FREE!

PCGZine

Issue 4 | April 2007

Free Magazine For PC Gamers. Read it, Print it, Send it to your mates…

FIRST PREVIEW INSIDE!

EMPIRE EARTH III

Epic strategy from Stone Age to Space Age

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW!

THE WITCHER MAN

We speak to CD Projekt's Michal Madej about the RPG that's aiming for Oblivion's crown…

HUGE REVIEW

S.T.A.L.K.E.R

The best shooter since Half-Life 2?

PLUS…

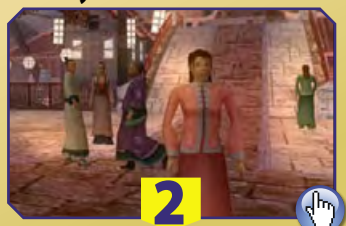
FRONTLINES: FUEL OF WAR
Hands-on playtest

SPARTA
Swords, skirts and strategy

REVIEWS



1 **Command & Conquer 3**
Will you believe in Nod?



2 **Jade Empire**
Epic Eastern RPG



3 **Resident Evil 4**
Spooky, scary, zombie free

PLUS

Runaway 2
Silverfall
War Front
And More!

Welcome to PCGZine



Despite the fact that March is traditionally a quiet time for PC gaming, we've filled another issue of PCGZine to the point that we're overflowing with great new games and tonnes of news about what's due later this year.

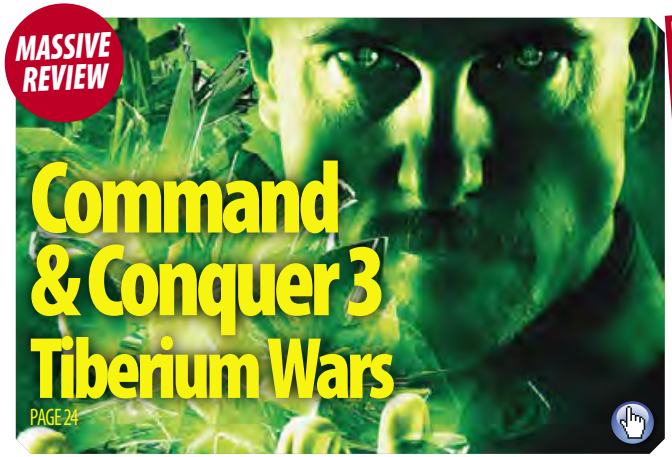
It's a welcome return to our screens for some old favourites – like Command & Conquer, Empire Earth and Resident Evil. And there's one game which feels like it's been around forever, but manages to stay fresh and full of new ideas: namely the long awaited and much maligned STALKER. Despite everyone's suspicions and fears, it turns out that it's… well, you'll have to read on to find out.

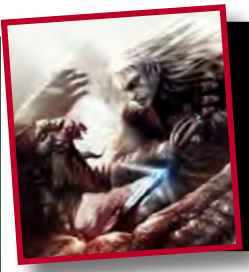
Enjoy the issue, and please feel free to send me your thoughts and ideas.

Adam Oxford, Editor
PCGzine@gamerzines.com

READER FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of the magazine!

Don't miss! *This month's top highlights*





EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW!
The Witcher
We talk to Michel Madej
PAGE 14









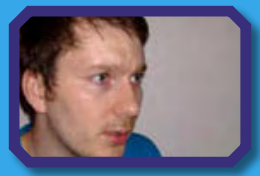


QUICK FINDER
Every game's just a click away!

Sparta	Empire Earth 3
Codename: Panzers	The Witcher
Clive Barker's Jericho	S.T.A.L.K.E.R.
Enemy Territory: Quake Wars	Command & Conquer 3
Bioshock	Jade Empire
Tabula Rasa	Resident Evil 4
Two Worlds	Runaway 2
Overlord	Silverfall
Colin McRae DIRT	War Front
Frontlines	Sam & Max Episode 4



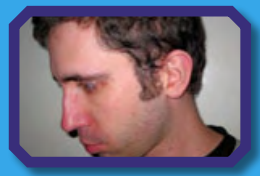
MEET THE TEAM
Probably the best games writers on the planet



Lee Hall
Our legendary newshound can get a quote from a mute donkey.



Ian Morris
He's not afraid of zombies. But there's a new Evil Resident in 4.



Alec Meer
If reviewers were geneticallly engineered, they'd look like this.



Steve Hill
Name a mag and Steve's written for it. Except Bridal Monthly.

LATEST NEWS

Ancient Wars: Sparta

What Rome did for us?

Publisher: Playlogic
Developer: World Forge
Heritage: Nowt. Oh, a Settlers bloke is leading the dev team.
Link: www.world-forge.com
ETA: April



The Persians attack Legoland, Windsor.



Ah yes, the gay Mardi Gras of Luxor…

"Heroes put the fear of Zeus into the enemy"





It's like Gladiator, only girlier.

What's the story?

Standing on the shoulders of Creative Assembly's warfare giants such as Rome and Medieval 2: Total War, mixed with the hit movie 300, Sparta promises real-time scrapping on an epic scale, only with resource management, upgradeable fortresses and strangely cutesy battle units.

What do we know?

Plenty – it's not far off and we're getting more jittery about this one that a drunk warrior itching to put his weapon to deadly use.

Playing as Spartans, Egyptians or Persians, you get your blade sharpening on the bones of falling enemies in 30 battles across a trio of campaigns. And while Sparta is story-led, there's plenty of freeform play as you barter for better kit, nick weapons your foes drop and equip your forces with special abilities and large swords, bows, spears and machine guns. OK, not machine guns.

A similarly potent weapon in your arsenal is your hero unit – hardened fighters capable of inspiring your other units and putting the fear of Zeus into your enemies.

When do we get more?

A full review next issue sounds like a decent battleplan, no?

Anything else to declare?

Yes. Those with an internet connection (it'll never catch on) can engage in eight-way playing romps – which sound delightful, if a bit dirty.

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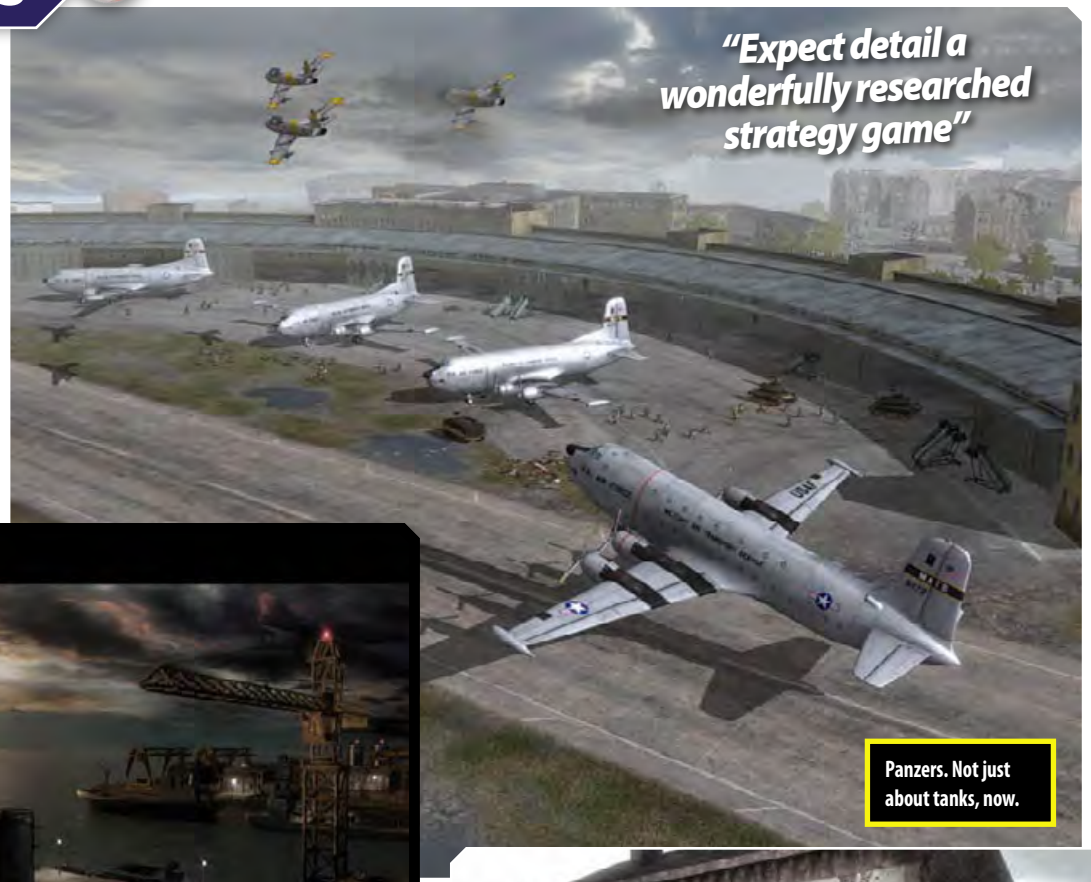
PC DVD-ROM SOFTWARE

SIGIL GAMES ONLINE

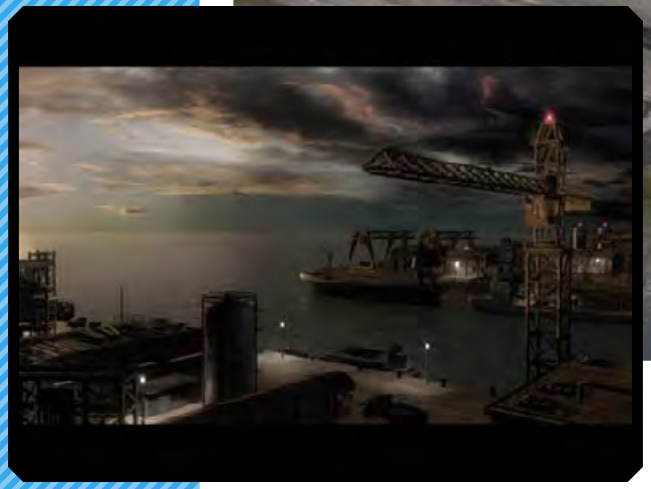
SOE SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT

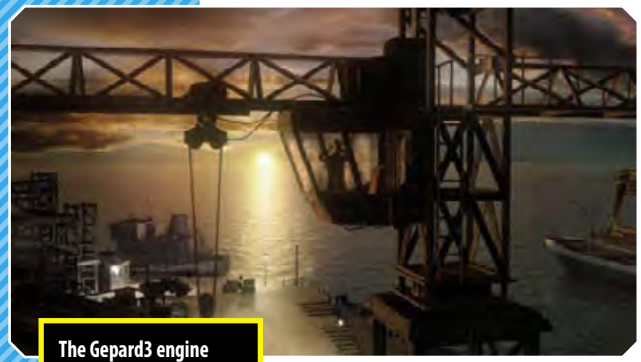
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Publisher: 10tacle Studios
Developer: Stormregion
Heritage: SWINE, Codename Panzers series
Link: www.stormregion.com
ETA: TBC



Panzers. Not just about tanks, now.




The Gepard3 engine sails off into the sunset


Destruction is mutually assured.

LATEST NEWS

Codename: Panzers Cold War

The cold war is over. A little earlier than expected.

What's the story?

The Second World War is over, so what better way to celebrate than kicking off another scrap for oil rich territory and the right to imprison foreign-looking people?

Panzers – Cold War asks what would happen if a US plane accidentally collided with a Soviet jet in the 1950s and answers it's own question with images of a fist-shaking Stalin and lots of big explosions.

What do we know?

Not much, apart from the fact this will likely be another engrossing, detailed and wonderfully researched real-time strategy from a firm that can quite confidently claim to be the greatest developer in Hungary. We can't think of any others.

So far it's only the premise that's been laid bare in a game in which the Cold War has just thawed out like a frozen turkey after a power cut. Expect explosions, screams and little men falling over when you run them over with a tank.

Oh, and these shots hint at a string of semi-industrial locales, bombed-out urban environments and destructible scenery to be crushed beneath your advancing tanks.

When do we get more?

Just as soon as we can get this blasted Enigma machine working.

Anything else to declare?

600 packets of fags, 32 bottles of gin and a condom full of cocaine. All for personal use.

7 UP

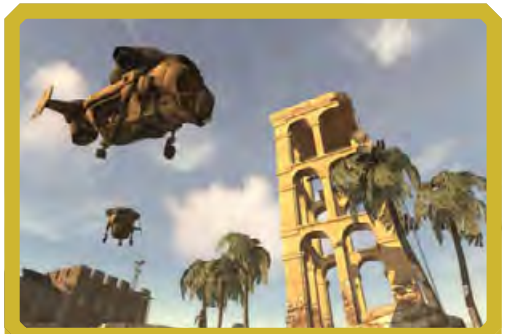
Lucky numbers to have caught our eye…



Clive Barker's Jericho

Publisher: Codemasters **ETA:** Late 2007

This is a squad-based first-person shooter featuring a story from the dark recesses of horror superwriter Clive Barker's enormous mind. Only just released in its uncensored form, the game's trailer features some kind of demonic fellow being shot to buggery before calmly sloping off (presumably for a fag and a pint). All of which doesn't bode well for those who incur this creature's wrath.



Enemy Territory: Quake Wars

Publisher: Activision | **ETA:** June

Come on… it's finished! Stop tinkering around with gameplay and getting good at the maps so you can make us all feel inadequate when Enemy Territory finally breaks cover. The boys at Splash Damage are teasing us now, which their endlessly ebbing frontlines and killer arsenal of future weapons. It's time they faced us like men.

Bioshock

Publisher: Take Two | **ETA:** June

Set in a nightmarish sub-aquatic world, Bioshock will doubtless be one of the most atmospheric shooters of all time. It comes from the brain of Ken Levine, whose CV lists System Shock 2 as well as a sound knowledge of Microsoft Office. sing genetic body modifiers and your noggin mean there's also something for you tacticians in Bioshock.

