0BQ.

PCZONE READERS' CHALLENGE

WIN BIG PRIZES!!

Prizes galore can be yours, just for playing games! Sweet...

THE PCZRC is officially underway, with the three first-month tournaments filling up with players and showing no mercy to the weak. The games – 5v5 CTF *UT2004* and *Quake III* matches, and one-on-one *Painkiller* knockouts – are pitting the best our wonderful readership can offer against each other in a no-holds-barred battle to win the top prizes. At the time of writing, the first month's action is still taking place and we'll have a full list of results, winners and prizes for you next issue.

And what prizes they are! Remember, the winners and runners-up will be sharing a first-month prize fund containing Radeon 9600 graphics cards, Sound Blaster Audigy 2 soundcards, Logitech performance mice, MSI motherboards and loads more! All for playing games online. You can't ask for better value!

The rules are simple. To take part, all you have to do is head over to www.pczone.jolt.co.uk and sign you or your team up to one of the three events by clicking on the 'Registration' button. Simple. Easy. No fuss, no bother. The site has a full list of competitors, matches and schedules, as well as a forum for each game, there for you to post gloating victory cries for the winners and excuses about dodgy mice for the vanquished.

But what if *Quake III*, *Painkiller* or *UT2004* aren't your particular cup of gaming tea? No need to worry. Each month, we'll be featuring a new roster of games to try your hand in, from classics such as *Medal Of Honor* to the latest and greatest such as (hopefully) *Doom 3*. Keep tuning into www.pczone.jolt.co.uk to see a complete list of what games are being played and what prizes are on offer.

So what are you waiting for? Get on over to www.pczone.jolt.co.uk, get yourself signed up for action and frag to win!

SIGN UP AT www.pczone.jolt.co.uk TODAY!

Get your team together and get it on in *UT2004*.

One-on-one deathmatches with *Painkiller*.

The slaughter continues in *Quake*.

READERS' CHALLENGE IS PROUDLY SPONSORED BY THE FOLLOWING COMPANIES

E-SPORTING LIFE

All the latest news from the wide, wide world of professional gaming. Your man at the E-Sports desk – *Philip Wride*

WELCOME E-Sports fans! This last month has seen a number of UK qualifiers taking place, with many of the nation's top *Counter-Strike* teams battling it out. The E-Sports World Cup Qualifiers were held at the Magna Centre in Sheffield and produced an unexpected winner in the form of =WOLF=. The team went on to represent the UK at the Grand Finals event held in Poitiers, France, but sadly couldn't manage to battle past the group stage. Players for *Warcraft III: The Frozen Throne* and *Pro Evo Soccer* were also sent to France to take part in the other competitions but again, failed to make it past the group stage.

Also taking place last month were the CPL UK qualifiers, which witnessed top teams from right across Europe raining down on Oxford, hoping to win a free trip to the CPL Summer Finals in Dallas, USA. In the end, the final was between the UK number one – 4Kings.Intel – and the French powerhouse, GoodGame. The closely-fought match went into overtime and eventually finished with a 16-13 victory

The top team in the UK, 4Kings.Intel, battle it out in a hard-fought fight.

for GoodGame. GameFrontier did a fantastic job hosting both events and has announced it's looking to continue running UK qualifiers in the future.

Having completed the qualifiers, the UK teams attending the CPL Summer event have been continuing their preparation for the event. The UK favourite, 4Kings.Intel has been practising for a number of weeks in Swansea, honing skills and working on tactics. As we write, there's only one week to go before the finals kick off in Dallas and the whole UK community is apprehensive about how our representatives will fare.

In other news, a new top team has risen in the UK *Call Of Duty* scene in the form of Levitation. So far, it's fought off all contenders in the recent *COD*-Nation Summer Cup in order to progress to the Grand Final. Top European *BF1942* team Dignitas has also had some good news this month, with the team becoming a registered business and bringing in support from major hardware manufacturer Abit. All in all, these are good times for UK E-Sports. Long may it continue.

GoodGame, the eventual winners of the CPL UK qualifiers.

Graphics aren't bad, but the lack of anti-aliasing doesn't help.

All sides are catered for.

Tracers at sunset.

If the rocket fails, try the hypno-ray.

The Japanese Ki61 is a virtual carbon-copy of the German Bf109.

ACES HIGH

ON THE DVD

■ $14.95 a month | Dev: High Tech Creations |
Pub: High Tech Creations | ETA: Out Now | www.hitechcreations.com

REQUIRES PIII 850MHz, 64MB RAM, 32MB 3D Card, 56k modem
DESIRES P4 1.4MHz, 512MB RAM, 128MB 3D card, broadband connection, joystick (with rudder and throttle controls)

The flight sim is dead – long live the flight sim! *Daniel Emery*
bastardises the death of Louis XIV while reaching for the sky...

ACES HIGH is pretty much the illegitimate love child of *WarBirds*. Both have the same basic premise: beat your opponents into submission using a mix of sheer weight of numbers and overwhelming firepower. But the raison d'être of *Aces High* is dogfighting. Pure, unadulterated furballing (to coin a phrase). While *WarBirds* has gone down the pure realism road, *Aces High* still has long-range icons and a virtual in-flight radar, so you can home in on the action fast. While purists may cry foul, it cuts down on pointless map roaming: a plus in our book.

The game's come a long way since it's inception two years

ago. The developer has dispensed with the rather surreal chess-set strategy menu, although there's still the three-way fight between the Bishops, Knights and Rooks. There have also been numerous aircraft updates and the addition of ground vehicles.

GO GET IT!

Behind the obvious aerial combat, there's a rather complex strategy model at work in *Aces High*. Airfields, vehicle depots and harbours can all be captured, usually with the judicial use of parachutists, although you can roll in a

halftrack packed with squaddies to do the job.

Coupled with this are targets of opportunity. These cannot be captured, but destroying them gives you a strategic advantage. These include cities, ammo factories, fuel depots, radar stations and the like. Knocking out a fuel depot can limit how much petrol is available to enemy fighters. However, the enemy can drop supplies in, so even if you've blown your foe into the Dark Ages, he's still capable of putting up a fight.

While the action will get your adrenalin flowing, the actual look and feel of the game is a bit old

hat. Compared to the stunning *IL-2 Sturmovik*, *Aces High* looks like something from a bygone age. True, the aircraft models look fairly true to life and the cloud effects have come a long way in recent updates, but you always feel like you're playing a computer game, unlike *Lock On* and *IL-2* where there are occasions when you feel as if you're really flying.

WHAT'S THAT NOISE?

So the visuals are somewhat lacking, but there's a vast array of new whistles and bells which add to the game. Air raid sirens sound when a runway is attacked and anti-aircraft shells burst with a satisfying pop (and leave a nice puff of smoke near your aircraft too). Plus, if you're unfortunate enough to get shot up, the plane and cockpit show signs of damage.

As a flight sim, we'd have to say that *Aces High* is above average. As a massively multiplayer flight sim, it's the best on the market. The price isn't extortionate and there's a free two-week trial without needing your credit card details anyway. If only all games were like this. **PCZ**

INPERSPECTIVE

WARBIRDS 2004
Reviewed Issue 144, Score 75%
Still soldering on after all these years. Sadly, the game's a victory of style over content – despite having some great-looking aircraft, there are big issues with the controls and more often than not, the arenas are devoid of players.

IL-2: FORGOTTEN BATTLES
Reviewed Issue 128, Score 92%
Strictly speaking, *IL-2* isn't a massively multiplayer flight sim – it's limited to a 32-player ceiling – but it's still the benchmark that all other flight sims are measured by. Great graphics, good flight models and a wide choice of aircraft.

"As a flight sim it's above average. As a massively multiplayer flight sim, it's the best on the market"

PCZONE VERDICT

✔ Huge arenas
✔ Accurate physics
✔ Addictive gameplay
✘ Huge learning curve
✘ Graphics starting to look dated

85

A triumph of content over style

Naval units also need a subscription.

You need to subscribe to experience all the maps.

Chess was never like ~~~ this.

A good community adds to things.

MASSIVE ASSAULT NETWORK

■ $6.95 a month | Pub: Wargaming.net | Dev: Wargaming.net
| ETA: Out Now | www.massiveassaultnetwork.com

REQUIRES PII 600MHz, 256MB RAM, 32MB 3D card, modem
DESIRES PIII 1.0GHz, 512MB RAM, 64MB 3D card, broadband or cable Internet connection

Nice Ice Magic™ mountain.

It's not massive – neither is *Richie Shoemaker*

BILLED as 'a hardcore online strategy game' (a turn-based one at that), it would be easy to assume that *Massive Assault Network* is something of an unwieldy beast, packed full of unfathomable figures and statistics only the serious-minded armchair generals could decipher. But in fact, despite the

barely camouflaged hex' tiles that overlay each map, *MAN* is a simple game to learn and master, and one that's nowhere near as ponderous as its developer would have you believe.

The aim, of course, is to eliminate your enemy, which is accomplished by capturing the capital cities of each of his provinces and eliminating his forces. The trick is, at the beginning of the game you're not sure which of the 12 or so bordered zones are your foe's until they're declared by him

is an enemy state as well. *Massive Assault Network* has no resource management. You simply receive an income for each of your territories – unless an enemy unit is encamped within its borders. The money, as you'd expect, is used to acquire new units, ranging from the cheap-but-effective light armoured vehicles to expensive mech-like walkers, seaborne battleships and tactical bombers. The spread of units is rather thin (there are essentially just 13 varieties), but the

and check to see if your opponents have made their turn, or seek and accept new challengers. The game server notifies you of any events by email if you wish, so waiting around is not a problem . The interface also includes a chat function, so if you do want to hang around, at least the wait won't be too boring.

TRIAL AND ERROR
The 3D graphics in *MAN* are decent enough but hardly what you'd call spectacular, and the unit designs are somewhat lacking in style or originality. As for the game – well, it's an enjoyable diversion from the norm, yet despite the fact the *Risk*-meets-chess gameplay is tactical and challenging, the games seem to follow a similar pattern and the lustre quickly fades after a dense play session.

As a game, *MAN* is certainly worth checking out. The trial

version may feature only a single map, but you can enjoy it for as long as you like. Eventually, you may find the mechanics are too simplistic to get any real long-term enjoyment from. As a consequence of this, there's little incentive for you to invest in a lengthy *Massive Assault Network* subscription. **PCZ**

INPERSPECTIVE

LASER SQUAD NEMESIS
Reviewed Issue 135, Score 87%
Admittedly we haven't played much *LSN* for a while, but the simultaneous turn-based play makes for a much more tactical email game than *Massive Assault Network*. It hasn't lost any of its B-movie charm either.

TIME OF DEFIANCE
Reviewed Issue 137, Score 66%
Similar in that it's an RTS played online, although the big difference is that *TOD* is real-time, and played among giant floating rocks in the sky. But otherwise it's a similar sort of strategic deal.

"*Massive Assault Network* is nowhere near as ponderous as its developer believes"

deploying his units. Blitz into a neutral country and you're almost guaranteed victory, until you discover too late that your other neighbour – the one you left no defences against –

mechanics of the game are so simple and random factor-free that you hardly notice.

The game itself is played out similarly to a play-by-email game, in that you simply log in

PCZONE VERDICT

✓ Simple, well-balanced gameplay
✓ Helpful community
✓ Generous trial version
✗ Subscribing doesn't add too many benefits
✗ Generic and unspectacular graphics

69

Refreshingly undemanding, but in the end, too simple

CARBALL V2.0

SIZE 14MB **REQUIRES** Full version of *UT2004*

nzue.skankyflat.net/cb/home.htm

TOTAL CONVERSION

Cars plus football is enough to get *Tony Lamb* all revved up

That's never crossed the line ref!

The vehicular equivalent of Roy Keane. Scary.

Told you that penalty spot was dodgy.

CARBALL brings a new gametype to *UT2004* that's rather topical following our traditional footballing defeat at the hands of Johnny Foreigner. Assuming that we can't kick footballs into nets, the *CarBall* team have added cars into the mix to create a melee of burning rubber, screaming engines and roaring crowds. Cars plus football equals fun, apparently.

The objective of *CarBall* is simple. You use your buggy to punt the ball into the opposing teams' goal, and along the way you might be able to punt a few other players into oblivion too.
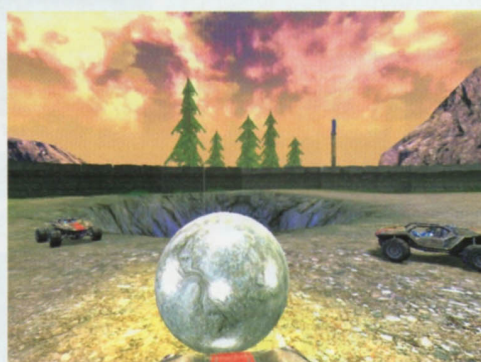
Obviously, the team with the most points wins.

However, *CarBall* tweaks the rules a bit. There can be more than one goal for each team, and knocking the ball into one of the 'random' goals can award a point to either side, so they're best left alone. The Stunt mutator is permanently applied making loony driving de rigueur, and a selection of power-ups and other goodies are dotted around to make life interesting.

However, *CarBall* is hindered by a lack of bots – they're just too dumb to drive a car and hit a ball at the same time, which is a shame. This limits *CarBall* to the LAN environment, or online if you can find a server – not an easy task. Maps and skins are good though, and gameplay is frantic, so it's worth persevering – providing others do too.

PCZONE VERDICT **71**

Quarter-finals at best

UNWHEEL V3.0

SIZE 132MB **REQUIRES** Full version of *UT2004*

unwheel.beyondunreal.com

TOTAL CONVERSION

PCZONE Z ESSENTIAL

Tony Lamb gets a little race-y

Big, but it handles like a pig.

Of course, that camshaft is totally out of alignment.

Not the usual car flag.

UNWHEEL is a top-class, balls-out, hairy-chested driving mod with an emphasis on fun. The premise is racing, pure and simple. It's all about choosing your vehicle, hopping in and mashing the loud pedal to the floor to go as fast as you can. Winning is everything. Second place is pants.

Now, if that isn't enough to whet your appetite, how about having a multitude of highly detailed vehicles ranging from nippy sports cars to ground-shaking earth-mover trucks?

How about being able to choose from enough well-designed maps to keep even the most ambitious crazy driver happy? And how about having more thrills and spills than playing chicken on the M25? Well, *UnWheel* offers all of the above.

It's one of the best-developed and well thought-out mods of any kind for *UT2004*, and it's a real thrill to play.

There are no less than six gameplay modes to try. These range from the standard lap-based thrash, to a flag-return CTF variant, 'roam' racing where you score points by going over bonus pick-ups and even a mode similar to the *CarBall* mod, where a beach ball has to be knocked into a goal to score. Talk about variety. Plus, you can choose any vehicle for any race, choose your skin, use headlights, handbrake and any of 100 other tweaks. *UnWheel* is well worth taking for a spin.

PCZONE VERDICT **85**

Wheely good (sorry)

CLONE BANDITS V1.0

SIZE 51MB **REQUIRES** Full version of *UT2004*
www.demiurgestudios.com   **TOTAL CONVERSION**

Tony Lamb is well aware it's a mad world...

CLONE BANDITS isn't a vehicles mod, but an enjoyable dose of lunacy that features some cracking vehicles. Loosely based around CTF gameplay, the background to *CB* is a *Mad Max*-style post-apocalyptic world in which two teams of clones (including you) are fighting for survival. Each team has its own reserve of genetic 'clone' material which is needed to survive, and naturally,

the objective is to steal the other teams' stash while protecting your own.

Added into the mix are a couple of good ideas, some inspired by inventiveness, others possibly the result of too much caffeine from the late nights working on this mod. Each team can build 'clone pumps' and once operational, these gradually leech clone material away from the opposing team. However, the

pumps aren't in your base and can therefore be stolen. If the enemy succeed in taking one over, it will then drain your reserve instead. Clever.

Vehicles are a major part of this mod and feature as essential transport for clone-pinching missions. They carry suitably destructive weapons and range from the heavyweight cannon-toting Lounge Tanks to mid-power Barracudas (stripped-out saloons with Gatling guns and nitrous oxide boosters), to Moscowboy motorbikes that are blindingly fast but unarmed, and can't be used when you're carrying clones. All are well designed and a little bit mad, if little more than a novelty at best.

However with good maps and skins, neat features and wacky humour, *Clone Bandits* has the potential to keep you going for a while at least.

That's one ugly baby.

If John Inman owned a tank...

PCZONE VERDICT 77
Madder than Max

DEAD CITIES V1.2   **TOTAL CONVERSION**

SIZE 83MB (with patch) **REQUIRES** Full version of *Battlefield 1942*
dynamic6.gamespy.com/~deadcities

Tony Lamb listens for a pulse

LIKE *Clone Bandits*, *Dead Cities* also bears more than a passing resemblance to the world of the 1980s *Mad Max* films. Set in yet another post-apocalyptic wasteland (just how many are there?), *DC* sees the Road Rogues with their mohican

hairdos and V8s facing off against the Civilian Compound, who want a peaceful life but will fight when pushed. Weapons and vehicles echo the film too, with gas tankers, buggies, a gyrocopter and a selection of nasties wielding crossbows and

Molotov cocktails doing the killing. *Mad Max* star Mel Gibson would no doubt be proud as each side sets out to slaughter the other.

