

## Loading...

### Die Hard Vendetta launch day

The recent launch of Die Hard Vendetta for the Nintendo GameCube went with a bang that left the much of the games press whimpering. Developer Bits Interactive and publisher Vivendi took the chosen few, including yours truly, to Highclere Castle, film location for *The Mummy Returns*. The bemused games journalists, many of us not used to the early morning entailed by the day's schedule, were shaken awake on arrival by a re-enactment of one of the missions in the game – the rescue of Lucy MacLane. Immediately after that we were plunged into the thick of the action when masked gunmen stormed the hall and kidnapped the person giving the presentation. It was our mission to rescue the hapless compere.

### Die another day

In teams we scaled an assault course, cracked codes in hazardous areas, saw combat in a paintball firefight, fled danger in a Bond-style helicopter ride and raced through the underground levels of the house to rescue the hostage. We then faced the most daunting challenge of the day: to complete a level of the



console game itself, which mimicked the real-life action we had just experienced, though with a few more explosions.

Die Hard: Vendetta is a more complicated treatment of the film licence than the Die Hard

trilogy on PlayStation and stands up extremely well to Die Hard: Nakatomi Plaza on the PC. As you'd expect of a modern first-person shooter, this isn't a game you can race through with all guns blazing – it requires thought as well as fire power. Busting Nintendo's kiddie-friendly image, Vendetta's profanity earns it an XX Certificate and an adult-only audience. It's a sure sign of a veteran publisher strengthening as we move into the festive season. ■

Kenneth Henry

### No sex please, we're Elspa

Consumers in the UK and throughout Europe will soon see the appearance of new age ratings and content warning symbols on computer and video titles bought over the web or through retail stores as well as online multiplayer games. This will give consumers added confidence that the content of the game is suitable for a specific age group.

### Watch your language

The pan-European voluntary system, which has been announced by the Isfe (Interactive Software Federation of Europe) will introduce five age categories: three and over; seven and over; 12 and over; 16 and over; and 18 and over. The intention of the new system is to ensure that children are not exposed to content that is deemed unsuitable, such as scenes of a violent, sexual, frightening or discriminatory nature or those that contain images of drug use or strong language. In addition to the age categories where an upper age rating applies, games will also display symbols indicating the nature of their content.

The Isfe system has been designed to meet varying cultural standards and attitudes across European Union member states. It is supported by the majority of relevant member state government agencies and all interactive leisure software trade organisations in Europe, including the UK, as represented by Elspa (Entertainment and Leisure Software Publishers Association).

Commenting on the new European rating, Roger Bennett, director general of Elspa said: "The purpose is to provide consumers throughout Europe with intelligible, easy-to-act-on information about the age categories for which the content of a product is deemed suitable. It also meets the European Commission's twin objectives of making it easy for businesses to sell cross-border and domestically, as well as making consumers feel comfortable shopping cross-border." ■

Spencer Dalziel



FEAR



BAD LANGUAGE



VIOLENCE



DISCRIMINATION



SEX



DRUGS

 <small>top digital music video games</small>	
PC GAMES CHART	
1	FIFA 2003
2	Iron Storm
3	Sims Unleashed
4	Rollercoaster Tycoon 2
5	Sims Deluxe Edition
6	Unreal Tournament 2003
7	Total Club Manager 2003
8	Hitman 2
9	Sims: On Holiday
10	Sims: Hot Date
<i>Positions correct for week 01/11/02-07/11/02</i>	



# Unreal Tournament 2003

With the Samsung World Cybergames Tournament gearing up for the finals in Korea at the end of 2002 and real money to be made from winning high-profile LAN (local area network) competitions, I think it's safe to say a new era has begun. This is the dawning of the age of the e-athlete: 16 years old, probably male, Slipknot posters on the wall, all confused adolescent angst and reflexes honed beyond sharpness by far too much time playing online FPSs (first-person shooters) online.

