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PCGZine

Issue 12 | Nov 2007

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

REVIEWED!

SUPREME COMMANDER: FORGED ALLIANCE

Robotics is back in style and bodies are popping!

MASSIVE REVIEW!

CRYSIS

The best-looking shooter ever?



FIRST LOOK!

TUROK

Sci-fi dino gore returns



EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW!

Sudden Strike 3's Igor speaks!

PLAYED IT!

UNREAL TOURNAMENT III

The epic multiplayer mashup rated!



REVIEWS



1

Hellgate London

What's on the tube? You don't want to know!



2

Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare

Goodbye World War II



3

Gears of War

Can it still live up to the console hype?

PLUS

Witcher • Timeshift
Empire Earth III

Welcome to PCGZine



I warned you last month that there were one or two big reviews coming, but did you listen? I saw you in M&S wasting money on Christmas presents for other people. What about your PC then? Who's going to feed it if you don't? Remember, a PC is for Half-Life (and other games), not just for Christmas, so start splashing the cash on one of the most wallet-slamming release avalanches in living memory. This month check out our reviews of Crysis, Call of Duty 4 and Supreme Commander: Forged Alliance for recommendations, and make sure you take a look at our verdicts on Gears of War, Hellgate London and F.E.A.R. Perseus Mandate before you rush back to the shops!

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

Steve Brown, Editor
pcgzine@gamerzines.com

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



Supreme Commander Forged Alliance

These robots need no disguise in our massive review and competition! PAGES 20 & 39



Why 3D is the new 2D! Igor on Sudden Strike 3... PAGE 15

PLUS! HANDS-ON PLAYTEST PAGE 10

QUICK FINDER

Every game's just a click away!

Supreme Commander: FA	Gears of War
Bionic Commando	Empire Earth III
Turok	Hellgate London
Sudden Strike 3	Sam and Max S2E1
Unreal Tournament III	Marble Arena
Crysis	Requital
F.E.A.R. Perseus Mandate	Splume
Call of Duty 4	Plasmaworm
The Witcher	Q&A
Timeshift	THQ games compo



Call of Duty 4

All hail Modern Warfare PAGE 26



Bionic Commando

Where's the arm in that? PAGE 4



F.E.A.R. Perseus Mandate

Should we still be scared? PAGE 25



Crysis

The PC shows why it is still the leading platform PAGE 23



EMPIRE EARTH III

Reviewed! PAGE 33



TIMESHIFT

The clock's ticking... PAGE 30

MEET THE TEAM

Probably the best games writers on the planet



Steve Hill
Got himself into a bit of a Crysis, but shot his way out.



Martin Korda
Found out that in the end he had nothing to F.E.A.R. but himself.



Richard Melville
Answered the Call and decided to do his Duty. Lost in action.



Ian Morris
Wanted to review Viva Pinata. Got Gears of War instead.

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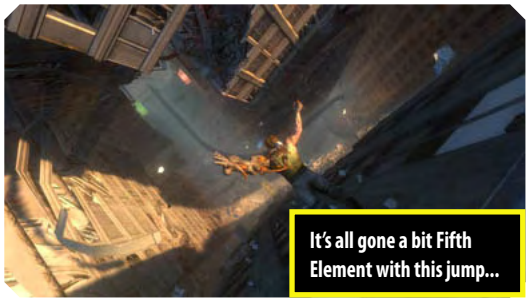
Adventure awaits



Publisher: Capcom
Developer: Grin
Heritage: Ballistics, Bandits, Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter 1&2
Link: www.bioniccommando.com
ETA: Late 2008

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of Bionic Commando!


Go, go, bionic claw hand!


It's all gone a bit Fifth Element with this jump...


There are Half-Life 2 style rural patches.


Dropships reinforce with troops and hefty mechs.


"Nathan Spencer is like a one-man A-Team"

Ascension City is a twisted shell of concrete now.

LATEST NEWS

Bionic Commando

Cyborg pants not included...

What's the story?
Spiritual sequel to the 1988 Nintendo classic, it's Prototype meets Gears of War in an all-action, city-leaping, conspiracy game.

What do we know?
The mechanically-enhanced product of the Federal Bionic Armaments Development Division, you are Nathan Spencer, Bionic Commando. After distinguished service during the Imperial conflict, you have, like a one-man A-Team, been betrayed, falsely imprisoned for crimes you did not commit and sentenced to death. After three years on Death Row (hopefully the game skips this episode) it's the day of your execution, when luckily (for you at least) Ascension City is ruined by the detonation of a massive experimental bomb and terrorists occupy the ruins.

Swallowing their pride, your detractors quash your conviction and reactivate you to save their city. Your unique powers enable you to make the city ruins your deadly playground, hanging upside-down, swinging, rappelling and wall-walking, with a bionic arm to wage war on terror!



When do we get more?
We're hoping to have a first play of Bionic Commando in the Spring.

Anything else to declare?
The Bionic Commando Nathan Spencer will be voiced by former lead singer of Faith No More, Mike Patton. This isn't Patton's first gaming voiceover, having been the voice of The Darkness in that console release earlier this year.

STRATEGY ON A REVOLUTIONARY SCALE



REPLAY THIS VIDEO

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Forged Alliance

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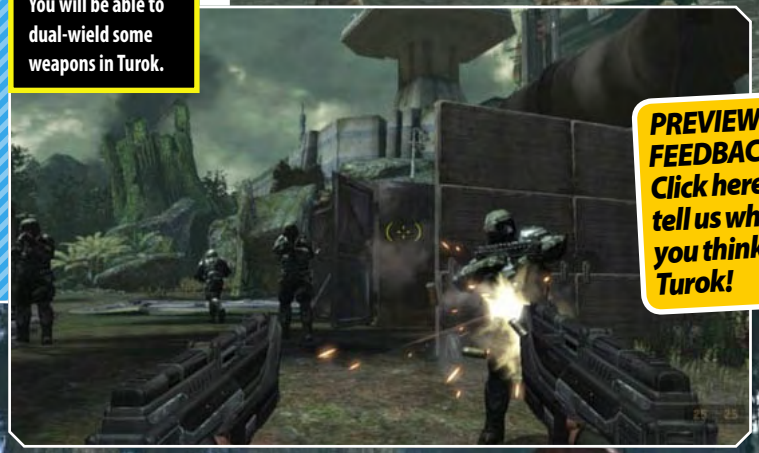
THQ

SUPREMECOMMANDER.COM

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Publisher: Touchstone
Developer: Propaganda Games/Aspyr Studios
Heritage: ParaWorld, Anno 1701, Top Spin 2
Link: www.turok.com
ETA: Spring 2008





PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of Turok!





LATEST NEWS

Turok

More mega-bites than your PC can handle!

What's the story?

An elite special forces soldier Joseph Turok crash lands on a hostile alien world in this sci-fi shooter, while hunting down an enemy leader. He must survive the crash, the local dinosaurs and the troops in the jungle.

What do we know?

Formerly a black ops commando, Joseph Turok seems to have dropped the Native American mysticism of earlier Turok games for a no-nonsense gung-ho outlook. He's now a member of Whiskey Company, elite troops on a mission to hunt down and destroy the evil Roland Kane (relative of Command & Conquer's evil Kane?) and his Mendel-Gruman Corporation mercenary army.

After locating Kane and his compadres on a dark alien planet, Whiskey Company's ship is shot down, crash landing in the hostile jungle terrain below. Turok's first task will be to join up with any survivors from Whiskey Company. He'll need all the help he can get, because behind every giant leaf may lurk a dinosaur, mercenary, or nature film documentary maker. And yes, Mr. T. Rex will be making an appearance.

When do we get more?

We're hoping to get prehistoric on your ass with the full review of the new Turok early in the New Year.



Anything else to declare?

Turok has somehow secured a massive Hollywood cast of voice actors, including Ron Perlman of Hellboy fame, who seems to be doing more games than films these days. You'll also hear Donnie Wahlberg, Powers Boothe and Timothy Olyphant among many others.

"Looking almost like the illegitimate love-spawn of Oblivion and Dungeon Siege, there is a whole world of adventure out there."
PC Format

"The Witcher is a hot RPG, resonating on similar frequencies to Oblivion and Fable."
PC Zone

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PC Gamer



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7 UP

More golden nuggets of gaming glory to come

The Club



Publisher: SEGA | **ETA:** Spring 2008

You know those 'Quake Done Quick' and other game videos where players charge through shooters as fast as they can? Well the concept is being turned into a game by Bizarre Creations of Project Gotham fame. In The Club you race through levels, guns blasting at enemies and bonuses, seeking shortcuts and high scores to send you to the top of the rankings. Simple, but a lot of fun.

Assassin's Creed

Publisher: Ubisoft| **ETA:** Spring 2008

It's out on consoles but will it be worth the wait for the PC version in Spring 2008? We'd say so from the first reviews, which indicate that the gameplay does live up to the hype, especially the acrobatic system that has your medieval hitman leaping up and between buildings as he targets enemies and flees the ensuing chase. Combat is reported to be over-simplistic, but overall we're very excited!





LEGO Batman

Developer: Travellers Tales | **ETA:** 2008

It may not be as strong a crossover as LEGO Star Wars, or the recently announced LEGO Indiana Jones, but it's still sure to be packed with co-op laughs and platform action that will attract all agegroups. But we'd still like to see Grand Theft LEGO!

Far Cry 2

Publisher: Ubisoft | **ETA:** Spring 2008

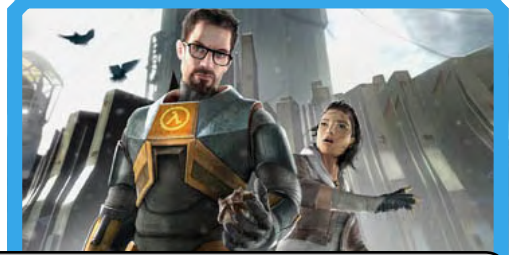
While the original was set on an exotic and dangerous tropical island, the sequel will relocate to a fictional African country just as dangerous. The developer felt that tropical islands were a bit last year after games like Just Cause and TV series like Lost had covered them to death. With Resident Evil 5 also setting itself in Africa, this could be a popular game continent next year.

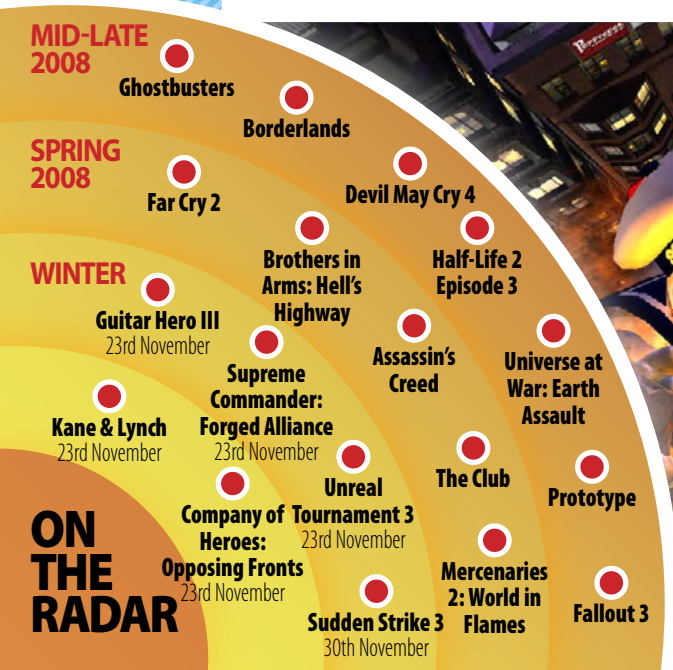


Half-Life 2: Episode 3

Developer: Valve | **ETA:** Late 2008

There's virtually nothing known about the final instalment of the shooter series that just released all bar this in Orange Box. But developer Valve has explained that there was no trailer for it at the end of Episode 2 (as there was for Episode 2 at the end of Episode 1) because they have something extremely ambitious planned, but don't want to over-promise yet. Just hurry it up!





Ghostbusters

Publisher: Vivendi | **ETA:** Late 2008

It's been a very long time since the first Ghostbusters game and film in 1984, but such is the power of the branding and quality of the original property, that it's still a franchise which demands attention. But try and keep your minds clear until our full preview next issue. Definitely don'yt think about the Marshmallow man...



Devil May Cry 4

Publisher: Capcom | **ETA:** Mid 2008

From the producer of Resident Evil 4, this action/horror is looking tasty as a blood sausage in garlic mash and we can't wait for the epic clash between Dante and Nero as a demon army invades Fortuna city. It could be time to call Ghostbusters!