However, it would be easy to pull *Dead Cities* apart. It's got an

Oh, the humanity...

Weren't you in *You Only Live Twice*?

iffy installer (create your own shortcut to the *BF1942* .exe file and add "+game DeadCities" to the target line), one dedicated map (although some vanilla *BF1942* maps have been adapted), simplistic skins and even occasional software hangs. These alone would make even the most placid reviewer want to bang his head against the wall. In fact, my PC came within a hairsbreadth of execution too.

But don't give up on it just yet. Sure, *Dead Cities* has its

faults, but the vehicles are cool, the weapons are effective and twatting people with stupid haircuts is just as much fun as it ever was. The installation problems and stability glitches can be sorted, and more maps will no doubt follow. It's early days for *Dead Cities*, but it could go far.

PCZONE VERDICT 61
Showing signs of life

Not the greenest car ever made.

Now that's a real motor...

COMMUNITY CHEST

GRAND THEFT AUTO

Guns, cars and girls: can *GTA* get any better? *Daniel Emery* wastes no time finding out...

With the release of *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* peeking over the horizon, now seems the perfect time to dust off the previous chapters in the series and show you how to give them a new lease of life.

Grand Theft Auto's spawned plenty of controversy since it launched, not that it put anyone off buying it. Despite not being as flexible as, say, *UnrealEd*, we've still seen a bucketload of mods, skins, cars, utilities and editors appear quicker than you can say "Vice City". So without any further ado, here's eight of the best – covering both vanilla *GTA* and the superlative *Vice City* sequel...
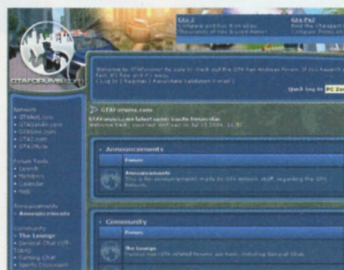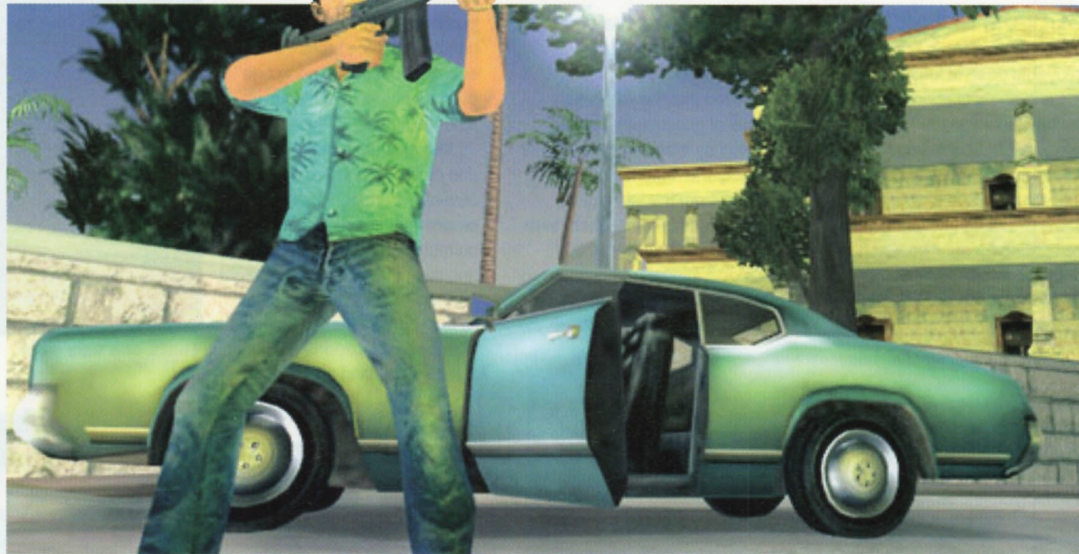
GTA FORUMS
(WEBSITE)
www.gtaforums.com

Sort of like an online British Library of violence, this is the discussion group for everything *GTA*-related. Every new TC, mod, skin and weapon is posted here, usually before it ends up hosted on the other sites. Plus, if you're thinking of building some *GTA* mods yourself, this is the place to ask questions.
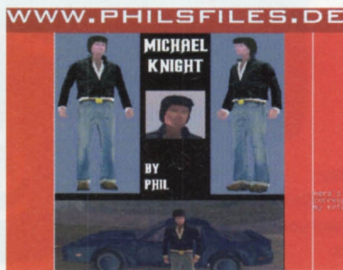
PHILS FILES
(FILES)
www.philsfiles.de

This is the source for many mods. Phil's site isn't the best laid out and his colour choice ensures a migraine in seconds, but there's a great collection of cars, some novel weapons (the Super Soaker is top) and a rather unhealthy obsession with David Hasselhoff. Well, everyone has their vice...
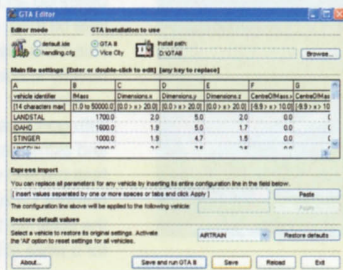
GTA EDITOR
(UTILITY)
www.divxland.org/gta

Does exactly what it says on the tin. This enables you to configure *GTA III* and *Vice City*, in addition to allowing easy editing of vehicles. Not only can you play with the look, you can also fiddle with the feel and handling of cars. Remember to make a backup before you start editing files – you have been warned.

PLANET GRAND THEFT AUTO
(WEBSITE)
www.planetgrandtheftauto.com

We couldn't have a Community Chest without featuring one of the Planet websites – they're a veritable goldmine of modding goodies. Every version is covered, with an excellent download section featuring skins, cars, tweaking utilities and a few nifty TCs.
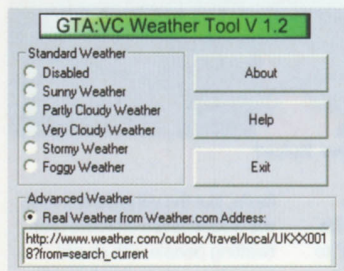
GTA WEATHER TOOL
(UTILITY)
coding.jameshansen.com

It's geeky and we love it! The *GTA* Weather Tool recreates the weather in *Grand Theft Auto* to reflect what's outside your window. So, as soon as it starts raining outside, it rains in the game. The program updates from www.weather.com and you can set when the game updates via the .ini file.
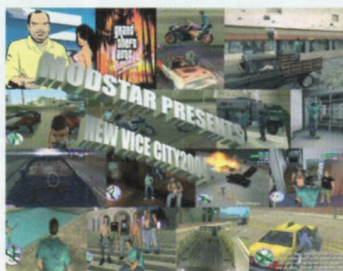
NEW VICE CITY 2004
(TOTAL CONVERSION)
www.modstargames.com

Out two months and already it's the most popular mod for *Vice City*. *2004* enables you to get petrol, add new bodyguards, missions and locations, and even means you can be mayor. As we went to press, the site was undergoing a major rebuild, but you can get the file from our discs.

LAZIOFREAK'S GTA PAGE
(TOTAL CONVERSIONS)
www.lzfdownloads.de.vu

Despite the dodgy English (it's a German site after all), you'll find some of the more light-hearted TCs/Mods for *GTA* here. One of the more interesting is *Speed Island* – a TC that turns *Vice City* into a stunt island. With luck, version two should be finished by the time you read this.
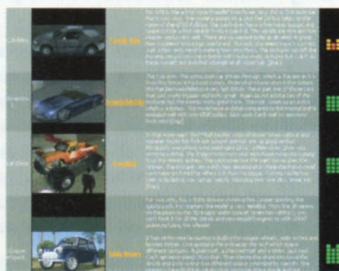
GOURANGA
(WEBSITE)
www.gouranga.com

Going up against Planet GTA is Gouranga. Don't ask how it got the name, we've got no idea either; perhaps they're Krishnas. Whatever, this has the edge when it comes to seeing what you're downloading. Everything's rated, has a great screenshot and a nice little editorial piece describing what it is and what it does.

STEVE HILL'S
NEVERQUEST

Private Hill enters his own private hell in **World War II Online**

I'M LYING face down wielding a huge weapon and staring intently at Maria's arse. Ordinarily, this would be a very good thing. Unfortunately, Maria is a burly (male) squaddie and we're ensconced in a hedge in Northern Europe in fear of our lives. You may ask yourself, how did I get here? Although if you've been paying close attention, you may already know.

S.W.A.L.K.
Some time ago, a message appeared on the *PC ZONE* website, personally inviting me to join the war effort. Written in pidgin English by someone claiming to be called Szyporyn, the call to arms pleaded: "So what do you say, no brit should be able to resist the urge to dress up in ol brow battledress and give Gerry what he needs across the fields of europe!" Igor Szyporyn was soon tracked down to a secret base in Denmark, where he was running operations in the largest global conflict known to man.

Fast forward a few weeks, and I'm signed up to Igor's Army, despite scarcely knowing my rifle from my elbow. Meeting up at an army base near Tienen in Belgium, pleasantries and salutes are exchanged and with a cursory cry of "Let's kill Germans!", my war effort is under way. I don't recall Denmark's exact role in Word War II, but I

heroically put my life in Igor's hands, or more accurately, his lorry.

Despite his promise that "we got a car ready for you", I'm ushered into the back of a poorly appointed truck where I sit silently with a bunch of sickly-looking infantry as Igor takes the wheel. My guess is that Alton Towers is off the agenda, and the atmosphere is muted to say the least. Struggling for smalltalk, I announce to the assembled cannon fodder that "I'm shitting myself".

"Why?" inquires Lancelot, somewhat needlessly.

"In case I die."

"You get used to it after the first 1,000 times."

Great.

Enemy aircraft have been spotted near Antwerp and this is our intended target, although thanks to Igor's erratic driving, we almost never make it. Seemingly in some hurry to deliver us to the battlefield, the truck bounces violently along the primitive roads, lurching perilously to one side as we traverse terrain more suited to pigs and goats.

Arriving at what I can only assume to be the destination (unless it's a piss stop), Igor gives his best Frank Gallagher from *Shameless* impersonation, and orders everyone to

"scatter"! Previous experience of doing runners from taxis has taught me to head for the shrubbery, and I instinctively throw myself down behind a sturdy oak tree.

AVÉ MARIA
It seems that there's a Stuka up above, and Igor orders the group to move with him.

"You couldn't trim the edges could you?"

Reinforcements have arrived and designated driver Igor takes the helm of a conveniently placed tank. All this running about is tiring, and I ask if I can ride with him, a request that he flatly refuses. With various self-appointed generals issuing commands at me, the abruptly-named gpvb politely requests that I "walk behind the tank sir".

It seems a reasonable ploy, although less so when seconds later the tank explodes, sending shards of hot shrapnel whizzing past my ears.
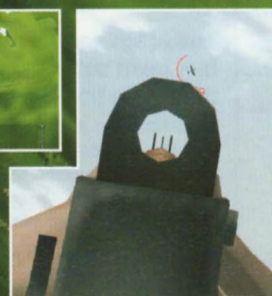

"Damn, he's got some sort of shield thing."

Igor miraculously seems to have survived and is indeed whooping with joy, inquiring whether I witnessed the pyrotechnics. I'm about to ask him how come he's so pleased at jeopardising the war effort when an allied plane drifts overhead, bearing the simple but appropriate legend, 'why?' The moment of quiet reverie is swiftly shattered by the sound of gunfire, and Igor orders me to "follow Maria", who leaps into the hedgerow.

I follow suit, and Maria orders "on belly from here", which is where we came in, me balancing on my gut like a

"It's no good Nigel, I can't get a tune out of it."

stuck pig, staring where the sun don't shine. Sounds like a lady, looks like a man…

DANCES WITH VOLES
Hedge warfare is the order of the day, and we painstakingly edge our way forward, utilising the cover offered by the traditional home of foxes and voles. It's a serious business though, and in the same way that the bewildered soldiers in *Apocalypse Now* were warned, "don't get out of the boat", the mantra here is, "don't get out of the hedge". On the occasions that I stick my head out, I'm swiftly shouted down.

Tick follows tock, and rapidly tiring of the lack of action, I fire off a few potshots at a passing Stuka, much to the indifference of its pilot. There are a few grumblings from my fellow hedge-dwellers as it seems that I may have given our position away. It's a theory given weight by the bullet that pierces my chest, splattering the surrounding greenery in thick red claret. There are always casualties in war. The first is topiary. **PCZ**

"Previous experience of doing runners from taxis has taught me to head for the shrubbery, and I instinctively throw myself down behind a sturdy oak tree"

KEEPING SCORE

■ **HARDWARE EDITOR** Phil Wand

▲ New video cards are here at last, and with the GeForce winning the performance crown and Editor's Choice trophy, I can't wait for all the stinging emails denouncing me as an NVIDIA fanboy. Why? Because they'll be exactly the same as all the emails denouncing me as an ATI fanboy when the Radeon won, and I can mark them read as soon as they arrive. Like a referee, I'm the guy who gets the blame for a team's shortcomings – gamers are more like football supporters than they care to let on.

Of course, graphics card benchmarks are nowhere near as straightforward as a match – to start with, there are no rules. My testing avoids high resolutions and the seemingly endless combinations of antialiasing and anisotropic settings loved by hardware websites because I feel they're irrelevant to the vast majority of gamers. In this issue's review of all 6800 and X800 variants, I made it clear right from the off that Valve's survey of almost a million Steam users had influenced my working – it showed that only a tiny minority had the processing power to handle large resolutions and an even smaller number chose to use them. Most fast response gaming panels, including *PC ZONE* favourites from LG and Hitachi, have a native resolution of 1280x1024. I have CRT monitors capable of 1600x1200, and I've seen a few flat panels capable of 1600x1200, but after half an hour's gaming I have a migraine – at that size it's almost impossible to read the text!

While it's true that we're moving towards high-definition gaming environments, by the time screens are capable of displaying the information at top resolutions and are cheap enough to buy, there'll be a whole raft of new video cards to complement them. In the same way you don't take a Mondeo for a test drive on a racetrack, my NVIDIA and ATI conclusions are drawn from an everyday gaming machine ▼ and not some cutting-edge monster.

THINGS CAN ONLY GET FASTER

The latest graphics technology is a blast, but GeForce roadmaps point to speedier cards just around the corner

NOW THAT the GeForce 6800 and Radeon X800 are taking up space on high street shelves, gamers have gone back to wondering what's coming next. With the help of experience and information leaked from NVIDIA, we can bring you some pretty solid predictions for the next six months.

The first clues are in the numbers. In the same way that the FX 5800 was replaced by the FX 5900 last year, expect the 6800 to be pushed aside at Christmas. The GeForce 6900 Ultra will boast AGP, 16 pipelines and 512MB of GDDR3 memory pushing 1.2GHz, and should have a GT version to partner it. ATI must follow suit with a successor to the X800 XT, most likely to be named X900, and with the GeForce GT walking off with all the trophies, the Radeon guys need to hit back. An X800 or X900 GT with 16 pipelines and a sub-£300 price tag means it'll
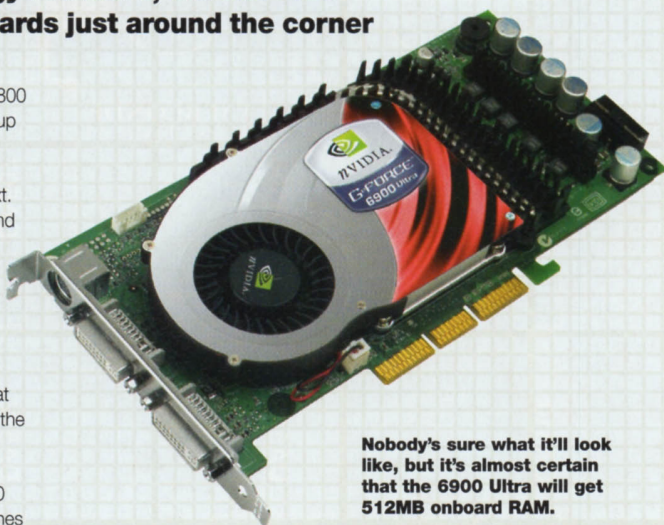
Nobody's sure what it'll look like, but it's almost certain that the 6900 Ultra will get 512MB onboard RAM.

meet the runaway NVIDIA card head on.

On the PCI-Express front, both companies are set to offer native solutions for the winter. NVIDIA is replacing its line-up of 'bridged' PCX hardware and will launch a GeForce 6850 and later 6950 to run alongside the AGP models. You're likely to see mainstream hardware such as the GeForce 6600 gain Shader 3.0 support, and the appearance of LE variants costing under £200. If NVIDIA is true to form, we'll also see the GeForce 6200 and 6700 appearing early next year. However, if ATI's successor to the 9600 series works well with *Half-Life*, the X600 could be the sanest choice.

IT'S MARKING TIME

Futuremark Corporation is hard at work on the successor to 3DMark03

Makes you want to howl at the moon, it does.

VISITORS TO Beyond3D were first to read about 3DMark03's long overdue replacement, 3DMark04. The Futuremark team is keen to stress that the product's name is likely to change by the time it's done with it. However, given the phenomenal

success of its predecessor, and the fact that the 'mark' has become overclocking currency, our bet is that it'll be called 3DMark something. Or Futuremark is mad.