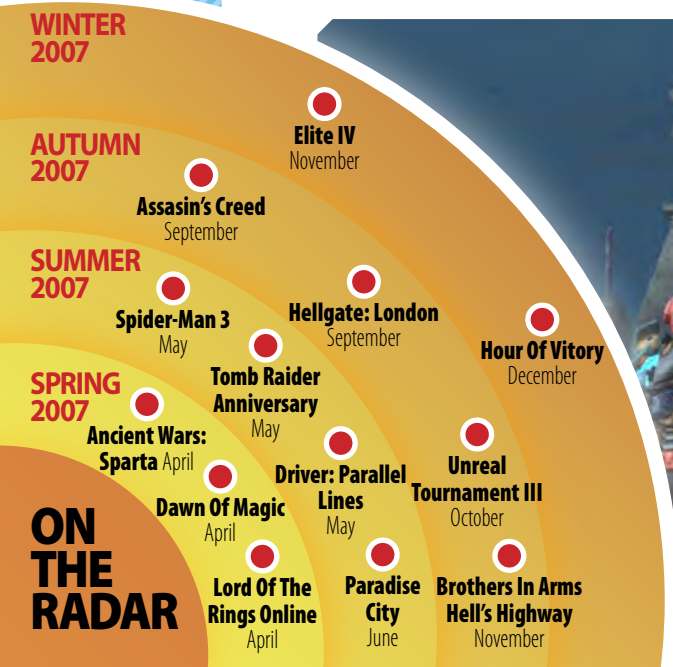




Two Worlds

Publisher: SouthPeak | **ETA:** May

Let's be honest – this one could go either way. It's either going to be a dreadful RPG also-ran living in the shadow of Oblivion, or a really, really good RPG that still lives in the shadow of Oblivion. It's from the Earth 2160 people, mind, and we're championing this, like a level 26 elf riding into battle on the back of a dwarf..



Tabula Rasa

Publisher: NCSoft **ETA:** September

Richard Garriott is better known by his nickname, Lord British, and rustled up the still-running Ultima series to stave off the boredom of working in a videogames store after college. He's now very rich, so if he says 'I'm doing a space RPG that's going to be a massively multiplayer online affair', he can. And he has. And it's Tabula Rasa.



Colin McRae: DIRT

Publisher: Codemasters **ETA:** October

As well as the usual solo racing around variously muddy, wet, snowy and generally inhospitable tracks, the latest Colin has an added CORR factor. By which we mean, of course, that you'll be able to compete in ten-car races true to the US Championship Off-Road Racing competition.



Overlord

Publisher: Codemasters **ETA:** July

Like a stropping Hollywood starlet surrounded by an entourage of yes men, in Overlord you can order about a band of blindly loyal minions. You can mix and match your subjects from a collection of healers, bruisers, sneakers and fire-chuckers.



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FIGHT · CONQUER · REIGN SUPREME

FRONTLINES FUEL OF WAR

Publisher: THQ
Developer: Kaos Studios
Heritage: These troops are veterans of the Desert Combat games
Link: www.kaostusios.com
ETA: September

HANDS ON

FRONTLINES: FUEL OF WAR

If there's no oil, why aren't the soldiers riding bikes?

OK, so there is a little bit of oil left in Frontlines: Fuel Of War – in fact that's the bleedin' problem. Black gold has become such a precious commodity that everyone's scrapping to get their hands on it like desperate bridesmaids trying to catch a hurled wedding bouquet. The air of desperation here is just as palpable too, as the acronyms (US and EU) take on the shades of red (Russia and China) in a bid to ensure no WAG has to do without petrol for her BMW X5.

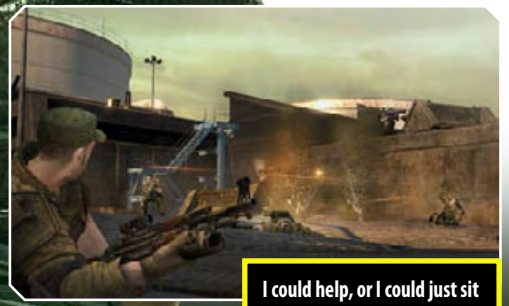
To be honest, the semi-apocalyptic, oil crisis backdrop is hardly an original or inspiring concept for a game. Luckily, all the inspiration you'll need comes from the meat of the gameplay. The dev team is a hybrid of ex-Battlefield testers and former Desert Combat >





"Black gold has become a very precious commodity..."

Who needs a helmet when you've got a thick skull?





FRONTLINES FUEL OF WAR



That's one way of getting past the bouncers.

>FRONTLINES continued

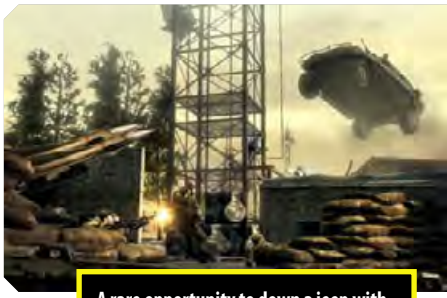
series coders. That should be hint enough as to the accessibility and intensity that looks set to underpin this war game.

Fighting is focused on flashpoints, whether you're battling alone or online, in a move designed to cut down on the trudging between blasts that is the bane of many an FPS. So far the game looks every bit as frenetic as you'd hope. True to life maps set in the Asian subcontinent are busily peopled with marauding troops and filled with the noise of endlessly chattering ballistics. And while much of the combat takes place on foot, the air is also filled with the screeching of jets, the badda-badda of skulking helicopters and the rumble of tank tracks.

What better way to fight for the world's few remaining sources of fuel, than by burning off gallons of the stuff in high-maintenance vehicles with a carbon footprint the size of Texas? OK, so Frontlines isn't going to win the Al Gore seal of approval, but who cares when you've got a game that's being billed as brainier than the world's most unlikely environmental champion.

Doubtless in an attempt to spruce up a single player campaign – which sees you eating up global territories on your way to dominating Earth and all earthlings – Frontlines pits you against advanced AI foes. And we're not just talking about a few enemies deciding they'd best not walk directly into your line of fire, here. These folks will alter their own tactics to counter your approach, fanning out when you move in a loose formation, and laying down area affect weaponry when you're bunched up like a team of girly footballers in the shower,

You'll need to be on your toes to react to an enemy that seems to be watching your every move so intently, though you will have help in the form of some fabulous military kit. You've got drones, for instance, that can fly above enemy targets or buzz around on the deck to remotely eye-up your foes' strength and posture. And once you come under fire you can hit back with missile interceptors, and even shoot round corners with the help of markers that can be laser 'painted' onto your target.



A rare opportunity to down a jeep with a surface-to-air missile.

There's so much going on that the game already looks to have captured the fury and clamour of real conflict. Only minus the actual dismemberment and senseless loss of life, of course. We've seen the first of the ten missions, and it's a beauty that brings together many of the facets of gameplay drooled over above. You're shot down over an oil refinery and must battle your way to an extraction point under intense enemy fire, securing increasingly precarious beachheads as you edge closer to safety.

Are you up for a challenge?

"Folk will alter their tactics to counter your approach"

Yeah, Kev – can you fix the satellite dish please mate?



What better way to relax after carnage than with a game of bowls?

PCGZine

FRONTLINES FUEL OF WAR

HOW COMPLETE? 78%

FIRST IMPRESSIONS 85%

Easy access shooter with a lust for battle action.

STRATEGY ON A GALACTIC SCALE

"A GAME SO IMMENSE THAT SUPREME MIGHT BE TOO DELICATE A WORD" - GAMESPY

CRUSH YOUR ENEMIES LIKE ANTS

ATTACK WITH GIGANTIC EXPERIMENTAL WEAPONS AND WATCH THEM CUT A SWATHE OF UNPRECEDENTED CARNAGE

WIN THE 1000 YEAR INFINITE WAR

COMMAND HUNDREDS OF UNIQUE UNITS. LEAD YOUR FACTION TO VICTORY AND WIN THE INFINITE WAR

DRIVE THEM FROM THE PLANET

EPIC, COMBINED-ARMS BATTLES TEAR ACROSS A DYNAMIC LANDSCAPE.

BASK IN THE GLORY OF SUPREME VICTORY

CONQUER THE GALAXY PLANET BY PLANET, AND REIGN SUPREME



REPLAY THIS VIDEO



SUPREME™ COMMANDER

AN RTS BY CHRIS TAYLOR.

PC GAMER MUST BUY ★★★★★

"MASSIVE, BRUTAL AND FIERCE.... THE FIRST GREAT GAME OF 2007"

90%

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HANDS ON

EMPIRE EARTH III

Publisher: Vivendi
Developer: Mad Doc
Heritage: EE I & 2, Star Trek Legacy, Star Trek Armada I & II
Link: www.empireearth.com
ETA: Autumn

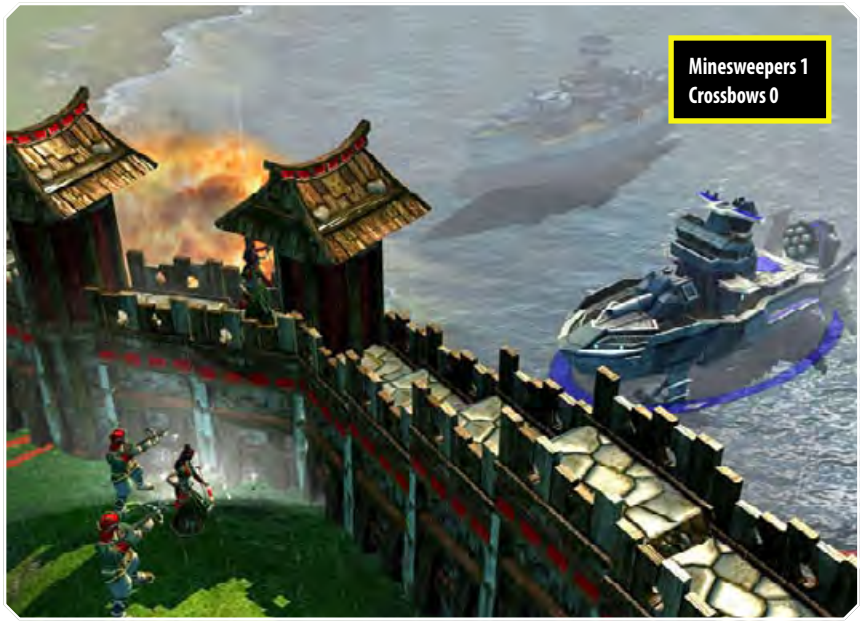

EEIII promises to be a sandpit for modders.

The Empire strikes back

With ambition befitting its grand premise, Empire Earth II was an RTS to be reckoned with. The battlefield general sim, with resource management elements, enabled you to guide your chosen faction from the cavemen to spacemen phase. And, lo, it was too much.

Enter: Empire Earth III, a game that promises to indulge your thirst for raw power, without causing your brain to hurt as you try to compute tech trees, resource needs and tactical decision all at once.


Joy – units you can actually make out.


Minesweepers 1 Crossbows 0


Drill sergeants in hovercrafts never seem quite as scary.

"The strategy mode in which you conquer a 3D globe looks mouth watering…"

With EEIII, developer Mad Doc has reigned in its urge to simply add more of everything, instead redesigning the game's interface and content ready for your next crack at world domination. As ever, your mission is to take over the world, evolving factions from one of three global groupings into undisputed world champs by flattening all-comers and gobbling up territories like a fatty on day leave from food prison.

This time round every faction can shell out on screen-filling, smoke-belching super units a la Rise Of Nations – a concession to empowering the gamer that we're quite frankly jolly pleased to see.

And this strange desire to turn a once-lumbering series into something more accessible and engaging doesn't stop there. Aside from a moron-pleasing redrafting of the visuals so units are better defined and more individual, the whole interface has been made sleek, sophisticated and in no way hideous.

In a genre where instant and unobtrusive control is often the difference between drinking your pop out of a fallen enemy's helmet and trying to barter your way into heaven, such a change is welcome indeed. >

EMPIRE EARTH


Unit life expectancy is unnervingly low.


Those squid would make one hell of a risotto.


Why have they got the lights on in daytime?

And we're not done with the welcoming of change yet. Already Empire Earth III's battles are looking less cluttered than its forebears – great news for those of us put off all tactical thinking when faced with a seething mass of miscellaneous bods clawing the crap out of each other.

We've not seen the game in its full glory of 500 units scrapping it out on screen at once yet, but the busy battles we have witnessed have all been compelling and fathomable, which means we really can't wait to get stuck in for real.

It's not just on the field of battle that Empire Earth has levelled up, either. The turn-based strategy element that forms the framework of the main World Domination mode, in which you plot a course of conquering around a 3D map of the globe, sounds mouth-watering. You'll be able to use espionage units to scout out territories before you launch attacks, for starters. And the previously convoluted diplomacy system has been pared down to a far more simple and manageable set of options, such as declaring war and forming an alliance – fancy that.

There will also be a clutch of quests attached to the main game which will affect your diplomatic status. Choose to take up a mission to assist a neighbour in, say, repelling some aggressors, and they'll buddy up with you for the rest of the campaign – or at least until you turn your missiles on them…

Looks like Empire Earth might finally live up to its 'realtime Civ' promise.

"Mad Doc has reigned in its urge to simply add more of everything, focusing on quality"


Sleepy dwellings… that are about to be squashed by a giant mech.

WHERE IN THE WORLD?

Introducing our trio of candidates for utter global supremacy…



The West | **The East** | **The Middle Bit**

The West

Fewer units, but they're techie and hard and their buildings look nice. Probably also have trainers with reversible tongues and iPod docks.