THE EVOLUTION OF FRAGGING

Unreal Tournament 3

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REPLAY THIS VIDEO

www.unrealtournament3.com

"There isn't any other shooter on the radar that has UT3's breadth of weapons, vehicles and level design"
- PC ZONE









COMING TO YOUR PC
NOVEMBER 2007

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HANDS ON

Publisher: Empire
Developer: Fireglow
Heritage: Sudden Strike 2
Link: www.suddenstrike.com
ETA: December

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of Sudden Strike 3!

SUDDEN STRIKE 3: ARMS FOR VICTORY

We go hands-on with the latest instalment in the killer RTS series



Land, sea and air. The action knows no boundaries here.

For years, the Sudden Strike series has been the epitome of the real-time strategy genre, with a firm gameplay emphasis on the latter. Letting armchair generals take a role in the greatest land battles of all time, the series has been a huge success so far, playing off a largely unchanged formula. Come the third generation, however, and Fireglow think it's time to make a change. Welcome, gentlemen, to the third dimension.

OK, so that isn't really anything special, but the jump to 3D has drastic implications for Sudden Strike's gameplay. Where before, you could only play on two planes, the developers have now been able to create a much more realistic battlefield, with sweeping hills, rather than just severe ridges. This not only enhances the game's overall graphical appeal, but also adds another depth to the strategy, as you have yet another way to gain a strategic advantage over your opponents. Gain the upper ground.

However, you needn't worry about the number of units being reduced because of the jump to 3D either. With a whopping 4,000 units available at any one time for you to play with, the battles are going to be just as epic as ever, but thanks to a rather nifty unit selection scheme, selecting the appropriate units to front your army won't be a problem.



Here's a bridge we made earlier. Fixing, and destroying bridges is a key part of any Sudden Strike battle.



The Germans are never happy when someone gets down to the beach before them.

"Roughly on a par with Jordan's breasts"

Artificial... intelligence?

But all this to one side, if there is one area that has us gobsmacked about Sudden Strike, it's the AI. Unlike other "realistic" strategy games, such as Combat Mission, which, thanks to its AI, has a level of realism roughly on a par with Jordan's breasts, the AI in Sudden Strike actually makes you feel your units are thinking about what they're doing. Thankfully, tanks actually drive towards targets, keeping their strongest armour facing any danger; trucks follow roads to keep their speed at a maximum, and we've even seen soldiers grouped together, crouching for cover behind >



The attention to detail really benefits from the new true 3D game engine.

> Sudden Strike 3 continued

burnt out tanks. Compared to the sorry excuses we've seen for artificial intelligence in other games, Sudden Strike is nothing short of a revelation.

Another first for the series is the addition of sea battles – a path down which several other well known RTS have been tentatively treading lately. As we all well know by now, Sudden Strike doesn't do things by half, and the sea battles sound utterly unbelievable, with aircraft carriers and other naval vessels supported by submarines. The naval battles aren't mutually exclusive to the land battles either – some maps will feature both, with one group providing support for the other, and your air units providing support for both.

The game will ship with five campaigns, letting you play through the Allied and German Campaigns in Europe, which includes the Normandy landings, the Crimea, and the Battle of Iwo Jima, which will let you play for both sides.

With an incredible amount of new features, not to mention a fancy 3D engine behind it all, and some of the best AI we've seen in any RTS to date, Sudden Strike is looking to be something special for the fans of hardcore strategy games. We'll be bringing you a full review next issue and there's an interview on page 15.



Bunker systems will need a real battering to soften them up for assault.



The beach landings are going to be some of the most exciting scenarios yet experienced.

"Includes the Normandy landings, Crimea and Iwo Jima"



Darth Vader wasn't quite sure how his Star Destroyer had landed here, but someone would pay!

PCGZine

HOW COMPLETE? 93%

ANTICIPATION? 90%

The ultimate WWII strategy now in glorious 3D!



REPLAY THIS VIDEO

"NOTHING CURRENTLY SET IN MODERN WARFARE COMES CLOSE TO THE HIGH QUALITY FOUND WITHIN CALL OF DUTY" - 360 MAGAZINE

"ASTONISHINGLY BRUTAL"
- OFFICIAL PLAYSTATION MAGAZINE

"THERE'S NOTHING QUITE LIKE IT OUT THERE"
-PC GAMER

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HANDS ON

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 3

With the third game looking this good, UT may be about to enter a killing spree.

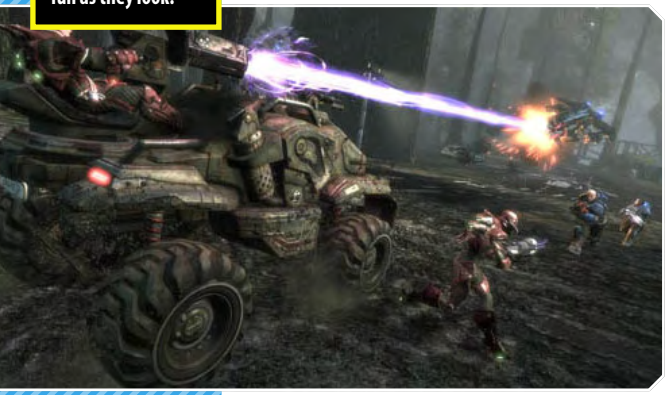
Publisher: Midway
Developer: Epic Games
Heritage: Gears of War, Unreal Tournament 2004
Link: www.unrealtournament3.com
ETA: November 23rd

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of Unreal Tournament 3!

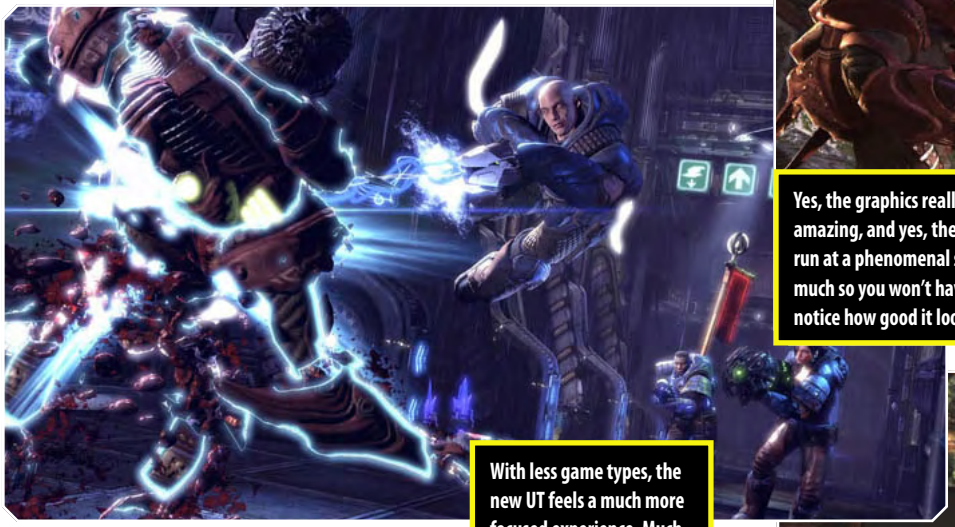
You're running down a narrow corridor in a metallic, claustrophobic space-station. Surrounded by incredibly detailed tributes to the people who built it – gigantic, hulking statues of men, posed as gods - you hear the sound of gunfire in the next room. Edging closer, and closer, and closer towards the corner... suddenly...

Your head gets blown clean from your shoulders at the barrel of a flak cannon, as someone taunts you for being such an "f**king n00b".

This, is Unreal Tournament 3, the evolution of the PCs most popular deathmatch shooter, and we were lucky enough to have a whole day going hands-on with a near-finished version of the game.



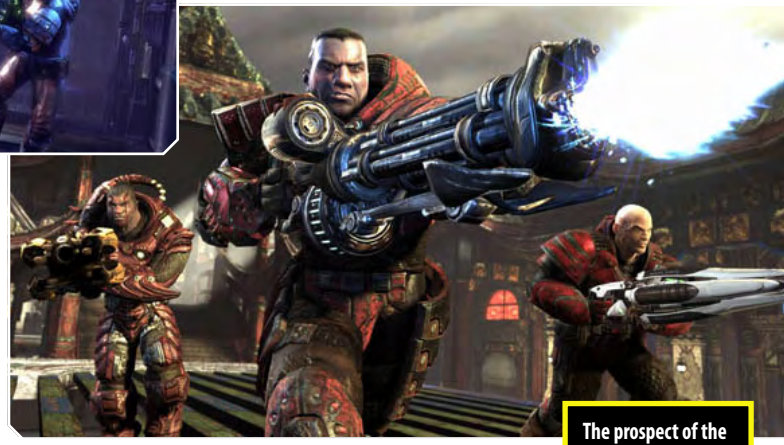
Some of the vehicles are just as fun as they look.



With less game types, the new UT feels a much more focused experience. Much like this guy's rifle.



Yes, the graphics really do look this amazing, and yes, the game does run at a phenomenal speed. So much so you won't have time to notice how good it looks.



The prospect of the Unreal 3 editor has us very, very excited.

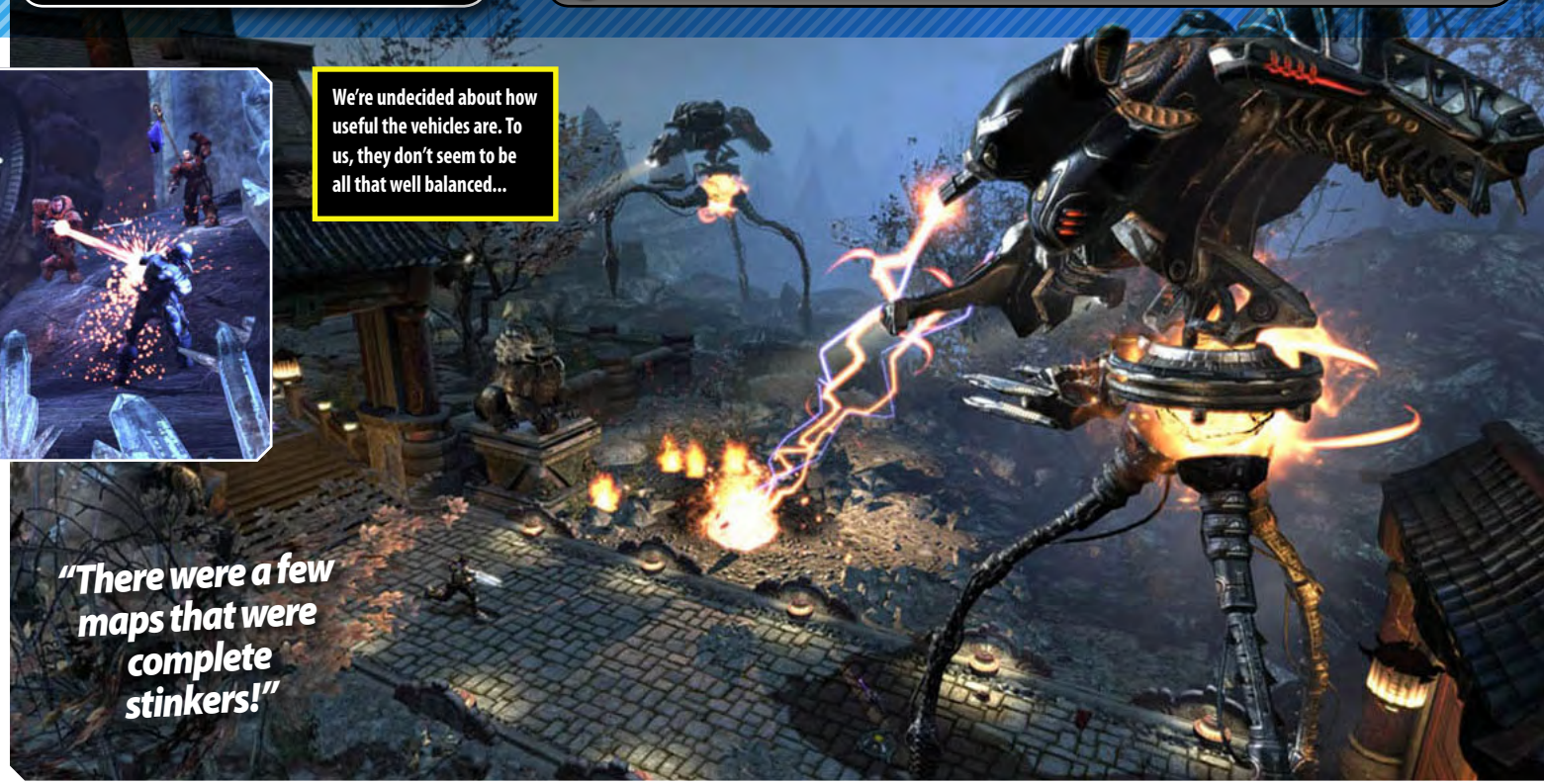
Melted eyeballs

Of course, if there's one thing UT has always been famous for, it's the eyeball meltingly fast speed, and this is also true for the third instalment. Running at at least 60 FPS throughout the duration of our play, it was almost hard to keep up with what was happening in UT, as the action is that fast. Your players feel like they're gliding rather than running; you can pivot on the spot and headshot an enemy that's just appeared behind you; and by simply double-tapping one of the keys, you can dodge out of the way of an enemy rocket. The controls for UT3 are just as responsive, fast, and, most importantly, fun as we ever could have dreamed, and are sure to see you through into the early hours of the morning, as you hunch over your keyboard to >

"Your head gets blown off your shoulders by a flak cannon"



While the game ships with a fair number of maps itself, we've been assured the game will be supported post launch with free extras.



