PC-ZONE

50TH COLLECTORS' ISSUE – TWO-COVER SPECIAL   JANUARY 2005   £5.99

THE FIRST AND BEST FOR PC GAMES

F.E.A.R.

The biggest shooter of 2005! P42

The big One-Five-O

150. One hundred and fifty issues of *PC ZONE*. Which, if stacked on top of each other would almost reach to the moon. It's a massive landmark and testament to the hard work that hundreds of people have put in through the years to make *ZONE* the longest-running PC gaming mag in the UK. Thanks to everyone that's worked on the mag and thanks to you for buying it.

To celebrate, we've made this issue a bit special. With the spectres of *Doom 3* and *Half-Life 2* behind us, we thought it was time to nail down the must-have game of 2005 and put it on our cover. There were lots of contenders, but in the end we decided that *F.E.A.R.* was the one. That was the easy part. Next came months of protracted negotiations with VU Games and Monolith. You see, no-one had been allowed in to see the game since the short demo released at E3 last May, and Monolith hadn't got any plans to reveal more.

Then we got the go-ahead. And, not only were we told we could fly to Seattle to interview Monolith, but we were also given the go-ahead to be the first magazine in the world to play the code. Big thanks to Monolith and big thanks to VU Games for making it all possible and for making us feel special.

But it's not all good news I'm afraid. I'm aware that this column isn't a space for me to unload my personal problems, but I'd just like to state that this month marks the end of a long and very personal battle. For years, I've resisted the insidious pull of the social disease we call MMORPG (pronounced Muh-Mawwwww-Pig-Er), only to fall in the face of a long and sustained two-pronged attack from *EverQuest II* and *World Of Warcraft*. So vicious and unexpected was the assault, that you're now more likely to find me fishing on the banks of Stone Cairn lake than supping pints in the local. I was also completely blindsided by a cloaked +1 cover spell, hence the glorious *EverQuest II* image you'll find on the back of the mag, along with the exclusive review inside. I am in therapy. Normal service will be resumed next month.

Dave Woods
Editor

COVER DISCS P136 →

■ **FANTASTIC EXCLUSIVES...**
Pro Evolution Soccer 4, stunning footage from *F.E.A.R.*, and the chance to see Dave and Jamie getting angry playing games. Plus *Need For Speed: Underground 2*, *FlatOut* and *Doom 3*.

■ **DVD EXCLUSIVES**
Demos of *Men Of Valor*, *Medal Of Honor: Pacific Assault (multiplayer)*, *Armies Of Exigo* and *Top Spin*. Plus the top ten Indie Zone games and much, much more!

"*EverQuest II* has exceeded all expectations, and it's only the beginning"

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MASSIVELY EPIC ONLINE

BLIZZARD
ENTERTAINMENT

FIRST Look!

DARWINIA

The origin of the virtual species...

■ **EVOLUTIONARY EXTREMIST** Rhianna Pratchett

ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW

PUBLISHER Introversion Software
DEVELOPER Introversion Software
EXPECTED RELEASE DATE March 2005
WEBSITE www.darwinia.co.uk

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

■ Beautiful retro landscapes
■ Intuitive control and gesture system
■ Dynamic sound stage-style audio
■ The technology of the present fused with the soul of the past

> "Bereft of the publishing fluff and conveyor belt mentality that plagues gamers"
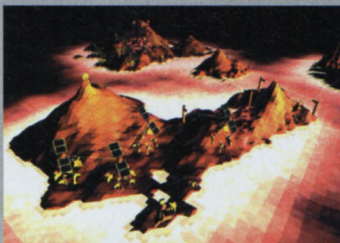
Each level has its own challenges.
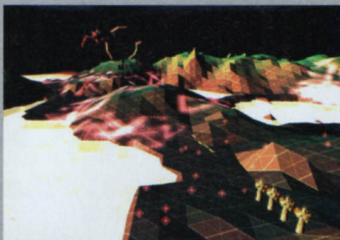
It's like being sucked into your PC.

WHATEVER happened to virtual reality? Weren't we all meant to be living our lives through giant headsets and wandering dreamily through polygon-filled worlds?

Well, while we're waiting for technology to adequately catch up with the digital dream, the nearest thing we're going to get to that which doesn't involve getting tangled in wires and throwing up, is Introversion Software's *Darwinia*.

Brought to you by the last of the bedroom coders and the guys behind *Uplink*, *Darwinia* is a virtual world that looks like a cross between *Tron* and a Jean Michel Jarre concert. The story goes that this little virtual playground of fractal vistas was the brainchild of one Dr Sepulveda who hoped to recreate the wonders of evolution. He populated this world with little green 2D Darwinians, sprites who wandered peacefully through its craggy valleys and mountains.

But real evolution ain't pretty and no pastoral existence can go on for ever. Sadly for the Darwinians, the end of their little utopia was brought about by the sudden invasion of the viruses. First there were just a few, snaking their way down from the polygon peaks. Then their numbers grew and started to spread across the land, destroying all in their path. Here and there new creatures began to spawn from the wriggling red mass; creatures even more deadly, that would consume the little Darwinians and swell to even greater sizes.

TALKING 'BOUT A REVOLUTION

Luckily, ever since the first caveman thought 'Hey, I wonder what happens if I bang these two rocks together?' nature likes to give the little guy a fighting

> I've given the Darwinians Grenades. It's a bit scary, but they should have a chance against stronger foes now.
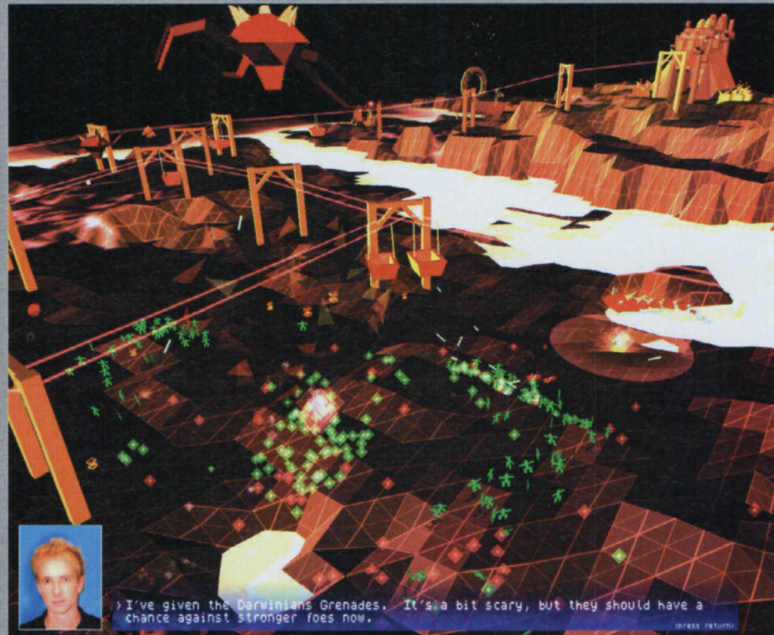
Left ungathered the souls will slowly float away.

chance. And so your given task is to spearhead the Darwinian revolution. You are going to help them rebuild their broken machines and derelict buildings, and help them fight back.

As the Darwinians' new leader, you're going to have to master some basic commands to create and control your minions and troops. All of these are executed through *Black & White*-style mouse gestures. These allow you to create engineers to help repair buildings, commanders to help herd the Darwinians in the right direction and armed squads to repel the ongoing virus attacks. If the children of the virus get too

overwhelming, you may even have to call in air-strikes from some very Space Invadery-looking airborne vehicles.

There's a beautifully retro look to *Darwinian* – appearing rather like how 20 years ago we all predicted games were going to look in the future. And the fact that it's essentially been put together by four guys in their bedrooms on the profits from the last low-budget game they made, gives us that lovely 'stick it to the man' feeling. It looks strange, but it's an offering bereft of the publishing fluff and conveyor belt mentality that plagues gamers today – and it's bloody addictive to boot. Keep an eye out for it. **PCZ**

GENERATOR
SANDBOX
CONTAINMENT
Zoom out of the level and you can see the Darwinians' heaven. It's profound.

The virus beasts take on many guises.
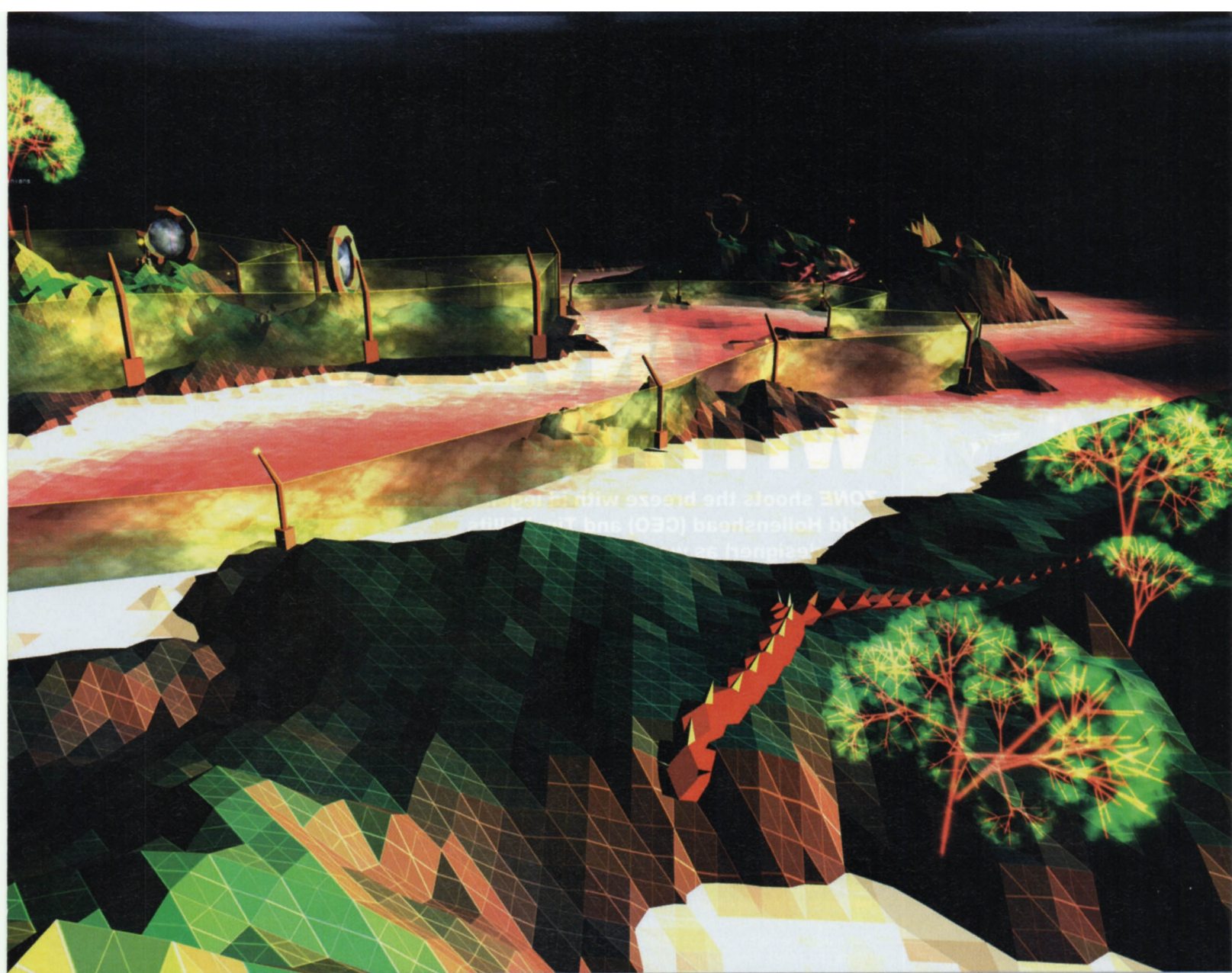
Between mining and milling about the Darwinians manage to plant a few trees.

SOUL SURVIVOR
Every Darwinian leaves behind a little green soul when they die. These, along with the souls from dead viruses, can be collected up and placed in an incubator to create more Darwinians.

WE BUILT THIS CITY
Throughout the levels in Darwinia you will have to restart various machines, including this mining equipment which the Darwinians use to harvest polygons from the mountains.

ARACHNOPHOBIA
The little virus strings aren't too hard to deal with, but these guys are a bit trickier as they are much stronger, emerge when the virus strings converge and can be land- or air-based. Plus they're big and look like spiders, which is always nasty.

PEOPLE POWER
The Darwinians are the life blood of your world and you must protect and nurture them. If they do bite the big one then their comrades will light little lanterns of remembrance.

SQUADDIES
Your squads are your muscle, and although you can arm the Darwinians, these guys will be your main fighting force against the viruses. They can also be upgraded and used to call in air-strikes.

LOCATION LOCATION LOCATION
The environments bring back happy memories of *Tron*, and the carefree days when you actually did wonder if there were tiny little people in your computer carrying chunks of memory from one place to another. Although scientists now know there aren't.

BULLETIN

YOU WANT ME

■ NEWS WRITER Will Porter

▲ "Hello? Hello? I'm just calling because I've bought your *PC Gamerplay* book, and I want to buy *School Tycoon 2* for the kids." No, sorry madam. I'm afraid you've come through to the wrong place. "No I haven't." Erm, yes I'm afraid you have. "Look you, I've bought your book and I need you to help…" And so it goes on.

Whether it's a man wanting to know how to fire catapults in *Age Of Empires*, or someone who's noticed an intriguing tower that might have a power-up on the top of it in a *Painkiller* level, the people I deal with on a day-to-day basis are certainly unique. I'm not complaining – they're a lot more fun than the occasional calls you get from random yokel radio stations demanding that you come on their shows and get shouted at by people who think that *Doom 3* encourages the vandalism of bus shelters.

And then *Half-Life 2* came out, and the switchboard (well, my phone) was jammed – with everyone at the other end of the line singing the same song. Gordon's big new adventure you see, can only be played if you've got an Internet connection – something we hadn't been told when we reviewed it. And you lot, well, you lot wanted blood. Valve, Vivendi, us – it didn't matter whose blood you got, just as long as it was red and tasted salty.

The thing is, it really was justified. I can't imagine a more frustrating thing to happen than buying a boxed copy of *Half-Life 2* and then realising that you could never extract the beautiful code from the DVD's lovely shiny surface. If, by the time you read this, a solution has been provided then all is well and good. If not, then a lot of us have been pretty much robbed…

▼

A CONVERSATION WITH ID

ZONE shoots the breeze with id legends Todd Hollenshead (CEO) and Tim Willits (lead designer) as we discuss *Quake*, Valve and the *Doom 3* expansion pack…

PCZ So what can you tell us about the *Resurrection Of Evil* expansion pack?

TODD Well, it's set about two years after the end of *Doom 3*. You actually play a different character: a combat engineer who is part of a team going back to Mars. Since the last game the UAC has basically initiated a cover-up, claiming it was a reactor explosion and that no one can go back to the planet. A satellite has picked up a beacon at what the UAC thought was a dead site, one of the initial excavation sites where they first found evidence of the ancient civilisation that you found at the end of *Doom 3*.

PCZ Can you tell us more about the new physics weapon?

TIM Well, as a combat engineer one of the tools you have is the ionised plasma levitator, which we call the grabber, which is capable of lifting and moving things that are barrel-sized and smaller. One of the really cool things about it is that it has the ability to take hold of any projectile – fireballs, rockets – even bullets are separate objects that the grabber is capable of holding on to.

PCZ A lot of people are going to pick up on this and use it as a way to compare *Doom 3* with *Half-Life 2*. Was that something you intended?

TIM We always had this functionality, as that's how we place all the objects in the game. There've been loads of games where

you can pick stuff up – the grabber gun is a logical extension of the physics engine, and you're going to see that all over the place from now on. *Half-Life 2* is going to be great, we're all very supportive of those guys. Hell, they built their technology on our technology!

PCZ How do you approach something like *Half-Life*? Do you see it as a rival, do you have a professional interest or are you simply an excited gamer?

TIM Oh no! I want to play it. I've always been a big fan of those guys. I'm definitely looking forward to it. We actually have a really good relationship with other companies – y'know there's the id/3D Realms thing – they're down the road and we see them all the time. It's the same with Valve and Epic, especially Valve as they've been partners with us for so long. It's silly for developers to think that in order for your game to be good then every other game has got to suck, because then the industry would die. It's like the movies – you don't think that Spielberg is upset because Ridley Scott made a good movie. It doesn't make any sense.

PCZ How about the *Doom* movie?

TODD Well, we leave this evening to fly to Prague to visit the set. They're filming right now. We're excited about it. If we weren't excited about it then we definitely wouldn't be going to Prague in the winter – 'cos I can't stand the cold.

PCZ How much creative control do you have on it?

TODD We have consultation, that's what it's called. On all the major decisions on the movie they have to come to us and say "OK, this is what we're thinking. What do you guys think?" The script isn't based on *Doom 3*, it's based on the *Doom* universe – it's not inconsistent, but it is different. Some of the characters are similar enough though, and
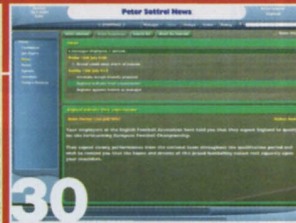
there are some interesting similarities in the plot. Dwayne Johnson, better known as The Rock, plays Sarge in the movie.

PCZ Oh he does?

TODD There was some rumour that he was going to play the *Doom* guy, but that was never the case. Karl Urban, the Rohan captain in *LOTR* plays John Grimm the Marine.

PCZ And what about *Quake IV*? How's that shaping up?

TODD *Quake IV* is looking real good. I'm not sure if I should be talking about this, but I will anyway. The Raven guys have multiplayer pretty functional – it was quite the passion around the office as soon as it was working. It's going to turn out to be a hell of a game. The focus is still single-player, but the multiplayer is going to be good too. It's still very

rudimentary – it's not fully textured out yet, but we've just been playing around with the character turnaround in the game. And deathmatch with the railgun is still fun.

PCZ So when do you anticipate having some news?

TIM On our next game?

PCZ Well, Yeah.

TIM It's going to be a while. John is working on the new architecture and the new technology, while the rest are working on other projects and starting to make the game. It's still very early in the development process because we've got Xbox *Doom 3*, the mission pack and *Quake IV* to deal with – and we're only 22 people! When John feels that the technology is ready, and we feel that there's enough of the game to talk about, then we'll start talking.

PCZ I think one of you recently mentioned a sequel that's in the works for *RTCW*.

TIM Yeah, Todd mentioned that a while back, but it's also way early.

PCZ Do you guys ever just think, 'You know, we've been making shooters for 15 years. Why don't we just make a nice flight sim or something'?

TIM Well, it's a genre that John Carmack invented, that we do well and still enjoy – honestly we're not going to do anything different! It's like Ford making cars – they're not going to start making airplanes! There's still a lot of things that can be explored. And also we're 22 people in our company – we don't want to have 100, and we don't want to have 80. All we want to do is make cool games. And hopefully get them done faster.

PCZ Yeah, we'd like you to do that too!

TIM Yeah, if we can just do that. Do more games like *Doom 3*, get them done more efficiently… That would be great for the next ten years.

RESURRECTION OF EVIL WILL GET THE FULL TREATMENT IN NEXT ISSUE'S 2005 PREVIEW BLOWOUT

Natural Selection: a hit among mod fans.

NS has also been accepted by Valve.

Even the aliens get in on the act.

SPECIAL REPORT

DEVELOPERS GONE MOD

Modding, once the domain of hobbyists and tinkerers, is now a popular holiday destination for professional developers fed up with the industry. *Anthony Holden* follows the brain drain

THERE'S A worrying new trend emerging in PC games development. Professional developers everywhere are fleeing their comfortable, well-paid jobs and working harder for no money, surviving only by eating dog food and doing favours for sailors. And why? To escape the cynical, corporate money-machine and enjoy a bit of creative freedom, of course.

OK, we're exaggerating slightly, but there's a kernel of truth here. Many developers are getting fed up with the stifling nature of the mainstream industry, and more and more are finding an enriching alternative in the PC modding scene. You knew about the trend for modders to make the leap to jobs in the industry – but I bet you didn't know they were going the other way too…

One man who got tired of the system was Charlie 'Flayra' Cleveland, designer of ace *Half-Life* mod *Natural Selection*. "I wanted to try something different," says Cleveland. "My background is in game programming, and I wanted to establish

myself as a designer. It's quite difficult to convince a studio to let you design an entire game for them, so making a mod was a great way to go."

FREE AS A MOD
It wasn't an easy decision to make. In 2001, he and his pal Cory 'Squeal Like a Pig' Strader were working on mega-budget RTS *Empire Earth* at Stainless Steel Studios, an enviable position for any developer. But after coming up with the idea for *Natural Selection*, they traded in their security passes and went it alone.

"Making a mod was the fastest and cheapest way to get our game idea into

players' hands," explains Cleveland. It makes perfect sense if you think about it. Mods are not only cheap to produce, they're often better than the games that spawned them. Indeed, some of the best and most innovative ideas in PC gaming in recent years have come from mods. On the other hand, the mainstream scene is
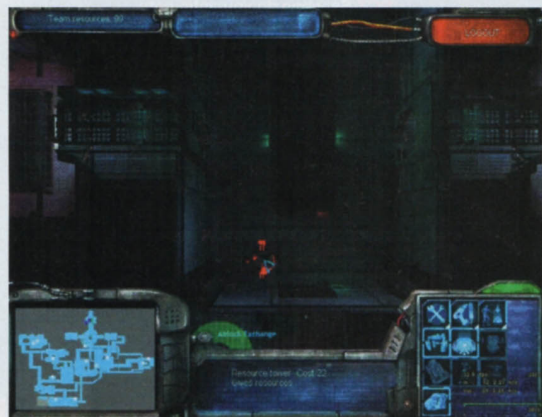
NS's designers originally started at Stainless Steel Studios.

The gambit payed off for *NS*'s team and they've gone legit.

Desert Combat was so good, the team was snapped up by Digital Illusions.

Half-Life: Nightwatch boasts ex-Ritual, 2015 and Taldren employees.

"The mod scene is increasingly looked upon by the industry as a test-bed for new ideas and talents"

getting more and more rigid. Development costs are spiralling and the big publishers are unwilling to take risks on unproven, unfamiliar ideas. And of course, they don't have to, because modders are doing it for them. Why make a risky game when you can let a group of students do it for you – and then nick their best ideas later?

As such, the mod scene is increasingly looked upon by the industry as a test-bed for new ideas and talents. Canny product executives are always on the lookout for the next *Counter-Strike*, and plenty of pros are willing to trade job security for that sort of attention.

ALPHA DEVS
Examples of this phenomenon abound. Clever whodunnit mod *The Ship Online* boasts several experienced pros (project leader Chris Peck was a designer on Rockstar's *State Of Emergency*), as does forthcoming single-player conversion *Half-Life: Nightwatch* (whose members have worked for companies such as Ritual, 2015 and Taldren). Trauma Studios, the team behind top *Battlefield 1942* mod *Desert Combat*, was founded by Frank Delise, who previously worked on 1995 FPS *Wetlands* (along with *Desert Combat* model-man Fred Ruff). It was a gambit that paid off, as the studio has since been snapped up by *Battlefield 1942* creator Digital Illusions.

For most pros who try their hands at modding, the objectives are pretty clear. One, obviously, is to further their careers in some way, giving up their roles as unappreciated cogs in a profit machine and returning (hopefully) as heroic, self-starting ass-kickers.

Cleveland describes his motive as "establishing street-cred". He wanted to prove his creative talents and ability as a project leader – an opportunity he may not have enjoyed in the mainstream industry for many years.

But more than this, the aim for many frustrated developers is simply to make the games they want to – to realise a creative vision that would never get off the ground under normal circumstances. (Like a murder mystery FPS on a ship, or in the case of *Natural Selection*, a strategy/shooter hybrid.)

Cleveland agrees: "I lived off my savings for a couple years to make *NS*, but now hopefully I can pursue more ambitious projects."

What this means for the rest of the mod community is unclear. Are these slumming professionals raising the bar too high for your average hobbyist to match? Are less ambitious mods being shoved to the sidelines?

The success of *Natural Selection* might certainly suggest so. Not only is it the most popular third-party mod for *Half-Life*, it's one of the top ten mods currently played online. Valve is adding it to the 'My Games' section of Steam, making it a semi-official add-on, and there are plans to move the mod over to Source as soon as the SDK is released.

However, Cleveland is confident that modding does not need to become more professional to compete. "The strength of a mod team isn't in shipping Hollywood-level production values. It's in doing something unique, doing it quickly and iteratively. As such, I think there will always be room for modders to run design circles around giant teams."

For now then, there seems little need for concern. It may speak badly of the industry that so many of its participants want to go outlaw, but we're the ones who will benefit. And as long as great games like *Natural Selection* are being made for free, who's complaining? **PCZ**

NATURAL SELECTION WAS MERELY A STEPPING STONE...

Having established his "street cred" with *Natural Selection*, designer Charlie Cleveland is preparing his next move – back into full game development. He's in the process of launching a new company called Unknown Worlds in San Francisco (www.unknownworlds.com), where he and several of the *Natural Selection* crew will be crafting their next slice of gameplay innovation.

"Right now we're still in the very early stages, but I'm putting together the new game design document and will soon be pitching to investors and publishers. I think anyone that likes *NS* will really love our next game. It will use much better technology, and will provide a social war-time experience you haven't seen before."

With a proven track record and substantial fanbase now in place, Cleveland has all the creative freedom he ever wanted. It seems quitting an anonymous programming post at Stainless Steel Studios was the best thing he ever did.

Cleveland is hoping Unknown Worlds will prove as big a hit as *NS*.

The Ship Online: product of an ex-Rockstar designer.

EMULATION ZONE

ANTHONY HOLDEN STEPS UP TO THE FORE AND TAKES EMU ZONE OUT FOR ONE LAST DANCE

SPEED 'EM UP

AS ANY emu fan will tell you, forcing your PC to pretend to be something it isn't is rarely an efficient business. Even though there are emulators out there for pretty much every game and every piece of gaming hardware prior to the current generation, it doesn't necessarily mean you can play them on your PC, as witnessed by the fact that we're not playing *Luigi's Mansion* on our laptops right now (even though the emu already exists in theory).

Which brings us to the new release of the splendid ZiNc emu, now at version 1.0.2. First featured in Emu Zone nearly two years ago (then an unnamed alpha made to emulate Namco System 11 games), ZiNc has blossomed into a powerful emulator. It still focuses on arcade technologies based on PSone hardware, but now takes in systems from Capcom, Taito, Konami and Tecmo, as well as Namco System 12.

What this means is that instead of the 26 games it supported a couple of months ago, it now plays a whopping 70, with more expected soon. Fans of fighting games should feel particular joy as ZiNc now takes in most of the *Tekken* series, the *Street Fighter Ex* series, cult favourite *Rival Schools*, *Battle Arena Toshinden 2* and *Soul*

Edge – not to mention *Mr Driller*.

Better yet, the new release is a lot faster and more efficient than before, with better frame-rates and accuracy across the board. Sound and music has been added to System 11 games, and they've even fixed the story text in *ZONE* favourite *Kikaioh: Tech Romancer*. There are still problems of course, most notably with sound and speed, but it's still a huge leap since version 0.9.

The twist is, all these games are also theoretically supported by MAME, but you've always required a super-computer to get them to run properly. Now, any 2GHz system should be able get decent frame-rates in all these titles, and more importantly, arcade-perfect *Tekken Tag* may soon be within our grasp. **PCZ**

LINKS
www.emuhype.com – ZiNc homepage with emulator and Direct3D/OpenGL plug-ins

> **"ZiNc is now a powerful emulator, supporting a whopping 70 games"**

Mr. Driller: you won't find a better example of brilliant time-wasting insanity.

Do things your PC never intended.

Star Gladiators doing it for themselves.

THE END

Sadly this is the last you'll see of Emu Zone in its current form, although needless to say we're beavering away to create something of equivalent brilliance. Until then, visit the home of the Reverend Stuart Campbell at www.worldof stuart.co.uk, marvel at his legacy and read up on three years' worth of Emu goodness.

WHAT IS EMULATION?

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

EMULATION OF THE MONTH

STARFOX 2 (SNES, never released)

Emulation scene in game back from the dead shocker! *Starfox 2* is one of the holy grails of the Super Nintendo emu scene, being an

This fox only kills intergalactic chickens.

Starfox 2 was one of the games that time forgot.

unreleased sequel to the legendary animal-based space shooter. It was meant to come out in 1995, but was cancelled at the last minute for reasons unknown.

The underground gaming scene still got a taste of the game however, through several stolen demo versions that showed up on the Net, including a supposedly 'final' beta that only emerged a year or so ago. For a long time *Starfox 2* remained a curio – an unfinished and only partially playable game that hinted at greatness but remained impenetrable. Especially as it was all in Japanese.

Hold everything though, as in recent weeks the clever folks at Aeon Genesis have released a patch,

Starfox 2, 1995 version. Not to be confused with the forthcoming GameCube extravaganza.

which not only translates the game into English, but fixes all the bugs and fills in the gaps, presenting the game in a 'finished' state for the first time. What's more, it was worth the wait, as *Starfox 2* is a fascinating and addictive little game that was way ahead of its time.

Getting hold of the correct ROM is not easy, and

almost certainly illegal since no one actually owns the original game. The fact that it's possible at all though is is a great victory for emulation, and gaming history in general.

LINKS
agtp.romhack.net – Aeon Genesis Translation Project
www.snes9x.com – homepage of popular SNES emulator

THE MAN WHO KNOWS

TREVOR MCDONALD has got the games industry's back up. The **veteran** newscaster sent **children** of **12** and **14** into shops to buy adult-rated computer and video games, including **terrifying** zombie-killer *Doom 3*. McDonald was presenting some programme or other, in which he asked: "Can violent videos warp young minds?" As the screen showed a mad-eyed youth playing a game, McDonald mused: "Some are violent and explicit and they're a potentially dangerous influence on our children." The **ITV** show also featured the mother of two boys who **shot** a motorist dead and later blamed it on *GTA*. **Donna Buckner**, white trash, drawled: "Go through that game yourself with a fine toothcomb. It's poison." Alternatively, don't leave **high-powered rifles** lying around the house.

Computer games could have **massive** educational benefits, claim **boffins** from the **Institute of Education** at **London University**. Project manager **Caroline Pelletier** whinnied: "Computer and video games entertain while promoting social development. Playing and talking about games is an important part of young people's lives. Games literacy is a way of investigating how games are a means of expression and representation, just like writing or drawing."

A **Texas** law firm is attempting to patent the third dimension. **McKool Smith** is threatening legal action against games companies including **Electronic Arts, Take 2 Interactive, Ubisoft, Activision, Atari, THQ, Vivendi Universal Games, Sega, Square Enix, Tecmo, LucasArts,** and **Namco Hometek** over a specific method of displaying 3D images on a monitor, as allegedly outlined in the 1988 patent, **Method And Apparatus For Spherical Planning**. A games industry employee hissed: "Publishers should be **very worried** – it's not impossible that McKool Smith will win. People are taking this seriously." An expert said: "The *Pac-Man* revival starts here."

IN FOR THE KILL

THE PUNISHER RAGES ONTO OUR MONITORS TO DEMONSTRATE THE ARTISTIC APPEAL OF A WELL-DESIGNED KILLING…

AFTER THE controversial videogame nasties tirade calculated by *Daily Mail* journos everywhere, it was feared that gaming violence would be horribly diluted, and the chances of seeing a pixellated decapitation in the future would be as likely as Disney remaking *Driller Killer*. Not so for *The Punisher*, a ferocious third-person action ride that treats death in the form of some twisted opera. Based on the 30-year-old Marvel franchise (and slightly based on the atrocious recent movie), the Volition-developed bloodfest boasts an entirely original storyline scripted by comic-book scribes Garth Ennis and Jimmy Palmiotti. Essentially, it masters the feel of a standard shooter/fighter (*Max Payne 2* is the obvious comparison), but delivers warped exuberance through its graphic kills and Bond-esque interrogations. Literally dozens of unique executions are there to be savoured, from plunging blades into tops of skulls to dropping grenades into tight spaces, creating a series of OTT shoot-outs that push Peckinpah, Woo and Tarantino in terms of balletic violence.

More interestingly, the environment is also there to be manipulated in the name of grisly experimentation. By threatening mobsters over wood chippers, chroming machines and laser cutters, not only can you extract essential information, but also enjoy the gory aftermath of an imaginative execution too. Flailing bodies are minced into sausages, others are incarcerated in funeral parlours and some are gruesomely impaled by charging rhinos in the zoo enclosure. It's like a comic-book reiteration of *Manhunt* that's eschewed snuff-movie brutality in favour of pure, exaggerated outrageousness.

"Guess who?"

With various Marvel cameos entering the equation and *The Punisher* actor Thomas Jane providing *Duke Nukem*-styled wisecracks, this should make for an entertaining slice of console-inspired mayhem. Provided you have the stomach to handle it all, of course…

- **Publisher:** THQ
- **Developer:** Volition
- **ETA:** February 2005
- **Website:** thq.com/punisher/
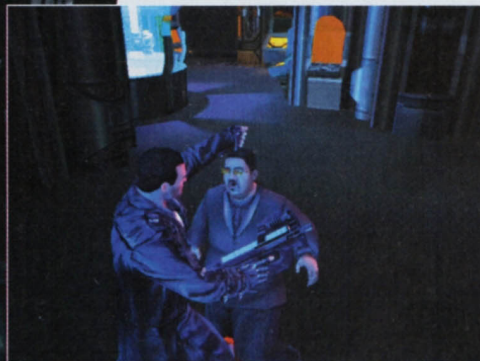
Why so blue?
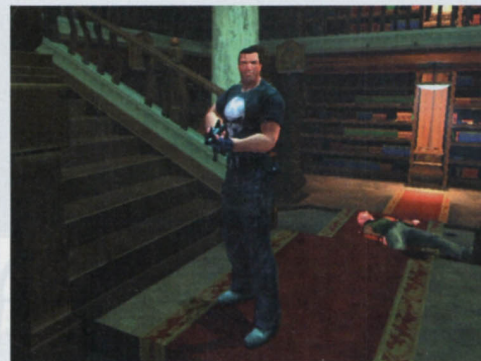
See – going down the gym *does* work.

FIGHT FOR SURVIVAL

DEVELOPER OF CONTROVERSIAL DISASTER SIM HITS OUT AT ITS CRITICS

Replay Studios' proposal for a disaster-based game is a controversial one.

LAST MONTH, IT'S fair to say that we pissed all over plans by a German developer to create a game based in and around disasters such as 9/11, Hiroshima and the recent Paraguay mall blaze in which hundreds of shoppers died. Always up for a bit of free speech now and again, however, we invited Claus Wohlgemuth of Replay Studios to fight his corner.

"James Cameron proved with *Titanic* that it's possible to be emotional and entertaining while still being respectful to real victims," he explained from his studio in Hamburg. "You might say that the Titanic was a long while ago, but how long do you have to wait until nobody objects?

"An artist must dare to do things that nobody did before. For example, when public opinion was set against Picasso, he claimed that when he's waiting to be given artistic freedom, he's lost. An artist must take the freedom for himself."

"In *Survivor*, exaggerated theatrical effects will be avoided as well as false heroism and glorifications," he continued. "We don't think that *Survivor* is more violent than any other game. In war shooters, everything depends on your killing skills, but in *Survivor* you often have to save people as a mission target.

"I think it's no worse morally to enjoy saving victims rather than slaughtering thousands, which is considered extra-special fun should they be Germans, the Vietcong or Iraqis. Nobody objects here, even though these games are based on real-life conflicts. Enemy soldiers are just not considered victims at all."

Well, he's not bad on the soapbox, we'll give him that – and we'll also give him the fact that we're clearly giggling like schoolgirls about the horrendous violence in *The Punisher* – see opposite page. But the basic fact of the matter is that *The Punisher* isn't real, and we still struggle to see the point of a game that (despite the seemingly artistic designs of its creator) can only serve to attract ghoulish rubber-necking, the further mass-media sanitisation of tragedy and added grief for victims'

families. What's more, as a complete aside, we honestly can't see the game being much cop either…

- **Publisher:** TBA
- **Developer:** Replay Studios
- **ETA:** TBA
- **Website:** www.replaystudios.de/survivor/
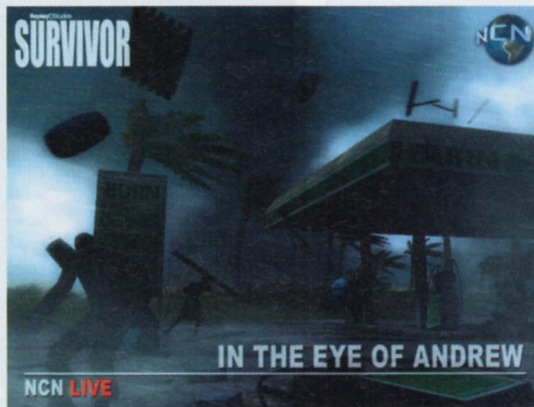
That's got to hurt. Poor Andrew.

Too much too soon? We think so.

OUT FOR BLOOD

HITMAN SERIES REACHES ITS FOURTH GRUESOME OUTING

ALWAYS guaranteed to provoke mixed opinion in his previous three sorties, slaphead, clothes-stealer and assassin-for-hire Agent 47 is on his way back to the fray in the next *Hitman* game to hit the shelves, *Hitman: Blood Money*. Essentially a less hirsute and more psychotic retelling of the Mr Benn story, 47's life will presumably continue to revolve around masquerading as workmen of various trades before being rumbled and killing one and all.

This time around though, he's being paid for his services, and from this you'll be expected to buy your own weapons and make your own way through the exciting world of diplomat-slayage. Members of the ICA, 47's contract agency, are being mysteriously nobbled by a larger and more powerful organisation – so our man ships himself over to the US (fearing that the next unexplained death could be his own), sets up shop and begins to unravel the mystery.

Hitman games have shown flashes of brilliance, yet have never quite hit the mark for us – but could *Blood Money* be the one that finally cracks it? We'll keep you posted…

- **Publisher:** Eidos
- **Developer:** Io Interactive
- **ETA:** Q1 2005
- **Website:** www.hitman.com

Proof positive that gambling is bad.

GOB SHITE

"My brother goes bear hunting in Alaska, and I'm going to join him sometime. It's simple: you start off with the shotgun, take out the pistol if he gets closer and when he's just about on top of you, then get out your knife."

Colonel John Antal – US Army (ret.) spokesman for the amazing-looking Brothers In Arms *stuns young Will with tales of what happens when bears steal too many pic-a-nic baskets. A nearby Martin Korda nods in sage agreement.*

"It's just another first-person shooter, guys. It even has the same lame biohazard suit. Guess what you do? You run around and shoot things! I mean, whoa… That's some innovative, modern 21st century gameplay!"

Curmudgeongamer.com gives the first true evaluation of that rubbish Freeman game. 97 per cent? We must have been barking mad…

indieZONE

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

THE TEN BEST indie games known to man, eh? Sounded enough easy enough when we thought of it. Three days in, however, having played and considered several dozen fantastic titles (and a bunch of soul-destroying *Arkanoid* clones), it proved a task to test the hardiest soul.

The indie scene is producing some brilliant work at the moment, and not just old-skool shoot 'em ups. Our list is far from definitive, but we can assure you that they're all great. Play them now or forever lose your soul to corporate greed.

TEN ESSENTIAL INDIE GAMES

1. **Gish** (www.chroniclogic.com)
2. **Orbz** (www.21-6.com/orbz.asp)
3. **Globulos** (www.globulos.com)
4. **Starscape** (www.moonpod.com)
5. **Wik** (www.wikgame.com)
6. **Demonstar Secret Missions 2** (www.mking.com)
7. **Samurai** (www.klear.com)
8. **3D Airstrike** (www.divogames.com)
9. **GeneForge 2** (www.spiderwebsoftware.com)
10. **Alien Shooter** (www.sigma-team.net)

FREE PLAY

NEO-SONIC GODSPEED

(Manic Team)
fanmade.emulationzone.org/manicteam/nsgs

SOME GAMES are free because no one in their right mind would pay money for them. Others are free because if they weren't, the gentlefolk who made them would be slapped with a lawsuit quicker than you can say 'breach of copyright'. *Neo-Sonic Godspeed* falls firmly into the latter category, being a completely unauthorised, fan-made homage to Sega's favourite son. It's actually just one title from a thriving community of *Sonic* homebrewers who've been doing this sort of thing for years now, but with *Neo-Sonic Godspeed*, developer Manic Team has shown that it's getting really rather good at it.
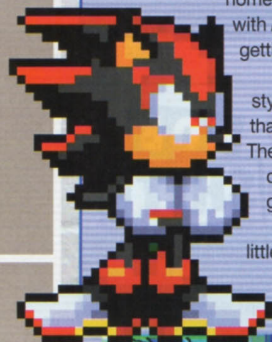
Using a brand new custom engine, the game faithfully mimics the style and gameplay of Sonic's classic 2D outings, with vibrant levels that frequently approach the standards of a genuine Sega creation. The difference is, *NSGS* is somewhat sillier and features four completely new fan-made characters (which are actually quite good), though you can only play as Sonic or Shadow.

Apart from a couple of slight control flaws (bounce pads are a little awkward), the game plays like a charm, and anyone with even a passing fondness for the world's fastest 'hog will get a 16-bit kick out of this.

Oh, sons of whores....

If only the developer had thought of this itself, it'd be made...

Giving new meaning to the phrase 'tongue lashing'.

WIK AND THE FABLE OF SOULS

■ **$19.95 (£11)** | **Pub: Reflexive Entertainment**
Dev: Reflexive Ent | **ETA: Out Now**
www.wikgame.com

Anthony Holden gets tongue-tied over a good-lookin' indie type

TO THE uninitiated, indie games are still synonymous with shit graphics, but clearly, these people are fools. Just look at *Wik And The Fable Of Souls*. Not only is it a hugely enjoyable and captivating game with a unique control interface, it also looks a million bucks. The same million bucks, in fact, that the developers didn't have to spend on it.

Starring an emaciated, saucer-eyed leprechaun, *Wik* is an arcade action game set in a whimsical fantasy world. The basic aim is to collect grubs from the air and load them onto a peculiar beast of burden before it trudges off the side of the screen, batting away grub-eating bugs as you go. Bizarre perhaps, but the real source of fun is in the control system.

Wik, you see, cannot walk. Instead, he jumps like a frog, or more often uses his splendid prehensile tongue to swing from place to place like a slightly unhygienic Spider-Man. (Or more correctly, Toad from *X-Men*.) Initially it's extremely difficult to control, being entirely mouse-driven, but eventually you find yourself swinging, twisting and looping around the screen in a display of simian aerobatics that's impossible not to enjoy.

There's more to the game than this, like the ability to lap up acorns and fire them at enemies, the two gameplay modes and special powers, but ultimately it's the control system that makes the game so good. The fact that it looks fantastic is a bonus.

PCZONE VERDICT	89
A swing and a hit	

The original angry Scotsman.
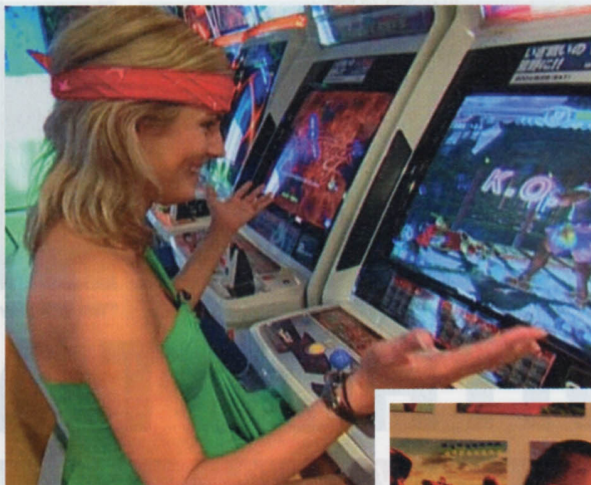
Return Of The Mac

DOMINIK DIAMOND RESURFACES IN *WHEN GAMES ATTACK*. DON'T CALL IT A COMEBACK...

SIX YEARS after the demise of Channel Four's *Gamesmaster*, controversial presenter Dominik Diamond has returned to the murky world of games television.

When Games Attack is being screened by Bravo, and *PC ZONE* attended the premiere at London's swanky Soho Hotel. Executive producer Richard Wilcox opened proceedings with a heartfelt eulogy: "It's very rare that you have a show which is a generation-defining programme, and *Gamesmaster* was that. Dominik is the producer's presenter. He's smart, intelligent and he says the things that you would love to be able to say and he makes them sound funny at the same time. I have to say I was blown away."

Cue predictable fellatio gag from Diamond, who thankfully bum-rushed the stage before it became too sentimental. Some hair may have migrated from his pate to his chin-glove, the gut is probably larger than is medically recommended, but essentially it's the same old Dom, not afraid to offer an opinion, or indeed to spatter it with foul and abusive language.

As for the new show, Diamond explains: "We've got knob gags, we've got tit gags and we're sorry." Reunited with *Gamesmaster* producer Jonny Ffinch, Diamond claims: "I didn't really want to do another videogames programme, but I did it because Jonny asked me, and I would do a show that involved me being raped by bulls to work with him."

The waist has expanded, but it makes room for extra talent.

Diamond didn't stop there, though we'd rather he had, stating that he wished he could always work with a producer with "such creativity, vision, dedication, commitment, intelligence, wit and the best arse I've ever seen, including any woman I've been inside."

Projectionist, please. Feature-led, highlights of *When Games Attack* are set to be 'Five Games That Should Never Have Left Japan', followed by a section called 'Behind The Game', charting the history of a classic title. 'I'm Famous, Give Me My Joypad' is an ongoing *PES4* league between professional footballers (and ex-Manchester United rogue Lee Sharpe), while 'Head To Head' is essentially a truncated Supertest,

"My producer has creativity, vision and wit, and the best arse I've ever seen, including any woman I've been inside"

comparing two games in the same genre, replete with glove puppets.

And in a location piece, Diamond poses the question: "In videogames there's a lot of simulation of running around, driving around, flying around and shooting, but what's it like for real?" before taking to the California skies for some fighter-plane paintball. There's also a token blonde in the shapely shape of Caroline Flack, and we should also mention that *When Games Attack* is very much a magazine format, specifically the magazine that you're cradling at this instant. It's a comparison that Diamond is big enough to admit. "Without sucking big dick here, I've always been very influenced by *PC ZONE*. I've always been very open in my admiration for it and the writers that have come out of that magazine speaks volumes." You heard it here first. We have a new best friend. Series One of *When Games Attack* is broadcast every Monday on Bravo and repeated during the week.

A rose among blonde thorns. And a brunette thorn.

Stubbs could become an undead gaming icon.

The Hand of God?

"You will play for QPR or else..."

REBEL WITHOUT A PULSE

HALO CREATOR MOVES ON TO SOMETHING FAR MORE SQUISHY

"HISTORICALLY, zombies have been shafted in the way they've been presented – they're always slow, dumb and soulless," says Alex Seropian as we quiz him on Wideload Games' new undead offering. "We figured a game with a zombie-centric point of view was long overdue."

Say a big hello then, to *Stubbs The Zombie* – the reanimated corpse who's set to put the gameplay boot squarely on the other rotting foot. Using a highly vamped-up version of the *Halo* engine (Seropian, after all, was the founder of Bungie) Stubbs is set to lurch through the streets, fields and shopping centres

of Punchbowl, Pennsylvania – adding all those he meets to his zombie horde via the universal language of brain-eating.

"There's an odd grace in the way Stubbs gobbles a brain right out of somebody's head," continues Alex. "But ultimately I think it's most satisfying to tear off Stubbs' hand and send it off to possess some unfortunate living chump and bend him to your will. There's nothing quite as enjoyable as turning your enemies against each other."

As well as following the traditional zombie tactic of finding safety in hordes of shambling automatons, Stubbs has the rare ability of being able to use

various parts of his body as an armoury – including explosive gut grenades, poisonous sputum, a severed hand that can creep through small gaps and grab people and a head that can be used as a bowling ball.

So is this a new, brighter way at looking at our zombie friends? "Stubbs is not, strictly speaking, one of the good guys. I mean, he eats people's brains," Alex calmly points out. "People he doesn't even know. But he's got his reasons. His love story is part of that. Never stand between a dead man and someone he loves." Good words to live – and die – by.

'Cos this is Thriller, Thriller night...

- **Publisher:** Aspyr Media
- **Developer:** Wideload Games
- **ETA:** Summer 2005
- **Website:** www.stubbsthezombie.com

Last Night Jackie Chan Came Round

UPDATE ON *RAG DOLL KUNG FU*, THE BIZARRE CREATION THAT LIES DEEP WITHIN LIONHEAD STUDIOS

This guy's been looking for a fight since his nan did his hair.

A WHILE AGO we spoke to Mark Healey, at that time an art bod on *Fable*, who told us all about a solo project that had ignited interest both in the higher echelons of Lionhead and the gaming community. Essentially a fight/dance/chat/piss-about game that requires you to move limbs of string puppets one by one with your mouse, the gameplay movie charmed one and

all with its homemade FMV, homemade hip-hop and general absurdity.

Now though, it's nearly finished. Sixteen levels of single-player *Kung Fu* will see your hero attempt to avenge the death of one Fat Bong, and rescue Ming Mong (the master's daughter) from the clutches of the Evil Puk Bul Kum, and his filthy ninjas. Unlockable

sub-games will also include Shaolin Soccer (with a massive, oversized ball), Shaolin Invaders (in which you protect a dragon egg with your handy head cannon) and Shaolin Athletics which should well give *Daley Thompson's Decathlon* a run for its money.

The weaponry on offer will include nunchukas, shurikens, a ball and chain, swords, bombs and a dog on a leash – all of which will really come into their own in multiplayer, where you can either choose Use Kung Fu on each other, have a little dance, play one of the sub-games competitively or simply gang up and beat up some computer-controlled badness.

To be quite honest, we reckon that this is going to be brilliantly stupid fun – and the fact that there are already rumours of its portability to other platforms and handhelds (specifically the touchpad-based Nintendo DS) stand as testament to this. We'll have the exclusive demo in a few months. Grasshopper.

That's some rock formation.

Football, Shaolin-style.

What kind of move is that?

WHERE'VE YOU BEEN?

WE ORIGINALLY announced *Psychotoxic* back at at the dawn of time (well, in issue 111 at the very end of 2001). Finally slated for a real release, at last you'll actually be able to play it. We'd be lying if we said it wasn't looking a bit dated now, but seeing as we're unremittingly shallow and we've got artwork of a woman with breasts and a screenshot of a cow with an udder-gun, it's back in the Bulletin section with a vengeance.

A first-person shooter that seems to echo *Soldier Of Fortune* in style, it's the charming tale of Angie Prophet (last hope for mankind) battling the minions of the Fourth Horsemen of the Apocalypse in 2022 New York. What with her being half-angel, she's got a bunch of supernatural powers to help her in her death-dealing, (bullet-time, invisibility and

the like) and a variety of zombies, crooked cops and cows as her prey.

Mindless, stupid and derivative then (the presence of an FBG weapon probably has *Doom*'s UAC corporation penning a copyright infringement lawsuit), but quite possibly a fun blast in a time when the FPS genre is getting more than a little po-faced. And there's a woman with suggestive buttons on her boobs as well.

■ **Publisher:** Whiptail Interactive
■ **Developer:** Nuclearvision
■ **ETA:** March 2005
■ **Website:** www.psychotoxic.de

It's the end of the world and Angie's pants are showing.

"That Horseman's in the pantry again."

Daisy grazed near Sellafield as a calf.

SHIVER ME WINNERS!

THE REALITY of 16th-century piracy was the destruction of homes and property, and the loss of countless lives at the hands of cut-throat maniacs. Now, however, we really quite like them – especially when they're ghosts as well.

So then, say 'yarr' and indeed 'avast', to a competition that'll give you the chance to be the first pirate to have ever gained notoriety by staying indoors and sitting around in his pants. Answer the following question correctly, and you could win one of ten copies of *Sid Meier's Pirates!*, of both *PC ZONE* Essential award and needless exclamation mark fame. To win, simply send us the relevant riposte to the following *Monkey Island* insult:

"You fight like a dairy farmer!"

a) "Even *before* they smell your breath."
b) "How appropriate. You fight like a cow."
c) "I am rubber, you are glue."

Send your entries on the back of a postcard, along with your full name and address to: *Pirates!* Compo, *PC ZONE*, Future Publishing, 99 Baker Street, London, W1U 6FP.

For full competition terms and condidtions, see page 7.

American McGee
Ex-id starlet and consultant creative director, Enlight Software

DEVELOPERS' QUESTION TIME

What PC games are you playing at the moment?
I just had to stop playing the *World Of Warcraft* beta – it was getting too addictive. Before that, I was addicted to *City Of Heroes*, and I was playing the *Desert Combat* mod for about a year straight. I get to a point where I have to delete these things from my hard drive.

What are you most proud of in your career?
I have a hard time being proud of things – I don't get why I'm where I am. I came from a pretty small background – I was repairing cars for a living when I was first working for id. I guess it's safe to say that I'm most proud of getting to where I am now.

Who do you most admire in the industry and why?
Hard to say, but probably Will Wright. I really appreciate his designs, and the way he thinks about them as entertainment. I like the way he looks at design from a more sociological perspective.

What has the PC contributed most to videogaming?
I guess massively multiplayer, but consoles can do that too. No, not anybody can pick up a PC and make a game on it.

What is your company's philosophy?
Everything we do is based on story. Everything is flowed out of and derives from story, first and foremost.

What's the best thing about your job?
I like writing – and I get to write. It's an escape. On the plane over here, I ran my laptop batteries into the ground writing an entire story.

What's the worst thing about your job?
There needs to be another way to say this – but I don't like dealing with stupid people. In my job, I get exposed to a lot of people who are frustrating because they are lazy, unaware and ignorant.

What are you working on at the moment?
A lot. The roster consists of *Bad Day LA*, *Oz* and *Grimm*. We're selling *City Of The Dead*, and there are some big announcements coming up in January.

What's the Next Big Thing in gaming?
I think we're going to start seeing a lot of advertiser-funded video games that you download and give you an hour of gameplay. It'll be good, because if someone made a small game that proves a game's concept, publishers or developers can do a full version in that style – which means you and I will suddenly have access to a greater range of genres.

R-TYPE   WOLFGANG   JAKE   CONNOR

ZOMBIE NATION
AMERICAN MCGEE ACQUIRES GEORGE ROMERO LICENCE

AMERICAN McGee, star of this month's Developers' Question Time, left, is a name we've not heard much since the rather peculiar *Alice* hit the PC several years back. Currently promoting *Scrapland*, the former id designer is now rumoured to be developing a new project, based on the zombie flicks of George Romero. Described as 'the goriest game ever made' (although it hasn't actually been made yet). We pressed for more information, and discovered that *City Of The Dead* is currently being offered by McGee's company to interested publishers.

"We all love zombies, and we all love George Romero," said McGee. "A lot was already finished material-wise and art-wise, so it was a really easy project to be pulled into."

"*City Of The Dead* is currently being offered to publishers"

But while McGee has been eagerly seeking a publisher, George Romero has exuded a slightly less enthusiastic attitude. "They basically bought my name for 'George Romero Presents' for three games," the man himself told HorrorChannel.com, while probably sporting a baffled expression. "I've never seen the games so I couldn't say if they were shit or if they were cool."

Although further details regarding the still purely conceptual *COTD* are being kept under wraps, we wouldn't be surprised if more inspiration is taken from the recent *Dawn Of The Dead* 2004 movie. "I thought it was better than the original – it was a lot more fun," McGee told *PC ZONE*. "I was impressed by it, and I was happy that that was the film that knocked Mel Gibson's *Passion Of The Christ* off the number one spot in the United States. I was just happy to see that zombies beat Jesus, that's all." Well, quite.