The Benchmark Development Program sees big names such as AMD, Intel, ATI and NVIDIA working to help Futuremark create an unbiased software tool for grading the video performance of your rig, and the new version will be the most punishing, most realistic test yet. It employs a totally new and dynamic shader engine designed to mimic the way tomorrow's games will abuse your PC – the only worry here is that it requires tomorrow's video cards. If you don't have a DX9 card, it'll be a wasted download.

There are suggestions that the new 3DMark will take advantage of wider PCI-Express bandwidth, but as with many possible features, including the addition of Punkbuster-like measures to prevent manufacturers cheating in the tests, the developer was noncommittal. For more information check out beyond3d.com/interviews/fm04.

SAPPHIRE GOES APE

Instant nitrous boost for the new Pro Raddy

SAPPHIRE'S NEW Toxic X800 PRO VIVO is now in stores. The 12-pipeline card's unique selling point is a feature called Automated Performance Enhancement (APE), which tweaks the card to its very limit without having to make any manual adjustments to the clocks. The settings for APE are determined by a factory procedure and are written to the card's ROM, meaning they can be put into force at the touch of a button.

Also included with every Toxic card is Temperature Monitoring Ready (TMR), a technology which allows you to send your Radeon's temperature to an external display, and Lethal Cooling, which centres around a quiet Arctic cooler unique to the Sapphire. The downside is that like the 6800 Ultra the design takes up two slots, and like a train wreck is gravely ugly. Then again, the clash of the piercing blue board and orange decking should appeal to overclockers – the crowd this card is aimed at.

Toxic cards have their maximum settings imprinted on them at the factory, ready for users to abuse at home. Just the way those overclockers like it.

ATHLON JNR

AMD readies its Celeron rival

DESIGNED TO compete with the Intel Celeron in the value segment, the AMD Sempron uses the same core as the Athlon XP and features Socket A packaging, making them compatible with a wide range

The AMD Sempron is an ideal purchase for the budget-conscious.

of existing hardware. The 256KB cache chip will eventually go on to replace the company's XP line, with the 64-bit chips remaining as flagship models.

As you can see from the chart, the new Sempron army has been detuned to Celeron levels – the original XP chips were cranked up to meet the old Pentium 4 head on – but with a higher front-side bus the cheap chips retain the old Quantispeed markings from 2200+ up to 2800+.

Later, we'll see new Sempron models featuring Socket 754 and even Socket 939 configuration seen in AMD's more recent high-end processors – the rumour is that these chips will switch from the XP core to the 64-bit engine, albeit with the 64-bit brains removed.
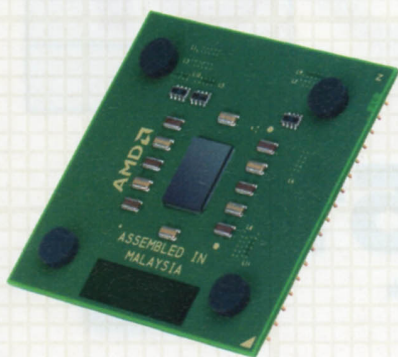
HOW THE SEMPRON MEASURES UP

AMD Sempron	FSB (MHz)	Multiplier	Clock (MHz)	AMD Athlon XP	FSB (MHz)	Multiplier	Clock (MHz)
2200+	166	9	1500	2200+	133	13.5	1800
2300+	166	9.5	1583	-			
2400+	166	10	1667	2400+	133	15	2000
2500+	166	10.5	1750	-			
2600+	166	11	1833	2600+	166	12.5	2083
2800+	166	12	2000	2800+	166	13.5	2250

SHAREWHAT?

And the stupid award...

The 2004 Shareware Industry Conference held recently in Rochester, New York, saw WinZip walking off with the Best Overall Utility award – and it's not the first time the compression tool has won, which beggars belief when you look at all the facts.

You see folks, there are ten million other utilities on the Web, many of which are free and a lot of which are better than WinZip. What makes this award so stupid is that Windows XP deals with zip files natively, making WinZip both meaningless and miraculous at the same time – it seems that people are buying something they already have. Looks as though you really can sell ice to Eskimos...

DRIVER WATCH

ON THE DVD

Need a patch? Take a look to see if you're behind the times

MOTHERBOARD

MANUFACTURER	NAME	DESC	RELEASED	SIZE	WEB	
Intel	INF Update Utility	6.0.1.1002	7-May-04	1.5MB	support.intel.com	NEW
NVIDIA	Forceware	4.27	19-Jul-04	20.2MB	www.nvidia.com	NEW
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 4.7	7-Jul-04	28.8MB	www.ati.com	NEW
NVIDIA	Forceware	61.76	20-Jul-04	12.0MB	www.nvidia.com	NEW

SOUND

MANUFACTURER	NAME	DESC	RELEASED	SIZE	WEB
Creative	EAX 4.0 ADV HD Driver Update	1-84-40	29-Mar-04	6.5MB	uk.europe.creative.com
M-Audio	Revolution	1.0.2.8	13-Feb-04	10.16MB	m-audio.com

SNIPPETS

STANDBY STAMINA

Philips claims that its most recent mobile phone, the tri-band 650, can go for five weeks without the need to recharge it. The clamshell style phone features a 128x160 TFT screen, GPRS and radio, plus MIDP 2.0 Java applications, polyphonic ring tones and optional camera. There's 6MB of memory onboard, enough for the details of more than 1,000 contacts. Left unattended, the Dutch electronics giant claims its 93g newcomer will last for over a month, and will deliver more than 8.5 hours of talk time. Mobile devices are beginning to look seriously useful. www.philips.com

DOOM 3 BENCHIES

HardOCP and id Software recently teamed up to bring you advanced news of frame-rate scores from the *Doom 3* time demo. On test were the flagship NVIDIA GeForce 6800 Ultra and ATI Radeon X800 XT models, with the 6800 GT and X800 Pro tagging along. And it was bad news for ATI. The NVIDIA competition was out front at almost every stage, with the lesser GT model often beating the big X800 XT into third place – *PC ZONE*'s own tests (see page 122) have also shown that the 6800 GT is very much the model of the moment. www.hardocp.com

GEFORCE LITE

Details are sketchy and specifications are non-existent, but an upcoming ForceWare driver update from NVIDIA shows the GeForce 6800 LE listed in the configuration file. The likelihood is that the baby GeForce will slot into the line-up just behind the plain 6800 model and feature between eight and ten pipelines, 128MB of DDR memory and a tempting price tag of between £150 and £200 before tax. What will be interesting is how the LE will compare with the likes of the old 128MB 9800 Pro, now widely available for under £140. www.nvidia.com

THEATRE 6 ZM-RS6F

■ £42 | Manufacturer: Zalman Tech | Phone: N/A | www.zalman.co.kr

HEADPHONES

Surround sound, without being surrounded

HEADPHONES might seem like a strange deviation for a company founded on noise prevention, but if you've ever been asked to "turn the bastard volume down", they're a quiet PC necessity – no more scrunched up faces leaning round doors at 1am telling you to switch off and go to bed. They're also great for watching porn.

Unlike conventional stereo headphones, the Zalman ZM-RS6F cans have three speakers in each earpiece, corresponding to front, centre and rear. Hook them up to your PC or to a console, and voila: six-channel positional audio.

That's the theory, but in practice the placement of game effects isn't anywhere near as precise as desktop speakers, and it's quite hard to tell where things are. You get a clue, but there's little sensation of distance, and your ears have a tough time convincing your brain that what you hear is coming from anywhere else but the thing clamped round your head. There's also no inline volume control, so splash screens leave you with messy pants and a fortnight's tinnitus; and no subwoofer channel, making the 5.1 label a trifle misleading and the experience a touch airy.

However, these gripes pale into insignificance alongside the biggest problem of all – what goes on inside the two plastic cups. Because they sound like two plastic cups. Uplifting tunes do nothing to stir you and action sequences have no real buzz to them. £42 buys you a significantly better-sounding pair of AKG or JVC headphones. Plus, with recent technologies such as SRS TruSurround (in the M-Audio Revolution) you no longer need more than two speakers on your bonce for a more believable, albeit virtual, surround sound.

PCZONE VERDICT

✔ Nice idea
✘ Lousy sound, not cheap
✘ Iffy positioning audio
✘ No in-line volume

57

Zalman should stick to cooling

LOGITECH MX510

■ £33 | Manufacturer: Logitech | Phone: 020 7309 0127 | www.logitech.co.uk

MOUSE

The next model on from our Editor's Choice rodent

LOGITECH mice are sad. Happy to have found a new home, they sit in raptures as you plug in their tail, tickle their tummy, push all their buttons and roll their little wheel. Then something happens. Within an hour they're just another sundry gadget for getting more important things done, and you never look at them in the same

way again. What did they do? Where did the excitement go? You just keep using them, keep abusing them, but because they never let you down and never complain, you forget they're even there. Logitech mice are lonely. Your clock radio is too.

Let's get real here for a second. The best mice should

make it seem like the crosshairs are a part of your brain – the only way to do that is to make them unexciting and unobtrusive. The MX500 won our coveted Editor's Choice trophy just seconds before it escaped

my mind, and the MX510 is even more instantly forgettable. It uses Logitech's improved MX engine to increase the rate of image processing from 4.7-megapixels per second to 5.8. This means greater accuracy and smoother movements, along with

increased acceleration from 10g to 15g, and so lag-free responses. Perfection.

Well, almost. The obvious flaw is that it's one-and-a-half times heavier than its baby brother, the 80g MX310, so if you prefer a smaller mouse, you'd be better off with the aforementioned sibling. Then there's the curvy shape, which isn't suited for those of a left-handed disability. I'd also dissuade existing MX500 owners from upgrading as the experience is somewhat similar, but I know you will anyway. Go ahead, see if I care.

PCZONE VERDICT

✔ Build quality and features
✔ Gaming performance
✘ Not suitable for lefties
✘ Larger and heavier than MX310

90

A mouse is not just for Christmas

"If you're going to buy a gaming notebook, buy this one."
- PC Zone

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GROUP TEST

GRAPHICS CARDS

A feast for the eyes! Five of the best graphics cards available today, each faster than anything you've seen before.

WE ALL KNOW that personality is important, but it's looks that really count. Valve's survey of close to a million Steam users revealed that the average PC has between 256MB and 512MB RAM, a 2.2GHz CPU and a screen size of 1024x768 pixels – less than 10 per cent of gamers in the survey ran faster or higher and our testing attempts to reflect this. All benchmarks were conducted on the 3.06GHz 533FSB Pentium with 512MB RAM, and using ATI CATALYST 4.7 and NVIDIA ForceWare Graphics Driver 64.15.

START YOUR ENGINES
The session kicked off with a round of 3DMark2001, 3DMark03, *Final Fantasy*, Aquamark3 and X2. There's a huge debate over the usefulness of synthetic benchmarks, but they remain the best way for home users to compare results.

We then moved on to *Far Cry* and *UT2004* at maximum detail and variable resolution, the former being the best way to make your graphics card sweat like it's locked in a sauna. It soon became obvious that these

beasts were way ahead of the PC into which they'd been slotted, and that the results would be limited by the processor. And that's one of our major beefs. To get the maximum return from one of these brutes, you need to pair it with a CPU of 3.4GHz or above.

While many reviewers argue that any X800 or 6800 is an investment for the future, we'd argue that you should invest in your PC first and then think about your video card – by which time prices will have softened. Read on and see if you agree…

RADEON X800 PRO

■ £305 | Manufacturer: Sapphire Technology | Phone: 01793 423830 | **www.sapphiretech.com**

It's leaner than the GeForce competition, but is it meaner?

Slightly behind the XT in terms of pipeline count and clock speeds, the Radeon X800 Pro is slightly behind the XT in benchmarks. ATI fanboys will be disappointed to hear that it lollops along behind the GeForce 6800 GT in

every test bar 3DMark2001, where it pulls 400 marks out of nowhere to jump ahead of its rival. An average of 53 frames-per-second overall puts it 10 per cent ahead of the old 5950 Ultra, but since the NVIDIA is now cheaper, they represent the same value. Not that there's much value in a card costing over £300.

The X800 Pro features a 475MHz core, 900MHz memory and 12 rendering pipelines, and requires a 300W power supply to run. Unlike the old 9800XT, the newcomer features GDDR3 and

is able to deliver healthy frame-rates at high resolutions with both antialiasing and anisotropic

filtering enabled. However, since there's precious little to be gained from adding AA and AF, and with
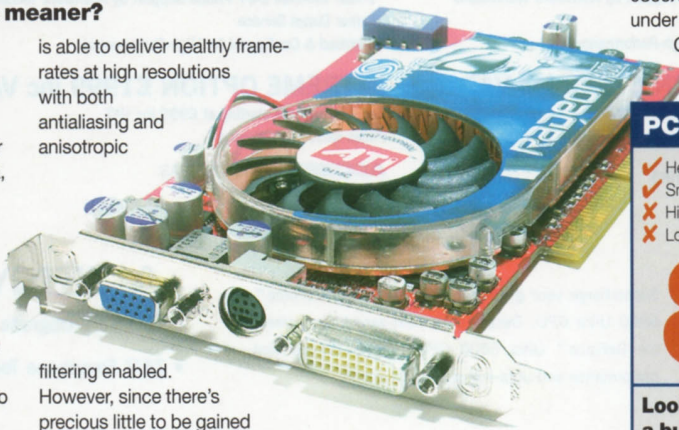
1600x1200 an impractical proposition for the majority of screens, the X800 Pro doesn't make sense. When the outgoing 9800XT can now be had for under £200, and with the 6800 GT faster, it's difficult to recommend it.

SPECIFICATIONS

HARDWARE 256MB DDR3 ATI Radeon X800 Pro
ANCILLARIES 1 x VGA to DVI converter, Composite cable, S-video to RGB, Power splitter
BUNDLE *Tomb Raider: AOD*, Power DVD 5, Redline utility, Installation CD

PCZONE VERDICT
✔ Healthy performance
✔ Small and cool
✘ High price
✘ Low value

81

Looks and goes like a buff 9800XT

GEFORCE 6800

■ £241 | Manufacturer: Sparkle Computer |
Phone: 0191 421 0166 | **www.sparkle-technology.co.uk**

It may look pricey, but it's still the cheapest card here

The plain vanilla GeForce 6800 features a 325MHz core, 700MHz memory and has four locked-off rendering pipelines in similar configuration to the X800

Pro. Unlike the Radeon, it features 128MB DDR rather than 256MB GDDR3 – there's less internal bandwidth here than the old 9800XT or 5950 Ultra. However, this makes it significantly cheaper than its bigger brothers – it's the least costly card here. While still not giveaway money, nor mainstream money for that matter, it's the best value by an important margin.
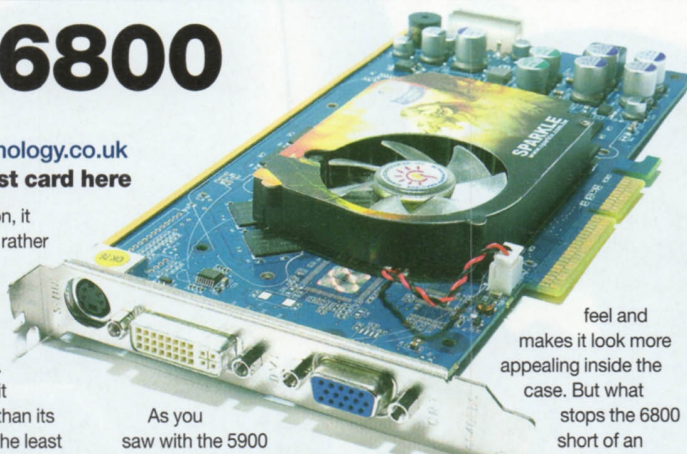
As you saw with the 5900 XT a few months back, Sparkle builds its products properly – there's a metal brace running along the top edge of the board, which lends it a sturdy

feel and makes it look more appealing inside the case. But what stops the 6800 short of an award is the way it flounders in key benchmarks. When raising detail and resolution in *Far Cry*, the frame-rate drops away into the

low 20s and the game gets choppy and unplayable. So if you're looking to up your settings a notch, the 6800 will go weak at the knees. A wiser move would be hunting down a sub-£200 9800XT.

SPECIFICATIONS

HARDWARE 128MB DDR NVIDIA GeForce 6800
ANCILLARIES 1 x VGA to DVI converter, Composite cable, S-video to RGB, Power splitter
BUNDLE *Tomb Raider: AOD*, Power DVD 5, Redline utility, Installation CD

PCZONE VERDICT
✔ Cheaper than a 5950 Ultra
✔ Faster than a 5950 Ultra
✔ Top notch Sparkle build
✘ Lacks clout when it counts

83

The most sensible card here

BENCHMARKS ■ MSI FX5950 ULTRA-VTD256 ■ SAPPHIRE RADEON X800 PRO ■ SPARKLE GEFORCE 6800 ■ XFX GEFORCE 6800 GT ■ XFX GEFORCE 6800 ULTRA ■ ASUS RADEON X800 XT PE
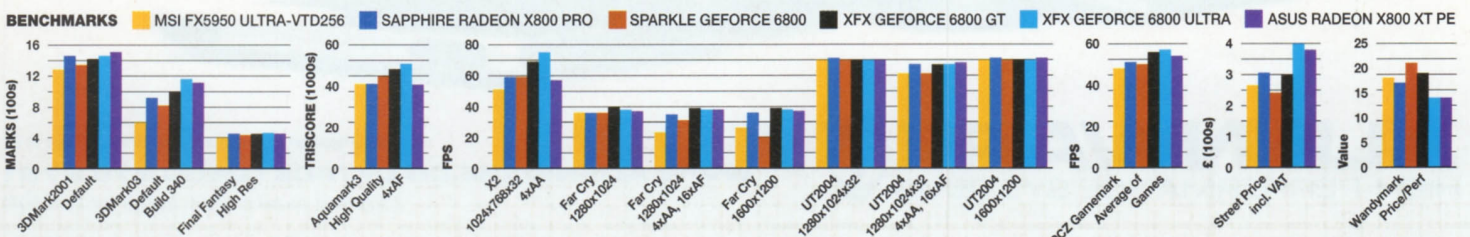
The **COMBINED SCORE** is an average of a number of real-world gaming tests and bespoke benchmarking tools. The **WANDYMARK™** is the combined average score divided by the price.

