# PC-ZONE

**EXCLUSIVE FIRST LOOK!**

# CALL OF DUTY 2

## The greatest WWII shooter is back – explosive details inside!

**FIRST SHOTS!**
**CONDEMNED**
True horror from the makers of FEAR!

**3 EXCLUSIVE REVIEWS!**

Finally...
## CHAMP MAN 5
But is it still top of the league?

adidas

## FREEDOM FORCE VS THE 3RD REICH

**REVIEW AND DEMO!**
POLICE
**SWAT4**

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**PLUS!** SPLINTER CELL: CHAOS THEORY

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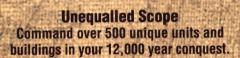
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## THE FIRST AND BEST FOR PC GAMES

# CALL OF DUTY 2 P38

**The greatest World War II shooter is back – explosive details inside!**

## A New Beginning

Hello and welcome to *PC ZONE*. If you read last month's editor's letter by Dave Woods, you'll know that he maliciously, and without any proof whatsoever, libelled me in the magazine. Without wanting to bring up unpleasant memories of the subsequent trial, Mr Woods basically unleashed an attack on my personal reputation and insinuated that I liked to wear women's lingerie. This is, of course, wholly untrue, and was proven in court recently, where Dave Woods was unceremoniously dragged away to the cells for sentencing, his life and career in tatters.

However, as now acting editor of Britain's best PC gaming magazine, I wish to say on record that I bear no malice towards Dave, and wish him the very best in his future endeavours.

So what have I got lined up in my first issue? For starters, *PC ZONE* is the first UK mag with the scoop on the WWII shooter everyone's been waiting for – *Call of Duty 2* – almost two years after we broke the original game on our cover. See Dave? Not bad, eh?

Not only that, but we have the first reviews of squad-based justice-bringing shooter *SWAT 4* (plus playable demo), superhero RTS sequel *Freedom Force Vs The 3rd Reich* and footie sim *Championship Manager 5* – all overseen by the technological marvel that is JournoBot.

So, if you were worried that the magazine would suffer without whatsisname and that the power would go to my head, you can now relax in the knowledge that *ZONE* is in safe hands. Of course, I now insist that all my minions – I mean, staff – refer to me as His Most Gracious One and don't ever have eye contact, but these are just small cosmetic changes that won't affect you, dear reader. *PC ZONE* will prevail! Now, where's that Kay's catalogue…

*Jamie Sefton*

**Jamie Sefton**
Acting Editor

# COVER DISCS P136

■ **DEMOS AND MOVIES!**
Tactical shooting that puts you in command of highly-trained yanks in *SWAT 4*, and camp comic capers with *Freedom Force Vs The 3rd Reich*. Plus! Demos of *Empire Earth II*, *GTR*, a first look at *Stargate SG-1: The Alliance* and more!

■ **DVD EXCLUSIVES**
Unlimited goblin bashing with a trial of *Everquest II* and demos of *S.C.S Dangerous Waters* and *Star Wolves*. Plus! Essential demos such as *Half-Life2*, contents of Community Chest and more!

**CONDEMNED 10**

**TWELVE 30**

**FREEDOM FORCE
VS THE 3RD REICH 70**

"With *Call Of Duty 2*, you'll see a glimpse of what the future of videogames holds for everyone"

**CALL OF DUTY 2 38**

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*Champ Man 5* – see p82 for our review

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**PCZONE**

SPRING 2005
PARIAHGAME.COM

# FIRST Look!

# CONDEMNED

**We expose the grimy underbelly of Monolith's new shocker**

■ **ARMED AND DANGEROUS** Dave Woods

## ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW

**PUBLISHER** Sega
**DEVELOPER** Monolith
**EXPECTED RELEASE DATE** Q4 2005
**WEBSITE** www.lith.com

## WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

■ It's from Monolith
■ Visually stunning, stylised and unique
■ Highly interactive environments
■ Wholly adult single-player narrative

> "It's a scenario about as far away from *F.E.A.R.* as you could hope to envisage"


"Um, nurse? I only said my knee hurt."

**MONOLITH.** A company that's already made some of the finest PC games ever – like *No One Lives Forever 2*. A company that's making the most anticipated FPS of 2005 – *F.E.A.R.* And a company that's seemingly not content to sit on its laurels, as it's just announced that it's already a way down the road on its next mega-release, *Condemned*.

And unlike other developers, Monolith is seemingly hell-bent on avoiding the FPS-only tag. In *Condemned*, described as a first-person psychological thriller, you play as Ethan Thomas, a lead investigator in the FBI's Serial Crime Unit. In classic Hollywood style, you find yourself suspended after a series of murders point to you as prime suspect, forcing you to start a new investigation under your own steam to prove your innocence. To do this you have to use your investigative skills and forensic tools to find clues and evidence – a scenario that's about as far removed from *F.E.A.R.* as you could hope to envisage.

Needing to know more, we used our investigative skills (admittedly very suspect) to track *Condemned's* producer, Dave Hasle, to the Monolith offices in Seattle. Is *Condemned* going to be a slower affair than *F.E.A.R.*? "We don't look at it as being slower, we see it as being a richer experience, where you're looking for clues and evidence as opposed to health and ammo."

But you do get to fire guns? "Sure. You'll have an assortment of melee and firearm weapons. Once your ammo runs


Try tilting your head back and pinching the bridge of your nose...

out of your firearm, it becomes a melee weapon. Fight with it as a melee weapon too long and you run the risk of shattering it. If it's destroyed, you have to find another weapon – a piece of pipe, part of a wooden shelf, a subway sign, a sledgehammer, or possibly another firearm, whatever is at hand."

Probing deeper, we were met with firm resistance. What about the serial killers? Is there one? A few? Many?

"No comment. In fact we're going to keep the details regarding the serial killers secret until the game ships." As a parting shot though, Dave Hasle did confirm that there'll be a coherent narrative and that the events, the serial killers and the choices you make are all related. And despite resorting to underhanded tactics – "do you know how much *PC ZONE* loves Monolith games?" – he wasn't prepared to go any further. For now. **PCZ**


"Aaaaaa-choooo! Oh, sorry about that. Did I get you?"


Greatest Air Guitar Hits Of The '80s, Volume 12.

*That's* why we don't play with scythes inside the house.

**NO F.E.A.R.**
According to Monolith: "Blasting your way through the opposition with over-the-top kick-ass weapons is *F.E.A.R.* Creeping through dark, dilapidated buildings filled with violent sociopaths while hunting deranged serial killers – that's *Condemned*."

**M FOR MATURE.**
*Condemned* isn't going to shy away from spilling blood, but only where necessary. It knows that proper suspense comes from suggested horror, which is more powerful than out-and-out gore. So, it's going to be scary then?

**QUEENSBURY RULES**
Melee combat is intuitive and straight-forward – you're not going to have to master multiple buttons to pull off amazing combos – but you get to use almost anything as a weapon, as do your opponents.

**BIG SCREEN**
*F.E.A.R.* looks to Japanese horror for its inspiration. The team behind *Condemned* cites *Silence Of The Lambs*, *Se7en* and *28 Days Later* as moulding many aspects of the game, the latter especially for its "intensity."

**HARD CEL**
The full power of the new DirectX 9 engines is finally starting to show. Using the latest shaders, *Condemned* is a highly-stylised game that looks like nothing we've seen before. Stills really do not do it justice.

**■ NEWS EDITOR** Will Porter

▲ They say opposites attract, or at least Paula Abdul and MC Skat Kat did. But it's not always true, as I discovered this month while ambling around, indiscriminately shooting lights and accidentally knocking over virtual vases (in a metaphorical sense) in *Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory* co-op. You see, when you partner a trigger-happy, *Painkiller*-loving guy like me with an ultra-serious stealth fan like our man Holden, then sparks will fly. "Why the hell are the alarms going off?" Erm... no idea. "Stop running around like a fool. We're meant to be invisible here, and you're f**king it all up!" Shall I shoot that man? "God no! Just stand over there in the corner until I'm done. And don't touch anything. I don't know why I even let you tag along..."

I swear it was as if Sam Fisher, running out of the house to his latest mission with his coat half on, had suddenly been lumbered with his idiot son due to a baby-sitting mix-up. "Don't touch that!" "Don't go there!" "Don't stand next to the security cameras bobbing up and down and turning your night vision goggles on and off!" Cuh. Anyone would think that the security of the free world was at stake.

Anyway, things did get better. Eventually both myself and Mister Holden came to terms with my glaring inability to keep quiet and really quite enjoyed all the masculine grunting and bizarre homoerotic positioning that *Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory* can provide. I'm a sucker for a good co-op mode, so a month of friendly, male-bonding experiences in *Chaos Theory* and the ace *SWAT 4* has neatly balanced out the grey slush and faceless boredom of my daily commute.

So, for all the games developers reading (we know you're out there), more co-op please! Xbox may get *Doom 3* co-op, but PC owners have friends too. I have several.

▼

The most interactive hairdos ever seen in a game.

"Come on, let's get this over with before the game finishes."

# TELL ME A STORY

**MOLYNEUX CONFIRMS *FABLE: THE LOST CHAPTERS* FOR PC. GAMERS USE WEST COUNTRY ACCENTS TO SHOW APPRECIATION**

**A GAME** that famously allowed your character to age, get married, have a hair-cut and fart to impress passers-by, *Fable* is now on its way to the PC. Peter Molyneux may have gone on record to apologise for not attaining his lofty target of a fully interactive world, but he still gave gamers the opportunity to woo men and women with odd Cornish accents while buffing themselves up to become a legendary hero – for good or for evil.

The tale finds an apparently orphaned child (that's you, that is) entrusted in the care of the Hero's Guild, where you learn feats of Strength, Skill and Will (which is *Fable*-speak for magic). It soon becomes apparent, however, that your fate is entwined with that of the world of Albion – and that there's more to being a hero than running around killing little monsters that look like boglins.

*Fable: The Lost Chapters* has all the usual graphical improvements that we've come to expect, as well as new regions, storylines and side-quests to

keep spirits up (and, presumably, to lengthen a game that was disappointingly short on its home platform). New monsters, spells, weapons and heroic peasant-impressing expressions are also promised – and even though the balance between dark and light won't be as intricate or deep as in the *KOTOR* series, you can't drink too much in the pub, go home and be sick on the floor before bedding your rustic wife with boring Jedis.

The Xbox game had the *PC ZONE* office split between lovers and haters, but this new content could well fill the divide between them. And at least we're getting something out of Lionhead, even if it isn't *Black & White 2*.

**■ Publisher:** Microsoft
**■ Developer:** Lionhead
**■ ETA:** Q3 2005
**■ Website:** www.microsoft.com/games/fable

Role-playing action from the UK.

# ANNIHILATE THIS
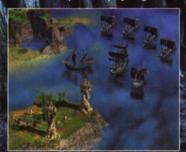
## TEAM *COSSACKS* TAKES A FLIGHT OF FANTASY WITH *HEROES OF ANNIHILATED EMPIRES*

**GAMES THAT** merge RPG and RTS are growing increasingly common – *Spellforce* and the upcoming *Dragonshard* are just two that spring to mind. But merging the exploits of up to 64,000 individual units with a single hero on a complex role-play tangent?

That's a mite tricky. Nevertheless, it's a task that Ukrainian outfit GSC Game World (of *STALKER* fame) is throwing itself into with wild abandon. *Heroes Of Annihilated Empires* is based on an advanced version of the *Cossacks II* engine, and as such has few of the jaw-dropping effects that are appearing in titles like *Rome: Total War* or *Rise & Fall: Civilizations At War*, but still has an advanced battle engine working behind the scenes that could make grown strategists weep.

The game, the first of a trilogy, is based in the world of En'liad. GSC has done its best to follow the example of Tolkien, creating a rich tapestry of history, legends, traditions, economies and even agriculture of the lands in question instead of simply conjuring

up some large generic battles in a token fantasy setting. El'hant (previously a word reserved for toddlers at Whipsnade Zoo) is the name of your hero, an elven ranger no less, whose fate is mixed with that of the noble druids and a cast of the

undead, ice folk, dwarves, demons and human-folk. No goblins though, sadly.

As well as epic battles and a massive catalogue of war spells, the game promises underground dungeon sections for the advancement of your hero (a la *Dragonshard*). Quite how this will work is yet to be seen, although GSC has labelled its major task as working out a perfect "symbiosis" of the two genres, creating an intuitive blend instead of two adjacent and distinct gaming styles. What with the insane promises made of *STALKER*, it seems that this is one developer that quite enjoys a tall order.

**Boats and everything!**

**There's thousands of the buggers.**

**Go on underground dungeon bashes.**

- **Publisher:** GSC World Publisher
- **Developer:** GSC Game World
- **ETA:** Q1 2006
- **Website:** www.heroesofae.com

# Undue Suffering

## INTEGRATE YOURSELF BACK INTO SOCIETY WITH *THE SUFFERING: TIES THAT BIND*, AND SEVERAL SHOTGUNS

**WELL, THEY** do say it takes time to re-adjust after leaving prison, and sure enough the troubled life of Torque isn't getting any rosier in his new outing, *The Suffering: Ties That Bind*. The recently-announced follow-up looks set to follow the tone and style of the first game closely, but takes the action out of prison and into the streets and slums of Baltimore – though from the looks of it we'll get to visit a few old jailhouses as well, just for old time's sake.

The morality system, as seen in the first game's under-developed choices between right and wrong, is being touted as a rather more 'full fat' option, with decisions that you make leading you down entirely different paths and towards entirely different outcomes. There are even three different beginnings depending on how you finished the last game – and should you take the 'good' route then the monster you morph into in times of trouble will look far more human and less intimidating.

With the cackling KillJoy making a welcome reappearance and a cast of beasties cursed with familiar afflictions like syringes for eyes, *Ties That Bind* clearly won't be pleasant. But it will be fun.

- **Publisher:** Midway
- **Developer:** Surreal Software
- **ETA:** Q3
- **Website:** www.midway.com

**Don't worry kids, it's just ketchup.**
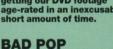
## Good Pop. Bad Pop.

### GOOD POP

***Call Of Duty 2*** on the cover, bringing joy to our hearts.

**Steve 'la-di-da' Hill** writing an article for *The Independent*. It's almost as if he's a proper journalist.

Thanks to the lovely people at the BBFC for getting our DVD footage age-rated in an inexcusably short amount of time.

### BAD POP

Getting a *papier maché* leg covered in real human hair in the internal mail. Its senders are clearly sick people.

**Will and Prez almost coming to blows over *Freedom Force Vs The 3rd Reich*. It's almost as bad as the *City Of Heroes* incident.**

Jamie Sefton, for taking our editor Mr Woods to court and then taking over the helm himself.

Good Pop: **Panda Pops lemonade** Bad Pop: **Panda Pops Cola.** Because luke-warm, wasp-attracting playground cola still haunts us, but everyone likes lemonade. Even lemonade with a panda on it.

# IN THE MONEY

## SPECIAL REPORT

Trade in MMOG property has become a multi-million pound business. Because we're living in a virtual world and I am a material girl, says *Pavel Barter*

**DAVID STOREY,** a 22-year-old gamer from Australia, knew it was the purchase of a lifetime. Acres upon acres of tropical bliss – lush forests, sandy beaches, coconut trees, a big old abandoned castle, and no Tom Hanks in sight. Paradise. After outbidding other potential buyers, the desert island was all his for the paltry sum of £13,700. Problem was, Storey's dream home couldn't be reached by plane or boat, only by broadband. Why? Because the island was located in MMORPG *Project Entropia*. In other words, it didn't exist.

For outsiders, virtual game economies seem stranger than the face of Sylvester Stallone's mother, but few can deny the whopping amounts of money involved. Edward Castronova, an expert in this sort of thing, from Indiana University in the US, reckons that at least £53 million in videogame goods are shifted online every year. Including offline trade, it amounts to over £1 billion. "At that level, it is comparable to economic activity in many

small regions, provinces, and even a few countries," he told us.

Need proof? Just check out some of the ghostly cargo shifting on eBay. A Jedi from *Star Wars Galaxies* will set you back £530, *Ultima Online*'s Hat of the Magi costs between £80 and £106, a house near a bank in *Ultima Online* can shift for around £265. For £95, one *Dark Age Of Camelot* power level is all yours. ("You'll level faster and get richer without going through tedious work," reads the vendor's description.) *EverQuest II*, *The Sims*, *World Of Warcraft*, and many more games are generating mega bucks. Even characters from an online text adventure, *Gemstone IV*, are bought and sold for silly prices.

### MONEY, MONEY, MONEY

When Dr Richard Bartle created the first virtual game world (MUD) in the 1970s, he couldn't have predicted the mushrooming markets of today. "There was some early trade in characters, particularly in virtual worlds that didn't have permanent death,"

he explains. "This was swiftly stamped out by the developers, though, as was the practice of paying people to level your characters for you. Informal property sales began when virtual worlds became more persistent. I'm pretty sure it happened in *Island Of Kesmai* on CompuServe, but it was always a black market."
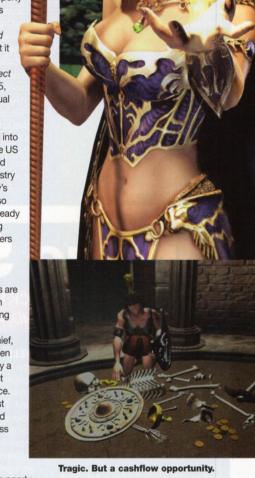
But how times change. *Project Entropia*, first conceived in 1995, is all about the bling. In this virtual world, you can exchange real currency for *Project Entropia* Dollars (PEDs), then back again into real money. Ten PEDs equal one US dollar and PEDs buy clothes and weapons, even mining and forestry rights. In this light, David Storey's island purchase doesn't seem so bizarre – the crafty bugger is already making a few quid from housing developments and visiting hunters and gold miners.

### BUOYANT MARKET

Independent trading companies are springing up fast. Gaming Open Market is a 'stock market clearing house', where players deal in *Second Life* Lindens. GOM's chief, Jamie Hale, explains: "The Linden Dollar secondary market is really a way for *Second Life* users to get paid for the content they produce. As such, it's in Linden Lab's best interest to keep the market liquid and stable. We frequently discuss ways of improving both of our services to further that goal."

Then there are the rumours about virtual sweatshops, where poorly paid peasants are forced to play MMOGs for days on end (which, between you and me, is very much the life of *ZONE*'s pet goblin-hacker Paul Presley). BlackSnow Interactive, for example, a company that traded rare and expensive items in games like *Anarchy Online* and *Dark Age Of Camelot*, bragged that it made its fortune from offices in Mexico, where three shifts of unskilled labourers played games and developed characters and goods for future sale.

BlackSnow's story should be taken with a pinch of salt, mind. After trying to sue Mythic Entertainment (*Dark Age Of Camelot* creators), BlackSnow allegedly legged it owing $23,000 to its lawyers and

**Tragic. But a cashflow opportunity.**

a long-time supplier of *Ultima Online* gold. Edward Castronova, whose book *Synthetic Worlds* is released this year, was especially cynical when we knocked on his door. "Virtual sweatshops are a myth," he stated. "The reality is virtual cottage industries. A big trader buys gold from hundreds of independent small gold farmers, and then sells it to hundreds of small game players. The trader does no farming itself, it just facilitates farming by a network of gamers."

### CONTROLLED ECONOMY?

Virtual economies caught game publishers with their trousers down. Should they capitalise on this money flow

"Hello scary Minotaur man. I'll have some tatty boats and a ragged pelt, please."

## "David Storey's dream home can't be reached by plane or boat, only by broadband"

or shut it down? Sony Online bans *EverQuest* player auctions; Blizzard Entertainment threatens legal action against anyone caught trading. Microsoft, on the other hand, allows the sale of *Asheron's Call* characters but (unsurprisingly, some might say) skims taxes off the top. *Ultima Online*, meanwhile, now sells advanced custom-built characters at $29.95 a pop.

Games companies who attempt to ban virtual trading "have a heck of a fight on their hands," reckons Jamie Hale from *Second Life* creators GOM. "As long as trade mechanics exist in these games, secondary markets will find a way to happen. If publishers want to completely snuff out secondary market trading, they will have to spend more money and effort on it than they do to produce content."

The implications for the world beyond an MMOG's borders are even greater. In the first virtual property rights dispute case, a Chinese court recently ordered the creators of MMOG *Hongyue* to return biochemical weapons to a gamer whose virtual armoury was swiped by a hacker – not exactly a case you'd expect Perry Mason to be dealing with. A legal decision of this level defeats arguments that virtual property is just insignificant piles of data. And Hale reckons it's just a matter of time before a similar court case takes place in the West.

"Publishers can never admit value to these digital goods we trade. If they did, they would be on the hook for gigantic financial losses should they ever have a crash or, heaven forbid, close shop." Publishers will argue that the goods traded belong to them because of small print in the End User's Licence Agreement, while gamers will say that EULAs can't reasonably force players to sign away rights to property that they created or earned. "The outcome of this potential court battle will determine the future of the business," is the last line on the subject from the MMOG man.

For Edward Castronova, the growing virtual game property market marks the first tentative steps into a new world only previously imagined in cyberpunk sci-fi novels. "New frontier, new rules. We do not know how many people will eventually find a fantastical society preferable to our own. It could be hundreds of millions. If so, we are in for some dramatic changes in society, economy, and politics over the next few generations." Better start saving those Linden Dollars then... **PCZ**



Chinese MMOG *Hongyue*: site of the first online legal property case.

# THE MAN WHO KNOWS

**LEGENDARY** screen actor **Marlon Brando** has spoken from beyond the **grave** to promote a controversial new computer game version of violent '70s **gangster** film *The Godfather*. Speaking via a recorded medium at a **gala** occasion in **New York's Little Italy**, Brando **mumbled** something along the lines of, "You can sit there and have a universal experience – of fear, of anger, of cheer, of longing – and I discovered that it's the audience really that's doing the acting." Also present at the event were Oscar-nominated Godfather stars **James Caan** and **Robert Duvall**. Asked about his involvement in the game, Caan mused, "It was fun – the voice came right back. For me, it was like the notion that my kids could play with me even if I'm not there." More taciturn than his co-star, Duvall simply rubbed his **fingers** together as if handling a **wad** of notes. Following their brief appearance, the stars were swept into the **VIP** room while the **unwashed** hordes scrambled for the free bar and food. A reasonable spread, although the **meatballs** could have been a bit hotter.

Back in the unreal world, a *City Of Heroes* player has secured further education by writing about his virtual experiences as part of his college entrance exams. **Roman Sizykh** claims to play the **Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game** for **35** hours a week, and rather than **reject** him with **disgust**, every institution accepted his application to study **accountancy**. No condoms required.

**Square Enix** has permanently **banned** the accounts of more than 800 *Final Fantasy XI* players after they were accused of **bullying**. A spokesman said, "Severely disturbing the enjoyment of other users by monopolising monsters is not acceptable. We have taken measures against players who have been clearly going against the terms of service." Any such problems in *World Of Warcraft* can now be solved by hiring an online **hitman**. For a "reasonable charge", **Wetworks Incorporated** will **slaughter** your chosen victim and provide you with a screenshot of the **kill** as well as a personalised message whispered in their ear as they lay dying.

> **"Legendary screen actor Marlon Brando has spoken from beyond the grave, to promote the new *Godfather* game via a recorded medium"**

# THIS IS THE FUTURE

## NO CLUTTER, NO MESS, NO HASSLE. WELCOME TO THE WORLD OF THE GAMEULATOR

**IT COULD BE** fresh from the script of *Look Around You*, but the Gameulator is very much grounded in reality. A gaming station with a very silly name, it's been designed to provide the perfect gaming experience. Like a computer desk that's been sucked through the black hole in Disney's 1979 classic movie, stuck onto an extremely comfy seat with go-faster stripes painted on the side, it's certainly an odd concept.

As modelled here by Will Porter in classic Next Catalogue style, the Gameulator comes equipped with a plastic covering to enable you to hide from sunlight, which looks and smells like caravan awnings from the late 1980s. A printer shelf is built in too, should you need the Gameulator for secretarial use.

With adjustable shelves, mouse trays, monitor stands and a sumptuous seat, the whole set-up will set you back £300 from its creators' website, and £430 if you opt for the dual upgrade (two seats for hot multiplayer action). Designed with both the console and PC fraternities in mind, we're honestly not all that sure what to make of it. Although we do know that if we ever brought one home then our wives, girlfriends and significant others would never, ever forgive us.

If you're interested, then hop over to www.gameulator.com – otherwise, don't.

# Radio, what's new?

**THIS NEWS STORY** is being written to the tune of *Warcraft 2: Beyond The Dark Portal – Covert Action*, quite literally. In a minute, its close will be composed to the atmospheric tones of *Final Fantasy XI: Chains of Promathia – Fourth Ode – Clouded Dawn*. And it's all thanks to www.gamingfm.com.

A streaming service with four channels that cover modern console music, classic console, PC themes and an amalgam 'Greatest Hits' channel, gamingfm has just had a facelift and is well deserving of your daily nerd-time. They do song requests, streaming is constant and everything, from *Star Trek: Voyager – Elite Force* to *Starcraft*, and from *Icewind Dale* to *Counter-Strike: Condition Zero*, is catered for. Our only other wish is that they'd start up a 'fun' channel that concentrated on bouncy themes such as that of *Cannon Fodder* or the original 'And his name was Boggy B' mix of the *Worms* theme, but beggars can't be choosers. Thank you for the music – for streaming it to me.


At last... Heart 106.2 meets its match.


Music to watch goblins by.


This is music.


*FFVII*: coming in your ears.


'Songs From Starcraft: The Album'.


GOB SHITE

# ROUND-UP

## HERDING CURIOUS NUGGETS OF GAMING INFO INTO AN EASILY DIGESTIBLE PEN


Yippee-ki-yay

### MAKE SOME DOOM

News leaking from post-production on the *Doom* movie has thrown out a few interesting tidbits, that could calm the troubled waters caused by the rumours that the film is neither set on Mars nor dealing with the denizens of Hell. Apparently The Rock, in his role as Sarge, gets to handle the fabled BFG, while there are a few characters with oddly reminiscent names. Mainly Dr Carmack and Dr Willits.

### LIKE A BAD PENNY

Indiana Jones, pretty much mistreated by the gaming world since *The Fate Of Atlantis*, will be returning to our screens each and every year – according to the blurb-men at LucasArts. Wanting to create a James *Bond*-style cash-cow (although hopefully with an ounce more quality), something has made them realise that they're sitting on one of the greatest licenses on earth. Took a while…

### TANKS FOR THE MEMORY

We really quite enjoyed phase one, so *Codename: Panzers Phase Two* could be interesting when it comes round in June. With missions in Africa, Italy and Yugoslavia and a new co-op mode it's otherwise more of the same – which isn't necessarily a bad thing. The German RTS: backbone of PC gaming.

### PERISH-TROIKA

The creator of *Vampire: The Masquerade – Bloodlines* and *Arcanum: Of Steamworks & Magick Obscura* have gone to the great character creation list in the sky. Specialists in deep (if buggy) RPGs with invariably silly titles, its undeniable talents will be missed.

> **I'm out to destroy the competition and my videogame is no different. I plan to shake up the games world like I did the rap world.**

*Gun-hungry gangsta and self-styled bad example to our children 50 Cent, on his new bling gaming venture. For the first time we'll have a game hero who can actually get shot multiple times without dying – it'll be just like a day in the life of the man himself.*

> **The judge also dismissed more than half of Marvel's claims against NCsoft and Cryptic Studios, including Marvel's claims that the defendants directly infringed Marvel's registered trademarks and are liable for purported infringement of trademarks by City of Heroes' users.**

*An announcement from the frontline of the Marvel vs City Of Heroes lawsuit suggests that, despite many signs to the contrary, we may be living in a sane world after all. It's not over yet, but the first batte appears to have been won by the forces of goodness. Hoorah!*

FREEWARE | HOME-BREWS | WEBGAMES | ABANDONWARE | EMULATION

# FREEPLAY

## Some of the best things in life are free! *Anthony Holden*'s got the proof…

**FREEPLAY IS** dedicated to bringing you the best free games content the Net has to offer, be it freeware, home-brews, remakes, webgames or emulation – you'll never have to buy another game again. Tickling our fancy this month are happy-go-lucky adventure-type *Cave Story* and our Webgame of the Month *X-Kings*…

Save the fluffy bunnies! It's your duty…

All bosses, all of the time.

Looks like fancy popcorn doesn't it?

# CAVE STORY

■ **Developer:** Studio Pixel ■ **Website:** agtp.romhack.net/doukutsu.html

**FREE GAME OF THE MONTH!**

If there's any sense of justice left in the world, there will be some very red faces in the indie development scene right now. *Cave Story*, aka *Doukutsu Monogatari*, is a 2D platform-adventure that's as free as the air we breathe, yet puts many 20-dollar indie titles to absolute shame. Indeed, with its high-sheen production values and surprising depth of gameplay, *Cave Story* could easily pass as a lost classic of the 8-bit era, hewing a line somewhere between *Metroid* and *Mega Man*.

There's a good six or seven hours of retro gaming to be had here, as your blank-faced little robot strives to save a race of fluffy bunny-creatures from the hands of an evil doctor, replete with tricky boss battles, countless secret areas and a branching storyline with three possible endings. Weapons include a bubble machine, rocket launcher and a Mario-style bouncing fireball, each of which is continually powered up by collecting points from slain enemies.

*Doukutsu* first appeared in Japan last December, but has only recently become available in English thanks to the tireless efforts of the Aeon Genesis Translation Project – a team of selfless hax0rs who use their l33t skills for the greater good of the (English-speaking) world. The language patch is available on the AGTP website, as well as a link to the original game – and while you're there, check out the impressive archive of previous AG translations as well. Don't miss *Cave Story* though – it's a marvel of generosity in a cold-hearted world.

It's hip to be square.

# WARNING FOREVER

■ **Developer:** Hizoka Ohkubo
■ **Website:** www.18.big.or.jp/~hikoza/Prod/index.html#wf

Sharing the abstract/wireframe aesthetics of titles such as *Rez* and last month's *Torus Trooper*, *Warning Forever* is a 2D shooter with a very pronounced sense of style. For a Japanese shmup the gameplay is fairly basic, pitting you against a cavalcade of unpredictable boss ships assembled from modular components. However, the real pleasure is to be found in the visual design. Saying that, there's an extremely tough game here as well, and if you're a high-score junkie you're sure to warm to the challenge once you get your head around the unusual aiming mechanic.

The game has been around for some months now, but a recent update was declared the final version, ironing out some bugs and bringing it up to version 1.06. If you haven't come across it before, now's the time.

**GOLDEN OLDIE:**
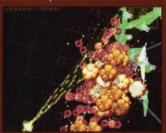# HIDDEN & DANGEROUS DELUXE

**Download from:**
www.gathering.com/hd2/hddeluxe.html

Free gifts don't come much better than this. Illusion's classic shooter was declared free in the run-up to *H&D2*, and remains a brilliant game to this day. The *Deluxe* version boasts improved graphics, manifold bug fixes and the *Devil's Bridge* expansion pack. There's no excuse not to have this in your collection.

## LAXIUS POWER 3: THE FINAL TERROR

■ **Developer:** Damianzeeking
■ **Website:** www.laxiuspower.com

Breaking the theme of free titles from Japan for a second, we have a free game that wishes it was: RPG sequel *Laxius Power 3*. Created in the style of old 2D RPGs like *Secret Of Mana* and *Chrono Trigger*, *LP3* is a resolutely old-school offering that concludes the story of Random Pendragon

and his pals as they strive to rid the world of evil.

And despite some exceedingly rough edges, it's an impressive piece of work. The game apparently offers up to a staggering 200 hours worth of gameplay, with over 1,000 maps, 500 monsters and 150 quests. For something created essentially by one person (using RPG Maker 2000), it's frankly astonishing, made all the more surprising by the fact that it actually looks pretty decent. Indeed, the only real letdown is the diabolical script and storyline. But if you can look past that, there's a tremendously detailed game waiting beneath.

Over 150 hours of gameplay.

Can you see the light?

Ooh, we've gone all *Zelda*...

# BEATS OF RAGE

Take that! And that!

And that! And that! Etc.

■ **Developer:** Senile Team
■ **Website:** senileteam.segaforums.com

One of the beautiful things about not charging for a game is that it allows you to get away with some stuff that would have you in jail or court in other circumstances. In this case, the retro buffs at Senile Team have created a pretend sequel to one of their favourite game franchises, Sega's *Streets Of Rage*, but combined it with characters and graphics from another classic arcade series, SNK's *King Of Fighters*. The result, while infringing more copyrights than a Hong Kong music store, is a highly entertaining beat 'em up that's every bit as playable as its namesake.

It's the polish of the thing that really stands out. *Beats Of Rage* offers three playable characters, a wide array of enemies and bosses, a bunch of combos and special attacks and even a few lame gags. Indeed, such is the quality of *Beats*

There are dozens of high-quality mods for the game.

*Of Rage* that since its release last year, it's spawned something of a phenomenon in retro gaming circles.

*BOR* has also proven particularly susceptible to modding, and there's now a whole network of bedroom developers cranking out new variations on the formula every month. One of the most popular *Beats Of Rage* fansites is BOR Revolution

(borrevolution.vg-network.com), where you'll find mods themed around *Castlevania*, *Resident Evil*, *Street Fighter*, even *Kill Bill* – all of them overhauling the graphics and often altering the style of gameplay significantly. It's a strange yet vibrant scene, and one that – if you like your scrolling beat 'em ups – could keep you busy until the end of time.

# WEBGAME OF THE MONTH

Login and Play
Name:
Password:
submit
Home
News
FAQ
New Player
Problems
Scores
Guilds
Tutorial
Forum
Voting

How can it be so addictive?

## X-KINGS

■ **Website:** www.x-kings.com

Stealing a worrying amount of Freeplay's time this month has been this insidious little webgame. It calls itself a 'browser-based MMORPG', but *X-Kings*' appeal is hard to put a finger on. It offers no characters, no environments, no graphics and almost no interaction of any kind. Instead, there's a very basic turn-based combat system and a highly addictive research tree, enabling rapid progression

within an active and cut-throat community.

When you sign up, you're granted a small allowance of gold and some workers. Workers can be trained into soldiers, who can then attack other players with the aim of stealing gold (attacking is simply a matter of clicking on a player name). As you amass gold you spend it on new technologies, be it mounted knights, trading or a church to increase the birth rate.

From such simple beginnings, a surprising number of tactics emerge. Some players are totally aggressive, spending all their gold on siege weapons and military technology; others favour defensive units and wall structures. Diplomacy also plays a part. Every player can grant at least three 'support points' per day (eventually translating into bonus units), and taking on a commander or a guild bestows other benefits.

It's all very simple stuff, yet incredibly addictive once you get past the first few techs. If you're looking for something to fill those morning tea breaks, you need look no further.

**Mirek Dymek** Project Leader of Earth 2160 and technical director at Reality Pump Studios

## DEVELOPERS' QUESTION TIME

**What PC games are you playing at the moment?**
*Earth 2160* (Alpha 3), *World Of WarCraft*, *Gothic II*, *LOTR: The Battle For Middle-earth* and *Jagged Alliance 2: Wildfire* (Beta).

**What was the last videogame you finished playing?**
That would be *Half-Life 2*.

**What's your favourite game of all time?**
*Earth 2150: The Moon Project*.

**What are you most proud of in your career?**
Being in the position to develop games that are played all over the world and which can attract a large community.

**Who do you most admire in the industry and why?**
Konrad Zuse. From 1936-1938, he developed and built the first binary digital computer in the world (ZI). He's the father of computer science – without him, there would be no computer games at all.

**What has the PC contributed most to videogaming?**
3D graphic cards with per-pixel shaders made PCs take a real step forward in terms of gaming. So now PCs have a real advantage over consoles.

**What's your company's philosophy?**
To always be at least one step ahead of all other development studios.

**Best thing about your job?**
Having new challenges every day. A project that swallows up several years of development always brings up new problems, solutions and ideas on a daily basis.

**What's the worst thing about your job?**
The days and nights are much too short on this planet. Time rockets by too quickly.

**What are you working on at the moment?**
Our upcoming RTS blockbuster *Earth 2160*. It'll be a real milestone in the genre.

**What's the Next Big Thing in PC gaming?**
Wide usage of new pixel shaders technology will open a new dimension of visual techniques for computer games. Today, only a few studios use this technology, but in the near future you can expect a real boom.

# RISE OF THE WAR MACHINES

**BOMBAST AND CARNAGE AS *RISE & FALL: CIVILIZATIONS AT WAR* BRINGS THE BLOOD BACK INTO BATTLE...**


When safaris go wrong...


Another Cunard Cruise balls-up.

**ROME: TOTAL WAR** may be nigh-on unbeatable, but when little soldier men get clonked by rampaging elephants in *Rise & Fall: Civilizations At War*, they get thrown way further: thus lies the thinking behind the Stainless Steel RTS 'em up.

We're talking high-octane carnage here – men hurled 20ft into the air, hulking siege towers collapsing in flames, steel-tipped warships smashing their way through the enemy's bows and out into the rough seas on the other side. This is *Rome: Total War* as produced by Bruckheimer, only instead of stars and stripes waving we've got the bloody banners of Greece, Rome, Persia and Egypt.

It's perhaps the naval battles, so conspicuously absent from Creative Assembly's masterpiece, that'll prick up ears. So far, we've seen giant chains hauling enemy ships towards boarding parties, harbour-based harpoons that drag triremes into the air and dislodge their crews and some truly sumptuous lapping water effects.

Elsewhere, meanwhile, the collapsing of buildings and the destruction of battlements is handled with an aplomb that verges on the cinematic, although a worthy caveat to mention is that we haven't seen any of the strategising behind the brutality so far.

The fact that you can actually control your general via a third-person hack-and-slash mode (touted by Midway as a 'fully controlled super-weapon') suggests a far more arcadey approach to the genre – but then again, it's a novel idea and should be welcomed as such.

Running around as Achilles surrounded by a perpetual cloud of blood or having Cleopatra firing arrows into advancing troops may not be historically accurate, but it's pretty good fun. Other historical starlets appearing include Julius Caesar, Germanicus Caesar, Ramses the Great, Alexander the Great – and maybe even a few other Great people. In a nutshell, *Rise & Fall: Civilizations At War* – is large, loud and even has camels in it. Loads of them. More soon.

- **Publisher:** Midway
- **Developer:** Stainless Steel
- **ETA:** Q4
- **Website:** www.midway.com
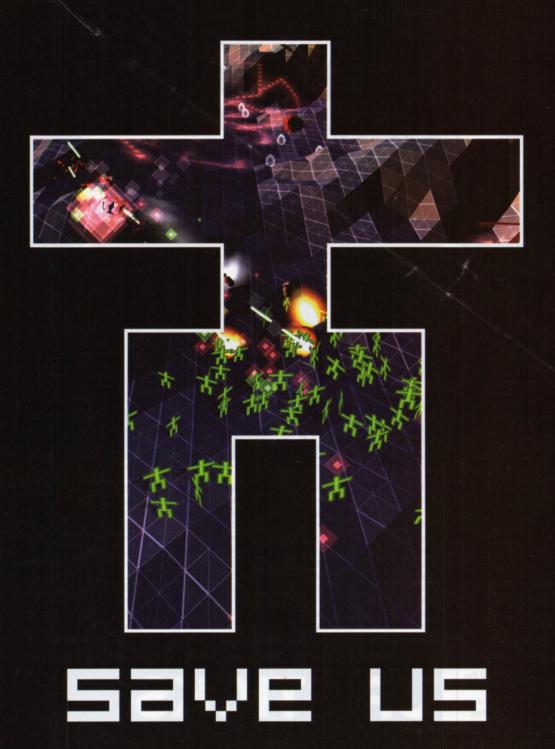

Nice dresses, fellas.


A trireme-hungry crane.


"It's that bloody Ben Hur again..."

# EVEN MORE BLOODY ZOMBIES

**PLAGUE OF UNDEAD SOULS SET TO GET EVEN MORE CROWDED WITH THE IMAGINATIVELY TITLED *ZOMBIES*. LOCK UP YOUR BRAINS!**



Brains, brains. Perhaps crumbed, with a little garlic and parsley sauce.



It's just so… Urban.

**"IT'S THE SAME** old theme since 1916; in your head, on your screen, they're still fighting. With their lurch and their brains, and their brains and loose limbs, in your head, on your screen, they'll be dying." Ahem.

Especially in new French offering *Zombies*, which is a game all about zombies – all of a sudden the most abundant species of undead mischief-makers to clog up the PC release schedules in years. This one's played from first-person perspective, and sticks you in firmly into *Resi* Raccoon City-style territory (or "le Cité de Raton Laveur" in French) with guns and squidgy dead-eyed corpses for company.

With 12 sidekicks available, each with the propensity to turn on you if bitten in the time-honoured way, and a collection of electric drills and molotov cocktails with which to dispense the undead, we're expecting a lo-fi blast that may not be the most promising in the forthcoming zombie wars (that accolade goes to *Stubbs The Zombie*) but at least, as the title suggests, it has copious zombies in it. As, indeed, The Cranberries once sang.



Look out *Half-Life 3*. Or not.

- ■ **Publisher:** TBA
- ■ **Developer:** Krysalide
- ■ **ETA:** TBA
- ■ **Website:** www.krysalide.fr/project/zombies

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# REHEATED RANDOMNESS

*FAHRENHEIT*, THE BIZARRE SERIAL KILLER INTERACT 'EM UP, BACK ON THE RELEASE MAP

**NOT AN** interactive movie, not a point 'n' click, not an RPG… in fact we're still not sure what it is. From the makers of the beautifully bizarre *Nomad Soul*, it's a psycho-thriller in which you play both a serial killer and the cop who's hot on his/your tail. A rash of unexplained murders is plaguing New York, and wherever you go you either feel compelled to kill, or (as policewoman Carla Valenti) compelled to get to the bottom of the mystery.

After falling off the VU release list last year, the game has now been grabbed from the abyss by Atari – and we're mighty pleased about it too. The lack of interface and proposed intuitiveness of control could rejuvenate the adventure in the way that *Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon* almost did. And we've already admired some *24*-style split-screen narratives guaranteed to keep the story motoring along. Speaking of which, the *24* game in development over at Sony could well pick up a few tricks from what is looking like an increasingly enticing, and bravely original title.

- ■ **Publisher:** Atari
- ■ **Developer:** Quantic Dream
- ■ **ETA:** September
- ■ **Website:** www.fahrenheitgame.com

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# UP STICKS

**FLYING PUCK GAGS RE-HASHED FOR *NHL EASTSIDE HOCKEY MANAGER 2005***



Canadians need something to ruin their social lives too, you know.

**SPORTS INTERACTIVE'S** plans for stat-heavy sports domination continues apace with the forthcoming edition of *Football Manager's* ice-bound cousin. Along with the usual comprehensive treatment (32,000 players and staff to play with, fact fans) come numerous gameplay tweaks and nudges – snapshot mid-game views of the action, training camps, better scouting, more feedback and more statistics. More statistics than you could shake a hockey stick at. Sports Interactive is more or less guaranteed to provide an excellent game for those who lean towards sports violence on ice rather than grass – even if it'll leave your average ignorant Brit gamer scratching his head and asking where the meat pies, Bovril and linesmen are.

- ■ **Publisher:** Sega
- ■ **Developer:** Sports Interactive
- ■ **ETA:** TBA
- ■ **Website:** www.sigames.com

# 150TH ISSUE QUIZ
## JUDGED, JURIED AND JUBILATED

**WELL, IT'S DONE** – and my God didn't some loyal *PC ZONE* readers throw themselves headfirst into this one? The 150th issue quiz provoked all manner of chin-scratching and quibbling (it turns out, for example, that there are far more characters called Bruno in games than we imagined), but in the end there could only be one winner. One winner and eight highly commendable runners-up who each managed to break the hefty 90 barrier. We got entries scented with enticing perfumes, we got entries scribbled on the back of homework, we got entries that thought the rockstar in *The Nomad Soul* was called David Barie… But if you didn't put down the following then you don't get respect.

1. Dappers
2. Super Shotgun
(also accepted: Double-Barrelled Shotgun)
3. SC-20K MAWS
4. The Nuke
5. Galaxy Dropship
6. Duke Nukem, Duke Nukem 3D
7. Barret, Final Fantasy VII
8. Bob Page, Deus Ex
9. Dr. Betruger, Doom 3
10. Announcer, Counter-Strike
(also accepted: Jess Cliffe)
11. Mafia
12. Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault
13. Ultima VII: The Black Gate
14. Flight Sim 2004
15. Sim City 4
16. Max Payne
17. The Sims
18. TrackMania
19. City Of Heroes
20. Beyond Good & Evil
21. Monkey Island series.
22. Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time.
23. Command & Conquer series
(also accepted: Evil Genius)
24. Broken Sword series.
25. Sam & Max Hit The Road
(also accepted: No One Lives Forever, Grim Fandango, Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon, Dark Sun)

26. Halo
27. Diablo
28. Beyond Good And Evil
29. Deus Ex
30. Fallout 2
31. Wizkid.
32. Microprose.
33. Bomb The Bass
(Also accepted: David Whittaker)
34. 1990
35. The Elder Scrolls: Arena
36. Wolfenstein 3D
37. David Wolf
38. Sex, Drugs & Rock 'n' Roll
39. Karate, Kendo, Nunchuku and Bo
40. Police Quest, Space Quest, King's Quest and Hero's Quest (Also Accepted: Quest For Glory)
41. Pillar Of Autumn
42. Ray Liotta
43. 140.96
44. David Bowie
45. Colonel Lord Ralgha Nal Hallas (also accepted: Hobbes)
46. New Mexico
47. Because you would have run over a column of Hare Krishnas in GTA
48. Silt-Striders
49. 'Freestyle'
50. The Daedalus Encounter
51. Jack Bauer is the odd one out, as all the others have had games based on their shows released on PC
52. Moscow, as the others are all locations in Soldier Of Fortune II: Double Helix
53. Far Cry is published by Ubisoft, the others by VU Games (also accepted: any other sensible answer)
54. Heather Graham is the odd one out because while the others provide voices for XIII, she was recorded for EverQuest II
55. Playback is a radio station from GTA: San Andreas, the others are from GTA: Vice City
56. Ashby Computer Graphics
57. Three from: Elixir, Lionhead, Mucky Foot, Lost Toys, Dogfish Entertainment, Big Blue Box Studios
58. Looking Glass

59. Seattle (also accepted: Kirkland)
60. Delphine
61. Micronesia
62. Indonesia
(also accepted novaworld.com)
63. Taris
64. Paris
65. Stark & Arcadia
66. Xen (also accepted: Another Dimension)
67. Tartarus
68. Paragon City
69. The Edge
70. Chicago
71. Splinter Cell series
72. Unreal Tournament 2003
(Also accepted: Unreal Tournament 2004)
73. MS Flight Sim 2004
74. Need For Speed: Underground
75. Postal 2
76. BDAC
77. DABC
78. ACDB
79. CDBA
80. BCAD
81. Ground Control II: Operation Exodus (Issue 143, Martin Korda)
82. XIII (Issue 135, Will Porter)
83. Aliens Vs Predator 2 (Issue 110, Martin Korda)
84. Command & Conquer (Issue 28, Duncan MacDonald)
85. Kingpin: Life Of Crime (Issue 77, Steve Hill)
86. Daikatana (Issue 91, Dave Woods)
87. Carmageddon II: Carpocalypse Now (Issue 69, Charlie Brooker)
88. Deus Ex (Issue 93, Paul Mallinson)
89. X-Plane V6 (Issue 132, Paul Presley)
90. Singles: Flirt Up Your Life (Issue 142, Steve Hill)
91. PlanetSide
92. The Suffering
93. Medal Of Honor series
94. Battlefield Vietnam
95. Return To Castle Wolfenstein
96. Unreal Tournament 2004
(also accepted: Battlefield series, Mech Assault 2)
97. Halo
98. Joint Ops
99. Postal 2: Share the Pain
100. Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow

Winner of the £3000 worth of games and other PC goodness was one James Adams who, staggeringly, got 99 of the 100 questions entirely correct. The man is a gaming encyclopedia. In fact, the only question that tripped him up was one that nobody knew – naming the review containing the following quote: "What starts out like a stroll in the park… soon turns into a unicycle ride through downtown LA – and eventually becomes a camping holiday in Cambodia." The answer was Duncan McDonald's review of *Command & Conquer* way back in Issue 28, we know it was harsh – but hey, we warned you it was going to be difficult.