PCGZine EMPIRE EARTH

HOW COMPLETE? 78%

FIRST IMPRESSIONS 80%

A top-down re-imagining of an already strong RTS



Welcome to Silverfall - a rich and detailed world that constantly revolves and evolves, around YOU.

A once glorious city that lies in a fantastical Kingdom where the forces of Technology and Nature are so strongly opposed, that symptoms of the conflict have begun to manifest physically as melded cyber-biologic organics and living steam-driven automatons.

Evolve your own hero from the pits of this world into a mighty champion that can oppose the planet-choking Order of Nothingness.

Freedom to evolve in either the technological or spiritual paths is in your hands and you must choose your comrades wisely to provide a balance and benefit to your efforts - but be cautious, any bias in your choices will either corrupt or upgrade the growing world around you.

Depending on YOUR point of view.

OUT MARCH 2007

SILVERFALL

16+ www.pegi.info

MONTE CRISTO

PC DVD ROM RPG



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SEARCH PCGZine PRINT THIS PAGE ZOOM IN ZOOM OUT TOGGLE FULL SCREEN VIEW PREVIOUS PAGE NEXT PAGE

Publisher: Atari
Developer: CD Projekt
Players: 1
Certificate: TBC
Features: Epic single-player adventure, real-time fighting a la action adventures.
ETA: Summer

The Witcher's Brew

We stroked beards with Michal Madej, chief designer of RPG monster The Witcher…



Polish devs CD Projekt don't do things by half. They're creating an epic role playing game and, as we found out, they've got their eye on Oblivion's golden crown…

What the hell is a Witcher, anyway?
A witcher is a medieval hitman. They're trained from childhood to fight monsters and have transformed into mutants. They're master swordsmen who use powerful magic to enhance their skills with the blade.

They also have a specific knowledge of monsters and alchemy and, thanks to their training, can use potions that would be harmful to humans. They use two swords – one for magical monsters and one for more mundane beasts, such as humans.

The Witcher is the most famous witcher of all time, the legendary Geralt of Rivia.

Before we get stuck in… Oblivion is the benchmark, so is your game better than Elder Scrolls IV?
It's completely different. I played the ES series from the beginning and became more disappointed with each game.

I'm looking for good stories, not just hack 'n' slash. I find Oblivion boring – it's an MMO without multiplayer.

We're similar in terms of graphics, we also use cutting edge visuals, and we're also trying to reach casual gamers.

But Oblivion is more about freedom and a huge world to explore, whereas we have a great story to explore. In Oblivion you can finish the story in a couple of hours or miss the story altogether. Our game is about the plot, so it's more like a book or film.

I think Oblivion will appeal to people who don't have much else to do. I don't have the time to sacrifice for it.

You mention hack 'n' slash. What makes your combat different?
We spent eight months making the combat system because we felt there was no good RPG combat system to take inspiration from.

In hack 'n' slash games like Diablo we felt the player wasn't immersed in the action and the mouse swinging of Oblivion meant no tactics were involved when fighting.



We were determined to combine tactics with action in a real-time combat system and motion captured hundreds of animations.

We're very proud of the system, which testers tell us is very addictive. It's more like action adventure fighting where you expect to do damage if you hit, rather than discovering you didn't do any harm. Here you can expect a reaction for all your actions.

From what we've seen of the game so far, choice seems to be a central theme…
RPG games are about choices so we give the player as many decisions to make as possible. Most successful games give the illusion of choice – it's like McDonalds, you can choose one of many restaurants around any city, but their burgers always taste the same.

You may have different character races and classes, but the experience is always the same.

We went a different way… you can only play as one character, but your



Grow up – it's just a nipple. Scroll over it for a close-up… kidding!



Not all monsters are bad. This one clearly is.



I actually wanted to be a hairdresser before I got into this witchering malarkey.

"RPG games are all about choices. So we aim to give the player as many choices as possible…"

>WITCHER continued

choices greatly influence the story and the game.

To avoid cheating we've separated choices from the results with a long time frame. We've concealed choices and their effects can occur several hours, which might be weeks in playing time, after the original decision so we have a flashback system to show players when the die was cast.

You're promising moral dilemmas, give us an example…

You'll meet people who need your skills to, say, kill a ghost. You have to research your prey, though, as you're not a mindless killer. You must prepare potions and find the right time to strike and the right weapons to use.

During your research you may realise that, while the monster is bad, it is not as bad as the person who sent you on a quest. In one case the ghost you hunt is the murdered wife of the guy who commissioned you.

You can choose to kill the monster and take the wife-killer's money. Or you can take an assignment from the ghost and kill the husband. You have to decide what kind of witcher you are as the game supports both options without judging you.

So you may develop morally during The Witcher, but how does physical progression work?

There are 250 special abilities based on 15 ability trees – five magical, four basic attributes (strength, dexterity, endurance and intelligence) and six fighting styles. This enables you to specialise without showing you the numbers, which mean nothing to casual gamers.

Personally, I favour the intelligence skills which turn you into more of an investigator. As you acquire skills you'll be able to see what part of monsters you can use in spells, for instance.

The same is true with all skills – they give you visible results. If you develop magic skills your spells look different, if you improve your fighting you'll have new strikes in your sequences.

The game borrows heavily from the books of author Andrzej Sapkowski. What are they like, and is he involved with the project?

The books are very special in Poland, where Sapkowski is probably more famous than Tolkien. His books get rid of the old fantasy ideas of good versus evil by populating the world with characters who have needs, who want to have great parties, gain power and have sex. His world is easier to relate to than one in which someone has to throw a ring into a mountain.

At first he kept his distance from us, having had a bad experience before with a movie that was crap. After two years, though, he became more enthusiastic and is helping with names and translation.

What about those darker themes you're borrowed from Sapkowskik?

The game is not about sex, violence, drugs and rock 'n' roll. We don't want to emphasise these things, but we don't want to lie either. As in the real world, people drink alcohol and have sex in The Witcher.

And as these things exist in the game, they can be used in gameplay.

Alcohol can be used in pubs as people become more friendly and may offer extra information or quests when they're drunk.

Sexuality is there because The Witcher is attractive.

So can you use sex as a charm?

No. in the books the Witcher doesn't have sex. In the books he is like a victim – lots of women want to have sex with him because he is famous and rich but, he doesn't.

Good for him…

NEW MAGAZINE! FOR PLAYSTATION 3

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YOUR E-ZINE IS ABSOLUTELY stunning. It beats all the PC magazines in paper shops. It's great to have the short videos of some of the games all in one place. I love it. So, well done.

However, I have been playing Vanguard for a while and was also playing the beta version. It is quite a hard game to get into and really needs to be played in groups rather than solo to get maximum fun from it. It is relatively unpolished at the moment but Sigil keep listening to the players and making refinements all the time. It's a great game and for me should currently score somewhere around 80%.

> Diana Gay

> Adam writes: as the person who reviewed Vanguard, I couldn't agree more. It is better to play with your mates – which is why the repeated crashing of the social server knocked at least 10% off the review score. Such a significant bug renders the game almost unplayable. I'm sure it'll be fixed, but we can only score as we see, not guess at how the game will change in the future.

I HAVE NOW READ ALL THREE ISSUES of PCGZine and I really enjoy it. This mag is the best and I can read it on my PC.

> Hendrik Bezuidenhout

> All we can say, then, is that we hope you enjoyed issue four and this issue too!

WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT a section that could give to the subscriber single and multiplayer tips of the best games in the market? And maybe some gameguides also?

Thank you for the magazine.

Bye

> R.G.

> I think it's a great idea. Check back in a couple of month's time!



In your own words, an awesome 'zine.

AWESOME MAGAZINE, GREAT PC articles. You have the gimp support of the internet! Keep up the good work.

> Malice

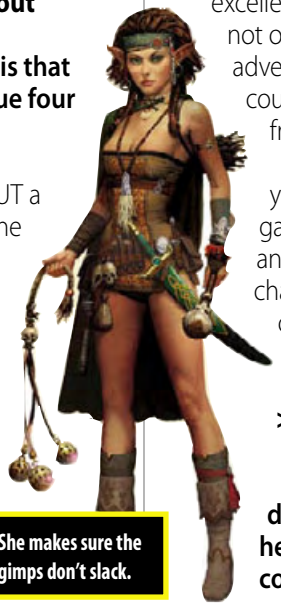
> The internet is gimp powered? Who'd have thought it…?

A MAGAZINE WITH GREAT WRITING, excellent PC game coverage and not overwhelmed with advertising! The print media could learn from you! And it's free! Thanks!

By the way, can I thank you for supporting us PC gamers in a world of more and more 'multi-format' game charts and more and more console gaming editorial replacing what used to be PC alone!

> John Ingrams

> We're absolutely dedicated to PC gaming here on PCGZine – the last console our editor bought was a second hand Xbox, and that just because my DVD player was stolen. And we don't envy Dan having to put together a mag about PS3 at all! What's he going to write about? The PC remains the premiere gaming platform from a technology point of view, and always will.


She makes sure the gimps don't slack.

SUPREME COMMANDER

Looks like heaven, runs like Hell

I KNOW THAT IT'S SET IN THE FUTURE, BUT IT WOULD have been nice if Supreme Commander would actually run on a PC today. Even on my Core 2 Duo machine, I get quite a bit of slowdown as soon as I try to run the graphics at a decent resolution. I'm all for pushing the boundaries, but how many people really have the quad core machines, which I hear are necessary for decent performance?

> Jon K

> You may be being a little hard, Jon. Supreme Comm is very scaleable in our experience, and it runs great on our dual core CPU at top quality. If it's Vista you're having problems with, wait for the DX10 patch next month before a final judgement.


Sup Comm can be a system hog.

Don't miss Issue 5
Out April 26th
Sign up now!

Name: amBX
Manufacturer: Philips
Website: www.ambx.com

How to build the ultimate games room



Don't just look at the game, immerse yourself in it.

Funny, isn't it? Despite years of surround sound and ever wider screen monitors, most of us still play PC games hunched over a machine that's stuffed in the corner of a bedroom or lounge. Yet over in the US, a 'den' or dedicated fun room is the norm in the average suburban ranch house design. Booming sound systems, vibrating chairs: it may be over the top for some tastes, but the environment we play in should be as conducive to enjoyment as the games we play.

Of course, on our densely packed isle there's little chance of moving to that luxury mansion in the Cotswolds with spare rooms for gaming in, but it's still worth making your play area a bit more fun. For starters, you need space. A widescreen monitor (20 inches is dirt cheap these days) will help to fill your peripheral vision with gloriously rendered gaming worlds, and a surround sound set-up is a must.

These are basic requirements in PCGZine's view. Taking it to the next level, though, is Philips amBX technology; due in the shops shortly. The concept behind amBX is simple – bring the atmosphere of a game out beyond the screen into the world around you. The way it does this is a lot more clever, not that you'd ever know since it's so easy to use.

Light me up

At the heart of amBX is a scripting language which games developers can add into their code before or after release. It describes a 3D space around the player's seat, by taking three flat planes and stacking them on top of one other. When an effect happens in the game, the amBX engine interprets it for the player's physical environment. So, for example, your gaming avatar might be stood in a dark cavern with green uplighting, a fire blazing away to their left and a slight draft coming from below and behind – and amBX knows it. Just as surround sound adds directional audio effects to games, so amBX adds directional physical effects as well.

What's even better, though, is that amBX is backward-compatible with unscripted games too. The amBX gaming FXGenerator engine will make a best guess attempt to fill the room with appropriate colour to the on screen action, just like a Philips Ambilight TV. The guys at amBX are

"Brings the atmosphere of a game out beyond the screen!"

THE GAMES OF amBX

Got the kit? These are the amBX enabled games you can't miss.



The innovative Darwinia has had amBX scripting added post release.



The ultra-real Rail Simulator now has added wind effects.



As total destruction approaches in Defcon, the lights amplify your panic.



Feel the wind rushing past your face in Codemasters' TOCA Race Driver 3.



The rebirth of adventure gaming continues with Broken Sword 4 & amBX.

>amBX continued

offering publishers a testing service to make sure their games work with the FXGenerator – Oblivion and Rome have already been certified!

That's what's happening inside the game engine. Next comes the hardware kits. Although any kit manufacturer can license amBX technology (like speaker manufacturers use Dolby), the first kits are coming from Philips itself. There are two sets of satellite LED lights – capable of 16 million colours – which can be placed around your desk and gaming area, as well as a 'wallwasher' which sits behind the monitor and projects lighting effects on to the wall in front of you. There's also a pair of powerful varispeed fans – which can create any effect from a quick blast of air to a gentle draft – and a wrist rumbler which sits underneath your hands.

INTERACTIVE CONTENT
Click here to see amBX in action



Effect-ive

All you do is place these peripherals wherever you want, and then run the set-up program to tell amBX where they are. Any effects that can be created using your set-up will be, so if you place the fans in front of you, they won't blow in your face if the draft is coming from behind.

The overall effect is captivating. Just turn down the room lights and let amBX do its work and you'll find games take on a whole new dimension. There are many games that are designed to use amBX already – in Broken Sword 4, for example, one puzzle can be solved by following the draft of air from under a door, while in other games explosions are magnified by rumbles and flashes while ambient lighting drags you into the game's world by filling your peripheral vision and blocking out the crowded bedroom around you.

Really clever games developers, like the guys at Introversion (who created Defcon) push amBX even further. There's no reason for the effects to be a naturalistic extension of the on screen action: you can use lights to signify gun shots, messages arriving – in fact any event at all.

The future for amBX is even more exciting. There's plans to start scripting movie releases with amBX, and sell larger lighting kits for the lounge. These will magnify the intensity of dramatic moments and bring action scenes out beyond the screen. And the beauty of the system is it's infinitely upgradable – any peripheral you can imagine could be added to the amBX line up. Design bods at Philips have considered prototypes for bubble machines, water atomisers and even scent sprays!

