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PCGZine

Issue 31 | June 2009

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- BIOSHOCK2
- STALKER CALL OF PRIPYAT
- STRONGHOLD
- NATURAL SELECTION 2
- SUBVERSION
- OPERATION FLASHPOINT: DRAGON RISING
- AND MORE!

MASSIVE REVIEW!

ARMA

You think you know war? Think again.

BONUS! Free ARMA II Screensaver!

THE HOTTEST NEWS AND EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEWS FROM E3 2009...

- MODERN WARFARE 2
- ALAN WAKE
- BRINK
- SPLINTER CELL

E3 expo

PLUS ALL THESE GAMES & MORE

REVIEWED!

THE SIMS 3

Back? They never left...

REVIEWED!

HIRED GUNS: JAGGED EDGE

Some Anti Aliasing required.

REVIEWED!

OFFICERS WWII

Is it an Officer's Mess?

REVIEWED!

LEFT4DEAD 2

Valve's latest revealed!

REVIEWED!

DIRT2

Cars and.../Battersea?

Welcome to PCGZine



Ah, it's that time of year again: the sun is shining; the birds are singing; and at E3 ears are ringing to the sound of a thousand throbbing bass amps. We were there and we've returned, ears bleeding, with a host of new screens and info on all the hottest games at the the show. We've a special extended preview section this month to bring you exclusive E3 interviews from exciting new titles like Brink and Splinter Cell Conviction, plus new screens and info for Alan Wake, Modern Warefare 2, Valve's new Left4Dead sequel and loads more. It's a great month for games news. But we're not all about E3 this issue. Check out our epic ArmA2 review and see if you've got the guts for war!

Dan Hutchinson, Editor
pcgzine@gamerzines.com

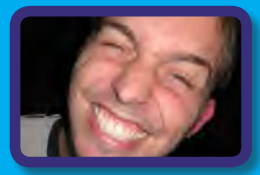
READER FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of the magazine!

MEET THE TEAM

Probably the best games writers on the planet



Andy Griffiths
Welcome new staff writer Andy, you'll be seeing a lot of him...



Will Porter
Will's braved LA and come back alive with tall tales to tell...

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



ArmA II
War on a scale you've never seen...



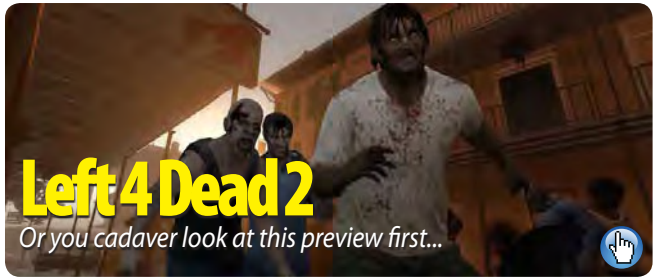
The Sims 3
Forget Big Brother, we're watching our sims.



Alan Wake
New screens and info!



Spinter Cell Conviction
Exclusive Interview!



Left 4 Dead 2
Or you cadaver look at this preview first...



Brink
Was this the best of E3?



Modern Warfare 2
It's all gone a bit Die Hard 2...

QUICK FINDER

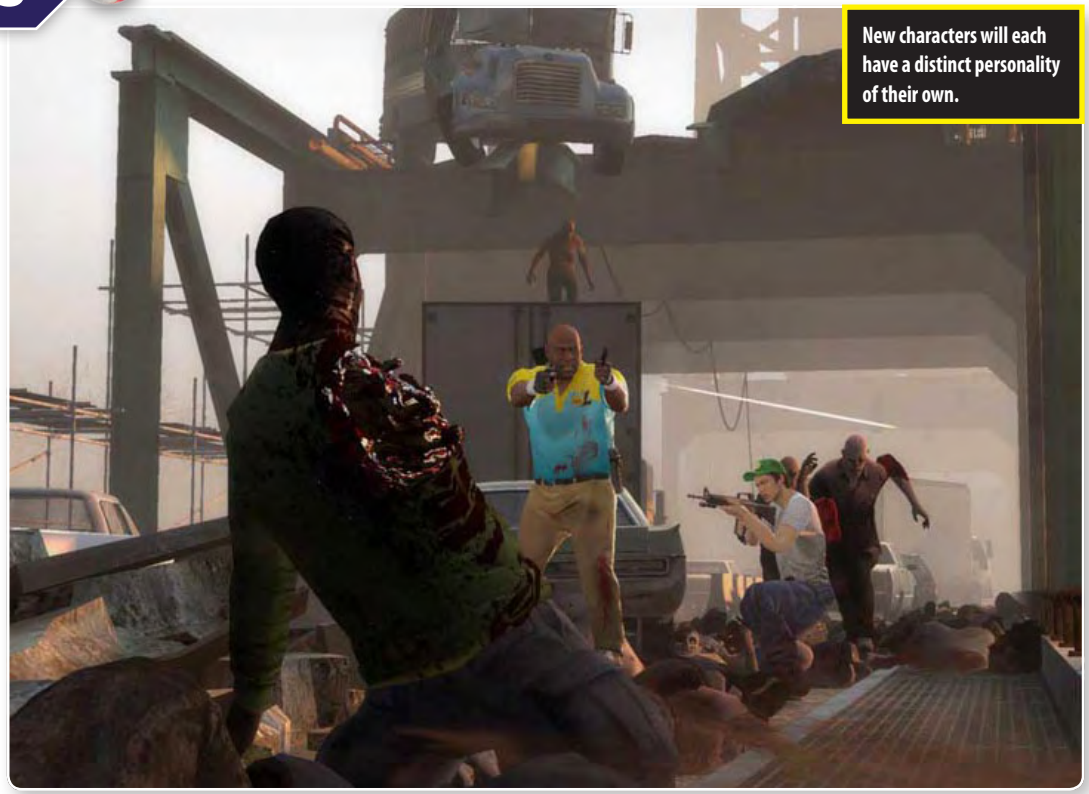
Every game's just a click away!

Left 4 Dead 2	Modern Warfare 2
S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Call of Pripyat	Splinter Cell Conviction
DiRT 2	ArmA II
Operation Flashpoint 2	The Sims 3
Brink	Hired Guns: The Jagged Edge
Alan Wake	Officers: World War II

MORE FREE MAGAZINES! LATEST ISSUES!

Publisher: EA
Developer: Valve
Heritage: CounterStrike, Left 4 Dead
Link: www.l4d.com
ETA: November

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of Left 4 Dead 2



New characters will each have a distinct personality of their own.

Left 4 Dead 2

FIRST LOOK

Bigger, badder, and in the Deep South of America… Left 4 Dead returns

What's the story?
The outbreak is sweeping across the US, and this time it's heading for New Orleans. This new version of the multiplayer shooter features the adventures of four entirely new characters who must fight to survive.

What do we know?
The game will not focus on melee combat, as baseball bats, frying pans and chainsaws have been shown off in the new trailer and the videos. The maps will also be far more open, allowing you to take multiple routes through any given level to the end area. Not only that but the Director will be able to rebuild the level ahead of you for dramatic effect, changing the very layout of the world.

When do we get more?
There's not a lot of time before the game hit – it's out in Q4 this year – but we can expect Valve to reveal a whole lot more detail on the various maps before then.

Anything else to declare?
This rapidly produced sequel has lost nothing in momentum. It's bigger than the original game – both in terms of having one more campaign and the maps being bigger within all five campaigns – but it's also got bigger environments and a new zombie type – the charger. Expect an awesome challenge from this sequel.



New horde challenges will mean constant flows of zombies.



Massive new maps allow some creativity for your journey.