All nine of our 90 per cent-ers will receive signed certificates of merit, while Dave Lloyd (97) and Christoper Loban (95) can expect a few goodies as well – seeing as they came so nail-bitingly close.

## THE WINNERS GALLERY

| | |
|---|---|
| James Adams | 99% |
| Dave Lloyd | 97% |
| Christopher Loban | 95% |
| Chris Leishman | 93% |
| Martin Pidhajeckyj | 92% |
| Emma Alison McQuillen | 91% |
| Richard Pickles | 91% |
| Sarah Cooper | 91% |
| Michael Walker | 91% |
| Michael Lehan | 90% |

# OTHER RECENT WINNERS
## CATALOGUE OF OTHERS WHO HAVE RECEIVED GOODNESS FROM *ZONE*

**WINNER** of the *Conflict: Vietnam* mega-monitor, watch and game was Brian Beal of London Village, with Jamie Dolman and Tim Moran also getting some jungle goodness. Recent chart compo winners include Innes Chatworthy, Alan Powell and James Watts. The winner of the ninja-bastard *Sabre Squadron* PC was Ben Procter from Barnoldswick, while many others have won copies of *Sabre Sqaudron*, *Riddick*, *Psi-Ops* and *Pirates!* – you all know who you are.

Them's the scores. They've been checked three times by independent adjudicators, rogue answers have been argued about and we've tried to get everything as watertight as humanly possible. The winner was as cut and dried as a week-old slice of Mighty White, so no whining… or else…

# CHARTS

In association with **VIRGIN MEGASTORES**

Charts are out there. They can't be bargained with. They can't be reasoned with. They don't feel pity, or remorse, or fear. And they absolutely will not stop, ever, until you are dead...

## **ChartTrack** — T**O**P 10 — **elspa**

| | | TITLE | PUBLISHER | SCORE |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | NEW | **WORLD OF WARCRAFT** | VU GAMES | 95% |
| 2 | ▼ | FOOTBALL MANAGER 2005 | SEGA | 90% |
| 3 | NEW | KOTOR 2: THE SITH LORDS | ACTIVISION | 88% |
| 4 | ▼ | THE SIMS 2 | EA | 82% |
| 5 | ▼ | HALF-LIFE 2 | VU GAMES | 97% |
| 6 | ▼ | ROME: TOTAL WAR | ACTIVISION | 93% |
| 7 | NEW | THE SETTLERS: HERITAGE OF KINGS | UBISOFT | 65% |
| 8 | ▼ | LOTR: THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH | EA | 91% |
| 9 | NEW | PRO RUGBY MANAGER 2 | DIGITAL JESTERS | 62% |
| 10 | RE-ENTRY | MS FLIGHT SIM 2004 | MICROSOFT | 89% |

**1** — It's taken over the lives of *PCZ* staff, freelance and art bods, it's the fastest-selling PC game of all time and it stands loud and proud at the top of the charts. With astronomic profits and gameplay to last till the end of time, Blizzard must be feeling fairly pleased...

**3** — The upper echelons of British government must have noticed a down-turn in national productivity of late, as so many workers have found themselves lumbered with 40+ hours of superb *Star Wars* adventuring. Good for them, bad for the economy.

**7** — They came, they saw, they settled and their community developed in a jolly fashion along the lines of many a German RTS before it. Breezy and colourful it may be, but a very traditional set-up lurks beneath. Fun for some, somewhat numbing for others...

**10** — Bizarre re-entry this one. Either it's had a price slash, or perhaps it's just the time of year when young mens' thoughts turn to aeronautical mischief. Or, if not mischief, at least piloting a light aircraft from London Gatwick to Charles de Gaulle.

### YOUR SHOUT

Have your say at www.pczone.co.uk

Too many number twos and colons for my liking, you know what I mean?
**Deadmartyr**

Remember that Japanese TV series *Monkey*? Well, it had this ladyboy priest character in it called Chipolata or something. I've lost my point now.
**Madameye**

Not bad, apart from *The Sims* being above *Half-Life 2*. Or any game at all for that matter...
**Cal40k**

## *Virgin* megastores TOP 10

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | REPUBLIC COMMANDO | ACTIVISION |
| 2. | KOTOR 2: THE SITH LORDS | ACTIVISION |
| 3. | DARWINIA | INTROVERSION |
| 4. | THE SETTLERS: HERITAGE OF KINGS | UBISOFT |
| 5. | PRO RUGBY MANAGER 2 | DIGITAL JESTERS |
| 6. | CITY OF HEROES DELUXE | NCSOFT |
| 7. | CHILDREN OF THE NILE | SEGA |
| 8. | PLAYBOY: THE MANSION | UBISOFT |
| 9. | THE SIMS 2 | EA |
| 10. | ROME: TOTAL WAR | ACTIVISION |

## COMPETITION

*Virgin* megastores

### 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:** In honour of *Darwinia*, which of these did Charles Darwin write?

**A** The Origin Of Species
**B** The Origin Of Monkeys
**C** The Origin Of Retro-Style 3D Gaming

**Send your answers on a postcard to:** *PC ZONE* Chart Compo Issue 154, Future Publishing, 99 Baker Street, London, W1U 6FP. Closing date: April 27, 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

## APRIL

| | |
|---|---|
| CLOSE COMBAT: FIRST TO FIGHT | GLOBAL STAR |
| COLD FEAR | UBISOFT |
| COSSACKS II: NAPOLEONIC WAR | CDV |
| DOOM 3: RESURRECTION OF EVIL | ACTIVISION |
| DRAGONSHARD | ATARI |
| EMPIRE EARTH II | VU GAMES |
| FREEDOM FORCE VS. THE 3RD REICH | DIGITAL JESTERS |
| LEGO STAR WARS | EIDOS |
| PARIAH | HIP INTERACTIVE |
| STRONGHOLD 2 | GLOBAL STAR |
| TRACKMANIA: SUNRISE | DIGITAL JESTERS |
| SÖLDNER: MARINE CORPS | JOWOOD |
| SPLINTER CELL: CHAOS THEORY | UBISOFT |
| SWAT 4 | VU GAMES |
| X2: THE RETURN | DEEP SILVER |

## MAY

| | |
|---|---|
| AREA 51 | MIDWAY |
| BOILING POINT | ATARI |
| SINGLES 2: TRIPLE TROUBLE | DEEP SILVER |
| THE MATRIX ONLINE | SEGA/WB |
| TOTAL OVERDOSE | SCI |

## JUNE

| | |
|---|---|
| BATTLEFIELD 2 | EA |
| BET ON SOLDIER | DIGITAL JESTERS |
| CALL OF CTHULHU: DARK CORNERS OF THE EARTH | TAKE 2 |
| EARTH 2160 | DEEP SILVER |
| GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS | ROCKSTAR |
| MOTOGP: ULTIMATE RACING TECHNOLOGY 3 | THQ |
| ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON 3: SOAKED! | ATARI |

## Q3 2005

| | |
|---|---|
| BATTLESTATIONS: MIDWAY | SCI |
| CONFLICT: GLOBAL TERROR | SCI |
| DREAMFALL: THE LONGEST JOURNEY | FUNCOM |
| F.E.A.R. | VU GAMES |
| HEART OF EMPIRE | DEEP SILVER |
| PSYCHONAUTS | TBA |
| STARGATE: SG1 – THE ALLIANCE | JOWOOD |
| STARSHIP TROOPERS | EMPIRE |
| STAR WARS: EMPIRE AT WAR | ACTIVISION |
| TIMESHIFT | ATARI |
| THE SUFFERING: TIES THAT BIND | MIDWAY |

## Q4 2005

| | |
|---|---|
| AGE OF EMPIRES III | MICROSOFT |
| CALL OF DUTY 2 | ACTIVISION |
| RISE & FALL: CIVILIZATIONS AT WAR | MIDWAY |
| THE GODFATHER | EA |

## 2005

| | |
|---|---|
| ADVENT RISING | TBA |
| BIOSHOCK | TBA |
| BLACK & WHITE 2 | EA |
| CIVILIZATION IV | TAKE 2 |
| DUNGEON SIEGE II | MICROSOFT |
| HITMAN: BLOOD MONEY | EIDOS |
| KING KONG | UBISOFT |
| MIDDLE-EARTH ONLINE | VU GAMES |
| QUAKE IV | ACTIVISION |
| STALKER: SHADOW OF CHERNOBYL | THQ |
| STUBBS THE ZOMBIE | ASPYR |
| THE MOVIES | ACTIVISION |

# MISSING IN ACTION

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

## X2: THE RETURN

Nothing certain on this one, but it's all gone a bit quiet of late. Last time we saw it, work was progressing nicely and it was all set to be an incredible expansion, but we don't quite see it making its April release date. It's conjecture, yes, but we have our suspicions.

- **Publisher:** Deep Silver
- **Developer:** Egosoft
- **ETA:** April or beyond
- **Website:** www.egosoft.com

## F.E.A.R.

Does every highly anticipated game have to get delayed these days? After so many epic delays on massive PC titles (we're looking at you Freeman), F.E.A.R. has hit the perennial stumbling block, and now won't be slo-mo high-kicking onto our screens until the autumn. Why God? Why?

- **Publisher:** VU Games
- **Developer:** Monolith
- **ETA:** Q3
- **Website:** www.whatisfear.com

## JUICED

We gave it a mighty 85 per cent, but the fall of Acclaim meant a change of publisher and six months of extra development time for Juiced. Sharper visuals, better menus, tweaked handling and the removal of UK rapper Shystie have been promised.
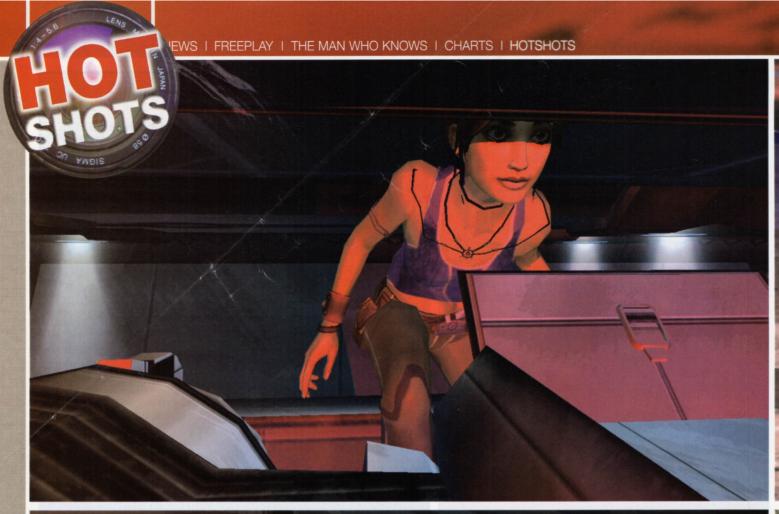
- **Publisher:** THQ
- **Developer:** Juice Games
- **ETA:** May
- **Website:** www.juicegames.com

# TOP 10 films that would make amazing games

1. **BATTLE ROYALE** (STALKER-style island-based FPS fighting off insane children).

2. **THE RUNNING MAN** (Hunted on a futuristic TV game show. With guns).

3. **KILL BILL** (Slo-mo, stylised swordplay, Bruce Lee tracksuits and Uma Thurman).

4. **GROSSE POINT BLANK** (FPS hitman for hire and impeccably planned assassinations).

5. **PREDATOR** (A standalone game, being hunted by the dreadlocked ones).

6. **WILLOW** (Hack-and-slash with Warwick Davies and some pigs).

7. **YOUNG GUNS** (High octane shootery in the Wild West. With Charlie Sheen).

8. **FIGHT CLUB** (A proper anti-corporate fight club game, not a shit beat 'em up).

9. **DRIVING MISS DAISY** (GTA-style roaming action in the Deep South).

10. **STAR WARS** (We're amazed that no-one's thought of it before).

**SOURCE:** Bureau of Wishful thinking

# HOT SHOTS

# DREAMFALL: THE LONGEST JOURNEY

**Even the longest of journeys must begin with a single step. This is the second...**
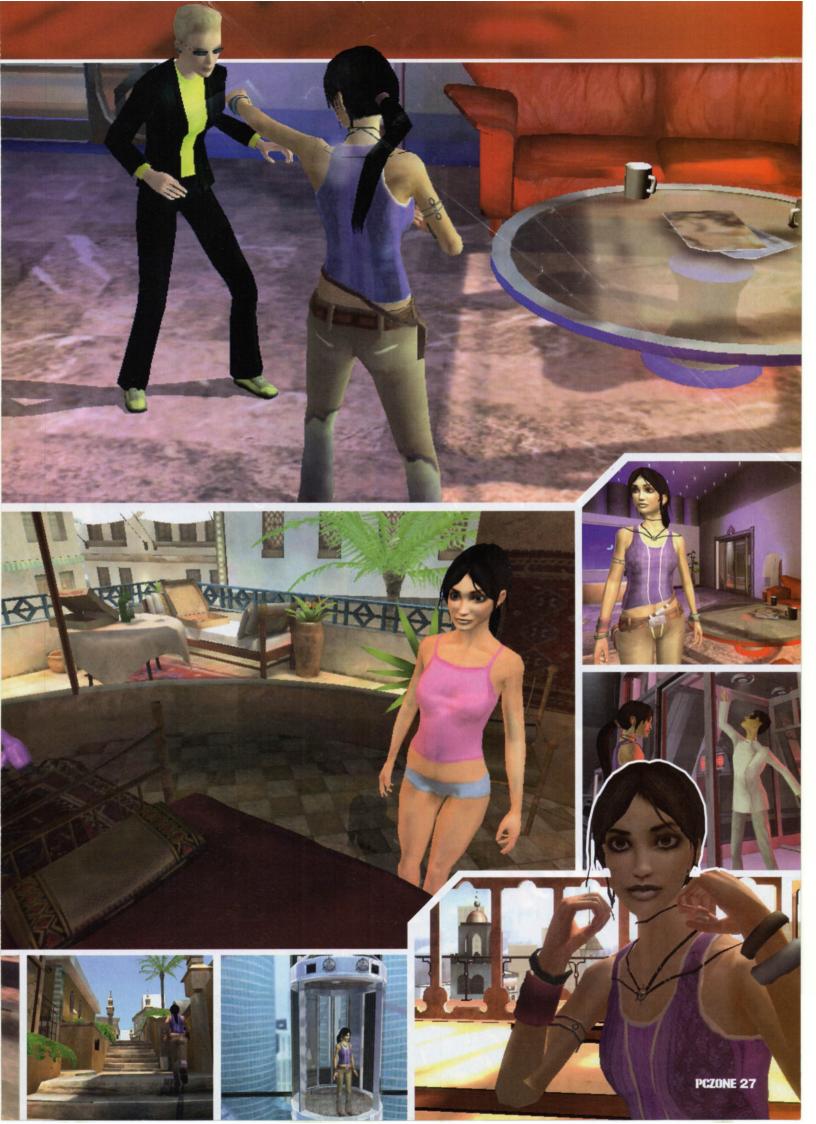
**THE MOST** emotional and poignant game of recent years is getting a sequel that's showing every sign of following its progenitor's lead – along with the promise of far less teeth-on-edge puzzles and the addition of fighting this time around. Of the three characters slinky Zoe, plastered on these pages and perpetually featured on your correspondent's desktop background, is least effectual in combat – so she'll be able to think and talk her way around conflict. Unless it becomes completely unavoidable, that is.

The game starts off in the world of Stark, itself an alternate vision of our own Earth, 200 years in the future. It then moves on to play itself out in this and two other worlds, Arcadia and the mysterious 'The Winter'. You begin with the lovely Zoe waking up in her pants and sashaying her way through her palatial home in New Casablanca (in Stark, Africa is a major global power y'see, and Europe a crumbling wreck of what we know today).

Swiftly launching herself into an adventure that deals with an ex-boyfriend's package (fnar fnar) and a biotechnology company where things are going noticeably awry, this could be the game that saves the 3D adventure as we know/knew it. Nobody's managed it yet, but there's always a first time. Isn't there?
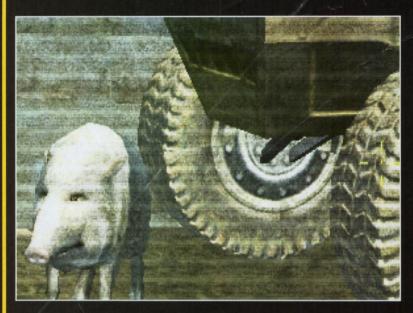
- **Publisher:** Funcom
- **Developer:** Funcom
- **ETA:** Q3
- **Website:** www.dreamfall.com

How will you spend your time at college?

Party with new friends, join a rock band, cram for exams or flunk out early. Will you satisfy your Sims' college urges or take pleasure in denying them? The choice is yours.

How will you play with life?

EA GAMES

Challenge Everything™

*12*
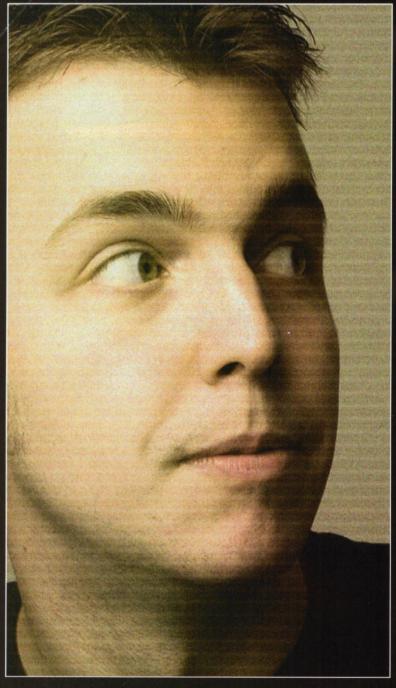
For years, developers have been hiding references, easter eggs and in-jokes deep inside their games. My mission is to bust every urban myth, uncover every truth, smash open every conspiracy in my entire games collection and rate them out of five. I have one day before my production editor claims my scalp and the clock is ticking.

The following takes place between a little bit after 10am (because the tubes were running late) and 10pm.
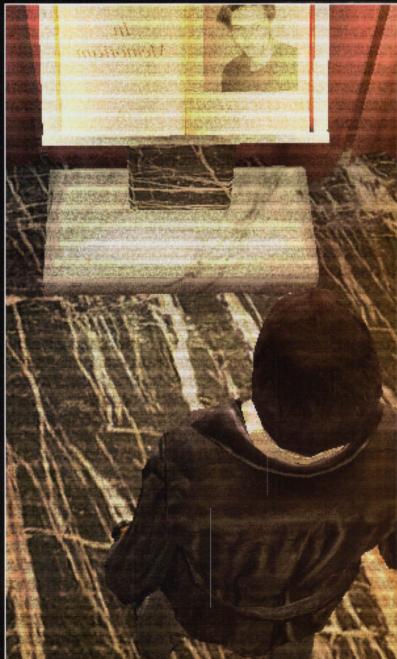
My name is *Will Porter* and this is the longest working day of my life.

*Beep* *Beep* *Beep* *Beep*

## 10:11 HALF-LIFE 2

It begins with Freeman. Word of a hidden vortigaunt at the end of the hover-boat section has reached my ears, and swanning about in an H.E.V. suit is the perfect way to antagonise everyone in the office as they deal with tetchy freelancers and edit copy. After an hour or so of feeling like a sci-fi version of the dad of the kid who owned Gentle Ben in my rusty boat, I get to the point at which Gordon shoots down the Combine chopper. Here, it is rumoured, is a vortigaunt with a bad cough hiding in a sewer pipe. Quarter of an hour of searching and sticking my head into puddles reveals nothing, not even a vortigaunt sausage. It's then that I have the bright idea of raising the gate and exploring beyond the helicopter fight zone – and I discover a sewer grating resting slightly ajar opposite the warehouses of the island. Jumping on my boat I crawl through the gap, wade through toxic waste, take a left and come across an old alien chap called Terminus who's busy roasting a head-crab. Approaching him and pressing 'use' again and again, I discover he's very much a Yoda for the Xen generation. "There is no distance between us, no false veils of space or time may intervene," says he. "For a brief time you join us, you are one between the worlds." After being told that he cannot truly forgive me for "those whose cords I cut" in the original game, I leave, duly admonished. **5/5**

### I MADE THIS

**HALF-LIFE NAME-DROPPING EXPOSED**

The original *Half-Life* had loads of moments of self-reference, most evident in the opening level's locker room where all the scientist names are also those of Valve workers, with head honcho Gabe Newell's name-tag appearing later in the game at the start of Office Complex. Inside Gordon's locker, meanwhile, is a novel by Marc Laidlaw – who also scripted the game. It's also said that turning the clipping off and peeking inside the G-Man's briefcase reveals quite a neat hidden extra.

## 12:30 PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME

What's better than a quick run and tumble through *Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time*? Well, how about a quick run and tumble through the original *Prince Of Persia*? Hidden away within the start of Ubisoft's charming wall-dasher is a 3D rendition of the prince's pixellated roots – and it's remarkably easy to find. A small pre-lunch crowd gathers round my monitor as I start a new game and, while the Prince is still standing on the opening balcony, hold down X while pressing (in sequence) space, left mouse, E, C, E, space, left mouse and then C. The secret level is pretty short, and packaged with a few designer in-jokes about bottles of pop, but it's still a charmer. With three games down, my working day is thus far completely unrivalled by any other on record – apart from, perhaps, the day we found a copy of *Razzle* behind the radiator in the toilet at our old offices. **3/5**

## 11:26 MAX PAYNE 2

To finish off a productive morning, I return to the embrace of Payne. Booting up the level in which Max wipes out the cleaners in the posh apartment block while Mona whispers into his ear ('The Million Dollar Question'), I get to the moment at which Max descends the scaffolding on a lift (which breaks) and then gets various household items from above. At its base I blast a cleaner in the kitchen window to my immediate right, but instead of moving on through the level I continue to edge around the building – jumping over a piece of scaffolding in the process. Around the corner I find something that instantly cools my blood-lust – a shrine to some poor kid who died when he was a mere 20 years old.

Bookended by two flames and heralded by a strange choral noise, I find a book of remembrance for one Milka Forssell (1983-2003). Suddenly sombre, I quit out and head for other pastures. **4/5**

## 13:15 FAR CRY

Legend tells of an easter egg in *Far Cry* that enables the pigs (well, wild boars) of *Far Cry* to leap into buggies and drive around with gay abandon. Innumerable sites on the Internet have this to say on the subject: "If you park a buggy in an unsafe spot, such as on a flight of stairs in the Fort level, eventually a pig will get in and drive it back to the road and park it. Be careful, the pig will run you over if you get in the way." But is this true? Only one way to find out.

**13:26** This looks like a nice spot. Pigs, apparently, hate bad parking.

**13:35** I take a higher vantage point and scan the trees for swine.

**13:42** No pigs yet. Some mercs attack me viciously, but no pigs.

**13:43** Getting a bit bored now.

**13:51** Worried that I might be scaring the pigs off, I seek cover.

**13:56** Oh bugger, a merc is trying to steal my buggy. I'll just kill him.

**14:01** Je-sus Christ! It's a pig! It's all true! I'll call him Hogsworth.

**14:03** We're all cheering him on, but Hogsworth is having none of it.

**14:04** Repositioning the buggy, I push my new friend towards it.

**14:05** Hogsworth doesn't know what to do and just stands there.

**14:07** A re-repositioned buggy gets his juices flowing. He snuffles at it.

**14:08** Hogsworth gets bored and stares at me disconsolately. Damn.

**14:10** I move the buggy and accidentally kill Hogsworth. Oops.

**14:11** Hell with this. The pig is gone and so is my patience. Boom!

## URBAN MYTH?

So can pigs drive? Before his demise, Hogsworth certainly showed some interest in vehicular activity. Spurred on by the memory of him I fire off an email to an ultra-secret source written in blood at the back of my contacts list. The reply is swift. "The pigs CAN drive the cars. It's not an easter egg, it's a very, VERY rare bug."

So there you have it. Hogsworth did not die in vain. His grisly fate went hand-in-hand with the advancement of the piggy race. When all boars drive cars, they will look back to him as a pioneer and a champion. God bless you, Hogsworth, you filthy little swine.

**5/5** [SHOULD THE PIG BE UP FOR IT]

## 14:36 SPLINTER CELL

If it's 36 minutes past two then it must be *Splinter Cell*. After a Pot Noodle, a Peperami and a re-installation from a dusty CD, I delve into the training mission of Sam Fisher's first outing – for the quickest, fastest and easiest easter egg of the lot. Having been ordered to gawp at red bulbs flashing around me (wondering exactly why Ubisoft weren't confident we'd grasped the rudiments of mouse-look) I notice a handy ledge over to my left. A double-jump from the back wall and on to the ledge and I discover a locked door and a keypad. Ham-fistedly punching 5656 into the pad, the door swings open, and I discover Anna Grimsdottir – Sam's hi-tech in-ear correspondent. We exchange gruff pleasantries and she wibbles on for a little while about largely irrelevant things. Getting bored, I punch her in the face, fail the mission and uninstall the game to make way for my next easter egg prey.

**2/5**
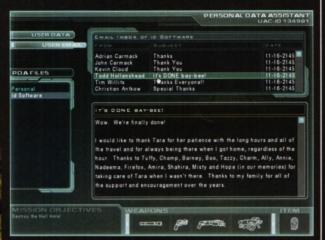
## 14:51 DOOM 3

Leaping straight into the final level of *Doom 3* via the handy level-skip (bringing down the console and tapping in 'map game/hellhole'), I set out to discover the secret PDA that's rumoured to be located just near the final encounter with the Cyberdemon Mk II. Basically just going left whenever I can (thereby avoiding the right turn at the end that would lead me between the legs of the ungodly one), I discover a further passage in the ruins that leads me into a room with the familiar id logo on the wall. I tap use on it, which opens up a nearby room with the fabled PDA lying on a nearby plinth. I pick it up and read the id gang's thank you letters to friends, family and household pets. It's pretty dull. An afternoon of similar inanities stretches out ahead of me while my work colleagues boot up a game of *Counter-Strike*. **1/5**

## ID EGGS

**CREATOR OF THE FPS, FAN OF THE EASTER EGG**

Whether it was discovering a level plucked straight out of *Wolfenstein 3D* in *Doom II*, unlocking the secret ending by turning clipping off and blasting John Romero's head or finding dead Commander Keens hanging in secret rooms, id is legendary for ferreting away stuff in its games. Another example is the presence of John Carmack's disembodied head in *Quake III: Arena*. Those wacky guys…

## 15:31 DUKE NUKEM 3D

My eyes feel like they're melting, and I need a pick-me-up fast – and Jack Bauer's remedy of intravenous drugs is off the menu. Only Duke can save me. I convince myself that I'm reinstalling the Atomic Edition simply to saunter round the deck of the Enterprise (as you can on E2L3), but I know that I'm really here for a dirtier reason. It's not technically an easter egg, but back when I was a nipper naughty men's magazine *Penthouse* sponsored an entire level of *Duke 3D* – which was made freely available online. Still available from reputable places like Fileplanet, it's got everything from naked women begging Duke to come back to bed to naked random women standing around for no reason. *Duke 3D Penthouse Paradise* – lo-fi smut at its best/worst. **4/5**

## 16:43 SERIOUS SAM: THE SECOND ENCOUNTER

The best easter egg so far comes with *Serious Sam's* collection of beheaded, screaming/exploding men and SpongeBob SquarePants-style roaming monsters. Starting off on the first level (having tapped in 'please giveall' on the console, natch) I burn, explode and shotgun my way through to the Aztec temple – at which point I veer off down a valley to the left. Here I find a secret crate train, but no easter egg. Disheartened, I wander back to the Aztec artifice where I spy a discoloured segment of wall on the side of the temple – truly the international sign of the FPS secret. I blast it with a rocket launcher and all oddness breaks loose. A score of large-brained beings leap out and surround me, all with the faces of bearded Croatian games developers and emitting strange meep-meep noises. I burn them all with my flamethrower before heading into the exposed cave, witness a brain-man deliver a short speech on a nearby stage before being slugged by boxing gloves on springs and then find myself in a crazy Euro-disco party, complete with mirror ball. Weird. **5/5**

## 17:53 OPERATION FLASHPOINT

While I'm cautiously installing *Flashpoint* (probably the most acclaimed game that I've never played), I sneakily trick my PC into thinking today is Christmas Day via the clock on my taskbar. (You'd think that a grand's worth of equipment would be wise to this, but never mind.) I've been told by the PR blurb man at Bohemia Interactive that on any map apart from Nogova Island this should turn the trees into Christmassy affairs and sprinkle the battleground with presents. And whaddya you know, it does! Having mindlessly shot some communists among these symbols of man's goodwill unto man I turn the game off and complain vociferously about a smouldering sensation in my screen-burnt eyes. Every one else in the office ignores me and goes home.

**3/5**

## 18:33 HALO

Last game of the day is *Halo*. Word on the street (well, my mate Ben on Official Xbox Magazine, anyway) is that there's a secret grunt on the very last level. My cheat crack fails to work, so I have to plough into the game from my last savegame – about two mammoth levels from the end. I'm tired, I'm frustrated, I'm missing Hogsworth like crazy, but my undimmed quest to conquer the unknown keeps me going. Two hours of play later and I'm cursing the day the Flood were even a twinkle in Bungie's eye (itself a twinkle reflected from Valve's eye, if you ask me). My girlfriend calls me and fails to respond with even a whiff of compassion when I inform her that I'm still in the office due to the machinations of a secret Covenant soldier. It's only then that I get to my target: the bridge in the final level of *Halo* where you're racing through the ship in a Warthog and the rescue craft is shot down. I've been told that the grunt is just ahead and to the left – it isn't. After a fair amount of dying, swearing and pouring hatred upon Master Chief I discover that it's actually down a tunnel that's a bit after the bridge and on the right, and another right turn after that. I meet the grunt and he starts talking – but the noises of the self-destructing ship drown most of it out. I make out something about "thirsty" and "nipples" before getting extremely angry and lobbing a grenade at him. I hold back the tears, grab my bag, and head for the door.

**1/5**

## 20:30 HOME

I unsettle commuters with my thousand-yard stare and bleak expression. An old woman looks at me suspiciously.

## 22:14 EPILOGUE

Happiness seeps from my every pore: I am reunited with Hogsworth. What's more, I am present to watch his first faltering steps as a fully-fledged rally pig. I feel like a proud father watching his son wobbling off on his bike into a glorious sunset. Everything is right with the world. My girlfriend starts speaking to me again, my pig is resurrected and my mission is accomplished. I rule.

*beep* *beep* *beep* *beep*

### PRINCE OF PERSIA: WARRIOR WITHIN

It would take too long to describe how to get them within these meagre pages, but a skim through the Net will provide you with ways to get some bizarre new weapons for the newly pubescent Prince. Hockey sticks, pink flamingos, *Rayman*-style gloves and teddy bears are all in there – ready to severely damage the grizzled one's newfound street-cred.

### DEUS EX: INVISIBLE WAR

This is an odd one. Should you make it to the end of *Invisible War*, go to UNATCO HQ on Liberty Island. Pick up the UNATCO flag in the first room, take it to Manderly's office and place it in his en-suite bathroom. Now flush the toilet. Just like that, you'll be transported to a 'Wrap Party' frequented by all the characters you didn't kill during the game. Check out the Datacubes for even more silliness.

## HONORABLE MENTIONS

### OTHER EASTER EGGS YOU MAY LIKE TO TRY OUT

### BLACK & WHITE

First off, if you set your PC clock to April 1 you'll find that your creature's footprints have magically become smiley faces. More interestingly though, once you have the creature leash, try summoning it and then waving your mouse in a square-wave pattern, like the up-down bits on top of a castle. Something strange will happen involving telephone boxes, your consciences and messages from Lionhead. For more easter eggs check out *PC ZONE* alpha-female forumite Fyska's excellent www.bwgarage.net – which is pretty much comprehensive in all things involving big monkeys.
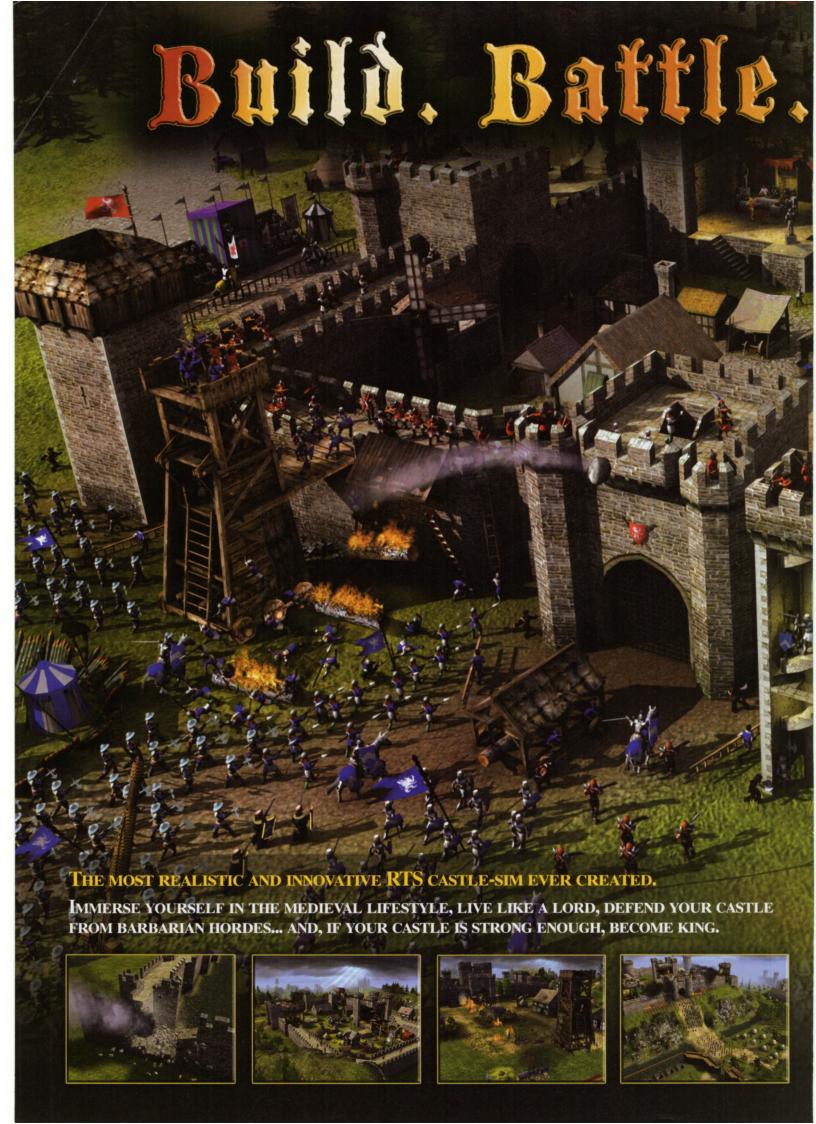
### GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY

There are more eggs in here than there are women that wiggle their arses, but our favourite is the interesting pattern that appears on a skyscraper every night from 23:00 through to midnight. It's the building across the road from the Malibu Club car park, although you may want to position yourself somewhere beyond the river to fully appreciate it – especially the jet of water that's apparently shot out every 15 minutes.

# Build. Battle.

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IMMERSE YOURSELF IN THE MEDIEVAL LIFESTYLE, LIVE LIKE A LORD, DEFEND YOUR CASTLE FROM BARBARIAN HORDES... AND, IF YOUR CASTLE IS STRONG ENOUGH, BECOME KING.

# Become a King.

FIREFLY STUDIOS'
## STRONGHOLD 2

# Back to the front...

# CALL OF DUTY 2

**Exclusive!** *Jamie Sefton* **interrogates Infinity Ward on the PC's most eagerly awaited World War II shooter sequel. And you thought the first game was explosive...**

## THE DETAILS

**DEVELOPER** Infinity Ward
**PUBLISHER** Activision
**WEBSITE** www.infinityward.com
**ETA** Q4 2005

## WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Sequel to the best WWII shooter ever
- Now with non-linear, more open environments
- New North African campaign
- More vehicles to drive
- Hugely improved next-generation graphics and animation

**EXCUSE US** if you will while we blow our own trumpet, but back in our July 2003 issue, we were the first magazine on the planet to feature a dedicated front cover and six-page preview on a little-known WWII shooter from a new games company formed from the ashes of the *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault* developer 2015. Since then, *Call Of Duty* has gone on to sell millions of copies, eclipse EA's franchise and spawn a superb PC expansion pack *United Offensive* (created by *Return To Castle Wolfenstein* developer Gray Matter).

So, when it came to unveiling the true sequel, the chaps at Infinity Ward were only too pleased to talk exclusively to us before any other UK mag – and so, lucky reader, you get to share in the first details of what promises to be the most exciting, rip-roaring, action-splattered, cinematic WWII first-person shooter ever created.

Despite LA suffering its worst bout of storms for decades, the severe weather hadn't dampened chief creative officer Vince Zampella's enthusiasm when I spoke to him. "We're trying to take the game to the next level based on feedback from the press, the fans and what we didn't get to implement ourselves in the first game. *COD2* covers a vast number of locations including Russia and Germany, and we've worked meticulously to create epic, chaotic battles and rich stories across the length of much of WWII."

### DESERT STORM

The first major announcement (cue black-and-white Pathé footage accompanied by a plummy English voiceover) is that for the British missions, *COD2* will now storm into North Africa as part of our brave boys' attacks against General Rommel, the 'Desert Fox' and his Afrikakorps. You'll play as infantry man Sergeant Davis in General Montgomery's 8th Army, and

also an as-yet-unnamed Scottish tank commander, as you push across North African countries including Egypt and Tunisia. After, there'll be a final push into Europe for the bloody Battle of the Hedgerows, where superior Nazi armoured firepower wreaked death and destruction on the ill-equipped American and British tanks, which – in a bizarre true story from WWII – were actually jeeps in disguise!

"We have some huge desert levels," says Zampella. "Rather than doing four-versus-four tank battles like in the past, we're now going all the way up to 40-versus-20 battles. It's on a massive scale – you start out having to use your binoculars to spot the enemy tanks in the distance when they're still miles away."

The Russian campaign, meanwhile, begins with the story of Private Vassili

## CV *Infinity Ward*

## INFINITY WARD

**Established in 2002 with 22 of the original *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault* development team, with the objective of making the best WWII shooter ever...**

**2003** *Call Of Duty*, Infinity Ward's first game was a triumph – a beautifully cinematic, exciting, bullet-ridden shooter that outgunned *Medal Of Honor* with a series of stunning set pieces, such as the Stalingrad invasion.

**2004** OK, *Call Of Duty: United Offensive* was actually developed by Gray Matter, but it gets a mention here because Infinity Ward did have some input, and it is one of the best expansion packs ever, adding brand new weapons (the flamethrower!), missions and particle effects, as well as some breathtaking aerial sequences.

## "We've included non-linear gameplay – we're opening up the levels"

**VINCE ZAMPELLA** CHIEF CREATIVE OFFICER, *COD2*



Maps are larger, non-linear affairs.



The Pet Shop Boys unveil their new look.



Check out the realistic lighting and distant smoke. Nice.

Ivanovich Koslov, a Red Army regular fighting 20 miles from Moscow. It was here, in appalling winter conditions, that the shattered remnants of the Russian army was finally able to halt the German blitzkrieg and deliver Hitler's first major defeat.

Finally, the American campaign focuses on Corporal Bill Taylor, a member of the legendary Army Rangers, the unit that gave birth to the US Special Forces. The Army Rangers demanded (and were apparently given) some of the toughest missions available, and you'll experience them in some of the game's most intense European battles – which apparently includes the D-Day beach landings, the first time the team has revisited this famous WWII battle since *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault*.

### OFF THE RAILS

Exciting stuff, but what is going to be the real gameplay improvement in *Call Of Duty 2*? "If there was any criticism from the first *COD*, it's that the game was a little linear," continues Zampella. "In that regard, we've now included non-linear gameplay – we're opening up the levels."

Yep, rather than always forcing you down a scripted hallway, where funhouse Nazis will pop up on cue for you to shoot, the new game is all about increased player freedom and choice during missions. *Call Of Duty 2* won't be completely unscripted, but you can now accomplish objectives in different orders and take a unique path through a level.

"This gives you strategic choices for which active objective to complete, and the opportunity to use actual military tactics like outflanking, and fire and manoeuvre to eliminate the enemy," states lead designer Zied Rieke. *Call Of Duty 2*, therefore, instantly offers you

increased replay value. You can now return to a favourite mission and attempt to complete it with, say, balls-out guns-blazing, rather than with a careful, considered strategy.

And there's more. "Rather than forcing you through each mission one at a time," adds Rieke, "when the player finishes a particular mission or 'vignette', we allow you to choose which of the characters' stories you'd like to continue next. You can follow a particular soldier's story through to completion, or alternatively, you can play chronologically across all the conflicts from 1941 to 1945."

### BATTLE TITTLE-TATTLE

Yet Infinity Ward was very aware that to produce its trademark intense battlefield experiences in large, mainly non-scripted levels, *Call Of Duty 2* was going to need significantly revamped AI for both the friendly and enemy troops. "Squad behaviour in *COD* was pretty good, although enemies weren't quite up to

scratch," says Zampella. "Now, on both sides, the AI has improved, and you can come at the enemy from different angles – although they'll now do the same to you. You need to watch for that – the enemy communicates with each other in the same way that you do with your squad. If you're flanking them, they'll communicate that to each other verbally, and shout it out – although you'll need to understand German to tell what they're saying! You won't be able to just sneak up on a guy unawares if there's a battle going on ten feet away."

Probably the best example of this in a recent shooter with wide-open levels, is the way the enemies react in Crytek's superb *Far Cry*, shouting to each other and calling in other units for help – but Zampella insists that the 'Battle Chatter' system in *Call Of Duty 2* is even more sophisticated. Apparently, the AI on both sides (although you'll obviously only really be concerned with your own squad's voices) will call out over 700 different phrases that are context-sensitive to the level, such as, "Sniper, second-floor balcony!" or "Watch that guy over there!"

### HOLD YOUR BREATH

#### STEADYING YOUR SNIPER'S AIM IN *CALL OF DUTY 2*

We wouldn't want to accuse Infinity Ward of copying *Far Cry*, but the team has included a "homage" to Crytek's superb ability to steady your aim when sniping from distance using a weapon such as the Gewehr 43 – a Nazi semi-automatic rifle with a very powerful scope and the ability to fire ten shots quickly.

However, when you're initially looking through the scope of a rifle, there's a certain amount of waiver. In *COD2*, you can now press a key to hold your breath, steadying your aim and allowing you to squeeze off your shot. As you do, the sound of the battle dies down and you hear your heartbeat in a typically cinematic *Call Of Duty* moment. After you've hopefully hit your target, you can catch your breath, re-acquire another enemy and shoot again.

"Look at the state of this lawn."

The Brits storm into North Africa.

Tank battles now comprise of more than 60 war machines.

Who hides in a house like this?

"These aren't scripted events – they're driven by the game's AI. It's very detailed and meant to mimic what real soldiers do in battle. That was one of the things our military advisors commented on from the first game – once the first shot is fired, the element of surprise is gone. Soldiers on the battlefield communicate constantly, whether it's "Hey, I'm reloading!" or "Cover me!" If you listen and pay attention to what they're saying, you'll get clues to what's going on around you. Of course, this is extremely important with non-linear gameplay – if you hear someone shout out "They're flanking us on the left!" then they're flanking you on the left!"

In Call Of Duty (and United Offensive), your AI squads would sometimes take the lead in firefights, but would never progress too far in front of you in a level – an element that has been retained for the sequel. "We don't want the friendly characters to finish the level for you, so there's a range where they'll advance. However, while they won't go miles ahead, we've tried not to make it feel like an imaginary line, where they don't react until you cross it," elaborates Zieke. So the team hasn't been tempted to include direct squad control? "Well, I'd say we've been tempted, but what people like about COD is that there's so much stuff going on all the time and it's so intense and exciting, that they don't have to deal with that level of tactics."

## DRIVING LESSONS

Time for another bombshell – Call Of Duty 2 has vehicles that you can freely drive around levels. "Yes, it's true – that's one of our missions, where you'll be skidding a jeep around," adds Infinity Ward's president, Grant Collier. "What's more, there are several different vehicles that you'll drive, as well as tanks in the single-player game. Another one would be the Bren gun carrier – I don't think we have a screenshot of it yet – it's a British vehicle that was used a lot in North Africa. It looks a bit like a square box on treads, without a top! But it was very effective."