Never trust the undead. They're shifty buggers...

SEABASS FOR BREAKFAST

EXCLUSIVE! FIRST DETAILS REVEALED FOR *PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 5*

THE LATEST and greatest arcade footy game for the PC from the Tokyo-based Konami development team, *Pro Evolution Soccer 4* scored 89 per cent and an Essential award last issue. Recently, *PC ZONE* enjoyed an exclusive early morning interview in the south of France with the mastermind behind the series, Shingo 'Seabass' Takatsuka, where we discovered his plans for online and whether he has actually programmed prejudiced referees for England games...

What do you feel are the main improvements in *Pro Evo 4*?
Well, we now have three of the six biggest official licences in the world (Italy, Spain and Holland), which is certainly an improvement from last year. Gameplay-wise, there's a new feel for the dribbling, where a player can now come to a complete stop, then continue, still in control of the ball. Also the Master League now has RPG-style development of players, whose skills can now improve, or actually get worse!

You said last year you wanted to improve heading in the game – did you achieve this?
Yes, but not completely – it's still far from what I envisaged. I want to go back and do more motion capture, especially for one-on-one headers, to make it a bit more exciting.

How exactly does the morale system work?
There is actually a big difference if you play home and away – for example, the referee is more likely to give penalties to the home side. However, as for actual morale, I've noticed that players' morale is affected more than anything we have in the game.

Will there be full online for PC next year's game?
Hopefully, and we plan to work towards a full online tournament for *PES5*.

How are you going to use the next-gen consoles and the PC's ever more powerful hardware to make *PES* into a better football game?
We're really looking forward to it. The team works on the PlayStation 2 as a basic platform and already we're really feeling the limit of the technology. But that's not to say we'll just make crisper graphics for *PES5* – we're much more interested in better AI and more gameplay for smarter player attack and defence.

Finally, when we play as England, we always feel that the referee is against us...
Yes, you're probably right! No, I'm joking. It must be to do with the home and away status – or your paranoia!

ROUND-UP

HERDING FASCINATING NUGGETS OF GAMING INFO INTO AN EASILY DIGESTIBLE PEN

Working Late

HALF-STRIFE
More than a few punters have been waving crowbars at Valve, VU and the Steam delivery system. With much the same smoke and mirrors routine that beset so much of the release, it was only in late October that it was finally outlined that a Net connection would be needed for all copies of *HL2* to authenticate themselves – by which point it was too late for us to warn anyone. It sucks, we know.

A SPECTOR CALLS
Warren Spector, he of *Deus Ex* and *Thief* fame, has left Eidos' Ion Storm. He's keeping himself on the books with a consultative role (presumably on the new Crystal Dynamics *Tomb Raider* game that he was linked to a while back) but other than that the bio-mod bod has flown the nest. Industry gossip has it that he's heading for Midway, an organisation already rejuvenated by the presence of id alumni John Romero and Tom Hall. Or he might be off to stroke his beard on a desert island somewhere and come up with a few more genius ideas.

TAKING THE SITH
It's been a while since the abominable *Force Commander*, and its stink must have finally dissipated since LucasArts is talking about another sortie into the world of the RTS. All we currently know is that it's being made at Petroglyph, a team comprised mainly of developers who've worked at Westwood on *C&C* titles – so perhaps AT-ATs and Snow Speeders will finally get the strategy classic that they so much deserve.

LOCKED VAULT
A touch of bad news, since *ZONE* has discovered that Elixir's promising *Blue Vault* project has been suspended. Not a single publisher took the bait on what was looking like an extremely innovative real-time strategy game. For shame! After *Evil Genius* struck gold you'd think that the games industry would have more sense...

Good Cop. Bad Cop.

GOOD COP
Our 150th issue. We're now the longest-running games magazine in the UK, and we're all proud to be a part of it.

Half-Life 2: unlocked, playable and quite brilliant. Even though we spent the first hour throwing bottles at Combine soldiers and then running away giggling.

New graphics cards! Beautiful, shiny graphics cards! Praise the maker! (Although Suzy didn't get one. Sorry Suze.)

An art editor? A real art editor, who does art stuff and is in charge of all that? Richard Grace – welcome to the gang.

BAD COP
Half-Life 2: we want to play more, but to keep our jobs we have to play other games. It makes us feel dirty.

Clare enjoying the fresh air of the Lake District, before coming back to the constrictive air of the office and useless, sniffling workmates.

Illness, trips, holidays and skiving turning the office into a place occupied only by tumbleweed and cacti.

Will's never-ending quest for the elusive Pepperami Fire Stick. It's almost as bad as when he couldn't find a reliable stockist for Beef Monster Munch.

Good Cop: **Dogtanian** Bad Cop: **Widermere** from *Dogtanian And The Muskehounds*. Quite possibly one of the greatest cartoon series of all time. Apart from *Batfink*.

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

The end is drawing ever nearer. After this month, there are just room for two more attempts to win over our judges before we put all those deemed good enough into our grand final to face the public vote. So make sure you get any last remaining entries sent to the usual address sharpish! This month it's the turn of Ross Pearson – he emailed in his idea for a gore-filled zombie splatterthon that he describes as...

"Resident Evil meets GTA: Vice City"
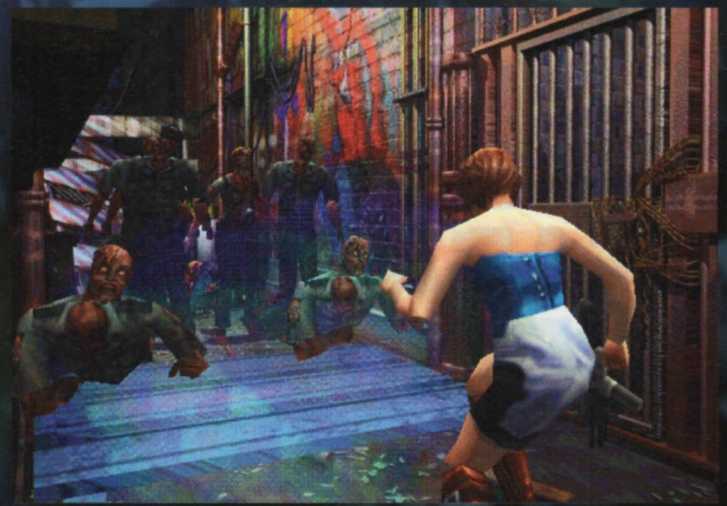
"Does my bum look big in this?" "Least you got one, love."

ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE!

YOU WAKE from a slumber and find there's been a zombie outbreak – time to take action! The game would feature two modes – single-player and outbreak simulation. Population numbers, infection speed, zombie speed, zombie awareness and map features could all be varied. The basic Romero zombie is supported by modern, fast zombies and a few gun-toting zombies. Watch out for aggressive looters and, even more dangerous, military patrols (they might mistake you for a zombie).

The weapon selection would be massive, ranging from baseball bats to shotguns to lawnmowers. The player is able to commandeer vehicles and generally interact with the environment.

The game ends when you secure a helicopter or boat, reach a military base or bunker, survive the time limit or totally annihilate the zombie horde. A day/night cycle would be added. A stamina bar would fall without food and water, causing slower reactions.

Multiplayer potential is enormous. Modes could include Deathmatch (during the outbreak), Survival (where teaming up is possible), Zombie Killer (first to reach a specified zombie frag limit) and Zombie Master (play as a strong, fast zombie).

Zombies are aware of living human flesh and will always flock towards those still alive. They also group together to pounce. Once bitten, your health drains and you turn into a powerful zombie and attack your friends.

It's like *Miami Vice* meets Romero.

"Eric! I think there's one in the garden!"

WHAT THE JUDGES SAY

Yay, yay and thrice yay! I love the *Resident Evil* games, but found the clunky third-person control system a pain in the arse – something that *Resi 4* is hopefully going to address. However, this is a cracking idea. Obviously the single-player game would have to be tightly structured with some smart set-pieces à la *Half-Life 2*, but I love the idea of a huge multiplayer map and being able to team up with other players to form squads – kind of a *Joint Ops* with the undead. Throw in a chainsaw, shotgun and vehicles and you have the potential for a real classic. **Verdict: HIT!**

A shooter... with zombies! It's brilliant – someone sign this man's prodigious talents now! Hang on, wasn't that the premise behind *Doom*, *Resident Evil*, *Half-Life* and 100 other games? OK, *Zombie Apocalypse!* is slightly different – it's more of a homage to zombie films, and takes place in a vast 'living' world, much like *STALKER*. Well, I hate these big, aimless shooters – I think they miss the point of what makes a tight, exciting game. As such, I think your idea might at best make a mod. Although *Half-Life: They Hunger* beat you to it years ago. **Verdict: MISS!**

It's interesting that we get this idea in the same month that we cover *Stubbs The Zombie* and American McGee's Romero project, not least because they're all such ace ideas. I don't think that anyone has ever managed to make a real zombie game that truly captures the spirit and terror of a *Dawn Of The Dead*. The *STALKER*-esque freedom that your game affords, plus the possibilities of random encounters and the mowing down of countless reanimated corpses make this the strongest game idea that we've covered so far! **Verdict: HIT!**

"Two out of three is a winner in our book! Congratulations Ross, you're through to the final in three issues' time. See you next month for the penultimate entry in Search For A Game!"

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.

Don't think you're safe on the roof. The canny zombies will just take the lift.

HAVE A DOUBLE THIS XMAS ON XPLOSIV...

PC CD-ROM

XPLOSIV

SONIC & KNUCKLES COLLECTION

XPLOSIV

XPLOSIV

Virtua Fighter 2

Free game CD in Xplosiv special edition packs.
Thirty top titles including new releases on sale in stores nationwide from November 2004.

Promotion ends 31st December 2004

CHARTS

In association with **VIRGIN MEGASTORES**

Add and subtract, but as a matter of fact, now that you're gone I still want you back. Remembering, surrendering, remembering that part. All of my charts

ChartTrack

PCZ TOP 10

eLspa — Entertainment and Leisure Software Publishers Association

Football Manager 2005 has more than proved its worth in the eyes of reviewer and punter alike. Even now, the Gross National Product of the UK is spiralling downwards due to its evil and seductive brand of time-wasting.

A winner with hardcore gamers and people's mothers alike, the newest *Rollercoaster Tycoon* incarnation could never have failed. It's much the same as before, only in flashy 3D, but everybody likes to endanger the lives of little simulated people…

		TITLE	PUBLISHER	SCORE
1	NEW	**FOOTBALL MANAGER 2005**	SEGA	90%
2	▼	THE SIMS 2	EA	82%
3	NEW	ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON 3	ATARI	79%
4	▼	ROME: TOTAL WAR	ACTIVISION	93%
5	▼	WARHAMMER 40,000: DAWN OF WAR	THQ	81%
6	NEW	TOTAL CLUB MANAGER 2005	EA	68%
7	▼	CALL OF DUTY: UNITED OFFENSIVE	ACTIVISION	87%
8	▼	DOOM 3	ACTIVISION	90%
9	▼	FIFA FOOTBALL 2005	EA	60%
10	▼	STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT	ACTIVISION	78%

YOUR SHOUT

Have your say at www.pczone.co.uk

It's all prepared for a *Half-Life 2* onslaught – if it doesn't go to number one for a couple of months, then I despair!
HyperiOn

Why, pray tell, is *Rome:Total War* only 4th? **summons the Praetorian guard to start randomly crucifying people**
cheesyleps

149 issues of practice and for the big 150 this is the best charts you can do? pfft!
PeachFUZZ

This is a rare example of a below-par EA game that hasn't leapt straight to the top of the charts due to punter ignorance. We can only assume that copies of *Total Club Manager* have been bought by hermits and/or the Amish. Buy *FM2005* instead!

Hanging on to the charts by the charred skin of its undead teeth is *Doom 3* – perhaps because those reluctant to upgrade when it was released have finally coughed up the cash. Pretty isn't it? But, as we've all discovered, *Half-Life 2* has eaten its soul entirely.

Virgin megastores TOP 10

1.	FOOTBALL MANAGER 2005	SEGA
2.	THE SIMS 2	EA
3.	ROME: TOTAL WAR	ACTIVISION
4.	MEDAL OF HONOR: PACIFIC ASSAULT	EA
5.	ZOO TYCOON 2	MICROSOFT
6.	ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON 3	ATARI
7.	WARHAMMER 40,000: DAWN OF WAR	THQ
8.	CALL OF DUTY: UNITED OFFENSIVE	ACTIVISION
9.	SID MEIER'S PIRATES!	ATARI
10.	TOTAL CLUB MANAGER 2005	EA

COMPETITION

Win £100 of Virgin vouchers!

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

QUESTION: Which boss of Crewe Alexandra is the longest-serving football manager in the UK?

A Dario Gradi
B Ian Holloway
C Alan Curbishley

Send your answers on a postcard to: *PC ZONE* Chart Compo Issue 150, Future Publishing, 99 Baker Street, London, W1U 6FP. Closing date: January 5 2005

■ Please include your name, address, daytime phone number, email address, job title and company name (and age if under 18).
■ Please tell us if you do not wish to receive details of further special offers or new products from other companies.
■ Please indicate whether you are a current subscriber to *PC ZONE*.

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

INCOMING!

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

DECEMBER

ARMIES OF EXIGO	EA
CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 5	EIDOS
THE CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK: ESCAPE FROM BUTCHER BAY	VU GAMES
THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH	EA
PRINCE OF PERSIA: WARRIOR WITHIN	UBISOFT

JANUARY

CLOSE COMBAT: FIRST TO FIGHT	GLOBAL STAR
IMPERIAL GLORY	EIDOS
SCRAPLAND	DEEP SILVER

FEBRUARY

BROTHERS IN ARMS	UBISOFT
CITY OF HEROES	NCSOFT
PLAYBOY: THE MANSION	UBISOFT
SETTLERS: HERITAGE OF KINGS	UBISOFT
THE PUNISHER	THQ
X2: THE RETURN	DEEP SILVER

MARCH

DARWINIA	INTROVERSION SOFTWARE
KOTOR II: THE SITH LORDS	ACTIVISION
PARIAH	HIP INTERACTIVE
PSYCHOTOXIC	WHIPTAIL
SPLINTER CELL: CHAOS THEORY	UBISOFT
STOLEN	HIP INTERACTIVE

APRIL

LEGO STAR WARS	EIDOS
STRONGHOLD 2	GLOBAL STAR
STAR WARS: REPUBLIC COMMANDO	ACTIVISION

Q1 2005

ACT OF WAR: DIRECT ACTION	ATARI
BOILING POINT	ATARI
COMMANDOS STRIKE FORCE	EIDOS
COSSACKS II: NAPOLEONIC WAR	CDV
DRAGONSHARD	ATARI
GHOST RECON 2	UBISOFT
GTR	TBA
HITMAN: BLOOD MONEY	EIDOS
PSYCHONAUTS	TBA
SWAT 4	VU GAMES

2005

ADVENT RISING	VU GAMES
BATTLEFIELD 2	EA
BATTLESTATIONS: MIDWAY	SCI
BET ON SOLDIER	DIGITAL JESTERS
BIOSHOCK	TBA
BLACK & WHITE 2	EA
DREAMFALL: THE LONGEST JOURNEY	FUNCOM
DUNGEON SIEGE II	MICROSOFT
ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION	BETHESDA
EMPIRE EARTH 2	VU GAMES
F.E.A.R.	VU GAMES
GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS	ROCKSTAR
KING KONG	UBISOFT
MIDDLE-EARTH ONLINE	VU GAMES
QUAKE IV	ACTIVISION
STALKER: SHADOW OF CHERNOBYL	THQ
STARSHIP TROOPERS	EMPIRE
STUBBS THE ZOMBIE	ASPYR
THE MATRIX ONLINE	SEGA/WB
THE MOVIES	ACTIVISION
THE WITCHER	TBA
WARTIME COMMAND: BATTLE FOR EUROPE 1939-45	CODEMASTERS
WORLD OF WARCRAFT	VU GAMES
YOU ARE EMPTY	1C

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

BALLERIUM

The intriguing online world of *Ballerium* has bitten the dust, adding to the rapidly expanding Massively Multiplayer graveyard. A game that was intent on merging RTS and MMOG, its passing has been blamed on a lack of investment and empty pockets.

- **Publisher:** N/A
- **Developer:** Majorem
- **ETA:** KIA
- **Website:** www.ballerium.com

DRIV3R

Suspiciously missing from Atari financial reports, yet still being spoken of in the present tense, just recently everything has gone a little quiet on the *Driv-three-er* front. Perhaps because the console game was a bit pants? Or perhaps because they're working extra hard on the PC version? We'll see…

- **Publisher:** Atari
- **Developer:** Reflections
- **ETA:** Not over-sure really
- **Website:** www.driv3r.com

CITY OF HEROES

Well superfriends, it looks like we're not going to get a European release of NCSoft's marvellous Marvel-baiting extravaganza until February. All right-thinking gamers will be distraught at the news. Or just continue playing on the US servers…

- **Publisher:** NCSoft
- **Developer:** NCSoft
- **ETA:** February
- **Website:** www.cityofheroes.com

TOP 10 *PC ZONE* IDEAS AND FEATURES THAT NEVER HAPPENED…

1. **PYTHAGORAS THE GAME REVIEWING CHIMPANZEE** (THEY WOULDN'T LET US DRESS HIM UP IN FUNNY SUITS)

2. **THE PDA FILES** (FOR OBVIOUS REASONS)

3. **SOURCE-Y POSTCARDS** (WILL'S MOMENT OF BACK PAGE DELUSION)

4. **RICHIE'S INFAMOUS 'GAY ROMANCE' *PIRATES!* REVIEW** (FUNNY WHEN HE WROTE IT APPARENTLY)

5. **THE BLIND MOUSE SITTING IN A WHEELCHAIR** (LONG STORY)

6. **THE SUZY WALLACE GARAGE FORECOURT CRISP AND SAVOURY SNACK REVIEW** (COULD'VE FARCKIN 'APPENED…)

7. **WILL'S PIKEY BARGAIN BASEMENT BIN OF CHEAP/FREE CRAP** (ANT'S SUGGESTION FOR PORTER'S DREAM COLUMN)

8. **A SUPERTEST ON THE ARSES OF LEADING GAME HEROINES** (WOULD HAVE ENDED IN FIGHTS)

9. **INDUSTRY DEATH WATCH** (WHICH LEADING DEVELOPMENT FIGURE WILL SNUFF IT NEXT?)

10. **THE DRINKING FEATURE** (HANG ON. NO, THAT DID HAPPEN…)

THE GREAT BIG 150TH ISSUE GIANT QUIZ SPECIAL!™

150! Who would have believed it? When we started this insane idea for a magazine, nobody had any idea that it would one day end up being the longest-running gaming magazine of all-time (sort of)! Or that Prezzer would have stuck around for every one of them! Despite our attempts to dislodge him!

In fact, there are many, many questions that have sprung up over the decade or so *PC ZONE* has been in the business of bringing you the latest and greatest from the world of PC gaming. So many, in fact, that we've had a brainwave. You see, we may be the brightest and best that the world of games journalism has to offer, but we want to know just how much our darling readers know about our favourite pastime.

To that end, we've put on our thinking caps, dusted off the research tomes and come up with 100 of the toughest PC gaming-related questions we could think of. Then we realised they were all piss-easy, went down the pub to strengthen our resolve and had another stab at it.

So what, you're probably thinking. Why should that concern me? We'll tell you why… Because this is our 150th issue, we're celebrating big time. Following many, many calls to our friends throughout the industry, we've put together the mother of all prizes for the ONE lucky reader who manages to get the most questions correct.

We've got the very latest, state-of-the-art hardware, peripherals and control devices, as well as more games than you can shake a stick at. The full prize list is detailed opposite, but among the delights are *Rome: Total War*, *Pro Evolution Soccer 4*, *Prince Of Persia: Warrior Within*, an XFX GeForceFX 5900XT graphics card and a set of Creative Gigaworks S750 7.1 speakers worth over £200. In fact, the total prize value is worth over £3,000! And ONE lucky reader gets the lot! Blimus! And that's not all! If you get over 90 out of the 100 questions correct, you'll receive a special certificate of excellence (see page 37) too!

So what do you have to do? Simple – answer as many of the following 100 questions as you can. Whoever sends us the most correct answers before Wednesday, January 5 wins the whole bally lot! In the event of a tie, the best answer to the tie-breaker question (in the opinion of the editor – whose decision, as we all know, is final) will win. Send your completed answers to:

Giant Quiz
PC ZONE
Future Publishing
99 Baker Street
London, W1U 6FP

Full competition terms and conditions on p7.

GOOD LUCK TO ONE AND ALL!

THE PRIZES

Big shouts and much love goes out to the following terrific companies for supplying us with our fabulous prize booty:

THE HARDWARE

CREATIVE Audigy 2 ZS Soundcard, Gigaworks S750 7.1 Speaker System

MICROSOFT Wireless Optical Mouse, Digital Media Pro Keyboard

NVIDIA XFX GeForceFX 5900XT Video card

SAITEK Cyborg Evo Wireless Joystick, Cyborg Evo Force Flight Stick, R220 Racing Wheel

THE GAMES

ACTIVISION Rome: Total War, Call Of Duty Deluxe, Tony Hawk's Underground 2, Star Wars Battlefront, Spider-Man 2, True Crime: Streets Of LA, Jedi Knight: Jedi Academy, Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic, Return To Castle Wolfenstein

ASCARON Arena Wars, Port Royale 2, Sacred Plus

ATARI Unreal Tournament 2004, Chris Sawyer's Locomotion, Axis & Allies, Railroad Tycoon 3, Sid Meier's Pirates!

CDV Combat Mission Anthology, Blitzkrieg: Burning Horizon, Codename: Panzers – Phase One

CODEMASTERS Perimeter, Colin McRae Rally 2005, Soldiers: Heroes Of World War II, TOCA Race Driver 2

DEEP SILVER X2: The Threat

EA Battlefield Vietnam, Sim City 4: Deluxe Edition, The Lord Of The Rings: Return Of The King, Command & Conquer: Generals Deluxe Edition, Medal Of Honor: Deluxe Edition, FIFA Football 2005, Battlefield 1942, Battlefield 1942: Secret Weapons Of World War II, Battlefield 1942: The Road To Rome, Total Club Manager 2005

EIDOS Commandos 3: Destination Berlin, Commandos 2, Deus Ex: Invisible War, Startopia, Project Eden, Anachronox, Soul Reaver 2, Legacy Of Kain, Hitman: Contracts, Gangsters, Tomb Raider: Angel Of Darkness

EMPIRE FlatOut, Mashed, Ford Racing 3

JOWOOD Transport Giant, SpellForce Gold Edition, Yetisports Deluxe, Future Tactics The Uprising, Silent Storm Gold Edition

KONAMI Pro Evolution Soccer 4

LIONHEAD Black & White

MICROSOFT Flight Simulator 2004: A Century Of Flight, Halo, Age Of Mythology, Rise Of Nations, Freelancer

NCSOFT City Of Heroes, Lineage II

NOVALOGIC Joint Operations, Delta Force: Black Hawk Down, Black Hawk Down: Team Sabre, Comanche 4, Delta Force: Task Force Dagger

SCI Richard Burns Rally, Conflict: Desert Storm II, Conflict: Vietnam

SEGA Children Of The Nile, Sonic Heroes, NHL Eastside Hockey Manager, Football Manager 2005, Sonic Adventure DX

SOLD OUT The Italian Job, Command & Conquer: Red Alert 2, Operation Flashpoint, Theme Park, Road To India, Clive Barker's Undying

UBISOFT Prince Of Persia: Warrior Within, EverQuest II, Alexander, Pacific Fighters, Myst IV Revelation, Far Cry, Chessmaster 10th Edition, Scrabble 2005, Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow, CSI: Miami

VU GAMES Tribes: Vengeance, Counter-Strike: Condition Zero, Evil Genius, Homeworld 2, Lords Of The Realm III, Emperor: Rise Of The Middle Kingdom, Ground Control II, The Hobbit, The Lord Of The Rings: The Fellowship Of The Ring, The Lord Of The Rings: War Of The Ring

WANADOO Dark Age Of Camelot (including Shrouded Isles and Trials Of Atlantis)

XPLOSIV No One Lives Forever (Game Of The Year Edition), Combat Mission, Total Immersion Racing, Dungeon Siege, Impossible Creatures, Rallisport Challenge, Mechwarrior Vengeance (plus Black Knight), Starsky & Hutch, Space Invaders Anniversary, Sonic & Knuckles Collection, Cossacks.

WIN! OVER £3000 WORTH OF GOODIES!

*Not all prizes pictured. Blimey!

HE SAID WHAT NOW?

Classic quotes from in-game characters. But who said them and what were the games?

6 "Shake it, baby."
7 "There ain't no gettin' offa this train!"
8 "We will be crowned its kings. Or better than kings. Gods!"
9 "Amazing things will happen here soon. You just wait."
10 "The bomb has been planted."

BOX-ART PHOTOSHOP

These are all classic PC games, but we've messed about with the covers. Can you tell what they are?

11

12

13

14

15

IT'S IN THE GAME

So you think you know your games? How well do you know the exact ins and outs, though?

1 What's the currency used in *The Saga Of Ryzom*?
2 Which weapon is on the default '3' key in *Quake*?
3 What is Sam Fisher's rifle model?
4 What superweapon does the Chinese Army have access to in *Command & Conquer: Generals*?
5 What's the name of the dropship available in *PlanetSide*?

PLOT HAIKUS

We may not be the greatest oriental poets in the world, but you'll still have to work out which games the following little ditties refer to...

16 Shooting and shooting; then slow down time for a bit; then yet more shooting.
17 Feed them, nurture them; wall them up if you want to; they're you, on the screen.
18 Race and chase with haste; but you will never collide; you move as a ghost.
19 I am Superman; no, my good friend you are not; I look like him, though.
20 Lips a shade of green; nature flees from my shutter; my pig, he is gone.

SUPPORTING ROLES

Obscure sidekicks, NPCs and supporting roles. But in which games do the following characters make their cameos?

21 Murray the Skull
22 Farah
23 Kane
24 Nico Collard
25 Bruno
26 Cortana
27 Wirt
28 Pey'j
29 Tracer Tong
30 Sulik

ONCE UPON A TIME

From the days when men were men, women were women and graphics were 256-colour VGA-compatible. How well do you know your gaming history?

31 What was the title of Sensible Software's sequel to *Wizball*?
32 Who originally published *Sid Meier's Pirates!*?
33 Who wrote the theme song for *Xenon II: Megablast*?
34 The first *Tycoon* game was released in what year?
35 What was the first game in the *Elder Scrolls* series was?
36 'Castle Hasselhoff' was one of the names considered for which 1992 classic?

37 What was the name of Dynamix's 1989 James Bond-style secret agent?
38 Which Sensible Software game never got made, due in part to its outrageous content?
39 EA's *Budokan: The Martial Spirit* focused on four martial arts disciplines. What were they?
40 Name the four-game series that made up Sierra's early 'Quest' range of adventures, published in the late '80s and early '90s.
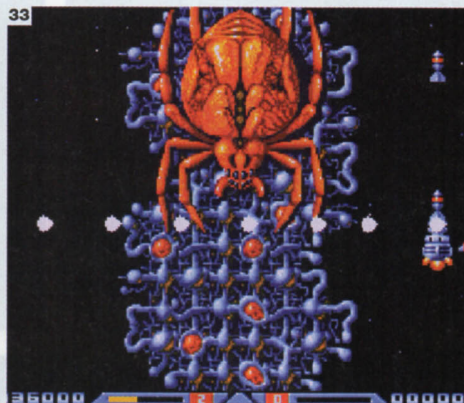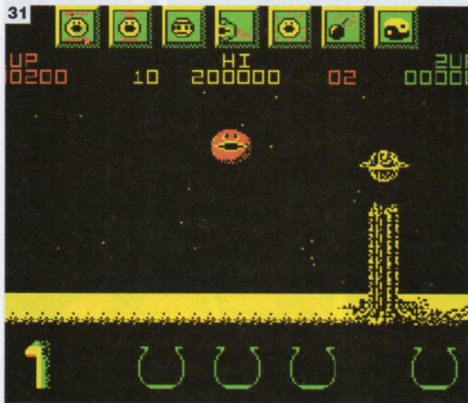
GENERAL KNOWLEDGE

Does exactly what it says on the tin (plus we couldn't fit these questions anywhere elsewhere)...

41 What's the name of the ship in which Master Chief is awoken in *Halo*?
42 Who provided the voice of Tommy Vercetti in *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City*?
43 What Codec channel saves your game in *MGS2*?
44 Which pop star featured heavily in *The Nomad Soul*?
45 What was the name of the turncoat Kilrathi in *Wing Commander 3*, who ended up being an implanted enemy agent?
46 In which US state is the Black Mesa facility?
47 Why would you see the phrase 'Gouranga!' in a game?
48 What are the giant transport creatures in *Morrowind* called?
49 What major new 'feature' did EA introduce in *FIFA Football 2003*?
50 Which sci-fi action game featured the talents of one-time Hollywood starlet Tia Carrera?

ODD ONE OUT

Four related gaming things, but which one doesn't fit and why?

51 Special Agent Fox Mulder. Captain Jim Brass. Agent Jack Bauer. Detective Ken Hutchinson.
52 Prague, Colombia, New York, Moscow.
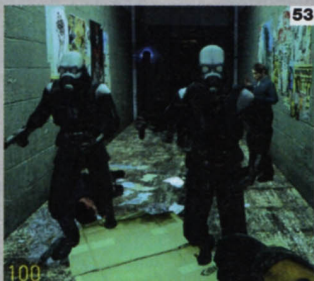
53 *The Chronicles Of Riddick*, *Far Cry*, *Mace Griffin: Bounty Hunter*, *Half-Life 2*.

54 David Duchovny, Heather Graham, Eve, Adam West.
55 Wave 103, Emotion 98.3, Flash FM, Playback FM.

DEVELOPERS, DEVELOPERS, DEVELOPERS, DEVELOPERS

Questions about the good folk behind the pixels. You've played their games for years, but how well do you really know them?

56 Everyone knows that that the developer now known as Rare used to release its software under the banner 'Ultimate Play The Game', but what was the actual name of the company?
57 Name three development teams that stemmed from the legendary Bullfrog.

58 What was the name of the development studio founded by Warren Spector prior to his involvement in Ion Storm?
59 Which city houses Monolith, Valve and Bungie?
60 Which French development studio revolutionised the '90s gaming scene with classics such as *Cruise For A Corpse*, *Flashback* and *Another World*?

GEOGRAPHY LESSON

Here we go-oh! Gaming all over the world! Dig out your atlases, we're going on a trip...

61 Which island network is *Far Cry* set on?
62 Which global hotspot hosts the *Joint Ops* missions?
63 Which planet do you first visit in *KOTOR*?
64 In which city does the first in the *Broken Sword* series begin?
65 Name the two worlds between which April Ryan travels in *The Longest Journey*?
66 Where are the *Half-Life* aliens from?
67 What planet hosts *Warhammer 40,000: Dawn Of War*?
68 Which city do the spandex-clad supermen of *City Of Heroes* protect?
69 What is Q2DM1 also known as?
70 In which city was the first *Midtown Madness* set?

RTFM

The trusty game manual. Where would we be without it? Identify the game from these classic quotes written on the papery things you never read...

71 "Now older and wiser, he has no interest in glory. If he fights, it is because he believes the cause is necessary and he is capable."
72 "You'll get a verbal notice and your enemies will receive a warning telling them that you're doing well."
73 "On a cold December day in 1903, after weeks of testing on the windy dunes at Kitty hawk, North Carolina, the Wright Flyer sputtered to life."
74 "This racing scene is not advertised in the paper, it has no official sponsors and there are no grandstands at the finish line."
75 "Press 'R' to unzip your pants."

REVIEW QUOTES

Time for some classic words from the *PC ZONE* archives. Which games inspired these snippets of verbal gold from *ZONE's* reviewers, and who said them?

81 "It's enough to send you into a keyboard-massacring fury as your men are cut down through no fault of your own, as you futilely attempt to select them, or find that half of them have been left behind in a nearby field and are idly admiring the dandelions instead of killing things."
82 "It's like having sex with Cameron Diaz and then complaining that she didn't have anything intelligent to say about the works of Plato."
83 "This is the most terrifying game ever. It should be shipped with a pack of man-sized incontinence pads."
84 "What starts out like a stroll in the park, regarding the difficulty level, soon turns into a unicycle ride through downtown LA – and eventually becomes a camping holiday in Cambodia."
85 "Taking to your neighbours' heads with a lead pipe is no guarantee of success – although it is a lot of fun."
86 . "Boring? Oh yes. Irritating? Chinese Water Torture is an easy option compared."
87 "If real life were as horrible as this, the Samaritans would be out distributing razor blades and sleeping pills."
88 "Imagine a cross between *System Shock 2*, *Thief*, *Goldeneye*, *Half-Life*, *Soldier Of Fortune*, *Kingpin* and *SiN*. And, erm, *Unreal Tournament*."
89 "Much like testicular piercing, [this game] is firmly in the 'specialist interest' market."
90 "I can't get them to f**k."

TIMELINE

Four screenshots from different levels of the same game. Put them in the correct sequential order.

76 SPLINTER CELL

77 CALL OF DUTY

78 DEUS EX: INVISIBLE WAR

79 HALO

80 PAINKILLER

THE BLURBS

It was a time of WAR. In a world where one man was king. Shoot to win, shoot to live. Inspired marketing blurbs from the backs of game boxes. But which games are they talking about?

91 For Land. For Power. Forever.
92 Prison is Hell!
93 You don't play, you volunteer.
94 Welcome To The Jungle.
95 You have more than a weapon in your hands, you have the lives of other men.

MULTIPLAYER MODES

Deathmatch, Capture The Flag and King Of The Hill. But what about when games try to be different with their multiplayer modes? Which games had these 'personalised' online gaming types?

96 Conquest
97 Slayer
98 Advance And Secure
99 Snatch
100 Neutralisation Mode

AND FINALLY...

If the last 100 questions didn't faze you in the slightest, then not only do you have a superhuman gaming brain, but you're probably not alone. So just in case we need to decide who gets the ultimate accolade of 'BRAIN OF *ZONE*', fill in this tie-breaker in less than 20 words...

101 "I hope *PC ZONE* survives for another 150 issues because..."

EVERYONE'S A WINNER!*

*Everyone that answers 90 out of 100 questions correctly that is...

Don't despair if you don't know the answers to every single question in our giant quiz (or can't find the answers on the Internet). Due to some kind of crazy governmental loophole, *PC ZONE* has managed to register itself as a bona fide edumecational establishment and that. To this end, everyone who obtains a 90 per cent passing grade earns themselves a genuine *PC ZONE* Institute Of Gaming certificate of excellence. We'll even print it on shiny paper for you. Be the envy of your friends! Fool potential future employers into thinking you have an actual degree in something! Hang it on your wall and admire it for several days before forgetting all about it! Good luck!

The PC Zone Institute of Gaming
to all who may read these letters, Greetings:
Hereby it is certified upon recommendation of the
National Examination Resource Department
The Regents of The PC Zone Institute of Gaming have conferred upon
John Q. Public
in recognition of the satisfactory fulfilment of the prescribed requirements the degree of
Bachelor of
Gaming & Electronic Entertainment Knowledge
with all the rights, privileges, honours thereto pertaining here and elsewhere.

HOT SHOTS

SWAT 4

Highly trained, technologically unbeatable and far, far better than that crap Colin Farrell film

AFTER VU made strange coughing noises and swept *SWAT: Urban Justice* discreetly under the carpet, the franchise appeared to be on the ropes. Thankfully though, for the series' hordes of tactically-minded squad-shooting fans, the fresh start made by current industry golden boys Irrational seems to have done wonders. Aiming for a strategic return to form coupled with a more streamlined interface system, the game has you doing everything from responding to 911 calls about maniacs to rescuing undercover cops after their cover has been blown and bringing arms dealers to justice.

All the expected incursion paraphernalia will be available to you – including non-lethal takedown tools like beanbag shotguns, stun guns and pepper spray. Should, however, the situation need a few more bullets in the fray, the game now caters for a sniper to be perched outside the unlicensed bookies (or whatever) that you happen to be storming. What's more, seeing as the game changes the enemy placement every time you boot up a level, you may well be needing him…

We'll have an in-depth preview next month, where we'll also go into the potential glories of *SWAT 4* multiplayer. All in all, it looks to us like Irrational is cooking up something pretty special…

■ **Publisher:** VU Games ■ **Developer:** Irrational Games
■ **ETA:** Q1 2005 ■ **Website:** www.swat4.com

HOT SHOTS

SC-20K LAUNCHER
30 / 150
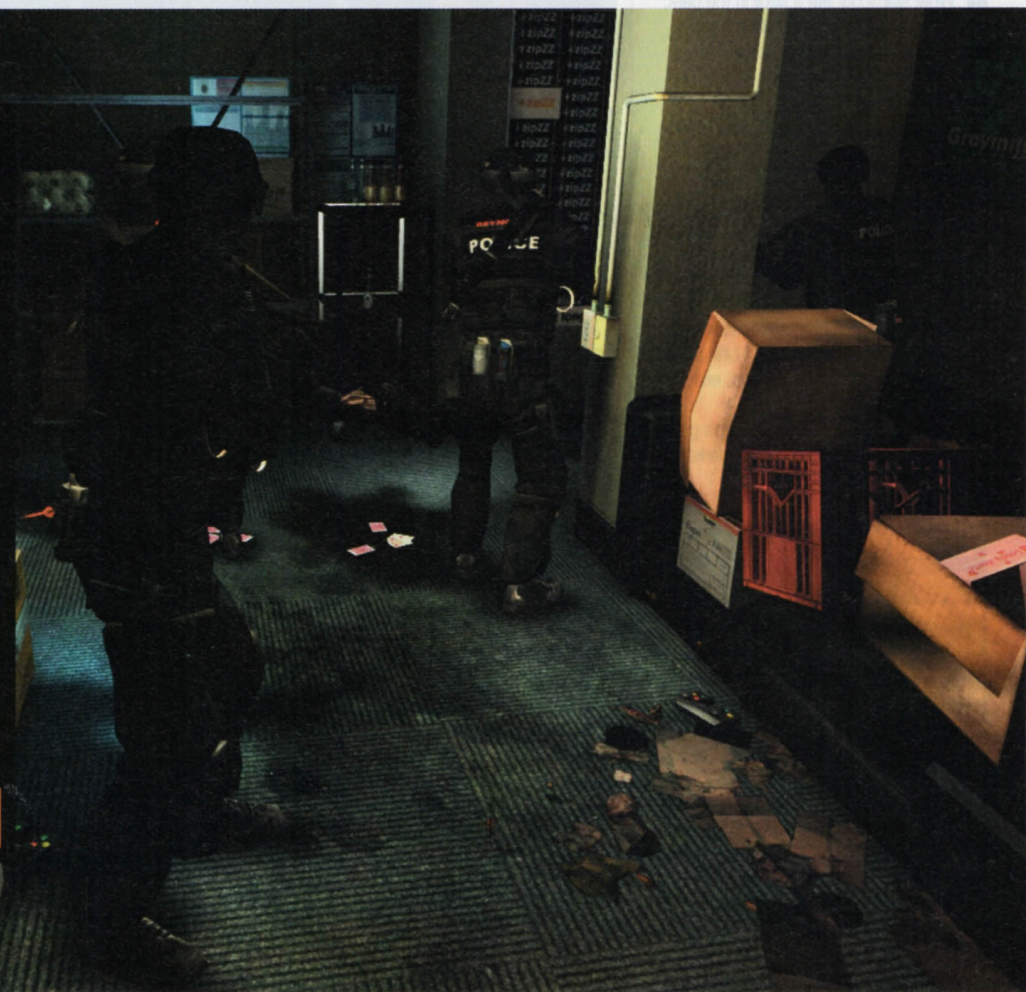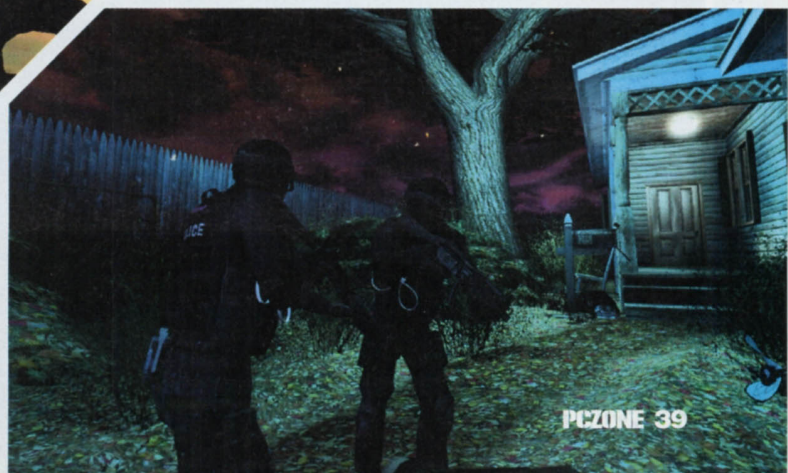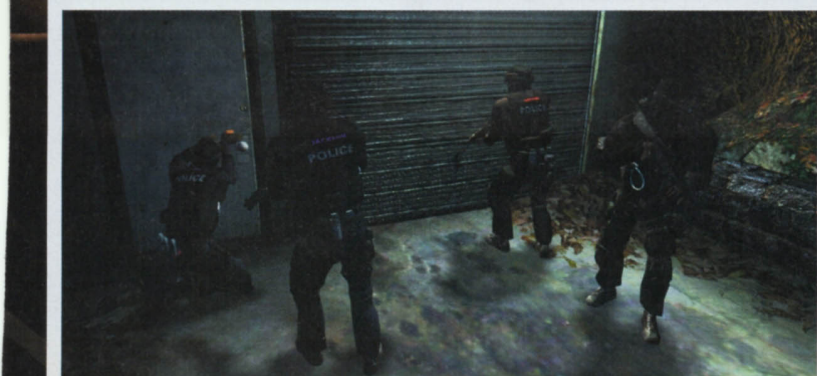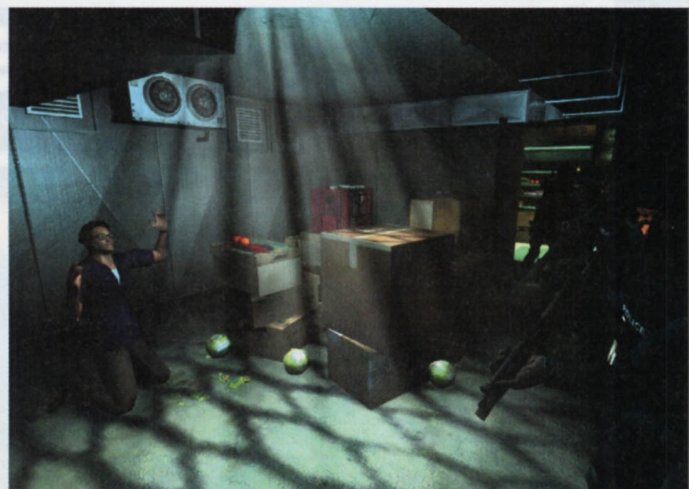
SPLINTER CELL: CHAOS THEORY
A butterfly flaps its wings in China and look what happens...
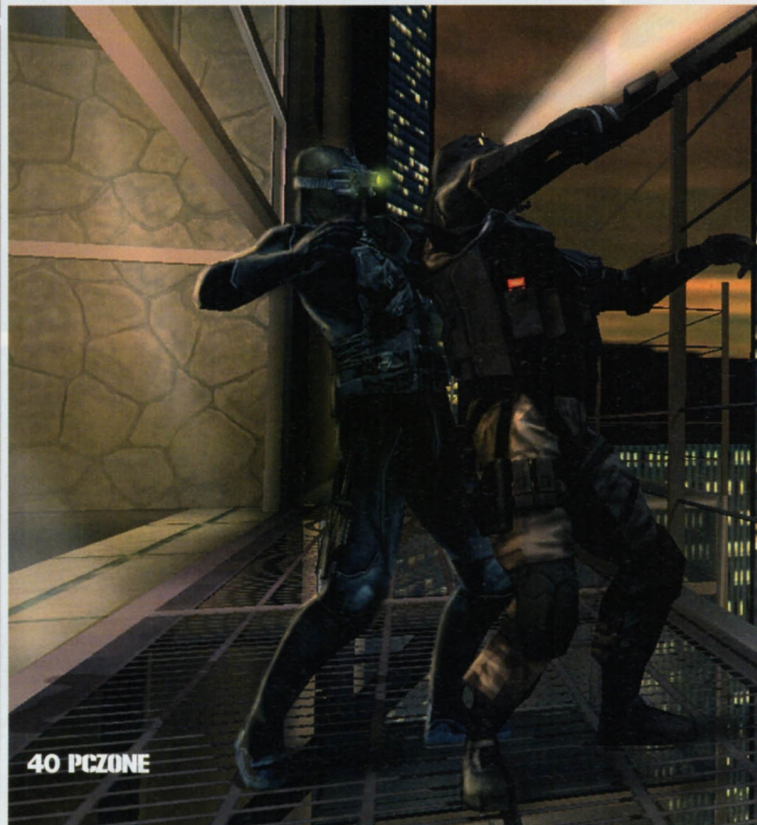
THE NEWS that the feverishly awaited (by us anyway) new *Splinter Cell* game had been delayed until next year sent shockwaves through all those expecting Fisher for Christmas. But take heart, as Ubisoft has given us some consolation with these amazing new screenshots, not to mention the announcement that the splendid Versus multiplayer game from *Pandora Tomorrow* is set to make a triumphant return.

If you played *Pandora*, you'll know this is very good news indeed, as the Spies vs Mercs multiplayer was a genuine revelation when it appeared earlier this year. *Chaos Theory* is set to expand upon the template, treating us to a bunch of new maps, manoeuvres,

weapons and gadgets, including the devastating therm-optic camouflage suit seen on these pages. There will also be a range of new hand-to-hand combat options and takedowns, as well as a completely new gameplay mode – Disk Hunt – in which the location of the objectives is randomised, which ought to give the maps a new level of intrigue.

All this is in addition to *Chaos Theory's* other new multiplayer mode, Cooperative, which if anything looks even more compelling. We're literally climbing the walls in anticipation.

■ **Publisher:** Ubisoft
■ **Developer:** Ubisoft Montreal
■ **ETA:** March 2005
■ **Website:** www.splintercell.com
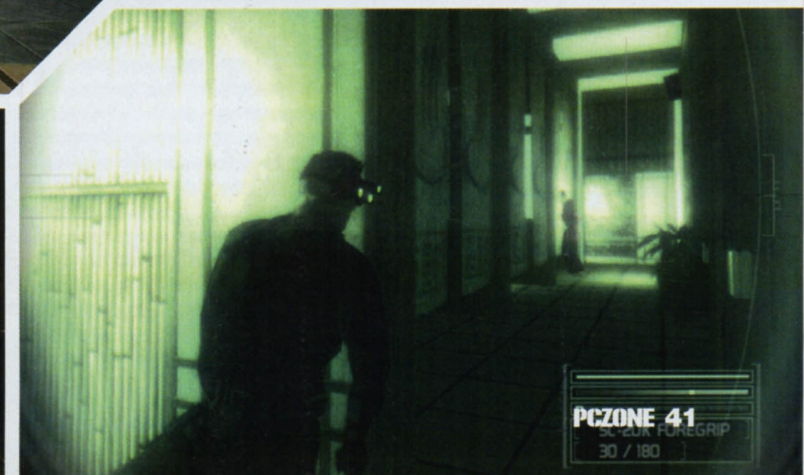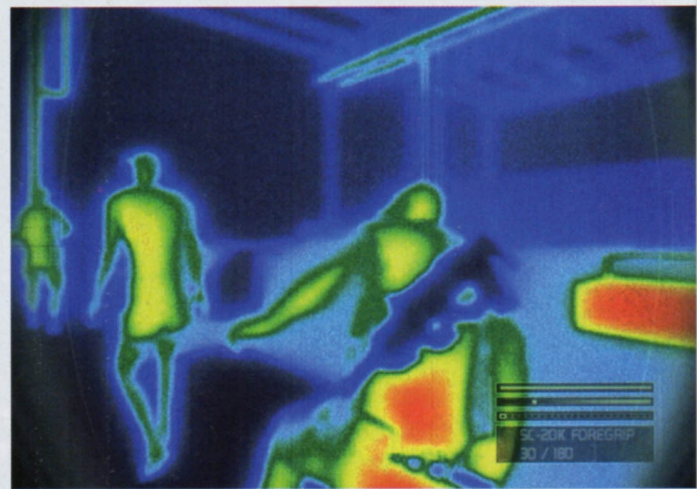
Kill your speed, not a paramilitary.

MONOLITH

Monolith is in the premier league as far as shooters are concerned. The team working on *F.E.A.R.* can be traced right back to *Blood*, through *SHOGO*, *NOLF*, *AVP 2* and *NOLF 2*. Just what is it with those acronyms?

1997 *Blood.* An early Monolith shooter that hinted at its penchant for horror.

1998 *SHOGO: Mobile Armour Division.* Big robots into big sales do not go. A classy game but one you probably won't remember.

2000 *No One Lives Forever.* The first appearance of the lovely Cate Archer. We didn't dig.

2001 *Aliens Vs Predator 2.* Still the scariest FPS money can buy.

2002 *No One Lives Forever 2.* The lady didn't give up. And we dug. A lot.

2003 *Tron 2.0.* A remake of the classic Disney film, and a damn fine game to boot.

"Oww... Me hands! Oi! Wait for me!"

LAST PREVIEWED PCZONE ISSUE 145

Living in...
ON THE CD — ON THE DVD

F.E.A.R.

World's first play of the scariest shooter ever? Surely not a job for *Dave Woods*, a man scared of flying, moths, electricity, ceramic clowns, hairy women and... //snip// (*That's enough! – Ed*)

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Monolith
PUBLISHER VU Games
WEBSITE www.lith.com
ETA June 2005

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

■ It's from Monolith
■ It's terrifying
■ It's shaping up to be *the* shooter of 2005
■ Lifelike squad-based AI
■ Amazing special FX
■ Oh look, just watch the video

BACK IN THE day I was a horror junkie, cooking up every grisly flick I could find in an ever more desperate bid to satisfy my craving for fear. As with all addictions it spiralled until I could sit through *Blair Witch* on my own, with a portable TV, in the middle of a graveyard, at midnight, with a full moon, and still not twitch. I thought I was finished. And then, at E3 last year, I sat through the first demo for *F.E.A.R.*, the new shooter from Monolith. I might have been stuck in a sweaty booth in the middle of LA, surrounded by games

journalists, in broad daylight, at eight in the morning, with a scorching sun beating down on the top of my head, but I was shit scared. And elated.

But they say the higher you go the further it is to come down, and since last May the Monolith team has retreated into its hideaway in Seattle, refusing to pick up the phone and turning visitors away. Until now. We sent in a desperate plea for information, expecting another knock-back, but then the call came. "How would you like to fly over to Seattle to be the very first magazine in

the whole world to actually play *F.E.A.R.*?" Oh, we like. And, as an experienced editor, I ignored everyone in the office – "Me!" "No, me!" "Me! I'm a good boy really!" – invoked Editor's Prerogative™, and booked myself on the first plane out. It's all a question of staff morale...

FOURPLAY

And in the blink of an eye (forgetting the ten-hour flight of agony) I'm there, surrounded by Monolith's finest. I don't know whether it's the fact that it was our

"He slipped! I was just trying mouth-to-mouth."

You can see the Woo influences throughout.

150th issue, or the fact they'd mistakenly heard Will Porter was coming over, or just the fact that they're extremely loving people, but, as well as Chris Hewett (producer on *F.E.A.R.* and director of development), I was surrounded by Craig Hubbard (lead game designer), Kevin Stephens (director of technology) and Jeff Orkin (AI engineer). A team that could surely answer any question I threw at them. "Can you tell us a bit about the paramilitary group you're fighting at the very start of the game?" Hewett fielded this one: "That's one of the many

revelations we're not going to discuss yet." Ah. OK, it was time to go back to the very beginning.

If you haven't seen the footage on this month's discs, switch all your lights out or draw your curtains before watching it. It's scary isn't it? Very scary. And hugely cinematic. Monolith has said it wants *F.E.A.R.* to be an action blockbuster with you at the centre, so what films have influenced the creative team? Craig Hubbard's eyes light up.

Why Don't You?...

TOO SCARY FOR SOLO PLAY?

F.E.A.R. is packed with rock-hard, frantic, close-quarters combat that seems to be begging out for a co-operative mode of play. Now we don't know if Monolith is already planning this, but it would fit perfectly – not least for the fact that it might well be too damn scary to play through on your own.

"I'm a huge fan of Hong Kong cinema, so there's a lot of John Woo influences. I'm also a huge fan of Asian horror films, so, *The Eye*, *Dark Water*, *The Ring*, *Juan*, but then I think the vibe of the game is like *Aliens*, where there's a lot of suspense and moments of real fear, but also lots of action and a touch of humour."

It's this pacing that comes through in the footage, and if Monolith can keep this up for the course of the game then it's cracked the puzzle that's had developers weeping into their keyboards for over a decade. It's something Hubbard's aware of. "We really want the pacing to feel deliberate, so you don't become numb to any particular situation. So, you go from exploration to some sort of suspenseful scene, to an action sequence, and then back to suspense, to keep it interesting."

And, in keeping with the times, Hubbard points out that *F.E.A.R.* is going to drive the narrative through in-game action, as opposed to cut-scenes. "There are a couple of visions that you'll see, stuff you're not seeing through your own eyes, but we're not doing traditional narrative cut-scenes." He expands on how Monolith is making this possible. "Any story is a series of epiphanies and reversals, so as you're exploring it's really important for us to give you a sense of

purpose – in storytelling terms, what the ramifications or the consequences of your actions are. Essentially, the player of a game is like the hero of a movie, constrained by the dramatic question and the environment you're in."

MAN WITH NO NAME

Unlike previous Monolith games, particularly *No One Lives Forever* and *NOLF 2* where Cate Archer was the very centre of the universe, your character in *F.E.A.R.* is almost completely anonymous. He's got no ethnicity, no name, and is only implied as male so that the other characters can address you directly. Basically your imagination dictates your identity – Monolith wants you to be the star. One thing you do know though, is that you're a member of F.E.A.R., a Special Forces team that specialises in dealing with the inexplicable. Again, Craig takes the reins. "Whereas *Delta Force* specialises in hostage rescue, *F.E.A.R.* deals with situations where SWAT has gone in and run into things they can't explain and don't understand, or don't know how to deal with. Think of it as an *X-Files* Special Forces group."

F.E.A.R. is different as well in that its members have been recruited because they're gifted in some way. You might play through most of the game solo, but your team is there as support and you can make use of their

"Don't worry lads, he's 'armless."

The star of the show so far. And she's very scary.

WHO'S THAT GIRL?

WE DON'T KNOW, BUT SHE'S CREEPY. KEEP REPEATING TO YOURSELF, IT'S ONLY A GAME... IT'S ONLY A GAME...

"I'm a big film buff and I'm a big fan of Asian horror films." Proof that Craig Hubbard is the right man to lead development on *F.E.A.R.* But the real star of the show so far is the little girl. Who's she? Monolith isn't telling but there are clues. "A lot of people have looked at the girl and said that we've modelled her after Sadako, the character in *Ring* movies, but actually she's a lot closer to Yoko – a character in Kiyoshi Kurosawa's *Kôrei* (aka *Seance*)."

