# lifestyle

## Tomb Raider: Angel of Darkness

When Core Design went for a developmental reinvention, the world's favourite cyberbabe returned to the PlayStation2 to some mixed reviews. New camera angles and different controls made for frustrating play and the inclusion of stealth felt like an afterthought to appease the current gaming zeitgeist. Most were only impressed by the new dark plot and, despite its release date being continually bumped back, there were murmurs that Angel of Darkness was rushed to hit the shelves before it was ready.

We've been playing the PC version of this latest incarnation. We understand that a lot has happened in gaming since Lara Croft first appeared several years ago, but we've had nothing but fun playing Angel of Darkness.

Okay, it's the sort of fun that derives from a punishing sadomasochism but fun nonetheless. While the often-imitated Lara is applying thick foundation to mask the crow's feet round her eyes and showing signs of cellulite, she's still a beauty to behold and my tomb is available for her raiding any day of the week.

### It's all in the power

Firstly, we have to give Core Design credit for utilising the power of the PC. Many developers releasing multiformat titles aim at the lowest common denominator – the PS2 – and knock out a PC version without enhancing its power. Take one look at the scalability of this game's settings plus support for Creative's EAX audio environments and you'll see that Core Design made sure this version is the most visually and aurally accomplished Tomb Raider to date – so long as you have a PC powerful enough to run it.



### Trouble in Paris

Lara starts her quest in Paris where a heated meeting with one-time mentor Werner Von Croy ends with his murder and the lovely Ms Croft is implicated in his killing by the local authorities. With France's finest on her tail, Lara spends the first few missions running, jumping and climbing the streets to avoid the constabulary. But it soon becomes apparent that her every move is being shadowed by, er, a shadowy figure.

These missions serve to acclimatise you with the controls and, given the all-new system, this is an important part of the game. We used mouse and keyboard for the job but would heartily recommend use of a gamepad.

That said, it doesn't take long to get to grips with the controls and once adept you'll be thrust into a world of full-on Tomb Raider action with secret societies and occult happenings. You'll even cross paths with a similar adventurer called Kurtis Trent, who becomes a playable character later on in the game.

### Mission impossible

Tomb Raider games always have an element of gameplay frustration and Angel of Darkness is no exception. Miscalculated jumps still mean instant death and you'll spend hours screaming at your monitor because you can't find that hidden lever. The instant save feature makes play much more bearable, however.

The level designs are fantastic, each has an epic scope and some of the massive platform environments leave you standing in awe wondering how on earth you'll complete each level. But then that's the beauty of Tomb Raider. ■

*Spencer Dalziel*

← I'll be back: she may be reaching midlife-crisis age, but Lara's still as agile as ever

← Hanging around: use the first few missions to get to grips with the new controls

**Overall rating**
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**elspa**

### GAMES CHART, ALL FORMATS

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 | **Tomb Raider: Angel of Darkness** |
| 2 | **Eye Toy: Play** |
| 3 | **Enter The Matrix** |
| 4 | **Socom: US Navy Seals** |
| 5 | **Hulk** |
| 6 | **The Sims: Superstar** |
| 7 | **Grand Theft Auto: Vice City** |
| 8 | **Starsky & Hutch** |
| 9 | **The Sims** |
| 10 | **Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell** |

### PC GAMES CHART

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 | **The Sims: Superstar** |
| 2 | **Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness** |
| 3 | **Warcraft III: Frozen Throne** |
| 4 | **The Sims** |
| 5 | **NeverWinter Nights: Shadows** |
| 6 | **Championship Manager 4** |
| 7 | **Grand Theft Auto: Vice City** |
| 8 | **The Sims: Unleashed** |
| 9 | **Rise of Nations** |
| 10 | **Elder Scrolls III: Bloodmoon** |