We're undecided about how useful the vehicles are. To us, they don't seem to be all that well balanced...

> Unreal Tournament
continued

complete just "one... more... game..."

During the course of the day, we got to sample a huge variety of maps, all of which were played over a LAN, and while we're pleased to say that the vast majority of the maps offered a great variety of enclosed corridor shooting (which could get pretty manic when 10 of your 16 players found themselves in there at once), and wide open spaces, which would always prove popular with the snipers, there were a few maps that were complete stinkers.

"There were a few maps that were complete stinkers!"

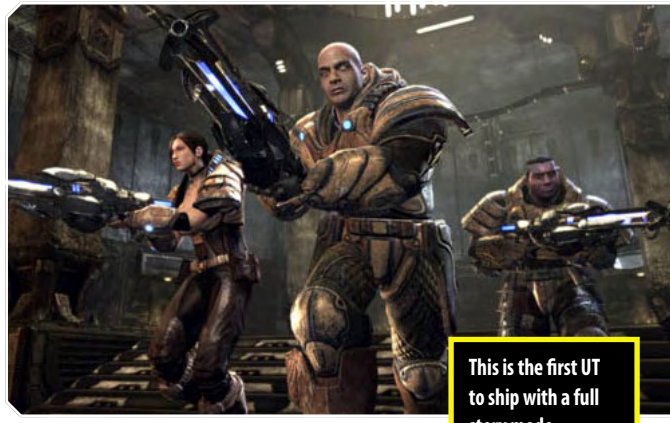


The majority of the maps are effortlessly balanced, with a great range of enclosed, and outdoor areas.

One of these was the visually breathtaking map set aboard a space station. Surrounded by asteroids and other various cosmos, we found it all too easy to fall off the edge, as too much of the map was just a series of platforms connected by huge, deadly chasms. The other major downfall of this map was the fact that the majority of the corridors were filled with some sort of goo, which slowed your player to a crawl. This is okay if there's some exclusive, all powerful weapon at the end of it – but there wasn't.

A lot's been said about the ability to play cross platform against PS3 owners, but, PC owners rejoice, Epic's own Mark Rein has told us that this isn't going to happen. "We decided in the end not to do it. ... to have cross-platform play, we have to be using the same version of the game – on the PC, we can go through a patch this afternoon; on console, this has to go through a certification process, which would mean we'd have to hold the PC version up for few weeks. We don't want to compromise our PC fan base."

Set for launch at the beginning of next month, UT3 is shaping up to be a PC fan's dream game. We'll be bringing you the full review next month.



This is the first UT to ship with a full story mode, although it's apparently less of a story, and more of a tournament-with-cutscenes

PCGZine

HOW COMPLETE? 95%

ANTICIPATION? 90%

The PC's best deathmatch shooter just got better

Publisher: Empire
Developer: Fireglow
Players: Millions+
Certificate: 12+
Features: Air, land and sea battles, trench warfare, new 3D engine, up to 4000 units per map
ETA: December

Third Strike and out!

The third episode in the Sudden Strike series has gone fully 3D. Fireglow Games' Igor Rzheffkin explains...



"This is logical" says Igor, holding us in his death grip.

This hardcore World War II sim is a favourite with realistic strategy fans and the latest collection of tough missions promises even more, with an all-new engine that opens up all kinds of new possibilities.

Why did you make the decision to move from 2D to 3D for this version of Sudden Strike?
This is logical. 3D gives more freedom and improves the play by adding smooth hills and rivers instead two-level cliffs. You can use highs and lows of the landscape to get a tactical advantage for your troops, and 3D particle effects look way better than 2D-sprites. With modern CPUs and graphics cards, supporting Shaders v2.0, users have enough power to fight in such a world.

We've heard a lot about the new engine's capabilities, but how many units can you have on screen at one time?
You can have 4000 units per map, but it makes sense to split your troops into squads and have rear and front lines, because you win with an army, not with a crowd. A big pack of units without proper defence lines can be annihilated in minutes.

Sudden Strike 3 feels like a major departure from the series' trademark gameplay – has this always been the intention, and in what ways have you tried to make the gameplay different?
Our goal was to ease the game for a newcomer without losing any options for hardcore players. We have added some new things, and reworked all of the interface components (Strategic Map, Vehicle Inspection Window, Minimap, Announcements). This allows you to control the most

>



Use tanks as cover for troops in wide open spaces.

"Without proper defence you can be annihilated in minutes!"

Those beautifully ploughed fields, utterly ruined!



Why do warplanes paint targets on their wings?

> Interview continued

important things at a glance. Coloured icons help a lot too and the Behaviour feature is great. You can deploy a squad, detach the guns and put infantry into trenches with a few clicks.

In your opinion, what's the biggest new feature for this instalment?
The trenches, if we are talking about the gameplay; the 3D particle effects, physics, shadows and surf, if about graphics; and the Behaviour Switch for the interface.

How do you feel RTS games like Company of Heroes have affected people's views of the WW2 RTS?
I wouldn't call it an RTS. It has a different scale of maps, level of detail and audience. It's a good tactics game but it has nothing to do with strategies. When young boys grow up, they realize they can control more. This will be the time to change for Sudden Strike.

Sudden Strike 3 covers the major battles of WW2, Normandy, and Iwo Jima, but do you also cover some of the lesser known battles?
Yes, we have the "Liberation of Crimea", which is playable for the Soviet side, defence of German industry sites in Europe, Sicily etc.

One of the features we were really impressed with in the preview was the AI – we even noticed soldiers covering behind tanks to stay out of the line of fire. Can you give us an example of how you've improved the AI?
This was the most complicated part of game design. On a micro AI level, this is a question of balance between what a unit should do on his own, and what he shouldn't (get closer to a target or go prone, seek cover or repair a vehicle, get into the trench or enter a house, leave an empty gun etc.).

On higher AI levels, we didn't limit the ideas of the game designers. Here are a few examples of what you can expect from the computer player...

A few defending soldiers retreat, when outnumbered by visible enemies. Then they regroup and counterattack.

The main forces and supplies are kept in the rear behind the deep defence. When the reinforcement is needed, it arrives from the rear to the place of breakthrough.

And, finally, the first two Sudden Strike games had quite a large amount of user-created mods and the like after the game was released – are there any plans to provide Sudden Strike 3 with a mission editor, or allow for user-generated mods?
There are plans to release the Editor. We expect a lot of mods this time, and we're going to support free mods. We ask modders to share their plans with us so we can help.


Air support will be crucial, especially during vulnerable beach landings.

"They have no right being super rich. All they did was say 'I love toy soldiers'"


A cowardly tank hidees behind sandbags and sends in the light armour.


Trenches promise to be one of the major new tactical features of Sudden Strike 3.

RICHARD GARRIOTT'S

TABULA RASA



JOIN THE FIGHT



REPLAY VIDEO

16+ www.pegi.info

PC DVD ROM

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OBLIVION AND ON AND ON...
CAN IT REALLY BE TRUE that mighty RPG Oblivion will be getting an MMO version some time next year? Oblivion is the best RPG ever and if it goes online I may just explode with joy!
> Sam Wells

> PCGZ says… This is still a tale lost in the dark realm of rumour we're afraid Sam, but there have been many clues brought back by intrepid adventurers. Bethesda has recently registered the new URL elderscrollsonline.com (although it says this is just to prevent others snapping it up) and parent company ZeniMax is working on an MMO headed by ex-Mythic man Matt Frior. Let's keep our talons crossed.

Don't miss Issue 13
Out Dec 13th
Sign up now!


Download new levels for Orange Box Portal now!

IN GOOD COMPANY
I REALLY ENJOYED YOUR Company of Heroes: Opposing Fronts review last issue and will definitely buy it. Is there anything else from Relic in the pipeline next year?
> John Millbank

> PCGZ says… Relic was bought by THQ back in 2004 and has since made Warhammer 40,000 Dawn of War and Company of Heroes. Although still unconfirmed, THQ recently filed for the Homeworld name from previous publisher Vivendi, so this could mean a new Homeworld game is in the works, which would be fantastic news!

ANY PORTAL IS A STORM!
THANKS FOR YOUR COVERAGE of the Half-Life 2 Orange Box last month. It really is, as you said, brilliant value. Episode 2 was just superb and I can't wait for the conclusion in 2008. Team Fortress 2 is the best team shooter I've ever played and so funny too. But Portal is the icing on the cake and I can't get enough of it. Where can I find more Portals?
> Jason Banks

> PCGZ says… It is hard to think of a more comprehensive shooter package and Portal is a great innovation. Actually one of the Fallout 3 team has been designing a new level for Portal and you can try it out here... www.twhl.co.za/mapvault_map.php?id=4842
Let us know what you think.

CRUNCHING GEARS
HELP ME PLEASE!. I'm desperate to get my teeth into Gears of War and the new PC levels, but I keep hitting a snag as it tries to update itself. Make it work!
> Anthony James

> PCGZ says… It's a common problem. Simply shut down the game after the update has downloaded and it should then install itself just fine.

NO CONSOLATION
Exploding the 'expensive PC' myth

I think we'd all agree that in terms of graphics and power, a cutting-edge gaming PC is way ahead of the next-gen consoles, but there's still the argument that the price point for a hot PC rig is way too high. But I disagree. I'd think that most of us already own PCs, so it's really just a question of upgrading motherboard, memory, CPU and GPU and I reckon you can do this for not much more than the price of a new Xbox 360 or PlayStation 3. Plus you then get to play awesome PC exclusives at their best like Hellgate and Crysis. The PC still rocks and it really isn't as expensive as many would have you think!
> Adam Bayliff

> PCGZ says… We couldn't agree more, Adam. The PC is again king of games machines!


Crysis really shows off PC superiority.

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Supreme Commander: Forged Alliance

Publisher: THQ
Developer: Gas Powered Games
Heritage: Total Annihilation
Link: www.supremecommander.com
ETA: 23 November

System Requirements: 1.8Ghz CPU, 512Mb RAM, 128Mb 3D card with Shader 2.0 support

If you're not crying and begging for mercy, this isn't doing its job properly

Well, it's been nine months. That's surely long enough to recover from the beating Supreme Commander handed to you back in February. Hope you've been training in the meantime. Command & Conquer 3, Company of Heroes: Opposing Fronts and World in Conflict, you say? Bum fights. Mere bantams compared to this RTS heavyweight. And, much like being repeatedly punched in the face by a large man, standalone expansion pack Forged Alliance is often more about surviving against impossible odds than it is about having fun. This is not an ignoble thing for it to be. It's just that there's only so many people who enjoy brutal punishment.

Before we go into Forged Alliance's sadism, here's a quick run down on what's different to its critically-acclaimed parent game. Alongside a bunch of new units and balance changes, there's a new playable faction. The alien Seraphim add a little more variety, but this RTS's stern focus on symmetry and absolute balance means the differences to the three existing races are primarily cosmetic until you >


The Seraphim ACU: terribly dashing in that shiny armour of his.



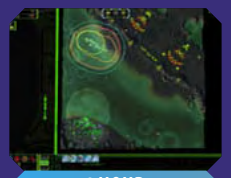
"Like being repeatedly punched in the face by a large man"

Maxi-zoom mode here is how you'll actually play the game. If you're zoomed in close, you're not paying attention to everything at once, and are about to die horribly.


The interface may make sense now, but it still fell out of the ugly tree and hit every branch on the way down.

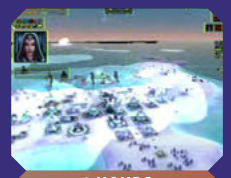
FREEZE FRAME

Slices of very tough gaming pie to chew on


1 HOUR
Having chosen which race to play as, you'll still be in the first corner of the first map at this point.


2 HOURS
The end is in sight – but only of the first level.


6 HOURS
You're granted access to units belonging to the other two human-ish factions.


8 HOURS
You'll probably be replaying level three or four, after suffering humiliating defeat.


15 HOURS
Game over, and turns out there's no Seraphim campaign. Boo!



We gave each one of these troops a unique name. From the left: Geoff 1, Geoff 2, Geoff 3, Geoff 4...