ROUND-UP

But which one fits your game? *Phil Wand* finds out...

GEFORCE 6800 GT

■ £299 | Manufacturer: XFX Graphics | Phone: 01327 315750 | www.xfxforce.co.uk

The *Gran Turismo* model that goes like a racer

As with the X800 Pro, the 6800 GT is one of those in-between models that's neither one thing nor the other – not all-out ballsy and not budget conscious. However, its specifications remain impressive. With the same core speed as the X800 Pro but with all pipelines pumping, NVIDIA beats ATI on fill rate – and with 1GHz memory, it's ahead on bandwidth too. Every benchmark bar 3DMark2001 puts the GeForce ahead of the Radeon, and with the former costing slightly less than the latter, it's an easy victory in the value battle.

What makes the GT so good is not the gap it puts between itself and the X800 Pro, but the gap it closes on its more expensive Ultra sibling and the X800 XT – just three frames-per-second separate the final averages of the Ultra, XT and GT. The two 3DMark scores are virtually inseparable and in the initial *Far Cry* tests, the GT even managed to tiptoe in front.

The card makes such a good case for itself that it makes both the 6800 Ultra and X800 XT seem unnecessary. Nobody's certain how it will compare in *Half-Life 2* or in *Doom 3*, but one thing's for sure: the XFX GeForce 6800 GT is the card of the moment.

SPECIFICATIONS

HARDWARE 256MB DDR3 NVIDIA GeForce 6800 GT
ANCILLARIES 1 x VGA to DVI converter, S-video cable
BUNDLE *X2 – The Threat*, Moto GP2, *Commandos 3*, Installation CD

PCZONE VERDICT

✔ Single power, single slot design
✔ Outguns the X800 Pro
✔ Great bundle
✘ Still not cheap

90

Snapping at the Ultra's heels, but better packaged

GEFORCE 6800 ULTRA

■ £399 | Manufacturer: XFX Graphics | Phone: 01327 315750 | www.xfxforce.co.uk

Big card, big price, big performance

If you're looking to impress your friends, the Ultra will do you nicely: superior length, width, weight, power and price tag. The fatboy XFX hunkers down across not one but two slots, sucks current through not one but two Molex plugs and sounds like someone vacuuming the adjacent room. OK, so that's a slight exaggeration, but it ain't quiet – the 480W PSU requirement should tell you that it chews its food noisily. The core ticks along at 450MHz and the memory at 1.1GHz. It's badass, in your face and proud of it.

Despite the racket and power drain, the 6800 Ultra isn't that far ahead of the GT and can't deliver a markedly different experience to gamers. True, if you have an Athlon FX or Pentium EE and a 1600x1200 desktop, you may find that it gets to stretch its legs a little. Howeve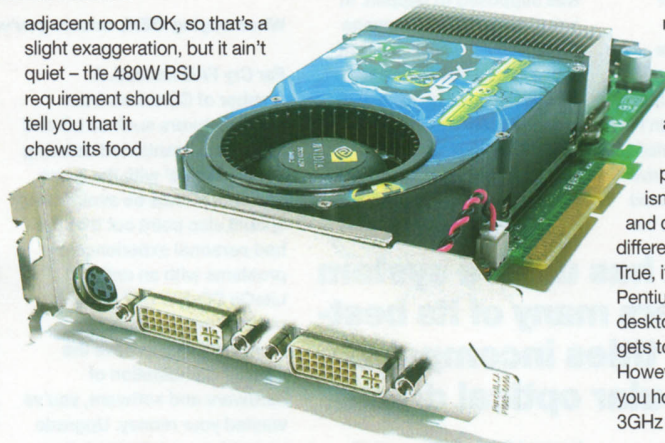r, if (like the most of us) you hover between 2GHz and 3GHz and find that anything above 1280x1024 gives you a headache, the GT is a shrewder buy. Which is why the Ultra, although fastest and no doubt expecting to have its tummy tickled, doesn't win this test. It's too much in every sense.

SPECIFICATIONS

HARDWARE 256MB DDR3 NVIDIA GeForce 6800 Ultra
ANCILLARIES 1 x VGA to DVI converter, S-video cable
BUNDLE *X2 – The Threat*, Moto GP2, *Commandos 3*, Installation CD

PCZONE VERDICT

✔ Great bundle
✘ Needs a monster CPU behind it
✘ Poorly packaged, expensive
✘ Not much quicker than the GT

82

Something of a status symbol

X800 XT PLATINUM EDITION

■ £379 | Manufacturer: ASUS | Phone: 01908 518000 | uk.asus.com

Trials and tribulations with ATI's big-hitter

ATI's 16-pipeline flagship zings along with a core speed of 520MHz and memory at 1.12GHz. Yet it's smaller, more hushed, draws less current and puts out less heat than the 6800 Ultra – with its yesterday looks and quiet disposition, you'll have a hard time convincing people it's the next generation Radeon.

However, 3DMark03 fell over regularly, *X2* bombed out in the middle of testing, and the card posted the worst Aquamark result here, lower even than the 5950 Ultra. Strangely, its 3DMark2001 and AA/AF results in *Far Cry* and *UT2004* were best in show – there was no obvious explanation for the roller coaster ride.

If you focus on ups rather than downs, it's clear the XT has real potential: its performance in *Far Cry* at maximum everything was seriously impressive. As with the 6800 Ultra, the CPU was the limiting factor – with an Athlon FX-53, this thing would really blow your socks off. Then again, you should really question whether a £379 video card demanding a £2,000 PC beneath it makes a lot of sense when your eyeballs will be just as impressed with a 6800 GT inside what you already have.
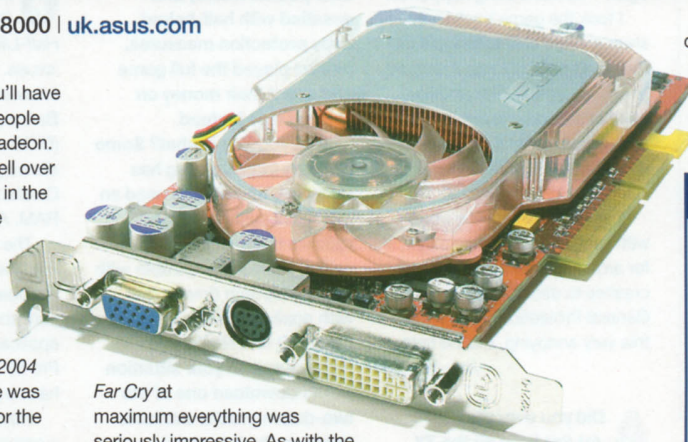
SPECIFICATIONS

HARDWARE 256MB DDR3 ATI Radeon X800 XT Pro
ANCILLARIES 1 x VGA to DVI converter, S-video to RGB, S-video to HDTV, Power splitter, USB webcam, kitchen sink
BUNDLE *Counter-Strike: CZ*, *Deus Ex*, Ulead Cool3D 2.0, Media Show, Power Director 3, Installation CD

PCZONE VERDICT

✔ ASUS quality, superb bundle
✘ Acted up like no other card ever
✘ Mostly behind the 6800 Ultra
✘ Expensive

80

Smallest score for the biggest Radeon

DEAR WANDY

Hard drive on the blink? Super-duper game that just won't play nicely? Don't just sit there blubbing into your milkshake – write to Dr Wandy!

■ **HEALING THE PAIN** Phil Wand

Copy protection has always hindered the wrong people. Here's an early example, the 1982 security card from *Jet Set Willy*.

FAR KING CRY

Q I recently bought a copy of *Far Cry*. I read the system requirements on the back of the case and could see that my machine (Pentium 4 2.5GHz, 256MB RAM, GeForce FX 5200, DVD and CD-RW drives) just about met all of them. The game installed without a hitch (though it was quite difficult freeing up the room needed on the hard drive) and I proceeded to play the game. At least, I would've done had it actually worked. The splash screen displayed for about a minute, then the message, 'Please Insert the correct CD-ROM' appeared.

Hang about I thought, there's only one disc – so it shouldn't come up with that at all! I tried to remove the DVD from the drive which was a no-go. I then tried opening My Computer, but the

> ### "Ubisoft has used a system which renders many of its best-selling titles incompatible with popular optical drives"

icon for the DVD drive had disappeared. By now, I was very pissed off, hit the restart button on the front of the PC and tried again. The same thing happened.

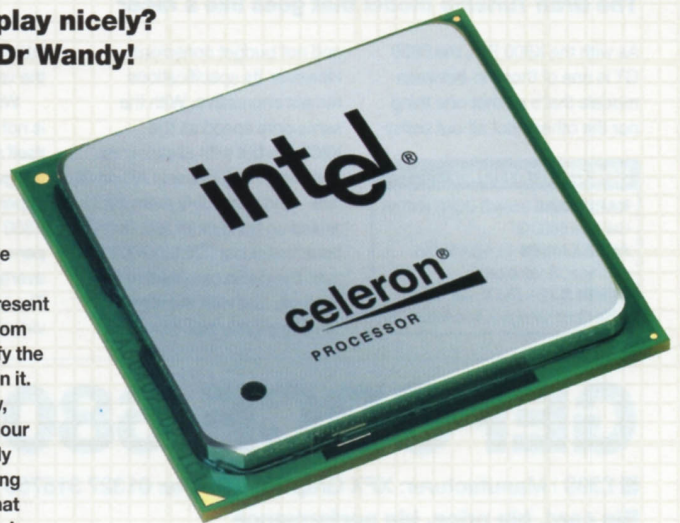I took the game back to the shop and the staff tried it out on their laptop. Of course, it worked fine! They traded it for another copy of the same game, which I took home, reinstalled, and the same bloody message came up. What should I do?

I've also been having trouble with *Unreal 2*. The game plays for around 30 minutes and then crashes to desktop with a General Protection Fault. I find this very annoying. Please help.
Rob Murray

A Did you ever play *Jet Set Willy* on the ZX Spectrum? Matthew Smith's 1982 platform game was one of the first titles to tackle the issue of software theft, and came supplied with a small security card divided into a patchwork of 162 cells. Once the tape had finished loading, a question screen would present the coordinates of a random cell and ask you to identify the four colours printed within it.

It seems primitive now, but in the days before colour printers it became a highly effective method of curbing piracy. No, wait, that's what was supposed to happen. In actual fact, any old sausage could copy the security card with a biro, substituting letters for colours, and anyone with an understanding of assembler could simply sidestep the question screen.

The follow-up to *Manic Miner* duly became the most hacked Speccy game of all time, and its legitimate users became the most hacked off of all time: while they spent their pocket money and wrestled with half-baked copy protection measures, pirates played the full game and spent their money on sherbet dips instead.

And you know what? Some 22 years later, nothing has changed. Ubisoft has used an ill-judged system which renders many of its best-selling titles incompatible with popular optical drives, and with applications such as CloneCD and Nero 6. While most people in your situation would download one of the two-dozen cracks available freely on the Internet, I strongly advise you don't break your licence agreement and that you investigate the

When buying OEM, ensure you've been sold the right kit.

Far Cry FAQ instead. A number of CD drives from manufacturers such as LG and Philips are mentioned as being 'incompatible' with the game and should thus be avoided. I should also point out that I've had personal experience of problems with an unlisted LiteOn CD-RW unit bought not four months ago.

In short, if you have the 'wrong' combination of hardware and software, you've wasted your money. Upgrade your drives or take back the game – it's up to you.

STOP THE HERTZ

Q After building a top-spec PC in anticipation of *Half-Life 2*, I'm having some real issues. My kit consists of the following: AMD Athlon XP3200+ Barton, Asus A7N8X Deluxe (BIOS updated to 1.0.0.8 allowing for 400MHz FSB), 1GB Crucial CT6464Z40B unbuffered RAM, ATI Radeon 9800 XT.

The BIOS says it's all working fine; the Asus probe utility says the board and processor are cool enough. Running desktop applications under Windows XP Pro SP1 and Direct X9.0b, it has no problems.

However, as soon as I run a game such as *Battlefield Vietnam* or *BF1942*, it starts having all sorts of problems. It either freezes up, loses sound or

the screen goes black or completely reboots itself. I've tried changing all sorts of settings/combinations in the BIOS, but to no avail. It seems the only option is to revert back to something under 400MHz for the CPU and RAM. Ironically, the most stable setting used was that of my previous XP2600+, where everything was running at 366MHz. Am I asking too much for it all to run and work at 400MHz?
Martin Hammond

A The first thing I'd do is check that what you have inside your case is really an XP3200+ Barton. This may seem stupid, but if your Athlon was in one of the temptingly cheap OEM bundles, there's a chance you were sold the wrong product with the old bus. While setting a 166MHz chip to use a 200MHz bus will make it unlikely to finish the power on sequence, there are reports of people doing it – and since you've been mucking about with settings in your BIOS, it's something you ought to cover.

The easy way to check your Barton is to download a copy of WCPUID from www.h-oda.com. The hard way is to lift the lid, remove the cooler and eyeball the processor. A stamp on its lower edge should read

> ## "The A7N8X Deluxe (among others) is famed for odd behaviour when the SB gets very hot, including loss of sound"

'AXDA3200DKV4E', which is deciphered as follows: AXD = Athlon XP, 3200 = AMD QuantiSpeed ranking, E = 200MHz bus (ie 400MHz DDR).

If you're satisfied that your chip is genuine, you should use Memtest86 from www.memtest86.com to punish your RAM and report any errors. I should point out that your Crucial chips are not certified by ASUS for use with the A7N8X Deluxe, and it's always worth checking with the manufacturer's website before spending your money.

Should your investigations show that it's not the CT6464Z40Bs at fault, my money's on a cooling problem. Make sure your case is away from the wall and properly vented, and that you have a decent heatsink on your Southbridge chip. The A7N8X Deluxe (among many others) is famed for odd behaviour when the SB gets superheated, including loss of sound. Seeing as that's one of your symptoms, maybe this should be your first port of call?

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS

Q About the problem Sam Jones was having with a wireless optical mouse (issue 144, p107). I've had similar, though not as extreme problems, caused by placing the wireless receiver too close to the mouse. The manual says it must be at least 20cms, but I find 50+cms does the trick.

Paul Mortier

A If I'm being honest – which of course I am all the time – I wasn't aware that putting the receiver too close to the mouse would have any adverse effects. You say it's printed clearly in the instructions, but I'm as guilty as the next man of never having opened a manual for a mouse in my life (principally because I don't want the embarrassment of being caught reading it).

I've always known that sources of electromagnetic interference – principally, your monitor – can wreak havoc with nearby wireless devices, but because I'd always tucked the receiver out of sight and away from my screen, neither interference nor distance had given me any grief.

However, I can now say that an hour's testing with Logitech's Cordless Desktop MX and with Microsoft's Wireless Optical Desktop Pro has revealed that Paul is right. Too close and the behaviour is not as smooth as you'd expect, and that's something that's exacerbated by, say, *UT2004*. Then again, I've always believed wireless devices to be the wrong choice for action games, so it's possible my distrust of cable-free peripherals got the better of me.

UNPLAYABLE TOURNAMENT

Q I've been having trouble getting onto some *UT2004* servers recently, including that of *PC ZONE*. An error message pops up, advising that my 'AntiTTC cannot be verified' and that I've been disconnected. I've no problem on other servers. As far as I'm aware, my version is up to date and I can't find much info on this problem in the forums.

Nick Richardson

A There are three possible explanations for the error you've been seeing. The first is that you're running other software that somehow conflicts with AntiTTC, which is a popular anti-cheating *UT* modifier run by some servers (including *PC ZONE*). My suggestion here would be to ensure nothing else is running when you play *UT2004*.

Second, it's possible that the AntiTTC on your system has become corrupted in some way. A reinstall of the game should sort it out. The last possibility is that your game is configured to disallow downloads from servers. That means that, when you connect to a server running AntiTTC, your machine is refusing to update to the latest version and thus fails the verification process.

Happily, fixing this is pretty straightforward. Open the System folder within your main *UT2004* directory and open UT2004.ini in Notepad or a real-text editor. Search for the AllowDownloads entry – you should find it in the [IpDrv.TcpNetDriver] section – and make sure that it reads AllowDownloads=True.

If you have any further trouble connecting to our *UT2004* server, please contact the *UT* admin, gowerlypuff@zonegames. co.uk – he's a friendly chap and will be delighted to help.

Strange-coloured lights? Richard Gillyon may have the answer.