*Positions correct for week 11/07/03-18/07/03*
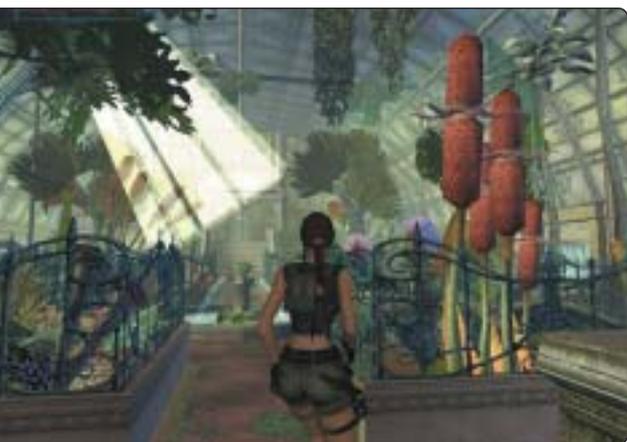
# Star Trek Elite Force II

It has fallen to the *Star Trek* franchise to make something of the final outing for the Quake III engine. What they've come up with – Star Trek Elite Force II – is decent enough, though perhaps not the swansong the veteran platform deserves.

A new species of alien is attacking Star Fleet outposts all over the galaxy, shooting down ships and killing piles of personnel. As leader of the Elite Hazard Force, it's up to you to put the universe to rights. You are posted to different ships and planets with the usual colourful variety of weapons, adversaries and messy deaths to deal with. The first few scenarios teach you how to use the weapons, where to pick up ammo and health and when to use your brain instead of brawn.

You can feel a bit spoonfed, but things soon get tricky and your initial condescension turns into excitement.

← Practise your weaponry skills to pick up the pace

Your challenges and goals change regularly enough to keep you interested, although at times they can seem pointless. Every so often you are given a stroll around Star Fleet with nothing to occupy you but trying out a new gun or, bizarrely, flirting with an alien. But you're soon back out in the field kicking a strange new alien's backside (if you manage to locate it).

Where the game does excel is in the environments. Though visually the ships, swamps and bunkers you romp through are average, the sound is brilliant and enhances the gameplay considerably. You naturally react to the realistically reproduced ambient sound as you would in the real world, so it becomes a point of reference for orientation and self-defence.

There's also a range of multiplayer games so you can network up and start shooting. This guarantees hours of intense action if your friends are good enough – if they aren't then you can play the computer, which certainly is.

For a first-person shooter it's all familiar, but if you like meeting new creatures and vapourising them it is sure to be great fun. ■

*Simon Easterman*

# F1 Challenge '99-'02

Driving titles can, broadly speaking, be divided into two categories. You've got the instant-thrill games – so easy that you don't even have to take your foot (or finger) off the accelerator. Second, the painfully complicated titles aim to be as authentic as possible but generally make you chew through your lower lip in frustration.

F1 Challenge '99-'02 definitely falls into the second category. Though the cars are fast enough to make your eyeballs explode, they hate going around corners. Nor do the tires grip particularly well when you accelerate – you need 100 percent concentration. Though these

machines are real beasts, they have to be treated very, very gently. And even then you can still very easily find yourself hurtling towards brick walls at stupefying speeds.

F1 Challenge '99-'02 is different to previous Formula One titles. You choose between four racing seasons so there is a wider variety of teams and drivers. In order to win races, though, you will need plenty of practise.

Unfortunately I didn't have a lifetime to spare and failed miserably with F1 Challenge. Perhaps I'm just a bad driver but I think the learning curve is too steep. Even with a steering wheel and pedals – a must for every serious driving game freak – it's very difficult.

The game looks fantastic, though, and the attention to detail is second to none. There are loads of options for setting up the car and the data provided by the telemetry systems is superb. I have no idea what most of it means, mind you, but it makes for some very pretty graphs and charts. ■

*Ben Camm-Jones*

↑ Hard-earned break: these high-speed machines need to be treated with care

← Get set: staying on the track may prove more difficult than you think

# Gothic II

The land of Khorinis is in turmoil. An uprising of the slaves – long entombed in the iron ore mines of the valley – has left it in disarray, with bandits and thieves ruling outside the town walls and the all-powerful militia in charge of the town itself. Evil is gaining the upper hand and only one man stands in its way – guess who? Yep, you've got it – you're the hero in Gothic II, a third-person fantasy adventure game.

## I need a hero

Despite your pivotal role in the plot you're a man with no name, called only The Hero – no pressure you understand. The aim of the game is to gain skills and power in order to become strong enough to defeat your enemies and restore peace. But the path you take isn't straightforward. Instead you create the gameplay by making choices about which tasks to complete, which characters to please or annoy, what jobs to tackle and which areas to specialise in.