If you want to fill time between now and *F.E.A.R.*'s June release, you should check it out. Without revealing too much of the plot, Yoko is a small girl who is accidentally killed and comes back to, for want of a better word, 'haunt' the unwitting protagonists. She doesn't do very much except linger, but her presence is more than enough to make you want switch the film off and switch all the lights on. As Kurosawa himself pointed out almost apologetically on a tour of the US: "Vampires drink blood. Zombies eat flesh. My ghosts are very Japanese... they don't do anything." And they really don't need to. The question is... can you get them out from under your skin?
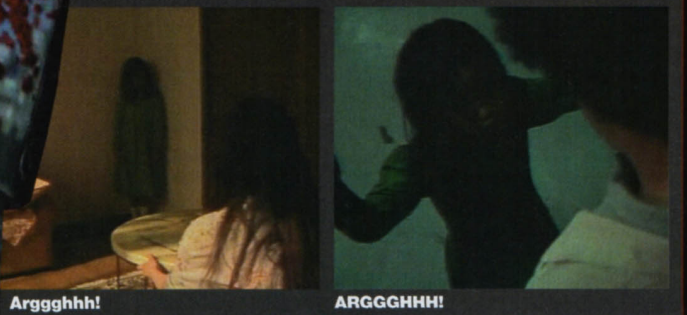
Arggghhh! ARGGGHHH!

The **F.E.A.R.** engine in full flight. Expect to leave your jaw on the floor.

talents, such as Jin's extraordinary hearing. Or there's Holiday, the bloke you meet in the room of carnage in the first level, who gets impressions of objects or people he touches, giving him glimpses into what's gone on before. You? You get the best of the lot – incredible reflexes that put the rest of the world into slow motion.

> "I think the vibe of the game is like *Aliens*, where there's suspense, fear, action and a touch of humour"
>
> **CRAIG HUBBARD** LEAD GAME DESIGNER, *F.E.A.R.*

If you've played *Max Payne* you'll know how satisfying this is as a gaming device. It works in a pretty similar fashion in *F.E.A.R.* in that you can kick it in whenever you want, and use it for a limited time, after which it has to regenerate before you can use it again. But in *Max Payne*, bullet-time is what

makes the game. In *F.E.A.R.* it's just another facet to an extraordinarily frenetic shooter. Something I'm about to find out for myself.

DEAD SIMPLE

"You should find this kind of challenging," Hewett says with a smirk as he fires the code up. Now I'm not bad at first-person shooters. In fact I'm a legend in my own bedroom, but within a couple of minutes I'm dead. The moment you get dropped off in the helicopter, the action kicks in, and immediately the game feels different to any other shooter I've played. Frenetic. Confusing. Exhilarating. Three adjectives that best sum up the action

sequences. As soon as the first shot is fired, the screen fills up with broken glass, flying bodies, smoke and debris, making it hard to see what's going on. It's imperative to hold back and take stock of things before charging in, something I spectacularly fail to do on my first run-through. In fact, the action is so intense that I completely forget about the slow-mo feature until gently reminded by Hewett. "Erm, you could use the slow-mo if you want. It might make it kind of easier to get through." And it does. It also gives me the perfect opportunity to experiment with the context-driven melee combat, which works through the alt-fire button. Hit this and in addition to standard punches and kicks

A simple physics lesson. Shoot the gas tank...

Back away smiling...

you can activate special moves like slide and jump kicks. It's a simplistic affair, though. *F.E.A.R.* is a shooter and these moves are there to enable you to make the most of the slow-mo feature, to take enemies down in a more cinematic fashion, or to take a guard out without alerting others. You never rely on it as your primary attack and you don't lock onto an opponent if you decide to kick into melee. Of course, the slow-mo feature also performs one other very important function – it enables you to see the DX9 native engine in full flow. Admittedly I was playing the game on a huge projector screen, but it looks absolutely stunning.

And, once you adjust to the pace of the game, *F.E.A.R.* really starts to impress. Even at this early stage the AI is

fantastic, and depending on where you are you can hear the paramilitaries barking out orders to their team-mates – "He's behind the wall!" – scattering when you throw a grenade, using formations to accurately stake out a room and use cover intelligently, something that lends it an uncanny realism.

These aren't scripted moments, where someone bursts in and proceeds to roll behind a conveniently placed sofa, but context-driven and because of this, the combat is rock-hard. Something Jeff Orkin is extremely proud of. "We've focused a lot on squad behaviours so you're not just fighting individual robotic enemies, they're working together like a Rainbow Six team. So, if an entire team gets taken out bar one person, he knows he's in trouble."

Navigation is another area that the team has concentrated on, so that anywhere you can go, the AI can go as well. "The idea is that when you're fighting if you were to like, run on a rooftop and jump down onto a fire escape, through a window and down a staircase, the AI can do the same thing. This means you can do whatever you want and the game will play out differently. If they lose track of you, they can form a search party where they move in formation through the level with one guy facing backwards and so on, and they can split up in pairs to search rooms where one guy guards the door, and another searches the room."

And with enemies like this you're going to need friends in the arsenal department. So far, Monolith has only

"*F.E.A.R.* is going to be *the* single-player shooter of 2005. Be afraid"

WREAKING HAVOK

CALLING ALL TECH-HEADS AND GERMAN READERS... KEVIN STEPHENS, *F.E.A.R.*'S DIRECTOR OF TECHNOLOGY, IS IN RESIDENCE

PCZ When we first saw *F.E.A.R.* we thought it was going to be built around an iteration of the LithTech engine. Can you explain why you moved away from this and created a new engine?

KEVIN "The main focus of this game is something that the old technology wouldn't support. From the beginning we knew we wanted to capture a totally dynamic world, with dynamic lighting, dynamic effects and engaging action – a movie-type spectacle."

PCZ What are you using for your physics system?

KEVIN "We're currently on Havok 2.4. We might go to 3.0 but we don't know yet."

PCZ Are the physics integral to the gameplay?

KEVIN "It's not integral to gameplay but integral to capturing the essence. Our plan is to use physics to reinforce the feel of an action movie, so there's explosions and glass breaking and so on, but it doesn't affect the plot. We never wanted it to be a gameplay device where you have to move boxes around just to get out of the room."

PCZ What can you tell us about the special FX system?

KEVIN "We've been hugely impressed with how much smoke, debris and the like we've got in without affecting performance. We had a vision at the very beginning and we feel like we've nailed it."

PCZ Is there anything in the technology that our readers won't have seen?

KEVIN "The *F.E.A.R.* engine is a native DX9 renderer. You've seen *Doom 3* and *Half-Life 2* that have DX9 Paths, but these are completely different from a DX9-native engine like ours."

And... Oh, sorry. That's got to smart.

HOW WOULD YOU PERFORM WHEN THE SPOTLIGHT'S ON?

"You went to Monolith? And played *F.E.A.R.*?" Now you might think that's about as good as it gets, and I'm not denying it's an honour to visit the top developers in the world and play code before anyone else, but it's also a particularly gruelling experience. An experience akin to cooking dinner for Gordon Ramsay while he sniffs around your work surface, cleaver in hand. No, scratch that, it's like attempting to pleasure Jenna Jameson with Ron Jeremy in your left ear giving pointers. Well, could you perform under these circumstances?

Dead. Well my hands were shaking a bit and I didn't realise damage was going to be so realistic. That was my first encounter as well.

Hypnotised by the smoke effects, I wander through in a daze and out into a hail of bullets. Dead.

I mean to press the slow-mo button but flick my flashlight on instead. For some reason this doesn't phase them. Dead.

Dead. OK, enough already. I think you get the picture.

PLAYED	DIED	VERDICT
15 mins	11 times	"Have you played a first-person shooter before, sir?"

disclosed details of three weapons, the shotgun and SMG from the E3 demo, and an assault rifle, but Hewett did reveal that you can expect a couple of surprises. "We want an arsenal where every weapon feels special and unique and has its own use. There's a lot of conventional weaponry because it's set around now, but there are a couple more unconventional things that we haven't disclosed yet. We wanted more of a balanced feel, where every weapon has its own function. You've got a limited inventory, so you can only carry three weapons at a time, so you really pick based on the functionality you want."

GROUNDHOG DAY

Then there's the sound. It's so subtle and so effective, I didn't even notice it until I suddenly realised I was extremely tense and unwilling to move forward, despite the fact nothing much was happening on screen. There's an extremely effective low-level contextual sound, that blends with the soundtrack to create an environment, again something that's only normally found in the cinema.

But the biggest compliment I can pay to the game thus far is that I was more than happy to play through the level again. And again. And again, until I was in grave danger of missing my flight home. Each time I played it, I became more accustomed to the tactical nature of the play, despite the fact that it was a very different experience. Replaying

sections of most shooters is a drudge, and, occasionally enough to ruin the experience entirely. *F.E.A.R.* is different and similar to *Max Payne 2*, not because of the slow-mo but because of the replayability and the coolness of pulling off a cinematic kill.

ALL GOOD THINGS...

"But what about the rest of the game?" Blank stares all round. "Where's the game set, when's it set? Will it be predominantly indoors, or a combination of inside and outside? Please, help me out here?" Chris Hewett takes pity. "In terms of the setting we're saying relatively near future. We want it to feel really immediate so we're not going to label a definite time period. As far as location, it's a big city. We don't want to be mapped down to specific locations."

Don't expect grand, sweeping vistas either. The *F.E.A.R.* technology, similar to the *Doom 3* engine, is fill-rate limited, which means you can't do huge environments with hundreds of objects and their shadows, as performance would slow to a crawl. But, while close-quarters combat is the name of the game here, Hubbard is quick to point out that "we're trying to provide a fair amount of contrast between indoor and outdoor, with tighter areas and larger, more open areas. It just won't be huge outdoor areas with hundreds of bad guys running at you."

With time ticking on, I had time to fire off a couple more questions. Do you spend most of the game fighting solo, or in a squad with team-mates? "There are moments, but you're the pointman – you go in first and eliminate the threat. The

rest of the team is there as support." Do you control any vehicles in the game? "No."

And that was that. In closing I ask Hubbard what he thinks the game is doing to progress the genre. "I don't really think that way. When you look at the games that stand out, it's about the experience, just like a movie. You go to see a movie that looks like it's going to give you an experience you haven't had before, and that's what we want to do. Our hope is that when you play it, you'll be thrilled and scared and exhilarated and you'll want to tell your friends about it." Thrilled, scared and exhilarated? Yep. Yep. And yep. It's fair to say that the game has surpassed my already weighty expectations. In fact, hell, I'll go out on a limb: *F.E.A.R* is going to be *the* single-player shooter of 2005. Be afraid. PCZ

Close-quarters combat, in between the scares. Nice.

Calling in air strikes is an important tactic.

Medical Black Hawks rescue your wounded from becoming POWs.

We don't think the tank's going to win that one.

Conquer & Command...

ACT OF WAR: DIRECT ACTION

Michael Filby braves the streets of Paris to get the latest on the war on terror

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Eugen Systems
PUBLISHER Atari
WEBSITE www.atari.com
ETA Spring 2005

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- RTS action set to be spiritual successor to *Command & Conquer*
- Stunningly high-detailed graphics with lighting effects to die for
- Near-future setting featuring units from Black Hawks to mechs
- Best-selling author Dale Brown consulting
- Resource collection system based around capturing POWs

CV — EUGEN SYSTEMS
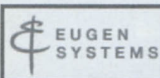
EUGEN SYSTEMS

Paris-based Eugen Systems is a modestly sized team more used to developing non-gaming software, although it feels this gives it an unconventional quality which adds to the company's occasional forays into gaming.

2000 *Times Of Conflict* was released to general disdain among the gaming populace – a bland RTS that was hardly the team's finest hour.

2002 *The Gladiators: Galactic Circus Games* – another RTS that received only a lukewarm reception, but was a considerable step in the right direction.

ALL THINGS considered, 2004 hasn't been a bad year for RTS fans. In fact, we've been spoiled, with the likes of *Rome: Total War*, *Warhammer 40,000: Dawn Of War* and *LOTR: The Battle For Middle-Earth*. Even lesser-knowns such as *Kohan II* and *Codename: Panzers* have been better than anyone expected. Whether 2005 will be as kind to the genre remains to be seen, but Parisian developer Eugen Systems is promising to give it a decent start with *Act Of War: Direct Action*.

At a presentation at Eugen's central Paris HQ, producer Bob Welch wasted little time explaining exactly what its goal was. "We want an action game with the sheen of a Jerry Bruckheimer movie," he explained. "We want to do for the RTS what *Medal Of Honor* and *Call Of Duty* did for shooters – total immersion. And for that, we need an environment that looks almost real."

TECHNO TECHNO TECHNO

Part of its strategy in achieving this has been to hire ex-US Air Force captain and author of several successful techno-thrillers Dale Brown to consult on the units and weapons, as well as the story itself. Set in the near future, a group of scurrilous oil companies known as the Consortium are launching terrorist attacks around the world, prompting the involvement of our very own wholesome world police – the US Army.

The water effects are stunning up close.

'Shield' units: the infantry's best option.

Fireworks night in Brixton.

"You may have to sacrifice one or two POWs by torturing them for map information"

Even when fully zoomed in, the detail is superb.

This roughly translates to a game of three main factions, two of which are playable in the single-player campaign. You'll primarily take control of US task forces assigned to track down the terrorists, although you'll also get to mess around with a group known as Talon. In addition to playing around with Black Hawk choppers and Paladin tanks, you'll be able to get your mitts on prototype and theoretical technology. Talon not only has programmable drones at its disposal, but stealth units that can travel undetected.

WAR GAMES
Among the upgradeable bases opening up new steps in the tech tree and the superweapons reminiscent of *C&C: Generals* lie a few innovations. Resource collection is handled partly through capturing banks and oil derricks, although the latter soon run dry due to the world shortage of oil. The only option left to keep the coffers filled is to send your men out to capture prisoners of war. Keeping them locked up will bring in a steady stream of cash, although you also have the option of sacrificing one or two by torturing them for map information.

Perhaps the most promising aspect though, is the presentation. The graphics look great in the screenshots, but are gorgeous when moving. The effects aren't finished yet, but the real-time shadows look brilliant even at this stage, and still look great when the camera's fully zoomed in.

CLASS ACT
It was also nice to see that several real-world locations have been recreated to fight across. As well as a promising-looking jaunt staving off a terrorist attack at San Fran's Fisherman's Wharf, we managed to sneak a peek at the unfinished London level. "We've arranged the game into chapters like a DVD," commented Eugen's co-founder Alexis Le Dressay, "to keep people playing to the end."

Even if it doesn't, there's always the multiplayer option. In this case, a skirmish mode playable with up to eight players on LAN or over the Net will be offered. It was this part of the game that we had the most fun with but, again, it offered few surprises.

It seems that *AoW* will have little new to offer upon its completion, and yet we still had a great time with the preview code. The multiplayer in particular feels instinctive, combining the splendid graphics engine and solid, satisfying unit combat to its gameplay. At the least, *AoW* promises to be a fine tribute to the genre that *C&C* made its own – we're unlikely to see a revolution, but it does seem likely that *Act Of War* could easily end up slotting into the gap that *Generals* seemed to inadequately fill. **PCZ**

Er... Aren't stealth bombers supposed to be stealthy?

Gearbox is looking to recreate every vehicle as accurately as possible.

This little baby's what you need.

And now in descending order of size...

Check that old rifle. It's the real deal.

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Gearbox Software
PUBLISHER Ubisoft
WEBSITE
www.brothersinarmsgame.com
ETA January 2005

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Extensively researched, hugely authentic and historically accurate
- Next-generation four-tier AI system
- Based on real-life squad tactics
- Lifelike character models
- Simple-to-use squad command system

Brotherly love...

BROTHERS IN ARMS

Martin Korda goes back to the front to see how Gearbox's impressive-looking squad-based FPS is shaping up

FOR 30 YEARS, Colonel John Antal (retired) served in the US Army, which is why Gearbox Software hired him as its military adviser on a project that could well be the most spectacular and viscerally realistic WWII shooter to date, *Brothers In Arms*. During his recent visit to the UK, I caught up with Antal and subjected him to a torturous interrogation about the game (he didn't crack), before being privileged enough to get my trembling mitts on it.

Brothers In Arms follows the exploits of the 502nd Parachute Infantry Regiment during the D-Day landings, and since I last saw the game five months ago it's progressed significantly. The much-vaunted four-tier AI system (most shooters only have two) has been shored up, while the tactically intense firefights have been honed to even greater levels of realism. All of this detail and authenticity follows

years of painstaking research conducted by Antal and Gearbox. "Every battle in the game is a true battle," he explains. "The way we show the German and American forces and their tactics – they're all authentic. We believe that we're making the most authentic WWII shooter ever."

Thanks to Antal's expert input, *Brothers In Arms* is being stringently designed to conform to real-life battlefield tactics, whereby you and your squad must first find the enemy, then fix them with fire, flank them and finally, finish them. But does it actually work? Antal urged me to find out for myself by double-timing me to a nearby PC for some quality hands-on action.

The first thing that struck me was just how real the world looked and felt. The attention to detail is already phenomenal, and we're convinced the game is using either the Source engine, or a heavily modified version of *Halo*'s PC incarnation – something that at the time of writing Gearbox was not willing to confirm or

deny. Whatever the technology though, it generates eerily lifelike models, and it was almost impossible not to feel immersed up to the eyeballs in this war-torn world.

HEY! I WAS JUST LOOKING

It wasn't long before my picturesque tour was cut short by an entrenched group of machine gun-packing Germans. Bullets hissed past my ears, a hunk of lead biting into one of my men and toppling him in a torrent of blood. German and American shouts melded with the snapping of bullets, the enemy bellowing orders while my men cried out in fear at being left so exposed by their leader (me).

BROTHERS ONLINE

THE SINGLE-PLAYER GAME IS LOOKING GREAT, BUT WHAT ABOUT MULTIPLAYER?

"We've taken the most innovative feature from single player – the AI squad control – and put that into the multiplayer environment," says John Antal. "The multiplayer game is balanced around a two- to four-player game, pitting Americans against Germans, with each player in command of up to two fire teams. Players will use the same tools and tactics from the single-player game co-operatively, to face a more formidable human opponent. To further enhance realism, we have ten environments designed specifically for multiplayer, each with a unique mission." Sounds promising to us, and a bit novel too. Which makes a nice change when it comes to multiplayer features on an FPS.

If only he knew.

With no aiming censors, accuracy is key in combat.

Ouch, that looks Nazi.

CV gearbox software

GEARBOX SOFTWARE

It may not have been going all that long, but Gearbox has crafted some sublime hits. Up till now, its reputation has been built on an ability to create quality conversions and expansion packs.

1999 *Half-Life: Opposing Force*, the first *Half-Life* expansion pack, is universally acclaimed for its incredibly lifelike AI.

2001 The conversion of *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3* onto the PC proves a phenomenal success.

2003 Adding a host of compelling and exciting multiplayer options, Gearbox ports the Xbox hit *Halo* to the PC.

I had to act fast. Using my extensive military training (a couple of sessions down the local Lazer Quest), I ordered my remaining two men to take cover with the intuitive, context-sensitive command interface. Placing the cursor on the Germans I ordered my squad to lay down suppressing fire and watched as

helmeted enemy heads ducked for dear life, Suppression Meters (which appear above each enemy's head and inform you how much of a threat foes pose) betraying their vulnerability.

Using the Situational Awareness feature that allows you to pause and zoom out of the action to assess the battlefield, I spotted a route that would allow me to flank the enemy. Jumping back to real-time, I left the squad and dived down a side alley, dispensing two more lurking Jerries as I weaved my way through the rustic town and emerged right behind the enemy, which was still distracted by my squad's barrage of bullets.

I'LL TAKE YOU ALL ON

Switching from rifle to a sub-machine gun (your character can only carry two weapons at any one time), I homed in with the gun's sights – to keep the game authentic, your weapons have no crosshairs – then popped out the enemy's brains with precision shots. I sat back, breathless. Antal simply smiled knowingly.

"The AI is very intelligent. It talks to you and the game is dynamic, not scripted.

You tell your soldiers a direction to move in, and they act as trained soldiers," explained John. It was hard to argue with the man given what I'd just been through. "Your troops will talk to you about their feelings and tell you when they can't do something," he continued. "They'll always obey your orders relatively. They're trained soldiers and want to do what you tell them to, but they're also human beings."

But time was running short, so John teleported me to a level that would show off the game's painstakingly recreated vehicles, or as was the case here, a bloody great tank.

"The tanks are tremendous," exclaimed Antal as I climbed onto the back of the hulking metal beast and took control of its mounted machine gun. "In other games, tanks stand still and shoot their machine guns till you take them out. In *BIA*, tanks act realistically. You can't just take one out with a grenade – you have to flank it and use proper anti-tank weapons. The tank crew will also act intelligently when it sees the enemy.

We've even made sure that the turret can't turn when you're manning the machine gun, otherwise it would knock you off."

The proof was right in front of me. Nazis spilled out of the surrounding forests, taking cover in ditches in futile attempts to escape the tank's devastating turret blasts and the bullets from my incessantly chattering machine gun. Issuing the tank with orders was just as quick and easy as ordering my squad, and having made the most of the combined arms available to me here (tank at the front, men taking cover at the rear), the surrounding area was soon a sea of dead jack-booted bodies.

"Tanks act realistically. You can't just take one out with a grenade – you have to flank it and use anti-tank weapons"

COL JOHN ANTAL, US ARMY (RET) MILITARY ADVISER, *BROTHERS IN ARMS*

Brothers In Arms is certainly shaping up to be every bit as good as Gearbox claims. There are still some rough edges to be ironed out, but all of the evidence appears to be pointing towards a game that could well merge hardcore realism with fun, intuitive gameplay in one exquisite historically accurate FPS package. And if Gearbox pulls it off, then *Brothers In Arms* could be one of the best shooters of 2005. PCZ

A far cry from the old top-down *Close Combat* games.

Bad guys may surrender, but they'll shoot you given the chance.

Jingo all the way...

CLOSE COMBAT: FIRST TO FIGHT

We must not falter in our fight against evil! *Anthony Holden* **joins the crusade**

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Like a first-person *Full Spectrum Warrior*
- Lead a crack squad of Marines in tactical urban combat
- Self-reliant squad-mates means you only give orders when you want to
- Rigorously authentic – developed in conjunction with US Marines
- AI governed by complex psychology model

CV

DESTINEER

Michigan-based developer Destineer was founded by Peter Tamte, former executive vice president of Bungie Software (of *Halo* fame). The company boasts veterans from Microsoft, EA and Raven (among others), and is currently working on a number of highly commercial projects.

2001 Destineer is founded and work begins on a proprietary 3D engine.

2002 Peter Tamte and Atomic Games boss Keith Zabalaoui start talking about joining forces to revive Atomic's once-great *Close Combat* franchise. Atomic has a deal with the Marines, Destineer has the 3D engine. It's a perfect match.

2003 Work begins on two new *Close Combat* games, *First To Fight* and *Red Phoenix*, handled by Destineer and Atomic respectively. One is an FPS, the other an RTS.

2004 Destineer sub-division Bold Games releases *John Deere American Farmer* and *In-Fisherman Freshwater Trophies* in the US. The gaming world reels.

THE US Marines are clearly worried about their image. I can't imagine why, especially now that whole Abu Ghraib thing has blown over, not to mention Camp X-Ray and the Massacre at Mazar and all those other so-called 'Geneva violations'. Besides, we've all seen *Black Hawk Down*, right? We know they're good guys really.

Just in case though, the Marine Corps has been commissioning a few videogames lately, to help hoist the flag

and remind us all why we're proud to be American. Er, allies. A couple of months back we were treated to the well-decent *Full Spectrum Warrior*, and next on the agenda is *Close Combat: First To Fight*, a tactical FPS based on the actual operating practices of the US Marines (apart from the ones involving testicles and car batteries, of course).

Like *FSW*, *First To Fight* puts you in command of a small, four-man unit of US troops in a hostile urban environment

(Beirut, Lebanon to be precise). Like *FSW*, the game mimics the 'Ready-Team-Fire-Assist' (RTFA) tactics employed by the Marines in Iraq and Afghanistan, and like *FSW*, a modified version of the game is to be used as a training tool by the Marines themselves.

However, in stark contrast to that game, *First To Fight* also features proper first-person shooting, putting you in the midst of the fray as a fire team leader in an imaginary near-future conflict.
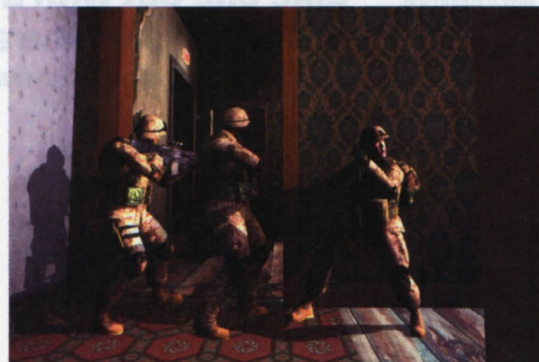
Kill more than three civilians and it's game over.

You can use any weapon, including your trusty M-16.
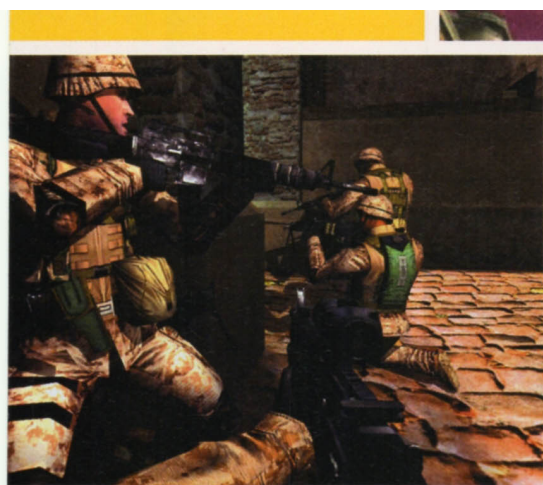
Multiplayer is focused on a four-way co-op mode.

You'll occasionally get the option to call in a mortar strike or chopper.

"Based on the operating practices of the US Marines (apart from the ones involving testicles and car batteries)"

Annoying patriotic bluster aside, *First To Fight* also looks pretty darn good. We recently had a chance to play the game, and though it bears a strong resemblance to *Full Spectrum*, *Raven Shield* and others, it also manages to extract a slightly different dynamic from the squad-based military formula.

INDEPENDENCE DAY
For a start, the level of autonomy granted to your team-mates is a real step forward. Rather than having to babysit your Marines and hold their hand at every turn as in *Raven Shield*, you can pretty much just get on with the job and let them get on with theirs.

Indeed, the friendly AI is one of the most impressive parts of the game. The developers have put a great deal of effort into imbuing your squad-mates with a grasp of real military formations and tactics, and it seems to work extremely well. Walk down a narrow street and your lads will automatically assume a 'double column' formation, two to a side. Approach an intersection and they'll automatically take up multiple angles of fire to keep each branch covered. It's almost too easy.

During the first two levels in fact, we found cause to give specific orders only twice. Once was to order a 'room takedown', in which your squad bursts into a room and kills anything with dubious facial hair, and the other was to order the heavy weapons guy (the 'Fire' in your RTFA sandwich) to lay down some suppressing fire on a particularly troublesome intersection. OK, that's not strictly true. There was a third time, when we ordered a hail of frag grenades to be lobbed into a building that turned out to be a factory full of

innocent workers, but that's an incident that's probably best forgotten.

FLOWER POWER
When you do have to issue commands, it's a straightforward affair. Point your reticule at a location, click the command button and your men will go there. Squeeze the formation button and they'll come back. More complex commands such as door breaches and suppression orders are handled with a simple right-click over the target, which brings up a radial-style menu nicked wholesale from *Raven Shield*.

Overall it's a remarkably uncomplicated system. The interface is smooth and unobtrusive, making for a fast-moving and exciting game that sits comfortably at the arcade end of the spectrum. Missions seem a lot more linear and straightforward than the likes of *Full Spectrum Warrior*, and enemies, unlike your own squad-mates, display little in the way of tactical know-how.

Saying that, some intrigue is added by the game's complex psychology model, controlled by stimuli in the environment and having a strong effect on morale and discipline. Give bad orders and your troops might not follow your instructions as promptly or enthusiastically, but break the morale of the enemy with a surprise attack and they may just turn tail and run.

Touches like this could help lift *First To Fight* from the morass of similar games around at the moment – there's still room there for a truly outstanding and genre-defining title that builds on the good work of *FSW*. From what we've seen, *First To Fight* has a good chance of being that game – either that or they've got the electrodes on my bollocks already. The truth will out in early 2005. PCZ

FIRST TO FIGHT IS PROBABLY THE MOST AUTHENTIC MILITARY SIMULATION SINCE THE LAST ONE

One thing the developers are keen to shout about in *First To Fight* is the 'unprecedented levels of authenticity.' To help achieve this, a total of 40 active duty Marines, all of whom have seen action in either Iraq or Afghanistan, were drafted in to test the product at every stage. Their input has resulted in things like the Corpsman character.

Basically a field medic, the Corpsman comes in and evacuates the bodies of any fallen squad-mates should you lose one (because of course,

the Marines never leave a man behind, even a dead one).

But all this realism has its downside. For one thing, having so many developers striving to be the most authentic means every game ends up looking the same. Same weapons, same tactics, different desert. Replace the word 'terrorist' with the word 'droid' throughout *First To Fight*'s press release and you've pretty much got *Star Wars: Republic Commando*. Which makes you wonder why anyone bothers with reality in the first place…

If a squad-mate dies, you're a man short for the rest of the mission.

Pick the lock to nick some stuff. Nice.

We love a bit of gadgetry, us.

Like *Splinter Cell*, the AI is based around alertness levels.

I'm havin' that...

STOLEN

After what he did to the stationery cupboard,
Anthony Holden **should know all about this game**

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Blue 52
PUBLISHER Hip Games
WEBSITE www.blue52.co.uk
ETA March 2005

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- New stealth game made right here in the UK
- Play as sexy burglar Anya Romanov
- Loads of gadgets and special moves
- You can see through walls!

THE DEVELOPER of *Stolen* must have a keen sense of irony. The forthcoming stealth-action title from Blue 52 takes its name, ostensibly at least, from the fact that you play a state-of-the-art cat burglar, using your Scouser-like skills to infiltrate a variety of high-security locations and remove their shiny contents. Somehow though, we can't help but notice that this title's approach to game design is also a little on the light-fingered side…

For a start, the concept is essentially a modern-day take on *Thief*. In each level, you have one primary item that you have to pocket in order to complete a level, while various secondary items can be half-inched for bonus points. Following the theme, you also have a light meter, a lock-picking mini-game, and a noise arrow. Or at least, a 'sound emitter dart', which amounts to the same thing.

Being a modern-day affair, you get the ability to shoot out lights, a set of glowing goggles with various vision modes, and an electrical stun gun (we're thinking *Splinter Cell*). You even get the concept of tagging guards with a tracking dart à la *Pandora Tomorrow*.

WHOSE GAME IS IT ANYWAY?

It doesn't stop there. From *Metal Gear* you get guards with vision cones and useless security cameras. From *Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time* you get acrobatic tricks like running up walls and spinning on parallel bars. One of your gadgets is a 'sonic visor' that offers an x-ray vision mode (see also Ben Affleck in *Daredevil*), while in one of the more obscure examples of shoplifting, you have to search furniture for hidden items, exactly like you used to do in *Impossible Mission* on the old Commodore 64!
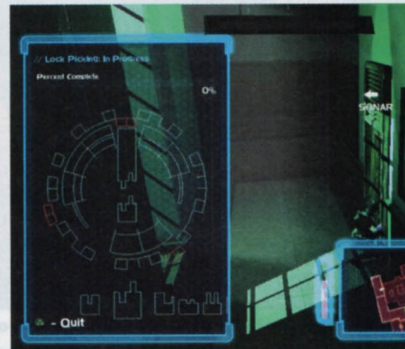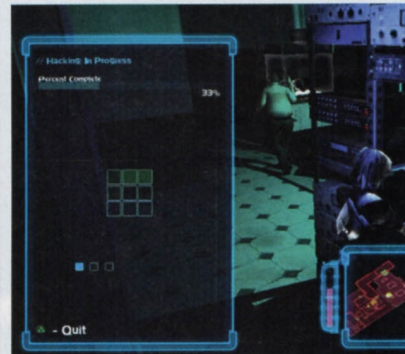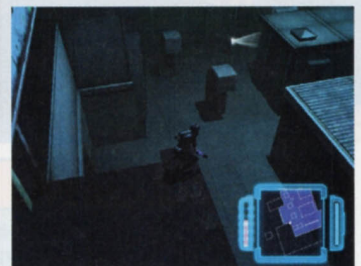
There's a lot of déjà vu in this game.

(Though I loved that game, so I don't really mind.)

Of course, I'm being a complete bastard. As we all know, nothing comes from a vacuum, and every game borrows from others to some extent. The question is whether this mix 'n' match approach to game design bothers you or not. If it doesn't, then *Stolen* could be a highly enjoyable addition to the genre. There's little here you haven't seen before, but all the elements have been put together in an intelligent and coherent fashion.

In one interesting twist, you're forbidden from killing anyone in the entire game, and as such you're really forced to use your stealth skills to their utmost, with no recourse to deadly force should things go tits up. The atmosphere is also reminiscent of *Alias* – you play a hot undercover chick with a conscience and a mysterious female nemesis – and after the disappointment of the *Alias* PC game this can also only be a good thing.

All the elements are here for an entertaining, if slightly console-focused, sneak 'em up. It's not going to keep *Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory* up at night, but with a bit of luck it could lay the ground work for a successful new stealth series made right here in our own backyard. **PCZ**

CORPORAL BIG DADDY

LEFT US FAR
TOO SOON WHEN THE
NUMB NUTS OPERATING THE
KEYBOARD ACCIDENTALLY
HIT THE RELOAD BUTTON
INSTEAD OF THE ONE
FOR GRENADE.

WITHOUT A ZBOARD, YOU'RE TOAST.

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X2: The Return has a spaceport crammed with new ships.
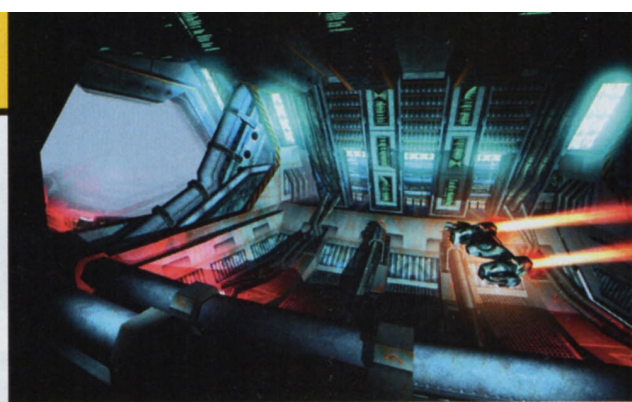
It still looks just as stunning as before.
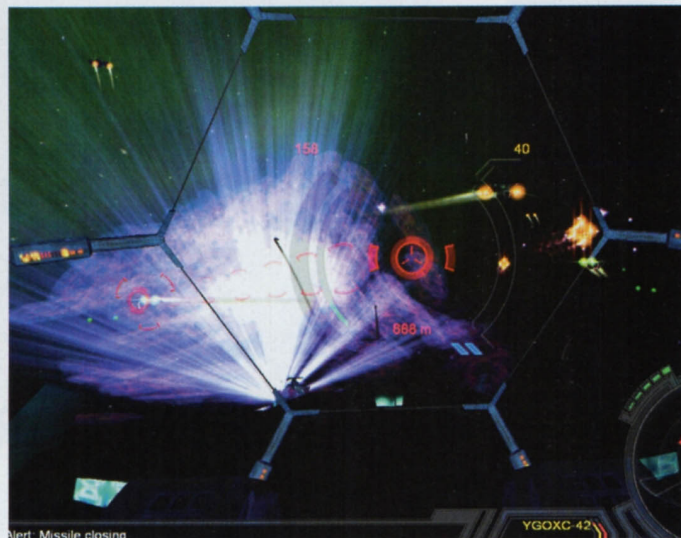
Turret missions provide more variety to your gaming experience.

Back in the black...

X2: THE RETURN

The most colourful region of the universe is back for more. *Paul Presley* sets his phasers to profit

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Egosoft
PUBLISHER Deep Silver
WEBSITE www.egosoft.com
ETA Spring 2005

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

■ Better trading options
■ A story that's six times as big as *X2*
■ Player HQs and tunnels (more important than it sounds)
■ Easier menus

CV
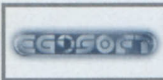
EGOSOFT

If you hadn't heard of them before *X2: The Threat* came along, well, you probably haven't heard of them now either. Here then, is a quick run-down of what Germany's answer to a working European space program is all about...

1999 *X – Beyond The Frontier* launches the space race anew, following the high-profile disasters that were the last two *Elite* titles and the runaway successes of the US's *Wing Commander* series.

2000 *X-Tension* x-tends and x-pands things in the X universe x-tremely x-cellently.

2003 *X2: The Threat* takes things to a whole new level. Going head to head with *Freelancer*, Egosoft's space baby provides more of a thoughtful, trade-rich gaming environment.

"**WE ARE** asking people right now to vote on whether they want a cursor or not. This is almost a religious issue to us." Bernd Lehahn, managing director of Egosoft and creator of the *X* universe of space simulations (*X – Beyond The Frontier*, *X2: The Threat* and now, with this expansion, *X2: The Return*), is a man with an eye for the details. Mainly because he knows how important they can be. "Not having a mouse cursor was a criticism we received from several US magazines," he sighs. "We did OK with the game over there, but it was not as huge a success as it was in Germany and the UK."

X2: The Return is Egosoft's attempt to put that little matter straight. Aside from

the little matter of being almost six times bigger in terms of content and story than the original game, and having plenty of new ships, factories, weapons and wares to play with, *The Return* makes some important, if not obviously so, amendments to the engine. Such as the new 'quickmenu' system.

FASTER FASTER

"What is most important for this menu system is that it is very fast to get anything done," says Lehahn as he shows off a prototype version. Essentially a complete replacement for the old, text-heavy, cumbersome menu system of *X2*, it takes the form of a row of icons along

the bottom quarter of the screen, that rotate to provide access to all your game functions. Neat, tidy and far more intuitive than the old version.

SPICE OF LIFE

The improvements for *The Return* are mainly in terms of the story though. Continuing mere weeks after the end of the first title, the player once again picks up the tale of Jules Brennan and the aftermath of the initial alien Khaak invasion. The Argon fleet is in tatters, all-new pirates are running wild and the aliens are still pressing their assault. The story is huge, far bigger than the original game's and this time is being told without the help

A profitable station is a happy station.

The new menu is much friendlier than before.

Make sure your connecting tubes are well defended.

"The story is huge, far bigger than the original game's and this time is being told without the help of cut-scenes"

(some would say hindrance) of the dodgy cut-scenes shown in *X2*.

Missions are now far more integral to exploring the game engine, are more tightly scripted and keep the action flowing far better than before. Turret missions, flying escort, piloting remote spy drones, commanding fleets – they're designed to provide a mixture of letting you use your freedom to complete them as you see fit, as well as forcing you into certain ships, positions or situations to help control your environment.

"The people who played *X2* were coming from very different directions," explains Lehahn. "Some were just interested in the trading, some were *Wing Commander*-type players just into the fighting, many more were interested in the plot and the story elements. It's always a mixture and you never know where they are coming from. So of course we have to expand the game in all directions."

DOWN THE TUBE
The building side of the game is the other part most integral to this expansion, thanks to the brand new station-connecting tunnels. "You can use the tunnels to connect as many factories as you want," Lehahn says loading up a sector of space that looks like a Borg hive world. "The main point of them is that you no longer need transport ships to take your goods from one to the other, making the economy work automatically."

Complexes can span entire sectors, making tubes and tunnels very vulnerable to attack unless you're extremely careful. There are upsides to it though, as Lehahn gleefully visualises: "When you have a

larger system of three or more factories, you can see how the wares are moving inside the tunnels, moving from one factory to another. Ideally, once you have everything connected you can just put a load of crystals in one end of the complex, then you can just watch how they're processed into energy, then how the energy is transferred into the different factories, then watch the factories start to manufacture until out pops your new laser at the other end. Of course, it all comes with a hefty price otherwise you'd just have a giant money-making machine."

Which, ironically, is what the *X2* series is starting to turn into. In Europe at any rate. Hopefully with all these upgrades and improvements, the rest of the world (ie America) might actually stop and pay attention this time round. **PCZ**

WRITING FOR FUN AND PROFIT

Major plot upgrades ahoy.

FROM *BYKER GROVE* TO *BABYLON 5*, WE CHAT WITH THE MAN IN CHARGE OF FLESHING OUT A UNIVERSE

Face it, the storyline in *X2: The Threat* wasn't exactly Tolstoy. We knew it, you knew, even Egosoft knew it. To rectify the situation, outside help, in the shape of professional scriptwriter Andy Walsh, has been brought in. Having cut his teeth in the televisual worlds of *Byker Grove* and *Emmerdale*, how has he handled the jump to lightspeed?

"The fact that it was sci-fi sucked me in," he says enthusiastically. "I love watching things like *Babylon 5* and *Star Wars*, so to get a chance to make a universe like that where you get to make those things happen has been a great experience. There's so much in terms of plot already there to play around with. It was a case of deciding how to explore the different mysteries in the universe."

So, kids' telly to hardcore space sim – isn't that a bit of a leap? "In terms of how you handle the dialogue and the plot, it's not too different to writing for TV or movies," he corrects. "But you do have to keep reminding yourself that you're writing for a game. Although you want to tell the story, the main thing is to get the player into the missions and make those fun. So whereas you'd approach a film scene thinking about how you were going to work this for a viewing audience, instead you're approaching this each time thinking will it be a fun level? It might be nice to look at and think about, but if it's going to be slow and dull then you chop it out and find a new plot solution."

Having been drafted in to help, how did the dynamic between scriptwriter and game developer work? Was Walsh given freedom to experiment? "As a writer I have a load of ideas. But sometimes I find myself suggesting an idea and hearing the programmers scream. Usually though, they'd phone back a couple of days later and say, 'Actually we can do that.' And vice versa. They'd often phone up and say, 'We'd really like to do this or that. Will it fit into the plot?' Somehow we've managed to get everything to flow organically with the plot – nothing feels crowbarred in."

Like a giant mechanic space octopus.

Aliens! With their fearsome killer-ambient-mood lighting.

Serf and turf...
THE SETTLERS: HERITAGE OF KINGS

Rhianna Pratchett says goodbye to the little tubby folk and hello to a new age of medieval warfare

The heroes do a bit of serf gloating.

THE DETAILS
DEVELOPER Ubisoft
PUBLISHER Blue Byte
WEBSITE www.thesettlers.com
ETA Q1 2005

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?
- Brand new 3D graphics engine
- Easier learning curve
- 70 new unit types and hero characters
- New combat system and more focus on multiplayer games

THE SETTLERS games always seemed to occupy their own little corner of the strategy world – one in which characters who looked like fat toddlers that'd been rushed through puberty reigned supreme. But from the looks of *The Settlers: Heritage Of Kings* (the fifth title in the series), said characters have clearly been on the Atkins diet, as they've shucked off their chubby cartoonish forms and are about to enter a new era of Medieval carnage.

"The previous *Settlers* games were quite hard for people to get into, as they were quite complex with a steep learning curve," explains the game's producer Benedikt Grindel. "You had a lot to do, juggling both the needs of the

settlers and the resources, so this time we've tried to make things easier by focusing more on the settlers themselves and their place in the world."

Visually, *Settlers: HOK* is a complete departure from the rest of the series and it really does look all the better for it. Gone are the irritatingly colourful and cartoonish 2D graphics (which often looked like they'd been put together at the Ray Charles School of Design), and in their place is a new 3D medieval world, somewhat reminiscent of *Stronghold 2*. Benedikt, who's understandably kinder about the previous games than I, puts it a little more gently. "People who saw the previous *Settlers* games thought

they looked like kids' games played by adults. Because of this, we've tried to make the series grow up a bit and look like the game it really is."

HOLDING OUT FOR A HERO
One of the ways in which Blue Byte has tried to refocus the gameplay is by introducing heroes. In a similar way to *Age Of Mythology*, these are the characters which drive the game's singleplayer storyline. However, unlike that game, these heroes actually come with their own benefits and unique skills.

Dario is the main guy, son of the old king and your typical Prince Charming-type, who was raised in secrecy in a small village after the kingdom was split

CV

Blue Byte

BLUE BYTE

Having been going strong for 16 years, this Düsseldorf-based codeshop knows a thing or two about making games – which is probably why Ubisoft snapped it up in 2001.

1991 *Battle Isle*. Blue Byte's first big franchise began life as a simple turn-based strategy game in a sci-fi setting. Fans of GBA title *Advance Wars* were right at home.

1992 *Historyline 1914-1918*. Also known as the *Great War*, this was basically a WWII version of *Battle Isle*, and just as good.

1993 *The Settlers*. Known as *Serf City: Life Is Feudal* in the US, the original *Settlers* was a cutesy strategy game with a focus on resource management.

1996 *Albion*. An interesting little futuristic RPG along the same lines as *Ultima 7* that mixed both 2D and 3D modes. Definitely due for a remake.

2001 *The Settlers IV*: the last of the old-style *Settlers* games, addictive for those in the know and slightly incomprehensible if you weren't.

"Oak beams! I said oak beams, dammit!"

You'll see every troop you create training themselves up. Good job too.

Construct a clay mine and watch the neighbours seethe.

WEATHERING THE STORM

YOU NEVER KNOW WHEN A QUICK THAW WILL COME IN HANDY

The Settlers: Heritage Of Kings includes a weather system that doesn't just enhance the look of the game, but weaves into the gameplay as well. Although the weather changes won't be automatically predictable, you will get warnings about approaching weather fronts, especially if you research meteorology.

You get rain and fog which makes it hard for your troops to fire straight and generally reduces your visibility, but where the weather really comes in handy is when you need to cross a big expanse of water. All you have to do is wait until it gets cold (you usually get warnings about this), then the water will freeze and enable your troops to walk across. At the highest levels of the alchemy research tree, you can also control the weather using weather towers. This means that if you see your enemy hot-footing it over the ice, you can call up the sun and send him to a watery grave.

Rain and fog reduce your line of sight.

up by wars. Now it's his job to unite the seven fragments of the old empire under the banner of his awesome blonde nobleness. But out to thwart him, and there's always a thwarter on the loose, is the Black Knight (who looks suspiciously like Dario in a big helmet) and his ruthless and fiendish cohorts.

BIGGER IS BETTER

Luckily, Dario will meet a few comrades of his own along the way. These include Pilgrim, a burly adventurer with an axe, who's an expert in explosives and proves very handy when you want to blow shit up. Not to mention Ari, the busty she-warrior and mistress of the longbow. Other heroes have their own unique abilities like being able to construct certain special units, heal troops and go undercover. Dario himself has a very useful hawk that he can send out to scout out hidden territory.

However, Benedikt is keen to emphasise that the game is still about

attention to detail and building big settlements. Key to this process are the serfs, who do all the drudge work like constructing buildings and collecting wood and stone. Once they've built a building, you automatically get workers seeking employment in your settlement. In exchange for their hard labour, you have to show that you're a beneficent Lord and make sure they've got somewhere nearby to get a hot meal and have a kip. If you don't provide this, they let you know pretty quickly and although you can't actively control them, you can click on every one of the settlers and find out what they need from you.

KICK BACK AND RELAX

Each little building has its own upgrades and little animations which lend a lot of life to your settlement, not to mention the fact the environment is full of deer, wolves and rabbits who gambol around as if they're auditioning for a Disney movie. It's nice to just sit back and watch your stone-masons tapping away at the stone blocks, little logs trundling through the sawmill and the general hustle and

bustle of medieval business as usual.

The Settlers: Heritage Of Kings marks a very interesting move away from the traditional *Settlers* style, which admittedly was rather convoluted for a lot of players (and let's face it, very Germanic). Accessibility is the watchword here, which shouldn't be

confused with dumbing down, because Blue Byte has retained the attention to detail and gameplay depth that the series has enjoyed all along. This should keep the old fans of the series happy and hopefully make a few new ones. We'll be settling down with the finished version in the next couple of months, so look out for a full review soon. **PCZ**

Your handy little serfs repair buildings as well as constructing them.

Ugh, mock Tudor is so *nouveau riche*, don't you know?

The fire effects are particularly nice, except when it's your settlement burning down...

REVIEWS

THE DEFINITIVE LOWDOWN ON ALL THE LATEST PC GAMES

WAITING GAME

■ **ASSOCIATE EDITOR** Jamie Sefton

▲ This month, I've truly experienced hell itself. Finally, after five years of waiting, a gleaming copy of *Half-Life 2* plopped onto my desk. It should've been a moment of sublime joy, but instead, it became the ultimate exercise in frustration – and I'm not talking about the Steam installation process. With Dave and Will in the USA, Suzy off ill and myself just coming back from a two-week break, I was forced to put the game in my desk drawer and ignore it until the mag was finished. This column is my last job this month, so you'll excuse me if it seems a little rushed – I can hear the G-Man calling me: "We've been rather busy in your absence Mr Sefton…"

So, mostly holding up *Half-Life 2* this month for me was *The Chronicles Of Riddick: Escape From Butcher Bay*, which despite being an Xbox port, is a fantastic mix of shooter, fighter, RPG and stealth game – check out our exclusive review on page 62. Our other major review is the first *Half-Life 2* Source engine game from a third-party developer – Troika Games' *Vampire: The Masquerade – Bloodlines*. Martin 'I love meat' Korda has been let loose on the fleshy necks of unsuspecting human victims, and you can check out his undead verdict on page 74.

We've also got the lowdown on the new sexed-up *Prince Of Persia* sequel *Warrior Within* (page 68), which has dumped the whimsical charm of the original and replaced it with full on tits and arse plus gratuitous head-chopping. We like. There's more gratuitous OTT violence in the *Painkiller* expansion pack *Battle Out Of Hell* on page 70, and the latest first-person jungle shooter *Men of Valor: Vietnam* is given a full tour of duty on page 72…

Production – please insert hilarious sign-off anecdote here – can't wait, off to play Half-Life 2 – ta, Jamie…

▼

THE CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK: ESCAPE FROM BUTCHER BAY 62

Exclusive review! Vin Diesel stars in a futuristic action adventure in the galaxy's most brutal prison.

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 2005*. 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. How would you survive in a brutal, futuristic prison like Butcher Bay?

DAVE WOODS
F.E.A.R.

I'd hide behind Martin Korda

JAMIE SEFTON
The Chronicles Of Riddick, (not) Half-Life 2, PES4

I'd trade copies of PC games for smokes and shivs.
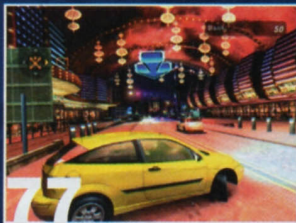
77
NFS: UNDERGROUND 2
Put your pedal to the metal

83
SONIC HEROES
More blue hedgehog capers

84
REPLAY
Games going cheap

88
SUPERTEST
Which is the best franchise game?

DEFINITIVE REVIEWS

PRINCE OF PERSIA: WARRIOR WITHIN 68

MEN OF VALOR 72

VAMPIRE – BLOODLINES 74

PAUL PRESLEY
EverQuest II, Half-Life 2, World Of Warcraft (Beta)
Industrial-strength Anusol

WILL PORTER
Half-Life 2, Vampire, Prince Of Persia: Warrior Within
I believe the applicable word is 'bitch'...

ANTHONY HOLDEN
Half-Life 2
I'd curl up into a ball and cry

MARTIN KORDA
Vampire: The Masquerade – Bloodlines, PES4
By using the other inmates as meat

STEVE HILL
GTA: San Andreas, Halo 2 and Need For Speed: Underground 2
A couple of snooker balls in a sock

RICHIE SHOEMAKER
Eve: Exodus, Half-Life 2
I'd make soap for Will to pick up in the showers
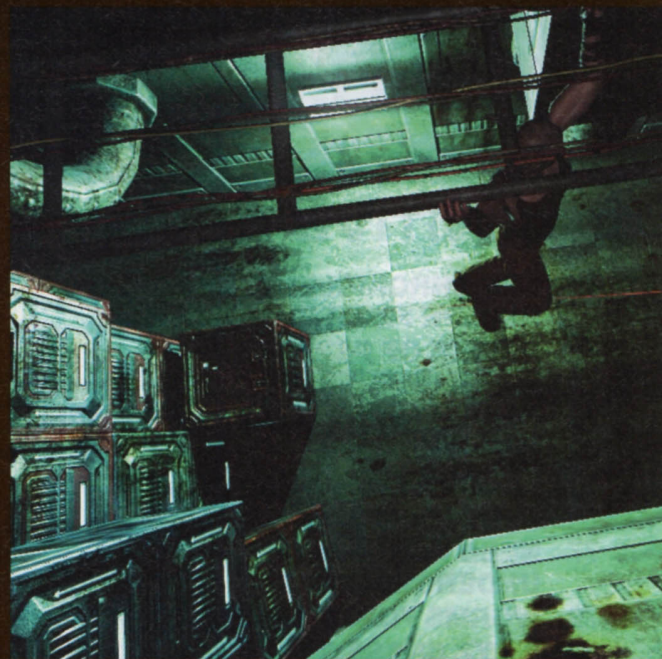
You can drop down on enemies to kill them.

THE CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK: ESCAPE FROM BUTCHER BAY

PC ZONE ESSENTIAL
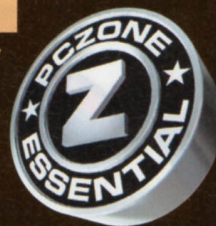
■ £34.99 | Pub: VU Games | Dev: Starbreeze/Tigon Studios | ETA: Out now | www.riddickgame.com/us

REQUIRES P4 1.8GHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB GeForce 3 or equivalent 3D card **DESIRES** P4 2.4GHz, 512MB RAM and a 128MB 3D card

Jamie Sefton **shaves his head, wears black sunglasses and talks in husky tones to take on the violent role of Richard B Riddick in the universe's toughest jail. Mr Big had better watch out...**

WE MAY baulk at the conditions in some of the most notorious lock-ups on the planet – Iraq's Abu Ghraib, Springfield Penitentiary – but they have nothing on Butcher Bay; a nightmarish triple-max prison containing some of the galaxy's most despicable criminals. Well, apart from Lord Archer...

This futuristic hellhole becomes home to Richard B Riddick, the enigmatic slap-headed, goggle-wearing psycho convict with the ability to see in the dark, from sci-fi movies *Pitch Black* and *The Chronicles Of Riddick*, portrayed superbly by gravel-throated Hollywood actor Vin Diesel. Despite the fact that movie-to-game conversions haven't fared well over the

years (think *The Great Escape* and shudder), I can happily report that *Escape From Butcher Bay* is one of the most surprising, atmospheric, brutal and downright enjoyable PC titles I've booted-up in the past year.

CELL MATES
Developed by Starbreeze (previously responsible for third-person hack 'n' slasher *Enclave*) in association with Vin Diesel's new games company Tigon Studios, *The Chronicles Of Riddick: Escape From Butcher Bay* is a triumphant sci-fi action-adventure that effortlessly fuses elements of first-person shooter, beat 'em up, stealth game and RPG. Although it's still

essentially a port of a summer Xbox game, us lucky PC owners receive a special 'Developer's Cut' version of the game. In addition to mouse control, better graphics and quick saves, this features a smattering of new levels and characters, plus a developer's commentary, akin to those DVD commentaries where directors and actors wibble on about how marvellous it was to work with each other.

The plot is pretty straightforward, with the title summing it up perfectly – *Escape From Butcher Bay*. As the game is essentially a prequel, it's freed the developer to create a videogame set in the *Chronicles Of Riddick* universe, without having to jemmy

IN PERSPECTIVE

HALF-LIFE 2
Reviewed Issue 148, Score 97%
Riddick won't be pleased, but you really must play Valve's stunning FPS before anything else.