By a most serendipitous twist of fate Infogrames has published Unreal Tournament 2003 to coincide with the cybersport phenomena and hopefully sate the urges of the average e-athlete. The aim was to turn the sordid pastime of bedroom gaming into a respected sport. UT2003 is the result. On a level of adrenaline-pumped frenetic action, this will be *the* multiplayer FPS by which all others are judged.

## Gaming history

For those of you not in the know, the original Unreal Tournament was released in 1999 and was one of the first FPS games designed purely for human-to-human online play. The initial idea was to take the 'deathmatch' and 'capture the flag' scenarios of classics like Doom or Quake and build an entire game out of it. The outcome was the surprise hit of the year and with its

↓ Hard knock lives: don't worry if your evil gun-toting alter ego is blown to bits, vengeance is but a click away



open architecture allowing the 'modding' community to create a stream of new level designs, the game was given a healthy shelflife... Until the release of UT2003.

## Sport of kings

The only real disappointment with the new release is that the future sports theme hasn't been further developed for the single player missions. There's something addictive about the combination of WWF wrestling and Rollerball. It's as if underneath the online play there's another game bursting to get out but it doesn't quite make it, so it's better to move on to where the real fun is.

UT2003 has five modes of combat: three of them you'll find on most online shooters, while the other two are specific to UT2003. Double Domination has two teams trying to capture two control points and keep possession for 10 seconds – okay, but not half as much fun as Bombing Run. Based in part on American Football, a ball is situated in the middle of the field, or post-apocalyptic industrial complex, and the objective is to pick it up and deliver it to the enemy base's goal. The player carrying the ball cannot shoot so the other team members have to protect the carrier. Expect to see it incorporated into other multiplayer games anytime soon.

Epic Games built a new engine from the ground up for UT2003 in the hope of getting some money from licensing deals to plough into UT2. It looks beautiful, plays smoothly and has fantastic level designs. Some of the scenarios are played out in low gravity and this has given the designers the chance to be hugely inventive. The well-crafted outdoor arenas and the rag-doll physics, which make players tumble realistically, are also impressive.

If you want to excel in UT2003 you'll need the reflex actions of a teenage e-athlete as well as his attitude. Every time I played Deathmatch our tactics were rent asunder by a fellow called Deathmunch2. He typed in that he'd love to continue humiliating a grown man but Mummy was calling him for his din-dins. I'm sure he went on to tell her everything was unfair, the world was against him and the only people that truly understand him are death metal bands. ■



↑ Free-falling action (top): try to stay in the ring during the fight

↑ Shooting stars (bottom): your adversaries are probably a bit closer to home

### Unreal Tournament 2003

- Infogrames: 020 8222 9700
- Website: [www.infogrames.com](http://www.infogrames.com)
- Price: £29.99

### System requirements

733MHz Pentium III; Windows 98/Me/2000/XP; 128MB RAM; 3GB hard disk space; 3D Video accelerator card with 16MB RAM.

### Overall rating



Spencer Dalziel



## Hitman 2: Silent Assassin

I have to admit that I never finished the original Hitman: Codename 47. I could see that it was a fantastic game – stealth and stalk hadn't been this much fun since Metal Gear Solid. It was one of the few games out there that truly felt as if it contained an entire, fully conceived and operable world with its own set of rules.

The barcoded central character was the epitome of calculated coolness and, despite being a cold-blooded assassin, struck a chord of empathy with the player. But despite all this it was the most frustrating gaming experience I've ever had: the game was impossibly hard. Fortunately in Hitman 2 Eidos has seen the light and made this a well-conceived game.

As before, the silent assassin has to make contract killings over a range of geographical locations in this tactical third- or first-person shooter but thankfully the developer has made it much more fun. There's still a heavy emphasis on stealth but this time you're offered a variety of ways to finish each

mission. And if it does end in a bloody gun battle then you can shoot your way through. The previous game was more of a puzzle completion effort and you'd have to follow a precise direction to finish any missions.

There was also the cruel lack of save points mid-mission so you could play for 20 minutes, sneeze in the wrong direction and have to start all over again. This time Hitman offers an open-ended approach with save points to help you progress through the beautiful environments.