Visit Wandy on the Web at www.dearwandy.com

WATCHDOG

Friends, sun, martinis and chocolate: these are a few of Watchdog's favourite things. Nasty companies who make you angry are not. Got a grievance? Let us know...

■ **NOT JULIE ANDREWS** Adam Phillips

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!

Don't worry – we're here to help when you're at the end of your tether. If you've got a consumer issue that needs addressing, then drop us a line.

WRITE TO Watchdog, *PC ZONE*, Dennis Publishing, 9 Dallington Street, London EC1V 0BQ
EMAIL Alternatively, email us at letters.pczone@dennis.co.uk with the subject heading 'Watchdog'

READ ME!

If you're writing in to complain about a product, please 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.

> ## "Ubisoft has a list of drives *Far Cry* isn't compatible with on its website. Why isn't this also stated on the back of the box?"
>
> **RICHARD FOSTER** ISN'T A HAPPY CHAPPY

SOLDIERING ON...

Now look 'ere you 'orrible lot at Ubisoft – our army boys have a tough enough time 'elping us defend our nation and keeping the peace in others without the hassle of trying to install *Far Cry*. You see, Richard Foster, *PC ZONE* reader and a Brit soldier serving in Germany, was looking forward to carving up a few trigens on his PC to let off some steam.

"I have to rely on my father to send me games from the UK," he explains. "On its arrival, I was able to install *Far Cry*, but when I wanted to play, the PC told me that it couldn't find the CD even though it was in the CD drive."

According to Ubisoft's website, the problem was down to Richard's DVD/CD drive and it needed a firmware update. Trouble is, said update made the disc totally unreadable. After emailing the company, Richard was (eventually) told by Ubisoft that the issue was being caused by his drive not reading the surface of the disks correctly.

"According to Ubisoft, it only seems to affect some of the budget drives," recalls Richard.

"My anger comes from the fact that on its website, Ubisoft has a list of drives that the game isn't compatible with. Why isn't this stated on the back of the CD? I'm sure many others have encountered the same problem."

We contacted Ubisoft, who eventually got back to us explaining why such situations can arise: "Safedisk produce the copy-protection software for Ubisoft games – this software is used to prevent copying of the software," explains a spokesperson for the company. "The encryption for this is contained within the surface of the disk and is stamped as part of the production process. It's not possible to copy this using conventional CD or DVD copying software, hence preventing (a pirated) disk from being run."

Now, because of the vast differences in the configuration of modern PCs, there can be problems with drives not reading the surface of the disk correctly: "The problem experienced by Mr Foster reflects a typical error," says Ubisoft.

Solutions include the aforementioned CD firmware update and if that fails, then your motherboard's drivers may need updating. Ubisoft also recommends returning the game to the place of purchase to make sure that the disk isn't simply faulty.

Ubisoft says it's happy to provide you with a replacement *Far Cry* game: "We appreciate that Mr Foster has not been happy with the customer service he's received on this occasion and we're eager to put that right."

Let us know what happens, but in the meantime, turn back a page and read what Wandy has to say about the situation.

A GRAPHIC SITUATION

"I'm shocked and appalled at the complete lack of service I've received since placing an order with Dabs," fumes reader

Reader Richard Foster, currently stationed in Germany, is none too happy with Far Cry's *CD issues...*

Marcus Jullion. Oh dear, not the most of auspicious of starts then. According to Marcus, he ordered a Radeon card from the company in late March, but then due to unavailability, he changed his mind and ordered a different Radeon card.

It duly turned up but alas, it was the one which he'd cancelled *and* the one he'd ordered. Now, for reasons unclear to Watchdog, Marcus then decided to send them both back using a single RMA number and packaging them together in the same envelope with a covering letter.

"After keeping an eye on my credit card account for several weeks, it became apparent to me that Dabs had only credited me for one item though," explains Marcus.

Dabs told him that payment was never taken for the second Radeon card, but according to Marcus's credit card statement, Dabs *had* deducted the £160.87 payment.

On Dabs' request, Marcus faxed the statement to Dabs. And then heard nothing: "The invoice sent with the first card was for £0.00, but the full value of that graphics card was still debited from my account," says Marcus. "I presume the reason that Dabs is saying no payment was taken was because, according to its invoice, there was a £0.00 value on that card."

To cut a torturous story short, Marcus feels like he's being ignored by Dabs and he's also been told that the company has no records of him ever sending the two cards back.

Off to Dabs we went. First off, Dabs says that yes, Marcus ordered a card that he then duly cancelled and this card was never shipped to him. He then ordered the other card that *was* duly shipped.

But this is where Watchdog's head begins to implode. Apparently Marcus, you have a second live account with Dabs – and you ordered another card on that account, which shipped – which explains the deduction from your credit card account.

Dabs also says that you were given an RMA for the second card ordered and a full refund was issued. "The only outstanding query surrounds the Radeon 9600 Pro AIW 128MB DDR from order number 5165180, which
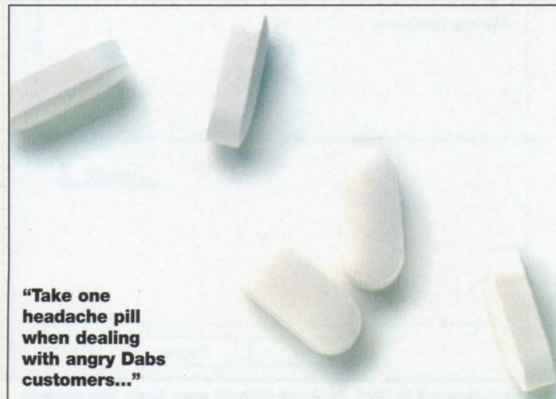
"Take one headache pill when dealing with angry Dabs customers..."

SAINTS NOT SINNERS

INFAMY DOGS MANY COMPANIES THAT APPEAR IN WATCHDOG, BUT WE'RE MORE THAN HAPPY TO HIGHLIGHT THOSE WHO ACTUALLY MAKE THEIR PUNTERS HAPPY TOO...

Watchdog isn't one to bear grudges (really, we're not). Especially against companies who've not exactly been forthcoming when we've been in touch with them on a reader's behalf – as we highlighted many issues ago when it came to our dealings with red-tape obsessed Overclockers. Thankfully, the company also appears to enjoy making its customers happy too – as reader Andy Brightmore is more than willing to testify to.

"I recently bought a new Asus P4C800-E Deluxe motherboard and P4 chip from Overclockers," explains Andy. "The board wouldn't power-up and I sent it back. I rang the company late on a Friday and someone answered the phone in seconds and quoted me an RMA number without any hassle. A new board arrived three days later after emails from Overclockers confirming receipt of the old board and shipment of the replacement."

According to Andy, Overclockers deserves credit for a customer-friendly and efficient service. And long may this outburst of customer satisfaction last...
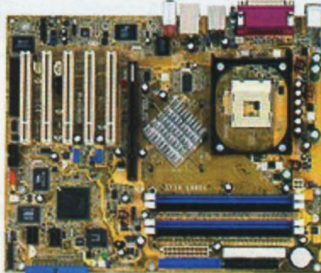
Happiness is motherboard-shaped.

Mr Jullion returned to us without notifying us of his wish to return. As such, an RMA number was not issued and the return was therefore never authorised."

Dabs says that despite your claim that you sent two cards back, it has no record of it in its returns department. "Because no audit trail exists for this item due to the absence of an RMA number, it's difficult to track this product further. We've kept Mr Jullion informed of this situation and are now working with him to reach an amicable solution," says Dabs. "We're sorry this issue has become somewhat protracted and that the confusion has caused Mr Jullion dissatisfaction."

GOD SAVE THE QUEEN

It's great being part of the United Kingdom isn't it? Especially if you live in Ireland – after all, because we're all one big happy nation, Irish punters who use companies such as Ebuyer get the full benefits of having not to pay £1.99 for delivery of an item. No, they have to pay the low, low sum of £15. Bargain...

Understandably, Irish reader Steven Corry is a tad miffed by this. As he points out: "I can order games and DVDs from companies such as Amazon and Play.com who're based further away for a few measly quid. Answers on a postcard please."

Or by some electronic means – at least, that's what we were hoping when we asked Ebuyer to explain its policy. However, our request for an official comment never materialised: we were told the relevant manager was away for a week.

At the time of going to press, we still hadn't heard anything... Here's hoping Ebuyer gets back to us in time for next issue.

M-AUDIO UPDATE

Well, it's not often that a complaint turns into a compliment, but you may recall the problems Michael Stout was having getting his knackered M-Audio card replaced (issue 144). With a little help from Watchdog – and through his own sheer determination – Michael had a replacement card sent over from M-Audio in the States. While he ended up having to shell out another £8 in customs duty, he was happy enough to finally get a replacement.

Until, that is, he tried to use it and realised that the new card was a dead donkey too. "On receiving the card, it wouldn't work in any PCI slot that I'd tried the old one in," says Michael, so he sent off a query to M-Audio in California. Imagine his surprise then, when M-Audio techie Kashan Curry called him on his mobile from California, and "guided me through the installation, until it was working".

While Michael won't be buying from overseas anytime soon, he'd like to thank that Kashan chap for calling him up and sorting his issues – particularly as it meant a wallet-busting call for M-Audio. **PCZ**

This is how some companies regard their Irish customers...

BUYER'S GUIDE

Credit cards have never been so flexible, so why not run up a bit more debt by buying some of this lot?

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

IC7
STREET PRICE £82.50
MANUFACTURER ABIT Computer
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.abit.com.tw
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 onboard. The downside to these boards is they don't support earlier 400FSB Pentiums.

K8N NEO PLATINUM
STREET PRICE £80
MANUFACTURER MSI
TELEPHONE 020 8813 6688
WEBSITE www.msi.com.tw
With AMD's 800MHz HyperTransport bus at its core, the K8N Neo Platinum is ideal for Athlon owners wanting to find a solid home for their 64-bit chips. As with many rivals, the MSI mobo features dynamic overclocking, but on this particular nForce3 250 board it actually seems to work, delivering 10-15 per cent additional thrust without you having to raise a finger. The downside is that it lacks SoundStorm 7.1 support.

875PNEO-FIS2R (INTEL)
STREET PRICE £105
MANUFACTURER MSI
TELEPHONE 020 8813 6688
WEBSITE www.msi.com.tw
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.

PROCESSORS

P4 3.2GHZ
STREET PRICE £183
MANUFACTURER Intel
TELEPHONE 01793 403000
WEBSITE www.intel.com
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.

ATHLON XP 3200+ 400FSB
STREET PRICE £135
MANUFACTURER AMD
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.amd.com
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.

P4 2.6GHZ
STREET PRICE £116
MANUFACTURER Intel
TELEPHONE 01793 403000
WEBSITE www.intel.com
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.

HDDS

WD1200JB 120GB
STREET PRICE £62
MANUFACTURER Western Digital
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.westerndigital.com
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.

DIAMONDMAX PLUS9 80GB
STREET PRICE £50
MANUFACTURER Maxtor
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.maxtor.com
The mid-sized Maxtor is for everyone: large, fast and not that pricey. 80GB is more than adequate for work, play and downloading requirements, and if you're greedy for more gig you 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.

RAPTOR 36GB *WAS £80 NOW £78*
STREET PRICE £78
MANUFACTURER Western Digital
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.westerndigital.com
If you don't need a deep hole for your data, or if you intend keeping your dirt on a separate drive, the 10,000RPM Serial ATA Raptor makes the ideal foundation for your primary partition. It's wickedly fast, perhaps the fastest HDD available yet, and although designed for server environments, provides gaming desktops with the kind of warp-nine, low access times that make any application more nimble.

GRAPHICS CARD

RADEON 9800 PRO 128MB
STREET PRICE £153
MANUFACTURER Sapphire Technology
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.sapphiretech.com
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.

GEFORCE FX 5900 XT 128MB
STREET PRICE £140
MANUFACTURER XFX
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.xfxforce.co.uk
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.

RADEON 9800XT 256MB
STREET PRICE £309
MANUFACTURER ASUSTeK Computer
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.asus.com
With mainstream cards hogging the two front pews, it's only fair we gave some space to the best card on the market: the world's best presented prize-fighter, the ASUS Radeon 9800XT. If you're lucky enough to have the requisite 300 quid rattling around in your back pocket, why settle for anything less? You even get a coupon for *Half-Life 2*, redeemable when the game finally gets released.

SOUNDCARDS

REVOLUTION 7.1
STREET PRICE £90
MANUFACTURER M-Audio
TELEPHONE 0871 7177 100
WEBSITE www.maudio.co.uk
Although it lacks a few of its rivals' gamer-friendly features, including hardware DirectSound and a joystick/MIDI port, the Revolution more than makes up for any deficit with a truly astonishing quality of sound. Unique technologies enhance your enjoyment of games, music and movies. The software is straight-talking and boasts a familiar look and feel, making the card a delight to work with.

AUDIGY 2 ZS
STREET PRICE £85
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com
A quantum leap from its predecessor, the Audigy 2 offers a boggling range of pro-gamer and DVD features, including 6.1 surround sound, EAX Advanced HD, Advanced Resolution DVD-Audio and 24-bit/96KHz recording – it was the first card to gain THX certification from LucasFilm. If you appreciate the immersive experience offered by high-fidelity surround sound, the Audigy gives you an experience like no other.

AUDIGY 2 ZS PLATINUM PRO
STREET PRICE £167
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com
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.

MSI World's Most Powerful VGA ever...

◄ EDITOR'S CHOICE ►	◄ RECOMMENDED ►	◄ ALSO CONSIDER ►	

MICE

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 ACTURER Logitech
TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127
WEBSITE www.logitech.com
Sporting the MX optical engine that made Logitech famous with gamers, the MX700 is essentially an MX500 with its tail lopped off. A cradle keeps your desk tidy and acts as a recharger for the unfettered rodent – making the mouse more attractive to people who don't do batteries. However, it's a touch pricey and we remain unconvinced that going cordless is worth the extra stash.

KEYBOARDS

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.

JOYSTICKS

CYBORG EVO
STREET PRICE £25
MANUFACTURER Saitek
TELEPHONE 01454 451900
WEBSITE www.saitek.com
A welcome new look for Saitek, with 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 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.

SPEAKERS

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 – if you're a basshead, you'll 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 make you leap out of your seat.

SCREENS

FLATRON L1710B
STREET PRICE £290
MANUFACTURER LG Electronics
TELEPHONE 01753 491500
WEBSITE www.lge.co.uk
This 17-inch panel has finally triumphed and knocked our favourite Hitachi from the top spot, largely due to its price tumbling over £50 recently. The LG boasts superb picture quality and is a speedy little number to boot, making it ideal for gaming. If you're currently weighed down with a monster on your desktop and yearn for a new, slimmer model (don't we all?), then this is the way to go. Yet another nail in the CRT coffin.

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 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 a solid choice.

VISIONMASTER PRO 514
STREET PRICE £410
MANUFACTURER Iiyama
TELEPHONE 01438 745482
WEBSITE www.iiyama.co.uk
Boasting a 22in Mitsubishi Electric DIAMONDTRON 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.

HEADSETS

EXTREME PC GAMING HEADSET
STREET PRICE £15
MANUFACTURER Logitech
TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127
WEBSITE www.logitech.co.uk
NEW ENTRY
This fits all the criteria for a gaming headset: it's comfortable (so you can spend hours shouting at your team-mates without feeling you've been cuffed round the ear), the boom comes with an easy-to-position ratchet and it sports a noise-cancelling microphone with excellent voice reproduction. The cable's a bit short, but that's the only drawback – and at this price, it's a steal.

HS300
STREET PRICE £11
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.europe.creative.com
NEW ENTRY
Light and comfortable and with impressive audio considering the rock-bottom price, the Creative HS300's are well worth considering. Sound is rounded, with a decent scoop of bass, and while they can't match the Logitech Extreme for voice quality, your message will still come across loud and clear. If you're strapped for cash, consider these.

AUDIO 90
STREET PRICE £23
MANUFACTURER Plantronics
TELEPHONE 0800 410014
WEBSITE www.plantronics.co.uk
NEW ENTRY
If your life is online gaming, you need a headset you can wear without developing earache – and the Audio 90 is the most comfortable set out of all the ones we've tested. The secret lies in the fact that you can pivot the speakers, which means they sit flush on your ear and block out any outside noise. Not the most stylish set on the market, but eminently functional.

MAILBOX

These pages would be nothing without you – so keep those missives coming...

■ **EAGER BEAVER** Dave Woods

'The Future Of The FPS' feature last issue was a hit.

WHEN I WERE A LAD...

I was on a messageboard the other day, and the subject was older (late '90s) games. Everyone was saying that the graphics would look dated – graphics this and graphics that, blah blah blah. Surely there are more to games than just graphics, but that seems to be the only thing people talk about.

Have people forgotten what makes classic games? Gameplay, plotline, strategy and

atmosphere. It's the same with movies. If all you're doing is admiring the quality of the special effects, bypassing the plot and characters, you're missing the whole point.

So next time you hear people talking about games of this era, look past the 'it's got blah blah graphics' naysayers and look at the game as a whole – not just the screenshots.

Andy Watts

Sorry, but graphics are important. They're not the be-all and end-all, but if you've got a great game, higher quality visuals can only be a good thing. Shallow graphics-a-thons might be rubbish, but I still want games to look as good as possible. Check out our *Doom 3* review out on page 62 and tell me you don't want games to look like this.