> Supreme Commander

hit the really big stuff at the top of the tech tree. They're a little flashier than the others, but they do nothing to give any sense of playing an especially different game. Much more immediate is an overhauled interface. It shouldn't matter as much as it does, and it could easily have been shoved into a patch, but in a game in which seeing the bigger picture (and the 2000 warring robots within it) is essential, no longer having half the screen clouded over with Windows 95-type icons makes for a more elegant, fluid game.

Back to that punishment. In case you're not familiar with Supreme Commander, the way its single player works is this: you build dozens upon dozens of ground, sea and air attack drones, then face them off against similar but different coloured ones, using a particularly focused take on the rock, paper, scissors mechanic, until you win. Except you don't win. Your reward for all that constantly attentive building and gathering and ordering and flanking is not a tedious cutscene and a victory screen after 45 minutes, but rather for the level you thought you'd just beaten to suddenly double, triple, quadruple in size.

This'll happen three or four times before the fight's actually finished. No pat on the head and off to the next level for you. Just more exhausting war. It's distractingly artificial (you have to accept that there's a whole world of enemies just off-screen who don't care about you trashing their mates until the exact moment that the game shows you the next bit of level) and was too demanding for a lot of players. So it's a shock to find that, not only does Forged Alliance play the same trick, but it's even more merciless about it. The first mission (of six) alone takes between two and three hours. You'll need a nap, a cup of tea and possibly a hug from mummy before you're ready >

Force fields offer some limited protection.



Getting your flimsy Aeon Czar shot down over an enemy base will cause untold damage to them. Dirty tricks are the best tricks.





You can't actually play the game from this angle, as it unhelpfully springs back to overhead view when you let go of Space. Handy for screenshots though, eh?

> Supreme Commander

on, even when there's no way you could possibly kill whatever they're asking you to just yet.

All that struggle and admonishment makes this being a standalone game rather than an add-on disc a little bit pointless. Forged Alliance is crazily inaccessible to anyone unfamiliar with Supreme Commander – so not requiring the original game to run seems less about winning a new audience, and more about having an excuse to charge £25 rather than £15.

On the other hand entirely, the unrelenting nature of the campaign means its yer actual proper challenge for SupCom old hands: this is exactly the add-on they'd hope for. How many RTS expansion packs have you played where the singleplayer is just an excuse to slowly dribble out new units to you, but really you're just going through the same motions as always? Complacency is not an option here. You're repeatedly placed in a David and Goliath situation, so even the most indefatigable SupCom vet has to think hard and fast, and will feel smug and happy for weathering the ever-growing storm.

For all its standaloniness, this is an expansion pack in the over-traditional vein of More, not Different. It doesn't push SupCom to new and interesting places, and it doesn't address much of what left many players cold first time around. But everything SupCom did well, so this does too, but bigger than ever. No other game does war quite this intense and this epic. Chopping wood or gathering space crystals in Generic RTS #419 after this feels hollow and pathetic. If you've yet to buy SupCom, buy this instead, as it's much more refined – just break yourself in with a couple of skirmish missions on easy before you subject yourself to the campaign's abuse.

Alec Meer



Oh, for a city to trash. Fighting over bits of desert scarcely seems worth it.

GODS OF WAR

A selection of SupCom's new Experimental uber-units

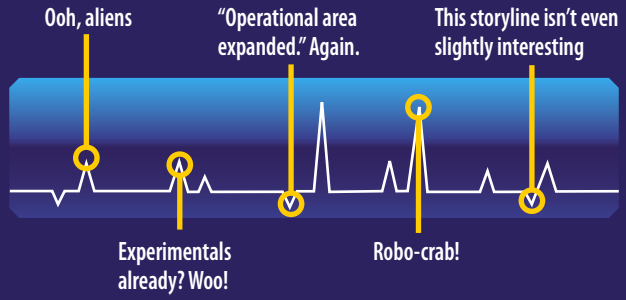


Seraphim Ahwassa | **Cybran Megalith** | **Aeon Paragon**

Seraphim Ahwassa

This massive bomber is surprisingly fast for its size, which means it's unlikely to get shot down before it can drop its negative energy bomb, which is capable of wiping out an entire base, Commander and all.

PULSOMETER *Signs of life*





The new Cybran Brick is the only SupCom unit that could possibly be described as cute.

PCGZine Verdict

Big, brutal and unique

- None more epic
- Much more polished than SupCom
- Fearsomely terrifying for new players

86%



Crysis

PCGZine GOLD

Jungle is massive…

Publisher: EA
Developer: Crytek
Heritage: Far Cry
Link: www.ea.com/crysis
ETA: Out Now!

System Requirements: 2.8 GHz CPU, 1GB RAM, 256MB Graphics card (with Pixel Shader 2.0 support)

In the pantheon of PC First Person Shooters, one game stands head, shoulders and crowbar above the rest. We are of course talking about Half-Life 2. However, a couple of years ago a game emerged from out of nowhere (Germany) that had one or two heretics proclaiming it as good, if not better than Valve's classic. That game was Far Cry, and the massively hyped Crysis is the nominal sequel. But whereas Far Cry had you wandering around a jungle living on your wits, Crysis puts you inside a super-powered nanosuit as part of a crack military unit sent to investigate the disappearance of an archaeology team on an island in the Philippines.

It's still all about the jungle though, which is recreated in blistering detail. Basically, if your PC is more than a couple of years old you're going to have to get your wallet out. It will just about stagger along with all the detail turned down, but you'll be missing out on what is one of the most visually resplendent games ever made. Sunk up to the nuts in flora and fauna, it's a stunning achievement, and that's even before the fireworks start, with tree trunks splintering in front of your eyes under a barrage of enemy fire. For reason of plot, that enemy is the Korean People's Army, and during >



It's like a jungle sometimes.


"Have you come about the guttering mate?"


The allotment dispute spiralled out of control.


Probably best not to take on a tank.


Shooting the sky isn't very much use.



You're never more than 12ft from an explosion.



Now the island party's getting going - when's the foam starting?



The travel agent never mentioned this.

> Crysis continued

the course of the game you will slaughter several thousand of them, all without spilling a drop of blood (made in Germany, published by EA).

Creative process

How you mete out the punishment is entirely up to you, as the joy of Crysis (like Far Cry) is that it enables you to get creative thanks to the flexible functions of your nanosuit. The voice in your helmet might advise a stealthy approach, but you might fancy stealing a jeep, ploughing it into the enemy base, jumping out at the last minute and tossing grenades around like confetti. There's no right or wrong method, and it's a case of by any means necessary. You're generally on your own though, as while you meet up with your squad for cut scenes, they soon piss off to do their own thing.

As for the story, there's an element of hokum TV show Lost about it, with an unseen force stomping around the jungle picking off goodies and baddies alike. And it's not too much of a spoiler to reveal that there is the obligatory alien section where you find yourself floating round fighting giant squid.

Crysis has been hugely hyped for a couple of years, and while graphically it has lived up to it, the bottom line is that it is just another shooter albeit with a clever tactical approach thanks to the nanosuit. That's not to say you won't relish every minute of it though, and it really is shit-the-bed-shoot-helicopters-out-of-the-sky-one-more-go-oh-bollocks-it's-6am stuff. Guilt-free rampaging genocide has never been so much fun… ● *Steve Hill*

PCGZine Verdict

Another day in paradise…

- Astonishing graphics
- Flexible gameplay
- Occasional ropey mission

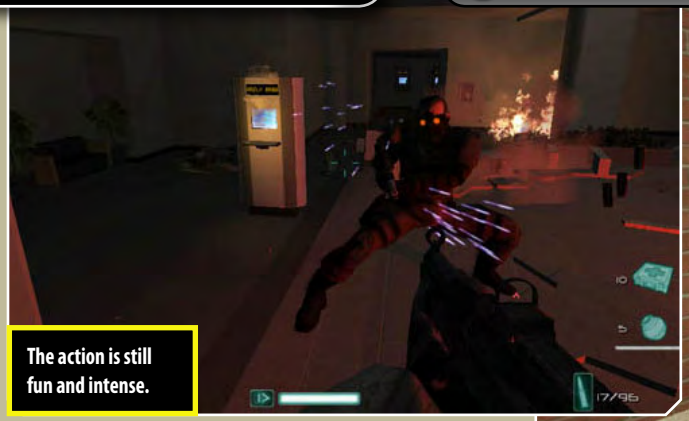
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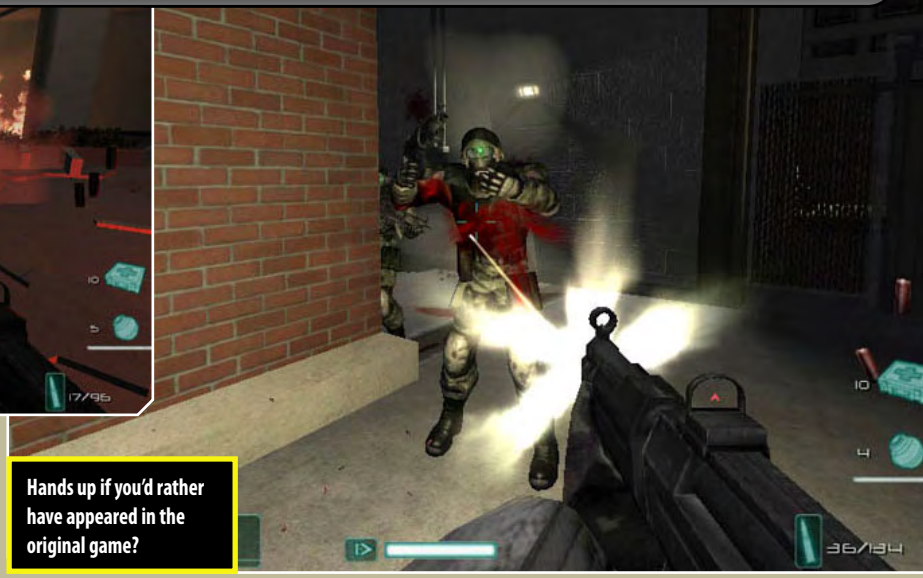


F.E.A.R. Perseus Mandate

Publisher: Sierra Games
Developer: TimeGate Studios
Heritage: F.E.A.R. F.E.A.R. Extraction Point
Link: www.whatisfear.com
ETA: Out Now!

System Requirements: P4 1.7GHz; 512MB RAM; At least a 64MB GeForce® 4 Ti or Radeon® 9000 video cardGraphics Card: GeForce 8800 or Radeon X1950 Creative Sound Blaster X-Fi Sound Card 2 GB Hard Drive Space


The action is still fun and intense.


Hands up if you'd rather have appeared in the original game?

"Action remains as intense and satisfying as ever, but frights are predictable"

Déjà vu, anyone?

For some reason, expansion packs for hit first-person shooters are habitually underwhelming. Perseus Mandate is the latest add-on to fall foul of this trend. While it may be set during the exact same timeframe as F.E.A.R., its attempts to emulate the same thrilling gameplay end in failure.

What's instantly striking is just how poorly the graphics engine has aged. Surroundings and enemies look bereft of detail and textures bland, especially when compared to Unreal Engine 3. If you've played F.E.A.R. (and to an extent, Extraction Point) you'll pretty much know what to expect; linear levels containing passages of exploration, combat and psychological terror. While the action remains as intense and satisfying as ever, many of the frights are more predictable than an episode of EastEnders, with the exception of a couple of terrifying moments.

Level design is another problem, lacking the attention to detail that made F.E.A.R.'s locales such excellent, tactical battlefields. Sewers, courtyards and corridors flanked with offices provide the majority of the locations here, and it's not long before your eyes start begging for something more interesting to look at. Like a picture book of steam railways.

While Perseus Mandate isn't a poor game, its inability to offer anything fresh means there's little here to wholeheartedly recommend. The three new weapons are solid if unspectacular, though more could have been done with the grenade launcher and the Lightning gun isn't as devastating as you'd like it to be. The new and nippy Nightcrawler enemy is tough but is essentially very similar to enemies that have come before.

If you're aching to play more F.E.A.R. and you're the forgiving type, then you'll find a few thrills and frights here, but those of you looking for a more fulfilling shooting experience should look elsewhere.

Martin Korda


What is it about FPS games and rubbish, turret mini-games?

TELL ME A STORY

Find out more behind the horrors of Armacham

While there's minimal mention of Alma, you will find out some new information about Paxton Fettle, the strangely toff-named bad guy from the original game. Perseus Mandate's plot is presented via some decent phone messages, live video feeds (pictured) and regular mission updates from your CO.