The sounds are brilliantly implemented and the ragdoll physics are by far the best we've seen in any game. Well worth buying. ■

*Spencer Dalziel*

→ The bald and the beautiful: never underestimate the determination of a quiet man

### Hitman 2: Silent Assassin

- Eidos Interactive: 020 8636 3000
- Website: [www.eidosinteractive.co.uk](http://www.eidosinteractive.co.uk)
- Price: £29.99

### System requirements

450MHz Pentium III; Win/98/Me/2000/XP; 128MB RAM; 800MB hard disk space.

### Overall rating



## Links 2003

### Links 2003

- Microsoft: 0870 601 0100
- Website: [www.microsoft.com/games/links2003](http://www.microsoft.com/games/links2003)
- Price: £34.99

### System requirements

400MHz processor; Windows 98/Me/2000/XP; 128MB RAM; 390MB hard disk.

### Overall rating



Links 2003 has an incredible amount of depth, yet it doesn't stop the casual gamer from playing. If, like me, you are new to the series, you'll find it perfectly easy to pick up and play. You can be off on the fairways in a matter of moments, happily slicing your first shot into the trees. But you don't have to end up hacking around in the rough, because a new practice facility lets you perfect your swing before stepping on to the course.

There are four different swing options available, ranging from the Easy Swing to the Powerstroke. The real-time swing lets your mouse become the club, factoring in speed, tempo, direction and spin in every shot. The more accomplished you become, the more you can experiment.

However, the great thing about Links 2003 is the special

← Swing when you're winning: the hole's a fairway away

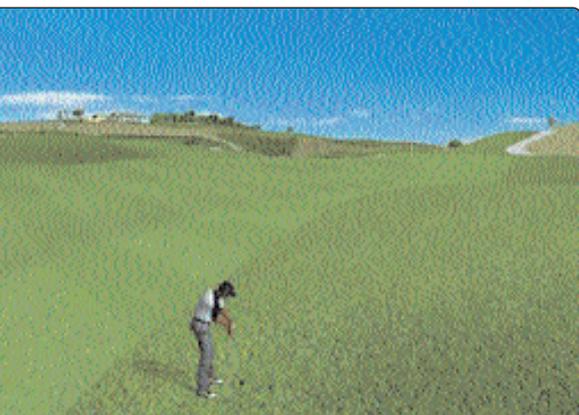
features. For instance, the Arnold Palmer Course Designer allows you to walk in Arnie's footsteps, creating the kind of golf course even Mr Palmer would be proud of.

I found the Links Career the most rewarding part of the game. For the experienced player it demands focus and motivation, with the cup as your goal. Once mastered, you can get really brave and go online to play golfers from anywhere in the world. For the neophyte online gamer this is inspiring, as you chat to your opponent while competing on 'friendly' terms. However, a word of advice: make sure you have broadband, because your dialup is guaranteed to fail you when it's least convenient.

Links 2003 is the most realistic golf game for your PC. It takes you through six all-new championship courses, giving you more realistic control over your shots and delivering very convincing graphics.

Is there anything missing? Not really, apart from a lack of pros to choose from. This is a game that can make a Sunday disappear in no time. ■

*Mark Brown*



## Timesplitters 2 (PlayStation2)



**F**PS (first-person shooter) games often tend to be quite similar in their structure and gameplay, so for a title to stand out from the crowd it has to be pretty good. Free Radical produced something special in GoldenEye, a fast and furious thrill fest with intuitive controls. Could the developer come up with something to match its best effort so far? The first Timesplitters game certainly wasn't the answer, but this new release is a vast improvement.

From the moment you lay eyes on the manga-esque cover design you know that here is something different. At first, though, you are thrust into what looks like a pretty standard FPS. However, looks can be deceptive. Once you have played Timesplitters 2 for a while and got your head around the slightly insane plot, you should slip into the highly intuitive and customisable controls with ease. You'll be popping heads in no time.