ANNO 1404



PLAYBACK OPTIONS: ENHANCED

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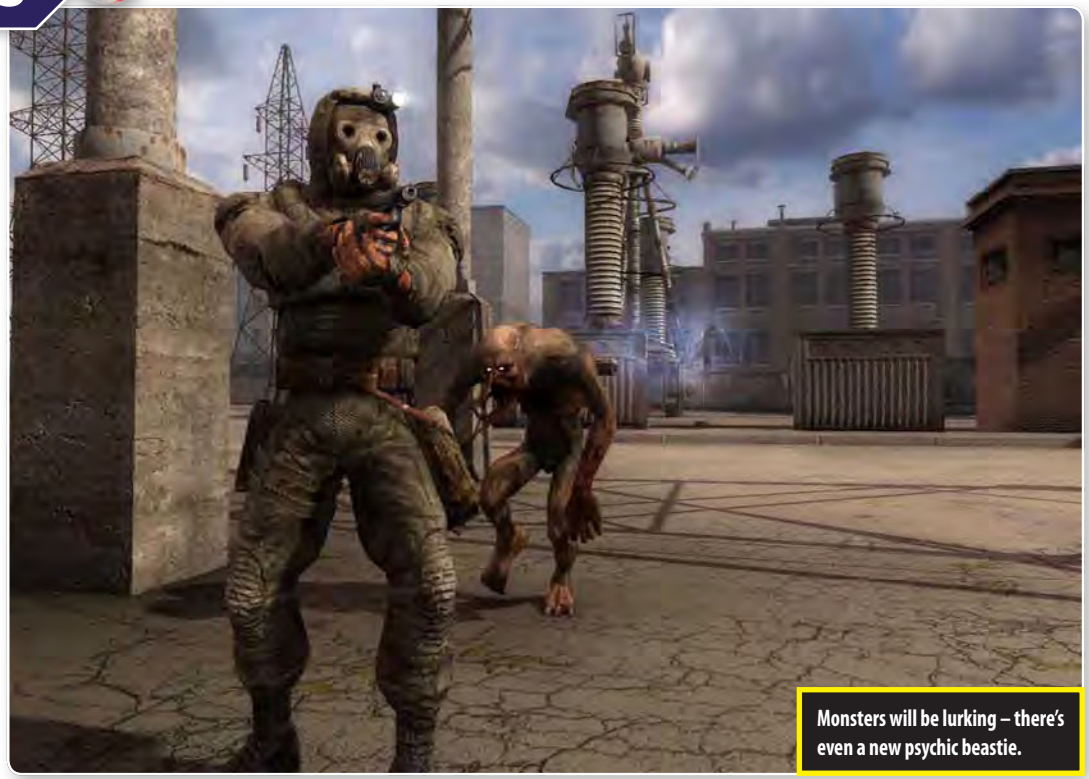
PC DVD ROM

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Monsters will be lurking – there's even a new psychic beastie.

S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Call of Pripyat

FIRST LOOK

New zone, new story – could this apocalyptic sequel be the ultimate S.T.A.L.K.E.R. game?

Publisher: Deep Silver
Developer: GSC Gameworld
Heritage: S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Shadow of Chernobyl
Link: http://cop.stalker-game.com
ETA: Q4 2009

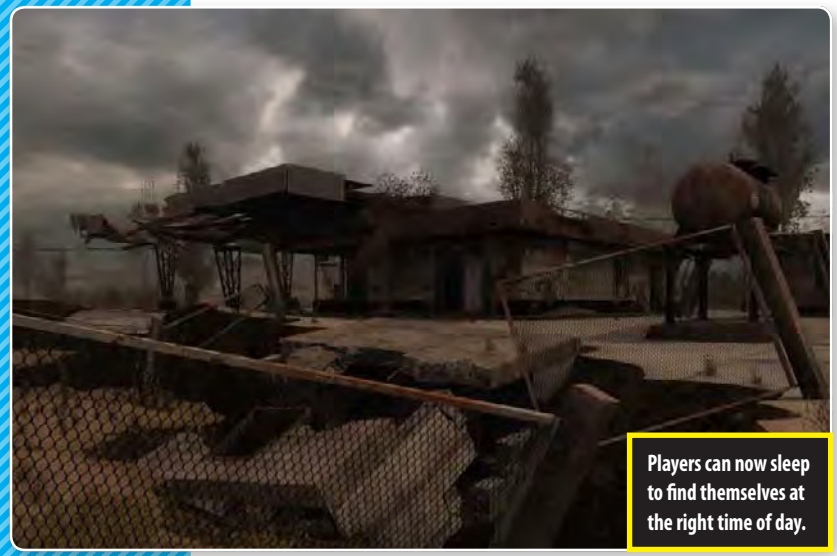
PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Call of Pripyat

What's the story?

Ukrainian masters GSC have returned once again to the Chernobyl exclusion zone to tell a tale of nature gone haywire and technology gone bad. Call of Pripyat tells the tale of what happened after Shadow of Chernobyl. This time the player is an agent of the Ukrainian government, sent into the zone to figure out why it is still inaccessible after the blast from the original game.

What do we know?

Call of Pripyat will constitute the largest addition of new material to the zone so far, with three entirely new regions for players to investigate. The finest of these will be an entire district of the abandoned city, Pripyat, and the rotting shipyards of the river basin.



Players can now sleep to find themselves at the right time of day.



Huge new environments will dominate the return to the zone.

When do we get more?

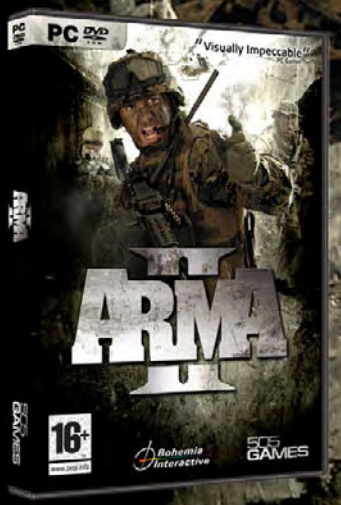
The game's out at the end of 2009, and we're expecting videos of new features and plenty of in-game info to appear on our radar in the coming months. The S.T.A.L.K.E.R. site is regularly updated with info tidbits.

Anything else to declare?

The worst elements of the previous game (Clear Sky) have been dropped, with the A-life intelligence running the factional disputes, rather than the faction system. Most players seem to favour this idea, making the world much more alive.

"Visually Impeccable"
PC Gamer

ARMA II





PLAYBACK OPTIONS: ENHANCED

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7 UP

More golden nuggets of gaming glory to come



DiRT 2

Publisher: Codemasters | **ETA:** September

Something very special is happening to Codemaster's racing series – they've discovered American culture. And you know what that means: bright lights, rawk music, and living in a trailer park. Okay, so the core game remains a splendid off-road racer, but the packaging is pure extreme sports.

Operation Flashpoint 2

Publisher: Codemasters | **ETA:** Autumn

The wide-open shooter of great realism – that's the heart of the game that we're not expecting to come out in the winter of 2009. It's Call of Duty 4 without walls – you can use the landscape to travel as far and as wide as you want, but there will always been a central mission urging you onwards. Don't lose this war, soldier.





Stronghold Kingdoms

Publisher: FireFly Studios | **ETA:** TBA

Firefly, the team behind Stronghold, have decided to take the series online. Creating a web-based Medieval Europe, the team are allowing us to become barons on our own time, collecting taxes, building settlements and going to war with our neighbours. It's a genuine MMO-RTS, and we can't wait to see it in action.

Subversion

Publisher: Introversion Software | **ETA:** TBA

Introversion have been revealing more about their city game, Subversion. They've shown off security systems and bullet physics, suggesting a huge-scale infiltration game of some kind. It's also getting funding from a UK technology council, which allows it to get even more experimental.



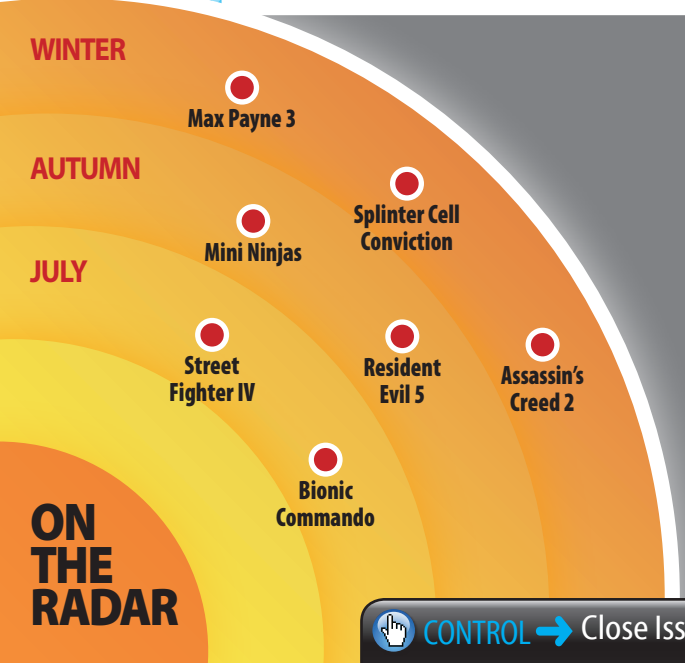
Natural Selection 2

Publisher: Unknown Worlds | **ETA:** Q4 2009

The return of the real-time strategy and first-person shooter hybrid mod brings with it some genuine excitement among its die-hard players. The team have taken years to turn this game around and now they've finally shown some footage. And it's impressive indeed.



ON THE RADAR



Front Mission Evolved

Publisher: Square-Enix | **ETA:** TBA

Squeenix have been knocking out the Front Mission games for years on console, but this is a slightly different angle – a third-person shooter angle to be precise. The configurable robots will be shooting each other into molten fragments as you make war in an urban setting.