PCGZine Verdict

Like F.E.A.R. only nowhere near as good

- Some decent plot developments
- Firefights still satisfying
- Imitates rather than innovates

74%



Call of Duty 4 Modern Warfare

PCGZine GOLD

Publisher: Activision
Developer: Infinity Ward
Heritage: Call of Duty & Call of Duty 2
Link: www.charlieoscardelta.com
ETA: Out Now

System Requirements:
2.4 GHz dual core, 1024MB RAM (2048MB for Vista)
Nvidia Geforce 7800 or better or ATI Radeon X1800 or better.

Forget the Nazis, beware the nuclear warlords

It was a shock when developers Infinity Ward announced that the next Call of Duty game would not be based around WWII. Dominating the genre and giving the Medal of Honor series a kick in the teeth, Call of Duty 2 was the last word in retro war. Call of Duty 4 concentrates on a disturbingly familiar yet fictional war in the present day and takes on both Rainbow Six and Ghost Recon at the same time. Vintage rifles are replaced with laser-guided air strikes, and GPS, night vision goggles and high-tech grenades are added to the kit bag. The big question is, does it work and can Call of Duty 4 compete with Rainbow Six and Ghost Recon?

Rest assured, Call of Duty 4 is the best shooter of 2007 and makes Rainbow Six look like a paintball session in the park. Polished beyond belief, Call of Duty 4 has awe-inspiring cinematic scenes and a musical score from the man who created the theme tune for Metal Gear Solid and, crucially, Hollywood blockbuster Enemy of The State. There's a real sheen which can be witnessed straight away on the atmospheric opening level. Dispensing with the clichéd yet necessary Russian, nuclear and Middle-East plot line, you're dumped on a boat with your team. It's set at night in a storm and there's the sound of helicopters and men screaming. It's what Under Siege would have looked like if it was real.

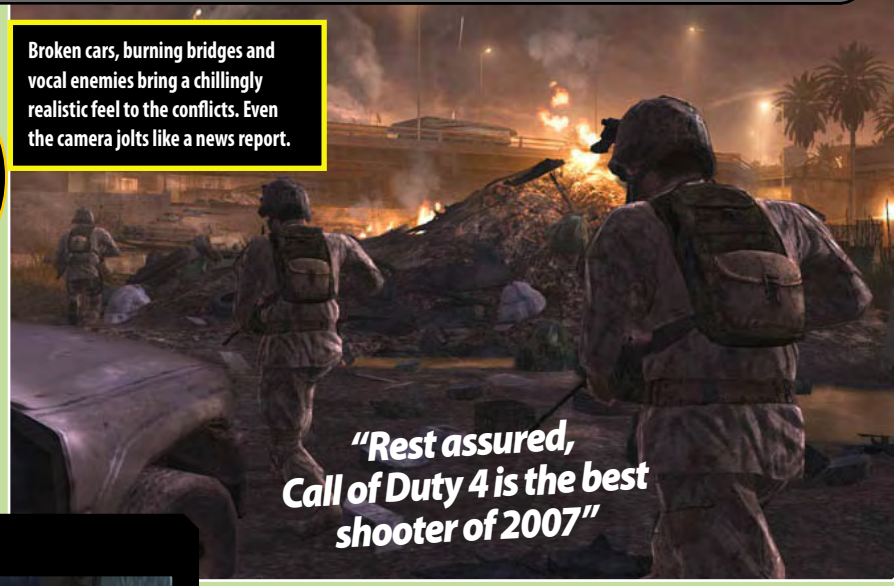


Smoke grenades are almost as effective as explosives in the right situation. Use them to escape groups of enemies or just confuse guards.

Roll over screen for annotations

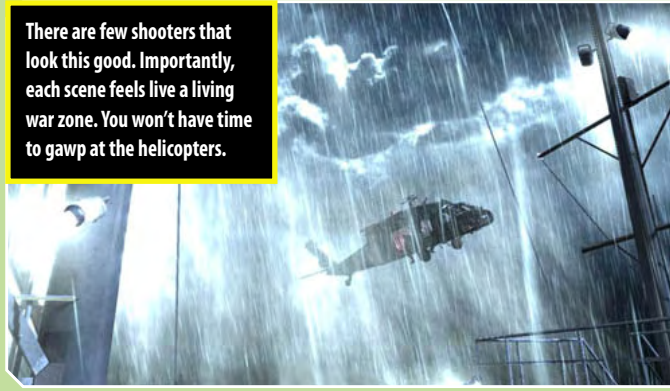


Broken cars, burning bridges and vocal enemies bring a chillingly realistic feel to the conflicts. Even the camera jolts like a news report.





The opening ship level is terrifying and makes Under Siege look like a walk in the park. Segal wouldn't last five minutes.



There are few shooters that look this good. Importantly, each scene feels live a living war zone. You won't have time to gawp at the helicopters.

Gripping

Getting to grips with the controls is simple, with just the right amount of >

STREET STRIFE

Because it's not all boats, bases and training missions…



Find cover **Plan your attack** **Use your units**

Find cover

Follow team leader Price and run into a flaming warzone. Find cover and observe which buildings have lights on. Those are the ones you'll want your fighter jets to reduce to rubble before moving forward. Avoid flaming barrels and listen to your team – the most important skill in open combat is finding cover, although there are no Gears of War style cover controls.



There's no early warning when rockets approach. Well, perhaps the whoop of the air around the missile about 0.5 seconds before it lands.



Street conflicts are gritty and among the harder missions. Fighter planes swoop overhead delivering airstrikes while you hide behind crumbling walls.



There's nothing more satisfying than doing your snake impression.



Tactics and correct weapon choice are crucial. You can't run in with a pistol and take a chance, it simply won't work. Flash-bang, shoot and CLEAR!

"The conflict is so alive with action it never feels clichéd"

> Call of Duty 4 continued

aiming assistance to make kills quick yet satisfying. Your team can run for cover and behave intelligently and the enemies are similarly cunning. Shoot one in the leg and you run the risk of a downed enemy taking a second pop, virtually from the grave, as he shuffles along the floor. Elsewhere the option to dress and prep your team adds real strategy to the proceedings, especially when playing online. Camo is as important as weapons and you'll never forget your first airstrike. The conflict moves from ship to war-torn cityscape to forest but is so alive with action, it never feels clichéd. Walls crumble as you hide behind them and there's a perfect mix of stealth and gung-ho, against-the-clock missions.

In short, the single player game is epic and benefits from being developed in conjunction with the Xbox 360 version – health is replenished by avoiding fire and resting behind cover, much like Halo. The controls are classic Call of Duty. You'll never fumble for your gun and taking the game online is more fun than ever thanks to the new team options which allow you to pick weapons, skills, outfits and even name your squad. In the heat of combat, it feels like the real life of a modern-day soldier and, aside from making you remember NEVER to sign up, Call of Duty 4 is simply the best shooter of 2007. ● ***Rich Melville***

PCGZine Verdict

Shooter of the year. Rainbow Six and Ghost Recon, pack your kit bags.

- Fantastic visuals
- Classic gameplay.
- Single player mode is over too soon.

93%



Publisher: Atari
Developer: CD Projekt
Heritage: None
Link: www.thewitcher.com
ETA: Out Now!

System Requirements: 2.4 GHz CPU, 1GB RAM, 128MB Graphics Card (with Pixel Shader 2.0 support)

The Witcher

Sex 'n' drugs 'n' rock 'n' roleplaying…

When you think about traditional roleplaying games, you probably legislate for portentous voice-overs, po-faced storylines, interminable quests, waist-length beards, trusty blades, magic potions and heaving breasts. And while the Polish-developed The Witcher ticks every one of those boxes, it also throws in a dash of racism, terrorism, rape, suicide, drugs, booze and even unfettered rutting. It's perhaps too simplistic to describe it as an allegory for modern woes, but this is certainly an adult-oriented adventure that explores a number of controversial themes. And you thought it was just about a long-haired monster hunter…

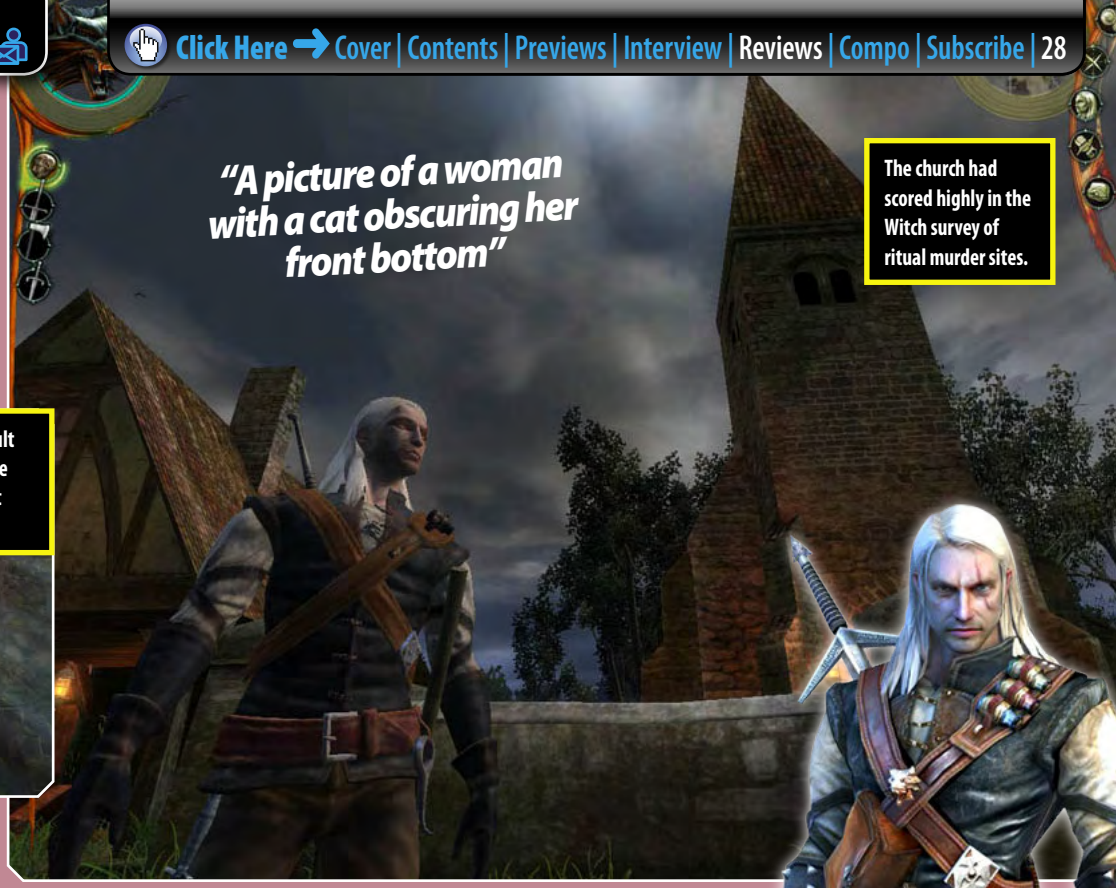


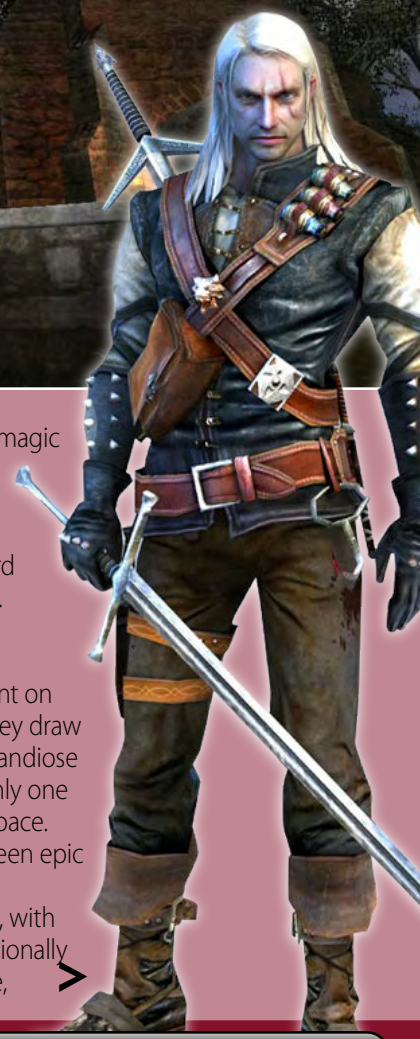
He's like an occult Mr. Darcy and he certainly puts it about a bit.



"A picture of a woman with a cat obscuring her front bottom"

The church had scored highly in the Witch survey of ritual murder sites.





You assume the role of said hirsute beast-baiter, one Geralt of Rivia, as introduced in an opening movie that is actually longer than a number of games. As for the narrative, well, Geralt has lost his memory so there isn't really a coherent back-story other than that introduced via various snippets as the game progresses, with virtually every other person claiming to be your best friend. This extend to the womenfolk of the land, as Geralt proves himself to be an expert swordsman, unleashing the beast within the first hour of the game, the sex scene conveyed via creaking bed springs, blurred imagery and, cryptically, a picture of a woman with a cat obscuring her front bottom.