TRY AND BUY

Just wanted to say thanks for the demo of *Chaos League* – it's amazing and hilarious! Nice to see some innovation in the modern PC games market. Also, an open note to developers.

Doom 3, reviewed on page 62. Finally.

After playing the demo of *Chaos League*, I'm now about to pre-order the game. See? Demos work!

Huw the Poo

Thankfully, developers seem to have got the message and most games now come with playable demos on or around the time of release.

DIY

I'm writing to highlight one of the most underrated areas of the PC gaming world – the modders. I think the way in which these guys (and gals) release their mods for free is awesome. Take my all-time favourite – *Desert Combat*. I've had ten times more play out of this game than the original *BF1942* and it didn't cost me a penny. Respect is due and I hope that in the future, *PC ZONE* expands its coverage, treating mods as games in their own right rather than a small corner of a single reviews page.

Steven Corry

We've always championed mods in *PC ZONE* – we were the first UK mag to recognise the importance and the first to run dedicated mod reviews. We plan to continue this, and run the best mods on our discs and review the best in the magazine. As for extended coverage – as the scene grows, the mag will reflect it.

POKE HER

I'd like to take issue with your article on Online Poker in issue 143. I've recently joined a poker site, started playing low level tournaments and am holding my own (not literally) – even making a bit of money. What's more, I'm having fun at the same time. Having fun and making money? I think it's disgusting. What are you going to do about it?

Matt Connolly

Ah, you're the one making money are you?

GTA: ERIC SYKES

An idea occurred to me the other day. As a lover of the *GTA* franchise, I noticed a glaring omission from all *GTA* games (and all others in the genre). If Hollywood has taught me anything, it's that at the heart of any great car chase there are always two men crossing the road carrying an oversized pane of glass for the subject to crash through. Where is it in *GTA*?

Rik Badger

Chaos League: amazing and hilarious. Told you so.

And where are the planks you carry over your shoulders in stealth games? It would make it extra hard to get around unnoticed if every time you turned around you accidentally twatted someone round the head.

FLAT TOP

You recently reviewed the Dell Inspiron 9100 3.2GHz laptop, which is, without a doubt, a powerful beast of a machine. One thing that shines through your review though is that the battery life of the machine is next to worthless. 30 minutes and then you need an electricity supply? For a laptop that's aimed at power hungry gamers, it leaves a lot to be desired.

Surely the main desire of a laptop is mobility. You can use it on the road, on the rails, in the air. But with computers becoming more powerful and graphic cards practically needing their own power supply, the drain on power will grow and grow as time progresses.
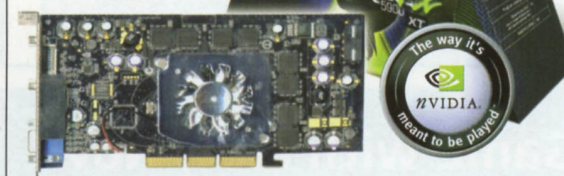
Eventually, you'll need a power supply to boot up! I'm surprised at how much advancement technology has jumped over the years,

"After playing the demo of *Chaos League*, I'm now going to buy it. See, demos work!"

HUW THE POO IS LOVING OUR WORK

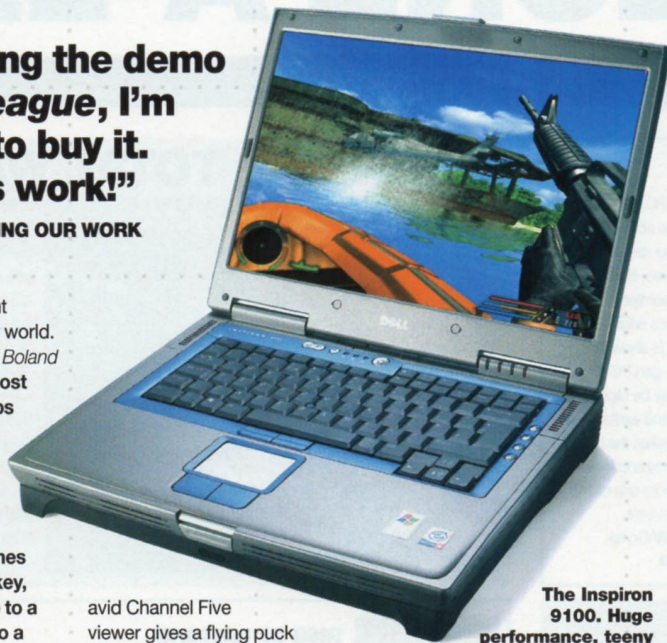yet how little advancement there's been in the battery world.

Paul Boland

The 9100 is one of the most awesome gaming laptops money can buy. The downside is that you can only play on the batteries for 30 minutes, but that's not necessarily where it comes into its own. Mobility is key, and getting one of these to a LAN party, as opposed to a hulking desktop is a big plus. Plus, hook it up to a monitor on your desk and it doubles as a desktop too.

PUCK YOU!

I've been a subscriber to your magazine since issue 100 and I love your honest reviews. I know I can count on you to save me wasting my money on an over-hyped game (how I wished I'd waited for your review of *Breed*).

However, I feel you let your high standards drop in your recent review of *Eastside Hockey*. You state 'nobody but the most

avid Channel Five viewer gives a flying puck about ice hockey'. If that's true, why does the UK have a successful hockey league?

But to stay on my point: instead of reviewing the game and awarding it for what it is, you dismiss it because it's a sport you're not interested in. You even state in your review 'you could easily confuse it with *CM*', but in the end give it a poor 68 per cent. Maybe you should review the game for what it is and not slam it for being something other than football.

To end on a high note, I just got the new issue in the post and

The Inspiron 9100. Huge performance, teeny battery life.

think that your feature on 'The Future Of The FPS' rocks.

Jim Harvey

Steve gave *Eastside Hockey* 68 per cent because that's what it was worth, and I'd like to take issue with the word 'poor'. 68 per cent is a decent score for a decent game, and one that shares the same style as *Championship Manager* without the depth. Have you played it or are you just angry that hockey isn't as revered as football in the UK? PCZ

LETTER OF THE MONTH

REALLY UNREAL

Brilliant feature on 'The Future Of The FPS' last issue. *F.E.A.R.* looks amazing and *Brothers In Arms* sounds interesting (not much info on *Doom 3* though). However, the stuff from the Unreal Engine 3.0 really blew me away. I'm playing *UT2004* at the moment and I'm really trying hard to visualise the game running in the new engine – it's going to be incredible.

It made me think though: with advancements like this and the possibility of photo-realism in the future, people like Epic could be at the start of a revolution in technology. Beyond games, the applications for an engine like this is immense. You touched on Hollywood and the ability to make effects for films and that's surely only the tip of the iceberg. It could be that in our lifetime, the core of the games industry become the pioneers of the technological world. How cool would that be? It's only a shame I haven't got a spare million to license the engine for myself.

Simon Dukkos

Shame. But here's a graphics card so at least your current games will look fantastic.

Girls In Games: no, not an updated Duran Duran classic, but a philosophical thread on the *ZONE* forum this month, on which, the appropriately monikered **CateArcher** posed a very interesting question. "I freely admit that it can only be a good thing to have a strong female lead in a game, and that the use of this character may help introduce many girls into the world of computer gaming. However, I have one important question to ask. Do men not find it emasculating playing a game as a woman?" **Davidmc555** had to think a while before coming to his startling conclusion. "Erm, no. Playing as Mona Sax in *Max Payne 2* doesn't really change anything – it just gives a different perspective on the game."

Emasculated? **Escaped_monkey** has an entirely different take on it. "Whenever you play a game as a woman, the woman is always (a) physically and mentally strong, or (b) a femme fatale. Either way, they kick mens' arses, so rather than feeling emasculated, I feel empowered. "Take this you chauvinist pigs! I yell. (I'm a straight, teenage male, for the record.)" Whatever you say.

On the other hand, **PlumpOrgan** doesn't see the difference. "It doesn't matter whether you're a man, woman or psychotic ape: the dialogue and action are fairly impersonal. Where it will all start to fall on its arse is when dialogue and plot within games matures sufficiently to cover complex issues and invoke higher emotional responses." Something **Bagsabbis** totally agrees with. "Exactly. It's not been a problem, because we men haven't had to think as a woman. So far, the dialogue and gameplay hasn't been either cerebral enough or challenging enough for us blokes to start feeling uncomfortable."

A theme everyone seemed to warm to, including the **ReverendJoseph**. "*NOLF* is first-person, so I could be a gun-toting cactus for all I care. But *Tomb Raider* makes me feel *more* manly, because I'm staring at a girl's arse which affirms my straight masculinity to anybody I may meet." Something Backchat imagines is very important for a man of the cloth. Then, **Bagsabbis** hit on a potential problem. "What if a game hinges on getting the correct answer to the question 'does my bum look big in this'?" "Ah, obviously you've never had a long-term partner," replied **PlumpOrgan**. "If you had, you'd know that at all times the answer to that question is a resounding no, which must be delivered immediately and with conviction (even if her posterior is so vast that it's dragged several small satellites into its orbit)." ▼ True enough, but it's a fact Backchat found out too late…

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 ISSUE 136**

MEDAL OF HONOR: ALLIED ASSAULT

It may have been toppled by *Call Of Duty*, but *Allied Assault's* set-pieces, period detail and intense action can still beat most recent FPS releases hands-down. Its graphics may be ageing slightly these days, but it's still a hell of a ride.
PUB EA **DEV** 2015   **PCZ ISSUE 112**

NO ONE LIVES FOREVER 2

Style, stealth and magnificent set-pieces are the order of the day in this excellent spy sequel. It looks brilliant, it's well designed and 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, now, its excellent expansion *Thrones And Patriots* make it hugely deserving of our prestigious Classic award.
PUB Microsoft **DEV** Big Huge Games   **PCZ ISSUE 129**

SOLDIERS: HEROES OF WWII

The strategy of *Commandos* meets the fun of *Cannon Fodder* in this top-down game of tactics and warfare. Being the underdog has never been so much fun, and the rumbling of distant tanks never so worrying.
PUB Codemasters **DEV** Best Way   **PCZ ISSUE 144**

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**

GROUND CONTROL II

Despite a few AI glitches and dull objectives, *GCII* is a great game if you prefer tactics to boring old resource management. A superb sci-fi effort with some intense freeform missions – strat-fans should check it out.
PUB VU Games **DEV** Massive Entertainment   **PCZ ISSUE 143**

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**

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 preposterously detailed follow-up even more.
PUB Eidos **DEV** Pyro Studio   **PCZ ISSUE 108**

HOMEWORLD 2

The interface to this epic space combat RTS might be a bit intimidating for rookies, but *Homeworld 2* definitely deserves a place in our hall of fame. Staggering visuals and gripping strategic manoeuvring make it addictive.
PUB VU Games **DEV** Relic   **PCZ ISSUE 134**

Welcome to the *PC ZONE* A-List, home to the greatest and most gorgeous games in the land. The titles listed here aren't just any old tat – they're the leading contenders in their genre, and have been played and rated as grrrrreat by us. As Tina Turner once warbled, they're simply the best...

◄ 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 scorcher of an RPG.
PUB Interplay **DEV** Black Isle Studio   **PCZ ISSUE 87**

DUNGEON SIEGE
Graphically brilliant, massively enjoyable and highly immersive, *Dungeon Siege* is one of the best RPGs to date and only misses out on a Classic 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**

THIEF: DEADLY SHADOWS
Garrett's new adventure is sure to thrill, although you can't help but feel that it's been hampered by console considerations. That said, sublime level design, amazing sound and real scares make it an excellent buy.
PUB Eidos **DEV** Ion Storm   **PCZ ISSUE 144**

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**

THE SUFFERING
NEW ENTRY A survival horror that's refreshingly fast and fluid, *The Suffering* takes place in an Alcatraz-style prison and surprised us with its ingenuity and tension-fused set-pieces. It gets slightly repetitive, but it's worth a ride.
PUB: Midway **DEV:** Surreal Software   **PCZ ISSUE 145**

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**

◄ 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 unhealthily long stay in the charts. It's now little more than a cash cow for Electronic Arts, although you can't help but admire the strength of community and the fact that it's still selling by the bucket-load.
PUB EA **DEV** Maxis/EA **PCZ ISSUE 87**

VEGA$: MAKE IT BIG
An in-depth tycoon game with all the 3D graphical glitz and glamour of Vegas itself, *Make It Big* provides hotels, casinos and over-priced magic shows that let you suck the money out of punters' pockets. It can get a little too fiddly, but it looks and plays really well. A *PC ZONE* 'Essential'.
PUB Empire Interactive **DEV** Deep Red **PCZ ISSUE 135**

SPACE COLONY
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 ►

DESERT COMBAT (BF 1942)

What with *Counter-Strike* now available as a full game in the form of *Condition Zero*, *Desert Combat* sits atop the modding tree. A *Battlefield 1942* TC that focuses on the more sandy conflicts of the last decade (scraps like the original Desert Storm or the troubles in Somalia), *Desert Combat* is extraordinarily good, extremely popular and as watertight as the best commercial release. It also provides a great stepping-stone between the original game and the forthcoming Middle-Eastern *Battlefield 2*.
WEB www.desertcombat.com

NATURAL SELECTION (HALF-LIFE)
This superb *Half-Life* mod sees marines squaring off against aliens in various sci-fi environments. With the marines working in teams and the aliens acting like mentalists, the variety in gameplay makes it a sure-fire winner.
WEB www.natural-selection.org

INFILTRATION (UNREAL TOURNAMENT)
A top drawer realism-bound mod for the ageing *Unreal Tournament* warhorse, *Infiltration* takes the familiar terrorist vs counter-terrorist plot and gives it a spin with some amazing weapon loadouts and hugely tense gameplay.
WEB infiltration.sentrystudios.net

THE SPECIALISTS (HALF-LIFE)
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

SAS: INTO THE LION'S DEN (UT2003)
NEW ENTRY A slick and atmospheric good guys vs bad guys mod that oozes class and detail – it's one-shot kills all round, with stamina levels and getting out of puff to add to the realism. He who dares, frags.
WEB www.sas.jolt.co.uk

◄ 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

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**

STAR WARS GALAXIES: AN EMPIRE DIVIDED
Despite a shaky start, *SWG* is now thriving – partly down to the addition of vehicles, Jedi and player housing, and partly because *Star Wars* fans are loyal as dogs. The *Jump To Lightspeed* expansion should boost things further.
PUB: Activision **DEV** Sony Online Entertainment **PCZ ISSUE 138**

DARK AGE OF CAMELOT
The alternative to *EverQuest* with a loose basis in European mythology and three-way PvP realm combat, this is also a beardy version of *PlanetSide*. Recent graphical updates have breathed new life into it.
PUB Mythic Entertainment **DEV** Mythic Entertainment **PCZ ISSUE 142**

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. The new Onslaught mode has given a new dimension to the series, adding tactical awareness to the list of skills online shootists need to master. It even plays well offline, making *UT2004* the definitive choice.

PUB Atari **DEV** Digital Extremes

PCZ ISSUE 138

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

BATTLEFIELD 1942

Not much in single-player, but online this Swedish gem has redefined the way online shooters work. Infantry, jeeps, tanks, planes, bombers, ships – the total WWII experience (minus the searing horror and psychological scarring for life).

PUB EA **DEV:** Digital Illusions   **PCZ ISSUE 121**

JOINT OPERATIONS: TYPHOON RISING

150 players! Count 'em. Some say a world record (although *PlanetSide* begs to disagree), this is modern-day online warfare at its finest. Quality maps, plenty of vehicles and the best helicopters in the business – why, it even has useful mortars.

PUB NovaLogic **DEV** NovaLogic   **PCZ ISSUE 145**

BATTLEFIELD VIETNAM

Take *BF1942*, drop it into the '60s and bingo – the total Vietnam war experience. More claustrophobic than *BF1942*, which suits the jungle warfare period setting, this has a great '60s mood: all it needs is the late Brando and it'd be perfect.

PUB EA **DEV** DICE Canada   **PCZ ISSUE 141**

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**

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**

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

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: Maddox Games

PCZ ISSUE 128

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

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**
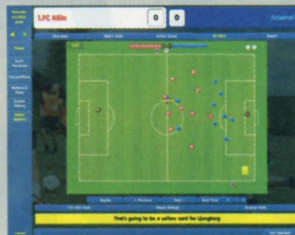
NEED FOR SPEED: UNDERGROUND

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**

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.

GIRL RACER

DISCWORLD

■ **WORDS & DISCS** Suzy Wallace

▲ In the dark realms of the *ZONE* HQ, I've become synonymous among the team for several things. The first is swearing like a trooper, and the second is my ability to bore anyone to death with my knowledge of and passion for cars. Not only have they been a long-term obsession of mine in real life, but I also delight in the joys of putting the pedal to the metal in the virtual world too.

So this month's exclusive demo of *Juiced* was right up my street (and all the way into my drive), featuring licensed cars, real-life modding parts and authentic crash damage – make sure you check it out. We've also got the fantastic exclusive demo of *Mashed* – an arcade-style racer that defines the enjoyable multiplayer experience.