Facial models have improved vastly since the original game.

Let's pray the Scottish accents are better than *Shrek* or Willie from *The Simpsons*.

Moving onto the other kinds of missions you can expect to play in *Call Of Duty 2* – there'll be the big set pieces that the series is renowned for (see 'Desert Fox Hunt', right), but Collier comments that there won't be any of the solo missions from the first game, such as the destruction of the anti-aircraft guns on the Eider Dam. "However, we do have sniper missions where you're sneaking around a level taking out targets. Also, while we won't be copying *United Offensive*, we're doing a lot of really exciting new gameplay stuff. They'll be as cool as the levels where you're taking over an aircraft gun turret and shooting down enemy planes, but not the same sort of thing."

Plus, you'll return to the locations of some popular battles from the first *Call Of Duty*, with brand new missions – such as a very different campaign in and around the battle for Stalingrad, and other conflicts on the Eastern and Western fronts.

"We're enhancing these locations the same way we're improving the whole game - making them non-linear, introducing better AI, vastly improving the graphics, with real-time dynamic lighting and weather effects," says Collier. "In the Stalingrad levels it's snowing, and you'll witness real attention to detail – soldiers, when static, will be shivering, and you'll see their breath in the cold."

**VOLUMETRIC FOG OF WAR**
Just take a few seconds to study the exclusive screenshots, and you really begin to appreciate the results that Infinity Ward has achieved so far with *Call Of Duty 2*. "To produce something that looks impressively superior to the first game, without compromising on the epic, *Call Of Duty* battles, we've developed our own proprietary graphics engine that can support open areas, many characters, a cinematically ambient world and high frame-rate all at the same time," says Infinity Ward's chief technology officer, Jason West.

**BEFORE AND AFTER**



**PLAY SPOT THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN *CALL OF DUTY 1* AND 2!**

*Call Of Duty* was graphically impressive two years ago, but as you can see in the top screenshot, the adapted *Quake III* engine is now looking a teensy bit, well, *Quake III*. However, Infinity Ward's brand new proprietary engine (bottom screenshot) has allowed the developer to keep the original's impressive number of soldiers for large set pieces, with the addition of real-time dynamic lighting, bump-mapping for more realistic environments, improved animation, organic buildings and new weather and atmospheric effects.

"We now have real-time dynamic lighting, all the surfaces are specular- and bump-mapped for more realistic textures in the environments, and we have a new particle and weather system." With this technology, *Call Of Duty 2* can create convincing thunderstorms, snow blizzards, volumetric fog and sandstorms, all of which will have a direct influence on gameplay and the AI of friendly and enemy troops. A new weapon – smoke grenades – has also been introduced, that can be thrown and used to conceal your squad on the battlefield, who will react accordingly.

"Another, more subtle aspect, is that we don't have to place buildings on a strict grid, as we had to with *Call Of Duty*," continues lead artist Michael Boon. "We're going for a much more organic look. We've done a lot of research on location in France and North Africa, taking close to 10,000 photos, and found that the look we wanted – wind-swept roads, buildings that have been patched up and repaired over hundreds of years – needed to support that. When we came back to the US, we had to throw away our early test levels and textures, but the difference is amazing. Having first-hand experience of the environments, the history and culture, ensures the levels feel incredibly realistic and distinct from each other."



**"We've built a game engine that can support a cinematically ambient world"** JASON WARD CHIEF TECH OFFICER

## DESERT FOX HUNT

### INFINITY WARD TAKES US THROUGH ONE OF THE NORTH AFRICA LEVELS

Steve Fukuda, designer on *COD2*, plays through one of the British campaign battles in the remote town of Toujane, Western Tunisia, in 1943. "In this mission, you're tasked with escorting Crusader tanks from the 7th Armoured Division through a difficult and cramped built-up area.

"During the battle, in which tanks and infantry are in close proximity, your fellow infantrymen are accurately communicating enemy positions in very specific terms, on the fly and with no scripting involved. 'He's on the second floor, right side window' or 'Behind that tank wreck, over to the left!' or 'Smith, cover me! I'm reloading!' Things like that.

"The Germans are also screaming various commands to one another, and reporting on you and your fellow soldiers' positions in the same way. You're constantly surrounded by soldiers struggling to communicate through the sheer density of combat noise – our new Battle Chatter system in full effect.

"The effect of thick, billowing dust and smoke in the streets creates a greater sense of confusion, and provides players with tactical opportunities. Faint shapes of Afrikakorps infantrymen moving around the flank are glimpsed through smokescreens, grenades are being thrown around, tanks sweep lanes with their guns and fire at each other in the tight space... It's chaos.

"Many of the layouts of *Call Of Duty 2*'s locations are much more non-linear than their predecessors, allowing you to take several distinct approaches to attacking enemy positions. While your friendly troops are occupying the enemy's attention, you can take a flanking route and hit enemies who, too busy dealing with your buddies, are clearly unaware of your position."

As for the question of whether *Call Of Duty* will implement physics and true ragdoll bodies being tossed through the air using the new engine, it appears that this was something, like squad control, that the team considered, but decided to reject. "We looked into that kind of stuff," comments West, "but with our gameplay it doesn't necessarily fit as nicely as it does other types of games. In *Call Of Duty* we like to set up our handcrafted battlefield, so the player can thoroughly enjoy it."

### SOUND OF THE CROWD

A major contribution to *Call Of Duty*'s immersion was the excellent sound effects – from the desperate click of a pistol out of ammo, to the major explosion of a tank shell smashing into a nearby building – all helped by the team's previous efforts of recording every weapon sound from the actual vintage weaponry. "The sounds that were there were good, but there wasn't enough," argues Vince Zampella. "So, we're going over it again with another pass and taking it up a level. We've got a new sound designer with 12 years of industry experience, and he's really into World War II. It's about bringing up the level of ambience – everything that should have a sound, does."

Enhancements include weapon sounds that scale correctly and change tone over distances, bullet impacts and ricochets that sound appropriate for the surface they hit, and even weather-related effects for correctly modelled wind gusting through streets and rain impacting on crates, rooftops and other objects.

"Also, the acting for the soldiers is better. This time they sound tired, they're screaming their lines and so on – it's got much more of a real battlefield feel. Along with the Battle Chatter, the overall sound adds to the colour and chaos of the war experience, bringing the battlefield to life."

As well as the original arsenal of *COD* weaponry, Infinity Ward has also had to sample more than 15 new weapons for *Call Of Duty 2*. For starters, there are more semi-automatic rifles such as the Germans' Gewehr 43 (see 'Hold Your Breath', page 40) and the Soviets' SVT-40, but all nationalities get their own pistol too, including the famous Webley Mark 6 revolver for us Brits.

### WWII X 10

How excited should you be by now? Well, if you're not thrilled by the thought of a *Call Of Duty* game with open-level gameplay, vehicles to drive, three different non-linear campaigns (including a brand new North African setting), beautiful new shiny graphics, immersing sound, new weapons including smoke grenades and the promise of new multiplayer modes, then I'm leaving the world of videogames forever, to set up an agrarian commune in Slovenia.

The truly fantastic bit in all this is how pumped up Infinity Ward is with its new game – you can hear it in the voices of the entire development team. "While we're proud of what was accomplished in *COD*, we still had many innovations that we didn't have time to include during the last game's development," says president Grant Collier. "Now with our own engine and a bigger team, we feel that with *Call Of Duty 2*, you'll see a glimpse of what the future of videogames holds for everyone." It appears my friends in the Eastern European organic vegetable business will have to wait for me a little longer... PCZ

"Please all put your hands up, I want to shoot you!"

"Wow! Look, have you seen this sunset?"

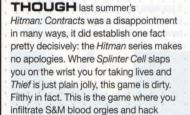You can drive the vehicles.

The Nazis relax in a game of hide-and-seek.

In a nod to *Splinter Cell*, you can distract guards by throwing objects.


You could feel a bit of a prick here.


It's curtains for you, Mr Pavarotti.

## Murder most foul...

# HITMAN: BLOOD MONEY

**Killing for money means getting your hands dirty. *Anthony Holden* reaches for the borax...**

**THOUGH** last summer's *Hitman: Contracts* was a disappointment in many ways, it did establish one fact pretty decisively: the *Hitman* series makes no apologies. Where *Splinter Cell* slaps you on the wrist you for taking lives and *Thief* is just plain jolly, this game is dirty. Filthy in fact. This is the game where you infiltrate S&M blood orgies and hack

### THE DETAILS

**DEVELOPER** Io Interactive
**PUBLISHER** Eidos Interactive
**WEBSITE** www.hitman.com
**ETA** Christmas 2005

### WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

■ New episode sees rival assassin agencies at war
■ Improved Glacier engine offers more detail and proper ragdolls
■ Have to clean up victims' blood to avoid discovery
■ Spend money from hits to buy weapons and other cool stuff

people up with meat cleavers. This is the game where you garrotte middle-aged women in the shower and dump their bodies in a ditch...

### EVERLASTING LOVE

It's one of the reasons we still love Agent 47, despite his patchy track record, and one of the reasons why his next outing – now apparently delayed till Christmas – is still on our list of prime targets. Already, there are some great indications that this will be another brutal, unrepentant affair. I mean, for god's sake, the first official screenshots showed 47 pushing Santa Claus off of a balcony!

Of course, this was merely to demonstrate one of the cool new features – using gravity and the environment to make deaths look like accidents. We've just been shown through another new level – an Opera House in Paris – and there are some other great examples of this device to be found. Our favourite (if

the insinuation of the developer is to be believed) involves planting a remote bomb on the anchor of the Grand Chandelier and waiting until your target wanders beneath before detonating. With carpentry work already going on all around the building, we think you can safely pass that one off as shoddy workmanship.

### STAIN PAIN

If you do things the old-fashioned way, there's yet another new feature to contend with – incriminating blood stains. Now, if you shoot or chop someone carelessly, the claret splatters at the scene; and if you drag the freshly punctured corpse away it leaves a sanguine trail for guards to follow. As such,

cleaning up after yourself is a grisly new part of your assassination duties.

Perhaps even more welcome is the way money is better incorporated into the game. Rather than just assuming 47 splurges all his earnings on scalp wax, the new game gives you a chance to spend your ill-gotten gains on mods and upgrades for weapons. So, think silencers, night vision scopes and so forth, as well as bribing corrupt cops and buying the silence of witnesses. This, combined with a plot that sees two rival assassin agencies at war, should give a much greater feeling of involvement in the world of contract killing, something strangely absent from previous outings.

Clearly, there are some great ideas at work here. Let's just pray that Eidos gives the game enough time and support to see them come to fruition and that the *Hitman* series might once again be able to mix it with the best. **PCZ**


Proper ragdolls mean you can dump bodies anywhere.


To 47, we're all just a potential change of clothes.

# What a rush...

# STARGATE SG-1: THE ALLIANCE

### As old as time and possessing more arcane secrets than a mummy's tomb. But enough of *Paul Presley*...

**STARGATE, EH?** Nope, not the 1994 Kurt Russell film about Egyptians in space (or something), but the spin-off television series that's been running for close to nine years now, is more popular than *Star Wars* and *Star Trek* combined (well, almost) and currently makes up a staple part of *T4's* Sunday afternoon schedule along with *Smallville* and the insane bleating of June Sarpong and imbecilic gurning of Vernon "What the hell is Tess Daly thinking letting this twat put his hands anywhere near her?" Kay. That *Stargate*. So what type of game is *SSG-1: TA* (or "Sue-gita" for short)? It doesn't take an Einstein to realise that we're talking about a first-person shooter here. But what exactly is it that promises to raise *Stargate SG-1* above the ranks of all the other two-bit TV show cash-ins?

## PYRAMID POWER

For a start, it seems as though Perception has put a lot of thought into the structure of things. "It's a first-person shooter with a strong team aspect," explains Radek Majder, project manager on the game matter-of-factly. "There are many different and visually stunning worlds to explore, some based on episodes from the show as well as some new ones. We've also incorporated the humour and wit of the series combined with a strong story. You'll be able to draw upon the SG-1 team members' special combat abilities or employ them directly when playing that particular character."

One very basic example is O'Neill's ability to order the use of the "Hand of Light" device to confuse and hurt enemies, thus allowing you to make more interesting gameplay choices.

"There are many different types of objectives in each mission," continues Majder. "We have several types including a 'Foothold' situation at Stargate Command, where the base is overrun and you have

### THE DETAILS

**DEVELOPER** Perception
**PUBLISHER** JoWooD Productions
**WEBSITE** www.stargate-thealliance.com
**ETA** Late 2005

### WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Based on the immensely popular (and actually really good) TV series
- Actual cast members provide in-game voices for their characters
- Uses a "heavily modified" version of the Unreal technology
- Co-op mode lets each player control an SG-1 team member

**CV** PERCEPTION

## PERCEPTION

*Stargate* has been placed in the sun-baked hands of Australian developer Perception, which was founded back in 1995 as an animation and sound house for the likes of EA. Coin-op success followed with *Top Down Racer* and *Thunderboats*. *Stargate* represents the team's first major foray into PC gaming. You bloody bewdy.

Nice pyramids, but that gift shop's a con.


Not too ostentatious for a hallway.


Don't think much of the colour scheme.


Haven't we seen this in *Independence Day*?

to retake it. Others involve infiltrating one of Anubis's bases, and then of course we have the Haaken [see below]. Making missions challenging and new is an ongoing task for us."

Frankly the thought of being able to walk around the SGC (Stargate Command), push the buttons on the dial-up console while saying "seventh chevron encoded," open and close the Iris and sit in General Hammond's (as was) chair fills me with the kind of giddy excitement that is usually reserved for six-year olds on Christmas morn. Ahem.

### NERD ALERT
OK, I'm a fan. Guilty as charged, your honour. This next section is going to describe the plot of the game (as much as Perception has revealed at least) and detail the various fanboy features included to keep raving maniacs like myself happy. Those of you with a more well-adjusted outlook on their television viewing habits might want to skip ahead.

*The Alliance* is set just before the penultimate episode of season eight ("Threads"), following the attack of the Replicators on the Goa'uld. Über-Goa'uld enemy Anubis is back in the picture, having discovered and unleashed an ancient race of aliens

> ## "We've made every effort to make it as close to the TV show as possible"
> **RADEK MAJDER** PROJECT MANAGER

called The Haaken. "We've really crafted a storyline that's up to date with where the series is at – one that taps in to many of the major themes set up in the show over the years – and added the layer of the Haaken," says Majder. "We have SG-1, Anubis, the Tok'Ra, the Re'tou, the Replicators, the Ancients – Oma and Shifu in particular – and the Haaken. It's a storyline that fans of the show will love, but if you're completely new to

*Stargate*, you'll be able to pick it up and follow along."

### ALL-STAR CASTING
One of the most important factors for *Stargate* fans, certainly one of the elements that's made the show the huge international success that it is, is the extremely high level of plotting and scripting. Perception is acutely aware of this and to that end has been working closely with the show's cast and crew to get the attention to detail spot on.

"We have some very pedantic fans in our team who make sure that things are as correct as possible in relation to the

show," laughs Majder. "We're also in contact with the team who produce the show and often seek their input on the worlds we're creating. They've always got some great behind-the-scenes info for us. We've had complete access to the cast, crew, sets and so on, which has proven invaluable."

To that end, each of the show's main characters is being voiced by the actual actors on the show – Richard Dean Anderson, Michael Shanks, Amanda Tapping and Christopher Judge – which should definitely help to retain some of the essential flavour and style of the series. Says Majder: "We're very mindful of the humour of the show and, with the help of the TV writers, we've made every effort to make it as close to the show as a game will allow. We see this as a key element of *Stargate*. Having 60-odd *Stargate* freaks working on the game helps too!"

### TIGHT-KNIT TEAMWORK
Beyond the bare details, Perception is playing its cards very close to its chest. Not much about the gameplay structure is being revealed, other than it's a linear series of missions in which you control each of the four main characters at different times – the choice of character


The new shipment of Polos arrived on time.


That's some pretty fancy flying there.

There's never an intergalactic taxi around when you need one. Oh no, hang on...



Kinder's latest design for its egg goes awry.



The new Wembley shapes up.

## CULT VIEWING

**FIVE LESSER-KNOWN SCI-FI SHOWS THAT DESERVE THE INTERACTIVE TREATMENT**

**SPACE 1999** – A nuclear explosion on the moon's first manned base sends it flying out of Earth orbit and into the depths of space!! Improbable live-action Gerry Anderson nonsense that would work best as a resource-management/colonisation type affair.

**AUTOMAN** – *GTA* crime-fighting action with the world's first (and last) computer generated hero. Like a reverse version of *Tron*, Automan was a digital creation sucked into the real world, along with his sidekick 'Cursor' who could change into a car, a plane, a boat, or anything else in an instant.

**METAL MICKEY** – The suburban comedy adventures of an impractical-looking robotic housemate with an unhealthy addiction to 'atomic thunderbusters' (sugary sweets, as opposed to a new rave drug). Not sure of the gaming potential but think of the merchandising opportunities!

**K-9 AND COMPANY** – This one-episode spin-off 'starring' Doctor Who's robotic pet hardly set the world alight but did manage to shift a load of toys in the early '80s. A natural FPS action romp seen from the low-level dog's perspective.

**SAPPHIRE AND STEEL** – Supernatural arsing about from a deathly-serious duo pretending to be 'elements' zapped to Earth to fight mostly imaginary (and therefore untaxing on the budget) foes. A more natural *Myst*-style point 'n' clicker there has never been.



depending on the aspect of the plot being told at that moment.

Naturally each character has his or her own abilities and it's on this that the success or failure of the game will most likely hinge. What makes playing as Daniel Jackson a different experience from playing as O'Neill? A simple case of different weapons, or something more in keeping with the character in question?

The game looks undeniably attractive, using the Unreal engine to impressive effect and managing to capture a great visual sense of the show's locales. Character models appear lifelike, wilderness stretches impressively to the horizon, indoor areas are rich in detail and even the shimmery effect on the Stargate itself ripples convincingly. But will it all be for naught if the game turns out to be a bog-standard shooter, wasting a potentially awesome franchise in much the same way EA has been spoiling 007 for the better part of five years now?

"We're aware of the expectations of our audience and you can be sure we're doing everything we can to stay true to the show as well as make a great game," says Majder. "It's not always easy, as what works on film may not always translate well into the game. We're continually refining every aspect of the game with the help of some very hardcore fans that work here as well as the show's director and producers. To be honest the biggest critics of this game will be us. We're all striving to make the game as true to *Stargate* as possible."

Made by the fans, for the fans? We'll find out later this year. **PCZ**



Nice shot.

## Why Don't You?...

**READY-MADE PLOTS RIPE FOR THE PICKING**
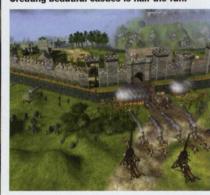
While *Stargate SG-1: The Alliance* is doing a pretty bang-up job of translating most of the TV show's feel and themes, we can't help but think Perception has missed a trick when it comes to the storyline. With nine seasons of episodes to play with, there's a natural wealth of plots to pick and choose from. Indeed, each season could have been made into a separate game, with each level being made from one episode (22 levels for a game is pretty standard these days). Not only would this provide non-Gaters with an ideal introduction to the show's background (instead of assaulting their fragile senses with everything at once), it would create a nine-year gaming franchise for JoWooD to milk for ages to come. They could even be packaged with special box sets of the DVDs for the true collectors. I know *I'd* buy them anyway...

**Creating beautiful castles is half the fun.**



**Charge! etc.**

**There are many painful ways to keep the foe from your door.**

## Once more unto the breach...
# STRONGHOLD 2

**Although eliciting painful memories of being burned at the stake in a past life, *Rhianna Pratchett* makes with the medieval merriment**

**EUROPE MIGHT** not have the Petrona Towers, the Great Wall of China or the mathematical majesty of the Pyramids, but what it does have in its architectural heritage are lots and lots of castles. These stony behemoths hark back to the days when ablutions were an annual event and the height of entertainment was a leper with bells on. But nevertheless, we took Firefly Studio's castle-building-sim-cum-RTS *Stronghold* to our hearts, and in return the London-based studio has returned with the sequel.

### BUILD IT UP

Like its predecessor, *Stronghold 2* depicts a kind of *SimCity* circa 500AD, in which you have to run your own bustling economy while at the same time erecting and defending a protective fortress around it. This time, Firefly has opted for a fully 3D engine and it's amazing how much more detail this adds, particularly in the way your faithful serfs react to your castle. If you don't build enough gong-pits (that's medieval poo depositaries), then disease starts to spread causing sickness and death among the population.

Likewise, when all the shit's been shovelled, your castle's inhabitants happily gather for a jolly old execution or even a bit of ritual humiliation (even bringing their own rotten fruit to throw). It might sound minor, but it's little details like this that really bring the game to life.

The military and economic campaigns which proved to be so successful in the original game are back with a vengeance. The war-time missions unsurprisingly revolve around combat, building up your military and seigeing other castles; while the more economically-focused campaigns revolve around attending to the details of your castle's development.

### HONOUR AND GLORY

Here's where the new honour points system in *Stronghold 2* comes into play. Your subjects can no longer be treated like mere produce luggers – you need to give a little love back too. This could be by staging a jousting tournament (because nothing says 'I care' like human kebabs), or you could provide candles so the local church can hold services. Keeping your serfs happy in this way generates honour points you can use to upgrade your castle.

Meanwhile, the game's new Kingmaker missions take you out and about ravaging the local countryside, because there's not much point seeking to be a king if you've got nothing to rule over. In a similar style to *Rise Of Nations*, you can take over neighbouring areas to boost your economy and pull yourself up by your boot straps to royal heights.

*Stronghold 2* looks like building on every aspect of the original game, while padding out under-developed areas too, such as AI and multiplayer. Barring a peasant revolt, we'll be lowering the drawbridge for a full review next month. **PCZ**

### WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?
- Fully 3D world
- Both war-time and peace-time campaigns
- New Kingmaker mode
- Detailed medieval economy



**Taking over villages boosts your economy.**



**"Sorry mate, heard it before."**



**Also good for backaches.**

The 'no more donuts' rule didn't go down well.

*Max Payne* with a Latino twist?

## Dirty sanchez...
# TOTAL OVERDOSE
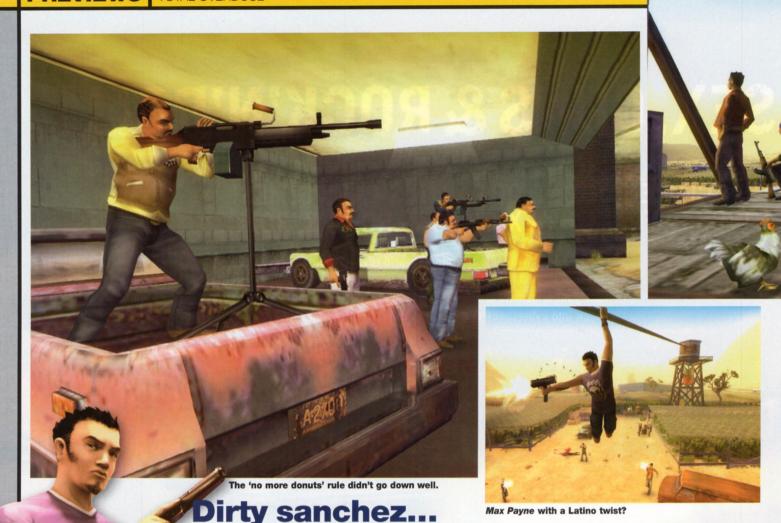
**Martin Korda** finds out whether this manic Latin American shooter is a Mexican or a Mexi-can't...

**FOR YEARS,** Robert Rodriguez's films have enjoyed a cult following, with his unsubtle blend of humour and extreme violence set in dusty Mexican locales proving a winning formula, most notably with the likes of *Desperado* and *From Dusk Till Dawn*. However, this begs the question – why hasn't anyone caught onto the fact that Rodriguez's approach to film-making would be ideal for games? You know what? Someone finally has.

**ABOUT TIME TOO**
*Total Overdose* is a third-person shooter which sits somewhere between *Max Payne* and *Serious Sam 2*, and has its tongue firmly superglued to its inner cheek. Borrowing heavily from Rodriguez's gangster-driven plotlines, you play as three different characters, though two of them make little more than cameo appearances. Confused? Let me explain.

You start off in the shoes of Ernesto Cruz (no relation to Beckham), a hardened tequila-swilling DEA operative (Drugs Enforcement Administration), on the trail of the world's most notorious drug barons. However, at the end of the first level, Cruz is killed by another DEA agent and his death covered up.

Skip forward a few years and enter his son Tommy, a rookie DEA recruit who goes in search of the truth behind his father's untimely demise. However, after his first mission he ends up in a wheelchair – due to extreme incompetence in the line of duty – and has to bust his delinquent twin brother out of the clink to track down his father's murderers instead.

Admittedly it's a bit on the tenuous side, but from what we've seen, the highly cinematic cut-scene-driven storyline is shaping up to potentially be both entertaining and – that rarest of gaming phenomena – genuinely amusing too.

**GOING LOCO**
So, onto the action – and believe me, there's plenty of it. *Total Overdose* simply haemorrhages carnage, action and gratuitous violence, offset by some outrageously eccentric and devastatingly effective special moves called Loco Moves. Oh, and loads of guns too.

"The more people you kill the more Loco Moves and power-ups you get," explains Dax Ginn, SCi's external designer on the game. "There are eight Loco Move in all, such as the Golden Gun which gives you five guaranteed headshots."

Dax took us through a typical level in order to show off some of the others. The most basic Loco Move sees your character jumping 360-degrees while firing twin machine guns (you can dual-wield any two identical weapons),

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**THE DETAILS**

**DEVELOPER** Deadline Games
**PUBLISHER** SCi
**WEBSITE** www.deadlinegames.com
**ETA** May 2005

**WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?**

- Huge firefights
- Imaginative collection of special moves
- Great use of bullet-time
- Vast array of weaponry
- Could be genuinely funny

**CV**
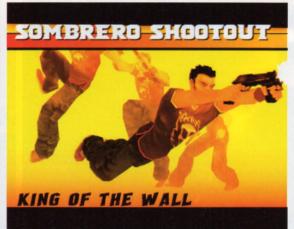
**DEADLINE GAMES**

Formed in 1996, *Total Overdose* is the company's first high-profile, mainstream game, having previously produced kids' and family-based edutainment titles, including *In The City* and crime thrillers such as *The Poison*, *Suspect* and *Blackout*.

Caption (left image): That's a big box of wee-d...

## BACK IN BULLET-TIME

**SOMBRERO SHOOTOUT**

**KING OF THE WALL**

Caption: Fly my pretty, fly!

### JUST BEEN SHOT DEAD? NEVER MIND, TRY AGAIN...

*Total Overdose* is set to feature a couple of great features that'll hopefully ensure the frenetic gameplay remains unabated, but not overly repetitive.

First off is the now-standard bullet-time mode, which, unlike a few recent games that have shoehorned the feature in, feels totally at home in *Total Overdose's* manic firefights.

Another great addition is the Rewind feature that means you can literally rewind the action and have another go should you meet an untimely death. These rewinds are limited of course, so you have to use them sparingly – but they should prove far more entertaining than constantly slapping the reload key.

Caption: Nicely sculpted side-burns.

Caption: "Today on *Trisha*: blokes with guns and women who love them."

Caption: Some people will go to any lengths to pick up Sky Sports 1.

wiping out every enemy around him in a seamless cinematic mini cut-scene.

Next up is the Piñata Of Death, a plaster horse stuffed full of explosives that detonate when a group of gormless enemies start trashing at it in hope of finding sweets. The twats.

Meanwhile, El Mariachi will be familiar to *Desperado* fans, enabling you to dual-wield a couple of machine guns posing as classical guitar cases; while the Sombrero Of Death is particularly amusing – a large hat that you throw onto the head of an enemy so that their comrades mercilessly turn on them. Best of all though is the Mexican Wrestler, which sees a maniacal hooded madman charging around the level cleaving up anyone

in his way with a machete. Now that's entertainment.

Loco Moves and other special features aside (see 'Back In Bullet-Time', above), *Total Overdose* doesn't hold back when it comes to weaponry either. Among others, you get to blow Mexican bandits away with M16s, bazookas, AK47s, Magnums and hunting rifles, and if you like to stove in people's heads in a more personal way, you'll be happy to note the inclusion of baseball bats, machetes and even rakes. Yes, you read that right: rakes.

"The great thing about the game is that you can pick up any weapon that the enemy drops, some of whom are armed with anything that comes to hand, such as planks of wood with spikes

or a rake," explains Dax. "Your enemies will also throw Tequila cocktails at you (like the Molotov version, only with tequila) which you can blow out of the sky before they get to you."

### MISSION POSSIBLE

The majority of missions see you taking on legions of enemies while undertaking numerous tasks, such as driving trucks into oil tankers and ziplining into a warehouse before blowing it to pieces, with the mayhem rarely abating for more than a few brief moments. There's also a

host of checkpoint-based driving mini-games that'll hopefully help break up the carnage.

While at first glance *Total Overdose* may look like a mindless shooter, it's just possible that if the humour and action live up to their billing, this could turn out to be a humorous *Max Payne* – though admittedly, *Total Overdose* lacks the polish and pizzazz of Rockstar's mega-hit. One thing's for sure though: if you're a fan of Rodriguez's movies, then this is certainly one game to be keeping in your sights. PCZ

Aah, it's starting to look like home already...

## Red factions...

# EARTH 2160

*Jamie Sefton* gets his ass to Mars to fight for the future of mankind. We're all doomed...

### THE DETAILS

**DEVELOPER** Reality Pump/Zuxxez
**PUBLISHER** Deep Silver
**WEBSITE** www.earth2160.de
**ETA** June

### WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Long-awaited sequel in the *Earth* RTS franchise
- Modular construction system with thousands of possible units
- Stunning graphics to rival first-person shooters
- Innovative virtual agents
- Several multiplayer modes and comprehensive level editor

### CV

**REALITY PUMP**

Established in 1995 in Krakow, Poland, Reality Pump has developed the *Earth* series, as well as *Frontline Attack: War Over Europe* and *KnightShift*. *Earth 2160* is being co-developed with the German owners of Reality Pump, Zuxxez Entertainment.

**PLACE: A STIFLINGLY** hot mini-cinema in the depths of London. Time: losing track of. Event: the premier showing of the new *Earth 2160* RTS. As I struggle to hear the incoherent mutterings of two pasty developers over the deafening orchestral soundtrack, stunning sci-fi images of beautifully desolate landscapes, intricate pulsating techno-cities and dozens of cyber-troopers storming into laser-battles flash across the large projection screen. Feeling a little disorientated, I am suddenly compelled – after being bombarded by this *Clockwork Orange*-esque display for 20 minutes – to turn around and politely ask the PR bod in the seat behind me, "What the f**k is going on?"

Sanity. The volume is lowered, and finally I have an opportunity to find out more about the latest instalment in the incredibly popular (mostly in Germany) strategy franchise, that began with *Earth 2140* in the mid-1990s and continued with an *Earth 2150* trilogy that shifted over two million copies. *Earth 2160* is actually an odd title, as the action takes place on Mars and other planets and moons in the solar system after our own planet is destroyed. Three earth factions – the female-only (no snickering at the back) Lunar Corporation, the android United Civilised States and the warlike Eurasian Dynasty – storm the red planet in a battle for supremacy, only in the process, they awaken another deadly force – aliens.

Yes, we've all heard this kind of gumph before, but after the initial shock of how god awful the presentation was, the fog of war started to lift and to my utter surprise, an incredibly impressive, futuristic



Terraforming can be used to make planets more habitable.

strategy epic was revealed. Enough of being talked at – time to skedaddle back to the office with the only copy of the game for an exclusive hands-on.

### COLLATERAL DAMAGE

Cripes. *Earth 2160* is immensely complex – the keyboard shortcuts alone would fill a tome heavier than the last *Harry Potter*. However this is apparently what the developer wants to unleash – a game packed with resource management, massive tech trees with unlimited research, a modular construction system,

single-player campaigns and multiplayer, graphics comparable with first-person shooters, and a comprehensive editor that allows you to make maps and your own machinima movies. This is an RTS with nowt taken out.

The main innovations are threefold: virtual agents, modular construction and free research. Virtual agents are similar to the heroes in *LOTR: Battle For Middle-earth*, but with more advanced features than just trainable skills, interpersonal relationships and an inventory. In simple terms, you can hire and fire 12 key agents,

The all-girl faction are basically space elves with psi-powers. And why not?


You can control individual units in first-person.

## CHANGING MOONS

### HOW TO CREATE YOUR OWN MAPS WITH EARTH 2160'S WORLD EDITOR

A major part of all the *Earth* games has been a map editor, but the latest is so comprehensive that you can even make your own sci-fi movies – it's already been used to make the latest *Earth 2160* trailer. First things first though: here are the five steps you need to build your own unique planet map from scratch.







**1** You begin your quest to become the new Slartibartfast (*Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy* reference alert) with a plain, ordinary map.

**2** Now you can generate and modify your own terrain, creating hills, valleys and dips that you can fill with any liquid.

**3** Next, add water, plants, rocks and a nice beach to sit and enjoy the 1000-degree sun rays and sulphuric fumes. Lovely.

**4** You can now add various units from the game and make the whole scene more interesting with fog. However it still looks like Earth, so…

**5** …a couple of clicks and you can instantly change the planet characteristics and colour scheme. Et voila – a planet fit for blowing up.

who take care of the stuff in the game that you can't be arsed with or have no knowledge of, such as increasing mining efficiency, conducting espionage and researching military tactics. The payoff is that they have a long memory – treat them like a *PC ZONE* freelancer (bully tactics, denial of food and water, ignoring personal requests, etc) and they won't work for you again, even going out of their way to stab you in the back by whoring themselves out cheaper to your enemies.

## "*Earth 2160* is immensely complex, but this is apparently what the developer wants…"

On to modular construction, which is basically the ability to create units from a vast collection of parts, enabling you to create custom buildings with different facilities, as well as mechs, vehicles and spaceships with unique purposes. Some buildings can reach six storeys in height – I cobbled together a medical research centre with a pharmacy, hospital, solar panels and research facility in a matter of minutes – and they can also take off and land somewhere else if your base is being threatened by hostiles. Army units can be built with different chassis, engines, armour, weapons and special items, so you can have a spider-bot armed with multiple lasers for frontline assaults, or an anti-grav tank with flame thrower and

reflective armour for base defences – it's entirely up to you.

Free research, meanwhile, is exactly that – the ability to work on as many different technologies as you like, as long as you have the resources of research centres, power and money. Tech trees I experimented with included upgrading an infantry unit to a hacker and then master hacker (complete with jetpack!) for breaking into enemy security systems. I also did a little weapons research for my Ares fighter craft, giving me access to three kinds of sniper rifle and a sonic beam for cutting through enemy forces like French soft cheese.

### TARGET RICH

The non-linear campaign lets you play as all four of the factions across Mars and 13 other worlds with wildly different environments,


Infantry can pick up and use weapons discarded by downed foes.

offering in excess of 150 hours gameplay. You certainly won't finish *Earth 2160* over a lazy weekend.

Some of the missions revolve around gathering the game's three resources (water, metal, silicon – all available in various physical states

including gas and liquid), but there are more gung-ho escapades such as escorting a dangerous prisoner on Titan and defending a research facility from a two-day onslaught on Io.

Drop-down menus help you negotiate the myriad of in-game options and you're always kept up to date with your goals on the mini-map, so you're never left confused about what to do next.

## LET THERE BE LIGHT

Explosions scatter fragments that can damage nearby units.

"OK, who said the volcano would shelter us?"

Master Chief takes the family out for a well-earned picnic.

**EARTH 2160'S** DYNAMIC LIGHTING CAN BE USED IN BATTLE TACTICS

Earth 2160 has gorgeous lighting effects – from explosions reflecting off buildings to alarm systems casting swathes of red light onto objects. Day/night cycles mean that you can watch the shadows stretch across the ground as the sun sets (or suns – you can have a Tattooine-style sky if you like) and dusk turns to night.

However, you can also use the lighting to give you a tactical advantage. Each vehicle has lights that you can manually turn on and off, so if you want to attempt a sneaky night raid, simply wait until it goes dark and assault an enemy's base with your lights off to approach completely hidden from sight.

Interestingly, alongside the usual drag-and-drop control mechanisms, the game also offers a real-time mouse-aim feature similar to the recent *Soldiers: Heroes of WWII*. While not a vital part of the gameplay, this device is intended to provide a more dynamic, hands-on feel to the battles. Elsewhere, units can be set to automatically engage nearby hostiles so you don't have to baby-sit every element of your forces, but you can also pause the game and give specific orders to individuals or groups of units if you prefer.

alloys, and infantry dressed in different uniforms and loaded up with individually-modelled weaponry.

Dynamic lighting means that shadows move as the day/night cycle changes (see panel, Let There Be Light), and there's particle effects aplenty with realistic fog, dust that kicks up and weather effects such as acid rain and thunderstorms. *Earth*

## "Take over any unit at any time and directly control it in first-person view"

Oh look, I'm getting too technical. *Earth 2160's* overriding wow-factor is the graphics – they're fantastic. The planets themselves have believable rock surfaces, shimmering pools of liquid, erupting geysers, moving skies and enough trees and fauna to give any botanist a chubby. As for the buildings and structures, they're incredibly detailed, organic affairs packed with steaming valves, moving panels, blinking lights, pumping pistons and fast-firing gun turrets. Not forgetting the army units, with shiny spaceships, mechs and vehicles constructed from dozens of colourful and strange metal

*2160* even has a fully-integrated physics system, demonstrated by a mission where you can fire lasers at large rocks to set off

an avalanche of debris that rolls down the hill to crush an advancing army.

The camera can be rotated in full 3D, with a cracking zoom function that can view the action from way up high, then move down to within inches of the surface. More impressive still is the ability to take over any unit at any time, directly control it and see the world from a first-person perspective – each type of unit even has a unique HUD! In one memorable sequence, I jumped into a tank at ground level, just in time to watch a marauding squad of *Terminator*-style robots and hulking mechs stomp past like a scene straight out of *Jurassic Park*. Developers Zuxxez and Reality Pump

have promised that even though 100 units on-screen is "not a problem", the actual total number of units possible is limited only by your PC's hardware.

### DROP IN, DROP OUT

Multiplayer is another area that's being stuffed with extra features, with up to eight players able to engage in battles using the four competing races. Better yet, *Earth 2160* will include the ability to save and restore matches, join battles that are already in progress and report on the action with video reporting via web streaming.

With a few months until completion, there are still a few issues to resolve, including the appalling voice acting, which sounds like an eastern European I-Speak-Your-Weight machine (proper Hollywood talent is apparently on the way). See also facial animation, spaceship battles and the occasional crash bug. Yet despite my deep scepticism caused by the earlier nightmare in Soho, *Earth 2160* may actually turn out to be one of the strategy highlights of the year. Videogame lesson number 87: never judge a game by its launch event. **PCZ**

The red army approaches...

"Next time, we take the high road!"

I know why, night after night,
you sit in front of your computer.
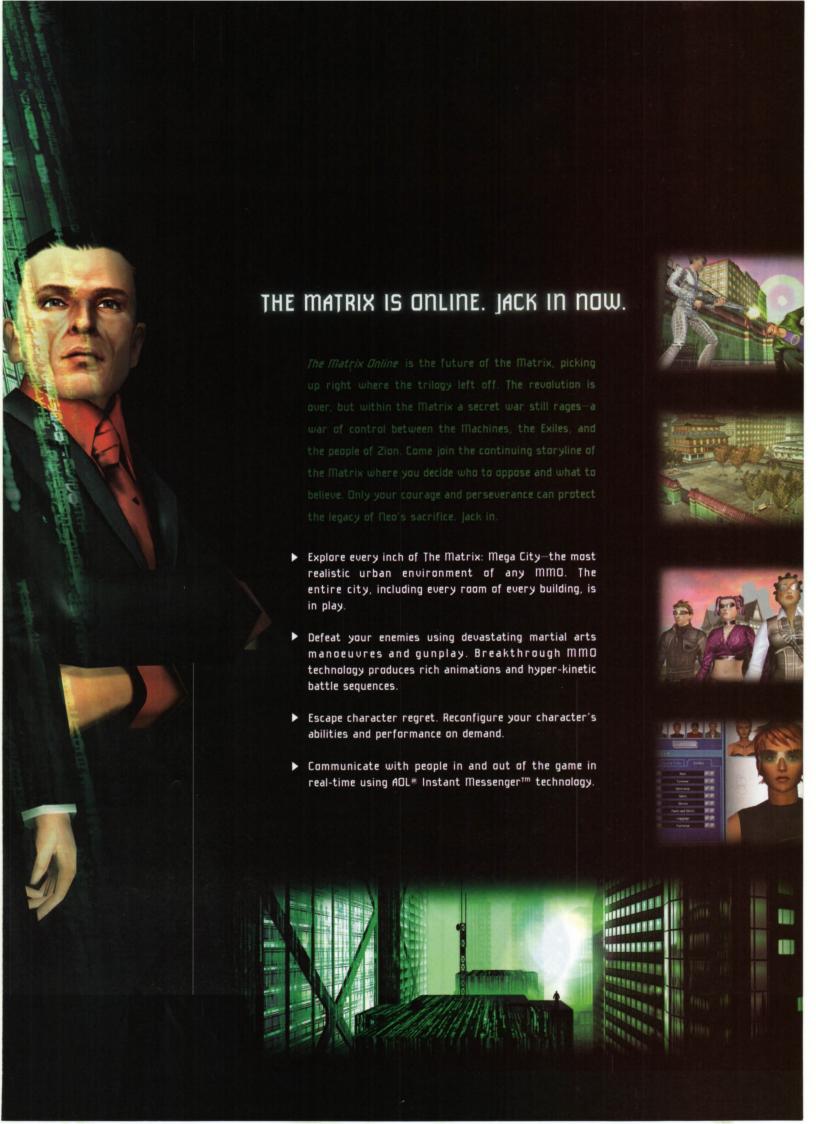
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MUSIC BY: DON DAVIS. PRODUCED BY: MONOLITH PRODUCTIONS. DIRECTED BY: THE WACHOWSKI BROTHERS.

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**■ REVIEWS EDITOR** JournoBot

▲ Welcome to the reviews section. I am JOURNOBOT and have been programmed to provide a humorous and informative introduction.

\*ANECDOTE SUBROUTINE\* Those French, eh? If they're not trying to pinch our 2012 Olympics or burn our cows, they're producing videogames for our consumption. This month we've got a couple of Gallic titles in my reviews section – you can check out the reviews for custom racer *TrackMania: Sunrise* and survival horror *Cold Fear* on pages 68 and 75 respectively.

\*CHECKING DATA\* We've also a brace of titles from the rather smashing Irrational Games – superhero RTS *Freedom Force Vs The 3rd Reich* (page 70) and this month's cover game, the non-lethal takedown FPS *SWAT 4* (page 62) – both available for you to playtest for yourself on this month's discs.

\*RINSE CYCLE\* Then there's the latest from stealthy psychopath Sam Fisher in *Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory* (page 76), Japanese-influenced role-playing console port *Sudeki* (page 80) and historical strategy game *Cossacks II: Napoleonic Wars* (page 84). 1010001 000101110111001001001111000.

\*ERROR\* However, there is one big disappointment – *Championship Manager 5* (page 82). The previous developer, Sports Interactive, recently jumped ship to produce the excellent *Football Manager 2005* for Sega. Unfortunately it seems that the reserve squad called off the bench hasn't the Premiership quality needed to prevent relegation to the lower leagues of footie management sims. However, JOURNOBOT reckons that it still has a 34.567 per cent chance of selling by the truckload.

\*BATTERY LOW\* That's it for this month readers of \*INSERT MAGAZINE NAME\*, so it only remains for me to bid you farewell. I hope you enjoy my mechanically superior reviews section.

\*LASERS FULLY FUNCTIONING\* Must destroy Earthlings! ▼



**SWAT 4 62**

**"Meet the gang 'cos the boys are here, the boys to pepper-spray you..."**

## 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).





**PCZONE CLASSIC**

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



**PCZONE ESSENTIAL**

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

# MEET THE TEAM

**QUESTIONS**

1. Currently playing?

2. Which non-lethal weapon takedown would you use?



**DAVE WOODS**

*Tiger Woods 2005, Pro Evo 4, World Of Warcraft*

The Open Door, Kneel Down and Push Over. Works every time and always raises a laugh



**JAMIE SEFTON**

*Cold Fear, Earth 2160, Counter-Strike: Source*

A particularly raw peeled onion. Better than tear gas

# DEFINITIVE REVIEWS

FREEDOM FORCE VS THE 3RD REICH **70**

SPLINTER CELL: CHAOS THEORY **76**

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 5 **82**

**PAUL PRESLEY**

SWAT 4, Freedom Force Vs The 3rd Reich, World Of Warcraft

A piece of fresh fruit and a pointed stick

**WILL PORTER**

TrackMania: Sunrise, Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory

Waiting for a very long time and letting old age do its work

**ANTHONY HOLDEN**

Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory, X-Kings

I find a few lashes of my razor-sharp wit usually does the trick

**MARTIN KORDA**

Counter-Strike: Source, Vampire: Bloodlines

Feeding Sefton peanuts. Although thinking about it, that could be lethal

**STEVE HILL**

Championship Manager 5

Flatulence

**RICHIE SHOEMAKER**

Far Cry, Cossacks II

Banana skins have always been a favourite of mine

# SWAT 4

■ £34.99 | Pub: VU Games | Dev: Irrational Games | ETA: April 8 | www.swat4.com
**REQUIRES** PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card **DESIRES** P4 2.4GHz, 1GB RAM and a 128MB DirectX 9.0-compatible 3D card

**A shady past, frequently up to no good and no stranger to life behind bars (albeit the alcoholic kind), *Paul Presley's* lot is not a happy one**

**I GUESS** we've all had our run-ins with the law – I certainly remember my own harrowing brush with the constabulary. I was on a primary school assignment to raise awareness of the police force in my area. We had to find a local bobby, as we called them, and get them to answer the questions on our worksheet. My first question was, "what shift do you work"? They gave their answer, "late turn" and to

my eternal horror I marked it down as "lake turn", thinking it was some sort of area-based reply. Naturally, the officer checked over my answers at the end of the inquisition and tut-tutted as he corrected my horrible, horrible faux pas. I left shame-faced and vowing never, ever to stray from the path of justice and righteousness again. I can't pass a prison to this day without thinking: "There but for the grace of god go I…"

So naturally, any computer game simulation in which I get to make amends for my early life of criminality, however virtually, is to be embraced to my bosom. *SWAT 4* not only lets me arrest criminals, but gives me the option of squirting condiments into their face beforehand. Let joy be unconfined!

