

PCZONE

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BARBARIAN
INVASION**

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RESURRECTION
OF EVIL**

IT'S BACK!

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AFTERMATH**

All new screens and info!

GTA: SAN ANDREAS
L.A. Riot! Exclusive playtest

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TINY COMPO: What's
the name of Pariah's
female co-star?

ISSUE #155 JUNE 2005

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CREATORS OF



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THE FIRST AND BEST FOR PC GAMES

PARIAH

Explosive action
from the **UT** team!



Head of Steam

Greetings. If you were caught out by last month's little April Fool joke, congratulations. Dave Woods is

still very much on the mag, but is currently working on a 'top secret project' to be revealed in a few issues time. While the boss is away, we'll continue to bring you the biggest and best exclusives, this month including *Civilization IV* (page 38), *Rome: Total War – Barbarian Invasion* (page 54), *Unreal Engine 3.0* (page 50) and the first review of futuristic shooter *Pariah* (page 66).

However, one game I'm afraid to say I've fallen out of love with is *Half-Life 2*. I've completed it once, and constantly load up *Counter-Strike: Source* for a cack-handed blunder against you in our monthly Fight Club – but only on my work PC. You see, I've just splashed out on a brand new games machine; a huge, black 2001: A Space Odyssey monolith with state-of-the-art graphics and a processor faster than the human brain (well, faster than most footballers' brains).

Unfortunately, it just won't play Steam games. *Far Cry*, fine. *Doom 3*, perfect. But if my ruddy computer goes anywhere near Gordon Freeman and his cuddly headcrabs, all I get is more crashes and Application Errors than HAL 9000. Of course, one advantage of working on *PC ZONE* is that we have a saviour we can call on; a shining light when all around is the blue screen of death – Wandy. So, apologies if you've written to our hardware guru this month with tales of woe, as he may be stuck in a small corner of North London for the next few weeks, tracking down the G-Man for me in time for Valve's new expansion pack *Half-Life 2: Aftermath* (page 14). Until next time, remember – you're only as good as your last Windows XP Service Pack.

Jamie Sefton

Jamie Sefton
Acting Editor

P66

COVER DISCS P136 →

■ DEMOS AND MOVIES!

Anti-virus hunting with *Pariah*, block-rocking beats with *LEGO Star Wars* and baldie-bashing fun in *The Chronicles Of Riddick* – all exclusive to *PC ZONE*! Plus all the latest patches, mods and much, much more!

■ DVD EXCLUSIVES

Sword-swinging in *Dungeon Lords*, full-on MMOG action with the *Anarchy Online* client, *The Bard's Tale* gets saucy and the updated Juiced demo! Plus the latest *Doom 3: Resurrection Of Evil* movies!

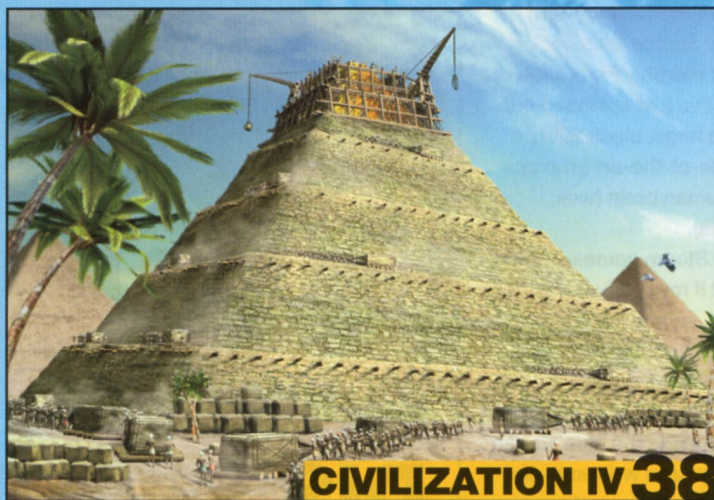


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PCZONE
FUTURE PUBLISHING
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LONDON W1U 6FP

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Origination ColourFlow 020 7323 0022
Printed in the UK by Southern Print
Distribution Marketforce (UK)

THE ESTABLISHMENT

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Distributed by Marketforce (UK) Ltd, 5th Floor,
Low Rise Building, Kings Reach Tower, Stamford
Street, London, SE1 9LS. Tel 0207 633 3333

Printed in the UK by Wyndeham Heron Ltd, The
Bentall Complex, Colchester Road, Heybridge,
Malden, Essex, CM9 7NW

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of Future plc. Future produces
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Future plc is a public company quoted on the
London Stock Exchange (symbol: FUTR)

Managing Director UK Robert Price
Non-Executive Chairman Roger Parry
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Tel +44 1225 442244

www.futureplc.com

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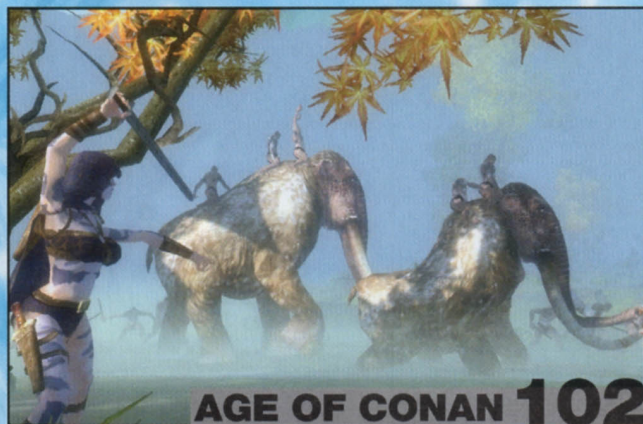
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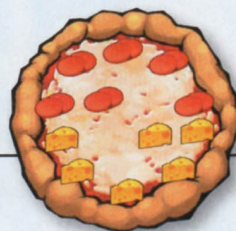
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NEXT ISSUE: PCZ #156

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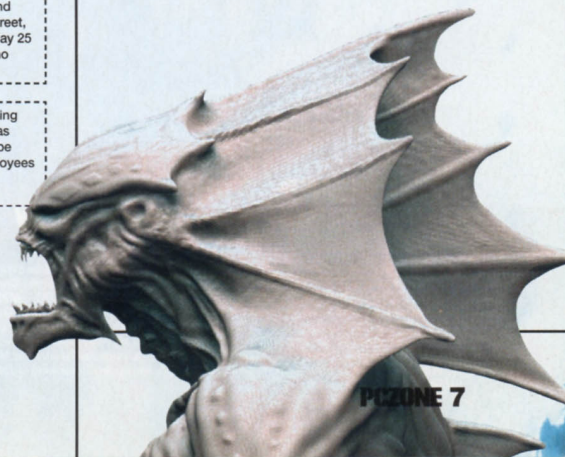


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WIN! **TINY COMPO:** Correctly answer this month's cover question and you could win some goodies. Send your entry on a postcard addressed to: Tiny Compo (155), PC ZONE, Future Publishing, 99 Baker Street, London W1U 6FP. The first correct entry plucked out of the hat wins a mystery prize. Closing date: May 25 2005. The winner of our March Tiny Compo (153) was Jo Phillips from Grovesend near Swansea, who knew that, apparently, Dire Straits sang a song called *Brothers in Arms*. Have a copy of *Riddick*.

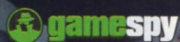
GENERAL COMPETITION TERMS & CONDITIONS: 1. Only completed entries received before the closing date will be entered. 2. Winners will be notified by post. 3. No cash alternative. 4. Prizes not necessarily as shown. 5. No correspondence will be entered into. 6. The editor's decision is final. 7. Responsibility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



WHEN LIVES ARE ON THE LINE, SWAT ANSWERS

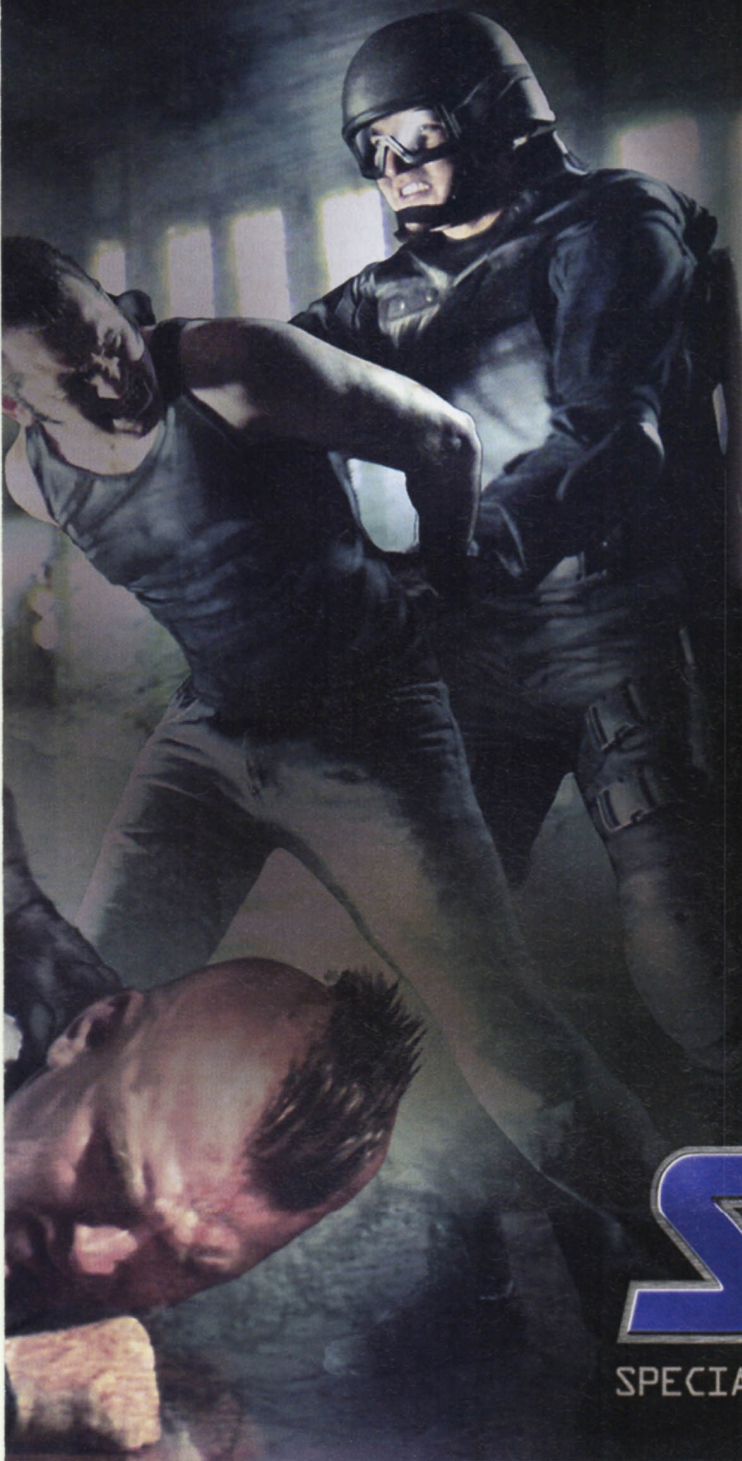
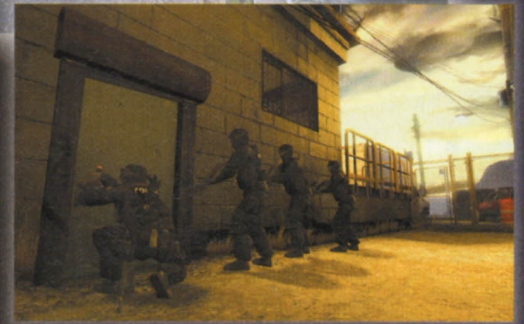
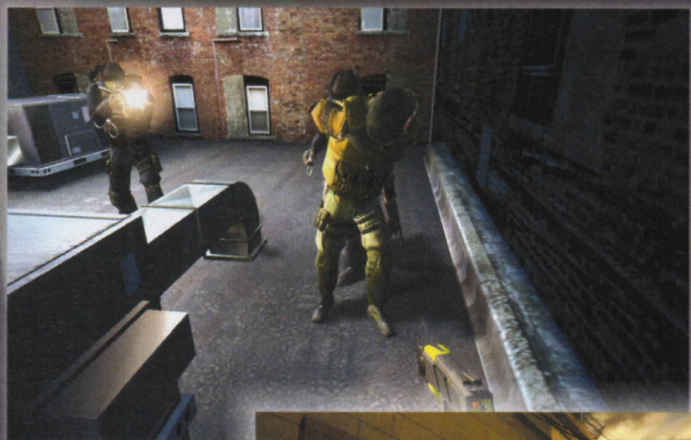
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THE CALL.



SWAT4
SPECIAL WEAPONS AND TACTICS

**FIRST
Look!**

GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS

Exclusive! First play of Rockstar's bitch-slapping crim sim

BAD-ASS HOMIE Jamie Sefton

ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW

PUBLISHER Rockstar
DEVELOPER Rockstar North
EXPECTED RELEASE DATE June 10
WEBSITE www.rockstargames.com/sanandreas

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Whuh? Oh come on. It's the next GTA!
- Includes three whole cities the size of *Vice City*
- Improved PC graphics and mouse-control
- RPG elements such as stamina, muscle and respect
- New vehicles, weapons and items (parachutes!)

"Eat too many pizzas and CJ gets too tubby to run from the rozzers"



Resisted the PS2 version? Then prepare to be rewarded...

IT'S 11am on an overcast Tuesday and I'm being taken into a darkened room at Rockstar's London HQ containing a kick-ass PC and a huge projection screen with a beautiful hi-res *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*. My guide beckons me towards the keyboard and mouse: "Go ahead – have however long you want." Despite the fact that none of us are wearing gold jewellery and I've yet to order the diamond-encrusted incisor I've always promised myself, this is most definitely bling.

If you've managed to avoid playing the PlayStation 2 version of *San Andreas* released late last year, then it's almost

time to remove the fingers from your ears, stop saying "la la la la la" and open your eyes. *San Andreas* is actually an entire mythical US state (obviously based on California), containing the three *Vice City*-sized cities of San Fierro (San Francisco), Las Venturas (Las Vegas) and Los Santos (Los Angeles). There's vast countryside, forests and mountains in-between, teeming with slack-jawed yokels and trigger-happy Hillbilly cops.

Set in the early 1990s (with accompanying period soundtrack containing the likes of Public Enemy and Guns 'N' Roses), you play through the game as Carl Johnson, a streetwise black kid who returns to his 'hood in Los Santos after a family bereavement.

DO BELIEVE THE HYPE

Rockstar North has basically "done a *Vice City*" with *San Andreas*, adding mouse control and improving the graphics with increased draw distance, more detailed textures, smoother frame-rate and extra

environmental effects such as reflections and shadows. You can again create your own radio station from a mix of tunes, but also import DJ chatter and ads. Plus, new to the PC *San Andreas* is a unique feature that enables you to replay the last 30 seconds of gameplay, save it as a game file and swap it on the Net – great fun if you want to challenge friends to beat stunts or show off your best action sequences.

Other than that it's a case of "if it ain't motherf**kin' broke, don't motherf**kin' break it", retaining the series' trademark humour (a fast food outlet called Burger Shot, for example), ultra-violent shoot-outs and beautifully-handling vehicles, which now include a BMX bike, combine-harvester and jumbo jet. All the recent gameplay additions are featured here too, with stealth missions similar to the hiding-in-the-shadows game mechanic of *Manhunt*, and CJ's role-playing element for stamina, respect and muscle – eat too many pizzas and he actually becomes too tubby to run away from the rozzers.

The only slight disappointment is the lack of a two-player co-op mode, which previously allowed console owners to go on Bonnie & Clyde-style killing sprees. However, in a great pointer to the future, Rockstar revealed that it's a huge fan and supporter of the *GTA* mod scene, especially the online *Multi Theft Auto*, so we're somewhat hopeful of some kind of multiplayer gang warfare in the next game. We'll shoot up the place with a review of *San Andreas* soon. Respect. **[X]**



We. Just. Can't. Wait.



You can pimp your ride. Or you can just be a pimp.



A relaxing countryside drive-by.



Strange. What we remember from the early '90s are lumberjack shirts, centre partings and the hits of the Levellers.

PC-FRIENDLY

Mouse-look, hi-res graphics, improved textures, smoother frame-rates, home-made radio stations and 30-second replays – all added for the PC version.

FAT CLUB

Although CJ can make regular visits to the Cluckin' Bell chicken restaurant, if he doesn't exercise or work out, he'll pile on the pounds quicker than Oprah.

BMX BANDITS

The first new vehicle you get to play with is the BMX, but there's also a host of new cars, bikes, boats, planes and a few very special 'experimental' rides...



GAGS GALORE

GTA's adult humour is peppered throughout – a particular favourite was the adult movie cinema showing The Wizard of Ass.

GERONIMO!

Using the new parachute, you can now base-jump off buildings, fall from Mount Chiliad or even fly an aeroplane and leap out.

SOFTLY, SOFTLY

CJ has an additional stealth indicator that goes blue when he's hidden – useful for burgling houses or sneaking past security guards in well-guarded locations.

Fire at Will...

FIRST
Look!

ENEMY IN SIGHT



Or, the closest you'll get to *Operation Flashpoint 2* without dreaming it...

■ ENEMY WITHIN Will Porter

ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW

PUBLISHER Atari
DEVELOPER Illusion Softworks
EXPECTED RELEASE DATE TBA
WEBSITE www.illusionsoftworks.com

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- It's just like *Operation Flashpoint*
- Real landscapes, some from Plymouth
- Go anywhere, use anything mentality
- 70 vehicles that can be commandeered

"Landscapes can be dented, trees uprooted and entire villages mangled"



The terrain is fully blow-upable.

"YOU CAN GO inside the building. Switch on TV and watch programme. We will allow players to create their own custom files, so they can have porno files for TV," explains the Eastern European developer stereotypically, before blowing air into his cheeks in a stereotypically Eastern European way, after a stereotypically Eastern European demonstration of his new game. Walking up a big hill in God mode and shooting faraway men? Be still our beating hearts.

But stop the xenophobia! These guys are from Illusion, the ones who brought you *Hidden & Dangerous 2* and *Mafia*. These are the men who practically live next door to the *Operation Flashpoint* boys over in the Czech Republic. And these are the men who've got an engine that sings, and it sings a song we've heard sung once before and never since.

Here's the deal. Hundreds of soldiers in a near-future setting. Communists versus the West. The ability to use every object you come across. The ability to drive 50 military vehicles and 20 civilian ones. Landscapes that are dented by bombardment or the digging of trenches. Vegetation that sways in the wind. Trees that can be uprooted or climbed by snipers. Forests that can be burned to the ground. Entire villages that can be mangled by the aerial bombardment that you call in. Excited yet? And if it looks like *Flashpoint* and smells like *Flashpoint*, then, well...

As is now covered by European Directive and various legal requirements, *Enemy In Sight* comes to us via the freshly scratched



Ah, the horrors of war. We've been pining for some *Flashpoint-y* action of late...

chins of many and varied Czech military specialists. The accustomed field manoeuvres of both the modern US and Russian armies are promised to be faithfully replicated (although we'll buy you a Mars bar if you actually notice), while mission design has been co-ordinated with both ex-strategists from NATO and their pesky Russkie counterparts.

You'll be fighting on a real landscape as well, and if you live anywhere around Plymouth, then you could be fighting on the exact same panorama that you can see out of the nearest window. Over 100 square kilometres of coastal south-west England has been declared a warzone, and it's all been faithfully digitally

engineered from aerial photography and clever research. Rivers, hills, villages, lakes, roads, buildings... Illusion says it'll all be there. Although we doubt you'll be able to saunter into your own home, sit on the couch and watch crazy Eastern European porno on TV.

Also up for the ten-levels-of-hell treatment are the German Alps and the forests, fields and rivers of Illusion's home country, the Czech Republic – each territory has its own days, nights, summers, springs, autumns and winters.

So if you've ever wanted to spend Christmas in Plymouth, then here's your chance. You'll even be able to shoot some communists while you're there. [X2]



Trees can be crawled up for sniping duties – but they can be pulled down, too...



Watch your back garden get invaded by Soviets! (*If you live in Plymouth.)



Vast swathes of the German Alps, the Czech Republic, (and Plymouth) have been faithfully recreated, right down to the bits of chewing gum stuck to the pavements.

AL DENTY

Explosions leave craters, and (unlike in its forbear *Operation Flashpoint*) aerial bombardment will be capable of levelling entire villages.

MIRROR MIRROR

So you don't wander into an invisible wall, Illusion has kindly mirrored each 100 square kilometre lump of battlefield nine times over... You may get lost, but you won't get stuck.

THE REAL THING

Illusion is promising to provide the first true recreation of modern first-person warfare. We've heard that one before, but we could be persuaded to believe it this time...

IN DA BUNGALOW

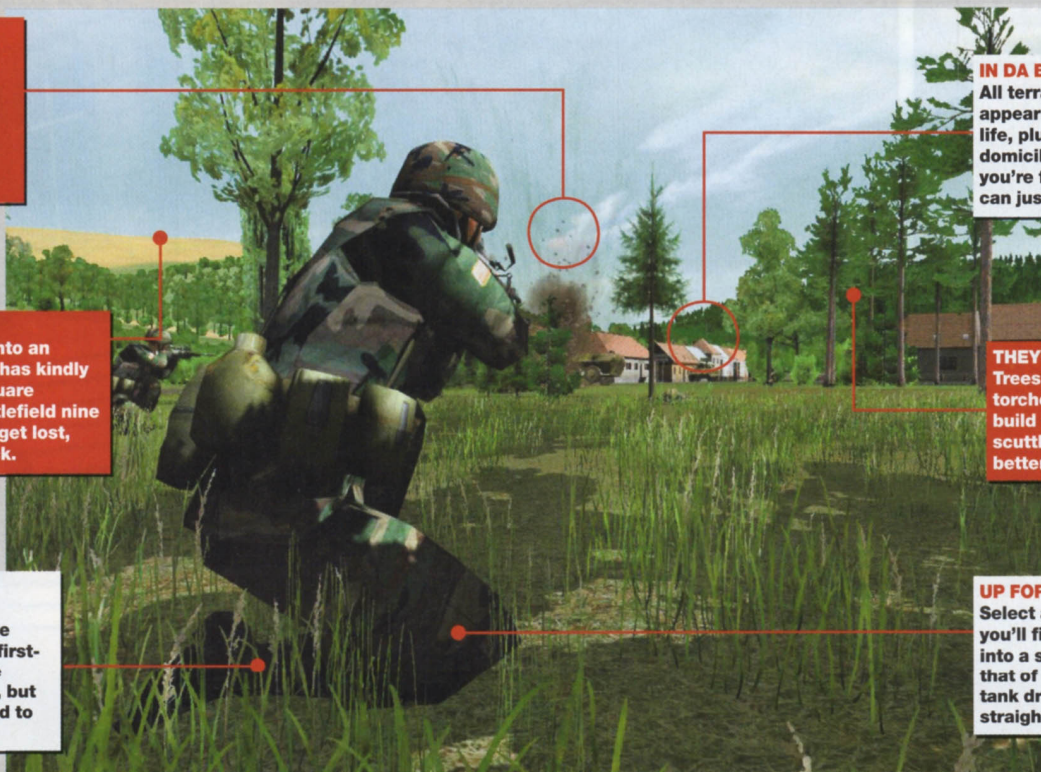
All terrain and buildings appear as they do in real life, plus you can enter any domicile you choose. Or, if you're feeling grumpy you can just blow them up.

THEY'RE IN THE TREES

Trees can be uprooted or torched, while in the current build plucky snipers can scuttle up the trunks for a better shot.

UP FOR A QUICKIE

Select a quick mission and you'll find yourself inserted into a specific role - such as that of helicopter pilot or tank driver - and ploughed straight into the action.



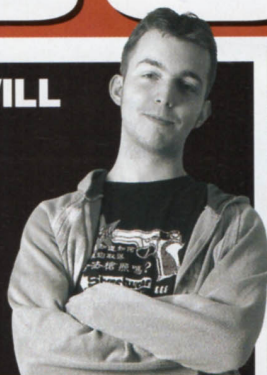


ALL THE NEWS, VIEWS AND RUMOURS FROM THE WORLD OF PC GAMING

BULLETIN

RISE AND

ILL WILL



■ NEWS EDITOR Will Porter

▲ "Will, we're all off to explore Berlin and see the latest and greatest in PC Gaming, are you coming?" No, no... I'll just stay here alternately inspecting my hotel room's U-bend and shitting through the eye of a ruthlessly efficient needle. "Well, if you're sure..." Oh, I'm sure. There's a news story on the current situation in North Korea coming up on CNN, the only English language channel I have, and I've only seen it repeated four and a half times. You go ahead and have fun. Just leave me here to die. Retch.

Glamorous life eh? Trapped in a hotel room for 50 hours hallucinating and going mad with the bug from hell. And what was I hallucinating about? Pigging *City Of Heroes*. Never has my status as professional nerd been hammered home so violently. Other people hallucinate about pink elephants and monkeys with hats, while I manage to convince myself that I've discovered a rare phenomenon in which *City Of Heroes* players are mysteriously struck down by stomach cramps when playing in certain areas. I go on to hallucinate that websites are springing up all over the Internet to commend me for this discovery. Something is clearly going wrong in my head. A sentiment that my bowels aren't remiss in sharing.

So, in brief, this is how I discovered that my subconscious was just as geeky as the front of my brain, which was quite a bummer because I was always counting on it being aloof and cool to compensate. Turns out that while I'm doing complicated things like making polite chit-chat with pretty women, my subconscious isn't even trying. It just perches at the back of my brain with some 12-sided dice and a heavily-thumbed *Fighting Fantasy* novel. Thanks subconscious. Thanks for nothing.

VALVE UNVEILS A THRILLING NEW EPISODE – *HALF-LIFE 2: AFTERMATH*, AND TALKS ABOUT *THE LOST COAST* AND *DAY OF DEFEAT: SOURCE*

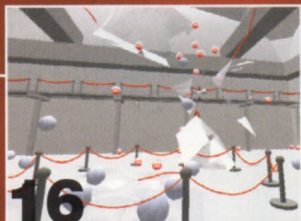


Alyx and Gordon return to the Citadel. We want it now.



The Lost Coast HDR: pretty.

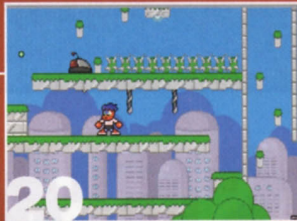




PHYSICAL ATTRACTION
Einstein would be proud



HELLGATE: LONDON
Future of the RPG



FREEPLAY
Because you're skint



CHARTS
Like Excel, only prettier

SHINE



Anzio in its old form, and its flashy new Source-feel appearance.

"RATHER THAN offer you the illusion of free choice, I'll take the liberty of choosing for you," explains the G-man. "If and when your time comes round again..." Seems though, that the time has come around sooner than everyone thought. Gordon's coming back to reality.

Valve is being remarkably strict on revealing much on *Half-Life 2: Aftermath*, the Steam-bound expansion due for release in the summer, with Freeman spokesman Doug Lombardi explaining that they're "trying to save a good portion of the surprises for when folks play it for the first time". So what do we know? We know that it takes place directly after the close of *Half-Life 2*, and further to this Lombardi responds to our hammering on Valve's locked doors by explaining that "much of *Aftermath* is set in City 17 and the Citadel", before cryptically muttering "however, things have changed quite a bit".

ALL CHANGE

They sure have. What with the Citadel about to go critical and take out the vast proportion of City 17 with it, much of the episode is said to cover the escape of you, Alyx and the rebellion from the blast radius. The various beasts previously on the outskirts of the city also seem to have infiltrated the crumbling buildings of the interior, as shown by the presence of the AntLion to the left.

Half-Life 2 took place over three virtual days, and *Aftermath* will cover a fourth – so it's fair to expect the game to cover a third of the running time of the original game. As these shots ably show, lovely Alyx will again be at the forefront of affairs, far more than she ever was in the original game.

Lombardi promises a mix of both familiar and new characters – so Dog, Eli and the gang will no doubt make their presence known. In terms of enemies, meanwhile, it seems increasingly likely that the spindly-legged ex-human Stalkers of the Citadel will come in for a gunning – what with the continued action within Breen's stronghold. Other than that, new vehicles? "Can't say just yet." New weapons? "Sorry". Will the water-tentacles from early *HL2* movies make an appearance? "Silence". Can you confirm we'll be controlling Freeman and not another member of the cast? "Confirmed – you are Freeman." So when does it come out? "This summer, debuting on Steam. Price to be confirmed." You heard the man...

BEYOND HALF-LIFE 2

But wait, there's more. Valve is feeling slightly less furtive when it comes to its other projects due for release this summer. First up is *The Lost Coast*, a graphics-card-munching feat of art and technology. "Separate from advancing the *Half-Life* story and providing further gameplay experiences in that world, we wanted to create something that gave the artists and engineers a chance to explore the limits of the Source engine with the latest hardware," explains a suddenly loquacious Lombardi.

The Lost Coast level, which will be available free to all *Half-Life 2* users, is taken from the Highway 17 area of the game, but its emphasis is tech and art; being custom-created to introduce something called High-Dynamic Range (HDR) lighting to the Source engine. So what does this mean to the gamer?

"In the simplest definition, the 'dynamic range' of a scene is the contrast ratio between its brightest and darkest parts" explains Lombardi, before drowning us in technical details. Essentially, HDR means that features



The Lost Coast's monastery will push your PC to its limits.



Donner, before and after: sheds become houses.

such as blooming (that creates a blurred effect around bright edges, much like an over-exposed camera) and vastly more realistic light effects – whether it's coloured light passing through the stained glass of a monastery, more accurate reflections and refractions and, put simply, some visuals that are jaw-droppingly gorgeous to behold.

And then there's the new version of *Day Of Defeat: Source*, the inevitable upgrade of the much-vaunted and inordinately popular World War II *Half-Life* mod. This too, is on the radar for release this summer – and it's looking in just as fine fettle as *Counter-Strike: Source* when it first nestled in our Steam trays.

"Like *Counter-Strike*, *Day Of Defeat* is always evolving," explains Lombardi. "*Day Of Defeat: Source* represents a significant move forward, as everything in the game has been redone to leverage the power of the Source engine technology. So, from the user interface to the sounds (and sound system), to the integrated physics simulation system, it's been

completely reconstructed."

Obviously, it's Valve's habit to add maps as time goes on, but on its initial release it'll showcase remastered versions of the four most played *DOD* maps – namely Anzio, Donner, Flash and Avalanche. A few gameplay nips and tucks have been included, namely artillery enhancements and tweaks to the soldier classes, but otherwise it seems to be a spangly, fresh-faced update of a much-loved mod – with high resolution textures and bump-mapping falling out of its ears. It'll be released later this summer on Steam with a price tag of \$14.99.

And the future? Well there's plenty on the Steam horizon, from both Valve and "other developers".

We've caught a strong whiff of who, and will bring you solid details in the next few issues. Suffice to say, it's very exciting.

PHYSICAL ATTRACTION

SPECIAL REPORT

Throw a PC from a third storey window and it doesn't bounce. Pavel Barter goes to extremes to explore the new generation of game physics

YOU'RE CREEPING along a dimly-lit corridor, shotgun at the ready, when a dangling chain jangles as you brush past it. Startled, you reel back into wooden shelving, rotten boards splinter beneath your weight, and you fall flat on your arse in a cloud of debris. All 50 bones within your virtual body have been measured for maximum bend properties, joint stiffness and weight, and now your hand is trembling because you've landed on it. Big oaf. Thought that hurt? Wait until the first bullet hits you.

According to Ukrainian game designer Alexei Sytyanov this is a potential scenario from *STALKER: Shadow Of Chernobyl*. Unscripted skeletal surprises go hand-in-hand with telekinetic monsters flinging all kinds of crap around and

bullets that spray like spittle from an angry tramp's lips. Christ, you'll even be able to shove car trailers around for cover in ranged combat. *STALKER* is a footnote in the changing face of physics, a Newtonian paradise where the lines between real and unreal are little more than a blur.

"The future?" asks Jonas Lindquist of Meqon, game physics sculptors. "Stranger machines, cooler contraptions and fully manipulable scenarios. You'll be able to chop down any tree in a forest, set off a bomb, and completely affect your environment. Characters will be able to rip their way through cloth body bags. Graphical optimisation is transforming, scenery is becoming less static, and physics has a far more dynamic environment to play with."

FUTURE PERFECT

Physics, traditionally a word associated with professors and torturous GCSEs, now means fun. Sure, everyone and their grandma

is an expert on the subject since their first Gravity Gun zombie slice, but game physics have been kicking around for donkeys years. *Trespasser* (1998) was one of the first games to recruit a ragdoll. Actually, it was more a ragosaurus – a dinosaur with a basic skeletal movement system who, when slaughtered, would flop to the ground like a sack of old spuds.

Primordial racing game *Carmaggedon* (1997) sparked the onset of car physics – blood-soaked jalopies that would spin, tumble and jump. *Hitman*, meanwhile, was the first game to use proper ragdolls back in 2000 – with the thumb-in-a-suit assassin stripping his enemies in now-characteristic style before hiding their twisty naked torsos behind bushes and in public conveniences. Over the years, basic collision detection became supplemented by basic gravity and soon many a shed-full of game world objects became interactive.

Today we're at the point where we can bowl floppy dead people

into oil drums and hurl TV's at Combine grunts. It's largely thanks to Havok, the physics company from Ireland that torture ragdolls for a living and were behind the best bits in *Painkiller*, *Max Payne 2*, *Psi-Ops* and *Half-Life 2* – while the misapplication of its services made for some of the worst bits of *Thief: Deadly Shadows* and *Deus Ex: Invisible War*. Chief technology officer Steve Collins is accustomed to excited developers toying with his wares. "When the Valve designers first received Havok they went crazy creating all these amazing puzzles and contraptions, a few of which involved toilets for some reason. They spent a long time in the pre-production phase for *Half-Life 2* envisaging what could be achieved with physics."

CRY HAVOK

Havok's latest demo, showcased at the recent GDC in San



Gordon insisted on Newtonian physics. The nerd.



DNF will showcase Meqon physics.



Thief 3: where ragdolls go wrong.



A ragdoll prototype: stupid, and also extinct.



Unreal 3.0 knows more about physics than anyone.

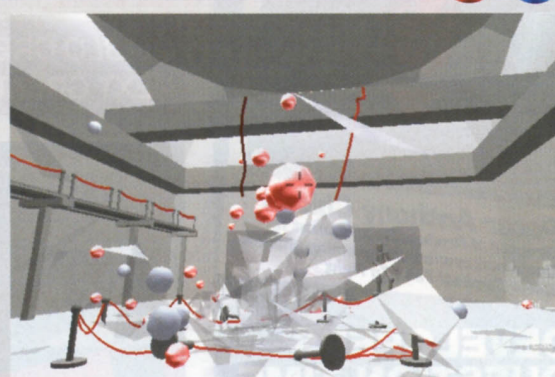
Francisco, suggests the future of game physics is in biomechanics. We've twatted ragdolls onto the floor ad infinitum, but how about seeing one get up again in an entirely unscripted manner? How about a character walking up a staircase and using hand-eye co-ordination to instinctively reach out for the bannister, carefully placing his feet on the steps?

"We've created a coupling of physics and animation that places a character more believably in an environment than you've ever seen before," Collins continues. "The character falls down the stairs and his body contorts

according to their shape. He then hauls himself up onto his feet using the steps."

Havok's funky new advances will be seen in *F.E.A.R.*, which features more gravity and mass than the Vatican on a Sunday afternoon.

MEQON MADNESS!



Some objects, having equal and opposite reactions yesterday.

WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT MEQON'S LATEST PHYSICAL WARES? CHECK OUT THE COVER DISCS WHERE YOU'LL FIND THE FOLLOWING...

- An exclusive play of Meqon's Games Developers Conference demonstration (pictured) – demonstrating the effect of hurtling red balls on cloth, glass and smashable walls. It looks basic without any textures, but it's pretty damn clever.
- Meqon's famous Jeep demo. Career a jeep around a literal sandbox – piling into men, destroying wooden towers and watching your own ragdoll driver slowly fall out and get tangled in your wheels.
- The Meqon game dynamics demo. A mixed bag of tumbling ragdolls, self-destructive barrel pyramids and other such physical nonsense.

"Ragdolls are like bags of flour connected by string. How could they ever be truly realistic?

We've gone beyond that and put muscles in their bodies. With our new physics and animation system, a character will be able to walk, jump and swagger, kicking away debris while crossing a surface," says Steve Collins.

THE COMPETITION

Havok isn't alone. The Unreal Engine 3.0 has been toying with particle-driven physics (such as splashing water driving a waterwheel) and improved ragdolls. Also trumpeting the revolution is Swedish middleware firm Meqon – the men who'll be crafting the drift of the big man's cigar ash in *Duke Nukem Forever*. Meqon's latest demo features a room getting annihilated by a ball-launcher: windows and wall tiles shatter realistically; hanging boxes explode, their contents smashing to the floor; best of all, a completely interactive piece of cloth billows and stretches when shot. According to Meqon, every effect is done in real time.

Having lent its skills to toss like *Shade: Wrath Of Angels*, Meqon is now working with premium developers and games such as *TimeShift* and the continually elusive *Duke Nukem Forever*. "3D Realms is using our physics extensively and the game is going to be heavily physics-orientated for weapons, puzzles and the general environment," says Marcus Lysen, Meqon product manager. "I'm as eager as everyone else to see the finished

product. Remember smashing soda cans out of a machine in *Duke Nukem 3D*? 3D Realms was one of the first developers to make physics fun."

Even the real-time-strategy genre is oiling itself up for action. "One thing RTS games need is a physics engine. God, they need a physics engine," says Peter Molyneux. Ask and you shall receive. In Molyneux's *Black & White 2*, a game where every interaction has a believable outcome, the world will be your oyster. Wanna uproot a tree or bash down buildings? How about rip the sun from the sky? It'll all be possible and supported by some truly classy physics, according to Lionhead. *Age Of Empires III*, meanwhile, is onboard the physics train with bouncing ragdolls and assorted shrapnel. With hundreds of integrated animations per unit, the Havok-led result sounds like it's going to be spectacular.

FAST FORWARD

The next age of physics? Prepare for gelatinous creatures whose bodies shift-shape like liquid, crumpling car fenders, and massive explosions with thousands of pieces of debris. When rigid body physics soften up, we'll see facial animation (wrinkling, eyelashes fluttering in the wind), cloth tearing realistically and fluids responding to splashes or movement. As Havok and other middleware masterminds refine their technology – and with the world's first chip dedicated to physics acceleration on its way (Ageia's PhysX) – a new level of realism, freedom and immersion is on its way. Were Sir Isaac Newton still around, the father of modern-day physics would be proud... And he'd probably be a die-hard *Half-Life 2* fan too. [E]



Peter Anthony Chiodo
Director of Product Development for
Destineer, creator of upcoming shooter
Close Combat: First To Fight

DEVELOPERS' QUESTION TIME

What videogames are you playing at the moment?

A wide variety: *Half-Life 2*, *Star Wars: Republic Commando* and *Brothers In Arms* on my PC. And *Halo 2*, *Knights Of The Old Republic II*, and *Star Wars Battlefront* on Xbox.

What is your favourite game of all time?

The original *Legend Of Zelda*, followed by *StarCraft* and the *Age and Myth* series. Arcade classics like *Ms Pac-Man*, *Donkey Kong* and *Spy Hunter* bring back fond memories. And *Top Spin* on Xbox is one of the best sports games ever.

What are you most proud of?

The technology Destineer has created, that's used to create unique, compelling game experiences and life-saving military training tools. A few years ago I had the honour of presenting game concepts to Steven Spielberg – nothing gets better than that!

Who do you most admire in the industry?

Shigeru Miyamoto. Since 1984, when I first turned on my NES, I've always had extremely positive experiences playing his games. His franchises have helped make the industry what it is today.

What is your company's philosophy?

Give gamers unique and compelling experiences. In our technology, in games and training tools, we want to innovate, not replicate. We want to make gamers say: "Wow... That was really cool! I've never seen that in a game before!"

What's the best thing about your job?

The best thing about my job is the thought that you're making something that gamers are really excited to play. The excitement within the community is infectious, and it pushes you to create the best, most compelling experiences you can.

What's the worst thing about your job?

George Lucas once said movies are never finished, they're abandoned. I think that also applies to games. You sometimes fall into a cycle of perpetually tweaking and tuning, and you have to know when to let go.

What are you working on right now?

We're developing military training tools and future games driven by the Destineer 1.0 engine. We're defining goals for the forthcoming Destineer 2.0 engine and brainstorming what kinds of games and training tools can be driven by it.

What's the Next Big Thing in PC gaming?

I'm excited to see a big leap in storytelling. I'm also excited about finding a truly interactive experience in which solid gameplay and emotional investment are woven into compelling, engaging story arcs that make me want to stay at my computer.

LONDON FALLING

DIABLO CREATOR UNVEILS HELLGATE: LONDON – THE NEXT GREAT HOPE FOR ROLE-PLAYERS EVERYWHERE



The only time you'll go to Covent Garden without throttling a tourist.

"FOR CENTURIES the veil between the demonic and earthly realms has grown weaker and weaker as man has lost his belief in the supernatural and embraced the ways of science" whispers Bill Roper, CEO of Flagship Studios and the man behind such diamond franchises as *Warcraft* and *Diablo*, in a fittingly dark and mysterious way. Unsurprisingly in his new game, *Hellgate: London*, the demons have found a way to break through into our world. And they've not only broken into our capital city, they've also broken into the single most exciting role-playing experience currently on the radar.

The story follows the Knights Templar, the oft-covered sect who have been quietly preparing for the demonic onslaught for centuries, yet have been forced into subterranean havens peppered throughout the London Underground system. From here they attempt to rebuild society while nightmares stalk the streets above them. Your character enters proceedings 25 years in the future, and five years after the success of the demons in taking over large parts of the earth. And it's here that the adventure begins.

Played from a goth/cyberpunk first-person perspective, the potential contained within the ruins of London town is phenomenal. "Actual sites that exist beneath London make for some

amazing places to take players, since they act as modern-day settings for good old-fashioned dungeon crawls," explains Roper. "From the Underground stations, to Roman Aqueducts, to the old underground Mail Train line, to Victorian hospitals, to World War II bomb shelters, to plague pits..."

The game and its environments are randomly generated, and although quests will be nudging you forwards in terms of storyline, random events will change each player's experiences. You might be adventuring and randomly come across a rocking van full of Flesh Eaters, for example, or a Templar surrounded by Ravagers – who, should you save him, will stick his details onto your PDA and team up with you later in the game. Or, you might come across nothing at all.

"The way we approach story-telling is from what we call the 'water cooler experience,'" explains Roper. "If we all started from the same point – say London – and travelled to the same destination – like Rome – we would be involved in the same parts, or nodes, of a story, but our experiences along the way would be vastly different. We like the idea of each character having their own tale to tell that revolve around the same key elements. It's like players hanging around the water cooler, sharing their unique experiences even though they were all on the same basic path to the same destination."

So that's *Hellgate: London* – a highly randomised RPG, from a company whose



leads are intimately connected with *Diablo*. It's set in London, obviously. The inspirations that Bill Roper cites include *Clockwork Orange*, *Dawn Of The Dead* and *Shaun Of The Dead*, *Diablo*, Marilyn Manson and Green Day. It also looks gorgeous. Are we excited? Hell, yeah...

■ Publisher: Namco
■ Developer: Flagship Studios
■ ETA: 2006
■ Website: www.flagshipstudios.com



Under new demon management! Now all of London looks like Camden High St.



...Apart from the bits that look like a sunny bank holiday in Hackney.



Or Holloway Road, for that matter.



Dalston hasn't changed much, though.

SHE'S BACK...

THE NEW LARA CROFT: SMALLER BOOBS, TIGHTER SHORTS AND A LESS STUPID FACE



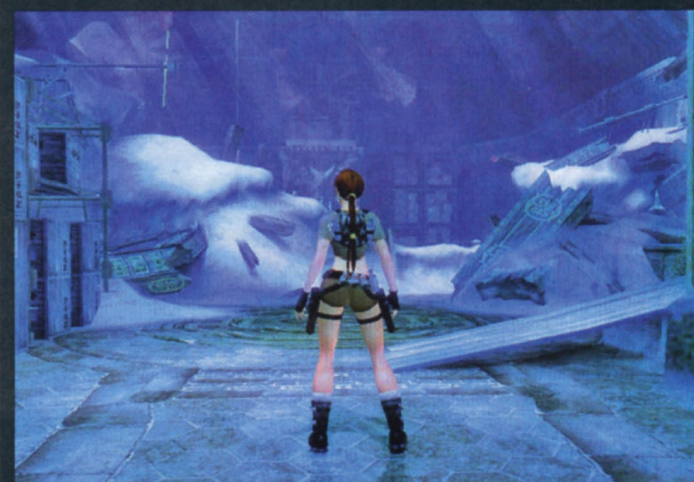
Surely someone this sweet and lovely couldn't viciously kill all in her way?

IS EVERYONE up to speed with this one? Well, in the not-altogether-unlikely event that you'd fallen out with what had turned from the brightest hope for gaming into a turgid monster of a franchise and stopped caring – here's the deal. Core Design was stripped of the tight Lycra top and it was given to the *Soul Reaver* and, recently, *Project: Snowblind* bods over at Crystal Dynamics. Then, in a stroke that really reignited our interest, Lara's creator Toby Gard was brought back into the fold – having previously left Core after the original *Tomb Raider*.

And now here she is in all her subtler glory. She's more realistic, her head's less like an oval and her breasts are less like bowling balls. Her

new outing, *Tomb Raider: Legend* is also promised to be a step back to what *TR* was all about in the first place; which was, y'know, raiding tombs instead of mooching around on the streets of Paris or in submarines. Peruse these shots and you can see an inventory strapped to her back (no more infinite piles of guns, then) and a communicator in her ear with which she'll no doubt chat away to a swarthy man of some description. We're certainly intrigued, though.

- Publisher: Eidos
- Developer: Crystal Dynamics
- ETA: Q3 or beyond
- Website: www.tombraider.com



Just like old times. Only, hopefully, better.

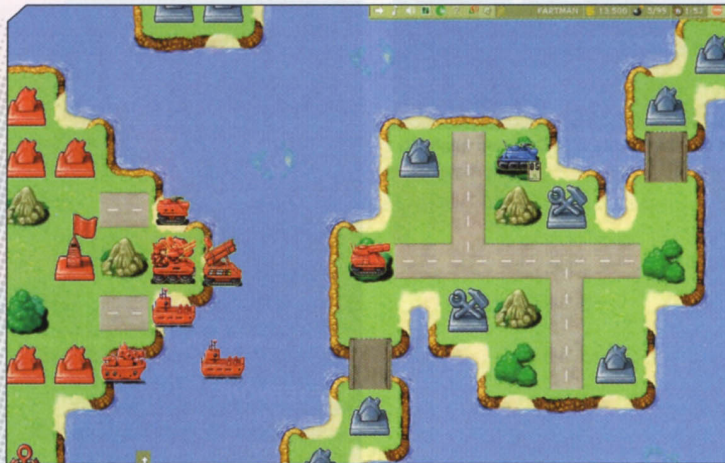
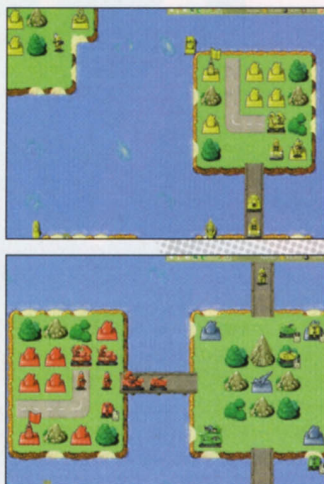


FREEWARE | HOME-BREWS | WEBGAMES | ABANDONWARE | EMULATION

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. Check out these bedroom-coded revamps of the GBA's *Advance Wars* and *Privateer* to see what we mean...



Nintendo won't mind – imitation is the sincerest form of flattery!

BATTALION: HEAD 2 HEAD

Developer: Urban Squall Website: urbansquall.com

When the Game Boy Advance came out a couple of years back, there was only one game worth knowing about – Nintendo's ace *Advance Wars*. In essence, it was a turn-based strategy game in the tradition of *Battle Isle*, but pocket-sized and cuter than a hatful of kittens. The console kids fell hopelessly in love with it, but we're sure that at the back of their minds they were secretly thinking one thing: if only it was on PC... And now it is (sort of).

Battalion is an unashamed clone of *Advance Wars* for PC. Or rather, it's a slightly

ashamed one, to the extent that the term '*Advance Wars*' is censored on the official forums and auto-replaced with the term 'that-GBA-game' (but we're sure that's just the lawyers speaking). In any case, *Battalion* reproduces AW with loving exactitude, with a near-identical array of units and strategic buildings, a similar mix of terrain types with various defensive bonuses, and the same cheery, super-deformed look. At a glance, they're the same game.

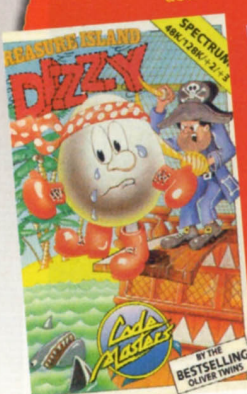
The difference, of course, is that *Battalion* is online, offering up head-to-head battles and larger, multiplayer skirmishes. As such, you get all the instant appeal of the original game, but deepened considerably by human cunning. There's also the incentive of a live leaderboard and the chance to join a squad (or guild), but this functionality is reserved for premium users who pay a fiver a month for the privilege.

Paying customers get other benefits too, such as extra maps and units to download, but there's still plenty on offer here for freeloaders. Get in now before Nintendo's lawyers pick up the scent.

**FREE
GAME OF
THE MONTH!**

GOLDEN OLDIE: TREASURE ISLAND DIZZY

Download from: www.codemasters.co.uk/downloads/?downloadid=17409



Back in 1987 the Oliver brothers created a platform sequel called *Treasure Island Dizzy*. Now, in the spirit of camaraderie and good nature to all, it's available for free download. True, you could get it from any emu site worth its salt, but here it's official. So you won't get the pirate police knocking your door down for the duplication of a hapless egg-man. Ah, them were the days...



Super fantasy piss-take ahoy.

ADVENTURE QUEST

Developer: Artix Entertainment
Website: www.battleon.com

After *X-Kings* had us in thrall last month, we had a look at some other browser-based fantasy games. One of the better ones is *Adventure Quest*, a light-hearted RPG set in a whimsical high-fantasy world.



Ikaruga, but with mad puzzles in.

DAN! DA! DAN!

Developer: Omega
Website: nagoya.cool.ne.jp/o_mega/product/ddd.html

We like to have at least one slice of Japanese weirdness in every issue of Freeplay, and this month it's the whacked-out *Dan! Da! Dan!* Half vertical shmup, half puzzler, it's a genuinely odd affair that somehow keeps you coming back for more, if only to work out what the hell is going on.

To get you started, the controls are Z to shoot and X to go into Hyper mode. Shooting the coloured blocks destroys all adjacent blocks of the same colour, as well as sometimes releasing a volley of bullets or a bonus item. You can fire a charged shot by holding the Z key down for a while before releasing it, which sends out a large red ring that slows down enemy shots and destroys otherwise inaccessible blocks. You're on a timer as well, so keep moving and remember to pick up the big grey discs to charge up the time (they're watch batteries, you see). Good luck.

The structure is simple, with turn-based combat and still-screen graphics, but it doesn't take itself all that seriously. Quests are frivolous, monsters deliberately ridiculous, and character classes largely self-parodies. The humour is fairly tame, but it certainly makes a change from the usual po-faced fantasy nonsense. Perfect for filling those ten-minute periods between tea breaks...

I OF THE ENEMY: RIL'CERAT

■ Developer: Enemy Technology
■ Website: www.enemytechnology.com

I Of The Enemy started life as a £10 shareware game we reviewed in Indie Zone a few issues back. Despite impressive production values for an indie, *IOTE* lacked the substance and sophistication to justify its price tag, and we

came down hard on it (issue 151, 53%). Now, however, Enemy Technology has heeded our words and released a free prequel version dubbed *Ril'Cerat*. The new game features a full episode from the sci-fi RTS, and while the gameplay is still a bit austere, it has the significant advantage of not costing any money.

Unfortunately, the online (perhaps the best feature of the main game) has been stripped out, making this a somewhat limited affair, but it's still worth a bash if you have unsatisfied yearnings for *StarCraft* and its ilk.



Hack, slash, hack, slash...



Bash, crunch, bash, crunch...



Bang, crash, bang, crash...

GATE 88

■ Developer: Queasy Games
■ Website: queasygames.com/gate88

You'd be hard-pressed to find two more different approaches to the low-budget RTS than this game and *I Of The Enemy*. Whereas *I Of The Enemy* strives desperately to ape commercial strategy games and pours all its efforts into presentation, *Gate 88* embraces the

virtues of simplicity and plays to its strengths. And while it might look like nonsense to the untrained eye, the results are very clever indeed.

Ignoring realism and other such distractions, *Gate 88* opts for a pure, iconic look and simple, fast-action gameplay. On the one hand it's a straightforward RTS, with base-building, research options and a command post to defend at all costs. At the same time however, it's a 2D shooter, putting you in control of a zippy command ship and reducing the complexity of fleet orders to a simple matter of designating targets.

The skew here is very much towards online multiplayer, where intricacies such as alliances and betrayals come into play, but the solo mode is addictive enough in its own right (indeed, it was a toss-up between this and *Battalion* for game of the month).

Much like *Doukutsu* last issue, this stylish, intelligent game leaves a lot of ten quid shareware in its dust, and definitely deserves a peek.



PRIVATEER REMAKE

■ Developer: Various (open source)
■ Website: priv.solsector.net

Space traders and interstellar rogues rejoice! After more than half a decade of work, the *Wing Commander Privateer Remake* project – an open-source community enterprise to remake the original *Privateer* for modern hardware – is finally complete. With the release of version 1.0, you can now enjoy one of the best space games ever for nowt, with fancy 3D graphics that would've been science-fiction back in '93.