So why do so many of us squat over tinny workstations in the corner of the room, when we could be sitting in the middle of the game world itself? Why not build yourself the ultimate games room with amBX?

SEE MORE, FEEL MORE

There are four amBX kits coming to a store near you soon…

Starter kit
Contents Wallwasher, two satellite lamps

ProGamer kit
Contents Wallwasher, left & right front lamps with built in speakers

Premium kit
Contents Wallwasher, left & right front lamps with built in speakers, two varispeed fans, wrist rumbler

Extension kit
Contents Two varispeed fans, wrist rumbler



IMMERSION ESSENTIALS

The kit we couldn't do without.



Surround sound | Widescreen monitors

Surround sound

Five speakers and a subwoofer – what was life like before them. Of course, we'll settle for some of those clever multi-can headphones at a pinch.



Publisher: THQ
Developer: GSC Gameworld
Heritage: Cossacks, Codename: Outbreak
Link: www.stalker-game.com
ETA: Out now

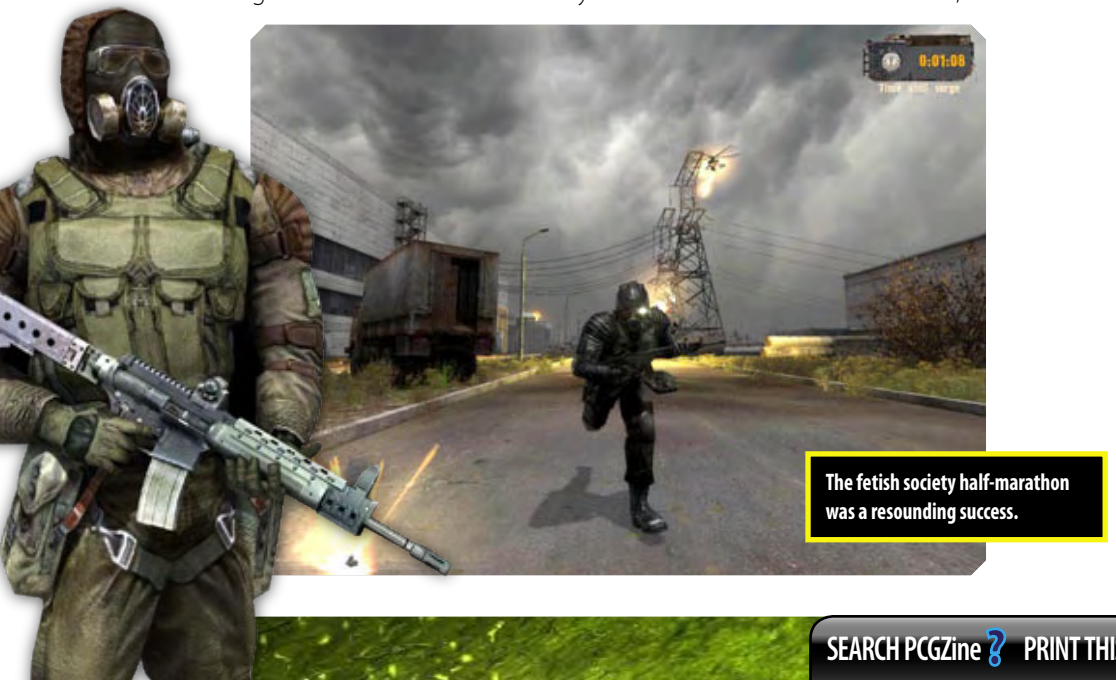
SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
2Ghz CPU, 512Mb RAM, 128Mb 3D card

S.T.A.L.K.E.R.

The game that came back from the dead – and it's incredible

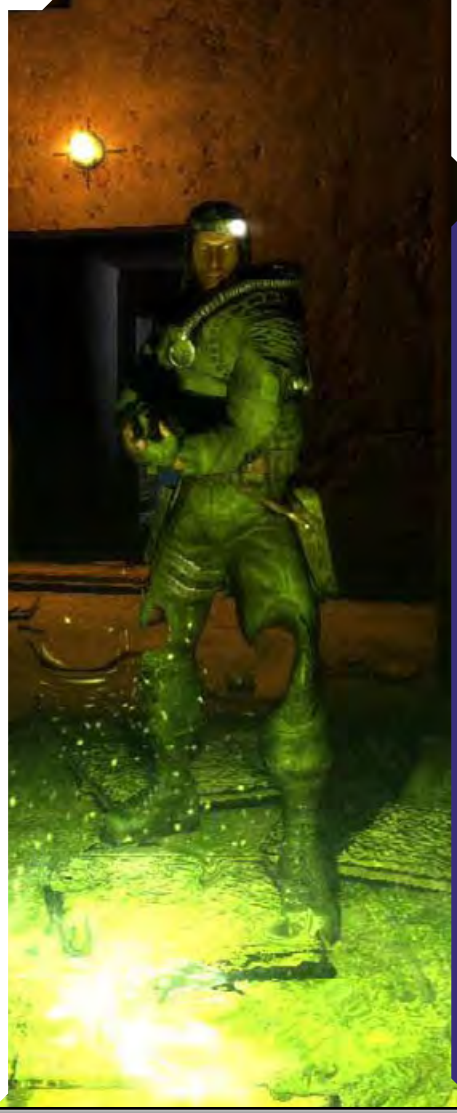
Stalker (please, don't dignify it with the futile f.u.l.l.s.to.p.s.) is the boy who cried wolf. It talked a frankly ridiculous blue streak, making all the promises that gamers wanted to hear but just couldn't take seriously. Delay after delay eventually collapsed into a silence that could only mean a fatal savaging by enraged lupine publishers. Bloodied but proud, now it's back. Most of Stalker's tall tales aren't, unsurprisingly, true, but that wolf didn't kill it. Rather, Stalker beat the hell out of the damned beast, and has emerged a game to be in awe of for entirely different reasons. Grim survival is etched into every inch of Stalker, giving it a personality quite unlike anything else, and making it the most compelling first-person shooter since Half-Life 2.

The original brief was a wide-open, living world, a playground of violence and horror that your journey through would be utterly unique. The reality is a more-or-less straight road with plenty of rather more fascinating lay-bys and service stations to break up the journey with and, honestly, it's the right decision. Without a focus, Stalker >



The fetish society half-marathon was a resounding success.

"Stalker achieves an overwhelming and unsettling atmosphere..."





THE BRAINS TRUST

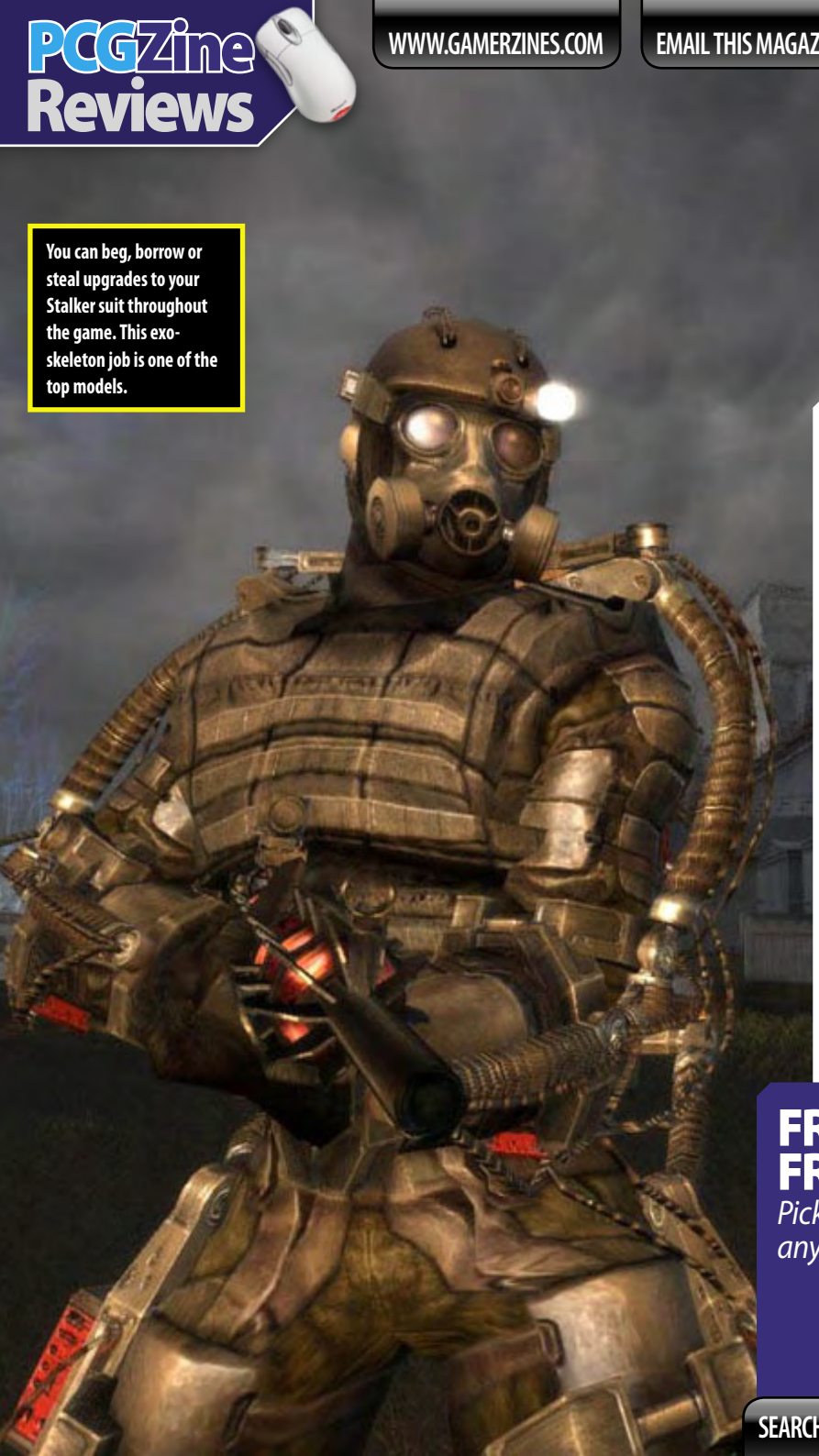
In which we find discretion really is the better part of valour. Sometimes.



Choose your adventure | Brain drain | Land of the dead

Choose your adventure

There are two ways to see all of Stalker's sights – follow the storyline missions and be guided through everything, or take optional sub-quests for cash and loot, which'll take you to new zones earlier on.



You can beg, borrow or steal upgrades to your Stalker suit throughout the game. This exo-skeleton job is one of the top models.

"It's the most compelling shooter since Half-Life 2"



Doggy needs a bath. And some new skin.



Real life features of the area have been accurately modelled.

>S.T.A.L.K.E.R. continued

would have been a mess, its really clever bits too vague to constitute a game of their own, but working brilliantly as randomly-generated scenery along a set path.

An example: en route to the next chunk of storyline mission, we stumbled upon members of one of Stalker's NPC factions ('Duty') murderously ambushing those of another ('Freedom'). Morally outraged, we tracked down the leaders of the victimised faction, told 'em what had happened, and agreed to join them in a revenge raid on the ambushers' base. Thanks to a grenade launcher we'd found in the cellar of a collapsed house, it went really rather smoothly. Well, in a massacre-y kind of way. Our allies returned to base, but we hung around cheerfully rummaging through corpses' pockets for loot. There was too much to carry, so we stowed it in box to come back for later.

A couple of missions later, in need of supplies, we returned for the stash under cover of dark and stormy night, with weird animals noises and unearthly lights too close for comfort –

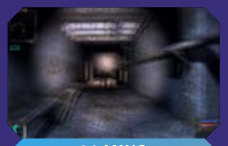


The final encounter is withing Chernobyl itself.

the kind of overwhelmingly unsettling atmosphere Stalker achieves incredibly well. We look up from our scavenging just in time to see a flash of lightning, and in it the silhouette of men. Armed men, coming towards the corpse-strewn camp. Oh God – Duty reinforcements. We scurry for a hiding place, unable to decide whether to risk either gunfire or retreat. Either means probable death. But then… the sound of ukulele music. It's more Stalkers, loners like us roaming the Zone, the irradiated, mysterious wasteland around Chernobyl, avoiding the trials of civilization by scraping a looter's living here. Spotting a campfire, they headed for it, looking for somewhere safe to stay the night, to unwind with music and booze. They've no idea that it is or was a Duty base, but the quiet magic >

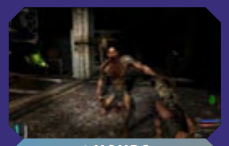
FREEZE FRAME

Pick a route, any route



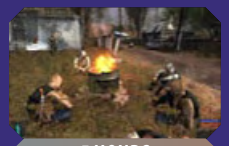
20 MINS

Weird anomalies hinder progress. Go around, or through – if you're wearing the right armour.



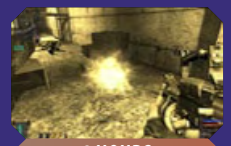
1 HOURS

Stalker's everyday monsters are mutated but recognisable wildlife. In a pack, they'll attack.



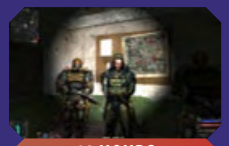
5 HOURS

The Rad 100 Bar is a neutral safe haven, where you can pick up missions or fight for coins in the arena.



8 HOURS

Brain Scorcher devices warp reality, blinding you with visions and making you oblivious to attack.



10 HOURS

Depending on your actions through the game, the various factions will help or hinder your progress.

>S.T.A.L.K.E.R. continued

of Stalker's artificial intelligence has led them here; a wonderful vignette.