### RAP SHEET

OK, it's a touch more complex than that. Regular readers will of

course need no introduction, having been treated to not one but two of my previous essays on the subject over the past two issues. But in case you've been in jail for the past three months (perhaps on a drink-driving charge, or disturbing the peace somehow), I'll quickly recap…

Criminals do something bad. Special armed response police turn up. They do a bit of sneaking about, looking behind doors and that. Then they take a
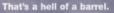
That's a hell of a barrel.

"No more illegal screenings of *The Passion Of The Christ* for you."

## "What really opens the game up is the amount of freedom you have"

deep breath and… "BANG! GO, GO, GO! GET DOWN! DROP THAT GUN! SHOOT HIM! AARGH! CHUCK A GRENADE! YOU'RE UNDER ARREST!"

Which pretty much sums it up I guess.

### POLICE FIVE

The idea is to follow proper SWAT procedures to the letter. You're faced with a series of increasingly tricky criminal situations to defuse – from nightclub riots to an armed robbery in a hi-tech jewellery store to anti-abortion fanatics bombing a research facility – and each time you have to lead a five-man team into action.

Where it gets good (from my perspective at least) is with the ability to issue tactical commands on-the-fly. Stack up on that door. Toss a flashbang in and clear the room. Arrest that man. Take a position on that side of the corridor. Red team cover me, Blue team assault.
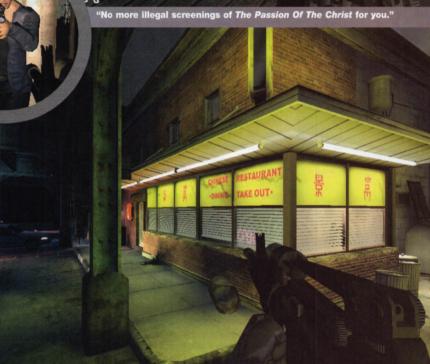
That sort of thing. It's all handled via an extremely comprehensive context-sensitive menu that, basically, works a treat. Right-click the mouse to bring it up, make your choice and watch as your well-drilled team of AI police bots carries out your every law-dispensing desire.

What really makes the game open up is the amount of freedom you have to work your way through each of the levels

and deal with the perps therein. Lethal ammo, non-lethal ammo, camera gadgets, door-breaching explosives, pepper spray, gas grenades, Taser stun guns – you have enough equipment to make 007's garden shed look like an old man's allotment hut, all of which have individual usefulness rather than all being mere varieties of the same thing.

### I SAY, GOOD SHOW

On to the AI, which is essentially the crux of the whole game and so warrants mention early on. In short, it's blisteringly good. So good sometimes that you barely have to do anything other than issue an order and let them get on with it. But where's the fun in that?

Getting a good takeaway is harder than ever.

## BRIEFING

Most levels have more than one way inside...

## EQUIPMENT

...but few have more than one way out.

Ahh, look at the ickle baby. Ignore the blood. Look at the baby. Only the baby.

Off-duty and a quick spot of ram-raiding to keep spirits up.

## WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Americans love their silly acronyms, but it isn't always easy to find the correct one for the job. Here are some of the names the founders of the SWAT unit rejected due to unsuitability...

**T**actical **W**eapons **A**gainst **T**errorists

**P**olice **R**apid **A**ttack **T**eam

**S**pecial **W**eapons, **E**quipment **A**nd **T**actics

**S**pecial **H**igh **I**ncident **T**actical **T**eam **Y**ellow

**C**ounter-**R**esponse **A**rmed **P**olice **P**atrol **O**fficers

**S**pecial **O**perations **A**nd **P**olice **Y**elling: **T**actical **I**ncident **T**eam (**W**eapons **A**nd **N**asty **K**it)

Of course, this wouldn't mean a thing if the enemy AI wasn't up to scratch, but incredibly this is just as convincing. Perhaps not STALKER convincing, but certainly good enough to react to your team of shouting policemen by either bottling it and surrendering, running away very fast in a mad panic or taking cover in an intelligent place and opening fire.

What also helps the game is that each time you play, SWAT 4 sneakily randomises the level elements, so that bad guys, hostages, civilians and so on are never quite in the same place each time. What this means of course is that you can never simply learn a level by trial and error, but actually have to rely on your wits to make progress. This is not only desirable in and of itself, but gives the single-player game a good degree of replayability.

### POLICE SQUAD

Which brings us neatly, I suppose, to the multiplayer game. Normally we'd shove in a caveat here about there not being any servers up at the time of review so we'll bring you a more in-depth look in a future Online Zone. However, since we've been playing both the co-op and VIP modes pretty extensively in the office since the review code turned up (and since there's only so many jokes about fly swatters to go around), it would be pretty remiss to ignore it.

Last month's preview detailed the modes available, especially the co-op game in which you can team up with up to four of your nearest and dearest to play through the single-player campaign. The only bugbear we had then was the issue of maintaining an acceptable chain of command, and unfortunately Irrational hasn't even attempted to resolve this.

Players are all still free to issue orders left, right and centre with gay abandon, meaning that unless you decide in advance who's the man and who are the man's little helpers, you're probably in for something of an uncoordinated time of it. Especially playing on the Internet where attention spans are so small you need atomic microscopes just to measure their ballpark figures and it only takes one whiny little Herbert to decide to take the law into his own hands and storm off all guns blazing.
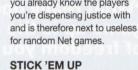
Of course, if you do find yourself in a well-structured team willing to play sensibly, then co-op SWAT 4 is one of the all-time highs in multiplayer gaming. Yes, it's that good. The sense of achievement that comes from conducting a well-oiled multi-team room takedown is second to none, although the game is crying out for some kind of integrated voice comms to properly coordinate things. Third-party programs such as TeamSpeak only work if you already know the players you're dispensing justice with and is therefore next to useless for random Net games.

### STICK 'EM UP

Away from co-op, there's still plenty of fun to be had. The aforementioned VIP game has enough novelty to make it interesting. Rather than a simple challenge to get from point A to point B, the Suspects (SWAT-speak for bad guys) have to capture and hold the VIP player for a full two minutes before

## MISSED OPPORTUNITY (O)

### EXPERIENCE IS ONE THING, BUT SOME PROPER TRAINING MIGHT HELP

One area of SWAT 4 that Irrational could really have gone to town on is the training aspect of the game. I know from experience (I watched a documentary on Discovery) that when a SWAT team isn't in the field shootin' bad guys, they spend their time brushing up their tactics and training with cool weapons and gadgets.

The in-game training, however, is bog-standard stuff – no more than an interactive version of the manual. You learn how to move. How to look up with the mouse. How to open a door.

What it doesn't even touch on are the relative merits of using a Colt M4A1 assault rifle in a situation over a GB36s. Or when you should use a gas grenade over a flashbang. Or anything useful that a SWAT officer might actually want to know.

What Irrational should have done is properly simulate the life of a SWAT team – mixing ongoing training sessions that teach you new techniques with actual emergency call-outs. Creating some sense of cohesion rather than just giving you a series of unconnected missions with little sense of progression.

Not quite the in-game manual we meant...

## WALKTHROUGH →

# SPEND A PENNY
Oh no! That pre-mission cocktail wasn't the wisest move and it's gone right through you. Nothing else for it, the bad guys will have to wait. Here's how you find the lav – SWAT style…

**1** Your team, ready as ever, gets organised and stacks up around the chosen door. Can't take any chances when armed villains are hiding in every nook and cranny.

**2** The Optiwand comes into its own here, allowing you to check the cleanliness of the place before you go in. No point unzipping only to find a giant floater bobbing in the bowl.

**3** Door's jammed and the bladder pressure's rising. Desperate times call for desperate measures, so a quick hit of C4 explosive should clear most blockages. Go! Go! Go!

**4** Ah, bugger, it's the ladies. "Sorry ma'am, important police business." Arrest her for obstructing an officer in the course of duty. "By the way, while you're down there love…"

> **"SWAT 4's co-op mode is one of the all-time highs in multiplayer gaming"**

"Jesus! I think I've wet myself."

being allowed to kill him. In the right hands (as is so often the case with Internet gaming) it can make for some pretty cool gunfights. Suspects charge about setting up impromptu defensive barriers around the capture point, SWAT members try to storm in from any and every direction, gas grenades and flashbangs fill the air and in the middle of it all the VIP player mills around making life difficult for everyone.

Will it replace *Counter-Strike: Source* as the online team game of choice? Of course it won't. Nothing will in the near future and it's an act of purest optimism to have posed the thought in the first place. But much as *Splinter Cell's* unique spin on multiplayer gaming has captured a small but loyal audience, so too should *SWAT 4's* interesting diversion from the standard deathmatch scenarios. Multiplayer gaming appears to be growing up at last, stretching its toes a little

"From now on, you'll be doing your diamond cutting at the County Jail."



Press Page Up to activate the sniper view
No Optiwand available to equip

AUTO
30 /30



"Yep, it's a P320 radiator. Always having problems with these."

and seeing what it can do. Hooray for that.

### ON A MISSION

Beyond multiplayer, longevity can also be found in the SWAT 4 mission editors. First is the in-game editor, which is little more than a tool for altering the parameters of the single-player campaign missions. Fill a previously deserted level with terrorists, reduce a teeming nest of bad guys to a single mano-a-mano pistol hunt – it's fairly comprehensive but of little long-term interest. The idea is to create scenarios to swap with your friends, but it's a safe bet that your friends will soon tire of playing the same level time and again but with a different combination of bad guys to shoot for no discernable reward.

What's of more interest is the full SWAT 4 editing tool (essentially a modified version of the UnrealEd tool). Although hideously complex to look at – and even scarier to actually try and use – the inclusion of the tool for those with a masters degree in working out the blisteringly unfathomable goes to show that Irrational is four-square behind supporting the modding community. With any luck, it won't take long until we start to see a wealth of extra maps and missions, in much the same way we did with SWAT 3 all those years back.

### BOBBIES ON THE BEAT

One other thing that you may remember from the SWAT 3 special editions was that the multiplayer side of the game was only added later on due to overwhelming pressure from fans. Aside from creating maps, one thing the small but loyal SWAT community might want to campaign for this time round is an enhancement in the physics engine being used.

Perhaps the only major fly in the ointment for SWAT 4 (Fly? SWAT? Told you those jokes were limited) is the rather static nature of the game world. In this modern age of Half-Life 2 and Havok physics and all that, SWAT 4 can feel rather old-school – no doubt a hangover from the protracted development period. Aside from doors, certain windows and the occasional beer bottle, not very much in the world of SWAT 4's urban rescues is interactive. It doesn't



"Remember: 3... 2... 1... Surprise!"

## TO SERVE AND PROTECT

### OTHER SPECIALIST POLICE UNITS DESERVING OF GAMING IMMORTALITY

**The Keystone Kops –** Top wobbly-car action with the wackiest cops in the West. Think GTA but with wicked pie thieves and moustachioed villains rather than crack dens and pimps.



**Scotland Yard, Fine Arts & Antiques Division 2005 –** When the criminal mastermind Lovejoy is on the loose, only one team of battle-hardened knick-knack experts can stop him.
**Freeman, Hardy & Willis: Store Detective! –** Hi-tech stealth action in the top gentlemen's footwear store. As a gang of international shoe thieves attempts to steal the latest brands, it's up to a lone night watchman to foil them.
**The Police –** Sting and co. tackle crimes against music in an authentic 1980s setting.
**The Fashion Police –** "STOP! Those shoes don't go with those pants!" Fighting the evil threats of flared pants, boring hair and plaid jackets with the fab five. (OK, that's enough gags about police... – Ed.)

FALL IN

John forgets his keys, again.



"This caravan holiday was a terrible idea, sarge."

detract too much from the overall enjoyment of the game, but it will serve to date things very quickly. You can't help but wonder at just how much more compelling a lot of the gunplay would have been had chairs and tables been usable as impromptu cover and so on.

As it is, *SWAT 4* is definitely from the previous generation of FPS engines and while still perfectly playable, the likes of *Half-Life 2*, *F.E.A.R.*, *Brothers In Arms*, even *Doom 3* are all showing what can be done when you push the technical side of the genre to new limits. Consequently, you can come away from *SWAT 4*

thinking it's a little short in the technical trousers.

## LOCK 'EM UP

Mind you, Irrational has certainly done its best to make the most of things, and the mission design generally achieves an impressive sense of atmosphere and tension. Certain levels, such as the Fairfax Residence, in which a psycho loner has taken to kidnapping young girls and forcing them to 'perform' for his cameras, are particularly unsettling. This is especially true as you creep past ghostly face masks, with a whimpering girl lying on a rancid mattress in front of a video camera and walls full of newspaper clippings

about kidnapped children. Even more creepy since you've already had to subdue his ageing mother who continually protests the innocence of her "little boy". Sometimes it's all a little too close to home, especially with news reports about paedophiles cropping up almost every day on TV nowadays. Even your AI mates can be heard muttering things like "Sick" and "Man, this is disgusting" as you proceed through the level.

In some ways it's brave of Irrational and VU to include something like this rather than sticking with 'safe' subjects such as robbers, terror bombers and cultists. The fact that it's handled with the appropriate gravitas and not trivialised in the slightest almost demands that everyone should play it, and certainly puts the unintentional comedy in using non-lethal devices on civilians into sharp relief.

## BOOK 'EM

Sorry, this has all got rather serious and weighty hasn't it? (*Try another fly swatter joke – Ed.*) No time. Instead I should probably just sum things up by saying that Irrational has done an absolutely bang-up job in saving the *SWAT* series from what was looking like certain death in its prior



Bloody builders. Jail's too good for 'em.

*Urban Justice* incarnation. All it needs now is a more advanced engine to power a sequel, a more involving sense of training and life in a pair of *SWAT* shoes (see 'Missed Opportunity', p64). That, and a willingness to continue dealing with the dark underbelly of real world criminality without pulling any punches. 

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## KILLING ME SOFTLY

**SWAT 4 HAS AN IMPRESSIVE ARSENAL OF NON-LETHAL WEAPONS FOR YOU TO EXPERIMENT WITH, BUT WHAT ABOUT SOME OF THE MORE EXOTIC DEVICES THE GAME HAS OVERLOOKED?**
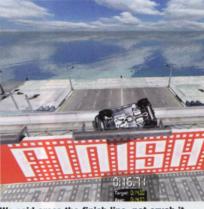
**The Porno Cannon** – Quite simply a high velocity nudie mag delivery device, the Porno Cannon delivers the latest in Scandinavian hardcore to the target's location, allowing your team to prepare an ambush once they inevitably "just nip out to the toilet for a minute, be right back".
**The Chinese Burn** – A close-quarters weapon, the CB is a swift and effective method for disarming an unsuspecting perp, best used in combination with a fellow officer administering an "atomic wedgie."
**The P-67 Norton** – In times of panic, the "Norton" is the ideal weapon for pacifying your foe.

At the push of a button, a torrent of vaguely comic references to anal sex and camp mincing is unleashed from a shiny-suited robotic host, quickly numbing the neural centres of anyone within a 50-foot radius.
**A Vague Sense Of Creeping Unease** – Simply have a small, dark-haired girl stare from the shadows of a window directly at the back of a suspect, disappearing from view should they turn round. Repeated use should ensure paranoia, mounting terror and eventual surrender once they can no longer stand the eyes, the eyes, oh god the eyes…

We said *cross* the finish line, not crush it.

No jostling for position here – all the cars you race are merely ghosts acting as time markers.

# TRACKMANIA: SUNRISE

**PCZONE Z ESSENTIAL**

■ £29.99 | Pub: Digital Jesters | Dev: Nadeo
ETA: April 8 | www.trackmaniagame.com

**REQUIRES** PIII 500GHz, 128MB RAM and a 16MB 3D card **DESIRES** P4 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

**Will Porter** hasn't blinked in an hour, it can only be one game…

## AS THE WORLD'S

leading *TrackMania* apologist, you'd imagine that I'd be pretty happy with *TrackMania: Sunrise*. And you'd be right, as it's had a facelift like no other in recorded history. Put simply, it's gorgeous – drop-dead gorgeous. All the low-budget hallmarks of the first game that my colleagues mocked the last time round have been ironed out – even the trademark 'dada-dada-DADA-DAARGH!' music has been erased in favour of catchy pop tunes – even if they admittedly wear pretty thin after a while.

So what's here? Well, there's Race mode (chasing ghost cars representing the times you have to beat) and the ace Puzzle mode (in which you use a comprehensive track editor to map out a navigable course using a limited number of pseudo-scalextric pieces). There's also Platform mode (in which you scale mountains and make jumps that span light-years) and Crazy mode (which does as it says on the tin.)

Where big name licences dribble out a few extra features every year, always holding a few back for the next annual cash-cow, Nadeo has put in every conceivable option known to man. Track editors, a movie facility, car-painting, image-importing and an amazing P2P function that lets you share your creations with the world.

### FAN-TASTIC!

This is perhaps the most community-minded game ever, and the fact that you can tap a button within the game and play a fan-designed game of *TrackMania* with rethought textures, tunes, car models and personalised advertising hoardings is super-funky. All this and people can laugh at your poorly designed hot-rod to boot.

What with all this fan-fellation though, the casual player can't help but wonder if Nadeo has forgotten that not everyone is as skilled as the baying horde of TrackManiacs. I say this because some of the levels are merciless, and you live in perpetual fear of mid-air collisions with lamp-posts or coming off a track that's impossible to get back on to. Meanwhile, unless you play on easy, some of the time-limits have your finger permanently hovering over the restart key.

The first game was addictive in that difficulty and reward were well balanced – but here the difficulty means that some tricky courses veer into irritation.

As before, the lack of 'real' racing will deter many, but this remains a great game. *Sunrise* isn't the shift into the mainstream that it should have been – it's too unforgiving for that – but it will certainly do wonders for the online fraternity and (who knows) maybe even give them a few punters who aren't French. **PCZ**

## INPERSPECTIVE

**TRACKMANIA**
Reviewed Issue 139, Score 79%
Charming it remains, but the days of clunky old *TrackMania* are over.
**NFS: UNDERGROUND 2**
Reviewed Issue 150, Score 84%
If you like your racing more traditional, and with bling, try *NFS*.

*Sunrise* takes gravity with a grain of salt.

The lack of collisions may deter some.

### PCZONE VERDICT

✔ Same *TrackMania* charm
✔ Prettier, faster and more varied
✔ Mind-blowing community spirit
✘ Very unforgiving
✘ Not as mainstream as it looks

# 83

**Not shareware anymore**

# IMPERIAL GLORY

"THE MOST DANGEROUS MOMENT COMES WITH VICTORY"
– NAPOLEON BONAPARTE –

www.imperialglory.com

The Green Genie copes with an upset stomach.

# FREEDOM FORCE VS THE 3RD REICH

■ £29.99 | Pub: Digital Jesters | Dev: Irrational Games | ETA: April 15 | www.freedomforcegame.com

**REQUIRES** PIII 733, 128MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card **DESIRES** P4 1.8GHz, 512MB and a 64MB 3D card

## For freedom! For justice! For about £5.50 and a bed for the night. *Paul Presley's* heroic instincts are sharp as ever

**WHAT'S** the difference between Andres Serrano and Oliver Reed? One's an artist who works with piss, the other's a piss... You get the idea. That's the trouble with comedy you see, it's all about context. And timing. Timing and context. And delivery. But mostly timing and

context. Reputation plays a part. As does taste. Audience judgement can help and you shouldn't underestimate the value of shock. But eight out of ten comedians, when queried for the sake of this poll, agreed that for the most part context and timing were the most important ingredients for successful gag execution.

For instance. Do you know who Andres Serrano is? A quick Googling will enlighten (not for the easily offended though), but without some sort of knowledge of the infamous "Piss Christ" the above jokelet most likely falls as flat as a pancake trodden on by a passing elephant parade.

And that's the main issue surrounding whether you'll get any joy, pleasure and fulfilment from playing *Freedom Force Vs The 3rd Reich*. Namely, just how well do you know and cherish

American super-hero comic books of the '50s and '60s?

Fans of the original *Freedom Force* will be right at home with this sequel as, on the face of it, nothing's changed. Slightly better graphics, as you'd expect, and a more polished, robust presentational style. But thematically we're ploughing a very similar furrow here, with all the exaggerated parody of old school comic book heroes intact as you work through a time-travelling plot involving communists, Nazis, Romans, aliens and just about everything else you can think of.

### THANKS ANTS, THANTS
We say parody, but here's the nub of why *Freedom Force* doesn't quite live up to the reputation it's attempting to build. It's something we here at *PC ZONE* call the *Look Around*

Nazis. We hate those guys.

*You* effect. You see, for all the loving homage and painstakingly faithful recreation of the period material, we can't quite agree on whether or not the TV programme is, you know, funny.

Sure the voice-acting is over the top (communist soldiers screaming, "I fall for the people!"

as they succumb brought a wry smile to the face), and the design of the various heroes and villains shows a lot of imagination, especially with the 'Origins' cut-scenes. But it's all played very straight, with none of the knowing comic winks or ironic touches that separate an

Destroy buildings for fun. Yippee!

## MISSED OPPORTUNITY

### OTHER THAN A DECENT CAMERA, YOU MEAN?

The odd thing about *FFVT3R's* biggest missed opportunity is that it stems from the developer's own statements about its plans for this sequel. Back in 2002, Irrational went on record claiming that should a *Freedom Force 2* arise, it would most likely be set in a more recent era, representing a more mature comic book style.

Unfortunately this idea appears to have been completely shelved, as what we have here is an identical love-it-or-hate-it style as the first game, ignoring all notions of what a sequel should really attempt to do – provide a different experience. What I'd like to have seen is a transition from the 'Jeepers' '60s style to a more arch and knowing '70s or '80s feel. You know, progression.


Would a more modern graphical style have been better?

incidentally, a young Arabic woman who finds escape from a stereotyped 'mad mullah' father by being transformed into a kooky, fun-loving 'westernised' girl. Culturally offensive? Contextually acceptable? You tell me.

The arguments about this sort of thing could fill volumes I suspect, and while this hasn't affected the score, I think it's worth making the point. In the end, it's up to you whether you're OK with it or not.

### LASER EXPLOSION

Let's move to slightly safer ground and talk about game mechanics. And in this area, *FFVT3R* has a lot to offer. As in the first game, it's defined by semi-3D *Dungeon Siege*-style RPG action, with plenty of variety in the heroes, their powers and your ability to utilise them in the field.
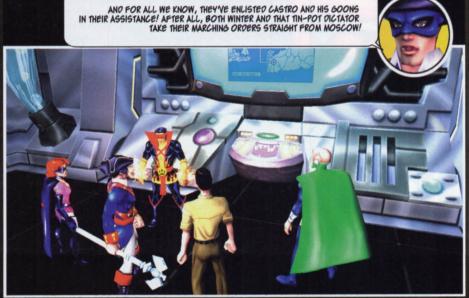
The option to pause (or slow right down) the action to think strategically about your team's actions adds a dimension to the game that's often lacking in RPGs of this type, and the ability to train up your characters as you progress allows for a lot of customisation. You can even create your own heroes, although it's not on a par with something like *City Of Heroes*.

The storyline is in keeping with the period setting – missions all forming chapters of different comic book "issues", and you really can't fault the presentation of the game. The way the issue "covers" (loading screens) sum up everything you really need to know is very cleverly handled, as is the interaction between your team

members – which can vary depending on which four members of the Freedom Force roster you take into action each time.

### SUPERFRIENDS

In fact, the only quibble I can find with the actual gameplay is with the camera controls, which are irritating beyond belief. You never quite have the level of control over your view that you'd like. You either can't see far enough or you're losing track of which hero is where and what they're doing. The pause function alleviates this and gives you time to marshal your thoughts, and providing you can live with it (and to be fair, you probably can) there's much enjoyment to be had from the actual game of *Freedom Force Vs The 3rd Reich*.

entertaining parody from a straight-out simulation.

So here we have to go back to whether you 'get' the source material or not. I'm hazarding a guess that the majority of gamers (in this country at least) are more attuned with the more

non-Americans in this game leave a vaguely unsettling taste in the mouth (especially the Middle-Eastern and Asian characters), although I certainly wouldn't go as far as using the R word. It does raise the question of whether outdated attitudes

## "For all the loving homage, we can't quite agree on whether or not it's actually funny"

modern, realistic, dare I say darker take on the world of superheroes. I certainly am, although disapproving muttering and scowling looks coming from the Will Porter camp opposite my desk would suggest that not everyone is left as cold by all this old-school stuff as I am.

Though obviously remaining faithful to the material of the time, some of the portrayals of

are acceptable when used in context though. In passive entertainment you can get away with this, but when you're actively taking part in things, is it right to simply assume that cultural differences such as arranged marriages are "bad", just because they're not in keeping with '50s American values? This forms the back-story for one of the main heroes,


AND FOR ALL WE KNOW, THEY'VE ENLISTED CASTRO AND HIS GOONS IN THEIR ASSISTANCE! AFTER ALL, BOTH WINTER AND THAT TIN-POT DICTATOR TAKE THEIR MARCHING ORDERS STRAIGHT FROM MOSCOW!

Freedom Force admire Minute Man's smart new home cinema set-up.

The Fetish Ball was in full swing.

Romans vs Nazis – the showdown everyone wants to see.

Ka-Blam! *FFVT3R* is packed with comic book exclamations.

Elsewhere, the game bristles with neat touches and satisfying mechanics – many of them held over from the original game but no less enjoyable for it. Being able to uproot lamp-posts and lift cars and use them as clubs (if you're a big strong hero type that is – an alternative method is to 'splode them with a fireball and fill anyone standing nearby with painful debris) raises the bar for action RPGs once more and will no doubt pave the way for interactive scenery to become the *de facto* standard for the genre from now on.

Multiplayer options have an intriguing spin, with the option to custom-build a multiplayer gametype of your choosing, *Halo*-style. It's called Story Mode, but it's effectively just customisable multiplayer combat. We're not talking any kind of co-op style campaign missions or anything, but it probably won't take the modding community long to handle that side of things.

### CLICHÉ TIME

Ultimately, it all comes down to whether you think your interest in the subject matter is sufficiently high to keep you plugging away to the end. Without the safety net of parody to fall back on, this really is one of the few times when saying you have to be a fan of this sort of thing to appreciate it really counts in a modern game review. I think perhaps I can now retire happy. **PCZ**

**PCZONE VERDICT**

✔ An engaging charm
✔ Fun heroes and powers and good combat system
✔ Presentation style works well
✘ Not as funny or clever as it thinks it is
✘ Camera controls are awful

# 81

**Spandex-wearing Marmite**

Ice cool big baddie Nuclear Winter gets the big freeze.

# DARK AGE OF CAMELOT

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**You don't get this on the Isle Of Wight ferry...**

# COLD FEAR

■ £29.99 | Pub: Ubisoft | Dev: Darkworks | ETA: April
www.coldfeargame.com

**REQUIRES** PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card
**DESIRES** PIII 2GHz and a strong stomach

### Jamie Sefton kills some zombies and solves some puzzles. On a boat...

*Resident Evil* on a boat. Except not as good.

**Focus on the white lights and maybe you won't chunder.**

**YOU'D EXPECT** the creator of *Alone In The Dark: The New Nightmare* to present something that'll send shivers down your spine and brown stuff down your legs. *Cold Fear* does have some genuine scares, but like a dumb teenager in a horror flick wandering down into a dark cellar, you often find yourself cursing the game for its stupidity.

Darkworks' atmospheric action-adventure begins on board a creepy Russian whaling ship caught in a terrible thunderstorm. Your character is Tom Hansen, a US Coast Guard in the wrong place at the wrong time, who's been sent to investigate the sudden loss of radio contact.

First, let's give praise where it's due: the way that the ship constantly rocks from side-to-side, while huge waves lash the

sides and torrential rain hurls down onto the decks is truly excellent. The last game I saw such an impressive ship-at-sea effect was in *Metal Gear Solid 2*, but this is infinitely better – though after a while it does have you almost hurling your guts over the keyboard. Maybe that's a plus point for realism – the world's first seasickness sim?

### SHIP'S MESS
As you make your way around the ghost ship, you run into the panicky and hostile Russian crew, and witness scenes of grisly dismembered bodies, blood-spattered walls and scattered limbs. Why? Well, you soon meet the real stars of the horror show: a collection of mutated humanoids that lurch and stagger towards you armed

with machetes and other weapons, as well as some rather *Alien*-like face huggers and pus-dripping nasties.

It's all competently handled, and the gore really lets fly when you unleash the shotgun, flame-thrower, machine gun and other weapons, with headshots exploding bits of brain and crimson goo occasionally splashing the screen with realistic drips. There are some clever twists, such as being able to lure the monsters to the edge of the ship so they're washed overboard, and a harpoon gun that emits a green gas that temporarily has any nearby zombies whirling in undead confusion.

It's a great disappointment then, that *Cold Fear* is doomed to mediocrity by several

annoying elements, the main one being the fiddly control system. This has you controlling Tom with the W, A, S and D keys in third-person, then switching to over-the-shoulder direct-aiming by right-clicking the mouse – frustrating and unintuitive when you're battling several enemies from multiple directions.

### NO SAVING GRACE
Then there are the random save points, which just 'improvise' and seem to happen when they want to – get killed before you encounter one and it's back to the last save point. Unforgiveable. Plus there's the clunky way you interact with objects and items for puzzle-solving, ammo-collecting etc, unsubtly indicated by the word 'Interaction' lighting up in the corner of the screen. Rubbish.

*Cold Fear* has a forbidding atmosphere (beginning on a ship and moving to an oil rig), violent

blood-letting and superb environmental effects. However, we've seen the same kind of lame puzzles (sodding keycards anyone?) and storylines a billion times before in games such as *The Thing, From Dusk Till Dawn* etc, etc, and the survival horror experience has recently been done to perfection in *Resident Evil 4* on the GameCube. Still, any port in a storm, as they say... **PCZ**

**That's one way of saving the whales.**

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### INPERSPECTIVE

**HALF-LIFE 2**
**Reviewed Issue 148, Score 97%**
The Ravensholm section is among the best survival horror moments in videogame history. Essential.

**THE SUFFERING**
**Reviewed Issue 145, Score 80%**
Although it's a console port, this tense, violent third-person action game set in a decaying prison is disturbingly good.

---

### PCZONE VERDICT

✔ Great ship-in-a-storm environmental effects
✔ Gory head-shots
✘ Awkward control system
✘ Random save points
✘ Generic gameplay

# 67

**Lost at sea**

*Chaos Theory* improves on the original in every way, without diverging too far from the winning formula.

"SIGAS GRENADER 19 / 19 2"

# SPLINTER CELL:
## CHAOS THEORY

■ £34.99 | Pub: Ubisoft | Dev: Ubisoft | ETA: April 1 | www.splintercell.com

**REQUIRES** P4 1.4GHz, 512MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card (Win2k/XP only)
**DESIRES** P4 2GHz, a 128MB 3D card and a broadband Internet connection

*PC ZONE Z CLASSIC*

"Maybe I should have packed that extra 20ft of rope..."

**After watching him play this, we're not letting *Anthony Holden* anywhere *near* the knife drawer for at least six weeks...**

**AS A MAN** who has frittered away the better part of his youth on sleep and videogames, I feel comfortable saying you have to keep pushing yourself if you want to stay at the top. It's not an easy maxim to live by, and not many can genuinely claim to pull it off – me, maybe Hasselhoff, and now, I think I can happily say, the team behind *Splinter Cell*, here in its third PC iteration.

With every new episode, Ubisoft's flagship has pushed the boundaries, hard. The first set a new standard for interactivity, gadgetry and sheer cinematic joy; the second pioneered an unimaginably clever new multiplayer paradigm. And with *Chaos Theory* we find the most complete picture yet.

The Spies v. Mercs multiplayer is back, retooled and focused to make it more accessible and coherent. Next to that, there's another completely new and unprecedented stealth game type in the co-operative mode, essentially a game within a game offering four custom-built missions for two. It's a slight

## INPERSPECTIVE

**THIEF: DEADLY SHADOWS**
Reviewed Issue 144, Score 84%
The recent *Thief* sequel has its flaws, but it's still a hugely tense amd atmospheric affair, and an excellent medieval counterpoint to the macho heroics of Sam Fisher.

**NO ONE LIVES FOREVER 2**
Reviewed Issue 122, Score 93%
If the unrelenting stealth of *Splinter Cell* is too much for you, this ace shooter marries pre-school stealth dynamics with great action gunplay.

## GEEK WAR

### WHEN TECHNO-BABBLE STRIKES

As much as we love *Splinter Cell*, we can't help but laugh at its constant use of jargon and increasingly contrived high-tech scenarios. It's as though there's someone in the background (probably Tom Clancy) saying, "Remember, tomorrow's wars will be fought over *information*, and the battleground will be *computers*..." It's like, can't I just assassinate some bad guys for a change? "No! You must hack into a mainframe and hunt for the digital footprint of an IW kernel and blah blah blah blah blah..."

**SC PISTOL**
**20 / 20**

**SC-20K SHOTGUN**
**30 / 60    7 + 7**

Lifts are for pussies...

addition, but most definitely a welcome one. And of course, there's the main event: the lengthy new solo outing. It's the total stealth package for the modern man.

What's more, it's a game to silence the critics. The team has clearly studied the reviews and web forums meticulously, as pretty much every grievance ever expressed by fans has been addressed. You thought the first one was too linear? Not this time pal – you'll be doing more exploring than an over-zealous customs official. You thought the AI was weak? Quite the opposite, bub – it's now among the most sophisticated and responsive in the business, leaving *Thief 3* desperately

rubbing sticks together in the Dark Ages.

Even the most anal criticisms we made in our review two years ago have been answered – the characters have more depth and humour to them, the gadgets are less redundant – you can even throw people off cliffs and boats. Whichever way you turn the thing, it's got it covered. Of course, that doesn't mean it's perfect, but it is tuned better than an F1 motor on race day.

**TO THE LIGHTHOUSE**
To bring you quickly up to speed, the game once again takes place in the very near future. There's a nightmare flashpoint brewing in the Far East, as North Korea and China start ganging up on

## "With versus, co-op and solo modes, it's the total stealth package for the modern man"

You can now switch between two or more sticky cams at will.

Japan, and America is forced to stick its oar in to prevent World War III. On the other side of the world, Sam Fisher is in Peru trying to rescue an information specialist from some half-arsed freedom fighters, and wouldn't you know it, the two events turn out to be intertwined. Cue a series of globe-hopping missions that take in New York, Hokkaido, North Korea, Seoul and a cargo ship somewhere in the Pacific.

At first, veterans may think little has changed, but delve deeper and you soon discover a world of delightful little tweaks (which sounds a lot ruder than was intended). The gadgets, for example, have been comprehensively tidied up. Useless things like the chemical flares have gone. The two different types of sticky spy cameras have been combined. The pistol now comes with an OCP device that can temporarily knock out lights and other electronic devices. The attachments for the SC-20k modular rifle now make more sense, forcing you to choose between the new shotgun add-on, a sniper scope and the simple, stabilising fore-grip.

The biggest addition however, is the combat knife, which is more fun than it has any right to be. The quick, up-close kills add a (worryingly) gratifying new dimension to the game, and now provide some of its best moments. You honestly won't care about damaging your
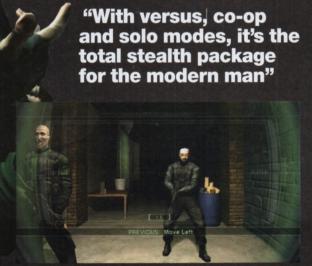
## STAND BY ME

### TWO'S COMPANY IN THE NEW CO-OP GAME

While offering up just four custom missions, *Chaos Theory*'s two-player co-op mode is an impressive and often hilarious addition to the series. It basically redesigns the solo gameplay for two, adding a handful of new moves and gadgets and rejigging the level design to suit. The new actions include human ladder, wall boost and the extraordinary Tomoe Nage, which allows you to launch your partner across a gap or *at* an NPC. It's all great fun, but perhaps the biggest changes arise simply from having two people in a level. Now, when you come to a room full of guards, you have all sorts of new possibilities: assaulting from two different directions, luring the enemy into an ambush, causing a diversion for your partner... Overall, it's a resounding success – and another great multiplayer coup for Ubi.

The four-player versus mode is far more approachable than in *Pandora Tomorrow*.

"Just say it, man, my semaphore's not what it used to be."

"Hmm. Did I remember to pay the Council Tax?"

In Checkers as in life, Sam likes to remain unpredictable...

## SECOND OPINION

**PAUL PRESLEY**

Despite rumours to the contrary I've always rather enjoyed the adventures of Samuel Fishmonger. OK, I've often bemoaned the fact that the games don't always offer you the acrobatic freedom they appear to (you can only hang from predetermined ledges and pipes, rather than from any you can see, for instance) and *Chaos Theory* doesn't really address this. Xbox-memory limitations probably – oh for a PC-led development. That said, the stories have always been engrossing and this is the best yet, with superb scripting and a real drive to keep you playing. Multiplayer is a brilliant laugh too, and let's hope it really takes off this time. It deserves to.

stealth rating once you've got a taste for the knife-kill – my favourite move in the game is now the 'jump and barrel roll into knife in guts of incredulous bad guy' (though the 'hanging inverted neck snap' comes a close second).

### SPLITSVILLE

The athletic moves too have been strengthened – implausible features such as the invisible pirouette from *Pandora Tomorrow* and the awkward, reverse shooting through doorways have been ditched, replaced by a new function that allows you to shift your weight to shoot around corners.

The alarm system has also been overhauled. Instead of the clunky 'three strikes and you're out' routine, tripping alarms now simply raises the level of enemy responsiveness, and eventually causes them to don body armour and helmets. And where the game used to cheat, bodies now have to actually be discovered by a patrolling guard before an alarm is raised.

I could keep going. The way noise is handled is vastly improved (there's now a separate sound meter), the way you hack into security systems is better, even the ways you can open a door (such as bashing them in) are better. The whole mechanism of the game has been tightened up and streamlined across the board – and it was none too shabby in the first place.

Despite this, there are one or two problems. There are less visible flaws and quirks, sure, but the experience as a whole is not as well orchestrated or

sustained as the original. There are definite low points in a game that should have none, and I suspect this is partly down to the new non-linear approach to level design. This is a vigorous step forward in some ways, adding a far greater sense of freedom and adventure to proceedings, but it also seems to have broken the perfectly modulated tempo of the original game, the precise sense of rhythm and variety. Worse still, there's at least one level – in which you break into the offices of a paramilitary organisation and hack into their networks – which is just plain dull.

### STRIKE A LIGHT

Luckily, the individual encounters are so improved as to make such concerns fairly negligible. Enemies are smarter, more responsive, they have more realistic eyesight, they light torches and flares to see into

dark areas, they notice when anything in the environment changes. (Some of them are even pretty funny.) In a game like this, it's the AI that often makes the difference between compelling and merely diverting, and while there are always going to be a few blind spots for the sake of playability, *Chaos Theory* does things better than any other stealth title on the market right now.

The presentation is also seriously top-drawer. You can see the standard of the graphics with your own eyes, but what you can't see is the triple-A voice-acting and the dirty, groove-laden soundtrack delivered by Amon Tobin.
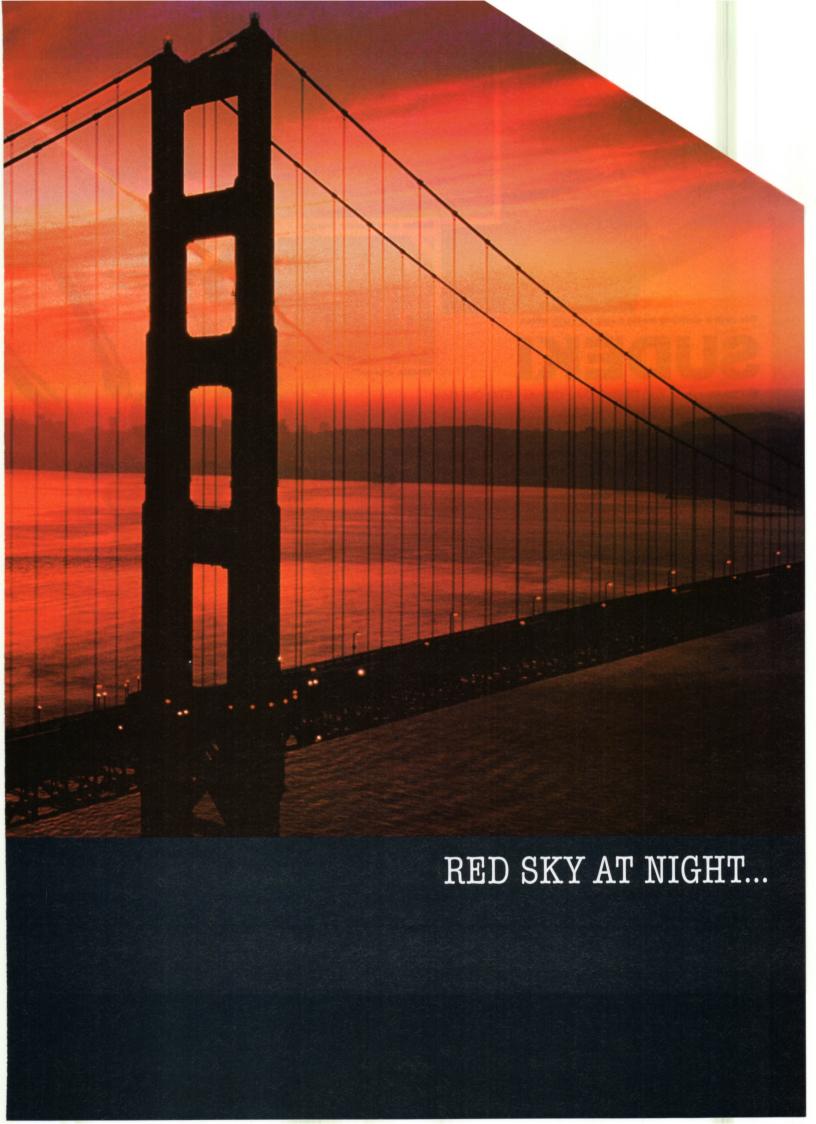
Indeed, whichever way you look at it *Chaos Theory* is a superior piece of work. It's a videogame blockbuster, but one

crafted with a love and care rarely afforded anything in this cynical age. Despite any small reservations I have about the consistency of the single-player campaign, it still ranks among the most polished and exciting games on the market – stealth or no. If you enjoy cutting-edge entertainment, you should definitely take note. **PCZ**

## PCZONE VERDICT

✓ Technically flawless and beautiful
✓ Non-linear levels
✓ Impressive AI
✓ Brilliant multiplayer and co-operative modes
✗ Enjoyment not as sustained or well modulated as first game
✗ Some weak levels

# 91

**Comprehensively brilliant**

RED SKY AT NIGHT...

Battles soon become tiresome.

This spell is obviously having a very enjoyable effect.

Good-looking for a console port.

"Hoopla, anyone?"

# SUDEKI

■ £29.99 | Pub: Zoo Digital | Dev: Climax | ETA: Out Now
**www.zoodigitalpublishing.com**

REQUIRES PIII 1.5GHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card DESIRES P4 2GHz, 512MB RAM and a 128MB 3D card

### *Jamie Sefton* does battle with ancient gods – and his PC…

"THAT'S Tom Baker!" As first impressions go, role-playing game *Sudeki* makes one of the best, with the ex-*Doctor Who* and *Little Britain* voiceover artist lending his tones to a beautifully-animated shadow puppet intro sequence. However, an hour later and my poor *ZONE* colleagues are wincing as I pummel the keyboard in frustration. Why the sudden descent into uncontrolled anger? Let me calm down and I'll tell you…

Although it sounds Japanese, *Sudeki* was in fact developed in the UK by Climax (currently creating *Moto GP 3: Ultimate Racing Technology*), and first released on Xbox last summer. Set in a world torn into light and dark by two warring sibling gods, *Sudeki* features four distinct heroes attempting to save the planet from oblivion: swordmaster hunk Tal, magical staff-wielding saucepot Ailish, shape-shifting woman/beast Buki and potty scientist inventor Elco. You begin your quest as Tal, and as you progress through

the towns, villages, forests and dungeons, you meet the other characters, who provide extra skills, weapon attacks and magic to help defeat the increasingly aggressive enemies that include warlords, metallic spiders, ogres, sirens and giant crabs.

### REAL-TIME PROBLEMS
Unfortunately, this skilfully-presented action RPG doesn't live up to its early promise, revealing a hugely-frustrating combat system beneath the vibrant and colourful fantasy. Rather than opting for the usual turn-based approach, *Sudeki* enables you to enjoy

## "Clunky real-time combat brought ruin to my keyboard"

straightforward gory hack-and-slash mouse button-mashing, pull off combos by pressing the left and right mouse buttons three times in a sequence, or enter slo-mo mode by pressing M to execute special attacks – if you have enough skill points.

Each hero also has access to Spirit Strikes, which summon one of the ancient gods to unleash a devastating magical spell.

You switch between characters using the function keys during a battle (that always happen in enclosed arena-style areas), but even with this addition from the Xbox version, the combat system is still imprecise and random as to which enemies you hit. When you have more than half a dozen baddies to contend with, it's tricky to aim and keep track of the action, and the AI of the four heroes (with three default settings of attack, defend and retreat) isn't good enough, meaning you have to constantly jump in to babysit a character who's getting duffed up. If you

do happen to be killed outright, you have to return to the last save point – which could be three or four fights ago. This is annoying and totally unnecessary to boot.

*Sudeki* isn't in the same league as Japanese RPGs such as *Final Fantasy VII* and *Tales Of Symphonia*, or the more-recent US-developed *World Of Warcraft*. What it does have are hundreds of NPCs (some with dire accents and acting), side quests and hidden

treasures, along with plenty of weapon, magic and character upgrades, plus eye-smacking graphics that approach the visual splendour of those titles. However, RPGs are all about the battles and level-ups, and *Sudeki's* clunky real-time combat system spoils the game and brought ruin to my keyboard. **PCZ**

### PCZONE VERDICT

✔ Pretty graphics
✔ Good variety of weapons and spells
✘ Awkward and frustrating combat system
✘ Slowdown even on a hefty games PC
✘ Some bad NPC voice-acting
✘ No quick-saves

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**Lacking magic**

*Sudeki* turns FPS when Ailish uses her staff.