Based on the open source space sim *Vega Strike*, *Privateer Remake* is one of the most ambitious fan remakes ever

TOP 5... BEST EVER REMAKES

1 MANIAC MANSION DELUXE

Get it from: lucasfangames.milten.lima-city.de/games_eng.htm

2 HEAD OVER HEELS

Get it from: retrospec.sgn.net/games/hoh

3 DRACULA'S SHADOW (AKA CASTLEVANIA 2)

Get it from: www.castlevania.nzone.it/download.html

4 MARIO FOREVER

Get it from: www.buzg.prv.pl

5 T4 FUNERAL (AKA TURRICAN)

Get it from: kickme.to/t4f



attempted. Every element of Origin's original freeform epic has been reproduced, from the opening splash screen to the dingiest bar at the Kilrathi frontier, and there are plans to expand the game to encompass the whole *Wing Commander* universe – over 500 star systems in total.

Considering the whole space genre has one foot in the grave and the other on a banana peel, this is something of a dream come true for space trekkers, and should keep the pulse ticking until *X3: Reunion*.

WEBGAME OF THE MONTH

STINKOMAN 20X6

■ Developer: HomestarRunner
■ Website: www.homestarrunner.com/stinkogame/stinkogame.html

A new game from HomestarRunner is always newsworthy in these parts – the folks that gave us *Peasant Quest* can usually be relied upon for a bit of well-targeted videogame humour. *Stinkoman 20X6* is a side-scrolling platformer in the vein of *Megaman*, based on the satirical character Stinkoman – previously featured in one of the site's trademark Strong Bad emails. Stinko is basically a piss-take of Japanese comic books, with blue hair, rocket boots and "a mouth that quickly goes from very small to very big". *Stinkoman 20X6* furthers the parody with bad English translations ("keep try!"), generic scenarios and ludicrous villains.

As you'd expect from the meticulous perfectionists at Homestar, it's also a



decent Flash game in its own right, with smooth animations and level layouts. The humour is often quite subtle (as when Stinko over-enthusiastically shouts "twenty-exty-six!" in the opening titles), and the game is almost too accurate to be just a parody, but it's extremely likeable nonetheless.

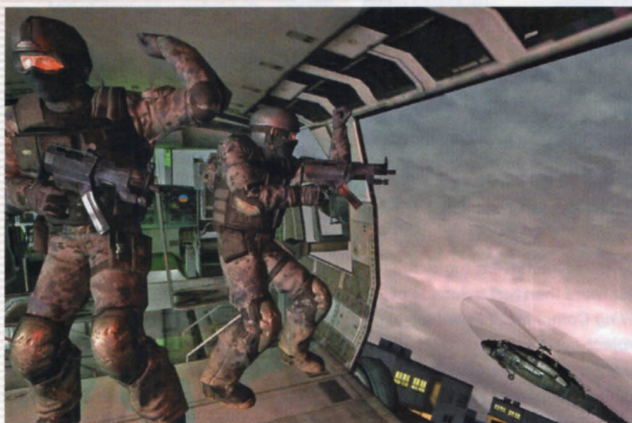


Like weirdcore Japanese *Megaman*-style platformers? You may find this amusing.



F.E.A.R. AND LOVE IN SAN FRANCISCO

ZONE PUTS A FLOWER IN ITS HAIR AND GETS A LITTLE MORE HANDS-ON TIME WITH MONOLITH'S BLOOD-CURDLING FPS



The warehouse level: required by law.



Yes, wear proper safety equipment.



For the love of God, stop the killing!

AT THIS YEAR'S Game Developers Conference in San Francisco, we managed to get another gander at the intro to Monolith's terrifying FPS *F.E.A.R.*, as well as some hands-on time with a previously unseen level called Docks.

Rather than focus on the hollow-eyed child made famous by previous demonstrations, this level was centred

on a sinister-looking man who we watched scythe his way through a squad of Special Forces soldiers during the intro, then feast on his victims' innards. A strange paranormal man surrounded by heavily armed evil soldiers? Clearly this was a job for the First Encounter Assault Recon team.

Playing through Docks proved every bit as unsettling. Unlike previous playtests

where the action was very much confined to claustrophobic confines, this level mixed things up with a collection of large open-air locations and small indoor areas.

We started off in a maze of dimly lit rooms. For a moment, the world slowed and something odd shambled towards us – but dissipated into a myriad of ash-like pieces before we could shoot. Things were getting a bit dicey.

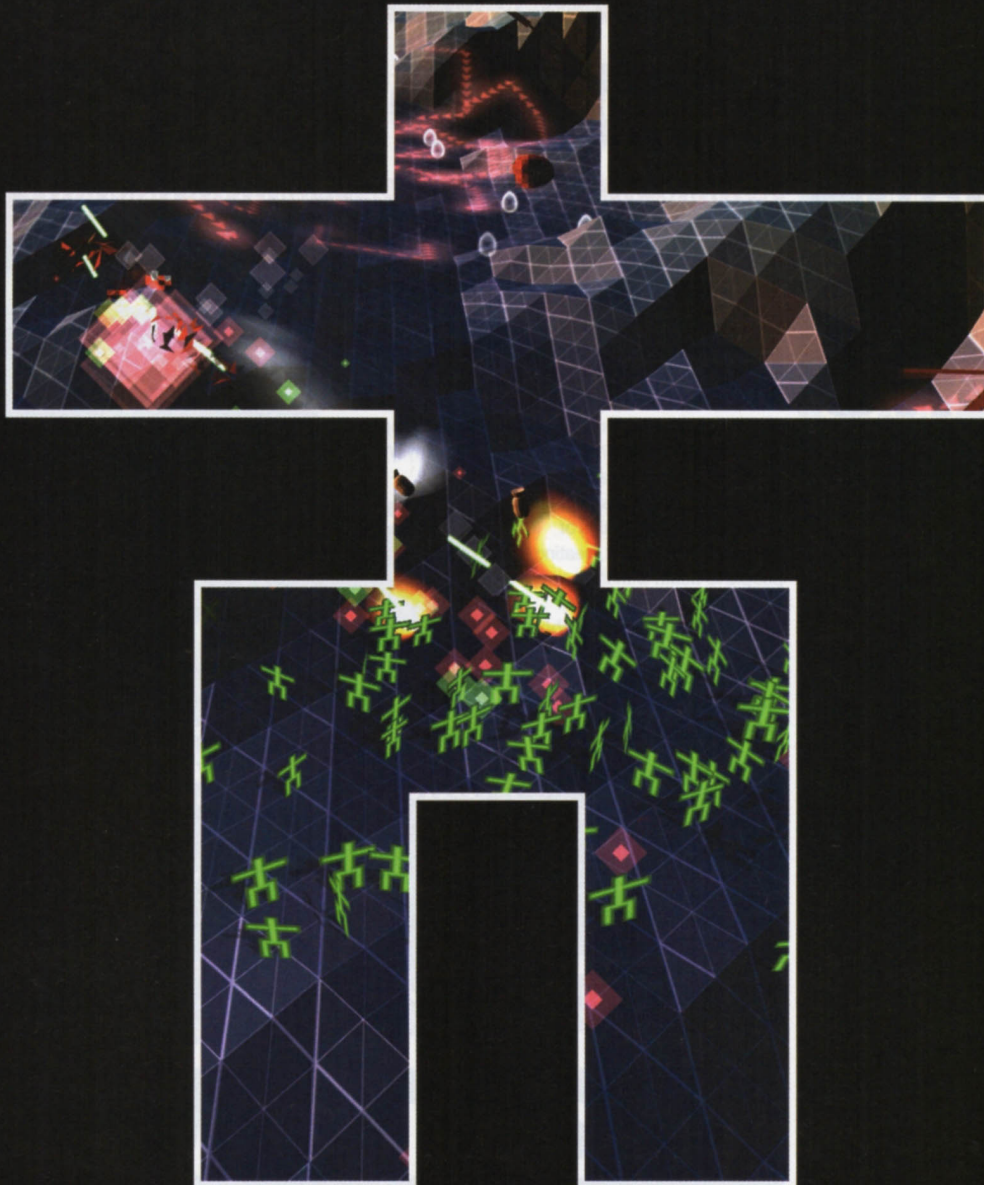
Being outdoors proved every bit as intimidating as being inside, its expansiveness and eerie understated lighting making us feel utterly exposed. Three white mask-wearing soldiers patrolled the area, unaware of our presence. After picking off one with a neat shot to the head and a bout of machine-gun strafing, sparks flying off armour, we left the grisly scene behind.

The mission was a brutal assault on the senses and the psyche, its slow/fast, claustrophobic/exposed pacing proving a real winner. Monolith reckons the game should be ready in August. After this experience, it could just feel like the longest wait of our lives.



Oh gawd! Not you again.

Publisher: VU Games
Developer: Monolith
ETA: August
Website: www.whatisfear.com



save us

The digital world of the Darwinians has evolved over thousands of generations under the benevolent eye of its creator, Dr Sepulveda. To his horror, a corruption in the Darwinian DNA has left Darwinia consumed by a highly infectious super-virus which mutates its peaceful inhabitants into killing machines.

Can you save Darwinia? Use gesture recognition to take control of Darwinia's death squads, rockets, grenades and airstrikes, in this year's most immersive and intense PC release.

90% PC GAMER "Darwinia will remind you why you love gaming so much."

90% PC FORMAT "This is a genuine classic - it will challenge every gaming instinct you have."

84% PC ZONE "The very best in indie development...someone please give these guys a lot of money."

Can't wait any longer?
Download the darwinia demo from
www.darwinia.co.uk




darwinia

THE MAN WHO KNOWS

FORMER FIRST lady Hillary Clinton has slammed *Grand Theft Auto* as a "major threat" to morality. The disturbingly attractive wife of the cigar-inserting former President has aligned herself with hardline right-wing Republican senators in order to pressure Congress into researching the impact of electronic media on children in what has been perceived as a thinly-veiled attempt to bolster her chances of achieving the Democratic presidential nomination for the 2008 election. Clinton crowed: "Children are playing a game that encourages them to have sex with prostitutes and then murder them. This is a silent epidemic of media desensitisation that teaches kids it's OK to diss people because they are a woman, they're a different colour or they're from a different place." Clinton wants a \$90 million investigation to be launched into the impact of games and other electronic media on the "cognitive, social, emotional and physical development" of children. She's joined on her crusade by Republican senator Rick Santorum, who's best known for his outspoken stance on homosexuality, which he has allegedly compared to bestiality. His surname is also being adopted by satirists as a word for the frothy mix of lubricant and other matter that's sometimes the by-product of man-love.

An American *Championship Manager* addict flew across the Atlantic Ocean in a doomed attempt to watch his adopted team. Chris Barrett, from North Carolina, has been following the fortunes of lowly Conference outfit Forest Green Rovers since 2000. A fan of English football from the age of 11, Barrett boomed: "Then this funny little computer game called *Championship Manager* got my attention. Most people like to play the big guns, but I wanted to play a smaller team and I picked Forest Green, partly because I've always been one for the underdogs, and partly because I used to have family in the Stroud area." Barrett planned his pilgrimage months ago to coincide with a home game, which was unfortunately called off as opponents Hereford United had an FA Trophy match. Barrett mused: "Just my luck, I suppose." He shouldn't worry, it's a shithole anyway.

"Children are playing a game that encourages them to have sex with prostitutes and then murder them"

VIDEO NASTY



STUBBS THE ZOMBIE DAZZLES WITH ITS UNSUBTLE TAKE ON VIOLENCE IN GAMES

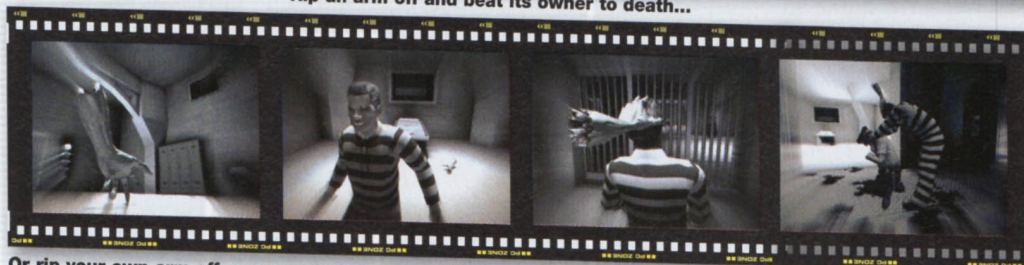
WE WEREN'T GOING to do anything on *Stubbs The Zombie* this issue, but then these screenshots were squeezed into our inbox, and we quickly changed our minds. And aren't they beauties? Developed by Wideload and fresh from the mind of Bungie founder Alex Seropian, *Stubbs The Zombie* is squaring up to be something fresh, original and drop-dead funny. With you controlling an itinerant zombie who spends his time shuffling around, eating the brains of unfortunate townsfolk, beating people to death with their own limbs and bending innocent bystanders to your will, *Stubbs* is the runaway leader in the endless shambling cavalcade of forthcoming zombie games. We'll have more next issue.



Steal a JCB and take it for a spin...



Rip an arm off and beat its owner to death...



Or rip your own arm off, possess an innocent and use him for your evil ends...

TOCA NOW EVEN MORE AMAZING!

MORE CARS AND EVEN MORE CAREER PROMISED IN TOCA RACE DRIVER

THERE WAS ONCE a time when you'd buy a racing game and it would only do what it said on the tin: Grand Prix, Rally, driving prehistoric cartoon characters through the legs of dinosaurs – that kind of thing. Now though, Codemasters' *TOCA* series has shown that one game can be the jack of all trades – although, thinking about it, it hasn't cracked the dinosaurs...

The third iteration is set to ramp up the physics and damage engine considerably (the first screenshots of which caused *ZONE*'s chief motoring correspondent to say 'fark' and 'woargh' on multiple occasions). Another major feature, meanwhile, is the development of the player's career as they work their way through their chosen disciplines – if you want to be the bestest Open Wheel driver in the

world (or, indeed, want to know what 'Open Wheel' means) then you'll have to start off in a Go-Kart before moving onto Formula 1000, Formula BMW, Formula 3 and even the Williams Formula 1 team. And if that sounds too much like hard work then you can just boot up a Monster Truck race and start making 'baroom' noises.

With the now traditional narrative structure still holding firm, Codemasters promises a *TOCA*



Remember: seat belts.



Mirror, signal, manoeuvre.

with *GTR* levels of perfection – engine temperatures, tyre wear, weight distribution – in 35 different motorsport disciplines. We're sending Suzy over next month to have a play and to fire baffling petrol-head questions about things called 'Torque Steer' and 'Real World Engine Inertia' at the developer. Even though for everyone else it might as well be in bloody Chinese...

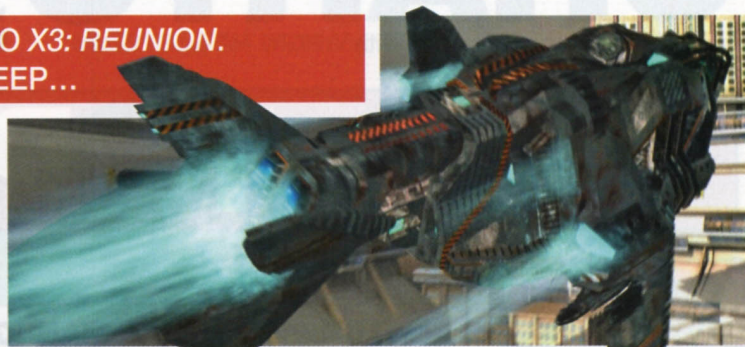
- Publisher: Codemasters
- Developer: Codemasters
- ETA: Q4
- Website: www.codemasters.com

The Next Generation

SAY GOODBYE TO X2: THE RETURN. SAY HELLO TO X3: REUNION. THEN SAY GOODBYE TO SOCIAL LIFE AND/OR SLEEP...



BT's new upper ionosphere call centre: employees now 74.2 per cent smilier!



WHILE ONE TEAM at Egosoft was beavering away at X2 expansion *The Return*, another hardy band of Germans were sitting next door tinkering with a singing, dancing engine for X3. Now when this second group turned up with the goods earlier this year, while the first group was still trying to crowbar all its ideas and fan demands into X2, a big decision had to be made.

"Ultimately, the new engine for X3 made the decision pretty easy," explains Greg Kingston from Egosoft. "It allows wholly new ship and cockpit models, together with huge improvements on the AI which would not have been feasible before, and that will evolve the player's experience far more than just an expansion based on existing technology. A small increase in development time will therefore

be able to deliver dramatic advances."

So what's on offer in X3? Well, clearly there are all the spangly Direct X9 ship models, cockpits and floating factories, but when we probed further Greg promised more. Another major consideration is the development of a sense of reality and consequence within the X universe, with NPCs trading and building factories realistically and independently of one another, while random events add a dash of the unexpected to the spin of the universe. The cut-scenes will probably be less crap too.

■ **Publisher:** Deep Silver
■ **Developer:** Egosoft
■ **ETA:** Q4
■ **Website:** www.egosoft.com

ROUND-UP

HERDING CURIOUS NUGGETS OF GAMING INFO INTO AN EASILY DIGESTIBLE PEN



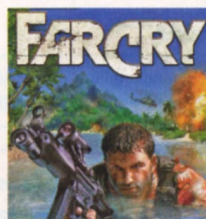
MMM... SAND WEDGE

While we usually wouldn't get 'wood' over a golf game, Fusion Software's *CustomPlay Golf* is offering something a bit different. While it lacks the big-name Tiger Woods licence, the game enables you to effortlessly create and customise your own golf courses, with huge support online and the ability to email a playable demo of any of your holes to a friend. Full review and exclusive ZONE-branded demo next issue.



JACK'S BACK

Zero details as yet, but Ubisoft has revealed that a *Far Cry* expansion pack is in the works. So it's all very exciting, but we're wondering whether or not Carver creators Crytek has had a hand in it or not. The developer's busily working on stuff with the bods at EA these days, so would it have been able to revisit the shores of Micronesia? We'll see...



I am your father



LIONHEAD ROARS

Peter Molyneux has been softly whispering details of his next game, the somewhat oddly named *Project Dimitri*. Nothing solid as of yet, apart from the words of the man himself in the presence of the pczone.co.uk boys. "It's a game about... You," intoned the first Earl Molyneux. "It allows anyone who plays the game to relive their life, their entire individual life. That's a pretty ambitious concept." You said it, Pete. Looking forward to it.



LET US PREY

It's been revealed that *Prey*, a one-time bedfellow of *Duke Nukem Forever* and a game long-thought of as being canned, remains in existence. The 3DRealms title that time forgot, *Prey* was last seen in 1997 when it dealt with a Native American battling evil alien forces. It's now thought to have been farmed out to another developer (perhaps *Rune* designer Human Head Studios), who's been using the *Doom 3* engine to bring it into the 21st century.



GOOD MOP BAD MOP

GOOD MOP

Having more amazing games in one issue than any other ZONE since records began. Although records only stretch back to last year.

Deputy art ed Jamie finally getting round to renouncing Satan.

The new *Doctor Who* being really, really rather good. Fingers crossed for *The Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy* movie.

BAD MOP

Will's ongoing accidental brushes with the vice trade involving him sitting next to two ladies of doubtful reputation on the Tube. They demand money from him for 'looking at my tits' when, in fact, he had done nothing of the sort.

A plucky forumite spotting Woods downing pink drinks in a disreputable way. We're glad we're shot of him, to be honest.

Accidentally making it look like Steve Hill was holding a male member in last month's *NeverQuest*.

Good Mop: **The Vileda Rapid Attractive**, probably the best mop we've ever had the pleasure of using. Bad Mop: **Vileda Super Mop**, a hideously overrated mop, despite its pleasingly old-school stylings.



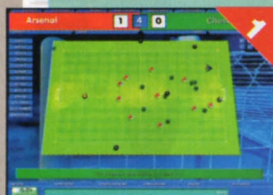
CHARTS

In association with **VIRGIN MEGASTORES**

Here we come, walking down the street. We get the funniest looks from everyone we meet. Hey, hey we're the charts! And people say we chart around! But we're too busy charting, to put anybody down...



TOP 10

You can't say we didn't warn you. If you want a decent footy spreadsheet, get *Football Manager*. We're considering handing out leaflets and singing songs of praise in regional shopping centres until the general populace has been converted to the cause.



All that alpha-kappa-zappa American university stuff has paid off and given EA another successful *Sims* pack – although we don't hate *The Sims 2* quite as much as we did *The Sims 1*, which still confuses us. Next year we may have changed our minds.

	TITLE	PUBLISHER	SCORE
1 NEW	CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 5	EIDOS	50%
2 NEW	THE SIMS 2: UNIVERSITY	EA	57%
3 NEW	BROTHERS IN ARMS: ROAD TO HILL 30	UBISOFT	87%
4 ▼	FOOTBALL MANAGER 2005	SEGA	90%
5 ▼	THE SIMS 2	EA	82%
6 NEW	ACT OF WAR: DIRECT ACTION	ATARI	84%
7 NEW	SILENT HUNTER III	UBISOFT	83%
8 ▼	ROME: TOTAL WAR	ACTIVISION	93%
9 ▼	HALF-LIFE 2	VU GAMES	97%
10 ▼	LOTR: THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH	EA	91%



It's selling well, but we're surprised at the extent to which *Brothers In Arms* has divided opinion. Perhaps an acquired taste, but definitely a game that those who want a bit of thinking to go with their Nazi-bashing adventures should at least try.



Silent Hunter III is direct proof that niche games can be money-spinners. It's like the ghost of PC gaming past come back to haunt the shelves of High Street retailers up and down the land. We adore it – more seemingly nerdy things that are actually great, please!

YOUR SHOUT

Have your say at www.pczone.co.uk

Six games that require you to kill things and four that make you want to... Somewhere, somewhere, has a plan.
PlumpOrgan

I'm just here to get put in the magazine.
Gangster15

An anagram of the no.1 is A CAMPAIGN HEMP RHINOS. Sums it up, really.
Darrenmdr



TOP 10

1.	SPLINTER CELL: CHAOS THEORY	UBISOFT
2.	CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 5	EIDOS
3.	ACT OF WAR: DIRECT ACTION	ATARI
4.	THE SIMS 2: UNIVERSITY	EA
5.	BROTHERS IN ARMS: ROAD TO HILL 30	UBISOFT
6.	STAR WARS: REPUBLIC COMMANDO	ACTIVISION
7.	KOTOR II: THE SITH LORDS	ACTIVISION
8.	GTR	ATARI
9.	FOOTBALL MANAGER 2005	SEGA
10.	MEDAL OF HONOR: PACIFIC ASSAULT	EA

COMPETITION



Win £100 of Virgin vouchers!

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

QUESTION: In honour of *The Sims 2: University*, which American university shares a name with a famous make of lock?

- A Harvard
- B Yale
- C Missouri Polytechnic

Send your answers on a postcard to: PC ZONE Chart Compo Issue 155, Future Publishing, 99 Baker Street, London, W1U 6FP. Closing date: May 25, 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

MAY

AREA 51	MIDWAY
BLOODRAYNE 2	VU GAMES
BOILING POINT	ATARI
CLOSE COMBAT: FIRST TO FIGHT	GLOBAL STAR
PARIAH	HIP INTERACTIVE
SINGLES 2: TRIPLE TROUBLE	DEEP SILVER
TOTAL OVERDOSE	SCI
WORMS 4: MAYHEM	SEGA

JUNE

BATTLEFIELD 2	EA
BET ON SOLDIER	DIGITAL JESTERS
CALL OF CTHULHU: DARK CORNERS OF THE EARTH	TAKE 2
DUNGEON SIEGE II	MICROSOFT
EARTH 2160	DEEP SILVER
F.E.A.R.	VU GAMES
GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS	ROCKSTAR
MOTOGP: ULTIMATE RACING TECHNOLOGY 3	THQ
ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON 3: SOAKED!	ATARI

JULY

HEART OF EMPIRE	DEEP SILVER
TOM CLANCY'S RAINBOW SIX: LOCKDOWN	UBISOFT

Q3 2005

BATTLESTATIONS: MIDWAY	SCI
CONFLICT: GLOBAL TERROR	SCI
DREAMFALL: THE LONGEST JOURNEY	FUNCOM
FABLE: THE LOST CHAPTERS	MICROSOFT
FAHRENHEIT	ATARI
STARGATE: SG1 - THE ALLIANCE	JOWOOD
STARSHIP TROOPERS	EMPIRE
STAR WARS: BATTLEFRONT 2	ACTIVISION
STAR WARS: EMPIRE AT WAR	ACTIVISION
TIMESHIFT	ATARI
THE SUFFERING: TIES THAT BIND	MIDWAY
X3: REUNION	DEEP SILVER

Q4 2005

AGE OF EMPIRES III	MICROSOFT
CALL OF DUTY 2	ACTIVISION
CIVILIZATION IV	TAKE 2
CONDEMNED	SEGA
HITMAN: BLOOD MONEY	EIDOS
RISE & FALL: CIVILIZATIONS AT WAR	MIDWAY
SPELLFORCE II: BLEND OF PERFECTION	JOWOOD
THE GODFATHER	EA
THE MATRIX: PATH OF NEO	ATARI

2005

ADVENT RISING	TBA
BIOSHOCK	TBA
BLACK & WHITE 2	EA
ENEMY IN SIGHT	ATARI
KING KONG	UBISOFT
PSYCHONAUTS	TBA
QUAKE IV	ACTIVISION
STALKER: SHADOW OF CHERNOBYL	THQ
STUBBS THE ZOMBIE	ASPYR
THE MOVIES	ACTIVISION

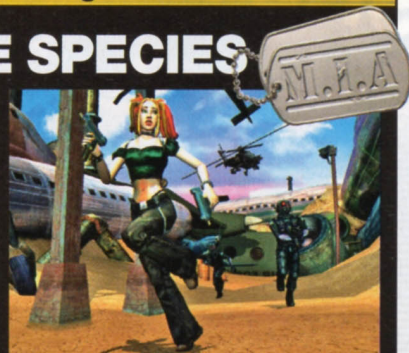
MISSING IN ACTION

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

ORIGIN OF THE SPECIES

She's called Dirt, her knickers are showing and she has a sentient-bear backpack called Mr Boo. Rumours suggest it's been picked up by Deep Silver, the name's been changed to *Dirt* and could be changing again. Never mind, we like rock chicks.

- Publisher: TBA
- Developer: Nu Generation Games
- ETA: Q3
- Website: www.nugenerationgames.com



HITMAN: BLOOD MONEY



With talks of a takeover at Eidos, release dates for all the company's games are liable for extreme change – but at the last count old bald-head (along with Ms Croft) can only be locked down to the 2006 fiscal year – that starts in July. Beyond that, who knows?

- Publisher: Eidos
- Developer: Io Interactive
- ETA: July onwards
- Website: www.hitmanbloodmoney.com

ADVENT RISING

For the first time in a while there have been distant rumblings on third-person sci-fi actioner *Advent Rising*. The nearest we have to a release date is a Q3 target hidden in yet another boring financial report – but something is stirring. More as it happens.

- Publisher: VU Games
- Developer: GlyphX
- ETA: Q3
- Website: www.adventtrilogy.com



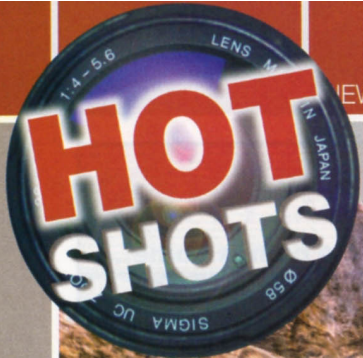
TOP 10 Game levels that feature trains

1. **BLOOD** (The best example you'll find. Get off my train!)
2. **HALF-LIFE** (The best monorail outside of Disney World)
3. **SOLDIER OF FORTUNE 1 & 2** (That Mullins sure likes his trains)
4. **UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2003** (A train with no particular purpose. Nothing obvious anyway)
5. **PROJECT IGI** (It didn't go anywhere, but it was a great level)
6. **PARIAH** (Topical, and one of the game's best levels)
7. **HARRY POTTER AND THE PRISONER OF AZKABAN** (Look out for the Dementors)
8. **WOLFENSTEIN: ENEMY TERRITORY** (Back and forth, back and forth. Bloody Nazis)
9. **GOLDENEYE** (Not on PC. But a cornerstone of virtual train history)
10. **WEST SOMERSET RAILWAY PACK** (Goes all the way from Minehead to Bishops Lydeard)



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

SOURCE: National Rail Enquiries



BATTLEFIELD 2

EA's definitive multiplayer shooter is more than just a storm in a desert

THE FEW extra months that developer DICE has spent tinkering under the bonnet of *Battlefield 2* looks to have paid off – as you can see from these scorching screenshots. “The key thing we’ve invested our time in is teamwork, and with that comes our hierarchy with squads and the commander,” says lead designer Lars Gustavsson. “In addition to that, we’ve also included a new quick command system, improved information spreading via the mini-map, plus better graphics, effects, sound and a new animation system.”

Gustavsson went on to describe how excited he was about a recent playtest, where as squad leader, he was involved in a full-scale counter-assault against Middle East coalition forces in the Persian Gulf. “I requested an artillery strike and afterwards a friendly Attack helicopter helped us take out a T-90 tank that had survived the barrage. However, a MIG-29 suddenly swooped down, blasting heat-seeking missiles into the helicopter, before applying its afterburner and flying off. To be in the middle of this chaos and feel your adrenaline pumping, it just plays like an all-out war.” Don’t miss our exclusive review and playable demo of *Battlefield 2* in a few issues time.

- Publisher: EA
- Developer: DICE
- ETA: Summer
- Website: global.dice.se





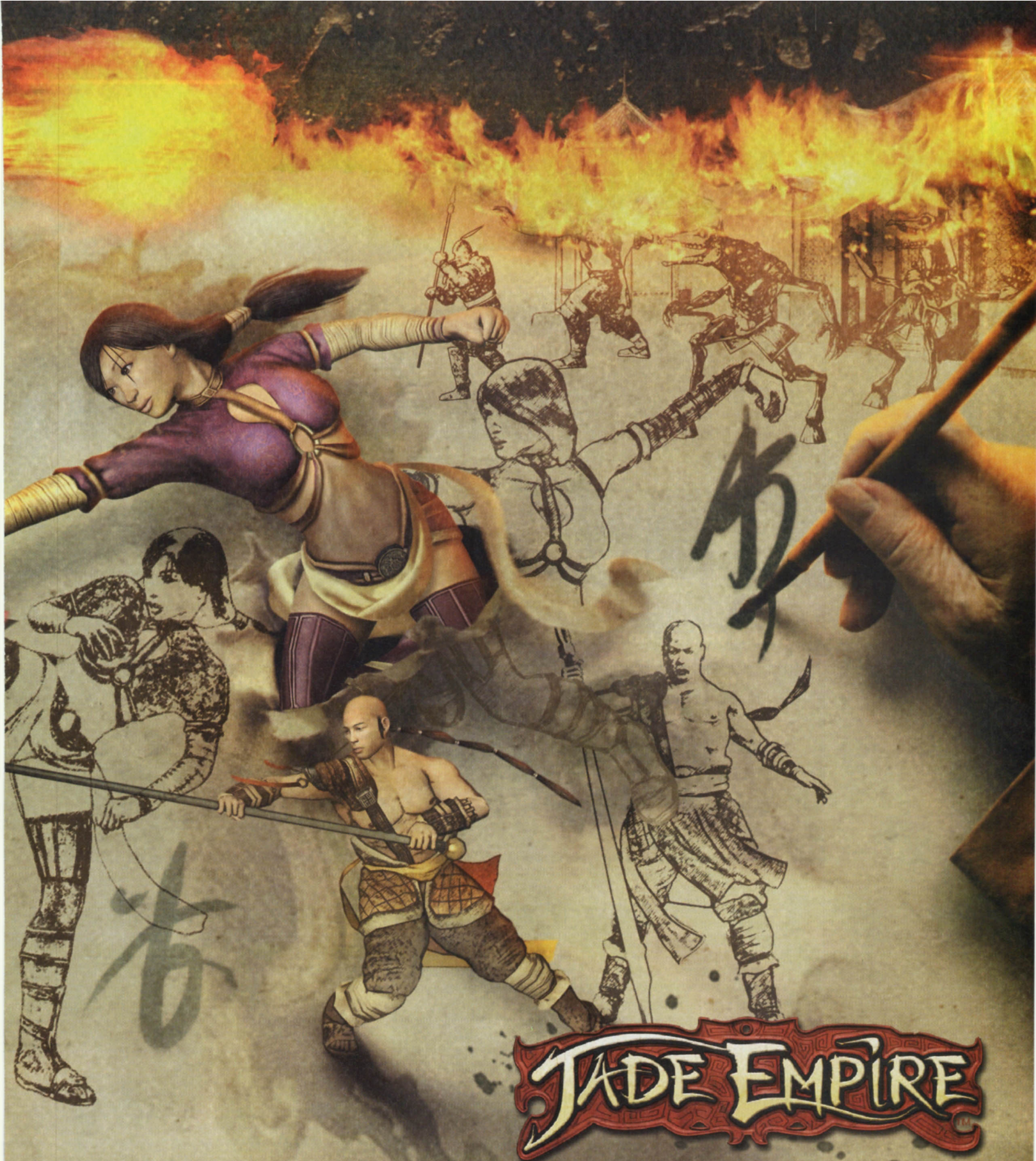
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16+

He who proves h
prov

Only the hands of a true master hold the fate
styles. Battle your way through a mystical wo
are broken. The final test of your skill is pas



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Will to be masterful,
himself to be immortal.

Jade Empire. Perfect your skills with over 20 fighting
where the boundaries between natural and supernatural
on your journey becomes legend.

jadeempire.xbox.com

Microsoft
game studios

BIOWARE™



it's good to play together



AFTER THE STORM

Penthouse offices, monster debts, vicious in-fighting. Oh, and some cracking games. In a *PC ZONE* exclusive, *Pavel Barter* interviews Romero, Spector and all the main players as we chart the rise and fall of Ion Storm...

FEBRUARY 10, 2005. An Eidos press release lands on *ZONE*'s desk. In between the usual industry waffle about "consolidation" and "competitive challenges", some gloomy news emerges. Legendary developer Ion Storm has kicked the bucket, shuffled off its mortal coil and joined the choir invisible. The studio that brought us arguably the greatest (*Deus Ex*) and certainly the most tortured (*Daikatana*) games of all time has become an ex-developer.

Ion Storm's closure was the final wrecking ball for the house that John Romero built, an end to the dream that began almost a decade ago. "My vision was of a game development company with enough people to create three titles at once and have a real nice space to do it in," Romero says. "We had plenty of people, we worked on multiple titles at once and had an incredible

office. So it looked great from the outside. Internally though, there were big problems. That wasn't part of the original plan."

TOWER OF BABEL

This real-life soap opera began, fittingly, in Dallas. In late 1996, John Romero stepped into the 55th floor of the Texas Commerce building, a downtown skyscraper stuffed with JR Ewing types, and drew his breath. This would be command control for his new kingdom. Sure, the two-storey 22,500 sq ft penthouse complete with a 360-degree view of the city and a 60ft arched glass ceiling might have seemed a little excessive, but for Romero, it was perfect. Even at a monthly price tag of \$350,000.

Romero was the daddy of the FPS genre – the co-creator of *Wolfenstein*, *Doom* and *Quake* – and a 29-year-old who looked more Metallica than game designer with

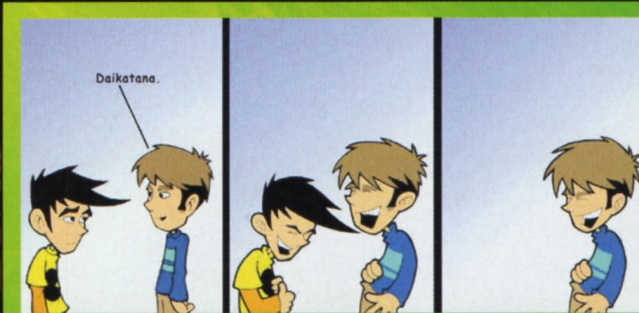
his mane of black hair, designer shirts and purring Ferrari. "My fondest memory of Ion? Moving into the office and starting development in this great space we had. The other tenants endured us. The security guards were the coolest, though," he grins.

By Romero's side were fellow id veterans Tom Hall (game designer), Mike Wilson (marketing guru), and CEO Todd Porter. This would be more than just a game company, Romero told them, it would be an entertainment empire. The world better prepare itself. "I travelled around talking to publishers, trying to find one that would be able to fund this huge studio. I eventually decided that Eidos was the player with the resources. The company was on an upward trend and doing really well with *Tomb Raider*."

Eidos agreed to almost all of Romero's terms: \$3m for three games and another \$4m for console







GABE AND TYCHO TAKE ON ION STORM

The guys at Penny-Arcade.com have in recent years become some of the biggest movers and shakers in the biz, and even back in the day of *Daikatana* they summed up the whole situation pretty much perfectly, as this cartoon shows.



Daikatana: a ZONE cover game.



Ion Storm "does an Elvis".



Gamers looking distinctly underwhelmed at Daikatana's E3 showing.

rights. The first titles would be Tom Hall's *Anachronox*, Todd Porter's *Dominion* and Romero's *Daikatana*. Next stop: hire the teams. Romero began recruiting rabid *Doom* and *Quake* fans via the Internet. Mike Wilson told Gamespot.com in 2000: "We didn't hire industry people and ended up with a lot of folks who didn't understand game development. I remember John telling them, 'Go play *Diablo*. Learn games'."

DOOM-ED

Ion's flagship title, *Daikatana*, was planned for a Christmas 1997 release – but at E3 that year, the demo was a shit sandwich compared to *Quake II*'s

nouvelle cuisine. Romero decided to switch from the Quake engine to its next-gen sequel, but the team couldn't get their hands on id's technology until the following year. Eidos was fuming.

In May 1998, the second deadline for *Daikatana* long passed, RTS *Dominion: Storm Over Gift 3* was released to a critical and commercial mauling. The *Daikatana* team were working long hours and morale was low. "One employee was found alone at his desk, screaming. Romero fired him," writes David Kushner in his novel, *Masters Of Doom*. The original \$13m from Eidos had evaporated and Ion Storm was relying

on regular hand-outs from Eidos to cover its \$1.2m monthly costs. Then *Daikatana*'s core team, nicknamed the 'Ion Eight' decided to quit. This was the lowest point yet for Romero.

Kicking a dog while he's down, the *Dallas Observer* printed an article in

early 1999 which featured Ion Storm's internal emails, including nuggets like: 'You better be f***ing glad we wrote off your car and house, you rat-faced bitch'." According to Romero, it was an "extreme morale hit. It wouldn't have happened if our employees hadn't leaked Todd's email file to the paper. Just sickening". Ion Storm's Warren Spector agrees: "The feeling of having been violated was pretty awful."

Another Christmas deadline came and went. The team was in permanent

"We ended up with people who didn't understand game development. John told them, 'go play *Diablo*, learn games'"

MIKE WILSON MARKETING GURU, ION STORM

UNDER THE WEATHER

LOOKING BACK ON THE HOUSE OF CARDS THAT WAS ION STORM

WARREN SPECTOR – MR *DEUS EX*

"Don't ever, ever, ever believe your own hype. Or, at least, if you believe the good stuff people say about you, you better be prepared to believe the bad stuff too."

DAVID KUSHNER – MASTER OF DOOM

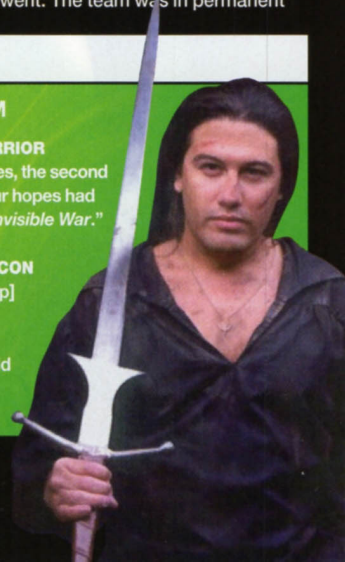
"A lot of people dissed *Daikatana* when it came out, but in hindsight it got something of a raw deal. The delays/expectations/hype simply proved insurmountable."

BILL MONEY – INVISIBLE WARRIOR

"The first year we had high hopes, the second we still believed, by the third our hopes had faded. I'm disappointed with *Invisible War*."

JOHN ROMERO – INDUSTRY ICON

"[If Ion Storm was a rock group] it would have been Accept. *Anachronox* would have been Metal Heart and *Deus Ex* would have been Balls To The Wall. Heavy metal rules!"





Deus Ex – a nanotechnological triumph.



Anachronox was well received by critics and still has a hardcore fanbase.

crunch mode and Romero's fanclub had wholeheartedly turned against him, especially after experiencing a bug-ridden *Daikatana* demo at E3 earlier that year. Even a positive response to Hall's *Anachronox* wasn't enough to abate the fanboy venom. "Your days as a game developer are absolutely over," read one email in Romero's inbox.

END OF THE LINE?

Three years, 60 employees and millions of dollars later, and after the firing of co-founder Todd Porter, *Daikatana* was finally released in April 2000. It bombed. The game simply couldn't match the new breed of first-person shooters like *Half-Life*. "The design was ambitious and I should have hired differently from day one," Romero contends. "I needed to have very experienced people on the team instead of giving hundreds of people their break."

Early the following year, the inevitable happened. Eidos, who had bought Ion Storm to cover its humungous debts, fired everyone in the Dallas office, Romero included. But, as Yoda once told Luke Skywalker, there was another hope. In 1997, Warren Spector had been signed to head his own Ion Storm team in Austin.

When we approached Spector at the recent Games Developer Conference 2005 about an interview concerning Ion Storm, he laughed and quipped: "Oh, not that f**king place!" Reared on more slow-burning wonders like *Thief* and *System Shock*, Spector was keen to distance himself from the deathmatch excess of Dallas. Even his Austin offices were "a lot less posh".

LIVING THE HIGH LIFE

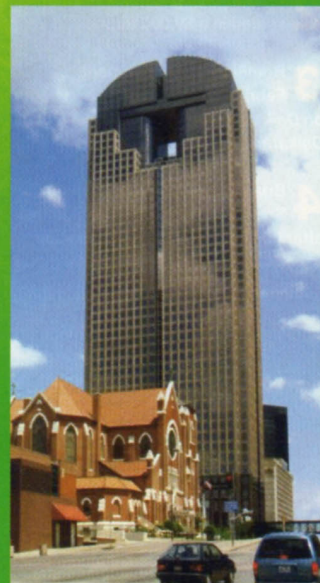


"I'm the king of the world!"

HAVE MONEY, WILL SPEND IT...

When the \$2.5m renovations were completed on Ion Storm's penthouse offices in Feb '98, the result was of Willy Wonka proportions. There was a games room with vintage arcade machines, football and pool tables, a cinema and a deathmatch area with 21-inch monitors.

In the conference room, Romero installed bullet-proof glass and steel window panels that lowered from the ceiling. Why? Because he could. Bothered by the sunlight spilling through the penthouse's glass dome, Ion Stormers spent thousands more dollars transforming their workstations into roofed caves – an endless source of amusement in the games industry to this day.



Ion Storm's impressive penthouse offices in Dallas.



TEXAN GOLD

ION DALLAS'S TOP TEN ROCK'N'ROLL MOMENTS

- 1** "John Romero's About to Make You His Bitch!" said early press ads for *Daikatana*. "Mike [Wilson] brought me that bitch ad and I thought it was funny," Romero told Gamespot.com. "I told him people might take it the wrong way, but he just said, 'Don't be a pussy'."
- 2** Promotional photos of Romero seated in a \$9,000 throne.
- 3** Romero's announcement, February '98, that work had begun on *Daikatana II*... Two years before *Daikatana I* would be released.
- 4** Brian Eiserloh, also known as Squirrel. Ion Storm hired Squirrel after he sent Romero an application essay written in the form of a medieval short story.
- 5** Squirrel setting the office record for sleeping
- under his desk and not going home for 85 out of 90 days.
- 6** Ion's on-site THX movie theatre.
- 7** Mike Wilson's trip to England to present Eidos with an outline of Ion Storm's next three games before the first three had been completed. Eidos politely told him to f**k off.
- 8** Romero's romance with *Daikatana* level designer Stevie 'Killkreek' Case. Case was also a silicon-enhanced *Playboy* model.
- 9** "id is a technology-orientated company, whereas our main focus is to indulge our artistic sensibilities," Mike Wilson, *Daily Telegraph*, April 1997.
- 10** Plans to start an Ion Storm comic book division and the hiring of artists from Marvel.

"John Romero offered me a much larger budget than I was going to get on my own," he says. "Impressive marketing guarantees and the chance to make 'the game of my dreams'."

That game was *Deus Ex*. The bearded guru had envisaged *Deus Ex* at his old haunt, Looking Glass Studios in Austin. "It just seemed natural to take a pinch of end-of-millennium conspiracy theories, some horror-of-biogenetic-engineering and some nanotechnology and stir it all up together."

The result, released in 2000, was Ion Storm's pièce de résistance. But had Dallas cursed Ion Austin's future success? Spector reckons not: "We got art and sound support from the Dallas guys and having all that biz and IT stuff handled was great." David J Reese, an engineer on the *Deus Ex* sequel *Invisible War* isn't so sure. "At first I believed that Dallas and Austin were considered different studios by Eidos. I found out later this wasn't the case and many of the financial burdens of the Dallas office were heaped on the Austin studio."

MO' MONEY

In a strange flashback to *Daikatana*, after a year's work on *Deus Ex: Invisible War*, the team decided to abandon the Unreal engine. "Instead of building the game upon technology", the team was now "building technology to make the game", according to producer Bill Money. Reese continues: "This single decision led to a domino effect of problems. We basically had to start *Invisible War* over, which meant another two years of development. Unfortunately, Eidos wasn't willing or able to let us proceed with a schedule reset. Combine

that with the fact that the new technology forced the designers to limit level size and the number of objects and NPCs."

"Up until the last month of the project we didn't know what the technology could do," says Money. "That's why you see some schizophrenic level design where some levels are big, others are small... When we were developing for the Xbox, the PC version was put on the backburner and the end result definitely shows. *Invisible War* on PC isn't as good a product."

Spector wishes the team had more time to develop the "freeform city sections" in *Invisible War*, but bears no grudge. *Deus Ex 2* underachieved and Ion Storm went into freefall, despite the success of the *Thief* sequel *Deadly Shadows*. Bill Money departed on the day *Invisible War* shipped on Xbox. Project director Harvey Smith left in February 2004, followed later that year by Spector. The death knell was sounding for Ion Storm.

THAT WAS THEN...

Today, Warren Spector is developing a game at his new studio, Junction Point; Bill Money is working on an *Ashen Empires* expansion pack. Former Dallas employees are scattered across the games industry and some are probably busy asking "would you like fries with that?" The Ion Eight went on to develop *Kiss: Psycho Circus* for Ion's former marketing chap Mike Wilson at Gathering of Developers. As for Romero, he's now creative director at Midway San Diego, while Tom Hall recently left the company to pursue other games projects.

Is there a lesson to be learned from Ion Storm's story? "Don't start a company unless you know your partners extremely well over a period of years," says John Romero. "Hire the right people and create a proper support structure to get the game done on a schedule." Romero doesn't mention it, but in all likelihood renting a penthouse studio is also crossed off his 'to do' list. After all, what goes up must always come down. [E]



Deus Ex: Invisible War. Disappointing.



Thief: Deadly Shadows. A corker.

TIMELINE

AUG 1996 John Romero leaves id Software	DEC 1996 Romero signs publishing deal with Eidos	APR 1997 Games mags publish Romero's infamous 'bitch' ad	SEPT 1997 Todd Porter's <i>Dominion</i> acquired from 7th Level	FEB 1998 <i>Quake II</i> code arrives	JUNE 1998 <i>Dominion</i> released	FEB 1999 'Stormy Weather' article published by <i>Dallas Observer</i>
NOV 1996 Ion Storm starts up	MAR 1997 Production begins on <i>Daikatana</i>	SEPT 1997 Warren Spector hired. Ion Storm Austin begins	OCT 1997 Marketing whiz Mike Wilson fired	MAY 1998 Bob Wright, COO, fired	NOV 1998 The Ion Eight walk out	

DAIKATANA PALAVA

Steve Hill recalls the glory days of Ion Storm...

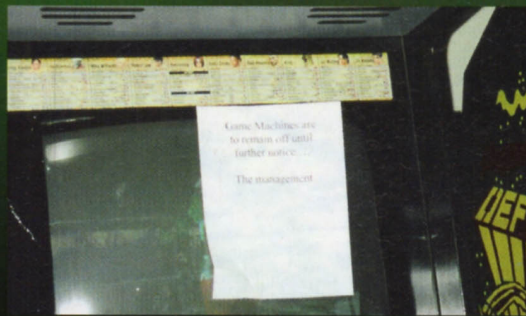
It was 1999, a press trip to Ion Storm Dallas, ostensibly to see John Romero's much-hyped *Daikatana*. Ion Storm was fairly high profile at the time, partly through Romero's wilful self-publicity, but also because it had recently shed eight core members of the team.

With the usual suspects on board, including a nervy Eidos PR man on his first press trip, we pitched up in the morning at the company's impressive HQ, effectively a skyscraper with a vertical hole in the middle. Ion Storm occupied the penthouse suite, offering vertigo-inducing views of the urban sprawl of Dallas and beyond. It was a view we had plenty of time to admire, as the company seemed wholly unprepared for our visit, shunting us into the recreation room for numerous games of table tennis interspersed with arcade classic *Scramble*. Eventually, someone appeared to tell us that *Daikatana* wasn't ready and we all duly scurried back to the hotel/steak place/strip club (delete as appropriate).

Hoping for better the next day, we endured an unremarkable multiplayer session of *Daikatana* with Romero and co, a quick look at RPG *Anachronox*, and a surprise unveiling of *Deus Ex* by Warren Spector. Shit, average and great, respectively.



Steve Hill 'working' at Ion Storm's Dallas HQ.



"Now finish bloody *Daikatana*!"

ION STORM

SUITE A210

VISITOR DELIVERIES

Please Use Phone To Your Left



- NO SOLICITING

- DO NOT TAP ON GLASS

- DO NOT FEED THE ANIMALS

OCT 1999

Eidos purchase
51% of Ion Storm

SEPT 2000

Deus Ex released

JUNE 2001

Anachronox released

NOV 2001

Work to date
on *Invisible War*
is scrapped

APR 2004

DX: IW project
lead Harvey Smith
leaves Ion Storm

OCT 2004

Bill Money leaves
Ion Storm

FEB 2005

Eidos announces
closure of Ion
Storm Austin

APR 1999

Columbine High School
massacre. Romero's
Doom blamed

APR 2000

John Romero's
Daikatana released

MAY 2000

Romero begins
prototype for a
new sci-fi RPG

JUNE 2001

Ion Storm
Dallas is closed

DEC 2003

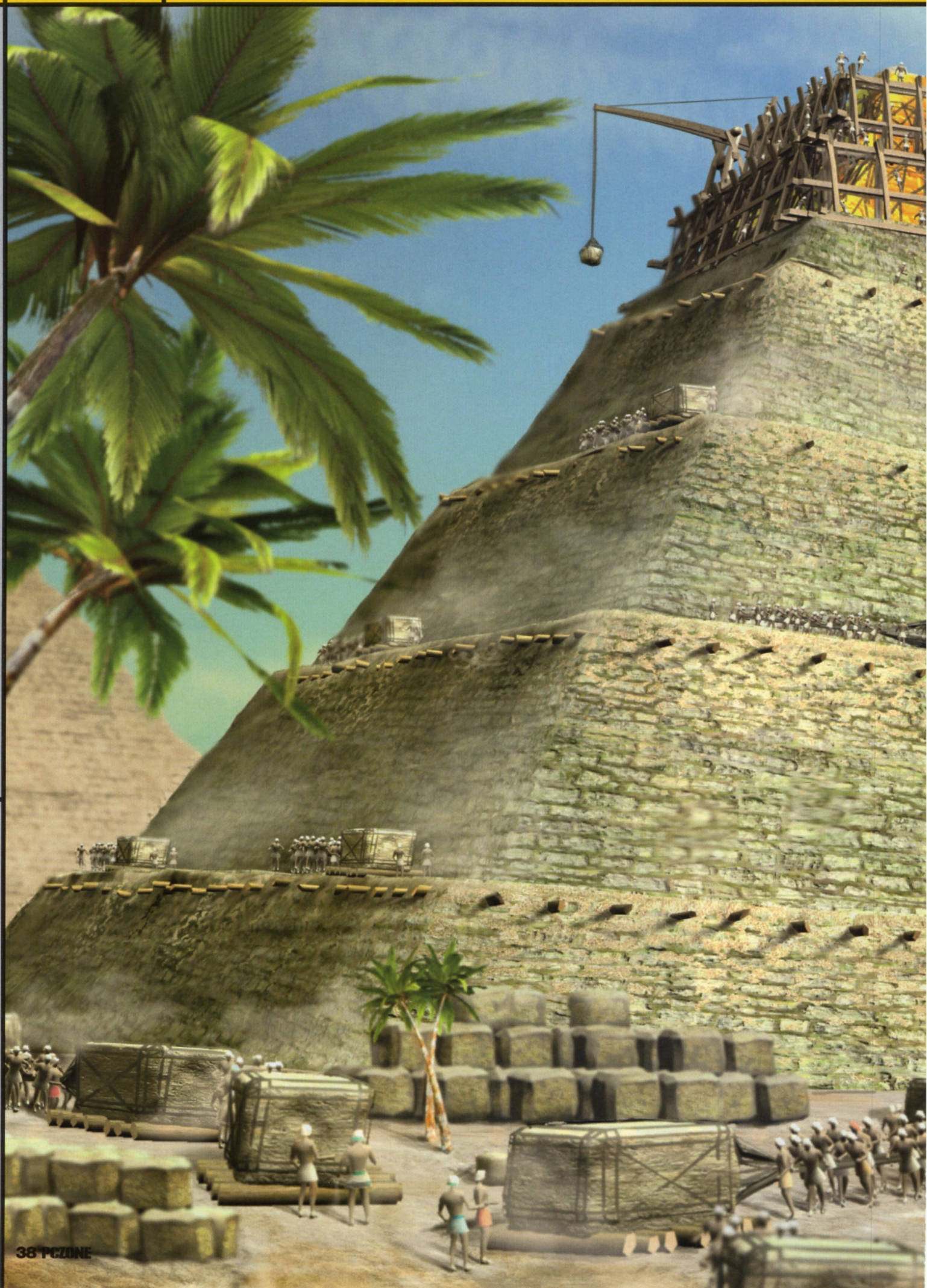
*Deus Ex: Invisible
War* ships

MAY 04

*Thief: Deadly
Shadows*
released

NOV 2004

Warren Spector
leaves



Hello Baltimore...