In a thousand other games of Stalker, it wouldn't have happened. Whether it had or not, whether we'd chosen to help Freedom in the first place or not, we still have to head North, to fight unspeakable horrors arranged in careful set pieces, but because of this random encounter, Stalker's world has that much more depth to it. Passing by again later, those Stalkers are still at the camp – but all dead. Who, or what, killed them? The Zone's mutant wildlife? A misguided revenge attack by Duty? A bandit raid? We'll never know, but a fight genuinely happened while we were elsewhere. Stalker's world continues to turn wherever you are...

All the maddeningly indestructible barbed wire fences in the world (Stalker's primary method of preventing true free-roaming) seem worthwhile in the face of such moments. Its storyline and dialogue are shoddy and clumsy, bugs are rife and there's a slightly unfinished feel, exactly as Stalker cynics predicted, but the journey through it all is peppered with incredible experiences. Some are inventive and truly horrifying monsters, some are massive, exhausting firefights, some are just seeing the surly, Eastern European men going about their business, fuelling the sense of grit and misery that gives Stalker such a unique flavour. There are no women in the Zone – only unhappy, uncommunicative men, who've come to this terrible place to escape something they think worse. It's a game primarily about shooting things, but it's also incredibly smart and artful. Even the combat is markedly different to the average brawn 'em up – guns are unreliable, a wound will continue to bleed unless you bandage it, and enemies will sometimes lose their nerve and run.

Creating a convincing, mesmerising, terrifying world is Stalker's great success. That it's buggy, mostly linear and barely resembles the game it once promised to be is incidental. In its own unique way, it's a triumph. ● ***Alec Meer***



You've got a little something on your chin. No, down a bit.

PULSOMETER *Signs of life*

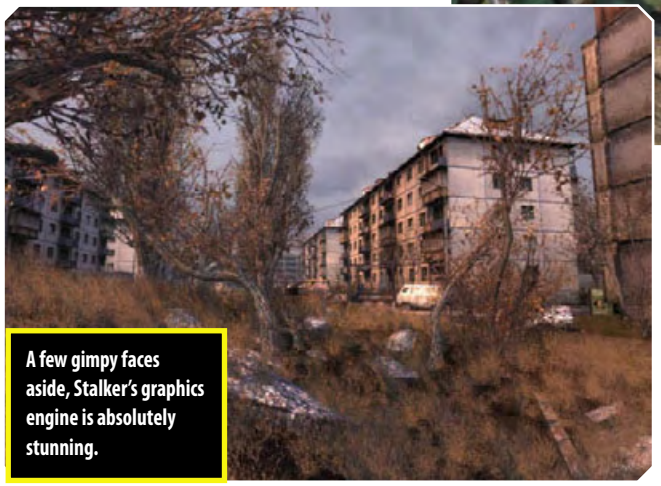




NPCs will fight amongst themselves. It's up to you if you want to get involved, or just frown disapprovingly.

READER REVIEWS! Click here to tell us what you think of S.T.A.L.K.E.R.!





A few gimpy faces aside, Stalker's graphics engine is absolutely stunning.

PCGZine Verdict

Proves that the best things come to those who wait…

- Incredibly atmospheric
- Amazing random events
- Predictably rough around the edges

88%

360Zine Issue 4 Out Now

★★★
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Completely free of charge
Passionate about videogames
Dedicated to the biggest releases
Written by the best in the biz
★★★

"I was impressed with the quality of the writing, content and layout of this publication."
MajorNelson.com



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Command & Conquer 3: Tiberium Wars

Publisher: EA
Developer: EA LA
Heritage: The Lord Of The Rings: The Battle For Middle-earth
Link: www.commandandconquer.com
ETA: March 30th

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
2.0Ghz CPU, 512Mb RAM, 256Mb Graphics card

This time, it's similar…

The venerable Command & Conquer franchise rolls into its second decade with what is officially number three in the series. Of course, there have been numerous spin-offs over the years, but sticking a great big three on the box might pique the interest of those who have wondered what the fuss was about, as well as luring back a few lapsed devotees. Adhering to the core storyline of the vanilla C&C series, yet again the upstanding denizens of the Global Defence Initiative are battling the low-down scoundrels of The Brotherhood of Nod.

And if that means nothing to you, presumably you've yet to sample the delights of this most esteemed of series. Spotters will tell you otherwise, but the original Command & Conquer is the game that effectively pioneered the real time strategy genre, prompting the floodgates to pour forth a slew of imitators. Having dried to a trickle in recent years, Supreme Commander is now topping the charts, and they appear to briefly be back in fashion.

Enter the Grandfather of them all to cuff the young upstarts around the ear with a blast of RTS action for space year 2007. So what's it like? It's like very other C&C game ever made. You might as well tear a demo off the cover of a defunct mid-90s PC magazine, load it up onto your 486 and sit back as the hours drift away. That's not meant to be a criticism, but despite what anyone says, the core gameplay is identical. Westwood nailed it first time out, and have spent a decade repackaging it a variety of guises.

WHICH SIDE ARE YOU ON?

Meet the C&C 3…



GDI | **Brotherhood Of Nod** | **The Scrin**

Global Defence Initiative

Very much the do-gooders of the piece, the GDI are loosely akin to the United Nations, keeping the peace and attempting to protect the earth from the harmful effects of tiberium via their sturdy vehicles and robust soldiers.



"After the first few missions, you won't have time for peripheral activities"


A lot of fuss over a few crystals.


"You sank my battleship!"



"Extreme close-up!"

HOORAY FOR HOLLYWOOD

Someone's agent is in trouble…



JOSH HOLLOWAY
Best known as arrogant redneck Sawyer in Lost, here he wheels out exactly the same routine sarcasm and sneer, albeit in a rubber suit.



BILLY DEE WILLIAMS
Arguably only known as the suave Lando Calrissian in The Empire Strikes Back, Billy also did some stuntwork in Police Academy 4.



MICHAEL IRONSIDE
He didn't play the wheelchair-bound San Francisco detective, but he did appear in the much-misunderstood Starship Troopers.



GRACE PARK
Continuing the sci-fi wet dream is Lt. Sharon 'Boomer' Valerii from Battlestar Galactica. Also played 'Asian Dancer' in Romeo Must Die.



TRICIA HELFER
Another Battlestar refugee, Trish has also graced the catwalk for the likes of Ralph Lauren, Versace and Victoria's Secret. Steady…

>C&C continued

As mentioned, Tiberium Wars sees the two old adversaries locking horns again, largely due to their different interpretation of the mysterious titular green crystal that is liberally scattered across the surface of the Earth. The peace-keeping GDI see it as an evil that must be banished, whereas thinly-veiled fundamentalist terrorists Nod consider it a spiritual gift that must be turned into weapons of mass destruction. Natch.

It is of course utter hokum, and worse, relayed via the much-derided medium of Full Motion Video, which most right-thinking people hoped had been left back in the 90s. In its defence, they've drafted in a few actual actors, although that bald bloke who used to work at Westwood before they were swallowed by EA returns to reprise his role as comedy villain Kane. The footage is slickly presented, with reasonably high production values and a first person view that puts you in the heat of the conflict.

"Graphically it's the most advanced C&C yet. Absorbing too…"

It's entirely incongruous, bearing little or no relation to the actual game, which as ever involves moving troops and vehicles round an overhead view of some godawful place, including >

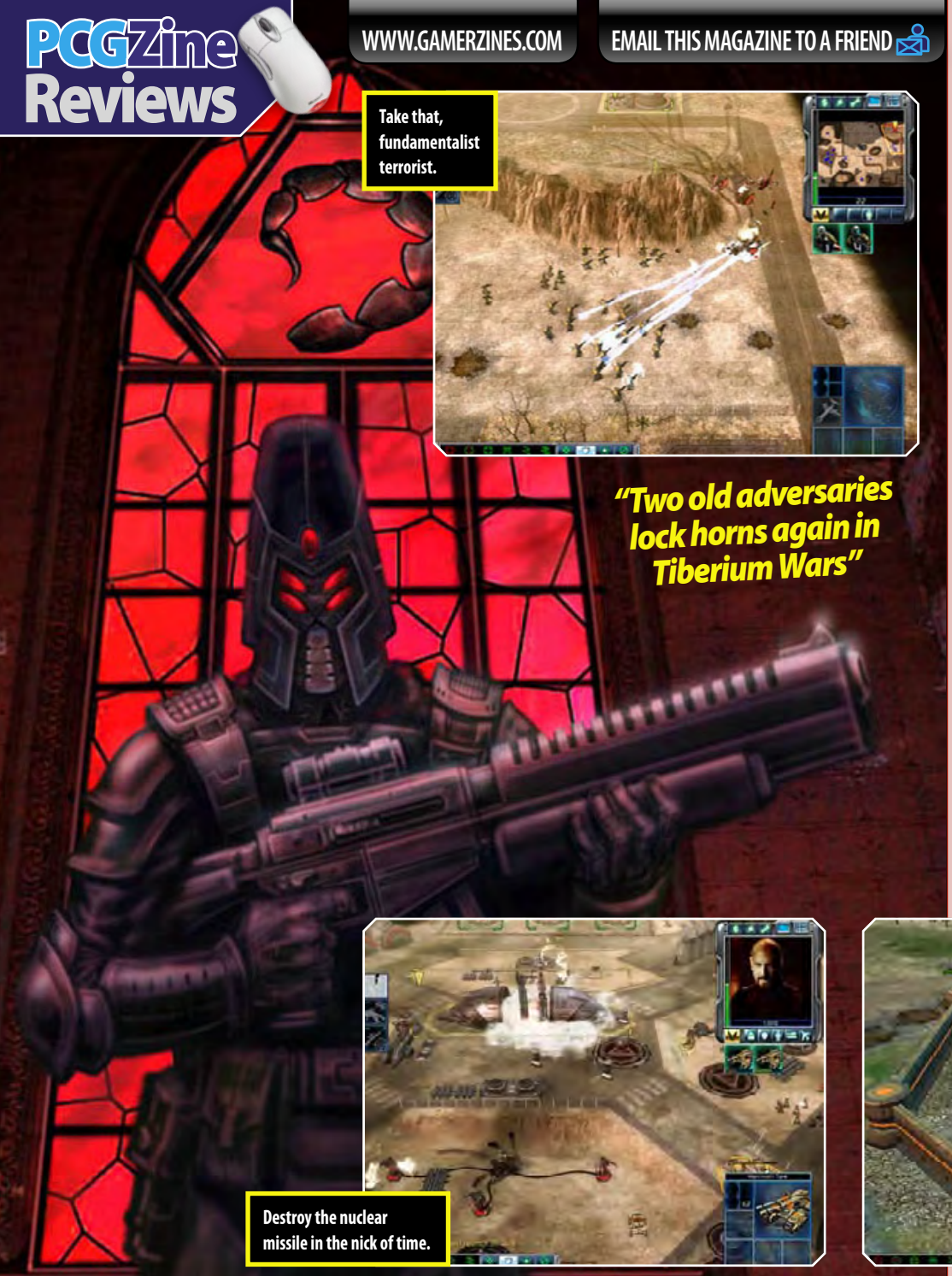


Bush declares war on tiberium.



Welcome to Milton Keynes.

QUICKFIRE QUIZ



Take that, fundamentalist terrorist.

"Two old adversaries lock horns again in Tiberium Wars"

Destroy the nuclear missile in the nick of time.



Lose your Construction Yard and it's curtains.

>C&C continued

the Eastern seaboard of America, North Africa, Eastern Europe and London. Give or take the odd landmark – the White House, Big Ben – it's largely abstract with little recognisable detail, and is basically a succession of maps wrapped around a story scrawled on the back of a beer mat.

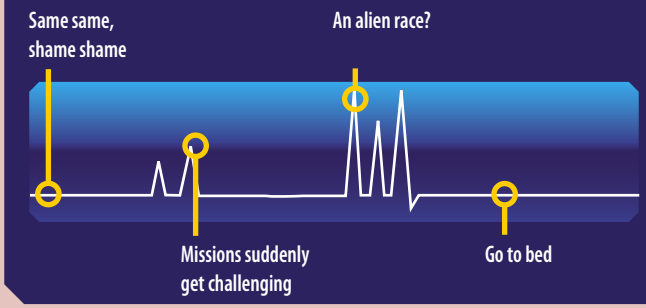
Don't look now

In fairness, and with a major spoiler alert, there is a major addition to previous games, in that a third – alien – race has been introduced, replete with its own units, weapons and formations. Why The Scrin haven't shown their faces in the previous eleven years is anyone's guess, and there is a suggestion that the game has 'jumped the shark.' Purists needn't worry unduly though, as they certainly don't diminish the core experience.

Graphically, it's the best C&C yet, although after a while you scarcely notice the difference, so absorbed are you in the action. That action can be rotated as well as zoomed in on, which offers little other than screenshot opportunities; to be honest being able to zoom out would have proved more useful. It's all largely intuitive though, with an unobtrusive interface that lets you drive the whole thing using only the mouse, leaving your other hand free to pick your nose, read a magazine, or flick between Sky Sports News and Countdown. After the opening few missions you won't have time for any peripheral activities though, as once the trademark ebb and flow gameplay kicks in, suddenly it's 5am.

Steve Hill

PULSOMETER *Signs of life*





Killing in the name of tiberium.

READER REVIEWS! Agree? Disagree? Tell us what you think of C&C3

PCGZine Verdict

Same as it ever was

- Addictive
- Exhaustive
- Repetitive

86%



Jade Empire: Special Edition

"Number 22 with fried rice please…"

Publisher: Take-Two
Developer: Bioware
Heritage: KOTOR, Baldur's Gate, Neverwinter Nights
Link: www.jade.bioware.com/specialedition/
ETA: OUT NOW

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
1.8Ghz CPU, 512Mb RAM, 256Mb Graphics card

A two-year-old Xbox port anyone? Or would you be interested in "an incredible story-driven gameplay experience with stunning high-resolution graphics and controls optimised for the PC gaming experience?" Jade Empire is both.