Geralt is also pretty handy with his steel and silver blades, smiting all and sundry via a mildly irritating combat mechanic of clicking on enemies at-the-correct-time-but-not-too-quickly. You've also got a bit of magic up your sleeve, and bamboozling them before running them through with your sword generally does the trick.

Polish polish

Mercifully not over reliant on banks of statistics, the key draw of The Witcher is the grandiose storyline, and it's certainly one that unfolds at its own pace. There's a fine line between epic and dull, and the action straddles it precariously, with wordy cut scenes occasionally draining your will to live,

>

POINTS OF VIEW

There can be only one…



High | **Low** | **Shoulder**

High

Allegedly giving a more tactical view, the high isometric view is unusable.



The flourescent footstool was way ahead of its time and came from Ikieealand.

"You can have consensual penetrative sexual intercourse"

I knight you, Sir 'Cleaved screaming in two from neck to belly'. Don't arise.

>The Witcher continued

exacerbated by lengthy loading times between areas.

Spirit levels

As the genre demands, it's generally a case of go there, do that, bring this, but it's carried off with a style that elevates it above the perennial level-chasers. No matter how much you attempt to ignore it, the story drags you in, and you are often faced with some difficult moral decision that has far-reaching consequences. You could almost make a case for caring about the characters, but this may be blurred a little by the fact that you can have consensual penetrative sexual intercourse with some of them.

While it's largely a highly polished affair, there are a few niggles such as the illusion of freedom being scuppered by some impassable barriers. These can easily be overlooked though, and before you know it, several hours of your all-too-short life will have been sapped away traversing rain-sodden countryside, wandering around squalid villages and running errands for the locals.

Based on the work of best-selling Polish author Andrzej Sapkowski, The Witcher may be utterly humorous, but it's a sumptuous affair that can be enjoyed by goblin-fanciers and fantasy-agnostics alike. ● ***Steve Hill***



"Throw Posh into the deal and we might just be getting somewhere Ginger"



There's nothing like an elephant leg kebab after a night at the tavern.

PCGZine Verdict — *A grown-up RPG*

- Epic storyline
- Adult themes
- Niggly combat

85%



TimeShift

Having too much time on your hands can be a good thing…

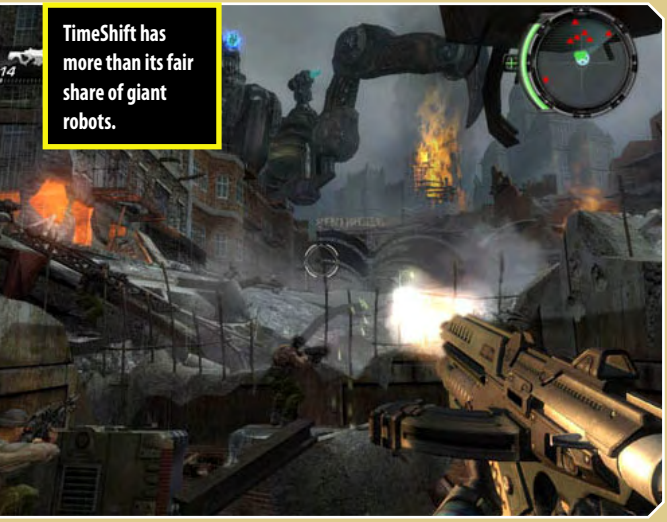
Publisher: Vivendi
Developer: Saber Interactive
Heritage: Will Rock
Link: http://timeshiftgame.com/us/
ETA: Out now!

System Requirements: P4 2GHz; 1GB RAM; 128 MB DirectX® 9.0c-compatible card with Pixel Shaders 2.0b support

After all the promises that we'd be able to manipulate time during some visually impressive firefights, TimeShift has unfortunately failed to provide anywhere near the level of combat flexibility and originality that we were all hoping for. However, the game certainly shouldn't be dismissed, as there's just about enough quality here to warrant your attention. After using a time suit to travel to a dystopian alternate timeline in order to stop a fellow scientist from subjugating humanity, you find yourself fighting in the resistance in an attempt to restore freedom.


It has improved vastly since first announced.

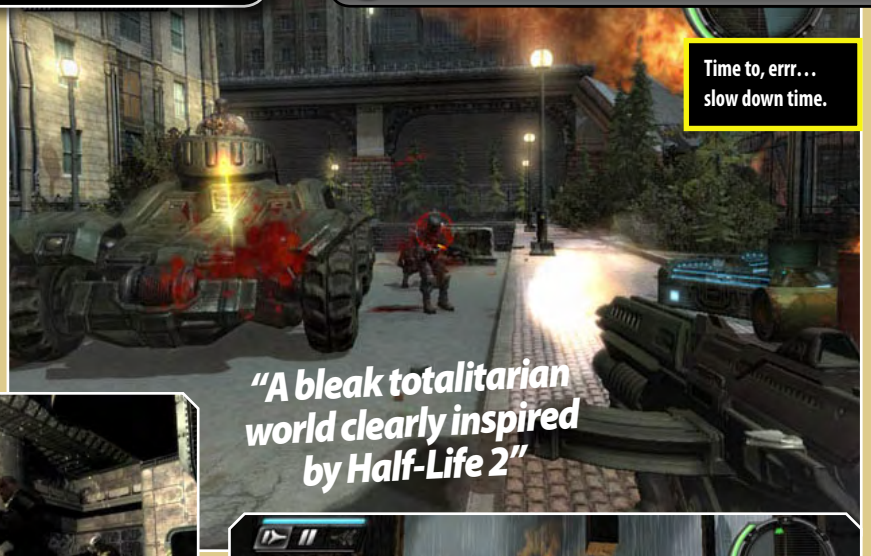
What follows is a set of solid if unspectacular battles against soldiers, robots and turrets, punctuated by a few puzzles, which take place within a bleak totalitarian world clearly inspired by Half-Life 2. Missions are scripted, with blocked pathways fortuitously removed by wayward shots, while weaponry is lacklustre, with the usual collection of machine-guns, sniper rifles, shotguns and pistols plus an excellent if overly powerful crossbow.


TimeShift has more than its fair share of giant robots.

Time after time

The ability to manipulate time is the game's major selling point, and while it does provide some variety, at no time do you feel its potential has been realised. Slowing down and pausing time allows you to mow through enemies with ease. Of course, this form of Bullet Time combat is nothing new, but thankfully it's well implemented here, and provides fun moments such as shooting slow-mo projectiles out of the sky. Sadly, puzzles fail to make any commendable use of these time shifting abilities, with simple freeze and rewind mechanics often enough to navigate unsophisticated obstacles.

It may be distinctly inferior to the likes of Orange Box and Call of Duty 4, but TimeShift will keep you entertained for a few hours. ● ***Martin Korda***


Time to, errr… slow down time.

"A bleak totalitarian world clearly inspired by Half-Life 2"



Firing turrets? Haven't we seen this before somewhere?

SUITS YOU, SIR

Proving suits aren't just for social occasions

As well as allowing you to pause, slow and rewind time, your time suit also possesses several other natty abilities. For starters, it regenerates your health, meaning that a few seconds in hiding can save your bacon. It also warns you of approaching enemies and dangerous obstacles such as fire or electrical fields. It doesn't make tea though.




Fight for freedom!

PCGZine Verdict

A fun on-rails sci-fi blaster that never quite delivers on its promise

- Plenty of intense firefights
- Some decent time-shifting abilities
- All a bit too predictable

79%

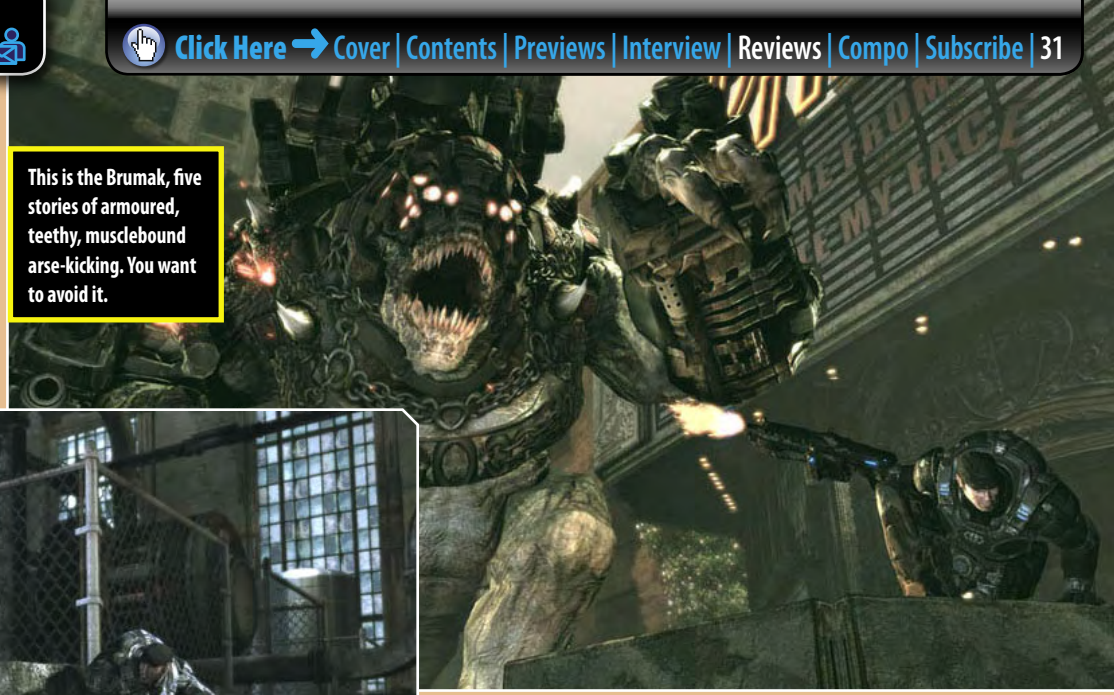


Gears of War

Now with added PC goodness, but is it enough?

Publisher: Microsoft
Developer: Epic
Heritage: Unreal franchise
Link: www.gearsofwar.com
ETA: Out Now

System Requirements:
2.4 GHz dual core, 1024MB RAM (2048MB for Vista)
Nvidia Geforce 7800 or better or ATI Radeon X1800 or better.

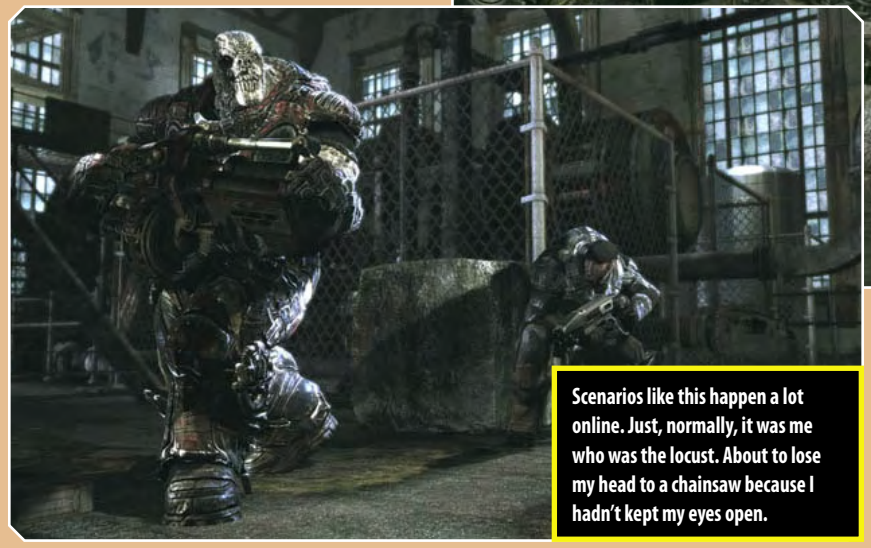


This is the Brumak, five stories of armoured, teethy, musclebound arse-kicking. You want to avoid it.

Gears of War first launched in November of 2006 on Xbox 360 to almost universal acclaim. This was to be Microsoft's new Halo – the first game to truly show what its white box could do. Like Halo before it, Gears went on to become a massive success, having now sold over four million copies worldwide.

However, it's a lesser known fact, that also like Halo before it, Gears was originally conceived for PC, before Microsoft persuaded (read: threw cash at) Epic to secure a Gears exclusive. And also like Halo, a substantial amount of time later, Gears has found its way back to its spiritual home, the PC, with a few tweaks and additions. The only problem is, Gears isn't exactly the game the 360 boys made it out to be.