SID MEIER'S CIVILIZATION IV

Steve Hill presents The History Of The World, Part Four, in 3D...

"ONE THIRD proven, one third improved, one third new." That's the mantra coming out of the Firaxis office, half an hour's drive from the empty fish restaurants and seedy strip clubs of downtown Baltimore (or an hour if the cabbie is a moron). Situated on an anonymous commercial estate, it's a typical American development studio, with natural light at a premium and salty snacks in ready supply. Not the most glamorous location

for the worldwide unveiling of *Sid Meier's Civilization IV*, but the veteran developer has never really been about show business. In fact, he's not even present at the presentation, preferring to remain out of sight, pulling the strings like the man behind the curtain at the end of *The Wizard Of Oz*. We do eventually catch up with him, but in the meantime it's down to cold, hard facts.

A four-strong team has gathered for our interrogation, comprising a producer, a designer, a software engineer and a man whose business card lists him as a polygon wrangler (oh dear). They've got their patter worked out, though, hence the opening mission statement. The 'proven' is a given, as with over six million units sold since the original 1991 game, and a wealth of critical acclaim, *Civilization* is recognized as one of the enduring PC game franchises. You are the King, and you must please the people – or not, as the case may be. Take over the world by fair means or foul, with a

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Firaxis Games

PUBLISHER Take 2

WEBSITE www.firaxis.com

ETA End of 2005

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- 3D graphics
- Multiplayer modes
- Advanced mod support
- New civilisations and technologies

rough time span stretching from 4000BC to 2000AD. Again.

Clearly, Firaxis isn't going to tamper with *Civ* by turning it into a platform game starring a squirrel, and fans will be pleased to learn that the core values will remain in place. Turn-based strategy is what the baying hordes want and turn-based strategy is what they're going to get. Firaxis has resisted the temptation to follow the likes of *Age Of Empires* into the real-time arena, arguing that it's the 'one more turn' appeal of *Civilization* that gives it the edge.

CV



FIRAXIS GAMES

Founded in 1996 with *Civ* creator Sid Meier as director of creative development, Firaxis has been knocking games out on a regular basis ever since, with a strong bias towards strategy-oriented titles which have a tendency to be prefixed by Sid's name...

- 1997** *Sid Meier's Gettysburg!* set the ball rolling, recreating the American Civil War in a real-time strategy game, including the titular battle.
- 1998** *Sid Meier's Antietam!* was a swiftly released sequel that also featured a superfluous exclamation mark, and enabled you to command either the Union or the Confederate side.
- 1999** *Sid Meier's Alpha Centauri* took the *Civ* ethos into space, putting you in charge of a faction with the overall goal of taking over a planet.
- 2001** *Sid Meier's Civilization III* brought turn-based strategy into the 21st century and continued the highly successful series.
- 2002** *Sid Meier's SimGolf* enabled you to build and manage your own golf course, and combined elements of *The Sims* and *SimCity*.
- 2004** *Sid Meier's Pirates!* was a remake of the 1987 swashbuckler and provided a overdue return for the exclamation mark.



A rich and verdant land. No off-licences yet though.



Civ IV now lets you start the game in a particular era.

Q&A

SID MEIER



Having been inspired to make the original *Civilization* through a combination of *Risk*, *Sim City* and a game called *Empire*, Sid is still at the helm, albeit with more of a back-seat role these days.

PCZ What's your official role on *Civ 4*?

SID I'm the spiritual leader. I'm kinda here to represent the tradition and what made the game fun for the last 15 years. We've got a lot of great young guys who want to use the latest technology and cool latest stuff to build on that.

PCZ How do you think it's had such a long-lasting appeal?

SID There's a gameplay appeal that's key to games, and the ideas of *Civilization* 15 years ago are still valid today. I think there are some key game ideas that are timeless, so it's really a question of us using the new resources and the new technology to add some freshness to it, but not to lose what was fun about *Civ* in the first place.

PCZ Do you think people who've never played these types of game could be convinced to play *Civ IV*?

SID I think they can. I agree it's a challenge, that people expect bigger explosions, more visceral, more movie-like gameplay. The good news for us is that those are things that can become part of the *Civ* experience, bringing the wonders of the world alive, bringing the interaction with other leaders. A lot of the ideas we could only imagine in the earlier *Civ* games we can now bring to life, and I think that brings in a new generation of gamers, they can interact with great leaders or watch their cities being built or see the battles take place on-screen in 3D. So that's fun, that's appealing and so we do have a new generation that we have something to offer to.

PCZ You're one of the very few people who can put your name on a piece of software. What gives you that right?

SID I don't know – as long as the marketing folks think it's a good idea! It is partly a marketing issue. It means things continue in the style and tradition, a way of gaming we've built upon. *Civ IV* will keep the tradition alive. It's built on some ideas I pioneered a number of years ago. It's not something we stamp on everything, but if there's a minimum amount of 'Sidness' in it we feel it's OK. But if we put it on, crap we've got to live with it. So we take it pretty seriously.

PCZ So do you feel somewhat disassociated from 'Sid Meier', the name on the box?

SID I've become this icon-person, I'm not a real person any more. I don't want to live in the past, I'm interested in the next game we're doing. I'm proud of the past and happy with all the *Civ* games and the other games, and there is the Sid Meier who did those games and whose name is on the box, but I'm still looking forward to new things we're doing.



There are 31 resources in total.



Before the white man rode into town.



The spanking new engine lets you build the same old square coastlines.

As for the 'improved,' one area that has been given a much-needed overhaul is the interface. For the uninitiated, attempting to negotiate *Civ III* without recourse to the manual or tutorial is a bewilderingly frustrating experience, like trying to unlock a door with your thumb. The purists probably love it, but the series wasn't doing itself any favours in terms of attracting new players. Thankfully it's all change this time round, with a far more modern interface that will be familiar to anyone who has ever dabbled with an RTS game. As Firaxis told us, it wants the first move the player makes with the mouse to be the right move, and this does seem a lot more intuitive than in previous instalments, having more in common with traditional strategy games such as *Warcraft*.

NEW DIMENSION

Moving swiftly on, a further key improvement is to the graphics engine, which now boasts a living 3D world, as the surrounding screenshots demonstrate. *Doom 3* it isn't, but it is a notable advancement,

and one that was perhaps inevitable, as 'spiritual leader' Sid Meier agreed when we finally tracked him down.

"It certainly became inevitable," hissed Sid, "and it opens up a lot of possibilities to us. The original *Civ* was a top-down map with squares moving around, and then we moved to a 'two-and-a-half D' view of landscape with a fixed camera. Now we can move around and zoom in and out and those are powerful techniques that we can use

to enrich the game and bring it to life."

He's not lying, as we can confirm having seen it with our own eyes, with the camera rotating, zooming right in on the action or panning out to offer a more global view. It's not merely eye candy though, as it also proves functional, with the close-up enabling you to see if there's a bear hiding in the woods, for instance, and the panned-out view offering a comprehensive outline of the bigger picture, with all the information available on one screen. Pastures, wineries, water mills and windmills are all represented in detail, and their current status is also immediately obvious, with smoke billowing from a factory, or a cart travelling in and out of a mine, for instance, enabling you to visually gauge how productive a city is.

Elsewhere, Firaxis is promising a faster game. With *Civ III* clocking in at about 550 turns, the feeling is that this was about 150 too many. As such, elements of the

"The original *Civ* was a top-down map – now you can move around and zoom in and out"

SID MEIER SPIRITUAL LEADER



Units are now far more detailed. Still enormous, mind.



Is that a oryx or an ibex? The engine will let you zoom in!



"Why are we picking Christmas trees? Jesus hasn't even been invented yet."

game have been recalibrated so that the pacing makes sense, enabling you spend the requisite amount of time in each era. Firaxis reckons you should be able to get through *Civ IV* in about 10-15 hours, although acknowledging that everyone wants to play the game their own way, there will be three core game speeds, namely Quick, Medium and Epic, plus a huge array of multiplayer options (see 'Civ Online', below).

THIS IS RELIGION

New stuff? For the first time, *Civ* will embrace actual-world religions, enabling you to carry out acts of war in the name of your favourite non-existent god. With seven different – and equally misguided – options on offer, all the big hitters will be included: Christianity, Buddhism, all that good stuff. Firaxis admits it's always been afraid to tackle real religions before, but is going at it with some gusto this time round. All religions will basically be generic, with no bonuses for a particular belief. As was explained, this was not a line Firaxis was willing to cross, as it "didn't want to get firebombed".

Within the confines of the game, however, allying yourself to a certain religion will enable you to curry favour with other like-minded peoples. They're not as stupid as you might assume though, and come fully equipped with a tangible memory. As such, suddenly converting to the same religion will not cut the mustard. As one of the dev team succinctly explained: "They'll be like, 'where were you a thousand years ago?'"

Deciding your state religion will be a crucial area, as you face the possibility of alienating half your city depending on your choice. It also impacts on diplomacy, and you can spread word of your chosen lord by building shrines, monasteries, and missionaries to take the message further afield. As well as appeasing your so-called god, religions do serve a practical purpose, with particular faiths associated with certain technologies.

And there's more, namely Great People, again drawn from the realms of reality. Split into five types – artist, tycoon, prophet, engineer and scientist – such familiar names as Plato, Shakespeare, Newton and Einstein will turn up,



There's no longer any limit on the number of cities. Have as many as you like.

depending on the type of city. The idea is to encourage specialisation, so, for example, if you nurture a cultural city full of theatres and artists, the likes of Michelangelo could turn up with some tall ladders and start splashing the Dulux on the ceiling.

As well as the meaningless kudos of having pretend real people in your pretend real city, they do serve some purpose in the game. Each Great Person has three or four tricks up their sleeve, such as boosting culture, founding academies, sparking multiple golden ages, or initiating free technologies. Talking of which, the

famous tech tree is now more flexible. Instead of being split into eras as previously, it now consists of one long tree, enabling you to make more strategic choices and develop your civilization along a unique path.

WAR, EH?

For all its pretensions towards culture and diplomacy, good old-fashioned war still has a big part to play in *Civ*, and combat is a further area that's being overhauled. Thanks to the new 3D engine, it's been enhanced graphically. Barbarians can now be seen clubbing animals to death or cleaving the skulls of any passers-by, but despite the leap in technology, Firaxis is adamant it's "not going down the blood route" (the last word rhymes with gout). Plus, despite the higher detail, the action will remain reasonably sanitised.

The more significant change is in the way the combat works statistically. In *Civ IV*, as troops win battles they gain experience points, more if the odds are against them. Each time they go up a level, you can choose to give them one of several unique abilities, such as using enemy roads, bonus attacks in cities, or moving faster in forests. In this way, units become customised – much like the design workshop of *Civ* spin-off *Alpha Centauri* – and you end up with high-level units with specific abilities, making combat more of a tactical affair.

If you're going to have a civilization, you're going to need a leader, or better

CIV ONLINE



Expand your empire. Rule the world. It's the *Civilization* way.

SID MEIER'S LATEST OPUS PACKS IN A HOST OF MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS

More sociable gamers will be pleased to learn that this time round, *Civ* has been designed from the ground-up with multiplayer in mind. *Civilization IV* will accommodate up to 12 like-minded souls over LAN, t'Internet, as well as PBEM (play by email) and using Persistent Turn-Based Servers, which sounds a bit like postal chess. Co-operative multiplayer is currently undergoing rigorous testing (every Wednesday night if anyone's counting) and is apparently shaping up pretty well, with alliances being struck in order to achieve world domination.



Water, trees, a cow. All the basics.

still, two. Of the 19 different civilisations, there are 28 leaders to go round, which if our calculations are correct means nine civs have two leaders, and ten have just the one. These are drawn from all areas of history, and include such disparate characters as Gandhi and Montezuma, whose famous revenge is well known to eaters of Mexican food in the form of chronic diarrhoea (the revenge, not the food). Each leader has traits that provide you with various bonuses, and they also appear in animations showing their state of mind, be it beatific, indifferent or really pissed off.

GOVERNMENT FLU

The specific nature of government is still down to you though, but this time round it's more of an à la carte affair. Rather than adhering to the set values of communism or fascism or whatever, you can pick and mix different styles, be it free markets, environmentalism, slavery, conscription or emancipation, all of which will have an effect on



The current interface: everything under one roof.



There's gold in them thar hills. Or bronze, at least.

your citizens. As well as the traditional currencies of happiness and money, health is now also an important factor. Keep your cities clean and your populace will live long and prosper; fill them with smoke-belching factories and they'll die an early death.

It's not exactly rocket science, although rocket science does of course feature, continuing a classic *Civ* tradition. Of the five different ways that the game can be 'won,' the Spaceship victory sees you become so advanced that you manage to develop the eight or nine spaceship parts required to get you off this godforsaken rock and colonise

another planet (hence *Alpha Centauri*). Less adventurous victory conditions are also available, namely Conquest, whereby you are the last civilisation standing; Domination, where you own some percentage of the land; Cultural, which requires you to build three cities with near perfect culture; and finally, a Diplomatic victory, for which you have to make friends and influence people.

The *Civilization* series has always had a disproportionate following among the programming community, and they will be chuffed to learn that the new game will be fully modifiable using XML, Python and SDK. We have to confess to not knowing

much about any of that, but those that do will be in their element, tweaking entire aspects of the game, including the AI. For the layman, the in-game editor should be enough to create varied maps, fashioning coastlines like a latter-day Slartibartfast.

There's still quite a long way to go, but *Civilization IV* is largely up and running, undergoing some final tweaking and tinkering, or as Firaxis would have it, "iterative design". Sid Meier may no longer be hands-on, but both he and his team believe that *Civilization IV* will be worthy of his name when it appears at the end of this year. And as ever, we'll be the judges of that. **EW**



"We laugh at your stupid, tiny buildings! Prepare to die!"



Get Modded. Get Racing. Get Juiced.



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The obligatory Gandalf figure.

Speak and spell...

DUNGEON SIEGE II

Rhianna Pratchett gets down and dirty with a hippy elf



The game even tests your typing skills.

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Gas Powered Games
PUBLISHER Microsoft
WEBSITE www.gaspowered.com/ds2
ETA Summer 2005

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Four playable races
- Cinematic story with a proper plot this time
- Overhauled 3D engine with brand new special effects
- Hero powers, pets and skill trees

CV

GAS
POWERED
GAMES

GAS POWERED GAMES

GPGs was founded in 1998 by Chris Taylor of *Total Annihilation* fame...

2002 The beautiful presentation of the original *Dungeon Siege* was a triumph of style over substance. Well, almost.

2003 *Dungeon Siege: Legends Of Aranna* wasn't a whole lot different to the first, but it did add a few cool features, such as transformation spells and item sets.

FRANKLY, IT was rather a shock to find that although I completed the original *Dungeon Siege* and thought it was all very pretty with great gameplay and the donkeys were quite cute, I couldn't remember what on earth it was about. There was some enormous and terrible evil blighting the land, but that's pretty much a given in a fantasy game, and there was some business with an imp in a giant robot suit, although possibly I dreamt that. But on the whole it was distinctly unmemorable.

I wasn't alone. Fans of the original game clamoured for something more substantial in the sequel – a great story that would complement the great gameplay and keep them chalking up the hours just to see what would happen next. Thankfully, Gas Powered Games actually listened, and it's come back with a follow-up that promises to be decidedly meatier and much more fulfilling than its predecessor.

SEETING THE SCENE

From first impressions it appears that *Dungeon Siege II* has been put through some kind of giant plot-o-matic machine to create the sequel – there's a storyline, backgrounds and characters you actually

give a monkey's about. But to be fair, this isn't merely due to the dialogue, cut-scenes and story text in the game, as the actual level designs themselves add to the immersive experience.

Here's a little example. You start the game as a mercenary on the side of the usual nefarious bad guy – basically, a sword for hire with no real comprehension of why you're doing what you're doing, only a single-minded focus on the pay cheque at the end of a hard

nice way to heat up what to all intents and purposes amounts to the tutorial section of the game.

PARTY HEARTY

But don't worry, it's not just modern warfare with a sword instead of a machine gun. The spirit of the original game is still very much alive and kicking. You're still in the business of creating a formidable fighting party based around the four basic fighting styles: range, melee, combat

"Fans of the original game clamoured for a more substantial sequel"

day's killing. You get unceremoniously dumped onto a foreign shore in the midst of a furious battle that appears to have been designed as if you're part of a WWII military unit sent in to relieve your comrades on the front line.

The initial part of the game is rather like trench warfare, with your character running up and down guarded lines trying to find someone who knows what you should be doing, while fireballs scream overhead, the sounds of battle rage in your ears and the charred remains of creatures litter the ground. It's a pretty

magic and nature magic. However, you'll find that these disciplines are a lot more flexible this time around.

The use of new skill trees gives the character development more of a *Diablo*-esque feel and each class has access to its own rechargeable hero powers. Rangers, for example, get a new Repulse power that enables them to push away and hold back a group of encircling enemies, so your character isn't trying to fire an arrow directly up a monster's nose the whole time. However, the hectic nature of some of the battles means that



Transporters help minimise travel time.



Also handy for opening tins of beans.

FACE TO RACE



If you've always wanted to be 10ft tall and blue, now you can.

NOT JUST HUMANS THIS TIME

Another oddity about the original game was the fact that you had no playable races to choose from. You were a bog-standard male or female human, and since pretty much all of us go around being those everyday, it didn't make for much excitement, especially for the multitude of elf-lovers out there.

This time around, you get four races to choose from: human (boring), elf (always a favourite), dryad (a kind of hippy elf that bizarrely only lives for one year), and half-giant (10ft tall and lives for hundreds of years). As well as having their own unique abilities and history within the world of *Dungeon Siege II*, you'll also meet potential party members from these races as you journey through the game. These characters will often have their own goals and agendas, as well as a much larger helping of personality.

learning when and where to use these powers take a fair bit of practise.

LITTLE THINGS COUNT

There's also a lots of little additional features to *Dungeon Siege II* that add to the overall gameplay. You can now harvest Mana and Health from the environment around you, as long if you have a party member with the right skill (OK, so health potions flying out of a bush is a tad unrealistic, but we'll let GPG off). And there's also the ability to learn chants, which you literally type in when you're at the appropriate shrine, to boost your entire party. On top of that, you also have

things like pets that can level up with you and the ability to gather resurgents and enchant items. Again, when it comes to the graphics engine it's the details GPG has focused on, such as shadows, beams of sunlight, dynamic weather effects and battles that look like an explosion in a fireworks factory.

It just goes to prove that having someone tell you all the great things they've put in their game while you sit round a table in a cardboard room at the E3 videogames expo has no real relevance to how the game feels when you play it yourself. Last year it seemed as though Gas Powered Games had

simply taken a long time to do a nice spit-and-polish job on the original game, but hands-on experience is proving it to be a lot more than that. Suffice to say, there are a lot of tiny elements that are making a hell of a difference. As with every game at the preview stage, there are still a few rough edges to be sanded off, but *Dungeon Siege II* could prove to be the underground hit (ho ho) role-playing gamers have been looking for. **PC**





Battlefront II gives you more freedom to complete missions as you want.

Return of the Jedi... STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT II

Exclusive! Jamie Sefton presents your first gawp at the multiplayer shooter sequel that loves to hate (and kill) Ewoks...

THE COUNTDOWN to the May 16 release of *Star Wars Episode III: Revenge Of The Sith* has begun in earnest, and the videogames are now popping up faster than warts on Jabba the Hutt's backside. You can check out the review of the rather special *Lego Star Wars* on page 72, but we can now reveal the first details and screenshots on the sequel to last year's not-bad-but-we-were-

expecting-better multiplayer first- and third-person blaster *Star Wars Battlefront*.

The new game again spans the entire breadth of the *Star Wars* saga, but this time adds the fall of Anakin and the events leading up to – and including – the beginning of *Episode IV: A New Hope*. “*Battlefront II* will bring players to new classic-era locations,” says producer Shara Miller. “For example, you’ll actually be able to participate in the battle on Princess Leia’s ship, the *Tantive IV* at the beginning of *Episode IV*, which we’re bringing to gamers for the very first time.”

battles that Miller reckons will vastly improve on the rather sluggish planet-based aerial dogfights of *Battlefront I*.

“When we say space, we mean more than just dogfighting. You now have many options on how you want to play a mission, so you can jump into one of the many turret guns on their capital ship and shoot down enemy TIE fighters trying to blow up your ship, or maybe pilot an X-Wing and even attack the enemy Star Destroyer and destroy it. You can also choose to land on-board an enemy craft and fight from within, fighting blaster-to-blaster with Stormtroopers and sabotaging the ship from the inside.”

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Pandemic Studios/LucasArts
PUBLISHER Activision
WEBSITE www.lucasarts.com
ETA Autumn

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Bigger, better sequel to the single- and multiplayer shooter
- You can now use lightsabers and Force powers
- Four factions from *Episodes I-VI*
- New character class and Death Star level!

SPACE IS THE PLACE

Most of the vehicles from the new film are included for you to play with – including that rather eye-catching TIE fighter prototype from the recent *Ep III* trailer – plus all the classic X-Wings, Rebel Cruisers and more than 20 additions, many of which can carry you and several human or AI team-mates. However, Pandemic has now included new space

THAT'S NO MOON

While it was undeniably good fun, *Battlefront* was no *Battlefield*, and developer Pandemic Studios has listened to criticism by introducing stronger online game modes (hopefully including co-op this time) that will offer more than just the basic taking over and dominating of

Why Don't You?...

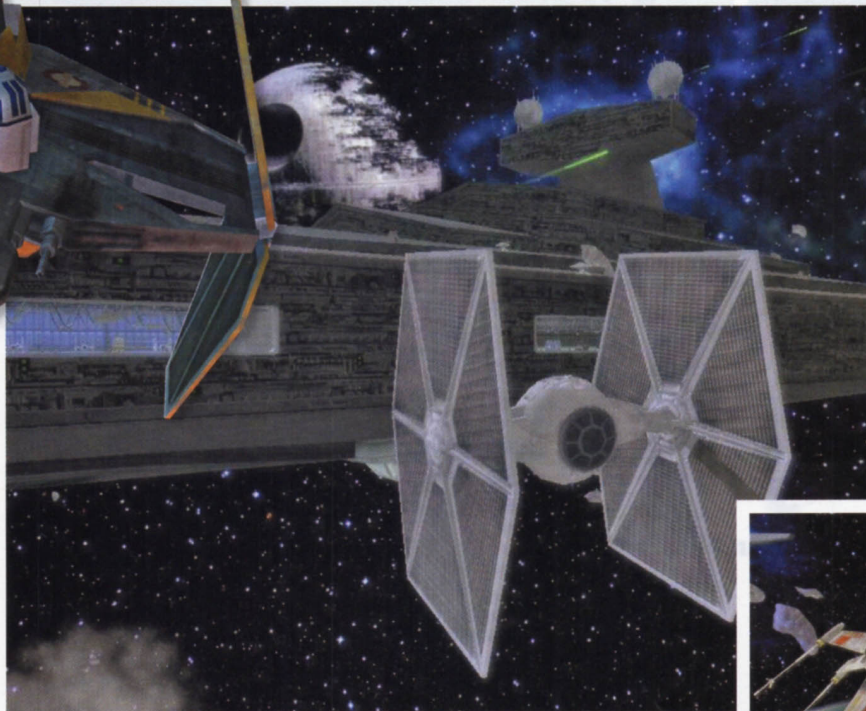


Could Chewbacca be one of the new hero characters?

WE WANT YODA!

Star Wars Battlefront included invincible hero characters such as Darth Vader and Luke Skywalker. You could earn these handy fellas in battle and they'd then fight alongside you, cutting through enemies like they were droids from Argos. Pandemic has confirmed that they'll appear in *Battlefront II*, but there may be additions according to producer Shara Miller. "Aside from our lightsaber-wielding favourites, other *Star Wars* icons will make cameos – look for them on the battlefield!" All we can say is – include Yoda, the team must. Imagine the sight of the diminutive green Jedi Master, leapfrogging and bouncing around the field of battle like a demented amphibian. Frightening stuff.

Congratulate that floor polisher droid.



Now with space missions and the Death Star.

control points, and new options and tools for people wanting to host games. However, it's the rather limited single-player mode where most of the developer's time has been spent improving things, by infusing some personality into the character classes and designing more objective-based missions.

EARN THE RIGHT

"The Campaign mode is now driven by a storyline that roughly follows the decline of the Republic and the rise of the Empire," continues Miller. "Most missions will have much more defined objectives for you to accomplish than in *Battlefront*, with our goal being to take the 'any-way-you-want' model and add a bit more of a framework. Along the way, you gain credits that may be used to upgrade units or otherwise affect battle conditions. Some missions will be optional too, so very skilled or dedicated players can earn extra credits."

The Galactic Conquest mode – where you set off on a quest to rule the entire Galaxy conquering planets one-by-one – has also been fleshed out, so you now have more strategic control over the factions of the Rebels or Imperials (from *Episodes IV-VI*), Clones or Confederacy of Independent Systems (from *Episodes I-III*).

In addition, each of the competing faction's five soldier classes will now be joined by a sixth character class, which will have a very special and unique ability – although Pandemic is guarding this as closely as the Death Star plans. Talking of which, yes, the Empire's ultimate weapon is featured as a level in *Battlefront II*, as you can see from the lip-smacking screenshots glued to these pages.

GLow STICK

However, the Republic-shattering news is that you'll now be able to cause mayhem as a Jedi or Sith, depending on what



"Er, does anyone have a fire extinguisher?"



Vehicle controls have been improved.

side you're on, with a full command of a lightsaber and Force powers. "We're also making sure the AI receives a significant amount of attention," adds Miller. "On one level, we really want to make sure both friendly and enemy AI are more responsive both to events occurring in the environment but also to the player's actions."

While the visuals won't give Gordon Freeman any sleepless nights, the multi-format *Battlefront II* will at least have dedicated engineers at Pandemic working on taking advantage of the latest high-end cards and making things more PC-friendly, including stuff such as removing the frame-rate limitation for multiplayer games. One slight concern, though, is the lack of true ragdolls again, with the physics system being the same as the first game. "There's some style

CV



PANDEMIC STUDIOS

US developer Pandemic began life with *Battlezone II* in 1999 and has since gone on to produce numerous console and PC titles including the following...

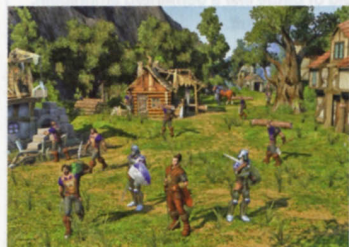
- 2000** *Dark Reign 2* was an apocalyptic action-RTS. Unfortunately, it wasn't very good.
- 2003** The company's first *Star Wars* game *The Clone Wars* gets released. It was console-only, but the game's emphasis on multiplayer vehicle combat was a blueprint for *Battlefront*.
- 2004** A good year for Pandemic, with the excellent squad-based tactical shooter *Full Spectrum Warrior* and the original *Star Wars Battlefront*.

controversy over whether the ragdoll effect is satisfying or whether it detracts from the immersion because of its over-the-top nature," asserts Miller. "The debate rages on, but we'll stay out of it for now..."

It's just a few weeks now until you'll find out whether George Lucas has delivered on *Episode III* – but you'll have to wait until autumn for the final verdict on Pandemic's new hope for the *Battlefront* franchise. Watch out for a major playtest in a future *ZONE*. [CP]



The focus is more on weapons-based argy-bargy this time around.



The fantasy stereotype gang's all here. Time for a light monster-snack.



PvP skirmishing is on the cards too.



A bit too big to perch on a glove, that.



Gold blend...

SPELLFORCE II: BLEND OF PERFECTION

Michael Filby ponders the genius of a game about an elite squad of English teachers, before noticing his mistake...

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Phenomic
PUBLISHER JoWooD
WEBSITE www.spellforce.com
ETA Late 2005

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Sparkly new 3D engine
- RTS/RPG hybrid that actually works
- Loads of new quests, factions and units
- Revamped levelling system
- Good multiplayer potential

THE ORIGINAL *SpellForce* was notable for two reasons. First, *The Order Of Dawn* (the first of the 'trilogy') and its two expansions were positively massive. Second, and here's the important one, it rather cleverly managed to marry the principles of the RTS and RPG genres without landing firmly on its arse. Its only real drawback is that it would have taken someone with a beard of Bellamy-sized proportions and a silver-gilded Campaign for Real Ale card to get even marginally through its triple-figured hours of plotting.

But what are sequels for if not to vanquish the sins of their predecessors? It seems Phenomic is heroically wielding its runes of upgrade over the fully-fledged sequel to *SpellForce*,

and boldly casting spells of enchantment with promises of improvements across the board.

BEST OF BOTH

Once again, you get to don the vaguely effeminate robes of an avatar of your choosing, this time as a dragon warrior caught up in a conflict between the Shadows and the People of Light five years after the events of *SpellForce*. Advancement through the game will be handled slightly differently this time, as you have access to a skill tree whenever you level up.

Add to this the summonable hero characters now playing a more active role in your adventure, not to mention the ability to level them up in whatever way you please, and the RPG elements look as though they'll be as strong as ever.

The questing system – another new enhancement – is set to lead you and your heroic chums into yet another plethora of RTS encounters. Happily, this area is also earmarked for a sizeable overhaul. In addition to running at around three times faster

than its predecessor (which, as anyone who has played the original will know, should be a godsend), the AI has been spruced up to lend a more strategic edge to the encounters. In fact, there are whispers that the entire focus has been shifted towards the way you use your troops, so expect a far more comprehensive line-up, including everything from airborne to siege units.

HERO'S QUEST

If Phenomic pulls it off, the new battle system should really get an opportunity to shine when it comes to multiplayer, which is scheduled to offer skirmish and player vs player matches. It's the co-operative options we're most looking forward to, though – if implemented well, we could even be looking at a whole new online genre.

From what we've seen so far, Phenomic is certainly giving the impression that it's listening to its critics. Even the plot is being written by native English speakers to ensure that it doesn't end up as another 100-hour Teutonic fantasy equivalent of *Titanic*. Check out these exclusive screenshots – we'll have a full hands-on soon. **EW**



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UNREAL ENGINE 3.0

Exclusive! *Martin Korda* gets up close and personal with what could be the most ground-breaking engine of all time...

LAST
PREVIEWED
PCZONE
ISSUE
145

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Epic Games
PUBLISHER Midway
WEBSITE www.unrealtechnology.com
ETA 2006

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- The most powerful, versatile and self-contained engine we've ever seen
- Can make in-game action look cinematic
- Matinee Camera feature enables film-like cut-scenes and seamless integration with gameplay
- Lifelike physics, particle effects and dynamic shadows and lighting
- Each character can possess unique breakable limb constraints and physics

I'VE JUST come out of a 25-minute demonstration of Unreal Engine 3.0 at this year's Game Developers' Conference, and I can safely say, without hype or hyperbole, that I've just witnessed what could be a defining moment in gaming history. In fact, I'm so impressed that I've just legged it back to my hotel room to type up what I've seen, fat globules of perspiration threatening to short-circuit my laptop as my fellow gaming correspondents sit in the bar milking a PR person's credit card like a haemorrhaging udder. But then, they haven't seen what I've seen.

BACK TO THE FUTURE

So, let's skip (or bound manfully if skipping is a bit too girly for you) back an hour to the start of level designer Alan Willard's tech demo, which kicked off with some footage from an as-yet-unnamed and unannounced third-person shooter (not *UT*), apparently due for release in 2006.

A squad of heavily armed grunts stalk through the ruined remains of a war-torn city, moving in formation as they search for enemies, faces contorted with

concentration. As cut-scenes go, it's among the most impressive I've ever laid eyes on. Except, to my amazement, this isn't a pre-rendered cut-scene. Oh no, no, no, no, this is anything but a cut-scene, my friend.

Without warning, three pug-ugly alien heads appear from behind the jagged remains of a bombed-out building and the action switches seamlessly from cinematic to real-time firefight, bullets biting fragments of concrete out of the already pitted walls around the grunts.

LOOKING FORWARD

But Willard is keen to move on and beckons we privileged few to roll our tongues back into our mouths so he can continue. "Cinematics can be merged seamlessly with gameplay," he explains, "and our Matinee Camera system lets us script the camera angles and cuts that we want to put in."

Willard switches to a level in which a towering city dwarfs a futuristic buggy. He drives around the city, mile after mile of concrete jungle with not a load or stutter in sight. He screeches to a halt and the action melts

seamlessly into a cut-scene that shows off the power of the Matinee Camera.

The camera pans upwards, revealing a sprawling metropolis, gliding along rooftops and passing a bell tower, from which a solitary bird takes to the sky. The camera locks in behind it, close enough to reveal each feather rendered in spectacular detail, while in the background, a sailboat glides over the sea, each

CV



EPIC GAMES

Making engines isn't the only thing that Epic excels in...

1998 *Unreal*: the visually impressive shooter proves a top-quality debut.

1999 *Unreal Tournament*: along with id's *Quake III: Arena*, this propels online shooters into the mainstream (see page 140).

2003 *Unreal Tournament 2003*: a great sequel to a classic game.

2004 *Unreal Tournament 2004*: introduces vehicles into the *UT* mix with amazing results.

wave perfectly refracting every beam of light from the setting sun.

But there's still plenty more magic that Willard wants to amaze us with. "We can apply any effect to any surface," he explains. "We use several different methods of shadowing for the world, and we can also use several shadows for dynamic lights casting shadows on dynamic worlds."

After a moment of loading, we find ourselves in a dungeon, patrolled by a huge, battle-armoured alien, faint beams of light landing perfectly on every crease and crevice while its shadow looms and diminishes on the far wall.

In the next room stands a 30ft high beast, three huge guns strapped to its back. "This is one of our larger characters, with around three million polygons," beams Willard. Yup you read that right: one character, three million polygons.

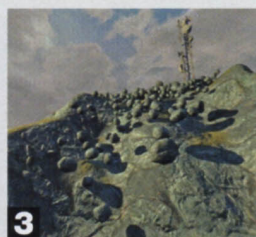
An adjacent corridor houses a maze of rooms displaying the engine's vast array of particle effects, generated by a system called Cascade. In one room, streams of lava flow down walls, while in another a ball of light sucks in dancing sparks before exploding in a flash of fire so real you could light a fag off it.

PAIN AND PLEASURE

The final part of the demonstration shows off the engine's physics and ragdoll capabilities, and once again,

"It's so powerful and self-contained, other engines look archaic and inadequate by comparison"

ROLLING ROCKS



Unreal Engine 3.0 looks like it could blow the competition away.

AN ENGINE THAT ROLLS OVER THE COMPETITION?

So you think Unreal Engine 2.0 was powerful, eh? You know, the one that powered *UT2004*? Well, in order to visually demonstrate just how much more powerful Unreal Engine 3.0 is, Epic's Alan Willard showed us several real-time avalanches rendered by the new technology.

The first one saw approximately 20 large boulders tumbling realistically down a steep mountain incline, representing *Unreal Engine 2.0's* capabilities at its peak. The second avalanche displayed literally hundreds of massive rocks hurtling down the hill: 637, to be precise. Screenshots 1-5 here clearly show that Unreal Engine 2.0 is to Unreal Engine 3.0 what a water pistol is to an atom bomb. Simply awe-inspiring.



Unreal Engine 3.0 doesn't disappoint.

Willard loads up what he calls The Torture Room, in which a droid hangs from the ceiling, suspended by its arms. With a sinister grin, he yanks the droid downwards, its arms snapping perfectly at its metallic joints as it falls to the floor in a crumpled heap. "We can have multiple ragdolls per character," he explains. "So you may kill them one time and an arm will fly off, then another time

and their head may get blown off."

For his next trick he pulls open a fridge door, then tosses the giant icebox around, its contents spilling out and scattering in all directions. Behind it, a giant waterwheel is driven by cascading water, its revolutions changing as Willard regulates the flow of the liquid.

Finally, we're taken to a room containing a dead body and a collection of nondescript metallic objects. With a

press of a button, Willard shifts the room's gravity field, the clanging objects and creased corpse sliding with unbelievable realism from floor to wall, then from wall to ceiling and back again. Then, sadly, it's all over...

When we looked at Unreal Engine 3.0 back in issue 145, we said it was unlike anything we'd ever seen before, so powerful and self-contained that other engines look archaic and inadequate by comparison. Now that we've seen its physics capabilities first hand, and marvelled at what can be achieved with its Matinee Camera and Cascade system, we're even more convinced it's a winner. And if Epic and third-party developers can harness the true magnitude of its power, then it could just herald the next step in the evolution of gaming. Yes, it really is looking that good – and best of all, you can check out the new *Unreal Tournament* powered by the Unreal Engine 3.0 in next month's *PC ZONE*. Now turn the page for some words on what this amazing piece of technology will mean for gaming... [PCZ]

NEW UNREAL TOURNAMENT!!!

EPIC'S NEXT UNREAL TOURNAMENT BUILT ON UNREAL ENGINE 3.0 REVEALED!

You've seen the stunning exclusive images on these pages from Epic's new Unreal Engine 3.0, but the company has also announced the first details of the new *Unreal Tournament*. Voice command will play a larger part in the next *UT*, enabling you not only to execute menu screens, but also ask questions and issue direct commands to the AI-controlled bots, who will understand what you're saying (so watch your language).

Epic wants to enhance the single-player experience by getting you more involved in the game's characters, such as the burly Malcolm (pictured here), fleshing them out and giving them distinct personalities and battle traits. This means that your usual hiring and firing of tournament grunts will take on new meaning as you discover the strengths and weaknesses (and likeability) of your crew of professional fraggers.

But multiplayer is obviously the driving force of the franchise, and as well as the usual deathmatch, CTF and Onslaught modes, the team is planning a brand new mode to rival or possibly replace the frantic Assault mode, currently referred to as Conquest. This will provide huge maps with objectives similar to those in Assault mode, and (RTS fans take note) with a limited form of resource-management. As one of two teams, you'll be able to play, log off for a while, then jump back in for more action, rather like the online shooter *PlanetSide*.

Plans are also afoot for a matchmaking system based on player ratings, which will enable you to meet up and play with similarly skilled gamers and see how you stack up against the rest of the world as a whole, as well as giving clans an opportunity to compare scores.

The rather special news is that you won't have to wait long to find out more about the next *Unreal Tournament*. As you're reading this, our own Anthony Holden is in Raleigh, USA, deep inside Epic's HQ enjoying the world's first play of the game that's going to redefine the PC FPS. Find out all the incredible details of the brand new *UT* only in next month's *PC ZONE*!

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Attila the Hun will be making an appearance, of course.

Here comes the horde...

ROME: TOTAL WAR – BARBARIAN INVASION

ZONE's very own hired lug Martin Korda hun-covers Rome: Total War's first expansion pack

WHAT IS IT about short-arse generals and their need to dominate the world? Take Attila the Hun for example, a bearded madman and driving force behind the barbarian invasions of Europe depicted in this, *Rome: Total War's* first expansion pack. Standing a mere whisker

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER The Creative Assembly
PUBLISHER Activision
WEBSITE www.totalwar.com
ETA Autumn 2005

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- It's the first expansion to the greatest RTS ever
- Visually stunning night time battles
- Barbarian/Hun campaigns set to offer a whole new gameplay experience
- Host of new units
- Lightly armoured units can now swim

over five foot, he was still tirelessly driven to subjugate the world and become master of all he surveyed.

Maybe he was bullied at school. Maybe he had his head stuck down a latrine by some floppy-haired thugs while being repeatedly kicked up the jacksie for being a shorty poo-poo crybaby. Or maybe it was a woman. Yes, that's it. Some luscious maiden with flowing golden hair he used to write poetry about while dreaming for hours that she'd one day be his wife and sire him blonde children, only to find she'd been secretly planning to elope to a small chateaux in Provence to tread grapes with his best mate. But whatever the reason for his desires to conquer, rape and pillage, one fact remains. He was still a short-arse.

However, one world dominating warmonger with no such stature problems

is the stunning, all conquering 3D RTS *Rome: Total War*, which, if you haven't already guessed, is about to sire a child of its own, an expansion pack sensitively entitled *Barbarian Invasion*. We caught up with producer Richard Blenkinsop to find

"The once-great Empire is dwindling at a terrifying rate, due to barbarian hordes overrunning its settlements"

out what we can expect from *Rome's* debut add-on pack and took a quick, exclusive gander at the game too...

ROMAN RETREAT

Barbarian Invasion will be set well after the closing stages of *Rome: Total War*, spanning the years 364AD to 476AD. The once-great Roman Empire is dwindling at

a terrifying rate due to barbarian hordes overrunning its settlements, forcing the Romans ever further back into its own territory. "The Roman Empire had split by this time into two smaller, weaker factions, (the Western and Eastern Empires), and it

was busy with its own internal political struggles," begins Richard. "This created the perfect opportunity for the uncivilised nations of Europe to rise up and start to take back the land which they believed to be rightfully theirs."

These nations included the Vandals (not to be confused with the toothless oafs who run around town centres late at

CV


THE CREATIVE ASSEMBLY

Originally a small company that developed sport games, The Creative Assembly has flourished into one of the country's leading developers, thanks to its massively successful *Total War* series.

2000 *Shogun: Total War*: Turns the world of RTS gaming on its head, with its realistic and gargantuan 3D battles.

2002 *Medieval: Total War*: Takes *Shogun*'s stunning premise and expands upon it with suitably impressive results.

2004 *Rome: Total War*: A breathtaking new engine and the greatest battles ever to grace a videogame make this the finest RTS in the land.



Many of the units from *Rome: Total War* will be present, along with some great new ones too.



Another writer is initiated into **PC ZONE**.

LATE NIGHT RUCKS



TIME TO KICK OFF AFTER CLOSING HOURS

Perhaps the single most impressive thing about *Barbarian Invasion* are the night-time battles. We sat and watched as producer Richard Blenkinsop assaulted a settlement during the dead of night, and we were blown away by what we saw. And that's despite all of the fire effects not having been fully implemented yet.

Torch-carrying troops raced towards the enemy walls, flames dancing realistically off their bodies as they bobbed from side to side. Onagers fired flaming balls of destruction over the city walls, their fiery shapes cleaving through the night air like a hail of meteors.

It all looked spectacular, and Richard also assured us that attacking an enemy at night would come with its own bonuses, though only an experienced commander would be able to lead the assault. "While attacking at night the morale of the enemy will be lowered at the start of the battle and missile units will become less accurate due to the poor visibility. However, this tactic can prove to be a double-edged sword. As the battle rages, your own troops' morale will start to be affected," he explains.

night upturning cars); Saxons (warriors with a mastery of coastal landings and invasions); and of course the Huns, an emergent threat from the Steppes, who swarmed across Europe like a plague of locusts, destroying everything they came across. And the good news is, not only will you be able to play all three of these new factions in *Barbarian Invasion*, but a host of others too.

HEAD FOR ROME

Your ultimate goal when playing as these rapaciously bloodthirsty lugs will be to ensure your nation's survival and, more importantly – from a mindless violence perspective – wreak revenge on the mighty Roman Empire, which has enslaved your people for generations. "When you play as the Barbarians you see that this is the time to strike and take back your people's land," explains Richard. "However, since all the other Barbarians are trying to do the same, you need to strike fast against your Barbarian neighbours in order to gain a foothold in Europe. Ultimately though, the thought of eventually turning on the crumbling Romans and sacking the legendary city of Rome will be your end goal."

Of course, this being *Rome: Total War*, any expansion would seem somewhat foolish if it neglected to add a Roman campaign, in which you could take the once-great empire's destiny into your own, claw-like, sun-starved hands.

"The other playable factions in the game include the Western and Eastern Roman empires, whose goal is to hold on to their crumbling empires and hold back the bloodthirsty waves of Barbarians coming at them from all sides," says Richard.

"However, you also have to deal with rebellions in your own cities, too." As if fending off near endless hordes of slaving madmen intent on ripping out your spine and playing it like a glockenspiel wasn't enough to worry about. "The key goal for the Romans is simple: survival," continues Richard ominously. "Also, you can play as the Persian Sassanid faction, a strong people from the East who rival Rome in wealth and are starting to consider building an Empire of their own."

TAKING SIDES

Having gleaned the information about *Barbarian Invasion*'s new factions, we grilled Richard like a sirloin on a hot summer's day about how each one will differ. "You're now given a very distinct method of gameplay depending on the faction you choose," he begins. We turn up the heat and urge him to continue. "Playing a Roman faction will have a very different feel to *Rome: Total War*, as you already start with a fully-fledged Empire. However you have to fight hard to keep it.

"Choosing one of the Barbarian factions in Europe means you start with a very small amount of settlements and need to expand quickly, often with intense and bloody battles. Then there are the Huns, who don't start with any

settlements at all. They're a nomadic horde comprised of around 15 large armies, and they have the ability to sweep across the map, razing cities for cash and hiring mercenaries to swell their numbers until they find a land they wish to settle in." So that's Bognor Regis safe, then.

WEAPONS OF DESTRUCTION

Just like any self-respecting expansion pack that can look you in the eye and say "buy me", *Barbarian Invasion* will be busting at the packaging with an abundance of new units and historical figures, including said insecure midget, Attila the Hun. Other historical figures from the time period are also available, while each faction's units and the weapons and armour they carry reflect the time period as accurately as any other *Total War* game – which, of course, means they're likely to be pretty damn accurate.

"Due to advances in composite bows, archers now have superior range and accuracy, and some factions have adopted the new X-bow, a weapon akin to an early crossbow which fires armour-piercing bolts," says an enthusiastic Richard. "Cavalry will play a larger role in any Barbarian army, especially for

Why Don't You?...

EVERYONE LOVES A GOOD HISTORICALLY ACCURATE PUNCH-UP

When we asked producer Richard Blenkinsop whether *Barbarian Invasion* would come with any new historical battles, we were surprised to hear it wouldn't. This is because you can play all of the historical battles in the main campaign. Not much of an excuse really, as the whole idea of historical battles is that you can play them as one-off battles whenever you feel like it. In light of this minor rant, can you guess what we'd like to see included in the game?



History in the making. Or not.

the Huns, who needed to be fast and mobile at all times. New unit abilities are also available to use, such as the Shiltrom – a Barbarian formation much like the Greek Phalanx, with spears pointing out in all directions and resembling a hedgehog – and the Barbarian's Shield Wall, where warriors stand shoulder-to-shoulder with their shields interlocked to

protect them from missile fire"

As if all of that wasn't enough, Richard informs us that there are even more new units we can look forward to commanding. These include the Barbarian Golden Band, a berserker infantry unit harder than granite who're so crazed they'll prove a handful both for the enemy and your commanders; and a carriage-drawn ballistae represents

"When you play as the Barbarians, you'll see that this is the time to strike and take back your people's land"

BRIDGE OVER THE RIVER DIE

ANNOYING FUNNELLED BRIDGE BATTLES A THING OF THE PAST?

Now I don't know about you, but I've never been to enamoured with *Total War*'s bridge battles. The idea of bottlenecking your troops in a small funnel with no option to flank the enemy, and being forced to sit around and wait as the two armies duke it out isn't exactly what *Rome*'s massively tactical and realistic battles are all about.

However, that's all about to change, because *Barbarian Invasion* enables your lighter troops – including cavalry – to swim across rivers and engage the enemy. The downside to this ability is that it takes them ages, making them sitting ducks for archers. Still, it's a small price to pay for such a great innovation, don't you think?



The once-great Roman Empire stands on the brink of extinction.



the mobile artillery on the battlefield.

Hun Lancers are mounted soldiers armed with long spears that give them the ability to hit an enemy formation with devastating force (and skewer pieces of beef without having to get off their horses), while the chanting Druids and Priests imbue your men with courage and a morale bonus in the heat of battle.

WAR IS BREWING

From what we've been told and from the early footage we saw after we'd finished quizzing Richard (for more see 'Late Night Rucks', p55 and 'Bridge Over The River Die', p56), it looks like The Creative Assembly could be about to unleash another blockbusting *Total War* title.

Utilising all of the awesome powers of its predecessor, *Barbarian Invasion* is already looking like it could well pull off the near impossible feat of embellishing and extending *Rome*'s near-infallible gameplay. With an all-new approach to how you can play the game – thanks to the migrating Hun hordes – you could soon be gleefully swarming over the Roman Empire like flies on a dung heap, while being swept away by what's looking like one hell of a frenzied, challenging and fresh campaign of merciless bloodshed. Frankly, we can't wait. **PC**



The Kris Kristofferson War Recreation Society enjoys its latest event.



There's a lot more to the plot than just a missing daughter, trust us.



Puerto Sombra is surprisingly quiet.



Stats run from strength to alcohol addiction.

Man on fire...

BOILING POINT: ROAD TO HELL

Anthony Holden joins some Ukrainian freedom fighters in the jungles of South America... Confused yet? You will be...

MAYBE IT'S a hangover from the space race, maybe not, but it seems like developers from the former Soviet republics always have to shoot for the moon. From *Operation Flashpoint* to *STALKER*, it's the same thing – a boundless, almost foolish desire to push the limits to their utmost.

The latest preposterously ambitious title from the region is *Boiling Point* (formerly known as *Xenus*), a vast freeform shooter-cum-role-playing adventure set in the jungles of South America. We've been putting the Beta code through its paces this month, and have to admit it's an impressive undertaking. The play area is massive, for a start – 625 square kilometres of jungle, river and scattered habitation, all totally open to discovery and exploration. As crazy as it may seem, however, it's the openness of the gameplay rather than the landscape that truly impresses.

FOR FREEDOM!

The game begins in Puerto Sombra, the sleepy capital of the fictional republic of Realia. You enter the scene as Saul

Myers, an ex-military thug on the trail of his kidnapped daughter – a journalist who was sniffing around the local crime lord. Your first couple of missions are pretty much laid down. You visit the editor of the local paper and pick up your daughter's car, then visit the pub to get some information – but from there on in you can take things in a staggering number of different directions.

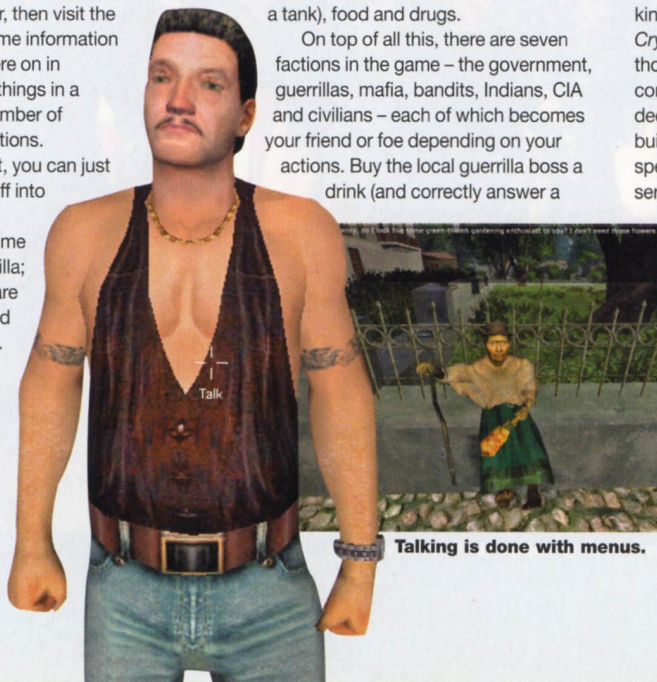
If you want, you can just tear straight off into the jungle to assault the crime lord's jungle villa; but chances are you'll soon find yourself dead. If you're sensible, you'll build towards major objectives by completing a

number of easier secondary missions for NPCs. Your aim, as in any RPG, is to build up your character stats and earn yourself some dough. With this you can buy and upgrade weapons and vehicles (including cars, motorboats, planes, helicopters and a tank), food and drugs.

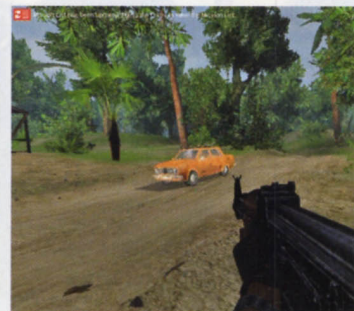
On top of all this, there are seven factions in the game – the government, guerrillas, mafia, bandits, Indians, CIA and civilians – each of which becomes your friend or foe depending on your actions. Buy the local guerrilla boss a drink (and correctly answer a

question about communist history), and hey presto, you've made your first alliance. Accidentally run over a pedestrian in the street and whoops – the entire civilian populace is against you.

There's a wild mix of gameplay here, kind of like *GTA* meets *Deus Ex* meets *Far Cry*. Certainly a fascinating experiment, though one that we're not yet totally convinced by – the combat and AI are deeply underwhelming in the current build. But if these can be brought up to speed, then *Boiling Point* could be a seriously hot property. **EW**



Talking is done with menus.



The gunplay needs a lot of work.

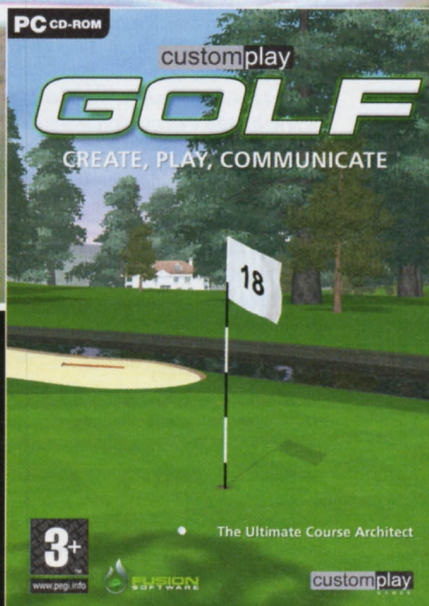
What ?*&@%! idiot put that bunker here?

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Bug baiting...

STARSHIP TROOPERS

Sam Kiildsen prepares to sacrifice
his worthless life in the cause
of humanity... And PC ZONE

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Strangelite

PUBLISHER Empire

WEBSITE www.strangelite.co.uk

ETA Q3 2005

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Based on Dutch schlockmeister Paul Verhoeven's love-it-or-hate-it movie
- Over 200 enemies on screen at once
- All-action FPS gameplay
- Co-operative multiplayer mode
- Large selection of weapons, including mini-nukes

CV

STRANGELITE
CREATORS AND DEVELOPERS

STRANGELITE

Previously known as Rowan Software, this team built its reputation up with a dizzying series of flight sims...