In common with games like Morrowind and Dungeon Siege, you develop skills along the way by practising various arts. The more practise you get, the better you become. There are several characters to choose from such as thief, sorcerer or warrior. This gives Gothic II true longevity as the speciality you choose will determine how gameplay progresses, so a game played as a sorcerer will be different to one played as a thief.

Gothic II is complex and a demo would have come in handy to teach you the basics. Instead the developers provide a tutorial manual. It offers all the info and tips you need to get started, but it's a pain to keep referring to it. Due to your untutored nature it's therefore a good idea to constantly save your gameplay – even when you complete the most minor task.

→ You can explore inside and out for useful items and helpful locals

## Good to talk

Creatures and men intent on your destruction meet you at every turn – sometimes even giving a wrong answer can result in a good thrashing. Indeed, your own choices play a huge role in how situations progress.

Although it's rather time-consuming it is worth having a chat with everyone you meet along the way. They'll often give you useful hints such as suggesting you ask for a certain person at a certain point. Ignore these pointers at your peril.

But the need to retain so many facts can become tiresome. We found ourselves madly scribbling in a notebook to remember where to go, who to ask for, what to look for and what tasks to complete. There is a diary that records some of this information for you, but we found it quicker and easier to resort to pen and paper.

The keyboard controls are relatively easy to get the hang of, but they aren't the smoothest I've experienced. And in the first stages of playing I kept finding myself drawing my sword rather than giving a jolly greeting, which didn't go down well with the locals.

Gothic II will certainly keep you amused for some time but it requires dedication. It's not for gamers after a little light relief, but more for those who want to immerse themselves in Gothic's rich fantasy world. ■

*Ursula Seymour*

↑ Watch out for sword-wielding militia men

← Food and drink help to restore your health. For even more benefit, cook up a feast

**Overall rating**

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# Wildlife Park

This is an ambitious simulation game posing similar challenges to those by in other business-based sims such as football management or rollercoaster park titles. The developers have attempted to factor in all aspects of running a zoo and it quickly becomes clear that a broad range of skills and knowledge will be required.

There are 70 buildings suitable for housing different breeds of animal, plus employees with various levels of knowledge and areas of expertise and you'll need to ensure these are well matched to their respective tasks.

You begin with a bare park, a ticket booth and a stash of money. It's up to you to build upon this and create a successful, happy park in which your creatures are nurtured and thrive.

You must select suitable accommodation and vegetation for the animals you import and provide for their every need. This includes keeping them mentally stimulated so visitors can see they are well cared for. Thus you can add bridges and waterfalls as well as buying in a particularly exotic beast to entice new guests.

## All creatures great and small

Should you choose, you can train aquatic animals to perform tricks and respond to commands. You can even put on a show, but heaven help you if a visitor discovers a sickly creature whose health seems to have been overlooked while you've been concentrating on developing your animals' acrobatic routines.

There are 50 types of animal and, as the scope of your park expands, you'll need more staff. Many employees must have specialist skills to help you look after the animals' disparate needs from particular foods and vegetation to nurturing through illnesses, pregnancy and rearing.

The developers have tried to imbue the animals with distinct personalities so even if you've solved a particular problem one way already, the same solution may not work with another creature – even if it's the same breed.

## Key to success

Wildlife Park has five separate ecosystems and your venture can be located in three distinctly different climates with flora and fauna that may or may not suit your menagerie of mammals, reptiles, birds and aquatic creatures.

But keeping the creatures fed and watered is not your only concern. The park needs to be a commercial success too, so you'll need to manage your budget well and ensure there's plenty to keep the visitors entertained and coming back time and again.

Once day-to-day operations seem to be running relatively smoothly, the game's possibilities expand and you can opt to take on a particular challenge such as running a breeding programme for an endangered species.