Beyond these two driving gems, I've worked extra-hard this month to bring you another five exclusive demos and four exclusive movies, including the stunningly beautiful Unreal Engine 3.0. And, never content with a good thing, these pages have also been subject to a bit of a *Changing Rooms*-style makeover. The new and improved disc pages contain shiny new challenges, features and facts. Plus, the Movies and Extended Play sections of the disc have been given the permanent home that they've been pining for, having been left out in the virtual rain for so long. So, without further ado, I present to you the newly revamped disc pages. Let me know what you think – send any suggestions and comments to mailbox@pczone.co.uk ▼

JUICED

CD1/DVD Pub: Acclaim **Dev:** Juice Games

EXCLUSIVE

IT'S TIME to rev up your engine with this street racing sim from Acclaim, with the excellent San Ricardo track and three tasty Toyota rides for you to choose from (see 'Take a Ride', below). The cars can't be individually modded, but each comes with an automod option in order to sate your big-wheeled desires. Tune up and tune in to the world of street racing...

SAN RICARDO

BEAT THE CLOCK!

Can you beat Suzy's time of: **2:09:42**

ON THESE SETTINGS
- Route 2
- 2 laps
- Automodded Supra
- Afternoon, Clear
- 6 Cars

6 Three corners to get you round the block. The roads are quite tight in this area, although the second corner is one of the few on the track where you can drive on the pavement.

7 The last corner before crossing the finish line, this is a lot tighter than it appears and can require some skilful driving to get you round at maximum speed without sustaining damage.

1 At the first corner, you enter a 90-degree right: expect lots of jostling on the first lap, as most of the cars pile into the corner at the same time.

5 The nastiest corner on the track with a solid fence on the inside, coupled with a slight left tilt just before you hit it. Best to come into it wide and use your brakes to kick the rear-end out.

2 A gradual bend to the left. This is a full-speed corner – take it tight at first and drift wide if you need to.

4 The best overtaking place on the track and an ideal spot for using your nitrous on the gradual curve.

3 Sharp right which requires some braking because you arrive at full speed.

TAKE A RIDE

Looking almost like it's been sponsored by Toyota, there are three vehicles to choose from in *Juiced*

Toyota Celica SS-I (GT). Very stable, with massive understeer. If you want to get round corners with any speed, try double-tapping the brake mid-corner to break into a very controllable slide. A great beginner's car.

Toyota Celica SS-II (2000). A little bit more twitchy than the SS-1, with a bit less understeer. Double-tapping the brake again results in a slide, but sooner and wider than the SS-1. A little bit faster than the SS-1 too.

Toyota Supra. Lots of power and massive oversteer thanks to the RWD. Combined, they make this the beast of the bunch, but watch out for over-correcting the oversteer and fishtailing down the road.

IMPORTANT!

You can find all of the content here on the DVD but we can't cram everything onto the two CDs. This is because we can get more than six times the content on our double-sided DVD, including a library of patches and utilities, along with DVD-video (that you can watch on your TV), bigger movies and more playable demos. Demos and movies are getting bigger all the time, and certain games are going to be released on DVD-only. If you still haven't upgraded to DVD, do it now. You can pick up a cheap drive for about £20, so there's no excuse (unless you're a real pikey).

MASHED

CD1/DVD Pub: Empire **Dev:** Supersonic **Reviewed:** Issue 144, 65%

MASHED is pure rip-roaring arcade driving action, and is best played multiplayer – although it may get more than a little cramped with four people crowded around your keyboard. There's only one track on offer: Tierra Piedra, but you can choose from the single-player Time Trial, Quick Battle (against bots) or the full Multiplayer mode. Blast, nudge and destroy your pals as you charge around the track – this is a great game for waging a bitter war of revenge!

BEAT THE CLOCK!
Complete the Time Trial in less than: **21:19**

EXCLUSIVE

POWER TO THE PEOPLE

Mashed has a selection of pick-ups littered around the Tierra Piedra track. Use them wisely in order to get ahead…

MACHINE GUN
Brings up a target in front of your car that locks onto enemies who cross your path.

MINES
Dropped from the back of your car to the track, watch cars hit them, flip in the air and burn.

BARREL BOMBS
Tossed from the back of your car, these have a short delay before exploding. Boom!

MISSILE LAUNCHER
Brings up a target that locks on to any cars in front of you. Aim, fire!

MORTAR
Shoots a mortar in front of your car. Useful for taking out enemies who're in your way.

AIR STRIKE (MULTIPLAYER ONLY)
Once you've been knocked out, you can unleash an air strike.

DISNEY'S TOONTOWN

CD2/DVD Pub: Disney **Dev:** Disney **Reviewed:** Issue 144, 80%

DISNEY'S *Toontown* manages to break the mould of the traditional MMORPG: it's safe for all the family, but is actually great fun for adults too, with smooth animation and chucklesome visual gags. This is a world where the currency is jelly-beans, your Laff meter represents your health and you fight enemies by making them giggle.

Disney's Toontown: jelly-bean-tastic!

EXCLUSIVE

GOOFY'S GAGS

Here's six of our favourite types of gag, which are used as weapons to fight the corporate Cogs

TOON-UP
Lets you fill other Toon's Laff meters in battle. Examples: feather, lipstick, juggling balls.

TRAP
The only gags guaranteed to hit, as long as you can lure a Cog into them. Examples: banana peel and TNT.

LURE
Bring the Cogs closer, so you can inflict maximum damage. Examples: $1 bill and hypno-goggles.

THROW
Every Toon starts with these – they form the core of your gag assortment. Examples: cupcake, fruit pie and cake.

SQUIRT
Not as powerful as throws but more accurate. Examples: squirting flower, seltzer bottle and storm cloud.

DROP
The most powerful gags in *Toontown*. Examples: flower pot, anvil and grand piano.

PAINKILLER

CD1/DVD Pub: DreamCatcher **Dev:** People Can Fly **Reviewed:** Issue 142, 83%

YOU'VE probably already experienced the joy of zombie-killing, but now you can try it out on up to 16 of your mates with this exclusive *Painkiller* multiplayer demo. It features the Free For All or Light Bearer game modes and two maps to 'stake' out – DM_Cursed and DM_Sacred. Get blasting!

The laxatives had taken full effect.

EXCLUSIVE

BRING THE PAIN

Painkiller doesn't have a huge selection of weapons available, but each one is perfectly formed with two modes of fire…

ELECTRODRIVE
Fires small darts at a rapid rate of fire. Secondary fire produces a lightning bolt that homes in to fry enemies.

ROCKET LAUNCHER
Primary fire rockets cause mayhem, while secondary fire is the minigun (think Arnie in *Terminator 2*).

STAKEGUN
The wooden stake-firing gun is a novel and satisfying weapon; secondary fire produces lethal grenades.

SHOTGUN
Packs a punch but lacks long-range accuracy. Solution: right-click fires nitrogen to freeze the enemy.

PAINKILLER
Primary fire enables Pain, a series of spinning blades. Secondary is Killer, throwing a grapple-style weapon.

SUZY'S TOP TIP
Got a problem with a sneaky sniper using height to his advantage? Try pulling them off their perch with the alternate fire of the Painkiller weapon.

D-DAY

CD2/DVD Pub: Digital Jesters **Dev:** Digital Reality **Reviewed:** Issue 146, 46%

"Look – there's Tom Hanks!"

US troops stop for a beer.

EXCLUSIVE

CHALLENGE SUZY!
Can you get through the level without losing a vehicle?

DIGITAL Jesters has teamed up with the Normandie Mémoire association to bring *D-Day* to your monitors for the event's 60th anniversary. Dropping you right in the heart of the action, the single-player mission is based on the bloody carnage of the landings at Omaha Beach, while the multiplayer option offers up one map from the full game.

GORKY ZERO: BEYOND HONOR

Bloody barrels…

EXCLUSIVE

CD2/DVD Pub: JoWooD/Koch Media **Dev:** Metropolis Software **Reviewed:** Issue 144, 62%

GORKY ZERO is best explained as a simplified *Splinter Cell* with some isometric views thrown in for good measure. Sneaking and stealth are the aim of the day and there's a tutorial and full mission included in the demo, where some pesky Ukranians are up to no good.

ALSO ON THE CD *Beanotown Racing, Camgoo, Battle Rush: Tanks* and *Superstar Chefs* (this month's Indie Zone game)
ALSO ON THE DVD *NHL Eastside Hockey Manager, Zoo Empire, Besieger, Massive Assault Network, Aces High, Rapid Gunner* and *Space Taxi 2*

MOVIES

ON THE CD / ON THE DVD

OUR FEATURE PRESENTATION...

UNREAL ENGINE 3.0

World exclusive look at Epic's stunning new graphics engine in action! See tomorrow's games today!

Environment – look at the detail in this scene.

Physics engine – who needs Havok when you've got this?

Materials/pixel shaders – stock materials are impressive.

Creatures – check out the folds in its skin!

ALSO SHOWING...

COUNTER-STRIKE: SOURCE – It's back, with a makeover courtesy of the new Source engine. This movie features the Aztec level and shows off the new physics-heavy engine that's been used to make *Half-Life 2*.
DON'T MISS – Check out the cool effect of the bullets hitting the water.

HALF-LIFE 2 – Its delays are making British Rail look efficient, but we still can't wait to get our grubby little mitts on the new Freeman epic. This shiny new trailer includes a couple of scenes we've not had the pleasure of seeing before.
DON'T MISS – The novel uses for the Manipulator gun. Who needs ammo?

STARSHIP TROOPERS – Take a peek at this world exclusive movie of the game of the film. Paul Verhoeven's celluloid antics look like they've been faithfully reproduced – you'll be able to recognise several scenes from the film instantly.
DON'T MISS – The dive-bombing flying alien who takes a poor unfortunate with it.

WARHAMMER 40,000: DAWN OF WAR – Space and Chaos Marines mingle with Orks, Eldar and the occasional body part. This RTS is looking hugely promising and could prove to be the first worthwhile digital crossover for Games Workshop (see page 40).
DON'T MISS – The hand-to-hand combat skills of the Eldar (the tall, green-haired dudes).

ALSO ON THE DVD – *NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND 2, WORLD OF WARCRAFT, ADVENT RISING, ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON 3, THE SIMS 2, COSSACKS II (EXCLUSIVE!), THE MAKING OF AND MUSIC FROM GROUND CONTROL II.*

EXTENDED PLAY

FAR CRY MAPS

Barrel bonanza with the physics-heavy Fun Island map.

ON THE DVD **FAR CRY** holds a special place in our hearts, so we've sourced eight of the best new maps for you. The single-player side kicks off with Sabotage, Matto is set on a small island featuring a military base, and Tutorial Map tweaks the original tutorial level. Fun Island is our fave though – plenty to knock over, drop onto mercenaries heads and explode. There are also four multiplayer maps.

Don't miss – the satisfaction to be had in destroying rows of fire extinguishers, barrels and the like with the mounted machine guns in the Fun Island map.

COME GET SOME!

ON THE CD / ON THE DVD

To celebrate our six-page exposé, we've collected everything *Duke Nukem*-related to keep you occupied until the game gets released.*

PLAYABLE DEMOS
Duke Nukem
Duke Nukem 2
Duke Nukem 3D
Balls Of Steel
Duke Nukem: Manhattan Project

MOVIES
Duke Nukem Forever 1998
Duke Nukem Forever 2001

*This may involve watching the movies over and over and over and over again...

GIFT OF THE GAB
Check out our Special Report on voice actors in games (page 10) and then listen to some of your favourite characters giving *PC ZONE* a verbal lashing. We like!

INCLUDES...
Duke Nukem, Barney (*Half-Life*), Adria (*Diablo*) and various samples from *The Lord Of The Rings*.

SYSTEM SHOCK 2

ON THE CD / ON THE DVD **WE'VE GOT** a few goodies for the ultra-creepy *System Shock 2* this month. First up is the patch which adds co-operative play, then there's ShockED – the game's editor, which enables you to create your own disturbing levels. Last, we've got two mods to make the game look pretty: *Rebirth*, which replaces the original meshes with hi-res ones, and the *System Shock 2 Texture Pack*, to make the textures hi-res too. Now we just need someone to re-release the game...

Before....

After....

BTB AIRLINES

ON THE DVD

Chocks away old chap!

SERIOUS Sam 2: The Second Encounter gets cut down to size with this fantastic vehicular deathmatch mod from CAD Creations. The maps are mostly oversized, featuring destructible terrain (making it feel like you're in a *Micro Machines* level), and the armed vehicles on offer range from muscle cars to mini bi-planes.
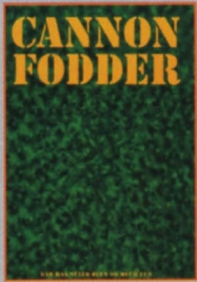
ALSO ON THE CD – Cobash *Space Colony* campaign
ALSO ON THE DVD – Elemental TC for *Dungeon Siege*, *Enemy Territory* pack, the fantastic contents of the Mods of the Month featuring *Return To Castle Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory*, and *The Wild West* mod for it, *Wasteland 2042*, *BF1942: The Great War* and *Silent Heroes*.
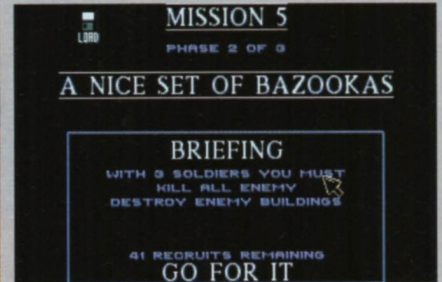
GAMES THAT CHANGED THE WORLD
CANNON FODDER

Many games have told us that 'war has never been so much fun', but *Cannon Fodder* said it first and, for our money, still says it the loudest. *Richie Shoemaker* rallies to the Sensible war cry

In 1993, this violence was deemed 'monstrous'.

MISSION 5
PHASE 2 OF 3
A NICE SET OF BAZOOKAS
BRIEFING
WITH 3 SOLDIERS YOU MUST KILL ALL ENEMY DESTROY ENEMY BUILDINGS
41 RECRUITS REMAINING
GO FOR IT

Ooh, you are awful.

When in doubt, shoot the villagers.

IF YOU'VE been paying attention, you'll know that this is the second Sensible Software title to feature in the pages of 'Games That Changed The World'. The first, which appeared in issue 122, was *Sensible Soccer* – *Sensi* to the initiated – perhaps the greatest football game ever made. However, linked inseparably to that noble game was another, a title directly inspired by the look and feel of *Sensi*, and one that would eventually eclipse it both critically and commercially.

Cannon Fodder was in every way the grittier, nastier offspring of *Sensible Soccer*, created immediately afterwards and sharing many of the same basic design ideas. And if *Sensi* is Sensible's best and most fondly remembered game, the irreverent war-themed *Cannon Fodder* is its most brash and contentious – even attracting the ire of the gutter press for its shameless misuse of flower power...

"Ah yes, the poppies," remembers Sensible co-founder Jon Hare. "We wanted to use the British Legion Poppy on the box as we were releasing the game on Remembrance Sunday and it had references to the war-dead, with gravestones and the cemetery you saw after each level. Unfortunately, they took offence to our 'abuse' of their poppy, as they thought it an insult to those who'd died in the war."

Publisher Virgin Interactive glibly insisted the poppy was 'there to remind customers that war is no joke', but after something resembling a minor national outcry from war veterans and MPs, who deemed the game 'offensive' and 'monstrous', and a nationwide boycott of the 'shameful game' instigated by the *Daily Star*, Virgin yielded to pressure from the British Legion and dropped the image from the box.

Jon remembers: "Funnily enough, when we agreed to pay their lawyer £500 they shut the fuck up about it. I've never bought a plastic poppy since."

The idea behind *Cannon Fodder* was formed towards the end of 1991. After mapping out a brief outline for a

PROFILE

Sensible was one of the few rock 'n' roll developers and Jon Hare was very much the front man, designing all the company's hits from the early C64 classics of *Parallax* and *Wizball* to the golden era of *Mega Lo Mania*, *Sensible Soccer* and *Cannon Fodder*. Sadly, the team split after the excesses of their most ambitious game, *Sex 'n' Drugs 'n' Rock 'n' Roll*, was deemed too un-pc to be 'accepted into the market'.

NAME: Jon Hare
ROLE ON CANNON FODDER: Lead designer, producer/creative director
FIRST GAME WORKED ON: *Twister*
WHERE IS HE NOW?: Working as a consultant for various games on mobile phones and PCs

That snowman is packed with explosives. Sick bastards those Sensible boys.

THE FUTURE

See how much fun war can be?

WHERE DO WE SHOOT AT FROM HERE?

When Codemasters stopped developing *Cannon Fodder 3*, it didn't know it would soon be grooming a successor – *Soldiers: Heroes Of World War II*. There are many similarities – the most obvious is *Soldiers'* 'direct control' feature, where you can play the game out as an action game within the structure of a typical RTS. Of course, *Soldiers* boasts a far greater degree of realism, which is why it's being compared to *Commandos*, but those with a sense of game history know where the true influence lies.

Though it's only been out a short while, *Soldiers* is already proving a minor hit and will doubtless be given a further boost with the promised multiplayer add-ons. Who knows: this brand of action-strategy may yet find its place in the market, and the spirit of *Cannon Fodder* will finally be revived.

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squad-level action game, the concept evolved from an elementary theme ("*Lemmings* with weapons") to something more complex. To make it work, Sensible developed a control method that was both simple and powerful: one mouse button ordered your troops towards the mouse pointer, the other commanded them to fire.