BioShock 2

Publisher: 2K Games | **ETA:** TBA

Digital Extremes, have been tasked with making the underwater shooter an interesting experience for the online gamer. Apparently, elements of the game are going to fill in the single-player narrative, as you play the roll of a pre-collapse plasmid tester.

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FIRST LOOK

ALAN WAKE

They say it changes when the sun goes down, around here…

Publisher: Microsoft
Developer: Remedy Entertainment
Heritage: The Max Payne series
Link: www.alanwake.com
ETA: 2010

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

We think it's best to start with the bad news… in all likelihood, Alan Wake will hit the Xbox 360 before it does the beautiful sun-kissed shores of the PC, as at the moment they're concentrating on the console release. The good news though, is that there's little doubt that it will be worth the wait. Finally, after a painful hiatus, the latest from the creators of PC action classics Max Payne 1 and 2 has shown off gameplay that gives life to its beautiful engine.

"Alan Wake is a best-selling writer, but he has a problem," explains producer Jyri Ranki ominously as we sit in the Microsoft booth at E3. "He hasn't written anything in over two years, so now his wife Alice has taken him away to the idyllic small town of Bright Falls in Washington to get back his creative flow. But when she vanishes, Wake finds himself trapped in a nightmare, and his latest work – a thriller novel he doesn't even remember writing – is coming true before his very eyes."



It looks jolly and yellow during the daytime, but it'll be a different story come nightfall.

"Paced and styled like a TV show, the dialogue and storyline seem impeccable"

BEST OF E3



The Remedy fascination with player characters who appear constipated shows no sign of stopping.

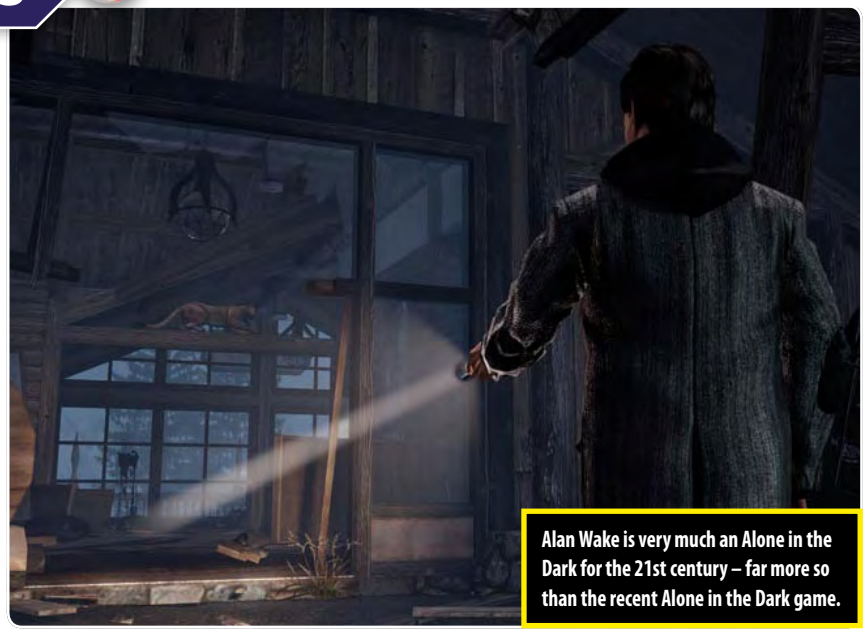
Paced and styled like a TV show – in that it's split into in-game episodes – and somewhat reminiscent of Twin Peaks, the dialogue and storyline of Alan Wake seem impeccable – it's genuinely eerie to find lost pages of Wake's manuscript before seeing them all come true in the gameplay.

As for the action, well – as you might well suspect – it all deals with a battle between light and dark. "Light is a key gameplay element," explains Ranki. "It reveals things as they truly are; it's a safe haven for the player in the night and a combat tool for the player in the dark. A light source like a >



He's not a happy chap, is our Alan. Poor thing.

Alan WAKE



Alan Wake is very much an Alone in the Dark for the 21st century – far more so than the recent Alone in the Dark game.



When there's a mechanised dangling lift involved, you just know something will go wrong…

> Alan Wake continued

flashlight is always more important than, for instance, a firearm."

Essentially, darkness has tainted Bright Falls, shrouding its occupants, wildlife and even inanimate objects and machinery. As Wake guardedly walks through the game's massive game world – in this case searching for an injured local called Rusty who's been dragged through the forest by an unknown force – he must break through the shield of darkness from those stumbling after him, before finishing them off with his pistol, or watch them fizz into nothingness by firing a flare gun in their direction. Fixing generators and turning on lights, meanwhile, will gift him an area that the forces of darkness cannot go into.

Sound and vision

Not only are the visuals beautiful and the music haunting, but the scripted happenstances of Wake's quest for his lost wife are conjured up in stunning and suspenseful ways – the machines that suddenly lurch into life and bulldoze the buildings that he's in, for example, are genuinely spooky. What's more, the slow-mo effects when the dark taint is ripped from possessed yokels by a burning red flare is gorgeous and exciting to watch – the legacy of Max Payne can be felt at its strongest here. Yet it isn't all corridors, Alan Wake's adventures will take him over both hill and dale in a vast playing area that will see him pootling around in cars just as much as hiding behind a portable light source. The 360 may well have Mr Wake first, but that's no reason to let him slip off your radar.

TENDER IS THE NIGHT

The dark is a worrying place to be…



Daytime | **Gloomy night** | **Dawn**

Daytime

During the day Bright Falls is a pleasant place to be, with a reduced chance of someone pouncing on you. That said, the locals will still behave oddly. Remedy are playing up the fact that the supporting cast of Alan Wake will be strong, amusing and faintly sinister. With this in mind, the day-time is for wandering and NPC chit-chat.

PCGZine Alan WAKE

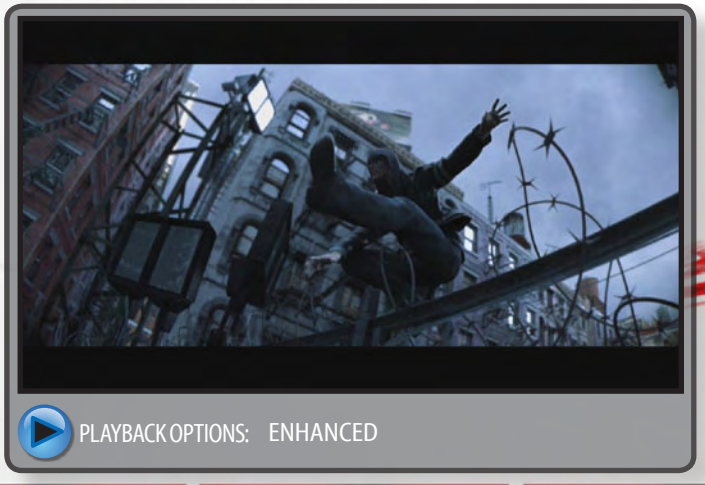
HOW COMPLETE? 75%

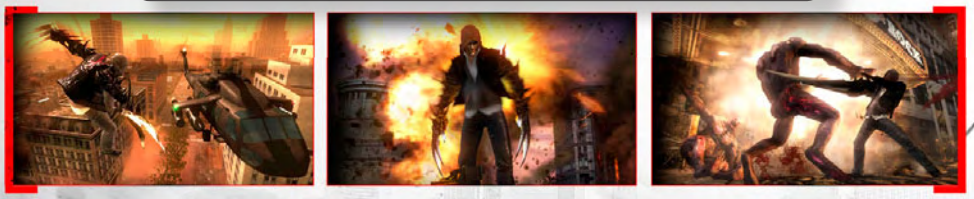
FIRST IMPRESSIONS? 85%

We'll be keeping an eye open for this one

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FIRST LOOK

BRINK

BEST OF E3

Splash Damage take us one step closer to the edge…

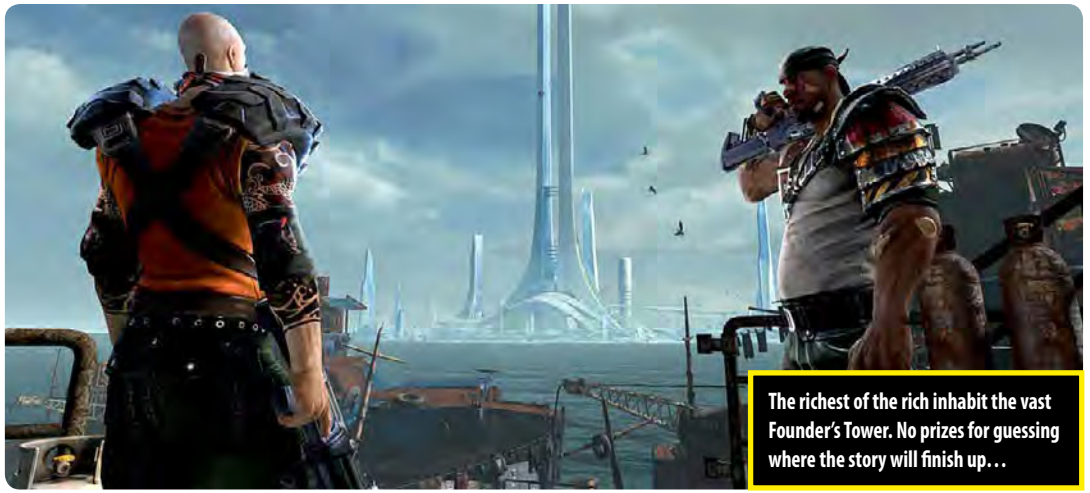
Publisher: Bethesda
Developer: Splash Damage
Heritage: Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory, Quake Wars
Link: www.splashdamage.com
ETA: 2010