DOOM 3
Reviewed Issue 146, Score 90%
Creates a similar claustrophobic indoor setting, but is much, much scarier.

BUTCHER
CORRECTIO
FACILIT

BAD MEDICINE

WHEN BEING HEALTHY IS PAINFUL

Butcher Bay is a grim place to spend your eternity, and the health facilities aren't up to much either. In keeping with the game's gritty feel and sick humour, the health pick-ups are actually gruesome med station machines that administer relief to Riddick via painful spikes that jab into his body or neck. Bloody NHS…

"Say cheese!"

"What do you mean, 'I have insufficient funds'?"

in a movie storyline. You play as Riddick, who's been transported to the prison by his old nemesis William J Johns (voiced by Cole Hauser from *Pitch Black*) as punishment for as-yet-undetermined crimes.

Your arrival ruffles a few feathers (and large, rippling muscles), and you're soon involved in the seedy underworld of the jail, learning how to chat with other prisoners through a LucasArts adventure-style interface, gradually beginning to work the system, find out valuable information and earn respect from guards and inmates alike. To progress the storyline, you complete missions – some essential, some optional – given to you by the characters you meet, ranging from taking out rival gang members to retrieving packages from poison gas-filled caves.

FISTS OF FURY

The game really sucks you in right from the start, and in the beginning is actually more akin to an action-adventure role-

playing game than a first-person shooter. You don't immediately have access to guns, because all of the guards' weapons are DNA-encoded – attempt to pick one up and you get a short sharp shock. What you do have access to is a range of nasty weapons for hand-to-hand combat, such as knuckle-dusters, clubs, screwdrivers and 'shivs', which are basically crude, home-made knifing implements.

Butcher Bay's brutal punch-ups are the best I've experienced in an FPS, with combinations of the movement keys and both mouse buttons pulling off a range of punches, stabs, uppercuts, blocks and combos that leave unfortunate opponents reeling with bruised faces, cut flesh and walls decorated in streaks of crimson. You can even wrestle with guards and use their own

weapons against them, forcing their hand to pull the trigger and blow their own heads off. Superb stuff.

SOFTLY, SOFTLY

Ah, but that's not all – Riddick also has the ability to use stealth to sneak up behind opponents and kill them in various unpleasant ways. Pressing the C key makes

"Punch-ups are the best I've seen in an FPS, with combos that leave opponents reeling"

Riddick crouch, with the screen getting a blue tint to indicate that you can't be seen by enemies. In this mode, you can tiptoe behind foes and snap their necks or push them over a ledge using your bare hands. Alternatively, you can use a handheld weapon to bash their brains out or hack at their spine. The stealth element of *Butcher Bay* works really well, and is actually much better and less clunky than many 'proper' stealth titles,

MISSED OPPORTUNITY

BUTCHER BAY'S LACK OF MULTIPLAYER IS JUST CRIMINAL

Escape From Butcher Bay is a phenomenal single-player game, but it resolutely remains an offline experience. This is such a shame – imagine enjoying those fist-fights and hand-to-hand combat sequences in an online prison league, or maybe in a massive multiplayer riot for 64 people, inmates versus guards. Or how about just the usual CTF and Deathmatch set in various arenas around Butcher Bay, such as the cell complex or the mines? Obviously, Starbreeze hasn't had time to produce a multiplayer element, but we live in hope that it'll either release modding tools so the community can have a crack at it, or maybe release a patch with a few Deathmatch levels thrown in for fun.

10

We want to be able to do this to our friends – now!

Kofi Annan adopts a different UN strategy.

GLOWER IN THE DARK

RIDDICK'S 'EYE SHINE' IS A REVELATION WHEN IT'S PITCH BLACK

If you're familiar with David Twohy's sci-fi epics *Pitch Black* and *The Chronicles Of Riddick*, you'll be aware of Richard B Riddick's special see-in-the-dark powers, hidden behind his trademark black specs. The great news for fans is that *Escape From Butcher Bay* has clues to Riddick's disturbing past (and future), and shows how an inmate known as Pope John gives Riddick his Furyan powers, known as 'Eye Shine'.

In the game, the device works brilliantly, allowing completely dark areas to be lit up with one key press, giving Riddick a stealthy advantage over much more heavily-armed opponents. The effect looks great, with the fish-eye lens, spooky luminescence and eye veins in the corner of the screen lending the experience an ethereal, other-worldly atmosphere. Also, there's no annoying battery to run down, so you can use Eye Shine as much as you like. However, watch out – use it in brightly-lit areas and your view will be completely washed out, leaving Riddick blind and at the mercy of any nearby foes.
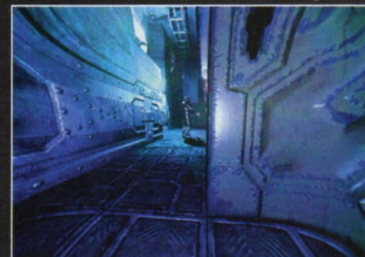
Before...   After...

Mechs and violence. Sorry.

with kill moves easier to pull off than in, say, *Manhunt*.

Once you've done away with the enemy – now an unloved, crumpled body on the floor – you can drag the corpse to a secluded part of the level to hide it. If you don't properly dispose of Riddick's victims, other guards could stumble upon the evidence and become suspicious, calling in back-up and searching for you. However, once Riddick gets his infamous Furyan powers (or 'Eye Shine') that allow him to see in the dark, no-one is safe (see 'Glower In The Dark', above).

Escape From Butcher Bay's level design is certainly not on the scale of *Far Cry* or *Half-Life 2's* massive outdoor locations, but the game still manages to create a believable, self-contained claustrophobic indoor world of foul-smelling cells, rusting air ducts, dank underground mines, mutant-infested pits, clanking lifts and high-tech cryogenic chambers.

HIDE AND SEEK

Much of the first two-thirds of the game consists of tightly interlinked levels, where you get a certain amount of freedom to explore and make your own way through the prison and mine areas, but it can get confusing. The static map screen is woefully inadequate, and you may find you have to wander back and forth between sections, linked by horrid loading bits (a hangover from the console conversion), until you realise you've missed a vital duct that gives you access to a new area.

Despite this, *Butcher Bay* is still expertly structured, stage-managing a thrilling and varied gaming experience. This is seen in stealth levels where you have to use cunning to survive, and in insane office shootouts where you're armed with massive weaponry (you'll have to play to find out what!) that can shred humans like paper, shatter chandeliers and rip up tiles from the floor. You rarely tire of the adventure, with the developers craftily scripting the game so that you're constantly having the rug pulled from under you and hurled into new, unexpected and frightening situations.

ACTION STATIONS

Your HUD is kept uncluttered throughout the game, so weapon changes only flash up briefly and health is only shown in combat with white blocks in the top-left corner of the screen. People or objects you can interact with are indicated by small on-screen flags – pressing the use key when prompted either triggers a conversation or an 'action sequence', when the camera switches into third-person and, for example, Riddick uses a vent-tool to unlock an opening and climbs into it.

Third-person view is also used in situations such as climbing ladders and boxes, hanging from railings, operating med stations (see 'Bad Medicine', opposite page), or in the game's excellent cut-scenes. It takes a bit of getting used to, but you soon appreciate how smoothly the transition between first- and third-person is executed, instantly solving the annoying FPS 'ladder problem' and any clumsy platform-jumping.

As for the rather clever AI enemies you face in *Butcher Bay*, be prepared for an onslaught of both human and non-human opponents lining up to shoot, bite, claw and blow you up, such as angry blue-faced inmates, sadistic security guards, mutant pit dwellers, tooled-up mechs and ED209-style robots. There's also a beady electronic eye watching you, dishing out futuristic vengeance in the form of sentry guns and rail defence networks that can spot you even if you're skulking in darkness at the far side of the room.

Fortunately, as well as the hand-to-hand combat, you get

ART FOR ART'S SAKE

COLLECT PACKS OF CIGARETTES TO UNLOCK HEALTHY GOODIES!

Although the game is short-lived, there are at least a few easter eggs, so dedicated players can squeeze out as much entertainment as possible. The main extra is the ability to collect 'smokes', packs of comically-named cigarettes (one example – 'Desert Air: Not For Weak Throats'). These unlock special concept art, movie stills, a novelisation and more.

"I have to say that *Riddick* caught me by surprise. The sheer detail in the levels and textures belies the game's Xbox roots – this is one console conversion that doesn't feel any poorer for being so. In fact, the engine looks so stunning, it's hard to believe that it wasn't designed for the PC all along. The voice-acting is superb, the level design creates exactly the kind of oppressive atmosphere needed to compliment the story, and hand-to-hand combat is, for once, surprisingly satisfying. In fact, every component of *Escape From Butcher Bay* fits neatly together to create a somewhat brutal, but always neatly polished shooter that's enough to slip out of shadows and take you by surprise too."

The butt of your weapon is an equally good way of dealing with troublesome foes.

your mitts on some serious hardware including a lethal shotgun and a hilarious tranquiliser gun, that zaps foes and enables you to finish off helpless twitching victims by stomping down hard on their heads with a well-placed boot.

SITTING PRETTY

Graphically, *Escape From Butcher Bay* uses similar technology to *Doom 3* – 'normal mapping' – a technique where you can get detailed lighting

and shading on characters and environments using low-polygon models. In practice, this means the game looks gorgeous but it can also zip along at a fast frame-rate. The dirty, dusty and corroding prison environments have been superbly realised, containing rusting metal wall panels, scrawled offensive graffiti (my personal favourite is 'guard your dick'), damp stone walls, buzzing electrified fences, decaying strip lighting, gleaming cryo pyramids and ominous rotating fans.

The atmospheric real-time lighting is really something special and as well as looking rather spiffing, it's used to great effect in the gameplay, gifting Riddick moments when he can

take advantage of his Furyan powers. Riddick and other characters also cast shadows on walls and floors, adding to your immersion into a solid and believable 3D environment.

SAY IT AGAIN

Motion-captured animation for the cut-scenes and third-person sequences is also excellent. What's more, the facial animation of the characters, especially Riddick, is top-notch – especially when combined with the smart, understated vocal performances from Vin Diesel and the cast.

A fully-integrated physics engine means that as well as ragdoll bodies, objects in the environment, such as grates, clatter satisfying to the floor when kicked out. Other inspired touches include bullet holes that glow red hot on metal surfaces, faces of enemies that visibly get splashed with blood, and flickering flares that light up dark corners. Even the game's menu interface is cool, featuring a series of small rotating 3D metal blocks that

shift and slot into place as you browse the options on offer.

THUMBS UP?

The Chronicles Of Riddick: Escape From Butcher Bay (Developer's Cut) is a hugely enjoyable cinematic action-adventure with sublime pacing, impressive graphics, sound and music, dark humour and a seamless mix of gameplay styles. It's stuffed with constant surprises and great scripted and non-scripted moments. We particularly like the repetitive exercise scene in the cryo chamber; pulling off a kill by dropping down onto an enemy from a rail; pushing a poor unsuspecting 'screw' into a rock crusher and Riddick's stylish comedy put-downs.

I've referred to a few criticisms throughout the review – the sometimes-confusing level structure, the annoying checkpoint loading – but there are a few other concerns. There's no multiplayer (see 'Missed Opportunity', p64), enemies sometimes spawn from

nowhere, and the game is very short, clocking in at around ten hours. You can collect 'smokes' that unlock easter eggs (see 'Art For Art's Sake', left), and there are a few extra bonus levels and other distractions in this 'Developer's Cut', but they don't expand the length of the game by much at all.

However, in popular entertainment, the mantra is always 'leave them wanting more', so maybe Starbreeze and Tigon Studios are continuing with that proud tradition? In any case, for the brief stretch you spend with Riddick in the galaxy's most notorious correction facility, *Escape From Butcher Bay* will keep you imprisoned in your house and chained to your PC from start to finish. **PCZ**

Third-person view gives you a better look at your environment.

Electric shock treatment.

Nice goggles.

PCZONE VERDICT

✔ Superb mix of different game styles
✔ Brutal hand-to-hand combat
✔ Looks and sounds fantastic
✔ 'Eye Shine' ability rocks
✘ No online play
✘ Sometimes confusing level design
✘ Short

86

Diesel-powered
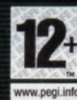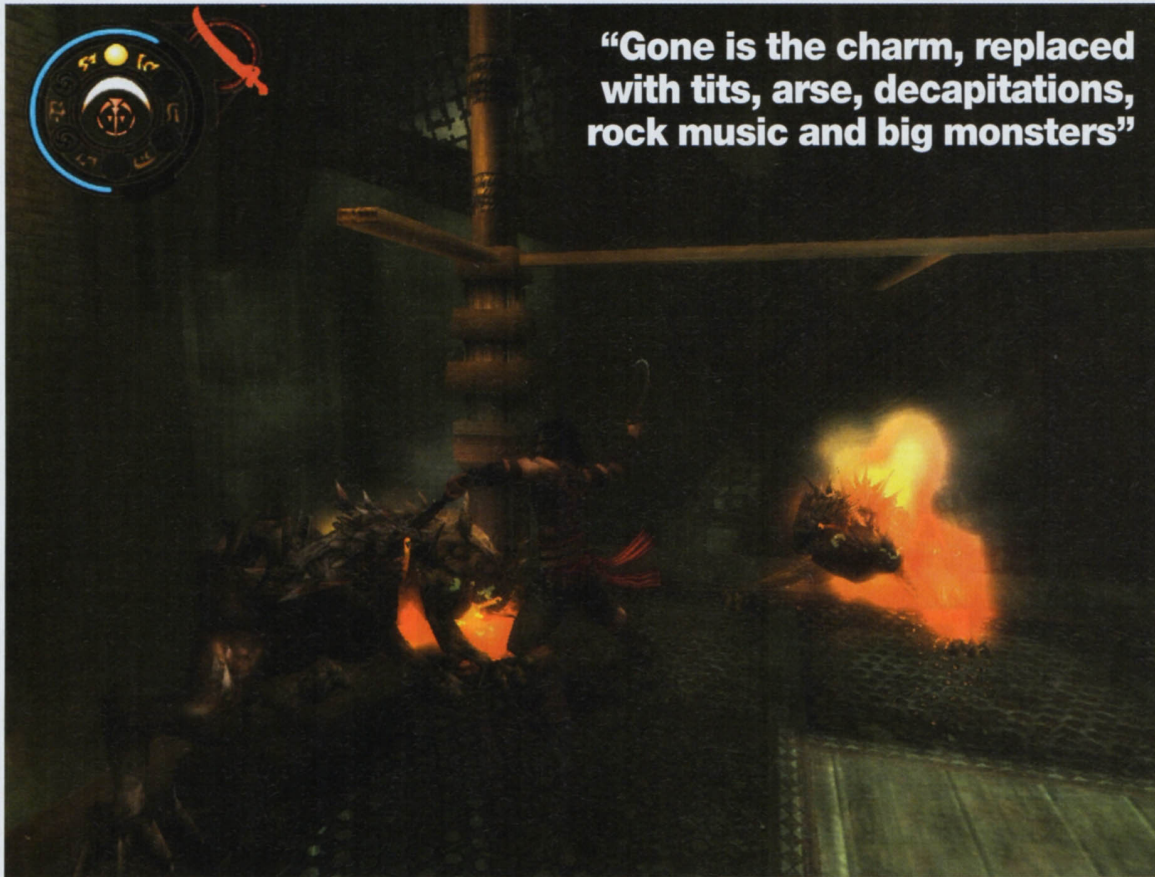
"Gone is the charm, replaced with tits, arse, decapitations, rock music and big monsters"

A rare moment of calm.

To fully appreciate this screenshot, you must listen to *loud* guitars while you look at it.

PRINCE OF PERSIA: WARRIOR WITHIN

Another villain takes a tumble.

■ £34.99 | Pub: Ubisoft | Dev: Ubisoft | ETA: Out Now |
www.princeofpersiagame.com

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM and an 64MB 3D card
DESIRES P4 1.5GHz, 256MB and a 128MB 3D card

Will Porter meets up with the artist formerly known as the Prince of Persia...

FIVE minutes into *Prince Of Persia: Warrior Within*, you realise that we've come quite a way since we left the posh, foolish and slightly fey youth that we left atop a minaret last year. An older Prince – I can understand that. He's had a hectic day and not had time to shave – that happens to us all. But he's facing an evil woman whose arse has almost entirely filled my screen with a close-up so intense that you can almost see the veins, and a leather G-string that could garrote a doormouse. Jesus wept! Ladies and gentlemen, it appears we're not in Kansas anymore…

Blame those marketplace realities. *Sands Of Time* sold bugger all, so a bunch of overweight men in suits came up with a Powerpoint presentation that clearly had 'the kidz' as its focus. Gone is the charm, gone the delightful relationship between the Prince and Farah, gone the absolute uniqueness that sold me its predecessor so utterly. To be replaced instead with tits, arse, decapitations, combos, rock music, big monsters and slow-motion depravity.

BUT HANG ON…

Thing is though, I actually quite like tits, arse, decapitations, combos, rock music, big monsters and slow-motion depravity – so I find myself in a bit of a pickle. I'm angry that something that I held so dear has been taken away from me, but the fact that the new game is actually pretty good certainly lessens my fury. The nuts, bolts, jumps and spins of the old game are still here you see, they've just been put through a heavy goth filter that might take away a lot of the originality, but they certainly add a fair dollop of fun.

The somewhat befuddled story has it that the Prince's prior time-fiddling and death-dodging has enraged the Empress of Time, who has sent her vengeful Dahaka demon to ensure that the Prince meets a grisly fate. In an effort to avoid this, the Prince sets off for an island full of cogs, gears and spinning blades where he can nip between the present and the past in an effort to stop the roots of the problem (the *Sands Of Time*) from ever being created. Among all this, there's a nice woman with astounding breasts and the

INPERSPECTIVE

LEGACY OF KAIN: DEFIANCE
Reviewed Issue 139, Score 79%
The recent, and most patchy, entry in the *Soul Reaver* series is truly out-gothed by the new *Prince*.

PRINCE OF PERSIA
Reviewed Issue 136, Score 84%
Purer, funnier and with more reliance on romance rather than silicone, the original *PoP* may not have the fight system but it does have the charm.
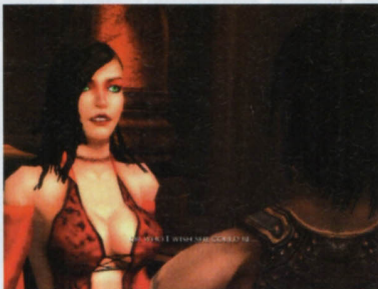
"Look at me when I talk to you!"

The game opens at sea.

Why would anyone build this place?

Despite this cracking rump, she's actually a bit of a BOBFOC.

Zombie executions never get boring.

"A little off the top, sir?"

There's still plenty of acrobatics and balancing.

Enemies, and testosterone levels, have grown.

voice of Monica Belluci, the aforementioned evil woman with the prominent arse and a variety of vampire women who really like it when you bite back.

Combat lies somewhere in the deadzone between button-tapping and carefully planned swipes – which (as someone who normally regards blocking in beat 'em ups as something that happens to other people), I initially struggled with.

The learning curve is steep – far, far steeper than the Prince's original outing, and it was a while before I felt brave enough to enter the game's vast list of teen-friendly, yet invariably spectacular combos. Once the simple beauty of the thrown secondary weapon and all the possibilities of zombie throwing, wall-pouncing and gut-carving have been explored however, you always find yourself looking forward to the next clash of swords. Every now and then a boss appears that has you fuming at the sparseness of time-reverse sand on offer while you glare at the Game Over screen for the fifth time in a row. However, overall the improved combat system is a massive feather in the Prince's turban.

JUMP AROUND
The required level of acrobatic finesse has also been raised; mainly through the paltry sand and save-point dispersal, and the presence of enemies in-between your innumerable wall-dashing sorties.

Warrior Within is also brave enough to add in some new features, such as Errol Flynn-style curtain sliding (which is ace); and, kicking in about halfway through the game, the appearance of a cavalcade of rotating surfaces and poles that move lengthways and sideways. The game capitalises on the possibilities afforded by the third dimension to a much greater extent than its forbear, and is far more difficult as a result.

Environments themselves, meanwhile, are pretty much the same as before. You generally run through an area twice – once in the past when all the traps and platforms are shipshape and operational, and once in the present where everything has fallen to bits and has tree trunks sticking in it. It's a nice touch, forcing you to think twice about the same environment, but it often strays into déjà vu – and not in the sense it intends.

Essentially, what's happened here is that while the previous game modelled itself in the fashion of *Ico* (the beautiful PS2 adventure), this version has regressed to the far more traditional, tried and tested mood and ambience of the *Soul Reaver* series. In this it succeeds wholeheartedly, blowing Raziel out of his grave in most conceivable ways, but a bit of me still misses the charm and the wit of its predecessor.

WHEN I'M 84
The difference can perhaps be best summed up thus – picture the scene. Years from now, I'll be shacked up in an old folks home, sitting with other wrinkled nerds wistfully reminiscing about the Prince (calling him a 'nice polite lad' who really showed us that games could be different if they tried). In my barmy old age, though, I'll be thoroughly unable to remember *Warrior Within*. Not because it's without greatness and not because it didn't give me a fun ride – but simply because, the day the Prince reached adolescence, he lost the ability to stand out in the crowd and became lost in the sea of other more commercially-viable titles. *Warrior Within* is a great game, and one you'll enjoy, but I much preferred the Prince when he was a bit of a div. **PCZ**

DAHAKA-TANA

IT'S A RACE, IT'S A CHASE, IT'S A REALLY DEADLY PLACE
Every now and then you'll be dodging spikes or chilling to the *Painkiller*-esque guitar riffs provided by angry teen-idols Godsmack, when Dahaka-Tana turns up – and he's a nasty piece of work. Basically providing the same sense of pursuit featured in *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis* or a few sections of *Beyond Good & Evil*, when this happens you just have to turn tail and run for your life.

The Dahaka's heavy footsteps that thunder behind you while you flee genuinely make for some tense moments in the game; all of a sudden, a simple rope jump or a scurry along a nearby wall has to be carried out with absolute haste rather than leisurely speed. The developer, the advertisers and various soothsayers claim that the Prince will die at the Dahaka's hands, but will he? Over to you…

The Dahaka: a horny devil.

PCZONE VERDICT
- ✔ Still an extremely enjoyable game
- ✔ Good combat, nice visuals
- ✔ More innovative acrobatics and puzzles
- ✔ Gigantic breasts
- ✖ Can get frustrating and repetitive
- ✖ Not as unique as it used to be

83

They grow up so fast, don't they?

It's not exactly Chessington, is it?

I'll think I'll give the bed bath a miss.

PAINKILLER: BATTLE OUT OF HELL

■ **£19.99** | **Pub:** Dreamcatcher | **Dev:** People Can Fly | **ETA:** Out Now | **www.dcegames.com**

REQUIRES P4 1.5GHz, 384MB RAM and a 64MB graphics card **DESIRES** P4 2.4GHz, 512MB RAM and a 128MB graphics card

Two paracetamol later and *Sam Kieldsen* still feels a bit hot

WOULD you believe it? You've just fought your way through the bowels of the underworld, slaying countless legions of cackling demons, giants and psychotic monks, setting a new world zombie-staking record and giving evil-doers the kind of pasting Dubya Bush would be proud of. In most cases a mug of tea, a couple of jammy dodgers and a well-earned breather would be in order, but no! You're Daniel Garner, the slayer of the undead, and there's no peace for the wicked. A demon lord is mustering an army or something,

and it's up to you to chuck a spanner in his infernal works.

WHO NEEDS A STORY?

The plot may be wafer thin, but then this is an expansion for *Painkiller*, a first-person shooter that was far more concerned with glorious, blood-drenched balls-to-the-walls action than weaving an enveloping, immersing story. The good news for fans of the original is that *Battle Out Of Hell* provides ten more levels of the same stuff; the bad news is that that's pretty much all it provides.

As with the original, Polish developer People Can Fly has

focused on providing a steady stream of old-skool FPS thrills. The AI remains rudimentary: swarms of crazed baddies pour out of doorways and crevices, and most of them make directly for you, while a few rely on missile weapons to take you down. For your part, you simply have to keep away from the enemies' claws/knives/teeth/dynamite and choose how best to slaughter them using the awesome arsenal at your disposal.

Two more instruments of destruction have been added to the existing list, and you get your mitts on both early on in the expansion. One is a jazzed-up

stakegun sporting a sniper scope, and the other is a bog standard sub-machine gun that doubles up as a pretty handy flame-thrower. Each comes in useful, with the developer evidently working to design levels and enemies so that you don't feel you can rely on just one or two guns all the time.

MORE GRUEL, PLEASE

The levels themselves are immense and gorgeously realised, with People Can Fly maintaining a twisted real-world theme throughout. You start off in a dilapidated orphanage, for instance, but don't expect *Oliver!*-esque singing and dancing – these urchins would

rather pick your bones than your pockets. Later, there's an unnerving funfair, an abandoned city and – most impressive of all – a demonic recreation of WWII Leningrad populated by undead Russian and German soldiers.

It's all good clean fun, and the visuals are nothing less than amazing on a high-end rig, but we can't help but feel that it simply supplies more of the same frantic first-person shootery action that filled the original. Add in the fact that you'll plough through it in a few short hours, and it all becomes slightly disappointing. If you're looking for true originality (and aren't we all?) you're in for one hell of a letdown. **PCZ**

INPERSPECTIVE

HALF-LIFE 2
Reviewed issue 148, Score 97%
The new and undisputed daddy of the first-person shooter genre, Valve's masterpiece has got the lot: jaw-dropping visuals, a gripping story and astoundingly lifelike physics.

DOOM 3
Reviewed issue 146, Score 90%
Another title that revolves around forcibly consigning the denizens of hell back to the pits whence they came, *Doom 3* takes a far more measured, atmospheric approach compared to *Painkiller*.

Zombified Nazis: that really is evil incarnate.

We're gonna need a bigger gun.

PCZONE VERDICT

✓ Gorgeously grotesque visuals
✓ New guns to play with
✓ It's got zombie Nazis
✗ Occasionally frustrating
✗ Nothing new gameplay-wise
✗ Doesn't last long

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Same Old Nick

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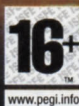www.novalogic.com

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"Ow! My bloody tie's got caught in the gun again..."

Gordon Freeman: the early years.

Don't shoot your load too soon...

Another Daz Doorstep Challenge!

MEN OF VALOR

■ £34.99 | Pub: VU Games | Dev: 2015
ETA: Out Now | www.menofvalorgame.com

REQUIRES P4 1.3GHz, 256MB RAM and a DirectX 9.0C-compliant 64MB 3D card
DESIRES P4 2GHz, 512MB RAM and a DirectX 9.0C-compliant 128MB 3D card

Anthony Holden has problems with Charlie that Adrian Mutu can only dream about

ON THE DVD

YOU know something's wrong when a game hits the shelves just in time for Christmas and it's already been patched twice. You really have to worry when a Bonus Level Pack has also been released, otherwise known as 'the rest of the game'. Clearly, there were some last-minute deadline issues leading up to the release of *Men Of Valor*,

and it shows. Without the patches it's an unplayable, crash-laden mess, and even with them it lacks the polish that games used to have before the industry buried its conscience in a New Mexico landfill, underneath five million crushed *ET* cartridges.

It's a shame, because in many respects *Men Of Valor* is an excellent war-themed FPS. It's certainly the best solo Vietnam shooter to date, effortlessly outstripping *Vietcong*, *Conflict: Vietnam* and the derisory *Shellshock Nam '67*. More importantly, in the battle of the big, heroically named war epics it unexpectedly slips into second place, nosing ahead of the erratic *MOH: Pacific Assault*. (Which is sweet justice in a way, given that 2015 made *Medal Of Honor* great in the first place.)

EXTREME PREJUDICE

However, as much as we'd like to punish the game for not

fulfilling its true potential, there's no denying its wily charms. It's got a superbly gritty atmosphere, features some excellent use of the word motherf*****, and looks as sharp as a pungi stick in a mantrap. Even the script and storyline are of a high quality, if a little laboured, as you follow the progress of the war from a small show of US arrogance to a full-blown jungle apocalypse.

The set-up is familiar enough. It's 1965. The situation in Vietnam seems contained, and American troops in Da Nang know that they're there primarily as a deterrent. As Dean Shepard, a young black GI fresh out of boot camp, you throw a football gaily with your squad mates Greaser, Hoss and Smooth, little knowing that within 13 bullet-riddled missions you will have been ambushed, shot, blown up and killed more times than you can remember.

(And that's not even counting multiplayer games.)

Along the way, you'll take in historical actions such as Operation Starlight, Khe Sahn and the Tet Offensive, with all the booby traps, village-burning and tunnel-clearing that implies. However, while the mixture of

small, squad-based incursions and grand chaotic battles is familiar, the game manages not to come across as simply another *Allied Assault* clone.

For a start, there's a lot less of the scripted rail-rides than the formula usually demands, concentrating more on tightly

INPERSPECTIVE

MEDAL OF HONOR: PACIFIC ASSAULT
Reviewed Issue 149, Score: 79%
EA's flashy *Medal Of Honor* follow-up has some genuinely exciting moments, but is overall a disappointment. We hate it when that happens.

CALL OF DUTY: UNITED OFFENSIVE
Reviewed Issue 146, Score: 87%
In the field of human conflict one name now reigns supreme: *Call Of Duty*. This excellent expansion pack shows exactly why.

One less communist woodpile to trouble the world.

"There's nothing of valour going on here – sneak from tree to tree mowing down men and women"

directed firefights than big showy set pieces. The dense jungle setting is used to excellent effect to create tension, forcing you to hug trees like your best friend and scan the foliage constantly for enemy presence. The need to bandage every wound to prevent massive blood loss also keeps you constantly on your toes.

When you do get thrown into an on-rails section, it's brief and efficient, not attempting to out-do the competitors with the biggest and best special effects. However, whatever it loses here *Men Of Valor* makes up for with tight mission design and a pleasing variety of objectives. Whether you're laying an ambush or extracting an enemy POW, there's always an excellent feeling of involvement and comradeship, thanks in large part to the expletive-riddled banter of your pals.

Aside from crafting a very coherent and convincing atmosphere, this highlights the fact that your only real concern is survival, which is reflected in the uncompromising gameplay. There's nothing of valour going on here – you mostly sneak from tree to tree, mowing down men and women indiscriminately and looting the corpses for ammo and med packs as you go.

CAN'T JUMP, WON'T JUMP
Sadly, the game is not without its quirks, many of them traceable back to its Xbox connections.

For one, there's no jump function. It may seem ridiculous in this day and age, but it's actually not as much of a handicap as it sounds. More crippling by far is the lack of a quick-save option, reducing you to frustrating and often widely spaced checkpoints.

The biggest booby trap of all, however, is the AI. It's not so much that it's bad – in fact it's admirably ambitious in places – it's more that it lets you down when you least expect it. Like when one of your squad buddies walks straight past a VC gunman while you're reloading, allowing Charlie to walk right up and blow your head off. Or when an idiotic team-mate plants himself right in your line of fire

just as you've lined up a tricky sniper shot. What are they – fools? It's enough to make you turn commie.

As for the enemies, they often spawn right before your eyes, something that simply should not happen in a 21st-century shooter. There are also some terrible trigger points where hundreds of VC troops will pour out of a tiny hut until you reach the magical point in the level that makes them stop.

Despite these blips however, *Men Of Valor* is a thoroughly enjoyable game. Yes it's frequently frustrating, but it remains compelling throughout,

and will certainly tide you over until the next *Call Of Duty* expansion pack turns up. **PCZ**

Time Team goes extreme.

"No, we don't deliver pizzas."

"That's right love. Hold it there and look mean."

VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE – BLOODLINES

■ £34.99 | Pub: Activision | Dev: Troika Games | ETA: Out Now
www.vampirebloodlines.com

REQUIRES PIII 1.2GHz, 384MB RAM and a DirectX 9.0c-compatible 64MB 3D card
DESIRES P4 2GHz, 512MB RAM and a 128MB 3D card

Martin Korda **gets sucked in by a vampiric beauty**

04:19:65

Side-quests are many and varied. Here you have to stop zombies from escaping into the city.

I'LL ADMIT IT, I was suspicious. You see, usually when I get to review a game that's already on sale, it's because the publisher has realised its product is about as entertaining as a depressed clown who's trying to gas himself to death in an oven. But in *Bloodlines*, we have an exception. A major exception.

INPERSPECTIVE

STAR WARS: KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC
Reviewed Issue 137, Score 94%
Featuring turn-based rather than real-time combat, this is one of the best RPGs ever created.

DEUS EX: INVISIBLE WAR
Reviewed Issue 137, Score 86%
Not as good as we hoped, but still a great game with many similarities to *Bloodlines*. If you prefer sci-fi, then opt for this instead.

As I'm sure you know by now, *Bloodlines* uses the same engine as *Half-Life 2*. But to linger on this subject for too long would be to do this freeform macabre RPG a gross disservice, as it possesses more than enough merits of its own. So let's get this part out of the way so we can sink our fangs into the meat of what is, for the most part, a superbly crafted yarn of underworld subterfuge and conspiracy woven into the fabric of a living, yet often unsettling world.

While *Bloodlines* is nowhere near as graphically impressive as *HL2*, it still proves an ocular delight, perfectly portraying the sinister LA streets in which the game is set, while characters display a fairly convincing array of facial expressions. However, the less said about the game's poor physics system the better, with objects often lacking both weight and substance.

CREATING A MONSTER

Bloodlines begins, as you'd well expect, with a detailed character creation process based on the White Wolf rule set (www.white-wolf.com). If you're an RPG veteran, you can jump straight in and start configuring your character, choosing from seven different vampire clans (all with different looks, strengths and weaknesses) and tweaking a host of stats, skills and disciplines (see 'Overview Of A Vampire', right).

Any newbies amongst you can relax too, as you're admirably catered for by a set of zany questions that will identify your ideal clan,

> "A superbly crafted yarn of underworld subterfuge woven into the fabric of a living, unsettling world"

"Don't try and stop me – I'm going back in for Mr Snuffles."

"I'm really glad he went first."

OVERVIEW OF A VAMPIRE

IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT BATS AND SUCKING BLOOD WHEN YOU RISE UP FROM THE GRAVE

You can master many disciplines in *Bloodlines*, many of which are dependent on your clan. Each one proffers great powers for a limited time, which increase as you level up. The downside is that every time you activate a discipline it drains your blood supply. Here's just a taster of some of the disciplines you can master, young bloodsucker.

CELERITY
Need some speed? Then *Bloodlines*' version of bullet-time is just the thing, slowing down the world around you and giving you more time to plan your next attack… or escape route.

POTENCE
Bargaining not your thing? Well, here's your answer. Activate this and you'll receive a massive strength bonus to help you tear your enemies a new blood donor hole.
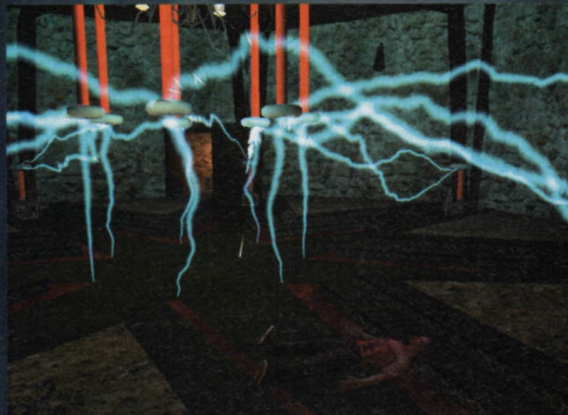
PRESENCE
If you're a bit of a pretty boy (or girl) and don't want to mess up your hair in fight, then this discipline will make you harder. That way you can stay looking like a complete nonce.

BLOOD BUFF
If you're struggling to pick a lock or just need to boost your strength, dexterity and stamina, then Blood Buff is the quick fix solution to solve all your problems.

---

depending on how you answer, before you're whisked off to the intuitive character creation screen. Just remember though, with every single skill and attribute affecting how you play the game and how NPCs react to you, it's important that you choose carefully.

Once you've made your choices, you're thrown straight into the world of vampires, and before you know it you're embroiled in the machinations of the undead, slowly unravelling a plot with more twists than a 1980s perm. Gradually you sink deeper into the game's clutches as you interact with its believable, finely crafted characters that brim with charisma and individuality, and embark on a seemingly never-ending stream of quests and sub-quests that are offered to you at every turn.

Every major character you meet has a back-story bubbling intriguingly in a in a world that spills over with sinister happenings and unsavoury individuals. The dusky LA locales brim with detail, genuine humour and masterful pastiche (just listen to the radio shows and you'll see what I mean), and it's all too easy to let yourself be seduced by the world around you, ignoring the crux of the plot and simply milking *Bloodlines* for every drop of immersion you can suck from its bountiful veins.

I LIKE 'EM BIG

The abundance of open-ended and varied missions mean you'll rarely, if ever, feel bored. One minute you'll be searching a haunted house, head crawling like a lice-ridden scalp as the sublime soundtrack and effects chill you to the marrow, the next you're hunting down a victim in a sleazy lap-dancing parlour while a rock track keeps time with your rushing heart.

Dialogue is another of the game's major features, with thousands of conversation topics and a myriad of responses provided when speaking with NPCs. But quantity doesn't assure quality, and while the dialogue is well written, all too often your replies seem fairly insignificant to a conversation's outcome. What's more, it's also usually pretty obvious which reply is your best bet.

To some extent, this problem is tempered by your skills and abilities. Confused? Allow me to explain. If you're a good-looking vamp with a silk-lined tongue and bags of charisma, then your dialogue choices will occasionally be bolstered by sweet-talking sentiments that'll help you get your way. If on the other hand, you're a bit of a brute, then you'll be able to issue threats instead. Simple.

The same attribute-based principals apply to how you can approach missions. Let's say, for example, you have to infiltrate a rival clan's base. You could sneak your way in, adeptly opening locks with picks and using your hacking skills to break into computer systems, disabling them as you go. Or, if your physical stats are up to it, you could simply head in with a shotgun and mow your way through the level, picking up keys and access cards from the still twitching corpses lying at your feet. Can't make your mind up? Then compromise, and do both. It's completely up to you.

It's this kind of freedom that propels *Bloodlines* into the same bracket as *Deus Ex*, *Knights Of The Old Republic* and

Don't cry love, it's not as bad as it looks.

You like that, huh?

Bloodlines takes full advantage of its 18 rating.

You'll try anything to recapture the magic.

Never buy a dog from *Exchange & Mart*.

Morrowind, and ensures that it never feels like a linear, predictable experience.

The LA streets aren't quite up to the same standards, though. Citizens generally mill around aimlessly, often standing around in alleyways waiting for you to suck their blood (which feeds your powers and bolsters your health), while police don't even flinch when you walk up to them with a shotgun and call them crackling. But get caught committing a Masquerade Violation (the code followed by vampires so that humans don't realise they're sharing the streets with the undead), or commit a crime, and they'll hunt you down, scouring the streets and back alleys en masse as you desperately hide in the shadows. In fact, the AI is generally pretty passable, though it never rivals the quality of *Half-Life 2*.

THING IS…

With time running out and with *Bloodlines* clearly threatening a Classic rating, it pains me to have to pull out a bag of negatives, especially as it's entranced me more than almost any other game I've played this year. But I'm a professional (layabout) and if there are criticisms to be levelled, then level I must.

First off, combat. While the first-person shooter sections are entertaining and challenging (accuracy and damage are based on your skills), the third-person melee combat sections are infuriatingly clumsy – a problem that's magnified by the game's unresponsive controls.

These combat sections feel more like a cheap console beat 'em up than a quality PC RPG, while the balance between the damage inflicted by melee weapons and guns is incredibly skewed.

Graphical and sound glitches also abound, with lip synching sometimes jerking out of time like a B-movie martial arts flick, thrown objects (like metal bins) making virtually no sound at all, and some clipping problems causing limbs to protrude through walls. You're also forced to endure fairly long loading times every time you enter a new area, meaning the game never flows as smoothly as you'd like it to (though admittedly,
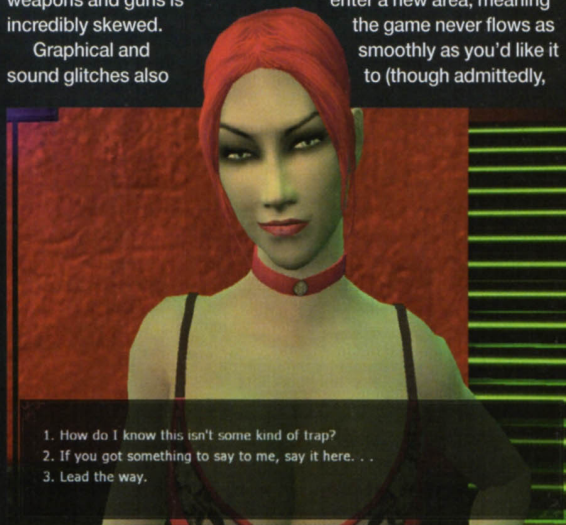
1. How do I know this isn't some kind of trap?
2. If you got something to say to me, say it here. . .
3. Lead the way.

Characters have convincing facial expressions.

The third-person melee combat is a pretty clumsy ordeal.
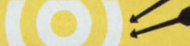
this is more of a niggle than a major problem).

Despite its shortcomings and glitches (the latter will hopefully soon be rectified by a patch), *Vampire: The Masquerade – Bloodlines* is still a beautifully chilling and captivating creation, an RPG that's earned the right to be mentioned in the same breath as the best, though sadly not as the best. It may not be perfect, but once it gets hold of you, it'll suck your spare time dry and enslave your attention, making you its loyal subject till the end credits roll. Go on take a bite – I think you'll really enjoy it. **PCZ**

PCZONE VERDICT

✓ Deep, immersive and disturbing
✓ Varied and entertaining quests and sub-quests
✓ Brilliant storyline with excellent moments of humour
✓ Genuinely freeform in nature
✗ Poor melee combat and unbalanced weapons
✗ An annoying amount of graphical and sound glitches
✗ Dialogue choices often arbitrary

86

Pretty Bloody Good

Word to your mama! These kids are 'down'.

Nice wheels. Shame they're not yours.

Brian never did master parallel parking.

NEED FOR SPEED: UNDERGROUND 2

■ £29.99 | Pub: EA | Dev: EA | ETA: Out Now | www.needforspeed.com

REQUIRES PIII 933MHz, 256MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card **DESIRES** P4 2GHz, 512MB RAM and a 128MB 3D card

Steve Hill pimps his ride in this street-racing sequel

LAST YEAR'S *Need For Speed: Underground* pretty much came out of nowhere, resuscitating a flagging brand while simultaneously kick-starting the whole car modification genre. A shrewd move by EA – it's a huge market, with top-selling magazines featuring a winning combination of neon piss-flaps and impressionable young girls exposing their breasts. The best-selling racing game of 2003, it was no surprise to learn that a sequel would follow, and you can bet your modified camshaft that as you read these words, an anonymous game factory is currently slaving away on number three.

In a break with EA tradition, this sequel does actually differ slightly from the previous game.

Whereas *Need For Speed: Underground* was a largely abstract series of events, number two embraces the current trend for so-called 'emergent gameplay', placing the action in a 'living, breathing' city, with even a vague storyline to back it up.

PIMP, WHORE

Arriving in the fictional city of Bay View following an unsavoury incident six months previously, a car is waiting for you at the airport. No sooner have you put the keys in the ignition than some Doris comes on the blower telling you to give her car back. Voiced by Brooke Burke, her CV also involves appearing naked for the gratification of men. In the game, she's a 'sassy broad' who introduces you to Bay View's thriving underground racing scene.

In time-honoured fashion, you start the game with a nice little runner. It may be adequate for picking up a selection of lonely meals from Sainsbury's, but it doesn't really cut the mustard in the high-stakes world of street racing. Some low-grade races soon earn you a few quid though, enabling you to pimp your ride, tweaking the performance as well as earning points for artistic merit, thus eventually securing magazine covers.

It's a tried and tested format, but one that works supremely well in this instance. Simply touring around the enormous city is a joy in itself, with a map directing you to the various shops and races, of which three new types are added. The story
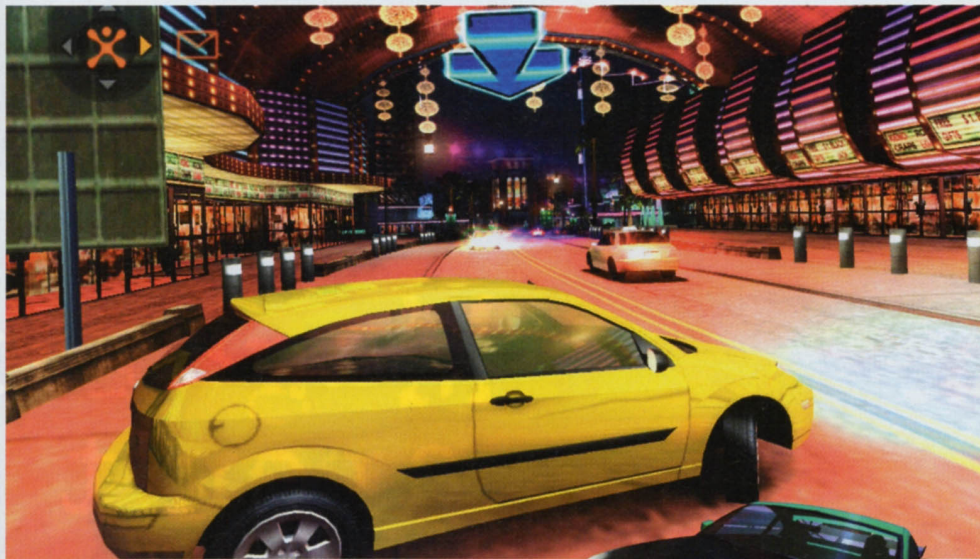
It couldn't be any more urban if it tried.

won't win any Oscars, particularly as it also features a cameo from Kelly Brook, but it does make it more of a rounded experience than previously. Musically, the EA Trax are again in full effect, this time featuring less hip hop and more shouting.

Ultimately though, it's all about the racing, which is rarely

less than gripping. For an arcade game, it's even surprisingly playable with a steering wheel, with near misses causing no small amount of amateurish flinching. If you can't afford to attach largely pointless gadgets to your otherwise moribund vehicle, this is the next best thing. **PCZ**

INPERSPECTIVE

NEED FOR SPEED: UNDERGROUND
Reviewed issue 137, 85%
Essentially the same game, but in a more rigid format.

MIDNIGHT CLUB II
Reviewed issue 133, 81%
Street racing, hippety-hoppety tunes, all that stuff.

The soundtrack's got Killing Joke! Ask your Dad.

Earn extra credit for skids and that.

PCZONE VERDICT

✔ Sense of speed
✔ Free-roaming gameplay
✔ Online action
✗ Erratic AI
✗ No damage
✗ Starts slowly

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Fast and furious

Balls like cauliflowers and ears like nutsacks.

A moose-launching catapult. Where else but in *Worms*?

Big explosions, no dents. That's new.

WORMS FORTS: UNDER SIEGE

■ £29.99 | Pub: Sega | Dev: Team17 | ETA: Out Now | www.team17.com

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card DESIRES P4 1.4GHz, 512MB RAM and a 128MB 3D card

The wriggling warriors are back, and this time they have bricks in their arsenal. *Richie Shoemaker* prepares his mortar

THE developer of *Worms* has pretty much stuck to the same formula over the last decade, polishing and building on the success of the first game which had players taking turns to fire outrageous weapons at worms and landscape alike. Then last year Team17 belatedly went 3D, and despite being a touch more complicated to control and a smidge less epic in scope, *Worms 3D* was a promising new beginning for our annelid heroes. Now, barely a year on, Team17 has built upon its success literally, offering what is undoubtedly the most unique in the *Worms* series to date.

Worms Forts gives our slimy chums the ability to erect towers, castles and citadels with the ultimate aim to destroy the Stronghold of your opponent before he destroys yours. You start the game perched upon your HQ and must first build a tower on an adjacent flat area. Build it on a space marked by a spinning star and you claim a victory location. The more victory locations, the bigger the buildings you can erect. Once the building's up, jump onto the tower, select a weapon and fire.

Some weapons can only be fired from the tops of buildings, like giant fridge-flinging launchers, whilst more traditional weapons like grenades and bazookas can be fired from anywhere. The only thing to remember is that when you place your buildings, they have to be next to each other. So, if one tower links all the other buildings you own to your Stronghold and it crumbles, the rest will fall and you will lose access to all that weaponry.

DESTROY ALL WORMS

Whilst the game offers much more scope for construction than ever before, the level of destruction is less impressive. Other than knocking down opposing structures, the terrain cannot be altered in any way, which basically limits strategy. Furthermore, because all the best weapons are only available on the largest buildings, the action is always focused in the same areas. Whilst it is possible to win by eliminating all the enemy worms one by one, with so much brickwork springing up and maps that are far bigger than ever before, taking out a worm from range is often futile.

As with *Worms 3D* the single-player campaign is more than worthwhile, offering a kind of platform game interspersed with turn-based strategy in which the further you progress, the more multiplayer options and features are unlocked. Similarly, the game doesn't break with tradition in that it remains easy to learn and fun to play whatever your level of proficiency. However, the worms themselves are no longer the stars – the buildings are. In fact, having to manoeuvre the worms to the top of high towers in order to fire weapons gets in the way of the fun. Ironically *Worms Forts* would probably be a faster and more intense game if worms didn't feature at all. Read into that what you will. **PCZ**

INPERSPECTIVE

WORMS 3D
Reviewed Issue 136, Score 80%
As they should be, the worms were the stars and whilst the old 2D games were faster, funnier and more frantic, the move to 3D was generally a successful one.

HOGS OF WAR
Reviewed Issue 98, Score 48%
A predictably embarrassing take on the Scorched Earth concept, the best feature being that the pigs were voiced by Rik Mayall.

Launch the old lady with the stairlift.

For best results, use an explosive Mexican.

PCZONE VERDICT

✔ Unique
✔ Big maps
✔ Plenty of single and multiplayer options to explore
✗ Fixed terrain
✗ Limited strategy

68

Less than the sum of its parts

FRITZ CHESS 8

PCZONE Z ESSENTIAL

■ £25 | Pub: Excalibur | Dev: Chessbase | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PI 466MHz, 32MB RAM **DESIRES** PIII 700MHz, 64MB RAM and a 4MB 3D card

Steve O'Hagan gets beaten by a bloke called Fritz

Whose turn is it again? I dozed off a minute.

IN case you don't know, chess is an abstract turn-based strategy game traditionally played out on a chequerboard map using a selection of wooden figurines. The fact that *Fritz* has had seven previous versions tells you something about the staying power of this particular franchise.

Initially unhappy with the weak back-story and lacklustre plot, we soon warmed to *Fritz 8*. It's a seriously powerful opponent (it's beaten Kasparov, apparently) as well as an easily tailored training tool and game analyser. In an annoying voice, it can tell you what you've done wrong, and what you should have done instead and why. You can even play in Friend mode where the bloody thing makes small talk with you while you play, although if you're in need of such companionship, it's clearly time to start worrying.

If you're a chess fan, get hold of *Fritz 8* and your game will improve in no time at all. To be honest, this is a pretty impressive package, with everything you could possibly want from a chess game. We still prefer *Doom 3* though.

PCZONE VERDICT 85

Great, but it's still chess

PITFALL: THE LOST EXPEDITION

■ £19.99 | Pub: Aspyr | Dev: Beenox | ETA: Out Now

PITFALL, shitfall, you might think, knowing that this is a conversion of the lukewarmly received console game released earlier this year. But it's not all that bad. What you've got is a cheery platforming adventure that might end up annoying the bejeezus out of you, but could be a good buy for a younger family member – should they be among the .01 per cent of the pre-pubescent population that doesn't have a console.

Based on a classic platformer of yore, *Pitfall* is nicely presented in a mock-*Indiana Jones* style. There's a bit of fighting, a bit of puzzling and plenty of platforming in a *Prince Of Persia* kind of way, set in some cutesy jungle and lost-civilisation environments.

There's little innovation going on, but provided you've got a joypad to play it with, *Pitfall* is fairly fun, and stuffed with plentiful mini-games to keep you distracted for the odd half hour. However, it's also saddled with the usual fallibilities of the genre: clunky camera, clichéd puzzles, annoyingly difficult bits – so we won't go overboard.

Steve O'Hagan

"You looking for the ruins of that lost civilisation? Up this way, mate."

Give him a whip and Sean Connery for a dad and he could be Indy.

PCZONE VERDICT 59

POOL SHARK 2

■ £19.99 | Pub: GMX Media | Dev: Buka Ent. | ETA: Out Now

FOR MOST, pool is best played in the back room of a pub with a bunch of mates after several pints of Stella and ten packets of fags – not in front of a monitor with a Cup-a-Soup. Nevertheless, if you're keen on home-based hustling, here's another game to tickle you with its cue.

The big boast in *PS2* is its physics – the developer has got a really good feel going on with the way the balls crash around the table. You can easily apply spin, screw and stun, although the mouse aiming system can be a little sensitive.

Single-player is all about the Hustle mode where you play for cash against a succession of low-lives, trying to convince opponents that you're crapper than you are so the other guy bets more money. Fun for a while, though hustling an AI routine ultimately wears thin.

Otherwise, there's rotation pool, 10-pin pool, three-ball pool – every variation you can think of. Great for a few frames at lunchtime on a LAN or online.

Steve O'Hagan

PCZONE VERDICT 65

SONIC HEROES

■ £19.99 | Pub: Sega | Dev: Sonic Team
ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 128MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card
DESIRES P4 2GHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

The boss 'hog may be a console boy, but *Anthony Holden* finds him in good form

SONIC the Hedgehog has a lot to answer for. I'm not talking about all the rubbish merchandise he's spawned over the years, but the fact that he may well have killed off the Dreamcast. *Sonic Adventure 1* and *2* – the first Sonic games in 3D – were a bit shit. Sure they had their moments, but they were hardly the must-have masterpieces you expect from a company mascot.

Now, four years too late, Sega is finally starting to get 3D Sonic right, and *Sonic Heroes* is the highly likeable result. Eschewing all the woeful 'adventure' elements of recent titles, *Sonic Heroes* puts the focus back on breakneck dashes through mad architectural dreamscapes, with all the loops, corkscrews, bounce pads and boss battles your watering eyes can handle.

The gameplay is still remarkably simple – go fast, collect rings, bop the occasional robot on the head. The key difference here is that instead of running solo, you now control a team of three characters. In the case of Team Sonic, that means the blue streak is flanked by Knuckles and Tails, though there are three other teams to choose from as well – Teams Dark, Rose and Chaotix.

At the flick of a button (or mouse-wheel if you must), your team changes formation, and with it the character you're controlling, giving you access to a different set of abilities and insane special attacks. Sonic is fast, Tails can fly, Knuckles can punch through blocks. You get the picture.

The action is bewildering and frenetic, the challenge is minimal and the usual camera problems persist, but this is still an exuberantly entertaining game.

Of course, it's all squarely aimed at kids, but who cares?

PCZONE VERDICT 79
The best *Sonic* in years

SUPERPOWER 2

■ £19.99 | Pub: DreamCatcher | Dev: Golem Labs
ETA: Out Now | www.superpower2game.com.

REQUIRES 1.5GHz processor, 256MB RAM and a 64MB DirectX9.0c-compatible graphics card
DESIRES 2.0GHz processor, 512MB RAM, 128MB DirectX9.0c-compatible graphics card and a modem

Richie Shoemaker has his finger on the button

IT MIGHT not seem an obvious comparison, as one is a simulation of managing the beautiful game, the other a simulation of a game far from beautiful, but *SuperPower 2* is very much the *Champ Manager* (or, should that be *Football Manager*?) of global real-time strategy. Or, at least, that's what it aspires to be.