1990 Rowan kicks off its history with Vietnam air-war basher *Flight Of The Intruder*.

1999 We don't see many games set during the Korean War, a fact which set the rather good *Mig Alley* apart from its rival flight sims.

2001 Rowan's *Battle Of Britain* takes flight. Gamers everywhere give the Luftwaffe a swift kicking before flying home in time for tea, crumpets and Vera Lynn records.

2002 Strangelite signals its appearance with PC conversions of Sega's *Crazy Taxi* and *Virtua Tennis*.

CREEPY CRAWLIES -

we've all had our troubles with them in the past. Whether it's a family picnic spoiled by a wasp sting to Uncle Andy's nether regions, ants invading the fridge or the sheer panic that results from hearing the whine of a mosquito hovering past your ear, bugs have a habit of making life a tad inconvenient.

However, as bothersome as they may be, wasps, ants and mossies aren't about to thrust their legs through your chest cavity, rip your arms out of their sockets or vaporise beloved Uncle Andy in a jet of boiling napalm. The alien bugs in Strangelite's forthcoming *Starship Troopers* title, however, seem to love doing just this kind of stuff. Over the couple of levels that we've had the chance to get to grips with in this exclusive hands-on, we've witnessed fellow Mobile Infantry troopers being torn in two, incinerated and decapitated, all by wicked oversized insects.

BLACK COMEDY

Paul Verhoeven's 1997 ultra-violent movie (upon which this game is based) painted the human Mobile Infantry as the aggressors and invaders, touching down on bug turf in a war that was started for reasons quite possibly fabricated by a belligerent government. The film suggested that the bugs, rather than being cruel, were simply defending themselves against foreign trespassers. Sound familiar? Factor in the blackly comic propaganda newsreels, and rooting for the film's ostensible heroes became an unusually difficult task.



Running from bug into tunnel = good.



Night missions offer varied challenges.



The Red Arrows found their audience somewhat unappreciative.



Think we might need a bigger gun.

While the movie was equal parts action-romp and unsettling satire, the game looks set to avoid making any controversial political points, instead concentrating on good old-fashioned alien-slaughtering action. The totalitarian regime that you're fighting for is the same, of course (you don't become a citizen until you've volunteered to serve the government, that kind of thing). However, we don't expect the game to provoke any thoughts other than those along the lines of, 'which Arachnid do I blow up first?' or, 'shall I use the alt-fire mode here or save my grenades for later?'

BRING ON THE GORE

Strangelite is aiming to deliver a full-sized helping of run-and-gun FPS action, echoing the chaotic, ultra-violent and relentlessly noisy battle scenes from the movie and its straight-to-video sequel – which, incidentally, you'd do well to avoid.

The background story is fairly straightforward, set five years after the events of the second *Starship Troopers* movie, where the once-tranquil planet of Hesperus is under threat from the Arachnid menace and humanity's finest have to step in to clean up the mess.

You're thrust into the gleaming jackboots of a member of the Mobile Infantry's 'Marauder Unit', an elite detachment – kind of an SAS of the future – with access to advanced weapons and equipment.

Because you play the role of a Marauder rather than a regular grunt, you're given the chance to participate not only in epic massed battles but in smaller, commando-style raids and even stealth operations. This, of course, provides *Strangelite* with a handy excuse to vary the pace of the game over its 12 single-player levels. We got the chance to experience this, ploughing through a couple of action-packed early missions.

ANOTHER WHISKEY, PLEASE

'Outpost 29' is a level heavily reminiscent of the original flick's memorable 'Whiskey Outpost' scene (apparently many of the movies' scenes will get this treatment in the final product). This mission sees you and a number of comrades charged with defending a fort-like outpost from an encroaching horde of Arachnids; think *Zulu* crossed with *Eight Legged Freaks*.

Gazing down the desert valley from our lofty position on the ramparts, we

VOICING CONCERNS

JOHNNY RICO TELLS YOU WHAT TO DO...

Strangelite's licence extends to the *Starship Troopers* comics, books and cartoons as well as to the 1997 Paul Verhoeven movie – and it certainly appears to be putting a bit of effort into using it. Lantern-jawed thesp Casper Van Dien has been drafted in to lend his dulcet tones to the pre-mission briefings: his character in the original movie was a mere grunt in the Mobile Infantry, but now he's General Johnny Rico, otherwise known as your boss.

Sadly, other *Starship Troopers* stars such as Bond girl stunner Denise Richards and Neil Patrick 'Doogie Howser' Harris had not been brought into the fold at the time of writing. We live in hope.



see several Warrior bugs emerge out of the haze, scurrying across the sand towards us. The commonest enemies you face in the game, these are the four-legged creatures that make up the bulk of the alien force. At first there's a mere trickle of the things in the distance, then more appear behind them, then more, then even more until there's something in the region of 150 scuttling nasties rapidly converging on your increasingly outnumbered platoon.

This huge number of enemies is awesome to behold, all courtesy of Strangelite's proprietary Swarm Engine, developed in-house for this title. While most current generation FPS engines are geared around creating several complex humanoid figures on screen at one time, Swarm has been engineered to deliver hundreds of simpler models. *Starship Troopers'* bug models, y'see, have less joints and moving parts than your average FPS homo sapiens, so a well-designed engine like this is able to literally fill the screen with them.

Enemy AI is still a work in progress, so the bugs don't provide a huge challenge

at the moment, with Warrior bugs that reach the outpost wall seemingly content to sit there, allowing themselves to be easily picked off – something the developer says will be changed before launch. However it's still a blast, as we shoulder our standard issue Morita assault rifle (which looks set to be the default weapon – there'll be no melee options) and pepper the advancing horde from the safety of the stockade. Our AI-controlled team-mates begin to do likewise, and soon the desert is littered with broken bug corpses.

ALIEN ANT FARM

With the initial wave obliterated, we're sent into the desert alone to grab some landmines from a downed dropship. Locating the crash site is a simple matter of following an on-screen waypoint indicator, and we're soon collecting a couple of crates from the burning wreckage. Doing so triggers another huge influx of Warriors, but this time we have to deal with them on our lonesome. Two other weapons in the Mobile Infantry arsenal, a burly combat

DO YOU WANT TO KNOW MORE?

A SPOTTER'S GUIDE TO THE ARACHNID MENACE

Starship Troopers hurls 20 different types of insectoid enemy in your direction. If you've seen the movie(s) some will look familiar, while others have been spawned in the developers' twisted brains. Here's a small selection of the bad bugs...



TIGER (UROPYGI-TIGRIS)

Identifiable through its distinctive orange-and-black striped markings, the Tiger is a heavier, more aggressive variant of the common Warrior species. Strengthened chitin plates provide extra protection against standard weapons.



BRAIN BUG (CEREBUS REX)

Weighing in at a metric tonne or more, these hideous bugs seem to fulfill a leader role within the Arachnid ranks. They're rumoured to be capable of reason and to possess psychokinetic powers. May employ some kind of brain-piercing tap as a weapon.



TANKER BUG (AMBLYPYGI)

The battering ram of the Arachnid horde, the Tanker's immense size, strength and heavy armour make it nigh-on unstoppable. This behemoth can bash through walls, crush infantry underfoot and generate a fire flow able to incinerate human flesh on contact.



HOPPER BUG (OPILIONEI)

A flying creature often used as a forward scout for the Arachnid army. Operating both alone and in groups, the Hopper is fast-moving and adaptable. Can impale and lift a trooper away using its stinger, or decapitate him with its razor-sharp wings.



The only good bug is a dead bug.



An infestation that Rentokil would fail to sort out!



Wait until you see the whites of their eye stalks...



AI is being tweaked to inject variety into bug attacks. Blue plasma = death.

shotgun and a heavy machine gun help us eliminate the menace at the cost of a few minor scratches.

SHOT AWAY

Strangelite is keeping schtum about the game's other weapons, although we know there will be nine in total, that most will have alt-fire modes and those cool miniature nukes make an appearance.

Something else scheduled for a shot in the arm is the bug animations. At present they flop down when killed, but Strangelite claims the final game will let you blow off their limbs, something sure to appeal to the inner sadist in you. The blighters will still be able to crawl and attack when heavily maimed though, which could lead to some interesting one-legged chase scenarios (we hope).

Back in our playtest, we return to Outpost 29, only to see a larger wave of Warrior bugs assault the walls, some blundering haplessly into our freshly-laid minefield en route. Once again, our left

mouse button finger gets a thorough workout as we riddle bug after bug with lead in a non-stop carnival of destruction. Then it's time to jump behind a wall-mounted AA cannon, clearing the skies of flying Hopper bugs so that air support can rain fiery death on the alien army.

BEETLE-JUICE

But there are simply too many Arachnids to kill, and as they begin pouring over the walls and brutally gutting my comrades left, right and centre, the order is given to abandon the outpost. Amid the chaos, a huge Tanker bug enters the fray, smashing down a wall and spouting flames in our direction. After killing this monstrous abomination by blasting it repeatedly in the face with our shotgun, we dive into the safety of a waiting dropship and hightail it outta there. Level over. Phew.

It's the merest taste of the action, and it still needs polish, but it's succeeded in whetting our appetite for the final game, which looks set to supply a brand of ceaseless carnage that befits the *Starship Troopers* name. After all, it's based on a movie where humans and bugs are constantly dropping like flies (no pun intended) in spectacularly gory fashion – and that's exactly what Strangelite is delivering. If nothing else, it should help banish the memory of the dreary movie-based RTS unleashed on us a few years back. Failing that, there's always the *Showgirls* and *Basic Instinct* licences up for grabs... **PC2**



Dad! I think there's a spider in the garden...



A bad day at the office.

Why Don't You?...

INJECT SOME PERSONALITY

One thing lacking in the levels we played was a sense of camaraderie within the ranks of the Mobile Infantry. Rather than being brothers in arms, your comrades seem to be mere walking gun platforms that come out with the odd battle cry or scream when they plug a bug or catch a spike through their guts. If Strangelite could inject a little personality into these grunts, it would make their inevitable bloody deaths all the more harrowing, while also spurring you on to help them out.

While we're on the subject of squad-mates, Strangelite is making provision for co-operative multiplayer action in addition to deathmatch and team deathmatch modes. So even if the single-player experience doesn't recreate the brotherhood of war as much as you'd like, you may well find it when blasting bugs alongside your real-life buddies.

REVIEWS

THE DEFINITIVE LOWDOWN ON ALL THE LATEST PC GAMES

MULTI-TASKING



REVIEWS EDITOR Jamie Sefton

▲ Hello. Yes, it's me again. While Woods is hidden away in a locked room in PC ZONE's office (there are rumours of hammocks and expensive champagne lunches), I'm flitting between jobs like a schizophrenic temp. Hancock would be proud.

So, with my reviews hat firmly placed on my head at a jaunty angle, I can now introduce you to this month's line-up of PC goodies. Our major review this issue is cover game *Pariah* (page 66), the first title from UT developer Digital Extremes after it split from Epic Games. We were expecting big, explosive things from this, and as Will Porter discovered, it does possess the required pyrotechnics, but is very much the Catherine Wheel compared to *Half-Life 2*'s bottle rocket. Don't forget to check out the game yourself, with our exclusive demo on the discs.

Another major scoop is *Doom 3*'s first expansion pack, *Resurrection Of Evil*, which sees the return of the mighty double shotgun, the jemmying-in of a physics-based gravity gun, and a hugely-improved set of online multiplayer features – head to page 80 for the scary verdict. Elsewhere, we finally have the review (and demo!) of *LEGO Star Wars*, a game that had the whole team giggling like Japanese schoolgirls on nitrous oxide. *Crash Bandicoot* developer Traveller's Tales should be applauded for resisting the urge to just stamp out another generic licensed cash-in, instead delivering a charming, colourful and lovingly-detailed platformer – even if it will only last you an afternoon (page 72).

Plus, we also cram in medieval RTS *Stronghold 2* (page 76), surprisingly violent vamp 'em up *BloodRayne 2* (page 78), the not-as-bad-as-we-thought-it-was-going-to-be racer *Driv3r* (85) and *Deus Ex*-inspired shooter *Project: Snowblind* (page 82). Right, no time to lose – I'll meet you in the hardware section in about 20 minutes, OK?



Dirty Sanchez 2025: "Left a bit. A bit more. Down a bit. That's fine. FIRE AT WILL. Urrrghh..."

THE ZONE SCORING SYSTEM

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

OUR REVIEWERS

We think our reviewers are the best in the business. Each one is a specialist in numerous genres and will have played every major release, so no game is judged in isolation. We also

make sure the right game gets reviewed by the right person, which means you won't see Steve Hill reviewing an RPG and we won't let Will loose on *FIFA Football 2005*. You can have your say on the games and our reviews as well. If you have a comment to make, please email your views to letters@pczone.co.uk and entitle your email 'Feedback'.

ONLINE REVIEWS AND MULTIPLAYER UPDATES

We review a lot of games before they go on sale and if there are no public servers running before we go to print, we won't second-guess how the game's going to play online. Instead, you'll find dedicated online reviews of all the major releases in our regular Online Zone section.

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

OUR PCS

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



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



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

MEET THE TEAM



DAVE WOODS

Brothers In Arms: Road To Hill 30, *Tiger Woods 2005*

LEGO The Brown Bunny (as long as I get to play the part of Bud Clay)



JAMIE SEFTON

Far Cry, *Doom 3: Resurrection Of Evil*, *BloodRayne 2*

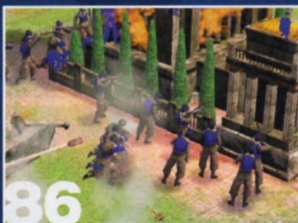
LEGO Aliens. Mind you, I think they've already done Kubrick Alien figures...

QUESTIONS

1. Currently playing?
2. What film would you like to see as a LEGO videogame?



78 BLOODRAYNE 2
Action game for fetishist weirdos



86 EMPIRE EARTH II
Chin-stroking classic updated



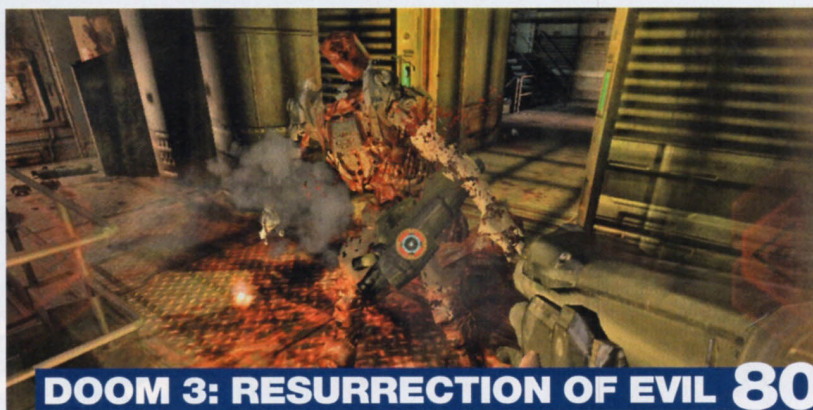
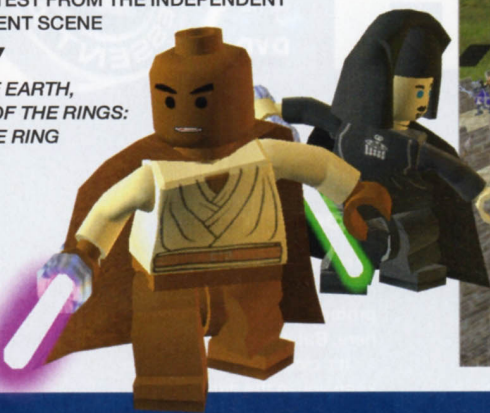
92 INDIE ZONE
Underground developers' wares



94 REPLAY
It's cheap! And cheerful!

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PAUL PRESLEY
LEGO Star Wars, Star Wars Galaxies, City Of Heroes
After seeing *Knights Of The Round Table* in LEGO, I want more LEGO Monty Python



WILL PORTER
TrackMania: Sunrise, Pariah, Project: Snowblind,
LEGO Evil Dead 2. A LEGO Bruce Campbell plus a LEGO chainsaw = heaven



ANTHONY HOLDEN
Doom 3: Resurrection Of Evil, Boiling Point
LEGO Ichi The Killer. Although they might struggle to convey sado-masochism in brick-form



SUZY WALLACE
The Chronicles Of Riddick: Escape From Butcher Bay
LEGO The Lord Of The Rings. LEGO-style Hobbit feet would be cool



STEVE HILL
Driv3r, Football Manager 2005
LEGO Deep Throat



RICHIE SHOEMAKER
The Saga Of Ryzom, Settlers Of Catan Online
Ray Winstone has a certain LEGO-ness about him, so it'd have to be LEGO Nil By Mouth



Satisfying moments like this are what *Pariah* is all about.

PARIAH

ON THE
CD

ON THE
DVD



■ £29.99 | Pub: HIP Interactive | Dev: Digital Extremes

ETA: May 6 | www.pariahgame.com

REQUIRES: P4 1.4 GHz, 256MB and a 64MB 3D card **DESIRES:** P4 2.4 GHz, 512MB and a 128MB 3D card

Last week, Will Porter said that we treat him like a pariah, but he doesn't even know what the word means. We've been shunning him ever since...

I'VE ENJOYED

Pariah, I honestly have. But, I've completed it and I'm unsatisfied. Me and lead female character Karina had some good times and killed many people in exciting ways,

but I've got some severe issues that aren't going away in a hurry. So, if you'll excuse the deviation from the expected 'Good stuff. Bad stuff. Score' game review template, here are my niggles. Or, more accurately, here's my main gigantic niggle.

JACKANORY

Pariah has been selling itself on the basis of its story. Digital Extremes has bigged-up its Hollywood scriptwriters, told us how painstaking the casting of voice-actors was, told us how it's researched story-telling techniques to death... But I'm sorry to say that the story doesn't work.

You play as Dr Jack Mason, crash-landed in hostile territory with the aforementioned Karina, a woman infected with a virus that many men with guns want to get their hands on. Now all the right stuff is here for a damn good yarn, don't get me wrong: a balding and mysterious hero, twists and turns in the plot, occasional events and sightings that won't make sense until several levels later, a world living in the shadow of an often referenced but never fully explained war against an enemy known as the Shroud and an attractive (if contagious) lady for the good doctor to

protect. All the ingredients are here. But it just doesn't work.

It's clear that the idea is to keep you in the dark, but whereas a good story would put you in as much darkness as, say, sitting at the bottom of a deep well, *Pariah* is content to sink you several levels of strata into the Earth's core. You just don't know what's going on: enemy characters appear from

INPERSPECTIVE

TRIBES: VENGEANCE

Reviewed issue 147, Score: 87%

Tribes does right everything that *Pariah* does wrong – storyline and all. If only people would actually buy the damn thing...

HALO: COMBAT EVOLVED

Reviewed issue 135, Score: 84%

Similarly off the Xbox boat, but with better vehicles and more convincing environments. Slightly duller interiors though.

"The guy you play knows everything – he knows more than you ever suspect he does – and as such there's an impenetrable distance between you"

BARREL O' DEATH



PARIAH INNOVATES ON COMBUSTIBLE FURNITURE OF DEATH

Barrels. They're everywhere and always have been. But Digital Extremes has bravely brought barrel technology forward a few notches in pretty clever ways. First, they don't explode with one graze of a bullet, meaning that gunplay can roll them towards danger before you let rip and ignite it. Second, they come in different varieties – including some that leak poison gas and (amazingly enough) some that have no death-dealing qualities whatsoever. It's basic stuff, but it works a treat.

• Remote Detonator
• Fragment Attractor
• Target Leech

Grenade Launcher

The radial menu works well – it's not just an Xbox consideration.

nowhere, the aims and origins of rival factions are never explained, information and back-story that should be underlined in red felt-tip and hammered

home to you are daintily skipped around – pretending to be enticing, coy and mysterious, but ending up being simply bemusing. It's like filling in a dot-to-dot puzzle of a lovely bunny rabbit,

but only being given five dots to play with. It's called exposition, but *Pariah* has none of it.

WHERE'S IT AT?

Now, you may argue that *Half-Life 2* does this too, relying, as it does, on a slow-drip feed of environmental and atmospheric detail to fill you in on what's been going on in your train-bound absence. What Valve succeeds in doing, though, is at least giving you the right information, whereas Digital Extremes is quite happy to feed you on random scraps. What's more, in *Half-Life 2* (or *Deus Ex*, or *Vampire: The*

Masquerade – Bloodlines, or *Far Cry*, or *System Shock 2*), the lead character knows diddly-squat about the world around him – he experiences and learns simultaneously with you, the gamer.

In *Pariah*, this doesn't happen. The guy you play knows everything – he knows more than you ever suspect he does – and as such there's an impenetrable distance between you. Furthermore, this means that you can never really connect with Karina either – although this is made pretty difficult anyway because the script is peppered with lazy ways to disinvolve her from the single-player



Futuristic prisons always seem to lack basic security issues.

action. Christ, she runs away more than the Littlest friggin' Hobo.

Having completed the game, I'm aware that there is some clever stuff at work in the plot, but none of it is of any help when you're playing the game through for the first time. It just feels like Digital Extremes has been playing around with so many 'higher' narrative devices that it's clean forgotten to ground you in the most basic of details. Stuff like 'this man is called x, he works for y, he is nice/nasty (delete as applicable), he is chasing after you for reasons #1 through to reason #4. Although there may well be further reasons. Reason #5 for example'. The plot the developer was aiming for is a very good one, and highly dramatic at its close, but its

attempt to package a novel's worth of cleverness into two-minute post-level cut-scenes renders it almost unfathomable.

BUT WAIT

Pariah is still a good game. If we ignore the narrative messiness, there's a lot to enjoy here. Take the first level, for example, the one that's partially included on this month's shiny cover discs.

For a start, it's beautiful – and 'artistic beautiful' rather than *Far Cry* 'realistic beautiful' to boot. Stylised lighting streams down through leafy boughs, trickling streams trickle, screaming men run at you with flamethrowers before running around on fire and exploding themselves – it's an idyllic scene. What's more, everything feels satisfying, chunky and

interactive. Shoot a pipe and it spurts out steam; knock too many bullets into a decayed concrete look-out point and it tumbles – these are the sorts of things that *Pariah* does really well.

Unsurprisingly (seeing as the game comes from *Unreal Tournament* co-creator Digital Extremes and uses Unreal technology to the hilt), it has the



Maureen from *Driving School* has a cameo...



Pariah is largely made of crumbling masonry and rusty metal.

WE DON'T NEED NO VENTILATION



DUCTS ARE A THING OF THE PAST. AND OF THE FUTURE, APPARENTLY...

I was all ready to praise *Pariah* for being the first ventilation system-free FPS in recorded history, when this little doozy appeared. Cuh. It's the worst example of the art-form I've seen in ages as well. Could fit a Ford Capri in here. And it's orange...



Eat physics evil-doers!

same satisfying feel as the *Unreal Tournament* series.

The game follows Jack and Karina in a tale that involves a lot of crash-landing and flying-vehicle explosions (the main result of which being an intriguing lycra rip just above Karina's right breast). Plus, as I've mentioned, there's also a lot of Karina either running away or being captured. The tale mostly unravels in outdoor settings that veer from the expansive and tranquil to the expansive and heavily industrial. Think of a wider network of *Halo* valleys rather than the free-roaming of *Far Cry* or *Tribes: Vengeance*. The action, meanwhile, is big, loud and some of the most body-hurling intensive I've seen in ages.

The holy trinity of *Pariah*'s greatest assets, y'see, are all intrinsically linked. These run as follows: a) the weapons b) the explosions caused by the weapons and c) the kinetic ways in which villains react to

the explosions caused by the weapons. We will study these in the applicable order.

AMMO LOCKER

The variety of *Pariah*'s arsenal isn't ground-breaking – they all have sci-fi tags but essentially it runs machine gun, shotgun, sniper rifle, plasma gun, grenade launcher, rocket launcher, super-mega-last-level-look-at-it-go!-intenso-cannon. Plus a neat melee weapon in the form of a futuristic doctor's trusty laser bone-saw.

So far, so routine, but each one is a wonderfully meaty creation that out-strips the offerings of so many recent games that have been accused of weapon-floatiness. What's more, a nifty radial menu is present that can not only be summoned for ease of boom-stick access, but also for weapon upgrades. As you explore levels you come across weapon parts that

The woman-drives man-shoots level! Seen it before.

allow you to modify your favoured guns with stuff like shielding, larger clips and armour piercing capabilities. This not only encourages you to explore levels with a bit of vigour, but also means you can tailor your armoury to your own playing style. It's a basic, yet clever system – and some upgrades are just peachy.

The introduction of a *Duke Nukem*-style trigger to the grenade launcher (enabling you to let an explosive emission fly over barren landscape and ignite it with a mere tap of the mouse) means that, with no hint of hyperbole, *Pariah* has the best bomb-chucker in the business. I'd go as far as putting that in caps and placing



some 1s after it as well. And I will: **BEST GRENADE LAUNCHER EVA!** 1!11! A well-timed grenade triggered upon the approach of an enemy on a wasp hover-bike, or indeed on any enemy, is immensely satisfying. Which leads us neatly onto the second and third things that *Pariah* does best.

For years, explosions have been fairly consistent shades of yellow and orange, so it must have been an especially creative day at Digital Extremes gaff when someone suggested that their grenade flash should be green-tinged and shimmer. It works though, and builds on *Pariah*'s stylistic look and feel. But what's a green, shimmering explosion without something for it to throw around? Eccentric physics and ragdolling on your enemies



ONE WAY TRAFFIC?



WHAT'S A SHOOTER WITHOUT A GARAGE FORECOURT OF DEATH?

Pariah's vehicles fall short of the *Halo* model that the game so consciously tries to ape – control is iffy and weight and power is lacking. The levels they're showcased in are pretty short and rudimentary as well. That said, the vehicles do genuinely work well away from the solo campaign in multiplayer. In addition, fighting against enemies riding Wasp hover-bikes when you're hitting the dusty single-player trail is probably the best experience that *Pariah* has on offer...

WITH FRIENDS LIKE THESE...



Multiplayer was clearly a major development consideration.

PARIAH IMPRESSES WITH MULTIPLAYER MODES, BOTS AND A LEVEL CREATOR FROM HEAVEN

Pariah's neat weapon upgrade system shines most brightly in deathmatch, where the wonderful green weapon parts fall out of the bodies of the recently fragged. On some remarkably wide vistas and environments there's plenty of dm, tdm and ctf fun to be had – and although it falls short of *UT2004*, it has much the same feeling and chaotic atmosphere. A full regiment of bots is included too, along with a game mode called Frontline that has the action ebbing and flowing through a variety of bases between two massive opposing strongholds.

It's all good stuff, and is backed up by a hugely impressive level design tool. Pissing all over *TrackMania's* already impressive example, *Pariah* enables you to raise and lower land and place buildings, vehicles and obstacles in your new deathmatch map in a fashion that's fairly reminiscent of *Populous*. Albeit too simple for some, this is a brilliant feature for those (such as myself) whose previous sorties into level design have resulted in little more than a rectangular room and a monster stuck in a wall. You can jump into your creation at any time and run around a bit (or scoot around in a vehicle) and it's all really rather clever. You won't be creating a new *de_dust*, but you will have fun...

means that firefights are always spectacular and often chuckleworthy. The surrounding screenshots of mid-air hoodlums more than testify to that, while the inclusion of shields, helmets and other henchman flying around on-screen also adds to the chaotic mix.

PRETTY PRETTY

AI is pretty competent as well. *Pariah* mixes up chasey-chasey-round-a-big-rock styled gunplay with the occasional surge of apparently overwhelming numbers of enemies (à la *Halo*). Because of this, it understands stuff like

finding cover, picking up discarded weapons and the like. Nothing special, but there's nothing particularly broken either. Cracks do start to show when the script calls for them to do something autonomously though, as is shown by some remarkably stilted battles between NPCs. At one stage (although, for reasons that have become apparent, at the time I didn't quite grasp what was going on), you find yourself meandering through a battle between two opposing factions – a trick that shooters



Ah, the trusty grenade launcher...

have been pulling off successfully ever since *Half-Life*. Here though, it's scripted to hell and back and as such is thoroughly flaccid and lifeless. It's like watching the bit in the *Naked Gun* where Leslie Nielsen is endlessly hiding behind a crate and failing to shoot a man hiding behind another crate that's 3ft away from him. One positive note on your enemies, however, is that every now and then one will say something that raises a smile. My favourite is the genuinely bizarre 'Doh-Re-Mi-Fa-So... Long sucker!' So singing lessons are obviously still popular in the 26th century.

FRESH AIR

There's no doubt that the outdoor sections that make up

a far greater proportion of the game with their swaying trees and tumbling leaves are markedly better than the interiors on offer – although mainly due to repetition. *Pariah* certainly suffers from the 'Halo Effect' (patent pending) that maintains that it's perfectly fine to have four rooms in a row that are fundamentally identical in everything bar the placement of enemy delinquents. Unfortunately, post *Half-Life 2* and post *Far Cry*, you can't get away with this. You can't get away with autosave points that punish you with having to sit through long, arduous gun emplacement stages again and again either – another crime *Pariah* knocks up on its permanent record.

THERE'S STILL HOPE...

It's important that I get across the fact that *Pariah* isn't a bad game, it's just that its potential was vast and its pedigree wonderful. It could have been marvellous, but instead it's simply highly competent. I feel a lot like the way I did when as a child I was told about the existence of Spider Monkeys and I assumed that they were some sort of amazing amalgam of spider and monkey. Clearly they weren't, so I was disappointed – but monkeys they remained, and monkeys are ace no matter which way you look at them. You can never be disappointed for long. With *Pariah*, I was expecting to go on a journey that was deep, visceral and narratively-bold, but I was disappointed. My disappointment was tempered though, by the fact the nuts and bolts of a good shooter remained, and good shooters (like



SECOND OPINION

JAMIE SEFTON

While it doesn't break any boundaries (*Far Cry* was out this time last year and is still technically more advanced), *Pariah* is tops. Ignoring the disappointing storyline – and god knows what happened to Jack's supposed virus-based character development that we were promised – DE has produced an entertaining no-brains shooter with a range of very satisfying weaponry and vehicles. Multiplayer is fun too – although you'd be daft to play *Pariah*, when there's a mass of *UT2004* and *Counter-Strike* players out there. *Pariah* is definitely the last of the last-gen shooters, about to be obliterated from history with the arrival of *Quake IV* and the next *Unreal Tournament*. However, until then, it's still worth considering, and is definitely the best 'new' FPS out there at the moment.

monkeys) will always remain high in my estimation.

Pariah is a good, solid game that could have been so much more – although it was in deep, dark danger of having its score slashed due to its brevity (I clocked in at around the ten-hour mark). Thankfully though, the enjoyable multiplayer and (quite ingenious) level design program keep its head above water.

There were clearly some fundamentally good ideas being thrown about during the development of *Pariah*, but unfortunately a fair number of them have been lost in transit – not least the stuff they were aiming for with the story. The game can and will entertain, but both myself and its creator were clearly expecting better, brighter and more narratively-coherent things. [B+]

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Fun, solid gameplay
- ✓ Excellent weapons and upgrade system
- ✓ Some great environmental touches
- ✓ Ace level designer
- ✗ Storyline is short and broken
- ✗ Some blatant gameplay flaws

81

Good. Not great

“Enemies have funny lines too like ‘Doh-Re-Me-Fa-So... Long Sucker!’ Singing is popular in the 26th century it seems”



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Our strangest drugmares pale in comparison to this



You'll need more than a starter box to make this lot.

LEGO STAR WARS



■ £29.99 | Pub: Eidos | Dev: Traveller's Tales
| ETA: Out Now | www.legostarwarsgame.com

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 32MB DirectX 9.3D card with pixel shader support

DESIRES P4 2GHz, 512MB RAM, 64MB 3D card and a garhepad (plus one for a mate)

Twisted by the shiny yellow side, young Paul Presley has become. We still love him though

YES, greatest concept of all time and that. The saviour of *PC ZONE* – well, a slight over-egging of the pudding perhaps. But we've played the full game now. From start to finish. From *The Phantom Menace* to

Revenge Of The Sith (and beyond). From baby Anakin to You Know Who. Luckily though, we've all calmed down a little since the rather passionate preview back in issue 153 and now feel ready to judge this thing on its merits as an actual game rather than as a fanboy's ultimate wet dream made real. And not the one about Jolene Blalock, Jennifer Garner and the shower block at a women's penitentiary, either.

PLASTIC FANTASTIC

What you get for your money are the first three films (including the imminent *Episode III* finale), rendered entirely in LEGO. All the characters, all the fights, all the battles, all the action. From young Anakin flying podracers in *Episode I*, to the massed Jedi fighting the droid

army in *Episode II*'s arena, to... well, let's not spoil any of the *Episode III* action. Not every scene is there, but enough of the story gets played out to get the basic gist across. All with sufficient doses of LEGO humour to keep things moving. Mostly the game is played out on foot, with occasional flying/riding sequences being used to break the pace up. You take on the personalities of various characters, usually with an AI partner in tow, and with the option of switching between roles at will through a sort of mind-swap affair. This is a mechanic that lends itself to various puzzles and situations

throughout the game, such as doors require you to momentarily inhabit the servos of R2-D2 to activate, or objects need to be manipulated with the Force by Obi-Wan. At all times you're pretty much battling through wave after wave of bad guys in a manner similar to the old *Golden Axe* style, either lightsabering their limbs off, blasting them to bits, or using the Force. All the while you're collecting 'studs' and exploring the meticulously

crafted world for hidden extras.

Other than the brilliant sense of humour on display – the developer really playing with the whole concept of seeing beloved *Star Wars* characters in toy form, even to the extent of making Jar Jar Binks seem acceptable – one of the best aspects of the whole game is this concept of collectability. As you unlock levels, you're rewarded with key characters to use in Free Play mode, the part of the game that lets you

INPERSPECTIVE

STAR WARS GALAXIES

Reviewed Issue 138, 73%

More realistic, online *Star Wars* action, although the term 'action' all rather depends on your taste for trad multiplayer online fare such as mining, crafting and building towns. You do get to shoot Jawas and fly X-Wings though.

HARRY POTTER AND THE PRISONER OF AZKABAN

Reviewed Issue 143, 68%

Less clever, less funny and with no Danish toy bricks in it whatsoever. Harry Potter's most recent offering is a half-decent reminder of what other 'kids' games are like.

"It's the kind of game that slaps a big, dopey grin on your face from the moment you start, then keeps it there for hours after you finish"



What's next? **LEGO EastEnders?** **LEGO The Shining?** We're expecting greatness here.



Darth Maul collects his first coffee of the day.

climactic boss battles such as the one with Darth Maul at the end of *Episode I*.

There's absolutely no doubting that to play, **LEGO Star Wars** is a blast. The kind of game that slaps a big, dopey grin on your face from the moment you start, keeps it there throughout and leaves it there for a good few hours after you finish. Except that the grin actually lasts longer than the game does. Yeah, that's right, you can see what's coming as clearly as if it were wearing a great big sign above its head. A flashing sign with neon lettering, followed by an even bigger sign pointing out the first one's existence just to be sure you don't miss it. I hate having to write it. You're going to hate having to read it. But it's unavoidable, so we'd better all just grit our teeth, get through it as quickly as we can then meet on the other side for a quick

debrief and a pint to console ourselves. Ready? Here goes: as much as we all absolutely love the concept at work here, as well as the execution, the sheer fact that from an actual gaming perspective there's almost little (if any) proper challenge and that you can feasibly complete the whole game – including bonuses – in less than a day



They should just make all games out of **LEGO** from now on.



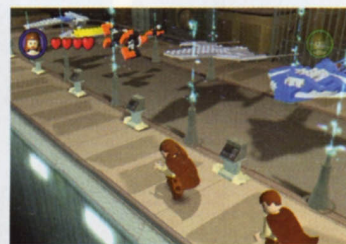
revisit completed levels with different characters to find hidden bonuses.

Each level contains hidden LEGO 'bonuses', mostly building bricks for various *Star Wars* vehicles. As you build your collection you can examine your hard-won gains in the mid-level 'cantina' holding area.

The other key aspect is the drop-in/drop-out nature of the two-player game. Because each level sees you playing with two or more characters, simply plugging in a second joypad (and joypads are really essential for getting the most out of the thing) and hitting P2 Start lets you play in co-op mode. It works a treat too, especially for some of the more

BRICKING IT

IT COULD HAVE BEEN EVEN WONDERFULLER...



Our every waking thought is of **LEGO**.

Lucasfilm is pretty touchy about unauthorised usage of *Star Wars* intellectual property and all, but surely a bonus area where you can buy boxes of bricks and/or blueprints and then build whatever takes your fancy might have been nice? There's very little missing from the **LEGO Star Wars** experience, but some multiplayer deathmatch action to accompany the two-player co-op could have worked too. Something along the lines of old Dreamcast multiplayer combat classic *Power Stone*? We moan about games lacking co-op modes for years, now we get one and start asking for competitive modes. No pleasing some people.



How about **LEGO Last Tango In Paris**? Marlon Brando would have to be made of Duplo, though.

simply has to count against it. Hence the lack of any shiny award logos anywhere on these three pages.

JEDI MIND BRICKS

It's a ride, pure and simple, which is no bad thing, but at 30 of your English pounds, it's a hell of a steep price to pay for such a limited amount of fun – however joyous that fun may be while it lasts.

However, we're not going to leave it there. This is a message direct to Traveller's Tales, to Eidos (or whoever owns them by the time you read this), to

LEGO, to everyone involved with the game – **YOU HAVE TO MAKE THE NEXT THREE CHAPTERS.** Have to, have to, have to.

LEGO Star Wars is simply the best damned gaming concept we've played in this godforsaken industry since time began. But – and it's a big but, a huge but, the kind of a but that takes up two seats on the Tube and still presses uncomfortably against your thigh whenever the carriage jolts – please, please, please don't feel as though you need to dumb things down for kids.

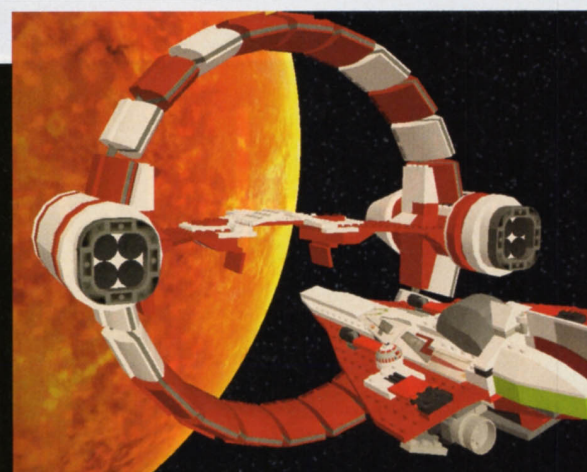
BUT WAIT, THERE'S MORE

GOOD THINGS COME TO THOSE WHO WAIT. AND THOSE WHO RABIDLY COLLECT LEGO BRICKS...

We're not ones for ruining things, not often anyway, so we're not going to let on what the secret bonus levels are should you complete the game and collect enough LEGO goodies. What we can tell you though, is that it's bloody brilliant. It made us scream and shout. It reminded us more than ever of why we love *Star Wars* and why we love LEGO. And, in a funny way, it also made us feel bad. Evil, even.



They look scary don't they? A bit.



Remember to get an adult to help you with the trickier models.



Noel Edmonds fights for House Party's return.



Don't fall in the Saarlac pit, **LEGO Miner Willy!**

Kids are sophisticated these days, more than most of us. Kids are smart. Kids want to feel like grown-ups. Kids know where it's at, while most of us are still left wondering what exactly 'it' is and why we can't get a more comfortable version with lower-back support.

LEGO OF YOUR FEELINGS

So, just to recap what we're saying. Make the damn sequel. *Episodes IV, V and VI* (you know you already are),

but expand those horizons. Don't change the style – we may already have mentioned once or twice that the style's perfect. Just make more of it. Make it harder, more of a challenge, more of a game. Add some multiplayer modes beyond two-player co-op (see 'Bricking It', p73), include more of each film in

there, really play with the whole LEGO/ building bricks/ Force thing (no

pun intended). We're not exaggerating when we say that you came very close to making one of the best games of all time here, Traveller's Tales. Very, very close. And you've still got one life left. For god's sake, don't throw it away. [E]

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Just plain fun – the way games are supposed to be
- ✓ Faithful to the *Star Wars* experience
- ✓ Free Play Mode
- ✓ Great two-player co-op mode
- ✗ You'll whizz through it in no time
- ✗ You need two gamepads

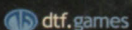
79

Great fun, but waaay too easy

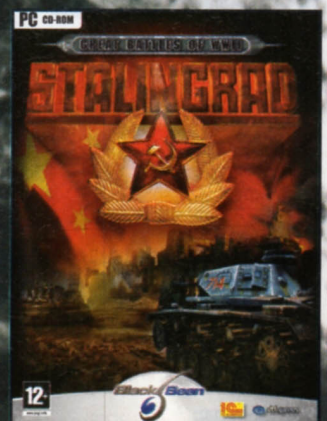
The fate of the world was played out here.

Re-live the battle that changed the destiny of the world

STALINGRAD



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Running up spiral staircases and swinging from chandeliers: crucial aspects of castle life.



Difficult to believe, but the blues quickly stormed the castle.



Zoom in and buildings cut away to let you see inside.



STRONGHOLD 2

■ £34.99 | Pub: 2K Games | Dev: Firefly | ETA: April 22 | www.stronghold2.com

REQUIRES P4 1.4GHz, 256MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card **DESIRES** P4 1.8GHz, 512MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

Richie Shoemaker lords it up like a good 'un...

IT APPEARS I've become something of an authority on poop 'em ups – after reviewing *Zoo Tycoon 2* a couple of issues ago (a game where shovelling animal dung was a rare treat), I've been assigned to critique this medieval affair, where at least the economic necessity of dealing in digestive by-product is tempered by a more distant view of the sanitation process.

Nevertheless, in order to facilitate a strong feudal economy and therefore build and maintain the most opulent keep, slop plop your citizens must, as well as chop wood,

pick apples, slaughter pigs and brew ale – all so that your high-and-mighty lord can live it up on their shit-caked shoulders.

Of course, there's much more to this than pillaging the land of resources, but it must be said that unlike the great morass of real-time strategy games, one of *Stronghold's* great strengths is the way in which your management of resources impacts into every facet of medieval life. For example apples, veg, meat, eels, berries and beer will provide obvious sustenance, but will also cheer the unwashed (so long as you clear up afterwards). They also enable you to – with the correct facilities in place – to throw lavish feasts for local dignitaries, from which honour points can be cashed in for specialist units and buildings. In short, the pursuit of honour points means you must focus attentions on your leader as much as your subjects.

IRON FIST, VELVET GLOVE

Building your economy would be for naught if you weren't required to defend and expand your borders, and *Stronghold 2* is just

as accomplished here. Again, building keeps, towers and walls is central, as is maintaining a full complement of soldiery and siege engines. And because it's now in 3D, you even get to see soldiers charging up staircases. As elsewhere in the game, the sheer detail soon presents itself as an ingenious addition.

Stronghold 2 is much more than an excuse to shoehorn the exact same game as before into a 3D engine. There's a lot of new stuff here, and Firefly has gone to impressive lengths to ensure

the detail remains high, the game is as easy to navigate and the gameplay is expanded into different areas. There's still no Skirmish option, but the campaigns (one each for those bent on war or peace) have that rare quality of introducing new features and neat little touches at every turn, and the new Kingmaker option goes some way to making amends.

There are a handful of games that provide greater economic depth, or are more immediate and spectacular on the field of

battle, but few marry these two traditional aspects of real-time strategy so seamlessly and with so much charm. As much as *Stronghold 2* is a very modern game, it also has an indefinable quality that will remind gamers of the classic Bullfrog games; full of humour, depth, subtle detail and replayability, with enough human misery thrown in to remind you why you started playing games in the first place. **PCZ**



INPERSPECTIVE

KNIGHTS OF HONOR

Reviewed Issue 148, Score 66%

Focusing more on conquering rather than castle-building, *Knights Of Honor* was supposed to be a kind of 2D *Total War*, but ended up way short of the mark.

SIM CITY 4

Reviewed Issue 125, Score 80%

The only thing that divides *SimCity 4* from *Stronghold 2* is about 1,000 years. Mind you, though the toilets are cleaner, we'd much rather be rolling in filth and getting medieval.



Stone is useful, otherwise you'd be making castles out of eels.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ A new engine that isn't just for show
- ✓ Supremely layered resource management
- ✓ Crammed with charm and detail
- ✗ Not as immediate as you might like
- ✗ Managing battles and your economy is a handful

85

The king of the castle

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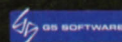
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EXTRA CONTENTS

- ▶ 80 page colour manual.
- ▶ Encyclopaedia with all the combat vehicles contained in the game.
- ▶ Limited Edition box.

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www.blackbeangames.com





Now that's just messy. Pure and simple.



'Bloodthirsty' just doesn't describe it.



A crimson shower for Rayne.

BLOODRAYNE 2

£29.99 | Pub: VU Games | Dev: Terminal Reality | ETA: May 27

www.bloodrayne2.com

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 3D card **DESIRES** P4 2GHz, 512MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

Is it a case of once bitten, twice shy? Not for our intrepid and really rather tasty correspondent **Jamie Sefton**...



Aura Vision in action.



"Comin' to get ya!"

I'M A SCANTILY-CLAD,

ample-breasted vampiress (you'll have to suspend your disbelief for a second or two). With my two razor-sharp swords, I've just sliced and diced a burly henchman while simultaneously pushing him through a window. Look and you can see a camera shot from below, as his head detaches from his body and splinters of glass and jets of crimson arc through the air in balletic slow motion.

As you might have surmised, *BloodRayne 2* is terrifically gory. The sequel to 2003's third-person action-adventure starring a sexy garlic-hating heroine revels in the on-screen ultra-violence that had me guffawing merrily throughout. If you're as sick as me (*Not possible - Ed*), you're going to love the ability to

finish off enemy vampires and foes in a variety of ways. *BR2* conjures up more than 60 combos for hacking off limbs, and you can cleave bodies clean in half and lop off heads while quipping, "I'd put that in ice" above the screams.

SEEING RED

Whereas the last game had the Dhampir (half-human, half-vampire) Rayne fighting German jackbooted bloodsuckers in 1935, *BloodRayne 2* jumps forward to our time, when descendants of her father Kagan (described as a "Nazi asshole") are plotting to enslave humankind, reducing them to nothing but engorged blood banks. Granted, it's the kind of *Blade/Buffy* goth claptrap that Americans suck up like strawberry-flavoured plasma, but the cut-scenes are well done and the plot serves the gameplay, introducing new powers and weaponry as you progress.

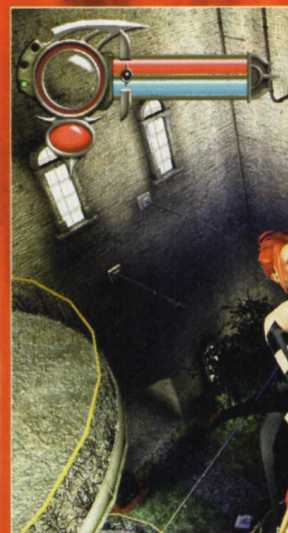
Rayne has to feed on victims to top-up her bloody health meter, which as before, involves a rather saucy embrace that's blatantly Sapphic when performed with another female. Levels mainly involve beating the red cells out of various gormless AI goons by using your twin

swords, kicks, a handy harpoon for dragging people off ledges or into hazards such as rotating fan blades, and the new upgradeable Carpathian Dragon dual-guns that are reloaded with the liquid red stuff.

Cool new acrobatic moves have Rayne swinging on poles and sliding down rails, which you can also combine with your weapons for Robert Rodriguez/Wachowski Brothers-style action sequences. Most satisfying, however, are the 'carnage kills' which involve extreme punishment for victims, including the body slice-and-smash through the window described at the start - and each gives a larger boost to Rayne's infamous Bloodlust meter. If you're unfamiliar with the first game, this gives you access to special vampire powers such as Aura Vision (sees hidden enemies/puzzles), Dilated Perception (bullet-time) and Blood Rage (faster, more lethal attacks). These come in handy for taking on the tougher boss battles.

PAIN IN THE NECK?

BloodRayne 2 has much-improved visuals from the first game, with the Infernal engine delivering ragdoll physics, destructible scenery, lush décor and smooth mo-cap animation in settings varying from medieval castles to grim meatpacking factories. Even the camera is pretty good. The main problems are that fights can get quite repetitive, level design is often unimaginative, AI is pigshit-thick and there simply aren't enough checkpoints and save points to avoid frustration. Yet despite



PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Extremely gory
- ✓ Great slice-and-dice combos
- ✓ Lesbianic neck-biting
- ✗ Repetitive
- ✗ Stupid AI
- ✗ Infrequent save points

77

Bloody good

IN PERSPECTIVE

MAX PAYNE 2

Reviewed Issue 136, 93%

Does the whole bullet-time, third-person thing better, with a more mature storyline and effortless cool.

LEGACY OF KAIN: DEFIANCE

Reviewed Issue 139, 79%

More atmosphere and less B-movie, Crystal Dynamics' action epic has more gameplay variety but less violence. Boo.

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Who you gonna call?

Unlike (most of) *Half-Life 2*, corpses are fair game for grabbing.

Slow motion effects: the friend of the screenshot-taker.

DOOM 3: RESURRECTION OF EVIL

■ £29.99 | Pub: Activision | Dev: Nerve Software/id Software | ETA: Out Now | www.doom3.com

REQUIRES P4 1.5GHz, 384MB RAM and a 64MB DirectX 9.0c-compatible 3D card DESIRES P4 2.4GHz, a 256MB 3D card and a broadband Internet connection

FULL VERSION OF
DOOM 3 REQUIRED

Anthony Holden went through hell to bring you this review. And it all looked strangely familiar...

I'M SORRY, but enough is enough. We've cut the *Doom* series A LOT of slack over the years, partly because it pretty much invented the world as we know it, and partly because it's always had that gorgeous

technology. But come on. How many times can we be expected to make the SAME journey through the SAME corridors, being attacked by the SAME sodding monsters jumping out of the SAME hidden cupboards and shooting them with the SAME weapons on the way to the SAME inevitable, infernal rendezvous in hell? It's fast

becoming the *Police Academy* of first-person shooters (or should that be *Friday The 13th*?). Quite frankly, we're bored.

To be fair, *Resurrection Of Evil* is not a bad expansion pack. It fulfils its assigned role ably, extending the experience of the original game and adding a few new weapons, monsters and (much-needed) multiplayer options. Being from the id stable, it's also stunningly realised, with some of the most detailed, intense and downright creepy visuals you'll find in a videogame (or elsewhere). And if anything, developer Nerve has slightly outdone id in the design stakes.

The problem is, it doesn't so much extend the experience of *Doom 3* as replicate it in slightly abridged form, recreating the familiar descent into hell with

only a moderate reshuffle of elements. You've got the ill-lit corridors, the locked doors, the armour shards under the stairs, the enemies that spawn right on cue every time you hit a power switch, the frantic dashes across the Martian surface, the cute canine security droids – even the setting is indistinguishable, simply moving the action to the abandoned Site 1 of the UAC research base.

A LITTLE HELP FROM GORDON

The big news is the double-barrelled shotgun's back (whoop-de-do), and of course there's Gordon Freeman's gravity gun, presumably dropped off by the G-Man on one of his more far-flung time jumps. Here labelled the

INPERSPECTIVE

HALF-LIFE 2

Reviewed Issue 148, Score 97%

The best PC game ever made – if you haven't played it yet you should be thrashed to within an inch of your life.

MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE

Reviewed Issue 136, Score 93%

The original and best for slow-mo action.



Don't fall apart on me now...



The alien artifact is the key to defeating the forces of Hell.



The double shotty makes mincemeat of his sort.

Grabber, *Doom*'s version of the gravity gun works almost exactly as *Half-Life 2*'s, though it operates much more as simply a weapon than the all-purpose tool of Valve's effort. By far its best feature is that it allows you to snatch fire- and plasma-balls out of the air and then launch them back at the demons that spawned them, which proves a particularly enjoyable way of dispatching hell's assorted minions. It's not as satisfying as, say, chopping zombies in half with sawblades, but it is kinda nice to turn the tables on the imps and cacodemons after all these years.

Unfortunately, the physics tricks end there. There are two, maybe three occasions where you can stack boxes to reach

an inaccessible area, but that's not what *Resurrection Of Evil* is about, and if you want clever physics puzzles Gordon's still your man.

What's more, a lot more stuff is nailed down than you'd hope (more so than in *Half-Life 2*), and what items are throwable – barrels, rocks and so on – behave more like polystyrene

slow motion or 'Hell-time' mode, another second-hand device that offers little real novelty. There's definitely fun to be had running circles around a roomful of treacle-jointed demons (especially once you've souped things up with berserk powers), but it's really just a way of making the trickier sections a bit more manageable, and the

"There's no real variety to be had here, just a relentless parade of shocks and monsters, punctuated by the occasional boss"

props from *Blake's 7* than the items they appear to be. Blame the Martian gravity if you want, but it still doesn't feel right.

The other new feature is the

puzzle applications are woeful.

Beyond these fairly negligible additions, *Resurrection Of Evil* shares all the advantages and shortcomings of the original

FILLING THE GAPS

NEW MULTIPLAYER CONTENT PUTS *DOOM 3* BACK ON THE MAP

To state the astonishingly obvious for a moment, *Doom 3* did not live up to id's legacy when it came to online play. With a paltry four-player limit and a scant few game modes, it was for the most part laughed off the Internet.

Resurrection Of Evil, in perhaps its best move, goes some way to redressing this, adding a robust Capture The Flag mode and increasing the player cap to eight. The Capture The Flag maps were designed by Threewave Software, a pioneer of *Quake* CTF and recognised veteran of the form. As such, it's a highly competent affair, if a little predictable – though admittedly there's only so much you can do with CTF. What's more, doubling the player cap has brought new life to the other modes, especially Team Deathmatch, which was a preposterous farce at 2v2. Four moody new DM maps have also been thrown in to help things along.