While the first description is simply fact, the second is more subjective. Story-driven it certainly is, with an epic tale spanning generations of eastern mysticism, conveyed via swathes of stilted dialogue. Largely delivered in monotone American drawls, it doesn't exactly conjure up the mysteries of The Orient, although thankfully much of the chat can be skipped in favour of speed-reading. And while it initially appears to be gibberish, the rambling plot eventually sinks in almost by osmosis.

That said, you're never really sure what's going on, as there is much subterfuge afoot. Deciding whom to trust is a key element of the game, and like that Fast Show character who can never agree on an argument, you tend to go along with whoever is bending your ear at the present time. Using a similar morality system to the Star Wars based Knights Of The Old Republic from the same developer, the choice here is between The Way of the Open Palm (good) and The Way Of The Closed Fist (nasty).

It's an interesting concept, albeit one that often leaves you with the nagging feeling that you've done the wrong thing. Quests come thick and fast, but are often interspersed with so many sub-quests that it's easy to lose sight of the bigger picture. As for the obligatory RPG levelling-up nonsense, it's all fairly rudimentary, with not even a traditional 'dressing-up' inventory to bother with.


A merry band of followers…



Your mentor, the honourable Master Li. Or is he?


Chinese Burn, anyone?

"Jade Empire eventually sucks you completely into its world…"

Less yapping

Being a martial arts themed affair, fighting is obviously key. The combat system takes something of a 'rock, scissors, paper' approach, with certain strategies successful against particular defences. You spend a lot of your time fighting ghosts, and while it initially seems that pummelling mouse buttons is the only skill required, more subtlety is involved as your fighter becomes more experienced.

Just like KOTOR, you're helped by a raggle-taggle troupe of hangers-on that you pick up en route, and you can set their approach to either Attack or Support, whereby they will either get stuck in, or help you out by boosting >


You're never far away from a cut scene.


A poor man's David Blaine.

> Jade Empire continued

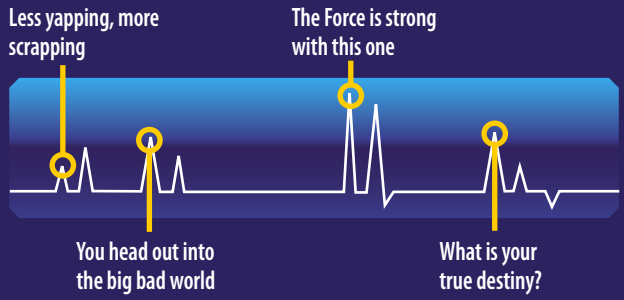
your attributes mid-scuffle. In your dealings with these NPCs, there is the occasional weak attempt at humour, which is somewhat at odds with the flayed human corpses being used in a cannibalistic ritual, for instance. And there's also a bit of pseudo-adult content, with unnatural sexual practices openly alluded to. Essentially though, it's a series of fights to advance the plot to the stage where you can have your next fight. While that may not sound that thrilling, in practice Jade Empire does eventually manage to suck you in to its beautiful world. It's hard to pinpoint where or when exactly this happens, but at some stage you transform from simply going through the motions to actually caring about the characters, and hoping for resolution to the convoluted story. Eventually... ●

"Deciding who to trust is a key element of the game"

Adam Oxford



PULSOMETER *Signs of life*



MIND, BODY & SOUL

A bit like scissor, paper, stones. A bit.



Health **Chi** **Focus**

Health

The red bar represents your health. You need this to stay alive, which is always useful.







PCGZine Verdict

Full of Eastern promise

- A varied universe
- Full of surprises
- Interminable chat

82%



"What'cha buyin'" If you shoot this guy, he'll be alive again later in the game. Insane!

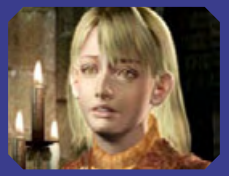
FREEZE FRAME
Meet the resident characters



"Not enough cash, stranger..." This mysterious salesman sells you items at various points.



Your first encounter with El Gigante is one of the scariest moments in the game.



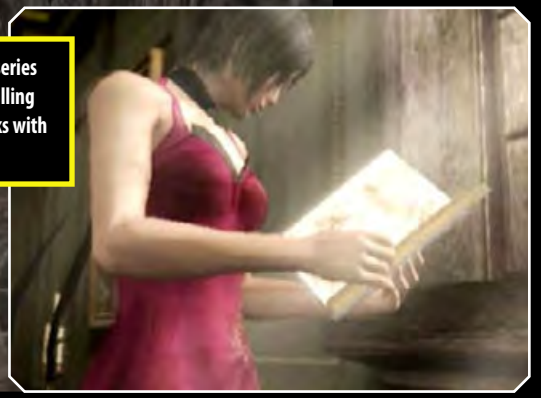
Ashley has got to be the most useless girl ever – all she does is moan and winge!



Who is this chap? Why does he have such a stylish beard? Find out, in Resident Evil 4.



The environments, and your weaponry, gets more exotic as you progress.



Ada Wong has a series of mini-games, filling you in on her links with Albert Wesker...



Like a MASSIVE fish, in a small pond.



Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Capcom
Heritage: Almost every decent console game ever
Link: www.ubisoft.com
ETA: Out now

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
P4 1.4, 512MB RAM, Shader model 2.0

Resident Evil 4

The only Evil thing here is a lack of effort...

Released on the Gamecube in 2005, and later ported to the PS2, Resident Evil 4 has been a commercial and critical success. Sporting gameplay that was a radical departure from the series' norm, the game was regarded by many as an instant classic, and a game that all future horror games should aspire to. Fast forward to 2007, and the PS2 version's been ported across to the PC, but sadly, a lot's been lost in translation.

For those of you unfamiliar with the earlier versions, and there must be some, Resident Evil 4 puts you in the boots of Leon S Kennedy, star of RE 2, who's been tasked with rescuing the President's daughter from a group of Spanish villagers. This sets the scene for one of the most original Resident Evil games yet; aside from the basic game dynamics, there's not even a mention of the normally ubiquitous Umbrella Corporation. Well. Not really.

Taking a break from one of the series' trademarks, everything here is rendered in full 3D. There are no pre-rendered backgrounds or door opening animations to break up play. Played from an over-the-shoulder perspective, Resident Evil 4 feels much more fluent than its predecessors, and this is accentuated by some near perfect level design. Areas are littered with action points, from windows you can jump through, to ladders you can knock down, and the switch from pre-rendered backdrops makes the environments much more dynamic.

"In another step away from the norm, there are no zombies in Resi 4. At all."

Brains-less

In another step away from the norm, Resi 4 doesn't feature zombies. At all. Yes, there are plenty of enemies to kill, and yes, they've been infected by something (we won't tell you what here), but these aren't the kind of dumb creatures you're used to killing. The villagers are fast, clever and can wield weapons with as much proficiency as yourself – even chucking sticks of dynamite at opportune moments.

Sadly, whilst the actual game core may be fine, Resident Evil 4 is let down >

GET ORF MY LAND

I would if I could find the controls



Trespassers | Local trouble | Deliverance

Trespassers

Early in the game, you and Luis find yourself in a bit of a predicament, after getting into a scuffle with an unknown stranger. Handcuffed together, left in an empty room with just your Spanish amigo for company, you seemingly have no way out. But then, you hear footsteps approaching.



One thing's for sure - there's an awful lot of black in these environments



PULSOMETER *Signs of life*

After the cool intro, you're dropped on the outskirts of town.

But my God, the controls are awful

Getting the hang of aiming, you get a few headshots

The zombie village is pretty cool

A QTE strikes, and you have no idea what to press.



Call us strange, but we think that chicken's infected. Do eggs usually glow like that?

>Resi 2 continued

terribly by the quality of the port. Based on the PS2 game, the game looks disappointing on a PC monitor: most of the advanced lighting that made the Gamecube version look so spectacular has been removed completely – the only improvement is the higher resolution. And whilst bad graphics shouldn't matter if there's fantastic gameplay, it's here we find another problem common to Capcom ports.

Thanks to its console heritage, the game has been designed for use exclusively with a gamepad, and no compromise for keyboard and mousers has been made in the porting process. This means that, unless you have dual-analogue sticks, its unplayable. Simply aiming your weapon is a Herculean challenge in itself – you move the reticule using the W,A,S,D keys on your keyboard. By the time you've actually pointed your gun at an enemy, they'll likely be right on top of you. Still, at least they present a big target that way.

Unfortunately, it seems Resident Evil has found a virus deadlier than the Progenitor virus and T-Virus put together – the dodgy port. If you have a dual-analogue controller, then the gameplay's still intact, but for everyone else, the poor quality of the port is sure to cloud your enjoyment.



Melee attacks bolster your arsenal of moves in RE4.

"Unless you have dual analogue sticks, Resi 4 on PC is completely unplayable..."

PCGZine Verdict

Pass the port

- Same, well designed gameplay
- Reasonable graphics
- Awful controls

64%

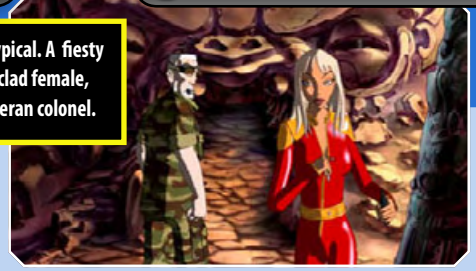


Runaway 2 : The Dream of the Turtle

Do amphibians dream of waterproof sheep?

Publisher: CDV
Developer: Penudulo
Heritage: Runaway
Link: www.runaway-thegame.com
ETA: Out now

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
P4 1.6GHz, 256MB RAM, 32MB 3D card



Stereotypical. A fiesty cat-suit clad female, with veteran colonel.

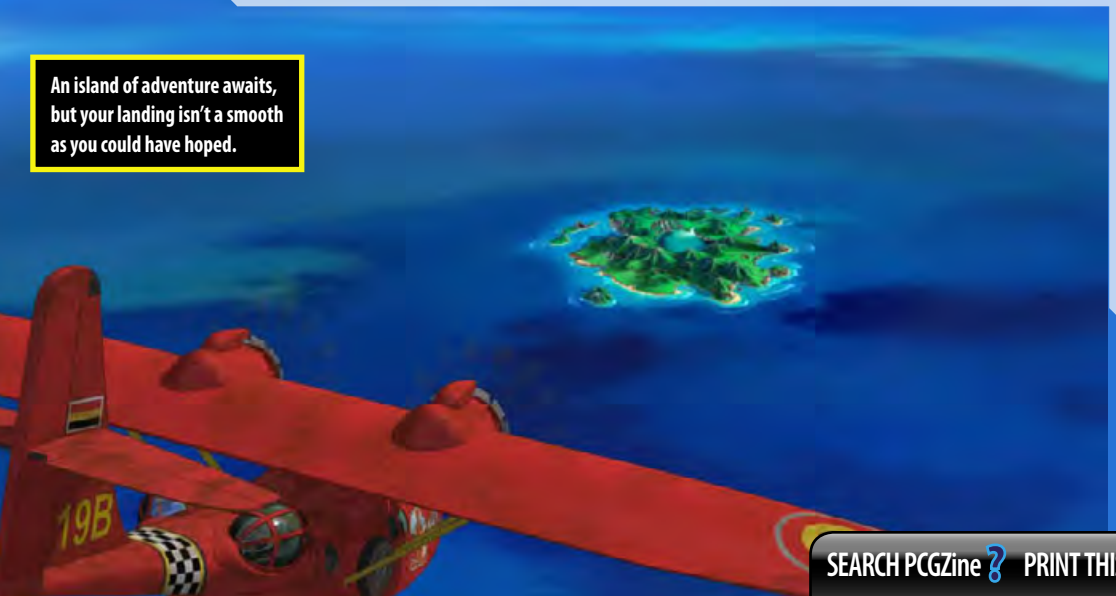
Where would we be without cel-shaded graphics, eh? Without cel-shading, we couldn't have had classics like Jet Set Radio. We couldn't have numerous rubbish cartoon spin-offs. But we certainly couldn't have had a game that's as gorgeous to look at as Runaway 2.

From the very beginning, the first thing you'll notice about Runaway 2 is just how stunning it looks. With a level of visual pizazz that wouldn't look out of place in a Disney movie, Runaway 2 combines cel-shaded 3D models, with pre-rendered cartoon backgrounds, giving the game a style of its own. Everything you come across looks simply phenomenal; from the jungle you start off in, to the secret underwater base, to the laid-back beach huts of the Hawaiian island, everything here has been drawn with a level of detail and visual flair that breathes life into everything it touches. It really is that gorgeous.

However, all the visual touches in the world wouldn't make up for below par puzzling, and it's here that Runaway 2 begins to stumble, though only slightly. For the most part, the puzzles are well designed, and will require a satisfying amount of thinking on the part of the player. While there's not much that deviates from the 'use x with y' mould, there's enough variation here to keep even the most seasoned adventure player occupied for hours.

Space oddity

However, disappointingly, Runaway 2 still has its fair share of obscure "use the spoon with the brick to open the door" puzzles, where trying random combinations of items seems to be the only way to go. To compound the >

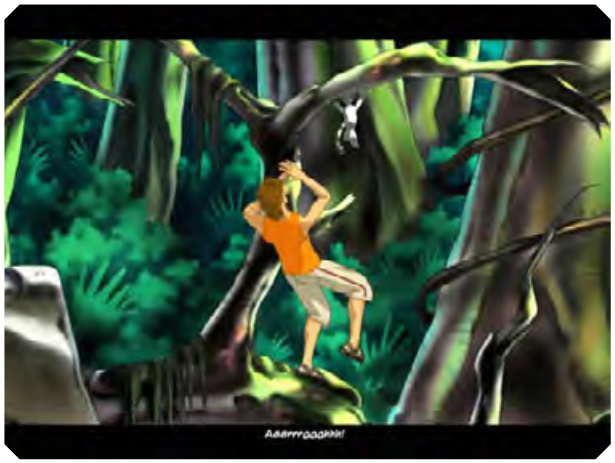


An island of adventure awaits, but your landing isn't a smooth as you could have hoped.