As with many sims, there's no clear-cut goal but learning the mechanics of running such an enterprise and getting to grips with the needs and foibles of all its players, in all their guises, is a rewarding experience in itself. ∎

*Rosemary Haworth*



↑ Make sure you look after your animals properly otherwise you'll feel the wrath of the animals rights crew

↓ Make some waves: the elephants go for a quick dip



← You can even train the water wildlife to perform tricks for a show

**Wildlife Park**
☐ www.kochdistribution.co.uk
☐ £19.99

**System requirements**
500MHz Pentium II (1GHz rec); Windows 95 (with DirectX 5.0 or higher)/98/2000/Me/XP/NT 4.0 (with SP4); 128MB RAM; 800MB hard drive space

**Overall rating**
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# Photo Lab Express

**D**igital cameras have changed photography for ever. The amateur photographer can now view their shots immediately, discard the duds and produce prints of the good ones as soon as they're near a printer. If they have more time to spare and the inclination to produce something absolutely perfect or personalised, a photo-editing package like Photo Lab Express will also come in handy.

Despite it's low price, Photo Lab offers you a good range of effects and touch-ups that'll help you disguise your minor shortcomings as a world-class photographer or create special effects to impress and amuse your friends. It has neither the precision nor the range of Photoshop or PaintShop Pro, but there's enough here to modify your family snaps and it is relatively easy to use.

You can cut sections out, change the colour balance, add filters, increase contrast and carry out many other functions, all without too much stress. Importing photos from a camera or scanner are also simple operations, with many of the wizards borrowed straight from Windows.

The interface is clear and simple and there are some nice touches such as an advice box, which tells you how to use the active function, and a history window that allows you to return to any stage in the editing process.

However, there are some drawbacks. Photo Lab was unstable – we basically had to quit and reopen the program every time we wanted to work on a new picture. There were also some errors in the handbook such as directions not matching up to the items in toolbar lists, which is messy and misleading. It also seemed that the more complicated the operation, the less direction the manual gave you. An interesting if unhelpful irony.

If you're looking for a quick cheap fix for your digital images with nothing too fancy or over-effective then Photo Lab Express is fine. Just don't expect it to produce publishable work. ■

*Simon Easterman*

→ Photo Lab's clear interface lets you create unusual effects with ease

### Photo Lab Express
- Mindscape: 0906 216 5432
- www.mindscape.co.uk
- £25.50

### System requirements
550MHz Pentium III; Windows 98/Me/XP; 28MB RAM; 100MB hard disk space

### Overall rating
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# Hazard Perceptions – RoadSense

**I**f you liked the movie *The Fast and the Furious*, with its insatiable mix of adrenaline, sex and death-defying stunts, then you probably won't care too much for Hazard Perceptions – RoadSense. This DVD is a no-frills, instructional guide for novices as well as more seasoned drivers wanting to improve their road awareness skills.

Produced by the Driving Standards Agency, you can be confident that the information is both reliable and current even if the cheesy editing and retro 1980s soundtrack points to the contrary. The main feature lasts just over 40 minutes and is split into eight modules, covering everything from spotting hazards to anticipating other road users. It offers very straightforward advice, clearly illustrated with road footage and interspersed with pop quiz-style questions.

Chapter eight, At The Test Centre, does its best to de-angst the theory test by addressing common concerns and teaching the proper etiquette of sitting down to the exam.

The Interactive Hazard Perception Simulation uses actual footage of roads in various driving conditions and traffic scenarios. Using a simple point-and-click system you're able to identify possible onscreen dangers. And the quicker you react, the higher you score. I did well in this test, managing an average of five out of five. I don't know if that's a reflection of my ability, the difficulty level of the test or both.

Confusingly, when I got to the end of the test, I must have pressed the wrong button as I was transported back to the menu page, losing the record of my final score. Having said that, the menu screens are fairly intuitive and easy to navigate.

In the Extras section, the RoadSense Multiple Choice Quiz offers the same ludicrously easy questions you'd expect to find in the real thing. If you do get a question wrong (unlikely), it explains why so you're less likely to make the same mistake twice.

While this is an excellent resource for beginners, it's no substitute for actual driving lessons that test your reflexes and prepare you for the unexpected. After all, clicking a mouse is a lot different from braking in a car. ■

*Jonathan Hart*

↑ Hardly the drive of a lifetime but it's an excellent beginners guide

### RoadSense
- DSA: 0870 241 4523
- www.driving-tests.co.uk
- £13 ex VAT

### System requirements
PC-based or standalone DVD player

### Overall rating
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