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

Taking the mentality of Enemy Territories Wolfenstein and Quake Wars and putting them inside a slick story-driven game is no simple task, yet over the past few years Splash Damage have been carefully assembling a development dream team with exactly that in mind. It all takes place in Ark, a floating haven for the world's elite that bobs on the top of an ocean that global warming has seen swamp the land. Here Ark's law enforcers are in constant conflict with the homeless stowaways trying to scrape a living there, often resulting in the spray of both bullets and arteries.

Playing co-operatively

You'll be able to play Brink with three other players in co-op fashion in story-based missions, but brilliantly, in every level there will be players on the rival side doing their best to attain their own goals. Even more brilliantly, you'll be swapping between different roles and selecting your own dynamically created personal mini-missions – each with a set amount of experience to gain attached to them, according to their relative difficulty – as you and your team move through the level. Whether it's sneaking behind enemy lines to torture a hapless NPC foe >



The richest of the rich inhabit the vast Founder's Tower. No prizes for guessing where the story will finish up…



The vibrant and crisp graphical style is a pure joy.

BRINK

> Brink continued

into spilling his guts, or blasting a short-cut in the level… everyone has an assigned, and self-chosen duty. It's the natural evolution of the defined player roles and responsibility seen in the Enemy Territory series, and plays as a fast-paced bullet frenzy.

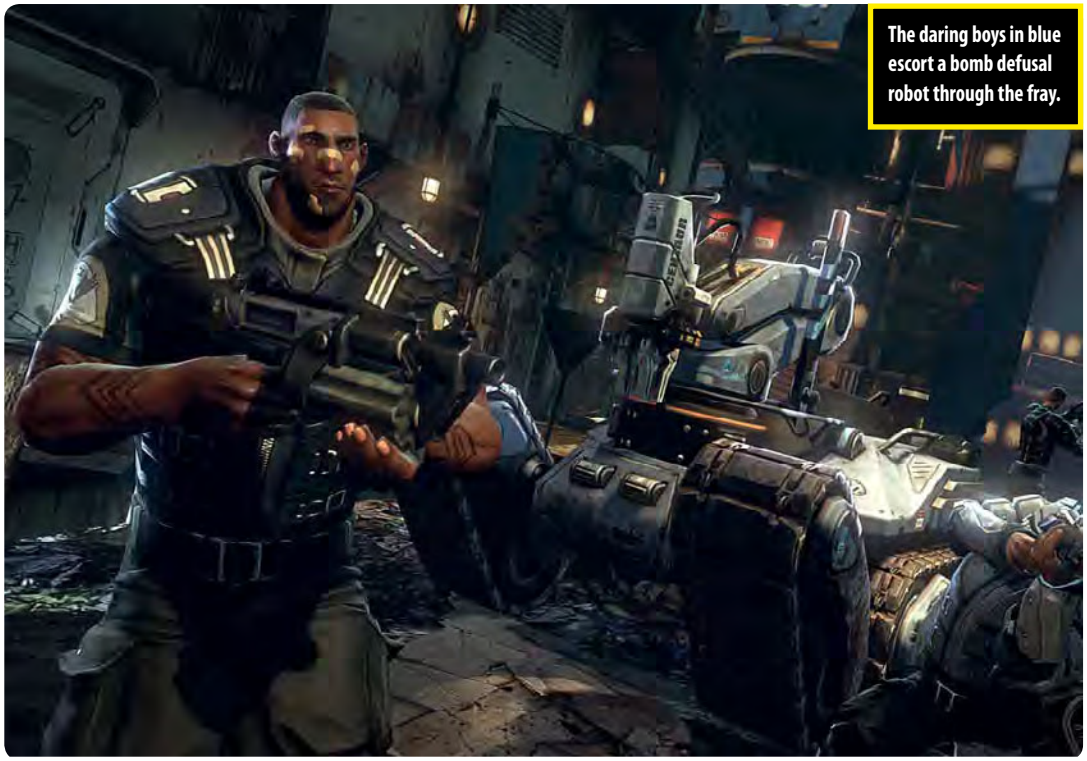
Level on show

The level on show at this year's E3 was set in Container City, with the storyline and action seen through the eyes of Ark's security forces rather than the rebels. Formerly this is where automated systems would ferry the elite's belongings over to their quarters as and when they were demanded, in the brave new world of Brink it has become a slum where the locals aren't over-chuffed with the boys in blue. Quite how the other side of the coin plays out is unknown, but the security forces narrative sees four bickering guards escort a bomb disposal bot through the settlement – with echoes of Wolf ET's Gold Rush map – and cut their way into a container that holds slightly more than they bargained for.

"There's still a long way to go for Brink, but its wild ambition makes it a remarkable prospect"

It doesn't end with this refinement of single and multiplayer dynamics though, since Brink is also going a long way in terms of manoeuvrability – incorporating something that Splash Damage call the 'Smart' system that plays out like a condensed variation on Mirror's Edge style acrobatics. Press the Smart button and the game will look at your environment and guess that you'll be intent on, say, sliding beneath an airport security laser – or if you're looking slightly upwards, that you'll be wanting to leap atop the security gateway itself. Much skidding, sliding and vaulting ensues – meaning that the fast-paced nature of Brink never fades away.

It's very clear that there's still a long way to go for Brink, but its wild ambition makes it a remarkable prospect. With its crisp, clear visuals and engaging sci-fi mentality, it could very well blow our minds on its release next year – let's just hope that the flood waters don't subside for a while yet… ●



The daring boys in blue escort a bomb defusal robot through the fray.

Roll over screen for annotations



PCGZine BRINK

HOW COMPLETE? 55%

FIRST IMPRESSIONS? 80%

A hugely exciting prospect for PC multiplayer gaming

AION



PLAYBACK OPTIONS: ENHANCED

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FIRST LOOK

MODERN WARFARE 2

The world's greatest military shooter specialist prepares to shock and awe

BEST OF E3

"The chances are that the game's box will come emblazoned with warnings about not forgetting to breath while playing…"

Publisher: Activision
Developer: Infinity Ward
Heritage: The Call of Duty series, Medal of Honor: Allied Assault
Link: http://modernwarfare2.infinityward.com
ETA: November

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of Modern Warfare 2

Sure, it helps if the guns are big and the explosions are pretty, but what Infinity Ward have always specialised in is the delicate art of pacing a level; stuffing it with enough surprise and suspense to ensure that your attention levels never once fall below a level marked 'utter joy'. The level on show at this year's E3 was an outright masterclass. Perilous mountain ascents complete with climbing axes and slow-motion NPCs flailing for your grip, rubbed shoulders with picking out blizzard-blinded sentries on a heartbeat sensor and blasting them from close range – or waiting for your sniping companion to do the business. A chaotic battle and a compendium of exploding MIGS on an enemy runway suddenly blurred into a headlong Die Hard 2 style chase through snowy forests on the back of a Skidoo. The chances are that the game's box will come emblazoned with warnings about not forgetting to breathe while playing…

"What we want to get across is that it's a true sequel – the storyline picks off directly from cues in the first game," explains Infinity Ward's >



Sadly there won't be any snowmobiles in multiplayer. Lots of fun to scoot around on in the main game, though.

> Modern Warfare 2 cont.

Robert Bowling, having leapt over a canyon to safety on his snowmobile steed and Uzi-ed five Russians in hot pursuit into pine trees. "At the end of Call of Duty 4 there's the shoot-out on the bridge, and characters may, or may not, have died – but unfortunately one of the villain Zakhaev's main guys, Makerov, is still around." Seeing as former player character Soap McTavish is actually the chap ordering you around in the E3 demonstration, it's clear that there was at least one survivor, but the new menace of Makerov was more than enough to call in Taskforce 141 – who are the international military super-unit, high profile target chasers and yourself – and Soap's new comrades.