Limbs are removed. Blood spilled. Lovely.
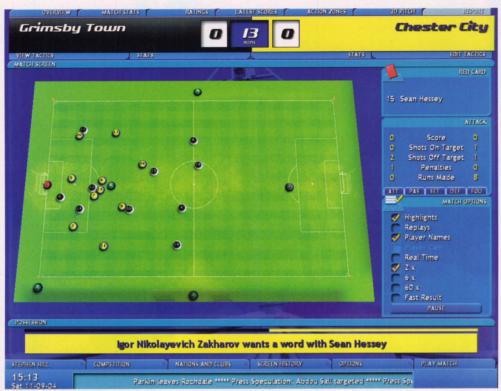
Wonder what that's worth at Scrabble?



Rooney's swearing attribute not shown.



CM4 with a different skin, anyone?



Not sure where they're getting these refs from.

# CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 5

■ £29.99 | Pub: Eidos | Dev: Beautiful Game Studios | ETA: Out Now
championshipmanager.co.uk

**REQUIRES** PIII 700MHz and 256MB RAM  **DESIRES** P4 2GHz and 512MB RAM

## Somebody has dropped the ball. Your referee: *Steve Hill*

**WE'VE** discussed the politics ad nauseum, now we're down to the facts. The brutal facts of an all-new *Championship Manager* from an all-new developer. Following months of rumour and counter-rumour, a release date was suddenly announced, and a review copy followed shortly (as did a patch), albeit comfortably too late for this review to deter early buyers. It's the oldest trick in the book and one that's particularly prescient here, as those who have already bought

the game will attest. In plain English, it's a stinker.

Following up the definitive football management game from scratch was admittedly an onerous task, but it's one that the now ironically named Beautiful Game Studios set about with good intentions. The obvious thing to do would be to simply to copy *Championship*
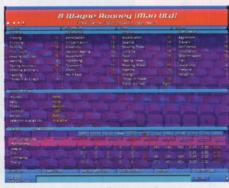
*Manager 4*, and as far as is practically possible, this would appear to be the case. Give or take the aesthetics and clunky interface, the layout will be largely familiar to fans of the series, and initially comes across as an Argos version of *CM4*.

So far, so predictable, and the game chugs along at a similar pace to its predecessors.

For all the claims of a quicker game, it's not vastly speedier, whether with just the one league loaded or the full complement of 26 nations. As for the other claim of 'constant gameplay', this simply means that you can continue tampering with your squad and so on while the game is processing results. Not exactly a revolution in the medium, but it

does give you something to do during matches apart from drum your fingers. Elsewhere, for all the bragging about having attributes rated out of 100, there is an option to revert to the traditional 'out of 20' score too.

**BAD COVER VERSION**
*Championship Manager 4* introduced the concept of the 2D

Filtering transfer targets is a largely thankless task.



One of the more pointless additions to the post-match analysis.

Darren Anderton makes an unlikely return to the England fold.



Two grand a week for a Brazilian international?

## HALF-BAKED

***CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 5'S* GOT MORE BUGS THAN AN ENTOMOLOGY CONVENTION...**

The more you play it, the more they keep coming, with *CM5's* bugs proving a mix of comical, niggling and fatal. And don't forget, this is the patched version. For starters, how about the same news story cropping up twice in a row? Or the fact you can happily select supposedly ineligible players even if they're on loan elsewhere. No more than a minor annoyance? OK, imagine how you'd feel if you watched your team win a cup-tie and were then informed you'd been knocked out of the competition. A bit of a pisser? Then try sending your scout to watch a player and you're greeted with the attractive screen of death shown here. Now say bollocks.



Bugger.



Seven out of ten for scoring a hat-trick with two shots on goal?

match engine to the series, and this is retained here, but at a slightly jauntier angle. An array of options is available for your viewing pleasure, and you can watch the entire match in either real-time, double-speed, six-speed, 60-speed or simply go for the fast result. Apart from the absurdity of the idea of watching an entire football match played out by dots, none of the times seem to be particularly accurate and are all largely pointless anyway.

As we said ages ago, the obvious thing to do is to include a highlights mode, and thankfully this is the case. However, this is where things begin to unravel, as the game's definition of highlights appears to differ drastically from the accepted

norm. The action cuts off in the middle of a goalmouth scramble, goals are even sometimes missed, although interestingly the whole thing slows down in order for the referee to run half the length of the pitch in order to book a player.

Any tension is taken out of the experience, and the game can go from 60 minutes on the clock to full time in the blink of an eye, thus scuppering any plans to bring on substitutes or make tactical changes. Attempting to enjoy a tangible match experience is something of a game in

itself, as you find yourself trying to second-guess the computer by switching off the highlights mode partway through the second half, and manually guiding the match home

## "The more you play it, the more it begins to fall apart, with bugs and flaws appearing regularly"

through a combination of double-speed and six-speed.

### PUBLISH AND BE DAMNED

This alone is enough to make you lose interest, but the more you play the game, the more it begins to fall apart, with a series of flaws and bugs appearing on a regular basis. The bottom line is that *CM5* simply isn't finished.

Had we received this disc out of the blue, we would have deemed it unreviewable and perhaps knocked out a cautiously non-committal preview. The fact that it's actually on sale in this state is little short of a disgrace, and is a damning indictment of the unprofessional nature of the games industry. It has been well publicised that the finances of *CM5* publisher Eidos are in a parlous state to say the least, and it doesn't take a conspiracy theorist to suggest that the company simply got it on the shelves before the end of the financial year in a last ditch attempt to save the company.

It's a sickener all round, not least for the developer, who,

given time and testing could feasibly have produced a decent game. It was never going to match *Football Manager 2005*, but the signs are that it could at least have been competent. If BGS remains in existence, no doubt patches will continue to appear thick and fast, but unfortunately, you can't polish a turd. Eidos, you have dropped the ball. **PCZ**

### PCZONE VERDICT

- ✔ Vaguely realistic football world
- ✔ Tolerable interface
- ✘ Unfinished
- ✘ Bugged to f***
- ✘ Erratic match engine

# 50

**Crippled**

H M 31000 14231 23000 28840 11575 17352 442

113/120
Highlander
272
113
261/261 0+42
5+23 130

Allow Shooting – troop will start to shoot on the nearest or indicated enemy (T)

89/120
Grenadier
20

Thankfully, *Cossacks II* is a worthy sequel to a solid predecessor.

# COSSACKS II: NAPOLEONIC WARS

■ £34.99 | Pub: CDV | Dev: GSC Game World | ETA: April 15 | www.cossacks2.com

**REQUIRES** P4 1.5GHz, 512MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card **DESIRES** P4 2.4GHz, 768MB RAM, a 128MB 3D card and a broadband Internet connection

The glory of France squares up to the madness of King George. *Richie Shoemaker* presides...

**THERE'S** something intrinsically ridiculous about the style of armed combat that characterised the times during which *Cossacks II* is set. Wearing uniforms that practically screamed, "Here I am, shoot me!", enlisted men would conveniently arrange themselves in rows and stroll toward enemy lines. Those that survived the unpleasant walk through clouds of billowing earth dredged up by cannon fire would, when in range, ready their rifles and pull the trigger in the hope it wouldn't misfire and rip their own faces off. And if they were still somehow alive after all this, they then had to stand their ground and reload, a process that required more than a steady hand and could take a minute or more of your already borrowed time.

*Cossacks II*, much like its predecessor, captures this antiquated style of combat remarkably well, and while the game probably isn't much fun for the thousands upon thousands of digital soldiers that fill your screen, it's a damn site more enjoyable for you, the general. The Napoleonic era is a rich and under-utilised period for strategy gaming, one that hasn't (yet) been flogged to death through repetition and regurgitation. It requires a different tactical approach from either ancient or contemporary strategy games, yet has many of the advantages of both: high body counts, rigid formations, plenty of explosive carnage and, of course, the fact that you can rely on your gaily-clad troops not to get lost in the undergrowth.

Despite the freshness of the setting, however, *Cossacks II* holds steadfast to its RTS roots. You're given some land and a few peasants and the aim is to gather resources and use them to build a vast war machine with which to conquer the enemy. Of course, the formula is a little more complicated than that.

## AGE OF TOTAL WAR

Whereas the original game was very much a direct *Age Of Empires* rip-off – a kind of pre-emptive attempt to outdo *Age Of Empires III* – this time developer GSC Game World has taken equal inspiration from *Total War*, sidelining the linear series of campaign missions and supplanting it with a dynamic battle for Europe in which you leapfrog your army across a

Bridges, roads and villages are all important military targets.

Hitting F7 treats you to an invaluable zoomed-out view.

## "With *Cossacks II*, developer GSC has learnt that less can mean a whole lot more"

There are six nations to control, as opposed to the dozen or so that characterised the original.

## 3D OR NOT 3D

### THAT ISN'T THE QUESTION...

*Cossacks II* is not without its faults, but you might be surprised to hear that the lack of a fully spinning whizz-bang 3D engine isn't one of them. At no point while playing the game did I think the game would benefit from being 3D – the thought simply never entered my head. (Although saying that, I am intrigued to see how *Imperial Glory* turns out).

What I was disappointed by was the *Total War*-inspired turn-based/real-time campaign, which to me seems too restrictive and a touch less epic that it should be. As a general you can command only one army, which I suppose has a certain historical resonance, but seriously limits your strategies and often sees you fighting over the same territories again and again with the exact same mission objectives. I spent an entire afternoon – six hours – taking and retaking Brussels to the point that I lost interest in the game completely, gave up and started the whole campaign again.

"But General, we only took this village half an hour ago..."

your units to face, they often find the correct facing on their own. When advancing too, they're cohesive and avoid getting tangled up with each other.

Battles are far more tactical than you might expect given the 2D perspective. Even roads have strategic importance, as units rush along them far quicker than yomping over hill and dale. Then there's the supply factor – for when you realise that food is running low, the only course of action is to strike out to take a local village and secure its food reserves. If not, your whole war effort is going to grind to a halt.

### IN THE BALANCE

Some players are sure to be disappointed that the resource management has been scaled down, but I felt the original *Cossacks* was too complicated for its own good. With *Cossacks II*, GSC has learnt that less can mean a whole lot more. By focusing on battles and properly modelling factors like morale, unit fatigue, experience and leadership, the game is a far more accomplished and ultimately more satisfying tactical challenge.

The experience is further helped by competent AI, some wonderfully detailed animations and maps that are rich and

diverse enough to justify the 2.5D visuals. Despite the almost retro look however, *Cossacks II* demands an impressive rig, one just as expensively equipped as might be needed for *Rome: Total War* or *Half-Life 2*.

If you possess such a beast and are looking for a strategy game with the same kind of depth as the best the genre has to offer, then *Cossacks II* comes highly recommended. Like the *Total War* games, *Cossacks II* balances its paper-scissors-stone gameplay supremely well. That said, with games such as *Imperial Glory* and – at long, long last – *Age Of Empires III* making the leap into the same era of combat, it might just be wise to hold the line.

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*Risk*-style map of Europe in between real-time battles for land and glory. However, unlike *Total War*, *Cossacks* is big on resource management, though things have certainly been scaled down since the original game. Wood, coal, food, iron and gold are all required to fuel your war machine, but rather than having to go through the process of erecting farms and milking cows, here most of the resource gathering is automatic, with pre-built villages that specialise in one raw material

and which, if you capture them intact, will add to your constantly dwindling supplies.

### TAKE CONTROL

The formula has been streamlined in other areas too. Research and technological advancement are no longer important, which is unsurprising given the 20-year timeframe the game covers. Armies too are far simpler to control. In the first game, the battles would often become unmanageable once your armies reached a certain

size, as the view simply wasn't big enough for you to take stock of the situation without whizzing all over the place. Rather than feature 3D units and a zoomable camera perspective, what the developer has done is create a handy two-tier camera system, so you can zoom out and better appreciate your tactical situation without losing control of your units in the process.

There's an impressive degree of automation too. Select a line formation and rather than having to drag out the direction you want

## PCZONE VERDICT

✔ Supremely tactical
✔ Streamlined resource management
✔ Wonderful variety of units
✘ Disappointing main campaign
✘ Needs PC du boeuf

# 80

A refined, slick and absorbing sequel

Some elves aren't sexy.

# FORGOTTEN REALMS: DEMON STONE

■ £19.99 | Pub: Atari | Dev: Stormfront Studios | ETA: Out Now
**REQUIRES** PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card **DESIRES** P4 2.8GHz, 512MB RAM and a 128MB 3D card

*Will Porter* has a thing for elves. We've given up questioning it and instead give him games like this...

**IT'S BEEN** what? Sixteen years since *Golden Axe* was slipped neatly into the bedroom habits of gamers? And still games appear with the same template of hacking and slashing – this one even returning to the triumvirate of two men and a sexy woman (elf-thing) with super-attacks that can be unleashed after an appreciable amount of undead-battery.

This is 2005 though, so the whole affair is drowned in combos, 3D shenanigans, stealth attacks, publisher-demanded *LOTR* stylings and even a statutory amount of bullet-time. Or 'throwing axe time' as it could be referred to...

All this and it's a bit of fun too. It's a blimmin' port and it's highly advisable that you use a gamepad as you *will* forget some moves even exist if you use your keyboard. However, if you're a fan of the genre you certainly won't be disappointed, especially with the fight mechanics and environments.


Look at her pretty elfin face.


Orcs: violent or misunderstood.


Manoeuvre enemies into the flames and they burn. Genius!

Saying that, you might be a tad miffed when you discover how short the game is and how none of the goodness of RA Salvatore's fantasy novels (which the game is based on) manages to reach the functional non-entity that is the game's plot.

However, the way that experience and gold can pay for new moves between levels is a nifty touch – although in most areas, the game has been thoroughly out-niftied by similar *LOTR* fare. Most irritatingly, with its three on-screen characters, this kicks, screams and begs for multiplayer co-op – only to be cruelly denied.

If you want a game with good fight mechanics that stands up well on the PC, you should get *Prince Of Persia: Warrior Within*. If you want a standard shoddy port of a console game, you should get this. It's fun, but it doesn't belong.

**PCZONE VERDICT** **58**

**Elf hazard**

# TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES 2: BATTLE NEXUS

■ £25.99 | Pub: Konami | Dev: Konami | ETA: Out Now
**REQUIRES** PIII 800MHz, 128MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card **DESIRES** P4 1.4GHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

*Will Porter* was on *Gamezville* talking about Turtles once. He was really ace and wicked...

**ON THE CD** **ON THE DVD**

**ALL** together now! "They're the world's most fearsome fighting teens!" We're really hip. "They're heroes in a half-shell, and they're green." Hey! Get a grip! "When the evil Shredder attacks, these turtles boys don't cut him no slack. Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. Heroes in a half-shell!" Turtle Power!

Hoorah! That's the best bit of the game. Not that the song is actually in it of course, the best bit is when you sing the old theme tune under your breath having double-clicked on the icon. After that it all comes tumbling down. A punchy, kicky affair with a glammed up April and a fight system that brings a new meaning to the word 'rudimentary', it quickly becomes apparent that this game is explicitly designed for children and simpletons.

Nowt wrong with that of course: children and simpletons need entertainment too. However, having seen and played more intelligent and more imaginative kid-friendly fare in the form of *LEGO Star Wars*, there's nothing on earth that could push me to recommend it.

Yeah, there's battle modes and collectable antiques (yes, antiques), but it's all inevitably pissed on from a great height by its ancient arcade great-grandfather from the misty days of my pre-pubescence. Nice cel-shaded turtles do not a good game make – in fact they only add to a crap one.


Punch. Kick. Punch.


*Turtles*: unrealistic.


Best left in the '90s.

**PCZONE VERDICT** **43**

**Destroy these meddling turtles!**

The definitive Napoleonic strategy game

# Cossacks II
## Napoleonic Wars

cdv    GSC GAME WORLD

www.cossacks2.com

PC CD

# MTX: MOTOTRAX

■ £29.99 | Pub: Aspyr | Dev: Beenox | ETA: Out Now

**REQUIRES** PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card
**DESIRES** P4 1.4GHz, 512MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card, modem

### Richie Shoemaker buffs his helmet



Bet she's a bit nippy.



The spirit of Evil Knievel lives.



"Look, I can do a wheelie!"



*Mototrax* was released on console more than a year ago.

**IF THERE'S** one thing a motorbike game absolutely has to provide in order for it to pass the *PC ZONE* MOT, it's an occasional pile-up. Yes, we like our bikes to sound a little more menacing than a mildly-irked bee, and we like having dozens of two-wheeled bikes, pro riders and freestyle events to ride in.

*MTX: Mototrax* is a one-stop shop for all things motorbike-related, offering moto and supercross racing and a rather more hit-and-miss freestyle mode that tries to ape the stunt-based antics of *Tony Hawk's*.

However, the game omits that all important "blood and bone" factor, and unless you can be thrown off your bike and see your digital self bundled up against a wall in a twisted mess of ligaments and leather, then we'd rather stick to perennial office favourite *Motocross Madness*.

It's not all bad though. What the graphics lack in detail and effects, they certainly make up for with speed, having courses that hare past in a blur of mud, sweat and tears. We're also quite smitten with the multiplayer modes and track builder, which probably double the amount of time you'll spend with the game. This is a decent package that's worthy of more than a weekend run-through. Just a touch more realism and we might have recommended it.

**PCZONE VERDICT** **68**

**Think bike**

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# POP LIFE

■ £24.99 | Pub: Mindscape | Dev: Monte Cristo | ETA: Out Now

**REQUIRES** PIII 500MHz, 128MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card
**DESIRES** PIII 800MHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

**IF YOU'RE** a six-year-old girl then you'll love this: a cheap *Sims* knock-off starring the winner of a *Pop Idol*-esque show, a designable pop-pad and all manner of glitter and fab girliness. It's pink, fluffy and proud. If you're a 20-something male with a nascent beer belly, however, you'll give your pop-tart the biggest breasts you can and get bored.

Then again, you're not really the target audience are you? You may snort with derision as you watch Complete Muppet (or whatever you call her) cuddling a teddy bear to increase her happiness bar, but then you'll quite enjoy building a slide in her garden. It's better than the efforts of either the *Pop Idol* or *Fame Academy* camps, but that's not saying much. Quietly competent, this is one for the kids.

*Will Porter*

**PCZONE VERDICT** **58**

**Popped**



Weeeeeeeeeeeee!



Bit slimmer than that Michelle bird.

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# SEAL OF EVIL

■ £19.99 | Pub: GMX Media | Dev: Object Software | ETA: Out Now

**REQUIRES** PII 350MHz, 128MB RAM and a 16MB 3D card
**DESIRES** PIII 600MHz and 256MB RAM will ensure smoother play

**AN RPG** based on ancient Chinese history? Sounds interesting. Except *Seal Of Evil* is anything but. This ocular violation of an RPG not only fails to make the most of its subject matter – the warring kingdoms of ancient China – but also succeeds in cheapening itself with a highly childish approach to both questing and conversing.

And don't even get me started on the voice-acting. Oh, OK then. Rarely can there have been a collection of would-be thespians butchering their lines with more carefree disdain than this lot. Character voices range from second-rate Kenneth Williams impersonators to surf dudes who think they're in a *Bill & Ted* movie.

It's not all a complete disaster though. While the visuals are admittedly an insult to your retinas, there are a host of different lands for you to explore and countless characters – all be they more wooden than a tree – to interact with. What's more, the choices you make during your adventures ultimately influence how the game ends.

*Seal Of Evil's* best feature is its comprehensive item creation system, which offers you a vast array of possibilities when it comes to creating unique objects. What's more, you get to play as five different characters during the course of the game, and these range from dainty magicians to powerful warriors, meaning combat remains mildly fresh throughout.

Despite all of this though, there's simply not enough quality here for *Seal Of Evil* to warrant your interest. Even if you're a die-hard RPG fan, ultimately this is one title you could very easily live without.

*Martin Korda*



A gaseous cloud of evil.

**PCZONE VERDICT** **42**

**Ugly and unspectacular**

# FIRE CAPTAIN

■ £24.99 | Pub: Monte Cristo | Dev: Monte Cristo | ETA: Out Now

**REQUIRES** PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card **DESIRES** Better with a P4, but otherwise that's fine

### *Martin Korda* experiences a different kind of backdraft

**REMEMBER** those simpler days when you wanted to be a fireman? When you were still young enough not to care that they get paid naff all and risk having their skin seared off by temperatures hotter than the sun's core? Well, if you still hanker after those youthful dreams, this rescue sim could be just the tonic.

Contrary to what you may think, *Fire Captain* isn't a dullard cat-rescuing snoreathon with a smattering of dousing thrown in for good measure. Rather, it's an intelligently crafted series of (four) campaigns – each replete with a plot, such as a titanic Mafia car chase which causes multiple crashes and fires – that task you with fighting fearsome blazes with often chronically undermanned forces.

Each mission is preceded by a detailed and highly cinematic briefing, after which you're left to tackle an array of challenges, including backdrafts, heat radiation and flashovers. You can use specialist units to deactivate short circuiting electrics, medics to treat and rescue stricken civilians, while your average fireman is a dab hand at smashing open windows with his fire axe.

But let's not start sucking *Fire Captain's* hose just yet, as it's far from perfect. First off, the game feels unfinished, with some irritating graphical glitches and sound omissions giving it a slight funk of amateurishness.

What's more, vehicle path finding is erratic at best, while mission objectives soon become all too repetitive. Don't get me wrong, *Fire Captain* is a bit of fun, but it's hardly going to set your world alight.


At least wait till you get home you animals.




Who lit up a fag?


Beats central heating.


Feeling hot, hot, hot...

**PCZONE VERDICT** **63**
Fun, but lacks spark

# LEMONY SNICKET'S A SERIES OF UNFORTUNATE EVENTS

■ £29.99 | Pub: Activision | Dev: Know Wonder | ETA: Out Now

**REQUIRES** PIII 600MHz, 128MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card
**DESIRES** P4 800MHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

### *Richie Shoemaker* receives game, plays game, writes about game...


His mum cut his fringe...


"Harry Potter?"


A baby in the rafters – slightly worrying.


Hmmm – how do I get across the river?

**BASED ON** the latest Jim Carrey extravaganza, *Lemony Snicket* is the kind of game that parents might insist their children play, as opposed to say, *The Incredibles*, or the latest *Harry Potter* – less mainstream, non-violent, slightly subversive and much cooler. In reality, it's less impressive than it might be, falling into the same trap as most film-to-game tie-ins by being rushed and rather short – so not great value.

In control of the three Baudelaire orphans, the aim is to thwart the dastardly schemes of evil uncle Olaf by using each special skill at timely intervals. Elder sibling Violet is the cunning inventor, Klaus is the far-sighted bookworm and Sunny the ravenous infant, each of whom can be directly controlled to find items to help Violet construct a bizarre tool that unlocks the next conundrum.

In truth, the puzzles are rather refreshing, not least because you have a gurgling baby to help you who eats literally anything. What I do take issue with is the cheap sets, poor resolution and lack of any visual clarity or distinction when compared to the film on which the game is based. There are far worse film tie-ins, but we'd hoped for more.

**PCZONE VERDICT** **60**
Unfortunate

# STAR WOLVES

**ON THE DVD**

■ £24.99 | Pub: Excalibur | Dev: X-Bow | ETA: Out Now

**REQUIRES** P4 800MHz, 128MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card **DESIRES** P4 1.8GHz, 256MB RAM and a 128MB 3D card

### Call *Richie Shoemaker* a space cadet and he thinks it's a compliment

**STAR WOLVES** eschews *Homeworld's* epic fleet conflicts between hundreds of fighters and carriers, instead focusing on more manageable battles between small squadrons of intergalactic raiders as they go about their business in deepest darkest space. You're the leader of one such band of brigands, the eponymous Star Wolves, and your task is to choose the right missions to ensure you can earn enough money to keep your small group of mercenaries in guns and ammo for the duration.

To ensure *Star Wolves* isn't mistaken for some cheap imitation of a game you may have played before, the developer has added a twist by enabling you to upgrade and equip your fighters and mothership whenever you see fit, as well as spending hard-earned experience points on furthering your pilots down one of four skill-paths (pilot, gunner, missile expert and electronic warfare). The result is a game that offers far more depth and replayability than it might otherwise deserve.

Certainly it lacks the pace of other sci-fi strategy games (*Nexus*, for example, offers a far more tactical challenge), but *Space Wolves* has a sedate charm that's hard to resist, so much so that if you're hungry for a new deep space challenge, it's worth taking a risk on.

A star gate, yesterday.

Coming soon: Space Beavers.

**PCZONE VERDICT 69**

**Decent and distinctive**

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"Of all the gin joints in the world..."

Good old universal translators.

# LEGACY: DARK SHADOWS

■ £19.99 | Pub: GMX Media | Dev: Razbor | ETA: Out Now

**REQUIRES** P4 800MHz, 256MB RAM and a 16MB 3D card
**DESIRES** P4 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

**ALAS,** it seems the golden age of adventure games are long past. Vain hopes that LucasArts might resurrect the old point-and-click heroes have been laid to waste and it falls to just a handful of independent studios to keep the dream alive for interactive storytelling. Step forward busty private investigator Ren Silver, star of *Legacy: Dark Shadows*, a game full to bursting with wordy over-acted dialogue and lightly peppered with bugs.

For all its cheap production and poor translation however, *Legacy: Dark Shadows* is not quite the lost cause we initially expected. For one thing, its lack of obtuse puzzles makes for a satisfying and easy-going break from the norm. For another, the story (which ties in a mysterious wooden box found during the battle of Stalingrad with strange goings on across 22nd century Earth and Mars) dangles enough intrigue to keep you from switching off for the first couple of hours. Having said all that though, if you're a serious adventure fan, it's unlikely that you'll find much to challenge you here.

*Richie Shoemaker*

**PCZONE VERDICT 43**

**Better than nothing**

# WANTED GUNS

■ £19.99 | Pub: Fusion Software | Dev: Iridon | ETA: Out Now

**REQUIRES** PIII 700MHz, 128MB RAM and a 16MB 3D card
**DESIRES** P4 800MHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

"Get off your horse etc etc."

The unforgiven.

**A BACKDROP** of Civil War, Mexican mercenaries chasing gold and you in the thick of it as a gun-slinging preacher with one eye: as westerns go (which isn't very often, it has to be said), this is a promising start. Then you install the game, start it up and you find yourself standing before a horse aching to be put out of its misery. How apt.

*Wanted Guns* is a very basic shooter that employs a distant third-person view and a huge dollop of dodgy graphics. Aside from sashaying about shooting cowboys, small crates and Mexican bandits, there really isn't very much to do in this game though – apart from heading towards each objective and killing whoever happens to have been placed in your way.

The variety of weapons is unsurprisingly slight, the enemy displays only basic intelligence and animation is laughably crude. Worst of all, the game utilises a targeting system that's almost as bugged as it is pointless. Stuffing your face with Milky Bars would provide a more authentic Wild West experience than this.

*Richie Shoemaker*

**PCZONE VERDICT 19**

**Not good, very bad and a bit ugly**

"Leaving, but not on a jet plane..."

# WILL OF STEEL

■ £29.99 | Pub: GMX Media | Dev: Gameyus | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card DESIRES PIII 1.2GHz, 512MB RAM and a 128MB 3D card

**Attention!** *Richie Shoemaker* **shouts at his troops – who promptly ignore him...**


Civilians? No, none in there.


Ready to take on Osama?


Try controlling this lot with voice alone.


It's a linear affair. Just look at the tank tracks.

**LEAVING** aside the War on Terror propaganda that *Will Of Steel* seems happy to perpetuate, there's only one fundamental difference between this and *C&C: Generals* or *Act Of War*, and that's the voice-operated command system.

Coming with a cheap 'free' headset, the game enables you to control your units by barking orders at them. Sounds very cool, but in reality the process is over-complicated, unreliable and, as a consequence, unnecessary.

Good news then that voice control can be deactivated.

Away from the gimmick and onto the game itself, you'll be similarly underwhelmed. The graphics look pretty good – the deserts being suitably sandy and the units models all feature impressive details – but the gameplay is suspect to say the least. Soldiers often get stuck at the edges of the map, vehicles seem to have a mind of their own, whilst en masse, units seem to overrun where you tell

them to go. In terms of path-finding, we're hard-pressed to name a game as inept as this. Tactically, you're hindered further by there being seemingly navigable areas of the map cut off from infantry units.

It's all very well having a game that does away with resource-management, but as a pay-off we'd like greater control of our units rather than less. While the game boasts an impressive array of hardware, you're sadly only allowed to play as the forces of the 'right and just' in a linear two-pronged campaign that starts with the US-led invasion of Afghanistan and finishes in Iraq. No skirmish or multiplayer options are available either, but you do get a headset – which would arguably last longer anyway...
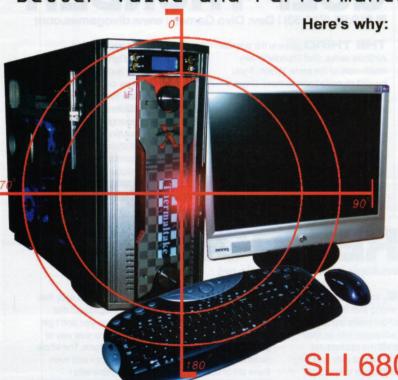
**PCZONE VERDICT 40**
**Voice of treason**

# indieZone

You can find demo versions of all these games on the CD & DVD. Try 'em then buy 'em...

ON THE CD • ON THE DVD

**Don't spend all your cash on games from big developers.** *Anthony Holden* **is here to offer up a few morsels from the indie scene – including laser-propelled dolphins and bowling babes...**

## LASER DOLPHIN

■ $19.95 (£10.50) | Dev: Dingo Games |
www.dingogames.com

*Ironically enough, the main thing it lacks is depth.*

**NOW THIS** is more like it. You can keep your shallow sports sims and B-grade shmups – give us a dolphin with a laser on its back any day. Better yet, throw in a few robotic sharks, seagulls that drop bombs (not that sort) and turtles strapped with TNT and you've got yourself a game. Not a very sophisticated one, I'll grant you, but one that at least has a sense of humour.

Unfortunately it doesn't go much further than that. *Laser Dolphin* is a likeable, breezy affair, but lacks the substance to genuinely entertain anyone above the age of six. There's nothing particularly wrong with it, and the comic strip interludes are brilliantly crap, but it simply isn't worth paying for.

*Search for this UFO - it is our best hope of saving the Prime Minister... But be careful Laser Dolphin... And set your laser to kill.*

*He's got bigger fish to fry...*

**PCZONE VERDICT** 52

## AIRSTRIKE II: GULF THUNDER

*Maybe if they'd got the* Airwolf *licence...*

■ $19.95 (£10.50) | Dev: Divo Games | www.divogames.com

**THE THIRD** game in the popular *AirStrike* series, *Gulf Thunder* is very much more of the same. Which, if you haven't stumbled across these chopper-based shoot 'em ups before means an impressive 3D graphics engine covering up some fairly basic and redundant arcade gameplay.

The main problem is that the 3D approach – while reasonably fetching – actually detracts from the experience, removing much of the precision and skill from the shmup formula. It's just like the early 3D beat 'em ups that tried to recreate *Street Fighter* in three dimensions – they sucked because they failed to realise how crucial the mode of representation was to the gameplay. Similarly, the *AirStrike* games fail to turn their much-prized engine into a genuine asset, and the resulting gameplay is sloppy and unsatisfying compared to its 2D cousins. As handsome as it is, *Gulf Thunder* is a mediocre diversion at best.

**PCZONE VERDICT** 51

## FUTURE POOL

*An evil mockery of a gentleman's sport.*

■ $16 (£8.50) | Dev: Cornutopia | www.cornutopia.net

**WHAT A TERRIBLE,** terrible concept for a game. There are so many things wrong with this idea I don't even know where to start. *Future Pool* posits the notion that one day, the noble game of pool will evolve into an alien atrocity played on a circular table with no pockets, no cushions and no cues. Instead, you'll shoot with a rotating firing mechanism and try to be the first one to knock all your balls off the table. Sound stupid? It is. Not only do the new 'futuristic' rules remove all vestiges of skill from the game, they simply make no sense. Potting is so easy that it's more of a race than a game, yet so haphazard that chance is the only real factor. What's more, you don't get a second shot for a pot, meaning there's no sure way of getting ahead no matter how well you perform. The whole game is an exercise in random ball physics – and even these are of dubious fidelity. A contemptible effort.

**PCZONE VERDICT** 08

# ANIME BOWLING BABES

$19.99 (£10.50) | Dev: Glimmer Games | www.glimmergames.com


Check those pins, man.


All a bit pink isn't it?


It's night-time. This is serious.

**SEXY ANIME** girls and ten-pin bowling – what could possibly go wrong? Well, for starters the fact that they're not at all sexy, even with the unlockable 'very raunchy camera mode' in action. Indeed, if you find this game arousing, you should take a serious look at your life and consider voluntary incarceration.

As for the game itself, it's rudimentary to say the least. Six alien-faced 'beauties', five bowling alleys, tournament and exhibition options and a raft of useless bonus material designed to provide longevity where the core game could not.

The sport itself is replicated with reasonable accuracy, down to proper pin physics and a bowling action that takes in direction, strength and spin. Despite that though, the chances of being entertained are slim to the point of anorexia.

**PCZONE VERDICT** | **36**

# ABC ISLAND

■ $19.99 (£10.50) | Dev: Kraisoft Entertainment | www.kraisoft.com/
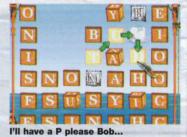

It wouldn't give me 'minge', though 'shat' was fine, funnily enough.

**WE GENERALLY** try to steer clear of this sort of 'spell and win' edutainment title, but this one is a pretty decent little arcade puzzler. It's essentially a cross between *Boggle* and *Zoo Keeper* – you plot out words on the letter grid, submit your entry and those letters disappear, causing more to drop down from above. Some boxes can be spun to change the facing letter, some are worth bonus points and some are on fire and pose a risk of sinking your pirate ship.

Clearly it's designed with kids in mind, but it's surprisingly entertaining in its way, and a lot more interesting than most of the monotonous colour-matching games


I'll have a P please Bob...

out there. Our *Zoo Keeper*-addicted production editor, for one, would do well to make the switch.

**PCZONE VERDICT** | **60**


No-frills pool for the frugal potter.

# KICK SHOT POOL

■ $19.99 (£10.50) | Dev: Glimmer Games | www.glimmergames.com

**YOU'LL FORGIVE** me for being wary of this. Not only does it come from the people who brought us *Anime Bowling Babes*, it's the second indie-coded pool game this month – and it only takes a glance to see how well the other one impressed us. Luckily, this is real pool, with real tables and real pockets. Straight pool, 8-ball, 9-ball, tournaments, shark events, even online play – all the fundamentals are covered.

What's more, at a glance *Kick Shot Pool* is a pretty decent effort. The balls are nice and shiny, the mouse-cueing system works well, the level of aim-assist is variable – it's all perfectly serviceable, especially for multiplayer games.

Inevitably, however, some shortcomings do emerge. For one thing, the physics simulation is clearly not up to the task – the cushions have no give, the collisions are unrealistic, the balls never leave the surface of the table. It all just feels a bit… Crude. What's more, the sound effects are all wrong, the AI is weak and there's little in the way of atmosphere.

If you're looking for a basic bit of potting action it definitely does the job – but only barely.

**PCZONE VERDICT** | **54**

# REPLAY

**For those of you with not much cash, *PC ZONE* finds treasures among the trash**

# SOLDIERS: HEROES OF WWII

■ £12.99 | Pub: Codemasters | ETA: Out Now

**THE GAME** you get when you cross *Commandos* and *Cannon Fodder*, *Soldiers* deserved to make waves in gaming – but only managed a couple of desultory ripples.

Its primary feat is to turn the traditional RTS framework into a playpen of player-controlled destruction, with your mouse controlling the crosshairs of your little soldier chap and/or the big tank/ship/plane he's driving. It makes for a very immediate experience, and the sense of tension you feel as a column of enemy tanks rumbles towards your position and you frantically set your men up is immense. What's more, seeing as

everything on the map is physics-imbued and able to be blasted into beautifully cascading chunks, there's no cover that isn't penetrable.

Elsewhere, the integrity of the physics means bullets and explosions can strike with wonderful precision – you might blow a tank's tracks off, strike its fuel tank or simply decapitate a frantic sentry.

It's a game about survival rather than the normal bombast and glory, as typified by the campaign in which you play as some German troops in dire straits, and stands out as an original and well-built game amid an ocean of RTS tripe – all

still plugging away under the ancient shadow of *C&C*.

Now packaged with its belated multiplayer additions, you'd be a fool not to nab it at this price. A fool I say.

*Will Porter*

**PCZONE VERDICT 90**
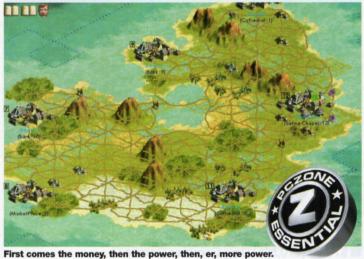
Small-scale squad action is the order of the day.

Another underrated classic...

The explosions are among the best in the business.

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# CIVILIZATION III

■ £9.99 | Pub: Atari | ETA: Out Now

First comes the money, then the power, then, er, more power.

**WITH SID MEIER** busily crafting *Civilization IV*, it's the perfect time to get re-acquainted with his previous empire-building epic. For those of you unfamiliar with the whole *Civ* shebang, it's basically a massive, turn-based resource management/strategy game, where you have to build cities, manage buildings and research technologies to expand your influence across the globe.

As your civilization evolves, you become more powerful as a military force

and can start bullying people about – although this incarnation also allows you to play the diplomat seeking world peace. Graphically the game is now looking a bit 20th century, but there's so much here in terms of gameplay – including 16 different civs such as Aztecs and Greeks with unique units – that it'll probably take you a thousand years to finish.

*Jamie Sefton*

**PCZONE VERDICT 88**

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# CHRIS SAWYER'S LOCOMOTION

■ £9.99 | Pub: Atari | ETA: Out Now

**CHUFFING 'ELL.** We only reviewed this at full price five issues ago, but already the isometric 3D empire-builder for trainspotters is heading through the tunnel of disappointment and pulling into Bargain Bin Parkway. Chris Sawyer is the man responsible for *RollerCoaster Tycoon*, but his latest effort really isn't worth getting steamed up about, being almost identical to *Transport Tycoon* – a game released a decade ago.

*Locomotion* requires you to make as much money as you can on the privatised

railways (always a popular idea) by ensuring that commuters, goods and raw materials are kept moving by maintaining airport, road and rail links.

Apparently there are more than 40 scenarios spanning 100 years of history to play with, but this is stupefyingly dull stuff, with even the graphics having a distinctly Steam Age feel about them. It's about as much fun as commuting.

*Jamie Sefton*

**PCZONE VERDICT 37**

Mind the gap.

We couldn't even tempt Prezzer with this one...

New Vehicle Invented "Comet"

Next stop: Dullsville.

Before *GTA3*, it was all about *Driver*.

# DRIVER

■ £4.99 | Pub: Sold Out |
ETA: Out Now

**DRIV3R,** the latest in the once-proud franchise is coming to PC, although after the debacle of its console release, we'd suggest you wait until our review before even thinking of parting with your cash. In the meantime you can sample the classic original – a prototype for the *GTA*-style mission-based car/crime adventure, only with more driving. There's no denying it's aged badly since its PSone debut, but it's still almost worth considering, if only to see what the *Driver* series could have delivered if it had lived up to its promise.

*Dave Woods*



Now, of course, it's mere nostalgia.



Crude yet effective.

**PCZONE VERDICT** 59



It looks weird, and, well... it is.



But give it a chance and you'll love it.

# PERIMETER

■ £12.99 | Pub: Codemasters | ETA: Out Now

**A LOT** of EA's output is fiercely commercial – stuff like football and snowboarding. If it tries its hand at an RTS then you can bet it will be accompanied by a mega-licence like *The Lord Of The Rings*. What it would never do is take an obscure and relatively impenetrable Eastern-European RTS set in 'The Psychosphere' and put its massive marketing spend behind it.

Which is a shame. Because while *Perimeter* might not have changed the world (or sold by the skipload), it's a diverse and technically excellent RTS that tries something different and pulls it off with aplomb.

The concept hinges around the eponymous shields that every base in the game can project, as well as unit morphing, which switches the emphasis from victory through numbers to a far

subtler blend of strategies. *C&C* it ain't, and clearly this is a very good thing.

If you're sick of the standard RTS approach pumped out by everyone and his dog, buy *Perimeter* and see for yourself that innovation isn't quite dead in the world of videogames.

*Dave Woods*

**PCZONE VERDICT** 80

*PC ZONE ESSENTIAL*



Look, there's a war on – trees are one luxury we can't afford.

# B-17 FLYING FORTRESS: THE MIGHTY EIGHTH

■ £4.99 | Pub: Sold Out | ETA: Out Now

**ONCE** a *PC ZONE* cover game (we kid you not – issue 96, Dec 2000), *The Mighty Eighth* was, for the time, an authentic and atmospheric flight sim. Covering every aspect of a ten-man crew's life aboard a B-17 bomber, the game allows you to control everything from mission-planning and navigation to dropping your payload on the enemy.

Because you can flit from one character to another, you can choose the role you prefer – you don't even have to pilot the B-17 if that's not your bag. You can play the game in real-time, although there is a skip function, useful for those testing ten-hour sorties. OK, so it's looking a little 'Pathe News' now, but for less than the price of a Gracie Fields LP, this is a bally good effort.

*Jamie Sefton*

**PCZONE VERDICT** 72

## LEFTOVERS

▲ **BUT WAIT, THERE'S MORE...**

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the part of the magazine that games fear. Pull up a pew, dust off the seat and cough disinterestedly as we parade a collection of unwanted tat past your eyes like a low-rent version of *The Generation Game*.

First up is a Soda Stream system – all the fizz and none of the fuss. Then it's *World Championship Snooker* (Sold Out, £4.99, Out Now), which is a snooker game. You hit balls around a table in a regulated fashion, thinking about how snooker games are a lot better these days: 43 per cent. Next up *Pirates Of The Caribbean* (Focus Multimedia, £9.99, Out Now), which would be ace if it was anything to do with the film – but it isn't. As it is, it's not a patch on *Pirates!* – 50 per cent.

Next up is a cuddly toy, a lovely fluffy monkey. Then it's *Cricket 2002* (Sold Out, £4.99, Out Now) which is a game in which you play cricket, largely based in and around the year of 2002. It's aged relatively well, and cricket isn't massively covered by games, so we'll be nice: 58 per cent. As a special bonus, we've also got *Chessmaster 9000* (Sold Out, £4.99, Out Now). It's chess. 60 per cent.

A chest expander! Then *Flight Unlimited 3* (Sold Out, £4.99, Out Now), the last in the line of worthy games in which you could fly planes in an unlimited style. Long in the tooth, and completely out-unlimited by *MS Flight Sim*, it gets 51 per cent and a pat on the head for effort. Penultimately, *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* (Focus Multimedia, £9.99, Out Now). Poke a body with sticks just like they do on the telly. 40 per cent. Finally, a beige teasmaid. Didn't they do well?
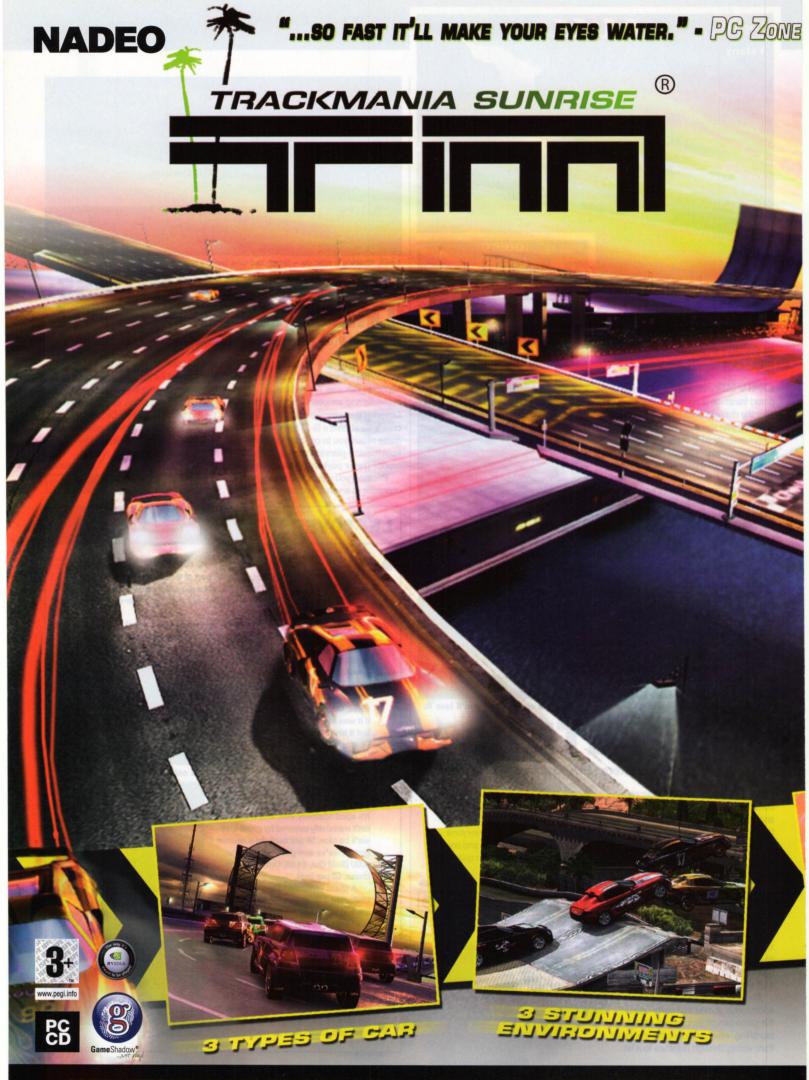
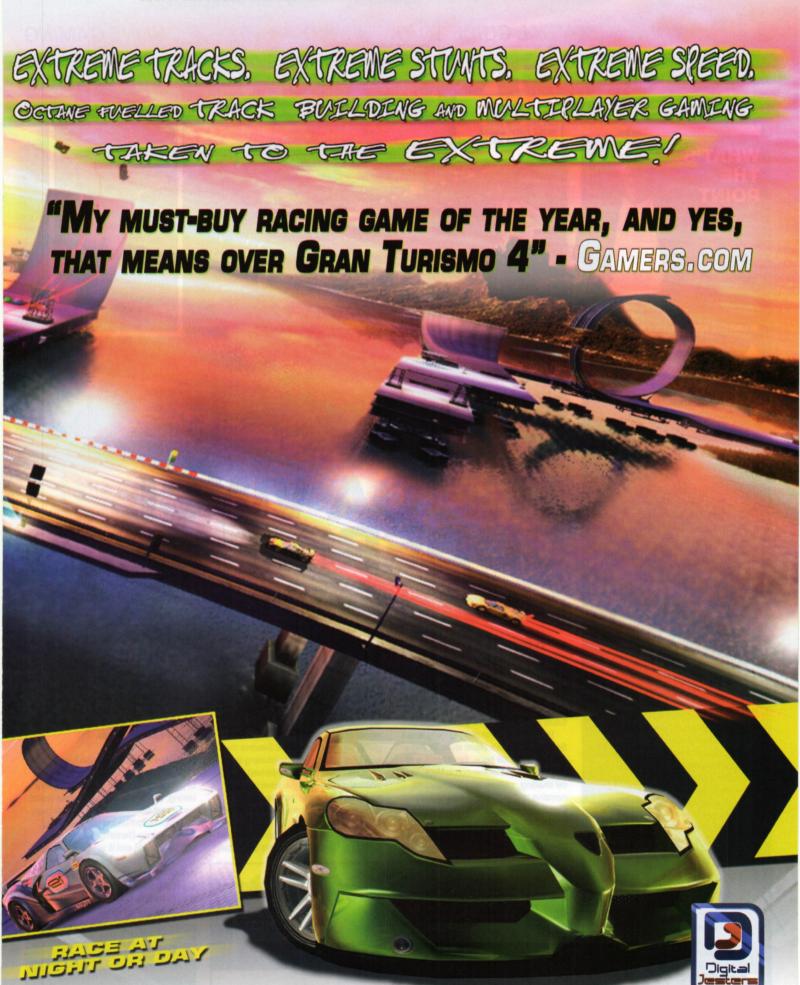

It's coloured balls.