Based on a wealth of outdated CIA and US government statistical data (much of it no doubt outdated when it was in official use – going by recent events), the game allows you to take charge of any world nation and transform it into a global superpower, whether by economic, political or military means. You can elect to play as the benevolent democrat, or a power-mad dictator, bring about revolution by hiring terrorist thugs, or go all Christian Fundamentalist Republican and nuke any slimy sonofabitch who doesn't bend to your whim. Anything goes, really.

The problem, much like with the original, is that whilst all the elements are there to have a fine old time, the game lacks any real frame on which to hang your ambitions. What scenarios are present act as simple tutorials, and unless you set yourself clear objectives, it's all too easy to coast along until you can take no more and then resort to Armageddon in the hope that genocide will liven things up.

Sadly, even when you do put some effort in, the game either rewards you with terse interpretation or streams of useless information, and navigating the sinuous menus often leaves you at confusing dead ends.

Simply put, the game is far too layered, the structure too woolly, and the mechanics just too simple to offer any tangible feeling of involvement – but, hey, that's realism for you.

The battles are awful. Rolling marbles would be more fun.

Research your own military units.

Sometimes the big red button just needs to be pushed.

PCZONE VERDICT 58
Imbalance of power

REPLAY

Anthony Holden feels something cheap in a stocking

BLACK & WHITE

■ £4.99 | Pub: Sold Out | ETA: Out Now

NOW HERE'S something that'll twist the melon of veteran *PC ZONERs* – it's been 50 issues since we first reviewed *Black & White*. Seems like only yesterday, doesn't it? Remarkably, the game has yet to be matched or even threatened by any other title in the four intervening years, its supremely ambitious mix of role-playing, strategy and lifelike AI ensuring its place as a god among mortals. Only the sequel is likely to topple it, but knowing Molyneux that could be decades away.

Despite the years, *Black & White* is still hugely impressive. The open-ended good or evil gameplay has some widely acknowledged flaws, but there's still an enormous amount of joy to be had simply exploring all the options. The creatures, while considered only a partial success by Lionhead, remain a masterstroke, and imbue the game with a sense of warmth and enchantment most games could only dream of.

Of course, the game was roundly criticised on release for being unfinished and riddled with bugs, but rest assured this version includes the latest patch. As such there's really no excuse – *Black & White* is an all-time classic game that no PC gamer should be without.

"Whipsnade has certainly upped its game lately."

Once a classic, always a classic.

PCZONE VERDICT 90

OPERATION FLASHPOINT: COLD WAR CRISIS

■ £4.99 | Pub: Sold Out | ETA: Out Now

ANY OTHER month and this would have been a dead cert for Best Buy. Yes the graphics are dated and the animations comical, but *Operation Flashpoint: Cold War Crisis* is still one of the greatest war-themed games on the market. And indeed, one of the greatest ever.

Despite this, we'd forgive you if you've never played the game, as its reputation for hardcore realism is not unjustified. In parts, it's an uncompromising simulation of the toughest kind, but it's a challenge you'll relish once you get a taste of it.

Part of *Op Flashpoint*'s appeal is its sheer variety. The game takes in everything from tactical squad-based action to solo stealth missions, with a slew of ground vehicles and helicopters to pilot later in the piece. There's loads of great add-on material too, both official and player-made, that could keep you going for months.

For a combination of challenge, excitement and scale, few games come close, and for this price we can't see how you could refuse.

Who needs *Battlefield*?

PCZONE VERDICT 87

C&C: RED ALERT 2

■ £4.99 | Pub: Sold Out | ETA: Out Now

AH, SUCH memories. The fierce skirmishes, the wonderful units, the frankly stupid time travel plotline. *Red Alert 2* was for me the last of the great *Command & Conquer* games, effectively the end of the 2D era, and the last time the formula was successfully reworked before I just got thoroughly sick of it and began to look elsewhere.

Playing it today, the strength of *Red Alert 2* is in the countless ingenious units, many of them introduced or improved since the previous game. Build and rush it may be, but the number of ways you can use and combine units results in enormous scope for tactical subtlety.

Whether you would still play it today is another question. I mean, it's 2D for God's sake, and there are behemoths like *Rome: Total War* to contend with. But if all that 3D rotation gives you a headache, and all that historical mumbo-jumbo bores you senseless, then this is one trip down memory lane you might want to consider.

PCZONE VERDICT 70

Michael Fish's worst nightmare comes true.

"Curse that *City Of Heroes*, stealing all our thunder."

FREEDOM FORCE

PCZONE ESSENTIAL

■ £4.99 | Pub: Sold Out | ETA: Out Now

I CHALLENGE anyone not to like this game. You may not be into role-players, you may not like superheroes – it doesn't matter. Unless you're fundamentally opposed to the idea of having a smile on your face, you will enjoy *Freedom Force* immensely.

The concept is basically a combat-heavy RPG set in a richly detailed comic book world. You have to form a group of superheroes, complete missions and gradually train your heroes towards defeating the evil Lord Dominion. It could

very well have been rubbish, but in the hands of *System Shock 2* developer Irrational, it's pure joy.

The combat system alone is brilliant. Following the pausable real-time style of *Baldur's Gate* et al, battles are at once tactical and enormous fun, thanks in part to the hugely varied character powers.

Beyond this, the game simply radiates charm, and with the sequel about to land there's no time to lose.

PCZONE VERDICT **87**

Top marks for effort. But not much else.

IRON STORM

■ £4.99 | Pub: Sold Out | ETA: Out Now

IT MIGHT appear that we were remarkably generous to *Iron Storm* when we first reviewed it – 77 per cent for what is essentially an ugly and technically moribund shooter set in a bland, alternative history battleground. But there's more to this game than meets the eye – literally. For all its low-rent, B-grade origins, *Iron Storm* tries its little heart out to better itself. There's a strong and detailed plot, reels of competent voice work and a host of quirky additions designed to lift the game above the

predictable. Like the exploding rottweilers, for example.

However, none of this disguises the fact that it looks like mud, has dismal AI and is clunky to play. On top of that, you spend much of the game's opening chapters running through featureless trenches – hardly riveting.

Iron Storm might have got a sympathy vote two years ago, but in the dying breaths of 2004 it's just not good enough.

PCZONE VERDICT **59**

CLIVE BARKER'S UNDYING

PCZONE ESSENTIAL

■ £4.99 | Pub: Sold Out | ETA: Out Now

NOW HERE'S a shooter that is worth revisiting. One of those inexplicable games that everybody loved but nobody bought, *Clive Barker's Undying* was one of the finest shooters of 2001, not to mention one of the most successfully scary games of all time.

At the time, it looked amazing, with fabulous animations and spell effects courtesy of the steady old Unreal engine. Even now it looks alright, thanks to the lavish detail of the haunted environments.

As a result, the magnificently creepy atmosphere manages to retain much of its conviction, and the game is still capable of delivering moments of sheer terror.

Admittedly, the lack of interaction with the environment (you can't even open

doors) seems odd, but overall this is still a worthwhile experience. (Unless you've got a weak heart, in which case we recommend *Eve Online*. And lots of rest.)

Scary as a razor-blade pasty.

PCZONE VERDICT **81**

LEFTOVERS

▲ **PLEASE SIR, CAN I HAVE SOME MORE?**

It's Christmas time and our stockings are bulging with barely contained excitement, so let's get straight down to business.

First up is 2002 movie tie-in *The Thing* (Sold Out, £4.99, Out Now). This third-person actioner had some great ideas, most of them botched, resulting in a disappointing overall experience: 68 per cent.

Still, it wasn't nearly as disappointing as *Global Ops* (Sold Out, £4.99, Out Now). Once touted as a *Counter-Strike* beater, this team-based FPS was anything but, and you'll only find a handful of desperados playing it now. A lowly 55 per cent.

Next on the cards is *The Great Escape* (Sold Out, £4.99, Out Now), a rubbish stealth game and undeserved Christmas hit of 2003. Give it a miss and watch the film instead. 48 per cent.
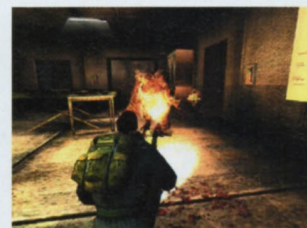
The lame movie licences keep floating in with *The Italian Job* (Sold Out, £4.99, Out Now), a low-budget arcade racer ported from the PSone, would you believe. Discerning driving (and film) fans beware: 45 per cent.

Breaking the solid run of Sold Out games for a second, we come to *In Memoriam* (Focus Multimedia, £9.99, Out Now), the surprisingly non-crap puzzle-adventure game from early 2004. If you want an offbeat challenge with a genuinely creepy tone, this is a solid bet: 82 per cent.

More traditional budget offerings come in the form of *Theme Park, Inc* (Sold Out, £4.99, Out Now). Four years old and it's not getting any better with age, this is one of the worst examples of the genre. Try *RollerCoaster Tycoon 3* instead: 30 per cent.

We're running out of room, so it's lucky that *Road To India* (Sold Out, £4.99, Out Now) can be dismissed out of hand. If you haven't even heard of it, sorry for bringing it to your attention. A simple and ridiculously short adventure game, it gets just 51 per cent.

▼ That's your lot then – revise your letters to Santa now.

The Thing: disappointing.

The Great Escape: B-list.

Global Ops: desperate.

Too fast to chase

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FEEDBACK

As someone very wise once noted, there's a thin line between love and hate. Whatever you think of a game, write in and tell *Will Porter* all about it. It's what he lives for after all...

TRIBES: VENGEANCE
REVIEWED ISSUE 147 (BY WILL PORTER), SCORE: 87%

What we thought

It's a game with some rarely seen sparkle. Whether it's the remarkable fluidity or the epic five-character narrative that leaps from generation to generation – it's clear that *Vengeance* is on to something good.

What you said

Well, let's see. What I must say first is that I was a *Tribes 2* fan – and then I played *Tribes: Vengeance*. As a separate game I loved it, but even though it's a fun game, it just doesn't stick to the formula. *Tribes 2* was exclusive, it appealed to a limited crowd and to all those people it was a special, communal experience. *Vengeance* is just too commercial, and the *UT2004* engine makes it too jolly looking. The single-player is great but it's just not *Tribes*. It's JUST NOT *TRIBES*.

Ruffled_Squirrel

Some of the timed missions make me want to cry, but overall *Tribes: Vengeance* is a really fun experience. The Mercury missions are, I reckon, some of the best levels I've played since *Far Cry* – although I completely disagree with your reviewer when he claims that the ground vehicles are useless.

Richard Oakley

Will says

Squirrel (if indeed that is your real name), Bob Dylan once sang that the times are a-changin'. They've changed for you, but I'm afraid that you're going to have to suck it up.

There are plenty of mods up and coming to restore the *Tribes* fundamentals of old, but I can't help but think that it's a good thing that the freedom and kinetic nature of *Tribes* now has an outlet to the mainstream. And Oakley, as for you, you're impressively wrong: air vehicles good, ground vehicles with funny boosters bad.

THE SIMS 2
REVIEWED ISSUE 147 (BY STEVE HILL), SCORE: 82%

What we thought

While we fully expect to grow to hate it – and the inevitable flurry of hateful expansion packs – for the time being we're hooked.

What you said

I'll admit that the interactions between characters may be better, more informative and animated. However, apart from the fancy 3D graphical flourishes and supposed gameplay enhancements (aka the goals/aspirations meters) the game plays and feels *exactly* like the original *Sims*. In fact, when you're playing there isn't really a difference apart from the hyped-up aesthetics. It's just too depressing – no doubt EA will have lined up a new progeny already for the public to gorge themselves on next time round – straight from the very bowels of hell.

Chris180000

Not that I've played it of course, (I'm far too mature for this sort of thing, honest) but what a load of poop. Yes it has better graphics, yes it's fun to distort peoples faces with the Sim creation tool, but apart from that there is nothing new. In fact, I would say its worse than the original *Sims* because it's bugged beyond belief for a game that's been in development for so long. Invisible visitors, flying teddy bears, disappearing kids never to be seen again – it's a mess. Plus it needs a *Doom 3* PC just to run properly. Avoid.

*_Rich_*

Steve says

The old argument that it's the same as the original can be applied to many things. It's like saying you don't want to watch your brand new 36-inch surround-sound TV because it's the same as the shit portable that you've had since college. *The Sims 2* reflects the rapid advances in technology, and as such is bigger, bolder and brighter than its prequel. As for the bugs, well I didn't see any – sounds more like a Sim Poltergeist to me.

FIFA FOOTBALL 2005
REVIEWED ISSUE 147 (BY STEVE HILL) SCORE: 60%

What we thought

With the new First Touch feature largely redundant, you're simply left with yet another sluggish, indistinguishable *FIFA* game.

What you said

I've got to say your review of *FIFA 2005* was spot on. You seem to be the only magazine that doesn't overrate everything. The impression I got from other magazines, was that *FIFA* had really closed the gap on *PES*. After renting *PES* for PS2 (waiting for the PC version) and playing *FIFA 2005* on PC, the difference is as big as it ever was for me. Well done for getting it right (again).

Carruthers43

"Well, I've played *FIFA 2005* and I really didn't mind it"
THAT'S CALLED DAMNING WITH FAINT PRAISE, MICHAEL

Shit and treacle, eh? Well, I've played *FIFA 2005* and I really didn't mind it. It looks gorgeous, it's got all the teams present, correct and looking right, and it's great fun to play. I'm sure that your little pet *Pro Evo 4* will be better, but come on... 60 per cent? That's a bit harsh for a game that so many people love and worship, isn't it?

Michael Dean

Steve says

My review was, of course, the only one that mattered, with everyone else seemingly blinded by the franchise, even to the extent of pointing out a list of flaws and then awarding it crazy high scores. As ever, *FIFA Football 2005* is a triumph of marketing over content, and while the console version borders on playable, on the PC it's a sluggish chore, not fit to lace the boots of *PES4*. Michael Dean, your letter is a selection of media-friendly soundbites. Go away. **PCZ**

SUPERTEST: FRANCHISE GAMES

Martin Korda leads the *PC ZONE* panel to the past, present and future to discover the greatest PC franchise of all time

THE CONTENDERS

	MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIMULATOR STARTED: 1982
	CHAMP MANAGER & FOOTBALL MANAGER 2005 STARTED: 1992
	DOOM STARTED: 1993
	FIFA FOOTBALL STARTED: 1993
	COMMAND & CONQUER STARTED: 1995
	QUAKE STARTED: 1996
	TOMB RAIDER STARTED: 1996
	UNREAL STARTED: 1998

THE CURSE

of the games industry? Curtailers of originality? Cynical marketing ploys? Franchises have been called all of these things. What's often forgotten though, is that franchises can also be used for the good of the games industry, their mass popularity providing a stable financial base for developers to push out the boundaries of technology and gameplay with every new title.

THE JURY

	DAVE 'RAMPAGE' WOODS
	MARTIN 'THE GENERAL' KORDA
	WILL 'TOTALLY UNREAL' PORTER
	PAUL 'THE NAVIGATOR' PRESLEY
	JAMIE 'BFG' SEFTON
	STEVE 'THE GAFFER' HILL

So we've decided to check out some of the longest-running and most popular franchises in the history of PC gaming, to see how they've evolved from their early days.

We'll be separating the cynical cash-ins from the genuine innovators and seeing which franchises have a future and which ones need to take serious action to stop themselves disappearing forever.

It's a hell of line-up, with the likes of *GTA*, *The Sims*, *Age Of Empires* and *Civilization* not even managing to make the shortlist. So without further introduction, let's head to the boozer, get the beers in and find out what is the greatest PC franchise of all time…

DOOM

Dave: *Doom* was the game that changed everything for pretty much everyone here. It was also the first time I experienced multiplayer gaming over the Internet. As a franchise, there were the first two games, then it stopped being a franchise until they decided to resurrect it with *Doom 3*, and it's actually gone nowhere.
Jamie: id has built its entire reputation on *Quake* and *Doom*. *Doom 3* is a beautiful game to look at, but it doesn't take the FPS anywhere new. In fact, it's gone backwards and doesn't feel

as fast as the first two games.

Steve: It's scarcely a franchise. There was too big a gap.

Will: I enjoyed the game, but it's true that it hasn't evolved at all, not like other shooters have.

Martin: Exactly. *Doom 3* only has one or two enemies on screen at a time.

Paul: But it's stuck to its guns. It's more of a technological advancement than a gameplay advancement.

Jamie: I'd say that games like *Painkiller* are more like the original *Doom* than *Doom 3* is.

Martin: That last level of *Doom* was amazing, when all of those enemies kept spawning. *Doom 3* has nothing like that.

Dave: *Doom 3* is brilliant though. It's scary and disturbing, and you have to play it if you own a PC.

Paul: Games like *Serious Sam* have gone down the route of trying to cram as many enemies on the screen as possible, but I think *Doom* has evolved by trying to concentrate on making every enemy as detailed and realistic as possible.

Martin: But as a franchise, it hasn't really evolved. It used to be the best shooter on the block, now it's more of an exhibition for your graphics card.

Paul: But isn't that the idea of franchises, not to evolve too much from their original concept?

Martin: Sure, to an extent that's true, but just evolving graphically isn't good enough in my book.

Jamie: It's about the engine and being able to sell the technology. It's a fantastic engine.

Dave: Definitely, but it's not the best engine out there. It's very constrained considering that the likes of the Source and Unreal engines enable you to render vast open spaces. There are loads of restrictions in *Doom 3* that don't allow the world to react like it should, like shooting a TV screen and getting the old *Doom* smudge on it rather than seeing it shatter.

Paul: There are so many other better and more versatile engines – as a franchise, I think *Doom* could be dead.

Will: It's not dead. And anything

that generates as much money as *Doom* will keep going.

Paul: FPS franchises are always reliant on licensing their technologies to a certain extent. But with the Unreal engine looking so good and versatile, who's going to want to use the *Doom 3* engine when they can have the Unreal engine instead?

QUAKE

Dave: *Quake III* was a classic game. I only ever really use two weapons, the Railgun and rocket launcher, which are possibly the two finest weapons ever to feature in an FPS.

Steve: I'm still playing the demo online. There are always loads of people to play it against.

Jamie: The pace of it is the coolest thing.

Martin: Unlike *Doom*, *Quake* really feels like it's evolved. id realised the *Quake III* engine was perfect for multiplayer gaming, and so took the bold step of going predominantly in that direction, and it really worked. It's one of the few older shooters I'd still happily play now.

Will: I hated *Quake III*. It was instafrag bullshit and not nearly as good as *Unreal Tournament*.

Dave: From what we've heard about *Quake IV*, it's going to be as fast and frantic as *Quake III*. I've got great hopes for *Quake IV* – it even has outdoor sections.

Hill: I can see the *Quake* franchise going the same way as *Doom*, just relying on more and more technology to sell itself.

Martin: But what about its return to having a proper single-player game – surely that's going to give *Quake IV* the edge?

Will: It's great news for the franchise. I still love *Quake I & II*. The first time you got attacked by

those chainsaw-wielding ogres was just amazing, so hopefully that kind of thing will return in *IV*.

Jamie: I'm all for it too. After all, why can't you have a good single-player and multiplayer game in the same package?

Martin: Which is hopefully what we'll get. The single-player games of *Quake I & II* were superb, then they mastered the multiplayer games in *Quake III*. With a bit of luck, *IV* will have the best from all three games.

Dave: *Quake* has always been well ahead of its time and is perhaps the franchise that's evolved the most. It's always given people what they wanted, even *Quake III*, because playing shooters online at the time was really taking off and everyone wanted a really fast shooter. The fact that it's still so widely played now is testament to how good it is. Hopefully, *Quake IV* should make the *Quake* franchises far more long-lasting than *Doom*.

FIFA

Steve: It's probably the truest franchise here. They've just got the official licence and are just raping people for money. It's a franchise, just like Manchester United is a franchise.

Dave: One thing you can say

about Man U is that at least they play good football, unlike *FIFA*.

Steve: Every now and then, a half-decent version such as *'99* comes out – but mostly, they're all shit. Every year they just concentrate on one gimmick to sell the game. This year it was the one-touch feature. It's like buying your team's new football strip that's got a slightly different collar to last year.

Jamie: It doesn't feel anything like real football. In the latest version, I dribbled to the halfway line and, without me doing anything, my player just kept 'stylishly' flicking the ball. *(Jamie starts beating his fist on the table.)*

Jamie: I just want to be able to

take the ball from A to B. And what's this f***ing 'Text' choice on corners? *(Beer spills as Jamie's fist connects with the table. Everybody dabs themselves dry.)*

Jamie: This is an arcade football game not *Monkey Island*. It makes no sense… *(Jamie sits back and mutters to himself angrily.)*

Hill: In *FIFA 2005*, you actively don't want to win a corner, because taking them is rubbish.

Will: *Pro Evo* plays like real football. But *FIFA* plays like it's been created by someone who's only ever seen one match before going out and making the game.

Jamie: The series does have an amazing level of detail though. I

Doom has made massive changes in graphics and technology, but not much in terms of gameplay.

Quake I & II nailed single-player gameplay. *Quake III* nailed multiplayer. Can *Quake IV* nail both?

was playing as Leeds and the crowd was singing Leeds songs.

Paul: That's what the franchise bases itself on, giving the player lifelike recreations of their heroes and teams, as well as having all of the latest kits.

Steve: The *FIFA* franchise makes more money than *Star Wars*.

Paul: That's because EA always generates so much hype about every game.

Martin: Which is amazing considering just how similar each one is.

Steve: Whenever you talk to EA about *FIFA*, it's always going on about its marketing value rather than the gameplay. It's basically all about making sure David Beckham has all of his new tattoos. It's a victory for marketing.

TOMB RAIDER

Jamie: I think there's still a lot of life left in the licence. If they get the next one right, it'll be OK.

Dave: It's a franchise that really kick-started something new on the PC. I've still got great memories of the early games, it's just a shame what the company did with the later ones. The next game is being made by an excellent developer – Crystal Dynamics – so it could be great. It could revive the franchise.

Paul: How many of these franchises can claim to have spawned two films, countless comic books and sold so much branded merchandise though?

Martin: Core made three very good but similar games, then realised it could make loads more money from the franchise,

so just rested on it laurels and knocked out sub-standard games in the hope they'd sell.

Dave: Core didn't try to evolve the series at all. It kept using the same really restrictive engine.

Paul: It's spawned so many games that it's even stopped using numbers. Now it's all *Tomb Raider: Chronicle* or *Tomb Raider: The Angel Of Darkness*. If you manage to do that, then you have a successful franchise.

Steve: And when you do that, anyone not in the know will walk into a shop and buy a game with *Tomb Raider* in the title, not knowing how old it is.

Will: It's all about what Lara looks like.

Martin: Like *FIFA*, it's become too reliant on gimmicks. The later games became more about what she was wearing and how big her tits were than about the gameplay.

Jamie: It's really lost its way and forgotten all the good things from the earlier games, like all the exploration you used to do.

Martin: When Core killed her off, it then announced that Lara would return in an all-new game, with new characters and revamped gameplay, but it was all a load of bollocks. The games have been getting steadily worse for years.

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER & FOOTBALL MANAGER 2005

Steve: As we all know, *Football Manager 2005* has been made by the same people who made all of the *Championship Manager* games up to *03/04*. And it's also come out before the new *Champ Man 5*, which is being developed by a totally different team. I think this could be a real problem for *CM5*. *FM2005* is so good and true to the previous *Champ Man* games.

Paul: Unlike *FIFA*, *Champ Man* fans know that *Football Manager* has been developed by the team behind all of the previous

Hot pants and guns? Why, hello Lara...

Champ Man games, which is why I can't see the *Champ Man* franchise lasting for much longer.

Martin: But *Champ Man* sells millions of copies in the UK alone. I think the next *Champ Man* will still sell well, but unless it's really good, the franchise could be dead and buried.

Steve: At its core, the franchise is still the same number-crunching hardcore game which creates accurate results and depicts believable football. It's never been about the brand. It's developed organically and its success has spread through word of mouth.

Martin: The games have always been so accurate – in fact, they just keep getting more accurate with every version. Sports Interactive has got thousands of scouts all round the world who write detailed reports on players from every team in countless countries.

Every single game has been capable of taking over your life. No other franchise here can boast a record like that.

Paul: But it's a very localised franchise, very successful in Europe but not anywhere else.

Martin: So what about *Champ Man 5*?

Steve: It's a totally different team who're starting the game from scratch. Sports Interactive has been working on its games since its founders were at school. It know it's got a big job on its hands. After all, you can't recreate almost two decades of work in under two years.

Dave: There's also been a lot of negative feedback about *CM5* after plays of the early versions.

Steve: You'll be able to rush through a match in seconds in *Champ Man 5*. They're making a really big thing of that.
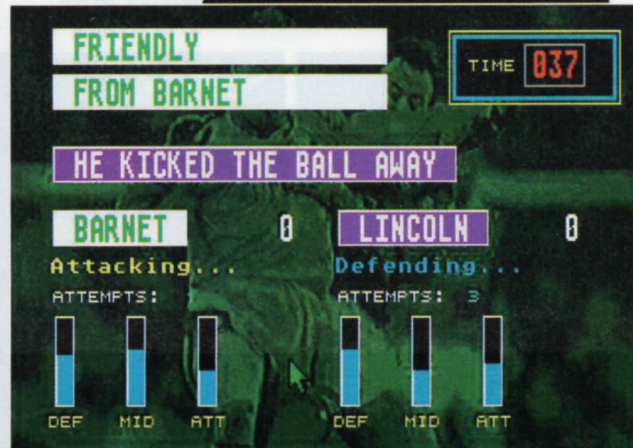
Martin: That's contrary to the ethos of the series though. Is it being done because they don't

"Every game has been capable of taking over your life – what other franchise can boast that?"
MARTIN KORDA KNOWS THE POWER OF *CM/FM2005*

The *FIFA* series has never captured 'real' football.

FRIENDLY FROM BARNET

TIME **037**

HE KICKED THE BALL AWAY

BARNET 0 LINCOLN 0

Attacking... Defending...

ATTEMPTS: ATTEMPTS: 3

DEF MID ATT DEF MID ATT

Yeovil 0 66:41 2 Chester

A wonderful goal !!

Champ Man first appeared 15 years ago and has flourished ever since. *FM2005* is a *Champ Man* game in everything but name.

MFS: the series has made massive strides in terms of graphics and realism.

want you to see how inferior the match engine is to *FM2005*?

Steve: It's always been about that ten minutes of watching the game.

Martin: Yeah, because the Sports Interactive games have always recreated matches so realistically, especially now it's got the 2D match engine. That was a massive evolution.

COMMAND & CONQUER

Paul: It's a franchise that's only known by the hardcore market.

Will: Westwood nailed the series with the first game, then improved on it with *Red Alert*…

Martin: Not even *Red Alert* was that much of an improvement, though both of the first two games were phenomenal.

Will: Then it kept doing the same things again and again…

Paul: And the graphics got better.

Martin: *Generals* did display a modicum of change – it finally went 3D and had a smattering of tactics. I don't think that only hardcore gamers have bought the games though, as they're all fairly mainstream. There's nothing remotely complicated about any of them.

Steve: It's become very political of late. *Generals* is all about terrorists and car-bombers.

Martin: It's taken a whole new game – *The Battle For Middle-Earth* – to finally do something new with the *C&C* system, such as streamlining the interface and adding some tactics. It's such a shame that the same step wasn't taken with the *C&C* franchise, and I think it's had its day now. The series started to die when *Tiberian Sun* came out, which was *C&C* with robots.

Paul: Or maybe *The Battle For Middle-Earth* will give the *C&C*

series the jump-start it needs.

Martin: If anything, *TBFME* proves what we've been harping on about for years – you can put strategy into RTS games and still make them mainstream. *C&C* never did that.

Dave: The games have always been fun though.

Martin: If they were to resurrect *C&C* and use the same approach as they have with *TBFME*, the franchise would still have legs.

Dave: But if you've got *The Lord Of The Rings*, why go back to *Command & Conquer*?

Paul: What they should do is use *C&C* as the name of the game engine, then make games based around the *C&C* engine, such as *C&C: The Lord Of The Rings*, or *C&C: Star Wars*.

Martin: This is the only one here that's moved into other genres.

Paul: True – there was that FPS, *C&C: Renegade*.

Martin: But they messed up the single-player game. The multiplayer was excellent – you felt like a unit in the RTS game. You had to protect your harvesters that gathered resources, which you could then use to respawn as different *C&C* units. It was a fantastic concept, but they never persisted with it. *C&C* has lost its magic with the buying public.

Jamie: I agree. Its profile is nowhere near as high as it was.

MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIM

Steve: Flying is partly abject boredom and partly abject terror.

Martin: Well at least the developer managed to capture the first emotion then…

Will: I like the fact you can fly really low and see how close you can get to buildings.

Martin: Yeah, that's like driving the wrong way in *Grand Prix* games because it makes them

more fun, but that's not the point. How has the series evolved?

Paul: It's been going longer than *Quake* and has always pushed the boundaries of technology.

Steve: And it can be used to train terrorists.

Paul: It's such a successful franchise that there's a whole industry out there that just churns out expansion packs for it. Unlike *FIFA*, every game in this series evolves substantially. Take the latest one, *A Century Of Flight*, which enables you to relive every historical aviation moment since flight began.

Martin: That's true, it does keep improving, like more detailed city layouts and better weather effects.

Steve: Who cares? What's next, playing as a trolley dolly going up the aisles selling duty-free?

Paul: That's the point though – people who like these games want that kind of realism, and it just goes to show how much the franchise has progressed. It's not just about graphics getting better. I'm still surprised there's no career mode though.

Steve: Yes. You could start off at EasyJet, move onto BA, screw a stewardess…

Paul: It's a fantastic simulation, but what they need to do next is put a game in there.

Martin: It seems to have evolved in so many ways in terms of realism, but as a game it's still a fairly empty experience.

UNREAL

Dave: It's such a vibrant franchise with so many strings to its bow. With most franchises, the best games often come out first – with *Unreal*, it's gone the other

way. The games just keep getting better, especially the *Unreal Tournament* games. The Unreal engine will soon be the most licensed FPS engine out there. It's just so scalable.

Paul: The franchise is massive within the gaming community, but almost unknown outside it.

Will: That's true. You can't imagine an *Unreal* film ever being made can you? I didn't think the single-player games were up to much, but the multiplayer games are amazing.

Jamie: After I played *UT2003*, I spoke with the guys at Epic who claimed that *UT2004* would be much better. I was sceptical at the time, but it was. It was a huge leap forward from *2003*.

Paul: The gaming concept didn't change, but the way it came together in *UT2004* was amazing.

Martin: It's all about the vehicles now. It was an obvious step, but *UT2004* delivered in every possible way. I didn't think *UT* would work well with vehicles, but I was proved very wrong.

Dave: In terms of franchise, Epic has the best business model of them all, even though *Unreal* isn't half as universally recognisable as some of the other franchises here. In the future, more and more games will use the Unreal engine. In terms of gameplay, the series has nailed the multiplayer side of gaming, and it'll be interesting to see how *Quake IV* stacks up against it, as there's little else out there to touch the *UT* games.

Paul: I think the *Unreal* franchise will eventually kill off the *Doom* and *Quake* franchises.

Dave: Yeah, and the Unreal 3.0 engine is looking amazing.

Martin: If they manage to get that right, then *Unreal* could well be top of single- and multiplayer in no time. The series has and continues to evolve in so many directions, not only graphically, but also in its single-player and multiplayer games. **PCZ**

"With most franchises, the best games often come out first – with *Unreal*, it's the other way"

DAVE WOODS LOVES THE FEEL OF *UNREAL*

Command & Conquer took the world by storm.

In space, no-one can hear you scream L33T.

AND THE WINNER IS... CHAMP MAN & FM2005

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER & FOOTBALL MANAGER 2005 KICK ARSE

Snatching it in stoppage time, the world's favourite footy management franchise walks away with the title.

Who would have believed it? In among such behemoths as *Quake*, *Doom* and *Unreal*, it was a UK football management franchise that snatched top spot. It was close though, with runner-up *Unreal* actually accumulating more first choices than the stalwart footy sim. But in the end, *CM/FM2005* won through thanks to being consistently popular with the panel.

Perhaps it was inevitable that Steve would vote it as his top franchise of all time. "It's consistently produced good games," came his understated reason.

Will mirrored Steve's choice, saying: "*CM/FM*2005 has always had the most consistently good games – I know I can pick up and enjoy any iteration of them."

Paul bucked the trend by voting for *Microsoft Flight Sim*. "It's been going the longest and made the most amount of significant changes."

With the shooters looking dead and buried, *Unreal* suddenly made a surge, with Dave claiming *Unreal* "has so many strings to its bow and just keeps getting better and better".

Jamie was equally enthused about Epic's franchise: "It consistently innovates in the multiplayer arena, with weapons and game modes."

Martin's *Unreal* vote almost swung the entire result in *Unreal's* favour, stating: "The Unreal games are incredible and keep evolving, while the engine just gets better and better." But it wasn't to be, and *CM/FM2005* was victorious.

OUR VERDICT

THE SCORES ON THE DOORS

JURY	WINNER (2PTS)	RUNNER UP (1PT)
PAUL	MS FLIGHT SIM	CM/FM2005
WILL	CM/FM2005	QUAKE
JAMIE	UNREAL	DOOM
DAVE	UNREAL	CM/FM2005
MARTIN	UNREAL	CM/FM2005
STEVE	CM/FM2005	QUAKE

POSITION	GAME	POINTS
1ST:	CHAMP MANAGER/FM2005	7 PTS
2ND:	UNREAL	6 PTS
3RD:	MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIMULATOR	2 PTS
3RD:	QUAKE	2 PTS
5TH:	DOOM	1 PT
6TH:	COMMAND & CONQUER	0 PT
6TH:	FIFA	0 PT
6TH:	TOMB RAIDER	0 PT

OVER TO YOU

THE PEOPLE HAVE SPOKEN AND THE VOTES ARE IN

All hail the *Unreal* franchise, your clear winner.

We've had our say, now it's over to you. Whatever your thoughts and opinions, jump onto www.pczone.co.uk, register your vote and leave your comments. A big thank you if you voted and posted comments this time around. Here's a taster of what was said...

The technology has come on in leaps and bounds with each engine and it's also had an effect on the core gameplay too.
darrenmdr gets real about *Unreal*

Tomb Raider is the best franchise, because every time a game with a female lead is announced, the press rush to draw comparisons to Lara Croft.
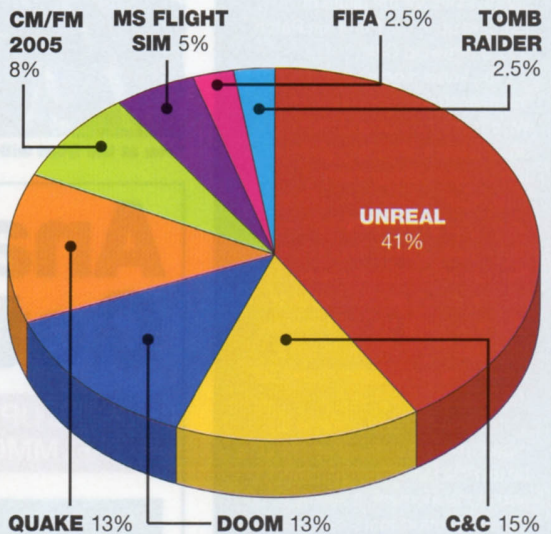**Reverend_Joseph** likes a leading lady

Command & Conquer revolutionised the RTS genre and made strategy games fun.
taimoor_h likes being in command

The *Quake* games are all about pure adrenaline-soaked shooting, and each incarnation has been significantly different from the last.
davidmc555 eulogises about *Quake*

CM/FM 2005 8% — MS FLIGHT SIM 5% — FIFA 2.5% — TOMB RAIDER 2.5% — UNREAL 41% — QUAKE 13% — DOOM 13% — C&C 15%

READER VOTES

UNREAL	.41%
COMMAND & CONQUER	.15%
DOOM	.13%
QUAKE	.13%
CHAMP MAN/FM2005	.8%
MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIMULATOR	.5%
FIFA	.2.5%
TOMB RAIDER	.2.5%

ONLINE ZONE

THE IN CROWD

■ **ONLINE EDITOR:** Paul Presley

▲ We've done it! They've cracked! First I get an email from resident MMO über-cynic Steve Hill, 'innocently' enquiring about the release date of *Guild Wars* following his experiences with this month's *NeverQuest*. Then, sensation upon sensation, I discover fearless leader Dave Woods, a man for whom a lunch hour is synonymous with six ten-minute games of *Pro Evo*, forsaking the football for the manifold delights of the *World Of Warcraft* beta. Which opened the floodgates and pretty soon even the art boys with their game-anaemic Apple G5s were forsaking Pret à Manger sandwiches for the allure of teaming up in the Pumpkin Patch and Stormwind City.

You know a genre has made it to the mainstream once even Hill and Woods are to be found sniffing around them. Which explains why the second of this month's Collectors' Issue covers has been given over to the MMO behemoth that is *EverQuest II*. Five years in the making and worth every minute. We've got the exclusive review on page 106, and trust us when we say it's going to set a whole new set of benchmarks for the genre.

It's also going to polarise the marketplace. You're either going to be an *EQII* fan or a *WOW* player, and at the moment, it seems to be Blizzard's effort that's catching the popular vote. *EQII* is every bit as good a game, but is finding it hard to shake off that hardcore lineage and gain mass acceptance. However, if any game deserves to, this is it. Now, if we can just get our production editor playing it, my ▼ work here will be done…

MARVEL VERSUS COH

WITH GREAT POWER COMES RESPONSIBILITY AND LAWSUITS

IT WASN'T quite the superhero match-up we'd all been waiting for, as Marvel Comics, home of *Spider-Man*, *The Incredible Hulk* and *X-Men*, recently filed a lawsuit against the massively popular, massively addictive, massively multiplayer *City Of Heroes*.

The complaint goes something like this: because players of *City Of Heroes* are able to create superhero likenesses that bear uncanny resemblances to Marvel creations, this infringes upon all manner of copyrights. Since NCsoft and game developer, Cryptic Studios host the servers, they are the ones responsible for the violations.

Cryptic responded to the allegation with a firm statement on its website claiming that "the complaint is meritless. Cryptic Studios is confident that the District Court will reject all of Marvel's claims and fully vindicate Cryptic Studios in all respects."

This is something of a first for the courts, ruling on the real-world repercussions of user-created content in a virtual world, and the industry will be watching the outcome like a hawk. The case continues.

"You at the front with the claws! You're nicked!"

Anarchy Online Gets A Lick Of Paint

VISUAL UPGRADE TO THE LONGEST-RUNNING SCI-FI MMORPG IS FINALLY ON THE CARDS

FOR OVER three years now, nano-warriors and meta-physicists have been faithfully logging into the world of *Anarchy Online*. With the next generation of MMOGs pushing back the boundaries of technological possibility, it now seems odd that such a forward-thinking game has such a dated-looking engine.

Luckily, developer Funcom is finally giving the inhabitants of Rubi-ka a makeover. To be implemented over the coming months, the game will see new ground textures, more vibrant colours and lush scenery, as well as more detailed character models. Which, for a game where most players have a fashion sense that would put Puff Daddy to shame, is going to make for one hell of a visual feast.

BEFORE

AFTER

WIN EVERQUEST II COLLECTORS' EDITION DVDS

TO CELEBRATE the release of *EverQuest II*, the fearsome warriors of *PC ZONE* have formed a party with the mighty magicians at Sony Online Entertainment to bring you a competition of truly ogre-slaying proportions.

We've got five copies of the *EverQuest II* Collectors' Edition DVD to give away to five lucky readers. These exclusive DVD packages contain a veritable treasure trove of real and virtual goodies to loot.

The real-world items include an exclusive book featuring the art of *EQII*, a bonus DVD containing trailers, gameplay videos and behind the scenes footage from the game, a soundtrack CD, a swanky collectors' coin in a lush velvet pouch, a cloth map of the new Norrath and two exquisite posters worthy of any wall.

Talking of decorations, you also get several in-game items to help make your virtual heroes feel more at home in their new environments. As well as 'paintings' of Norrathian scenery to hang in your in-game apartments, you'll receive magical talking statues of leading game figures Antonica and Lucan (voiced by Hollywood superstar Heather Graham and the living legend that is Christopher Lee). To top it all off you'll also be given a pet baby dragon, which is a darn sight better than a cat or dog, even if house-breaking it takes on a whole new meaning.

To get your hands on one of these awesome packages, simply answer the following question and send your entry on the back of a postcard or envelope to *EverQuest II* Collectors' Edition Competition, *PC ZONE*, Future Publishing, 99 Baker Street, London, W1U 6FP. Entries must be received by Thursday, January 6. Good luck!

How long after the events of the first game is *EverQuest II* set?

A. 500 years
B. 5,000 years
C. 5 hours, 32 minutes and 27 seconds, roughly speaking

For full competitions terms and details, see page 7.

Where Adventure Comes Alive
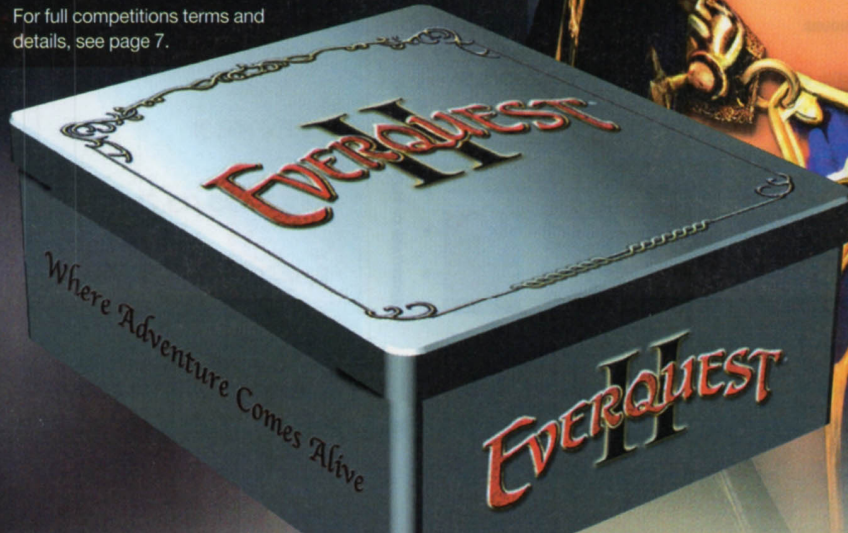
WEBGAME
OF THE MONTH

WHY PAY TO PLAY WHEN THE INTERWEB PROVIDES FUN FOR FREE?

THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY
(WWW.BBC.CO.UK/RADIO4/HITCHHIKERS)

Space, if I might paraphrase the late, great Douglas Adams for a moment, may well be vastly, hugely, mind-bogglingly big, but at least it isn't as jam-packed with brain-numbing inanity as the Internet. That said, every once in a while the vast collective that is human endeavour will manage to force something of true value up from the cesspit of mediocrity.

One such stroke of brilliance is the 'reimagining' of the great man's classic *Hitchhiker's* text adventure, giving yet another dimension to the tale of Arthur Dent, Zaphod Beeblebrox, Ford Prefect and the destruction of the Earth. The original was a hit for text adventure giants Infocom, back in the early days of gaming.

This reworking has been produced for the BBC in celebration of the recent radio broadcast of the long-lost third series and, in a move some old farts may consider sacrilege, it's been given a graphical makeover.

Don't worry, we're not talking swanky *Doom 3*-style visuals or anything, just simple line-art illustrations and a tidy-looking interface that actually serves to breathe new life into the game. Otherwise it's the same classic brain-twister, full of the most twisted, fiendish and outrageously funny puzzles ever encountered (the Babel Fish poser is still an all-time adventuring classic).

In keeping with Adams' desire to rework his tale for each medium it appeared in, the game remains faithful to the basic plot, but is far from an exact retelling – so even if you know every word of the *Hitchhikers'* novels backwards, you'll still find plenty here to flummox, confuse and confound. Which is just the way Adams would have wanted it.

The third worst in the galaxy.

CLAN DIARY

SCEE

ANNE ROGERS, aka Jaffy
www.scee-clan.co.uk

We may be in the depths of winter, but SCEE Lady Happy-Bunny has come out of early hibernation to organise the team's next LAN experience.

At the time of writing, the SCEE Ladies will be setting off for Manchester to participate in the Unicon 5-on-5 Cup. Hosted by the Unicon LAN Centre, the Fifth *Counter-Strike* 5-on-5 Cup boasts some modest yet enticing prizes.

With attending teams familiar to most of the UK's competitive *C-S* scene, beside some unknown names looking to prove themselves, the cup looks to produce some exciting matches.

Our team is unfortunately placed in the same group as the SCEE Lads team, so rivalry and baiting will be in abundance! Remember, we know their tactics! Sadly, we won't have that advantage in games against the other teams in our group – Rage.cs and e-TONK – and will have to rely on our sharp aim and quick wits.

At least we haven't been drawn in the hardest group, with names such as UniCon and remOte,

"The competition and pressure of playing in a mixed cup is different to a female-only tournament"
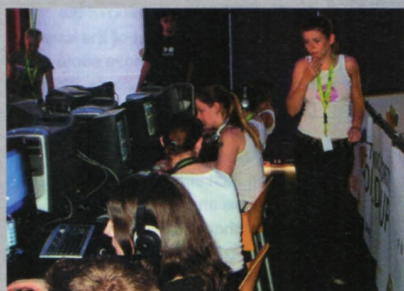
The battle of the sexes continues.

which might make our progression through the tournament that much easier.

The team will have a lot to prove, being the only female team present out of a total of 16. The competition and pressure of playing in a mixed cup is quite different to that of a female-only tournament. The general skill level of men's teams is considered to be higher, as there are far more males who play games than girls – but this is a generalisation, and hopefully the SCEE Ladies will prove it wrong.

The age-old gender wars will surface at Unicon, and we will be looking to make an impression in the male-dominated world of E-Sports. However, if we do well, we certainly won't be the first female team to dominate some games against men. In July 2004, at the E-Sports World Cup in Poitiers, France, the German female team Catz beat UK men's team WOLF in a short show-match organised by Gamer.tv.

Such things are becoming a common occurrence, so the best of luck to the other teams we face this month!

These people create universes for a living.

These people just live in them.

A COLD RECEPTION

LAND AHOY AS *EVE ONLINE* FANS GATHER TO REJOICE

Hundreds of *EVE Online* fans descended on Reykjavik in October for the inaugural *EVE* Fanfest, in celebration of the record-breaking sci-fi game and to catch a quick peek at the shape of thinks to come.

Musical director Jon Hallur, as RealX, provided a set of *EVE* tunes, remixed and reorganised in line with the occasion, after which the gathered tribes alighted for a night of hedonistic pleasure.

More serious business was conducted at the conference on day two at Loftkastalinn. Vast screens, atmospheric lighting and a tight and humorous script kept the entertainment coming thick and fast, with captivating presentations on the making of the game, followed by insightful info on the forthcoming *Exodus* expansion (see page 110).

Lastly, there was a teasing glimpse of the next add-on, codenamed 'Kali', which will see player-run corporations having to administer their own territories and pilots flying across impressive 3D terrain. At a demo the crowd whooped with joy, before settling down for two hours of hardcore chit-chat and free beer – designed no doubt to whip up a frenzy as yet more heavenly bodies were unveiled to celebrate the launch of in-game soft drink, Quafe (where to a chorus of gagging geeks, 'Eva' was crowned the Quafe Queen). Same again next year? Here's hoping.
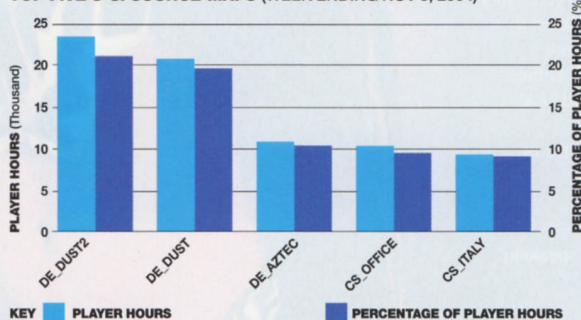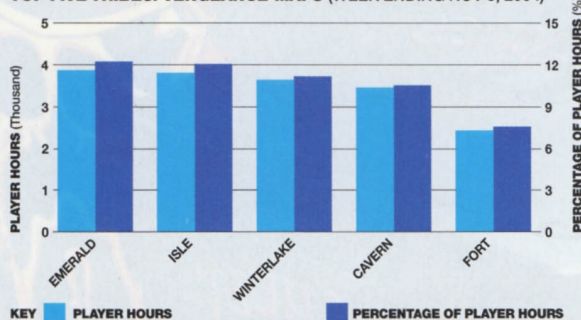
STATZONE

A LOOK AT THE DATA SHAPING YOUR ONLINE WORLD

ALL DATA SUPPLIED BY: **CSPORTS.net**

TOP FIVE *C-S: SOURCE* MAPS (WEEK ENDING NOV 5, 2004)

Y-axis left: PLAYER HOURS (Thousand) — 0, 5, 10, 15, 20, 25
Y-axis right: PERCENTAGE OF PLAYER HOURS (%) — 0, 5, 10, 15, 20, 25
X-axis: DE_DUST2, DE_DUST, DE_AZTEC, CS_OFFICE, CS_ITALY

KEY ■ PLAYER HOURS ■ PERCENTAGE OF PLAYER HOURS

TOP FIVE *TRIBES: VENGEANCE* MAPS (WEEK ENDING NOV 5, 2004)

Y-axis left: PLAYER HOURS (Thousand) — 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5
Y-axis right: PERCENTAGE OF PLAYER HOURS (%) — 0, 3, 6, 9, 12, 15
X-axis: EMERALD, ISLE, WINTERLAKE, CAVERN, FORT

KEY ■ PLAYER HOURS ■ PERCENTAGE OF PLAYER HOURS

TOP TEN MOST POPULAR *STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT* PLAYER NAMES (WEEK ENDING NOVEMBER 5, 2004)

1 **MIKE** (37.2)
2 **CENTRRIAN67** (28.3)
3 **AHRAGON** (24.8)
4 **JEDIEEZ** (23.6)
5 **CHRIS** (21.7)
6 **.** (21.3)
7 **VISION** (19.4)
8 **ALEX** (19.3)
9 **KLON435** (19.2)
10 **SHADOW** (19.0)

X-axis: 0, 10, 20, 30, 40, 50
(HOURS ONLINE)

WELCOME TO MY WORLD...

William Westwater – The Matrix Online

IF THERE WAS ever a job in this grand old world of virtual reality video gaming design that you wouldn't want to take on, designing the massively multiplayer incarnation of *The Matrix* must surely be near the top of the list. With a setting so well mapped out already, and with such a deep rooting in the cultural psyche of the world's populace, creating a virtual world of a virtual world must be a task burdened with the weight of far too much expectation. Luckily, the team at Monolith Productions seems fully tuned in to the high-brow sensibilities of the background material.

"Our approach was to focus on the essence of the Matrix, which we felt came across most strongly in the first movie," says *TMO* producer, William Westwater, inadvertently reassuring those of us left deflated by the two sequel films. "Conspiracy. Betrayal. Surprise. The sense that you can accept the banal monotony and safety of the Blue Pill – live a blind, but secure little life – or you can struggle to understand Truth, a naked and difficult path, but the only path of true power."

Recreating *The Matrix* has been a complicated endeavour, not least when you consider that the team's stated goal has been to make every single building in The City completely interactive. Every building, every floor, every room – and all of it adheres to the guidelines laid out by the Wachowski brothers themselves.

"We focused on capturing scenes directly from the films, and combining these with advice from the Wachowski Brothers and the film production team," reveals Westwater. "At all times, we made sure that it felt like *The Matrix*, and looked for their approval both in direction and sensation."

Not that it meant Westwater and his team couldn't express themselves in places. "The International District is my favourite region," he confesses. "I love the vibrancy of the reds and yellows against the general green tones of the Matrix world. I also enjoy the more organic curves of the pagodas and ornamental archways. It gives a balance to the strict rectilinear perspectives of the Machine design behind the Matrix."

Not that the seedier side of things was too far away, even if Westwater wasn't too au fait with the surroundings. "The Hel Club is the most unusual part of the world for me," he grins. "I don't tend to hang out in S&M clubs for the most part." PCZ

Publisher: Sega **Developer:** Monolith Prod, Inc.
ETA: Jan 05 **Website:** thematrixonline.warnerbros.com

"Our approach was to focus on the essence of The Matrix, which we felt came across most strongly in the first movie"
WILLIAM WESTWATER *THE MATRIX ONLINE*

Trafalgar Square goes gothic.

The morning school run just gets worse and worse.

Who's the boss...?

GUILD WARS

Graeme Boyd goes one-on-one as ArenaNet's founder spills the beans

ONE OF the biggest complaints non-MMORPG players have of our beloved genre is that the games don't have the same kind of instant-gratification, action-oriented gameplay offered by first-person shooters and their ilk. It's all 'hit auto-attack and sit back for ten minutes while the game fights itself'.

Guild Wars, however, is a very different kind of beast, and developer ArenaNet talks about it in a very different way. Forget the l33t speak jargon and the image of obsessed level-grinders spending 17 hours at a time in front of their screens killing rats. *Guild Wars* is taking a far more action-packed route, one that barely lets you stop for breath.

The point of *Guild Wars* is that it's fun. Instant, accessible fun, that nevertheless provides you with enough depth to keep you coming back for more. Everything

about the game has been designed to streamline the experience, making it less nerdy but equally as compelling.

DO IT WITH STYLE

"One of the main reasons for the visual and gameplay style is that if you're not into the level-grinding mindset, then what you're looking for is the minute-by-minute experience to be fun," explains Jeff Strain, the game's producer and ArenaNet's founder. "We have a mantra: 'What am I doing right now?' It's not about 'what am I working for?' or 'what will I be doing when I finally get to level X?' Whatever the answer is, it should be fun."

Part of this is down to the fast nature of the game's combat system. Don't expect to find any drawn-out automated fighting here (as seen in other MMOGs). "We've designed it to be very fast and quick," explains Jeff, "and we wanted to strike a balance between twitch games or 3D fighting games and MMO games where you set a target, click a few buttons and see how it comes out. We wanted combat to be something you managed – something you felt like you were doing."

The outcome, as comprehensively tested by the recent three-day free-for-all public beta testing event, has resulted in a system that oozes so much playability that even resident MMO cynic Steve Hill was caught up in the fun. (See this month's NeverQuest, page 117.)

"When you watch a skilful *Guild Wars* player, their hands are never still," enthuses Jeff. "They're continuously managing their health and magic, as well as engaging in the act of combat. And that skill doesn't just come from sitting in

---

CV

ARENANET

Guild Wars is the first game from the ArenaNet stable, though many of the staff are veterans of Blizzard, with extensive online experience on games such as *StarCraft*, *Warcraft* and *Diablo*.

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER ArenaNet
PUBLISHER NCsoft
WEBSITE www.guildwars.com
ETA Q1 2005

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Fast-paced combat action
- No tedious level grinding
- PvP in tournament arenas
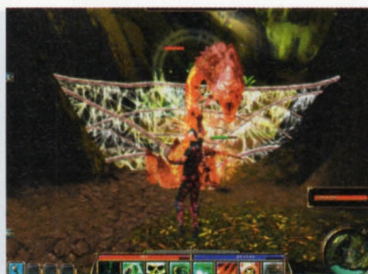- Looks bloody gorgeous
- Accessible to all
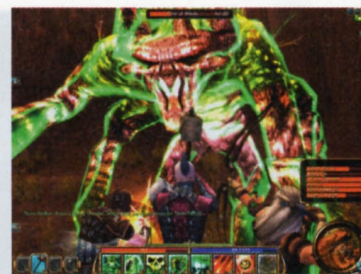

"Anyone else think this is a comb-over?"