"Tweaks to the existing CoD 4 engine mean that levels can now be bigger and more varied"

What's more, tweaks to the existing CoD 4 engine mean that levels can now be bigger and more varied, despite providing far more detailed environments and character models close-by. "The designers have the freedom to not do the scripted corridor levels, but levels like Favela – a mission that takes place in Brazil and gives you multiple paths that you can take, and dynamic AI that reacts accordingly." Explains Bowling, referencing a Rio-based level that features a colourful shanty town and the arms of the famous arms-outstretched Jesus statue towering over the scene. "The new technology we have in our engine allows us to have these much bigger worlds."

But what else? Well there's the utterly immaculate stunt motion-capture work, that sees enemies being yanked off snowmobiles with ice axes or pile-driven into sets of open lockers with weighty finesse. There's the talk of levels set in Afghan caves and Russian dockyards – and even a mooted sequence that involves the International Space Station. Then there's the multiplayer that Infinity Ward aren't even talking about yet, but still sends a shiver down the spine at the thought of it. There's just so much to be excited about and very little doubt that Modern Warfare 2 will be the shooter of the year. November can't arrive soon enough.



As well as the gun-toting mercenaries, there will also be innocent civilians fleeing from the carnage in levels like the Rio favela.

Roll over screen for annotations



PCGZine

HOW COMPLETE? 55%

FIRST IMPRESSIONS? 95%

A hugely exciting prospect for PC multiplayer gaming

Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Ubisoft Montreal
Link: http://splintercell.us.ubi.com/conviction
ETA: Winter

Fisher King

BEST OF E3

It's back to basics for Sam Fisher, even if the basics have become even more stunning than before…

So what's happening with Sam Fisher? What's changed since last time round in Double Agent?
Well, Sam Fisher is on a personal quest in Splinter Cell Conviction – his daughter died during Double Agent, so he's essentially looking for the answer to who killed her. Because of all that, and because it's more personal this time, he's more violent, more agile and the gameplay has changed.

How so?
We want faster-paced gameplay. One of the things we don't do any more is that we don't force the shadows on the player – it's now more of a tool. Sam isn't weak in the dark now; he's truly powerful and that's the feeling we want to give to the player. Also, because we have this faster gameplay, we want people to be immersed the whole time. We don't want any cut-scenes and we don't want any loading screens, so we've really innovated in how we unroll the story. We do stuff like project movies onto walls while you're interrogating somebody, for example, so you can visualise it without being pulled out of the game.


The crowds of people in different locations are a great feature of the game.

So where will Sam Fisher's sneaking-around antics take him in this game?
Well, what we're showing at E3 takes place in Malta, but most of the rest of the game will be in Washington DC – and we're trying to use as many iconic locations as possible. Something else that's new is that during loading times you see everything that's going to be in the next map – the transition between the levels is hidden by the video showing where the enemies >





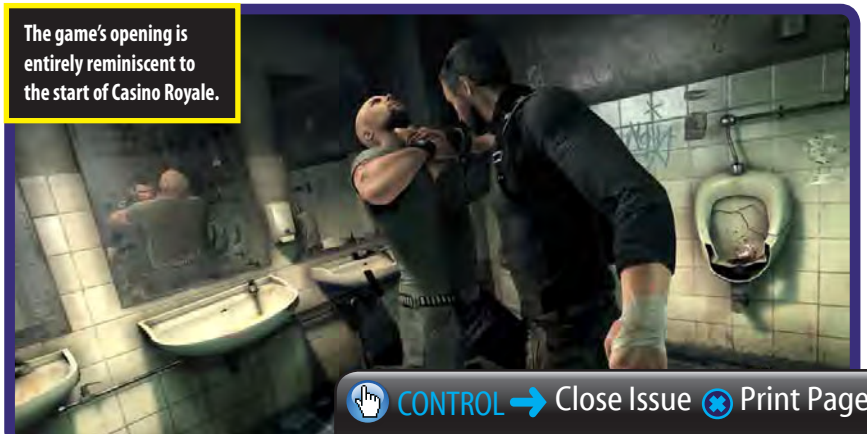
With his extreme manoeuvrability there's a greater feeling of guards being Fisher's prey in Conviction, rather than the other way round.



> Interview continued

are in the next map, and hints as to what you should do.

Is it fair to say that Splinter Cell is becoming more and more of a Hollywood action experience?
The cinematographic look is definitely something we're going for. Then again, we're not so much going for action as what we're calling 'dynamic stealth'. In previous games, whenever you set off an alarm or got seen by a camera it was pretty much game over. With Conviction we want to give the player more options once that happens, so we now have the 'last known position', meaning that when you're spotted, as soon as you vanish, you see a white silhouette – which is where the AI thinks you are. So you can effectively play cat and mouse with the AI. What's more, to allow for faster gameplay there's an innovation called 'mark and execute' – which is like when someone like Bourne or Jack Bauer scopes out what is in a room, plans ahead and takes them all out as soon as he bursts through the door. We can promise you that it feels really good to play.



The game's opening is entirely reminiscent to the start of Casino Royale.

When the game was shown two years ago it was a very different…
Previously we were a bit too excited in terms of redefining the franchise. But after listening to the fans and the journalists, we went back to the drawing board and said 'Okay, let's bring back what was fun in the old games, but give it a faster pace that ties in the with the story'. All the technology that we had in that first version though, it's still in here – the civilian behaviour for example. It's not like we went all the way back to Double Agent and started again!



ArmA II

Team Razor… disposable, or the best a man can get?

The key difference between a soldier sim like ArmA II and a military first-person shooter like Call of Duty 4? Uncertainty. In this follow-up to 2007's flawed but peerless ArmA, half the time you don't know where the enemy are, or even *who* they are. They could be miles away; they could be round the next corner. They could be rustic irregulars packing hunting rifles and hope; they could be canny special forces backed by T-72 tanks and Frogfoot bombers. You just don't know.

These scary unknowns combined with immense tactical freedom and exacting realism make playing ArmA II a deeply memorable experience, but not one that will suit every taste. If the screenshots scattered over these >

PCGZine

EXCLUSIVE SCREENSAVER

Click on the download button on the right to save the screensaver to your PC.



Publisher: 505 Games
Developer: Bohemia Interactive
Heritage: Operation Flashpoint, ArmA
Link: www.arma2.com
ETA: 19th June

System Requirements: Dual core CPU, 1GB RAM, 256MB Shader Model 3-capable GPU

> ArmA II continued

pages were a true reflection of the campaign then 70 per cent of them would show Team Razor (a five-man Marine Corps recon squad sent in as part of a US effort to stop ex-Soviet Republic Chernarus from sliding into civil war) advancing warily through villages and woods, or travelling pensively in the backs of helos and APCs. Anticipation and atmosphere rather than action. Welcome to the reality of modern warfare.

Bohemia Interactive have obviously listened to the criticism levelled at the story segment of their last effort. Operation Harvest Red is a far more engaging affair, with better-drawn characters, superior dialogue and a richer backdrop. Soon after parachuting into troubled Chernarus you're confronted with gruesome war crimes and thought-provoking RPG-style choices. Always credible, early tasks tend towards the stealthy. Communication masts topple, targets painted with laser rangefinders disappear in clouds of smoke, unsuspecting Chedaki separatists slump to the cool night-time turf. After the main USMC force has come ashore you find yourself assisting government forces in bitter streetfighting. Then things start getting really interesting.

With frontlines established, the missions assume a new flexible form. Rather than dump a single objective in your lap, you are delivered to a forward base where a CO reels off >

"Bohemia have obviously listened to criticism levelled at the story segment of their last effort"



ArmA II Golden Rule #6: Shoot first, admire ecclesiastical architecture later.



It's hard to feel pity for a man in a ski mask.

TACTICAL TAXIS

Why walk into battle when you can…



Fly like an Osprey | **Swim like an AAVP7A1** | **Sneak like a Muddyfox**

Fly like an Osprey

In real-life, the MV-22 is an expensive white elephant, but in-game it's the perfect way to shrink Chernarus and conduct HALO missions.

FREEZE FRAME

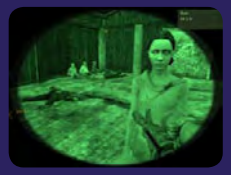
Taking you through a mission, one step at a time…



5 MINUTES
The boot camp instructors are surprisingly polite. They know you're a vet.



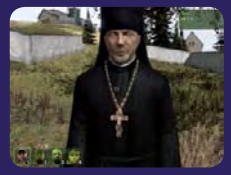
30 MINUTES
Hard hats on. The last of the tutorials introduces the new base-building ability.