Putting you into the gigantic boots of Marcus Fenix, Gears of War drops you into the midst of a battle between the humans, and the Locust Horde; a bunch of ne'er-do-wells who crawl up from the bowels of hell itself.



Scenarios like this happen a lot online. Just, normally, it was me who was the locust. About to lose my head to a chainsaw because I hadn't kept my eyes open.

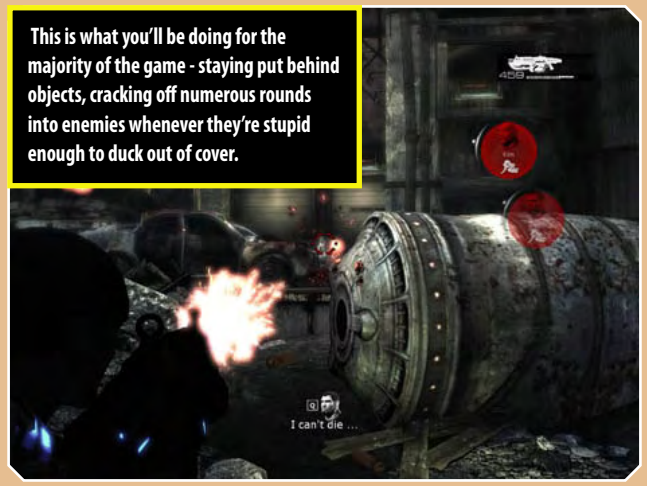


Covering forms the majority of the gameplay, so you'd have thought they'd at least have got it right!

The first thing you'll notice about Gears is just how different its combat feels from most other shooters – if you try to play this like you'd play an FPS, you'll find yourself breaking your keyboard off the nearest pointed object quicker than you can say "run and gun". Lead Designer Cliffy B describes the gameplay as "stop and pop", and this is actually a fair description. Rather than simply running through levels blasting, Gears of War requires you to stay put, squatting behind bits of rubble, only to pop up every few seconds to spray another clip in the general direction of your foe.

"The scenery is some of the most impressive in any game"

And thankfully, while the game's incredibly unforgiving when it comes to your health, you'll find no shortage of things to cover behind as you progress through Gears' beautiful landscapes. Showing off the scope of the Unreal 3 Engine, Gears of War's scenery is some of the most impressive in any game, and the "destroyed beauty" theme is fantastically conveyed through the crumbling architecture you'll come across, and usefully, hide behind, as you progress through the game.



This is what you'll be doing for the majority of the game - staying put behind objects, cracking off numerous rounds into enemies whenever they're stupid enough to duck out of cover.

But this brings us to the first of Gears' flaws. You see, rather than using standard controls, like having a button for running, Gears has two speeds of >



The PC has five new chapters. While quite brown, they've got good variety.

> Gears of War continued

movement – either as slow as hell, when you're moving normally, or as fast as lightning, when you're holding space to dash for cover. This is one of the most frustrating aspects of the game, especially as it's nigh-on impossible to control which direction you're heading in when you're dashing, leaving you to take your finger off the dash button, crawl to a halt, and then try and re-orient yourself while being torn to pieces by locust bullets.

Even worse, you'd better pray that you're standing perfectly square-on with whatever you're trying to hide behind, as if you don't, the game won't have a clue what you're trying to do. Stand next to a pillar and press the dash/cover button, and there's every chance Marcus will just roll. Walk backwards, press the dash/cover button, and Marcus will quite happily dash into the same cover spot. This might not have annoyed the 360 players, but it damn sure annoys us.

Set piece in our time

Thankfully, once you've managed to get past the obvious flaws of the cover system, the rest of Gears of War's campaign is fine, and occasionally actually quite good. With several spectacular set pieces between you and monstrous enemies that are over five stories high, the campaign is chock full of action, and the five PC exclusive chapters make the deal even sweeter.

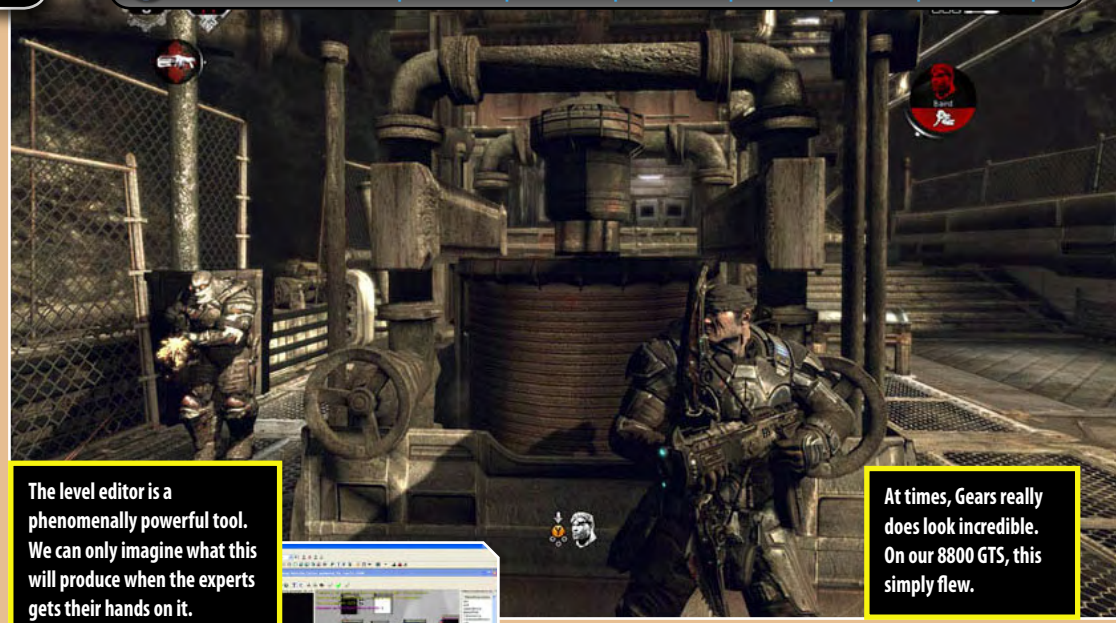
But unfortunately, the disappointment isn't over yet, as our other problem is with Gears' online mode, which has seemingly been designed to frustrate and infuriate in equal measures. When you get shot, you're given the chance to hammer a button to bring your character back to life (allegedly bringing his pulse back to speed). At the same time you're doing this, however, you'll have your opponents moving in towards you to deliver the finishing blow – a gruesome stamp to the back of your head known as the curb-stomp. When this happens – and keeps happening – just a split-second before you revive your player, it's incredibly annoying, and when combined with the Games for Window Live restrictions (if you don't already have a 360 Gold subscription, or aren't willing to pay £40 a year, you won't be able to earn online achievements, invite friends into games, or take part in ranked matches), Gears of War online is an eternal disappointment.

While the game was undoubtedly a huge hit on 360, over a year later, the time has taken some of the shine off Gears of War's polished space-marine armour.

Ian Morris

Another 360 games comes to the PC too late.





At times, Gears really does look incredible. On our 8800 GTS, this simply flew.



The level editor is a phenomenally powerful tool. We can only imagine what this will produce when the experts gets their hands on it.



King of the Hill is a new mode for GoW on PC, and is actually one of the best modes.

PCGZine Verdict

Beautiful, frustrating, buggy and brilliant. A real mixed bag.

- Great graphically, good performance
- Limited online if you don't pay
- Not as good as it's made out to be

70%



Empire Earth III

Everybody wants to rule the world…

Publisher: Vivendi
Developer: Mad Doc
Heritage: Empire Earth I & Empire Earth II
Link: www.empireearth.com
ETA: Out Now!

System Requirements: P4 1.7GHz; 512MB RAM; DirectX® 9.0c 128MB 3D video card with hardware T&L and Shader Model 2.0+


Conquer the world from the turn-based global map.


Real-time battles are a watered down version of Empire Earth II's.

After the success of the first two Empire Earth games, it was always inevitable that a third would follow. However, this latest instalment of the popular epoch-spanning RTS series takes a rather major detour from the formula of its predecessors by adding a global campaign map into the mix.

Siphoning some of the complexities from the real-time levels and adding them into this turn-based format, EE3 tasks you with leading a fledgling civilization to world domination through a combination of military might, diplomacy and economic strength. Starting out in 3000BC, you must capture provinces (each with their own Military, Economic and Imperial properties), discover new lands, research new technology and ultimately rule the globe.

Troops and spies can be moved from one province to the next, with each turn spanning a somewhat unrealistic 500 years. Once your armies enter a new region, the action switches to a more traditional real-time battleground, powered by an engine that looks positively archaic compared to the sparkling graphics of Supreme Commander and the Total War series.

"Nowhere near as involving as Empire Earth II was"

Sadly, troop path finding is atrocious. If you're a fan of the first two games, it's possible that these watered down real-time missions may prove a touch disappointing, as they're nowhere near as involving as Empire Earth II was.

Ultimately, Empire Earth III feels like one game watered down into two parts, and while the change of format offers a refreshing approach to familiar gameplay mechanics, there simply isn't enough variety and substance in either section to seriously turn your head, despite some solid skirmish options and a smattering of entertaining campaign features. ● ***Martin Korda***


"When we said tanked up, this isn't what we had in mind, lads."

WE DO NEED ANOTHER HERO

Complete side quests for big rewards

If you're not keen on freeform RTS gaming, then fear not, as Empire Earth III provides missions and goals to help guide you in the right direction. These may involve discovering new worlds on the turn-based map, or saving a tribe's princess from kidnappers in one of the real-time missions.



PCGZine Verdict

A great idea with somewhat lacklustre execution

- A novel approach for the series
- Accessible for newcomers
- One game watered down into two

79%



Hellgate London

Not so much World of Warcraft as Megalopolis of Mediocrity for this pretty but repetitive action RPG

Publisher: EA
Developer: Flagship
Heritage: Diablo II
Link: www.hellgatelondon.com
ETA: Out Now!

System Requirements:
OS: Windows XP with SP2 or Windows Vista
CPU: 1.8 GHz or faster (2.4 GHz for Vista)
RAM: 1GB (2GB for Vista)
Hard Drive: 7GB
Video Device: Directx 9.0c/10 compatible

Action RPGs have always had a bit of an identity crisis, with developers having to decide to put the emphasis on the action, or the role-playing. In Hellgate London the focus is resolutely on the fighting, with most character interaction and trading linked to improving your character's potency as a liberator of life.

The setting is refreshingly real-world, though we're 31 years ahead in London 2038. The city sits in smouldering ruins, ravaged by an invasion of some unspeakably ugly characters from, unsurprisingly, Hell. Humanity is trying to get its collective backside in gear to do something about the invaders, with the help of various characters including your own.

On your marks(man)

Character creation is pretty standard fare, though one interesting aspect is the option to play as a gun-toting Marksman (one of six possible classes to adopt). That choice switches your default view to first person, and essentially makes the game an RPGFPS.

It's all reasonably well done (and with a sense of humour at times); the graphics are effective and the music very moody. We did have some stability issues, however, with the game frustratingly crashing, muttering something about our memory (on a machine packing 2GB of the stuff). Annoyingly, this was after we spent 10 minutes waiting for the single-player game to update itself. This could suggest there are more bugs to be ironed out, though we didn't encounter any notable others.

That would be fine if the game were not so repetitive. Anyone who played Serious Sam will have experienced large scary monsters attacking from all angles before. This is not innovative gameplay, but it forms the backbone of Hellgate to the game's detriment.

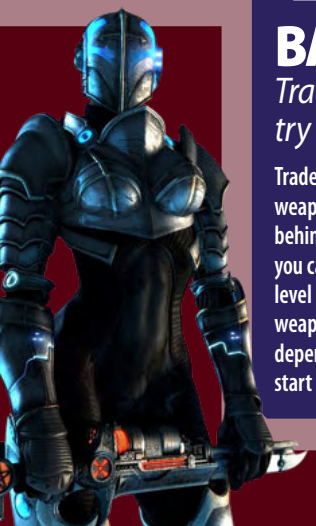
Online play is bafflingly similar to the single player game for the first couple of hours, and has to be updated separately (so another 10 minutes of sitting around). ● ***Andrew Sutcliffe***



BARROW BOYS

Traders of the Hyde Park will try to sell you all sorts...

Traders exist to equip you with improved weaponry and armour. Slain foe may leave behind the local currency, Palladium, which you can then use to purchase items. As you level up various skills, you can buy better weapons and armour, as well as some extras, dependent upon the class you selected at the start of the game.





Playing online puts you in touch with other like-minded nasty-creature-slayers. They didn't seem to talk much, though.

"London sits in smouldering ruins, ravaged by an invasion from Hell"



London's underground is full of ugly, scary beings. And it's the same in Hellgate.