The hidden dangers of silly string.

Time for a light dusting.

"This way for the Sellafield tour."

"When you watch a really skilful *Guild Wars* player, their hands are never still"

Guild Wars has a distinctive visual style, with locations taken from hand-drawn originals.

front of your PC and level-grinding for hundreds of hours – in *Guild Wars,* we've limited the effect of levelling up so players have to rely on their ability, not how much free time they have. It works: we've found that the speed and accessibility of the action and the animation really adds to the adrenaline and excitement."

CLICK, ATTACK!

So, how does it work? "We wanted to ensure it was accessible to casual players and not just designed for the hardcore. If you click the mouse, something should happen. Every character has what we call a 'grunt attack', so if battle begins and you're not sure what to do you can just select a target, click the mouse and your character will attack. You always have that satisfaction of something starting.

"As your skills increase, you have the added management of the eight skills you can choose before a mission, or a

player-versus-player contest. As you progress, you develop skills that you open with, ones that you sustain with, ones you use in a pinch, ones you use when you're trying to escape, and ones where all your team-mates are dying and you've got to pull out a big nuke. Managing the energy cost is something that's constantly ongoing."

HANDS ACROSS THE WORLD

Guild Wars' combat isn't restricted to beating the crap out of the game world, though. As the title suggests, this is about in-game guilds taking on each other to prove their might. PvP is integral to the experience, but as Jeff insists, it's all strictly regimented.

"When you create your character, you place it within a certain world that corresponds to the real world. What this means is that you can decide to play with other Europeans or Americans, and so on.

When you go to social areas and on missions in your world, you'll find yourself with people from the same world. You can challenge other guilds from within your world.

Jeff goes on: "The coolest thing is that we'll be running an International Guild Tournament between guilds from the different worlds. If you have a team, and that guild fights its way to the top of the intra-world tournament, then your specific world will receive benefits like exclusive missions, items and special features that can be unlocked. That's why we call it the International Tournament, because you're always pulling for the team from your world to be in the top spot." So get out there. Sign up and do it for your country. Your mother would be proud. PCZ

IS *GUILD WARS* IN DANGER OF DUMBING DOWN THE MMO?

Guild Wars' lack of crafting or story development isn't likely to win it any friends with the hardcore role-playing fraternity (assuming they can tear themselves away from *EverQuest* to begin with). So is Jeff Strain worried about putting off potential players?

"There are definitely players who enjoy that hardcore level-grinding kind of game," he admits when pressed on the nature of the typical MMO gamer. "I think there are some fantastic games out there that do that very well. *Guild Wars* isn't that kind of game. You're not going to be chopping wood for five hours so you can raise your wood chopping skill by one point and make a bench to sell to somebody. *Guild Wars* is designed to be a much more accessible, much faster action game. It's *Diablo* meets *EverQuest* rather than *EverQuest* with some *Diablo* in it."

So who exactly is Jeff targeting the game at? "I think the ideal *Guild Wars* player is probably the kind of person who has enjoyed online action-based RPGs like *Diablo*, but who yearns for more infrastructure and support for social gaming, and who wants to feel more like they're part of a community and a vast world." Sound like anyone you know?

The Strokes' new look didn't go down too well.

"If I had a hammer…"

Destroyers fly past a planet whose ring has just slipped a bit.

Gallente Battlecruisers patrol the perimeter.

Did you know *Eve* has its own soft drink? Quafe is available from the *Eve* Online shop.

Moving out...

EVE ONLINE: EXODUS

It's new and it's free, but *Richie Shoemaker* isn't jumping in just yet...

AS TIME goes on, *Eve* is becoming an increasingly difficult game to categorise. When it first blasted onto the market it was seen as a kind of online *Elite*. Today, it's evolved beyond being a cocktail of 3D combat and commerce to include elements of high-level manufacture, research, personnel management and even diplomacy. Players have become specialist miners, pirates, battleship commanders and corporation managers. The ever more complex world now has a life of its own, one that isn't just a lot of fun to explore, but also one that's without equal in its geographical size, population density and aesthetics. It's ironic then, that it still remains overlooked, as online gamers scramble to try out 'next big things' like *EverQuest II* and *World Of Warcraft*.

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER CCP
PUBLISHER CCP
WEBSITE www.eve-online.com
ETA November

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- It's a big expansion to our favourite sci-fi MMOG
- It's free
- The single-shard *Eve* universe now regularly boasts over 10,000 players
- Build your own outposts
- Massive-scale combat and more groovy-looking ships

Hoping to change all that is *Exodus*, *Eve's* second major update since launch and one so overflowing with new features and upgrades that to call it an expansion pack would be to do it a great disservice. This is not least because *Exodus* – as with all future *Eve* additions, will be free… To subscribers, obviously.

NEW FRONTIERS

Introducing new ship classes like Destroyers, Battlecruisers and Mining Barges, *Exodus* is set to boast close to 100 varieties of ship with nearly double the number of skills to train. But the biggest change is the introduction of 'player-owned structures' (POS) – deep-space mining, production and research outposts that player-corporations have to construct away from the relative security of the inner systems.

As much opportunity for profit as these structures provide, there will of course be the danger that player-run criminal gangs, corporations and alliances will seek out and try to destroy or intimidate their owners. They're aided by the new Tactical Command feature, where hundreds of player ships can be given orders and waypoints by their fleet commander. If nothing else, at least battles will migrate away from the choke point 'camping' that currently hinders the trade of smaller in-game organisations.

The list of new and updated features goes on to include a new Alliance structure, a greater expanded trading system, new mining opportunities and NPC scenarios, but it's the interface and engine improvements we're most excited about. According to the developer, *Exodus* has been overhauled to such a degree that the game runs between 30-70 per cent faster. *Eve* was hardly a slouch before, but if you experienced lag during battles between hundreds of ships, missiles and drones, you'll hopefully now be man enough to blame defeat on a lack of ability rather than flabby Net code.

READY FOR LAUNCH?

So do we have any reservations about *Exodus*? Well, yes. First, it's a universal upgrade, applied to all players. As such it could end up as one big mess, that in a worst-case scenario will take a couple of weeks to sort out. On past experiences, its introduction is unlikely to be smooth.

Our second concern is that *Exodus* caters too much for the established player. *Eve* was bordering on being hideously complex anyway, and these new additions make it even more so. On both counts, unless you're a dedicated player who has to be a part of the experience come hell or high water, it may be best to wait a little while before opening your first account… Say, about a month, when we should have a full review. **PCZ**

Not exactly the ideal location to open a trading post.

No Contest!

"…Q17+… is the most convincing reason for gamers
to finally make that jump to TFT that we have seen."

GamersEurope.com, 10/2004

Now you can enjoy state-of-the-art PC gaming with a
Hyundai ImageQuest TFT display engineered specifically
with high-end gamers in mind.

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signal ensure you can now focus on the game without
distractions. Connect your controllers to the USB hub and
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Height and angle adjustable | DVI Cable included

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✦✦HYUNDAI
HYUNDAI IMAGEQUEST

FIGHTCLUB

FIRST RULE OF FIGHT CLUB: *PC ZONE* OWNZ JØØ
FIGHT CLUB MODERATORS: METALFACE, REX MUNDI & GOWERLY

An oldie but most definitely a goodie. Last month saw the might of *PC ZONE* (ie Prezzer and Filby) squaring up to the unwashed masses in the *Battlefield 1942* über-mod, *Desert Combat*. Transplanting the action from war-torn Europe of the 1940s to the Middle East of today, it was a mighty fine night, despite the lack of *ZONERs*.

■ Doing themselves proud on the night included such Fight Club regulars as fnaa, Oddjob and Carpet (who kindly provided some of the images you see on these pages), along with more unfamiliar, but still welcome, names such as Muu_Puklip, Hyper Brute, Shoo the Wildman and the lads from -=[GOR]=- clan.

■ Remember, if you take part in *any* Fight Club and want to share some memories of the night with us, feel free to send your screenshots to online.zone@pczone.co.uk following the event, marking your emails 'FIGHT CLUB

SCREENS'. Only send the choicest selection though, we can't guarantee to print them all.

■ Next month, we'll have all the happenings from our glorious return to the world of *Counter-Strike* as we take on all-comers in *C-S Source*. Meantime we're still accepting votes for our January 27 Players' Choice night. Head over to www.pczone.co.uk and make yourself heard.

■ We're also still looking for requests for *UT2004* mods to host on our public servers. If there's a total conversion that's a particular favourite, or one you've always wanted to try but never had a chance, let us know by emailing online.zone@pczone.co.uk or joining the conversation on our forums, and we'll look into hosting it.

■ As always, to take part in Fight Club, or to find the connection details for all our public game servers, just aim your web browsers towards www.zonegames.co.uk for all the details. By the right… March!

COME & 'AVE A GO! WWW.zonegames.co.uk for all the info

UPCOMING FIGHT CLUB EVENTS

THURSDAY JANUARY 27
6.30pm - 9.00pm
Players' Choice

THURSDAY FEBRUARY 24
6.30pm - 9.00pm
Joint Operations: Escalation

WHO'S WHO

Paul Presley	Prezzer
Will Porter	Batsphinx
Suzy Wallace	Uzibat
Jamie Sefton	NorthernScum
Stu Bishop	Banzai
Anthony Holden	Shokupan
Jamie Malcolm	JimLad
Martin Korda	Nameless One
Phil Wand	People's Front of Judea
Michael Filby	Parallax
Dave Woods	Kid Unknown

A bridge over troubled waters, yesterday.

"Heart 106.2? Are you crazy, man?"

Filby has an accident.

Muu_Puklip feels the power of *PC ZONE*'s fury.

Carpet shows what he's made of.

ZONECHAT

CAN YOU HEAR US AT THE BACK, MOTHER?

The Prezzer & Will Show

WITH THE technical gremlins of last month's *ZONE* Chat seemingly taking a well-earned break, it was business as usual this month. Much nostalgia based around the fact we're 150 issues old, plus talk of the hopelessly misguided US election, favourite films, when *GTA: San Andreas* is likely to make it on the PC, and which area of the UK would be best suited to a localised version of the game ('*GTA: Stockport*' probably being the most apt).

Competition time saw five lucky winners getting copies of much-played superhero MMOG, *City Of Heroes*, after submitting their ideas for useless heroes. MMOGs seemed to take up a fair chunk of the conversation (perhaps unsurprisingly given Prezzer's, er, presence). There was much discussion of *World Of Warcraft* and the *ZONE* team's aliases (say hi if you see Prezzer, Kid

Unknown or LeatherRaven walking around in a virtual world near you), as well as those that were taking part in the *EverQuest II* beta.

There's a break now while we stuff ourselves silly on organic mince pies and pre-processed imitation turkey meat cutlets while pretending to be overjoyed at the socks Aunt Bessie has sent us again. *ZONE* Chat will be back, better than ever on Wednesday, January 26 at the usual time.

Of course, just because we won't be there, it doesn't mean the place is empty. The #pcz channel on Quakenet is alive and kicking 24/7. All you need to do is get yourself an IRC program (we recommend mIRC – downloadable free at www.mirc.com), log in to the irc.uk.quakenet.org server (or any other Quakenet server you can find), type /join #pcz and you're ready to go. Chat away!

WEDNESDAY JANUARY 26 5PM –7PM

LAN ROVER

'TIS THE SEASON TO BE JOLLY, LAN-LAN-LAN-LAN... *STEVE RANDALL* RISKS LOSING HIS CHRISTMAS BONUS

■ You've got bags of spare time at Christmas, so why not practise a bit of *Painkiller*? Said game has been picked as the official game for the upcoming Cyberathlete Professional League (CPL) World Tour. The CPL World Tour starts in late February 2005, and travels to ten cities across the globe. The tour offers a US $1,000,000 cash purse, the largest cash prize ever for a computer game tournament. Over 10,000 gamers are expected to participate in the qualifiers, stops and finals. Find out how to join them at www.thecpl.com. Meanwhile, here's where to hone those skills...

■ First stop, a big three-day event from www.thebiggame.org. These ever popular 80-person events fill up fast. Based in Southampton, you can pre-book the December 17-19 event at a cost of £20.

■ The Multiplay Stratlan is a 100-person event at Stratford-upon-Avon racetrack, and runs from 6pm on December 10 though to Monday December 13. It costs £50 for the three days and has a 'bring your own' policy. To see if they can accommodate you, contact them via the www.multiplay.co.uk website.

■ Next year, you should see a flurry of parties as everyone competes to have the first LAN of the New Year. But what will 2005 bring? Will the de rigueur cable/DSL connections herald the death of LAN parties, or will the demand for hearing your victim scream see LANs grow from strength to strength? Time will tell. 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

GUILDHALL

▲ **DON'T BE LONELY THIS CHRISTMAS – GET ONLINE AND FIND SOME FRIENDS**

With so much activity in the world of pro and amateur online gaming, where's a clan to start? Why, right here at Guildhall of course. Drop us a line and we'll help you find team-mates, existing clans and online guilds to join as you pursue the online lifestyle you've always dreamt of...

CLAN =JFA= (Justice For All)
CONTACT admin@jfaclan.com
WEBSITE www.jfaclan.com
MAIN GAME Soldier Of Fortune II
DETAILS We are a multinational clan with a fun online forum where we set up matches and help other players get into the online gaming world. We are not looking to become the next 4Kings – we just meet up and have a laugh and plenty of fun. If this sounds like you, drop in some time.

CLAN MEN IN COMBAT
CONTACT windtalker@menincombat.co.uk
WEBSITE menincombat.co.uk
MAIN GAME Medal Of Honor
DETAILS We are a *Medal Of Honor* clan and are recruiting. We play in three ladders and have been in two cup finals. We also play many other games together for fun. Check out our forums and drop us a line.

CLAN The Irish Guard
CONTACT stevenkilleen_38@hotmail.com
WEBSITE www.clan-tig.org.uk
MAIN GAME Battlefield Vietnam
DETAILS We are a 34-player Irish clan who are looking for new members who fancy playing ladder/clan matches but also just for fun. We have our own BFV server and TeamSpeak channel to use alongside it. If you're interested, take a look at our site – you're more than welcome.

CLAN URBANSAMURAI
CONTACT fatjimmy25@hotmail.com
WEBSITE www.urbansamurai.org
MAIN GAMES Joint Ops, Raven Shield
DETAILS We are a newly formed squad looking for mature (18+) players in both games. We have dedicated servers for each game, plus TeamSpeak. Contact jimmy on MSN, or jump into #urbansamurai on Quakenet IRC and ask an @ for details.

CLAN MAG (More than Averagely G00d)
CONTACT magspiderwebmaster@fastmail.co.uk
WEBSITE magician.atspace.com
MAIN GAMES Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow, UT2004, Call Of Duty
DETAILS We're a new but highly active Clanbase-linked multinational clan. We play games every day and have at least twice-weekly clan wars on Clanbase. To join you must own one or more of the games listed and be 'More than Averagely G00d' at it. If you would like to join, email me (magspider) or apply at the forums and/or Clanbase. We look forward to playing and training with you!

CLAN Twisted Unreal Fraggers ||TUF||
CONTACT silk@clantuf.com
WEBSITE www.clantuf.com
MAIN GAMES Unreal Tournament (Instagib), Age Of Empires II: The Conquerors
DETAILS We are a worldwide clan, looking for UK/European members (speaking English). No obnoxious behaviour, no cheating, must be dedicated, active and fun to play with. We have two servers, located in the US, and we're starting a UK/Europe division.

▼ 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*, 99 Baker Street, London W1U 6FP.

The 4Kings team will be planning tactics at a "boot camp".

Both 4Kings and TAG are relying on Swedish talent to help improve results.

E-SPORTING LIFE

All the latest news from the wide, wide world of professional gaming. Your man at the E-Sports desk – Philip Wride

The eventual winners at SmaulIP: e*star.

A BUMPER edition this month, and we begin with the CPL winter event. Many teams the world over are preparing their cunning plans for global domination and there have been a number of recent roster changes, especially with regards to the UK's finest. Both 4Kings and TAG have re-jigged things and are starting to buckle down in a bid to prove they have improved since the CPL summer competition. The new recruits for both teams come in the form of Swedish superstars, and this proves to be the continuation of a common theme within the upper echelons of the UK *Counter-Strike* community. Time will tell whether they are indeed successful, or whether the blend of Swedish flair and British grit is watered down into nothing more than a sloppy paste. The 4Kings team are hoping that a six-week "boot camp" in Stockholm at the HLO Cafe will stand them in good stead for the CPL UK qualifiers at the beginning of December.

SORRY, WHO WON?

On the other side of the coin there have also been some rumblings in the UK *Call Of Duty* scene, mainly due to a recent LAN event in Italy. The SmaulIP event was offering a tidy sum of 10,000 Euros and attracted the interest from Europe's top *COD* teams.

In the end, the final came down to an unexpected British team, Victum, who were ranked outsiders after the success of Supermen at EOGC, and the Swedish powerhouse, e*star. After initial reports that Victum had taken the crown it transpired that e*star had actually been victorious, walking away with smug grins on their faces and the cash in their back pockets. Victum took home 5,000 Euros, though they will feel disappointed not to have won.

TRADING PLACES

No sooner had the LAN ended than changes started to rock the UK *COD* scene with Adam 'Yekoms' Woodhouse jumping ship from Victum and moving to TAG. This then started a chain reaction with Supermen also dropping players and recruiting, and only a week after their success at SmaulIP, Victum closed their doors. Supermen were the only team to really benefit, as they picked up some of the former Victum players, but the whole *COD* scene was shaken as the clans fragmented. Hopefully things have settled down and that the whispers of more player moves are just that.

There have also been some other major announcements, mainly circled around the news that 4Kings will be running a competition to find some players for its *Painkiller* squad. On offer is a chance for two people from the UK to join the 4Kings team, and travel the world in 2005 to compete in the CPL World Tour for *Painkiller*. With the online qualifier stages having been completed and only a few players left, these eight will be whisked away to LAN finals held in London. The venue is a respected television studio, and the whole event is being marked as the third instalment of the popular Intel Extreme Edition Challenge, with Intel providing the majority of support for the event.

But this isn't all. There will also be a 400-person BYOC event hosted by Jolt, who is also running the online qualifiers for the 4Kings *Painkiller* competition. GameFrontier, who was successful in running the ESWC UK and CPL UK qualifiers earlier this year, will also be in attendance with its own part of the show, this time for the CPL UK qualifiers. One lucky *Counter-Strike* team will win an all expenses paid trip to Dallas to compete in the CPL winter event. Overall it promises to be a spectacular event – check back next month to get the full low-down. PCZ
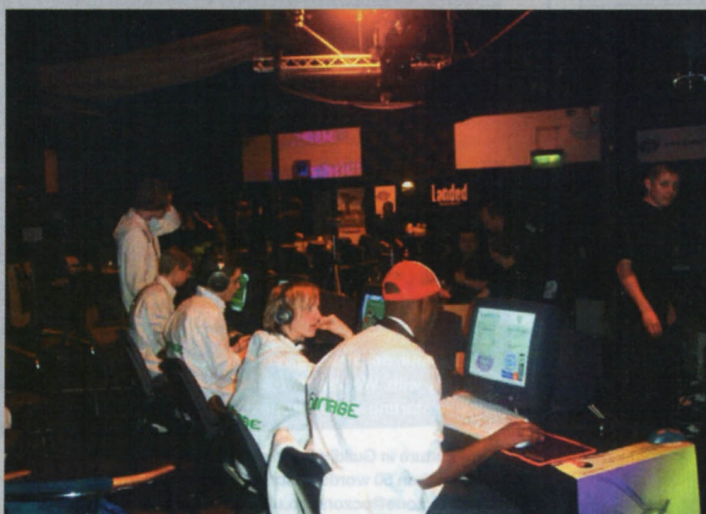
TAG's new recruits played for ownage at the CPL qualifiers.

The mounting tension leading up to the evening's fashion parade was palpable.
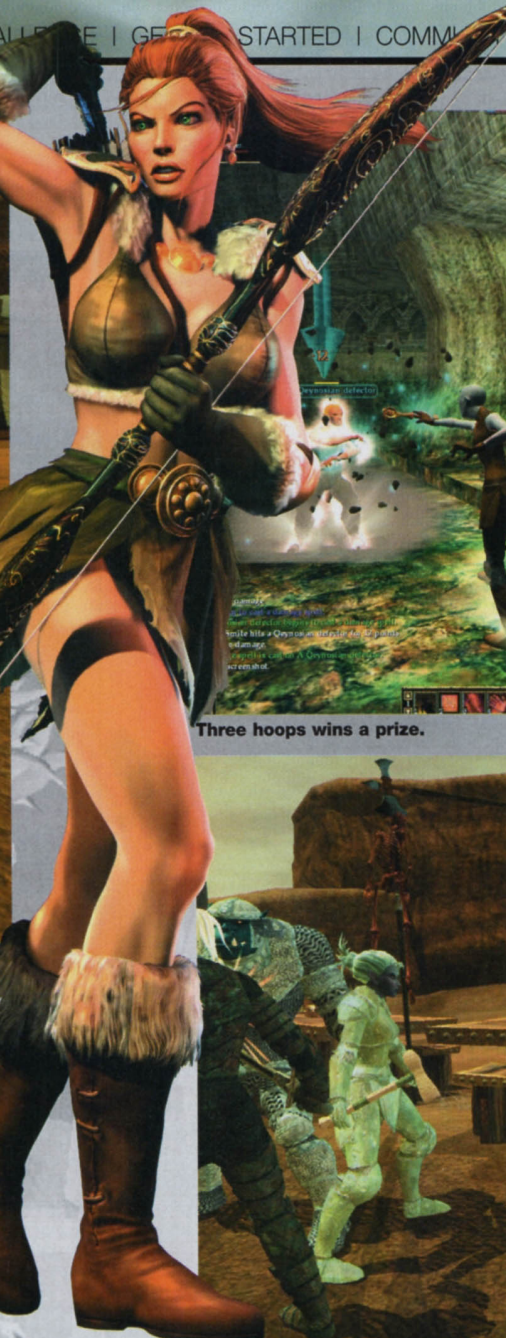
Three hoops wins a prize.

EVERQUEST II

■ £34.99 (plus £9.49 monthly subscription, first 30 days free) | Pub: Ubisoft |
Dev: Sony Online Entertainment | ETA: Out Now | www.everquest2.com

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 512MB RAM, 64MB 3D card and a 56K modem
DESIRES P4 2.5GHz, 1024MB RAM, 256MB 3D card and a broadband or cable Internet connection

The original game saw off at least one *PC ZONE* editor. *Paul Presley* casts his defensive spells as the sequel turns its sights towards him...

IT'S TRUE. We never did find out what happened to ex-*ZONE* editor Chris Anderson. Last time we saw him, he was disappearing into the rat-infested dungeons of Norrath version one, wizard's staff in one hand, packet of Marlboro Lights in the other, muttering something about taking a week's holiday from the mag. Then nothing. Communication lost. Woods assumed command and as far as we know, Chrisola is still battling his demons to this very day. If anyone comes across him in there, tell him to give us a call. He owes us a tenner.

Anyway, that's our own personal hell. But it does illustrate nicely how the legacy of *EverQuest* has infused itself into the lives of games-players over the last five years. Whether you play it or not, you know exactly what it is. It's shaped the way the very genre of MMOs has developed. Indeed, it could almost be argued that had *EverQuest* failed to catch on, there wouldn't be an MMO genre today. Every single game since has used its gameplay mechanics as a template – for good or ill and not always successfully. Which proves another point – if it was that easy to make an MMO, we'd all be doing it.

Nope, the people at Sony Online Entertainment know that it's more than just the game code at work here. They've seen the high-profile car crashes that were *Horizons*, *The Saga Of Ryzom*, *Mythica*, *Dragon Empires* et al, and they know that the public can't be fooled by imitations and third-rate knock-offs that don't fully understand the nature of what they're getting themselves into.

So with all that in mind, isn't making a sequel to a game that

INPERSPECTIVE

FINAL FANTASY XI
Reviewed Issue 148, Score 81%
Probably the best of the rival fantasy MMOGs, although plenty of *Dark Age Of Camelot* fans would strongly disagree. It's filled with things to do, looks lovely but has a horrible PS2-derived interface.

EQ LIVE
Reviewed Issue 149, Score 81%
The original *EverQuest* now goes by this name and has just seen its eighth expansion pack. It may not look anywhere near as good as this sequel, or be anywhere near as user-friendly, but it's still going strong.

"Are you sure Dr Doolittle suggested this?"
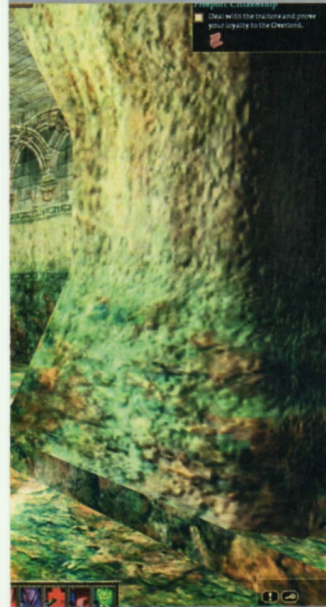
"Anyone know when the next bus is?"

Like Mousse T, they're horny.

She looks like the book-learnin' type.

not only set so many of the ground rules for the genre, but is also still going strong with over half a million regular players perhaps the trickiest endeavour ever known to man? (And that's including landing on the moon, splitting the atom and playing away at Bolton.) Maybe so, but do you know what? They've only gone and pulled it off.

STORM RISING

Let's get this out of the way right at the start. *EverQuest II* is the greatest MMORPG ever made. I don't care if that sounds like a blatant attempt to get on the box cover or paints me as a servant of the great hype machine. It's a simple fact. This is the best.

I realise that tens of thousands of *World Of Warcraft* players have just felt their ears prick up and are probably marching towards me with rabid eyes and letters of protest even now. There's no doubting that *WOW* is a very, very fine game – one that we'll review once the UK release is confirmed some time in February 2005. But guess what, zealots? There's room for more than one game and one

"What? It's the monocle isn't it? Too much?"

opinion in a genre, and in the estimation of this reviewer, *EQII* just pips Blizzard's title.

It nearly didn't though. Along with thousands of testers, I've been following the game through its beta stages and bore witness to the many changes that took place during that time, seeing it go from the bare bones of a visually-detailed world to one practically overflowing with content, quests and interest.

ACTION-PACKED

I have a confession to make too. Despite repeated attempts, I never managed to get into the original *EverQuest*. Maybe I came to it late. Maybe I wasn't in the right frame of mind. Whatever the reason, I just found it a cumbersome, ugly and

unfriendly place. I could see the appeal for others, but equally I could see why so many more wouldn't be seen dead with it.

So could Sony, and it was that single factor that provided the starting point for *EQII* – make a game that would appeal to all those that didn't like

"*EverQuest II* is the greatest MMORPG ever made. It's a simple fact. This is the best"

EverQuest. What that means in practice is that areas are now much tighter in terms of space, content and activity. In the original game, you'd create your character and then be dumped in at the deep end. "Here's the world," it would say to you, "off you go then." And you'd look around in confusion, not understanding a blessed thing, being ignored by the experienced players.

Not here. Oh no. *EQII* sets you up right from

the start, tells you what's what and practically bombards you with options. Your first few hours will probably go a bit like this: "Look at this boat and those beautiful wave effects! Gorgeous aren't they? Here's how you move about. Here's how you talk. Aargh, a dragon! Duck! Now here's how trading works. Quick! Kill that crawling thing! "OK, now over there you can build stuff. Shit, goblins! Blast 'em! Phew, right, now here's a house for you. Over there are a couple of dungeons. Do this, go there, do that, collect those…" And so on.

WELL PRIMED

By the time you've left the training island, you're already overflowing with skills, spells and actions, and you feel like the most important thing in the (virtual) world. But you never feel swamped. Through some clever organisation and (what feels like, but actually isn't)

MISSED OPPORTUNITY

### IT SEEMS VARIETY REALLY IS DEAD

Not necessarily a complaint this one, more a musing on possibilities that could have been. Despite the brilliance of it all, *EQII* is still mired in the world of the fantasy MMOG cliché. Admittedly, the original *EverQuest* did invent most of those clichés, but nonetheless it might have been interesting to see some real variety in the way different races/classes are played. Here, everything is coloured by choosing either a 'good' or 'evil' path, opening up merely two gameplay routes that are different only in atmosphere. Every character type progresses along the same guidelines, just with different clothing (warriors learn fighting techniques, magicians learn spells – but fundamentally, it's all the same). Of course, with 16 different races and 24 classes, we probably wouldn't have seen the game this side of 2011 if the developer had taken this route…

Warrior is as warrior does.
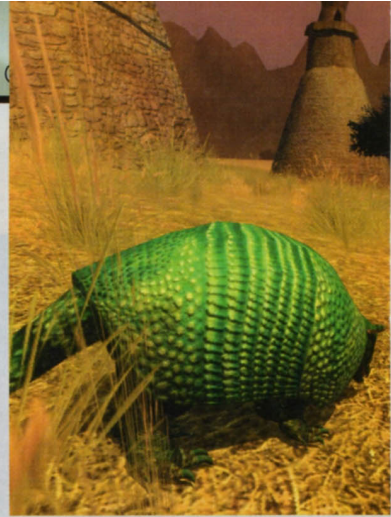
Fields of gold.

IF I HAD A HAMMER +1

BUILDING THE FUTURE OF NORRATH, ONE TABLE AT A TIME...

Crafting in *EQII* is practically a game in its own right. Well, a mini-game perhaps. Again, learning the lessons from every other game, Sony has made the path of the artisan open to anyone, regardless of their main archetype. Separate skills, separate experience paths, separate levelling – you're free to jump in and take it as deep as you like without it affecting your main game path. There are also hundreds of recipes, from food and drink to weapons, furniture, clothing and scrolls imbued with spells and skill upgrades. You name it, you can build it.

Gather your ingredients, approach the required workstation (oven for food, tailor's dummy for clothes and so on), then start the crafting process. However, once it begins, you can use dozens of specialised crafting skills to affect the outcome, much as a combat skill affects a fight, while random setbacks require quick-thinking to counter. What's more, bonuses and penalties can affect the quality of the finished product.

It's easily the most comprehensive crafting system we've yet to see, but it still feels enjoyable rather than turning the game into a second job.
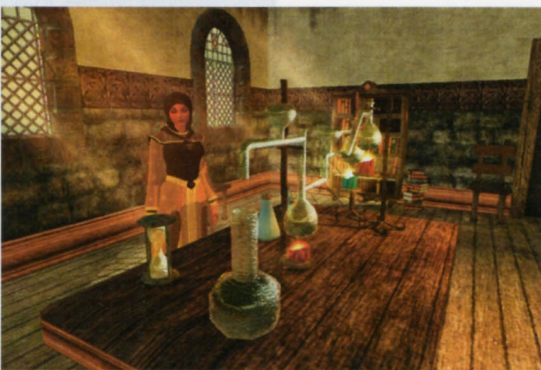
natural exploration and discovery, everything comes to you just as you need it, until before you know it you're so at home in the new Norrath you feel like you've been playing it for years rather than hours. Basically, Sony has got the pacing exactly right. Yes, you're killing rats, but it just never feels like a grind – the biggest complaint of any MMOG.

BACK TO BASICS

As your character grows, so does the game. Another thing that put people off the original was the way that over five years of expansions and gameplay patches, the damn thing had become near-impenetrable for newcomers. Here, everything has been simplified. Four character archetypes inhabit

the world (the stereotyped mage, fighter, priest and thief/scout), making your starting choice much simpler, based more around the way you like to play. You don't have to know the difference between an Enchanter and a Wizard anymore. You just

"You're soon so at home in the new Norrath you feel like you've played it for years"

have to know if you want to twat things with fireballs, hit things with swords, sneak about a bit or stand at the back helping others.

JUST FOR YOU

The specialisations come later on – specifically at levels 10 and 20 – once you're comfortable

enough with the way your chosen archetype plays to want to branch out a bit, all the while providing smaller ways to specialise yourself if you choose (from improving specific skills and spells to decorating your house). Again, pacing. Spot on.

I mentioned content earlier. The variety of quest types is unparalleled. All the bog-standard 'go there, kill ten of them, bring me the corpses for a bit of cash' and 'deliver this package to that person' types are there, and for many MMOGs, that would be enough. (Some,

"No, I don't know how to make Irn-Bru."

"I thought you said it's just round this corner?"

"This one's for Tippi Hedren."

HOP TO IT

THE MYSTERY OF THE 16TH RACE

Although 16 races are promised on the box, you can only select from 15 once in-game. This is because the 16th race, the Frogloks, are a mystery waiting to be uncovered. Whether this is down to some dramatic future twists in the story of *EQII*, or simply because Sony couldn't get them finished in time, nobody knows. However, since we've already seen them in the last *EverQuest* game, no-one's quite sure why they're such a mystery. Plus, you know, they're frog people. Not exactly the greatest reward we could hope for. Unless they've mutated into dragon frog people or something. Yeah, that'd be cool.
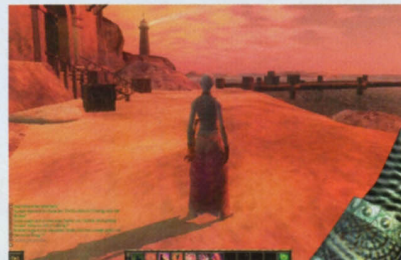
Maybe they're under those rocks?

"I remember you from *Galaxy Quest*! Can I have an autograph?"

Bitch tits ahoy...
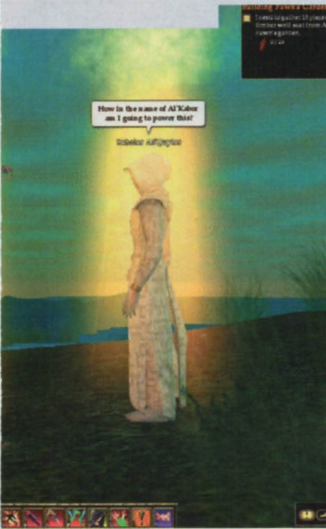
that shall remain nameless, didn't even bother to go that far and left the quests for a post-release patch.)

QUEST-ARAMA

On top of these, there are collection quests for the archivists out there. In mastery quests, you concentrate on killing one type of creature, analysing it and developing better attack methods as a result. Hallmark quests are major life-changing missions designed to rubber-stamp significant development points in your character's life arc (such as gaining citizenship). Tradeskill quests are for crafters (see 'If I Had A Hammer +1', opposite page). And let's not forget the Guild quests, which are designed to further the social standing of you and your friends in the game.

Of course, there's a price to pay for all this wonderfulness. Hardware. Seriously, if you've been putting off thoughts of upgrading, wondering if it's really worth it, you've simply no excuse anymore. Go read Wandy's pages, find out what the best setup for your budget is and do it. *EverQuest II*, *Half-Life 2*, *Doom 3*, *Rome: Total War* – now is the time. This is a golden age for PC games, broadband is getting cheaper and cheaper – go on, indulge yourself.

One of the keys to the original *EverQuest's* success was Sony's constant production of expansion packs. Of course, five years takes a toll on any game.

To that end, *EQII* has been 'future-proofed'. Enter the graphic options screen and you'll see a menu of pre-selected set-ups. Select 'Very High' or 'Maximum Quality' and a warning box comes up that pretty much tells you that there aren't computers yet invented that are capable of running the game at these settings. Are you sure you want to continue? Better dig out those wallets.

NO EXP NEEDED

What's perhaps most amazing about all this is that we're only at the beginning of it all. *EverQuest* had five years of expansions, patches and community input, and grew out of all proportion. It was a grand experiment and one that Sony has learnt every lesson it could from.
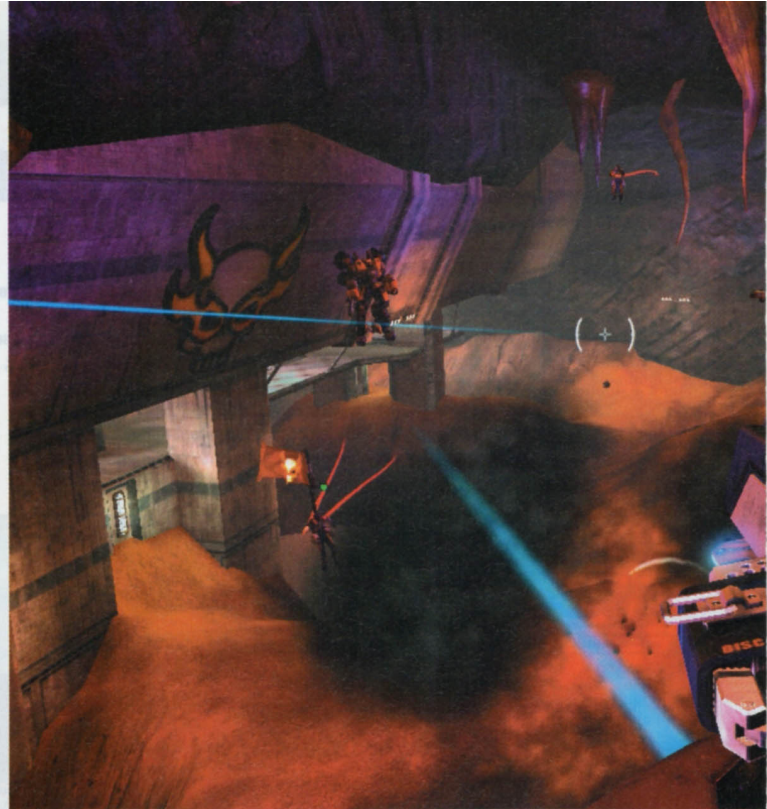
Expansions are already being worked on for *EQII* which, by my estimation, is going to take the content from the current "Jesus Christ!" levels to something closer to "Holy F**k!"

Again, just to reiterate. *EverQuest II* has exceeded all expectations. The journey has begun again and who knows how many staff members we'll lose this time round? Keep watching the job ads, folks. Your dream of working for *PC ZONE* has probably never been closer to reality. PCZ

PCZONE VERDICT

✔ The best looking MMOG world bar none
✔ Superbly designed
✔ Packed with content
✔ Future-proofed
✘ Needs a monster PC to play
✘ Will destroy your life

95

Wow

Ever tried your hand at fighting in 3D?

TRIBES: VENGEANCE

■ £29.99 | Pub: VU Games | Dev: Irrational Games | ETA: Out Now | www.tribesvengeance.com

REQUIRES 1.3GHz CPU, 256MB RAM, 56K modem and a 64MB 3D card **DESIRES** 2GHz, 512MB RAM, a 128MB 3D card and broadband

Phil Wand flies through the air with the loveliest of knees

MULTIPLAYER

CRAPPY isn't it, how every blockbuster from the last few months has been a multiplayer letdown? We've gone from the underwhelming *Far Cry*, to the plain awful *Doom 3*, arriving at the new *Half-Life* to discover Valve just left the multiplayer feature out altogether. Add in the resolutely single-player *Grand Theft Auto*, which removed all traces of network options when it became a console game some years back, and you can see why everyone's still defusing bombs and rescuing bloody hostages.

So it was more invigorating than a 3am hedgehog rubdown to return to the world of hills, valleys, jetpacks and unflattering armour (does my bum look enormously coated in metal in

this?) and get ready for some no-nonsense shooting Internet people in the head.

Vengeance is the 12th game from the *Starsiege* universe and the third from *Tribes* – a ground-breaking multiplayer franchise that has never once had a single-player campaign foisted upon it, nor some cockamamie storyline involving a warrior princess in unsuitable clothing on a quest to send us all to sleep. No, wait, it has. Porter reviewed it in issue 147. I should have guessed that while publishers were dropping multiplayer from games that needed it the most, they would be contriving single-player for something as focused as *Tribes*.

Still, the original was a trailblazer in its day, and

Vengeance was written to be a concentrate of everything that made its predecessors great – an abridged yet intensified version for fans and freshers alike. *Tribes* pioneered the use of large-scale, outdoor 64-player maps, not to mention teams, classes and vehicles, and despite suffering the ignominy of its developer being disbanded and its code being dumped on the Internet as freeware, it still plays well and is famously lag-free. That's all the more impressive when you consider it was written entirely in-house by Dynamix and, contrary to popular belief, was not licensed from id or Epic. Sadly, community support has waned over the years as people moved to the likes of *Unreal Tournament*

2004, *Battlefield*, *Planetside* – and all the other games which owe *Tribes* a beer.

SAME AS IT EVER WAS
Fast forwarding to the present day, *Vengeance* uses a barely disguised *Unreal* engine – something which in any other setting would have me banging

the desk with my hand. Here, the anime colours, sci-fi gothic architecture and general sense of non-realism (hence the name, I guess) make new *Tribes* seem even more otherworldly and even more, well, *Tribesey*. In short, no complaints.

There are three armour classes to choose from – light

> ## "The vehicle tally has been cut by a third to make the game more melee-oriented"

INPERSPECTIVE

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004
Reviewed Issue 138, Score 94%
One of the oldest FPS franchises gets better with every release. Fun new game modes, satisfying weapons and new vehicles make *UT2004* our favourite online shooter.

PLANETSIDE
Reviewed Issue 131, Score 82%
Developed by the *EverQuest* team, *Planetside* is a sci-fi blast 'em up in the *Tribes* mould. It's an accessible and appealing game, but the £8 monthly subscription keeps the head count down.

"Threatening the base? I'm trying to take a photo."

Your generator's down. That's bad.

The flag zone's a bit busy today.

"Mr Wand, you're wanted in wardrobe."

The Unreal engine sometimes makes its presence a little obvious.

boundaries. The Targeting Laser has gone, as have a number of toys much beloved by veterans (the Stealth Pack being the most obvious example), but this was done to make the game more accessible – *Tribes* needs fresh blood, and a bewildering array of equipment and options only serves to alienate the majority of casual players.

SMALLER IS WORSER

Tribes was always the polar opposite of the competition, presenting you with colossal landscapes rather than narrow corridors, and allowing you to drive or fly rather than trudge everywhere on foot. We take such things for granted nowadays, but five years ago these were revolutionary ideas – and sadly, *Vengeance* has done little to advance them.

The map size and player count have been halved so that the exhilarating scale of your surroundings is lost (a situation made worse by the way everything not in your immediate vicinity is enveloped in a graphics engine-friendly fog), and the vehicle tally has been cut by a third to make the game more melee oriented. While not a bad thing per se, it's had the effect of making battles rather conventional and less reliant on tactics – criticisms you would never normally level at *Tribes*.

But before you consign the game to your mental junkyard and move on, do please understand that *Vengeance* isn't a bad game. Really. It has its flaws, as do its rivals. It's not quite what existing players wanted, but then it's become more approachable to newcomers. And yes, it's lost a little of its grandeur, a little of its individuality, but no game can be all things to all people – not all the time. Thinking about it, this latest *Tribes* should have enough to keep everyone happy. **PCZ**

being a fast mover but vulnerable to enemy fire, heavy being a slow but brawny bastard, and medium striking a balance between the two. But unlike previous versions, where inventory size was related to chest size, each armour is now restricted to a maximum of three weapons. Combined with the fact that *Vengeance* maps are smaller than

those of its predecessors, and that the ancient Tribal art of skiing – in layman's terms, aquaplaning on rocks – is achieved simply by leaning on the space

bar, it means that a heavy suit is no longer the impediment it once was and can even be used for the odd capping run.

The gun count is identical to the last game although the actual line-up has changed. The Mortar Launcher, Chaingun, Grenade Launcher and Spinfusor, now a trademark of the game and lethal in the right hands, have all made it to *Vengeance*. There's a newcomer in the shape of the Grappler, allowing players to do Spidey tricks from cavern roofs, hitch rides with passing vehicles, or dangle above the flag and wait for an unwary enemy to pass underneath. In addition, the Jackal Rifle has been tweaked, and now requires ammunition as well as energy in an effort to stop players spending whole games sniping from the map

Call that water? There's no ripples!

Hope they've got batteries in the smoke alarm.

PCZONE VERDICT

✔ Less complicated than before
✔ Not a Second World War game
✘ Can be unsatisfying
✘ Small community
✘ Games dominated by old hands

SINGLE-PLAYER SCORE	87
MULTIPLAYER SCORE	80

Apparently close to a million people play the game in China.

Items can be infused with elements to cause maximum damage.

THE LEGEND OF MIR 3

■ £8.50 per month | Dev: Wemade Ent | Pub:
QGO | ETA: Out Now | www.mir3europe.com

REQUIRES PII 433MHz, 128MB RAM, DirectX8-compatible 3D card, 56K modem
DESIRES PIII 800MHz, 256MB RAM, DirectX8-compatible 3D card, ADSL/cable

Richie Shoemaker is Homeworld bound

OK, WE KNOW –
it's not exactly what you'd call a
looker is it? In fact, if you were
in a particularly cruel frame of
mind, you might refer to this
latest Korean import as a
'minger'. Objectively speaking,
it's rather unsightly when
compared to the myriad of
fantasy online games about
to strut along the MMO catwalk
– or indeed any that have long
since tripped into the abyss
at the end.

Running in a standard
800x600 resolution, in 16-bit
colour and with a view of the
world that's unashamedly
isometric, the look of The

Legend Of Mir is reminiscent of
the four-year old *Diablo II* (which
was hardly cutting-edge in its
day). It's a far cry from being
'state of the art', as so claimed in
the game's marketing. Still, you
shouldn't judge a game by it's
graphics (unless it's a first-
person shooter), and my job is
to peel back *Mir's* outer layer to
find the beauty that lies beneath.

FUTURE SHOCK
It's only after you've checked the
calendar a couple of times to
make sure it isn't 1997 and
accepted the fact that *The
Legend Of Mir* is never going to
transform into a beautiful swan

TLOM3 is full of bugs. Well, creepy-crawlies...

With full health points, the monsters are yours.

that the game becomes
temporarily spellbinding. This is
because, as well as looking a bit
Diablo-ish, it also offers much
the same gameplay, where
sword-swinging enthusiasm is
preferred over the more goal-
orientated approach of
EverQuest and its more
Western-centric peers.

In line with most fantasy
RPGs, the emphasis on

'treadmilling' your way through
the levels is immediately
identifiable. After you've created
a character, you have to cautiously
venture out from your starting
village until such time as you can
comfortably take out more than
the odd hen. Once a few NPC
missions have been completed,
experience earned and a new
sword bought (within a few
hours), you can explore dungeons,
the darker forests and earn
better rewards by joining a gang
as they go a-huntin' skeletons,
zombies and spider-frogs.

COMFORTABLY NUMB
While time passes quicker in the
company of others, progression
in *The Legend Of Mir* does feel
more of a grind than in other
like-minded games. NPC
intelligence is obvious and
environments are flat. What's
more, with only a cursory nod
to aspects like trade and
crafting, the game can feel like
a relentless slog through territory
that quickly becomes cloyingly
over-familiar.

As an introduction to online
fantasy role-playing, *The Legend
Of Mir 3* is a decent training tool.
It introduces the basic concepts
and never feels over-bearing or
complicated. However, unless
you hook up with a group who're
going to become lifelong friends,
it's unlikely you'll want to stay for
more than a couple of months.

While we're more than happy
to overlook the game's graphical
senility, the gameplay offers
nothing new either. With another
generation of MMORPGs
gliding ever closer, this feels
like a step backwards. **PCZ**

Guilds can fight for castles.

PCZONE VERDICT

✔ Accessible and easy to play
✔ Technically undemanding
✗ Lacks depth
✗ Looks and plays old

68

Living in the past
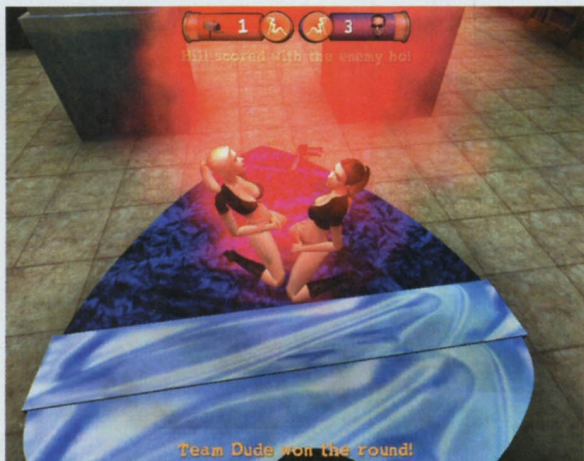
Now that's a prize worth fighting for.

"Eeny meeny miny mo…"

POSTAL 2: SHARE THE PAIN

■ £29.99 | Dev: hell-tech | Pub: Running With Scissors | ETA: Out Now | **www.gopostal.com**

REQUIRES PIII 733MHz, 128MB RAM, 32MB 3D card and a 56K modem
DESIRES PIII 1.2 GHz, 384MB RAM, 64MB 3D card and a broadband connection

Steve Hill plays a game that's so wrong, it's almost right…

MULTIPLAYER

I'M DRESSED as a member of the Taliban, totin' a machine gun and pissing in a whore's face. And they say games are a bad influence. *Postal 2* is of course the morally bankrupt first-person shooter that largely slipped under the mainstream outrage-o-meter when it was released earlier this year. Maybe the *Daily Mail* didn't receive its review copy, or perhaps the minor publisher simply lacked the PR weight to concoct a mutually beneficial tabloid storm. Either way, the pipe-hittin', animal-torturin', shock 'em up was dismissed as little more than a blip on the FPS radar.

The good/appalling (delete as applicable) news is that *Postal* is back, replete with all-new online multiplayer functionality. *Postal 2: Share The Pain* combines an enhanced single-player game with 14 multiplayer maps spanning four different game types. DeathMatch is the bog standard FPS perennial, with the key difference here being the diverse array of characters, spanning from Osama Bin Laden to Gary Coleman, aka the stunted kid from mawkishly moralistic '80s TV series, *Diff'rent Strokes*.

CAPTURE THE SLAG

Team DeathMatch is much of the same, whereas the Grab mode involves collecting ten bags, each of which make you stronger, something that may

or may not be due to the fact that they contain amphetamine-based drugs.

Finally, our favourite, the Snatch game sees you kidnapping a whore from your rival team and positing her in your bed. A simple variation of Capture The Flag, we can only speculate as to why they didn't call it Capture The Slag. Either way, it adds a new dimension to the basic tenet, in so much as the position of your stolen 'ho' is given away by her desperate screams. And besides, it's more

satisfying to return a 'bitch' to a heart-shaped bed than it is to plant a flag in a generic science fiction landscape, particularly as the two rival ladies lez it up for the winner.

ARE YOU BEING SERVED?

That's pretty much the level of sophistication you're looking at throughout, so if that kind of thing appeals, it's all wrapped up in a moderately playable game. It has to be said, the servers aren't exactly bulging with players, but for an entry-level online FPS, you

could do worse. You soon become so caught up in the frantic nature of the action that any moral issues are quickly forgotten about, and the bad taste aspect quickly becomes almost abstract (not necessarily a recommendation).

And if you already own the original single-player game, don't start crying, as a deal on the website enables you to upgrade it for a commensurate price. That said, choosing to condone this type of thing shouldn't really be a financial issue. PCZ

"Nice doggy. Down boy. Good dog."

INPERSPECTIVE

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004
Reviewed Issue 138, Score 91%
When it comes to online FPS action, this is currently the connoisseur's choice. Loads of modes and significantly less controversy.

HALF-LIFE 2
Reviewed Issue 148, Score 97%
AS FPS games go, by all accounts this one is quite good. No multiplayer though, unless you count *Counter-Strike: Source*.

"Not now love, I'm busy murdering."

Jumping for rather obvious joy.

PCZONE VERDICT

✔ Actually quite funny
✔ Features Gary Coleman
✔ And whores
✘ Morally dubious
✘ Fairly basic
✘ Empty servers

| SINGLE-PLAYER SCORE | 67 |
| MULTIPLAYER SCORE | 70 |
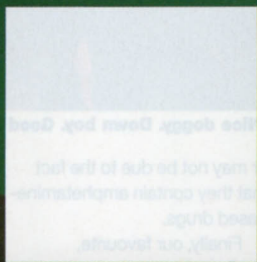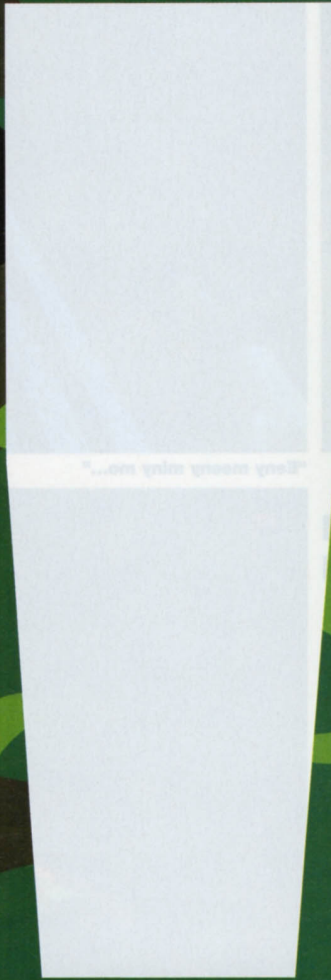
PSW

ALIEN SWARM V1.2

■ Size: 125MB | www.blackcatgames.com/swarm

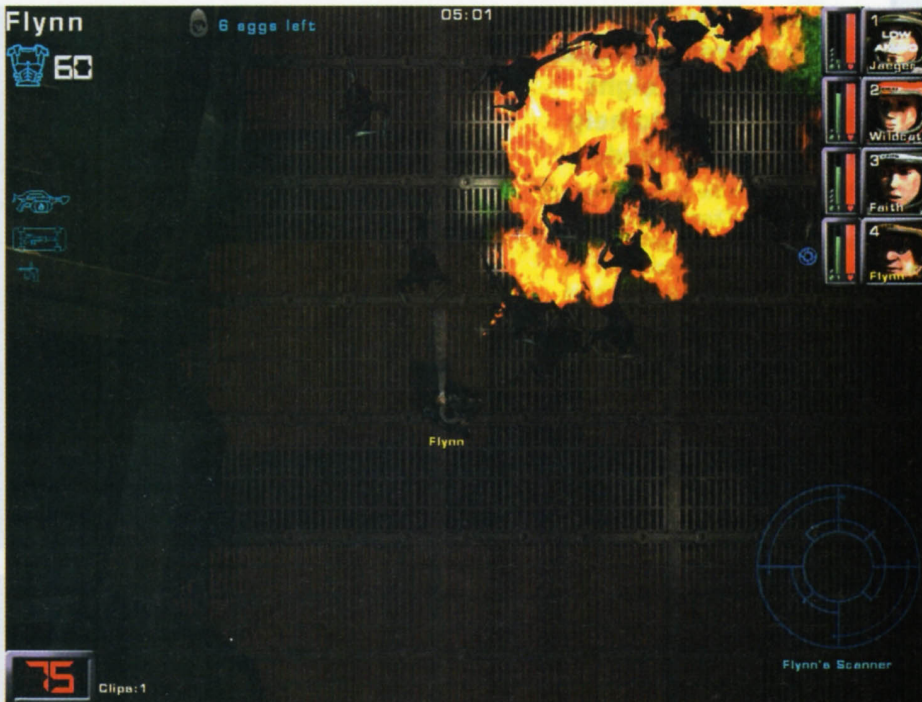REQUIRES Full version of *Unreal Tournament 2004*

Tony Lamb finds the bugs are biting again

THIS IS great, make no mistake. I haven't seen a mod that's so different from the formulaic norm for ages. To many a grizzled old gamer, the name alone conjures up the heady pre-*Doom* days when the scrolling shooter was king and you viewed your heavily armed hero from above or the side as you stomped around, blasting multitudes of enemies into steaming lumps. Boring? Oh no. It was exciting and adrenaline-fuelled mayhem. So, a mod that turns *UT2004* into a retro-style gorefest is a breath of fresh air.