Four multimedia red balls.



Just balls.
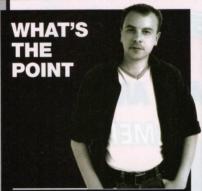
TUBE CENTRAL, THE STORM IS RAGING OUTSIDE. YOU HAVE STORM WATCH DUTY: HANDLE EMERGENCIES AND REPAIRS.

ANNE

## WHAT'S THE POINT

■ **ONLINE EDITOR:** Paul Presley

▲ It took around three weeks for the first office *WOW* fanatic to reach a high enough level for the traditional creeping MMOG doubts of self-worth to take over. Levels one through ten are a breeze. You can get through half of them within an hour of play if you're pacing yourself. The truly dedicated power-gamer can probably reach double figures in the time it takes you to finish this sentence.

It's only once you start sniffing around the arse-end of the high 30s that you start to wonder if there's anything more to it. If, in fact, you haven't just been conned again into investing a significant chunk of your leisure time into yet another no-end-in-sight level grindathon – a strappingly pretty and downright fun level grindathon – but still…

So how to combat this feeling of same-old same-old? Believe it or not, Mr Games Developer, there's a simple answer – one that's already been tested in the world of offline gaming. Player-created content. Put the power back in the hands of the people. Take a lesson from the good old tabletop role-players of old. Let's see a *Dungeon Master* character class to play, enabling players to write storylines, create NPCs, use your lovingly created world to write stories and quests that are a million times more involving than the database-driven 'Kill 10 boars for X experience points' tasks that we all get lumbered with at the moment.

*DM* characters can create plots, earning experience alongside the adventurers that play them, opening bigger and better toolsets as they rise in level, in turn allowing bigger and better campaigns to be devised.

Suddenly your virtual worlds will be alive with interest. Players will never be bored. Subscription fees will be less likely to lapse. Ah hah! ▼ Got your interest now haven't I?

# THE DA VINCI CODERS

**SEED** AIMS TO SET NEW STANDARDS IN MMOG GAME DESIGN

**IF THERE'S** one thing we here at *ZONE* admire, it's when a developer takes a genre in a new direction. Runestone Game Development is planning to do just that with the markedly different-looking *Seed*, a game set 1,000 years into the future on the marooned planet of Da Vinci.

Perhaps the most striking thing about *Seed* is the game's visual style. Taking a leaf out of the *XIII* book, *Seed* looks and plays like an interactive comic book, using cel shading, multiple panel viewpoints, narrative text and even a suspiciously Comic Sans-looking font. The developer states that the graphical style was designed to stand out from the crowd of photorealism-obsessed MMOGs – a

stance that appears to have worked for *WOW* at least.

Apart from the visuals, *Seed's* other main selling point is that it's combat-free. Yep, it's another in the line of socially-responsible 'constructive' virtual worlds (á la *A Tale In The Desert*), giving you and your fellow *Seeders* the task of rebuilding and maintaining the ravaged colony. Power is derived through political means, and you have to curry voting favours with other players in a scramble for a better reputation, higher office and better perks.

Other advances Runestone boasts of include advanced AI characters that can



**Those new Alienware PCs are looking fancy.**

supposedly respond to plain English text input, storylines that evolve naturally out of player actions (and are said to have a lasting, visible effects on the game world) and a vast amount of scientific discovery and information-based puzzle-solving.

*Seed* is the Danish development team's first title and is set for release in early 2006. Whether a game with such a distinctive take on both its visual and structural sides will have enough clout to hold its own remains to be seen. We'll have a full interview with Runestone soon.

■ **Publisher:**
Runestone Game Development
■ **Developer:**
Runestone Game Development
■ **ETA:** Spring 2006
■ **Website:** www.runestone.dk



**Vegetarians in space.**



**Your home away from home.**

# Source-powered MMOG

## *TWILIGHT WAR* MARKS THE FIRST MMO TO USE THE *HALF-LIFE 2* ENGINE
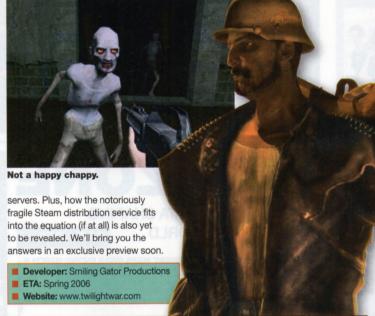

Nice, but it's no Herbie.


Where's the gravity gun eh?


Mutant MMOGs – the way forward.


Not a happy chappy.

**HUMANS** versus mutants in the year 2296. Post-apocalyptic settings are nothing new in the world of gaming, but what sets *Twilight War* apart from other games is that this is being made with the Source engine – and it's a MMOG. A first-person shooter MMOG at that.

Smiling Gator Productions is pitching this as an 'XORG' or 'eXtreme Online Roleplaying Game'. Following a devastating war with aliens, Earth is little more than a radioactive wasteland. Primarily PvP in nature, you get to fight for any of the seven human or mutant factions, each with its own allegiances and enemies.

With the obvious influences of *Fallout*, *PlanetSide* and *Half-Life 2*, the key question that remains to be answered is just how well the Source engine can handle the huge bandwidth requirements of a massively multiplayer game. Especially following complaints of lag on simple 16-player *Half-Life 2* deathmatch

servers. Plus, how the notoriously fragile Steam distribution service fits into the equation (if at all) is also yet to be revealed. We'll bring you the answers in an exclusive preview soon.

- **Developer:** Smiling Gator Productions
- **ETA:** Spring 2006
- **Website:** www.twilightwar.com

## THE ONLINE SHORTS

### REAL NEWS ABOUT VIRTUAL WORLDS









#### GTA MMO
Details of Real Time Worlds' much speculated *GTA*-style MMO have been revealed, in a Korean press conference of all places. *APB* is aiming to bring gang/cop warfare in hundreds of accurately recreated cities to the online market in early 2007. Korean über-MMOG softco Webzen is handling global publishing duties.

#### UNREAL 3 MMO
Still with Webzen, details have also come to light about two other MMOs on the way from the publishers behind the massive 500,000-player-strong *MU Online*. *Huxley* is to take advantage of the Unreal 3 engine in 2006, while *Sun* is due to launch (in the US) later this year.

#### ELIXIR MMO
Having made their name producing intelligent strategy games, the gaming brainboxes over at Elixir have teamed up with *Time Of Defiance* creators Nicely Crafted Entertainment to create an MMO sci-fi sequel to *Republic*. Head over to www.pczone.co.uk and search for *Republic Dawn* for an exclusive interview.

#### TABULA RASA NO
Bad news if you're waiting for MMOG *Tabula Rasa*, latest brainchild of the legendary *Ultima* creator, Richard Garriott. Having already slipped from its late 2004 release due to 'noteworthy modifications', it's now set to miss its 2005 slot as well. An NCsoft spokesman confirms a 2006 release at the earliest.

## THE A-Z OF MMOs

### ONLINE GAMING EXPLAINED

**C** **C is for Crafting.** Sometimes in life, you have to step back from what you're doing and take an outsider's view to get a sense of perspective. Witnessing deadly serious conversations between a leading magazine editor and one of his art team about needing to collect scraps of linen in order to fashion a lovely dress for a troll friend is one such occasion. Crafting is essentially the MMOG equivalent of working from home, and frequently involves spending lengthy periods repeatedly clicking on buttons and watching progress bars slowly move from left to right until you hear a ping and have somehow made a pair of magic boots. Which is marvellous escapism following a hard day at work repeatedly clicking on buttons and watching progress bars slowly move from left to right until you hear a ping and you've somehow made a large corporation's shareholders that little bit richer.

**C is also for City Of Heroes**, perhaps the most controversial online game ever made. The currently legally-contested issue of trademark-infringing players could open a potential Pandora's Box of metaphorical landmines should Marvel Comics win its case. Holding a MMOG content provider liable for the actions of its players is akin to holding trees accountable for any hardcore pornography that ultimately gets printed on paper made from their pulp. But should the judges give the superhero purveyors the thumbs up, then the floodgates are open. This could mean that anyone playing as a vaguely film, novel, comic book, soap opera or milk delivery service-inspired character could cause their beloved game to be exterminated with extreme prejudice by crack tactical anti-copyright response soldiers.

## CLAN DIARY
### SCEE

### SCEE
**ANNE ROGERS,** aka Jaffy
www.scee-clan.co.uk

In the endless quest to find skilled female gamers, I recently came across a new development in girl gaming – the Frag Dolls, a team of youthful American female players with attitude to boot. Attending LAN and promotional events, they bring girl gaming into the public eye – so why is it that girl gamers across the world largely disapprove?

The Frag Dolls' website (www.fragdolls.com) presents the players as more glamorous than the typical girl gamer – in fact, far from the public's stereotype of female gamers. You'd imagine this would be a welcome portrayal for female gaming communities, fighting against the view that all gamers must be complete geeks, something that even our male counterparts haven't completely shaken

The Frag Dolls in all their glory.

### "The Frag Dolls show up at events mostly to demonstrate rather than perform"

yet! However, it's common opinion that the Frag Dolls represent something else – using women as an advertising tool. After all, as a true gamer, some of the 'favourite games of all time' indicated in their biogs would seem to be odd, sponsor-friendly choices.

In the SCEE camp we largely disagree with this move. The Frag Dolls show up at events mostly to demonstrate rather than perform, and when in competition they don't prove themselves to be particularly skilled – this kind of promotion puts genuine female gamers in a weaker position, furthering common opinion that they only gain sponsorship because of their gender.

This is perhaps not their fault. The industry simply might not be ready to support gaming females, or even top teams in male-dominated arenas to such a level that they can allow gaming to become their profession. The sponsorship the Frag Dolls receive is exceptional for both female gamers and their male counterparts, when the norm is server sponsorship or website hosting – simply not enough for serious teams.

So, using females purely as a promotional tool may seem unfair, but hopefully more girls will be encouraged by this display, making our recruiting job easier and giving us more quality opposition for the competitions we work so hard to partake in.

# MMOG FOR SALE
## COULD AD REVENUE SPELL SUBS-FREE GAMING?

**COULD THIS** be the beginning of the end for the monthly subscription-model MMOG? With player retention more of an issue than ever these days, top MMOG developers are starting to look at alternate sources of revenue to keep their games going. Most gamers are familiar with the upcoming *Guild Wars* plan (see page 104) to make only a single price for the game client, with further investment coming through future expansion pack sales rather than charging players a set fee each month.

*Anarchy Online* developer, Funcom, meanwhile has gone a stage further, making the entire game free to download (or, indeed, grab from our cover discs next month), and free to play for an entire year. Again, expansion packs such as *Shadowlands*, *Notum Wars* or *Alien Invasion* incur a monthly charge, but the real indication that subscriptions aren't long for the world is the news that the sci-fi world of Rubi-ka is to start featuring in-game advertising of real-world brands. Media advertising network, Massive Incorporated, has signed a deal to rent ad space on the world's massive billboards, promoting goods specifically targeted to the key male 18-35 demographic that makes up the majority of the game's players. *AO* subscribers will remain ad-free, but for everyone else it's just likely to be a bearable intrusion in return for free play of one of the longest-running virtual worlds to date.

Will others follow suit? One early indication that even the big names are willing to start cross-promotional tie-ins came with the recent update to *EverQuest II*, enabling players to make Pizza Hut home delivery orders by typing '/pizza' into the chat bar of the game. Free-to-play MMOGs may be just around the corner, as long as you don't mind slaying orcs with a Nike-branded broadsword or topping up health points with a swig of cool, refreshing Coors rather than a magic potion. *EverQuest* or *World Of Warcraft*? Pepsi or Coke? It's about to become the same debate.
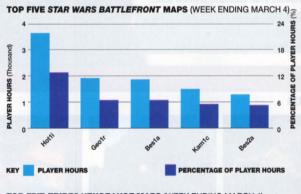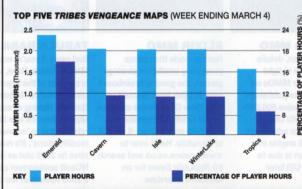
# STATZONE
## A LOOK AT THE DATA SHAPING YOUR ONLINE WORLD

**CSP★RTS**.NET

ALL DATA SUPPLIED BY

**TOP FIVE** *STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT* **MAPS** (WEEK ENDING MARCH 4)

PLAYER HOURS (Thousand) / PERCENTAGE OF PLAYER HOURS (%)

Hot1i · Geo1r · Bes1a · Kam1c · Bes2a

**KEY** ■ PLAYER HOURS ■ PERCENTAGE OF PLAYER HOURS

**TOP FIVE** *TRIBES VENGEANCE* **MAPS** (WEEK ENDING MARCH 4)

PLAYER HOURS (Thousand) / PERCENTAGE OF PLAYER HOURS (%)

Emerald · Cavern · Isle · WinterLake · Tropics

**KEY** ■ PLAYER HOURS ■ PERCENTAGE OF PLAYER HOURS

### TOP TEN STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT CLANS
(based on recorded scores week ending March 4)

**1.** =XSL=

**2.** -=MOC=-

**3.** [ITA]

**4.** [US]

**5.** –FART-

**6.** [SL]

**7.** =422=

**8.** =TF=

**9.** [SFI]

**10.** [-13TH-]

# Who's who in...
# GUILD WARS

**It's going to be a busy life in the world of *Guild Wars* and knowing your role is vital. *Rhianna Pratchett* gets into character**

**GUILD WARS** is set to change the way you think about MMOs when it launches later this month. First there's the subscription-free model. You only pay for the game once, as with a normal single-player title, with optional expansion packs providing a continuing, yet purely voluntary source of revenue for ArenaNet.

Secondly, the game mechanics work a little differently from most MMOs, especially with regard to combat. Skills themselves often have both positive and negative points, but it's totally different from anything else out there. It's also very fast-paced compared to a traditional MMO, rather like *Magic: The Gathering* mixed with *Team Fortress* and a smattering of *Diablo II*.

Finally, there are the character types. *Guild Wars* doesn't have characters per se, since *you* are the character. Instead it has six professions in total, from which you choose a primary when you start and a secondary once you're in the game. But what to choose? We caught up recently with *Guild Wars* producer (and founder of ArenaNet), Jeff Strain, and asked him to expand upon the virtues of the various characters you can choose...

## RANGER
**STRAIN:** This profession is a mixture of physical ranged damage and nature damage. They also have spells called rituals that have an impact on the battlefield as a whole (on both allies and enemies), so like the monk they have to be careful what they use and when they use it to be most favourable to their party. Rangers also have lots of bow-based skills and the ability to set traps, although they can be easily interrupted when they're laying them. This profession can also charm the ambient life in *Guild Wars* and bring them into battles. Charmed animals also grow and evolve over time.

## MESMER
**STRAIN:** Mesmers revolve around something called denial magic. Basically this means stopping your opponents doing what they want and denying them the use of their spells and special abilities. These are the guys that shatter illusions, interrupt spells and basically annoy the hell out of their enemies. They also have a specialised fast-casting skill which helps them in this pursuit. Rather than damaging an opponent's health, Mesmers do direct damage to their energy levels. They also have a rather cool ability to be able to remove hexes from other characters and then cast that hex back on the enemy.
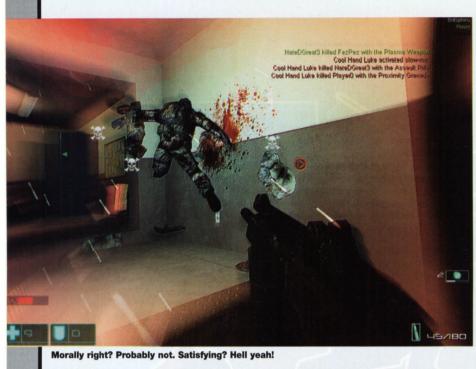
## MONK
**STRAIN:** Monks are the most sought-after profession for a group as they're the primary healers, which means they're the ones that other players get irritated with if they die, so it's also rather stressful! They have a lot of healing spells, enchantments and positive effects and form the support structure, which is why a lot of the hardcore guilds are building several monks into their parties. Monks have to really think about how they manage their healing spells – they can't just keep hitting heal, heal, heal, because things like 'heal area' will heal everything, ally and foe alike.

## WARRIOR

**STRAIN:** This is obviously a tank profession, the one you want on the front lines. They're heavily designed to give and absorb the most damage. A lot of their skills are based on either moving quickly around the battlefield or augmenting their weapons and attacks for more damage. They have several categories of skills, one of which are 'shouts' which operate as morale boosters. A simple one would be 'charge' which allows all allies in the area to move 25 per cent faster. Warriors also have to manage their adrenalin level which builds up as they dish out and receive damage.

## NECROMANCER

**STRAIN:** Obviously these guys are big users of death magic. They can cast hexes, counter-spells and de-buffs on their enemies. Necromancers can cause physical damage from afar, but it can be quite subtle and devious at first. As you'd expect they can also manipulate corpses in a variety of useful ways. They can summon creatures like bone fiends out of the corpses, they can cause the corpses to explode to damage nearby enemies and they can use corpses to teleport themselves or their party to a different location. They can completely change the dynamics of a battle. They're all about pain and death. I love them!

## ELEMENTALIST

**STRAIN:** Those who choose the Elementalist will be the ones who like the real 'flash-bang' characters because this profession is the heavy ranged spell-caster. They can manipulate the elements and cast things like fire storms, meteors, earthquakes, fireballs and blizzards on the battlefield. Although they have the same health and energy as other characters (everyone starts out with the same basic levels) the Elementalist can store up energy for longer, but their armour isn't as powerful. These guys are good at countering physical attacks as well as dealing out magical damage so they can protect themselves pretty well.

NateDGreat3 killed FezPez with the Plasma Weapon
Cool Hand Luke activated slow-mo
Cool Hand Luke killed NateDGreat3 with the Assault Rifle
Cool Hand Luke killed Player0 with the Proximity Grenade

Morally right? Probably not. Satisfying? Hell yeah!


Clipping issue or result of limb removal? Hard to tell.

# Let the bodies hit the floor...

# F.E.A.R.

*Will Porter* ventures into the *F.E.A.R.* multiplayer beta and finds it good for laughs and lashings of ultraviolence

**SOMEONE, SOMEWHERE** slams his slo-mo key and everything slides into *Matrix* territory. Out of habit and reverence for my *Spaced* DVD box-set, I mouth the word 'tits' in bass, lethargic tones as an enemy slowly lobs a grenade in my direction. Back-pedalling through treacle (and I swear this is true), I let off one burst of fire from my shotgun and it connects with the slowly arcing grenade – blasting all and sundry into bloody chunks. It becomes the sort of multiplayer moment you want to frame, put in your living room and use as a lively conversation piece in years to come.

*F.E.A.R.'s* slo-mo team deathmatch contingent works like this: both teams have a marker showing the location of the hyper-sensitivity power-up, which charges itself up before being unleashed

### CV    MONOLITH

**MONOLITH**
A supreme crafter of single-player shooters it may be (*Blood*, *NOLF2* and *AvP*), but Monolith hasn't cracked multiplayer – even if *AvP2* came close. *F.E.A.R.* is a mainly solo affair, but it's still put its heart into the deathmatch.


Player names are stencilled onto jackets and armour, in case you lose them.

by whoever possesses it (you if you're lucky). Everyone can see the location of the time commander too, so he can either be avoided or hunted down for flailing slo-mo shits and giggles. Just as the mode retains a steady rate of fire for whoever triggers it, it also makes for increased *Max Payne*-style accuracy for his prey – so in all honesty, it's hard to

work out who benefits from the bullet-time the best. But with frags like this and the odd stylised decapitation or limb removal, it's hard to care.

### F.R.A.G.
Life on the *F.E.A.R.* multiplayer beta isn't all smiles though. The insta-death nature of the weaponry can become infuriating,

while it's clear that many of the bump-maps and flashy particle effects we've played in the forthcoming single-player game have been sacrificed to the god of lag and the pursuit of smooth-running.

A full server means that the exchange of life and death is overwhelmingly frequent. Spawning is well handled, always doing its best to have you appear close to the action and with friends (although occasionally in the presence of three burly enemy soldiers instead).

### HIT ME BABY ONE MORE TIME
In tone, we're talking the turnaround of *Quake III* mixed in with the strafing, leaning and ultra-violence of *Soldier Of Fortune 2* – a somewhat heady mix that leaves the battleground absolutely strewn with the dead. The three maps available (an office block, some dockland warehouses and a building

### THE DETAILS
**DEVELOPER** Monolith
**PUBLISHER** VU Games
**WEBSITE** www.whatisfear.com
**ETA** Autumn

### WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?
- The DM contingent of the SP event of the year
- Intensely brutal
- Tight, confined spaces mixed with powerful guns
- It's got bullet-time. Loads of it
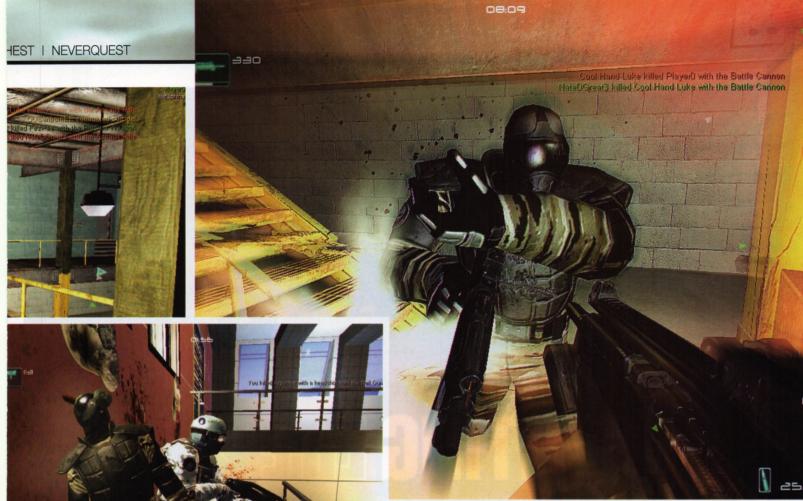

A friendly welcoming committee.


Prez encourages a nad-shot.

08:09



The aftermath of this screenshot wasn't pleasant.



All games should have enemy stapling nail-guns.

site) are all tight affairs designed with enough convenient windows, ledges and lines of sight to leave you permanently exposed in several directions to enemy fire. As chunks of masonry are blasted out of the walls around you, a lot of the challenge lies in working out where your assailant is situated before he caps you with the inevitable headshot.

Another *F.E.A.R.* calling card, meanwhile, is the flashy nature of the unarmed kill. Kung-fu slides designed to steal an opponent's feet from underneath him and gravity-defying

There's nothing more satisfying (perhaps in the history of human existence) than sailing through the air and connecting boot with the back of skull in slow-motion, apart from taunting your victim with a vicious 'haha!' message afterwards. Unless, of course, it's nailing some guy's head to a wall who's just perpetrated the exact same crime on you.

### PATIENCE GRASSHOPPER
Of course, there's oodles of work to be done in terms of balancing, and there's an obvious conflict between those

## "Pirouetting scenery is kept to a minimum in favour of bullet-holes, ragdolls and neat wave effects"

scissor kicks are both easily launched through the right mouse button. It's fair to say, however, that in noob hands these stylish flicks aren't of huge use in the face of nailguns, rocket-launchers and (the fundamentally awesome) battle cannon. What they are is an excellent way to freeboat and show off your skills.

attempting to play seriously and those quite content to use the slow-motion to watch the pretty patterns formed when you shoot out a pane of glass. If anything, the weapons (admirably weighty and a far cry from their somewhat floatier forebears in *Half-Life 2*) are pretty much all-powerful and

### YOINK



View the battle from afar, then join the action.

### *F.E.A.R.* POACHES A FEW NIFTY IDEAS

Now I'm prepared to admit that I'm wrong (its hardly a rare occurrence), but I'm sure that I haven't been able to look through security cameras and check where the heavy action was kicking off since the days of *Duke Nukem 3D*. Nor have I really seen remotely detonated mines or proximity charges well-used since the heady days and sweaty palms of N64 *Goldeneye* in olden times. Whether I'm right or wrong, *F.E.A.R.* certainly seems to be borrowing a few otherwise unplundered chunks of ingenuity – and it's all the better for it.

it seems odd that firepower like the Plasma gun can be selected as a meaty starting weapon.

Don't come here expecting the physical glory we've seen in Source-code infused multiplayer either – pirouetting scenery here is kept to a minimum in favour of bullet-holes, ragdolls and the neat wave effects that

surround bullets and grenade blasts.

The right word to use is 'kinetic', and the right glib phrase to use is 'it certainly packs a punch'. It won't change the world in the manner of *Counter-Strike* or *UT*, but it does enable you to decapitate a soldier in slow-motion – and sometimes, you can't ask for anything more than that. PCZ

**If this guy even says the word NVIDIA, electrodes zap his bollocks.**  *Counter-Strike* **still reigns supreme.**

# E-SPORTING LIFE

## All the latest news from the wide, wide world of professional gaming. Your man at the E-Sports desk: *Philip Wride*

**IT'S BEEN** another exciting month for E-Sports with lots happening in all parts of the world. First there's been the continuation of the World E-Sports Games in Korea, where several of the top *Counter-Strike* teams and *Warcraft III* players have been invited to live in Korea for two months and compete in a special invitational tournament.

The UK's own 4Kings have been in attendance and managed to put in some strong performances. Most notably they took down the CPL Winter Champions and arguably the World

No.1, NoA, in a close game, as well as edging past German powerhouse Mousesports. This paved the way to the semi-finals where they battled with another American team, GamerCo, who were amongst the favourites for the tournament (despite not living up to their recent form). Now that this game is done and dusted they see themselves firmly placed in the grand final to be hosted in the Forbidden City, China with an estimated 100,000 screaming Chinese fans in attendance. With these results they've guaranteed themselves at least $20,000 for second

place. Claiming the top spot would net them a cool $50,000.

Meanwhile in Turkey, extreme bad weather meant the first CPL World Tour stop to be held there had to be postponed until the end of March, pushing the Barcelona stop back until the end of April. However, it was not all doom and gloom, with Intel rescuing the event for those players that had already travelled to the event or were halfway there when the announcement was made. The *Counter-Strike* and *Warcraft III* tournaments still took place as planned with Catch-Gamer from Norway and Grubby from 4Kings coming out on top respectively. The *Painkiller* tournament that was held acted as a qualifier for Barcelona rather than an official stop itself, but it meant the players actually had something to play for along with the $20,000 Intel contributed.

A little closer to home, we've just seen the zBoard *Painkiller* Tournament in Southampton at the StarBytes Internet Café. The premise of this was much like the Intel Bloodline tournament in December but this time zBoard was looking for players for its own *Painkiller* team. It was a good tournament overall with a few very close games between the top contenders and in the end it came down to an all 4Kings final between Bloodline Champion David "Zaccubus" Treacy and Dan "KuuLa" Marshall.

**They come for the games. They stay for the rough company of unwashed men.**

Zaccubus eventually pipped KuuLa to the title. Ironically, neither player could accept the grand prize of a place in Team zBoard due to being contracted to 4Kings, but we're sure zBoard managed to spy some other talent in the rest of the field.

Finally, a welcome announcement was recently made regarding the next instalment of the Acon Series, hosted by hardware manufacturer Abit. Acon5 will host another *Warcraft III* tournament much like last year but it will also expand to include a *Counter-Strike 1.6* competition. With qualifiers being held in countries across the globe, each offering the chance of a free trip to Shanghai to compete, it has once again gained the support of the gaming community. For more info about the UK qualifiers head on over to the iGUK site at www.iguk.org and put yourself in with a chance. PCZ

**The excitement mounts at the zBoard tournament in Southampton.**

# FIGHTCLUB

**FIRST RULE OF FIGHT CLUB:** *PC ZONE* OWNZ JØØ
**FIGHT CLUB MODERATORS:** METALFACE, REX MUNDI & GOWERLY

OK, so we've learnt our lesson. No more *Joint Operations* Fight Clubs for us. No fault of the game itself you understand – as fine a contemporary-set, 150-player online shooter you're unlikely to find – it just seems to be a cursed game for *ZONE*/reader match-ups. Every time we've tried to run one, it's been a nightmare of connection problems, server issues and unexplainable 20-minute disconnections from our office network – and this was no different. A last-gasp rush to get the server running meant our usual admin controls were denied to us and the game was stuck on a 40-minute map rotation – not ideal for a fast-moving, high-turnover night like Fight Club. Plus, we were unable to sample any Escalation goodness because we couldn't choose the maps. Finally, a lack of *ZONERS* meant it was just Prezzer and Will facing the hordes.

That said, there were still moments of sublime gaming excellence, including Prezzer's less-than-dramatic one-

man parachute drop on an enemy base, a tense helicopter stand-off between Will and an enemy pilot and some superb sharpshooting from the likes of Cal40K and Liquid of the DOA clan, Sparky and BigWookie from the SOE clan and lone wolves DealerinDeath, Solomo and Eagle -NmF-. Well done to all for showing us how to play a game like *Jops* the right way.

As we said though, we've learnt our lesson. Someone once said always stick to what you know, so for the next few months we'll be running regular bouts of *Counter-Strike: Source*. In the longer term, we're going to be looking at taking things in a new (scary) direction by meeting up in popular MMOGs *City Of Heroes* or *World Of Warcraft*. More details on that in the coming months.

For now, just point your browsers at www.zonegames.co.uk, keep watching the *ZONE* forums on www.pczone.co.uk and www.dearwandy.com, or jump in the #pcz IRC channel to get the latest info. See you on the front lines.

**COME & 'AVE A GO!**
WWW.zonegames.co.uk
*for all the info*

## WHO'S WHO

| | |
|---|---|
| Jamie Sefton | Northern Scum |
| Paul Presley | Prezzer |
| Will Porter | Batsphinx |
| Suzy Wallace | Uzibat |
| Jamie Malcolm | JimLad |
| Anthony Holden | Shokupan |
| Martin Korda | Nameless One |
| Phil Wand | People's Front Of Judea |
| Michael Filby | Parallax |
| Sam Kieldsen | BoyWonda |
| Philip Wride | Wride |
| Stu Bishop | Banzai |

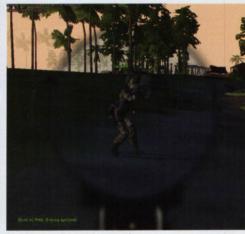## UPCOMING FIGHT CLUB EVENTS

**THURSDAY APRIL 28**
6.30PM – 8.30PM
*Counter-Strike: Source*

**THURSDAY MAY 26**
6.30pm – 8.30pm
*Counter-Strike: Source*

Fight Club – a great way to pick up a few new friends.

Making good use of cover there...

Will takes aim. And invariably misses.

German_007 sets up.

# ZONECHAT

## WHERE THE WORLD AND HIS WIFE COME TO TALK GAMES...

### The Prezzer & Will Show

**A TRUNCATED** chat last month, for Messrs Will and Prezzer anyhow. Urgent monkey business called for Mr Porter, while a house-bound Prezzlewick was suffering power outages due to Necessary Electrician Interference. Nonetheless, the fort was admirably held down by pretty much everyone else in the great *ZONE* pantheon of legends, with Dave, Sefton, Suzy, Rhianna, Kieldsen and Filby providing chat, gab and natterings at various points throughout the scheduled two hours.

Dave continued promoting his *Far Cry* Awareness Campaign, Sefton took umbrage at anyone and Prezzer's brief appearance was able to cover such weighty topics as whether *The Matrix Online* will be any good or not (verdict: too close to call). Sefton was embroiled in dual discussions about the merits of *Neighbours* over

*Home And Away* and his games magazine writing history. Sam and Filby got caught up debating the finer points of Michael Moore and *Team America*, with Rhianna theorising on violence in games. All in all, a well-rounded chat – thanks to everyone who took part. Next month we should be back to normal Prezzer and Will service, so expect the tone to be back to it's usual low-brow level. Yes, we'll be talking about what we had for tea and the like...

So, if you fancy joining in the fun, be there or be square on April 27: usual time, usual place. Which for non-regulars is 5pm in #pcz on the Quakenet IRC servers. Even if you've never been along to one before, there's no reason to feel left behind. Just grab a decent IRC program (www.mirc.com is a good starting point), log on and say hello. We're a friendly bunch and even when the *ZONE* staffers aren't there, you'll always be able to find a fellow reader willing to chew the fat.

**WEDNESDAY APRIL 27 5.00PM – 7.00PM**

## LAN ROVER

### Steve Randall seeks out the best LAN parties this April

We're well into the year now, and still many party organisers are yet to have their first event. Still, for those that have made the effort, kudos to you...

■ There's a one-day event at www.lanarchy.co.uk on Saturday April 23, taking place at St Marks church hall, Watford, 10am-10pm. It shouldn't be a bad turnout for just £10 a head – if you fancy joining in, head to the website for more details.

■ You need to move quick to get into the popular www.moongames.co.uk event from April 1-3 in Kettering, Northamptonshire. It costs £30 for the weekend and includes an appearance for all 58 entrants in their online video. All very exciting.

■ If that doesn't appeal, then how about heading to Lymplan 16, which is being held by www.westlan.co.uk. It runs from 7pm, April 8 until 5pm April 10 at Lympstone, Devon. Costs

are £15 in advance or £18 at the door – check out the website for more.

■ Another event at the 41st Scout Hut, Walderslade, Chatham from April 1-3 is Llamalan 5. More info from www.llamalan.co.uk – it'll set you back 20 crisp pounds.

■ April 8-10 sees 120 players gathering in Midlands hotspot Stoke-On-Trent, courtesy of www.thefragfactory.co.uk. If you fancy a weekend of fun and frolics, it costs 35 quid.

■ The newest addition to my favourites list is www.igme.me.uk who're starting out with their first event on April 23 in Billinghurst village hall. They're targeting 46 people for the afternoon for the absurdly reasonable price of £5 a head. Why not give them a try?

■ If you want your party to feature here drop me a line, with at least two months advance notice, the details of numbers, costs and location at scalper@gglan.co.uk. Scalper out.

## GUILDHALL

▲ ### BECAUSE PLAYING WITH YOURSELF JUST ISN'T AS MUCH FUN

Let's face it, the majority of online gamers are socially abhorrent elitists who shun outsiders in every form. But not here. Oh no, here at Guildhall we bring you only the friendliest, most welcoming of clans, guilds and gaming groups for you to team up with. Be it *Counter-Strike* terrorists looking for a few new bombers, or a *City Of Heroes* Supergroup recruiting for new tights, here at Guildhall you'll find a new home...

**CLAN:** {Unknown F@ction}
**CONTACT:** nemster@unknown-faction.com
**WEBSITE:** www.unknown-faction.com
**MAIN GAME:** *Counter-Strike: Condition Zero*
**DETAILS:** We're a UK-based clan, playing for fun but also with a competitive edge. We have our own server which applicants must be able to contribute towards. So if you enjoy a laugh and like to play matches, pop into #ukfc on Quakenet IRC and speak to Nemster.

**CLAN:** =TCT= Tactics Clan
**CONTACT:** silent_sniper_uk@hotmail.com
**WEBSITE:** www.tctclan.com
**MAIN GAME:** *Counter-Strike: Source*
**DETAILS:** We're a fun-loving clan based in the UK. We love to play *CS: Source* and do so pretty much every evening. All ages are welcome and we're getting a 20-player server and a 30-player TeamSpeak server within the next month. Come. Use Tactics.

**CLAN:** 22nd SAS
**CONTACT:** recruits@22ndsas.org.uk
**WEBSITE:** WWW.22ndsas.org.uk
**MAIN GAME:** *Call Of Duty* and *United Offensive*
**DETAILS:** We're a long-established clan with in excess of 40 players. We're always on the look-out for new members, but players must be 16 or over. We play seriously but have a server set aside if you just fancy having a bit of fun too.

**CLAN:** Dark Faction
**CONTACT:** Darkfaction@gmail.com
**WEBSITE:** www.darkfaction.uni.cc
**MAIN GAME:** *Counter-Strike: Source*
**DETAILS:** We're a newly formed *Counter-Strike: Source* clan who currently only have a few members and are looking to expand. As of the January 22 we're holding weekly public tryouts on our server. For more details, please visit our website.

**CLAN:** {-BravoCo-}
**CONTACT:** admin@bravocompany.org.uk
**WEBSITE:** www.bravocompany.org.uk
**MAIN GAME:** *Call Of Duty* and *United Offensive*
**DETAILS:** We're a newly formed clan who enjoy playing for fun. We're currently running three busy servers containing Awe mods along with custom and original maps. We're also recruiting, so if you fancy joining up or just want to pop along to pop some heads, we're waiting!

**CLAN:** =DB4D= (Death B4 Dishonour)
**CONTACT:** chequered@deathb4dishonour.co.uk
**WEBSITE:** www.deathb4dishonour.co.uk
**MAIN GAME:** *Day Of Defeat* and *Battlefield Vietnam*
**DETAILS:** We're a clan that's been going strong for over a year, successful in many cups with a popular server in the top 20 in the UK. We're currently looking for over 18s to expand on our *BFV* faction. Friendly and dedicated members required.

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*, Future Publishing, 99 Baker Street, London, W1U 6FP.
▼

John's LSD trips were getting worse.

"No, the white cloak was taken."

"I think it just moved."

These new outdoor showers are never going to catch on.

# DARK AGE OF CAMELOT: CATACOMBS

■ £19.99 | Pub: GOA | Dev: Mythic Entertainment | ETA: Out Now | daoc.goa.com

**REQUIRES:** PIII 1.4GHz, 512MB RAM, 64MB 3D card, 56k internet connection, full copy of *Dark Age Of Camelot* + active subscription **DESIRES:** P4 2.4GHz, 1GB RAM, 128MB 3D card and a broadband connection

**FULL VERSION OF DARK AGE OF CAMELOT REQUIRED**

## *Max Donnelly* prepares to go deeper...

**IN THE** world of MMOs there are expansions and then there are *expansions*. One merely adds things, the other transforms it. *Dark Age Of Camelot: Catacombs* is definitely in the latter category. Easily Mythic's most ambitious effort since the epic *Trials Of Atlantis*, *Catacombs* changes nearly everything about the core game, generally for the better.

### MONSTERS, INC.
One of the goals here was to have minimal impact on the PvP game, so this focuses on monster-bashing. The effects on the war between Midgard, Hibernia and Albion are muted – new items, five new classes and an easier levelling curve should bring more players into the *New Frontiers* battlegrounds sooner. Mostly though, this is a PvE add-on – and a good thing too. The biggest weak spot has always been its monster-bashing grind. The new areas offer more quests, better experience and a much faster level progression.

The chief vehicle for this improvement are the instanced dungeons. These private playgrounds, spawning uniquely when you enter, offer a controlled environment scaled to your level with appropriate rewards for the challenges. While most of these dungeons appear in the new underworld areas, there are some in the classic world too, usually tied to quests designed to speed your advancement.

Each realm has its own new theme too. Albion gets Roman-esque catacombs, Hibernia an elvish vision of Hell and Midgard a sort of Ring Cycle gone bad, with all sorts of Nordic mumbo jumbo. While the décor differs, the challenges and rewards remain roughly identical.

The new classes reflect the Realms' unique character. Albion gets the Heretic, a sort of whip-wielding evil priest. Hibernia gets a Vampyr in Kabuki face paint and a Bainshee, a spectral female shrieker. Midgard comes off the best, with the excellent Valkyrie and the Warlock. The Valkyrie and Bainshee are only available to female avatars too, which has sparked an epidemic of cross-dressing. Overall, the classes are interesting without disturbing the PvP balance.

### NO FREE LUNCH
The graphic improvements are also impressive, particularly the character models which have gone from vague sketches to fully-fleshed avatars. You can even change your characters' appearances after creation. More polygons, better textures and better use of lighting all improve the look significantly, particularly in the new areas.

This comes at a price though: *Catacombs* requires the earlier *Shrouded Isles* and *Trials Of Atlantis* expansions and has beefy hardware needs. However, the benefits are legion, like the souls of the damned. If you play *Camelot*, this is a must-buy. **PCZ**

### INPERSPECTIVE

**ANARCHY ONLINE: SHADOWLANDS**
Reviewed Issue 134, Score 80%
Perhaps the ultimate in MMOG expansion packs, *Shadowlands* is practically an entire game unto itself. Also worth trying is *Alien Invasion*.

**EVE ONLINE: EXODUS**
Reviewed Issue 152, Score 91%
Another expansion that changes the boundaries. *Exodus* adds new ships, interfaces, player structures and a new graphics engine.

> **"The Valkyrie and Bainshee are only available to females, causing much cross-dressing"**

### PCZONE VERDICT

✔ Faster levelling
✔ Great looks
✔ More customisable characters
✘ Some new classes better than others
✘ High system requirements
✘ Still too damn hard to level a healer

# 88

**Best thing to happen since *Shrouded Isles***

VIDEOGAME CULTURE

# EDGE®

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IN ISSUE 148:

## EXCLUSIVE: INSIDE MICROSOFT'S NEXT CONSOLE

ON SALE NOW

# Getting started in...
# EVERQUEST II

**You've installed the tutorial on this month's discs, played with the character creation and mastered the basics of movement and combat aboard the Far Journey. Now let *Paul 'Goblin-Master' Presley* take you through the ins and outs of your first six levels on the Isle of Refuge...**

ON THE DVD

### THE SCRIMSHAW TOKEN

**1** At first sight the crabs littering the beaches are little more than practice targets for early combat experience. However, kill a few before you reach level four (while they're still blue-coded) and you earn a bonus treasure chest. Inside is a Sandy Bone Shard, which, if examined, triggers a bonus early-level quest. Follow the quest instructions (kill more crabs, then triggerfish and eventually a goblin runner) to gather the ingredients needed to assemble the fabulous Scrimshaw Token – a necklace that offers bonuses to your power and health values.

### CELLAR CLEAN UP

**2** If you fancy a life of crafting once you leave the island, the best way to start is to talk to Assistant Dreak in Malvonicus's Tower. You have to perform a few perfunctory cleaning tasks in the cellar first (designed to get you used to the crafting side of the game), then build him a couple of tin items. In return, you're given a guide to crafting schools in the main game, a handy four-slot bag and a bracelet that boosts health and wisdom. You can also return to the cellar at any point and practise some basic crafting routines using items bought from the nearby merchant.

### FIND A FRIEND

**3** OK, so you've created your fancy-pants wood elf or hard-as-nails ogre and want to join your *ZONE*-reading mate who's also just installed our demo and entered the Isle. Wouldn't you know it, the game's only gone and spawned you on a different Isle of Refuge 'zone' due to overcrowding (all those other *ZONE* readers trying out the demo probably). Fear not though: simply head to the right-hand pier at the starting beach, ring the bell at the end and you're given the option to 'zone' (warp) to your buddy's location or to choose which Isle of Refuge to change to. Simple.

### LASYIDA'S CALL

**5** Another waterlogged quest, this requires you to do a spot of deep-sea diving in the ruins around the waterfall (mind the sharks though). Seek out a statue lying on its back and examine it to start the quest. You're asked to help clean up the water by killing ten razortooth sharks. This is not the easiest task (especially with Bladefin popping up every 20 or so minutes), so make sure you've got plenty of healing spells or a friend or two to help. For your troubles, you receive a Castaway Sash that boosts stamina and strength.

### BLADEFIN

**4** One of the tougher 'mobs' (monsters to you and I) on the island is Bladefin – the shark with an attitude. Extremely tough and not to be tackled unless you've reached level six or have a few friends along, this distant cousin to Jaws not only drops some attractive loot items, but can also trigger the Aquatic Research quest. Examine the dropped book (don't ask how a shark turns the pages), then kill a sawtooth shark, a shoal glider, a needlefang and a reef turtle. Head off to visit Malvonicus in his tower and you're rewarded with a bracer that boosts your intelligence.

## XALIEA'S REQUEST

**6** Life's not all roses on the Isle of Refuge apparently. Head to the northern part of the map and look out for Priestess Xaliea standing in a tent near a gateway. Listen to her moaning about the good old days for a while, then agree to help her recapture her youth by finding a few skeletons to crush. The graveyard on the eastern side of the island is the spot (although you have to dodge some tough goblins to get there). Kill the bony ones until you've gathered three bone chips, then return them to Xaliea for a cash reward.