With this new content, *Doom 3* is now a respectable online prospect, the only problem being that there are still no decent servers and you're more likely than most games to suffer lag. Still, it's a step in the right direction.



CTF is CTF is CTF. But it does look nice.

game. On the one hand, it's extremely tense and scary, and in short bursts there's nothing else like it for adrenalin-fuelled violence. On the other hand, it follows an extremely dated and overused formula that remains compelling mainly by virtue of amazing visuals and corny shock tactics.

SEEN IT BEFORE

Indeed, the *Doom* style of gameplay is not only over-familiar, it's monotonous by its very nature. There's no real variety to be had here, just a relentless parade of shocks and monsters, punctuated by the occasional boss and forgettable puzzle. Like few other games, *Doom* has only one tone – emotionally, psychologically

here to entertain the young and forgetful, and the new weapons, if not a revelation, do improve the game. The grabber in particular adds an enjoyable new way of combating foes, while the double shotty brings back the joy of close-quarters decimation. This, along with the addition of eight-player CTF (see 'Filling The Gaps', above) will be enough for many. But with the whole experience becoming more and more tired with every telling, and a hefty price tag attached at that, we can only preach caution. **PCZ**

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Throwing fireballs at imps with the grabber
- ✓ Looks just as stunning as ever
- ✓ Eight-player CTF
- ✗ Same as the original
- ✗ Monotonous
- ✗ Expensive

79

Flogging an (un)dead horse



Bullet-time: we moan, but we still enjoy it.

PROJECT: SNOWBLIND

■ £29.99 | Pub: Eidos | Dev: Crystal Dynamics | ETA: Out Now | www.projectsnowblind.com

REQUIRES P4 1.5MHz, 256MB and a 64MB 3D card DESIRES P4 2.4MHz, 512MB and a 128MB 3D card

Will Porter becomes a nano-technological marvel in the streets of Hong Kong. Again. But he doesn't have to think quite so hard this time...

YOU KNOW that bit in the out-takes of *Toy Story 2* when Mrs Potato Head is continually stuffing more and more stuff into Mr Potato Head until his eyes are forced out of his head by Play-Doh? Well *Project: Snowblind* is Mrs Potato Head.

"I'm packing your extra pair of shoes and your bullet-time just in case. And your rocket-launcher. And your Mine Gun.

INPERSPECTIVE

PSI-OPS: THE MINDGATE CONSPIRACY

Reviewed Issue 152, Score 77%
Another game with the Mrs Potato Head effect. *Psi-Ops* is just as good, but with a heavier console-orientation.

REPUBLIC COMMANDO

Reviewed Issue 152, Score 80%
Just as dumb and a bit more fun. *Republic Commando* gets several ounces more adrenalin pumping than *Snowblind*. And it's *Star Wars*.

And invisibility, you like invisibility don't you?" Yes dear. "And your shotgun, here's your shotgun. And you might have to hack into systems, so here's a system hacking gun. Oh, and you did get invulnerability installed didn't you?" I did it yesterday. "Good, well here's your physics kicker gun thing. And here's a sniper rifle, because sometimes sniping is a necessity. And here's the Spider Chow." What's the Spider Chow for? "For the Spider droids of course! And here's an augmentation that lets you see better. And here's a riot wall. And here are frag grenades, EMP grenades, gas grenades and some other grenades. And your angry flashing blue eyes just in case. And a Herf EMP Gun..."

Argh! Shut up! I'm just trying to shoot people. Stop giving me guns! Stop giving me new

abilities! You gave me something new five minutes ago, I've barely worked out how to use it, I keep on getting my 'augmentation' key mixed up with my 'throw grenade' key and I'm confused. So confused. Just let me kill things in the normal way, just for five minutes. Please. You can give me a new weapon then.

"Ah. But which way do you want to complete this level? You can go several different ways through the same linear path. You could steal this car

anyway." I'll have the car then. "Fancy a new gun while you're doing it?" Noooo!

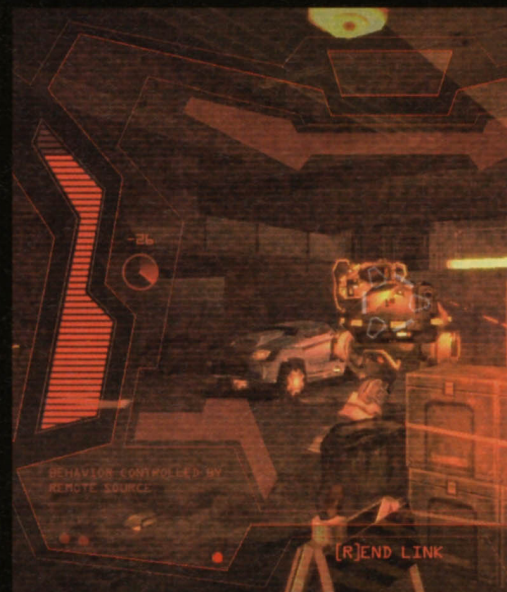
ENOUGH

Project: Snowblind was conceived before the *Deus Ex* franchise was pissed against the wall behind Eidos HQ, and its hallmarks remain. The many weapons, the many augmentations, the faux non-linear nature of its levels – but here it's all distilled into ten hours of blasting. Whereas *Deus Ex* overwhelmed you

**"Stop giving me new guns!
Stop giving me new abilities!
Just leave me alone!"**

with the big shiny gun if you want." Does it make any real difference? "No, because as soon as you're killed once you'll just choose the fastest route

pleasantly with its slow-burning depth and complexity, here in compacted visceral form it's gained the remarkable ability of stressing you out. It gives you



Why do giant killing machines always see in red?



You can sneak or nick a rocket-firing car. Tough choice.

so much, so quickly that when you should be hiding behind barrels and peppering cyber-punks with bullets, you instead seem to be perpetually sifting through weapons, abilities and taking different paths through levels, always slightly worried that you're not doing what the game really wants from you.

FRESH, EXCITING

It's a jack-of-all-trades and a master of none, but it remains a good game. And, in fairness, this Mrs Potato Head effect does peter out about halfway through. Specifically marked for praise is some fresh and original level design – whoever came up with the idea of placing a military jail in an opera house and letting you run riot with escapees should be given a medal. Meanwhile, the ever-changing nature of gunplay and mission objectives mean that

YOU MUST LEARN CONTROL

BEND THE MINDS OF MACHINERY TO YOUR WILL...

One part of your arsenal is known as an ice pick, designed to get your ghost into the machines of the enemy from your hiding place in the shadows. Security cameras, computer consoles and even hulking security bots are fair game. Whereas the game's physics-based kicker gun is pretty much useless, this little beauty provides no end of machine mischief.



Left a bit. Right a bit. Slightly left. Perfect...

AI comrades impress.



"I hear mischief and villainy!"



<Insert masturbation gag here>.

you'll never get bored – even if you will occasionally wish you could just be left alone.

EX MACHINA

The fact that for all intents and purposes it's set in the *Deus Ex* universe is also a massive boost. You play as Nathan Frost, a reborn *Robocop*-style super soldier in the same vein as JC Denton – even if your vocab consists of a lot more grunting bon-mots on military brotherhood and the continual need to avoid 'leaving a man behind'. If you're a *Deus Ex* fan or you finished *Invisible War*, you should certainly play a few levels of *Snowblind* – even the way you open cupboards screams: "*Deus Ex*!" It's definitely part of the same canon – even if it is from an entirely different league.

As a basic shooter though, it's spearmint chewing gum for

the eyes and brain – and nice apple-flavoured Bubblicious for the ears, since the sound is noticeably classy. It has none of the moments of destructive joy that *Republic Commando* provides, but certainly fills ten hours inoffensively with some neat touches and clever design when you're not juggling your weapons and abilities in the corner. The Mrs Potato Head effect (a term I'm in the process of copyrighting) will bring out your angry eyes, this much is true, but the game remains worthy of attention. **PC**

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Undeniably enjoyable
- ✓ *Deus Ex*, despite what's on the tin
- ✓ Fresh, imaginative level design
- ✗ Can feel too much like work
- ✗ Stop giving me new weapons!

78

Not a must-buy,
but fun all the same



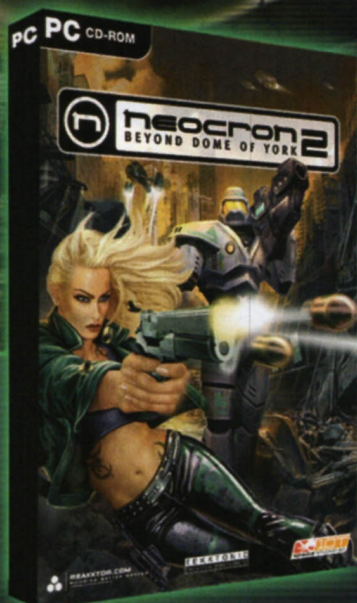
ONLINE-GAME MMORPG MEETS FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER



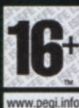
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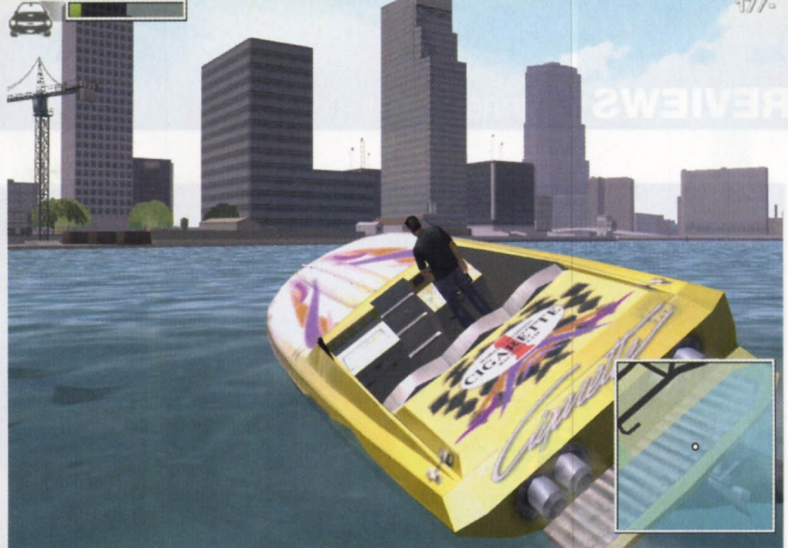
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It's a little known fact that Tanner is a previous Bullseye winner.



Tanner murders a policeman, despite being a cop himself.

DRIV3R

£19.99 | Pub: Atari | Dev: Reflections | ETA: Out Now | www.driv3r.com

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

St3v3 Hill surveys the wreckage

AH, the *Driv3r* saga. Forget last year's botched console release and the ensuing furore, the real saga occurred here at *PC ZONE*. Naturally, early review copies were notable by their absence, in a textbook application of the traditional damage limitation exercise favoured by publishers hawking rosey products. With the game safely on the shelves, two copies were dispatched to the *ZONE* office, and your reviewer

summoned to collect them. Dave Woods had considered selling one for a sandwich, but deemed it only fair that I take that option in order to cover my travel expenses (£4.70).

With the games handed over, alcoholic refreshment was drunk, resulting in a huge row between Sefton and Woods over how long the review should be. Woods argued that its failings should be exposed over two pages, while Sefton maintained it was old news and should be a solitary page. Unfortunately Sefton is in charge now, and the package was signed off by way of commission.

One tequila frenzy later, and that package remained on the back seat of a black cab, an unwitting gift for the kids of the thieving driver (or passenger).

Some days later, a third copy arrived at my house, and promptly failed to run on my PC. This left me trying to assemble a brand new Alienware rig (that didn't work), and finally I had to make a last-minute dash to the local computer store, which I was pleased to discover had closed down.

KNACK3R3D

All of which brings me back to the *ZONE* office a week later, playing a PC conversion of a nine-month-old console game. Apart from the addition of 'One Exclusive Mission!', very little has changed in the interim, the game boasting high production values and celebrity voice-overs, but hampered by technical inadequacies and design flaws.



Night or day, the map shows where you should be heading.

The major beef was that the on-foot sections were unplayable; here the mouse control improves this markedly, although rosey AI still ensures that it's little more than a glorified shooting gallery. Elsewhere, the gaps between save points are still ludicrous, forcing you to replay great swathes of the game, much of which is simply travel. Cock up a shooting section and you have to spend five minutes driving back to the location. The simple addition of a quick-save function could have gone some way towards rectifying this, but it seems that Reflections has spent nine months doing nothing, and the game has arrived stillborn.

Some parts are playable, the driving sections retain the trademark swagger, but taken as

a whole it's not really the full ticket, as suggested by the budget price. While nowhere near as bad as the baying nerd community would have you believe, it would appear to be the 3rd of the 3 for the 3s.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Decent music
- ✓ Reasonable voice-acting
- ✓ Occasionally tense
- ✗ Too difficult
- ✗ Sparse save points
- ✗ Technical issues

59

Good. Bad. Both

INPERSPECTIVE

GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY

Reviewed Issue 131, 95%
This is how it should be done.

DRIVER

Reviewed Issue 82, 83%
The original and best.



Zooming in this close is pointless, unless you want a close-up of the nasty graphics.

EMPIRE EARTH II

■ £34.99 | Pub: VU Games | Dev: Mad Doc Software | ETA: April 29
www.empireearth2.com

REQUIRES P4 1.5GHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card **DESIRES** P4 2.4GHz, 512MB RAM, 128MB 3D card and a broadband Internet connection

A new age for strategy gaming, or another case of history repeating? Both, according to Richie Shoemaker

WHILE THE strategy genre is well represented by a number of distinctive games, a new release will typically either be a real-time click-fest – frenetic, fantastical and usually not very strategic – or a ponderous, more historically accurate and impenetrable turn-based affair. Of course, there are a healthy number of games that

turtively prod these boundaries, and many more that happily exist within them, but only a handful have ever transcended them. *Empire Earth II*, with its fast-paced combat set across the breadth of human history – the likes of which even the mighty *Civilization* would be hard pushed to recall – clearly has aspirations to be one of the elite.

Genetically, *Empire Earth II* comes from good stock: the original game was of course designed by Rick Goodman, lead designer on *Age Of Empires*. We're happy to report that the sequel (handled by the chaps responsible for *The Art Of Conquest* expansion) continues in much the same vein, offering the kind of gameplay you might expect of a game so accurately summarised by us as 'Age Of Empires with loads of bloody big knobs on'. As such, there is much to do above lassoing a bunch of tanks

and sending them against the enemy. Cities need building, research must be undertaken, resources harvested and allies fostered – all this while keeping an eye on the calendar.

FITTED AS STANDARD

Empire Earth II differs from the typical historical RTS in a number of ways. For one, rather than dumping units into a large empty space and then asking you to fill it with buildings, each map is subdivided into territories. Erect a City Centre somewhere within its boundaries and the province becomes yours. Land ownership, of course, has obvious benefits, the main one being an increase in the number of units you can build and a staging post from which to eventually conquer the map. Though the borders are rigid (whereas in *Rise Of Nations* they were cleverly ebbed with the tide of war), the maps are

vast enough to ensure a greater degree of dynamism in the way each level plays out.

This is aided by the game's approach to diplomacy, as rather than opt for complete subjugation, it pays to try and bend other tribes and nations to your will by offering them tribute or territory. Having an ally on side constitutes more than a backdoor route to ambushing the enemy, for here you can create war plans for your ally to follow simply by marking out waypoints for their armies to

follow. Whether they carry them out is another matter, but the fact that you can concoct elaborate plans of attack for AI or human allies to consider is a feature sure to be a standard fixture in future strategy efforts.

SHOCK AND AWE

Whilst most games of this ilk make a point of hurrying you through various stages of human development so you can build



INPERSPECTIVE

RISE OF NATIONS

Reviewed Issue 129, Score 90%

Although it sticks to its 2D engine and traditional interface, *Rise Of Nations* is the better game, simply because it feels more natural and features a superb Conquest mode.

EMPIRES: DAWN OF THE MODERN WORLD

Reviewed Issue 135, Score 83%

From the creator of *Empire Earth* came this streamlined follow-up. Sadly, apart from the updated graphics, it also featured many of the same problems.



This must be the age of Aquarius.



Create war plans for your allies – they won't necessarily follow them, though...

the biggest, baddest weapons more quickly and defeat your foes through overwhelming technological superiority, here it pays to pause a moment before advancing towards Armageddon. See, a dozen technologies are available to research during each of the 14 epochs (ranging from pre-Classical to post-nuclear holocaust eras), but only six are required to advance to a new stage. The catch is, if you do advance, some technologies are no longer available to research. Simple, but clever.

As well as planning research, the game forces you to plan your attacks with greater care than might be required in other games. By erecting Outposts,

for example, your border guards can tell you if a storm is brewing and thereby warn you that should you be planning an attack, it might be prudent to sit

"Empire Earth II is basically Age Of Empires but with bloody big knobs on"

in your fortress and put some extra logs on the fire.

BEAUTY OR BEAST?

Packed with superb and unique features, *Empire Earth II* comes with two caveats. The first is the graphics engine, which, although it features plenty of detail and can accommodate impressive numbers of units without slowing down, simply doesn't look

anywhere as spectacular as a 2005 game should. Explosions have a transparency to them that makes them look like the cheap overlaid effects they are. Very

few of the units move with any kind of realism, either – foot soldiers don't so much walk as skate, while vehicles often get stuck in bunches and formations sometimes lack cohesion. None of this has any impact on the gameplay, but next to today's lavish strategy titles, *EEII* stands out for its average appearance.

The other problem is the single-player game, which lacks

TAB IS YOUR FRIEND

ASTOUNDING NEW HOT KEY FOR EEII!

Marginally useful when combined with a word processor, here the Tab key means you can switch between an overview map and the traditional view of the immediate area. It's here that *EEII*'s most useful features can be found. One part is the Citizen Manager, a sub-screen that shows you the resources under your control and how many of your citizens are harvesting them. Better than that, rather than having to whizz across the 3D map, from this one screen you can allocate and reassign citizens to break rocks, chop trees or tend crops. It is, in four words, a work of genius.



Character Manager – every RTS should have one...



They don't look all that interested do they?

any kind of dynamic missions – a paltry three short campaigns focusing on ancient Korea, 18th century USA and 19th century Germany. *Rise Of Nations* was quick to borrow *Total War*'s Risk-style turn-based campaign and it's a feature we've come to expect in these epic strategy games. But the superb skirmish

campaign structure, so too will they steal *Empire Earth II*'s diplomacy options and character manager. *Empire Earth II* may not be the best historical strategy game on the market, but it is bloody good all the same, and points to a bright future for the RTS. **EW**

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ A solid marriage of pace and depth
- ✓ Superb new features and intuitive interface
- ✓ Excellent skirmish functions
- ✗ Disappointing graphics
- ✗ Linear campaigns

80

A huge improvement on an excellent game

SILENT HUNTER III

■ £29.99 | Pub: Ubisoft | Dev: Ubisoft | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES P4 1.4GHz, 512MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card DESIRES P4 2.5GHz, 1GB RAM and a 128MB 3D card

Paul Presley could do with losing a bit of ballast



"Anyone know the theme from M*A*S*H?"



Torpedo deathmatch, anyone?

IT TOOK the better part of a day for me to fire my first honest-to-God, non-training mode torpedo, and it came as welcome relief. Except for the bit when it just bounced harmlessly off the target's bow – just another dud in a war full of the buggers. I nearly didn't go back to *Silent Hunter III* after that, although it would have been my

loss rather than the game's fault, since *SHIII* is a much-needed shot of claustrophobic goodness in a flagging genre.

The amount of care and detail lavished on this (from the cheering crowds as you leave dock to the sausages and bananas hanging from the sub's interior ceiling beams) is phenomenal – it could so easily



"OK, who's farted?"

have been a half-hearted rushed job for a limited audience. There's a touch of redundancy about the 3D interiors – full FPS-style 3D would have been welcome, rather than the *Myst*-style click-and-move on offer – especially since hotkeys take you instantly to any station you need. Otherwise though, it's a beautifully tense and atmospheric trip into the world of WWII U-boats. Even multiplayer works a treat, with



The bit where you're shouting "Dive! Dive!" into a metal tube.

multiple subs acting as a wolfpack, or just disregarding the war and torpedoing the hell out of each other for kicks.

The AI puts up a good fight at the higher realism settings, and should you wish to throw caution to the wind and try manual torpedo solutions, you'll

either be in maths heaven, or find your brain oozing from your ears (or both). Don't worry – it's a lot more fun than it sounds.

PCZONE VERDICT 83
Makes a big splash

BLITZKRIEG: MISSION BARBAROSSA

■ £19.99 | Pub: CDV | Dev: Active Gaming | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PIII 700MHz, 128MB RAM and a 16MB 3D card DESIRES PIII 1.2GHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

Richie Shoemaker looks out onto another burning horizon...

HAVE YOU had enough of World War II yet? More to the point, have you had your fill of *Blitzkrieg*? After no less than eight expansion packs, you might reasonably assume so, but the thunder just keeps on rolling and shows no sign of stopping. Not only is there a *Blitzkrieg II* due this year, but a sequel to this very add-on is also in full production. And there you were thinking *Blitzkrieg* was just a better-looking rip-off of *Sudden Strike*.

Focusing entirely on Hitler's romp across the Russian steppes prior to getting bogged down in Stalingrad in 1943, *Mission Barbarossa* is a no-frills package offering a smattering of new units and single-player levels that stand out little from those that typified the original

game. Where it does make its mark is in the changes to the gameplay, with wide-open levels, more realistic viewing distances, less effective artillery and emphasis on using infantry other than as cannon fodder. The net result is that *Barbarossa* offers the kind of challenge WWII buffs have been pining for since *Sudden Strike* first made its mark.

Make no mistake about it – *Barbarossa* is a serious challenge for serious RTS players. Missions require a great deal of replay before success is assured, and with no resources to call upon save the units you're handed at the beginning of each level, frustration is sure to blight those who prefer a lighter challenge. If you relish the chance to use an 88 as it was intended, *Mission Barbarossa* is

FULL VERSION OF BLITZKRIEG: BURNING HORIZON OR ROLLING THUNDER REQUIRED



Doing this without infantry is costly.



Serious about your RTS games? This is for you.



Artillery isn't as effective, but still essential.

for you. If you have no idea what an 88 is, please wait – another generic brainless RTS will be along presently.

PCZONE VERDICT 75
Seriously challenging



It's all very hard and serious.



Farms? Check. Nazis? Check.



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DOMINATION

■ £19.99 | Pub: DreamCatcher | Dev: Wargaming.net | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PIII 750MHz, 256MB RAM, a 32MB 3D card and a modem

DESIRES P4 2GHz, 512MB RAM, a 128MB 3D card and a broadband or cable Internet connection

Massive Assault has a new name. **Richie Shoemaker** doesn't...

THIS IS the sort of turn-based strategy game that would probably work better played across a dining room table with coloured counters in place of 3D models, a small band of close friends in place of the AI and the obligatory selection of snacks and beers from around the world instead of a power supply.

Domination's appeal lies in simple objectives and numerical predictability. The new Bullfrog super-unit will always strip five hit points from an enemy for instance, and the reliable old tanks will move up to two spaces cross-country. With similar figures for other military units locked in your head, conquering territories is the sole aim, and with more territories comes greater income and therefore new units.

Fun for all the family
Domination most certainly is,



Could have been the PC *Advance Wars*. It's all a bit dull, see.

but for the soloist it's a game that's difficult to recommend. You see, while there are hundreds of hours of single-player campaigning included and the computer AI is undeniably challenging and capable, the simple game mechanic is stretched to breaking point across a story that's horribly generic and poorly presented. Much better is the online game, for which purchase

gets you a four-month spell playing across the *Massive Assault* Network. Playing via email is certainly more exciting and natural, but whether you'll be subscribing once the quarter has expired is another matter.

**PCZONE
VERDICT**

69

Elegant gameplay,
clumsily presented



The Secret Allies concept makes a return.



Each side has three super-units as well as a regular arsenal.



There aren't enough pirates in games. Everything's gone a bit *Galleon*, innit?

BILLY BLADE AND THE TEMPLE OF TIME

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

REQUIRES PIII 700MHz, 128MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card

DESIRES PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

THE PRESS release that comes with *Billy Blade And The Temple Of Time* proudly proclaims that the game features "tons of moves: run, jump, roll and fight". Our experience with games has led us to believe that this should be standard issue – but not wanting to pre-judge, we booted the game up and gave it a try.

Graphically, things aren't too shabby; the cartoon-style graphics and Disney-esque animated cut-scenes won't win any prizes, but they lend themselves well to the overall feel of the game. Sadly, this is where the good parts end. Gameplay is plagued by dodgy camera angles, almost

non-existent enemy AI, infuriating platform sections and clumsy combat.

If its sword-wielding acrobatics you're after, the infinitely superior *Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time* can be found for the same amount or less. Failing that, if you still want to run, jump, roll and fight, why not spend your £20 in the pub, then pick a fight with the bouncers?

Suzy Wallace

**PCZONE
VERDICT**

38

Not the keenest knife in the box

PIPPA FUNNELL: THE STUD FARM INHERITANCE

■ £19.99 | Pub: Ubisoft | Dev: Lexis Numérique
ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PIII 450MHz, 64MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card

DESIRES PIII 800MHz, 256MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card



Start jumping or it's the glue factory.



She's in mourning, you heartless bitch.

'TAKE THE piss out of the horse-faced nose-bagger.' As commissions go, Sefton's directive isn't particularly helpful. Besides, the titular equine sportswoman is only marginally involved in the game, making fleeting appearances mainly as a guide.

The core game features a young girl who is bequeathed a dilapidated stud farm by her great aunt. You are that young girl, and through a combination of hard work and extreme patience you can get the place back on its feet and straddle your horses into competition.

A moribund mixture of genres, it's

part painstaking 'adventure' in which you wander around the stables and nearby village, and part RPG whereby your horses level up to become better at jumping and so forth. Grooming them involves a series of manual tasks that would be more suited to the Nintendo DS, and apart from the dressage, riding them is actually too difficult.

Steve Hill

**PCZONE
VERDICT**

30

Horse shit

WORLD SNOOKER CHAMPIONSHIP 2005

■ £29.99 | Pub: Sega | Dev: Blade Interactive Studios | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PIII 800MHz, 128MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card DESIRES PIII 1.4GHz, 256MB RAM and a 128MB 3D card

Steve Hill pots the purple and screws back. Eh?



Do not adjust your set. That really is a purple ball.

A COMMON view of snooker is that it's dull. It's a problem that the sport itself faces, although the last (and only) time I was at a snooker match it was anything but, particularly when a heavily

refreshed Jimmy White stumbled into our executive box, accompanied by leather-faced Rolling Stone Ronnie Wood.

No such shenanigans occur in *WSC 2005*, although you can sense the development team's

desperation to make it more interesting. Once you've got the physics right and have managed to create the world's roundest balls, where do you go? The answer is *Snooker Plus*, a modification allegedly invented



The Len Ganley stance in full effect.

by the legendary Joe Davis that sees the addition of two new coloured balls; an orange for eight points and a purple for a whopping ten. It may irk purists, but it does lead to more open play and bigger breaks.

Elsewhere, it's business as usual, with developer Blade on its third publisher in as many years. Commendably, Sega has at least managed to get the game out in time for the World Championships, which are of

course featured along with a number of major tournaments.

Ultimately, you know what it's going to be – like snooker, but with the key difference that you can actually pot the balls. It looks all right, it works and there's online play if you like sitting around on your arse.

**PCZONE
VERDICT**

68

None more round

MARTIN MYSTERE: OPERATION DORIAN GRAY

■ £29.99 | Pub: GMX Media | Dev: Artematica | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PIII 866MHz, 128MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card

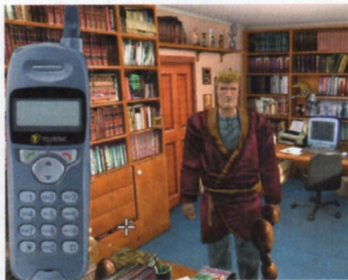
DESIRES P4 2.5GHz, 256MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card



"I left my keys here somewhere..."

A COUPLE OF years ago a game called *Druuna: Morbus Gravis* was released, and it was one of the worst games ever made. Worryingly, instead of retiring from a fickle and cruel industry, the people who made it decided to continue, and this more traditional point-and-click adventure is the result.

Based on an Italian comic-book hero (who is also apparently one of the biggest stars on Canadian TV), *Martin Mystere* is an intriguing adventure, one that strives to be both humorous and puzzling. Thankfully, aside from his rather unnerving resemblance to Charles Napier, the



Columbo guest stars are everywhere.

eponymous hero is rather likeable and the murder mystery in which he's embroiled is engaging and rather unique.

Unfortunately, most of the other characters are wooden and the dialogue is far too wordy, but you shouldn't let that put you off, as this is one of the better adventures to appear since the genre took a nosedive.

Richie Shoemaker

**PCZONE
VERDICT**

66

Strangely alluring

GREAT BATTLES OF WWII: STALINGRAD

■ £19.99 | Pub: Black Bean
Dev: DTF Games | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PII 400MHz, 64MB RAM and an 8MB 3D card

DESIRES PIII 800MHz, 128MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card

FOR ALL intents and purposes, *Stalingrad* is a mod for Nival Interactive's WWII stalwart, *Blitzkrieg*. The isometric engine is the same, the combat-focused gameplay is the same and the graphics are indistinguishable to the untrained eye. Indeed, perhaps the most distinctive part of the whole package is the incongruous rock/heavy metal soundtrack, which provides a very strange counterpoint to the sight of Russians and Germans fighting it out on the icy Steppes.

Other differences between this and *Blitzkrieg* are hard to spot. *Stalingrad* boasts greater historical accuracy and the interface has been slightly redesigned, but otherwise it's a largely familiar affair. As such, incredibly tough missions are the order of the day, as you battle superior forces with a limited number of units. Recon, repair and resupply form a trinity of strategic imperatives, though even the most incisive general will eventually have to fall back on trial and error.



Game for sale. One careful owner.

With such a proven blueprint to work from, the game could hardly help but be competent, and it delivers an experience just as enjoyable, or slightly less enjoyable, than *Blitzkrieg*. If that's something that interests you, *Stalingrad* is a solid option and cheap enough to almost overlook its pre-loved origins.

Anthony Holden

**PCZONE
VERDICT**

69

Predictably efficient expansion

IndieZone

You can find demo versions of all these games on the CD & DVD. Try 'em then buy 'em...



Glitzy graphics and big budgets do not always a good game make. **Anthony Holden** unearths more indie gems – including a psycho poker-playing granny and space, the final frontier...

TELLTALE TEXAS HOLD 'EM

■ \$14.95 (£7.80) | Dev: Telltale Games
www.telltalegames.com



The closest you'll ever get to *Sam & Max 2*...

WHEN LUCASARTS

pulled the plug on *Sam & Max 2*, most of the team split into splinter groups and re-emerged as small independent developers. Telltale Games is the latest such group to appear and is perhaps the most indie of the lot, having announced just one game based on cult comic *Bone*.

In the meantime, it's released this poker game and put it out as shareware.



Careful of the granny.

Technically, it's just what it says it is – a simulation of Texas Hold 'Em, but the true appeal of the game lies elsewhere.

Indeed, the real draw here is the quartet of quirky characters, none of which would look out of place in a triple-A LucasArts adventure. Ranging from a stoner dude to a sinister granny, each is lovingly fleshed out with bluffing tells, mannerisms, expressions and a repertoire of superbly-scripted banter.

In all probability, the game was made only to show off the team's skill with character and dialogue, but we're certainly not complaining. Insubstantial as it is, the charm here is irresistible.

PCZONE VERDICT

75



The enjoyment hinges on how much of an *Elite* geek you were as a youth.

EVOCHRON

■ \$24.95 (£13) | Dev: StarWraith 3D Games |
starfighter.home.att.net/evochron

STARWRAITH 3D Games is basically one obsessed fella who devotes his life to creating hardcore space games. He's already brought a good deal of joy to washed-up *Elite* fans with the likes of *Star Wraith* and *RiftSpace*, and this is *Evochron*, a freeform trading and combat sim.

For a one-man show it's impressive, with a graphical quality to match anything in the *Wing Commander* canon (FMV notwithstanding). A freeform single-player mode is complemented by a catalogue of objective-based missions, as well as a

healthy multiplayer system for online play.

The gameplay is straight from titles like *Elite* and *Freelancer*, but the number of features is still admirable. You can join in piracy, exploration, mining asteroids and trading goods, but also things like racing, bribing your way out of fights and building a reputation in various systems.

Like most space games it's slow and laborious, but as a lo-fi alternative to X2, it's not too bad at all.

PCZONE VERDICT

60



Water's looking lovely.

HEAVY WEAPON DELUXE

■ \$19.95 (£10.50) | Dev: PopCap Games | www.popcap.com

YOU CAN'T GO far these days without tripping over remakes and clones of the arcade hits of the '80s, but one that's been largely overlooked to date is *Moon Patrol*. Leaping into the breach, PopCap Games has just released *Heavy Weapon Deluxe*, an arcade shooter that takes the basic concept and sends it into atomic overdrive.

Rather than the moon, here you find yourself trundling through a warzone in a series of vaguely humorous countries like Dictastroika and Antagonistan, piloting a tank with a variety of upgradeable weapons. Bomber planes, kamikaze jets and dirigibles darken the sky, raining an assortment of projectiles that can either be

shot down or dodged. Further interest is added by a friendly supply helicopter that does the occasional flyover.

It's largely brainless stuff, with none of the crater-hopping that defined *Moon Patrol*, and the entirely mouse-driven interface presents problems in that it always moves you towards your target. Nonetheless, *Heavy Weapon Deluxe* is a bright and well-presented affair that offers a few hours of destructive fun.

PCZONE VERDICT

64



WILDSNAKE PINBALL: INVASION 2

■ \$19.95 (£10.50) | Dev: WildSnake Software | www.wildsnake.com/pinball/in2



Another good idea down the toilet.



HERE'S A BIT of indie innovation for you – a game that blends pinball with *Space Invaders* and a splash of *Breakout*. Now, instead of just using your flippers to keep your pinball(s) in play, you have to deflect balls of laser fire coming at you from an array of alien spacecraft as well. Both balls and returned laser shots can be used to destroy enemies, but if you fail to deflect too many enemy shots, they'll eventually destroy your flippers.

Bizarre as it might sound, I actually think



this is a pretty good concept, adding a nice new dimension to the pinball formula. Unfortunately, the idea will probably never be exploited further, as this game is absolute shite.

Not only is the control system unforgiving and capricious, but the stark, featureless boards are designed with all the flair and imagination of a sedated baboon. Throw in amateurish presentation and mind-numbing music and you've got yourself one of the most awful pinball variants ever perpetrated.

PCZONE VERDICT

17

DDD POOL

■ \$19.95 (£10.50) | Dev: Paprikari games | www.paprikari.com

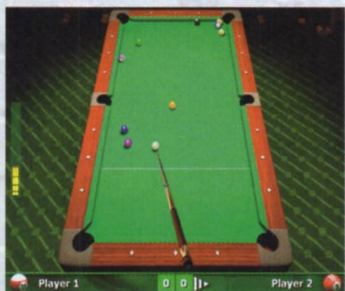


There are three different rooms to play in – as if you care.

POOL SIMS SEEM

a popular choice for indie start-ups at the moment – this one is almost identical to last month's *Kick Shot Pool*, but with the added bonus that the physics don't suck. All the same, it's a very basic simulation – 8-ball, 9-ball, some pointless time challenges and that's about it. Of course, there's a two-player mode, but unlike *Kick Shot*, *DDD Pool* doesn't cater for online action. Which is no great loss really. I mean, it's not *Counter-Strike*, is it?

Otherwise, it's an adequate effort throughout – the only real problem being the complete lack of character, humour, charm or atmosphere. But if it's pool you want, with no bells or whistles (or



even a comb wrapped in a piece of paper and a pair of spoons), you'll definitely find it here.

PCZONE VERDICT

55



This'll only entertain the very young or the very hungry.

PIZZA FRENZY

■ \$19.95 (£10.50) | Dev: Sprout Games | www.sproutgames.com/pizzaFrenzy.php

CONSIDERING THE

special place they have in the hearts (and arteries) of your average game developer, it's surprising that pizzas don't figure more strongly in game design. It's taken the work of Sprout Games to rectify matters with *Pizza Frenzy*, a charming yet exceedingly basic arcade game based around (extremely) fast food delivery.

The idea is that you run a chain of gourmet pizza restaurants and must fill delivery orders as they pop up around town as icons on an overhead map.

It's perfectly fine in concept, but the method of filling orders is simply far too basic – click on the icons to pick them up and then drop them on the appropriate restaurant (each of which specialises in a particular topping). The action is slightly complicated by prank callers, thieves,



bums and the need to score combos, but it's essentially just a lot of rapid clicking around the screen until your patience breaks.

Admittedly, the 'Memory' and 'Simon Says' modes do slightly more than just test your reflexes, but it remains an extremely shallow, if well presented dish.

PCZONE VERDICT

45

REPLAY

Strapped for cash? **PC ZONE** is here to provide some cheap cheer...

XIII



■ £9.99 | Pub: M.A.D. | ETA: Out Now

BENEATH THE

gloss, it's fair to say that *XIII* is a fairly rudimentary shooter. The AI is ropey at times, a few stealth sections don't work – the usual crimes really. The thing is though, that it's got some really good gloss.

It isn't just the comic-book stylings of the visuals and the way that when someone falls off a cliff the word "Noooooooooo!" follows them down either – no sirree. It's the sort of gloss that makes sure you're always doing something slightly different – whether you're dangling off a building attached to a *Zelda*-style climbing rope, taking a pretty woman hostage in a chilling asylum or battering a

security guard over the head with an ashtray in a posh bank. In fact, the game shamelessly steals from one and all with wild abandon – but it's all wrapped up in such enjoyable packaging that you'll be too busy throwing knives at cartoon men to notice.

All these wonderful gameplay touches are melded to an intriguing rehash of the *Bourne Identity* plot (with an ounce of *The Prisoner* thrown in), which ensures that your rubbish-radar barely beeps at all – completely overlooking moments that have you slamming your head into your desk in any other shooter.

XIII is exactly the sort of undemanding game that you want to play after a long day at



work and want to avoid any variety of human interaction apart from shooting them. It's one of those victories of style over substance, and should be celebrated as such.

Will Porter

PCZONE VERDICT 81



He deserves to be shot for wearing sunglasses indoors.



Brown sky at night... Er, we're not sure of the rhyme for that.



Veni, vidi, vici etc...



The history of humankind in your hands.

EMPIRE EARTH COLLECTION

■ £9.99 | Pub: Sierra | ETA: Out Now

IT'S A GOOD time to be an uncontrollable megalomaniac. With *Civilization IV* (page 38) and *Empire Earth II* (page 86) on the way, this seems like an opportune moment to reassess the latter's first incarnation. The *Empire Earth Collection* is Stainless Steel Studio's original RTS plus *The Art Of Conquest* expansion – both of which secured 'Essential' awards back in 2001/2002.

Empire Earth has a vast array of units and buildings that span thousands of years of human evolution, from the moment we discovered fire through to an imagined future where we've all transformed into mighty mechs (here's hoping).

While the Bronze Age graphics jar somewhat, the gameplay is still compelling enough, serving up addictive resource management and complex strategic battles. Good value, but if you like this sort of thing, you're better off putting the cash towards the sequel.

Jamie Sefton

PCZONE VERDICT 72

TREVOR CHAN'S CAPITALISM II

■ £9.99 | Pub: Revival | ETA: Out Now

CAPITALISM MIGHT

not be built around the most egalitarian principles, but at least the economics are relatively sound. At a towering £9.99, this version would mortally offend even the most hawkish American, who'd force it into hiding before you could say shock or awe.

The basic problem is its subject matter. Dull, dull, dull and morally questionable –

at least the pursuit of capitalism in the real world yields material rewards. Study the spreadsheets, graphs and flow charts here and you'll end up at the top of a virtual pile, with nothing to show for your efforts bar a headache. Oh, and by the way, who the f*** is Trevor Chan?

Dave Woods

PCZONE VERDICT 37



Not content with capitalism the first time, here's *Capitalism II*.



Unfortunately, it doesn't refresh the ramparts other strategy games can reach.

THE LORD OF THE RINGS: WAR OF THE RING

■ £9.99 | Pub: Sierra | ETA: Out Now

RELEASED JUST before the third and final instalment of the superlative film adaptation of Tolkien's classic, *War Of The Ring* is a decent stab at a fantasy RTS, marred by two critical failings. First, the game is built around the book, as opposed to the film. And, while for purists this is obviously a plus point, anyone reared on the all-action big-screen version will be left a little puzzled.

Second, the definitive *LOTR* RTS has recently been dispatched by EA.

The Battle For Middle-earth, developed by the ex-Westwood *Command & Conquer* team, is a far superior effort in every aspect, from tactical play through to the EA-style presentation – which means its game only looks marginally worse than the DVD. Seek this out if you're a completist; otherwise leave it to rot in the bargain bin.

Dave Woods

PCZONE VERDICT

59



Spreading the communist word.



Dig that colour scheme.

FLANKER 2.0

■ £9.99 | Pub: Revival | ETA: Out Now

WHEN FLANKER 2.0

first arrived, the flight sim genre was just commencing its downward spiral into oblivion and many people hailed it as a new dawn – the game that would save us all. As it turned out, this exceptionally decent sim of life in the overly cyan cockpit of the last great Russian jet fighter merely delayed the inevitable.

Today, it's still solidly flyable, but left in the dust (clouds, mist, whatever) by the *IL-2* series. One urgently flashing warning light on the instrument panel of fate though – *Flanker* is incompatible with either Windows 2000 or XP. Which limits things further. Still, we can see the intentions were good though.

Paul Presley

PCZONE VERDICT

71

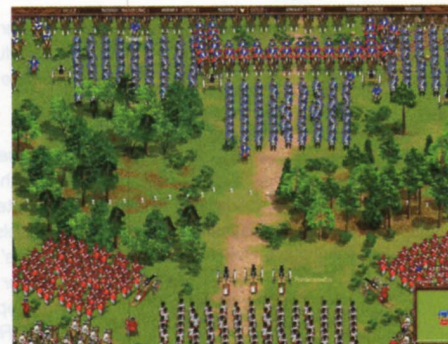
One up the bum, no harm done.

COSSACKS ANTHOLOGY

■ £9.99 | Pub: Xplosiv | ETA: Out Now

COSSACKS II managed to pillage an Essential award and 80 per cent in our last issue, but if your budget doesn't stretch to a trio of tenners, you could consider this decent collection of hardcore strategy titles. While the original *Cossacks: European Wars* has already been released for a fiver, this anthology adds two expansion packs – *The Art Of War* and *Back To War* – both of which expand the historical RTS to include more campaigns, units, multiplayer modes and a map editor.

Spanning the 17th and 18th centuries, with over 20 rival nations to choose from including Hungary, France and good old Blighty, *Cossacks* is exhaustingly comprehensive. Unfortunately, the series has since been superseded by The Creative Assembly's *Total War* franchise, which delivers superior visuals and more



Nice spot for sunbathing in the middle there.

in-er-face battles featuring thousands of troops. Stolid stuff.

Jamie Sefton

PCZONE VERDICT

66

LEFTOVERS

MORE GREASY SCRAPS FROM THE GAMING TABLE

Something of an RTS bonanza this month, beginning with the vaguely satirical stylings of *Conflict Zone* (Revival, £9.99). Fight a war not just in the land, on the sky and, er, around the sea, but also in the hearts and minds of the giant media machine, monitoring your every move and ready to lay the bitch-slap down should you blow shit up rather than rescue sick kiddies or something. Nice idea, decent execution, but not as clever or engaging as it thinks it is: 60 per cent.

Then there's *Sudden Strike II* (Xplosiv, £9.99), a decent stab at bringing *Cossacks*-style mass-unit action to the world of top-down RTS games. There are a lot of faults with it – lousy interface, seen-it-all-before gameplay, units all look like plastic toys – and it can't hold a candle to more recent fare such as *Soldiers*, but the battles are satisfyingly huge. Still, I'm hard pushed to really recommend it: 54 per cent.

Ah, a change of pace with *Sonic Adventure DX* (M.A.D., £9.99). Not afraid of the colour palette, it's amazing that even after all these years, a game that was a launch title for the Sega Dreamcast can still gather a crowd around a monitor on a busy Wednesday afternoon. Only trouble is, it was more of a pitying, baying crowd. Not the Hedgehog's finest hour, although the whale-chase still evokes a smile: 48 per cent.

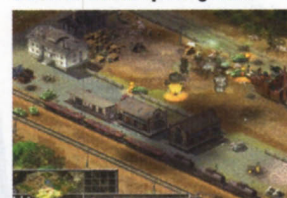
Oh lordy, more top-down blatherings, this time *Lords Of The Realm III* (Sierra, £9.99) a game so abysmal our original score of 19 per cent was considered generous. Time has not been kind. In fact, the only thing of note about it now is that it comes with a demo of *Empire Earth II* (but then so do we and we're cheaper yet): 10 per cent.

Finally, it's military action of a more traditional sort with *Rogue Spear: Black Thorn* (Focus Multimedia, £4.99). There have been a billion other games since this first arrived that have done so much with the tactical shooter concept that to re-release what was essentially a standalone mission pack for an even older game seems optimistic at best: 41 per cent.

Paul Presley



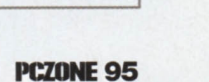
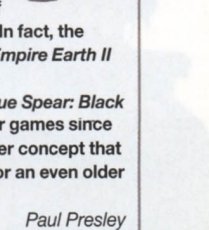
Conflict Zone: quite green.



Sudden Strike II: a bit grey.



Sonic: dazzlingly bright.



FEEDBACK

Will Porter daubs himself in Pritt-Stick before rolling around in a barrel of opinions marked 'Brothers In Arms'

IT'S YOUR SHOUT

Feedback is here to offer you a platform to have your say about games we've reviewed in recent issues. Whether you totally agree or utterly disagree with us, we want to hear from you. To get your views in print, all you have to do is send an email to letters@pczone.co.uk with 'Feedback' in the subject line. Please try and keep your views to less than 100 words. Anything longer will not be considered or may have to be edited for size.

BROTHERS IN ARMS

REVIEWED ISSUE 153 (BY ANTHONY HOLDEN),
SCORE: 87%

What we thought

It establishes a tactical-action formula that trounces the opposition for functionality and ease of use, and the results are never short of compelling. As a first effort, *Brothers In Arms* is pretty damn good – if Gearbox can just build on this, the next instalment will almost certainly be a classic.

What you said

Not quite certain on this one. It is a good game, the pity is that it could have been a great game rivaling the likes of *Call Of Duty*. Some of the places are a bit too maze-like (notably Dead Man's Corner), and with the lack of no quicksave button it can become a chore doing the same bit again and again. The weapons feel and sound nice, but it's so hard to hit an enemy that sometimes you feel like you're shooting out of desperation. It does have some great moments though, and limbs being blown off is a nice touch. I'd say

87 per cent is about right – hopefully the sequel will improve on the format.

Rjcanty

Brothers In Arms is an actual breath of fresh air for the WWII shooter genre, as it finally dispels the one-man-army 'issue' that plagued *Medal Of Honor* and *Call Of Duty*. The gameplay is much less rigid than *Republic Commando* (the other squad-based FPS) and the production values are extremely high. The accuracy of the guns really did disappoint me, and there's a fair bit of *Commandos*-style frustration as you repeat sections of a chapter because you messed up (which is fairly common). However, it doesn't detract that much from an otherwise solid experience.

Heero Yuy

There is no real sense of "brotherhood". Sure, it's nice to have backup, but they don't add to the emotional involvement of you or the character. They can be a bit thick, too. There should be more control over the stance and positioning of your AI buddies, à la *Ghost Recon*. They



"Secure that hedge, Private Pike!"

seem to like standing in front of hails of bullets, even when you have directed them to cover.

And the shooting? Pah! I've shot real things in real life, with real guns and it was never this hard! Maybe everyone in 1944 had really bad eyesight. Better go to Specsavers, eh? Finally, German AI: discuss. No wonder they lost the war. Dad's Army could take this lot on (and win).

Quadruple

Where's the depth and emotion we were promised? *Hidden & Dangerous 2* made me care for my squad simply because I could name them, and seeing my dad ripped apart by an MG42 while my best mate went on a rampage was a powerful experience. In *BIA*, if one of your faceless buddies dies... Who cares? They all come back to life.

It can be quite fun in short bursts, but without the feel of war *Call Of Duty* has, the planning and teamwork

Hidden & Dangerous 2 has, or the freedom of *Operation Flashpoint*. It's just



Sniping practice in Manchester.

wandered round some poorly populated maps, killed a hundred or so Germans and not done very much besides that. I think I prefer the cinematic, epic feel to the understated story of *Brothers In Arms*. If I had to sum it up in one word? Empty.

PawsofEvil

Ant's comment

Wow, you guys have some anger to work through. The impression I get is that you agree with all my criticisms and only some of my praise, which seems a little unfair. This issue of the 'inaccuracy' of the weapons I find bizarre – *Quadruple* and *Rjcanty*, you have to consider that you're playing as a guy with next to no combat experience, who's hungry, tired, stressed and probably just shat his pants when a nearby shell went off. Don't you think his aim might be a little on the erratic side?

As for the quicksave vs checkpoint debate, well, we have that one at *ZONE* every other week. I'm a checkpoint man myself (provided it's done right), and I think the game would have been a lot weaker without it. On the major points, however, most of you seem to agree – not much brotherhood, stilted AI, but still a fine and commendable effort. I think *PawsofEvil's* 'empty' summary is unfair to say the least. [X]

Having just finished it, I reflected on how I felt when I finally completed *Call Of Duty*. With *COD*, I got a sense of achievement, of satisfaction, of taking part in something great. With *BIA*, I just felt like I'd

Moomocow8

"I've shot things in real life and it was never this hard!"

QUADRUPLE TELLS ABOUT THE WORLD OF REAL MEN



30 minutes and we still can't hit him.

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YOUR ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO THE WIRED WORLD OF ONLINE GAMING

ONLINE ZONE

THE NEW BREED



■ **ONLINE EDITOR:** Paul Presley

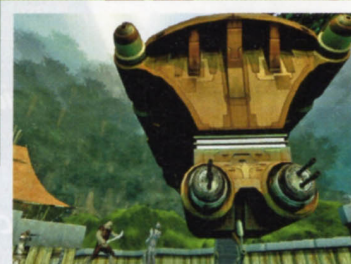
▲ Hosannas and exultations! Somebody is finally paying attention to my plaintive cries for originality in the world of gigantically numerous-player virtual gaming. Over on page 102, you'll find our exclusive unveiling of the stunning-looking *Conan* MMORPG from *Anarchy Online* veterans Funcom. Rather than just taking a well-loved franchise and slapping it onto a bog-standard *EverQuest*-templated game engine, *Conan* is attempting to blend the world of single-player story-driven gaming with online group play, trying out dynamic new combat techniques and saying 'to hell' with MMO gaming conventions.

Then there's *Gods And Heroes* (see story on the right). Command massive NPC squads team up with other player squads and fight as giant armies while still controlling a single character. Sounds incredible. Or there's *Guild Wars* (coming any day now). Think *UT2004*-style arena combat in a larger MMO world. *Dungeons & Dragons Online* (now free of publisher VU Games and solely in the hands of developer Turbine Entertainment) is focusing on creating intricate character-driven quests that are about more than just fighting ever-stronger waves of enemies. And should *Warhammer Online* really make a comeback, you'll see a new style of career progression in an MMO.

Bottom line is that we're finally starting to see some original thinking in the genre. Many marketing bods harp on about each new game being the "next generation of MMORPG", but until now everything has really just been variations on the first generation. These advances don't come about simply with a fancy new graphics engine. Instead, it's when we see new ideas taking the content to all new levels that we can really claim to be seeing a new dawn for the genre.



Attack of the cling-ons?



Cashing in on Kashyyyk.

ATTACK OF THE FURBALLS

STAR WARS GALAXIES ADDS KASHYYYK, SPACE MINING

EVER WANTED to visit the home of the Wookiees? Until now, the walking carpets have been a nomadic race within *Star Wars Galaxies*, forced to ply their trade away from their native world. However, with the next add-on pack just announced for LucasArts' online world, you'll finally get to visit the tree-lined planet of Kashyyyk.

From May 5, subscribers will be able to digitally download *Episode III Rage Of The Wookiees* and join in the fight to either free Chewbacca's brethren from the clutches of Trandoshan slavers or enforce Imperial diktat and quell their Rebel leanings. Over 100 story-driven quests should keep you busy as

you explore, experiment with the new cybernetic body implants and try to avoid thinking about (shudder) Life Day.

Meanwhile, if you own *Jump To Lightspeed*, you can explore the depths of space around Kashyyyk in several new starships too, including the curvaceous Jedi Starfighter. There's also the option to start mining asteroids throughout the galaxy, earning a crust in giant 20-man mining ships, selling your wares to planet-side crafters. It's not quite *EVE Online* in scope, but it should definitely add a further wrinkle to the *Star Wars* experience prior to the long-awaited *Combat Upgrade*.

Speaking of which, the

Combat Upgrade recently (finally) went live on the Test Server (the non-official beta universe) to much hullabaloo from the die-hard SWG crowd. Not everyone has taken to the changes well (the Entertainer profession feeling especially undervalued), although LucasArts is assuring fans that it has plans to continue to revamp and tweak things until it all feels right and provides a faster-paced and more exciting and dynamic *Star Wars* experience. Here's hoping.



The new ships are Episode III-inspired. Kashyyyk is also a new space zone.

■ **Publisher:** Activision
 ■ **Developer:** SOE/LucasArts
 ■ **ETA:** May 5
 ■ **Website:** www.starwarsgalaxies.com



**102****AGE OF CONAN**
Exclusive look at Funcom's latest**110****THE MATRIX ONLINE**
Jack into our exclusive review**114****CITY OF HEROES**
We delve into the Issue 4 update**119****NEVERQUEST**
Steve Hill fights for justice again

Gods Among Men

PERPETUAL ENTERTAINMENT EXPLORES ROME IN GODS AND HEROES**That'll make a lovely ruin some day...**

NOT CONTENT with bringing the world of *Star Trek* to a MMO environment (due way off in 2007, so hold your horses), San Francisco-based Perpetual Entertainment is first going to prove its chops by unleashing the fury of Ancient Rome to thousands of players in *Gods And Heroes: Rome Rising* later this year.