In putting Timesplitters 2 together, the Free Radical team seem to have sat down with every groundbreaking FPS game and incorporated some aspect of it – and to great

→ Shot pants: take a lunatic murderous blonde home with you today

effect. The championship leagues are reminiscent of Unreal and provide no end of fun, giving the game a level of playability way beyond the single-player campaigns. Free Radical continues using the unique FPS control setup that helped make GoldenEye such a hit. It has also stuck with a similar heads-up onscreen display.

All in all, Timesplitters 2 manages the difficult task of courting familiarity without breeding contempt. The result is a game that will feel familiar to all FPS players, is easy to pick up and play, yet is a new and exciting experience. ■



### Timesplitters 2

- Eidos Interactive: 020 8636 3000
- Website: [www.eidosinteractive.co.uk](http://www.eidosinteractive.co.uk)
- Price: £29.99

### System requirements

Sony PlayStation2

### Overall rating



Simon Alveranga

## Pro Evolution Soccer 2 (PlayStation2)



### Pro Evolution Soccer 2

- Konami: 01895 200 573
- Website: [www.konami.co.uk](http://www.konami.co.uk)
- Price: £39.99

### System requirements

Sony PlayStation2

### Overall rating



**E**lectronic Arts' FIFA football series displayed all the in-depth knowledge of football that the average American did when the US hosted the World Cup. Its arcade action had defenders running past 10 men to score a goal, while an overhead kick from midfield always found its way to the back of the net. Fantastic fun it was, but football it wasn't.

A far more realistic onscreen evocation of

The Beautiful Game was a Japanese offering, ironically with the word 'soccer' in the title. Pro Evolution Soccer was the best football game in the world – surely it couldn't be improved upon, we thought. How wrong we were.

← I should coco: as in the real game, timewasting and arguing with the referee will get you nowhere sonny

PES2 takes all the foibles and nuances of the real game and transfers them beautifully to a virtual environment. It takes a lot longer to master than EA's FIFA series – you'll have to play a few matches before you even get on the scoresheet. In fact, even when you're adept at PES2 you'll find scoring goals is a difficult thing. But this reflects just how good this game is – you can play a 20-minute game of football, come away with a nil-nil draw and still enjoy it thoroughly.

PES2 isn't much of an update from the previous version. Aesthetically it's very similar and there are no great leaps in graphics or sound. That said, Konami has ironed out some of the annoying creases that plagued the first game and added features such as distinct dribbling styles. Consequently, the game plays with an arcade smoothness yet it isn't any easier to score those all-important goals. When your efforts are finally rewarded with a goal, especially if you've been playing with friends, you'll be waking the neighbours with shouts of 'Go on my son!' An unmitigated pleasure. ■

Spencer Dalziel





## Super Mario Sunshine (GameCube)

Super Mario Sunshine heralds the arrival of brilliant gaming on the underrated GameCube console. We were blown away by the brightly coloured Japanese weirdness of it all and reckon this outing should keep Mario's handlebar moustache bristling for a few years yet.

Mario games were never about plot but here Nintendo has added the semblance of one. While our hero is holidaying with the lovely Princess Peach on the sun-bleached Isle of Delfino, a Mario impostor is seen to be ruining the resort with daubs of graffiti and pollution.

Naturally Mario is fingered as the offender and sentenced to clean the island. Out he goes to restore his reputation and find the real culprit.

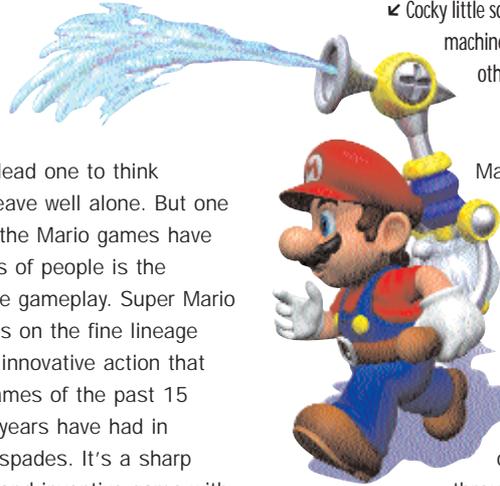
Everything about this Mario title implies it's to be played by

children. The plot is kid-friendly and the bright chunky cartoon

graphics could lead one to think adults should leave well alone. But one of the reasons the Mario games have reached millions of people is the dynamism of the gameplay. Super Mario Sunshine carries on the fine lineage of creative and innovative action that all the Mario games of the past 15

years have had in spades. It's a sharp and inventive game with fantastic level design.