1 HOUR
War is hell. Within minutes of arriving in Chernarus you find evidence of atrocities.



3 HOURS
The war criminals can run but they can't hide from your new toy, a nosey UAV.



5 HOURS
The conflict starts getting *really* complicated. Who are the good guys again?



If one of Team Razor gets killed it's mission over.

> ArmA II continued

a list of Things He'd Like Done, before offering the services of the camp's helo pilot and UAV. Find evidence of atrocities, locate arms caches, eliminate Chedaki camps and gun runners, bring in suspects for questioning... how you go about achieving these goals is up to you. The freedom is invigorating, and exactly what the series needed to show-off its vehicular variety and vast landscapes.

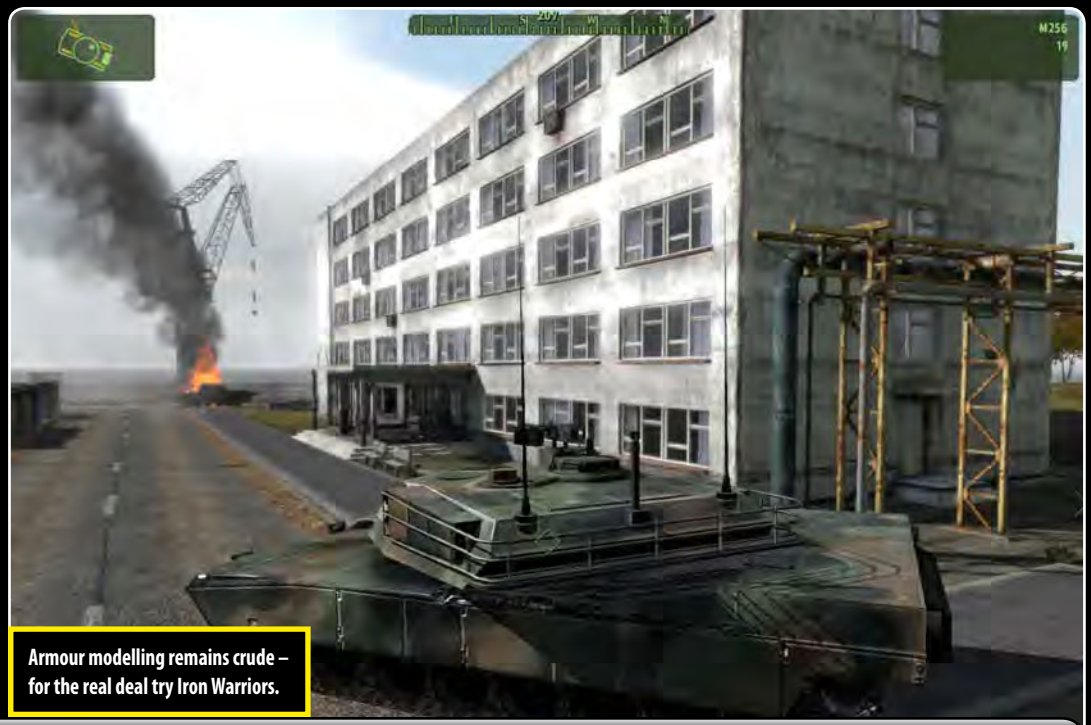
And Chernarus is a truly splendid place to soldier in. Soaring above its gloomy spruce forests, ruined castles and distinctive gold-leafed churches in the Venom air-taxi, or exploring its sleepy villages and deserted collective farms in trundling APCs, the country gets right under your skin. Not every local is willing to chat, but those that do often provide vital clues. Assuming you don't antagonise them that is.

The new campaign approach might be a breath of fresh air, but, sadly, it's not free of frustrations. Several times we found ourselves unsure how to proceed, or derailed >


One of six flyable helos, the USMC Super Cobra.



The locals speak Chenarussian (actually Czech) which adds to the atmosphere.


Armour modelling remains crude – for the real deal try Iron Warriors.

> ArmA II continued

by inept AI and faulty triggers. The on-call Venom is piloted by a prize buffoon. If you're not very careful picking LZs, there's a good chance he'll wrap his hoverer around trees or buildings, leaving you dead or earthbound for the rest of the mission. At other times it's far from obvious how to fulfil victory conditions. More guidance and a bit more polish wouldn't have gone amiss.

Of course, the campaign is just one way to enter the fray. A small but well-crafted single mission selection let's you play as the balaclava-ed baddies and try your hand at choreographing an entire battle – surprisingly easy. It also introduces Warfare, a marvellous mod-inspired skirmish mode in which two sides scrap for control of an island while building bridgehead bases with kill and capture-generated cash. Neutralised an enemy rifleman? Have $50 to spend on a new MG post or kit upgrade. Lovely stuff.

Multiplayer – the connoisseurs choice – is as enticing as ever. With implausibly high headcounts, priceless co-op (replay the entire campaign with chums) and unrivalled opportunities for applying authentic tactics, it's military service without the physical rigours and PTSD. For more whimsical/truncated >



The best visual effects from the ACE mod have been integrated.

Roll over screen for annotations





Vast beautiful vistas + realistic ballistics = sniper heaven.



Advancing down the middle of the road is seldom a good idea.


Flight models seem a little friendlier, but auto-hover still comes in handy.

> ArmA II continued

play sessions, the armoury offers a mountain of kit-unlocking mini-games. Ranging from skeet shooting and obstacle courses, to assassination and evasion challenges, they're perfect tea-break fillers.

"ArmA II's tweaks and new attitude to injuries ensure incredibly intense combat"

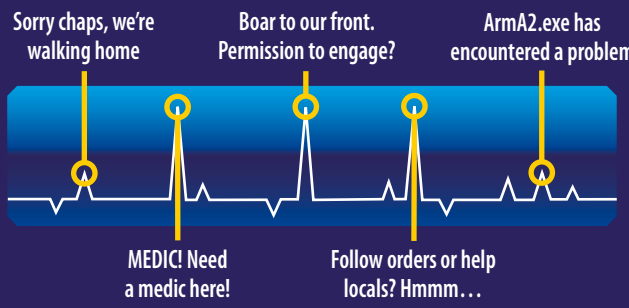
However you access the action, ArmA II's AI tweaks and new attitude to injuries ensure incredibly intense combat. Hostiles are now far likelier to put trees, poles and walls between themselves and danger. They also seem more willing to flank and lay down suppressive fire. If the adrenaline isn't pumping as you sprawl in the pine needles with bullets zipping over your head, it will be once you hear one of your team calling for a medic. Because the injured can now be dragged or carried to safety then given life-saving aid, some mad fool – usually you, though you could always send a comrade – has a duty to play the hero.

Disappointingly, ArmA II doesn't eclipse its predecessor in every respect. The interface remains opaque and labyrinthine, a tangle of confusing menus. Yes, it's so powerful you could sit back at base, dishing out orders and probably still win the game, but all that power should be far easier to utilise. Then there's the spectre of build quality. ArmA had lots of ragged edges, and sad to report, so does the sequel. On top of the minor campaign trigger and pathfinding problems mentioned earlier, there's also graphical glitches and savegame-related crashes. While an elderly babushka embedded in a wooden door doesn't disrupt play, a broken save does. Given the state of Bohemia Interactive's last offering, you'd think they'd have been more careful.

So should you hang back? That's a tricky one. Most of the bugs we encountered only damaged the campaign and then not grievously. Even with its blemishes, this is an incomparable war simulation.

Tim Stone

PULSOMETER *Signs of life*



PCGZine Verdict

Operation Flashpoint 2 has its work cut out

- More involving than ArmA
- An Aladdin's cave of guns and rides
- Campaign wrinkles and clumsy UI

84%

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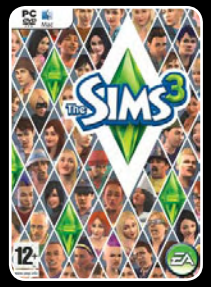
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The Sims 3

The biggest game in the world just got a bit bigger

Publisher: EA
Developer: EA Play
Heritage: Sim City, Spore
Link: www.thesims3.com
OUT NOW

System Requirements:
2 GHz CPU, 1GB RAM, 128MB SM 2.0 3D card

PCGZine GOLD

Ian Mclan's first kiss was a beautiful moment. He arrived at her door, fresh from a visit to the catacombs, his skin smeared with grime. His white underwear – the only thing he was wearing – spoke volumes about the man; he pursued matters of the mind, not of the body. He was pathetic, but she didn't seem to mind. He chatted to the girl for hours about computers. He insulted her flatmate, he read her books. To avoid passing out on the floor, he drank her coffee. And then he kissed her, wrapping his stinking arms around her and planting his festering lips upon hers. His first kiss, and it was beautiful. Then he asked her to marry him. She refused, of course, and he was humiliated. The next day, he died.