But *Alien Swarm* is more than just a nod to old games. While the Marines vs. Aliens theme is nothing new, *AS* adds many modern features to make it a truly complete and well-rounded mod. It's class-based: you can choose from a variety of weapon loadouts and skills. It's tactical: you need a mix of firepower and technical abilities in your squad to survive. It's action-packed: you lead your squad through an ever harder series of hostile environments. And, best of all, it can be played co-operatively. Forget leading a squad – get your mates on a LAN and get stuck in!

And the rest? The graphics, sounds and effects are excellent. The maps are classy and difficult. The atmosphere is tense and exciting. Even single-player mode is a laugh, although death is inevitable, swift and bloody. Top stuff. **PCZ**

PCZONE VERDICT 89

They're behind you

Not quite Ripley and the gang, but it'll do.

RED ORCHESTRA V3.0

■ Size: 497MB | redorchestramod.gameservers.net

REQUIRES Full version of *Unreal Tournament 2004*

Tony Lamb strikes up the band

WITH *Battlefield 1942*, *Call Of Duty*, *Medal Of Honor* and others slicing up the WWII cake, it's a brave mod that tries to take them on at their own game. However, *Red Orchestra*, now in its third incarnation, acquits itself very well indeed and comes out with its head held high.

Set on the Eastern Front during WWII, the gameplay will be familiar to most FPS fans. This is a team-/class-/objective-based multiplayer mod in which each side has predetermined tasks to achieve in order to win – usually the capture of various locations. It's also a realism mod,

sacrificing little in the way of real-life accuracy in favour of gameplay. Get shot in the hand for example, and you'll drop your weapon. Run too far and you'll get out of breath. Stop a bullet and you'll die – that sort of thing. This becomes especially interesting when vehicles

are involved, because although you can position yourself as a tank driver, machine gunner or turret operator, you can't do all of them at the same time. Teamplay is essential here!

The *Red Orchestra* maps are excellent. Some are too big perhaps, but

that's okay so long as there are plenty of players. Online support is limited unfortunately, but a LAN game would be great fun, and bots are there for the unloved. The skins, models, and sounds are likewise excellent. All in all, this is easily one of the best *UT2004* mods around. **PCZ**

Doesn't look much like a violin to me.

That's one hell of a mole he's got.

Bloody rain.

PCZONE VERDICT 85

Better Red than dead

COMMUNITY CHEST

EVERQUEST

The king of MMORPGs reigns supreme. *Daniel Emery* looks at eight sites designed to help your questing needs

After five years as the undisputed king of MMORPGs, *EverQuest* is getting a serious makeover with *EverQuest II* (see review, page 116). But because *EverQuest* is server-based, there's not much scope for customising your own skins and the like – not least, because the server will block any attempts to add something unusual to the system (too many hackers tried that). There are, however, essential websites with more information than the Encyclopaedia Britannica, so why not use a bit of help getting to grips with the world of Norrath? You know it makes sense.
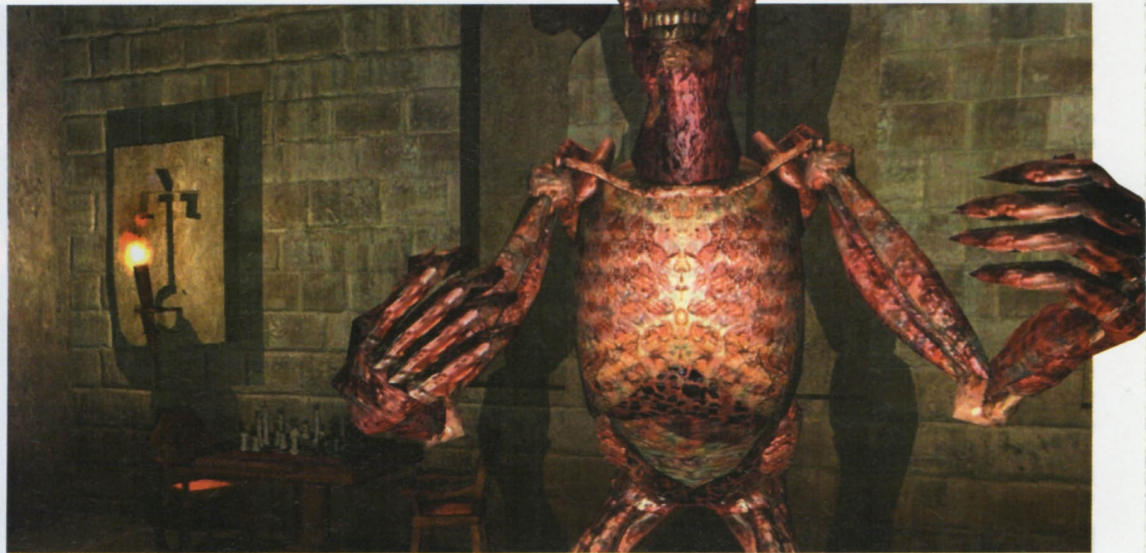
ALLAKHAZAM'S MAGICAL REALM
(EQ & EQII)
everquest.allakhazam.com

You can either spend hours trying to work out what's where in *EQ*, or you can head over to Allakhazam where the hard work's done for you. That doesn't mean you can complete quests in a flash – many require items that are a bitch to find – but you'll at least cut down on some of the frustration.

EQ TRADERS
(EQ & EQII)
www.eqtraders.com

Trade skills let you make unique items for sale or for specialised quests. However, most require specific recipes and unless you know the combination you can waste precious time, resources and rare items finding out. EQ Traders has practically every one written down, with the required ability, stats and ingredients. Bonza!
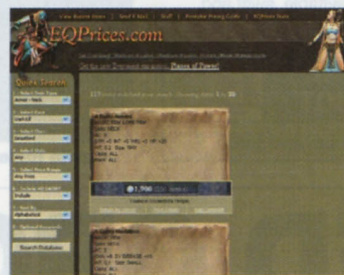
EQ PRICES
(EQ)
www.eqprices.com

You can never get enough money, and while looting corpses is one solution, selling rare items to other players can be a cash bonanza. But just how much is something worth? EQ Prices has listed every possible item found in *EverQuest*, along with an average price which players enter themselves.
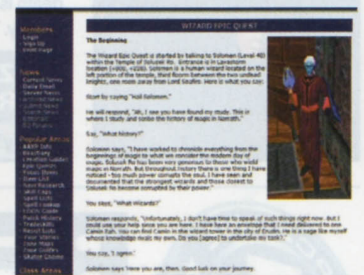
EQ CASTERS
(EQ)
eq.crgaming.com

If hitting monsters isn't your thing, then why not fry them with a nice fireball? EQ Casters is dedicated to spellcasters of all classes, and features walkthroughs to get epic items, spell lists and reagent combinations. There's even a handy archive of patch information, so you can see what's changed and when.

EVERLORE
(EQ & EQII)
www.everlore.com

What sets EverLore apart are the utterly fantastic maps. Getting lost in *EverQuest* is all too easy for the unprepared, but this site has a map for every occasion. Even the über-zones are included here – and when you consider that the slightest wrong turn results in rapid death, these maps will save your virtual life.
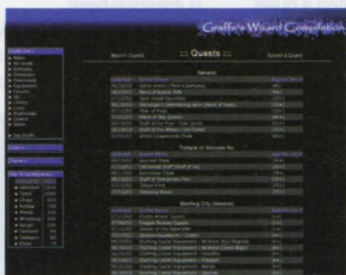
GRAFFE'S WIZARD COMPILATION
(EQ)
www.graffe.com

Wizards usually get a rum deal so this site should prove a boon. As well as the usual quest and item guides, it's also full of information that's Wizard-specific – where to get certain spells, what mobs drop handy 'wizard' items and a great forum where wizards stroke their beards together.

EQ RANKINGS
(EQ)
www.eqrankings.com

Guilds are an essential element in *EQ*. Once you reach a certain level, the only way to progress is by killing creatures that would be impossible by yourself. EQ Rankings not only lists hundreds of guilds by server, but also shows you how active (and successful) they are. Handy for the discerning adventurer.
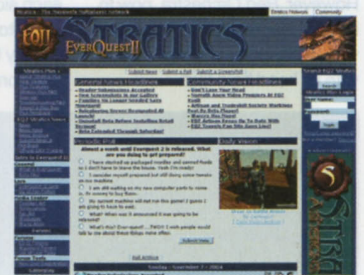
EQ STRATICS
(EQII)
eq2.stratics.com

This is another one-stop shop, this time for everything *EverQuest II*-related. It's packed with up-to-the-minute news, an excellent character class guide, quest lists, a lively discussion board, some nifty desktop wallpapers, fan art (if you want to take your *EQ* obsession to whole new levels) and a really good world atlas.

STEVE HILL'S
NEVERQUEST

Steve Hill **joins the weekend warriors of** *Guild* *Wars*
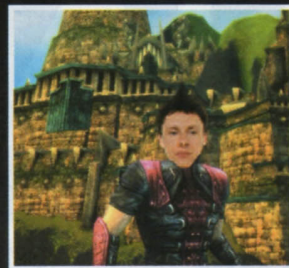
THREE DAYS. That's all I've got. Three. Don't worry, I'm not dying, it's just that the worldwide preview of the *Guild Wars* beta only runs from Friday to Sunday. It may not seem like a long time, but for the shallow purposes of NeverQuest, it should be more than comfortable. Nevertheless, Friday passes without any inclination to enter a fantasy world of warriors, monks and mesmers, Saturday is reserved for more traditional weekend pursuits, and Sunday is spent staring into the abyss.

Suffice to say that by the time I drag myself into *Guild Wars*, I'm slightly off the pace, with some people having spent the entire weekend in there. Undeterred, I select my character, opting for the Necromancer. Does this spell repressed Gothic tendencies, having dedicated much of my life to ridiculing them? Or is it just because I like the trousers? Either way, I fashion a unique look, tweaking my Mohican to perfection until I resemble a skinny negative of Mr T.

As for a name, I opt for Steve Hill: partly as I can't be arsed to come up with some mystical codswallop, but also on the off chance that regular readers might come to my aid. Nevertheless, Ultu Bespa mocks, "good god, original name," unaware of the paradox.

TWO'S COMPANY

Essentially a glorified *Gauntlet* for the 21st century, *Guild Wars* involves small groups of heroes embarking on co-operative missions, typically entailing kicking the shit out of giant spiders. A largely moron-proof experience, that's not to say it's entirely free of morons, and within minutes I've already met a proper whopper. Despite the extremely individualistic approach to my appearance, I manage to run into someone who's almost my exact double (an irony that Goths must live with daily). Blubber Nugget is the looky-likey in question, and we circle each other like hissing cats, both appalled yet disturbingly fascinated.

Television connoisseurs will recall the classic scene in *The Boys From The Black Stuff* where Yosser Hughes eyeballs Liverpool hardman Graeme Souness, calmly exclaiming: "You look like me." In attempt to break the ice, I resurrect the line, but the obscure tribute is lost on my US doppelganger, who bleats: "You cheating bastard! You stole my look!"

"I had it first," I respond.

"No!" he screams. "When did you get this game?"

"Day one," I tell him.

"Yeah right, then how are you still a level 15?" spits the level 18 Blubber.

"Haven't played much," I truthfully reply, as if in court.

"Whatever, you gay dumbass," replies the eloquent Blubber, although I manage the last word with a hastily barked: "F**k you bummer."

Thankfully, he's not representative of the populace, and putting together a party for a mission is a surprisingly civil business. Effectively consisting of a holding area where people offer their services, the prelude to a mission is loosely akin to reading the personal ads. Various approaches are taken, from the somewhat technical 'level 19 warrior looking for group' to 'monk mouse looking for fun and thrill' from Chocolate The Mouse, and even 'me want smash!! Invite me please!!' – thanks, Skull Fauker.

PARTY ON DUDE

Me? I simply strip down to my undercrackers, promising to put my clothes back on only once I've got a full crew. The response is immediate, and our dirty half dozen heads into the wilderness to smite the undead. As a Necromancer with a sideline as an Elementalist, I hang back, dropping fire onto the beasts then resurrecting their corpses to fight for our side, although I do occasionally get stuck in with a giant hammer. The missions fly by as we liberate the downtrodden masses, at one stage transporting a giant magic eye to its rightful resting place and being made Knights Of The Mantle (not something that happens every day).

Party members come and go between missions, and in the main it's quite polite, with only Charlie Bean branding everyone "idiots" for allowing the monk to die, scuppering any resurrections. The intensity of the fighting precludes much chat, but I do strike up a rapport with female Necromancer, Capt Nipples, a former Hackney resident now living in Canada who admirably buys the import edition of *PC ZONE*.

With missions getting harder and party members dropping like flies, it comes down to me, Nipples and a hired monk, with all hope disappearing when the latter falls foul of a Moss Scarab. "Just keep going," urges Nipples, but a brace of Jungle Trolls seals our fate, and we simultaneously bite the dust. Me and Capt Nipples, dead, chatting. This is becoming a theme. **PCZ**

All hail discordia.

That's one big chicken drumstick.

TWIN STREAK

■ **HARDWARE EDITOR** Phil Wand

▲ Founded in 1872 and with a circulation getting on for 1,500,000 introverted Americans, *Popular Science* is the world's largest technology magazine. It's published monthly and consists mainly of articles furthering the myth that nothing of any scientific consequence happens outside the US. Nestling among this year's awards for 'advances' such as dashboard traffic systems (despite the fact that Europeans have enjoyed Trafficmaster for over ten years) was an award for NVIDIA's SLI technology which, as you're no doubt aware, allows two GeForce 6-series cards to be linked to one another and share the love.

Being a Canadian outfit, ATI was never going to win anything but the wooden spoon in a publication such as this, but if we ignore the rampant nationalism and the fact the awards are sponsored by Bose, the 'Best of What's New' awards are spot-on. It may be old technology – 3dfx introduced a less complicated, less restrictive SLI in the '90s – and it may require a deeper than average pocket, but it's still something to which every gamer aspires. We've all promised ourselves our own 16-player air-conditioned LANs when our lottery numbers roll in, each machine boasting a 21-inch LCD, FX-55 plus two SLI 6800 Ultras. It's this wayward dreaming that goes a long way to explaining why NVIDIA, although lagging behind both Intel and ATI in overall market share, now has a commanding lead of the high-end segment where three in every five cards are GeForce 6800s.

SLI is the marketing department's dream come true and an award from *Popular Science* is a gift from the gods. Once the twin-card benchmarks appear, and twin PCI-Express motherboards are available online for next-day delivery, expect NVIDIA to be back on top again.

▼

BUILDING THE PRESSURE

THE FIRST VALVE BENCHMARKS UNVEILED

ATI claims monster lead in first *Half-Life 2* benchmarks; NVIDIA releases beta drivers optimised for the game

BENCHMARKS ■ 6800 GT ■ 6800 ULTRA ■ X800 PRO ■ X800 XT ■ X800 XT PE
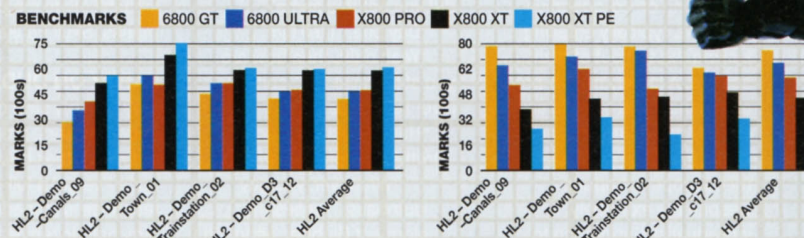
The **COMBINED SCORE** is an average of a number of real-world gaming tests and bespoke benchmarking tools. The **WANDYMARK™** is the combined average score divided by the price.

The very morning *Half-Life 2* was released, Radeon went public with a range of benchmarks demonstrating the dominance of its R4xx-based hardware in the Source engine. Across the board, from high-end X800 PROs and XTs down to entry-level X300 SEs, the reds were kicking the greens – Canada versus America, The Commonwealth beating up The Colonies. It was like The War of 1812 all over again.

Patriotism and brand loyalty aside, enthusiasts should be interested to learn that according to the manufacturer, the X800 XT PE yielded frame-rates that were 150 per cent faster than the GeForce 6800 Ultra – a margin you simply can't ignore. And comparing our Buyer's Guide favourite 6800 GT with the top banana X800, ATI claims its Platinum

Benchmark the Source engine yourself using the Video Hardware Stress Test.

Edition flagship is almost twice as fast when playing through *Half-Life 2*. Whoosh.

WHAT? WHY? HOW?

This is all horribly disorienting for end users. If the Radeon and GeForce ranges weren't confusing enough already, buyers are being bombarded with conflicting results from objective and subjective sources alike. Take the *Doom 3* benchmarks released by id Software back in July. These showed that NVIDIA's NV4x-based hardware was way out in front of the competition, and that the GT was almost as quick as the Ultra – results that were later supported by our own testing. More recent numbers from Futuremark's 3DMark05 identified the Radeon X800 XT as the outright

winner, even though we've known for some time that *Far Cry* is best experienced with its competitor. And now this. Who are we to believe?

To add to the scrimmage, NVIDIA released a beta version of its 67.02 drivers just before we went to print – at the click of a 'Next' button, the new drivers added 15 per cent to scores from the Video Hardware Stress Test (try this yourself – it's available from the main screen of *Counter-Strike: Source*). At a resolution of 1280x1024, running full detail with both 4xAA and 8xAF, the 6800 Ultra leapt from an already impressive 99fps to over 115fps. That's a huge improvement achieved with no effort whatsoever, and one that should help take the wind from ATI's sails. The battle continues unabated…

HEAVEN 17

The merchandising starts here...

Named after the world's most famous virtual metropolis, the City 17 features an FX-55 and costs over two grand.

LAUNCHED the day before *Half-Life 2*, the Aurora City 17 is a limited-edition heavyweight developed in cooperation with Source engine developers at Valve. The £2,285 Aurora features an AMD Athlon 64 FX-55, Radeon X800 XT and a whopping 2GB RAM. The sleek shape of the case also houses dual 74GB Raptor HDDs (the 10,000rpm Western Digital drives featured in our Buyer's Guide) to enable quick level load times. Disappointingly, although Alienware's specifications mention a CD-RW unit, they omit any form of DVD writer – so if you bought *Half-Life 2* over the Steam platform, and burning all that downloaded data to a DVD seems like a sensible backup

option, you can't with this.

The new Aurora will be manufactured in a strictly limited run. However, with no numbers mentioned, this presumably means the developer will stop making it once people stop buying it.
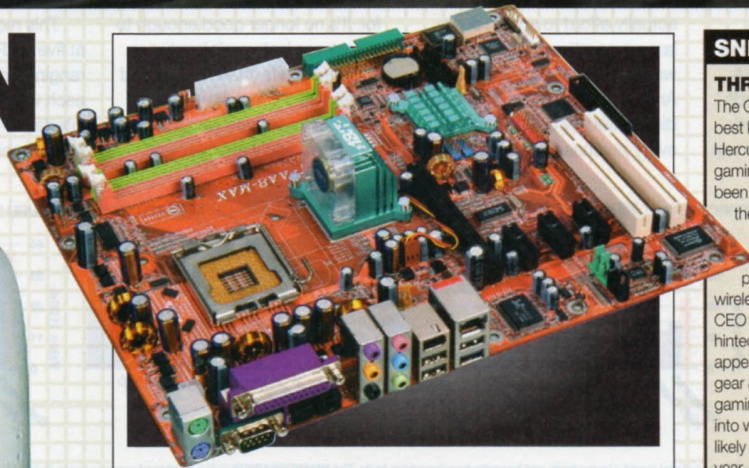
ABIT WICKED

ABIT joins ASUS, MSI and GIGABYTE in unlocking the Pentium multiplier.

CPU accelerator claims to boost ABIT LGA775 mobos by a third

AVAILABLE on new ABIT's latest 915P-, 925X- and 925XE-based motherboards, CPU Accelerator means that if you own a Pentium 4, you can now get greater flexibility in your overclocking. This permits you to change the multiplier of your chip as well as the clock of its bus, and thus reach previously unattainable speeds. It also means that if you own an 800MHz FSB chip, you can run it at 1066MHz.

You may recall that a chip's frequency is the product of its front-side bus (FSB) and its multiplier – a Pentium 4 550 is 200MHz x 17 = 3.4GHz. From the Pentium II through to the present day, these processors have had their multipliers 'locked' by Intel, and anyone wishing to pump up a Pentium has had to do so using bus speed increases alone. Recently however, key mainboard makers such as MSI and ASUS have introduced systems which allow their users to fiddle and tweak in places no tweakers have fiddled before.

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
NVIDIA	Forceware	5.10	17-Sep-04	26.8MB	www.nvidia.com
VIA	Hyperion 4in1	4.53	16-Aug-04	1.4MB	www.viaarena.com
VIA	Hyperion Pro 64-bit	0.99 Beta	06-Aug-04	2.7MB	www.viaarena.com

GRAPHICS

MANUFACTURER	NAME	DESC	RELEASED	SIZE	WEB	
ATI	Display, Control Panel, WDM	CATALYST 4.12	15-Nov-04	26.1MB	www.ati.com	NEW
NVIDIA	Forceware	66.93	09-Nov-04	17.8MB	www.nvidia.com	NEW

SOUND

MANUFACTURER	NAME	DESC	RELEASED	SIZE	WEB
Creative	Audigy 2/2 ZS Driver Update	1-84-50	29-Jul-04	16.6MB	uk.europe.creative.com
M-Audio	Revolution	1.0.2.8	13-Feb-04	10.16MB	m-audio.com

PLAY YOUR CARDS RIGHT

Is it possible to get superb performance for not much cash? *Phil Wand* is the man to find out...

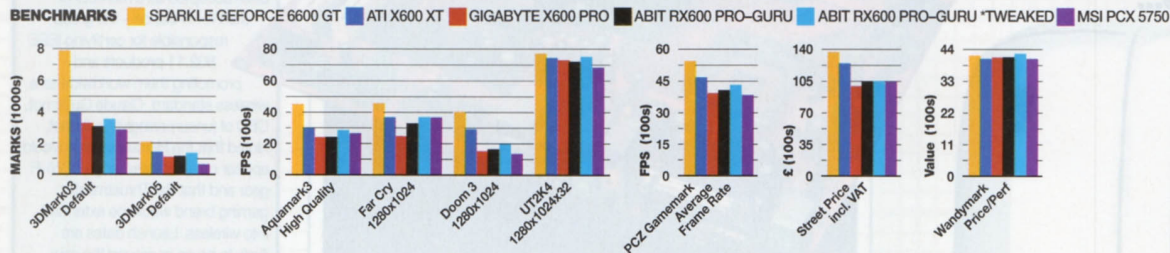**THE TOP-END** graphics cards might get all the headlines, but ATI and NVIDIA actually sell most of their cards at around the £100-£150 mark. Let's face it, how many of us can actually afford to splash out a large proportion of our month's wages on a single purchase? And, with gamers becoming less disoriented by the technology, every purchase has to be fought for. It's no longer good enough to repackage last year's hardware with last year's chart failures and a *Half-Life 3* voucher – because as we all know, you want power more than you want freebies.

This month, we've looked at five mid-range contenders ranging from £99-£139, and each with the new PCI-Express interface – so yes, you guessed it, you need one of the more recent Intel motherboards to use them. But before Athlon fans turn the page in disgust, consider that every card you see here will be made available with AGP – and that PCI-Express AMD boards will soon be available in large numbers – and then you'll appreciate how these cards will be relevant to everyone with £150 in their pocket.

Trouble is, as you can see, performance varies massively and you can't trust the man in the shop to steer you right. That's where we come in...

BENCHMARKS ■ SPARKLE GEFORCE 6600 GT ■ ATI X600 XT ■ GIGABYTE X600 PRO ■ ABIT RX600 PRO-GURU ■ ABIT RX600 PRO-GURU *TWEAKED ■ MSI PCX 5750

The **PCZ GAMEMARK** 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.

GEFORCE 6600 GT

■ £139 | Manufacturer: Sparkle Computer | Phone: 0191 4210 166 | www.sparkle-technology.co.uk

A true champion of value and power

SPARKLE'S GeForce 6600 GT is powered by NVIDIA's latest generation NV43 chip – it's a younger brother of the NV40 with the same core architecture as our Editor's Choice 6800 GT. Broadly speaking they're the same card, except the 6600 has had its memory bandwidth cut, courtesy of a 128-bit rather than 256-bit memory interface. It's also had half its pixel pipelines removed, down from 16 to 8. As with all the other cards on test this issue, the 6600 GT features a PCI-Express interface. With the motherboard now providing adequate power, it requires no extra connectors and thus doesn't need splitters or additional cables inside your case.

As you can see, the 6600 GT produces benchmark results which dwarf the opposition. Its 3DMark03 score is almost twice that of the most expensive X600 variant, and its 3DMark05 result is not only half as good again as any Radeon, but a whopping four times the number achieved by the PCX 5750. Most importantly, the 6600 GT is as fast as the fastest cards from last year – including the 9800 XT. It can also be used as one of a pair with NVIDIA's SLI mode, although the £278 total outlay for this set-up makes a 6800 GT a much saner and less complicated choice.

SPECIFICATIONS
HARDWARE
128MB GDDR-3 NVIDIA GeForce 6600 GT
Ancillaries: S-video cable whip
Bundle: Installation CD

PCZONE VERDICT
✔ Top performance
✔ Top value
✘ SLI ready
✘ Meagre bundle

92

Mid-range price, high-end technology

RADEON X600 XT

■ £125 | Manufacturer: Sapphire |
Phone: N/A | www.sapphiretech.com

This one comes close, but no cigar...

EVEN in XT guise, the X600 can't conceal the fact that it's based on yesterday's technology. At its heart, the ATI RV380 chip is basically a clock-tweaked Radeon 9600 XT – the same four-pixel pipeline, 128-bit technology that debuted back in 2003, but with a PCI-Express connector and more MHz on the memory.

It's already been superseded by the X700 XT, an RV410-based product which successfully counters the hefty punch of the GeForce 6600. However, since no retail cards were available when this article was written, you'll have to wait another issue to see how it performs.

Still, the X600 XT remains noticeably faster than its PRO siblings, and is able to get reasonably close to the performance of the GeForce 6600 GT in both *Unreal* and *Far Cry*. However, it couldn't scrape above 30fps in the *Doom* benchmark, where the NVIDIA was doing over 40fps, nor does it offer much in terms of value – it's just £15 cheaper than the GeForce and has no support for SLI.

In essence, the X600 XT is all wrong – the mainstream line-ups of ATI and NVIDIA are already mystifying most users, and poor-performing, old-hat technology would be better off consigned to the scrapheap.

SPECIFICATIONS
HARDWARE
256MB DDR ATI Radeon X600 XT
Ancillaries: VGA to DVI converter, S-video cable whip, RCA composite, cable, S-video to RCA
Bundle: PowerDVD 5, Installation CD

PCZONE VERDICT
✔ Reasonable value
✔ *Far Cry* performance
✘ Old technology
✘ Slow

74

A 9600XT in new shoes

X800 PRO

■ £99 | Manufacturer: GIGABYTE Technology | Phone: 01908 362700 | uk.giga-byte.com

Less than a ton, but less than whelming

AS with all other X600 products here, GIGABYTE's X600 PRO card is based around Radeon technology that's been kicking around for 18 months or more. Its benchmark results are less than inspiring, especially alongside the all-new GeForce 6600 GT, and unless a hundred quid is your absolute limit, it's not something any right-minded gamer should have on their shopping list.
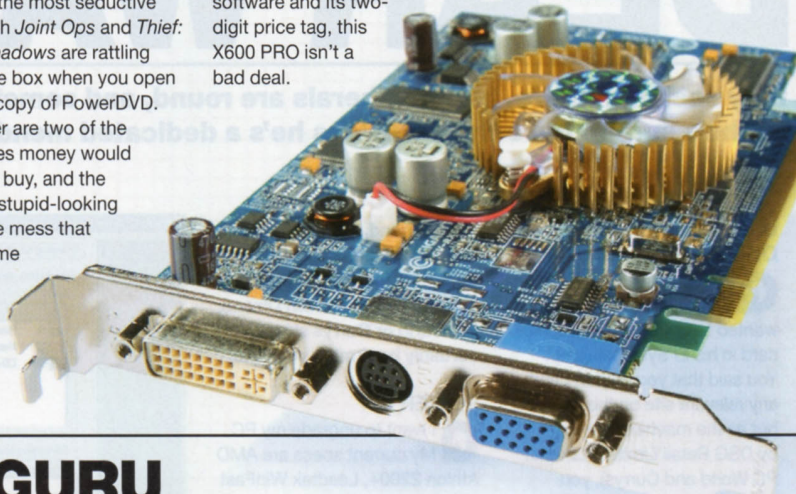
Plus, if you've read the review of the XT, you'll know that the X700 has recently made the entire X600 line-up pretty much obsolete, and so like Jodie Marsh, it gets less attractive the more you look at it. Poor X600.

To be fair, the GIGABYTE bundle is the most seductive here – both *Joint Ops* and *Thief: Deadly Shadows* are rattling around the box when you open it, as is a copy of PowerDVD. The former are two of the best games money would otherwise buy, and the latter is a stupid-looking Taiwanese mess that has become popular through virtue of the fact that most

people never pay for it. Personal prejudices aside, when you consider the free software and its two-digit price tag, this X600 PRO isn't a bad deal.

Just don't expect too much from the hardware, because it can't deliver.

RX600 PRO-GURU

■ £105 | Manufacturer: ABIT Computer Corp | Phone: 01438 228888 | www.abit.com.tw

More memory, more features – can they make a difference?

FOR £5 more than the GIGABYTE, you can buy ABIT's RX600 PRO-Guru card with ABIT's proprietary vGuru technology – in other words, manufacturer-approved overclocking, hardware monitoring, fan speed adjustments, plus a module that enables you to communicate more effectively with technical support.

Well, that's what the box promises. It'll be interesting to see how all this makes a difference to the benchmarks, especially as this 256MB model offers twice the onboard memory as the GIGABYTE variant. To that end, there are two results presented for your delectation – the first for standard settings, the second achieved using the vGuru utility.

Sadly, the aforementioned vGuru prefers the old-school approach to overclocking: increase numbers, hit OK and see what happens. Because

it doesn't test your chosen clock speeds, the card is prone to crashing when you overcook things. What's more, because there's no way of reverting to defaults if your display corrupts, you end up having to hit restart. Again and again.

In short, it's bloody awful, but with a little perseverance and a lot of luck, the results helped propel the card from last to first place for value and to within a gnat's chuff of the XT. It's just a shame that ABIT's tool is so ungainly compared to ATITool.
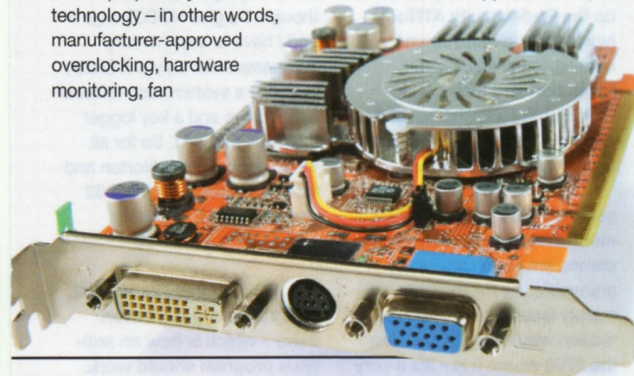
PCX 5750

■ £125 | Manufacturer: Micro-Star International |
Phone: 020 8813 6688 | www.msicomputer.co.uk

Nice bundle, shame about the pace

IF you've been scoffing heartily at the X600 line-up, get ready to snort with derision at the PCX range. The MSI card you see here is an old FX model with a PCI-Express bridge, and is even more of a lamentable performer than the mainstream Radeon.

Although replaced by the GeForce 6600 range, the PCX is available in large numbers at retail outlets both online and down the high street. So if it isn't already abundantly clear, avoid this card. Even if it's a life or death situation, where the frustrated manager of a Currys branch is pointing a gun at your head and ordering you to buy one, don't.

The biggest giveaway is the 3DMark05 result – though 'result' is hardly the word I'd choose. Although I'm no fan of this particular test, it does make it abundantly clear that DirectX-9.0 compliance isn't enough. Where the old 3DMark03 score suggested the PCX is on a par with the X600, the newer

benchmark throws its head back, cackles insanely and then pummels the card into a frame-per-second slideshow. Other scores, such as 13fps in *Doom 3*, reveal that a lot of the high-power games aren't even going to be playable. And that's all there is to it.

DEAR WANDY

They seek him here, they seek him there, his peripherals are round, and sometimes square. But whatever your problem, he's sure to have the cure, 'cos he's a dedicated mender of all things PC

■ **DOCTOR BEAT** Phil Wand

Unless you're giving your PC a major overhaul, or are adding new peripherals, you shouldn't fret about your power supply.

DIXONS OUT OF THE DOCK

Q In issue 148 you printed a letter from Chris who wanted to upgrade the graphics card in his Ei System laptop. You said that you couldn't find any relevant site on the Internet, but as the machine was sold by DSG Retail Limited (Dixons, PC World and Currys), you need to pay a visit to www.pcservicecall.co.uk. This is the website that deals with all technical support for computer products bought from Dixons Stores Group.

You can find the specs of most machines sold in the last few years on the site, and there are hints and tips on how to remove viruses and protect yourself online. So next time someone tells you PC World fixed their computer, the chances are it was PC ServiceCall. We're the only UK-based 24/7 technical support centre and we also offer support on non-DSG PCs and software through premium-rate calls.
Cheeba

A Thanks for sharing a useful link. Sadly, I'm not sure it'll help Chris in this particular instance (he was trying to perform the impossible task of swapping out the video card in his Ei System laptop). However, all Advent, AlbaComp, Averatec, Compaq, Dreamsys, eMachines, Everex, Fujitsu-Siemens, Hewlett Packard, JVC, Legend, Medion, Packard Bell, Patriot, Samsung, Sharp, Sony and Toshiba owners who bought their stuff from Dixons, PC World or Currys should certainly bookmark your site.

POWER UP

Q I want to upgrade my PC. My current specs are AMD Athlon 2200+, Leadtek WinFast K7NCR18D, 1024MB RAM and a Radeon 9700 Pro. OK, so the processor is something of a bottleneck here, but the greedy gamer in me fancies upgrading my graphics card as well.

Thing is, I'm concerned that upgrading these two components may be useless given the power supply I have – a look under the lid revealed that it offers 300W maximum output. Do I need to update this? And if so, could you advise me on which product to choose? Is it easy to change, or is it something you'd recommend only more experienced PC boffins to try?
Christian Ainsley

A Even though you're bound to be sick to death of your old 2200+, I would do nothing but spend £80 on an upgrade to a 333FSB 3000+ and leave the 9700 Pro and PSU where they are. This is because unless you then spend £250 on a significantly better video card, plus £90 for a 400FSB chip and a further £100 for memory to go with it, you're not going to enjoy an appreciably better gaming experience. Quite honestly, and this goes for anyone with an older Athlon board, you should be looking to save up the necessary £200-£300 for a leap into the 939-pin, 64-bit AMD world; don't waste your money on rinsing an extra nine frames-per-second from yesterday's technology.
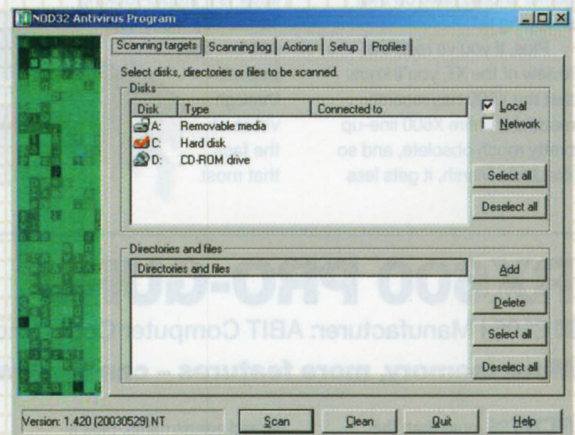
Switch to NOD32 and kiss your anti-virus worries goodbye.

Buy that new Barton, clock up the Radeon with ATITool (www.techpowerup.com/atitool), lower the screen resolution and then put up with it until replenished funds allow you to leave it all behind for something far faster.

Demanding less of your gear has always been the most effective way of making games smoother and more enjoyable. As for the power supply issue, that's another reason why I suggest leaving the 9700 where it is – it's a very respectable card that won't stress your 300W supply.

The moment you start pairing a new X800 or 6800 with larger processors, you're going to need a beefier PSU to feed a substantially larger appetite for electricity. Don't be afraid when that moment comes – they're not difficult to fit (no more so than installing a processor into a busy case). Spend £50-£75 on a top quality Tagan or Antec TruePower product. Avoid value brands – they're not worth the risk.

SMUG MODE

Q I've been using Norton Anti-Virus for years and have been pretty happy with it. At the same time, I've had people telling me that it uses too many resources and is slow. After reading issue 148, I thought I'd give NOD32 a go – and I have to say, I'm very impressed. Not only is it faster, but after a system scan it found two Trojans and a key logger that Norton didn't. So for all those people using Norton and feeling all secure, try NOD32 and see what it's missing.
*David Searle*

A I'm glad you like NOD32. You'll forget it's even there – which is how an anti-virus program should work.

MINIMIZE DRIVERS

Q My machine has developed a frustrating and peculiar problem of minimizing games back to the taskbar when I open them. It continually returns them there each time I bring them back into focus, and the only way to close them is by hitting CTRL+ALT+DEL and then ending the process prematurely.

This has been an intermittent problem in the past and I've just put up with it. I've even managed to cure it after reinstalling Windows. However, I'm now running a clean XP install and have had no success using Microsoft's Knowledge Base to look for the symptoms I'm experiencing. With the imminent release of *Half-Life 2*,
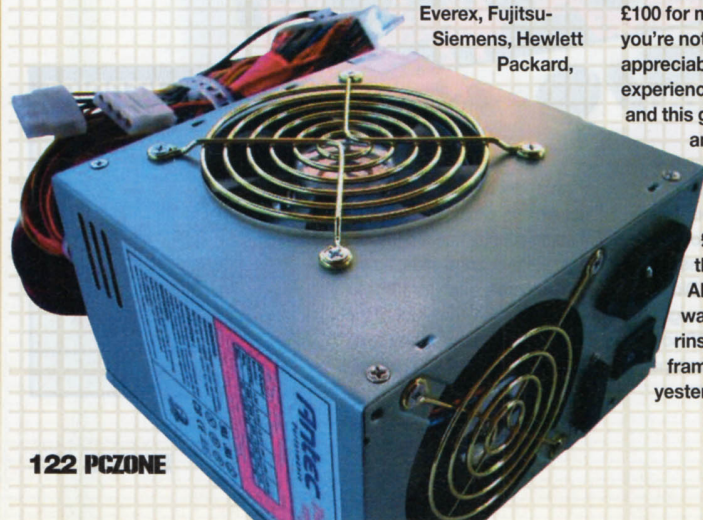
"For all those people using Norton and feeling all secure, try NOD32 and see just what it's missing"

I'm more eager than ever to resolve the problem before it ruins my enjoyment. I'm running Windows XP Home SP2 with a Radeon 9700 Pro and Norton Internet Security 2003.

Ian Keay

A There's no easy answer here, so we'll just have to go through a list of what it could be. The first thing I'd check is the most obvious – are the games set to run in their minimized state? It's not likely, but also it's not impossible! Right-click on the relevant shortcuts in the Start Menu, choose Properties from the individual pop-up menus, and then make sure the drop-down box next to Run shows 'Normal' and not 'Minimized'.

Next, switch off Norton Internet Security, as this could be the culprit – you'd be wise to replace Norton with NOD32. Although NOD32 is strictly anti-virus, SP2 provides a worthy and free replacement for Internet Security's firewall anyway.

If that doesn't sort things, try ditching your ATI drivers and download the Omega ones from omegadrivers.net instead. A number of people have reported that by switching to this popular but unofficial driver set, they've cured all manner of weird problems. Just make sure you read the disclaimers before clicking the Install button.

Lastly, and probably most importantly: there's a strong likelihood that you have one or more processes running on your machine related to viruses or spyware, and it could be this that's upsetting the smooth-running of your system. Make sure Norton's up-to-date and that you complete a full system scan before ditching it. Also, stop using Internet Explorer today, and run Lavasoft's Ad-aware from www.lavasoft.de.

DEUTSCHLAND ÜBER ALLIES

Q I recently downloaded an update to *Allied Assault* using GameShadow.

Unfortunately, it was a German edition patch, and thinking I was cancelling it (my German's not good), it started patching my copy of the game. I managed to stop it before it completed and found an English version of the patch instead.

MOH:AA then told me that the patch was for the English version of the game only. Thinking that the earlier patch had written something to the registry identifying the game as German, I uninstalled and then reinstalled the game. No change. It still won't update my English version. I've tried looking in the Registry but that's a scary place.

Colin

A Yes, the Windows Registry can be a scary place, and the fearsome awfulness of the Registry Editor makes it far more unpleasant than is absolutely necessary. Sadly, the Registry is where you need to go and the Editor is what you need to use if you're going to get around this curious problem.

First, make sure you uninstall *MOH:AA* completely, which means deleting its home directory. We could try fixing up what you have already, but it's simpler this way. Next, look in the Application Data folder within the C:\Documents and Settings hierarchy to ensure everything's gone from there too. The Application Data

folder is hidden – you need to visit the Tools menu of any Explorer window, click Folder Options, View and then select Show hidden files and folders before it shows up.

Now for that scary Registry place. Since you're an XP user, create a restore point before you start. Open the Start Menu, choose Accessories, System Tools and finally System Restore. Select the second option and continue through the wizard dialogs until you've described and created a new restore point. Now, open the Registry Editor by typing WINDOWSKEY+R and typing regedit into the box. Open the HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE branch, which, as its name suggests, describes settings for the entire machine. Open the SOFTWARE branch and locate the EA GAMES folder. Within that folder you should see a folder called *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault*. Select and delete it.

Then, keeping the Registry Editor running, install the game again and run the patch. If the patch still fails, return to the Editor and to the *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault* folder. You should see another folder with a version number, such as 1.2.1.280. Right-click on this, select Rename from the menu, and change it to 1.1.12.200. You should now be sorted. **PCZ**

Visit Wandy on the Web at www.dearwandy.com
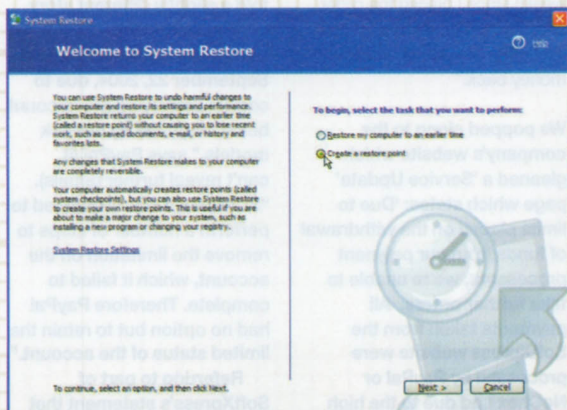
It's always wise to create a System Restore point before making changes to your Windows system.
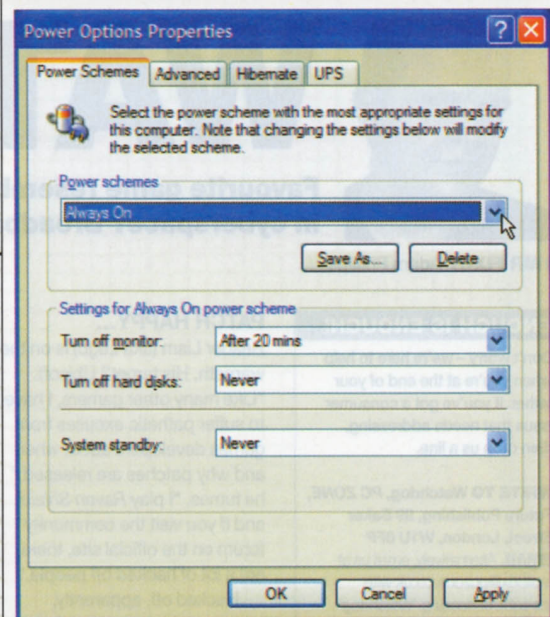
IN AND OUT, NO MESSING

Q I previously had no problems leaving downloads to finish while my machine was left doing other things. But now, having installed a new motherboard (an ECS KV2) and Service Pack 2 on XP Home Edition, if I leave the PC and it drops into idle, downloads that are running stop and I have to reconnect.

Derek

A By idle I assume you mean standby? Alas, it's not clear. In any case, right-click on your desktop and choose Properties. On the Screensaver tab, first of all make sure that you don't have a check on the On resume, password protect box. Next, click the Power button in the lower right corner. On the first tab of Power Options, select Always On and click OK to dismiss both dialogs. Depending on your type of Internet connection, you should also open the Internet Options control panel and select the Connections tab. Double-click your connection and ensure there isn't a checkbox making XP drop the line when you go idle. See how you get on.

Q I'm stuck with either a Leadtek GeForce3 Ti500 or ASUS GeForce FX 5500. I recently bought a new AMD64 3200+ PC and games are jittery even at 1024x768. Games like *MOH:AA* and *TOCA Race Driver 1 & 2* are terrible and I'm getting appalling scores at 3DMark03. What's wrong? I'm using Windows XP Pro SP2.

Tristram Davies

A To be honest, running these games at a resolution of 1024x768 is stretching the 5500 – I couldn't pull any more than 15fps from this particular FX when running *Halo* – and is well beyond the capabilities of the Ti500 mule. Plus, your poor AMD64 isn't getting any chance to breath. You should either run at 800x600 or spend £125-£150 on a new video card.

Q I managed to put a 512MB RAM stick into the slot on my MSI 875P Neo the wrong way round. The machine hung, I smelt burning and turned the power off at the socket – the stick was burned and useless. The PC runs with one stick now, but could I have wrecked the motherboard on that particular slot for the RAM, or are they more robust than that?

Darren

A It's a miracle that the motherboard still works at all. Be thankful that you can still power it up on the one slot! Memory sticks are notched to prevent you putting them in the wrong way round. To be sure next time, you need to check that the RAM is fully seated and that none of the pins are showing above the line of the connector before you power up.

WATCHDOG

Favourite game resembling a patchwork quilt? Paid-for goods gone walkabout in cyberspace? Broadband not so snappy? Whatever your woe, let us know…

■ **MR FIX-IT** Adam Phillips

PATCH HAPPY…

Reader Liam (aka Lego) is on the warpath. His target? Ubisoft. "Like many other gamers, I have to suffer pathetic excuses from games developers about when and why patches are released," he fumes. "I play *Raven Shield*, and if you visit the community forum on the official site, there are a lot of hacked off people."

Hacked off, apparently, because of the number of patches that have been released – and because some of said patches seem to have actually made the bug issues worse.

He then goes on to list the patches released for *Raven Shield* since its release: "1.0 (retail); 1.1; 1.2; 1.3; 1.31; 1.4; 1.41; 1.5; 1.51; 1.52; 1.53; 1.54; 1.55; 1.56," recounts Liam. "And in Ubisoft's last botched attempt to fix the game, it left some development commands unlocked, so any idiot can load in its own cheat file. The 1.6 patch was promised for the first quarter of 2004, but we're still waiting."

Finally, Liam states that the last good patch Ubisoft released

> ## "All that followed made things worse, and the bugs from the original release are still there. What's Ubisoft doing about it?"
>
> READER LIAM, AKA LEGO, ISN'T A HAPPY CAMPER

was 1.41. "All that followed made things worse, and the bugs from the original release are still there. What's Ubisoft going to do about it?"

Good question Liam, and one we popped along and posed to Ubisoft. "We're aware of the in-game cheating issues and are exploring solutions to correct them," states the nameless *Raven Shield* community manager in the US. In the meantime, the company recently released the *Raven Shield* 1.60 patch and dedicated server.

It says this includes features like new reticules, improvements to the automated patching system

If you want to play *Raven Shield*, you might need a patch or two…

and a crash fix. Why the cheat issue wasn't fixed by the 1.6 patch isn't addressed in the official response…

GOING SOFTLY…

Hmm, this is an intriguing one – reader Matt Taylor is very unhappy with e-tailer, SoftXpress. He ordered *The Sims 2* and *Cold Feet* from them at the end of September. Both payments were whipped out of his account but alas, he hasn't received anything in the post.

"I'm complaining as I've noticed that other people have had problems with orders not being delivered by the company," says Matt. "It's been over two weeks since I placed the order and I'm concerned that I won't see either the goods or my money back."

We popped along to the company's website which gleaned a 'Service Update' page which states: 'Due to limits placed on the withdrawal of funds from our payment processors, we're unable to take further orders. All payments taken from the SoftXpress website were processed by PayPal or NoChex and due to the high level of transactions, these processors were unable to

physically provide us with these funds in a 'timely' manner. Subsequently, we've authorised these processors to refund all customers.'

SoftXpress says that it's unable to provide information relating to specific transactions, 'as in many cases, the payment processor is only party to this information and we'd advise in the first instance to contact these processors directly.'

Righto. It finishes off by apologising for any inconvenience and assures hacked-off customers that it will assist to ensure all refunds are complete. Truth or fiction? Off we went to PayPal, who told a slightly different story…

"We limited the Softxpress.co.uk account on September 22, 2004, due to certain activity on the account being identified by our risk models," says PayPal (it can't reveal further details). "SoftXpress was requested to perform a number of steps to remove the limitation on the account, which it failed to complete. Therefore PayPal had no option but to retain the limited status of the account."

Referring to part of SoftXpress's statement that says 'we have implicitly requested for payments to be

returned and this request should be actioned shortly', PayPal points out that it's the seller's responsibility 'to action refunds' where appropriate, not PayPal's.

"PayPal is a payment service and merely facilitates payments between buyers and sellers," says the company. "We only get involved in cases where our Buyer Complaint Policy is invoked by the buyer."

In order to help SoftXpress buyers recover their cash, PayPal urges punters who used the PP service to log onto its account and review its Buyer Complaint Policy (to see if they're eligible for cover). In the meantime, if you've experienced any problems when dealing with SoftXpress, let us know…

PC WORLD OF HURT

You spend £1,500 on a new PC. You'd hope that such a price would cover the basics, you know, like the operating system software. Well, that's what reader Philip Mowbray thought anyway.

"I wrote to PC World to complain about buying a PC from them and only getting a boot disc for Windows and not the full program," he explains. "After nearly three months, I'm still waiting for a reply to my

SAINTS NOT SINNERS

▲ THERE ARE COMPANIES OUT THERE WHO BELIEVE IN PROVIDING REAL CUSTOMER SERVICE, NOT LIP SERVICE…

It's not all doom and gloom y'know. Some stories are short and sweet – like this one. Reader Jack Gammon owns some Oracom headphones for his PC. When they broke, Jack emailed Oracom to see if it knew of a UK retailer who stocked its range. Said company then emailed him back wanting his address and, hey presto! "Within the week, Oracom sent me some brand spanking new headphones," recalls Jack. "What's more, they were far better than my old ones and completely free of charge. Cheers Oracom!" 'Nuff said.

▼

query – why am I supplied with only a boot disc and not the full retail version?"

Over to you, PC World: "We've spoken to Mr Mowbray and explained the licence agreement that Microsoft has with PC manufacturers, which means that the OS is preinstalled and the copy of Windows is on the recovery system," it says. "This means the customer does have a copy of the OS, but not a standalone copy."

To be frank Philip, this is normal practice these days – it's something to do with Microsoft trying to ensure pirates don't run riot with copies of standalone, fully licensed Windows.

PC World says it's been on the blower to you with its explanation. It also apologises for not replying to your email and says it's sent "a letter confirming our conversation with goodwill vouchers".

MAD AS HELL WITH NTL

Disgust is such an ugly word, but it's the only one reader Chris Harding can think of to describe his decidedly un-lovey feelings towards broadband supplier NTL. "About four weeks ago, I ordered NTL broadband and was told someone would come

by to install the modem, even though I already had one installed!" fumes Chris. "This phonecall to order the package took over an hour too!"

Chris has subsequently been trying to negotiate via customer services so he can get his service going. In that time, a modem was plugged in by engineers but then Chris was left to get his own IP address; his details were wrong so he couldn't register; and recorded messages have been telling him that there were problems with the registration servers.

It's all the more galling for him because he was supposed to be on a 60-day free trial, but has been sent a bill instead. "NTL has the worst customer service ever, along with a product that doesn't actually work," states Chris. "Can you help me?"

Our pleasure, Chris. NTL did get back to us and says it's apologised. "We also checked that Mr Harding's broadband service was operating normally, which it was," says a spokesperson.

NTL has zeroed your account and applied three months' free broadband (worth £75) as a goodwill gesture – which it says you're happy with and have accepted. **PCZ**

NTL broadband: not quite as quick as you might like.

BUYER'S GUIDE

Christmas cash burning a hole in your pocket? Tip it out now and grab yourself some of these goodies...

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

A8V DELUXE WIRELESS
STREET PRICE £92
MANUFACTURER ASUSTeK
TELEPHONE 0870 1208 340
WEBSITE uk.asus.com
For the first time, an AMD board takes gold. Based on the VIA K8T800 Pro chipset, the ASUS A8V supports 939-pin Athlon 64 and FX processors (the engines behind the best gaming systems), and up to 4GB of dual-channel PC3200 RAM. Onboard dual RAID, 7.1 sound, automated overclocking and AGP8X complete the picture. The Wireless Edition comes bundled with more.

K8N NEO2 PLATINUM
STREET PRICE £96
MANUFACTURER Micro-Star
TELEPHONE 020 8813 6688
WEBSITE msicomputer.co.uk
MSI's K8N Neo has always boasted stability and performance, and the new 939-pin, nForce3 Ultra variant is just as impressive. The Neo2 supports the new Athlon 64 and FX-53 processors and incorporates a dual-channel memory controller. The board includes 7.1 sound, Gigabit LAN, 8 USB 2.0 ports, 2 x ATA and 4 x SATA connectors. Multi-function RAID is also standard.

IC7-MAX3
STREET PRICE £123
MANUFACTURER ABIT Computer
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.abit.com.tw
Getting on a bit now, the Canterwood-based IC7-MAX3 still provides a solid foundation for any Socket 478 Pentium-based games rig. It even looks great. The board has 5.1 onboard audio with optical out, Gigabit LAN, four-port SATA RAID, and ABIT's usual array of enthusiast-friendly features including SoftMenu Overclocking and OTES cooling. It's a real power-user's delight. If you don't want to stray from Intel, look no further.

PROCESSORS

ATHLON 64 3500
STREET PRICE £235
MANUFACTURER AMD
TELEPHONE 01276 803100
WEBSITE www.amd.com
Now the 939-pin chips no longer require registered memory, the AMD64 route is a cheaper option. Smash open your old Pentium PC, snatch the PC3200 sticks from its banks and mate them with a new Athlon on an A8V Deluxe. Although the Hyper-Threading alternatives can be better for business and encoding apps, the 64-bit chips are great for gaming, the 3500 giving best value. Die-hard Intel fans are missing out.
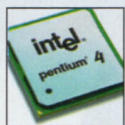
P4 3.2GHZ
STREET PRICE £220
MANUFACTURER Intel
TELEPHONE 01793 403000
WEBSITE www.intel.com
With the price of the 3.0GHz now dropping to well below £200, it makes sense to spend just a little extra on the 3.2GHz. Hyper-Threading delivers a jaw-pounding, double-whammy power hit that pushes benchmark scores well ahead of the equivalent Athlon, and an 800MHz front-side bus paired with the right memory can make its presence felt. If you have a P4 motherboard, you're already set for an upgrade to remember.