"Everything you come across looks simply phenomenal"

CHELONIA-FREE CAPERS

Because there's more to life than turtles



Monkey business | In the dog house | Animal in stinks

Monkey business

Early on in the game, you have to traverse a narrow log across a pit of quicksand. Every time you attempt this, a rogue lemur swoops down and knocks you off balance, causing you to fall to the bottom. So how do you get past this little menace?



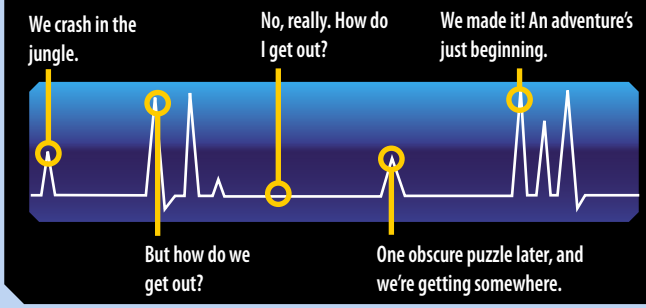
You'll visit a load of varied locations during the game, not least on this scuba expedition.



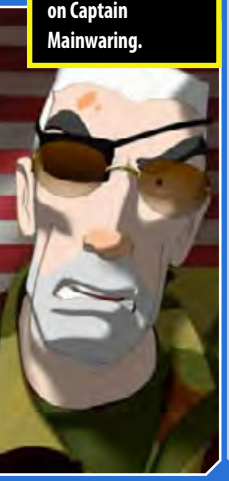
Your computer hacker friend, Sushi, may be of use to you later on.



PULSOMETER *Signs of life*



> Runaway 2 continued



"Listen here, maggots" He may be an angry colonel, but he's not a patch on Captain Mainwaring.

matter further, there are even some puzzles that require you to do tasks in a certain manner before you can complete them. If you're a relatively bright person (and we're sure you are, reading this magazine), there's every chance you'll notice what to immediately, but try to do the obvious solution, and the game will occasionally insist on you doing stuff in a non-intuitive pattern (see the box-out for a good example).

It's not just looks

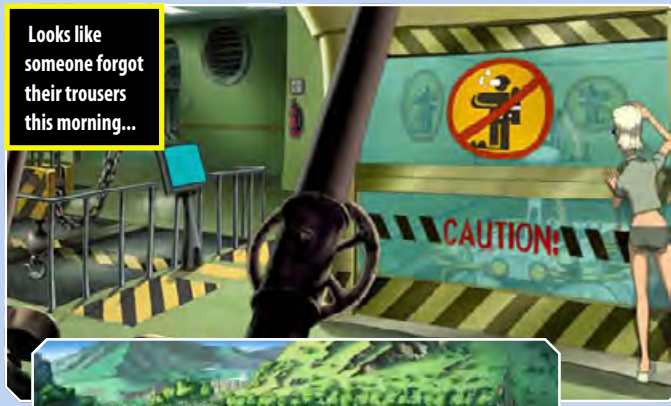
The characters are well designed and modelled, and each oozes their own individual personality, from Lokelani, the sexy barmaid who's never too shy to tease you, to the strangely named "Knife", the muscle bound Australian with a degree in Surfing from the University of California. Although every character you come across here has been pretty heavily stereotyped, it doesn't really detract too much from the fun.

The dialogue has been well written, for the most part, almost on a par with the original Runaway. There's a good number of one liners, which bring out the character in everyone you meet.

"Characters ooze their own individual personalities..."

Overall, Runaway 2 delivers a solid point and click experience with some graphics to die for. Unfortunately let down by a few puzzles that are a bit too obscure, and a structure that's a tad too rigid, Runaway sadly falls just short of its potential – we could have been looking at a classic.

Ian Morris



Looks like someone forgot their trousers this morning...



One of the first locations you'll visit in the game, the army camp holds a few secrets.

FREEZE FRAME

Can anyone fly a plane?



Waking up in paradise with your topless girlfriend, it seems the world is your oyster.



Your girlfriend wants to take you on a trip to Mala island to see some rubbish waterfall.



Well, at least your pilot looks... "experienced". At least he knows where he's going.



He snuffs it! In a panic, you strap a parachute to your girlfriend and lob her out the crashing plane.



Not long after, you wake up alone. Finding your girlfriend is the least of your worries.

PCGZine Verdict

Not quite a runaway success, but a solid adventure all the same.

- Good characterisation
- Spectacular graphically
- Some obscure puzzles

78%



Silverfall

Hug the trees or cut them down?

Publisher: KOCH
Developer: Monte Cristo
Heritage: Another World, Heart of Darkness
Link: www.silverfall-game.com
ETA: Out Now

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
2Ghz CPU, 512Mb RAM, 128Mb 3D card

You should never judge a book by its cover, so the adage goes. Well, this may not always be the case. In fact, if you take Monte Cristo's new RPG for instance, the cover is as good a place to start as any.

For, what we have here is a standard paint-by-numbers fantasy cover, which is fitting since the case it adorns contains a join-the-dots fantasy roleplaying game.

If you're fond of the likes of the Diablo series, or the more recent Titan Quest, you'll be right at home with Silverfall. Point, click, attack, pick up loot, grab the odd quest, attack a few more monsters, pick up more loot: it's a rather cliched formula by now, but in all fairness, it still works.

Quests unfortunately aren't particularly imaginative, though if you take the time to sit back and read the text and NPC conversations, there is a degree of depth which helps draw you in to its setting, the world of Nelwë.

Where Silverfall tries to set itself apart from the crowd is in the integration of technological and scientific advancement into an otherwise traditional fantasy land. It has also opted for some nice eye-candy with the cell-shaded graphics.

You will have the opportunity through the choices you make along your journey, to ally yourself with the forces of nature, or the ingenuity of technological evolution. You can, if you wish, dabble in both areas but this would naturally limit your advancement in either.

You get what you expect with Silverfall. A traditional combat-heavy fantasy RPG. Sure, they've tried to shake it up a little with a well infused advanced technology element, but this is nothing new.

To be fair, Monte Cristo isn't pretending to be pushing the boundaries. What it does is present a good example of a popular genre. OK, so there are better examples around, and it isn't the Diablo-killer you might be hoping for, but for a bit of elven sword-swinging you can't go wrong.

Darran Hepworth

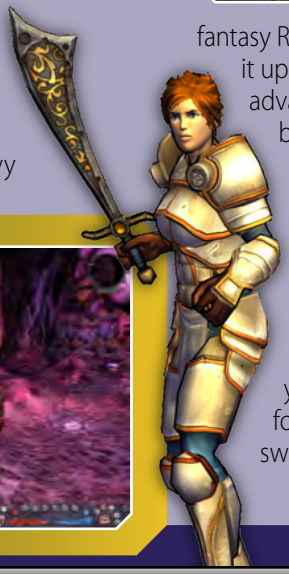




This wasn't the welcome they'd hoped for.







NATURE VS THE MACHINE

Are you environmentally unfriendly?

Throughout your adventures in Nelwë, you will have to choose between the elemental forces of nature's magic, or embrace the complexities of advancing technology. Be prepared though, as your enemies have also had to make these decisions. From humanoid cannons and gun slinging goblins, to mechanical dragons and walking trees, science and nature have been employed to create and distort the most monstrous of adversaries.



PCGZine Verdict

Hack, slash, adventure. Repeat. Again.

- Nature Vs Technology setting
- Intuitive controls
- Unoriginal

80%

HandheldGamerZine

For PSP & DS - Issue 2 out now!





Don't miss issue #2



SONY PSP

Prince of Persia: Rival Swords Call of Duty: Roads to Victory Tomb Raider: Anniversary

NINTENDO DS

Phoenix Wright Final Fantasy (all of them!) Lunar Knights Harvest Moon

PLUS! LOTS MORE...







★★★

HGZine

Completely free of charge
Passionate about videogames
Dedicated to handheld
Written by the best in the biz

★★★



Warfront: Turning point

Burn your history books, and don your jetpack.

Publisher: 10tacle Studios
Developer: Digital Reality
Heritage: War on Terror, Field Ops
Link: www.warfront-game.com
ETA: Out now

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
System Requirements 2Ghz CPU, 512Mb RAM, 128Mb 3D card

There obviously comes a time when creative minds, regardless of their chosen medium, sit down and actively strive to create something a little bit different, a little bit unique. Sometimes a tweak here or there would suffice, other times anything less than total renovation would fall short.

In opening a front on the World War II strategy genre, developer Digital Reality has focused on re-imaging in the historical events of the period rather than innovating in the field of virtual battles. The result is a solid and fun game, which pulls off the unenviable feat of making Nazis in jetpacks seem a little stale.

The game posits a 'what if' steam punk scenario where Hitler dies early in the war and mad science are the order of the day. There are three playable sides: the Allies, Soviets, and Germans. We'll have to assume the Japanese will enter the war in an expansion pack, hopefully with Godzilla in tow.

Each side has its particular strengths and weaknesses. The Allies are stronger in the air than their opponents, while Germany proves to be quite an aggressive ground force. The Soviets, meanwhile, are well suited to dug in defensive strategies.

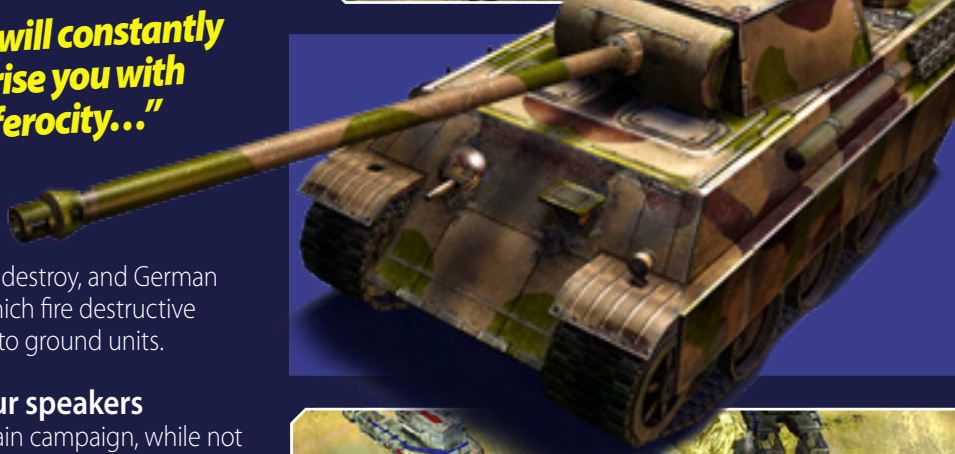
Among the more interesting units available are the Soviet Ice Spitters, tanks which freeze enemy units making them easier to destroy, and German Sonic tanks which fire destructive waves, deadly to ground units.



The rockets weren't doing much damage, but they looked pretty



Grandad never mentioned jetpack Nazis



"The AI will constantly surprise you with its ferocity..."

Turn off your speakers

The game's main campaign, while not particularly varied, is enjoyable enough, and can be quite challenging at times. What lets it down, though, is the sound. Not only is the voice acting some of



The new garden lamp was attracting more than just moths

FREEZE FRAME

Building a nuclear power



Humble beginnings. From a single building, begin to construct a base.



You're going to need an airfield so that you can construct your bomber.



With your base complete, ensure it's in safe hands.



Once your base's defences are in place, it's time to send in the bomber.



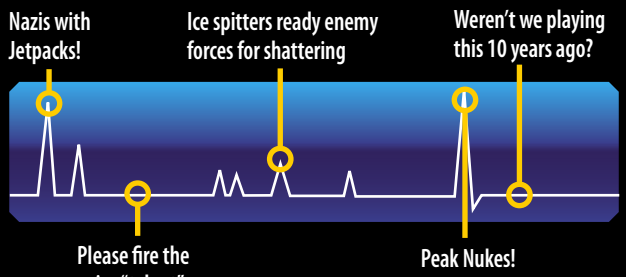
And from the alternate Enola Gay... Little Boy's alter ego.







PULSOMETER *Signs of life*



> Warfront continued

the cheesiest you'll have heard for quite a while, but you'll end up pulling out your hair due to the constant repetition of certain lines of dialogue.

Visually, there are some nice touches. Explosions (of which there are many) are satisfying, you'll be grinning from ear to ear when you see your first Nuke hit enemy territory. Weather effects also add atmosphere to the battlegrounds. For a game based on outlandish battle units, though, the actual models themselves are uninspiring to look at, especially when you have the camera fully zoomed in.

AI is also hit and miss. While enemy units are usually quite capable of looking after themselves, and can quite often surprise you with their ferocity, there are also moments of complete insanity as infantry charge heavily armoured tanks, or bombers bypass the opportunity to flatten your base instead choosing to obliterate a single soldier. There are also pathing problems, and you'll frequently have to manually adjust the route your units have taken.

That aside, War Front ticks all the right boxes for an RTS, but doesn't match the interesting concept to innovative gaming. Side by side with the likes of Company of Heroes, this is yesterday's game in more than theme.

With Supreme Commander currently taking the PC chart by storm, and Command & Conquer 3 within reach, War Front: Turning Point just isn't quite up to the fight. ●

Darran Hepworth





PCGZine Verdict

Not got as many new ideas as it thinks it has

- Intuitive
- Dated gameplay
- Awful voice acting

72%

A TALE OF TECHNOLOGY

The crazy world of MacArthur Brown



Allies | **Soviets** | **Germans**

Allies

Allied forces rule the skies. While 'The Earthquake Bomb' is quite effective at softening up the enemy defences and can severely damage buildings and structures, the pièce de résistance is undoubtedly a good old Nuke. Carried by the XB-35 Northrop Heavy Bomber, the Nuke, as you would expect, can total an enemy base, along with any units unlucky enough to be caught in the blast.