It's always easy and tempting to write about a new Sims game in terms of the features and tweaks it introduces. While that's all well and good for the back of the box, it's not the purpose of continuing this line. Yes, clearly at least some of its purpose is making enough money to buy Belgium, but it's also about making the ultimate game of anecdotes. The more options and possibilities there are in The Sims, the more stories you have to tell.

> **"The more options and possibilities there are in The Sims, the more stories you have to tell"**

The Sims 3 may not offer dramatic changes to what's by now a very familiar formula, but it manages to be bigger >



House design doesn't have to be as strict as before.



Oooh, we're not fond of that carpet. Oh no.

FREEZE FRAME

Taking you through the game, one step at a time…



5 MINUTES
Start with creating a Sim, and their life goals – best-selling novelist, or creature-robot cross-breeder?



1 HOUR
Jobs are still essential, but you choose what they get up to at them – working hard, napping or yapping.



3 HOURS
The park's a good spot to make friends. Or perhaps enemies, if you've created a mean-spirited neurotic.



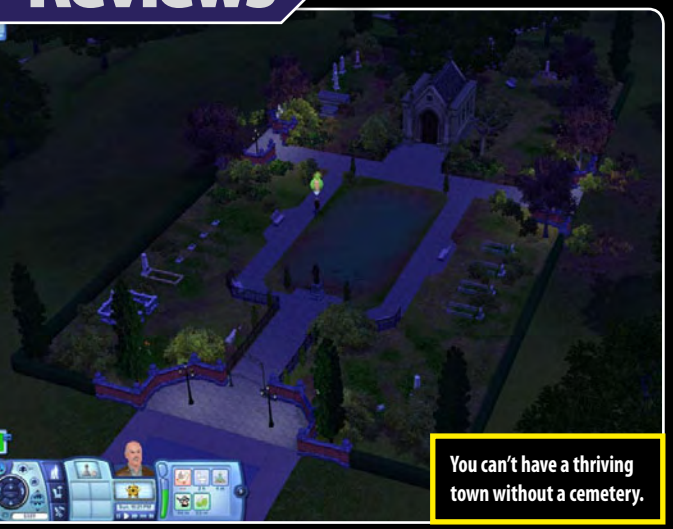
10 HOURS
Even if you have created a couch potato, nothing is denied. This slob could yet be a sporty lothario.



12 HOURS
Death comes for us all eventually. Unless you feel like turning off the ageing option, obviously.



Yes ladies, he's single.



You can't have a thriving town without a cemetery.



As always, conversion is done via speech bubble and 'Simlish'.

> The Sims 3 continued

in subtle ways – meaningful expansion in every direction, rather than simply bolting a lump of new stuff onto the side. Most obviously, the Sims' town is now an open, persistent, free-roaming world, rather than a clutch of closed-off houses. If you want to meet someone new, you don't have to creepily turn up at their door unannounced, take a wander to the park or book store, or even elect to spend your working day slacking off and chatting to co-workers. It's difficult to be lonely in this third Sims. Which, if you do want to design an introverted weirdo with only plants for company, is not ideal, but hey, you could always remove all the doors in his house.

Perhaps more meaningful is the changes to the Sims themselves. They're no longer simple ciphers with tiny bladders – that constant need to minutely manage their physical needs is mercifully reduced, in favour of managing their more metaphysical needs. A bookworm wants to read more books, an introvert wants to spend more time in his own bedroom, a mean-spirited guy wants to write angry forum posts… It's slotted into the Sims' existing structure impressively, so that your little guys have new purposes alongside, rather than replacing, the traditional need to eat, sleep and micturate. The essential appeal of the Sims – creating your friends, enemies and favourite celebrities – grows massively, as you're now creating their personalities as well as their appearance. The knock-on effect is you get to prioritise how you play.



And that's The Sims 3 all over: choice. While you've always been able to dictate your puppet-people's appearance and abode, now you're really directing their life story, and the game's formerly >



Put a virtual gym in your virtual house and get virtually fit.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Life, but not as we know it…



Pod people | Against nature | Spin me right round

Spin me right round

This sounds minor, but in practice it's crucial to the Sims 3 evolving from the series' boxy past. Objects are no longer locked to 90-degree rotations – instead, you can minutely tweak their angles, resulting in houses that look like houses, rather than boxes. Carving out pools and hills is gloriously simple now too.



Building up your house and adding furniture is as great fun as ever.

> The Sims 3 continued

rigid rules don't get in the way too much. You're now able to create individual situations starring individual personalities, rather than simply applying chaos theory and sadism to what are otherwise identical setups.

Roll over screen for annotations

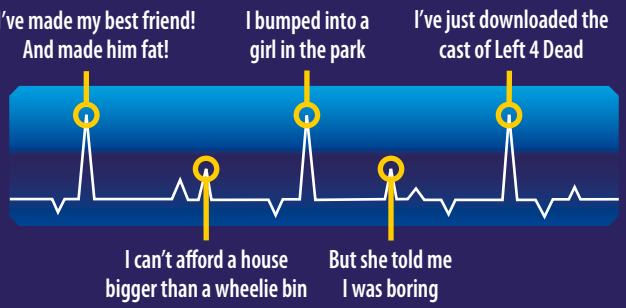


For all that, this isn't going to change anyone's mind about The Sims. The new stuff is, in practice, just more buttons to press, and much of it relies on the imagination. Be it a day at work, watching a movie or wandering around a spooky crypt, all you see is the outside of a building and a floating progress bar. It's an understandable design decision, even if it's an unfortunate one – this is a world without loading screens, and to build in so many esoteric interiors and animations would doubtless make that impossible. A real shame, as what is shown looks delightful – making the absolute best of low-tech graphics by piling on more charm than a million-and-one Muppet shows.

A compensation of sorts is building the community content that's always fuelled The Sims right into the game. A launcher application points you to an endless slew of homemade wallpapers and sad-faced fat men, with even entire homes and families there to be downloaded straight into your own game. Perhaps it's a mite cynical on EA's part, but it does mean there is always something new to play with, and that lends The Sims 3 a longevity even its undying predecessors lack. This isn't any shock departure – and nor should it be – but it's one giant leap closer to the infinitely flexible game that we all dreamed The Sims would be when we first heard about it.

Alec Meer

PULSOMETER *Signs of life*



"The Sims 3 is one giant leap closer to the infinitely flexible game that we all dreamed The Sims would be"

PCGZine Verdict

Perhaps a little too familiar, but it's grown up in all the right ways

- Wonderfully, charmingly silly
- Loads more to do
- Bodily functions still take hours

91%



Hired Guns: The Jagged Edge

When money isn't enough…

Publisher: Kalypso Media
Developer: Morphicon Limited
Heritage: Jagged Alliance
Link: www.kalypsomedia.com
OUT NOW

System Requirements: Windows XP/Vista, Intel Pentium IV 1800MHz, 512MB RAM, 1Nvidia GeForce 5600/ Ati Radeon 9600 Pro or higher video card, Direct X 9.0c

Is it best to burn out or fade away? It is a question which has preoccupied many for decades but today we have a definitive answer for a game series that, we are all sad to say, has passed its best. Jagged Edge is the unofficial sequel to Jagged Alliance, and its lineage is faithful to the point of frustration. The problem is that the most recent game of the series was in 1999, so Edge feels old, despite the shiny new 3D engine.

The game's story is based on removing a despot leader of a fictional African nation – Diamond Coast.

"The game's story is based on removing a despot leader of a fictional African nation"

Through the nifty in-game laptop, emails are received constantly explaining how the ruler is indeed a very bad man and his henchmen deserve everything that they get. Kill all mercenaries, soldiers, policeman and civilians in your way until you finally get a swipe at the top dog himself.

Game structure is split into three distinct areas. First is the planning stage, which is where players kit out their hired mercenaries, check emails on mission objectives and manage their income. Second is the free roaming in-engine aspect, which involves positioning your men and talking to NPCs. The third >



Guess Who: Mercenary Edition.


Combat often deteriorates in chaos.



CHECKING OUT THE GUNS

How Jagged Edge works



Making decisions | **Strategically speaking** | **Assault mode**

Making decisions

The character screen is where you decide what character has which weaponry – there is an impressive amount of detail and customisation on offer.



Transport is a big bonus to your team, helping them move around quickly.



The African Savannah is faithfully represented.