Set around 300BC, you'll be given the chance to earn your stripes in the old Republic, fighting real-life enemies including Carthaginians, Visigoths and Gauls (though probably not Asterix and Obelix), as well as more fantastical beasts such as minotaurs, skellingtons and the legendary giant bronze Talos, last seen terrorising Jason and his Argonauts.

G&H features epic combat, seeing you command and train squads of NPC soldiers before leading them into battle alongside other player-run squads in giant armies, all the while personally controlling your own character. Finally,

those Russell Crowe fantasies can be yours.

You'll also get to go on more traditional solo and group adventures, powering up your hero until you control the very powers of the gods, all through a personalised 'epic quest' system for each player.

G&H is set for an autumn 2005 launch and should it prove a hit, it will put Perpetual in good standing for the no doubt career-defining *Trek* MMO to follow.

■ **Developer:** Perpetual Entertainment
■ **ETA:** Autumn 2005
■ **Website:** www.godsandheroes.com

**Siegfried screws up again.****"What fight?"**

THE A-Z OF MMOs

ONLINE GAMING EXPLAINED

D is for **Dungeons & Dragons**, the birthplace of pretty much all gaming, online or off. Today, the gaming industry is a multi-gazillion dollar gorgon of a beast, attracting celebrity, schmoozers and the cream of society. Yesterday it was the province of the nerd, shunned by society and laughed at by the very people so eager to suck glamour and money from its teat today. It's also safe to say there probably wouldn't be an MMO genre had the legion of designers and developers responsible for everything from *EverQuest* to, er, *EverQuest II* not spent their youth sitting around dimly-lit tables, with crumpled paper character sheets and 20-sided dice, shunning natural light and the ability to form meaningful romantic liaisons with other humans. Except for Vin Diesel of course, who not only apparently plays *D&D* regularly, but also probably has oodles of sex with astonishingly attractive women. I would if I were him.

Amazingly, it's taken all this time before somebody had the nous to make an actual *Dungeons & Dragons* MMO. With most MMO players now being the modern-day equivalents of the shunned tabletop role-players of yore, it seems the high priest of uncool is set to reclaim its nerdy flock once more and all will finally be right with the world again.

D is also for **Disillusioned**, which is how many online gaming fans felt following 2004's far too numerous list of high profile MMO cancellations. Luckily, 2005/2006's roster is jam-packed with another round of independent hopefuls all taking their place on the great lottery wheel of development success.

Without securing some big-name financial backing quickly though, many teams may find that D all too quickly stands for **Deluded...**

WIN!

THE MATRIX ONLINE

TEN COPIES OF THE BRAND NEW SCI-FI MMOG UP FOR GRABS!

YOU MIGHT not get to be The One, but you can certainly join The Thousands (ho ho) now swallowing red pills and jacking themselves into the newly launched virtual universe of *The Matrix Online*. To help celebrate the game's launch, we've teamed up with Sega and have ten copies up for grabs.

You can read our full review of the game on page 110, but to win one of ten copies and see for

yourself what life is like in the desert of the real, simply answer the following question:

Which famous brothers created *The Matrix*?

A: The Farrelly Brothers
B: The Wachowski Brothers
C: The Chuckle Brothers

Send your answer before Wednesday May 25 on the back

of a postcard or envelope to:
The Matrix Online
Competition, PC ZONE,
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For full terms and conditions, see p7.

**PCZONE 99**

CLAN DIARY

#Truth

TRUTH

ANNE ROGERS, aka Jaffy

It was a sad day, but the SCEE Ladies recently became inactive for several reasons. It came as a shock, despite a number of the UK's female clans suffering the same fate in past months. Not ones to dwell, however, a new team has been formed. Welcome #Truth, with a strict seven-girl line-up and plenty of ambition to boot!

The team is an amalgamation of many of the clans that defined the female UK Counter-Strike scene. #Truth will be left with the cream of the crop, the members looking to start where their previous teams didn't take them – to more national and international LAN events than ever.

As with all clans in their beginnings, it will take some work to get to a stage at which



The new home of girl gaming in the UK.

"The buzz of starting out in a new clan is great. So much ambition, so much of a challenge"

we can compete with success – one of the major factors that dogged the UK female scene was the rivalry between clans. This is the first time where people from each major clan have all played together, so it could be interesting yet difficult times. I must admit, however, that the buzz of starting out in a new clan is great. So much ambition and so much of a challenge, besides getting to know your team-mates better – it's exciting!

#Truth will be competition-ready soon, following some intensive training sessions, and are looking for LAN events to attend in order to prove ourselves. As we're sponsored by #Enamor.gaming, one of the North's premier LAN Centres, we will no doubt make an appearance there in the near future. With 16 high-spec PCs and regular tournaments, it makes for a friendly yet competitive LAN experience, with some top gamers to contest. You can also indulge in multiplayer console gaming in the chill-out room. A PC gamer by trade, I don't often turn down the opportunity to use a console – first-person shooters not included, however.

I'm looking forward to chronicling the progress of #Truth, the trials and tribulations of the UK's newest female team. Feel free to drop by the #Truth channel on Quakenet IRC and have a chat!

TURN-BASED TACTICA

AUSTRALIA'S ANSWER TO GUILD WARS PREPARES TO FIGHT

FURTHERING THIS month's theme of trying new things with the world of online gaming, *Tactica Online* from Sydney-based Imaginary Numbers aims to bring you fantasy adventuring in an alternate Earth, through the medium of tactical, turn-based strategy gaming.

Due for release this autumn, *Tactica Online* eschews single-character control for that of squad combat in a Leonardo da Vinci-inspired Renaissance-era Europe, telling the struggles between forces of science, magic and secret societies all vying for ultimate power. As you progress through the world you build up skills rather than levels, opening up commands for you and your squad to use during battle. It's similar to *Guild Wars*, in the sense that at the start of each fight you'll choose which abilities to play with from your overall pool of skills, with everyone from beginners to seasoned veterans able to fight it out on a level playing field.

Tactica Online also shares *Guild Wars'* approach to money, in that you'll only pay once for the retail box and not for any monthly subscriptions. Instead, regular expansion packs with extra skills and new areas to explore will provide the developer with a source of revenue, although it's keen to stress that nobody will be at a disadvantage if they stick with the basic package.

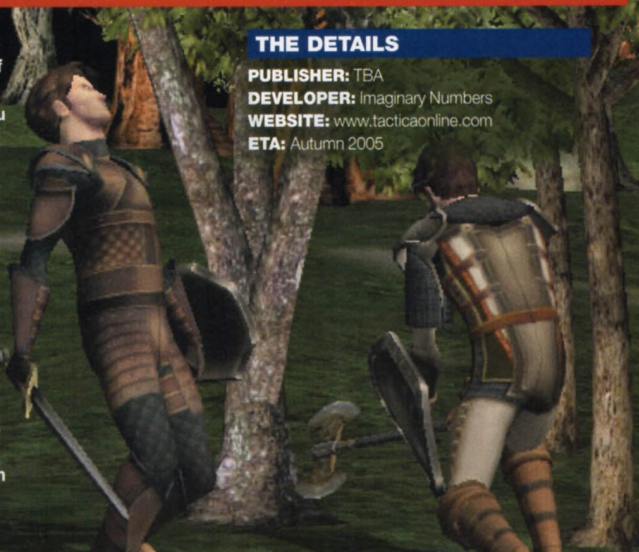
THE DETAILS

PUBLISHER: TBA

DEVELOPER: Imaginary Numbers

WEBSITE: www.tacticaonline.com

ETA: Autumn 2005



Mind that Van de Graaf generator!



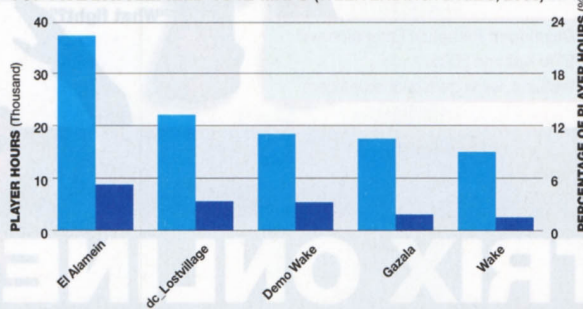
"My bridge is not for Pooh Sticks."

STATZONE

A LOOK AT THE DATA SHAPING YOUR ONLINE WORLD

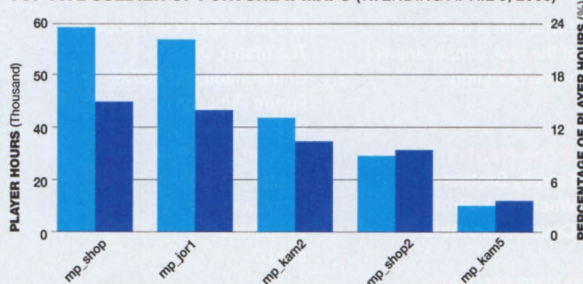
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TOP FIVE BATTLEFIELD 1942 MAPS (WEEK ENDING APRIL 8, 2005)



KEY ■ PLAYER HOURS ■ PERCENTAGE OF PLAYER HOURS

TOP FIVE SOLDIER OF FORTUNE II MAPS (W/ENDING APRIL 8, 2005)



KEY ■ PLAYER HOURS ■ PERCENTAGE OF PLAYER HOURS



TOP TEN UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004 CLANS

(based on recorded scores week ending April 8, 2005)

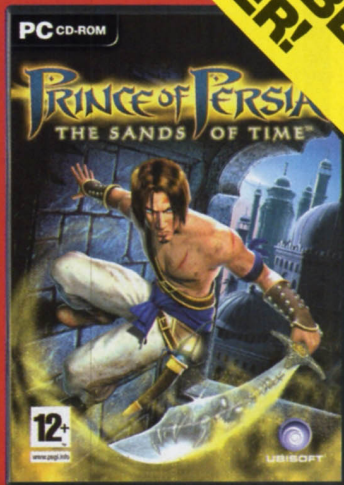
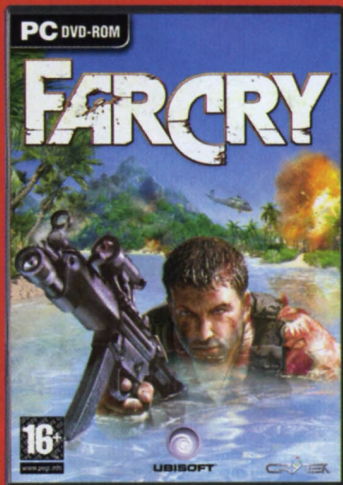
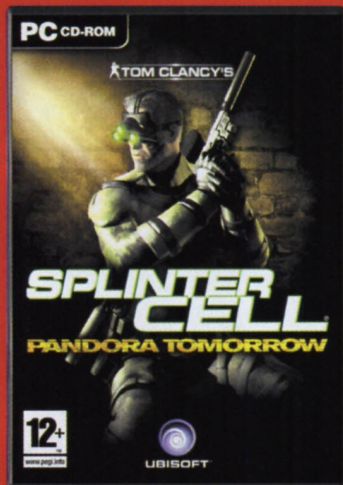
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The ivory trade goes back to basics.

Thief, Warrior, Gladiator, King... AGE OF CONAN: HYBORIAN ADVENTURES

When is an online RPG not an online RPG? Paul Presley brings you an exclusive look at what could be the biggest MMO licence of 2006...

WHEN THE folks at Norwegian MMO specialists, Funcom, first teased us with rumours of a brand new online title based on a huge licence (due for a new film), boasting a rich cross-media heritage and beloved by people around the world, naturally we all jumped out of our seats here at ZONE Towers at the thought of a brand new *Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy* game. Try again, said Funcom. Ah, we thought – Transformers then. Brilliant! Nope, came the response. At which point we walked away more puzzled than ever.

Luckily, we didn't have to wait long for the mist to clear. We were recently invited by Funcom to unveil the brand-new online world of everybody's favourite muscle-bound barbarian warrior-king – *Age Of Conan: Hyborian Adventures*.

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Funcom
PUBLISHER Funcom
WEBSITE www.ageofconan.com
ETA Early 2006

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Robert E Howard's mystical fantasy world brought to staggeringly attractive life online
- Huge 20-level story-driven solo game to flesh out your character prior to the MMO game
- Revolutionary new three-stage combat system: 'real combat', formation battles and sieges
- 2006 is the official Year Of Conan™ with a brand new movie, new novels, boardgames, toys and merchandising galore

"First let me point out how serious we are about the Conan legacy," says Gaute Godager, game director for Conan and the man previously responsible for shaping *Anarchy Online* into the success it is today. "I've always been a huge fan of Robert E Howard's novels and his Hyborian universe, and to direct this game is a dream come true. To create a game true to Howard's dark vision is important to us. Luckily, the entire Hyborian world forms a great canvas for amazing stories since it's a twisted mirror of our own world."

Indeed it is. If you're not familiar, the world of *Conan* is set on 'Earth' (give or take) on or around 10,000 BC. Taking in themes from prehistoric life, mystical fantasy and even old Atlantean mythos, the gameworld recreates Conan's current kingdom of Aquilonia, the Stygian desert to the south and Conan's homeland of Cimmeria.

"We've built on this a storyline where players become the victims of a sinister, grand-scale plot by an age-old enemy of Conan," says Godager. "Through this plot Conan's kingship, his kingdom and your very soul are at stake."

A GAME OF TWO HALVES

Unlike most MMOs, you're likely to have a lot more emotional investment in that character thanks to the unique online single-player game that sets your back-story. "As an RPG, the game is divided into two parts," Godager describes.



Never mind, mate. Some superglue will fix that right up.

"The first 20 levels are driven by a personalised story where there are four story arcs woven together to affect several different endings. This part marks the beginning of your life as a Hyborian adventurer. It sets you on the path to the second part of your life as a traveller (the last 60 levels), where you gradually cooperate more and more with other players."

These four arcs are split across the four major character archetypes – Rogue, Priest, Mage and Warrior. This in turn enables the award-winning writers behind adventure titles *The Longest Journey* and *Dreamfall* to provide a detailed, atmospheric and above all engaging plot to engage your interest – certainly more than the typical

"thrown in the deep end, back-story tucked away in the manual" approach taken by most MMOs.

TRAFFIC CONANS

By the time you reach the end of the story, the plan is to have you eager to take the next step with your now fully-established character. "When a great RPG ends, you must have felt the urge to have your character live on and interact with fellow travellers, to enter an even greater world," says Godager. "This is that opportunity – to have a RPG all about you, your choices and your character, and if you win to share that victory at an even greater stage, where you can adventure with others and share in much, much more."



CV

FUNCOM

FUNCOM

The Norwegian developer was founded in 1993 and for the next six years steadily built itself up with simple puzzle games, console platformers and online card games. Then in 1999 classic adventure title *The Longest Journey* arrived and went to number one in Norway...

2000 *Anarchy Online*, the sci-fi MMORPG of choice begins beta testing and blows people away. Meanwhile, *The Longest Journey* gets a worldwide release.

2001 *AO* gets released to a hungry, *EverQuest*-bored online world and blows away everyone who wasn't already blown away in the beta test.

2003 *AO: Shadowlands* arrives and blows away the last few remaining people who were still standing after the previous two attempts, including those who had managed to clamber back up again, dust themselves off and begin looking for renewed shelter.

2004 Another *AO* expansion – *Alien Invasion* – is launched, along with news of a sequel to *The Longest Journey* in *Dreamfall*. Windbreaker manufacturers rub their hands with glee.

"You'll never fight rats in *Conan* – I solemnly swear that right now!"

GAUTE GODAGER, GAME DIRECTOR, FUNCOM

At least he shaved his bikini line.



Your progression through the story is in stages, starting as a commoner in one of the three aforementioned regions. At level five you get to choose one of the four archetypes, with three further sub-classes available at level 20 – the entry point into the MMO game. From there you work your way past level 40, choosing a secondary profession on the way (including becoming master to your very own apprentice), until finally reaching your last choice of two further specialised classes at level 60.

PLAY IT YOUR WAY

Of course, it's all customisable along the way explains Godager: "We've tried to make a simple but deep character creation and visual customisation system, letting you create unique visual appearances by modelling looks, skin tone, degrees of muscles, skeletal structures, hair style and more. You can also choose permanent changes to your characters through displaying battle scars, for instance, visually showing what you've been through."

Speaking of battle scars, what about arguably the most important aspect of the game – the combat? Perhaps the most enduring mental image of the

Conan world is watching Arnie swinging a sword twice the size of a London bus about his head while lopping the heads off passing unfortunates. Luckily, Godager seems to have the same memories as us (as one of the images on these pages amply demonstrates), and the combat sounds thrilling.

INTO BATTLE

There are three stages to the combat experience: Real Combat, in which you get direct, hands-on control over your actions; Formations, which see you teaming with other players tactically; and Sieges, which do what you'd imagine.

"Real Combat is our revolutionary multi-point melee system," Godager explains. "The unique aspect of this system is that you swing your weapon where you direct it. Imagine standing in front of your opponent and dividing the area around your opponent into six different areas. We use these to let the players direct and combine the swings to create brutal and effective slashes and thrusts, or combine them in combos or special attacks that do additional damage. You should really 'feel' the power of your character when you fight, feel the power of each and every blow."



"See, told you. Everyone loves elephants."

HOW TIMES HAVE CHANGED

NO SEX PLEASE, WE'RE HYBORIAN

The world of Conan was always a brutally misogynistic one, understandable given that Howard's novels were originally written in the 1930s: "A long time before WWII, Martin Luther King or the '60s sexual revolution," says Godager.

"This is something I've spent a lot of time thinking about. The game will clearly be made for mature gamers, with raw violence, beheadings and brutal action. There will be scantily clad men and women and a 'sinful' sense of darkness through the game. This is Hyboria, and this is what appeals to so many fans. But, and this is important, it won't be done in a tasteless or exploitative manner. You will not be having sexual intercourse, nor will we ever look at women in a derogative manner."

It has been important to everyone at Funcom to lift Howard into the 21st century: "Not all hardcore fans will agree to the choices I've had to make," he says. "But I can promise you that Hyboria will never, ever be politically correct."

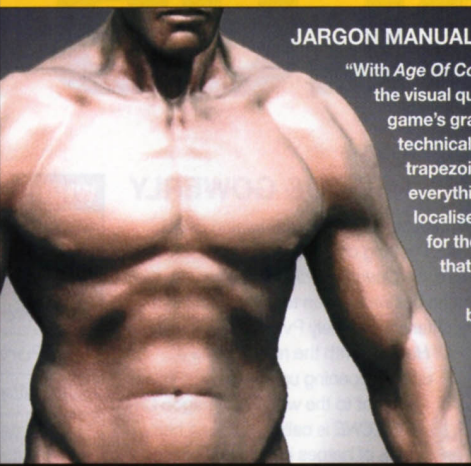


"Fighting a huge boss will be like fighting a hurricane. You will be stomped and thrown around like a ragdoll"

GAUTE GODAGER, GAME DIRECTOR, FUNCOM



THE TECHNICAL BIT



JARGON MANUALS AT THE READY, IT'S CONAN'S GRAPHICS ENGINE

"With *Age Of Conan: Hyborian Adventures*, we've really tried to push the envelope on the visual quality with something we call 'Magical Realism'," says Godager of the game's graphic engine. "The 3D engine will support DX9 standards. We've many technical features that make for an excellent eye-candy machine. For instance, trapezoidal shadowmaps for soft and beautiful shadows from everything, on everything. Per-pixel diffusing, specular and environmental lighting system, localised environmental maps, aerial perspective light scattering simulation for the day sky, ambient occlusion... Actually, it's all a bunch of fancy words that only the guys over at ATI really understand."

One standout feature of the engine is the layered animation system, blending many levels of animations on top of each other. "Let's say you're wounded," visualises Godager. "You still walk and run, possibly with a limp. Perhaps you get drunk to drown your sorrows and dull your pain? Now you still walk with a limp, but also an unsteady gait. This would perhaps make you stumble into a heap of snow. If so, you must lift your legs, as they sink in - giving a limping, drunken walk in the snow..."



"Bloody dry ice. Can't see a thing."



They weren't like that on *Blue Peter*.

The idea is to create a fast and intuitive targeting system that feels as close to actually swinging a sword as you can get online. It works for both melee and ranged weapons, with the camera flowing to an over-the-shoulder view for aiming if you're opting to play in first-person mode.

The other aspect to remember is that the system combines player ability with traditional RPG attributes. You're still likely to get beaten to a pulp if you misjudge your opponent's power though, no matter how good your mouse skills are through years of *Counter-Strike*.

HOLD... HOLD...

Formation combat comes into its own once you're in the online world and teaming with others. "This is a completely new aspect of multiplayer gameplay," Godager tells us. "In previous RPGs, with indirect point-and-click movement, you've seen party-based formations. In *Conan*, for the first time you can not only have a formation, but be in direct control of both your character, NPCs and other players. The leader can decide on different formations and the degree of freedom the various players and NPCs can have within them. In some cases, it'll be essential to pick the right formation to survive. How will you stop a line of ten mounted knights thundering down on you with furious anger? With an equally impressive line of pikemen digging in, naturally!"

Finally, Sieges will see you teaming with other players to protect cities, towers, keeps, houses and so on from bandits, monsters and enemy races or, alternatively, taking the fight to their fortified walls with siege weapons and hundreds of players. "Combining Siege combat with formations and Real Combat gives us a truly unique, powerful and outright fun combat experience, never before seen in one game," adds Godager happily.

HUNGRY LIKE A WOLF

An impressive combat system is nothing without impressive enemies though, so aside from the PvP side of the game (which Godager fails to elaborate upon beyond indicating that it will exist in some form or another), the team at Funcom has been hard at work creating brand-new AI routines for monsters and creatures that behave both intelligently and realistically.

Godager gives an example: "In most RPGs, when you meet a wolf, it will attack, run up to you and stand there growling while attacking in a round-based manner like any other monster. In *Conan*, the wolves hunt in packs. They might evade you if you travel together, while if you're alone they'll hunt you down, circle you and even try to pull you off your horse."

The main tasks for the team have been realism and going


beyond the formulaic nature of MMOG combat to provide something new. "You will never fight rats in *Conan*, I solemnly swear that right now!" laughs Godager. "Most prey-like animals will flee when they sense you as all NPCs have vision, hearing, smell and sense, as in real life. To hunt something, you must approach silently from down-wind. One well-placed arrow should be enough."

On the flip side to that, huge 'boss' monsters will require plenty of strategic thought, more so than the usual simplistic MMO group combat options. "Fighting a huge boss will be like fighting a hurricane," continues Godager, warning to his theme, "and you can't expect to

stand there fighting his 'foot' as you'll be stomped and thrown around like a ragdoll. Only through locking shields in formations and using long spears might you win. On the other hand, who says you can't climb his back and stick your sword into his eye? I'm sure Conan would..."

CIMMERERIAN AWAY

Naturally, there's still a fair amount of work to go on *Conan* - indeed, the already impressive-looking screenshots on these pages are all early alpha and being enhanced even further as we speak - with a first public showing of the game due in May at the E3 tradeshow.

It all sounds incredibly ambitious and if it weren't for the oodles of enthusiasm that pour out of Funcom and Godager whenever you get them talking on the subject, (and had *Anarchy Online* not proved to be the massive success it is), we'd probably be more worried than we are. As it is, we can't wait to strap on our furry boots, oil up our pectorals and practise our best Austrian accents. And it takes a lot to make us admit to that kind of behaviour. 



FIGHT CLUB



FIRST RULE OF FIGHT CLUB: PC ZONE OWNZ JØØ FIGHT CLUB MODERATORS: METALFACE, REX MUNDI & GOWERLY

A last minute change of plans (OK, shortages of office copies) led to our *Red Orchestra* Fight Club being replaced with the traditional stand-by that is *Counter-Strike: Source*. Not that it had a negative effect on the action as our usual two public CS:S servers were combined into one giant arena of death, destruction and decals.

The ZONE team were ably represented by Prezzer, Will, Sefton, Ant, Sam, Filby and our lovely admins, all kicking arse (especially Prezzer and his shotgun of doom) and taking names.

Names such as the Dear Wandy and [FLY] clanners (big-ups to AlaskanReeve, Cheezymon and Olistar in particular for topping the scoreboards consistently), B1G_Dave, Azrael and djackl put on particularly good displays this month, although thanks go out to everyone who took part for a truly entertaining evening. And especially for all the interesting and amusing decals being sprayed everywhere. We may be running a mini-competition

in a few month's time for the most entertaining decal of the night, so start getting creative.

As you can see, it's *Counter-Strike* all the way for the next few months but we're soon to try something a little different – namely PvP duelling in *City Of Heroes*. With the recent *Issue 4* update opening up consensual arena combat to the world of Paragon City, PC ZONE is calling out for a hero. Lots of heroes in fact. We'll post details next issue, but we're looking for teams of spandex-wearing superpowered warriors to come and take on the PCZ Super-Justice Squad in a series of matches throughout the evening. Get yourself in training as we're deadly when we pull on our tights.

You can find details for Fight Clubs, plus the addresses of all our other public gaming servers at www.pczone.co.uk. You can also find most of the ZONE crew hanging around on the excellent XFire service (check out our cover discs), as well as a large swathe of fellow ZONE readers all waiting for a game or two. Get in!

COME & HAVE A GO!
www.zonegames.co.uk
for all the info

WHO'S WHO

Dave Woods	Kid Unknown
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 MAY 26

6.30pm – 8.30pm
*Counter-Strike: Source**

THURSDAY JUNE 23

6.30pm – 8.30pm
*Counter-Strike: Source**

*all details subject to change. Be sure to check www.zonegames.co.uk for the latest information
Note: the password to join these events is: pczone.



I think Wandy's upset someone...



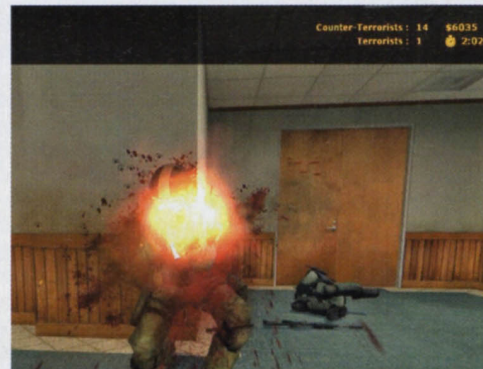
"Ow, my tongue's stuck in the trigger..."



Azrael hits the wall early on.



Cheezymon has back problems.



ZONECHAT



A LOCAL chat for local people. That's how the last ZONE Chat seemed to be heading, with Prezzer and Deadpool debating the merits of life in sunny Ruislip (specifically the local branch of Waitrose and the various famous residents of the illustrious London suburb – Jordan once lived there dontchaknow). Mentioning Waitrose sparked a lengthy discussion on the poshness levels of different supermarkets, with Will plumping for M&S, trumping Waitrose over Sainsburys with Lidl firmly at the bottom of the ladder. See the fun we have!

Meanwhile, back in the world of games and that, people were all too keen to voice opinions on WWII shooter *Brothers In Arms*, the F.E.A.R. multiplayer demo and the addictive qualities of our exclusive *EverQuest II* trial last issue.

There was also a link to zonegames.co.uk/ pczcrunchers, our own small part of the very noble

Find-A-Drug project. This is a distributed computing scheme that makes use of your PCs' idle processing power in order to help sort through the masses of medical research data in the search for cures for CJD, HIV, malaria, cancer and other illnesses. Similar to the old SETI at

Home project (harnessing the world's computers in the search for life among the stars), our thanks go out to ZONE admins Rex Mundi and Carpet for setting this up for us.

We're proud to be a part of something so useful. Head over to zonegames.co.uk/ pczcrunchers to find out how you can help...

If you want to take part in our next ZONE Chat, just get yourself a decent IRC browser (Trillian on this month's cover discs might work for you), log on to one of the Quakenet servers and type /join #pcz. The channel is open 24/7 and you'll always find someone willing to discuss the ins and outs of the world of games. Chat-tastic!

**WEDNESDAY
MAY 25
5.00PM – 7.00PM**

LAN ROVER

The latest gaming meet-ups monitored by Steve Randall...

■ We begin this month with game-domain.net/generator2005 on May 20-22, a Bristol-based 34-player, three-day LAN that costs £25 a head. Nice network set-up with a 1GB backbone.

■ CLUK 8 has 55 sign-ups for its May 13-15 event. As ever, it's first to pay that guarantees a spot, so if you fancy some action and live near Bagnell, Staffordshire (ten miles from the M6) visit www.centralanuk.co.uk for details of where to send your £30.

■ The annual Exeter University event is due to take place on May 1-2 and has 100 spaces to fill – and with only 20 currently paid for at the time of writing, you may still get in. £15 for two days with a full Internet connection (so no Steam problems). More information from www.exelan.co.uk.

■ Another 24-hour extravaganza from 6pm on May 21 is being held by www.zombielan.co.uk.

It costs just £15 and includes FREE food. Even better, you won't need to carry your machine up any hills as it's in Norfolk.

■ Going from strength to strength are the www.blasthards.co.uk team. Its next event runs from 10am May 6-8 and costs just £15 (£11 for a partial visit). It's in Thirsk, North Yorkshire where the function room at The Lord Nelson (www.thelordnelson-thirsk.co.uk) can cope with 80 people.

■ Finally this month, www.dreamlan.co.uk is having a 40-person LAN from May 13-15 at East Hendred. Places are being booked and paid for fast, so if you want to get in you'd best be quick.

■ 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@ggfan.co.uk. Scalper out.

GUILDHALL



▲ A GAMING LIFE ALONE IS NO GAMING LIFE AT ALL. SNIFF...

We're still getting plenty of clan adverts here at Guildhall, but don't forget this is the place for all you MMOG guilds looking to up your membership numbers. Night Elves in *World Of Warcraft*, Troll gangs in *EverQuest II*, Jedi Knights in *Star Wars Galaxies* – you can find anyone and everyone right here...

CLAN: Counter Terrorism Alliance

CONTACT: joker@c-t-a.com

WEBSITE: www.c-t-a.com

MAIN GAME: *Raven Shield, Joint Operations*

DETAILS: We're a mature clan with members from England, Norway, Canada and the USA. We've been gaming together for over one year and we meet around three times a week. We have dedicated gaming and Ventrillo servers and we compete in one of the main ladders too. Our main objective though is having a good laugh and playing some top games – fancy joining us?

CLAN: Ex Inferis

CONTACT: mako@exinferis.co.uk

WEBSITE: www.exinferis.co.uk

MAIN GAME: *World Of Warcraft*

DETAILS: We're a British *World Of Warcraft* guild playing on the Thunderhorn server. We're a friendly bunch of people who seek like-minded gamers to join us in the quest to nail as many Night Elves as possible and bring honour to The Horde. All levels and classes welcome!

CLAN: The 206 Division

CONTACT: englishhippy@hotmail.com

WEBSITE: www.206th.com

MAIN GAME: *Battlefield 1942, Battlefield: Vietnam, Desert Combat, Battlefield 2*

DETAILS: As the banner on our website states, we're 'a gaming community' above all else. With close to 30 members, we have the strength to be a competitive clan in leagues and vibrant forums too. Plus, we have our own *Battlefield* and Teamspeak servers.

CLAN: [MFW] Mercenaries Of The Free World

CONTACT: Team_mfw@yahoo.co.uk

WEBSITE: homepages.nildram.co.uk/~hotdogzn/xionic/

MAIN GAME: *Counter-Strike: Source*

DETAILS: We're a UK-based clan looking for new members – n00bs are welcome to try out, though we prefer some skill, even if it's not a great deal! By the time you read this, we should have our own server up and running too.

CLAN: [SoE] Soldiers Of Europe

CONTACT: SoE Forum

WEBSITE: www.soeclan.org

MAIN GAME: *Call Of Duty: United Offensive*

DETAILS: We're a well established clan in the world of COD, with over 40 members all over Europe. We have three active servers and are active in clanbase and the CODHQ cup too, which we won last year. Plus, we're up for scrums, fun matches and beer drinking contests.

CLAN: {dta} Don't Trust Anyone

CONTACT: voodoodemon@dtagames.co.uk

WEBSITE: www.dtagames.co.uk

MAIN GAME: *Day Of Defeat, Tactical Ops, Counter-Strike: Source, Call Of Duty: United Offensive*

DETAILS: We've been going for just over five years. We compete in many ladders and cups with popular servers in most games. We're a fun, friendly clan currently looking to recruit dedicated members over 16 for CSS and COD.

To feature in Guildhall, 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.

PCZONE READERS' CHALLENGE

WIN
BIG
PRIZES!!

Win amazing prizes just for being any good at games! Life is sweet...

AS WE reach the halfway point in this year-long journey into the world of online tournament gaming at its very finest, it's time to pause and serenely reflect on the glories, the defeats, the victories, the... Argh, who are we kidding? It's been one long non-stop blastathon of pure gaming goodness and warrants as much trumpet-blowing and rooftop-shouting as we can muster. A massive thank you to everyone who's taken part so far, and a special shout out to the fabulous guys and gals over at Jolt for keeping the whole shebang running so smoothly.

So, to round six. The 8v8 *Joint Operations: Escalation* Team King Of The Hill matches were a showcase for some of the best JO players in Europe, with the Killers In Action clan fielding both an A and B side, and providing a very tense semi-final in which the A-Team eventually won through. They then went on to polish off the Death Valley Assassins in the final and won a handful of prizes, including some special donations by NovaLogic and NVIDIA. Cheers guys!

Our *Painkiller* 1-on-1 Deathmatch tournament saw some familiar names cropping up among the total 64,

although the eventual final saw a convincing win for Steven 'SteLam' Lammert over Karl-Erik 'Tybalt' Danielsson, taking part in his first PCZ tournament! Well done to him! Finally, the *Battlefield: Vietnam* team games were convincingly won by returning champions PVP.bfv who won our previous BFV tournament back in round two.

Round seven's games should just have been completed and we'll have the full run-down of winners and non-winners in the *Day Of Defeat*, *Quake III*, *Unreal Tournament 2004* and the bonus UK-only *Painkiller* rounds next issue. If you're hoping for a *Republic Commando* event, we can only apologise – technical problems mean we've had to postpone for now.

Meanwhile, round eight promises some exciting gaming with *Half-Life 2* 4v4 Team Deathmatches, 1-on-1 *Painkiller* shootouts and another frantic *UT2004* 3v3 blastfest. Get over to www.pczone.jolt.co.uk for all the match details and to sign up to be in with a chance of nabbing some of the prizes yourself.

Don't worry if you're not part of a professional clan or gaming outfit, the PC ZONE Readers' Challenge is open to all levels and should you find yourself needing some team-mates, you can always advertise for free in the Guildhall section over the page. So what are you waiting for? Let's get fragging!

SIGN UP AT
www.pczone.jolt.co.uk
TODAY!



Battlefield: Vietnam, where PVP.bfv fought their way to victory.



Jeeps creepers!

READERS' CHALLENGE IS PROUDLY SPONSORED BY THE FOLLOWING COMPANIES

ASUS
HEART OF TECHNOLOGY

The V9950 series from leading graphics card manufacturer Asus takes GeForce FX performance to a whole new level. www.asus.com

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The XMS product line is Corsair's premium desktop product family and the world's most highly awarded memory. www.corsairmemory.com

CREATIVE
WWW.EUROPE.CREATIVE.COM

Creative's Sound Blaster Audigy 2 ZS soundcards and the Inspire T7700 speakers produce superior audio for gamers. www.creative.com

Logitech

Logitech raises the bar in gaming precision and performance with the MX 510 mouse and Internet Navigator SE Keyboard. www.logitech.co.uk

MSI
MICRO-STAR INTERNATIONAL

A worldwide leader in the motherboard industry, MSI's K7N2 supports the latest AthlonXP and Duron processors. www.msicomputer.co.uk

PLANTRONICS
World Leader in Communications Headsets

Plantronics USB headset with DSP (digital signal processing) and maximum bass response – enhanced for gaming. www.plantronics.com

Western Digital

The WD Raptor is a new class of hard drive that matches SCSI reliability and performance. www.westerndigital.com

jolt
online gaming

The home of Online Gaming, Jolt provides services from basic Quake clan ports to managed corporate game server solutions. www.jolt.co.uk

RESULTS

JOINT OPERATIONS: ESCALATION - 8v8

QUARTER-FINALS

DEATH VALLEY ASSASSINS	4-0	DE FORUM SUPERSTARS
DARK NEMESIS	2-3	FCOPZ
COMMANDER FORCE	1-3	KILLERS IN ACTION B
FSK	0-4	KILLERS IN ACTION A

SEMI-FINALS

DEATH VALLEY ASSASSINS	4-0	FCOPZ
KILLERS IN ACTION B	2-3	KILLERS IN ACTION A

FINAL

DEATH VALLEY ASSASSINS	1-3	KILLERS IN ACTION A
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WINNERS: KILLERS IN ACTION A SQUAD

PAINKILLER - DEATHMATCH 1v1

SEMI FINALS (MAP - ABSINTHE)

TYBALT	10-2	ZACCUBUS
ZHRANCE	5-31	STELAM

FINAL (MAPS - PSYCHO & SACRED)

TYBALT	6-27	STELAM
TYBALT	5-27	STELAM

WINNER: STEVEN "STELAM" LAMMERT

BATTLEFIELD VIETNAM - 10v10

FINAL LEAGUE POSITIONS

GROUP A

TEAM	PLAYED	WON	DRAWN	LOST	POINTS
PVP.BFV	4	4	0	0	12
[77CREW]	4	1	0	3	3
{SAS}	4	1	0	3	3

GROUP B

TEAM	PLAYED	WON	DRAWN	LOST	POINTS
[TIG]	4	4	0	0	12
=ICONI=	4	2	0	2	6
[VCCC]	4	0	0	3	0

FINAL

TEAM	PLAYED	WON	DRAWN	LOST	POINTS
PVP.BFV	1	1	0	0	3
[TIG]	1	0	0	1	0

WINNERS: PVP.BFV



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 that time again, time for your monthly dose of E-Sports goodness, and this month we'll once again be concentrating on the tournaments across the globe that have seen the best of the best test their mettle in order to become filthy rich.

First, we had the Samsung Euro Challenge at the ceBit Computer Trade Show in Hannover, Germany. As always, this was an invite-only event with the cream of Europe in attendance, based upon the teams and players that represented their nations at the World Cyber Games last year in San Francisco. It turned out to be a disappointing event for the UK with the only honours coming in the form of the Mobile Gaming competition and one of the British hopefuls, Anthony Lack, earning himself a second place and 3,000 Euros in a final round dominated by German entrants. Paul 'd'astz' McGarrity of the dignitas clan narrowly missed out on the podium and took fourth place in the *Unreal Tournament 2004* competition, but it was a very successful event for one team - yes you guessed it, 4Kings.Intel. In the *Warcraft 3* competition, they managed to claim all the podium spots with Manuel '4K^Grubby' Schenkhuizen



The victors, rightly looking smug.

beating Yoan '4K^ToD' Merlo in the final and representatives from Netherlands, France and Croatia all flying the 4Kings flag.

The next thing on the cards was the completion of the World E-Sports Games League in Korea, the invite-only event that I updated you about last issue. Following on from that, the finals have now been played and the champions crowned, but unfortunately it wasn't the result many had hoped for, with NoA emerging victorious over the UK representatives, 4Kings.Intel. All was not lost though as the UK entrants earned themselves \$20,000 for their troubles and the opportunity to go back to Korea for Season 2 and the chance to win more money.



Kill him! Kill him! Etc.



The crowd were enthralled.



Pick your allegiances first: the sunglasses come later.



Rubbish guns are the only letdown in the fighty bits.



Be prepared to have your noob Burton/River Island 'cargo pants' mocked by more EXPERIENCED PVC-c

THE MATRIX ONLINE

£34.99 (+ £8.49 monthly subscription) | Pub: Sega | Dev: Monolith |
ETA: Out Now | www.thematrixonline.com

REQUIRES P4 1.4GHz, 512MB RAM, 64MB Radeon 8 series or GeForce 3 Ti 3D card and a 56K modem
DESIRES P4 2.4GHz, 1GB RAM, 128MB 3D card and a 2MB broadband connection

Martin Korda jacks into Monolith's MMORPG. Is it The One?

ANTICLIMAX IS a pisser isn't it? You get all keyed up and excited, slaving and twitchy with anticipation, then just as your enthusiasm reaches its zenith, when your hands are sweatier than a fat man's armpit and your brain buzzes like a jamjar full of wasps, the open-handed slap of disappointment impudently stings your cheek, leaving you red-faced and deflated. Yes,

after months of excited anticipation of what could have been a MMO gamer's wet dream, we're left with this, a level 20 letdown, with a +5 anticlimax hit modifier, though admittedly with some glimmers of potential and twinkles of excellence lighting up the otherwise unspectacular world of *The Matrix Online*.

You start off, naturally, by creating your character, choosing from one of ten character types, each of which has its own strengths and weaknesses. Once you've

chosen one – incredibly, you don't get to tweak your stats – you get to configure your look (basic) and sit through the tutorial (inadequate), before uploading your selected skills (vast and varied). After this, it's time to jack in.

WE'RE IN

The first thing that strikes you is just how messy it all looks. Forget the sleek, polished presentation of *EverQuest II* and *World Of Warcraft*, this is MMOGing at its most cluttered, ranging from the blocky, often overlapping text boxes to the unsightly shortcut bars, which look more placeholder than blockbuster. The world of *The Matrix* is rather



"Stop trying to hit me and hit SYNTAX ERROR 10011101110."

more impressive, sprawling excitingly in every direction, barren, green-tinted dilapidated cityscapes ripe for exploration. Along with the excellent soundtrack, it generates a genuine sense of eerie foreboding that perfectly captures the psychological uneasiness and fear so prevalent in the movie trilogy. The gaming world is also seamless, with not a single loading screen to be seen as you move from outdoors to in, though *The Matrix Online* does currently suffer from some

serious lag issues, despite many of the areas being surprisingly unpopulated. Seeing as you've only just been awakened, your first few missions are confined to Zion operations – the human faction of freed former Matrix inmates and freeborn humans, intent on liberating as many subjugated minds as possible. Later on, you'll be approached by representatives of both the Machines and the Merovingian (the babbling Frenchman from the films), intent on recruiting you to their cause, a choice that

INPERSPECTIVE

EVERQUEST II

Reviewed Issue 150, Score 95%
The joint king of MMORPGing, though lacking PvP combat. However, its depth, presentation and attention to detail are simply unparalleled.

WORLD OF WARCRAFT

Reviewed Issue 152, Score 95%
Blizzard has created a real gem here. A sublime online gaming experience with great PvP options and simply haemorrhaging with atmosphere.



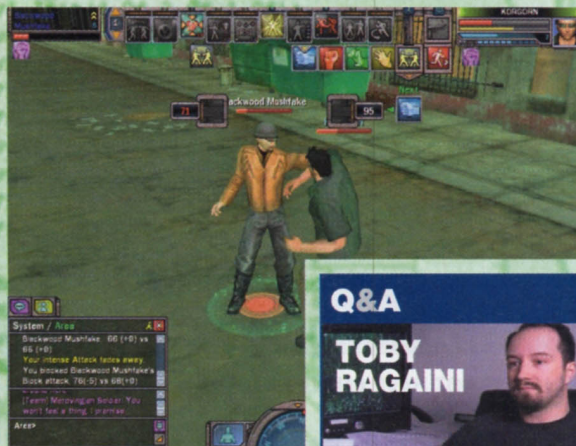
It's so buggy you can see the code leaking out of the graphics!



"See, all this ain't real right, and robots are using us for food. Got any of them blue Smarties?"



"Yeah it's like we're inside this giant computer and we're made of green numbers, and... OW!"



"Yeah? Well I know jive dancing!"

ultimately decides how the storyline unravels in your own personal adventure.

Each mission starts off with a phone call to your chosen faction's contact, who dishes out your mission objectives. After this, it's just a simple case of following a marker to a

about as thrilling and varied as most missions get early on.

TOGETHER ALONE

Thankfully though, there's plenty more here to distract your attention than the often samey missions. Vendors ply their wares on every street

and machines – and level up at a much faster pace than when working alone.

Before you know it, you're dashing around completing missions with your buddies and generally beating the binary code out of AI-controlled enemies who, at first, prove to

Seeing as they're seven levels higher than you are, you die again. Very quickly. This sort of thing happens all the time. As one of the many disgruntled players I spoke to while playing the game put it: "Get used to it." Before you reach level eight or nine – which takes an eternity – you'd better get ready to die more deaths than a reincarnated gnat.

LIGHT FROM DARK

There are, however, some excellent features too, most notably the close combat battles. It's hard not to feel that the game has been very intentionally geared towards making you specialise in hand-to-hand combat skills, with a range of martial arts just begging to be mastered, including the defluctive-throwing art of Aikido, and of course everyone's favourite, Kung Fu.

Battles are genuinely exciting affairs, especially

"The game world sprawls in every direction, barren, green-tinted dilapidated cityscapes generating an eerie sense of foreboding"

building, going to the correct floor and completing your tasks – which range from right-clicking on the person you're looking for, then left-clicking on either Talk/Search/Unlock/ Take/Give/Follow/Close Combat, depending on what your mission objectives are. Then it's off to the next location, where you do pretty much the same thing, before being awarded experience points if you succeed. And that, sadly, is

corner, encouraging you to spend your Information Points (TMO's version of gold pieces) on a cornucopia of new clothes, apparel and weapons.

It's also testament to the allure of the subject matter that the majority of players seem keen to hook up and work together. This allows you to advance through the game's already clearly gripping storyline – centred around an uneasy peace between humans

be among the most irritating beings you've ever come across. And we mean they trump even the likes of Joe Pasquale and people with big heads who sit in front of you at the cinema.

Picture this. You've just died, so you jack back in (there are no XP penalties but you do lose any items you haven't uploaded since your last death), only to be instantly attacked by one of the game's many AI-controlled gangs that pollute the streets.

Q&A

TOBY RAGAINI

The architect speaks. We catch up with *The Matrix Online's* lead designer, Toby Ragaini.

PCZ How did the Beta tests ending event go down?

RAGAINI People were blown away by it. The sky turned blood red as Agents began to purge the Matrix and prepare it for reset. Characters began to spontaneously combust. Giant eyes opened up in the sky. Real apocalyptic stuff.

PCZ Can you reveal anything more about the storyline?

RAGAINI TMO players must learn to expect the unexpected. The Wachowski Brothers have pulled out all the big guns for the ongoing story and nothing, and I mean nothing, is sacred.

PCZ How much have they been playing?

RAGAINI The Wachowski Brothers played in the Beta Test all the time. Believe me, I'd hear about it if they had any issues with the game, but I'm happy to say that they're very pleased with it.



The Architect occasionally appears to look down your top.



Throw the flash mobbers off the roof in the fastest time possible.

DIFFERENT CLASS



IT MIGHT NOT HAVE ANY GOBLINS IN IT, BUT IT'S STILL A MMOG

One of the advantages *The Matrix Online* has over its competitors is its setting. The game's sci-fi world is a long way removed from the mystical worlds of *EQII* and *WOW*, which some may argue furberishes it with more of a cool factor – perhaps more a matter of conjecture than fact.

However, just how different are the games really? Take the character classes, for example, and you'll see that perhaps fundamentally they're not too dissimilar. For Warrior, see Operative (weapons and martial arts specialist); for Mage, see Coder (summon servants to fight for you); and for Cleric, see Hacker (a healer with the ability to attack enemies with virus-like programs).

One key difference between this game and the likes of *EverQuest II* is your ability to constantly reinvent yourself by uploading a whole new set of abilities as and when you desire, meaning that in terms of skill variety, *The Matrix Online* certainly has the edge over the opposition.

when several characters are involved against an AI gang, or in one-on-one face-offs with other human players on PvP servers. Based on a real-time turn-based concept, the principal lies in identifying an opponent's weakness. You then choose from one of four standard attack types (Power, Speed, Blocking or Throwing), or from a vast array of special moves and then sit back to watch the thrilling, tactical

and superbly animated exchanges that follow.

The higher your skill level, the more exciting these scraps become, with the action sparingly kicking into bullet-time as you execute killer moves. You can also combine firearms (which, for *The Matrix*, are strangely ineffective and fail to capture the thrilling gunfights of the films) with martial arts, opting to fire off a few rounds before scrambling your foe's



Ever get the feeling you're being watched by some enormous eyes?

hairy spheres with a few well-placed crotch kicks. Of course, your enjoyment hinges heavily on what mood the erratic camera is in, with some battles being missed entirely as your view defaults to a highly uninteresting shot of a nearby skirting board, while the action rages on out of shot.

FALSE PROPHETS

Despite the decent combat, *The Matrix Online* has to go down as an opportunity missed, especially given its rich back-story and endless gaming possibilities. It certainly hasn't turned out as we'd hoped, but despite its failings, it has just about enough promise and potential to make us think it could, with time, get a whole lot better. Look how much *Star Wars Galaxies* improved following its rather tepid beginnings for proof that it can be done.

It feels like *The Matrix Online* was released six months too

early, with an avalanche of bugs and glitches (inaccessible revolving doors, crap camera, malfunctioning mission goals), compounded by poor presentation and somewhat repetitive gameplay and locales. Sure, its combat is among the best we've experienced, you do get to meet many of the characters from the films and the story already looks strong (especially if we see the kind of events that happened at the end of the Beta test – see 'The Architect Speaks' p111). However, that's simply not enough these days, especially when the likes of *EQII* and *WOW* have recently raised the MMORPG bar to stratospheric heights. We'd love to be able to tell you that in time everything will be alright, and there is potential here, but for now *TMO* clearly isn't The One. [D]

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Excellent tactile combat system
- ✓ There's a huge, varied and imaginative array of skills to learn and master
- ✓ Storyline has much promise
- ✗ Too many bugs, glitches and annoyances for comfort
- ✗ Poor presentation
- ✗ Currently lacks variety

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Superpowers are handicapped in PvP to make things fairer.

CITY OF HEROES ISSUE 4: COLOSSEUM

■ Free upgrade (requires full *City Of Heroes* subscription) | Pub: NCsoft |
Dev: NCsoft | ETA: Out Now | uk.cityofheroes.com

REQUIRES PIII 800MHz, 256MB RAM, 32MB 3D Card and a 56K modem

DESIRES P4 2GHz, 512MB RAM, 64MB 3D Card and a broadband or cable Internet connection

Always up for a decent superpowered scrap, Paul Presley sucks in the gut, straps on the tights and goes looking for trouble

SIX MONTHS is a long time in the life of a hero. Since we first scuffed our boots of justice on the criminal backside of Paragon City, the game has seen four major content upgrades, is preparing to unveil the *City Of Villains* expansion and has launched to much acclaim and fanfare across the continent of Europe. And it's been sued to the high heavens by Marvel Comics

because people couldn't resist creating their own versions of established, recognisable, copyrighted superheroes. At the time of writing the case is yet to be decided (potential penalties for NCsoft could be anything from a hefty fine to a complete shut-down of the game – the combined powers of Corporate Lawyer Man and Captain Attorney appear to be the strongest of all). However, the judge in charge recently threw out six of the 11 charges

Marvel brought against the game, bringing hope to gamers everywhere.

BOX FRESH

Point is, things are afoot in *City Of Heroes* and the game has moved on significantly since our initial review (issue 149, score 77%). Now, with *Issue 4* opening the first stages of player-versus-player combat, it seems as good a time as any to revisit the game and see what's happening.

Issue 4: Colosseum is a tentative toe in the water for PvP, ahead of *City Of Villains'* full-on cannonball-dive into the deep end in a few months' time. Regular visitors to the Galaxy City, Talos Island and Peregrine Island areas of the game will have previously seen some fevered construction activity taking place in-game. With *Issue 4* fully downloaded and installed, the work has now been revealed as brand-



INPERSPECTIVE

EVERQUEST II

Reviewed Issue 150, Score 95%

In terms of character creation, *EQII* is the only other MMOG to go into this much depth (well, *EVE Online* too, but you never see those characters so it doesn't count). Totally different gameplay experience though.

WORLD OF WARCRAFT

Reviewed Issue 152, Score 95%

WoW is pulling in the punters in the same kind of droves that *COH* did when it first launched. Both take the colourful, populist approach but *WoW* arguably has more depth. We are starting to hear grumbles about the long game, though...



Everyone can be a superhero! Even your dog! And your granny!

CHOOSE YOUR BODY TYPE



Fine-tune your ultimate hero with the improved creation tool.



Lady-bumps are fully adjustable, which is crucial.



Let's hope evil legal shenanigans don't spoil the COH party...

spanking-new duelling arenas, allowing heroes to take each other on in consensual tournament-style gladiatorial combat.

It's a cool, well implemented system that provides scope for everything from one-on-one duels to multiplayer battle royales and giant, 150-player 'supergroup battles'. However, such huge numbers place a big drain on CPUs and are only recommended if you have a supercomputer or two handy to draw power from.

The in-game ranking system (working along similar lines to that used in chess – you start with 1,500 points and have your score raised or lowered by a scaling amount depending on the rank of your

opponent, and whether you win) provides you with an incentive, although not as much as that of wagering influence points on the outcome.

The ranking system is complemented by a decent handicap procedure too, meaning players of higher levels can pair off against lower-level chums, temporarily reducing their stats for the duration of the bout to even things out. Finally, it's topped off with boxing-style weight categories – welter, feather, light, etc – to provide plenty of routes in for players to explore. The set-up is simple, yet comprehensive. Each

arena contains plenty of terminals in which you can view or set up matches. Options range from the number of players, to restricting the use of certain powers (teleports, flying etc) to how quickly your endurance levels recharge. Matches can be scheduled for specific times, letting you sign up, then wander off for a spot of extra villain-thwacking until the appointed hour arrives (a warning notice pops up letting you teleport instantly to the arena at the given time).

MINIATURE HEROES

Non-participating heroes can view the action (as can heroes who have exhausted all their respawns mid-match) by inhabiting tiny camera drones, flitting about the arena floor spying on the action. In a nice touch, these cameras can be

destroyed if they prove especially annoying.

Does it work though? Emphatically, yes. Duelling with super-powers is, forgive the pun, a blast. Certain abilities are tweaked to provide balance in the arena, which results in ultra-competitive matches. No-one feels undervalued, including the oft-maligned Controllers who come into their own here, and the combat is fast-moving, spectacular and raises the whole *City Of Heroes* experience exponentially.