To make it more than just another Mario title, Nintendo has added a great feature to the gameplay. To clear away the pollution and graffiti



↙ Cocky little squirt: with his new machine Mario reaches the parts other hygiene operatives can't



Mario gets a Fludd (flash liquidiser ultra dousing device). This gives our moustached hero excellent manoeuvrability including hover, spin jump, blast off and motor. Moving through the environment

with the Fludd puts a great spin on the game and differentiates it from its predecessors beautifully. If you're thinking of getting a GameCube this Christmas then get it bundled with this addictive fun-packed game. ■

Spencer Dalziel

### Super Mario Sunshine

- Nintendo: 02380 623 200
- Website: [www.nintendo-europe.com](http://www.nintendo-europe.com)
- Price: £39.99

### System requirements

Nintendo GameCube

### Overall rating



## Dragon Throne: Battle of Red Cliffs

Chinese history is an area I must confess to being especially ignorant about but having enjoyed Sierra's Age of Empires series, based around ancient Greece and its myths, I was keen to repeat my dynasty-building experience.

I was pleased to discover that Battle of Red Cliffs resembles the Age of Empires titles both visually and structurally. Here, rather than being a Greek god, you play as one of three warring rulers, but the general aim of building up an army to pick fights with the neighbours remains.

Before you can begin to plan a sortie, you must establish a base and people it with useful inhabitants – warriors, labourers, farmers and anyone else likely to contribute food and skills. This is how you'll spend your first few hours, so plan your city carefully. Exploit the crops and natural resources and make sure your subjects keep up to speed with the latest battle techniques.

Battle of Red Cliffs has been created with an obsessive's attention to detail, so if your settlement isn't up to scratch or your populace is deficient in any area this will be reflected in your battlefield performance.

Those with a real interest in Chinese history will be delighted by Dragon Throne's developer's adherence to the original manuscript *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, written in medieval times. The cast includes hundreds of the era's leaders while many of the battles themselves actually occurred. However, I found the detailed biographies and lengthy excerpts an unnecessary distraction at times, particularly as the dialogue is in Chinese so you are forced to follow everything onscreen.

Dragon Throne is cleverly made and, though not a groundbreaking title, its focus makes a welcome change from endless WWII real-time strategy games. ■

Rosemary Haworth

→ Chinese whispers: to have any chance of being the battle victors, you'll need to plan your city carefully

### Dragon Throne: Battle of Red Cliffs

- Strategy First: +1 514 844 4337
- Website: [www.strategyfirst.com](http://www.strategyfirst.com)
- Price: £30

### System requirements

233MHz Pentium II; Windows 95/98/2000; 64MB RAM; 270MB hard disk space.

### Overall rating



## Butt-Ugly Martians: Martian Boot Camp

preview

**B**ased on the TV show, this space game is set in 2053 featuring the three Butt-Ugly Martians: B.Bop-A-Luna, 2-T-Fru-T and Do-Wah-Diddy. They are sent on a mission to invade Earth by their evil leader Emperor Bog, but the three heroes discover their love of fast food, video games and pop music, defy their orders and protect their new home instead.

Convinced that the Butt-Ugly Martians need a refresher course in conquering planets, Emperor Bog ships them off to Martian Boot Camp for some combat training. Nasty and condescending Dr Damage has booby-trapped the standard obstacle course, turning it into a 'BOG-stacle' course: the most dangerous course in the galaxy.