BE PREPARED

"Once we had the controls working, including the ability to split your squad, the game got mapped out fairly early on in quite a lot of detail," recalls Jon. "At a very early stage, I planned all 64-odd levels so that the player would always see something new every time he got to the next stage: a new background style or a new vehicle, a

new weapon or enemy type, pick-up or building. At that stage it was all mapped out on the back of fag packets, then on graph paper with coloured pencils – like you'd do at school."

"Interestingly enough, I don't recall any features that we had to drop. Perhaps that's why the game seemed so complete, because the finished game was exactly what it was always planned to be in the first place. Having said that, the development for *Cannon Fodder* was a lot more organic than a game would be now. We only specced what we needed as we went along, re-evaluating the game virtually every day and then adding to and modifying the spec accordingly. Using this kind of approach, you rarely feel that features are missed out,

> ## "The spirit of the *Cannon Fodder* video is the biggest missing ingredient in the computer games market today"
>
> **JON HARE**
> CO-FOUNDER, SENSIBLE SOFTWARE

When graphics were crap and games were absolutely brilliant.

as you don't set your agenda so clearly in the first place – it's more a process of logic, experimentation, perfectionism and intuition. The only significant difficulty during development was that Jools, the programmer, was ill towards the end of development – but I think that might have been something to do with his rather excessive night-time habits."

If the team's antics on previous games hadn't already done so, events during the development of *Cannon Fodder* certainly cemented Sensible's reputation as rock 'n' roll developers. As development reached the final stages, thoughts turned to fleshing out the game with the required intro sequence. Technology was not yet at the stage to provide lavish full-motion video sequences, and since in-engine 3D visuals were unheard of, Jon and his team had to come up with some alternative. So, capitalising on his unrealised musical ambitions, Jon managed to convince publisher Virgin to finance a pop music video.

Soon enough, *War Has Never Been So Much Fun* was composed by Jon Hare and musical collaborator Richard Joseph, and the team left the office with a wardrobe of military uniforms with a view to lark about the countryside and film some footage.

"What can I say?" laughs Jon. "In those days, we were allowed to do what we wanted by publishers like Virgin, who had a bit more balls than we generally see these days. It was our first video – a real fun day out. It was shot by an Anglia TV cameraman who we hired for the day, and the whole thing cost less than £200 to shoot and £200 to edit. I'd like to see an intro as memorable as the *Cannon Fodder* one made for less than £500 these days. There's a lot of value in originality and enthusiasm if it's put together well enough." Pausing, the veteran developer adds thoughtfully: "The spirit of the *Cannon Fodder* video is the biggest missing ingredient in the computer games market today."

A BRIDGE TOO FAR
Cannon Fodder was released for the Amiga at the end of November 1993, and the critical reception was rapturous. An Atari ST version followed in March 1994 and the game was eventually ported to all the home consoles of the time, as well as the PC. All told, close to a million copies were sold and despite the impending demise of both Amiga and ST as the premier gaming platforms – the game's natural home – a sequel was quickly commissioned, written and released within a year.

"The aim of the sequel was to link the levels in with a bizarre time-travelling plot, but unfortunately I don't feel I put sufficient time into the overall direction of the game. *Cannon Fodder 2* was the first game where I relinquished control of the game design – every senior designer experiences this for at least one game in their life and this was my turn. In retrospect, all it needed was more

The skidoo was the first vehicle you got to drive, followed by tanks later on.
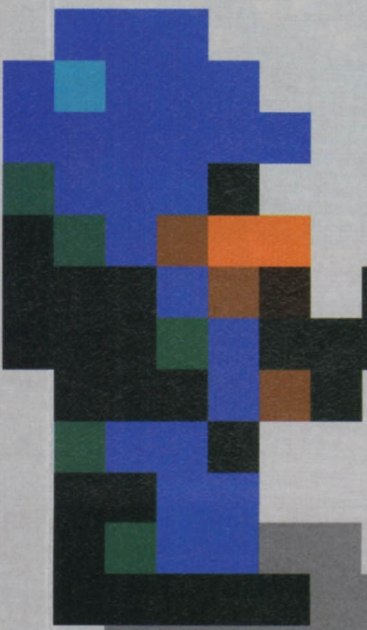
attention to detail on the text and graphics. But by this time, my attention was diverted to other projects."

Despite the problems, *CF2* notched up respectable acclaim from both press and punters – the only problem was that technology was starting to leave the series behind. A new breed of consoles was taking over and on PC, *Cannon Fodder* was looking decidedly retro next to the newly released shareware phenomenon that was id Software's *Doom*.

COMMAND & CANNON FODDER

But when it comes to the original, Jon remains upbeat. "I'm generally very pleased with *Cannon Fodder*," he says. "It was the perfect follow-up to *Sensible Soccer* – it had a similar look and feel, it was excellent quality and it sold pretty well too. We never really tried to do anything different or amazingly unique,

just something good and fun – which is what we tried to do with all our games."

However, despite the pride he feels for *Cannon Fodder*, Jon doesn't believe it to be Sensible's best title, nor particularly influential.

"It fits in at about number five of my list of all-time fave games that I've made. I know this may seem strange, but it's true. It's somewhere below *Sensi Soccer/SWOS*, *Wizball/Wizkid*, *Mega Lo Mania* and *Sex 'n' Drugs*. As to the game's influence, I'm more proud of the way we got people to care about their individual soldiers and the way we used a personalised military squad, rather than any notion that we may have fostered the real-time strategy genre.

"I remember *Command & Conquer* being in development in the Virgin Offices as we were finishing off *Cannon Fodder*. I must confess that I didn't expect it to be as huge a success as it

was and I've held some kind of illogical Westwood grudge ever since. But I wouldn't say that it's a direct rip-off of *CF*, it just pisses me off that a lot of consumers and journalists are so ignorant, particularly in America. They aren't even aware of our game and therefore don't credit it as having been any influence at all… I dunno, maybe it wasn't…"

NEW HOPE FOR EPISODE III

Despite still being a successful team, thanks in no small part to the continued success of *Sensible World Of Soccer*, Sensible's next batch of planned releases were to prove too risqué in a market increasingly edging towards global mainstream acceptance. *Sensible Golf* was stripped down prior to release, *Have A Nice Day* and *Sex 'n' Drugs 'n' Rock 'n' Roll* were both axed and Sensible's final release, *Sensi World Cup '98* was a game torn in two directions, its 2D roots flailing in the face of 3D-accelerated necessity.

In embracing the PC market too late and having invested heavily in *Sex 'n' Drugs* (the game, that is), the writing was on the wall for Sensible, and the company was eventually acquired by Codemasters. For *Cannon Fodder* however, there remained some hope.

"When I first worked for Codemasters, I worked on *Cannon Fodder 3*," reveals Jon. "In fact, the development stopped and started three times in a two-year period, eventually ending up in Codemasters' London Studio. The death knell for *CF3* was rung when Codemasters hit a dodgy financial year and needed to lay off 20 per cent of its staff. The temptation to shut down the London studio and sell the building was too great for the directors (and a very sound business decision I might add), but unfortunately with the whole team gone, the game effectively disappeared too. It was a huge disappointment to me that it never came out, especially as it
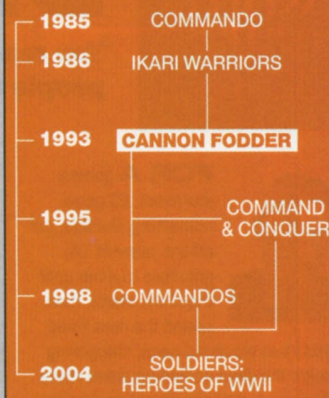
was such an excellent concept."

Jon has since left Codemasters, so it seems unlikely that *Cannon Fodder 3* will ever see the light of day. Behind a bitterness that seems to ebb slowly with the passing of time, Jon remains defiant against the corporate forces that have taken over the modern games industry.

"Corporate culture has its place in our industry, but it's not the only way to make good games," he says. "We weren't a money-driven team at Sensible, but we sold millions of games. Our top programmers were earning over £100,000 a year each thanks to their royalty deals and our partnership was still making about 75 per cent profit each year after we'd paid everyone. We were rich and it was a lot of fun. Thankfully, I still have some of it left… I think. But there are still plenty of new things left to do with games, it's just that no-one is prepared to risk their money on new things any more." He pauses ruefully. "Including me." PCZ

Split up your troops and they'd provide covering fire.

MISSION COMPLETE

The battle is won, but for Jon Hare, the war for the games industry has been lost.

THE LIONHEAD DIARIES

You read about it every year, but what is E3 like for the people showing their games? *Mark Hill* **has a backstage pass**

The world of *Black & White 2*.

Jonty Barnes tells it like it is.

Dry your eyes mate.

FOR A games journalist, E3 goes something like this: get off the plane in LA, gravitate to a bar until the show starts, then spend the next three nights in an alcoholic haze, staggering through the days collecting press discs and wincing at the loudness and bright lights. The only time the sunglasses come off is to get a better look at the bikini-popping silicone that adorns the tackier game stands.

Developers experience the show rather differently: they actually have to work. And how. As a journalist, it's hard enough listening to 20 different people explain their game while munching on paracetamol. The thought of doing the talking, over and over again, for three days solid is enough to make me feel ill. It's no wonder Jonty Barnes, head of Black & White Studios, needed a week off to regain some semblance of health and sanity after the event.

Even before going out, there was a mind-breaking amount of work to do at Lionhead, just to get a stable build ready in time to show behind closed doors. And

that was before ATI offered the game a booth on its prestigious stand (right next to *Half-Life 2* no less), which meant creating a demo that thousands of people would be able to see and write about.

NO SLEEP TILL LA

The result was that Jonty and Ben Sebire (of the gameplay and testing department and in charge of showing the demo on the ATI stand) stayed up for 47 hours straight. First, they had to get everything ready in Guildford, before flying to LA and downloading the latest version of the build to fix the latest bugs found. By this stage, "our eyes were bleeding" as Jonty delicately puts it. Then there was a few hours of shuteye before E3 began.

From 9.30am till 6pm, Jonty was showing the game to half-hourly groups of journalists, with a brief lunch break consisting of an apple and a bottle of water. He did this for three whole days (though Peter Molyneux was on hand to help on the second of those). Meanwhile, Ben was out in the crowd, explaining the demo to thousands of people, including camera crews and, he says: "One guy was in absolute hysterics after watching the cow-playing-basketball-with-its-own-udders animation."

Not even the evenings could offer a respite. With Ron Millar (a pivotal figure in landmark titles like *Diablo* and *Warcraft II*) and his brother Chris about to join Lionhead at the time – they're working

on various projects as I type, including *B&W2* – this was the perfect opportunity to get to know them. Cue nights of intense discussions and even more intense drinking.

It was all worth it in the end though, since the reception to the game was tremendous. "When you're in the studio, you just focus on what you need to do," explains Jonty. "So it's a real pleasure to talk to the press and concentrate on what you've already done, specially when they get so enthusiastic."

PROVE YOURSELF

I asked him if the reception was a bit more sceptical – after all, many people felt let down by what they saw as the first game's failure to live up to its extraordinary hype.

"The whole of the *B&W2* design is based on feedback, and hopefully we've answered all the criticisms. The hype had got out of control with *B&W*, so people were more cautious this time. But the big difference is that at this E3, we talked about what's already in the game, rather than what we're going to do or would like to do. We had the evidence to back everything we were talking about, and everyone walked away loving it".

Yes, that may be, but it still sounds like a nightmare of work. "Yes," he agrees, "but it's also an amazing experience, and completely necessary." I'll stick to writing, thank you. Gives you more time to drink yourself into a stupor. And isn't that what E3's really all about? **PCZ**

> ## "We had the evidence to back everything we were talking about, and everyone walked away loving it"
> **JONTY BARNES** ON THE POSITIVE RECEPTION FOR *B&W2*
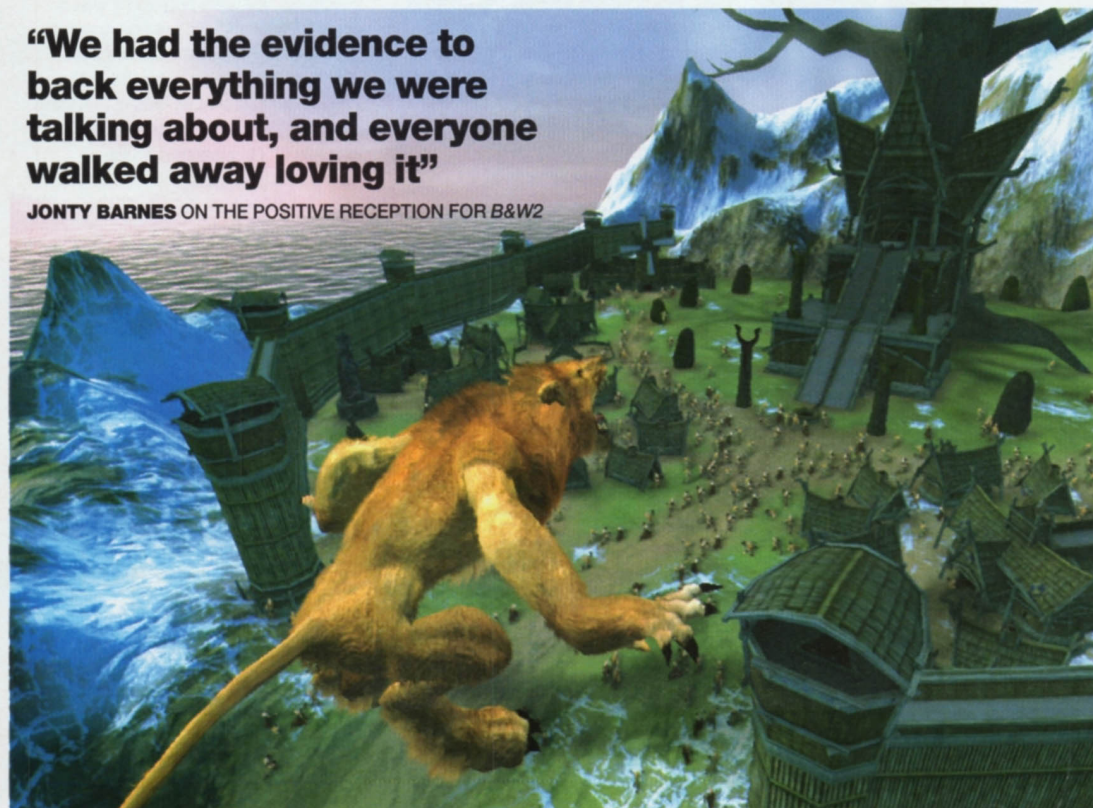
He'll huff and he'll puff and he'll blow your house down. Or is that the Wolf?

We've set up a forum where you can tell us exactly what you want to read in forthcoming Lionhead Diaries. Vent your spleen at boards.bwgame.com

NEXT MONTH
MEDAL OF HONOR
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2 MASSIVE WORLD EXCLUSIVE REVIEWS!

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- MEDAL OF HONOR: PACIFIC ASSAULT
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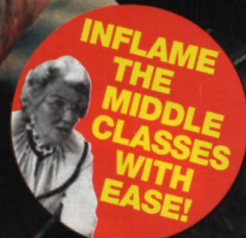- CONFLICT: VIETNAM

PLUS... FULL HANDS-ON!
SPLINTER CELL 3

WIN!
A trip to test games at Lionhead Studios!

ALL THIS AND MORE, IN NEXT MONTH'S PC ZONE
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DIY TABLOID OUTRAGE HEADLINE KIT

To celebrate the imminent release of *Doom 3*, the vilest, most depraved, stomach-churning, columnist-baiting game ever, we here at *PC ZONE* present this handy tool for tabloid sub-editors across the country. Why waste precious minutes thinking of your own vitriol-fuelled headlines when we can take care of it for you?

INFLAME THE MIDDLE CLASSES WITH EASE!

1: PICK A WORD AT RANDOM FROM EACH COLUMN

SICK	SCARRED	HAMSTER
TERRORIST	ATE	PARENTS
UNEMPLOYED	SHOCKED	DOG
EVIL	BEAT	WIFE
DISGUSTING	PERVERTED	HOUSE
HORRIFIC	ROASTED	SCHOOL
IMMIGRANT	TORMENTED	OFFICE
COMMUNIST	BOMBED	CHURCH
PAEDOPHILIC	TERRORISED	SEX-FARM
FRENCH	TICKLED	VICAR

2: CREATE YOUR OWN HATE-FILLED HEADLINE!

"GAME" _____ MY/OUR _____

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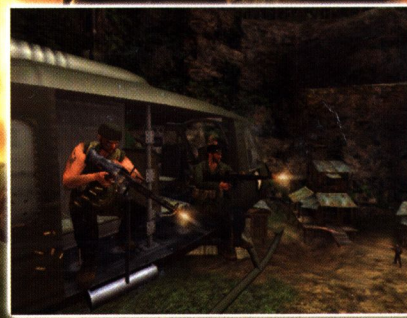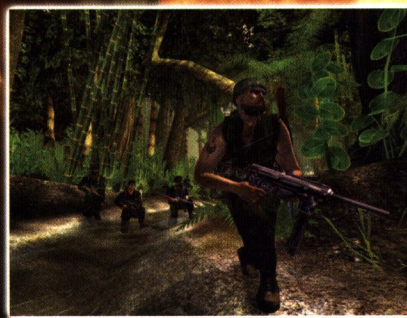
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