Another *Issue 4* enhancement that makes things better is the revamped character creation tool. Already one of the best out there, you now get to choose from a wealth of new clothing options (mostly anime-inspired in advance of the upcoming Asian launch), as well as

make specific changes to your alter-ego's physical appearance – nose length, face shape, arm width and so on. And yes, you can also adjust female chest sizes. We know you were thinking about it.

NO WE WEREN'T

Meanwhile, the rest of *City Of Heroes* has been tightened up significantly since our last review. More in the way of rewards for persevering (capcs, costume changes, new character types to unlock and so on) and a more focused back-story. There's still a lot of repetition involved, but the main criticism we had previously has been well addressed since launch and consequently *COH* is much better for it.

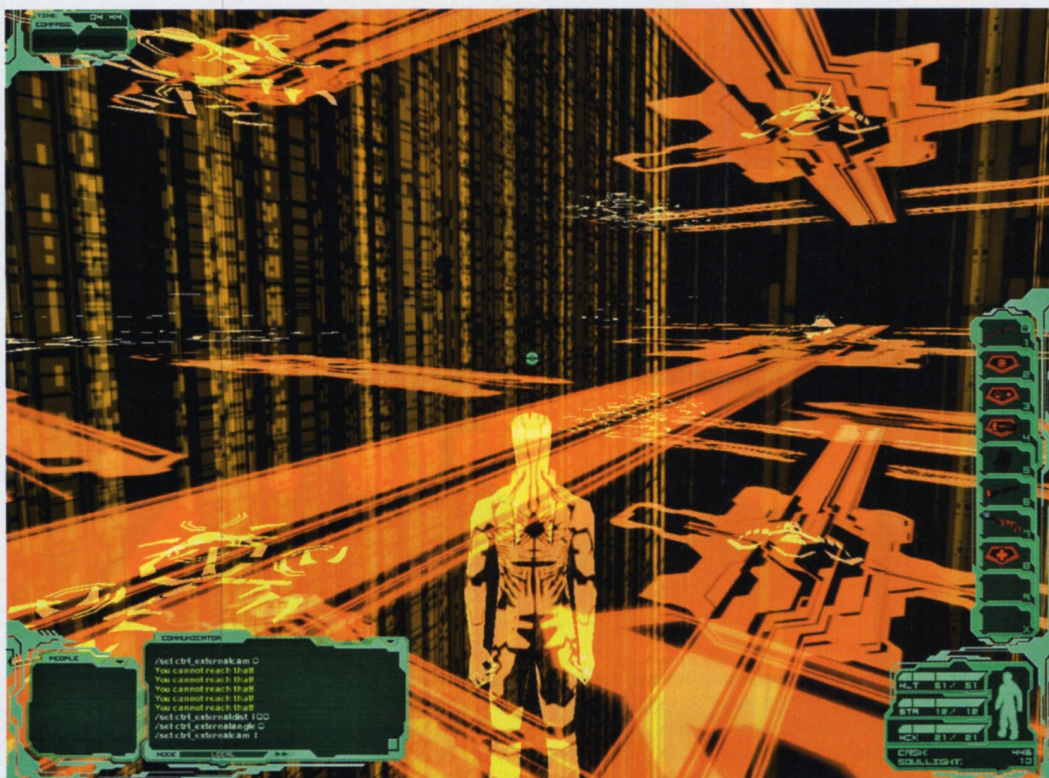
It could still be better, and chances are *City Of Villains* will help further, but right now it's definitely earning its reputation as the populist MMOG that isn't *World Of Warcraft*. **PC**

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Plenty of PvP options to keep you interested
- ✓ New character creation tools make the best better
- ✓ Still enormous fun
- ✓ Kheldion story is adding more weight to the world
- ✗ Still somewhat repetitive away from PvP

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Getting more super



Typical. You wait for a light bus to the Master Control Program, and then none come, and you have to walk.

NEOCRON 2: BEYOND DOME OF YORK

■ £29.99 (£9 monthly subscription) | Pub: Atari | Dev: Reakktor.com |
ETA: Out Now | www.neocron2.com

REQUIRES: PIII 1.4GHz, 256MB RAM, 3D card with 32MB RAM and a 56K Internet connection
DESIRES: P4 2.6GHz, 512MB RAM, 128MB 3D card and a broadband Internet connection

Paul Presley's eyes are burning with a twisted vision of the future

PEOPLE WILL play anything – it's official. No matter how bad the game, how appalling the implementation, how atrocious the development, how buggy the code, how superior the alternatives – some people will happily sit down and submit themselves to any old shit, come back for more and pay t'mill owner f'privilege.

INPERSPECTIVE

ANARCHY ONLINE: SHADOWLANDS

Reviewed Issue 134, Score 80%

If it's sci-fi MMOGs you're after, you won't go far wrong with Funcom's futuristic classic *Anarchy Online*. The engine may be almost as old as *Neocron*, but it's a far more rewarding gameplay experience.

PLANETSIDE

Reviewed Issue 131, Score 82%

One of the few other MMOGs to feature real-time FPS combat, although since the whole game is based around it, *PlanetSide* is obviously much better than *Neocron*'s pitiful attempt.

Masochists, the lot of them.

There are no two ways about this: *Neocron 2* (and I'm still not sure I fully understand why this is being billed as a sequel since it's essentially the same game that was originally released in 2002) is almost criminally bad.

When it was first released, this tale of life in the 28th century, a life of mutants, cyberpunks, sex and violence was at least different to anything else out there. We'd certainly never seen a MMOG with an in-game porno district and, with the exception of *The Red Light World* (see issue 147), we still haven't. Not exactly a badge *Neocron* can wear with pride and now, well it should just hang its head in shame.

Where to start? The interface is a mess. You can't even resize the windows – ironically, the first incarnation's menu system was actually a lot neater. The content is frequently broken, bugged or so hideously under-explained that you almost never have any

clue what you should be doing. The graphics are, for this day and age, a joke, despite supposedly having undergone an enhancement (although I'd defy anyone to tell the difference beyond the odd texture here and there). The new city area (Dome of York) is to all intents a mere retreat of the original city, just with shabbier social values. It doesn't add anything significant to the *Neocron* experience, other than to spread the already thin numbers of people that have bafflingly decided to commit themselves to the game over an even larger area – thus reducing further the chances of ever actually meeting another player.

SOCIAL OUTCASTS

Not that you'd really want to meet another *Neocron* player. Based on several weeks running around this hell on virtual Earth, I can say they are, to a man, the most obnoxious, foul-mouthed, unhelpful, bitter, spiteful, unpleasant and insular MMOG

players I've ever had the misfortune to encounter. I'd love to put it down to a couple of one-off encounters, but for over two weeks I never once had an enquiry answered in a useful manner or managed to find anyone to team up with, instead being barraged by abuse, taunts and hostility simply for being a

"Why anyone continues to play is a complete mystery"

newbie. Honestly, they're worse than the Young Conservatives.

I wish I could find something redeeming to say, some reason to recommend giving *Neocron 2* a try. Unfortunately, I can only sit here and resent the fact it exists. This is because there's a staggeringly good William Gibson-esque, *Deus Ex*-ish cyberpunk MMOG waiting to happen and while *Neocron* continues to pollute the genre with its presence, it's unlikely to encourage

anyone else to want to give the setting a try.

Why anyone continues to play to this day is a complete mystery. A mystery wrapped in a riddle, surrounded by an enigma, guarded by starved Rottweilers with bags of angry wasps strapped to their genitals. Avoid this like the plague. [F]



Well! The Jorvik Viking Centre's certainly changed since we were last in York.



It's like Trent Reznor told some angry goth teenagers from the 1990s to make a game.



Nudeness! Leather! Strobing lights! If this doesn't piss your parents off, nothing will!

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Nice concept
- ✗ Awful implementation
- ✗ Badly ageing engine
- ✗ Lack of variety
- ✗ Buggy as hell
- ✗ Extremely unfriendly players

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Neochronic

THE HOTTEST NEWS ON THE PLANET...

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EVE ONLINE: EXODUS

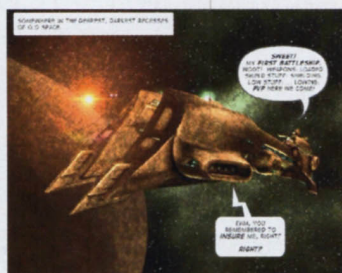
For two years **Richie Shoemaker** has been hopelessly addicted to **EVE**. If anyone knows anything about this sci-fi epic, it's him...

EVE may not be the most popular online game, but it's certainly the most unique. Its ongoing sci-fi world is teeming with political intrigue and enriched with a healthy body of fiction (see www.eve-online.com/background). More importantly, all 60,000 players interact through the same universe and can advance their alter-egos, whether they're online or not. And among that number are some enterprising and altruistic souls who've made it their aim to make the lives of other capsuleers easier...



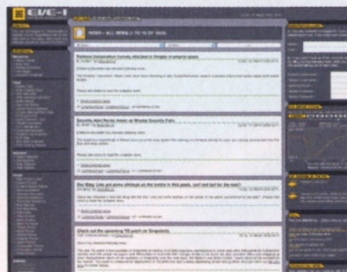
EVE RADIO (INTERNET RADIO)

All the best online games have one, and *EVE* is no exception. We're talking radio stations and this one operates 24/7 with live DJs spinning the hard drives of steel during peak times. Typically, listeners are treated to a healthy mix of news, comment, music and regular competitions to win millions of ISK (the in-game currency).



WARP DRIVE ACTIVE (FANSITE)

It would seem that Warp Drive Active's creator has buggered off to play *World Of Warcraft* (or something), but that doesn't mean you shouldn't stop by the site. It offers an archive of comic strips, most of which have a friendly dig at *EVE*, its players and the developers. In-jokes for *EVE* geeks.



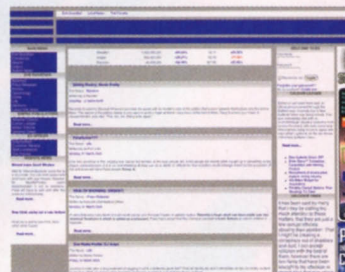
EVE-I (FANSITE)

As it's always first with game news and fosters a sharing community of diehards, we might suggest EVE-I is the best *EVE* site in existence. It's much better than that however, with a live server status tool that tells you how many people are playing and downloads of all the third-party tools that matter.



EVE POLITICAL MAP (MAP TOOL)

The in-game map is an essential tool for finding out what dangers there may be en route to wherever you're going. What it won't tell you is whose territory you might be trespassing on, or where all the pirates like to hang out. Which is why this regularly updated 2D map is worth a browse every once in a while.



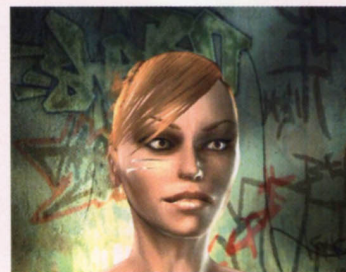
EVE GUARDIAN (NEWS SITE)

EVE has its own official news agency, but it's slow, unreliable and restrained by an overbearing urge to be impartial. The EVE Guardian, however, feasts upon rumour and propaganda, which makes it all the more interesting to read. Sadly there's no crossword or horoscope page, otherwise it would be perfect.



EVE MAP (UTILITY)

From the makers of Character Manager, this handy navigation tool enables you to plan for elaborate journeys across *EVE* space. Without having to stumble through the in-game menus, this tool can tell you at a glance what's available where, and you can even add your own notes.



CHARACTER MANAGER (CHARACTER TOOL)

Experience in *EVE* is earned online or off. The problem is knowing when you're due to complete skill training and planning what to train in next. This handy application can be used as an alarm clock to tell you when to log on, or can be configured to plan sophisticated training regimes for multi-character accounts.



HDY SHOP (MERCHANDISE)

EVE has its own online shop (www.eve-online.com/store), selling, among other things, T-shirts, mugs and the Quafe soft drink. HDY (Hadean Drive Yards), one of *EVE*'s oldest corps, also has one, selling branded shirts, mugs and bags. It's a niche market, but how many other MMOG guilds offer that kind of service?

STEVE HILL'S NEVERQUEST

Steve Hill squeezes back into the spandex for the swears world of *City Of Heroes*



"SWEAR FOR ME you shitmonger." If Will Porter said that to me in the pub, he'd get a thick lip. However, masquerading as a superhero, the tea boy has shed his bumbling persona and is mixing it with the grown-ups. It's debatable how grown up swearing at each other dressed in spandex is, but Will – aka NightPorter – has switched off his profanity filter and is now able to join in the fun and appreciate my insults uncensored.

Interestingly though, while I was previously unable to call him a tit****, as he pointedly observes, "It doesn't seem to know spunkbubble," which went through uncut. This revelation earns Will an admonishment from team leader Prezzer, who instructs him to "wash your mouth out".

Nevertheless, just to check that everything's working correctly, I respond to NightPorter's opening request with an efficiently blunt "cock piss shit." Receiving loud and clear, Will cheers "hoorah", Prezzer chips in with an unexpected "c***yboobies" and we're good to go. All except Sefton, that is, who, having forgotten his password, is

apparently swearing at his computer in a more traditional fashion. Thankfully I can't hear him – I'm sat at home in my smalls while the other three are trapped in an airless office. Like the man said, we can be heroes, just for one day...

MISSION POSSIBLE

We're back in Paragon City, a four-strong team of superheroes ready to take on the baddies and restore justice to the world. Or we would be if Sefton could work out the rudiments of how to join us. He seems to have his dick

"He may never have been down a mine in his life, but Yorkshireman can certainly handle himself in a scrap"

caught in his spandex zipper, so we set off without him, thwarting crime wherever it rears its ugly head. That woman being mugged? We're on it, levitating the lowdown varmints before finishing them off with a good old-fashioned kicking.

It's fun for a while, but eventually we attempt a mission, the first part of which is the seemingly simple task of walking through a door. While Prez and Porter manage this effortlessly, I find myself stuck like a pig in a skip, moonwalking into the void in mounting frustration. "I can't get through the door," I wail, pre-empting any snipes by hastily adding, "not because I'm fat."

"Some hero," opines Prezzer. When I eventually manage to negotiate the door, the increasingly impudent Will sarcastically exclaims "well done, have a banana". Suffice to say, his tongue will not be so loose next time we meet, the straw-chewing, tractor-driving little tit.

MINER ALTERCATION

Seems we have to meet some bloke called Jose Brogan, and with Prezzer opting out in order to help Sefton slip into his skintights, it's left to me and my youthful ward. As I point out, "me and

point, what an outfit. While the rest of us are sporting fairly orthodox superhero attire, Sefton has pitched up in a yellow helmet, an orange bib, and a pair of flares, while boasting a thick moustache and a full set of lamb chop sideburns. Looking like a rejected member of The Village People, it's the sartorial equivalent of turning up at an orgy in a pair of stripey Y-Fronts, and I think I'm well within my rights to ask: "What the f**k has Sefton come as?"

WILL POWER

"Why are you wearing a yellow helmet?" asks a patently confused Will.

"I am Yorkshireman!" explains Sefton of his alter-ego. "I get my power from down t'mines."

Jesus Christ on a bike. Two decades after the miners' strike almost prompted a second civil war, one of Yorkshire's own is parading round a fantasy world with a yellow breast on his head. Arthur Scargill would be so proud.

He may never have been down a mine in his life, but Yorkshireman can certainly handle himself in a scrap, smiting enemies with a beam of blue power. I myself prove able to effortlessly toss them into the air with my well-honed repellent powers, and Prezzer socks them in the chops like the camp '60s hero he dreams of being.

As for the puny Will, he couldn't punch his way out of a Monster Munch packet, and is found cowering in a corner screaming "help me someone".

Not likely, tea boy. Now get the kettle on... ☕



Have you read Alan Moore's *Top Ten*?



It was quiet... Almost too quiet. Even for a royal wedding reception.



HARDWARE

ALL THE LATEST NEWS AND REVIEWS FROM THE WORLD OF PC HARDWARE

FORCE FEEDBACK



■ **HARDWARE EDITOR** Phil Wand

Every once in a while, I meet up with an old friend to spend a day playing *Grand Prix 4*. Both of us have been big fans of Geoff Crammond games since the release of *F1GP* on the Commodore Amiga, and the LAN multiplayer options in the PC version are a hoot. As well as being an afternoon full of severed wheels, blown engines and Tamburello Concrete Challenge, where we re-enact Ayrton Senna's rendezvous with the scenery at Imola, it's a reminder of just how shallow many console racers are – and of how good PC hardware is at creating a sense of realism.

Take the new *Gran Turismo 4*. Unlike the PC, the PlayStation doesn't have the guts to render a starting grid of two dozen AI players, nor to make them lifelike. Follow any 'computer' driver in *GT4* and you'll quickly realise he's stuck on rails. Stop anywhere on the racing line, and every lap he'll rear-end you at some heroic speed as though you weren't there. The game has become so visually complex and so biblical in scope that there are hardly any processor cycles left to give your competitors even half a clue.

Or make them believable. Where an hour spent playing *Grand Prix 4*, *GTR* or *Live For Speed* makes you drive like a lunatic next time you get into your car, console games rarely have that effect. And what about online play? While almost every new racing title on the PC offers Internet play, *GT4* has none. Unless you're prepared to put up with the squint-inducing split-screen mode, or you have a lounge big enough for two TVs and two PS2s, you're stuck. Think I'll stick with PCs...

BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

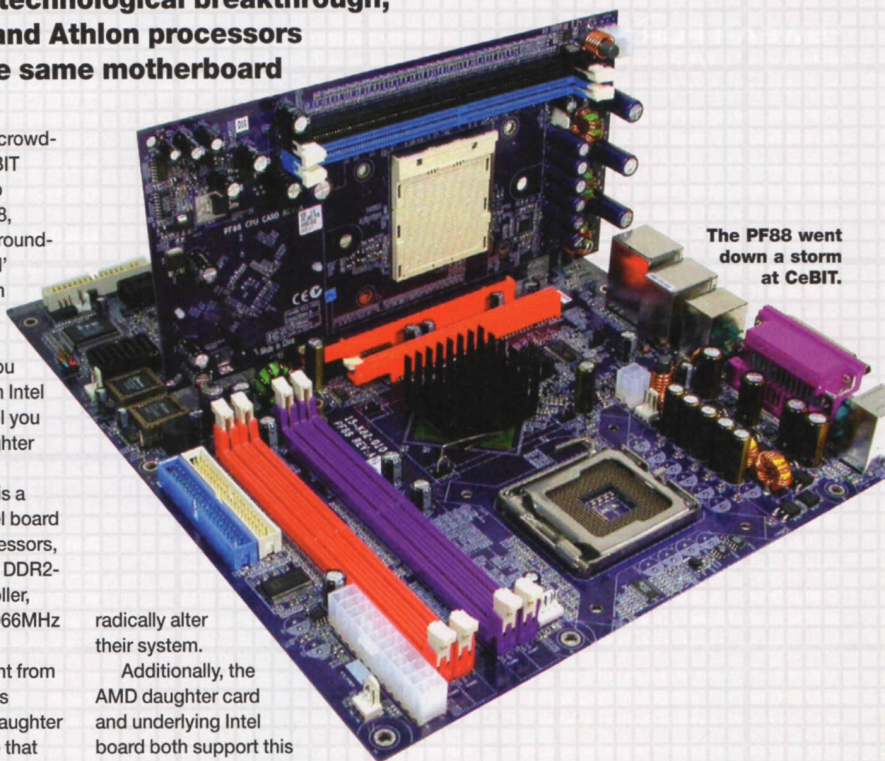
ECS boasts of technological breakthrough; puts Pentium and Athlon processors together on the same motherboard

ONE OF THE biggest crowd-pullers at this year's CeBIT show was the Elitegroup Computer Systems PF88, a motherboard whose ground-breaking 'converter card' technology enables both Pentium and Athlon processors to be used inside the same PC. If you want to switch over from Intel to AMD, or vice versa, all you need do is slot in a daughter card and reboot.

At its core, the PF88 is a standard SiS-based Intel board for LGA775 socket processors, with banks for the latest DDR2-667 RAM, a SATA controller, plus Gigabit LAN and 1066MHz FSB. What makes the Elitegroup board different from any other is that it comes supplied with an AMD daughter card – a miniature mobo that shares a Northbridge chip with the host Intel board and has sockets for a 939-pin Athlon plus up to two sticks of DDR-400 RAM. Intel users wishing to try out the latest AMD64 chips, or Athlon fans wanting to compare their performance with the equivalent Pentium 4 can do so without the need to

radically alter their system.

Additionally, the AMD daughter card and underlying Intel board both support this year's dual-core chip designs, as well as Intel's new EMT64 technology (see Snippets, opposite). ECS has not fixed a price, but expect the PF88 and converter technology to cost around £170 at its summer launch. The company also has plans to sell the two elements separately.



The PF88 went down a storm at CeBIT.

"This card means both Pentium and Athlon processors can be used inside the same PC"

DOUBLE VISION

GIGABYTE unveils new addition

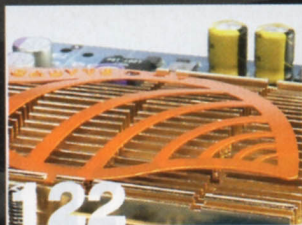


The PT880 Pro supports PCI-Express x16 and AGP 8x.



GIGABYTE'S GA-8VT880P Combo makes use of VIA's PT880 Pro chipset to deliver both AGP 8x and PCI-Express x16 interconnects on one Pentium motherboard. The new GA-8VT880P supports all LGA775 Intel Pentium 4 processors, DDR-400 and DDR2-667 memory, and includes a controller for Parallel and Serial ATA hard drives, plus Gigabit LAN and 7.1 channel onboard sound. The board will be on sale towards the end of spring, and should appeal to anyone with an existing high-end AGP 8x card wishing to buy a motherboard that doesn't exclude them from upgrading to PCI-Express x16 at a later date.

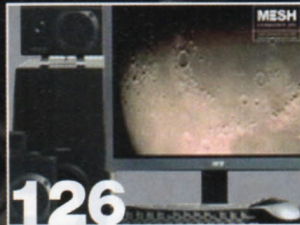
"Based on feedback from our customers," says Richard Brown at VIA, "there's strong demand for a chipset that provides the bridge between new and established technologies." The company reckons that its new architecture will offer the same or slightly lower performance as Intel's 915 and i925X products.



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You ask, he answers



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Nasty companies given a slap



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Retail therapy here

QUIET A CARD

Sapphire announces Ultimate X800 XL, using Zalman solution to reduce noise

Zalman's cooler is a conspicuous addition to the new X800 XL.



the ZM80 was that the huge weight of the Zalman block caused it to break free of its mountings and overheat.

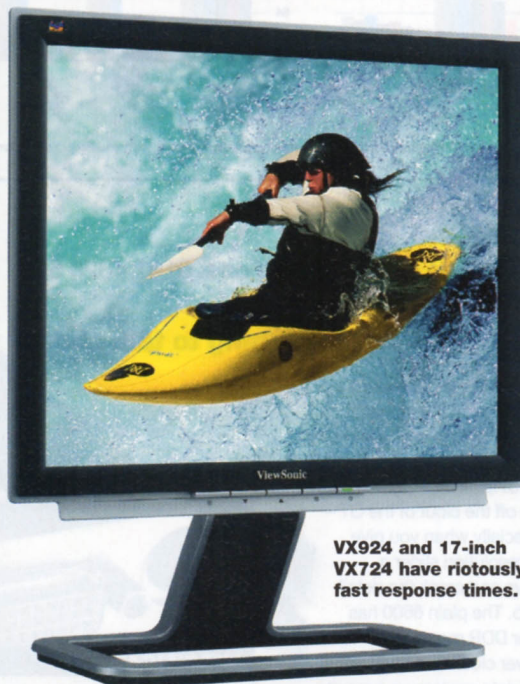
Now the Ultimate line is back, it's no surprise to see the ZM80 gone and the new X800 sporting the same revision that so greatly improved its predecessors – a low-noise Zalman fan. The card's specifications remain unchanged, with the core running at 400MHz and memory at an effective 980MHz, so existing XL owners will want to look elsewhere. Given that today's PSUs drown out the world's loudest video cards, the Ultimate X800 XL should only be bought to complement an existing quiet cooling solution.

IT'S BEEN a year since Sapphire introduced its last Ultimate cards, the silent 9600XT and 9800XT. The duo featured Zalman's gold-plated, aluminium-clad heat pipe – an imposing metal sandwich which cooled the RADEONS noiselessly and removed the need for a fan. The lack of any moving parts also meant the cards were maintenance-free.

But although inaudible, the Ultimates were expensive, unwieldy affairs, and the complex heat pipe system wasn't that special. Our experience with

BUILT FOUR GAMES

ViewSonic introduces new Xtreme flat panels; claims are world's first four-millisecond screens



VX924 and 17-inch VX724 have riotously fast response times.

NOT LONG after BenQ wowed everyone with plans to create a 5ms LCD, ViewSonic has gone one better – quite literally – with the introduction of its new Xtreme Line. "It marks a major milestone in LCD technology," says Russell Cole at ViewSonic Europe. "The 4ms response time across all colour scales has allowed us to create the ultimate gaming monitors with motion video performance rivaling the best CRTs." Such speeds

should (in theory) allow the VX924 and VX724 to render motion accurately at up to 250-frames-per-second.

The 1280x1024 resolution, 19-inch VX924 will be on sale first, with digital and analogue inputs, a 550:1 contrast ratio, 160-degree viewing angle and ViewSonic's ultra-slim bezel and distinctive style. The company is targeting gamers, plus DVD whores and telly addicts, with UK products arriving in the next two months. Although prices have yet to be confirmed, and specs drawn up for the 17-inch model, you won't see much change from £400 for the VX924.

SNIPPETS

INTEL'S 64



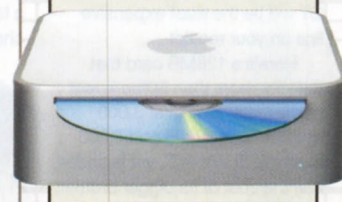
Intel has finally shipped its 6-series chip, with the company's new EM64T 64-bit addressing technology and clock speeds ranging from 3-3.6GHz. Additionally, as Intel's EM64T attempts to mimic the success of AMD64, so SpeedStep will offer the same features of rival Cool'n'Quiet power management. The chip giant has also introduced a monster 3.73GHz Extreme Edition chip with 1066MHz FSB and 2MB of cache, but expect a hefty street price of close to £700. As reported last month, the EE chip will be superseded by a dual-core design later in the year. www.intel.com

PIPE DREAM

ATI's barely-secret R520 replacement for the current crop of RADEON cards is rumoured to have 32 rendering pipelines, twice the number of the existing X800-based flagships. With a transistor count heading towards 350 million, the chip design will be extraordinarily complex – more so than any Intel or AMD processor. Additionally, the Canadian company is to pursue multiple processor technology, but unlike NVIDIA SLI, it enables you to use any number of video cards in parallel. www.ati.com

TURNCOATS!

Last month, a survey of 400 iPod owners revealed that almost one fifth of the PC users among them were looking to switch to Macintosh. With a global market share of just 1%, Apple aren't likely to dominate the home computing scene, but with the company's US share rumoured to hit 5% by the end of this year, and the popularity of Mac desktops reflecting the popularity of the iPod, PC manufacturers need to realise that many of today's users want stability and simplicity rather than outright power. www.apple.com



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	nvidia.com
NVIDIA	nForce4 Standalone	6.53	17-Mar-05	31.3MB	nvidia.com
VIA	Hyperion 4in1	455vp1	25-Nov-04	1.4MB	viaarena.com

GRAPHICS

MANUFACTURER	NAME	DESC	RELEASED	SIZE	WEB
ATI	Display, Control Panel, WDM	CATALYST 5.3	9-Mar-05	23.1MB	ati.com
NVIDIA	Forceware	Release 71.84	11-Mar-05	17.9MB	nvidia.com

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

GEFORCE FISTICUFFS

Five cards duke it out in a benchmarking battle, but which is the one you want?

LAST MONTH saw a group of RADEON cards biting and scratching each other like a bevy of teenage girls as they fought to knock GeForce cards from their perches. But with no obvious winner, the GT duo

remained on top to flick Vs at the downtrodden ATI camp.

Now we've ripped the shrink-wrap from a teetering pile of new GeForce cards and have tested them on the same machine to see how they stack up. Will the

6600 GT and 6800 GT remain out front?

CONTENDERS... READY! Sparkle's 6600 GT has been our favourite mainstream card for some time. Just for jollies, we've

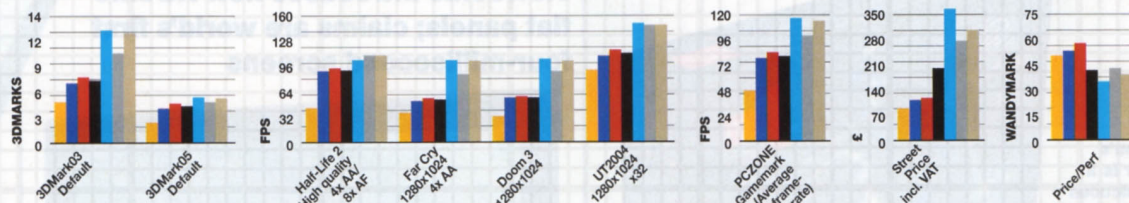
pitted it against a 256MB plain 6600. Will the cheaper card's memory give it the boost it needs? Probably not. What'll give the Sparkles a run for their money is the BFG 6600 GT OC

**PCI-
EXPRESS
GRAPHICS**

and GIGABYTE WEIRDO TURBO SUPER, two cards that come tweaked from the factory. And at the top of the shop, a 6800 Ultra provides a frame of reference.

BENCHMARKS

SPARKLE 6600
SPARKLE 6600 GT
GIGABYTE 6600 GT
BFG 6600GT OC
XFX 6800 ULTRA
GECUBE X800 XL
GIGABYTE X800 XT



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.

6600

Price: £91 | Manufacturer: Sparkle Computer | Phone: 0191 4826 656
www.sparkle-technology.co.uk

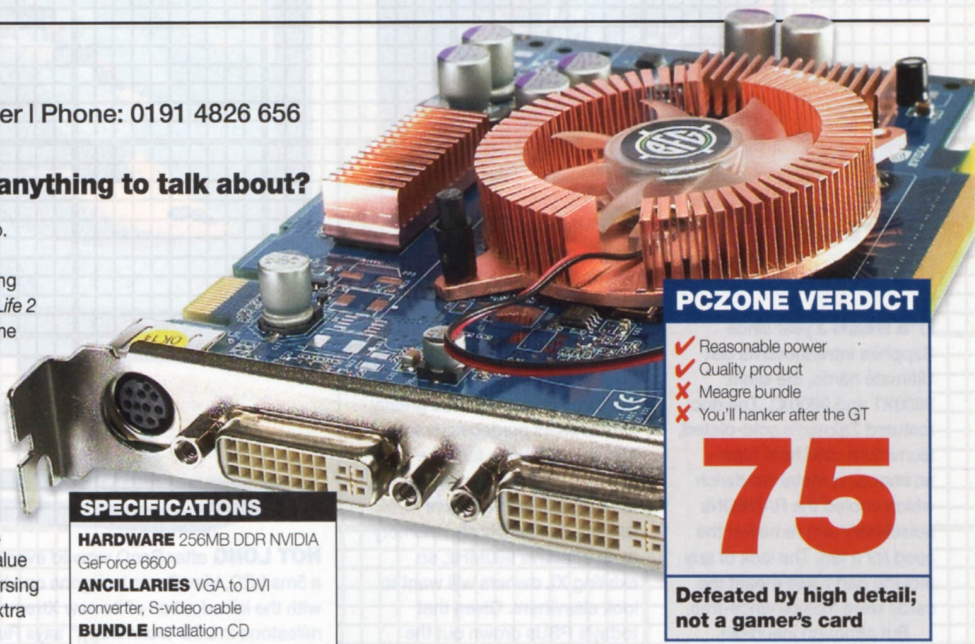
A vanilla card for under a ton, but is it anything to talk about?

WITH WEBSITES

such as dealtime.co.uk and nextag.co.uk allowing users to compare prices from different stores, no wonder shoppers click through to the retailer that makes the smallest hole in their Visa statement. Forget customer service, overlook the returns procedure and ignore the derogatory remarks of people who've bought there before – price is king. Trouble is, when people go hunting for a 6600 GT, the plain 6600 always turns up in their results – and at £91 they think they've stumbled across

the Web's top bargain. Er, no.

While the benchmarks show it as a reasonably strong performer, with 48fps in *Half-Life 2* and 37fps in *Far Cry*, it's some way off the clout of the GT – especially when you give the resolution slider a shove and crank the detail knob. The plain 6600 has older DDR memory, a slower clock and its fill rates and data are less as a result. It's not poo, but it's worse value than the GT and you'll be cursing that you didn't spend that extra £40 on the GIGABYTE.



SPECIFICATIONS

HARDWARE 256MB DDR NVIDIA GeForce 6600
ANCILLARIES VGA to DVI converter, S-video cable
BUNDLE Installation CD

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Reasonable power
- ✓ Quality product
- ✗ Meagre bundle
- ✗ You'll hanker after the GT

75

Defeated by high detail; not a gamer's card

6600 GT

Price: £129 | Manufacturer: Sparkle Computer | Phone: 0191 4826 656 | www.sparkle-technology.co.uk

Our mainstream favourite attempts to woo us once again

BUILD yourself a machine based around any 939-pin Athlon board like the AN8 Fatal1ty, pair it with an AMD64 3200+ Winchester, 1GB of decent PC3200 memory, a monster SATA hard drive, low-response 17-inch flat panel and a shrink-wrapped copy of Windows XP, and Sparkle's 6600 GT will be the least expensive line on your receipt.

Here's a 128MB card that delivers more than 50fps in real game tests, plus over 3,000 marks in *3DMark05* and 7,000 marks in *3DMark03*, yet is under half the cost of its bigger brother, the 6800 GT. Sure, the more

powerful GeForce is some way ahead in the benchmarks, and OK, power-hungry gamers with deep pockets or wealthy parents won't settle for any mainstream product, no matter how good, but the 6600 GT gives you all the smoothness and detail you need. For real world users, it remains a tempting choice.



SPECIFICATIONS

HARDWARE 128MB GDDR3 NVIDIA GeForce 6600 GT
ANCILLARIES VGA to DVI converter, S-video cable
BUNDLE Installation CD

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ All the power you really need
- ✓ Quiet, single slot design
- ✓ Great price
- ✗ The GIGABYTE card

87

Still sparkly

GV-NX66T128VP TURBO FORCE

■ Price: £131 | Manufacturer: GIGABYTE Technology | Phone: 01908 362700
uk.giga-byte.com

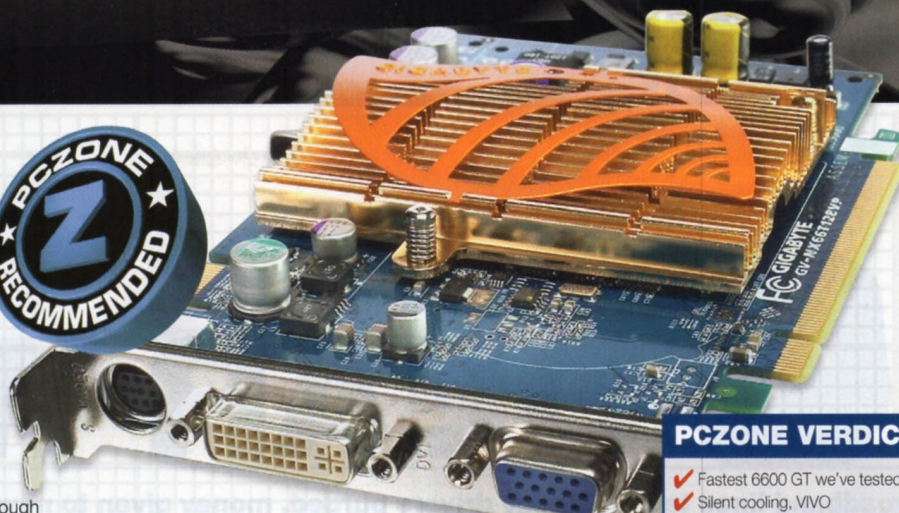
Those crazy Taiwanese are at it again, praise be

LIKE ALL GIGABYTE products from recent months, the NX66T128VP's name has been created by someone opening Notepad, emptying a packet of peanuts over their keyboard, then hunting them down individually with cocktail sticks. The NX66T128VP remains a little pricier than the PIOSUX256DDR, but is a better choice than the LALALA123 and

MMMMM69. As expected, the box it comes in is big enough to grow four medium-sized plants and is a nasty shade of pink. Good old GIGABYTE.

But by heck, what a wonderful thing. A heat-pipe arrangement replaces the fan to make this GT totally silent, and it's a weighty affair too, meaning you feel like you're getting double your money's worth. You

also have the company's T3 Technology and V-TUNER 2 adjusting the clocks for a claimed 38 per cent speed boost, and while it isn't quite that amazing, it is the fastest 6600 we've tested. Add the fact that it has VIVO and is only two quid more than the Sparkle, and the decision just got even easier.



SPECIFICATIONS

HARDWARE 128MB GDDR3
NVIDIA GeForce 6600 GT VIVO

ANCILLARIES VGA to DVI converter, nifty-looking multimedia thing

BUNDLE Thief: Deadly Shadows, JointOps: Typhoon Rising, PowerDirector 3, PowerDVD 5, Installation CD

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Fastest 6600 GT we've tested
- ✓ Silent cooling, VIVO
- ✓ Hideous box deters thieves
- ✗ Hideous box might deter you

93

May the turbo force be with you

6600 GTOC

■ Price: £199 | Manufacturer: BFG Technology | Phone: +1 847 281 3110
www.bfgtech.com

Highly-strung version of our champion GeForce

FAST! HIGH quality!

Made in the USA! Actually, the blurb says China. And having phoned a rival card manufacturer in the Asia-Pacific region to explain that I'd just received a 6600 GT with its fan assembly rattling around the box like a spare change in a tumble drier, I was asked, "Was it from BFG?" Looks like the boys from Illinois need to work on their quality.

But let's be unprofessional and ignore all that. Let's assume the card you buy is free from damage, and that you recover

from the shock of paying £200 for it. Like the GIGABYTE, the little BFG comes tweaked from the factory and delivers some unexpected thrust for pleasing results. It was universally quicker than the Sparkle and within a gnat's tader of the GIGABYTE, and despite having fallen apart in transit seemed none the worse for its ordeal. It also comes with 24/7 free email support and a lifetime warranty. You may need it, but the results speak for themselves.

SPECIFICATIONS

HARDWARE 128MB GDDR3
NVIDIA GeForce 6600 GT

ANCILLARIES 2 x VGA to DVI converter, multimedia cable whip

BUNDLE Installation CD



PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Faster than stock
- ✓ Lifetime warranty
- ✗ Giddy price
- ✗ Suspect quality

71

Needs to be nearer to £100

6800 ULTRA

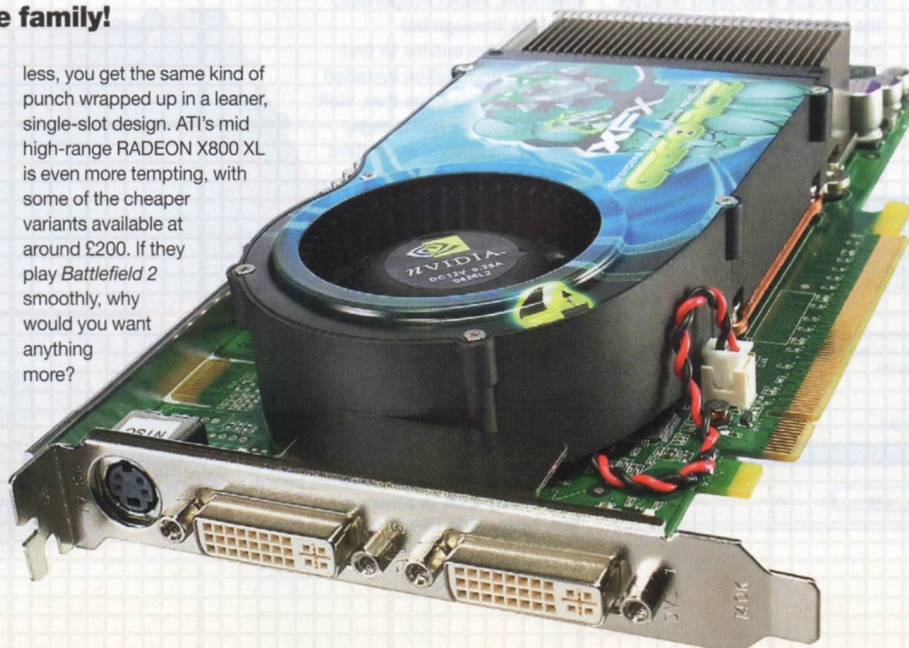
■ Price: £359 | Manufacturer: XFX Graphics | Phone: 01327 315750 | www.xfxforce.co.uk

Lots of fun for all the family!

HARD TO believe it was almost a year ago that the XFX 6800 Ultra first impressed us with its high-end length, girth, weight and power. Not much has changed. The benchmark results still blow the mainstream boys out of the water, the price still points the way to £400, and gamers who have anything less will still want to talk benchmark results with you. If you're a GeForce fanboy who wants outright power and the chance to find out just how far a card's clocks can be stretched, the Ultra is still the only way to go.

As you all know by now, the one problem is the GT. For £100

less, you get the same kind of punch wrapped up in a leaner, single-slot design. ATI's mid high-range RADEON X800 XL is even more tempting, with some of the cheaper variants available at around £200. If they play Battlefield 2 smoothly, why would you want anything more?



SPECIFICATIONS

HARDWARE 256MB GDDR3
NVIDIA GeForce 6800 Ultra

ANCILLARIES 2 x VGA to DVI converter, S-video cable

BUNDLE Moto GP, X2: The Threat, Commandos 3, Installation CD

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Fast and furious
- ✓ Ideal for overclockers
- ✗ Needs a hefty CPU and PSU
- ✗ Price

80

The original daddy



DEAR WANDY

Broadband lines tested, dodgy drivers purged, money given to newborn babies. Wendy's rates are very reasonable and it all goes to prove he's the hardware guru with a heart...

■ MR FIX-IT 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 Wendy's impressed, he'll print them and send you £50 for your trouble.

Write to Dear Wendy, PC ZONE, Future Publishing, 99 Baker Street, London, W1U 6FP.

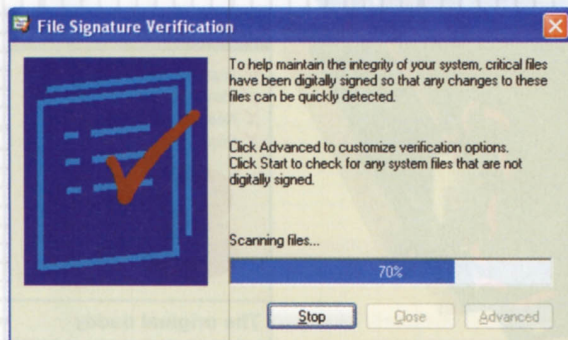
Email Address your letters to us at wandy@dearwandy.com with the subject heading 'Dear Wendy'. Please note: while we can assure you that we read absolutely every techie query sent to us, we're unable to offer personal replies. Sorry.

"Put the £180 AMD Athlon 64 3500+ with it and you'll have a zinging system which makes mincemeat of games"

you don't see ntdll.dll errors anywhere else but inside *Max Payne*, I'd make your first port of call the 3D Realms site at 3drealms.com/max. Scroll down and click to enter the downloads area, then choose the full version, v1.05 patch, run the installer and see if your problem goes away.

If not, the next thing to do is visit www.windowsupdate.com and make sure your system is fully up-to-date –

Microsoft's File Signature Verification tool: another little gem nobody knows about.



MAX PAIN

Q I recently bought *Max Payne*, and to my horror it just keeps on crashing every time I start a new game or try the tutorial. The following error message is what I'm presented with when it crashes. AppName: maxpayne.exe AppVer: 1.0.0.0 ModName: ntdll.dll ModVer: 5.1.2600.2180 Offset: 000122ba. Having no technical experience, I have no idea what it means. Any light you can shed on this matter would be much appreciated.

Eddie Lucas

A Problems such as this are normally the fault of dodgy drivers, an out-of-date Windows install or a game in dire need of a patch. If

that means no procrastinating over the large files. Once you're finished there, click the Start button, choose Run, type 'sigverif' into the box and hit return. This launches the File Signature Verification tool which checks to see if any of the drivers on your system are unsigned – in other words, whether Microsoft has certified them for use with your version of Windows. Unsigned drivers can play merry hell with the stability of your system, and it may be that one of them is tripping up your gaming.

Once the tool has loaded, hit the Advanced button to change program options. Click the option that reads 'Look for other files that are not digitally signed'. Now press the Browse button and select your system32\drivers directory located within the main Windows folder, then click OK and then Start. Once the scan has completed, the tool will present a list of all the potentially rickety drivers – you can either Google their file names, or locate each of the files in turn within the system32\drivers directory. Once there, right-click their icon, select Properties, and look through the identification entries to find out what application installed it. Once you've done that, visit the developer's homepage, look for an update or contact them direct to get advice on what you should do.

STACEY IS MOM

Q My system is as follows: ASUS P4S8X, P4 2.8GHz, PNY 6600GT, 1.5GB RAM,

80GB HDD, DVD/RW, CD/RW and a 15-inch TFT screen. Basically, I've got a new PCI-Express RADEON X850XT PE around which I'd like to build a system, but I want to take across as much as I can. The case, CD, DVD and HDD won't be a problem. I'm looking for a good PCIe motherboard – it doesn't have to be SLI as the 850XT is powerful enough. I think I'm going to be forced to change CPU as well and am leaning towards the AMD64. My budget is £300 tops, as I have a baby on the way!

Stacey Ellis

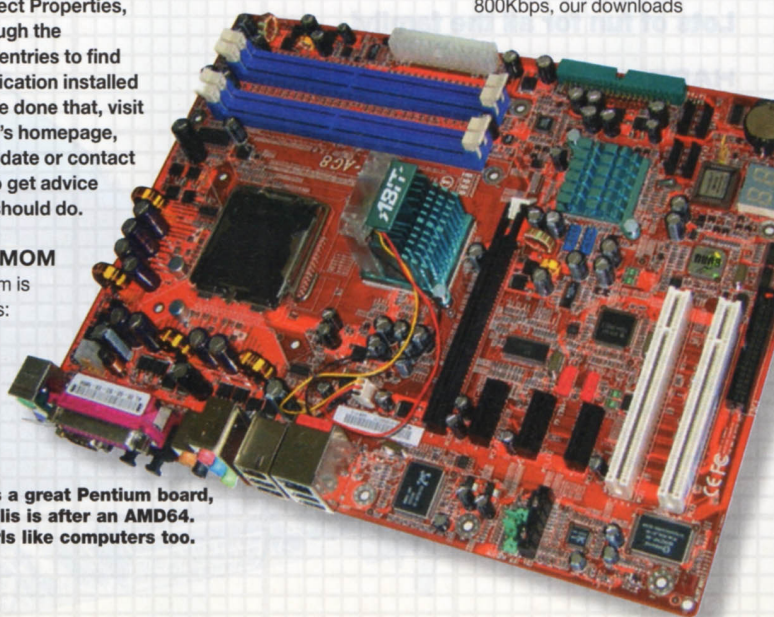
A If you were to stick with your existing CPU, you'd need a Socket 478 motherboard to go with it – and you won't find one of those with a PCI-Express connector for your swanky new RADEON. If you want to stick with Intel, you're going to need an LGA775 board and a new processor – GIGABYTE's flagship GA-8AENXP-D is a good bet, although at £160 it'll lunch half your budget straight off. It's also designed to work with much faster memory than you already have, so give it the

swerve. I'd be inclined to go for something a lot cheaper, such as the £90 ABIT AG8 and pair it with a £155 Pentium 4 540J at 3.2GHz. That gives you £55 to put in the nipper's first bank account.

If you're set on the AMD64 route, the £115 MSI K8N Neo4 is the nForce4 update to our favourite Athlon board – put the £180 AMD Athlon 64 3500+ with it and you'll have a zinging system which will make mincemeat of the most demanding games. And remember not to bung your old stuff in the bin – far better to stick it on eBay with a starting price of £0.99 and see what happens.

DOWNLOADS SYNDROME

Q My friend and I have a problem with our download speeds and I hope you can help. We're both paying for AOL's 1Mbps service, but have been concerned as neither of us has ever achieved download speeds of more than 80Kbps. We've tried a connection-testing tool we found on the Net to test our connections, and while our connection speed is around 800Kbps, our downloads



ABIT's AG8 is a great Pentium board, but Stacey Ellis is after an AMD64. Yes, boys, girls like computers too.

Application Error



Exception EConvertError in module pczone.exe at 00004652.
'0.0' is not a valid floating point value.

OK

Seen this error? We got the fix.

are limited to 90Kbps due to "download capacity". According to the tool we used, it takes ten seconds for my connection to download a 1MB file. This concerns me as I'm paying for a service that should download that same file in just one second.

Keith Rowling

AIn answering your question, I'll need to revisit some of the more common misconceptions about broadband because your email is a little muddled. As you'll see, the average user's poor grasp of the terminology is not down to imbecility but to the way ISPs oversimplify their products and fill their support desks with zombies trained to do nothing but read prompts from a screen.

If you're a regular reader, you'll have seen this all before, so if you know your bits from your bytes, plus your kilos from your megas, drop your eyeballs a few lines and pick up the story from there. And Keith, before I go any further, calm yourself with the thought that your AOL line isn't doing badly – my BT line was recently upgraded to 1Mbps and its performance is much the same. And with that comforting thought in mind, let's get jiggy with the jargon.

Your AOL line is 'one meg', meaning a transfer rate of one megabit per second, more commonly written as 1Mbps. There are 1,024 kilobits in each megabit, and eight bits to every byte, so you need to divide the 1,024 by eight before going any further. That gives us 128 kilobytes per second, or 128KB/sec, which is your maximum line rate – a 1MB file would take around eight seconds at this speed.

As you can probably appreciate, the majority of users are baffled by all this. A number of ISPs promote products with names such as 'AllTime 1000' and 'HomeOffice 1000', both of which fudge the underlying

maths. Many refer to '1Mb' services; none explain the real-world download rates you might see, choosing instead to present meaningless phrases like "ten times faster than dial-up" as part of their sales pitch.

All that aside, the reason you're not going flat out could be down to any number of factors, including router congestion and throttling, your whereabouts on the network, line quality and so on. While you might feel you're some way off the ideal numbers, remember that 128KB/sec is a theoretical limit – few users will actually see that. Pulling in 100KB/sec is significantly faster than cheaper 512Kbps products, it makes no difference to your overall experience and the effect on your gaming is nil. I'd not worry about it.

PC ZONE BROWSER FIX

QCover disc! The browser! It keeps going wrong! Help! Exception Econvert Error! Arggh!

Everyone in Europe

AThanks to Kestas Kapocius, a Lithuanian whose grammatically-perfect email identifies him as foreign to these shores, we have an official response from the developers of the PC ZONE browser. And here it is...

This problem occurs because the cover disc browser software was written primarily for the UK market. The result of this is that if you run your PC normally in a non-English language, you'll get this error.

The solution is to go into Control Panel and select Regional and Language Options. Then select the Advanced tab and change the Language for non-Unicode Programs to English. You should now find that the browser software will autorun without the error.

This solution is for XP users that have an Advanced tab in the Regional and Language Option. For Windows 98

and ME users, you'll have to change the Regional Setting format to English. And as Kestas points out in his email, although the answer is specific to Windows XP, it's actually good for any version of Windows.

BENCHFARCING

QWhat's the point in having benchmark programs if you invariably end up basing your satisfaction on how well your computer runs by testing the games you want to play? Is this not totally obvious?

Mark Gould

AIn all honesty, yes – any regular benchmarking process is flawed – it's like reviewing cars based on their top speed. Unless you drive a Transit, you might reach your motor's top speed only twice during ownership. In the same way that the verdict on a car should recognise and identify its true purpose – forget rating 4x4s on their mud-plugging abilities, or rating luxury cars on their handling – so a videocard's score should reflect how good it is at delivering whatever it is that you want from it.

If all you want to play is *Minesweeper* and perhaps the odd game of *Team Fortress Classic* at the weekend, then a £5 bid on a Voodoo3 from eBay will do just nicely. Rest assured that the benchmarking process is not the only component of the overall PC ZONE scoring system. I'm just as interested in a card's relative availabilities, software bundle and overall value as I am in its frame-rates.

That's not to say I pay no heed to benchmark results,

Johnathan "Wendy" Wendell helped design the ABIT Fatal1ty AN8, a board featuring AudioMAX and SmugGIT.

"You'd be silly not to pay heed to benchmark results – gamers demand power, and power leads to smoother, better graphics"

because that would be plainly silly – gamers will always demand power, and power leads to smoother, better graphics. But with so many cards providing pretty much the same oomph, the decision is always a tricky one. Quite often, the final rankings of a group test will change right up to the point of publication – you might not think it, but it often takes longer to deliberate the scores and settle on a winner than it does to write the review!

SOUND ADVICE

QEvery few years I set about building a new system and I'm currently in the research stage of my next build. I'm in need of some help when it comes to my new sound and speaker set-up, especially with regards to 5.1. Most motherboards seems to offer this feature onboard – does that mean soundcards are an unnecessary purchase? If so, is onboard sound DirectX-compliant, and what about EAX?

To add further confusion, I note that the latest flagship speakers from Logitech, the Z-5500s, come with a Dolby Digital hardware decoder built in. How would the onboard, Audigy2 and Logitech all

communicate with each other? Any light shed you could shed on this confusing subject would be greatly appreciated.

Barry French

AUntil recently, NVIDIA's nForce chipset featured its SoundStorm APU, a rather appealing onboard audio processor with real-time Dolby Digital 5.1 encoding – it pretty much did away with the need for add-in cards. However, for reasons nobody knows, and to the consternation of AMD fans across the planet, NVIDIA unceremoniously dropped the technology from nForce4 variants. This means if you're buying a new nForce board, you'll need something like a Revolution or Audigy to pair with it.