You have to help the BUMs overcome the various obstacles. If your performance wins you enough points, Bog may allow you to return to Earth (and all that junk food). The challenges are many: fly a ship over orbs and through the Energy Field Maze; break through walls and defeat the vicious Humanga; test your dodge-and-drive skills on a martian air bike

during rush hour; blast robot fighters and destroy the mother ship in a space fight; and blast as many asteroids as you can in the asteroid field. It's now time to get into BKM (butt-kicking mode) and use your special attacks on various simulated opponents such as Jax the Conqueror or Gorgan. You are then ready for the final obstacle in the BKM challenge arena. Test what you've learned in a one-on-one competition against the fiercest enemy of them all: Infi-Knight 5000.

This game is uncomplicated, colourful and good fun. I suspect it will appeal to fast food-eating youngsters who watch the TV series and enjoy fighting aliens. ■

Faith Wardle

→ Looking good: tackling killer robots better come naturally to you, or the world's gonna get it

### BUM: Martian Boot Camp

- Vivendi: 0118 920 9100
- Website: www.vivendi-universal-interactive.co.uk
- Price: £19.99

### System requirements

266MHz Pentium; Windows 98/Me/2000/XP; 64MB RAM; 175MB hard drive space.

### Overall rating



## 3D Home Designer

### 3D Home Designer

- Global Software Publishing:
- Website: www.gsp.cc
- Price: £19.99

### System requirements

200MHz processor; Windows 95/98/Me/2000/XP; 64MB RAM; 620MB hard disk space.

### Overall rating



**B**efore you don your overalls and begin recreating Laurence Llewelyn-Bowen's latest masterpiece, you may want to invest in a piece of 3D design software. Some programs can be extremely complex and end up putting you off before you've even picked up a paintbrush. Home Designer may take a little while to master, but once you've got the idea of the controls things becomes fairly straightforward. You'll soon be radically rethinking your living space.

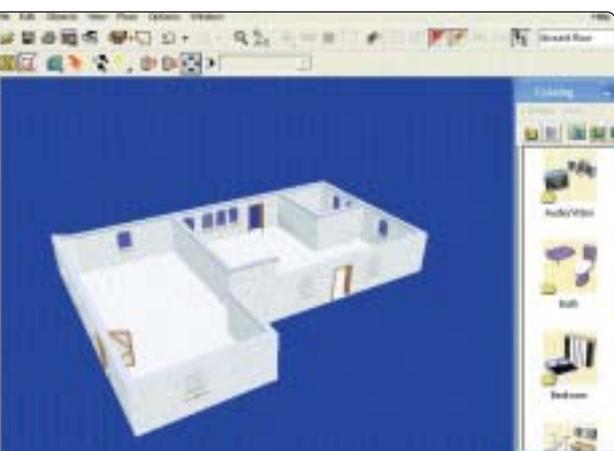
Home Designer allows you to create a pretty accurate reconstruction of your house or just the room you are planning to make over. You can then choose from hundreds of floor coverings, paint colours and wallpapers to decorate it with. If all you're planning to do is paint a few walls, it may not be worth installing this software. However, if you're

considering undertaking some serious reconstruction or adding a new kitchen or bathroom suite then 3D Home Designer is not to be missed. It gives you the opportunity to see how things will look before you've even unpacked the dust sheets.

The format of most of these applications is pretty much the same, providing a 2D or 3D image with which to work. My main complaint with this CD is that once you have chosen an object or wall it is extremely difficult to go back later and alter it without undoing most of the actions you have performed after it. There is little help on the design front either. Many other programs offer walkthroughs of predesigned rooms from which you can steal ideas, something which is quite useful if you don't have loads of artistic flair.

Home Designer does redeem itself, though: once you've finished your rooms you can 'walk' around the house to see how your designs would look. You can even view them in the daylight and at night, creating real-time shadows and allowing you to see how your chosen colours appear in different lights. ■

Wendy Brewer



← The final frontier: test out what your living space could become without making too much of a mess



## Cossacks: Back to War

The next instalment of the Cossacks saga is finally here and I for one greeted its arrival with some excitement. Cossacks: Back to War is a must for new and old Cossacks fans who, until now, have had to be content with a single add-on pack. The new edition expands the original title but also works well as a standalone title.