## STOP THE SABOTEURS

**8** Another high-level quest this, you first need to find either a gruttooth warmonger or siege planner in the camps at the NW end of the island. Aside from sometimes dropping a handy six-slot goblin satchel, you also occasionally find a goblin attack plan. Examine it and you're tasked with hunting a gang of saboteurs found at the bottom of the stairs near the waterfall. This is another tough group, so bring friends or healing potions. Your reward though is an Exceptional (their words, not ours) Goblin Crafted Helmet, which aside from the armour bonus, also boosts your stamina.

## X MARKS THE SPOT

**7** A two-part quest this, with the eventual reward being a fine-looking cutlass that boosts both strength and health *and* decreases your attack time (useful for scouts). You first have to head back to the graveyard at the eastern edge of the island and kill several fallen pirate skeletons. Eventually, you get a chest drop which contains a treasure map. Examine it, put it away, find a few friends to team up with and head off to the waterfall north of the graveyard to find Captain Rockbelly's gravestone. See him off, loot his cutlass, examine it and take it to the mender in town to make it useable.

## EBIK'S MISSING PARTS

**9** Not exactly a hidden quest (Ebik Wobblecog is the gnome standing on the eastern beach), but finding his three missing items can be a pain. The size-seven clunker is between the port view bridge and the top of the waterfall and it's surrounded by nasty goblins that attack on sight. The copper-coated springer is underwater, straight out east from Rivicea Goldwind (south of Ebik). The triangle spinner is hidden in the roots of the treehouse to the NE of the island. There are plenty of nasty goblins about, so be careful. Your reward is a Constructed Wrist Spanner that boosts power and health.

## COLLECTABLES
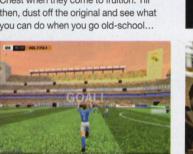
**10** *EverQuest II* contains many 'collection quests', the first two of which are located on the Isle of Refuge. Trawl the beaches for glowing question marks, then examine the uncovered items to start the shell collection. You also need to search in the forests to kick off the feather quest. Getting all five items for each quest takes some patience, but you find that other players are usually willing to trade (or even give away) any you're missing. Take your completed collections to Rivicea Goldwind on the eastern beach for rewards – a stamina-boosting trinket for the shells and a protective necklace for the feathers.

# COMMUNITY CHEST

# HALF-LIFE

**How do you make one of the greatest games of the decade even better? *Daniel Emery* thinks he may have some answers to that question...**

OK, *Half-Life* is one of the greatest games to ever grace the PC, but some aren't happy with perfection and have tampered with its beauty ad infinitum. Still, the results not only extend the life of the game, they also go to show what a wonderful engine *Half-Life* really is. Of course, with the release of *Half-Life 2* there are a multitude of mods in the pipeline and we'll be featuring them in a future Community Chest when they come to fruition. Till then, dust off the original and see what you can do when you go old-school...

### INTERNATIONAL ONLINE SOCCER (MOD)
www.planethalflife.com/ios

Yup, someone's turned *HL* into a footie sim. Not only does it almost perfectly mimic console games of the same ilk, but it also adds full online support so that every character can be a real human player. You can also use bots to plug the gaps so you're never waiting for a game to start.

### VAMPIRE SLAYER (MOD)
www.vsmod.com

Another innovative mod is *Vampire Slayer*. Although lacking a nubile young Buffy, there's no shortage of ultra-violence, with two teams (good and evil) battling it out. Weapons consist of guns and stakes for the good guys, or some up-close-and-personal haemoglobin cocktails (with a side order of stealth) for the vampires.

### WH40K : RIVAL SPECIES (MOD)
www.rivalspecies.com

We couldn't do a Community Chest without at least one mod making liberal use of a well-known brand: in this case, *Warhammer 40,000*. All characters have been remodelled, combat has been given an overhaul and a clutch of new maps added. Everything the hardcore crowd could ask for.

### HL RALLY (MOD)
www.hlrally.net

Another mod that takes a genre and stands it on its head is *HL Rally*. Actually, it's more like *Carmageddon's* bastard love child. It's not a frag-fest on wheels though: time is the objective, you can upgrade your vehicle in between races, and you can also mount an über death-cannon on the top of your car. Class.

### FIREARMS (MOD)
www.firearmsmod.com

*Firearms* is a mod that converts *Half-Life* into modern-day warfare, replete with helicopters, M60s, mortars and grenades. Sadly, it's never quite found its place in the sun, being eclipsed by both *Day Of Defeat* and *Counter-Strike*. However, the final version is due for imminent release and the mod's still a blast...

### NATURAL SELECTION (MOD)
www.unknownworlds.com

Honest guv, it's not *Alien Vs Predator* – although it's not hard to spot the similarities. That said, this is probably one of the best free mods for *Half-Life* ever produced. It certainly deserves to be a game in its own right, a move that's currently underway as we speak.

### PLANET HALF-LIFE (WEBSITE)
www.planethalflife.com

Don't want to trawl the Internet in search of goodies? Planet Half-Life has practically every level, map, mod, skin and decal ever made. There's even a nostalgia section for the pre-release version of *Half-Life* that got canned one year into production. Missed opportunity anyone?

### THE SKIN LAYER (SKINS)
www.skinlayer.com

Whether it's Spider-man or something downright surreal, you'll find a suitable skin for you here. While the design leaves a little to be desired (not to mention the search function), once you get into the file structure there are literally hundreds of skins to choose from. Why just stick with Gordon?

# STEVE HILL'S
# NEVERQUEST

**Steve Hill** revisits *Guild Wars* to explore his feminine side


Hill on the pull.


You don't get this in *WOW*.


Not your typical first date.


The Purdey bob makes a comeback.

**I AM A** beautiful young woman with a passion for animals. Of course I'm not, but the last time I got involved in *Guild Wars* I was a purple-haired Necromancer, which is scarcely any nearer the truth. This time round, I've introduced a much-needed touch of femininity allied to a tough exterior, as reflected in my carefully chosen name. Say hello to Fanny Batter.

Technically I'm a Wolf Child, and one of my key skills is the ability to charm animals. As such, I come pre-equipped with an Elder Wolf, a huge slavering beast that in any civilised society would be hunted to extinction. If I had a saddle and a pair of stirrups, I could just as well ride it into battle. As it is, my advanced Beast Mastery attribute enables me to send my trusty wolf into a feral frenzy, capable of tearing the throat out of anyone who so much as looks at my cute leather-clad arse.

## MAD FOR IT

As a change from the co-operative missions of yore, this time round it's all about player vs player, with randomly selected teams of four going at each other hammer and tongs. In some ways, it's like a bunch of old-school football hooligans turning up for a pre-arranged meet, with Stanley knives and broken bottles replaced by axes and magic.

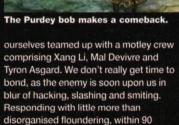Ready for a rumble I enter the mission, and the wolf and me find ourselves teamed up with a motley crew comprising Xang Li, Mal Devivre and Tyron Asgard. We don't really get time to bond, as the enemy is soon upon us in blur of hacking, slashing and smiting. Responding with little more than disorganised floundering, within 90 seconds our entire team has been wiped out – lock, stock and Elder Wolf.

Not a great start, and one that can't readily be rectified as the next scuffle involves another random bunch of strangers. This time round however, Praetor Fenix, Big Cosmos and Mistress Of Malice prove more able companions and we swiftly defeat the enemy, whereby we immediately go up against another crew.

This lot come armed with an Elder Wolf of their own, and perhaps provoked into a jealous rage, I go at the beast with

> ## "I sidle up to the nearest dumb-looking bloke and seductively announce 'You look like a big strong man'…"

barely restrained fervour, hacking at its throat and eyes with a giant axe, forgoing any notion of animal charming. A competent opponent, it puts up a decent fight, gnawing at my midriff and clawing at my breasts and face with gusto. My own faithful wolf comes to the rescue and eventually the beast is slain,

giving a final whimper as it drops dead at my feet in a mess of blood and fur. However, while I've been slaughtering the wildlife, the rest of my team has taken one hell of a beating. I rejoin the throng as they're in their death throes and within seconds it's all over: four dead gimps and a wolf.

## BIG AND STRONG

Several attempts later and I still have only that solitary victory to show for my efforts. Deciding I need help, I sidle up to the nearest dumb-looking bloke and seductively announce: "You look like a big strong man."

Amilio Versailes – for it is he – immediately takes the bait and asks if I want to "make a guild" with him. In reality, he hasn't got a clue what he's doing and is probably just looking to get into my skin-tight body armour. After a few minutes of an increasingly awkward date, he announces we need to teleport to the Tomb of the Primeval Kings.

I'd have settled for a cab home, but I dutifully follow him, only to find no sign of him on my arrival. What I do find is a

bleak desert populated almost exclusively by French people. As Sylver Hand says: "Pis squi est con sais quapres on se plain quon na pas asser," which might even be Spanish. Either way, given that my Spanish amounts to little more than ordering 'dos cervezas, boss' and my French is largely limited to describing what part of their house Mr and Mrs Marsaud are currently occupying, there's little here for me by way of interaction. To my credit, I do manage to get a team together, but it's a shambolic affair and we soon disband due to linguistic differences.

## DANCE DANCE DANCE

Teleporting back to the Gladiator's Arena, a scantily-clad girl by the name of Blub Blub is performing an erotic dance. Asking her to teach me how, I enthusiastically join in, as does another girl called War Cal, who has no qualms when I suggest we "lez up".

A crowd soon gathers, and within minutes it's like a scene from *The Accused*, with armour-clad blokes whooping and hollering and a brave few even attempting a bit of ill-advised break-dancing.

"Be even better if we were naked" I observe, and nobody disagrees. Make love, not *Guild Wars*. **PCZ**

## GIVING YOU LESS

■ **HARDWARE EDITOR** Phil Wand

▲

"You'll be delighted to hear we've dropped the price of your BT Broadband service," said the letter.

Wandy's heart was sent aflutter. "Why yes, I am truly delighted," he said, clutching his hands together and dropping toast crumbs on to the second paragraph. "Although I should confess, I am a little concerned this is but a ruse to win over my affections."

The letter held up a hand. "There is no need to worry," it said. "You can continue to enjoy the true power of Broadband from BT for even less."

Wandy frowned.

"To enable us to offer our best possible price," continued the letter, "we are introducing a usage allowance."

Wandy frowned some more.

"It lets you download up to 15GB of data per month."

Well, that did sound like a lot.

"That's 3,000 music tracks."

Wandy tried to imagine so many tracks. It was really difficult.

"Plus your line will be upgraded from 512KB to our new 2MB service," said the letter confidently.

Wandy reached for his calculator. "Your 15GB limit is equivalent to 505MB per day, assuming an average of 30.44 days in a month," he said.

The letter shrugged.

"And if I were to buy an old 56K modem capable of transferring 7KB per second," said Wandy, tapping rapidly on the calculator, "I could download 25,200KB in an hour. Or 591MB per day."

The letter looked at its footer.

"And if I listened to an Internet radio station for just three days, I'd have used up more than a quarter of my total allowance."

"Er," said the letter.

"So basically, I can download more each month with a V90 modem."

"Um."

▼

"Goodbye," said Wandy, dropping the letter in the bin.

# 512 OVERTURE

**NVIDIA and ATI both announce half-gigabyte video hardware; 512MB RADEON X850 XT increases speed by a third**



**To the untrained eye, the 512MB RADEON looks no different from its 256MB counterpart. Memory chips on both sides of the card give the game away.**

**ATI SHOWED** off the world's first 512MB GDDR3 video card at the Texas Gaming Festival last month, claiming that it was "between 20 per cent and 30 per cent quicker" than the current flagship RADEON X850 XT. The benchmarks provided did seem to show that,



**ATI's own benchmarks indicate the extra memory can have a significant effect in certain situations.**

although the card isn't significantly faster than current products (its R480 processor is straight from the parts bin, albeit with a sexed-up memory controller to talk to double the RAM), it does provide enough thrust to propel it ahead of any 256MB sibling in *Half-Life 2*, *Far Cry* and *Doom 3*.

ATI has stressed that the half-gig card is for demo purposes only – it's little more than a "technology preview" to whet our appetites – and has stated that it has no official plans to push the card to retail. But with NVIDIA partners announcing 512MB GeForce variants, and benchmarking records currently dominated by the 6800 Ultra, it's almost certain we'll be seeing beefed

up X850 cards on shelves within a matter of months – if only as a matter of pride.

And what of the price? It's likely that you can expect a hefty premium of between £100 and £150, making the total outlay more than £500. When the same amount of money buys you a new 3.0GHz Dell complete with 17-inch flat panel monitor and enough change for a Sparkle 6600GT, only poseurs and rich parents need apply. Put simply, the increase in performance is dwarfed by the cost. You're far better off spending the money upgrading your motherboard, CPU and memory.



# CREATIVE ARRANGEMENT

**Creative launches budget monitors for budding digital musicians**



**Your multimedia station deserves a proper set of cones.**

**WITH MORE** and more people using music tools such as FL Studio, Rebirth and ACID PRO to create banging choons on their PCs, it was only a matter of time before Creative launched a product to cater for them.

Already going down a storm in Far Eastern markets, the Monitor M-series features bi-amp speakers – the woofer and tweeter are driven by separate amplifiers – with 16W RMS per channel and a frequency response range of 62Hz ~ 20kHz. The M80 features a front headphone jack, rotary volume, bass and treble controls, plus analogue inputs on the rear; the M85-D includes a digital to analogue converter.

With MDF construction, rear bass ports and various Creative sound enhancements on board, they should sound a lot better than they look. If pricing elsewhere in the world is anything to go by, the cost here should be seriously tasty – around the £45 mark. Listen out for a review soon.

# FOUR GONE CONCLUSION

**The Pentium 4 is dead...
Long live the Pentium**
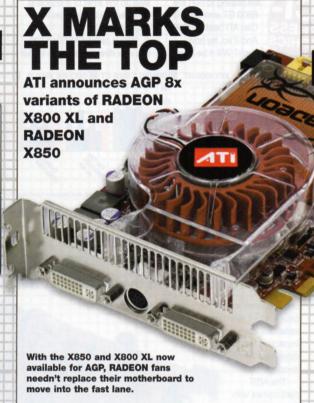
**Launched in November 2000, the Pentium 4 is almost an antique. To mark the entrance of new technology, the old name will make an exit.**

**THE PENTIUM** 4's days are numbered. Intel's dual-core desktop chips (Hardware News, PCZ #153) will be branded Pentium D 800-series when launched later this year, and the Pentium 4 Extreme Edition will drop the numeral to become simply Pentium Extreme Edition. The Pentium Ds are also likely to lose their Hyper-Threading capabilities, whereas the Extreme Editions will retain them – although with a raft of similar tricks integrated into both designs, it's unlikely to lose Intel any sales.

Intel's D chips should arrive a few months ahead of AMD's dual-core line-up, and will mark the end of almost five years of the ubiquitous P4. The chip giant has also straightened up its strategy after a handbrake-turn on 64-bit last year, and confidently predicts that every server product it ships will encompass the architecture by the end of this year – not to mention half of all desktop processors. That's a far more bullish approach than AMD, which still offers users a choice between 32- and 64-bit Athlons, and with Windows XP Professional x64 Edition due within the next two months (trial versions are already available), it's an attitude that should win back some market share.

# X MARKS THE TOP

**ATI announces AGP 8x variants of RADEON X800 XL and RADEON X850**



**With the X850 and X800 XL now available for AGP, RADEON fans needn't replace their motherboard to move into the fast lane.**

**ALTHOUGH PCI-EXPRESS** has become the standard way of planting graphics cards in new motherboards, most of the world's gaming rigs are based around the 'old' AGP 8x standard. And yes, although PCI-Express is by far the superior solution, offering a greater throughput of data, AGP versions of today's fastest cards are pretty much indistinguishable from their PCI-Express counterparts. Until PCI-Express becomes commonplace (which won't be for a few years yet), it makes sense to manufacture just as many AGP graphics cards as PCI-Express ones.

Which is why NVIDIA has been keen to ensure that its best-selling products such as the 6600GT and 6800GT are available with both interconnects, and why the company has been edging ahead in sales charts. ATI on the other hand, as though only just aware of the situation, has announced the availability of the RADEON X800 XL and RADEON X850 to AGP customers – the former offering a native connection, the latter using a much-maligned 'bridge' chip. "The RADEON X800 XL and RADEON X850 products are perfect for gamers looking to upgrade their AGP systems to play the latest games," says their European vice president. Look out for them on shelves over the coming month.

# DRIVER WATCH

**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 | 6.0.1.1007 | 16-Dec-04 | 1.5MB | support.intel.com | |
| NVIDIA | Forceware | 5.10 | 17-Sep-04 | 26.8MB | www.nvidia.com | |
| NVIDIA | nForce4 Standalone | 6.39 | 04-Feb-05 | 32MB | www.viaarena.com | |
| VIA | Hyperion 4in1 | 455vp1 | 25-Nov-04 | 1.4MB | www.viaarena.com | NEW |

### GRAPHICS

| MANUFACTURER | NAME | DESC | RELEASED | SIZE | WEB | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ATI | Display, Control Panel, WDM | CATALYST 5.3 | 9-Mar-05 | 23.1MB | ati.com | NEW |
| NVIDIA | Forceware | Release 70 Beta | 02-Mar-05 | 17.9MB | www.nvidia.com | NEW |

### SOUND

| MANUFACTURER | NAME | DESC | RELEASED | SIZE | WEB | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Creative | Creative Audigy 4 Pro Update | 3.00.55 | 20-Dec-04 | 20.95MB | uk.europe.creative.com | |
| M-Audio | Revolution | 1.0.2.8 | 13-Feb-04 | 10.16MB | m-audio.com | |

# RADEON RUMBLE

**With prices ranging from under £150 to over £300, which is the fastest Radeon, and which the best value?**

**WITH THE** graphics category of our Buyer's Guide now under GeForce control, it seems only fair to allow the Radeon boys a chance to flex their shining frame-rates and show off some gaming muscle.

**PCI-EXPRESS GRAPHICS**

**CONTENDERS... READY!**
Lined up below, oiled and ready for benchmarking, are ABIT's X700 Pro, the Radeon X800, X800 XL and two X800 XTs. All are PCI-Express – and all

are hoping to hurt the 6600 GT and 6800 GT. Can ATI beat NVIDIA? And if so, by how much? Will it be a light slap on the wrist or a crippling kung-fu kick to the grundies? Let's find out.
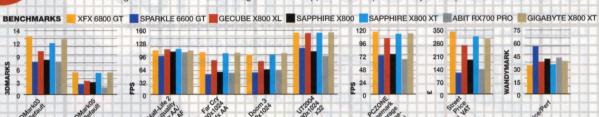
We've picked ABIT's X700 Pro as a direct challenger to our favourite Sparkle 6600 GT, and the GeCube X800 XL will be doing all it can to make the XFX 6800 GT sing falsetto. The X800 appears with its price exactly

halfway between the two NVIDIA cards, and the more expensive X800 XTs from SAPPHIRE and GIGABYTE provide our high-end point of reference.

**BENCHMARKS** ■ XFX 6800 GT ■ SPARKLE 6600 GT ■ GECUBE X800 XL ■ SAPPHIRE X800 ■ SAPPHIRE X800 XT ■ ABIT RX700 PRO ■ GIGABYTE X800 XT

[Benchmark charts: 3DMARKS (3DMark03 Default, 3DMark05 Default); FPS (Half-Life 2 High quality 4x AA/8x AF, Far Cry 1280x1024 4x AA, Doom 3 1280x1024, UT2004 1280x1024 x32); FPS (PCZONE Gamemark Average frame-rate); £ (Street Price incl. VAT); WANDYMARK (Price/Perf)]

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.

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# RX700-PRO

■ Price: £144 | Manufacturer: ABIT Computer | Phone: 01438 228 888 | abit.com.tw

## The mid-range was always ATI's house. Can the X700 evict NVIDIA?

**THE ABIT** RX700-PRO is priced within a few pounds of our Sparkle 6600 GT champ, and the benchmark results are predictably close. The RX manages to pull out a lead in the *Half-Life 2* tests, but slips up in *Doom 3*, wheezes a little in *Unreal Tournament 2004*, and finishes with an average of 65fps against 75fps from the GT.

Now although that may seem like a healthy margin, if you were to run these cards alongside one other they'd be impossible to tell apart – much like a 65W and 75W light bulb. If you think you could tell the difference, and are

one of those people who believes that minor frame-rate variations have a negative impact on your enjoyment, there are other factors to consider

The ABIT card comes with PowerDVD 5 and a few ancillaries the Sparkle doesn't offer, and as we've seen, it's an impressive performer in Source. So if you're a keen *CS: Source* player, or you've been living under a rock for six months and haven't yet finished *Half-Life 2*, you'd be daft to dismiss it.

**PCZONE VERDICT**
✔ Strong performer in *Half-Life 2*
✔ Overall quality
✘ Drops behind the 6600 GT
✘ Should be £10 cheaper

# 82

**A good card up against a brilliant one**

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# RADEON X800

■ Price: £180 | Manufacturer: SAPPHIRE Technology
Phone: 01793 423 830 | sapphiretech.com

## The plain-clothes X800 drops blistering pace for an interesting price

**COSTING THE** same as some of the big-ticket 6600 GT variants, the RADEON X800 is the entry point for high-end ATI performance and is the 12-pipeline rival to the GeForce 6800. Overclockers will be disappointed to hear that unlike the NVIDIA card, the X800 is stuck with its restraining bolt. While there's a voltage mod that permits some heart-racing clock rates, there's no way of freeing up the pipes. You can't flash an XT card's

BIOS like you can with the X800 PRO, and there's no RivaTuner equivalent to get all pistons firing like on the 6800. So, if you don't like what you see in the benchmarks, it's probably not the card for you.

In terms of value for money, the X800 ranks highly on the Wandymark scale, beating the X800 XL and getting close to the X700 PRO. Speed-wise, its

performance is equitable with the 6800 – but it's not far enough ahead of the 6600 GT to make the additional £50 seem worthwhile. Quite honestly, you'd be better off saving your cash and getting the X800 XL.

**PCZONE VERDICT**
✔ A pretty cheap way into high-end territory
✔ Decent performance
✘ You'd only want to go faster
✘ Unmemorable

# 78

**Decent all-rounder, but the 6800 still beats it**

# RADEON X800 XT

■ Price: £326 | Manufacturer: SAPPHIRE
Phone: 01793 423 830 | sapphiretech.com

**Flies through complex scenes with the greatest of ease**

**IT MIGHT BE** slower than the X850, but the X800 XT is still a badass. To give you some idea, its 3DMark03 score was 75 per cent faster than the RX700 Pro, and its *Doom 3* performance was almost twice as good. Look at the average frame-rate and you'll see some big numbers – all three digits, all within a gnat's chuff of the 6800 GT.

The thing is, a lot of PC buyers are opting for NVIDIA nForce chipsets, are falling in love with them, and are then buying NVIDIA GeForce cards to match. If you were to buy GIGABYTE's 6800 GT rather than its X800 XT, or indeed this SAPPHIRE XT, you could take advantage of SLI on any suitable motherboard.

That said, of course you don't have to, but it's having the possibility of doing so that's alluring to end users – it gives them something to boast about at LAN events. And however good the X800 XT is, and however close it gets to the 6800 GT, ATI's technology seems oddly dull by comparison. Look at retail sales figures for this sector and you'll understand – NVIDIA just reported the second-highest quarterly sales in the company's history.

### SPECIFICATIONS

**HARDWARE** 256MB GDDR-3 ATI RADEON X800 XT
**ANCILLARIES** VGA to DVI converter, S-video cable, composite cable, S-video to composite adaptor, S-video to RBG whip
**BUNDLE** *Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow*, *Prince Of Persia: TSOT*, PowerDVD 5, PowerDirector PRO VE, Installation CD, Tweak CD

### PCZONE VERDICT

✔ Top bundle
✔ Space conserving box
✘ Not a lot really
✘ PowerColor XT is cheaper

# 85

**It's an X800 XT. It's fast**

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# RADEON X800 XL

■ Price: £279 | Manufacturer: GECUBE | Phone: N/A | www.gecube.com

**Designed to best the GT, is this the new best buy?**

**AS THE PLAIN** X800 imitates the plain 6800, so the XL matches the GT. With the latter selling in such huge numbers, not to mention being our Editor's Choice since it turned up late last year, the XL is ATI's most important product. Luckily, everything about it is right. The price is right, matching NVIDIA's champion to the penny, and the full 16-pipeline count is right, giving the card genuine high-end credentials. But what about performance? Does it actually go as well as its specifications suggest?

The results say yes – yes, you probably want one. The new XL goes neck and neck with the GT, and although the RADEON isn't manifestly faster than the GeForce, it does mean that the "high-end mid-range" is no longer a one horse race. More competition will only mean more price cuts – if you shop around for an X800 XL under £250, you'll be buying a jet-propelled card which only the 6600 GT can rival for value. And if that doesn't have people scurrying to shops, what will?

### SPECIFICATIONS

**HARDWARE** 256MB GDDR-3 ATI RADEON X800 XL
**ANCILLARIES** VGA to DVI converter, S-video cable whip, S-video to RBG whip
**BUNDLE** PowerDVD 5, Installation CD

### PCZONE VERDICT

✔ All the grunt of our favourite GT
✔ Whisper-quiet
✘ Loses out in *Doom 3*
✘ Overall it's neither faster nor slower than its rival

# 90

**Phat card with an underweight price tag**

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# RADEON X800 XT

■ Price: £317 | Manufacturer: GIGABYTE Technology
Phone: 01908 362700 | www.giga-byte.com

**Want something to keep your ferret in? Get this card**

**GIGABYTE'S** big-hitter comes in a big box. If you were to shrink yourself down to Ken and Barbie size and have someone hand you a packet of B&H Superkings, well, OK, that'd be the size of your car and the GIGABYTE box isn't quite that huge. But you get the idea. This is a box which makes you feel like you're getting what you pay for (all £317 of it). It's a box you could use to defend yourself when facing a midnight intruder brandishing a Sparkle 6600 GT.

If you're wondering why I'm talking such bollocks, it's because the performance of the GIGABYTE X800 XT is no different from that of the SAPPHIRE X800 XT (see above) – and there's really not a lot else to say. When choosing your XT, just make sure you hunt out the cheapest variant with a favourable bundle – use a comparison site like nextag.co.uk or kelkoo.co.uk – and buy from a reputable source. Through nextag.co.uk you can see that Micro Direct sells a PowerColor X800 XT for £293. Thank you and goodnight.

### SPECIFICATIONS

**HARDWARE** 256MB GDDR-3 ATI RADEON X800 XT
**ANCILLARIES** VGA to DVI converter, S-video cable whip, S-video to RBG whip, Power Splitter
**BUNDLE** *Counter-Strike: Condition Zero*, *Joint Ops*, *Thief: Deadly Shadows*, PowerDirector ME, 3D-Album, Installation CD with V-Tuner

### PCZONE VERDICT

✔ Top bundle
✔ Huge box
✘ Not a lot really
✘ PowerColor is cheaper

# 85

**It's an X800 XT. It's fast**

# X52 FLIGHT CONTROL SYSTEM **JOYSTICK**

■ £99.95 | Manufacturer: Saitek | Phone: 01454 451900 | www.saitek.com/uk

### Light 'em up

**THE X52 IS** aimed totally at the hardcore crowd, with more buttons, switches, toggles, nodules, sliders, twisters, turners, spindles and flippers than just about anything else out there on the market today. And it has an LED screen with a clock and stopwatch. And it glows. Blue. So the hardcore flight sim crowd should love it, right? With the exception of the Thrustmaster HOTAS Cougar, it's the most scary-looking addition to any virtual fighter pilot's desk you can get. Problem is, while it looks more hardcore than a night in Amsterdam with Jenna Jameson, when you get your hands on the thing it actually feels really light and plasticky (again, much like Ms Jameson I should imagine).

The X52 is a marketing idea of what a hardcore joystick should be – all bells and whistles, buttons and lights.

What an actual hardcore joystick needs to be is heavy, responsive and blessed with tactile feedback. The X52 is none of these things. It's just a fancy-looking desk ornament. There's not even any force feedback (a fault it shares with the Cougar it must be said), and whatever you might be told, it does make a hell of a difference to the committed virtual sky captain.

That said, the X52 is blessed with an incredible amount of versatility. The staggering number of programmable buttons lends the device some terrifying functionality.

Personally, I've got mine mapped to my PC's iTunes controls so I don't have to keep swapping back and forth to shuffle through my music collection. There's something oddly satisfying about being able to control the volume of your atmospheric entertainment by pushing the throttle forward and back. I'm sure you'll find other creative non-joysticky uses for the thing. Hell, it even serves as a half-decent night light for midnight toilet trips (the ravages of age, don't you know).

### PCZONE VERDICT

✔ Enough programmable buttons to replace your keyboard and mouse
✔ It glows blue
✔ Looks snazzy
✘ Feels too lightweight
✘ No force feedback

## 78

**Style over substance**

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# TRACKIR 3-PRO

■ £79.95 | Manufacturer: NaturalPoint | Phone: N/A | www.trackir.se

**OPTICAL TRACKING SYSTEM**

### That's using your head

**MY FAVOURITE** ever 'alternative' control device was originally a little plastic surfboard number on the ZX Spectrum. You'd place it over the keys, load up *Pro Surfing '87* (or whatever it was called), then use your dangling fingers to simulate paddling and pressure on either end to get the needed balance to avoid wipeouts. That's changed now. The TrackIR is easily my most favouritest thing in the world ever. Bottom line, it's a motion sensor device. You pop it on top of your monitor, stick the shiny silver 'tracking dot' on your forehead and the rest takes care of itself.

Your every head movement is then translated into in-game 3D viewpoint adjustment. Ostensibly this has been designed as an alternative to mouse control for carpal tunnel sufferers and the like (and as an alternative mouse pointer, your head is surprisingly effective, if a little hard to fine-tune), but it's in simulation games that the TrackIR really shines.

Load up *MS Flight Sim*, *IL-2*, *GTR* or even the included copy of military MMOG *World War II Online* and the difference is immediate. Moving your viewpoint with your head takes some getting used to, but it's extremely responsive and as long as you can put up with the constant need to hit the recentering key whenever you stray your head too far, it actually starts to make a difference. More so with the Vector Expansion device that adds full 3D movement (in fact I'd go so far as to say that's a necessary requirement for full usage).

Of course, if in three years time there's a government study into a plague of debilitating neck injuries throughout the gaming fraternity and the TrackIR is named as the leading cause, well… You never heard of me, right. We never had this conversation. Remember, I know where you live.

### PCZONE VERDICT

✔ Come on – you're using your head to control the game
✔ Actually very responsive
✔ With Vector Expansion it makes loads of difference to your game
✘ Needs more support from developers
✘ You may leave the silver dot on your head by mistake

## 87

**The future of gaming, honest**

# ICEMAT SIBERIA MULTI HEADSET

**PCZONE EDITOR'S CHOICE**

■ £69 | Manufacturer: Soft Trading ApS | Phone: 00 45 7025 0075 | www.icemat.com

### White is the new, erm... Brown  `GAMING HEADSET`

**WHITE'S BACK IN.** People are buying white carpets and white furniture – they're even ordering white cars again. What was once an unfashionable colour is now the height of chic, and it's all thanks to the iPod. But irrespective of Apple's triumph of marketing over common sense, you can't deny that these headphones are a beguiling mix of new and old – a look back at NASA's moon mission archives reveals the chaps at Houston control were wearing apparatus of a similar design.

They sound good, too. Music reproduction can get a little muddled and the bass can't match the reference JVC HA-DX3 cans, but gaming effects are superlative and the integration of a top-quality microphone makes them ideal for team gaming and Skype.

The design is sensible too. There's a short cable hanging from the left cup which is ideal for portable players – you extend the cable for your PC by connecting it to the supplied junction box. From here, one wire goes to the 'line out' and the other to the 'mic in' on your sound card. The microphone itself has a clip for your lapel or a hook for your screen. Most importantly, these are the most comfortable headphones I've ever had on my head. Hence, they're our new Editor's Choice.

### PCZONE VERDICT

✔ As stylish as any iPod
✔ Intelligent design
✔ High quality
✘ Ambient noise suppression

## 91

**The most comfortable gaming cans ever**

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# INTELLIGENT MAINS PANEL

**PCZONE RECOMMENDED**

■ £29 | Manufacturer: OneClick Technologies | Phone: 0870 321 4620 | www.quietpc.com

### Do your bit for the environment...

**SUCH A SIMPLE** idea. Connect your PC to the master socket on the OneClick panel, then push up to five peripherals into the other holes. When you fire up your machine, the panel waits for a few seconds, then provides juice to the remaining sockets.

It works the other way around, too, meaning that when you switch off your PC, your monitor, printer, external hard drive, scanner and speakers (or whatever) also power off in succession – without you having to lift a finger. Given the colossal amount of power that's wasted every day by people leaving their stuff on – the makers reckon an average setup wastes 35W per hour through leaving stuff on standby – it's a sound environmental idea also.

Additionally, the OneClick panel gives surge protection and integrates a voice/data line-splitter so your phone and modem are protected too. It's such a monumentally good idea every home should have one.

### PCZONE VERDICT

## 90

**A right proper idea**

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# STEELPAD QCK+

■ £14.95 | Manufacturer: Soft Trading ApS | Phone: 00 45 7025 0075 | www.steelpad.com

`MOUSEMAT`

**MEASURING 45CM** by 40cm, the Steelpad QcK+ is a mousepad of truly epic proportions. It would cover the screen of a 22-inch LCD monitor, yet because it's cloth with a flexible, non-slip rubber base, it can be rolled up and pushed back into its box or folded over and dropped into a drawer. And assuming you have enough room on your desk to accommodate it, the QcK+ provides more than enough room in which to swing any mouse.

In fact, such are the pad's dimensions that it encourages you to drop the sensitivity and make more use of the area – with lower sensitivity comes greater accuracy. It could be all in my mind, but I swear it made me play better – and even if I did imagine it all, the fact it heightens confidence can only be a good thing. My only reservation would be that, because it's cloth, it's prone to picking up crud from your desk.

### PCZONE VERDICT

## 84

**Ample and accurate, for optical and ball mice**

# DEAR WANDY

**If your memory's on the fritz, your graphics are all blotchy and your hard drive sounds like a cement mixer, write in and share with the group. Wandy promises not to laugh too hard...**

■ **SMIRK-FREE** Phil Wand

## LET IT ALL OUT

Share your techie or gaming-related problems with us and in turn, we may well share them with thousands of readers via these very pages in a big communal love-in type thing.

If you have any **top tips** to share with the group, then send them in too: if Wandy's impressed, he'll print them and send you £50 for your trouble.

**Write to** Dear Wandy, *PC ZONE*, Future Publishing, 99 Baker Street, London, W1U 6FP.

**Email** Address your letters to us at wandy@dearwandy.com with the subject heading 'Dear Wandy'. Please note: while we can assure you that we read absolutely every techie query sent to us, we're unable to offer personal replies. Sorry.

## MEN OF VALIUM

**Q** I've just bought *Men Of Valor* and keep getting the same error message at the same point. It pops up on the training mission when I enter the bunker, saying that the instruction at 0x01ee9a23 referenced memory at 0x000005c – the memory could not be "read", click OK to terminate the program. I went to the developer's website to find the relevant patch and was dismayed to find that the 1.2 update could not be installed – something about an old version not being found?

I've found quite a few people on forums having the same problems, so please help us sort this out. My computer is an AMD64 3000+ with 512MB RAM and an NVIDIA GeForce 6800GT.

*Chris Roffe*

**A** I tend to keep half an eye on community forums for the top-selling games, so when someone such as yourself makes plaintive noises about crashes and error messages, there's a

This happened a long time ago with *Frontier* and the infamous joystick bug; it happened more recently with *Half-Life 2* and the quirk that left players feeling let down and stitched-up after they finished it.

*Men Of Valor* is worse than either of these, in that there's a never-ending stream of 'OMFG HELP!' threads on the Vivendi forums, with grievances ranging from the ridiculous (the installer locking up) to the calamitous (your desktop appearing where the game should be). And it's been going on for months. So many people are talking about your problem, even repeating the exact location in memory that it happens, that I've managed to see the error for myself simply by Googling for it.

Sadly, like the stuttering in *HL2*, there's no definitive answer – until a patch is released, you're most likely to be left going round in circles. You could try the latest 1.3 update, but I'd uninstall the

## "There's a never-ending stream of 'OMFG HELP!' threads on the Vivendi forums"

high chance I'm already acquainted with the problem. I don't go swotting up on every single gripe ever, but I'm pretty good at remembering issues which affect a large number of players and account for the lion's share of complaints.

game and play something else. I can understand you might feel aggrieved by such advice, but once you realise *Men Of Valor* is a thousand miles of bad road and no amount of driver updating, BIOS flashing, blaspheming or juju stick waving will suddenly make it work on your system, the easiest course of action is to wipe it from your hard drive and attempt to get a refund.

## IN THE DARK

**Q** I bought an NVIDIA 6600GT graphics card

| MODEL | TAGAN TG420-U02 (I-XEYE) | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| AC Input | 100-240VAC 10/6A 60/50Hz | | | | | |
| DC Input | +3.3V | +5V | +12V | -12V | -5V | +5VSB |
| Max Output Current | 28A | 42A | 22A | 1.0A | 0.8A | 2.5A |
| Max Combined Power | 220W | | 264W | 12W | 4W | 12.5W |
| | 400W | | | 28W | | |
| Total Power | 420W | | | | | |

**The information printed on the side of power supplies is vital, but something few people really understand.**

from Scan Computers a while ago and since installing it, it's given me problems playing games. The problem is when I start a game it runs for about five seconds before I get a blank screen. I've installed the latest Forceware drivers, but to no avail. Any help on the situation would be much appreciated.

*Eddie Lucas*

**A** These are classic symptoms of your power supply being too puny for the job at hand. In replacing the unit, don't make the mistake of buying something hefty but cheap – peer very closely at the specifications and opt for a product that delivers at least 20 amps along the +12V rail. "What, what, what?" I hear you cry. Let me explain.

A power rail is, as the name suggests, a way of delivering electricity to the stuff inside your case. Any PSU you buy new these days will have at least +3.3V, +5V, +12V, -12V and -5V rails listed on the side in a chart you've seen a thousand times but never understood, together with each rail's current in amps.

In essence, the current tells you how powerful a particular rail is – power being the voltage multiplied by the amps. The +12V is vital to system stability as it supplies your processor, graphics card, case fans and so on, so it needs to be of a minimum level. Importantly, if

the +12V rail cuts the mustard, you needn't worry about any of the others.
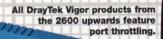
Looking at the Tagan 420W i-Xeye (see diagram above) from last month as our example supply, it has a 22A +12V rail – more than enough for your particular system. While you could spend a great deal of time with your calculator and GCSE physics textbooks working out the power requirements of individual components and thus the total demanded by your PC, you're better off simply opting for a PSU capable of 20A on the +12V rail. That'll do almost everyone.

## STRIPED UP

**Q** I was given a subscription to *PC ZONE* for Christmas, and I also went out and bought a second-hand RADEON 9700. I then waited and waited for my first copy of *ZONE* to arrive, only to be disappointed when it never did. To top it all, my RADEON card broke – I've attached a



**Can't say I've seen this before. Which is probably a good thing.**



Men of Valor: MenofValor.exe - Application Error

❌ The instruction at "0x01ee9a23" referenced memory at "0x0000005c". The memory could not be "read".

Click on OK to terminate the program

[ OK ]

**Seen this error? Well you're not big or clever.**

All DrayTek Vigor products from the 2600 upwards feature port throttling.

## "All of a sudden, my girlfriend has started to take a huge interest in *UT2004* and now I can't get her off my machine"

picture of the screen. How can I fix the card?
*Max Hastings-Herbert*

**A** Your card is done for. If you're looking to source your gear second-hand, buy only from reputable sources, and if possible stay away from hardware which is older than 12 months.

ATI launched the RADEON 9700 some three years ago, and there's a high chance your card is just a very tired example that's been used and abused and overclocked to within an inch of its life. Check the cooling fan over the GPU still spins, and even if it does, chuck it in the bin. Oh, and we hear you've had your mag through now as well – sorry for the delay.

### SHARE AND ENJOY

**Q** I'm currently in a *UT2004* clan and have to practise three nights a week – we're hoping to compete in the ladders pretty soon. All of a sudden though, my girlfriend has started to take a huge interest in the game, and now I can't get her off my machine.

One solution would be to upgrade my broadband to a 1MB connection, purchase a second PC and do some kind of 'connection share' thing so we each get half the bandwidth. What I don't have is the expertise to pull something like this off. I have a Wanadoo Copperjet USB modem which doesn't have an Ethernet port on it, but I'm willing to buy a different modem if that helps. Can the sharing be done and still give good performance?
*{Ez0}Mace*

**A** If all the pair of you are doing is playing games together, you shouldn't need any bandwidth management at all. Two instances of *UT2004* will not hog all the space on a broadband pipe – you should be able to get away with five or even six. That said, introducing a new PC means you'll need to run

the Network Setup Wizard on each machine and make sure ICS (Internet Connection Sharing) is configured and running – this is a standard Microsoft component, and full details can be found in the Help and Support pages from the Windows Start menu.

However, there's a little more to it than that. If one of you drops out and decides to check your email, look at Web pages or muck about with large files, whoever's left playing will suddenly have a half-second ping and an air of displeasure about them. The reason for this is quite complex, but what it boils down to is a TCP connection (eg browsing the Web) will squeeze out a UDP connection (such as *UT2004*), causing the packets to be delayed and the latency to shoot up accordingly. The only way you can deal with this is to buy a modem router with advanced firewall settings that includes bandwidth management, or buy a third-party Windows utility that enables you to 'throttle' individual users.

The first option is the expensive one, with a £110 Draytek Vigor router your best bet – most Vigor models allow you to clamp the throughput on any given Ethernet port. The latter option is a lot cheaper but less elegant solution, with Bandwidth Controller costing £25 and available for a 30-day trial from bandwidthcontroller.com. The choice is yours.

### THANKS FOR THE MEMORY

**Q** I've just bought a new ABIT AS8 motherboard, Pentium 4 3.2GHz and 2GB RAM. Once delivered, I had it professionally installed at a cost of £75. Once it was home and working, every so often when I started a

process or finished one the machine would restart – running scandisk found invalid files and then applications like Norton Anti-Virus became unusable.

I took it back and the shop reinstalled Windows XP at a cost of £35. I soon started having the same problems, and after a little research online tried a RAM test. I tested each 1GB stick individually and found that one was bad. I wish I'd done this first and saved £110. Hopefully one of your readers might learn from this and know to research a problem first before throwing their hard-earned money at it.
*Mark Bratt*

**A** Thanks for writing in. I had the precise same symptoms some time ago with an iffy RAID controller. Regular trashing of files, reboots and scandisk turning up duff files with any regularity points to a hardware rather than a software problem.

My problem with the controller was double trouble, as it affected both the drives in the RAID array – which just goes to show, your backups aren't safe unless you can remove them and store them separately from your PC.

Anyway, if you're experiencing the symptoms discussed here, pay a visit to memtest86.com and get hammering that RAM.

### NOT SO SPARKLY

**Q** A few issues back, you reviewed the 128MB version of the Sparkle GeForce 6600GT card and quoted the price as around £130. The reason I bring it up is that I was told there's a softmod for the 6600GT which unlocks the pipeline count from 8 to 12 – do you know anything about it? I can't find it.

Also, a quick scan of the microdirect.co.uk website shows you can get the 256MB version for just £105,

which is a considerable saving and increase in RAM.
*Christopher E Man*

**A** First, there's no softmod available to open up the pipelines on the 6600GT. Although NVIDIA based the design of the 6600 on the high-end 6800, the pixel and rendering pipelines were lopped off to keep the price down – you can't coax them into working because they aren't actually there.

However, if you're the owner of a plain 6800, you can download RivaTuner free from guru3d.com/rivatuner and unplug all the pipes. I should say that I've not tried it, so can't comment on whether it's safe or how likely you are to succeed, but if RivaTuner does what a number of people are claiming it does, the full complement of 16 pipelines should make a significant difference to the £200 card's performance.

As for the link you've referred to, you're making the mistake a lot of people make: the GeForce 6600 is not the same as the more expensive 6600GT model. Don't buy the wrong card!

### GRANNY TURISMO

**Q** My copy of *GTA3* has a graphics problem. After a while white squares appear, the game crashes and finally drops out to Windows and turns a funny colour. The patches don't help. My copy of XP is fully updated.

Second, my copy of *NFS: Underground* doesn't allow me to see crowd or nitrous effects. Third, my *Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow* doesn't work – it needs a pixel shader. Can I change the graphics card in my laptop?
*Luke Uzoziri*
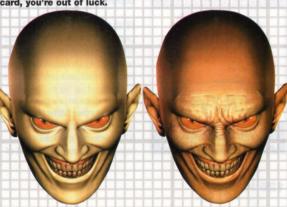
**A** I'd suggest that the problem in *GTA3* is down to heat build-up, for which laptops are famous. If it were a driver problem, you'd see any graphics artefacts the moment you started playing – it's not something that would get worse over time. You don't mention which laptop you own, nor how long you've owned it, but I'd suggest you get someone to look at it in case one of the fans isn't spinning or a vent has become blocked somehow.

Your problem with *NFS: Underground* is due to the graphics hardware you have – you need a DirectX 9 card to experience the game's motion blur effects.

As for *Splinter Cell*, that's the same kind of deal – the game uses some pretty complex lighting and shadows and requires hardware-based pixel shaders. If your video hardware is lacking in that department, I'm afraid there's nothing you can do – most laptops simply can't be upgraded. **PCZ**

*Visit Wandy on the Web at www. dearwandy.com*

Pixel shaders can't be downloaded, they run in hardware on your video card. And if you can't change your video card, you're out of luck.

# WATCHDOG

**Imagine a world where nothing broke down, broadband worked seamlessly and customer complaints were handled right away. Just imagine. Until then though…**

■ **WONDER WOMAN** Suzy Wallace

## "We've now changed how we handle customer cancellations to prevent it happening again"

VIRGIN RESPONDS POSITIVELY TO MARTIN JENNINGS' COMPLAINT

BT's broadband modem. Or a breast implant. You decide.

### THE ACCUSED

BT
virgin.net
ebuyer

**GUILTY UNTIL PROVEN INNOCENT**

### LIKE A VIRGIN

In early November, reader Martin Jennings decided he wanted to disconnect his Virgin.net broadband package. He phoned Virgin and was told that the cancellation process would take up to 30 days, but when Christmas rolled around the line was still active.