PCGZine GOLD

Sam & Max: Episode Four Abe Lincoln Must Die

Developer: Telltale Games
Publisher: Telltale Games
Price: $8.95 (~£4.65)

The freelance police are back again, in the latest in their series of downloadable adventures. Even if you haven't played the previous episodes, "Abe Lincoln Must Die" is a hilarious, lengthy and refreshingly original point and click adventure. With a typically black sense of humour behind the storyline (which revolves around the President of the US hypnotising his countrymen to do his bidding), some fantastic characterisation, and a good range of brain-teasing puzzles, Sam & Max is sure to keep you occupied for hours.

- Incredibly funny
- Original puzzles
- Great Value

"Max, we're going to the White House"

91%



Rayman 3: Hoodlum Havoc

Developer: Ubisoft
Publisher: Revival
Price: £4.99

Although he may be an unlikely hero for a platform game (what with having no arms and legs), Rayman has established a history of enjoyable platform games, and this is no different. Although it's not as charming as Rayman 2, the platforming action in this budget re-release is solid enough, and the addition of collectable super-powers spices up the gameplay to stop it feeling repetitive. Whilst the experience is marred somewhat by an awkward camera, and some awful voice acting, this is still the best 3D platformer available on the PC, even if it hasn't really got much competition.

- Epic soundtrack
- Some stunning environments
- Awful voice acting

Good platforming fun

78%



Splinter Cell

Developer: Ubisoft
Publisher: Revival
Price: £4.99

The US Government's least secret secret agent, Sam Fisher's first outing is now available to buy for just a fiver. This was the game that kick started the stealth 'em up genre's popularity on the PC, and thankfully, all the sneaking behind guards, lurking in the shadows and taking hostages feels just as enjoyable and fresh as ever. Graphically solid, with the same impressive cloth and lighting effects as before, Splinter Cell is a game that's stood the test of time well, and the result is an experience that's just as enjoyable now as it was the day it was released, some five years ago. Later sequels cured the overly-linear approach to problem solving SC suffers from, but it's still an essential in any decent library.

- Challenging gameplay
- Still impressive visually
- Some unfair AI

Third Echelon, First Class

81%



Wild Earth: Africa

Developer: Super X Studio
Publisher: Xplosiv
Price: £19.99

Wild Earth : Africa is a first-person shooter, with one major difference – instead of using a gun to shoot animals, you'll be using a camera. The idea is directly from Pokemon Snap on the N64, of course, but there's an almost photo-real twist to this zoological paparazzi-em-up. As wildlife photographer working to commission, you must stalk your prey and sneak about in the shadows to try and get the best shots of the animals in their natural habitat, whilst being careful to not disturb them. Your guides relay interesting animal facts to you as you progress through 11 varied assignments, and with a wide variety of animals on offer to snap, this is bound to prove popular with kids and adults alike.

- Great for kids and adults alike
- Educational, and fun
- Some scenery you can't climb over.

Spend a day in the life of Andy Rouse

85%

Area 51 7500

A gaming PC that shoots for the stars?





Push the head to turn it on.

"There's not a game on the planet that it'll struggle with"



The front ports are handy.

ALIENWARE

Manufacturer: Alienware
Specs: Intel Core 2 Extreme X6800, NVIDIA 680i SLI, 2 x NVIDIA GeForce 8800GTS 640MB, 2GB PC-6400, Alien Ice 3.0 Cooling & lighting
Link: www.alienware.co.uk
Price: £2917

Without doubt, the Alienware P2 chassis is one of the best PC cases around. Its distinctive glossy finish, curved like the best of HR Giger's designs, is unmistakable. It's squat, chunky; looks as powerful as the high-spec components inside deserve to look. Most importantly, there's stacks of room inside to allow for easy upgrading and good ventilation for hot parts like the memory and graphics cards.

More gimmicky, but no less desirable, there are LED lights capable of 16 million colours concealed behind the logos on the side, the power button, the grill on the front and the door which glow through for that all important other-worldly effect. All can be independently programmed to flash or blend colours for particular system events – like running a particular game or receiving an MSN message. It's top notch craftsmanship – our only real criticism is that compared to the NXT cases, it's a bit noisy.

Power house

It's what's inside that counts though, and since you can customise the exact set-up using the website configurator, you'll be able to build a 7500 to match your performance needs and budget. Our review system is about as powerful as you can get – but the Area 51 is a Vista-based machine, which explains why the benchmarks are a little lower than you might expect. Keep an eye on driver updates over the next few months to get the most from it. In the meantime, though, there's not a game on the planet it'll struggle with.

For the money, we'd probably have opted for a more future-proof quad core chip, and you can probably pick up a slightly higher specced system from others for slightly less, but you won't get the attention to detail that goes into the P2 case, nor the same level of after sales service.

Adam Oxford

THE BENCHMARKS

All benchmarks were carried out on a 22-inch widescreen monitor, at 1680x1050 resolution with 4x anti-aliasing and 8x anisotropy.



Half-Life 2: Lost Coast

109.85 Frames Per Second



Medieval 2: Total War

23.28 FPS



F.E.A.R.

75 Frames Per Second



3DMark 06

11148 3DMarks (at default settings)



PCMark 06

6441 PCMarks

PCGZine Verdict

A great PC, but be prepared to pay for the brand.

- Glorious P2 chassis
- Very powerful system
- No monitor included

85%

Tech Support

Got a PC problem? Our resident expert can fix PCs merely by typing their network location three times. Send your questions to help.pcgzine@gamerzines.com

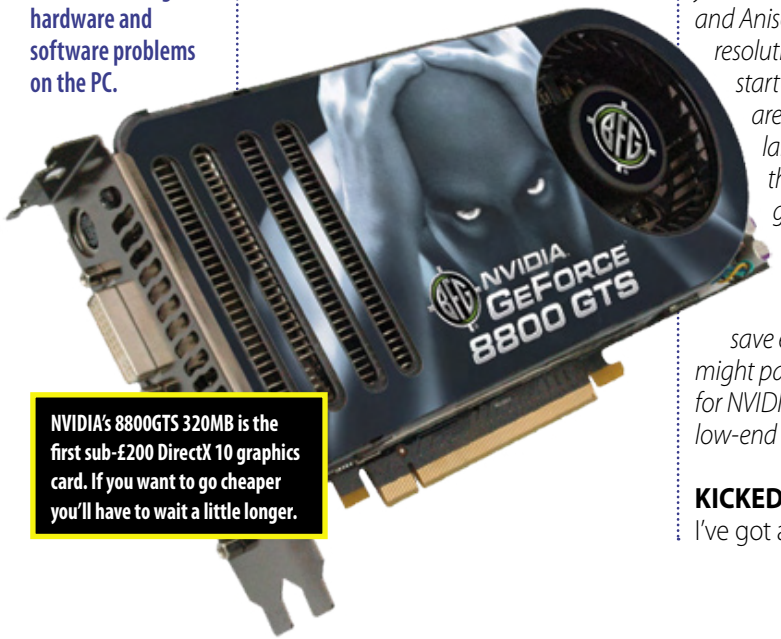


Russell Barnes is a freelance computer and technology journalist. He has spent 10 years specialising in PC gaming and troubleshooting hardware and software problems on the PC.

SPEND OR SAVE?

With my upgrade to Vista finally complete I'm looking to make the move to a DirectX 10 graphics card. I've given up waiting for AMD to get their act together so it's going to have to be a NVIDIA 8800. Although I'm currently set on the 640MB GTS model, I notice the 320MB version is available for up to £100 less. Should I save the difference, or is the 8800GTS 640MB really worth the extra cash?

> Lee Holland



NVIDIA's 8800GTS 320MB is the first sub-£200 DirectX 10 graphics card. If you want to go cheaper you'll have to wait a little longer.

> NVIDIA's 8800GTS 320MB is interesting not only because it's the first DirectX 10 (DX10) graphics card to fall under £200, but because it's identical to its more expensive brother in every way bar the amount of RAM on board. While this extra memory can be very useful, in video RAM more is only better in specific circumstances. After spending a little time with these cards it quickly became clear that at lower resolutions the performance difference is negligible at best. It's not until you start applying tons of Anti-Aliasing and Anisotropic Filtering at really high resolutions that those extra megabytes start working for you. Although there are no hard and fast rules (and the landscape will likely change with the arrival of DX10 games), it's generally accepted that the 320MB model remains competitive up to 1920x1200 in many games. If you want to save even more money however, it might pay to wait another month or so for NVIDIA to release its mainstream and low-end DX10 cards.

KICKED TO DESKTOP

I've got a bit of a strange intermittent problem in which the game I'm playing goes to a black screen and freezes for a while before kicking me out of the game back to the desktop. Oddly, the game will continue running in the background, minimised to the Taskbar. Although I can click back onto it and continue playing the same thing to happen a little while later. Any ideas on what could be causing this? I have an Athlon X2 4200+, 1GB PC3200 RAM and an ATI X1800XT all running on Vista Home Premium.

> Dean

> This is probably due to a combination of Vista's infancy and incompatible applications, though there are other possibilities. My best guess is a background program or process is stealing focus away from your game and dumping you back to the desktop. The problem here is most current games and application weren't written with Vista in mind and until said software is updated or patched quirky behaviour like this is only to be expected.

Take a look in the Task Manager (by right click on the Taskbar and select Task Manager) to see what other applications and processes are running when the problem occurs. Try shutting down any virus and malware scanners (since these are currently the most common offenders), and work your way down the list. Using the process of elimination you should happen across the offender sooner or later. Another option – which you should probably try first in almost all situations where a game is misbehaving – is to check the support forums for the game in question to see if any other Vista users are suffering similar problems and if any workarounds exist.



The Tuniq Tower 120 is a classic example of quality, quiet cooling. Just make sure it'll fit in your case.

QUIET COOLING

My computer is so unbelievably noisy the guys I play online with complain about the background racket when I chat to them on Ventrilo. Any tips on cutting down on the noise?

> Steve

> A noisy PC can be really off-putting for the person sat in front of it, but when you've got people on the other side of the country complaining you know you've got a problem. If the noise levels have recently increased then there's a chance that either your fans are doing double time because your case is clogged up with dust, or the bearings in one or more of them have given up the ghost. Either of >

"Pretty much all of today's games take a considerable performance hit in Vista"

Tech Support

> *these possibilities is easily addressed, but if your machine's always been this audibly offensive then you're going to have to carry out some extensive open case surgery to sort it out. Take off the side panel and power up to find where the worst of the noise is coming from and then point your web browser at www.quietpc.co.uk. As the name so cunningly suggests this is where you'll find the quietest CPU coolers, power supplies and case fans on the market. After the aforementioned short-list of worst offenders other parts including the chipset, graphics card and hard drive also have the potential to be rather uneasy on the ears.*



Vista gaming performance is somewhat lacking, but will improve in time with new drivers and patches.

VISTA PERFORMANCE DEFICIT

Since upgrading my Windows XP Pro machine to Vista Home Premium I've noticed that the frame rates in all of my games have taken a nasty hit. In one of more recent purchases, TrackMania United, the average frame rate has dropped from around 60 frames per second to more like 45. A work colleague suggested I change my graphics options to disable Vista's Aero Glass because it's a graphics hog. Is there anything else I can do to help retrieve these lost frames?

> Nick Mitchell

> *Unfortunately Aero Glass isn't solely to blame for your performance deficit because when you go into a full screen application Aero Glass is essentially turned off by being thrown out of physical memory and paged to virtual memory. The sad fact is, pretty much all of today's games take a performance hit under Vista to some degree. The best thing you can do is keep an eye out for the latest drivers for your hardware – especially in relation to your graphics card and chipset – since future revisions will address the problem in time. Game patches and updates are also a good source of performance improvements, but since TrackMania has a built-in updater you won't need to worry too much on that front.*

CRYSIS REQUIREMENTS

I'm pricing up a new PC and want to make sure I'm covered for future games like Alan Wake and Crysis. As far as I can tell no official requirements are available for either game, but I'd be interested to hear what sort of specs you guys think will be required for them and what you recommend.

> Ian



Despite all the panic, you won't need to break the bank to play games like Crysis (but it helps).

> *Although most hardware manufacturers would like you to think otherwise, all new games – even DX10 'killer apps' like Crysis and Alan Wake – will work happily on relatively cheap or old hardware. It's generally expected that machines that were considered 'with it' three or so years ago will do the job quite nicely for both the games you mention, and for good reason. Publishers wouldn't release a game that only works on a £2,500 DX10-only PC since only three hundred people would end up playing it. Since they'll need to sell more like three million to re-coup today's massive development costs they need to cater for as wider an audience as humanly possible. A single core Pentium 4 equivalent of around 2.5GHz and 512MB of RAM would probably be a ground floor requirement for these games, coupled with either a Six Series graphics card from NVIDIA or a 1XXX Series card from ATI. Obviously, it's not going to be pretty, but it will be playable and that's the main thing. As far as recommendations go however it's pretty safe to say the sky is the limit. The 'official' recommendations are likely to include something like a dual core processor, 1GB+ of RAM and a Seven Series NVIDIA graphics card or ATI equivalent. Considering Alan Wake will have off the shelf support for quad core processors and both will boast DX10 effects you'll want to spend a fair bit more if you want it to boost the settings to anywhere near the maximum.*

"It's a problem when people a thousand miles away complain your PC is noisy"

GOT A PROBLEM?

Send us your technical questions and we'll try and help you out

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Halo 2 | Spider-Man 3
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PREVIEWS

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