Although our favoured card, one of the oft-lamented pitfalls of choosing the Revolution is that, while it supports EAX 1 and 2, it has no support for EAX Advanced HD. On the upside, it's more of a rounded performer and doesn't come with the tidal wave of replacement control panels, utilities you don't use and sundries you don't need that make every Creative install a housekeeping nightmare.

If you do buy a board with onboard sound, try it before you ditch it – the AudioMAX chip on the ABIT Fatal1ty

AN8 features Dolby Digital Live and is perfect for the average user. But if you do drop in an external card, make sure you disable the AudioMAX in the BIOS and uninstall all the software associated with it.

As for connections, just run a digital line between the audio generation and the audio replication – one coaxial wire will hook up your PC to your Z-5500s. Trust me, it's not as confusing as it sounds... [Q]

Visit Wendy on the Web at www.dearwendy.com



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■ IN THE RED CORNER Suzy Wallace

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EMAIL Alternatively, email us at mailbox@pczone.co.uk with the subject heading 'Watchdog'.

READ ME!

If you're writing in to complain about a product, please send us your full name, address and **contact number**. With PCs, make sure that you also include all **purchasing details** such as reference and invoice numbers.

CAUGHT IN THE MESH

Dave Whitehouse's problems began when he purchased a new PC from Mesh Computers. "After about two minutes of its first boot up, it decided to give me the 'blue screen of death' and turned itself off." Despite a home visit and a diagnosis of motherboard failure, "a further call to Mesh customer services confirmed that it wasn't going to send out any more parts and that it needed the computer back to check it out". A bit miffed, Dave requested a replacement machine – but when the new box arrived, he found that Mesh had returned his old machine. Willing to give the company the benefit of the

DELAYS AT DABS

Reader Kiel Milkins had previously ordered from dabs.com, so when his girlfriend needed to get her laptop hooked



Look closely and you can see the Dabs delivery van. Nearly.

up to his home network, he went back to order a USB wireless network card. Despite five days being quoted for delivery, the awaited date came and went, so off Kiel went to send dabs an enquiry. Auto-reply told him to allow five days for delivery, but when Kiel contacted us it was a fortnight later: "Dabs has my money but we have no card. I've sent four enquiries and received no human response. Is dabs' customer service team one man with a computer in Paraguay?"

Unable to confirm the Paraguay rumours, we instead got in contact with the UK office. It told us: "The delivery was first delayed due to the recent bad weather." Admittedly, it did snow like hell, but it still sounds like a bit of a dog-ate-my-homework excuse to us. But that wasn't all: "Then, the item was lost by the carrier." Double-whammy! Dabs continues: "This is an unusual incidence, it is of course regrettable and we apologise for any inconvenience caused." Kiel has now been offered a full refund.

TSK, TSK, TISCALI

When is an unlimited download broadband connection not unlimited? Maybe Ruben Smith can explain. He registered with Tiscali for the 1Mb unlimited download broadband, but after two weeks of playing online games and sampling beta tests, his connection had slowed to Robin Reliant-speed. Suspecting that his connection had been capped, he phoned Tiscali and

asked to cancel his account, but was told the two-week trial had passed and that he'd have to wait for three days to be contacted by someone from the technical dept. But Ruben just wanted the speed issue sorted or his account cancelled.

Tiscali acknowledged that Ruben had contacted it with "connection and speed problems before requesting cancellation". It went on to explain that "although we routinely sign customers to a 12-month contract, we agreed to cancel his account. We have not collected any payment against this account and have written off the small balance that has accrued."

As for the connection cap, it explains it's introduced a 30GB guideline for 'fair usage', "which would give most of our users an 'unlimited experience'." However, Tiscali has decided "it's no longer appropriate to promote these services as 'unlimited'." Well done them.

ENCORE EBUYER!

Ebuyer's back for the second month running thanks to the debacle experienced by James Adams when he ordered a copy of Raxco's PerfectDisk 7. With the delivery date passed, he sent off an eNote querying the order. The eventual response was not one that he was pleased to hear: "It said the order had been cancelled because either I'd

requested it or the product was unavailable". But he hadn't and it wasn't (at least, according to the site). With two further eNotes not eliciting a response, he decided to pay them a visit in person, driving from Manchester to Sheffield to do so. While there, he spoke to a product manager who informed him that "the order had been cancelled as the product code for the item had been changed". His parting words to James advised him to re-order it via the site – but when James tried, he couldn't find the software on the eBuyer site: "It showed as not available/discontinued if I put in the ID given to me".

Ebuyer apologised for not replying to James's eNotes, saying it was recovering from the Christmas backlog. It's since "appointed 15 new customer service members and also established a customer service team in the USA to deal with eNotes during the UK's night-time".

As for the order, it seems the issue arose because Ebuyer changed the code for this product and James's order was rejected because it consequently appeared as out of stock. Ebuyer goes on to state that James should have been fully refunded and that if he still wants the product, it's now available on the site and is currently in stock. Which begs the question, do you feel lucky James? Well, do you? [\[2\]](#)

"When the computer crashed three times in five minutes, he asked for a full refund"

READER DAVE WHITEHOUSE WASN'T HAPPY WITH HIS MESH PC



A Mesh computer that may or may not work, yesterday.

THE ACCUSED






GUILTY UNTIL PROVEN INNOCENT

doubt, he gave it a try anyway. However, when it crashed three times in five minutes, he asked for a full refund. Two months later, Dave's still waiting...

Despite all that Dave had to say about the situation, Mesh had considerably less to say: "The refund paperwork for Mr Whitehouse was completed on March 7. From this date, Mr Whitehouse would need to allow 3-5 working days for the funds to show on this account." So, without so much as an apology or explanation, Mesh has now refunded Dave's account. If that's the company's attitude, he's probably better off spending his cash elsewhere anyway...

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Or don't, as reader Ruben Smith might advise.

126 PCZONE

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BUYER'S GUIDE

These are exciting times – some prices are dropping and there's a new graphics card in our midst...

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 £82

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 PC3 200 RAM. Onboard dual RAID, 7.1 sound, automated overclocking and AGP8X complete the picture. The Wireless Edition comes bundled with more.



K8N NEO2 PLATINUM

STREET PRICE £81

MANUFACTURER Micro-Star

TELEPHONE 020 8813 6688

WEBSITE msi.computer.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 £73

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.

PROCESSORS



ATHLON 64 3500

STREET PRICE £174

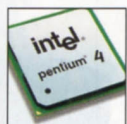
MANUFACTURER AMD

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 £140

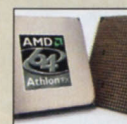
MANUFACTURER Intel

TELEPHONE 01793 403000

WEBSITE www.intel.com

If you're desperate for an Intel-inside, the

3.2GHz still packs a hefty punch. Hyper-Threading delivers a jaw-pounding, double-whammy power hit that pushes benchmark scores well ahead of the equivalent Athlon, and an 800MHz front-side bus paired with the right memory can make its presence felt. If you have a P4 motherboard, you're already set for an upgrade to remember.



ATHLON 64 4000+

STREET PRICE £351

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, Claw-Hammer-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 £51

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 CARDS



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.



GV-NX66T128VP TURBO FORCE

STREET PRICE £131

MANUFACTURER GIGABYTE

TELEPHONE 01908 362700

WEBSITE uk.giga-byte.com

A fanless heat-pipe arrangement keeps this GeForce cool and silent. GIGABYTE claims a 38% speed hike over a regular card – not quite, but the boost is noticeable – it's the fastest 6600GT we've tested. *Thief: Deadly Shadows* and *Joint Ops: Typhoon Rising* come bundled, and the card has full VIVO capabilities – PowerDirector comes free. A stunning card at a stunning price.



RADEON X700 PRO 256MB

STREET PRICE £150

MANUFACTURER Sapphire

WEBSITE www.saphiretech.com

Hot on the heels of the 6600GT is Sapphire's

X700 Pro, featuring PCI-Express, GDDR-3 memory, 8 pixel pipelines and a 128-bit interface. It's a quality product bundled with quality games, and in benchmarks has no trouble keeping up with the runaway GeForce. Unlike the 6600GT, there's no AGP counterpart and it's more money. But if you're looking for a RADEON and maximum mainstream grunt, this is the card for you.

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.

EDITOR'S CHOICE

RECOMMENDED

ALSO CONSIDER



MX510

STREET PRICE £30

MANUFACTURER Logitech

TELEPHONE 020 7309 0217

WEBSITE www.logitech.co.uk

The best example of the MX optical engine, the MX510 is ideal for gaming. Logitech has upped the rate of the MX500's image processing from 4.7 megapixels per second to 5.8, meaning greater accuracy and smoother movements. It's also increased acceleration from 10g to 15g, meaning lag-free responses. The scroll wheel is nicely ratcheted and although it's heavier than the slimline MX310, it's well balanced for quick movements in FPSs.



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 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.

MICE



PC GAMING KEYBOARD

STREET PRICE £35

MANUFACTURER Saitek

TELEPHONE 01454 451900

WEBSITE www.saitek.com/uk

A simple yet elegant design, with variable backlit keys and peerless build quality make the PC Gaming Keyboard a very desirable object. The keys are weighted perfectly and are ideal for late-night gaming because they hardly make a sound. Rubber pads stop the thing sliding away from you, and the silver Saitek comes with a programmable command pad which can be positioned to both suit lefties and righties. Finger heaven.



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.



PRO KEYBOARD

STREET PRICE £46

MANUFACTURER Apple

TELEPHONE 0800 0391 010

WEBSITE www.apple.com/uk

If you think we're mad for including an Apple keyboard, think again. Anyone looking for a Rolls-Royce keyboard, and who can live without all the additional buttons, scroll wheels and assorted paraphernalia need look no further. The Apple Pro plugs straight into your USB port and, with the help of third-party utilities, disguises the fact that it was designed for computer illiterates with fewer than two mouse buttons.

KEYBOARDS



CYBORG EVO

STREET PRICE £25

MANUFACTURER Saitek

TELEPHONE 01454 451900

WEBSITE www.saitek.com

A welcome new look for Saitek, 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.

JOYSTICKS



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.

SPEAKERS



VP171S

STREET PRICE £250

MANUFACTURER ViewSonic

TELEPHONE 01293 643900

WEBSITE www.viewsonic.co.uk

With a response time of 8ms and both DVI and analog inputs, this ViewSonic LCD was always going to be best suited to gamers. Images are sharp and richly saturated, with a huge range of contrast and brightness. A thin bezel makes it ideal for multi-monitor setups. Height adjust, tilt, swivel and even pivot means the 17-inch screen can be put anywhere and made to suit anyone. The only problem is the fiddly buttons on the front.



FLATRON L1730P

STREET PRICE £355

MANUFACTURER LG

TELEPHONE 0870 585000

WEBSITE uk.lg.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.



VISIONMASTER PRO 514

STREET PRICE £398

MANUFACTURER Iiyama

TELEPHONE 01438 745482

WEBSITE www.iiyama.co.uk

Boasting a 22-inch 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.

SCREENS



ICEMAT SIBERIA MULTI HEADSET

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 if you're after a new pair of headphones on a budget. 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.

HEADSETS



MAILBOX

EMAIL YOUR RANTS TO
MAILBOX@PCZONE.CO.UK

It's the last-chance saloon for **Dave Woods**. Close the door on your way out will ya?

■ TA-RA! Dave Woods

GREAT GAMING MOMENTS #1

I thought your '50 Greatest PC Gaming Moments Ever!' article (issue 153) was pretty much spot-on. *Monkey Island* is a worthy winner – "How appropriate, you fight like a cow" is still a sure-fire argument-winner – and I love the fact that *TIE Fighter* and *Elite* cropped up too. Now for a short list of things that should have been included, in my humble opinion.

Homeworld: sitting helpless in your mothership, watching your planet and people getting decimated from space, while Samuel Barber's *Adagio For Strings* plays on in the background.



If you knew the answer you were probably the most popular ten-year-old in town.

Conflict: Freespace – The Great War: the home planet of the Vasudans getting wiped out. You may have spent most of the game fighting them but you can't help but feel sorry for them when they're getting slaughtered by something even nastier.

Unreal: that scary bit where all the lights go out down the corridor, one by one, just before you get charged down by your first Skaarj.

Leisure Suit Larry: In The Land Of The Lounge Lizards: the innovative interrogative method used to make sure no under 18s get into the game. As one of the few ten-year-olds in my local area who could correctly answer the questions, I was in great demand.

Dave Buckland

GREAT GAMING MOMENTS #2

Two points. In your '50 Greatest PC Gaming Moments Ever!' feature, you overlooked the already criminally neglected classic, *Mafia*. One of my favourites comes quite early: After hitting a brothel for Don



Have you seen any other appearances by The Beatles in PC games? Send them to the usual address – the best one gets a copy of Paul McCartney's epic, *The Frog Chorus*.

Salieri and enduring a rooftop gun battle, you descend into a cathedral. Expecting nothing more than a cut-scene, you emerge in the midst of the funeral of an opposing mobster you've previously despatched. The only way out is through a distinctly hostile congregation...

Also, I noticed that the soldier pictured in your *Brothers In Arms* review bears a distinct resemblance to John Lennon in his role as Private Gripweed in Dick Lester's anti-war film, *How I Won The War*. Said grunt should be cherished and protected from shot and shell for that alone.

Pete Pointon

PLAY IT AGAIN SAM

Am I the only one who would love to see more old, classic games revamped with new graphics, sound and extra missions? It seems to be a golden opportunity for developers out there to take highly successful games from their back catalogue such as

Final Fantasy VII, *Half-Life* and *Quake* and just revamp them with extra side missions, goodies and real-life physics.

Neil Peace

Some developers are doing exactly that – buy *Half-Life 2* and you can play through the original in the new Source engine. And the beauty of the PC is that there's an army of bedroom coders working on new maps and missions, some of which rival the original developer's output.

BOLL-OCKS

I've just learned that my beloved *Far Cry* is to be made into a movie by Uwe 'House Of The Dead' Boll. Why!? I already knew *Doom* was being made into a barely recognisable movie version and you remember how (not) great *Mortal Kombat* and *Resident Evil* were. But *Far Cry*? Why tarnish something so beautiful?

The ratio of good game-movie adaptations to bad is so slight, they should be kept separate altogether. To register my disgust, I'm going to try to get the BBC to make the following documentaries, complete with fashionable unnecessary subheading to alert the world to this travesty...

Far Cry: From Doing Justice. *Changing Doods*: Unrecognisable Rubbish. *MasterChief Goes Large*: *Halo's Kitchen*. (Missing the point entirely, but never mind...) Carol Smillie has already confirmed. Probably.

James Parkinson

We actually think the *Doom 3* movie is going to be pretty good – check out the first report direct from the set next issue. As for Uwe Boll, he seems to be making a 'name' for himself directing game-

BANNED!

In a bid to make these pages even more exciting, we're flexing our dictatorial muscle and exorcising certain dead topics. Write to us about these things and we won't print your letter, and we definitely won't send you a graphics card. You have been warned...

- Sefton and his penchant for lady's undergarments.
- The ever-escalating price of keeping up with the latest hardware.
- How bad the *Doom* movie is going to be. Watch it, then write us a letter.



to-film shit-showers. As well as *House Of The Dead*, he's done *Alone In The Dark* (with Christian Slater) and is currently in post-production for *BloodRayne*. The mind does indeed boggle.

HILL'S HELMET

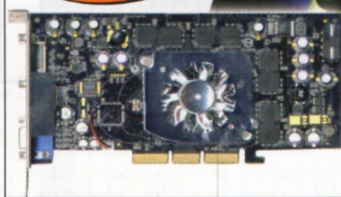
Just thought I'd drop you a line to say how shocked I was by page 115 last issue. Not only is that girl holding something normally found in top-shelf magazines, but Steve Hill talks about things purple and hairy.

SEND US A LETTER AND WIN A TOP-OF-THE-RANGE GRAPHICS CARD

MAILBOX, PC ZONE, FUTURE PUBLISHING, 99 BAKER ST, LONDON, W1U 6FP OR MAILBOX@PCZONE.CO.UK

■ The new XFX 5900 XT is one of the best graphics cards we've ever reviewed, with extreme overclocking, ludicrously fast memory and ultra cooling. Write us a letter and if we think it's the pick of the month, we'll send you one to stick in your PC. What are you waiting for?

WIN!
A TOP
GRAPHICS
CARD





The Sims – evil and out to control your life.

The only praise I can give is for Ms Suzy Wallace's column. Suzy, you're the man! Anyway, I'm proud that Suzy has tried to instill pride among geeks everywhere. I've been looking for a girl like Suzy all my life

facts in mind – you might thank us one day.

GAME OF LIFE

I've worked it all out – we're all part of a huge computer game. The Earth doesn't really exist, it's

a game called *The Sims*. So he controls me, a character in his game, controlling a character in a game I am playing. This amuses him hugely.

Often he will make me sit around all day in my dressing gown. I don't get to wash, shave or dress. He will let me eat, but I can't do the washing-up (sometimes for several days). Thankfully, he hasn't been sadistic enough to make me wet my trousers or starve to death. But surely it's just a matter of time. I suspect that I only get to sleep when he stops playing the game for a while.

We're all doomed, I tell ya!

Gavin Hay

You're lucky, Gavin. My sim has me answering letters penned by characters controlled by other sims. It's a thankless task, I tell you.

"The most brilliantly sarcastic, vitriolic, pathetic example of pathos I've experienced"

ANDY REMIC ANALYSES THE SCRAWLINGS OF STEVE HILL

(sigh). I bet she even knows what torque steer is!

Adrian

The 'girl' in question is Steve Hill, and the 'artwork' in question disturbed him as much as it did you. However, Suzy is most certainly not "the man", despite knowing what torque steer is. Bear these two

just a digital creation. The sims are playing the game, and hence control us all. The sim who controls me won't let me get a fulfilling job. He won't allow me to form a meaningful relationship with a woman – instead, I have to play PC games all day.

Sometimes, to really mess with my head, he makes me play

LETTER OF THE MONTH

SIM JUNKIE

I've found a cure for one of the evils of modern society – *The Sims*. Despairingly I watched my teenage daughter transform from a beautiful and vibrant little girl into a *Sims* junkie. A virtual recluse, not caring about her appearance, only her next 'hit' in the form of the latest expansion pack. She'd spend hours, eyes lifeless and empty, in her own small world, and would only communicate in short grunts. Her bedroom became a squalid mess of half-eaten meals and empty drinks cans as she became more and more withdrawn.

Then came the breakthrough – MAME. Our daughter still requires her 'fix', but is now able to get it via *Rainbow Islands*, *Mr Do*, *Bubble Bobble* and the like. Her 'high' is almost immediate and without any noticeable side-effects. I know she has merely replaced one addiction with another, but it somehow seems more socially acceptable

and does not dominate her life the way *The Sims* did. Her mother and I dabbled in some *Bubble Bobble* when we were teenagers and have done so again recently, although we wouldn't let our daughter know.

It's been a slow process and our daughter has occasionally 'fallen off the wagon', but we feel that she has now returned to us and become a member of the family again. Lapses back to her old life are becoming less and less frequent.

I'm writing this letter to offer hope to all those parents out there whose lives have been blighted by *The Sims*. Please let them know that they are not alone and that help is available.

R@y-B@ns

Don't tell anyone we told you, but it's true. You can wean victims off *The Sims* with a steady dose of MAME – see about getting onto a rehab programme at www.mame.net. And have a graphics card to soothe yourself too.

BACKCHAT



E3 is just around the corner and we've managed to scoop loads of games early this issue (we're so good to you). But what else do you really want to see? We hit the forums – at www.pczone.co.uk – to find out...

Spudy2000 wants to see *Mafia 2* – and he's not the only one. A sequel to the most criminally neglected game ever would be near the top of our list as well. In fact, sequels dominated the proceedings, with **PawsOfEvil** bemoaning the fact that "*Vampire The Masquerade: Bloodlines 2* is never gonna happen"; **Tinnion** guessing that next month's mega-cover is "*Battlefield 2*", despite the fact that what he really wants is "*Operation Flashpoint 2*" (wrong and wrong).

Meanwhile, **Doomus** wants to see "*Joint Ops 2: The One Where We Sort Out That Annoying Thing Where The Long Grass Stops You From Seeing Anything If You Lie Down In It, While Not Concealing You In Any Way From Anyone Standing More Than About 50 Metres Away*". And amazingly, someone actually wants to see *MechWarrior 5*! So **Goattail's** the one that buys it then. If any developers are listening, he wants to "stomp on the little people again". And he's not finished there, either. He also wants *Wing Commander 6*. "What happened to Mark Hamill? BRING BACK FMV." To be honest, we're surprised they let him have a PC – they have sharp edges.

Final word this month to **_Rich_** for being offensive. "*Carmageddon 4*! Made by Stainless Software and not the useless bunch of retards who made the last one. *TDR2000* never existed for me." Charming language. (Can you say 'retard' these days?) Meanwhile, **PawsOfEvil** starts the long wait for *Call Of Duty 2*. Ah, happy days...

GET OVER THE HILL

God, how I laughed when you used Steve Hill's face to cover the nipples of the hapless girls in *Playboy: The Mansion*. You've also used Mr Hill's image in a similar manner in previous issues. This can only mean one of three things: (a) Steve Hill is a nipple; (b) Steve Hill is a tit; or (c) Steve Hill is obsessed with tits. Or nipples.

I always read Hill's 'NeverQuest'

page first (p119) – it's the most brilliantly sarcastic, vitriolic, pathetic example of pathos I've ever experienced. Hill's loathing for his subject is unparalleled. Well done! And as for his 'Reality Check'? Never have I enjoyed watching a man break bones so much. Steve Hill is a superstar (antichrist?). Give him a pay rise.

Andy Remic

We've tried, but he's just not interested. He does it "for the love".



Using mere words, Mr Hill seduces his fans into a sexual frenzy. Again.

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 Monolith
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 VU Games 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 *PCZONE* solo-shooter hall of fame. It's quite simply the greatest deathmatch experience money can buy.

PUB Atari DEV Digital Extremes/Epic
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 orkish 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 JoWoD DEV Paradox
PCZ ISSUE 152

Want to know what's the best shooter, what's the top strategy game 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**. New kids on the block this month include the fantabulous *Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory* and the jaunty *Freedom Force Vs The 3rd Reich*

◀ ROLE-PLAYING GAMES ▶

KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC



The best RPG to appear for five whole years, and the best *Star Wars* game to surface in ten. *Knights Of The Old Republic* manages to develop the franchise more than even Lucas's cinematic efforts ever could. With beautiful graphics, a gripping plot, oodles of Force powers and supreme character development, this is proof, if ever it were needed, that Bioware is one of the best development houses on the planet.

PUB Activision DEV BioWare
PCZ ISSUE 137



DEUS EX

Great sci-fi plot, amazing attention to detail and unparalleled player freedom: combining the finer elements of *Half-Life*, *System Shock 2* and *Thief*, *Deus Ex* is an RPG of complex beauty and a true revolution in computer gaming.

PUB Eidos DEV Ion Storm
PCZ ISSUE 93



THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND

One of the most impressive RPGs we've seen in years. A massively open-ended world full of beautiful visuals, superb depth of gameplay and innovative character development make this a classic that will keep you totally absorbed.

PUB Ubisoft DEV Bethesda Softworks
PCZ ISSUE 117



NEVERWINTER NIGHTS

The maker of the epic *Baldur's Gate* series proves it's still a leading force in the world of RPGs with this glorious hardcore 3D adventure. It features great single and multiplayer options, along with a very accessible toolkit.

PUB Atari DEV BioWare
PCZ ISSUE 118



PLANESCAPE: TORMENT

An incredible game from Black Isle, using the *Baldur's Gate* engine. With a compelling story, well-scripted dialogue and the best character development we've seen in any game of its kind, this is a dark, adult scorch of an RPG.

PUB Interplay DEV Black Isle Studios
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: CHAOS THEORY



NEW ENTRY An amazing new rendition of Sam Fisher's oeuvre, now packaged not only with the excellent gruff mercs vs slinky spies multiplayer but also with a (strangely homoerotic) co-op mode where two players can join forces for some stealth rough 'n' tumble. The single-player remains brilliant as well, with Sam's moves and new-found knifework becoming so lithe and smooth he's apparently aging backwards. Great stuff.
PUB Ubisoft DEV Ubisoft
Montreal PCZ ISSUE 154



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



THIEF: DEADLY SHADOWS

Garrett's new adventure is sure to thrill, although you can't help but feel that it's been hampered by console considerations. That said, sublime level design, amazing sound and real scares make it an excellent buy.

PUB Eidos DEV Ion Storm
PCZ ISSUE 144



PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME

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



SPLINTER CELL

Three green lights on his head and (still) some of the best stealth missions available – not bettered by *Pandora Tomorrow* and only recently equalled by *Chaos Theory* – the original *Splinter Cell* is now so cheap it hurts.

PUB Ubisoft DEV Ubisoft Montreal
PCZ ISSUE 125



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



VEGAS: MAKE IT BIG

An in-depth tycoon game with all the 3D graphical glitz and glamour of Vegas itself, *Make It Big* provides hotels, casinos and over-priced magic shows that let you suck the money out of punters' pockets. It can get a little too fiddly, but it looks and plays really well. *APC 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 stirring 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.

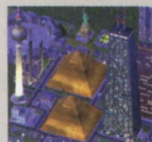
PUB Atari DEV Frontier Developments
PCZ ISSUE 149



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

◀ ONLINE SHOOTERS ▶

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

◀ SPACE COMBAT ▶

X2: THE THREAT



Vast, engrossing and utterly compelling. We firmly believe that *X2* is the game that can finally banish the memory of *Elite* to the shadows. The level of detail here is immense, as is the potential. Build your own space empire, form a pirate fleet or just bomb around the universe like an interstellar playboy. The game could go on forever. And did we mention it's also gobsmackingly beautiful? OK, the story isn't all that, but while nothing's perfect in life, *X2* comes very close.

PUB Deep Silver DEV Egosoft

PCZ ISSUE 138



FREELANCER

Freelancer combines the epic open-endedness of *Elite* with the combat immediacy of the *Wing Commander* series. It also mixes in a well played out (if short) story and gorgeous graphics to create a totally engaging experience.

PUB Microsoft DEV Digital Anvil

PCZ ISSUE 128



X - GOLD

The spirit of *Elite* lives on in this 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

◀ SPORT ▶

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 game ever. Incomparably better than any *FIFA* offering, *PES* is the only footie game that plays like the real thing – with all the joys and agonies that entails.

PUB Konami DEV Konami

PCZ ISSUE 149



VIRTUA TENNIS

Who would have believed that this console favourite would translate so well to the PC? Its control interface is supremely intuitive, while the AI is massively challenging. Best of all, though, are its truly sublime multiplayer options.

PUB Empire Interactive DEV Hitmaker/Strangelite

PCZ ISSUE 114



TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2005

Some new game modes gives 2005's *Tiger* 'em up some welcome variety – although even without them, it would remain the PC's premier golf sim. This year is a good vintage too, with visuals to die for.

PUB EA Sports DEV EA Sports

PCZ ISSUE 148



NHL 2005

Shiny and beautiful, yet nowhere near as vapid as its *FIFA* compatriot, EA's *NHL* series continues its run of consistent excellence. Better AI, better production and as slick as they come.

PUB EA Sports DEV EA Sports

PCZ ISSUE 148

◀ 3D ACTION/STRATEGY ▶

BROTHERS IN ARMS



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



FREEDOM FORCE VS THE 3RD REICH

NEW ENTRY Smack! and, indeed, kerblammo! as our favourite heroes travel through time to fight the Nazis. Much comic silliness, knock-about combat and ironic guffawing make the second *FF* game a blast. If you like that kind of thing.

PUB Digital Jesters DEV Irrational Games

PCZ ISSUE 154



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

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.

MUST RESIST

DISCWORLD

■ WORDS & DISCS Suzy Wallace

▲ I'm outnumbered and outgunned. I sense they have me surrounded. The sounds of battle erupt to my left, magic flashes to my right. I huddle down, hoping I won't be spotted. But a furtive glance over my shoulder reveals one of them is coming straight for me. My mind races, trying to think of an escape plan but it's too late...

"So Suzy, how come you're not playing *World Of Warcraft* yet?"

You see, *WOW* has become the lunchtime game of choice in our office, and as one of the last bastions of non-MMORPG conformity, I'm always being poked and prodded into joining up. I'm not a noob to the genre, I've just been scarred by it in the past. Having spent months hunting one particular game's vermin population to extinction, the game's final defining moment featured a high-level area I mistakenly strayed into, several dropped Internet connections and enough swearing to make a navy blush. With my character dead, experience lost and my belongings bathing in sunlight on the beach of a deserted island on the other side of the virtual world, I decided to quit.

And quite frankly, I don't want to go back. Life is good now, I get to see the sunshine (occasionally) and the excellent discs this month have proved my saviour. Full to the brim with amazing demos such as *Pariah*, *Lego Star Wars*, *The Chronicles Of Riddick*, *TrackMania: Sunrise* and more, they've provided me with a great excuse to avoid going back to 'the dark place'.

EXCLUSIVE!

PARIAH

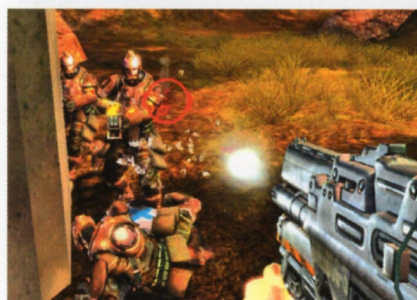
CD1/DVD Pub: Hip Interactive Dev: Digital Extremes Rev: Issue 155, 81%



DIGITAL Extremes'



illustrious history at the helm of *Unreal* development has given the company an enviable reputation and a whole heap of experience to call upon when developing *Pariah*. This exclusive demo is taken from the first level of the game and is set in some rather gorgeous-looking scenery, complete with plenty of destructible structures and some upgradeable weapons for you to get to grips with.



1 Press X to bring up this radial weapon selection menu. As well as letting you choose your gun, you can upgrade your equipment from here.

2 Weapon cores. This denotes how many weapon energy cores you have left to upgrade with. Careful use allows you to specialise.

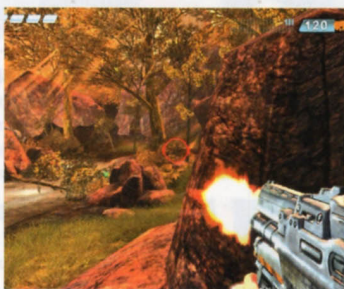
3 Pipes. Hit a pipe and the resulting steam that comes gushing out of the hole will obscure both yours and the enemy's views.

4 Destructible scenery. If you find the enemy hiding behind a pillar, a strategically placed grenade will blow their cover clean away.

5 Enemies. The demo sees you up against enemies equipped with anything from standard assault rifles to grenade launchers and flame-throwers.

WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION

Grab the weapon energy cores (green circles) lying dotted around the map and press the X button to bring up the weapon menu. From here, you can upgrade any weapons and the healing pack (to level two)...



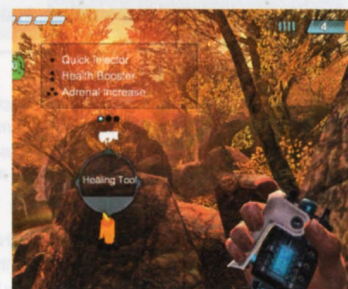
BULLDOG

Your standard issue assault gun's first upgrade is a Fire Accelerator, enabling you to pump bullets into the enemy much quicker. Upgrade two is the Recoil Stabilizer, which makes the gun more stable to fire.



GRENADE LAUNCHER

Your grenade launcher's essential first upgrade is the Remote Detonator that enables you to detonate the grenade at your leisure. The Fragment Attractor attracts shrapnel in flight before exploding for maximum damage.



HEALING TOOL

Your only method of getting life bars back, the first upgrade is Quick Injector, which speeds up the time taken to heal. The second upgrade is Health Booster, which gives you a handy extra bar to add to your health.



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.



EXCLUSIVE!

LEGO STAR WARS

CD2/DVD Pub: Eidos **Dev:** Traveller's Tales **Rev:** Issue 155, 79%**Magnet + droids = chuckles.****Go grab that LEGO bling!****Deflecting blaster bolts is satisfying.**

LOOKING GLASS Studios has craftily managed to harness the might of two adored franchises to bring you this chance to experience the world of *Star Wars* in cute LEGO form. You take control of the dinky Obi-Wan and Qui-Gon in a block-flavoured version of *Episode I*'s opening scene. What's more, once you've played it through you can play in free mode with your choice of characters.



SET YOURSELF FREE!

In Free mode in the full game, you can choose from the entire *Star Wars* repertoire of characters. The demo's more limited, but here's our pick of essential *Episode I* crew members...



OBI-WAN KENOBI/ QUI-GON JINN

The two Jedi not only have Force powers which can move objects, send droids flying and rearrange strategically placed blocks, they also have lightsabers – the coolest weapon in the world and useful for deflecting blaster bolts too.



PROTOCOL DROIDS (C3PO lookalikes)/R2D2

Both of these droids are used for opening specific doors (the ones with their pictures by the lock), but of far more amusement is chopping the protocol droid's arms and leg off with a lightsaber and watching him hop around.



JAR JAR BINKS

Despite having the dubious honour of being one of the most detested characters in *Star Wars* history, Jar Jar's massive jumps make him essential for getting to those hard to reach places. So you're just going to have to lump it and use him.

EXCLUSIVE!

THE CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK: ESCAPE FROM BUTCHER BAY

CD2/DVD Pub: VU Games **Dev:** Starbreeze/Tigon Studios **Rev:** Issue 150, 86%

THE PREMISE of basing a game around a film sounds like a great idea, but the reality is normally a half-baked mess. Luckily, *Riddick* is a rare gem, so if you haven't got around to trying it out yet, this is your chance to take on the role of gravelly-voiced Riddick as he attempts to extract himself from the confines of Butcher Bay prison.



PERFECT EXECUTION

Chronicles Of Riddick's success is based not only on its tasty graphics and violent action, but also on its attention to detail. Here's a taster...



BULLET HOLES

Stray wide of the mark, put a bullet into the wall and then watch as the resultant holes glow red at first then fade to black as the heat dissipates.



SHADOWS

Light plays an important part in the game, as guards can spot your shadow. Riddick's 'Eye Shine' ability makes him the king of the darkness.



FIST FIGHTING

Probably the first FPS to effectively utilise hand-to-hand combat. Different punches can be thrown by using the WASD keys while attacking.

FIST FIGHTER

How many guards can you take on with your bare fists? We managed to take out six...

CHALLENGE SUZY!

TRACKMANIA: SUNRISE

CD2/DVD Pub: Digital Jesters **Dev:** Nadeo **Rev:** Issue 154, 83%

THE ORIGINAL *TrackMania* managed the feat of being one of the only driving games of 2004 to get Will behind the wheel – the young lad just couldn't get enough of its wacky build-a-track-and-then-career-off-it-ness. This crazy demo of the sequel features a gorgeous new engine, three frenetic gameplay modes (each with two races) and insane stunts that remind us of age-old classic *Stunt Car Racer*. Go play it. Right now.

**EXCLUSIVE!**

DUNGEON LORDS

DVD ONLY Pub: DreamCatcher **Dev:** Heuristic Park

FANTASY RPGs have been rather thin on the ground recently, so you may find your appetite for magic, slashing and stats is at a max. If so, this massive demo gives you the chance to take on the essential role-playing bad guys before facing off against the War Troll boss. He's green, he's mean and probably dying to rip out your spleen.



ANARCHY ONLINE

DVD ONLY Pub: FunCom**Dev:** FunCom

YOU'VE GOT until Jan 15, 2006 to try out this free trial of the marvellous sci-fi world of Rubi-Ka. Just go to <https://register.funcom.com> to grab your free account and then you can spend the best part of a year experiencing the weird inhabitants, fighting the bizarre creatures and dosing yourself in nano-enhanced goodness. What more could you want?



IMPERIAL GLORY

CD1/DVD Pub: Eidos**Dev:** Pyro Studios

HAS ROME: *Total War* left your brain overflowing with tactics, troops and techniques? If so, it's time to dig out your war plans because the demo of this war sim features two battles set in Napoleonic times as well as demonstrations of the in-game management and naval battles.



ALSO ON THE CD

Contents of this month's Indie Zone

ALSO ON THE DVD

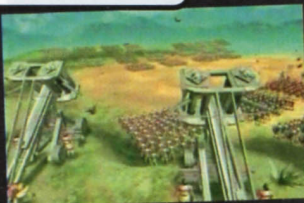
The Bard's Tale, Juiced, Pro Rugby Manager 2, Freeplay and Games That Changed The World

MOVIES

OUR FEATURE PRESENTATION...

RISE & FALL: CIVILIZATIONS AT WAR

DVD ONLY Rome: Total War raised the bar for war simulations, but *Rise & Fall* could provide it with a real challenge...



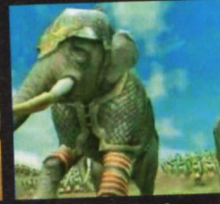
SIEGE WARFARE Some awesome siege weaponry will be on offer.



NAVAL BATTLES Wave-tossed carnage on the high seas!



FIRST-PERSON Step into the action as a great historic hero.



ELEPHANTS Our favourite animal of war is here!

ALSO SHOWING...



DOOM 3: RESURRECTION OF EVIL (DVD ONLY)

Doom 3's expansion pack looks set to provide more scary thrills. Check out the gravity gun-style weapon, new bad guys and Hell Time, then if you like what you see, go grab yourself a copy now.

DON'T MISS - Grabbing the fireballs thrown by the imps and tossing them back.



STUBBS THE ZOMBIE (DVD ONLY)

Life's not easy when you're dead, as these two movies show. The least gory vids on offer, *Zombie Charge* shows Stubbs using his undead army as cannon-fodder, while *Possession* shows his Thing-style hand used to control enemies.

DON'T MISS - The ambling shuffle: the producers have got it down to a tee.



DAY OF DEFEAT: SOURCE (DVD ONLY)

The WWII mod for *Half-Life* was always a favourite and with its port to the Source engine nearly done, we're eager to see what Valve can bring to the WWII table. This movie shows what the new engine has done for the Flash level.

DON'T MISS - Physics looking present and correct as road signs are shot off.



F.E.A.R. (DVD ONLY)

This teaser shows that Monolith is intent on trying to scare the bejeezus out of you. Although with glass, flying debris and smoke everywhere, we're not sure you'll have enough time to worry!

DON'T MISS - The scary girl running along on all fours. She makes our blood run cold...

● ALSO ON THE CD *Battlefield 2*, *TrackMania: Sunrise* and *Pariah*

EXTENDED PLAY



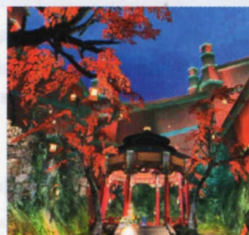
Be careful. It's a jungle out there.

PTERODON HAS released this free expansion for *Vietcong*, so if you've completed the war-torn Vietnam shooter, this is your chance to head back to the jungle. The pack contains 'Rice Fields': an entire sniper-based single-player mission and 15 multiplayer maps. Ten maps will feature the new co-operative game type, seven of these presenting the action from the side of the Vietcong, enabling you to take out those Americans GIs with your buddies playing the VC beside you. The other eight new multiplayer maps feature modes such as Deathmatch, Assault Team Game and Real War - there's even a 64-player CTF map.

DON'T MISS - Co-op mode playing as the VC. Go home GI!

ULTIMATE COMMUNITY MAP PACK FOR UT2004

WITH UT2004 still proving popular with the community, this map pack contains 13 maps (three Capture The Flag, eight Deathmatch, one Domination and one Onslaught), a collection of static meshes, custom textures and the addition of the Anti-Gravity Grenade Launcher. Enough to keep any fragger happy for a while.



Fragging hell!

ATLAS MOD

MMORPGS can be big places and *WOW* is no exception. So, if your character seems to spend more time running around the world of Azeroth than is necessary, you need this great Atlas mod to keep you on track. There are currently 13 maps which you can view via a drop-down menu - but check the website for the latest version.



MODS OF THE MONTH

THIS MONTH we've got *Point Of Existence*, which pits the US and Russia against each other in *Battlefield: Vietnam*; *Commando Zero*, which turns *Counter-Strike: Source* soldiers into German special forces; and *Doom 3 Open Coop*, which does what it says on the tin. *Daemonhunters* adds the Grey Knights and the Imperial Guard to *Warhammer 40,000: Dawn Of War*, and *Holowan Plug-In 2* combines around 80 *KOTOR* mods, from newly-skinned armour to alternate endings.



BUG-FIX OF THE MONTH

Bizarre Problems Fixed In A Patch

THIS MONTH: SILENT HUNTER III

Patch v1.1 fixes the problem of 'the crew that remains on deck while underwater'.

● ALSO ON THE CD Meqon physics demos, *Anarchy Online* soundtrack, *Pirates!* theme pack and *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault* source map files.

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.

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IN ISSUE 149:

THE HANDHELD CONSOLE WAR REACHES CRITICAL MASS

ON SALE NOW

PREVIEWED BOILING POINT **ELECTROPLANKTON** NINTENDOGS **GAUNTLET: SEVEN SORROWS**
REVIEWED TEKKEN 5 **GOD OF WAR** WIPEOUT PURE **RED NINJA** HAUNTING GROUND **METEOS**



GAMES THAT CHANGED THE WORLD

UNREAL TOURNAMENT

ON THE DVD

It was to prove the catalyst that would give birth to the multiplayer FPS phenomenon, but as *Martin Korda* discovers, the original goal for *Unreal Tournament* wasn't nearly as lofty...

PROFILE

Digital Extremes' and Epic's first major success was the impressive-looking single-player shooter *Unreal*. However, it was a year later that the pair really hit the big time with *Unreal Tournament*, a triumph that propelled them to the pinnacle of the multiplayer FPS pile. Recently, the two developers have separated, with Epic concentrating on *UT 2004* and the Unreal Engine (see our preview on page 50) and Digital Extremes with *Pariah* (review on page 66) and *Dark Sector*.

**NAME:** James Schmalz**ROLE ON UNREAL****TOURNAMENT:** Co-designer and weapons designer**FIRST GAME WORKED ON:***Legends Of Murder II: Gray Haven***WHERE IS HE NOW?** Creative director at Digital Extremes and has just finished *Pariah*.**NAME:** Cliff Bleszinski**ROLE ON UNREAL****TOURNAMENT:** Co-designer and lead level designer**FIRST GAME WORKED ON:***Jazz Jackrabbit: Holiday Hare 1994***WHERE IS HE NOW?** Still at Epic, working as a lead designer on a new next generation console franchise.

GAME Unreal Tournament

DEVELOPER Digital Extremes/Epic

PUBLISHER GT Interactive

RELEASED 1999

INFLUENCED Without a doubt, *Unreal Tournament* (and *Quake III*) were to prove that the online shooter was a viable genre for developers and publishers to channel huge resources into. The game's stunningly smooth online play, coupled with the rise of broadband, saw an influx of games – admittedly of varying quality – flooding the market, with most major and many minor publishers jumping onto the bandwagon. Perhaps the most notable titles to be influenced by *Unreal Tournament*'s success were *Battlefield 1942* and the titanic *Counter-Strike*, which was little more than a fledgling mod when *UT* hit the big time.



Death animations were satisfying...

IT WAS ONLY meant to be an expansion pack. Hard to believe, given that *Unreal Tournament* was to challenge *Quake* as the king of multiplayer shooters in one brutal and unexpected assault. Perhaps the greatest irony in this tale of *UT*'s meteoric rise and world-shaking success is that, had it not been for its more illustrious id Software-created predecessors, *Unreal Tournament* may never have even existed. Rarely, if ever, can there have been a clearer example of the student becoming the master than in the shockingly short ten-month cycle it took to transform a bot-based add-on pack into a game which would shake the very foundations of the still burgeoning online first-person shooting genre.

SHOT IDOL

For years, the guys and gals at Epic and Digital Extremes had cast envious yet respectful gazes up at their id idols, hoping to one day emulate the legendary developer's success. They got off to a solid enough start with 1998's visually impressive single-player FPS *Unreal*, which shipped with a handful of (as it turned out, unusable) multiplayer options. "When *Unreal* shipped it had broken network play, so we decided we needed to make an add-on pack that had good multiplayer. We started working on one with Digital Extremes and called it *The Bot Pack*," explains Cliff Bleszinski, co-designer and lead level designer on the game. "Then one day, Mark Rein (CEO of Epic) sat us down and said that he thought it should be its own product, at which point we renamed it *Unreal Tournament*."

Epic's idea was simple; make a great multiplayer game in collaboration with Canadian development



Digital Extremes' James Schmalz did a great job designing the weapons.



Considering he had to relocate an entire team, Steve Polge made *UT*'s bots immensely lifelike.

team Digital Extremes, full of different game modes, levels, mutators, weapons and some smart AI, and unleash it on the market as a new franchise.

Of course, one massive obstacle stood in the team's way – the feverishly anticipated multiplayer titan, *Quake III: Arena*, which by a twist of fate was set to ship almost simultaneously with *Unreal Tournament*. The scene was set for perhaps the biggest face-off in PC shooter history, a battle of David vs Goliath proportions that would see the gaming public's loyalties divided like never before.

"A lot of people didn't even have *UT* on their radar," recalls James Schmalz, *Unreal Tournament*'s co-designer and weapons designer. "A lot of people were looking forward to *Quake III*, and most had dismissed *Unreal Tournament* as we'd originally

announced it as an add-on pack. I think that all changed when the demo came out. People saw the cool stuff that we were doing with it and it really brought a lot of fans onboard and got a lot of people excited about the project. As for the rivalry, we just hoped enough people would like *UT*."

RALEIGH TOGETHER

Unlike the majority of game development projects, *UT* was to prove one of the smoothest projects that either Digital Extremes, (responsible mainly for the artistic side of development), or Epic (who provided the engine, AI and level design) had ever worked on. "It was one of the smoothest developments we ever had," remembers Schmalz, of Digital Extremes' dealings with the project.

However, things weren't quite so straightforward for the Epic team. "To be honest, the development of *Unreal Tournament* was immensely easy, but only once we'd sorted out our new offices," recalls Cliff Bleszinski. "*Unreal Tournament* was developed during the whole transition when Epic was moving from Canada to Raleigh, North Carolina. So we had to develop the game amid this immensely bizarre situation where we were relocating 15 people and trying to find them houses."

RISE OF THE BOTS

Enter Steve Polge, the man whose input would ultimately not only bring stability to the Epic team, but more importantly, set *Unreal Tournament* apart as unarguably the most lifelike shooter of its generation. "Steve spent a long time figuring out

how to get office space for us in Raleigh and finding everyone houses, instead of working on the AI. But he got around to doing it eventually, and it was amazing," recalls Cliff.

Given the short timespan and the constant distractions of relocating a 15-man team, it's perhaps even more impressive that Polge managed to create bots that could barely be distinguished from human players. "Steve Polge had written the original bots for *Quake*," says Bleszinski. "He took the work that he'd done there and applied it to *Unreal Tournament*. Our goal was always to make bots that would play like real people. It's easy to make bots that can kick your ass, but it's hard to make AI that's entertaining and interesting. We did put a

DID YOU KNOW?

The booming announcer who shouted the likes of "Double Kill," and "Rampage" in *Unreal Tournament* was inspired by voice over from *Mortal Kombat*.

lot of tweaking into the levels. We had constant passes where we'd follow the bots around the levels to make sure that they picked up all of the items. Ultimately, Steve wound up making very, very compelling artificial intelligence opponents." Not bad for a man who'd spent much of the early part of his career working with distributed networking at IBM.

SECONDS OUT, ROUND ONE

The millennium was coming to a close and the stage was set for the multiplayer shooter face-off of the century. *Unreal Tournament* shipped first – but only just –

storming to the top of the PC gaming charts and enthralled gamers the world over with its eclectic mix of frenetic deathmatching and bright, ingeniously-designed levels. Critics were united in their

praise, hailing it as one of the highlights of 20th century online FPS gaming. It was a triumph that neither Epic, nor Digital Extremes had been expecting. "I think

both us and Epic were surprised," explains James Schmalz. "We worked very hard on the game and were hoping for the best, but we were surprised by how well received it was."

A little over a month later, *Quake III* showed up, its stunningly energetic deathmatch-based gameplay racking up equal amounts of praise and almost identical sales figures to its less fashionable rival. From this point onwards, the balance of power would start to be more evenly distributed between the two huge franchises.

DEAD HEAT

In truth, the difference in quality between *UT* and *Quake III* was negligible. In most cases, preference came down to each gamer's personal likes and dislikes rather than any real brand superiority. *UT* undoubtedly shipped with a more diverse selection of gaming modes and multiple mutators, but for many, *Quake III*'s reflex-heavy gameplay was the ultimate deathmatch experience.

"It was a Coke versus Pepsi situation," says Bleszinski of the rivalry between the two games, one that he personally



The old *Unreal Engine* didn't look nearly as impressive as the new one.

THE FUTURE



The possibilities for the *UT* series are endless, thanks to Epic's stunning new *Unreal Engine* 3.0.

THE FUTURE IS UNREAL

Epic is currently working on a new *Unreal Tournament*, utilising the retina-searing brilliance of *Unreal Engine* 3.0 (see our report on p50 for more).

But speculation aside, here's the latest info from the horse's mouth.

Epic's Cliff Bleszinski told us: "We're definitely working on another *Unreal Tournament* game," he begins. "I think if you're going to work on deathmatch, you can make it tighter and more fun. Going with a broader, grander scale with better graphics can really add a lot if you take a game mode like Assault or Onslaught and add some other interesting game dynamics that go in the direction of an RTS. I think gamers are sophisticated enough to handle deathmatch with vehicular elements and some RTS-type elements. You just have to be careful about over-designing your product to the point where everything falls in on itself, and that's something we're definitely conscious of."

believes *Unreal Tournament* won. "This is what the heart of capitalism and American consumerism is all about. If you don't have a choice you may as well be living in Soviet Russia. I think we may have capped out with slightly higher review scores and shifted more units. It was great to win that round, especially as id had already had the *Doom* and *Quake* games, which were all immense multi-million-selling titles. So for us to have this one victory was immense. I'd personally grown up respecting id and wanting to make games like they made, so it was immensely satisfying."

IN PERSPECTIVE

Despite their love of their own product, Schmalz and Bleszinski are ready to accept that *Quake III: Arena* had more than its fair share of merits, in some areas even having the upper hand over *Unreal Tournament*. "I thought that *Quake III*'s graphics were really impressive, and the

game was really polished," says Schmalz. "I think we had more game types and more variety of gameplay than *Quake III*," continues Bleszinski, "but *Quake III* had a certain tangibility to its physics and the way the characters were built, which a lot of *Quake* fans still believe was far superior to *Unreal Tournament*."

Suddenly, the multiplayer shooter genre sprang to life, with the likes of *Counter-Strike* and *Battlefield 1942* the highlights of a rampant spate of

of the genre," says Schmalz. "When you have a larger fanbase, then other developers and publishers feel they can spend more money on developing those kinds of games."

DRIVING ON

But Epic didn't just sit back and watch those other developers close the gap, instead launching itself almost immediately into the development of a successor, *Unreal Tournament 2003* (the

that they require a tremendous amount of custom content and code, which is loads of work, so we decided that we had to back off from *Assault*, which in hindsight was stupid. When we did *UT2004*, we decided that *Assault* had to come back and it had to kick ass."

ANOTHER ROUND

And kick bottom it did. The development of *Unreal Tournament 2004* – in which Digital Extremes designed little more than a handful of maps for the game – once again blew the world of online FPS gaming wide open by introducing vehicular combat to the *UT* universe and the stunning new territory-based gaming mode, *Onslaught*. And with the triumphant return of the revamped *Assault* mode, *UT2004* swept much of the opposition before it, with only the hugely anticipated *Battlefield 2* and *Quake IV* seemingly posing any kind of serious threat to its crown these days.

But that's not to discount the challenge to *UT2004*'s dominance by Epic itself, with the team now feverishly working on a number of PC and next-generation console projects for its awe-inspiring *Unreal Engine 3.0* – including a new *Unreal Tournament*.

If Epic continues to generate titles as pioneering and entertaining as the previous three *Unreal Tournament* games, then it could be set to become one of the most dominant multiplayer FPS developers of all time. And to think it all started with a project that was intended to be little more than a multiplayer stopgap. Surely, when it comes to achieving so much in so little time, it doesn't get much more impressive than the story of the original *Unreal Tournament*. **PC**

"I'd grown up wanting to make games like id made, so for us to have this victory was immensely satisfying"

CLIFF BLESZINSKI CO-DESIGNER, *UNREAL TOURNAMENT*

multiplayer gaming projects inspired by the success of *UT* and of course, *Quake III*. "I think *UT* sped up the creation of other games by expanding the popularity

title began development at Digital Extremes before being handed over to Epic), which utilised the company's stunning new *Unreal Engine 2* to power its even more frenetic gameplay.

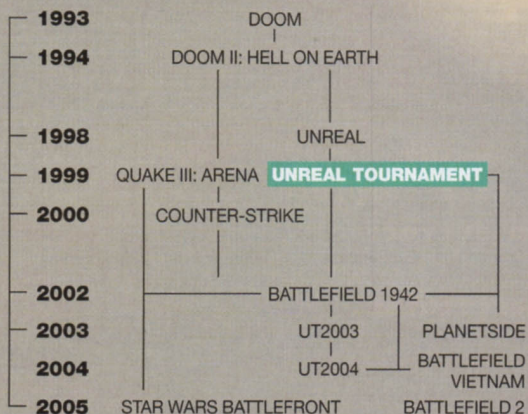
Ironically, the game contained far more similarities to *Quake III* than its predecessor, most notably with its rail gun-esque sniper rifle and faster, twitchy, trigger-happy gameplay. *UT2003* was also to dispense with one of the most popular gaming modes, *Assault*, an omission that Bleszinski regrets to this day. "We didn't put *Assault* into *UT2003* because of the really steep curve of learning the new technology, and the amount of time it took to make the art assets. The problem with *Assault* maps is



UT was so popular with the public, that before long, everyone was jumping onto the multiplayer FPS bandwagon.

FAMILY TREE

Unreal Tournament was the first mainstream blockbuster to blow open the burgeoning online FPS market to the masses, although *Quake III* – released just weeks later – takes as much credit for fuelling the genre's success and popularity...



UT certainly didn't hold back when it came to gore.

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