Expecting the line to be shut down soon, Martin waited until the end of January, but still the line was active. After phoning customer services and being shunted around several depts, he was informed that the line should be cancelled by Feb 1. But guess what? It wasn't…

We got in contact with Virgin. net: "We've checked Mr Jennings' customer records and can confirm that he did request us to cancel his account in November 2004.

"Unfortunately, while a record of this request was made, the cancellation request was not passed to the cancellation team. Mr Jennings' account is now in the process of being cancelled and a refund has been issued to cover all payments since the original request. We're sorry for any inconvenience caused. This was an unfortunate oversight on our part and since this, we have changed the way in which we handle customer cancellations in order to prevent further instances occurring." Power to the people!

### IT'S GOOD TO GAME

Last month, Watchdog received an email from John Mott who'd been having problems setting up his BT broadband service. Upon trying to set up his modem, the installer stuck in one place and went no further. Miffed but unperturbed, John spoke to BT's customer services who managed to source him a set of drivers and get his PC online. Everything looked rosy until John found that his connection was great for Web surfing, but the moment he tried to play online games it regularly gave up the ghost.

After more attempts to sort things out, an engineer was booked to give John a call, but a month later he sent us an update – not only has he not received the promised call but he's now been billed for a service that he can't use properly.

**When we contacted BT it apologised for the problems John's been experiencing and arranged for a member of its technical complaints team to give him a call. It also stated that "if BT have wrongfully charged Mr Motts for an insufficient broadband service we will fully refund the charge". Let's hope John's running amok in the world of online gaming as we speak.**

### SQUARE PROBLEM

Reader Alan Percival has been a regular customer of Ebuyer for several years. A year ago he bought a 17-inch monitor from Ebuyer, which worked well until the screen began flickering recently. Never mind thought Alan, the screen came with a three-year on-site warranty.

Off he went to Ebuyer's site and used its ENotes to contact the company. A month later and with tumbleweed rushing by, he sent another email. When Ebuyer finally replied, it apologised and gave Alan the contact details of the faulty monitor's manufacturer. Only it supplied him with the wrong manufacturer's details.

After apologising again, it supplied Alan with details of the correct manufacturers, GCI, who told him that it only supplied a year's warranty and not three, despite Ebuyer's site stating otherwise. Alan told Ebuyer but got no response.

We tried our hand at using the Enotes system ourselves, but three days later and with no response, we tried a more traditional method – snail mail.

Amazingly, Watchdog received a next-day reply from Ebuyer apologising for the delay and stating that a Christmas backlog was affecting its response times. It seems the problem arose because the company who supplied the warranty on the product has ceased trading. However, Ebuyer is more than happy to honour its original three-year warranty. "We're sending a courier to pick up the old product and deliver the replacement." PCZ

Virgin: changing its customer service because of us.

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### SAINTS NOT SINNERS

iiyama
excellence displayed.

▲ **WE GET LETTERS ABOUT BAD CUSTOMER SERVICE EVERY DAY, SO IT'S NICE WHEN WE RECEIVE TALES OF JOY – LIKE THIS ONE CONCERNING IIYAMA…**

Reader Stewart Pickering was certainly feeling the festive cheer when he made a trip to PC World and treated himself to a swish Iiyama TFT monitor with £100 slashed from its price in the sales. Feeling rather pleased with himself, he made his way home and plugged in the monitor, only to discover that a cluster of dead pixels were ruining his beautiful panorama. When he returned the unit to PC World, he was informed that the superstore had none left in stock in the entire country, but it did offer to swap or refund the cost.

Unfortunately, due to the bargain that Stewart had picked up, this would have meant exchanging the monitor for a lower-spec model. However, one phone call to Iiyama and the following day not only had it couriered over a new monitor, it even waited around while Stewart tested the new arrival to make sure everything was in perfect working order. Looks like the monitor company must 'screen' its staff in order to provide the best customer service around. Sorry, we couldn't resist…

**Reader Stewart Pickering thinks Iiyama's customer service is first class.**

ProLite E435S
17"W
iiyama

# BUYER'S GUIDE

## Don't fritter your money away on wine, women and song. Get yourself a new motherboard instead...

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 £86
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**
*NOW £81 WAS £87*
STREET PRICE £81
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 £180
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 £142
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+**
*NOW £410 WAS £480*
STREET PRICE £410
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 £36
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.
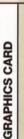
**RAPTOR 36GB**
STREET PRICE £73
MANUFACTURER Western Digital
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.westerndigital.com
If you don't need a deep hole for your data, or if you intend keeping your dirt on a separate drive, the 10,000RPM Serial ATA Raptor makes the ideal foundation for your primary partition. It's wickedly 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**
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**
*NOW £135 WAS £191*
STREET PRICE £135
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 £58
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.

## 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** £56
**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** £58
**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** £180
**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

### ICEMAT SIBERIA MULTI HEADSET
**NEW ENTRY**
**STREET PRICE** €69
**MANUFACTURER** Soft Trading ApS
**TELEPHONE** 00 4570 250 075
**WEBSITE** www.icemat.com
A beguiling combination of modern chic, excellent sound reproduction and the integration of a top-quality microphone propel these headphones to the top of the pile. You can buy a lot cheaper, but if you want to look like an old-school astronaut and play games in absolute comfort, you won't find a better pair without travelling to distant planets far, far away.

### 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.

# MAILBOX

### Less anger and bile than we're used to this month – have you all gone soft?

■ **WARM AND FUZZY** Dave Woods



**Brothers In Arms**: great.

## DIRE STRAITS

I was disappointed to read that *Brothers In Arms* fails to deliver the emotional aspects the developer was so keen to portray. I was really looking forward to a WWII shooter that actually rose to the level of some of the finer films in the genre, and saw it as a turning point where people might actually start taking games seriously.

*Richard Ottinger*

**Don't be too disappointed. Gearbox might not have been able to deliver the depth of** emotion we were looking for, but the game itself is superb and a step in the right direction. And remember Ant's parting shot: "If Gearbox can just build on this, the next *Brothers In Arms* will almost certainly be a classic."

## WHEN GAMERS GO BAD

I like to think I'm a hardcore gamer, but deep down I know it just isn't true. The recent glut of classics have me beat. *KOTOR*: I got stuck; *Far Cry*: I got stuck. I even gave up on *Enter The Matrix* because I couldn't find the bloody 'anchors.'

And what about *Half-Life 2*? Being chased along on the Water Hazard level by the second helicopter, into a dead end of radioactivity with seemingly no exit and no way of killing the floating metal chunk isn't really my idea of fun. I've tried the damn level so many times that I did something I've never done before – I cheated. And still no joy! It's just a dead end. So what gives? Give it to me straight *PC ZONE*, is it



**Gibbs thinks games are too hard. We think he's rubbish.**

me – or are games these days just too hard?

*Michael Gibbs*

**Erm, you might want to sit down Michael. It's you. Saying that, *Far Cry* is bloody hard, although I still maintain that if you download the Quicksave patch you're a big quilt.**

## SYSTEM SHOCKER

Why are some old classics almost impossible to find? I must have been to every games store around looking for *System Shock 2*, but without joy. So I resorted to eBay where I found it listed along with the following quote. "*System Shock 2* is a highly rated, but very rare game." Is this part of an evil *Deus Ex*-style conspiracy made by

shopkeepers to keep their grubby hands on the best games? And keep up the good work with the magazine guys. It's awesome.

*Louis Borg*

**It's a simple fact that everyone in the world should be forced to play *System Shock 2* at least once in their lifetime. It's also a fact that it's impossible to buy a copy from the shops because of some murky licensing issues that have left the game in legal limbo (or at least that's what they're telling us). You can still pick up a used copy on eBay or Amazon**

## TOP OF THE SHOTS

Hi Guys and Gals, here are my top ten reasons to still play FPSs in 2005:
1) Getting your first knife kill in *Counter-Strike: Source*
2) Shitting yourself playing *Doom 3*, alone in the dark
3) Using the gravity gun to cut things in half with a saw blade in *Half-Life 2*
4) Finishing a level of *Thief: Deadly Shadows* without killing anyone
5) *F.E.A.R* (I hope)
6) Going back to *System Shock 2* thanks to your Games That Changed The World feature – it still rocks
7) Getting to make your own decisions about how you play – well done *Far Cry*
8) *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* (Not just coz it's got full stops in it like *F.E.A.R*, I hope)
9) *Far Cry* again for providing the perfect excuse to carry on playing: "Sorry, I can't save here"
10) Mouse fluff is a thing of the past, so half of the reasons you used to give for being shot have gone

*Letch*

**Perfect. Apart from the glaring omission of Unreal Engine 3. We're going to check out the latest in next month's magazine – you really won't want to miss it, I promise.**

The mighty *Far Cry*: most of you seem to agree it deserves more acclaim.

Do you like to do it with others? Or on your own? *Brothers In Arms* or *Far Cry*? *SWAT 4* or *Splinter Cell*? Squad or solo? This is what you had to say…

**Rjcanty's** preference is "to go at it with a squad of highly-trained men." OK, let's keep it to games, eh? And who more apt to get the subject back on track than **Randy_beagle**? "If you're in a good team that works together and listens to each other there are fewer greater gaming experiences to be had." **PlumpOrgan**, on the other hand, prefers solo play. "Partly because it gives me a feeling of greater control and partly because I'm an anti-social scumbag!" **Moby_matt** doesn't agree. "Although I enjoy a good solo frag, you can't beat the feeling of being part of a team." A view shared by **Sir_Loin_OfSteak** who's "definitely a fan of games involving teamwork. When the little shits actually follow the orders they're given, it makes for a truly rewarding experience. Also, it makes me feel less… lonely." Bless.

Sitting on the fence is **G_Man_007**. "It really depends on the game. *Far Cry* is great, and gives you freedom to go off and do your thing. *Half-Life 2* centres around you, the player, so the team element is implemented correctly." With a name like **The_many** we didn't expect the following proclamation – "I don't do teamwork" – but we like the direct sentiment. And while a few years back **Crow555** would have preferred to be a 'lone wolf', these days he prefers teamwork. "Though some idiots can ruin it, the use of clever tactics and fighting alongside your buddies is the best." Not **Davetsutton** though. "I prefer to go solo – it's what I'm used to. Gaming-wise, I also prefer the solo experience." Ah, the old ones are the best ones…

but you're going to have to part with up to 30 quid for the privilege, which certainly smacks of conspiracy to us.

## UN-PC

I was clearing out some cupboard space the other day when I came across some old PC magazines. When I saw those old PC classics of 2000, it really hit home how far PC gaming has progressed. But what was really amazing were the prices of some of the old PCs – nearly £2000 for a Pentium III 550 with 128MB RAM and a 16MB graphics card! Top stuff then, I suppose, but a small mortgage money wise. Today's gamers don't know how lucky they are that they can get a state of the art gaming rig for under half that amount.
*Slc1205*

**We've never before received a letter arguing that today's PCs are a bargain. Or one containing the immortal line 'you don't know how lucky you are.' Pure genius. True though. We're running a sweepstake in the office to guess your age – could you email in and let us know?**

## FUTURE PERFECT

Firstly it goes without saying that the mag is great and improving all the time. Having read Dave Woods' editorial, I went out and bought *Far Cry* and my first impressions are that it's awesome. My concern is where the next epic is coming from? Games are becoming more and more expensive to produce and the development times in the region of years

rather than months. Is there already a *Half-Life 3* in the wings? Or a *Far Cry 2*? The similarities between the games industry and Hollywood are apparent but I don't see a 'Hollywood' style pipeline of releases. Sure there are games out there – loads – but they're in the straight-to-video category.
*Neil Stokes*

**Neil, Neil, patience my dear boy. The magical E3 show is just around the corner and our issue on sale May 26 will contain all the exclusive news on the next raft of mega-releases. We've already got wind of a couple of major announcements that are happening, including** CENSORED **and** CENSORED**. Surely they're good enough to satisfy your future cravings?**

## DUMB AND DUMBER-ER

Issue 152 highlights perfectly the problem I see facing the PC gaming scene. *Second Sight*? *Psi-Ops*? Both of these have been on console for a while now, so why on earth would I want to buy them? The reason I built my PC was to get away from the tepid titles and simplistic franchises that the likes of PS2 and GameCube offer.

It's not all like this. While clearly in the minority, *The Suffering* and the *GTA* series show that not all console-based offerings are unsuited to the PC. Where I do have concerns however is the dumbing down of what were originally great PC titles, like *Deus Ex 2* (and quite possibly *Ghost Recon 2*). If I'd wanted to play the likes of

*Second Sight* I'd have saved myself the money spent on a PC and bought a PS2 instead.
*Dave McGeown*

**Hopefully the tragic fate that befell the *Deus Ex* franchise will point out as a great big marker to publishers the world over. Mess with the core concepts of a game and you might end up killing your golden goose.**

## MUCK

Having just read of Will Porter's encounter with the innards of a keyboard (Mucky Pup, issue 151), I would like to pass on a tip that may sound like madness – stick it in the dishwasher! I've cleaned my keyboard several times this way and I can honestly say it comes out looking like new. First remove the batteries if it's wireless or wrap the cable round the keyboard and just put it on the top rack with the keys facing down then put it through on a low temperature setting (hot may warp the plastic). After this you need to dry it out again, so either stick it in the airing cupboard and forget about it for a week or two or, if you can't wait that long, simply dismantle it, towel dry then use a hairdryer. Et voila, good as new!
*Nige Butler*

**Wandy, our hardware guru, wouldn't suggest this as a general rule. Instead, he suggests popping out all the keys and putting *them* in the wash, while cleaning the base with a damp cloth. Safe.**

## LETTER OF THE MONTH

### PIRATE SOFTWARE

Two things. Firstly, Dave's rant about *Far Cry* was bang on. While *HL2* was a beautiful thing to behold, did it actually take computer gaming anywhere new, or did it just do some old things better than anything else had done before? I reckon the latter. *Far Cry* did move the genre on in that it gave the player new freedom. Freedom to move and to decide how to approach each task; freedom to play the game how you wanted and not as choreographed by the designers. While *HL2* was like a ride through a movie, *Far Cry* was as close to a freeform adventure as we've had since *Deus Ex*. As an indication of how the industry sees the future meanwhile, IGDA nominated *Doom 3* as one of its games of the year, and while *Far Cry* received nominations in other categories, it was ignored for the big one.

Secondly, *Pirates!* Bloody *Pirates!* is eating my life. I haven't been this hooked since I first discovered *Civilization*. The sun goes down and lights come on in neighbouring houses, and I can't even let go of the mouse long enough to get out of the chair to hit the light switch. Last night I was at it till 0200 – OMG you eejit, stop playing! And while we're at it, let's hear a round of applause for Firaxis for making a game that works right out of the box without a patch or six.
*Tim Bromige*
*Lt Commander, Royal Navy*

**A Lt Commander of the Royal Navy playing pirates? Ye Gods! Is this a new policy? And on the subject of the Royal Navy, we've been getting a fair few missives from the high seas lately. First one to send us a photo holding a copy of *PC ZONE* wins a prize. And it won't be *Pirates*!**

# 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 still 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 it's 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**

### RIDDICK: ESCAPE FROM BUTCHER BAY

A brutal and brilliant shooter that's infinitely better than Riddick's cinematic outing. It may have started out life on the Xbox, but that's no reason not to try out its own brand of violence and filth.
**PUB** VU Games **DEV** Starbreeze          **PCZ ISSUE 150**

## ◄ 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

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**

### SID MEIER'S PIRATES!

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 cool 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**

### HEARTS OF IRON II

A supremely hardcore RTS with the trappings of *Risk*, this certainly isn't for the uninitiated or foolhardy. Functional graphics hide a deep, complex system of world conflict and politics – if you're clever enough that is.
**PUB** JoWood **DEV** Paradox          **PCZ ISSUE 152**

Want to know which game is the best shooter, which is the top strategy or what to play if you want to blow away your mates online? You've come to the right place – the *PC ZONE* A-list is home to the greatest games in the land. Fresh impetus this month is provided by WWII tactical shooter *Brothers In Arms*...

## ◄ 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**

### VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE – BLOODLINES
Once you get past the bugs and glitches, *Bloodlines* is a deep, absorbing game that everyone with an interest in the genre should play. Great dialogue, clever plot and (despite the dodgy combat), a superb experience.
**PUB** Activision **DEV** Troika Games
**PCZ ISSUE 150**

### 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**

## ◄ 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 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
He may have gone all moody on us in *Warrior Within*, but we still prefer the Prince's younger, more innocent days of *Sands Of Time*. Combat is iffy, granted, but there's a rare charm here that the sequel could not replicate.
**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
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 *Rollercoaster Tycoon 3* 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 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**

◀ **MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER** ▶

# EVERQUEST II

The best just got soooo much better. As visually alluring as a lingerie-clad supermodel holding a giant meat pie, as full of content as the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, and as addictive as purple Fruit Pastilles topped with Pringles. Sony has learnt every lesson it could in the five years since the original and produced a MMOG that sets new standards across the board.
**PUB** Ubisoft **DEV** Sony Online Entertainment **PCZ ISSUE 150**

### WORLD OF WARCRAFT
The most popular PC game of all time according to reports, *World Of Warcraft* is the 'other' best MMOG ever. Less realistic and perhaps a touch more fun than *EQII*, it's horses for courses as to which one you choose. The only real difference is that *WOW* is PvP based.
**PUB** VU Games **DEV** Blizzard            **PCZ ISSUE 152**

### CITY OF HEROES
It may not have scored as high as the others in our review, but this spandex-wearing, justice-dispensing, superhero-themed MMOG has certainly won over the popular vote. Long-term appeal may be dubious, but for instant-action fun, it simply can't be beaten.
**PUB** NCsoft **DEV** Cryptic Studios            **PCZ ISSUE 149**

### PLANETSIDE
The eternal war for Auraxis just keeps on going, but now with giant battlemechs thrown into the mix. The subterranean *Core Combat* expansion may have disappeared down its own hole, but recent updates have managed to keep the fighting fresh.
**PUB** Ubisoft **DEV** Sony Online Entertainment            **PCZ ISSUE 131**

### EVE ONLINE
Best described as '*Elite Online*', the sedate nature of *EVE* has managed to pull in more and more space traders with each passing month. It may not be the most human of MMOGs, but it's definitely worth putting the time into it considering what you get back.
**PUB** CCP **DEV** CCP            **PCZ ISSUE 130**

### ANARCHY ONLINE
Quirky science-fiction action abounds in this ever-popular take on mankind's distant future. Two major expansions (one practically bigger than the original game) and a forthcoming graphical overhaul is doing more than enough to keep the world of Rubi-ka buzzing.
**PUB** Funcom **DEV** Funcom            **PCZ ISSUE 148**

### FINAL FANTASY XI ONLINE
Probably the best of the non-*EverQuest* fantasy MMOGs (although not by much), this Japanese entry into the genre is about as fully realised a world as you can get. The controls may be cumbersome, but you can't deny the atmosphere that lies within.
**PUB** Ubisoft **DEV** Square Enix            **PCZ ISSUE 148**

### DARK AGE OF CAMELOT
The fantasy version of *PlanetSide* (although without the FPS-trappings) is still going strong, despite firm opposition. It's starting to show its age now, although a graphical overhaul due in a few months time might be enough to keep it competitive.
**PUB** Mythic Entertainment **DEV** Mythic Entertainment            **PCZ ISSUE 149**

### STAR WARS GALAXIES
*Jump To Lightspeed* has recently added the final piece of the *Star Wars* jigsaw – space combat – but is it too little, too late? There's a loyal audience of Jedi wannabes in there, but the Force is growing weaker. Nonetheless, there's still plenty to admire here, including a superb skill system.
**PUB** Activision **DEV** Sony Online Entertainment            **PCZ ISSUE 151**

### EVERQUEST
The original can't compare to its sequel in terms of looks and polished gameplay, but five years of expansions have kept its half a million regular players more than happy. There's more on the way too, just in case you feel like keeping it old school.
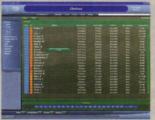**PUB** Ubisoft **DEV** Sony Online Entertainment            **PCZ ISSUE 149**

## 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**

### COUNTER-STRIKE: SOURCE

The daddy of all online shooters is back, running on the jaw-dropping *Half-Life 2* engine. All your favourites are here – Dust, Italy, Office – all with realistic physics. All that's missing is *HL2's* ability to pick up objects, but it's surely only a mod away.
**PUB** VU Games **DEV** Valve
**NOT REVIEWED**

## FOOTBALL MANAGER 2005

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

Fact. This is the finest arcade football gamer 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**

## 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 huge 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**

## BROTHERS IN ARMS

**NEW ENTRY** Clever and intuitive tactics (once you get into the meat of it) meld with the WWII first-person scenario you know and love. More realistic than the bombastic Hollywood fare in *Call Of Duty*, *Brothers In Arms* is an admirably gritty and highly replayable jaunt, flanking Nazis through the woods, fields and foxholes of wartime Normandy. Essentially the place where *Medal Of Honor* and *Full Spectrum Warrior* collide, it comes highly recommended.
**PUB** Ubisoft **DEV** Gearbox
**PCZ ISSUE 153**

### OPERATION FLASHPOINT

The Game of the Year edition of *Flashpoint* remains widely available, and remains as wonderfully immersive as ever. With the *Resistance* expansion alongside the original missions, if you love tactical warfare, you'll love this.
**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**

# DISC PAGES

**EXCLUSIVE!**

## SWAT 4

**CD1/DVD Pub:** VU Games **Dev:** Irrational Games **Rev:** Issue 154, 86%

**KEEN** on tactics? Well, it doesn't come much better than our exclusive *SWAT 4* demo. In charge of a team of five men and tasked with taking down a gang who've raided a garage, cautious advancement is the by-word here. Although there's the chance for you to wade into the fray with all guns blazing, with criminals popping out of the woodwork it's best to make good use of your team and their hi-tech gadgets to take them down in style.

## 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.

## GEEK PROUD

## DISCWORLD

■ **WORDS & DISCS** Suzy Wallace

During one lunch hour whilst chowing down on some seasonal chocolate Mini Eggs, conversation in the *ZONE* office got round to the word geek. Gamers have long been labelled with this unfortunate stereotype, but the truth of the matter is that anyone with a passion for anything non-mainstream could be classed as one. My own geek classification can be narrowed down to games and cars. My love of automobiles and willingness to drone on about them has produced many a blank face amongst the *ZONE* team. Conversely, when I go to a car show and ramble about the new directions that the FPS genre is heading in, I soon found that people remember fuses that need switching and gearbox oil that requires changing. So why should the title of geek be such a negative thing? I say rejoice in it.

After all, who else can say that in the last month they've been a member of a SWAT team on a dangerous mission, wandered around a large island filled with strange characters whilst twatting fantasy creatures on the head, taken charge of a bunch of superheroes, time-travelled through three entire epochs, driven a tuned-up supercar – and more, eh? Even *Star Trek*'s holodeck would have popped a circuit by the end of this lot, but that's exactly what you can expect from this month's discs – and lots more besides.

My name's Suzy, I'm a geek and proud of it. Just don't call me a nerd...

**CHALLENGE SUZY!**

**NO HARM DONE**
Can you go point for the whole mission using non-lethal weapons and still come out victorious?

As the leader of the SWAT team, you're expected to know what's going on at every point but it can sometimes get a little chaotic, so here's our quick guide on what to keep your eye on.

**1** Person – is he an enemy or a hostage? This guy has a pistol in his hand so you may need to shout at him and restrain him to get him to comply. Try not to shoot hostages.

**2** Contextual menu – right-click on something and the menu will bring you up a list of commands relevant to it.

**3** Damage – red areas indicate where you've been hit. Your bullet-proof vest is only good for so many shots!

**4** Ammo – make sure you reload before you go into each room. You won't want to have to reload in a firefight!

**5** Doors – keep a close eye on 'em. Use the mirror on locked doors to find out what's on the other side.

**6** Quick command – press the space bar to use this. Handy for getting your men to check things out, pronto.

**7** Hiding spots – be wary of anywhere you can't see fully. Enemies can hide behind doors and round corners.

## IT'LL BE ALRIGHT ON THE NIGHT

**Years of elite training, a squad equipped with the latest crime-fighting gadgets, and other people's lives resting on your shoulders. With this amount of pressure, it's no wonder you'll sometimes make a hash of it...**

**ELECTRIFYING**
There stands the suspect, unaware, primed for the takedown. Your Tazer is at hand, and the moment draws close. But in the last seconds to countdown, your crosshair goes awry, you miss with the shot and take down a hostage by mistake. Try not to laugh as he convulses on the floor. Debriefing should be fun.

**BLIND AS A BAT**
Outside an occupied room, your men prepare to steamroll through it. The door is thrown open, a flashbang thrown through and you idiotically don't look away in time. When your sight returns ten or so seconds later, your team is either lying dead on the floor or sitting on a couple of suspects. Doh!

**THAT STINGS!**
Your squad-mates are bunched up against the door, ready to carry out your commands after you've thrown in a stinger to disable any opponents. But you were never picked for the rounders team at school and for good reason. Your throw hits the door frame, bounces back and explodes into your men. Oops.

**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.

# EVERQUEST II: TRIAL OF THE ISLE

**DVD ONLY Pub:** Ubisoft **Dev:** Sony Online Entertainment **Rev:** Issue 150, 95%

*See page 112 for a detailed guide!*

*Have that you eight-legged fiend!*

*Just chilling on the beach.*

*What you looking at?*

**HOT ON THE** heels of its recent release, we've got a free trial of our number one MMORPG for you to dip your role-playing toes into. Pick your character, learn the basics on board a sea-faring ship, and then get dropped off on the Island of Trials where you can advance to level six whilst exploring what the game has to offer. Like what you see? Simply buy the full game and take your fledgling character into the big wide world of Norrath.

## HEROES' DAY OFF

If you think the goblins in Norrath have it pretty hard, and you fancy giving them the day off from being mercilessly slaughtered, here's some other things to keep you occupied…

**FISHING**
Down by the sea, in a river, next to a waterfall – JR Hartley would have had a field day. Not only does it pass the time, you can also drag up some strange things from the depths, as well as the occasional tasty morsel.

**CRAFTING**
Once you've gained some skill, buy a recipe book, collect the ingredients and get your hands dirty by crafting something. Everything from food to weapons can be made and either used or sold for cash.

**GET SOME BEAVER**
Once you're at a high level, make your way to the waterfall in the north-east corner of the island, where you'll find as many of the furry critters as you could possibly care for.

# FREEDOM FORCE VS THE 3RD REICH

**CD2/DVD Pub:** Digital Jesters **Dev:** Irrational Games **Rev:** Issue 154, 79%

**IT'S TIME TO** don your skin-tight spandex suit because the Freedom Force are back, and this time it's those pesky Nazis that require thwarting. Mr 'Eaten One Too Many Pies' Fortissimo and his minions are planning to burn some of the greatest literature known to man and it's up to you to save these exalted pages.

**CHALLENGE SUZY!**

**SUPERHERO CHALLENGE**
Destroy as many buildings, vehicles and other bits of scenery as possible.

## DISPATCHES

With not one, not two, not even three – but four superheroes under your control, things can sometimes get a little confusing. Here's our quick guide to each one…

**THE UNDEAD AVENGER**
The hard-man of the bunch, combining devastating melee attacks with the ability to bring a downed ally back to life. He can also possess enemies and use them to take down opponents.

**GREEN GENIE**
The token female of the group has green skin and flies a carpet. She's very fast and her powers stun and paralyse enemies, as well as transforming them into vases. It's a woman thing.

**EL DIABLO**
This Latino hero has garnered a reputation as a gifted firestarter. Able to both create and manipulate fire, he can also fly and is great for taking out enemies on elevated ground.

**BLACKJACK**
England's only star in the line-up is a master of gadgets. With his dodgy "Cor blimey, guv" accent and naff jokes, his pockets are lined with a variety of ways in which to attack the enemy.

# EMPIRE EARTH II

**CD2/DVD Pub:** VU Games **Dev:** Mad Doc Software

**ON THE CD**
**ON THE DVD**
**MAKE LIKE** Doctor Who and time-travel through three entire epochs with this time-spanning RTS. Skirmish is the only mode available for play, but with the Americans, Germans and Koreans all being available for trying out your empire-building skills and the opportunity to battle against other players, there should be plenty to keep you engaged.

# GTR

**CD1/DVD Pub:** Atari **Dev:** SimBin **Rev:** Issue 153, 90%

**ON THE CD**
**ON THE DVD**
**IF LAST** month's review piqued your interest, we've got the fantastic second demo for you to burn some rubber in. Now featuring all three difficulties so you can try out the challenging Simulation mode, there are two new cars to take out for a spin around the Spa track – this time beautifully lit at dusk.

**CHALLENGE SUZY!**

**BEAT THE CLOCK**
Can you beat Suzy's time on this track? Spa Circuit (Simulation): 2:19.7

# TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES 2: BATTLE NEXUS

**CD2/DVD Pub:** Konami **Dev:** Konami **Rev:** Issue 154, 43%

**ON THE DVD**
**QUITE HOW** a bunch of mutated amphibious beings became trained in martial arts we're not sure, but they're not finished yet. Back for another spot of cel-shaded hi-jinks, this two-level demo gives you the opportunity to take our web-toed friends out for a spot of enemy bashing, ninja-style.

● **ALSO ON THE CD**
Contents of this month's Indie Zone, Freeplay and Games That Changed The World
● **ALSO ON THE DVD**
SCS – *Dangerous Waters!* and *Star Wolves*

# MOVIES

**PC ZONE**

## OUR FEATURE PRESENTATION...

# LEGO STAR WARS

**CD1/DVD** Marrying together all of the best bits from two multi-million dollar franchises, watching this trailer for *LEGO Star Wars* had us yelping with delight like kids in a toy shop.

**CHARACTERS** All your favourites from Chewie to Boba Fett

**SPACE BATTLES** Fly through the cosmos in your LEGO ships

**FORCE POWERS** Move and re-assemble LEGO using the Force

**EPISODE III** Ruin the f by playing the game fi

## ALSO SHOWING...

**STARGATE SG-1: THE ALLIANCE (CD1/DVD)**
An exclusive teaser to whet your appetite for the game based on the film and TV series, this features some grand outdoor environments and plenty of action and vehicles. One for fans and newcomers alike.
**DON'T MISS** – The quick peek at your ominous, skull-headed opponent.

**STALKER: SHADOW OF CHERNOBYL (CD1/DVD)**
This impressive movie combines real-life video with in-game footage to give you a taster of all the detail in this radioactive title. Buildings, weapons, vehicles and troop movements have all been accurately reproduced in-game.
**DON'T MISS** – The almost seamless switch between real-life and in-game footage.

**WORMS 4: MAYHEM (CD1/DVD)**
The trigger-happy invertebrates are back and as the title suggests, the latest instalment is even crazier, with a selection of new weapons to add to the classic line-up. Seems that the mystery location of Saddam's missing WMDs has finally been found!
**DON'T MISS** – The aerial sheep bombardment: death by mobile woolly jumper.

**THE SUFFERING: TIES THAT BIND (CD1/DVD)**
Although this first teaser doesn't give much away, *The Suffering* was last year's stealth horror hit, gaining an Essential award in these pages. On this basis alone, we're rooting for the next in the series to be even better.
**DON'T MISS** The change of scenery moves from inside the prison walls.

● **ALSO ON THE CD** *Project: Snowblind*, *Battlefield 2*, *Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory* and *Empire Earth II*.

# EXTENDED PLAY

## BATTLEFIELD 1942 MAP PACK

**Expand your horizons in *Battlefield 1942*.**

**ZARA5USTRA** and other members of the *Battlefield* community have put together a four-map tournament pack for *Battlefield 1942*, with each based on a different area of WWII operations. The Great Pursuit map is based around the Russian resistance to the German invasion. In Operation Forager, Japanese and American forces battle for supremacy on an island in the South Pacific. The Remagen map has American and German forces fighting for control of one of the last bridges over the Seine, and the Faid map is a sandy affair, set in the Tunisian mountain pass where the US battles with Rommel's Africakorps.
**DON'T MISS** – Capturing the bridge in the Remagen map.

# THIEF: DEADLY SHADOWS EDITOR

**AFTER A** spot of lobbying from the fans who just can't get enough of Garrett's light-fingeredness, Eidos has decided to release this editor. Featuring the ability to create and modify maps, scripts and more, it also includes several tutorial maps, so you can create your very own sleight of hand missions.

**Make it, then steal it!**

# PILOTABLE STRIDER MOD

**IF YOU** wandered through City 17 looking jealously at the ominous striders, then here's your chance to jump into the cockpit. In the single-player version (v2.7.5), you can pilot the Antlion Guard, the Gunship, the Combine helicopter and the APC (as well as the striders). For multiplayer action check out v3.0, where you can use the striders in deathmatch. Happy stomping!

## MODS OF THE MONTH

**FIRST UP** is *Experience WWII*, a *BF 1942* mod that turns the game into a stunningly realistic WWII experience, followed by CTF for *Half-Life 2*, where the inimitable gameplay mode comes to Freeman's world. *True Combat Elite* sets *Enemy Territory* in the modern day complete with realistic weapons, while the co-op version of *Case Closed* allows you to play the *Half-Life* mod with your mates. *Invasion Gotland* pits the Swedes against the Russians in *Battlefield Vietnam*.

## BUG-FIX OF THE MONTH

**Bizarre Problems Fixed In A Patch**

**THIS MONTH: PLAYBOY THE MANSION**

Patch v1.01 fixes various strange bugs round Hef's house, including squashed breasts on some characters.

● **ALSO ON THE CD**
*Garry's Mod v7a* (Half-Life 2 and CS:S versions), *Codename: Panzers* and *Warcraft: The Frozen Throne* bonus maps

## 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).
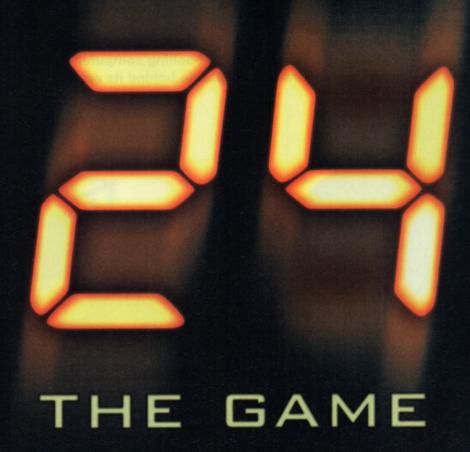
**DISCLAIMER**
■ This disc has been thoroughly tested at all stages of its production. However, it's always wise to use a virus checker on any software before running it.
■ Future Publishing Limited cannot accept responsibility for any loss, disruption or damage to your data or your computer system (including hardware) that may occur while using either the disc or programs and data on it.

## GAMES THAT CHANGED THE WORLD
# MYST

It may have been the preserve of crossword fans and *Countdown* viewers, but *Myst* was also the best-selling computer game of the 20th century. *Steve Hill* unravels the puzzle behind its creation...

**GAME** Myst
**DEVELOPER** Cyan Worlds
**PUBLISHER** Bröderbund
**RELEASED** 1993
**INFLUENCED** In many ways a byword for non-serious gaming, *Myst* managed to spawn a few multi-CD clones such as *Lighthouse* and *Obsidian*. By and large though, it remains in a genre of its own, and perhaps its biggest influence was in driving sales of CD-ROM drives. We've recently seen the heavily *Myst*-inspired *The Journey To Wild Divine*, but retailing at £120 and requiring wires to be attached to your fingers, this could be dismissed as a bad influence.

### PROFILE

Rand Miller has been creating computer games for almost 30 years, with his high-school effort *Swarms* earning him second place honours at the National Student Computer Fair in 1976. While working as a programmer in a Texas bank in the '80s, he and brother Robyn created a number of childrens' titles that would prove to be precursors to *Myst*.

**NAME:** Rand Miller
**ROLE ON *MYST*:** Co-creator
**FIRST GAME WORKED ON:** *The Manhole*
**WHERE IS HE NOW?** CEO of Cyan Worlds, overseeing *Myst V: End Of Ages*.

**ARRIVING** at a time when PC games were barely established, *Myst* rapidly found favour among early adopters, library users and the kind of people who keep the plastic sheeting on the back seat of their cars. While the gaming world went crazy for *Sonic* and *Mario*, it was a brave gamer who would boast of solving lateral thinking puzzles on his dad's 'home computer'. An acquired taste it may have been, but the original game has shifted a staggering six million copies, arguably proving the viability of the PC as a gaming medium and helping to establish the healthy scene that we have today.

The equivalent of Stonehenge (both aesthetically and in terms of pace), *Myst* involved a bizarre story about two brothers being imprisoned for crimes against literature. Not entirely coincidentally, it was the work of two brothers, Robyn and Rand Miller, who began working on the game in 1991 following a modicum of success with a pioneering series of childrens' titles.

A big fan of text adventures such as *Zork*, Rand was the driving force, having dabbled with games ever since "somebody hooked me on a timeshare system and I would steal passwords out of the trash to play the games".

## YOU KNOW, FOR KIDS

According to Rand, the partnership began when he wrote Robyn a letter. "I told him we needed to write a new kind of children's software – like a good quality children's book that adults actually want to read too. I wanted to do that for software, but I had to convince him. He's an artist and a musician." Robyn started on the first page of this book, which held a picture of a fire hydrant. "I thought it'd be somewhat interactive and you'd turn the page and go to the next interactive stage and tell a story. However, what actually happened somewhat set our future – Robyn never turned the page. There was a manhole in the street, the manhole cover slid away, a vine grew out of it and you could go down the manhole or climb the vine. Once you did that there was no need to turn the page, there were no other pages. It became a world instead of a book and that really defined our future for us."

That game became *The Manhole*, and was followed by the likes of *Cosmic Osmo* and *Spelunx*, each refining the template for what would be the breakthrough of *Myst*.

However, as Rand concedes: "We didn't know what we were doing at that point. There was nothing defined – Robyn was just drawing pictures as he was going and the world was defining itself. He went down in the manhole cover and said, 'I'll put an island here and then a sunken boat there'. So it was just whatever was in his head – there was no rhyme nor reason to it."

But the concept did eventually evolve into *Myst*? "Yes.

This was state-of-the-art a decade ago.


Atkins diet extreme.


Screaming out for an Ikea couch...


That's one surreal Test Your Strength machine.

To cut a long story short: after a few childrens' games in between, a Japanese company approached us and asked us to do something for an older audience. We were ready – we'd been talking about this for a while, about building much more story and building a goal, because previously we never had one."

## MONEY MONEY MONEY

Having wangled £250,000 out of SunSoft (development on *Myst* eventually cost double that), the Millers began work on their opus. A world away from the arcade action of the consoles of the era, *Myst* represented something of a gamble.

As Rand says: "We were looking at things a little bit differently. Our games were based on the worlds and the stories around them. They wanted something for CD-ROM and we said, 'great, we're going to build a big thing and we think it'll be appealing to a lot of people'. We had no idea it would be as successful as it was, we just thought we'd build another world. It was an evolution for us more than a revolution."

Developing a PC game in 1991 was a very different process to that of today. However, the technical constraints played an integral part in the evolution of *Myst*.

"We knew we had to use CD-ROM," says Rand. "We knew that memory footprint was a problem, so anything we wanted to load would need to be small. We knew that consoles were a possibility, so all those constraints were taken into account too. We also knew we wanted some live action, but it had to be small. All these things shaped *Myst*."

The pair used still images because they could render them. Meanwhile, the Ages (the levels within the game) were used because they wanted to make sure they had small elements that could be loaded a piece at a time. Even the design of seeing the pictures of the brothers in small pieces of the books was used because they could only do postage-stamp movies at the time. "Any good development takes into account what the technology can do and pushes the envelope past the limitations," adds Rand.

## CD-ROM ABUSER

One of the first games to appear on CD-ROM, *Myst* was undoubtedly a pioneering title for the format. It was far from plain sailing though. The brothers had to try and squeeze everything down to the smallest amount so that it would load

faster, and making the movies as small as possible was the challenge. "We pushed it to the absolute limit for what we had at our disposal, but it worked."

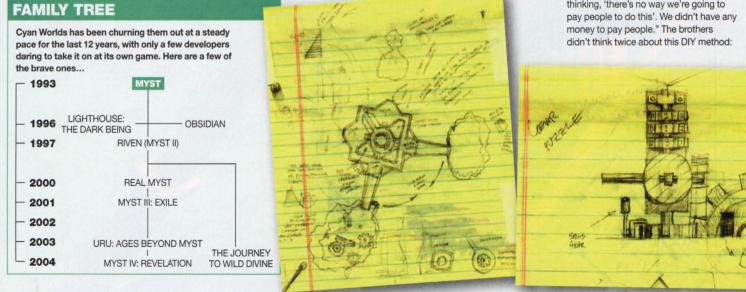It certainly did. Indeed, *Myst* was inevitably described as 'photo-realistic' by editors of magazines such as the perfunctorily named *CD-ROM User*. Nobody had ever seen anything like it at the time, but as Rand concedes: "If you look back now it's pretty poor, but we had a lot of things working to our advantage.

The success wasn't just because of what we did – the timing was right, CD-ROMs were coming out and it had a certain freshness to it."

## BROTHERS GONNA ACT IT OUT

For all the technical grappling with *Myst*, Rand admits that "the craziest stuff was just us being in it", referring to the Miller brothers impromptu acting debut.

"At some point along the way we knew we had two brothers in it. And we're two guys working out of our homes in Spokane, Washington State, so we're thinking, 'there's no way we're going to pay people to do this'. We didn't have any money to pay people." The brothers didn't think twice about this DIY method:

> ## "We had no idea that *Myst* would be as successful as it was. It was an evolution more than a revolution for us"
> **RAND MILLER** CO-CREATOR, *MYST*

## FAMILY TREE

Cyan Worlds has been churning them out at a steady pace for the last 12 years, with only a few developers daring to take it on at its own game. Here are a few of the brave ones...

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1993 | MYST | |
| 1996 | LIGHTHOUSE: THE DARK BEING | OBSIDIAN |
| 1997 | RIVEN (MYST II) | |
| 2000 | REAL MYST | |
| 2001 | MYST III: EXILE | |
| 2002 | | |
| 2003 | URU: AGES BEYOND MYST | |
| 2004 | MYST IV: REVELATION | THE JOURNEY TO WILD DIVINE |

A giant fishing reel? Six pots of jam? Well, the solution's obvious isn't it...

"We just went in the basement and didn't let anybody watch us. Then we set it up and after getting over the giggling and thinking that this is ridiculous, we put a piece of blue paper behind us and tried to act like these crazy insane brothers that were in the books. It was very unique."

Despite the unusually hands-on approach, Rand is adamant that they wouldn't have done anything differently. "Given the constraints, I think *Myst* is everything it could have been. I mean, if we'd have had another six months we could have done a few more things here and there, but we did everything as efficiently as we could for what we were trying to do. Because we had some history doing some of these kind of games with the childrens' products, we weren't surprised at what we had at our disposal. We knew what the technology would allow us to do."

### IT'S IN THE GAME

However, what the brothers can't have expected is the massive success of the game, and Rand admits that it's still hard to believe. As for his biggest achievement, he cites the stories the pair got from people saying that they felt like they were really there, that it began to feel like a real place.

"That's what I'm most proud of, because I still remember Robyn and I both talking about doing everything we could to try and make it feel like you were really there when you were working out how to solve a puzzle or what to do next. The fact that we got letters from people saying 'I turned down the lights, I put up the sound and I felt like I was exploring this place' was really satisfying."

Unsurprisingly, the sequels followed, beginning with *Riven*, which Rand claims was one of the best things the duo ever did. However, he's big enough to admit that it was also too tricky and the puzzles too hard. "The gameplay in *Myst* was actually better than in *Riven*."

> **DID YOU KNOW?**
>
> Having appeared as one of the imprisoned brothers in the original *Myst*, Rand Miller plays the part of their father in *Myst IV*. As he admits: "There are people for whom acting comes naturally, but I'm not one of them."

As for *Myst III*, with its innovative 360-degree view, Rand says: "It wasn't our development per se, but it kept the same *Myst* feel."

A different – specifically online – approach was taken for the ill-fated *Uru: Ages Of Myst*, of which Rand wistfully muses: "It's almost a spin-off – it was very different from all the *Myst* games. We wanted to change the world, but primarily for resource reasons, we didn't get a chance to see what it could do. There was some amazing potential there."

Bringing the series up-to-date, Rand reckons *Revelation* is an amazing piece of work: "It opens up the story and does things we've always wanted to do."

### SEND IN THE CLONES

Given the amazing success of the series, it's remarkable how few *Myst* clones there have actually been.

As Rand comments: "That really surprises me. There's a genre of games that are based on stories and exploration, typically they're called adventure games, but it's a dying breed in some regard. Because of *Myst's* success, we thought there'd be a whole huge evolution of those games, people pushing it further and further and further. However, I don't think we've gotten there."

Contrary to many people's belief that adventure games are a dead genre, Rand believes that they're actually the final frontier in interactive gaming right now: "The gameplay systems we're working with now are all very well known, we're just doing them better now. There's nothing wrong with that, but to me the last vestige is this one, the adventure game, and I think it's waiting for someone to make another innovation."

### NEW DAWN

So does Rand reckon that he'll be the one to revolutionise the genre in the future? "I don't know that it'll be us, but it'll be done by someone who brings innovation to storytelling. It needs someone to base a game on exploring and storytelling that will then bring in a whole new generation of people,

*Myst V: End Of Ages.* Or so we're promised...

### THIS IS THE END

Cyan Worlds recently announced that the final *Myst* game will be released this autumn. According to CEO Rand Miller, *Myst V: End Of Ages* follows the *Myst* storyline to its conclusion – closing the book on the Ages of *Myst*. "To complete this circle of *Myst* we've embraced the idea of something old and something new. New in regard to pushing forward in areas of interface and technology; old in the fact we're getting back to the simple exploration that made *Myst* so magical."

Speaking to *PC ZONE* about the strain of continuing the series for over a decade, Miller smiles: "You'd think I'd be tired of it wouldn't you? When we did *Myst*, we did so much story around it, but there are so many other aspects of it too. We wanted to make sure we told enough to satisfy ourselves before we moved on to the next thing. At some point you want to start with a clean sheet of paper."

making them say, 'I felt like I was really there'. I hope it happens – that some game somewhere touches that nerve again. There's so much potential there, it feels like it's still the infancy of that part of the industry. There's something inherent in human nature, the desire to explore. I think we touched on that a little bit in the *Myst* series." **PCZ**

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