Back to War brings you over 100 additional single player missions, and the action is spiced up by two new countries – Hungary and Switzerland – vying for glory. There are also 40 new units available, including Harquebusier and Swordsman as well as coast defence cannons that are found in extra mode. Turkey and Algeria have swordsman on camelback called bedioun as their new units, and many more are available. There are now 20 European sides to command in random-map single missions and various different scenarios.

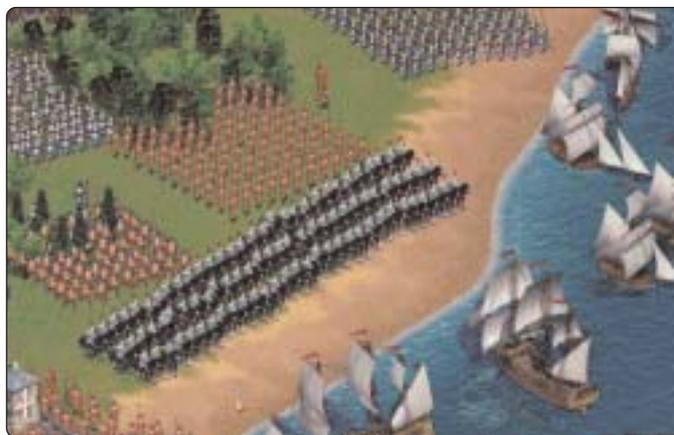
The artificial intelligence engine has been immensely improved and your tactical skills are now more important than the brute force that took precedence before. The new campaign will

→ War dance: the Dutch fleet is met by the massed ranks of the dancing Karamatsov Brothers

enable you to control the Russian forces in the 18th and 19th century under orders of the Tzar. There is a tutorial as well for newcomers.

This is a vast improvement from the original Cossacks as the graphics are better and gameplay is much improved. Unlike the last add-on, this one is a standalone with all the updates which is good news for newbies. Cossacks takes up a greedy 600MB of disk space and still needs the CD to play but is easy to install. Multiplayer mode lets you play with up to seven others and can now be observed online with the new Vizor system. ■

David O'Connor



### Cossacks: Back to War

- CDV Software: 020 8880 4144
- Website: www.cdv.de
- Price: £19.99

### System requirements

233MHz Pentium; Windows 98/Me/2000/NT 4.0/XP; 32MB RAM; 600MB hard disk space

### Overall rating



## IronStorm

### IronStorm

- Wanadoo: 01256 707 767
- Website: www.wanadoo.com
- Price: £29.99

### System requirements

600MHz Pentium III; Windows 98/ME/2000/; 128MB RAM; 1.2GB hard disk space

### Overall rating



So the First World War never ended, right? No of course not. It carried on going right up until the current year 1964. Axis and Allied Armies still exist but under different names.

Now waging war is an expensive business so to raise cash, both armies floated themselves on the stock exchange and pay their troops by way of share options and bonuses. Not too dissimilar to modern day venture capitalists – except they know when not to cross the line.

IronStorm is definitely one of the more beautiful FPS (first person shooter) games about. We played it on a reasonably powerful PC so we could appreciate the visual treat that this game delivers. Player and

enemy models are well drawn with specific detail given to the faces. The game features atmospheric lighting that is realistic throughout. You try sniping while facing into the sun – it just doesn't happen! The game runs well and never slowed down beyond 30fps (frames per second).

There are all manner of modern weapons from shotguns and assault rifles to gas grenades, all of which are available from the early stages. The balance of the game is set just right so that weapon selection is of huge importance. Enemy AI (artificial intelligence) is very impressive too: they don't charge headlong at you, they duck, bob and weave, throwing grenades if you stand still for too long. The overall game is quite difficult, even on easy mode. Our one tip is to save your game often. The controls work well, with the one exception of the view, which can inhibit shooting options.

IronStorm really excels online and most people buying this game will do so for its multiplayer offering. An entertaining and thoroughly challenging game with an excellent multiplayer feature. ■

James Majer



← Striking views: realistic depiction of destruction combine with sunsets and breathtaking scenery