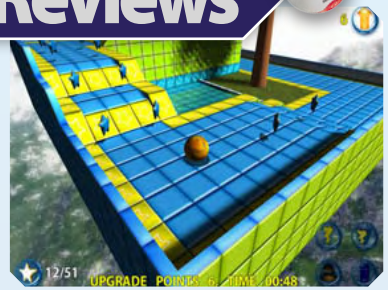
Venturing out of London will mean something terrifying tries to kill you. Just like if you stay in London, then.

PCGZine Verdict

Great potential goes mostly unrealised, unfortunately

- Impressive setting
- Stability issues
- Repetitive combat

72%



Marble Arena

Publisher: Brightside Entertainment
Developer: Brightside Entertainment
Price: Free

If you took Marble Blast Ultra and squinted a bit, you'd have a good idea of what Marble Arena is all about. Rolling said glass sphere around a number of courses, you'll have to collect stars along the way, until you have enough points to complete the level. Later courses are spiced up further with the addition of fans, and other physics trickery, as well as AI marbles who will try to ram you off course. Just how a developer works out the AI of a marble, we've no idea! With both multi- and single-player game modes, a built-in level editor, and the fact the game's free to play, Marble Arena is an impressive, if not entirely original package.

- Good Keyboard controls
- Plenty of levels
- Rubbish mouse controls

Keep rolling, rolling, rolling... **70%**



Requital

Publisher: Excalibur Publishing
Developer: Akella
Price: £24.99

If first impressions are everything, Requital never stood a chance. With an interface that looks like it's been cobbled together on a shoestring budget (in reality, it probably has), the world's worst voice acting, uninspiring characters, poor translations and a sloppy combat system, the game seems fatally flawed from the start. Unfortunately, the same remains true throughout. What you've got here is essentially a bog-standard RPG, with the kind of budget production values that put people off instantly. In a nutshell, this is a poor man's Oblivion – and you'd have to be pretty poor to choose this over the former.

- Awful graphics
- Predictable gameplay
- Mistranslated

Poor man's Oblivion. Go unrequited! **41%**



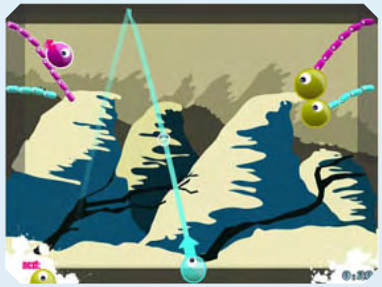
Sam & Max Season 2, Episode 1: Ice Station Santa

Publisher: Telltale Games
Developer: Telltale Games
Price: £5

Season 2 of Telltale Games' mini-adventure series kicks off in style this month with the launch of Ice Station Santa. When everyone's favourite (and only) dog and rabbit cop combo get attacked by a giant robot that was sent by Santa, the duo head to the North Pole to figure out what's driven the big guy insane. With the same dark sense of humour, witty one-liners, and perfectly balanced puzzles, this is yet another hit for Sam & Max.

- Funny
- Good puzzles
- Same great characterisation

Bring on the next episode! **85%**



Splume

Publisher: http://splume.flashbangstudios.com
Developer: Flashbang Studios
Price: Free

Free browser-based web games seem to be in vogue this month, but who are we to complain when the output is as good as this. Splume plays a bit like age old classic Puzzle Bobble, just with one difference – now, it's physics based. No longer can you have huge strings of balls suspended by one tiny sphere from the roof – instead, the whole thing will start to swing and sway, sometimes even swinging past the "failure" line, causing you to lose the level. With a built in level editor, and a really cool "happening right now" leaderboard, Splume is well worth a look. Just brush up on your GCSE physics first and you'll have a better chance!

- Puzzling
- Physics
- Free

Not a classic, but fun nonetheless **74%**



Plasmaworm

Publisher: www.digital-eel.com/plasmaworm
Developer: Digital Eel
Price: Free

As far as cheap Snake rip-offs go, this is the cheapest. After all, it is free *bu-dum*. But joking aside, what you have here is quite simply a slightly updated version of Snake, which adds all sorts of obstacles into the later levels for you to avoid, as you try to swallow more and more random objects to make your snake bigger. With a migrain-inducing background, some truly awful music, and graphics befitting of an Amiga game, we don't really think too much of this one. You'd be better off tying yourself to your mum's clothes line and running in circles around the garden avoiding dog shit and pot plants without ever stepping over your own bit of string.

- Just like Snake
- Migraines
- Crap soundtrack

Slippery and best left in the long grass! **38%**

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Tech Support

We've received so many emails asking for advice, we thought we'd better open up a dedicated help desk. Send your questions to help.pcgzine@gamerzines.com



Neil Mohr has been playing with and playing on PCs for over a decade

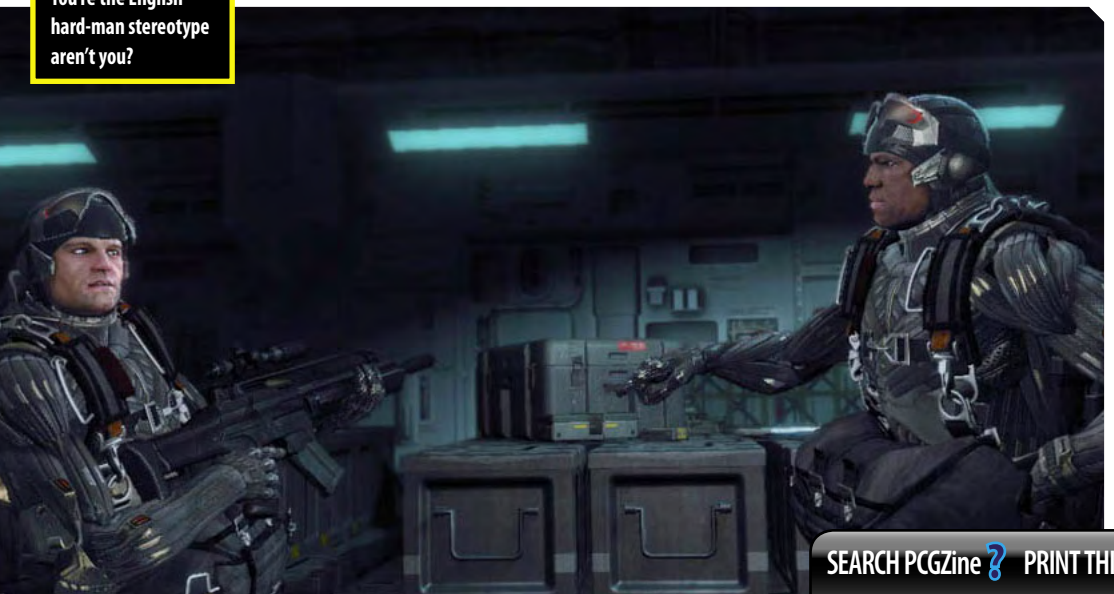
TOTAL CRISIS

I've been trying to run the Crysis demo on my ATI X1950 Pro card and Core 2 E6420 processor, but I'm only getting invisible objects. The odd thing is the first time I ran it, it worked perfectly. I've tried reinstalling the drivers and game with no success.

> *This is a problem we've encountered to much annoyance here at Gamerzine towers. As it turned out the problem seemed to be connected to the 3D settings in the ATI driver. Open up the Catalyst Control Center and select the 3D settings; reset all of these to either Disabled or Application controlled.*

We've also come across some more advice from EA that may help others with general problems. To start if you have a 64-bit OS, forget running the 64-bit version of Crysis. You're best locating the 'bin32' folder in the Crysis install folder and running the Crysis.exe found there. Another suggestion to cure in-game crashes with the 64-bit version is to make sure the Windows Firewall Control Panel has the 64-bit executable listed ñ as by default it may only add the 32-bit version.

Generally a number of ATI problems have to be fixed by reinstalling the previous 7.09 drivers or the current 7.10 Catalyst drivers. We'd expect performance boosts from the next 7.11 drivers, so keep an eye out for these.



You're the English hard-man stereotype aren't you?



Despite being ever so beautiful, their games wouldn't run either

NOTHING INTEGRATED

After I load the Sierra game Joint Task Force I receive the following error message "Your graphics card does not support pixel shaders or vertex shaders". I've just bought a Toshiba Satellite P205-S6287 with Windows Vista installed.

> *Oh dear, the problem here, and one that plagues lots of laptops and cheap PCs - is that the integrated graphics that the Toshiba uses - the Intel GMA950 - do not actually support pixel and vertex shaders in the hardware, only via software emulation, which the game will not use. Unfortunately there's nothing you can do to fix the problem.*

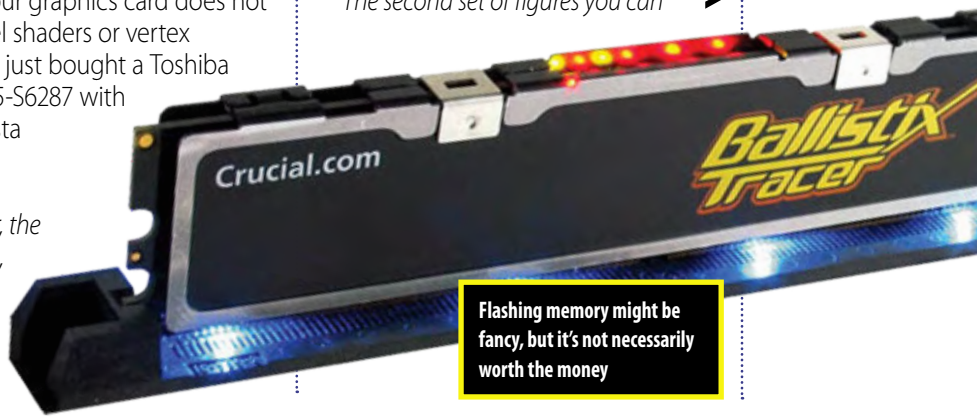
"The graphics problem here is one that plagues lots of laptops and cheap PCs"

COMPLEX MEMORY

I'm looking at a memory upgrade but I can't figure out what DDR2 memory 4-4-4-12 DIMM means. Do I also need dual or single-channel? My motherboard says it has a 1,333MHz FSB, can you recommend the best memory for me?

> *We'll try to keep this short. DDR2 is the memory generation based on the DDR 'Double Data Rate' technology it uses; so DDR1 was the first generation, DDR2 is the second and DDR3 has just been released for the latest Intel systems.*

The second set of figures you can >



Flashing memory might be fancy, but it's not necessarily worth the money

Tech Support

> *ignore, they're related to timings the motherboard uses for the memory. If you want to get into overclocking they become more useful but otherwise these are set automatically by the motherboard, after an exceedingly polite chat with the memory modules.*

Most motherboards support both dual and single-channel memory. If you install two identical memory modules - called DIMMs - these can be both used at the same time over a dual-channel, which provides a boost in memory speed. An odd number of DIMMs would force it to use a slower single-channel system.

As to what type of memory, we'd normally ask for more information as to your motherboard. As it is, it'll be an Intel based one. Intel systems tend to benefit less from fast memory than AMD systems. Therefore you'll be best looking for two 1GB DDR2 667MHz DIMMs, sometimes called PC2-5300. This will give you 2GB of total memory for around £35.



Not official in any way, but it works and is up-to-date.

VISTA-A-GO-GO

I was thinking of installing Windows Vista on my Dell laptop, which has 3GB of RAM, an Intel dual core 1.83GHz processor and a 256MB GeForce Go 7300. This is because new drivers for my graphics card are Vista only, and since I really only play new games, I thought I should upgrade. Would you recommend this, or is there some way I can get drivers for my hardware?

> *We would say no. Vista is simply still too quirky to use on upgraded systems and as you won't be able to use DirectX 10 graphics there's no advantage to Vista over XP. On such a new Dell you'd probably be better off than most, but why take the risk?*

As for getting upgraded drivers, the official line from ATI and NVIDIA with laptops is that only the manufacturer can provide drivers. Thankfully hacked drivers will enable you to continue updating with XP. Browse over to www.omegadrivers.net for the latest NVIDIA ones.

FORCE INSTALL

I'm trying to install my Sidewinder FFB Wheel 4.0 on my new computer Dell XPS410 running Windows XP. Everything appears to install OK but when I click the 'Recorder' tab I get a RUNNDLL error: An exception occurred while trying to run joy.cpl, Game Controllers. I've tried reinstalling and updating it and DirectX.

> *As long as you're running this from an Administrator's account all should be well. However we did find reference to a very odd driver issue that can cause this error. Apparently you will need to force Windows XP to use the default signed driver that ships with Windows XP. Go into the Device Manager, locate the Wheel's driver and choose Update Driver. Choose to Install from a list or specific location, then select 'Don't search' and then choose the signed driver from the list.*

"Vista is simply still too quirky to use on upgraded systems. Why take the risk?"



Microsoft, why did you stop making such a beautiful wheel?

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