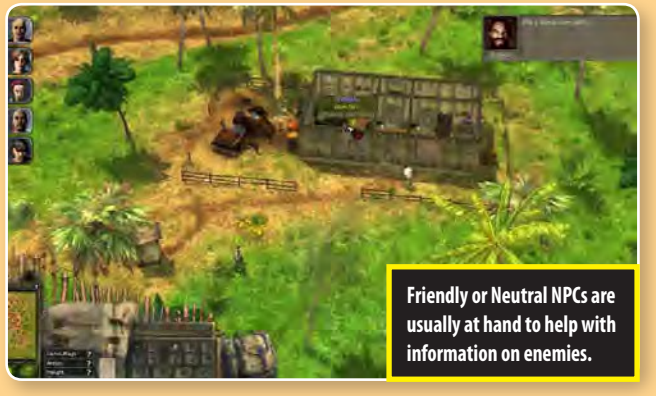
> Hired Guns continued

area is engagement, where the action is slowed to allow for turn-based combat. All movements and shots are restricted by Action Points which regenerate after every turn. The problem is that AP's are eaten up so quickly that after a shot or two, player characters can barely raise a smile let alone hit a target, yet enemy soldiers repeatedly get a direct hit. This section of the game is broken, and no indication is given why some shots miss while others hit. AP demands also change turn after turn with no obvious reason why, so deciding on a clear strategy becomes redundant.

Roaming free

Players only return to the free-roaming mode after all of the engaged enemies are killed. Enemies will often be dying in front of you, yet players will have to end their lives ruthlessly, just to go back to non-turned based exploration. This game borders on the masochistic at times and its frankly disheartening to have to go back to. This is punctuated with obnoxious AI, which is nigh on impossible to overcome, even on 'newbie' difficulty.

Even the most basic tutorial would have been cherished, yet all gamers have to refer to is the in-game help feature which does nothing more than provide a general outline. Graphics are vibrant but plagued by a rigid camera system, and zoom functions vary only between birds-eye and isometric. Players are able to pan around but it seems oddly limited for a title which has such impressive environments.



Friendly or Neutral NPCs are usually at hand to help with information on enemies.



Movement becomes a pain when you're caught in the line of sight by the enemy.

Those who remember the Jagged Alliance series fondly – and better games like X-Com – will enjoy the nostalgic feel of this title. But for everyone else, and this really does mean everyone else, there is nothing here for you.

Andy Griffiths

PCGZine Verdict

An update to a much-loved series that sadly does nothing for its good name

- Fleshed out storyline and characters
- Broken combat
- Unapproachable

45%



Officers: World War II

For those who know their Shermans from their Cromwells

Publisher: Kalypso Media
Developer: Games Factory Interactive
Heritage: Hired Guns: The Jagged Edge
Link: www.kalypsomedia.com
OUT NOW

System Requirements:
Windows 2000/XP/Vista, Intel Core 2 Duo 2.6 GHz or AMD Athlon 64 X2 5000+, 512MB RAM, nVidia GeForce 6200 128MB or Raeon HD 2400Pro, DirectX 9.0c compatible sound card

Sales and World War 2 games go together like Strawberries and Cream. No wonder then, that there are so many of them. Some are good and some are bad, and then there's Officiers, which slots in-between nicely, with an RTS experience that anyone can enjoy.

The campaign begins with Operation Overlord, continues with the Liberation of Caen and concludes with the assault on Germany. Much like a greatest hits of World War 2 Allied Operations, Officers covers five major battles in the war, all important in beating back the Nazi invasion. Maps are enormous too, with tons of capture points to fight over before trying to assault enemy bases – which usually number in the handful. Special attacks can be called in from command, such as Artillery Strikes, Carpet bombs and Paratroopers.

Battles are often long and gritty but inevitably satisfying as you feel the fight slowly bending to your will. Bases are constantly being fought over, with AI which is both adaptive and surprisingly intelligent – often striking your weakest line of defence. The day/night cycle adds further drama, as some units light up the sky with their firepower but it rarely factors into the battle's outcome.

"Battles are often long and gritty but inevitably satisfying"

It's not all peachy with GFI's title however, as some of the music borders on annoying and the unchanging unit chatter will keep reverberating around your brain even after play ends. They are niggles which become more significant as you continue to play, but overall it's quite a good package. There's a multi-player mode where players can choose from three factions (Allied, German and Russian) but sadly no skirmish mode.

Officers is approachable fun and includes what most people would want from a WW2 RTS. Nothing groundbreaking, and perhaps nothing many won't have seen before, but enjoyable nonetheless.

Andy Griffiths



Tanks for the memory.


There's plenty of action here, but with a strong simulation thread right through it, too.

TREASURED MAP

You'll see this screen a lot in the game

Players will see a lot of this map when playing the game, managing resources between bases and scoping out where to the enemy forces next. Reports constantly flood in about supply points and where your soldiers are getting hit.



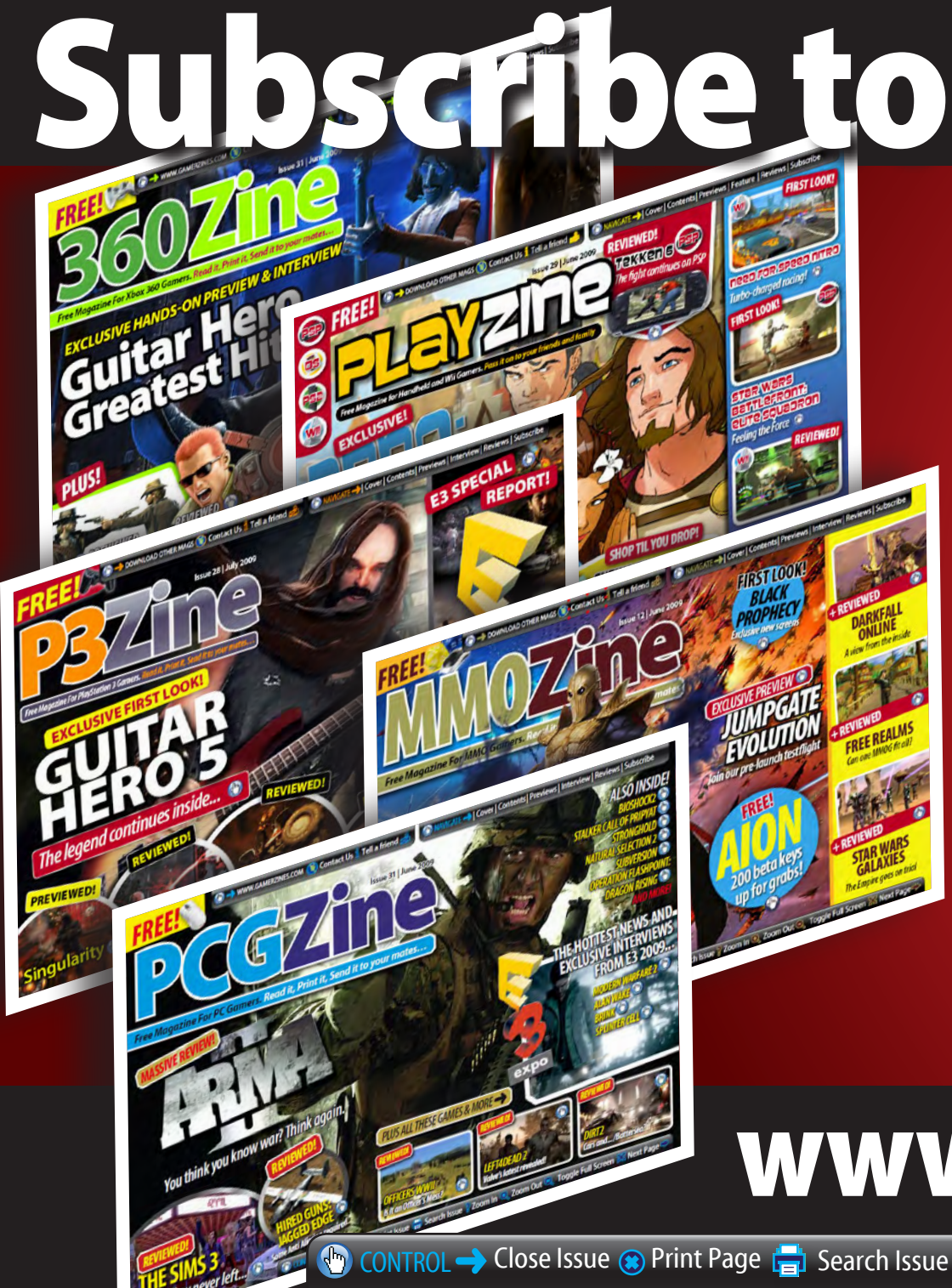
PCGZine Verdict

Puts the fun in functional

- Scope of maps
- Challenging AI
- Niggles stop it from being a classic

78%

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