ATHLON 64 4000+
STREET PRICE £550
MANUFACTURER AMD
TELEPHONE 01276 803100
WEBSITE www.amd.com
Although the FX-55 is AMD's hottest tamale, it's more expensive than the 939-pin, 2.4GHz, ClawHammer-based Athlon 64 4000+ chip. And if you're thinking those specs look oddly familiar, full marks: the 4000+ is a rebadged FX-53 with its price shaved by £50, making it the slightly saner choice. Mind you, if you're looking to spend this kind of money, finding the extra nifty for the full-on FX-55 might not be an issue…

HDDS

WD1200JB 120GB
STREET PRICE £57
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 £44
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 up a size. 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
STREET PRICE £73
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

GEFORCE 6800 GT
STREET PRICE £299
MANUFACTURER XFX Graphics
TELEPHONE 01327 315750
WEBSITE www.xfxforce.co.uk
The release of *Doom 3* means that NVIDIA couldn't have timed its return to the top better. The 6800 GT is a slight step down from its über-Ultra card in terms of performance (only by a few frames per second), but at under £300 it gives you much better value for money. If you can afford the not insignificant outlay, this is the card to buy – and your games will love you forever.

GEFORCE 6600GT *NEW ENTRY*
STREET PRICE £139
MANUFACTURER Sparkle
TELEPHONE 0191 4210166
WEBSITE www.sparkle-technology.co.uk
Never before has such high performance been available at such a low price. Forget the old mainstream NVIDIA technology, the new stuff is quicker than many of the old high-end cards, and in many tests this 6600 GT beats the FX 5950 Ultra – pair it with an AMD64 and you're laughing. Sparkle's bundle is on the mean side, but we've not yet found a GeForce maker who builds to a higher standard.

RADEON 9800XT 256MB
STREET PRICE £191
MANUFACTURER ASUSTeK Computer
WEBSITE www.asus.com
With mainstream cards hogging the two front pews, it's only fair we give some space to the fastest card on the market: the world's best presented prize-fighter, the ASUS Radeon 9800XT. If you're lucky enough to have the requisite 300 quid burning a hole in your pocket, why settle for anything less? You even get a coupon for *Half-Life 2*, redeemable when the game's 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 £67
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 £144
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 £17
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. What's more, this latest design includes a headphone jack too.

Z-640
STREET PRICE £53
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 L1730P
STREET PRICE £355
MANUFACTURER LG
TELEPHONE 0870 607 5544
WEBSITE uk.lge.com
If you're after speed, quality and features, the 17-inch Flatron L1730P is the one to covet. It boasts a 12ms response time, has an amazing picture, a range of colour presets, detachable two-port USB hub and is TCO-03 compliant to boot. This accreditation means there's height and tilt adjust, plus the screen is lit uniformly – it's noticeably a superior image. The only drawback is the price, and the pivot feature won't interest gamers.

CML174SXW
STREET PRICE £340
MANUFACTURER Hitachi
TELEPHONE 01628 585000
WEBSITE www.hitachidigitalmedia.com
We still think the 17-inch CML is one of the best-looking, best-performing flat screens on the market – even though it remains over £300. It delivers a great-quality image, weighs in at just 5kg, and comes in a choice of colours to match your kit. If you're wanting to make the move from CRT, and action games are a priority for you, the sensible, slim bezel Hitachi remains a solid choice.

VISIONMASTER PRO 514
STREET PRICE £398
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
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 europe.creative.com
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 still comes 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
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

No need for morse code or smoke signals – just put finger to keyboard and write us a letter...

■ **SANTA'S LITTLE HELPER** Dave Woods
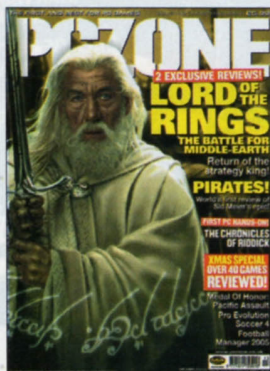
Our Christmas issue was stuffed full of festive cheer.

Doom: scary, and you get to shoot monsters.

Wahey, it's a monkey!

DOOMED

I see that Activision and id Software have revealed that the first official expansion pack for *Doom 3* will be called *Resurrection Of Evil*. They're not giving much away about the storyline, but if it plays anything like *Doom 3*, I'm betting it will go something like this:

1. Enter a dark room.
2. Kill the first monster.
3. Turn around, kill the second monster.
4. Go through the room, looking for supplies.
5. Kill the third monster in front of the medikit.
6. Jump to 1.

Simon Thornber

You forgot 1.5: jump out of your seat and scream.

WHY SO?

What keeps me subscribed to *PC ZONE*? Well, mainly I don't like spending money on crap games. But I've noticed recently that more and more games are going on sale before you get a chance to review them. Is this a ploy by publishers to shift as many copies as they can before negative reviews come out that may put people off?

Stewart Pickering

If publishers want to get reviews before a game goes on sale, they can. If a game's on sale and we've not reviewed it, you've got to wonder why. If the publisher was convinced it was going to get a good score, surely it'd want the publicity? Play it safe and wait for a review before you buy.

MONKEY BUSINESS

I've always enjoyed your magazine, but I feel a grave wrong has been done to your readership. I can't believe you would tantalisingly tell us about 'Will coming across a website that's absolutely packed with brilliant pictures of monkeys' ('Good Cop, Bad Cop', issue 148) and then not print the website address. I was so disappointed. Sadly, I realised about two seconds after I pressed Enter that Googling for 'monkey pictures' would produce things that I really did *not* want to see. Please make amends...

JP

Sorry. You can find them at www.manipulator.com

BEST. GAME. EVER.

I finally got my hands on *Half-Life 2*. OMG! OMFG! Sorry.

Excuse the language, but I've suddenly realised what you were going on about in your review many moons ago. "97 per cent? 97 per cent. *PC ZONE* has gone mad," I said when I got your mag through. I'm saying exactly the same now, but only because I'd have given the game at least 99 per cent. It's brilliant. It's the best shooter ever and though I'd like to stay and talk more, I'm going to have to leave you and go back to playing the game. OMFG!

Tom Claridge

I hate to say we told you so, but indulge me just this once. Told you so.

"97% for *Half-Life 2*? Have you gone mad I thought? Until I played it. I'd give it 99%"
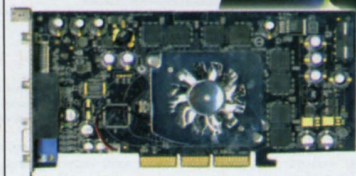
TOM CLARIDGE LOVES A BIT OF FREEMAN

LIFT HERE
U.S.M.C.
12F037

Men Of Valor: better than VU Games thought.

150 TODAY!

We're 150 issues old, which makes us the longest-running PC games mag in the wholest widest world (probably). We'd like to think that we've been around so long because we're the best, but we don't want to appear arrogant. Which is why we approached you (see Backchat), along with some of the best developers and personalities in gaming for feedback. Why have we stayed at the front of PC gaming for so long? This is what they said…

"The fairness of your reviews and your passion for games, mixed in with irreverent humour has been the key to your enduring appeal. Stick with this and I see no reason why you can't carry on for another 150 issues."

Peter Molyneux,
Lionhead Studios

"Many congratulations on reaching the ripe old age of 150.

Your success is built on remaining true to your beliefs – and ultimately true to your readership. Consoles come and go, but the PC will always be a key gaming platform."

Charles Cecil,
Revolution Software

"The success of any magazine is dependent upon the spirit and savvy of the people who produce it. The incredible staff at *PC ZONE* is what makes it one of our favourite reads."

Doug Lombardi, Valve Software

"Yeah, yeah, *PC ZONE* rules… Read it all the time… Yadda, yadda, yadda… Seriously though, you guys do a great job. *PC ZONE* is our favourite UK mag at Gearbox. Copies are always getting nicked…"

Randy Pitchford,
Gearbox Software

"Congratulations on reaching a fantastic milestone. You've

always been one of my favourite mags and give great insights into all aspects of PC gaming. I'm also impressed by your coverage of online MMO games. Very few, if any, print mags do it better."

Jørgen Tharaldsen, Funcom

"When you consider how games mags have moved in this horrible direction of bigger pictures and smaller words, I find it incredibly refreshing that there's enough intelligent people out there that want something different. Games as a culture should be written about with humour, passion and intellect, the same way that music is. *PC ZONE* is the *NME* of videogames."

Dominik Diamond

"We have the hardest-core fans per capita for our games in the UK, more than anywhere in the world. A lot of that has to do with great magazines like *PC ZONE* – you've been good to us and we get the magazine every month."

Todd Hollenshead,
id Software

"*PC ZONE* was the first magazine to feature our game *Call Of Duty* on the cover. That was back in the day when we were just some upstart company who had the gall to compete with some of the most entrenched and successful franchises out there. Way to go *PC ZONE* for sticking with the little guy. Congratulations on your 150th issue!"

Grant Collier,
Infinity Ward

"150 issues old and still going strong. Congratulations from Epic Games for reaching this impressive milestone. Also – thanks for finally sending my subscription to my house. When I return to the office after a business trip, I can always count on finding a small mountain of magazines sitting on my desk, with the exception of *PC ZONE* – it always disappears before I get a chance to read it."

Mark Rein, Epic Games PCZ

LETTER OF THE MONTH

PARADISE INC

I'm a 50-year-old gamer and have progressed from Spectrum to Commodore 64 to PC, and from *Pong* to *Elite* to *Half-Life*. Gaming has come on in leaps and bounds with new benchmarks littering the way, but I've never been stirred to write until *Far Cry*. Never before have I played a game where I actually found myself wanting to lay on the beach, take a swim, take a boat for a quick spin, hang-glide, do a bit of all-terrain driving and basically sod the game and just have a holiday. I've cleared out each level (except the last) so me and the missus can lie on the beach safely.

Adrian Rigg

And that's where you're going to take her for the next few years? I bet she loves you. Have a graphics card on us.

▲ **US! YOU WERE MOSTLY TALKING ABOUT US THIS MONTH. GO TO WWW.PCZONE.CO.UK**

What makes *PC ZONE* possible? Games? Well, yes. Writers? Twelve-a-penny. No, it's you, the readers. Without you, we are but a vacuous shell, a solitary voice on the wind, a lonely cloud wandering a… (*I think they get the picture – Ed.*) But what do you think of us? You've had 150 dates to make your mind up after all. That's the question we posed on the forums this month. Over to you…

"*PC ZONE* is the best in the business! It's informative and witty, and makes taking a s**t an enjoyable experience."
RollsRoy

"*PC ZONE* hasn't let me down yet on the entertainment front. I've been reading it for years and the sense of humour is still great, like an old friend."
Liquid_metal

"Being new to the mag, I think *PC ZONE* has great style and fantastic character. The fact you appreciate your readers so much and get them involved in nearly every aspect of the mag is tremendous!"
Rjmax13cvg

"Will Porter infiltrated one of my dreams recently, and I've been trying to remember what it was about. I think it involved a pool cue. What other magazine could be so embedded in my very mental being that it's in my dreams? And what the hell was Will doing with that pool cue?!"
Escaped_monkey

"I've been reading since June 2000, the *Deus Ex* review and demo issue. 'Tis a great mag, the best a man can get."
Spudy2000

"*PC ZONE* has been more informative than the Iraqi Information Minister. There's a place for it in any self-respecting person's bedroom, next to *Hustler/Euroboy*."
Jason_6780

"I'd like to complain about *PC ZONE's* consistently informative and amusing take on the PC games industry, as I believe it's played a major role in the steady decline of my social and societal status. A pox on you all!"
Reverend_Joseph

"'*PC ZONE* or a rival mag' I pondered? What won it was the lower cost, irreverent humour and your light-hearted style – and little has changed. What stands out is the strength of the team, which continues to evolve and stay fresh."
G_Man_007

"I've enjoyed you for years and all I have to do in return is outlay a small fee every month. A bit like my wife really… It's also the only PC mag to have a former staffer accused of wanting to assassinate the American president…"
PlumpOrgan

▼ "I've subscribed for two years now and it's money well spent. No other games mag comes close to what you've achieved. Congratulations on reaching the big 150."
K3rmit

TXTCHAT

LET YOUR FINGERS DO THE TALKING!

Just send the keyword 'PCZCHAT' to 83125, followed by your name and comments, quips or angry rants. Please be aware that messages sent to TxtChat cost 50p plus your standard operator (text messaging) charge. For full terms and conditions, see page 7.

SEAN B: *Rome: Total War* rocks!
YANIS: My life is over again. *Football Manager 2005* is here. My girlfriend is not impressed.
JULES: Love the *PC ZONE* christmas card. Dave Woods looks like Big Bird from *Sesame Street*…

THE PCZONE A-LIST

◀ SHOOTERS ▶

HALF-LIFE 2

We always knew that somewhere within our PC there was the potential for absolute, outright brilliance – and now Valve's cracked it. *Half-Life 2* is a masterpiece, and a game that won't be trumped for a long, long time. Maybe not even until *Half-Life 3*. With physics, design, art and ambience to die for, this sequel builds on its Black Mesa roots with stunning aplomb. Gordon Freeman, we salute you.
PUB VU Games **DEV** Valve
PCZ ISSUE 148

FAR CRY

Far Cry may be several notches beneath *Half-Life 2*, but it remains an outstanding and exhilarating experience that pushes your rig and your nerves to their limits. The narrative may be iffy, but *Far Cry* is a cracking achievement.
PUB Ubisoft **DEV** Crytek
PCZ ISSUE 140

DOOM 3

Technologically dazzling, genuinely shock-providing and resolutely back to basics: *Doom 3* may not bring anything new to the FPS table, but it's a stunning thrill-ride that every PC gamer should sample.
PUB Activision **DEV** id software
PCZ ISSUE 146

CALL OF DUTY

With an excellent expansion in the form of *United Offensive*, *Call Of Duty* remains the best war game on the PC – and possibly of all time. Constantly managing to mix up feelings of dread and excitement, it's an absolute must-play.
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

TRIBES: VENGEANCE

A generation-leaping storyline and some silky skiing and sliding slot this remoulding of the online favourite firmly into these hallowed pages. It's a brilliant and original game, even if a few levels are slightly lacklustre.
PUB VU Games **DEV** Irrational Games
PCZ ISSUE 147

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** VU Games
PCZ ISSUE 122

HALF-LIFE: GENERATIONS

Long in the tooth? Dated? Not one iota. The original *Half-Life* remains a touchstone for every shooter of recent years, and for good reason: it's fantastic, and remains so to this day. Play it again – the magic's still there.
PUB Vivendi **DEV** Valve Software
PCZ ISSUE 71

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004

It may be a multiplayer game, but the superb bots of *UT2004* still grab it a place in the PC ZONE solo-shooter hall of fame. It's quite simply the greatest deathmatch experience money can buy.
PUB Atari **DEV** Digital Extremes
PCZ ISSUE 138

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

◀ STRATEGY ▶

ROME: TOTAL WAR

An engine that makes grown men cry, AI so great that Hannibal could be in charge and a cinematic tinge that grabs your social life and will not let go. *Rome: Total War* is every inch the champion we knew it would be. A few rough edges appear occasionally, but this is strategy far above anything we've seen in *Medieval: Total War* or anywhere else. The greatest battle simulator ever.
PUB Activision
DEV The Creative Assembly
PCZ ISSUE 148

LORD OF THE RINGS: BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH

NEW ENTRY Melding the best of the hardcore and mainstream markets, this strategic gem combines intuitive gameplay with real-life tactics to create an epic, deeply entertaining experience that's dripping with atmosphere.
PUB EA **DEV** EA Pacific
PCZ ISSUE 149

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

SID MEIER'S PIRATES!

NEW ENTRY If you're looking for something that doesn't quite fit into the usual template, *Pirates!* is the game for you. With governor's daughters to dally with, trade routes to plunder and land to be lubbered, *Pirates!* is a winner.
PUB Atari **DEV** Firaxis
PCZ ISSUE 149

GROUND CONTROL II: OPERATION EXODUS

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

WARHAMMER 40,000: DAWN OF WAR

An old school charmer with some flash visuals, varied units and super-flash presentation: what *Dawn Of War* loses in dull AI it wins through with sheer orcish belligerence. Multiplayer is pretty smart too.
PUB THQ **DEV** Relic
PCZ ISSUE 147

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

Welcome to the *PC ZONE* A-List, home to the greatest games in the land. To gain entry to these hallowed pages, a title has to be top of its respective genre. Overjoyed newbies this month are the gorgeous *LOTR: The Battle For Middle-Earth*, *Sid Meier's Pirates!*, *RollerCoaster Tycoon 3*, *Football Manager* and *PES 4*

◄ 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.
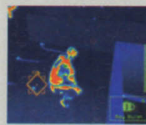**PUB** Ubisoft
DEV Ubisoft Montreal
PCZ ISSUE 125

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
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

EVIL GENIUS
It's always more fun being the bad guy, and when you're an insane megalomaniac it's even better. *Evil Genius* awakens the Blofeld inside you, with all the henchmen, lairs and diabolical plans you could ask for. Basic graphics, ace gameplay.
PUB VU Games **DEV** Elixir
PCZ ISSUE 147

THE SIMS 2
We still hate *The Sims*, we hate them and everything they stand for, but even we have to admit that the sequel's a good game in itself. We found it addictive and absorbing when we reviewed it – but we'll have changed our tune by the time the fifth expansion pack is dribbled onto the market.
PUB EA **DEV** Maxis
PCZ ISSUE 147

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

ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON 3
NEW ENTRY A stirling return for the ride-creating cash-cow that brings with it a snazzy 3D engine and more coasters than you can shake a stick at. It doesn't quite recall the *Theme Park* glory days, but *RT3* is the closest we've been in ages.
PUB Atari **DEV** Frontier Developments
PCZ ISSUE 149

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

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

◀ SPACE COMBAT ▶

X2: THE THREAT

Vast, engrossing and utterly compelling. We firmly believe that *X2* is the game that can finally banish the memory of *Elite* to the shadows. The level of detail here is immense, as is the potential. Build your own space empire, form a pirate fleet or just bomb around the universe like an interstellar playboy. The game could go on forever. And did we mention it's also gobsmackingly beautiful? OK, the story isn't all that, but while nothing's perfect in life, *X2* comes very close.
PUB Deep Silver **DEV** Egosoft
PCZ ISSUE 138

FREELANCER
Freelancer combines the epic open-endedness of *Elite* with the combat immediacy of the *Wing Commander* series. It also mixes in a well played out (if short) story and gorgeous graphics to create a totally engaging experience.
PUB Microsoft **DEV** Digital Anvil
PCZ ISSUE 128

X – GOLD
The spirit of *Elite* lives on in this massive trading epic, in which you must buy and fight your way back home to Earth. It rewards patience with variety and months of absorbing gameplay. Deeply hypnotic and beautiful rather than tense and frenetic.
PUB THQ **DEV** Egosoft
PCZ ISSUE 82

TERMINUS
Who says the days of bedroom programming are over? *Terminus* proves you can make a great game on your own if you have the talent and passion – we reckon it just edges out the mighty *FreeSpace 2*.
PUB www.macgames.co.uk **DEV** Vicarious Visions
PCZ ISSUE 93

FREESPACE 2
Following in the footsteps of *Wing Commander* and *X-Wing*, *FreeSpace 2* offers fast-paced dogfighting action all the way. It has an epic story and superb graphics, but does suffer from being a bit short-lived if you don't play online.
PUB Interplay **DEV** Volition Inc
PCZ ISSUE 84

◀ 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

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.
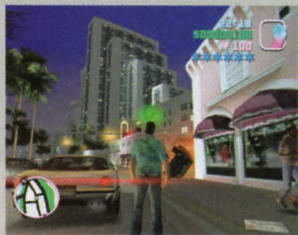**PUB** EA **DEV** DICE Canada

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

FOOTBALL MANAGER 2005

NEW ENTRY Eidos and the *Champ Man* licence have got a hell of a lot to beat in Sports Interactive's *Football Manager* – easily the most streamlined and absorbing management game to come out of its stable to date. It's management in its purest form, with an improved match engine working under the bonnet of a sparkling (well, green and gray) redesigned interface. We're just as addicted as we always were.
PUB Sega **DEV** Sports Interactive

PCZ ISSUE 149

PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 4

NEW ENTRY No online play (grrr…), but this is still the finest arcade football game ever. Incomparably better than any *FIFA* offering, *PES* is the only footie game that plays like the real thing – with all the joys and agonies that entails.
PUB Konami **DEV** Konami

PCZ ISSUE 149

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

TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2005

Some new game modes gives 2005's Tiger 'em up some welcome variety – although even without them, it would remain the PC's premier golf sim. This year is a good vintage too, with visuals to die for.
PUB EA Sports **DEV** EA Sports

PCZ ISSUE 148

NHL 2005

Shiny and beautiful, yet nowhere near as vapid as its *FIFA* compatriot, EA's *NHL* series continues its run of consistent excellence. Better AI, better production and as slick as they come.
PUB EA Sports **DEV** EA Sports

PCZ ISSUE 148

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 mission-breaking missions or just shooting pedestrians, *Vice City* is about as close to gaming perfection as you can get.
PUB Rockstar Games **DEV** Rockstar North

PCZ ISSUE 131

GRAND THEFT AUTO III

It may have been overshadowed by its younger brother, but *Grand Theft Auto III* remains as awesome as it ever was. It's a great spin on both driving and shooting genres and you'll still love its noisy orgy of violence and speed.
PUB Rockstar Games **DEV** Rockstar North

PCZ ISSUE 117

TOCA RACE DRIVER 2

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 2005

More of a tweak than an overhaul, the fifth *McRae* boasts immaculate handling and oodles of gameplay potential. With excellent damage modelling and plentiful motor-fiddling opportunities, it's the best rally game around.
PUB Codemasters **DEV** Codemasters

PCZ ISSUE 148

JUICED

The growing car-modding genre gains another excellent racer in the form of *Juiced*, a game that outdoes *NFS: Underground* with some great graphics, impressive AI and a great sense of personalisation. We like.
PUB Acclaim **DEV** Juice Games

PCZ ISSUE 147

OPERATION FLASHPOINT GOLD

Now available with the tricky *Red Hammer* add-on, *Flashpoint* has become to tactical action what *Half-Life* was to shooters. Fight on foot or in tanks, fly planes or even direct an entire platoon, this game is total war – in your face and on a massive scale. The graphics are an acquired taste, but they convey a sense of wide-open warfare perfectly. It's the ultimate military simulation, with a stunning atmosphere and superb missions.
PUB Codemasters **DEV** Bohemia Interactive

PCZ ISSUE 104

HIDDEN & DANGEROUS 2

With a real Boy's Own-feel, a ninja-bastard difficulty rating and the same superb engine as *Mafia*, *H&D 2* is one of the finest squad-based tactical shooters around. It's got a few bugs, but it's still an essential purchase.
PUB Gathering **DEV** Illusion Softworks

PCZ ISSUE 136

RAINBOW SIX: RAVEN SHIELD

All the style and presentation you would expect from a Tom Clancy game, from the realism of the weapons down to footprints in the snow. A tactical and atmospheric game that can be frustratingly tricky at times.
PUB Ubisoft **DEV** Ubisoft Montreal

PCZ ISSUE 127

FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR

A remarkably innovative military simulator, *FSW* provides tense urban combat with you in a commanding role – despite feeling as if you're in the line of fire with your two fire-teams. It gets repetitive, but it's worth a look.
PUB THQ **DEV** Pandemic Studios

PCZ ISSUE 147

HIDDEN & DANGEROUS: DELUXE

This revamp of *H&D* removes all of the infamous bugs from the original, as well as including three extra campaigns. There's been a lot of work put into improving the graphics and modding fans will relish the new editor that ships with this edition.
PUB Take 2 **DEV** Illusion Softworks

PCZ ISSUE 115

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.

ADULTS ONLY

DISCWORLD

■ **WORDS & DISCS** Suzy Wallace

▲ Eighteen isn't a bad age to be. For starters, you're old enough to shag, vote, drink, smoke and watch porn. Also, the wrinkles, grey hair and never-ending bills haven't quite started to take root yet *and* you can get a full taste of what we've got in store for you on this month's 18-rated discs. If you can't yet legally experience the joys of imbibing too much alcohol, staggering home, throwing up and feeling like crap in the morning, you should look away now…

Among the adult content this month – which includes *Daily Mail*-baiting racer *Carmageddon 2* – is some stunning in-game footage from our cover game, *F.E.A.R.* If you've read the *F.E.A.R.* preview (see page 42) and are now eagerly chomping on the bit to get a look for yourself at what all of the hype's about, check out this amazing trouser-soiling footage. We also have the inimitable *Doom 3* playable demo, so if you haven't got around to sampling the delights of wandering down dark corridors hounded by the denizens of hell, or were just waiting to see how your system stands up under the pressure, what are you waiting for? There are zombies that need gibbing.

On a less frightening note (that is, unless you've seen our 'How To Be A Good Sport' footage), we've got the exclusive demo of *ZONE*'s arcade footy game of choice, *Pro Evolution Soccer 4*, as well as fantastic demos of *Need For Speed: Underground 2*, *Men Of Valor*, *FlatOut* and much more. Enjoy!

PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 4

EXCLUSIVE

CD 1/DVD Pub: Konami **Dev:** Konami TYO **Rev:** Issue 149, 89%

CHALLENGE SUZY! **JEEPERS KEEPERS!** Can you score a goal using David James? For the challenge, play as England against Italy on a one-star difficulty.

KONAMI'S definitive digital kickabout is back, and better than ever! Hosting a whole new catalogue of player moves, animations and goal-scoring opportunities, *Pro Evolution Soccer 4* is truly the champion of arcade footy games. Our exclusive demo allows you and up to eight friends to enjoy the first half of a five-minute match, playing as either England, Spain, Italy or Sweden.

IMPORTANT!

HOW TO SET UP THE SCREEN RESOLUTION AND GAME PADS

Once you've installed the game, before you boot up *PES4*, make sure you set up any game pads you have connected to your PC using the 'Setting' program, in the Konami folder in your Windows Start menu. Here, you can also change the default screen resolution from a paltry console 640x480 up to a whopping PC 1280x1024!

SUZY'S TOP FOOTY TIPS

PS2-USB ADAPTOR
Buy one of these. You can only play *PES4* properly (and improve your skills) using an official Sony PlayStation 2 controller. All the tips on this page refer to the buttons on the PS2 pad.

THROUGH-BALL
Pressing L1 and Triangle enables you chip a through-ball to one of your team-mates. Fast forwards such as Michael Owen will run onto the ball, cutting out the last defender.

FAST CROSSES
Double-tapping Circle when you have the ball on the wing will whip a fast ball into the box. Hit Circle three times and the ball will be fired in along the ground – any defender's nightmare.

LOB SHOT
Pressing L1 and Square at the same time will enable you to attempt a lob shot over a goalkeeper. Difficult to pull off – you have to watch the power gauge carefully – but great for one-on-ones.

QUICK DRIBBLE
Tapping R2 is perfect for side-stepping any opposition players in your way. R2 is also good for pushing a ball into a space. Try not to rely heavily on the R1 run or you'll keep losing the ball.

FREE KICKS
When attempting a long free kick, first aim, then press Square to boost the power gauge. Quickly hold Up on the D-pad or Left analogue stick to drive a low shot towards goal.

CORNERS
Using Beckham, you can really whip a corner into the box by aiming first, pressing Circle for power, then using the D-pad or Left analogue stick to bend it in the direction of goal.

FANCY TURN
To completely take the piss (obviously when you're winning a game), rotate the Right analogue stick when a skilful player (such as Raul) has the ball and you'll pull off a poncy spin.

SHIELDING
When receiving the ball, always turn your player away from opposition players to shield it. This will give you time to look for a deft pass to a team-mate or even take the ball past any opposition.

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.

DOOM 3

CD 2/DVD Pub: Activision **Dev:** id Software **Rev:** Issue 146, 90%

IF YOU'VE been waiting for this to test your system specs, we've got the awesome *Doom 3* demo for you. Featuring the first three levels from the game, the pace starts off easy but things soon go wrong, and after all hell literally breaks loose, you'll find yourself up against imps, zombies and your own nerves. Best played alone, in the dark and with the sound turned up to 11!

"Wanna buy a car stereo mate?"

Enough to put you off your dinner.

FINISHING TOUCHES

Doom 3 is all about atmosphere, creating a believable world around you. Here are a few neat bits that we particularly like

BIOSCAN
When you first enter the complex, you'll be asked to stand in place as these bioscans examine you. It's little touches like this that add to the feeling of immersion.

SUPER TURBO TURKEY PUNCHER
Videogames have a pretty bleak future if this is an example of what we'll be playing. Never mind – just punch some turkeys till they explode!

SENTRY BOT
Who could fail to love this little fella? Reminiscent of a dog and equipped with a powerful machine gun, this guy could well turn out to be a man's best friend.

NEED FOR SPEED: UNDERGROUND 2

CD 1/DVD Pub: EA
Dev: EA Black Box
Rev: Issue 150, 84%

REV UP your engines because we've got the glorious *NFS: Underground 2* demo for you to burn some rubber. Take the Nissan 350Z for a quick spin in the Downhill drift and Circuit race, or explore the city at your own pace in the Free Roam mode (see 'Born Free', right).

BORN FREE

New to *Need For Speed: Underground 2* is the Free Roam mode, that apart from letting you take a leisurely tour of the city, opens up three challenges scattered around the map

OUTRUN Drive close to another cruiser then accept the challenge by SMS. Chase and pass the other car, then put a kilometre between you to win. Fall 1km behind and you lose.

CIRCUIT RACE Drive into the glowing icon in the Burger King car park to take on three other racers in a two-lap race around the streets. Scout out the area to find some sneaky short cuts.

DOWNHILL DRIFT Enjoy some stunt driving action by drifting down the mountain road. Slide close to other cars without hitting them, and keep your drift going for maximum points.

MEN OF VALOR

DVD Pub: VU Games **Dev:** 2015 **Rev:** Issue 150, 80%

VIETNAM is the latest destination of choice when it comes to war-based shooters and this *Men of Valor* demo is no exception. The demo sees you trawling through the jungle in South East Asia, before coming to a village that you have to clear of seven 'hooches', and locating a camera crew. Guns at the ready soldier – your country needs you…

FLATOUT

Pub: Empire Int. **Dev:** Bugbear
Rev: Issue 149, 79%

IF YOU'RE the type of person who enjoys taking out the opposition in driving games, then the high-speed carnage of *FlatOut* will be right up your street. Crash your way through obstacles and smash against other racers to gain nitrous in the races, then enjoy some stupid but hilarious ragdoll action in the High Jump.

CHALLENGE SUZY!

WHITE MEN CAN'T JUMP Hurl your driver through the windscreen and get over 303.97m for your three tries in High Jump.

ARMIES OF EXIGO

Pub: EA **Dev:** Black Hole Games

THIS FANTASY RTS sees you in command of the Empire in a battle to destroy the Beast army. Although you're tasked with simply getting to the other side of the map, there's plenty to keep an eye out for on the way that will help you in your journey. Don't forget to use TAB to keep an eye on the different levels!

MEDAL OF HONOR: PACIFIC ASSAULT

Pub: Empire Int. **Dev:** Bugbear
Rev: Issue 149, 79%

HERE'S your chance to take *Pacific Assault* out for a spin against the online world. Featuring one map based on the Japanese stronghold of Gifu situated on the island of Guadalcanal, there are four player classes to explore, and six weapons to test out as you try to attack or defend the four objectives.

● **ALSO ON THE DVD**
Nexus: The Jupiter Incident Multiplayer, *Colin McRae Rally 2005* Multiplayer, *Top Spin*, *The Moment Of Silence*

MOVIES

OUR FEATURE PRESENTATION...

F.E.A.R.

CD1/DVD Mixing elements of Japanese-style horror with chaotic gun battles, Monolith's creepy shooter looks set to be one of the biggest games of 2005...

DEBRIS Check out the sparks, flying glass, smoke and bullets!

AI Smart enemies take cover behind anything available.

INVISIBLE ENEMIES Check out the Predator-like camouflage.

MELEE FIGHTING Could we get full-on combat?

ALSO SHOWING...

BATTLEFIELD 2 (DVD ONLY) – *Battlefield 1942* practically created its own genre when it was released, and with the experience garnered from both *BF1942* and *BFV*, plus the added talents of the *Desert Combat* mod team, we're waiting with baited breath for its successor. Take a peek at this video showing off the stunning progress.
DON'T MISS – The missile. The helicopter. Does it get any better than this?

WORLD OF WARCRAFT (DVD ONLY) – We've gone a bit *World Of Warcraft* crazy this month, and as well as having half of the team connected up to the European beta, we've got the breathtaking intro sequence, and an exclusive walkthrough from All Guns Blazing.net (produced by Kirk Watts) on the discs for you.
DON'T MISS – The awe-inspiring animation in the intro movie.

JOINT OPS: ESCALATION (CD 1/DVD) – Our recent online lunchtime shooter of choice looks set to improve upon the goodness that's already in place with this *Escalation* expansion pack. The video shows off the new vehicles such as bikes and attack helicopters, new weapons, parachutes and some glorious level design.
DON'T MISS – Two-person motorbike and machine-gun action. Anyone for pillion?

BROTHERS IN ARMS (DVD ONLY) – This looks set to add a new twist to the WWII shooter genre with its team-based action. Here we have excerpts of Gearbox CEO Randy Pitchford playing through part of the game, to give you an idea of the squad commands and gameplay on offer.
DON'T MISS – The way the enemy intelligently seeks cover.

● **ALSO ON THE DVD** The trailer for Digital Extremes' new shooter, *Pariah*

EXTENDED PLAY

HOW TO BE A GOOD SPORT

IF YOU'VE ever been to the *ZONE* office, you'll know that most lunchtimes you can find Dave Woods and Jamie Sefton battling it out in *Pro Evolution Soccer 4*. Even if you're on the other side of the office, you'd still know by the near-constant stream of swear words. So when Will recently acquired a webcam, our devious little minds went to work. Secretly setting up the webcam to capture Dave and Jamie's lunchtime sessions, we've compiled some of the best bits to show you just why playing games can be bad for your blood pressure (and how the name Jamie 'Angry' Sefton came about).
DISCLAIMER – Sefton's actually a very nice guy. It's all *Pro Evo's* fault.

X2: THE THREAT AI CODES

IF, like Prezzer, you love the infinite possibilities of space in *X2: The Threat*, we've got some AI codes to make your life a little easier. There's code to employ traders, set up basic patrols, tune your engine to get more output, manage your stations, improve combat AI, set up a sector defence and much more.

Extend space's final frontiers.

CARMAGEDDON 2

POSSIBLY one of the world's most controversial games (if you don't include the *Daily Mail* furore over *Manhunt*), the age-old hit and run makes a reappearance on our discs as this month's Classic demo. If there's a Classic demo you'd like to see on the discs, then send your suggestions to mailbox@pczone.co.uk.
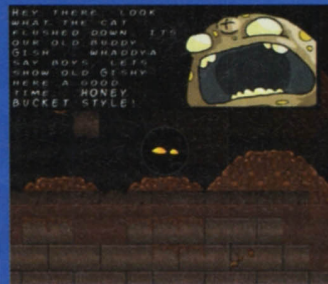
Gish – one of Indie Zone's best.

TOP TEN INDIE ZONE GAMES

IF YOU'RE a big fan of Indie Zone, we've got the top ten Indie Zone games for you to try out on the DVD. It all goes to show that you don't need a big budget to make a great game. Oh, and don't forget to show your support for the independent community by buying a full game or two....

● **ALSO ON THE CD** *Pacific Fighters* Dynamic Mission Generator v3.11 and *Counter-Strike: Source* Fusion Pack

● **ALSO ON THE DVD** *Nexus: The Jupiter Incident* Modding Tools, *Warhammer 40, 000: Dawn of War* Mod Tools and *Sacred Plus*

HELP!

CD trouble? Don't worry – phone our helpline on **01225 442244 and ask for cover disc support.** Or email **support@futurenet.co.uk.**
BEFORE YOU DIAL...
If you're calling the helpline:
■ If possible, have your PC operating and near the phone when you call.
■ If this is not possible, note down all relevant information – ie system type,

soundcard, RAM and so on, along with the nature of the fault.
■ Have a pen and paper to hand so you can jot down the relevant info.
MINIMUM SPECIFICATION
■ To run the software on these discs, you need at least a PIII 1GHz or equivalent, with a GeForce 3 64MB graphics card and 256MB RAM (512MB recommended for Windows XP users).

DISCLAIMER
■ This disc has been thoroughly tested at all stages of its production. However, it's always wise to use a virus checker on any software before running it.
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GAMES THAT CHANGED THE WORLD
SIMCITY

Who would have thought that urbanisation, town planning and traffic control could be made fun, let alone the roots of an entire gaming franchise? *Rhianna Pratchett* **takes a trip back to the big city...**

THERE ARE certain videogames that manage to get noticed by gamers and non-gamers; the ones that both 'us' and 'them' know about. *EverQuest* managed it through the headline-grabbing lunacy of some of its more extreme players, and *The Sims* did it through sheer sales figures and

bombastic marketing. However, for the 1989 game *SimCity*, it was the fact that something usually only practised by men in beige offices could be entertaining and addictive to people whose only previous experience of traffic control was stealing a one-way sign.

"Urban planning is actually really interesting,"

claims *SimCity* creator Will Wright, who delved into the shady world of urbanisation academia when he was researching the original game. "It's just really well camouflaged with all this very arcane language. But once I could read the theories and then go and program them into the game, all these stupid, goofy academic terms suddenly made perfect sense when I saw them working." However, the technological inspiration for Will's city-simulator-cum-game came from the first title he worked on, a top-down helicopter bombing sim called *Raid On Bungeling Bay*, that was published by

Industrial, Commercial and Residential. Pure. None of this 'light' business.

A falling jet engine's view of your city.

Brøderbund in 1983. *Bungeling Bay* was the archetypal one-man-band game, back when bedroom coding was still a very viable path for those seeking to break into the industry.

"I had to create this intricate archipelago of islands that had little roads and buildings on them," explains Will. "I ended up writing an editor that enabled me to scroll around the world dropping these little tiles. It was only meant to be a tool, but I found I was having more fun designing these islands than I was bombing them. After the game shipped, I kept playing with this editor and making it more and more

elaborate. Then I thought 'hey, what if I could actually simulate things like traffic'? That's when I started looking into various aspects of urban planning."

DOWNTOWN
So Will went on to study the works of people like Jay Forrester who wrote some of the first papers on computer simulation at MIT and who'd already documented very abstract spreadsheets about how a possible city simulation might work. Alan Turing, the father of modern computer science, was another academic fellow who inspired Will, particularly Turing's ideas about cellular

automation, which was basically a way to simulate spatial organisation and patterns.

"What I ended up building was a combination of Jay Forrester's system dynamics, married to Alan Turing's work on cellular automation. By using the two of them for different parts of the engine, but having them both interconnect, I managed to build a pretty detailed simulator."

So out of something quite boring and inaccessible to most of us, was born a game that would capture the hearts, minds and DOS systems across the globe. However, the version that most of

us remember is actually the second incarnation of *SimCity* – Son of *Sim* if you will. Will built the original game single-handedly back in 1985, then put it on a shelf while he took time out to spend with his newly-born daughter. Then, in 1987 he met Jeff Braun at what has now become a legendary pizza party. After they'd hit it off, he showed him the version of *SimCity* that he'd put together.

"He thought it was cool and that we should publish, so I took the royalties from *Bungeling Bay* and Jeff took money he had from a previous software company and together we founded Maxis."

TAKE IT TO THE MAX
So Maxis was started on the premise of one single game, but it was this title that was to dictate the progress of the company for the next few years, as well as providing the foundation for several other *Sim* titles.

To bring the title up to scratch for the latest machines, Maxis hired three programmers to work on the graphics, while Will reprogrammed the simulation. And because the foundations for the code were already firmly in place, the first teething problems of Maxis were more coming to terms with running a project and a company.

Will Wright continues: "I'd never studied software development or run something

PROFILE

Despite being one of the all-time gaming greats, Will Wright always looks like he should be giving lectures on astrophysics. A fierce passion for all kinds of design, from architecture to product packaging, mixed with a boyish fascination with robotics and AI has enabled him to spearhead two of the most well-known gaming franchises of all time.

NAME: Will Wright
ROLE ON SIMCITY:
He created the first incarnation of the game single-handedly and was then lead designer when the game was being worked on by Maxis.
FIRST GAME WORKED ON:
Raid On Bungeling Bay, a helicopter action game for the C64.
WHERE IS HE NOW:
Still chief designer and co-founder at Maxis.

"*SimCity* gave you the ability to be creative instead of destructive"

WILL WRIGHT CREATOR, *SIMCITY*

like this before. So in the beginning, we were just like, 'OK, let's do this'!"

But Will had no idea that what they were working on was going to be a potential hit. "I think Jeff knew it was going to be a success, but I didn't. I thought it would probably appeal to strategy game players and maybe a few architects. But I think by then the market was mature enough to appreciate it, and people wanted more than just arcade action games. The reason *SimCity* was so successful was down to the fact that the game gave you the ability to be creative instead of destructive, and didn't just put you on a rollercoaster and say, 'here you go, have a good ride'!"

BUILD IT UP

However, Brøderbund took a bit of convincing about the potential of *SimCity*. After all, here was a game that effectively had no end, and instead of putting you in the role of an adventurer, or a pilot or something equally macho, it put you into the shoes of a mild-mannered city planner. It definitely wasn't sexy, but as time would tell, the gaming public had been given enough 'sexy': what they really craved now was a cosy night in with something a bit more cerebral.

The publisher was also concerned that *SimCity* was going to be perceived as more of an educational tool than a game, and so it encouraged Maxis to add random disasters like nuclear meltdowns and earthquakes. But it was Will's underlying simulation technology that proved to be the golden

> **DID YOU KNOW?**
> Will Wright was a regular contestant on the US version of *Robot Wars*. His first robot was called Juliebot and featured a severed talking doll's head on the top.

core. Although sales were slow for the first few weeks of release, meaning that the technical support for the game had to be carried out from Jeff's apartment, the game started to generate a buzz and sales improved by word of mouth as much as anything else. This was further compounded when *Newsweek* ran a full page praising the game. Sales rocketed and it was a sure sign that Will Wright and Maxis had successfully managed to tap into that part of our brain that caused us to spend hours building Lego villages as a child. More importantly, it proved that it wasn't something we lost as we got older, but instead it was simply the Lego that grew up.

Brøderbund was partly right in the educational possibilities of *SimCity* too, however, and over the next few years the game was used as a teaching aid in over 10,000 classrooms. The fact that simulation was such a new field of computer technology meant that Maxis also drew the attention of government agencies such as the FBI, although Will can't divulge the content of those particular phone calls.

SIM EXPLOSION

SimAnt, *SimEarth* and *SimLife* followed, all ploughing similar furrows to the original. By the time *SimCity 2000* went into development, Maxis had lots of ideas about what to put into the sequel. This was due partly to the fan mail the company received, which was littered with the suggestions for a follow-up.

"By today's standards, the team for *SimCity 2000* was tiny," explains Will. "We only had two people who did the programming and three art babes (they called themselves that!) – and even

that felt hugely extravagant. We also had a guy who did the music. All in, it was about six or seven people, and most of them only came onboard for the last few months. Up until then it was just myself and Fred Haslam doing the design. But again, it was built on the same simulation as the original game, which meant the code was still strong. Our job was as much about the challenges of building a company as building a product."

However, having already played a big part in the development of *SimEarth* and *SimAnt*, Will wasn't

Alien invasions are always a threat to a thriving city.

FAMILY TREE

SimCity is one of the cornerstones of the god games genre and the father of city sims in its own right – and it's still influencing games even now…

Year	
1985	RAID ON BUNGELING BAY
1986	
1987	
1988	
1989	**SIM CITY**
1990	
1991	CIVILIZATION
1992	
1993	SIMCITY 2000 & CAESAR
1994	
1995	
1996	CIVILIZATION II
1997	
1998	
1999	SIMCITY 3000
2000	ZEUS: MASTER OF OLYMPUS
2001	STRONGHOLD
2002	
2003	SIMCITY 4

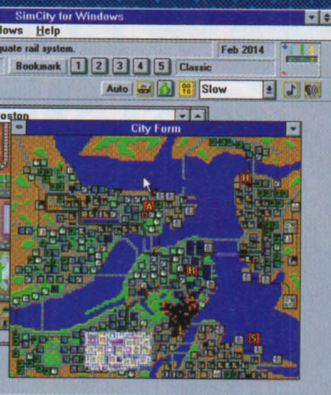*Raid On Bungeling Bay* was the inspiration for *SimCity*.

Pretty, but no 3D.

Lizard on the loose!

Blinding lime green in Win 3.x.

Much like downtown LA. But with less traffic.

WEIRD IS THE FUTURE

WHAT'S NEXT FOR THE CITY THAT NEVER SLEEPS?

With *The Sims 2* doing roaring trade, the *SimCity* franchise seems to have been put on the backburner. However, Will assures us that's not the case and that Maxis has future plans for the franchise, but nothing it's willing to tell us about yet.

When Maxis does come to address *SimCity* once again, Will's in no doubt that it should start by addressing the faults of *SC4*. "We need to increase the ratio of what you see on screen that's cool, how much of it you're responsible for and increase the creative breath of the things you can build. I'd also like to be able to build really unusual, strange cities in very different directions, as opposed to having various incarnations of a 1950s American city. To me, it would be great if I could make weird and different-looking cities that had their own behaviours, rules and infrastructures." Watch this space.

You get a statue, but how much of the coolness is really down to you?

that keen to do *SimCity 2000* himself. So instead, Fred Haslam took the helm and Will started to research a personal project of his, which at the time was called *Dollhouse* and would eventually go on to be what we know today as *The Sims*. However, although they'd performed decently, the other *Sim* games didn't have the appeal and potential as *SimCity*. Because of this, it became clear to Maxis that it needed to focus firmly on this franchise.

"Fred was a great programmer, but back then his designing skills weren't as strong and the project was going off-course and getting really goofy," explains Will when talking about his move to work

on *SimCity 2000*. "It became obvious that this was what we had to concentrate on, so I dropped *The Sims* and Fred and I redesigned *SimCity 2000* together."

As with the original game, Will was determined to research his subject as much as possible. This meant that he devoted quite a bit of time to meeting and talking to city planners, public utility workers, teachers and so on, all of whom had real-world experience in what he wanted to simulate.

YEAR 3000

The next episode in the *SimCity* saga was *SimCity 3000*. However, this was not a 3D version of the game (as the title suggests), despite Maxis's desire to send the blooming franchise in that direction, as Will reveals.

"*SimCity 3000* went through a lot of trials and tribulations. We originally wanted to do it in 3D, but the computers weren't really up to it. I was busy at the time trying to get *The Sims* off the ground too. Also, EA bought Maxis, and Lucy Bradshaw was brought onboard as *SimCity 3000's* executive producer, which meant she took the decision to keep the game in its isometric form."

SimCity 3000 came and went without much of an impact, and it wasn't until *SimCity 4* last year that Maxis got to fulfil its long-held desire to produce the game in proper 3D glory.

By this point though, Will's baby was well and truly *The Sims* franchise, although he did work on the terrain editing, region play and port-a-sim features in the game. Despite being

released with a lot more fireworks and hype, *SimCity 4* didn't proved to be a *Sims*-beater in the sales stakes.

Will has his theories on why *SimCity 4* didn't do as well as he'd hoped. "I think it's been catering to the same group of gamers for too long. Someone who played *SimCity 2000* and loved it would have no problem whatsoever enjoying *SimCity 4*. But someone who's never touched a *SimCity* game before would have a much harder time getting into it – it was fairly daunting for casual gamers in particular. The *SimCity* franchise needs to be reinvented and a fresh new approach created for it. *SimCity 4* was a great game, but really only if you already knew something about how to play it."

HOT IN THE CITY

"I played the game an awful lot and from a gamer's perspective, I noticed that most of what I was seeing on the screen that was really cool and detailed *wasn't* something that I directly created in the game. There are these elaborate buildings that the Maxis artists have made, which are beautifully detailed and fun to watch. But you're just moving all these elaborate models around, not physically creating them in the game. So in a sense, the artwork we put in was distracting from what you were doing."

So here ends the tale of four cities – in fact millions of virtual cities – all over the world that were spawned from one man's mind and a lot of heavy reading. As for the cities of the future, well if Will Wright has anything to do with it, they'll be up to you. **PCZ**

PC Zone

THE FIRST AND BEST FOR MECHANICAL WIZARDRY

MEDAL OF HONOUR: CRIMEAN ASSAULT RELEASED

QUEEN "NOT AMUSED" BY TSAR-BASHING TOMFOOLERY

LIGHT BRIGADE CHARGE DEEMED "BEST BIT"

Announced in May last by Electrification Artistes, the highly anticipated sabre-clasher *Crimean Assault* was yesterday released to piffle-purveyors throughout the Empire. Detailing both our victories over potato-eating swine at Alma River, Balaklava and Inkerman, and featuring an exquisitely etched rendering of an ankle-revealing Florence Nightingale to keep your spirits up, First Batallion's spokesman Brigadier Prezzlewick proclaimed that the game was "very great" and "likely to make chaps say 'Egad!' or even
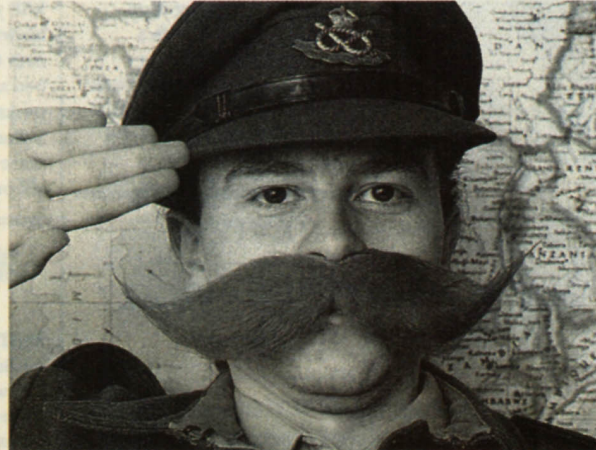
Brigadier Prezzlewick of the First Batallion, yesterday.

Nightingale: a decent sort of woman.

'Zounds'!" Sounds spiffy.

Her Royal Majesty, Empress of India and Queen of Great Britain and Ireland, our dear sovereign Victoria played the training level before claiming that she was "not amused" – leading to round criticism of the game from the royal court and particulars. This is now the sixth electronic jollity of

the year to fail in amusing the Queen. It now joins ranks with much other rejected silliness, including *The Fall Of Maximillian Pennyworth*, *Age Of Empire: Keep It Up Boys!*, *Soldiers: Heroes Of The Zulu Conflict*, *Cock Fighter 1854* edition and Mister Beesley's *Waltz Waltz Revolution* Dancemat Contraption. Her Majesty's displeasure is likely to cause *Crimean Assault* undue suffering, although through tears Brigadier Prezzlewick declared that he cared 'not a whit'.

DISREPUTABLE GAME URGES GENTLE-MEN TO KILL

Grand Theft Horse And Trap Encourages Misdeeds, High Jinks

COPY FOUND IN JACK THE RIPPER'S HOMESTEAD

After one brief sortie into the depraved world of *Grand Theft Horse And Trap*, myself, a gentleman of some breeding, had within a scrap of time already paid for some ungraceful attention from a lady of doubtful reputation before battering her to her grave with a stout walking stick and stolen back my sinful ha'penny. Has society ever bred a more bawdy and chilling diversion?

Should fallen women be bludgeoned in such a manner, or imprisoned and starved as is common practice? Should our kinsfolk be permitted to witness carriages moving as fast as a running man while listening to chamber music? Should ladies be present even within the same townhouse as a game in which one must mix with those of Irish Descent, or even the Chinee? 'Tis a violent aberration unto God!

An artist's etching of the unfortunate incident.

ACADEMICS OF AGE SOLVE ALL ILLS

Electric Counting Machines Of The Future To Know No Hindrance

Prince Albert to Inspect "Blue Screen of Death"

Oxford scientists yesterday revealed that from this day forward, no contraption will suffer undue hangs or crashes. Their invention, the 'Blue Screen of Death' (sportingly named after its colour and its creator, one Professor Benjamin De'ath) will henceforth come compiled with all Personal Computing appliances and cleverly inform the user whenever an error happens to occur. What's more, the Screen will also provide us chaps with a 12-digit number so that we can pursue the nature of the problem at a later date.

FENESTRATIONS

Cripes. A fatal exception 0E has occurred at 0167:BFF9DFFF mi'lord! I'm afraid to announce that the current application will be halted forthwith.

*Press any key to curtail piston movement
*Press CTRL+ALT+CALLSERVANT again to restart your Magical Box of Cogs You will lose everything.

Press any key to continue dear sir.

Truly we live in an age of wonders.

Professor De'ath said of his Blue Screen: "Crashes and hang-ups that occur when your machine has a good old think about what it's up to will soon be a thing of the past." Her Majesty's courtier Prince Albert, only recently attending such galas since the unfortunate incident when he inspected

Morrison's Pierce-o-matic Metal Insertion machine, called it 'good'. Later in the evening, rival academics at Cambridge raised the question of machines of the future having to perform two operations at the same time – a question to which Professor De'ath was unavailable to comment upon

PREVIEW

ORGAN GRINDER TYCOON

There is no finer joy than on an autumnal morn to watch a savage beast such as a bear standing upon a heated surface and dancing for the amusement of bairns. But, sir, pray think of the joys that you could experience should *you* be the fellow pulling on the bear's chained snout! Commencing your street-entertainment trade with a stoat or badger (and culminating with monkey and tyger), *Organ Grinder Tycoon* will be a delight for any child who delights in the mastery of beasts and vermin.

REVIEW

FIFA FOOTBALL 1855

Stephen M Hillington-Smythe plays a working-class sport

Gadzooks. Must we go through this nonsense every year, dear reader? This is none but the self-same game this almanac labelled rotten but a year ago – albeit now with a ball that revolves in the exact manner of a pig's bladder and a neat one-touch system. In faith, there are those within this great Empire who are gifted with the ability to tell the difference between both ordure and treacle – and this offering is neither sugary nor sweet. It is common knowledge within these halls that *Pro Evolution Jolly Fun Balls* is by far the greater re-enactment of common villagers fighting in the streets, gouging each other's eyes and being caught offside. This game, by contrast, is for none but beggars and whores.

DEAR WANDSWORTH

His scientific knowledge is second to none!

Q I've just purchased my first pictogram-processing contraption unit and I am extremely befuddled with which way it should be powered should I wish to experience *Damnation 3* to its full, undoubted prowess. Should I select clockwork or steam? My companion Lord Fauntlington claims steam to be of infinite worth, yet I fear rust shall contaminate a machine for which I have paid an entire 4s and 3d.

A Rust is a displeasure to be expected with steam-powered processing units – and a singular capacity for confounding the user with scalded legs beneath his workspace. It remains, however, superior to clockwork, which damages wooden components and requires your maid or (if you are a pauper) your wife to wind up the device every night before you both retire to bed. Steam is truly the way of the future.

REVIEW

LEISURE SUIT LORD BYRON

Whether concocting poetry with which to entice and bamboozle harlots or offering opium in exchange for feisty fillies to tell you stories of corpse reanimation, this foul offering gives gentlemen the chance to live the vicarious life of noble poet Lord Byron. Will you care that he manages to dip his wick under your tutelage? Using over twelve dozen lines of poetry to bed simpering womenfolk and packaged with eleven prints of ladies showing their ankles, once more we are confounded by such abhorrent naughtiness.

· NOTIFICATIONS ·

PC ZONE

EVERQUEST II